

## 6 *Diversifying the Arts Bringing in Race and Ethnic Perspectives*

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MORRIS FRED AND BETTY FARRELL

It is not only the young who are the new audience members for the future, but a more racially and ethnically diverse range of adults who have not been significantly visible in the audiences for mainstream arts. For most of U.S. history, the "fine arts" have been dominated by European artistic traditions and cultural values and consumed by a culturally specific audience that was predominantly white, Anglo-European, highly educated, and upper- to middle-class in background. Many cultural organizations with this audience profile have understood themselves as representing "Culture," rather than "a culture." The awareness that there are other traditions, values, and interests in the arts with appeal to a more diverse range of arts audiences has been slow to take hold or to challenge the status quo in the mainstream cultural sphere. But the notion of equity is now being added to the long-held tradition of excellence in the arts, and the ethos of exclusivity has begun to give way to a commitment to inclusivity.

The current project of diversifying participation in the arts is built, then, on a relatively new moral impulse for inclusiveness in the cultural sector that is driven in part by the changing demographic landscape of the United States. Arts organizations are responding to these new patterns of racial and ethnic diversity by establishing different organizational goals and different conceptions of what it means to diversify. On the one hand, organizations that have long been defined by an Anglo-European perspective are now attempting to change their practices to supplement or stretch their repertoire to become more diverse by adding auxiliary and expanded programs to their core in order to draw a multicultural audience. On the other hand, ethnic organizations are also diversifying the cultural field by providing core programs that represent their own traditions and artistic products. A recent study of ethnic museums in Los Angeles noted that

[A]lthough many museums retain their status as prestigious Temples of art or science, many also aspire to serve as forums for the representation of diverse identities and points of view. Thus, they address issues, exhibit collections, and provide for communities once considered peripheral to the mainstream museum. Such museums have become vehicles to affirm and articulate new forms of identity and community, but also sites of conflict and contest, where different groups battle over appropriate definitions and representations. (Loukaitaou-Sideris et al. 2004, 53)

As this statement suggests, ethnic organizations add diversity in terms of museums' organizational mission and intended audience, but their impact on changing the cultural landscape is neither simple nor straightforward. As these institutions seek cultural parity with the more established institutions, and as their concerns are embraced by the institutional core on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., they share many of the same challenges facing all institutions that seek to expand both customer and donor bases. Yet their presence opens up many questions that mainstream cultural organizations have only recently begun to ask: Who and what is represented in most genres of art, and why? Who decides? What is missing from those representations? What should new representations include? How will institutions build their own capacity and the capacity of the field to serve this variety of audiences?

These provocative questions can challenge the status quo and unsettle deeply held values and beliefs, as numerous recent examples of art controversies over issues of representation have attested. But the process of unsettling the status quo creates not only controversy but the space for arts organizations to think more responsively about the needs, interests, and tastes of new audiences and participants. When they do so, they discover several things:

- Ethnic audiences want to see representatives of their communities as performers and artists, along with deeper representations of their cultural traditions.
- Ethnic audiences want exhibitions and programs that are relevant to issues in their own lives.
- Ethnic audiences are attracted to art reflecting values that resonate with their communities and to organizations working purposefully to build long-term, sustained relationships with them.

Not surprisingly, ethnic cultural organizations seek to control their own cultural representations. They want to present what they consider to be truly authentic interpretations of their history and traditions and, in the process, to contest stereotypical or simplistic views of those traditions. Occasionally, as we will see, they begin to challenge the notion that

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a racial or ethnic group has a single identity or mode of representation. In this, they have been joined by a range of new hybrid cultural organizations whose mission is to represent diversity through their structures, operations, and repertoires. This chapter will explore the variety of ways that the interrelated imperatives of diversifying art forms, diversifying cultural organizations, and diversifying cultural audiences have been unsettling, reshaping, and challenging the cultural landscape.

#### EXPANDING THE CANON WITH DIVERSE STAFF AND REPERTOIRE

What does it mean to diversify a cultural organization? One meaning is to change the complexion of the organization by adding more people of color to the board, the staff, and the artists, while simultaneously pushing the artistic repertoire to expand beyond the traditional canon in which it operates. The Chicago Sinfonietta is one cultural organization that was founded upon this principle and has been doing just that since 1987. Among all the arts, it is perhaps most surprising to find a dynamic of innovation and change at work in a symphony orchestra, where the artistic product has traditionally been rooted in a Western European classical repertoire from the nineteenth century and in a particularly rule-bound performance style. Like many of the performing arts organizations in our study, the Chicago Sinfonietta earned nearly 50 percent of its \$1.7 million annual revenue in 2004 from its programming revenues, which included ticket sales and contracts for its performances. Its subscriber base of eleven hundred has been augmented by five thousand to ten thousand single-ticket sales annually, a number that is likely to increase dramatically as the organization expands its repertoire to reach a broader audience.

