

DRAWING FROM THE EARTH: EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCES AT THE MUSEUM OF NORTHWEST ART

Designing an on-site art museum experience that engages younger generations during and after their visit.

BY

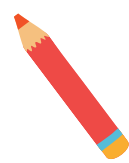
Chi-Yun Cheng & Lydia Roca



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to our committee, Angelina Ong, Dr. Brock Craft, Tasia Johnson, and Kimberly Simon, for their guidance and their support throughout this project and to the Museum of Northwest Art for welcoming us and partnering with us for this work. Additional thanks to Nicolette Harrington, Meg Holgate, and Steve Klein.

FRAMING



Art museums struggle with being welcoming and participatory spaces. In fact, younger generations have lower visitation rates to art museums compared to older generations, which is a concern when they are to become art museums' primary audience (Sommer, 2018). Hood (2004) indicated that "limitations on group social behavior and active participation" (p.154) are the barriers that lower individuals' willingness to attend art museums. The one-way communication and lack of interaction can cause these institutions to lose relevance if they do not make proactive changes.

Nina Simon (2010) proposed and defined "participatory institutions" as a place to "create, share, and connect with each other" (Chapter 1). The museum field's approach to visitor engagement will need to adapt to their visitors' expectations and social needs.

PURPOSE AND IMPACT



The purpose of this project was to design a participatory on-site art museum experience. This experience was developed at the Museum of Northwest Art (MoNA) on its exhibit titled *A Precarious Edge*.

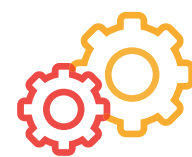
This project intended to help MoNA make their younger visitors feel more connected and engaged with the exhibit and the collections. They would be able to explore their interests and creativity through their participation with this experience. MoNA's staff would also feel more connected to their visitors, and develop a greater understanding of their interests and needs. This experience would also provide social connection and engagement between visitors, as well as between the visitors and the featured artists.

This project can serve as a learning example for museums that want to increase engagement. By following this process of conducting front-end evaluation, museums can identify visitor needs and create experiences that will successfully meet them. It also provided MoNA an opportunity to experiment with a way to draw in a younger demographic as both activities were designed centering local high school voices.

DELIVERABLE

- Brief front-end evaluation report
- Product Brief: Design Process, Project Components, Project Plan, Booklet Content, Visitor Response, Implications, Appendices

PROCESS



JAN.

Began front-end evaluation to understand MoNA's visitors/non-visitors and their art museum engagement. Developed instruments for data collection – semi-structured interview, focused observation, and survey.

FEB.

Conducted data collection through semi-structured interviews and focused observations at MoNA and sent surveys to high school contacts. Analyzed data and created user personas.

MAR.

Created brief evaluation report to synthesize results and share back with MoNA, developed 3 potential experiences based on this data, and finalized event activities.

APR.

Designed souvenir booklet and drafted product brief. Participated in and conducted observations during the Earth Day event on 4/22/2022.

MAY

Revised and finalized product brief. Reflected on event observations and feedback. Discussed continued use of activities following the event.

EVALUATION RESULTS



The following three key results influenced the three proposed potential experiences:

- The top 5 activities that respondents are most interested in are: taking pictures (70.18%), talking to people in their group (52.63%), museum led tours (43.86%), museum interactive gallery guides (38.60%), and then reading labels (33.33%).
- After describing an enjoyable activity, respondents said it brought them a positive emotion (like fun, calm, etc.) or an emotional connection (18.75%), liked the act of looking at art (12.50%), or broadened their perspective (10.42%).
- Respondents most wanted to do an artistic activity (29.41%), do a game-like activity (13.73%) or look at art (13.73%).

EARTH DAY EVENT AT MONA

- As visitors enter the first floor gallery, they saw a table with a drawing of the Earth, drawn by artist Meg Holgate, that they could draw on. As more visitors participated in the drawing, the Earth gained more color and unique designs.
- As visitors passed the docent desk, they could take a souvenir booklet which contained prompts, open drawing/response spaces, actionable information about climate change, and a plastic reduction pledge. Visitors could complete the booklet and keep it as a memory book, one that also provided some educational resources. Visitors could post images of their work in the booklet, using #MoNA_MyArtMyEarth, if they wanted to share back with MoNA.
- Following the event, the drawing remained out for visitors to continue "making their mark." The booklets continued to be offered at the docent desk. MoNA also created social media posts sharing the drawing and inviting the public back to continue collaborating.

IMPLICATIONS AND TIPS



- **Front-end Evaluation:** Museums should increase their use of front-end evaluation to communicate with visitors/non visitors and use these findings when developing participatory experiences and content.
- **Collaborative Artwork:** Incorporating collaborative art activities connected artists and visitors, and visitors with each other.
- **Social Media:** Social media has the potential to uplift visitor voices, whether that was sharing back a visitor's art with the museum or sharing a collaborative work created by visitors.
- **Talk to Visitors:** If museums do not have the training or funds to hire evaluators, they can still interact with visitors through informal conversations.
- **Community Connections:** Museums can consider their existing relationships with communities and who they can involve.
- **Involve Artists:** Museums can facilitate connections between artists and the public by creating comfortable environments.
- **Support on-Site Staff:** Museums can support their on-site staff by providing simple references sheets to assist with being the face of a museum.

REFERENCES



Black, G. (2018). Meeting the audience challenge in the 'Age of Participation.' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 33(4), 302-319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2018.1469097>

Simon, N. (n.d.). The Participatory Museum. Retrieved October 15, 2021, from <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>

Sommer, H. (2018, June 16). Assessing Millennial Engagement in Museum Spaces. *The Museum Scholar*. https://articles.themuseum scholar.org/2018/06/16/tp_vollsommer/