

## Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum – The Sackler Center for Arts Education

Visit : 02/ 03 /2015



Photo: Carolina Zamora

### Introduction on the Sackler Center for Arts Education (Guggenheim website):

Opened to the public in fall of 2001, the Sackler Center for Arts Education serves as a dynamic 21st-century education hub and learning laboratory that offers innovative public programs in the visual as well as performing and literary arts. Exploration and experimentation with new technologies is the center's hallmark, which broadens and enriches programs for youth, adults, and families. Artists as well as cultural and academic institutions are valued collaborative partners.

The 8,200-square-foot education facility comprises Studio Art, Computer, and Multimedia Labs, the New Media Theater, an exhibition gallery, the Resource Center, the Conference Room, and education offices. It also includes the existing Peter B. Lewis Theater, part of Frank Lloyd Wright's original architectural design for the building. We welcome the public to the Sackler Center, located just below the rotunda of the landmark Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

### Report of the visit and meeting with Kim Kanatani, Director of Education; Rebecca Mir, Associate Manager Digital Media and Online Learning; Christina Yang, Director of Public Programs en Sarah Malaika, Associate Manager of Global Programs:

Most of the offices of the Guggenheim staff are found several blocks away from the museum, but the education staff is to be found in the Sackler Center for Arts Education, with offices in the museum itself. **Education** has a place **at the heart** of the museum's dynamic and the education staff is constantly in contact with the curators and the other museum departments. **Exchange and sharing of expertise** is highly valued, also within the art education staff, who works with communities, families, children, schools; everybody wears different hats and mixes work for different target groups. 25 staff members of different departments (education, IT, digital & social media, special events etc.) have weekly meetings about upcoming projects. They function as a 'mini-museum' within the bigger institution.

The **Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative** cultivates the global network of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. It supports artists, educators and curators in three regions: South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. With curatorial residencies,

international touring exhibitions, educational programs and collection acquisitions MAP exchanges expertise that is built worldwide. Education and public programs for example are shared globally and customized for local Guggenheim UBS MAP exhibitions. It provides an international forum on education where artists and educators blog about their collaborations and experiences.

Guggenheim's Director of School and Family Programs, Sharon Vatsky, reflected for example on reaching out to New York's Latin American community for engaging with the exhibition *Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today*. (<http://blogs.guggenheim.org/map/connecting-with-communities-for-under-the-same-sun/>) Or Guggenheim's Director of Public Programs, Christina Yang, who shares her insights on a collaboration with the Asia Society Hong Kong Center. <http://blogs.guggenheim.org/map/educators-reflections-global-museum-work/>

The ongoing innovation of the arts education programs are made possible by the close **collaboration with artists**. They are real partners in the development and application of the programs. A very successful **school program** is the *Learning Through Art* (LTA) program that allows the art educators to work in depth with several schools each season. Experienced teaching artists are sent to New York City to public schools in the 5 boroughs. The program cultivates student creativity by designing sustained, **process-oriented art projects** that support **learning across the curriculum**. Artists work closely together with the classroom teachers. During the 20-week in-school residencies, participating students examine, discuss, and create works of art. Visits to the Guggenheim support the residencies, offering new insights into art and challenging students to think critically about art and ideas. At the end of the residency, selected student works are exhibited in the annual *A Year with Children* exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum. On the website we can learn more about a research that has studied the links between participation in LTA and the development of problem-solving skills among fifth-grade students.

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/learning-through-art>

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/school-educator-programs/learning-through-art/research-studies/art-of-problem-solving>

The education staff noticed a shift in the last few years: **artists** are becoming more **socially engaged** and are making works from perspectives resembling those of the art educators. Working with artists demands a lot of investment from the whole museum staff. In terms of legal issues, security etc. when it comes to **participative art works**. The line between an artwork and a public/participative activity is sometimes very thin. What is art? What is art education? (A personal note: the question can also be: when a participative project is named 'art', is it taking more seriously than when it's named 'art education'?)

Guggenheim holds **diversity** in backgrounds (social, cultural, ethnic) of curators and artists in high regard. Curators and artists from different backgrounds bring a different public. The openness in the programming goes together with the openness for diversity in the education programs. The education department keeps a deep **network** with artists and different museums (Queens Museum etc.) and they program together in the Guggenheim collection. For every event, for every experience it is important to have a 'key stake holder' and to sustain the relationships.

**Public programs for adults** include lectures & symposia, conversations with contemporary artists, artist tours, gallery programs, film screenings and so on. Guggenheim offers **guided tours in a wide variety of languages**, including tours in Mandarin, Spanish and Portuguese. The last 10 years the '**blend of arts**' is more and more visible in the program and events (film, performances, literature

together with the visual arts). Again, education staff, curators and artists work closely together to develop these programs.

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/education/public-programs>

On our self-guide tour through the museum galleries after the meeting we met a young artist who works as a **'Gallery guide'**. This job combines the function of a security guard and a guide. She offered us more detailed information about the artworks on display by On Kawara and informed us about her function in the museum. On the Guggenheim website we can read more about this very interesting initiative:

***Gallery guides:** Posted throughout the museum, Gallery Guides offer visitors a singular opportunity to explore art through one-on-one conversation. Gallery Guides have extensive backgrounds in the arts and are trained to engage individuals in meaningful, shared dialogue. Certified by New York State in museum security, the Gallery Guides are also responsible for protecting visitors and works of art. Gallery Guides are dressed in black with colorful scarves or ties and wear orange or black buttons that read "Let's Talk Art."*

*Gallery Guides speak a range of languages and are trained to provide verbal imaging descriptions for visitors with low vision or blindness.*

*Visitors of all ages and abilities are encouraged to approach and speak with Gallery Guides.*

**Life Long Learning** is held in high esteem by the Guggenheim art education staff and last but not least they insist that to **learn & to play** must go together!



Photo: Tanya Ahmed

### Takeaways

- Make sure education has a place at the heart of the museum's dynamic by breaking the boundaries of your department. Engage colleagues to be involved in your projects by investing in project communication.
- Set up strong relationships with your local school communities by investing in in-depth process-oriented art projects.

- Artists are becoming more socially engaged and are making works from perspectives resembling those of the art educators. Perceive your artists as real partners in the development and application of the programs to create authentic experiences.
- Curators and artists from different backgrounds bring a different public. Collaborate with people and organizations who already connect to a diverse audience. Make sure these partners are part of your network to sustain long term connections.
- Give visitors the opportunity to start a dialogue ('let's talk about art') on the art works inside the exhibition space by providing gallery guides.

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