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# Art Education as Social Experience: Victor D'Amico and the Origins of MoMA's Progressive Educational Project

Elena Sidorova

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## Introduction

- 1 Contemporary Museum Studies scholarship defines art museums not only as sites of aesthetic pleasure, recreation, and entertainment, but also as institutions having a potential to play a certain educational function. According to Hooper-Greenhill, art museums put a greater emphasis on the relationships between culture, communication, learning, and identity in the post-modern age. As a result, their educational objectives get prioritized and their education budgets tend to increase. From Falk and Dierking's perspective, learning in art museums presents a community-building potential because educational programs foster social interactions and make art museums places of social encounters. In Legault's opinion (quoted by Emond 5), educational programs in art museums lead to both the democratization of culture and cultural democracy. If the former aims to grant fair and equitable access to art to all socio-economic classes in society, the latter seeks to promote cultural diversity and establish cultural dialogue among different societal groups. Golding, in turn, argues that learning in art museums contributes to the production of cultural identity. It enables the negotiation of core cultural values, traditions, and artifacts that constitute collective memory and national heritage. For Black, art museums contribute to life-long learning, allow the previously excluded members of society to develop new skills, and provide intellectual, social, and emotional access to cultural public goods. Rasse, for his part, considers art museums as public spaces whose enlightenment function—or, in Kantian terms, the ability to

encourage the public to reason and argue freely and responsibly—is intrinsic to such public cultural institutions.

- 2 In the United States, the quest for good gallery teaching began around 1900, when American art museums first assigned cultural mediators to work with the public. A true pioneer in fostering art education in US museums was the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston. MFA's art educators (called docents) instructed visitors about the museum's art collection in an unimposing way and were sensitive to the audience and its interests. One of MFA's docents, Louis Earle Rowe, recalled: "No settled plan is followed out, for the fact is always recognized that each group or individual has different interests and requires varying treatment" (quoted by Burnham and Kai-Kee 21). Following MFA's example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York became the second art museum in the United States to appoint its own paid art educators (called museum instructors). Unlike MFA's docents, who kept themselves in the background, at Metropolitan no attempt was made "to veil the agency" of the museum instructor (Burnham and Kai-Kee 22). The introduction of contextual information in relation with the aesthetic experience at MFA and Metropolitan caused controversy from the very beginning. At the turn of the century, art history was still a budding discipline in the United States, with the first department of art history founded at Princeton University as recently as 1883. Consequently, the first American experience of gallery teaching raised many unanswered questions about its goals and methods. Furthermore, the issue of how much information docents and instructors should transmit to the public prompted a great deal of discussion and was soon subsumed by a wider debate about the place of art history in US art museums (Taylor; Lowry).
- 3 Founded in 1929 by three wealthy women, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) was the first of its kind in the United States. While in the 1920s other American art museums kept a "timid, contradictory or unpremeditated approach" to the most recent art, MoMA "became a provoking champion of modernity" more because of the lack of competition than "of its own merits" (Lorente 128). MoMA's stance on modernity is best encapsulated in a famous graphic representation of the museum's "ideal" permanent art collection in the form of a torpedo, "moving through time, its nose the ever advancing present, its tail the ever receding past" as its first director Alfred Barr famously defined it in 1933 (quoted by Bajac 37). Although substantial academic research has been done on MoMA's art collecting (e.g. Elderfield, 1995; Duncan, 1993; Wilson) and exhibition practices (e.g. Elderfield, 1994; Guilbaut; Sylvester), the museum's long-lasting commitment to modern art education is only marginally present in the academic literature on the history of art museums in the United States. This paper focuses on the origins of MoMA's Educational Project developed by Victor D'Amico, the museum's founding Director of the Department of Education between 1937 and 1969. It examines D'Amico's progressive educational initiatives and assesses their significance for MoMA's current take on art education.<sup>1</sup>

## John Dewey's Theory of Experiential Education as the Cornerstone of MoMA's Original Educational Project

- 4 MoMA's founders were passionate advocates of experiential education, which was an integral part of American Progressivism, the early twentieth century socio-political

movement that addressed various issues and ideas stemming from the modernization of American society (Flanagan). Historian Aaron Schutz distinguishes between three different visions on American Progressivism, namely the administrative, collaborative, and personalist progressive philosophies. These three visions represent “three relatively distinct approaches to social reform [which] emerged among middle-class intellectuals and policy makers at the turn of the century” (Schutz 28). Furthermore, they reflect, though only partially, key socio-political divisions between bureaucrats “embedded in the hierarchical structure of social institutions,” semi-independent professionals looking for “strength in association,” and independent artists and intellectuals advocating for “cultural reconstruction and opportunities for self-expression during the machine age” (Schutz 29). Whereas bureaucrats saw in progressivism “methods for managing recalcitrant workers,” semi-independent and independent professionals were more inclined to “envision a social democracy that embodied either the more collaborative practices of their association and daily work or the intimate relationships and expressive individualism nurtured in middle-class families” (Schutz 29).

