

9/11
MEMORIAL
MUSEUM

2013
Museum Planning
Conversation Series Report



Museum Planning Conversation Series

Final Session - June 18, 2013

On June 18, 2013, the National September 11 Memorial Museum (the “Museum”) convened the final session of its Museum Planning Conversation Series. With the Museum scheduled to open in the spring of 2014, the large artifacts installed in their final locations, fabrication of the exhibitions fully under way, and over 80 media programs in various stages of production, plans for the Museum’s exhibitions are finalized.

This meeting was held to summarize the impact the Conversation Series participants have had on the Museum’s content and design strategies through a review of key components that demonstrate this influence, as well as to thank the participants for their help in shaping the Museum.

Over a period of seven years, at the invitation of the Museum staff, a diverse group of constituents has engaged in a series of robust, at times contentious, but always productive, discussions focused on the opportunities and challenges of creating a memorial museum dedicated to the memory of the nearly 3,000 victims of 9/11, as well as the story of the terrorist attacks themselves, their precursors, and their ongoing implications. This collaborative endeavor has involved historians, curators, educators, researchers, designers, conservators, architects, and advisors from all sectors and constituencies, among them family members of 9/11 victims, first responders, survivors, recovery workers, preservationists, and colleagues from other museums and cultural organizations. Many of these participants have been engaged in this conversation continuously since the summer of 2006; others have joined more recently, bringing fresh perspectives and considerations to the planning process.

Joe Daniels, President and CEO of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, opened the meeting by affirming that:

“The Museum will be the global focal point for preserving the history of 9/11, and as this group knows so well, there have been many challenges and decision points we’ve been faced with, as we’ve struggled to ensure that history is told in a way that is always respectful of the site on which it’s located—and that is factual, but also moving and inspirational.”

He went on to remind the group about some of the most important and sensitive aspects of museum planning that were addressed through the Conversation Series. Among these was the portrayal of those who were trapped in the burning Twin Towers and fell or jumped to their deaths. Mr. Daniels observed that the Conversation Series had “helped us understand that this horrifying part of the 9/11 story must be told—and also that we needed to ensure that it was told in a way that preserves the dignity of those who faced that impossible choice.”

Another challenging topic considered in consultation with Conversation Series participants was the crucial decision of how to portray the hijackers in the Museum’s historical exhibition. Mr. Daniels commented that the guidance received from these planning discussions was clear that: “the world will know who did this, and that those men were absolute criminals.”

Museum Planning Conversation Series

Final Session - June 18, 2013 (continued)

More broadly, the Conversation Series has been instrumental in shaping the ways in which the Museum will prepare its visitors for what they are about to see, empowering them to make their own decisions about whether to experience some of the difficult content that will be presented. Mr. Daniels reported that the impact of Conversation Series discussions will be evident throughout the Museum, from labels outside the audio alcoves to signage outside the historical exhibition recommending an appropriate age for those who are about to enter.

With Vice President for Education and Public Programs Clifford Chanin serving as moderator, Museum Director Alice Greenwald led a three-part presentation that included:

- An update on the current status of construction of the Museum and fabrication of the exhibits, including an animation of the touchscreen tables planned for the memorial exhibition and a fabrication report from Director of Exhibition Development Amy Weisser.
- A screening of a mini-documentary created by the Museum for presentation in the historical exhibition to address the sensitive topic of the emergence of the terrorist organization al-Qaeda.
- A preview of *Reflecting on 9/11*, a media installation to be located in the Museum space at bedrock that addresses the multiplicity of ways people think about the continuing impacts of 9/11 through a digital conversation in which visitors will be invited to participate.

Two short films provided bookends for the session. An animated fly-through of the Museum showing the path visitors will take as they descend to the exhibition level at bedrock provided the opening context for the meeting. At its conclusion, a short film entitled “The Stories They Tell” provided a glimpse into a few of the Museum’s most powerful artifacts through interviews with some of the people personally connected to them.

Commenting on the journey that had brought the Conversation Series to its conclusion, Ms. Greenwald observed:

“From our first sessions seven years ago when we considered, in the most abstract terms, the opportunities and challenges of this project, to the reviews of the early design proposals, to our deliberations over highly sensitive and emotionally resonant content, this has been an extraordinary and deeply collaborative effort of creation.”

Museum Progress Report

Report on Superstorm Sandy impacts, remediation, and emergency planning

- Flooding at the bedrock level of the Museum was due to the storm surge and open construction at the World Trade Center site, and the 9/11 Memorial is working with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) to ensure the site will not be susceptible to flooding in the future.
- Despite over seven feet of water at bedrock, there was no permanent damage to large artifacts on site, due, in part, to earlier precautions taken to protect these artifacts from routine exposure to construction dust and debris.
- Going forward, the 9/11 Memorial and the PANYNJ, is taking proactive efforts to protect the Memorial and Museum spaces and exhibition contents; these measures include but are not limited to emergency preparedness planning, installation of water-tight doors in various locations, closing of all below-grade penetrations, and modifications to drainage and pump systems.

