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# A Labor of Love, But Labor Nonetheless

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# A Labor of Love, But Labor Nonetheless

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**Keywords** Labor; Unions; Ethics; Museum Workers

**Abstract** Recently, museum workers have been unionizing. This essay explores the radical imaginative potential of museum unionization, asking the question “what if museum workers went on strike for more than just labor rights?” The argument draws connections between labor struggles, issues of decolonization, and inclusion in museums. It proposes that museum workers, at all levels, have both the ability and the responsibility to be concerned with wide-ranging and overarching ethical dilemmas. The paper uses the case studies of the unionization efforts at the Tenement Museum, the New Museum, and the Museum of Contemporary Art to illuminate the different ways that unionizing shifts power dynamics within an institution. It is pulling from the work of Karl Marx and Dr. Ariella Azoulay to ground these potentials in a theoretical framework. Ultimately, it argues that if museum workers want to be a part of large shifts in the cultural sector then they must begin thinking of themselves and their power collectively and seeing the scope of their impact as wide-reaching and expansive.

**About the Author** Yael Horowitz is a Master’s candidate at George Washington University in the Museum Studies program. She holds a BA in African American Studies and Film Studies from Wesleyan University. She has writing published with *The Activist History Review*, in the *Reclaiming Judaism from Zionism* edited collection, and various poetry collections and zines. She is an artist, performer, educator and organizer in the District of Columbia and has been working in museums for 6 years. Her research interests include social justice in museums and exhibiting and performing collective memory.

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*“The worker must have bread, but she must have roses too.” – Rose Schneiderman*

*“I am tired of listening to speakers talk in general terms. What we are here for is to decide whether we shall strike or shall not strike.” – Clara Lemlich*

Over the last few years, museum workers at various institutions have gone through the arduous process of unionizing. This process entails talking to fellow employees about labor practices and conditions at the museum, holding a union-organizing drive to get workers to become a part of the union, and voting to establish the union and have it recognized by the institution, setting up a bargaining unit, and then potentially beginning processes of contract negotiations. Although a union and its bargaining power is certainly an essential component in improving working conditions, the radical potential of unionization and the practice of going on strike remains untapped.

The potential for class solidarity exists when unions form and include employees across different sectors of the museum. When/if strikes are used to confront large ethical dilemmas and when the process of unionization is seen as a process of collective ownership, powerful possibilities are born. A union presence can alter the way museum ethics are approached by shifting who has leverage in making ethical decisions. By examining the newly formed unions at the Tenement Museum and the New Museum, both in New York, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in California, it becomes clear that when museum workers see their labor rights as connected to other ethical issues concerning museums, the radical imagined potential for unionization and the power of the union itself increases. These museums were selected as the case studies because they represent museums that uplift innovation and progressivism in the museum sector. By demonstrating the challenges and potentials of unionizing at institutions that are closer to the cutting edge of museum practice, it becomes clear how arduous this form of institutional change can be.

The International Council of Museums' Code of Ethics explicitly states that the role of ethics in a museum is to create "desirable professional practice."<sup>1</sup> This phrasing indicates that ethics, professionalism, and museum work are interrelated. It is interesting to note that although the code talks about professionalism and the ethics that apply when working in a museum, it says nothing about ethical labor practices. In its section about professional standards, it argues that museum workers "should safeguard the public against illegal or unethical professional conduct."<sup>2</sup> Focusing on the public supports the idea that museums serve the public interest and are sites of public trust. However, the code refuses to acknowledge that museum workers are also people who make up and are a part of the public, providing almost no textual protection for them. Additionally, section 8.2 of the ICOM Code of Ethics explicitly states that museum workers "may properly object to practices that are seen to be damaging to a museum, to the profession, or to matters of professional ethics."<sup>3</sup> This is one of the only sections of the code that delineates the rights of a museum worker to confront unethical practices, but it is vague about what that would be. The section on professional ethics continues to describe all of the ways that collections should be kept safe and undisturbed by conflicts of interest between the institution and those who work for it.

