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Two Professional Development Learning Communities Experience DC Art Museums

Summer 2009 provided the opportunity for two learning communities of diverse educators—one local to the Metropolitan DC area and one drawing from the US and beyond—to study DC art museums and meet one another to share their artful explorations and discoveries.

Christine Ballengee-Morris and Patricia L. Stuhr from The Ohio State University created a graduate course introducing a broad range of issues, theories, policies, and practices of museums within the gaze of American Indians. Graduate students from Italy, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Ohio met at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC for a week exploring the conditions impacting indigenous identity constructions as well as Non-Native understandings of diverse American Indians and their communities through visual culture and art.

The resources of NMAI—personnel, architecture, exhibitions, collections, photo archives, film and video theatre, computer lab and resource center—were investigated in relation to literature pertinent to their exploration. Students

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Participants review visual journals inspired by museum visits.

Professional Development and DC Museums *continued from page 1*

participated in guided tours; viewed permanent videos/films; attended lectures by prominent Native American author and curator, Paul Chaat Smith; and visited the Cultural Resources Center through the guidance of the supervisor Dr. Patricia Niefeld.

On July 28, 2009 our group met with Dr. Sandell and her students to share experiences and explore the artwork by Fritz Scholder, a prominent Native artist. Students were required to explore a research question congruent with their interest relative to our on-site explorations at NMAI. This week was life-altering and proves that an emergent experience heightens one's understandings.

—Christine Ballengee-Morris



Renee Sandell, Roger Tomhave, Christine Ballengee-Morris, and Patricia L. Stuhr, July 28, 2009.



Student-led collaborative activities on identity and Fritz Scholder.

Renee Sandell and Roger Tomhave created and taught a new professional development course—Advanced Studies in Critical Response to Art, PK-12—in July 2009. Meeting off-campus while George Mason University's new School of Art building was being completed, two dozen Fairfax County Public School and other Virginia art and non-art teachers explored the issue of identity in art and life by visiting seven DC art museums. These learning sites (and educators) included the National Gallery of Art (Heidi Hinsh), Freer/Sackler Gallery (Elizabeth Benskin), National Museum of African Art (Deborah Stokes), National Museum of the American Indian (Paul Chaat Smith), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Ryan Hill), Smithsonian American Art Museum (Carol Wilson), and National Portrait Gallery (Rebecca Kasemeyer and Briana Zavadiil White). To research and interpret every art

museum as well as selected artworks, students used a Form+Theme+Context (FTC) Palette for Decoding an Art Museum (see <http://arteduca-tion.gmu.edu/sandell2.html>).

Maximizing the use of technology via Mason's Blackboard to complement the expeditionary museum visits and inspiring education curators' presentations, this group became enthusiastic art museum ambassadors. United as a creative and reflective learning community, these teachers fell in love with the multidisciplinary arts connections and rich offerings of DC cultural institutions, artfully documented their learning process in visual journals, and became eager to share with their students inspiring learning strategies gained through rich art experience and critical response. As indicated above, they also

hosted a special session on Visual Culture and Art Education with a group of Ohio State University graduate students and faculty to explore identity issues related to the National Museum of the American Indian exhibition, Fritz Scholder: Indian, Not Indian.

A number of the students will present their visual journals and findings at the Fall 2009 Virginia Art Education Association Conference in Richmond. They also hope to present at the 2010 National Art Education Convention in Baltimore in April—and to reconnect with Drs. Morris and Stuhr and their students, extending this enriching summer professional development opportunity into the future.

—Renee Sandell