

Ethnographic Research of the Museum of Vancouver (MOV): Critically Examining an Institutional Shift towards an Engagement-based Model



**Rachel Roy,
PhD Candidate in Museum Anthropology
University of British Columbia**

Overview of presentation

- ✧ Research Contributions
- ✧ Ethnographic Fieldwork Methodologies: Intersections
- ✧ Museum Ethnographic Findings at the Museum of Vancouver(MOV):
 - 1) MOV Paradigm Shift from 2008 onwards
 - 2)Embracing an Engagement-based Model: Effects on Collections Work
 - 3)Reflections on Tracing the Development of *All Together Now*, A Case Study

Research Contributions

- My research follows the disciplinary stream of critical museum anthropology that examines the 'behind the scenes' of how western museum institutions function

- Focus on the recent paradigm shift in 2007/2008 from the Vancouver Museum to the Museum of Vancouver (A deeper historical context is also considered)

Research Contributions

-My research lies both in **behind the scenes of the transition itself and how this transformation manifested itself** (i.e. case studies)

-How this contributes to a new paradigm manifesting in urban museums by thinking about the benefits, challenges, pitfalls and lessons learned for museums going through similar transitions

Fieldwork Methodologies

Ethnographer

- Staff Meetings
participant observation
- Collectors Show
participant observation
- Former & Current Staff
semi-structured
interviews
- Archival research



Fieldwork Methodologies

Museum Work

- Blog writing/photographer
- Museum Interpreter and Visitor Studies Work
- Museum Auxiliary Staff (Opening/Closing Museum, Front Desk)



Museum Ethnographic Findings at the Museum of Vancouver (MOV)

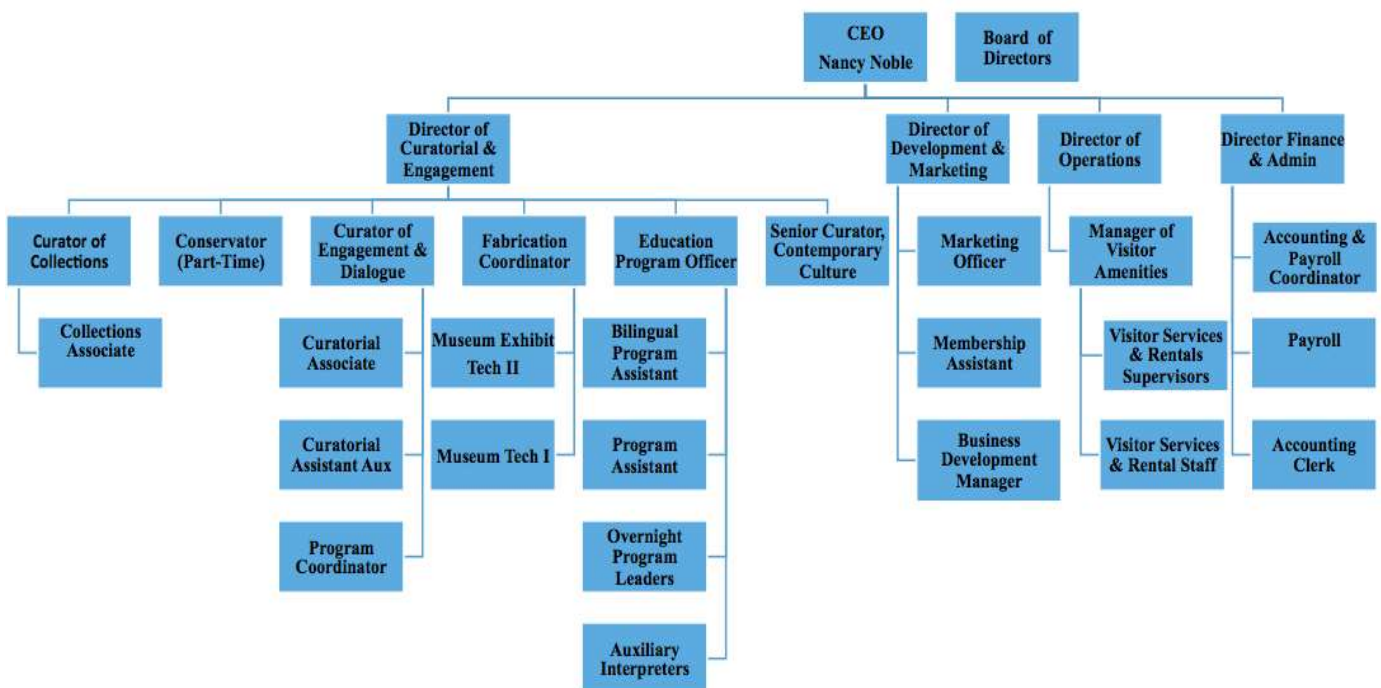
MOV Paradigm Shift from 2008 onwards

-Examined the institutional work behind the Re-envisioning and Rebranding of MOV:

