



## How People Learn Alumni Profiles **Alyssa Machida**

**ALYSSA MACHIDA:** Hi, my name is Alyssa Machida. I currently work as an interpretive specialist at the Detroit Institute of Arts. I was in the arts and education program at Harvard Graduate School of Education and I graduated in May of 2016.

When people hear that I'm an interpretive specialist, most people think that that means language translation, but actually it's a role that a museum educator has in a museum. I closely collaborate with curators at my museum to design visitor experiences for both special exhibitions and the permanent collection.

So after I graduated from college, I started working as an intern in museum education and that's when I first learned that there is an entire field dedicated to learning through the arts. And museum educators really try to get kids exposed to looking at visual art, the making process, and critical thinking and dialogue at a much earlier age than I was originally exposed to.

When I was looking into the programs at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I noticed that it was bringing together a lot of different people who work in different aspects of education, but people who were all gathered to make change, who are interested in approaching what is the future of education in our societies.

Museums need to be a part of that conversation, and for a long time we haven't been working with neuroscientists, with psychologists, with educators who are working in urban schools, who are combating mass incarceration. That is a conversation that museums need to be a part of and I knew that that's why I wanted to be a student here.

I think when I first got to HGSE, and even for a little while after I got here, I was thinking about learning as a cumulative process, and I was thinking about it in ways that society often teaches us to think about it-- so child development, K through 12 schools, adult learning, lifelong learning. That makes a lot of sense.

But when I was here at Harvard, I was exposed to things like learning, and not learning, and unlearning. It's not just a linear, cumulative process. Sometimes it can be additive. Sometimes you need to unlearn things that you've been taught. Sometimes not learning is an act of resistance.

For the museum to be really, truly public space, that means that the learning experiences offered there have to be just as varied and just as diverse as their public. It has to be inclusive



and accessible to all the many different kinds of people that attend the museum and also that we hope to visit our museum in the future.

As a museum educator working in the galleries, I used to think that learning in museums meant one thing. I used to think about it in terms of visitors learning in the galleries in front of artworks with educators like me.

Now over the years as I've been working in museums in different roles and capacities, I've had a shift in thinking. Now I think about learning internally within the museum as well. As museums try to make these big shifts towards inclusivity, accessibility, and equity, I have found that the learning can't just be an external force towards its visitors. Before we make these big shifts, the learning needs to happen within as well.

In my role as a museum educator, learning has always been at the heart of what I do. As a gallery teacher, learning alongside and with my visitors was my main goal and purpose. Now trying to think of how I can be a leader in the field of museum education, and more broadly, in museums, I'm thinking about how learning plays a role for me, my colleagues, and institutions across the nation of how we can make museums actually more inclusive public spaces for learning.

Over the years working in museums, something that I've actually learned is that people have a lot of assumptions and expectations about what museums do, who they're for, and what their purpose is. And I think the kinds of social impact and change that I would like to have is to surprise people. People who work in museums-- museum professionals, educators like myself-- to be creative, to play. And I'd also like to surprise visitors who come within the museum to see that there are different kinds of learning experiences available for different kinds of people, different purposes. It doesn't have to be one size fits all. Another thing I'd like visitors to be surprised by when they go to a museum is that they feel welcome and that they know it's a space for them.

When I was looking in to different masters programs to apply to, I knew that the arts and education program here at HGSE was the only option for me. Even working in museums, the flexible curriculum that the arts and education program offered allowed me to take courses like critical race theory, ethnic studies, art, design, and learning in public spaces. And the critical lenses that each of those classes provided to me, all in different ways, have given me the momentum to do the work that I do now in museums and I couldn't have gotten that anywhere else.

To any incoming student at HGSE, the first thing I would say is welcome and congratulations. I am so happy for you and that you are coming to learn at this incredible place. I had one of the most life-changing experiences here. The people who I met, who were strangers at first, are now my closest friends. I reach out to them all the time. Take advantage of opportunities outside of classes and lectures. Sit at fireside on the sofa in Gutman and have coffee and talk.



I was talking to a friend the other day. We were reading an article together line by line over the phone and we said, why didn't we do this when we were actually in school? Maybe try to not just read by yourself, but read with other people too and discuss. Take advantage of the fact that you are here with the most incredible and brilliant people working to change education today.

A mistake that I might have made is to take on too much, but also at the same time, I was only at Harvard for 10 months, so take advantage of all the resources and opportunities you have around you and make the best of your experience here. re with their parents or with a school, right? So--