Large artifact installation at bedrock

- The spaces are taking shape at bedrock, as envisioned in the design renderings.
- All large artifacts have been installed within the historical exhibition.

Decision to include the artifact known as the “composite”

- Among the most challenging and sensitive issues addressed during previous sessions of the Conversation Series was the question of whether to display one of the artifacts known as composites. The composites are amalgamations of building elements—steel rebar, floor decking, pulverized drywall, carpeting, furniture, even carbonized bits of paper—fused by heat and pressure into multi-ton objects. These artifacts exist solely as a result of the collapse of the Twin Towers and are unique to this event and site.
- Consistent with the advice of a majority of Conversation Series participants, the Museum will include one composite in the historical exhibition. It has been determined that this composite consists of the compacted and heat-fused elements of approximately five floors from one of the towers.
- For some, there is a perception that there could be human remains contained within the composites. Given that the Museum collections and exhibition policy prohibits the display of human remains, staff has considered the question of whether to include one of these objects with great care, listening to all sides and respecting the integrity of all positions.

Museum Progress Report (continued)

- A high level of due diligence went into researching and engaging multiple avenues of analysis including:
 - Forensic analysis for potential human remains in 2007 and 2009
 - Verification of provenance in 2009
 - Structural engineering analysis in 2009
 - Thermal mapping in 2009
 - Forensic analysis of charred paper fragments in 2009
 - Consultations with:
 - Conversation Series participants in 2007
 - Board of Directors Program Committee in 2010
 - Museum Ethicists Panel in 2010 and 2011
 - “Kitchen Cabinet” of historians, curators, political scientists, and cultural sector professionals in 2009, 2010, and 2011
 - Focus groups in 2010
- Findings:
 - Two independent, forensic studies of surfaces, crevices, and interior fragments broken off from these composites returned no evidence of human remains.
 - FDNY thermal mapping studies of Ground Zero were reviewed to establish locations and temperatures of fires at the site. Studies indicated that the intense heat and pressure that created the composites would likely render the presence of identifiable human remains within them impossible.
 - Further studies on the potential existence of human remains would result in the destruction of the composites.
 - An international group of museum ethics advisors argued for inclusion of the composite as reflective of the Museum’s institutional commitment to authenticity and historic documentation, but also advised transparency, encouraging the Museum team to acknowledge in the interpretive text that there are many perspectives about this charged artifact.
 - Focus groups involving 9/11 family members (specifically including individuals with no previous relationship to the Memorial or the Museum planning process), first responders and recovery workers, and members of the general public reviewed five objects under consideration for display in the Museum, one of which was a composite. Each of the focus groups recognized both the power of this artifact and its sensitivity. The focus group participants unanimously supported its presentation in the Museum.

Museum Progress Report (continued)

- Presentation in the Museum:
 - The decision to include the composite has focused on it serving as an artifact of the event. It will be placed in the section of the historical exhibition that addresses the recovery at Ground Zero, within the context of where this type of material was found and what it uniquely documents.
 - Its physical placement also makes it a transitional artifact. It will sit at the cusp between the end of the recovery period and the concluding section of the historical exhibition that focuses on the many questions arising out of 9/11 and our continuing search for answers.
 - Specific design considerations have focused on contextualizing the composite while honoring its authenticity and taking into account the sensitivities surrounding it. Following a design technique used earlier in the historical exhibition of using alcoves (segregated, more intimate spaces for the most sensitive topics), the composite will be placed within its own quiet and secluded alcove. This alcove is unique in that it will have curved walls, suggesting a kind of protective embrace. Information about the composite will be presented on the exterior wall, so visitors can decide whether they wish to view it.

Exhibition fabrication progress report

- Cases, railings, benches, and bases are complete for all but the historical exhibition.
- Memorial exhibition portraits and tables have been fabricated.

In Memoriam touchscreen table animation

- The tables had been included as part of a memorial exhibition preview for 9/11 family members in September 2012 at the Voices of September 11th annual forum. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Conversation

In response to this first part of the session, participants requested more information about artifact protection and removal as part of overall emergency preparedness, expressing particular concern for the remains repository that will be maintained and operated by New York City's Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). That space is receiving a number of modifications following Superstorm Sandy, made in consultation with the OCME, to ensure disaster protection in the future.

A question about the timing for transfer of the remains to the repository was referred to the OCME.

Referencing the fragility of the composite artifact, one participant inquired whether there would be a shield between visitors and the object and was informed that there would be a glass wall, floor to ceiling, with the composite fully contained in its own humidity-controlled environment.

