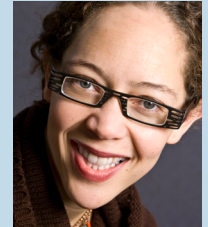
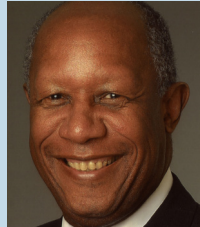


## Renewing the Relevance of Museum Collections



From Left to Right: **Gillian Thomas**, President & CEO, Miami Science Museum; **Judith Dueck**, Director, Research Content and Scholarship, Canadian Museum for Human Rights; **Howard Dodson**, Director, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; **Stephanie Nolen** and **Ngaire Blankenberg**, Museum of AIDS in Africa.

See inside for articles...

## Collections in the 21st Century



By Brad King,

Vice President,  
Management Consultancy,  
Lord Cultural Resources

Are collections still at the heart of museums? If so, will that continue to be true in the future, and in what ways?

This issue of *Cultural Capital* examines the changing definitions and uses of 'collections' from traditional artifacts, artworks and specimens to those representing intangible heritage and living collections. We explore the issue of relevance and whether collections are still as central to institutions as they were in the past – and whether they will remain so in the future. And we look at these questions in the context of established institutions holding major collections and new institutions aspiring to develop them. To do so, we have asked some leaders in the field about these issues from the point of view of their own museums.

Both the definitions and uses for collections have been expanding. Although art museums still present works of art for sheer aesthetic pleasure, the diagram on the right presents a broad range of options for science, history and natural history museums, with one axis considering the spectrum of interpretive approaches, and other the array of collection types from intangible to tangible. More traditional methods are found in the lower right-hand section, where interpretation tends to emphasize tangible collections used in didactic

ways. Newer approaches are represented by the upper left-hand side of the diagram, where more interactivity and direct engagement with the visitor and less emphasis on tangible collections is the rule.

Along with changes in the ways collections are defined and used, there are ongoing changes in collection development practices. The enormous cost and effort of developing a 'traditional' collection – and the heavy cost of ongoing management and care – means that many new museums approach the issue very carefully indeed. The decision to collect is never taken lightly, and even when the answer is 'yes', acquisitions are often intended for display only.

But this does not necessarily mean that collections are becoming less relevant. As we will see, all of the contributors to this issue are involved in re-visioning existing institutions or creating completely new ones, and their articles focus on how collections (however the term may be defined) can support their institution's mission. Mission is the key, and as institutional missions



evolve, so too does the understanding and use of their collections.

Consistent with the environmental education mission of the Miami Museum of Science, collections there are used as vehicles of engagement with current events. Gillian Thomas has led an effort to expand and relocate this museum with emphasis on living collections as bridges between people and contemporary issues relating to our natural environment. Relevance, engagement, interactivity and education – all of these adjectives apply in this case as this long-established institution repositions itself for the 21st century.

Continued on Page 4...

# Renewing the Relevance

## Miami Science Museum

By Gillian Thomas, President & CEO

Miami is a gateway, existing on the edge between the ocean and the Everglades, open to the world. In earlier epochs under the sea, now above the sea, it may soon be under the sea again. The diverse population is always changing, new waves of people arriving. Almost no family comes from here only, so defining cultural capital for a science museum in this context is a challenge.

Our focus is on what we all share: our environment and our links to the rest of the world, our desire for a better place and better opportunities for our children. Planning for our new Museum has led to a broader vision of sustainability, seeking not just to engender a love for the environment and fostering learning, but also helping to create a sustainable community through encouraging social action. In this context, our collections need to create meaningful enjoyable experiences which inspire the desire to participate and act. Our Living Collections have taken on an increased importance as a result.

Our Living Collections of the birds and reptiles of South Florida have grown out of our wildlife



Miami Science Museum, Living Collection Wildlife Rehabilitation Services programming.

rehabilitation services, specializing in birds of prey. As people bring in found or injured animals, they have already taken an action towards protecting our environment. These animals each have a personal story, reflecting some aspect of how life on the edge affects fragile species and habitats. Through the care they receive from trained staff, and their valued place at the heart of these living collections, these animals highlight the impacts that we often inadvertently have on the environment, and the responsibility we all bear

to try and help. They are precious interpretive tools, each one an individual with a history, creating unparalleled opportunities for teachable moments, providing aesthetic and emotional connections that cannot be matched by television or other media, and encouraging inter-generational conversation. They are our objects, our links, and their care is our future. ●



## Canadian Museum for Human Rights

By Judith Dueck, Director, Research Content and Scholarship

with Sharif Islam Khandaker, Head: Archives, Library and Collections, and Heather Pitcher, Archivist

*Museums play an essential role... in preserving and promoting the heritage of Canada and all its peoples throughout Canada and abroad and in contributing to the collective memory and sense of identity of all Canadians... (Museums Act of Canada. <http://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/sc-1990-c-3/latest/sc-1990-c-3.html>)*

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) is a unique institution that will use collections to enhance our understanding of human rights, to illuminate personal experiences with rights issues, and to transform our perspectives. Human rights culture is expressed in both the tangible and intangible – in objects, documents, and art, and in ideas, memories, language and beliefs. It is captured in the stories of individuals and communities, in a country's engagement in national and global human rights, and in the development of legislation.

