

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Monica Bryant**

The Station Museum – Contemporary Art Museum

Interviewed by: Anna Burke  
Date: June 16, 2008  
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes  
Location: Station Museum of Contemporary Art

AB: Alright this is Anna Burke. I am sitting here with Monica Bryant the curator of The Station Museum in Houston and she will be speaking with us today about her work in the museum field and about her current show “Defending Democracy.” Let’s begin with the creation of The Station Museum. Whose vision was it to start The Station Museum?

MB: I guess we can attribute that to the director, Jim Herathis. This is pretty much his brain child. The sister museum, The Art Car Museum is run by his wife Anne Herathis.

AB: How would you describe the primary theme of The Station Museum?

MB: Well we are very committed to good contemporary art with a very heavy political undertone. We are all about representing the plight of the people. We are representing truth or an effort towards truth and what really goes on in essence for the people. Yeah we have the tendency to ruffle feathers as well in the museum family, especially in Houston.

AB: Since The Station Museum is not located in Houston’s Museum District does this affect the numbers or the type of audience that you attract?

MB: I think it does. This museum was placed here with the intention of it being primarily for the HCC kids, that’s Houston Community College, which is right on the

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

other side of the road, right on the other side of Alabama. His mission was he was considering a museum and its location and where the people need it the most and this was an ideal location since it is right there in the center of Third Ward and right near HCC. So his idea was providing a free museum to the kids who need it most.

AB: Has the museum always focused on local contemporary art?

MB: Not necessarily local. We have had world renowned artists. Did I mention that it has only been open for five years now but within the five years, in all honesty, we have done minimal regional representation and more on a global scale.

AB: Does it always represent political art?

MB: Yes for the most part.

AB: And why is that?

MB: I think a lot of it is it is in line with Jim's passion and interest and philosophy. He is an avid supporter of the highest form of art which he believes to be tragic art. Really it is kind of unfortunate that this would, that this would be a museum is on the fringe. It seems like it would be essential for a museum like this to exist and all museums should represent the types of things that we do but unfortunately in this country we are kind of one of a kind, versus the norm. But it is my hope that through our practice and through our legacy we would influence other museums to perhaps consider things on a more social level and how politics truly influence the people in the community.

AB: Why do you feel that is important?

MB: Because for me museums ultimately are for the community. They are facilities, they are institutions for the people and our primary function is to exist for them and second to preserve their material culture. That is second. And then third, provide

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

thoughtful and stimulating and interesting exhibitions. For our case we usually attack more of an emotional level. Emotional and intellectual level then a lot of other...

actually that's kind of a mean statement I won't say that. Yeah we try and present things that are not necessarily presented typically in a museum setting and yes we do believe in good clean show. High aesthetic but we are also are kind of pushing to do something more. Really shake people up on a emotional and intellectual level.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about the national and international art that you have had here in the museum?

MB: Yeah sure. I will just mention that the next show will be "Iraqi Artists in Exile." That will be opening up before the next election, November 1<sup>st</sup>. We really want to bring the Iraqi war back to the people's attention. It is just kind of been either sensationalized or just thrown to the wayside, especially in our current campaign. Everyone is focusing on green energy and conservation, which is great ...don't get me wrong, but unfortunately the Iraqi war hasn't seemed to be a big ticket issue with either of the conventions. So we would like to reintroduce the reality of it. The fact that we are spending \$300 million per day. The fact that we are trillions of dollars in the hole now because of this war and we'd like to re-educate the people about that in hopes that would possibly effect the next campaign. But anyways, obviously from the title we are brining in artists that we have found from all over Europe and all over the United States that have been exiled from Iraq. We have also done a Palestinian show called "Made in Palestine." We brought in international acclaimed artist such as Melchin. I don't know I'm having a brain fart right now but... we have also had local shows like James Little, George Smith. I have only been here four months so I'm kind of the new kid on the block. So far I came

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

in right with this current show “Defending Democracy” and I helped with that instillation. And we do... the first room is dedicated to ASARO which is the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca. They are these giant street murals that which they brought into the museum walls that highlights the revolt that went down in Oaxaca, Mexico two years ago. It is just a powerful commentary of our social relations or policies with each other. Then the middle room, well it’s become an international movement. We are highlighting the Black Panther party and that movement in the 70’s and what it has become. Then the last one, the final room is dedicated to Otabenga Jones & Associates which is a local African-American collective. They have converted the last room into a gymnasium called “El Shabaz Gymnasium” and that’s where we hold our film screenings and we also have a constant film loop going on throughout general admission hours, general hours of operation. So it took me kind of a long time to answer that I don’t know if I fully did. But we do host local representation but it also, it is a mix between international and national and local.

