

Art Museums in the Age of #MeToo

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## Author's Statement

This capstone aims to identify and present strategies that museum professionals may utilize as they navigate the challenges and opportunities that emerge in the wake of the #MeToo movement. It is my hope that museums will be bold and brave as they take on the difficult work that is necessary to correct the many injustices that persist.

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## Introduction

Art museums today face ethical dilemmas on many fronts including fundraising, governance, and collecting and exhibition practices. Artists and activists call for transparency and ethical behavior (Battaglia and Greenberger). Recent reports of sexual harassment in the art world and the broader #MeToo movement are prompting museums to consider the ethical response to both contemporary and historical artists who were accused of sexual misconduct (Pogrebin and Scheussler; Frank). Before the #MeToo movement, museums and much of the art world separated the personal behavior of artists from their artistic output. Now, #MeToo is demanding that museums address the troubling behavior of both living and historical artists.

In 2017 and 2018, hundreds of stories came to light in which powerful men were accused of inappropriate sexual behavior (North et al.). Vox reports that 263 public figures have been accused of sexual misconduct (North et al.). Beginning in late 2017 with the highly publicized allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, many people began to share their accounts of sexual harassment and sexual assault using “#MeToo” on Twitter (Bennett; Rutenberg et al.). The hashtag spread rapidly on social media and the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment led to a reckoning in many industries, prompting what may be the watershed moment for survivors of sexual harassment (Bennett; Rutenberg et al.).

The art world is no stranger to allegations of misconduct. In fact, many artists firmly established in the canon of art history have long been considered persons of questionable moral character, many of whom mistreated women and girls— Benvenuto Cellini, Carravaggio, Egon Schiele, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Gauguin, among others (Farago “Gauguin”; Pogrebin and Schuessler). Unfortunately, little has changed. In autumn of 2017, Knight Landesman, co-owner

of the international art magazine *Artforum*, was accused by nine women of sexual harassment (Battaglia and Greenberger); in late 2017 and early 2018, eight women alleged that the artist Chuck Close harassed them (Pogrebin and Schuessler; Voon and Steinhauer); and in early 2018, a *Boston Globe* investigation revealed dozens of accusations against renowned photographer and art school professor Nicholas Nixon (Seeyle; Lazar and Gay). For women and others in the art community, these cases are not simply recent developments or anomalies. They are symptoms of the larger, longstanding problems of gender inequality and abuse of power in the art world (Battaglia and Greenberger). Just as abuse of power and gender inequality will continue to be pressing issues across disciplines for years to come, the #MeToo movement will not be short-lived.

This is a significant moment for art museums. #MeToo provides an opportunity for museums to think critically about the way they present artwork by problematic artists; to examine their role in perpetuating the problems of sexual harassment, gender inequality, and abuse of power; to reconsider their ethical obligations to the public; and to take actions that lead to meaningful change. This capstone addresses questions about the presentation of work by artists who have been accused of sexual harassment by looking at this topic through the lens of museum ethics. First, it is essential to consider the greater context within which the #MeToo movement falls. Second, an analysis of a past exhibition demonstrates how museums have exhibited the work of a great artist who was also notorious for inappropriate sexual behavior. The analysis of a past exhibition provides evidence that museums have not been entirely ethical in their presentation of these artists and that there is room for change. Third, this capstone explores museums' ethical obligations, agency in society, and responsibility to communicate truthfully in addressing social and moral issues. Finally, it recommends strategies for practical

steps that museums can take in response to artists accused of sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual behavior. Because art museums are public institutions that are valued as highly trusted sources of information, their response to the dialogue and broad consequences prompted by the #MeToo movement will prove to be significant as institutions and organizations across many disciplines are also navigating these issues.

### *Definition of Terms*

It is crucial to adopt clear and consistent definitions of the terms to be used throughout this paper. Many recent reports have used the terms “sexual misconduct,” “sexual abuse,” “sexual assault,” and “sexual harassment,” among others. In this paper, the term “sexual harassment” will be used as it often applies to situations that occur in a professional setting or workplace and most of the cases addressed here involve situations in which the harasser is the experienced teacher or artist who holds the power and controls the situation, while the harassed is the student or model, vulnerable because they have little or no power.

In 1965, the US Congress created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as a means of enforcing the Civil Rights act of 1964 (“About EEOC”). The EEOC functions as the federal organization that enforces the laws that make it illegal to discriminate in the workplace (“About EEOC”). The term “sexual harassment” came into use in 1986 when the EEOC recognized it as a form of discrimination, defining it as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature,” as well as offensive or inappropriate remarks about a person’s sex (“Select Task Force”; “Sexual Harassment”). In 2017, following the accusations against Landesman, over eighteen hundred women, trans people, and gender nonconforming artists and arts professionals published an open

letter titled “Not Surprised,” denouncing what they called the “larger, more insidious problem: an art world that upholds inherited power structures at the cost of ethical behavior” (Vartanian; “Not Surprised”). This paper will use the term “sexual harassment” as defined by the letter-writers because it is inclusive and descriptive of the many forms of sexual harassment:

A type of personal or institutional abuse that uses sexual behavior to alarm, control, demean, intimidate, bully, belittle, humiliate, or embarrass another person...Sexual harassment is rarely purely related to sexual desire. It is often a misuse and abuse of power and position, whose perpetrators use sexual behavior as a tool or weapon...Sexual harassment is any unwelcome behavior of a sexual kind and can take many forms, including making unnecessary, unwanted, or unsolicited physical contact; complimentary or derogatory comments; unwelcome comments about a person’s physical appearance or clothing; commenting on a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity; asking questions about a person’s sex life; engaging in unwelcome sexual propositions, invitations, and flirtation; making somebody feel uncomfortable through displaying or sharing sexual material; giving unwelcome personal gifts; wolf-whistling; catcalling; following; leering or stalking. (“Not Surprised”)

This capstone is primarily concerned with the ethical dilemma presented by exhibiting the work of artists accused of sexual harassment. The word “accused” will be used to mean a person who is charged with an offense, or, in other words, a person who is alleged to have committed a crime. Accused does not mean guilty. Many of the examples that will be referenced in this paper are men who have been accused but were not or have not yet been convicted for a

variety of reasons. Some of these artists and their accusers are no longer living, and their cases will never be resurrected, but many of the accused are living artists and the allegations against them are recent, legal proceedings are ongoing, and the judicial process is underway.

The artworks of these accused artists are in museum galleries and are part of exhibitions that are planned years in advance. Herein lies one of the many reasons that museums are grappling with this issue and why it is particularly fraught with uncertainty: some would argue that the accused are innocent until proven guilty and a hasty response could prove disastrous for museums and artists alike. However, museums need to respond regardless of whether the accused remain merely accused or whether they are found guilty. It takes time for claims to receive due process, but museums are forced to make swift decisions about the accused artist's work that is currently in its galleries or risk becoming subject to what would surely be highly critical public scrutiny. While the difference between accused and guilty is significant, for the purposes of this paper, the recommended strategies remain the same, regardless of whether the artist is accused or has been proven guilty.

### **Background and Context**

Before beginning any discussion of museum exhibitions as they relate to #MeToo, it is important to understand what the #MeToo movement is and the context within which it falls. As the eighteen hundred artists and arts professionals wrote in their letter titled "Not Surprised," it is imperative that arts institutions consider their role in perpetuating these injustices and their obligation to respond accordingly ("Not Surprised"). Similarly, many artists, critics, gallerists, curators, and museum professionals who have addressed injustices in and through their work have called for the recognition that the recent events are simply a part of the urgent, larger

problems of sexism, abuse of power, discrimination, and misplaced priorities (Battaglia and Greenberger; Reilly “What Is”). Before addressing what response is required of museums, it is critical to place this movement within the larger context of gender inequality and abuse of power in the art world. The current power structure allows sexual harassers to be tolerated and the harassed to be silenced (“Not Surprised”; Pogrebin and Schuessler).

