

## ***Stories From Syria Exhibition Evaluation Report***

Medelhavet Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm, Sweden

A Qualitative Study of the Exhibition Project's Impacts  
and the Healthful Psychological Affects of its Object-Based Experiences on  
Object Donors, Museum Staff, and Visitors

*"The museum is like a stage for everyone to gather. The museum  
put glue inside of everyone and made them all better."* - Visitor



Photo: Brenda Cowan

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## Background and Introduction

### Evaluator

As associate professor of Exhibition & Experience Design in the School of Graduate Studies at State University of New York, Fashion Institute of Technology, I specialize in exhibition concept development, storytelling, narrative, exhibition evaluation, object and visitor studies, and research. Throughout my career I have had the fortune of experiencing how museums and cultural institutions can positively impact people's lives as places of scholarship and experimentation, interpersonal and intrapersonal connectivity, civic action, and meaning-making. Museums and their dynamic environments have the unique ability to reach participants intellectually, physically and emotionally – they encourage self-reflection and social engagement, and can enable people to see the interconnectedness and dimensionality of our world. Museums and cultural institutions have the power to improve lives in identifiable and measurable ways, and current research shows that in empathetic, and visitor-centered participatory environments, exhibitions and programs are and can be places of health, wellbeing, and healing. These are the core values that underscore my teaching and the direction of my research.

### Research Specialization

In 2015 I developed the theory of *Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics*, providing a framework for identifying and understanding the psychological underpinnings of people's inherent relationships with objects, and the healthful impacts of museum and exhibition encounters on participants. [www.psychotherapeuticobjectdynamics.com](http://www.psychotherapeuticobjectdynamics.com)

This area of research coalesces scholarship in object and museum studies, phenomenology, psychology, and psychotherapy. The theory articulates the healthful psychological impacts inherent to the human-object relationship, and is comprised of a convergence of three factors: an individual's subjective associations with an object, the object's unique evocative characteristics, and the catalytic dynamic activity between the object and person.

Altogether, these factors produce outcomes that foster fundamental psychological health.

The Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics framework is comprised of seven universal, dynamic human-object actions: Associating; Composing; Giving/Receiving; Making; Releasing/Unburdening; Synergizing and Touching. In application, the framework can be used as an instrument for identifying the healthful and healing impacts of exhibition experiences with participants including museum visitors, staff, and most notably, non-expert participants in the exhibition process.

### *Stories From Syria* Exhibition Evaluation Project Intent

In this time of unprecedented global refugee crises, museums are uniquely positioned to provide forums for physical, emotional and intellectual safety, community building and healing. Particularly in participatory museum environments and processes that feature the voices of individuals, and incorporation of personal "everyday" objects, such as in *Stories from Syria*, institutions are having a powerful and healthful impact on their constituencies. Studies with museum visitors, staff, and exhibition participants, particularly where exhibition subjects discuss tragedies or atrocity, have found that the experience of sharing stories of meaningful everyday objects to be a profound part of trauma healing and mental wellness. In participatory exhibition experiences, and even in

more passive exhibition encounters, individuals can experience connectivity to objects and their meanings that directly impact their health and wellbeing.

The evaluation of the highly participatory *Stories From Syria* exhibition at Medelhavet identifies where and in what ways the goals of the exhibition were met, the ways in which the museum's relationship with their Syrian constituency have been fostered, and where and in what ways the exhibition project impacted the psychological health, healing and wellbeing of object donors, visitors and museum staff. The evaluation findings and outcomes provide a model for the broader museum community about the power of participation and co-creation, and inform the curatorial, museum education and exhibition design disciplines about the meaningfulness of ordinary/personal objects and modes of display on participant-object engagement. The evaluation also produced data that contributes to advancing scholarship related to studies in health, wellbeing and healing through exhibition experiences on museum constituents.

## Executive Summary

### Museum Mission and Vision

The National Museums of World Culture (World Culture Museums/Världskulturmuseerna) is a Government agency under the Ministry of Culture. The National Museums of World Culture is responsible for displaying and bringing to life the various cultures of our world, in particular cultures outside of Sweden. Furthermore, the agency is to document and illustrate different cultural manifestations and conditions as well as cultural encounters and variations from a historical, contemporary, national and international perspective. Finally, the agency shall promote interdisciplinary knowledge and various forms of public activities. The agency consists of the Ethnographic Museum, the Museum of Mediterranean and the Museum of Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm and the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg.

The National Museums of World Culture (World Museums) was formed as a response to changes globally as well as domestically. Internationalization has increased and we experience a more globalized world, while the former culturally and ethnically quite homogeneous Sweden is becoming more multicultural. The museums' mission is to use the international cultural heritage to provide a perspective that helps people orient themselves in this transition. The overall objective of the activities of the World Museums is that cultural heritage should be used as an active force in promoting sustainable global development. Our ambition is to provide perspectives that help people to deepen and renew their worldviews in an increasingly internationalized world. Based on what's happening in the community to work through a combination of skill, artistry and involvement give our visitors experiences that entertain, challenge and inspire to action.

World Museums has recently developed a new common vision: "To make the world bigger, more humane and more inclusive." The primary tenets of the vision include the following:

- Our museums are about the world, with the world – for the world

*The National Museums of World Culture manages a global collection covering all continents and thousands of years. Our vision is a bigger, more humane and inclusive world.*

- We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity

*Our museums are places where everyone feels welcome and included. We engage in active dialogue with our visitors and users — they are our foremost ambassadors.*

- We engage, we inspire, we affect

*The National Museums of World Culture encourages and inspires people. We make the world, the past and the present more comprehensible.*

- We develop the collection's potential

*We activate, use and develop the collection in dialogue with others. We are convinced that the*

*collection we manage has significance and value for more people.*

- We build and share knowledge together

*Our collection is extensive and relates to a wide spectrum of research fields and hundreds of specialist areas. We are constantly posing new questions to the material.*

- We are digital – to be able to give more, to more people

*Visitors and users make increased demands for digital accessibility, interaction and individual experiences. We integrate digital technology in order to create new opportunities to engage our target groups and enhance their museum experience.*

- We are lifelong learning

*We believe in humanity's intrinsic curiosity and that we never stop learning. We offer unique environments for mutual learning between people of all ages, with different interests and needs. Here, everyone can be challenged and astonished.*

#### *Stories from Syria* Exhibition Overview and Goals

The exhibition *Stories from Syria* (March 2017- December 2018) included personal belongings that carry stories and memories. The objects belong to people born in Syria. Some have lived in Sweden for a long time, while others came here as refugees during the current war. Together with objects from the collections of the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, the exhibition gives glimpses of Syria's long and rich cultural history, as well as the area's role as a meeting place for people and cultures. There is much to Syria beyond the headlines - the exhibition provides a historical perspective of the area as well as a place for meetings, conversations and community. The exhibition will serve to:

- Show Syria behind the war-dominated headlines and provide a longer, historical perspective.
- Give people from Syria a place where they can remember their home country and share their stories in the public space.
- Create a room/space for encounters and conversations.

#### Evaluation Project Goals

Through personal one-on-one interviews and information gathered from published exhibition text, the evaluation project sought to identify:

- Whether and in what ways the goals of the exhibition were met;
- The impacts and emotional affects of the exhibition project on key constituents;
- Evidence of wellness and healing resulting from exhibition and object encounters;
- Ways in which the museum can meaningfully continue to serve its Syrian constituency.

Although the evaluation project did not seek to measure results in accordance with the institution's newly-developed vision statement, data was produced that gave illustrative examples of several of the statement's tenets and are therefore shared within this report

for edification purposes. Likewise, resultant recommendations are aligned with the elements of the vision statement that would be supported via their execution.

### Evaluation Methodology

Between the dates of June 12<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> 2019, 25 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in various settings including a private office in the museum, and participants' homes located throughout Sweden. Interviews were conducted with 12 object donors, 8 post-visit audience members and 5 museum staff. Interview participants included 17 women and 8 men. Performing the interviews on site were associate professor Brenda Cowan and translator Lusian Alassaf, exhibition project liaison, Medelhavet Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities.

The interviews utilized script instruments designed specifically for object donors, post-visit audience members and museum staff (see Appendix B). The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 - 90 minutes in length. The differences in interview duration were due to the personal manner in which individual participants answered each question and the amount of information they were willing or able to share. Additionally, data was collected from 4 object donors who are featured in the Stories from Syria exhibition catalogue. The selected texts are first-person descriptions of the meanings and stories of the donated objects. Data from this source material were included because the object donors weren't able to be interviewed in person, and the written content they provided in the catalogue fulfilled interview questions. Therefore, the data collected from the catalogue source was compatible and consistent with the in-person interviews.

The interviews were conducted heuristically. While following the interview scripts, participants were not restricted in their responses and free to follow their own natural flow of thoughts and feelings. Participants were free to ask questions as well, and the interview questions were addressed at times out of order. Based upon the information being shared by the participant, additional questions or prompts were given to more fully explore or examine the thoughts and information being provided. The majority of interviews with Syrian participants were conducted in personal environments. Time was allowed for personal introductions, sharing and developing familiarity prior to the interviews, most often in the form of having a meal together, meeting additional family members, and socializing in the home.



Photo: Lusian Alassaf



Photo: Widad Kass Jebrai



Photo: Lusian Alassaf



### Subject Recruitment and Protection

On behalf of the evaluator the institution sent out a voluntary call to a prospective interview population. Professor Cowan prepared a letter of invitation for selected individuals whom the museum determined would be willing and valuable to the purposes of the study (see Appendix A). Each participant was introduced to the inquiry, its purpose, and to the questions so as to make an informed decision. In keeping with NIH Human Subject Research specifications, participants provided consent prior to the interviews. No identifying information was collected or requested of the participants, and consent was also received for the use of photographs in anticipated future publications.

