

Art, Science, and History: A Summer in the Rio Grande Valley

By: Andrea Valdez

An internship

Approved by the Department of Museum Studies

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Kenneth Hafertepe, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
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of  
Master of Arts

Approved by the Internship Chairperson

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## ABSTRACT

Art, Science, and History: A Summer in the Rio Grande Valley

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Mentor: Julie Holcomb, Ph.D.

In the summer of 2022, I interned at the International Museum of Art and Science (IMAS) and the Museum of South Texas History (MOSTHistory). At IMAS, I was hired as a part-time educator and my responsibilities included facilitating educational programs and exhibits, creating a collection's manual for the organization of the educational objects, and aided in the evaluation of a community pilot project. At MOSTHistory I worked with the Education Coordinator to create onboarding documentation and docent training. Both museums are in Rio Grande Valley, located in the southernmost point tip of Texas consisting of Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy County, home to over 1 million Hispanic Americans. My learning goal for these experiences was to learn how institutions with Hispanic audiences implement DEAI initiatives in their daily operations and strategic planning. Reinforcing the skills I learned in the Museum Studies program, I was able to bring my expertise in evaluation, education, and collections management and explore facilitating programing in a bilingual multicultural environment.



Before attending the Museum Studies graduate program at Baylor University, I lived in Pharr, Texas, a small town on the US-Mexico border. Like many in my hometown, I am a first-generation Mexican American, bilingual, and intrinsically inspired by my culture. Within museums, my focus is education and evaluation, all within the lens of advocating for underrepresented voices in history. During my undergraduate degree and before my master's, I interned at Mission Historical Museum, Alamo City Museum, and the McAllen Heritage Center, but had not ventured to connect with two of the largest non-profits in town. Now fully immersed in the industry of museums, the International Museum of Art and Science and the Museum (IMAS) and the Museum of South Texas History (MOSTHistory) has become widely known in Texas and beyond for their contribution to the preservation of the borderland's heritage. Returning to my hometown was an intentional decision, in order to gain insight into how these AAM-accredited institutions operate in a bilingual and multicultural environment.

As an educator at IMAS, my main responsibilities were to staff the BioZone lab and the Ann Moore Art Studio, handling other duties as assigned. The BioZone lab is supported by the McAllen Public Utility and is a space in which visitors can engage in hands-on science activities. On display in this space is an array of ambassador animals: a bearded dragon, leopard gecko, hermit crab, Gulf Coast toad, freshwater fish, darkling beetles, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches. As educators, we were responsible for the care of the animals which included daily feeding and the cleaning of their displays. Visitors were encouraged to ask questions about the animals and had the option to attend "Animal Talks" in which an educator gave a short presentation on an animal and allowed visitors to interact with it. One of the most memorable takeaways from this space was the use of technical Spanish needed to convey STEM content

efficiently. Although I consider myself bilingual, having grown up in the Valley for most of my life, the Spanish I know is colloquial to the region. My language learning has been primarily based on what I have been exposed to in my environment and without any formal language training. When I had to explain electric conductivity in Spanish, I found myself at a loss for words, using a mixture of Spanglish to convey my meaning. It was interesting to see visitors adapt to my level of Spanish. In a mixture of both languages, they filled in vocabulary words that I was missing and expressed their understanding of my meaning. To facilitate this area, I learned to be better prepared and review new vocabulary in Spanish. I enjoyed the opportunity to expand my knowledge of Spanish, even if my proficiency is not perfect.

My other role at IMAS was to facilitate the Ann More Art Studio, a space that has rotating crafts based on upcoming exhibits or the theme of the month. Visitors were given the choice to engage with the theme and materials provided, but I was always impressed by what their boundless creativity produced. The most pivotal moment of my professional career came when I observed a grandmother visiting this space with her granddaughter to paint. In Spanish, the grandmother reminisced about growing up without the opportunity to draw or paint. This was because she had to work in the fields picking vegetables, a collective experience for most people from this agricultural region. This particular statement hit close to home, as my own grandmother was a laborer who had come to this country in search of a better life for her children. It was at that point that I realized museums had the power to provide individuals with a safe space to recount their past and provide generations with a way of connecting through art. This realization is one that I will continue to champion in my role as an educator.

