

National Narratives in Maritime and Ethnic Museums

Displaying and Celebrating the “Other”: A Study of the Mission, Scope, and Roles of Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles

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In the last thirty years, ethnic museums have mushroomed in American cities. Although this is certainly a national phenomenon, it has been particularly evident in Los Angeles. In this paper we examine the genesis and evolution of these emerging institutions. We survey the mission, scope, and role of ethnic museums in Los Angeles, and we contrast them with the stated mission and scope of “mainstream” museums in the city. We further present case studies of three Los Angeles ethnic museums. The museums vary considerably in the ways they perceive their role in the community, the city, and the nation and in the preservation and display of ethnic culture. At their best, ethnic museums serve to make new art and histories more accessible and visible and provide a forum in which to debate contemporary issues of politics and identity. The paper highlights some of the tensions faced by ethnic museums as they seek to define their audience and role(s) in multi-ethnic, twenty-first century Los Angeles.

IN RECENT YEARS, museums have become an increasingly visible and significant feature in cities around the world. In their capacity to stimulate a

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cultural economy and to create a more attractive image that enables cities to compete regionally and globally for tourists, businesses, and new residents, some museums have become important components of urban redevelopment and city marketing strategies.¹ Witness, for example, the rebirth of the sleepy Basque port of Bilbao—a town facing not only economic decline but also ethnic conflict—after the building of the Guggenheim Museum.

As many museums have sought new strategies to finance their expanding urban role, they have been forced to pursue alternative funding sources. They have often embraced corporate sponsorship of their exhibitions, constructed elaborate renovations and branch museums, and added museum stores and restaurants to attract a broader paying audience.² In the process, museums have become popular attractions and integral parts of an expanding leisure industry. Thus, many museums today are not only depositories of high art and culture, but also have pursued a more populist, entertainment-oriented role.

As museums have gained more prominence in the public eye, they have emerged as central battlegrounds in the “culture and history wars.” Questions of the appropriate representation of the past or what constitutes art have incited controversy and have generated debate over larger issues of national self-definition and group values.³ The mission, scope, and mandate of museums have come under increased scrutiny. Furthermore, as urban places have become home to more diverse populations, traditional channels of representation do not seem adequate to capture the complexity and multiplicity of the needs of different publics.⁴ Thus, whereas museums may have once served as sites of collective remembering, firmly vested in the nation-state, their mandate today is challenged in “a world in which the borders by which societies are kept apart are increasingly criss-crossed by ever-speeding flows of images, information, ideas, and people. . . . These flows generate new hybrid cultures which are largely unremembered within existing institutional representations of the past.”⁵

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1. Elizabeth Strom, “Converting Pork into Porcelain: Cultural Institutions and Downtown Development,” *Urban Affairs Review* 38, no. 1 (2002): 3–21.

2. Mark Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated: Museums, Artists, and Corporate Sponsorship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Chin-Tao Wu, *Privatizing Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London and New York: Verso, 2002).

3. Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

4. Jan Linn, “Globalization and the Revalorization of Ethnic Places in Immigration Gateway Cities,” *Urban Affairs Review* 34, no. 2 (1998): 313–340; Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

5. John Urry, “How Societies Remember the Past,” in *Theorizing Museums*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 46.

Since the 1960s many have become skeptical of the museum's fundamental principles and techniques of representation that privileged "national" and "elite" culture over "ethnic" and "popular" culture, and have actively sought to reorganize the institution. Critics charged that, as temples of high culture, mainstream museums have failed to present the "other" voices in the city or have continued to exhibit them under categories of "primitive" or "exotic." In response, some mainstream museums have gradually recognized the needs, values, and histories of multiple publics and have experimented with new and self-critical modes of display.⁶ Well-known museums like the Smithsonian have added special collections and exhibits that represent multiple perspectives, giving voices to publics previously "spoken for" or ignored.⁷

At the same time, many ethnic and minority groups have responded to their perceived and often real exclusion and the growing interest in their own culture and heritage by creating distinct institutions to document, interpret, and exhibit the art, culture, and history of their communities and cultures.⁸ The last thirty years have thus witnessed an explosion of ethnic and culturally specific museums. Although this is certainly a national phenomenon, it is particularly evident in Los Angeles, where in the last decade many ethnic museums have opened their doors to the public. The list includes local efforts by African, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Jewish, Korean, Latino, and Ukranian American museums.

Although the literature on ethnic museums and their anticipated roles is growing, few studies have attempted to evaluate their role and actual impact on ethnic communities and cities at large. Rarely does the literature address empirically the role of such museums in defining cultural representation and community participation. Furthermore, although increasing discussion has focused on the commercialization of museums, sufficient attention has not been paid to the genesis and evolution of more specialized cultural institutions such as ethnic museums. This paper will start addressing these issues.

In the first section, we provide an overview of the prominent issues and debates that surround the history and development of the museum as an institution. In the second section, we highlight the emergence of ethnic museums and their divergence from mainstream institutions. In the last section,

6. Anita Herle, "Torres Strait Islanders: Stories from an Exhibition," *Ethnos* 65, no. 2 (2000): 253–74; Henrietta Riegel, "Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference," in *Theorizing Museums*; Susan Vogel, "Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 191–204.

7. Sharon Macdonald, "Theorizing Museums: An Introduction," in *Theorizing Museums*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 1–18.

8. James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219; Edmund Barry Gaither, "'Hey That's Mine': Thoughts on Pluralism and American Museums," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Kreamer, and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 56–64; Moira Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: Routledge, 1996).

we survey the scope, role, and mission of ethnic museums in Los Angeles, and discuss case studies of three Los Angeles ethnic museums that range in size, mission, and history.

