

Down the Rabbit Hole

Adventures in Creativity and Collaboration



DENVER
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Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

(from Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll)

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A photograph of two women working on a large, colorful, abstract sculpture made of ropes and sticks. The woman on the left is wearing glasses and a black shirt, and the woman on the right is wearing a red and blue patterned top. They are both smiling and looking at the camera. The background is a blurred, colorful abstract painting.

Creative-in-Residence Program at the DAM

Diviane Le Courtois
Artist in Residence

Introduction



In recent years, museums worldwide have been challenged to rethink their role in order to better meet changing visitor expectations. At a seminar in Salzburg, Austria in 2011, international museum and library leaders recognized that in an era of participatory culture museums must “embrace the changing nature of authority, allowing for co-creation of content as an accepted part of our work.”¹ The James Irvine Foundation has also encouraged arts organizations to transform engagement models, shifting the way visitors experience the arts from “one-way, as passive spectator, to two-way, as active participants in shaping the creative life of their communities.”²

The Denver Art Museum (DAM) is committed to expanding the ways in which we create engaging and relevant programming, while broadening and deepening our networks and creating new connections with our community. For the last several years, we have focused on inspiring creativity in our visitors, based on a growing body of evidence that creative experiences in the museum are a source of personal inspiration and connection.

Over the years, our programming has grown to include working with artists and **creatives** who we believe play a critical role in re-imagining the museum environment and thereby enhancing the individual and collective experiences of all stakeholders: visitors, DAM staff, and the artists and creatives themselves.

What is a creative?

We use the term **creative** for a person who applies their creative skills to a museum intervention that may take many forms. Because the nature of creatives’ work spans many different disciplines, from musical composition to floral arrangement, the pathway for visitor connection is enhanced. Some visitors who find traditional modes of artmaking intimidating or uninteresting may find it easier to connect through avenues such as cooking, music, or gardening. Many creative fields overlap with visitors’ pursuits and passions, and we believe that creatives can be a bridge between works of art displayed in the museum and visitors’ personal meaning-making. Collaborating with creatives within a museum context provides new and surprising opportunities for audience engagement.

¹ Mack, Deborah L., “Libraries and Museums in an Era of Participatory Culture,” The Salzburg Global Seminar and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, Session 482 Report, 2011.

² <http://irvine.org/grantmaking/our-programs/arts-program> (accessed Nov. 8, 2013).

In a previous project funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) we learned that participatory programs and **co-creation** experiences were powerful vehicles for engaging a broad spectrum of visitors in new ways. Past interviews with our creative partners revealed a number of benefits, ranging from feelings of being part of something bigger to heightened appreciation for the DAM. We saw how crucial a creative culture can be in building internal and external collaborations that produce programs that are authentic, responsive, and reflective of the communities we aim to serve.

Sparked by our earlier explorations of creativity and to gain further experience in developing participatory programming, we committed to further exploring a co-creative model. We wanted to understand what it would take and what it would look like to work in this way with the creative communities both inside and outside our walls. We were fueled by the belief that partnering with outside creatives could be a catalyst for transforming visitor experiences, building staff capacity to push boundaries, and contributing to the creative vitality of our community.

For more about how we got to where we are today, read our report **Tapping into Creativity & Becoming Part of Something Bigger**, available online at denverartmuseum.org.



What do we mean by co-creation?

Co-creation occurs when two or more parties come together and actively engage, either physically (as in hands-on experiences) or personally (as in meaningful conversations) with one another to produce a mutually valued outcome.

Words Matter

The call-out words we use throughout this report and how we define them come from a glossary that was a work-in-progress during the course of this IMLS project. You won't find these definitions in any standard dictionary; they emerged out of ongoing conversations with staff, colleagues, and creatives. Turn to the reflection essay by evaluation consultant Daryl Fischer for her discussion of *why* and *how* these words mattered to us.

What is a Creative-in-Residence?

A CiR program engages creatives to work onsite at the DAM on projects inspired by the museum's collection. For creatives, this arrangement provides a time and place for the artists to work away from their usual environment in conditions that foster creativity and provide new context, audiences, resources, and connections to other creatives. For visitors, it sparks creative thoughts and actions as they interact with creatives and explore artistic processes. For staff members, it brings new partners into the process of planning and implementing exhibits and programs.



Photo by Amanda Baker

“Creative in Residence” at a Glance

In 2014, we received a two-year grant from IMLS which enabled us to conceptualize, prototype, implement, and evaluate what we call **Creative-in-Residence**, or CiR for short.

Through this project, we aimed to address some big questions:

- ⇒ What are the types of experiences and degrees of participation visitors have with CiR programs and what does this suggest for how we move forward with participatory engagement?
- ⇒ How does a visitor's participation in CiR projects impact their perception of the museum?
- ⇒ Can the museum expand its repertoire of techniques to engage visitors through creativity by co-creating content?
- ⇒ What are the best approaches for supporting co-creation?
- ⇒ Can projects have a more permanent, less ephemeral presence at the museum?
- ⇒ How do creatives inspire us to activate the museum's collections and spaces?





As an opportunity for collaborative experimentation and learning, we invited six local creatives working in a range of non-traditional mediums to “set up shop” inside our galleries and public spaces. Over two years, we asked each of them to co-create with us to build unique programming that both responded to our museum collections and sought to actively engage visitors in new and unexpected ways. We envisioned two formats for residencies. The first type of residency would “pop up” in the galleries and stay for a month or less; the second invited creatives to take over a gallery space and install a project for up to four months. With both formats, our hope was that the DAM would provide a platform for creatives—and museum staff—to imagine new possibilities for their work and practice.



Turn to pages 27-39
in CiR Project
Descriptions to
learn more about
each residency.

Based on a number of factors, including previous work at the DAM, an experimental portfolio, and an interest in working directly with the public, we selected the following creatives for our initial **CiR series**:



NATHAN HALL,
Composer and Artist
March 5–27, 2015



FLOBOTS,
Alternative Hip Hop Group
May 2–31, 2015



ARTHUR WILLIAMS,
Floral Artist
August 1–28, 2015



**WARM COOKIES OF THE
REVOLUTION,**
Civic Health Club
September 15, 2015–January 3, 2016



MAR WILLIAMS,
Hacker
March 22–May 22, 2016



VIVIANE LE COURTOIS,
Conceptual Artist
April 5–15, 2016

Each of these projects allowed us to explore what it means to expand visitor experiences with creativity while giving staff members experience working in a co-creative mode. And while co-creation was our aspirational goal, whether it was achieved or not, what we fully learned and continue to explore is that **when authority is shared, relationships are re-defined**. This report documents our experiences and ongoing learning as we continue to develop participatory programming with our visitors, staff, and local artists.

New Experiences and New Roles for Visitors

Shifting existing notions of what art museum experiences are and can be was a fundamental goal of this project. Jaime Kopke, Adult Programs Manager during the IMLS grant period, made an important point: “People have perceptions of art museums, and one of them is that they are elitist. We are intentionally trying to open up the conversation.”

When floral artist Arthur Williams, our third CiR, set up a working studio in the museum, it sparked new kinds of conversations. “My whole goal was to show people that flowers are art, and that they should be expecting more,” he explained. Visitors stumbling upon him actively creating arrangements could meet, greet, and experience the designer’s craft in action. A related aspect of Arthur’s residency was taking visitors on “Tag Along” tours of his flower installations, which were located next to works of art in the museum galleries.

Projects like this gave visitors multiple opportunities to witness the creative process up close and personal, shifting their expectations of an art museum as a result.

Some of our favorite visitor quotes include:

- “The museum is not so much the ‘cultural sarcophagus’ as I thought.”
- “It felt a bit disruptive to *normal* museum experience.”
- “It was an interactive and eye-opening scene. Being able to use my skills, or hair, as part of an art installation was interesting and a very new concept.”

Unexpected, surprising, playful—these are some of the words visitors used to describe their experiences with the CiR projects. After participating in a residency—whether taking part in call-and-response performances, tending floral arrangements in galleries, or gathering to crochet a tent with human hair—visitors were hungry for more of these interactive and unexpected ways of engaging with the DAM, our collections, and the local art scene.



In several residencies, visitors were encouraged to play active roles in the art. Nathan Hall set up a “piano office” in our European and American art galleries and invited visitors to create sounds, which the composer and musician recorded for a collective musical soundscape played elsewhere in the museum. Inside the exhibition *Audacious: Contemporary Artists Speak Out*, Viviane Le Courtois built a *Global Thinking Pod* and welcomed visitors to participate by crocheting fiber chains or donating a piece of their hair, which she wove directly into the frame of the *Pod*. One visitor exclaimed, “Mom, guess what? I cut my hair to put it in an art exhibit today.” **Co-creative experiences like these allowed visitors to literally see themselves as part of Denver’s creative community.**



What do we mean by interactivity?

Interactivity is an elevated form of engagement in which one person responds to something created, said, or done by another. It may involve a call to action (a.k.a. “proaction”) or questions that invite people to come to their own conclusions. We encourage visitor interactivity through the design and creation of opportunities for them to contribute their own actions or thoughts, thereby connecting in meaningful ways to their museum experience. With formats that may or may not involve physical activity, outcomes may include physical or audible products along with new thoughts and ideas.

Interactivity’s power as a catalyst for greater creative participation was not lost on us. As creatives brought interactive, hands-on moments into their projects, we watched how these activities sparked new ways of thinking and feeling in visitors and, in some cases, fostered conversation among strangers. Our list of ways to incorporate and amplify interactivity into future participatory programming has continued to grow. **Facilitated exploration, dialogue with others, hands-on activities, minds-on provocations, and calls to action are all proving to be powerful new directions for the museum.**





A “Warm Cookie” that Pushes Boundaries

How Can a Museum be a “Warm Cookie”?

