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The New Orleans Museum of Art: Managing the Collection

An Internship Report

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Arts Administration

by

Laura Baker

B.F.A. Louisiana State University, 2011

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Abstract

An internship experience in the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management at the New Orleans Museum of Art is reviewed alongside discussion of the Museum's history, structure, and permanent collection, in addition to analyses of the organization's finances and its institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Discussion topics also include the intern's experience, best practices in similar institutions, and a conclusion with recommendations made by the intern.

Keywords:

Arts Administration, Visual Art, Museum, Collections Management, Registrar

Chapter 1

The Museum

A Brief History and Overview

Founded in 1910, The New Orleans Museum of Art (hereafter referred to as “NOMA”) first opened its doors to the public in December 1911. Although the region had long desired a prominent art museum, the financial opportunity did not arise until self-made-millionaire and sugar magnate Isaac Delgado made a large donation to the City Park Improvements Association. Delgado’s generous donation was given for the explicit purpose of building and fireproofing a museum in the Park, and was commemorated with the name of the institution: The Isaac Delgado Museum of Art.¹ The Delgado experienced turbulence and prosperity in its first sixty years, both suffering some controversy and securing some extremely important donations and bequests. However, a new chapter was begun in the early 1970s.

On October 20, 1971, the Museum was renamed the New Orleans Museum of Art. This decision was motivated by several different goals, not the least of which was an increase in national name-recognition. Other reasonable incentives included a pervasive confusion with Delgado College and the common misconception that the museum regularly received funds from the Delgado-Albania Plantation. In fact, Delgado’s contribution to the museum began and ended with his \$150,000 donation.² Additionally, the museum was undergoing a massive expansion at the time of renaming, and as the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art had been identified with one

¹ Dunbar, Prescott N. *The New Orleans Museum of Art: The First Seventy-five Years*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990. 8. Print.

² Ibid. 10.

building for sixty years, the board argued that “Now that there are four buildings, we face the necessity of having our name tell the more complete story”.³

As of 2014, NOMA boasts an impressive collection of nearly 40,000 objects. Pieces in NOMA’s permanent collection span an array of historical and contemporary movements, but - in keeping with the goals of NOMA’s 1980 expansion⁴ - some of the most developed collections include French, American, Japanese and African art, glass, and photography.⁵ In addition to these accumulations, a small but important collection of paintings were contributed by Samuel H. Kress and his Foundation throughout the 1930s and 50s. It was with this collection that I spent a significant portion of my internship.

The Contribution of Samuel H. Kress

Established in 1896, S. H. Kress & Co. 5-10-25 cent stores appeared on Main Streets in over 200 cities and towns across the United States. “Kress’s” appeared in more than half of the states, selling cheap, high-quality products to the American public. The vast success of Kress’s was not limited to retail; many of the buildings themselves, designed in the Art Deco style by Edward F. Sibbert, became symbols of the area’s prosperity and a source of community pride.⁶

Kress’s long-term commercial success allowed him to continuously add to an extensive personal collection of European art. During and following World War II, so many works of great importance entered this collection that, in order for the entire collection to remain on public view, the artwork needed to be displayed in institutions across the country. The Kress Foundation (formed in 1929) organized the complex program that oversaw the donation of more

³ Ibid. 252-253.

⁴ Ibid. 325.

⁵ "A World Class Collection in the South." The New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

⁶ Figure 1 (see appendix).

than 200 paintings to twenty-three colleges and universities, several large, specific collections to major institutions, and over 700 Old Master works to eighteen regional museums in the 1950s.⁷

The then-Isaac Delgado Museum of Art was fortunate enough to be among those eighteen museums. Guy Emerson, director of the Foundation, explained the purpose of the donation:

“For many years most of the great works of art in the United States have been concentrated in the museums of a few large cities....But in Italy...fine paintings can be seen in almost every town. They are not all gathered in Florence, Venice or Rome...That is the ideal we now have for the United States and New Orleans is part of our program. We are very hopeful that this gift to the Delgado Museum will inspire other people of wealth and taste to add to this nucleus.”⁸

The 1953 Samuel H. Kress Foundation donation added 30 masterworks of Italian Painting to the Museum, a significant addition to the three works that had been previously donated.⁹ A majority of these paintings remain on perpetual display in the first-floor Kress galleries to this day. This fact directly led to one of the two main projects I handled in my time as an intern at NOMA, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Mission and Programming

The mission of the New Orleans Museum of Art is to inspire the love of art; to collect, preserve, exhibit and present excellence in the visual arts; to educate, challenge and engage a diverse public. The guiding vision of the New Orleans Museum of Art is to advance its position as a premier national visual arts museum vital to the cultural and educational life of our city, state and region.¹⁰ NOMA’s institutional values, which include stewardship, education and community, are detailed in Figure 2 of this paper’s appendix.

⁷ "The Kress Legacy." Kress Foundation. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

⁸ *Time*, 27 April 1953. 90.

⁹ Dunbar. 353-355.

¹⁰ “About : Mission Statement” The New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

NOMA offers an extensive and varied selection of programs. While a great many of these programs are organized internally, the Interpretation and Audience Engagement staff also encourages organizations to collaborate with the Museum to offer an even more diverse range of activities. Aside from a waiver of the cost of regular Museum admission, individuals and families that choose to become NOMA members often benefit from discounted or free entry to many of these events.¹¹ Regular events at NOMA include:¹²

- Friday Nights @ NOMA: a series of events including movie screenings, musical performances, dance lessons, and a variety of other entertainment options.
- NOMA Book Club: a club that meets approximately once per month to discuss art-related novels and literature.
- Tai Chi, Chi Kung and Yoga in the galleries and the Sculpture Garden; a collaboration with the East Jefferson Wellness Center.
- Noontime Talks: discussions led by Museum curators and special guests, usually pertaining to a current special exhibition.
- Studio KIDS!: A series of classes for children ages 5-10 that visit current exhibitions inside of the Museum, where they find inspiration for their own art projects.

Annual Fundraising Events include:¹³

- The NOMA [Easter] Egg Hunt.
- LOVE in the Garden: an epicurean event hosted in the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden occurring each September.

¹¹ “Join : Support NOMA @ NOMA.” New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

¹² “Events : Events @ NOMA.” New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2014.

¹³ “Events : Fundraisers @ NOMA.” New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2014.

- NOMA Odyssey: an upscale gala, colloquially known as the “Odyssey Ball”, taking place each November.

Funding

Excepting Wednesdays, during which NOMA offers free admission to any Louisiana resident with proof of residency, the Museum charges a modest entrance fee of \$8.00 for regular adult admission. There are discounts available for university students, children, seniors, and active military, and NOMA members enter for free. Entrance to the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden is always free.¹⁴ In Fiscal Year 2012 (FY2012), the revenue from Museum admission cost totaled \$366,752, which was 74.6% of total program service revenue and 5.6% of total revenue.¹⁵ The largest source of revenue in both FY2013 and FY2012 came from appreciation in investments, meaning the Museum’s substantial endowment. Unfortunately, less than half of those funds are temporarily restricted. Behind the appreciation in investments, the most significant sources of unrestricted revenue in FY2013 were foundation grants, affiliate memberships, and admission charge revenue. The revenue generated from FY2013 admission charges was \$606,999, which was 90.4% of program service revenue and 9.3% of total revenue,¹⁶ as well as a 166% increase from FY2012. This upward trend is promising, implying an increase in visitors to the museum.

Although NOMA is operating with a budget deficit of (\$611,261) according to FY2012 Form 990, it should be noted that this represents a significant improvement from previous years.

¹⁴ “Visit : General Visitor Information @ NOMA.” New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2014.

¹⁵ New Orleans Museum of Art, comp. *Form 990*. Rep. no. 93493319058703. N.p.: n.p., 2012 *Guidestar*. Web. 09 Aug. 2014.

¹⁶ *2012-2013 Financial Statements*. Rep. The New Orleans Museum of Art, 23 June 2014. Web. 22 Sept. 2014.

With an average of a \$6.7 million-dollar operating budget,¹⁷ in FY2010, NOMA was operating in a deficit of (\$1,049,808).¹⁸ In FY2011, the year in which Susan Taylor was appointed Director, the deficit was (\$1,876,903).¹⁹ As such, a FY2012 deficit of (\$611,261) represents a notable improvement.

A brief ratio analysis²⁰ of NOMA's FY2013 financial statement revealed several illuminating facts about the organization. NOMA's current ratio of 4.86, working capital ratio of \$2,438,823, and quick ratio of 4.29 all indicate sufficient liquidity. If NOMA were to experience a severe financial emergency, it would be able to liquidate enough assets to continue operations.²¹ The Museum's long-term solvency is also without question. Debt-to-asset ratios of 0.01 for both FY2013 and FY2012 and debt-to-equity ratios of \$0.01 for both FY2013 and FY2012 indicate that NOMA will have no difficulties meeting its long-term commitments.²² These figures are not surprising, considering the asset that is NOMA's extensive and valuable permanent collection.

While NOMA's liquidity and long-term solvency are secure, an analysis of NOMA's efficiency and profitability reveals some concerning figures. An asset-turnover ratio of \$0.12 indicates that NOMA is only generating \$0.12 in revenue for every dollar invested in assets. The general rule is that a nonprofit should generate upwards of \$1.00 for every dollar invested,²³ but this knowledge might be tempered by the fact that a large percentage of museum assets gained

¹⁷ Average calculated from "Total Revenue" from NOMA's FY2010, FY2011 and FY2012 Forms 990.

¹⁸ New Orleans Museum of Art, comp. *Form 990*. Rep. no. 93493319058703. N.p.: n.p., 2010 *Guidestar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2014.

¹⁹ New Orleans Museum of Art, comp. *Form 990*. Rep. no. 93493319058703. N.p.: n.p., 2011 *Guidestar*. Web. 23 Sept. 2014.

²⁰ Figure 3 (see appendix).

