

**The Inclusive Knowledge Philosophy: Understanding practices through Deweyan and Naessian philosophical lenses**

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**Abstract:** This conceptual paper discusses the inclusive knowledge philosophy fundamental for different modes of experiencing living enterprises. The American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey pointed to the importance of restoring the continuity between the refined and intensified experiences in our practices and everyday doings. He based this restoring on “the inclusive philosophic idea”. By this idea he was acknowledging the possibilities of imagination and associations among the social, technological-physical, natural, and mental modes. Another philosopher, the Norwegian Arne Naess, also highlighted imaginative experience and the human/nature interconnectedness including its potential joy and perseverance for individuals as well as organizations.

- We combine these two related philosophical lenses to enable fundamental understanding of concerted practices and strategic accomplishments for knowledge management (KM) studies. We propose inclusive association and imagination are necessary for the arts of exhibiting and experiencing new or improved offerings.
- We provide examples drawing on our own studies in the businesses of art organizations as knowledge-based, complex practices. Given that rich knowledge endeavours are necessary to develop arts for society, how can valuable arts/business practices be accomplished in inclusive, resourceful ways? Specifically, we investigate how arts business exhibition strategies develop in art museum contexts as illuminating examples of this process.
- The necessity of art is giving a societal meaning to the process of knowing based upon the experience of art. The reflection and dialogue based on art-as-experience can contribute to knowledge management by the shared ingredients involved in creating and participating in more fulfilling experiencing in the business offering process.
- The paper introduces a philosophical framework for how this might work. Dynamic art, design, and innovation processes are imaginative practices where the past, the present, and the future melt together. The imaginative experiencing might be crucial not only for the creation, but also for the make-believe of sustainable businesses and societies. We conclude that understanding the inclusive dynamic knowledge processes might be mutually beneficial for art and innovative businesses.

**Keywords:** philosophical foundation, strategies, museums, change, art

## **1. Introduction**

In this conceptually oriented essay paper, we address arts as necessary, imaginative perspectives for knowledge management (KM) in organizations. Specifically, we build on process thinking from the philosophers John Dewey and Arne Naess, because they are offering fruitful concepts and views based on experiential possibilities in the everyday. We propose the process concepts Naess used in his sustainability thinking can be combined with a pragmatist philosophy for experiencing, where we lean on John Dewey’s inclusive philosophical idea and “art-as-experience”. Because the combined lenses of ecological process philosophy and art-as-experience can have a strategic role with far reaching impact on developmental processes and knowledge sharing in organizations, KM can benefit from this enlarged experiential philosophy. We explore this inclusive knowledge idea view in a Nordic art museum context, which offer further valuable insights on the importance of imaginative experiencing.

- Research Question: In what ways does a Nordic art museum build creative experience and collective knowing through their art exhibitions strategies?

- Our primary interest in this explorative case research lies in identifying imaginative exhibition practices of exemplary art museums using the lens of an inclusive knowledge philosophy perspective.

This paper can contribute to the fundamentals in KM, KM in the Organization, KM in Practice. It can also contribute to KM, Organizational Wisdom and Spirituality. By using the combined philosophical concepts from original thinkers John Dewey and Arne Naess respectively, we contribute to an improved understanding of the fundamental experiential ontologies and potentials of KM strategies as artful practices.

## 2. Theoretical framing for an inclusive knowledge philosophy

In the following, we specifically address the lens of inclusive or multifaceted experiencing to understand imaginative KM approaches in complex, creativity-dependent organizations. For the first time to our knowledge, we combine the lenses of an inclusive pragmatist philosophy with process ecological thinking in the contemporary developmental context of art museums and their KM approaches.

### 2.1 Deweyan inclusive experiential view

Our idea of inclusive knowledge philosophy is adapted from the philosophical idea of inclusion proposed by the American pragmatist philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey (1859–1952). Dewey (1932/2018) pointed to the inclusion of the social, the physical, the economic, as well as the vision and mental capacities of interest for human enterprises. This inclusive philosophy is embracing multiple modes of association and interconnectedness regarded as foundational for “the art of experience” (see Table 1). Dewey (1934/1980) saw experience as “a product, one might almost say a by-product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world” (p. 220).

