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**Evaluating a Need for Somatic Access to Classical Objects in Public Museums**

A Thesis Presented

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

The University of Montana, Missoula

Jerod Peitsmeyer

December 2021

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## Introduction

The Montana Museum of Art and Culture (MMAC) is the current custodian of an ancient, Rhodian wine amphora<sup>1</sup> that provides a lens through which to examine injurious, institutional gatekeeping practices and as an object that proffers exciting display opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Montana Museum of Art and Culture, Catalogue # 59-025, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, United States. This transport vessel measures H-29.725, Dia-14.5 inches. Through a series of emails with Dr. Mark Lawall, professor at the University of Manitoba and chair of the Managing Committee of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens and president of the Winnipeg Society of the Archaeological Institute of America and member of the Board of the Canadian Institute in Greece, I was able to determine the amphora had been misclassified as a 3rd C. CE, Greek vessel. Dr. Lawall is a published and oft-cited expert in transport amphora and determined, via photographs, that the MMAC's vessel was in fact a Rhodian work dating from 290-280BCE.

that will serve as a progressive, humanist touchstone. This thesis will consider the jar's custody as an example of unintentional lapses on the part of collecting institutions, especially when caring for ancient art. More importantly, this thesis will reimagine the amphora's future custody and suggest methods of participant-object-interaction that bridge chasms in educational backgrounds and cultural privileges and customs. In the following chapters I will draw on defensible and pertinent philosophical and theoretical positions to argue for a method of museum practice that will transform an audience's interaction with classical objects from a prescribed and narrow interplay into a more equitable and democratic interrelation; I will illuminate a need for the objects that chronicle a segment of our shared history (classical objects in particular) to be made available to museum goers for direct, psychical touch; this novel presentation allows for a somatic experience and dispenses with nearly all forms of institutional supplementation.



Figure 1 *Rhodian Transport Amphora*. 290-280BCE MMAC Montana Museum of Art and Culture, Missoula, MT Catalogue # 59-025

For the lion's share of the vessel's time in situ at the MMAC, beginning in 1959, it has been mostly unavailable to both the student population and the public at large, directly in opposition to the explicit wishes of the donor.<sup>2</sup> The vessel has appeared in a few University of Montana publications but has gone largely unexperienced by museum goers during the last sixty years. The amphora's perceived edification of ancient history, and thereby "precious"

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<sup>2</sup> In a letter received by the MMAC dated March 29, 1994, The donors reiterated that the vessel was donated "with the soul(sic) purpose of people to view." In a series of phone interviews I conducted with Nina Seaman, the original donor's wife, in September, 2020, I was able to validate the Seaman family's wishes that the amphora be permanently displayed or that it be returned as stated in the original deed of gift.

designation, has provided its caretakers a flawed yet accepted ideological pedestal on which to unwittingly alienate the work from direct, physical interaction with audiences and has thus reduced the chances of an autonomous museum-going experience.

Pierre Bourdieu and Alan Darbel's sociological text *The Love of Art : European Art Museums and Their Public*, a detailed study and examination of the relationship between museums and the public, confirms that our cultural institutions are made for and by the "cultivated" class, and debunks the idea that museums are equally accessed and enjoyed across demographic lines.<sup>3</sup> The authors' study argues furthermore that the very need to satisfy the consumption of many of the cultural objects we curate and Canonize is created by a system of education that is far from equal.<sup>4</sup> It is under this flawed, foundational arrangement that much of the MMAC's collection is situated; the amphora, however, provides the institution with an opportunity to upend this paradigm and create a platform along with museum-goers that challenges the imbalance of power that often creates a problematic relationship between audiences and collecting institutions. This thesis will propose a novel presentation of the amphora that will create a venue for a new dialogue with which to discuss past participant alienation/marginalization and create a set of guidelines to redress a host of structural and dogmatic fissures that continue to saddle publicly funded, collegiate fine art institutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel *The Love of Art : European Art Museums and Their Public*. (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA : Polity Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Institutional Gatekeeping in Collection, Curation and Display at the MMAC

The Oxford Dictionary of Social Media defines gatekeeping as “a role or function involving the regulation of access to information, goods and services and to those in power within hierarchies.”<sup>5</sup> American university museums and galleries offering collections and exhibitions seemingly, freely open to the public may initially advertise an eschewing of the insignia of the institutional gatekeeper while continuing to circulate many of the systematic regulations that inhibit democratic-object-access. In the case of the MMAC’s Rhodian Amphora<sup>6</sup>, a host of consequential, custodial actions highlight unintentional gatekeeping that has inhibited access opportunities and set the object apart from the local community. Gilles Deleuze would discern a rhizomatic imbalance of power<sup>7</sup> between the MMAC and the community that has inhibited the amphora’s ability to be deterritorialized and reterritorialized.<sup>8</sup> Deleuze would likely contend that by allowing unprescribed and maximum access to the jar, the MMAC could allow for the “possibility of a rhizomatic (!) grass roots revolution...” and possibly lead to a “practice of finding ourselves by exploring our identities as pack animals.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>A *Dictionary of Social Media*, s.v. “Gatekeeping,” accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.weblib.lib.umt.edu:2443/view/10.1093/acref/9780191803093.001.0001/acref-9780191803093-e-524?rskey=7g6muo&result=5>

<sup>6</sup> Montana Museum of Art and Culture, Catalogue # 59-025, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, United States.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze along with Pierre-Félix Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), explore western thought through the idea of the “rhizome,” a philosophical term used to describe the interconnectivity of living entities. The “rhizome,” like the roots of many plants, spreads underground with no direction, no beginning, and no end and includes potential for reterritorialization and deterritorialization especially within a social or political realm. Within this structure Deleuze allows for the creation of meaningful assemblages of coexisting entities but warns of the dangers of rhizomatic, territorialization interactions when power imbalances exist, such as in the case of colonization.

<sup>8</sup> Damian Sutton and David. Martin-Jones, *Deleuze Reframed : A Guide for the Arts Student*. Contemporary Thinkers Reframed Series. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 6-9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

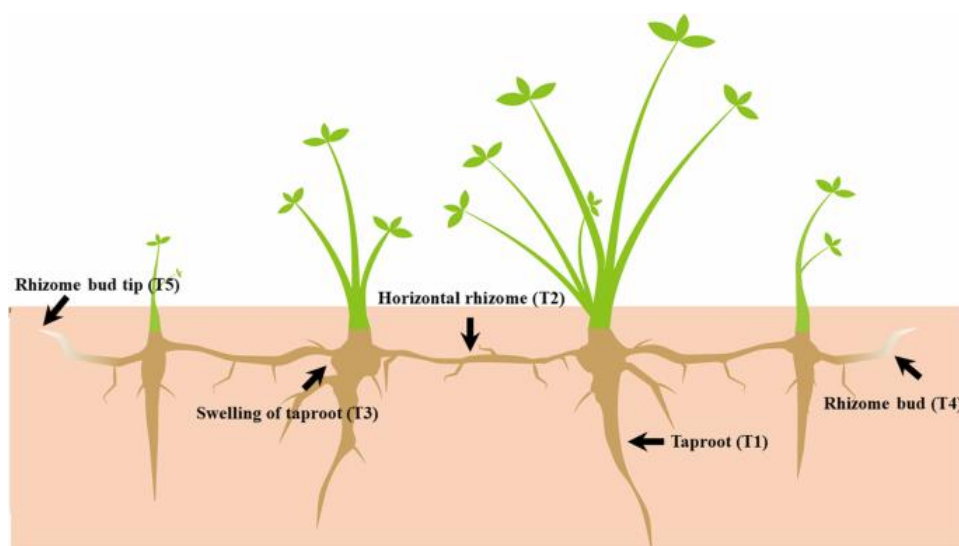


Figure 2. Revealing the full-length transcriptome of Caucasian clover rhizome development Yin, X., Yi, K., Zhao, Y. et al. Revealing the full-length transcriptome of Caucasian clover rhizome development. *BMC Plant Biol* 20, 429 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12870-020-02637-4>