Temples and Forums: The Evolving Role of Mainstream Museums

Historically, museums have been deeply involved in the formation and interpretation of identity and history. However, rather than serving as a democratic forum to debate and exchange ideas on the representation of identity and history, the early museum functioned more as a civic temple—a space that authenticated and consecrated the values of the bourgeoisie and nation-state as an objective reality for all to emulate.⁹ As temple, the museum contributed to reinforcing the values of a select segment of society, while often subordinating competing views and agendas. Such museums served not only as repositories of elite culture and national heritage, but also as spaces that categorized cultural differences along a hierarchy of race and class.¹⁰

As public museums, these institutions were open to everyone, but their emphasis on the display of elite culture practically served to exclude a large segment of the public. In this way, early public museums created their publics by providing a definitive space, the art museum, which was devoted to a specific activity: the cultivation of art appreciation as a mark of elite culture. Museum users were passive observers of displays and exhibits that were selected by museum board members, who set the standards of taste. Moreover, museum exhibits largely served to naturalize hierarchies of cultural differences, visually distinguishing between the museum's public and the "other." Early public museums arranged objects along a sequence of progressive stages implying that as objects were increasingly more sophisticated and technical, so were the people who created them. Museum anthropologists and exhibition curators froze "primitive cultures" in the past through the construction of evolutionary narratives of humanity and constructed racial difference through museum exhibitions.¹¹ In other words, anthropologists and museum professionals, who actually argued for social equality, helped to construct racial inequality within the purportedly democratic public space

9. Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995); Steven Lavine and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism," in *Exhibiting Cultures*, 1–9.

10. On museums and national heritage, see Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Exhibiting Cultures*; 88–103. On the categorization of cultural differences, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

11. Nelia Dias, "The Visibility of Difference: Nineteenth-Century French Anthropological Collections," in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (London: Routledge, 1998), 36–52; Flora Kaplan ed., *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The Role of Objects in National Identity* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994).

of the museum. Museums, then, contributed to embedding hierarchies of racial and cultural difference within their conceptions of a universal public.

Today, however, although many museums retain their status as prestigious temples of art or science, many also aspire to serve as forums for the representation of diverse identities and points of view. Thus, they address issues, exhibit collections, and provide for communities once considered peripheral to the mainstream museum. Such museums have become vehicles to affirm and articulate new forms of identity and community, but also sites of conflict and contest, where different groups battle over appropriate definitions and representations.¹²

Since the 1960s there has been a rising tension between the role of the museum as a temple or as a forum. Voices of dissent toward the traditional role and the modes of display upon which mainstream museums have historically relied have emerged from the American civil rights movement, feminist and minority groups, minority artists, and museum scholars and professionals. Critics have questioned the traditional museum's tendency towards Eurocentric practices of representation, its focus on a cultural elite, and its failure to provide equal opportunities for minorities.¹³

In the process, some mainstream museums have attempted to restructure their exhibits. One often-cited attempt to re-present cultural history is the 1992 exhibition *Fluffs and Feathers* at the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada.¹⁴ The exhibit's curators employed ironic displays to demonstrate the ways that typical exhibition techniques reflect and define Native culture. Similarly, Anita Herle's exhibition of the Torres Strait Islanders in the University of Cambridge Museum put on display not only the social relations and belief systems of the Islanders, but also those of the anthropologists who studied them.¹⁵

Emergence and Divergence of Ethnic Museums

As many mainstream museums have struggled to transform from exclusive temples to inclusive public forums, new types of museums have also emerged. Over the last three decades, there has been a tremendous rise in the U.S. and Canada of ethnic museums—institutions formed by members of ethnic groups to collect, exhibit, and interpret the history, art, and culture of their communities.¹⁶ According to a research report published by the American Association of Museums, 26 percent of the new museums scheduled to open

12. Steven Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars*.

13. Moira Simpson, *Making Representations*.

14. Henrietta Riegel, "Into the Heart of Irony."

15. Anita Herle, "Torres Strait Islanders."

16. Karen Mary Davalos, "Exhibiting Mestizaje: The Poetics and Experience of Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum," in *Latinos in Museums: A Heritage Reclaimed*, ed. A. Rios Bustamante and C. Marin (Malabar, Fla.: Kreiger Publishers, 1998); Moira Simpson, *Making Representations*.

between 1998 and 2000 were museums on specialized topics such as ethnic or cultural themes.¹⁷

The ethnic museum has been hailed by advocates as an alternative site of cultural production and exhibition and as a promoter of ethnic culture and identity. According to E. Barry Gaither, director of the Museum of the National Center of African American Artists,

Culturally specific museums have a unique role to play in forging a new America. Grounded in historic heritages associated with particular communities, they provide intimate models for the partnership and dialogue which museums and their communities may develop. Responding to social, cultural, and educational needs, these museums participate simultaneously to affirm the worth and contributions of minority peoples.¹⁸

Although the ethnic museum is seen by many as a keeper of ethnic and cultural traditions—as a means for recalling what has been lost and retaining a sense of cultural identity that is different from the mainstream—critics charge that the ethnic museum too often assumes an authoritative stance towards cultural authenticity that leaves no room for change.¹⁹ Whereas opponents have lamented the threat of cultural balkanization and fragmentation across racial, ethnic, or class lines,²⁰ advocates have seen the ethnic museum as a mediator between the ethnic community and the larger public.²¹ By making ethnic cultures or histories visible to a larger audience, the ethnic museum is educating the larger city audience and bringing to the mainstream the culture it represents. Importantly, by establishing something as permanent and visible as a museum, the ethnic culture is conveying the message of coming of age; it is giving an evidence of its permanence and stability.

Another reason for the flourishing of ethnic museums has been the widespread sentiment among ethnic communities that mainstream museums have marginalized and excluded “other” cultures. Karen Davalos poignantly summarizes this feeling: “The public museum does not collect our histories and experiences, particularly not our art. It does not categorize our cultural products as ‘American’ but marginalizes them, even placing them in the hallways and other makeshift galleries.”²²

The preponderance of ethnic museums can also be partly attributed to the proliferation of cultural and ethnic tourism. Thus, as we will see in the case studies, some ethnic museums also aspire to attract an increasing flow of tourists who seek to discover how their diaspora have fared in the foreign

17. Cited in Reuben De Leon, “Cultural Institutions in Ethnic Los Angeles Neighborhoods” (unpublished paper, UCLA Department of Urban Planning, 1999).