My final project for IMAS involved creating a collection plan for the management of their education objects. In the short time of my internship, it would have been impossible for me

to inventory a large collection and catalog each item according to standards. Instead, I opted to create a collections manual based on the industry's best practices according to the resources provided to us in our museum studies collection course. I cited the 6th edition of the *Museum Registration Methods*, as well as *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies* published by the American Alliance of Museums. Referring back to my own experience as a curator assistant, I established an intern journal, in which anyone working on the collection must record what they accomplished each day they worked on the collection. This avoids confusion in the future and allows for a detailed record of collection management for interns working on this project. I also implemented the same resources at MOSTHistory, which needed assistance organizing its education collection.

Tuesdays through Thursdays I interned at the Museum of South Texas History, an institution within walking distance of the University of Texas Rio-Grande Valley. I connected with René Ballesteros, the Community Engagement Officer, who referred me to Dr. Debora Arce, the Education Program Coordinator at the time. During my internship, I met with Dr. Arce to discuss which areas would benefit from my assistance. She mentioned that the quarterly docent training was coming up and that she wanted me to observe school tours PreK-2nd grade so that I may create training workshop.

Getting to know the docents was a highlight of my experience at MOSTHistory, many of them parents with children or undergraduates from UTRGV. In a conversation I had with one of the docents, she remarked how she liked working there because she loved learning about her own history. She took great pleasure in teaching her daughter about her family's history as the family had lived along the Rio Grande for several generations. Many of the other docents were history

majors with a variety of talents. One came as far as to make a detailed Lego replica of a historical scene famous in our region.

During my observations of the school tours, I noticed that the docents had difficulty communicating complex historical themes to young children while maintaining their attention. Having taught young learners in the past, I was able to offer them some advice that will be helpful for them in the future. The workshop I gave on the 2nd of August was entitled “Engaging Children in the Museum: Tours for Young Learners” and covered topics such as the characteristics and development of children, identifying common problems during tours, and practical tips I gained after teaching preschool for five years. We ended our workshop with an idea-sharing activity in which the docents shared their best tips and tricks. I received very positive feedback afterward and saw many of the ideas that they shared implemented.

MOSTHistory has a seasonal educational program called Summer Saturdays in which the docents dress up as historical characters fitting the eras of various exhibits. I chose to be a laundress, a role that I was quite familiar with from my work facilitating pioneer-era programming at Maybon's historic village. One grandmother exclaimed, “This is what I had to do growing up!” as her children learned to use a washboard and hang their clothes with wooden clothes pins. During the facilitation of this activity, I reflected upon the power of objects, their history, and the connections they can form between generations.

