

I'm honored to share this day with all of you, whose scholarly, creative, and personal convictions give body to the narratives that shape our institutional histories. I've been asked to reflect on the recent —dare I say “recycled” — controversy surrounding Sheryl Sandberg's book “Lean In” which I confess is not high on my reading list. I suspect the reviewer who called it a “sort of feminist manifesto” got it right and I have been a proud feminist for well over 40 years. For me, the question isn't whether or not we can have it all, but how we can expand the pool of those who have the luxury of asking for what they want. A review of Sandberg's book included the outcome of a study of 55 cultures in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* which found, “gender difference may be a phenomenon not of oppression, but rather of social well-being.” So, since we know there is an increasing divide between those who enjoy the comforts necessary to think about an aspirational future and those who are scraping by, it's clear our issues as women are part of a larger set of concerns and we can't be “liberated” until those issues of social justice and equality are addressed.

But we can make a difference every day. Within our museums and with each other, we can set aside territorial imperatives and old ideas about hierarchy and power. For me power mandates that we seize a different sort of responsibility: one that embraces change and mutation, resists fixed identities, rejects one authorial representation of quality and significance and replaces nostalgic and dangerous concepts of wholeness with an acceptance of the fricative possibilities of multiplicity. I know that's a mouthful but I hope it suggests a renewed sense of intellectual freedom --- of opening ourselves and our work to new ideas, new voices, new methods, and new criteria.

Why am I standing at the podium? You might want to ask my mom who is here today and, at 85, is writing her second book while running a department called Solutions at Bergdorf's. Yes, that is a commercial plug and, no, she did not dress me today. By the way, her mother's obituary at 94 read, “Sitting behind the cash register just inside the wide window of her famous bookstore, a cigarette dangling from her mouth, she was a master at luring in customers with simple charm and a few forceful words.” Growing up in a household of privilege in this city, I came to MoMA as a 12 year old after classes at the Art Students League. I lived down the street from the Guggenheim, where today Alexandra Monroe's Gutai exhibition reminds me of the sheer pleasure we can find in new histories. Over a lifetime, some of my most intimate and stirring experiences have occurred in museums. I still remember walking barefoot as a teenager on the cold marble floors of the Met and

getting lost amid the Egyptian architecture. I confess I ran my fingers across the shallow stone carvings, unable to quite fathom how a chunk of history, more than 2,400 years old, could feel so immediate. I also recall getting lost amid cases of silver and Sèvres, wondering if the velvet sleeves of royalty dragged through their gravy. These galleries made time travel possible.

I was reminded of this when, in 1985, the Japan Foundation invited me to immerse myself in the culture of that country. Over-stimulated and unable to sleep I would lie in bed trying to make sense of everything I smelled—salty—or touched—silken—or ate—slippery, and saw---a perspective that didn't fall back in space. I asked myself one question after another while free-associating my way to an answer that, unbeknownst to me, was significantly shaped by my own version of the truth. For example, when I wondered why cartoon imagery dominated the visual environment---from the profusion of signs to the sexually explicit comic books pored over by men on the subway---I imagined this love of the cartoon was due to their resemblance to the ideograms of the Japanese language.

This analysis, of course, represents a perfect example of the ignorance many of us rather innocently bring to cross-cultural experiences. Since I couldn't read the kanji---the characters of the logographic Japanese system of writing---they appeared to be abstracted pictures and, consequently, all too easily linked to the distilled imagery of the cartoons that saturated my vision. When I began to test my theory on a few experts, they were kind enough not to laugh. I learned my instincts were OK but my information was limited: they said it was possible to trace the Japanese interest in cartoons to the print culture that emerged in the second half of the 17th century with the beginnings of ukiyo-e images of courtesans, famous Kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers. Affordable because they were mass-produced, such prints gradually began, with the introduction of foreign merchants in the mid-18th century, to reflect imports from the West, such as 3-point perspective, photography, and new dyes. Curiously, as ukiyo-e prints faded from fashion in Japan with the advent of the Meiji restoration, their influence made a profound impact on Europeans such as Degas and Manet. What a journey that misunderstanding mapped out for me!

I am sharing it to expose two lessons that shaped both my personal and private life. One has to do with expertise; we all need to be aware that the criteria we employ are necessarily more promiscuous than many might acknowledge. I believe the most influential authority we possess is knowing where our expertise ends. Coupled with enough confidence to admit our lack of certainty in

a way that allows someone else to feel both powerful and helpful, this alleged lack can become a positive force for engaging others. Since my success is dependent---as yours is as well---on others' ability to translate words---of mission or purpose---into action, I work hard to encourage folks to do more than they think they are capable of, to dare to be inventive, to care deeply. Just before I left Walker where I had been director for 16 years, a staff member said, "for many of us our ability to be creative has been part of our compensation; thank you for giving us that." It was one of my proudest curatorial moments.

The other lesson I hope my Japanese story reveals is the flipside of the first. It has to do with learning to trust one's own methodologies and qualities. Sometimes it's necessary and even wise to embrace that trust quietly, to not trumpet difference. It makes me sad that so many of the ways women tend to instinctively lead---looking for shared values, seeking to help others excel, remembering the powers of the emotional realm, or figuring out what psychological needs are at play---aren't validated until the Harvard Business School gives them credence, which it increasingly has. I believe it is more difficult for women to trust their methods and themselves because the canon---whether it be the history of art or of good business practices or effective health-care measures---has been written and promulgated by others, by men. For centuries their truths were supposed to be universal. And, while some of their truths are mine, women also are beginning to create alternatives, overlays, expansions to the rules.

So having been asked to talk about feminism, I have told you about a life instead. For many of us there isn't much separation between our professional and private lives anyway. Our task in organizing objects is to make sense of a life, another's as well as our own. When Sue Graze and I organized Elizabeth Murray's first survey, seeing how Elizabeth struggled but managed to love both her studio and her nursery gave me an inkling that I, too, might be able to enjoy motherhood in tandem with an ambitious work life. Whenever I'm feeling a bit too proud of my own achievements, I remember my son Henry asking, "Mom, why can't you be the director of a good museum, like the science museum?" When I worked with Neal Benezra for six years on the Bruce Nauman retrospective, I learned how to take a different set of risks---how the artist's own ability to risk everything demanded we curators did, too. So when I left Walker knowing it was time to turn it over to someone who answered "yes" more often than I did, it felt as if I were jumping into Yves Klein's

void. Happily, like Klein, my landing was soft and I am immensely happy to be working with the extraordinary MoMA family. I am very honored to be here on the day when we all are honoring MoMA trustee Patty Cisneros whose friendship and knowledge has expanded my world immeasurably. She, like the 3 women who founded MoMA and Aggie Gund who was an impressive MoMA president, believes art challenges and comforts, tells remarkable stories of human and collective drama, and makes a difference regardless of gender or economics. I am here today for them and because of them. Many thanks.