Maori Cultural Heritage Preservation Project at The South Otago Museum

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Research Proposal

For the 2.5 million years in which humans have roamed the earth, we have unearthed various forms of evidence to dispute the events of our past. Arguably, the most important findings are the cultural materials we collect and preserve within the walls of the modern museum. Despite today’s technological expansion, the recent economic recession, and the overall inclination of today’s society to spend time on all things new and inventive, the public’s desire to visit and observe museums has remained unscathed. According to the American Alliance of Museums, the United States sees approximately 850 million museum visitors every year (AMA, 2013). This kind of attraction places an enormous value on cultural heritage, as well as the need for cultural preservation. In other words, museums are important to people because they shelter and protect our cultural values.

In this thesis, I will unite theoretical and applied perspectives. In particular, I will combine my knowledge derived from time spent working at a museum in New Zealand with my background in anthropology to discuss the importance of maintaining and protecting cultural heritage in a museum setting. In order to do this, I will focus on The South Otago Museum’s Maori Collection, where I spent time exploring and classifying local cultural material of the Maori people. This process required patience, diligence, and most of all, a firm understanding of modern curation procedures.

To effectively apply modern curation practices, it is first important to understand a museum’s purpose. Museums benefit all aspects of today’s society. First and foremost, museums exist to educate. Museums introduce both children and adults to a tangible and visual environment, where art, history, and science can transform from a mere idea into a
physical object. Museums offer visual aids and archaeological materials that enable people to make their own judgments about the past. Secondly, museums are essential to the world of research. As anthropologists Rothschild and Cantwell once wrote, “Some of the most critical values of our society may be seen in the organization and presentation of material” (Rothschild & Cantwell, 2006, p. 2). Research is an ongoing process, and to have tangible evidence allows for physical analysis and validation. Lastly, we must value and protect our cultural material for future generations of scholars. Each time a historically significant artifact is handled or examined, its condition is worsened. Because of this, it is imperative to implement correct museum procedures and guidelines. Throughout my thesis, I will apply what I learned at The South Otago Museum about running an ethically sound museum institute.

Overall, this thesis will largely concentrate on cultural artifact protection of the South Otago Museum’s Maori Textile Collection, of which I was able to audit and catalog. This work was done under the supervision of the head curator, Gary Ross, who is also on the Board of Directors at the South Otago Museum. Under his instruction, I was able to gain a unique perspective on Maori culture and specific procedures that are required when handling such Maori artifacts, including spiritual practices and obligations to New Zealand law.

In preparation for writing and conducting this senior project, I have the unique opportunity to work from Dunedin, New Zealand. Methodologically, this opportunity allows me to connect with other New Zealand museums, explore historical sites, and speak one-on-one with both indigenous Maori citizens and museum affiliates and scholars. In
addition, I will utilize books, journals, and other academic research that I may find throughout the Cal Poly Kennedy Library Website.
Annotated Bibliography


Although there are various museums that specifically focus on cultural minorities, there is no denying that museums are an invention of Western society. In this article, the author explores Christina Kreps “Liberating Culture” and questions her view of the modern museum. I will be looking at Krept’s view of what she terms “decontextualization”, or the disconnect between artifacts from their original cultures. This is a problem I was able to observe in some of New Zealand’s museums, despite their close proximity to various Maori tribes. Specifically, I’ll be looking at decontextualization of artifacts at The South Otago Museum, why it occurs, and what can be done to better unite Maori museums to Maori people.


This article argues that religious and spiritual practices of the Maori should be incorporated into museum collections, but shouldn’t be the overlying theme. Although religion is a historically sensitive topic, it’s important for curators to look at collections objectively and sensitively. One specific aspect of the article I will focus on is the step-by-step process that is required in the implementation of culturally sensitive materials. This includes storage requirements, usage of correct terminology,
ceremonial guidelines, and the handling of artifacts. I will be using this article as reference for a large portion of my thesis.


This article focuses on museum appeal and the importance of collection display with the involvement of new media. As technology becomes an increasingly major sector of modern society, it is important for museums to keep up with new advances as to avoid becoming dull and uninviting environments for learning. This book is outlined as a rough manual for curators to use, as it draws numerous examples from labs, broadcasting, festivals, and a number of other unexpected fields. The authors are two experienced curators who address a wide range of museum dilemmas under the installation of new media. The writing is not only relatable, but also instructive and concise.


This article reflects a unique perspective towards culture and its interpretation by anthropologists and educators. The author draws on the importance of second-guessing formal research techniques, a view that is uncommonly exercised in the academic realm. I wanted to include this article because it specifically looks at the “invention” of Maori Culture within the field of education. Hanson argues that the current understanding of Maori culture is less a reflection of who the Maori truly are as a culture than the western world’s invented understanding. Since much of the
research that encompasses Maori cultural research occurred around the same time of
Maori assimilation into “white life”, it is certainly reasonable to question our
perception of the Maori people.


   Many visitors to Maori Museums are international tourists. Because of this, it is
   important for curators to understand the most successful learning environments for
   such tourists. This article identifies five central tools used in successful New Zealand
   tourism and in the teaching of Maori culture. In my thesis, I will be using this article
   to link defined successful strategies to those we used at The South Otago Museum.

   In addition, I will recognize how we can improve the museum’s appeal to tourists.

   Although this article focuses on tourism as a whole, a major factor in the study was
   the impact of museums and what can be done to expand tourist’s perspective of the
   Maori people.


   This article was taken from a New Zealand daily newspaper and looks at the ethics of
   research funding. Though the article is fairly short, it claims that the Waitangi Treaty
   entitles indigenous Maori people to any profits that may emerge in the research of
   New Zealand flora and fauna. Given that the Maori are the original owners of this
   land, they should reap the benefits of its products. This topic arose several times
during my time at The South Otago Museum, particularly because I worked
alongside a Maori woman who strongly believed all of New Zealand should be returned to the Maori people. The dispute over the Treaty of Waitangi greatly affects how museums are operated in New Zealand, and this article reflects both sides of the argument in a fairly objective manner.