Describing itself as “the nation’s most diverse symphony orchestra [that] shatters traditional boundaries through its collaborations, creating synergies between classical, dance, theater and other musical styles including jazz, rock, and world music,” this professional orchestra, founded in 1987 by African American music director Paul Freeman, embodies diversity among the musicians on the stage, in its repertoire, and on its board of directors. In 2006, it had twenty-one African Americans, four Latinos, three Asians, and one Native American making up the musicians on stage; an African American musical director at its helm; African Americans making up 50 percent of its board; and four to five works per year written by composers of color and performed by guest artists of color. Thus, the Chicago Sinfonietta represents an unusual level of racial diversity for any cultural organization, much less one in the world of symphonic orches-

tras. This is undoubtedly a key factor in explaining why its audiences are currently composed of 55 percent people of color. Its stated mission of musical excellence through diversity ([www.chicagosinfonietta.org](http://www.chicagosinfonietta.org)) is thus represented throughout the organization, as well as in its innovative approach to programming.

According to its executive director, Jim Hirsch, who brought to the Chicago Sinfonietta some of the marketing strategies and organizational changes that he spearheaded so successfully as director of the Old Town School of Music, the strategy that any cultural organization trying to involve a more diverse set of participants must pursue is "making the tent as large as possible." To this end, the Sinfonietta's programs include the traditional classical repertoire, the orchestra's signature performance, the Martin Luther King Tribute Concert, and innovative collaborations with jazz and rock musicians, dance companies, theater performances, and video projections, which, in Hirsch's words, intentionally "mess with the orchestra model." Their goal has been

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[We want] to stretch how people perceive orchestral [music] . . . to open some doors so it becomes relevant for a broader range of people.

JIM HIRSCH

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to stretch how people perceive orchestral [music]: what orchestral music is and [what it] can be, and trying, hopefully, to open some doors so it becomes relevant for a broader range of people. . . . We have one foot in the traditional orchestral world—we did Tchaikovsky's *Fifth*, [but we had] the first half of the concert with [Chicago's Mexican folk band] Sones de Mexico

and this young, African American cellist, Patrice Jackson, who kind of blew the doors off the place. . . . We just want to explore [new musical combinations]. (Hirsch interview 2005)

The Sinfonietta works at creating new "point-of-entry" opportunities—such as the concert collaboration with the Chicago-based rock group Poi Dog Pondering in the 2005 original and remixed performances of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, which attracted a younger audience of rock fans, or the collaboration with the virtuoso guitarist Fareed Haque and renowned tabla player Zakir Hussain, which melded jazz, classical Indian music, and orchestral music and brought in a new audience of South Asian Indians, "99 percent [of whom] had never been to a Sinfonietta concert before" (Hirsch interview 2005). Hirsch calls "diversity and daring" the two concepts that the orchestra sells—with its staff, composers, and performers more closely modeling the racial and ethnic diversity of the city in which it is located, and with its "unstuffy," relevant, and innovative programming. As one Chicago music critic noted:

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[A]ny orchestra that dares to put a Mozart piano concerto at one end of  
 a program and a concerto for steel drums and orchestra at the other had  
 better have the artistic wherewithal to justify its chutzpah. Fortunately,  
 Chicago Sinfonietta has been shaped into a buff and vigorous chamber or-  
 chestra in its 19 seasons under founder and Music Director Paul Freeman.  
 [This] concert was another example of how the nation’s most racially di-  
 verse professional orchestra is also among the most musically diverse (von  
 Rhein, 2006)

Even so, attracting equally diverse audiences cannot be left to chance.  
 Diversifying arts participation is at the very core of the orchestra’s on-  
 going project. The Sinfonietta actively markets its programs—through  
 its media partners, through churches and organizations such as African  
 American sororities and fraternities, through partnerships with groups  
 such as the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance, and in Chicago’s most racially di-  
 verse communities. It offers board members free tickets to invite people  
 from their social networks to sample Sinfonietta concerts via a “birds  
 of a feather” marketing strategy—and, in a more specific instance of au-  
 dience targeting for the Martin Luther King Tribute concert, it tried  
 sending its staff members out to the Marshall Field and Nordstrom de-  
 partment stores to hand out free ticket vouchers to African American  
 women professionals, or “Mrs. Huxtables”—a group it targeted as family  
 cultural decision makers who should receive a direct invitation to the con-  
 cert. This is one example of the kind of direct approach that Sinfonietta  
 staff have been willing to try in their attempt to keep their audiences as  
 diverse as possible as they expand their reach. Through such efforts, the  
 Sinfonietta’s subscriber base grew 24 percent from 2004 to 2006, and the  
 goal is to keep that base growing by 8 to 12 percent per year.

