

Activity: Extending the discussion of abstraction beyond the classroom

(Using a course management tool or e-mail students may be directed to post and respond to a specified number of postings of their classmates. Alternatively, they could submit responses directly to the instructor.)

a. In the introduction to *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, anthropologist Chris Miller-Marti expresses the perspective that museums reflect the values and beliefs of contemporary society. She writes “What museum exhibits appear to be telling us is more about ourselves than our ancestors, more about our own values and concepts than those of the culture they profess to portray.” [Macdonald, Sharon and Gordon Fyfe, ed. *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (1996).

As you consider how you have experienced abstract art within a museum setting (online or actual), discuss how Miller-Marti’s statement is or is not true in you experience. How, when and where have museums reflected (or failed to reflect) the values and beliefs you feel are significant in contemporary society? Provide concrete examples, and when appropriate, link to a museum web site or other online location that depicts an image you wish to discuss.

b. Vera Zolberg writes that, “Art museums have the dubious distinction of winning accolades for cultural merit and brickbats for cultural exclusiveness.” Explain what you think Zolberg means by cultural merit and/or cultural exclusiveness and give a concrete example of cultural merit or cultural exclusiveness or both as you have experienced either to illustrate the position you take. [Zolberg, “An Elite Experience for Everyone – Art Museums, the Public and Cultural Literacy”. *Museum Culture*, 1994.]

c. Recalling museum visits you have made in the past, or online explorations you have made in connection with this class, ascertain what appealed to you what did not. For example, which strategies do you find useful in your encounters with abstract art: wall text, an audio commentary, a resource room? Using these personal recollections as illustrations, comment YOUR philosophy of the museum’s responsibility to its viewing public, particularly in exhibiting abstract art.

d. Congratulations! You’ve just been selected as a summer intern at a local art museum. You will be assigned to the team putting together an exhibit of contemporary abstract art. Your specific area of responsibility is to highlight the work of artists of color. Choose an artist (not from Gee’s Bend) whose work you would like to highlight. Write a 150 word label text explaining the significance of this artist’s work. Provide a link to any online resources you consult and a bibliographic citation for any print source. Include a link to an image of the artist you choose, if possible. See the bank of questions (link) to help you think through the visual analysis questions that are pertinent to describing and interpreting this artist’s work.