Rather than continuing in a classic, top-down relationship between a curating institution and participants, the MMAC has an opportunity to offer a new system of rhizomatic interaction that limits and questions ideological, territorial imbalances and encourages the public and a resulting feedback network to determine its relationship with the amphora. Kevin Lowell, in his dissertation “An Application of Complexity Theory for Directing Organizational Change,” explains this notion as one found in the foundations of complexity theory; “organizations in fast-changing environments need to produce ongoing innovations, continually adapt to new circumstances, anticipate the need for change, and continually evolve if they are to survive and prosper.”<sup>10</sup> The MMAC exists within such an environment and In Lowell’s analysis, museum

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Lowell. "An Application of Complexity Theory for Directing Organizational Change." Order No. 27998238, Fielding Graduate University, 2020, 4-5. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest One Academic, accessed November 20, 2021 <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/application-complexity-theory-directing/docview/2418016928/se-2>.



participants should be allowed to enter an interactive loop with the institution, creating a relationship within a model that helps define the structure of the museum through feedback<sup>1112</sup>

Adherence to complexity theory embraces a non-linear system of organization, allowing for the creation of a network that depends on constant, fluctuating changes of internal structures that help to determine decisions, strategies and the overarching direction and goals of the organization (see figure 2).

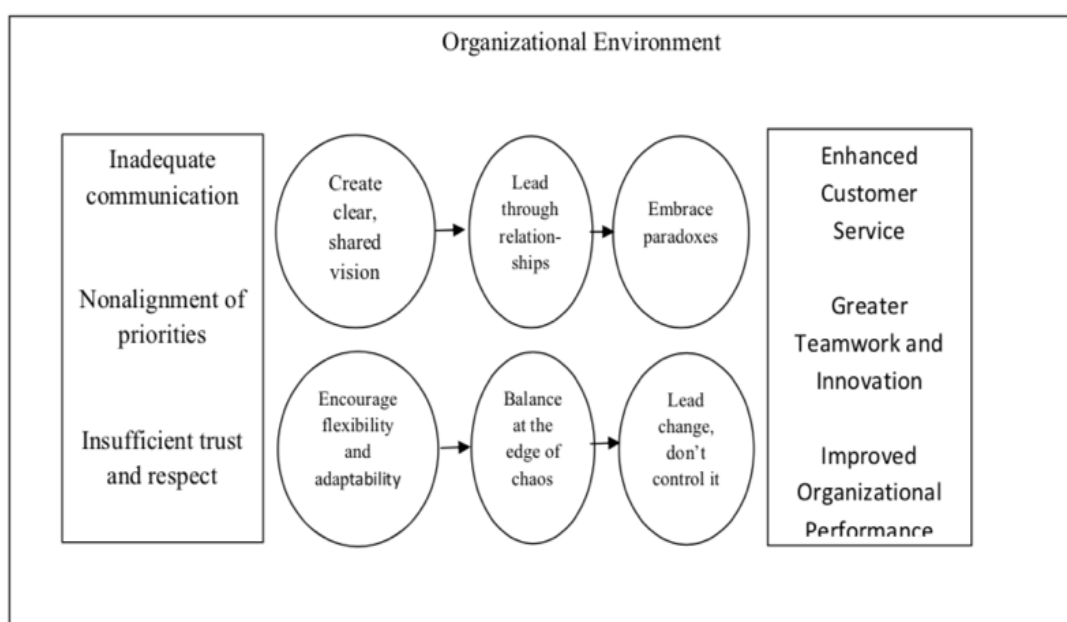


Figure 3. Management implications of complexity theory for improving customer service, collaborative working relationships and organizational performance. Kevin Lowell. "An Application of Complexity Theory for Directing Organizational Change." Order No. 27998238, Fielding Graduate University, 2020.

Art and other objects stewarded by museums have the chance to interact with the culture in which they are situated or be concealed from them: philosopher and critic Jean Baudrillard argues that there is danger in bestowing an exceptional or sovereign quality upon art objects that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 6.

circulate in mass culture<sup>13</sup>. Baudrillard proclaims that “you should be able to apply the same critique to art as to everything else.”<sup>14</sup> The amphora, a storage vessel borne of necessity and used by a strata of populations regardless of status, provides an example of an object that was common among an entire populous much like the signs Baudrillard identifies in Andy Warhol’s *Campbell Soup Cans*<sup>15</sup>; in this work Warhol epitomizes the locus of the pop art<sup>16</sup> movement as he draws from familiar and casual images from consumer culture. The amphora, if displayed in a venue which allows for popular access, can offer a similar point of reflection. The jar offers viewers inherent and understood tangible qualities defined not by the history of art, but more importantly by its function as a common object.



Figure 4. Warhol, Andy. *Campbell's Soup Cans*. 1962. Acrylic with metallic enamel paint on canvas, 32 panels. 97 in. x 163 in. Museum of Modern Art. Accessed October, 14 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79809>.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Toffoletti. *Baudrillard Reframed* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011), 39.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Baudrillard and Sylvère Lotringer. *The Conspiracy of Art : Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*. (New York: Semiotexte, 2005), 65.

<sup>15</sup> Warhol, Andy. *Campbell's Soup Cans*. 1962. Acrylic with metallic enamel paint on canvas, 32 panels. 97 in. x 163 in. Museum of Modern Art. Accessed October, 14 2021. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79809>.

<sup>16</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of American Art and Artists Online*, s.v. “Pop Art,” accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www-oxfordreference-com.weblib.lib.umt.edu:2443/view/10.1093/acref/9780191807671.001.0001/acref-9780191807671-e-1067>

Though currently anachronistic, the amphora shares similarities with Warhol's work as the function of the object still resonates with a purpose that Baudrillard would identify as a mass-produced, serial, commercial and aligned with food products that "erode(s) the line between the 'authenticity' of high culture (art) and 'fakeness' of low or mass culture (consumer objects). Pop art renders art interchangeable with any other commodity sign. "It is no longer rare or unique."<sup>17</sup> Warhol proclaimed, "I don't think art should be only for the select few, I think it should be for the mass of the American people."<sup>18</sup>

Though questions of public accessibility can be raised about the physical custody of the amphora, ideological impediments should not go unstudied either. If the jar can or should be allowed to stand for low or mass culture, then it may insight an oppositional force - elitism. Baudrillard forwards that an erudite critical paragon often gathers against consumerist ways of life, noting that "those with money and status do not have to buy lots of things to retain social standing, but can participate in the 'paradox' of underconsumption."<sup>19</sup> "Differentiation," Baudrillard wrote, "may then take the form of the rejection of objects, the rejection of "consumption," and yet this still remains the very ultimate in consumption."<sup>20</sup> In this light, the amphora inculcates the opportunity to explore the nuances of a paradox, yet another precept of complexity theory.