²¹ Weikart, Lynne A., Greg G. Chen, and Ed Sermier. *Budgeting and Financial Management for Nonprofit Organizations: Using Money to Drive Mission Success*. Los Angeles: SAGE ; CQ, 2013. 136-137. Print.

²² *Ibid.* 138-139.

²³ *Ibid.* 139.

each year are works of art. The space limitations of any visual art museum are such these investments might take a significant amount of time to see a reasonable return. Similarly, the FY2013 negative profit margin of -73% is cause for concern, especially compared to FY2012's negative profit margin of -68%. Rather than making a profit, or even breaking even, NOMA is losing funds at a rate that will make its long-term survival difficult.²⁴

Management Structure

The Museum is organized as a private, nonprofit corporation, maintaining 501(c)(3) tax status.²⁵ The 42-member Board of Trustees serve staggered three-year terms,²⁶ with Museum staff structured in a common hierarchical pyramid model.²⁷ The Museum's 80-odd staff members, including approximately 17 part-time employees, are organized in four major divisions. Each division is led by one of the four deputy directors, who are in turn led by the Museum's current Executive Director and President of the American Association of Museum Directors, Susan Taylor. These four divisions are:

- Curatorial Affairs
- Interpretation & Audience Engagement
- Development & External Affairs
- Finance & Administration.

²⁴ Ibid. 141-142.

²⁵ FY 2012 Form 990

²⁶ *2012-2013 Financial Statements*.

²⁷ Lord, Gail Dexter, and Barry Lord. *The Manual of Museum Management: Second Edition*. 2nd ed. Lanham: AltaMira, 2009. 30-33. Print.

Each division consists of some combination of full- and part-time employees, in varying numbers.²⁸ Below is an illustration of the hierarchy of the Curatorial Department; the department that houses the office of the Registrar and Collections Management.

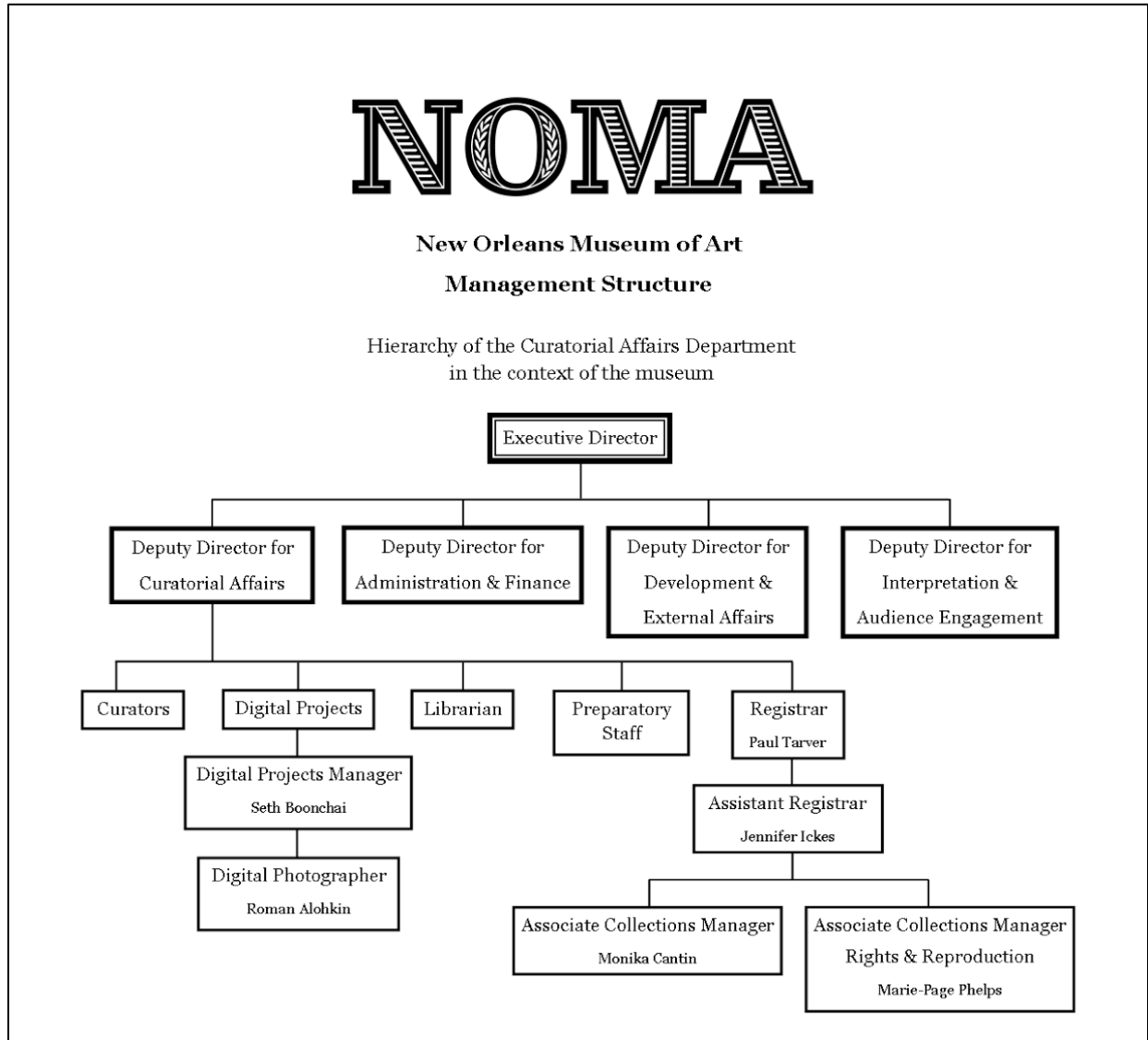


Illustration 1 – The Management Structure of the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management within the overall context of the New Orleans Museum of Art.

This diagram illustrates how the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management is structured, and its overall context within the Museum’s managerial hierarchy.

²⁸ New Orleans Museum of Art Organizational Chart 2014. June 2014. Raw data. New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans.

While the specifics of an individual job description might differ in another institution, a Collections Manager is typically an employee charged with the physical oversight of a museum's permanent collection. This employee manages the hands-on problem-solving and supervises object movement in and out of the museum. Registrars are individuals that oversee documentation and risk management of the collection, often creating and maintaining organizational systems and databases.²⁹ At NOMA, all individuals in the Collections and Registrar Department keep the digital database (Mimsy XG) up-to-date, while Associate Collections Manager Marie-Page Phelps also handles NOMA's internal and external rights and reproductions requests. Additionally, Assistant Registrar Jennifer Ickes has inherited the orphaned responsibility of exhibition coordination while still managing the Museum's loan agreements. Although the staff's responsibilities are oddly distributed, this has not gone unnoticed by museum administrators. In fact, the department is in the process of being restructured.

Changes in the Collections and Registrar Department

Prior to an explanation of my personal role as an intern with the offices of NOMA's Office of the Registrar and Collections Management, I believe it is helpful to possess an understanding of the substantial changes the department has undergone in the past four years. Additionally, significant changes to the departmental structure and personnel are slated to occur in the near future.³⁰ The timeline on the following page illustrates a chronology of the events leading to these changes.

²⁹ Buck, Rebecca A., and Jean Allman Gilmore. *Museum Registration Methods*. 5th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2010. 13. Print.

³⁰ Figure 4 (see appendix).

<p>August 2005 Hurricane Katrina</p>	<p>While no artwork was harmed in the wake of the storm, the building and Besthoff Sculpture Garden sustained \$6 million of damage. The water table rose enough to cause severe damage to the basement floors and compromise the security of the Art Storage areas. The nearly 100-member staff was slashed to a skeleton crew of thirteen individuals. Artwork is removed from basement storage and placed in temporary storage spaces: converted gallery space.³¹</p>
<p>2006</p>	<p>Following a seven-month closure, NOMA is reopened to the public. Around this time, NOMA’s insurance officially states that individual artworks worth upwards of \$100,000 will not be covered if they remain in basement art storage.</p>
<p>2010</p>	<p>NOMA closes for an eight-month renovation to repair damage from Katrina. Marie-Page Phelps and Monika Cantin are hired as the museum’s first Collections Managers to oversee the organization of the museum’s collection and movement to safer storage locations within the museum.</p>
<p>2014</p>	<p>Collections and Registrar department restructuring announced.</p>
<p>Late 2014 - Early 2015</p>	<p>Department restructuring slated to occur.</p>
<p>2015 (intended)</p>	<p>Movement of permanent collection to offsite storage and hiring of new departmental personnel.</p>

Illustration 2 – A chronology of the events preceding the restructuring of NOMA’s Registrar and Collections Management positions.

As mentioned in the illustration above, Hurricane Katrina did not directly cause physical damage to NOMA’s collection. Rather, the still-rising water table breached the museum’s basement floor ten days following the storm. As this compromised the stability of the collection’s environment, a large number of gallery spaces and some former education facilities

³¹ *New Orleans Museum of Art Long Range Plan, 2008-2011*. Rep. New Orleans: NOMA, 2008. Print.

were converted to temporary art storage locations. The most valuable and fragile paintings were moved to spaces in which the temperature and humidity could be closely controlled, while the more resilient pieces were carefully returned to the basement when the renovations were complete.³²

Following the storm, moving the permanent collection to offsite storage evolved from an eventuality to an immediate necessity. Nine years later, a significant percentage of gallery space still serves as temporary art storage, but the preparations for a state-of-the-art nearby storage facility are well underway. With this immense task looming near, the hiring of an additional Preparator will assure that there are sufficient personnel to handle the physical movement of the objects. The hiring of an Assistant Collections Manager for Rights and Reproductions will allow Marie-Page Phelps from the time-consuming rights and reproduction duties and free her to head the collections management-*aspect* of the move to offsite storage. Will Sooter will use his previous experience moving fine art collections to coordinate the physical movement of the collection. Together Will and Marie-Page will organize and supervise the movement of the 40,000 paintings, sculptures, photographs, works on paper, decorative arts pieces, and African objects in 2015.