AB: Now why the design of the gymnasium?

MB: Good question! Actually there’s some back story to that. That vision is the product of Kedro Suzuki’s, who is one of our employees. He actually studied at U of H, he is working, he is doing post graduate work for the painting department. But yeah they were kind of discussing what to do with the last, with the installation casing and Kedro had this wonderful pitch and they loved it so it’s really not the collectives, it’s really not their art or their work.

AB: What kind of artifacts do you have on display in this current show?

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

MB: Kind of artifacts? We have a wonderful series of the Black Panther Newspaper that was passed around during the late '60's, '70's. That was their primary means of communication, to getting the word out. As well as we have this great photography exhibition called "Louder than Words" which is wonderful visual commentary of the Black Panthers and all the social programs that they were engaged in and all the work that they did for the community. Then we have taken prints... I'm sorry Emory Douglas, he was a Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, he was the one responsible for all the illustrations for the Houston... I'm sorry for the Black Panther Newsletter. So we took some of those images and blew them up and lined the walls with that along with some quotes and what not from the newspaper and famous quotes from some of the major leaders of the Black Panther Party. So it is more of an informational show. This isn't typical for The Station. Usually we focus primarily... we're all about the art. But this one had definitely more of an educational slant than any other show that we have done. It is pretty much all about educating the people with the underlying tone of revolution.

AB: There are many interpretations to the concept of "Democracy" and since they did exhibit deals with what some would define as radical political issues, has there ever been a challenge or questioning of the art that you present or the title that you have?

MB: Oh for sure.

AB: Can you explain?

MB: A lot. Well every since The Station has been in existence we have received or they have received, I have only been here four months, negative comments or we have had contrarians that defiantly opposed what we stood for, what we are representing.

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

AB: Do you know what kind of things they were saying?

MB: Well for instance the “Made in Palestine” show... well some people are critical that we are too political. But being that is kind of what we represent as a fringe museum, you know, everyone is welcome to their opinion. We aren’t going to close the place down though because of the close mindedness. Some people have accused this place of being very misogynistic, which I also disagree with that. Actually for the most part we get a lot more positive feedback then negative. But every now again you get someone that just is in uproar. We had an African-American gentleman come in here and just go crazy... well sorry that was kind of subjective. But he came in here and he was outraged that we were displaying Hewey Newton and a Black Panther exhibition in general. So it varies but again I think we have more support than opposers I guess.

AB: Why would they define it as misogynistic? Is it because of the choice of artists or the lack of female representation?

MB: Lack of female representation both behind the scenes and artists that we are representing. But now, I mean there have been women on the team since. But now there is two women and two guys and we are currently looking for another employee. So we have the balance. Again, you get some of these ultra-feminists that just want to bitch about anything.

AB: Can you describe the work that went into creating this exhibit? Who painted the murals by the way?

MB: Yeah no problem. That first room, the ASARA room, half of the... I guess half of the section is dedicated to these giant wall murals. We flew in six artists. There’s a total of twenty-six artists in the collective and we flew in six of them and they spent an

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

entire week doing stencils and creating them and free styling, free hand spray painting. It was an amazing process to watch. Then the other half of the gallery is devoted to their prints. They also have a print making work shop in Oaxaca that they use to educate children about the print making process and, you know, the uses of it as a very important tool for communication. So we have (12.9) style, a bunch of those prints on the wall with Vierta to look at. Then on the center room I've kind of already briefed it. It is really some information. It is really not focused on art at all. And you can look at the newspapers on the artistic level. We hope that people do. But a lot of people spend time in that room looking at the pictures and reading the text. As I already mentioned we just took the Emory Douglas illustrations and blew them up and pasted them on the wall. Then the last one is a, I would consider a rather medium scale installation with wooden bleachers and outfitted to look like a high school gym.