Table 1: Overview over key Deweyan concepts in the paper

Concepts for an inclusive philosophy of art		
Terms	Meaning	Examples and significance
Experience	Experience is a matter of the interaction of organism with its environment.	“An experience has a unity that gives it its name, <i>that</i> meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship” (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 37). “A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory” (p. 35).
Aesthetic experience	Experience in its integrity. All aesthetic experience is imaginative.	“Any practical activity will, provided that it is integrated and moves by its own urge to fulfillment, have esthetic quality”.
Imaginative vision	“The power that unifies all the constituents of the matter of a work of art, making a whole out of them in all their variety” (p. 277).	Ideas and imagination come in flashes. The imaginative experience endures.

According to Dewey (1934/1980, p. 22), “experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication”. The “art” in the art of experience is not regarded as something entirely separate, or compartmentalized. Dewey saw art as “prefigured in the very process of living” (p. 24). Why then introduce art in relation to experience? Dewey (1934/1980, p. 260) reflects that “ordinary experience is often infected with apathy, lassitude and stereotype. We get neither the impact of quality through the sense nor the meaning of things”. Whereas “art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is” (p. 18). Since artists tend to use rich imagination in their intensive interaction with the object in focus, materials they experiment with, and surroundings they explore, their art can become a gateway to a whole, imaginative experience. “Taking in” any vital experience can be both engaging and painful, as it involves reconstruction. It is “something more than placing something on the top of consciousness of what was previously known” (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 41).

Dewey further contends, “Possibilities are embodied in the works of art that are not elsewhere actualized” (p. 268). Objects of art express, i.e. “to stay by, to carry forward in development, to work out to completion” (p. 62). With an *inclusive philosophy* of knowledge creation and sharing, we also need to attend beyond the material or digitized objects to the art of experiences of the living creatures. To *experience* in a human enterprise context thus means to participate in the carrying forward as well as enjoy or use (something) jointly with another or others in natural and artificial surroundings. The inclusive idea means embracing the experiences in its entirety, including the human, social, technological, capital, and ecological relations. We thus turn to an ecological process-oriented thinking next.

## 2.2 Further inspirations from process philosophy – a Naessian view

Arne Naess (1912-2009) was a Norwegian philosopher working actively with possibilities, ecological thinking, and the meaning of practical wisdom, as well as the logical philosophy of science. In line with ideas that everyone can follow an own path, he argued that everybody should develop their own eco-philosophy or what he coined “ecosophy”, that is, one’s personal system of values.

Arne Naess is among the key founders of deep ecological thinking. Deep ecology is related both to thinking and to being constructive in our approaches to change. The Naessian thinking also goes way back to early philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza in the Netherlands (1632-1677), as well as Aristotle in Greece (384–322 BC). Three of the conceptions Arne Naess adopted from Spinoza we will briefly introduce below.

Table 2: Overview over a sample of key Naessian concepts

Concepts for ecological process-view on knowledge		
Terms	Meaning	Examples
Virtus ( <i>potentia</i> )	The courage, character, and strengths, power “to do”.	Power to realize something.
Joy	Openness and happiness in action, i.e., in movement. Enacting active feelings, necessary for change.	Enjoying active feelings including freedom to move.
Striving ( <i>conatus</i> )	A striving beyond mere survival.	Ongoing meaningful efforts. Relates to <i>perseveration of self</i> as a dynamic notion.
Eco-sophy	One’s personal system of values.	Personal reflection and philosophy.

The first is *virtus* (from Latin, *vir* for man), which means the courage, character, and strength or power to do something, i.e. to be capable of doing something of value, something excellent (Naess, 2005).

The second concept we wish to highlight, is *joy* – and even a full joy that activates our mind/body. Both Spinoza and Naess saw active feelings as necessary for all to be capable for changing.