Not unlike the spheres of business, media, and politics that have garnered much attention throughout the #MeToo movement, the art world has long been a place of gender disparity and inequality (“Get the Facts”; Reilly “What Is”). According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, while about half of all artists in the US today are women, they continue to experience income inequality, only earning about eighty-one cents for every dollar that male artists earn (“Get the Facts”). Furthermore, women are underrepresented in museums and galleries across the world and over ninety-six percent of artwork sold at auction is created by male artists (“Get the Facts”). Women hold less than half of all leadership positions in museums in the US and earn less than their male counterparts (“Get the Facts”).

For thirty years, the Guerilla Girls, a group of self-declared “feminist activist artists,” have been drawing attention to the lack of female representation in art galleries and museums around the world. Despite their efforts, sweeping changes have not happened (Callihan and Feldman). Maura Reilly, arts writer and self-declared curatorial activist, gauged the progress of correcting centuries of gender discrimination by looking at several recent iterations of the Venice Biennale and blockbuster museum exhibitions, and reported the levels of gender inequality and female representation remain abysmal (Reilly “What Is”). A lack of women in leadership roles at the world’s top museums means that men are most often deciding what art gets displayed and what stories get told (Stanfill; Traister). Just as art historian Linda Nochlin pointed out in 1971

when she first published “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”, there is an urgent need to examine and question the institutional structures that have allowed only the privileged, white, male perspectives to shape the narratives that define culture (Stanfill; Traister). As the evidence confirms, the art world has long been a male-dominated place and the fight for equality is not over (Callihan and Feldman; Reilly “What Is”).

The continued fight for gender equality is essential as museums move toward becoming more inclusive, diverse, and representative spaces, but the #MeToo movement is demanding more than that; it is pushing museums, and the public, to think critically about gender inequality as it relates to institutional ethics and to question if and how personal behavior is relevant to artistic output. This movement provokes society to reconsider not only artists who are accused today; it forces museums to turn the contemporary lens toward the past and consider artists long-believed to have had both exceptional artistic talent and dubious moral character. Scholars, artists, and activists alike question museums’ complicity in perpetuating the problem and demand that museum policies and practices be more transparent and inclusive (Battaglia and Greenberger; Steinhauer; Reilly “What Is”). If museums are to be held responsible, in part, for both canonizing artists who exhibited reprehensible behavior and for creating and upholding the framework in which powerful people continue to harass others without penalty, then surely the time for museums’ passivity is over. They must respond to the #MeToo movement.

Social justice activist Tarana Burke began the original “Me Too” campaign over a decade ago, but it was not until *The New York Times* broke the story about film executive Harvey Weinstein’s long history of sexual harassment in October 2017 that the movement took off. It spread rapidly, first in Hollywood, after actress Alyssa Milano shared a friend’s suggestion that women who “have been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’” (M. Green; Bennett;

Harris). Perhaps due to the overwhelming number of responses, women were finally believed (Bennett). Naturally, celebrities received most of the attention, but this movement was for any and all survivors of sexual harassment and assault. The list of the accused grew quickly and included many powerful men who shaped and defined cultural narratives in the last several decades through media, politics, business, and the arts (Bennett; Traister; North et al.). The injustices span all demographics and industries (North et al.).

Although the #MeToo movement gained attention and momentum in late 2017, inappropriate sexual behavior by powerful men is nothing new. Women have been mistreated and sexually harassed throughout history, but only since 1986 have women in the US had legal right to challenge what is now called “sexual harassment” (M. Green). Perhaps due to shame, embarrassment, or fear of losing a job or opportunity, many people who have been sexually harassed remain silent and do not report it (“Not Surprised”; “Select Task Force”). The EEOC reported in 2016 that about sixty percent of women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace and that, sadly, “the least common response to harassment is to take some formal action” (“Select Task Force”). #MeToo is changing that: these voices will not be silenced any longer (“Not Surprised”).

Traditionally, museums have not addressed the personal behavior or character of artists, as will be evidenced in an examination of an exhibition of Paul Gauguin’s work. Now, the #MeToo movement is shedding light on not just the men accused of sexual harassment, but also the power structures that allowed inappropriate behavior to persist. The #MeToo movement demands attention as museums seek to move forward with engaged and relevant exhibitions and programs. It provokes critical thinking and requires looking at the past and the present through a new lens. It provides an opportunity to begin discussions about artists now and in the past who

demonstrated problematic personal behavior and to explore how and why art museums should respond.

### **Art Museums and Exhibitions**

Museums have long used exhibitions and displays of their collections as a vehicle for delivering content for visitor consumption (Simon). Exhibitions take many shapes and each is unique, but regardless of subject matter, they are modes of communication and representation (Hein “The Responsibility” 117). Exhibitions and related programs are ways in which museums present objects and convey information, but they also function as spaces in which audiences can engage in dialogue, share ideas, and create meaning. Director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History Nina Simon has spent the past few years championing the concept of “the participatory museum,” in which the museum is more of a platform where experience and meaning are constructed by visitors and museums together (Simon). Audiences want more than just visiting the museum; they expect opportunities to discuss and process what they are experiencing (Simon).

As museums accept that their continued existence in the twenty-first century and beyond relies upon their ability to provide audiences with the opportunities they desire, they must adapt and learn to use their resources to connect with audiences about things that matter to them (Simon). Where the museum of the past placed its collections at the center of its activities, today’s museum is focused on its relevance and service to the public (Anderson 5). Art museums are looking for ways to use their resources to engage in topics that matter to their public, which may mean taking on current challenging or controversial social and moral issues in exhibitions and related programs.

Museum exhibitions are designed to affect how people think; everything from the artworks selected to the design and arrangement of the wall text contributes to a viewer's understanding and appreciation of the objects, narratives, and topics (Hein "The Responsibility"; Karp). Museums are constantly choosing what is presented and what is not, and with every exhibition decision, they are making ethical choices (Hein "The Responsibility" 124; Lindauer 306). In his chapter on ethics and exhibitions in Gary Edson's seminal work *Museum Ethics*, David K. Dean asserts that museums have ethical responsibilities to the public regarding exhibitions (218). Because museums are trusted sources of knowledge, their ethical obligations lie in ensuring that the information they present in exhibitions is as accurate and true as possible (218). Furthermore, museums must practice a willingness to acknowledge the fallibility of the ideas presented (218). Both of these principles are key as museums seek to address contemporary moral and social issues.

Museums, at times, opt for self-censorship of a particular artist or specific work of art in order to avoid controversy (Steiner 399). As Christopher B. Steiner shows in his chapter "Museum Censorship" in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics*, censorship rarely has the desired effect. Instead of averting attention from the target artist or exhibition, it usually puts it in the spotlight (397). Steiner suggests that rather than self-censoring to avoid controversy, museums must demonstrate transparency and use the controversial art or artist to begin honest conversations with their audiences about censorship and museum decision-making (408-409). Deborah Cullinan, Chief Executive Officer of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, asserts that understanding the artist is part of the context and story of the artwork itself. If museums chose not to show the work of artists who have been accused of sexual harassment, they would miss opportunities to use that artwork as a starting point for dialogue about difficult ethical and moral

dilemmas (Cullinan). In choosing to censor the artist or artwork, museums would, in effect, become less relevant (Cullinan).