AB: What do you do with the murals and exhibits after the show is finished?

MB: Well we're sitting right next to one. This is the "Made in Palestine" which has posed many problems for the next person that wishes to show it, which brings me to some of the shows we travel with. Some of them some people expressed interest in certain pieces. We definitely set them up with the artist. We don't function as a gallery. We are not for profit in any way despite being single funded. But if someone expresses interest we set them up with the artist so some pieces have been sold through here. We are basically functioned as liaisons for those people to acquire art. Yeah that's pretty much it. If not then it's returned back to the artists.

AB: Do you ever have an excess of collection pieces such as the Black Panther newspapers or magazines?

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

MB: Yes we do.

AB: And what do you do with those? Do you rotate them through the exhibits?

MB: Yes we have been. There are probably 50. I think we have a total of maybe 100, maybe 150. We have been rotating them out on an every other week basis. Then the other ones sit on the pool table in the back.

AB: How many people worked on the exhibit and how long did it take to pull together.

MB: We installed it in a week. Conceptually I guess Ryan Perry who was the first curator or the curator in charge of the Black Panther and Otabenga Jones & Associates portion conceptually I know he put in a couple of months to it before the week of install. But we did it, I mean aside from the ASARO portion because they did their thing and it took a week for them to spray paint so we didn't really have much to do with the installation of that room. We left it in their hands. But the second and third room was done with the team, we also get outside construction assistance. Or you know we do contract work. But from the staff: three people. Then we brought in contract work for the walls and the floors and their teams are from two to five depending. I don't know how much detail I'm supposed to go into these things.

AB: What marketing techniques do you use for your exhibits?

MB: It's quite minimal actually, surprisingly minimal. We send an email blast. Fortunately we do have a pretty large mailing list and we also send invitations and other than that it's word of mouth. Every now and then we use the Houston Press. Every now and then we use a couple of online resources like Last Hire. But other than that I think our primary... Well fortunately our... Jim and Anne Herathis are very well connected in the Houston art scene. Being that people are always very interested in the type of work



**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

that we are doing and I guess their reputation we get a really good turn out. But I have noticed since I have been here with the last two shows that the crowd is great for the first couple of months but that last month kind of gets to be slow time and then people just trickle in until the final week of the show and then we will have one last pop of visitor attendance.

AB: Do you ever find it or do you ever run into difficulty with the newspaper refusing to advertise you or anything like that?

MB: No not yet.

AB: What sensitivities, if any, did you have to take into consideration when planning this particular exhibit "Defending Democracy."

MB: Any sensitivities? Nothing comes to mind. And if any did I don't think that would sway our decision at all for this type of show and what it means. Yeah that's all I have to say about that sorry.

AB: That's okay. What is some of the other exhibits that have been on display here?

MB: Okay well there's the Power Pathos show. We've done a Norman Bloom show. Melchin was one of our blockbusters as well as "Made in Palestine" which I have already mentioned. The last show is "Apertura Columbia" which was part of the photo fest which is a huge Houston festival, photography festival that happens every four years. Is it every four years or every two years? I think it is every four years. But that was a beautiful photography exhibition. What else? We've done a Ron English show.

AB: What are some of the audience's reactions to your exhibits?

MB: Gosh if you are to go just from the comment book, they are always glowing. We are always receiving praise and thanks for the shows that we put up. There is always

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

comments on how the city needs these types of shows and how they always... The Station has the reputation for always putting on good and thoughtful and invocative shows and exhibitions.

AB: How do you translate the deeply personal issues that an artist pours into his work into something that the audience can relate to and appreciate?

MB: I guess that would be considered interpretation. There's a couple schools of thought on how to approach that in the museum type setting. We do it pretty minimal. We allow the artist to communicate. We always give them the option if they want to provide their own label or type of interpretation. Some of them do some of them don't. Everyone of us... well not every one of us but usually Jim and now that I am on the team and I also write, we have also been doing essays or explanations and wall text and labels to kind of add supplemental information or more layers to what the viewer is looking at. Because we understand contemporary art can be inaccessible for some and yeah some of the stuff you see you just need some underlying information to "get it." So we do like the art to speak for itself however we acknowledge that in order for it to be effective we need to provide some added insight or interpretation to it. But we keep it to a minimal in comparison to other museums I think. Not every piece or every painting has its own text. We are kind of free willed in our process and we kind of allow that freedom as well for our visitors. They can engage with the museum and the art however they want.

