

# Approaches to Cultural Heritage Presentation

Digital Lecture Series

Video Transcripts

## 1. Cultural Conversations at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and Beyond

Hello, my name is Jim Deutsch, and I'm a curator with the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., in the United States, and my lecture is part of a series of lectures, presented by curators like myself at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, as we discuss the cultural heritage of diverse communities. my topic for today is "Cultural Conversations at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and Beyond."

First, I'd like to give you some background about the Smithsonian Institution, which is the National Museum of the United States. The Smithsonian Institution was established by an act of Congress in the year of 1846, and the mission for this new institution was that it should promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge. I like those words a lot. We at the Smithsonian, we strive to educate people around the world by promoting the increase and diffusion of knowledge.

I should say that we at the Smithsonian Institution like to say that we are the world's largest museum and research complex with nineteen major museums, a National Zoo, and many research centers, such as the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, or CFCH as we call it. The CFCH mission statement states that through the power of culture, we build understanding, strengthen communities, and reinforce our shared humanity.

Much like the idea of promoting the increase and diffusion of knowledge, I like those words a lot. We at CFCH take those words and our mission very seriously. Through all of our efforts, we try to build understanding, meaning that we help people understand the world around us. Second, we strengthen communities—the communities that we serve, the communities that we document, and the communities that we research and that we support in terms of their cultural heritage. Finally, we reinforce the shared humanity of all of us.

What I'll be talking about today is the way in which we do all these three things: build understanding, strengthen communities, and reinforce our shared humanity through our Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

The Festival began in 1967 and it began, according to our own Festival folklore, with words that were said by S. Dillon Ripley, who's the man you see on the left in this photograph. Ripley was Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, meaning that he was the head of the Smithsonian Institution. What he told Ralph Rinzler, who is the man you see on the right and who was the founding director of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, was "I want you to take the instruments out of their cases and make them sing." Meaning that the Smithsonian Institution, had all these instruments inside glass cases that you could not touch and could see only behind the glass. What Ripley is supposed to have told Rinzler is "take the instruments out of their cases" and show that they are used by living people around the United States and around the world today. Ripley did not mean that literally; he didn't want Rinzler go into the museums and take the instruments out of their cases. Rather he meant it metaphorically—to show that these instruments are being used and that they are part of traditional culture. They're not just museum artifacts or unused objects, but rather they're living instruments that are used by living people. So the idea for the Festival began with this statement of Ripley to Rinzler in 1967.

The decade of the 1960s was a very influential time, and I think it's no accident that the Festival begins in the 1960s. The 1960s was a time of questioning, a time of challenging, a time of asking questions about how we can make things better. The Smithsonian Folklife Festival was one of these ideas, which comes out of this cultural ferment of the 1960s. Another part of the 1960s was the notion of relevance—meaning the idea of making things relevant for the times. What Ripley and Rinzler felt was that the Smithsonian Institution needed to become more relevant during this time.

The 1960s was also a time of greater diversity and of telling the story of the United States in a way that was different from previous methods, which were largely telling the history of the United States from the top down. The idea of the Folklife Festival was to tell it from the perspective of the folk. Highlighting the presidents of the United States is something that the Smithsonian Institution has done a lot of, through the galleries of the First Ladies' gowns and through portraits of the presidents. But the idea of Ripley and Rinzler was to look at the traditions and the customs, the crafts, the music, the dance, the storytelling of the folk. Out of all that comes the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

There are a number of different ways that we at CFCH talk about the Festival, but one of them is to say that it's a museum without walls, because it's an outdoor festival. The Smithsonian has all these museums indoors, but the Folklife Festival was something very different. It was literally a museum without walls, open and free to the public, lasting for ten days during June and July in Washington, D.C., in the summer. The fact that it's free and the fact that you can get

there from many different entry points means that it's very difficult for us to figure out how many visitors we actually have. We estimate anywhere between half a million and one million visitors during the ten days of the Festival, but we're not really sure because we can't count them. In a museum, you can count the visitors coming in or going out. We can't do that at the Festival. There's not just one gate that people have to walk through. But based on other factors, based on our food sales, based on our Marketplace or craft sales, based on congestion, we estimate between half a million and one million visitors at this open-air museum.

A second characteristic is that we like to say that the word "festival" is a verb, not a noun. A noun would be like "the festival." But a verb gives it more action, "we will festival now." In English, we don't really use "festival" as a verb, but this is the metaphoric idea of action and activity and telling the stories of people whose stories were not normally told throughout the Smithsonian Institution.

A third element is that the Festival is a means of conveying and promoting living cultural heritage. This is the heritage of living people. Of course, throughout the Smithsonian Institution—for instance, at our National Museum of American History or our National Museum of African American History and Culture or our National Museum of Natural History—it's mostly objects in cases. But the Folklife Festival focuses on the people, not the objects, and it's the people who tell the stories in ways that I think objects are not really able to tell very well. Of course, I love museums. I love going to museums and looking at objects. But the Folklife Festival—our museum without walls—finds a very different way to promote and to conserve our living cultural heritage.

Another way that we describe the Festival is to say that the Festival is culture of, by, and for the people. This phrase "culture of, by, and for the people," resonates very deeply in American culture and actually comes from Abraham Lincoln, our sixteenth president, in 1863, as part of his famous Gettysburg Address. Lincoln said the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth. Our Folklife Festival is culture of the people, by the people, and for the people. Those are very important characteristics that we try to maintain and promote when we produce our Folklife Festival every summer.

Also, what's important is that the Festival is based on research and collaboration. When we as curators curate a Festival program, we are always working in close collaboration with the cultures that we are presenting. It's not just curators at the Smithsonian Institution who are imposing our view. Rather, it's curators and art designers, and technical experts and administrative staff working in close collaboration with our partners to produce this amazing

event as a collaboration. It's something that we've been doing every summer since 1967, outdoors on the National Mall.

As I said, it's a ten-day Festival and it usually takes place around the Fourth of July, which is our national Independence Day. The importance of that date goes back to 1776, 245 years ago, when the United States declared its independence from Great Britain. The Festival not only takes place around the Fourth of July, our most important civic holiday, but it also takes place in our most important civic space, which is the National Mall of the United States in Washington D.C.

If you look at the photograph, you see that the National Mall is that green space between the U.S. Capitol, the seat of our government and the Lincoln Memorial, a memorial to the president I just talked about—Abraham Lincoln. In between the Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial is the Washington Monument, a monument to our first president George Washington, for whom Washington, D.C., is named. It's the largest freestanding masonry structure in the world: 555 feet or 169 meters tall. The buildings around the green space are mostly museums of the Smithsonian Institution. So you see that this is the most important civic space in our nation's capital, taking place around our most important civic holiday.

All of this reinforces the significance and importance of the Folklife Festival, as we seek to promote and conserve cultural heritage around the world. The Mall is a very, very special place. Normally, every weekend there is some type of activity, demonstration, rally, or festival taking place on the National Mall. For example, in August 1963 on the National Mall, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King gave perhaps, perhaps his most famous speech that we call "I have a dream." He was standing right in front of the Lincoln Memorial looking east, towards the Washington Monument and towards the museums of the Smithsonian Institution. Of course, 1963 was before the Folklife Festival began, but it is part of what I'm calling this cultural ferment—demanding civil rights and equal justice. It made a deep impression on people like Dillon Ripley and Ralph Rinzler to create the Folklife Festival, just four years later. The National Mall is also where presidential inaugurations take place, such as the inauguration of Barack Obama in January 2009, where the Mall was just covered with people watching that momentous event.

The Mall is where our Folklife Festival takes place—in a very special place at a very special time. In fact, the National Mall is managed by the U.S. National Park Service, which is the same agency that oversees our national parks, like the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone National Park, or Yosemite National Park. These are parks with great natural beauty. There are also parks and monuments that have historical significance. So I think the fact that the National Mall is

managed and protected by the U.S. National Park Service is something that underscores its significance and its value to all of us.

Some of the key words I've mentioned—such as building understanding and the continuity of diverse contemporary grassroots cultural traditions in the United States and around the world—highlight the focus of what we at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage do. It's the idea of working collaboratively with exemplary artists and their cultural communities. Since the first Festival in 1967, we have featured at least ninety nations, every geographic and cultural region of the United States, scores of different ethnic communities, Native American groups, and occupations.

For example with occupations, we did a program in 2001 on *Masters of the Building Arts*. We've done programs on transportation workers and on energy workers. We even did a program on American trial lawyers as an occupational group. This was in 1986, and although I wasn't working at the Smithsonian, I heard people asking, "What are trial lawyers doing at a Folklife Festival?" This is part of a misunderstanding that the folk are people who live in remote geographic areas and are people without much education. Of course, trial lawyers are highly educated, but they are a folk group. Every occupational group has a distinctive occupational culture, which they learn among themselves. The folk culture of trial lawyers is not what they learn in law school, but rather what they learn by being members of this occupational group, through the process of observation and imitation. They will observe master trial lawyers, and they will imitate some of their traditions, customs, and activities—much like the way that a master folk singer or a master storyteller or a master craftsperson will learn through the process of observation and imitation. That's what we do at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which has become now the largest annual cultural event in Washington, D.C.

One of the pleasures of working at the Festival is that every year we're doing something different. I've been a curator since the year 2003, and during that time I have worked on programs dealing with World War Two, the U.S. Forest Service, the province of Alberta, Canada, the Mekong River region, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the U.S. Peace Corps agency, and with Hungary, China, circus arts, and Armenia.

This, for me, is the great pleasure of working at CFCH because every year we are learning new things and working on new programs. Of course, in the last two years of 2020 and 2021, because of the coronavirus pandemic, we had to switch to programs we're calling "Beyond the Mall." These are virtual programs, rather than in-person programs. But we're hoping in 2022 to return to live in-person programs on the National Mall.

One of my favorite programs was what we did in 2007—a program on the Mekong River region featuring five countries: Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and China’s Yunnan Province, all of which share cultural traditions, by virtue of their being along the Mekong River. In this photograph from the Mekong River program in 2007, you see the Bahnar Rangao people who came from the central highlands of Vietnam. We brought them from Vietnam to Washington, D.C. In fact, when they came to Washington, most of them had never been out of Vietnam. Many of them had never even been to the capital Hanoi, which they visited for the first time to get their passports and visas, so they could come to the United States and participate in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Even though they had never been outside their country, or never been to Washington, D.C., before, when they came to the National Mall in Washington, they realized how important this space was. They realized the ways in which we were honoring them and their cultural traditions. I think it gave them a sense of renewed pride in their own culture and their own traditions. This is how we use the significance of the National Mall and its status to communicate important messages, much like the way that Martin Luther King used the National Mall to communicate his message about “I have a dream.”

