

underlying structures of diaspora, sociality, and power.

- What were the material and labor conditions for the production of this sound or music, and who gets credit? How does that line up with the goals and politics of this exhibit?
- Sometimes the best route to go is to commission original sound and music, even if it seems more resource-consuming at first.
 - In our exhibit, the team waited out COVID lockdowns to conduct a collaborative video and sound recording project that complemented the dance regalia in the exhibit. The resulting images and sound were more effective in supporting the message and they were more

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community that had donated the regalia.

If you're interested in these ideas too, I would love to be in conversation!

MuseReview

This is our sixth installment of MuseReviews. MuseReviews provides the opportunity to learn about recent materials related to museums beyond the realms of events and scholarly publications. Each installment of MuseReviews discusses a recent memoir, documentary, history, or other kind of work that offers unique insights into and

perspectives about museums. If you're enrolled in the MSMC certificate program, please consider submitting a review for MuseReviews to Kenna (kenna@umd.edu)!

This month features MSMC faculty Dr. Diana Marsh reflecting on her book *Extinct Monsters to Deep Time: Conflict, Compromise, and the Making of Smithsonian's Fossil Halls* (first published in 2019) as the paperback edition comes out.

**Revisiting the Relevance of Ethnography:
Reflections on *Extinct Monsters to Deep Time***

Extinct Monsters to Deep Time: Conflict, Compromise, and the Making of Smithsonian's Fossil Halls (first published in 2019) was released this year in paperback. The overall claim in the book is that we're seeing an increasing tension between the research and outreach functions of museums, here large natural history museums – think the Field Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the case study I dive into here, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. I get there through a close investigation of exhibition processes – which are this really interesting kind of microcosm of the wider organization –and I show how that tension manifests in three spheres: in exhibit content (what's in public-facing galleries themselves); in the teams that plan exhibitions (made up of professionals from increasingly niche museum subfields); and in institutional mission (looking at what institutions say about themselves and what they're doing). I go on to argue that these creative tensions might be important to museums trying to display some of the world's most important but also politicized topics, here climate change.



Entrance to the *David H. Koch Hall of Fossils – Deep Time*, Photo by Miguel Montalvo

The David H. Koch Hall of Fossils—Deep Time opened in June 2019, just after the book came out. Having had the opportunity to see the finished exhibit, but also having been through a pandemic and perhaps the greatest racial reckoning of our time, I am thinking a lot about what the book means and says in the contemporary moment.

1. **Maintaining Trust:**

Museums are perhaps the most trusted information institutions. [The most recent study](#) on this in 2021 showed museums are second only to friends and family as trusted sources of information. The top two reasons why they are so trusted are that a) they are considered “fact based” and b) because they are thought to hold original or “authentic objects.” In that context, and in the “[infodemic](#),” you bring together the world’s experts on science communication, education and informal learning, different subfields in paleontology, and you task them with communicating the deep history of the earth and human impact on climate; essentially, you ask them to argue about how to do that until they find a compromise, until they agree on the best way to do it. In

the final *Deep Time* hall, in the world's most visited natural history museum, on the national mall, a team of experts who didn't agree created this pretty unusual dinosaur exhibit on that kind of stage, which is actually not at all about dinosaurs but about what the deep history of the earth can tell us about the most pressing environmental issues of our time. Maybe that's crucial in museums maintaining that trust for the public.

2. Acknowledging Power Dynamics

The power dynamics at play here between curators and other experts is something you see in lots of organizations, and among many teams; and if we're going to create more inclusive and equitable work environments, we need to be aware of those dynamics. We need to recognize others' expertise and acknowledge just how many people it takes to accomplish something. It's not just the professor or curator or scholar who gets the PR, but huge teams of people that make any creative endeavor possible. We need to value peoples' labor and expertise and acknowledge their work. Project management-wise, understanding stereotypes and perceptions, and clearly delineating roles among teams, is really important for them to work together well from the start and throughout a process. Museums and other cultural heritage organizations are taking a harder look at their own power dynamics more broadly. Those dynamics are highly gendered and highly racialized, and we need to attend to that if we want to change how institutions work. Even among curators in history or anthropology or other fields ordinarily attuned to power, you see that many are completely oblivious to their own institutional positionalities. Or, perhaps an ethnographic piece here might also help prevent staff from across the museum in all these hyper-departmentalized cultures from getting caught up in their own in-fighting, rather than seeing the big picture, and what they're all

working toward. I hope that the potential that I saw among the *Deep Time* team – for tackling complex issues through compromise – can in fact allow museums to fulfill an important role in the current informationscape.



Miniature Jurassic diorama in the final *David H. Koch Hall of Fossils – Deep Time*, Photo by Miguel Montalvo

Things to Do

- ***Safety in Numbers: Portraits of East Baltimore’s “Reservation” Exhibition Launch***, Thursday, March 9, 2023, 7:00 PM EST, Zoom, **Register:** <https://tinyurl.com/422eej5k> Co-curators Tiffany Chavis, Stanton Lewis, and Ashley Minner Jones (MSMC alum), in partnership with the [University of Maryland Baltimore Intercultural Center](#), will host a virtual launch for their exhibition *Safety in Numbers: Portraits of East Baltimore’s “Reservation,”* an