- 5 The preeminent theorist of American “collaborative” progressive thought was philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952). He “developed the most sophisticated conceptualization of this democratic ideal,” nevertheless, “in its general outlines his vision closely resembled models developed by many other progressive intellectuals, activists, and religious leaders” (Schutz 31). Dewey’s ideas appealed, in particular, to the 1920s upper middle class “reacting to new pressures of organization, [and] to systems of socially imposed morality ranging from Prohibition [...] to restraints imposed by traditional schooling” (Efland quoted by Amburgy 6). Shortly after Dewey had founded his experiential school at the University of Chicago, a number of progressive museum workers started to apply concepts of progressive education to museum education. They embraced progressive education not so much to demonstrate the value of this theory per se, but rather to “align themselves with the emerging Progressive movement, especially its application of democratic principles and modern pedagogy to educational activities” (Hein 70). For example, John Cotton Dana and Louise Connolly worked together to introduce the experiential philosophy of art education to the Newark Museum (Duncan, 2009). Laura Bragg developed her pioneering progressive art education ideas first at the Charleston Museum and later at the Berkshire Museum (Allen). Anna Billings Gallup applied experiential art learning techniques at the Brooklyn Children’s Museum (Tulloch). Alfred Barnes appointed Dewey the first director of education at the Barnes Foundation. Both men “shared a serious and abiding interest in educating ‘the masses,’ being deeply involved in bringing art to many people in a way that affects their lives by integrating the aesthetic with ongoing experience” (Johnson 45).
- 6 For George Hein, although the importance of museums for education in a democratic society had been “recognized a century before Dewey championed it,” American museum educators embraced the socio-political aspect of progressive education “ever since Dewey articulated it” (50). What were the milestones of Dewey’s experiential education approach that made him stand out from other American progressive education philosophers of the era and appeal to many American museum professionals, including MoMA’s founders? Most importantly, Dewey regarded creative self-expression as a dominant concern in education and treated schools as effective

agencies of a democratic society. He tested his ideas at the Laboratory School based at the University of Chicago. The aim of Dewey's teaching philosophy was, above all, to convert schoolchildren into engaged citizens and motivate them to be socially responsible not only in their future adults lives, but also in their present capacity as pupils (Dworkin). Dewey formulated his ideas on education in a number of books including *The School and Society*, *The Child and the Curriculum*, *Schools of To-morrow*, *Democracy and Education*, and *Experience and Education*. Broadly speaking, we can identify two essential components of Dewey's learning philosophy. First, Dewey put the child at the center of the educational system, expecting schooling institutions to adapt to children's wants and needs and not vice versa. He argued in *The Child and the Curriculum*: "The case is of Child. It is his present powers which are to assert themselves; his present capacities which are to be exercised; his present attitudes which are to be realized" (Dewey, 1902a 40). Second, Dewey defined education as social experience and claimed that, through the learning process, pupils ought to develop critical and socially engaged intelligence to help them effectively contribute to their community's affairs and welfare. He wrote in *Experience and Education*: "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience; or, that the new philosophy of education is committed to some kind of empirical and experimental philosophy" (Dewey, 1938 25).

- 7 By and large, Dewey's philosophy of experiential education sought to challenge the traditional top-down organizational structure of the US educational system and narrow down the social distance between educators and pupils by giving the latter more decision-making power. It is worth noting that, besides articulating the advantages of progressive education at schools for children, Dewey also wrote extensively about the importance of experiential learning in museums for both children and adults. His appreciation of the value of museums for social learning was influenced by his close association with Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr's progressive education experiments at Hull House in Chicago—one of the first settlement houses in the United States, which addressed problems of urbanization by providing "direct social services along with cultural opportunities and adult education" for city slum residents, often of immigrant background (Hein 49). In his essay *The School as Social Centre*, Dewey characterized Hull House's socio-political value:

the function of such an institution as Hull House has been primarily not that of conveying intellectual instruction, but of being a social clearing-house. It is not merely a place where ideas and beliefs may be exchanged in the arena of formal discussion, for argument alone breeds misunderstanding and fixes prejudice; but it is much more a place where ideas are incarnated in human form and clothed with the winning grace of personal life. Classes for study may be numerous, but they are regarded as modes of bringing people together, of doing away with the barriers of caste or class or race or type of experience that keep people from real communion with each other. (Dewey, 1902b 84)

