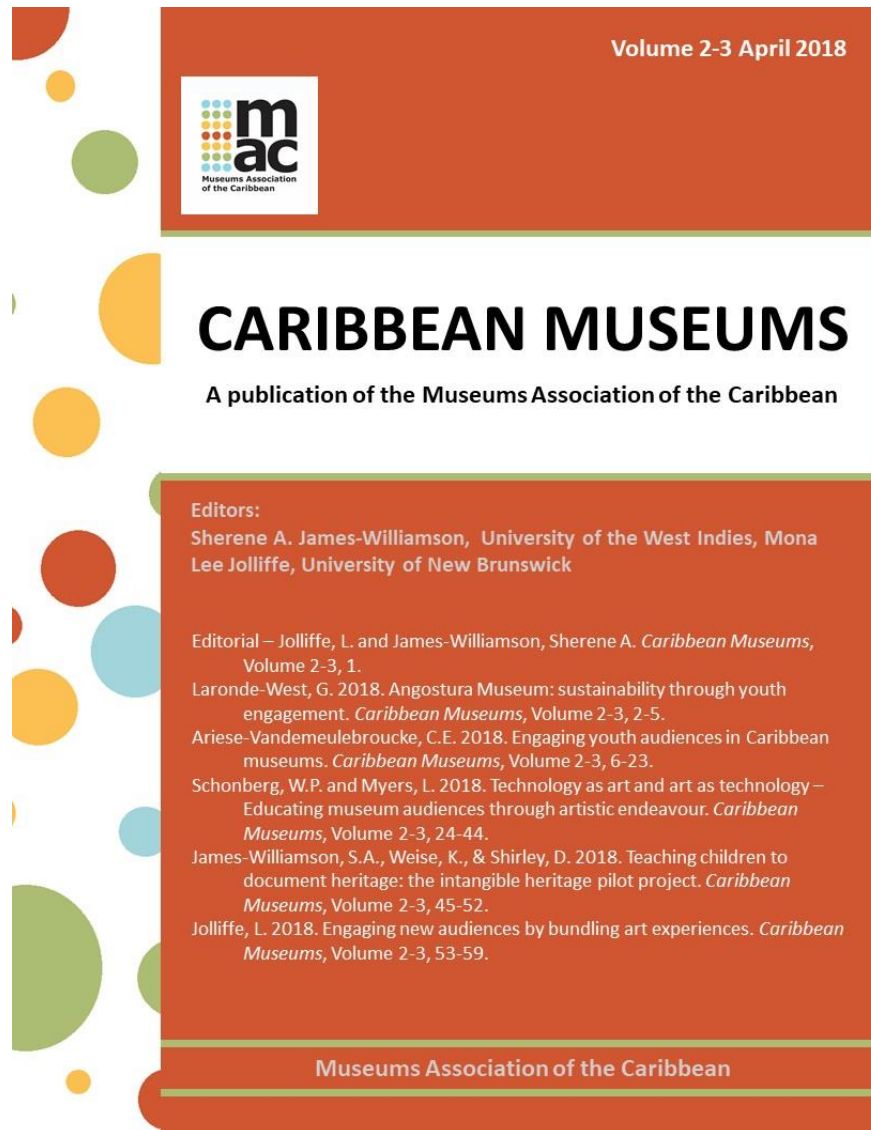


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Engaging New Audiences by Bundling Art Experiences

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ABSTRACT. This paper examines how museums can encourage audience participation by taking their programs and activities out of their buildings and into the urban environment. The goals of public art programs outside of museums can include improving the quality of public space and engaging communities in a dialogue about identity and sense of place. As a framework the literature about the benefits of interacting with art and artifacts in outdoor settings as well as bundling external art experiences into one product is reviewed. The themes from this review are then examined and lessons are derived in the context of case studies from Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. The first case study examines a self-guided Public Art Walk. The second case profiles a long running Gallery Hop event in the city, that bundles exhibit openings of both public and private galleries including the Saint John Art Centre into a product and experience, partnering with local restaurants and attracting new audiences. The third case profiles the educational program of an event, Sculpture Saint John. From the literature review and these cases practical lessons will be derived for the consideration of other museums that wish to reach new audiences by taking art activities outside of their physical walls and into the community.