As the Chicago Sinfonietta seeks to build upon its diverse audience,  
 its efforts cannot rest on a single point-of-entry experience. To date, the  
 orchestra has had greater success in attracting African Americans than  
 Latinos—37 percent versus 5 percent respectively. But, in its mission and  
 strategies, in its relentless quest to learn more about the tastes and inter-  
 ests of its targeted and potential audiences, and in the way it has managed  
 to break out of old traditions—even while retaining a mix of the old and  
 the new, the playful and the serious—the Sinfonietta represents a model  
 of a cultural organization that is elastic and expansive in its participa-  
 tion-building efforts. Few symphony orchestras, surely, can claim to have  
 commissioned a Concertino for Cell Phone and Orchestra—with audience  
 cell phone participation (Pasles 2006)—for the 2007 season. Because its  
 multiple efforts to live out its motto of diversity have so visibly created “a  
 large tent” for an organization that is rooted in a classical tradition, the

Chicago Sinfonietta is particularly well positioned to build and expand its multicultural audience.

### ADDING AUXILIARY PROGRAMS TO SUPPLEMENT (AND CHALLENGE) THE CORE

Most cultural organizations find themselves in a very different situation than the Chicago Sinfonietta, which has built diversity into its entire organizational structure and into its expanded programming efforts. More typical are the organizations that are now facing the task of diversifying by adding auxiliary programs that will help attract a broader racial and ethnic mix of participants, while still maintaining their core programs and audience base. Short-term strategies or limited efforts—such as a museum exhibit featuring black artists during February, the month officially dedicated to celebrating African-American culture and heritage, or Latino-themed events scheduled to coincide with Cinco de Mayo—are destined for, at best, limited, short-term success. Any effort to build a multicultural audience that does not institutionalize the project of engaging diverse participants in a long-term, sustained effort cannot hope to succeed.

This is the message of Donna Walker Kuhne, president of Walker International Communications Group, who identifies five crucial goals for mainstream organizations intent on building and sustaining a multicultural audience:

- Listening to the needs of the target community, then institutionalizing the idea of engaging diverse participation as part of the organizational mission, through the involvement and empowerment of staff, and through programs that reflect an interest in creating new audiences.
- Creating a presence that helps broaden the organization's reach into a targeted community, and cultivating the audience as a long-term strategy.
- Reaching new communities through personal relationships, rather than necessarily through the content of the art, since it is personal relationships that build trust and bring in new audiences.
- Choosing new marketing strategies, such as selling blocks of tickets to groups, offering ways that new audience members can sample the cultural offerings before committing to a ticket sale, and developing a task force of community volunteers to help with the marketing effort.
- Building bridges to audiences through forums of dialogue about arts and culture that allow new participants to explore how the art relates to their own life. (Kuhne interview 2004)

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## PROGRAMS TO SUPPLEMENT CORE

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As Kuhne's list and other evidence collected over the course of this study suggest, the types of relational strategies and transactional strategies for building a more diverse group of cultural participants are closely interwoven. Building relationships with diverse audiences is the precursor to engaging them in more sustained transactions with the organization. Greater institutionalization of the processes designed to build transactions will help build organizational capacity to serve these groups over the long term.

### *The Seattle Art Museum*

Among established cultural organizations that have sought to become more visible to local African American, Latino, and Asian communities, the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) stands out for its multifaceted approach. In the midst of an expansion project to triple the size of its downtown museum site, to renovate its sister facility, the Seattle Asian Art Museum, and to develop the eight-and-a-half-acre Olympic Sculpture Park, the museum has also been investing considerable effort in expanding its reach and making its presence more visible to local communities of color. With a new mission statement—"SAM connects art to life"—the museum signaled its intention of becoming a more accessible organization. Most significantly, it began a research effort in 2001 to put the visitor at the center of all its programs and activities by conducting extensive surveys of visitors' interests, expectations, and experiences at the museum; conducting focus groups with diverse community members before all major exhibitions; doing a follow-up "How Are We Doing?" survey to assess their ongoing efforts; and working with cross-divisional task teams within the museum to prioritize, implement, and evaluate a full range of audience engagement efforts. A 2005 report, "Measurements of Success: Outreach and Diversity Efforts," highlights some of the outcomes of those efforts inside the museum, among visitors, members, and staff, and in Seattle's communities:

- From 1999 to 2001, the ethnic diversity of SAM's visitors varied from 8 percent to 10 percent of total visitors; from 2002 to 2004, an increase of diversity in 14 percent to 34 percent of total visitors was achieved.
- Comparing two exhibitions with similar art content and overall visitation revealed nearly a 100 percent increase in ethnic diversity of SAM's visitors. During the Impressionism: Paintings Collected by European Museums exhibition in 1999, 316,000 visitors and 8.1 percent visitor ethnic/cultural diversity was noted; in 2004, for Van Gogh to Mondrian: Modern Art from the Kroller-Muller

Museum, 288,228 visitors and 15.5 percent visitor ethnic/cultural diversity was tallied.