18. Gaither, quoted in Moira Simpson, *Making Representations*, 75.

19. Guillermo Gomez-Peña, “The Other Vanguard,” in *Museums and Communities*, 65–75.

20. John Higham, “The Ethnic Historical Society in Changing Times,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 13, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 31–44.

21. Larry Gordon, “As Minorities Thrive, So Do Ethnic Museums,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 May, 1998.

22. Karen Davalos, “Exhibiting Mestizaje,” 40.

land, but also to get a flavor of the early twenty-first century multicultural city.

Despite the transnational ties that some ethnic museums may be able to build and the global aspirations that the larger of them may have, the majority of ethnic museums are primarily grounded in local communities. Ethnic museums exist within a local context, at the same time that they are expected to promote and create a specific cultural context. They are often vested with a larger role than that of purveyors of ethnic culture. As community-based institutions, they are frequently expected to contribute to community building and sustainability. Their mission is often described as social, educational, and political, in addition to cultural. At times, ethnic museums are even described as “advocates for ethnic communities, often becoming directly involved in community development, political action, and protest.”²³ Thus, ethnic museums are expected to provide a new form of community space, at the same time that they are assuming a greater variety of functions than mainstream museums.

Although ethnic museums emerged partly in reaction to the misrepresentation and exclusion of mainstream museums, the reality is often more blurred, with mainstream museums often striving to incorporate multiple voices and ethnic museums sometimes exercising top-down planning and decisionmaking. As our case studies will indicate, ethnic museums vary considerably in size, scope, and financial status. Their role often spans both models of temple and forum, and at the same time, encompasses entirely new responsibilities.

In the next section we will explore the varied attributes of ethnic museums in Los Angeles and the processes by which they define and preserve ethnic culture and identity and engender community involvement.

Ethnic Museums in Los Angeles

The Los Angeles region is home to literally hundreds of cultural institutions, which pursue a diverse array of activities and agendas.²⁴ Of these many institutions, we have identified twenty that operate as ethnic museums (Table 1). Our classification of a museum as “ethnic” was based on the museum’s stated mission and practice to represent, exhibit, and interpret the history, art, and culture of a specific subpopulation in the city, distinguishable from the rest of the American society by its ethnicity (e.g. Italian-, Ukrainian-, Japanese-, Chinese-, Korean-, Filipino-American), race (e.g. African American, Latino, Asian, American Indian)—or religion (e.g. Jewish).²⁵

23. *Ibid.*, 41.

24. See Susan Ciccoti. “High Art in L.A.: A Preview of AAM’s Annual Meeting City,” in *Museum News* (January/February, 1998) and the *Greater Los Angeles Arts Resource Directory* (4th ed.) (Los Angeles: Arts Resources and Technical Services, Inc, 1999).

25. We should note that “whiteness” or rather lack thereof was not a determining factor in our classification of a museum as “ethnic.” As can be seen in Table 1, some of these institutions

A careful examination of the mission, scope, and facilities of these twenty museums reveals that the perception of the ethnic museum as a homogeneous construct is a myth. Although all ethnic museums aspire to highlight and display elements of one or more ethnic cultures, they vary considerably in the ways they perceive their role in the community, the city, or even the nation. These museums range extensively in size and facilities as well. Some are modest institutions, occupying neighborhood storefronts and struggling to survive. Others are well-established museums with considerable budgets and facilities. Ethnic museum visitors also range from members of the local neighborhood and surrounding community to a national and even global audience.

To better understand the aforementioned differences, we will first highlight how the twenty ethnic museums describe their mission, scope, and role. We contrast their mission statements with those of the six most renowned mainstream museums in Los Angeles: the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the National History Museum of Los Angeles County, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), the Huntington Library and Art Collection, and the Autry Museum of Western Heritage. In the next section we present the results of a content analysis of the written mission statements of these museums. Following this, we report on three particular case studies of ethnic museums as indicative of their range and scope.

For the content analysis we generated an inventory of the twenty ethnic museums, drawing from the *Greater Los Angeles Arts Resource Directory*.²⁶ From museum websites, contact with the institutions themselves, and site visits, we compiled each institution's mission statement and expressed function and scope (type of activities, roles), and means of representation and exhibition. The content analysis allowed us to contrast and compare the scope, goals, functions, and roles and intended impact of ethnic museums vis-à-vis other ethnic and mainstream museums. The shortcoming of this analysis was that it was based on the perspectives of museum founders, curators, and boards, and did not reveal the perceptions of the visitors. As such, the content analysis was not able to measure the impact and effectiveness of the museum mission on the community. However, although mission statements are often expressions of institutional ideals, written in part to satisfy prospective donors, their analysis does provide a window into the goals and ambitions of these institutions.

To gain more detailed information about the spectrum of roles and functions of ethnic museums, we focused on three particular museums in Los Angeles: The Museum in Black in Leimert Park, the Japanese American National

represent and celebrate the culture and history of specific white groups, which are distinguished from the white Anglo-Saxon population by their ethnic background (e.g. Italian, Ukrainian) or religion (Jewish).

26. *Greater Los Angeles Arts Resource Directory*.