One of the most important functions of the Folklife Festival is to develop this sense of pride in your community and pride in your traditions. That’s why we say that we are building understanding, and that we are strengthening communities. I think that we certainly strengthened the community of the Bahnar Rangao people by bringing them to the Mekong River program in 2007 at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

What we do at the Festival is we allow artists, musicians, and culture bearers to perform, to cook, to demonstrate, to narrate, to illustrate, and speak for themselves. That’s also a very important element of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. We do not tell participants what to say. Rather, we allow them to speak for themselves and to present their traditions. These traditions come from the grassroots. It is not the Smithsonian imposing its view, but rather letting the participants and the community speak for themselves, and to have conversations when they speak with our visitors. Which brings me back to the title of my lecture, which is “Cultural Conversations at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and Beyond.”

We as curators are always trying to foster these types of cultural conversations. We want people to speak with our visitors, but always to speak for themselves. This is another way of talking about culture of the people, by the people, and for the people—the idea of cultural democracy—rather than a top-down, authoritarian dynamic. We represent the communities and their traditional cultures for a diverse public that may be half a million to one million visitors. I think that is a very diverse group of people. We know that most of our visitors—meaning about fifty to sixty percent—come from the Washington, D.C., area. But we also get a

lot of people who are visiting from other places within the United States and places around the world. They come to the Folklife Festival precisely so they can engage in these cultural conversations that we as curators, try to stimulate.

How do we do this? One way at the Festival is through what we call our discussion stages. The discussion stages are venues where people can discuss contemporary cultural issues about their cultural heritage, and to do so in ways that preserve, promote, and maintain their cultural heritage.

One of my favorite examples of these conversations on our discussion stages comes from the Folklife Festival in 2008, when we had three programs: NASA, or National Aeronautics and Space Administration; Bhutan, the tiny kingdom between China and India; and the state of Texas in the United States. In many of our discussions on these discussion stages, we brought together participants from all three programs. That is, we had participants from NASA and from Texas and from Bhutan. One of my favorite conversations was about food in remote places. That is, we had astronauts talking about food from the International Space Station in space, which is a remote place. We had participants from Bhutan talking about food in some of the remote places of Bhutan. And we had participants from some of the remote areas of Texas. All talking about, how do you prepare food in these remote places?

A second conversation on the discussion stage that brought people together was talking about boots. We had the astronauts talking about their space boots. We had the Bhutanese talking about Bhutanese boots, which are very elaborately crafted boots. And we had Texans talking about their Texan boots—all talking about the similarities, the shared humanity of NASA astronauts, Bhutanese, and Texans. We also had a conversation with Bhutanese monks talking with NASA astronauts about their conceptions of the heavens. The NASA astronauts had been in space and the Bhutanese had not, but they were able to talk about their similar conceptions. That's one of the things we do at the Folklife Festival is bring people together for these cultural conversations.

Another element of the Festival is that through crafts and artistry we illustrate the ongoing contemporary creativity that is rooted in tradition. One of my favorite examples is from the Folklife Festival in 2002, when we featured the Silk Road—roughly twenty-five countries along the Silk Road from China, Japan, and Korea in the east, all the way to Venice, Italy, in the West, through Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, all the -stans. One of the things that we brought to illustrate this movement along the Silk Road was beautifully painted truck that came from Karachi, Pakistan. In fact, our researcher Mark

Kenoyer from the University of Wisconsin, went to Karachi and his mission was to purchase a great example of a painted truck for transportation along the Silk Road.

Through Mark's tremendous efforts and a wonderful shipping company we got this truck from Karachi to Washington, D.C. I was one of those who worked on transporting the truck from Karachi to the United States. We not only brought the truck, we also brought the painter Haider Ali, and the metal fabricator Jamil Uddin, the two people who had created this object. They were there to talk with our visitors, to share their culture and their traditions. We had a translator who translated from Urdu to English, so that our visitors could have a direct cultural conversation with the painter, and the fabricator. This object obviously attracted a lot of attention, and people wanted to talk to Haider Ali, and Jamil Uddin. You could see it for meters around.

We not only brought the painted truck, we also brought camels, because historically camels were the main means of transportation along the Silk Road. Because of regulations concerning health, we could not bring animals from Central Asia, but we found Bactrian camels in the state of Texas, with an organization called the Texas Camel Corps. You'll sometimes see photographs from the Festival of camels juxtaposed with our painted truck—two very different types of transportation. But both are traditional means of transportation along the Silk Road and were ways in which we were able to connect cultures.

Something else about the *Silk Road* Festival is that it took place in June and July of 2002, which means it was the first Folklife Festival, to take place after what happened on September 11, 2001, with the attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. But the idea of this Festival was not to show hostility, but rather to show ways in which people could come together and connect through their traditional cultures, bringing them together, to show this idea of reinforcing our shared humanity. This was probably our most successful Folklife Festival ever, with more than one million visitors attended. So we bring craft objects like the painted truck and we bring artists like the painter and the metal fabricator to demonstrate and to share their traditions.

We also have what we call foodways demonstrations, to demonstrate the traditions of food. In this photograph taken from the China program in 2014. you'll see they're making Miao-style poached sour beef. For our foodways traditions, it's much more than just the food, and it's more than just the recipe. It's about the culture and the underlying traditions, and so we bring people to talk about the traditions of the way that you present and prepare and consume the food in your home. As a general rule, we do not bring professional chefs, but rather more ordinary people who learn their foodways traditions from their parents or their grandparents,



or from other members of their communities. They are people who are able to talk about the significance of food, because everybody eats; everybody has some foodways story.

Our foodways demonstrations are very popular because it's something that everybody can relate to. It's this idea of reinforcing our shared humanity. You may not know how to cook Miao-style poached sour beef, but you understand what it's about. Our visitors are fascinated by our foodways demonstrations. You'll see in this photograph that there's a mirror on top so that you can watch the chef prepare the dish from a distance. The mirror reflects down on what the chef is doing in terms of mixing, and frying, and stirring a dash of this, and a dash of that.

Musical performances are also a very important part of our Smithsonian Folklife Festival. This photograph shows the Dimen Dong Folk Chorus, which came in 2013 as a preview of the China program that we did in 2014. We have some wonderful recordings of the Dimen Dong.

Also in that same year, in 2013, we featured members of the Siletz Dee-Ni community from the Oregon coast, the West Coast of the United States. They were part of a program we called *One World, Many Voices* that looked at endangered languages around the world. The Siletz Dee-Ni were one of those communities where at one point they were down to very few fluent speakers of the language. But thanks to efforts to preserve and promote that language, it's had a bit of a renaissance. We brought members of that community from the Siletz Dee-Ni to the Folklife Festival to talk about their successful efforts to promote and preserve their linguistic heritage.

Another part of the Folklife Festival is that we always have a Marketplace where we sell craft items that are produced by the people that we bring to the Festival. This shows a sample of items for our Marketplace in 2014, when we featured China and Kenya. You'll notice at the top are kites from China. In fact, that year we had a fourth-generation kite maker from Beijing. Mr. Ha Yiqi, whose family has been making kites in Beijing since the late nineteenth century. He's someone who studied and who inherited this rich tradition of kite making. We were able to sell his kites in our Marketplace. And not just kites but also basketry, engraving, etchings, and embroidery. The Marketplace at the Festival is a wonderful opportunity, both for the artists to sell their items and for our visitors who want something genuine. Our visitors can not only purchase the item, but also meet the person who made the object they are acquiring and have one of these cultural conversations, which we try to promote and foster at our Festival.

Another element of the Folklife Festival are what we call iconic objects, which are often large installations. One of those installations, which you see here, is a flower plaque, which is a traditional installation from southern China and Hong Kong, made from bamboo, often to mark

an important event in the community. At the 2014 Festival, we had people build this bamboo flower plaque. It was more than thirty meters tall and about a hundred meters long or wide. We brought Danny Ning Tsun Yung, the person who designed it. We brought the team from the Wing Kei Flower Shop in Hong Kong, who build these flower plaques as part of their traditions. They were there at the Festival, not only to demonstrate the building of this amazing object that you could see from far away. It was the first thing you saw when you came out of the Washington Metro system. They were there to demonstrate their building techniques, their design techniques, and to share their knowledge and their skills with our visitors through these cultural conversations. In the case of the flower plaque, the bamboo came to Washington, but all the bamboo had to go back to Hong Kong. That was one of the conditions with our U.S. Department of Agriculture: that everything that came had to go back. We had a permit for the temporary loan of the bamboo. It came by ship and then by truck, and it went back by truck and by ship.

Another iconic object comes from the Festival in 1999, when we did a program on Romania. We built a traditional wooden church from Romania on the National Mall. Another example is from the Festival in 2008, when we built a Bhutanese temple. It was originally built in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, then disassembled and shipped to the United States, where it was reassembled on the National Mall during the Folklife Festival in 2008 and subsequently disassembled and in this case shipped to El Paso, Texas, where it is now today on the campus of the University of Texas at El Paso. We love for these objects to have an extended life.

Our Festivals are always built on research, and this is a photograph of me from the year 2013 with our program coordinator Li Jing, who was based in Beijing, as we were doing research for the China Festival in 2014. Both myself and my co-curator Sojin Kim made several trips to China to identify the participants that we would bring to the United States for the Folklife Festival, as exemplars of Chinese cultural heritage and tradition. We were part of a very large team of people, including speakers of Mandarin or speakers of Cantonese, who helped us in the research and production of our Folklife Festival program on China.

I think for the last part I'm going to focus more on this idea of cultural conversations, when our Festival participants speak directly with our visitors. In this photograph, the man you see on the left is Nathan Jackson, a Native American participant, Tlingit, from the state of Alaska. He builds these amazing totem poles, which are wooden structures, that are maybe five or ten meters tall. So here is Mr. Jackson, who also is the winner of a National Heritage Fellowship, which is the highest honor that we have in the United States for the folk and traditional arts, talking about his methods. Unlike any museum where they'll say don't touch, don't touch here, the Folklife Festival encourages you to touch because you can learn through that sense of touch.

This photograph shows participants from the program on Tibetan culture in the year 2000. The idea is to attract our visitors by showing them something they may not have seen or may not understand. We're helping to build understanding and to share that knowledge, and information with them directly.

This photograph is from the program in 2005 on the U.S. Forest Service. It shows Keith Bear, who is Native American from the Three Affiliated Tribes: Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara in North Dakota. He was there to talk about his traditions of flute playing and flute making. Look at the expressions on the two girls on the right there, you know you can see their rapt attention as Keith Bear is sharing his traditions. We love to get younger visitors involved and touching, using their senses. The younger the better, to get them learning at an early age about these traditions.

Here's another photograph from the Mekong River program in 2007. The man on the right is Naxi Dongba, talking about his traditions, with the visitors and you can see that connection. Yes, there is a table between them, but the table is not there to separate. It's just a handy place on which we can place materials. The idea is to engage people directly, because we feel that's the best way to learn, face to face and learning directly from each other.

In fact, for this lecture, I wish I could be talking directly with you. But instead we're trying a different technology with these digital lectures. But for our Festivals, the optimum learning occurs face to face, without mediation. You're not looking at a telephone in your hand; you're not interacting remotely with someone who's in another location. Rather, you are looking at another person directly, and you can see the way that they are engaging by their facial expressions.