The underlying question of this article looks at how international law affects museums and researchers in New Zealand and Canada. Specifically, the author questions what can be done in the handling of indigenous artifacts to be more ethically responsible and culturally conscious. Author Bradford Morse delves into many examples of right and wrong archiving within museums and libraries, while still shedding light on New Zealand politics. Further, he provides several of his own solutions to the mishandling of artifacts, including detailed policy proposals and planned programs.


This paper summarizes a research collection presented at the “Conference on the Research Potential of Anthropological Museum Collects” held in 1981. The authors explore the impact of anthropological research in museums and vise versa. The article goes through museum history, research, and briefly discusses museum curation.
practices. The authors also attempt to redefine the word museum itself, claiming that any collection of data, materials, or even organized historical societies fit the mold. Although the main goal of the paper is to demonstrate the plethora of information that museums provide for anthropologists, I am interested in looking at the progress of museum curation practices over the past thirty-two years. I’ve noticed that although cataloging and charting artifacts may have changed since 1981 (due to recent technological advances), basic ethical procedures have remained fairly unchanged.


One of the key learning aspects for me in New Zealand was discovering the importance of the term taonga, which is defined as a “valued Maori object”. As an intern, I had to undergo training of how to properly care for and respect taonga items. This article is useful in that it discusses the legal rights surrounding taonga materials with specific regards to museum care. The author incorporates a great deal of ethical thought regarding cultural exchange and the ownership rights of such treasured objects.


Te Papa is one of New Zealand’s biggest and most popular museums. It is known for its extensive Maori collection, and is awarded a very high praise from various
professors, researchers, and museum professionals. Since I worked at a relatively small-sized museum, I wanted to use this article to compare my experience with that of a larger-scaled museum. This article discusses the uniqueness of the Te Papa museum, both in scale and style. It is divided into four main topics: listening, describing, doing, and watching. I believe these are all very important aspects of interactive learning, and are responsible for why Te Papa is a nationally recognized museum.


I will be using this manual for preservation policy throughout my thesis as a reference for both correct and incorrect museum procedure. It is the National Library of New Zealand’s preservation policy guidelines and is referred to by most New Zealand curators. Since certain museum procedures are debated in the field, I will use this to clarify and define appropriate methods.
Outline

I. Introduction
   a. Importance of museum curation
      i. Education
         1. Example
      ii. Research
         1. Example
      iii. Inspiration and entertainment
         1. Example
   iv. Tourism
      1. Example
   b. My internship at The South Otago Museum
      i. Location and background of The South Otago Museum
      ii. My role and training
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         2. Working with Maori Tapu (spiritual object) keeper
      iii. Audited collection
         1. About the Maori population
         2. Specifics to the South Otago Collection
            a. Where artifacts originated
            b. How we tracked artifacts back to donators
         3. Technical involvement
a. Past-Perfect Software
   i. How Past-Perfect is used to benefit museum cataloging
   ii. My training
b. Photography element
   i. Incorporation of Graphic Communication Minor
   ii. Correct formatting and configuration for cataloging objects
   iii. Limitations

II. Involving audiences

a. Incorporating new media and improving display
   i. Drawing from other fields (festivals, music, labs, etc)
   ii. Creating an interactive and stimulating environment
      1. Kids
      2. Adults

b. Public relations
   i. Fundraising
   ii. Involving the local community
   iii. Reaching out to government opportunities
   iv. Reaching out to larger museums
      1. Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand
2. Connection with Southland Museums in Invercargill, West Coast, and Nelson

III. Artifact cataloging procedures

a. Before inventory
   i. Physically locate all items
   ii. Record previous indication of inventoried items
   iii. Classify

b. Inventory
   i. Establish numbering system
      1. Using a 3-part system
      2. Using a 2-part system at The South Otago Museum
      3. Compare the two systems
   ii. Paper record file
   iii. Create Past-Perfect computer database

c. How to correctly photograph artifacts
   i. Lighting
   ii. Angles
   iii. Number of images required for database

d. Accessioning artifacts (adding new objects)
   i. Identify all necessary fields for inventory of new artifacts
      1. Example
         a. Accession number
b. Title of object

c. Origin

d. Donator

e. Material

f. Physical location

g. Dimensions

h. Short description

ii. Triple-check all information

e. Handling artifacts

i. Group similar objects together

ii. Make sure cases are logically ordered

iii. Required materials

1. Sure grip cotton gloves

2. Deacidification boxes and spray

3. Mini static whisk

4. Polyethylene padded boxes for moving

iv. How to correctly hold/carry artifacts

1. Limit amount of touching

2. Use care with delicate items

3. Use two hands

f. Compare international standards of cataloging

IV. Discussion/Conclusion
a. Ethics

b. Redefine the importance of museum curation
   i. For entertainment purposes
      1. Example
   ii. For educational purposes
      1. Example
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      1. Example

c. What can be done to improve museum curation
   i. Compare material preservation to field work
   ii. Redirect the subject of collections
Introduction

There is a reason over eight million people flock to Paris every year to gaze at a portrait of a woman painted over 500 years ago (Zug, 2011, p. 3). It is the same reason that draws people to wander the exhibitions at The Metropolitan in New York City, venture north to The Hermitage in St. Petersburg, and tour exhibits at The British Museum in London. That reason is curiosity. While admittedly, some museum visitors are tourists simply looking to check off attractions on their to-do list, most are in fact looking for intellectual and cultural fulfillment. This fulfillment is consequential of a common human trait of cultural curiosity that museums actively cultivate and nurture.

Curiosity about others and their life ways has evolved over time in humans. Our curious nature has led us to invent, learn, copy, and discover. Had we not gained the curiosity to explore the world around us, humans may have never discovered the earth was round, and societies would not have benefited so greatly from the borrowing of ideas and technology facilitated by cross-cultural interactions. Curiosity has drawn leaders to lead, inventors to invent, and artists to inspire. If we, as a human race, lacked the inclination to learn more about the world around us in general, we would be living a life incapable of developmental growth or social expansion.

