

INTERACTIONS/INTERSECTIONS: CULTURAL GLOBALISM AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

ON MARCH 15, 2002, Sarah Schultz, Kiyoko Motoyama Sims, Susan Rotilie, Christi Atkinson, and Meredith Walters of the Walker Art Center’s education and community programs department engaged in a conversation about their participation in the museum’s global initiative, the impact the project had on their work in museum education, and the most salient issues facing institutions striving to understand the needs of their audiences in an increasingly global and interconnected world. Below is an edited version of that conversation.¹

Sarah Schultz: The primary drive behind the Walker’s global initiative was to enhance the ability of curatorial staff to create international programming. The advisory committee was created to generate a better understanding of curatorial criteria and artistic traditions beyond a Eurocentric construct. Of course, as the Walker increasingly presents work created from multiple cultural practices and histories, work that may not be easily understood by our audiences using familiar aesthetic criteria, new challenges and opportunities arise for presentation, contextualization, and learning. For two years, we have participated intensively in the advisory committee meetings. What aspects of the discussion have been particularly meaningful to each of you?

Susan Rotilie: I was impressed with a project Vasif Kortun described called Oda Projesi in Istanbul. It is an artists’ collaborative operating out of an apartment in Gültepe where artists, non-artists, and people from the neighborhood participate in the art-making process. That area of Istanbul is constantly changing as first-generation immigrants settle there, and many of the projects use the city and city life as points of departure. The idea is that producing art produces possibilities—that everyone is an artist, for example. The Oda Projesi organizers see the whole project as a “social sculpture” that emerges as a collaborative process and shared experience.

Meredith Walters: Paulo Herkenhoff gave useful examples of ways he worked with the favelas around São Paulo during the Bienal. While many artists worked there, he and the education staff worked directly with teachers in the favelas, giving them materials such as teaching guides about the show. Their goals were to help facilitate discussions around the work and to start conversations around issues of racism and classism, which are felt as keenly in Brazil as they are in the States. Not only did this strategy function as a personal invitation to the kids, many of whom had never been in a museum before, but it also gave them tools for discussing the works. Although it’s great to be invited into the museum, visitors don’t have true access unless they have tools to look at the art on its own terms. Of course, the kids would have had valuable opinions anyway, but this way they were partners in a discussion.

Kiyoko Motoyama Sims: Vishakha Desai addressed the idea of different cultural perceptions in her presenta-

¹ Sarah Schultz is director of education and community programs; Kiyoko Motoyama Sims is associate director in charge of community programs; Susan Rotilie is associate director in charge of schools, tours, and family programs; Christi Atkinson is assistant director in charge of teen programs; Meredith Walters is assistant director in charge of public programs.

tion on Uttar-Priyadashi.² This work could be perceived as traditional East Indian theater-dance from the Westerner's point of view, but from the East Indian's point of view it's a very contemporary interpretation of the traditional forms. It made me rethink how I might design programs with different resident artists and art forms that we bring in from around the world. When the Walker presented Uttar-Priyadashi, our solution was to invite a scholar of Indian dance and theater, Dr. Sunil Kothari, who was traveling with the company, to speak to students in theater and dance classes at Macalester College and also to have him give a talk before the show. It helped to frame the performance within a more nuanced context than simply traditional or nontraditional. It conveyed that these artists are carrying forward—and adding complexity to—longheld traditions, but using a contemporary vocabulary.

MW: Making those many vocabularies available is so important, and your solution is a perfect illustration of it. Westerners, Americans, anyone removed from that culture, really, have limited vocabularies for that form of dance. As you said, traditional and nontraditional are terms that don't illuminate anything and are in fact misleading. Audiences unfamiliar with these complex histories are forced to make analogies to what they do know—or think they know—about a foreign culture, which is usually a mix of news reports, a few facts from world history class, or artifacts seen in museums. In a contemporary arts context we had the opportunity to distinguish between flat representations of a culture and the actual artistic process of contemporary dancers from Manipur.

SS: I valued hearing about the various issues and challenges the committee members faced in their own communities surrounding the presentation of contemporary work. Walter Chakela, for example, is dealing with a particular history of revolution and apartheid in South Africa. He was struggling to convince his audience, consisting of primarily black South Africans, that their literature and theater are as good and as valuable as the works of Shakespeare and Chekov. Because European drama was all they ever read or learned about in school, Shakespeare is perceived as literature with a capital L, and they needed to be convinced that their stories, about revolution and apartheid, were equally "Literature." **Though the details vary from locale to locale, in a strange way it was reassuring to discover that everyone around the table was wrestling with the challenge of overcoming audiences' preconceptions and apprehensions about contemporary art.**

Christi Atkinson: One thing this initiative has reinforced for me is the power of certain words, such as global and globalism, and how those words can mean dramatically different things to different people. For example, one of our advisors felt that globalism was just a buzzword for the new American imperialism. And yet, no matter how strongly we all felt that these words were problematic, there were no agreed-upon, adequate alternatives to these terms. **When our vocabulary itself is shifting, the intended discussions can't even be realized.**

KMS: There is a connection between a person's perception of a word—such as globalism, community, local—and the cultural background and history that he or she grew up in. I'm working in an American institution, creating programs for an American audience, yet this process has made it clear that my ideas of internationalism or globalism stem from being Japanese and growing up in Japan. I have a double perception in a way.