The jar, though functionally innocuous and easily understood as a utilitarian object, can become a venue for the postulation of radically different ideas, each adding to the institution's development of complex, display regulations regarding the work and manifesting barriers to

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<sup>17</sup> Toffoletti, *Baudrillard Reframed*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Andy Warhol. *Campbell's Soup Cans* "MOMA Learning," accessed October 30, 2021. [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/andy-warhol-campbells-soup-cans-1962/](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/andy-warhol-campbells-soup-cans-1962/)

<sup>19</sup> Toffoletti, *Baudrillard Reframed*, 79.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

open-access. It is the duty of curators to explore appositions between all elements of presentation and custody. Hans Obrist charges curators to understand that “the task of curating is to make junctions, to allow different elements to touch”<sup>21</sup> and in so arranging, they should focus on “making impossible things possible.”<sup>22</sup> On first glance it may seem reckless, even absurd to allow for the amphora to be touched indiscriminately, yet such interactions may actually work to reestablish ideological equity between museum goers and those who hold the keys to the gates.<sup>23</sup> This thesis will identify literal and figurative gates which have limited public access to the amphora, a common object as tenuously linked to scholarly ideas as a pair of stockings and a garden chair.<sup>24</sup> Each addressed instance of gatekeeping will be illuminated in order to further a fair chance at inclusion and participation in the rituals that often codify and sanction our cultural capital. According to Obrist, the role of curation, which dates to a Roman civil-servant profession, *curatores*, remains that of “*curare*,” of cultivating, growing, pruning and trying to help people and their shared contexts to thrive.”<sup>25</sup> To forward a widespread shift in curation based on the foundational goals of inclusion, all methods of display and related frameworks of exhibition and storage of stewarded objects deserve scrutiny; the physical, the cultural and the ideological ramifications of every museum choice must either align with a new focus on limiting

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<sup>21</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist. *Ways of Curating*. (Ney York: Faber and Faber INC, 2014), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist. *Ways of Curating*. (Ney York: Faber and Faber INC, 2014), 17. Obrist discusses the notion of authorship in an artist/audience relationship and details an aspect of power restoration that is experienced by participants who engage in creating works of art according to the instructions of the artist. Movement and action by those involved replaced silent contemplation and participants engaged in the creation of work in a method akin to the action of performing another’s music score.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Baudrillard. *The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures*. Revised ed. Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 107.

<sup>25</sup> Obrist, *Ways of Curating*, 25.

the role of institutional gatekeeping or risk perpetuating a historically sanctioned system of presentation.<sup>26</sup>

To understand the complex and embedded role that gatekeeping plays in any curatorial setting, an initial operational analysis of the collecting institution itself must be performed. An examination of the organization of the MMAC collection reveals a host of logistical barriers that inhibit participant experience with the amphora and much of the collection at large. These following critiques are not unique to the MMAC and are present at many publicly funded collecting institutions; every brick-and-mortar museum has inherent physical limitations that might generate instances of gatekeeping. Scrutiny of any institution must begin by examining the physical structures and methods that present the objects in question; the three chief public interfaces of the MMAC's collection spawn an immediate critique.

The discreet location of the MMAC on the campus of the University of Montana is at odds with its role as a public art museum. The museum offers two exhibition spaces<sup>27</sup> that are geographically independent from the offices of the curatorial staff and the storage area that houses the permanent collection. These galleries are the chief interface between museum goers and the collection and stand as the museum's most notable, authoritative edification. These flagship galleries, housed in a larger building notably not dedicated to the museum, but to the University's college of performing arts, are nestled inconspicuously within the confines of the

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<sup>26</sup> Montana Museum of Art and Culture, "Social Justice Directive," September 11, 2020. accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.umt.edu/montanamuseum/>. The MMAC's website broadcasts the museum's positions on intersectionality and a commitment to audience feedback – "Our efforts are strengthened by welcoming people of every race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, disability, age, national origin, and citizenship." "We further commit to seeking broadly diverse leadership, input, and participation in all aspects of the MMAC Collections Committee's work."

<sup>27</sup> The MMAC exhibits work in the Henry J. Meloy and Edgar Paxon Galleries.

theater and dance complex and are difficult to locate. The galleries are given little to no marquis space or directional signage neither on campus nor within the city or neighborhood in which the museum is situated. This labyrinthine physical arrangement presents immediate impediments to access of the permanent collection and to the amphora.

A visit to the museum might begin by finding the lone<sup>28</sup> designated parking spot which is dedicated to the MMAC. This 60-minute space supplies free parking, but when occupied remits others to find a remote lot sentineled by meters that accept only quarters or debit/credit cards; these obstacles create a physical-access-inconvenience and a small but potentially discouraging economic barrier. Visitors that successfully navigate their way to the museum and are able to secure parking are asked to do so during the MMAC's open times - Tuesdays through Saturdays, 12 noon - 6 PM; these hours may be conducive to student schedules but create limitations and deterrents for those with disparate, hourly-access-needs.

The MMAC's gallery spaces, when not hosting travelling/featured exhibitions,<sup>29</sup> are intermittently used to highlight works from the permanent collection. However, the museum's cadre of objects are disembodied physically from the two exhibition spaces and have no opportunity to be easily shown to visitors who may request an audience with them. The collection is housed in a separate storage area and therefore operates within a set of elemental restrictions by disallowing common and frequent interactions between the public/students and the objects that are not currently available in a curated exhibition. As a result, thousands of works of art and archeological objects have been unable, in part because of the spatial display limitations of the MMAC, to be experienced in person with regularity or at all. Should a museum

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<sup>28</sup> A single sign indicates the designated MMAC parking, but the posting is unclear and as the sign seems to straddle two, lined spots.

<sup>29</sup> Five of the twelve exhibitions during the seasons 2018-2021 focused on works from the MMAC's permanent collection.

goer have knowledge of an item they would like to view from the permanent collection, a series of complex and cumbersome arrangements for both the MMAC staff and the participant would need to be made in order to do so. These internal limitations are thusly transferred to museum goers as additional barriers to object-access. The museum is operating under constrictions that require a physical transfer of the amphora to a location that could harbor visitor investigation and inherently presents myriad risks to the safety and integrity of the vessel. These organizational hurdles, which require a degree of labor that the MMAC is unlikely to be able to regularly fund or staff also produces fiscal and structural barriers that may arrest organization change.

The MMAC's most effective satisfaction of open-object-access offers a less advertised but more actively deployed interface of the permanent collection; the museum has installed scads of the collection's works for display in structures throughout an ensemble of many of the university's most frequented spaces and on the exterior grounds of the campus. These paintings and sculptures are presented primarily with basic information (work title, artist name, creation date), thereby offering a chance at an unguided and autonomous experience (removing elements of gatekeeping); the interior spaces display primarily two-dimensional offerings such as paintings or prints while the objects installed outside are three-dimensional and sculptural but offer few invitations for direct, physical contact. The campus-wide installation of the works places an overwhelming significance on a visual encounter with the MMAC collection and thereby deemphasizes the possibility of a direct, somatic experience. Undersighted or blind visitors are underserved in this ocularcentric system and the MMAC, again, enforces an ideological spatial distance that places the participant in a subservient position; the museum dictates how and where the works are seen.

The mostly unprescribed accessibility to this aspect of the collection's works creates a template for continued public access to art, but this strategy also initiates a critique that must address how the aforementioned access is foundationally impaired. Chiefly, the current system propagates encounters that do not address the needs of a variety of intersectional and marginalized groups and largely negates avenues of discovery for unsighted audiences that could be addressed through alternate presentation methods, the amphora being used as the case study by which to affect this change.

The MMAC's digital access to its works of art along with those of likeminded institutions, exists under a semblance of addressing issues of access and gatekeeping. Admission to the MMAC's permanent collection online is free and displays most of the museum's holdings, however the interface is hampered with limitations and barriers that do little to address a nuanced experience for those with access needs that reach beyond the realm of sighted participation. Additionally, research indicates that online museum users spend very little time (an average of 10 seconds) viewing objects presented digitally.<sup>30</sup>

MMAC digital users must first locate the website of the MMAC, then navigate through several inconspicuous links to find the searchable database. This presents additional access inhibitors; research indicates that users often visit only one to two pages on a museum's web portal.<sup>31</sup> The MMAC's database interface includes a "random images<sup>32</sup>" tab that allows for a degree of viewership autonomy but upon choosing any of the displayed images, lacks an audio component to aid the visually impaired. If a participant were unaware of the amphora it would

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<sup>30</sup>David Walsh, Mark M Hall, Paul Clough, and Jonathan Foster. "Characterising Online Museum Users: A Study of the National Museums Liverpool Museum Website." *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 21, no. 1 (2018): 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The odds of encountering a single, random image of the amphora amongst the sheer number of collected objects within the MMAC's, randomized database is striking low.



likely remain unviewed unless searched for specifically as the interface is limited to either viewer-dictated search terms or a chance interaction. The gate to the collection is ajar on the MMAC's website but true access to its holdings is not yet egalitarian.