- 8 In Dewey's opinion, the greatest value of museums was their ability to expose visitors to original artworks and engage people in an active inquiry about the nation's cultural legacy. For him, museums should be accessible to wider publics from all socio-economic classes. If museums remain the products "of the capitalist urge to flaunt wealth," art risks being "separated from the rest of life and cloistered in selected, inaccessible places" (Hein 48). Otherwise speaking, according to Dewey, museums, being educational sites and places of social encounters at the same time, transform art from a

social phenomenon to social experience. In *Art as Experience* Dewey singled out a crucial role for museums in the experiential art education practice:

The arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts: for instance, the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and, too frequently, newspaper accounts of love-nests, murders, and exploits of bandits. For, when what he knows as art is relegated to the museum and gallery, the unconquerable impulse towards experiences enjoyable in themselves finds such outlet as the daily environment provides. Many a person who protests against the museum conception of art, still shares the fallacy from which that conception springs. For the popular notion comes from a separation of art from the objects and scenes of ordinary experience that many theorists and critics pride themselves upon holding and even elaborating. (Dewey, 1934 11-12)

- 9 MoMA's founders were fond of Dewey's philosophy of progressive education. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller even sent her four sons Nelson, Laurence, Winthrop, and David to the Lincoln School, a pioneering experiential educational center affiliated with the Teachers College at Columbia University in New York. The Lincoln School, one of the most expensive schools in the city for elite children from the New York City upper class, adhered to Dewey's principles of experiential learning. As David Rockefeller would later recall in his memoirs, Lincoln's "experimental curriculum and method of instruction" distinguished it from all other New York schools of the time. In his son David's words, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was an ardent and generous supporter of John Dewey's educational methods and school reform efforts and even donated \$3 million for the development of the Lincoln School that embraced Dewey's philosophy (Rockefeller).
- 10 Regarding Dewey as an absolute authority in experiential education and admitting the cultural-political significance of his groundbreaking ideas about art as a type of social experience, MoMA's founders were eager to test his philosophy in their museum. With this in mind, they established in 1937 the Department of Education. Actually, prior to laying ground for the Department of Education, MoMA's first Director Alfred Barr hired Dartmouth College's Department of Art Chairman Artemas C. Packard, at Nelson Rockefeller's suggestion, to survey public attitudes towards MoMA's potential involvement into educational programs. Packard conducted his survey in 1935-36 and completed the report in 1938. The survey asked respondents one crucial question: "Should MoMA be maintained as a museum for the few or for the many?" (Rasmussen quoted by Meecham 477). Concluding the results of the survey, Packard stated that MoMA ought to put greater emphasis on the educational value of its museum activities. In particular, he suggested that MoMA's newly founded Department of Education should pay particular attention to educational programs for children. The focus on children and the critical role of art education in their lives were supposed to contribute to the further post-New-Deal democratization of American visual culture (Cremin; Musher; Saab).

## Victor D'Amico's Progressive Educational Project for MoMA

- 11 MoMA's project of progressive, experiential education was closely associated with the name of prominent art teacher Victor D'Amico. He was one of the most talented and prolific American art educators of the twentieth century. Many of his pioneering ideas

and inventions, although they are almost never associated with his name, are widely used in contemporary art education all over the globe. D'Amico was the first Director of MoMA's Department of Education. His term lasted for 32 years: from 1937, the year of the Department's creation, to 1969, when he retired. Both MoMA's first Director Alfred Barr and MoMA's second Director René D'Harnoncourt were unfailing supporters of D'Amico's progressive art teaching methods. Indeed, all three had been art educators prior to their arrival at MoMA. D'Amico felt a philosophical kinship with Barr and D'Harnoncourt and admitted in 1960 that MoMA "had a genuine interest and an extensive background in education because several of its leaders were outstanding teachers" (quoted by Morgan in Elderfield, 1995 162).

