

Internship | First Impressions

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Management styles: The PICA staff operate mostly horizontally. There are distinct departments that each have their own interns and agendas but there is a lot of overlap and intermingling. Everyone is in conversation with one another and there seem to be few hard boundaries distinguishing lines of communication. There are informal expectations about communication and management but those are mostly common sense. The horizontal organizational structure and this communicative openness is one of the things that really drew me to PICA initially. I greatly appreciate work environments where staff are given the space and time to operate how they do best, rather than forcing rules and boundaries that can be draining and counterproductive. Within just a few days I felt comfortable talking directly to almost anyone. It was refreshing to actually feel welcomed by upper management. I have found that this is not always the case, especially in more formal organizations such as museums. Everyone works together rather than under and over each other. It seems that everyone is given a fair amount of freedom in how (and when) they complete their work. There is definitely an element of trust that is integral to this. The director seems to work pretty closely with everyone, especially the artistic director, and she is not above handing out popsicles in the afternoon or picking up lunch. She makes office morale part of her job.

Organizational culture: The office is very casual and accepting, permitting staff to dress however they would like. Hours are flexible given that everyone is doing different things every day and may be working early or late depending on what is happening. Impromptu conversations bubble up here and there, and meetings happen both formally or casually whenever needed. Work isn't always the topic of every discussion. Everyone uses different parts of the space at different times, depending on what feels best for what they need at that moment. Most of the time there is no receptionist so everyone takes part in greeting visitors. It doesn't seem to be unusual for staff to take on responsibilities outside of their formal job descriptions. I really appreciate this more informal atmosphere. It is extremely flexible and laid back yet there are definitely strong expectations for hard work and dependability.

Facility & resources: The facilities are stark and contemporary, but extremely flexible, allowing for impromptu performances, lectures, meetings and whatever else might need to take place. The energy in the room isn't found as much in the physical interior as much as it is found in the conceptual potential of the space. There is so much that could *happen* there. It is refreshing in that none of the materials in the space try to hide. They are just out there for all to see, much like PICA's artists and the organization itself. They don't try to hide behind any facade of expectations. The simplicity of the space suggests its temporality, and the fact that this organization is always on the move, never stuck. The second most notable aspect of the space was how open it was. The open floor plan allows for flexibility, but it also generates a sort of openness in conversation throughout the room. You can see everything that is going on across the entire space. There is both physical and conceptual transparency. The space also includes a specialized resource room, PICA's contemporary arts learning hub that is open to the public. It is a great place to work quietly, sit down for a meeting or spend time reading and researching. The only thing that I struggle with in the space as a whole is the persistent quiet, which sometimes feels a little awkward.

Part of PICA's identity is temporarily taking over spaces and buildings in Portland to host contemporary art exhibitions and performances. They literally bring the art to the public. I really admire this about PICA. They break outside of traditional expectations of the commercial gallery and museum, making a statement that art lives among all of us. It has no boundaries. All while introducing new audiences to really contemporary art by national and international artists working today. And they don't want to show the work that everyone else is showing; the work that already exists. They want to present the work that the artist is thinking about doing *next*. I find that really exciting.

Work styles of staff, volunteers etc: The PICA staff are very good at accommodating everyone's opinions and perspectives. Decisions seem to always be a discussion rather than derived from one person, which is highly valuable to achieve the best overall result that takes into account multiple perspectives and outcomes. It feels like everyone is working within their own little departments but they are doing it together, without walls in between, so that all it takes to break down any separation is just a shout across the room. It is not unusual for one department to give thoughts on the work of another. Volunteers and interns are an integral part of the organization, especially in the summer. Each department determines what they need and they carry out tasks with volunteers internally. There are distinct departments, but everyone seems to work all over the board. It is clearly important to be flexible and well-rounded.

General perceptions: I was definitely a little nervous at first because I didn't really know what to expect. I think that when you work within the contemporary art world there is often a sort of judgmental intensity present, especially among those who have been in the field for a while. But I was pleasantly surprised at the how casual and friendly the atmosphere was at PICA. I really feel like the organizational culture in general is a great fit and this is an organization where I would love to work. That flexibility is extremely important to me. I also highly appreciate the way that they are constantly pushing on the boundaries and thinking about art differently. Even though it is contemporary art by renowned national and international artists, it feels sort of grassroots almost. Contemporary performance is very new to me. Some of it I still don't understand, but it is similar to contemporary visual art in that it helps immensely to actually understand the medium. I am starting to feel much more comfortable and more engaged. I am excited to see how my perspective will change and what I will learn about this medium. I feel that by the end of my internship, I will have a completely different idea of what *multidisciplinary* really is. That word, *multidisciplinary*, is really at the heart of how I understand PICA. It relates to everything from the artists to the organizational culture.