This study examines *This, and my Heart*, an community based art project by Lynne Yamamoto that incorporated archival materials. This exhibition was part of the Art ConText partnership, a collaborative artist residency program between the Rhode Island School of Design Museum and Providence Public Library in Providence, Rhode Island. The study evaluates how this project engaged the community, accomplished the goals of the participating institutions, and provided opportunities for learning through interviews and examination of documentation about the exhibition project. Themes including “Serving the Community,” “Collaboration,” and “Incorporation of Archival Materials” are discussed.

Headings:

- Museum-library relations -- Case studies
- Manuscripts -- Exhibits and displays
- Rhode Island School of Design. Museum of Art
- Providence Public Library
- Yamamoto, Lynne, 1961-
ARCHIVAL MATERIALS EXHIBITED IN AN ART MUSEUM: A CASE STUDY OF MUSEUM-LIBRARY COLLABORATION

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
August, 2002

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, demands have increased on cultural institutions to justify their purpose in a society that demands accountability. In response to questions regarding their value, museums and other historical repositories are shifting their attention away from the internal concerns of the long-term accumulation of historical artifacts and focusing on providing services to the public. In their efforts to engage communities, these repositories have sought alliances with similar institutions to reach beyond their traditional roles and capitalize on each other’s strengths. This research project is a case study to determine in what ways collaborative exhibition projects between artists and cultural repositories are effective methods of serving the surrounding community. *This, and my Heart*, an art project by Lynne Yamamoto, part of the artist residences sponsored by Art ConText, at the Rhode Island School of Design [RISD] Museum of Art in Providence, Rhode Island, was examined to see what aspects of the project successfully engaged the community. This case study also investigated whether the use of archival materials provides effective formal and informal learning opportunities.

This artist residency and subsequent installation at the RISD Museum was part of the larger Art ConText partnership between the museum and Providence Public Library and its efforts to reach out to the diverse society surrounding their cultural institutions. The case study considered how Yamamoto’s incorporation into her artwork of historical
diaries from the Rhode Island Historical Society and Brown University’s John Hay Library alongside the journals of contemporary girls enhanced the impact of the exhibition. The result of this research offers insight into how museums, historical societies, and libraries can work together with artists to inform the public about the past in the context of the present. Through qualitative interviews and examination of documentation about the exhibition, this research project assesses the effectiveness of this project and offers guidelines for future endeavors.
Description of Art ConText and Lynne Yamamoto’s *This, and my Heart*

Initiated in 1998, Art ConText is a project bringing together the talents and assets of the RISD Museum and the Providence Public Library. This institutional partnership has been granted funding by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Institute of Museum & Library Services [IMLS], and the National Endowment for the Arts. Each institution brings a tradition of public service into this collaborative project. In 2001, IMLS awarded the Providence Public Library the National Award for Library Service in recognition for their “extraordinary service to the community.”¹ The purpose of Art ConText is to expand this outreach by “bringing art and reading programs to communities throughout Rhode Island.”²

The Art ConText partnership has employed artist residencies as the primary means of connecting with their surrounding multicultural society. These residencies are a collaborative effort involving contemporary artists, RISD students, staff at the two cultural institutions, and the community. The relationships fostered among the nationally recognized artists, the RISD students, and local residents are intended to stimulate public awareness of the museum and the library.³ Artists are given the freedom to define what community they want to interact with and creative autonomy over the work of art produced. Since the first residency in 1998, several different groups have cooperated with the resident artists to formulate artwork. Among the organizations that have
participated are The Diabetes Foundation of Rhode Island, Joslin Community Development Corporation, Hasbro Children’s Hospital, and several local schools.\textsuperscript{4} Artists involved in the Art ConText program have produced a variety of creative installations. Photographs, paintings, videos, collage, sculpture, and other media have been used during the residencies to create the artwork. Working with their community partners, the artists have addressed a variety of topics including identity, ethnicity, history, illiteracy, nature, and disease. The first residency with Jerry Beck resulted in the transformation of a 1974 Providence Public Library book mobile into “Wheels of Wonder”, a traveling interactive bus that serves the local community.\textsuperscript{5} Another artist, Ernesto Pujol, incorporated books and objects from the public library collections in his installation to explore the purpose of libraries and museums within society.\textsuperscript{6}

