

Meet the Board

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

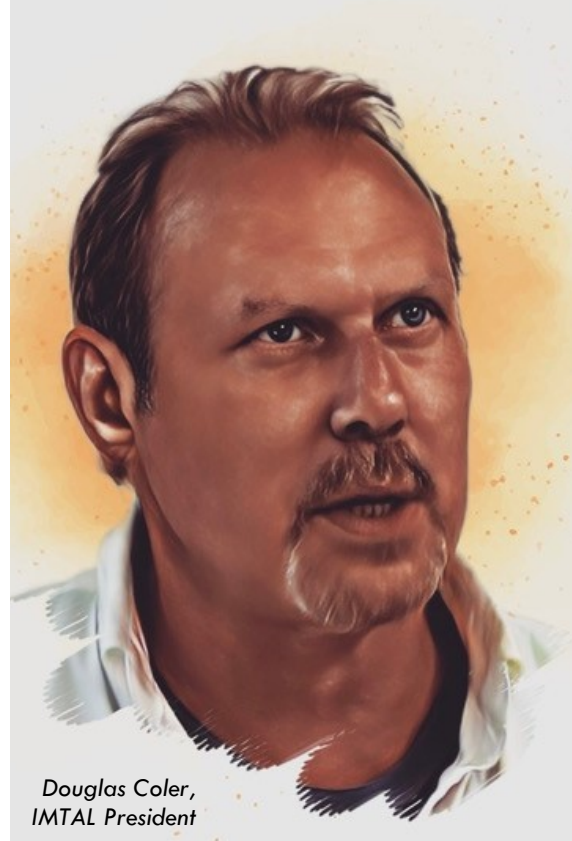
Too often, the programs we present are viewed as a luxury, something nice to have, but not necessary to the survival of the institution. To that end, Marketing dutifully promotes offerings that will bring in the largest number of visitors and generate the most revenue, and usually, those offerings are classes for school groups and IMAX films.

There are museum theatre programs in place at many of our institutions that do drive audiences and revenue, programs that are considered successful, and viewed as a valued part of the whole experience. They are run by passionate, remarkable people, and frequently, when those remarkable people move on, the Theatre program withers, perhaps limping along for a few seasons. We are seeing the result of such losses brought on by pandemic-era downsizing. Museum theatre programs may take years to recover from the loss of a dynamic leader, if they recover at all. So we ask your help: Make it your business to involve another museum or independent artist in the IMTAL narrative. Invite them to our conferences and

workshops, suggest that they submit an article for this newsletter, introduce them to your IMTAL associates. Let them know we want to have them involved in our extraordinary tribe. Our field has taken a hit, certainly. We are down, but we are not out, and we have much to share. What we do matters. We strike the spark of imagination, we feed the flame of learning.

And after the fire has consumed all the fuel and all the oxygen, and the embers have been tamped out and the ashes scattered, the memory of the heat remains. So, spread the word. Strike the spark. Feed the flames. Feel the heat. and watch it glow.

-Douglas Coler,
IMTAL President



*Douglas Coler,
IMTAL President*

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This summer, I had the chance to survey my fellow board members on a breadth of topics, from our museum theater goals to our current pop culture obsessions. Over the past year, we've welcomed Aaron Bonds as Outreach Officer and Jacquelyn Coleman as At-Large Member, and welcomed back former board member Elizabeth Keaney as Secretary. You can get to know a bit about them, and the rest of the board, in this issue's "Meet the Board" feature.

We also have the privilege of republishing an article by Ilana Gustafson, this publication's former Editor! On the AAM

blog, she wrote lovingly and eloquently about the curiosity and empathy that museum theater can inspire in our audiences.

Finally: some conference updates! First read Jacquelyn's reflection on the Global Conference held in Athens, Greece, this past summer, and then check out the News and Events section at the back for a couple of great opportunities - we are looking for a host institution for the next IMTAL Americas conference!

-Fiona Meagher
IMTAL Publications Officer



Fiona Meagher
INSIGHTS Editor

Submission guidelines are available online at <http://www.imtal-us.org/insights>.