Above all, curiosity allows for the growth of learning. George Loewenstein, a professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University, once explained that curiosity occurs “when attention becomes focused on a gap in one’s knowledge . . . The curious individual is motivated to obtain the missing information to reduce or eliminate the feeling of deprivation” (Paul, 2013, p. 1). It is here that museums play a significant role in the
narrowing of cultural “information gaps”. When human beings sense the unknown, it is instinctual to behave like scientists and explore causes and effects of phenomenon as well as mentally document cultural events. Humans learn through observation, interaction, and the gathering of evidence. These are themes that frame and fuel the need for the modern museum. Further, the interactive learning environment offered in museums highly benefit younger generations. In addition to providing reason for the improvement and enhancement of current museums, this information encourages the need to establish more available children’s museums (Kushnir, 2013, p. 1).

But if museum environments are so valuable and informative then why are they so often portrayed in the media as dull and uninteresting places of work? Perhaps the question to be answered here is why are museums important at all? Why should humans care to protect ancient artifacts salvaged from years into the past? Beyond entertainment, museums serve society intellectually in a number of ways. First, museums provide stories about the world and the people in it. Yes, they exist to inform and educate, but it is important to remember the cathartic feeling people experience upon their first time climbing into a World War II airplane replica or the thrill of staring down at a two thousand year old Egyptian mummy. Further, museums play a fundamental role in the protection and conservation of cultural items. Although museum conservation is a comparatively young practice, researchers have markedly improved the quality of artifact protection and continue to set new and resourceful standards (Met, 2013, p. 1). With this idea of cultural preservation comes the subjective nature of museums. This subjectivity allows individuals to communicate, discuss, create, argue, and reflect upon the cultural artifacts and history of a society. In a large way,
museums serve as educational resources for the general population. For example, a workingman in New York City with a passion for primate biology may not have the financial opportunity to engage in higher education. However, major museums like the American Museum of Natural History allow this man the chance to explore a plethora of primate collections in a nearby location and in an affordable manner (AMNH, 2013). Given the funding it takes to maintain exhibits and employ staff members, it’s remarkable how reasonable museum entrance fees are. In every way, these formal institutions truly represent an amazing sector of society. They provide rare cultural items to many and embrace the uniqueness of our world, while still acknowledging that some questions can simply not be answered.

This research paper aims to explore the modern museum, with a particular emphasis on small-scale museums. Because it is a common goal for museums to look at the world in a more holistic way, this paper will use both theoretical and applied practices to examine what makes a culturally sound museum. There will be an explorative look at the work completed at a small-scale museum in New Zealand, the skills and knowledge gained from working with the head curator, and the major role that ethics played when handling culturally sensitive materials. Further, it will investigate how to better promote museums through the use of new media, visually appealing displays, and public marketing. Since the technology revolution has taken the world by storm, it is important now more than ever to unearth and decipher what can be done to make sure museums do not vanish behind new technology. Using a variety of methods, the primary intent is to look at what should be done to promote and encourage human curiosity with regards to the modern museum.
The South Otago Museum

In order to develop an informative paper, it was important to write from a place of experience, practice, and understanding. In preparation, time and energy was devoted during the summer of 2013 in the audit of a Polynesian collection at a small-scaled institute known as The South Otago Museum. The museum is located on the South Island of New Zealand, which allowed for an international experience as well as a unique perspective on the science of global museum curation. It is helpful to know that the museum sits in the town of Balclutha, a small coastal settlement situated between the larger cities of Invercargill and Dunedin. While the museum contains an extensive collection of items, most objects relate to domestic and industrial heritage, which reflect over 150 years of pioneer endeavor on the river deltas and fertile plains throughout Southern New Zealand. Despite the prevalence of materials that stem from the Western world, the internship revolved heavily around cultural materials in the Maori Collections Display. Here, there was the opportunity to gain trained experience in both the handling of artifacts as well as the cataloging process. The work was completed alongside the head curator and museum director, Gary Ross. Born and raised in New Zealand, Gary Ross is well acquainted with the area and has been working as head curator for the past eleven years. In addition, he is an active member of the Balclutha community, an often volunteers his time to present for local school groups and lecture at elderly homes to those who are physically unable to travel to the museum.

An additional member of the South Otago Museum Board involved in the audit work was a woman named Arana. A Maori native herself, The South Otago Museum guidelines require that outsiders meet with Arana before beginning any work with Maori
collection objects. Arana is the Maori Tapu keeper, otherwise known as the “spirit guide”. Her job involves work with the Maori artifacts, as she works to provide a fair and ethical opinion to better reflect the beliefs and morals of the Maori people. While she was a friendly personality, Arana was very firm in her instructions regarding the handling of objects. In order for any person of non-Maori descent to handle sacrificial or precious items, there are various regulations and sacred rules that must be followed. For example, women are specifically instructed to not enter museums that contain Maori artifacts if they are menstruating or pregnant. Contrary to popular belief, this is not because the Maori believe pregnant or menstruating women are bad luck, but rather because the Maori believe menstruation and pregnancy are tapu. Tapu is a well-known term throughout New Zealand. It is the equivalent of an object having such a sacred nature that it is forbidden (Moorfield, 2013). The Maori believe that the life and nurture represented by pregnancy and menstruation is tainted when a woman enters a museum because of the “damage” and “age” associated with the objects in a museum. Many of these items are representative of death to the Maori, and are subject to delicate care. In order to fully understand tapu and other Maori traditions and beliefs, it is important to first understand who the Maori are as a culture.

Understanding the Maori

While it is often disputed where the Maori originated, most anthropologists and historians agree that the ancestors of the Maori began their journey somewhere in Southeast Asia around 1200 AD (Best, 1934). Before the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century, the Maori prospered by means of a Stone Age culture and owe much of their success to the local flora and fauna and creative tool making. Some of the Maoris’ admired tools and crafts include
hand woven baskets, fishhooks, canoes, and skillfully crafted traps. While the Maori are often famed for their alleged cannibalism activity and dealings in brutal warfare, they led fairly peaceful day-to-day lives. They worked by means of a chiefdom social stratum and thrived under a unique and resourceful culture (Chaves, 2007. p. 25). One particularly creative tradition of the Maori that is still carried on today is the Moko Ritual. This tradition, typically performed around the time of one’s puberty, gives prominent face tattoos to Maori youth and is used to signify a coming-of-age. Depending on the detail and skillfulness of the tattoo, this art can help to establish rank within a tribe, family status, or even signify an important moment in one’s life (Lee, n.d.). Many other Maori cultural practices like the Moko ritual still exist today. However, these practices do not go unseen amongst New Zealand’s non-Maori population, and are often ill received. In this way, New Zealand parallels many Westernized nations of the world. Racism is still a prevalent issue, which obviously makes it more difficult for the Maori to carry on with customs and rituals as they are in constant fear of being harassed and taunted by non-Maori New Zealanders. The Maori are often compared to the aboriginals in Australia or the Native Americans in the United States because they maintain many of the same struggles. Some difficulties include the fight to maintain land rights, the effort to obtain equal representation in politics and government, the attempt to overcome social injustices, and the general challenge in providing basic human rights (Pawlik, 2011. p. 7).