Lynne Yamamoto’s residency was the fifth in the series conducted during the Art ConText project and it lasted from January 8 to April 30, 2000. The artist worked with six RISD students during their winter session, primarily researching the diaries of young women from the nineteenth and early twentieth century held at The Rhode Island Historical Society and John Hay Library of Brown University. For her community, Yamamoto selected a small group of young women from Mount Pleasant High School. The artists spent about six weeks with the girls, helping them create their own journals as a contemporary parallel to the historical manuscripts. She also taught them about photography during her workshops, having the high school students take portraits of each other. The research, writing, and interactions culminated with an installation at the RISD Museum the first week in March. After the exhibit was installed, some of the Mount Pleasant students conducted workshops at local public library branches for children.\textsuperscript{7}
The resulting exhibition by Lynne Yamamoto comprised three major components. On one wall, Yamamoto displayed oval glass frames she had etched with passages from the historical diaries. An exhibition case containing the actual manuscripts was positioned just below the frames. Silhouette self portraits of the artist flanked either side of the inscribed items. On the opposing wall, the portrait photographs of the high school girls were presented, above a case with their contemporary journals. In the middle of the room, Yamamoto placed a rug with an old organ, whose top had been converted to accommodate objects. The organ and museum artifacts placed inside were inspired by the historical diary entries and issues faced by women like the suffrage movement. Laminated pages of passages, from both the contemporary and historical diaries were available in the gallery for visitors. A comment book was also made available for input and most of the pages were filled with drawings by the end of the exhibition.8
Literature Review

The case study of Lynne Yamamoto’s *This, and my Heart* involves three exhibition issues: the demands on cultural institutions to serve their communities, the collaboration between separate institutions, and the incorporation of archival materials into artists’ installations. The library science and museum studies literature frequently emphasizes exhibitions as a means of reaching out to communities, providing opportunities for learning that are fundamental to the institution’s mission. Public programming advice for museums, libraries, and archives advocates exhibitions as a means of attracting and interacting with the average citizen. Organizations, most notably the IMLS, have highlighted the contributions of libraries, museums, and archives alone and in collaboration to the education of society. This focus reflects a changing philosophical attitude within cultural institutions, where professionals have questioned the traditional methods of authoritative presentation of materials to their audience and sought interpretations that are more inclusive.

Serving Communities

The focus on responsiveness to the community, beyond the traditional tasks of collecting, preserving, and studying artifacts, is most evident in the literature on museum exhibitions. Numerous articles and monographs explain the shift in museums from isolated storage warehouse for artifacts to an active center concentrating on public service. Stephen Weil’s, writing for the *Daedalus* issue on America’s museums, cites
two factors causing this focus on serving the world outside of the institution, economic necessity and evolving professional principles. Both Weil and Marlene Chambers distinguish the concentration on public service exemplified in the American Association of Museums [AAM], through its literature and accreditation standards. Established in 1998, the AAM’s Museums & Community Initiative has underscored the community responsibilities of museum and the importance of responding to the public’s changing needs. AAM’s President and CEO Edward J. Able, Jr. has said “Every museum takes its own approach to this civic role, but the times demand that museums take this responsibility seriously as a core value.” Other museum professionals, including Edmund Barry Gaither and Rex Ellis, have made a point of acknowledging that cultural institutions were created by the public to serve the community and that their exhibits should be developed within the context of the surrounding environment. The Commission on Museums for a New Century also reinforces the importance of exhibits to fulfilling the museums’ mission to educate the public.

Libraries, over the past few decades, have realized the importance of exhibitions in supporting their community service mission. Both the American Library Association and Association of Research Libraries have conducted surveys in the past two decades to provide examples of exhibit policies and procedures in their efforts to confer authority on this facet of library activity. Journals and books advocate for increasing the profile and formal support for exhibits, highlighting their potential to raise an institution’s visibility and significant impact on public education. Anne Tedeschi contends that “an exhibition program can be a major strategy in attracting the attention and reflecting the interests of a library’s natural community, for presenting the image the institution…as a community
hub, as an information resource, as a source for continuing education and cultural enrichment, or, all of these together.”17 In her comments on a visual art exhibition series at a branch of the San Diego Public Library, Director Anna Tatár points out how this program has engaged people with the library in a new way and contributed to the cultural underpinning of the community.18

For archives and manuscript collections, the preservation and security issues surrounding display of unique documents and objects often overshadow the outreach aspects of an exhibit program. Despite this, exhibits are acknowledged as a means of arousing public interest in their holdings, expanding their audiences, and raising community awareness of their cultural heritage.19 Albert H. Leisinger, Jr. conceives exhibits as drawing the community in so that “the word archives does become for them not just a word buried in Webster’s dictionary but a part of their active vocabulary.”20 Archives and manuscript collections traditionally collect and preserve the documents of local organizations and individuals, materials that promote connections with the neighboring community. The Society of American Archivists Basic Manual Series addresses exhibits alongside the other major functions integral to the institution’s mission.21 More recently, Joan Rabins has encouraged archivists to employ exhibits in their efforts to attract new patrons and illuminate their institution’s position within the wider intellectual and cultural society.22 James G. Bradsher and Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler also advocated exhibit programs, saying “no other aspect of public programs reaches so many people or touches them in such a manner that graphically illustrates the goals and contributions of archival institutions.”23

