

## **A SUCCESSFUL EXHIBITION: Criteria**

Please consider the specific questions listed under each item to be suggestions rather than edicts. In other words, use these as prompts to generate your own thoughtful responses about what makes a successful exhibition. **USING YOUR NOTES FROM THE NUMBERED QUESTIONS, WRITE A TWO PARAGRAPH REVIEW OF TWO EXHIBITIONS ARTICULATING IN YOUR OWN WORDS HOW THE SHOW SUCCEEDED OR FAILED AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO BETTER ENGAGE THE PUBLIC.**

### **WHAT IDEA/CONCEPT IS THE CURATOR TRYING TO CONVEY?**

1. Include a brief description and summary of the exhibition's theme or subject. What is the thesis or message of the exhibition AND WHO CURATED IT?

2. What do you think is the purpose or goal of the exhibition? What is the museum trying to accomplish with it?

### **HOW HAS THE CURATOR ORGANIZED THE EXHIBIT TO ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSE?**

1. What is the method of the exhibition, i.e. what kinds of artifacts make up the exhibition and how are they used to tell the story the museum wants to tell?

2. How are the artifacts displayed? Can you understand what they are and how they function as evidence to support the theme of the exhibition? Is there a sufficient number or variety of art/artifacts to support the theme?

3. How is the exhibit organized? What is the logic of its organization? Why is the art arranged just so? How do you enter or leave the exhibit (does it matter)? Is the exhibit

in the form of a historical narrative? Is it thematic? Is it topical? Is it object or non-object driven?

4. What kinds of exhibition techniques have been used? In other words, what are the "constructed" aspects of the exhibition? Are there labels for the work? What kinds of information do they convey? Are there audio-visual components or interactive displays? In what kinds of display cases or sets are the artifacts displayed? What kind of technical artistry has been employed in creating the exhibit? ARE THESE INTERACTIVE TOOLS HELPFUL OR ENGAGING?

### **WHAT IS YOUR CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EXHIBIT?**

1. Does the exhibit tell the story the curator intends to tell? Is this an effective exhibit?

2. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What are the confusing parts (and why)? What are the enjoyable parts (and why)? Does any part of the exhibit make a point in a particularly dramatic or delightful way? Does any part of the exhibit cause you to lose interest?

3. Is the method effective? Are the artifacts chosen appropriate to the topic or theme? Do they convince you of the exhibit's message?

4. How effective are the constructed aspects of the exhibition? Can you read and understand the labels? Do the audio-visual segments communicate clearly? Do you

understand the purpose of the interactive components? Did you learn from them? Does the exhibit manifest an effective presentation of ideas?

5. Are there any biases or hidden agendas in the exhibit? Be critical. Who has underwritten the exhibit? Do you detect any biases held by the museum/curator? Does it suggest that only certain topics or subjects of history are important? Does it embody any "historical fallacies"?

### **WHAT IS YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE EXHIBIT?**

1. What is your summary judgment of the exhibition? What did it mean for you? What is its importance (did it teach you something? was it entertaining? did it exemplify "how not to do a museum exhibit")?

2. What does the exhibition communicate about American/GLOBAL society or culture? Did you learn anything about history? Did the exhibition convey a message relevant to contemporary society? Did you gain any insight about yourself? Or, about the characteristics of a particular culture?

3. Evaluate the exhibit as a cultural artifact in its own right. What are the cultural implications of the exhibit? What does it reveal about the values and priorities of the museum or about the values and priorities of American culture-at-large?