TABLE 1. SURVEY OF FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, AND MODES OF REPRESENTATION OF TWENTY ETHNIC MUSEUMS IN LOS ANGELES

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Functions</i>							<i>Mode of Representation</i>		
	<i>Museum Display</i>	<i>Community Service/Center</i>	<i>Education Programs</i>	<i>Research Center</i>	<i>Entertainment and Performance</i>	<i>Commercial</i>	<i>Art</i>	<i>Culture</i>	<i>History</i>	
African American Firefighter Museum	x						x		x	
Black Inventions Museum Inc.	x								x	
California African American Museum	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles	x	x	x	x			x		x	
Italian Cultural Institute	x	x	x	x			x		x	
Japanese American National Museum	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Korean American Museum	x	x	x				x		x	
Latino Museum of History, Art and Culture Los Angeles	x		x				x	x	x	
Museum of the Holocaust Los Angeles	x							x	x	

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Table 1. continued

Museum in Black	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Museum of African American Art	x							x	
Museum of Latin American Art	x		x					x	
Museum of Tolerance	x		x		x			x	x
Pacific Asia Museum	x		x				x	x	x
Philippine American National Museum	x	x			x			x	x
Pico Rivera Center for the Arts	x								x
Skirball Cultural Center	x				x			x	x
Southwest Museum: Native Cultures of the Americas	x				x			x	x
Ukrainian Art Center	x	x			x			x	x
Watts Towers Art Ctr.	x	x			x			x	x

Museum in Little Tokyo, and the Museum of Latin American Art in the East Village Arts District of Long Beach. Each case study examines the motives of curators, their definition of their public or audience, the mission and perceived role of the museum in the preservation and display of ethnic culture and in the production of cultural identity, and the perceived role of the ethnic museum as community institution. The case studies address some of the shortcomings of the content analysis and add an empirical dimension to illustrate more fully the various forms that ethnic museums take and the diverse mandates that each seeks to fulfill. We carried out each of the case studies based on site visits, interviews with museum personnel, and a survey of documents such as newspaper articles, museum press releases, exhibition reviews, and the museum's annual reports.

A careful reading and analysis of the mission statements of the twenty ethnic museums in Los Angeles clearly reveals that their perceived role cannot be simply classified in one of the two polar categories of "temple" or "forum." As Table 2 indicates, we have identified five roles that the ethnic museum might prepare itself to play as (1) advocate of a particular culture, (2) interpreter of the culture and history of the ethnic group, (3) zone of contact between the ethnic culture and the culture of others, (4) keeper of ethnic traditions, and (5) site of contest. These roles are not mutually exclusive, as ethnic museums often aspire to or are drawn to play more than one role.

The content analysis shows that most ethnic museums perceive themselves as advocates for their culture, places to *promote*, *celebrate*, and *recognize* a particular cultural heritage. Their goal is to instill *pride* in the members of the ethnic group. So the Museum in Black wants to "teach the younger African-Americans to be proud of who you are, where you are from, and what you are about." Additionally, ethnic museums feel responsible to develop a sense of *appreciation* in the general public for the ethnic group's *achievements* and *contribution* to society. For example, the California African American Museum wishes to "enhance the public's knowledge of the African American's contribution to society." The Philippine American National Museum seeks "to appreciate Filipino Americans' contributions as an integral part of our nation's heritage." The Chinese American Museum wants to celebrate "the achievements of these people who have contributed to the dynamic and diverse community in Southern California." In a society that has privileged the achievements of a majority culture, such descriptions reveal the need felt by ethnic communities to establish the significance of their achievements, celebrate their heritage, and show the ways that it should be integrated in history and society.

An ethnic museum often plays the role of the interpreter of a specific culture and history. It seeks to *inform* and *educate* a larger public about the culture, develop its *awareness* about matters of ethnic heritage and history, and *interpret* and translate the culture and history to outsiders. For example, the African-American Firefighter Museum "extends an invitation" to the public "to learn more about the courage and dedication" of African-American

TABLE 2. CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MISSION STATEMENTS OF TWENTY ETHNIC MUSEUMS IN LOS ANGELES²⁷

<i>Verbs</i>		<i>Nouns</i>		<i>Museum Role</i>
Promote	5	Contribution	6	Museum as advocate of ethnic culture
Celebrate	2	Appreciation	3	
Recognize	1	Achievement	2	
Advance	1	Pride	1	
Occurrences	9		12	21
Understand	5	Education	6	Museum as intepreter of culture and history
Interpret	3	Awareness	1	
Inform	1			
Occurrences	9		7	16
Share	2	Diversity	3	Museum as zone of contact
Exchange	1	Forum/public arena	3	
Bridge	1	Interaction	2	
		Outreach	1	
Occurrences	4	Understanding between cultures	1	
Occurrences	4		10	14
Preserve	5	Heritage	7	Museum as keeper of ethnic traditions
Remember	1	Tradition	1	
Occurrences	6		8	14
Challenge	2	Prejudice	1	Museum as site of contest
Confront	1	Bias	1	
		Racism	1	
Occurrences	3		3	6

firefighters. The California African American Museum “tells the story of African American contributions to world history and culture.” The Chinese American Museum “defines and interprets the Chinese Americans’ role in establishing the California community.”

The mission statements of many ethnic museums reveal that they perceive their role as zones of contact that *share* and *exchange* information about their own and other cultures, *bridge* diverse publics, and *develop an understanding between cultures*. They display their cultural heritage as a means of recognizing the existing cultural diversity, and represent the experiences of their group as one of many forces that shape both local and global culture. So the Korean American Museum aspires to “serve as a dynamic force in bridging the widest array of generational audiences as well as ethnic communities.” The Japanese

27. Numbers indicate the number of mission statements that contained the word.

American National Museum strives to provide “a voice for Japanese Americans and a forum that enables all people to explore their own heritage and culture.”

Ethnic museums also appear as keepers of their *tradition* and *heritage*, feeling responsible to *preserve*, *document*, and keep alive the art, history, experiences, and culture of their groups. As institutions, they are there to recall and represent buried histories, thus filling the silences perpetuated by mainstream museums. In doing so, ethnic museums are sometimes presenting themselves as sites of contest, where *prejudice*, *bias*, *bigotry*, and *racism* are exposed, confronted, and challenged. Ethnic museum exhibits often force a forgetful public to *remember* painful injustices encroached upon the ethnic group. According to its mission statement, the Japanese American National Museum “believes in the importance of remembering our history to better guard against the prejudice that threatens liberty and equality in a democratic society.” The Museum of the Holocaust wants “history to come alive for museum visitors” so that society does not forget the events that led to and followed the unbearable tragedy of the Holocaust. Similarly, the Chinese American Museum seeks “to bring to life the challenges” encountered by the early Chinese Americans, while the Museum in Black reminds its visitors of the harsh injustices of slavery and the horror of lynching.

