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EDITORIAL

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ADULT EDUCATION, EXHIBITORY STRATEGIES AND MUSEUMS

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This special edition of the *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education* takes us into the complex, dynamic world of museums and art galleries and discourses of new museology, feminism, transformative learning, public pedagogy, and decolonisation. Museums and art galleries are important institutions for a number of interconnected reasons. Firstly, they are pervasive. Approximately 2300 of these institutions exist across Canada alone and thousands more worldwide. Secondly, they are visited daily by millions of adults, many of whom trust almost implicitly what these highly authoritative, seemingly objective, and highly intellectual storytellers show and tell them about the world and themselves (e.g. Gordon-Walker, 2018; Janes, 2015). Thirdly, while adults visit museums and art galleries for the purposes of leisure and fun, many come to learn something about history, society, art, nature and culture. Therefore, regardless of genre or theme – ethnographic, aesthetic, scientific, textile, industrial, military, Indigenous, or war, to name but a few – our art and culture institutions play a key educational role. They act as nonformal educators through seminars, guided tours, workshops and various forms of community engagement. Museums and art galleries are also masters of informal teaching and learning. By fusing together objects, artefacts and narratives into exhibitions and displays, these institutions visualize and engulf us into created worlds with extraordinary communicative power. They have, to borrow from Giroux (2004), great power “over how people think of themselves and their relationship to society and to others” (p. 59). Yet similar to all practices of power, museums and art galleries are never neutral. The “nature of their work, selecting which objects to collect and whose memories to preserve—or not, deciding whose stories will be told—or not, and not least, defining which voices are worthy of being heard in the great human choir of history speaks of a great deal of power” (Brekke, 2018, p. 268). This power makes museums and art galleries, as this volume illustrates, legitimate spaces of critique and intervention for adult educators.

Museums are practised at weaving narrow mainstream accounts of history, culture and people, shaping what people see, understand and accept as reality about the world, themselves, and ‘the other’ (e.g. Bergsdóttir, 2016; Phillips, 2011). Even when our own experiences challenge their limited, ideological narratives—many are deeply colonial, racist

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and sexist, as this volume illustrates—their pretexts to neutrality and objectivity, and their radiating sense of authority, can destabilize our experiential knowledge to the extent that it does not prevail over encounters with contrary evidence (MacDonald, 1995; Phillips, 2011). This raises interesting challenges for feminist and critical museum adult educators in terms of how to render visible the problematic master narratives and imaginings of who we are or are not—total absences or stereotypical and impartial presences—that hide in plain sight in these institutions in ways that revalue and empower people's experiences, knowledges, and interpretations.

How do we interrogate the limited representations and narratives offered by museum and art gallery collections and intervene into these in ways that allow different visions and stories to be told? In this issue, Lauren Spring and Andrea Werhun take up this question as museum adult educators at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Their field note illustrates how they used a form of the *Feminist Museum Hack*, a pedagogical and analytical tool, with a group of women sex trade workers. Together, educators and participants interrogated how the images and texts in the gallery intersected with wider gendered meanings about women in general and prostitution in particular to write their own authorial texts. In the hands of these skilled feminist adult educators, the gallery's stories are turned on their heads as paintings act as dialogic spaces for critical teaching, learning, and imagination. This work raises the question: How do museum and art gallery educators learn the capacity to engage critically with problematic or difficult subject matter? The training of educators who work or want to work in museums and art galleries is central to the articles by Kayon Murray and Emily Keenlyside. Speaking from Canada and United States respectively, these authors outline the learning conditions and strategies required if we are to help museum and gallery educators become skilled and confident enough to facilitate necessary critical conversations we need to have on some of the most pressing, divisive, and contentious social issues of our time.

With the great power held by museums and art galleries comes great responsibility. A perhaps lesser known side, but one central to this volume, is the courageous political acts of contemporary museums and art galleries. Pressures from scholars and new discourses of museology and public pedagogy, generated by museum educators and curators, and by communities, are having an impact on the ways museums position themselves and carry out their socio-educational roles. This is manifest in this volume in new exhibitions, community collaborations, and even the development of a museum. In Zimbabwe, Njabulo Chipangura guides us through a pedagogical process used by the Mutare Museum involving the bringing together of community members to challenge the diamond mining industry. By telling their own stories of the negative impacts of this industry, community members' experiences became the centre of the new exhibition and active dialogue. Not only did this give the community a voice in a public space, it also acted as a decolonising process for the museum itself. In Korea, Dae Joong Kang, Hong Lee and Seungeun Kim pick up on this notion of decolonising (in this case by Imperial Japan) in an exploration of the creation of a new museum both for and by citizens. Rather than supporting relations of power, the museums in both Zimbabwe and Korea act as deliberate provocateurs, exhibiting alternative to mainstream histories and experiences to create new knowledge and a sense of agency in their populations.

The discourse of decolonisation is also central to articles by Kay Johnson, Janet Groen and Colleen Kawalilak, and Leisa Desmoulins who write from across Canada. Johnson and

Groen and Kawalilak take an autoethnographic approach. Johnson's reflections illustrate the transformative impact on her of the satirically poignant and spectacular defiance displayed through the exhibitions and works of Indigenous artist Kent Monkman and his muse/character, Miss Chief Testicle. Groen and Kawalilak focus on both the artworks and the practices used by educators on guided tours. They illustrate how this pedagogical work offers a challenge to normative exemplification of dominant colonial practices. Lisa Desmoulin shares the findings of the emotional impacts and learning in her study of an exhibition of moccasin vamps that spoke visually and powerfully to the violence with respect to hundreds of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada. However, Monica Drenth in her field note reminds us, through an application of a feminist anti-militarist 'hack' (an adapted form of textual and visual display analysis for war and military museums) to two museums in the United States that, while some museums are engaging in more activist practices that respond to this troubled world, others continue to perpetuate narratives that uphold a masculinized status quo of heroism. Yet, as museums and art galleries challenge once powerful certainties about the world and even ourselves, and throw their immense authority behind revisualizations and alternative narratives of what this world was, is, or should be, they generate significant 'disorientating dilemmas'. Micki Voelkel and Shelli Hennihan illustrate this through their field note reflections as White women who experience an exhibition of critically focussed artworks by African-American artists. As museums intentionally take up the history of colonialism as one not of discovery and progress but of violence, silencing and oppression, they unsettle normative assumptions, challenge stereotypes and allow for deeper, more critical and embodied understandings of who we are and how we might live together. When museum and gallery educators use the power of aesthetics and dialogic engagement they play an important role in the struggle for social or gender justice and change. This special edition concludes with two book reviews, by Ash Grover and Mary Pinkoski, which discuss important resources that can assist readers in problematizing and critiquing museological representations.

The scholars and practitioners in this volume never shy away from the problems inherent in museums and art galleries, but they do elucidate the potential of these institutions to be critical pedagogical resources in the struggle against the persistent inequalities and injustices, which all too often happen in the name of 'art' or 'history' around the globe.

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