- Based on 2004 membership data, 21 percent of SAM members were people of color, compared to 27 percent of its total county population (King County) according to the 2000 U.S. Census.
- Ethnic/cultural diversity—among staff, board, and volunteers combined—reflected an increase from 12.3 percent to 15.5 percent over the past four years. However, the ethnic/cultural diversity of staff declined slightly.
- Among the museum's community engagement results, the report also cites its extensive community partners and programs, a high level of involvement of children and families in the monthly ethnic festivals cosponsored with the Seattle Center, the distribution of free and reduced admission passes (8.4 percent of which were redeemed, a proportion about twice as high as usual); and diverse audience participation in a series of community dialogues, including three Forums on Race programs. (Seattle Art Museum 2005)

Such audience research is high on the Seattle Art Museum's priority list of strategies to engage audiences and participants. It speaks to the kind of institutional commitment that Donna Walker Kuhne identifies earlier in this chapter as central to any long-term effort to build diverse participation. It suggests the museum's recognition of the need to collect reliable baseline information and to track changes over time, as well as to evaluate ongoing participation-building strategies both inside and outside the organization. The Seattle Art Museum's priority on audience research has allowed it to become a more responsive organization. When it conducted its "How Are We Doing?" community survey in July 2003 among a diverse audience, it learned that "61 percent of the respondents . . . had visited the museum more in the past two years than in previous years due to more engaging exhibitions, special invites received from SAM, and more engaging programs and events." They learned that respondents perceived the museum as having greatly improved in "diversity of exhibitions, community outreach efforts, and marketing efforts to diverse communities" (Seattle Art Museum 2003).

How has this research effort played out in the kinds of exhibits that SAM presents? An example is reflected in the narrative account by Victoria Moreland, SAM's director of community affairs, of the 2004 exhibit *Only Skin Deep* (see text box on *Only Skin Deep*).

Many organizations have launched similar kinds of relevant and compelling auxiliary exhibitions or programs, beyond their permanent collections or core programs, which are intended to reach a broader audience and help in the process of diversifying participation. The Seattle Art

ages was to learn about which concerns we should be particularly sensitive.

Focus group participants were very candid in providing feedback on everything from exhibition titles, themes, and marketing strategies to the importance of incorporating multiple community voices in the exhibition, and providing space for reflection and response within the galleries. In response to these suggestions, a small library of resource materials and online access to related materials was developed so visitors could respond to and further explore the many questions posed throughout the exhibition. . . .

We had sensitivity training for our frontline staff and volunteers regarding diversity and customer service. The goal of the training was to prepare staff and volunteers to adequately deal with audience members affected by the subject matter and images. During the time of the exhibition, front-line staff only reported a few emotional incidents, such as visitors crying. Staff offered visitors [tissues] or directed them to an area where they could sit alone for awhile.

We wanted the exhibit environment to be conducive to people sharing their ideas. Multiple response areas were created in the galleries by providing visitor response cards and hand-held gallery guides, prompting visitors with questions about the exhibition. Docents were introduced to a new method of working with audiences—visual thinking strategies (VTS)—which gave them a method of making their tours more conversational and less docent-directed. The docents' learning objective

(continued)

A great example of how SAM involved all ethnic/cultural groups in this process can be seen in a 2004 exhibit, *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, organized by the International Center of Photography in New York. The exhibition led viewers on a provocative journey through the history of American photography, while critically considering its role as a medium that shapes how we understand race and national identity, provoking us to rethink our ideas of what an American looks like, of what makes anyone more or less an American. The exhibition featured over three hundred historic and contemporary works dating from 1840 to the present, contrasting a diverse range of genres and movements.

Because the exhibition dealt with potentially controversial images, SAM felt it important to understand how community members/visitors might respond, and [to] enlist their assistance in presenting this exhibition. In the months prior to the opening, we had dialogues with our Community Advisory Committee and community partners; focus groups gathered input from the community at large. We invited individual feedback through our community network Listserv of over four thousand diverse contacts and through postings on various e-news/event sites catering to diverse audiences. In these feedback sessions, the curators presented a wide range of images, some of which were difficult to view, such as those of the Ku Klux Klan in action or of ethnic group stereotypes. Our purpose in showing these stark im-

was to engage visitors in a discussion in which they would explore how historical and contemporary photographs used the conventions of photography (composition, lighting, pose, costume, and setting) to create works in which stereotypes are suggested, reinforced, and/or challenged. Docents encouraged people to speak from a personal point of view about images in the exhibition. For example, one image, by the artist Roger Shimomura, "24 People for Whom I have been Mistaken," included photographs of twenty-four people, thirteen of whom wore glasses, most [of whom] appeared to be of Asian descent, with two appearing to be white, and one [of whom] appeared to be a woman. A simple starting question, "What do you see?" brought on a lively discussion from

the group about personal experiences of being stereotyped.

By the conclusion of the show, over three hundred handwritten cards were posted on a bulletin board at the end of the gallery for all to read, reflecting the heartfelt impact the exhibition had on viewers' understanding of race and racism. The response cards also provided visitor demographics showing that more than 35 percent of visitors to the show were people of color. The success of the program in meeting our goals to expand participation was recognized at the end of the exhibit with a letter from Seattle's Mayor Greg Nickels praising the exhibition and SAM's efforts to stimulate public dialogue around race and identity.