GLOBAL CONFERENCE 2022

New board member Jacquelyn Coleman was a first-time IMTAL conference attendee and speaker when she flew to Athens, Greece for the 2022 IMTAL Global Conference. We asked her to write up a reflection: what were you expecting, and what did you experience?

-By Jacquelyn Coleman-

As a first-time attendee and speaker to the IMTAL Conference this past May in Athens, Greece, I was quite thrilled to meet other museum theatre professionals. It was exciting to meet and chat with attendees from all over the globe.

The conference was well-attended and -organized.

Highlights of presentations included Elysia Segal's 'Crossing the Line: Bringing History Alive to Teens' and Agni Karagianni's 'Inquiry Drama in Museums: A New Perspective.' I was proud to see that the U.S. presentations were themed on DEAI matters in museums. The presentation on how to interpret for children who are neurotypical was especially moving and important for accessibility in our institutions.

The hosts and fellow presenters and attendees were extremely welcoming and friendly. Overall, the presentations were stimulating and thought-provoking. The workshops, programming



examples, field trips, and conversations were inspiring and delightful. And it was a dream to be in Athens, Greece!

MEET THE BOARD: DOUG

PRESIDENT

Douglas Coler
*Formerly of Discovery Place
 Science (Charlotte, NC)*

What is your relationship to museum theater? Tell us how you first got involved.

I spent most of my theater, film & TV career based in Los Angeles, but I was a recent transplant to North Carolina from New York/ New Jersey. I had been on the road, directing for a company in Boston, appearing in a couple of films, and acting in regional theatre in Florida for most of the year. On my return to Charlotte, I learned that the local science museum was looking for actors, and I was hired to portray a gladiator in the exhibit "A Day in Pompeii". I had an emotional 10 minute monologue that I delivered roughly 30 times a day among the eerie body casts. I was also trained to do the live animal presentations in the museum's rainforest exhibit, and present the chemistry and physics shows on the museum floor. Soon, other large exhibits followed, and I was asked to stay on to write and present characters, to continue doing the floor programs, and supervise and train a new group of employees we dubbed InterActors.

I joined IMTAL at the suggestion of Stephanie Long of Science Museum of Minnesota after we met and worked together at a conference for NISEnet. (The National Informal STEM Education Network). My first actual exposure to IMTAL was at the mini conference in Indianapolis in 2011, where I also attended the Theater in Museums Workshop, taught by the amazing Tessa Bridal, and met (and got to work on a script with) my friend Aaron Bonds.

Tell us about an excellent piece of museum theater - one you witnessed or one you created.

I have seen many extraordinary museum theatre works over the years. Two that stand out:

The Road to Redemption, by the gifted team at Colonial Williamsburg. Heartbreaking, truthful, inspiring, and impeccably performed. And wholly necessary.

And: *Art Emergency: Code Red* at Denver Art Museum. Appeals to all ages. Great humor and ingenious use of the museum's various collections. So well received by patrons that it has spawned several sequels.

What story are you chasing? An idea, person, or topic that you've tried and - so far - failed to base a piece of museum theater on.

I am distantly related to the Confederate General Robert E. Lee. Over the years, I have struggled to create a work that addresses the life and contradictions of this man who honorably served the United States for 25 years, but in the end could not escape the pull of his native Virginia. He was so similar to his adopted kinsman George Washington, but threw his lot and loyalty into the service of a Very Bad Idea.

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently?

I was broken by the film Tick, Tick...BOOM! For a bit of context, I am exactly one day older than Jonathan Larson. The film beautifully captures love and loss and so much of what that time was - the devastating and frightening AIDS crisis, the challenges, frustrations, and joys of being an artist, and the need to be seen and accepted.

MEET THE BOARD: ELYSIA



VICE PRESIDENT

Elysia Segal

Intrepid Air, Sea and Space Museum (New York, NY)

What is your relationship to museum theater? Are you an actor, writer, producer, stage manager, other? All of the above? Tell us how you first got involved.

