

**NEW ENGLAND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
CURATORS' PROFESSIONAL AFFINITY GROUP
REGIONAL REPORTS
(2007-2009)**

**CurCom Board Meeting
at the
American Association of Museums
Annual Conference
Philadelphia, PA
2009**

**NEW ENGLAND MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
CURATORS' PROFESSIONAL AFFINITY GROUP**

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AUGUSTA, MAINE

Workshops and Conference Presentations

In June 2008, the Curators' PAG sponsored a daylong workshop entitled, "What Every Curator Should Know, Part II: Curating in the 21st Century." Designed as a follow-up to Part I held in 2006, this workshop focused on three core responsibilities: collections planning, exhibitions and program planning, and publications. In an effort to attract and involve more art curators, the workshop was held at the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts. Nicholas Capasso, Curator of the Decordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Katherine French, Director of the Danforth Museum of Art, and Carole Anne Meehan, Curator of the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, offered a lively panel discussion on "Animating the Museum with Contemporary Art." Ellen Dyer, Director of Education and The Center for the Study of Early American History at Montpelier, the General Henry Knox Museum in Thomaston, Maine and Virginia Anderson, Assistant Curator of American Art at the Harvard Art Museum, shared recent successes in publishing collections and exhibit catalogs. The day wrapped up with thought-provoking discussions on collections planning and the ever-changing role of the curator. Approximately 50 people participated in the workshop.

Another daylong workshop is planned for June 29th focused on "Advocating for a Strong Curatorial Program in Today's Economy." Hosted by the Museums of Old York in York, Maine, the intent of the workshop is to demonstrate how collections can increase the visibility of museums, attract new audiences and memberships, and promote grant funding and collaborations. John Mayer, Curator of Maine Historical Society, will

discuss “Revenue Versus Ethics: Are they Compatible.” Jackie Calder, Curator of Vermont Historical Society, and Dr. Paula Work, Registrar at Maine State Museum, will report on progress made with recent IMLS Connecting to Collections Statewide Planning Grants. Participants will also hear from Scott Stevens, Director of the Museums of Old York, about his views on what he wishes his curator was doing, from a Director’s perspective. Tracy Quimby, Director of Education for Victoria Mansion in Portland, Maine, will report on a successful city-wide program, *The Big Read*, which relied on the collection of an historic house museum and collaborations with local organizations.

The Curators’ PAG sponsored a business lunch at the 2008 New England Museum Association annual conference in Warwick, Rhode Island. Ron Potvin, Assistant Director & Curator, John Nicholas Brown Center in Providence, Rhode Island, led a stimulating discussion on the evolving role of the curator.

University Products Fellowship

The Curators’ PAG, with support from University Products, continues to provide a \$300 stipend for new curators to attend NEMA’s annual conference. The scholarship covers the cost of registration and is offered on a competitive basis to a curator who has worked in the field for less than five years and works for an institution with an annual budget of less than \$250,000.

Some News from around the Region

- All New England states have either started or recently completed the IMLS Connecting to Collections: Statewide Planning Grant
- Maine Historical Society in Portland reopened the Alida Carroll and John Marshall Brown Library, completing a 2-year, \$9.5 million renovation and expansion
- Maine State Museum in Augusta opened a new permanent exhibit *At Home in Maine*
- The Williams College Museum of Art in Massachusetts (and former Curator Deborah Rothschild) won the award for Best Show in a University Gallery for *Making it New: The Art and Style of Sara and Gerald Murphy*, awarded by the International Association of Art Critics
- Massachusetts Historical Society was awarded a grant of \$150,000 from the national Historical Publications and Records Commission to digitize the Adams Papers control file, a two-year project
- Tuoro Synagogue Foundation has laid off all staff and ceased operations, due to differences with its major funder
- The Washburn-Norlands Living History Center in Livermore Falls, Maine will re-open in June, one year after a devastating fire destroyed the barn. Plans are to rebuild the barn in 2010. They have just completed a major post-disaster recovery and re-housing of the textile collection.
- Massachusetts is one of the two pilot states for the CoStEP (Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness) program. This project is intended to create a statewide disaster preparedness plan for cultural resources involving the cultural and emergency management communities regarding disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The plan will ensure an ongoing dialogue between these communities that fosters mutual understanding and coordination. In March 2008, librarians, archivists,

museum professionals and emergency managers gathered for the first in a series of meetings to implement *COSTEP* in Massachusetts. The documents resulting from that meeting and subsequent meetings have been posted on the COSTEP Wikipage, which may be accessed at <http://costepinma.pbwiki.com>. NEMA director Kate Viens and Curator PAG co-chair Andy Grilz are both members of the COSTEP development committee. Outreach and education programs are currently in development, and the towns of Lexington and Lancaster, Massachusetts have been identified as the first test sites for project implementation.

- NEMA responded strongly to the announcement that Brandeis University decided to capitalize and sell the collections held by the university's Rose Art Museum. Valued at approximately \$350 million dollars, the collection would be sold to defray the University's operating expenses. Public outcry to the plan, particularly from the museum community and alumni of Brandeis had been vociferous. Founded in 1961, The Rose Art Museum collection contains significant holdings in post-War American art including iconic works by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Willem DeKooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and numerous others. NEMA director Kate Viens drafted an open letter addressing the controversial decision, requesting the Massachusetts Attorney General investigate the legality of the plan. While Brandeis University Provost Marty Krauss claims in an April 17, 2009 letter to the Brandeis Board of Trustees that the "Rose Art Museum will remain a museum," the University continues to take steps to dismantle the institution, according to the Rose Art Museum Board of Overseers. The NEMA response can be viewed at <http://www.nemanet.org/roseagletter.htm>.

Regional Reports
2007
CurCom Board Meeting
AAM Annual Conference
Denver Colorado

NEW ENGLAND REPORT

RONALD POTVIN – JOHN NICHOLAS BROWN CENTER, BROWN UNIVERSITY

The New England Curators, working with the New England Museum Association, have maintained an active and lively schedule of professional development and education. At the 2006 NEMA conference in Hartford, Connecticut, Curators were represented well in sessions ranging from “Material Culture of the Baby Boomer Generation,” curatorial ethics, and several sessions on exhibits and historic house museums. Also, a workshop at the conference posed the question, “So You Want to be a Curator,” and provided career development and networking advice to newcomers to the profession. The NEMA curators 2007 spring workshop, titled “Maritime Culture and Material History: A Curator’s Guide to the Artifacts and Heritage of Sea & Shore,” will help museums to examine more closely the maritime material culture in their own collections and to uncover new and deeper meanings from these artifacts.