



A Case Study Workbook for Museum Professionals

June 2024

remancipation.org

Acknowledgments

Written by

Tarah Connolly

Edited by

Noah Weeth Feinstein

Jeremy Stoddard

***re:mancipation* Curriculum Advisory Board**

Lisbeth Solano

Dr. Kantara Souffrant

Kareal Amenumey

Dr. Mike Murawski

re:mancipation is a collaboration between the Chazen Museum of Art and MASK Consortium. This professional development resource is a further collaboration with the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This work was made possible through support from the Mellon Foundation and the Chazen Museum of Art.



Chazen Museum of Art



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Case Study Overview.....	6
About <i>re:mancipation</i>.....	8
Case 1: Paying for <i>re:mancipation</i>.....	15
Case 2: Violating Norms.....	23
Case 3: Reinterpret and Recontextualize.....	30
Case 4: Found in Collection.....	37
Conclusion: In the Spirit of Critique.....	44
References & Resources.....	46

Introduction

When *re:mancipation* began, it followed an existing script. Artist Sanford Biggers encountered a statue called *Emancipation Group* at the Chazen Museum of Art on the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus. He was inspired to critique it through his own medium, and the museum was interested in engaging the critique. They formalized the partnership and wrote a contract that hinged on the production of a response piece; a timeline was mapped out, and relevant resources were lined up.

At the same time, museums were actively reckoning with the inadequacy of these scripts. The illusion of the neutral museum had been broken, and museum professionals, scholars, and members of the public were calling on the museum field, again, to right the historical wrongs perpetuated by these powerful institutions. From decolonizing collections to reimagining organizational structures, the field was at an inflection point in the process of meaningfully transforming into more equitable and justice-oriented institutions.

So, when Biggers began to imagine a more holistic response to the problematic composition of *Emancipation Group*, the Chazen Museum of Art began to co-author a new script for understanding and challenging how racism pervades the art museum. Biggers and his partners in MASK Consortium partnered with the Chazen to imagine new strategies to “recontextualize and reinterpret” *Emancipation Group*, an object which itself is a case study in the ways racism operates in the museum. The resulting collaboration created the conditions for the case studies in this handbook, which we hope will be rich provocations for others who are committed to dismantling white supremacy in their museums.



A Guiding Concept: Organizational Routines

To do this work, we situate *re:mancipation* against theories of organizational change and race-critical perspectives on organizations. In particular, we turn to Diamond and Gomez¹ who identify organizational routines as a site for intervention. Organizational routines are the

¹ John B. Diamond and Louis M. Gomez, “[Disrupting White Supremacy and Anti-Black Racism in Educational Organizations](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231161054)”, *Educational Researcher*, (2023): 1-9 [https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231161054]

repetitive actions and patterns enacted by those within institutions; routines reflect social biases and stereotypes and they become taken for granted. Because routines are often implicitly enforced, they are hard to name and, by extension, are a reliable mechanism for reinforcing white supremacy and racial domination within and through an organization.

Drawing on the critical theorist Paulo Freire and the Black feminist scholar bell hooks, Diamond and Gomez call for what they call *reflection-in-action* around organizational routines to interrupt them.² Reflection-in-action, as opposed to reflection-*on*-action, is a strategy for connecting theory and practice through reflection that is done simultaneously with the work one wants to change. Reflection-in-action is done publicly and by those who are responsible for the ongoing work, from strategic leaders to boots-on-the-ground implementers.

While changing organizational routines was not an explicit goal of *re:mancipation*, addressing racism in the museum was. Looking back, however, the collaborative process certainly involved confronting and challenging the museum's organizational routines. Inspired by these moments of reflection and change, the case studies in this workbook take crucial moments of dissonance, dilemma, and decision making from the *re:mancipation* project as a starting point for others to engage in reflection-in-action about their local work.

The cases included in this workbook are drawn from key moments of learning between the Chazen and their partners, which speak to concerns relevant to many museums: managing money, making curatorial decisions, building and sustaining collections, and engaging in authentic partnerships. Given the central content of *re:mancipation*—the study of an object which evokes America's history of slavery and systemic racism—each of these topics are considered through a race-critical lens.

Therefore, one broad takeaway that these cases hope to communicate is that the everyday conversations, decisions, and assumptions that we don't think are "about race" are often where systemic racism lives on, if left unchallenged. Importantly, this is not a how-to guide for hosting a *re:mancipation*-like project at your museum. It is a tool for reconsidering what interests are being served in our day-to-day work—and a prompt to consider how museum workers might disrupt the most deeply entrenched assumptions within our institutions.

Using Case Studies to Change the Museum

When the *re:mancipation* project leadership team initially decided to develop professional development resources to complement the project, they asked a team from the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at UW–Madison to create materials that would help informal educators facilitate discussions about artworks that relate to America's history of racism. While such a resource is valuable and necessary, the project that was unfolding between the Chazen and MASK Consortium was grist for something more. As the curriculum development team started to integrate into the project, we watched the museum and its collaborators encounter moments

² John B. Diamond and Louis M. Gomez, "Disrupting White Supremacy," 5

of conflict and creative innovation that were happening at the level of the institution. Rather than developing materials to change individuals' teaching strategies and pedagogical approach to tough topics, we saw the process of *re:mancipation* as a teaching tool for supporting organizational change work. To do so, we conducted interviews with project contributors, analyzed documents, and reviewed meeting recordings and notes to identify a handful of scenarios that were clear cases of the Chazen reimagining its organizational routines.

Cases are individual instances of a phenomenon of interest. Similar formats have been used in fields like law and medicine to acquaint professionals with the types of dilemmas they might encounter in their work. Case study has also been used in education as a way to grapple with ethical dilemmas and pedagogical change, with cases presented as points of comparison and inspiration. Cases are often left unresolved and ambiguous, as readers of the case have to wrestle with how they would respond to the situation.

Case study is also a research method that is well-represented in academic literature on museums.³ This method is effective because it is sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of specific contexts—something museums have in spades. But case study research can also illuminate principles and insights that are relevant to situations with similar features and related problems of practice. Our choice to use case studies from *re:mancipation* is a recognition of this duality: while not every facet of the stories told will be applicable to your museum, we anticipate that there will be points of identity between the story of *re:mancipation* and your work in other settings.

We also chose case studies because talking about race and racism can be uncomfortable. Talking about systemic injustices upheld by your own workplace can feel especially risky and deeply personal. The cases from *re:mancipation* offer a starting point that can displace some of this discomfort and take the pressure off of “fixing” your organization in one conversation. These stories can be something that you and your team sit with for a while, revisit, and think about in relation to your own work on an ongoing basis. Again, they are not a how-to guide, but a prompt for reflection-in-action.

To support this process of learning through case studies, each case is peppered with questions at key junctures in the story. The “Reflect” questions ask discussants to untangle what is going on in the case. The “Connect” questions turn the conversation toward your own museum and challenge participants to find the resonance between *re:mancipation* and their own work. A grid of concluding questions also prompt participants to discuss how it felt to have conversations about these topics. Did you feel safe? Energized? Frustrated? Surprised? These emotions can

³ For a few relevant examples related to organizational change, see S. Coman and A. Casey “The enduring presence of the founder: A historical and interdisciplinary perspective on the organizational identity of collection museums” in *Historical Organization Studies* (London: Routledge, 2021); Yuha Jung, “Micro examination of museum workplace culture: how institutional changes influence the culture of a real-world art museum,” *Museum Management and Curatorship*; and Jennie Morgan “Assembling the New: Studying Change Through the ‘Mundane’ in the Museum as Organization,” *Museum & Society*, 16, no. 2. (2018):157-170

point to places where we might focus on building more just processes, structures, and relations within our organizations.

Audience + Facilitation

When writing these case studies, we imagined a team of museum professionals, primarily those working in object-based institutions, gathering during their work day for about two hours at a time to work through a portion of one of the four case studies. We imagined a facilitator, having reviewed one case study in advance and considered areas of emphasis that might be pertinent to the group. The facilitator would bring printouts of the case to use as an outline for discussion, moving between the narrative and the reflection prompts. We imagined a diverse group of professionals, representing various departments, career stages, and personal identities who have some prior knowledge and fluency around discussing race and identity in the workplace. We recommend this kind of arrangement, if you can manage it, and if you feel like your organization is ready to dive in.

That being said, we recognize a number of limitations to this vision. Within many museums, hierarchical structures and power differentials may prevent individuals from speaking candidly about race and racism in their institution. These relations are amplified when facets of identity like race, gender, and age mark our experiences and are put on the table for discussion. Depending on one's positionality, calling these things out can feel like a personal attack, it can raise fears of retribution, alienate people who feel threatened, or compound the harms that marginalized employees experience.

What's more, the possibilities for change that emerge from discussions of the case may feel out of reach for staff who are not in traditionally empowered leadership positions. We recognize that not all museum staff will have capacity or sanctioned authority to change policy, allocate resources, or make major institutional shifts. We do, however, believe that individuals have a sphere of influence within which they can intentionally reflect on and address how their work is done. As teams consider the case studies, it is important to identify the spheres of influence where individuals, teams, and organizations as a whole can act.

With these two challenges in mind, we suggest that staff interested in using these materials think critically about their organization's readiness for the conversation. Here are a few resources and pointers to make these conversations accessible and meaningful for your team:

- Before you start, check out [MASS Action's Readiness Assessment](#)⁴ to reflect on your museum's equity journey. If you are just at the beginning, consider doing some more learning as an organization before diving into *re:mancipation*.
- Be intentional with who is in the room. Each case has suggestions about which staff roles might find particular resonance with the story but consider the power differentials

⁴ [Readiness Assessment](#), Museums as Sites for Social Action (2017)
[<https://www.museumaction.org/resources>]

between staff when preparing to discuss the case. While we shouldn't shy away from hard conversations, consider who will be safe in discussing race and racism in their institution. For example, a conversation facilitated exclusively by and for a single department, or just among the leadership team, could be more productive than a cross-department, cross-hierarchy conversation, although the latter will surface different perspectives and important dialogues.

- Consider multiple modes of engagement. The discussion questions can be used as writing prompts, they can be addressed in small group conversations, shared as a walk-and-talk prompt over lunch, or not at all. Choose ways to engage that prioritize equitable sharing and multiple pathways for participants to express themselves.
- Commit to action. At the end of a facilitated case analysis, invite participants to consider what organizational routines intersect with their work and articulate something that they can change, try differently, or rethink as a result of the case study's provocations. We must celebrate interventions at every level of the organization—from how we greet visitors at the front desk to how we engage with the Board of Directors.

Case Study Overview

Case Name	Case Parts	Relevant Organizational Routines
Paying for <i>re:mancipation</i>	<p>Part 1: Project scope changes and budget implications</p> <p>Part 2: Logistics of raising money and making decisions in partnership between Chazen and MASK</p> <p>Part 3: How race and money intersect with each other on a personal level</p> <p>Part 4: How the values of flexibility and trust can be difficult to maintain in institutional contexts</p>	<p>Budget negotiation</p> <p>Contract preparation</p> <p>Norms for team meetings</p> <p>Navigating philanthropic resources</p> <p>Expectations of partnership</p>
Violating Norms	<p>Part 1: Turning Gallery IV into a site for staging artistic interventions</p> <p>Part 2: Planning for the second symposium called “Impeach the Precedent”</p> <p>Part 3: Museum staff reflect on the process of planning and facilitating this unusual collaborative activity</p>	<p>Event planning</p> <p>Safety protocol related to art</p> <p>Protecting museum assets</p> <p>Approving activities</p>
Reinterpret and Recontextualize	<p>Part 1: Collaborating to research the sculpture</p> <p>Part 2: Ideating an innovative exhibition</p> <p>Part 3: Drawing on the expertise of an historical museum, America’s Black Holocaust Museum</p> <p>Part 4: Processing feedback from visitors who experience the <i>re:mancipation</i> exhibition</p>	<p>Expectations of partnership</p> <p>Deferring to expertise</p> <p>Curatorial decision making</p> <p>Exhibit design protocols</p> <p>Standards of disciplinary rigor</p>
Found in Collection	<p>Part 1: Finding a gap in the collection</p> <p>Part 2: Grappling with an object “found in collection” that marginally fills this gap</p> <p>Part 3: Finding display solutions for objects in poor condition</p>	<p>Collecting practices</p> <p>Curatorial decision making</p> <p>Protecting museum assets</p> <p>Exercising transparency</p> <p>Safety protocol related to art</p> <p>Expectations of partnership</p>

Facilitation Preparation Checklist

We encourage you to use these materials as you see fit for your organization. However, we offer this checklist as a way to organize and prepare for engaging in these conversations and bringing colleagues along in the process.

