Hack the Museum

Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (2013) a camp and an exhibition

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1. Exhibition Concept

The Santa Cruz MAH is quite well known in the museum world. They are considered to be the pioneers of participatory art experiences in search of the best ways to engage[1]. In this case – with the Hack the museum camp they are trying to engage an idea and push the boundaries. In about 2.5 days 75 campers from around the world, who were half museum professionals, half artists, architects, and designers, have been working in 15 teams to develop exhibits based on artifacts from the MAH's permanent collection. In this way museum conventions and traditional exhibit design practice was challenged[2]. The goal was to create a space for the Santa Cruz community and a museum exhibition that challenges the way people think about displaying the artefacts[3]. The project has opened two large questions: how to create space and support for risk-taking, and how to orient the risk taking towards work that will excite and energize visitors[4]. This project was possible because of international interest in the MAH's reputation for exploring new forms of engagement in museums, to truly challenge traditional museum practice, and to see, what is possible.

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[1] http://issuu.com/arts_marketing/docs/lets.get.weird-lessons-on-how-to-in (page 2, 09.09.2013)

[2] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-making-space-for.html (09.09.2013)

[3] http://issuu.com/arts_marketing/docs/lets.get.weird-lessons-on-how-to-in (page 2, 09.09.2013)

[4] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-making-space-for.html (09.09.2013)

2. Reception

Resulting in an exhibition, this was a project, based on ability to trust and to hand over the reins to a large crowd of people, who themselves were taking a risk, when accepting the 48-hour project. The project included also the option of sleep-over in the museum for the campers, which might be a base for doing so also with the visitors.

The mission of the Hack the Museum counsellors and MAH staff team was to think about how can they be space-makers for campers, focusing not so much on how the projects can be executed but how the campers can really pursue their risk-taking passions. And they have managed to fall into the breeze of *nothing is too ridiculous*. The idea behind this was to encourage teams to take the risks in a way that was about opening up new possibilities instead of shutting down old ones[5].

3. Exhibition Design

A team of 75 museum experts has developed an experimental exhibition around MAH's permanent collection in their largest gallery. The plan was to work in teams of four or five to create exhibits around artefacts that are not currently on display. Despite the fact Simon has a reputation of being a risk-taker, she has never done anything like this, and so she and the rest of the "hacking" team were well aware of the risks[6].

This exhibition represents some things, which were unimaginable at first. As Simon said: "*We now have a painting hanging from the ceiling that you can lie under and experience in 3D. We have a gravestone with a Ouija board in front of it so you can commune with its owner. We have a sculpture in its crate/prison cell, unwrapped and unexhibited since its acquisition thirty years ago.*"[7]

Hack the Museum has featured new experiments in exhibition-making developed by a group of diverse experts, artists, engineers, architects, and designers of various age. Teams have developed risk-taking exhibits around objects from the MAH permanent collection. The result was Hack the Museum, a series of experiments that were inviting the audience to explore how they connected with art and history artifacts. With Simone's words: *"the exhibition is chaotic. But it is also full of surprises and vitality, and it showcases a very wide palate of approaches to collection objects".*[8]

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[5] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-making-space-for.html (09.09.2013)
[6] http://www.santacruz.com/news/2013/07/16/a_night_in_the_museum1 (09.09.2013)
[7] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-part-2-making-magic.html (09.09.2013)
[8] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-part-2-making-magic.html (09.09.2013)

