

Imaginary Museum 2015

Big Imagination

2015

By Marcus Civin

Museums are more than buildings, more than cabinets that house specific collections. Stomping grounds and showcases for curators and designers, museums can be hubs for expansive exchange and can test human perception or issue invitations to play. Today, people go to museums not just to experience art but to shop, eat, talk, socialize, sit down, walk around, and make new historical and philosophical connections. *Imaginary Museum* is a collaboration between MICA's MFA in Graphic Design and MFA in Curatorial Practice. Curators and graphic designers worked together to develop fictional museums through the production of branding, posters, products, videos, signage, and other elements.

Imaginary Museum 2015, on view in MICA's Pinkard Gallery March 27–April 12, 2015, was good-humored, bustling, and cross-disciplinary, a big collection of exhibitions and strategies for extending contemplation and affirming the direct and intimate relationship between contemporary curators and designers and between idea, artifact, and souvenir. *Imaginary Museum 2015* invited interaction and it displayed museum tickets, games, art, and objects you might regularly find laying around backstage at a fashion show, in the museum gift shop, worn by museum staff, or stuffed into a kit for making protest posters.

The curators and designers who created *Imaginary Museum 2015* have generous and poetic sensibilities evident in where they choose to heap their admiration. Curator and designer Linxuan Lyu contributed to two ethereal and poetic museums for *Imaginary Museum 2015: 1+1 Museum* and *Museum of Scent*. Reflecting on the work of supercurator Robert Storr, Lyu appreciates that Storr is also an artist, and points to *New York Magazine's* 2006 claim that Storr is "an artist who's logged enough studio time to have a special regard for painters' painters like Elizabeth Murray and Philip Guston..."

Margaret MacDonald is one of the student curators who co-conceived *Hive Institute*, a proposal for a school-as-museum, an intensive summer program for future leaders in the arts, leaders who will perhaps consider fruitful relationships between the arts and other fields of inquiry. Appropriately, MacDonald chews over the contributions of Peter Weibel: "Weibel has been an early adaptor and advocate for new media art and an innovator in curating works at the intersection of art, science, and technology, notably net art... Weibel has paved the way for future curators to come from non-traditional paths and succeed... In the early 1960's, Weibel first studied medicine at the Sorbonne in Paris before turning to filmmaking in 1964, becoming an expert in the history of the cinema by the time he returned to Vienna in the mid-1960s. Weibel has also studied literature, philosophy, mathematical logic, and he is an artist. It is perhaps unsurprising that Weibel is a pioneer curating in new media. His background in both the arts and the sciences allows him to see work beyond those boundaries."

Thinking about Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement The New Museum, one of the other curators of *Hive Institute*, Lee Heinemann, writes: "Burton embraces a practice that is difficult to pin down. Active as a scholar, curator and organizer, Burton brings a rigorous relationship to critical theory, particularly feminist, queer, affect and poststructuralist theory... Her work often orbits the

practices of artists with similar focuses, particularly queer and feminist artists active from the 1980s to the present. She also brings a commitment to 'liveness' and programming to her work..."

Perhaps re-imagining museums as curators and designers will turn us away from museums entirely. Jiminie Ha visited MICA as a guest critic at a critical moment in the germination of *Imaginary Museum 2015*. A designer and a curator, Ha has a keen editorial eye and sees a fluid relationship between design and curating, engaging both in a holistic practice that values criticality, accessibility, and site-specificity. Speaking as Editor and Creative Director of the magazine *White Zinfandel*, Ha describes the magazine as a platform co-equal with gallery, restaurant, art fair, and historic house. In a 2012 interview in the publication *Cool Hunting*, Ha announces: "I view design as a type of curating." The imaginary museums and their curatorial and design agendas suggest that the future of museums might depend on each museum's ability to frequently reinvent, resist rigidity, resist rarefaction, resist austerity, and cultivate teams of flexible, round, multi-talented, and well-informed exhibition-makers working simultaneously through and between design and curating.