These distinctions in the Code of Ethics limit the scope of how professional ethics can inform labor practices. By failing to address that museum workers also have rights and are part of diverse publics, ICOM uses the Code of Ethics to control productivity and employees, treating them interchangeably – it does not matter what their needs are, as long as the collections are held safely and ethically. Although other institutional ethical codes lightly address working conditions, such as the American Association for State and Local History's recommendation to pay interns, very few explicitly provide details on workers' rights or union rights.<sup>4</sup> The American Alliance of Museums only discusses labor issues when in terms of "loyalty to the mission of the museum...where conflicts of interest arise – actual, potential or perceived – the duty of loyalty must never be compromised."<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on loyalty echoes anti-union discourse and demands self-sacrificial labor from employees.<sup>6</sup>

The limitation and control set by codes of ethics and the professionalization of the museum field relates to Karl Marx's theory on estranged labor.<sup>7</sup> Marx asserted that workers in a capitalist society are estranged from their labor, and that through this process, their labor has become a commodity that is separate from their humanity. While Marx was writing primarily

about manufacturing, his work can help frame jobs in the cultural sector as labor under capitalism; the commodities being produced by museum work — experiences, education, and entertainment — are not necessarily physical ones but are commodities, nonetheless. He explained, “labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a commodity.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the code of ethics published by the ICOM, AASLH, or AAM do not address the potential ethical needs of the individual museum workers. It divorces personal ethics from the ethics required by the museum itself. These codes of ethics view individual labor as “*something alien, as a power independent of the producer.*”<sup>9</sup> This depersonalization for the sake of professionalism limits the investment that all museum workers might have in the ethics of the institution.

Alienation makes working at a museum “just another job.” Paul Thistle characterized this form of alienation by pointing to the high turnover rates in museums (37% of cultural/non-profit workers between ages 18-34 report thinking about leaving their jobs within a two year time period) and the general anecdotal trends of burn-out and task saturation.<sup>10</sup> While this statistic is about the same for this age group across the board, if museums aim to be sites of social change (more so than other businesses or workforces) then the internal institutional dynamics must be taken into account.<sup>11</sup> The process of unionization and other forms of collaboration allow museum workers to access a less alienated space. However, when unions are formed to only address one subset of ethical issues or working conditions, they lose some of their potential power.

An organizing body called #MuseumWorkersSpeak attempts to address a gap in museum ethics. Their mission is to interrogate “the relationship between museums’ stated commitments to social value and their internal labor practices.”<sup>12</sup> As evidenced by the ICOM Code of Ethics and its alienation of workers from their labor, “many museums have a stated commitment to acting as agents of social change, but [there is] an inconsistency between this mission and museums’ internal labor practices.”<sup>13</sup> If museums began instituting and uplifting just labor practices, as pushed to do so by the unions, perhaps it would serve as a model for the larger art and non-profit sector and the museums themselves would be sites of change.

After a rogue session jumpstarted the organizing process, Alyssa Greenberg and Nina Peleaz, two of the founders of #MuseumWorkersSpeak, wrote a blog post clearly outlining the problem – a silence and taboo around discussing working conditions and those conditions themselves. This problem is reflected as well in the swell of support for projects like Art + Museum Transparency, a spreadsheet where museum workers can anonymously share job information that had over 3,000 entries by early 2020.<sup>14</sup> In the post, Greenberg and Peleaz wrote about how, in order for things to change, “staff working at all levels and in all museum departments [must] expand their consciousness of how their choices impact museum working conditions.”<sup>15</sup> This call is quite similar to discourse around forming a union and the desire and impulses behind that process.

Although creating channels of communication between museum professionals and starting essential dialogues is a powerful act of organizing, unionization creates even more specific, directed, and leverageable avenues for conversations. Unionization is an attempt to bridge the ethical inconsistencies. Each process of unionization share things in common, regardless of time, place, or institution. A statement released by workers at the Museum of Contemporary



Art in Los Angeles (MOCA) declared, “that in order for the museum to realize its core value as a civic institution, the well-being of its workers needs to be considered among its chief concerns.”<sup>16</sup> This language strongly echoes the language distributed by #MuseumWorkersSpeak, drawing parallels between the public-facing mission of the museum and its internal structure and dynamics.

This parallel is even more poignant alongside the fact that MOCA transitioned to free general admission in January 2020. The wage for a gallery attendant in 2019 was \$13.75 while the living wage in Los Angeles for one person with no dependents was \$14.83.<sup>17</sup> The MOCA Union was formed in response, in order to address “low wages, lack of benefits, schedule instability and high turnover.”<sup>18</sup> While the institution’s change to a free admission policy is a powerful statement and action in terms of making the museum more economically accessible to the public, it highlights the irony of the bad working conditions and poor wages it continues to pay its staff. It took the leadership of the museum two weeks to officially recognize the union. When they finally did, the director of the museum, Klaus Biesenbach, stated that they were considering the “staff’s initiative through the lens of MOCA’s vision of being a civic-minded institution.”<sup>19</sup> This nod to the core mission of the museum demonstrates that establishing a union can be a fundamental step towards getting the institution to better align with its values. A union not only makes it possible to negotiate working conditions and have leverage while doing so, but the union also can improve the museum’s ability to be truly civic-minded and act as a vehicle for social change by making it more consistent and accountable.