Facilitator To-Do's

Before

- **Reflect on organizational capacity—including opportunities and limitations.** Check in with yourself and with others in the organization as appropriate to consider where these conversations and stories connect with your museum's work. How will these discussions activate change? What is the capacity for reflection? Partnership? Action?
- **Familiarize yourself with the materials and intentionally adapt to your context.** *re:mancipation* was specific to a time and a place, but emblematic of broader patterns in the museum field. Become familiar with the arc of the project, its main threads and themes, and where it mirrors equity-focused work in your museum.
- **Thoughtfully invite and prepare colleagues for the conversation.** Conversations about race in the workplace can be difficult. After acquainting yourself with the materials, invite colleagues into conversations by providing clear expectations and goals for the conversation, contextualizing *re:mancipation* and its relevance to your local context, and sharing pre-reading materials that will help participants launch into the case study. This might include the "About *re:mancipation*" section of this booklet, links to the *re:mancipation* website, news articles, or a podcast episode about the project. Consider a [re:mancipation documentary](#) screening for participating staff.⁵
- **Prepare for facilitation.** Think about the structure of the case, consider when to take breaks, and plan for small group discussions or written reflections. Print out the case study or share a digital copy in advance.

During

- **Check in and think about norms.** Remember we're working with people who bring their work days, personal lives, and lived experiences to the discussion. Invite participants to collaboratively establish norms that honor people's whole selves and the nature of the conversation.
- **Be patient and use wait time.** We're asking big questions here! Don't worry if participants don't have a response right away to the discussion prompts.
- **Always come back to the case.** If conversations get tense or the conversation loses focus, come back to what's written on the page and represented in the case study. Focus on the Chazen's process.

After

- **Follow up and next steps.** Thank your colleagues for participating. Note any follow up items that were discussed. Begin planning future case study analysis conversations, as needed and desired by the organization.

⁵ [re:mancipation: The Process Behind the Project](#), published November 28, 2023
[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw>]

About *re:mancipation*

re:mancipation was a collaboration between the Chazen Museum of Art, MASK Consortium, artist Sanford Biggers, and a wide range of artists, campus groups, and community partners. Throughout the project, the primary collaborators (the Chazen, Sanford Biggers, and MASK) developed close working relationships. As the project and collaboration evolved, both parties recognized that the *process* of working together to study and recontextualize *Emancipation Group* was the most important output, rather than any specific *product*. While *re:mancipation* generated many concrete deliverables, including an exhibition, new artworks, public programs, and more, attention to the process of partnership was the most valuable strategy for finding inroads to address institutional racism in the museum while confronting a problematic piece of art.

In this section, we highlight some key details about the project that are relevant context for engaging with the case studies. This includes brief bios of key contributors who are featured in the cases, a project timeline, and an index of digital resources that can be explored before the case study discussions. Additional details can be found at remancipation.org.

Key Players

Throughout the case studies and workbook exercises, you will encounter and hear from different members of the *re:mancipation* “project team,” a term we use to refer to the broadest group of contributors. This group grew over time and came to include curatorial, operational, and educational staff from the Chazen, plus leadership and administrative staff from MASK. As *re:mancipation* developed, the project team stretched to include artists, activists, students, and community members. The full list of credits for *re:mancipation* includes more than 150 individuals. We focus here on the most central participants of the project team.

When referring to the primary decision makers in the initiative, we use the term “project leadership.” This refers to the Director of the Chazen, Amy Gilman, and the Creative Director of MASK Consortium, Mark Hines. At times, project leadership includes artist Sanford Biggers who provided creative direction for *re:mancipation*.

Project Leadership

Amy Gilman is the Director of the Chazen. She joined the museum in 2017 and started the position with a mandate to make the museum a more relevant resource on campus and in the broader Madison community. As a director of a university museum, she reports to the campus Provost.

Amy’s role in *re:mancipation* was significant. She directed Chazen staff and the allocation of internal resources for the project, drove most fundraising efforts, served as the external face of *re:mancipation* in press and communications, and co-curated the resulting exhibition. Amy provided a vision for *re:mancipation* in collaboration with Sanford Biggers and MASK Consortium. She also imbued the work with a vision for the museum field and framed the project

as an opportunity to explore new ways of dealing with contested objects, as well as developing new strategies to pursue equity in museums. Reflecting on Amy’s role in the project, Mark Hines said, “Having a partner who also has vision...if this doesn’t work in other places, it’s because they don’t have vision. It will work, but you gotta have you an Amy Gilman.”

Mark Hines is the Creative Director of MASK Consortium with a background in business management and music production. A close partner of Sanford Biggers, Mark came to the Chazen in 2019 to celebrate the closing of Biggers’ show, *BAM!* where a dialogue between Mark, Sanford, and members of the Chazen staff began about *Emancipation Group*.

Mark’s role in *re:mancipation* was instrumental to the operations of the partnership and creative vision of the project. He served as a liaison between the museum, Biggers, and other MASK Consortium artists, brought technical expertise to produce digital assets, and managed the project at the highest level. Mark developed project timelines, imagined deliverables, and co-curated the resulting exhibition.

Sanford Biggers is a highly accomplished artist based in New York City, whose work ranges from textiles to sculpture to live music performance. Among many other media, he began working in marble in 2017 following an American Academy Fellowship in Rome. He applied the medium to his *Chimeras* series, which “creates hybridized forms that transpose, combine and juxtapose classical and historical subjects to create alternative meanings and produce what he calls ‘future ethnographies.’”⁶ The piece he created for *re:mancipation* echoes this approach.

Sanford’s role in *re:mancipation* was catalytic; his reaction to *Emancipation Group* during a visit to the Chazen in 2019 initiated a dialogue between Mark, Sanford, and Amy. In conversation with the Chazen, he originally imagined a single response piece to *Emancipation Group*. However, Sanford’s creative reflections on the meaning of the artwork motivated ongoing changes to the scope of the project. His insights drove the activities between MASK and the Chazen, including deep research into *Emancipation Group*, a range of artistic responses, and the final exhibition. Sanford ultimately created a response piece called *Lifting the Veil*, which depicts Frederick Douglas lifting a veil of ignorance from a seated Abraham Lincoln. This piece was included in the *re:mancipation* exhibition and acquired into the Chazen’s permanent collection in 2023.



⁶ [Bio](https://sanfordbiggers.com/bio), Sanford Biggers, accessed June 11, 2024 [https://sanfordbiggers.com/bio]

Project Team

Janine Yorimoto Boldt was the Associate Curator of American Art at the Chazen Museum of Art. When Janine joined the Chazen in early 2021, one of her first tasks was to reinstall Gallery IV, *Emancipation Group*'s display location for more than 40 years. In tandem with the growing momentum for *re:mancipation*, Janine's research on *Emancipation Group*—and the artworks surrounding it in Gallery IV—became central to the project team's work to recontextualize the sculpture.

Kate Wanberg is the Exhibition and Collection Project Manager. Her role is operational in nature, as she oversees exhibition timelines, manages the movement and care of objects, and handles relationships with local vendors and producers to make exhibitions come to life. Responsible for the safety and protection of the museum's physical assets, she was involved in the approval of activities in the galleries and the production of materials for the exhibition.

Lindsay Grinstead is the Chief of Staff at the Chazen Museum of Art. She assists the Director in her duties and is a liaison between staff and other museum stakeholders. She maintains calendars and logistics between museum staff and relevant partners, and also contributes to strategic initiatives. Lindsay managed scheduling between MASK, Sanford, and Chazen representatives. She maintained meeting agendas, supported grant proposals, and facilitated communication with strategic project partners.

Guy Route is a member of MASK Consortium with a track record of creative production in the music industry. He is the principal of Schematics Industries, a multimedia production company based in New York. Throughout *re:mancipation*, Guy was a connector, making alliances between the project team and other individuals who could contribute artistically and creatively.

Eddie Gajadar supported *re:mancipation* in an operational capacity for MASK Consortium. Eddie was involved in the early financial management of the project but transitioned away from the project in 2022.

Kristine (Zickuhr) Klasen is the Chief Operating Officer of the Chazen Museum of Art. She is responsible for the museum's budget and primary general operating concerns. Kristine was involved in *re:mancipation* primarily for fiscal oversight and management.

Project Timeline

September, 2019

Sanford Biggers visits the Chazen Museum of Art at the closing of his show, *BAM!*, and encounters *Emancipation Group* for the first time with his collaborator, Mark Hines, where it is on display in Gallery IV. See the scan of Gallery IV [here](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=EGy5eVD9jux) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=EGy5eVD9jux].

March, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic begins; the Chazen Museum of Art is closed to the public until state, county, and campus policy allows visitors to return.

May 25, 2020

George Floyd is murdered by police in Minneapolis, MN. Museums begin to release statements signaling their solidarity with Black Lives Matter. Some Chazen staff insist that the museum also release a statement; however, Director Amy Gilman does not because she believes the museum has “not done the work” to authentically claim allyship.

June, 2020

Amy, Sanford, and his collaborators at MASK Consortium reconnect to start speculating about developing a “response piece” to the Chazen’s version of *Emancipation Group*.

December, 2020

A monumental version of *Emancipation Group* in Boston, MA is removed from public view following a petition started by activist Tory Bullock and a unanimous vote by the Boston Art Commission.

January, 2021

Chazen and MASK Consortium leadership begin meeting regularly to plan a response to the Chazen’s version of *Emancipation Group*. Both organizations begin to seek funding for the partnership, which is limited in scope to 3D scanning items from the collection and production of Biggers’ response piece.

July 11-15, 2021

First symposium. MASK Consortium travels to the Chazen to conduct 3D scans of *Emancipation Group* and a selection of 30 objects from the collection. These scans serve as fodder for Biggers’ creative process and eventual response piece. See the research process in action [here](https://remancipation.org/reprocess/) [https://remancipation.org/reprocess/].

November, 2021

Janine, the Associate Curator of American Art, and MASK Consortium produce a preliminary proposal for an exhibition about *Emancipation Group*, to be hosted at the Chazen in 2023.

January, 2022

Planning for a second symposium is underway, with multiple meetings between Chazen, MASK, and campus groups. Several significant grant applications are submitted for additional project funding for symposia, exhibit development, a documentary film, and curriculum development.

April 10-14, 2022

Second symposium, titled “Impeach the Precedent.” Across four days, a series of interventions are staged in the Chazen’s Gallery IV, where *Emancipation Group* is on display. Interventions range from live music and dance performances to poetry readings and quilt making. The artistic responses become the anchor of the third section of the *re:mancipation* exhibition. Explore response works [here](https://remancipation.org/artist-responses/) [https://remancipation.org/artist-responses/].

May, 2022

Chazen and MASK Consortium move forward with concrete details of a future exhibition, which prompts additional changes to the budget. Planning for a third symposium begins.

November, 2022

Third symposium focuses on campus participation and public facing events including a lecture, reception, and panel discussion about public art. Project partners meet to plan the exhibition, conduct interviews for the Chazen’s forthcoming podcast, [Meet Me at the Chazen](https://chazen.wisc.edu/press-room/publications/meet-me-at-chazen) [https://chazen.wisc.edu/press-room/publications/meet-me-at-chazen], and engage with students.

