

DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

SESSION 157

CREATING A BIGGER IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

WITH ELISABETH BERRY DRAGO AND REBECCA ORTENBERG

BETH: Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky and welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am recording from the Chemical Heritage Foundation with Elisabeth Berry Drago and Rebecca Ortenberg. They created a really interesting program at the museum called “Things Fall Apart” and I really wanted to have a chance to talk to them about how they created it and how they worked with a number of other organizations, really focusing on collaboration to make it something pretty amazing. So, Elisabeth and Rebecca, thank you so much for joining me today.

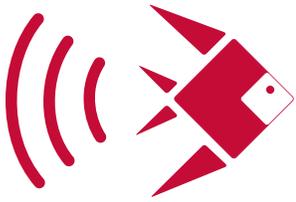
ELISABETH: Hi, Beth. Thanks for having us.

REBECCA: Yes, thank you.

BETH: So, the Chemical Heritage Foundation. We’re gonna get to that and have you explain what that is, but I want to start off with my favorite question, which is what does the word “participation” mean to you guys? How does it show up in your work in a way that helps you thrive? So you created a really interesting program. As you were planning on doing that, how did participation even play into your thoughts as you were forming your ideas around this program?

ELISABETH: One thing for me is that I, as a museum professional, someone who thinks about storytelling a lot as a museum professional, not just about what objects people see, what interactives will they touch, but like what story will they take away. It’s incredibly important for me that there’s an emotional participation, that I’m telling stories that resonate with people and telling stories that are sort of human scale because I want them to be part of the exhibit in a way that’s direct. I’m not there necessarily to tell someone how to feel about something, but to give them an opportunity to bring their own experiences into the museum





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

because I think that a museum can be educational, but it's also a space for people to just have, it's a place for people to have experiences that are coming from the inside as much as from the outside. So that's what I want. I wanted to find a story that would connect with people so deeply that their own experiences would immediately surface in the gallery and they would be bringing their own stories to bear on the narrative we were telling.

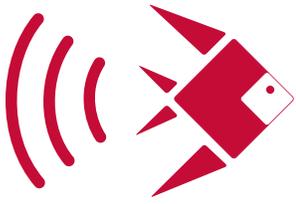
BETH: Rebecca, what's your perspective?

REBECCA: When you posed this question, at first the word that came to me was "investment" and finding ways to get people invested in the story as Lisa is saying, and that really happened I want to say from all levels, from building the team that put together the program with us and finding ways for them to feel like their unique expertise were being brought into build something that we couldn't develop without all those pieces in terms of reaching out to partners and other organizations saying "OK, we are an organization that is in a neighborhood with a lot of other people, a lot of businesses and people looking at preservation. How can we make them feel invested in the story that we're trying to tell?" and then also on the level of people who both come to the visit and the audio tour, getting invested in these questions that we are asking.

BETH: I love that. So why don't we make sure that we tell people a little bit about what the Chemical Heritage Foundation is actually about as an organization.

ELISABETH: Sure. Well, we are a sort of multi-faceted organization. We are a museum. We are a library. We are a center for scholarship, whether that's a short-term research fellows or longer term research projects going on in the department. We have a Center for Oral History. We have a lot of moving parts. We have great collections, history of science collections and we are the history of science and society. So not just telling a story of the chemical industry and not just telling a story of the chemistry itself or chemical discoveries, but how those things actually affected people in their everyday lives and changed the sort of