Internet interfaces require a level of literacy<sup>33</sup> both traditional and digital that can easily alienate participants. A web-based interaction platform relies on the faith that internet access is available to museum goers, potentially alienating those without access to or working knowledge of computers and mobile devices. Rural (perhaps with limited internet access), unsighted and economically disparate people may also be dissuaded despite the indications of open-access. Though the MMAC's digital portal partially opens the visual gate to its objects, the interface's limitations deny gateways towards anything other than a visual experience and one beset with the complications of viewing copies<sup>34</sup> of an original work of art. Currently the MMAC's computer-based viewing option is the amphora's only public interface and asks viewers to be satisfied with an experience that replaces a somatic experience with a virtual one and suggests that the validity of viewing a copy is somehow as valuable as a firsthand experience. These logistical gates that stand in the way of egalitarian museum access are tangible, but a more fundamental pylon stands

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<sup>33</sup> Kirsch I, Jungeblut A, Jenkins L, et al. Department of Education; 2002. Adult Literacy in America: A first look at the findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey, 3rd edition. Vol 201. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education; US 2. Literacy in the Information Age: National Adult Literacy Survey found that 21-23% of U.S. adults had highly deficient literacy skills while another 25-28% had very limited literacy skills.

<sup>34</sup> Hannah Arendt, ed. *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, from the 1935 essay (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 6. Zohn's translations of Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, offers a harsh critique of copy vs. original. Benjamin argues that "The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity," and "that technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself."

in the way of equitable object encounters both within the MMAC's custody and with nationwide, university object-stewardship as unintentional, intersectionality suppression endures.

Pierre Bourdieu emphatically states that “all visitor's behavior and all their attitudes to works on display, are directly and almost exclusively related to education ...”<sup>35</sup> As Bourdieu delineates, we know that the displayed works mentioned above are primarily viewed by those within the privileged apparatus of American higher education. Those from without the educational system will likely never interact with these works despite their continuous presentation. Much of the public, with few or no ties to a particular university or the higher education system in general may never feel comfortable with visits to a college campus either physically or digitally. Any combination of the logistical details I've outlined maybe enough to dissuade the casual participant, but a deeper distrust or lack of relationship with higher learning might perpetuate a system of alienation that preexists and has created an intrinsic rift between citizens and art-exhibiting intuitions.

The MMAC and other museums being made aware of Bourdieu's study<sup>36</sup>, in conjunction with my following proposal and likeminded, contemporary philosophical arguments, must choose, specifically with objects of archeological significance (that are oft-touted to embody the genesis of Western thought and rational thinking), to either embrace the notion of removing educational barriers and inequities or to continue to uphold the status quo. Unfortunately, the benefits of perceived free and direct access to public collections mentioned above are often not as impactful as advertised, yet the mere appearance of such access creates an empirical crutch on which inadequacies may perpetuate. As a result, important works such as the amphora, are often

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Alain Darbel *The Love of Art : European Art Museums and Their Public*. ( Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA : Polity Press, 1997),

obtured behind ubiquitous institutional barriers that help to unintentionally cache these works from the full breadth of the public.

## - The Story of An Object

During my brief and privileged physical access to the object, I have been able to uncover a 600-year error<sup>37</sup> in its identification and I've discovered a host of unpublished and exciting details about its journey from the Mediterranean Sea to its current resting place in the collection. These details give an intriguing glimpse into the history of an ancient storage jar but more importantly offer a chance to examine and reimagine the conventional, curatorial practices that ought to guide its stewardship in the future. The details that follow are a small part of the amphora's lengthy history but are merely an aside or a supporting document that is meant to accompany the jar and not define, ameliorate or mystify it.

Any effort to festoon an amphora with the philosophical and ideological structures of Western thought and thereby provide it additional prestige, should begin with an acknowledgment that these objects, though revered, were once used as common storage units. Amphorae offer us a glimpse at the technological advances in maritime transport design, but overarchingly, they provide modern audiences a chance to connect with common citizens of a bygone era. For me, that connection began when I touched the vessel with my own hands and that interaction has fueled my passion to advocate for the sharing of similar access to this work with as many individuals as possible.

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Lawall, email message to Jerod Peitsmeyer, December 3, 2020. Dr. Lawall posits that the jar is likely "an early Hellenistic Rhodian amphora, (Type Rh I.2) datable to perhaps the 290s-280s BC."

Rhodian amphora are considered one of the most ubiquitous maritime transport units of the ancient world. They have been widely studied and have provided scholars with a robust chronological map that has helped historians understand the nuances of trade and storage of consumable goods. Much of what is understood about their usage has helped to color our knowledge about the relationships between trading cities in the Mediterranean. Whether found terrestrially or in the sunken hulls of wrecked ships, amphorae have supplied us with a link to a time of dynamic cultural expansion and provide a focal point on which to connect with the humanity that propelled it.

Storage amphorae were made by hand, of coiled clay on a potter's wheel and created en-masse in production facilities by enslaved peoples and free citizens.<sup>38</sup> These makers used specialized skills and artistry/craft to create vessels that were durable and efficient. Each shop manifested its amphorae slightly differently and changed their specifications often to reflect new and evolving ideas and advances and experimentations in design.<sup>39</sup> This ever-altering system of packaging shows an ability and willingness of its makers to adjust to demands and innovative ideas just as our commercial industries do today. If found in the future, our current packaging units might offer a tangible look at consumer-driven economies and/or global transport solutions; no matter how they were displayed or presented, they would chiefly offer a glimpse into how we order consumables in our daily lives. A similar study of the manifestation of ancient quotidian objects is possible with the MMAC's amphora.

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<sup>38</sup> Diana Twede, "Commercial Amphoras: The Earliest Consumer Packages" *Journal of Macromarketing* 22, no. 1 (June 2002): 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027467022001009>.

<sup>39</sup> Virginia Grace, 1921. *Amphoras and the Ancient Wine Trade*. (New Jersey: American School of Classical Studies at Athens 1961).

The MMAC's amphora was sold by a sponge diver to an enlisted US Marine, Richard Seaman JR. in 1959.<sup>40</sup> Seaman was aboard the USS Fort Snelling as it sailed the Mediterranean Sea on its first voyage. The ship, a transport vessel, happened to be moored off the coast of Rhodes and was in communication with the crew members of a film being shot within the region entitled "Boy on Dolphin" which starred Sophia Loren and worked from a script that coincidentally revolved around sponge diving and the recovery of ancient, Greek treasure. According to Seaman's wife<sup>41</sup>, many of the marines aboard USS Fort Snelling found ways to engage with the film crew and cast and this is perhaps how the amphora was initially found. The jar, much like the treasure in the film script, likely left Rhodes between 290-280 BCE and promptly fell victim to a shipwreck<sup>42</sup>, settling to the bottom of the sea until being brought to the surface 2300 years later.