Figure 1: Tenement Museum Union graphic, designed by @melevado.

Similarly, the union at the Tenement Museum in New York City highlighted how the museum’s mission and content about working class immigrants was misaligned with current labor issues. In the workers’ campaign to unionize, the educators used the stories and tour content that they share with the public every day to create content and context for the campaign. Most recently, in response to an email sent out by museum management, the union posted a picture on their Instagram of Clara Lemlich. Lemlich was a union organizer in the Lower East Side and her story is discussed on the tour about sweatshop workers. The post and the picture asked the question, “What would Clara have said?” when faced with divisive emails about the union.<sup>20</sup> In the original push to establish a union, Tenement Museum workers referenced the historical stories tour content in order to justify and support a union. Nicole Daniels, one of the lead organizers of the union drive, explained:

*“At the Tenement Museum we tell the stories of workers who were engaged in many cases in labor struggles. And some people have been worried that this is becoming the narrative, like, “Oh the Tenement Museum forms a union, how ironic.” While we find the family stories we tell to be very powerful and empowering, we don’t want that to be the only lens that our unionization effort is seen through.”<sup>21</sup>*

Daniels highlighted an important tension in the drive for unionization at the Tenement Museum, which occurred primarily in April 2019. Unionizing resonates with the content and the mission of the museum, but unionizing workers cannot be reduced to being only historically resonant; that association minimizes some of its contemporary significance. Organizing museum unions in this day and age creates pathways for solidarity between different museum unions, regardless of institutional type. In the same interview, Daniels affirmed that “organizing in cultural institutions has to look radically different than organizing in other environments, especially when you do like your work.”<sup>22</sup> The process of organizing within cultural institutions specifically must consider the ways that museums approach public ethics, and create mission-driven educational content, could support internal ethics.

Per Marx’s theory, Daniels also underlines how museum workers are estranged from their product. By discussing unionization, more space was created to examine and unravel complex worker-labor dynamics. Unionization is also a process of contending with the institutional hierarchies and power dynamics between distinct departments and types of workers (i.e. curators and visitor engagement staff) within the museum. People are estranged from their work in different ways depending on their role and social positioning within the museum, as well as within the larger socio-economic sphere. It is important to reckon with institutional power and hierarchy; it is also important to not do it alone. For instance, during their unionization efforts, workers at the Tenement Museum communicated with and learned from the experiences of MoMA union members and New Museum employees who were pushing to unionize.

The union at The New Museum in New York City, New York formed in January of 2019. The New Museum is a “leading destination for new art and new ideas,” which ideally would make them an ideal home for new labor practices.<sup>23</sup> However, soon after the union formed, the union was engaged in fierce contract negotiations with the institution. They joined UAW Local 2110, the same union that included the Tenement Museum Union, MoMA Union, The Bronx Museum of the Arts Union, and the New-York Historical Society Union. This consolidation of unions offers powerful opportunities for cross-institutional conversation, solidarity, and action.

Like the Tenement Museum, The New Museum used a similar tactic in their efforts to unionize by pulling messaging and art from their institution’s content. During a protest the union put on while they were undergoing contract negotiations, neon buttons with the phrase “Hell, Yes! Union Rights” were handed out to attendees. The phrase “Hell, Yes! Union Rights” referenced a rainbow-colored sculpture by Ugo Rondinone that was displayed on the museum’s façade from 2007 to 2010.<sup>24</sup> Referencing significant pieces in the museum’s collection helped the union connect their struggle directly to the institution. What would change if art critics and museum goers looked at museums’ pamphlets, advertisements, or comments as institutional

commentary or critique? Perhaps the drive for a union would positively augment and supplement a museum-goer's experience. When describing how unions change work environments, Dana Kopel, a New Museum employee, explained that while a union certainly helps with better working conditions and benefits "it also means having a voice in the place you work."<sup>25</sup> Once a union is formed, it is up to the workers to determine to what extent and in what ways they will use that voice.



Figure 2: "Hell, Yes!" Local 2110 UAW union pins, courtesy of the author.