I am sensitive to how Asian culture is often wrapped up into one big category, which hides all the unique qualities and differences within Asian cultures and art. Asia includes China, Japan, and Korea as well as the expanse of Southeast Asia, and we all have very distinct cultural and artistic traditions and histories, although we have a lot of things in common too. From the Westerner's point of view, the commonalities are often emphasized more than the differences. I am much more aware of the need to accentuate differences within Asian cultures, rather than to simplify them in one cultural category.

SS: Do you think there is a tendency in America to lump everyone from one country or continent together?

² Uttar-Priyadarshi (The Final Beatitude) is a music-theater-dance work conceived and directed by Ratan Thyiam, a leading East Indian director, and uses stylized movement and vocal techniques that reference traditional performing and martial arts of Manipur. Uttar-Priyadarshi was performed by the Chorus Repertory Theatre of Manipur, India, which was established by Thyiam. It was copresented by the Walker Art Center and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts at the Ordway Center, St. Paul, Minnesota, on October 2, 2000.

KMS: Yes. This is reinforced by the way the census is conducted in the United States. There are certain categories of ethnicity that you have to check: American Indian, Latino, Asian, African American, or Caucasian. Those are the labels that we tend to get categorized by, and they influence our philosophy as a culture in general.

MW: The problem of using sweeping cultural identifiers was one of the things our advisors quickly made apparent to us. For example, Chakela was not representing all of Africa. He was representing not even South Africa but the Windybrow Centre for the Arts in Johannesburg, a very specific city, a very specific community-focused organization with a history of developing new works, and a very specific individual.

KMS: The question is: How can we make that complexity more apparent in our educational programming?

SS: Meredith, I've heard you refer to Arjun Appadurai's ideas about how similarities among cultural groups often obscure their differences. He seems to have had quite an impact on your thinking.³

MW: Well, his ideas certainly helped me articulate some of the problems with language I have when discussing globalization, specifically cultural globalization. For example, the word culture felt to me like a conceptual placeholder. To discuss Japanese culture or American culture is to describe ways of understanding time, justice, gender roles, or a set of "characteristic" social rules, or players within a historic and political trajectory, and so on, that do not add up to a totalizing force called culture. I might identify a type of interaction or object that is of a culture but not what it means as part of the process and experience of being in a culture. The term isn't dynamic or precise, and so it lends itself to generalities and essentialism.

I value Appadurai's idea that, as a noun, the word culture is not very useful, but as an adjective it is. Instead of discussing culture, we should discuss cultural phenomena. Which leads to another important point he makes: that, at its core, an exploration of cultural phenomena is an exploration of difference—and people demonstrate their differences for all kinds of reasons, very deliberately and self-consciously.

When he sat in on one of our advisory meetings, he parted with the comment that we should include people from cultures not represented in our collection not only as artists but also as visitors. I took that to mean that **not only should we expose visitors to all the possibilities of artistic practice but we should encourage them to participate in shaping the discourse here at the Walker as well as in our city.** Although our collection isn't, and cannot be, inclusive of all contemporary art, we do represent and acknowledge many histories of art and we do suggest the value of acquiring alternative knowledge by bringing in scholars from different backgrounds and artists from different disciplines. He also addressed the urgency of inspiring our visitors to enter the world of wider representation. For me, it was a call to "incubate little collaborations" (to borrow his phrase) in communities that have their own ongoing projects.

SS: The global advisory committee was, in a way, our institutional effort to incubate a particular kind of small discussion and then to take the resulting issues, ideas, and possible solutions and apply them to our work.

SR: How do these small conversations translate? How do these interactions shift the way we think about our work?

MW: Because I work in this privileged institution there are conversations that I can facilitate. By facilitate, I mean providing a stage and a microphone. I don't have to start conversations in the community. It's not incum-

³ See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Appadurai, an anthropologist, asserts that the concept of culture is neither accurate nor useful as a noun because it implies that culture, physical or metaphysical, is an object. As a consequence of this misapprehension, culture seems to define a substance (such as ethnicity or language) that emphasizes an essential sameness among people identified as being part of a culture. As he explains, "The noun culture appears to privilege the sort of sharing, agreeing, and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles, and to discourage attention to the worldviews and agency of those who are marginalized or dominated" [pp. 12-13].

Appadurai offers the adjectival form cultural as the more precise and context-sensitive term for understanding the dimensionality of culture. He further suggests that the cultural attends only to those differences that express or serve the mobilization of group identities.

bent on me to go out and make sure different communities are culturally enfranchised. They already are. They're already making waves, but they are small waves only because they don't have a stage. My practice has shifted from a need to initiate conversations to working with people who have already started them.