One invitee who was unable to attend the meeting wrote in advance to express opinions she wished to be made part of the record: first, that accommodations should be made for individuals other than family members of victims who may wish to pay respects at the OCME repository, without having to pay an entry fee to the Museum. This individual also called for the composites to be checked for human remains, even if that means dismantling them, and suggested that, at a minimum, they should be buried, not displayed.

Presentation of Original Media Production from Historical Exhibition

Media sample from historical exhibition, part 2, *Before 9/11: “The Rise of al-Qaeda”* documentary

- This mini-documentary addresses one of the more challenging subjects, which is how to provide adequate historical context for the 9/11 attacks in a succinct and digestible format.
- Guidance from the Conversation Series had a direct impact on this production, particularly with respect to earlier discussions about the obligation to be straightforward and factual, and not whitewash this history, while also remaining sensitive about how to reference those who perpetrated the attacks.
- The goal of the film is to document and teach about this history, and to help visitors understand the context in which the 9/11 attacks happened. It focuses on the emergence of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization and is not meant to be comprehensive about the long history of Islam and its relationship with the West.
- In developing the script, the Museum and media production team was careful not to present this history in any way that might be construed as glorifying the terrorists or providing excuses for their criminal agenda.
- The team worked with scholars and historians to shape the film, which has gone through multiple reviews and revisions. The mini-documentary is meant to offer an introduction to the context in which al-Qaeda emerged, its ideology and intentions as framed by extreme Islamism, but without indicting all Muslims or the entire normative Islamic tradition.

Conversation

Several participants acknowledged the film’s success in condensing complex historical information into a succinct and comprehensible exhibition format.

One participant expressed concern that references in the film to Islam and Muslims may be interpreted negatively, particularly by Muslim visitors. Acknowledging that scholars and others consulted on the film paid close attention to this issue and noting the film’s historical accuracy, a participant proposed that staff might review the film with the organization’s Interfaith Advisory Group and discuss ways to prepare for visitor reactions. The Museum staff has committed to doing this.

Another participant suggested that visitors be referred to more in-depth information available on the Museum’s website, and that staff consider placement of reference books in the gallery, space permitting.

Following on that comment, a participant asked to know more about how the exhibition provides a broader context for the video through text, documentary photographs, and artifacts. He suggested that the exhibition include positive messages about Muslim

Presentation of Original Media Production from Historical Exhibition (continued)

Americans and U.S. allies in the Middle East. Another participant offered that the film could be posted to the Museum's website to encourage active engagement through a web forum.

Additional comments focused on the absence in the film of a reference to oil as a strategic interest of the United States in the Middle East; the omission of the word "sharia" in the film (though "Islamic law" is referenced), and how homegrown terrorism, the 9/11 Commission, and family member advocacy will be addressed in the Museum.

Following on that comment, the group engaged in a discussion of the broader context for the video, including other content in this section of the exhibition and additional potential resources such as the 9/11 Memorial's website.

Reflecting on 9/11 – Sample Cuts

- In prior sessions of the Conversation Series, discussions focused on how important it will be for the Museum to remain topical and to highlight the continuing relevance of an event whose repercussions are still felt, remaining very much a part of our world and public discourse; an event that, in so many respects, is not yet over.
- The enduring impact of 9/11 is experienced daily, whenever travelers contend with increased security protocols at airports and at entries to public venues. It is present in the civic arena as citizens and governments seek to find the right balance between protecting civil liberties and ensuring national security. On a global level, the legacy of 9/11 informs the continuing debate over the nature and extent of military intervention needed to root out the sources of terrorism.
- The immersive media installation, *Reflecting on 9/11*, has been conceived as an ongoing project designed to track personal reflections about the attacks and their ongoing impacts. It will be located in the north footprint, adjacent to the historical exhibition and sharing space with the Museum's Recording Studio.
- *Reflecting on 9/11* will provide an opportunity to keep the Museum relevant, while also welcoming visitors to be a part of the story.
- The installation will comprise a digital conversation, with participants projected at human scale. They will consider a variety of questions, and their responses will demonstrate the wide array of positions and opinions in response to the continuing impact of 9/11.
- Some of those questions and issues coming out of 9/11 include:
 - Why do you think it's important to remember 9/11?
 - Can governments protect citizens from terrorism?
 - Do you think the national security measures put in place after 9/11 have been effective?
 - Why do you think the 9/11 attacks happened?
 - How has your life been affected by the events of 9/11?
 - What do you hope U.S. political leaders can learn from 9/11?
- *Reflecting on 9/11* will convey the idea that people from all walks of life—whether family members of victims, political leaders, historians and academics, journalists or Museum visitors—continue to struggle with making sense of the attacks and their aftermath.
- More than 90 people have been interviewed for approximately 18 pre-produced segments.
- Visitors will be able to use the recording booths to answer some of the same questions, and Museum staff will continually refresh the installation with these user-generated interviews.