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

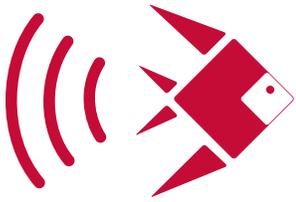
material world around us. So, Things Fall Apart was conceived as an exhibit that would be really the story of that material world. So it could be called Stuff Falls Apart because it's really about everything from mugs and coffee cups to clothes to fine art and artifacts and instruments that we use whether we're in the lab or in a class setting. Really kind of like what's around you, what's happening to it. The answer is it's falling apart. It's degrading. It's decaying whether it's plastics or wood or textiles or whatever, it's all undergoing what you would call entropy, but all in its unique ways. It's either being affected by humidity or UV light or it's being broken and repaired and that kind of cycle of use and wear and tear and that struck us as a really personal story because there's a whole chemistry story like what is rust? What does UV light actually doing to the molecules that give that object its color? But there's a real human story too because we, as a museum and a collecting institution, we're responsible for preserving objects for the next generation, for people to study, for people to be intrigued by or people to have a material record of all that. Not only achievements, but like failures and surprises. All of that so it's a very a museum-centric story, but at the same time, it is absolutely not a museum centric story. It's really more to do with people's real experiences because when you take people into the exhibit, one of the things they immediately start to say is "Oh my God, they repaired this plate with Elmer's glue?" and you start to hear things like "Oh man, I broke the handle off my mug, but none of the glues I worked with would survive the dishwasher." Everybody has a story like that and everybody has had the experience of something really beloved falling to pieces just by their best efforts, which that's the emotional core of the show.

BETH: It's so interesting because I know this organization has been around for how long? A really long time.

ELISABETH & REBECCA: 30 years?

BETH: It didn't always have ... the museum is newer? I forget how long you've had the museum.





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

ELISABETH: Just about 10 years.

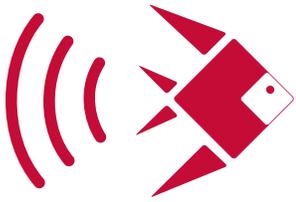
REBECCA: Yeah, 10 years.

BETH: Yeah, so for 20 years this organization existed without a way to communicate this or demonstrate this kind of stuff to the public. So what's it been like learning to translate your stories that used to be your audience was, you were talking to chemists and scientists for the most part, and now you're trying to tell a story to connect this scientific learning to people that walk by on the street and might come in. What's that been like?

REBECCA: I think it's been a really interesting experience for the organization as a whole and has taken in some ways I think some re-jiggering of the way in which we approach things, but in a lot of ways, I think that one of the things that is great about saying we are not just for chemists or scientists or interested in history, but by saying we are for more people, we also are able to get to the fact that scientists are more than just scientists. They are also people with families. They are also people who collect art. There are also people who are interested in doing stuff with their kids, and so not only are we seeing a more holistic audience in Philadelphia, but we are also able to see that scientist audience may be as more holistic people.

BETH: I think that's so interesting, that going public with this has actually helped you understand the people that were already in your organization a little bit better and look at them a little bit differently, because sometimes people can get into trouble when they start to go to you know the "public" and you go from having a really specific audience that has specific needs, specific traits, things that you really understand, to I think kind of watering down that message to make it appeal to everyone. How are you addressing that in your efforts to get people to come into the museum that may be out in the city for First Friday or doing different things without I call it genericizing the things that you're talking about?





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

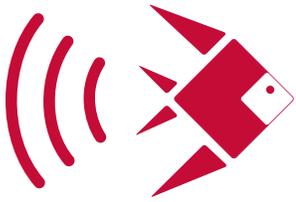
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

ELISABETH: For this show in particular, the answer for us was personalizing. Not to go the route of making it generic, but to provide content that was sort of an open door for people to walk through and put their own experiences into, because you know like the public is, I think of it this way. When I'm in a museum gallery, I'm not the only expert in the room, no matter who else is in the room with me. They may not be an expert in the history of chemistry, but they are an expert in their own experiences. They may be an expert in mechanics or fashion and textiles or they may be an expert in retail or an expert in plastics. They may be someone who is, they have like all these other life experiences that we're trying to, that I want to open a door for them to see the connection to science in their own, wherever they are. To meet them with the history of science wherever they are because the history of science touches all of those things. So really not, not the path to making it generic, but the path to making it relevant, deeply relevant.