One of the most recent examples of this was a student forum we hosted. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Muslim students at the University of Minnesota from Africa, Saudi Arabia, and other regions felt they needed to have a conversation about what it means to be Muslim and, specifically, Muslim in America.⁴ They wanted to discuss how Islam is a global culture, and how they, as Americans or as foreign students in America, need the protection that all Americans deserve in terms of not being hunted down and questioned simply because they're here and they're visible as being different. They were not negotiating their right to be "different" but rather demanding the respect and protection that everyone else takes for granted.

SS: It was affirming that the students perceived the Walker as a relatively neutral site and safe place to have a very challenging public discussion. There has been a great deal of research and discussion in the field about the museum's role as a civic institution. One report even dared to ask the question, "Should museum professionals view themselves as citizens first and museum staff second?"⁵ For me, the idea of the "small" conversation or collaboration is shorthand for creating multiple and flexible strategies of paying attention to and supporting the social transformations taking place here and throughout the world.

SR: The education advisory committee is another example of a small conversation. That group is a small circle of people involved in educational systems, either as teachers, administrators, teaching artists, or professors teaching education at the college level. This year, largely because of our involvement with the global advisory group, we decided to engage these teachers in a discussion about what is appropriate for us to offer schools in terms of resources and educational experiences around ideas of globalism. Initially the conversation reminded me of what Christi mentioned earlier, that the understanding of certain words, such as globalism, shifts in different contexts. We needed to unpack the associations we had with that term, in particular how globalism and multiculturalism mean different things.

Multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s had to do with the local—understanding cultures that form a diverse local community. Multicultural learning helped us to be citizens of a very diverse community by understanding traditional practices, histories, and ways of communicating and living. Globalism has different connotations. It is about the world today and the interconnections between economic systems, the effects of new telecommunications and technologies, environmental concerns, and political dynamics as well as the cultural and historical contexts.⁶ In schools, globalism crosses many disciplines and subjects. Because teaching from a global perspective is so complex, it is often not specifically part of school curricula.

This generation of students will probably form their ideas about globalism from the media, marketing, and the Internet. I imagine we'll go through the same cycle with globalism education that we did with multicultural education, where first of all there's a questioning, then an acknowledgment of what's lacking, and then an inte-

4 [Understanding September 11](#) was presented by the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change/MacArthur Program, University of Minnesota, in partnership with the Walker Art Center and the Institute for Global Studies, University of Minnesota, on November 12, 2001, at the Walker Art Center. This community forum featured two panel discussions. The first, "Effects on Civil Liberties," was chaired by John A. Powell, founder and executive director of the Institute on Race and Poverty (IRP) at the University of Minnesota Law School; other panelists were Keith Ellison, attorney with the law firm Hassan and Reed Ltd.; Joan Humes, Assistant United States Attorney and civil rights coordinator for the U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Minnesota; and Joseph Margulies, a principal in the law firm Margulies and Richman. The second panel, "Arab-Americans and Muslims in the Fabric of U.S. Society," was chaired by Ragui Assad, associate professor of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota; other panelists were Dominique Najjar, member of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee; Fatma Reda, MD, FAACP, clinical associate professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School and associate at the Center for Human Rights, University of Minnesota Law School; and Ahmed Samatar, James Wallace Professor and dean of International Studies and Programming at Macalester College, St. Paul.

5 Ellen Hirzy, [Mastering Civic Engagement: A Challenge to Museums](#) (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2001).

6 See Roland Case, "Key Elements of a Global Perspective," [Social Education](#) 57, no. 6 (October 1993), pp. 318–325. In this article, Case, a Canadian social studies educator, defines two interrelated dimensions for educating from a global perspective. The substantive dimension includes knowledge of the world today and how it works. The perceptual dimension encompasses concepts and attitudes such as open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, and empathy, from which we want students to perceive the world.

gration into practices. The arts—artistic expression and artistic practice—can help facilitate this process, and museums can offer resources and models to teachers as we integrate these issues into our own practices. This is one goal of Global Positioning: Exploring Contemporary World Art, which the Walker is launching this year.⁷ It highlights works by fourteen artists who not only examine changing artistic practices but also, in various ways, connect with global issues. It is designed for students ages twelve to eighteen and their teachers, and can form links among art, world history, cultural studies, geography, music, and other school subjects.

Another issue that we've discussed with the education advisory committee is how nearly all of the school districts in Minnesota, particularly in the metropolitan area, are facing changing demographics in the student body—and the challenges of trying to form communities among such a diverse student population. Students who have come to Minnesota from parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe bring a variety of life experiences to American culture.

SS: A few years ago, the Wilder Research Center issued a report on the challenges that new immigrants face when they come to Minnesota.⁸ It focused on the fastest-growing populations, which as I recall are Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali. How have immigration and changing demographics impacted our community, and how is this reflected in our audiences and the communities with which we work? Susan, do you see a need to work differently, given the changes in the school system—the fact that well over fifty percent of new enrollments are children who have immigrated to this country and there are eighty languages spoken in the public schools? Have you seen any changes in the actual audiences coming to the Walker?