—Moreland interview 2005-2

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Museum has given recognition to the diverse groups that make up the city's communities by including them in the process of representing their culture and by creating programs that are relevant to the interests and needs of their multiple publics. The museum has made a serious effort to build trust in Seattle's diverse communities by explicitly acting on the motto "SAM connects art to life," while understanding that lives are complex and varied and that needs and interests are ever changing.

The project is long-term, demanding, and expensive, and it involves institutional vision, commitment, and sustained resources. So far, at SAM, these efforts and programs have been sustained by foundation grants, although the museum has made a commitment to continuing the department of community affairs beyond the initial grant period. Whether most organizations are up to the labor-intensive and long-term challenge of creating and sustaining the strategies and programs that will draw a more diverse audience is an open question. As this case study suggests, there are multiple factors at work—from committed leadership, to changes in the organizational culture, to the institution-wide willingness to make diversity a top priority. The pressures within most mainstream cultural organizations to revert to a supposedly universal model of "Culture" are therefore great. Many efforts falter when special funding initiatives end,

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when the leadership that has driven the effort changes, or when diversity efforts are given lower priority than other organizational goals. This is one of the reasons that ethnically specific or pan-ethnic cultural organizations also play an important role in the process of diversification in the cultural sector, for—by their very nature and purpose—ethnic cultural organiza- tions can make diversity their core priority.

### ETHNIC CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS: PROMOTING DIVERSITY AS THE CORE

In part as a response to exclusion from the mainstream cultural landscape and in part driven by the surge in the ethnic cultural politics that characterized the 1980s and 1990s in the United States, a new set of culturally specific and ethnically defined institutions has now firmly taken root in the cultural field. Several ethnic cultural organizations in this study serve as examples of the ways in which cultural spaces have been used to define and explore ethnic identity issues and cultural representation. In this way, they offer another model of diversification of cultural organizations—one that identifies diversity as the core of the organization's mission, structure, and programs. The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago and the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle are two examples of representa- tive organizations that will be considered in this context.

#### *The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum*

Located in the Mexican American neighborhood of Pilsen in Chicago, the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum (MFACM), as it is referred to in this study (renamed the National Museum of Mexican Art in December 2006), is viewed by many as the premier institution for Mexican art in the nation; it represents the cultural roots of Chicago's substantial Mexican American community of 1.3 million people, a concentration second only to Los Angeles among U.S. cities. Its mission is to provide opportunities for individuals to develop bonds within the Mexican American commu- nity, to explore their connections to other cultural groups in the Chicago area, and to integrate themselves into American cultural, economic, and social life. It is simultaneously a museum and, as its name suggests, a cen- ter for community activities. This expanded notion of what a cultural or- ganization can and should be is a feature common to many other ethnic organizations.

The MFACM was founded by a group of educators under the team lead- ership of Carlos Tortolero and Helen Valdez. Since opening its doors in 1987 it has grown enormously in terms of facility, budget, the size and prominence of its collection, and its reputation as the only accredited

Mexican American museum in the United States. But its purpose remains most deeply rooted in the idea of giving a sense of identity and pride to the Mexican American community. Carlos Tortolero, founder and president of the museum, states it most clearly: "We are here for the Mexican community, first and foremost. By presenting the art and artists that should be presented, we are part of setting the cultural agenda for this country. When we talk about the importance of "first voice" we mean [that] no one is more expert about our culture than we are" (Tortolero interview 2006). According to the MFACM's director of development, Randy Adamsick, "Even as the museum has grown financially from basically zero to five million dollars in twenty years, we still want to have exhibitions that serve the people in our neighborhood. So, we are dedicated to keeping admission free and our education programs affordable; . . . we want to do all we can to remain the hub of the community" (Adamsick interview 2005).

The museum was founded by Carlos Tortolero and Helen Valdez, educators with a commitment to using the arts to stimulate and preserve knowledge and appreciation of Mexican culture, with particular emphasis on a commitment to youth. The MFACM runs the Yollocalli Youth Museum, which each year provides two hundred young people with career training in the arts; and it sponsors Radio Arte, a seventy-three-watt radio station run by 120 youth staff members. Both are located in the Pilsen neighborhood. Radio Arte broadcasts to approximately five hundred thousand people on Chicago's South Side, but it focuses primarily on local neighborhood and youth issues. The MFACM's exhibitions are attended by more than fifty thousand school-age children and teens each year, filling an important gap in art education in the public schools. Through its specific youth programs, through the mentoring of young staff members, and through the program with the Chicago school district, the museum has made significant strides in living up to its founding educational mission.

