

CAMOC Annual Conference Migration:Cities

In October 2017, I had the pleasure of attending the CAMOC annual conference in Mexico City. As an emerging museum professional still in my graduate program, this experience was incredibly valuable and has provided me with insights I will carry with me throughout my career.

My first contact with the international museum community was at the pre-conference workshop held at the historic Museo Nacional de las Culturas. This workshop, featuring speakers from countries such as the Netherlands and Japan, provided me with a great introduction to the types of discourse happening in the museum world. The conference theme was Migration:Cities and explored issues such as post-colonial identity and cultural respect, topics that I wish to make paramount in my practice. I was very pleased to see the variety of ways that museums are attempting to connect with their communities and how they are reaching visitors who may not understand what is happening in their own cities. I found the workshop by Linda Norris, “Getting Uncomfortable: Working Outside your Comfort Zone”, particularly interesting as it asked participants to think about things that are often not considered in museology. In Norris’ discussion, processes such as body mapping were completed by community members in order to gain a deeper, personal understanding of histories and traumas. My own interests revolve around human rights and inclusion through museum education and access, making this workshop highly conducive to my learning. It was eye-opening to see the practical ways in which museums around the world have made efforts to engage with their communities and promote positive social change.

During the two-day conference, I was also able to see my hometown of Toronto well represented by speakers Elka Weinstein and Doug Saunders. Weinstein's talk, "A Museum for the City of Toronto?", explored the roots of the efforts to create a traditional civic museum and why this method may not be effective in representing the diversity and multiculturalism that is present in the city of Toronto. Witnessing how museums at home and abroad are responsibly engaging with urban populations allowed me to see the endless opportunity for productive transformation present in the field.

A post-conference tour led us through the San Ángel neighbourhood of Mexico City. We began at the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo before heading to the Museo de El Carmen, a former 17th century monastery. Attending this tour with other participants of the conference allowed me to apply my knowledge first hand, having discussions among ourselves about how historic museums such as these can incorporate the issues of urban change and global movements within an environment as complex and dynamic as Mexico City.

The full four days of conference-related activity taught me the importance of taking charge and creating positive change when there are gaps to be filled. I learned to utilize interdisciplinary resources, such as social workers and musicians who experience cities and urban populations much differently than museum professionals might. Speaker Rachel Erickson from the Manitoba Museum shared her findings after presenting a pop-up style exhibition at local shopping centres in order to further connect with community members who may not usually enter the museum space. Erickson was able to form relationships with locals who had not previously considered their stories as valuable to the Manitoba Museum and ended up receiving donations of personal items to be featured in future exhibitions. This example demonstrated to

me the benefits to thinking outside the box, as such a low cost, easily available method of outreach is incredibly useful for institutions intending to be more inclusive and responsible. The importance of partnership and communication between international institutions was also highlighted. An overview of the web-based Migrant:Cities project presented by Marlen Mouliou discussed how collaboration between global museum professionals can lead to further growth, adaptation and transformation through the sharing of efforts and resources from around the world.

Participating in these thought-provoking discussions has inspired me to amplify my voice and position within the museum world to uplift others. Since attending the conference, I have begun to conduct research regarding how LGBTQQIP2SA people are represented at both private and public levels within numerous Ontario institutions. My preliminary research has found that these groups are severely underrepresented in collections databases, and I would like to continue to explore how this translates to their visibility in exhibitions and educational and public programming. Much like how migrants have historically been excluded from city museum narratives, these communities and their contributions have also been largely overlooked. As the majority of the discussion at the CAMOC conference revolved around working with and partnering with local communities, I would like to reach out to LGBTQQIP2SA communities to discuss what we can do to improve our institutions. Inviting these important knowledges into the museum will lead to more enriching and comprehensive histories, allowing space for the public to learn and communities to thrive.

The concept of empathy was important at this conference, urging us as museum professionals to do better and understand the powerful platform we have at our disposal. I am so

grateful that I was able to see all the fantastic and engaging efforts that are being made internationally and I am so excited to be a part of this activated, socially conscious community.











MUSEO
FRIDA KAHLO