Another photograph, also from our Forest Service program, shows people touching the animal furs. At the Festival, you get to touch the furs to learn about the different animals to which these furs belonged. Another photograph from the Mekong River program shows lots of fish traps. We had fish traps from all five countries—Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, China, and Vietnam—to show the different types of fish traps all in one tent. So you could see the different traditions and talk with the fish-trap makers.

Also, at the Festival we always try to get people dancing. This is a photograph from our Hungary program in 2013. Dance is a very important element in Hungarian tradition. You can see people on the left wearing their dance costumes from Hungary. They're actually from a region of Transylvania that is now in Romania, but they are ethnic Hungarians, who are teaching our visitors some of the dance steps. We even built a dance barn—an amazing structure that we

built and afterwards disassembled and then sent to a Hungarian American camp in the state of New York.

More from the Forest Service: in this photograph, you see the use of a cross-saw. The woman on the left with the orange hard hat is a visitor; the man on the right with the green hard hat is a Forest Service participant. The idea is to get our visitors learning what it's like. Because until you've operated one of these cross-saws, you really don't know how difficult it is to use one, which brings us back to cultural conversations.

As I'm coming to an end, I should say that although the Festival takes place on the National Mall for ten days, we always like for the Festival to live on and endure. Thanks to the internet and the world wide web, we can place videos and other visual materials from the Festival to continue. Here's a website that I recommend through [asia.si.edu](http://asia.si.edu) that you see on the screen. It's where CFCH worked with our Freer and Sackler Galleries, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, to post videos from our 2014 Folklife Festival program on China, including videos about the flower plaque that I discussed, as well as videos about bronze making, pottery, Chinese opera. It's all there with translation in Mandarin.

To conclude and just to sum up some of the most important points: the mission of the Smithsonian is to promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge. The mission of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage is that through the power of culture, we build understanding, strengthen communities, and reinforce our shared humanity. The ideas of the Festival are a museum without walls; festival as a verb; culture of the people, by the people, and for the people; and promoting contemporary grassroots cultural traditions, not only in the United States.

I hope that this lecture has given you a better understanding of the work that we do of promoting cultural heritage in diverse communities. I hope also that you'll have a chance to participate in one of our question-and-answer periods. You'll find more information about when the Q&A will take place. Here's a final slide showing my contact information and my email address. Please feel free to reach out. Stay tuned. Thank you for your attention and take care.

## 2. The Presentation of Artisans: The Community as Museum Space

Hello, my name is Dr. Diana Baird N'Diaye, and I'm a senior curator and cultural heritage specialist at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. I am also a textile artist inspired by the needlework traditions of my family and community.

This presentation will discuss how museums can forge relationships and collaboratively developed projects with people outside of the museum in local neighborhood settings to create programs of outreach and mutual engagement.

I'm going to talk about three things, therefore: bringing community into the museum space before museum presentations in new ways as partners, planners, experts, and participants.

Secondly, I want to talk about taking the museum out to the community. And that's planning programs of community engagement through projects and events that may bring some of the things presented at the museum that revolve around issues of heritage and in folklife outside the museum.

Finally, I'm going to talk about the dynamic forging and maintaining museum and community relationships. I am going to speak about this based on some of the programs that I have curated or led in about three decades of being at the Smithsonian Folklife program and Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Community engagement is one of the pillars of the Folklife Festival. And there are three aspects to the way that these programs are developed. Before the Festival, in the *Will to Adorn* program for example, we worked with a variety of researchers. Some of them were folklorists and had degrees or museum staff. Others were students. Others were people within the community: educators, as well as cultural practitioners themselves who wanted to learn how to document their own communities. Others were just interested in making sure that if we were presenting their community at the Festival, we were able to present it in a way that reflected what they see as the important aspects.

So, we formed study groups in various cities, and we went into art studios, we went to barber shops, we went to beauty parlors. We went to the places where people had fashion shows to show off the work of designers or people who made and designed their clothing. We looked at the venues where clothing was worn and performed. So, we looked at a range of culture that

related to dressing. We did this with an eye towards thinking about what we would present at the Festival. Our philosophy was that there's no folklore without the folk, or nothing about the community without the community's involvement.

So, we even started with writing our own autobiographies of dress. We started thinking about what messages we received when we were young, and what messages we received from our parents, from the people in our community, and what were the values that they were passing on. What were the criteria for beauty? What were the events that we went to that highlighted dress and adornment?

So coming back to the table with the stories and narratives from all over the communities, all over the cities, as well as our own stories, that was the first step in engaging community, and really thinking about the role of the dress within in African American community.

These stories, reflections, and images and videos were recorded. They were brought together in an archive, and we discussed them. We discussed the values that these icons of dress represented. Who were the best dressers in the community and why? And all of these, the answers to these questions, helped to shape the Festival.

Another way that this could have happened might have been to send out only seasoned researchers or only museum staff members. But if we did, we would have created a much less vibrant Festival and experience. So, the first pillar of community engagement is what takes place before the exhibition and when people go into the community and come back.

The second pillar of community engagement takes place at the Festival. In the case of *The Will to Adorn*, we had members of the various communities that were represented present their communities both on the narrative stages and on the stage as performances, and also in discussion. Our discussions might have ranged from the way that religion, or faith, has a role to play in how people dress, to the ways that people who were artisans of style sustain themselves as makers within the community. Who are the customers? How did they make a living while preserving and carrying on the culture of, let's say, hair braiding or hairstyling, or creating specialized clothing?

Another topic that came up at the Festival had to do with how artisans of style have people who had knowledge about dress and hairstyling and leather working. Some pass that knowledge onto others, whether they be people of a new generation, younger generation, or to people who were new to a tradition.

As part of the Crafts of African Fashion project, which looks at the ways that artisans are involved with creating the things that people wear on the African continent and in the African diaspora. One of our programs that I guess links *Will to Adorn* and the *Crafts of African Fashion* was with a metalsmith, a woman metalsmith, who was African American but who studied metalsmithing in West Africa, in Senegal. Some of the questions we asked about were, what she talked about was how learning metalsmithing in Senegal as a woman was quite a challenge, because traditionally only men learn metalsmithing.

But we also learned from her how she was taking the knowledge that she had acquired to expand the tradition to teaching women the art of metalsmithing. Women are often the recipients, the wearers of jewelry or gold, especially gold and silver jewelry, but this was an innovation on the tradition. So the ways in which community agency came into play there was not only in the interest in sharing this knowledge, which has to do with something that might take place during a Festival, but also in the ways that people would connect with others, who had similar concerns, or were learning about similar conditions, during the Festival. So, this is a really important aspect of community engagement, how the Festival connects people who have one cultural experience to people who may have a different cultural experience but that may be parallel.

At the *Will to Adorn* program, we were paired with people who were participating in a language program but also included artisans of style, people who made either clothing or are interested in the culture of dress. So, the opportunities to bring people together and to convene in a museum setting is another aspect of community engagement which takes place during a Folklife Festival.

The third context for community engagement that translates to the museum experience takes place after the Folklife Festival, when participants who are the cultural practitioners, the cultural experts who have been involved in sharing what they do, with others in a public setting. At that time, people may choose to create their own experiences right there in their own studios, or in their own places of gathering within the community, and they may do so with the assistance of museum staff or with the encouragement of Festival staff.

Some of the things that come out of the Festival with *The Will to Adorn*: we were able to work with museums that had their own youth programs and replicated their whole research process, where they had students go out and follow the same set of inquiries that we made to create the Festival. But they did it at home, in their own communities, and they used that as a learning experience and then created mini festivals or, in some cases, exhibitions.

At the Institute of Texan Cultures, for example, the museum staff worked with young people in internships in their community to interview someone who was a “sneakerhead,” someone who collected sneakers and who knew everything there was to know about the culture of wearing sneakers. Who are the people nationwide who are the inspiration for sneakers? Who helped to develop sneakers? What were the sneakers that were popular at different stages? After sneakers which were tennis shoes came into use, and had a collection, which he then presented back at the museum.

There was another gentleman in San Antonio, Texas, who collected shirts made of different African textiles and made in different places. Wherever he traveled on the African continent, he would bring back a shirt that would become part of his curated wardrobe. And so at the museum and at community get-togethers, the young people who were trained through the *Will to Adorn* program were able to introduce him, share their experience, and have him share his experience with the community members. So that is only one place.

In other programs, people went to each other’s fashion shows, went to each other’s presentations of dress. Fashion shows are like visual concerts in many African American communities. So there are all sorts of fashion shows that they placed, and each community may have its own style of dress. We saw at the Festival, there were fashion shows that were presented by church communities, showing off the beautiful hats that are part of the culture of wearing hats in church as to show respect for religion, to present oneself in a way that is, as they would say, pleasing to the Lord.

There are fashion shows that are created to raise funds for community. With the *Will to Adorn* program, we had fashion shows of church hats, hats that people wore to churches, but we also invited the milliners. And the church fashion shows that always have the people who create the hats to come to the shows. But there is opportunity to sit down and discuss the meaning of these church fashion shows. After the Festival, some of these presentations were created in community libraries, other venues that allowed more people to engage in the conversation about the role of the hats in African American heritage.

The Festival and also museum programs are the spaces for community engagement, both before, during, and after community events. There are things that we can learn about the importance of creating a venue where people feel comfortable as part of the museum, feel welcomed by the museum, but also are able to learn about techniques and practices of presenting, of looking at traditions in new ways, and in presenting back to their own community.



Like the *Will to Adorn* project, the *Crafts of African Fashion* project, the *African Immigrant* project, the museum project can also facilitate community and individual agency about the content of what is presented at the museum, but also the way that they are presenting the material and presenting their own perspectives.

Significantly, we took advantage of technologies that are now readily available. Some of the research by communities was done on iPhones and iPads and included social media. Some of the ways that people presented back were through things like through social media, through virtual conferencing, and through the growing recording quality and capacity of mobile tools, which we used to link together several community-centered research communities.

Some suggested strategies for community engagement: first of all, at the beginning of projects, get to know your constituents. Get to know who is interested in documenting community life. Who are the cultural practitioners that are respected within the community? Invite the communities' representatives into the research and planning process. Provide training, cultural documentation, and orientation for community students and cultural groups, co-create museum programs and neighborhood spaces, as well as at the museum.

And finally, evaluate, revise, and build on programs that you've created, because it's a matter of a learning curve, that navigating through collaborative community documentation project is always fraught with negotiation for space with difficulties. Sometimes it's very important for people to know who the museum is and to trust the museum, that the materials are being honored and respected and the people are being honored and respected. The people who are involved are being honored and respected.

Many times, community scholars or community researchers find the research process very challenging. Mastering the cameras and other recording equipment prove frustrating for many people. Frustrating for me as well, even as someone who's done this quite a bit.