- 12 D'Amico started his art teacher's career in 1925 in New York settlement houses. This professional experience gave him some initial ideas about what progressive art education might be. He admitted: "I acquired some basic educational concepts: stimulate the child to explore his own idea once he has been motivated by a theme or his environment" (quoted by Lerman 4). In 1926, D'Amico received a teaching position at the Ethical Culture Fieldston School in Riverdale, New York, which endorsed Dewey's philosophy of progressive education. This job at Fieldston strengthened D'Amico's commitment to the principles of child-centered and practice-based learning, and introduced him to high-profile progressive professional associations, like the Teachers College and the Progressive Education Association. Affiliation with American progressive educators helped D'Amico formulate his own theory of progressive art education and come to realize that "art experience should be a problem-solving situation with the end product an individual result" (quoted by Lerman 4).
- 13 Once hired by MoMA, D'Amico was given *carte blanche* to run experiential art education programs at the museum. In total, MoMA's Department of Education under D'Amico's leadership managed to launch five progressive art education initiatives. The very first one was the establishment of the Young People's Gallery (YPG) in 1937.<sup>2</sup> As per the official press release issued upon its opening on December 1, 1937, YPG aimed to make MoMA's collections of painting, sculpture, architecture, industrial art, and films "more useful and more easily accessible to New York public and private schools in the teaching of art in general education" ("Museum of Modern Art Establishes"). In other words, YPG was expected to play the role of a somewhat "supplementary" art school that provided children with additional artistic skills beyond the regular school art curriculum. Besides offering them various art activities, YPG was also meant to educate children about the art historical value of MoMA's permanent collection of modern art. It is striking that not all New York schools were initially granted access to YPG. In fact, MoMA chose only twelve select private schools whose pupils were invited to take part in YPG's undertakings ("Museum of Modern Art Establishes").<sup>3</sup> The choice of these twelve schools was not random: they had a reputation for being progressive educational establishments for the upper middle class and were known for their strong support of John Dewey's experiential teaching and learning methods. With time, nevertheless, the number of schools participating in YPG rose significantly. In 1944, for example, more than forty schools from New York City were already involved in this project and "there were seven Saturday classes to which 200 city-school children came" (Lynes 170).
- 14 YPG's main activity was the involvement of schoolchildren in the creation of art. The mission of MoMA's educators working on this program consisted in transforming



children from passive “art consumers” into active “art makers.” By and large, YPG used two strategies to motivate children to create their own art. On the one hand, starting from 1939, MoMA gave children a permanent space on the third floor of MoMA’s new building at 11, West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street. There, children created and displayed their art, held roundtable discussions, and shared their thoughts about modern art with one another. YPG was the first educational initiative to ever grant children their own space in an adult museum. On the other hand, YPG functioned as a temporary exhibition space outside MoMA’s premises. In particular, YPG circulated both MoMA-produced children’s art and the work from MoMA’s permanent collection among the schools that participated in the project. Combined exhibitions of children’s and adults’ artwork contributed to the creation of a “quiet, simple atmosphere” that counteracted “the usual museum fatigue” and brought children “in intimate contact with objects presented.” From D’Amico’s perspective, young children’s art was “a necessity, not a luxury” (“Museum of Modern Art Establishes”). YPG’s stated goal was to contribute to the proper development of children’s emotional and spiritual life because it gave them room for self-expression and self-realization.

- 15 YPG’s mission ended in 1948. All in all, over its eleven years’ existence, it had served as a unique venue for the creative development of children from the select progressive New York schools. The gallery’s greatest accomplishment was the involvement of young art lovers into the creation of art and the study of art history. YPG was the first museum initiative to take children’s art historical knowledge seriously and emphasize the value of children’s art for the modern art museum experience. At the same time, YPG’s social outreach was very limited: this initiative was especially designed for elite American families who could afford costly education and remained inaccessible to less affluent households. In other words, YPG did not contribute to the democratization of art and culture in American society. On the contrary, it presented art education as an aristocratic privilege accessible for the few, instead of promoting it as the “notion of universal access to a universal good” (Fleury 49-50).
- 16 Five years after launching YPG, MoMA’s Department of Education decided to enlarge the scope of its activities. In 1942, D’Amico set up three new educational initiatives at the same time: the Children’s Art Carnival, the National Committee on Art Education, and the War Veterans’ Art Center. The Children’s Art Carnival (CAC),<sup>4</sup> also known as the Children’s Holiday Fair, the Children’s Holiday Circus, or the Children’s Holiday Carnival, was an annual art festival open to young visitors. The Carnival consisted of two activities each set in its own space. The first took place in a so-called motivational area where children played specially designed motivational games. The second activity was set in a studio-like area where children created art. D’Amico was particularly proud of CAC and considered it one of his most efficient art education initiatives and best embodiments of his experiential art teaching philosophy. He admitted that both Carnival’s areas filled with toys, art tools, and “delightful surprises beckoning the child from every direction” represented a new approach to art education, for children were stimulated “to think creatively” and were oriented to the fundamentals of artistic craftsmanship “without words or dogma of any kind” (D’Amico, 1963 35).
- 17 CAC was so successful that it inspired MoMA to put together an itinerant version of the Carnival traveling outside the United States for diplomatic purposes. In 1957, the US Department of Commerce thus organized the event at international trade fairs in Milan and Barcelona. In 1958, the US Information Agency featured CAC in the US National



