

As I proceed, it becomes apparent that scenographic practice is synonymous with any artistic process that invests itself in dramaturgy and in evocative, versus literal, conveyance of ideas.

Living Museum, Definition #2, 12.16.11, in a letter to Donna Szoke, Assistant Professor and Visiting Artist, Department of Visual Arts, Brock University, St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada

I am writing to formally invite you and a group of your video art students to participate in an experimental collaboration with a team of professional artists and theatre design and technology students from University at Buffalo (UB). Collectively, we will explore how Niagara Falls, ITSELF, can become a Living Museum through lighting, sound, projected imagery and film. Serving as Artistic Director for the theoretical museum, I intend to work with a select group of visual storytellers in order to create proposals for installations that celebrate the POWER and POETRY of Niagara Falls. UB alumnus Chantal Calato, in curating the museum, is identifying content for individual artists to explore. UB adjunct instructor Dyan Burlingame, as museum designer, is studying the terrain of the national park. She is working to identify installation locations within the park and will create a "ground plan" that will contribute to the storytelling. It is the intent of the UB creative team to actualize our ideas by using our detailed theoretical proposals to seek further funding to realize the project in its entirety. The scope of the project includes a central film directed by Chantal Calato, a new lighting design for the falls, and five art installations that reveal the history of the area through the voices of visual storytellers such as you. Through this project, the University at Buffalo and the Brock University communities will gain a greater understanding of our immediate border as Canadian and American artists alike explore the history of the Niagara Falls region through experimental collaboration. I am hoping you will accept the invitation to work with us.

Donna did accept the invitation and she along with Canadian Artist Grace Channer, and two Brock University students, worked alongside the UB contingency for two days in April, 2012. The artists collected "data" during a field study that took them to eight distinct vantage points in Niagara Falls, New York and Niagara Falls, Canada. A common vocabulary was established between the artists. Inspired by historical writings and social commentary, an artwork was collectively created by the group. As Donna's personal artwork thrives on the utilization of new media/technology, I identify with her process. We both care about how advancements in technology can further artistic expression. In working with smart technology, she brings a medium to our collaborative table that greatly serves the Living Museum concept.

As I recap this on June 4, 2012, it should be noted that Chantal, Dyan and myself have redefined our roles in the collaboration as the living museum definition has evolved. Chantal, in developing and directing a film that reveals the dark history of Niagara's hidden stories while celebrating the human draw to its' beauty, will identify moments that serve as jumping off points for work by other lead artists. Chantal as the Niagara Falls native, offers us a lens by which to view the history of this majestic natural wonder. The themes addressed in the film present themselves in iterations, created by the lead artists, in the 360 degree theatre that is Niagara Falls itself. The lead artists, as instruments in an orchestra that make sound or are at rest but together convey a story, create iterations that are synthesized to create a single experience for the viewer. Under the artistic direction of Lynne, the disparate components will be synthesized through light and rhythm.

To create an experience worthy of Niagara, it is best to empower your collaborators to do what they do best. Such a simple concept, but one that is easy to overlook as you try to do justice to the history of a region. What LCD (Lynne, Chantal, and Dyan) have discovered, is that it is impossible to be comprehensive. Our Living Museum is analogous to a curiosity cabinet. It will showcase a collection of things that captivate our imagination and challenge our intellect. And, the showcase must meet the living museum requirements. Work must be ethereal, kinetic, and temporal. For the artist's rendition to be worthy of Niagara's majesty, the medium is personal to the artist and the idea relevant to their concerns. The Niagara region has a history of inspiring technological innovations. Living Museum exhibits must push the limits of technology and artists must be mindful, in material choices, of the self-sustainable culture the Falls itself promotes.

Living Museum, Definition #3, 1.8.12, as presented to the United States Institute for Theatre Technology

Authored by Lynne Koscielniak with contributions from Chantal Calato and Dyan Burlingame.

Project Summary/Abstract

Drawn to the duality of Niagara Falls, it is the subject of our project. As core collaborators (LCD), we work towards a proposal for a "Living Museum," one that exposes and celebrates the darkness and light of Niagara's rich history. As scenographers taking lead on this socially relevant project, we illustrate how our skill set lends itself to preserving history. We will analyze our subject, research its past, and figure out how to best enhance its natural powers through collaborative discourse. Over brainstorming sessions we will identify the stage technologies that lend themselves to dynamic exhibits. Charrettes, workshops devoted to a concerted effort to plan the design of something, will allow us to work with artists whose heritage is tied to cultures that have deep rooted historical presence in the region. Computer applications for stage design, 3-D modeling and simulation programs, will be used to generate plans. The proposed museum includes six exhibits: a central exhibit that uses the Falls itself as a canvas for projected film and light and five satellites exhibits installed in the national park. In collaboration with a Technical Director, we will develop a complete proposal for a "Living Museum."