The third key concept from Spinoza is *conatus* or effort. Arne Naess refers to *conatus* as a striving. This striving is important because it relates to *perseveration* as a dynamic notion (De Jonge and Whiteman, 2014, p. 437). According to Naess, this striving is something which is more than mere survival (Naess, 2005, p. 414):

*“There is an urge for change. Human beings, and others being, are always “on the way”(…). The dynamic, interactionist view of the self makes it inevitable to interpret a basic principle of conatus as a striving for self-causingness, activeness, power”.*

Overall, as free human beings, Arne Naess (2005) pointed to our positive imaginative possibilities, the potentiality of doing something more. He was no fundamentalist, he articulated that he was more interested in whether leaders had visions, rather than utopias. As he understood, when we create a new vision for the future, we will probably see the current knowledge as well as the past differently. Moreover, imaginative work includes a third

kind of knowing (e.g., intuition), which is different from both vague sense perceptions and rational (scientific) thinking, according to Naess.

While exploiting logical reasoning and respecting opponents, Naess (2005) recommended to use active feelings creatively towards visions of our future. We should try to transform the pessimistic aspects into optimistic ones. In other words, we should seek to do something more, with impact and joy. Arne Naess developed his own wild-life experiences into a thinking of the *place*. He argued that humans are not separate from nature and to think so leads to trouble (De Jonge and Whiteman, 2014, p. 446).

### 3. Methodology and material

How then do organizations enable imaginative strategies and more inclusive experiencing of their offerings? We base the paper on our study of modern and contemporary art leadership and organizing practices in the Northern context of modern art museums. We investigate how the museums' accumulated and regained implicit and explicit strategies transforms into art experiencing at the collective and individual level.

The research assumptions are: a visionary eye of the future is needed for leadership organizing for understanding and developing imaginative knowledge. Inclusive modes of experiencing are ways of developing knowing, but how are these experiential knowledge challenges explored in the art museums' exhibition practices?

*Methodology.* We base our research methodology upon Bunge's (1998) theory of conceptual generalization as clearly different from empirical generalization. The empirical generalization demand verification and falsification during the analyses and discussion. The conceptual generalization demands a strict logic interpretation and argumentation. We adapt the conceptualization methodology from an exploration of clarified subjectivity concepts. It is exploring the concepts of knowledge together with the concepts of art and business. The concepts are sensitizing, seeking directions to look as opposed to definitive concepts seeking already predefined directions (Blumer, 1969). The argumentation is thus not falsifying anything but instead exploring possible directions to look for art and business.

This article neither develops a grounded theory of KM nor presents an entirely new theoretical framework; instead, it examines some key philosophical process-based conceptualizations of imaginative work and shows—by analyzing specific cases of interest for the experiential, sustainability-oriented economy—how they can help us analyze changing knowledge practices. Resonating with this methodology, we propose a more dynamic understanding of process-oriented KM combined with an arts-based inclusive theory of experience (Dewey, 1934/1980).

*Cases explored.* To illuminate our conceptual paper, we draw on empirical insights we collected from four Nordic arts museums: (1) Munch museum (MM) & Munch's artworks, (2) The National Museum for arts, architecture, and design (NaM), (3) The Henie Onstad art center (HOK) & The Monster Dada Show, and (4) The Kistefos arts museum & its new Twist.

We visited these museums and their exhibitions several times, took part in their events and open meetings, and have consulted their annual reports, their online webpage and social media communications, as well as other available documentation (incl. through membership in their museum friend networks). A brief overview of the four museums is provided below,

*The Munch Museum:* a museum for works by Edvard Munch (1863-1944), an internationally renowned painter and graphic artist born in Norway. He is most famous for a few of his iconic prints, such as *The Scream*, *Madonna*, *Vampire*, and *the Sick Child*. Munch is also known for his university hall paintings such as "the Sun", which is a new way of portraying progression in the sciences. Munch gave most of his vast production to Norway's capital city municipality (Oslo), which built a museum devoted to his arts, first located outside the inner-city centre. Over time it was regarded as not sufficiently funded, nor well-placed. An entirely new museum building is to be opened (autumn 2021) in Oslo's central seaside area.

*The National Museum of Arts, Architecture, and Design (NaM):* NaM in Oslo is a state-owned museum. It was re-established on July 1, 2003 by merging several arts, architecture, and design museums. NaM can offer a rich

collection of Norwegian and selective international painters including a great collection of Munch's artworks. Currently, NaM's paintings are not on display in Oslo due to the planned move to their new main building in Oslo's harbour area. The new building will become the largest art museum in the Nordic countries (Director's report in the Annual report 2018). The new museum building did not open as planned in 2020, due to trouble with the safety doors (Hindsbo in Klassekampen newspaper, 22.09.2020). Artworks have been on loan or on multiple tours to other institutions. NaM launched its new digital museum website in 2020 in beta version to stimulate a broader user engagement with its vast collections.