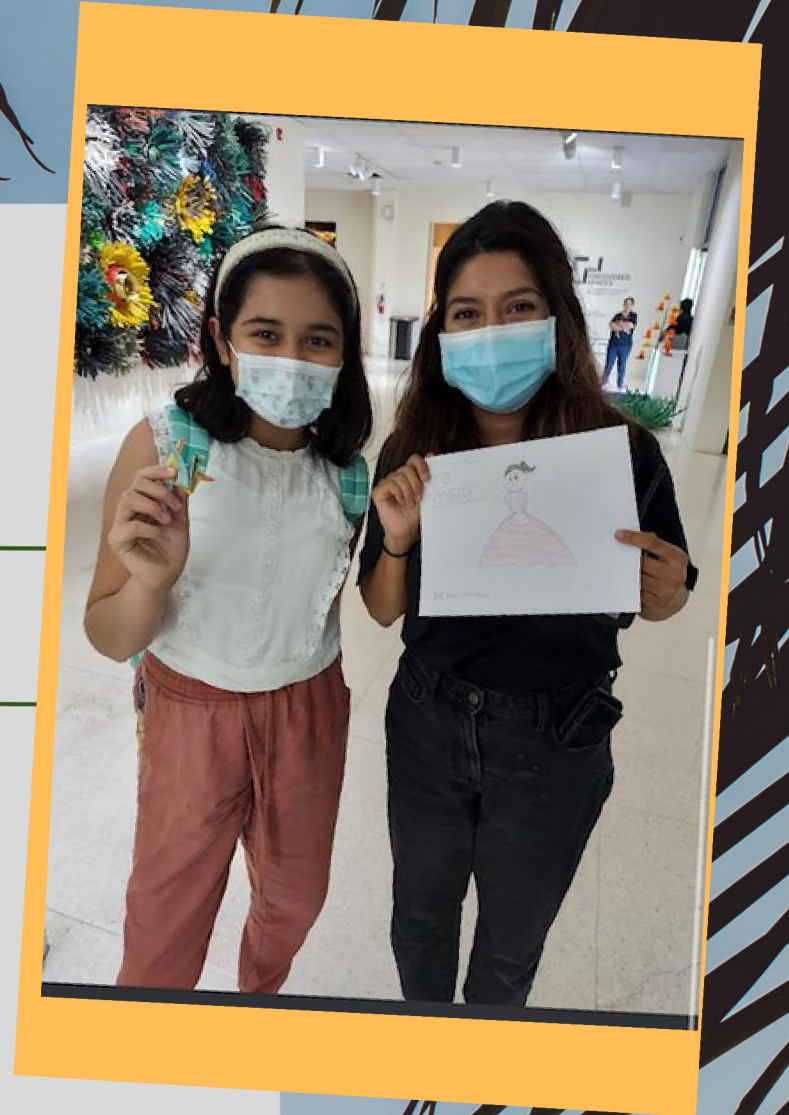
My time at both institutions was one that I will cherish for the rest of my career. The professional connections and friendships that I made throughout this time are ones that will always remind me of home. My gratitude extends to those who shared with me their expertise in order for me to continue to pursue a career in this field.





Art, Science, and History:

# A Summer in the Rio Grande Valley





# Agenda

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Demographics of the RGV

Institutional History

Completed Projects/ Programs

Memorable Moments

Challenges

Thank you/ Questions



# Rio Grande Valley



## Population Size

1,368,723.

## Ethnicity

93%

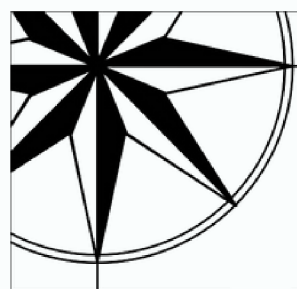
## Poverty Line

1/3rd

## Language Spoken at home

79%





★★★★  
**CHARITY NAVIGATOR**  
Four Star Charity







# Museum of South Texas History's Mission Statement

The mission of Museum of South Texas History is to preserve and present the borderland heritage of South Texas and Northeastern Mexico for all generations.



La misión del Museo de Historia del Sur de Texas es preservar y presentar el patrimonio fronterizo del sur de Texas y el noreste de México para todas las generaciones.



# Museum of South Texas History

## Founded



The Museum has been a part of the community since 1967. It first opened its doors as the Hidalgo County Historical Museum in the old Hidalgo County jail.

## Expansion



In 2003 the Museum completed a \$5.5 million expansion, including a 22,500 square foot wing that includes the Museum Store, Grand Lobby, and permanent exhibits.

## New Director



Dr. Francisco Guajardo became director in 2019. Dr. Guajardo has over 20 years in formal education and work with UTRGV to into a bilingual, bicultural and biliterate institution.