—

February 5, 2023

The *re:mancipation* exhibition opens to the public at the Chazen Museum of Art. Explore the virtual exhibition [here](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb].

May 11, 2023

Biggers’ response piece, *Lifting the Veil* is displayed for the first time and added to the exhibition. The Chazen announces that it is acquiring the piece into their collection. Read about *Lifting the Veil* [here](https://chazen.wisc.edu/new-sculpture-at-the-chazen-museum-of-art-responds-to-controversial-work-in-the-collection/) [https://chazen.wisc.edu/new-sculpture-at-the-chazen-museum-of-art-responds-to-controversial-work-in-the-collection/].

June 25, 2023

The *re:mancipation* exhibition closes to the public. Explore the virtual exhibition [here](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb].

July 28, 2023

The project team gathers to reflect on the process and discuss how the lessons learned and working relationships established through the project will carry forward.

November 28, 2023

[re:mancipation | process behind the project](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw) documentary film premieres [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw].

—

May 15, 2024

re:mancipation book published.

May 18-19, 2024

The Chazen, MASK, and Sanford Biggers present two sessions at the American Alliance of Museums 2024 conference in Baltimore: “Leveraging Permanent Collection Objects for Collaboration and Change” and “Trust the Process: Working with Others to Reimagine Object Interpretation” and host the first *re:mancipation* documentary screening and talkback.

re:mancipation Digital Resources

To further explore the process and products developed through the collaboration between the Chazen, MASK, and Sanford Biggers, check out the range of digital resources developed by the project. In different ways, these media represent the process and partnership, the story of the collaboration, and the challenges that contributors faced and grappled with. Elements of these media are dotted throughout the case studies.

Project Partners

- [re:mancipation website](https://remancipation.org/) [https://remancipation.org/]
- [Chazen Museum of Art website](https://chazen.wisc.edu/) [https://chazen.wisc.edu/]
- [MASK Consortium website](https://maskconsortium.com/) [https://maskconsortium.com/]

Exhibition Materials

- [re:mancipation virtual exhibition](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb]
- [re:mancipation exhibition guidebook](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NnFCBIJd-_Et5wPIUszyQTtr-ng-M74U/view?usp=drive_link) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NnFCBIJd-_Et5wPIUszyQTtr-ng-M74U/view?usp=drive_link]
- [Chazen webpage on re:mancipation](https://chazen.wisc.edu/exhibitions/remancipation/) [https://chazen.wisc.edu/exhibitions/remancipation/]

Additional Media

- [Meet Me at the Chazen podcast](https://chazen.wisc.edu/press-room/publications/meet-me-at-chazen/) (First season focuses on *re:mancipation*) [https://chazen.wisc.edu/press-room/publications/meet-me-at-chazen/]
- [re:mancipation YouTube Channel](https://www.youtube.com/@remancipation5003) [https://www.youtube.com/@remancipation5003]
- [re:mancipation: The Process Behind the Project documentary film](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw]
- [American Alliance of Museums blog post by Amy Gilman](https://www.aamus.org/2023/02/24/trusting-the-process-the-collaborative-journey-to-reframing-a-problematic-object/) [https://www.aamus.org/2023/02/24/trusting-the-process-the-collaborative-journey-to-reframing-a-problematic-object/]

Coverage of *re:mancipation* Exhibition

- [Hyperallergic article by Debra Brehner](https://hyperallergic.com/823424/anatomy-of-a-disputed-emancipation-monument-sanford-biggers-chazen-museum-wiscon/) [https://hyperallergic.com/823424/anatomy-of-a-disputed-emancipation-monument-sanford-biggers-chazen-museum-wiscon/]
- [New York Times profile by Siddharta Mitter](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/26/arts/design/chazen-museum-emancipation.html?smid=url-share) [https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/26/arts/design/chazen-museum-emancipation.html?smid=url-share]
- [The Isthmus \(local Madison news source\) article by Jeffrey Brown](https://isthmus.com/arts/the-remancipation-exhibit-at-the-chazen-museum-of-art/) [https://isthmus.com/arts/the-remancipation-exhibit-at-the-chazen-museum-of-art/]

Case 1: Paying for *re:mancipation*

Introduction

This case study comes in four parts. The interrelated anecdotes below address...

- Institutional orientations to money that can either reproduce or disrupt inequity
- The logistical, financial, and interpersonal challenges of partnership
- How race and racial identity inflect museum operations, particularly around finances

This case study focuses on how systemic racism shows up in the mundane processes and procedures of a museum. While budgets may seem like a clear-cut matter of balancing spreadsheets and processing invoices, financial resources confer power and privilege. This is especially the case in a working relationship like that between the Chazen, a predominantly white institution, and MASK Consortium, a Black-led start-up. Part 1 describes how the project changed scope, which had implications for the budget. Part 2 explores the logistics of raising money and making decisions in the partnership between the Chazen and MASK. Part 3 highlights how race and money intersect with each other on a personal level. Part 4 highlights how the values of flexibility and trust can be difficult to maintain in institutional contexts.

This case study analysis can include all museum staff, but is especially relevant to...

- Senior leadership
- Board members
- Staff with fiscal responsibility
- Staff who manage or facilitate partnerships

Before you Start:

The Chazen is a large museum inside of an even larger institution—the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Museums come in many shapes and sizes with different financial and capital resources at their disposal.

Before diving in, have a brief conversation about the overall financial status of your institution. Establish to what extent your institution identifies with the Chazen when it comes to budget size, financial stability, and autonomy so that your comparisons are realistic.

Part 1: Partnering and Scoping

In the beginning, before it was called *re:mancipation* and before a formal contract was established, the vision between the Chazen and MASK Consortium was for Sanford Biggers to create a single response piece or “countermonument” to *Emancipation Group*. MASK Consortium would visit the Chazen and conduct 3D scans of the sculpture and other related objects to facilitate Sanford’s creative process. Then, Sanford would prepare and fabricate a

response piece to be displayed at the museum. Relatively limited in scope, this type of project was well-established as a form of critique in museums, going back to the work of Fred Wilson⁷.

Over the first year of informal ideation, Sanford and MASK Consortium decided it would be more powerful to invite responses from many artists and cultivate a dynamic dialogue around the sculpture, rather than produce a single response. This spawned new ideas like hosting symposia with multiple artists visiting Madison to collaborate at the museum. The possibility of a full-scale exhibition became more concrete. A documentary film was suggested as a way to capture and extend the impact of the project. *re:mancipation* didn't know precisely where it was headed, but before long, it was becoming something that would touch every corner of the museum.

A contract was written with MASK Consortium in the fall of 2021 that articulated these various deliverables and tied it to a limited amount of funding that the Chazen could commit to the project. Amy had allocated, "basically what I thought I could manage to cover without any outside funding." But the possibility of securing additional funds was always there, which enabled new ideas to surface. The *potential* of new funding enabled the symposia, artist workshops, and future exhibition to proceed while the budget was still a work in progress.

As planning carried on, the scope of each project element began to ebb and flow. Travel expenses for the artist workshops were higher than expected, and the invoice for the documentary production was more than originally planned. At the same time, the cost of Sanford's response piece had been eliminated, so funding for materials and production could be moved around. But it wasn't that simple. Mark explained:

You're taking the same budget you made around creating an object, but we're not doing that. We have to chop it up in a totally different way, activate different artists in their ways to respond. In reality, [the budget] is not one to one. Couldn't ever be one to one. Fundraising is going on in the background, but we had one budget from the Chazen. Over time, it got enhanced by Mellon, NEA (National Education Association), it might have doubled ultimately, but we were initially working with a fixed budget.

Reflect:

Imagine you're in a meeting with an exciting new organizational partner in the early days of a collaboration. How would it feel to hear that partner share an idea that was far beyond the scope of what you thought was going to happen? What are some of the immediate considerations that come to mind?

Connect:

Can you think of a time when your museum had the chance to "go bigger" following the direction of an artist or community partner? What happened? What worked or didn't work?

How are partnerships with artists or other community partners developed, formalized, and enacted at your museum? How do those processes enable or limit creative exploration?

⁷ *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–1993

Part 2: Logistics of Funding in and for a Partnership

As both partners sought additional funding, *re:mancipation's* open-ended, generative process was in tension with funders' desire to understand the specific outcomes and outputs of the project. The Chazen had funding opportunities and relationships through its position within the University, and MASK had relationships and resources from their work primarily on the east coast. In advance of the April 2022 artist workshop, though, Amy commented to the group about the difficulties of raising money for *re:mancipation*. She wrote:

I am admittedly discouraged by our lack of traction on the funding front. It's baffling to me and frustrating that we haven't been able to hit the right notes quite yet. Part of the problem as I see it thus far is that we are really trying something new and unusual, and it's very hard for big funders to "see" what the scope is—and, as noted here, that is continuing to evolve. This whole project is an onion—many, many layers and I just keep seeing more.

The partners continued to pursue financial support, but even the mundane logistics of planning and submitting funding applications slowed them down. In one instance, the project team identified a grant program through the National Endowment for the Humanities and agreed that MASK Consortium would submit the application. As the deadline approached, MASK realized they didn't have a Universal Entity ID (UEI) number, a requirement for government grant applications. At that point, the museum could not apply for the grant before the deadline due to the timeline of the University's internal processes (see the Basecamp exchange). The application materials could be adapted to a different grant application with a later deadline, but

Jun 7, 2022 **LG** Lindsay Grinstead
Hey Mark, what is "SAM"?

Jun 7, 2022 **AH** Alicia Hines
Hi Lindsay,
To apply for federal grants like the NEH, "You must register your entity (you as an individual or your organization) to be able to bid on contracts or apply for federal assistance (e.g., grants, loans) from the federal government."

The SAM or Unique Entity ID (UEI) as well as the tax ID number are required entries on the Application For Domestic Assistance Form of the grant package.

Jun 7, 2022 **AG** Amy Gilman
I think I may be confused about this. I understood you all were applying for the grant through your newly created 501c3 - which would allow you to do the application directly. And to avoid the difficulties of applying through the University (which has a cumbersome Fed grant process). If we use the universities tax ID number etc, we must send the application through the department here called research and sponsored programs (also , the university takes a % cut of any Fed Grant). Do we need to hop on a call today to figure this out?

Jun 7, 2022 **LG** Lindsay Grinstead
Alicia Let me know if you want to hop on a call this morning. As Amy mentioned, we were under the impression that MASK was submitting this application as a NPO. I believe either Mark or Eddie mentioned they recently received 501c3 status in one our Zoom meetings this spring.

UW does have SAM registration, but it's not something we can "give" to you guys for the application. If we were to submit the grant, the university's research and sponsored programs department would actually review the grant and then submit it directly themselves using UW's SAM registration. Typically, they want at least a week's notice for this.

Edited Jun 7, 2022 **AH** Alicia Hines
Good afternoon Amy, Lindsay, Eddie, and Mark,

My apologies for this morning's confusion around the SAM registration. While we recently received our 501c3 status, it seems we have not yet received our UEI. I understand the ramifications of submitting the application through the UW, and so with some disappointment, we will not be submitting this application. But the good news I believe is that the package we have assembled is a near perfect fit for the NEH **Public Humanities Projects Grant** for the implementation of a public facing exhibition. The deadline for this is **August 10th** and the funding is equal to that of the Digital Humanities Project; the earliest proposed the start date is **May 1, 2023**. MASK would have our own SAM registration and UEI by that point.

I appreciate everyone's attention and the work that went into this application nonetheless.

Forward,
Alicia

Jun 7, 2022 **LG** Lindsay Grinstead
Thanks for the update, Alicia. I am sorry that you won't be able to submit for this grant but am glad the content can be repurposed. Apologies if there was any miscommunication our part--just let us know what you need for the next application!

this oversight highlighted how fundraising in and for this partnership was messy.