Seaman crated the amphora in wood and blankets and returned it to Missoula, MT in 1959 and donated to the State University of Montana Museum. The amphora was displayed for an undocumented amount of time and has been shown occasionally as a highlight of the collection. The *Art of the State*<sup>43</sup> publication included an incomplete and scant text about the work along with a photo, but it has largely been unseen by local audiences. The jar remains fully intact and in roughly the same condition as it was when removed from the sea. The surface of the jar is partially covered in the concretions of sea creatures and other organic laminations that its

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<sup>40</sup> Nina Seaman, interview by Jerod Peitsmeyer, Missoula, December 5, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Lawall, email message to Jerod Peitsmeyer, December 3, 2020. Dr. Lawall explains nuances of the jar's discover near its production site: "Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, one often finds that the amphoras from undersea sites near a major exporter like Rhodes in fact come from the nearby island. It sometimes seems like just getting out of port was the hardest part of the voyage!"

<sup>43</sup> Montana Museum of Art & Culture. *The Art of the State : 120 Artworks for 120 Years : Selections from the Montana Museum of Art & Culture Permanent Collection at The University of Montana*. 2013.

underwater journey provided. Nothing appears to have been either added or taken away from the jar at any point during the MMAC's custody. On the jar's main body, a hairline crack, likely caused by improper display or a handling accident, extends partially across the equator of the jar. The vessel currently offers a set of visual clues that offer waypoints towards understanding its chronology. The sea accretions, the modern crack and the patina shifts speak directly to the jar's long journey across the world.

In 1996, Seaman's wife asked, in a formal letter to the MMAC, that the amphora be returned if it wasn't going to be displayed and enjoyed by the public. She was told she could visit it at any time by the director of the MMAC, but shortly thereafter she began caring for Richard who was in ill health and lost her ability to follow up on the jar's custody. I contacted Nina in 2020 after finding this letter and her wishes for its display remain unchanged. She was stalwart in forwarding her late husband's desire to have it made available to the public as much as possible. The desire of the donor and the required diligence of the MMAC align with a broader, cultural need to present the amphora as publicly and often as possible. The age of the amphora, its current condition, and lack of display solutions have ideologically handcuffed the MMAC for nearly sixty years and created a resulting paucity of human-object interaction that can be elegantly solved with the following solution:

1. The MMAC recognizes the amphora as cultural capital that belongs to the public.
2. The MMAC aligns its custody choices with the wishes of the donor.
3. A system for direct, physical access to the amphora is to be implemented.
4. The university and the museum funds, advertises and commits human resources towards a continuously available exhibition that addresses all issues of accessibility to the jar.

Each of these guidelines, in concert, can serve to broaden the public's awareness of and rightful access to the amphora. The resulting, direct experiences of the museum goer will be enhanced, less prescribed and more autonomous. At least one or more existing veils of institutional privilege can be lifted by simply allowing participants an opportunity to touch the jar. Intersectional barriers can be removed, and museum goers will have an unfettered chance to create a personal relationship with an object that has until now been kept under lock and key, held almost as a token of ideological ransom.

## - Ideological Ransom

Professor of Roman studies at Princeton, Dan-el Padilla Peralta, presents an urgent call to address the dangers of Greco-Roman fetishization. Rachel Poser summarizes Padilla Peralta's view about the classics:

Long revered as the foundation of "Western civilization," the field was trying to shed its self-imposed reputation as an elitist subject overwhelmingly taught and studied by white men. Recently the effort had gained a new sense of urgency: Classics had been embraced by the far right, whose members held up the ancient Greeks and Romans as the originators of so-called white culture. Marchers in Charlottesville, Va., carried flags bearing a symbol of the Roman state; online reactionaries adopted classical pseudonyms; the white-supremacist website Stormfront displayed an image of the Parthenon alongside the tagline "*Every month is white history month.*"<sup>44</sup>

Objects from ancient Greece and Rome have long been protected as ideological ransom from the public under a system of academic and institutional gatekeeping.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rachel Poser, "He wants to save classics from Whiteness. Can the field survive?" *The New York Times*, April 25, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Conventional, scholarly paradigms manifest patently in the presentation and display of classical object collections of many museums continue to comply with and propagate an established ideology of elitism and erudite regulation/restriction that is hostile to the current, sociological zeitgeist.

The orthodox presentation restraints and tenets which often limit direct access to Greco-Roman objects continue to manifest logistical and philosophical circumstances that are overwhelmingly and harmfully rigid; viewer esteem is often annulled or marginalized, and democratic or autonomous access is not widely established as a foundational, curatorial maxim especially within museum systems that endure funding gaps and resulting staffing and research shortfalls. Additionally, accepted methods of display and preservation along with a canonized proliferation of doggerel and often incorrect or incomplete literature, continue to surround these ancient artifacts with a lore and mystique that codifies their intrinsic value, problematically, as static and often disallows for participant engagement that champions or encourages fluid or incidental interpretations that might differ from the established and standard criterion.

At the core of these curatorial practices stands the notion that exhibiting institutions hold an intellectual high-ground over the general populous and have thusly been entrusted to disseminate information that works to aid viewers in “making sense<sup>46</sup>” of the objects that have been presented. Greco-Roman logic and epistemology, as clearly evidenced in the architectural design of many collegiate buildings, continues to guide educational and custodial practices

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<sup>46</sup> Mieke Bal, “Guest Column: Exhibition Practices” *Publications of The Modern Language Associations* 125, Issue. 1 (Jan 2010) 9-23.



across the United States, despite contextual omissions that might call such ideologies into question.<sup>47</sup> Many references to the classics omit details such as the following:

In fifth-century-B.C. Athens, which has been celebrated as the birthplace of democracy, participation in politics was restricted to male citizens; thousands of enslaved people worked and died in silver mines south of the city, and custom dictated that upper-class women could not leave the house unless they were veiled and accompanied by a male relative.<sup>48</sup>

The simple act of providing direction or historical supplements in a museum setting can be viewed as prescriptive and many museum layouts and exhibition choices are often deeply informed by cultural and professional norms that have been based on unidimensional and narrow belief systems. These widespread rituals, even within the confines of a noble curatorial design (one which seeks to offer viewers an experience that allows for the “greatest freedom to do with art as it pleases<sup>49</sup>”), often falls victim to its own inability to recognize alternate methods of human/object interaction. These constructions circulate, often unknowingly, a set of guidelines that champion a primacy of Western and colonial thought. When a participant is provided information or direction within a museum a potential imbalanced power dynamic<sup>50</sup>; therein, curatorial conventions often disrupt a participant’s chances at equitable interactions and allow for the perpetuation of accustomed aspects of viewer obstruction.

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<sup>47</sup> Rachel Poser, “He wants to save classics from Whiteness. Can the field survive?” *The New York Times*, April 25, 2021.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bal, *Guest Column*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Patricia Homan, Tyson H. Brown, and Brittany King. “Structural Intersectionality as a New Direction for Health Disparities Research.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 62, no. 3 (September 2021): 350–70. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221465211032947>. This article delves into recent research that suggests “a key insight from the literature on intersectionality is that systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism are interlocking, mutually constituted, and reinforcing. Thus, intersectional perspectives on stratification highlight the utility of examining the joint and potentially synergistic effects of multiple dimensions of inequality.”

Standard methods of classical object display<sup>51</sup> have beset the discipline of artifact stewardship with a set of intrinsic complications resulting in museums professionals' continual reinforcement of an imbalanced power dynamic that begets a fertile construct for institutional gatekeeping and reinforces a model of ocularcentric curation. When museums offer their patrons a chance to view objects of archeological intrigue or historical significance, they tend to follow a rigid system of display. The Greco-Roman artifacts that have offered European-based cultures an opportunity to connect to their classical roots and echo the foundations and very framework that have informed much of the university system, are usually encapsulated by vitrines and extensively preserved and restored so that any trace of their intermediary history has been removed. These works are sequestered and guarded from the touch of participant hands and infrequently given little chance to be fully and democratically experienced.