### Overarching Outcomes

Based on data collected from the qualitative evaluation with object donors, visitors and museum staff, the exhibition **achieved its three stated goals; created a successful model for the co-creation of cross-cultural exhibition projects; supported trauma healing and wellness** in participants; and **enacted several of the tenets of the institutional vision statement**. These outcomes were identified within participants' answers to interview questions, anecdotes that were shared during extended visitations with participants in informal settings, and via the demonstrated receptivity of participants to contribute to the study and share intimate information. Overall, the exhibition environment and mode of display was passive, nevertheless, specific objects and stories activated moderate-to-strong emotional responses, both in the moment and upon reflection over time. Subjects who brought personal objects of their own to the interview did so seamlessly within the context of the messages of the exhibition and in resonance with the every day items presented in *Stories From Syria*. Exhibition object meanings and their importance to subjects were highly subjective, contextual, associative, and unrelated to monetary or material value.

Itemized evidence of the achievement of the exhibition goals and illustrative examples of the seven object-based Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics are shared in the Findings section of this report. Quotes are used as illustrative examples of the ways in which the exhibition met its goals and fostered healthful object dynamic experiences. Information that describes the strengths and qualities of the exhibition co-creation process is also provided in detail in the Findings section. Additionally, common object characteristics – consistent with the literature in phenomenological human-object encounters – emerged and are identified in the Findings section, alongside a set of common subjective object associations shared by participants. This data is pulled from the interviews where subjects described experiences with exhibition objects (object encounters) and defined object associations that illustrated concepts of self-identity, self-awareness, personal power, numinous and transpersonal affects (awe, empathy, feelings of transportation), objects as storytellers, repositories of memory, and objects as life companions.

### Portrait of the Participant-Museum Relationship

The evaluation provided an opportunity to not only assess the exhibition and aspects of related human-object encounters, but also provided information that shaped a portrait of

participants' relationship with the museum and the exhibition project overall. This portrait is shaped by a set of emergent themes that capture participants' experiences, thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and desires resulting from engagement in the exhibition project: the exhibition process, the exhibition's collection and environment, and the museum overall. The emergent themes are: Vulnerability and Trust; Reality; Giving; House; Pride; Gratitude and Loss. Importantly, these themes underpin core human factors that shape an individual's self-identity; resiliency competency; feelings of personal power, and connection to others. This demonstrates the exhibition's depth of meaning and personal significance to participants. *Stories From Syria* was extremely positively impactful, affective and influential in the lives of its participants, and continues to be so after its closing. The following descriptions include selections of illustrative data from the interviews.

### *Vulnerability and Trust*

The theme of vulnerability and trust was the predominant experience felt by object donors in the process of deciding whether to donate an object to the exhibition and build a relationship with the museum. Addressing and managing feelings of vulnerability, and overcoming fear and uncertainty, are key to competencies affiliated with personal power and resiliency. For a population of refugees who experience trauma, the significance of their choice to join in this initiative is remarkable.

"When I thought about [donating] I was worried, afraid it would get lost or harmed. I really had to think about it. It was the only thing I had to share. They were all I brought with me. I handed it over and I felt afraid but I just had to trust." Object Donor

"I couldn't bring [my object]. I asked my husband to bring it to the museum. It was really hard to think about giving them." Object Donor

"I was thinking about the exhibition and [my object] would be perfect, but I had to really realize that it would be away from me for a year." Object Donor

"I miss Syria and everything about it. I felt angry about how this bad war is the reason my daughters came to show their personal objects. It feels a little naked having the things that should just be private or in the home used in a spotlight because of this war." Visitor

"I was surprised by how the exhibition made me feel. I can be emotional but when you get a new life you can be weak again. I didn't expect the people [featured in the exhibition] to be so open." Visitor

"I was a little bit afraid about letting it go – it's not easy – and it was a weird concept to me at first. But I gave it. The procedure was very important." Object Donor

"I was really afraid [to donate]. I trusted, but I was afraid. And it was

bittersweet.” Object Donor

“I had to trust the museum first that it wasn’t wanting to make fun of Syrian people. Then I thought very hard about what would be the most important thing to give. I was careful to put it in wrapping and then a bag.” Object Donor

“I felt safe and I trusted [giving my object].” Object Donor

### *Reality*

The theme of reality is one that appears often in studies related to objects and mental health. Determining and defining the meaning of reality is a core factor in human development, and appears in contexts of trauma healing. Objects are core to human cognition, perception, meaning-making, and constructing one’s relationship within the world, and in this evaluation, reality speaks to the need for the Syrian people and their experiences to be seen in relevant and “truthful” ways by others.

“Most exhibitions are about things from buried underground. Archaeology, ancient artifacts. But this kind of exhibition shows reality and humanity and what happens now. It’s alive.” Visitor

“The objects speak about the reality more than just archaeology. That this is now.” Visitor

“I felt like I was a part of this reality – of all these people [objects] around me in this exhibition.” Object Donor

“I want to share my story, not just be a number, and tell the reality of my story. I am here.” Object Donor

“The objects in the [exhibition] were not art they were reality. They are social, cultural reality.” Object Donor

### *Giving*

Giving was described by participants as a key aspect of Syrian culture and mindset, both as a common social interaction and means of connection in daily life, and as a response to the challenges of attempting to assimilate within and connect to Swedish culture. The exhibition initiative provided participants with a means of giving in several different ways, alleviating a deep need to enact a key part of their Syrian identity, and form a relationship with the Swedish people in a meaningful way. Visitors and museum staff also overwhelmingly expressed an interest in giving objects and stories to the museum should an opportunity to do so arise. Giving is at the heart of the healthful object dynamic Giving and Receiving, multiple examples of which are shared in the Findings section on Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics.

“It was important that I share. The museum knows me now and they allowed

me to show who I am.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I was a little bit happy to give a story of Syrians and show that we are strong and we like to give. Especially Syrians in Sweden want to give – not just take. Here I had the opportunity to give.” Object Donor

“I was so happy to give [my object] knowing it was safe.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I would give my ring to the museum – I would leave it here today! I want to share my experience with many people and the museum is for good things and respect. I would give it [permanently] to the museum. I would give my hand to the museum and they would keep it safe and show it in a nice way.” Visitor

### *House*

The use of the word house is very specific and not to be supplanted by the word home. As a theme, house refers to the literal exhibition space and adjoining gathering area; personal associations and affiliations with objects in the exhibition; the museum and its staff; and personal everyday objects from Syria that are gone. House is core to participant’s concepts of family, community, love, comfort, cultural traditions, and societal and familial rituals and roles.

“It’s so difficult to think that your house doesn’t exist anymore. Every memory, laughter, it’s all only memories now.” Visitor

“The house keys were a special moment [in the exhibition]. It was not a good feeling because it’s your life. Your home. Maybe I had so much feeling. We brought our keys. Why? It’s sadness. We still have them.” Visitor

“I call this exhibition house because this exhibition speaks about the love, the family, the connection, and the meanings of home to me. I was so proud that they made this house for Syria – my house.” Visitor

“[The exhibition] was warm and comfortable, like coming into a house. They are my friends [Syrian object donors], these are their things.” Museum Staff

“I would keep my keys if my house was blown up.” Museum Staff

“I would like this exhibition to continue but it would be hard because we don’t live in Stockholm. It would be hard not being able to visit it – my home.” Object Donor

“These are the keys to my house, my love, my memories, my everything. They open all of this, they open my house. When you move from your home you are like a plant in a changed environment. You need time and hard work

when you change your home. It's very hard. I have keys but no home." Object Donor

"I wish I could start over and have a solid house and feel like home. My house was always there. In Syria we lived in the same house for 35 years. Now it's gone. A house in Syria means you are settled. I'm sure every immigrant has experienced this – this need for a house. Here there just isn't a feeling of people being established in them, in their houses. Houses in Syria are a family system. Now I literally feel like I'm swimming all the time." Object Donor

### *Pride*

Pride is another theme participants described as representative of a key aspect of Syrian culture and identity. Pride in culture, tradition, family, community, ethics and belief systems. Pride also represents the feelings of power and strength in participants who overcame feelings of distrust and anxiety related to sharing their objects and stories, and forming relationships with the museum community.

"The exhibition made me feel proud and missing my country. I was surprised. Because it [the exhibition] was working." Visitor

"I felt happiness and sadness and was so proud. It was strange to come home without them but I knew they were safe. At home I was mixed with sadness but pride that I shared." Object Donor/Museum Staff

"I am proud of myself. I wrote the story and my husband cried. I felt really strong and great power and happiness. I felt hope. My story did not die." Object Donor

"I wanted to feel the pride of seeing Syria on display and it was so incredibly special, like a marriage. I was so surprised at how special it was." Visitor

"I didn't think it would be more than a small thing. I was so surprised. It was so big and each object and story was really thought about. It made me so proud to be Syrian." Visitor

"The exhibition made me proud." Museum Staff

"I was proud to show people where I come from. People don't understand we had a high life and happiness." Object Donor

"I could see people connecting with my ring and I felt pride, happiness that I can share this story – and oh this is so beautiful! I am putting my ring with all the museum's beautiful objects." Object Donor

### *Gratitude*

There were powerful feelings of relief, surprise, awe and appreciation that emerged in participants as the exhibition project unfolded and the high level of care and reverence for their stories and objects were demonstrated. This appreciation and feelings and expressions of gratitude were also associated with the personal, respectful and well-informed social dynamic that underscored the co-creation process.