BETH: I love that. I mean it's so interesting that you say it that way because I know the first time I went to the museum myself, I have an art background and part of the exhibit was about color and how color is imbued into products and what are the materials that make color, things like that. I never expected that. I'm thinking, you know, it's a chemistry museum and the reason, I was gonna go to medical school until I took chemistry and that's how I ended up in art school. So you know, my natural thinking was you know, I'm coming to this exhibit, but it's not really my thing, and the next thing you know, there was something that I could really connect to.

REBECCA: I would say that something that's also being helped by or at least happened in tandem with the history of science, technology and medicine academic field where I feel so much of the work in the last couple of decades has been about redefining science or at least expanding the idea of what science is and saying science is all of these other things besides professional scientists and who are the people therefore who are left out of an area when it's professional





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

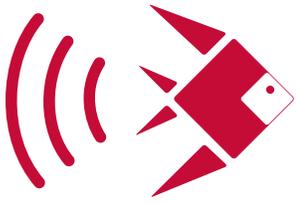
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

scientists versus when we say well, in what way are cooking and science related, what way is our home remedies and medicine related. In what ways are different kinds of artisan skills connected to engineering, and because those kinds of questions are asked out there in the academic world, I think we're able to also get sort of buy-in for the idea that we are expanding the idea of what science is as well.

ELISABETH: I also think that finding a way to sort of, when you're building an exhibit, accepting that not everyone in the whole world will be deeply fulfilled by every exhibit. We have a changing exhibit gallery, there's always going to be something new. We have a permanent exhibition which we are working a refresh of, hooray, but we also have a changing exhibits gallery and we have other programs and pop-ups and that sort of thing and realizing that it's OK to speak directly to one audience or another, as long as you are leaving the door open for people to come in and inviting people to come in, in a sort of diversity of approaches. Like you know, if someone is not attracted to the exhibit, maybe they will love the walking tour because what they really want to do is be in motion, outside in what they consider a real environment. You know, if someone is not attracted to the walking tour, maybe they'll be attracted to a program they can bring all their friends and be highly social at. They don't want to do a solitary activity. They want to bring people, they want to do a multi-generational thing. They want to bring a family to an event. So offering a variety of things and knowing that not everything will appeal to everyone, that's never gonna happen. It's never gonna happen, and that's fine. That's good because you can go further in directions that you may cut yourself from everything. This isn't gonna appeal to everybody. Well, of course it's not. That's fine. We'll appeal to a different group of expertise at another time, a different group of interests at another time.

BETH: So let's talk a little bit about "Things Fall Apart." I don't even want to call it an exhibit because it seems like it's so much more than that. So first, let's talk about why did you make it more? Why did you go outside your walls and you could have just said, "Here, we got a bunch of things. We pulled them out of the





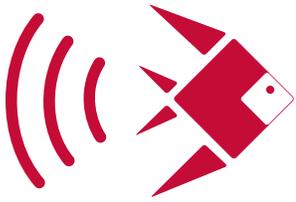
DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

archive,” because that’s how curation works, right. “I’m gonna go get that box.” You know (laughter) ... Exactly right, but you could have said, “I’m an expert, and I can build something and build and create and curate a program that’s within the confines of our museum,” but you didn’t do that. You decided to do something bigger, that in many different ways goes outside your four walls. What was going on here at the time that led you to take that approach?