Even as challenges arose, project leadership maintained a positive, forward-looking attitude, communicating to staff that it would all work out. Mark was especially optimistic that the budget would eventually balance, even if it required unusual adaptations. Discussing expenses for the artist symposium, he said in a meeting:

Let me say that there's strategic flexibility with regard to how we both resource different parts, different phases [of the project]. And it might be very well, even though we intend to really pay for them with an external source, that something needs some love [money] sooner than later, and we need to pull something later to fill that hole. And that isn't a problem for MASK. I don't know your internal logistics to know where the constraints are, but regardless, I think we're both flexible in trying to work whatever angles to manifest that.

Reflect:

Why do you think it was difficult to get funders “on board” with *re:mancipation*? What do you know about funding structures that might have stymied the project early on?

How do you think that *re:mancipation*'s collaborative approach to funding impacted how power was distributed in the partnership?

Connect:

Are there initiatives or ideas that your museum has proposed to funders that have been declined or especially difficult to fund? What did your museum do when faced with rejection?

Part 3: Race, Roles, and Reconciling Budgets

While this can-do ethos of flexibility enabled creative innovations, the reality of paying for the project and managing money raised tensions around the racialized nature of the partnership and of sharing resources. This became clear when the partners experienced some crucial instances of miscommunication around project funds.

According to the original contract, the Chazen paid \$50,000 to MASK in August 2021 at the time of signing an initial contract for the cost of materials and the production of a response piece by Biggers. As the project evolved away from a countermonument as its central activity, MASK began spending down these funds toward a variety of other expenses. This caused confusion because project leadership thought those funds would be available for upcoming expenses, but the balance had been used towards various artist fees, technology, and research over the course of the project's first year under contract. What's more, the \$50,000 would have to be accounted for according to the University's policies, and the Chazen didn't know how it had been spent.

Listen to [this excerpt from a budget review meeting](https://youtu.be/dFOQcrgQYro) [https://youtu.be/dFOQcrgQYro] in May 2022 where the use of these funds is raised as an issue that needs clarification.

Additional conversations between MASK and the Chazen followed to sort out the discrepancies. In one meeting, a member of the MASK team left the discussion with the impression that the museum was criticizing MASK's capacity to responsibly manage money. The individual thought that, at the heart of their criticism, museum staff were making a racialized judgment rooted in stereotypes and biases that have systematically limited Black peoples' access to material wealth and resources. The museum, meanwhile, was following procedure, asking for precise justification of expenditures according to the responsibilities given to them by the University. In between these two positions was the informal norm of *re:mancipation*: shared trust that the money would work out. The relationality of *re:mancipation* clashed with the bureaucracy of a large institution.

The issue of the floating \$50,000 had to be escalated to Mark and Amy because the reconciliation needed now was both financial and interpersonal. Mark reflected that, "[The emotional reaction] was with one person, but it was about a big topic, and it put everything in a funny vibe. The two teams retreated to their sides, and we couldn't have that."

The situation was sensitive because of the racial dynamic between the Chazen, MASK, and the person who had felt hurt by the negotiation. Mark noted that this conflict was resolved effectively because, "Amy didn't go into defensive mode." He said, "She went into 'What do we need to do to resolve this for the team?'" Mark and Amy heard the perspectives of their respective team members, communicated to the opposite parties what the impact of the conversation was, shared feedback for the future, and came up with a comprehensive accounting of the initial payment. In this instance, *re:mancipation* was reminded that the impacts of racism are embedded—and need to be confronted—in all areas of a museum's operations.

Reflect:

In this anecdote, conversations about money were also conversations about race. How did the partners' different personal experiences and feelings, and different professional responsibilities related to finances, shape their negotiation of a budget problem?

Connect:

Does this example give you insight into experiences you've had talking about money (or other resources) with partners? What conversations have you had with partners that are about one thing on the surface—but might also be about race or other facets of identity?

Where else might race be present when race is not specifically what you're talking about?

Part 4: Keeping the Budget Clean

As project leaders worked to manage the above incident, both partners became more proactive about communication related to funding and expenses. The unaccounted-for \$50,000 also launched a cascade of adjustments to the project's formal and informal agreements. The University required that the Chazen prepare an addendum to the contract with MASK

Consortium, which gave the project a chance to reset the conditions of the agreement. See the email below between Kristine and Guy about the particulars:

On Oct 20, 2022, at 2:29 PM, Kristine wrote:

Dear Guy,

I hope you're doing well and hope to see you on the call tomorrow. The university has asked us to begin drafting a contract addendum, so we can clarify if any terms have changed and also pick up the upcoming activities.

They've let us know that we've exceeded the original contract amount, so would like an addendum before they process any additional invoices. I have a draft ready to share, but Amy recommended reaching out about the following questions:

- Will there be a lump sum payment for services related to physical exhibition (such as research, interactives, content creation, etc.)?
- Regarding Ukachi's time, will the Chazen be invoiced?
- For the three upcoming trips (November 2022, opening, and closing) we'll be covering \$10,000 in travel for each trip. Other than the \$50,000 for the November symposium, do you anticipate an additional fee associated with these trips?
- For the mural design, will we be paying MASK or paying Marka27 directly for this service, and is this cost known?

And finally, could we settle on a lump sum for all future activities such as the above? Or are there too many variables?

I'd be happy for your feedback and, if it's easiest, I could send the addendum draft with some suggested amounts and agreements. If you're on the call tomorrow, maybe we could also talk it over at the end of the meeting.

Thanks,
Kristine
Chief Operating Officer

The disconnect over the initial funding also prompted clarity around communication between the partners. Listen to [this excerpt from a meeting](https://youtu.be/DG8mfxY-Xyk) [https://youtu.be/DG8mfxY-Xyk] between Amy, Lindsay, and Eddie where they discuss expectations about making decisions with regards to project funds.

The final funding for the project was a combination of additional grant funds and discretionary funds from both the Chazen and MASK, but the many moving pieces were not always apparent as new ideas and expenses emerged. Norms around communication regarding the budget had to be revisited as the project developed.

Funding Sources	Major Expenses
Chazen Museum of Art operating funds Mellon Foundation grant National Education Association Terra Foundation for American Art UW–Madison Chancellor & Provost Office support	Artist fees Artist travel for symposium events Curriculum development Documentary film Exhibition development/fabrication Fabrication of countermonument MASK 3D scanning services Symposium events

Reflect:

Read between the lines of Kristine’s email to Guy. What moves does she make here to navigate between the bureaucratic routines of the University and the collaborative, open-ended values of *re:mancipation*?

What norms or expectations are communicated and clarified in the conversation between Amy, Eddie, and Lindsay? How do they negotiate the tension between the project’s ethos of flexibility and the museum’s need for compliance?

Connect:

In what ways is your museum flexible or inflexible with money? Where does financial rigidity come from, and why are those limitations important to you in your role? To the institution? To other stakeholders?

How do you respond when those limitations are challenged?

Closing

Over the course of the project, the cost of *re:mancipation* represented a significant chunk of the Chazen’s annual operating budget. Its full scope would not have been realized without additional fundraising done by both organizations. The partners had to navigate scope changes—and therefore, budget changes—that the museum wouldn’t have allowed in other situations. Throughout, the museum had to confront practices and procedures that marginalized their partners and navigate conversations that stemmed from the racialized structure of the partnership.

Mark noted how these tricky budget conversations were indicative of a bigger issue. In most cases, the project partners did not explicitly discuss the role of race in the partnership, but the triggering interaction described above reminded project leaders that *re:mancipation* was tasked with confronting these instances of systemic racism head-on. From MASK Consortium’s perspective, criticism or distrust about finances was connected to systems that have historically excluded and distrusted people of color. Mark said of the incident:

We’re a Black-owned start-up financed by our own funds. This is one of the [implicit] race conversations...It is a fact that cash flow is not always there [for a Black-owned

start up] and that's part of why we're doing this project! I went to Princeton, but I can't get a business loan. It's not a functional part of our [Black people's] reality. We live project to project. We're small, but we're effective.

re:mancipation was an opportunity, then, to redirect resources to a group that was underrepresented and historically marginalized in the fields of business, art, and museums. With redistribution and resource sharing underwriting the work of *re:mancipation*, Kristine came to recognize the possibilities, rather than the pitfalls, in this process. In a reflection email to Amy in the final stages of the project, she articulated a lesson learned about formalizing these kinds of partnerships. She wrote:

Base the budget and contract style on the project style. For example, an organic working style could be supported with an organic contract and budget. Examples might include establishing an hourly rate instead of a lump sum, or a lump sum for the entire project instead of costs for individual deliverables. To that end, it was unrealistic to create target dates for deliverables because they shifted throughout the process. And due to the style of the working relationship, contractual enforcement wasn't necessary. The contract could still have created a safety net, for example with some recourse if some deliverables never arrived, but it didn't need to serve as a project plan with milestones. Creating an open-ended contract would have also avoided issues such as rushing to create an addendum to document additional work. An organic approach sometimes clashes with university requirements, but it's possible to fulfill both needs by thoughtfully structuring agreements that mirror the working style.

	The Chazen	Your Museum
Analysis	<p>How did the values of trust and flexibility cause friction in managing finances between partners in <i>re:mancipation</i>?</p> <p>In what ways did race and power show up in managing money for <i>re:mancipation</i>?</p>	<p>What values and norms do you and/or your institution have about managing money?</p> <p>Where do those values and norms come from? Who or what interests do they serve?</p>
Action	<p>What lessons do you think the Chazen can apply to budgeting for creative partnerships in the future?</p>	<p>Thinking about your role in the institution, what routines related to money do you have control over?</p> <p>Drawing on Kristine's reflection, how can your work adapt to be responsive to different work styles, partnerships, and power dynamics?</p>
<p>Meta Reflection: Talking about money can be really difficult. How was it for your team to talk about the Chazen's process? How was it for your team to talk about your internal process?</p>		

Case 2: Violating Norms

Introduction

This case study comes in three parts. The story below addresses...

- How written and unwritten norms act as gatekeepers to the museum's resources
- How a trusting partnership can stretch the bounds of what we consider "acceptable" in the museum
- The role that museum staff can play in sharing and redistributing power

This case study is an exploration of how norms and boundaries of acceptability can interfere with our work towards equity and justice in the museum. As *re:mancipation* expanded in scope, the partners imagined a series of symposia and artist workshops which would facilitate the production of artistic responses to Ball's *Emancipation Group*. Not only did these stretch the scope of the project, but they stretched the museum staff's ideas about what was allowed, safe, and possible in their facility. In Part 1, the *re:mancipation* project team identifies Gallery IV as the site for staging artistic interventions. In Part 2, they plan for the second symposia called "Impeach the Precedent", which will be a week-long workshop bringing Black artists into Gallery IV to respond to *Emancipation Group*. In Part 3, museum staff reflect on the process of planning and facilitating this unusual collaborative activity.

This case study analysis can include all museum staff, but is especially relevant to...

- Senior leadership
- Board members
- Security staff
- Curators and curatorial staff
- Project managers and operational staff
- Education staff or staff who facilitate partnerships

Before you Start:

This case grapples with the norms we maintain within the physical space of our museum. As a starting point, take a look at any written policy, signage, or protocol used in your museum that describes what is expected of people in the museum space. Think of visitor codes of conduct, HR handbooks highlighting professional behavior, and/or fine print in contracts about what partners or vendors are allowed to bring into the museum.

Don't have a written document? Brainstorm some bullet points of implicit norms and expectations that exist at your museum.

When, why, and by whom were these norms developed? How are they enforced? What purpose do they serve for the institution?

Part 1: Welcome to Gallery IV

As *re:mancipation* evolved, the project's creative vision expanded to include a range of artistic responses to *Emancipation Group*. Rather than generating a single countermonument designed by Biggers, the initiative would solicit artistic responses and reactions from many disciplines and artistic traditions. To generate and capture these artistic responses, the project team began to imagine a workshop that would invite a series of artistic interventions around the sculpture in its original museum context, the Chazen's Gallery IV.