Pavilion at the World's Fair in Brussels (Haddow). As journalist Alistair Cooke noticed in his TV coverage of the fair, CAC was an "American triumph" and a "heaven for the children of all nations" (quoted by D'Amico, 1963 34). In 1962, at the request of Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi, CAC traveled to New Delhi and was formally presented by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy as a gift from the children of the United States to the children of India. According to the official press release, Carnival's objective was not only to give pleasure to the Indian children, but also to act as a "teaching device" and "a training center" for Indian art teachers at the recently established National Children's Museum in New Delhi ("Children's Art Carnival"). The US government's endorsement of CAC transformed this project from a purely cultural event into a cultural-political one (Grieve). In this respect, the Carnival's circulation abroad could be regarded as the articulation of United States' "cultural soft power" (Fraser) able to attract the hearts and minds of foreign publics by means of co-option rather than coercion. In the context of the Cold War and the bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Carnival became unwittingly "a cultural export and ambassador for the United States" and D'Amico's themes of creativity and imagination turned accidentally into "a symbol of American ingenuity and freedom" (Rasmussen 461-462).

- 18 Interestingly enough, CAC was D'Amico's longest-lived educational project. It ran regularly up until D'Amico's resignation from MoMA in 1969. Since 1970, CAC has been an independent Harlem-based non-profit organization providing vocational art classes for the youth, training courses for art educators and career development services for young adults. It was D'Amico's former colleague, Betty Blayton Taylor, who decided to revive his project and continue the tradition of progressive art education. Today, Harlem's CAC is the only active New York extra-curriculum art education program still demonstrating D'Amico's original experiential art teaching principles.<sup>5</sup>
- 19 Though completely different in nature, the other two projects initiated by D'Amico in 1942 shared one crucial element: they reflected MoMA's ambition to go beyond art education programs established exclusively for children, as they were especially designed for the adult population. We suggest that the shift in MoMA's educational goals from one age group to another went hand in hand with changes in the national political agenda. In the 1930s, art had a political function, helping the public "to gain confidence in the national economy and to strengthen community cooperation and financial responsibility" (Freedman 17). Under such circumstances, MoMA invested in the niche of progressive art education for children because it regarded the task of educating children about art by means of brand-new experiential methods as a long-lasting contribution to a nation's cultural capital. During the 1940s, art came to play the role of supporting "liberal Western traditions, loyal citizenship, and national security" (Freedman 18) and was enlisted in America's cultural war against Fascism. Therefore, the country's new political reality made children's programs less of a priority. Instead, the 1940s political climate encouraged all educational centers to focus on the interests of the whole nation. For this reason, MoMA's Department of Education adapted all its progressive educational projects to larger audiences and broader subject matters.
- 20 Aiming to promote the creative arts sector during World War Two, MoMA founded in 1942 the Committee on Art Education (CAE).<sup>6</sup> According to *Art Education Today*, a progressive media outlet edited by D'Amico, CAE's goal was to make art relevant to an ever-changing contemporary world and to plan for its "increased importance and

usefulness in the reconstruction to come” (quoted by Freedman 20). From D’Amico’s standpoint, CAE ought to function as a “clearinghouse” of ideas, examine problems in art education, and provide expertise on what was appropriate for art education. From 1943 to 1963, the Committee held annual forums where many prominent art educators, psychologists, artists, and art professionals discussed different issues of art education. For two decades, CAE acted as an advisory institution associated with MoMA’s Educational Project. It functioned as a professional association that expressed the point of view of a community of art educators who believed in Dewey’s progressive philosophical theories.

- 21 CAE’s meetings served as a discussion platform to frame basic assumptions on creative art education philosophy. The central problem that preoccupied CAE’s members was the defense of the cornerstones of experiential art education philosophy. The Committee opposed teaching art by both imitation and a *laissez-faire* approach, stressed the value of a guided creative education process, and explored unconventional techniques of aesthetic education. Likewise, it did not approve of art education standards introduced into the US educational system in the early 1950s, such as the proliferation of school contests and competitions, television art copy courses, mail-order art-instruction courses, and paint-by-numbers kits. As D’Amico wrote in the 1954 *CAE Newsletter*, new national teaching methods were all based on the idea of imitation that was “slavish and dictatorial”: they denied the right of individual choice and artistic freedom, and laid ground for “a dictator type of society” (quoted by Morgan in Elderfield, 1995 163).
- 22 In an attempt to counterbalance the standardization of art education, which was a dominant trend in the United States in the 1950s (Chang *et al.*), and to add value to CAE’s art education policy directives that defended the notion of the “creative child” (Ogata), D’Amico launched in 1952 a TV program called *Through the Enchanted Gate*. The program, broadcast on the NBC network and sponsored by MoMA, was D’Amico’s last-ditch effort to popularize the individualized creative art teaching methods in the era of mass-oriented teaching practices (Harvey). Though successful (the program ran for two seasons, in 1952 and 1953, each comprising 13 episodes), *Through the Enchanted Gate* did not contribute much to the propagation of CAE’s pro-experiential art education ideas among the general public (Berger 93). Since the information-based approaches had taken over completely the American educational system by the early 1960s (Eisner), CAE was doomed to end its mission in 1963.
- 23 Alongside with the foundation of the Children’s Art Carnival and the Committee on Art Education in 1942, MoMA’s Department of Education under D’Amico’s leadership launched simultaneously the War Veterans’ Art Center (WVAC).<sup>7</sup> At first, WVAC prepared art materials for the United Service Organization, an institution founded in 1941 to provide entertainment and leisure activities to the US Armed Forces members and their families. In 1944, WVAC turned into an active rehabilitation art center for war veterans. It had a small place in MoMA’s main building and an off-site studio at 681 Fifth Avenue. WVAC’s purpose was to encourage former soldiers to make art objects and, through this engagement, reorient them towards a civilian life. As D’Amico wrote in MoMA’s 1945 *Annual Bulletin*, there were two fundamentals to the veterans’ art education program: “the capacity to discover the nature and extent of each veteran’s aptitude, and the means of developing it to his best advantage” (quoted by Morgan in Elderfield, 1995 156). On the whole, WVAC’s educational mission in 1944-1948 was