In many ways, this notion of warm cookies reflected our hopes for the larger CiR project. We experimented with activities that were new and different from what most visitors are used to experiencing at a museum. Some activities, such as singing along with a hip hop group or crocheting your own hair into a sculpture, may not be things people comfortably jump into in everyday life. But there was something about being in the museum that provided them with a safe environment and an invitation to “loosen up” and try something new. In this way, the museum itself served as the “warm cookie” that helped get the tougher conversations and unexpected connections flowing.

When Warm Cookies of the Revolution (WCoR), our fourth CiR, founded their “civic health club,” they knew asking a bunch of strangers to get together and immediately start discussing politics would intimidate most people. To help overcome this reluctance, they hosted meetups with milk and warm cookies, which broke the ice. Participants found themselves open to talking to strangers and more readily engaged in dialogue about challenging issues. (See p. 34 for more on WCoR.)

It’s good to see that people are becoming more aware of issues and [here they are] presented in a way that isn’t a news blurb but interactive and hands-on. — DAM Visitor

Hands-on activities also helped to put visitors at ease. When project designs explicitly invited visitors to **slow down, stop,** and **engage,** as with Viviane Le Courtois’ verbal invitations to join her in the *Global Thinking Pod* and either crochet hair or leave something of themselves behind, visitors relaxed into conversations and building relationships. When projects altered the design of the public space to create a sense of intimacy, like sitting inside Viviane’s tent-like enclosure, visitors engaged in reflection and meaningful exchange with one another. Moving forward, **we will continue to create intentionally provocative juxtapositions and use a calming presence to inspire relaxation and slowing down.**

I liked what I felt like was being said, which was talking about knitting people together from all different walks of life and people coming in and having an experience in which something is constructed from all these different parts and parcels and viewpoints. — DAM Visitor



Photo by Chris Perez

Evoking conversation is so important. People need to be moved and that is what a CiR can do. — CiR Roundup participant



We saw great potential for inspiring community connections and civic engagement through our CiR projects. **As we evolved from a place where art is merely seen into a hub for social and civic interactions, we saw public perceptions of the DAM change.**

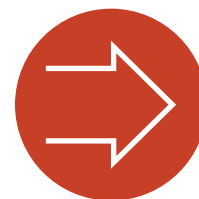
As WCoR's Chris Getzan observed, "They [visitors] understood that this [CiR program] is about community and about big things like social democracy and their place in it." At the museum, **we learned we can link art, individuals, and communities through creative thought and action.** Moving forward, we have a call to action that raises new questions. How do we build a shared understanding among staff doing this work about what it means to be that safe, public gathering space where community issues and calls to action can be voiced? And are there residency formats that would make better use of the museum as a warm cookie?

A Portrait of Creativity in Denver



Art is happening here in Denver, not just in Los Angeles and New York. The Denver Art Museum can showcase that.

—CiR Roundup participant



Turn to Appendix 2 to see a visual recording of our CiR Roundup.

In many cities including Denver, new residents and businesses are changing the social, intellectual, and ultimately, the creative landscape. The CiR projects allowed us to more actively participate in the creative evolution we see happening in our city. In June of 2016, at the conclusion of the CiR projects, we hosted our Creative-in-Residence Roundup. Modeling it on a **World Café** format to provide a holistic view of all six residencies, we gathered the creatives we had worked with, visitors who had attended one or more residencies, and DAM staff who had helped bring the residencies to life for an evening of reflection and dialogue sparked by the following questions:

- ⇒ What was your experience with the CiR project(s) and how did that experience affect you?
- ⇒ What have your previous experiences with the DAM been, and how has your view of the museum been influenced by the CiR project(s)?
- ⇒ How could a mash-up between Denver's creatives and the DAM benefit our city, and what could that partnership look like?

What is a World Café?

A World Café brings together a group of stakeholders—in our case, creatives, visitors, and museum staff members—for a structured process intended to facilitate open discussion, share mutual knowledge, and discover new opportunities for action. This methodology of supported conversation and connection fit the spirit of our CiR programs.



We were struck by the recurring sentiment that the CiR projects were *about* Denver. To quote one Roundup participant, the CiRs were a “portrait of creativity in Denver.” For visitors, they were a source of local pride. For creatives, the residencies recognized the value creatives bring to our community. And for the DAM, these projects allowed us to expand the sense of what’s happening at the museum since visitors did not distinguish between the work of museum staff and creatives—both were seen as part of the DAM.

Traditional institutions attempting to try new, riskier things says good things about the creative community as a whole.
—CiR Roundup participant

Working with and in the museum provided the creatives opportunities to connect with other creatives as they implemented their project ideas. The Flobots, as a part of their residency, invited fellow musicians to use the galleries as an open studio, creating, improvising, and practicing in front of works of art. WCoR’s installation featured various collaborations, including a local theater company, local film makers, furniture designers, and political activists. Some creatives introduced other, new creatives to the DAM as a venue for their own work. In this way, the circle of people we reached continued to expand, further enhancing our appreciation for the value creatives have in the community and the vibrancy of their collective creative endeavors.

These residencies felt like Denver. This is our city NOW.
—CiR Roundup participant





A New Way of Working

Guiding Principles for a Successful Creative-in-Residence Program

In general, think of each project as a lab. This means continuing to honor experimentation and being prepared to learn from failure.

Moving forward, we will:

- ⇒ Maximize the unique opportunities for creatives working inside a museum
- ⇒ Nurture mutually rewarding creative partnerships
- ⇒ Realize skill-sharing goes both ways
- ⇒ Establish parameters
- ⇒ Build in time—plenty of it
- ⇒ Re-imagine space
- ⇒ Promote individual residencies and the CiR program as a whole

We quickly learned that co-creating is a worthy and aspirational goal, but the reality is far more messy and complicated than we assumed. Co-creation was new to almost everyone involved, be it staff, visitors, or our creative partners. After the first two residencies, we realized that projects are not only co-created, they are collaborative; the layers of participation experienced by each party are dynamic, shifting during the course of a project and varying widely from one residency to another. With some projects, for example, co-creation seemed to happen easily between the creatives and visitors, while we struggled to foster co-creation between staff and our creative partners. At other times, the opposite dynamic might occur. **Taken as a whole, the CiR projects provided an up-close examination of the meaning of co-creation, not only between creatives and visitors, but between creatives and staff.**

⇒ Maximize the unique opportunities for creatives working inside a museum

This type of partnership between a large, public art museum and independent artists has the potential to make an even greater impact on all participants. The creatives valued partnering with the museum for many reasons, telling us the opportunity provided inspiration for their work and influenced new approaches to their creative practice as they interacted with the museum setting, its collections, staff, and museum visitors.





Stephen Brackett of the Flobots reflected on performing in the galleries, surrounded by museum collections, saying, “Playing at the DAM during museum hours allows artists to *stretch* their perception of performance. It’s a *new* opportunity in a place filled with art.” The influence of the collections had a powerful impact on the planning of Mar Williams’ project, which incorporated interactive Bluetooth aspects directly based on visitors’ emotional reactions to *Audacious*, an exhibition of select works from our Modern and Contemporary art collection.

The creatives also valued what they saw as the validation offered by the museum as a public space and its exposure to a broader and expanded audience. “The art museum is big; it has resources; it brings in people constantly,” stated Evan Weissman of WCoR, “And that, to any artist or creative person or someone wanting to do civic engagement, is huge . . . what the art museum provides . . . people, resources, exposure, and legitimacy.”





⇒ Nurture mutually rewarding creative partnerships

For this type of work you have to be someone who thrives on conversation, face-to-face interaction, dialogue, and visitor engagement. —Lauren Hegge, DAM staff

A main goal was getting creatives to work in a way that incorporated and engaged one of our most unique assets—our visitors—into their own processes and projects. Not only did we want them to make art in the museum, **we wanted them to make art with visitors in the museum.** The first few residencies taught us that being explicit and owning our goals was crucial. Nathan Hall suggested that we “tell creatives ‘this is what we are trying to do’. Think of it in the same way that you might present the mission statement to your partner.” It was critical that our creative partners be ready for the visitor-centric process we envisioned.

We learned that some personalities are more likely than others to flourish in this environment and with these expectations. As we move forward with CiR programs, we know it is critical that we work with creatives who:

- understand that engagement with visitors is an essential ingredient in their project;
- are comfortable with extemporaneous conversations and interactions;
- are interested in learning more about how the public views their work;
- are intrigued by working in a museum environment, with its set of creative challenges;
- see value in working with and within museum collections;
- are willing to embrace constraints and work within parameters;
- and**
- have a high degree of personal and professional maturity.

The residency reinforced for me that these are the kinds of projects that really excite me . . . I definitely want to do more audience-focused work. —CiR Nathan Hall



⇒ Realize skill-sharing goes both ways

Visitors benefitted when the creatives shared more about their individual work, their processes, and their goals for the residency. Each installed CiR project incorporated a video of the creatives introducing their projects in their own words. This bit of extra introduction helped staff not directly involved in the residencies put a face to the project. Face-time with the creatives was invaluable for everyone supporting the CiR projects—educators, conservators, curators, project managers, and front-line staff. The Flobots toured the storage and collections areas with a group of our educators and curators in preparation for developing their audio tour. At an all-staff meeting leading up to the launch of the CiR program, we broadcasted a video of two upcoming CiRs, Nathan Hall and Evan Weismann of WCoR, to introduce them and their personalities to DAM staff. As in any developing relationship, providing such ways to meet, greet, and work with each other helped everyone to feel invested in the process.