Furthermore, community researchers often didn't expect, and neither did we, that even if you are a practitioner who's respected in the community, sometimes you'd have to establish a real rapport with members of your own community. Even though they were well respected for a while, it was difficult to convince members of the community that researchers were not just trying to get information to use commercially. So the level of trust that is part of engaging in community work is very, very important.

So the decision to meet outside the museum can be a very important one, symbolic of determination to maintain the community center core. Other things are, obviously, there are

always political challenges. There are bureaucratic challenges. It's important for museum staff to go into this with a little knowledge.

This work is very intensive, in terms of dealing with the day-to-day basis. Staff burnout is one of the factors that museum staff need to consider. You are interacting not only with objects in the collection, but you're having constant conversations with people about things that are very meaningful and need to be presented in a way that those cultural practitioners know, respect what they do, and how they do it, and the cultural aspects of this are quite important.

Finally, maintaining relationships with the community is a very important aspect of these projects within a particular place, especially if you're going outside of the museum.

When we closed the *African Immigrant Folklife* program, as well as when we closed the *Will to Adorn* program, it was clear that the program had made a significant impact, that people wanted to continue the relationship, that people wanted to do new things, both the cultural practitioners and people who had attended the Festival programs. Many people continued to be involved and to meet, for several years, to discuss new collaborative programs of their own.

When we did the *African Immigrant* program in 1997, an oud musician from Somalia, living in the United States, Hassan Gure, and Ghanaian drummers Kofi Dennis and Kwame Ansah-Brew performed together on several occasions, at cultural and social events of the D.C. area.

At the fiftieth commemoration of the March on Washington, commemorating the march led by Martin Luther King for justice and civil rights, one of the community scholars and community organizers wore the T shirt from the *Will to Adorn* project, because she said that being involved in the project, working with young people, and talking about and organizing the fashion shows which were celebrating and learning about African American heritage is one of the ways that she saw herself as an activist.

So, there are ways that we can encourage, perhaps through bringing people back to the museum periodically, by sharing what we learned from working with the communities within our particular neighborhoods, within our particular museum constituencies, that help to carry on the work.

Finally, it's my conviction that, notwithstanding the cultural and the social complexities, contradictions, sometimes the missteps that are part of real-life practice, that the Folklife Festival and the extensions into the community can be a means to facilitate shared ownership of the curatorial role, the research role, to really create the programs that are of the people, by

the people, for the people, and that are continued to help to sustain the important heritage of a group, of a community, of a neighborhood, of a nation, and of humanity. Thank you.

### **3. Incorporating Language Diversity into Cultural Heritage Research and Presentations**

Hello, my name is Mary Linn, and I am a curator of language and cultural vitality at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. I have a PhD in linguistics, and I was trained to document and describe Indigenous and minority languages, especially those in the United States. And I have written a grammar and dictionary of a small Native American language.

I also trained community people in linguistics and language teaching, so that they may work on their languages and help keep their languages alive and being used in daily use. And I have also been a linguist in a museum for nearly twenty years, where I have started collections of Native American languages, trained community members to use museum collections, and help people represent their languages and cultures to the larger public audience.

My lecture is on minority languages and museums. First, I will introduce the idea of language endangerment and the crisis of language shift in the world today. We will see why the loss of languages is important to museum professionals and discuss how your work can help minority languages, even if you're not a linguist.

Then I want to encourage you to participate actively in video documentation of traditional cultures and languages. We will look a little bit at why to collect, what to collect, and how to collect. In particular, we will look at a re-elicitation task that is used by linguists to get richer linguistic data out of cultural documentation.

The world has about 7,000 languages. We think that this is about the rough number of languages that the world has always had when we look at historical documentation. However, right now, the world is experiencing a major crisis in the loss of human languages. Right now, nearly ninety percent of the world's languages are in some degree of danger of disappearing. This means the speakers gradually shift to a majority language. This can happen in one generation, especially in context of immigration and urbanization, or it can happen gradually over many generations of being a minority language and culture.

Among a majority language and culture, minority languages generally have fewer economic and educational opportunities that help keep them alive, and keep people from shifting to the majority languages, but the end result is that languages and cultures that they express are being lost.

Let's look at this map of language diversity and language loss in 1920. The dark green areas are language areas of diversity that have kept their languages. The lighter areas, the yellow and oranges, are those that have lost nearly twenty to thirty-three to fifty percent in some cases, already by the 1920s. You can see that the areas of long and intense colonialization from England are the main areas of language loss, such as the United States and Australia.

Let's jump ahead at seventy-five years later, and the world has experienced quite a few years of global economics by this time, and you can see the situation is dire. Those areas that had fifty percent language loss now have up to ninety percent language loss. And you can see that that fewer areas are actually not affected by language loss, Asia, now has more areas of yellow, as do most of South America as well.

Now let's look ahead, only twenty-five years to the present. This map is from 2019. You can see that, at this point, almost every area of the world is affected with the majority being up to thirty-three to ninety percent. The only green areas are those that are areas of more isolation, such as Greenland and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa or areas of low linguistic diversity to begin with, and therefore not experienced as much loss, such as Belgium or Saudi Arabia. Also, if you look at New Zealand, which is green—that is because they have reversed the language shift, and Māori is doing much better than it was twenty-five and fifty years ago.

Now let's talk about language diversity in China. China has 297 languages. It contains approximately thirteen percent of Asian languages. This diversity broadly follows global patterns as well, with higher diversity in the southern tropical regions, such as Yunnan Province, than in the north, and in higher diversities of biodiverse mountainous areas, such as the Tibetan Plateau.

If we look at this map of language density in China, the darker shading signifies large numbers of languages spoken in that province. For example, we can contrast the 155 languages spoken in Yunnan Province, or for about one in about every 300 people, with only eight languages, or one in every 4.7 million people that are spoken in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang.

Now let's look even closer at the languages of this issue of Sichuan Province, and that is what's called the ethnic corridor. You can see the larger languages, the Tibetan languages Amdo and Kham. The majority language, Mandarin Chinese, and Sichuan dialect, and the larger minority language, Yi to the south that extends into Yunnan Province. But in the middle you can see lots of smaller languages that we're going to be calling Tibetic languages. When we talk about minority languages in Tibetan areas of China, we often refer to minority Tibetic languages. This

includes Tibetan languages and non-Tibetan languages that are spoken by people who are culturally Tibetan.

Let's look at these minority Tibetan languages. There's two ways we can look at this. One are Tibetan languages that are very small— by Tibetan languages where these are related to each other. These include large or majority Tibetan languages, such as Amdo and Kham, and the Lhasa Tibetan dialect as well. It also includes some of those smaller or minority Tibetan languages. Naxi in the south, and it goes into Yunnan Province. And the unrecognized variations of Naxi la say, Mel masa, and there's also unnamed Tibetan languages, such as the variety that spoken around Lhagang Monastery in western Sichuan. There's also a Tibetic spoken in Shaowa township in southern Gansu Province. This is a Tibetan language, although the people do not consider themselves ethnic Tibetan. So we can see among the Tibetan languages, there's a wide variety of size of speakers.

Another way we can look at minority Tibetan languages are non-Tibetan languages that are not related to Tibetan, but they are spoken in Tibetic areas, or they consider themselves culturally Tibetan. Some examples of these are Khroskyabs, or Lavrung, Ersu, and Zhaba. Minority Tibetan languages, as well as minority and local or small languages around the world, are endangered. The younger generations are ceasing to speak their heritage languages, and they cease to pass them down to their children. In other words, they are shifting to larger culturally and economically more prestigious languages. As these generations grow older, the languages cease to be spoken on a daily basis. And when the last people of this last speaking generation dies, the language falls silent, unless we do something about this.

What do we lose when we lose a language? Well, we can look at this at human scientific and cultural levels. One of the most important things that we lose, our people's identities, can be on many different levels. It can be ethnic or subethnic, can be regional, local, religious, class, family, or clan, or even polity base or metropolitan or village base. The loss of identity has intergenerational impact on health and well-being, including lower graduation rates and higher cases of diabetes, alcoholism and drug abuse, and suicide rates in societies that have or are experiencing language loss. The opposite of this is also true. Those cultures that are reviving their languages are experiencing high rates of graduation and lowering rates of health and abuse issues.

When we lose a language, we also lose the traditional ecological knowledge, or how to care for the land, how to use resources from the land to live, including food and shelter and medicine. The loss of traditional ecological knowledge and oral traditions to pass on knowledge are associated with the degradation of local economies, traditional ways of making a living, while

living in situ, such as farming, pastoral care hunting, fishing, gathering, and the many works of artisans. For example, people may cease to know where certain grasses are located, or which grasses to use for traditional basket making or mat making or house making.

We also lose larger scientific knowledge for the rest of the world. When we lose languages, we also lose a trove of this intellectual knowledge. And we also lose how human languages work and our larger knowledge of what it means to be human, and how the human brain works with language. The linguist Ken Hale once said the loss of local languages and of the cultural systems which they express has meant irretrievable loss of diverse and interesting intellectual wealth. When you lose a language, a large part of the culture goes too, because much of that culture is encoded in the language.

So now that we understand a little bit about language endangerment and language loss, we may ask, “Well, as museum professionals, what can we do?” We’re not trained as linguists, and we’re not language teachers. Museums, special collections, libraries, and archives are called memory institutions. As such, museums house more than just objects, but we may collect memories and knowledge about the cultures that made and use these objects. After all, what good is an object if we don’t know who made it, how it was made, what it was for, how people felt about it? Was it beautiful? Was it just functional? Was it spiritual? Was it a bad example of that object? And what was it called?

Language is the basis for culture, and as museum professionals, it is our job to safeguard cultures and memories. We can take care of the collections that we have, but we can also actively shape our collections. We can do this in two main ways. By working with researchers and community members who are documenting today, we can make sure that their documentation collections are properly housed, archived, and accessible. And we can do this by actively video recording traditional culture ourselves.

It is especially important to create a record when traditional ways are changing fast and being lost. This is called primary documentation then, and it is a research basis for current exhibits, folklife festivals, and living museums. And as we see, it can be repurposed for maintaining minority languages, reversing shift of minority languages to majority languages, and reviving silent languages. In other words, you are creating a record for many generations to come.

What should you record? Well, we really want to record the process of making material culture, such as craft—for example, textiles, basketry, the instruments used to do farming or pastoral care, tools, kitchenware. We want to record ritual objects and decorations and ritual costuming as well. We want to look at architectures, your houses, even the individual parts of it, such as

frames and mantels. We want to look at foodways as well. What are people eating? How do they prepare it? What do they eat on special days? We also want to look at intangible cultural heritage. This is the knowledge and skills that are needed to produce material culture and lifeways. We want to look at oral traditions such as legends and historical narratives, for sure, but also include other things like jokes and insults and children's games. We want to look at the performing arts, music, dance, theater, rituals, festival events, big pageantry, but also the small everyday practices. We want to look at the knowledge concerning nature and the universe, this traditional ecological knowledge that underlies a lot of the other knowledge. In other words, take a walk with an elder and talk about the plants around you and how they can be used.