³² “About : Museum Timeline” The New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

Chapter 2

The Internship

In June of 2014, I began working with Associate Collections Managers Monika Cantin and Marie-Page Phelps. To a lesser degree, I also assisted Assistant Registrar Jennifer Ickes and the Preparatory staff. These individuals invested a significant amount of time and effort into developing my industry skill set, and did so while maintaining an extremely professional, courteous, and welcoming environment.

While I completed numerous small tasks during my time as an intern at NOMA, the bulk of my efforts were spent on two major projects, detailed below.

The Kress Gallery Project

Located on the first (ground) floor of NOMA immediately off of the Great Hall,³³ the Kress Medieval and Renaissance galleries and the Keller Baroque gallery are some of the most heavily trafficked areas in NOMA's public spaces. Parties wishing to rent out galleries inside the museum for private events are frequently placed inside these three interconnected gallery spaces,³⁴ as are late-night and museum-hosted events.³⁵ The social nature of these events often includes the otherwise-prohibited presence of food, drink and alcohol in the galleries. Despite a vigilant security staff, the combination of valuable artwork and libations can occasionally result in damage to the galleries' artwork. Without a record of the object's condition

³³ Figure 5 (see appendix).

³⁴ "Entertaining : Weddings @ NOMA." New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

³⁵ "Entertaining : Options & Amenities @ NOMA." New Orleans Museum of Art. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Sept. 2014.

immediately prior to these events, it is impossible to definitively identify the event during which said damage occurred and enforce the accountability of the responsible parties.

In order to remedy this and establish a baseline for the condition of these objects, I was given the task of creating detailed condition reports of these thirty-three paintings and a single wooden credenza. To supplement these reports, I went through the process of sorting each object's file folder in NOMA's archives and added any missing information to the object's record in Mimsy XG - the museum's digital collection database. Using the information found in these object folders - especially past condition reports - I was able to discern the more recent damage to these pieces and note the issues of immediate concern. The entire process is detailed below.

1. Pull the object's file and sort the contents, updating the object's record in Mimsy XG whenever necessary. Categorical updates included the Publications, Exhibitions, Provenance, Condition, Restoration authorities and general notes.
2. Using a high-resolution printout of an image of the object, complete a thorough condition report. At times, this included taking photographs of damage or areas of concern.
3. Using the physical condition report as reference, create a digital condition report in Adobe Illustrator.³⁶ This digital document incorporated any detail images I might have taken when completing the physical condition report, and was saved as a .pdf.
4. Create a Condition authority record in Mimsy XG, using the database's metadata to link the record to any relevant objects, personnel, etc.
5. Filing the physical condition report in the object's file and linking the .pdf report to the Condition authority record for that object in Mimsy XG.

³⁶ Figure 6 (see appendix).

I began working on the Kress Gallery Project (hereafter referred to as "Kress") within my first week at NOMA. With regular interruptions to complete small, time-sensitive projects, I completed this task list for eleven paintings and one credenza in the Medieval gallery, twelve paintings in the Renaissance gallery, and ten paintings in the Baroque gallery. The vast majority of these well-documented pieces were accessioned in 1961 or earlier, as discussed in Chapter 1, resulting in thick object files that required a significant dedication of time to process. Since the completion of this project, two major events have taken place in the galleries and thorough checks have been completed for these objects using the condition records that I created.

Photography Problem Projects

Over the past several months, NOMA's digital photography team - consisting of (Institute of Museum and Library Services) Project Manager Seth Boonchai and Digital Photographer Roman Alokhin - have been systematically photographing the contents of every archival portfolio and storage box containing works on paper that can be found in NOMA's art storage. Once the pieces are photographed and the images are edited and renamed in a method consistent with NOMA's standards, they are linked to the museum's network and database. In these digital destinations, NOMA employees are able to access to the files as needed. The task is of an undoubtedly high priority, and is necessitated by both museum 'best practices' and the imminent move to offsite storage discussed in Chapter 1. High-quality, high-resolution images of NOMA's extensive photography collection will greatly aid the future rights and reproductions personnel by circumventing the oft-encountered request for high-resolution images. If an image has not already been taken of the piece in question, the Museum must either charge to have the image taken by a staff photographer, or else cover the cost itself. Unfortunately, Seth and Roman

have encountered a number of problematic portfolios throughout their process. When a problem is discovered, the portfolio is left in a designated area in print storage and the Collections Managers are left to resolve the issue(s). The “problems” range from simple to immensely complex, and the projects are somewhat a mystery until they are undertaken.

The Photography and Print Storage projects were introduced prior to my completion of the Kress project, and were worked on as Monika’s schedule allowed. The ambiguous and multifaceted nature of the projects called for close supervision and near-constant consultation with Monika and other museum employees. While I had worked on a small number of Photography/Print Problem Projects (“PPPs”) prior to the completion of the Kress project, the completion of Kress marked the beginning of a specific concentration on the PPPs.

In total, I worked on thirteen separate PPPs in the summer of 2014. In several instances, the “problems” were extremely minor. For example, several portfolios had been accounted for in the database and NOMA records as a group record (see Illustration 3 on the following page), but each piece within the portfolio had been photographed and warranted a separate, (currently nonexistent) database record. When this occurred, the group record remained in the database, and separate records were created and populated with all relevant, known information (i.e. the group record 2009.43.1-.33 was used to create records 2009.43.1, 2009.43.2, etc.) Subsequently, the digital images went through the somewhat-convoluted process of being linked to these separate object records.

NOMA’s system for numbering objects is a standard system shared by numerous museums, such as the LSU Museum of Art in Baton Rouge and the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. For a thorough explanation of NOMA’s object numbering system, please see the illustration on the following page.

NOMA

Object Numbers (a.k.a. Accession Numbers)

Objects in NOMA are assigned numbers based on their status upon museum entry. All numbers begin with the year the object entered the museum, with a few stipulations. Objects received before the year 2000 might be listed beginning with either a two-digit or four-digit year. For example, an object accessioned in 1966 might begin “66” or it might begin “1966”. All objects accessioned in the year 2000 or later begin with the four-digit year, without exception, to avoid confusion. Thus, any object found beginning with a two-digit number can safely be assumed to have entered the museum in the 1900s. Below is an overview of the different number types and when they’re used.

Object Number	What it Means
YYYY.## OR YY.## Ex: 2006.32 66.68	The item is part of NOMA’s permanent collection, and is legally owned by the museum. In the case of the example “2006.32”, the number means that this object was the 32nd object to be accessioned in 2006.
EL.YYYY.#	The object is an “extended loan” to the museum. The object doesn’t legally belong to NOMA, but is temporarily under its care. This might be seen for objects that are on loan from other museums/individuals, for objects that are being considered for accession, and for objects that are part of traveling exhibitions currently at NOMA.
U.YYYY.#	The object is an “unknown”. This number is assigned when an object is found in the collection that was unable to be identified. Typically, these objects have been in the museum for quite some time, but there are not sufficient records to fully ascertain its legal status.
TWC. GP. +others	These types of numbers are assigned to exceptionally large groups of pieces that come into the museum from one source. “TWC” specifically refers to a very large collection of Native American artifacts that are part of the Whitecloud collection. These types of numbers are not common, and shouldn’t be assigned without specific instruction to do so.

In all cases, the numbers might not end after “YYYY.#”. When pieces come in as part of a portfolio, but are closely related, they might be numbered starting at “YYYY.#.1”, continuing until all pieces in the portfolio have numbers. For example, if group of four photographs created in the same year and by the same artist, were accessioned at the same time in 2012, they might be numbered 2012.3.1, 2012.3.2, 2012.3.3 and 2012.3.4. A record might exist as “2012.3.1-.4” that contains information about these pieces as a whole.

Alternatively, when an object is accessioned that contains more than one part that can be physically separated, but isn’t meant to be displayed separately (i.e. a teapot and its lid), letters will be used to indicate the separate pieces. In the example above, the body of the teapot might be “2013.43.a”, meaning its lid would be “2013.43.b”.

Illustration 3 – The Object Numbering System at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

The more complicated “problems” often entailed extensive research and creative problem solving. On one occasion, a box containing numerous original John J. Audubon prints included eight pieces that were not included in the database, and physical files for the pieces could not be

located in the file room. However, upon examining the museum's original accessions ledger, a handwritten entry from 1912 noted the donation and receipt of eight Audubon prints from an individual known to have donated extensively to the Museum during its early years. Further research led to the surprising discovery that three of the prints had been executed posthumously by an established New York printmaker, at the request of Audubon's sons. When all avenues of research had been pursued, the pieces were given "U" numbers and records, which were then populated with all available information. As is discussed in Chapter 3, these actions closely align with established practices for "collection conundrums."³⁷

The thirteenth and final project I undertook came to be known colloquially as "Grotz". Born in Germany in 1902 and living a significant portion of his life in New York City until his death in 1990, Paul Grotz was known for being both a close friend of the photographer Walker Evans and for being a talented, prolific photographer in his own right.³⁸ Grotz and Evans frequently photographed the same subjects and each other, occasionally making the photographers' work nearly indistinguishable. While the Metropolitan Museum of Art boasts the largest-known collection of work by Walker Evans,³⁹ NOMA enjoys the complimentary largest-known collection of work by Paul Grotz.

Although the vast majority of this collection resides in a single archival box in photography storage, there were some curiously complex questions that the contents raised. The final week of my "official" internship hour was spent with this box, familiarizing myself with the contents and discovering every possible fact about the prints within. I compiled every piece of data within my power, and on the final day of the internship, I presented the following findings

³⁷ Buck, Rebecca A., and Jean Allman Gilmore. *Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2007. Print.

³⁸ Gehman, Geoff. "Portrait of a Modest Photographer." *The Morning Call*. N.p., 21 Apr. 1991. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.

³⁹ "The Collection Online." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2014.

to my supervisor Monika Cantin, and to the Curator of Photography, Russell Lord. Inside Box 28(B) were 146 prints of 116 different images. When compared to the 106 object records in Mimsy XG, this number is extremely incorrect. Of those 146 prints:

- 75 pieces perfectly aligned with records in Mimsy XG, and had accession numbers physically written on the back, as per NOMA's standard procedure.
- 9 pieces for which Mimsy XG records existed could not be located.
- 25 prints of 18 different images could be identified as duplicates (i.e. printed from a known negative).
- 47 prints of 39 different images could not positively be identified.