Keywords: Art experiences, bundled experiences, new audiences

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how museums and galleries can encourage audience participation by taking their art programs and activities out into the urban environment. Public art programs outside of museums can have the goals of improving the quality of public space and engaging communities in a dialogue about identity and sense of place (Becker, 2001). As a framework the literature about the benefits of interacting with public art in urban settings as well as bundling external art experiences into one product or experience is reviewed. The themes from this review are then examined and lessons are derived in the context of several case studies of urban art products, experiences and events from Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. The paper builds on previous work by the

author in the areas of both the bundling of art experiences in an urban context (du Cros and Jolliffe, 2011) and the arts and events (du Cros and Jolliffe, 2014). From the literature review and case study analysis practical lessons will be derived for the consideration of museums and galleries that wish to reach new audiences by taking art activities outside of their physical walls and into the community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.2 Art in the Urban Environment

Public art is noted to have potential for contributing to the sustainability of urban areas (Miles, 1997). Programs making art accessible can play a role in building vibrant communities (Becker, 2004). Moreover, public art can contribute to the regeneration

of cities whilst encouraging social inclusion (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2005). Public art is distinguished in part by location and social purpose (Hein, 1996). Within the urban environment 'open air exhibitions' can serve to bring public spaces and the artworks located there to center of attention, removed from static museum and gallery settings (Fenz & Kecht, 1989). The process of the creation of public art involving artists, administrators and communities is seen as a dynamic area of contemporary art practice. A survey of public arts programs in the USA identified a number of areas of impact of taking arts programming into the community including: engaging civic dialogue and community; attracting attention and economic benefit, connecting artists with communities; and enhancing public appreciation of communities (Becker, 2004). Goldbard (2006) notes that attending arts events can boost participant's confidence in partaking more fully in the arts and cultural life of the community.

Arts events and programs outside of the museum and gallery therefore might contribute to nurturing new audiences. Carr (2004) observes that for a viewer contact with public art could improve the experience of the urban environment in a way that influences their appreciation of such art. Interacting with public art and related programs in the urban setting could as a consequence contribute to developing audiences for the art within the ongoing exhibition of the collections of museums and galleries. Taking art programming out of the museum fits in with the idea of the post-museum based cultural diversity, accessibility, engagement and the use (not accumulation) of objects (Barrett, 2012) concepts of diverse publics. Engaging diverse publics with art in the urban environment brings the traditional museum and gallery into contemporary spaces and contributes to

these institutions relevance in today's society.

2.3 Bundled art experiences

Visitors can view art in the urban environment by chance or intent on an individual basis, or based on a tour, a walk or event, specific art components may be bundled into a more complete art experience. Especially in outdoor urban settings these bundled art experiences create opportunities for interaction with art on a more intense basis, and in some cases such as events in a more social setting. Museums and galleries have long had outreach activities, and taking art programming into the community by bundling known components into one experience may contribute to the goal of nurturing new audiences for later visits to museums and galleries with indoor facilities. Investigated how bundling of arts exposes local art communities to a broader audience du Cros and Jolliffe (2011) noted that increasingly, the art works and art spaces of urban destinations are bundled into both products and events aiming to improve quality of life and increase art experience access for both residents and tourists. Bundling is seen as an important strategy for combining a variety of similarly themed products and experiences and promoting their collective consumption to visitors (McKercher and du Cros, 2002). Approaches to bundling urban art components in particular into a product or event include public art walks (guided and self-guided), gallery crawls or hops, gallery and/or studio tours and studio open days, as well as urban art performance events (du Cros and Jolliffe, 2011).

3. METHODS

This paper takes an exploratory case study approach (Yin, 1994) utilizing personal interviews and correspondence with arts related agencies and secondary analysis of

existing materials to assemble information for the preparation of the cases layered with the author's own observations as a participant in the case study products, experiences and events.