*The Henie Onstad Art Center (HOK):* As a modern international art museum established in 1968, HOK represents the new wave of modern art's acceptance and work (together with the Astrup Fearnley museum) as a "MOMA" for Oslo. The HOK works towards communicating with a broad audience. It has workshops for children, alongside a broad array of media facilities, shops, meeting rooms, the cafe, and a sculpture park, accessible in coastal surroundings, 15 minutes from Oslo city center. HOK had 89,206 visitors (2018) increasing to 95.000 in 2019 (cf. annual reports). The avant-garde strategy including art photography and targeting younger generations, are to be continued. The Covid-19 pandemic led to unfortunate closure of the indoor museum in 2020-21 while the coastal outdoor museum nature park with some sculptures has remained open.

*The Kistefos museum:* The Kistefos Museum is a modern indoor and outdoor art gallery about 80 km from Oslo that tries to integrate modern outdoor sculptures and modern indoor paintings exhibited in an old industrial setting in a rural area. The museum is young (establ. 1996) and is currently expanding its presence in Norway and internationally, thanks to engagements by its key owner and investor, Christian Sveaas, together with a team of competent curators. Every year, Kistefos presents new art exhibitions by highly recognized national and international artists in its two galleries, The Twist (new) and Nybruket Gallery, located in one of the old factory buildings. The outdoor gallery is also an excellent exhibition during all seasons. Art is mainly modern, but also contemporary art exhibit extensively. The social media and word-of-mouth marketing has made it probably the best-visited Norwegian art museum in 2020.

Why these art museums and not others? We chose these four museums to provide a tasty variety of Nordic arts museum practices while keeping the setting relatively constant to make comparisons and exciting contrasts. They are all situated in or near Oslo, which allowed recurrent observational visits in one setting. This research design enables the investigation of a 'contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin, 1994: 13) and facilitates comparison to uncover emerging patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989). These museums are of interest for exploring arts-based approaches working with varieties of knowing in the creation of arts experiences. In short, their exhibition strategies enabled us to identify varieties of "art as experience".

#### **4. Findings from art practices in four Nordic museums**

In the following, we draw on research and arts-based texts grounded in four Nordic museums' art practices. We have chosen four excellent museums in the Oslo region to explore this.

##### **4.1 Five ways of building experiencing with artworks**

Drawing on their contemporary art practices, several points of general interest can be made.

First, making artwork imaginatively present – here and now – for the visitor can *deepen* the creative experiencing with artful knowledge among the public (e.g. by experiencing side by side enlarged, illuminated versions of Munch's colourful expressions of a couple walking toward the forest). No doubt, MM has an internationally highly attractive collection to draw on to deepen our experience and knowledge with his artworks. Throughout his life, Edvard Munch experimented in both painting and graphic visual arts, and he regularly also made and preserved rich notetaking. His works encompass narrative and poetic texts, sketches, and multifaceted laboratory materials.

Second, the art museums showed *parallel* aesthetic forms of arts in multiple materials, technologies, and processes. All four museums were striving to engage new and existing audiences by inviting the visitor to parallel rich art worlds, such as at Kistefos, combining a sculpture park and artworks in old forest mill buildings with its brand-new Twist, a signature art gallery placed over the wild river. The Twist is a gallery, a bridge, and a sculpture, all in one. The 1000 square meter building twists into a sculptural form. The building spans 60

meters spectacularly across the Randselva River. Human sculptures stand at the river side looking into the huge glass windows of the building, as if from a parallel world.

Third, the four art museums were also, to some extent, curating a *double or combined presenting* of artworks as well as offering multimodal forms of art enabling this. The MM has exploited this strategy by curating combinations of finished and unfinished artworks by Edvard Munch, sometimes contrasting the qualities of dualities with other artists. The museum curators have exhibited excellent artworks by several distinguished international artists such as Gauguin and Van Gogh juxtaposed with selections of Munch's artworks. The arts experiences enacted were triggering and invited visitors to reflect on deeper emotions and know many facets of human life by, for example, Munch plus Van Gogh.