Conversation

Participants responded to a screening of two sample cuts—one pre-produced and the other user-generated—both in response to the question, “Why do you think it’s important to remember 9/11?”

Comments were mostly positive, with one individual commenting that hearing other people speak and being invited to record one’s own opinions would provide a “grounding experience” that “allows visitors to come out of the historical narrative and return back to who they are.” He strongly endorsed inclusion of *Reflecting* as a concluding experience in the Museum.

Another participant was pleased to hear Attorney General Eric Holder’s comment about the outpouring of support in the aftermath of 9/11, which he considers to be a key message of the Museum.

Another participant queried if Muslim speakers will be featured in *Reflecting on 9/11*, expressing her desire that Muslim visitors see themselves in the installation. Museum staff responded in the affirmative, noting that among the interview subjects included are President Obama’s Special Representative to Muslim Communities and the first Muslim American to be elected to Congress.

Some concerns were expressed about the inclusion of certain issues in *Reflecting on 9/11*, as well as the potential for the program to include factual inaccuracies. Acknowledging that people’s opinions could include misrepresentations of fact, the Museum planners provided assurances that the historical and memorial exhibitions would serve as the primary means of conveying factual information.

Further discussion focused on how to involve younger visitors in dialogues similar to those presented in *Reflecting on 9/11*, and potential efforts to ensure that programs like *Reflecting on 9/11* reflect the range and diversity of Museum visitors. It was agreed that the Museum staff may conduct outreach periodically to ensure a sustained diversity of perspectives.

Finally, with respect to the potentially controversial nature of some of the questions in *Reflecting on 9/11*, it was observed that the point of the installation is not to foment controversy but rather to demonstrate the diversity of points of view and to model respectful dialogue.

Program Conclusion

Conclusion

With Mr. Chanin calling the meeting to a close, one participant requested the opportunity to offer concluding remarks. He spoke about how he has observed that people, when visiting the Memorial for the first time, do not fully anticipate how deeply the experience will affect them. He stated his expectation that the Museum will be equally if not more powerful. Speaking for the group assembled, he expressed appreciation for having been given the opportunity to provide input into the museum planning process.



2013

Additional Invitees,
Participants, and Speakers

New Invitees to the Conversation Series

Family Members of Victims and WTC Survivors

Susan Sadocha, 9/11 Family Member*

Lower Manhattan Residents, Business Community, and Government

Anne Beagan, Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Mary Galligan, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation*

Richard F. McCarthy, Supervisory Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Frank Pellegrino, Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Gary J. Pontecorvo, Supervisory Special Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation

Uniformed Rescue and Recovery Workers and Agencies

Joe Bradley, 9/11 First Responder, Local 15

Barbara Butcher, Chief of Staff, Office of Chief Medical Examiner*

Henry Jackson, Deputy Commissioner,

New York City Office of Emergency Management

Frank McCarton, Deputy Commissioner/Operations,

New York City Office of Emergency Management;

OEM liaison to Memorial Museum

John Ryan, Detective Lieutenant, Port Authority Police Department,

Assigned to Joint Terrorism Task Force, New York Division*

Dr. Barbara Sampson, Chief Medical Examiner, Office of Chief Medical Examiner*

Interfaith and Multi-Cultural Perspectives

Kara Holmes, Audience Development Associate, Trinity Wall Street

Anne Petrimoux, Assistant Archivist, Trinity Wall Street

Museum, Education, and Cultural Perspectives

Greg Blackburn, Thinc Design

Margaret Chen, Special Assistant to the Director,

National Museum of the American Indian - New York

Anita Kassof, Deputy Director, Museum of Jewish Heritage

Erin O'Flaherty, Associate Director, Project Rebirth

Sam Miller, President, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council*

National September 11 Memorial & Museum Staff

Liz Blackford, Memorial Exhibition Assistant

Elyse Brendlen, Exhibition Coordinator

Cate Conmy, Exhibition Developer

Michael Chui, Collections Cataloguing Assistant

Rose Deeb, Exhibition Research Assistant

Melanie Derschowitz, Assistant Cataloguer

Mackenzie Flight, Exhibitions Consultant

Amy Kelch, Memorial Exhibition Assistant

Kirsten Madsen, Memorial Exhibition Assistant

Jillian Meyer, Exhibition Coordinator

Julie Pyun, Fundraising Consultant

New Invitees to the Conversation Series (continued)

Kathryn Robinson, Memorial Exhibition Coordinator
Bethany Romanowski, Museum Registrar
Susan Wigodner, Exhibition Coordinator

Social Services and Counseling Professionals

Amanda Smith, Student, Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program,
Long Island University Post

For a complete listing of all invitees to, participants in, and speakers at the Museum Planning Conversation Series since 2006, please refer to the summary reports for prior seasons.

*Invited but unable to attend.