That's a good place to start, but there's a lot there that I just mentioned. So, how do you know what to record? I suggest working with the community that the language is situated in. We call this the source community. The source community, or people whose languages and cultures you are recording and whose objects are housed in your collections and represented in your exhibits. These are your main community ties. Involve the community and what to record from the very beginning. Creating video documentation with community members and in the community often leads to record recording, more than what you the researcher has ever had in mind. What you end up recording is what people feel is the most important to them to record, not necessarily what the researcher feels is the most important. This creates a more meaningful and useful documentation. We don't want to record just the exotic but the everyday. This is particular for helping revive languages which really need documentation of the everyday use of language.

I want to look at an example. A young linguist named Yulha has gone to the University of Oregon to learn how to be a linguist. She's from the Khroskryabs community. This language used to be called Lavrung, or you may know it as that as well. As a linguist, she began recording people in her community and her village, and this became the basis of her documentation work. The language is an unwritten language, and unwritten languages are even more susceptible to language shift and loss because they don't have the underlying documentation, they are generally not used in educational systems, and they're often considered just poor dialects of a language that is written.

When she was at the University of Oregon, she started sending back some audio tapes of her narrating her life in Oregon, and she sent them back to her family, and these got spread around in her village. She ultimately ended up making a series of videos to send back to her community in the same way, things that she was interested in and things that the community was interested in knowing about her life in the United States. This is a wonderful example of documenting what is needed and wanted in a community. It may seem very little to videotape



on your cell phone and send it through WeChat, but it really does make a difference and is the underlying basis of a lot of work that is being done today on the language.

Let's talk a little bit about archives. A language archive is often situated in a museum or a special collections in a library. Language archives are slightly different than most archives in that they contain generally primary and secondary language materials. Primary documentation includes the audio and video with spoken language, documents or books written in language, and elicitation work by a linguist, such as what Yu Lha was doing. Secondary documentation includes grammars and dictionaries and teaching grammars that are written about the language. Any primary recordings can be used later by communities and linguists for secondary documentation for teaching materials, for creating children's story books. And the list goes on and can be used for almost anything else.

Most museums and special collections don't have a specific language archive, and you may never be tasked with making a specific language archive, but primary language can be found throughout other areas of museums as well. In particular, language is often found in early maps and in genealogical records. On the screen, you can see a photograph of Mrs. Charmaine Baker. She is a Ponca researcher, and she was working in the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution. She didn't find much on her language until we looked at maps. She is holding up a map, a hand-drawn map of a river in Nebraska, a state in the United States, that has the names of the Ponco villages on them, and other Ponco information.

Another place that you can find language already in your collections are in biological collections. Often identification tags and field journals or sketchbooks will have Native or Indigenous names of the items in it as well. For example, you can see on your screen a very early sketchbook by Philip George Frederick from about 1736. He went to the United— it wasn't the United States yet. He went to Georgia, and he started drawing the flora and fauna around him. Besides writing in Latin and in German, he also recorded the Creek Native American language, and the Yuchi Native American language. In the case of Yuchi, this is the earliest known documentation of the language.

You may not be able to build a language archive, but you can keep language in mind and create language-rich materials as you build other collections. When you video record traditional culture, you are usually recording language as well. When you record, this documentation becomes part of the permanent record of this culture and its language. You can get natural language data occurring in natural contexts when you record traditional culture, and modern culture, as Yulha did in her voyages in the United States. You can record a variety of speakers,

age, gender, occupations, regions. All of this adds to a really rich linguistic data. The everyday, as I said before, is important.

There's an approach that many people use when their languages fall silent, when they no longer have fluent first-language speakers alive, are using the language daily. They have to fall back on documentation of the language if they want to revive the language. We have several very successful examples of a language that falls silent and then is later revived again from documentation. Examples of this include modern Israeli Hebrew and the Myaamia language, or Miami language, spoken in the United States now, again, and also the Wampanoag language, which was the first language encountered by English-speaking colonists when they arrived in the United States. It was silent for about a hundred years or more, and it's now being spoken by younger generations.

So, we can say that a language is not "dead," it is not "lost," if the language exists in any kind of usable form. In other words, documentation, and if there is a community that identifies with it and wants to revive it.

So, how do we begin collecting? First, I realize that most of you may not have video training. But we have a handy new Video Production Handbook that talks about videotaping as storytelling, and it introduces the ideas of framing your picture, lighting, and getting the best audio. It is an introduction also to getting informed consent. In other words, getting people's permission to record them and to archive them and to use the recordings. We have this little handbook available in English, Mandarin, and Tibetan, and we encourage you to use this if you are starting and have never done any videotaping before.

In most cases, you're going to work with somebody who is behind a video camera, and you will be the person asking the questions or you will be training a community person to ask these questions. So I'm going to give you a little just kind of down-and-dirty advice on how to do this.

On the screen, you can see a photograph of a young woman who is learning to interview. There's definitely somebody behind the camera, but notice that that she's taking notes, even while she's listening and talking and it's being recorded. And notice on the couch behind them is her cell phone, where she is making a backup recording on her phone. So, the person behind the camera is videotaping and getting the main audio, but she has backup in her cell phone and by taking her notes by hand.

Now let's say you've gone out and taken some really wonderful video that you're very excited about, and you can't wait to use it. You get it back and you listen to it, and you realize it's a

really good documentation, but nobody's really talking in it. In fact, most people don't narrate themselves, their daily lives. If you take a photograph, if you take a video of a woman weaving, she's not talking, generally, about what she's doing while she's doing it.

So we have what is called a stimulus re-elicitation task that we can do in order to get more language data after we've taken the natural videotape of the process. Stimulus re-elicitation is when you watch the video that you've made at the event or process or game with your consultant or consultants. You want to watch the video back with the consultants, at least one, preferably three times, and even more if you can.

The first time you watch, people generally laugh. They're a little embarrassed about seeing themselves. And in this time, you're recording the session of them watching it, and you're able to record the impression of the event or process. Oftentimes what comes out during this first watching is their reaction of whether it was typical or if they did a good job, or what they would like to have seen, done better. But you can also ask them questions afterwards, such as: how did you learn to do this? Do you always do it this way?

The second time you watch it, you want to turn the sound of the video off. Watch it in silence. This time, you want to have the consultant narrate what they're doing. This is not an easy task, and sometimes it takes them a couple tries. So the second time might take a couple times to get it, so that they feel a little bit more comfortable about it. The point of this is that in narrating what they're doing, they're going to be providing you with specific vocabulary for that task process or event.

The third time you watch the video again, you usually turn the sound off. And this time you stop in different places, and you ask them questions that you have. You ask them specific questions, such as: what are you doing here? For example, if you're talking to a grandmother making something, you may get more specific vocabulary, again, such as "grating" or "beating" or "pulling" something, aligning these kinds of words. You can also stop to ask them specific vocabulary about what they're using, the tools that they're using, such as the part of a loom. What specific type of material are they using? You can also ask them the specific meaning of what they're doing, or what they have made. For example, if there's a certain pattern, does it mean something? If they're using colors, do the colors mean anything?

Let's actually try this once. Let's watch a video of some young men playing a traditional bone game. We're going to watch it first together.

Okay, now that you've watched the video, you might ask them such questions as this: is the typical a typical example of the game, it seemed pretty short. Do you usually play longer? How did you learn how to play the game? How old were you when you first played this game? How many people can play at a time? What is the goal, and what are the rules? Do you always play on a blanket? Is it always played in summer and outside or on special occasions?

Okay, let's watch the video a second time. And this time, I'm going to play the part of the consultant narrating the video. Okay, here I am. It's my turn, and I flicked the bone. It goes off, so I don't get any points. Here's my friend. He's going second. He's crouching down. He's aiming. He shoots. He misses too. My turn again, and I shoot, it goes off the blanket, so it's my turn. I'm going to go, and yet— No, it doesn't work. Actually, I think I hit it a little bit. Yeah, now I missed. Okay. It's my friend's turn again, He always is very careful in his aiming. There he goes. Yep. Here you hit it, so he gets to go again. There you go. And there we go. Nope. Yeah, he's— It's pretty funny. It was a pretty bad shot, so— And I go. Oh, that one hit me. We're laughing about that. Okay. We kind of have a dry spell here. Nobody's really getting anything. And there again. And there we go. I finally got one again. It's my turn. Taking a little bit more time here, and nope, still doesn't work. There we go. It hits in. Okay, we're going to finish this game. We finished it up and put it in the middle so it's ready for the next game to go.

Okay. By doing that narration, we get vocabulary such as “crouch,” crouch down, to aim, to flick, to miss, my turn, to bounce, and other vocabulary like this.

The third time you watch this video, you may stop along the way to ask questions like: what do you call the bones again? Are there names for the scoring or the turns? How do you say out of bounds? Can you lose points? Okay, so you kind of understand this re-elicitation task now.

If you look at the photograph on your screen, you can see a picture of Jiatai, who is using the re-elicitation method in Dawu County and Sichuan Province. He's a young person that's learning to document his language and culture, and he is working with the family in the videotape that he's made. They're going through it using this stimulus re-elicitation. And as you can tell, they're having fun. Stimulus re-elicitation is a fun task. People enjoy seeing themselves, enjoy talking about what they were doing, and the recording that you're making of the re-elicitation task itself becomes a wonderful trove of people talking, laughing, discussing, and negotiating information about what they're looking at.

Re-elicitation does not happen just with videotapes. You can also use this kind of technique to help bring people into your museum, into your collections, and have them talk about the traditional material culture that you have housed in your collection.

On the screen, you can see a photograph of Native Americans in Oklahoma from the Natchez people in the ethnology collections of the Sam Noble Museum in Oklahoma. They're looking at traditional ball sticks. These are sticks that are used to play a traditional ball game. They're talking about the differences in who made what kind of stick, who the potential makers were. The museum didn't know who made them, but the Natchez people did know— recognized people's styles. Notice that they're older people and younger people. They're talking about the ball sticks, the language, and getting the younger people involved as well is really crucial.

Another photograph is a picture of Alutiiq researchers from Kodiak Island in Alaska, and they're at the Smithsonian in the National Museum of Natural History and their collections, and they're looking at some traditional boots and who the makers were, what they were made out of, about when they were made. They also, in looking at the collections, looked at the elliptic lamps. These lamps used whale oil to light the insides of traditional homes, and they were all stored as you see them, with a groove in it to put the whale oil facing up. The young researchers basically told the museum that that was the improper way to store them, that they needed to be stored with the groove facing down, so that the spirit of the lamp could not get out. The museum took them very seriously, and turned all of the traditional Alutiiq lamps the other direction.

So this kind of relationship in going over the items you have in your collection, gets rich linguistic data, it gets a lot of other cultural data, forges a relationship between you and the community, and helps you more properly care for your items.