# Summer Projects

Museum of South Texas History




**Made a Tour  
Evaluation Survey**

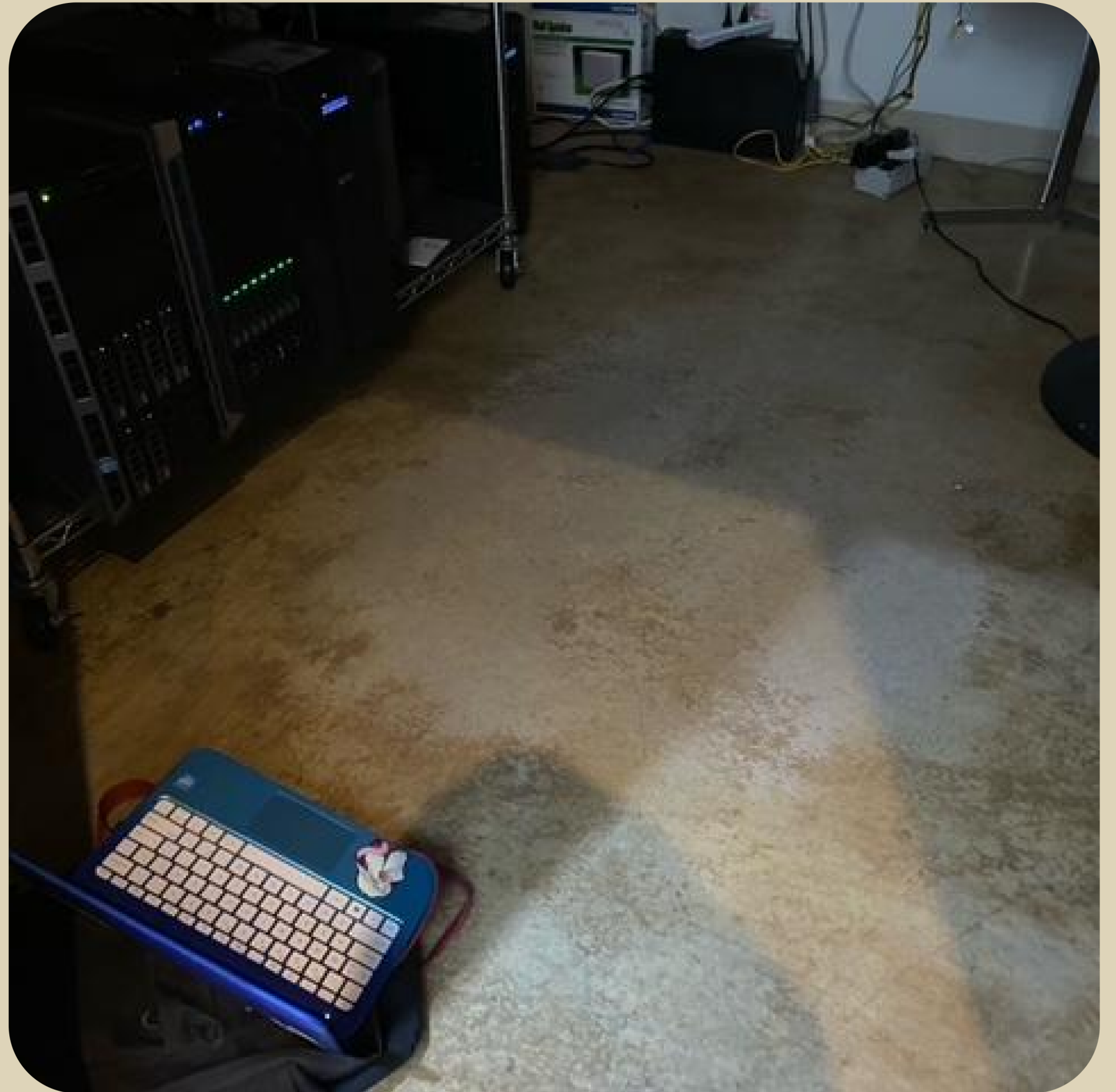
**Created documentation  
for Docent Onboarding/  
Evaluation**