University pedagogy and the scholarly canon of Western thought is beholden to the tenets of classical studies and the resulting paradigms are evident throughout a plurality of collegiate structures both literal and figurative. In Caspar Meyer's writing on the implications of museum display decisions, she writes, "It is not surprising that classical education was soon established as a precondition for the proper enjoyment of the painted decoration, bringing into play the

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<sup>51</sup> Caspar Meyer. "Ancient Vases in Modern Vitrines: The Sensory Dynamics and Social Implications of Museum Display." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 63, no. 1 (2020): 93. According to Meyer, Greek vases (although primarily writing about painted and decorate vessels) were at the "vanguard in shaping the norm of vitrinized display." Not only were vitrines used in the early days of museums to keep objects safe, but the vitrine was also used to control the visual experience of the viewer and thus is suspect of the continued use of the vitrine as a standard display device. She contends that the vitrine perpetuates the "myth of pure vision" and privileges one form of participant investigation over others, leaving a visitor's ability to ask certain questions truncated.

entrenched interdependencies between class, gender, and schooling in Western systems of privilege.”<sup>52</sup>

The University of Montana campus presents itself architecturally with many of these physical manifestations which immediately inform participants of this ingrained philosophy. Numerous buildings, including the entrance to the structure that houses the MMAC collection, are adorned, frontally, with Greco-Roman architectural elements. To enter these structures, one must pass through façades that call directly on the architecture of a Greek temple. Engaged columns surround opportunities for ingress and stand as sentinels to buildings in a system of trabeation that supports raking or broken cornices complete with egg and darting motifs, dentals and coffers and pillowy abacuses. Many of these structures ask entrants to move up a set of stone stairs reminiscent of stereobates and stylobates, with wheelchair accessible ramps tacked on as an afterthought. Some of these buildings, which have been granted as the venues to house the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, social work, and the contemporary gallery of art to name a few, begin an entrant’s journey with a direct homage to the superiority of Greek and Roman thought, philosophy and ideals.

These portals exist ubiquitously on collegiate campuses in the United States and illuminate a deep and robust cultural influence that champions the logic and philosophy of the classical world. These foundations form far more than the physical make up of lecture hall entrances, they harken to the intellectual infrastructure that places classical logic at the center of the liberal arts. Historical objects, such as the amphora, which offer a tangible link to the origins of Western thought, have supplied museums and universities with a manifestation whereby institutions can act as guardians, hoarding the literal material that links entire disciplines to their

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 91.

epistemic genesis. The amphora has been subject to such idolization and as result it has been kept from view and from engagement.

Often, archeological artifacts in museums are untouchable and have been presented as snapshots or frozen portraits of the past; their display does not often allow participants to experience the object as it may have been discovered; traces of excavation are nearly always removed. A clean and pristine presentation of the corresponding objects mimics the reverence that universities pay to the ideas of the classical world. These conventions of object presentation that place literal boundaries between the participant and the work, serve also to distance the public from the vaunted ideological canon that informs traditional study of the arts and sciences. Caspar Meyers addresses this issue as well in her critique of the vitrine:

To the detriment of the national heritage of Mediterranean countries, the treatment of these objects as purely visual creations also nurtured the conviction that to grasp the importance of Greek vases the educated eye only needed to apprehend their decoration and craft excellence, not the archaeological contexts or present-day communities from which they were taken.<sup>53</sup>

The vitrine or display case that would likely house the exhibited amphora in any future setting presents myriad participant interruptions and would ultimately prohibit the full emergence of the work from its current, ideological and physical confinement. A glass case, though permeable by sight, reinforces a story of privilege and removes an audience's ability to directly engage in the jar's history and as the amphora has escaped acts of restoration, it offers audiences an opportunity to encounter an ancient object absent of institutional, visual edicts. The amphora has not been cleaned nor is it free from blemishes. The jar can be presented as a jar; its history can be shared and attached as companion literature. The amphora, having never been

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 93.

cleaned to fit into a certain “look,” holds an innate ability to be displayed without the physical interjections of the institution by which it is stewarded.

Currently, however, only a select few entrusted with the key to the permanent collection have been vetted with institution’s blessing to fully take part in of the object’s story. By removing the jar from behind any barrier, the MMAC can begin to allow for a robust and complex set of unscripted interactions between museum goers and the amphora.

## - The Frame

The amphora is currently framed within a woolen blanket in a cardboard box in a storage room within the walls of a scholarly building in the heart of a collegiate campus. The jar rests in darkness within a city largely inhabited by white people<sup>54</sup> and within a state population of a similar demographic.<sup>55</sup> This artifact has not been viewed by many though its relation to the origins of Western thought provide its stewards with an easy, ideological platform on which to display it to the populous. Rather, the earthen storage container is hidden, as if buried inside the innermost chamber of a set of nesting dolls, its ancient handles and neck and foot exist deep within a capsule inside a capsule and so on; the removal of each literal or figurative layer of institutional framing reveals yet another.

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<sup>54</sup> Data USA, “Missoula, MT,” November 23 2021. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/missoula-mt/>. Current US Census data reports that 88.5% of Missoulians identify as white.

<sup>55</sup> Census.Gov, QuickFacts Montana, November 23, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT/RHI125219>. Current US Census data reports that 88.9% of Montanans identify as white.

As the layers or frames are set aside the relationship of the layers to each other can be more clearly examined. Within this analysis the figurative encapsulation that surrounds the vessel is also illuminated. For instance, the frame of the remote storage room might both stand for a physical barrier to access and also recall notions of ideological gatekeeping. Singular identification of this gatekeeping frame and its relation to the population demographic frame, offers the chance at a novel exploration concerning the relationship of both the frames to each other as well as that particular pair (or any potential arrangement of individual frames) to the object in question. A shuffling of the removed frames supplies a near endless opportunity to create meaning and offer critique. The complexity of analyzing the removed frames hinges on the dictum that the layers are not static. As Jacques Derrida posits as a component of his philosophy of *différance*,<sup>56</sup> “The process of constructing meaning neither ends, nor is a singular process in time and space.”<sup>57</sup> Just as the amphora cannot act as a singular yardstick by which modern audiences measure their understanding of Greek or Rhodian culture circa 290 BCE, nor can the current frames in which the MMAC surrounds the vessel act to satisfactorily serve the varied intersectionality of public participation needs.

The amphora’s own history has given rise to multiple and ever-changing meanings. During the period of its construction the form of this jar likely relayed a concrete message

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<sup>56</sup> Chandler, Daniel, and Rod Munday. s.v. “différance.” In *A Dictionary of Media & Communication*. : Oxford University Press, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191800986.001.0001/acref-9780191800986-e-693>. Jacques Derrida’s term for the concept that every signified is also a signifier: there is no escape from the sign system. The meaning of signs involves endless substitutions of signifiers; there is always slippage of meaning. His coinage alludes simultaneously to ‘difference’ and ‘deferral’, and in French the distinction from the word for ‘difference’ is apparent only in writing. Whereas Ferdinand de Saussure referred to meaning being differential (based on differences between signs), Derrida’s term is intended to remind us that signs also *defer* the presence of what they signify. Meaning depends upon absence rather than presence.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Malcolm Richards, *Derrida Reframed : A Guide for the Arts Student* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 19.

of storage, containment and transport. While the perishable goods inside the vessel offered sustenance jar's stamped handles<sup>58</sup> simultaneously advertised the related prowess of whence the vessel was borne and by whom. The maker may have seen the completion of the object as a source of income or pride or duty or even the product of forced labor. The dock worker who carried the vessel to a ship likely sustained a disparate meaning from the seafarer who may have watched the amphora sink along with their ship as they offered a troubled valediction while safety of Rhodes rose from the sea just out of reach. Snails and fish territorialized the amphora as their underwater homes. The sponge diver and Richard Seaman, Jr. reterritorialized the jar with monikers of commerce and treasure. The Montana Kaimin<sup>59</sup> presented the jar as if an oddity at a roadside attraction. At every turn and to each actor involved, the jar's meaning has mutated.

