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## En El Museo No Se Incluye

Kimberly Fernandez Pedraza

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2021 Winner

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En El Museo No Se Incluye

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Santa Clara University

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Por mi mami, siempre me has dicho que yo puedo lograr lo que me pongo en la mente. Este ensayo refleja los cambios que quiero inspira y sin tu esfuerzo nunca hubiera llegado a la universidad. Te quiero y gracias por ensayar me como luchar para lo que yo creo es justo.

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### **Abstract**

The attendance of art museums has often been exclusionary to nonwhite individuals. As a space revered for the “high class” or “educated”, there is a direct correlation with art museum attendance being dominated by white, middle class, college graduates. Being a current student pursuing higher education at Santa Clara University (SCU) and in an academic environment that has pushed for arts participation, the research would suggest this is the perfect environment for students to develop museum going habits. Based on interviews with three current SCU students and utilizing an auto-ethnographic approach, this research paper looks at the barriers that push BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) SCU students from attending art museums. In conducting interviews with BIPOC SCU students, themes that encompass exclusion, erasure, and discomfort are deeply institutionalized methods in museum and art history’s curriculum that act as obstacles to the diversification of the space. Although these spaces were not created with the intention of including these demographics, it is key for art museums to begin to recognize this history and have their attendance be more diverse as the national demographics are headed towards a nonwhite majority.

*En el Museo no se Incluye***Introduction**

As an art history student and someone who's been infatuated with looking at a culture's artistic output, I have always been drawn to enter spaces where this could be a reality.

Traditionally, these spaces are often in galleries and art museums. However, as I have gotten older and begun to be an avid museum visitor, both domestically and abroad, I have noticed the discrepancies with art museum attendance. The humanities have historically been a material reserved for the "elite" and the "educated", thereby leaving a stigma on expanding the material to those outside of these categories. Unfortunately, in my experience as an art history student on Santa Clara's campus and an art history student abroad in Vienna, Austria there have been little to no efforts to increase representation, inclusivity, or relationships with the community. I have never felt fully part of the art history community; I have seen myself being on the borderlands and never fully integrated in the discipline. I started to actively attend museums to be able to find a safe space where I was allowed to view art and be appreciative of artistic ingenuity and risk without being judged or marginalized. My individual experiences at art museums have been filled with wonder, resonance, and excitement as I was in a space surrounded by what I love most: art. Yet, as I began to be a more active museum visitor, my friends were confused as to why art museums were a pivotal hobby for me. As BIPOC students, they had expressed to me not feeling appealed by the activity. They shared similar feelings of imposter syndrome, lacking the cultural capital, and lack of efforts from museums to actively make a space beyond the white majority. To them, entering these spaces was a foreign mystery encapsulated by feelings of uneasiness.

One of the reasons I decided to stay in the art history major was to open a path for BIPOC students to enter the humanities. I want nonwhite artists to be recognized and praised as much as our white counterparts. In order for this to become a reality, art museums need to be involved in critical conversations and participate in the decolonization of these spaces. I wanted to explore the following questions in relation to art museums:

1. What are the barriers that push away BIPOC SCU students from art museums?
2. What exclusionary practices disproportionately affect them?

My research topic centers on the lived experiences of BIPOC students at SCU and their hesitations with visiting art museums. My topic becomes increasingly more important to confront as our nation's demographics become more diverse and decolonial art and museum practices are beginning to take form.

## Literature Review

### *Museum History*

Museums have always been safeguarded as a site for individuals to view and interact with the objects on display. Beginning in the 15th century, museums were first formed as “curiosity cabinets” or “kunstkammern” for wealthy and elite men to display their owned objects, or property, for public viewing (Mason et al., 2018, pg. 22). This idea of a private collection being showcased to the general public in an attempt to inspire resonance has informed the most fundamental goal of a museum today. The Museums Association defines museums as “[Spaces where] people explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society” (Museums Association, 2016). Museums goals have expanded to now center the viewer’s experience and no longer simply serve as a storage container of items.

In today's world, museums have faced an internal revolution as the institutions have become aware of the power they yield, which has led to these sites to begin to focus on the individualized effects their sights can have on the community rather than focusing on care and preservation of owned items. As the roles of museums have expanded and the cultural capital has risen with it, museums have had to overcome their own histories of negetating the stories of nonwhite groups. With the rise of efforts to begin to deconstruct the power of museums, attempts at decolonizing access and structure of museums have surfaced as well. Recent research efforts aimed at disseminating new methods (the white walls of museums meant to convey a space for critical reflection or layouts connected to a ritual of citizenship) for a 21st century museum model has called for a “new museology”. In this research and practice, museums are encouraged to participate in a self reflexivity survey through the daily practices of the museum site (Mason et. al., 2019, pg. 21). The “old museology” found itself too concerned with theory. Minimal

attention was given to understanding the role museums play in society and their influence in shaping knowledge, and therefore, power. A central critique within the new museology movement has been towards the museum's tendency to focus on telling the stories and showcasing the objects of the dominant culture, thereby marginalizing nonwhite groups. Museums now find themselves attempting to center the stories of those traditionally forgotten and to individuals representing their own histories and cultures over presenting outside narratives. These institutions have held onto a tradition in which they showcase biased European art or showcase exhibits that perpetuate a backwards ideology (the merits of colonialism or the "savages" of the indigenous peoples of México). Now that cultural institutions have finally recognized the troubling nature of artworks and their own shows, new museology attempts to finally give the stage of perceptions of those ethnic groups that have been silenced.

