

Communication Meeting

November 8, 2019

8:33

0:00 Sarah Eaton (SE): Um...it's Sarah, hi. So, I wanted to just, this won't take long, but I wanted to, um, just brief you on some of the activities that have been going on this week that you're probably aware of, and I've been uptown most of the time, so I probably, I haven't really seen, um, many of you in a few days. But, um, as you, um, are no doubt aware, on Tuesday night, um, there was a panel at the Guggenheim, um, that featured five thinkers and scholars, um, who are looking at, um, new art histories and using the Guggenheim's current exhibition slate, you know, to start a conversation, um

0:46 SE: at that panel, Chaédria LaBouvier, who is the cur--the guest curator for the Basquiat show, uh, stood up and made a very, very strong statement, um, about her experiences at the Guggenheim. Um, this statement was recorded by someone who was with her, they posted it on social media. They also recorded, um, Elizabeth got up and tried to, um, you know, kind of address the situation, that was also recorded, and posted on Twitter. And, um, there was then the resulting, you know, kind of exchange on Twitter.

1:32 SE: This resulted in, um, the New York Post contacting us for comment and, um, a quite large piece in the New York Post, [lowers voice] my god, was it yesterday or the day before

1:46 Unknown: Yesterday

1:47 SE: Yesterday, [laughs] yesterday. Um, so, which was also using some, um, it was very, very strong language, um, some very, um, you know, serious sounding accusations. Um, you know, if you read the article you could see that there was [laughs] they quoted Elizabeth from the video and then our kind of, um, trying to be very neutral and high road, high road response. Um, you know, and I just, I wanted to, uh, talk about it a little bit because I want to address some of the misinformation that she is sharing on social media, and, uh, I'm sorry but I'm going to refer to my notes here--

2:37 SE: So a few of the accusations or the assertions that she made, both on Twitter and on Instagram, is that she was intentionally excluded from the panel. And, um, the fact of the matter is that the Guggenheim programs a lot of panels that don't involve curators. For example, [name redacted] was at the panel, she was the curator of the [redacted] show, and she wasn't on the panel. And, it's just often that the programmers bring in other voices and other scholars to give their points of view, so it's not an unusual situation.

3:17 SE: Why is she excluded from the deinstall of the exhibition--well, she's participating in the deinstall of the exhibition, so, that's [pause] she's there, she was there yesterday, she'll be there on Mon--on Tuesday. Um, she also claims that she, or asserts, that she was excluded from giving tours. She was invited to give both public and private tours, some of which she granted and led, and some of which she declined, and I believe that she also has posted about this publicly on Twitter, her feelings about having, about doing public tours, and um, she has some feelings about that.

3:55 SE: She also, there was a, there was a moment, I, I guess it was during the UN summit, where apparently, um, the wife of a European president had asked to come see the show. She was given a tour of the show by Richard Armstrong, the Director, I don't need to tell you that, um [laughs] and, um, you know, Chaédria claimed that she was shut out of that and that, that purposefully excluded from giving, um, this dignitary a tour. The fact of the matter is that whenever there are high level dignitaries or leaders from other countries, ambassadors, people at a certain level, the Director of the museum gives the tour. That's just the way it goes, that's his prerogative, he runs the business, it's his museum, he gives the tours, so that's not unusual. Other curators do not always participate in those, it's kind of common practice.

4:57 SE: She has also asserted, not as much on Twitter recently, but in the past, that her work has been used without citation. I think we all know from working on materials that she's prominently credited throughout the exhibition and all of its materials, including the catalogue, for which she has sole credit, and it's in the bookstore now. She also claims that we created digital apps without her consultation. As we have the digital content team here, everybody knows that we didn't create [laughs] any digital apps for the Basquiat show. The wall text for the Basquiat exhibition was posted on the digital app, it's not audio, it's just text. And then, um, as you know, Jon Batiste created a playlist for Spotify and that was, people were, visitors were notified they can access Spotify and find the playlist, but no apps were created.

5:53 SE: And then most importantly, what I want to say is, you know, some of her assertions that the institution has behaved, um, in a racist manner, and to use some other language that's even stronger than that, but I'll just leave it at that, I just, I think that overall, institutionally, um, the museum feels that they really did approach their relationship with her with the respect that's accorded any other professional with whom we would work, and, um, was really supported, also kind of with the professionalism and the collaborative spirit with which exhibitions are made. As we all know, because we're part of the larger exhibition making team, and exhibition promoting team, it takes a lot of people to get this done.

6:41 SE: All curators are asked to follow the same procedures and guidelines to produce exhibitions and publications, um, and I think the Guggenheim tries to meet international

museum standards of excellence wherever it can. So, I just overall, you know, the position of the museum is that we, we disagree with her assertions that she's been treated differently than other, you know, Guggenheim or guest curators. That said, I, uh, you know, we cannot discount her personal experience. She, which she's been very, very, very vocal about, and, um, you know, I think it's something that we need to talk about some of these issues more internally and will.

7:27 SE: My understanding is that, um, HR is going to set up some, kind of, group discussions that people can participate in around some of these issues and also as part of the DEAI initiative, which I think would be really helpful, um, to participate in some of those conversations. Um, and, you know, it's also, some of these issues are being addressed at the leadership level, um, now, so, um, you know--I just, I didn't want people on my team walking around not knowing what's going on. And since we're in the Communications [laughs] department, I also would assume that people would ask you if you know something or if you have more information, and I'm happy to answer questions, um, and, if people have, want to talk about it further. It's, you know, I think it's, um, it's probably an understatement to say it's an unfortunate situation, but it's an unfortunate situation.