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One on One:  
An Exploratory Study of Facilitated Dialogue  
at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This research examines the Interpretive Guide program at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden as a case study and counterexample to common practices of facilitating interpretive experiences in art museums. Interpretive Guides serve as in-gallery conversationalists available on a regular basis to engage in impromptu dialogue with visitors. They are heavily trained in interpretive techniques and exhibition content and placed in the galleries with a common goal of engaging visitors on visitors' terms. A number of methods were applied to explore the program including surveys, reflective exercises, interviews, and observations. These were utilized in order to come to understand what the conversations with Interpretive Guides "look like," how visitors think about them, and what impact the program has on Interpretive Guides. Results suggest that Interpretive Guides are successful at engaging visitors while utilizing mixed methods (inquiry, information, and interpretation) and that a wide variety of visitors, including those who highly value contemplation, find the program of great benefit to their museum experience. The program also seems to have a significant impact on the Interpretive Guides, who self-report substantial shifts in how they perceive of visitors and the role of socialization in museum experiences. While specific to the Interpretive Guide program, findings speak to the successes and pitfalls of highly responsive and conversational approaches to the facilitation of interpretive experiences in art museums.*

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **INTERPRETIVE GUIDES AS FACILITATORS OF DIALOGUE**

Interpretive Guides are essentially in-gallery conversationalists, placed in temporary exhibitions to facilitate personalized interpretive experiences that start and move with the visitor. They are provided with a variety of techniques and information, and work to utilize them in harmony with visitor interests and tendencies in order to encourage visitors to open up and explore their interpretive potential. Interpretive Guides are prepared for a wide variety of possible encounters, and fit their approach to the visitor without any pre-determined destination in mind.

The approach is more of an attitude and less of a technique. When beginning a conversation, Interpretive Guides are trained to solely have the visitor's interpretive arc in mind and utilize whatever tools they can to ensure the highest possible level of engagement. They embrace the complexity and variety of human interpretation, play to the power that socialization has on the process of learning, and put a friendlier face on what can often be "difficult" Modern and Contemporary artwork. Through these conversations, the Hirshhorn intends to unpack the museum experience, leading to visitors that are both more comfortable in the museum space and more willing and able to express and synthesize their thoughts about the artwork.

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

The Interpretive Guide approach is unique in that it strays from applying any strict methodology to interpretive facilitation and instead wholeheartedly embraces the diversity of what visitors bring to and expect from their experiences. This is all not to say that

Interpretive Guides go about business without structure, they simply try to make their processes of facilitation invisible to visitors (Fischer, Daryl, & Levinson, 2010, p. 301).

The field of art museum education, specifically relating to the facilitation of interpretation is understudied, although the role of the docent has been in existence in museums of art for over a century (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 19). For years, museum educators have sought ways to streamline the process of training interpreters (many utilizing methodologies such as Visual Thinking Strategies, which focuses on “open-ended yet highly structured discussions of visual art” (Visual Thinking Strategies, 2012)) in an effort to create ample opportunities for rich interpretive experiences. The pitfall of such techniques, however, is that they focus too strictly on inquiry and structured conversation and thus “circle around without progressing, and end back where [they] started” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 104).

Another common practice involves using a methodology as a starting point in the process of training interpreters, but allowing for some deviation so as to accommodate the variety of visitors one will encounter. A potential issue with this slightly less rigorous approach, however, is that the philosophical focus easily becomes lost or ignored, especially with high demand for tours and many interpreters to train and manage. Quality control can thus become a difficult issue to resolve. The Interpretive Guide program resists regimentation, focuses on quality over quantity, and makes a determined effort to enforce the philosophical grounding of the approach, thus serving as an intriguing counterexample to many common practices.

## **IMPETUS FOR RESEARCH & RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

An evaluation was developed out of interest in the distinctive qualities of the Interpretive Guide approach and an expressed interest from the Hirshhorn in coming to understand exactly what these experiences “look like” in the galleries. Working with program administrators and Interpretive Guides during the *Andy Warhol: Shadows* exhibition, the evaluation plan was developed with the following questions in mind:

- **What do these conversations “look like?”**
- **How do visitors think of their Interpretive Guide experiences within the context of their overall museum visit?**
- **What impact does the program have on the Interpretive Guides?**

Little is known about facilitated interpretive experiences in art museums, especially those highly responsive to visitors on such an ongoing basis. Thus, the goal of the evaluation was to come to understand the approach and its impact in more concrete terms in order to better inform the future structure of the program, and provide the field with a case study from which similar programs can be developed.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM**

Interpretive Guides serve as interns at the Hirshhorn under the Manager of Interpretive Programs, generally for a period of three to four months (dependent upon the length of their assigned temporary exhibition). Commonly, three to five are brought on board at a time and culled from a substantially larger group of applicants. Interpretive Guides are typically still pursuing or recently graduated from undergraduate or graduate studies in fields such as art history, studio art, museum studies, museum education, and/or

education. The position is posted on the museum's website and requires a standard application (resume, letters of recommendation, and writing sample) along with an interview. Interviews typically take place in person at the museum (with the Manager of Interpretive Programs) and consist of informally discussing objects so as to ascertain the applicant's level of comfort with discussing artwork and thinking on their feet.

When the program begins, Interpretive Guides receive a substantial binder of readings that they review as a group on a regular basis. The readings addressed cover topics including:

- The history of the role of the docent
- The significance of museum education
- The differences between conversation, discussion, and dialogue
- Embracing visitor uncertainty and anxiety
- Body language
- Questioning the use of questions
- Potential issues visitors may have with Modern and Contemporary artwork

The training process involves discussing readings, role-playing, extensive study of exhibition content, and reviewing the philosophical underpinnings and goals of the program. Training takes place both in and out of the galleries and docents frequently join Interpretive Guides in the process as well, serving as a source of information regarding what to expect in the galleries. After two to three weeks of this process, Interpretive Guides begin their shifts in the galleries. They wear graphic badges that feature question marks and their names and

stanchions are occasionally placed outside of the galleries so as to inform visitors of their presence.

Alongside three-hour shifts in the galleries (10AM-1PM and 1PM-4PM), Interpretive Guides also hold three-hour research shifts in the museum offices once a week, during which they work on a number of individual projects for the Education department. Specifically during the summer, the museum provides one full-time and two part-time Interpretive Guides a stipend. In all other months, and to those beyond the three paid summer positions, the position is unpaid.

Throughout their time at the museum, the Interpretive Guides are kept in constant contact with one another so as to refine their practice over time as well. They utilize forums on a dedicated wiki site to post common visitor questions and tendencies, new information on the exhibition, accounts of unique experiences, and lessons learned. They also meet every two weeks with a variety of Hirshhorn staff to discuss the visitor experience at the museum.

### **ABOUT THE HIRSHHORN**

Located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden serves as one of the city's premier art museums, focusing solely on Modern and Contemporary artwork. The collection of the museum's founder, Joseph H. Hirshhorn, serves as the core of the museum's collection and consists of over 12,000 works of nineteenth and twentieth century art (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2012). Hirshhorn had a particular penchant for sculpture, thus the Hirshhorn

complex as a whole consists of both a museum and an outdoor sculpture garden that sits directly across the street.

The Hirshhorn Museum's architecture is particularly important to note, as it so heavily impacts the viewing experience. Designed in 1966 by the architect Gordon Bunshaft (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2012), the museum can best be described as a large ring or doughnut, nearly four stories tall, with a central courtyard featuring a grand fountain. The stark exterior façade is punctuated by only one large viewing window looking out onto the National Mall and sculpture garden. Otherwise, the museum appears from afar as a large drum, hovering on four massive plinths.

Inside the museum, one has access to four floors, three of which feature galleries. Staff offices and storage are located on the top floor (4), permanent collection galleries on the third floor, and temporary exhibition galleries alongside some permanent collection works on display on the second and lower level floors. The first floor features the museum's entrance, information desk, security checkpoint, and museum store. It is also important to note that by virtue of the Hirshhorn's inclusion in the Smithsonian family of museums, it is free of charge to visitors, and attracts a wide variety of locals and tourists alike.

#### **ABOUT THE ANDY WARHOL: SHADOWS EXHIBITION**

The exhibition *Andy Warhol: Shadows* (September 25, 2011-January 11, 2012), consisted of 102 silkscreened and hand-painted canvases lined edge-to-edge, extending some 450 feet along a great expanse of one of the curved temporary exhibition walls. The work features multiple color variations of two abstract images, believed to be photographs of a maquette in Warhol's office. The images appear as "blips in an electrocardiograph" and

have been categorized as “peaks” and “caps,” which almost seem to be positive/negative versions of the same image (Gambino, 2011). The work was loaned by the Dia Art Foundation, where 72 panels typically hang side-by-side in Dia’s Dia:Beacon museum located in upstate New York. This exhibition was both the first time the work had been displayed on a curved wall, and the first time it had been displayed in its entirety, due to the accommodating size of the Hirshhorn’s galleries.

### **HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM**

The philosophical core of the Interpretive Guide program was first informed when its founder was working as an educator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in the early 1990s and was encouraged to spend downtime in the galleries talking to visitors, where an immediate difference was observed between these conversations and inquiry-based tours. Years later, the first program for this specific approach was established at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum when an opportunity arose to develop a program for hybrid educators and security personnel (the program still exists today). The Interpretive Guide program first began at the Hirshhorn in 2007 and has been in existence since then.

### **RELATIONSHIP TO THE PROGRAM**

During the *Yves Klein: With the Void, Full Powers* exhibition at the Hirshhorn in the summer of 2010, the author served as a full-time Interpretive Guide. Having served as an interpreter in four previous capacities, all with Modern and Contemporary art, the nature of the Interpretive Guide approach resonated as particularly intriguing, albeit difficult to describe. Having both experienced and facilitated interpretive experiences in a wide variety

of arts institutions, the author chose to explore this particular case in order to contribute to a reevaluation of the ways in which institutions train interpreters and view interpretation.

### **BENEFIT TO THE FIELD**

This research is of benefit to the field both as a case study of a unique approach and as an example of how to evaluate interpretive programs. The nature of human interpretation, specifically with Modern and Contemporary art, is the topic of a significant amount of writing, but rarely is this writing from an evaluative standpoint. Institutions looking to explore more dialogic models of interpretive facilitation could utilize this research as a source to assist in the development and sustainability of new programming. The evaluative methods applied to this study could easily be adjusted to evaluate a wide variety of interpretive experiences as well.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **INTERPRETATION AND THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR**

Gross oversimplifications of the nature of what some call “aesthetic understanding” perpetuate a perception of the viewing experience as one largely reliant upon one’s ability to tune into some mystical quality of a work of art. This mindset suggests that labored looking and being able to “feel” the work somehow leads to understanding it (Lachapelle, Murray, & Neim, 2003, p. 78). Some suggest a model for aesthetic understanding that purports a symbiotic relationship between *experiential* experience and *theoretical* experience: that which we experience, and our melding of that information with external information (Lachapelle, et al., 2003, 79). In essence, this argument asserts that an aesthetic encounter with an object cannot lead to full understanding without some form of external contribution; to simply look is not to *fully* see.

To that end, George E. Hein argues that some experiences can be “mis-educative,” that is, they can stunt the potential for interpretive growth and inhibit the potential for further experience (Hein, 1998, p. 2). Experiences that focus solely on the delivery of information as a means of creating understanding hinder learning from occurring, as learning is commonly perceived as a “complex, nonlinear, active process” (Lankford, 2002, p. 144) and visitors engaged in this kind of transmission of information are often completely silent, thus suspiciously unengaged. As Melamed states, “an experience which is not reflected upon or is not tested in actual practice, is lost as potential learning” (Lachapelle, et al., 2003, p. 9). Museums may believe that simply offering up information “cafeteria-style” is enough to ensure significant understanding when, as Lankford argues, visitors will be

selective in what they read and even more selective in what they absorb (assuming they even fully comprehend the often specialized language in label text). Constructivist models of museum education suggest that museums need to relinquish some of their authoritative control over right and wrong in the museum space and embrace a multiplicity of viewpoints (including those of their visitors)(Lankford, 2002, p. 145).

As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi concluded, the majority of museum visitors have great uncertainty regarding what to do in front of works of art, which they often view as containing language specific to a time and community outside of their own. With this in mind, Csikszentmihalyi claims that a visitor who is adept at finding significant meaning in an artwork is one who has been situated conceptually in the relevant period, is skilled at critically engaging with works, and has a certain emotional responsiveness to connecting with the human experience of another as expressed through an artwork. Thus only when some kind of aesthetic education has taken place is a visitor likely to have a full aesthetic experience (Lankford, 2003, p. 12). This is not to say that visitors come to experiences completely uninformed. As suggested in Lachapelle, Murray, and Neim's discussion of "aesthetic understanding,"(Lachapelle, et al., 2003) visitors come not as blank slates but rather with knowledge that they combine with the experiential and theoretical knowledge they potentially gain during a museum visit.

Rika Burnham and Elliott Kai-Kee state (2007), "In the art museum of the future, we walk into a gallery in which the hum of conversation fills the space. A small group of visitors clusters around a single work of art, exchanging their observations, led quietly in their conversation by a museum educator" (p. 11). To that museum educator, the facilitation of

learning in the gallery requires viewing techniques and methodologies as tools, not ends; it is keeping the ideal experience in the foreground that leads to consistency and direction (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 67). This perspective, alongside an understanding of art history as suggestion and not final word, leads to a more open approach that leaves room for and welcomes visitor interpretations (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 71). After all, “an aesthetic encounter in the museum is focused mainly on an art object, not a text,” prescriptive approaches only hinder learning from taking place (Lachapelle, et al., 2003, p. 82).

Danielle Rice uses the metaphor of museum educator as anthropologist, “working to interpret two cultures to one another,” as opposed to museum educator as missionary or defender of art (Rice, 1991, p. 135). In this model, the mode of museum practice in which the museum views visitors as outsiders in need of assimilating into the cultural value system of the museum is exchanged for one far more symbiotic in nature. The museum educator is viewed as a valuable source of information regarding the receiving end of the museum’s outputs, and is thus respected as a key player in decision-making processes. This model combats “‘phenomenal absolutism,’ the tendency most people have to assume that everyone else sees and thinks exactly the same way that they do,” and promotes a responsiveness that could prepare museums for the cultural diversity of the future (Rice, 1991, p. 135).

### **DIALOGUE AS COUNTER-METHODOLOGY TO INQUIRY**

The first usage of the word “docent” appears in a 1906 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston bulletin article written by J. Randolph Coolidge, the temporary Director of the museum at

the time. In 1915, Benjamin Ives Gilman, the Secretary of the MFA Boston wrote “the exchanges between visitors and docents should not be like those between teacher and student, but more like those between friends, undertaken ‘in the spirit of free intercourse, not in that of compulsion, in the spirit of play and not of work’” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 21) Fast-forward nearly 100 years and the field has reinterpreted interpretation countless times, responding to changing conceptions of museums, education, and society. As our world becomes increasingly complex, Elliott Kai-Kee (2011) suggests that educators will continue to re-conceptualize their approaches to facilitating interpretive experiences and also suggests that by understanding the field’s past, we can better inform the future (p. 21).