Upon receipt of this information, two of the pieces were immediately accounted for. Russell assured that they had been framed for a recent exhibition and were safely stored. The misunderstanding stemmed from the fact that the objects' location records had not been properly updated. With an upcoming retrospective of NOMA's Grotz collection, and the persisting 'problematic' status of the remaining prints, I accepted a request to continue working on the Grotz project. This entails the following tasks:

- Assign "U" numbers to the unidentified prints and to the large box Grotz of negatives in NOMA's possession.
- Write numbers on the verso of the "U" images.
- Photograph every print in the box for use until the Digital Projects team is able to take high-resolution images.
- Extensively research Paul Grotz and Walker Evans, attempting to identify the "unidentified" prints as accurately as possible.

- Populate the Mimsy XG records with as much detailed information as possible, including:
 - Accurate dimensions of both the print's paper and image "sight".
 - Linking the digital photographs to the object records.
 - Detailed descriptions of each print, making on-sight identification and research simpler.

This undertaking has resulted in 179 object records that will go through this procedure. If time allows, I will process the box of negatives and contact sheets in a similar manner. While the assignment is daunting, I am confident that the conclusion will greatly reward all involved.

Chapter 3

Best Practices

Collections Management “includes everything that is done to document, care for, and develop museum collections and make them available for use.”⁴⁰ This broad statement introduces a complicated and detailed collection of responsibilities. In response to this, a museum should establish a Collections Management on the basis of five principles:⁴¹

1. Each object or specimen entering the museum must be documented.
2. Collections should be stabilized for long-term preservation and housed in a proper storage environment.
3. The collections must be regularly inventoried and monitored.
4. The collections storage environment must be regularly monitored.
5. All collection activities and monitoring must be documented.

NOMA is in a unique position when it comes to museum “best practices”. Not only is the Museum an accredited member of the American Association of Museums, but NOMA’s own Director Susan Taylor is the recently-elected Vice President of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD).⁴² AAMD is comprised of 263 museum directors, and exists for the purpose of furthering museum missions by “establishing and maintaining the highest standards of professional practice.”⁴³ Susan Taylor’s new status brings additional attention to NOMA, giving rise to higher expectations for qualitative and quantitative staff performance. In response,

⁴⁰ *Museum Registration Methods*. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 24-29.

⁴² "Susan Taylor on the Arts in New Orleans and Beyond." *Association of Art Museum Directors*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Oct. 2014.

⁴³ "Mission." *Association of Art Museum Directors*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 Oct. 2014.

NOMA's staff has increased its awareness of industry standards; constantly adjusting to remain at the forefront of the industry. A number of the most important practices for museums – especially pertaining to collections management – are detailed in the following pages, including comparisons to both NOMA's practices and to the practices of similar organizations.

Collections Stewardship

Claiming indefinite responsibility – accessioning – an object into a museum's permanent collection has the interesting effect of equalizing that object with others in the collection. According to established museum professionals Buck and Gilmore, “The standards and best practices for collections care and documentation...must be applied equally [to each accessioned object].”⁴⁴ NOMA's policies regarding art handling, art storage and database upkeep do an excellent job of keeping this in mind. Furthermore, NOMA staff members abide by these policies by assiduously caring for each object under their stewardship.

Art Handling

Organizations that see original artwork travel in and out of their spaces must have procedures in place for properly handling said object. General rules and established parameters should include, among others:⁴⁵

- Who should be allowed to handle the objects?
- When should gloves be worn when handling objects? Should the gloves be cotton or nitrile?
- How should artwork be packed for shipment?

⁴⁴ *Collection Conundrums.2.*

⁴⁵ *Museum Registration Methods.* 209-218.

- The object’s destination should be determined prior to movement.
- Appropriate padding and stabilizing materials should be used when transporting artwork on any kind of rolling cart.

These procedures are established in museums in an effort to ensure the objects’ condition in perpetuity. The National Park Service has published a three-part handbook that includes policies that have been adopted by museums across the country.⁴⁶ Some of those policies include:

- How to protect artwork from over-exposure to light, both while the artwork is traveling and when it is in storage.
- The types of carts and materials that should be used when transporting artwork, both within the museum environment and when it is shipped elsewhere.
- Proper technique for lifting and moving works on paper, paintings, ceramics, furniture, etc.
- What to do when damage occurs.

These detailed art handling policies go a long way toward protecting a museum’s objects, but it is equally important to address the inevitable damage to objects. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s The Care and Handling of Art Objects states:

“If there is an accident during handling, report it immediately to the appropriate curator or conservator. If neither one is present to supervise, carefully collect broken pieces and provide support (such as a cushioned tray) for cracked or weakened areas. Further damage frequently occurs from carelessness in cleaning up after an accident. It is important not to “test fit” broken elements...”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ National Parks Service. *Museum Handbook, Part I: Museum Collections*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2007.

⁴⁷ Shelley, Marjorie. *The Care and Handling of Art Objects: Practices in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987. Print.

A clause regarding accidents and damage to artwork is the only piece missing from NOMA's art handling policy. Assumptions have been made that common sense will dictate the course of action following accidental damage. However, as the Met's statement above mentions, continued damage can easily occur when some seemingly-logical steps are taken, even with the best of intentions.

Art Storage

“Collections storage should be located in an area separate from all other activity, removed from exhibition, preparation, and general administrative functions. In the best of worlds, storage space will not be at the top of the building or in any area below grade... There should be no windows, and areas should be isolated enough to be easily secured. They should be located in an area that is privately accessed from the outside, through a loading dock and prep area, and from the inside, through corridors or doors leading to preparation and exhibition space.”⁴⁸

This policy on art storage is one universally accepted in the museum world. It is however understood that certain aspects of the policy (i.e. storage locations being “below grade”) cannot always be helped. In addition to the above stipulations, facilities for the storage of artwork are expected to avoid materials such as acidic paper, metal paper clips, and unsealed wood products. The spaces are expected to possess adjustable climate control and relative humidity (RH), so that the objects may be stored at constant levels. Moreover, traditional methods of pest control must be avoided, lest pesticides damage the objects in storage.⁴⁹ Other institutions expect the museums to which they loan work to keep the objects in spaces as carefully maintained as their own. As such, information regarding museum's art storage facilities are kept public and outlined in detail on a loan agreement each time an object is lent to that museum through the provision of

⁴⁸ *Museum Registration Methods*. 293.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 295-297.

a standard facility report.⁵⁰ As stated in NOMA's 2008-2011 Long Range Plan, it is a specific goal of the Curatorial department to adhere to best practices in the storage of NOMA's permanent collection.⁵¹

Database Upkeep

Data entry and upkeep is a complicated and time-consuming task. Quigley and Sully make the case that data should be considered just as valuable as the object(s) they represent.⁵² It is important for a museum to choose a collections management system that is flexible enough to fulfill its many expected purposes, but structured enough to ensure consistency. The database should be backed up often and in multiple physical locations, and rules should be in place for both who is allowed to update the database, and the method in which they should enter the information.⁵³

NOMA's policy on data entry for its database, Mimsy XG, is kept updated and accessible for all staff members at all times. NOMA's "rules" for data entry are clear and discussed regularly to assure that reports generated from the database display consistent data. Although all staff members are permitted to view the database, only certain employees have the power to enter information. Even fewer individuals have the authority to delete information in the database. For example, collections interns are permitted to enter information into Mimsy XG, but are not authorized to delete anything. While this can cause inconvenience when information is unintentionally duplicated, it alleviates a significant amount of liability for collections staff.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 502.

⁵¹ *New Orleans Museum of Art Long Range Plan*. 14.

⁵² *Museum Registration Methods*. 169.

⁵³ Ibid. 161-183.

Found-in-Collection

The longer a museum has been in operation and the larger that museum's collection becomes, the more likely it is that objects will be "found-in-collection". Through some series of events, usually many years before it is found, an object entered the museum and failed to be properly documented. Among many other possibilities, the object might have been an extended – and forgotten – loan. It might have been lent to the museum and the true owner could not be reached to retrieve the piece. Quite possibly, the object could have been properly accessioned and stored, but the object record was subsequently lost or misplaced.⁵⁴ It was precisely this set of possibilities that were considered as I worked with the Collections Managers to solve the "Photography Problem Projects". When objects are found in the collection and deemed "unknown", it is helpful to have an established protocol in place.

Buck suggests a policy that NOMA follows closely.⁵⁵ When an object has been found in art storage and – after extensive research – cannot be positively aligned with an object record, it is assigned a "U" (Unknown) number. Unless the object can be absolutely tracked to the year it entered the museum, it is assigned this U-number based on the year it was found-in-collection. The hope is that an eventual inventory of the collection will allow the staff to reunite the object with an established record, but NOMA's staff refuses to consider the object as official museum property without positive identification.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 109.

⁵⁵ *Collection Conundrums*. 37-48.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

Code of Ethics

One of the three stated purposes of the American Association of Museums (AAM) is to develop standards and best practices for American museums.⁵⁶ This being the case, the AAM's outline for a museum's code of ethics is widely adopted. The three main components of AAM's suggested code are governance, collections and programs.

AAM on Governance:

“Museum governance in its various forms is a public trust responsible for the institution's service to society. The governing authority protects and enhances the museum's collections and programs and its physical, human, and financial resources. It ensures that all these resources support the museum's mission, respond to the pluralism of society, and respect the diversity of the natural and cultural common wealth.”⁵⁷

NOMA's 42-member Board of Trustees meets as a whole approximately once per month. Assorted committees meet at regular intervals to discuss different aspects of the Museum's operation such as accessions, fundraising events, and programming. The Board is dedicated to NOMA's mission and status within the community.

