UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

April 13, 2020
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A Virtual Delight

What does a world-class repository of fine art and more than a million architectural drawings do when it's forced to shut its doors? It brings its collections and exhibits to the public.

The campus's Art, Design & Architecture Museum, shuttered amid the coronavirus pandemic, has brought its exhibitions online.

"The museum has a long-established online trajectory, but the present lockdown has given us the opportunity to think about our digital domain in a more intentional and strategic manner," said Silvia Perea, acting director of the museum and curator of architecture and design.

"Traditionally," she added, "we have thought of our raison d'être as primarily associated with what happened in the galleries — our audiences' visitation, engagement with exhibitions, provision of feedback, participation in events. The current situation has shifted the perception of our purpose from interacting physically to virtually. In this regard, we are imagining ways of complementing our online offerings with participatory experiences."

Visitors to the museum's website can expect small doses of new, carefully curated content, Perea said, with a focus on quality over quantity while ensuring a diversity of offerings.

"So far," she noted, "we have transformed the exhibitions that were on view in our galleries into online portals as a means to maintain their accessibility during their

respective planned cycles. These exhibitions will soon feature videos from artists represented in them.

The museum has also launched two contests, "ADA in Space" for kids and "Fables in Labels" for adults. In the first, artists aged 3 to 11 are invited to draw what they think life on another planet would be like. The 10 best — judged by a curator — will be featured in an exhibition on the museum's website.

In the adults' contest, participants write a brief fictional account of a precious 15th-century bronze medal by Giovanni Boldu. The winner will receive a free annual membership to the museum and have his or her historical fiction included in the upcoming exhibition of the museum's Morgenroth Collection, where the medal is held. Details for both contests are on the AD&AM website.

In addition, Perea said, the museum is enriching the online records of its Fine Art and Architecture and Design Collections. It's also planning the months ahead to ensure that its upcoming exhibitions and programs can be enjoyed remotely.

Not surprisingly, the move to the digital realm is a work in progress, one that has museum staff working to put together future exhibitions.

"Even though we have a website and a sound presence on social media, we feel we are in the infancy of what we dream of doing," Perea explained. "By now, we are actively analyzing online visitation data, and collecting feedback from the museum's audience and team. In this regard, we are having regular brainstorming meetings to come up with initiatives that, in responding to data analysis, can be inspiring and useful for both our audiences and the museum."

For Perea and the museum staff, taking exhibitions online is more than giving the public another distraction in challenging times.

"In the long-gone past," she said, "to curate meant to 'heal the ailments or passions of the soul.' If we can't go that far, we hope that the art we present through our website and social media reconnects us with our human condition in this moment of global isolation and segregation.

"The thriving capacity that our community has demonstrated in these unexpected and challenging circumstances sets an inspiring example for all of us at the AD&A Museum," Perea continued. "As we keep on working on our virtual interface, we welcome everyone's comments, ideas and feedback, and remain 'on the line' for

anything we can assist with.”

About UC Santa Barbara

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