Each case of unionization raises questions about who has a voice in the museum, who makes up the museum, who makes executive decisions, who makes intellectual choices, and who is essential for the day to day running of the museum. All of these questions involve the fundamental consideration of who has power within and over the institution. For instance, both the Tenement Museum Union and the New Museum Union exclude custodial staff or security guards. Similarly, the MOCA Union talks have been conducted primarily by "gallery assistants and guest-facing roles."<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the Tenement Museum Union took a different approach, including visitor service associates and museum shop workers, which is powerful evidence for including and reimagining workers in cultural institutions.

Distinctions based on role and institutional department bring up complicated questions about who is responsible for ensuring the museum is acting ethically and who has the authority to make those choices. Lower-level museum workers are often at risk of losing their jobs because of precarious employment conditions such as drastic budget cuts, as well as temporary, contingent, or contracted employment status. By choosing to unionize, these workers are able to increase their authority and create collective bargaining units to add new and different perspectives to the decision-making process while mitigating some level of risk. Input from different departments on ethical matters could increase the ability of a museum to be more inclusive and accessible because the perspectives of those who physically make the museum run are often not explicitly considered. Extending a union's reach beyond labor issues and including new and different perspectives in union and museum conversations could have powerful and positive implications for the ethical standing of a museum. These expansions help radically reimagine the potential of museums. They create a vision of



museums that could be inclusive centers for community and justice that engage in education and social change.

The process of radical imagination, the ability to imagine a fundamentally changed world or institution, cannot be limited to a union drive for better working conditions. Labor rights and working conditions are also social justice issues. Museums often address and generate conversations about other social justice issues outside of the institution, so there is a precedent and framework that can be used to apply those processes inwardly. The working conditions in museums are similar to other social justice issues; in fact, they are fractals of each other. As noted in the mission of Museum Workers Speak, “a discussion about museum labor practices is inevitably a discussion about racism, sexism, misogyny, elitism, and various other social inequalities.”<sup>27</sup> In her potent journal article, Professor Ariella Aïsha Azoulay expands upon ideas about unions and microcosms. She recounts that museum workers have conceptualized striking not as “the right to protest against oppression, but rather as an opportunity to care for a shared world.”<sup>28</sup> In doing so, Azoulay believes that museum workers should be able to see their work not just as a job but also “as a worldly activity, a mode of engaging with the world that seeks to impact it while being ready to be impacted in return.”<sup>29</sup>

This view of museum labor increases the scope of the capabilities and responsibilities of museum workers. Without a union promoting better working conditions, workers could be unfairly asked to give more than the responsibilities and duties of their job descriptions demand, setting the stage for high levels of exploitation. In order for this new scope of work to be both possible and ethical, striking would need to be a potential and real option to achieve better working conditions. For example, the New Museum Union voted to strike if an agreement was not reached during contract negotiations in September of 2019 and shortly after that vote, a five-year contract was agreed upon.<sup>30</sup> The duality between changing the scope of responsibilities of lower-level workers to have more autonomy over ethical decisions, and of being careful about how that might increase work-load and shift labor dynamics, is evident. Strikes and unions must then be imagined slightly differently. Azoulay calls for a strike that changes the nature of work itself, that dismantles a sense of alienation from labor and a commodification of objects and artifacts. According to Azoulay, strikes should be:

*“Against the institutionalization of the abyss between people and objects, against the imperial powers that forced people to turn their world-building skills into cheap or slave labor, and their sacred, spiritual, and ecological objects into commodities.”<sup>31</sup>*

But strikes should also be against an unlivable wage, the lack of benefits and job security, the unachievable requirements for entry-level jobs, and all of the other labor conditions that make working in a museum feel untenable and irrational. In part, this occurs in the museum field because of the increased professionalization since the advent of museum studies programs and the history of the sector as a “pink-collar” gendered field, predominately populated by women, which leads to decreased funding and lower salaries across the board.<sup>32</sup> In fact, these reasons for striking are interconnected; they exist as systems of oppression.

As Azoulay asserted, “one should consider the strike a modality of being in the world that takes place precisely by way of renunciation and avoidance” when the work being done is

harmful or not aligned with the values required to create a more just world.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, according to Azoulay's vision, a strike could and should occur not just because of poor working conditions in a museum, but also when workers decide a museum is engaging in unethical activity. Azoulay's visualization drastically expands the scope of a strike and the concerns and engagement of all museum workers. Imagine striking until an object in the collection is repatriated to its country of origin or until more works by women of color are acquired for the collection. These ideas seem farfetched but they provide a bit of hope and a path towards action when museum workers are faced with the enormity of museums' ethical dilemmas and histories of violence. A union has the potential to increase solidarity across different departments. This would invest workers in each other's experiences for the sake of collective bargaining. Any subsequent strike would then have the potential to expand the average museum worker's ability to shape the ethical landscape of a museum.