AAM on Collections:

The distinctive character of museum ethics derives from the ownership, care and use of objects, specimens, and living collections representing the world's natural and cultural common wealth. This stewardship of collections entails the highest public trust and carries with it the presumption of rightful ownership, permanence, care, documentation, accessibility, and responsible disposal.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “About Us” *The American Association of Museums*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Oct. 2014.

⁵⁷ “Code of Ethics for Museums.” American Alliance of Museums, 2000. Web. 03 Oct. 2014.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The Collections Management staff at NOMA takes the responsibility of collection stewardship quite seriously. Employees are diligent about maintaining the condition of the objects under their supervision, and take every precaution to assure that each object is treated with the utmost care.

AAM on Programs:

“Museums serve society by advancing an understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural common wealth throughout exhibitions, research, scholarship, publications, and educational activities. These programs further the museum’s mission and are responsive to the concerns, interests, and needs of society.”⁵⁹

NOMA’s small Interpretation and Audience Engagement staff works tirelessly to increase the variety and attendance of NOMA’s programs. Although some programs, such as Tai Chi, Chi Kung and Yoga in the galleries and the Sculpture Garden, do not seem at first directly relevant to NOMA’s mission, events such as these succeed in promoting the mission in a number of ways. Encouraging individuals to enter the gallery spaces increases their exposure to art, and working with other local nonprofits fosters goodwill and increases NOMA’s bond with the community. Other programs, such as Studio KIDS! and the Noontime Talks series tie more recognizably to increasing public awareness and appreciation of the visual arts. The diverse – yet art-related – activities offered during Friday Nights @ NOMA are reminiscent of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art’s Thursday night “Ogden After Hours” series.⁶⁰ Both social event series feature live music and include a supply of food and beverages for purchase.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Ogden After Hours." *Ogden Museum of Southern Art*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Oct. 2014.

Copyright and Reproductions

Managing images of objects in a museum's permanent collection is a complicated task. There are times in which a museum will need to use images to create promotional material. In addition, museums regularly receive requests from outside entities and individuals for images of pieces at the museum. Regardless of the intended use of the image, it is important to obtain permission prior to use. Even when the object is part of the museum's permanent collection and will be used for museum purposes, a number of considerations must be taken into account.

For images that will be used by an individual or organization outside of the museum, a detailed fee schedule should be in place. Additionally, a number of prerequisites must be met prior to the exchange of funds for an image. The exception to this rule is Fair Use.⁶¹ Should the image be intended exclusively for educational, religious or critical purposes, payment is usually waived. Most importantly, the receiving individual or organization must sign a document stating that they will abide by the museum's terms. Among those conditions:⁶²

- The request must be made in writing.
- Reproduction rights are granted on a non-exclusive basis only for one usage...permission to publish in [any] subsequent edition or reprint must be obtained in advance.
- All reproductions must be made from photographic materials supplied by the museum; these materials remain the property of the museum.
- The reproduction must be accompanied...by the full caption and by credit lines as provided by the museum.
- The client must provide two gratis copies of the publication to the museum.

⁶¹ 17 U.S. Code § 107 - Limitations on exclusive rights: Fair use.

⁶² *Museum Registration Methods*. 436-437.

The terms should also include an indemnity clause to protect the museum from any potential claims against the applicant. NOMA's reproduction request form includes all of the above and much more, with the exception of requesting only one gratis copy of the publication.

In spite of a carefully contrived system, situations will arise that have not been previously considered. For example, it is possible that a museum can accession and legally own a piece of artwork that was created on or after January 1, 1978, but not own the copyright for that object.⁶³ At this stage, it is important to have an individual (or department, depending on the size of the organization) with the knowledge and ability to reach a conclusion that is beneficial to all parties.

The Brooklyn Museum of Art and El Museo del Barrio both possess copyright and reproduction policies that NOMA might use to supplement their own forms and procedures. Both publicly post the forms and fee schedule for all available services. Like NOMA, the Brooklyn Museum requests two copies of the published materials, and El Museo del Barrio requests one gratis copy.⁶⁴ The numerous similarities of these two museums' policies to NOMA's own, coupled with the knowledge that all museums quoted in Brown and Crews's study are also accredited by the American Association of Museums, should provide a confident basis for comparison and subsequent policy updates.

⁶³ Malaro, Marie C. *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1985. 116. Print.

⁶⁴ Brown, Melissa A., and Kenneth D. Crews. *Art Image Copyright and Licensing: Compilation and Summary of Museum Policies*. Rep. New York City: Columbia U, 2010. Print.

Chapter 4

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Strengths

Permanent Collection

Undoubtedly, one of NOMA's greatest strengths is its permanent collection. Narrowing the focus of acquisition efforts in the 1970s and 80s⁶⁵ helped the Museum in its efforts to become an institution of renown. Although NOMA is a large museum, especially within its region, the overall field of visual art is too vast to be thoroughly represented in one 40,000-piece collection. While the collection successfully spans an array of historical and contemporary movements, the time and effort spent developing NOMA's niche collections has had impressive results. For example, in 2014 the Brooklyn Museum of Art teamed with NOMA's Curatorial Fellow for Spanish Colonial Art Lucia Abramovich to present *Behind Closed Doors: Art in the Spanish American Home, 1492-1898*.⁶⁶ The exhibition brought in thousands of visitors and generated an array of positive press reviews.⁶⁷

Donors

The aforementioned collection would not be possible without the support of loyal donors that have made significant investments in the Museum. Contributions and bequests from

⁶⁵ Dunbar. 263.

⁶⁶ *Behind Closed Doors*.

⁶⁷ Castjohn.

individuals such as the sculpture garden from Sydney and Walda Besthoff, the Whitecloud collection of Native American art, and the Billups glass collection are just a few of the major donations that have conclusively improved the permanent collection. Other dedicated members and patrons contribute financial resources without which NOMA would struggle. This devoted generosity is inspired by a museum that has successfully, linked itself inextricably with its community.

Database and Shared Network Drives

NOMA is fortunate to have made a good choice of collection database software. Mimsy XG is a secure database that, compared to past personal experience with other collection databases, is easy to navigate and fairly intuitive. The real strength of the database is a consistent, museum-wide set of data entry rules and guidelines for linking photographs to the system. Crystal Reports IX is an external program used by much of the staff to generate reports based on groups of Mimsy XG records. Crystal Reports pulls information directly from the database, but fails to do so if the information or images are not correctly entered. This being the case, it is imperative that the records and images follow those aforementioned consistent, specific rules. By limiting access and administrative power to only those staff members that need to access the database on a regular basis, the standards in place are able to be upheld and updated as necessary.

For all staff members, there are three network drives that are regularly used and updated. The I-drive is colloquially known as Image Corral and primarily serves to store high-resolution images. The Z-drive, or “d_images”, is the database from which Mimsy XG pulls the images that are linked to object records. Thousands of .jpeg images reside in this folder. Finally, the NOMA

Sharedrive is accessible by all staff members and is used to store all files relevant to the Museum and its employees.

Weaknesses

Technology and Communication

The issue of technology is one of great frustration at NOMA. In a number of ways, the Museum has improved greatly on the technological front in the past two years. For example, the Museum's website www.noma.org has recently undergone some drastic and long-overdue changes, and a NOMA app is being designed for Museum guest use. However, some very basic deficiencies cause an abundance of problems.

The Collections and Registrar staff at NOMA all have relatively new, high-functioning computers. This was not the case until quite recently, but is nonetheless fortunate and contributes greatly to the employees' individual productivity. Less fortunately, the remaining computers are designated for intern use. These outdated machines function with such an array of limitations that extremely simple tasks became quite time-consuming. To make up for this limitation, the interns were allowed to log in to the machines of any staff member that would be away from their computer for a significant amount of time.

One of the most frustrating technological absences is that of a stable wireless internet signal. The locations in which I spent the majority of my internship hours often experienced short- and long-term internet outages, and several locations in the basement (specifically basement art storage) lack a wireless signal entirely. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that in 2008, NOMA stated the goal of implementing Wi-Fi throughout the Museum and some of

the Sculpture Garden by summer 2009.⁶⁸ NOMA shares internet with the City of New Orleans, and lengthy internet outages occur regularly. This is especially true during the summer months as strong storms form in and around the region. Additionally, because NOMA's office spaces are in the basement, it is very rare for a cellular phone to reach a signal. These technological deficiencies are inextricably linked to a relative lack of communication between museum personnel. Employees have landlines and individual extensions, but it is rare that a specific staff member can be reached on very short notice. Indeed, it is not uncommon for some employees to be excluded when, through some combination of events, they are not informed of a meeting or discussion in which they should be included.

Office Layout

The aforementioned communication difficulties are further exacerbated by the layout of NOMA's basement offices.⁶⁹ The basement is laid out in a labyrinth of sorts, which contributes to a general directional confusion and division between staff members. The "administration" hallway parallels a separate "curator" hallway, which is separated from the Collections and Registrar offices by two staircases and several small hallways. The Interpretation and Audience Engagement ("education") offices are past the lunch room on one extreme side of the basement, and the Development personnel are scattered throughout the floor. While the layout succeeds in regard to security, as it is impossible for anyone to enter the basement without seeing or being seen by the receptionist, it is otherwise confusing and problematic.

⁶⁸ *New Orleans Museum of Art Long Range Plan*. 43.

⁶⁹ Figure 7 (see appendix).

Object Records

While there are clear and thorough instructions for every possible interaction with the collection and collection database, I occasionally witnessed a somewhat worrisome behavior. A small number of longtime employees appeared to disregard part or all of certain systems that have been put in place within the past several years. Despite a large amount of signage, the most frequently abused system is that of the file room. Individuals taking all or part of an object's folder out of the file room are instructed to sign the file out in the File Log. However, some individuals gather object folders relevant to their current project and, rather than sign the folder out of the room, put all of the folders in a personally-chosen location in the stacks. When this happens, the object folder is not signed out, but it is nevertheless "missing" from the stacks. This has caused confusion on more than one occasion.

