



“Fireside Chat: Institutional Change, Funding, and Infrastructure”

Evolution of the Arts in a Digital World Symposium - Session No. 5 Notes

February 3, 2021

Question 1: With the cultural change involved in making the transition to digital, what aspects do we need to be thinking about?

Gretchen Coss' Answer:

- Before introducing digital media, consider whether you have the staff to maintain and curate content. In her previous talk, she covered the idea of 'set it and forget it' where content is uploaded to a website and never updated again.
- Technology can be flexible, but it is challenging to keep it fresh and updated.
- It is recommended that organizations have an ongoing line item in their budget for technology such as content created by consultants, hardware that needs to be updated and maintained, etc. Maintain this line item over time.
- Does the level of technology align with your personality and mission of your institution or have you just imported something from another media piece that you like in a different environment? In some cases, it is possible, but you need to think if it is appropriate for you.
- Technology is an element that is usually used to create a visual. However, technology should be used to stimulate all five senses.
- How does technology address your audience's needs and engagement? Consider your digital messaging and your audience. Engagement depends on the audience's level of knowledge or interest. Technology should be used to engage each of your audience groups.
- Virtual platforms are looked at in a siloed strategy. Your branding and experience must sync up with each other, both in the physical and in the digital space.

Scott Smallwood's Answer:

- Digital transition in the world already happened a long time ago. It is not really a transition that we are looking at today, rather a call to diversify.
- What in our society is considered high art? The orchestra is alive and well, but it needs to make room for other live art forms.
- The integration of digital into the fine arts has resulted in new modes, new languages, and new ways of presenting art. The digital sphere allows the world to learn about new cultures of music-making.
- When Scott was in college in the late 80's, it was hard to find recordings of non-western, non-digital music. We are now inundated with it because of the internet. We can easily find digital and non-digital content.
- The digital revolution has created an expanded view of what is possible. It demands that we double down on Electron Data Interchange (EDI) issues.



- There has been lots of positive change brought about by being open-minded about other cultural music forms.
- The digital sphere has also increased the flexibility around surrounding art. It challenges how, when, and where art can be presented.
- We must challenge the notion of what makes something high vs. low art. For Scott, he grew up learning that classical music is 'high-art' and everything else was considered 'low art'. This is a damaging way to think about music today.

Question 2: In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in making the transition to digital?

Annette Mees' Answer:

- It can feel overwhelming. There are so many things that are possible.
- You need to find your own identity and find a way that technology will serve your organization's mission.
- Short term vs. long term. Many organizations are very short-term in their thinking and they lose the sense of the journey along the way as they make the transition to digital.
- Many organizations are crisis planning right now. They feel that they must go to digital to save themselves. This mindset is a complex place to start innovating from.
- In a time of crisis, the wise build bridges and the fools build walls. Digital should be ways to build bridges with your current audience and new audiences. It is a way to open the art form. Open it up to more diverse audiences and more diverse creators.
- We all must find our identity. Identity is hardly created by geography. The digital sphere makes geography less important. What is your draw?
- Also consider what partnerships are possible for your organization? Are there new ways for you to explore your identity? Who do we want to be in this space? Whom do we want to be with in this space? And for whom do we want to reach in this space?
- Keep it evolving and keep it alive. Become more and more who you are in the digital space.

Tateo Nakajima's Answer:

- Upon reflection, the biggest challenge of technology is the sheer speed it moves in. Going from horse-drawn buggies to cars, that was a slow, painful change. Cities had to change; society had to change. We are facing that change now and are questioning how we do things and with whom do we communicate ~~with~~.
- How can we reach new and more audiences? There must be a fundamental transformation of the experiences we are offering.
- Consider what tools artists have at their disposal to communicate with audiences?
- The challenge with transitioning to digital is the speed and reality of the competitive landscape. In the digital sphere, you might have completely new competitors, funders, and opportunities. Getting online is an important way to connect with audiences, but now your competitors also have allegiances because you no longer have geographical ties.



- - Things around us change slower than we can change. Balancing change and speed are critical.

A question from the chat for Tateo: What is the impact of digital transition on art forms? What happens to the traditional end-product?

Tateo Nakajima's Answer:

- We are people who want to communicate and speak to issues, share, and make people feel through different media. How do you do that? This is akin to a pencil drawing that is done in black in white. If you introduce a pack of crayons and colours, the picture can have a new dimension. Digital change is like this. Digital as a media is nothing new.
- VR Opera experience project that Tateo worked on - interesting because it was a collective experience, whereas some other digital offerings are isolating experiences.

Question 3: What are some long-term results of our quick digital transition? What are the skills we should be looking to develop as we move forward?