Many people will make the case that artwork should remain separate from the conduct of the artist—that it should stand on its own merit (Pogrebin and Schuessler). The other side of that argument is that supplying the context that surrounds an artwork may provide a deeper and richer understanding of it. James Rondeau, the president and director of the Art Institute of Chicago, believes that museums can no longer afford to present art without also offering whatever context surrounds the artist (Pogrebin and Schuessler). Fortunately, museums have the unique opportunity to use exhibitions to present art, wrapped in all its context, whatever that may be; there is room for both an appreciation of the art and a serious discussion of the context in which it was created (Sotto). Now, in the expectant wake of #MeToo, museums find they must do both.

In the last few decades, there has been a gradual push for museums to take on an activist role and become increasingly more engaged with contemporary social issues like equality, diversity, and human rights in order to promote change (Karp; Marstine 5; Nightingale and Sandell; Sandell). It is now widely accepted that museums have social value because audiences can, in the safety of a public forum, learn and interact with objects and narratives that bring up controversial or difficult topics (Nightingale and Sandell 3). Recent research shows that a museum's engagement with contemporary issues can positively impact its standing with the public (Dilenschneider "MoMA Sees").

An example from 2017 demonstrates the benefits that may be associated with responding to or engaging with current issues that may be controversial. In early 2017, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) responded to US President Donald Trump's executive order on immigration that blocked citizens of certain majority-Muslim countries from entering the US

(Farago “MoMA”). In a quick and decisive move, MoMA installed seven works by artists from some of these countries and added a wall label beside each work which read:

This work is by an artist from a nation whose citizens are being denied entry into the United States, according to a presidential executive order issued on January 27, 2017. This is one of several such artworks from the Museum’s collection installed throughout the fifth-floor galleries to affirm the ideals of welcome and freedom as vital to this Museum, as they are to the United States.

(Farago “MoMA”)

While it was a swift and direct statement, it was neither a knee-jerk reaction nor a ploy to gain media attention; rather, it stemmed from the museum’s commitment to its mission. Two years earlier in 2015, MoMA began a series of projects that uses exhibitions and public programs to explore themes related to immigration (“Citizens and Borders”), so the response to the travel ban was aligned with their clear investment in the dialogue surrounding immigration.

Colleen Dilenschneider of the website “Know Your Own Bone” looked at the data following MoMA’s move (Dilenschneider “MoMA Sees”). By looking at metrics that gauge things like trust, value, and authority for the past three years, she noted that MoMA’s reputation got a significant boost in public opinion following its stand on immigration (Dilenschneider “MoMA Sees”). While she states that there is not a definitively causal relationship between the installation of the artworks and the reputation boost in January and February 2017, it was the biggest jump in reputation in the last three years and is decidedly correlated (Dilenschneider “MoMA Sees”). MoMA acted quickly in response to a current, controversial issue, and because their actions were in line with their mission and values, they were able to effectively address topics that matter to their public.

Therefore, in order to contribute to social change and progress, museums need to leverage their position as powerful agents of change and determine how best to utilize their unique resources to engage with their audiences about the things those audiences care about. Museums must decide how bold and provocative they want to be in shaping the type of public discourse that can lead to change (Cullinan). The relevant, twenty-first century museum is one that both engages with audiences by addressing contemporary social issues and remains truthful in its exhibitions.

It is useful to look to the past to understand and acknowledge how museums have exhibited the work of an artist notorious for sexual misbehavior to see what museums today can and should do differently in light of #MeToo. Museums worldwide have put on exhibitions of Paul Gauguin's work, beginning shortly after his death in 1903 (Riding). Gauguin, a French post-impressionist artist, is often described as a complex, multi-dimensional figure who was influential in moving art forward in the nineteenth century (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). His is a story of the self-made artist: a man who, at age twenty-seven, quit his job as a stockbroker to pursue his dream of being an artist, determined to create his own narrative (Cotter). In his art, he was often unconventional, weaving together fact and fiction, fantasy and reality (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). But he was also a problematic figure: the self-professed "savage," believed to have been an abusive husband, "sexual tourist," colonialist, and pedophile who was obsessed with adolescent girls ("Gauguin: Maker of Myth"; D'Arcy; Mathews 178, 181-183). Gauguin wrote of sexual fantasies—sadistic and erotic illusions involving both pleasure and violence (Mathews 197). Again, the extent to which he wove together fantasy and reality in his writings is unclear, but it is certain that he took a thirteen-year-old mistress in Tahiti ("Gauguin: Maker of Myth"; Cotter; Mathews 180). While some say it was

not an uncommon practice for a foreigner to take a teenage wife in Tahiti, Gauguin reportedly remained interested in underage girls upon his return to France, usually daughters of his friends or other artists (Mathews 205). He frequently portrayed young girls in his art, often in the nude.

It is difficult for scholars to say with certainty where the line is between Gauguin's storytelling and reality (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). Museums are presented with the dilemma of having Gauguin's less than savory reputation on one hand and his compelling artworks on the other. Looking at an exhibition from within the last decade—yet well before the recent #MeToo movement—is useful for exploring how two museums handled Gauguin's questionable personal behavior and character.

### *Gauguin: Maker of Myth*

Art historian Belinda Thomson curated the exhibition *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* for Tate Modern in London ("Explore"). The show ran from September 2010 to January 2011 before traveling to a second venue, National Gallery of Art in Washington DC (NGA), where it was put on from February to June 2011 ("Explore"; "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). The exhibition was essentially the same in both venues, so both iterations will be examined and assessed as one.

This exhibition is a worthy selection for examination for several reasons, chiefly because two large, internationally renowned museums with massive public appeal hosted the exhibition, meaning a large amount of exhibition material is readily available for review. NGA's electronic exhibition archives contain a wealth of information about the show, including a recording of the introductory lecture by Dr. Thomson, a four-part film about Gauguin created by NGA that played within the galleries during the run of the exhibition, an interview between NGA curator of French paintings Mary Morton and Dr. Thomson, the exhibition brochure, and a recording of a

press event. Tate Modern's electronic exhibition archives include the exhibition guide with gallery text, as well as video and audio recordings of two day-long conferences held at Tate Modern titled "Myths of the Other" and "Myths of the Artist." These conferences featured lectures and performance art related to the themes of the exhibition. All of these materials provide a clear picture of the exhibition as a whole. This exhibition was quite popular: attendance for the show in London was over 420,000 visitors; attendance in Washington was over 176,000 ("Gauguin: Maker of Myth").

A thorough assessment of the *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* exhibition reveals that it was a thoughtfully-conceived and well-produced exhibition. The curator's idea of arranging the galleries and grouping the artworks by the various themes and phases in Gauguin's life rather than chronologically was intended to allow the visitor to view Gauguin's work in a new way, which is necessary when viewing works by a well-known artist. In the exhibition, there was a whole room devoted to "The Eternal Feminine," which the curators used to describe Gauguin's presentations of symbolic, "archetypal" women ("Explore"). In the accompanying text, there was scarcely any mention of Gauguin's relationship with the wife and children he abandoned, his teenage wife in Tahiti, or the woman he referred to as a "whore" in his own writing (Mathews 179). In a lecture that took place when the exhibition opened at NGA, Thomson made a brief reference to this problem of the "sexual innuendo" associated with Gauguin, and the disparity between the women in his art and the complicated relationships he had with the women in his life (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). Thomson only noted that the press were fixated on this idea (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth"). While she admitted that this is an area of Gauguin's life and work where it is difficult to determine what is fact or fiction, she did not elaborate (Thomson "Gauguin: Maker of Myth").