A common methodology utilized by art museum educators to facilitate experiences is Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), a teaching method that focuses on “open-ended yet highly-structured discussions of visual art” (Visual Thinking Strategies, 2012). The technique has been in circulation since 1995 and involves the teacher using a series of three open-ended questions in rotation (“What’s going on in this picture?” “What do you see that makes you say that?” and “What more can we find?”), alongside paraphrasing and linking student responses together (Visual Thinking Strategies, 2012) so as to formulate a collaboratively constructed interpretation of the artwork being examined. The technique avoids the usage of information and is solely focused on exploration so as to develop student “aesthetic and language literacy and critical thinking skills” (Visual Thinking Strategies, 2012).

Rika Burnham offers critique of this kind of inquiry heavy-handedness in museum education and suggests that educators should be as mindful of their usage of inquiry as they

should be of their usage of personal interpretation and information. Should caution not be exercised, visitors can become confused, as strictly inquiry-based experiences can easily come across more as a “stand-up oral quiz than as an opportunity to exercise curiosity and imagination” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 95). Burnham (2011) “questions the use of questions that dominates current museum teaching,” suggesting that educators serve as co-explorers, not as inquisitors (p. 96).

Another approach to training interpreters involves utilizing inquiry less strictly than VTS and simply encouraging interpreters to develop their own set of questions to inspire dialogue. While less rigorous, therefore more open to visitor motivations, this approach often leads to experiences in which the facilitator has “translated their lectures into a series of leading questions” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p.99). With both methodologies, explorations of the artwork may leave visitors feeling as if they have been “cheated out of an authentic encounter with the painting” and strung along a road to nowhere.

Burnham suggests focusing on the facilitation of true dialogue as counter-methodology to inquiry, and goes on to elucidate the differences between conversation, discussion, and dialogue to clarify. She describes conversation, discussion, and dialogue respectively as a circle, triangle, and diamond in order to illustrate their individual structures. Conversations are all-inclusive and participation is only lightly encouraged, they do not move “methodically from point A to point B” and instead traverse back and forth, crossing the circle and creating a “web of connections among the participants” (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 83). Discussions, taking the much more purposeful shape of a triangle, are to be imagined with the facilitator at the apex and participants at the base. Discussions are

often utilized when there is a specific connection or goal for the experience in mind; they are far more methodical and premeditated than conversations (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 86). In a dialogue, participants actively, if not always consciously, fall into one of four roles and change roles at any point. *Movers* propel the interaction forward, *followers* maintain equilibrium, *bystanders* are least active and solely observe, and *opposers*, although rarest, lead to some of the most memorable (if not uncomfortable) experiences by virtue of their stirring the interpretive pot (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 89). Dialogue thus has the potential to be valued more by visitors than conversation or discussion, as its success is due almost exclusively to the ideas that visitors themselves raise (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011, p. 87).

### **ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF MUSEUM EDUCATION**

Danielle Rice states (1995), “art museums are locked into a value system that, despite claims to the contrary, continues to place preservation (and acquisition) firmly above education” (p.19). Art museums are notoriously object (not visitor) centered and frequently do more to function as part of the consensus limiting art from aligning “favorably to popular tastes” than to work toward inclusivity (Rice, 1995, p. 19). However, with respect to the potential falsehoods of inclusivity:

The proliferation of participatory strategies seem[s] less engaged with the transformative goals of cultural redefinition than with salvaging an art world facing a crisis of competing agendas – the historical legacy of its own insularity, and the imperativeness of serving an increasingly diverse audience, in a climate of intense

financial pressure...The bottom line is that participatory strategies, at present...put the “public” in the service of the art world, rather than vice versa. (Rice, 1995, p. 20)

Thus it seems that in the worst-case scenario, art museums are perhaps negligent of their public service and/or solely capitalizing on the trend of participatory practice as a way to stay afloat.

Museum educators and advocates for museum education frequently suggest that truly successful programming consists of “showing up” where visitors already are and engaging visitors in tandem with *their* agenda, *not* the museum’s agenda (Fischer, Daryl, & Levinson, 2010, p. 317). This museum agenda often involves an emphasis on processes that “may be antithetical to the notion of art as experience or idea” and structures the museum that visitors experience in ways that may be altogether invisible to them.

Greatness in the field of art museums is almost exclusively determined by collections, thus many “view the curatorial function as primary and the education function as secondary” (Dobbs & Eisner, 1987, p. 80) and displace public values with museum values. While the establishment of significant interpretive programming lends a museum a “significant degree of professional integrity,” the overarching perceptions of the importance of museum education will not shift until “education is taken seriously by those who formulate museum policy and determine museum priorities” (Eisner & Dobbs, 1988, p. 15).

Research has illustrated that neither “novice” nor “regular” museum visitors highly value subscribing to the use of a system of art historical or stylistic distinctions to guide their experience (Rice, 1991, p. 130). For this reason, many visitors take issue with the

“artness” specifically of art of our time. The value system the museum applies to such artworks is one largely, if not exclusively determined by the art world and often in direct conflict with how ordinary museumgoers would define art (Rice, 1991, p. 131). Developed out of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, the notion of art as understandable to anyone and more about feeling than intellect is still accepted widely as truth. This mindset proves problematic when visitors experience Modern and Contemporary artwork that fails to meet their expectation of accessibility (Rice, 1991, p. 134). As Nelson Goodman asserts, unless museums make a conscious effort to make themselves more accessible, the artworks within will lay “as dormant as books in an unreadable language or in locked buildings” to the public (Goodman, 1985, p. 56).

#### **RESEARCH AND EVALUATION OF INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS**

The function of interpretation/learning in the art museum is an understudied topic in the field of museums, with much research and writing “in the arts and in museums but [not] in art museums” (Luke & Adams, 2012, p. 2). Luke and Adams note that “no one theory can accommodate the complex, non-linear, and multi-dimensional nature of learning in art museums” and that “art museum research is largely descriptive” and “current research provides rich descriptions of art museum experiences, but little indication of cause and effect within these experiences” (p. 8-9). Compelling fragments concerning interpretation did arise throughout their survey of research in the field, however. For instance, in a Gay, Boehner and Panella study in 1997, it was concluded that university students visiting art museums felt that “in a museum they were not always assured of a ‘partner with whom to converse and often felt as if the museum environment discouraged

verbal interaction” (1997). Furthermore, a Twiss-Garrity study in 1995 suggests that visitors’ ability to access artwork relies not on their “age, prior experience knowledge, or familiarity with art or museums” but rather on their “personal references or interests” (1995). In questioning the educational function of art museums, a Getty Center for Education in the Arts study in 1991 noted that visitors identified numerous desired takeaways from experiences in art museums, including “arousal of intellectual curiosity; increased understanding of content or subject; enhanced appreciation of the beauty, age, and craftsmanship of objects, increased understanding of technique and media; and opportunities for communication about related and unrelated subjects” (1991). Overall, Luke and Adams suggest that further research is needed on this subject, as current studies “hint at the broad and complex nature” of outcomes concerning learning but few studies are comprehensive and thorough enough to speak to much beyond a specific institution or experience (Luke & Adams, 2012, p. 20).

Weiler and Ham note that “currently there is no tool that can be used to benchmark, monitor, and compare outcomes of interpretation between visitor groups, across sites and over time, and between different kinds of visitor experience contexts” (Weiler & Ham, 2010, p. 190); thus it seems that the detriment of immense specificity of current research to the field-at-large surfaces as a common concern for those delving into what research presently exists. Simple demographics studies or descriptive studies can be conducted in most art museums; however, elements such as attendance “[do] not describe how visitors experienced the exhibition, or how their thinking or lives were affected, or what they will do differently as a result” (Preskill, 2011, p. 95). Rather than examining with depth in mind,

museums constantly play “the mole game” in which they hammer away at concerns as they pop up as opposed to being less reactive and methodical (Preskill, 2011, p. 95). Research must be “credible, relevant, and useful” in order to instill change, and must acknowledge that “change is often inspired by emotional appeals rather than factual statements,” thus mixed-methods serve institutions best in telling truly “effective stories” (Preskill, 2011, p. 98). Preskill concludes by stating that in order for art museums to invest in change as a result of evaluation, research must be thorough and appeal to emotion, and institutions must also be willing to “come to grips with [their] own inconsistencies,” for evaluation can only impact institutions and the field at-large if it takes place within a courageous and inclusive environment (Preskill, 2011, p. 99).

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

### **DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Mixed methods were utilized so as to approach the program from multiple stances and in a variety of situations. Organized by research question, the following is a list of methods followed by a detailed description of each:

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Corresponding Instruments</b>
<b>What do these conversations “look like?”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interpretive Guide reflective journal</li><li>• Observations of visitor conversations with Interpretive Guides</li><li>• Interview with program administrators</li></ul>
<b>How do visitors think of their Interpretive Guide experiences within the context of their overall museum visit?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Visitor exit survey</li><li>• Post-Interpretive Guide conversation survey</li></ul>
<b>What impact does the program have on the Interpretive Guides?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Past Interpretive Guide survey</li><li>• Mind-mapping activity with Interpretive Guides</li><li>• Interview with current Interpretive Guides</li></ul>

#### **Interpretive Guide Reflective Journal**

**Number of journal entries completed: 2,252**

Interpretive Guide reflective journals were created as a way to consistently collect descriptive information about conversations with visitors while also engaging the Interpretive Guides in reflective practice. The journals consisted of approximately 100 copies of a short 5 question survey hand-bound into a pocket-sized journal that was carried in the galleries at all times by the Interpretive Guides. After every encounter with a visitor, the Interpretive Guide used a pencil to fill out a survey and took notes on the interaction and attempted to be inconspicuous to visitors who hopefully assumed they were simply taking notes in a notebook. Interpretive Guides were instructed to fill out a survey even if the visitor was uninterested in conversation as well, so that a running count of rejections

could be kept over time. If they completed a journal in the middle of a shift, they were instructed to keep a tally of visitors they spoke with throughout the remainder of the shift to use in finding the average number of visitors engaged within a shift. The author replenished the journals with each research trip and from October 4, 2011 through January 14, 2012, Interpretive Guides filled out surveys on almost a daily basis. This instrument was utilized with such frequency so that the arc of Interpretive Guides' time in the galleries could be analyzed for trends. Please see Appendices B and C for sample surveys and photographs of completed journals.

### **Observations of Visitor Conversations with Interpretive Guides**

#### **Number of observations conducted: 96**

During research visits in November 2011 and January 2012, observations of conversations between Interpretive Guides and visitors were conducted in order to come to understand the breakdown of the elements of these interactions. General information such as the length of the conversation, observable visitor demographics, and who approached whom was recorded as well as everything stated by both Interpretive Guide and visitor. Categories of interpretive statement, informative statement and question were developed and every utterance was tallied in one of these categories.

An observation was conducted only if the visitor stopped to engage with the Interpretive Guide (as opposed to declining an interaction in passing). As one observation concluded, the next conversation that could be viewed in its entirety was observed, thus convenience sampling was utilized. During each observation period, equal attention was paid to the Interpretive Guides on duty so that observations remained equally distributed

amongst the five Interpretive Guides. This required being unobtrusively present in the galleries and remaining close enough to the Interpretive Guide to overhear conversation while seeming to be observing the artwork and taking notes. Luckily, the conversations generally tended to occur near the artwork, thus having another “visitor” present seemed to not register on the minds of visitors whatsoever. Careful attention was paid to ensure that data was being recorded in a notebook (as opposed to a clipboard) and that timing was measured using an iPhone, yet again to ensure discretion. Please see Appendix D for a sample observation sheet.

### **Interview with Program Administrators**

An interview was conducted with the current program manager (who has served in this position for approximately 2 years) and the program founder and previous manager (who now works in another capacity in the Education department). The interview was recorded utilizing AudioNote, an iPad program in which one can type notes and record audio simultaneously. Questions were prepared and distributed to the respondents before the interview, and used to impose a basic structure on an otherwise informal conversation. Verbal permission to be quoted anonymously was granted by all before the interview commenced as well. Please see Appendix I for interview questions.

### **Visitor Exit Survey**

#### **Number of surveys completed: 178**

Surveys were administered to visitors as they exited the *Andy Warhol: Shadows* exhibition utilizing random sampling (every third visitor was selected). Data collectors (the author or an Interpretive Guide) approached visitors with a clipboard, survey, and pencil

and simply asked if the visitor had a few moments to provide the museum with some feedback (rejected participation was tallied on a separate sheet). The front of the one-page survey contained questions pertaining to the overall visitor experience, while the backside contained Interpretive Guide-specific questions for those who spoke with one to answer. A main purpose of this survey was to ascertain the frequency of encounters with Interpretive Guides. What was concluded relatively quickly, however, was that the amount of Interpretive Guide-specific data was unacceptably low compared to the overall amount of data. This instrument was eventually altered and the post-Interpretive guide conversation survey was developed, utilizing many of the same questions. Please see Appendices E-F for a sample survey.

### **Post-Interpretive Guide Conversation Survey**

#### **Number of surveys completed: 92**

The post-Interpretive Guide conversation survey was developed utilizing questions from its predecessor, the visitor exit survey. Data collectors also received some negative feedback from visitors about the length of the previous survey, thus this survey was shortened to five questions. Convenience sampling was utilized, so every possible visitor that the data collector could observe stopped, in conversation with an Interpretive Guide, was approached. Data collectors approached visitors, stated that they noticed they were in conversation with an Interpretive Guide, and asked if they would mind providing the museum with some feedback about their experience (again, rejected participation was tallied on a separate sheet). This survey contained both questions about the overall

museum experience and the Interpretive Guide experience, so as to still situate Interpretive Guide-specific data within a greater context. Please see Appendix G for a sample survey.

### **Past Interpretive Guide Survey**

#### **Number of surveys completed: 32**

Working with program administrators, an online survey was developed and distributed to all Interpretive Guides that have participated in the program since its inception in order to understand the impact of the program, how past Interpretive Guides think of it in retrospect, and what suggested changes could be made. Respondents were given approximately two months to complete the survey and 32 out of 49 individuals contacted completed the survey (65% response rate). Please see Appendices J-O to view the survey.

### **Mind-Mapping Activity with Interpretive Guides**

#### **Number of mind-mapping sessions: 3**

In September (before they began in the galleries), November, and January, a mind-mapping session was conducted with the Interpretive Guides in which they were given a stack of sticky notes, two sheets of paper and two questions to answer. They were given approximately 10 minutes and asked to perform a “mind dump,” writing every word, phrase, or sentence that answered the two questions, placing the sticky notes on a sheet of paper per respective question. This method was chosen in order to track any shifts in perspective over time, as the Interpretive Guides honed their skills and spent more time in the galleries. The two questions to be answered were:

#### **1) How would you describe the Interpretive Guide approach/experience to a friend?**

**2) Why is the Interpretive Guide program important (to you, to the museum, to the visitor experience, etc.)?**

**Interview with Current Interpretive Guides**

During the final wrap-up meeting after their internship, a group interview was conducted with the Interpretive Guides (and recorded using AudioNote) in a boardroom at the museum. Interpretive Guides did not receive the interview questions beforehand but were prepared to have a recorded reflective conversation as group well in advance. Verbal permission to be quoted anonymously was granted by all before the interview commenced. Please see Appendix H for interview questions.

**DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE**

The *Andy Warhol: Shadows* exhibition opened September 25, 2011 and closed January 15, 2012. Three research trips were made to Washington D.C.: September 22-27, 2011, November 10-15, 2011, and January 11-18, 2012. Each trip included an extensive meeting with the Interpretive Guides and program administrators, distribution of new instruments, and collection of completed instruments. During the first trip, the evaluation plan was presented to the Interpretive Guides who participated in their first mind-mapping activity and received training on how to administer visitor surveys and utilize the reflective journals. Instruments were also tested at this time. The second mind-mapping activity was conducted during the second trip, as was a significant amount of the observations. During the last trip, the final mind-mapping activity, both interviews, and the final observations were conducted, the past-Interpretive Guide survey was distributed, and all materials were collected.

### **TRAINING INTERPRETIVE GUIDES AS DATA COLLECTORS**

During the first research trip, Interpretive Guides were trained in data collection procedures by the author. A meeting was held in which the entire evaluation plan was reviewed and Interpretive Guides were briefed on standard data collection procedures. Particular emphasis was placed on sampling methods to ensure consistency. The author also posted instructions for review and continued use on the program's wiki site so that it could be made constantly available to Interpretive Guides. The author also used the wiki site's forums to communicate with the Interpretive Guides about any issues that arose during preliminary data collection. For one hour a week each, Interpretive Guides administered visitor surveys during their routine research shifts.

### **QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

Quantitative data was first entered into Microsoft Excel, then copied into SPSS (statistical analysis software) for analysis. All numerical datasets (scales, tallies, recorded numbers) were entered directly while other data was coded (each answer assigned a numerical value) then analyzed. All responses to scale questions, although received on a 6 or 8-point scale, were translated to a 10-point scale for the sake of comprehension.

### **QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

Most open-ended responses were thoroughly explored for trends, and the frequencies were tallied and analyzed using SPSS. Other qualitative data (interviews and mind-mapping activity) were studied and reduced to their most essential words, phrases, and paragraphs to supplement overall findings. Some responses (question 1 from both the

visitor surveys and past-Interpretive Guide survey) were analyzed using Wordle, in order to produce a visual representation of the frequency of selected or submitted text data.

### **CHALLENGES**

The most innate challenge to this study was the cross-country nature of the collaboration. Effective communication became essential to the research so as to ensure consistency in the data collected. The intersection of the structured nature of evaluation with the highly organic nature of the program proved to be another challenge. Overcoming this obstacle required supplementing the more difficult-to-collect quantitative data with qualitative data. For all Hirshhorn parties involved, this was also a relatively new (if not altogether new) process, thus the thoroughness of training and explanation of reasoning and processes was paramount to the success of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **QUESTION: What do these conversations “look like?”**

#### **OVERVIEW**

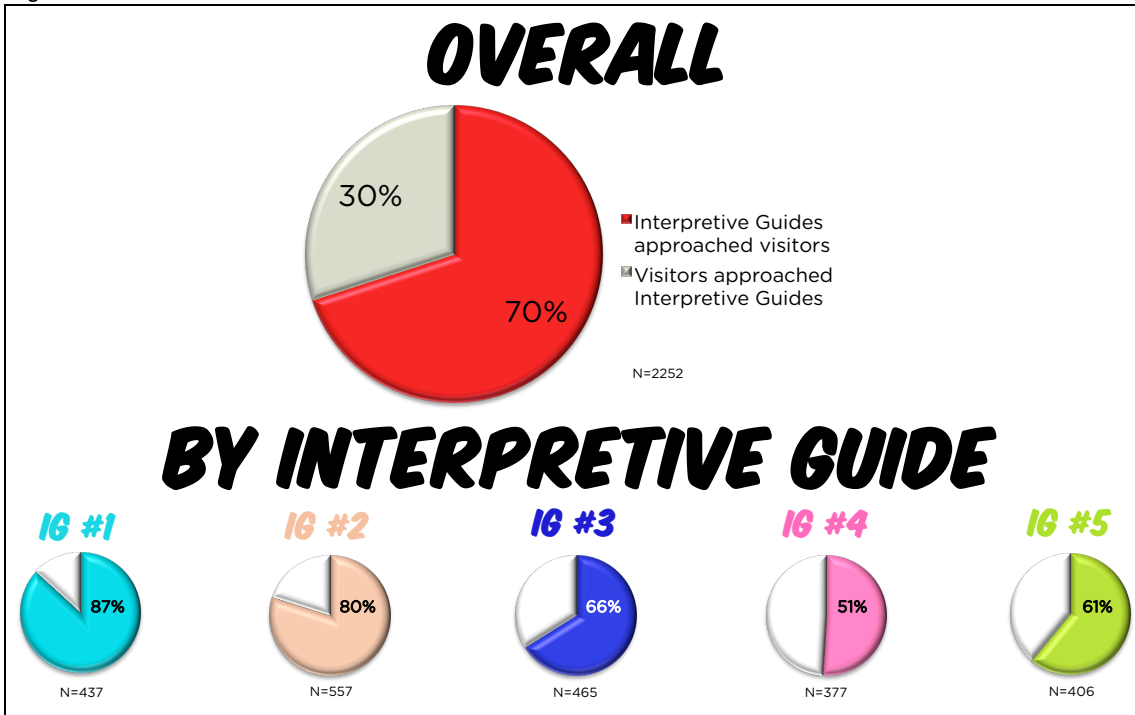
Conversations with Interpretive Guides tended to be relatively intimate in size and only last a few minutes on average. Interpretive Guides utilized mostly information, followed by inquiry, and sharing their interpretation as the three tactics for eliciting visitor response. Most frequently, Interpretive Guides used the gallery space to their advantage and approached visitors instead of visitors approaching them. From their perspective, visitors displayed only mild interest during conversations and seemed to be slightly more interested in listening than talking. However, visitors made more interpretive statements about the artwork than asked questions, thus the data may suggest that Interpretive Guides were being highly self-critical.

Program administrators highlighted the difficulty of defining the approach in structured terms and that those who find the greatest success are those who develop an ability to step outside of themselves and focus the conversation on the visitor. Conversations seem to be at their worst when the Interpretive Guide falls back on providing solely the information visitors often crave, thus success is marked not by placating visitors but by somehow working with them to reach new levels of interpretive ability.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

**Overall and by Interpretive Guide, who approached whom to start the conversation?**

Fig. 1



Interpretive Guides approached visitors the vast majority of the time, which was later described in the interview as particularly easy due to the openness of the galleries (due to there only being one artwork in the exhibition). Interpretive Guides found certain choke points in the space where visitors were most likely to cluster, and found that walking through the exhibition against the flow of visitor traffic also worked successfully. Another tactic involved playing “good cop bad cop,” or approaching visitors after being addressed by security personnel for taking photos or standing too close. This way, Interpretive Guides were able to turn an otherwise uncomfortable situation into an opportunity for potentially great conversation about what piqued visitor interest. It is important to note than on an

individual basis, there was great variety from guide-to-guide regarding their frequency of approaching visitors as all five guides used a slightly different approach in the galleries.

**Overall and by Interpretive Guide, what was the perceived level of visitor enthusiasm?**

Fig. 2

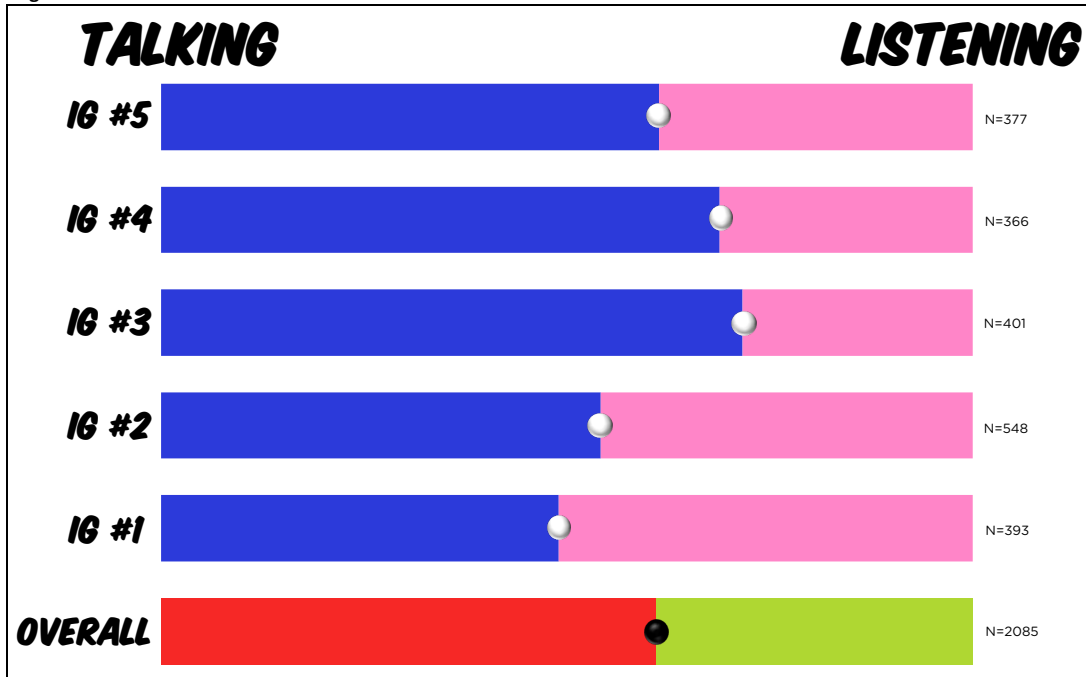
	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Overall</b>	1199	<b>6.5</b>
<b>IG #1</b>	248	<b>6.5</b>
<b>IG #2</b>	367	<b>6.4</b>
<b>IG #3</b>	197	<b>6.3</b>
<b>IG #4</b>	175	<b>6.3</b>
<b>IG #5</b>	212	<b>7.0</b>

Interpretive Guides were asked to rate their perception of visitor enthusiasm after every encounter on a scale. As compared to visitor responses to similar questions (visitors rated the benefit their conversation added to their visit as a 9.1 on a 10 point scale), it appears that the Interpretive Guides were particularly self-critical, thus perhaps highly self-aware.

In the past-Interpretive Guide survey, Interpretive Guides also drew attention to the unexpected nature of these conversations to visitors as a potential drawback, thus it is likely that visitors who seemed caught off guard or awkward were actually more enthusiastic about their experience than they seemed. Although not noted in the chart, the average number of visitors per conversation was 2, with a maximum of 15 (N=2252), so the conversations were also typically rather intimate in size.

Overall and by Interpretive Guide, what was the perceived ratio of visitor interest in talking vs. listening?

Fig. 3



Interpretive Guides were asked to mark their perception of visitors' interest in talking vs. listening within a spectrum, resulting in an overall assessment that visitors seemed to be slightly more interested in listening than talking. What is most interesting about this data is how it compares to previously mentioned data, as the Interpretive Guide who approached visitors most frequently self-reported that visitors were almost equally interested in talking and listening. Conversely, the Interpretive Guide who approached visitors least reported a significantly higher level of visitor interest in listening. This suggests a potential correlation between approaching visitors and eliciting response as the more one approaches visitors, the better they become at doing so.

### SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – OBSERVATION

**What were the average, most common, shortest, and longest lengths of conversation?**

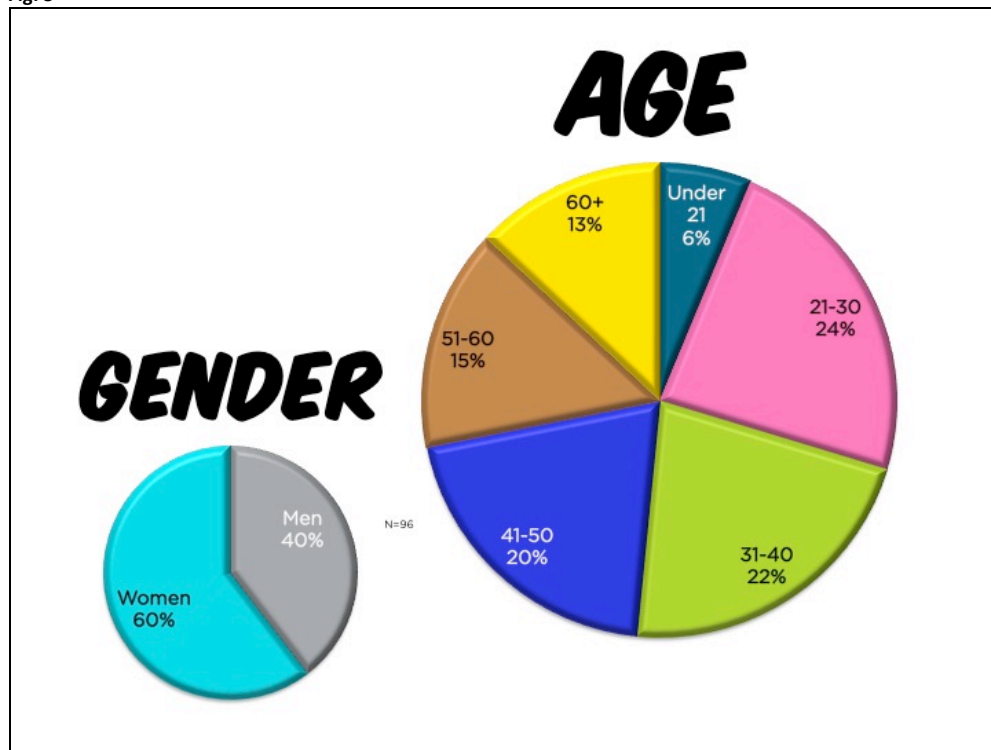
Fig. 4

	Sample size	Length/Percentage
<b>Average length of conversation</b>	96	<b>4.1 minutes</b>
<b>Most common length of conversation</b>	96	<b>1.8 minutes</b>
<b>Shortest conversation</b>	96	<b>24 seconds</b>
<b>Longest conversation</b>	96	<b>39 minutes</b>
<b>% of conversations longer than 5 minutes</b>	96	<b>27.1%</b>
<b>% of conversations longer than 15 minutes</b>	96	<b>2%</b>

The average length of conversation over the course of nearly 100 observed conversations was just over four minutes, although there is a significant disparity between shortest and longest conversation. Of those observed, 27% were longer than five minutes, and only 2% were longer than 15 minutes, thus the vast majority of conversations were short. Shorter conversations tended to consist mostly of visitor questions or quick discussions of specific elements, while longer conversations (especially those over five minutes in length) were much more substantive and interpretive in nature.

What is the age/gender breakdown of visitors that spoke with Interpretive Guides?