A further effect of European exploitation can be demonstrated by the foundation of the New Zealand tourism industry. While New Zealand’s natural environmental beauty provides reason enough to attract visitors from all over the world, the Maori have played a
very influential and effective role in tourism. In recent years, the tourism business has been able to capitalize on the “native charm” and “authenticity” of the Maori, which is a distinctive quality many people seek when travelling. However, the problem with this system is that the profit and economic earnings rarely end up in the hands of the Maori people. This has become an increasingly large problem within New Zealand’s museum community. While most museum professionals and researchers seek out total equality and opportunity for Maori communities, there has been a fair amount of resistance from the indigenous peoples of New Zealand to fully support museum cultural integration. This hostility towards non-Maori people stems from hundreds of years of discrimination. It is difficult for the Maori to support assimilation when so much of their historical interaction with Western cultures has had negatively impacted consequences.

The situation is not dissimilar from the British conquest of the Native Americans. Over time, the native population fell deeper and deeper down the social pole until a majority of the native population was dependent on welfare and food stamps. Similarly, the Maori have fallen victim to an undeserved stereotype by non-Maori populations in New Zealand. Not only are Maori people often dubbed “lazy” and “stupid”, but the high-prevalence of emotional abuse regarding Maori physical appearance is alarmingly high. According to researchers at Massey University, the most common stereotype of the Maori is that they are “unemployed bludgers who smoke and drink too much” (Massey University, 2010). Having established this unfortunate Maori stereotype, there is no denying the Maori are clearly at an educational disadvantage, both economically and socially. Although there is recent evidence of an increase in Maori university students in the last ten years, Maori researchers are
reluctant to declare the Maori are on a path of social incline (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). These, among other stereotypes brought about by non-Maori New Zealanders, create a very difficult environment for museum researchers to work around, unless they are of direct Maori descent themselves.

It is here that museum ethics play a major role in creating historically accurate and appealing collections. Often, it is required that in order for an object to go on display, a Maori native must first confirm its display approval. The South Otago Museum curator Gary Ross notes that if there has been a recent political protest or racial issue, Maori authorities are noticeably less willing to sign off on a museum object. This not only creates social tension, but it drastically stunts museum development. This tension between researchers and Maori representatives is exposed nearly every year on the anniversary of the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi (Stokes, 1992. p. 1-8). The Treaty of Waitangi is arguably the most important document in New Zealand’s history. Whether one works as a museum administrator, researcher, or curator, it is imperative to understand the historical record of this document. Signed on February 6, 1840, the Waitangi Peace Treaty was transcribed to Maori chiefs as a way to lessen British sovereignty of local Maori people (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2013). The 540 head Maori chiefs, who were eager to sign a truce settlement, were obviously non-English speakers and therefore were forced to have a British interpreter explain the details of the document. However, the document contents were mistranslated from the English version to the Maori version, resulting in years of disagreement over what the treaty truly represents. Perhaps the most important piece of information from the document was the fact that the word “sovereignty” was transcribed
into “governance”. Thus, the Maori believed they were signing a treaty to reappoint self-
governance and independence of their land, when in reality, the treaty essentially declared
British rule. Since, there have been never-ending protests of the original agreement, each of
which have left the Maori just as hopeless as before. This has produced a difficult situation
for museum curators, who are funded by the government and pressured to present the Treaty
of Waitangi in a positive light to the public. For museums administrators, it is of the utmost
importance to display cultural information in an unbiased way. However, the constant
struggle for funding and public support creates a system largely dependent on outside
resources. This can sometimes influence the cultural integrity of museum artifacts and the
preservation goals of a museum, as proven by the lasting impact of the Waitangi Treaty.

At The South Otago Museum, this issue was much less of a problem. Since a
majority of the objects preserved in Balclutha reflect the surrounding European settlers, there
is not a great deal of government interaction regarding the items. A number of these items
were donated by locals and therefore require a lesser degree of procedural formalities.
Nonetheless, a section of The South Otago Museum that does require contact with outside
government-operated museums was the Polynesia and Micronesia collection. One of these
outside contacts was the New Zealand National Te Papa Museum, a world-renowned
archive museum located in Wellington (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa,
2013). This contact was required as reference for a specific set of Micronesian fighting
gloves, which will be revisited later in this paper. While some of the audited items were
unable to be traced back to their original donator, many objects were linked to well-known
members of the community and past museum administrators. This is one of the chief
benefits in running a small-scaled museum. The community is both very proactive and tremendously helpful in the maintenance and promotion of museum cultural items.

