

The Drawing Center

Community Engagement Report

Katja Vujić

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Executive Summary

The Drawing Center has a long established reputation in the art world that grants it an automatic core group of loyal visitors. By planning exhibits and designing programming that both meets the interests of those existing patrons *and* invites new visitors to join the museum's community, the Drawing Center has effectively formed strong relationships with community members. The museum's dedication to education, cultural programming, and prioritization of accessibility are truly impressive.

However, the museum staff appears stretched thin, and its lack of social media presence and interactivity in the physical museum space is a passing up of opportunities for growth in the visitor community.

Findings

- Visitors are primarily reached via press, word of mouth, and in-person connections.
- The museum newsletter is a key way it engages visitors, along with the guide on Bloomberg Connects app and its easy-to-navigate website.
- The museum's social media is not a high priority, and Instagram followers don't often overlap with actual visitors.
- Visitors can be split into two general categories: NYC art world folk, and casual drop-in first-timers.

Recommendations

- Dedicate a small space in the museum to creating a permanent interactive exhibit or rotating interactive exhibits.
- Extend hours on Friday evenings.
- Track visitors with optional email sign-up.
- Increase social media output.
- Collaborate with organizations outside the Soho neighborhood.

Background

The Drawing Center was founded by Martha Beck, a former MoMA contemporary art curator, in 1977. Her impetus to open it was that she didn't see respect for the medium of drawing at the MoMA at that time, and wanted to create an experimental institution that would exhibit work by living artists, honor the history of drawing, and advance and expand our cultural understanding of what drawing is. It was intended as a home for the medium of drawing and the artists who dedicate themselves to it. In more recent years, the institution has expanded its mission and focus to specifically include community building and accessibility.

The center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; in addition to taking individual donations, the museum is financially sustained by a number of organizations; free admission is made possible by the Cy Twombly Foundation, for example, and educational/cultural programming is funded by the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, Inc.; The Evelyn Toll Family Foundation; public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; and the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation. Institutional decisions are made by a board of directors.

At its founding, the Center was located in a warehouse at 137 Greene Street, and was moved in 1987 to its current location at 35 Wooster Street, making it a longtime SoHo institution. It belongs to a cohort of "alternative art spaces" founded in the late 1960s and 1970s, and was part of the SoHo art scene of that time. It shows a lot of contemporary work and has exhibited all sorts of artists, from Antoni Gaudi to Julie Mehretu, and more recently it has exhibited works by people who aren't traditionally thought of as belonging to the art world, like chefs and tattoo artists. It also runs "artist-centric" programming run by an artist-in-residence, forming a strong community of artists, and the center also uses programming to invite in communities who don't always feel welcome in museum spaces; they launched a series of drawing classes catered specifically to artists who are deaf or hard of hearing, and they also run online drawing classes catered to teens. For the current exhibition of works by Fernanda Laguna, there was a bilingual tour of the exhibit and drawing class. It seems like the Drawing Center has a robust foundation when it comes to community building and engagement, which can be attributed to its history as part of a larger alternative art movement and its mission to show art from members of the surrounding community. There are opportunities to build on that history and expand the Drawing Center's offerings, as well as ways to increase engagement online. It would be interesting to see the museum participate more firmly in community conversations, online and off, and to find ways to build the audience beyond its partnerships and entrenched art-world community. That it offers free admission is a significant help in terms of accessibility and therefore community — but its limited hours (12-6) present a challenge.

Mission

The Drawing Center doesn't have a public mission statement listed, but its mission can be condensed as the following: "The Drawing Center's mission is twofold: first, to protect and honor the history and the future of drawing as an artistic medium, while expanding what that medium can look like — and second, to curate a welcoming artistic environment which is accessible to as many potential visitors as possible." Drawing Center

exhibits highlight the drawings of both contemporary artists and artists of previous generations, sometimes within one exhibit. Importantly, they also place the works in relation and conversation with the larger artistic world and culture at large. Programming at the Drawing Center feels intended to nourish and encourage the next generation of drawing artists, and build relationships with community members. Because it's one of the most accessible art forms around, drawing is often seen as being less impressive or important or museum-worthy. But it's an incredible skill, and not only that, it's an important part of the contemporary art world. The Drawing Center highlights that, and invites a diverse audience to experience it.

Partner and peer/competitor organizations

The Drawing Center was part of a wave of art spaces that opened in the late '60s and '70s. Those included [MoMA PS1](#), [Artists Space](#), [Creative Time](#), [White Columns](#), [The Kitchen](#), the [New Museum](#), and [Printed Matter](#). In addition to these, I'd consider the [ICP](#) a peer/competitor organization because of its singular focus on one medium, as well as the [Poster House](#) for the same reason. For the purpose of this report, I will focus on two of these many competitors: The New Museum and the International Center of Photography (ICP), both located in Lower Manhattan. All three museums are within a twenty minute walk of one another.

The Drawing Center's similarities with the ICP lie in the organizations' shared singular focus on one medium, as well as their shared commitment to education — though the ICP takes it a step further, running a school where students can receive certificates. Too, the ICP was founded in 1974, just three years before the Drawing Center was, with the explicit intention of championing "concerned" photography, which is photography that addresses social and political issues. Both institutions are currently 501(c)3 nonprofits. Today, though, the ICP's offerings are more robust than the Drawing Center's — in addition to being a school, the ICP offers public programming, a reading library, and archival collections which researchers can view online or by appointment in-person. The ICP is physically much bigger than the Drawing Center, and it does charge an admission fee of \$16. On Instagram, the Drawing Center's 194k followers may at first glance look paltry in comparison to the ICP's 379k — but when we consider the difference in size and scope between the two organizations, the Drawing Center's following seems more impressive.

