

What is a Museum?

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The whole idea of museums as art institutions is based on an implicit assumption that art museums are typical of all museums. It's true that the traditional mores of a museum atmosphere – quiet, solemn, reflective, reverent – are based in the heritage of art museums. However, museums are much more diverse than that. Of the [museums that were accredited by the American Association \(now Alliance\) of Museums as of 2012](#) [3] (which is a small sample of the museums in the US), 10% were general or multidisciplinary, and 8% were focused on natural history or anthropology. Science and technology museums, children's museums, and many history, anthropology, and natural history museums define their goals very differently than a traditional art museum. For example, the [Association of Science-Technology Centers](#) [4] says, "Science centers encourage the innate curiosity that resides in all of us, providing opportunities for education, awareness of social and global issues, even recreation." Many museums are arts institutions, but the term "arts" is inadequate to describe the breadth of the museum field.

For this reason, museums are often described as cultural institutions, rather than arts institutions.

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