#### *Demographics of Art Museum Attendance*

In order to better understand the recent inclusivity efforts of the museum space, being cognizant of the current museum attendance is a crucial starting point. A report published by the NEA's (National Endowment of the Arts) survey of Public Participation in the arts, inclusive of the data chart shown below, demonstrates a visible discrepancy of the ethnic groups that attend art museums (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010).

	% of visitors to art museums	% of U.S. population
<i>By race/ethnicity</i>		
Hispanic	8.6%	13.5%
Non-Hispanic White	78.9%	68.7%
African American	5.9%	11.4%
Other	6.6%	6.4%

*Figure 1: Data showing nationwide museum attendance in 2018*



The data supports the idea that the dominant museum visitors are white individuals and nonwhite groups do not match with their domestic visibility. This is a cause for concern because the numbers illustrate how art museums easily attract white visitors while continuing to marginalize nonwhite individuals causing them to evade these institutions. In Hendon's 1990 research, he is able to certify these claims with supplemental data from a study by the U.S. Census Bureau. In his findings, Hendon reports that generally the arts audience has a correlation to individuals with higher levels of income and education. Visitors to art museums are usually in upper educational, occupational, and income groups and are also more active in other forms of arts participation and leisure activities, such as attending musicals, watching classical music performances, plays, and operas. As a result, the visitors and participants of art museums are a homogenous group containing white, educated, wealthy individuals who also dabble in other forms of cultural leisure activities. With this being the dominant group, allowing for nonwhite groups with varying levels of education and income has proven to be a challenge to the inclusivity efforts of museums. It cannot be denied that there is a very dramatic ethnic and racial disparity.

An additional factor that can influence the attendance and participation of museums is parental influence. In Farrell & Medvedeva's 2010 study they were able to find a correlation between a parent's educational level and the subsequent influence it has on their children's personal interests, including attending museums. The accessibility of an individual enrolled in higher levels of education, leads to greater access to exposure to the arts and accompanying cultural activities. By having parents who are knowledgeable in this subject matter, they can easily instill these values into their children. Likewise, parents with lower educational levels and/or lower income have to consider additional structural factors with visiting museums. Parents who find themselves working long hours and multiple jobs do not have the luxury to take

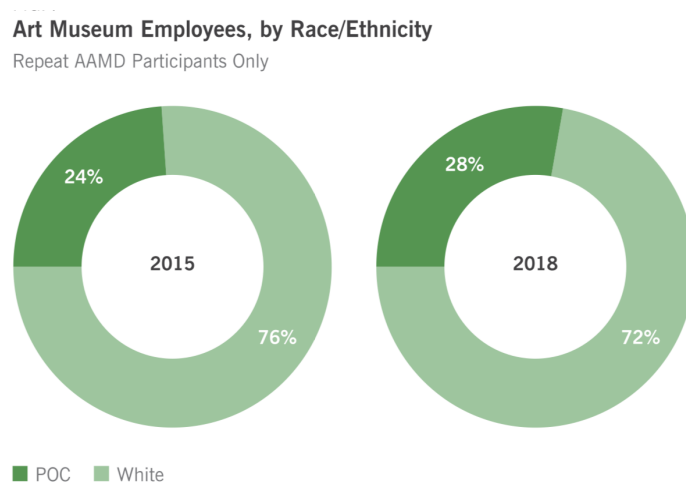
their kids to a museum, especially considering most of them are open Monday - Saturday, 9AM -5 PM. Immigrant families also have to be confronted by language and cultural barriers. They have to carefully consider the price and time needed to participate in this activity and begin to value the worth of the experience, since this is something that can be intimidating. This is not the fault of the parents but rather the social structures into which they are embedded and don't have access too. Many of the parents who are confronting these issues are from BIPOC communities who don't attend university at the same rates as white individuals and who have to constantly face cultural barriers. Museums need to realize this and begin to deconstruct the idea that all individuals can visit the site, when BIPOC folks are the ones working during their operating hours and having to consider these additional barriers.