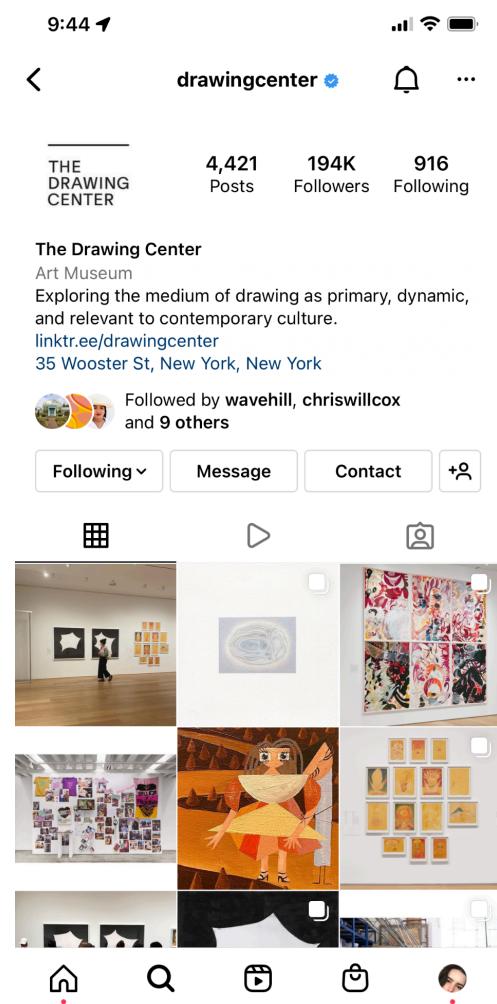
The New Museum, too, is much larger than the Drawing Center, and doesn't focus on just one medium. However, its history is deeply aligned with that of the Drawing Center. They were founded the same year, 1977, and was founded by Marcia Tucker, who noticed, in her work as a curator at the Whitney, that traditional museums had difficulty incorporating living artists into their collections and exhibitions. This is incredibly similar to the story of Drawing Center founder Martha Beck, whose work as a MoMA curator similarly inspired her to create a space to show drawings, including by contemporary living artists. Like the Drawing Center, the New Museum is a non-collecting institution, meaning they don't have a permanent collection. Despite their vastly different sizes, these two institutions actually have a similar cadence of programming, about 2 events each month (though both institutions vary by month and exhibition), which

speaks to how much the Drawing Center values programming and education. The New Museum's Instagram following is at 799k, while the Drawing Center's is, again, at 149k.

Online overview

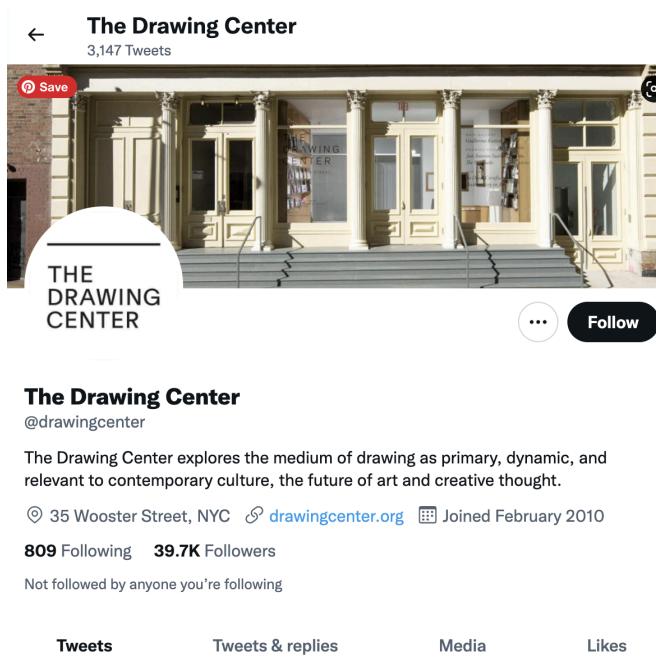
The Drawing Center has accounts on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Vimeo](#), [Eventbrite](#), and Bloomberg Connects. At the time of this writing, the Twitter account has 39.7k followers, the Instagram has 194k followers, and the Facebook page has 63,732 likes and 70,629 followers. While the Twitter and Facebook events don't receive particularly high engagement, the Instagram account receives a significantly higher level of engagement, with the most popular posts gaining anywhere from 500+ to 3,000+ likes and a smattering of comments. This makes sense, since Instagram is the visual platform, and it's where they share images of the drawings on display in the museum — a solid strategy, although tweaks could be made. The Instagram account also employs a much more frequent posting cadence, averaging between 5 and 6 posts per week in the month of March.

Instagram



Instagram is the Drawing Center's highest-engaged platform. The account is primarily used to share images of artworks on display in the museum, with occasional posts to advertise events. The account doesn't appear to use the Instagram story function, at least not on a regular basis. The posting cadence is fairly consistent, reducing slightly during periods when the museum is closed down for installation and doesn't have an exhibit actively on display. The captions are often long and informative, featuring quotes from artists, curators, and/or critics, or context regarding the artwork. For posts advertising events, the captions are slightly shorter, but still highly descriptive. The [Linktree](#) currently features 5 links: one that goes to the homepage of the Drawing Center website, one that leads to the "Plan Your Visit" page of that website, a third link to register for curatorial walkthroughs, also on the Drawing Center website, a fourth that links to their website's info page for the annual gala, and finally, a link to the Bloomberg Connects guide for the museum.

Twitter



The Drawing Center
@drawingcenter

The Drawing Center explores the medium of drawing as primary, dynamic, and relevant to contemporary culture, the future of art and creative thought.