In conclusion, you as a museum professional are not just housed with taking care of items, but also taking care of the memories around these items. You can be involved in rich cultural documentation that leads to rich language data. You can be involved with the community to participate and engage in your items and the languages. And as such, you are caretakers of the past but also of the future, and importantly, the future of minority languages.

Thank you.

## **4. The Representation of Cultural Heritage through Effective Modes of Presentation and Interpretation**

Hello, my name is Marjorie Hunt, and I'm a folklorist, curator, and education specialist with the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to take part in the digital lecture series on presenting the cultural heritage of diverse communities, given by curators at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

The topic of my lecture is the representation of cultural heritage through effective modes of presentation and interpretation. I will be speaking for the most part about my experiences as a curator at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which, with the exception of these past two pandemic years, has taken place every summer since 1967 outside on the National Mall of the United States in the capital city of Washington, D.C.

But I want to underscore that much of what I will be sharing with you today is transferable to public presentations of cultural heritage and a wide variety of formats and context, whether it's inside a museum, a cultural center or community hall, or outside on the streets of a village, or in a town square.

Each program at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival is unique in terms of its conceptualization, themes, participants, and goals. Each has its own particular set of challenges and constraints. Yet all of the programs share a common overarching goal to provide a platform that enables tradition bearers from diverse communities to speak in their own voices, to present themselves and tell their own stories, to share their cultural traditions skills and values with others.

The great strength of the Festival, what sets it apart from other mediums of communication, such as exhibitions, film, radio, and publications, is the opportunity it offers for face-to-face interaction and exchange, for cultural conversations between traditional practitioners and the public, exchanges that help to bridge cultural differences and foster greater understanding, appreciation, and respect. The same holds true, really, for any type of public-facing program that features cultural practitioners openly sharing what they know and value with an audience.

During my thirty-five years with the Festival, and a myriad of other public programs, I've compiled a continually growing and ever-changing toolkit, a curatorial practice. One of the most important principles that informs my work is the fact that there is a direct relationship between modes of presentation and interpretation at the Festival and the effect of representation of

cultural heritage. How cultural barriers are presented in a program has everything to do with their ability to engage and interact meaningfully with the public and with one another.

No matter how compelling the themes in the message, no matter how virtuosic, eloquent, and dedicated the tradition bears—if modes of presentation and interpretation are not appropriate or effective, impact of the Festival for both the participants and the public is diminished. In other words, the *who*, *what*, and *why* of any given program are all served by the *how*.

As a curator, I believe that one of my most important responsibilities is to give careful thought and attention to what I call the “poetics of presentation,” to the collaborative construction of cultural representations that enable people to share their expressive traditions in a way that conveys meaning and increases public understanding and respect. The bedrock upon which all of this rests is strong field research, documentation, and sustained community engagement. Both of these go hand in hand.

Curating a Festival program is a deeply collaborative process, informed by reciprocal respect and an ethos of mutuality. A curator works together closely with a wide range of people, including community members, fieldworkers, advisors, presenters, designers, editors, technical staff, collaborating partners, administrators, and many others.

As the Center’s director Richard Kurin has emphasized, cultural representations at the Festival are negotiated and emergent. He speaks of the curator’s role as that of a cultural broker, a role that in his words involves active, respectful engagement with communities, so that a particular cultural representation can be presented to an audience in a new setting in an honest way that accurately conveys its meaning.

My lecture looks at how we can accomplish this goal, explores various strategies and modes of presentation and interpretation, and considers some of the ways in which the Festival programs explore various strategies and modes of presentation and interpretation, and considers some of the ways in which Festival programs can best serve the needs and interest of both the participants and the audience.

So first I’d like to turn to program research and planning, especially fieldwork. In my view, the most successful presentations of cultural heritage at the Festival are those that are based on strong research and planning on the front end, especially fieldwork with tradition bearers in their communities. Fieldwork for the Festival provides critically important background information on cultural traditions, communities, and individual practitioners.

It seeks to comprehend the richness and complexity of cultural traditions, so that they can be presented validly and meaningfully in the context of the Festival. Very importantly, it is through careful fieldwork, if it is undertaken with sensitivity and respect, that we are able, ideally, to establish a close collaborative working relationship with community members.

Fieldworkers identify and document potential participants. They conduct audio or video recorded interviews and take photographs of cultural context. They make recommendations for possible presentations, demonstrations, and performances at the Festival, suggest ideas for discussion session topics, outline the steps of a craft process, and provide information about necessary supplies and materials needed for artists and demonstrations. They identify possible items for display and provide key contextual content, both written and visual, for signs, banners, program book articles, web-based media, and other interpretive materials.

One example I can give you from my own experience is the fieldwork I conducted for the 2001 *Masters of the Building Arts* program with Nick Benson, a third-generation stone carver and letterer at the John Stevens Shop, a 300-year-old continuously operating stone carving shop in Newport, Rhode Island. Our colleague in Rhode Island had told me about Nick Benson, that he was a superb craftsman and would be a great potential participant for the building arts program.

So I called Nick and made arrangements to visit him and his shop in Newport and went up to see him with my audio recorder, my camera, and field notebook. I was able to speak with Nick to ask him questions about how he learned his craft and to take me through the process, to tell me about the different tools and techniques that he used. I was able to photograph him at work and observe his techniques. I was able to photograph his amazing workshop, which is just so beautiful and has many, many layers of meaning, as it's been in the family for generations and, as I said, goes back 300 years as a stone carving shop.

And very importantly, I was able to tell from meeting and talking with Nick that he would make a great participant for the Festival, for he was not only highly skilled, really a superb craftsman, but he loved talking about his work and was very comfortable sharing his skills and knowledge, and I could tell that this would be something that he would be happy to do in the context of the Festival, to an audience of thousands of people over the course of ten days.

Field research for the Festival and other public programs differs even from research conducted for an academic publication or scholarly presentation, in that it is primarily directed towards identifying and presenting people who can perform, demonstrate, and explain their culture and folklore to a public audience. The knowledge and understandings of individual practitioners,



cultural traditions, and community priorities that good fieldwork provides, informs the curator's vision and goals for a particular program and helps the curatorial team to revise and fine-tune a program's themes and conceptual framework, as well as determine successful strategies for presentation and interpretation.

For example, for the *Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritage* program, which I co-curated for the 2013 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, our field researcher advisor for the Hawaiian language case study, Aaron Salā, strongly recommended, after interviewing members of the Native Hawaiian community, that we organize the Hawaiian presentation around family groups and include children as official participants, so that we could highlight the important ways in which Hawaiian language revitalization efforts were taking place, intergenerational in the home and community, as well as in the schools with language immersion programs.

His recommendations influenced our decisions about programming and the craft demonstration areas, sessions on the discussion stage, in the family activity area, and performances on the music stage. And, primarily, this had to do with budget implications. Children do come to the Festival, but most often it's as guests brought by their parents who are official participants. For official participants, we pay for their travel, we pay for hotel, we pay for their meals. And people who are guests status, it's the participant who's actually paying those costs.

So when making children official participants, that meant that we were also incurring these extra cost of paying for their travel, their hotel, and their food. So I think we had budgeted for about fifteen Hawaiian participants to take part in the program. We had to recalibrate, and instead of bringing this broader range of adult participants, as we had originally envisioned, we brought fewer adult participants and filled it out with the children. But it made for a very rich program because we were able to show this beautiful intergenerational learning that was going on in the context of family and in community, and ended up being extremely successful.

Fieldwork for the *Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritage* program also revealed that the majority of music traditions from the diverse cultural communities around the world that we were considering for the program involves small groups and fairly quiet dance, song, and music traditions. Thus we decided that the main performance stage should be a smaller, more intimate, low-to-the-ground stage that would allow the performers to feel more comfortable and be able to connect more effectively with audience members, rather than go with a large, high stage which we had originally conceived. We also included a lovely small venue in the program called the Song and Story Circle where participants could conduct workshops and present small-scale performances on the ground, up close to the audience.

For the 2006 *Carriers of Culture: Living Native Basket Traditions* program, the extensive research and fieldwork that my co-curators Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell conducted with Native American basket makers across the United States underscore the close relationship that Native basket makers have to the land, their intimate knowledge of local habitats and ecological systems, and the central role of harvesting, gathering, and preparing local, natural materials in the basket making process. Native basket makers or ethnobotanists. We took this into consideration in our presentations at the Festival, prominently featuring natural materials such as a wide variety of grasses, roots, and other plants and displaying large photo murals of regional environments and harvesting activities.

Festival research and fieldwork leads to the selection of participants, which is of central importance to every Festival program. Decisions are based on a thorough program review and involve a broad range of factors and criteria. Chief among them, in my view, is the ability of participants to effectively address the major themes and messages, the storyline of the program, coupled with their desire to share their knowledge, experiences, and traditions with a large audience in a public setting.

An equally important consideration is the potential impact of the Festival, on the participants and their communities, in terms of the cultural work that they're striving to accomplish. It is important to listen to culture bearers and get their input on how we can help to encourage and support community members in their cultural sustainability efforts.

A good example is the Wabanaki Indian basket makers presentation. That was part of the *Native Basket Traditions* program in 2006. Four distinct Native American tribes, the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot are known collectively as the Wabanaki, the People of the Dawn. They live primarily in the state of Maine. My co-curators Kurt Dewhurst, Marcia McDowell, and I have been working together closely with master Penobscot basket maker and founding director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, Theresa Secord, who is serving as a community advisor to the project. It was determined that there was funding to invite four participants to represent Wabanaki Indian basket making traditions.

Theresa recommended that instead of selecting four accomplished basket makers, we invite three young, novice basket makers, along with one master artist, believing that this would have the greatest impact back home, fostering the young people's pride in their cultural heritage and their interest and involvement in their Native basket making tradition. As it turned out, the recognition they received during the Festival had a tremendous effect on the lives of these three young basket makers, bolstering a strong sense of identity and self-worth and

encouraging them to continue practicing and perfecting their basket making skills. Today they are among the most talented basket makers in their community, featured in museum exhibitions and winning major jury prizes for their artistic work. Their example has stimulated interest in other young Tribal members and helped to sustain a once endangered cultural tradition.

Successful presentation of cultural bearers and their expressive traditions at the Festival involves a complex interplay of many factors. These include the overall site design, appropriate performance and demonstration venues for the selected participants, visual presentation and display, the physical setup of craft demonstration areas, participatory hands-on activities, the use of interpretive materials such as signs, photo murals, banners, and props, having the necessary supplies, tools and raw materials on hand for skilled demonstrations, the role of presenters, and much more.