ELISABETH: Well I think there’s a few things. There’s what’s happening sort of in the exhibit space and there’s what’s happening in the walking tour space, and I’ll talk a little about the exhibit space, which has been, this seems so simple and it’s gonna sound so ridiculous. We have a building and we are located in space and time. I mean, we are in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania at this point in history and there are these institutions around us. We have this neighborhood. We have these possible partners and friends. I wanted to make a show. I sort of think about the suitability of an exhibit concept for the museum. Is this a story that our museum not only can tell, but we can tell it, maybe not the best or that’s an interesting, best or better, but our museum can tell this particular story with this particular spin and this particular content really well. It’s really suitable for us. It’s really appropriate to tell this story here in this building and we are looking at an old city. We are in one of the most historic neighborhoods in Philadelphia. We are surrounded by historic content and historic sites, and so it makes perfect sense to me that we would seek out partners who are also working on issues of the historic preservation. A place like Eastern State Penitentiary, who we reached out to very early on, and we said, “Can we come and learn from you? Can we talk to you about historic preservation because that’s a lot of what you’re doing?” and sort of managing the ongoing decay of your stuff, your site and your stuff. You know, can you not only loan us something from your incredibly fascinating collection, but can you sort of talk us through like what you’re doing? Help us understand what you’re doing. Can we go to a place like Winterthur, we’re lucky enough to be close to the Delaware Valley where there’s one of the premiere conservation programs in the world. We have those, we have access to those conservation scientists and experts right there in our own backyard very early





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

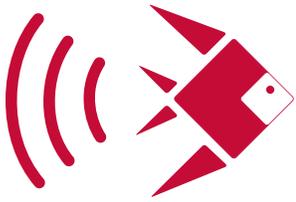
in the process and said, “Can we learn from you? Would you like to contribute objects to this, but also your perspective to this exhibit? Can we represent you and your sort of voice in with all of the individual object stories and people’s personal history and stuff. Can we represent a little bit of the conservator’s voice who is often intentionally behind the scenes of the process?” So we went to the National Park Service because they are directly, Independence National Park is directly on our doorstep. We stare out through the windows at it every day.

REBECCA: We eat lunch in the National Park.

ELISABETH: So we have, there were all these extremely natural partners. There’s Drexel, Fox Historic Costume Collection right there who we worked with on our previous exhibits. We’re building on a partnership to be, or we’ve taken those steps to build a partnership with them, and we came back and we said, “You’re also historic collection, but you’re also a historic textile collection. We have a limited amount of textiles and we’re very curious to know more. Can we come and learn from you?” So with these, and we ended up selecting in the Temple Archaeology lab. So it was sort of, we went there to look at objects that were pulled out of the ground by archaeologists one block away from our location. So we were able to build a show that was highly local because of that process we started looking at what story can we tell here? That’s not necessarily the approach for every single exhibition ever, but it’s something, if we’re gonna talk about preservation, historic preservation, objects and artifacts that are, you know, what’s the process of making them like, what’s the process of preserving them like. We have a really rich, there’s an incredible wealth of materials right here on our doorstep and the story of preservation is enormous. It’s a huge story that can take place anywhere in the world at anytime, but that’s, we have a 1600 square foot gallery, so how do you limit yourself?

BETH: Right, and you can’t have everything in that. But I love what you’re saying about this. From what you were saying before about personalization to how you even thought of “Who should we reach out to?” ... you know, we talk a lot





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

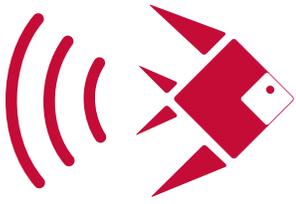
about branding on this and people often don't really know what that means and ultimately it comes down to you know, what can you do to be uniquely you? What can you do in a way that people will value it coming from you, in a way that it maybe wouldn't be as effective or authentic coming from somebody else and the fact that you looked at curation and executing a program like this from the perspective of you know what, we are uniquely suited to do this, and who else in this community has a unique perspective that would then add to this central story. That's really interesting.

ELISABETH: There are amazing conservation centers. I've toured the Rice Museum Conservation Labs, which are out of this world. The Getty has amazing conservation programs going on with plastics and we looked at all those things, but in the end, I was interested in finding that local expertise and that local choice. Like I said, this isn't necessarily every exhibition, but in trying to find a way to limit it and deepen its local relevance and with the thought also that with all of those institutions comes their local audience. People could be served with a show like this or reconnected or could physically come to our galleries and enjoy this experience. They could be served by this, too. So am I not, because our institution and the needs of our audiences and our perspective audience are served by having something that is such a direct connection.