I grew up in Orlando, Florida, and worked as a Disney character performer while in high school and during college breaks. That experience and being exposed to the “streetmosphere” performers may very well have been my first encounter with the idea that this (somewhat) educational, immersive performance was an actual line of work. After graduating from NYU, I was fortunate to find a summer gig working as a performer at the Bronx Zoo doing puppet shows about things like bird migration and pond life. I gave historical

ghost tours in Greenwich Village for a while as well, and then started at the New York Transit Museum in a short-term role as a third-rail supervisor for summer camps. They asked me to stay, and that turned into a part-time position for six-and-a-half years. Because of the very small staff and limited oversight, I ultimately was given free-reign to explore creating new shows on a variety of topics and characters that are still used for school visits today. This opportunity inspired me to sink my teeth into primary sources for inspiration and it was also while there that I stumbled upon IMTAL. I became a sponge for studying this work. Finding others in our community taught me a lot about the importance of advocating for best practices in our field and honoring the memory of those we portray.

I also periodically performed freelance work at museums like the New-York Historical Society and the DAR Museum, and was later approached by someone at the Intrepid Museum (where I currently work) about helping to flush out a new program they wanted to create that involved working with teens to use primary sources to create their own performance pieces. I’ve now been working there full-time as the project director/facilitator of that program and have written, produced, and performed a number of other museum

theatre pieces and virtual experiences for our visitors. My position involves wearing many hats, but writing and performing, particularly stories of overlooked women in STEM will always be my first love!

What story are you chasing? An idea, person, or topic that you’ve tried and – so far – failed to base a piece of museum theater on.

My museum houses almost 30 aircraft from WWII-the Vietnam War eras, as well as the Space Shuttle Enterprise. When I had first visited the museum, one plane caught my eye: the T-34 Mentor, a cute little Navy training plane from the 1950s. Our aircraft curator swears that it was never on a text panel, but somehow my husband and I both have a memory of reading that the plane was famously demonstrated at airshows by a largely-forgotten woman named Betty Skelton.

When I first started working at the museum, I had come up with a list of interesting figures to highlight. She was on the list, but I fell even more in love with her story when I learned that in addition to being a champion aviator and racecar driver, she was also the very first woman to undergo the Mercury astronaut testing procedures, even before the Mercury 13. She fit both the air AND space themes of our museum! Long story short, I eventually got the greenlight to create a performance about her

MEET THE BOARD: ELYSIA

for a touring exhibit on the early years of the space program that we were slated to host during summer of 2020, but then the pandemic hit and it was all cancelled. I was crushed to have to shelve her, however ended up doing a scaled down mock up for it for a class while in grad school since I already had done the research. Now that the museum is bouncing back, I've just just been greenlit to move forward on it again and hope to bring her to life this Fall to accompany another touring exhibit we'll be hosting on women in space. Betty has been living rent-free in my head for years now, I can't wait to finally honor her memory properly!
Update: Elysia's play on Betty Skelton went live in October and is going strong!

How have the past two years changed your work? How have you made, or not made, adjustments to our new realities?

The pandemic shuttered our doors for a while, and like every other institution, we switched to virtual programming. That's really tough and kind of hit or miss for theatre, but as the main educator doing virtual programs for my museum, I've since really found my niche and embraced science communication more generally. I've always been obsessed with all things space, and working at a museum with a rich history tied to the Space Race era, it's been a joy to interpret these topics online and to connect with fellow space nerds across the country, even around the world. Our programs now reach upwards of 30K viewers each month and I've had the opportunity to partner with NASA on a few projects, even recently heading down to the Cape for the launch of the NASA/SpaceX Crew-4 launch. It's been a wild ride, but I

definitely credit my museum theatre background with my ease of transitioning into this new type of work.

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently? Movie, tv show, book, play, song, etc.

I recently had the opportunity to see a scrappy little two-man rock musical here in NYC on the history of the Soviet space dogs program (yes really!), highlighting Laika the dog and the "Chief Designer" who trained her for her one-way mission to the stars. It was my first theatre experience since Covid closed down the Broadway community and was not only refreshing in that regard, but also just SO much fun. I'm eager to get out and support more local theatre now that things are reopening again!

MEET THE BOARD: NORA



TREASURER

Nora Quinn
Formerly of National Constitution Center (Philadelphia, PA)

What are you working on today?

