

## Round up meeting at Flanders House, Friday 6th of March 2015, 5:30 PM

(620 Eighth Avenue, 44<sup>th</sup> floor, The New York Times Building, New York, NY 10018 – [www.flandershouse.org](http://www.flandershouse.org))

Geert De Proost, the General Representative of the Government of Flanders, and Mieke Renders, the director of Arts and Culture welcomed our group, as well as the inviting NY museum professionals and the Board of the New York City Museum Educators Roundtable (NYCMER) at Flanders House.

Geertje Cools (MAS, Huis Van Alijn) summarized the impressions of the group and the lessons learned during this field trip.

### MoMA

Laurel Humble introduced our group to the program Meet me at MoMA. This program offers guided tours for people with dementia and their caregivers. It was interesting to see how the program grew from its experimental stage into a full blown program with immense impact, inspiring museums worldwide. We also learned that MoMA is developing a program for other senior groups based on the same principles. The developers' willingness to share their experiences and knowledge through publications and online resources is inspiring in itself.

### Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum

The education department of the Guggenheim is situated in the heart of the museum and is run in a large part through private sponsorships. In this way the museum is able offer the *Learning through Art initiative* to schools that would otherwise not have the means to integrate art education in their curriculum. The education department sometimes engages in interesting social issues through collaboration with artists from all over the world. We visited the museum after meeting with the education staff and noticed that the guards/guides wear badges saying: 'Let's talk art'. We experienced how this initiative really encourages interaction and dialogue among visitors and the museum.

### The Frick Collection

We had the privilege to meet and experience a group dialogue with Rika Burnham, for one hour, discussing the *painting St. Francis in the Desert* (G. Bellini). We got the chance to observe her, to ask questions about the interactive methods she uses and to deepen the experience. Afterwards, we gathered with Rika Burnham and her colleagues of the education department talked about their challenges in the museum. Our group was happy to share some of our ideas and examples from our own daily practice.

### The Met

This museum has a large offer of activities for people with disabilities. Many tips and tricks for visiting the museum are found on the website of the Met. We were impressed with the amount of online information. The head of the education department stressed the essential position of education in the museum and thereby also stressed the importance of our role as educators. We certainly will remember her saying: As a museum, we don't want to reach out to the community, we want to be the community!

### Tenement Museum

The warm welcome in this museum reflects the atmosphere and values they cherish: paying attention to the personal experience. Every staff member in this museum (including people in administration) engages in some kind of public service once a week, facilitating guided tours or welcoming visitors at the reception desk, as to maintain a strong connection with the public, their needs and expectations. Connecting is the key word in the Tenement museum; and (personal) stories are often the starting point in making this connection with visitors. The educators are called facilitators and they are trained to allow storytelling to develop during the guided tours.

### Whitney Museum of American Art

The Whitney Museum will re-open in May in a new building in a different area in Manhattan and will have to reconnect with this new community. The education department has a clear vision which they summarized in four key terms: being the artist museum; working with the real thing; keeping a good balance between complexity and accessibility and being a museum for NY. Every activity, plan or program is tested on these four criteria. They believe this will assure consistency and continuity.

### The Wonder of Learning

The Reggio Emilia approach presented in this exhibition is not only relevant in formal education but also in museum education. Looking at the museum from the perspective of a child, we may all discover a hundred ways to learn and experience in a multisensory way.

### Brooklyn Museum

Radhah Harper, Head of the Education Department, shared some of their education formulas. The starting point for all Museum activities is always the question: What can the museum mean to Brooklyn? Every first Saturday of the month, for example, the museum is open late and stages a range of artistic interventions: dance, performance as well as live music all in collaboration with local Brooklyn artists. These first Saturdays have become a tremendous success and a staple of the Brooklyn Museum.

### Extra visits

On our free day, some participants decided to take on extra visits to museums with a particular interest or connection to the institutions we represent. A visit to the Morgan Library inspired the head of the education department in the Pantin Moretus museum to collaborate on an international program for schools about the creation of manuscripts. A part of our group visited the Museum on Ellis Island and discussed current migration issues with our guide, Peter Wong who encourages personal story telling during his tours. Other members of our group visited the Cloisters, MoMA PS1, New Museum, Socrates Sculpture Park, Dia:Beacon, Rubin Museum of Art...

### Conclusion

We have seen many different museum practices and met many remarkable museum professionals and we will certainly return to our own practices with refreshing new ideas. The size and scale of museums in NY is different, but some initiatives, challenges are similar to ours. Future opportunities to work together and exchange experiences in the future will be a wonderful way to expand the impact of this trip.

We end this round up with a reception and informal meeting. Our group members talk about some of their own museum projects thankful to give something in return for all the knowledge and

expertise we experienced. We are also very thankful to Flanders House to host this final meeting. It was a great way to officially end our field trip to New York..

Hildegarde Van Genechten, FARO, Flemish interface centre for cultural heritage