



FRONT PAGE DIALOGUE

Museums and #MeToo

In 1997 - long before Twitter hashtags - social activist Tarana Burke heard a 13-year-old girl's personal account of sexual assault. In response, she arranged a series of community-based healing circles and, in 2007, officially launched the MeToo Campaign, which sought to unite women and their allies in the fight against sexual assault. A decade later, in October 2017, women across the globe adopted the now infamous hashtag #MeToo after Harvey Weinstein was accused of multiple accounts of sexual assault, including rape. In every industry, survivors of sexual assault bravely came forward and shared their stories. As a movement, #MeToo has sparked dialogue and action on how to heal and support survivors, as well as propelled conversations about accountability and gender equity.

In the years following the allegations against Harvey Weinstein, museums, and cultural organizations have responded to the movement in a variety of ways. In Stockholm, the Nordic Museum began collecting stories shared under #MeToo in October 2017 in their digital archives, viewing them as part of our intangible cultural heritage. The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC cancelled a Chuck Close exhibit that was planned for May 2018 due to allegations of misconduct against the artist. The Guerilla Girls rewrote descriptive labels to show how museums can change misogynistic language. As Museum of Sex curatorial adviser Maggie Mustard said, "The worst thing a museum can do is plug its ears and hope it'll go away." Mustard was specifically referencing allegations of sexual harassment against an exhibiting artist, but the statement holds for the entire #MeToo movement as well.

Sites of Conscience have an important role to play in facilitating constructive conversations and creating spaces where visitors, particularly those who may not always agree, listen to each other in new ways. Below is one model for engaging visitors or your staff in dialogue around the #MeToo movement. We encourage you to adapt and ground the dialogue in the unique history that your Site of Conscience works to preserve and share.

HOW TO USE FRONT PAGE DIALOGUES:

Rather than using all the model questions suggested under each phase, facilitators may select questions that reflect the evolving conversation of the group they are guiding in dialogue. Some questions may be useful for multiple topics; we mark these with slashes (ex. race/policing/protest). We are always available to work with you as you develop your dialogue session. If you are not familiar with the [Arc of Dialogue](#) model, you can contact Braden Paynter (bpaynter@sitesofconscience.org), Director of Methodology and Practice, for more information.

PREPARATION:

Print multiple copies of each of the images and descriptions included here.



SITES OF CONSCIENCE THAT CAN BE RESOURCES FOR YOUR ONGOING WORK:

- Jane Addams Hull-House Museum
- ESMA
- Women's Rights National Historic Park
- Museum of Women's Resistance
- Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation
- Lowell National Historic Park
- Pauli Murray Project
- Constitution Hill
- The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Project

SHARED CONTENT:



Emma Sulkowicz's asterisk performance at The Museum of Modern Art in 2018. Photo by Sangsuk Sylvia Kang.

Murut As part of a series of protest pieces, artist Emma Sulkowicz stood in front of Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, spreading her arms and legs so her body resembled a human asterisk. Sulkowicz noted that she chose the asterisk motif because of a New York Times article in which museum officials discussed using asterisks on wall labels to acknowledge artists who had been accused of sexual offenses. "I was just so appalled by what the museum directors were saying in the article...One guy said something like, 'If we go down this road, all of our museum walls would be bare.'" — <https://www.good.is/features/museums-address-artists-after-metoo>



In August 2015, the Museum of the Moving Image removed [a sweater worn by Bill Cosby](#) from their core collection exhibition without any announcement or statement. A museum representative confirmed that the sweater had been removed from the collection, but would not comment on why Cosby's sweater is no longer a part of the exhibition.

One month before, museum visitor Christen Clifford photographed the sweater on display and posted it on Instagram with the comment, "Dear Museum of The Moving Image in #queens – we love you but time to take that [#Cosby sweater](#) OFF display. He's a rapist. Thank you, Humans"



Debra Kessler, "Cosby Sweater Disappears Quietly From Museum's Core Exhibition," *The Interrobang*, August 12, 2015. <https://theinterrobang.com/cosby-sweater-disappears-from-museums-core-collection/>



In June of 2018, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto opened a display prompted by sexual misconduct allegations against Raghurib Singh, an artist whose work was being exhibited at the museum. *#MeToo & the Arts*, exhibited in a small space near the main entrance, references allegations against the Indian photographer who died in 1999.