I'm in the design process right now for *In the Next Room*. What's been especially fun with this show is that it's been quite a while since I've taken on a full design for a full theater production that's

not in a museum. It's been really interesting in relationship to the museum theater work I've done, especially having worked for my museum and especially working in a history museum.

At the Constitution Center, I worked really hard for everything to be as historically accurate as possible. The intimacy of the spaces and the intimacy of our interactions with the audience meant that there wasn't a lot of,

MEET THE BOARD: NORA

“Oh, that's just upstage!”

Now I'm working on a production that's set in a particular time period that I recently researched extensively for a show at the museum, and I'm finding it funny for my brain to recalibrate. What can I make theatrical choices about and what do I have to make historical choices about?

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently? Movie, tv show, book, play, song, etc.

I was very much excited about the release of Ozark's fourth

season... I consumed it in two days. It's incredibly good writing and acting - it's not even the subject matter, but it just sucks me in.

What are your dreams for IMTAL?

One of the things that I'm really interested in is enhancing our connections to museum theater around the world. Giving validity to this work means matching it to what's happening across the world and acknowledging that it's not just something that happens in the States; it happens everywhere.

I'd also love to see us foster the next generation of museum theater practitioners and find new ways to do that. We can look at theater programs and at museum programs and see how we can help students and institutions and scholars lift up our field, because I think it's sometimes undervalued by the institutions but also as a genre of work that's added to the arts as well as to education. And especially after the past two years: how does IMTAL help foster a recovery for the industry?

MEET THE BOARD: ELIZABETH



SECRETARY

Elizabeth Kearney
George Washington's Mount Vernon (Mount Vernon, VA)

Tell us about an excellent piece of museum theater - one you witnessed or one you created.

One of my favorite pieces is African Roots Latino Soul from Smithsonian's Discovery Theater.

The clever use of suitcases as set pieces and props, the music, the incredible message—I saw it years ago and it's still one I talk about.

What story are you chasing? An idea, person, or topic that you've tried and - so far - failed to base a piece of museum theater on.

I've been really wanting to work out the best way to share the parallel yet unequal stories of two women at Mount Vernon. Doll was an enslaved cook at the home of Martha Washington's first husband and was brought to Mount Vernon in 1759 with her children. She and Martha lived side by side until Martha's death and I think there is a lot of incredible history to share.

Do you have any advice for someone who wants to get involved in museum theater?

Remember that we are here to support the learning of our guests -we get to do incredible work, often really fun work, but if we aren't visitor centered, what's the point?

What are you working on today?
Perfecting Baked French Toast!

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently?

I just saw The Merchant of Venice at DC's Shakespeare Theatre Company and it was one of the best interpretations of Shakespeare I've seen in a very long time!

MEET THE BOARD — AARON



OUTREACH OFFICER

Aaron Bonds
Children's Museum of
Indianapolis (Indianapolis, IN)

What is your relationship to museum theater? Are you an actor, writer, producer, stage manager, other? All of the above? Tell us how you first got involved.

I started as an actor at the Children's Museum in 2006, before that, I had no idea this thing called museum theater even existed. I had just been fired for being a pretty bad server, and a friend showed me an ad for an audition at the Children's Museum. Luckily I was hired and have been here ever since. I was an actor here for about 5 ½ years, then I became Experience Manager and am now the

Director of Actor Interpretation and Theater. I still perform as an actor, a writer and a director at TCM.

Tell us about an excellent piece of museum theater - one you witnessed or one you created.

I have 2 - One is the Miep Gies piece that our actor Christa Shoot-Grimmer performs at TCM, it is an excellent piece of performance, and does a great job of telling the story of Anne Frank's family in our Power of Children Exhibit.

Another happened on an IMTAL conference trip to Mount Vernon. Mary Wiseman played Martha Washington and was mesmerizing. She had played this role for something like 20 years, and she was breathtaking. It was one of the best pieces of museum theater I have ever experienced.

Do you have any advice for someone who wants to get involved in museum theater?

Yes, just do it. Find somewhere where you can get the opportunity and start learning. Just like anything else, you can't get good without first being bad. So get out there, and start doing your very best to present some bad theater!