In the accompanying lectures and film, the curators, art historians, and museum professionals who managed this exhibition acknowledged that Gauguin was a controversial figure. Several mentioned his difficult nature, his apparent cultural appropriation and plagiarism, his strangeness, but of course, none of these complaints is criminal. In a series of lectures at Tate Modern called “Myths of the Other,” one of the speakers, University College of London professor Tamar Garb began by questioning how we look at Gauguin today in diverse, multicultural societies (Garb). She describes the popular, prevailing conception of Gauguin and his work that came out of the post-colonial period—that of “brown, reclining bodies, dusky maidens, a kind of exotic, tropical fantasia”—as the very thing that brings people in the door and ultimately funds the work of the museum (Garb). Interestingly, rather than address or include this part of Gauguin’s story, she asserts that the creators of the exhibition had to work against these ideas about Gauguin and his personal behavior in order to get down to the depth and complexity of his work (Garb).

In a second lecture series titled “Myths of the Artist,” Gill Perry, professor of art history at the Open University and one of the conference hosts, briefly mentioned Gauguin’s sexual deviance and alluded to future discussion of this topic (Perry), but such a discussion did not materialize. Christine Riding, one of the curators from Tate Modern, brought up Gauguin’s reputation for having relationships with underage girls (Riding). Like Thomson, Riding stated the curators were concerned that this would be a focal point in the press and that they were aware of the challenge of balancing what an artist does in their personal life with their artistic output (Riding). She stated that people should keep an artist’s personal life in mind but did not comment on Gauguin’s sexual misbehavior any further (Riding). The brochure from the exhibition’s NGA

iteration is similar in tone and scope—it briefly references Gauguin’s “scandalously young mistress” but leaves it at that (Matheny).

In her lecture at Tate Modern, curator Belinda Thomson mentioned Gauguin’s influence in moving forward the now familiar idea of the artist lifestyle, saying he lived and promulgated the idea that artists could not be confined to the same rules and standards as the rest of civilized society (Thomson “Myths of the Artist”). Furthermore, she suggests that artists learned from Gauguin’s example and imitated his narcissistic way of life (Thomson “Myths of the Artist”). Perhaps this persistent idea—that the artist is free from the constraints of ordinary society, permitted to live by a different set of rules—contributes to why some male artists, with their work on display in the world’s museums and their egos stoked by the power of celebrity, have abused this power. The curators lost a critical moment to address an aspect of Gauguin’s life that continues to remain relevant and debated.

*Gauguin: Maker of Myth* was a missed opportunity. It is notable that the creators of the exhibition were well aware of the public’s preconceptions about Gauguin’s reputation. Despite fleeting references in the public lectures to Gauguin’s problematic relationship to women and his sexual misdeeds, there was no discussion of this in the exhibition itself, where nearly six hundred thousand visitors would certainly encounter it. In an exhibition dedicated to understanding the complexity of the artist and the myths that he both created and surrounded himself with, there was no reference to the myths of his sexual misbehavior that overshadow his work. The room specifically dedicated to Gauguin’s depictions of women might have been the opportune moment to introduce the public to the facts about the artist and his treatment of women, as well as the stories and details about which art historians are less certain.

Surely, addressing the rumors that swirl around Gauguin's personal life would have contributed to the audience's greater understanding of the artist, his art, and the context in which it was produced. Despite choosing to take on an overarching theme of myth-making, an exploration of how Gauguin's life and output was a result of his weaving together narratives both real and fantasy, the curators did not choose to directly address the reputation associated with his name—that of a pedophilic, sexual deviant. If the curators believed those stereotypes malign Gauguin's name because they are false, then surely in their ethical obligation as truth-tellers, they also had the responsibility to prove them wrong.

This exhibition is an example of how museums have failed to address personal behavior as it relates to artistic output. In the age of #MeToo, museums will need to address the problematic behavior of both living and deceased artists as they never have before, and there is no roadmap. A close look at museums' ethical responsibilities may help illuminate how museums might move forward with exhibitions of artwork by artists of the past who were known to have problematic personal behavior related to gender, sex, and power.

### **Museum Ethics**

Museums in the US are organized as public trusts and therefore are responsible to the public they serve. In their responsibility to the public trust, they are required to act not only legally but also ethically (“AAM Code of Ethics”). The American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) are two esteemed organizations that grant memberships to museums in the US that adhere to certain standards and purposes. Both present codes of ethics and standards to which member museums subscribe. These codes do not provide a set of rules or deliver a prescription for ethical behavior. Rather, they function as guidelines for

museums. Any discussion of how a museum might ethically respond to #MeToo and accusations of sexual harassment against artists must begin with an examination of these codes and what guidance they may provide.

Both codes are general and therefore limited in their usefulness in guiding a museum to an ethical response to any specific issue. The AAM code of ethics is broad and necessarily so, as it is meant to be applicable for many types of museums. AAM expects that each member institution use the AAM code as a starting point, a frame of reference, to develop its own code of ethics that is specific to its collection, practices, needs, and so on (“AAM Code of Ethics”). Naturally, then, it has no explicit recommendations for ethical behavior in response to the issue at hand. In making a case for a museum response to a contemporary social issue like #MeToo, it is useful to note that its code states that a museum, as part of fulfilling its public trust responsibilities, must advance the public’s understanding of the world through exhibitions and programs that are “responsive to the concerns, interests, and needs of society” (“AAM Code of Ethics”).

The AAMD code of ethics for its member museums relates ethical standards for art museums in particular, but, like AAM, it does not offer explicit guidance on how a museum might handle the issues brought up by #MeToo. One of the “guiding principles” within AAMD’s code of ethics states that AAMD members agree “that art museums play a constructive role in society and that art conveys the rich complexity in human experience...” (“Code of Ethics”). This principle relies upon a notion that has been much discussed in the literature on museum ethics. The idea that museums play a constructive role in society assumes that museums have agency and can effect change.

Codes of ethics can promote social change by guiding behavior but they do not resolve all ethical issues (Marstine 16; Stark 27). Museums are facing increasingly complex ethical dilemmas, and narrowly-focused ethics codes could, in fact, be a hindrance as museums seek to respond to issues that are often unique and resist one-size-fits-all solution (Marstine 7, 16; Stark 27). Therefore, the generality of the AAM and AAMD codes of ethics is appropriate. While they guide individuals and institutions to ethical behavior, they do not address many of the ethical challenges presented in today's changing social and political climate. Unfortunately, these codes leave museums with no real directives on what to do with artists accused of sexual harassment or inappropriate sexual behavior. What is needed is a new way to think about ethical behavior.

The ever-changing social and cultural landscape in which museums exist prompts much discourse on museum ethics and a renewed commitment to exploring ethical theory and practice (Marstine 5; Sandell 129). In the introductory chapter to her edited volume *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics*, Janet Marstine argues that museum ethics today is no longer defined by codes (7). She introduces the idea of “new museum ethics,” an idea which involves infusing previously-held notions of ethics codes with new life so that museums can respond to a diverse array of ethical challenges (7). She argues ethics for the relevant, twentieth-century museum is guided by its agency—the museum’s unique ability “to do good with [its] resources” (8).