35 Wooster Street, NYC drawingcenter.org Joined February 2010

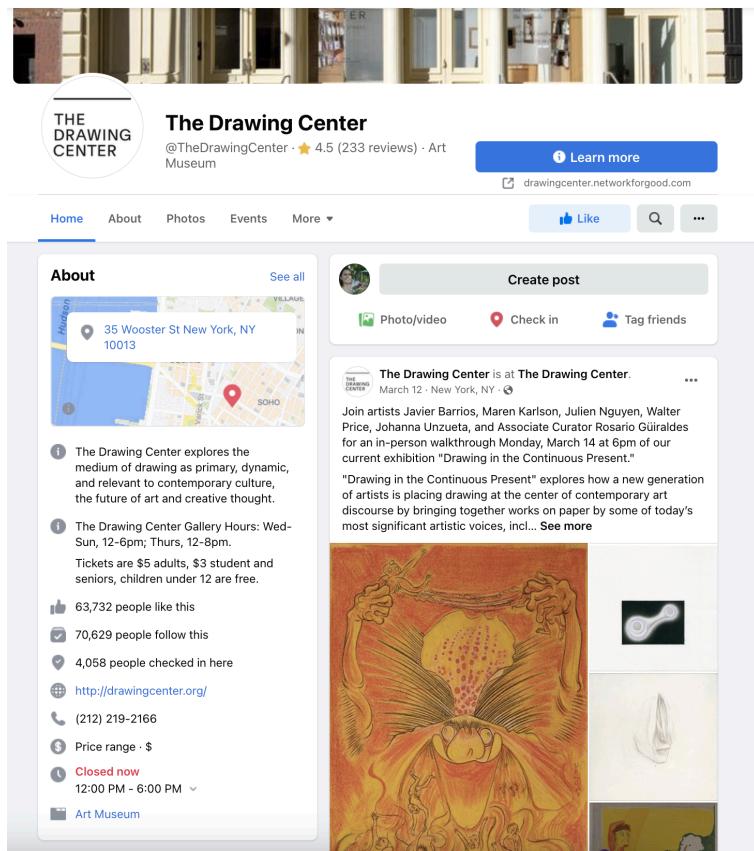
809 Following 39.7K Followers

Not followed by anyone you're following

Tweets Tweets & replies Media Likes

The Drawing Center's Twitter account, which was created in February of 2010, does not appear to have been active since November of 2021. When it was active, it was used sparsely, and primarily to share announcements, information for visitors (like museum closings), press coverage, and events. This account is a weak point and could likely be utilized more effectively.

Facebook



The Drawing Center
@TheDrawingCenter · 4.5 (233 reviews) · Art Museum

Learn more drawingcenter.networkforgood.com

Home About Photos Events More Like ...

About See all

35 Wooster St New York, NY 10013

The Drawing Center explores the medium of drawing as primary, dynamic, and relevant to contemporary culture, the future of art and creative thought.

The Drawing Center Gallery Hours: Wed-Sun, 12-6pm; Thurs, 12-8pm. Tickets are \$5 adults, \$3 student and seniors, children under 12 are free.

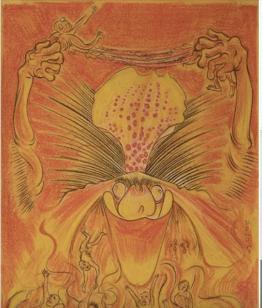
63,732 people like this
70,629 people follow this
4,058 people checked in here
<http://drawingcenter.org/>
(212) 219-2166
Price range - \$
Closed now
12:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Art Museum

Create post

The Drawing Center is at The Drawing Center. March 12 - New York, NY ...

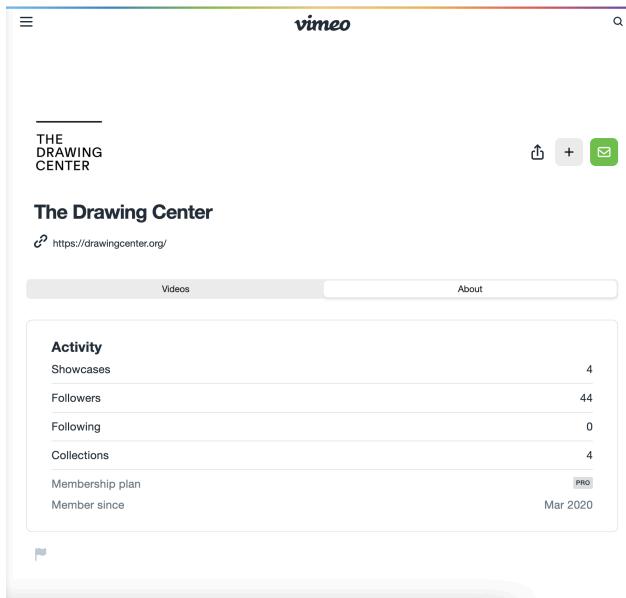
Join artists Javier Barrios, Maren Carlson, Julien Nguyen, Walter Price, Johanna Unzueta, and Associate Curator Rosario Giraldez for an in-person walkthrough Monday, March 14 at 6pm of our current exhibition "Drawing in the Continuous Present."

"Drawing in the Continuous Present" explores how a new generation of artists is placing drawing at the center of contemporary art discourse by bringing together works on paper by some of today's most significant artistic voices, incl... See more



The Drawing Center's Facebook account is more active than the Twitter account, with 10 posts shared so far in 2022. The Facebook also offers up-to-date information for visitors and a reviews tab for users to leave reviews (4.5 out of 5 star average!). For logistic purposes, the Facebook page serves its purpose — and since Facebook is no longer as widely used as it was in the 2010s, increasing Facebook cadence likely would not be worth the effort.