**What is Curation?**

The word curation is ambiguous, broad, and constantly changing in meaning. What curation is to Gary Ross at The South Otago Museum holds a far different connotation than what it means to the head curator at The British Museum. According to Lisa Graziose Corrin, head curator of Block Museum of Art History at Northwestern University, a curator translates to anyone working at or in the museum realm (Borrelli, 2013). For Corrin, a woman who has been working in the field for over twenty-five years, curation has become less about quality control, and more about learning to work and collaborate with donators, artists, and the community. This is not to say quality has lost all importance in a curator’s role. Rather, it has become a unifying factor in the shared responsibilities between curators and the public. In order to protect the items of our past, it is extremely important to maintain a positive relationship with the public. This not only ensures a well-rounded perspective regarding the conservation of such items, but it also speaks to the integrity of curation as a profession. With the onset of social media, it has become increasingly efficient for the average person to simulate the work of a professional curator. Redesigning your Facebook page and editing a post on Twitter are two everyday dealings that can technically be considered forms of curation. If this is true, it may seem unnecessary for prospective curators to work towards a higher degree in a field like anthropology, history, biology, and even design. If anyone can curate then why, in recent years, has the world seen a dramatic increase in the number of students working towards doctorate programs like museum studies.
and decorative arts? (Pfeiffer, 2012). It is simply put that museum curation is a demanding and ever-changing profession. Curators must be artists, technicians, teachers, and historians all at the same time. While any one person has the online resources to start up a website, it takes a creative eye to help that website flourish. Similarly, museums can exist for some amount of time as standard, plain institutions of knowledge, but if the museum is to succeed on a long-term timeline, it must have a curator willing to put in the necessary creative work. In the words of a current graduate student in the decorative arts at Bard Center, New York, it takes an experienced curator to “contextualize the work within its historical and socioeconomic framework” (Pfeiffer, 2012).

One particularly important role that often falls under the work of a curator is that of tracking an item throughout its entire museum life. After the artifact’s original source is established and any additional information is gathered (dates, use, past owners, etc.) about the object, museum curation requires a strict and specific set of guidelines to be followed. A significant part of this process includes the technical responsibility that is required by catalogers. This involves the ability to manage software, photograph objects, and navigate digital and web media resources. Like most modern museums, The South Otago Museum benefits from the use of a software device called Past-Perfect. It is a self-proclaimed leader in museum technology (Past-Perfect Museum Software, 2013) and has been positively reaffirmed by outside reviewers for “encompassing every aspect of collection and membership management” (Chhabra, 2008. p. 435). While Past-Perfect Software is able to provide its users with an extensive and affordable method of organizing artifacts, it is highly valuable because of its ability to unite museum users and researchers. For example, classification of
items can become a major problem for researchers when they have to compare archaeological and significantly old materials. Although one reporter may identify an object as a figurine, a reporter on the other side of the world may declare a seemingly identical object as a statuette. Objects are constantly at risk for losing cultural meaning and significance; one object by itself may mean less than the discovery of two of a kind. Archaeologists Paul Jacobs and Christopher Hollands explain that the “endeavor to reconstruct cultures on the basis of physical remains is by necessity a collaborative effort” (Jacobs & Holland, 2007. p. 198). Thus, Past-Perfect Computer Software demonstrates an ideal platform for assembling museum collections and piecing together objects of our past in a collective and comprehensive way.

In terms of museum graphics and pictorials, Past-Perfect is an ideal format for organizing images. A personal interest and minor degree in Graphic Communication allowed me to expand on my knowledge with studio imaging and photography. This proved helpful when there was work to be done under specific lighting and environmental conditions. At The South Otago Museum, objects were captured from multiple angles with a Canon T2i digital single-lens reflex camera. These image collections were then paired with the object’s title information and linked to the Past-Perfect Database. This procedure is used internationally because it enables other museum workers to reference the specific data server for image details rather than resorting to the object itself, which would require a separate and complex order of procedure (Becker, 1992. p. 3-18). There are several details that allow for appropriate formatting and configuration of museum artifacts. According to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, the six essential factors to be aware of when photographing
an object are: light quality, texture, focus, angle of view, color, and compositional framing (Amon Carter Museum, 2003). Together, these variables enable the photographer to maintain a consistent perspective throughout the imaging process. While light quality, color, and texture tend to be more subjective characteristics of a photo, angle of view, composition, and focus should typically be rendered the same. In addition to these factors, it is highly advised to capture six of the primary angles in artifact photography (top, bottom, front, back, left side, and right side). This allows museum researchers to gain a better understanding for an object without having to physically handle the object. As shown in Figure 1, The South Otago Museum’s lighting accommodations were fairly elementary. While the materials were basic, the room allowed for suitable natural lighting and protection from unwanted shadowing. This permitted for image efficiency and accuracy. While this environment was adequate for the work completed, curatorship in larger-scaled museums has undergone a number of digital advancements within past years. One specific technological advance is that of 3D imaging. What first began with simple 360-degree video footage of objects soon progressed into the development of automatic machines, which are capable of capturing multiple angles of an object at once. These images are then virtually combined and transferred to an online database, where they are available to the general public. Beyond providing technological inspiration and inventiveness, 3D imaging allows millions of viewers to observe and analyze museum artifacts from the comforts of their home (Hawkins, Cohen, Debevec, 2001).

Figure 1
Developers at the Conservation Information Network claim this recent invention may someday lead to object replication. If achieved, object replication would allow for people to handle delicate items without the use of molding or applying chemical processes, which highly influence object quality (Boulanger, Cohen, Debevec, 2001. p. 131-147). If achieved, this process would change nearly every aspect of museum conservation, including the way audiences interact with items and the general standards for object preservation.