BETH: When I talked to people about this a lot, like you're pulling this together. It's all going to happen here at your location and you're bringing in all these other people and you said, "and their audiences." That often brings up a lot of fear in people, especially in those potential partners that says, "Do we want to share our story? Do we want to jump on board something that could potentially take our audience and give them to somebody else?" Did that fear or nervousness come up with anybody?

ELISABETH: I mean we were literally throwing our audience outside. In the walking tour, we sent them, we decided to literally send our audience outside into the neighborhood. We chose to go with hope and excitement instead of ...





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: That's so great!

REBECCA: Yeah, I feel like when what I've heard from you so much is that so much of your kind of initial pitch to many of these organizations was, "So I want the stuff that you actually don't care about at all," and so you kind of in the stories you told, trick them into it ...

BETH: Soften the blow. We'll go with that.

REBECCA: No, I just want like all the stuff that you really don't care.

BETH: You're never gonna show this, so you may as well give it to me.

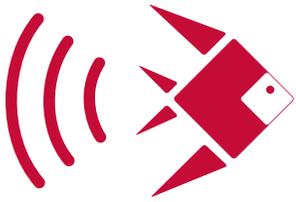
ELISABETH: That another institution wouldn't want or something that causes a kind of existential preservation problem for you. Like how do we preserve this thing that's already in terrible shape?

REBECCA: Yes, but then there was also I think the little bit of that caused the excitement. Oh this is a really weird request that got a lot of people on board.

BETH: Yeah and that is part of it. Nobody has ever asked for that before and the idea of showcasing something that's in bad condition, it's kind of brilliant. It saves a ton of money. The money it takes to fix, my mother is involved with Friends of Independence and there's a seal that's in Independence Hall that they're working on trying to conserve right now and the effort and the money and the process that it takes, it's even hard to get people to understand what that's about. So to begin in our community, it's almost a public service that you're doing to get people to understand what, most people don't understand what conservation means and that bench didn't come out looking like that. You know, it's 300 years old.

REBECCA: And also that's the other place where there was a lot of buy-in. I will say especially in reaching out to people came in for the audio tour and we





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

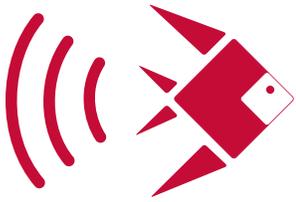
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

reached out to a lot of preservation experts and/or advocates and part of their job and goal in life is to make people understand these needs more, and so I think that added a lot of interest and excitement for people. One of the other things, I don't think this also taps into the audio tour, but also into your point about branding and kind of what it is that we do that maybe is different and that's added kind of that why and in what context question to science. I think Philadelphia has so many science institutes and science museums and many of them are also asking those questions, but I think that we are particularly well-situated to ask those questions and that also gave us a way to do something about preservation in Old City, which in some ways has so many preservation related stories and advocacy things and places where you can learn about how conservation works, the history of various old buildings. So the question became what are we adding, and the answer really came back to these ideas of why, what does it mean to be original or to be preserved early on. In previous jobs had given many historic walking tours. Not in Philadelphia, but in other places and there's always the person who wants to know is that the original? I always want to say, "What do you mean by original?" and I know they are looking for authenticity and I am sympathetic to that, deeply sympathetic to that, but it's important to acknowledge that sort of buildings have lives and that they go through and that at every point in their lives was original to someone. So like the building, so our archive building, most of the facade is original. The rest of it is not original, but it's certainly original for our archivist who goes in there and goes up in the cherry picker to the very top of the three stories and stores documents in there.

BETH: Really? That is really fascinating.

REBECCA: But all these weird things have become part of his job now. So that kind of the fact that we are in our galleries and our permanent galleries, but then also in the temporary galleries asking these "Why" questions let us then bring you to these why questions outside into the world, and Lisa kind of conceived of this project as something that was going to be very local and also gave an opportunity to try something new and try something that embraced this neighborhood by getting people out into the neighborhood as well.





