

Is It Real? Who Cares?

Exploring the nature of authenticity in artifacts and experiences

AAM Baltimore

Sunday, May 19, 2013 3:30-4:45 pm

Panelists: Roy Campbell, Darcie Fohrman, Judy Gradwohl, Steven Lubar, RaineyTisdale

Tumblr: <http://is-it-real-who-cares.tumblr.com>

Although museums are valued as keepers of "the real thing" many museums face the occasional need to display replicas, models, casts or other non-accessioned artifacts. Both authentic and inauthentic objects can lead to meaningful or insignificant experiences. "Real" and "Fake" may seem absolute and obvious to museum professionals, but visitors may have different interests and criteria. Many factors affect how visitors experience artifacts, and each situation is individualized. The panel will employ case studies to practice decision-making about how and when to use non-accessioned objects. Questions listed below outline some of the criteria that can be used in situational decision-making.

Association

Is the content or story compelling enough that it doesn't matter if the object is real?

Is the object rendered more real because it is associated with a famous person or event?

Context

Can display context render real objects fake or make fake objects seem real?

How do labels affect whether objects seem real?

Does the location confer real-ness?

Value/Rarity

Is the object rendered more real because it's rare or one-of-a-kind?

Are easily obtained consumer objects real?

Are very old things inherently real just by virtue of the fact that they've survived so long?

Is it possible to have a very old thing that feels fake?

Familiarity

Has the object become so familiar to people—that it has turned from fake to real?

Can popular culture make fake objects real?

Necessity

If you can't show the real version, is the fake better than nothing?

Is the fake ever useful?

Is the real thing ever touchable?

Point of view

Does authenticity of objects matter more or less to different visitors?

Does authenticity of objects matter more or less to different museum professionals?

How do the points of view map on each other?