

The university art museum has more than 40 years of history and a reputation of strong academic achievements. However, is it time to review the museum's education and outreach program? Is it time for a change?

In 2008 Barack Obama's presidential campaign in the United States used the slogan "Change we can believe in". To certain extent, this is an idea that can be borrowed for any established institution to review its current situation and make changes that will make it better. In the case of the Art Museum of CUHK, we believe that it is very important to preserve the cultural identity of the museum, and the distinct academic achievement that has been accumulated for more than four decades. At the same time, it is also important to keep pace with the ever-changing world and be ready to deal with the new challenges of the 21st century.

The Art Museum of CUHK decided to launch a series of new education and outreach programs for the dragon exhibition. These outreach efforts included public lectures, workshops, guided tours, a virtual museum tour for mobile phones, a student ambassador training workshop, summer programs and art competitions. These programs were an attempt to transform a seemingly primarily academic institution into one that was audience-friendly – while continuing to serve university students. Public outreach efforts were successful, and registrants for guided tours increased fourfold within a month.

In this paper, the author who closely involved in the dragon show and in planning these outreach programs will introduce the educational and outreach strategies for this exhibition, and give her suggestions and vision for the future.

In the first section, she first discusses a case study of the current out-reach effort. In the second section of the paper, she will then reflect on her understanding of an identity of a university art museum and her suggestions on possible future directions of education and outreach programs.

Section I

1.1 Expectations from the audiences

Since the Art Museum of CUHK is distant from the centre of the city, all of the outreach programs aimed at attracting visitors to come to the Art Museum again and again. The Art Museum of CUHK has a good tradition of providing guided tours for student and local communities, but this is not sufficient to attract more visitors to come. In order to increase engagement with students and university staff in the campus, we launched several new programs such as a student ambassador program that encouraged students themselves to be tour-guides. Moreover, a series of follow-up activities were conducted to stimulate frequent visits. For instance, after they had attended the artwork and design workshop, participants could apply the skills they learned and enter art competitions.

Marketing should always play an important role in designing outreach and education programs. It can be viewed from three aspects: 1) program design 2) product design and 3) promotion to different targeted audiences.

1.2 Museum marketing

1.2.1 Marketing on program design

The 41 years before 2012, the Art Museum of CUHK held many lectures for academics and the general public. However, most of them could be considered academic in nature. The outreach and education committee noticed this and from the first meetings of the team, proposed a variety of topics that were not limited to visual arts, but included literature, music, history, local religions and food culture. Since the exhibition lasted for ten months, a new theme was designated for each month and interesting lectures and workshops were planned around the themes. Activities were conducted not

only on campus, but also in the centre of the city, thus reaching a larger audience. And hopefully, the participants would come to visit the museum after the lectures.

1.2.2 Marketing on the product design

If the audience can take a souvenir home, those can remind them of the pleasant time they experienced at the museum. The outreach committee took the Dragon exhibition as a starting point and designed museum souvenirs, such as t-shirts, cups and paper fans. Other nicely designed products included stickers, puzzles and file clips.

We also set up a mascot design competition on campus, and the winner designed a dragon mascot that wears an imperial robe and opens its arms, welcoming everyone.



Fig. 2 - Souvenirs designed by Eric Leung and Chan Lai Pik

1.2.3 Marketing on targeted audiences

Who are the target audiences for the university museum? What kinds of knowledge we want to give them? And what do audiences actually need? The dragon exhibition has been attracted 140,000 visitors in total. The distribution of types of audiences is as follows.

Thirty-five percent of participants were primary and secondary school students, the single largest audience for the show. Since a transportation subsidy that schools can apply for was launched university museum visits became the favourite school extra-curriculum activity. Other community social services groups, such as elderly groups were 25% of the attendees. University students and staff members were 14%.

Collectors play an important role in the art museum as donors. They also provide loans of their collections to the museum for academic research and exhibits. Collectors groups made up 6% of the visitors. Twenty percent of visitors did not fit any of these categories, and were designated as “others”.