Vimeo

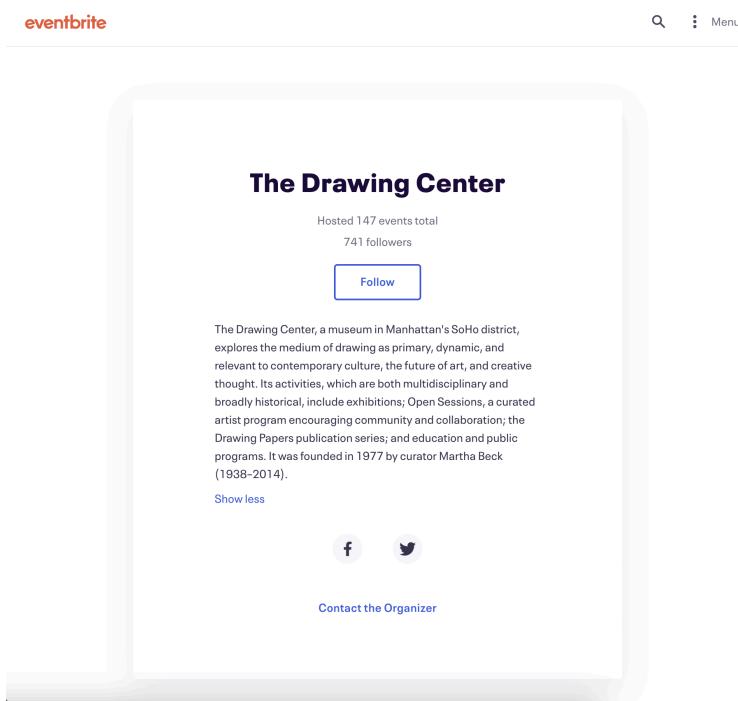


The screenshot shows The Drawing Center's Vimeo profile. At the top, there's a navigation bar with a menu icon, the Vimeo logo, and a search icon. Below the logo, the text 'THE DRAWING CENTER' is displayed. The main content area shows the profile for 'The Drawing Center'. It includes a link to their website (<https://drawingcenter.org/>) and a 'Videos' tab. A table titled 'Activity' provides the following data:

Activity	Count
Showcases	4
Followers	44
Following	0
Collections	4
Membership plan	PRO
Member since	Mar 2020

Below the activity table, there's a video player with a play button and a progress bar.

The Drawing Center's Vimeo page may not have many followers, but it does offer a robust archive of 39 videos, many of which are recordings of virtual events that have taken place since 2020 — along with a smattering of virtual walkthroughs of exhibits and a few other videos taken in the museum's physical space. It's likely not a place users or potential visitors would go to discover the museum, but it is a lovely educational resource for existing visitors.



The screenshot shows The Drawing Center's Eventbrite page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the Eventbrite logo, a search icon, and a menu icon. The main content area features a large box with the title 'The Drawing Center'. Below the title, it says 'Hosted 147 events total' and '741 followers'. A 'Follow' button is present. A detailed description of the museum follows:

The Drawing Center, a museum in Manhattan's SoHo district, explores the medium of drawing as primary, dynamic, and relevant to contemporary culture, the future of art, and creative thought. Its activities, which are both multidisciplinary and broadly historical, include exhibitions; Open Sessions, a curated artist program encouraging community and collaboration; the Drawing Papers publication series; and education and public programs. It was founded in 1977 by curator Martha Beck (1938-2014).

Below the description are 'Show less' and social media links for Facebook and Twitter. At the bottom, there's a link to 'Contact the Organizer'.

Eventbrite

Since Eventbrite is used by some folks as a search engine of sorts for events happening in their area, it's helpful that the Drawing Center posts many of the museum events there — in addition to being a convenience for existing regular visitors, it could actually be a good way for new visitors to discover the museum via programming.

Bloomberg Connects

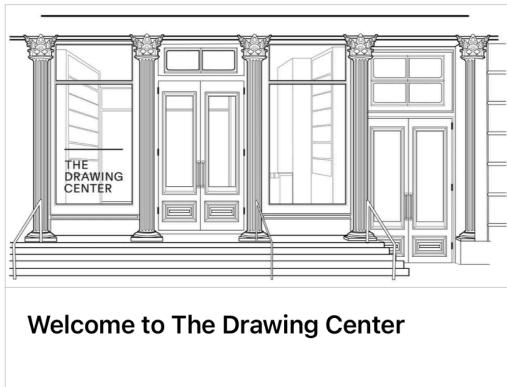
9:20 4



All Guides

THE DRAWING CENTER

The [Bloomberg Connects](#) app offers guides to various cultural institutions, and the comprehensive guide created by the Drawing Center likely helps attract users of the app to the museum — of course, it helps that these users are already predisposed to be interested in visiting a museum.



Current Exhibitions



METHODS

The research plan for this study included the following:

1. In-person observation of The Drawing Center's foot traffic and patronage over 3 1-hour periods
2. In-person and virtual attendance and observation of 2 of the Drawing Center's events
3. Observation and evaluation of the Drawing Center's social media presence on the Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook platforms over a period of 3 months.
4. Planned interviews conducted with museum staff, and Instagram followers
5. Unplanned interviews with museum visitors.

In-person Observation

Observations were made in one day, spread out over the course of the day in order to gain a more accurate sense of the overall crowd. Observation periods were as follows:

- 12pm (opening time) — 1pm
- 3pm — 4pm
- 5pm — 6pm (closing time)

Observations were made in a notebook. Observer noted each person who entered, with basic information that could be ascertained through the act of observing. Observer chose not to include gender, in order to avoid making incorrect assumptions, but noted age range and style of dress. Observer noted race when it was apparent and made best guesses when it wasn't. Observer also noted relevant overheard snippets of conversation.

In the hours outside of direct observation, Observer walked around the museum and spoke to some visitors.

Event Attendance

Observer attended two of the Drawing Center's events:

- Fernanda Laguna: The Path of the Heart Virtual Book Launch on April 5 at 6pm
- DibujoAhora! DrawNow! with Ada Pilar Cruz on Fernanda Laguna on April 9 at 11:30am

Observer actively participated in both events while also taking note of attendees where possible. Observer spoke with in-person event attendees about their reasons for attending and their relationship with the Drawing Center, and also asked attendees how they heard about the event and whether they follow the Drawing Center on their social media accounts.