In the same study, Farrell & Medvedeva were able to offer some insight into the reasons that account for the stark disparity between white and nonwhite groups' museum attendance. For BIPOC communities, they have had to face unique obstacles when entering museum spaces -- and most of these stem from systemic issues. Firstly, there is an aura of exclusion associated with the museum space. This can stem from the lack of diverse objects showcased and the lack of initiatives that attempt to have programs or shows that relate to a collective communal experience such as a showcase about the prison abolition system in a community with high incarceration rates (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). Secondly, the fear of lacking cultural capital and knowledge to be comfortable in these spaces (a topic I will expand on later). Thirdly, the lack of example or precedent set by parents or other leading figures. Similarly, the lack of this tradition is established within an individual's social circles. All of these reasons can affect any individual wanting to enter the art museum tradition, however, it is particularly damaging to BIPOC communities. A museum's history is rooted in the exclusion of nonwhite communities

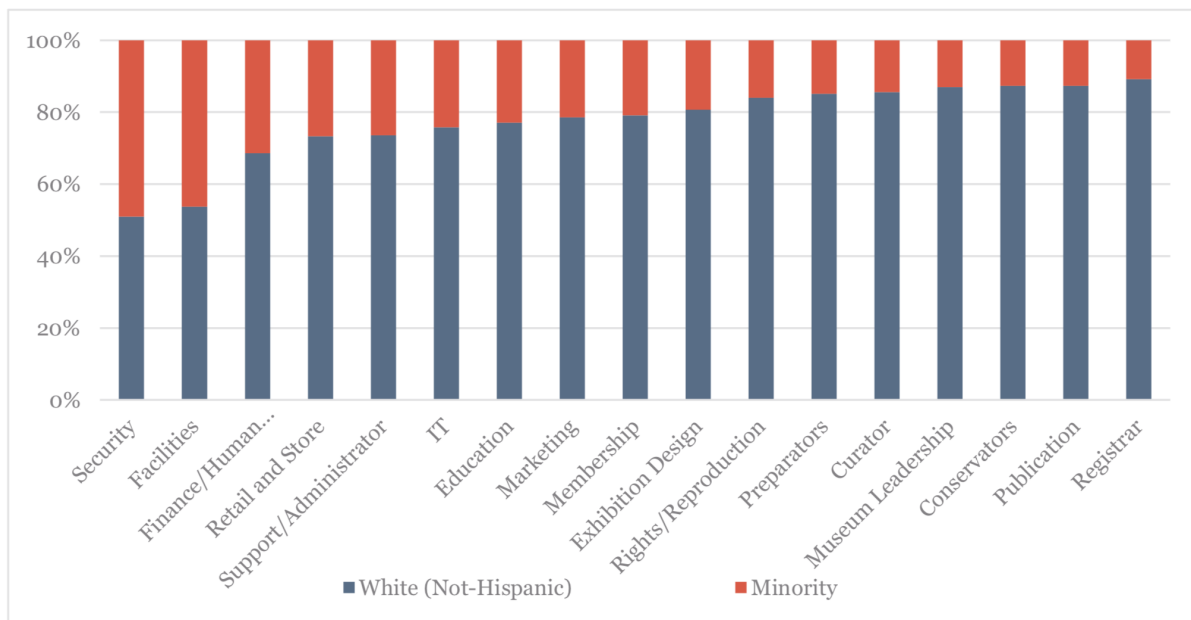
and showcasing objects to those who have the cultural attributes and knowledge to understand it. As art museums have continued to exist, there have been little efforts to confront these issues that systematically affect BIPOC communities. Although these spaces were not created to be inclusive and welcoming to nonwhite communities, in order for art museums to actively change the demographics of their attendance they need to be more attentive and critical to the ways they perpetuate exclusionary practices.

### *Demographics of Art Museum Staff*

Similar to the visitor demographics, art museum staff demographics lack any significant diversity. In Westermann et al. 's 2019 report, the authors found that 72% of art museum employees are white, leaving only 28% to be composed of ethnic minorities. Of the 28% of staff that are nonwhite, the majority of them are employed in lower skilled jobs, such as security, retail, and facilities. The following graphs, figures 2 and 3, better showcase this severe distinction.



*Figure 2: Data showing art museum employees broken by race in 2019*



*Figure 2: Data showing art museum employees broken by race in 2015*

Although nonwhite employees exist in these institutions, they hold meager positions. Those in executive leadership, curatorial, or publication roles continue to be dominated by a white workforce (Schonfeld et al, 2015). This is another troubling issue because the positions that yield the most power continue to allow for exclusionary practices to exist. Dutta's 2019 article explains that every individual holds natural biases that were obtained through their environment and identities, thus the need to have workplaces be diverse in order to account for this discrepancy. A white leadership staff will hold onto biases that picture a ethnic group through a certain lens or will fail to realize the methods in which their site has microaggressive practices that can deter nonwhite folks from being exposed to the museum. The hegemony of the dominant culture will continue to prevail and the othering of BIPOC groups will continue to be an unquestioned practice in the industry. As BIPOC staff continue to be left out of these roles, they

won't be allowed to lead the museum in issues that pertain to their lived experiences such as decolonization efforts or community outreach.

### *Cultural Capital and Retaining Culture*

One of the biggest challenges to diversifying the museum attendance is the expansion of cultural capital. Cultural capital is defined as the ability to successfully understand signals and knowledge of high culture (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). In relation to museums, it is the ability for a visitor to enter the space and successfully interpret and interact with the artworks on display. Although a widely defined and studied topic by sociologists, cultural capital has maintained an ability to be an indicator and basis of a class position and seen as a power resource. Cultural capital has essentially been seen as an institutionalized method aimed at social and cultural exclusion. Bourdieu and Passeron, the sociologists who coined the term, had seen cultural capital as an exclusionary method since the dominant group can mark cultural awareness, further monopolize privileges, and exclude nondominant groups of high status positions. Cultural capital can be seen as an identifier of social ranking and only those who possess it can recognize it.