Another issue that I was instructed to watch for were metal paperclips in the object folders. The rust from paperclips as far back as the 1910s has severely damaged papers in some of the object folders. The process of removing these paperclips and replacing them with coated plastic paperclips is an ongoing project that needs a dedicated effort to complete. At this time, that effort cannot be made and could eventually cause significant harm to important records.

A final issue of note in relation to object records is the system of data entry. The procedures and rules that are in place are clear and consistent, but only when viewed from a current standpoint. Throughout the lifetime of NOMA's Mimsy XG database, the data entry has not been uniform. The problem is not one of immediate concern, but as with any major accumulation of data, a major cleanup will need to occur at some point in the future.

Collection Breadth

Currently, NOMA's object records depend on a relatively large amount of staff interaction to be properly kept up-to-date. This can become problematic for several different reasons. Firstly, accession numbers can become quite long and easily misremembered. The movement of a large number of pieces – such as will occur with the movement of the collection to offsite storage (see “Opportunities” and “Threats” below – can make the process of updating object locations both confusing and tedious. The establishment of a more automated system, such as one involving UPC or QR codes, could significantly reduce the risk for human error.

Opportunities

Prospect New Orleans

2014 marks the third Prospect New Orleans art biennial. While NOMA is decidedly involved with P.3, the opportunities for increased visibility and community engagement were not necessarily maximized. The usual planning period for museum events is long enough that planning a significant increase in involvement with 2016's event would ideally begin within the next several months, at the closure of the current event.

Young Fellows

In the recent past, NOMA officially began the Young Fellows program. The organization of the Young Fellows is a direct attempt to engage a younger audience with the Museum at a level above simply volunteering. The Young Fellows are essentially intended to serve as a younger version of the Board of Trustees, with less decision-making power but more hands-on event organization. The 2014 LOVE in the Garden fundraiser was the first effort to which the

Young Fellows have made significant contributions, and the event saw considerable attendance by young patrons.

New Hires

Currently, the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management is struggling with confusion over professional responsibilities. The staff eagerly awaits the completion of the departmental restructuring of which they were informed in June 2014. While the current status of the department can be considered a weakness, the hiring of additional personnel will be a wonderful opportunity to significantly increase productivity and decrease employee stress. Clear job descriptions both for those shifting position and for the new hires will ensure dedication to the proper duties and relieve some of the significant pressure under which the department has been operating.

Offsite Storage

The pending move to offsite storage is an exciting opportunity for the future of NOMA and the permanent collection. The most obvious benefit will be a secure, state-of-the-art facility in which the condition of pieces in the permanent collection will be more stable. Other benefits include increased visibility and access for visiting researchers and scholars and an occasion to assure that all objects have updated Location authority records in the database. The move to offsite storage will provide the Collections department with the unique opportunity to rediscover pieces that had either gone missing or never properly recorded, and the gallery spaces that had been converted to temporary art storage can be returned to their original purpose. Additionally,

potential benefits could include an eventual on-site conservation lab and a renovation of the educational facilities that had also been converted to temporary art storage.

Threats

Offsite Storage

While the move to offsite storage will provide NOMA with a number of opportunities, a number of threats must also be considered. As with moving any large collection of objects, the potential for damage to those objects is exponentially higher in transit than while motionless. However, the collective experience of the staff and contractors is reassuring. A more realistic concern is for the organization and record-keeping aspect of the move. An updated location record for every object in offsite storage would be immensely helpful in the future. However, tired and impatient workers could very easily fail to record all relevant information.

Also of concern is the reality of distance. With the majority of the permanent collection stored elsewhere, the act of selecting objects for exhibitions or outgoing loans is more difficult. However, if the database is as thoroughly updated as the staff hopes it will be, this will not be a threat so much as an inconvenience.

Private Events at NOMA

As discussed in Chapter 2, the threat to artwork on gallery walls during private and late-night events is very real. Intoxicated guests are much more likely to accidentally bump into artwork than sober patrons. Malicious intent need not be present for irreversible damage to occur; even an elbow accidentally extended too far backward can create a permanent abrasion or dent on an aged canvas.

Fortunately, the best action I might have recommended taking to remedy this problem was exactly what my Kress project entailed. By keeping an eye on the pieces following these crowded events, collections and security staff can assure that proper action is taken as soon as the damage is noted.

Recession

A regrettable reality for nonprofit institutions since the beginning of the 2008 recession is a universal lack of funds. Government grants are scarce, foundations are forced to be more selective to meet the increased demand, and individual and corporate patrons have fewer funds to contribute to nonprofits. Tragic events stimulate donations to health and disaster relief organizations, and visual art museums such as NOMA are left to rely on dedicated patrons and long-time donors to work through difficult financial times. The resultant scarcity of funds leads to understaffing and unavoidable tension. Unfortunately there are no recommendations that I can provide that have not already been considered by the Museum at this time, but I'm certain that a continuation of NOMA's strenuous efforts to do more with less will aid the Museum through these challenging years.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the most motivating aspects of my internship at NOMA was the knowledge that my contributions would serve to truly help the organization. In many cases, the projects on which I worked were the professional responsibilities of my supervisors, delegated whenever such action would prove mutually beneficial. As such, I gained significant skills and experience that are applicable to my career.

Since the completion of the Kress project approximately six weeks ago, no less than three major events have taken place in spaces that include the Kress galleries. Following these events, thorough checks have been completed for the objects in those spaces using the condition records that I created, thus decreasing the Museum's liability and increasing object security.

The photography/print "problem projects", while more nebulous in nature, will also serve to aid the Museum in both the near and distant future. The importance of solving these problems is an utmost priority for collections managers, and the imminent move to offsite storage raises the importance of these projects even higher.

Of the thirteen photography/print projects, the Grotz project is likely to have the most obvious far-reaching benefits. Without thorough documentation of the exhibition candidates, it would be impossible to plan a retrospective of NOMA's collection of Paul Grotz prints. The aforementioned print collection will be even further benefitted by the supplementary 500+ negatives and contact sheets I am currently working to catalogue.

Finally, using the information that I was provided and the processes that I learned throughout my time at NOMA in the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management, I

drafted a handbook for future departmental interns. As the document was simply an amalgamation of information gathered for my own personal use, I shared it with my supervisors with an invitation to use, alter or disregard it as they saw fit. Although I have no confirmation, it is my hope that this will aid the Collections staff and interns in the future.

Recommendations

Much of my time at NOMA was spent in the role of observer. The significant amount of time I spent in the Museum allowed me to witness employee and departmental dynamics from a unique perspective. A perspective which, although limited, allowed me to conclude that some of the following recommendations might serve to benefit the organization.

Barcode System

The most ambitious recommendation I wish to make is the instigation of a barcode system for NOMA's permanent collection. The imminent move to offsite storage has presented the Museum with a number of unusual opportunities, not the least is which a chance to complete a thorough inventory of the 40,000-piece collection. During the physical move, NOMA intends to contract a company for the specific purpose of moving the artwork. During this process, a system must be used to keep track of which pieces are moved where, and when they are moved. The sheer number of objects prevents this from being tracked by hand, and as such a system must be in place that is at least partly automated. Without a prior system in place, the contracted movers will likely institute their own temporary system that will leave when the job is completed. If NOMA were to institute a barcode system, not only would the contractors be able

to use the system during the move, but NOMA would be able to easily track the objects in the permanent collection for years to come.

Management

While many items discussed in this category are specific to different Museum departments, all are under the ultimate control of Management.

The items I feel are of most immediate concern are those that manifested time and again in the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management. The announcement of two new positions in the department first elicited a response of excitement and relief. However, in the months that followed, the feelings turned to confusion and frustration. It is my opinion that increasing the communication between management and personnel would go a long way to relieve some of the current negativity. Announcing the new positions and departmental restructuring with no timeline or budget was an inadvisable action, and it was not until the department was informed that the position would be budgeted for the beginning of 2015 that the staff once again felt relief.

Along the same lines, NOMA could do a lot to improve communication within the building. Inexpensive cellular boosters can be purchased and placed in locations with decent signals, consequently improving the signal in the surrounding areas. A more powerful wireless router would also allow the staff Wi-Fi signal to reach spaces that are currently dead zones.

Development and Financial Management

My very minimal knowledge of NOMA's development plan prevents me from making any substantial suggestions. However, attending the 2014 LOVE in the Garden event increased

my awareness of a potentially beneficial possibility. The ticket prices for university students wishing to attend the LOVE in the Garden event are the cheapest of any of NOMA's major events. As such, young patron attendance was very high, proportional to events such as Odyssey. However, the \$50 ticket price is still out of reach for many university students. I suggest that further lowering ticket costs for students – perhaps as a limited pre-sale “special” – would foster repeat attendance and aid in the cultivation the younger generation of patrons that NOMA is seeking.

Regarding NOMA's financial management, my observations were limited to public documents, such as the Form 990 and financial statements. From these documents and the financial analysis conducted in Chapter 1, my impression is that NOMA is doing a great deal to improve its financial situation and I am unable to provide any recommendations that have not already been considered.

Marketing and Legal

In 2011, during its centennial celebration, NOMA unveiled a new and temporary museum logo⁷⁰ while a design team in New York City worked on the logo that would spearhead the subsequent rebranding effort.⁷¹ After its reveal, the new logo appeared on all NOMA print and advertisement and is now featured prominently on the newly-updated Museum website. The rebranding effort was undertaken in earnest and continues to this day. One example of this is the exciting NOMA mobile application that is being created. However, with the NOMA website and app, some sensitive legal issues have arisen.

⁷⁰ Figure 8 (see appendix).

⁷¹ Figure 9 (see appendix).

The laws of copyright and reproduction are complicated at best, and the heightened technological exposure of works in the permanent collection on the website and app can increase this complication. For example, it is common for low-resolution images to have fewer restrictions. However, in a few instances during research for this report, I have found high-resolution images of artworks on the Museum website. Upon inquiry, these images were not meant to be accessible to average website visitors. This could lead to significant complications in the long term if it is not addressed. Indeed, launching a website update a short time after the deadline would be much simpler than navigating the legal issues that a premature release might entail. Increasing communication between the departments and encouraging internal beta-testing would allow this to be avoided in the future.