While the ideological focus on involving the community is a significant factor in
the development of exhibits, it is complemented by the economic realities faced by cultural institutions. Funding for exhibits, whether from public or private resources, is increasingly tied to a museum, historical society, library, or archives’ ability to demonstrate their positive impact on the public. Exhibits are a means of responding to these demands because they are “an effective means of teaching visitors what museum curators, archivists, and librarians do, how they do it, and why they rely on the public for assistance, donations, and financial support.”24 Statistics collected by the AAM have indicated that endowment funds have decreased as a source of income and that museums must find other external means of support.25 The IMLS, a major source of program grants for cultural institutions, has prioritized the support of projects that satisfy people’s desire for information and edification.26 Weil’s study of museums points out that grants, corporate sponsorship, governmental assistance and even tax-exempt status are based on an institution’s ability to attract and benefit an audience through their exhibitions and programs.27 The San Diego Public Library has attracted new philanthropists to give money, books, and other library donations during the tenure of its art exhibit program.28 Joan Rabins likewise identifies exhibits as a means of attracting potential donors of manuscripts and other paper collections to archives.29

Collaborations

The literature on exhibitions also highlights how the advance of non-traditional beliefs and economic demands has strengthened the need for collaborative efforts among cultural institutions. Cultural institutions have realized that collaborations provide opportunities to innovate and satisfy a wider public interest. Sharing knowledge and expertise allows museums, libraries, and archival collections to expand on their standard
techniques. In a recent speech, Robert S. Martin observed that the distinctions between collection-based cultural institutions are blurring and collaboration “is not so much a joined at the hip partnership, but a recognition of intersecting nodes of interest, activity, and mission.” He further suggests that “collaboration is emerging as the strategy of the 21st century” and the similar values of supporting public learning and providing trusted content held by museums, libraries, and archives facilitates their working together.

Museum studies have taken the initiative in exploring collaboration between social agencies. Scholars have discovered that working in tandem with other cultural institutions broadens the scope of their programs and builds momentum for more original ideas. The AAM advocates employing alliances with a varied range of organizations and individuals to reach the public. In discussing the results of a “think tank” on interdisciplinary collaboration sponsored by the Museum Loan Network, MLN’s director Lori Gross posits that the challenges and complexity of contemporary society require the varied outlooks and talents supplied by collaborative projects. As long ago as 1984, the Commission on Museums for a New Century recommended the shared approach as the primary means of realizing the museum’s educative mission. Furthermore, museum literature discusses the difficulties inherent in working with others on public programs, including exhibits. Organizations involved with inter-institutional projects are required to transform their traditional methodology, be imaginative, and confront practical obstacles. Howard Taylor of the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts has said, “Collaboration is very hard work” and that efforts must be made to infuse it into all aspects of an institution’s environment.

In library science literature, the exhibit is perceived as an opening for
collaboration with other cultural institutions. Libraries have established practices of
collaborating with one another through interlibrary loans, shared cataloging systems, and
cooperative collection development agreements. In their efforts to reach out to similar
public associations, libraries are employing exhibits as a means of expanding on the
tradition of library cooperation. Hikmet Doğu’s account of a display of the Marriott
Library artists’ books collection at an off-site partner institution demonstrates that joint
efforts provide an opportunity to broaden and diversify the public supporting and
interacting with the materials.38 Showcasing local artists from the community in a public
library exposes their work to a different audience and fosters connections with other
neighborhood cultural events.39 An exhibit may even spur collaboration; the Louisville
Free Public Library received offers to partner with other organizations on projects
following their successful Gutenberg Millennium Exhibition.40

Partnerships between archives and other groups for exhibits have been
increasingly promoted as the scholarship about the field has developed. Gail Farr
Casterline’s manual identifies the opportunities for career experience and strengthened
relationships afforded in producing an exhibit.41 The inherent prospects for interaction
with other institutions is another recognized benefit of mounting exhibits.42 In a
monograph on public relations in archives, Philip F. Mooney instructs archivists “to think
outside their box, considering interrelationships with organizations that share their
mission to enrich the community’s cultural life” and that “by cultivating associates in the
arts, historical, and other cultural communities, you will uncover new opportunities for
publicizing your archives”.43
As a result of diminishing resources, organizations are increasingly compelled to work together now and into the future. Grant agencies have established funding programs targeted at supporting these inter-institutional projects. The priorities of the IMLS National Leadership Grants focus on projects that enhance “interoperability of library and museum collections…strengthen long term relationships between museums and community organizations…develop, document, and disseminate model programs of cooperation between libraries and museums.”

The Report of the Commission on Museums for a New Century highlights the economic benefits and mutual enrichment of joint endeavors, consolidating their respective resources to realize more inclusive events than would be possible alone. Laurel G. Bowen and Peter J. Roberts’ study of exhibits in academic libraries asserts that collaboration promotes the value of the libraries’ work to corporate sponsors and administrators. The increased exposure of archival or manuscript materials in exhibits helps institutions discover additional avenues for fundraising.