confined to two goals: providing art classes and organizing exhibitions. The largest exhibition of the veterans' art created at WVAC was shown at MoMA in September-October 1948. On opening the exhibition, D'Amico stated the following:

The principal object of the Center was to help veterans adjust themselves through the creative process. It was primary an orientation to the arts. There was no attempt to produce artists or to train to a professional level. [...] This exhibition shows only the products produced by the veteran but it is unfortunate that the real satisfaction in individual growth and rehabilitation cannot be demonstrated or exhibited. ("Exhibition of Work")

The 1948 exhibition of veterans' art was WVAC's final undertaking. It was the culmination of MoMA's commitment to the United States' wartime effort and testified to the museum's endorsement of the 1940s national political agenda of mass mobilization and collective action. In 1949, WVAC was transformed into the People's Art Center (PAC) that welcomed both veterans and civilians to participate in art classes for adults and children. PAC, which merged together MoMA's two previous initiatives, the Young People's Gallery and the War Veterans' Art Center, was the fifth and last program of MoMA's progressive educational project led by Victor D'Amico.<sup>8</sup> It operated from 1949 to 1969. The decision to establish one single art education program for both children and adults was dictated by the socio-political national context of the 1950s (D'Amico, 1954). Most importantly, the 1950s in the United States were the decade of "rising expectations, the emergence of youth culture, and the unprecedented availability of cultural products" (Halliwell 2). Moreover, new socio-economic conditions resulted in a shift to a new type of domesticity in American families. This was a time when the number of marriages and the birthrate rose at an unprecedented rate. At the same time, this decade challenged existing notions on the family. According to Ruggles, the 1950s were a transitional period from an extended to a nuclear family structure: the ties between parents and their children intensified, whereas the relationships with the larger family kin weakened.

- 24 PAC located in MoMA's new main building at 4, West 54<sup>th</sup> Street offered five types of art classes to the museum visitors. The division between classes was based on age. First, PAC had classes for children between three and five years old. These classes focused on a simple exploration of art materials. Second, PAC had classes for children aged six to twelve. These classes consisted in guided art-making with special emphasis on design and craftsmanship as well as guided discussions on artworks from MoMA's permanent collection. In D'Amico's opinion, these classes were meant as a means of developing art appreciation and artistic self-consciousness, by contrast with art lessons with specific instructions. Third, PAC offered classes for high school teenagers. These classes embraced the study of individual artists, art movements, and art concepts designed to extend the students' art experience beyond personal artistic expression. This level of study, according to D'Amico, was a critical moment when children progressed from making their own art to "thinking about and understanding the art of others" (quoted by Morgan in Elderfield, 1995 157). Fourth, PAC developed a special Parent-Child Class. These classes encouraged parents to work alongside their children. The main goal was to teach adults not to do the work for their children nor to inhibit a child's creative process. Parents were taught to learn to respect the children's own ideas and efforts, as well as to recognize key patterns in the child's behavior and artistic engagement. Fifth, PAC organized separate art classes for adults. Annually, 500 adults came to MoMA to learn the basics of painting, sculpture, ceramics, drawing, photography, jewelry, glass and mosaic making, art history, and art criticism in an experiential way. As D'Amico

noted, at a time when the majority of adults displayed “a deadly earnest interest, one almost approaching a spiritual hunger,” PAC satisfied “that indescribable urge for creation on the part of the general public” (D’Amico, 1951 10).

