

Interpreting the Art of Curating: How an Art School Presented at a Medical Museum

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School of the Art Institute



- Hosted in the Art Institute of Chicago, SAIC is one of the premier art schools in the nation.
- Ranging from animation to sculpture, SAIC offers degrees in the fine arts, as well as the use of Chicago as a classroom.
- Students often gain experience throughout both the Art Institute of Chicago and various sites throughout the city.

Excavating History



- Taught in Spring semester every year at SAIC.
- Lead by artist and professor, Rebecca Keller.
- Each year it is hosted at a different Chicago area museum.
- Students work closely with museum curator and staff to create their final art pieces.
- ‘Excavating’ means to look deeply at a historical building or place.
- Final pieces showcased within the museum.

Why a medical museum?

- IMSS is hosted in an old mansion: the excavating portion!
- Collections reflect a transformative timeline throughout human history.
- “We all feel pain, and we all have wanted to feel better.”
- Ideology of the doctor as savior.
- What stories and narratives are created from this piece of history?

The International Museum of Surgical Science



- Housed in historic Lake Shore Drive mansion.
- Built in 1917 for Eleanor Robinson Countiss, heiress to the Diamond Matchsticks fortune.
- Purchased in post-World War II period by the founder of the International College of Surgeons, Dr. Max Thorek.
- Started as collection for surgeons, expanded into museum.
- Now serves 20,000 visitors a year in Chicago, including visiting scholars, surgeons, and students.

The Influence of Historical Medicine

- What does ‘medicine’ mean in art? What does art mean in medicine?
- Especially so for surgery, which has a tumultuous history.
- Who is a doctor? What do they look like?
- How are we healed? What heals us?
- What role does science play in art?

Pieces of Art, History and Medicine

- Students used each room to ‘excavate’ a piece of history to interpret.
- This included performance art, live movement (of a liquid), 2d printed art, rotoscopes, paintings, collages, and more!
- Some even encouraged visitors to engage with them; a challenge for visitors who assumed this was true with other artifacts.
- An opening event was allowed for students to showcase their work to visitors and museum members.
- Worked closely with staff members to incorporate into field trips and tours.

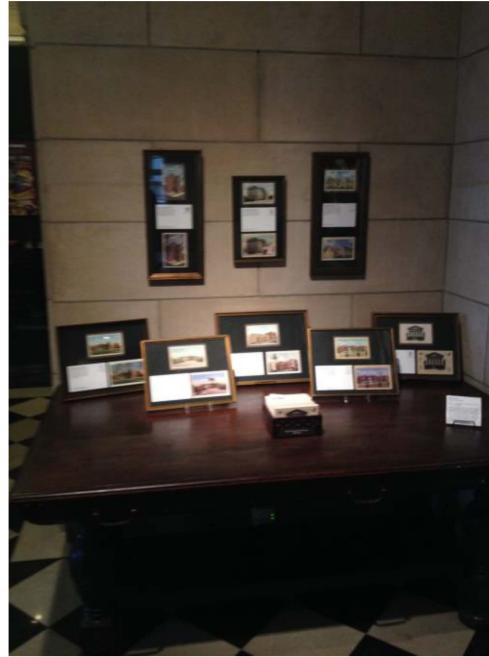
Some Challenges

- Had some issues over whether or not this was relevant to surgery.
- Argument was that the presentation of art and artifacts reflected the stories of the collections and the museum itself.
- Some messes!
- Some visitors confused, or could not find information that was not properly labeled.

Final Results



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Take Away Message

- Students were able to incorporate the collections in their artwork.
- Allowed a new relationship between artists and the museum.
- Museum was able to benefit from new ideas and art.
- A new narrative was allowed to be present in the museum.



Questions?