Likewise, we realized how much the creatives needed museum staff to share *our* knowledge—not only about how the museum functions, but more importantly, about best practices for engaging visitors. There was a steep learning curve for creatives as they worked with museum visitors, some for the first time, and they benefitted from working with staff members in a more co-creative and collaborative way to envision and design new visitor experiences. It was important to offer guidance regarding program schedules, instructions, and placement of people and equipment within the galleries. **Working hand-in-hand with our creatives as partners to develop the participatory aspect of the project paid off in the quality of the visitor experience.**

True co-creation meant reflecting a co-creative approach internally, as well as with the creatives. We implemented, and then found ourselves re-defining, multi-layered and multi-disciplinary staff task forces to share knowledge and experiences so we could collectively solve problems and make progress. We began with a Core Team that set direction for each project and a Design and Implementation Team that focused on problem-solving across departments. By the second residency, these



Photo by Amanda Baker



Photo by Amanda Baker

two teams had merged into one collective group, with a mix of departments and a variety of seniority and expertise. **We learned that creativity thrives with multiple perspectives, shared problem-solving, and cross-departmental communication.** Incorporating all needed perspectives—marketing, communications, guest services, facilities, graphics, curatorial, education—is the best way we found to advance institutional learning. Successful projects also required transparency and risk-taking. We will continue to ponder how we can best encourage and set the conditions for this kind of teamwork in forming, monitoring, and owning a project's success.

⇒ Establish parameters

The uncharted and expansive nature of the CiR projects made it all the more important to be upfront in defining project parameters and constraints. Not only to accept them, but to see them as positive contributions to the co-creative process.

The specific framework shifted from one CiR to another, but all involved needed structure and boundaries to maximize creative potential. Given the unique opportunity to create with and in the museum, creatives were inspired to dream big! So were museum staff, but we held back, concerned about interjecting too much and limiting the creatives' ideas. Staff member Jaime Kopke expressed a sentiment shared by several others, "Sometimes you can foresee problems but you don't want to kill their creativity."

The CiR program purposefully encouraged risk-taking and pushing boundaries. Achieving a balance between allowing new ideas to flourish and serving as the voice of the museum was a delicate proposition. Understandably, creatives and museum staff members had very different ways of working—ways that were not always aligned. These differences could either be in conflict, which inhibited co-creation, or in balance, which stimulated both creatives and staff to experiment boldly.

While intentions were always good, competing priorities often resulted in confusion about roles and creative authority and sometimes created



Photo by Chris Perez

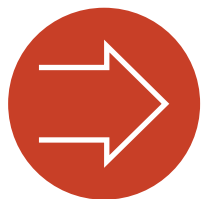
a stressful experience for both creatives and staff. Suffice it to say there were different expectations and comfort levels around issues of risk, tidiness, experimentation, uncertainty, unexpected results, and surprising outcomes. While these were real struggles that needed to be worked through, several staff members noted that working on CiR projects introduced them to staff colleagues with whom they had not collaborated in the past.

Interestingly, in exit interviews at the end of each CiR, several creatives stated that they wished DAM staff had interjected more often and owned their expertise, offering guidance more freely. “You [the museum] have stuff here and the people here have knowledge,” said Evan Weismann of WCoR. “Consider offering that. Take stock of the things you take for granted.”

Experimentation, openness, and reflection—these are all key concepts as the DAM shifts from a mindset of *implementing* CiR projects to *collaborating* with creatives to envision future projects together. We floundered at times with when and how to interject our expertise into the design of the CiR projects. We now know it is crucial that we build confidence and skills among staff to see ourselves as *creative participants*. As one CiR Roundup participant said, “The museum itself should be treated as creative material that staff are experts in. Try using a staff member as a creative partner to the external partner, to collaborate, rather than implement with.”

Questions to ask when setting CiR parameters:

- What do we want to achieve for visitors, staff, and creatives?
- What can we realistically do given budgets, schedules, and museum rules?
- Are we comfortable with some rules being bent?
- Which staff members have the final say concerning activities installed in the galleries?
- What will provide the best experiences for visitors and creatives?



Turn to Appendix 4
for Creativity
Roadmap.

⇒ Build in time—plenty of it

This kind of meaningful work takes time. What we have found is that we're not just hiring a creative to do a project—we're developing a mutual understanding of how each other works.

—Heather Nielsen, DAM staff

Investing sufficient time to build relationships, communicate, and problem-solve throughout each project was vital to achieving our key goals of co-creation and shared decision-making. We learned the value of starting strong by building relationships—with the creatives of course, but also with staff members across the museum. Both internal and external partners found that communicating more clearly about initial and ongoing expectations and needs—while staying flexible to allow for the inevitable fluidity of a creative process—made for a stronger team and less-stressful residency.

We learned to build adequate time into our schedules, including time (more time than we thought!) for training and program-building. We quickly realized the need for building in regular check-ins, planning, and making adjustments based on what we learned from daily interactions, especially when it was a new relationship or involved people new to the co-creative process.

No matter how pressing the other things on our calendars were, we also built in time for ongoing evaluation—exit interviews and unobtrusive observations, followed by reflection sessions that went beyond a debriefing of project implementation. We also spent time talking about terms and definitions and building on our evolving frameworks, such as a glossary, matrix, and Creativity Roadmap.

We now realize that four residencies in one year was too many. This pace did not give staff the time they needed to be fully involved in every aspect of the creatives' work, and co-creation between staff and creative was compromised. Moving forward we plan to produce two longer residencies per year, slowing down to develop mutually meaningful projects that advance the practice of everyone involved.

One of the things we're doing with our residency is thinking about how to change spaces.

—CiR Stephen Brackett



⇒ Re-imagine spaces

Space is an essential ingredient in maximizing creativity. The creatives' imaginative use of museum spaces pushed us to think more expansively about “setting the stage” for creative participation. **One thing we found particularly inspiring was their use of the museum's transitional spaces and thoroughfares.** The Flobots used our stairwell for call and response activities with visitors, while Nathan Hall used the bridge that connects our two facilities across a busy street as a performance space during his residency. Arthur Williams used an elevator lobby as a floral studio.

All the CiR projects pushed us to think about how we might re-imagine available transitional spaces to **harness the power of intimacy and surprise**—two strong components of maximizing visitor engagement. When creatives' projects popped up in corners, stairwells, and atriums, visitors happened upon new experiences and enjoyed unexpected encounters with both creatives and other strangers passing through the same space. Similarly, projects **inviting passersby into intimate or cozy spaces** deepened visitors' levels of engagement, supported personal reflection, and sustained conversations, often around tough topics.

⇒ Promote individual residencies and the CiR program as a whole



Museums face tension as we roll out new ways of working, exhibiting, and interacting with visitors and artists. We want to experiment, but when we cannot be sure of the outcome, we do not give innovative projects the broad public awareness they deserve. This was true of the CiR program, where we learned during the Roundup that many DAM members had not known about the CiR programs. Even those visitors who had attended an individual residency often were not aware of the fact that there were a variety of other CiR-related events. From this, we realized we need to raise the profile of individual residencies and be bolder in how we communicate the overall initiative, including our commitment to involving the local creative community in our work.

Where Do We Go From Here?

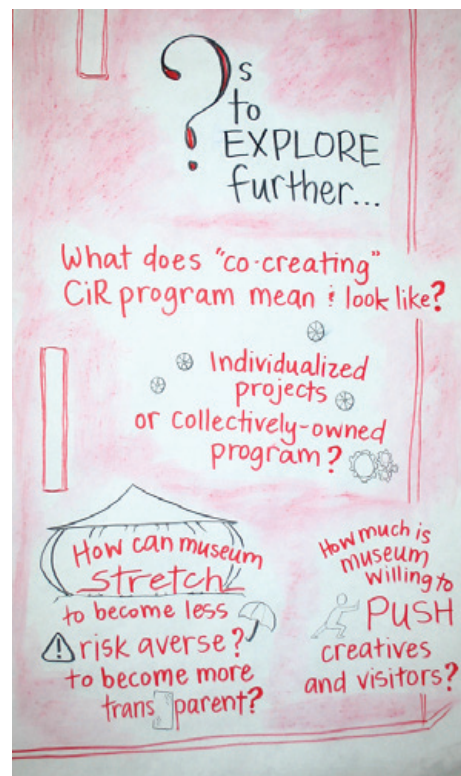
The DAM is more open to the community now than it ever was before.

— CiR Roundup participant

This project exemplified the old adage that the more you learn the more there is to learn. Many of the important questions we still need to answer revolve around our internal culture and capacity for change. We pushed hard in encouraging creatives and staff to use the museum and our unique assets to build creative practices while expanding what is possible for visitors. What remains to be seen is how “sticky” this collaborative and co-creative way of working will be.

We are now actively considering the following key questions:

- **How can our insight into the role we play in the creative lives of visitors and artists permeate our practice?** Perhaps our greatest opportunity for growth will be in aligning how we engage visitors and creatives in the creative process with how we engage our staff in the same process.
- **How can we develop staff skills and comfort in dealing with uncertainty, experimentation, vulnerability and surprising outcomes?** One of our overall goals was to develop a culture of creativity and a collective responsibility for the success of CiR projects. We anticipated that this would involve an exploration of staff roles and responsibilities, but we were surprised at the level of discomfort staff members felt in moving away from familiar job descriptions and procedures. As a result of this grant, we now know it is just as crucial that we build staff confidence and skills around facilitation and collaborative problem-solving expertise.



- **How can the museum stretch to become less risk-averse?**

The CiR Roundup revealed that the DAM's sense of risk around residencies is much greater than visitors' sense of risk. This underscored the need to re-examine how we apply museum rules to special projects, keeping in mind whether the constraints may enhance creativity and when they will likely impede it.