In understanding cultural capital and the challenges that arise to those who lack it, there is an obvious disparity in which the dominant group (white, wealthy, and educated individuals) can assert their power and privilege by continuing to assert this ideal. In Boudier-Pailler and Urban's 2015 article, they look at ways in which underprivileged communities can access culture. Specifically, the authors note that cultural leisure time is an activity that those socially and financially vulnerable do not have the luxury of engaging in. In their situations, they find taking care of their immediate needs to be more important than engaging in cultural leisure time. In their interviews, their participants discussed some of the barriers that stand in the way of them accessing leisure activities. These obstacles were financial constraints, access to these activities,

time to engage with these activities due to a concentration on survival over pleasure, and psychological obstacles (internal fears). The last category is in relation to an individual's social status and their own fears of appearing uneducated enough (i.e. lacking the cultural capital) to be comfortable in these cultural spaces. From this study, it shows how culture is concentrated in individuals who have the freedom to dedicate themselves to these activities, which tend to be higher income individuals and pre established traditions that hold this activity as a priority. In order to expand culture to underprivileged and underrepresented communities, art museums need to deconstruct this belief that those who enter the space have had the opportunity to successfully understand the artworks. Also, there needs to be initiatives to break down structural barriers such as being open on weekends and for longer periods of time, having partnerships with schools and public transportation that can bring in underrepresented groups, diversifying collections and curatorial shows, and more. By doing this, art museums will be able to better access BIPOC communities, especially those that are low income.

#### *Who is their Public: Community or Tourists*

The intended audience of museums is another important factor that shapes museum engagement and culture. In particular, this issue has risen within museums and their inclusivity efforts, which reinforce a particular kind of audience that is exclusive to the audiences that they have catered to previously. In the past, museums have been focused on the attraction to tourists, who are only temporary visitors (Crooke, 2008, pg. 179). In recent years through the lens and critics of new museology, there have been calls for museums to begin to center their programming and outreach efforts aimed at the local surrounding communities. In Crooke's article, they note that being able to engage in outreach to the community allows them to reach new and wider audiences, build trust, and be able to reinforce the new role of a museum.

Additionally, by establishing these connections the idea of a museum being a superimposing and intimidating force disappears, which allows for more diverse groups to engage with the institution. It's also important to establish these connections because the museum also has a better understanding of which stories to showcase, which is an opportunity for those excluded and underrepresented identities to finally be showcased.

The Brooklyn Museum in New York has been able to accomplish the task of addressing the needs of its surrounding community which has resulted in more local residents taking a key role and interest with the art museum. The Brooklyn community has been dominated by BIPOC's since the second world war (Schonfeld and Sweeney, 2018). It has also seen in recent years gentrification, causing these communities to be significantly displaced. It's community is filled with marginalized ethnic groups who are confronted with issues relating to economic distress and underrepresentation within the arts.

In order to meet the needs of their community, the museum has established new policies and efforts. The museum contains a wide and diverse collection along with accompanying information through the lenses of intersectional feminism and critical race theory to inform it's viewers. Instead of having an opulent and neoclassical facade, it instead chose a design that prioritized accessibility. Many Brooklyn residents are first introduced to this museum through it's lively and popular Saturday night parties rather than a bleak display of artworks on white walls. The curators have an open discourse with it's public and scholars about what shows and artworks will be put on display. The museum thinks critically about which communities have been historically underserved and bases programs and spaces for these communities to feel welcomed and cared for. The leadership at this museum emphasizes the importance of fighting the systematic issues that leave nonwhite communities out of art museums. This is an excellent

example of what art museums should be concentrating their efforts on. However, the museum has faced scrutiny for its innovative approach since some believe it strays too far from what a museum should be offering. This example shows the museum's colonist practices rooted in exclusion and prejudice are allowed to prevail, however, any efforts made to change this narrative are heavily criticized thereby showing the deeply imbedded roots of marginalization in museum history and subsequent practices.

### *Art History's History*

On this topic I cannot solely critique art museum's history and practices, art history's own history also alludes as to why art museums refuse to showcase diverse artworks. Art history's history has been defined by a narrow viewpoint meant to limit those who can be viewed as artists. By establishing this tradition, art has been a discriminatory field meant to advance the ideals and merits of the dominant culture.

In the discipline, students and scholars are constantly referring back to the canon which are artworks seen to have pivotal importance and be exemplary (Saloman, 1998, pg. 163). From greek sculpture, Polykleitos' *Doryphros (Spear Bearer)* has been imputed into the canon and referred to as the ideal for male body sculptures moving forward. It is artwork that is highly revered and sought to be copied after. The issue with the canon, however, is it's history has propelled wealthy white men to be idealized and established as the "artistic genius".