The MM has thus found a new way to exhibit their extensive collection of Munch paintings by deliberately contrasting them with another famous painter in what they call *The Munch+ exhibitions*. In short, the curators are creating a new combination of paired artists and selective artworks that can attract new audiences and recurrent visits and interests.

The fourth pattern is curating *opposing/contrary presenting* of forms of art and art technologies. One example is Dada artworks. In 2019/2020, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter said, "Welcome the dada rebel". Dada is an avant-garde art movement in the early 20th century. This Dada, Great Monster major exhibition sought to present "the historical works of the Dada movement with a contemporary side program pinpointing how the avant-garde ideas are of relevance today" (from the HOK program, 2019). The exhibition presented more than 200 works by 43 artists (incl. collage, sculpture, painting, drawing, photo, film, sound, puppetry, and periodicals). The HOK also offered events e.g. the Cabaret-The Great Monster Dada Show with support from The Fritt Ord (Freedom of Speech) Foundation and Goethe-Institute.

Other examples of opposing/contrary presenting include Bjarne Melgaard's multimodal works at MM, with some highly controversial video-recordings. Melgaard's works exhibited closely entangled with Edvard Munch's artworks at MM created quite a stir, which helped communicate the new exhibition series. Furthermore, the National Museum staff have also engaged in creative video recording and documentation related to e.g. the Picasso and Nesjar mural arts on a controversial "brutalist style" demolished governmental building, designed by the modernist architect Erling Viksjo. Key leaders at NaM as well as HOK assembled relevant knowledge to help communicate arts-based resistance towards the planned demolition of this artful building in 2020.

Finally, a fifth pattern we could identify was a *surprising presenting* of art as experience. Edvard Munch's Scream painting is one evident example. Also, the Munch plus exhibition series have created some surprising juxtapositions, attracting an international audience to visit the respective exhibitions at the MM. We also found the Kistefos museum could foster a surprising presenting of art in the woods.

## 5. Discussion

Specifically, we asked how a Nordic art museum builds creative experience and collective knowing through their art exhibitions strategies. Our study suggests the four museums work with partly overlapping and partly different strategies – from deepening various national and international seminal arts forms to inviting the visitors into a particular landscape of arts to showing contrary art forms. These art museum practices are thus multifaceted and may be beneficial for each museum and the regional art scene.

We believe insights from the four Nordic museums can contribute to an inclusive KM philosophy also in other contexts in at least three ways:

Our first contribution is *the actuality of making enterprises into attractive places, especially museums can become attractive destinations*. This finding resonates with Smith (2021) and all the four museums we studied were engaged in this strategy. At Kistefos, the industrial museum buildings and their natural river park combine with a new signature modern art museum house built over a river where all are a part of a large river. The Danish star architects BIG - Bjarke Ingels Group designed the building, which is named as a "must-see" cultural destination by the New York Times, Bloomberg, and The Telegraph, among others. The architecture received several awards. The Kistefos Museum is also regularly using outdoor environments as a part of its exhibition strengths. Thus, the museum is offering arts as experience with highly inclusive resources (the river landscape, the old factories, the social joy with getting close to the playful artworks, etc.). This combination apparently became appreciated

during the long Covid-19 pandemic. The Kistefos museum had 25.777 visitors in 2019, increasing to 127.000 visitors per October 1, 2020. There are astonishing many traveling such a long distance outside Oslo.

Our second contribution is *the potential of making digitization an important, integrative part of the art experience*. At MM, the large text and visual material offer rich insights into Munch's poetic and reflexive thinking and highly experimental doings and ongoing arts workings. For some years, these texts have been in the process of becoming fully digitized and organized in accessible ways, which enable a revisiting of an international artist's work and his reflexive writings over a lifetime. The MM's contemporary strategy gives this work high priority. More than 30 people are regularly working on this large digitization project (32 persons according to MM's 2018 annual report).