- 25 It is rather curious that PAC was MoMA’s first attempt to customize its experiential art education practices with reference to the selected target audience. The enrollment by age groups served as a key reference point in PAC’s complex educational offer. This choice was strategic: it not only adapted PAC’s initiatives to different needs, wants, and academic levels of particular age groups, but also involved as many people as possible into the personalized, informal art training based on the philosophical ideas of American progressive art educators. In contrast to YPG, PAC was not an elitist undertaking: it welcomed New Yorkers of various socio-economic backgrounds, which made it a truly democratic cultural initiative (Graves). The Center contributed to the creation of favorable social conditions for the cross-class cultivation of taste, acquisition of cultural capital, and formulation of democratic cultural values. Furthermore, PAC’s activities tackled the issue of public trust in art museums in the United States (Cuno). This last educational program undertaken by D’Amico shifted the cultural power discourse from the museum staff to the museum-goers, thus anticipating the audience’s increasingly recognized authority in the constitution of the art historical canon and the means of its interpretation and representation in a museum collection (Villeneuve and Love). The closure of PAC in 1969 marked the end of D’Amico’s era of experiential art education projects at MoMA.

## Conclusion

- 26 In the late 1960s, the wealth of progressive educational activities that Victor D’Amico had brought to MoMA began to wind down. From D’Amico’s personal perspective, his art school at MoMA closed because “there was no trustee interest in art or art education” (quoted by Newsom and Silver 61). With Barr’s retirement in 1967, D’Hannoncourt’s departure in 1968, and D’Amico’s resignation in 1969, MoMA decided to stop all its experiential educational programs. Broadly speaking, we can name three key reasons why MoMA’s senior management closed all D’Amico’s projects so abruptly. First, D’Amico’s program, despite its pedagogical excellence, served mostly the educational needs of literate, upper-class New Yorkers, thus failing to contribute to the democratization of the United States’ educational system nationwide, which was one of the cornerstones of American progressive education philosophy. In the opinion of MoMA’s then-acting president Blanchette Rockefeller, the museum’s dissatisfaction with the experiential art education project grew with time because “for all the effort that went into educating the New York teachers, the public schools did not pick up D’Amico’s ideas” (quoted by Newsom and Silver 61). Second, D’Amico’s art school operated autonomously and did not engage extensively with MoMA’s evolving curatorial practices. In the words of one of MoMA’s trustees, Eliza Bliss Parkinson, since there was no clear connection between the children and the museum as a whole, D’Amico’s teaching kit was “separate” from MoMA and, potentially, could have happened in a studio space anywhere (quoted by Newsom and Silver 61). Third, as MoMA’s leadership was undergoing a series of institutional transformations in the late 1960s, the newly appointed museum’s senior staff started to show interest for

completely different art education initiatives, notably higher education and art historical scholarship.

- 27 Indeed, since the early 1970s, MoMA's Department of Education has endorsed the concept of knowledge-based education, which favors art education initiatives that create "landscape for cultural participation" (quoted by Ivey in Tepper and Ivey 2) and focus "on the object and what must be known about it in order for it to be appreciated" (quoted by Morgan in Elderfield, 1995 170). This new approach has turned MoMA into "the source of a host of informational programs" capable of serving a vast range of visitors spanning "from toddlers with their families to eminent scholars and art historians" (Sims 10). Presently, MoMA's Department of Education offers a number of knowledge-based art education public events whose primary mission is to ensure that people of all sexes and social, economic, and racial backgrounds could "enjoy, understand and use the visual arts of our time" (Bee and Elligott 83) in ways that add value to their lives. The majority of these events are free, thanks to MoMA's donors who contribute large sums of money through the Annual Education Fund to make art education at MoMA accessible to everyone ("Annual Education Fund"). Content-wise, MoMA's contemporary art education project is made up of three groups of knowledge-based art education programs ("80 Years of Education"). The first group comprises such programs as Gallery Sessions, Art Speaks, MoMA Learning, and A Piece of Work Podcast, which convene critical conversation about modern and contemporary art. The second group consists of such initiatives as Art InSight, Prime Time, Create Ability, and Meet Me at MoMA, whose goal is to increase accessibility to art through programs and resources that remove social or physical barriers to art participation. The third group, which includes programs like Art Lab and The People's Studio, aims to foster experimentation and creativity among children, teens, and adults.
- 28 Even though MoMA no longer supports the experiential philosophy of art education, the legacy of D'Amico's progressive educational project is perceptible in MoMA's ongoing knowledge-based art learning priorities. In the words of MoMA's educator Wendy Woon, D'Amico's ideas are especially suited to such contemporary challenges of art education in museums as "participatory spaces; experimentation with new methods for engaging people with art; embracing technologies for greater reach and leadership; and convening of conversations about the role of art in society, artist-centered practices, and a commitment to accessibility and inclusion" (Woon). Even if today Victor D'Amico's name remains virtually unknown to American and international art professionals and art history students, his ideas are still relevant to contemporary museology all over the globe. For example, there is a direct link between D'Amico's experience-based art learning practices and the phenomenon of creative thinking. From the perspective of art theory, the idea of creative thinking echoes D'Amico's concerns about the effectiveness of dogma-free learning and the separation between subjective (psychic reality) and objective (interpretive field) contexts for the meaning of art. According to Boden, creativity occurs in three ways that correspond to three "sorts of surprise": by generating unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas, exploring "structured styles of thought," and transforming "conceptual spaces in people's minds" (31-35). For Gold, creativity means "making something new that also opens up a new category, a new genre, or a new type of thing" (5). Dutton, in turn, argues that creativity is an imaginative experience that decouples imagination from practical concerns and frees it from the constraints of logical and rational thinking. He suggests