**Artists’ Incorporation of Archival Materials**

While the research supporting analysis of cultural institutions fostering relationships with the community and other organizations through exhibits is sufficient, the information on artists incorporating archival materials in their installations is limited. In his discussion of exhibits in archives, Kenneth W. Duckett emphasizes the need for aesthetic quality in the presentation of materials but does not suggest consulting an artist. Alan Brody acknowledges the partnership between artists and museums addresses the issues of creativity, productivity, post-modernism, and diversity. Moreover, the think tanks sponsored by the MLN proposed that artists provided a way to
make institutions more inviting and increase the accessibility of their collections to the public.\textsuperscript{50}

A few artists have been examined with regard to their inclusion of manuscripts and other artifacts in their work. The most recent documented exhibition of this type of artistic expression was the 1999 group show “To the Rescue: Eight Artists in an Archive,” based on the photograph collections of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). Contemporary artists were asked to create projects based on their explorations into the archives and their subsequent creations either included JDC documents or were supplemented by the archival materials that serve as inspiration.\textsuperscript{51}

One of the participating artists, Fred Wilson, is known for his inclusion of historical manuscripts and other artifacts in his artwork. Wilson has culled historical societies, libraries, and archives for documents and objects that challenge public perceptions of history. As part of the Artist and the Community series of SECCA (Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art), in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, he used historical records to illustrate the lives of African-Americans in the reconstructed village of Old Salem.\textsuperscript{52}

Fred Wilson’s “Mining the Museum” in 1992 was a collaborative partnership between The Contemporary and the Maryland Historical Society, similar to the exhibit being studied in this project.\textsuperscript{53} The exhibit’s catalog serves as the most comprehensive examination of an artist employing archival materials in a museum exhibit, complete with interviews, visitor surveys, and other research on how Wilson’s installation of the historical society’s records impacted the community.

Summary

The themes of community service, collaboration, and the creativity of artists’
support the literature’s assessment of exhibitions like Lynne Yamamoto’s installation at RISD. Scholars examining cultural institutions seek to determine the best methods available for establishing connections with those groups and individuals whom they are trying to serve. Whether in a museum, library, or archive, the emphasis on the educative and financial considerations in the discussion of exhibiting artifacts indicates the paramount importance being placed upon engaging the public. Exhibits, especially those involving a partnership between separate cultural institutions, have become the means of advocating for an organizations’ significance and place within a community. The literature, while acknowledging the difficulties and complexities of collaboration between organizations, asserts that the results from these efforts are increasingly valuable to all involved. In limited resources available on artists incorporating archival materials into exhibits, their repurposing of artifacts into aesthetic installations is portrayed as bolstering the inclusion of new and underserved members into the community’s social heritage. By incorporating archival materials into contemporary exhibits, artists provide an innovative opportunity for diverse modern audiences to connect with history.
Methodology

This research project employed case study methodology in order to determine what qualities of a collaborative exhibition with archival materials engage the community. The effectiveness of the exhibit was measured through a combination of interviews and document analysis. Open question interviews were conducted with staff members who worked with Lynne Yamamoto during her Art ConText residency. These inquiries lasted approximately forty minutes and participants were given the opportunity to make further comments about the project. The first telephone interview was conducted with David Henry, Art ConText Project director at the RISD Museum. Interviews with Kathyellen Bullard, Assistant Director, Neighborhood & Family Services at the Providence Public Library and the Art ConText Project Coordinator Stephen Oliver followed. An email interview was performed with Rick Stattler from the Rhode Island Historical Society because the previous interviewees designated him as individual most directly involved with the exhibit of historical diaries from their collections.

By studying the responses of those individuals directly involved with the exhibit, the case study approach yielded significant insights into how the collaborators sought to enlighten the community. Interviewees were asked about their individual reactions to the project, the effects of the inclusion of archival materials in the installation, and how their work related to the institutions’ mission to serve the public. The interviews were analyzed for themes concerning the exhibit development process, the goals of the
participating institutions, and what elements contributed to learning opportunities for the community. Since the results of this research project should give guidelines to professionals involved in future collaborative projects directed toward their surrounding communities, it is appropriate to include the experiences of the professional staff in the analysis.

The data gathered from these inquiries was complemented by the examination of text and web documentation about *This, and my Heart*. These documents included the online transcription of an interview with Lynne Yamamoto, wall text panels produced to accompany the installation, and local news articles regarding the exhibit. This study looked for patterns of phrases or words indicating how the exhibit provided opportunities for learning, whether it altered public perceptions of the archival resources available in the area, and if it impacted the institutions’ profile with the community. These documents characterize the experiences and opinions of the originator of the exhibit as well as the viewpoint of the audience she sought to reach. In examining the information provided to passive spectators at the installation, the study focused on what statements the artist and RISD staff selected for the public to focus on. The news articles represent the views about the work of cultural institutions from the perspective of the outsider, expanding the scope of the evidence.

