



# The Museum of the African Diaspora “Builds a Bigger Pool” for its Emerging Artists Program Applicants with SlideRoom

## The Challenge

### Streamlining for Success

As one of the only museums in the world to shine a light on the physical movement throughout history of Africans and their descendants around the world, San Francisco’s Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) fills a unique and important cultural need.

Located in the Bay Area’s vibrant Yerba Buena arts district, part of MoAD’s self-proclaimed mission is to take three distinct but complimentary views of — and approaches to — museum exhibition: international, national, and hyperlocal. It does this with a commitment to thoughtful and unique exhibition programming.

To embody these three views, Smithsonian affiliate MoAD delivers several signature programs. These include its Emerging Artists Program (EAP), which provides the hyperlocal angle for MoAD. EAP provides novel opportunities for exposure for and to artists right in the Greater San Francisco Bay area.

**“We wanted a means of streamlining our application-review process — that was really why we came to SlideRoom.”**



**Elena Gross**  
*Director of Exhibitions  
and Curatorial Affairs*

**MoAD**  
Smithsonian Affiliate



# Simplifying to Set the Scene for Scalability

The Emerging Artists Program enables the museum to offer solo exhibition opportunities to local artists who self-identify as “emerging.” Artists applying to the program are diverse, representing a wide range of backgrounds, practices and experience levels.

“We needed a proposal system that enables artists to submit exhibition proposals, and then through a jurying process of local arts professionals, or curators, or other artists, to identify between three and five of that year’s most interesting, dynamic, or successful artists within that applicant pool,” said Elena Gross, Director of Exhibitions and Curatorial Affairs at MoAD.

“When you get so many submissions and it takes hours and hours of your time to review them, SlideRoom helps to make the process go a lot quicker.”

Elena Gross

“In order to make this application-based process work, we needed a platform that was going to allow for us to receive proposals, allow for tailoring judging criteria to fit our needs within the museum space, and within exhibition programming,” Gross continued. “And we needed something that was going to be easily accessible for a variety of different types of artists who would be using it.”

The Emerging Artists Program receives many applications for its local scale, according to Gross. As the program has grown and its application pool has increased, the rudimentary email-based system for submission that it had used to launch EAP applications and review simply could not keep up. In 2018, when Emerging Artists was three years old, MoAD made the switch to SlideRoom and never looked back.

“As the program grows, you need something a little more with a little more heft,” Gross advised. She has used a number of jurying platforms in her own professional experience and has observed firsthand how strongly that platform choice impacts jurors’ day-to-day work. Tasked with providing thorough and thoughtful review on deadline for what can be a high volume of applicants, Gross noted how quickly any system inefficiencies can become review roadblocks.

“When you get so many submissions and it takes hours and hours of your time to review them, SlideRoom helps to make the process go a lot quicker,” Gross said. “That’s something that we jurors definitely appreciate.”

Gross said she also appreciates the quality of the review process, and the insights and results that it yields. “As a SlideRoom juror myself, we get the ability to be a little more intentional and more thoughtful in the way that we’re reviewing.”



# Results

With SlideRoom, the Museum of the African Diaspora found:

**The ability to accommodate and drive program growth** with easy scaling of submission and review

**A streamlined and more universally accessible application process** for artist applicants that removes barriers to maximize participation

**Platform customization** that allows for both formalized structure and flexibility for better jurying input

**Next-level ease of use for reviewers** that fosters communication and collaboration

**Convenient access to centralized applicant data** for future engagement and outreach





Reaching (and Helping) More Emerging Artists

With growth as the top-level goal for MoAD’s Emerging Artists program, the museum has been hitting the mark with an increase in applicants since adopting SlideRoom. **Gross reports that total Emerging Artists applications received grew by 50% from the time that MoAD started using SlideRoom until COVID began.**

(Out of an abundance of caution, MoAD made the unusual decision to close its physical space from the start of COVID in March 2020 until October 2021. Its Emerging Artists Program was put on hold during this extended physical closure to maintain the highest program quality and best outcomes both for its artists and consumers.)