Building on the field research and our engagement with communities, a critical undertaking for me, as a curator, is to follow up and engage in ongoing dialogue with the tradition bearers who've been selected to take part in the event. My goal in this effort is to learn what it is they want to convey about their culture and their traditions and to work together to devise modes of presentation that will allow them to tell their own stories and represent themselves in their communities in the best possible way in the context of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Many cultural bearers have never experienced the Festival. They do not have a frame of reference or know what to expect and how to prepare. Program curators and coordinators can impart important firsthand information about what the Festival is like, describing, explaining the nature of the event, what participants can expect to encounter in terms of the audience, and the different types of venues, interactions, and presentations, as well as exchanging ideas about the supplies, materials, and physical setup needed for each of the skill demonstrations. And of course, we impart what we know about certain restrictions and regulations that are required on National Park Service land which is where the Festival takes place.

I can give you the example of Hispanic adobe craftsman Albert Parra from northern New Mexico. He took part in the *Masters of the Building Arts* program. Before he arrived at the Festival, discussing what it was that he would like to demonstrate, he said that he would like to build a small adobe dwelling as part of the program, and went on to say that he would need to dig a foundation for the house. And I was able to say, "Well, wait, wait a minute. We are not allowed to dig on National Park Service land."

And so together and working also with our technical director, we were able to come up with a solution for that and devise a way that Albert was able to demonstrate building a small dwelling with adobe bricks on the National Mall, without having to dig. And it took some time to figure out, but we came up with a good solution and were able to go on from there. Albert revised his methods of beginning the building, and, over the course of ten days, he was able to work on building a traditional Adobe dwelling as part of the program.

Some participants may be thinking about the Festival in terms of other modes of presentation that are familiar to them. For example, a number of the participants in the *Masters of the Building Arts* program are accustomed to the trade-show model, with its booths, videos, screenings, and glossy handouts. We were able to advise them that computer videos in the craft demonstration areas and formal lectures and PowerPoints on the discussion stage do not come across very well in the Festival setting. But instead, interactive skill demonstrations, hands-on participatory activities, and informal conversations with visitors are the most effective ways to connect with the public and share their skills and knowledge.

From the very outset, we encourage all of the culture bearers who will be taking part in the Festival to come prepared to speak for themselves and to interact freely with the public. We also encourage them to meet and interact with fellow participants, both within the program and across the entire Festival. We work to facilitate multiple opportunities for these interactions to take place.

Many times, the participants themselves have the best ideas for successful presentations. Based on his previous experience demonstrating at the New Orleans Jazz Festival, master ornamental plaster Earl Barthé suggested that we build a wall so that he and other members of his family can involve Festival visitors, both young and old, in running a decorative plaster mold, as well as show the considerable skill required to perfectly plaster a smooth, flat surface. Stonemason Joe Alonzo suggested having a chain hoist and several pieces of heavy stone in their demonstration tent, so that he could enlist the help of visitors and show them how masons carefully lift, position, and set—with trowels, mallets, levels, and plumb bobs—the massive limestone blocks used to construct the Washington National Cathedral, a fourteenth-century Gothic-style cathedral being built in Washington, D.C. Brick masons came up with a popular interactive activity in which kids could help lay a course of bricks to build a wall using a special non-setting mortar that would allow the brick wall to be disassembled every evening so the activity could be repeated again the next day.

In addition to follow-up conversations with participants and fieldworkers to discuss the nature of the Festival and ideas for presentation, it's important for the curatorial team to work

together closely with the Festival design team and technical staff as early as possible in the process, ideally starting in the conceptual phase. The Festival is a living exhibition, and brainstorming with the designers and fabricators of the exhibition yields valuable ideas for design and structural elements that help convey the main messages of the program to the public, and that serve the demonstration, performance, and communication needs of the participants.

My curatorial goal for the *Masters of the Building Arts* program, and all of the artisan-based programs that I've worked on, has been to create forums at the Festival that will give visitors a chance to meet people face to face and gain an appreciation and understanding not only of the remarkable skills, but their values aspirations and ideals. Working together with artisans, I tried to collaboratively construct presentation contexts that provide multiple ways for the public to understand diverse traditional crafts from the perspective of the artisans themselves.

What is it that they know and value? How do they perceive themselves and their art? What are the underlying cultural and aesthetic attitudes that shape and give meaning to their work? What are the challenges they face today as they strive to preserve and revitalize craft traditions? How are craft skills and standards of excellence being taught and passed on to a new generation of artisans?

One of the main challenges that one has to take into account with public craft demonstrations is the fact that mastery belies skill. Whether carving stone, forging metal, or forming clay, a master artisan makes the craft process look easy. How can visitors to the Festival come away with a better understanding of the extensive knowledge and skill that master artisans bring to the practice of their craft?

One important presentational strategy is the use of interpretive signage for each of the craft traditions featured in the program. A compelling photograph and a short block of text on the sign can provide just enough information about the craftspeople and his or her tradition to prompt questions from Festival visitors and provide points of entry that help encourage conversations with participants and take discussions to a deeper level of understanding. I also like to use first-person quotes from the participants on the signs that foreground the range of themes and attitudes about work, and connect the public with the voices of the craftspeople themselves.

One example from the building arts program is a sign that was outside the timber framer's demonstration area. Timber framing is a craft that had died out in the United States in the early 1900s. In the 1970s, when an interested group of young craftspeople wanted to learn and

revive the centuries old craft, they discovered that there were no skilled practitioners left to teach them. There were only the old timber-frame buildings left standing on the landscape. I used quotes from the timber framers on the interpretive signage to telegraph this information. One sign had the quote, “All the old teachers were gone. The lessons came from old buildings.” Another sign said, “Our teachers are the buildings themselves. We love to get into an old house, take it apart, and discover how it was made.”

Design and physical layout of the craft and illustrations are key to successful presentations of cultural heritage at the Festival. The size and interior configuration of a tent or other type of demonstration space needs to allow the public easy access to the participants. It must be carefully tailored to meet the particular needs of the artisans and the nature of their craft process.

I also think it’s critical to pay attention to and arrange for what I call “visual magnets,” story vessels or touch stone items, such as a wide array of tools, various raw materials, finished works of art, and pieces that show different stages in the technical process. Such elements help draw visitors to the craft demonstrations and spark questions, facilitate interactions, and encourage cultural conversations.

Photo murals are another effective way to contextualize cultural representations at the Festival. I already mentioned the use of large photo murals for the Native American basketry program. In the case of decorative painters John Canning and his daughter, Jackie Canning-Riccio, in the building arts program, our goal was to connect these artisans to the buildings they helped to preserve through their artistry. Since they could demonstrate their painting techniques at the Festival, but the buildings themselves could not be physically present on the National Mall, we displayed large photo murals of the Canning’s historic preservation work on such national treasures as Grand Central Terminal and Radio City Music Hall in New York City and the National Building Museum and the U.S. Treasury Building in Washington D.C., were numerous examples of the effective use of large photo murals to help contextualize presentations. Over the course of the many years of the Festival, one of my favorites is from the Basque program in 2016. As you walked through the program, you came upon a net maker who is mending her fishing nets in front of a giant photo backdrop of a coastal scene from her home community.

Another presentation strategy is to have as many hands-on participatory activities as possible in the skill demonstration areas in order to facilitate quality interactions and active learning. Festival visitors have been able to try their hand at cutting stone with a mallet and chisel, modeling clay pots, making tortillas, weaving baskets, and much more. These kinds of

unmediated interactions between craftspeople and the public are not only fun, but they can sometimes be learning experiences that change attitudes and transform the way people think about the cultural traditions of others.

The following short video shows Guillermo Bautista, a potter from the Andean highlands of Colombia, demonstrating his craft at the Festival as part of the 2011 *Colombia* program illustrates many of the points I've been making about successful craft demonstrations. You can see that Guillermo is speaking for himself, explaining the process of throwing a pot. There's examples of his pottery on the table next to him. Interpretive signage is behind him. Visitors are able to easily approach him to observe the process and ask questions. And there are opportunities for visitors to handle the clay and try their hand at turning a pot themselves.

Presenters, or moderators, play a central role in Festival presentations. As the Center's former senior folklorist Peter Seitel once noted, presenters help performers and audiences build bridges of understanding. Many of you are probably familiar with the role of presenters who introduce musical groups on performance stages, or who act as moderators for discussion panel sessions. I also find it extremely helpful to have a presenter for each of the class people or craft traditions, featured in the Festival program in the context of skill demonstration areas. Presenters can help facilitate interactions between the artisans and the audience by asking if the visitors have any questions, by providing brief background information.

It's important that the presenter not speak for the participants, but they can help jumpstart cultural conversations and encourage deeper exchanges by bringing out themes not immediately apparent to visitors who want to learn more but perhaps don't know what to ask or where to begin. For example, a presenter can model questions such as: what are the standards of excellence by which good work is judged in your tradition? Or, how do you teach and pass on your skills?

I think the main thing is to avoid the sense of participant on display, with people just passively watching someone demonstrating their craft. What I tend to do when I'm presenting in a craft demonstration area is, if I see a group of people watching and not asking any questions, I'll just raise my voice a little bit and introduce the participant, say a few words about his tradition or her tradition, and then ask if there are any questions. Then I might even ask the participant a question myself and get them talking, and then with the audience and then that helps things flow.

Unlike documentary films, articles, and exhibitions, the Festival is not a linear experience. There's no clear path or storyline for the audience to follow. Instead, it allows visitors and

participants, in the words of Richard Kurin, to chart their own experiential routes. This is both a good and desirable thing.

As a counterpoint, more structured forums and scheduled activities have an important role to play at the Festival. The discussion stage is perhaps one of the most successful venues for presentation and cultural representation. Thoughtful programming of sessions on a small and intimate discussion stage can frame important content and themes, and very importantly bring together different participants to share knowledge and experiences, similarities and differences around a common topic.

For example, in the *Masters of the Building Arts* program, we brought together artists from different crafts: a blacksmith, a stone carver, and a woodworker to talk about the common theme of tools of the trade. We also had panel sessions on materials matter, teaching and learning, and family-run businesses, among many other topics. In the *Endangered Languages and Cultural Heritage* program, discussion session on the intergenerational transmission of language featuring Siletz Indian cultural leader Bud Lane with his granddaughter Halli, and the cross-cultural panel discussion with Welsh and Colombian participants on the role of verbal arts and music and language revitalization efforts are just two examples of the more than seventy narrative sessions that were presented over the course of the ten-day Festival.

The role of the presenter during discussion sessions and workshops is to frame the session in terms of its themes, introduce the participants, and ask questions of each of the traditional bearers taking part, striving to keep the conversation flowing and making sure that each participant has a chance to speak during the allotted time period, which is usually about forty-five minutes.

The convening power of the Festival, the invaluable opportunity it gives participants to meet and interact with one another, to share and learn from one another's experiences, to forge new working relationships and friendships, is one of the most powerful and positive aspects of the Festival. As a curator, I try to create space and time for participants to come together. Cross-cultural programming on the discussion stage is one important context in which this can happen. Others include participant orientations and workshops, special ceremonies and celebrations, and informal social gatherings at the hotel.

In the *One World, Many Voices* program, which brought together more than a hundred speakers of endangered or minority languages, from more than fifteen different language communities across the world, having the chance to learn about one another's language



revitalization efforts, about strategies, struggles, and success stories, was inspiring and encouraging experience for all the participants.