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: That's interesting. Talk a little bit more about how you then took that and walked with it shall we say. So you've done a lot of, you've curated tons of things inside these walls and now you decided to add this walking tour to this whole program. What possibilities did that then open up for the organization once you decided to think that way?

REBECCA: Oh man. So many. So many that we had to like stop and put some limits on things.

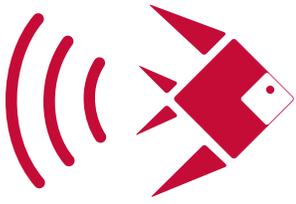
BETH: Right, exactly.

ELISABETH: I will say shout out to Detour, which is the company that runs the app that has, it's a fairly new company and it's done a lot of cool stuff to rethink the idea of the audio tour and sort of place-based storytelling and then also made a lot of tools, both software tools and how to tools available to people who are willing to help them beta-test what they're doing so they have these great how tos about writing for place and writing for voice and writing directions and outlining programs and I really think that they're doing, they're building a lot of, along with some great technology, they're building I think some really neat tools for nonprofit and arts and culture and place-based storytelling organizations.

BETH: I think that's important to talk about that because if you say, "Oh, we're gonna add a walking tour," you've got to be able to think about it from a strategic point of view, from what's the content gonna be point of view, from a did I say left when I meant right, all the way down to what's the technology that we're gonna be delivering. There's lots of different ways that you can do that.

REBECCA: Yeah and I've heard about Detour from when they did the San Francisco Museum of Modern Arts audio tour and that's more of a traditional, you push the button and you hear it, but that kind of opened with a splash that they got a lot of celebrities to narrate pieces, but they also took this very personal approach in this very like quality and PR-esque audio storytelling approach to building things, and I was like, "That's an interesting approach" and also I will say





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

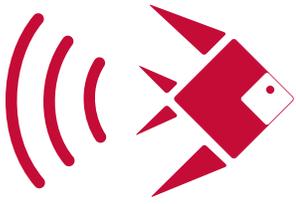
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

that, like I said, I've done a lot of both written and given many walking tours and the idea of kind of finding a way to take something of that experience of being with a person who is a really great storyteller, who is emotionally invested and who is there with you teaching you about a place as you walk around and making that something that joins that with kind of audio tour using an app kind of thing is really exciting to me, and so I had all those kinds of things in my head and so I was, then you came to me, and you're like, "Do you want to work with me?" and I said, "Yes, and I really want to do it this way," and we came across Detour and that put a lot of pieces into place. It also we realized, OK, what are the other resources, already had, things we already do here that actually probably have a home in like this and the obvious place to go with that was our Center for Oral History. They all professionally interview people and transcribe interviews and think about hearing people's stories and preserving those stories. So I worked with Center for Oral History to do interviews with people. This is a different kind of interviews they usually do. They usually do life histories with scientists, but those same interview skills are also valuable.

BETH: I think that's so interesting because when we talk about collaboration, there's both internal and external collaboration. So to be able to say yes we went out to these other museums and these other organizations within our community or even across the country and learn from them, but that we also looked inside and see like what assets do you have here. What are people that maybe don't get pulled in on the work that you could utilize in a completely different way. What could that create?

REBECCA: And I would say that the other thing that solidified the direction we're going with this is that there is one of the staff members on the oral history team. His academic background is in historic preservation, and so I was like, "Great, you're my research person. You explain historic preservation to me and make sure that I'm doing things correctly and keep me honest," and he's someone who like, in terms of, like he's been at CHF for a year-ish. So he's already someone who is I want to work in different parts of the organization and so yes, that then helped





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

us put it together and if those tools hadn't been in place, then other tools would have been in place.