AB: Do you incorporate multimedia into your exhibits and in what ways?

MB: Yes. Well in every way I guess that is kind of the age we live in. We have film instillations. I guess that would be our primary. I mean right now we have three different films going on. For instance, at the front, a screen that shows this ongoing

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

collage or photo montage of ASARO as they spray paint these murals on the streets of Oaxaca we have that actually kind of [REDACTED] (21.0) with one of the mural paintings so they kind of interact and function together. Every show that we have... I guess except for the last one which was purely a photography show, every show that we've had, all of them that have been mixed media having, you know, ranging from painting to sculpture to various types of digital technology artwork. It's really whatever fits with the overall theme in a thoughtful manner.

AB: Is there any type of collaboration with any other museums in Houston and The Station Museum?

MB: Oh sure. The Station is involved with a lot of groups and we try and help out as many people as possible and we see it as a community front and effort. So in order to achieve that you have to collaborate with other organizations and groups and efforts that are going on. Gosh I couldn't name them all right now. But just to name a few: like The Shape Center, all the universities around town, various arts organizations like the Arts and Lions, Arts Storm, Diverse Works, Project Roadhouses. We have strong ties with those that I've mentioned. That's all I can think of now but you know Jim and Anne Hearthis have been around for a good 30 years and they have been philanthropists to the Houston's Arts organizations and they have an integral part of the establishing a lot of them that I have named. So we have continuing ties with a lot of art organizations in the community.

AB: What makes The Station Museum distinct from other contemporary art museums in Houston?

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

MB: In Houston? Why I guess the function, we all function the same way but what makes The Station Museum unique I think mainly has to do with the type of work and commentary that we are displaying and our intentions behind what we are trying to educate about being that, as I have already mentioned we are very political. That goes, our function goes beyond just an aesthetic experience for a person who, I mean, a visitor may walk in and have a similar experience but I hope that when they walk into The Station Museum they are more inflicted then if they are walking into a different contemporary art museum that has, you know, generic (23.4) artists, contemporary artists on display for artistic purposes and not necessarily political or sociological implications if that makes sense. What also makes it unique is the fact that we are only funded, we are funded by one single family which allows us to do basically whatever the hell we want which is very nice. Like other museums they always have a board of trustees and they are always playing the donations game and they have to deal with memberships and all sorts of money making endeavors in order to operate and fortunately The Station Museum doesn't have to worry about that. That is another reason why we are a unique institution. Yeah other... that's it.

AB: Well let's turn to the running of the museum. Can you briefly describe your duties as curator and the average day in running the museum?

MB: Gosh! Well curator here entails a lot of things. I baby sit. I clean toilets. I write papers. I do research. You know... we do various outreach efforts and programs and so I set up for that. Or if people want to have functions here I help out with that. Basically if there is a hole... if something needs to be done then I apply myself. That's been part of the learning process for me. You know, just throwing myself in any way I can to get to

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

know the ins and outs of this institution and how it operates and from that approach I was able to learn the dynamics between my co-workers and the team. That has been very helpful. I am now getting able... I am now able to start getting my hands dirty and actually curate which I am very excited for. I have the show, Jim just told me that I had the show following the "Iraqi Artists in Exile" show so I am now in the preliminary stages of conceiving and working on that and trying to create a magnificent show. This will be my Houston debut. I am very excited for that. That entails, well first of all a lot of research. In the preliminary stages a lot of people don't realize just how reading intensive curatorial practices is. So that's where I am at right now. Then I always must keep in mind that it is all about the artist. So I will be collaborating and really getting to know and becoming authority of Anthony Muntatist's work, who I have selected, and what his art represents and means and however leaving it solely to him. Well not solely to him but allowing him to have an integral voice and vision in the process.

AB: What made you decide on him?

MB: Well Jim said I had to do a Spanish show and this is one of his good friends and he is worldly renowned and it's due for him to have a show here.

AB: What would you say is the most difficult aspect of running this particular museum?