Gallery IV was, in itself, an important artifact to the project. Guy Route, a creative liaison with MASK, reflected on a conversation about the space ahead of the symposium. In parallel with research that Janine had been conducting on other objects in Gallery IV (see Case 3), Guy said that members of MASK had taken it upon themselves to do some research about the figures in the portraits surrounding *Emancipation Group*. Both the museum and MASK had found that most, if not all, of the portrait subjects had direct connections to slavery—either as slaveholders or beneficiaries of industries that relied on enslaved labor. Guy remembered how this motivated their vision for an artist workshop in the gallery:

To get to do an intervention around that [during the artist workshop], to upset the room and bring in music, dj's...We had to convince the museum around all this art. It's not just the statue, it's everyone in here. [We told them], whether it's intentional or not, 'you got a bunch of slave masters on the wall.' As soon as you say this, they [the Chazen] all said, 'Wow you're right!' And they did something about it.

The lens of *re:mancipation* and the partnership with MASK had made these interpretations and stories more salient. As more voices joined the conversation to critique and reimagine the presentation of *Emancipation Group*, the opportunity to critique and respond to *Emancipation Group* in its original context of Gallery IV inspired much of the project's activities.

In January, four months before the week-long event in April 2022, Amy tried to summarize back to the group what the purpose of the upcoming workshop was. She said, "It sounds like this week is really about setting up really fertile conversations and letting all of that bubble up, right? Allowing everybody to be in the room and be focused on this together?" MASK Consortium partners agreed. The purpose of the gathering was to host open-ended, generative interactions and art-making inspired by the content and themes of the sculpture and its setting in Gallery IV, largely in the spirit of critique.

- [Original Gallery IV](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=EGy5eVD9jux) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=EGy5eVD9jux]

Reflect:

Spend 10-15 minutes exploring the virtual Gallery IV.

Several MASK Consortium contributors expressed how traumatizing and uncomfortable the original Gallery IV space was to them. What is your impression of Gallery IV? What is the story that it tells about race in America, as presented here? Why do you think that this gallery was able to remain unchanged for so long?

What are some of the opportunities and challenges you anticipate when it comes to hosting an art-making event in this space?

Connect:

Do you have a particularly “precious” space in your museum? This could be a gallery, display, or interactive space that has specific norms for behaviors. What are people expected to do (and not do!) when they enter that space?

Part 2: Dancing in the Galleries, and other Possibilities

Planning for something so unknown and serendipitous was uncomfortable for Chazen staff. Plus, as more details came into focus, the practicalities of the workshop raised concerns. Dancers would perform in the gallery and needed water to drink. Musicians would set up amplifiers with cords running across the gallery floor. Film crews would capture the proceedings and move around the space. Student groups would present spoken word pieces. These activities would happen during an open museum day, limiting access to the gallery while it was occupied by *re:mancipation* contributors. Additionally, a space for socializing, rest, and reflection was needed for the many participants throughout the week, and all of the visiting artists and partners needed to be able to move about the museum facility freely.

These facets of the event were made more complicated by frequent changes to the workshop lineup. MASK continued coordinating additional interventions and generating new ideas up until a week before the event. See the dialogue between Chazen staff (blue) and MASK team members (red) during a planning meeting on April 1, 2022 about finalizing details of Sanford’s participation before the April 11-14 workshop:

>> **Jamie:** I did put that on the agenda, and Lindsay can talk about this too, but we were just wondering what the expectations were of [the activity for Sanford], what that looks like if we’re still thinking you want to do that on Wednesday afternoon, and what supplies we need to order to make it happen, what you’re bringing for it.

>> **Kate:** Also, who’s painting, is it just Sanford? Is it, are lots of people painting, kind of?

>> **Jamie:** All the details?

>> **Kate:** Yes. Sounds exciting. We wanna know more.

>> **Guy:** From what I understand...I know that was more so for Sanford, like, ‘If you are so inclined Sanford, this is the opportunity to do your part of the collaboration.’ So I think that’s

totally an inspiration thing more than it is an actual agenda item to make the space for it. We'll make sure he has what he needs [for when] he's like, 'I'm just so inspired, we gotta do this.' We'll have the space for him.

...

>> **Amy:** Okay. I think really what we're trying to get to is, within the next week, what you need us to have on hand in order to be able to allow for that kind of dynamic. Whether it is [contributing artist] Marka 27 or whether it's Sanford, we're trying to identify a space that can allow for wet material, right? Because we can't allow wet material in the galleries, but we're trying to figure that out, so really it's what do you need to have on hand, right? We have lots of art supplies right, so there's lots of things that we have here. But can we make sure that, by the time you actually need it, we have the things that you would want, whether it's different tempera paints or whatever. But that way, Kate and Jamie and everybody who's trying to sort of have this space as a possibility, we won't be scrambling at the end.

These interventions, and all of the attendant logistics of the as-yet unknowns, prompted a cascade of potential risks: What if a cameraman backs into a painting? What if a dancer trips and knocks a frame off the wall? What if a visual artist brings wet material into the gallery? The museum had never done something like this before and some museum staff struggled to conceive of the necessary steps to protect the gallery contents—and by extension, the museum. However, Amy gave direction for staff to proceed and follow the lead of their partners, even if it made them nervous.

Reflect:

Why did these kinds of activities feel risky or uncomfortable to the Chazen?

Do you think these ideas would have been received any differently if they were proposed as activations during a fundraising event? As an intervention by a well-regarded white artist? As part of a field trip experience for middle schoolers?

Connect:

How do you think your museum would respond to these workshop ideas, such as having dancers perform in a gallery or allowing glue in a room full of portraits? Does that response change if the participants are Black, white? Old, young?

Has there been a time when you or your team said no to a creative idea because it went against standard practice? What do you think was underwriting that “no”?

Part 3: Opening Gateways for New Visions

For Kate, the Exhibition and Collection Project Manager, this stage of *re:mancipation* was especially stressful. Tasked with providing primary logistical oversight of the workshop's activities in Gallery IV, her initial reaction to many of the proposed artist interventions was to hesitate and suggest that they happen outside the context of the gallery. For Kate, many of the suggestions were difficult to imagine because they felt daunting and risky. Her primary job

responsibility, above all else, was to protect the artworks and the facility. The unknowns of this project were in conflict with that priority.

As ideas flowed through MASK's project partners, Mark could sense the skepticism coming from the museum. Mark said that he "wasn't trying to be difficult...I was just thinking, creating... [Since I was] not thinking that these ideas were so wild, I had no hesitation to voice them." He went on, "So many things that I suggested were counter to what the museum had done before. Kate complained, but I knew in some way she was going all-in to make this happen. [For Kate], it was like, 'I feel uncomfortable, but I'm going to do what y'all are trying to do.'"

Thinking back on the preparations for the April workshop, Kate echoed Mark's description of the dynamic leading up to the event. She said that what ultimately made the artist interventions possible was the trust established between partners over time. Kate had trust that MASK would provide whatever information she and the Chazen needed to safely facilitate the creative work on the agenda for the workshop. Similarly, MASK trusted that the Chazen staff would support their creative vision.

Because of this reciprocity, Kate knew she could communicate candidly to the workshop participants. She set the expectation "that my role is to protect this artwork, and I'm trusting you to respect that." Kate was direct in establishing boundaries with participating artists, such as setting limits on where liquids could be and monitoring how close people got to the artworks. As artists came and went from the gallery for their interventions, and as MASK Consortium collaborators spent time around the museum, the stress and uncertainty resolved itself.

She reflected, "Once everything was set up, and once it started, then we were like, 'Oh, this is fine.'" The workshop produced more than a dozen artistic responses to *Emancipation Group* that were featured in the *re:mancipation* exhibition.

- View the [artist responses enacted in Gallery IV](https://remancipation.org/artist-responses/) [https://remancipation.org/artist-responses/]

Reflect:

Kate eventually recognized that her job responsibilities positioned her to either enable or inhibit MASK Consortium and the Black artists they invited to the museum to realize their visions. What kinds of norms did she and other Chazen staff have to break in order to center their partners' work? What values facilitated the choice to break those norms?

Connect:

Think of a partnership your museum has engaged in. To what extent was trust established and rapport built? Would you have trusted that partner to activate a gallery in this way? Why or why not? What would you have needed from them to pursue these kinds of activities?

Closing

While reflecting on the April 2022 symposium, Kate said, “I’m not a statistician, so I don’t understand the full risk. But I think it’s definitely something where, once you’re in the situation, the anxiety eases.” For the Chazen, the anticipatory anxiety of such “unusual” activities may have shut down transformative opportunities in the past because they conflicted with existing standards of what was allowable within the museum. However, in making plans for this symposium and beyond, it became apparent that these norms act in conjunction with other systemic forces to keep the white museum at the center, indirectly reproducing the racial hierarchy embodied in the iconography of *Emancipation Group*.

With access to so many logistical levers through her formal role at the Chazen, Kate realized, “My decisions to support or not support an idea can, from behind the scenes, sway the way things are presented, or how we work with people, and us saying yes to projects.” Through the negotiations and collaboration of *re:mancipation*, Kate began to see the ways in which her job was that of a gatekeeper. Her role at the museum directly approved or denied access to the museum and its resources. The opportunity to open up resources to the Black artists responding to *Emancipation Group* was a moment to tip the scales of power away from the institution and its historic way of doing things.

This kind of power-sharing and recentering was visible in the results of the artist workshop and in the final exhibition. When asked about how her experience supporting *re:mancipation* changed both her and the museum, Kate had an aspirational takeaway: “My hope for the museum...is to be more open in giving up authority and power as the ‘curator’ or ‘selectors’ to other voices. It’s just a question of how long it will take for that to materialize.”

	The Chazen Museum of Art	Your Museum
Analysis	<p>What norms had to be busted or established to decenter the conventional holders of power in the museum to realize the symposium’s creative vision?</p> <p>How do you think race influenced the way this case unfolded? The Chazen is a predominantly white institution and MASK is a collective of Black artists.</p>	<p>What norms does your institution preserve that limit the exploration of new partnerships, programs, or creative endeavors?</p> <p>In what ways are these norms racialized? In other words, how do they protect the status quo and/or white supremacy?</p>
Action	<p>How did <i>re:mancipation</i> change the way different museum staff conceptualized their job responsibilities?</p> <p>What do you expect the Chazen will do differently now that they’ve successfully hosted a symposium like this? What changes in their decision making?</p>	<p>Think about Kate’s reflection on gate-keeping. Where are the “gates” in your museum, or in your role?</p> <p>What is one written or unwritten norm for your job that you could test the limits of? What do you think will happen?</p>
<p>Meta Reflection: This story represents the ethos of risk-taking and trust that made <i>re:mancipation</i> possible. How did it feel for you to talk about the Chazen’s choices and negotiations with their partners? How did it feel to talk about opportunities for your museum to facilitate and open doors to unconventional creative partnerships?</p>		

Case 3: Reinterpret and Recontextualize

Introduction

This case study comes in four parts. The story below addresses...

- How disciplinary practices and ways of knowing can protect dominant perspectives
- The racialized nature of professional standards in the museum
- The intellectual challenges and opportunities of partnership

re:mancipation challenged the Chazen's approach to developing exhibitions and presenting pieces from their collection. With a goal to "reinterpret and recontextualize" *Emancipation Group* by Thomas Ball, the project team developed an exhibition that was unlike anything the Chazen had done before. This case study explores how the museum opened up and invited multiple points of view into the development process, which pushed on the boundaries of the museum's practice. In Part 1, the Chazen and MASK Consortium collaborate to research the sculpture. In Part 2, they take their new knowledge and transform it into an unprecedented kind of exhibit. In Part 3, they turn to another museum, America's Black Holocaust Museum, to co-develop an historical timeline that will frame the *re:mancipation* exhibition. Finally, in Part 4, the museum hears from a handful of visitors on their response to the exhibit.

This case study analysis can include all museum staff, but is especially relevant to...