“I couldn’t believe how special and important the museum was and I was so grateful to see all the people – Swedish and Syrian together.” Visitor

“[If she were to donate to the museum] It would make me so grateful and proud to show who I am and not be shy.” Visitor

“I was surprised [by the exhibition] because it’s unusual in the museum context. I was surprised by just how personal the stories were – like reading someone’s diary. I felt grateful for their [the Syrian’s] generosity.” Museum Staff

“I feel grateful, and awe and admiration for the people who did this, who shared their irreplaceable precious things. So filled with awe.” Museum Staff

“I am grateful that I can share all this in Stockholm. My new home.” Object Donor

“No one could not understand *Stories From Syria*. Because of the sound and the environment. People could be transported to Syria and feel like they go there. I was so grateful and so happy.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

### *Loss*

Loss emerged as a theme related to the loss of objects, lifestyles, homes and systems of life, and also in relationship to participants’ relationship to the museum. The closure of the exhibition has had a profound negative impact on participants, including feelings of the loss of a house that had been created and is now gone, the loss of a gathering space that was for some, a significant means of interacting and connecting, and the loss of a conduit or repository of cultural and individual identity. This is extremely significant to the Syrian community that struggles to find means of connecting with their own self-identity, connecting among themselves, connecting to the Swedish people. Connection and self-identity are two key factors essential to stabilized mental health and wellness in people.

[Cries] “I saw the keys in the exhibition. Why didn’t I bring my keys? Because I need them.” Visitor

“I am surprised by how it’s closed. The exhibition was a memory of my community and of us now in Sweden. I have a new home now and I want the people here to see my life. I’m disappointed inside because I have a lot of

meaning inside of me, especially because the exhibition was a house, and was peaceful and now it's gone. Taken away from me. I felt safe there. Every day I went there, even if just seeing it from the outside. Once I felt I wanted to go but it was closing so I went inside to say goodbye. Now I don't feel well and I have a lot of sadness, of loss." Visitor

"It's hard now. I can't believe [the exhibition is] over now." Object Donor

"[The exhibition] feels like a fleeting acquaintance that leaves a feeling. I miss it." Museum Staff

## Findings

### Meeting Exhibition Goals

The following data from the participant interviews provides evidence of the exhibition's goals having been met. These illustrative quotes are selected from and representative of all three types of participants including object donors, visitors and museum staff.

- Show Syria behind the war-dominated headlines and provide a longer, historical perspective.

"I wanted people to see the Syria that is not the war and destruction. The real Syria that is beautiful and so lovely." Object Donor

"We are not just refugees, we are from such a nice history and social life. I wanted to tell all of Europe about us." Object Donor

"It was powerful how the museum was showing the other side to the world." Visitor

"It's really nice to share something nice from my beautiful home in Damascus; to show it because it's important for people to see the beautiful life there and the nice connection between the museum and the people [Syrians]. It's important to show the life in Syria and the happiness there." Object Donor/Museum Staff

"I was a little bit happy to give a story of Syrians and to show that we are strong and we like to give. To show people that Syrians are many things and we had a nice life and sophisticated. I could show that Syria is more than war. People have love and families and we are modern and I got to show them that." Object Donor

"I could speak about my people as people – the other side." Object Donor/Museum Staff

"I had a nice life before and I thought I could feel better if I shared [my object]." Object Donor

"I felt like Sweden understood us [as a result of the exhibition]." Object Donor

"I felt proud and like I could give a small lesson to the community [about Syria]." Object Donor

"The exhibition is a stage between the wild [war in Syria] and our lives here. A place for compassion and condolence. It's like a movie of my life has come together in this exhibition." Visitor

- Give people from Syria a place where they can remember their home country and share their stories in the public space.

"I felt like I had a voice. I was sharing my story, something my family doesn't really do." Object Donor



"The museum is a safe place for me to tell my story, connect and make contact with all people." Object Donor/Museum Staff

"I was so surprised [by the exhibition]! What is that? It's small pieces of our lives." Visitor

"I wanted to share my special stories of my friends because I don't want my life in Syria to be over. Because of sharing I can still feel like I'm still connected with my friends. I can let my feelings go and picture Syria and those times – I remember the feelings of love." Object Donor

"I wanted people to feel even 1% of what I feel when I think about Damascus. Because I am still there." Object Donor

"I had many feelings. I miss my country, and [the exhibition] was working. They were thinking about us [Syrians]. It was a pleasure." Visitor

"It was incredible. I felt happiness and pride, I couldn't believe it. It was like a success to share it and I got to share how much we worked to get here and live here. Maybe this will help others see them [Syrians]." Object Donor

"I wanted to share what I feel. I want to share my story, not just be a number, and tell the reality of my story. I am here and I want to tell my story, and by telling them the stories behind the objects the people of Sweden can understand their value. And not just me but a lot of people."

"It's important to share my story to show my new community [Sweden] where I come from and why I brought [my object]." Object Donor

"It made it good for us to hear the others' stories." Object Donor

"I thought I should participate. If not me then who? This is the biggest tragedy of our century and I could share my story." Object Donor

"I felt sentimental, a personal connection as if the people were telling me their stories right there. It felt like it could be anyone – people I know. That matters because it could be me, or my brother, someone with the same senses and basic instincts." Museum Staff

"The [historical and personal] objects got a new life. Visitors identified with these because they were things that they have as well. How similar we are." Museum Staff

- Create a room/space for encounters and conversations.

"The family could all meet together in the exhibition as it was the only place we could all meet. It was big enough. The family was living separately and this

exhibition was the only home for all of them.” Object Donor

“I brought so many people here to see [the exhibition] and I felt so proud. I was grateful to see all the people here and to share my experience from Syria.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I went to the exhibition ten times and each time it was new.” Visitor

“In the exhibition I was shaking. When I started working with [the exhibition] I saw the people donating their objects were so happy and connected with each other. It was very special.” Museum Staff

“I love to be here and study the language and the culture yet I am always a Syrian, and I would love to always connect with my [Swedish and Syrian] friends and neighbors and this was the place.” Visitor

“The museum let all Syrian people together in one room. This was incredible. For such different people who might be in conflict the museum brought us all together.” Visitor

“The museum is like a stage for everyone to gather.” Visitor

“I couldn’t believe how special it was and I was so grateful for seeing all the people together – Swedish and Syrian together. The way that they made it [exhibition], I knew I would never feel those feelings of being in Syria again yet I could feel those feelings in the exhibition.” Visitor

“The room was like a garden from Damascus and I just stopped. I was in this magic room. We [her family] connected after three years [in the exhibition] and in this moment we were connected. I don’t have the words.” Visitor

### Successful Model of Exhibition Participation and Co-Creation

*Stories From Syria* is an example of museum participation that fostered meaningful connections between exhibition environments and immediate and extended museum constituencies. The form of the *Stories From Syria* exhibition was co-creation, where object donors were the subject of the exhibition, and actively authored the exhibition’s content. Authorship in this example includes both the provision of written and verbal stories and affiliated personal objects. Three of the major themes that emerged from this study of the exhibition’s impacts and affects were “giving,” “vulnerability and trust,” and gratitude, as defined and illustrated in the Executive Summary. These emergent themes speak particularly to the ways in which the process for creating the exhibition was professional, empathetic, and respectful to participants.

The exhibition process was especially successful in its **comprehensive and broad approach to selecting participants**, beginning with the decision to engage participants of

multiple religious affiliations, geographic and ethnic origins, and various cultural traditions and practices. Also, the process took into consideration the **long-term requirements of co-creation in its methodical approach to building relationships** with potential participants. First, the critical phase of initial outreach to potential participants was thoughtfully paced, allowing time for developing familiarity, establishing trust and making the intents of the project completely transparent. Second, the opening of the exhibition was formalized, personalized, and ritualized to emulate the deeply meaningful Syrian wedding tradition of bringing together the bride and groom, in this case, representing the bringing together of Syria and Sweden. This reference and simulation generated deeply positive emotional responses by participants. Third, the project concluded with a likewise personalized, formalized, and ritualized moment of closure, wrapping of the donated object, and its personal return to the donor participant accompanied by a gift of Syrian origin. Throughout the period of the exhibition, participants were encouraged to visit, bring family and friends, personally connect with museum staff, and participate in programs.

The project contracted a **sympathetic professional liaison** that represented and was fluent in the language and diversity of the Syrian people, fluent in the Swedish language and culture, and experienced with museum curatorial, programs and exhibitions practices. The liaison was with the project from its inception through its closure, and was again contracted for the purposes of this study by reconnecting with the exhibition project participants. In many ways, this study was viewed by Syrian participants as a continuation of their relationship with the museum, and my own protocol, manner, and interactions supported this understanding. Participation is an ongoing relationship that does not end with the completion of a project or close of an exhibition, as seen in the emergent theme of “Loss,” and in the Recommendations section of this report are suggestions for **maintaining the connections and relationships that were established**, both to respect and serve the needs of the project participants, and also the opportunities that their perspectives and unique qualities provide for the museum.

In compliment to the data provided in the Executive Summary’s presentation of relevant emergent themes, the following selected quotes provide examples of the ways in which the exhibition project’s process demonstrated a model for participation and co-creation:

“[When I brought in my object to the museum] I made sure Lusian was there. I was really proud and really happy. I gave my identity to the museum.” Object Donor

“The charge to create the exhibition was concerning, so we decided to go for intimate stories. The experience of interviewing and coordinating and speaking felt like I came a little bit closer – the distance between me and Syria was getting closer. I felt a little scared and guilty, but the process was good; there was a lot of laughter. The exhibition made me proud.” Museum Staff

“I had to trust the museum first and that they weren’t making a joke of Syrian people. I was so happy to give [my object] to them knowing it was safe. When I saw it was treated like an artifact, and then the contract, it made me realize I will be treated professionally.”



