

2012 MEDAL WINNER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART
Speakers: Bonnie Clearwater, Cassandra Timothy

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>> FEMALE SPEAKER: The National Medal for Museum and Library Services is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums that are serving their communities in exceptional ways.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Director Bonnie Clearwater and community member Cassandra Timothy traveled to Washington from North Miami, Florida to receive the National Medal and spoke to IMLS about how the museum impacts the community.

>> BONNIE CLEARWATER: MOCA's mission is to bring the best of local, national, and international art to Miami and especially to the widest and most diverse audience possible. Our programming is always at the very highest level.

It is contemporary art so I very often say we're the most accessible museum showing the least accessible art and perhaps because contemporary work is so challenging and we don't compromise on the kind of programming we do, it means how do you find ways to engage an audience in a way that they feel comfortable and open and receptive to the ideas and to the work that are produced by artists of our time.

So the trick or the method is to find ways to bring people in, make them break down that barrier to feel like they don't understand or this is too weird. How to engage them and make them feel comfortable? And that is done with all kinds of educational programs, public programs, outreach programs.

When we had our Keith Haring retrospective, I felt this was a good introduction for teens to the contemporary art and we started the Junior Docent Program.

The idea was to have a seminar program that is really done at a very sophisticated level, at a college level seminar. We recruited students from the high schools and not just from our immediate area. They were coming from all over.

>> CASSANDRA TIMOTHY: Well the Junior Docent Program, it is a program for like after school high school students. You go in and you know, you kind of walk through the exhibitions that are there. We kind of learn about the artists and then we also come back and we like, you know, we kind of break it down.

We pretty much kind of dissect the artwork and then we become tour guides towards the end of the week. So we'll give out tours when we feel comfortable enough. But it's really just going and just learning about the exhibition, learning about the artist, learning about the different crafts, and we kind of put it into our own perspective.

So that's what's interesting about the Junior Docent Program.

>> BONNIE CLEARWATER: We have an art historian who will meet with the students and discuss and it's not like a typical classroom situation. They see this art, it provokes questions on its own, and the students and the teacher have conversations about it. They learn about how to analyze and that kind of criticality can be applied to anything.

Then we also educate them in how to do public speaking, now because they are going to give tours of the exhibitions. Now that is really important as we found because a lot of the kids were not doing well in their school - in - when they applied to colleges in the interview.

So we put even greater emphasis on the public speaking but also we realized if we taught them the techniques of interviewing, this would also benefit them.

>> CASSANDRA TIMOTHY: Right now I graduated college and I am currently the legislative aid for a councilman in the city of Tampa.

MOCA has provided me with the on the job skills that I need, the communication skills that I need, like the ability to think critically and like you know, just from dissecting art pieces now to you know, working in the council and working with the constituents and working with members in the community.

I remember going over to the City Hall and you know, dropping off stuff from our office and it was just like, now I can put them both together and see how they relate because MOCA - MOCA, we do so much community outreach. We're in the community. Now

that I am helping the community, I wish - I hope to bring art to the Tampa community because that is one thing that we definitely need in the city of Tampa. So that is one thing that I can take away from MOCA that I've learned in North Miami to the city of Tampa where I am now.

>> BONNIE CLEARWATER: Very often people say that you're building the audience for the future. I often say our audience is today. Just because they're kids, just because they're teens doesn't mean we're building them for the future. This is our audience. These are the people engaged with what we have to do. They are at that age where they are searching and they are still at a point of becoming.

And that if we can get them at that moment to realize that the world is much bigger and so wonderful and so many opportunities and that they are part of it, we could have such a major impact.

If we could build a community that is receptive to contemporary art, we could build a community that would be receptive to innovation in everyday life and thinking about ways of solving problems because artists are basically problem solvers. And if we get an audience to understand that, that is a point of view, a way of thinking that they could bring to everything, all problems, all issues, and something that Cassandra and I were talking about is how she's analyzing in Tampa, the problems and how to solve them. That was partly because of the analytical training that she had as the Junior Docent.