The history of the canon begins with Giorgio Varsari writing his book *The Lives of the Artists* in which he collected biographies of the important Italian artists during the time (16th century). However, Varsari's writing has been scrutinized for being extremely biased and problematic. Nanette Salomon notes that Varsari's writings have maintained the dominance of white and wealthy males as the ideal artist. Varsari's book was written with the motives of



placing value to Florence's role in the High Renaissance and constructing the histories of the artists at the time. By utilizing chronological biographies and a biased personal judgement of influence, Vasari stresses the importance of the individual genius or artist. The individuals that he describes worthy of this title are white upper class males; he perpetuates the idea that authentic artistic genius can only be attained by white upper class males.

Additionally, Vasari's tradition sets innovative and influential artworks to be worthy of the canon. The issue with this viewpoint is that each culture sets their own ideals and meanings relevant to artworks (Saloman 1998, pg. 325). In African culture, much of their artwork is not concentrated on following naturalistic depictions but rather stylized ones that symbolize the characters of the individual over their realistic depiction. But in the vision of Vasari and the canon, this artwork would not suffice to be canon worthy since it does not follow any set influence or following the classical model, thereby marginalizing these communities out of fine arts and art museums.

Another aspect of art history's history that has further perpetuated this discipline to appeal to the white and educated are the establishment of art academies. Beginning around the Renaissance towards about the 20th century, academies were formal art schools where artists were taught the formal techniques needed to be a professional artist (usually derived from antiquity and the renaissance). The art academy is an institution aimed at ensuring women and minorities do not enter the canon by reinforcing archaic ideals that stressed white men as the ideal image of an artist (Saloman). Artists were trained following techniques set by white men and most of the admitted students were white men who came from wealthy families. The value of non European art is erased to elevate the merits of antiquity, thereby creating a precedent in visual culture that fails to recognize the merits of nonwhite cultures.

Varsari viewed standards for the academies through the lens of classical (antique Greek and Roman) art and the recovery of the achievements set by classical culture. This in turn creates a hierarchy of insiders and outsiders. This dichotomy sets central Italy's renaissance as the culture with the greatest values and achievements and successfully marginalizing all other artistic traditions. These other cultural achievements are deemed "irrelevant" because they view classicism as the universal standard, any art or culture who strays away from this viewpoint is not seen to the same height. The unchallenged influence of Vasari has led art history to lead with a classical bias and a preference for upper class male creativity and patronage. It's history is rooted in the exclusive support of white male artists.

Art museums today follow in Varsari's outdated model. Topaz's et al 2019 study showcases the diversity of artists in major U.S. museums. To begin to equalize the attendance of their museums, diversity efforts need to be extended to their collections. The study found that 85.4% of collections were white, followed by 9% being Asian, 2.8% Latinx, 1.2% Black, and 1.5% were noted as "other". White men comprised 75.7% of these collections followed by white women at 10.8%, Asian men at 7.5%, Latinx men at 2.6%, and "other" being less than 1%. The average artist's birth year was also found to be 1863 among all museums, which meant the majority of the artists showcased were working during the neoclassical revival (an art movement that reinforces the values of antiquity during the 19th century). Art museums, unfortunately, continue to follow in this model that excludes nonwhite artists tradition. The first method to attract BIPOC folks is by having art that represents their communities and unique struggles, however, by continuing to have European art that follows a tradition established during the renaissance, art museums will continue to push away BIPOC individuals.

Given these limitations and the challenges of fostering an inclusive museum going culture, my research project seeks to understand how museums can break away the European hierarchies and models of exclusion they have established in their institutions. Although both museum and art history need to be challenged in order to bring that necessary change, my research looks at the methods that BIPOC students wish to see art museums engage in to attract them better.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Method**

I ultimately decided that the best way to obtain tangible results and information for this project was through interviews. I had reached out to BIPOC SCU students who have been enrolled since their freshman year. Due to the pandemic this turned out to be more challenging than expected. During the interview I asked a total of eighteen questions. The first set of questions are introductory questions that help define the positionalities and lived experiences of these students. Through their experiences, I wanted to empower students to describe their true and unbiased feelings about art museums. In museums it is these accounts that are constantly looked over, hence, my efforts on making sure I reverse museum history in these interviews. The second half of questions were related to my project such as their personal experiences with art museums and upbringing. I asked close ended questions as well as conducted a semi-structured interview since some of my interviewees had different experiences that I had accounted for (which ended being good because my results were very diverse and accounted for much more experiences). I also wanted to include an ethno-graphic approach in the results section since my positionality leverages me to account for both BIPOC individuals as well as a student in a discipline closely affiliated with art museums.

### **Community Setting**

My participants are current undergraduate students at Santa Clara University. SCU is a private Jesuit university located in Santa Clara, CA and boasts of affluent students. An article by the New York Times showcased that 14.4% of the student population comes from the top 1% income bracket. Furthermore, SCU is a primarily white institute (PWI). According to their website, from 2010-2017 white students were at least 40% of the population and follow a steady trend of being the majority (SCU, 2017). Through these statistics, SCU is a university that has vast financial resources yet with little diversity, a trend similar to art museums. Both of these institutions are rooted in prioritizing the interests of white students and fostering a negative experience for BIPOC students due to their own practices of exclusion.