Photo: Brenda Cowan



Photo: Lusian Alassaf



Photo: Brenda Cowan

“Lusian became like a brother. I had it [the letter] for 9 years and I never shared it with anyone. When I thought about [participating] I was worried. I really had to think about it. It was the only thing I had to share, it was all I had brought with me [from Syria].” Object Donor

“I thought [the exhibition] was a really good idea. I like the idea and I want to be with it. The people in charge of the exhibition are really good people. I would put myself in this exhibition – I can be an object!” Visitor

“[In the exhibition] I would ask people who were there if they’d seen my objects and I would tell them to go see them. I felt like I was a part of this reality – of all these people around me in this exhibition.” Object Donor



Photo: Brenda Cowan



Photo: Brenda Cowan



Photo: Lusian Alassaf

“I saw the beautiful opening and it was like a wedding. I was surprised and grateful and it was so beautiful, so professional.” Object Donor

“After visitors learned [the objects] were mine they cried and hugged me. I felt so proud that I shared. I could show and help create our humanity together.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“All of the objects that were there, all of these stories show all kinds of Syrian people. Lusian thought so hard about this and now we all share this story. He knocked on a lot of doors and didn’t know who would answer, and helped us change sadness to happiness.” Object Donor

“[When my object was returned to me] it was wrapped like a present! I checked it all over and I was so happy that they gave me the text panel. I gave it to my son and he was so proud. I have this exhibition in my heart and in my house. I put the label over my son’s bed, the exhibition is now over his bed.” - Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I opened it and just held it and it was wrapped as if it were a present. It was incredible! The return of it was so beautiful.” Object Donor



Photo: Lusian Alassaf



Photo: Lusian Alassaf



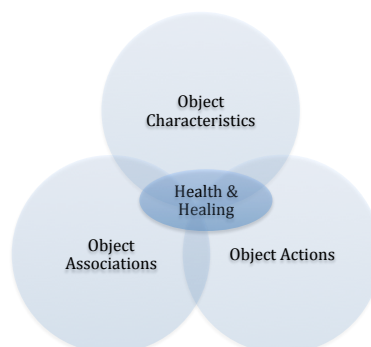
Photo: Lusian Alassaf

### Identification of Healthful Outcomes

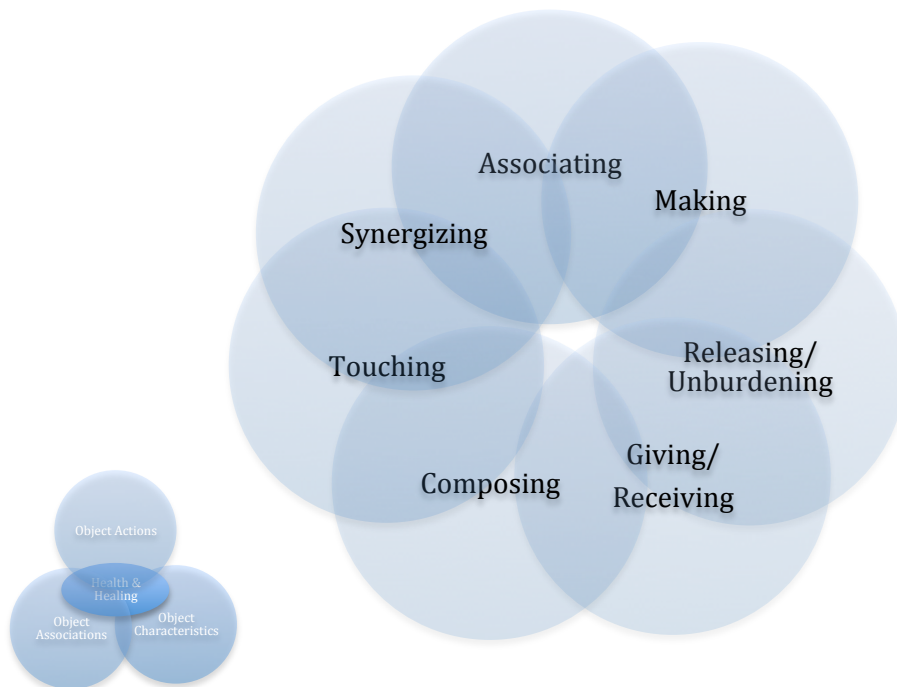
The Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics framework was utilized as an instrument for identifying evidence of healthful and healing impacts resulting from exhibition participation and object encounters. Throughout the interviews participants gave specific evidence of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics, indicating the ways in which the exhibition experience, object encounters, and/or participation in the exhibition project’s process fostered healing and/or well-being impacts.

### Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics Definition

The theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics defines the inherent and inextricable coalescence of object associations, attributed characteristics, and dynamic interactions that result in healthful and healing outcomes. These correlations, interactions and impacts are automatic, self-driven, and simultaneous.



Seven universal patterns of engagement with objects form the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics framework: *Associating, Composing, Giving/Receiving, Making, Releasing/Unburdening, Synergizing, and Touching*. The dynamics are inherent, multidimensional, catalytic, human-object relational experiences and are therapeutic in nature. They occur in everyday life as well as in therapeutic settings, and they also occur in museum settings and situations. Each of the dynamics is comprised of overarching object characteristics and corresponding inherent therapeutic activity.



The following definitions indicate the nature of each therapeutic activity and the attributed characteristics as drawn from the literature. The definitions also show the corresponding therapeutic competencies resulting from dynamic engagement as drawn from theory and practice. Relevant scholars are shown in parentheses.

### **Associating**

The action of maintaining, and keeping within close physical proximity to, an object in an effort to perpetuate the knowledge, and memory of the object's associations (including experiences, states of being, places and people).

### **Object Characteristics**

Human Connectedness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, Marcher)  
 Bearing Witness (Hoskins)

Companion in Life Experience (Turkle)  
Connections Bigger than Self (Wood & Latham)  
Silent Partner (Spitta)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Self-efficacy (Levitin)  
Mindset (Dweck)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)  
Self regulation (Baumeister, Ekman)  
Trauma recovery (Levine, van der Kolk)

The dynamic of associating is particularly resonant with the object characteristics of “companion in life experience” (Turkle, 2007) and “silent partner” (Spitta, 2009). It has several variants. Associating is dependent upon physical proximity, and in many cases this is demonstrated via objects that are worn or carried on, or with, the person on a near daily basis. Sometimes the dynamic is illustrated by an object that is kept in a person’s home either in a prominent place where they see it everyday, or stored where it is not seen regularly but the person knows it is there at all times. People can draw personal comfort, energy, confidence or power from the proximity of the object, and experience empowering or even enlightening elements of “connections bigger than self” (Wood and Latham 2014). Sometimes, associating is a dynamic action that precipitates intended subsequent action, and keeping an object near is essential for a person to become “ready” to address it more fully.

### **Composing**

The action of juxtaposing objects with the intent of forming and expressing a concept or idea in order to coalesce, examine, and convey a meaning that cannot otherwise be fully explained or expressed.

### **Object Characteristics**

Unity of the Moment (Wood & Latham)  
Bearing Witness (Hoskins)  
Provocations of Thought (Turkle)  
Perrisological Resonators (Lemonnier)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Self-expression and communication (Rogers)  
Self-awareness and self-efficacy (Levitin)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)  
Containment (Marcher, Levine)  
Trauma Recovery (Levine, van der Kolk)

The dynamic of composing has variants. It can be seen in the form of a collection for which meaning is dependent upon every object being present, and typically in a particular arrangement. It also emerges in the composition and juxtaposition of as few as two objects. It can be a sequence of objects as in a timeline, or a set of objects manipulated into different juxtapositions at different times. At the core of composing lie communication, expression, and the psychological concept of the “perrisological resonator”: the active juxtaposition of objects and the messages conveyed in their coalescence (Lemonnier 2012). Composing can be explicitly enacted in place of language (written or verbal). The form of the composition is intended to communicate a deep truth, emotion, or abstract concept:

There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities... to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence (Dewey 1934, 77).

### **Giving/Receiving**

The action of donating or offering to another person or people an object with the intention of its being accepted, and the resultant act of its being received with its attributed meaning being mutually understood and held intact.

### **Object Characteristics**

Unity of the Moment (Wood & Latham)  
Bearing Witness (Hoskins)  
Connections Bigger than Self (Wood & Latham)  
Provocations of Thought (Turkle)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Human Connectedness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Resilience (Jarlnaes, Marcher)  
Stabilization (Levitin)  
Perspective-making (Ashton)  
Trauma recovery (Levine, van der Kolk)  
Connection with family/society (Neufeld)

Human connection is at the heart of this dynamic. The object transaction is deeply symbolic and meaningful. The moment of giving and receiving is respected, reverent, emotional, and personally and socially significant for both the giver and the receiver. It is the literal act of connection via opening oneself to another, and of being told *yes, I am with you*. Gifts retain something of their givers (Mauss 1950). Some variants of this dynamic include the common yet powerful convention of giving and receiving gifts, giving and receiving objects that identify and mark personal achievements or milestones, and passing along objects within a family or community across generations.



## **Making**

The action of generating an original or newly-formed object as a means of experiencing and implementing the phases of the fundamental creative process.