- Senior leadership
- Board members
- Curators and curatorial staff
- Staff who manage or facilitate partnerships
- Staff who survey or evaluate the visitor experience

Before you Start:

This case grapples with whose and what expertise is valued and elevated in the museum. For the Chazen, a large fine arts museum on an R1 university campus, the disciplinary values of art history, the mandate to engage in research, and the practice of conservation are all front and center.

Before exploring this case, begin by articulating the disciplinary identity of your museum. Is it clearly defined? What is included or excluded in your museum's work? Your institution may have a different focus than the Chazen. Keep an eye out for points of alignment or similarity, in spite of any differences in your museum's content or focus area.

Part 1: A "Tennis Game" of Collaborative Research

Even before pursuing a full-scale exhibition, MASK Consortium was motivated to understand the composition of *Emancipation Group* in great detail because Sanford Biggers' artistic approach involves remixing and recombining elements of existing artworks into contemporary pieces. The original plan to develop a countermonument assumed that Biggers' piece would integrate iconographic forms from the Ball sculpture with motifs from African and contemporary

art. To this end, MASK created 3D scans of the sculpture while Janine Yorimoto Boldt, the Associate Curator of American Art, began to research the object and its multiple versions.

Janine found relevant literature about Ball and *Emancipation Group*, but no formal iconographic breakdown of the sculpture's symbols. Inspired by Bigger's process of de- and re-composition, she began with an iconographic study, using the 3D scans MASK had produced to help communicate her research back to the project team. As she made new connections to references related to the kneeling figure, the shrouded whipping post, the bleeding heart, and the many other icons in the piece, MASK generated new questions about the object and its origin story: What do the icons in the composition represent in different time periods? Why did the versions change? How was it fabricated? Who paid for it?

Mark described the dialectic of research as a tennis game. He said:

There was an interplay, a tennis game between Janine and myself where...we needed each other and the difference in how we work. I don't have the research skills, but we [MASK] know what to do with new information. Then, as we came up with things to do with that information, Janine was thinking differently because it was presented back to her in a different way than she had thought about it.

And indeed, with the ball in their court, MASK was able to drive the project to take this new knowledge and build it into a creative reality. The research that Janine, Mark and other contributors co-produced eventually became the bones of a full-scale exhibition.

Reflect:

Whose knowledge and expertise is guiding the research process here? The exhibit design process?

Connect:

Is there anyone that you or your museum "plays tennis" with? Where do you go for thought partnership that pushes your museum's creative vision? If you don't have that person or group, who could you turn to?

Part 2: A Constellation of Inputs

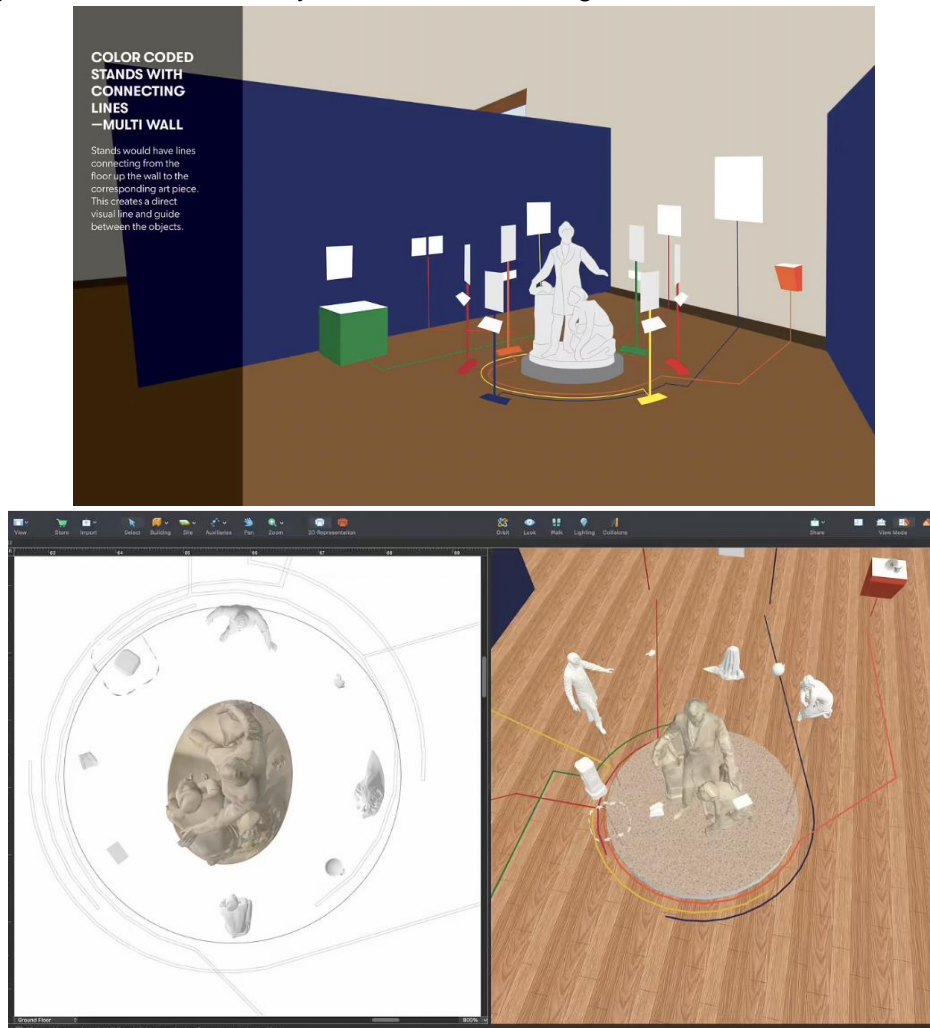
Listen to [this episode](https://www.buzzsprout.com/2120678/12250715-janine-yorimoto-boldt-what-is-re-mancipation) [https://www.buzzsprout.com/2120678/12250715-janine-yorimoto-boldt-what-is-re-mancipation] of *Meet Me at the Chazen* featuring Janine Yorimoto Boldt, in which she discusses the historical research and iconography behind the sculpture (13 minutes).

Next, watch [this section of a meeting](https://youtu.be/1Yp0gpRyuiU) [https://youtu.be/1Yp0gpRyuiU] between Amy, Mark, and Sanford in May 2022, where they riff on the idea of representing the iconographic analysis, which Janine had completed and presented to the group, as a physical form in the exhibition.

Note that, in this clip, Amy, Mark and Sanford reference 3D printed objects. At this phase of the project, the Chazen had invited the UW Makerspace—a community of designers and builders

within the College of Engineering at UW–Madison with a collection of fabrication tools like 3D printers and laser cutters—to partner on some elements of exhibit fabrication. As the vision for *re:mancipation* developed, the makerspace enabled project participants to “reimagine” the sculpture using 3D printed models of isolated elements of the composition, create mockups of countermonuments, and fabricate artistic responses.

See mockups of the ideas that Amy, Mark, and Sanford generated below.



Reflect:

What about the story and/or content of *Emancipation Group*, as told by Janine, stands out to you?

How was Janine’s research instrumental to the design ideas discussed in the meeting? What do you think the project team would have to do next to realize those design ideas?

Connect:

Do you have an object in your collection that might benefit from an iconographic analysis? From a deep historical contextualization? How would you start? Who would start?

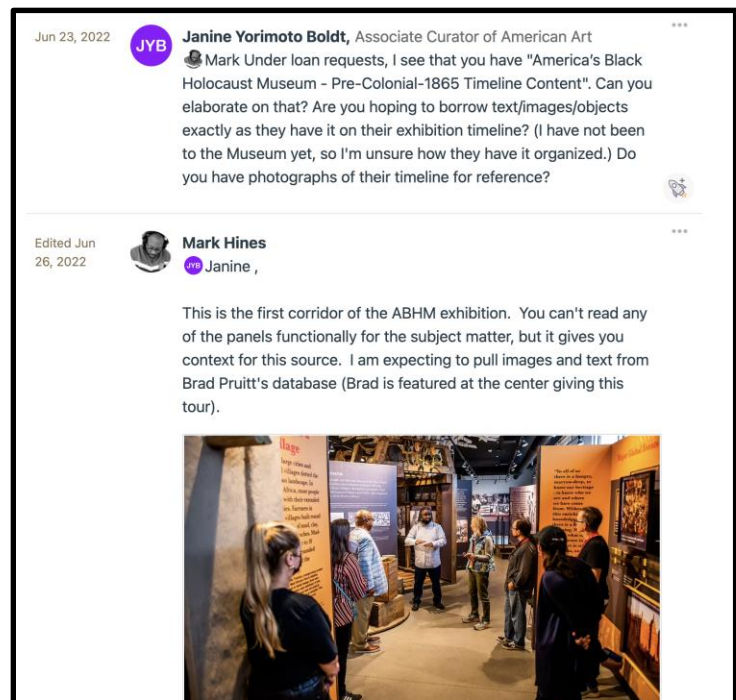
Part 3: Pulling in more partners

With all of this newfound information about the object, the project wanted to present *Emancipation Group* within a broad historical context. The project team wanted to emphasize the connectedness between the institution of slavery, the founding of the United States, the history of the Civil War, contemporary patterns of racial inequality, and Thomas Ball's multiple iterations of *Emancipation Group*. To tell this story, the project needed to stretch its disciplinary bounds and invite even more perspectives into the exhibition research and development process.

While the iconography display was underway in collaboration with the UW Makerspace, the Chazen also needed to pull on another expert to develop an exhibit of historical research. Knowing that much of the relevant historical content already existed elsewhere, *re:mancipation* turned to America's Black Holocaust Museum (ABHM), an historical and memorial museum in Milwaukee, WI. ABHM was founded by Dr. James Cameron, the only known survivor of a racial lynching.

After MASK Consortium visited the Milwaukee museum in April 2022, ABHM was asked to contribute to *re:mancipation*. ABHM's curator shared content from their timeline of Black history, which starts in 2700 BCE and runs through the Civil Rights era of the 1960's to the present day. The project team also took inspiration from ABHM's timeline installation for the physical design of *re:mancipation* (see Basecamp exchange).

What came next was a tedious editing process that put the Chazen's commitment to traditional art historical analysis into closer contact with other disciplinary traditions and points of view. Janine recounted that developing the text of the historical timeline was cyclical and contested. She said, "There was a lot of pushback on what Mark wanted to include...he provided a very detailed timeline of information, and I would ask, 'Can we cut this?' He would say that he really wanted it." To Mark, it was important to demonstrate a robust history of African arts and culture before the transatlantic slave trade took Africans from their homelands. To Janine, Kate, and other exhibit design team members, it was important to produce an exhibit that was accessible, rigorously researched, and commensurate with visitor experience and design best practices.



With an increasingly constrained timeline ahead of the February 2023 exhibition opening, Janine worried about their capacity to fact-check and source this amount of content. She wondered, “How do we do that responsibly, as historians?” Meanwhile, deadlines for design and fabrication approached. As Janine, Mark, and others negotiated the content of the timeline’s text, Kate, the project manager, was tasked with finalizing loan requests for objects to supplement the timeline display and getting details to the design firm to mock up and produce the physical exhibition panels.

Janine reflected on the tension between honoring MASK Consortium’s and ABHM’s voices in developing this core feature of the exhibition while editing and revising content to meet the museum’s standards within the limitations of design and fabrication. She said of the process:

I did a lot of revisions, we had to cut quite a bit. I don't know how far I would have brought the timeline back [in time]. Mark provided content, then I did some fact checking and rewriting [to make a] more cohesive timeline, rather than just all of the things that could've been on there. I probably would not have had all the same things. But that's the process of collaboration.

Reflect:

Imagine you are in the Chazen’s position, just a few months out from a new exhibit opening. How do you deal with changes to content, new ideas, and feedback from partners that doubles back on work you’ve done or slows down timelines?

How do those timelines or professional standards impact project partners whose voices have historically been excluded from the museum?