MB: Most difficult aspect? You know its long hours. I've pretty much put my life aside, even though I don't have time for a relationship or anything like that. I am very career focused right now and very driven and passionate about my work. So I often find myself in 50-60 hour days. As you all know, museum, people don't pursue the museum profession for the money. They do it because they love it and they believe it in the work.

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

Not to say you can't make money in this gig but you have to start off at the bottom, I'm coming to learn, and then you work your way up to those to I guess those high paying positions in the museum world. But here, you know, each place is very unique, but here our director is 75 years old so I think there is the patience aspect. There is always so much going on. I guess just staying on top of the game and making sure you know what is going on and nothing is being dropped because people, miscommunication does happen and sometimes details do drop between the cracks and yeah just making sure that you've got everything covered and your not missing out on important details and you are getting the job done. But I guess that is true of any position really. But that's just one of the difficulties.

AB: How long would you say it takes to create an exhibit from conception to its opening?

MB: I guess it is really relative how long that would take. Some museums start planning years in advance, I guess depending on budget, scale, magnitude and what they are communicating. Our shows kind of I think the bulk of the work is done in conception or the conceptualization rather, which ball park estimate or average, a couple of months. But I have been planning shows for years though or just playing around with certain ideas for shows now for years. We do have a very group collective approach. We all bring our ideas to the table and kind of create shows from that. Installation never takes that long. We have installed in a night. I mean it can take anywhere from a night to two weeks.

AB: How do you go about seeking artists for your exhibits?

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

MB: That depends as well. A lot of it has to do with who Jim knows and who he wants to present, you know, being that their work stays in accordance with what they start for an idea for an exhibition and of course underneath our political umbrella.

AB: You mentioned the comment book that visitors write in is usually a way for you to gage their public reaction. Is there any other way that you discover their feelings about a particular exhibit?

MB: Yeah fortunately we do get written about often in various art scenes and journals, publications like the Arts Forum or Houston Press or various online ones. Yeah other than that it's nice because there are many instances where I am walking around and people just stop me and just compliment The Station or what it stands for after I mention that I am working there. I don't think I have ever heard anything negative. People are always... it is actually rated as a cool job I think. It seems to be "the cool" place to be for the lefties or the radicals. That's... people are very supportive.

End of Side 1 tape 1

AB: What have you found to be your most popular exhibit?

MB: Most popular? The one that everyone talks about most is "Made in Palestine," which was three years ago. I did not have anything to do with its curation or its development but I did see it. It was amazing. It's really a toss up between that one or the Melchin since he is such a big name in contemporary arts.

AB: Can you tell me a little bit about the demographics of your visitors? Are the primarily older or younger individuals?

MB: Good question. It varies. With this show I know my boss has been very pleased because we have been able to tap into the African-American community and we have had

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

a wealth of support and response from them but I don't think that has been the norm for all of our other shows but I think that is kind of understandable being that we are doing a Black Panther show. They can identify with it is something near and dear to them. We don't cater to school children for the most part. We have young adults on up, it varies from young adults on up. That's really all I can say about that. Nothing too striking, more female than men, more older people to younger people. We don't see too many young kids because it's really not a... we would love for families to come but it's really not a museum geared towards families and especially some of the stuff that we are communicating or discussing, it maybe a challenge for kids to grasp.

AB: You said that one family funds this museum do you ever host other fundraisers to kind of off set that contribution?

MB: No we haven't needed to yet but there have been development discussions because we are hoping to, yes expand.

AB: What do you plan to do?

MB: Top secret right now.

AB: Top secret?

MB: Yeah, sorry I wish I could answer more on that but it is still developing.

AB: Okay, how well is the museum visited?

MB: You know I'd already mentioned, at the beginning of a show's run it's pretty popular and we get a couple hundred through the door per week. Last week we may have only had 50 though. We only have a couple more weeks of the show's run, it closes September 14<sup>th</sup>, so that is typical. Most likely we'll see another insurgency or another boom of people walking in the door hopefully. You know we have not been tallying how



**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

many heads walk in the door, however I do think it is important to see, to gauge, if museum's properly functioning, and you know I find it interesting data to see how effective or successful the exhibition is being used. So for the next show for sure I will be monitoring that.