And so in conclusion, I just want to underscore again that the Festival seeks to give tradition bearers a platform where they can share their skills and knowledge and tell their own stories. It strives to foster greater cultural understanding and to help sustain and support the vitality of diverse cultures across the United States and the world.

For the Festival to accomplish its goals, it is important to give careful thought and attention to the poetics and power of presentation, to the collaborative construction of cultural representations that allow participants and visitors to engage in meaningful interactions, and which help community members present their cultural traditions in ways that convey meaning and value.

Thank you.

## 5. Teaching Folklore to Learners of All Ages

Hello, I'm Dr. Betty Belanus, curator and education specialist at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. I've been working at the Smithsonian since 1987, and I've done many education programs, bringing folklore to audiences of all ages.

I'll be explaining some of the strategies we have developed over the years, and also demonstrating how you can get started with this work yourself.

First, I'd like to provide some background on education at the Smithsonian Institution as a whole. The Smithsonian was founded in 1846 with the goal of "the increase and diffusion of knowledge." This means that the staff of the Smithsonian not only gathers knowledge and conducts research, but also reaches out to audiences of all ages and geographic regions to share that knowledge.

The Smithsonian is composed of nineteen museums and nine research centers. Each have their own education staffs and programs. The larger museums such as the National Museum of Natural History have public spaces for education, and also host many school groups in non-pandemic times.

Our Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which is very small in comparison, does not have a museum to carry out educational programs. We must reach out to audiences through other means. As curators at our Center, we plan educational components for our programs, sometimes with the help of partners or consultants.

Today I will be discussing our folklore and education programs at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, as well as special opportunities for learning about cultural heritage, such as cultural exchange programs.

Let's step back and learn more about the subject of folklore. A colleague of ours says, "There is no folklore without the folk." By that, he means that in the field of folklore, we put people first and create platforms for them to share knowledge and stories (or lore) that they possess.

For us, folklore means knowledge and skills that have been passed down through families and communities. We also use the term "folklife" as an alternative, since folklore really encompasses not just oral lore, but is infused into people's total lives. You will notice many examples of folklore throughout my presentation, including music, dance, cooking, and crafts.

You may know folklore as “cultural heritage.” It includes both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. We create many educational opportunities for people of all ages to learn about folklore and folklife at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. This event was founded in 1967, and usually takes place each year, out of doors in an open park space called the National Mall, which is near the Smithsonian museums. Different countries, regions of the United States, and thematic programs are presented.

Musicians, dancers, craftspeople, and traditional artists come to the Festival to perform, to do demonstrations of their work, and to participate in discussions. While anyone can learn from the demonstrations and performances, we also often set up a special “Family Activities” tent where families with children, as well as organized groups such as children’s summer camps, can visit and learn in engaging ways.

For example, performers who would usually be on a large stage can visit the Family Activities area and teach the visitors a dance or a song from their culture. This way they can explain their tradition in more depth, and children, parents, and grandparents can learn more, ask questions, and engage in hands-on activities. Folk games are also a good way of sharing culture at the Festival with young people. Children, and even adults, can try a simplified version of a folk craft and take home their creation. This provides a tangible memory of the event, and it is also a reminder of what was learned.

This is a great way to emphasize the educational experience. At the Festival, and especially at a family tent, activities can be created for all age groups from toddlers to elders, and families can work and learn together. Some educational experiences organized by our Center are more focused on classroom teachers, who will then bring what they have learned back to their students.

This is the case with the World Music Pedagogy Workshops developed by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. Folkways Recordings researches and produces world music. The record label was established in the 1940s and brought to the Smithsonian in the 1980s. It is housed at our Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Since acquiring the label, Folkways staff and academic partners have developed a number of learning strategies, including over a hundred lesson plans introducing elementary and secondary students to the musics of many cultures.

Folkways staff and partners at the University of the State of Washington developed the World Music Pedagogy Workshop as a training program for teachers. Each summer, workshops take place at the University of Washington and sometimes in other areas around the United States.

Teachers gain general knowledge about teaching world music but also meet and interact with world music practitioners to model ways that they can bring world music alive in their classrooms.

My third example involves cultural exchange, which is an immersive way to learn about the folklore of another cultural group.

In 2018, our Center received funding from the U.S. State Department to engage in an in-person and virtual exchange of young people from India and the United States. I traveled with four U.S.-based students who are studying cultural heritage to West Bengal, India. There, we met with cultural practitioners and attended performances, took tours, and truly immersed ourselves in learning about the folklore and folklife of this part of the world. We were in West Bengal for two weeks.

The experience was very memorable and rewarding, especially during our visits to villages of craftspeople and performers. After our in-person visit, we engaged a larger group of students in a virtual exchange via Facebook and a WordPress blog space. This twelve-week virtual experience involved weekly posts, during which the U.S.-based students and artisans in West Bengal exchanged information about food, clothing, favorite pastimes, and other information. The virtual exchange came at a time when virtual experiences were not the norm! It taught us many lessons about engaging in this sort of long-distance experience that we could put to use during the pandemic.

Finally, in the summer, five young Bengalis came to Washington, D.C., for three weeks to share their culture, attend the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and learn more about the culture of the U.S. and especially the culture of Washington, D.C. This group included four musicians and a scroll painter and singer. The musicians participated in many exchanges with musicians from around Washington, D.C., and the world, including those participating in the 2018 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

One day, for instance, they shared their traditions with musicians from Catalonia, Spain. This cultural exchange established a relationship between our Center and the sponsoring NGO in Kolkata, West Bengal, which is still in place. For instance, recently I worked with teachers at a local school here in the Washington, D.C., area to connect them virtually to scroll painters and singers in West Bengal.

So far, I have talked about models that rely on masters of folklore, such as musicians and craftspeople, as the core of educational programming. Let's now turn to ways our Center

engages a wider audience of all ages to document and present their own “everyday” traditions, because, again, there is no folklore without the folk.

Traditions are constantly being shared among families, communities, peer groups, and others with common life experiences. Our Center’s education team works to help teachers, students, and the general public gain tools to research their own folklore through interviews, writing, audio recording, photography, and video; and then to share this information within their families or communities in meaningful ways.

One of the most useful tools in this work is our Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide, a comprehensive learning guide which is written in plain language and provides many good examples, documentation tips, interview question lists, and ideas for sharing information. The guide was written by our Center colleague Marjorie Hunt. This guide has been translated into several languages, including Tibetan!

*The Will to Adorn* project is a wonderful example of the way young people can learn about their own traditions and those of their community. This project engaged groups of African American youth, partnering with schools, church groups, and enrichment programs. The project was organized by our Center colleague Diana N’Diaye. During this multi-year program, young people learned the skills of interviewing and documentation methods in audio, photography, and video recording to study dress and adornment in their own lives and in the lives of their families and community members.

They started by describing themselves and explaining why they dress and adorn themselves as they do. Then, they met and documented skilled craftspeople such as hatmakers, tailors, and hairstylists in their communities. Much of their work was then presented and recorded for sharing with a wider audience.

As the example of the Will to Adorn shows, with some background and training, people of all ages can engage in the documentation and presentation of the folklore of their own families and communities.

Next, I will give you two examples of how you can get started with this work. The first example is called the Cultural Marker Exercise, and it is available in the appendix of the Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide. We have used this exercise with many groups over the years, including teachers.

The exercise asks a person to choose an object that is important to them and that they feel illustrates their life or culture. This might be an inherited item of clothing or jewelry, a photograph of a well-loved family member, or even the brick from a former home. The person is then given three minutes to explain the item. For example, one teacher brought a type of bean grown and eaten very commonly in his community. This small bean was the jumping-off point for an explanation of the landscape, occupations, pastimes, and foodways of his community. Any item that has significance in a person's life can be used.

For example, I have a photo here. This photo shows my daughter and I at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, where she spent many a summer while growing up. I won't talk for three minutes about this photo, but I could!

After each person explains his or her item, the group breaks up into pairs and asks each other three questions to learn more about the item and how it relates to their lives. This gives them some interviewing practice. The pairs of people then report what they learned to the larger group.

It's always surprising how much more they learned about the person's folklore in a short period of time by going deeper into discovering about this one item and all of its associations. What questions would you want to ask me about my cultural marker?

Another simple activity relates to celebration and food. Food is a commonality around the world, of course, so it is often a good choice for folklore documentation and presentation projects. In the United States, Thanksgiving is a widely celebrated, secular harvest festival which has existed as an official national holiday since 1941. But, of course, the tradition of Thanksgiving goes back much further into American history.

Every family or community group across the U.S. has their own Thanksgiving traditions, most of which center around food. A roast turkey is often the centerpiece, although families who do not eat meat or prefer other foods may prepare a feast with other dishes. "Family" is also a fluid term, as some Thanksgiving groups include neighbors, friends, and others who may not have a large family, or are not able to travel to visit their families for the holiday.

We have developed a simple and fun exercise for engaging learners in documenting and sharing their Thanksgiving food traditions. This could be adapted to other traditional feasts, such as a Lunar New Year celebration or other holidays with specific food traditions. For this activity, you need an inexpensive, disposable paper plate like this one. A white paper plate. or just a circle the size of a dinner plate drawn on a sheet of white paper, and some crayons or markers. Recall

the foods that your family or community typically eat for this holiday, especially those that your own family might prefer.

Draw a representation of the food on the “plate.” No drawing skills are necessary, as you see from this one that I did. Next, explain the foods you have drawn and why these foods are important to your family or community. Even though many Americans assume that everyone eats the same menu of turkey and side dishes for the holiday of Thanksgiving, the variations on the meal are usually very surprising. For instance, some families have added more vegetarian or vegan options to make members who do not eat meat feel welcome, or have adapted recipes to accommodate allergies of particular family members.

But often the most striking variations in the meal relate to the region the family lives in, their favorite recipes, and other traditional aspects affecting food choices and preparation. For example, families with a strong ethnic identity may add traditional dishes from their cultures, alongside the turkey. Other families may always include fresh or pickled vegetables from their own gardens. Still others may have a treasured pie recipe passed down from generation to generation. In short, recalling these foods, through this simple exercise, prompts stories and memories, through which we can share each other’s folklore.

Either the Cultural Marker or Thanksgiving activities can be easily expanded into a larger project of documentation and presentation. For instance, the Thanksgiving activity could be expanded into a family or community recipe book including stories about the various recipes. The Cultural Marker could be the basis for a small (in person or virtual) exhibition of cultural items. These examples are engaging for all ages of learners and also have many cross-generational possibilities: children, parents, and grandparents can relate to both of these examples and use them as a basis for sharing information and stories.

In summary, this presentation has given many examples of the ways that the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage’s staff and their partners have found to create both in-person and virtual spaces of learning. This information will help you develop your own folklore and education experiences, across generations. A list of links to the resources I mentioned are provided for you.

Thanks for your attention! Bye!