Background and Context

Project MIST documents the process of creating a site-specific museum that presents historical narrative through art and technology. It maps the scenographer's journey "out-of-the-box" and reassesses the role of scenography in today's society. As the museum's stories are told from the perspective of cultures that have deep rooted historical presence in the region (African-American, American, British, Canadian, and Native American), the project stretches the scenographer's dramaturgical skill set and invites artists from various cultures to collaborate. To connect these groups, a traditional charrette is given new life through cultural exchange both in person and via group video calls on Skype. Through the work, a new collaborative ideal, whereby scenographers, stage technicians and visual artists engage in cultural exchange to create dynamic theatrical installations, will be modeled.

Although anchored to Niagara Falls, our work sheds light on a number of global issues relevant to live event production. We address the complexity of sound, light, and projection control for outdoor installations in an extreme environment. We challenge the lighting designer and technician to create lighting positions that exist harmoniously in nature. In addressing green initiatives, we will model a self-sustaining show control system for use in outdoor venues. In identifying the technology that can best achieve effects on the Falls, we demonstrate the importance of photometric data in the design process.

The project is unique in many ways. We will experience and relate the trials and tribulations the contemporary artist faces when trying to obtain permission to exhibit in a national park. We will execute an in depth study on the effect that weather conditions and mist has on projected film. Although there are fountains with lighting effects and man-made water walls that serve as projection surfaces in theme parks, no documentation on how to project film onto a natural waterfall exists. As we expect the animated and textured projection surface of the Falls to create an impressionist image, we challenge ourselves to complement our story with audience-driven technology. Thus, we will investigate the role of a “smart device” application in our storytelling.

Methods/Procedures/Materials

We assert that scenographic practice lends itself to creating historical narrative in the concept of a “Living Museum.” Collectively, core collaborators arrive at visual solutions to telling historical narrative in the same way that scenographers, in the theatre, create designs for a play. Our process includes analysis, writing, and research, testing solutions, drawing, modeling, and revising. In ANALYZING the situation, we maintain that the history of a majestic place is being lost. We establish a POINT OF VIEW, stating that a “Living Museum,” one that relies on art and technology, would address the issue. The museum’s content is determined by both personal experience and extensive RESEARCH into the history of the region and its people. The DESIGN OBJECTIVE becomes specific. Presented in an evening of projected image, augmented reality, and light, history is revealed through an ephemeral exhibition that questions Niagara’s fate. Chantal, in developing and directing a film that reveals the dark history of Niagara’s hidden stories while celebrating the human draw to its’ beauty, will identify moments that serve as jumping off points for work by other lead artists. Chantal as the Niagara Falls native, offers us a lens by which to view the history of this majestic natural wonder. The themes addressed in the film present themselves in iterations, created by the lead artists, in the 360 degree theatre that is Niagara Falls itself. The lead artists, as instruments in an orchestra that make sound or are at rest but together convey a story, create iterations that are synthesized to create a single experience for the viewer. Under the artistic direction of Lynne, the disparate components will be synthesized through light and rhythm.

As the core collaborators strive to make the museum energy efficient, RESEARCH in self-sustainable systems is required. Along the way, the museum’s design and its technology are TESTED. Through charrettes, the core collaborators are joined by groups of artists. All work together to create sculpture, extreme garments, environments, lighting effects, and soundscapes in response to given themes from the curator. The artwork created will be used to establish a common visual vocabulary for the project as a whole. The first charrette brings a media artist from Brock University, St. Catharine’s Ontario, to the University at Buffalo. In this Canadian-

American cultural exchange, artistic exploration leads way to opportunity, where aesthetic choices for the museum design are assessed.

The process continues as we SKETCH and MODEL the terrain of Niagara Falls National Park. The organic nature of the terrain stretches our abilities in the use of computer application design software. We will utilize Vectorworks Spotlight to create a 3-dimensional schematic of the site. We will integrate ESP Vision and ETC EOS family off-line editing software in order to simulate the projected film and lighting design of the central "Living Museum" exhibit. ESP Vision will allow us to show both film and lighting effects in real-time, demonstrating how the rhythm of cuing contributes to the story. Finally, it is in collaboration with technologists that we will address project engineering requirements and execute the vision.