**Procedure Manual for  
the organization of  
the Education  
Collection**

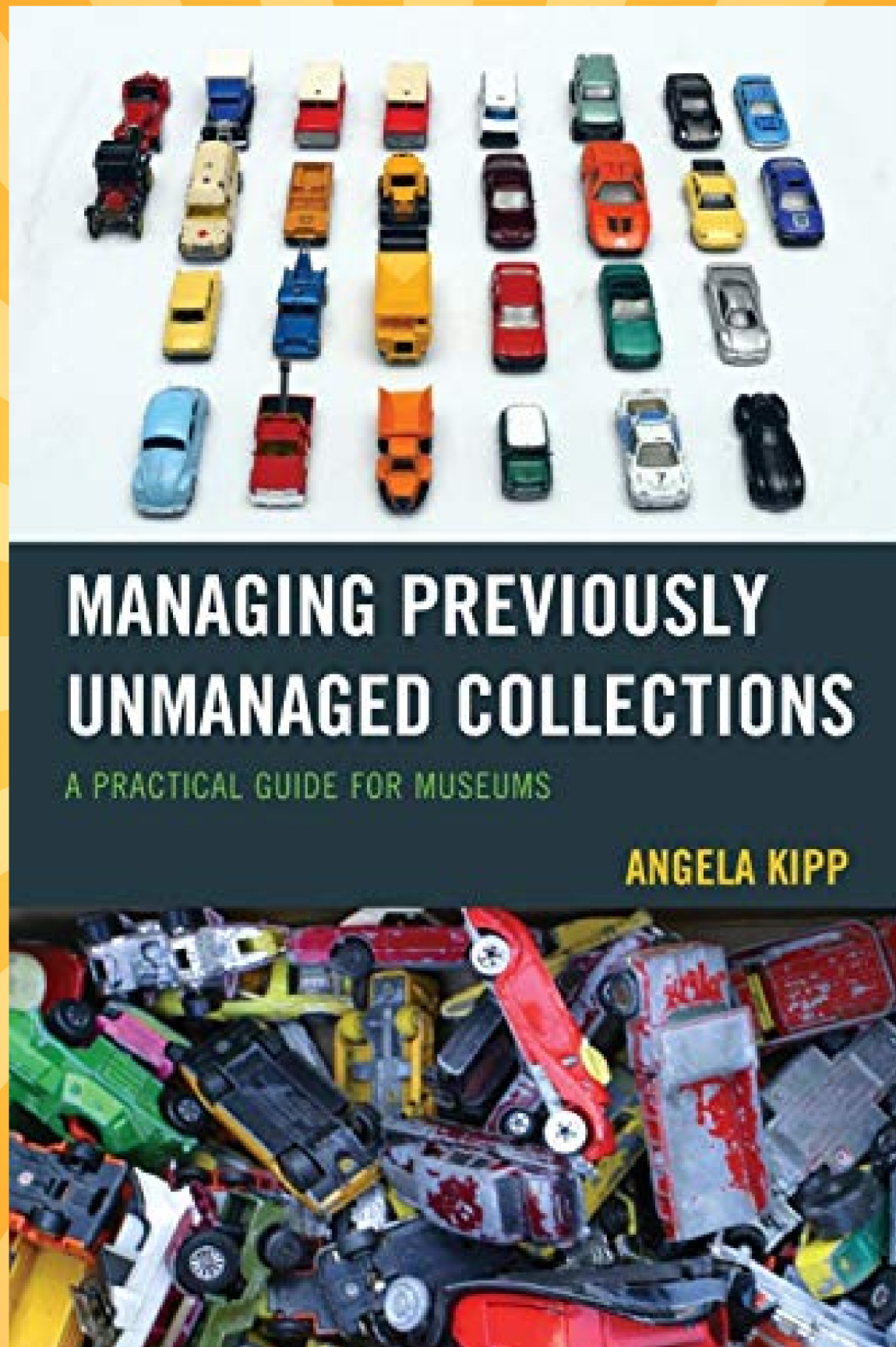
**Facilitated a workshop  
for the  
engagement of children  
pre-k/ K**