I myself am a current student at SCU, thus, I am an insider to the campus climate and the concerns raised by BIPOC students. As mentioned in the introduction, many of my BIPOC peers had questioned my interest in attending museums and as current students in the same university participating in similar activities (MCC, LEAD, arts and sciences majors) I began to question this discrepancy. Additionally, SCU is the perfect environment for students to develop a museum going habit. SCU has a core curriculum that requires a cultures and ideas class to be taken during a student's first year. This requirement is meant for students to begin to delve into the arts and humanities and better understand culture through a global perspective (SCU, 2020). The university also has an on campus museum and a whole building dedicated to showcasing student artwork. With these different components, SCU students are in an environment that heavily pushes the merits of the arts as well as has facilities that allow students to easily access the arts and museum spaces.

Although an insider, I have found my position to be unique within this project. I do identify as a low income Latina student and thus an identity that has been pushed away from art museums. However, I am an art history major whose academic focus has been on art museums and the environments they foster. I have been doing this research for two years by actively attending art museums and being observant of their demographics, programs, and curatorial shows. While abroad, I took a class centered on museum theory and history where I was exposed to the academic research and resources of this topic. I have also done two internships at art museums. In 2019, I worked as the research and curatorial administrative intern for the San Jose Museum of Art (SJMA) and have been actively working with them for a year on an advisory group that aims to diversify the museum attendance. Likewise, since February I have been the access and community intern at the Whitney Museum of American Art (one of the nationally recognized institutions), where I have been able to observe how a larger and more affluent institution plays to the culture of exclusion created by museums. Through these experiences, I have infiltrated the museum space and have been aware of their resources and practices.

Additionally as an art history major, I have never lacked the cultural capital to be fearful of exclusion in these spaces. Although I am a Latina, being an avid museum goer who has the ability to prioritize culture and regularly gains cultural capital, my own position is more privileged than my BIPOC peers.

### **Participants**

The participants I recruited contained similar demographics and characteristics. I interviewed 3 current SCU undergraduate students to whom I will refer to as Gustav, Lorna, and Artemisia. Gustav identifies as Latinx male, Artemisia as a Latinx female, and Lorna identifies as a black female. All of my participants also come from low income families and grew up

outside of the Bay Area. Artemisia and Gustav were raised by immigrant families, while Lorna was raised by a single mother. All three of them are active in the LEAD scholars program for first generation college students and Artemisia and Gustav are ethnic studies majors. Lorna is a second year and Gustav and Artemisia are both juniors at SCU and all three have been enrolled at SCU since their freshman year. Lastly, they all consider themselves to lack cultural capital and never had a museum going tradition established in their upbringing. The participants I was able to recruit signed a participant consent form and were recorded over the platform Zoom.

### **Data Analysis**

Through the interviews I conducted, I was given much insight and perspectives into the wide depth of an art museum's disapeal. To analyze this data, I utilized a thematic analysis since it is the approach that is best tied to my research because it allowed me to categorize my data in explicit detail and thereby allowing me to further understand the data. Through the inductive coding method, I firstly created categories of the themes that were prevalent in my interviews. I then proceeded to continue to utilize inductive coding to construct connections between these broad thematic categories and the literature. These are the main themes present in my research:

1. Exclusion
2. Erasure
3. Discomfort

### **Results**

The three main overarching themes that were prevalent in my interviews were that art museums exclude their community from entering, erase any non dominant narrative, and are uncomfortable to be in based on their site and lack of cultural capital. My three interviews

related similar feelings of being pushed away from these institutions and not wanting to delve deeper into its discourse. However, one unique aspect about my results is that Gustav had two different experiences when it comes to art museums. At museums that stress the white male artist and are dominated by white curators and “cultured” individuals, he felt excluded and uneasy. However, in his hometown he was near two Latinx based art museums. It was in these art museums that he had a favorable time and began to actively engage with it. Artemisia and Lorna, on the other hand, only have experiences with the exclusionary museum and wish they had a Latinx based or ethnic museum near them.

Lorna, Artemisia, and Gustav were quick to note that traditional art museums are unappealing to them because when they think of these institutions they associate them as a space for white and rich individuals who are cultured. The museums failed to attract their communities by not offering any community based programming. When they enter these spaces they are taken aback by the focus that is placed on nurturing white art and the rejection of attracting their communities, which are the communities disproportionately not attending art museums. Gustav thinks by having programming related to the community, it would take away from the feeling of exclusion:

“I want to see more diverse and inclusive programming. You know programming that engages the community around it. In my hometown there is a huge disconnection between art and BIPOC communities and by offering programming that relates to these communities that's how I think you can get more people engaged”

He later talks about his experience at Latinx based art museums, the MOLAA and Plaza de Cultura, and how they actually were successfully able to draw him in because of it's community

based programming. The surrounding area of this museum was dominated by Latinx immigrant families and these museums ensured that their cultures were at the center of any programming:

“What makes the MOLAA inviting and inclusive is that they have events that are community based and attached to it. They go beyond and do workshops on things like decolonizing your diet which was super cool. That museum was beyond art and a lot and had a lot of community engagement opportunities for students. Meanwhile the Broad [A contemporary art museum in Southern California] doesn't have anything like that.”