Observation & Evaluation

The content posted on the Drawing Center's Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts between January 1, 2022 and April 14, 2022 was closely monitored, observed, and evaluated. Reference to content posted outside of that time period was referenced as needed. Data collected includes: posting cadence for each account, average engagement levels for each post, and type of content posted.

This data helps to gauge the level of community engagement present on the Center's various social media platforms. Paired with data from in-person observation, interaction, and interviews, it helps to elucidate the relationship between online engagement and in-person engagement with the Center.

Interviews

There were two types of interviews conducted as part of the research process:

1. Planned, formal interviews conducted in-person or via Zoom, with a prepared list of questions (available in Appendix A).
2. Unplanned, informal interviews conducted in-person while attending museum event. Questions were not prepared ahead of time because interviews were conversational and unofficial. Attendees were generally asked how they learned of the event and the museum.
3. Unplanned, informal interviews conducted in-person while visiting the museum. Questions were prepared ahead of time (available in Appendix A) and tailored to the interviewee's contextual information; they generally focused on patrons' engagement with the museum in person and on social media.
4. Planned, informal interviews over Instagram DM with followers who commented on Instagram posts from the Drawing Center (available in Appendix B).

Planned interviews were solicited via email and LinkedIn. Unplanned interviews were solicited via in-person conversation.

Interviewees included:

- **Mark Zubrovich**, the Drawing Center's visitor services associate
- **Aimee Good**, the Drawing Center's director of education and community programs
- **Valerie Newton**, the Drawing Center's senior manager of retail and visitor experience
- 7 event attendees
- 8 museum visitors

FINDINGS

What is the Drawing Center doing?

This case study addresses two core questions. First: What is the Drawing Center's foundational mission and overarching vision, especially as it relates to visitor engagement? Second: What tools — programming, social media, etc. — does the Drawing Center use to actualize that vision, and are there ways they can better align with their stated mission?

The Drawing Center wants to take seriously the often-undervalued artistic technique of drawing.

Drawing is one of the most accessible artistic techniques — at its simplest, the required materials are nothing more than a piece of paper and a pencil. Or a cave wall and a rock. In part because of this, drawing is seen by many in the art world as amateur or childish. The Drawing Center expands our understanding of both what a drawing is and can be, and the value it deserves to be assigned. As part of its exhibition “Fernanda Laguna: The Path of the Heart,” on view from March 10, 2022 to May 22, 2022, the Drawing Center published *The Path of the Heart*, a book that encompasses the theoretical framework and social context of Fernanda’s artwork via essays written by some of the most prominent scholars of her work, as well as poetry written by Fernanda, and images of both her artworks and documentary photography of her artistic and activist work. The Drawing Center hosted a virtual book launch for this publication, which I attended, and also an exhibition tour/art class inspired by the exhibition, which I also attended. Both the launch and the tour/art class were guided by folks who were intimately familiar with Fernanda’s work, and whose enthusiasm for it was evident.

However, both events also felt somewhat disorganized and ill-prepared for; during the book launch, it wasn’t clear until near the end of the panel discussion that Fernanda’s lack of participation was because of a language barrier, and the moderator’s questions didn’t feel particularly well thought out — it didn’t feel to me that the planners of the event had carefully considered how to organize the conversation or what themes it should focus on. Instead, the moderator overly relied on the panelists to guide the conversation, which resulted in occasional long, awkward silences. It was also unclear how many attendees were at the event, since the Zoom was set up so that attendees weren’t able to see how many of us were present. The art class also felt somewhat improvised; it wasn’t clear from the description that it would begin with a tour of the exhibition (although I was certainly grateful it did), and attendees also were not told ahead of time that the art we created would be sent to Fernanda herself. Both were things I was personally pleasantly surprised to discover, but I’m not sure how many others felt that way, if any. The passion and care for the work made both events ultimately successful, but there was a distinct feeling that at both events, the outline for how they would play out was *sparse*. It made me wonder how much more successful both events could have been with sufficient forethought.

The Drawing Center wants to be a leader in accessibility.

In recent years, the Drawing Center has sought to center often-overlooked groups, via curation strategy and especially via programming. “As an institution that’s interested in community building, at least recently, in my experience with the Drawing Center, a big thing that we’re focused on right now is accessibility. We do a whole series of public programs with the deaf community, tailored specifically around deaf participants. In the two and a half years that I’ve been here, one of the most important ways that we’ve seen to grow our community is to find very specific and pointed ways to engage with people who usually don’t get priority in museum spaces, like disabled people, like deaf people,” said visitor services associate Mark Zubrovich. In 2019, for example, the Drawing Center held an exhibit called “The Pencil Is a Key,” with works all by incarcerated artists, accompanied by programming that was in conversation with formerly incarcerated artists and folks working in prison advocacy. “It’s reaching out to people — and not just art world people,” said Zubrovich. He attributed much of the museum’s community growth and outreach success to Aimee Good, the director of education and community programs.

Good runs educational and community programming — classes with teaching artists, museum walkthroughs, field trips and other direct interactions with local schools. Describing her techniques and how a typical program might go, Good said, “I work from a racial and social justice-based lens, with much improvisation as part of the conversation and direct engagement that gets built when we work together in the galleries. So, storytelling methods, visual thinking curriculum methods, starting with a community introduction circle, and history about the drawing center, and always trying to open up the space for it to be a group conversation, where then we’re prioritizing what people are noticing, and then I just keep asking lots of questions to keep the flow of the dialogue going with an intentional outcome, and then we do a drawing based activity at the end.”