The CMHR's collections are defined to include these tangible and intangible assets and will play a valuable and integral role in supporting the exhibits, research, education, projects, web

presence and programming of the Museum. The collections will be a foundation for interactive and sometimes controversial exhibits. They will help make human rights personal and relevant.

They will contribute to the preserved collective memory and sense of identity of Canadians, thereby fulfilling our role as a national museum.

The Museum will also create, acquire and preserve born digital resources. Over time, it will develop a significant collection of oral histories and memories related to human rights and have already begun to establish this collection through our unprecedented cross-Canada story-gathering process. Once created, sophisticated search engines will provide visitors and researchers with broad and specific access to both the born digital resources and also written original memoirs with photographs, images, diaries and letters, published materials, and commercial and museum-produced media as well as related physical artefacts and artworks.

Although storage of digital resources may be less expensive, this is not the main reason for 'going

digital'. Certainly, access to all resources is aided by technology. However much human rights evidence is now in digital format and visitors will access not only the Museum's own born digital resources, but also human rights resources worldwide.

While physical objects have a role to play in the museum, the stories that embody human rights ideas and experiences are paramount. Preserving the words, the look, the voice and the moving image will paint vibrant pictures which convey powerful human rights messages enhanced by important physical objects.

The stories of individuals and groups along with their thoughts and ideas illustrate multiple perspectives. They also provide an opportunity to identify gaps in our understandings, allow new human rights insights to emerge, and contribute to the body of human rights knowledge. ●





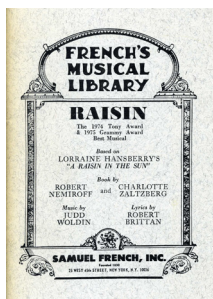
# of Museum Collections

## Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

By Howard Dodson, Director

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is first and foremost a research library. As such, its collections are the foundation of its existence. Founded in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance, it gained international recognition when it acquired the personal collection of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, a Puerto Rican of African descent who had amassed an original collection of more than 10,000 items – books, manuscripts, artworks, photographs and periodicals – on the global black experience.

Schomburg had spent more than a quarter of a century collecting evidence to dispute the myths of black racial inferiority and historical insignificance. These myths had provided the ideological justification for the enslavement and colonization of blacks for centuries. Each item was gathered as a piece of evidence of the place and role of black people in the making of human history and human civilization or of black achievement



Poster for musical based on "A Raisin in the Sun" by Lorraine Hansberry.

document through evidence the achievement, triumphs and travails of black people as human beings.

Over the last 85 years, Schomburg's collection of 10,000 items has increased to a figure in excess of 10 million. While the myths of black racial

inferiority are still with us and unfortunately demand refutation almost daily, the evidentiary basis of the counter narrative has long since been established.

But even these extensive collections do not begin to provide sufficient evidence to tell the unvarnished truth about the global black experience. Because of the global nature of that experience, records essential for documenting it are located wherever black people live or have lived – archival materials created by the colonizing or colonized societies, the personal records of black people and their unique expressive cultural creations, and more. The Schomburg Center will continue to collect and preserve an adequate documentary record of the global black experience. ●

inferiority are still with us and unfortunately demand refutation almost daily, the evidentiary basis of the counter narrative has long since been established.



## Museum of AIDS in Africa

By Stephanie Nolen, Board Member and Ngaire Blankenberg, Senior Consultant, Lord Cultural Resources

There is nothing that replaces the gravitas of seeing a 'real' object or document – rich with story and history, often transported from another time and place – a piece of evidence that is irrefutable and unchanging. The Museum of AIDS in Africa is a new museum being planned for South Africa where collections are at the core of the experience. Medical and ethnographic artifacts, documents, photographs, audio/visual material, art and an archive of personal stories and 'remembrances' will dispel the mythology associated with AIDS in Africa and its origins. Through presenting the concrete evidence of the history and epidemiology of the disease that has claimed millions of lives and which to date has been accessible to only select researchers and scientists, the Museum aims to make tangible what too often has been seen as an impenetrable, omnipotent and unconquerable disease.

The Memory Bank will be a place where individuals and families can 'store' a memory box – tangible remembrances of a person they have lost to HIV/AIDS. This is particularly poignant in a



Museum of AIDS in Africa collections will include this T-shirt worn by former South African president Nelson Mandela.

context where millions of children have been left orphaned, often with no way of safekeeping the memories left to them by departed loved ones. This traditional function of the museum and archive – as a place that preserves what is 'of value' from the past – is evoked here on a deeply personal scale.