A similar content analysis of the mission statements of six mainstream museums in Los Angeles showed some distinct differences in their roles (Table 3). The most prominent roles that these museums perceive themselves as playing are as keepers and enhancers of knowledge and interpreters of art and history. Like ethnic museums, mainstream museums also see themselves as advocates. However, whereas ethnic museums seek to promote and celebrate a specific ethnic culture, mainstream museums assert their expertise and authority in broad areas of art, history, and scholarship. For instance, MOCA “identifies and supports the most significant and challenging art of its time.” The Getty strives to “educate a diverse public through . . . works of art of the highest quality.” The Huntington Library and Art Collection draws on its “legacy of renowned collections” and offers “its extraordinary resources to the public.” Indeed, mainstream museums expect to attract “the widest possible audience to enjoy and value” their resources (Natural History Museum). The mission statements of the six museums include a number of references to a broad, homogenized, and generalized public. One encounters references to the “interwoven contributions of many cultures” (Huntington Library and Art Collection) or the “interwoven histories and myths of the American West and its diverse people” (Autry Museum). Finally, the mission statements of mainstream museums (presumably reflecting the sentiments of their boards) did not include specific references to controversy or dispute, despite the fact that some of these museums have in the past been sites of contestation by supporting exhibits and art which challenge conventional canons and norms.

As expected, the content analysis showed that the biggest difference between mainstream and ethnic museums is that the latter are firmly rooted within specific ethnic communities. Although only four museums (Korean American

TABLE 3. CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MISSION STATEMENTS OF SIX MAINSTREAM MUSEUMS IN LOS ANGELES

<i>Verbs</i>		<i>Nouns</i>		<i>Museum Role</i>	
Preserve	4	Repository (of knowledge)	1		
Educate	3	Learning laboratory	1		
Reveal	2	Forum for ideas	1		
Enhance	1	Exchange of ideas	1	Museum as keeper	
Enrich	1	Discovery	1	and enhancer	
Explore	1	Investigation	1	of knowledge	
Occurrences	12		6		18
Interpret	1	Interpretation	4	Museum as interpreter	
Understand	1	Understanding	3	of art and history	
Occurrences	2		7		9
Support	2	Haven			
Protect	1	(for scholarship)	1		
Foster	1				
Promote	1			Museum as advocate	
Encourage	1			of art/history/scholarship	
Occurrences	6		1		7
Inspire	3				
Delight	1			Museum as site	
Enjoy	1			of inspiration and delight	
Occurrences	5				5
Engage	2	Connection	1	Museum as site of contact	
Link	1			between (1) past and present,	
Connect	1			and (2) artists and public	
Occurrences	4		1		5

Museum, Museum in Black, Ukrainian Art Center, and Watts Towers Art Center) explicitly identify themselves as community centers, many others strive to be focal points for the community and also provide community services such as meeting spaces and educational programs. Of the four institutions mentioned above, two have emerged directly out of the physical neighborhoods in which they are located. Museum in Black occupies a small storefront along the main street in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Leimert Park, whereas the Watts Towers Art Center, founded in 1956 by neighborhood residents, organizes “arts exhibitions and performances of special interest to the Watts community.” The Ukrainian Art Center organizes theatrical performances, art education, and craft fairs, in addition to displaying Ukrainian arts and crafts. In addition to its promotion of Korean and Korean American art and culture, the Korean American Museum assumes a strong community service role, offering advocacy, health, and family services, and youth programs.

Many ethnic museums consider education as a central component of their mission. Fifteen museums offer educational programs for the youth, as well as courses on visual and performing arts, language, cooking, and crafts.²⁸ Some museums, such as the Japanese American National Museum and the Museum in Black, offer guided tours of Los Angeles that emphasize ethnic places and history. Additionally, nine museums contain research centers and archives. Many offer lectures on ethnic history and culture, and at least two museums, the Japanese American National Museum and the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles, have ongoing oral history projects.

Ethnic museums not only seek to educate, but also to entertain. Seven museums offer entertainment programs that share ethnic culture through music, dance, and theater. Still others, such as the Museum of Latin American Art, offer introductions to popular ethnic culture such as tango lessons and tequila tasting. Entertainment programs are often considered to contextualize museum displays, such as at the Museum of Latin American Art, “where visitors can enjoy programs and entertainment that stimulates the senses, inspires the intellect, and gives the art a cultural context.” Of course, entertainment programs are more than just means to promote cultural awareness and appreciation, but also a way to raise money for these often-struggling institutions. In fact, ten museums also attain some commercial function, often in the form of a museum store, gift shop, or restaurant. A few museums also sell or rent some of the objects on display.

Despite the importance of programs and services, a primary function for ethnic museums is the display and interpretation of ethnic art, history, and culture. Unlike the mainstream museum, however, art, history, and culture are often inseparable in ethnic museum displays. Fourteen of the ethnic museums collect and display cultural artifacts. Museum exhibits address both historical and contemporary aspects of the ethnic culture and are situated at all geographic levels from the neighborhood to the nation and around the globe. Curators organize exhibits utilizing cultural artifacts and memorabilia in a variety of mediums including sculpture, painting, and porcelain; cultural practices from Feng shui to tango; music; cuisine; and architecture and design. Cultural displays are a means to promote awareness and, more importantly, reveal cultural adaptation or invention. Thus, the Skirball Cultural Center offers visitors a chance to “discover how the Jews met the challenges of dispersion and adapted to different cultures [and] how ancestral visions and values have been retained and transformed in America.” Complementing cultural exhibits, the display of group history and heritage is perhaps a central thrust of the majority of the museums. Fourteen museums display cultural heritage using a variety of historical documents, photographs, material culture, oral histories, and family artifacts. Exhibits explore a range of subjects including occupational histories and individual and group accomplishments.

