

Chapter 29

Stay Gold: An Intergenerational LGBTQIA+ Arts Program

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the experiences of participants in an intergenerational art program for LGBTQIA+ audiences, which takes place at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson (MOCA). In this chapter, the authors outline the impetus and purpose of this program. They consider the impact that it has had on LGBTQIA+ individuals and the formation of an intergenerational community. From combating loneliness to creating connections across generations, this program invites individuals into the museum space who identify as LGBTQIA+ but rarely have the opportunity to connect with one another. Facilitators and participants design projects and gallery activities that promote engagement through dialogue and art-making. As such, art provides connections that give participants opportunities to share and learn from one another. Contemporary art and the museum become sites for engagement. Gallery activities and art-making allow participants to experiment with a range of materials and learn new skills through humor, play, creative inquiry, and collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the experiences of participants in an intergenerational art program for LGBTQIA+ audiences¹ called *Stay Gold*, which takes place at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson (MOCA). In this chapter, we outline the impetus for and purpose of this program. We consider the impact that it

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has had on LGBTQIA+ individuals and the formation of an intergenerational community. From combating loneliness to creating connections across generations, this program invites individuals into the museum space who similarly identify as LGBTQIA+ but rarely have the opportunity to connect with one another. Facilitators and participants design projects and gallery activities that promote engagement through dialogue and art making. As such, art provides connections that give participants opportunities to share and learn from one another. Contemporary art and the museum become sites for engagement. Gallery activities and art making allow participants to experiment with a range of materials and learn new skills through humor, play, creative inquiry, and collaboration.

Programs such as the one described here provide a place where community members from a variety of generations feel safe and can engage with each other. The LGBTQIA+ community can be compartmentalized due to generational, social, and personal factors. However, there are more similarities than differences between generations, and research has found that older and middle-aged adults can offer support to LGBTQIA+ youth, while youth can encourage elders to examine their multiple identities (Vaccaro, 2009). Creating a space where intergenerational connections can be made has illustrated the benefits of programs like *Stay Gold*. Participants value learning new skills and ways to give voice to experiences, emotions, and ideas through art, while at the same time making social connections and new friends and expanding chosen families through the process, without the added layer of navigating sexual and gender identities.

We include previous research on intergenerational learning, the value of contemporary art as a catalyst for community building, as well as research that highlights the issues faced within the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole. We consider the impact of this program through the perspectives of the participants and how personal and social connections shape their experiences. We discuss how we incorporated participants' voices in the planning of each iteration of the program, changes we made as the program progressed, and successes and challenges in working with community audiences. Finally, we make suggestions for how these types of programs can be developed and implemented in a variety of art museums.

BACKGROUND

Stay Gold was initiated in 2017 by students in a graduate course in art education at the University of Arizona. Students in the class, which focused on public pedagogy, worked with Chelsea Farrar, curator of community engagement, University of Arizona Museum of Art (UAMA), to create a four-session program for youth and seniors, as an extension of an existing program for LGBTQIA+ youth called Mapping Q (UAMA, n.d.). It was also based on The Latona Project, a museum program for LGBTQIA+ seniors. The Latona Project was a series of three free art making workshops, a tour, and a lecture series at UAMA. This project, created by Becky Black and David Romero, aimed to discover[ing] how art and art museums are relevant to important issues and lived experiences of LGBTQ seniors in Tucson" (UA News, 2016). Outside Tucson, there are few examples of programs and exhibitions focusing on intergenerational connections between LGBTQIA+ audiences in art museums. These include *Powerful Self: LGBTQIA2s+ Lives Today*, a "conversational workshop" and exhibition at the Portland Art Museum that is part of their *Object Stories* community project designed to share personal stories through objects (Portland Art Museum, n.d.).

The students in the graduate course chose the name *Stay Gold* after a 1923 poem by Robert Frost (1975):

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