Meanwhile, we are also considering how the CiR program can enable us to develop and deepen our connection to our local community, including the creative community:

- **How can we nurture relationships with our creatives post-residency?** Addressing this question will allow us to deepen our connection to the creative community of Denver and enable former CiRs and the DAM to build upon the residency experience. We are looking at involving our former CiRs in the development of new residencies and setting up a mentoring network whereby our former CiRs provide peer mentoring to our current residents.
- **What are the opportunities for off-site projects that extend our reach into the wider community?** One visitor who participated in the CiR Roundup asked, "What is a museum? What if it were more like a park, playground, library, train station, or restaurant?" As we go forward, we are questioning what might it look like to extend projects off-site and "travel" residencies beyond our walls, further blurring the boundaries between community space and the museum space.
- **At the same time, what further collaborations could we support that expand CiR residencies within our walls?** What if creatives worked together in overlapping residencies? We experimented with this idea at one of our monthly Friday night *Untitled* events, gathering CiR alums, composer Nathan Hall, and floral artist Arthur Williams to perform a multi-media event.

During the CiR Roundup, many ideas were generated about how the DAM, creatives, and visitors could continue our work together to support



a fresh and dynamic city. As we continue to refine and develop our CiR model, we are still listening to what was said about how we might play a greater role in the local creative ecosystem.

Therefore, while the IMLS grant period has ended, the DAM's commitment to CiR has not. Our 2017 budget includes funding for two more residencies. The kind of innovation and experimentation involved in CiR has begun a transformation in the way we work. We will continue to push ourselves as an organization to embrace collaborative and co-creative models of working, finding ways to embed creatives into visitor experiences while simultaneously strengthening our internal culture and capacity to develop and implement co-creative projects. Our adventures in creativity and collaboration continue.



*It's no use going back
to yesterday, because
I was a different
person then.*

*(from Alice in Wonderland
by Lewis Carroll)*



CiR Project Descriptions





CiR 1 Profile

I'm already so critical of myself that I want to be able to make mistakes and be okay with it, and not have someone think that it has to be perfect. Because perfection is, like, really overrated.

—Nathan Hall

Nathan Hall, Composer & Artist March 5-27, 2015

During his residency, artist, composer, and musician Nathan Hall created music and sound pieces inspired by artworks in the DAM's permanent collection. His projects ranged from unexpected installed musical moments that visitors could interact with anytime, to large-scale live performances announced in advance. With a "piano office" right in the middle of our European and American art galleries, Nathan invited visitors to be everything from collaborators to listeners, and to make new connections between music, visual art, and the creative process. Tension over unexpected materials in gallery settings—such as baby wipes, harmonicas, and a bundle of sticks used as a percussion instrument in our Western American art galleries—pressed Nathan, the DAM, and visitors in new ways. Nathan increased his own comfort level with risk-taking, sharing his process, and working interactively with the public. He also pushed the potential for using music and musical instruments within the museum space, which challenged both DAM staff and visitors to think more creatively about how sound can convey the essence of artworks and the experience of visiting a museum.



Unexpected materials used as percussion in the Western American art galleries



Nathan recording visitor sounds for an audio installation



Nathan's live performance in the atrium of the Hamilton Building



Photo by Jarrod Duncan

Nathan Hall's works have been called “fearless” in their multifaceted expressions of the composer’s personal and musical identity. Nathan uses music as an artistic medium to explore a variety of fields including science, nature, the fine arts, history, and sexuality. Many of Nathan’s works are based on his travels, mapping out a geography of his experiences while taking the listener on their own personal journey. Other works are inspired by the composer’s sexuality and experiences as a gay man, creating a special intimacy between performer, place, and audience.



CiR 2 Profile

One thing people are an expert in is their own curiosity and their own questions . . . So why don't we empower people to be experts in curiosity and engage with that mindset, which is really the mindset that a child comes to the museum with.

—Jamie Laurie

Flobots, Alternative Hip Hop Group May 2-31, 2015

Alternative hip hop group the Flobots focused their residency on a series of performances and programs that both gathered and reacted to visitors' emotional responses to art. Recognizing that not all visitors are experts in art and art history, the Flobots instead chose to engage visitors through something they are experts in: their own emotions. They developed a "curiosity package" of activities, including an audio tour with accompanying visitor surveys, which enabled them to create a dialogue between themselves, visitors and artworks, and each other. The intention was to "reward" visitors who were more curious with new and deeper experiences. In addition to hosting open studio hours, the Flobots partnered with local musicians and artists to choreograph live performances interpreting museum artworks through the lens of an emotion. They also presented smaller, pop-up performances that offered visitors spontaneous interaction points. The Flobots incorporated multiple perspectives, which advanced the idea of the museum as a place of dialogue rather than a unidirectional monologue.



Local musician, Adam Stone, responding to Gustave Doré's painting through the lens of the emotion "disgust"



"Curiosity Package" map

The Flobots are an alternative hip hop band from Denver made up of Jamie Laurie ("Johnny 5," emcee and vocals), Stephen Brackett ("Brer Rabbit," emcee and vocals), and Kenny Ortiz ("Kenny O," drums). In Colorado they are recognized for their community endeavors. In 2007, they founded Flobots.org, now Youth On Record, an organization dedicated to empowerment through creative education. They are the recipients of the 2009 Cesar Chavez Leadership Award and the 2010 Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Their current project, NO ENEMIES, invites the public to use music as a tactic for social movements.





CiR 3 Profile

The most fulfilling part of my residency was interacting with the public in my pop-up studio. To have people simply recognize my work as art, to not be put into the somewhat dated term of 'florist.' Yes I am that as well, but that's literally just the surface of the possibilities. I'm many things.

—Arthur Williams

Arthur Williams, Floral Artist August 1-August 28, 2015

Floral artist Arthur Williams took inspiration from the museum collections to create site-specific installations and live performances. His residency coincided with a larger, campus-wide program focused on flowers that included flower exhibitions and programming. Once a week, Arthur set up a pop-up floral studio outside the design galleries where visitors could interact with him while he worked on floral arrangements. He hosted "Tag Along" tours where visitors could accompany him as he worked in the galleries, doing everything from refreshing arrangements to installing new works. Arthur also held three large-scale performances that literally brought our summer theme of flowers to life. Using a range of botanical, natural, and man-made materials, as well as live models, these performances challenged perceptions and created a powerful connection between visitors and the artist. Working with organic material in the museum presented a number of concerns, and it was crucial for the DAM team to work closely with our conservation department to negotiate solutions. This residency allowed Arthur to showcase his process without the constraints of the retail world. His pieces created lovely elements of surprise for visitors and pushed the perception of floral design as art.



Arthur creating a piece for his *Adam & Eve* performance Photo by Amanda Baker



A model from Arthur's *Adornment* performance



Photo by Beth Sanders

Arthur Williams

is known for his floral headdresses and the use of natural tension in his work. He considers “what’s yet to come” in positioning a bud yet to blossom, or a full bloom that will decline, showing that a floral work of art is alive and transitory, and cannot be possessed; it can only be experienced. With a background in gardening, sculpture, and photography, he entered the floral industry in 1996, and opened Babylon Floral Design, Inc. in 2004. One of the first seven people in Colorado to become a Certified Professional Florist, Arthur is also a Certified Floral Designer at the national level. In 2015, he was inducted into the American Institute of Floral Designers, and he completed his European Master Certification in 2016.



CiR 4 Profile

It's not fair to suggest that what makes this place [the museum] run is only the artists that made the paintings and the curators who've decided that they're interesting.

—Evan Weissman

Warm Cookies of the Revolution, Civic Health Club

September 15, 2015-January 3, 2016

Evan Weissman and Chris Getzan brought their civic health club, Warm Cookies of the Revolution, into the DAM from September 2015 through the beginning of January 2016, for the longest of the six residencies. With the help of partner creatives, WCoR developed an installation called *Vote Every Day*, a series of eight interactive stations that examined voting and civic health from different perspectives. WCoR were present in the space for several scheduled hours each week, but they also designed the installation to work on a self-serve basis. This was the first extensively installed space in the museum designed entirely by creatives and creative partners. The setup of *Vote Every Day* gave visitors options for different levels of participation and engagement, which allowed for a greater sense of personal agency. The space became a hub of conversation and local connections, and it introduced visitors to politics and civic engagement in the unexpected setting of a museum.

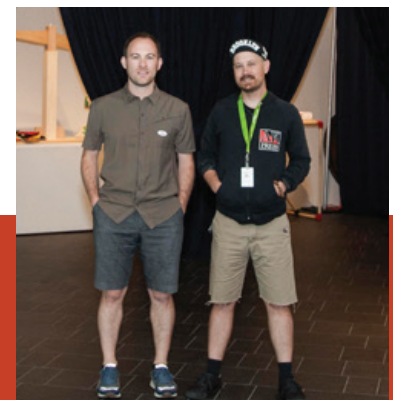


Visitors using the conversation table



Balancing a mock budget using beanbags

Evan Weissman and Chris Getzan make up the world's very first civic health club, *Warm Cookies of the Revolution* (WCoR). You go to a gym to exercise your physical health, a religious institution to exercise your spiritual health, a therapist to exercise your mental health—but where can you go to exercise your civic health? WCoR was founded to provide a forum for people to gather and discuss issues important to the community, and to take actions to be a part of the decision-making process. WCoR's name comes from the fresh-baked cookies served as both a gesture of hospitality and a reflection of the group's dual beliefs that civic participation is a group activity and that civic health is nourished by a social setting.



FEED THE ANIMAL

CiR 5 Profile



What I want to show to people is something that's more human, that they can relate to in a way that they could relate to another person, and see this data in a way that makes emotional sense to them.

