CMA

A New Vision
BACKGROUND

For over 30 years, Children’s Museum of the Arts has created opportunities for children and their families to make art side-by-side with artists. From its origins as a small storefront project in Soho serving local families, the museum has expanded over the decades. In terms of space, CMA has expanded to accommodate a more robust exhibition program of contemporary art, as well as classrooms and specialized facilities for media arts; and in terms of program, CMA has expanded school partnerships across the city, summer camps on Governors Island and in Prospect Park, Outposts with various sponsor organizations, and general audience with specialized programs for children with physical disabilities, children on the autism spectrum, and families with children in the foster care system.

But efforts to expand have often superseded concerns for quality or adherence to an integrated, invigorating mission.

Then COVID-19 happened. While the pandemic did not cause the challenges endemic to the museum’s expansion, it has provided an impetus to correct course quickly by considering our institution holistically, beginning with an assertion of the museum’s values. I have identified five values that iterate from each other to comprise a system that I believe should guide CMA for the future.
VALUES
FIVE VALUES OF CMA

1.

Art is fundamental to life.

Art is not a hobby or an extracurricular activity. Participation in the creation and reception of aesthetic experiences is a necessary condition for life to be more than brute biology – for life to be worth living. While access to the arts may prove to enhance academic performance or increase our capacity for empathy, it needs no justification. To take part in the experience of art is to live fully.
Everything we do can be more or less beautiful, resonant, touching and meaningful. *Everything* – from the artworks we celebrate and the programs we run to how we write an email or conduct a meeting. While not everything is art, everything can be. Art is the aspiration of all our endeavors.
3.

Art comes from art; art is collaborative.

Art, like language, is continuously created anew through collaborative exchange. Just as no one learns to speak through the study of grammar or parts of speech, no one learns art by abstract study. To learn art, we must see it and make it. To teach art, we must make it and share it.
Art grows when the community of art grows.

Our collective capacity to transform our world – to make it more beautiful, resonant, touching and meaningful – expands exponentially as the community of people who actively participate in it expands. Art cannot thrive as a privileged domain.
FIVE VALUES OF CMA

5.

All children are artists.

Lack of art historical knowledge, technical training, and a general tendency to patronize the young has been used to marginalize the creativity and curiosity children can contribute to the arts. But everyone is born with the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the conversation of art and the development of form. Though specialized language and complex traditions have served to refine the arts over time, knowledge of these is only valuable if they open more paths to direct engagement, not less. Adults have as much to learn from children as they do from us.
MISSION
Several of these values are alluded to in the previous mission:

The mission of the Children’s Museum of the Arts is to introduce children and their families to the transformative power of the arts by providing opportunities to make art side-by-side with working artists.

But ultimately, the previous mission statement describes a one directional program, presuming that “working artists” can introduce art experiences to the uninitiated.

CMA deserves a mission that expresses an aspirational spirit while validating the creativity of children and communities.
A new mission for CMA expresses the belief that all children and communities can participate meaningfully in an egalitarian future of art:

CMA unites children and artists to create and share ambitious new works of art with their communities and the world.
This new mission expresses CMA’s role as a platform for bridging constituencies toward the creation of new knowledge (art), rather than a one-directional transfer of knowledge (power).

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Why focus on children? Because historically people under the age of puberty have not been allowed to participate fully in the development of culture. While schools and independent programs have attempted to address this deficit from the point of view of a child’s development and well-being, CMA recognizes this marginalization of children as a comprehensive deficit to the wider culture. The inclusion of children in the creation of widely experienced works of art expands what art is: art grows when the community of art grows.
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Since at least the Enlightenment, the role of artists in society has been ambiguous and mutable. The negative consequence of this lack of clarity has been that artists and their creative work are often easily co-opted in service of entrenched power. CMA believes that forging strong bonds between artists and communities can help to establish the centrality of art in society, helping us all to appreciate that art is fundamental to life.
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Art grows when the community of art grows. To this end, CMA prioritizes the involvement of communities that have been marginalized from “the art world” due to systemic biases against identities, class, languages and disabilities. CMA amplifies the artistic contributions of these children and communities not as “a charitable act toward the underprivileged,” but because the world is underprivileged without their artistic contributions.
CMA MISSION

CMA unites children and artists to create and share ambitious new works of art with their communities and the world.