Derrida is most emphatic in his recognition of a museum's ability to frame and manipulate meaning.<sup>60</sup> In this light, the MMAC has punctuated its own institutional canonization with a two-dimensional copy of the amphora, published in relative perpetuity, as a symbol of collection clout. As Derrida contends, "there is no limit to the possible contexts that any statement or work might find itself in."<sup>61</sup> It becomes the museum's due diligence to recognize

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Lawall, email message to Jerod Peitsmeyer, December 7, 2020. Dr. Lawall responds to a question about identification. "... the encrustation will have to be removed very carefully here to avoid erasing the stamped impressions. It could be very good to know the stamped names (if present) since pairings of annual priest of Helios (eponym) and the 'fabricant' are very useful in the ongoing process of refining the Rhodian chronology, especially for this early period."

<sup>59</sup> Vicki Burkart, "Museum Includes Indian Scalp Aepyornis Egg, Mummified Body," *Montana Kaimin*, October 18, 1963. The amphora is mentioned later in an article touting the museum's holdings. The article begins, "Have you ever seen the mummified remains of a human body? An 1870 Paris original dress? A real Indian scalp? A 14-inch long Aepyornis egg? If you haven't, visit the University Museum on the third floor of the Fine Arts Building. You'll find all of these items and many more there."

<sup>60</sup> Richards, *Derrida Reframed*, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Richards, *Derrida Reframed*, 34.

how the frames it has proffered and how those borders have come to interact and the contexts in which those interactions collide with each other and the public. Moving forward, the MMAC's treatment of the amphora, has the capability to either support a system of framing that occludes strata of equity or allows for new and open transfers of meaning to potential participants.

The amphora *can* be experienced by visitor's bodies and *can* be used as a touchstone to open the usually closed prescriptions of the museum. The amphora *can* be offered to the public as an olive branch and an opportunity for the university to honor and allow and encourage a system of autonomous appreciation and avenues of exploration that subsumes a classical, pedagogical power imbalance. If the MMAC were to offer visitors a chance to touch the jar, conventional governance between the museum and the university and the public would be conspicuously in flux. The MMAC *can* and *should* offer an arrangement that champions the importance of a direct relationship between the participant and the work; this model removes as many possible interruptive instances of supplementation and aesthetic nominalization/historical fetishization and would culminate in establishing a core, institutional recognition of dignity and value and worth of the individual experience.

Julia Kristeva offers that that when language is stripped from material interaction, as in the case of a child's unprescribed exploration of building blocks, a 'concrete operation,' is performed.<sup>62</sup> In Kristeva's view, as coalesced by Estelle Barrett,

Concrete operations, which include sensory-motor actions, involve handling the objects that produce results or transform the objects ... anyone who has watched a child at play will know that the possibilities are varied, endless and often quite unpredictable. Concrete operations such as these are internalized and prolonged to produce forms of 'knowledge' that precede language – they put down the mental templates that make language possible. More importantly, they put down templates that reflect the novelty of the

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in poetic language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 123.



unpredictable material interactions, and as such they hold the potential for transforming and extending language.<sup>63</sup>

An act of physical interaction between museum goers and the amphora may not only provide an opportunity for this Kristevian notion of autonomous knowledge creation, but it may also allow for the creation of a venue that inherently changes the status quo and calls the dominant thinking of the time into question. Kristeva aligns her thinking with mathematician, René Frédéric'

Thom's Catastrophe theory which puts forward the following idea:

... small changes and contradictions in minor parts of a non-linear system or field of forces can cause instabilities of attraction or repulsion that may lead to changes in the whole system. In this model, when elements in the system lose equilibrium or are shattered, one element does not replace another, but shattered elements re-form to bring about a completely new system or object. Hence transformations that occur in subjectivity result in transformations of language, and this in turn has the potential to transform discourse.<sup>64</sup>

Here we see both a model for the transformation of the museum experience and a potential answer to the inherent custodial question, "what if the amphora is broken?" In Kristevian philosophy if the amphora were to become damaged and require repair or conservation, the museum and its participants would simply be offered yet another story to digest and newly created opportunity for reflection and meaning. As this thesis contends, such an instance would allow for yet an additional tactile point of departure for the audience's creation of personal knowledge.

## – A Case for Somatic Experience

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<sup>63</sup> Estelle Barrett, *Kristeva Reframed* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2011), 19-20.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 23-24.

Many contemporary methods of interacting with art in a museum rely on an unequal relationship between viewers and curators. Though most exhibitions typically offer freedom of movement for museum goers by allowing participants to choose their path of investigation, the classic prescriptions of public collecting institutions largely dictate a unilateral reading of the objects on display; a curator or curators choose which works are presented and how, usually providing a set of supplements which include narratives and informative wall texts along with identification labels and printed literature that further frames the objects and provides annotative descriptions. At each turn of the museum's interior, a participant is usually offered printed sets of words that establish a historical or aesthetic context within which to "understand" the work; the museum offers its visitors a set of leading solutions that often pre-frames and limits the scope of a participant's potential journey. This hermeneutic guidance leads viewers towards a museum experience that reiterates a hierarchical eminence which relies almost solely on the capability of language to serve as a mediator between the participant and the object. In so doing, museums, the MMAC included, continue to negate a potential for somatic wisdom and interaction. As academia begins to embrace and publish newly accepted histories, so must the museum find novel methods of display and allow for alternate understandings of corresponding objects. Offering participants an opportunity to relate to objects through a somatic interaction is one such possibility that would allow the MMAC to confront and oppose a Western system of logocentrism.

Geraldine A Johnson discusses a historical precedent for somatic engagement with art in her essay, "Touch, Tactility, and the Reception of Sculpture in Early Modern Italy."<sup>65</sup> Johnson

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, eds. *A Companion to Art Theory*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2007, 61. Accessed November 20, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.weblib.lib.umt.edu:2443/lib/msoumt/detail.action?docID=242431>.

identifies a host of noted philosophers and intellectual historians such as Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, and Martin Jay, who have spent ample time in critique of the ocularcentric preoccupations of Western culture, while often negating to fully delve into the considerations of touch.<sup>66</sup> These critics, Johnson claims, have ignored important instances in history where physical interaction with art objects was normalized. Her focus most sharply hones in on the significance of somatic interactions with art in early modern Italy. Johnson recognizes multiple instances of touch's importance during this time period including the talismanic or ritual touching of religious or magical objects, the somatic accessibility afforded to early collectors and connoisseurs and depicted as such in paintings (see Figure 3) and the generative force of touch instilled by artists themselves such as in the following case:

Ghiberti seems to have understood, unlike a painting, a touchable sculpture often remains inaccessible to ocular scrutiny alone and may even require tactile exploration in order to be fully apprehended and appreciated, a fact that allows or even encourages beholders to interact with sculpted objects in ways that are unimaginable for two-dimensional works of art. Ghiberti's manual encounters with female and bi-gendered statues in particular also suggest that sculpture's tactile accessibility at times can be profoundly intertwined with questions of sexual desire and differentiation.<sup>67</sup>




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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 65- 66.