AB: Do you have several volunteers on a regular basis?

MB: No.

AB: Do you offer any internships?

MB: Yeah we currently have an intern, that's Kedra Suzuki. He is a Japanese exchange student and brilliant artist and a very, very helpful, a very good team player.

AB: What do you think the future holds for the museum?

MB: Good question. You know that is kind of up in the air really. Yeah we are all a bunch of nuts here so who knows what much week holds much less distant future so I really can't comment on that.

AB: What is the most important thing you want people who have never come to this museum to know?

MB: To know... well that's a loaded question. To know that there can be explicit, evocative, impacting contemporary art that challenges you, that breaches your intellectual construct, that educates and teaches you and goes beyond paint splattered on a canvas. And oh, I always have to remind people that museums are for the community and for them so I keep on encouraging people to use them and to start thinking of them as extensions of their home.

AB: What changes, if any, would you like to make to The Station Museum?

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

MB: What changes? That's a good question. There are a lot of rough edges to this museum and I know on the last interview I mentioned that I have a degree in museology as well. So I was able to learn a lot of helpful tools or resources and museum operation. So being that I see some loose ends I'd like to help the institution out, develop an archive. I think a good strong archive is essential for any museum and a collection. So I'm trying to organize that because it hasn't been at all. And continue the legacy of putting on kick ass shows.

AB: What do you find to be the most rewarding about being the curator here?

MB: The challenges. Its hard work and I love that. I don't get bored. I've had every B.S. low paying job under the sun: waited tables, washed dishes... anything. So this is, it is really nice to kind of find my niche and find something that I care so much about that I don't mind getting up in the morning and going to work and I don't mind staying late and I don't mind putting 20 hours extra then what I get paid for. So that's a really good feeling. Also it is really neat to be cool for once. I know... we chat about this already but I feel like I became cool in a day when I got the job. It is a lot of fun and you do meet the most spectacular, brilliant people and I just never in my wildest dreams thought I would be able to interact and work in such a stimulating environment. I feel very lucky.

AB: Let's turn to your educational background. Can you tell us a little bit about what first sparked your interest in the museum field?

MB: Yeah I guess just going to them a lot. I loved museums. My father, he took my brother and I to museums from a very young age. Some of my earliest memories were in museums. He was a single father just looking for an inexpensive way to entertain his kids and museums were often the place. So I think that really began my love for the

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

location, the environment and there are a couple museums around Houston that have become my Utopia's in the city, like the Maniel. I need it for my psychology quietude if I'm just going crazy and overwhelmed with work, I run into the Magrieth room in the Maniel collection and I just kind of chill out there and that is a very significant and important space and art collection for me. Professionally, I decided to do it after I had my run as a commercial gallery curator. I quickly found out just how bad of a sales person I was. You know I love the art, I love talking about it and having the openings and the wine and the cheese and the whole works behind it but I wasn't very good at wheeling and dealing the stuff, especially enough to cover operational costs. So just the constant stress of trying to make money and push art really kind of killed my passion for working with it. So it became an obvious cross over, "hey what about museums?" because you don't have to deal with that as much, especially here, fortunately. So it was half a snap judgment. I decided to sell everything I owned and go to England and then I decided to pursue a degree in museology but those were kind of the thoughts that were kind of culminating to that decision to pursue the masters in the field.

AB: In your professional schooling, what was offered to build field experience?

MB: There was a lot of practical or just hands on I guess is what they call it. We visited many museums and their storages and talked to many professionals in the fields in the region of Newcastle or North Umbria. They brought in a lot of guest speakers from like the Museums Association or the National Lottery who funds a lot of the museums of the U.K. There is also like a placement program, an internship I guess if you will, for two months where a lot of museums lent a position to the program and you did have to compete, if you will, for certain positions but I worked at the Gallery of Modern Art. I

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

got to curate there for two months in Glasgow, Scotland, and it was an amazing experience. So it is part of the program to actually get the student in the museum and see how they actually function and operate on a day to day level and not just on a theoretical level.

AB: What kinds of course work or experience have you had in contemporary art?