In addition to using the arts to enhance the Mexican American community's sense of shared tradition and identity, the MFACM sponsors other programs and exhibits attracting two hundred thousand people annually. Its programs are intended to provide a means of strength and renewal among individuals in the community. The Día del Niño (Day of the Child) Family Festival, for example, draws its cultural resonance from a tradition celebrated yearly in Mexico on April 30. But the family- and arts-oriented program that has been developed, to great success, by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum involves hands-on activities, music, and food, along with partnerships with social service and government agencies, corporations, and the school district to promote nutrition and good health. In 2004, with the support of such organizations as the Department of Public

United States. But its purpose remains giving a sense of identity and pride to the Carlos Tortolero, founder and president of the organization. He says, "We are here for the Mexican community, representing the art and artists that should be on the cultural agenda for this country. The concept of 'first voice' we mean [that] no one else has heard from us" (Tortolero interview 2006). The director of development, Randy Adamsick, says, "We started financially from basically zero to five hundred dollars. So, we are dedicated to keeping admissions affordable; . . . we want to do all we can for the community" (Adamsick interview 2005). Carlos Tortolero and Helen Valdez, editors of the arts to stimulate and preserve Mexican culture, with particular emphasis on the MFACM runs the Yollocalli Youth Center, which serves two hundred young people with career advisors, Radio Arte, a seventy-three-watt radio station, and staff members. Both are located in the Loop, but it focuses primarily on South Side issues. The MFACM's exhibitions serve thousands of school-age children and teens in art education in the public schools. Through the mentoring of young artists, through the program with the Chicago school district, the organization strides in living up to its founding edu-

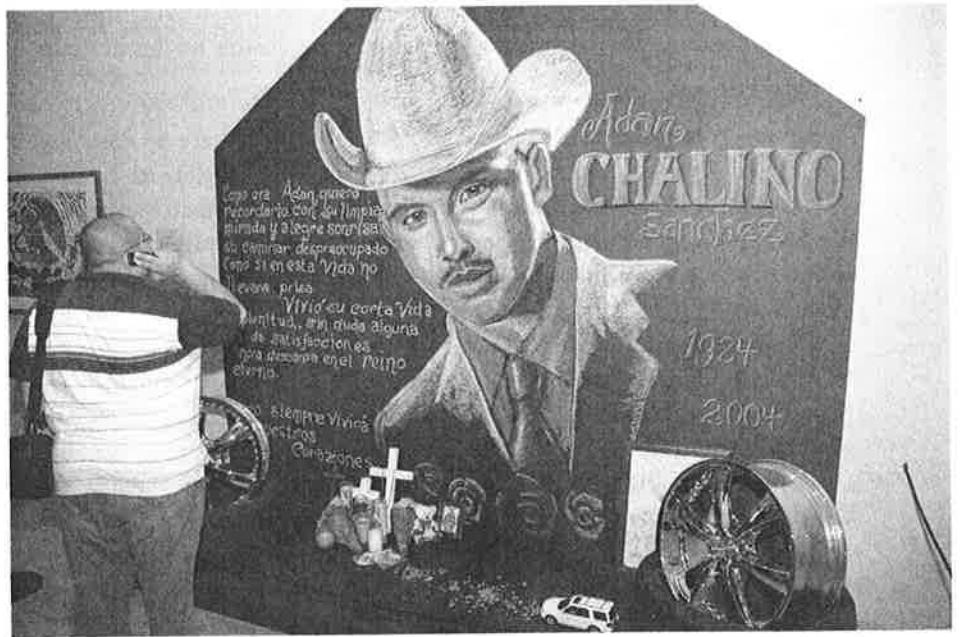
ation. To enhance the Mexican American community identity, the MFACM sponsors other programs for two hundred thousand people annually. It provides a means of strength and renewal to the community. The Dia del Niño (Day of the Child) is celebrated on April 30. But the family- and arts-oriented Dia de los Muertos, to great success, by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, along with the support of government agencies, corporations, and organizations as the Department of Public

Health, Human Services, and Children and Family Services, the program produced a record attendance rate of ten thousand participants—a 100 percent increase in a two-year period. According to Nancy Villafranca, director of education,

Interestingly, while the focus was still on families and art, we also partnered that year with the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children [CLOCC]. So now we have added a health aspect too. Confronting this issue is especially important because of the high obesity rate among children in Chicago, particularly Latino youth. The program was meant to educate about the value of eating healthy [foods], exercising, and lowering obesity or hypertension. We had a climbing wall, a presentation by the Chicago Bicycle Federation, cooking demonstrations, and other types of health-related activities, computer games. . . . The event has become a huge annual success. (Villafranca interview 2005)

The theme of spiritual healing is also built into the traditional activities that the MFACM sponsors every autumn in its Day of the Dead exhibit. The 2006 exhibition marked its twentieth year. According to Tortolero, the exhibition always includes three sections—one with traditional

6.1 Dia de los Muertos/Day of the Dead installation by Roberto Valadez at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, Chicago, November 2006.  
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*ofrendas* [altars] from Mexico, a second with *ofrendas* by Mexican Americans, and a third with contemporary expressions of the Day of the Dead theme. The common link across these galleries is in promoting awareness of the deeply rooted traditions and cultural heritage shared by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The exhibition also provides an opportunity to deal with grief (figure 6.1).