Rafael Baldwin's Answer:

- Long-term benefits include many organizations finally integrating software for video conferences, such as Zoom, the integration of Microsoft Office's applications for document share, and the use of team communication platforms such as Slack and Asana to improve workflow.
- Other long-term benefits are companies embracing hybrid work, where employees only go into the office for two or three days a week, the ability to work-from-home, and companies giving employees more time back to spend with their families.
- Skills that should be developed, both for the future and right now include:
 1. **A true passion for acquiring new knowledge.** Employees should have the right mindset and become fluent and competent with new developments. Companies need to invest in employee education.
 2. **Use research and experience to understand your audience.** This includes what they do, what they like, and how they engage with your product. If you want people to engage with your product, you had better be interested in what they think. This will also allow you to tailor your product.
 3. **Computer programs** - learning how to utilize these machines.
 4. **Data analytics and data visualization** - how to make sense of a large data set and put it in the right perspective. How to analyze statistics to identify opportunity areas.
 5. **Storytelling** - how to structure a clear and compelling message to deliver to your audience.



Milan Krepelka's Answer:

- For his work at the Telus World of Science, a big component of the exhibits was having in-person science demonstrations. This required people to come and gather in the building, which is not currently possible. This forced them to go online.
- The Telus World of Science is an informal science education organization. They have connection to the Alberta Curriculum and focus on creating exhibits that show experiences that people cannot get in their classrooms or in their own homes.
- Engaging the five senses is key.
- Create experiences for people.
- Prevent 'scope creep' – this is when an object has too many aspirations to teach many things and it ends up being nothing.
- Consider how will digital media align with your identity and your mission? These messages can be lost when transitioning to digital. Focus on the message rather than the digital.
- Utilize storytelling. What is the objective of your media piece and what is the take-away?
- In terms of skills, focus on cultivating people's abilities to tell stories. An exhibit's role is to be a tool for facilitators to engage with the public and to help them understand the topics. Foster people's abilities to communicate, synthesize information, and have a conversation.

Question 4: How do we fund experiences we cannot necessarily monetize?

Annemarie Petrov's Answer:

- Monetization - convert a non-revenue generating asset into something that is a revenue-generating source.
- No simple answer to this question.
- Have a diversified portfolio of money sources such as advertising, gated content, sell expertise, sell memberships, ask for donations, etc.
- Ways to make money that is not monetizing content – solicit the community for support.
- Have partnerships with other organizations that align with your goals.
- In Canada, we are lucky to have governments that are willing to be partners for arts organizations.
- Develop an endowment to sustain your arts organization.
- Monetization suggests a commercial component to something that we do, which suggests that art has a commercial appeal. This is not necessarily what the arts are intended to do. The arts can be commercialized, but it does not have to be.
- Digitalization and commercialization can suggest a certain level of censorship.

Tateo Nakajima's Answer:

- The history of the area suggests that monetization as a goal is challenging. It is an additional cost, in and of itself. How much of it is an option going forward?
- Monetization is in the spectrum of how we communicate with our audience. If you are selling an entertainment product, then fine, monetization is expected. However, if you are on the part of the spectrum that is focused on community building, wellness, providing benefits for our society for



- having access to the arts, monetization is not the point. How do we pay for to do these things that we know are important to do? There are more costs associated with these different values that must be paid for.
- Example: An orchestra in Japan sold tickets at the same price for a live performance and for a VR experience of the content. Many people bought tickets for each experience. They are two different experiences for the same work of the same group of artists.
- Example: A theatre in London sold tickets to a very limited group of people. They made it an experience by creating exclusivity.
- Understand your medium and what you are trying to do.
- We are talking to different audiences and integrating digital into what we do. This changes the way that society pays for it.
- Monetization in the short-term will continue to be a challenge.
- We value different experiences in different ways.

Question 5: What institutional infrastructure should we be considering as we move forward?

Scott Smallwood's Answer:

- Going back to the monetization topic, as a presenting organization, we want to be able to encourage and enable artists to continue making work. Sometimes best handled by professional organizations that set rates.
- Physical presentation space may need to change. The modes of presenting and creating work has expanded. The traditional performance spaces are no longer adequate.
- There is a tension between having a flexible presentation space vs. a need of having a space that can be turned on and ready to go.
- Maintain good relationships with other organizations and look for opportunities to collaborate, even with other mediums. Digital spaces allow for multi-disciplinary work.
- When COVID ends, people will be flocking back to performance spaces. They will be demanding fantastic experiences.
- Infrastructure is important. Opportunities to create exhibitions within your spaces, such as sound exhibitions. Most galleries are not great places for presenting sound work, but music organizations have this ability.
 - For example, the Winspear could have had sound art galleries that could be open to the public to visit during the day.
- Willing to collab with other media and rethink the kinds of presentation spaces we can have.

Milan Krepelka's Answer:

- Infrastructure depends on the organization in question. Infrastructure depends on what you are presenting.



- At the Telus World of Science, they have small spaces within the gallery to have a facilitation/classroom space that is flexible for demonstrations, for classrooms to gather, or for tourists to come together to see demonstrations that cannot be done within the exhibit.
- The Science Garage - two rooms dedicated to exhibits that are not traditional.
- Milan's role is to determine the outcome of the exhibit experience. Before, the user would push a button and either get or not get the outcome. They are now moving to a user-driven outcome. At the exhibit, provide the guest with a question and then provide the tools to try to get the guest to the outcome that will answer the question.
- This method shows the democratization of problem-solving and makes the exhibit more economical.
- User-driven outcomes have different level of impact. The goal is to have users participate and be part of the solution. Sometimes guests come up with solutions that the designers did not even think of.
- Milan's main goal is to enhance the access with infrastructure.