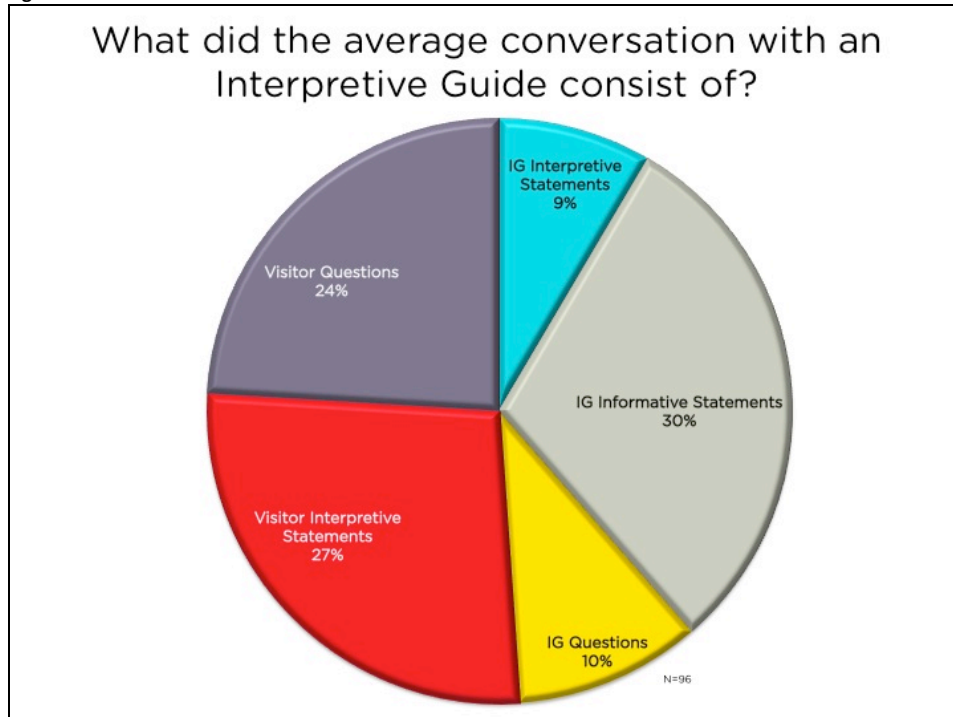
Fig. 5



Both the breakdowns of visitor gender and visitor age are relatively even, although the data suggests that Interpretive Guides spoke most with women between the ages of 21 and 30.

## What did the average conversation with an Interpretive Guide consist of?

Fig. 6



While observing conversation, the author tallied every statement made by Interpretive Guide and visitor into one of five categories, which were determined through informal observation during the process of developing the instrument. The right half of the chart represents that which Interpretive Guides stated and the left side represents that which visitors stated. The evenness of the two sides suggests that the conversations, on average, were balanced between Interpretive Guide speaking and visitor speaking and that the vast majority of the time, Interpretive Guides used information in the conversation while still eliciting a substantial amount of interpretive statements from visitors. This suggests successfulness in the use of mixed methods to engage visitors.

**What is the relationship between high usage of interpretive statements/informative statements/questions by the Interpretive Guide and interpretive statements by the visitor?**

Fig. 7

	Sample size	Visitor interpretive statements
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS</b>	32	<b>279</b>
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG INFORMATIVE STATEMENTS</b>	32	<b>233</b>
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG QUESTIONS</b>	32	<b>211</b>

In order to determine if there is a relationship between the use of information/interpretation/inquiry and visitor engagement, the entire dataset was sorted by each of the three Interpretive Guide categories in order to study visitor behavior when Interpretive Guides used substantial amounts of each of the three categories. As noted above, when Interpretive Guides used their highest level of interpretive statements (relative to their use overall), visitors responded with more interpretive statements than when Interpretive Guides used their highest levels of information or inquiry. What this suggests is that the Interpretive Guide can stimulate visitor engagement successfully when they share their perspective frequently, as one that does so is perhaps likely to seem more genuinely engaged in conversation.

## SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – INTERVIEW WITH ADMINISTRATORS

Fig. 8

<b>How would you describe the ideal Interpretive Guide?</b>
"You have to be curious about people."
"I think the people that have the hardest time are those that come in and expect a template for this. I think we can evaluate programs like this and we can come up with theories about programs like this but there's also going to always be this intuitive aspect of it."
"It's good we have students doing this because they haven't necessarily made up their minds yet about what responses to art should be."
"You have to be able to step outside of yourself and not make it about you."
<b>What is the role of the ideal in this program?</b>
"Our job isn't to entertain people or to give them what they want as educators."
"I've heard about so many amazing conversations IGs have had because they went looking for 'it'."
"There's not a lot of writing on this...on what conversations can be and are around art so you kind of have to bricolage it all together."
"The construction of meaning isn't singular, it's something we're all doing and a conversation we're all part of already."
"It's the different between knowledge and wisdom, you know, you build this thing up over time and eventually it just becomes something you can do."
<b>What is your biggest challenge?</b>
"The biggest challenge I have is trying to get people away from lecturing. No matter how many times you tell them it's about listening, there are certain people who, as soon as I walk out of the room, go back to wanting to tell visitors everything and think that that means they're doing a good job."
"People want to formalize informal conversations because now there's a need to do it because people are realizing formal conversations aren't working anymore because they're not responsive to a postmodern society that is multi-interpretive, multi-voiced, multi-access."
"Not to be crass but if you do look at salaries, the highest salaries in the museum are the positions that are considered to be the most important or accountable. And so if you look at educators, especially people who are on the floor working with the public, and they aren't paid at all, what we're basically saying is that we're internally motivated as opposed to externally motivated. And if we were externally motivated and saw ourselves as truly serving the public, then those folks and those program would be the ones that are most endowed and the most invested in."

Program administrators at the Hirshhorn pointed out a number of key considerations for coming to understand what this approach "looks like." A few times, they pointed out the difficulty in describing this approach in defined terms, as there is no template, just suggested techniques. The current program manager expressed concern for rerouting those who naturally resort to lecturing, as it may lead to positive reinforcement from visitors, but not true engagement. The selflessness of the approach was also stressed, as Interpretive Guides who focus solely on serving the visitor's potential are those who seem to succeed at facilitating those "magic conversations." As the program founder noted, "The construction of meaning isn't singular, it's something we're all doing and a conversation we're all part of already;" it is this concept paired with an ability to step outside of oneself that makes for a particularly successful Interpretive Guide.

**QUESTION: How do visitors think of their Interpretive Guide experiences within the context of their overall museum visit?**

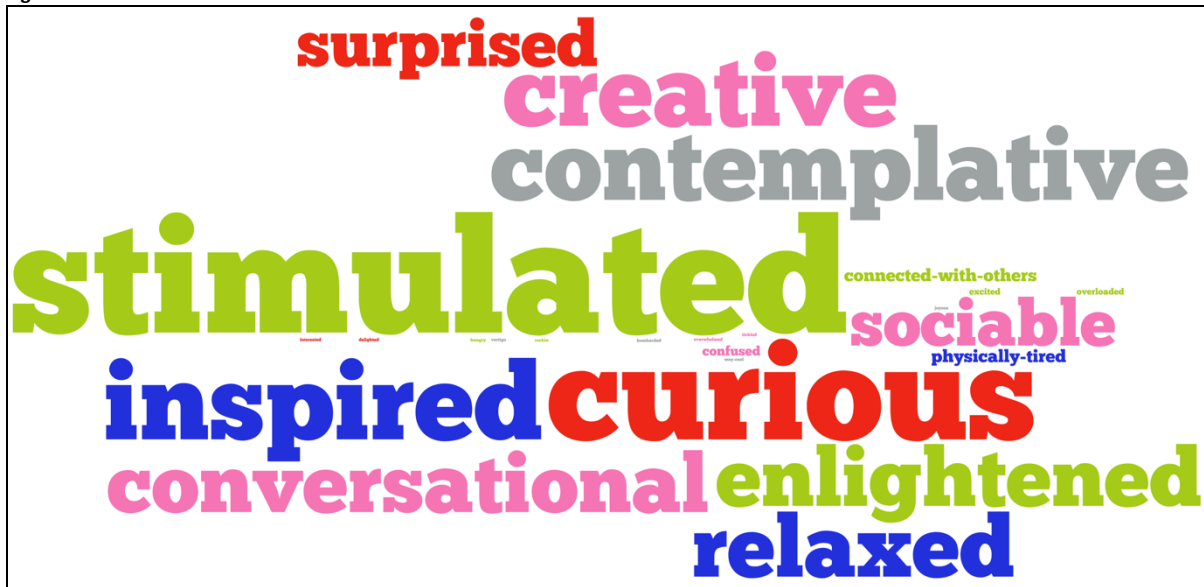
**OVERVIEW**

Nearly all visitors, even those who expressed an interest in a contemplative experience over all others, seemed to greatly value their conversations with Interpretive Guides. Interestingly, visitors ranked opportunities for reflection and opportunities for discussion as nearly equally important in a museum visit as well. Visitors reported feeling inspired to explore, relaxed, and surprised after these experiences, as well as incredibly comfortable with the Interpretive Guides overall. They stated that they would likely seek out an Interpretive Guide in a future experience and that overall, their Interpretive Guide experiences added great benefit to their museum visit.

## SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – VISITOR SURVEY

What words did visitors use to describe how they felt after their Interpretive Guide experience?

Fig.9



Visitors were asked to choose three words that best describe how they felt at this point in their visit (from a bank of 20), shortly after an Interpretive Guide experience. “Stimulated” was selected most frequently, followed by “curious,” “inspired,” “creative,” and “contemplative.” Of particular interest is the significant difference in size between “contemplative” and “sociable,” as a goal of the program is to encourage visitors to be more social in the galleries and it seems Interpretive Guides inspired more contemplation in visitors. Overall, this data suggests that speaking with an Interpretive Guide left visitors intrigued and seemingly inspired to resolve that curiosity through further observation and contemplation of the artwork.

**To what extent do visitors who spoke with an Interpretive Guide value opportunities to reflect on the artwork alone/ discuss the artwork with others in a museum visit?**

Fig. 10

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Reflect on the artwork alone</b>	159	<b>7.8</b>
<b>Discuss the artwork with others</b>	159	<b>7.7</b>

Visitors were asked to rate the extent to which they value opportunities to reflect on the artwork alone/ discuss the artwork with others on a scale (from “not at all” to “extremely”). The data suggests that visitors value both highly and almost precisely to the same degree in a museum visit. Consider these findings alongside overall visitor ratings of their Interpretive Guide experiences and it seems that a visitor satisfied by their Interpretive Guide experience can also be one who greatly values opportunities for contemplation. This possibly may be due to the informal and “optional” nature of conversing with an Interpretive Guide, as visitors who seek contemplation can explore ideas, have their questions answered, then move on to further contemplation. Interpretive Guides expressed a constant effort (during their interview) to ensure that visitors understand that they are not bound to the conversation once it begins. This no-pressure environment may be what leads contemplation-seeking visitors (assumedly if not stereotypically anti-social) to find enjoyment in their Interpretive Guide experiences.

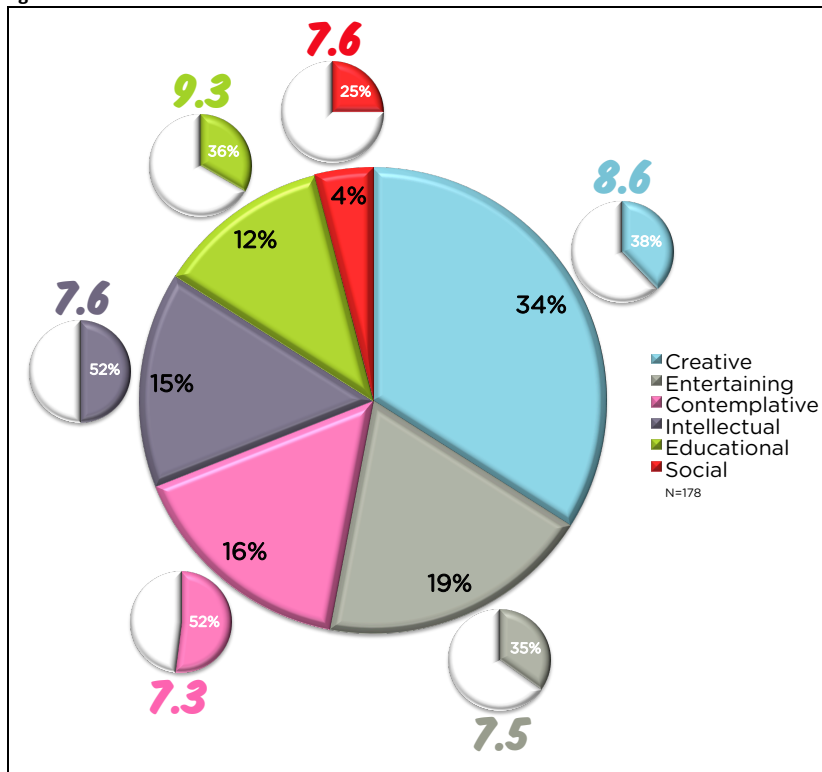
**How do visitors rate their comfort speaking with an Interpretive Guide? To what extent did visitors state they would seek out an Interpretive Guide in a future museum visit? To what extent do visitors feel their Interpretive Guide experience added benefit to their visit to the museum?**

<b>Fig. 11</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>Rating (10 point scale)</b>
<b>Level of comfort with the IG</b>	91	<b>9.5</b>
<b>Would they seek one out again?</b>	63	<b>8.8</b>
<b>Added benefit to their overall visit</b>	63	<b>9.1</b>

The data suggests that visitors felt extremely comfortable with the Interpretive Guides, would likely participate in a future conversation, and felt their experience contributed greatly to their overall museum visit. The slight decline in rating of whether or not they would seek out an Interpretive Guide in the future may be due in part to responses from visitors who enjoyed their conversation but still prefer a more contemplative, private experience in the museum.