**Museum Display and New Media**

Involving various types of new media such as 3D manipulation has become an essential role in the development and progression of collection display. In order to maintain a regular museum audience, institutions have had to rapidly adapt to new technologies and the recent boom in social media. Because this shift in technological advances has most greatly affected the youth of our society, museums have geared much of their technology towards kid-friendly displays. This is not only a way to inform and educate a new generation, but it also attracts the parents and families of these kids, thus, increasing the possibility of museum donations. In addition, new media has proven to be effective in explaining intangible cultural ideas. While physical items provide a visual cue for audiences, intangible cultural ideas present a more difficult concept to audiences. For example, it is easier for a child to understand how arrowheads were once used as weapons when he/she is able to physically hold one. Similarly, the challenge of describing intangible cultural values like language, folklore, and traditions has become increasingly easier with the onset of computer displays and interactive touch screens.
On the other hand, this basic shift in museum design and collection display has altered nearly everything we once understood about museums. Suddenly, museums have lost their ability to disconnect audiences from the real world and technology. Instead of allowing museum viewers to disengage themselves from the anxiety that technology is often associated with, museums have found a way to incorporate technology into displays. With the incorporation of flashy and eye-catching displays, people are given just another excuse to depend on social media. Most museums now allow access to applications like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram, ensuring that visitors are never too far from accessing the world of online media. While some major museums resisted this integration of new media into displays, most large-scale museums have taken advantage of the new system. Not only does it attract and draw in a new generation of visitors, but it also allows for a great deal of free marketing and advertising services. Every time a visitor “tags” a location post on Facebook, or “tweets” about an exhibit on Twitter, there is a possibility that thousands of people will eventually see it. Between these two sound arguments sits one of the more difficult challenges museum curators have had to face: To continue the transition into the use of social media or to resist it? Author and columnist Arianna Huffington claims that “the danger of social media becoming the point of social media – connection for connection’s sake, connection to no end – is one museums need to particularly guard against…” (Huffington, 2010). For Huffington, the experience of walking through a museum is not only educational, but also spiritual. As a self-proclaimed advocate for the integrated use of social media (particularly within the realm of journalism), it may come as a surprise that Huffington has expressed this contesting view. Still, she is not alone in her certainty that
museums should remain separate from emerging technology. Antonio Damasio, neuroscientist and director of USC’s Brain and Creativity Institute, believes there is a rewarding and emotional response that humans undergo when they discover a new object or idea in a museum. It is a “sense of discovery” that stems back to our primate ancestors (Garreau, 2007). Further, this “emotional response” can be stunted by the involvement of new media, as the focus dissolves away from cultural heritage and instead is re-centered on modern and appealing displays.

There is a certain balance that must be understood about using new technology in a museum setting. The presentation of an exhibit should not concentrate on solely on new media. However, there is an undeniable benefit in the incorporation and use of technology and media. For instance, The South Otago Museum would hugely benefit from an advanced upgrade in display performance and enhancement. Certain advances such as video art, touch-screen liquid emitting diode displays, audio displays, and creative light exhibits would help appeal to younger generations, who by and large represent the technology generation. If The South Otago Museum were to allow access to applications like Facebook, museum publicity would also be increased, thus creating the possibility for increased funding. This in turn would result in endowment of new display exhibits, and so the cycle would continue. An additional factor to consider in the design and creation of these displays is the artistic challenges that often arise in the creative process. In the acclaimed book, “Rethinking Curation”, authors Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook mention several resources that have helped them spark ideas for display performances. Mainly, Graham and Cook recommend the advantage of drawing ideas from completely different fields such as concert stages, play
sets, broadcasting designs, and even scientific labs. In this way, museums are able to merge together a variety of display types to better attract people from a wide range of backgrounds (Graham, Cook, Dietz, 2010).

**Museum Politics, Fundraising, and Public Outreach**

As previously stated, social media is just one successful technique in the strategy of setting up a successful public outreach department. Museums are centers for discovery and learning, but they are nothing if people are not aware they exist. In a way, good marketing is essential to running a good museum. First and foremost, it is important to understand the functionality of public relations departments. They exist as entities to draw in funding and economic growth because more visitors directly result in greater capital. This allows museums curators and researchers to not only fund new materials, but also keep up with technological advances. Secondly, effective marketing allows for museum workers to better connect with the local and international community. Developing a relationship with the surrounding community is especially important for small-scaled museums, which largely depend on the support of the town or city in which they are located. A further advantage of a successful public relations department is the support and opportunities that are provided by government organizations. In 1965, the United States Congress established a law named the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities. The law recognized two separate funding agencies and was a highly debated topic in Washington D.C. for many years. The essential goal of the law was to strengthen the arts and make art and humanity institutions more available to the general public (Clotfelter, 1991). This governmental push for the
encouragement of the arts is not unique to America. The recent resurgence in the humanities field and the importance placed on cultural values is an international progression that should not go unnoticed. In Australia, New Zealand, and a number of other European countries, there is a regular tax break allotted to museums that are “cultural in nature and traditionally supported by the state” (Marriott, n.d.). With the harsh effects of the 2008 recession still looming, government support has remained key in recent years. While this support is necessary in order to keep museums alive, total government dependence also has its drawbacks. For instance, in the first few weeks of October 2013, the United States Government underwent a full-blown shutdown. This drastic move forced thousands of government-operated organizations to seize funding, essentially stopping all research projects and regular visitors to museums across the nation. President of the American Alliance of Museums Ford W. Bell reported that while some museums thrived from community support during this time, many struggled to maintain regular visitor attendance. When the government eventually reopened its doors, Bell argued that Congress needed to do the responsible thing and “make restitution to these communities” (Blanton, 2013). In times of need, many museums remain open in order to maintain societal perspective. They establish and frame the true values of a culture, and in doing so, serve as moral support to many.

While the 2013 government shutdown was a rarity, it is important for museum curators to prepare for this kind of event, should they rely on much of their funding from the state. In other cases, like The South Otago Museum, it’s important to develop effective relationships and to reach out to neighboring museum curators in order to fight the plagues of economic instability. On the South Island alone, there are an estimated forty-nine
museums (NZ Museums, 2013). Most curators in the area have longstanding relationships with neighboring institutions, which creates a fairly tight-knit community throughout the southland. One particularly valuable connection Gary Ross had at The South Otago Museum was with researchers at the Te Papa Museum in Wellington. While Te Papa is internationally recognized for its extensive research on the Maori (Tramposch, 1998, p. 339-350), they have maintained a very humble relationship with smaller New Zealand museums like The South Otago. For example, it was relatively easy to confirm the origin, dates, and uses of specific Polynesian and Micronesian objects with Te Papa researchers. They were not only efficient and thorough in their responses, but friendly as well. This type of unassuming attitude gives Te Papa a respectable and valued name across New Zealand and throughout the world.

Artifact Categorization

From Te Papa to The South Otago to The Louvre, every museum has their own standard process of artifact categorization. According to the Australia Museum’s Small Museum Cataloguing, documenting the items in a collection is “vital to a museum’s active and responsible role in managing its key asset, no matter what the focus of the collection” (Massey University, 2010). It is an effective way to search for pieces, reference specific items, and maintain consistency and organization. A successful cataloging process reflects successful protection of cultural heritage. To accurately depict the categorization process, I aim to address the step-by-step process of inventorying a collection while integrating personal experiences at The South Otago Museum.
Prior to recording each item, it is necessary to physically locate all items in a collection. Some questions to ask while locating items include:

- Are there artifacts stored off-site or on loan to other organizations or lodges?
- Are there artifacts displayed in administration offices, hallways, or departments?
- Are there artifacts that should no longer be recorded at all?

