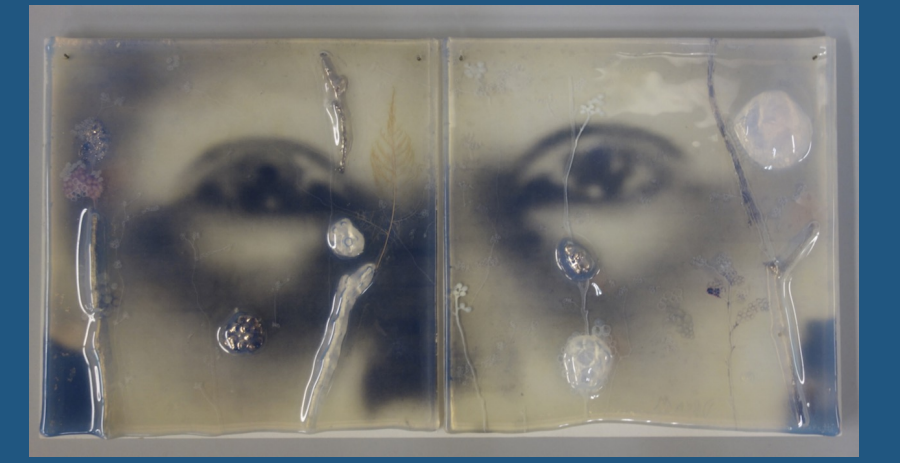


# The Art of Being: Feelings, Memories and Imagination



Sibylle Peretti (German, born 1964)  
Eyes, 2016  
Kiln-formed glass, engraved, painted, silvered, and paper appliqué  
10 x 19 7/8 x 1/16 in.  
Collection of Museum of Glass, gift of the artist (2016)

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## FRAMING

### Problem & Impact

Empathy is a declining skill.

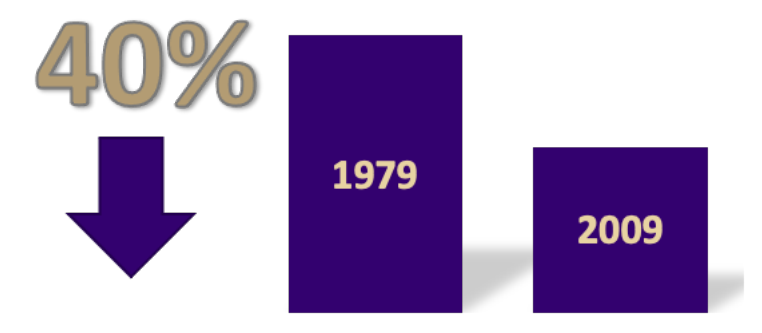
Lower empathy impacts society by increasing the risk of:

- Intolerance
- Aggression
- Political Gridlock
- Social Distrust
- Discrimination
- Bullying
- Suicide



("Empathy a Mile in My Shoes," 2017)

Empathy in College Students  
Konrath et al, U of M, 2011



Opportunity

Empathy is a "muscle" that can be honed.



(Gardner, 2019, p. 400).

## Literature – What We Know

### ABOUT MUSEUMS AND EMPATHY (Gokcigdem, 2016)

- "Museums, as safe and informal learning platforms, are uniquely equipped to encourage visitors to imagine, explore, and experience empathy first hand." (Gokcigdem, 2016, p. xxvi)
- Museums can foster empathy by providing opportunities and frameworks for visitors to "experience an emotional connection and at the same time have the freedom to arrive at their own conclusions." (Potash, 2016, p. 79)
- Guided relational viewing is a technique used to foster empathy (3 steps):
  - Ask visitors to identify one artwork or object that is personally meaningful to them
  - Visitors create a response art based upon thoughts or feelings evoked by their selection
  - Visitors are invited to reflect through individual writing

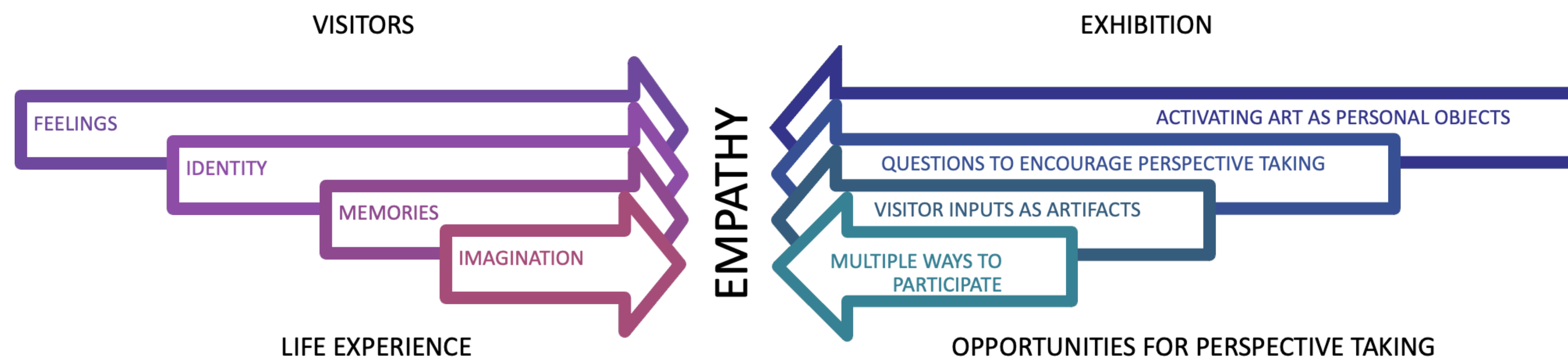
### ABOUT PARTICIPATORY DESIGN (Simon, 2010, p. 130-151)