## What kinds of experiences were visitors looking to have at the museum?

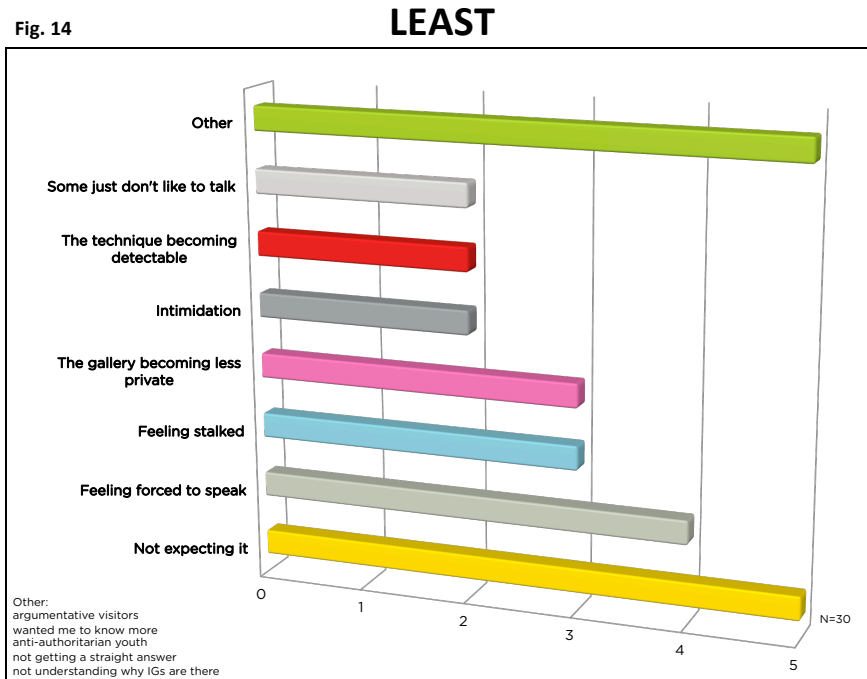
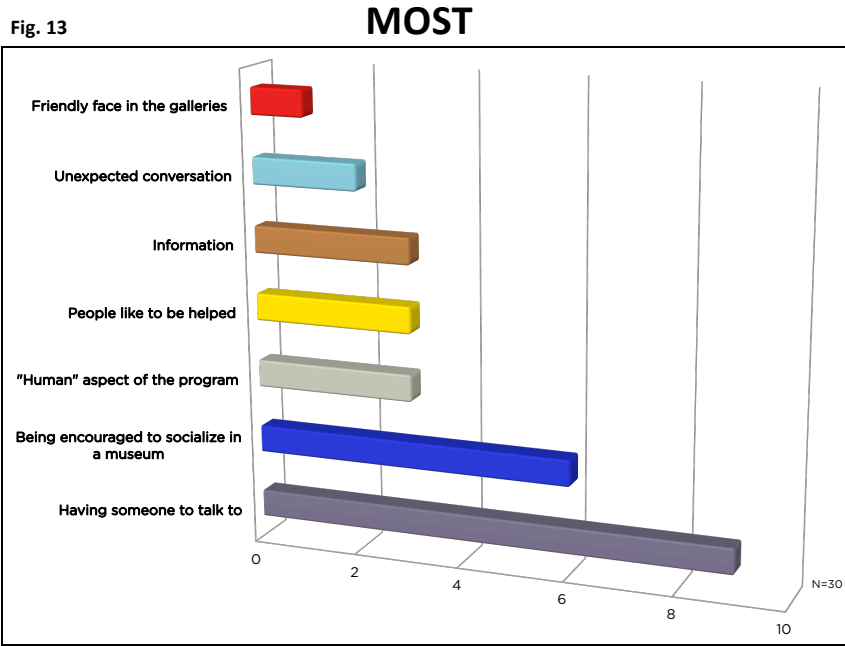
Fig. 12



In the first visitor survey (an exit survey administered to a random sampling of *all* visitors to the exhibition), visitors were asked to choose from a list of six possible museum experience types that which most closely matched the kind they were hoping to have at the museum that day. The chart above displays their selections, along with the percentage of those from each category who spoke with an Interpretive Guide and their respective average rating of the experience on a 10-point scale. The data suggests that visitors were seeking to have a creative experience more than any other kind, and that a social experience was what they were seeking least. Interestingly, however, visitors who selected “contemplative” or “intellectual” were also those who spoke with an Interpretive Guide more than any other category.

**SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – PAST IG SURVEY**

**What do Interpretive Guides feel visitors like most/least about having them present in the galleries?**



Interpretive Guides were asked to provide what they believe visitors like most and least about having them present in the galleries. Perhaps most interestingly, the unexpected qualities of the experience ranked highly in both instances. Beyond simply having someone to talk to, Interpretive Guides stated being encouraged to socialize in a museum as second most appealing to visitors. However, the unexpectedness of socialization was also stated as the element of the experience visitors possibly like least.

## **QUESTION: What impact does the program have on the Interpretive Guides?**

### **OVERVIEW**

The majority of both current (during the evaluation) and past Interpretive Guides reported their internship as challenging but incredibly telling of visitors and museum experiences. They stated that what they enjoyed most was the depth of the experience (both with the artwork and visitors) and that what they enjoyed least was the monotony of slow days in the galleries and encountering unhappy or unruly visitors. Interpretive Guides in the program during the evaluation period exhibited a perspectival shift over time, speaking more to the process and methods of facilitation when starting their internship and concluding with much more focus on the visitor and how the method can fit the visitor. All surveyed Interpretive Guides rated the extent to which the experience impacted how they think of the field of Museum Education as a 8.7 on a 10-point scale and their overall satisfaction as an 8.6. Thus, findings suggest that the program is of value to Interpretive Guides and provides them with experiences that profoundly impact their understanding of visitor experience.

## SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – PAST IG SURVEY

What words do Interpretive Guides use to describe the program?

Fig. 15



Interpretive Guides submitted three words they would use to describe the program, and entered “challenging,” “informative,” “interactive,” and “innovative” most frequently. In the group interview, Interpretive Guides also expressed that the experience was challenging but that its personal impact stemmed from working through and resolving the challenge of engaging a great variety of visitors.

## What did Interpretive Guides enjoy most/least about their experience?

Fig. 16

### MOST

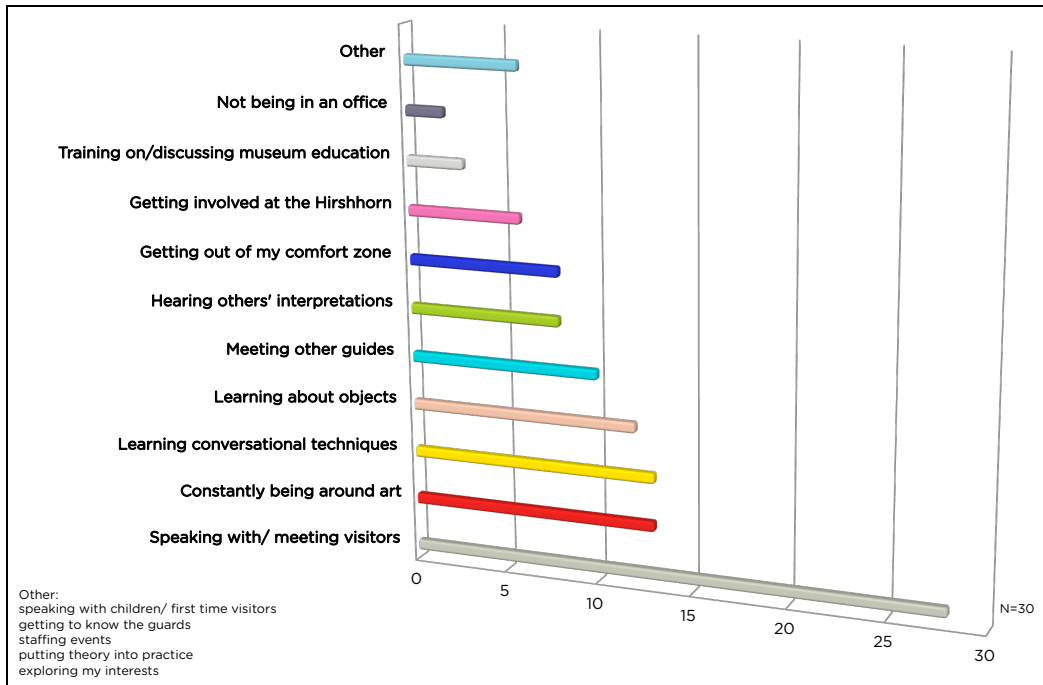
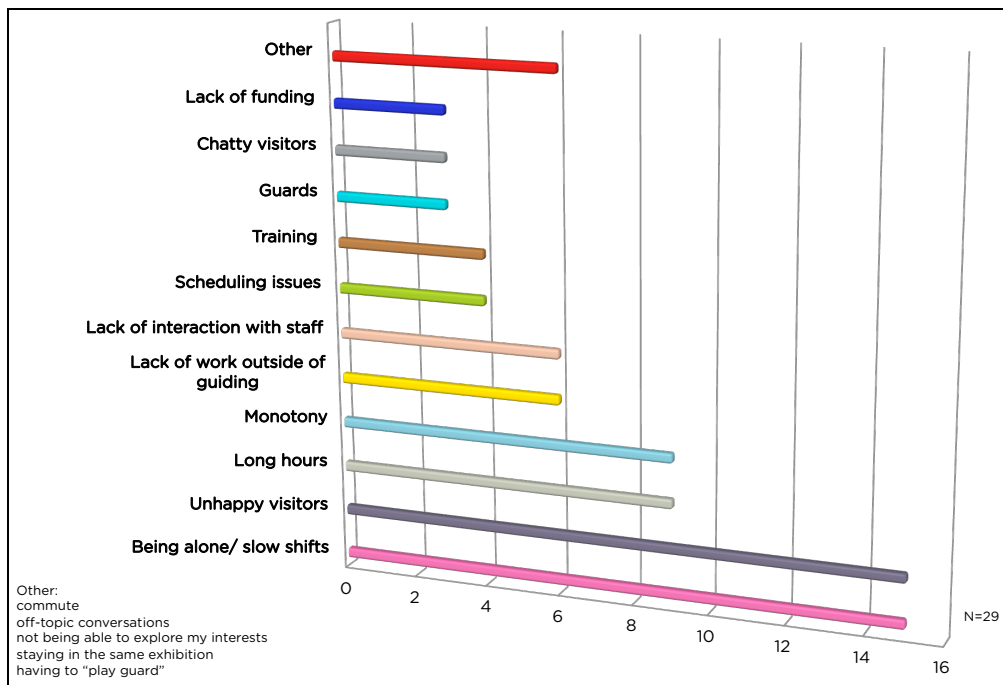


Fig. 17

### LEAST



When asked what they personally enjoyed most/least about their experiences in the program, past Interpretive Guides expressed speaking with (and learning how to speak with) visitors and having the opportunity to spend an intense period of time with an exhibition as some of their favorite things. The fatigue associated with the experience alongside sometimes rude or unhappy visitors were some of their least favorite elements, as was lack of exposure to staff and projects outside of their interpretive guiding.

**What impact does the program have on how Interpretive Guides think of Museum Education as a field?**

Fig. 18

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Impact on how IGs think of Museum Education</b>	31	<b>8.7</b>
<b>Anecdotes from Interpretive Guides</b>		
"Being an IG wasn't about lecturing or "teaching" instead it was and is a way to interact with a human being-to make a connection of sorts- both fruitful for the guide and visitor."		
"The program forced me to reevaluate the possibilities of museum education, and its place in the larger field of pedagogy. My ideas about museum demographics and visitor intention were turned on their heads. At this point, I am trying to be much more flexible about how I approach the subject, and suspect that the idea of set learning outcomes could be better replaced by a broad understanding of individualized learning possibilities, which educators would then have to take upon themselves to foster and develop."		
"The process of treating guests as agents of, rather than vessels meant to be filled with, interpretation effectuates the aesthetic experience of education--the moment when the visitor's senses are fully engaged and resonating with what she/he is witnessing."		
"I now never underestimate a visitor, their intellectual capabilities, and their willingness to "work" towards understanding."		

Interpretive Guides rated the impact the program had on how they perceive of Museum Education as a field relatively highly, focusing predominantly on how much it informed their understanding of the capabilities and willingness of visitors. An Interpretive Guide stated (during the group interview) that the program positively impacted the way they think of visitors, but negatively impacted the way they think of the field of Museum Education.

## SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – MIND MAPPING ACTIVITY

**How did the Interpretive Guides’ perceptions of their function change over time?**

Fig. 19

<b>How would you describe what you do to a friend?</b>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>
Conversational, fun, interactive, spontaneous, transformative, freeform, stimulating, exciting, dynamic, inclusive
I go up to people in the galleries and ask if they want to talk about art
Equitable (I have information, but don’t use it to dominate)
Helping visitors arrive at informed interpretations of art
Engage every visitor with meaningful interactions
<b>NOVEMBER</b>
We try to get people to leave with a new understanding of what they saw, and arrived at on their own terms
I help people define their own questions and reassure them about asking them
I engage visitors in a dialogue to support their unique interpretations
Reading people as much as interpreting art
I help people look at art in a new way
<b>JANUARY</b>
I engage visitors in conversation that creates meaningful connections
Create a social atmosphere in the gallery
I act as a bridge into the museum
Being there for people

Interpretive Guides were asked to respond to the prompt by writing individual thoughts on sticky notes, the most representative of which are displayed above by session. Examining the key words in each set of statements, what becomes apparent is that Interpretive Guides become more visitor-centered over time. While “people” and “visitor” are mentioned in the results from the first session, it seems there was a shift from thinking about what the Interpretive Guides do for visitors to what they can do to help visitors help themselves. It becomes less about what they can provide and more about what visitors want and need. By the final session, Interpretive Guides were visibly worn from their experience (thus responses were less frequent) but nevertheless responded with more about visitor needs than previously.

**How did the Interpretive Guides think about the importance/impact of the program over time?**

Fig. 20

<b>Why is the IG program important?</b>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>
Uses art as a means for connecting with people
It will help me learn how to talk about abstract art with anyone
Helps the museum get a better idea of how they're reaching people
Builds a sense of safe space in museum, but still fosters intellectual rigor and curiosity
Because everyone involved can have an informative, inspiring experience in the museum and hopefully leave with a new understanding of their interpretive potential
<b>NOVEMBER</b>
Teaches visitors that the art belongs to them
Makes the museum more responsive to the community
I'm learning new ways to talk about art with people with all levels of knowledge
Establishes level of comfort for all visitors who could otherwise be uncomfortable
Allows/fosters human interaction in what can otherwise be a sterile/isolating space
Creates a safe space for art novices and an intellectually and aesthetically challenging space for art aficionados
It gives visitors a halfway ground between formal tours and the ordinary museum experience, we can give them as much time as they want, the exact info they want and tailor the experience to their needs
<b>JANUARY</b>
An enriching personal experience
Gives a human/relational face to the museum
Helps visitors feel that the museum is a safe space
Because it regards the public as agents of interpretation
It makes people more likely to talk about art with friends in the future

As with the first prompt, Interpretive Guides seemed to shift from thinking about their/the museum's needs to thinking about visitors' needs. Establishing a "safe space" was mentioned all three instances, as was the museum exhibiting responsiveness to the public. Socialization also became increasingly important, both as something to foster in experiences with the Interpretive Guide and in future visitor experiences.

## SPECIFIC QUESTIONS – INTERVIEW WITH INTERPRETIVE GUIDES

Fig. 21

<b>Tell me about the arc of your experience.</b>
"When I first was interviewing for this position I thought that it would be more art historical. I read the description and knew it said 'conversational,' but thought it would be more like what I had seen docents do in museums before. I knew that there was some new angle here, but I didn't really have a handle on what that was. Then, in the gallery over the course of these four months, what it has become is kind of a way to be all things to all people but from a defined viewpoint. So, instead of standing and delivering information, or guiding people through an explicit narrative that was predetermined, it was really working to meet people where they were."
<b>Any great revelations?</b>
"Whatever you have in your mind that you think is important to tell them, wait until they're done talking first. Wait until they've completed an arc and then begin."
"I came into this very much with an expectation that I wanted to find the "truth" about this work and find the definitive narrative of this thing so I could tell people. But what I ended up finding was that all of my research became useful in actually broadening my potential narrative."
"If you have faith in the people around you, they'll have faith in you way more often than you expect and that really is a beautiful testament to the truth of what this program offers."
"This program exposes you to what can be, that's the beauty of it because if you don't know what can be, you're content with what is."
<b>How about your individual styles? How did you use information?</b>
"I think the hardest part about using information is knowing how to steer it back towards interpretation, because it can so easily fall into this trap of Q&A."
"One of the most challenging things is using information to lead to critical thought, as opposed to just inquiry after fact."
"Having a stockpile of questions prepared didn't work because I could tell that the visitor could tell that this was no longer a conversation."
"I think it was almost better if you could get them to talk without asking a question."
<b>How has it impacted you?</b>
"This has dramatically changed what I think museum education is. I feel the way museum education is structured in this country is fundamentally, deeply, flawed. I think it's aligned to things that have nothing to do with people and aligned with ideas and ideals that have more to do with statistics and curatorial decisions, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but when that doesn't take into account that the institution was founded with the core value of the dissemination of knowledge but that's not represented in the galleries I think there is something fundamentally wrong. And I think this program is a magnificent first step towards redressing this. It has made me realize that if I want to pursue Museum Education as a capitol "P" profession, I want to be an agent of change."