—Mar Williams

Mar Williams, Hacker March 22-May 22, 2016

Mar Williams worked with a collective of local hackers on an interactive installation that explored the connection between technology, art, and individual identity. Mar's residency involved experimentation with Bluetooth technology to track visitors' interaction with the art and each other in the exhibition *Audacious: Contemporary Artists Speak Out*. These interactions could be used to create and visualize a unique identity for each visitor. Mar's medium was something we had never experimented with before; as such, it was totally uncharted territory. This was a technically and technologically challenging residency that, in the end, proved more of a learning launch pad than a final, polished project. Although certain elements never came to fruition, Mar did attract a new audience to the museum and got people excited about interacting with technology at *Untitled Final Fridays* in March and April 2016.

EXPERIMENT IN PROGRESS...

Feed the ANIMAL with Data

In the coming weeks, we'll be gathering and analyzing data on visitors' emotional experiences using wearable gesture sensors.

The sensors will allow visitors to communicate with any artwork in *Audacious: Artists Speak Out* exhibit (located on this floor).

The animal will react to each person differently based on the gestures used while in *Audacious*

Keep an eye on this space to be part of the experiment, and to see how the animal reacts to you!



Guests can use gestures to tell the artworks how they feel.

Label inviting visitors to provide feedback



Mar (left) and colleague during public office hours



Photo by Dan Chick

Mar Williams

works in a number of mediums, but maintains an interest in the artistic applications of emerging technology, open source, and DIY. As someone who enjoys “the intellectual challenge of creatively circumventing limitations,” Mar proudly represents the hacker identity and is a leader in the DIY Denver arts scene. Mar is a past *Untitled Final Fridays* collaborator, an experienced designer, and a key instigator of mischief and collaboration in the local creative community.



CiR 6 Profile

Photo by Chris Perez

Art does not have to be a passive activity; it can be a transformative experience that makes people think.

—Viviane Le Courtois

Viviane Le Courtois, Conceptual Artist April 5-15, 2016

For the shortest of the six residencies, Viviane Le Courtois built a *Global Thinking Pod* inside the exhibition *Audacious: Contemporary Artists Speak Out*. She was interested in creating space in the galleries where visitors could slow down, make something, and connect with new people. Viviane invited visitors to sit down with her in the *Pod*—an ever-evolving fiber structure—to discuss the artworks surrounding them. She also welcomed visitors to participate by either crocheting chains out of different fibers or by donating a piece of their hair, which she wove directly into the frame of the *Pod*. Viviane was present in or around her *Global Thinking Pod* every hour that the museum was open and, despite the provocative nature of the request to donate hair, she created a safe and intimate space for visitors within the *Pod*. The design of the *Pod* allowed for intimate conversation and reflection and the resulting structured spontaneity pushed the boundaries of how far visitors were willing to interact with strangers in a museum setting.



Viviane collecting hair to weave into the *Global Thinking Pod* Photo by Chris Perez



The *Pod* provided an intimate space for conversation Photo by Chris Perez



Viviane (left) adding a visitor's contribution to the *Global Thinking Pod* Photo by Chris Perez

Born in France, *Viviane Le Courtois* is a Denver-based artist who creates process-based, conceptual, and participatory installations, performances, sculptures, videos, and prints that connect art to everyday life. She is a curator, teacher, and the Studio and Gallery Program Manager for DAVA (Downtown Aurora Visual Arts), as well as co-founder and conceptual director of Processus, The Institute for Art and Life, a co-working and co-thinking space.



Photo by Chris Perez



Perspectives on Evaluation

Developmental Evaluation in Action

This report reflects our deep commitment to evaluation and reflection at every step. Daryl Fischer and Mary Ellen Munley, our evaluation consultants, were reflective partners and critical friends. They helped us shape an evaluation protocol based on a Developmental Evaluation framework we had used before. This approach, along with our reflective practice, helped evaluative thinking to become second nature for staff members who participated. We conducted interviews and wrote evaluation memos. We formed staff task forces to reflect on what we were seeing and hearing from visitors and

what we were learning about working together. We wrapped up the project with a CiR Roundup, inspired by the World Café model, to assess the overall impact of CiR experiences on creatives, visitors, and staff. This sometimes “messy,” yet extremely fruitful combination of formal interviewing, structured observations, staff reflections, and coaching by our savvy evaluators became the basis for the reflections and next steps articulated in this report. The following essays from our project evaluators provide their perspectives on this process.



A reflection on evaluation, research and practice

By Mary Ellen Munley, Principal, MEM & Associates

The CiR evaluation process—and results—challenged our team and stimulated the evaluators and practitioners to think in new ways about what is too often experienced as an uncomfortable tension between evaluators and practitioners and a divide between research and practice.

Some things, we learn—or are taught, just don't go together naturally. Even more, things are falsely represented as dichotomous. Water and oil don't mix; emotion and reason are too often pitted against each other. Closer to the world of museum education, the dualistic limitations of Western thinking show up in the worlds of practice and research and often result in what C.P. Snow called the “gulf of mutual incomprehension” between humanists and scientists.

The CiR project surfaced some of the tensions between evaluation and practice. For one, while “evaluation” was the operative word, in fact, it did not sufficiently encompass the depth to which DAM staff wished to explore and understand how creativity might be activated more fully for Denver creatives and for visitors. Reflective practice and action research were closer to what the team wanted to do.

The evaluators and staff working on the project had a history of working together and had developed mutual respect for each other's work. The staff was keen on including more evaluation into their practice, thus *we experimented with a practitioner/researcher approach and together we considered the very real possibility that the divide need not remain impenetrable*. Think vinaigrette—and don't forget the mustard. Pour oil and vinegar into a container and the divide between the two is clearly visible. Add some mustard, shake, and voila—it's neither oil nor vinegar but something new—a smooth vinaigrette. The scientific term for what happens is emulsion, a mixture of two or more liquids that are normally unmixable or unblendable. The agent that makes this happen is called an emulsifier—in the case of vinaigrette, what stabilizes the mixture of the two opposing liquids are the chemicals found surrounding mustard seeds.

Why this mini-lesson in cooking and science? Because as I reflect on what we learned during the CiR project, a highlight was getting more clarity about how research and practice can not only co-exist, but blend together into something as

smooth and tasty as a good vinaigrette. The trick is finding effective emulsifiers to stabilize the mixture of research and practice; or, to follow our cooking example, our task became one of finding museum educators' and evaluators' equivalents of egg yolks and mustard.

Throughout the project's two years, the dedication to the practitioner/researcher approach remained solid. We did, however, experience tensions—times when the evaluators and museum staff were not on the same page. Proposed information gathering methods were too time consuming; observation instruments were technically solid, but they were not revealing information that was useful for practitioners; and often we tussled over the differences between developing an overarching framework about maximizing creative experiences in a museum (evaluators) and looking at each program as a unique entity (practitioners).

In the remainder of this reflection I share some of the tensions we encountered, and the emulsifiers (stabilizers) we experimented with to keep the practitioner/researcher mixture intact.

One of the first tasks was untangling ideas about research, evaluation and practice. The CiR project did not use any of the usual front-end, formative or summative types of evaluation. We believed that none of those approaches, or combination of approaches, would answer the most pressing questions about co-creation between creatives and staff and between creatives and visitors in an art museum.

Tension 1

We were not able to articulate specific elements of best practice and intended outcomes when the project began.

The CiR project is most honestly described as a purposeful experiment. Purposeful, because developing new ways of interacting with artists, art, visitors, and even strangers is an important part of today's museum education work. CiR was a direct response to that need for innovation and creativity around new forms of engagement. Everyone was operating in new territory.

If we were not careful, the project would be seen as flaky since we were, in essence, saying: “this is something new

and we don't have any idea about what the actual methods or outcome will be." That position flies in the face of responsible, accountable practice. However, the truth was that for all the DAM staff's cumulative experiences and knowledge, best practices for co-creation in a museum setting simply did not exist. They needed to be discovered—building on what was known and exploring what was unknown.

Stabilizer 1

Search for solutions that fit your REAL situation. In our case this meant turning to developmental evaluation, an approach introduced by Michael Quinn Patton¹, and successfully used in the first creativity project undertaken by the DAM². Developmental evaluation is a way to support adaptive learning in complex and emergent initiatives. Combining the rigor of evaluative thinking with the flexibility and imagination required for new approaches, this form of evaluation brings critical thinking to bear on the creative process. It is suited to a CiR project that involves high levels of uncertainty, innovation, emergence, and complexity.

Instead of framing our evaluation around looking for evidence of best practice and achievement of intended outcomes, the staff and evaluators created an evaluation plan that took the form of a learning framework. Early in 2015 we identified three areas of inquiry: collaboration; values-driven co-creation; and organizational change. The plan was rigorous and included questions to guide the investigation; sources of data; methods and frequency of data collection; and methods for analysis. We'd found a way to address the uncertainties of the project with ongoing feedback mechanisms to assure continual learning, experimentation, and accountability.

Ideas about the superiority of theory over practice or the irrelevance of practice to theory building are slowly dissolving.

Tension 2

Finding a balance between an overarching framework and situation-specific solutions. Early on, the evaluators introduced the DAM team to the audience involvement spectrum published by the Irvine Foundation that was based on the work of WolfBrown³ and the multi-layered participatory structure articulated by Pablo Helguera.⁴ They then used Helguera's structure that distinguishes among four levels of participant—nominal, directed, collaborative, and creative, to analyze what happened—and did not happen—during the first two residencies. The evaluators' intent was to use this already articulated framework as an analytical tool for

examining co-creation at the DAM, and thus produce findings that would readily be seen as advancing a field-wide body of knowledge. The staff was not sure what to do with the resulting four levels of participation analysis. There was a clash of vernacular. Helguera's chosen label of "nominal participation" seemed pejorative and did not sit well with the DAM staff's belief that all levels of participation had value. Clearly, the use of a pre-established framework that had not been specifically adapted to the DAM was not the way to go.