The research location is the historic yet industrial port city of Saint John, New Brunswick located on Canada's eastern Atlantic coastline. The city has both long established public art galleries and museums, including Canada's first museum (New Brunswick Museum) dating back to 1842 and an emerging contemporary art scene composed of a number of small and innovative public (such as the Third Space Gallery) and private galleries. Through co-operation between civic officials in both culture and tourism and stakeholders in the arts, art is being taken out into the community in an effort to draw in local residents and for visitors to differentiate the place from others, based on its public arts and art venues. These efforts reflect the arts and cultural policy of the city (City of Saint John, 2005). The policy recognizes that participation in and appreciation of the arts enhances the lives of residents and contributes to the development of the community.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1 Case Study One - Art in Public Places Walking Tour

This self-guided bilingual walking tour of the art in public places within the historic core of the city of Saint John was developed by the destination management agency Discover Saint John, in direct response to questions received at their Visitor Information Centers regarding art that could be viewed in the urban environment of the city. The brochure was prepared in consultation with the Cultural Affairs Officer of the City of Saint John, and using archival information in the agency files. It took about six months to develop and the first print run of 15,000 brochures was made available to the public in

the 2012 tourism season. It is now accessible to visitors in a number of formats (paper brochure, PDF online and App) and after a second print run of 7500, is due to be updated for 2017. Changes in the brochure are due to the relocation of private galleries (who must be members of Discover Saint John) as well as to the additions of public art to the cityscape, for example the sculptures from the Sculpture Saint John 2016 symposium will need to be added.

It is estimated that during a four-year period (2013 – 2016 inclusive) over 15,000 visitors have used the print brochure to take the self-guided Art in Public Places Walking Tour. This estimation is based on print runs and brochure distribution so the number could indeed be higher, as more than one visitor could have used each brochure and others could have used the App or downloaded their own brochure in PDF from the Discover Saint John web site.

A parallel guided interpretive tour of Public Art Walk is offered occasionally as a public program by the New Brunswick Museum. This however is not a free event as paid museum admission is required in order to participate. It is also not offered on a regular basis. An earlier Public Sculpture Walk brochure (2014) had also been developed for the Sculpture Saint John event (that will be profiled later in this paper) by the Saint John Arts Centre.

What is evident from this case is that as a product developed in response to visitor interest the Art in Public Places Walking Tour (in its various forms) has promoted access to the art located in public places in the city by bundling the art together into one experience. For both locals and visitors it encourages walking in the urban environment while interacting with art. It has also built synergies promoting the private galleries that visitors can access independently (versus promotion on a single event basis as with the free Saint John Gallery Hop or occasionally

with the paid admission Public Art Walk organized by the New Brunswick Museum) and with Sculpture Saint John, by profiling their sculptures once they are completed and in place.

Linking together both the public and private art evident in the urban milieu not only creates arts related experiences for visitors to the city, but it also makes art more accessible to the local population, on a free and un-gated basis, as there is no charge for the brochure or App, and outside of the confines of the traditional galleries and museums where admission might be charged. This Art in Public Places Walking Tour brochure project is thus likely contributing to developing new audiences for both the private galleries as well as the public museums and galleries in the city such as the New Brunswick Museum and the Saint John Arts Centre.

4.2 Case Study Two: Saint John Gallery Hop

This case profiles a long running Gallery Hop event held three times a year in the city core, that bundles exhibit openings of both public and private galleries including the Saint John Art Centre into a product and experience, attracting both core and new audiences to experience art. There are currently six public galleries and six commercial galleries participating (Table 1) in this bundled art event with venues being open over the late afternoon and early evening hours on a Friday three times a year in May, August and October. Formal attendance statistics have not been collected and as noted by the Cultural Affairs Officer of the City of Saint John each event is influenced by a number of variables including the weather and competing events. However, it is estimated that the August 2016 Gallery Hop drew a record audience estimated to be 3,500 to 4,000 over a period of six hours due to it coinciding with the Third Shift (public

alternative art gallery) contemporary art event in the Uptown. Earlier Gallery Hops may have attracted in the range of closer to 3,000 visitors. While the clientele is mainly local some tourists have been observed attending the event which is also advertised by Discover Saint John as a tourism product.

Table 1. Saint John Gallery Hop Participating Galleries, 2016

Public	Commercial
City of Saint John Gallery	Citadel Gallery
Imperial Theatre Library Millennium Artplace	Cobalt Gallery Handworks Gallery
New Brunswick Museum	Jones Gallery & Studio
Saint John Arts Centre	Merrifield Gallery
Third Space Gallery	Trinity Galleries

The Saint John Gallery Hop event differs somewhat from The Art in Public Places Walking Tour in that it is only held three times a year, and it entices visitors to walk from one exhibit venue to another to small indoor galleries. For the participating galleries it provides the benefit of joint promotion. The event exposes those visiting to some public art along the way but the main focus is the synergy created by the bundling of many small exhibit openings into one product and thus provides lessons for drawing in new audiences and maintaining the interest of existing ones.

