

Resilience of Objects, Cultures and Ideas

An Interview with Limor Tomer, General Manager, Live Arts, Metropolitan Museum of Art

EDITORS' NOTE *In her current position, Limor Tomer has overhauled the Metropolitan Museum's performing arts program; built a diverse, powerful team that curates, presents, and promotes more than 100 events annually; produced TEDxMET in 2013 and 2015; increased the department budget by 40 percent; increased both earned and unearned income significantly; and solicited and received many major gifts. Tomer has also served as an Adjunct Professor teaching entrepreneurship in performance at The New School. Additionally, she was an Executive Producer, Music, at New York Public Radio and an Adjunct Curator, Performing Arts, at The Whitney Museum. Born in Israel, Tomer moved to the United States at age 13. She earned both her BA and MA from The Juilliard School and studied for her doctorate in aesthetics at New York University.*



Limor Tomer

INSTITUTION BRIEF *The Metropolitan Museum of Art (metmuseum.org) collects, studies, conserves, and presents significant works of art across all times and cultures in order to connect people to creativity, knowledge and ideas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art presents over 5,000 years of art from around the world for everyone to experience and enjoy. The Museum lives in two iconic sites in New York City – The Met Fifth Avenue and The Met Cloisters. Millions of people also take part in The Met experience online.*

Will you provide an overview of the Metropolitan Museum of Art?

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 by a group of American citizens, businessmen and financiers as well as leading artists and thinkers of the day, who wanted to create a museum to bring art and art education to the American people. Today, The Met displays tens of thousands of objects covering 5,000 years of art from around the world for everyone to experience and enjoy in its two iconic sites in New York City – The Met Fifth Avenue and The Met Cloisters. These items are also available for millions of people to experience through The Met online. Since its founding, The Met has always aspired to be more than a treasury of rare and beautiful objects: every day, art comes alive in the Museum's

galleries and through its exhibitions and events, revealing both new ideas and unexpected connections across time and across cultures.

How do you describe your leadership style and what do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

My leadership style is grounded in recruiting, training and nurturing extraordinary people. I look for qualities such as curiosity, inventiveness and low tolerance for error balanced with empathy in my staff. I believe

what makes a strong leader is the ability to have an empowered team of individual thinkers rather than simply “project managers.”

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How do you define resilience and how is resilience ingrained in the culture of the Metropolitan Museum of Art?

Encyclopedic museums like The Met are primarily about cultural resilience and consider resilience from multiple perspectives – resilience of objects, cultures and ideas. The Met is actively building resilience through projects such as the Indian Conservation Fellows Program, as well as through generous support like Adrienne Arsht's recent transformative gift which will provide funds for performances that champion resilience through art by engaging with artists of varied backgrounds, perspectives and voices.

How has your personal resilience helped to drive your work?

For me, the ingredients of personal resilience include adaptability, as well as a high tolerance for change and creativity. Also, a certain amount of “give,” or knowing when to bend (a tree that bends will survive the storm better than one that is rigid). These personal qualities have allowed me to navigate our ever-changing cultural and professional landscape.

Do you feel that resilience and music are linked and what do you see as the role of the arts in resilience?

Performing artists – composers, choreographers, actors, and musicians – must have tremendous amounts of personal and professional resilience as the landscape is always changing. They serve a unique and essential purpose in our society: they help “metabolize” our collective experience and allow us to gain multiple ways to understand social, cultural and political forces.

Has your work changed as a result of COVID-19 and the anti-racist movement across the U.S. and the world?

We at MetLiveArts – the performance series at the Museum – have been lucky to be able to work with ever-broadening circles of progressive artists who are pushing the envelope in dance, theater, opera, music and related hybrids. We have always engaged with artists from underrepresented communities, global communities and non-conforming artists. The combination of the profound isolation many of us are feeling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the demand for justice and equality at this moment, fortifies us and allows us to reinscribe our commitment to challenge existing assumptions about power and creativity, and to even more forcefully embrace multiplicity of points of views, experiences and voices.

Who are some of the resilient leaders you see today?

At any given moment, I am in touch with dozens of artists, some at the beginning of their career, some already established leaders. To me, all the artists I have worked with and am currently working with are the most resilient and influential artists working today. Artists who I turn to for leadership and perspective on our world include Anna Deveare Smith, Bill T. Jones and Julia Bullock. Each, in their chosen métier, through their life experience, personal struggles and artistic achievement, opens the door of understanding our changing world. ●