### **Object Characteristics**

Being Transported (Wood & Latham)  
Loss of Ego (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Materiality (Dudley)  
Hypnoglyph (Critchley)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Unity of the Moment (Wood & Latham)  
Object Focus (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Self-awareness (Kahneman, Levitin)  
Endurance (Baumeister)  
Stabilization (Baumeister, Levine)  
Emotional grit (Duckworth)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)  
Resilience (Dweck)  
Containment (Levine, van der Kolk)  
Self-regulation (Baumeister)

The experiential characteristics of flow, and the evocative and transcendent attributes of the numinous, are particularly strong in the dynamic experience of making. So too is the connection with primal power: attainment of goals, achievement, and mastery (Nguyen 2011). In our research, this dynamic emerged in three predominant forms: the actual activity of making an object and experiencing flow and the efforts of the creative process first-hand; observing another person making an object with a feeling of reverence, awe, or deeply felt appreciation; and seeing evidence in an object of its making and feeling a sensation of its origin, with feelings of reverence, awe and wonder. The dynamic of making is one of the more multifaceted of the dynamics, explicitly interrelating mind, body and emotion. Its variations engage the individual in a primal connection with personal power. The dynamic can be extended to the use of an object as a tool to create something else. According to anthropologist Trevor Marchand, the haptic relationship between the brain, body, and tool is neurologically and psychologically primal and is key to the definition of being human (2012). In *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Turkle 2007), archaeologist David Mitten describes a deep somatic experience with the dynamic of making in his observations of a 5,000 year-old stone axe head found on his grandfather's farm. Mitten imagines the life of the axe head, in which its ancient maker "chipped and pecked and ground away much of the cobble that he had found, transforming it... into a well-crafted object, highly suitable for cutting and chopping and a work of beauty as well" (2015, 122).

## **Releasing/Unburdening**

The action of releasing an object from a state of highly associative ownership into another place or state to permanently remove it from its former association, meaning, or state of ownership.

### **Object Characteristics**

Unity of the Moment (Wood & Latham)  
Bearing Witness (Hoskins)  
Companion in Life Experience (Turkle)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Silent Partner (Spitta)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Resilience (Baumeister)  
Self-efficacy (Levitin)  
Containment (Levine, van der Kolk)  
Self-awareness (Ekman, Jarlmaes, Marcher)  
Empathy (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, Keltner)  
Stabilization (Baumeister, Levine)  
Self-regulation (Baumeister)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)

The dynamic of releasing/unburdening objects from our lives is as commonplace as discarding or donating objects in a flurry of spring cleaning, returning an ex-boyfriend's belongings after a breakup, or even sometimes when we thoughtfully re-gift. This dynamic is rooted in intent, heightened and deliberate action, and a determination to make or recognize change. In our research with object donors to museum exhibitions, every example of this dynamic was deeply emotional, profound, and catalytic. The range and multidimensionality of the dynamic action of releasing/unburdening can be aligned with the four object experience elements comprising Wood and Latham's *unified experience*, including *unity of the moment*, *object link*, *being transported*, and *connections bigger than self* (2014). The object is burdensome; its associations and attributed characteristics — a memory, experience, concept, person, place, time, event, etc. — are prohibitive. The object's presence delays or thwarts personal growth, health, or healing. The object is therefore evocative, or even numinous. Its depth of meaning is expansive, bigger than the individual, and can even feel spiritual or supernatural. The dynamic activity of releasing/unburdening is a unification of all of these elements in a single, decisive, active moment commonly accompanied by feelings of relief, empowerment, openness, and transcendence. In our many examples of releasing/unburdening, participants were able to articulate clearly the meaning of their object, its associations, their decision-making process and intent, and the impacts of their experience. This dynamic comes with a particularly heightened state of self awareness.

## **Synergizing**

The action of contributing an object to a collective in which combined components produce a meaning larger than the individual alone.

### **Object Characteristics**

Unity of the Moment (Wood & Latham)  
Bearing Witness (Hoskins)  
Provocations of Thought (Turkle)  
The Transpersonal (Salom)  
Perrisological Resonators (Lemonnier)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Connections Bigger than Self (Wood & Latham)  
Awe (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, Keltner; Latham)  
Human Connectedness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Resilience (Duckworth)  
Endurance (Baumeister, Duckworth)  
Wholism (Marcher)  
Perspective-making (Levitin)  
Stabilization (Baumeister, Levine)  
Empathy (Piff, Dietze, Feinberg, Stancato, Keltner)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)  
Connection with society (Marcher, Neufeld)

The dynamic of synergizing has a significant connection with studies in awe, reverence, and empathy. It is seen in different variations, in quotidian experiences as well as powerful museum-based experiences. Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton speak to the experience of synergizing in human development as a transactional experience of the “cosmic self,” the portion of the self whose ultimate goal is interconnection with the larger harmony of things (1981). Synergizing is an action of creating shared or collective knowledge (Wood and Latham 2014). The impacts of the experience — whether an individual donates an object to charity or gifts it to a museum — illustrate the connection between the “small self” (Piff, Feinberg, Deitz, Stancato, Keltner, 2015) and “connections bigger than self” (Latham, 2016). The dynamic of synergizing helps people develop prosocial behavior, compassion, empathy, and an awareness of collective social emotion (Piff, Feinberg, Deitz, Stancato, Keltner, 2015).

## **Touching**

The action of touching an object either consciously or unconsciously while thinking or speaking about its meaning.

### **Object Characteristics**

Hypnograph (Critchley)

Materiality (Dudley)  
Object Focus (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Unity of the Moment (Latham and Wood)  
Primal Power (Nguyen)  
Sense of Wholeness (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson)  
Object Link (Wood & Latham)

### **Therapeutic Competency**

Resilience (Duckworth)  
Endurance (Baumeister)  
Wholism (Marcher)  
Stabilization (Baumeister, Levine)  
Mindfulness (Ekman and the Dalai Lama)  
Emotional grit (Duckworth)  
Containment (Levine, van der Kolk)  
Self-regulation (Baumeister)  
Empathy (Latham, Rogers, Marcher)

There are two main variants of the dynamic of touching. The first involves the literal act of touching objects in a wide variety of settings. The second relates to the thought, anticipation of, or resonant memory of touching an object. Both forms of sensory experience are deeply connected with emotions, memory, elements of flow experience, and in many cases feelings of awe and reverence. People can describe their attraction to an object via its visual materiality. This was often related to its use and wear over time — or “stickiness,” as described by archaeologist Sara Ahmed — whereby an object shows marks of its history (2006). Many participants lovingly described the texture, shape, surface, and feel of used and aged objects — mostly domestic — that they had not actually touched. Similarly, people can describe memory associations with tactile and haptic object experiences in which prior engagement with an object — a “tactile memory” (Gallace & Spence 2008) — is activated and serves to connect them with the object they were observing. Feelings of nostalgia, warmth, comfort, and joy resulted from this particular type of experience.

### *Stories From Syria* Evaluation Findings

As commonly occurs, some object experiences described by participants also coalesce more than one Dynamic. Using the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics framework, data collected among 29 individuals including the 25 in-person interviews and 4 exhibition texts, presented evidence of object-based therapeutic healing and wellness as follows:

*Associating* (10/29 respondents)  
*Composing* (4/29 respondents)  
*Giving/Receiving* (12/29 respondents)  
*Making* (3/29 respondents)  
*Releasing/Unburdening* (2/29 respondents)  
*Synergizing* (5/29 respondents)

*Touching* (7/29 respondents)

Selected illustrations from the data include demonstrations of a Dynamic occurring during the interview, descriptions by subjects of actively engaging in a Dynamic, and/or reference made to a Dynamic while within the exhibition environment:

*Associating*

Associating was the most prevalent Dynamic described, which was unsurprising given the nature of the objects relationships to their refugee/immigrant owners. In most cases, the meaningful objects shared in the exhibition are the only, or one of only a few, objects that were brought with or survived the journey to Sweden.

“I keep it in a special drawer and I have it all the time always.” Object Donor

I have a special Syrian box with many small things that also came from Syria. I keep the box in a special place.” Object Donor

“I have this exhibition in my heart and my house. I put the label over [my son’s] bed and now the exhibition is over his bed.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

Now I put them in a small box and always in the same place. I want to make a small exhibition in my house with the museum label so others who come to my house will understand them.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I have a special place for this in my wallet.” Object Donor

“Now, the pendant hangs around my neck, which is still young and smooth. Hopefully, it will still be there when my neck is old and wrinkled.” Object Donor (from exhibition text)

“[Touches object constantly while speaking about it] It’s one of a matching pair. My boyfriend is away right now and he wears his and we send pictures of ours to each other. Maybe it is like a marriage ring. I wear it every day and sometimes I wear it at night when he’s away because it’s like I’m in bed with him.” Museum Staff

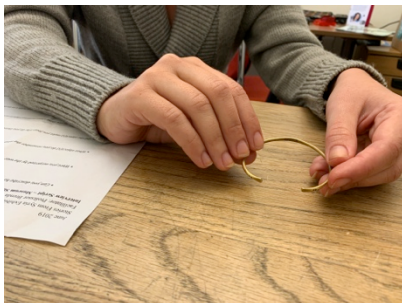


Photo: Brenda Cowan

### Composing

The composing of objects was a lesser-demonstrated Dynamic, although appeared in the typical form of objects have an associated subject or theme, or an associated purpose/intent.

“I bought things for my family that I keep together in the box with my own objects from Syria, but in a separate part of the same box.” Object Donor

“I brought my [collection of] objects in a box and a zippered bag to make sure they would all be together.” Object Donor

“My kitchen is from Damascus. The cupboards, the tiling, the floor, all of it. Even the sink. I wanted to bring everything with me [from Syria]...I feel at home in my kitchen...the kitchen is my own place, the heart of my home. It's my little corner of the world where I can relax and be completely myself. The kitchen lifts my spirits.” Object Donor (from exhibition text)

### Giving/Receiving

This dynamic experience was spoken about extensively related to the reverence with which object donors gave their objects to the museum for the exhibition, and the care and reverence with which the objects were given back. At the core of this process was the demonstration of a shared understanding of the meaningfulness and personal importance of the object. Giving and Receiving was also described several times related to objects that were meaningful because of having been gifts, and objects that will be gifted as legacy items.