SR: The school groups that come here are a reflection of the communities and of the schools themselves. It's extremely common for us to have groups of students in which not everyone speaks English. We are training Spanish-speaking tour guides, but we don't currently have the resources to address the needs of many other students. Generally, what I observe is that students are helping students. In a group of students there might be one who speaks English better than the rest and that person will translate for the others. Often, unfortunately, they tend to not participate very much.

In terms of the teachers who come here for training and workshops, we do not have very many teachers from immigrant communities. In fact, I doubt that there are many teachers from immigrant communities in the schools at all. When I visited Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, the issue they wanted to address through their arts program was how to blend their community, which consisted of an almost equal distribution of Somali students, African American students, white students, and a growing number of Hispanic students. This school had experienced a lot of racial conflict among those groups. But the teachers at the table were all probably forty years old or older, and all white. It's not that they were insensitive to the issues. They were making sincere attempts to understand the communities with whom they were working.

Later, a teacher planned to bring a group of students who were in an English-language learner program—largely Somali—to the Walker for a tour. When he walked through the galleries prior to the visit, he said, "I have a lot of Islamic girls in my group and they cannot see nudity. It would be culturally very difficult for them to handle that." He was being sensitive to the community and in a way that we hadn't anticipated.

English-language learner teachers, who are a growing population in the cities, are a wonderful audience for us to connect with in the future. Arts education can help these teachers work with their students to communicate better and to understand cultural attitudes better.

SS: You raise an interesting point, about the ways in which art and the creative process can help people better understand some of these complex social issues. Christi, could you talk about the ways in which you've tried to do that with the Teen Art Council?⁹

⁷ See <<http://education.walkerart.org/global/>>.

⁸ Wilder Research Center, *Speaking for Themselves: A Survey of Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali Immigrants in Minneapolis-Saint Paul* (St. Paul: November 2000).

CA: Sure. Social issues are always easy points of entry into artworks because teens are really concerned with these topics. There is also significant interest in people from other countries and their points of view, and art is an ideal forum for exploring alternative viewpoints and learning about other realities. When you're young there is a lot of idealism and a desire to be understanding and tolerant, so when we talk about these issues that are raised by the artworks, the teens are just, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," completely agreeing with the artists, who are often pointing out injustices and inequalities. It provides a great opportunity to talk to them about how they may have intolerance for the person sitting right next to them. It's an easy way to take issues they care about and apply them to their own everyday actions.

The Walker made the connection very early on between young people and contemporary art. A lot of our literature talks about how artists are often actively engaged in overturning conventional wisdom, and in this way they parallel the processes that are a huge part of the adolescent years—the probing, questioning, and provoking that go on as a young person attempts to find his or her place in society and to create an individual voice. And, as a contemporary art center, we often deal with issues that are challenging and topical. This place is not always a comfort zone for all of our visitors, but it can be like a magnet for teens when you can get them to see these kinds of issues.

But, that being said, WACTAC has never been too accepting of the Walker as a cultural authority. The reason why teen programs have worked so well here is that the Walker has been completely open to the teens' point of view and has given them an amazing amount of freedom in their programming. For instance, this year they made a gallery guide and it opens with the phrase "You are here." They provided their own interpretations of the artworks to show visitors that there is more than just the curator's label on the wall. There are multiple viewpoints, multiple ways to experience the work, and no one is necessarily right or wrong. Their guide maps the places that each artwork took them as individuals, whether it's a mental place, a physical place, a poem, a drawing, etc. They included some research on the historical context and artistic intent, but primarily offered a model for all visitors that encourages them to find their own place in relationship to the artwork.

SS: The idea of mapping as a way to reclaim your place in time and in history is very important. To remap yourself is to be able to place yourself, to reimagine yourself, and to lay claim to power. How did the teens get interested in the idea of mapping? What were some of their conversations around it?

CA: It came from looking at the work of Julie Mehretu, Sarah Sze, Rivane Neuenschwander, and Shirin Neshat. We had presentations on all four of those artists within a two-week period.

SS: Why those particular artists?

CA: They all deal literally with ideas of mapping—attempting to decipher the unknown or unfamiliar, connecting and communicating, recording or tracking presence or the physical. We talked about how maps are not neutral reference objects but vehicles of communication, influence, and power. Maps are like art—they present a point of view, they reflect social choices and political interests. And the distortions in maps, just as in art, are often what point the way.

KMS: Julie Mehretu is currently doing a project with the Walker to remap the Twin Cities as African cities.¹⁰ We are inviting local residents of East African descent to share photographs, words, and perspectives that show Minneapolis and St. Paul from their points of view as a means to conceptually remap the Twin Cities. The proj-

⁹ The Walker Art Center Teen Arts Council (WACTAC) is a group of young people, ages fourteen to eighteen, who meet weekly at the Walker to develop and market programs designed specifically to connect young people with contemporary art and artists. Walker curators present upcoming programs to WACTAC, who then identify which programs are of interest to teens. WACTAC also develops its own programs, such as artist residencies, classes, artist's talks, and zines, which it then markets to teens through flyers, postcards, stickers, posters, and print ads. Since the inception of WACTAC in 1995, attendance by teenagers has grown by twenty-nine percent and teens now make up eleven percent of the Walker's audience (100,000 yearly), a figure that does not include school groups.