# The Office











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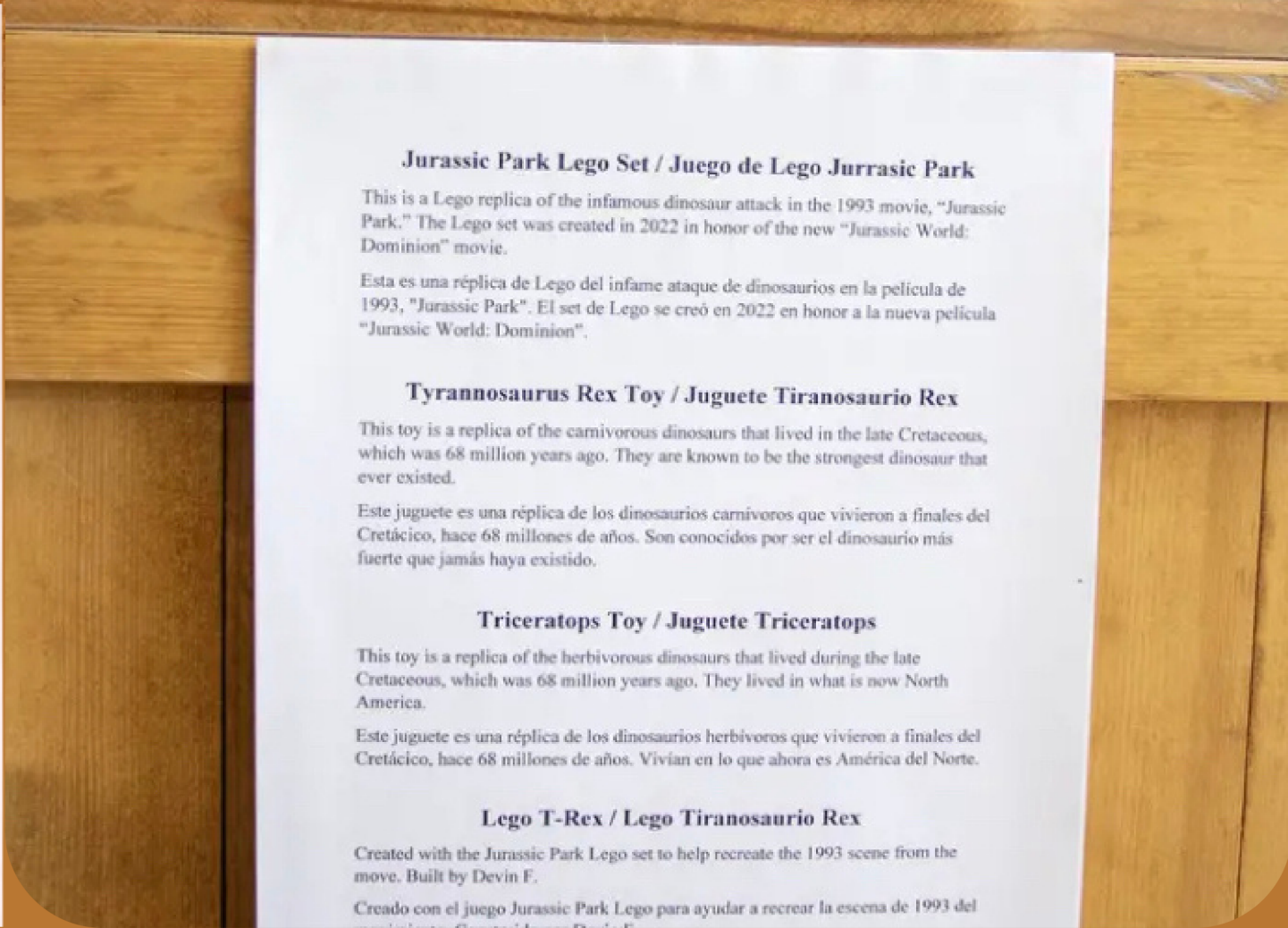
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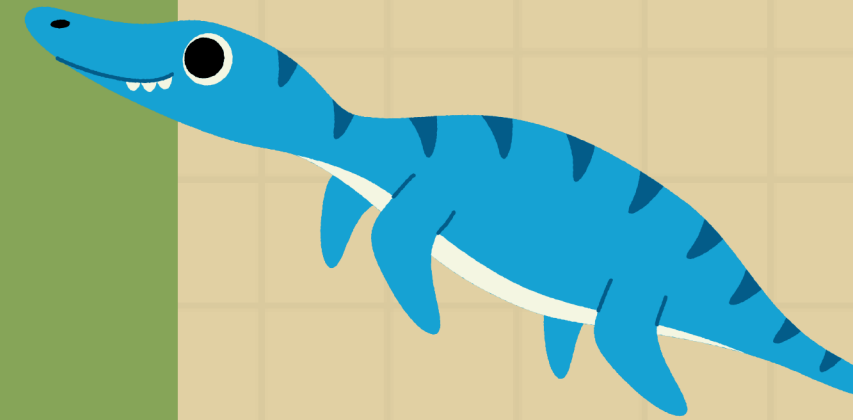