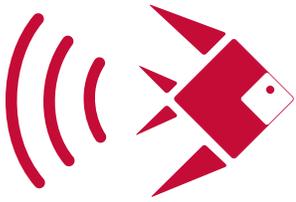
BETH: Right. Are there other, so what other kind of partners have we not covered? You know, did you have sponsorship partners? Did you have other types of people? So you had some institutions that you got some advice from. You had a technology partner. You had some internal people. Who else kind of came together?

ELISABETH: One of the nice things about this project is that we were able to put together project teams that were cross-departmental in a sense that I tried to look at the boundaries as invisible or not real. Our project teams are people from our Center for Oral History, our Center for Applied History, our Research Department, people from the museum. Actually we have someone on staff who works in Advancement who by training is an archaeologist. So we pulled her into the project, too, and she ended up informing a lot of the decisions that we made, and so that was a privilege at our particular institution to be able to work like that. I know that there are many places where many things are silo-ed and on paper there's a lot of places where we are silo-ed, too, but the joy of being able to put a team together based on skill sets and resources available in the building was really, it made us way more effective in working, being able to work across the lines and we've also been able to, as we're thinking about programming, pull in sort of unexpected partnerships. We had a terrific program on opening day that was a cheese expert, an expert cheese monger from Di Bruno Brothers. He came in and talked about the sort of delicious side of when you leave things to decay in a cave, sometimes they're cheese.

(laughter)

BETH: I mean how clever to think, "OK, we're going to take this all the way to the end," and even in your opening events you explored every angle. Like how did you come up with the idea of saying, "Well, cheese decays?"



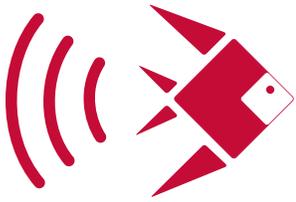


DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

ELISABETH: It was part of our, part of our research process was identifying sort of, sort of our early brainstorming process and this is something that I like to do when I'm planning projects is start from obviously I mean like something I like to do. You start from like the broadest net and then you sort of reel it in slowly and we had early brainstorming sessions with people from basically every department, communications, library, the research, oral history, the archives. We brought together everybody in these very big sessions where we were throwing stuff at the wall and saying, "OK, what are things we could explore, themes we could explore, problems we could explore, objects we could explore?" basically everything in the world. There was decay in food, there was decay in art objects, art conservation and there was the nuclear bunker that's sort of debate over nuclear waste sites, like in a thousand years, will we have written language any more? Who knows and so how do you mark a bunker with waste? Like how do you warn people in the future that there is still radioactive waste here? How do you do it? So that's, radioactive waste has a half-life that we can't imagine. So we thought of literally everything and then in forming the exhibit, we pulled it in much tighter to create that local story that really centers on people's personal objects and their personal surroundings. So that story is a smaller microcosm. It's very enriched, but it's a limited story that you can tell in a 1600-square-foot gallery to someone who is there for one hour. We reeled it in I think pretty well conceptually tightly, and then we have the walking tour to really broaden it and take it out into the neighborhood, and then we have the programs where we can hit those individual points that are so cool and so compelling and bring in a whole other audience. Like if you don't care about textile conservation, you might care about cheese. So you are also invited to the party. Finding a path with programming to hit those points that you could not satisfyingly talk about in the exhibit with your limitations, but you are able to say you know what? People are interested in cheese. People are interested in going deeper into archaeology with a great upcoming program with the Penn Museum that will deal with sort of like what will modern contemporary objects, how will they be interpreted by historians 200 years from now?





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

BETH: So what do you think you guys have learned from this whole process that somebody that's listening today could take away and learn from if they wanted to try to bring collaboration and bring outside partners, inside partners together to come up with the best program that they can come up with?