Lorna wishes she took better advantage of visiting art museums due to her own intrigue, however, she finds these spaces to lack any efforts to connect to her community:

“I do not have much personal interests in visiting museums, but I would be interested in visiting small art galleries. Something that would probably motivate me to visit, is the idea of putting my own perspective on the artwork. What intrigues me about art the most is the ability to interpret it so differently from the next individual. But since I grew up in a predominantly black and hispanic city, local museums or galleries never cared to try and get my community to these spaces. If they weren't going to try, I didn't see the point of me trying either.”

In the literature, Crooke discussed how being able to engage in outreach to the community allows for a mutual trust. By doing this, more BIPOC folks will feel as though their representation and experiences do matter, thereby, wanting to take a role in becoming more active in the museum and beginning to develop that museum going culture. Through the experiences reflected in Gustav's and Lorna's interviews, it becomes evident the need for museums to engage in this tactic; their stories reflect the consequences of failing to conduct any outreach efforts.



Secondly, the interviews brought up erasure. In the few times they visited art museums, the artwork did not appeal to them because it was mainly art by white men. As BIPOC students, they wanted to see a part of the museum that was able to encompass some of their ethnic origin. Artemisia also talked about how having white curators and tour guides was disheartening. To her these individuals could not relate to her struggle as a Latinx individual and they assumed that the male dominated artwork was superior. Artemisia elaborates:

“ I've been to an art museum twice, the first time I went was with a friend after school and it was free. I felt out of place there. It's cool and I like the aesthetic, however, they don't show much diversity, it's always white people in their art, I would love to see more Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian art. The art that is displayed in museums is racist in the fact it does not represent other ethnicities. Also all employees were white. They should change their staff to have more BIPOC so that I feel more welcomed.”

Gustav also echoed these feelings:

“I feel more comfortable at Latino based art museums that are diverse and reflect my experiences. I love them because I feel a connection to them and I feel both of these art museums [MOLAA & Plaza de Cultura] tell more. They tell a whole story accompanied by the history of the place. I know the Broad has pop art but I don't know the story or connection. I felt more intrigued at the latino/ethnic museums while at the Broad I was mostly there to take pictures for instagram.”

Although Lorna had only visited one art museum, she reiterated much of the same sentiment as Gustav and Artemisia. She felt comfortable to be in the space of a historical museum, when the realities and lived experiences of oppressed groups were highlighted :

“I feel that historical museums have felt more inclusive due to its ability to focus on specific times in history where individuals were oppressed or when society failed them. For example, the African-American museum felt very inclusive due to my ability to identify and its focus on the black experience and history. Moreover, I also found the Holocaust museum very inclusive because it also focused on a time in history where individuals were clearly oppressed.”

Earlier in the paper, I had talked about art history’s history and how that has influenced our galleries today. The hierarchy of artworks established by Varsai continues to impact which works are seen to be worthy of showcase. All of my interviews have confirmed that showcasing more diverse art outside of the European tradition would appeal to them greatly in actually attending art museums. I recall while beginning my study abroad process, I told myself I did not want to go to a European country because I was tired of learning about it’s art and tired of being told it was the most ideal. Unfortunately, there was no program outside of Europe that offered my major and thus my decision to go to Vienna. Even as a humanities student, I am also drained of constantly hearing and seeing the same European males be seen in galleries. I want to be in a space where nonwhite art is showcased and I get to be reflective of these cultures and histories.

Lastly, museums were seen as an uncomfortable place to be in. Both Gustav and Artemisia both attended the museums when they were free. Once in the building, they felt immediately intimidated by the fact they knew nothing about the art because of their lack of cultural capital. Gustav documents this intimidation, “In my experience, these spaces are definitely intimidating if you don’t know anything about the art. I felt out of place.”

Both Gustav and Artemisia documented how they felt more comfortable looking at street art or murals than being in these clean and maintained spaces. Artemisia specifically noted,

“Where I grew up graffiti to me represents the homeland with bright colors which I find more welcoming than the screaming man [alluding to Edvard Munch *The Scream*] that stuff is ugly.”

As a BIPOC student I also attest to these feelings. I recall when I began to visit museums in high school due to fundraising brought on by our arts appreciation club. I recall how my sister and I both were excited to see the Mexican art in SFMOMA and after seeing the handful of artworks we were lost on what to do. We did not understand the artwork and found ourselves sitting around most of the time since the rest of the artworks did not make sense to us. Now, as an art history student with sufficient cultural capital I find myself being more comfortable in the space and aware of how to navigate certain themes and artists. It’s unfortunate that in order to feel welcomed in these spaces, you have to come with knowledge if not the museum will supplement very little information which is extremely elitist and continues to push out these underrepresented communities.