Organizing a union is a process of intense vulnerability in an already precarious and high-barrier field. Unionizing changes what is at stake. In some ways, the potential to radically imagine more ethical museums is also at stake in these union drives. As Greenberg and Peleaz asserted in their blog post: "We make ourselves vulnerable by speaking out: in the museum field, silence about labor and working conditions is deeply entrenched, and breaking it can damage our professional reputations and even endanger our jobs."<sup>34</sup> Museum workers are willing to make themselves vulnerable in a union drive by deeply relying on each other. The same kind of vulnerability is necessary to radically imagine a different museum. The potential of a union strike also changes the conversations amongst museum workers. The process of forming a union develops the trust, support, and infrastructure necessary to go on strike. In order for a strike to be effective, all staff members must understand the rationale behind the strike and feel secure in the aftermath should they decide to participate.

Museum workers must also have a deep understanding of the risks involved while striking. For example, they must be willing to give up a certain amount of stability in their daily lives. Some individuals may deem these risks too severe to take on. This is especially true when museum workers already need graduate degrees for entry-level jobs, when they could be fired at any moment, and when there is a scarcity mentality about the inability to find sufficient work. For example, the Marciano Art Foundation laid off sixty employees days after the employees announced a drive to unionize.<sup>35</sup> The museum is now permanently closed, evoking questions about how deeply an institution can be shaken by a union drive at a vulnerable moment and how that puts workers' livelihoods at risk. The vulnerability of the institutions and the vulnerability of the low-level employees creates a tense dynamic that makes striking seem extreme. Striking employees must have a level of trust and dedication to the causes they are striking for and to the process of unionization that enabled the strike.

Choosing to strike together over an ethical issue would require demystifying the issue, the museum procedures, and effective museum practices. It would also require that each individual employee feel like they had a personal vested interest and stake in that issue because it would require them to take on a huge amount of risk. In these kinds of radical imaginings, there is no room for inculpability and irresponsibility. A strike would require a conversation between all museum workers: the museum shop attendants, the guides, the security guards, the curators, and the administrators. The conversation would also need to address the unpredictability of museum work, the power dynamics between different

departments, and the level of risk that workers would be willing to take on; in order to adequately unionize, there can be no uncomfortable stone unturned.

The risk involved in museum work has been thrown into sharp relief as the COVID-19 crisis of 2020 has unfolded. Museums have been forced to close their doors to the public and in doing so have laid off and furloughed many employees. The workers who have been hit hardest by those cuts are the front-facing floor staff and lower-level employees, the same people who have the most to gain through unionization. MOCA fired all 97 of their part-time employees and, in response, the recently formed union launched a mutual aid hardship fundraiser for the employees while the museum itself has not done anything equivalent.<sup>36</sup> In a statement to the *LA Times*, Judy Leroy, a part-time gallery attendant at the museum, “raised questions about the \$10-million pledge from MOCA Board of Trustees President Carolyn Powers last May to allow free admission to the museum.”<sup>37</sup> The refusal to keep the part-time, public-facing employees on staff during a pandemic while still having a large endowment points to the priorities of the museum and the reason that unionization efforts were necessary in the first place.

At the Tenement Museum, 13 people lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the museum educators, who are essential for a tour-based museum, were furloughed without pay. Similarly, the Tenement Museum Union set up a mutual aid fund to support the workers because the museum opted not to do so. A part of the fundraising bid from the union explained that members “saw that the Museum had launched a \$250,000 fundraiser for their expenses, but with no mention of sustaining or supporting their staff. The Tenement Museum Board includes multimillionaires; however, the Museum and its Board is asking the public to “save the Museum.”<sup>38</sup> At the MOCA, employees point to the millions of dollars in the institutional coffers that wealthy board members have designated for other purposes, despite the hardships that staff members experience. The New Museum similarly fired 7 people and furloughed another 41 people.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the New Museum is the only one of the three above case studies that had previously agreed upon a union contract with employees; in fact, the museum states that they “have made it a priority to go above and beyond the terms of the union contract to provide all furloughed staffers extended health care at least through June 30.”<sup>40</sup> Regardless, the New Museum Union used social media as a platform, calling for everyone to “question claims of scarcity in the arts where huge endowments, billionaire donors, and outrageous executive salaries abound.”<sup>41</sup> All of these lay-offs and furloughs disproportionately impacted the employees who were also union members because of their position within the museum.