Art museums exercise this agency in many ways, including the exhibition of artwork. Through the presentation and interpretation of objects, ideas, and narratives, an art museum invites visitors to understand the world in new and different ways and shapes the way they think about and interact with contemporary issues (Hein “The Responsibility” 123; Sandell 135). Because museums are perceived as trusted, authoritative sources of knowledge, they can use

their resources to be highly influential (Dean 218; Marstine 14; Sandell 136). Recent studies show that people view museums not only as authentic and credible sources of information, but also as experts that can and should recommend behavior (Dilenschneider “People Trust”). With both authoritative power and abundant resources, museums are well equipped to be agents of change.

Hilde Hein, a philosopher who studies feminist theory and often applies its principles to museum theory, argues that museums are fundamentally “ethical entities” that are uniquely positioned to bring about societal change (“Responsibility” 112-113). She posits that museums are distinguishable from other types of repositories or collections because of this agency (“Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory” 38). In his chapter “On Ethics, Activism, and Human Rights,” Richard Sandell, a professor of museum studies whose research focuses on museum agency, advocates for the idea of museums playing a constructive role in society. Sandell asserts that museums are socially constitutive in that they have power to communicate realities in ways that change the way people see and experience the world both socially and morally (135).

In addition to their position as trusted sources of information, museums also preside over the canonization of art history and keep the “art tradition” in place (Hein “Institutional Blessing” 561). Museums confer honor, status, and power to artists by both exhibiting and collecting their work (T.Green; Hein “Institutional Blessing”; Reilly “What Is”; Tonner). A solo exhibition is a great honor for an artist, increasing their visibility and status in society (T. Green; Sotto). Art museums both confer and celebrate status; blockbuster exhibitions featuring the work of celebrity artists bring in much-needed crowds and money, but museums bear some of the responsibility for the current power structure because of this celebration of individual artists,

rather than art (Moisey). It is this status, celebrity, and power that some artists abuse. The current climate of #MeToo demands that in their exhibitions, museums consider more than the aesthetic quality of the artworks and the significance of the artist; they must now consider the character of the artist.

One way museums can assert moral agency is through practicing radical transparency (Marstine 14). Radical transparency is disclosing the issues that museums are struggling with, their decision-making processes, and “an acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for actions” (14). Radical transparency in theory may sound reasonably easy to achieve; in practice, it proves to be more challenging. In considering how they can implement and encourage radical transparency and what it might look like in practice, museums can evaluate both internal and external operations. Exhibitions and associated programs are some of the outward-facing means through which museums can demonstrate radical transparency to the public.

The establishment of museums’ ethical responsibilities, agency and power, and ability to address social and moral issues allows for a return to the core tenet of this capstone—answering the question of how art museums might ethically respond to the #MeToo movement and allegations against artists accused of sexual harassment both now and in the past. The #MeToo movement is prompting museums to question and revisit how they present works by artists of the past who are firmly established in the canon of art history but also demonstrated problematic behavior. It also forces them to reckon with living artists accused of misdeeds. Museums are seeking strategies for handling these artists and their work truthfully in exhibitions. Recent accusations are fueling a reckoning in the art world today, but artists of the past are not exempt from current standards for ethical exhibitions. While the #MeToo movement is happening now and museums are making decisions about what to do with the work of living artists, #MeToo

also offers a new lens through which museums must view artists from the past. Those who were harassed and abused in Gauguin's time—or Picasso's, or Cellini's—are not here to add their voices to #MeToo. Museums must seek to provide space in their exhibitions for the context and layers of meaning that those voices provide.

### **Recommended Strategies for Best Practices**

Museums are tackling many challenging, controversial topics with a wide range of tactics and strategies. However, because there is little precedent for museums having to contextualize or understand the behavior and character of artists rather than simply their artwork, museums must draw upon their experience with effectively addressing similarly controversial issues. Although sexual harassment has persisted throughout history, the #MeToo movement is a recent phenomenon that is prompting museums to both address the personal behavior of contemporary artists and to reconsider artists of the past. There are only very few institutions who are addressing artists accused of sexual harassment. Therefore, in developing strategies for best practices, there is much to be gained by looking to museums who are addressing similarly controversial issues and to the few that are already responding to the issues brought to light by the #MeToo movement.

Since art museums vary in many ways, including size, type of collections, and resources available, recommended strategies for an effective and ethical response to #MeToo must be scalable and therefore adaptable for many types of art museums. The strategies must also be applicable for addressing the past and the present. Furthermore, there must be both short- and long-term strategies. The #MeToo movement has prompted a sense of urgency around institutional response to allegations of sexual harassment. The circumstances often demand a

swift response to accusations of sexual harassment and many museums must take immediate action. However, in order to address the underlying problems of gender inequality and abuse of power that created the framework within which harassment is tolerated, museums must also take steps that require long-term planning and big-picture thinking. The short- and long-term strategies share the common threads of truth-telling, accuracy, and admission of fallibility. They are rooted in museums' ethical obligation to the public trust and the evidence of their agency in society. They are reflective of museums' acceptance of responsibility in perpetuating the problem.

### *Short-Term Strategies*

As previously stated, museums must often make swift decisions in response to accusations of sexual harassment. The short-term strategies are intended as practical ways in which museums can respond quickly when accusations of sexual harassment are made against an artist whose work is featured in a museum's galleries—either as part of a permanent collection installation or as an exhibition. These short-term strategies are drawn from examples of museums addressing such accusations or similarly difficult issues.

### **Supplemental Labels in Existing Galleries or Exhibitions**

In 2016, the Worcester Museum of Art in Worcester, Massachusetts began to evaluate the labels in its American portrait galleries (Bond). Elizabeth Athens, the curator of American art at WAM began exploring how they might update the standard object labels to include information about the wealthy patrons portrayed in the paintings and their connections to slavery (Bond). The museum decided to add an additional label beside each artwork that would explain the sitter's or

patron's connection to slavery, as well as an introductory wall text explaining the additional labels throughout the galleries (Bond). By contextualizing the artworks for a contemporary audience, WAM sought to both tell the whole truth about how sitters benefited from the institution of slavery as well as addressing a relevant contemporary issue—the lack of representation of people of color in American art galleries, despite their presence throughout American history. Athens viewed the labels as “an effective act of restorative justice,” one that sought to correct the omission of enslaved people from the historical narrative (Bond; Daley).

The museum's Assistant Curator of American Art Erin R. Corrales-Diaz told *Artnet* that labels are one of the primary ways that audiences engage with artworks, and that “the new label encourages us to think about what is not visible in the painting and alters how we view the portrait...How might our understanding of the paintings change when these statements of fact are presented in a straightforward manner?” (Cascone “A Massachusetts Museum”). The museum also changed the introductory panel in the gallery to read:

These paintings depict the sitters as they wish to be seen—their best selves—rather than simply recording appearance. Yet a great deal of information is effaced in these works, including the sitters' reliance on chattel slavery, often referred to as America's ‘peculiar institution.’ Many of the people represented here derived wealth and social status from this system of violence and oppression, which was legal in Massachusetts until 1783 and in regions of the United States until 1865. (Daley)

Similarly, the National Portrait Gallery added text to the labels for portraits of Floyd Mayweather Jr., Tupac Shakur, and US President Bill Clinton, noting Mayweather had been charged with domestic violence, Shakur was charged with sexual assault, and Clinton was

impeached for denying under oath his sexual relationship with an intern (“Floyd Mayweather, Jr.”; “President Bill Clinton”; “Tupac Shakur”; Cascone “A Massachusetts Museum”). Director of the National Portrait Gallery Kim Sajet says that the Portrait Gallery strives to be forthcoming about a portrait’s subject (and creator) in their labels (PBS News Hour). She said that the labels written to accompany portraits often get rewritten as information and context evolves (PBS News Hour). While providing this type of context for subjects of artworks is becoming more common, museums are less experienced in providing that type of context for the artists themselves (PBS News Hour; Pogrebin and Schuessler). But as the #MeToo movement continues to upend the power structures within the art world, museums need to develop ways to provide similar context for creators as well.

The Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (ICA) is an example of a museum responding to allegations of sexual harassment. In 2018, a *Boston Globe* investigation revealed that photographer Nicholas Nixon was accused of sexual harassment by more than a dozen former students (Lazar and Gay). Nixon, at the time a professor at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, asked students to complete a variety of inappropriate assignments, including an assignment to analyze a photograph of his own genitals (Lazar and Gay). Nixon also asked to several students to pose nude for him while they were students (Lazar and Gay). Prior to the *Globe* investigation, none of the students had ever filed complaints against their professor because they felt “dazzled by his work and stature in the photography community...they wanted to please and felt at the time it was an honor to pose for him” (Lazar and Gay). As is common in sexual harassment, the harasser was in position of power over the harassed (Higginbottom).

When the *Globe* broke the story of Nixon in April 2018, an exhibition of Nixon’s celebrated photographs was on view at the ICA (Kinsella). The ICA was forced to respond

quickly based on the accusations only; the museum decided to keep the exhibition open, issuing a statement: “The ICA is committed to a culture of inquiry, respect, and democracy, and once we have more information we will move to act responsibly and responsively” (Seeyle). The ICA added a new label in the gallery acknowledging the allegations and explaining the decision to keep the exhibition open (Seeyle). The decision was controversial and contested among ICA staff (Kinsella). To its credit, the museum responded with a gallery label that was truthful and admitted fallibility—a move toward radical transparency. Museum director Jill Medvedow and chief curator Eva Respini shared that the decision was difficult, but that ultimately, they had to remain true to the ICA’s mission of sharing art, no matter how complex or controversial, and to its commitment to provide spaces for dialogue and debate (Kinsella). Interestingly, Nixon asked for the exhibition to be taken down ahead of schedule, stating that the merit of the photographs would no longer be the focus of the exhibit (Kinsella; Seeyle).

Art museums seeking to respond to #MeToo can learn from the WAM, the Portrait Gallery, and the ICA. Labels are intended to help visitors understand and appreciate the artwork they are encountering and are therefore a key component of their museum experience (Trench 17). In acknowledging accusations against an individual, museums are providing as much accurate context as possible and fulfilling their ethical obligation to tell the truth with exhibitions. Furthermore, museums should admit uncertainty and potential fallibility in these labels. While some museums may fear that this type of honesty may make visitors question the expertise or authority of the museum, this helps to “dissolve the barriers” between the museum and the audience and engages audiences in the debate surrounding an artwork (20).

This idea of admitting uncertainty fits in with Marstine’s notion of radical transparency. She describes what a practical application of radical transparency may look like: “a transparent

wall text might tell us that an artifact is of unknown provenance; a radically transparent wall text would additionally engage the ethical issues of exhibiting works of unknown provenance” (14). Museums can use this strategy of reframing or supplementing existing wall text and the object label that accompanies an artwork by an artist accused of sexual harassment. In addition to affirming a commitment to ethical obligations to truth telling, fallibility, and radical transparency, updating or supplementing wall labels is relatively low-cost and easy to accomplish quickly. This is essential as museums are often required to act quickly in response to accusations against an artist whose artwork is in their galleries.

### **Supplemental Exhibitions and Related Programming**

A second short-term strategy for museums seeking to respond to #MeToo and accusations of sexual assault against an artist is to provide opportunities for dialogue through supplemental exhibitions and related programming. Museums often plan exhibitions years in advance, but accusations of sexual harassment forced several museums to quickly alter their plans in early 2018.

Accusations of sexual harassment against the artist Chuck Close forced two museums to rethink their exhibitions. In late 2017, four women accused Close of sexually harassing them (Pogrebin). A few weeks later, four more women came forward with their own allegations of sexual harassment (Voon and Steinhauer). The accusers had remarkably similar stories, despite not knowing of the others’ encounters with the artist (Voon and Steinhauer). They were all young female artists who admired Close’s work, idolized him to some extent, and, at first, felt honored to have his interest when he asked them to pose for him (Pogrebin; Voon and Steinhauer). According to the accusers, Close took advantage of his power and their

vulnerability, making sexual explicit remarks and acting toward them in ways that made them feel uncomfortable, manipulated, and exploited (Voon and Steinhauer). The two museums responded to the accusations against Chuck Close in different ways.

In early 2018, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (NGA) postponed two exhibitions it planned to open that year: one featuring the artist Close's work and one featuring the work of another artist, photographer Thomas Roma, who had been accused of sexual harassment and rape (Cascone "National Gallery"). The Close exhibition at NGA was to include around thirty works of art, mostly from NGA's collection (Cascone "National Gallery"). Both Close and Roma denied the accusations against them, but the circumstances and the urgency provided by the #MeToo movement required NGA to respond quickly. The museum made the decision to postpone the exhibitions, telling the *Washington Post* via email that given the allegations against the artists, all parties involved agreed it was not the appropriate time to open the exhibitions (Cascone "National Gallery"). Certainly, had the museum moved forward with opening the exhibitions, they would surely have no longer been about the art. NGA receives much of its funding from the government and was likely keen to avoid any controversy (Pogrebin and Schuessler). But, as the #MeToo movement could reveal, the future of exhibitions may no longer be only about art. The conversation is even now tilting increasingly toward a museum experience in which both art and artist are considered.

The museum's decision to postpone may have been wise, but the most important lesson to learn from its example is that, by failing to take any further steps, it missed a critical opportunity to be transparent with its audiences by explaining its decision-making process or acknowledging the difficult questions that the situation raised. NGA's website no longer lists the exhibitions, and from all accounts, it neither issued a press release nor added any notice to its

website. By postponing the exhibitions, the museum sent the message to its public that it does not condone sexual harassment, which is commendable. But by failing to do anything else in response, it sent a message that it is not prepared to engage in dialogue about the challenging topics of sexual harassment and the question of separating artists' behavior or moral character from artwork.

The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) took a different approach in its response to the accusations against Chuck Close. PAFA opened a traveling exhibition of ninety of Close's photographs in October 2017 and planned to keep it open until April 2018 (Voon). When the news broke in mid-December 2017 of allegations of sexual harassment against the artist, PAFA museum leadership was also forced to make a quick decision about its exhibition. Before making a decision, the museum organized a forum in mid-January with students, senior leadership from the school and museum, faculty, and staff (Macke; Voon). The responses were wide-ranging, but ultimately, they concluded that, as an art museum and school, they had an obligation to facilitate conversations about the problems in the art world with the aim of producing change (Macke). Rather than close the show, PAFA decided to organize an exhibition and programs using work from its permanent collection that would "catalyze conversations about power, gender, visibility, and voice..." ("PAFA Organizes Interactive Exhibition").

Despite having only about ten days to mount the new project, "The Artworld We Want," museum staff, students, and faculty pulled together to select artworks, write wall labels, and create an experience that prompted conversation (Macke). PAFA museum educator Monica Zimmerman explained that the museum's decision to write simple, honest, and direct wall labels was rooted in a desire for transparency and clarity (Macke). Accompanying programs included workshops, a panel discussion, and a "Guerilla Girls-inspired printmaking workshop," in which

students and visitors created their own protest art (Macke). The museum then used the protest prints to wallpaper the doors of the Close exhibition when it closed in April (Macke).