¹⁰ Julie Mehretu is the Walker's visual arts artist-in-residence for 2002-2003. The Ethiopian-born, New York-based painter is currently creating a project titled *Minneapolis and St. Paul Are East African Cities*.

ect is very exciting for us because we are able to work with a community that we have not yet worked with in depth. We are fortunate to have an artist of Ethiopian decent who has a good understanding of East African cultures and is committed to providing artistic experiences to this immigrant community. One of the lessons we learned from Julie is that privacy is very important within the East African communities. Originally the project was conceived as a group activity. Now, it's shifting toward individual projects so that the participants will feel more comfortable.

CA: At the heart of Julie's project is the desire to have these new communities be able to take ownership of their new neighborhoods, new routines, and new homes. It's a self-mapping, self-ethnographic project that reflects the stamp they have made on the city. They are not just outsiders here in a new city but rather are in a city that has been distinctly imprinted and changed by their presence.

SR: The idea of mapping is also connected to the exhibition How Latitudes Become Forms. The invention of latitudinal measurements in the fifteenth century marked a major advancement in Western mapmaking processes. Of course, now those inventions are associated with issues of exploration and colonialism, and maps have become politically controversial to a certain extent. Consequently, the use of the word latitudes in the title of this exhibition provides an opportunity to thematically connect with place, and also with multiple histories. Mapping can be a metaphor for how we organize knowledge or experience. We are combining these themes in a hands-on class for students in the Walker's art lab, offered in conjunction with tours of the Latitudes exhibition. Students will use maps as place identifiers, pattern work, and collage elements to make artworks both individually and collaboratively in response to the work they see in the galleries.

SS: Mapping is a way to graphically and conceptually understand complex connections, especially between the local and the global. We live in a nomadic world, where the Internet literally creates new networks and associations. Also, people are able to travel and move about more freely. You don't really belong in one place, but in multiple places.

MW: That raises the issue of the museum's role in a nomadic world, both as a civic institution and as one node in a global network of contemporary art institutions. As the institution presents and collects work by artists from around the world, it is important that we present the art on its own terms and interpret it according to its own strategies. This requires us to know the implications of the artist's choice of materials and forms and to recognize the cultural dialogues the pieces are participating in: Is a piece created for an international audience or an internal one? Understanding the art-historical context of some of this work will be a challenge. It's hard enough to talk about contemporary art when you are familiar with its conceptual antecedents. Could it be that art produced for a global audience is the beginning of a new art history—that its antecedents are all of the possible art histories?

SR: One of our responsibilities is to go beyond just looking at a work of art in terms of its elements and to examine the (art)world in which it was made. That includes the world of the artist—his or her local community and historical context. That might sound monocultural, but, in fact, more and more artists today live in and move through many localities. They may be working as artists on several continents. They may have their work shown in many, many different places, in many, many different contexts. Global arts education, for me, means precisely these overlapping circles of (art)worlds that can inform even just one work of art.

SS: I've certainly experienced a shift in practice. I have to say, a few years ago, I would have thought naively that the phrase "global arts education" meant doing a forum on the Web that would have reached out across the world. Now, I have a very different opinion about what working globally might mean, which, for me, probably means working locally in a very different context.

CA: The global and the local have been discussed among the teens for a long time. We're always looking at the most contemporary work in the galleries because that is where we can find artwork from all over the world. Those "global" issues we see in the work relate to the "local" (as well as profoundly personal) issues that are going on in the teen's small communities of friends or at school. I feel my job is to help the teens work in the

reverse, by incubating the small discussion and then getting them to take the conclusions and the ideas that come out of it and translate them into the world.

SS: A topic we always revisit, when talking about art objects, artistic practice, and larger theoretical ideas, is the audience. How do people in our community, in our own institution, interact with the work? How can it change the way they think? How can it open up the world to them? What does it, in fact, mean to them?

CA: Something unique about the Walker is that education planning and strategies are part of a project's formation, rather than being tacked on at the end. That sensibility about the importance of education was certainly shared by the advisory committee members. They were concerned about how these ideas would be communicated and what experiences would be created, not simply what an object "meant."

KMS: For me, the beginning of any project is about connecting with the local community. I think about how best to connect global issues to our local community, as well as how to highlight the global issues that are very much alive in the local community.

SS: For example, would you say that *Forgiveness* was a major project in which that played itself out? In some ways, it seemed to be a very significant and defining moment for you, when the global and the local, as well as your own personal background, came together.

KMS: I learned some valuable lessons through the *Forgiveness* residency.¹¹ First, I realized that the distance between global and local issues was closer than I had anticipated. Being Japanese, I had to deal with "ghosts" of past history, and I was in a sensitive position. On a personal level, this experience made me realize that I still had a lot to learn about my own cultural history, especially in relation to other Asian countries. It is somewhat ironic that I had to be in the United States to engage myself further in that history.