“[The returned object] was wrapped as if it were a present. All of the return of it together was so beautiful.” Object Donor

“The keys are my goal to go back to where I came from. I will give them to my daughter.” Object Donor

“My [returned object] was wrapped like a present. I was so happy they gave me the text panel. I gave that to my son and he was so proud.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“[My object] is special to me and I wrapped it in several layers like a present and I gave it to Lusian.” Object Donor

“My mother gave my aunt a necklace and she gave it to me. I gave it to my sister and it's always been so important. It makes me feel safe, good, strong. When I got it from my aunt it was like a holy moment and she was very specific about how I had to keep it safe. After 15 years I wrote a speech about it to tell to my sister when I gave it to her. I know that my sister understood and I hope she keeps it safe.” Museum Staff

“These were from my grandmother to my mother to me. In the future I will see that my daughter knows how important they are. They are happiness. The happiness of my mother receiving them from my grandmother, and now I know that I am trusted.” Object Donor

### Making

Making was referenced where object donors described the meaningfulness of having made their objects or used their objects in the making of another object. Making was also referenced in descriptions of the meaningfulness felt in evidence of an object’s making by others.

“I bought this pen to write this wonderful song. It is so special to me and the pen is connected with this.”

“I think the making of an object is still in it – like the energy. You can see the time invested in the complexity of its making and that time invested is still in the object.” Museum Staff

“I crocheted this shawl myself, but I’ve never worn it...When I had seen the shawl in my dream a cousin of mine helped me and showed me what to do. How to handle the delicate yarn, and how to string the beads. It took me about a month to finish the shawl, but it was worth it. It was a labour of love.” Object Donor (from exhibition text)

### Releasing/Unburdening

There were only a few examples of releasing/unburdening, which wasn’t surprising given the temporary-loan format of the exhibition. Still, the Dynamic emerged in conversations related to personal objects in general.

“If you keep connected to objects you aren’t going to make it. You can’t hang onto things when you are in this [refugee] life. Sharing these stories helps you to move on – the object loses some importance when you share them and this is good somehow.” Object Donor

“I don’t like to keep stuff. My things don’t mean anything to me.” Visitor

### Synergizing

There were several examples of synergizing, mostly related to contributing to the exhibition collection, and feelings of being immersed with or surrounded by others in the museum’s community when in the exhibition.

“I am showing how my family is all together. We have an identity together. I learned [through sharing his object] that it’s not just about me.”

“I am so proud that I shared. I could show and help create our humanity together.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“This will help others see them [Syrians] and maybe they can help. I try to make the community better. All this to make the community better.” Object Donor

“Now we all share this story. The object, the Lusian, the museum, now they are all a part of the same story – the other objects as well.” Object Donor

“Thirty-eight stories and thirty-eight objects. They are like my own life. Each one is just a small thing that is coupled with my life.” Visitor

“I was surrounded by the stories. I knew it was my Syrian community and each story met with each person and I had all of the same objects. The [exhibition’s] objects are mine too.” Visitor

### Touching

The Dynamic of Touching was evidenced in participants’ descriptions of feelings associated with holding or touching their object, or in seeing evidence of others’ having touched a meaningful object. Touching was also demonstrated by the touching or holding of an object as its meaning was being described in the moment of the interview.

“This is where I have been with all my family, my work, my social life. When I touch [my object] I remember every person and everyone all together.” Object Donor

“I wore them the minute I got them back from the exhibition.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I wore it for two days, the minute I got it back [from the exhibition].” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“I remember the cutouts in the letter and that they were writing because they couldn’t call. It’s like they were going back to the old ways. You can see the folds and how worn the letter is from having been opened and read so often.” Museum Staff

“I opened [my returned object] and I just held it. It was incredible.” Object Donor

“When I touch it, I read it, I fly. It’s a ticket for me to fly, it’s magic. It’s special when it’s in my hands. Such a special feeling to a time and this special place.” Object Donor



Photo: Brenda Cowan



### Predominant Phenomenological Object Characteristics and Subjective Associations

The experience and meaning of being a refugee and/or immigrant dominated this study. Participants described the exhibition's subject of Syrian refugee and immigrant experiences in the form of broader concepts, as well as being intimate impacts on people and individual lives. Participants associated specific exhibition objects likewise with broader concepts such as Syrian culture, geographical places, periods of time and larger world events, and also as representations of personal and individual milestones, moments in time, people, transitions, traditions and rituals. In both these broader conceptual associations as well intimate personal object associations, participants resoundingly demonstrated what cultural anthropologist Silvia Spitta describes in her studies of the significant and powerful role of objects in the lives of immigrants. Spitta identifies objects as being cultural signifiers and silent partners in migration, accompanying individuals throughout life, from one place to another, one culture to another, one time of life to another. Objects are vehicles of intimate and inward narratives, they are memory-embodiment, and to them individuals imbue the cultural meanings of the people and practices of the places where they once lived. As people become uprooted and displaced, their objects migrate with them, and new memories to new places are attached to them. New/additional meanings are associated with them. In these long-term relationships, cultural objects become progressively and deeply entangled in immigrants' lives (Brown, Frederick and Clarke 2015), providing a sense of security and safety as they manage the challenges of identity that come with adapting to new cultural environments (Mehta and Belk 1991).

Examining the collected data through a phenomenological lens, 3 predominant meaningful object characteristics and 7 specific subjective object associations emerged that resonated with Spitta's depictions of the relationship between objects and the refugee/immigrant experience. These characteristics and associations underscore the desired outcomes of the exhibition environment, the exhibition experience, and the project's process. The predominant object characteristics described were repository of memories, silent life partners/companions, and the numinous/transcendent. Selected illustrative data:

#### Repository of Memories

Participants would often refer to their objects specifically as a memory, an immediate (real time) connection with a specific memory, or a receptacle for memories.

"In that moment I opened it and it was like a time machine." Object Donor

"The towel is memories. Missing my past and my history." Object Donor

#### Silent Life Partner/Companion

At the core of the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamic of Associating is the phenomenological object characteristic of constant companion or life partner. The data representing the previously itemized Dynamic of Associating also apply here: Associating was the most prevalent Dynamic described, which was unsurprising

given the nature of the objects relationships to their refugee/immigrant owners. In most cases, the meaningful objects shared in the exhibition are the only, or one of only a few, objects that were brought with or survived the journey to Sweden.

“I have a history with [my object]. It’s like a companion in my life.” Museum Staff

“I keep it in a special drawer and I have it all the time always.” Object Donor

“I have a special Syrian box with many small things that also came from Syria. I keep the box in a special place.” Object Donor

“Now, the pendant hangs around my neck, which is still young and smooth. Hopefully, it will still be there when my neck is old and wrinkled.” Object Donor (from exhibition text)

“I wear it every day and sometimes I wear it at night when he’s away because it’s like I’m in bed with him.” Museum Staff

#### Numinous/Transcendent

When describing their objects or the encounters they experienced with others’ objects in the exhibition, participants used expressions, ideas and anecdotes that illustrated evocative characteristics of a numinous nature. They provoked feelings of awe, amazement, even transcendent feelings of elevation and transportation.

“The watch opens the door for me to fly to my feelings.” Object Donor

“The picture of the little boy [in the exhibition]. It makes fire in my heart.” Visitor

“When I open it it’s like I fly, I’m in a space of my relationship with [my wife]. When I touch it, I read it, I fly – it’s a ticket for me to fly – it’s magic.” Object Donor

“[The object’s] story is coupled with my heart. It’s a magic feeling with my heart. When I hold it I become powerful, power to be in another place, traveling through space to Syria.” Object Donor

“When you read the letter it’s like you are going into another person.” Museum Staff

“The pen is not working. If I tried to use it here it wouldn’t work, but if I brought it back to Syria it would work again.” Object Donor

“[The object] makes me feel up in space, meaning when people see the small details I feel good that others are interested. It makes me want to do better, do more. [The object] woke up my eyes.” Visitor

The predominant meaningful subjective associations shared by participants when describing what they associated their objects with were romantic partnerships; moments

in time; places; family; self; feelings of personal power; and the refugee/immigration journey. Selected illustrative data:

Self and others, places, everyday life

"The watch is my mother and when I look at it I know she is here with me." Object Donor

"I wanted to show the towel because it's about me and my wife and the Syrian Community. The connection between man and woman." Object Donor

"The clothes make me think about my father. He makes the clothes for the first son in the whole family and it is so special for him to make the clothes for my son." Object Donor/Museum Staff

"I would donate [to a future exhibition]. I would want to tell my story. I would feel like I exist. And I would share a story that someone else could connect with." Museum Staff

"[The object] is time, love, memory, my feelings of my wife." Object Donor

"I wanted to put my face cream in the museum so people can learn that girls are pushed to be beautiful and perfect. I was supposed to be shining, yet now in Sweden I am me. I don't use it anymore. And I think of the other girls in Syria and I feel a little sad of them wearing the same cream so they can feel beautiful." Object Donor

"The keys in the exhibition are coupled with my life, my everyday, my whole life in Syria." Visitor

"The face cream, the coffee bag and the house keys, they make me think of my house, home, friends, family, community, history, myself. " Visitor

"I look at the objects in the exhibition and I thought of my family in Russia and my grandparents who were refugees too. I could see so many stories that the people wrote about their object and I think of them. It's a mindset. It's like I know the person." Museum Staff

The refugee/immigration journey

"I brought [my object] to the museum in a plastic bag and I realized that it was the same plastic bag I carried it in from Syria. The raft capsized and because my object was in the plastic bag it was safe. Everything went into the water and got wet except my object. I just realized that it's still the same plastic bag." Object Donor

"My object makes me think of going through this journey – Sweden, everything, has made us all grow older. I was given no means of transition. I had to go straight from a comfortable childhood and now right into being an adult with adult responsibilities." Object Donor

“These earrings are a special story because of how hard it was to get them here or they would be destroyed.” Object Donor/Museum Staff

“[The object] made me think of my journey here. How hard the journeys were.”  
Visitor

“The objects have tremendous meanings related to the horrendous journey here.”  
Object Donor

#### Personal Power/Strength

“These shoes are me being an individual. The shoes today continue to say ‘no’ to the things I didn’t want in my life anymore. I started my new life. The shoes teach me how I threw back everything the people around me were speaking and how I can care for myself in my own way.” Object Donor

“When I see [my object] I am feeling strong and proud.” Object Donor

“[My object] is very potent. It is potential. I will have a future and a special person in it.” Object Donor

“When I hold [my object] I become powerful, power to be in another place, traveling through space to Syria.” Object Donor

“With my lipstick I feel confident in different situations. Maybe if I had to leave suddenly [like a refugee] I would bring my lipstick and it would make me feel confident.” Museum Staff

## Recommendations

The following recommendations incorporate direct requests made by participants, supportive and helpful responses to the affective feelings of loss (of the exhibition) demonstrated by participants, and opportunities to continue to expand upon the successful elements of the exhibition project. These recommendations are intended to directly inform the museum leadership as they move forward with future initiatives in fulfillment of the institution's mission and vision. Furthermore, these recommendations are intended to highlight ways in which the museum can continue to provide a model for innovation in exhibitions practice for the broader museum community.

