

ELIF M. GOKCIGDEM

Dr. Elif M. Gokcigdem, Ph.D. is a thought leader, historian of Islamic art, and a museum scholar who is committed to creating fertile grounds of empathy through informal learning platforms. She is the founder of Empathy-Building Through Museums Initiative which aims to transform museums into platforms that inspire positive behavior change, caring mindsets, and compassionate worldviews that value all of humanity and the planet. She is the author and editor of two visionary books on the subject: *Fostering Empathy Through Museums* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), and *Designing for Empathy: Perspectives on the Museum Experience* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). *Fostering Empathy Through Museums* has been recognized as a reference book by the American Alliance of Museums' (AAM) *TrendsWatch 2017*. Dr. Gokcigdem co-chaired and curated the world's first summit on "Fostering Universal Ethics and Compassion Through Museums" with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama (Dharamsala, India, October 2018). Dr. Gokcigdem is a Fellow at the World Innovation Organization (WIO) by the World Summit on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (WSIE), and an Advisor to the following initiatives: Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia)'s Center for Empathy and Visual Arts (CEVA), the Empathy Project by the Woodland Park Zoo, the Seattle Aquarium and Point Defiance Zoo, and (An)other AI. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. in Art History from the Istanbul Technical University and completed her Museum Studies graduate certification program at The George Washington University. She can be reached via her website at: www.elifgokcigdem.com.

The role of arts centers in fostering creative imagination and empathy

Empathy and creative imagination, which are inherent to arts, are essential to solving the increasingly complex problems of our humanity and the planet. They are also at the heart of positive behavior change as well as how we make meaning, and find purpose in life through acts of compassion and altruism. By providing a safe space for dialogue, experiential learning, storytelling, awe and wonder, and contemplation, arts centers and museums are uniquely equipped to empower individuals to discover, ignite, and exercise their creative imagination and empathy towards positive personal, environmental and societal progress. This presentation will focus on a new conceptual framework titled "Designing for Empathy," which proposes a series of design elements for those institutions that are willing to go beyond a collection-centric existence towards an exploration of how resources of an arts institution could be repurposed and utilized towards institutional, societal, and environmental progress through an investment in empathy-building in individuals, institutions, and society.