Finally, fifteen museums display the work of ethnic artists through exhibi-

28. See Table 1.

tions of both experimental and traditional subjects including painting, photography, and a variety of other media. Exhibits highlight both original pieces and contemporary reproductions of traditional arts and crafts. The focus may be on local artists, such as at the Pico Rivera Center for the Arts, or on an international context, such as at the Museum of Latin American Art. Many ethnic museums perceive art as a “communicator of culture” (Korean American Museum) and a medium to display group history and culture.

We purposefully selected three institutions that illustrate the range of ethnic museums in the Los Angeles area. The three museums—the Museum in Black, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM), and the Museum of Latin American Art (MoLAA)—display aspects of ethnic culture by members of their respective community, but vary widely in their mission, functions, and roles. They also vary considerably in terms of scale (both in the size of their resources and occupied space), ranging from small (Museum in Black), to medium (MoLAA), to large (JANM). Two of the museums (Museum in Black and JANM) are situated within ethnic neighborhoods, but the location of the third (MoLAA) is not particularly associated with the ethnic community it is representing.

Museum in Black. For nearly twenty years, the Museum in Black has exhibited African and African American art, history, and culture from a small two-room storefront in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Leimert Park. The museum is the product of the work of one man, Brian Breyé, known informally as the “Mayor of Leimert Park,” who has dedicated his life to the collection and display of African and African American art and memorabilia. A few miles southwest of downtown, the Museum in Black has witnessed Leimert Park’s neighborhood commercial district evolve into an Afrocentric cultural center that includes a prime blues spot, art galleries, performance spaces, gift shops, and restaurants. Neighborhood and city residents comprise the main audience of the museum, which also attracts visitors from around the world. Primarily a local institution, the museum has also sent temporary exhibits to other museums in California, Louisiana, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

Reminiscent of the early “cabinets of curiosity,”²⁹ the museum exposes visitors to a large collection of objects. Under glass, overhead, and underfoot, the front room contains ceremonial African masks, shrines, wood sculptures, and costumes. The walls are lined with odd weapons and farm tools. Rusted and worn slave shackles and other paraphernalia used to detain, control, and torture produce a jarring contrast with the religious artifacts and works of art. At the center of this apparent disorder is a space with chairs cleared for discussion. In the back room, almost hidden from sight, is possibly one of the

29. The “cabinets of curiosity” housed the treasures collected by the nobility and scholars of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Objects haphazardly covered every inch of the room and were chosen to capture the known world in miniature. See Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

largest and most diverse collections of black memorabilia in the country. Ironically contrasting the cabinets' display of trophies from exotic lands, the room uses material culture to portray a dismal side of American history. Ranging from Jim Crow to the present, a startling array of artifacts is on display including products, advertisements, dolls, and figurines that depict African Americans in demeaning and racist ways. Photographs of lynchings stand side by side stereotypical commercial mascots such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben. This disturbing and overwhelming collection is juxtaposed to historical figures and American heroes from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition, placards explain inventions from the refrigerated rail car to the pencil sharpener patented by African Americans.

The Museum in Black fulfills a number of functions listed in Table 1. For example, the museum operates as an informal community center and serves as a space for special events. It provides tours to students, academics, church and tourist groups, and even police officers. Additionally, the museum has an educational function. Using the black memorabilia didactically, the museum attempts to teach officers how history informs contemporary race relations and provides potential tools to improve police/community interaction. Its central educational technique is to allow the visitor close inspection of its artistic and historical objects, thus purposefully putting the history of racism and exploitation in the visitor's face. In our interview, Breye explained that "when you come here you can smell the art, you can touch the art, you can get up close. When you go to most museums you can have a tendency to look through . . . plexi-glass you can't touch it, you can't feel it, you can't smell it."³⁰ According to Breye, the mission of the museum is to educate and inform both the local community and a wider public of American history and culture through the preservation and display of African American culture and history. Above all, the museum considers itself to be "a learning tool . . . complimentary to people who want to understand other people."³¹

The museum also plays the role of an "advocate" promoting African American cultural heritage and seeking to instill a sense of appreciation in its visitors of the artistic and political contributions and achievements of African Americans through its display of black inventors, abolitionists, civil rights figures, and African art. In addition, the museum contains a commercial aspect atypical to most museums—many of its African art pieces are for sale and are continually rented for use in movies and commercials.

The Museum in Black can be viewed as an "interpreter of culture and history" as well as a "site of contest." Artifacts of abjection for the African American community are displayed for didactic purposes. According to Breye:

Americans have a tendency to hide certain things. What we need to do is expose them and let the people see and understand where the history is, what it's

30. Brian Breye, Museum in Black, interview by the authors, Los Angeles, Calif. 30 January 2002.

31. *Ibid.*

about, how it came about, who brought it. We need to understand that even though it's not pleasant, it's not glamorous, it is a sad chapter in American history, but it needs to be seen, it needs to be spoken about, it needs to be put out to the younger people so that they can understand, maybe perhaps what their grandparents, their great-grandparents and their parents have gone through to make it necessary for them to obtain the education, and the moneys and the gratuities in life.³²

The Museum in Black is an important cultural institution in Los Angeles, yet like many ethnic museums, it is constantly plagued by financial difficulties and has received little financial support from the city or state. Financial woes and inability to pay its rent forced the museum to close its doors temporarily in July 2002. It was able to reopen thanks to a private \$20,000 donation. During its brief closure, an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* summed up the significance and role of the museum for the city: "The Museum in Black functioned as a community living room. . . . This is not just a museum, not just a store, but an irreplaceable and critically important space that should be maintained at any cost."³³

Japanese American National Museum. Located downtown in the Little Tokyo historic district, the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) is the only museum in the U.S. that explicitly focuses on the experiences of Japanese Americans. It houses the largest collection of Japanese American artifacts in the world. The JANM, which opened its doors in 1992, is the result of an unlikely coalition between a Little Tokyo real estate developer and Japanese American World War II veterans. Of all the ethnic museums in Los Angeles, JANM is by far the most prominent and comprehensive in scope. The museum has the largest budget as well, receiving generous grants from the City of Los Angeles, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian Institute, Sony Corporation, and the U.S. Department of Defense to raise \$65 million for its recently completed expansion.