Question 6: What have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic that has provided us with something we will use in the future?

Rafael Baldwin's Answer:

- Do and try new things before we need them. Proactive actions vs. reactive actions.
- Incorporating technology into companies should have been something that was done before the pandemic.
- Video production capabilities (80% of engagement online is video watching). What else can we do with video? How can we use video to diversify our offerings?
- Coming together works! We should be working together.
- Remote collaboration is here to stay. This is beneficial to the company and for employees.
- Teams benefit from hiring the right people. Bring people on who are flexible, organized, and versatile.
- We do not need as many meetings as we did pre-pandemic. Having good touchpoints throughout projects allow people to work more efficiently.
- Wellness matters! You need to take care of yourself both mentally and physically.
- Art matters! It has been proven to be a strong companion during these tough times. As art organizations, we should continue to spread joy with our art forms.

Gretchen Coss' Answer:

- Music and the arts are a universal language that can cross barriers.
- Building bridges - Virtual performances and presentations have taught us that we can reach a wider audience. Let us not forget that we are striving to reach a broader audience. Go to the audience, they may not always come to you.
- Creating great content is more important than just getting your name out there. Creating relevant, meaningful, targeted content will not go away. Less is more, in this case.



- Digital and virtual platforms can be used to leave breadcrumbs and lead to live performances. It can keep audiences connected before, during and after the performance. Digital tools can create a different and powerful performance experience.
- All these tools have strengths and weaknesses. We are not looking to replace in-person performances. We have opened a new door to draw people in. The arts and music can feel inaccessible, but the digital space can break down that barrier.
- Outdoor spaces - consider what can be done in parking lots, grassy areas, etc. Being vocal can happen in so many ways. We must expand our thinking.
- You should want to do those things for your audience.

Question 7: What are the responsibilities that arts organizations have in lifting voices and hosting important social conversations?

Annemarie Petrov's Answer:

- Art organizations vs. the responsibility of the Arts. Arts organizations need to remember and remind ourselves that it is fundamentally about the art. For arts organizations, the silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic is that we must understand how nimble we are and whether we are able to service the art. As organizations, we need to be focused on serving the art because art provides hope through providing a means of expression.
- When working for the Winnipeg Symphony, they introduced a new music festival. Had they done a survey asking the community if they wanted a new music festival, the results would have showed a resounding 'no'. But because they had a partner that was able to help underwrite the costs, they were able to get the festival up off the ground. We have a responsibility to do things like this because of our scale.

Annette Mees' Answer:

- Art is full of courage and expression.
- No one works in the arts because of wealth and riches. They do it because they believe in the space and the role that the Arts can play in reflecting our society and diversity.
- In the digital spaces, this does not go away. There are still structures to be made in the digital spheres that we can create.
 - How do we interact with our audiences?
 - In what ways can we present our work?
 - Whom do we showcase on our platform?
 - Whose voice gets which platform?
- This digital sphere gives us a lot of space and we are inventing things as we go.
- Digital is like a new public space. We are not the only ones occupying this space. Politics, brands, commercials companies are there too.
- Digital is an interesting space. What is our role as art organizations and artists in that space? How can this be a space for imagination and not just transactions? How do we think about it as a village
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green where a festival can happen and where we can bring people together? As a culture, how do we plant our flag and make sure equitable society is present within this landscape?

Q&A Session

Question: As transitioning to digital can be a significant change in an organization's operation, what kinds of approaches are useful for supporting staff through that transition?

Rafael Baldwin's Answer:

- Have a designated budget for technology every year!
- Technology is becoming cheaper, so you don't have to break the bank to get high-quality gear.
- It is important that the institutions invest in the education of the employees. It is with a common understanding or common idea that you get things off the ground. Have everyone on the same page by having a shared vision and understanding.

Question: What obstacles to our digital transition are still in place and why are they still obstacles?

Gretchen Coss' Answer:

- Many clients see media moments in other spaces and what to incorporate them in their own exhibits. Sometimes this is not feasible, and you need to consider what spaces you do have available.
- There is also a preconceived notion that technology is so expensive that we cannot even consider using some of it. Technology does not have to be astronomically expensive. But, for the ones which are expensive, consider what they bring to your project. How does it impact your overall visitor experience?

Question: How do arts organizations avoid the temptation of going back to "how we used to do it" after the pandemic instead of continuing to forge new ways of presenting their art? Will those who won't be left behind?

Tateo Nakajima's Answer:

- All organizations need to deal with this. Many major organizations have decided not to go back to the office and consider different ways of working.
- As organizations, take a moment to think about how society has changed and what we should be doing as organizations and artists.
- Consider: what can be better? Is it better to work from home? There are better things and worse things. There are new audiences that you can connect to, but maybe audiences that you will lose.
- Become more data driven.

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- Take the time to consider and think about what you should be doing. What is your goal? That should show you the path you should take as an organization.