1) Organizational Restructuring of Staff

2) Staff challenges, successes, tensions in this restructuring including its **effects on collections**

2015 MOV Organizational Chart



From a **Collections-based Model** to an **Engagement-based Model**

Nancy Noble, CEO (2005-2016) states:

“Some people may argue that the collections had been neglected but in fact when I got here there was almost nobody looking after the collections...this is a resource we need to use *to engage* the community...this is how we are going to tell the stories...so we actually have put more resources into the collections then before I got here...individual curators did that [before]but off the sides of their desks” (Roy, 2015: Interview Data)

Embracing an Engagement-based Model: Effects on Collections Work

- Conservation (minimized staff and work)**
- Collections Management Focus:**
 - Deaccessioning (Fiercer or not?)**
 - Accessioning and Digitization (Olympic Collection)**
- Curatorial: Embracing a Civic Museography**
- Repatriation (Engagement on their terms)**

Curatorial: Embracing a Civic Museography

“a form of curatorial action designed to identify and address issues of public concern and interest while seeking public participation and involvement”
(Gosselin, 2013: 21)



MOV's *Engagement Turn* (2008+)

- *Home Grown: Local Sustainable Food, 2010-2011
- *Bhangra.me: Vancouver's Bhangra Story, 2011-2012
- *Sex Talk in the City, 2013
- *Rewilding Vancouver, 2014
- *Our Future Homes: Creating a New Vancouver, 2016
- *All Together Now, 2016



Repatriation (Engagement on *their* terms)



In late 2013, MOV received a request from the Sts'ailes First Nation for the repatriation of the Sasq'ets [Sasquatch] mask and "was pleased and honoured to be able to follow through with the repatriation in 2014" (MOV, 2014: 28)

**All Together Now:
Vancouver Enthusiasts and Their Worlds
(June 23rd 2016-Jan.8th 2017)**

All Together Now explores the act of collecting, the collector's vision and the role collections play in building identity, public memory and social connections. The exhibition will explore the questions: *Why do people collect, and how do private collections touch public consciousness?*

Vancouverites were invited to submit their collections for inclusion in the exhibition. Although the collections have now been chosen for the exhibition, the public can still contribute photos of their own collections to be included on a projected wall of photo. *To submit your photo, share it on Twitter or Instagram with the hashtag #MyCollectionatMOV.*

All Together Now: Vancouver Enthusiasts and Their Worlds (June 23rd 2016-Jan.8th 2017)

All Together Now: Vancouver Collectors and Their Worlds features 20 beautiful, rare, and unconventional collections. In this exhibition both collector and collected are objects of study, interaction, and delight.

Collectors and their Collections

Angus Bungay: Action figures and toys

Art Lingren: Fly fishing lures and gear

David Moe: Prosthetics

Gabrielle Whiteley: Taxidermy

Gerry Parson: Juke Boxes and toasters

Harold Steves: Seeds

Imogene Lim: Chinese restaurant menus

Ken Stephens: Ramp walker toys

Kyle Seller: Pinball machines and arcade games

Lyanne Smith & Angus McIntyre: Transit memorabilia

Major James Matthews: Vancouver history

Marie Allen: Artificial eyes

Maurice Guibord: Expo '67 memorabilia

Melanie Talkington: Corsets

Nancy Bendsten: Chairs

Neil Whaley: Vancouver memorabilia

Rob Frith: Concert posters

Willow Yamauchi: Drag queen costumes

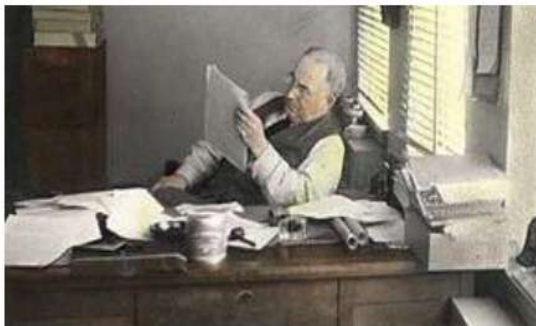
Yosef Wosk: Circus toys

Anonymous: Pocket watches

Tracing the Development of All Together Now

- 1) MOV staff brainstorming meeting
- 2) Accessioning a new collection: Categorizing, Culling, Organizing
- 3) Visiting potential collectors
- 4) Photoshoots with collectors and their collections
- 5) Design Team Meetings