Whereas the Museum in Black utilizes just two rooms, JANM occupies 100,000 square feet and two buildings. Some exhibitions chronicle the history of Japanese Americans such as "Common Ground: The Heart of Community," which features Issei artifacts and a fully restored barracks, from the Heart Mountain concentration camp in Wyoming. Other exhibitions document local, interethnic history or neighborhood life, such as "For a Greener Tomorrow," which highlights Japanese American and other gardeners in Southern California, and "Boyle Heights: The Power of Place," which traces the multi-ethnic roots of a Los Angeles neighborhood.

JANM provides a variety of education and entertainment programs, offers lectures on ethnic history and culture, and sponsors walking tours of the Little Tokyo neighborhood. The museum also offers a variety of classes and workshops on Japanese crafts and music and sponsors traditional ceremonial per-

32. Ibid.

33. "Museum in Black Falls into Red," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 July 2002.

performances and activities. The museum maintains an expansive archive and has a research library, theater, gardens, and museum store. JANM pursues collaborations and joint exhibitions with other institutions. The scope of the museum is national, but its reach is also international, as it sponsors programs, events, and exhibitions around the world.

JANM's mission statement locates the museum in most of the categories outlined in Table 2. The museum functions as a "keeper of tradition" through its many exhibitions that chronicle the Japanese American experience from concentration camp life to gardening, to participation in amateur and professional sports leagues. It is also an "advocate" as it seeks to highlight Japanese American contributions to American history. Using its vast collection of Japanese American historical artifacts, oral histories, and photographs, the museum not only captures and preserves hidden histories, but also celebrates Japanese American culture. According to Director of Community Affairs Nancy Araki, the museum "affirms and reeducates [visitors] as well as provides a vehicle for [the public] to say 'Oh yeah, that is American.'"³⁴

In its mission statement, the museum emphasizes that it preserves and displays the art, culture, and history of Japanese Americans to foster diversity and a shared understanding among ethnic groups. Although its founders initially conceived of JANM as a place to preserve Japanese American heritage, the museum quickly evolved into a site that not only explores the changing identity of Japanese Americans, but also promotes an understanding among cultures. Thus, JANM also serves as a "contact zone," a fact that is reflected in the composition of its visitors (60 percent are not Japanese Americans). JANM, through its many programs and exhibitions, builds bridges among ethnic communities and promotes a vision of a multicultural Los Angeles. According to Araki,

What we're telling is an American story and Japanese Americans don't live in isolation. So, much of our program . . . always tries to point out the points of intersection between all people. That's different from being an ethnic-specific museum which celebrates only their thing. . . . It isn't about having someone come and look at art, the Japanese American experience in a microscope and then interpreting for us. . . . It isn't us saying, "well, the Japanese American experience is this way and how do you fit in that." No . . . it's developing an understanding of us being people.³⁵

The Museum of Latin American Art (MoLAA). MoLAA boasts that it is the only museum in the Western United States that exclusively presents contemporary Latin American art. Opened in 1996, the museum is located in the newly established East Village Arts District of Long Beach. The museum's three galleries and restaurant are housed in a former roller skating rink, and

34. Nancy Araki, Director of Community Affairs, Japanese American National Museum, interview by the authors, Los Angeles, Calif., 6 February 2002.

35. Ibid.

its conference room and events ballroom occupy a former silent movie studio. Most of MoLAA's artwork comes from the private collection of its founder, Dr. Robert Gumbiner. Unlike the majority of ethnic museums in the study, the founder of the museum does not come from the ethnic background that is the focus of the museum. Dr. Gumbiner is not Latino; the museum is, however, operated largely by Latinos.

The museum's permanent collection, "Latin American Artists: A Contemporary Journey," contains over 140 works organized according to country, demonstrating the diversity of artistic styles and traditions of Latin American art, and reflecting diverse Latin identities. In addition, the museum maintains two rooms for temporary exhibitions. Recent displays have included a series of sketches by Diego Rivera rendered in the 1920s and "El Poder de Humanidad/ The Power of Humanity," an exhibition of contemporary Mexican artists in a variety of mediums. Proceeds from ticket sales from "El Poder" will support the Mexican Red Cross.

Like many ethnic museums, MoLAA operates as a cultural center. The museum also sponsors a series of educational programs and events. It regularly conducts tours for students and provides workshops in the visual and performing arts for adults and children. Other educational activities include children's summer art camps and Spanish language courses. The majority of MoLAA's educational programs complement its special events and entertainment calendar. For instance, the museum offers tango lessons and classes in tequila tasting and Latin American cooking and has held Latin fashion shows. Lectures are geared toward popular aspects of Latin American culture such as the history of the Panama hat. The museum even includes its own cultural tourism department, *MoLAA Traveler*, which has organized tours to sites in Latin America. MoLAA's restaurant, *Viva*, features Latin American cuisine; its store carries a variety of items from folk art to the museum's own coffee, "MoLAA Blend." Appropriately, the MoLAA website presents the museum as "more than just a museum. It is an exciting cultural center . . . a place where visitors can enjoy programs and entertainment that stimulates the senses, inspires the intellect, and gives the art a cultural context."

Through such events and classes, MoLAA appears as an upscale cultural center geared towards those who appreciate Latin American art and culture, rather than to Latinos specifically. According to the museum's director of visitor services, the majority of visitors come from the Long Beach and Los Angeles areas. Roughly 50 percent of its visitors are white, 40 percent are Latino, and 10 percent are of other racial backgrounds.