This research strategy offered the most appropriate means of exploring the project as a model for future exhibits and is supported by the library science and museum studies literature. As stated by Laurel G. Bowen and Peter J. Roberts, “the exhibit’s kinship with creative artistic expressions makes it more difficult to evaluate than more traditional scholarship.” The qualitative approach measured results that are ascertainable upon
examination but not quantifiable. This follows the structure of other research, by Norman Morton, Mark-Elliott Lugo, and Hikmet Doğu, on library exhibits that focused on the experiences of individual institutions.\textsuperscript{56} Previous studies of museum exhibits generally select case studies to illustrate the various strategies designed to engage visitors as well.\textsuperscript{57}

The qualitative methodology allowed for in-depth exploration of the exhibit from several different perspectives. This research project considered the elements contributed by the producers, archival content, and public as advocated by Elaine Gurian, to ensure it measures learning opportunities.\textsuperscript{58} The semi-structured interviews were particularly suitable because the questions allow for elaboration and adapted queries in response to the answers. This technique is able to explore the narratives and perspectives of informants while capturing the nuances of the qualities particular to this type of exhibit. According to Gurian, the convictions of professionals involved in the creation process are indicative of a cultural institutions’ ability to relate to the community.\textsuperscript{59}

The data analysis of the exhibit’s documentation will help to balance the partiality of the interview replies with different messages about what elements of the joint effort engaged visitors. Memories of the participants may be incomplete and the written records will serve as a means of corroboration. The records will also provide a context to base some of the interview questions upon and augment the broader inquiries with specific details. The juxtaposition of documents produced by the museum against those written by local journalists will reveal divergence in the assessment of the qualities of the exhibit that hindered or aided its edification of the community.

This research approach is not without drawbacks, due in part to the historical
nature of this case study. Observations of visitors’ behavior in the exhibit measuring indicators of communication, conversation and flow would have provided an unobtrusive means of assessing how the public related to the artifacts. The reactions studied would not be influenced by the research activity. A survey of the visitors during the exhibit’s run would have been the preferred means of ascertaining community response.

Questionnaires given to a random sample of people who saw the installation would have increased the reliability of this research project. The difficulties, however, inherent in gathering and analyzing the large quantity of data required for significant conclusions within the short time frame afforded to the researcher would have been problematic. And though this case study relies on the narrative of those members of the community involved with the artist residency and installation, it does provide more specific information than the broad summaries resulting from a survey.
Discussion

Serving the Community

Assessment of Lynne Yamamoto’s residency in terms of its serving the surrounding community was complex, given the different interpretations of what the community was and the complicated nature of community based artwork. Not surprisingly, the analysis revealed that those specific people involved with the residency benefited more than the community at large. All of the materials I gathered agreed that the project reached out most successfully to the high school girls directly involved in the project. The residency gave the students a formal educational opportunity to observe the way an artist forms an installation, learn how to research primary materials, and discover their own creative talents. According to the interviewees, Lynne Yamamoto taught these young women about artistic expression, introduced them to manuscripts and other library materials they had not been exposed to prior to this experience, and encouraged their endeavors. Kathyellen Bullard emphasized the importance of the connection made with these girls during the residency, saying, “I know that they certainly got a lot out of it.”60 Newspaper coverage of the exhibition frequently highlighted their collaborative role in the project. In addition to the girls, David Henry noted that their families became a new audience for the museum following this experience.61

While this artist residency certainly reached the small group of Mount Pleasant High School girls, its connection with the RISD was less definitive. Interviews with
David Henry and Lynne Yamamoto indicated this project engaged only with those six students from RISD who worked directly with the artist. These interviewees said an interactive, mentoring relationship was formed between the RISD students and the artist that enabled her to show these students the complex creative process of formulating an installation artwork. While the affiliation with the participating students was beneficial, the project’s interaction with the broader school community was not significant. Henry posited that this lack of extension to the outside campus was due to weak communication between the museum staff and RISD faculty about what was occurring. Another part of this disengagement may have been the result of Yamamoto’s approach to her work. In her interview, the artist discusses her artistic and teaching practice as separate matters and admits that initially “it was very difficult to have the RISD students experience” the complex creative process she employs when formulating an installation. Stephen Oliver likewise noted this separation of activities and how the Art ConText goal of involving RISD was a challenge for Yamamoto. Since it was already demanding for the artist to integrate the six participating students into her artistic process, reaching out to the wider campus community would have been problematic.

The success of Lynne Yamamoto’s project in serving the larger Providence community was also limited. Both David Henry and Kathyellen Bullard mentioned that the audiences for Lynne Yamamoto’s project seemed narrow and they would have preferred that it connect with more of the general public. Henry attributed this lack of connection to the short time frame of this artist residency and posits that if she had been able to spend more time in the library, it may have fostered more involvement. Stephen Oliver also commented on the lack of time and limited opportunities for the Art ConText
staff to develop supplementary programming, such as arranging speakers from women’s
groups. Bullard observed that even though the artist worked with the students at a
neighborhood branch of the Providence Public Library, few of the library patrons seemed
aware of the residency. Yamamoto and the girls worked apart from the main public one
day a week for five weeks and consequently the broader community was not very
engaged in the artistic process. According to Kathyellen Bullard, increasing the visibility
of subsequent artist who chose to work in a branch increased public awareness and
connections to the project.