These, among others, are important steps to guarantee that one does not later come across a lost item (Tabbert, 2001). A second step to carry out before direct inventory is to record which items may have been recorded already. It is not uncommon to find labels or tags that are assigned to an object with a number from a previous method of categorization. When computers were first developed in the 1980s, museums had to adjust to a new way of tracking items. This left many items with their old identification numbers. It is necessary to erase all previous methods of tracking items as to avoid confusion with new methods. Next, it is important to recognize what the ultimate goal of the project is. It will dramatically slow down the inventory process if there is a need to constantly keep track of multiple objectives.

The most important variables to record include name of the object, where the object is located, and making sure that there is an effective link by use of a numbering system. In addition, it is important to maintain a classification method. This helps with later display organization. After performing these steps, you are able to begin inventory on the collection.

To begin, there must be an established numbering system. Regarding The South Otago Museum, there was already a standard Two-Part Numbering System, so it was unnecessary to implement a new method. Despite The South Otago’s system, the most common system internationally is the Three-Part System. The standard template for the three-part system is
as follows: Year + Order of Accession + Item in Accession (Tabbert, 2001). For example, if you had a pottery artifact that was gifted in 1920, and it was the 8th artifact and the 23rd gift, the label would read 1920.023.0089. It should be noted that zeros are added before numbers to better sort items within the database. Although this system is not necessary for smaller museums that carry fewer items, there are several advantages in using the Three-Part System. First, it is designed to make it easy to insert and add artifacts later on. It is also easier to track items chronologically. Finally, using the Three Part System allows catalogers to break down collections into sub-categories and therefore use smaller numbers. For example, it is much easier to refer to an object if it is labeled “28” than “784,522”. Some museums are inclined to use different numbering systems for different sections of the museum. It really depends on the quantity of each collection, as well as the size of the museum.

The next step to take in the cultural material inventory process is the creation of an online database. As I mentioned before, The South Otago Museum uses Past-Perfect Software to input data. Other basic systems incorporate alternative programs like Microsoft Access or Masonic Library (Tabbert, 2001). There are specific fields of detail that are necessary to save when forming a database. In order to better portray the formal inventory process, I will use an example of a real artifact that was correctly catalogued at The South Otago Museum. The first step of the process is to identify the accession number. In the case of said object, it was previously labeled “32-A”. This meant that it was the 32nd object in the case. The “A” indicates that it is a member of a subgroup of items, all of which have a common relation to each other. The next identification to affirm is the given name of the object. If there is no obvious name given to the item, it is best to describe the object as best
as possible. Using the origin and known information about the said artifact, it was appropriate to name the artifact “Micronesian Fighting Mitts”. Because the origin of the artifact was already given, the item was not necessary to track so “Micronesia” was stated as its origin place. In addition to the location and when the object was created, it is important to record the donator of the item. The fighting mitts were part of a much bigger donation that was given by a family living in Dunedin, New Zealand. This information allows Gary Ross and other administrators at The South Otago Museum to gain further information about the object for future reference.

The next step is to record the material of the artifact. This includes a thorough description of color, pattern, texture, contrast, and relative condition. In regards to the fighting mitts, their material was documented in the following way: “medium-brown husk woven into two hand mitts; possible palm leaf string; each glove contains eight white fish teeth woven into two vertical lines down the topside of the mitts; two lines of rope connecting the two mitts together at bottom of object”. There is also the need to describe the location of the object within the collections case, including shelf number and its position to the surrounding artifacts. Next, the dimensions should be recorded, using the metric system as guidelines. The fighting mitts were 14 centimeters by 32 centimeters, not including the extended rope. The final variable to record is any additional description of the artifact. This can include specific tribal origins, notable damage, or any past ownership of the item. As for image capture, it is generally required that a multi-angle photographic recording of the object should be filed with each item. Within the Polynesian collection, there were no previous images saved of the artifacts. Because these were the first recorded photographs of
the objects, it was necessary to complete a full photography audit. For the fighting mitts, six separate angles of the photo were taken. Figure 2 displays the front-centered angle. This photo shows correct use of lighting, angle, exposure, and composition. Technically speaking, the database can record hundreds of photographs, but it is generally expected to insert three to six angles of one object. Before the development of digital photography, a large component of logging photographs included the recording of film type (e.g., color slide), date, type of light exposure, and name of photographer (Procedures Manual, 2002). However, with recent advances in digital photography, this information is recorded automatically under a graphical element called a histogram. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to manually input separate image-related information into the Past-Perfect Software. The absolute last step in accessioning new items is to double and then triple-check all recorded information. Making sure there are no errors at this stage of museum work is crucial in upholding a museum’s reputation.

**Handling and Moving Artifacts**

Throughout the process of cataloging and handling the objects in a given collection, it is very important to understand the basic treatment and protection of objects. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, there are seven primary guidelines regarding access and use of museum objects (WIPO, 2013). First, and most obviously, there is absolutely no consumption of food or drink within the curation areas of a museum. Second,
artifacts are available for handling and observing on-site only. Unless there is an approved agreement for the release of a specific item, artifacts cannot leave the building, even with certified museum staff. Third, items that are in poor or fragile condition should not be directly handled. General viewing of the object should be carried out by use of photography or copying. In accordance with the third rule, copying and digitizing of an object should only be carried out if there is absolutely no possibility of harm or affliction to the object.