Stabilizer 2

Customize theoretical frameworks to coincide with situation-specific language and considerations. The answer for how to best integrate existing knowledge into DAM practice was found close to home. The first creativity project began with the preparation of a DAM-customized literature review about creativity. At that time the evaluators reviewed the literature and prepared a synthesis that was specific to the DAM's interests. For the CiR project it became important to do the same—adapt the existing taxonomies of levels of participation and co-creation to the specifics of the DAM's creative-in-residence efforts.

The process of customization spanned over a year. The Helguera framework was put aside. The staff and evaluators spent time doing observations and recording specific visitor behaviors as they interacted with the creatives. The staff became comfortable as they gained concrete knowledge about what was actually happening. At that point, the evaluators reintroduced the idea of a taxonomy of types of participation, but this time using the behaviors that were actually observed in the galleries as the foundation for categories such as spectating; tasting; enhancing participation; exploring; and co-creating. Still these were not enlightening distinctions for the staff. The distinctions among the types of engagement were not precise enough and in any given residency, more than one type of participation was evident.

A breakthrough came when, in the challenge of trying to align what was happening in the DAM co-creation projects with the existing knowledge about types of experiences, the team moved away from articulating specific, discrete types of engagement. They realized that what was happening—and what they could manipulate as practitioners—was the interaction between two big ideas: the degree to which both parties were active, rather than receptive, and the degree to which both parties could influence the nature of the experience and/or product. The existing linear taxonomy got more dimension and transformed into a two-dimensional matrix on which different types of creative/visitor interactions can be plotted. See Appendix 3.

This resolution was born from the mixture of the researcher/evaluator desire for identification of key concepts and parsimony, and the practitioners grounding in situational differences and nuance.

Everything was not perfect and smooth. We struggled with how to report on the evaluation findings. What was too much information? What was too little?

Tension 3

The action-oriented nature of a museum does not always provide the conditions and time for research and reflection. Finding time to conduct interviews, do observations and read evaluation reports was not easy for staff. There were always competing pressures for assignments that provided direct services to visitors and that need to operate on schedule. Furthermore, staff changes meant that the staff team kept changing, which made it difficult to sustain a learning effort like the CiR evaluation. Losing staff who'd been trained in data collection methods and who'd been involved in conceptual discussions and introducing new staff to the intellectual background of the CiR project and processes of the evaluation were realities that hampered progress. There was also a strong tendency to get caught up in details of implementation and to thus lose time for reflection.

For the evaluators, the challenge was presenting the vast amount that was being learned in a form and format that was useful to staff. Long narrative reports of methods and findings satisfied their need for transparency and completeness, but they included items that were not relevant to practitioners.

Stabilizer 3

Build evaluation activities into the project schedule—from beginning to end and be strategic in presentation of findings. The success of the evaluation depended upon scheduling time and developing systems for data collection, reading, and reflection. With the guidance of the evaluators, staff were trained and scheduled to conduct interviews and observations. When the practice of keeping a project journal became too cumbersome, it became routine to devote a portion of each team meeting to reflection on what was being learned about co-creation and what were the emerging challenges and issues. It was the devotion to reflection that was retained, not the specific form it took. Yet, the investment of time with the journals did produce richer data for analysis than did the notes from team meetings.

Reporting did not wait until the end of the project. The evaluators produced four developmental evaluation memos

over the course of the two years. Each one had a unique purpose, format and audience. And every time a memo was prepared, at least one meeting was held to discuss the findings and their implications for the project among the staff and with the evaluators. Reflection was built into the process.

Working with my colleague, Daryl Fischer and the DAM staff on the CiR project has been tremendously rewarding. I believe we've blended the essence of evaluative and research thinking with the brilliance of real practice. As evaluators, it is enormously rewarding to see professionals adopt rigorous methods for gathering information that will advance their practice. I believe that the Roadmap (Appendix 4) and engagement matrix (Appendix 3) that emerged from our practitioner-researcher approach and developmental evaluation learning agenda offers us all a new and better understanding of what the DAM—and any art museum—can do to expand its repertoire of visitor experiences and reach further into the realm of creative experiences for all.

¹ Patton, M.Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: Guilford Press.

² *Tapping into Creativity & Becoming Part of Something Bigger*. Denver Art Museum, 2014. Available at: <http://denverartmuseum.org/about/research-reports>

³ Brown, Alan S., Novak-Leonard, J. in partnership with S. Gilbride, Ph.D. *Getting in on the act: How arts groups are creating opportunities for active participation*. The James Irvine Foundation. 2011. Available at: https://irvine-dot-org.s3.amazonaws.com/.../12/.../GettingInOntheAct2014_DEC3.pdf List the types of participation—nominal, directed, collaborative and creative.

⁴ Helguera, P. *Education for socially engaged art. A materials and techniques handbook*. New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011.

The Evolving Lexicon of Creative-in-Residence

By Daryl Fischer, Principal, Musynergy

For the last two years, we've been steeped in the words of DAM staff members, creatives, and visitors as they talked and wrote about their experiences with the Creative-in-Residence (CiR) project. It presented countless opportunities for *staff members* and *creatives* to push their practice and for *visitors* to stretch their sense of what an art museum can be. Each group participated actively in different and essential ways so let's think of all of them as participants and reflect on how they came to their own understandings of creativity-in-action and gave voice to their points of view.

Halfway through the project, our growing sense of the importance of language led us to analyze transcripts of team meetings as the first step in creating a project glossary. As key concepts emerged, we drafted definitions, identified features, and gave examples of each. Staff members often engage in reflective conversations as projects unfold; but how often do their words find their way into a glossary that serves as a working tool for staff and evaluators? As we wrap up the DAM's second deep dive into creativity we'll use the glossary as a frame of reference, focusing on features and examples that reveal the perspectives of staff members, creatives, and visitors.

We came to see interactivity, personal agency, collaboration, co-learning, and co-creation as foundational pieces—like verbal building blocks—that we talked about again and again. In some cases, we gained increasing clarity; other times we circled back to our initial questions as we grappled with the nuances of each definition and carefully parsed their features. The glossary (Appendix 1) is still a work-in-progress, a living document that emerged through reflective practice as part of our Developmental Evaluation approach.

It's no surprise that interactivity is a plus for museum visitors. Interactive devices have become ubiquitous in museums and maybe that's what caused us to continue to wrestle with the term. We knew that it had a different meaning in CiR projects than in the traditional sense of opening a flip door or pressing a button, but we struggled to articulate that difference. James Bradburne, Director of the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, offers a useful insight when he says that interactivity, like creativity, is a property of users not of things.¹ As such, it includes a wide range of opportunities for

creatives to reimagine the museum and for visitors to contribute actions or thoughts that help them connect to their museum experience in meaningful ways.

Interactivity involves flexible formats, flexible outcomes, conversation, and contributing to something larger than oneself. Let's focus on the last two features.

Conversation sparked interaction between creatives and visitors, be they friends and family, or complete strangers who sat down together in Viviane Le Courtois's *Global Thinking Pod*. Her personal invitation and live presence in that intimate space opened the door to one-on-one and small group dialogue. The Flobots, who saw the typical museum visit as a monologue, scattered their interventions throughout the museum to stimulate dialogue with visitors. All participants—creatives, visitors, and staff members—came together at the end of the project for lively conversation in the CiR Roundup, modeled on the World Café.

Contributing to something larger than oneself engendered a sense of personal and collective gratification and, for some, imbued the museum experience with a sense of permanence. A visitor who contributed some of her hair to the *Global Thinking Pod* said "I'm glad I did it; it's like I'm a part of something." As members of Denver's creative eco-system, several creatives were aware of one another's work and were able to see how their own individual projects fit into the larger scope of the overall CiR initiative.

We defined personal agency as an individual's sense of power—what they can do in the museum. It determined how participants contributed their own creativity, experiences, actions, or thoughts to their museum experiences. Features include authority, ownership, and efficacy. We'll focus on the first two.

We learned that **authority** is something to be shared. Warm Cookies of the Revolution aims to "get people to act on their power." This feature raises such interesting questions: What does it mean for the DAM to share authority with creatives? How can the museum maximize visitors' sense of personal creativity by developing competence, confidence, and independent thinking?

Ownership led to feeling invested in creative endeavors, be they artistic interventions, creative products, new insights, or taking action. It applied to creatives and visitors in the sense of expanding their notions of what's possible. And it applied to museum staff members in the buy-in, personal involvement, and intrinsic motivation required of everyone who supported CiR projects.

Collaboration was seen as a joint undertaking leading towards a common goal, which often evolved as projects unfolded. Roles and responsibilities evolved too, making the process of collaborating a critical part of the product. Collaborators had to show up and stay in the game—especially as goals and roles evolved. Features include shared resources, integration, positionality, and knowing what is essential. Let's focus on the last two.

Positionality involved taking the fullest advantage of the unique resources each participant brought to the collaboration, recognizing that one may have been better positioned than another to put innovation or controversy forward. As a respected anchor in Denver's cultural community, the DAM was able to bring broad exposure to creatives. They, in turn, were able to present controversial topics in visitor-friendly ways. Visitors occupied a key position in the collaborative process too. Initial guidelines stated that residencies should include a "participatory element" but after reviewing the first few proposals, staff changed the language to say that visitors should be "integral" to the projects. One staff member saw that change as "shifting the center of gravity for the grant."

Notions of **what is essential** varied widely among DAM staff members from Curatorial and Exhibitions to Guest Services and Learning & Engagement. For those supporting creatives, it was essential to have a clear sense of what was most integral to each artist's vision in order to weigh the options open to them. Challenged by some of the unorthodox materials in Nathan Hall's projects, team members needed to understand why he wanted things like harmonicas and sticks in the galleries, what was absolutely essential to his work, and what he might be willing to reconsider.