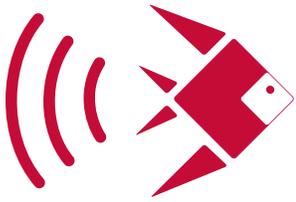
REBECCA: I'm gonna go back to investment. I think that one of the things and I really learned from bringing together the different experts on staff that worked on the audio tour, but also the people that we interviewed for the audio tour on board. That's another piece of the collaboration that was really important. All the people who lent their expertise and their voices to the audio tour, but meeting various people where they work, making them feel like their contribution mattered and that their voices were heard I think was really important too. I really like to talk about I did not create the audio tour, my team did. I'm part of that team, but just because there were so many pieces of expertise and so many pieces of what like people cared about that went into that, but also we created an investment where people we interviewed I think were comfortable telling stories that did not always put their organizations or their professional communities in a great light, but were willing to kind of go and talk about a little dark corner of conservation or to say this didn't work historically and then you have the curator of IMHP saying "I wouldn't have made these preservation choices," about her employer. I think it's OK to say because she says it and it's in the tour. It's in the tour and we have you know a middle-aged white male curator saying this historically this preservation privileges, the stories of white males and that's a problem, and so I really think that came from meeting people where they were and investment and letting them get invested and it made a better product.

ELISABETH: I think they could see how much we cared.

REBECCA: Yeah, I think that we, made them care.

ELISABETH: Yeah, well for me it was sort of like care more. Care more and don't be afraid to show that you care. Like our preservation audio tour is, it's not super





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

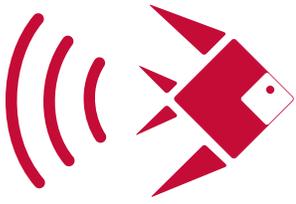
WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

heavily weighted in one particular argument or another, but it is, it's advocacy. It's absolutely, there is absolutely a message of advocacy for preservation inside it. We didn't shy away from that. We were like, "Oh, this is sort of unabashedly pro-preservation". There's many forms preservation can take, but there's some, there's an element of advocacy in it. We were like great, cool. We care. We're caring more, and I think that like I'm also, I'm an art historian in a science museum, and I have to embrace that. I can either fight it, and pretend I know a lot about molecules, or I can bring, like I want people to do when they're in the museum, I can bring my personal experiences and my personal training and make something that, like I curated the show in a very particular way. Someone else would have done it differently. Like everyone who was on our research team and everyone that was on our walking tour team brought their own. We have all these people in the building with specific trainings and experiences and we asked them to bring that out and to, we asked them to care more about that rather than sort of fit the, a different sort of line of what stories a history of science museum can tell. We couldn't tell a lot of things. You know, it's just pulling the team together and allowing people to be who they are and bring what they can to the surface.

REBECCA: I think that the other great realization is if it had been a different combination of people, it would have been something different that also would have been great.

BETH: I love that. I feel that's the message I got out of listening to you, that you started off this conversation by talking about wanting to connect the people, the audience, the public to the personalization and as we're closing this out, you're talking about the fact that it's not just that. It's that you had to connect to it personally and to be OK with the fact that you're telling your version of this story and not the version of the story. It's almost like you're moving it out of the third person and into the first person. Even though you just said that a minute ago, the story of conversation and conservation as opposed to you know I'm telling my story and how you look at that. It's fascinating. This has been such an interesting conversation and I'm sure people are going to want to learn more from you. So





DRIVING PARTICIPATION

WITH BETH BRODOVSKY

if people have further questions, how can they reach out and connect with you guys?

ELISABETH: I will say, institutionally I would love it if folks would follow us on our Twitter, our Instagram, our Facebook. We have a hashtag for the exhibit and for the walking tour. That's #WhatFallsApart. The idea was that's the question of the exhibit and the walking tour. Answer it.

BETH: That's brilliant!

ELISABETH: What falls apart, stays fall apart. I also welcome emails. So go on and send it to me.

REBECCA: So do I.

BETH: And I will put links to the exhibit and to everyone's emails on the show notes page. Thank you both so much for sharing your knowledge and experience with both me and our nonprofit community.

REBECCA: Thank you so much for asking us.

ELISABETH: Thank you.



GET ACCESS TO OUR
MASTER CLASSES
ON DEMAND

[CLICK HERE TO PURCHASE](#)