that artistic experience, which is purely creative, “takes place in the theater of the imagination” that co-exists with “normal human conscious life” (58-59).

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## NOTES

1. This article relies on the open-access archival sources published in volumes 4 and 5 of MoMA's *Studies in Modern and Contemporary Art* edited by MoMA's Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture John Elderfield. MoMA's *Studies* represent a unique compilation of archival documents amassed and explained by MoMA's curatorial staff. Together with the Oral History Program and MoMA Press Release Archives, these materials are the only public sources pertaining to MoMA's collecting and exhibition practices that researchers worldwide can cite and quote in their publications without MoMA's preliminary authorization. For more information about each of D'Amico's five progressive art education initiatives covered in this article, as well as direct citations from MoMA's institutional archives, please consult the Victor D'Amico Papers available upon request at MoMA Archives in New York.
2. Photos of the Young People's Gallery (object numbers ARCH.2992, ARCH.5303, ARCH.9308, ARCH.9309) are available for consultation in MoMA Archives Image Database.
3. These were the Brearley School, the Buckley School, the Chapin School, the Dalton School, Erasmus Hall High School, Evander Childs High School, the Fieldston School, the Horace Mann School, the Lincoln School, the Little Red School House, Music and Art High School, and the Spence School.

4. Photos of the Children's Art Carnival (e.g. ARCH.1964-ARCH.1973) are available for consultation in MoMA Archives Image Database.
  5. The Children's Art Carnival Records are available for consultation at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
  6. Photos of the National Committee on Art Education (ARCH.1910-ARCH.1915) are available for consultation in MoMA Archives Image Database.
  7. Photos of the War Veterans' Art Center (e.g. ARCH.3949-ARCH.3967) are available for consultation in MoMA Archives Image Database.
  8. Photos of the People's Art Center (e.g. ARCH.1937, ARCH.1945, ARCH.5321, ARCH.9076, IN522.1-IN522.5, IN767b.1-IN767b.13) are available for consultation in MoMA Archives Image Database.
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## ABSTRACTS

The paper addresses the issue of education in art museums. It examines the first attempt to establish an art education project at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Firstly, the paper explains why MoMA based its original art education program on the fundamental ideas of John Dewey's theories of progressive education. Secondly, it analyzes the grassroots of five progressive art education initiatives launched by MoMA's founding Director of the Department of Education Victor D'Amico in 1937-1969. The paper concludes that D'Amico's experiential philosophy of art education, although no longer practiced at MoMA, advanced the value of art education as social experience in art pedagogy both in the United States and abroad.

Cet article traite de l'éducation dans les musées d'art. Il revient sur la première tentative de création d'un projet d'éducation artistique au Musée d'art moderne (MoMA) de New York. L'article explique en premier lieu pourquoi le MoMA s'est appuyé, pour son premier programme d'éducation artistique, sur les théories de John Dewey en matière d'éducation nouvelle. Il se consacre ensuite à cinq programmes d'éducation artistique progressiste lancés entre 1937 et 1969 à l'initiative de Victor D'Amico, directeur du département de l'Éducation. L'article en conclut que le projet éducatif expérimental de D'Amico, bien qu'il ne soit plus aujourd'hui pratiqué au MoMA, aura mis en avant la valeur de l'éducation artistique en tant qu'expérience sociale dans la pédagogie artistique contemporaine aux États-Unis et à l'étranger.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Musée d'art moderne (MoMA) de New York, MoMA, D'Amico (Victor), Dewey (John), éducation nouvelle, éducation artistique, éducation muséale

**Keywords:** Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), MoMA, D'Amico (Victor), Dewey (John), progressive / experiential education, art education, museum education

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