One of my favorite stories is about a teacher's aide who came with a school group. The following Saturday, when I stopped by the gallery, she was there. I saw her, she saw me. We smiled at each other. She came up to me and said, "You know, grandma passed away so I thought I'd bring my daughter to talk about it." That's what it's supposed to be. That's what you try to do. It's [a way to] deal with grief. [From creating *ofrendas* to visiting the show, it helps] to talk about it, to talk about whether or not there is something after life. Life is valuable, and we should appreciate it. (Tortolero interview 2006)

The goal is also to make these traditions meaningful and relevant in a contemporary sense to both insiders and outsiders. To this end, the museum has developed different tours of the exhibits—one designed to provide the necessary social and historical context for an understanding of the holiday by outsiders, another to deepen the experience of this cultural tradition for the core Mexican American audience. Thus, promoting a sense of cultural identity, strengthening the bonds within the community, and focusing on spiritual healing are three interrelated goals of the Day of the Dead exhibit at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum. There is an educational function to the exhibit as well, according to the director of education:

[E]very year a different school is selected to participate by creating an *ofrenda*. One or more classrooms work in collaboration to create one *ofrenda* for the entire school. We always try to connect the exhibit to something that has happened in the school—for example, a school where there was a shooting and a student was killed. So the exhibit is more than about the healing. In such cases, we would learn about the life of the student and how his classroom came together to create the *ofrenda*. I recall that, in 2001, one school changed plans immediately after 9/11, dedicating their *ofrenda* to those who had lost their lives. For that particular school, the exhibit helped with the healing process. Coming to the museum and talking about the tragedy in the atmosphere of the Day of the Dead exhibit does seem to make people feel better. We always have a community *ofrenda* where we just have these little pieces of paper, and we say, "Now you write a little something to someone you lost this past year or



indigenous, Mestizo, etc. Initially, I sensed much hesitation in dealing with the issues of this race-loaded show, particularly since there is often a denial of an African presence in Mexico. The center gallery will focus on U.S./Mexican relations in the twentieth century. Additionally, we plan on having . . . about a dozen public programs mixing locations throughout the city. (Adamsick interview 2005)

Using art exhibitions to address group differences does not imply that the process will be easy or harmonious. Two months prior to the opening of *The African Presence in Mexico* exhibit, a commentator close to the planning process for the exhibit observed that, from the outset, the MFACM had planned to put together a steering committee for the exhibitions that included roughly half MFACM key staff and half African American leaders in Chicago. This proved an invaluable source of ideas, differing points of view, and, ultimately, a buy-in from their communities. The dynamic of the early meetings was collegial, but also somewhat cautious. Both groups seemed concerned with guarding their territory.

Only two funding organizations out of the fifteen that had initially been approached ultimately denied funding for the exhibition. In both cases, it was reported that representatives from the predominantly African American funding institutions had objected to a Mexican museum depicting what they considered to be African history. Tortolero admitted fearing that some people might think “we were trying to steal their thunder.” In addition, many MFACM staff heard dismay from their own friends and families when they described the theme of this impending exhibition. The most typical reactions were: “What are you doing that for?” and “There are no Africans in Mexico!” According to Tortolero,

[W]e recognized early that this was not going to be a popular show to some people. “Shade-ism” is an issue we don’t talk about. If you want to get people in the Latino community nervous, talk about skin color. You can talk about God, politics, but walk into a Mexican family’s home and talk about skin color [and] they get very nervous. They do not like talking about it. It really makes people uncomfortable because it becomes racism in our own community. You know, I attack the mainstream a lot because of its racism. But there is racism in Mexico. So we would be hypocritical if we did not talk about it. But a lot of Mexicanos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans don’t like talking about that, because it makes us the bad guy. Well, we are the bad guy too, sometimes. Racism is racism. Mexico is a country that has never dealt in the proper way with its indigenous past. So, if being dark is bad, being African is worse, obviously. Mexico has not dealt with its indigenous past, [and] here we are throwing in the African now. Oh my God, too much information—overload, overload. A lot of people were uncomfortable

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These group differences does not imply that it is non-issues. Two months prior to the opening of the Mexico exhibit, a commentator close to the exhibit observed that, from the outset, the exhibit was either a steering committee for the exhibit or MFACM key staff and half African American. They provided an invaluable source of ideas, differently, a buy-in from their communities. The exhibit was collegial, but also somewhat cautious, with guarding their territory.

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It was not going to be a popular show to some extent, we don't talk about. If you want to get people nervous, talk about skin color. You can talk about it to a Mexican family's home and talk about it to a Mexican family's home and talk about it to a Mexican family's home. They do not like talking about it. It is not a problem because it becomes racism in our own country. It is not a problem because it becomes racism in our own country. So we would be hypocritical if we did not talk about it. Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Cubans don't like talking about it. They do not like talking about it. They do not like talking about it. Well, we are the bad guy. Well, we are the bad guy. Well, we are the bad guy. Mexico is a country that has never dealt with its indigenous past. So, if being dark is bad, being light is bad. Mexico has not dealt with its indigenous past, and the African now. Oh my God, too much. A lot of people were uncomfortable

with that in the Mexican community. In fact, some people called me up and told me so. (Tortolero interview 2006)

These initial responses point to the different perceptions and cultural stakes that African Americans and Latinos have in relation to such issues as language, culture, and skin color; the historical experiences of slavery, colonization, or immigration; and continuing patterns of exclusion/inclusion vis-à-vis mainstream American society.