Brooke Davis, Museum Director at PAFA stated that had the institution removed the Close exhibition, it would, in effect, be ignoring its responsibility to face the issue and facilitate meaningful, difficult conversations about it (“PAFA Organizes Interactive Exhibition”).

Zimmerman noted that although it may require self-criticism and admission of some responsibility, museums must be a part of the solution to the problems of gender and power imbalances in the art world (Macke). This move by PAFA illustrated key principles in ethical exhibitions—those of truth-telling, admission of fallibility, accepting responsibility, and radical transparency. In a bold move, PAFA let its audiences know that it is willing to engage in dialogue about challenging and controversial social and moral issues.

The Legion of Honor Museum in San Francisco planned to open an exhibition in early February 2018 titled *Casanova: The Seduction of Europe* (“Reckoning”). Casanova was a notorious womanizer, infamous for supposedly having sex with more than one hundred women (Wilson). The exhibition was to show Casanova’s world of eighteenth century Europe, celebrating the art, costumes, and decor of that period, and had been planned more than four years before the #MeToo movement took off (Wilson). In light of the heightened awareness surrounding sexual harassment, the exhibition may have seemed somewhat tone deaf if the museum did nothing. Rather than canceling or modifying the exhibition, which was scheduled to go to two additional venues following its stint at the Legion of Honor, the museum decided to hold a forum with local art historians and critics to discuss strategies and provide an opportunity for conversations about the difficult questions that the exhibition brought up (Wilson). The museum stated that the occasion of the exhibition provided an opportunity to present a forum “to

consider questions of exhibition practice and the historical framing of artworks from the past in light of contemporary discussions around gender equity and behavioral accountability” (“Reckoning”). The Legion of Honor’s forum is an example of how museums might take on challenging social issues with thoughtful, transparent programming in conjunction with an exhibition it had planned years earlier.

Many museums may not have the physical or financial resources necessary to mount a supplementary exhibition like the PAFA, but by using panels, online forums, or social media to reframe or supplement existing or planned exhibitions and programs, any museum can respond to #MeToo and the questions surrounding sexual harassment.

### *Long-Term Strategies*

Even as art museums are often forced to take swift action and make adjustments to specific exhibitions and programs in response to #MeToo and accusations of sexual harassment against artists, they must also begin to consider long-term strategies. While the short-term strategies are more reactive in light of current crises, the long-term strategies are proactive. As they move forward in a post-#MeToo world, museums must begin to consider how they might use their resources and agency to correct the broad, structural problems that allowed this inequality and abuse of power to persist. They need to devise long-term strategies that will make an impact on the imbalances, injustices, and inequalities in the art world. The long-term strategies focus on internal transformation and reimagined museum practices.

## **Institutional Self-Assessment for Internal Transformation**

The first thing museums can do to promote change in the art world is to take time for institutional self-assessment. They must develop plans for how they might transform into spaces where injustices like abuse of power are challenged. Gail Anderson notes in *Reinventing the Museum* that museums must maintain an ongoing process of self-assessment (1). This self-critique may mean asking questions and bringing up issues that are uncomfortable but necessary if museums are to “foster an attitude of vigilance rather than denial” (Reilly “What Is”). Museums must hold themselves accountable, acknowledge responsibility, and assess the internal policies, practices, biases, and beliefs that perpetuate the imbalance and inequality that ultimately allow abuse of power to persist (Reilly “What Is”).

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) embarked on a mission of institutional self-assessment with a goal of creating gender equity (Callihan and Feldman). In working toward their goal, they partnered with other individuals and institutions attempting to achieve the same goals in a project called Museum as Site for Social Action (MASS Action) (Callihan and Feldman). MASS Action is “collaborative project [that] seeks to align museums with more equitable and inclusive practices” (“Toolkit”; Callihan and Feldman 183). MASS Action was born out of a desire to help museum workers learn how to transform their institutions from the inside out into more equitable and just museums (“Toolkit”).

MASS Action is rooted in the same notion that others advocate—that the museum is a place for social and moral engagement, activism, and justice (Marstine 5; “Toolkit”). With an understanding that the museum’s power to promote change and social justice starts from within, MASS Action developed a “toolkit” as a resource for museum workers seeking to transform their institutions (“Toolkit”). The toolkit provides a guide that includes both information about the

theory behind the work, as well as practical resources like activities, discussion prompts, and assessment tools (Callihan and Feldman 183). The toolkit is designed to help any sort of museum ask difficult questions of various areas and operations within the museum, including leadership, organizational culture, collections, education, interpretation, and exhibitions (“Toolkit”).

Mia used the toolkit and resources to do the “deep, messy, long-term, and at times, uncertain work” of “questioning long-upheld hierarchies and power dynamics...and [challenging] frameworks” in order to make a change in their museum’s policies and practices (Callihan and Feldman 189). Mia is an example of how one museum sought to become a more equitable place and realized it had to go back and do the hard work of changing internally first. Museums of any size, type, or location can utilize the free toolkit and resources shared by MASS Action. By asking honest, self-critical questions, museums can take responsibility for their past, including their complicity in sustaining the hierarchy and power structure that created inequality and injustice, and move forward toward real change. Now, in the age of #MeToo, art museums must ask these questions as they seek to effectively address social and moral issues.

### **Exhibiting and Collecting Work by Women Artists**

A second long-term strategy builds upon museums’ ability to assess their shortcomings and develop plans to correct them. In order to address the broad framework within which inequality and abuse of power persist, museums must commit to exhibit and acquire more work by women artists. Despite feminists’ best efforts, representation of women artists in exhibitions is abysmally low: in almost six hundred major exhibitions in nearly seventy US institutions from 2007-2013, only twenty-seven percent were dedicated to women artists (“Get the Facts”). However, there have been some gains: throughout the past two decades, curators have included more women in

major exhibitions and solo exhibitions devoted to women are on the rise (Reilly and Lippard 35). In 2015, Maura Reilly, writer and curatorial activist, suggested that in order to “right the balance” in the art world, women must continue to push museums to acquire women’s artwork and to put on feminist and women’s art exhibitions (Reilly “Taking the Measure”).

The Brooklyn Museum is an example of a museum that is seeking to correct its imbalances. It persists in its desire to present feminist art and art by women since it opened the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in 2006 (“About”). From 2016-2018, the Museum presented “A Year of Yes: Reimagining Feminism at the Brooklyn Museum” and hosted a variety of exhibitions designed to tell the history of feminist art and imagine next steps, including exhibitions of trailblazing women artists like Georgia O’Keeffe as well as lesser known artists (“A Year of Yes”). It sought to use these artworks as a “starting point to showcase underrepresented artists” and to “[push] back against conventional barriers while expanding the canon” (“Brooklyn Museum Acquires”; “A Year of Yes”). In what should be a signal to the rest of the museum world, the Brooklyn Museum decided not only to present these exhibitions, but to acquire ninety-six of the works exhibited during its “A Year of Yes” series (“Brooklyn Museum Acquires”).

Similarly, women are underrepresented in museums’ permanent collections: a 2019 study of eighteen prominent museums in the US revealed that only thirteen percent of permanent collections were works by women (“Get the Facts”). The Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) took a step in the right direction when it announced in April 2018 that it would be deaccessioning repetitive works and diversifying and filling in gaps in its collection by acquiring works by women and artists of color (Ober).