I would like to use a triangle diagram to explain the relationship of different types of audiences with the Art Museum. As a university museum, university students and staff members should be the first priority group. As a teaching museum, students who study art history, scholars and people in the

Distribution of Audiences for the Dragon Show

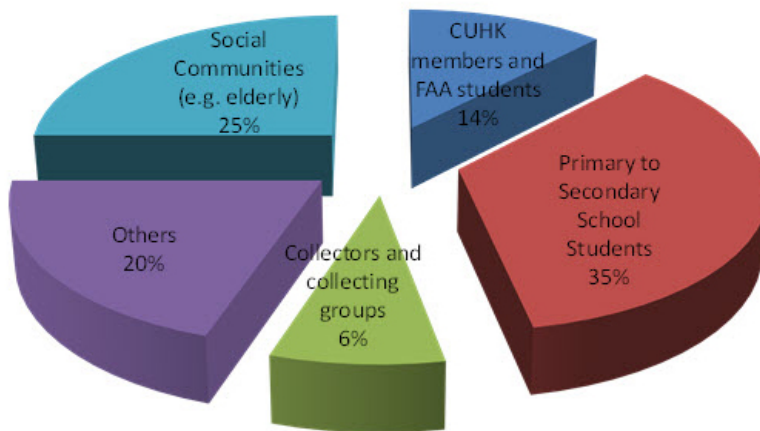


Fig. 3 – Distribution of the audiences in the exhibition *Divine Power: the Dragon in Chinese Art*

related academic fields can put on one side of the triangle, and groups such as students from local schools and the elderly can be placed another end of the triangle. Art-lovers and collectors can be put on the third side.

I would suggest several marketing plans for education and outreach programs in the near future. First, it is important to identify and prioritize targeted audiences. Second, short-term and long-term plans for education and outreach programs are necessary for both academia and local communities, such as the docent training

program, the student ambassador program, the object handling and study workshop, and museum professional enhancement schemes. Third, it is also good to bear in mind that education and outreach programs should be thought of from the beginning when we curate an exhibit.

1.3 Suggestions and evaluation of current education and outreach program

In this section, I will discuss five possible future directions for designing the educational and outreach programs in a university art museum. It includes virtual museum and digital media, targeted members, collaborations with other programs on the campus and venues for publicity.

1.3.1 Digital world

It is important to develop twenty-first century digital assets for the museums. I am committed to developing new digital assets, such as a cell phone app for the museum. The free app has been launched in December 2012. It not only shows the strength of our collections, but also serves as a trilingual tour guide. We have a Facebook page that helps docents communicate. Of course, like most museums, we have our own bilingual webpage.

I would also like to mention two interesting projects. One is the Song and Yuan project at the Freer and Sackler galleries.¹ Audiences and scholars can access online the inscriptions of their very strong Chinese painting collections. It helps tremendously for academic research and art appreciation. The other one is an online scholarly catalogue from the Getty Centre run by several museums in North America.² This is different from the printed catalogue but is a constantly growing and changing catalogue. Scholars and the general public can participate in writing sections. It brings lots of interaction between academia and the general public. The above projects are both ambitious yet useful for the audiences and scholars to conduct research, or to learn more about arts via Internet.

At a university museum it is very important to have an online database and a search engine so that knowledge can be spread easily. The Art Museum of CUHK does not have an online database yet, but this should be considered a priority for university museums in the near future.

¹ www.asia.si.edu/songyuan/ (accessed November 1, 2012).

² www.getty.edu/foundation/funding/access/current/online_cataloging.html (accessed November 1, 2012).

Virtual museums have proliferated in the last decade, and the trend of virtual museums such as Google Art Project will be prevalent in the 21st century. We believe that this kind of project should not exclude university museums because they play a key role in producing knowledge. So far the Google Art Project's team has already launched two phases of the project, and most of the participants are national museums. Hopefully, university museums can be part of it in the near future.

1.3.2 Venue and spaces

As mentioned above, the Art Museum of CUHK is well located on the campus, right next to the main avenue of the university. Students at CUHK have been very creative in using space. In fact, the avenue can actually accommodate 5,000 people at the same time. In 2012 students used it for a protest, for promoting different social clubs and a variety of performances and competitions.

It is very important to understand that the university museum is not limited to its physical building, but also can use the surrounding spaces. If we can use spaces around the building that means we can give students and other people nearby easier interaction with the museum. Can we be more flexible and creative in using surrounding space for the programs of the university museum? Is it possible to use the public space for recreational functions, such as setting up booths for promoting the museum, and creating a space for students to take a rest and enter the museum?



Fig. 4 – Open spaces at the Art Museum, Institute of Chinese Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

1.3.3 Target audiences

The outreach and educational programs of the Art Museum of CUHK have so far involved different types of audiences such as students from kindergartens, the elderly and students at CUHK. However, our program is still experimental and no priority for our target audiences has yet been set. How can we skilfully use museum resources for targeted audiences, and what kinds of programs can we present tailor-made for them?

For example, the Art Museum has a program to reach out to the elderly. We provide replicas of artefacts and games for the elderly to play with. They really enjoyed this activity and increasing numbers of groups requested visits to the museum afterwards.