MB: Coursework? Minimal. Going back to my art history. I think I mentioned that I studied Art History and Philosophy at U of H and I may have taken only one or two... I remember taking a contemporary painting class and a 20<sup>th</sup> century photography class but just a handful of contemporary art history classes. In practice I've... that's what I do I go to museums, especially contemporary museums. I have been all my life. It's not just for... it's not just for a professional endeavor that's just what I like to do is hang out at museums and libraries and go to openings. There's always free booze like that. Well I have a lot of artist friends. There's just always something going on and someone to support or someone's art work to look at. That's just one of my past times.

AB: Do you feel your educational experience has prepared you to work in this museum or have you had to learn things on your own?

MB: For sure it has prepared me. I got to look a wealth of tools and resources that have helped me kind of have an upper hand in museum management operations. You know, taking care of collections and preparations. My Masters in the field definitely helped me, right when I walked it, the day when I walked in I didn't have a training I just kind of started working and I don't think I would have had that same experience if I hadn't had the degree. But with that being said I can't deny how much I have learned since I have been here. There are things that a classroom can't teach you; that you just

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

have to learn once you are there. A lot of that is site specific. This place has a unique operation, unique people and minds behind this institution and so a lot of that you just kind of adapt to and learn through time and experience.

AB: What advice regarding a job in museums can you give to present museum study students?

MB: First and foremost: know your field. Know the big names. Being in this age of globalization you have to know it on an international level which I know is very lofty and is an ongoing process. Once a week I got to newsstands and get a stack of art magazines and just kind flip and see what's going on. So that would be probably the biggest advice: know your field, while your job is to be able to discuss, articulate artwork. With that is a vocabulary that you must learn and it's like any scene though. You know, there is a lot of... that's not really advice never mind. Know your field and be able to discuss and stand up for what you believe a particular art piece is about... that came out, that didn't come out as well as it sounded in my head but...

AB: What are some of the trends that you immerging in contemporary art?

MB: Well right now the big thing is graffiti art, or street art. For me there is a trend of decline. We are in this age of post modernism where anything goes. So especially in contemporary art you see a lot of crap because everyone can be an artist and it is all accepted and okay and can be displayed in a contemporary art museum setting.

Fortunately there are more and more contemporary art museums opening up by the second and more and more alternative space is dedicated to presenting contemporary art which is awesome. I'm kind of torn because I do believe and that energy does excite me but in all honesty out of all the contemporary art I see I maybe 10% I deem as good. I get

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica****Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

outraged when I see pieces of foil tacked to the wall and I get it on a conceptual level, okay I see what the artist is going for but I just... I would just love to see a renaissance of talent again and true craftsmanship and art that definitely, that pierces your conscience and makes you think that lasts with you for years to come. That's a successful piece of art to me is if you reminisce about it years later and it still continues to impact you and make you question.

AB: Do you plan to incorporate any of these trends into the museum any time soon?

MB: Yeah sure. A lot easier said than done. You know these thought processes I hope translate to its manifestations?

AB: Do you have any favorite contemporary artists or [REDACTED] (26.8)?

MB: Yeah sure. Contemporary I guess I should also mention the lines of contemporary art, you know, some people I consider contemporary art to be living, existing artists that are still creating. Others consider contemporary art artists in a lifetime. Then some people go back to the last 100 years where modernism and contemporary art kind of blurs. So there are different schools of art that academics and intellectuals are arguing. My favorite contemporary artist I got to meet on Saturday, Melchin, and the reason he is my favorite artist is because I saw his show here at The Station Museum before I even worked here and was just blown away by how sophisticated and beautiful and tragic and amalgamation of all sorts of emotions that I experienced while looking at his art. He totally left a great impact on me. Gosh, you know I have been exposed to so many artists in these last four months since I have been here it is kind of hard to say my favorites now. I seem to have a new favorite every day because I come across something new that just

**Interviewee: Bryant, Monica**

**Interview Date: June 16, 2008**

blows me away. But Stacy Landino is another favorite artist of mine. Jesse Lott. Yeah those are probably the main ones.

AB: Is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview?

MB: No.

AB: Come visit The Station?

MB: I was going to say come visit The Station! If this interview didn't turn you off then please come by.

AB: Thank you so much Monica.

MB: Thank you so much I really enjoyed that.

End of Interview

