After Critical Theory, Then What? A Post-museological Perspective

Dana Carlisle Kletchka
The Ohio State University, United States of America

Abstract

In 1999, Stephen E. Weil, a senior scholar at the Center for Museum Studies at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., wrote that American museums were in the process of a dramatic philosophical re-orientation in an article he titled, "From Being about Something to Being for Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum." The article proposed that a drastic change in art museum culture was well underway, with visitors moving toward the center of museum practice.

In 2017, we find the United States in the midst of social upheaval, political polarity, and systemic injustice, prompting art museum educators to move toward a paradigm of practice that is socially responsive, community-centered, and critically aware, even as they operate in institutions that remain embedded in traditional systems of cultural production, power, and privilege.

This begs the question, "Are art museums as institutions capable of moving away from the elite, Western-centric, heteronormative, capitalist structures of power that enabled them to become cultural forces in the first place?" Is it possible to envision alternative futures for art museums and they might align more

closely with the imperatives of art education? In this paper, I consider the recent history of museums through two museological frameworks and suggest a potential future through post-critical museologies, a stance first elucidated by staff and researchers at the Tate Britain (Dewdney, Dibosa, & Walsh, 2013), in which re-centers institutional practices toward a goal of participating in a global, inclusive conversation rather than reifying art historical narratives or object-based epistemologies.

Keywords

Art museum education, Post-critical museologies.