**“Our Emerging Artists Program immediately experienced an increase of 50% more applicants with the addition of SlideRoom.”**

Elena Gross

Saving More Applications with Friendly Reminders

Gross credits the quality of the SlideRoom-fueled EAP applicant experience as an important facet of the museum’s ability to attract and retain top talent.

“The platform is very straightforward in terms of exactly what is being asked of candidates for this application, and then also the ability to save and return later, and the prompts,” she advised.

“There have been a few applicants who have actually thanked us for the reminder to complete and submit their application via the SlideRoom prompt,” Gross added. “They thought they had submitted their application and were grateful that they were still able to go back into their SlideRoom account to finish and submit it on time.”

Community-Building – Even During COVID Closure

Armed with a convenient cloud-based contact database, thanks to SlideRoom, MoAD has been able to stay connected to all its EAP applicants to date, to send them information about other artist opportunities and grants.

During COVID, and in service to local artists, this capability became especially important as the museum leveraged this SlideRoom data for important outreach. In those months when the pandemic created additional challenges and some hardships for so many artists, MoAD achieved a newfound goal of providing ad hoc assistance by disseminating information on much-needed relief grants for artists.



**“The thing that was really helpful about SlideRoom is that we do get far more functionality.”**

Elena Gross

Geared for Greater Growth

Even beyond widening and deepening the applicant pool with each cycle, MoAD has more recently set its sights on even bigger goals for the Emerging Artists Program: to scale it up further to include artists throughout the entire State of California.

“Reaching as many artists as we can is definitely a goal,” Gross shared.

In the same breath, she rattled off a list of the museum’s “quality assurance” requirements for program expansion to all of California. It’s clear that MoAD’s leadership will not move forward to expand EAP or other programs unless it can continue to maintain the highest standards.

These internal requirements for state-level growth include keeping the Emerging Artists Program sustainable, equitable and accessible to the many diverse types of artists who may be in distinct stages of their career.

They also include supporting EAP’s artist roster by always pushing for greater benefits for its winners, from maximizing the available honoraria to maximizing their visibility in the museum’s space and the larger community.

And added growth of the museum calls for continued focus on creating an applicant experience that will always “elicit excitement from participants,” according to Gross.



She feels that SlideRoom delivers on this goal for the organization and will be a key part of expanding the Emerging Artists Program to an even larger size. Perhaps thanks to the lessons of COVID, MoAD EAP reviewers will have the option of fully remote jurying moving forward, Gross confided. This will make a substantial aspect of the typical scaling logistics from hyperlocal to statewide completely seamless.

A Long-Awaited Reopening and Open Call

When the Museum of the African Diaspora finally reopens in person in October 2021 for the first time in over 19 months, Gross’ team will be overjoyed to finally show its two pre-pandemic Emerging Artists Program winners. The museum will restart the next EAP cycle with the continued support of SlideRoom, ready and able to welcome a potential surge in artist applicants. This cultural jewel will also continue the work of strategically expanding its vision — without compromise — to amplify its important diaspora stories and further its historic legacy.

**“SlideRoom helps us capture that added thing that we didn’t know we were looking for. It really is a benefit to helping us expand the artists that we’re aware of, and what’s possible within our programming.”**

Elena Gross



## About the Museum of the African Diaspora

The Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD), a contemporary art museum and Smithsonian affiliate, celebrates Black cultures, ignites challenging conversations and inspires learning through the global lens of the African Diaspora.

First opened in 2005, San Francisco-based MoAD is uniquely positioned as one of the few museums in the world focused exclusively on African Diaspora culture and on presenting the rich cultural heritage of the people of Africa and of African descendant cultures across the globe.

MoAD is a thriving fine-arts institution dedicated to building a community that inspires, educates and connects people of all ages and backgrounds.

**Learn more about how SlideRoom can help you build a bigger applicant pool, at [slideroom.com](https://www.slideroom.com).**