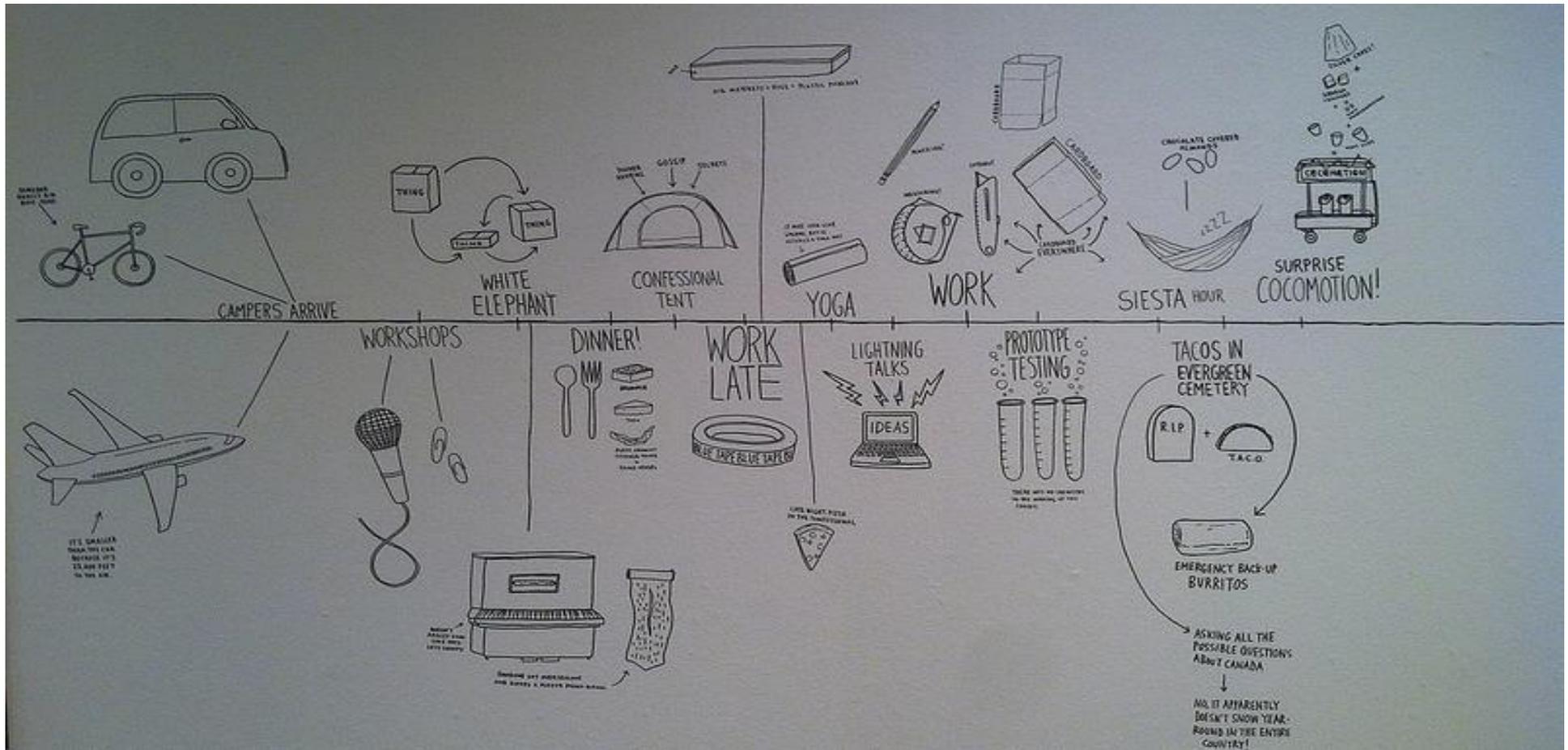### 4. Visitors Approach-Activation/Participation

One of the most important aspects within this camp-exhibition is the focus on the potential problem - while confronting traditions can be a useful starting point, confronting visitors can be lead to unpleasant experiences. Instead of confronting, Nina Simon always encourages "*risk-takers to think about how they can approach their work in a way that is "generous" to visitors. It can be just as subversive to hand someone a flower as it is to slap them in the face - and they are probably more likely to be receptive to your larger message. Some of the most powerful risky work I've experienced has started with an invitation, not a confrontation. Our museum's mission to "ignite shared experiences and unexpected connections." I believe that we are most likely to achieve this mission if we invite people into the unexpected in with experiences that radiate generosity and possibility*"[9]. Besides this the entire exhibition design was focused on the engaging the audience by trying out artefacts, adding their opinion, finishing the stories, think about the important questions. And apart from the exhibition itself, they prepared series of exhibit design workshops taught by international experts. An hour-long workshops have served as the "warm up" for those participating in the Hack the Museum project, and also for additional participants as an experience of a standalone half-day professional development experience.[10]

5. Conclusion: Hack the museum project in respect to the COP 1 and 2

The project, which is to replace the conferences and talking was meant for the campers from all over America and from different fields of knowledge (diversity was prioritized when choosing, who can participate) to create the exhibition – how they see the objects by having all the power of deciding, what to do with them (Toolkit 1 – the object immanent, comparative, and thematic and beyond national approach). What is really interesting is the comparison of the camping project to the Project Runway[11]. This really means that the museum has come closer to the most various audience and experts – one of the most difficult tasks for the museums – to be an open space and yet keep the "authority" of a cultural institution. And also all the teams have made their work on time with their full engagement (related to Toolkit 2 – integrating cultural Europe - social arena). The idea of role modification lays in the change from talking to being active – not only the audience, but also various experts. And not only being active, but also a bit "crazy" – to think outside of the box, after knowing the box (related to Toolkit 3 – activation, participation and & role modification). The result of such a various teams working on the exhibition was the exhibition, which can be perceived in many ways, for adults, for children, and for the new audiences (Toolkit 4 – synesthetic translation of perspective).

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[9] http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2013/07/hack-museum-camp-making-space-for.html (09.09.2013)
[10] http://www.santacruzmah.org/event/exhibit-design-workshops/ (09.09.2013)

Timeline from the camp and exhibition, MAH (Photo: MAH, 2013, http://www.flickr.com/photos/santacruzma h/9354133058/in/set-72157634769286422)

One of the teams of campers doing their thing for a part of the end goal – the exhibition, MAH (Photo: Paul Orselli, 2013, www.orselli.net)

Culture

A part of the exhibition, MAH (Photo: Paul Orselli, 2013, www.orselli.net