Revising historical interpretations of identity, culture, and tradition can be a potent source of contention, as well as a bond of commonality. The early concerns voiced about the nature of this exhibit raise more general questions about the willingness of ethnic cultural organizations to challenge or transcend the very boundaries of group identity that they have helped forge. Despite the initial concerns expressed about the MFACM's exhibit, *The African Presence in Mexico* was a great success. The committee work paid off, and the buzz generated by the exhibition in both the Mexican and African American community got louder as the exhibition went on.

People would come to me and hug me and kiss me and say, "Thank you. I'm African American, Mexican. It's about me. And it's about time somebody did something with this issue." It's one of the nicest things that happened with this whole show. In the arts world you never hear the word[s] "Thank you." I mean, people say, "The show's great," "The show looks good," [or] "It sucks"—whatever. But they hardly ever say thank you. (Tortolero interview 2006)

By the time the Chicago exhibition closed, an estimated seventy-two thousand people had attended. The MFACM estimated that 58 percent of the audience had been African American, many of whom came to Pilsen and to the museum for the first time. The diverse audience-building potential of this show will be further tested as it travels to at least ten other institutions through 2010. Tortolero reports, "It's the first show ever to travel to an African American museum, a Latino Museum, a major museum in the United States, and to go Mexico. A smaller panel show is being constructed to travel to libraries and schools." An extensive bilingual catalog that includes an in-depth history of Africans in Mexico and reproductions of featured works was published by MFACM to accompany the exhibition. The launching of this exhibit provides a glimpse of the courage and mutual respect such projects must engender if they are to succeed. It also shows one particular dilemma faced by ethnic cultural organizations that have defined part of their mission around the promotion of a singular ethnic identity. There is a clear value in giving voice to a group that



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has been ignored by mainstream cultural organizations. There is value in creating programs that expand understanding by outsiders of a group's identity, cultural traditions, and experiences. But there is also a delicate balance to be maintained between the projects of strengthening internal social bonds and of giving recognition to complex, internal differences within an ethnic or pan-ethnic community. This is a challenge that is particularly characteristic of ethnic organizations as they seek to set the record of cultural representation straight, and it is the subject of the next organization to be discussed, which has its focus on inter-group relations within the multiple Asian communities of Seattle.

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ne impact and tensions that accompany  
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1 community? (Bunch 2005, 52)

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## CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on a range of cultural organizations that have been attempting to diversify the arts—from expanding the traditional artistic canon to bringing in new voices, perspectives, art forms, and organizational practices that will attract and engage new participants. The realization that there is no single strategy or one-time effort that will help build a more diverse group of cultural participants became clear in the course of our research as we investigated a variety of organizations and cultural forms. If there are general lessons to be learned from the wide range of practitioners we interviewed and organizations we studied, including those highlighted in this chapter, they include some of the following insights:

- There must be an understanding that an institutionalized diversity project is a multifaceted, never-ending process that needs to permeate all aspects of an organization’s culture and practices. It needs to be renewed and refreshed in order to stay alive and dynamic, and it can disappear if it is not given priority and nurtured.
- There must be recognition that diverse audiences are, in fact, diverse in their interests and tastes. There is no one-size-fits-all formula that will attract them. Reaching different audiences that are characterized not only by race and ethnicity but by social class, age,

nationality, longevity of residence in the United States, language, and different histories of cultural participation will require different kinds of programming and niche marketing.

- There must be a willingness on the part of cultural organizations to cede some of their control and expertise by giving people real opportunities to take ownership in the production of culture—in other words, making it possible for people to become more engaged in the processes of cultural planning, presentation, and promotion of activities, performances, and exhibitions from the beginning. Participation—especially sustained participation—is built on deeper kinds of engagement than simply being the recipient of cultural products.
- There must be a willingness to take risks by producing exhibits, performances, and programs that have meaning and relevance to participants, even if these are emotionally challenging and potentially controversial. Although there is little general proclivity in American society to address such difficult social issues as racism and inequality, many cultural organizations have drawn participants to provocative programs on these topics because they allow for new modes of understanding and new possibilities for dialogue and communication. Newcomers to the arts want relevance and meaningful connections to their lives; this is one of the most powerful incentives to cultural participation.

Diversifying the arts is therefore much more than the recognition that there is cultural richness in plural perspectives and representations. It is more than a targeted strategy to bring in new participants for a blockbuster program or event. It is a long-term project that holds out the promise of transforming the meaning and relevance of cultural organizations in the lives of Americans of all backgrounds and in making culture a more central component in public discourse and civic participation.