The interview conducted with Interpretive Guides was incredibly telling, and highlighted how informative the Interpretive Guide experience can be about people in general. They expressed noticing a distinct shift during their experience from wanting to utilize a more structured approach to letting go and working with the spontaneity of the experience. The use of inquiry vs. information was mentioned a number of times, as Interpretive Guides noted that one of their greatest challenges was truly engaging visitors who are seeking information and resisting inquiry. Developing rapport with visitors was stated as essential to the experience overall, as visitors were far more willing to explore once it was established. One Interpretive Guide also stated that this program inspires them

to seek to become an agent of change in the museum profession, as they felt their experience forced them to reevaluate the field.

### **OTHER RELEVANT QUESTIONS – PAST IG SURVEY**

#### **How do Interpretive Guides feel the program could inform the work of other departments?**

Fig. 22

<b>Ideas for how to inform other departments at the museum</b>
“Interpretive Guides were often the first point of contact to any visitors to the Hirshhorn. For a National institution whose primary concern is providing a public service, I think every department in the museum could use feedback gathered from Interpretive Guide conversations to help develop their departments.”
“If we were able to quantify the experience more, then I think that other departments could see the value more concretely.”
“I believe guides have the practical in-gallery experience that would be really valuable to curators to let them know what is working and what doesn't, even with things as minute as how the placement of sensors affects the overall experience.”

Interpretive Guides expressed a concern for their lack of rapport with staff outside of the Education department at the museum as well as an interest in what more collaboration could look like. The core values of the museum were mentioned as closely tied to the program, as Interpretive Guides feel they are closest to visitors, therefore knowledgeable about what works and does not work best in the galleries. One Interpretive Guide in particular discussed how the program might receive buy-in from staff if it were able to quantify the experience more. Overall, Interpretive Guides expressed interest in creating a feedback loop with staff at the museum in order to impact decision-making processes and ultimately better the museum experience.

**To what extent do Interpretive Guides remember bonding with the rest of their group?**

Fig. 23		Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Level of bonding amongst IG group</b>	30	<b>8.3</b>	
<b>How could the museum help facilitate greater bonding?</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More trips outside of the museum</li> <li>▪ Always have 2 IGs in the galleries</li> <li>▪ Ensure that all IGs have a shift with one another</li> <li>▪ Provide housing suggestions</li> <li>▪ Give IGs a joint project to work on</li> <li>▪ Meet more frequently and in different locations</li> </ul>			

Overall, it seems Interpretive Guides bonded relatively successfully during their experiences. The only mentions of lack of camaraderie blamed scheduling or infrequent opportunities to meet and nearly all respondents expressed interest in more opportunities to work and meet with the rest of the group.

**How fatigued do Interpretive Guides remember feeling?**

Fig. 24		Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Level of IG fatigue</b>	30	<b>6.2</b>	
<b>Ideas for combating fatigue</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More tours to break things up</li> <li>▪ More substantive and continued reading on museum education</li> <li>▪ Option of shorter, more frequent shifts</li> <li>▪ Weekly technique experiments/ goals</li> <li>▪ Being in more than just the temporary exhibition</li> <li>▪ Develop “games”</li> <li>▪ More professional development opportunities</li> </ul>			

Surprisingly, past Interpretive Guides did not express having suffered significantly from fatigue during their experience, however, there were many instances of expressed interest in finding ways to break up the monotony.

**How do Interpretive Guides rate their overall experience in the program? What changes would they make to better it?**

Fig. 25

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Overall rating of IG program experience</b>	30	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Suggested changes to the program</b>		
"I think my main issues were with the relationship the IGs had to other departments in the museum. I felt very ignored by those departments."		
"Perhaps IG's could venture more into the permanent collection to break up some of the monotony on slower shifts."		
"The research days could be a little vague so a more solid explanation of what those should involve might have been nice, but at the end of the day I was glad to be able to tailor those to my own interests."		
"Morale was the big problem for me; mine flagged halfway through just because I felt cut off from the staff."		
"It might be possible to extend the time that IG's are employed and have them work for a year rather than for a single exhibition."		
"As always: more readings, more interaction, and more conversation."		
"I would find some money for stipends!"		
"I would have liked more structured time to discuss pros and cons of how individual guides are approaching the problems of guiding."		

Overall, Interpretive Guides rated their experience relatively highly but expressed room for growth in terms of visibility with both the museum and staff. Interest was also articulated in developing the program into something more substantial (and substantially funded). It seems Interpretive Guides, although often drained by the monotony of the experience, crave increased responsibilities, immersion, and reflection.

**KEY FINDINGS AND LIMITATIONS**

Overall, findings suggest that Interpretive Guide conversations were highly responsive, thus widely varied, and consisted of sharing information and interpretation both as a result of and not as a result of the use of inquiry. Interpretive Guides started conversations far more than visitors did, and reported mild visitor enthusiasm and interest in conversation, yet visitors rated their overall enjoyment of their Interpretive Guide

experiences very highly and on average, engaged in the conversation almost as much as the Interpretive Guides.

Visitors reported an almost equally substantial interest in opportunities for contemplation and opportunities for socialization in museum experiences, yet even those who seemed to prefer contemplation or an intellectual experience rated their Interpretive Guide experience highly. From the Interpretive Guides' perspectives, it is likely that visitors most dislike feeling caught off guard by the Interpretive Guide and most enjoy having someone to speak to in the galleries and being encouraged to socialize in an art museum.

Interpretive Guides reported satisfaction with their internship experience at the museum, and stated that it greatly informed how they perceive of visitor experience and museum education. The Interpretive Guides that assisted with the evaluation become significantly more visitor-centered over time as well, and stated that the experience provided them with an informed outlook on visitor experience. Interpretive Guides also suggested that there is room for improvement concerning the program's relationship with museum staff at-large.

The most pronounced limitations of this research are its specificity to the Hirshhorn and Interpretive Guide program and its level of descriptiveness. The findings do speak to the nature of interpretation of Modern and Contemporary art in museums, but lack robustness and breadth, thus cannot speak definitively to the field-at-large. Due to the desire for baseline data, this evaluation was designed with description as a primary concern as well, so findings only suggest likely impacts on the visitor and leave room for further study concerning the true impact of these experiences on visitors.

## **CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **FUTURE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Seeing as this evaluation provided the museum and field primarily with descriptions of Interpretive Guide experiences and data culled from Interpretive Guides, further study of the direct impact of these experiences on visitors should be conducted in order for them to be fully understood. Beyond the scope of possibility for this particular evaluation, a longitudinal study could be conducted, in which visitors are studied before, during, and after their Interpretive Guide encounters. More comprehensive future research could also be conducted on what personality traits and characteristics make for the most successful Interpretive Guide, in order to inform institutions interested in starting similar programs. Finally, a field-wide study synthesizing the training processes of interpreters in art museums could be conducted alongside a standardized visitor study in order to ascertain what kinds of approaches to facilitating interpretive experiences visitors respond to most positively.

For the program, variety amongst Interpretive Guide approaches and relationship with museums staff are the two areas in which improvement is most needed. Quality control after gallery shifts have begun (especially after the midway point of the internship) is of concern, as some Interpretive Guide seemed to develop set mindsets rather quickly, and rarely experimented with deviating in order to develop a more informed perspective. While a relationship between the program and museum staff has been established, utilizing the Interpretive Guides more holistically could strengthen the program and museum. The responsive and reflective nature of the program could serve as a constant and embedded form of formative evaluation that the museum could draw from when informing decisions

relating to future exhibitions and gallery experiences. Interpretive Guides remain closely tied to the realities of visitor experience in the galleries, thus could be utilized far more than presently.

### **CONCLUSION**

When conducting research to inform this evaluation, only one previous study at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden emerged (dating to 1980). Conducted by the Smithsonian Office of Museum Programs, it gathered baseline data concerning general visitor perceptions of the museum. Speaking to the Interpretive Guide program that was formed some 17 years later, the evaluation stated in its conclusion that visitors “were not necessarily asking for formalized educational programs, but rather seemed interest in things that they could pursue on their own” including “roving guides to answer specific questions.” Wolf and Tymitz also note that “providing these kinds of learning opportunities is no simple matter” as “many art museum professionals are often more interested in enriching the aesthetic experiences of their visiting public and sometimes the strategies engaged in achieving that end are inconsistent with and in opposition to what is needed to enhance learning encounters” (Wolf & Tymitz, 1980, p. 50).

Visitors and Interpretive Guides alike seem to respond very positively to the program, which seems to lead to emerging artists, art historians, educators, and museum professionals who understand human interaction and interpretation in the museum space very deeply. While the program certainly has room for improvement, it serves as a intriguing case study that speaks to the successes and pitfalls of shifting the facilitation of

interpretation away from rigid structure and premeditation towards responsiveness and coming to understand visitors as people, not participants.

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## APPENDIX A

Photographs of the *Any Warhol: Shadows* exhibition



Andy Warhol, *Shadows*, 1978-79. Dia Art Foundation. ©The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Photo: Cathy Carver.



Andy Warhol, *Shadows*, 1978-79. Dia Art Foundation. ©The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Photo: Cathy Carver.



Andy Warhol, *Shadows*, 1978-79. Dia Art Foundation. ©The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Photo: Cathy Carver.

# APPENDIX B

## Sample Interpretive Guide reflective journal surveys

Date \_\_\_\_ \ \_\_\_\_

**1. Where did it happen?**

- Warhol    Ambulatory
- Flavin

**2. How many people did you encounter?**

**3. Did they approach you?**

- Yes    No

**4. What did they seem more interested in?**

Talking < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Listening

**5. How enthusiastic did they seem?**

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Extremely

**NOTES**

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Date \_\_\_\_ \ \_\_\_\_

**1. Where did it happen?**

- Warhol    Ambulatory
- Flavin

**2. How many people did you encounter?**

**3. Did they approach you?**

- Yes    No

**4. What did they seem more interested in?**

Talking < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Listening

**5. How enthusiastic did they seem?**

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Extremely

**NOTES**

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Date \_\_\_\_ \ \_\_\_\_

**1. Where did it happen?**

- Warhol    Ambulatory
- Flavin

**2. How many people did you encounter?**

**3. Did they approach you?**

- Yes    No

**4. What did they seem more interested in?**

Talking < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Listening

**5. How enthusiastic did they seem?**

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Extremely

**NOTES**

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Date \_\_\_\_ \ \_\_\_\_

**1. Where did it happen?**

- Warhol    Ambulatory
- Flavin

**2. How many people did you encounter?**

**3. Did they approach you?**

- Yes    No

**4. What did they seem more interested in?**

Talking < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Listening

**5. How enthusiastic did they seem?**

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 > Extremely

**NOTES**

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## APPENDIX C

Photograph of completed Interpretive Guide reflective journals



APPENDIX D  
Sample observation instrument

# INTERPRETIVE GUIDE OBSERVATION

DATE \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

INTERPRETIVE GUIDE \_\_\_\_\_

IG APPROACHED VISITOR? \_\_\_\_\_

# OF VISITORS \_\_\_\_\_

AGES \_\_\_\_\_

GENDERS \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH \_\_\_\_\_

**IG INFORMATIVE STATEMENTS**

**IG INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS**

**IG QUESTIONS**

**VISITOR INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS**

**VISITOR QUESTIONS**

**NOTES**

# APPENDIX E

Sample visitor exit survey (Page 1)

Please respond to the following questions as honestly as possible, we would love to hear your thoughts as we continue to improve your experience at the museum.

### ABOUT YOUR OVERALL EXPERIENCE

1. What kind of experience **most closely** matches the kind were you hoping to have today? (Please choose **one**)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> An entertaining experience | <input type="checkbox"/> A social experience        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A creative experience      | <input type="checkbox"/> A educational experience   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> An intellectual experience | <input type="checkbox"/> A contemplative experience |

How satisfied are you with the extent to which this has occurred so far?

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

2. Which **three** words or phrases would you choose to describe how you feel after your experience in *Andy Warhol: Shadows*?

Sociable	Frustrated	Enlightened	Physically tired
Uncomfortable	Surprised	Confused	Relaxed
Inspired	Mentally tired	Stimulated	Overwhelmed
Bored	Connected with others	Bombarded	Curious
Creative	Overloaded	Conversational	Contemplative
Other _____			

Is there a specific reason why you chose one of these words or phrases?

Word or phrase \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the following supplemented your experience in the exhibition the **most**? (Please choose **one**)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The labels/wall text                | <input type="checkbox"/> A conversation with an Interpretive Guide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A conversation with another visitor | <input type="checkbox"/> The exhibition pamphlet                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                         | <input type="checkbox"/> A docent tour of the exhibition           |

What makes you say that?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. To what extent do you value the following in a museum visit?

Opportunities to hear about the artwork (tours & lectures)

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

Opportunities to reflect on the artwork alone

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

Opportunities to discuss the artwork with others

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

Opportunities to read about the artwork (labels & texts)

Not at all < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

**APPENDIX F**  
Sample visitor exit survey (Page 2)

**\*DID YOU SPEAK WITH AN INTERPETIVE GUIDE? IF SO, PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 5-9. IF NOT, PROCEED TO QUESTION 10.\***

5. Was this your first encounter with an Interpretive Guide?

- Yes
- No

If it was not, how many times have you spoken with an Interpretive Guide in the past? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How were you made aware of Interpretive Guides in the galleries? (Check all that apply)

- I was approached by one
- I noticed signage about their presence
- I noticed their nametag
- I saw them speaking to someone else
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. How likely is it that you would recommend the Interpretive Guide experience to a friend?

**Not at all** < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 **> Extremely**

8. What was **most** valuable/enjoyable about your Interpretive Guide experience? Why?

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9. What was **least** valuable/enjoyable about your Interpretive Guide experience? Why?

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10. How many times have you visited the museum in the last year?

- This was my first time
- 2-3 times
- 4-6 times
- More than 6 times

11. Your age:

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+
- I would prefer not to say

12. Is there anything else you would like for us to know?

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**Thank you for your responses and we hope to see you again!**

## APPENDIX G

### Sample post-Interpretive Guide conversation survey

Please respond to the following questions as honestly as possible, we would love to hear your thoughts as we continue to improve your experience at the museum.

1. Which **three** words or phrases would you choose to describe how you feel at this point in your visit?

Sociable	Frustrated	Enlightened	Physically tired
Uncomfortable	Surprised	Confused	Relaxed
Inspired	Mentally tired	Stimulated	Overwhelmed
Bored	Connected with others	Bombarded	Curious
Creative	Overloaded	Conversational	Contemplative
Other _____			

2. To what extent do you value the following in a museum visit?

**Opportunities to reflect on the artwork alone**

Not at all < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

**Opportunities to talk about the artwork with others**

Not at all < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Extremely

3. Was this your first time speaking with an Interpretive Guide?

- Yes  
 No

4. Would you recommend your Interpretive Guide experience to a friend?

- Yes  
 No

Why or why not?