In their experiences as BIPOC students, Artemisa and Gustav remembered the guards in the galleries and their unnecessarily hostility nature towards them. The guards are meant to protect the artwork, however, in Artemisia and Gustav’s experiences they felt as though they were quickly profiled being one of the few nonwhite attendees and constantly watched over. Gustav talked about his experience at the popular LACMA museum and how the guards intimidated him:

“At LACMA they all wear these red coats and suits and are walking around and looking for different people and keeping an eye on me. They have an imposing position to intimidate me and I understand it but at latin american art museums [MOLAA & Plaza de Cultura] they approach you and have conversations and actually smile at you which makes their presence much more inviting.”

For Artemisia she was much more critical:

“When BIPOC enter those spaces, they are always being surveillanced or followed by guards, which are microaggressive acts and I saw how they were not going around to white people. I wasn’t planning on stealing the whole painting. Following BIPOC around is not cool or fun.”

Artemisia, recollected further on her experience and discussed how when she attended art museums, the location and site were unappealing. She noted how the art museums in her local area were either clustered downtown or secluded in an affluent area. Furthermore, the building itself being in the classical style perpetuated the European art, which she is not a fan of:

“They need to change their aesthetic of being white and classical. It doesn’t draw me because it continues to idealize the greeks. I am tired of seeing the Greeks and roman dominate art spaces.”

Lorna also expressed the frustration of having travel a substantial distance in order to be exposed to these institutions and how there was little value in outweighing the travel:

“There were no museums in my local area. The closest one was about 30 minutes away and not much people from my community went to it...I never found much interest in art museums because I would have to travel all the way to downtown Chicago, and with traffic that took about 2 hours. It was not worth the travel knowing that I would not feel comfortable and the art would not represent anything I would want to see. Maybe if the museums had art from black artists or from other marginalized groups, I would consider it but most of the time they didn’t so I just was never interested.”

Artemisia and Gustav also discussed how the price was a factor to consider. As two individuals that come from low income families, sparing twenty dollars was a heavy decision to

consider. They eventually were able to attend art museums on days where the museum would offer free admission, however, they wish for the price to be free to underrepresented communities (BIPOC families, immigrants, and disabled individuals) or to at least better advertise the days where admission will be free. I recall how I was also put off by the cost that some museums charge. I would start to do my own research to see if there were any free days discounts to students. However, as someone who has worked at two art museums I can admit these institutions can do better about highlighting these days at the same rate they promote their memberships. If museums are truly committed to the prospect of free admission days, trying to maximize the number of individuals who attend by properly advertising to underrepresented groups would seem to be a task that should be prioritized.

When I asked Lorna, Artemisia, and Gustav any final feelings about art museums, their responses show how museums that continue to foster white art and staff will continue to push them away. For Artemisia she will continue to be feel excluded:

“I wish I could go to museums but I just feel unwelcomed in the spaces. To me, it's crazy to think people go to art museums as a hobby or to distress. Unless they are more inclusive and less racist, I don't see that occurring. ”

For Gustav he only feels comfortable at Latinx art museums due to their inclusivity and outreach efforts:

“I've gone to latino art museums in LA and they're great and I love them. I feel more at home there than at the Broad. I felt engaged there almost like a home. At The Broad the art was super cool and fun but there was no connection superficial, I was wondering what I was doing there.”

For Lorna, she was also critical about museums being cognizant of the role they play and the narratives they showcase:

“I feel that museums should be more inclusive given our current socio economic political context. They should aim to include all history if it is a historical museum and more non European male art at art museums. This means not just white colonialism.”

As I reflect on the experiences reflected in the interviews and my experience in this space, there can be no denial that art museums glorify the merits of whiteness and aim to push out those who challenge this ideal. In a form of irony, the visual arts were created with a purpose to showcase grievances, offer counter narratives, and fight against oppressive institutions. However, museums are devoid of any appreciation of these goals and have established an industry where excluding BIPOC voices and bodies from their spaces is not a cause for concern. The interviews I have conducted for the purposes of this project reflect the realities of BIPOC folks in the humanities. Although these testimonies capture hard truths, it illustrates the changes that need to occur in order to diversify the space and have museums become more reflective of the nation's diversity.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Over the summer, as a result of the Black Lives Matter protests occurring nationwide many art museums published statements of solidarity and reports that aimed to centralize Diversity and Inclusion Efforts (D&I). However, the research I have presented in this research paper would show that in order to be successful in their allyship and D&I efforts, museums need to acknowledge the deeply rooted institutionalized practices that perpetuate BIPOC folks away from their spaces. My project is crucial during this time as museums reimagine their goals

because it ties existing literature and lived experiences into one picture. The research shows that museums center around white voices, perpetuate white dominance in their visitors, and have an overriding history of exclusion. I have been able to tie in this data along with interviews and my personal experience to explain why BIPOC students are not attracted to art museums. This research closes the gap on the why and begins a critical conversation on the actions needed to reverse this trend. By using the master's tools, academia, I hope to establish reasons as to why art museums push BIPOC students away and the initiatives needed to take to attract them. As a humanities student, I very much live this every single day, however, it was disheartening to see other students outside the discipline echo this. It further demonstrates how the humanities continue to be a backwards discipline and needs to elicit change for it to be a space for *everyone*.

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