From the beginning of the process, I found that issues of Japanese aggression toward other Asian countries during World War II remained very much unresolved in local Asian and Asian American communities. Those issues were still very emotional. Early on in the planning stage, the Walker received a letter from a local Korean activist that included materials about "comfort women."¹² I began receiving phone calls and e-mails from local Japanese, Korean, and Chinese activists and historians. Essentially, though they were all excited about *Forgiveness*, they were concerned about how the historical and political context would be presented to the audiences. The only way to present the *Forgiveness* residency, as respectable of and appropriate to our local communities, was to work closely with them. We needed to provide appropriate educational tools for audiences to understand the historical context in Asia, which reflects the perspectives of Chinese and Korean communities, while being sensitive to the Japanese community. In order to provide a deeper artistic context and respect for Asian traditional art forms, we offered a series of master classes in Noh, Beijing Opera, and Korean traditional dance forms, all of which were employed in the production. We also organized a community forum¹³ to explore some of the many controversial issues surrounding inter-Asian conflict and to examine the process

¹¹ *Forgiveness* was conceived and directed by the Chinese theatrical innovator Chen Shi-Zheng, in collaboration with Noh master Akira Matsui and composer Eve Beglarian. Co-commissioned by the Walker, the work had its world premiere at the Walker Art Center on March 9, 2000.

From February 20 to March 11, 2000, the Walker Art Center presented a three-week residency with artists from China, Japan, Korea, and the United States coinciding with the final development of *Forgiveness*. Together with community partners, the Walker's performing arts and community programs departments collaborated on designing this residency, which explored the painful twentieth-century history of Japan, China, and Korea, and examined possible paths toward reconciliation. *Forgiveness* drew from traditional Asian art forms to create a contemporary theater-music-dance experience. Due to the complexity of the piece, both politically and artistically, we were challenged to develop educational activities employing multiple viewpoints to enable audiences to embrace the performance.

¹² Comfort women were the young women of various ethnic and national backgrounds and social circumstances who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army before and during World War II.

¹³ "The Future of the Past" forum was held at the Walker Art Center on March 11, 2000. Panelists were Adelbert Batica, a specialist on equal opportunity employment and diversity issues; Akiko Tsutsui, member of the Japanese Relations Committee of the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II; Dr. Byong Moon Kim, director of the Korean American Today and Tomorrow Center; Juliana Pegues, writer and visual artist; and Dr. Yue-him Tam, professor of history and director of East Asian Studies and Japan Study at Macalester College, St. Paul.

of healing and the role of the arts in creating a path toward further understanding. These programs illuminated the complexities of Asian cultures through historical and artistic aspects to offer a better understanding of and respect for Asian art traditions, while avoiding viewing this production as an “exotic” Asian piece.

This experience and other residency programs in which I’ve partnered with Hmong, Ethiopian, and Somali community groups have taught me the importance of being familiar with their cultural backgrounds. We need to be aware of a community’s history, religion, thought patterns, immediate concerns, and how different generations of the community interact with one another. You have to do your homework to better understand their cultural context before you ask them to be involved in artistic programs or partnerships.

SS: I’d like to move on to address shifts in the way the Walker is working curatorially. Because we often use the permanent collection as a teaching tool, it’s crucial that the collection itself continues to evolve and is reflective of this, that it becomes more global in its representation of non-Western or non-European art.

CA: With WACTAC, it’s a point of pride for them that the Walker’s collection is more than one canon of art history, that we tell multiple stories. And this has only become possible with the work that we have collected over the last ten years.

SS: Is there a difference in how we present so-called global contemporary art as opposed to any other contemporary work we show?

SR: All artworks need to be unpacked. Young people in particular are not always going to understand the context just by looking at the artwork. I was talking with a group of fifth graders in the galleries yesterday about Kazuo Shiraga’s Untitled (1959) and Kara Walker’s Endless Conundrum, an African Anonymous Adventuress (2001). They were impressed with the Shiraga piece, but didn’t understand the impulse behind the artist’s choices until we talked a little bit about Japanese history, particularly in the postwar period. Then they understood better. They certainly noticed the violent imagery in Kara Walker’s piece, but without an explanation I don’t think they understood why that image was being presented on the wall.

SS: This is a good example of how the global advisory committee has pushed us to be more expansive in our understanding of history. Has collecting work from outside American and European perspectives inspired us to be intellectually, historically, and humanistically more expansive and rigorous in general, in our approach to Western as well as to non-Western works?

CA: I find that works from other continents are actually easier to explain to our audiences because nobody expects to get it right away—it is less intimidating. The addition of the “foreign” element lets people off the hook, so they don’t feel dumb for not understanding the art. With a Rauschenberg, however, we think we should understand it—he’s American, that’s our history. But a lot of people don’t understand it, including art historians.

