

## 2021 MUSEUM STUDIES INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

### *Virtual Dialogue. Museum Academics and Professionals on Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-COVID World*

#### Keynote Speakers' description of topics and professional profiles:

##### **Do we have everyone here? Considering Virtual Programming in Small Museums**

With 2020's pivot to virtual programs, many small museums felt left behind, not believing they had the assets to embrace the movement. Yet, faced with shrinking relevancy, small museums rallied to connect with their communities, nourishing relationships with existing stakeholders while often meeting new audiences far beyond their regular reach. These museums championed resourcefulness as they shared collections, exhibitions, and programs virtually and through other creative means.

**Donna L. Merkt**, Director of the South Dakota Art Museum, believes art and museums should connect diverse people, promote inclusivity, and enrich lives. She previously served as Director of Museum Experience for the Oklahoma Hall of Fame's Gaylord-Pickens Museum (2019-2021) and as Curator of Education for the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art (2008-2019). Merkt is an at-large board member for the Mountain Plains Museums Association and serves as chair of MPMA EdCom and as the Mountain Plains representative for AAM EdCom.

##### **Museum Studies in Changing Times: Re-imagining Practicum Opportunities during COVID**

Real-world museum experiences are key to any museum studies curriculum. Our Johns Hopkins University online museum studies graduate program relies on physical museum spaces for practicums, internships, in-person seminars, and class assignments to meet this critical component of learning about museum practice. When the pandemic hit, we leveraged our online communities and resources to create dynamic virtual opportunities to fulfill this need — many of which we will continue to offer into the future.

**Phyllis Hecht** is the founding director of the Johns Hopkins University Master of Arts in Museum Studies program. She has taught at Hopkins since 2005 and her research focuses on best practices and innovative use of technology in the museum field. Ms. Hecht co-edited *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, an anthology on museums and technology. She has published papers and participated in international panels on topics of museums and technology, building online community, and current practices in digital curation. Ms. Hecht has more than 25 years of museum experience, and prior to Hopkins, worked at the National Gallery of the Art in Washington, D.C., as founding team member, art director, and then manager of the museum's

website, as well as a designer of print and web publications. She currently serves on the advisory board of the international initiative “One by One: Building Digitally Confident Museums.”

### **Onsite to Online: How Being Present with Art Virtually in Community Can Strengthen Critical Thinking and Support Social-Emotional Wellness in Teachers, Students, and All Virtual Visitors**

People around the world have looked for ways to engage with museums during the COVID-19 pandemic. As many discovered, visiting the museum online and attending museum programs doesn't have to be remote or passive. It can be dynamic and collaborative. It can break down barriers, build community, and expand conversations. At the National Gallery of Art, we've found this to be the case in our Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), [\*Teaching Critical Thinking through Art with the National Gallery of Art\*](#). The course introduces online learners, primarily educators, to the power of slowing down and thinking critically about works of art, while giving them tools to replicate the practice with their students. In discussion forums, teachers pose interpretations of artworks and share takeaways from lesson videos, working at their own pace. The pandemic had a profound impact on teachers, who were suddenly instructing their students remotely. Our MOOC typically provides asynchronous learning opportunities to thousands of teachers globally, but we sensed the urgency of connecting more directly with our online community to support them during this crisis. So, we began a series of live MOOC Meet-Up webinars on Zoom. We continued from there to expand these programs to the general public and to also host two Summer Institute for Educator one-week professional development conferences for education professionals around the world. In this session, Julie Carmean will share the story of this online program development and will show how these opportunities for engaging with art sparked not only deeper critical thinking but also social-emotional wellness in participants.

**Julie Carmean** is the Manager of National Teacher Programs for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. She has developed and oversees professional development programs for educators, nationally and internationally, onsite and online. She and her team produced the National Gallery's first Massive Open Online Course, *Teaching Critical Thinking through Art with the National Gallery of Art*, on edX, serving over 20,000 participants since its launch in 2019. She also leads annually the Summer Institute for Educators, a one week convening of educators around ideas of integrating art into pedagogy. She consults and presents regularly about critical thinking through art, teaching practices, and online learning. Previously, Julie worked with the National Gallery's Art Around the Corner programs partnering with District of Columbia Public Schools. She also taught for five years as a classroom teacher before venturing into the museum world. She began working with Project Zero research and pedagogies as a graduate student in Arts in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and has applied these pedagogies to both the classroom and museum.

## Digital storytelling and collections – what digital skills do museum people need and where do we start?

**Anra Kennedy** works with museums, galleries and heritage organisations, nationally and internationally, to help them successfully navigate the impact of digital change, digital culture and technologies. Her specialisms are digital literacies and skills and cultural learning, particularly in the context of the cultural sector's resilience, social impact and values-led practice. These days she spends most of her time in Zoom working with leaders, staff and volunteers from museums, galleries and heritage organisations to build their skills and confidence and help them make decisions around digital.

Anra's current projects include Culture24's ACE-funded [Sector Support programme](#), supporting museums in England with digital skills and impact and [Leading the Sector](#), a cohort programme for 16 senior leaders from UK heritage organisations to develop their digitally literate leadership, part of NLHF's digital Skills for Heritage initiative. She's part of the [One By One](#) team, researching and defining digital skills and literacies for museum people, an initiative lead by Leicester University and is working on developing and embedding the [Digital Culture Compass](#) a multi-partner project lead by The Space. Anra advises groups including [Art UK](#) and [GEM](#) and is an Industry Champion at Nesta's [Creative Industries & Policy Centre](#).