MoLAA's stated mission is "to educate the American public about contemporary Latin American art through the establishment of a significant representative permanent collection and the presentation of dynamic exhibitions and related programs." The museum is especially interested in promoting Latin American artists who may be well known in their home

country, but not necessarily in the U.S. As MoLAA Museum Director Gregorio Luke maintains, “we speak for those who have no voice, no big institution behind them.”³⁶ Thus, whereas the museum fits into the category of “interpreter of culture” it also assumes the role of an “advocate.” Although the museum provides art history education through its exhibits, it does so not necessarily to challenge historiographies or reveal hidden histories, but to recognize the contributions of Latin American artists to the development of art movements. For instance, speaking about a recent exhibition of Cuban artists, Luke noted that “presenting the show has nothing to do with politics; it’s about our mission. I think it’s very important to talk about the culture of Cuba. You can’t be a Latin American art museum today that ignores some of the best art produced in the Americas. Cuban art deserves to be seen.”³⁷ MoLAA’s education and entertainment programs are also in line with the role of “advocate” as they celebrate the cultural diversity of Latin Americans, while not necessarily venturing beyond the popular aspects of the culture.

MoLAA provides a space for the appreciation of Latin American cultural and artistic achievements. Some curators are concerned, however, that the museum’s selection of displays is heavily based on its founder’s personal tastes and preferences and does not accurately portray Latin American identity. A curator we interviewed at MoLAA feared that the exhibitions tell

a very conservative art history. . . . And I don’t think it’s trying to get rid of stereotypes, I don’t think there is an intention to do so. I think the opposite; it’s feeding those stereotypes that all Latin American art is super colorful and showy and [only depicts] landscapes and surrealism. . . . And sometimes I believe that if we continue displaying the colorful, the figurative, or the surreal we are feeding those stereotypes and we are diminishing the success and the level of professionalism that a lot of Latin American artists are achieving, not only in their own countries but internationally.³⁸

MoLAA’s founder began his collection before he conceived of the museum and purchased artwork according to his personal taste and investment value, rather than to represent Latin Americans in contemporary art. Despite the museum’s efforts to recognize the diversity of Latin American culture and identity, the collection is not wholly representative of Latin American artistic production. Many of the pieces on display lean more towards tourist images of Latin America or romantic Latin scenes and avoid addressing or depicting sensitive political issues such as immigration or contemporary Latino struggles. In that sense MoLAA avoids assuming the role of a place of contest.

36. Gregorio Luke, cited in Suzanne Muchnic, “Art, Bridging the Cuban Divide,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 2000.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Anonymous curator, Museum of Latin American Art, Long Beach, Calif., interview by Carl Grodach, 11 March 2002.

Conclusion

This study was triggered by the observation that special-interest or ethnic museums constitute a high proportion of museums founded in recent decades. We started our investigation under the assumption that there is a clear dichotomy between such museums and mainstream museums. Although we were able to observe distinct differences in the mission statements and assumed roles of the two types of museums, we have also noticed similarities. We conclude that the story of ethnic museums is more complex and nuanced than our initial assumptions had suggested.

We found that ethnic museums are not monolithic or homogeneous entities and that they often tend to privilege different roles and missions. Although all museums want to be perceived as “advocates,” “keepers,” and “interpreters” of culture, they differ significantly in the types of additional roles they assume, in the ways they privilege local or global audiences, and in their bottom-up or top-down approach to decision making.

Some ethnic museums (usually the smaller ones) are vested in particular neighborhoods and are primarily local constructs (e.g. Watts Art Center, Museum in Black). Although the geographic context of such museums is smaller than that of the mainstream or other ethnic museums, their role appears more expansive, frequently assuming the character of community and cultural center and educational facility. As we discovered in our empirical study, their focus has sometimes gazed away from the masterpiece to encompass more mundane articles of the material culture and everyday life of the ethnic neighborhood. Often these museums attempt to construct sites of difference and contest, where the status quo is questioned and challenged. Such museums view themselves as antidotes to a cultural hegemony that privileged national or elite cultures. Their didactic and polemical role can sometimes be misconstrued, however, as promoting cultural balkanization.

Other ethnic museums (usually the larger ones, such as JANM, and the Skirball Cultural Center) increasingly cast their gaze to the whole city and to global audiences. In doing so, they find themselves under the tension of having to reconcile the different needs of local and global publics. Often these museums try to present themselves as “zones of contact,” engaging in dialog the wide range of communities and cultures that comprise the city, the nation, or globe. In their attempt to reach a larger audience, they resemble their mainstream peers. In our case study of MoLAA, we found that the institution has attributes that challenge the dichotomy of “mainstream” vs. “ethnic.” However, as its curator indicates, MoLAA runs the risk of being perceived as slipping into the old-style, “high-culture” mold, which privileges the tastes of wealthy collectors and “mainstream” audiences.

Ethnic museums also transcend the polarity of “temple” vs. “forum,” although they frequently seem to draw from either or both categories. The format, focus, and mission of ethnic museums are often “up for grabs,” as they strive to be perceived as more democratic than their traditional “mainstream”

peers.³⁹ Ethnic museums reveal the difficulty of escaping the historic function of the museum as “temple” that authenticates specific representations and histories and operates as a tool to legitimize group identity and obtain recognition, status, or power. At the same time, however, some ethnic museums call into question prior assumptions of a universal public and form a space in which to explore new interpretations of history and to debate contemporary issues of politics and identity. Ultimately, it is in this capacity—both individually and collectively—that ethnic museums can play a significant role in diversifying cities like Los Angeles, where the increasing numbers of non-European racial and ethnic groups are alternatively romanticized or vilified.

In conclusion, we find that the ethnic museum is an evolving and diverse institution which has expanded both in numbers and functions. Individually, museums have to grapple with the tension of operating in an urban context produced by globalization and with the questions of which role(s) they want to pursue, which audience they want to privilege, and which stories they choose to tell. Collectively, ethnic museums promote the multicultural image of the early twenty-first century city by expanding the repertoire of arts and histories which deserve to be visible. Increasingly, ethnic museums become influential forces in the city. Consequently, they should not be objects of attention only of ethnic or museum studies, but deserve to be studied and understood by scholars of urban studies at large.

39. We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.