SS: So we’re learning to avoid assumptions about what we already know as well as what we don’t know.

CA: It makes me wonder whether it has been given the attention, and the reexamination, that we give to less familiar, less Western works.

KMS: That also gets into the area of how best to engage the audience. For instance, looking at Yayoi Kusama’s work, if you know something about the history of women in Japan, that will make a big difference in how you embrace the work.

SS: What are some of the ways we can help our visitors understand these issues? Do you think it’s important for viewers to know the nationality of the artist in order to understand the work, or do you think that type of information is irrelevant?

KMS: Defining artists by nationality is very problematic. How do you define where someone comes from in such a nomadic world? Does one’s identity stem from where he or she was born? Where he or she currently lives?

CA: This is an important issue for educators as we struggle for adjectives to describe artistic products and practices for our audiences. Art language is a little abstract to begin with. A descriptor such as “Japanese artist” gives our audiences some recognizable information, but how useful is that information?

KMS: If birthplace identity becomes the only measure, it implies that only the place or the culture in which the artist was born has a major influence on an his or her work, which isn’t necessarily true.

SR: One danger is to make the meaning behind a particular artist’s work speak for the entire culture. For instance, in looking at Huang Yong Ping’s work, we talk about connections with the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the history of his own lifetime, including the events at Tiananmen Square. For many Americans, those particular references tend to evoke certain assumptions and associations. We don’t always emphasize that the piece is one person’s interpretation.

CA: Yes, for most Americans Tiananmen Square recalls the events of 1989. For the Chinese, Tiananmen Square recalls multitudes of significant events stretching back to the fifteenth century.

KMS: Similar issues arose during *Forgiveness*. The piece dealt with hot issues, yet the artists made it very clear that they were comfortable addressing those issues only through an artistic context. The artists were also clear that *Forgiveness* was not going to provide “solutions” to historical conflicts, even though the title might imply a possible resolution. They simply wanted to raise audiences’ awareness of historically contentious issues, so that they might begin their dialogue.

But I knew we had to provide some historical context for the audience to fully grasp what this piece is about. It’s not fair for us to expect the artists to have all the answers. They’re only responsible for bringing their own personal perspectives to that piece. So we debated about how best to lay out those historical contexts in a manner that didn’t represent just one voice or culture, but several. As a result, we decided to present the artists’ points of view through an artists’ talk and postperformance Q & A sessions, which allowed the artists to share their perspectives on historical issues and their emotional links to the project, while providing historical context through a commissioned essay by a scholar, which was printed in the program notes, and a community forum with local activists and historians.

MW: It’s dangerous to use someone’s nationality as the first point of entry into a work of art and to rely on a brief history of modern China and a reference to Tiananmen Square. Particularly because we may have only one or two contemporary Chinese works, and you end up loading an entire contemporary history on that work, sometimes, perhaps, as a way of avoiding issues that our audiences find more complicated, such as formal issues or issues of art history, quality, or taste.

CA: I agree that we do that, but we do it as well with Mike Kelley, Kara Walker, and Matthew Barney. The very first thing we say is that they are American.

MW: More than a few of their pieces specifically address American cultural attitudes.

CA: In some ways the global initiative has taught us to look at Americans as products of their culture, too. As we have this conversation, I’m realizing that I still tend to validate global voices more with the teens. It’s back to that exoticizing of the other, as if the non-Western work is more urgent, more in touch. This is what’s real, not the la-la land in which Americans float around. But isn’t Mike Kelley’s message equally important?

SR: We also tend to be more comfortable questioning the work of American artists—whether it’s good or bad, whether we agree or disagree with the artist’s point of view, whether his or her take on artistic practice is valid or uninteresting. We are afraid to question work from outside our own culture to the same degree.

KMS: Nationality might not be the right word, but the dominant culture of an artist should be identified because it may make a difference in how you view the work. If that culture tends to be something that Americans don’t have much knowledge of, it’s important to provide context for the audience. In some ways, nationality does

indicate the cultural background that may have influenced the artist's philosophy. But, if that person moves around and lives somewhere else for a long period of time, then nationality isn't so relevant. Knowing that Kusama is Japanese and currently producing work in Japan means something different to me than categorizing Yoko Ono as a Japanese artist who is based in New York City.

SS: How can we avoid presenting ourselves as a cultural authority? What does it mean to be a responsible global institution?

MW: We are an American institution in a global network of other institutions. We don't have to be an authority on art from everywhere, because we can't be. To get back to the mapping metaphor, I have to locate myself pretty specifically and culturally in terms of the education that I have received, the institution that I'm working in, and my knowledge of other places culled through reading. While it's great that we've all expanded our knowledge through the articles that our colleagues shared with us, I haven't been to China or South Africa, so for me to shape something from my realm of experience, my place on the map, about global issues, I need to be honestly aware of all that I don't know.

CA: I try to dispel the notion, with whatever group I'm talking to or working with, that I, or the Walker, know the one and only way an artwork should be interpreted. I can articulate the museum's view and at the same time reinforce that there are many other views, some well supported, some not.