As early as 1913, John Alfred Charlton Deas, a former curator at Sunderland Museum in England, organized several hands-on sessions for the blind, first offering an invitation to children from the Sunderland Council Blind School for hands-on sessions with some of their collections. They were so successful that Deas went on to develop and arrange a course of regular hands-on sessions,

extending the invitations to blind adults.³ The Art Museum of CUHK did several guided tours for blind adults as well, and they enjoyed the tours very much. They first heard the story behind the artefacts, and then touched replicas that we prepared for them to handle.

1.3.4 Collaboration with different art-related units in the campus

There are many art-related functions on campus, some of which duplicate each other. For efficient use of university resources, is it possible for the university museum to collaborate with different existing art-related units in the university?

It is surprising that at least three student ambassador programs have been taken place at CUHK at the same time. For instance, one is at the university art museum, another one is at the performing centre of the CUHK, and the last one is designed for the college exchange program. If universities would pay more attention and encourage the collaboration of different cultural units on campus, this would be highly beneficial to students.

1.3.5 Creative use of space

Recently the Art Museum held a Chinese musical instrument performance in one of the three-storey galleries, designed by the famous architect I. M. Pei in the 1960s (CHENG 2000, 60–62). The professional performers said that this is a perfect venue for Chinese music performances as the acoustics are excellent. In fact, we could also consider other types of performances that are suitable for both indoor and outdoor venues. Outside the Art Museum, there is a nice corridor in the garden. It could be used to perform Chinese opera, jazz music or even other types of soft 'pop music'. Music has added another layer of audiences that can potentially be museum visitors. But the most important thing we have to consider is that sounds would not bring any potential harm to the artefacts.

Section II

2.1 The role of a university art museum

In this section, I will review briefly the role and the functions of a university art museum. A university art museum is somehow different from a national or regional art museum. It is highly linked with the university. It shares knowledge and beauty with the audience within an academic institution, and it inspires innovation.

The Art Museum of CUHK is part of the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS). Its logo tells the story. It is a Chinese ornamental motif. On one end it links up with tradition and the East, on the other end it links to modernity and the West. Therefore, the Institute of Chinese Studies serves as a bridge to connect the traditional and the modern in its research (CHENG 2000, 157–179).

I would suggest three essential functions of a university art museum as follows. Firstly, the university art museum is not an independent museum, but it represents the university. Therefore, it is also important to consider what the benefits to the university are of supporting a museum on campus. Secondly, the university art museum inspires human wisdom and creativity. Its curatorial directions can be related to academic research and the creation of knowledge discoveries of the parent university.

Thirdly, the university art museum merges traditions and current knowledge together, and contributes to the creation of new knowledge for society.

³ publicdomainreview.org/2011/08/09/sessions-for-the-blind-at-sunderland-museum/ (accessed November 1, 2012).

From the perspective of the academic achievements of a university, and the ways it is related to the museum, I would suggest two feasible curatorial examples for references.

2.2 Curating exhibitions, promoting university

Chinese medical research at the Chinese University of Hong Kong has a very high standard among institutes around the world. This is one of the research strength of CUHK. Can the art museum of CUHK, with many precious Chinese artefacts in its collection, collaborate with the department of Chinese medicine? Can the Art Museum curate a show, illustrating the wisdom of Chinese medicine by showing nice herb drawers, medical bowls and related utensils? This kind of exhibition could demonstrate the wisdom of Chinese medicine throughout the ages by showing precious medical antiquities and also introduce the pioneering scientific research at CUHK.

Thanks to the father of fibre optics, Professor Charles Kao, all of us can be connected in the Internet. He was one of the vice-presidents at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He discovered the light reflection of glass that led to the invention of fibre and he put forward the "optical communications" theory. Chinese ancient wisdom on light reflecting artefacts can be found as early as the Bronze Age. How can we use the beautiful bronze mirror collection at CUHK and demonstrate the wisdom of people both today and the past and at the same time, highlight the achievements of the university?

Conclusion

To conclude this paper, firstly, the university art museum should preserve heritage and traditions, but it also has to be innovative and reach a wide variety of potential audiences.

Secondly, it is important to prioritize the target audiences, and then design tailor-made education programs for them.

Thirdly, short-term and long-term strategic plans are needed for education and outreach programs. It is also good to use outreach programs to compliment the curatorial aspects of exhibitions.

Fourthly, make use of digital media.

Fifthly, demonstrate the most important achievements of your university through your university art museum.

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