Nigel Hunt, Stephanie Skenderis, "New #MeToo ROM exhibit tackles sexual misconduct in the art world," *CBC News*, July 21, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/entertainment/rom-metoo-arts-exhibit-1.4755257>

Some visitors and critics felt the exhibition and its relationship to Singh was inadequate. "There is nothing in the ROM's Singh exhibition that points to the #MeToo exhibition it has sparked," Leah Sandals of *Canadian Art* magazine said. "And the three references to the ROM's Singh exhibition within their #MeToo display are minimized – in one case quite literally put in smaller print." ROM director Josh Basseches said the museum wanted to separate Singh's exhibit, *Modernism on the Ganges*, from the #MeToo display. "On the one hand, the allegations against the artist were a catalyst for us thinking about these issues, but they are separate projects. We want people to be able to come up to the gallery on the third floor and really celebrate Raghbir Singh's work as a pioneering photographer and street photographer and then separately to be able to look at and think about the #MeToo issues and artists and institutions."



In the final section of their "Prisons Today" exhibit, Coalition member Eastern State Penitentiary (ESP) noted that Glenn Martin, a criminal justice reform advocate who was referenced earlier in the exhibit, had been accused by three colleagues of sexual misconduct. The museum also created a prototyping wall to gather visitor feedback on a way forward.

Ultimately, ESP removed Martin, feeling that he was no longer an effective spokesperson for change on mass incarceration issues. Staff and consultants put together a list of potential replacements, and staff voted. The institution reserved the right not to use the popular vote, but ultimately did, replacing Martin with Danielle Sered, the founder of Common Justice, which brings together victims of violent crime and people who have perpetrated violence.



GUIDELINES:

What are the group agreements or guidelines for the dialogue that help us establish the “container” that the dialogue occurs within? Here are some sample agreements:

1. Share the air: leave room for everyone to speak.
2. Our unique backgrounds and social status give us different life experiences.
3. Seek first to understand – ask questions to clarify, not to debate.

PHASE I - COMMUNITY BUILDING

Questions in Phase 1 help build the “learning community” and break down artificial barriers between people by allowing participants to share information about themselves.

Who is a woman in your life you respect? Why?

Share your impression of the #MeToo movement.

When you imagine the face of the #MeToo movement, who do you see?

Share a story of an act of resistance you witnessed or participated in.

PHASE II - SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Questions in Phase 2 help participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why.

How do you define “ally”? How do you define “accomplice”?

Are there incidents of harassment that you would like to share with the group?

Who fits under the women’s rights umbrella? How have you worked to widen it? When have you found it useful to limit it?

When has an ally been helpful to your efforts? When have you witnessed their good intentions gone awry?

When have others’ actions in the movement encouraged you to or turned you off from participating?

Who or what first taught you about feminism/harassment and what did you learn?

How has the #MeToo movement changed the way you think about gender/activism in America?



TO DO: BEFORE STARTING PHASE 3, ALLOW PEOPLE TO VIEW THE SHARED CONTENT IN SILENCE.

PHASE III - EXPLORING BEYOND OURSELVES

Questions in Phase 3 help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic in an effort to learn with and from one another.

In looking at these images from museums, what's important for us to call out?

How might we better support our colleagues coming forward? What do our institutions need to do?

What challenges you about any of these approaches? What do you find reassuring?

What role does race play in our handling of assault accusations?

How should our museums and historic sites address people/artifacts/art in our collections that are associated with someone who has been accused?

How can men be allies? What can only women take on?

What role should survivors play in today's movement? Those who are not survivors?

What is the biggest barrier to achieving gender equity in American museums?

PHASE IV - SYTHESIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Questions in Phase 4 help the group to reflect on the dialogue and what they learned.

What is one concrete step all institutions should take in support of survivors?

How can the movement more effectively mobilize those who have previously resisted participation?

If we could continue this conversation, what would you want to discuss?

What will it look like when we have achieved gender equality?

What is one thing that is necessary for the #MeToo movement to succeed?