After the residency concluded, however, the high school students who benefited
most from the project were instrumental in attracting a broader audience. Some of the
girls conducted art workshops for children at several library branch locations around
Providence that connected with local patrons. This programming, according to Henry
and Bullard, promoted the exhibition to a wider community and helped strengthen the
affiliation between the museum and the library. In addition to the exposure provided by
the workshops, the high school students attracted publicity about their involvement with
Lynne Yamamoto’s residency and installation. The girls’ collaboration with Yamamoto
was profiled in local news articles at the beginning of the project and after the exhibition
opening. This, combined with the marketing efforts made by staff at each institution,
helped enhance awareness of the project. All of these observations indicate this project,
within a section of the community, engaged individuals and accomplished the principal
goals of the Art ConText program.

The evaluation of the art installation that resulted from Lynne Yamamoto’s
residency is similarly involved. According to the museum staff, the exhibition displayed
the tension between aesthetic elements and the collaborative character of the community-based artwork. In their interviews, the staff at the RISD Museum commented that the elements produced by the high school students were not effectively incorporated with Yamamoto’s work. Stephen Oliver said that “the girls’ work was exhibited respectfully but it didn’t integrate that much into the show.” Oliver expressed concern that this separation may have unintentionally endorsed the public perception that community art is not on the same level as other artists’ work in the museum. Oliver and Henry attributed this lack of unity primarily to the shorter time frame of the winter session residency. Each stated that if Lynne Yamamoto had been able to work on the project longer, she would have been able to achieve an aesthetic cohesion between the elements. The artist herself acknowledged that her previous collaborative pieces were removed from her own artwork and it was difficult to author the final product with the students’ contributions.

Interestingly, those outside of the museum did not mention the concerns about how the elements related aesthetically that the museum staff noted. In evaluating the installation, the other professionals interviewed expressed satisfaction with the project’s final outcome. Rick Stattler stated that the journals created by the high school students were “the most interesting aspect of the exhibit.” Kathyellen Bullard liked the literary aspect of the artwork and how this element connected with the students and the library. Aesthetic criticism about the integration of the girls’ contribution in this piece was absent from all of the news items about the exhibition. In articles announcing the local cultural activities, the installation of community-based art was given the same consideration and treatment as the other art shows.
Collaboration

The analysis of Lynne Yamamoto’s residency revealed insights concerning what elements influence the effectiveness of collaborative projects between cultural institutions. Reinforcing what I discovered in the literature about collaborations, the members of the Art ConText partnership discussed the need for organization. These interviewees talked about their part within the overall framework of the program and how other professionals involved contributed to its success. By defining their roles and understanding what was happening at their partner institutions, they were able to manage their efforts and use their resources effectively. According to the interviewees, one of the most valuable elements of the organizational structure at Art ConText was the position of program coordinator. David Henry and Kathyellen Bullard both mentioned that having personnel assigned to support the artist on a full time basis was important. Having one individual overseeing the logistics of the project allowed the other people involved to fulfill their own responsibilities and facilitated the collaborative process.

As with the importance placed on organization, having a common sense of purpose emerged as a reoccurring theme in the interviews with the Art ConText staff. All of the interviewees underscored the expectations their institution had for this program and collaborative focus of the project. They expressed an understanding that the success of the residency involved more than the resulting installation artwork and was part of a larger objective to reach out to the community. As the administrative leader of this program, David Henry advocated the clarification and commit to mutual goals as essential for success. He stated “you need to know that everybody’s working with the same goals in mind and if doesn’t quite get reached, that’s art, but you don’t want it to be
because someone was on a different train.” 81 The interviewees’ responses to a question about how this program affected their institution’s mission emphasized its contribution to building ties between the cultural institutions and with the wider community. At the library, the association provided innovative resources to the branches that supported ongoing efforts to inform and serve neighborhood residents. 82 The museum staff felt that Art ConText partnership, including Lynne Yamamoto’s residency, helped them to reach people outside of the museum with locally significant programming. 83

Communication was another component of the collaborative process cited repeatedly in the interview responses. The professionals involved in the Art ConText program stressed the necessity of communication between those involved in the residency and with the surrounding community. Stephen Oliver advised that this “interaction can inform the project so that you start out with a framework but you really allow for their voice in the project.” 84 Besides responding to public interest and input, the artist, staff, and other participants have to know what is occurring to facilitate the process and ensure those individuals appreciate expectations. Kathyellen Bullard remarked that Lynne Yamamoto was a good communicator with the librarians, which contributed to the residency’s going well. 85

While the collaboration between the Providence Public Library and RISD Museum worked well, the affiliation with the Rhode Island Historical Society was seen by some informants as ineffectual. Conflicting statements and other views expressed by all of the interviewees indicate a disconnection with this outside cultural institution. Lynne Yamamoto and the staff at RISD pointed out the instrumental contributions made by the historical society to the project. Yamamoto praised the Manuscripts Curator Rick
Stattler for introducing her to the historical diaries and compiling a directory to the collection, saying she was “indebted to the fine organization of the diaries and this directory because the idea of using this primary material may well have been unrealistic otherwise.”