Connect:

Has your museum engaged in collaborative curatorial or research projects? If yes, what was it like to integrate knowledge and ways of thinking that come from other disciplinary traditions? If not, what do you think would be some of the challenges or opportunities with collaborating in this manner?

Part 4: “It’s a bit yikes”

When the exhibition opened, visitors were greeted with a comprehensive historical timeline. Behind the timeline, they encountered three versions of *Emancipation Group*, one of which was surrounded by isolated 3D printouts of the icons in a constellation-like arrangement. The oddness of the exhibit was not lost on visitors: one person leaving the *re:mancipation* exhibition was overheard asking, “Does the Chazen think that it is an art museum, or a history museum? I can’t tell with this exhibit.”

- Explore the [virtual re:mancipation exhibition](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb]

 the re:mancipation show is the best post-George-Floyd's-murder effort by a museum I've seen.

basic narrative: Sanford Biggers and collaborators at the MASK consortium resituate the awful, patronizing, 19th-c. white-self-congratulatory sculpture, Emancipation Group, by Thomas Bell (of which the Chazen I think owns two iterations?), by indicating the statue as part of a series of evils amid a longer history of Black African and diaspora heritage that culminates in the new statue and installation. the new statue is called Lifting the Veil and shows Frederick Douglass lifting a quilted "veil of ignorance" from Lincoln's head

(this intervention is redolent of some of the issues raised by @mwidrich in her news article posted in my stories about the Lueger monument in Vienna)

and above all I just loved the final room, staged with absent viewers wearing cloths in solidarity with the cape iconography of 19th century abolition fighters. there was a great uplifting energy combined with genuine openness to critique

(and indeed in that spirit I strongly recommend that ppl skip the first room of the exhibition which is full of almost absurdly misleading superficial facts and miscontextualized artworks from before 1800--or just focus on the wall on the right as you enter and don't even bother looking at the left wall, it's a bit yikes)

but most of this exhibition is a testament to what is possible if institutions actually center Black artists and curators as well as Black discourse on issues of Blackness.

While feedback and reviews of the show were largely positive, there was as much complexity among the audience responses as there was within the sculpture. One visitor, who had gone through *re:mancipation* and a separate gallery that was, at the time, featuring artworks by Diné artist, Monty Little, approached a museum guide and asked in a tone of sincere frustration, "Where's all the art about America being great?" Another visitor, answering to a prompt offered to all guests at the end of the exhibit asking "What does freedom mean to you," wrote on the comment card, "Freedom is my right to own a gun." While this entry made some staff uncomfortable, it was an honest, meaningful response.

Yet another visitor, who was a faculty member in UW–Madison's art history department at the time, shared their reflections on Instagram. They offered a generous evaluation of the exhibition as a whole, but they suggested that others skip the timeline materials in the front hallway on account of the "superficial facts and miscontextualized artworks from before 1800...it's a bit yikes" (see the abbreviated caption above). The historical timeline was a bust for this museum-goer, but it was also a boon for others. A group of social studies teachers visited and found the timeline to be a valuable element that would appeal to some students in ways that the visual components might not. Museum staff observed visitors taking significant amounts of time to read and review the timeline before launching into the rest of the experience.

Reflect:
From the Chazen's point of view, how would you react to the Instagram comment about the timeline's content? How would you react to teachers' feedback about the multimedia design of the exhibition? The begrudged guest? How would you use this feedback in the future?

Connect:
How has your museum handled feedback, critique, or dissatisfaction from visitors? How would you deal with criticism that is racially charged?

Closing

Janine indicated that, if the museum was developing a show on its own, a lot of things would be different from how *re:mancipation* turned out. But, she also recognized that the difference was precisely the point. The impetus to recontextualize *Emancipation Group* against a broad history pushed the disciplinary boundaries of the museum. Furthermore, the goal of reinterpreting the sculpture also demanded new relationships and sources of expertise to be brought into the museum. Throughout, the process resisted the Chazen’s existing protocols for content development and exhibit fabrication timelines, as well as visitor expectations. For the project partners, they believe that this multivocal process resulted in a more complete representation of *Emancipation Group*.

Mark recognized how power was shared through the exhibit development process: “It’s not a ceding, it’s a sharing of the role to get more input to form a better perspective.” He went on to describe how transparency and trust were essential to this endeavor, especially as critical reflection was central to the process. He summarized what made this dynamic work:

In a typical relationship, someone might take criticism as ‘Oh no, we’ve done it wrong, we’re so embarrassed, we’re getting called out,’ which would make it hard to work with the museum. It was very important for MASK to say ‘We’re not dissing you, but these objects do make a difference.’

	The Chazen Museum of Art	Your Museum
Analysis	To what extent do you think the museum would have been able to “reinterpret and recontextualize” <i>Emancipation Group</i> if curatorial staff had been working independently to study the object and prepare it for display?	What disciplinary boundaries does your institution hold onto that limit the exploration of new partnerships, programs, or intellectual points of view? Where do you see those limits in action day-to-day?
Action	How could the Chazen translate this process of collaborative meaning making and exhibition development into future initiatives? What policies or protocols could the Chazen change or reimagine to cultivate these kinds of creative projects moving forward?	Think of an object in your museum. What blind spots do you and your museum have that might limit your understanding—or even the questions you think to ask—about that object? Who could you invite into a conversation who might challenge you to uncover a more complete story about it?
Meta Reflection: These stories are about the value of sharing and redistributing power and privilege in the museum, which can feel threatening for some, empowering for others. How did it feel for you to talk about the Chazen’s choices? How did it feel to talk about opportunities for your museum to share and redistribute power?		

Case 4: Found in Collection

Introduction

This case study comes in three parts. The interrelated anecdotes below address...

- How collecting and curatorial practices can embody systemic racism
- The tensions between professional standards in the museum and anti-racist practice
- How the value of transparency enables us to confront patterns of exclusion and harm

This case study focuses on the objects that are—and more importantly, are not—in the Chazen’s permanent collection. The stories and prompts below consider how the collection is a reflection of histories of racism in the art world, the museum, and the other institutions surrounding the Chazen. In Part 1, the curatorial team can’t find many objects that meet MASK Consortium’s search criteria. In Part 2, the project team grapples with an object “found in collection” that marginally fills this gap. In Part 3, in the spirit of collaboration and centering MASK Consortium, the exhibition development team has to find a solution for an object that the museum wouldn’t typically put on display.

This case study analysis can include all museum staff, but is especially relevant to...

- Senior leadership
- Board members
- Curators and curatorial staff
- Education staff or anyone with an interpretive role
- Visitor services and security staff

Before you Start:

This case deals with collecting practices and preservation priorities that the Chazen has engaged with over time. The opportunities presented by *re:mancipation* were one point along a long arc of the museum—and the broader field’s—history. These histories are present at the museum today in their galleries, organizational structure, programs, and more.

To start this case, have a short conversation about the history of your institution. Who or what agency started the museum? Where do your museum’s assets originate from? Has the museum’s mission or priorities changed over time? Keep these histories in mind as you discuss the decisions and dilemmas below.

Part 1: Curatorial 404 Object Not Found

As the *re:mancipation* project team began to develop an exhibition to display the project’s research and artistic responses to *Emancipation Group*, MASK wanted to find other objects in the Chazen’s collection that could be in dialogue with the sculpture. Much like any guest curator would, MASK asked the Chazen team to pull files from their database of other related art pieces. Specifically, they were interested in representations of Black Americans in artworks from

the late nineteenth century. The Associate Curator of American Art, Janine, set out to the database and the collection storage facility to look for relevant works.

Among the hundreds of portraits and prints, porcelain figures and paintings, furniture pieces and odd-ball objects, the curatorial team could not find any paintings or sculptures meeting their criteria. The official collection of American art did not have any other pieces featuring Black bodies or artworks produced by Black artists in America from the nineteenth century that interested the collaborators.

This absence was frustrating, and a disappointment for the curatorial team—both in that there was such an obvious gap in their collection and that they couldn't return any results to the *re:mancipation* team.

Reflect:

How could this kind of gap have persisted after all these years? What are some possible explanations (but importantly, not excuses) for this absence in the Chazen's permanent collection?

Connect:

If you were asked to find something representing a particular racial history in your collection, what do you expect you would find?

How do you think you would feel if you couldn't find that kind of object in your collection? What would you tell the artist or guest curator?

Part 2: Grappling with Gaps in the Collection

While the Chazen team couldn't find something in their collection that met MASK's search criteria, they did come across an object that challenged their approach to curating *re:mancipation*. While combing through the collection, the curatorial team found an etching from 1876 that depicts an enslaved family crossing into Union territory from the South as fugitives. It is titled *Coming into the Line* (see below).

The Chazen team did not know its origin and found it to be in rough condition. It had not been accessioned by the museum—rather, it was “found in collection.” However, it was the only other representation of Black Americans in the Chazen's care that was relevant to the time period of *Emancipation Group* and which spoke to the themes of the exhibition.

The discovery of this print sparked a deep dialogue between the curatorial staff and the project partners. The prospect of showing it publicly was uncomfortable for the curators. First, it did not have a proper provenance that could be traced and attributed confidently. Second, it was deemed to be in poor condition, with the margins of the page in disrepair and the paper stained. By existing museum standards, it would not be considered appropriate for display. Without any knowledge of its origins, Janine said, “We don't know if it is an important piece.”

But, in the context of *re:mancipation*, it was an important illustration of the systemic failures of the Chazen and the museum field at large when it came to valuing and representing the experiences of Black people in America. After sharing the print with the MASK team, Mark and Sanford found it to be an essential, intriguing indicator of the state of the museum over time.

The push to include this object in the exhibition raised some concerns for curators on staff. Mark, as the primary collaborator on the curatorial process, was aware of their discomfort. When reflecting on the conversations about this object and others, he was mindful of his role as a critic of the museum. He said, “Information from the curator was informing the process... [but my] job was to challenge what it is we’re being told about the objects. We just took those descriptions as baseline, but didn’t take them as fact. Because that’s part of the problem.”

In the case of *Coming into the Line*, the status of the piece was the baseline, but that was not taken as a final reason to exclude it from the show. Janine recalled that Mark and other MASK Consortium contributors encouraged them to be candid about it. Janine said that MASK eventually asked the Chazen, “Why don’t we just address the fact that it is not in the collection but that it is the only representation of Black Americans in our care?”



Edwin Forbes
American 1839-1895
***Coming into the Line*, 1876**
Etching
Found in Collection, x.120

During the Civil War, it was common for enslaved people to emancipate themselves by running away and seeking protection from the Union Army. This illustration represents some of these refugees. Many were sent to refugee camps while others, especially men, were hired by the Union Army, working as cooks, teamsters, or in other roles.

This print was found in the Chazen Museum of Art's storage and is not an officially accessioned object in the collection because it is in poor condition. It is, however, one of the few nineteenth-century representations of Americans of African descent in our care. It is on display for this exhibition because it is important to acknowledge gaps in the collection as the museum works to acquire more artworks by African American artists in order to more fully represent the experiences of all Americans.

After much debate, project leaders chose to prioritize transparency and include the piece in the exhibition with a label that clearly describes its relationship to the collection as something that is not accessioned, or legally held in public trust, by the museum. Part of the label reads:

This print was found in the Chazen Museum of Art's storage and is not an officially accessioned object in the collection because it is in poor condition. It is, however, one of the few nineteenth-century representations of Americans of African descent in our care. It is on display for this exhibition because it is important to acknowledge gaps in the collection as the museum works to acquire more artworks by African American artists in order to more fully represent the experiences of all Americans.

Janine noted about this label, "It's uncomfortable to show that piece and share the realities of our collection...There's some uncomfortability about putting it up there. But Amy, Sanford, Mark all wanted it. The project was about transparency, acknowledging the missing pieces." As of this writing, Chazen staff are looking for opportunities to acquire a higher-quality version of the print and the portfolio it was a part of into their collection of nineteenth-century American Art.