---

---

---

5. How would you rate the following elements of your Interpretive Guide experience?

**Comfort speaking with the Interpretive Guide**

Very uncomfortable < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Completely comfortable

**Confidence in his/her knowledge**

Not confident at all < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > Completely confident

**Overall enjoyment of the conversation**

I really disliked it < 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 > I really enjoyed it

**Thank you for your responses and we hope to see you again!**

## APPENDIX H

### Interpretive Guide interview questions

#### INTERPRETIVE GUIDE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

January 17, 2012

11:30AM

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

- 1) To start us off, talk to me about the arc of your experience. How did you perceive of what you would be doing back before you started and how do you think of things now?
- 2) Is there anything you wish you had known before starting this program? Can you share any great revelations?
- 3) Speak a bit about your individual styles. What do you do when all the visitor wants is a Q&A session?
- 4) What were some of your go-to phrases or tactics (things you greeted visitors with, general questions you asked, etc.)?
- 5) When did conversations feel like they went well? What were your signifiers?
- 6) What are some skills, interests, ideals, etc that you feel served you well as an Interpretive Guide?
- 7) What were some of your greatest challenges to work through?
- 8) Without going too in depth, talk to me about some of the most challenging experiences you had in the galleries.
- 9) Imagine yourself at another institution trying to start a program of this sort, do you think it would be feasible and how would your approach change if at all?
- 10) So if we're thinking about the visitor experience and museum education, what would you say are some of your biggest takeaways?
- 11) Coming away from this program, how do you think it has impacted what you'll do from this point on?

## **APPENDIX I**

### **Program administrators interview questions**

#### **PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

January 11, 2012

10:30 AM

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

- 1) Please tell me about the history of the program, how and why did it first take shape?
- 2) How would you describe the ideal Interpretive Guide (in terms of personality, approach, ideals, etc)?
- 3) What do you feel are the outcomes of the IG program? (After a conversation with an IG, visitors will..., After the IG internship, interns will...)
- 4) To what extent do you feel these outcomes are being achieved?
- 5) I know fatigue is one of the biggest issues the IGs face, what do you think are some of the other challenges innate to the program/approach?
- 6) What are your thoughts about the IG approach in relation to other approaches to interpretation? How it is similar/different/stronger/weaker?
- 7) What is your ideal future for the program?

# APPENDIX J

## Past Interpretive Guide experience survey (Page 1)

### Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey, your responses will be incredibly useful in working to improve the Interpretive Guide program. Please be completely open and honest and answer as much as you can.

#### 1. What are three words you would use to describe the Interpretive Guide program?

1-

2-

3-

#### 2. What are some of the things you MOST enjoyed about being an IG?

1-

2-

3-

4-

#### 3. What are some of the things you LEAST enjoyed about being an IG?

1-

2-

3-

4-

#### 4. On a scale of 1 to 8, how would you rate the impact being an IG has had on how you think of museum education and the visitor experience?

(1) No impact    (2)    (3)    (4)    (5)    (6)    (7)    (8) Great impact

I would say the IG program has had...

\*\*\*What makes you say that? \*\*\*

## APPENDIX K

Past Interpretive Guide experience survey  
(Page 2)

### Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey

**5. If you could have called yourself something other than "Interpretive Guide" what might you have called yourself?**

**6. Based on your experience, what do you think visitors like most/least about having Interpretive Guides in the galleries?**

One page down, two to go...

# APPENDIX L

Past Interpretive Guide experience survey  
(Page 3)

**Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey**

**The survey continues, you're almost there...**

**7. On a scale of 1 to 8, how would you rate how you were managed as an Interpretive Guide by Ryan and/or Kristy?**

	(1) Horribly	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Wonderfully
I would rate their management...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*\*\*What did you enjoy most/least about how you were managed?\*\*\*

**8. On a scale of 1 to 8, how would you rate your relationship with museum staff outside of the Education department?**

	(1) Horrible	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Wonderful
Our relationship was...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*\*\*How do you feel staff perceived of you and to what extent did you feel valued?\*\*\*

**9. How do you think what Interpretive Guides do could inform the work of other departments at the museum?**

## APPENDIX M

Past Interpretive Guide experience survey  
(Page 4)

### Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey

**10. What are your thoughts about the training process for the program? What was most/least useful?**

**11. On a scale of 1 to 8, how would you rate what your relationship was like with the other Interpretive Guides?**

	(1) Not close at all	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Extremely close
I would say we were...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*\*\*Is there anything the museum could do to better facilitate bonding amongst the group?\*\*\*

Almost there, just one page to go!

## APPENDIX N

Past Interpretive Guide experience survey  
(Page 5)

### Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey

This is the last page!

**12. By the end of the program, how fatigued do you remember feeling (on a scale of 1 to 8)?**

	(1) Not fatigued at all	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Incredibly fatigued
I remember feeling...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\*\*\*What do you think could have been done to help ease that fatigue?\*\*\*

**13. What are one or two other challenges you remember facing while you were an IG?**

1-

2-

**14. Have you experienced any similar approaches to interpretation at other museums? If so, where and what is your memory of that experience?**

## APPENDIX O

Past Interpretive Guide experience survey  
(page6)

### Past Interpretive Guide Experience Survey

**15. How does your Interpretive Guide internship rank with other internships you have had in museums?**

- It was far greater
- It was somewhat greater
- It was just as great
- It was somewhat worse
- It was far worse
- N/A (this was my first)

**16. On a scale of 1-8, how would you rate your overall experience in the program?**

	(1) Horribly	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8) Wonderfully
I would rate my experience...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**17. Is there anything you would change about/add to the program to make it better? (Use this as a place for final thoughts)**

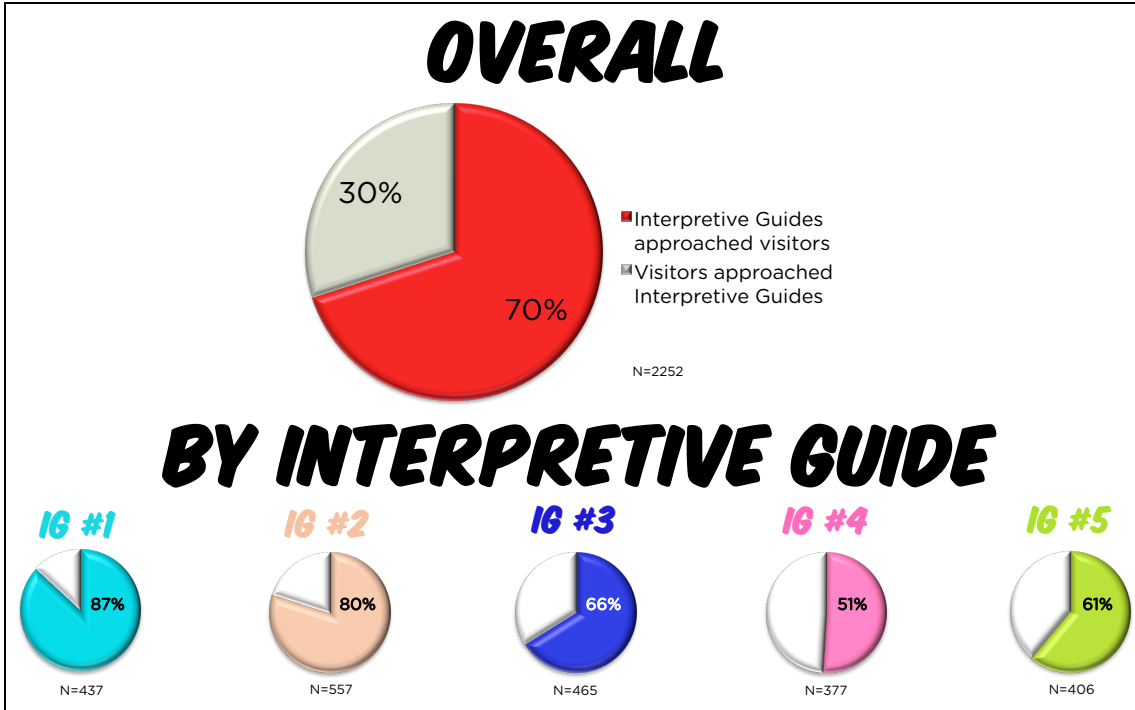
**You survived! Thank you so much for participating in this evaluation, your feedback is incredibly helpful to us!**



**APPENDIX P**  
 Who approached whom?  
 Perceived visitor enthusiasm

**WHO APPROACHED WHOM?**

Fig. 1



**PERCEIVED VISITOR ENTHUSIASM**

Fig. 2

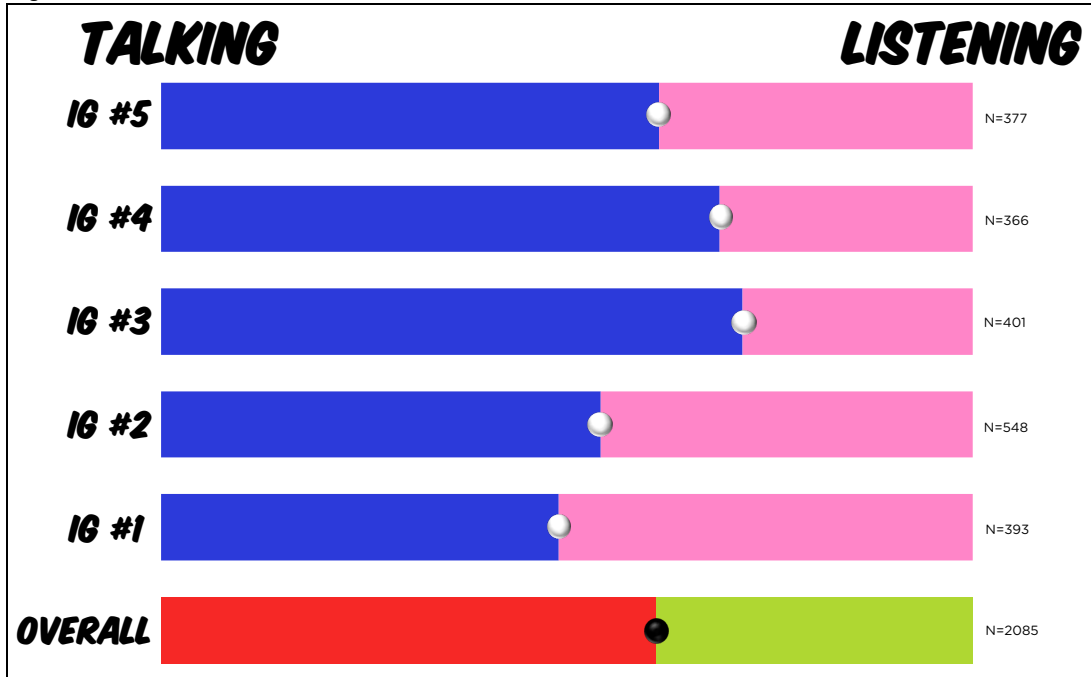
	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Overall</b>	1199	<b>6.5</b>
<b>IG #1</b>	248	<b>6.5</b>
<b>IG #2</b>	367	<b>6.4</b>
<b>IG #3</b>	197	<b>6.3</b>
<b>IG #4</b>	175	<b>6.3</b>
<b>IG #5</b>	212	<b>7.0</b>

## APPENDIX Q

Perceived level of visitor interest in talking vs. listening  
Length of conversation

### PERCEIVED LEVEL OF VISITOR INTEREST IN TALKING VS. LISTENING

Fig. 3



### LENGTH OF CONVERSATION

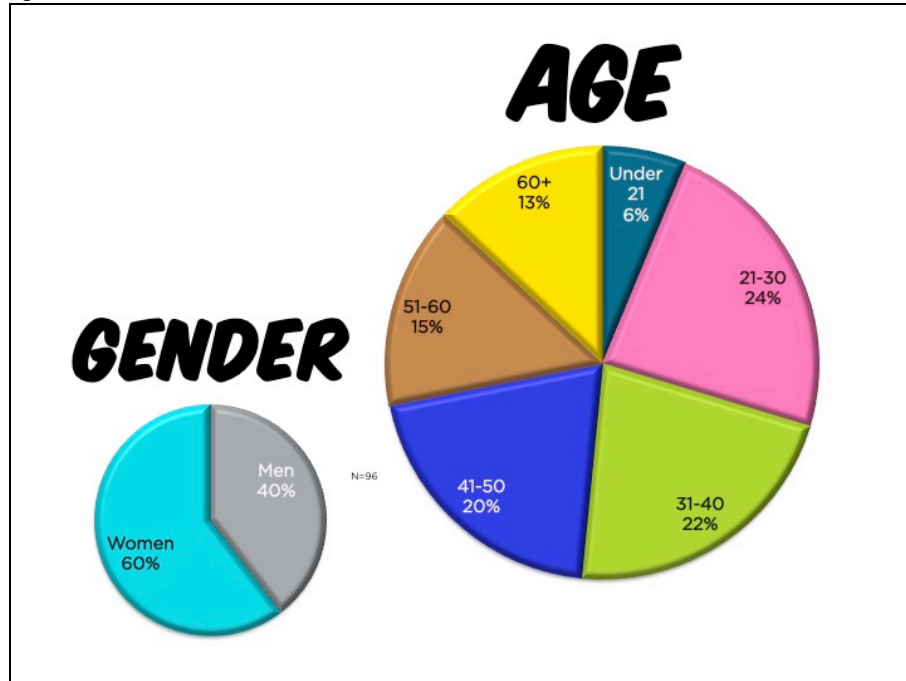
Fig. 4

	Sample size	Length/Percentage
Average length of conversation	96	<b>4.1 minutes</b>
Most common length of conversation	96	<b>1.8 minutes</b>
Shortest conversation	96	<b>24 seconds</b>
Longest conversation	96	<b>39 minutes</b>
% of conversations longer than 5 minutes	96	<b>27.1%</b>
% of conversations longer than 15 minutes	96	<b>2%</b>