- Objects that are personal → stories
- Asking Visitor questions and prompting them to share their reactions to the objects → activates art as social objects.
- Kinds of questions to generate authentic, confident, and diverse responses:
  - Q. that help visitors connect their own experience to the objects on display (personal questions).
  - Q. that ask visitors to imagine scenarios involving objects or ideas that are foreign to their experience (speculative questions).
- Two characteristics of successful questions:
  - Are open to a diversity of responses (no right answer)
  - Draw on visitor experience; visitors feel capable of answering.

## PURPOSE & IMPACT

Big Idea: Use studio art glass and participatory techniques to address the empathy deficit.

Often museums engage empathy by telling a particular story about an event or group of people or a person. I wanted to take a different approach with my thesis and relate empathy to the mechanics of meaning making: namely how we interpret the world through our feelings, identities, memories and imagination. My purpose was not to have someone feel empathy for any one thing in particular but to hone visitors' empathy "muscles" by providing various opportunities to practice perspective-taking. My thesis is informed by the literature which states that empathy is a life skill that can be increased through practice



## DELIVERABLE

Exhibition at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma Washington(MOG).

**This exhibition is not about art. It is about people.**

Because MOG's Grand Hall is a vast space which functions as the museum's main lobby, each exhibit area had to stand on its own and be visited in any order. I created the construct of a buffet table of art for visitors to sample using their feelings, identities, memories and imagination. In each section, visitors are invited to select a piece of art to "taste" and then answer some questions as they reflect on their experience. The questions are intended to do the following:

- Create a personal connection. (What this means to me)
- Flip the visitor's perspective. (Imagine what this means to others)
- Encourage sharing. (Write, vote, tell)
- Make visitor narratives available to provide additional perspectives.

## THE ART OF BEING: FEELINGS, MEMORIES AND IMAGINATION

I FEEL	I AM	I REMEMBER	I IMAGINE
• HOW DOES THIS PIECE OF ART MAKE YOU FEEL?	• WHICH PIECE(S) OF ART ARE YOU?	• WHAT MEMORIES OF YOURS DO THESE PIECES OF ART EVOKE?	• WHAT DO YOU THINK THE STORY IS?
• WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE THE CHARACTER IN THIS ART PIECE IS FEELING?	• DO OTHERS SEE THE REAL YOU?	• ASK SOMEONE ELSE FOR THEIR MEMORY	

## CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

Conclusions based upon Preliminary Testing:

- It is possible to create a diversity of emotions and stories from studio art glass by asking viewers to consider how a piece makes them feel and to describe what stories they associate with the piece.
- Emotions generated by a piece can vary significantly based upon surrounding pieces. One piece when shown alone was interpreted as expressing anxiety. When placed next to a piece generating higher anxiety, the same piece was described as "calming".

Benefits:

- Establishes another non-narrative approach for museums to use to address the empathy deficit.
- Provides MOG with further insight into how visitors connect with and apply meaning to the studio art glass in their visiting artist collection.
- Each additional perspective encountered when reading other visitor's content, provides an additional data point for visitors to draw upon when they practice empathy in the future.

Next Steps:

I am looking forward to reviewing the data to see how successful I was in activating the art as personal objects and engaging the audience in perspective-taking and empathy. I feel this is a concept that can be used repeatedly with different forms of artwork or objects and hope to use the results of this exhibition to inform my future practice.