David Henry concurred with the artist’s opinion about the importance of the Society’s collecting and cataloging these materials. In addition, the text panels at the exhibition accredited who held the diaries and thanked those individuals from the historical society involved in the project by name. Rick Stattler, however, conveyed dissatisfaction with how the role of the Rhode Island Historical Society was portrayed. He felt that the archival institution’s part in identifying, collecting, and caring for the diaries were obscured by the focus on the aesthetic aspects of these “found object[s]”.

The detachment of the Rhode Island Historical Society from the Art ConText partnership may have been the result of several factors. A lack of communication was demonstrated by the contradictory responses from the interviewees. Stephen Oliver thought the inclusion of the historical society emphasized the collaborative elements of the project and the manuscripts staff was pleased with their contribution. Rick Stattler, however, remarked that the staff was overwhelmed when Lynne Yamamoto and her students simultaneously researched the diaries; and further, the manner in which the primary sources were exhibited would not foster enduring interest in archival institutions.

The goals of Art ConText and the Rhode Island Historical Society were also disconnected. David Henry pointed out that collaborating with the historical society was not an aim of the project yet he expressed disappointment in their lack of interest in the exhibition. Stattler likewise separated involvement in this project from his institution’s
mission to collect, preserve, and share historical materials. The level of participation of the historical society in the project may have also been a factor. Stattler characterized his institution’s role as passive, removed from the development of the exhibition. Henry agreed saying, “the people from the historical society…just felt like they were doing their job and didn’t really embrace the project as much.” The development of supplemental programming may have diminished this lack of engagement in the Art ConText project by increasing the historical society’s involvement. Stephen Oliver even suggested the interest in planning associated events with the historical society but cited the short time frame as prohibitive to this idea. These observations signify that the Art ConText program and the Rhode Island Historical Society probably missed an opportunity to form new alliances with another local cultural institutions.

Incorporation of Archival Materials

Lynne Yamamoto’s residency and installation expanded the tradition of utilizing archival materials outside of their original purpose for historical research. Scholars examine manuscripts to understand the prevailing attitudes and experiences of the past in efforts to educate themselves and others about history. By incorporating the archival materials into her artwork, the artist creates a similar learning opportunity for a more diverse audience. In commenting on the inclusion of diaries in the exhibition, Kathyellen Bullard stated

It did remind me that archival materials which we tend to think of as research oriented could none the less be of interest and could really still speak to a young audience like teenagers. That was interesting that because something is classified as archival doesn’t mean that it isn’t of interest to a popular or wide audience.
The installation at the museum was able to increase community awareness about the local manuscript resources and its history. Stephen Oliver felt that the project forged a special connection between the institution and the history of the surrounding area. Rick Stattler said the exhibition “was certainly seen by an audience that was not generally familiar with manuscripts.”

Besides presenting the archival materials to the local public, the juxtaposition of the contemporary journals with the historical diaries offered a learning opportunity at the exhibition. The interviewees and an in-depth news article commented on how the passages displayed generated comparisons between the present and past, thereby fostering connections with local history. The museum staff agreed that visitors were informed about historical Providence through contrast with their contemporary society. A newspaper account of the exhibition remarked “since all of these women have a Providence connection, it is fairly tempting to make comparisons of these young women of today with those of yesteryear.” While these differences were instructive, the similarities of the girls’ diary passages also associated the visitors with the past.

Kathyellen Bullard pointed out the evolving circumstances did not alter the basic characteristics of young women and their aspirations.

Although generally supportive of the historic diaries’ inclusion in the This, and my Heart exhibition, assessment of the responses revealed different opinions concerning the method of presenting archival materials. The background and occupation of the professional corresponded with their reaction to the method of exhibition. The panels in the display cases included the name, date, and source information characteristic of art museum labels, only the laminated handout with diary transcripts provided limited details
of the manuscripts’ historical context. Interviewees accustomed to art installations praised how the aesthetic characteristics of the historic manuscripts were highlighted. Both museum representatives discussed the artist’s inscriptions of selected passages as the most elegant elements of the installation. Lynne Yamamoto saw the nineteenth and early twentieth century diaries as fascinating, beautiful objects. This artistic presentation was a departure from more traditional historical and literary interpretation of archival materials that received a mixed response from other observers. Rick Stattler expressed disappointment at the dearth of explanatory text about the manuscripts and it’s parallels with contemporary society. His dissatisfaction appeared to stem from his work at the historical society, where the emphasis is on historical interpretation and educational programming. Additional programming of lectures and other events to accompany the installation may have accomplished the same objectives while maintaining the artistic method of presentation. Literary explanations of the manuscripts were also eliminated by alternative, artistic approach in this exhibition. Kathyellen Bullard pointed out that the written word was still represented amid the focus on artistic expression. Perhaps the accessibility of the narratives on display compensated for the absence of literary explanations and consequently was less of a concern than limited historical interpretation.
Conclusion