The COVID-19 crisis is revealing to many what those who have been pushing for unions have been saying for a long time— that museums are precarious places to work and need to vastly improve their working conditions. The crisis is also crystalizing what museums choose to prioritize, which is rarely front-line staff and their work. The drive to unionize and the potentials of going on strike attempt to reconcile those power dynamics and force a shift in priorities to make them more equitable and more conducive for social change.

The work that the employees at the New Museum, Tenement Museum, and MOCA have done to unionize their institutions is a huge effort in exerting a degree of control and power over their workplace. The Tenement Museum Union’s desire to be “truthful to the story that [they]

tell, and [to continue] the history of the very people that this museum is founded on” demonstrates that they see themselves as active agents of history.<sup>42</sup> The next step could be expanding those efforts in order to become active agents capable of creating more widespread change in their institution. The New Museum Union’s choice to “invoke the spirit of the museum’s founder...who they said had ‘envisioned an institution that did away with hierarchies’” already envisions the role of the union beyond fairer working conditions stepping towards a more ethical institution.<sup>43</sup> The MOCA Union’s demand that museum leadership “listen to its own workers and hear [their] needs directly,” instead of hiring outside consultants points to an understanding that power of voice and representation matter, both in the galleries and as gallery workers.<sup>44</sup> While the specifics of the working conditions and the demands for each of these unions are unique, the underlying trend of creating a museum work environment that is more aligned with the museum’s public mission and values is present in all three cases.

It is notable that all of these examples are from newer, more progressive museums. The foundation and content that they pull from, as well as their identity as places for new and innovative ideas, lend them to unionizing a bit more easily than much larger institutions that have greater pressures from the government or from donors and board members. Still, their success at organizing as a cultural institution and their initiative to envision a different reality bodes well for the future radical imagination of museums. Resources are starting to be compiled in the sector about the process of unionization by Art + Museum Transparency.<sup>45</sup> As these practices spread more widely into the museum world there will be more resources available to museum workers, as well as the potential to take greater risks, because there will be more widespread knowledge and support. The structure needed to imagine going on strike “against the very logic of the capital embodied in museums” is slowly being built.<sup>46</sup> In order to realize and take advantage of this potential, museum employees must see themselves and their work as directly connected to legacies of liberation and oppression, legacies of the institutions that they work for, and the power to enact radical change.

Museums would cease functioning if the workers stopped working. An organizer at MOCA stated that she was “looking for more investment from MOCA into the workers so we can invest more in the public’s experience of art.”<sup>47</sup> A museum’s ability to serve in the public trust is directly and deeply connected to the institution’s ability to maintain ethical working conditions. Rethinking the origins of museum ethics helps reveal and challenge the “political economy [that] conceals the [alienation] inherent in the nature of labor” by actually “considering the direct relationship between the worker and production,” between the museum employee and the ethics.<sup>48</sup> Expanding our conception of a strike, of the role of museum workers in changing the sector, and of the power of unions can help “museums fulfill their highest potential as protectors and promoters of the public good.”<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, in order for museums to actually change- to be socially, economically and politically just- each museum worker, individually and as a part of collective bargaining units, must be able to imagine “striking until their work could help repair the world.”<sup>50</sup>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Tenement Museum Union graphic, designed by @melevado.

Figure 2: “Hell, Yes!” Local 2110 UAW union pins, courtesy of the author.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, International Council of Museums, 2017, Preamble. <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> *ICOM Code of Ethics*, 41.

<sup>3</sup> *ICOM Code of Ethics*, 42.

<sup>4</sup> "AASLH Statement of Standards and Ethics," American Association for State and Local History, 2018, 4.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Paul Thistle, "New Research in Museum Retention," Solving Task Saturation for Museum Workers, September 2016, <https://solvetasksaturation.wordpress.com/2016/09/22/new-research-on-retention-of-museum-workers/>.

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<sup>12</sup> "Museum Workers Speak," accessed November 23, 2019, <https://museumworkersspeak.weebly.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> "Art/Museum Transparency," Google Sheets, accessed April 13, 2020, [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14\\_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/edit?usp=sharing).

<sup>15</sup> Alyssa Greenberg and Nina Peleaz, "Unsafe Ideas: Building Museum Worker Solidarity through Social Justice," American Alliance of Museums, June 2, 2015, <https://www.aam-us.org/2015/06/02/unsafe-ideas-building-museum-worker-solidarity-for-social-justice/>.

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