Figure 5. Tiziano, Vecellio. *Portrait of Jacopo Strada* 1567-68  
 Oil on canvas, 125 x 95 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna Accessed November, 2021.  
<https://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/1949/?offset=23&pid=2582&back=&lv=listpackages-5479>

The three types of sculptural tactility associated here with different categories of early modern beholders – the devotional or talismanic touch of the religious devotee, the collector’s possessive grasp, and the artist’s generative handling – also are discussed in early modern writings devoted to the so-called *paragone* debate, the theoretical discussion concerned with comparing and contrasting sculpture and painting in order to establish which art was more noble

Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry, Jr argue for the value of a multisensory approach to understanding the aesthetic experience.<sup>68</sup> Sherry and Joy’s research has identified a need for the inclusion of somatic-based learning within the arts, showing a clear need for the inclusion of such experiential learning:

By emphasizing the role of somatic experience in aesthetic appreciation, like Howes (1991) and Stoller (1997), we critique the Kantian notion of practical reason (purely cognitive), arguing that perception and imagination coexist and are thoroughly embodied. Kant may have recognized the importance of sensations and the perceptions that derive from them, but he contended that reason had to be divorced from feelings, which required the elimination of the body. We, on the other hand, begin with the premise that the body represents the root of all thinking—not just the process of thinking bodily—and informs the logic of thinking, because the world is primarily accessed through the body. With a novel, interactive display of the amphora the MMAC could pioneer a

programmatic system of somatic interaction that addresses a host of current social inclusion issues. By allowing the amphora to be touched, the museum could publicly ask questions about its own relationship to the dominant and problematic institutional power imbalances which

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<sup>68</sup> Annamma Joy and John F. Sherry, Jr. “Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination: A Multisensory Approach to Understanding Aesthetic Experience.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 30, no. 2 (2003): 259–82. <https://doi.org/10.1086/376802>.

continue to marginalize unsighted viewers, visitors with low literacy (including pre-reading/writing children) and populations whose values differ from those upheld by the conventions of Western thought/culture.

The amphora is an object that gives a glimpse at the daily life of those in an ancient epoch which has informed the canonical arrangements of Western pedagogy, but to shroud the vessel in a veil of philosophical honors based on its ties to the academically lauded criterion of classical thinking is to likely misinterpret the makers of the jar. The people who dug the clay, then coiled it, then spun it on a kick-wheel in preparation for a firing likely differed greatly from our imaginative ideas of those we associate with texts of that era. The current, American academic framework relies heavily on a discursive architecture which is largely based on a cadre of classical writings. These thought-related maxims continue to inform the presentations of public museums by placing a high degree of importance on logic and the mastery of language, but at what cost? While these conventions persist, a contemporary progression towards inclusion and the dismantling of unequal, institutional power relations intensifies; a great social reckoning is at hand and the MMAC must choose whether to participate.

If presented traditionally in a method that relies primarily on one sense (sight), and one act of cognition (language) the vessel will hold steadfast to its agreed upon historical and temporal importance. New ideas regarding the jar will remain limited if the MMAC ascribes to current conventions of display which rely solely on language as the progenitor for experience. This continuance would be out of step with the current cultural reckoning as it disallows myriad groups of audiences a chance at true object-visitor participation. Derrida is circumspect of the role of Western thought, contending that there is an impasse between logocentrism and

philosophy that disallows for a needed escape from the established “word-order.”<sup>69</sup> Derrida’s efforts to further methods of understanding that transcend logocentrism define one extremity of epistemological theory and could serve as the basis for museum display decisions, but a strict adherence to his conjectures would also potentially alienate segments of the population. Gaston Bachelard’s notions may more adequately address current needs for museum display transformations. Bachelard does not forswear the necessity for language, he proclaims its integral role in the formation of imagination, claiming that “imagination is nothing if not verbal.”<sup>70</sup> Imagination’s role, an ability shared across cultural lines, educational backgrounds, or physical ability is key to allowing maximum access to the amphora and supporting it as a cultural treasure to be enjoyed by all.

Bachelard recognizes that literature and poetry are privileged forms of media and offers a case study that may help to inform the MMAC’s future stewardship of the amphora. Bachelard speaks of the universality and importance of reverie and contends that it is achieved through a manifestation of words. He offers a case that depicts a method whereby the absence of prescriptive text (aka conventional supplementation) allows for maximum imaginative interpretation. His 1960 essay on Marc Chagall’s visual depictions of the Bible, celebrate a viewers’ ability to reimagine biblical texts without the constrictions of written language, a form of media that he recognizes as privileged.<sup>71</sup> His contention, however, is that an imaginative translation of a visual work happens and can only happen through a mental expression of words.

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<sup>69</sup> Roch C. Smith, “BACHELARD’S LOGOSPHERE AND DERRIDA’S LOGOCENTRISM: IS THERE A ‘DIFFERENCE?’” *French Forum* 10, no. 2 (1985): 228. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41429509>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 225.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 226

Both Derrida and Bachelard's contentions offer possibilities for the exploration of personal knowledge. Each philosopher's position, however, would not ignore the generative role that a somatic experience can supply and would align with the idea that a spiritual experience can exist with minimal reliance on the role of prescriptive and inherently biased language.

The amphora, relating more closely with a study of archeology, has escaped a multitude of conscriptions by aesthetic nominalism.<sup>72</sup> The dangers of these artistic classifications and institutional framing devices raised the eyebrows of Theodor W. Adorno who claimed that "nominalistic artworks constantly require the intervention of the guiding hand they conceal in the service of their principle."<sup>73</sup> All labels, including nominalist designations, are addressed by Derrida and considered as acts of supplementation.<sup>74</sup> Supplements, for Derrida, while not always problematic, do negate the idea of purity in works of art.<sup>75</sup> Language, being another act of supplementation through which art is nearly unequivocally enjoyed, corrupts the idea of the original and the sanctity of a purely physical experience.<sup>76</sup>

Language may be applied to a fixed concept or object in act of supplementation, but that language is only fixed for a moment by its author in a specific place and time and open, at once, to the caprices of the next language that is affixed. The MMAC is the current author of the nominal language and has at its disposal a cavalcade of decisions related to the display of the amphora; each decision either adds a supplement to the work, removes one or both. Another of Derrida's conceits is that nearly all axioms include paradoxes, or *aporias* (impossible passages), and that understanding these dualities is important in the search for understanding the ethics and

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<sup>72</sup> The amphora is owned by an art museum but is an archeological object and thereby is not classified according to conventional artistic movements or genre nomenclature.

<sup>73</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 221.

<sup>74</sup> Richards, *Derrida Reframed*, 19-20.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

questions asked during the process of making decisions.<sup>77</sup> The museums' decision ultimately must acknowledge the potential that the value of the amphora, whether monetary or cultural, may be at odds with the merits of unrestricted access.

The amphora presents the MMAC with display decisions rife with such paradoxes. In order to fulfil part of the mission of the museum (public exhibition of its publicly owned works) and to honor the wishes of the amphora's donors, the museum must reckon with its own outmoded models and must also include an acknowledgement and subsequent set of actions that address concerns of inclusion, intersectionality and dismemberment of unfair discriminatory power structures. These structures include the methods whereby/how/to whom the amphora is displayed; in allowing maximum access in alignment with the current gestalt, the amphora's physical safety may be compromised. But as Kristeva posits, "revolutionary discourse," produced by transformation is vital to the artistic process.<sup>78</sup>

- New Display Method (can I include a rendering of the display idea?)

My proposed method of display for the amphora involves allowing visitors to touch the vessel. In this scenario, museum goers would approach the jar as it rested in a shallow tray of sand. This tray would sit atop an adjustable stand that would facilitate access to visitors of different heights and physical abilities. A docent would staff the room to ensure that vessel was not moved and to answer questions about the work when prompted by museum goers.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>78</sup> Barret, *Kristeva Reformed*, 23.



John Howell White's asserts that a return to pragmatism in the arts and art education can and should reconnect viewers of objects to our current social zeitgeist by way of alternate involvement and interaction with the arts;<sup>79</sup> this thesis proposes a method that would allow for such an interaction.

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<sup>79</sup> John Howell White, "Pragmatism and Art: Tools for Change." *Studies in Art Education* 39, no. 3 (1998): 215–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1320365>.

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