It’s clear from my conversations that there are three primary sources of community growth and engagement: 1) Aimee Good’s work directly reaching out to specific organizations and communities; 2) Positive press generated by high caliber curation; 3) Word of mouth, particularly within the art world.

The Drawing Center separates the majority of its visitors into two general groups.

According to Zubrovich, the core group of visitors to the Drawing Center are longtime NYC residents with connections to the art world — “Either they come to every show, and we see them all the time, or they haven’t been here in 15 years, and they just decided to stumble in and they’re like, *Oh my god, I forgot about this place. I can’t believe you’re still here.*” The other major group consists of visitors who are coming for the first time, often on unplanned visits, just because they were walking around in the area and popped in. “We get a lot of people who come in once, stay for five minutes, and then forget about us and never come back. So having that initial person come in is an important part for us to like, have them remember us,” says Zubrovich. That’s part of the reason the Drawing Center has recently expanded their storefront bookstore

area to include merch and other more giftable items, like Japanese watercolors or a stenciling set. Valerie Newton, the store manager, is in charge of ordering the merchandise, and says she thinks the museum would benefit from staying open later on some days — perhaps Fridays — and placing a sidewalk sign on the sidewalk to help attract more people.

Programming for both groups is a balancing act.

“We get a lot of walk-ins, a lot of people who know nothing about the art world or that wider canon in general. And then we have a clientele of people who are extremely in tune with that, and art is kind of like their life. So we kind of have to balance these two forces. We have to have programming for both the people that fund the institution, because we’re a nonprofit, we have a board of directors who are all art world people. But we also want to put on shows that engage with people who don’t necessarily have ... people who aren’t like, well versed in international art English, or the canon of history of art or anything. And I think we’ve done a pretty good job at finding that democratic center.”

Instagram followers sometimes translate to visitors at the Drawing Center, but it’s more often the other way around.

Many of the Instagram followers I spoke to over Instagram had not visited the museum in person. Out of the visitors I interviewed who did follow the Drawing Center on Instagram (many did not), the majority were aware of the museum prior to following the Instagram account.

The Drawing Center nimbly adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to value visitor and employee health & safety.

When COVID-19 first hit, the Drawing Center shut down completely for the first few months. Staff adapted by holding virtual events — lots of them. There were (and still are) virtual drawing classes, panel discussions, and even the annual gala was held virtually. Once the museum did reopen, they took every precaution — visitors had to sign in for contact tracing, everything had to be wiped down constantly, etc. COVID precautions were a huge part of Zubrovich’s job, and only recently eased with the museum’s decision to cease requiring visitors to register, to perform less intensive cleaning, etc. Visitors are still required to mask, but are only tracked via a clicker counter.

The Drawing Center wants to deepen relationships with surrounding communities & attract visitors from those communities.

The museum’s continued goal is to build deeper relationships with local communities, organizations, and institutions. That’s what Good’s job is all about — reaching out directly and in person to potential new visitors. The company website, Bloomberg Connects, and the email newsletter seem to be the primary tools

used by repeat visitors to learn about goings-on. However, social media has been a somewhat overlooked component.

NOTE: Despite multiple requests and reach-outs via email, I did not hear back from Kara Nandin, the Drawing Center's digital content coordinator. This is almost definitely the person who runs the social media platforms, and while their perspective would have been invaluable, these conclusions were made without it.

The Drawing Center utilizes Instagram as its primary social media platform.

The Instagram account @drawingcenter has 194k followers — an increase since mid-March, when it had 193k — and as of the writing of this report, 4,420 total posts. The Instagram account does not appear to use the Instagram Stories feature, which also means there are no story highlights. The strategy on Instagram appears straightforward: regular posting of artworks on display or soon to be on display at the museum, with informative captions that contextualize the work. These visually appealing posts are highly shareable, and while I don't have access to any analytics around how much the Drawing Center's posts are shared on Stories, I am confident it happens — and is a good way to expand the museum's online network and presence.

A Twitter strategy is currently nonexistent, since the account hasn't been touched since November of 2021. On Facebook, the posts generally contain useful information — events, exhibit openings and closings, and in one post, a job opening at the museum.

Online, the Drawing Center primarily communicates with visitors via email and directly on the website.

Many of the visitors, especially older visitors, I spoke to told me that they simply go onto the Drawing Center's website periodically to check and see what exhibits and events are on. Based on my interviews with employees, it seems clear that the biggest portion of communication occurs via the newsletter. There's a huge email list, and E-blasts are the primary way many visitors are informed of upcoming exhibits and events.

The Drawing Center relies heavily on its age and reputation, along with direct interaction, to build up the community.

Much of what the Drawing Center hopes to achieve is made clear via the goals implicit in the way exhibits are curated; for example, it was a deliberate choice for the Drawing Center to exhibit the work of Fernanda Laguna, whose artistic practice is so much about opening up the medium to use whatever materials are currently available, to improvise — and too, has no interest in or desire to join the Western canon. Fernanda Laguna's work is as much about activism and social change as it is about art, and the Drawing Center chose to show her work in part because of that. They are intentional about showing work that aligns with their larger institutional mission of making art accessible for everyone.

By inviting in artists who are not part of the more traditional art world, the museum also implicitly invites in visitors who don't have artistic training or an academic background in art. And partnerships with local schools and other organizations help to consistently cement the invitation for all visitors to come to the museum as their authentic selves.

Zubrovich and Newton both said that they make an effort to engage visitors, particularly first-time visitors, in conversation about the art and the museum, as another way to connect with them and make them feel welcome to return.

More than anything else, the Drawing Center is deeply invested in arts education and conversation.