Reflect:

How do you think staff at the Chazen might have initially felt in response to the question from MASK about including this print in the show?

What are the reasons why the museum would or would not want to "just address the fact" of this piece in their care? What do you think is the responsible thing for the museum to do in this situation?

Connect:

Has your museum ever publicly recognized a gap or limitation in its collection or collecting practices?

How might you go about transparently addressing this kind of contested (or missing!) object through your work in the museum (i.e. developing marketing materials, curating an exhibit, developing education programs)?

Part 3: Another Object Dilemma



The project faced similar debates about pieces from the museum's collection of African Art. In collaboration with America's Black Holocaust Museum, the project team created an historical timeline to contextualize *Emancipation Group*. The timeline stretched back to pre-history and was designed to encourage visitors to recognize the rich artistic and cultural traditions of African people that existed well before the transatlantic slave trade. To integrate the historical information with the resources of the museum, Sanford and Mark selected and proposed artifacts from the Chazen's collection to display along the timeline.


One piece they selected was a Samana mask. However, museum staff determined that, given the piece's condition, displaying it could be risky. The Chazen's initial reaction to having this particular mask on the exhibition checklist was to find an alternative. However, Mark and Sanford insisted that it was important to include. In a discussion thread (see Basecamp exchange), Mark explained the importance of its place of origin and offered some pointers about other kinds of objects that could stand in for the mask. He also suggested the possibility of displaying the object virtually or in print form.


Kate and Janine tried to find something with similar history in the collection but nothing else met the specific criteria related to place of origin. "If it was just us," Janine said, "we probably wouldn't have displayed it. But we were trying to be collaborative, and it was more important to have it." Rather than putting the object aside, the next step was to find a solution to display the mask.

Eventually, the team found a solution to display the mask using a special mount and case. They also agreed together to accept the tradeoff of potential damage for the benefit of including this specific object. The *Samana Mask* (referenced as the *Hunter (Dyodyonune) Mask* in the Basecamp exchange) was presented with a label that identifies its relationship to the slave trade. While it was not addressed in the final label, the mask also prompted the Chazen to reflect on the ways that their preservation practices guide curatorial decisions and can limit access to objects.

See the object and its label below, and see it in the context of the virtual exhibition [here](https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb&sr=.25%2C-1.19&ss=17&tag=m3K9q77XBRs&pin-pos=3.12%2C2.6%2C10.44) [https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=8htGiiwQFHb&sr=.25%2C-1.19&ss=17&tag=m3K9q77XBRs&pin-pos=3.12%2C2.6%2C10.44].



Sep 16, 2022  **Kate Wanberg**, Exhibition and Collections Project Manager
Hey,  Mark. Unfortunately, we feel the [Hunter \(Dyodyonune\) Mask](#) is too fragile to place on display at this time. Janine and I can work on generating a list of suggested replacements. We wanted to know more about why this specific mask was selected, so we can try and find another object that would overlap with your selection criteria. Or if something is already on your short list of objects that might be a suitable replacement. Let us know what you think. Everything else on this list looks good!

Sep 16, 2022  **Mark Hines**
Hiya... the region the mask is from was impacted by the slave trade vs other items selected in the night at the museum. Proximity to impact by the Dutch West India company would be the portal to find other relevant items in the collection. Thank you 🙏

Sep 16, 2022  **Mark Hines**
Maybe also this is a reason to use technology to display an object that cant be accessed safely on exhibition.

We can show it in AR.
We can print also facsimile and explain why the original item cannot be displayed or, explain the conditions upon which access can be granted.

This would be an opportunity to educate people outside of the museum practice about real limitation to access that are not about equality.

Sep 16, 2022  **Kate Wanberg**, Exhibition and Collections Project Manager
Thanks for the information,  Mark. Janine and I will think through possible replacements and the option to display either digitally or in a printed format. I'm interested in your idea to also address limitations to access that are centered on preservation practices.

Reflect:

Why do you think the geographic origins of the chosen mask—being near a key center of the transatlantic slave trade—was an important detail in building the context for a nineteenth century statue celebrating Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation?

Read the conversation between Mark and Kate from Basecamp. What conversations do you imagine happened *offline* about the Samana mask and finding a solution for Mark's request?

Connect:

How does your museum make decisions about what is “safe” or “appropriate” to display? Where do those requirements come from? How do those decisions impact what is accessible to the museum's audiences?



Unknown
Malian, Dogon People
Samana Mask (n.d.)
Wood
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Pascal James
Imperato 1997.13.3

These artworks come from modern-day Nigeria and Mali in West Africa. Many enslaved Africans came from this region. These works date to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but are part of cultural traditions that pre-date the Maafa. The Samana Mask was worn during Dogon cultural ceremonies. It represents a Samo, a member of the neighboring ethnic group. The wearer performs a mock battle and interacts with the audience during ceremonial

Closing

These two object-focused negotiations prompted the project partners to reflect on the history of the Chazen's collecting and preservation practices, as well as long-standing biases in art museums as a whole. Janine recognized the absence of relevant artworks as a “failure of the institution, but also the failure of the field.” Janine further articulated how, in the past, “The brokers of power were not interested in those things.”

And indeed, the brokers of power enforced inequities that began with chattel slavery and continued through the Reconstruction era and beyond. Systemic racism manifested in art and culture in innumerable ways, with the erasure of Black Americans being reinforced through many intersecting systems of oppression. For one, portraiture of Black Americans from the nineteenth century is rare because Black people were denied opportunities for economic mobility that would have positioned them as art patrons. Centuries of collecting practices also diminished and devalued the work of Black artists, leaving gaps in collections where Black artists should have been.

In an exhibit planning meeting discussing what to do with these gaps, Mark articulated the lesson and opportunity in the dilemma. He said to Amy, Janine, and Kate, “I know that starting to acquire works by artists of color would be a logical extension of the work that we do [in *re:mancipation*]. We're looking at what's not in the collection and we have the opportunity to learn about how to grow the collection based on this.”

	Chazen	Your Institution
Analysis	<p>Consider these two dilemmas: “found in collection” and displaying an object in fragile condition.</p> <p>Put yourself in the shoes of Janine: Summarize what happened in these two curatorial situations.</p> <p>Put yourself in the shoes of Mark: Summarize what happened in these two curatorial situations.</p>	<p>Where do your museum’s collecting practices come from? What values or norms does our collection represent? Who do they serve?</p> <p>As a group, discuss whether these norms align with your present mission and commitments. What would you change?</p>
Action	<p>In small groups or individually, draw a model of how the Chazen and MASK made these curatorial decisions. What was the process, and what were the key inflection points?</p> <p>What would happen next, after these decisions were made?</p>	<p>Look through your galleries or collection database and investigate who is represented in your collection, and in what ways. Notice what gaps exist.</p> <p>How would you go about examining potential acquisitions in that area? What opportunities exist outside of collecting and curation to address any gaps?</p>
Meta Reflection	<p>Objects that are absent, contested, or uncomfortable can challenge our commitments to certain professional practices that have been the norm for a long time. How was it for your team to talk about the Chazen’s decisions about these objects? How was it for your team to talk about your internal approaches to similar cases?</p>	

Conclusion: In the Spirit of Critique

re:mancipation was a bold departure from what the Chazen had done in the past, and it was a new model for confronting racism in the objects and structures of the art museum. From the Chazen's perspective, it was promoted as a great success and a tremendous learning opportunity that would motivate further change in the museum. Amy Gilman spoke publicly in multiple forums about how this project was going to shape the museum's reinstallation of their permanent collection. She also wrote about this being a field-shaking model that could be replicated in other contexts with similarly complicated objects at the center. As the project finished its formal phases with the exhibition, she and Mark were imagining ways to share out this process and keep the momentum going with other institutions.

These cases, and the reflection-in-action they are designed to facilitate, are one way of sharing this work with others. Diamond and Gomez call on organizations to engage in *equity-focused pauses* to understand, name, and rewrite the organizational routines that normalize inequitable practices in their day-to-day work. They argue that "organizations need explicit tools to slow down and engage in disciplined, critical reflection and action to transform their most fundamental aspects"⁸ which perpetuate white supremacy and anti-Black racism in our major institutions. This case study workbook attempts to provide a scaffold for these pauses, but it is not a comprehensive or sufficient resource for rooting out these systemic forces. Like *re:mancipation* as a whole, this workbook is incomplete and certainly not perfect.

As such, we invite you to reflect on the project and the cases presented here in the spirit of critique. The case studies only characterize a fraction of the project's work, relationships, and outputs. Because these stories are limited, they leave out many of the hiccups, points of friction, and moments of discord within and around the initiative. And while the stories *also* obscure moments of joy, connection, and celebration that punctuated the collaborative process, it is important to grapple with where *re:mancipation* might have missed the mark. As you and your colleagues think back on the learnings from the case studies presented here, we encourage you to reflect on some of the additional questions raised by project contributors, museum staff, and the public who encountered one of the project's many threads.

Consider these questions as you continue to engage with *re:mancipation* and map it onto your local context:

- Why did the project collaborate with such a remote group of partners? MASK Consortium is based on the east coast, not in Madison, WI. How would the project have been different if more local stakeholders were involved from the beginning?
- Who was this project and exhibition *for*? Was the exhibit for white people? Black people? Young people? Museum people? The Chazen? Was this an exercise in tokenism and white comfort, or was it a genuine exercise in partnership and remaking the museum with Blackness at the center? Does it fall somewhere in the center?

⁸ John B. Diamond and Louis M. Gomez, "Disrupting White Supremacy," 6

- Amy, a white woman with multiple decades of experience in art museums and museum leadership, was an essential spokesperson of and champion for the project. Does this project happen at all if her leadership is not there, or if it is located elsewhere in the organizational hierarchy? What privileges did Amy leverage to make *re:mancipation* happen to such dramatic effect?
- How does the project team know that it was a success? The project did not implement any formal evaluation or research. Did the exhibit and all of the attendant resources actually achieve their educational, aesthetic, emotional, or change-related goals?
- The Chazen is situated in a particular context, with significant resources at its disposal and an executive director with a large degree of autonomy (for example, Amy does not report to a board of directors). To what extent is this kind of thought leadership—and action—possible in other contexts? How does it translate?

References and Resources

- Coman, S. and A. Casey. "The enduring presence of the founder: A historical and interdisciplinary perspective on the organizational identity of collection museums" in *Historical Organization Studies* (London: Routledge, 2021).
- Diamond, J.B., and Louis M. Gomez, "Disrupting White Supremacy and Anti-Black Racism in Educational Organizations," *Educational Researcher*, (2023): 1-9.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X231161054>
- Jung, Yuha. "Micro examination of museum workplace culture: how institutional changes influence the culture of a real-world art museum," *Museum Management and Curatorship*
- Morgan, Jennie. "Assembling the New: Studying Change Through the 'Mundane' in the Museum as Organization," *Museum & Society*, 16, no. 2. (2018): 157-170.
- Museums as Sites for Social Action. "Readiness Assessment" (2017). Accessed June 2, 2024.
<https://www.museumaction.org/resources>
- "re:mancipation: The Process Behind the Project," Published November 28, 2023.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnGf9AVMydw>
- Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Contemporary and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–1993
- Further Reading
- Corrin, L.G. "Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History." *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 36, no. 4. (2010): 302–313.
- Janes, Robert R. and Sandell, Richard. *Museum Activism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Raicovich, Laura. *Culture Strike: Art Museums in an Age of Protest*. Verso Books, 2021.
- Moore, Porchia, Rose Paquet, and Altheia Wittman. *Transforming Inclusion in Museums: The Power of Collaborative Inquiry*. Roman & Littlefield Publishers/American Alliance of Museums, 2022.
- Acuff, Joni Boyd and Laura Evans. *Multiculturalism in Art Museums Today*. Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014.
- Bevan, Bronwyn and Bahia Ramos. *Theorizing Equity in the Museum: Integrating Perspectives from Research and Practice*. Routledge, 2023.