CMA is not a children’s museum with a focus on the arts. CMA is a new idea of what a museum of the arts can be, an organization that contributes to the greater good of art itself by drawing on the creative abilities of children to create artworks that reflect a broader vision of our world, works that are only conceivable through collaboration.
In accord with this new mission, CMA’s takes an integrated approach to engaging children, artists, their communities and the world,

appealing to children by respecting their capacity to contribute creatively to the world, inspiring them with ambitious, imaginative programming,

appealing to parents and educators with life-altering opportunities for their children to collaborate with leading artists in realizing ambitious and significant artworks,

appealing to leading artists of today and tomorrow with opportunities to create ambitious new works with high visibility in a manner that expands their creative practice,

appealing to neighborhoods and community groups with opportunities to make their voices heard through art, drawing attention to their locales and concerns,

appealing to multiple donor profiles with singular, high-profile opportunities to support children’s arts education, community development, and significant new art
PROGRAM
CMA PROGRAM

DEEP LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

A Museum-in-Residence

Twice a year CMA selects an artist or group of artists and a neighborhood to collaborate in the creation of significant new artworks.

The artist(s) will be asked to address a thematic question (e.g., How do we look at a monument?) through their projects, which will provide a framework for a season of public programming with that neighborhood.

The three contextual factors (thematic question, neighborhood, artist) are determined well in advance of each residency, allowing ample time for targeted outreach, engagement, research and fundraising.
AUTHENTIC ART WORLD ENGAGEMENT

Gallery Collaborations

Each summer CMA introduces children to NYC’s art world – and NYC’s art world to children – with week-long exhibition-making camps held on-site at an NYC gallery.

Students will spend their week visiting artist studios, exhibitions and public art sites, while working together in the gallery to create an original public exhibition in response to a thematic question.
INNOVATIVE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

A Living Collection

CMA perpetually builds on its originating collection of over 2,000 artworks by children through an interactive online portal encouraging children from all over the world to share their artistic responses to our seasonal thematic question. Our online collection aspires to be the largest, most globally diverse collection of contemporary children’s art in the world, a continuous source of inspiration for artists, children and scholars.
INNOVATIVE GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

The Look Make Show

This living collection, in concert with our seasonal neighborhood and gallery projects, are regularly highlighted through The Look Make Show, an episodic, character-driven arts program for children of all ages.

In collaboration with our artists, neighborhoods, gallery, and our online community, a full season of The Look Make Show is shared online each year.
BROAD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Look Make Show

Beyond CMA’s locally engaged residencies, CMA regularly engages children across the city through school visits, Weekend Open Studios, and After School opportunities at the CMA Studio where children have the opportunity to participate in the making of The Look Make Show.

These free programs allow CMA to engage with children from all over the city, while centering inclusive communities within the making of The Look Make Show.
TEAM
The CMA Team is organized according to six priorities.

**Direction**
Provides leadership and vision for CMA. Chief collaborator across all departments.

**Operations**
Support for all regular operations of CMA including staff management and finance.

**Advancement**
Responsible for fundraising through grants, individual donors and corporate sponsors.

**Outreach**
Responsible for marketing and communication across all of CMA’s programming and advancement efforts.

**Curatorial**
Responsible for programming in neighborhoods, galleries and online.

**Studio**
Responsible for *The Look Make Show*, provides guidance and support for children in our After School Programs, Summer Camps, School Visits, and Weekend Programs, supports the production needs of each season’s artist.