We saw **co-learning** as a search for greater meaning or understanding by two or more participants. Its features are social interaction, equality, and pushing boundaries.

Social interaction provided a basis for learning and growth, especially when it came to issues and concepts that can best be learned with the participation, reflection, and guidance of others. Co-learning was often mutual. For example, Viviane

Le Courtois was as interested in observing visitors as they were in talking with her.

Equality set the stage for co-learning by leveling the playing field. For all of the depth and breadth of their expertise—from musical composition to flower arrangement—creatives did not position themselves as experts, but as equals with a genuine interest in mutual learning. Audience evaluation was another type of mutual learning—between staff and visitors. By observing visitors in the galleries, conducting interviews, and reflecting on their findings, staff gained powerful insights as they "lived the data."

Pushing boundaries involved individual and collective learning. Among the goals expressed in the values statement was inspiring the DAM "to work in new ways, push the boundaries of what [it] can be and learn more about the role of creativity for the museum." At the CiR Roundup, museum staff members, creatives, and visitors all saw where their limits had been, stretched beyond them, and shared new possibilities with one another. One of the most insightful comments came from a visitor who suggested that the DAM could be redefined as a place where art is produced as well as displayed.

Co-creation, a word that emerged in the museum's first IMLS-supported foray into creativity, was defined as active engagement by two or more participants. The activity, which can be physical or mental, provides individual and collective satisfaction and fulfillment. It depends on dialogue, access, transparency, and risk. We'll focus on the last two features.

Transparency adds power to the process of co-creation. The project values statement advocated "sharing all aspects of process (including ideation, iteration, messiness and mistakes) to inspire creativity." Like many ideals, this one was hard to realize in practice. When it came to staff members, information was shared more freely with some people than others because of assumptions about how they would react. When creatives were involved, they were not always included in team meetings in an attempt to shelter them from competing staff agendas. Bringing the thinking of all participants into the mix of co-creation is what will propel the DAM into the future as it makes plans to realize Vision 2021 in the reimagined Ponti building.

Risk-taking and experimentation went hand-in-hand. The very nature of each creative residency precluded knowing exactly how the process would unfold or what the outcome would look like. So why not adopt language that acknowledges the unknowns and conveys the potential to stretch current practice? Framing CiR projects as

experiments could lower the stakes for staff members, reducing angst over the bending of museum rules and the possibility of failure. At a recent conference I was introduced to two new terms: “acceptable risk,” which can be determined by considering the best/worst case scenarios; and “constructive failure,” which was defined as “useful lack of success.”

Staff members, creatives, and visitors had very different notions of the risks that were involved in CiR projects. Some staff members were concerned that the interventions of creatives might be confused with works of art, while others wondered if they’d even be noticed by visitors. Creatives, like Nathan Hall, embraced the risks of making mistakes that might embarrass them or making visitors uncomfortable by stumbling into works-in-progress. Staff referred to this as “happy discomfort.” Visitors who came together with creatives and staff members at the CiR Roundup were generally unaware of the risks involved in the residencies.

Language as practice. Stepping back from the meanings of specific words, I see broad implications for how language can impact the work of museum practitioners. Over the years, I’ve enjoyed thinking together with my colleagues at the DAM and my fellow evaluator, Mary Ellen Munley. Three characteristics have contributed to our big picture thinking: intentionality, reflection, and revision.

Intentionality is demonstrated by using language deliberately and articulately. Anyone who has ever read a verbatim transcript knows how conversations tend to meander before getting to the point. Encouraging participants to write down their thoughts helps to avoid digressions and circular conversations. In the early stages of the project, team members used an online platform called Penzu to record their thoughts. Of all the words written and spoken about CiRs, I think this elicited some of the most insightful observations. This online journaling platform was eventually abandoned, perhaps because it didn’t fit into the museum’s culture or working process. I encourage my colleagues to continue to experiment with other platforms—low tech or online—that help them to capture their thinking and share it with project partners. I hope they’ll also continue to explore innovative ways to present language in visual terms, like the graphic illustration of conversations at the CiR Roundup.

Given the demands on everyone’s time, **reflection** is a stage that sometimes gets short shrift; however, time invested in this step can yield big dividends. The very act of stopping to reflect on an experience maximizes the potential impact for all participants—be they staff members, creatives, or museum visitors. The quality of the questions asked always has a

direct bearing on the caliber of the responses. So does the timing. Allowing time for individual reflection before group discussion can greatly enrich the feedback.

Finally, **revision** can help to ensure that short-term projects have long-term impact. The nitty-gritty work of continually updating documents to incorporate new thinking and definitions, modifying and expanding upon existing frameworks, can create value added for project teams, museum leadership, and the larger staff. Reconsidering different points of view and incorporating diverse perspectives can create a culture that is comfortable with ambiguity and appreciates the richness of multiple meanings.

After reflecting on two years of conversations with staff, creatives, and visitors, one of the biggest revelations is how much language that expresses new understandings adds to the process of Developmental Evaluation. The other is that a project lexicon, like any living language, is always a work in progress. It will keep evolving as the DAM continues to define, question, articulate, and invent the language of creativity.

¹ Bradburne, James M., PhD. *The politics of creativity: interactivity and creativity in contemporary society*, 2005.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for supporting the DAM over the years, making it possible for us to explore new ways of interacting with visitors and artists and to nurture an internal culture of exploration and experimentation.

The Creative-in-Residence project was a purposeful experiment that involved staff, creatives from across the Denver community, and our visitors. Each staff member, each creative, each visitor played a part in shaping this project, providing us with lessons in the nature of collaboration and the values and complexities inherent in co-creation. Along the way, we have been guided and supported by critical friends and valued external collaborators who have positively challenged us, pushing us to extend and articulate our learning.

None of these projects would have been possible without the DAM's wonderful teams, including A/V, Exhibition and Collection Services, Facilities, Gallery Hosts (formerly known as Security Guards), IT, Marketing, and Photographic Services. Huge thanks to our Director, **Christoph Heinrich**, and our Chief Learning and Engagement Officer, **Melora McDermott-Lewis**, for their leadership during this project.

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Jamie Laurie

Kenny Ortiz

Arthur Williams

Chris Getzan

Evan Weissman

Mar Williams

Viviane Le Courtois

Our visitors!



Appendices

Appendix 1—CiR Glossary of Terms

Co-creation

Definition

Co-creation occurs when two or more parties come together and actively interact with each other to produce a mutually valued outcome.

Co-creation is a continual two-step process: 1) contributing ideas; and 2) selecting the viable ideas.

The value of co-creation lies in the personal gratification of contributing to something larger than yourself and the emergence of unique outcomes—outcomes that could only come about with a particular group of people in a specific place and time.

Features

- Dialogue: The parties have a face-to-face interactive relationship.
- Access: Everyone involved has access to needed information and available resources.
- Risk: No one knows exactly how the process will unfold or what the outcome will look like. The outcome emerges from the interactions.
- Transparency: Parties share ideas, motivations, and challenges in the spirit of developing and maintaining mutual trust.

Examples of co-creation

- Co-creation involving creatives and DAM visitors: Nathan Hall's *Corridor Voices*.
- Co-creation involving DAM staff and creatives: DAM Education staff and Arthur Williams create new ways for him to interact with the public.

Co-learning

Definition

Co-learning occurs when two or more people work together to search for understanding and meaning.

Features

- Social interaction: Co-learning assumes that social interaction is a basis for learning and growth. There are things that cannot be understood by an individual alone; some learning benefits from help and guidance from others. This idea is related to Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the learning space that puts an individual in proximity to others' experience and knowledge.
- Equality: Co-learning takes place between equals and breaks down the notion of hierarchy of knowledge based on age or specialized expertise.

Examples of co-learning

- DAM staff identifying new ways of interacting with visitors based on conversations and observations of creatives.
- WCoR learning more about civic engagement through interactions and observations of visitors.

Collaboration

Definition

Collaboration involves working together to accomplish a common or agreed upon goal. Different parties have different roles and responsibilities, which may be agreed upon at the beginning or may evolve as the project unfolds.

In a collaboration each party has expectations re: their own work which may, in turn, influence/impact the work of the other.

Features

- Sharing resources: Both (or several) parties recognize that they each have different resources to bring to the collaboration.
- Integration: Resources provided by different parties are integrated into a single outcome that is seamless for museum visitors.
- Positionality: One party may be better positioned to put controversial or innovative ideas forward than another; each leverages their unique position and resources to the greatest impact.

Examples of collaboration

- Staff members working with WCoR to design and interpret the *Vote Every Day* installation.
- Staff members working with the Flobots to enhance gallery signage by striking a compromise between spontaneity and museum standards.
- Mar Williams working with staff to use beacon technology as a prompt for visitors to interact with art and discovering that surveillance is another issue that interests her.

Interactivity

Definition

The intentional design and creation of opportunities for visitors to contribute their own actions or thoughts, thereby connecting in meaningful ways to their museum experience. These opportunities may be led by creative or museum staff members.

An elevated form of engagement in which one person responds to something created, said, or done by another. This may involve a call to action (a.k.a. “proaction”) or questions that invite visitors to come to their own conclusions.

Features

Conversational: Aspects of the experience stimulate conversation and interaction, even among strangers.

Flexible formats: May or may not involve physical manipulation such as opening a door or pressing a button.

Flexible outcomes: May or may not result in the creation of a physical or audible end product; new thoughts and ideas are also creative responses.

Examples

- Visitors who took Arthur Williams’ tour modified their behavior according to that of another visitor.
- Visitors who talked with Warm Cookies while exploring *Vote Every Day* reflected on their level of civic engagement.
- Visitors who talked with other visitors while working on the balance the budget activity in *Vote Every Day* thought in new ways about what matters in our society.