Our third contribution is adding to the knowledge-intensive *strivings behind creating an enduring imaginative vision* (Naess, 2005). For example, as part of Munch's preparing, competing, and experimenting over several years with and for the University Aula decorations in Norway's capital, we may revisit his Laboratory materials (published by MM as a catalog in 2011). In showing us all kinds of material (digital/physical/social/mental) enriched with the research-active curators' knowledge of particular artwork practices, we learn how Munch broke away from the Greek assumptions of what and how to portray in mural decorations and how he worked hard to find other ways of representing knowledge-building of the nation (see Jevnaker and Olaisen, 2019). Munch created his seminal University Hall paintings between 1909 and 1916 dedicated to knowledge sharing of the past, present, and future melting together, searching for the new light.

## 6. Conclusion

The five patterns identified in these Nordic art museums illuminate the importance of making a memorable experience through imaginative, inclusive expression of artworks. As both Dewey and Naess argued, an art experience builds on imagination to become fulfilling. Placing art works to be interacted with in special surroundings can foster this (new buildings are not enough). Enlarging the art experience also includes sharing more of the art works artistic and knowledge-based backgrounds, which represent current possibilities in all four museums' KM.

Below we point to two learning lessons for potentially strategic accomplishments in this endeavour.

### 6.1 The importance of place, continuous striving, and ecological thinking

The placing of the Twist, Kistefos' new white gallery building twisting unexpectedly beautiful over the local river "in the wild" of Norway, is contributing to making art a memorable experience. The lively river landscape can be experienced artfully in many installations. Kistefos has created an interesting *place* attracting a record number of visitors in 2020 and awarded as the museum of the year 2019.

From Munch Museum, we can learn how the continuous striving placing Munch in an enlarged context matter in nontrivial ways. Edvard Munch and notable other artists his works are contrasted with in the Munch plus exhibition series, such as Paul Gauguin, lived complicated lives in places that did not merely harm them as artists. Both used art exploration of humans in nature encompassing trial and error to develop and reflect human life in stimulating new ways. Gauguin is said to have remarked that he closed his eyes to see, while Munch famously put it like this: "I do not paint what I see, but what I saw." Both Gauguin and Munch encourage us to turn our gaze also inwards and focus on the indelible impressions that art can make.

With their constant experimentation, the HOK and the MM museum have adopted *a principle of continued exploration*. This resonates with the strivings suggested by Naess in his readings of Spinoza, a philosopher the artist Munch also appreciated. Munch found several ways of dealing with and transgressing the dark sides when he painted and repainted The Sick Child in a close-up fashion that broke away from the conventional. Looking afresh at Munch's Scream painting reveals the agonized face in the middle of a moving landscape, an

iconic Art image symbolizing modern man's anxiety and uncertainty. Screaming is a dynamic way of behaving since it opens for a reflection of why we are screaming.

## 6.2 Joy and pain in knowledge-seeking

We suggest art is bringing us in contact with knowing and life matters of untouchable kind. Moving into a kind of imaginative knowing also means that metaphors partly determine the future collective knowing. "Metaphor (...) constituted an important method of creating a network of concepts which can help to generate knowledge about the future by using expressions from any existing knowledge", Nonaka (1994: 21) emphasized. These expressions are a part of Munch's paintings, e.g., in "Alma Mater" as mother of all faculties in his Aula decorations for University of Oslo. They are also a part of "Path of Silence", a fountain sculpture by Jeppe Hein in front of the old pulp mill at Kistefos.

The question often posed is if art can change the world or the actual behavior (Dewey 1934/1980). The traditional way of thinking is that art cannot transform businesses and society. Ideas and concepts can only do this transformation. We propose that art may also be converting the business community like the works of Munch. The Munch Scream describes the anxiety of modern times anytime and is spread as virus internationally. Art is in transit between the non-representative and representative. From this reason, art might change an individual and collective perspective. Having seen Munch's life frieze images such as the Sick Child, people reflect upon their life. Hope is essential (Naess, 2005). After recovering from his own illness, Munch worked in outdoor studios re-focusing his imaginative workings towards the life-bringing Sun, the Alma Mater, and the old fisherman sharing his knowledge to a young-one under a tree as crucial for enlightenment in society. Art certainly can change perspectives, attitudes, and behaviour, which can be an inspiration in museum exhibitions and beyond them.

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