Conclusion

I feel that NOMA's Collections staff utilizes its interns in a significant and effective manner. I never felt that I was pushed to complete a task under unreasonable conditions or felt that I was unable to request further information or assistance. The staff consistently responded thoughtfully to all requests and inquiries and maintained a professional, welcoming environment. There were few times in which I found myself without a task, and fewer still in which I was unable to confer with someone so that I could progress in a project.

NOMA encouraged the summer interns to attend different events at the Museum, some of which were organized specifically for the interns. In early June, there was an "orientation" in the Felix J. Dreyfous Library so that we could effectively navigate the literary collection. Nearly every Wednesday, the interns gathered in the volunteer lounge to hear from the Deputy Directors of the Museum's various departments. At the meeting in which the Deputy Director for

Administration and Finance spoke to us, Museum Director Susan Taylor took the time to introduce herself and answer our questions. Out of genuine interest, I took the time to attend docent training for the *Behind Closed Doors: Art in the Spanish American Home, 1492-1898* exhibition and the LOVE in the Garden event.

The internship program at NOMA is organized with the intention of making the intern's time at the Museum both useful and pleasant. Additionally, the intern coordinator does everything in her power to enhance the experience by serving as an invaluable and friendly liaison. I personally found that these efforts, combined with the professional and welcoming disposition of those in the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management, created an ideal internship experience from which I derived great personal and professional benefit.

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Appendix – Figures

Figure 1 – Kress Façade



Restored Kress storefront in Charleston, South Carolina.

Figure 2 – NOMA’s Values, as taken from www.NOMA.org

Values

- *Quality.* We consistently strive for excellence in all that we do. Quality in art is our fundamental objective.
- *Community.* We endeavor to reach the largest and most diverse audience to enjoy and appreciate the benefits and treasures of the Museum.
- *Integrity.* We adhere to the highest ethical standards in all Museum policies and practices for the board, staff and volunteers.
- *Stewardship.* We professionally maintain the preservation, conservation, exhibition, scholarship and accessibility of the Collection.
- *Diversity.* We are committed to serving a diverse public through innovation, enrichment and inspiration for people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- *Education.* We seek to promote the visual arts through innovative educational programs and learning experiences to ensure broad participation from both traditional and new audiences.
- *Stability.* We maintain economic stability through responsible financial planning and management, allowing NOMA to grow and accomplish its vision and mission for the future.
- *Creativity.* We celebrate creativity in all cultures and from all periods. We continuously set high standards through openness to new ideas from the community, staff and supporters.
- *Collaboration.* We recognize the importance of collaboration with other cultural, academic, scientific and professional communities to expand our reach, leverage our resources and diversify our audience.

Figure 3 – NOMA Ratio Analysis

New Orleans Museum of Art Ratio Analysis

All figures from FY2013 unless otherwise noted.

Liquidity

Current Ratio

Current assets / Current liabilities

$$\text{\$3,070,243} / \text{\$631,420} = \mathbf{4.86}$$

Working Capital Ratio

Current assets – current liabilities

$$\text{\$3,070,243} - \text{\$631,420} = \mathbf{\text{\$2,438,823}}$$

Quick Ratio

(Cash + Marketable Securities + Accounts Receivable) / Current Liabilities

$$(\text{\$449,406} + \text{\$1,833,316} + \text{\$427,565}) / \text{\$631,420} = \mathbf{4.29}$$

Long-Term Solvency

Debt-to-Asset Ratio

Total liabilities / Total assets

FY2013

$$\text{\$631,420} / \text{\$61,330,299} = \mathbf{\text{\$0.01}}$$

FY2012

$$\text{\$627,876} / \text{\$53,563,543} = \mathbf{\text{\$0.01}}$$

Debt-to-Equity Ratio

Total liabilities / Net Assets

FY2013

$$\text{\$631,420} / \text{\$60,698,879} = \mathbf{0.01}$$

FY2012

$$\text{\$627,876} / \text{\$52,935,667} = \mathbf{0.01}$$

Efficiency

Asset-Turnover Ratio

Total unrestricted revenues / average total assets

(Avg total assets from 2009-2013)

$$\text{\$6,526,814} / \text{\$53,703,576.80} = \mathbf{\text{\$0.12}}$$

Days Receivable Ratio

(Accounts Receivable * 365 Days) / Unrestricted Revenue

$$(\text{\$427,565} * 365) / \text{\$6,526,814} = \mathbf{23.9}$$

Figure 3 – NOMA Ratio Analysis (continued)

Profitability

Profit Margin Ratio

Unrestricted Revenue – Expenses = Unrestricted Surplus

Unrestricted Surplus / Unrestricted Revenues = Profit Margin

FY2013

$\$6,526,814 - \$11,294,327 = -\$4,767,513$

$-\$4,767,513 / \$6,526,814 = -0.73$ or **-73%**

FY2012

$\$4,329,296 - \$7,287,851 = -\$2,958,555$

$-\$2,958,555 / \$4,329,296 = -0.68$ or **-68%**

Return on Assets

Operating Surplus / Total Assets

FY2013

$\$3,329,623 / \$61,330,299 = 0.054$ or **5.4%**

FY2012

$\$1,304,774 / \$53,563,543 = 0.024$ or **2.4%**

Contributions Ratio

Revenue from individual and corporate contributions / Total Revenue (%)

$\$2,606,590 / \$6,526,814 = 0.399$ or **39.9%**

Figure 4 – Proposed changes within the Office of the Registrar and Collections Management at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