4.3 Case Study Three – Sculpture Saint John

Since 2012 on a bi-annual basis the Sculpture Saint John event has been hosted on the waterfront of Saint John, New Brunswick. The event is modelled after the international sculpture symposiums dating from the first one held in Austria in 1959. At that inaugural

event, international and local sculptors were invited to a location to work together to create sculptures on site that remain as public art in the host community once the artists departed. During the six-week long Sculpture Saint John events the public are able to view the process of creating sculptures as well as to participate in different educational activities on-site that include the provision of information (posters, interpretive signage), interactive tours and sculpture workshops (Jolliffe and Blatherwick, 2016). One of the key goals of the event is the provision of education about stone sculpting and public art. By drawing on local and regional traditions of stone masonry this event has allowed international sculptors and local interns to work together, creating public access to sculpture both during the event and after when the sculptures are placed in outdoor settings, some in the urban core of the city or in host communities within the region (du Cros & Jolliffe, 2014).

Synergies with the traditional museums and galleries in the city have been developed. For example, the launch of the Sculpture Saint John Project in 2012 was at the New Brunswick Museum and the Saint John Arts Centre delivers the educational workshops and demonstrations that are held on site during the sculpture symposium. During the 2014 event the Saint John Arts Centre also created A Walking Tour of Public Sculpture brochure that linked the Sculpture Saint John symposium site with the arts centre, linking public art in ten separate outdoor and indoor spaces.

The Sculpture Saint John event has dramatically increased the access of local residents to the making of public art, beyond the viewing of completed sculptures in the urban environment or within the confines of physical museum or art gallery buildings. A survey of a sample of the approximately 30,000 visitors to the 2014 event indicated that over 76% of visitors were local (Jolliffe

and Blatherwick, 2016) and the event can be viewed as positively contributing to developing an audience for public art in the city outdoors (on a waterfront site) and outside of the museum and gallery context. Based on personal observation on site during the 2016 symposium many locals visited the site regularly, either daily or weekly, to observe the process of creating a sculpture. A large core of local volunteers was also involved with the event acting as greeters, interpreters and site assistants. That Sculpture Saint John is freely accessible with no admission fees and with staff and volunteers on site to ask questions the event is contributing significantly to raising awareness of public art beyond the walls of the traditional museum or gallery. The output of sculptures is also contributing to the stock of public art in the city, now available for consumption and viewing either by chance or packaged together through the use of Discover Saint John's Art in Public Places Walking Tour brochure and App.

5. DISCUSSION

In comparison the three case studies of a public art walking tour, a gallery open house event and an international sculpture symposium in the urban environment of Saint John have a number of characteristics in common. First, for the most part they bring a focus on art out of traditional museum and gallery settings, allowing visitors to interact with art in the context of the urban environment. Second, they enrich the urban environment, enhancing the cultural experience and quality of life of both local residents and visitors. Third, they engender partnerships and collaboration on the part of the smaller galleries and venues with those that are larger and more established, allowing for joint promotion and nurturing new audiences. Fourth, they benefit from the concept of the bundling of individual art

components into one more intensive art-related product, experience or event.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the concept of encouraging and developing new audiences for museums and galleries by taking art programming out of traditional buildings and into the urban community. While the limitation of this enquiry is that it focuses on one small historic city some general lessons can be drawn, especially for smaller museums and galleries in that there are benefits to be gained by taking art programs and events out into the urban environment. The study could be extended on a comparative basis examining the development of art-related products and experiences in other comparative locations, either to validate, dispute or extend the lessons derived from the current brief review of the bundling of art experiences to attract new audiences in the case of Saint John, New Brunswick.

In the case of the Caribbean the lessons outlined in this paper regarding the bundling of art experiences could be applied to public spaces in the cities of the region. In particular, by the exhibiting and bundling of contemporary art outdoors new and relevant narratives can be created that allow for the expression of diverse voices within traditional spaces.

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