

Sara Kachelman  
Dallas Museum of Art  
Summer 2016

The Dallas Museum of Art contains over 23,000 art works spanning 5,000 years. It occupies its own city block in the largest urban arts district in the United States. Over a period of ten weeks this summer, I had the pleasure of working with two integral departments in the museum, Adult Programming and Arts and Letters Live. The Adult Programming team oversees monthly Late Nights, weekly gallery talks, and numerous other special events that engage the public with the collection. The Arts and Letters Live team brings authors to the museum in a series of popular readings, lectures, and live interviews. My responsibilities for Arts and Letters Live included answering the public ticketing line, combing anthologies for short story material to be used in the Texas Bound reading series, and assisting in event logistics. For Adult Programming, I worked gallery talks and Late Night events, organized survey data, and compiled a comprehensive list of scholars and curators across the country for an upcoming fall program. I was also closely involved with the department's development of a new monthly program to be launched this coming October that would target the millennial generation.

My most challenging task was the selection of short stories to be read by a hired actor, twice a week, for consideration in the Texas Bound series. The DMA hosts two evenings of readings every year of short stories that either relate to Texas through the story's content or the author's biography. The DMA's submission period ended in the first half of my internship, so I was in charge of sending responses to the writers and printing and organizing the work for our archives. I read all of the submitted work (around 50 stories) and made my selection of the pieces

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that would be best served by a table reading with a hired actor. During the readings, the panel and I considered the piece's length, content, amount of difficult dialogue, how well the piece could be paired with other material we were screening, and what actor could potentially perform the piece. Midway through the internship, I was tasked with mining previously published anthologies and short story collections for other possibilities. This task involved innumerable trips to the library. By the end of the internship, I had read 25 books by authors Sandra Cisneros, Padgett Powell, Barry Hannah, Cristina Henriquez, Octavio Solis, Larry McMurtry, and more. In my reading, I had to keep in mind the frequency the program had used the author in the past, and the reception he or she was given. Helpful exercises included watching past videos of the program and updating the Excel archival sheets from 2010 with the recent Texas Bound stories, authors, actors, and reading times. This involved rooting through the paper trail in the storage closet for old brochures.

While I've always dreamed of finding a job in which I could read on the job with impunity, I had to remind myself to look past my own personal tastes and read for a general audience; more specifically, an older demographic on a pleasant night out. My training at Sewanee as an English major inclined me toward the more complicated narratives, with nested parenthesis, paragraph-long sentences and other postmodern circumambulations that my analytical mind longed to unpack. I quickly learned to listen instead for more conversational narrators and the instant relief of easy humor. By the end of the internship, I felt confident in training my ear for this specific criteria in a story. But I found that I was able to employ analysis

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at the reading table. Each session required that I participate in an analytical discussion on the merits of each story, a useful editorial skill.

My Texas Bound reading was tempered with my hands-on involvement in the museum's programs. Over the summer, I worked three Arts & Letters Live events, two Late Nights, and ten gallery talks. For my last Arts & Letters Live event, I was given the opportunity to write and deliver the introduction for our speaker, *Glee* actor and young adult novelist Chis Colfer. I also handled logistics offstage and conducted the Q&A and trivia sessions with an excited audience. Another public speaking opportunity arose when my Adult Programming supervisor offered space in our July Late Night for me to give a thirty-minute tour. I chose to study self-portraits in the collection to complement the theme of July's event, "Heads Will Roll: A Bastille Day Celebration." For weeks in advance I studied various paintings ranging from Picasso's *The Guitarist* to 18<sup>th</sup> century French genre paintings, examining the painter's self-portrait in context with autobiographical information, the painting's style, or other subjects in the painting (in one case, an entire cast of seasick French people on a sinking ship). Since Late Nights close at midnight, I was in charge of the last tour of the night, the Insomniac Tour. Wielding my TOUR sign, I led forty guests into the galleries at 10:30 pm.

My experience at the DMA imbued me with confidence toward my passion for editorial work. I enjoyed my strategic reading for Texas Bound and the involved discussions the stories created. Public relations and communication skills were more out of my comfort zone, but I learned to appreciate my progress. I learned that careers in event programming involve strong

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communications skills and a sizeable amount of multitasking. At the end of my internship, I was invited to interview employees from other departments about their careers. I spoke to a pair of junior curators, the publications manager, and the senior editor. While I loved my art history research during my internship, I felt myself connecting with the editorial staff, fellow English majors who painstakingly edited the numerous museum publications. As I consider my postgraduate plans, I feel hopeful about the options available in museum institutions, whether in programming, editing, copywriting, or publishing.