Fifth, there is no use of pen or ink permitted in the recording of object information. Pencil, paper, and computers are the only necessary note taking instruments. Sixth, access to special or valuable objects may be limited to a certain number per year as to avoid any damage. The final rule is that gloves, book supporters, mini static whiskers, felt mats, and acid-free museum approved boxes and spray should be used for the actual transfer of items. This rule is particularly important in regards to ensuring a long lifespan of an object. Gloves are especially important as they protect objects from potentially harmful variables like dirt, dust, and oil. Even after washing hands, the oil produced by humans is strong enough to leave fingerprints on any object. Oxford University’s Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology recently named hand oil as one of the most harmful outside influences to museum artifacts (Ashmolean, 2011). The South Otago Museum requires the use of white, lint-less, cotton gloves at all times to stop acids and salts from influencing the alteration of an object’s material. Other major factors to consider include storage environments, light, material, humidity, and insects. Termites were also a major issue at The South Otago Museum. New Zealand winters are cold and bring in various unwanted insects. While storage boxes and materials are built to withstand light, humidity, and falling objects, they are not invincible to
a hungry termite. Together, these guidelines encourage a longer lifespan among museum objects. Their intent is to allow future generations the opportunity and privilege to observe, discuss, and enjoy such cultural objects.

While the list of precautions to take when storing items is lengthy, it is also necessary to take certain safety measures when moving the items back and forth between the display room and curation room. New Zealand native and co-curator of the Western Australian Museum Stephen Anstey explains that in order to limit the amount of handling of an item, it is first important to organize the objects into relative categories (Anstey, 2007, p. 2). In this way, there is no need to organize the objects later, which limits the amount of human contact with the items. Essentially, there are two methods of transport for items. First, there is the use of a trolley. This is effective because there is an even surface for the items to be placed on, there is a limited amount of handling, and the handler is able to go as close to the point of loading and unloading as possible. The second method is to carry the item itself.

Because The South Otago Museum did not own an acceptable trolley cart, items were carried back and forth by use of an acid-free box. There are several key points to remember when directly handling objects, some of which are listed as follows (Anstey, 2007, p. 3):

- Always use two hands to carry one object at a time
- Try carrying different sides of the object to determine which is the most stable side
- Note the weak and fragile parts of an object and understand to not put any gravitational stress there
- If there are removable parts, be sure to take them off before handling
- Do not place item on a surface that has not been previously prepared for the specific item
- Use high impact padding or soft cushioning to support item, if necessary
- If item should break, make sure to report and record the damages

These standards are generally consistent throughout other parts of the world, with few exceptions. While the primary role of a museum is to conserve and protect historically and culturally valuable items, not all societies interpret conservation under the same light. What is a culturally sensitive topic to one group of people, may not apply to another group. For instance, Gary Ross is a strong advocate for the cultural protection of all Maori items. He respects the spiritual process that is required for the display of Maori related artifacts and appreciates the importance of *tapu*. While admirable, Ross’s careful attitude towards the Maori may not resonate with other museum researchers in different parts of the world. This is because museums are designed to protect human values. These values are often a subject of debate and vary depending on where museums are located around the globe. What may be of importance to a community museum in Tanzania is far different from the values of a national museum in Stockholm, Sweden. Museums cater towards specific audiences, and so they primarily adapt to local or state interests.

The ability to unite traditional indigenous conservation methods with more advanced standards of care has become a particular challenge for museum professionals. The way scientists and researchers perceive proper care of objects often challenges what native communities believe to be suitable curation methods. The Department of Anthropology at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History has been dealing with this issue for
many years. In the past, items in The Smithsonian’s collection have been treated and cleaned with toxic chemicals like nicotine, strychnine, and mercuric chlorine. Because of this, it is a necessity to wear gloves when handling these objects. However, this has caused an outcry from several religious elders who believe it is disrespectful to hold items with anything but bare hands (Flynn, Hull-Walski, 2001). It seems there is no ethically moral way to please every cultural group. However, if there is one trait that humans have historically benefited from, it is the ability to cooperate. Despite the differences shared, it is instinctual for humans to copy and learn from one another. According to professors Richerson, Boyd, and Henrich, “humans have lived in social environments characterized by high levels of cooperation for as long as human culture has played an important role in human development” (Richerson, Boyd, Henrich, 2002, p. 11). This process has greatly benefited global museum preservation.

Curators are constantly finding, adapting, and changing practices and procedures. While some curators are resistant to change, most look at effective curation practices from neighboring institutes as opportunities to imitate new methodologies, thus further advancing the industry as a whole.

Discussion

While science and methodology are undoubtedly important aspects of museum curation, ethics play an equally significant factor. This is perhaps the largest lesson that can be taken away from work done at The South Otago Museum. In addition to the various technical and methodological rules, it is of the utmost importance to remember what the core function of a museum is, why they hold such value, and why they deserve such high
praise throughout our society. Museums do not exist for profit or exploitation; they exist to satisfy human curiosity.

Looking forward, there is a great deal of unexplored territory within the museum industry. Museum programs and exhibits hold a subtle power in human culture. One important change that can be made is the redirection of display themes. If museums were to shed light on more relevant social issues like poverty, drug use, and war, positive social change is not only possible, but also likely. It is important to reflect on the past and problems of society so that we can grow and evolve as a species. One extreme example of museum influence is that of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. People do not endure the tragedy and sorrow of travelling to Poland because they enjoy pain and suffering. People make that trip because they want to understand how such an event could occur among a species that is so heavily structured around the idea of social cooperation. Humans are a constantly adapting group, which is why we so often look to museums for a reminder of our cultural values.

In 1904, author Frederic H. Balfour spoke to the Royal Anthropological Institute of the United Kingdom and Ireland and emphasized the importance of anthropological collections. Balfour declared that museum collections were “…to a great extent, the laboratories of anthropologists…(and that) their potentialities, as factors in the advancement of Science would be almost infinite” (Cantwell, Rothschild, 1981). In school, children are taught the importance of fieldwork. There is a degree of discredit associated with researchers who have spent their lives working with materials that have been collected by others. While fieldwork is an immeasurable and unique experience on its own, Balfour makes an important
point: museum collections are an anthropologist’s laboratory. It is in the lab that researchers are able to question, analyze, observe, and explain. Museums exist to conserve and protect, but they are so much more than that. They provide us with intellectual and creative escapes from the worry and stress of our fast-paced lives. They provide us with answers, and yet still manage to trigger new ideas. It is the effort of museums that encourage kids to explore, researchers to investigate, and adults to rediscover what it truly means to exist as a curious being.
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