The educational programming at the Drawing Center is free, high quality, and frequent for an institution of its size. Events are well-attended, according to Good. Earlier in the pandemic, when all programming was online, Good says that around 80% of those who signed up for an event would actually join the Zoom. Now, that number is closer to 50% as many have begun to experience Zoom fatigue. While she didn't share specific numbers, she said that in-person events are "always really full," and that there is steady attendance for the two recurring art workshops, the ASL workshop and the teen workshop. That public programming, along with the individualized programming with partner organizations and schools that Good works on, makes up what appears to be the bulk of the museum's investments. They often employ guest teaching artists and design robust programming around each exhibit; for example, Zubrovich shared that the museum has discussed holding a cake-decorating class for an upcoming cake-related exhibit that will be on this summer.

How are visitors actually learning about the Drawing Center?

Out of the visitors I spoke to at the art class I attended, none learned about the event via the Drawing Center's social media or institutional website. One of the attendees is someone who regularly browses Eventbrite for art classes to attend, and brought a friend along. Two of the attendees came to the museum unaware that the class was happening, but when asked if they were there for the class, requested to join in. A third group of attendees was made up of three former coworkers, two of whom were visiting the third from New Jersey. The person local to NYC had searched for a fun activity for them all to do in the area, and came across the art class.

Visitor interviews confirmed what Zubrovich and Newton stated — most of the visitors I spoke to were longtime NYC residents, art world-adjacent, who had known of the Drawing Center for so long they couldn't remember exactly when or where they first heard about it. Two of the visitors I spoke to were from out of town, and were clearly museum enthusiasts who had received the recommendation from a friend and/or done some of their own research. One had first visited the Drawing Center for a class at art school, and another first visited after hearing about one of the exhibits five or six years ago. One of the visitors I spoke to said,

How well-attended is the Drawing Center on a regular Saturday, and how well-attended is an in-person event at the Drawing Center?

Zubrovich told me, during a conversation after our recorded interview, that museum attendance varies greatly not just by day or week, but by exhibit. For super-popular exhibits, Zubrovich said the museum can receive up to 800 visitors in a day — which apparently happened during a recent super-popular exhibit. Because of COVID protocols at the time, there was a capacity limit and all visitors had to register, so there was a line out the door on some days.

For the current exhibit that's up, and for the average exhibit generally, Zubrovich estimated that a busy day looks like 150-200 visitors in one day. At around 5pm — an hour before closing — on the day that I visited and observed, Zubrovich said there'd been 77 visitors so far that day. In my observation, I counted the highest number of visitors entering between 4pm and 5pm — 32 by my count, but there was a period of about 5 minutes during which so many visitors walked in at once I'm not even sure I counted them all. Between 2 and 3pm, I counted 17 visitors entering, and between noon (opening time) and 1pm, I counted 12. I also realized that there was another entrance which I didn't have eyes on, so these numbers are only estimates.

There were, in total, nine attendees not affiliated with the Drawing Center who attended the museum's art class. There were enough supplies and seats for about 15-20 attendees, and considering that the event was free, one might expect attendance to reach full capacity. This indicates room for improvement when it comes to advertising events.

Who are the Drawing Center's visitors?

Demographically, the visitors I saw varied widely. I would estimate that about a third of the visitors I observed were over 50, and about a fourth looked to be in their 20s. About half looked to be in their 30s or 40s. I'm not sure that math adds up, but keep in mind that these are informal estimates. The crowd appeared to be mostly white and Asian; during my observation periods, I saw one Black visitor enter the space. This is somewhat consistent with the demographics of the neighborhood, but seems quite unusual for New York City.

It was often clear which visitors had been to the museum before. They either went straight for the door, or stopped to inquire about registering, indicating that they'd last visited during a time of stricter COVID protocols. Some came in with shopping bags, seemingly thinking the Drawing Center was simply a store, and after browsing, left. In a few cases, visitors left upon being asked to put on masks before entering the exhibition space — though none had a particularly angry reaction about it. One visitor, after being asked to put on a mask, asked if there were masks available at the front desk, since theirs had been left at home, and was given one. However, staff did not actively offer masks to visitors. Many of the visitors looked to be couples, although I also observed some groups of 4 and 5, and a fair number of solo visitors as well. Some seemed to be casually strolling around Soho, choosing to visit the museum on impulse.

Most of the visitors I observed were in the museum space for somewhere between 15 and 20 minutes, though about a fourth stayed in for half an hour or longer. Many of them browsed the storefront space for 5 minutes or longer, either before or after entering the museum. I observed three purchases; two visitors purchased Drawing Papers, which are exhibition booklets published by the Drawing Center. One visitor purchased a set of Japanese watercolor paints. Another visitor asked about the same paints, and asked whether the Drawing Center sold brushes, and I heard Zubrovich say to Newton, “We should sell some brushes.”

This indicates to me that staff is guided by visitor interactions, and there’s a current and consistent effort to design offerings around what existing visitors are looking for, while also reaching out to new potential visitors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Transparently, I was rather impressed with the way the Drawing Center currently operates, and struggled to make realistic recommendations, because the impression I received from speaking to museum employees was that they are a small but extremely dedicated and nimble staff, able to adapt and shift their programming to fit the exhibition that's on, the needs of their visitor, the public health necessities of the larger community, etc.

However, there is always room for improvement. While I personally believe that in-person engagement is the most effective to convert new visitors into return visitors, there are moves that the Drawing Center can make to further increase accessibility, invite in new visitors, and improve the visitor experience within the museum. I suggest:

1. Dedicate a small space in the museum to creating a permanent interactive exhibit or rotating interactive exhibits.
2. Extend hours on Friday evenings.
3. Track visitors with optional email sign-up.
4. Increase social media output.
5. Collaborate with organizations outside the Soho neighborhood.

Interactive exhibit

A wonderful addition to the Drawing Center's robust interactive programming would be a passive interactive exhibit allowing visitors to creatively contribute and feel part of a larger visitor community. Something as simple as offering a guest log in which visitors can make sketches would go a long way toward inviting in visitors who might not be dedicated enough to attend events, but would participate in a low-effort, fun way to contribute. The museum could put up a rotating wall of visitor drawings, and offer drawing materials relevant to the exhibit on display.