The move received mixed reviews, but many in the arts community saw this as an example of how a museum might begin to correct the imbalances in their collection (Ober). BMA director Christopher Bedford stated that museums “must undergo a continuous process of reviewing its collection and identifying areas for growth and refinement,” and the BMA is committed to “achieving equity and historical accuracy” (“The BMA Diversifies”; Ober). Deaccessioning works by prominent white, male artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol is a bold and daring move by the BMA. There will always be critics of such steps. However, this is a case of a museum looking inward and assessing its collection and daring to begin taking steps to repair the imbalances.

### **Increasing Gender Diversity on Museum Boards**

The third long-term strategy dovetails with the second strategy: museums must have more women in leadership roles. According to Maura Reilly, the failure of not having women in top leadership roles “trickles down into every aspect of the art world” (Reilly “Taking the Measure”). The number of women in director roles is rising, with sixty-two percent of director, chief financial officer, and chief executive officer roles filled by women, but there is still work to be done on museum boards (Reilly “Taking the Measure”; Washington). Gender diversity on museum boards is also improving, with women comprising forty-five percent of museum boards (“Museum Board Leadership” 8). This is a problem that is being acknowledged and addressed: AAM recently announced it would launch an initiative to help diversify museum boards and leadership (Harrison). Because museum boards make the final decisions about which artworks get acquired and exhibited and therefore whose perspectives get shown and whose stories get told, there must gender parity in the boardroom (Reilly “Taking the Measure”). While gender

imbalances persist on museum boards and in directorships, the problematic framework that allows for sexual harassment will persist (Steinhauer).

In its quest to achieve internal gender equity, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) used some key elements from a report by the Fortune 500 accounting firm EY (Callihan and Feldman). The firm's platform, "Women. Fast Forward," is all about working to advance gender equality and offers ideas, tips, and strategies to help businesses do so ("Women. Fast Forward"). The elements that Mia adapted for their own purposes are: "illuminating the path to leadership; accelerating culture change with progressive organizational policy; and building supportive environments to work towards eliminating bias" (Callihan and Feldman). While EY's strategies are primarily focused on for-profit businesses, museums may be able to learn from the corporate world and adopt similar strategies when seeking to achieve gender equity on museum boards. Mia is proving that museums can and must begin to address internal gender inequality if they are to rectify the imbalances in the power structures that allow abuse like sexual harassment to continue.

## **Conclusion**

Before #MeToo, there was little demand for art museums to comment on, contextualize, or explain an artist's behavior (Pogrebin and Schuessler). For the most part, art was left to its own merit, separated from the personal behavior of the artist. With the reckoning ushered in by the #MeToo movement, the world is changing; now, rather than just presenting and interpreting art, museums may need to address artists' behavior, as well. The #MeToo movement is prompting art museums to think more critically about the creator and context behind the artwork. There is a sense of urgency in many cases because some people who have been accused of

sexual harassment are living artists, like Chuck Close and Nicholas Nixon. However, this is also a time to revisit how museums discuss and present works by historical artists like Gauguin, Picasso, and others.

As demonstrated here, museums have ethical obligations to the public, agency and power in society, and the ability to open up a dialogue about current social and moral issues through truthful and honest exhibitions. They also bear some of the burden of responsibility for perpetuating the problems of gender inequality and abuse of power by sustaining the framework that allowed such injustices to persist and contributing to the canonization of these historical artists. In light of the obligations, they must also be a part of the solution. Some museums are beginning to respond to #MeToo movement, mostly out of necessity, but much can be learned from their responses. Careful examination of these museums' actions led to the development of the short- and long-term strategies for best practices presented here.

Short-term strategies are recommended ways in which a museum can respond swiftly to accusations of sexual harassment against an artist, whether historical or contemporary, and are meant to be scalable and possible to accomplish quickly. By adding supplemental labels or text to an existing exhibition or gallery, museums can demonstrate to the public that they take accusations of sexual harassment seriously. The museum is being truthful and accurate by providing additional context through honest, direct language and demonstrates radical transparency by admitting uncertainty or identifying the incongruence between art and artist. Additional exhibitions or programs related to the artist or exhibition in question can provide audiences a safe space for dialogue and difficult conversations.

The long-term strategies are recommended for museums as they seek to correct the framework that allows gender inequality and abuse of power to persist in the art world. These

strategies require museums to thoughtfully consider how they might use their resources to make the art world more equitable and just by challenging hierarchies and problematic power structures. Institutional self-assessment may be a difficult process, but museums must look inward to begin to develop ways to “right the balance” (Reilly “Taking the Measure”). Museums must also push to exhibit and acquire more work by women artists. Finally, museums must achieve gender equity in leadership positions.

The #MeToo movement is far from over, and there may be more accusations against living artists that prompt speedy responses. Museums will face many challenges when implementing these strategies. There are many artists throughout history who have been accused of various crimes or egregious behavior including sexual harassment and abuse. This moment prompts museums to address not only living artists but artists from the past as well. Museums must begin to think about how those stories might be told. Timing also presents a challenge. As mentioned, litigation and due process take time, and museums must make decisions in the space between accusations and dismissals or convictions. Undoubtedly, there will be some historians, curators, artists, and museum workers who believe the art should remain separate from the artist. Museums must be prepared for criticism, as some decisions may be unpopular.

The bold, twenty-first century museum will fully embrace their role in shaping, supporting, and reinvigorating the discourse about contemporary social and moral issues—the kind of discourse that leads to change. It is critical that museums take action to respond to #MeToo in order to remain relevant to their communities and engaged in the things that matter to them. It is vital to the future of museums that they make a bold, public commitment to correcting systemic gender imbalance and abuse of power by developing and adopting the kind of strategies outlined here.

### *Scope of Project and Future Research*

This capstone is primarily concerned with the ethics of exhibiting the work by artists accused of sexual harassment—understanding why and how art museums should respond to #MeToo as it relates to exhibitions and displaying works from their permanent collection. Throughout the research process, the urge to broaden the scope of the project was strong. There was the dilemma of whether to look at museums' collecting practices; the difficulty in choosing which examples to include, as there are many cases of both living artists and artists from the past who have exhibited questionable moral behavior; the question of whether to discuss museum exhibitions that directly address the topic of sexual harassment; the idea of collecting visitor feedback via surveys about museums' recent responses to #MeToo; and the list goes on. Any one of those topics would prove to be a capstone in itself. Therefore, the scope of this capstone remained limited.

In fact, two of the long-term strategies introduce ideas that are at the outer limits of the scope of this paper but are important and need further research: exhibiting and collecting more art by women artists and increasing the number of women on museum boards. In 2019, AAM announced an initiative to diversify museum boards and leadership (Harrison). It will be interesting to see what the AAM initiatives are and how museums implement them. Achieving gender equality on art museum boards is a big step in correcting the power structures that allow injustices to persist in the art world. As the art world continues, ever so slowly, to become a more equitable place, it will be exciting to see how exhibitions and collections reflect the decisions of a more balanced museum board.

Undoubtedly, there will continue to be new and different ways to approach this topic as more museums respond to #MeToo and take on the issues of gender inequality and abuse of

power. Future research might involve an assessment of the effectiveness of museums' response to #MeToo and accusations against artists. The art world will be watching as museums continue to put on blockbuster exhibitions that incorporate a deeper, broader context that might include accusations of sexual harassment, abuse, misogyny, or other injustices and oppression. Including this type of context will be new terrain for most museums but will surely provide greater depth of understanding for audiences as well as ushering in a new age of exhibitions.

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