Personal agency

Definition

Personal agency is an individual’s sense of what they can do and what they think they can do. It is the extent to which a person contributes his/her own creativity, experiences, actions or thoughts in a given situation.

Features

Authority: A person with a high level of personal agency experiences the authority to initiate and control his/her own actions and thoughts in a situation.

Ownership: There is a high correlation between personal agency and having a sense of ownership of a product, thought, or experience.

Efficacy: Personal agency is contrasted with lack of control and passivity. Personal agency increases through development of competence, confidence, and autonomy of thought.

Examples

- People with no formal dance training, feeling like they were competent and trusted, initiated their own movements in the Nick Cave *Herd* piece. The sense that they did not need to be told how to move; they could design their own moves.

Residency

Definition

A CiR residency provides a time and place for artists to work outside of their usual environment. It offers conditions that foster creativity for the creative and provides them with a context, resources, connections to other creatives, and new audiences.

A CiR residency is also a strategy for sparking creative thought and actions among staff and visitors through interactions with creatives as they explore creative processes and, in some cases, make their own creations.

Features

Integrated experiences: Residencies allow the museum to integrate community art/creativity resources into visitors’ experiences.

Extended duration: Residencies vary in length, but tend to be carried out over a substantial period of time; they are not one-time events.

Ongoing relationship: The best residencies, when completed, are the beginning of a long-term relationship between the creative and the host.

Creatives’ impact: Residencies highlight the critical role of creatives in society and interaction with creatives assists others in developing their own creativity and well-being.

Multiple benefits: Residencies provide an opportunity for experimentation and risk taking that stimulates new ideas and work by the creative; connect creatives to a wider network, and raise the profile of creatives in Denver; bring a sense of experimentation and liveliness to the museum; provide visitors with direct access to creatives who inspire them to more creativity and action.

Examples

- Flobots inviting a wide range of artists into the DAM who experienced it as a new source of inspiration for their creative expression.
- WCoR interacting with visitors in the exhibition space they created.
- Visitors having conversations with Arthur Williams as he worked.

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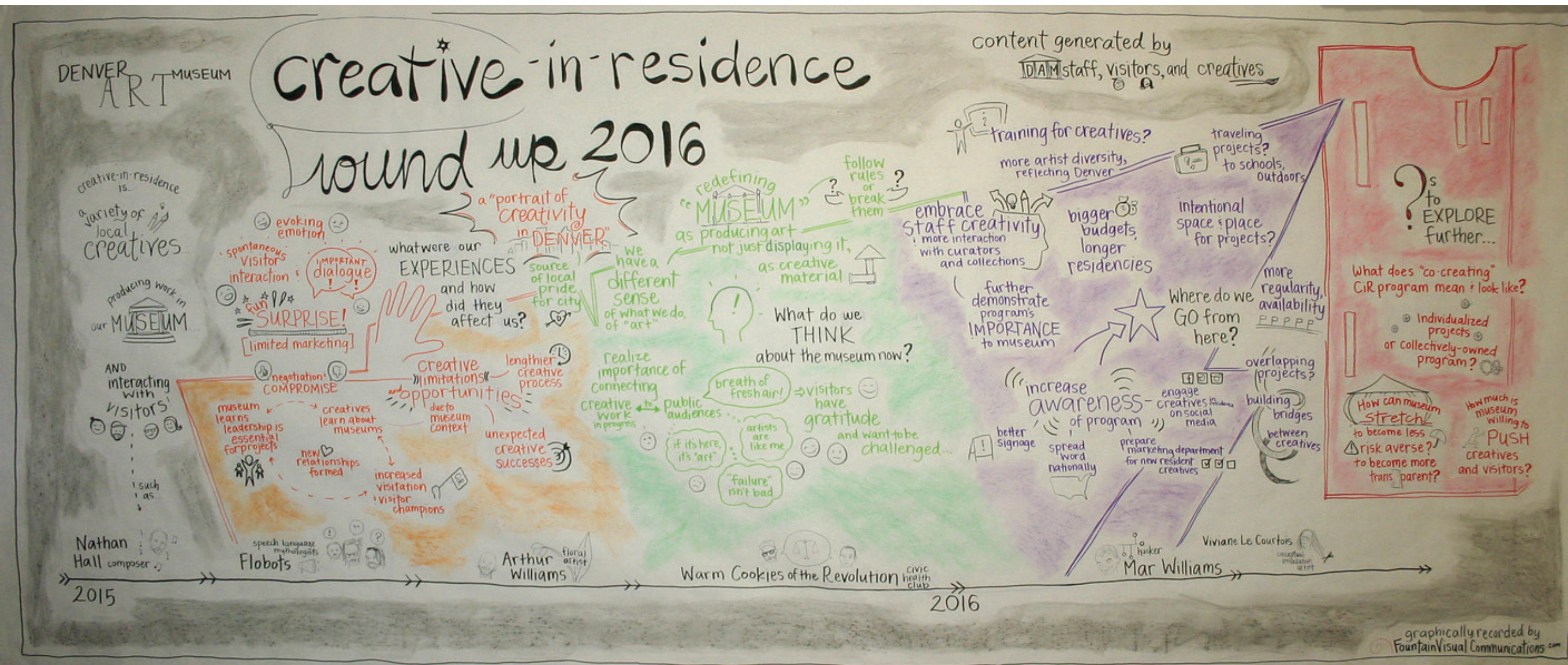
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Appendix 2—Visual Recording from CiR Roundup

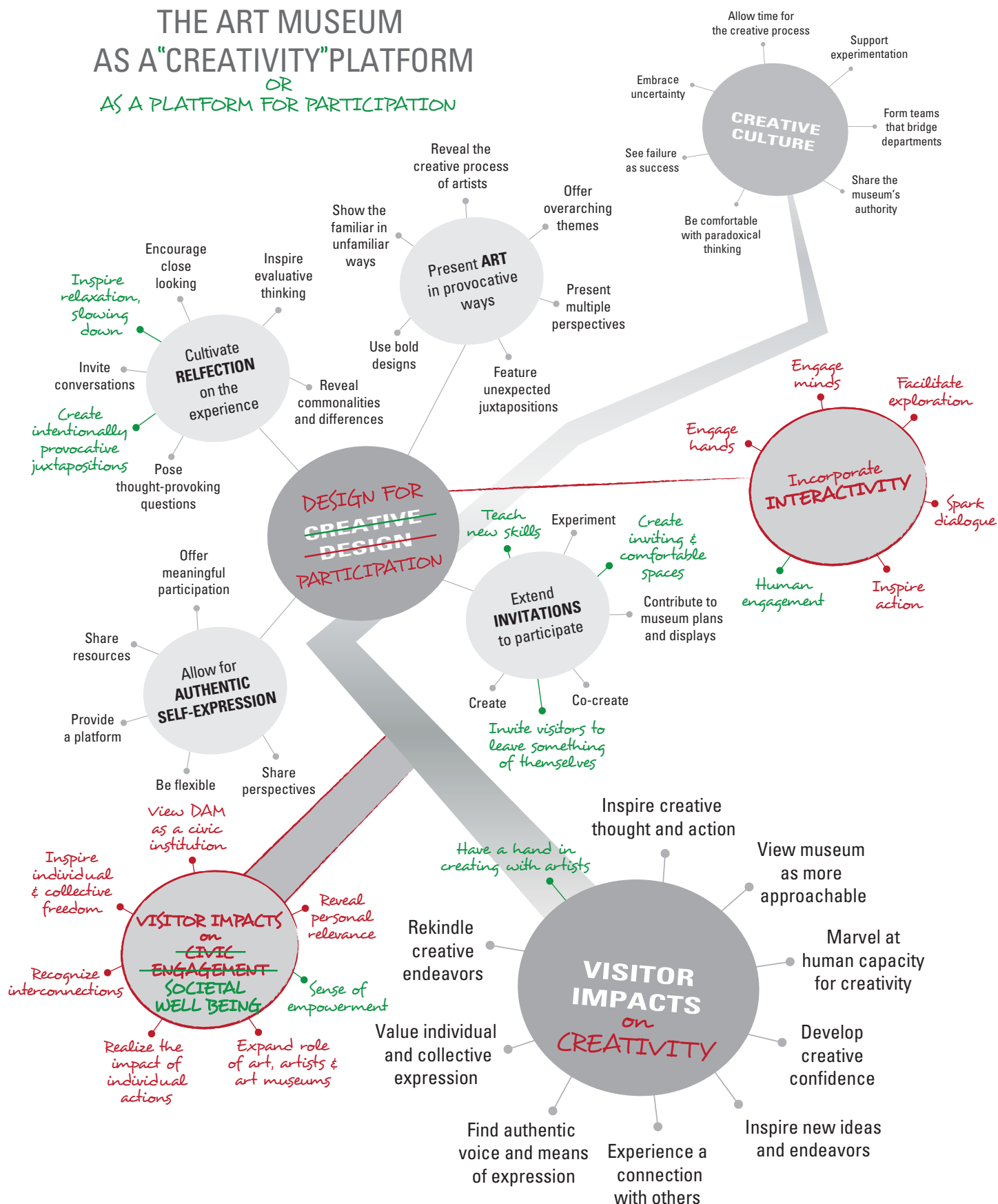


Appendix 3—Matrix



Appendix 4—Creativity Roadmap

THE ART MUSEUM AS A "CREATIVITY" PLATFORM OR AS A PLATFORM FOR PARTICIPATION



We developed the Creativity Roadmap in our previous IMLS grant, *Tapping into Creativity & Becoming Part of Something Bigger*. The original roadmap became a catalyst for conversation during the course of our work with CiRs, and it highlights how our thinking around creativity continues to evolve. Words in red reflect the development of our learning from our first three CiRs, while words in green represent what we learned from our final three residencies.