Extend hours

Since the museum is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays and doesn't open until noon, keeping it open until 8 or 9 would increase accessibility for potential visitors with busy work schedules, or who live outside of Manhattan and don't often come during the day. It would open up the museum as a space for date nights and post-dinner strolls.

Track visitors

Even though the museum no longer deems contact tracing necessary, tracking visitors a little more closely could be a great way to gain insight on visitor demographics. Privacy is important, too, so if a visitor declines to sign in, that shouldn't be a huge issue. However, asking visitors to share information as simple as name, neighborhood, and email address could result in some useful insights for the museum's future development.

Increase social media presence

Social media is a lot of work, and it's understandable that a one-person social media might not have a huge output. However, the Drawing Center is missing out on the opportunity to reach potential visitors by not using Twitter, and by keeping the Instagram presence relatively lowkey.

Twitter

On Twitter, I would like to see the Drawing Center create educational threads about artists or artworks they have on display. In my personal experience on Twitter, I often see threads that highlight historical figures, break down important artworks, and otherwise bring expertise and interesting tidbits to the larger Twitter community.

Instagram

On Instagram, the Drawing Center would benefit from using the Stories feature and saving Story Highlights for new followers to watch. Even something as simple as adding all the feed posts to the story could do a lot to increase engagement, since some Instagram users watch Stories for longer than they spend scrolling through their feed. It would also help give context and personality to the account if new followers had highlights they could watch to learn more about the museum.

Collaborative posts are another effective way to increase engagement and reach new audiences. Since the Drawing Center partners with so many organizations, it should take advantage of the social media followings those organizations might have.

Interborough collaboration

The Drawing Center is a Soho institution, but visitorship could be expanded by venturing outside Soho with collaborative events and even pop-up exhibits. The Drawing Center's disadvantage is its small physical space, so holding events and temporary pop-up exhibits to complement existing exhibitions could increase name recognition across New York and prompt new visitors to seek the museum out when in the area.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Tools

Prepared interview questions

For employees:

Questions were customized by interview, but included:

- Could you introduce yourself, and then tell me about your role at the Drawing Center? On the macro level, what are the guidance purposes you're thinking about in the context of the organization's larger mission? And on the micro level, what does your day-to-day look like?
- It seems like events and community programming are a priority for the Drawing Center. Would you say that's the case, and why/why not? What kind of institutional investment is put into the programming and event planning?
- Why is educational and community programming important? What does it do for the institution?
- How would you describe the attendance at museum events and programs? Are there people who keep coming back?
- What kinds of programs and events do you put on?
- How do you promote events and programming?
- Do you think visitors are learning about the Drawing Center primarily via social media? If not, how are they?
- Does the engagement and following the Drawing Center has on social media align with IRL visits and event attendance?
- Do you track any information about visitors?
- What would you consider an average amount and frequency of visitors?
- How would you describe visitors of the Drawing Center in general?
- Do you have 'regulars'/repeat visitors you recognize?
- Do most visitors seem familiar/unfamiliar with the museum?
- How often do people leave because of mask requirements?
- Do you think the Drawing Center's social media presence effectively builds community?
- What are the ways the museum effectively builds community?

For visitors:

Basic info: name, age, pronouns, occupation

1. What brought you here today?
2. How did you first learn about the Drawing Center?
3. Do you follow the Drawing Center on social media? If yes:

- a. Which platforms?
- b. What do you think of their social media presence? Do you feel invited in?
- c. Have you ever decided to visit because of something they posted on social media?

4. Do you feel part of the Drawing Center's larger community of visitors? Why/why not?

5. How often do you visit?

6. Is there anything you'd change about the museum's outreach, as someone on the receiving end of it?

7. Do you consider yourself an artist, art appreciator, both?

For followers:

- How did you learn of the drawing center?
- What made you follow the Instagram account?
- Have you visited, and if yes, how often?
- If you've visited, did something they shared on Instagram inspire you to visit?
- What do you think of their Instagram account? How often do you engage with it?

Appendix B: Research Result Data

Links to data collected

Instagram interviews:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qHRMhzk9IBU64J2LyJ5omBLTDmkRn4XEoURBYPLBrxQ/edit?usp=sharing>

Interviews:

Aimee Good: https://otter.ai/u/hjaNuvNKi_EBvfDShQfejdnuJ0

Valerie Newton: https://otter.ai/u/FS2i5M1HGV_rTdBpX9nSfGJLi8

Mark Zubrovich: https://otter.ai/u/2TJmoppyFx_QDBKEJxN1-zpUmo

Museum Visitors:

1 <https://otter.ai/u/hoclzXmxVBMBrqlPstI7o3cfIBo>

2 https://otter.ai/u/cKo4pQX6N_IaaVprsTc8-IjEKXo

3 https://otter.ai/u/oWVUihc8ztnTgYGTsPzAUX_-Rok

4 <https://otter.ai/u/e2S-Yw-NB9UgE1cDnb99N4cMq1Y>

5 <https://otter.ai/u/uvd4nJDEsoJ4eP43dJg1KLF72IQ>

6 <https://otter.ai/u/A8vk4N4jSTCXno36gXoXwh6-GUc>

7 <https://otter.ai/u/tuJ-jRXjsYgYHkOZbqqFeTro2do>

8 (declined to be recorded):

interview w/ 2 visitors

both
work
in arts
education
longtime
NY
residents

visiting art in area

both NY residents and have
Known abt dc, are artists,

1 follows, the other gets email
both follow Instagram

they like the ed info on the
website, find insta
effective

Come to enjoy show, but
don't feel part of community

visit 2,3 times a year both

if I'm in the neighborhood