SR: I agree with Christi's comments about making different points of view transparent, along with what informs them. That doesn't necessarily mean being critical of what you're hearing, but it does require being reflective about it. To be truly responsible to the community, to schools, to families, means to not oversimplify things. There is a real impulse among people who have to condense a lot of information into a curriculum, a tour, or a lecture to make it simple, to formularize it, to come up with a catch word or phrase. We need to keep it open-ended, keep the questions hanging, not always answered.

SS: I'd say that **to be a responsible global institution you should be a responsible local institution.**

MW: I've become aware of how difficult and necessary it is to keep our institutional identity in mind when we work with partners both on a global level and on a local level. When we work with our local partners, we need to be conscious of the fact that we're multidisciplinary and that we're a major arts institution. We have to be mindful that we don't squash the identity of our local partners, that we encourage them to hang on to their structures and ideas.

KMS: I'd like to add that **we should not create a hierarchy between our local community and the global community.** We often bring in speakers from overseas or out-of-state. We present artists, for example, from East India as part of the global programming, while in the local community there are East Indian immigrants who also are artists. Their voices are no less relevant than those of the people who are coming directly from East India. This is a very delicate balance that we face with our programming. **I want to be sensitive about validating the work, the voices, and the stories coming out of our global local community.** Without acknowledging the importance of this work, it will be difficult for us to move forward.

MW: And then on another level it is important to build a network globally and to create partnerships with other institutions and organizations, choosing guides in localities all across the globe.

KMS: We must choose the right guides locally as well.

SS: I believe our audiences are guides. We learn a lot from the communities with whom we work and from our visitors. We guide one another. Perhaps the most important lesson we've learned is that we have to choose our guides carefully and then trust them. That's a key for being a responsible institution, both globally and locally. It gets back to what you said, Meredith, about acknowledging what you don't know and finding people to guide you in the right direction. The global advisory committee is a wonderful example of finding exceptional guides.

SR: In fact, we work with a whole group of people here whom we call guides. In their training we encourage them to ask questions rather than to provide definitive answers. The idea is to point to the variety of paths that are open for understanding or engaging with a work of art.

SS: This initiative has reminded me of how important it is to make our work transparent to the public, especially why and how we make the artistic choices we do. Last summer, as part of the exhibition *Superflat*, the Walker had installed in the main lobby a work by Japanese artist Katsushige Nakahashi that was a re-creation of a World War II Japanese military aircraft constructed from roughly 15,000 color photographs of a model airplane. On September 11, and in the days that followed, we received several comments from visitors who found the work very threatening in light of the terrorist attacks. Suddenly, the context for the piece had changed. The museum staff debated whether or not to take the work down, knowing that it was stirring up powerful and unsettling emotions. We chose to keep it up and provided an expanded label that articulated the artist's intentions in making the work as well as our debate about visitors' responses to it and a comment book in which people could share their thoughts. The responses were remarkable, with many visitors commenting on our decision to leave the work on view. One person wrote, "I'm glad you left it up after September 11. It reminds us that there are ways to move beyond grief."

Moments such as this reinforce how a small, intimate, and honest encounter, which perhaps lacks a lot of conclusions, can be a very profound moment, although you may not realize it until much later. This idea of the "modest practice" that we talked about so much in one of our last meetings has given me a new sense of permission and renewal about my work.

MW: One of the points, when we talked about modest practice, had to do with the incorporation of everyday objects, not in terms of high culture and low culture, but simply objects that are a part of our daily lives. For us, that has meant presenting the opinions and the expertise of people who aren't necessarily artistic and cultural professionals, as with the comment book and some of the public programs that I am currently working on. It's interesting that we learned from artists to bring that into our educational practice.

SS: I agree. We learn a lot from the artists. When I talk to my colleagues in other institutions, I realize what a luxury it is at the Walker to work with so many practicing artists. Not only are we dealing with contemporary issues, we are collaborating with living artists who literally create new ways of seeing the world. In a conversation with Carol Becker, Okwui Enwezor articulated a phrase that really resonated with me.¹⁴ He talked about how **curators who curate within cultures and outside the confines of conventional art history make room for "unruly forms of intelligence."** I think that phrase can be applied readily to the ways in which so many artists are currently working and their willingness to engage with audiences.

Looking ahead to *How Latitudes Become Forms*, I am eagerly anticipating the "unruly" outcomes of our residency program with Robin Rhode, a young artist from South Africa. Rhode's interventionist work is rooted in the street and youth culture of South Africa. He'll be spending several weeks with teens from WACTAC creating some kind of public work with them that will be visible around Minneapolis in the form of bus shelter posters or some other public, nontraditional outlet. It will be fascinating to see what new possibilities arise out of a collaboration between a South African artist and a group of teens from the Upper Midwest. These are the kinds of artistic and cultural intersections that make our education practice here at the Walker so vibrant and dynamic.

¹⁴ See Carol Becker, "A Conversation with Okwui Enwezor," *Art Journal* (summer 2002), p. 26.