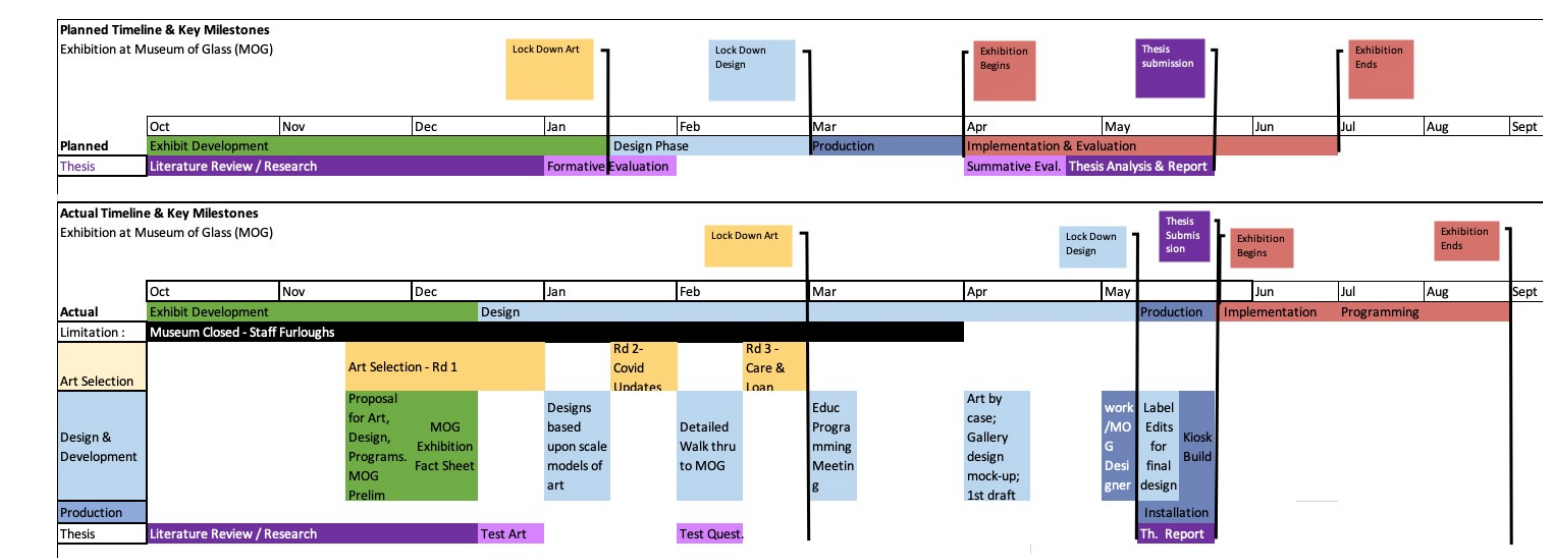
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Wilson O'Donnell, MA (Chair), Jessica J. Luke, PhD and Katie Buckingham for their generous support and guidance and thank Museum of Glass Curatorial and Education staff who worked tirelessly to help me realize this exhibition. I would also like to thank my wonderful family and museum cohorts for their unfailing support and for being willing to be both guinea pigs and cheerleaders during the development of this exhibition

## PROCESS

### Milestones & Timeline

Original plan was to install Mar. 31 and then analyze the visitor inputs in April, looking for signs of perspective-taking and empathetic concern. Due to pandemic-related delays, the exhibition is currently being installed. Museum will send me photos of results later for post thesis review.



### Stakeholders



### Preparatory Testing

Because the museum was closed, informal testing was done with family, friends and museum staff to provide data to help with the selection of art. The intent was to try to identify art which generated emotion or stories. Later informal testing was done to help refine my visitor questions.

Results:

- Testing of art did not surface obvious front runners. Highest ranked art varied with every measure I evaluated.
- Testing of questions did serve to eliminate questions and helped me to appreciate the time commitment required from respondents.

	F = 26 - single	F = 36 - Parent	M = 62 - Parent	M = 35 - Single	F = 19 - single	F = 60 - Parent	F = 22 - single	story + emotion - negative if favorite
<b>Highest Emotion</b>	1 Eyes	20 Guard Dog						
<b>Highest All Weights</b>	18 Mediate	21 B V Map	23 Planted	25 Silver Leaf (cont)	30 Guard Dog	31 Descend (Leaf)		
<b>Highest Story</b>	21 B V Map	24 Highway	25 Silver Leaf (cont)					

## KEY LITERATURE / PHOTOS

Gardner, K. (2019). Museums as Incubators of Innovation and Social Impact. In E. Gokcigdem, & American Alliance of Museums, *Designing for Empathy: Perspectives on the Museum Experience* (pp. 397-413). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Merritt, E. (2017, May 1). Empathy a Mile in my Shoes: Closing the Empathy Deficit. *American Alliance of Museums*. <https://www.aam-us.org/2017/05/01/empathy-a-mile-in-my-shoes-closing-the-empathy-deficit/>

Potash, J. S. (2016). Response Art: Using Creative Activity to Deepen Exhibit Engagement. In E. M. Gokcigdem, *Fostering Empathy Through Museums* (pp. 77-91). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Simon, N. (2010). *The Participatory Museum*. Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0.

**Photos (Left to Right)**  
 Oben Abright (American, born 1980); *Shan Boy (Hoodie)*, made at the Museum in 2019; Blown glass, oil paint, and aluminum; 21 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 12 in.; Collection of Museum of Glass, gift of the artist (2020.9); Photo by Jesse Goff  
 Paul Marioni (American, born 1941); *Green Head*, made at the Museum in 2011; Blown glass and enamels; 10 x 6 1/4 x 6 1/2 in.; Collection of Museum of Glass, gift of the artist (VA.2013.55)  
 Alex Stisser (American, born 1974); *Silver Leaf*, made at the Museum in 2010; Blown glass and silver foil; 8 1/2 x 17 x 7 3/4 in.; Collection of Museum of Glass, gift of the artist (VA.2013.73); Photo by Duncan Price  
 Nancy Callan (American, born 1964); *Black Baron Snowman*, made at the Museum in 2012; Blown glass; 29 x 18 x 17 in.; Collection of Museum of Glass, gift of the artist (VA.2016.6)