There will be four pillars of the AIDS Museum: a science and history museum; a place for memorialization; a public space for dialogue and reflection; and an archive. It is hoped that 'touching AIDS' through making its collections accessible to members of the public will bring HIV/AIDS out of the realm of the unimaginable (and often the unspeakable) into the realm of the known. The Museum hopes to deeply move its visitors, empower them with understanding and knowledge, help them to recognize that they are neither alone nor invisible, and provoke a more compassionate and practical response to HIV/AIDS across the continent. ●



Photo: John Morstad



Continued from Page 1...

Some cultural institutions are broadening their definitions to include a stronger emphasis on intangible collections. Judith Dueck's article about the Canadian Museum for Human Rights illustrates this dynamic new museum's focus on 'stories' as collection resources, supported as well by historical objects, works of art, and archival materials. Again the Museum's mission to educate and engage visitors in human rights issues drives the ways in which the collections are used and defined.

Collections can be weapons in the fight against ignorance, irrationality and intolerance. Current events will not allow us to forget that myths, half-truths and outright falsehoods are often difficult to eradicate. Stephanie Nolen and Ngairé Blankenberg in their article on the Museum of AIDS in Africa and Howard Dodson in his piece

on the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture touch on this important theme. For both institutions, collections are understood as a bulwark – in one case against misunderstandings relating to the human immunodeficiency virus, and the other against resurgent racism. Facts and evidence still matter – indeed, they are more important than ever in these days of 'culture wars' and polarized debate.

In all of these cases, the institutional mission is crucial. As missions evolve – as museums focus on contemporary issues, search for ways to make themselves continually relevant, and seek to engage visitors and encourage them to explore their personal creativity – they will find creative ways of building collections and using existing resources. And they will continue to tap into the enduring power of the authentic, whether represented tangibly or intangibly. ●

## Announcements

### 30th Anniversary of Lord Cultural Resources

Founded in 1981, Lord Cultural Resources celebrates 30 years as the leading global professional practice dedicated to creating cultural capital, having completed over 1800 projects in 48 countries on 6 continents. Visit [www.lord.ca](http://www.lord.ca) homepage for our visual corporate timeline!



### 2010 Design Exchange Award

On November 23, 2010, the Ontario Pavilion at the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games was awarded Gold in the Design Exchange Interior Design – Temporary/Portable category. Lord Cultural Resources led the Creative and Program Development for our client Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, along with the core team led by general contractor

EllisDon, with Hariri Pontarini Architects, Nüssli and Infinite Stage Design.

### Grand Egyptian Museum

Lord Cultural Resources is on the team of the joint venture between Hill International and EHAF Consulting Engineers contracted by the Ministry of Culture's Supreme Council of Antiquities of the Arab Republic of Egypt to provide project management services during the design and construction of the Grand Egyptian Museum within sight of the famous Old Kingdom Pyramids. Our specific role will center on managing the tender process and construction for the exhibitions.



Dr. Zahi Hawass, Minister of Antiquities, Egypt; Stephen Greenberg, Principal, Metaphor Ltd.; Maria Piacente, Vice President, Lord Cultural Resources; Ezzedine Barakat, Director of the Technical Committee, GEM; and Dr. Mohammed Saleh, Egyptologist; at a meeting at the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

## Client News

In San Francisco, the **Museum of African Diaspora** received the 2010 *SF Weekly* Award in the category of Best Museum: "There is nowhere else like this. Its mission and reason for being are so rare, and the execution so flawless, that the 2005 addition to the downtown museum district has become a flaming jewel in the area's already-crowded art crown."

The new **Anchorage Museum** opened to great acclaim in May 2010 incorporating to of our major recommendations from our Master Plan for an expanded facility: the 10,000 sq. ft. Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center and the former Imaginarium, which took over 9,000 sq. ft. of interactive gallery space in the Museum's 80,000 sq. ft. expansion.

The **Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art** in Toronto forged a partnership with the National Gallery of Canada in a three-year program that will see the two institutions co-organize and co-present a series of exclusive exhibitions in MOCCA's newly-renovated project space.

The **American Indian Cultural Center & Museum** launched the Keeping the Fire Campaign to support its dynamic program development and operations as an institution dedicated to telling the stories of Oklahoma's tribes. Visit [www.aiccm.org](http://www.aiccm.org) for further information.

**Longwood Gardens** in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania has opened a new 3,590 sq. ft. green wall featuring 47,000 plants, making it the largest greenwall in North America.



Typewriter used in Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film, "Schindler's List," which received seven Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director. Photograph by John Elder

The **National Museum of American Jewish History** opened its new \$150 million, 100,000 sq. ft. building in the heart of historic Philadelphia on November 14. It is the only museum in the nation dedicated solely to telling the story of Jews in America.

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