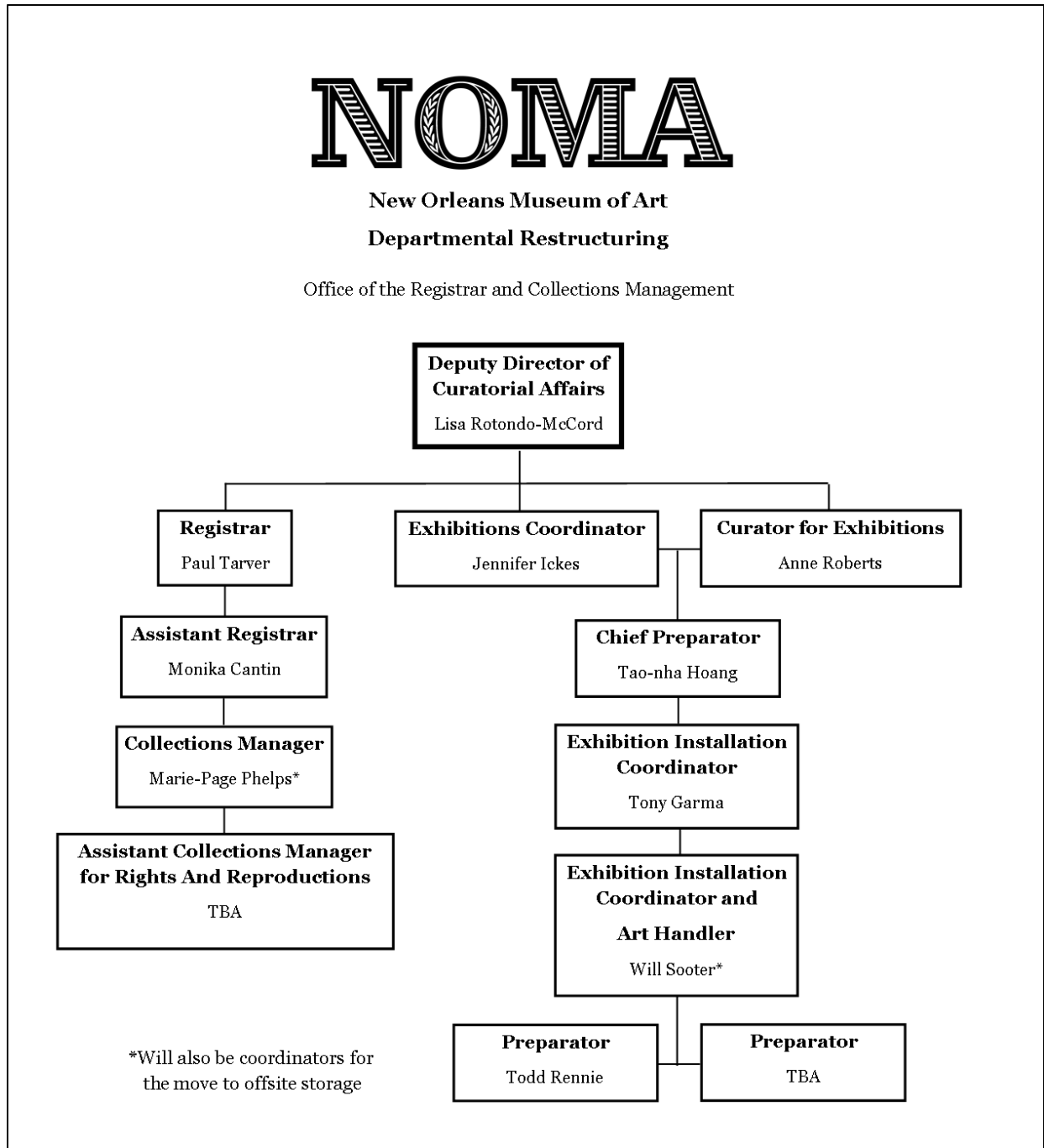


Figure 5 – NOMA First Floor Map

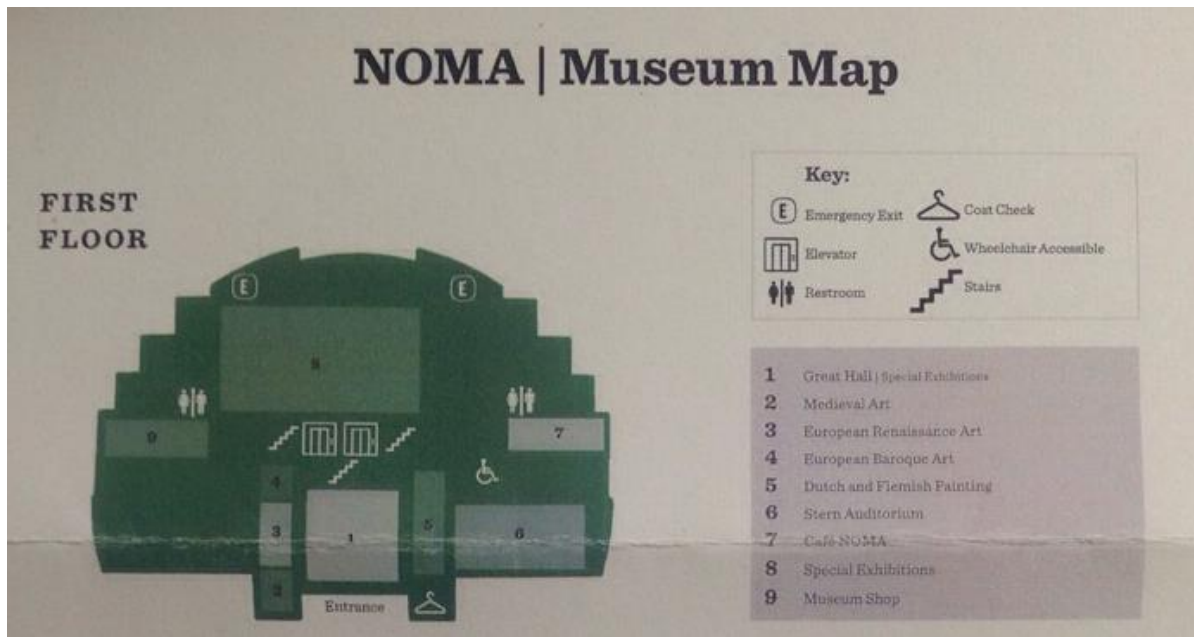


Figure 6 – Example of a Digital Condition Report

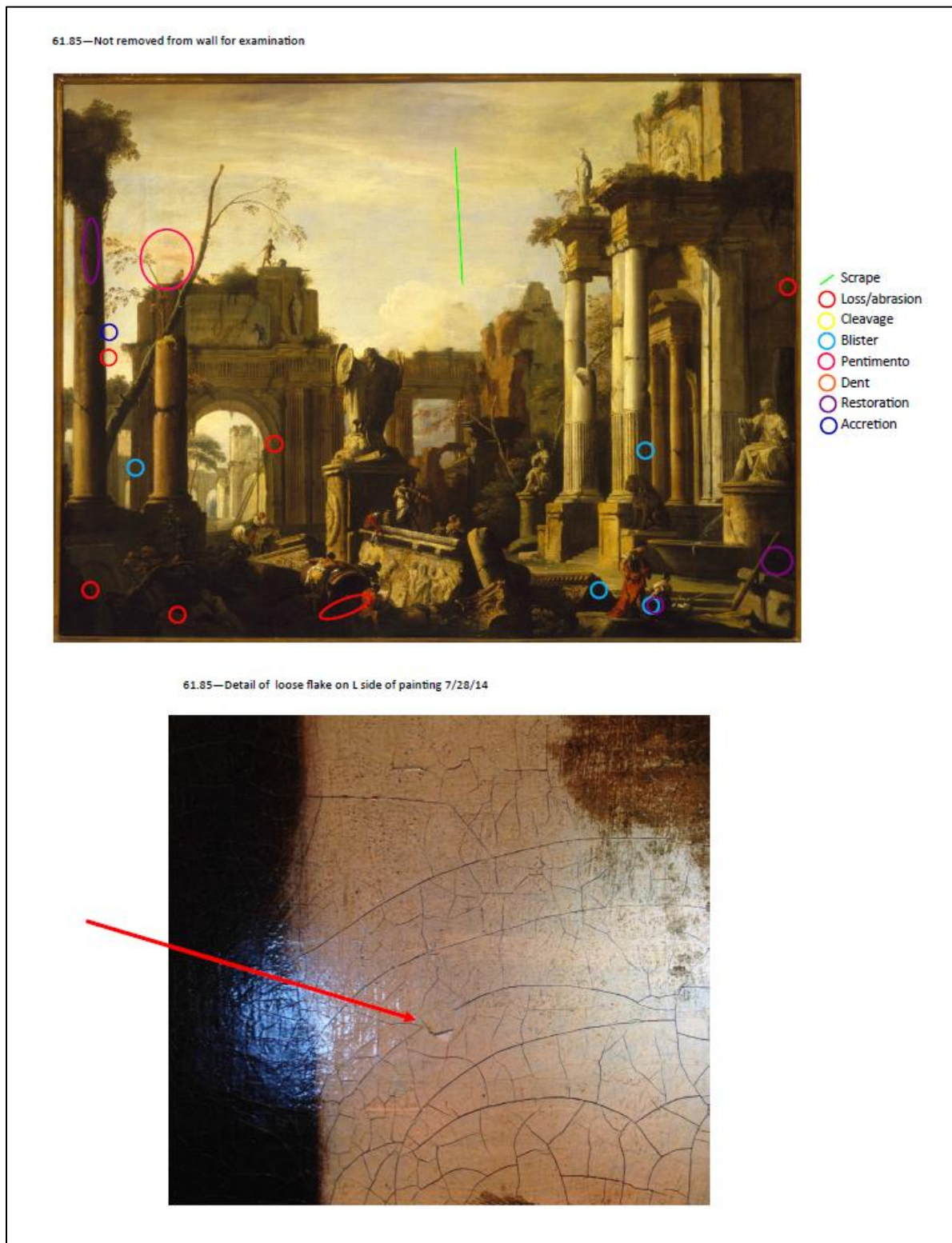
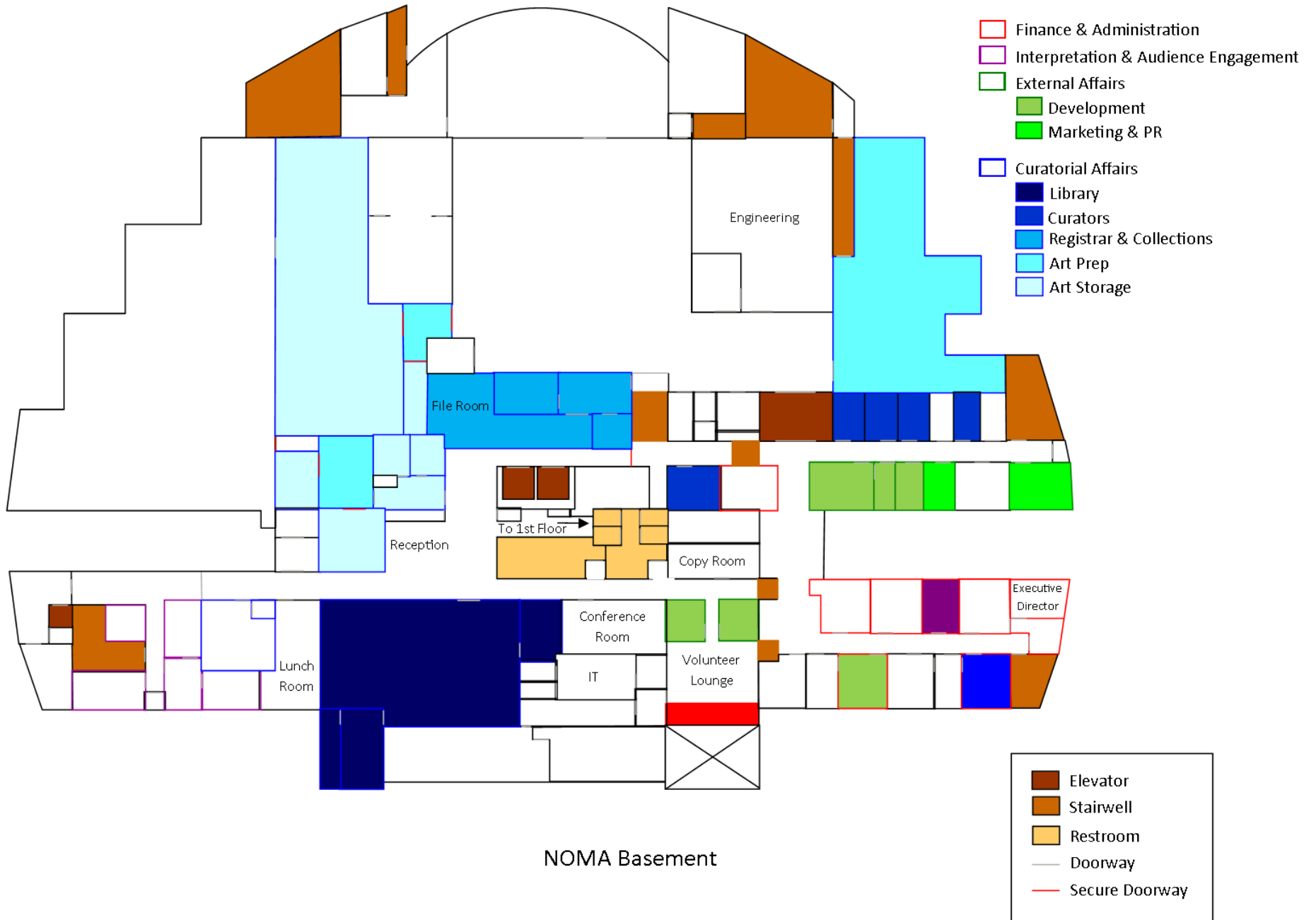


Figure 7 – NOMA Basement Map



NOMA Basement

Figure 8 – NOMA’s Centennial Logo (2011)



Figure 9 – NOMA’s New Logo (2012-Present)



NOMA



NOMA

Vita

Laura Baker was born in Houston, Texas. After graduating with honors from Tomball High School, she moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to attend Louisiana State University. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with Upper Division Honors Distinction in December 2011, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Studio Art and a minor in Art History. In August of 2012, she moved to New Orleans, Louisiana to pursue a Master's Degree in Arts Administration from the University of New Orleans.