Engaging Children in the  
Museum:

# TOURS FOR PRE-K - 2ND







## THE GREAT HISTORICAL SHOOTOUT

SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 2022



Sporting Clay Shooting Tournament benefitting the preservation services  
& educational programs of the Museum of South Texas History.

**CHECK-IN 8 A.M. | TOURNAMENT 9 A.M.**

**COYOTE ARMS SHOOTING CENTER**

8600 North Big Five Road | Edinburg, Texas 78541

**LUNCH COURTESY OF TRUE TEXAS BBQ BY H-E-B**

# Challenges

This four-person sporting clay shooting competition with fifteen stations and one hundred “birds” is a way to raise funds to support the preservation and education programs and service the museum offers to the public year-round.

Museum Board Chairman Robert McGurk is heading up the Shootout Committee consisting of MOSTHistory board members: Manuel Cantu, Karina Cardoza, Kellye Ortega, Laura G. Ramirez, Daniel Rios, and Judith Solis.





# IMAS

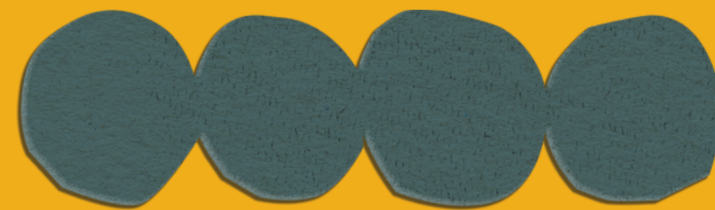
International Museum  
of Art & Science







The International Museum of Art & Science (IMAS) located in the Rio Grande Valley inspires audiences of all ages to explore art and science through its permanent collections, exhibits, programs, and partnerships by empowering learners to discover their interests and pursue their passions.



El Museo Internacional de Arte y Ciencia (IMAS), ubicado en el Valle del Río Grande, inspira al público de todas las edades a explorar el arte y la ciencia a través de sus colecciones permanentes, exhibiciones, programas y asociaciones al capacitar a los visitantes para que descubran sus intereses y persigan sus pasiones.



# IMAS

International Museum  
of Art & Science



## FOUNDED IN 1967

McAllen  
International  
Museum (MIM) and  
granted its 501(c) 3  
nonprofit.

## EXPANSION

In 2000, the museum expanded  
20,000 square feet. In 2003, the  
museum's name was changed to the  
International Museum of Art &  
Science, towards broadening its  
funding and service capabilities.

## NEW DIRECTOR

In 2019, Ann  
Fortescue as the  
institution's new  
President and  
Executive Director.



# RIGOR MORTIS IN THE RGV













“ Yo nunca tuve la oportunidad de hacer algo como esto. Cuando yo era joven tuve que trabajar en el campo.

“ I never got a chance to do to do something like this. When I was young I had to work in the fields.



# Summer Projects

At the International Museum of Art & Science

**Made a Tour  
Evaluation  
Survey**

**Procedural  
Manual for the  
organization of  
the Education  
Collection**

**Did evaluation  
work for the Sea  
Turtle Inc X  
IMAS  
partnership**



¿manos Sucias?  
Por favor lávese  
las manos en  
nuestro lavado.







¡ Gracias! Thank you!

Questions?  
Preguntas?