What are you working on today?

I'm working on a first person touring piece centered around Emmett Till's lynching. While I am excited by the opportunity to craft this piece, the content is soul wrenching. I believe the details of this American tragedy need to be shared, but I am feeling the charge of how important it is to get this story right. It's a bit different than preparing for the last exhibit we opened, which was Doc McStuffins.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I'm excited to be part of this board, and to be an advocate for Museum Theater, which I think the world needs now more than ever. I'm also excited to bring a bit more racial diversity to our group. I'm hopeful that more young brown artists can start to see themselves inside of this world of museum theater, because I think there is a need for all of our voices to uplift the possibilities of the next generation.

MEET THE BOARD — FIONA



PUBLICATIONS OFFICER
 Fiona Meagher
*Smithsonian Institution National
 Museum of American History
 (Washington, DC)*

What is your relationship to museum theater? Tell us how you first got involved.

I'm still fairly new to the work! I have loved theater for most of my life, and though I've never formally trained in it, I've participated in school and community theater productions in a number of roles, mostly as actor and more recently as stage manager and costumer. I started my museum career in 2015 at NMAH working on a few hands-on programs and helping with general visitor experience. I watched our one museum theater specialist do her thing from afar with admiration and some envy.

When the opportunity arose to help relaunch one of our signature shows, Join the Student Sit-ins, I jumped on it. I now develop all sorts of experiences at the museum, but interactive theater is my specialty and soft spot!

What are you working on today?

I'm deep in conceptual and fundraising mode. After two years with very little in-person interpretive programming, we're hoping to someday revamp our theater programs and get steady funding so we can build a dedicated team, rather than rely on a few staff members and project-based contracts with seasonal actors. Anyone got a few million lying around?

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently?

I've been reading the Wheel of Time series for the first time. I'm seven books and about 2 million words into this 14-book epic fantasy.

MEET THE BOARD — JACQUELYN

What is your relationship to museum theater? Tell us how you first got involved.

I'm an actor, director, writer, and interpreter. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Theater Arts and a Bachelor of Science in Anthropology, and then received a Master's degree in Museology, for which I did a thesis project on virtual museum theatre. I've worked on museum programming at various museums and I am now the Senior Living History Interpreter at the High Desert Museum in Bend, Oregon. I am excited to work more

closely with colleagues in the museum theatre field!

Favorite non-museum creative thing you've consumed recently?

Most recently the *House of the Dragon* and *The Watcher* series. I'm also an active actor and director in community theatre in Bend. I'm rehearsing currently for *Tapestry of the Arts* at Cascade Theatrical Company and I'm also events assistant for a production of *Native Gardens* with Deschutes Theatre Co.



AT-LARGE MEMBER
 Jacquelyn Coleman
*High Desert Museum
 (Bend, Oregon)*

CATCHING FEELINGS



Lisa McNeely and Dakota the *Triceratops*, part of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's [Performing Arts program](#).

Catching Feelings for a Triceratops: How Live Theater in Museums Evokes Empathy in Visitors

By Ilana Gustafson

This piece originally appeared on the American Alliance of Museums website on February 25, 2022, at <https://www.aam-us.org/2022/02/25/catching-feelings-for-a-triceratops-how-live-theater-in-museums-evokes-empathy-in-visitors/>.

An excited murmur can be heard throughout the audience as they await the show to begin. When we come together to watch a live performance we expect to be moved, to be transported out of the mundane of daily life and have our imaginations engaged. This communal experience, known as theater, is as old as human history, in one form or another. It is one way that we bond with each other. The anticipation of an imminent transformative journey is palpable in the diorama hall at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County (NHMLAC) where a [Dinosaur Encounter](#) is about to begin.