Three Sources of Inspiration for the project (among others)



Major Matthews:
Vancouver's First Archivist

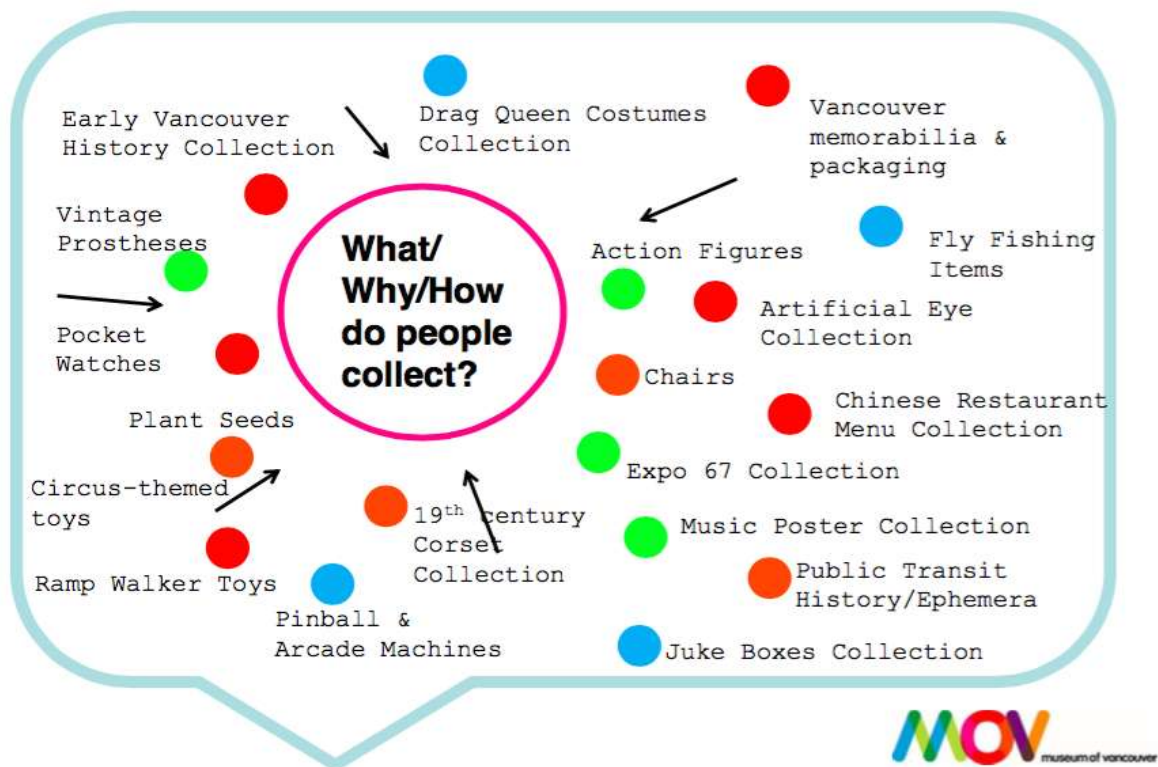


Interactivity embedded in design solutions



16th century
Cabinets of Curiosities

ATN Project Inquiry & Collections



Accessioning a new collection: Categorizing, Culling, Organizing



Visiting Potential Collectors



Collector Photoshoots



Photo taken by Rebecca Blissett

Design Team Meetings



Exhibition Tour and Sneak Peak with Collectors



What's Next? Conversations with the Public and Local Cultural Organizations on **Redefining** what an **Engaged form of Collecting** Means



The Result: MOV Collections Plan on what Vancouver-based collecting means moving forward

Acknowledgments

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Jillian Povarchook, Curatorial Associate

Greg Dreicer, Director of Curatorial and Engagement

Bruce Miller, Chair and Collections Committee member; Professor of Anthropology UBC

My PhD Committee:

Anthony Shelton, Director of MOA (Museum of Anthropology)

Carol Mayer, Head of Curatorial, MOA

Nicola Levell, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, UBC

Department of Anthropology & Museum of Anthropology UBC