### *Stories from Syria* Extensions

1. A *Stories From Syria* **permanent digital display kiosk** of object photographs, accompanying text in Arabic, Swedish and English, and accompanying directed/enclosed audio recordings of text in Arabic, Swedish and English. The exhibit kiosk could be located in a programming area or in a Syrian content related exhibition gallery, and should include highly visible graphics identifying the kiosk and its contributions from members of the Syrian community. It could be updated with ongoing contributions from the Syrian community over time. It would be valuable for the location of the kiosk to be close to a place for public gathering/seating, as opportunities for socializing was of great importance among the Syrian participants. This form of juxtaposition would most likely be viewed as welcoming, warm, and respectful among the constituency, and would serve the vision statement's tenets: We are digital – to be able to give more, to more people, and We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity.

- A resource for a digital collection of this type can be seen at the Derby Museum and Art Gallery in Derby, England <https://www.derbymuseums.org/spaces/world-cultures-gallery> Within this large exhibition of global cultural artifacts is an excellent co-created digital exhibition display called *Objects of Love*.

### 2. A *Stories From Syria* **traveling exhibition**

Traveling the exhibition's content would be an ideal initiative. This idea was raised by different interview participants including visitors, museum staff and Syrian participants alike. Traveling exhibitions are complex, and there would be the critical factor of care and preservation of personal belongings, and willingness of object donation to consider. This would demand an very high level of trust, and associated feelings of separation and loss on behalf of Syrian participants could trigger anxiety and trauma, so this option should be discussed with an advisory group (below) and a mental health professional (also below) first. There is also an option to consider a traveling exhibition of photographs with text and audio instead of actual objects, which could alleviate the challenges mentioned above. The museum could identify a network of potential hosts, including international museums, libraries and public institutions. A traveling exhibition would support the following tenets from the vision statement: Our museums are about the world, with the world – for the world; We engage, we inspire, we affect; and We develop the collection's potential.

Informational resources:

- American Museum Of Natural History (AMNH) Traveling Exhibitions

<https://www.amnh.org/global-business-development/traveling-exhibitions>

AMNH has been internationally traveling exhibitions with objects, interactive elements, and media for well over a decade. They would be a valuable colleague from whom to learn about formats, logistics, policies and models for practice. Their exhibitions are large and more complex than *Stories From Syria*, however they would be valuable to contact and learn from. The museum's director of exhibitions is Mr. Michael Meister, and Director of Project Management is Mr. Dean Markosian, either of whom could suggest the best person to speak with, if not themselves.

<https://www.artsandartists.org/traveling-exhibition-service/about/>

- International Arts & Artists is a nonprofit arts service organization dedicated to promoting cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally. IA&A fulfills its mission by providing programs and services to artists, arts institutions, cultural organizations, and the public. <https://www.artsandartists.org>

- The War Childhood Museum (WCM), located in Sarajevo Bosnia-Herzegovina, is a highly relevant resource for you. It exhibits in a similar format to *Stories From Syria*, collects in a similar way, and has comparable subjects. The WCM has a permanent collection of personal childhood objects from now-adult survivors of the Bosnian War. It has recently completed an exhibition of personal belongings from child refugees from Syria. They would be a valuable resource for you in many ways, including subject areas, relationship-building, methods for collecting, and traveling objects to their site. I have already put the museum founder Jasminko Halilovic in contact with Anna Lundstrom and Sofia Sofia Häggman, and he has welcomed a delegation from the National Museums of World Culture to meet with him and his colleagues in Sarajevo. <https://www.warchildhood.org>  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bosnia-syria-children-museum/syrian-children-in-focus-at-sarajevo-museum-on-war-and-childhood-idUSKCN1PL0GR>

- The United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York could be a potential host for a traveling exhibition of photographs and media. <https://outreach.un.org/exhibits/> Exhibitions organized for the general public at UN Headquarters in New York are displayed in the Visitors' Lobby, inside the General Assembly building. They feature photographic and multimedia displays covering important topics that the UN works on such as human rights, sustainable development, the environment, women and girls, and more. Explore a selection of previous exhibits on the [online gallery](#).

### 3. Community Advisors

A **Syrian community advisory board** comprised of individuals from the Syrian refugee and immigrant community would foster exhibitions and program development in a deeply personal and intimate way, and would address the needs for long-term connection desired by *Stories From Syria* project participants. It would address the feelings associated with the concept of "house" that has been "lost." The community advisory board could be structured as a review body for new or ongoing exhibition topics and programs under consideration,

provide resources in terms of content information and material culture, and provide connections with individuals, cultural and academic institutions, and professional communities in Syria. An advisory board charged with thinking about the concerns of the existing and ongoing relationship between the museum and the Syrian community would foster the skills of empathy and mentorship within your institution. Nurturing systemic empathy and mentorship requires much commitment and practice, and museum professionals worldwide have begun to emphasize the importance of these skills in helping museums to care for individuals, support communities, grapple with vulnerability, and build resilience. For example, the Happy Museum Project in the United Kingdom with global affiliates worldwide, has articulated specific principles and imperatives to achieve these aims:

“Create happy, resilient teams and communities... Work towards building more mutual relationships with your staff, communities, supporters and visitors. Explore how museum staff and public can work together, with different expertise but equal respect, to achieve common outcomes such as making a sustainable locality in which to live and work. Learn from voluntary organisations and social enterprises to try out new models of working with people... Work across hierarchies and boundaries. Be a host, brokering new relationships and becoming a hub for communities.” (Happy Museum Project 2019)

Informational Resource:

- Happy Museum Project is one of the most innovative museum and heritage institution consortiums working with the cultural sector to support, provide models for, and advise on the creation of exhibitions, program initiatives, and organizational community-building, and wellbeing-focused missions. I very highly recommend looking into Happy Museum and can make introductions if you are interested. <http://happymuseumproject.org>

A formalized Syrian Community Advisory Board would support the following tenets of the vision statement: Our museums are about the world, with the world – for the world; We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity; We engage, we inspire, we affect; and We develop the collection’s potential.

#### 4. Mental Health Professional Support

Increasingly, museums are **engaging with mental health professionals** in different ways: to serve on exhibition teams when subjects are traumatic, to provide counseling and support mechanisms to staff – especially those who engage with visitors, or to serve in an advisory capacity in fostering connections with external mental health agencies or health care providers. The ultimate purpose of an exhibition is to foster connectivity and meaning-making, and it is objects, as the primary elements of the exhibition experience, that serve to illustrate, explain, captivate, and enable the visitor to relate to the content in a way that is personally significant. Seen through this lens, object meanings support fundamental psychological functions and psychotherapeutic development. The underlying connection between these separate domains becomes especially easy to see in museum settings in which visitors interact with objects of a cultural, historical, or human origin, which tend to readily activate emotional content.

### **Train staff and volunteers in empathy *and* compassion fatigue**

“Frustration, wonder, sadness, hope – it’s very emotional when you imagine what it must be like to be one of these people. I give tours and I was surprised by how emotional I was. I would have visitors who were very moved or cry. I had to learn how to manage it and it felt very important to me. I was really moved [looking at the objects] and had to read just a few at a time and take a break because they were emotional stories. I didn’t think I would be that emotional when talking with visitors but I would choke up.” Museum Staff

The museum can contract mental health professionals for individual projects and programs, or in an ongoing advisory capacity, who will provide training and support for staff and volunteers to develop empathetic listening skills and to deal with or redirect emotional situations. The skills of empathy and active listening require a blend of self-awareness and attentiveness to others. Emotional reciprocity and sharing are at the core of empathy, and its effective use has an inherently stabilizing function on almost everyone. Building skill in empathy also entails developing the skill of self-regulation, which is also developed by therapeutic object interactions. In turn, empathy and self-regulation contribute to self-awareness, the most important psychological skill of all. Opening oneself to the emotional world of others, communicating effectively, building trust, contributing to a culture of collaboration: all of these behaviors grow from a base in self-awareness. It is critical however, to build in a means of relief for staff so that they do not develop a burdensome or fatigue experience with ongoing compassion and empathy in the museum setting. Staff need respite, places to recenter themselves, people to discuss their experiences with, and professional resources for understanding their feelings.