During the show, the audience cheers as a young guest, decked out in a bedazzled dinosaur shirt, is called onstage to feed the juvenile *Triceratops* known as Dakota. The child is hesitant as they approach the

CATCHING FEELINGS

moving, grunting creature, whose giant head is adorned with a formidable frill and three horns. The audience falls into a quiet anticipation as Dakota's feet shuffle impatiently, her beak opening and closing, indicating that she's hungry. The child onstage gets closer to the dinosaur, leaf in hand, and reaches their arm out nervously toward her beak. Slowly Dakota approaches. You can hear a few quiet "awww"s from the crowd. One child audibly exclaims, "She's so cute!" Others giggle in response. Dakota opens her mouth and suddenly clamps it closed with the leaf in its clutches and excitedly wiggles her tail. The audience cheers as the child onstage, grinning from ear to ear, watches a dinosaur playfully eat a leaf right at their feet. The host of the show thanks the young visitor and sends them back to their family, who gleefully celebrates their bravery.

As a theater artist, I have been witness to the phenomena of an enraptured and moved audience countless times, but now science has offered a bit of insight into what is going on physiologically. Researchers from University College London found that audience members, whether they know each other or not, will synchronize their heartbeats while watching a live theater performance. The study measured the heart rates and sweat glands of audience members as they watched both live theater and movies. It found that the audience's heart rates did a bit of a synchronized dance, rising and slowing as they watched a scene unfold before them, and that this was far more pronounced in a live theatrical experience than when watching a film.

Audience's heartbeats synchronize while watching live theater, studies have shown.



CATCHING FEELINGS

The full-suit *Triceratops* puppet, created by the fabulous puppeteers at [Erth](#), is made of aluminum and plastic boning, foam, and lycra painted with acrylic, and contains an internal speaker and other mechanisms. Inside is a puppeteer who is using stilts on their arms and whose back legs are inside of the legs of the puppet. They are holding the sixty-five pounds of the weight of the puppet on their back, using largely their shoulders and core strength to maneuver it. Many technical elements need to come together to bring the dinosaur to life, but when they all unify in a performance, the audience forgets to focus on the mechanisms at work. They are transported. They *ooh* and *aww*. They suspend their disbelief. There is a dinosaur in the room and it's pretty darn cute. Ultimately, you could say, they end up catching feelings for a *Triceratops*.



A young visitor is captivated by Dakota, NHMLAC's full-suit *Triceratops* puppet.

This act of relating to the characters on stage is another thing that makes theater so powerful. In a study published in the [Journal of Experimental Social Psychology](#), researchers discovered that watching theater can lead to increased empathy, the ability to understand the feelings of others. According to one of the authors of the study, Steven Rathje, the team found that “after, as opposed to before, seeing the plays, audience members reported feeling more empathy for the groups of people depicted in the plays.” But why is it significant that the audience catches feelings for a dinosaur puppet? I would make the argument that this empathy toward the dinosaur increases intellectual curiosity about these creatures, paleontology, and other related studies. Forming this type of connection is likely to have strong positive outcomes in their lives. According to an [article](#) by Saga Briggs, “researchers...have identified significant correlations between student scores on measures of empathetic understanding and their grade point averages, and a review of research related to empathy training/instruction indicates that this instruction enhances both critical thinking skills and creative thinking.”

CATCHING FEELINGS

Producing the Dinosaur Encounters allows us to see this effect up close. For instance, the father of a dedicated fan shared with us in an email the love his son had developed for our puppet, and in turn for the Natural History Museum:

Lev didn't just watch T-Rex and Triceratops. Lev **BECAME** T- Rex and Triceratops. After each show, Lev would show us his improvisational reproduction of the show we had just watched. He insisted upon silence while he delivered his performance, mirroring and perfectly mimicking the T-Rex right down to lifting his legs, bending over with retracted arms, and delivering his ferocious “roar” while bobbing his head back and forth seeking his prey. By the time Lev turned four last year, he had visited the NHM over one hundred times.

We all know kids who are fascinated by—nay, *obsessed* with—dinosaurs. But how did so many of them develop this “dinomania” in the first place? It took more than just the knowledge that the creatures had existed to make them a subject of public fascination. In his book *The Horned Dinosaurs: A Natural History*, Peter Dodson writes, “When Richard Owen coined the name dinosaur in 1842, it had no impact on the public—none whatsoever. But twelve years later, when he teamed up with the eccentric sculptor and artist Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, the dinosaur at last took tangible form and became accessible to the Victorian public—and Dinomania was born!” It was only when artists brought the concept of dinosaurs “to life,” in other words, that they became a phenomenon. This effect is only enhanced with the experience of witnessing a full-suit puppet of a dinosaur moving and roaring right before your eyes during a live performance.