As the previous discussion indicates, Lynne Yamamoto’s project was a complex undertaking that principally achieved the goals of the Art ConText program. The issues and challenges faced by those involved have offered guidelines for other cultural institutions working on future undertakings. This case study revealed that several elements contributed to the effective realization of a community-based art project incorporating archival materials. Initially, the commitment of personnel and resources to the project was necessary to ensure completion of all the component duties. The professionals directly occupied with the Art ConText program were instrumental in achieving the project’s objectives. As project director, David Henry was the standard-bearer advocating Yamamoto’s and other artists’ residencies to the community, the participating institutions, and those individuals whose involvement was supplementary. This type of exhibition required academic, administrative, logistical, planning, and neighborhood support and the full-time coordinator facilitated all of these components. Having individuals whose time was specifically dedicated to a program improved their ability to effectively complete these various tasks.

The complexity of Lynne Yamamoto’s project likewise required and achieved good communication among the participants and with the surrounding community. Communication during this project was considered very important by those interviewed, confirming the sentiments expressed in the literature review. Communication was a vital
facet of the entire program whether between those actively occupied in the process of creating the art, those ancillary institutions brought in for specific matters, or with the public this exhibition hopes to engage. Even when acknowledging the instances where disconnects occurred, as with the historical society and the faculty at RISD, the project’s overall interaction and response to feedback was successful. Those involved in the Art ConText program made adaptations based upon the lapses in communication, listened to the reactions from the surrounding community, and strengthened existing channels for information.

In addition, this study revealed that a significant part of communication involved the establishment of definitive goals that were understood by those participating. The goals of the Art ConText program were reasonable, innovative, and offered a challenge to the cultural institutions, artists, and other groups involved. Understanding these fundamental objectives of Lynne Yamamoto’s residency fostered enthusiasm among the constituents, particularly the students from Mount Pleasant High School. Developing strong support for program objectives assisted the staff in their efforts to realize the exhibition because each individual knew others were committed to the project. Having goals also encouraged those involved to sustain good communication over the course of the project.

Another important lesson that emerged during the analysis of this particular exhibition was the importance of access to archival materials. Most of the interviewees were unaware that the historical society had collected and cataloged the historical diaries. The Rhode Island Historical Society’s comprehensive cataloging project on the diary collection and their surrounding publicity initiatives raised public awareness. Because
the archival materials were readily available to the artist for research, it facilitated their use in the show and further expanded the community exposure. This residency showed how cultural institutions are capable to increase their knowledge of each other’s resources by involving a third party, the artist. The collaboration capitalized on the individual organization’s efforts and therefore expanded the cataloging beyond its original intentions.

Time was the only element that weakened the overall success of this project. The short time frame for Lynne Yamamoto’s residency constrained the staff’s ability to reach a wider audience and develop stronger partnerships with secondary organizations. Additional time would have provided more opportunities for relationships with the community and between institutions to grow. The development and execution of supplementary programming based on the installation subject was hampered by the lack of time, even though the interviewees thought it would make the project more inclusive. Moreover, the interaction of the artist with the RISD community, patrons at the neighborhood library branch, and the historical society may have been curtailed due to the pressure to complete the project quickly. Allocating longer periods of time for this type of endeavor in the future would enhance the ability of institutions to adapt and respond to the exhibition as it is formulated.
Notes

3. David Henry, interview by author, tape recording, 27 March 2002; and The RISD Museum, “Welcome to Art ConText.”
8. Ibid.
31 Martin, “Blurring the Boundaries.”
35 American Association of Museums, Museums for a New Century, 60-63.
36 Museums as Catalyst, 49-52.
37 Ibid., 52-53.
41 Archives & Manuscripts, 8.
“Funding Available for Museums.”


*Museums as Catalyst*, 30.

Ibid., 51-52.


See Appendix A for a list of several of the interview questions used by the author.


Ibid., 178-181.

Kathyellen Bullard, interview by author, tape recording, 5 April 2002.

Henry, interview.


Henry, interview.

Yamamoto, “Interview with the Artist.”

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Henry, interview; and Bullard, interview.

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Yamamoto, “Interview with the Artist.”

Rick Stattler, interview by author, Email, 8 May 2002.

Bullard, interview.

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The RISD Museum, “This, and my Heart” (exhibition text panels, 2000).

Stattler, interview.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

What advice would you give to a colleague about how to realize this type of exhibition or residency?

What were some difficulties you experienced?

If you had to do this exhibit or residency over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?

What was your first reaction to the completed exhibit?

Did the installation make you reconsider your ideas about the archival and library materials? How?

Did the artist’s use of the archival materials change your perception of them?

How did the inclusion of contemporary girls’ journals affect the exhibit?

How has this exhibit changed your definition of your institution and its mission?

Do you think this exhibit reached out to members of the community that had not been interested in manuscripts and other library artifacts before?

Can you remember any visitor anecdotes or interactions you observed during the installation that made a strong impression on you?

What did you like best about the exhibit? Least? Why?

Are there any other comments you would like to make?