### **Inform visitors of potential emotional activation and craft appropriate trigger warnings**

where there is content in an exhibition that deals with tragedy or atrocity. Preparedness for the possibility of strong emotion is crucial whenever visitors are welcomed into a museum environment that contains provocative material. Surprise is the enemy of calm. Surprised and emotionally activated visitors lose their self-regulation and often their ability to control basic behavior, such as crying, getting angry, an inability to continue socializing or engaging in conversation, or leaving the exhibition/museum unexpectedly. Trigger warnings in simple introductory exhibition text or verbal introductions by staff to visitors in tours or programs can help people adjust and set their expectations, and think about their own thoughts and feelings in a more self-aware way. Example trigger warnings:

Remember to take care of yourself.  
Stay connected.  
You decide how much of this to see.  
Some visitors have strong reactions.  
Your reactions are unique to you.  
It’s OK to be emotional.  
Reach out if you need help.



Do this in your own way.  
Practice safety.

Engaging with mental health experts in short term or ongoing ways would support the vision statement's tenet We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity.

Informational resources:

- The United Kingdom is currently engaging in a national system of Social Prescription, where museums and heritage institutions are connected with health service providers as a means of providing unique and powerful mental health support, especially with communities where depression and loneliness are causes of health problems.  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>
- Happy Museum Project is also an excellent resource  
<http://happymuseumproject.org>
- War Childhood museum is also a good resource for this subject, as they worked with mental health experts in the creation of their exhibitions and programming, for visitor support and also staff support.

## 5. Museum-Based Exhibitions Formats, Programming and Participation

As a framework for interacting with objects in museum settings, your institution could **use Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics as an instrument** for understanding the existing affective impacts of your exhibitions, support deeper community engagement, enhance staff development, and explore broader opportunities for crafting exhibition experiences. As with this study of *Stories From Syria*, the framework could be utilized as an evaluation instrument in assessing whether current audiences and participants experience therapeutic impacts from their museum visits. The dynamics could also provide strategies for creating highly active, themed, and content-rich exhibitions with the intent of providing healthful and healing outcomes for visitors. The framework could also inform a model for creative teams to blend the expertise of designers, educators, curators and visitors with psychotherapy professionals, research universities, and other external sponsors.

For example, museum touch boxes are very successfully used in museum programming worldwide, and could be developed as extensions of your exhibitions offerings both in-gallery and in the external community. (Study into the healthful and healing impacts of touching museum objects can be explored particularly in the work of Dr. Helen Chatterjee at University College London.) Additionally, protocols for community participation in the co-authoring of exhibitions and programs might be developed with the help of the specific object criteria outlined by the dynamics. Your museums might explicitly target permanent object donations for exhibitions that enact the dynamics of synergizing and releasing/unburdening (This approach is utilized in the National September Memorial Museum and War Childhood Museum, for example). Or, as illustrated in *Stories From Syria*, exhibitions could provide giving/receiving, associating, composing and synergizing experiences focused on visitor-object reciprocity. Activity-based programs and spaces that

provide the impacts of touching, synergizing and making could be designed with a view to long-term visitor engagement and the creation of objects with deep personal connections between exhibition content and visitor participation. Composing can be the dynamic focus for curatorial-like engagement and co-creation with the metaphorical possibilities of displays and object interactions, as well as modular and adaptive exhibitions in which visitors actively juxtapose objects and customize exhibition messages. (This form of participation can be seen in museums such as Derby Museum & Art Gallery and the Santa Cruz Museum of Art.) The dynamic of associating lends itself to healthful initiatives for museums to build close ties with their immediate communities and to cultivate repeat visitors through personal object donation initiatives and co-created exhibitions. Finally, opportunities to foster synergizing include exhibitions built around broad themes such as legacy, culture, and historical initiatives that encourage collective experiences among museum participants and the broader public.

Exploring these suggestions would support the following tenets of the vision statement: Our museums are about the world, with the world – for the world; We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity; We engage, we inspire, we affect; and We develop the collection’s potential.

#### 6. Participant-Recommended Exhibition Subjects

As part of the interviews with all three participant types, I asked what they would recommend as **future exhibition topics** that would align with the institution’s content, and support ongoing connection with the museum constituencies. The following are the most predominantly mentioned:

- Food across cultures: same food with different recipes; “my grandmother’s kitchen;” ancient foods that are still used today; foods that are medicinal; foods that have spiritual or religious uses
- Writing: the development of writing from Mesopotamia to today; how different languages developed; the resilience and continuation of “small” or lesser known languages across time to active present day, to save them
- Stories of everyday life in Sweden and all of the different cultures living there today (as the Nordic Museum is creating)
- Clothing across time and different cultures; traditional clothes and their geographies and ethnic connections; the making of/craftsmanship of traditional clothing; personal stories of clothing and how people /customize personalize clothing
- Interactive art-making exhibitions about how people across cultures live today – a focus on how these ancient cultures are alive today
- Global indigenous people, what connects them, their similar yet differentiated stories and life experiences, and their connections to nature and the spiritual
- Slavery around the world and across time
- The war in Syria, politically, geographically, ethnically
- Women
- Child soldiers
- Racism

The importance and relevance of these subjects, and continuing to develop exhibitions in a participatory manner, would support the following tenets of the institution's vision: Our museums are about the world, with the world – for the world; We welcome everyone with warmth and curiosity; We engage, we inspire, we affect; and We develop the collection's potential. In the words of a Museum Staff member, even more would be accomplished if the museum continued creating participatory exhibitions:

“Exhibitions like *Stories From Syria* are for the people. They provide a healing process. They enable us to integrate the historical objects and everyday ones to show culture and place, and we would be able to know it all better. Understand the history and the people in a relevant way. We could understand the world as the lived and the living, and it would change something in yourself and in other people. Thinking about objects and their personal stories changes you.”

## Appendix A

### Invitation to Participate

May, 2019

Dear Friend of the Museum,

As someone who experienced the *Stories From Syria* exhibition at The National Museums of World Cultures, we would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study about your experience.

The purpose of this study is to learn about the reasons why you chose to contribute to or visit the exhibition, what the content of the exhibition meant to you, and what your feelings are following the time of your visit. Your associations resulting from this exhibition are of particular interest to our study. The researcher leading the project is an expert in museum and object studies, who seeks to learn whether your experience with *Stories From Syria* and seeing its objects has had a healthful impact. Your input will help museums and institutions that collect and display objects learn why and how objects are meaningful to people, and the psychological community would gain valuable insight into the healing and wellbeing impacts of object engagement.

We are hoping you would be willing to participate in a private 30-minute long personal interview about your experience. The interview will be arranged at a time and place most convenient to you, and your private information will not be shared. If you are able to participate, we will provide you with all of the details of what to expect and the questions that will be asked so as to make the experience as clear and comfortable for you as possible. We also welcome you to bring with you an object that is meaningful to you as you reflect upon your exhibition experience. As you consider whether to participate and if you would like some initial information about who we are, you can learn about professor Cowan online at:

- Associate Professor Brenda Cowan, Chairperson, Graduate Exhibition Design at SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, [www.fitnyc.edu](http://www.fitnyc.edu) <http://www.fitnyc.edu/exhibition-design/faculty/brenda-cowan.php>;

If you are able to participate in the study, please reply to this email so that we may schedule your interview.

The National Museums of World Cultures would like to thank you so much for your consideration, and we hope to include you in this study that aims to help museums and the therapeutic community, and the many people that they serve.

Most Sincerely,

museum representative

## Appendix B

### Interview Scripts

#### Exhibition Object Donors

Facilitators: Professor Brenda Cowan, Graduate Exhibition & Experience Design; Arabic translations Lusian Alassaf, Medelhavet Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities

- *Why did you decide to contribute your object to the exhibition?*
- *Why did you select the object that you did?*
- *What associations or meanings does the object have for you?*
- *How does your object make you feel? Why do you think that is?*
- *What was it like to bring your object to the museum and hand it to the museum representative?*
- *How do you feel about having had your object on display in the exhibition? Were you surprised by your feelings?*
- *What have you done with the object since it was returned from the exhibition?*

#### Exhibition Audience Members Post-Visit

Facilitators: Professor Brenda Cowan, Graduate Exhibition & Experience Design; Swedish and Arabic translations where necessary, Lusian Alassaf, Medelhavet Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities

- *Why did you decide to visit Stories From Syria?*
- *What did you expect you would experience?*
- *Can you describe how Stories From Syria made you feel? Why do you think that was?*
- *Were you surprised by the way the exhibition made you feel? If so, why do you think that is?*
- *What object(s) do you remember the most? What about them stands out in your memory?*
- *How did the object(s) make you feel? Why do you think that is?*
- *How did the exhibition make you think about personal objects of your own – if it did?*
- *Would you contribute a personal object and your associations with it to an exhibition? If so, why? What would you hope your experience would be like?*
- *Should the Museum do more exhibitions like Stories From Syria? If so, why? What subject do you think would be important?*

(If the participant brought a personal object)

- *Tell me about your object.*
- *Why did you choose this particular object to share with us?*
- *What kinds of feelings do you have about your object? Why do you think that is?*
- *What do you do with your object? Why do you think that is?*

## **Museum Staff**

Facilitators: Professor Brenda Cowan, Graduate Exhibition & Experience Design; Swedish and Arabic translations where necessary, Lusian Alassaf, Medelhavet Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities

- *Can you describe how Stories From Syria made you feel? Why do you think that was?*
- *Were you surprised by the way the exhibition made you feel? If so, why do you think that is?*
- *What object(s) do you remember the most? What about them stands out in your memory?*
- *How did the object(s) make you feel? Why do you think that is?*
- *How did the exhibition make you think about personal objects of your own – if it did?*
- *Would you contribute a personal object and your associations with it to an exhibition? If so, why? What would you hope your experience would be like?*
- *Should the Museum do more exhibitions like Stories From Syria? If so, why? What subject do you think would be important?*

(If the participant brought a personal object)

- *Tell me about your object.*
- *Why did you choose this particular object to share with us?*
- *What kinds of feelings do you have about your object? Why do you think that is?*
- *What do you do with your object? Why do you think that is?*