Like the renderings that originally introduced dinosaurs into the public imagination, NHMLAC’s Dinosaur Encounters performances are a collaboration between scientific experts and puppetry experts. The designs of the full-suit *Triceratops* and *T. rex* puppets were informed by the museum’s paleontologists, including Dr. Luis Chiappe, Senior VP of Research and Collections, who advised the fabricators on how best to merge entertainment with science. The physical characteristics of our juvenile *Triceratops* and *T. rex* puppets were based on our paleontological collections and research. The museum’s scientists were keen to have some of



Hunter, the full-suit *T. rex* puppet, creates a scene in NHMLAC’s Dinosaur Hall.

CATCHING FEELINGS

the current research on dinosaurs reflected in these creatures. After a performance with our *T. rex* puppet, known as Hunter, we often get the question from a visitor (young and adult alike), “What’s that fluffy stuff all over his body?” This opens up a conversation about proto-feathers, and how scientists have been able to make the connection between theropod dinosaurs and modern-day birds. Would so many guests have readily made that connection otherwise? Hard to say, but I imagine that for many, the excitement of meeting a “real-life” *T. rex* covered in proto-feathers may have been the initial spark.

The experts at NHMLAC see the value these puppets have in garnering interest and support for their research. Dr. Nathan Smith, Curator at NHMLAC’s [Dinosaur Institute](#), says, “As scientists and museum educators, we look for ways to ‘bring to life’ a lot of these prehistoric animals, and do so via scientific illustration, exhibits, and even feature films. However, the puppets are a truly unique way where we can envision these species as living animals, but also allow visitors to interact with them. In terms of a visceral experience, that’s still miles ahead of what you might be able to do on a movie screen, video game, etc.”

Museums hope to inspire our visitors to develop a care for and interest in our collections, and to deepen their understanding of the world we share as a result. As with the Dinosaur Encounters show, theater can be one of the best tools for fostering this curiosity. But you don’t necessarily need to commission a life-size dinosaur puppet to do it. You only need two simple ingredients: actors and a script. I encourage museums to provide theater training for your staff, or consult with theater artists, or even better still, bring them on as permanent members of your education departments. An art museum can theatrically animate how exhibits are curated, as seen at the Denver Art Museum’s award-winning show [Art Emergency](#). A historical site can bring forth the personal stories interwoven throughout the history it interprets, as Colonial Williamsburg has expertly done in its show [Journey to Redemption](#). Any museum can find a way to use theater for its purposes; just explore the [International Museum Theater Alliance](#) website for proof of this. Theater artists will be able to bring the guests into a communal, shared, and oftentimes revelatory experience of awe. As the audience’s heartbeats synchronize with each other and they become emotionally connected to the characters, their curiosity about the world will be fostered and nurtured. They will see the collections in a new multidimensional, multisensorial light.

MEET THE AUTHOR:

Ilana Gustafson is Manager of Performing Arts at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. She is a theater artist, educator, and writer dedicated to using performance and events to create meaningful connections to this planet and one another. She is especially passionate about making science accessible for the general public and is honored to work with a team of incredible artists on the Performing Arts team at NHMLAC who make this happen on a daily basis.



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Learn more and reserve your time:

<http://imtal-us.org/zoom>.

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Upcoming Meeting**2023 IMTAL Americas Conference**

We are seeking a **host institution** for an in-person conference in 2023. Please email president@imtal-us.org for more information if your museum, historic house, or other cultural institution is a potential location.

KEEP UP

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for posts and pictures about IMTAL news and events!

Tag us when sharing your own museum theatre-related posts and tweets so we can help spread the word.

...and don't forget to check out our [online archive](#) for past issues of *Insights!*

The International Museum Theatre Alliance (IMTAL) is a nonprofit, professional membership organization and an affiliate of the American Alliance of Museums. IMTAL's mission is to inspire and support the use of theatre and theatrical technique to cultivate emotional connections, provoke action, and add public value to the museum experience.

IMTAL BOARD

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