**APPENDIX R**  
Age and gender breakdown  
Elements of average conversation

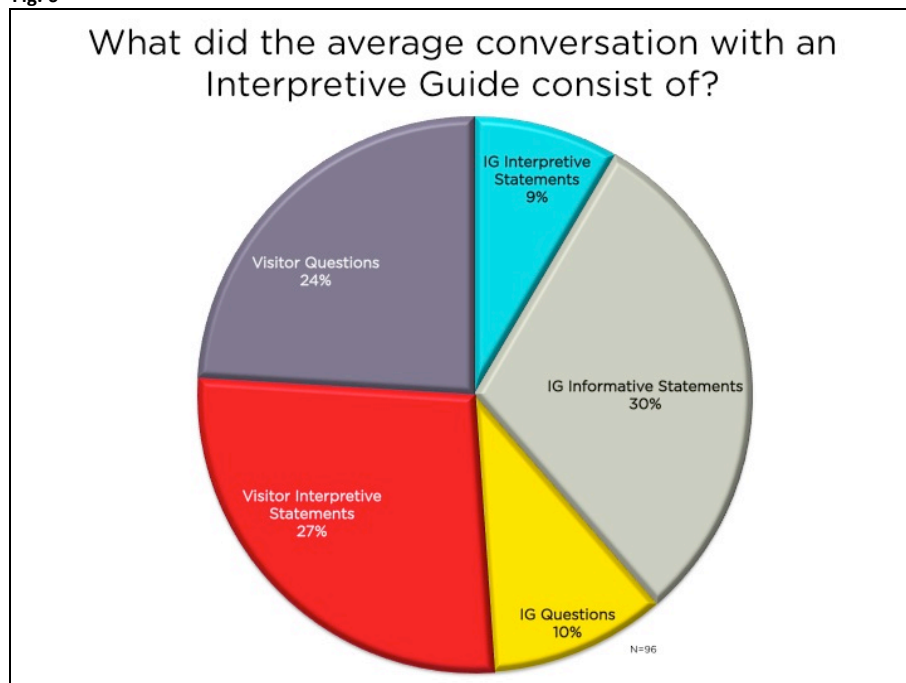
**AGE AND GENDER OF VISITORS**

Fig. 5



**ELEMENTS OF AVERAGE CONVERSATION**

Fig. 6



## APPENDIX S

Number of visitor interpretive statements by IG method  
Interview with program administrators

### NUMBER OF VISITOR INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS BY IG METHOD

Fig. 7

	Sample size	Visitor interpretive statements
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS</b>	32	<b>279</b>
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG INFORMATIVE STATEMENTS</b>	32	<b>233</b>
Number of visitor interpretive statements in last third of dataset when sorted (least to greatest) by <b>IG QUESTIONS</b>	32	<b>211</b>

### INTERVIEW WITH PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

Fig. 8

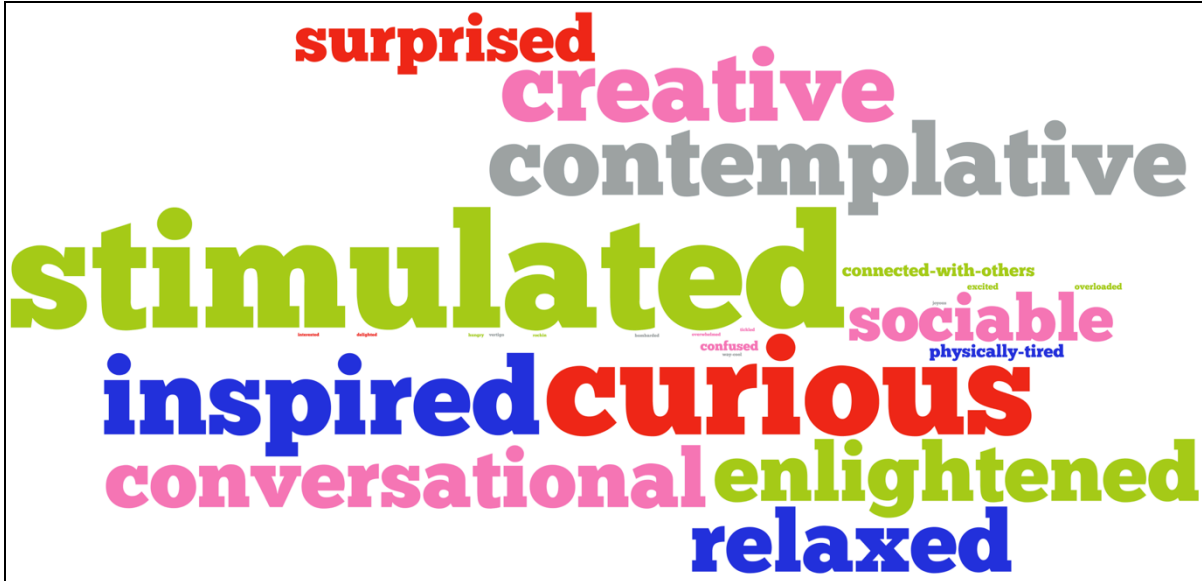
<b>How would you describe the ideal Interpretive Guide?</b>
"You have to be curious about people."
"I think the people that have the hardest time are those that come in and expect a template for this. I think we can evaluate programs like this and we can come up with theories about programs like this but there's also going to always be this intuitive aspect of it."
"It's good we have students doing this because they haven't necessarily made up their minds yet about what responses to art should be."
"You have to be able to step outside of yourself and not make it about you."
<b>What is the role of the ideal in this program?</b>
"Our job isn't to entertain people or to give them what they want as educators."
"I've heard about so many amazing conversations IGs have had because they went looking for 'it'."
"There's not a lot of writing on this...on what conversations can be and are around art so you kind of have to bricolage it all together."
"The construction of meaning isn't singular, it's something we're all doing and a conversation we're all part of already."
"It's the different between knowledge and wisdom, you know, you build this thing up over time and eventually it just becomes something you can do."
<b>What is your biggest challenge?</b>
"The biggest challenge I have is trying to get people away from lecturing. No matter how many times you tell them it's about listening, there are certain people who, as soon as I walk out of the room, go back to wanting to tell visitors everything and think that that means they're doing a good job."
"People want to formalize informal conversations because now there's a need to do it because people are realizing formal conversations aren't working anymore because they're not responsive to a postmodern society that is multi-interpretive, multi-voiced, multi-access."
"Not to be crass but if you do look at salaries, the highest salaries in the museum are the positions that are considered to be the most important or accountable. And so if you look at educators, especially people who are on the floor working with the public, and they aren't paid at all, what we're basically saying is that we're internally motivated as opposed to externally motivated. And if we were externally motivated and saw ourselves as truly serving the public, then those folks and those program would be the ones that are most endowed and the most invested in."

## APPENDIX T

How visitors feel after an IG experience  
 Visitor interest in contemplation and discussion  
 Visitor feedback about overall experience

### HOW VISITORS FEEL AFTER AN INTERPRETIVE GUIDE EXPERIENCE

Fig.9



### VISITOR INTEREST IN CONTEMPLATION AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 10

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
Reflect on the artwork alone	159	7.8
Discuss the artwork with others	159	7.7

### VISITOR FEEDBACK ABOUT OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Fig. 11

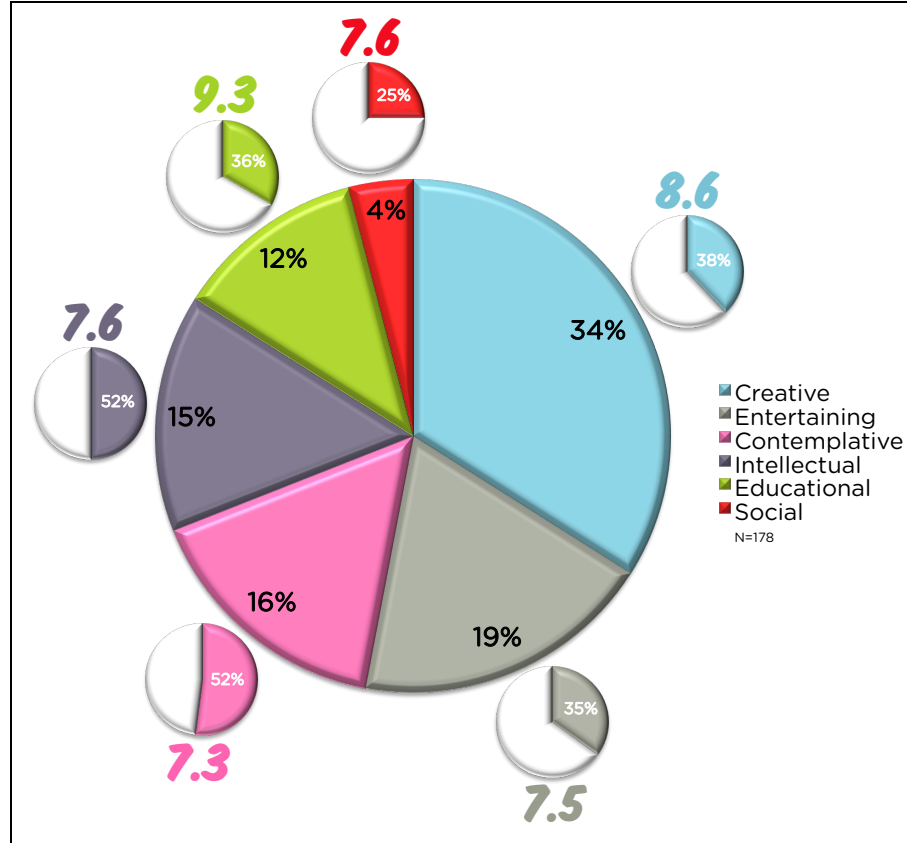
	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
Level of comfort with the IG	91	9.5
Would they seek one out again?	63	8.8
Added benefit to their overall visit	63	9.1

## APPENDIX U

Visitor preferred museum experience type  
Percentage per category that spoke with an IG  
Average rating on a 10 point scale

### VISITOR PREFERRED MUSEUM EXPERIENCE TYPE/ PERCENTAGE PER CATEGORY THAT SPOKE WITH AN IG/ AVERAGE RATING ON A 10 POINT SCALE

Fig. 12

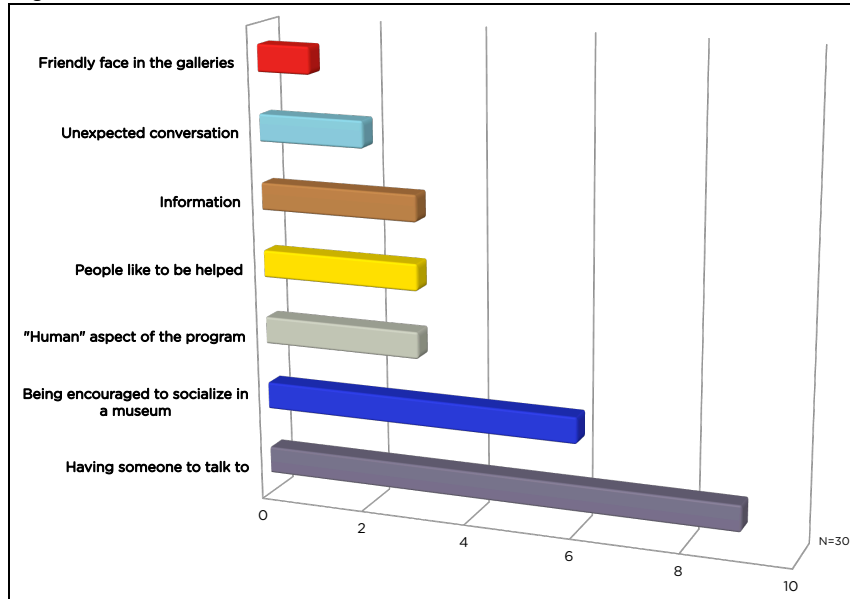


## APPENDIX V

What IGs believe visitors like most about the experience  
What IGs believe visitors like least about the experience

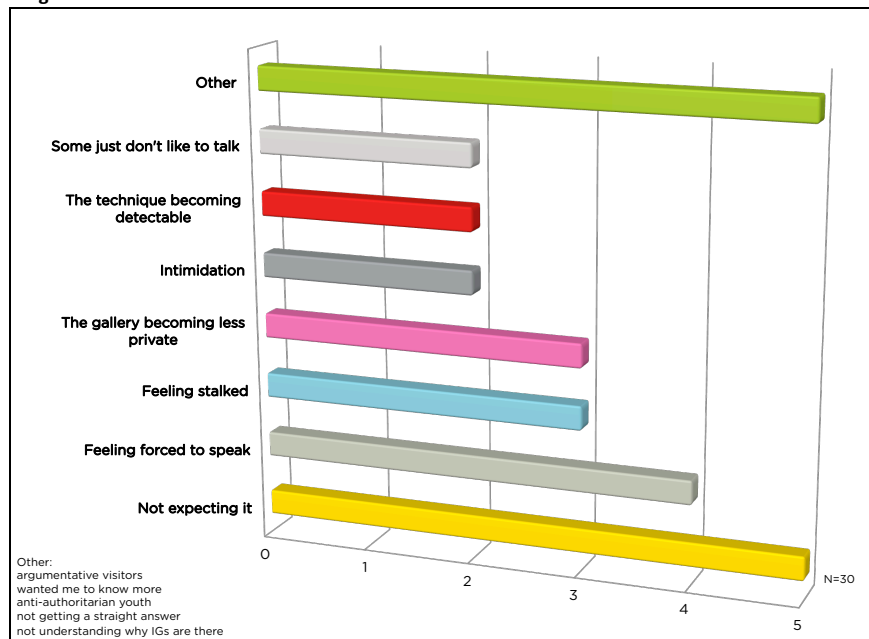
### WHAT IGs BELIEVE VISITORS LIKE MOST ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Fig. 13



### WHAT IGs BELIEVE VISITORS LIKE LEAST ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Fig. 14



## APPENDIX W

Words IGs use to describe the program

### WORDS IGs USE TO DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM

Fig. 15

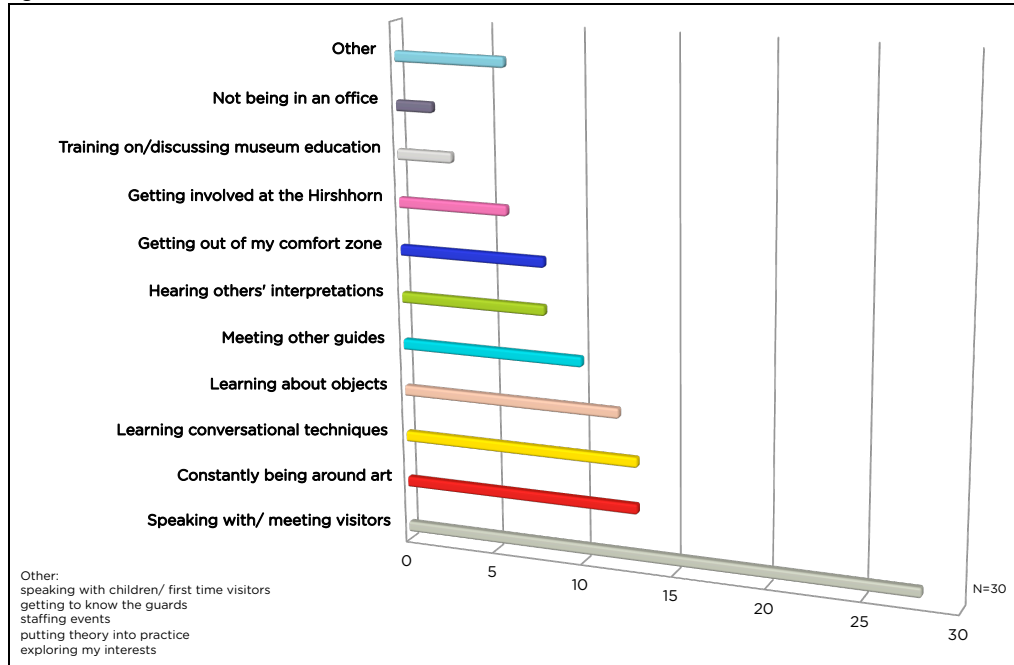


## APPENDIX X

What IGs enjoy most about the program  
 What IGs enjoy least about the program

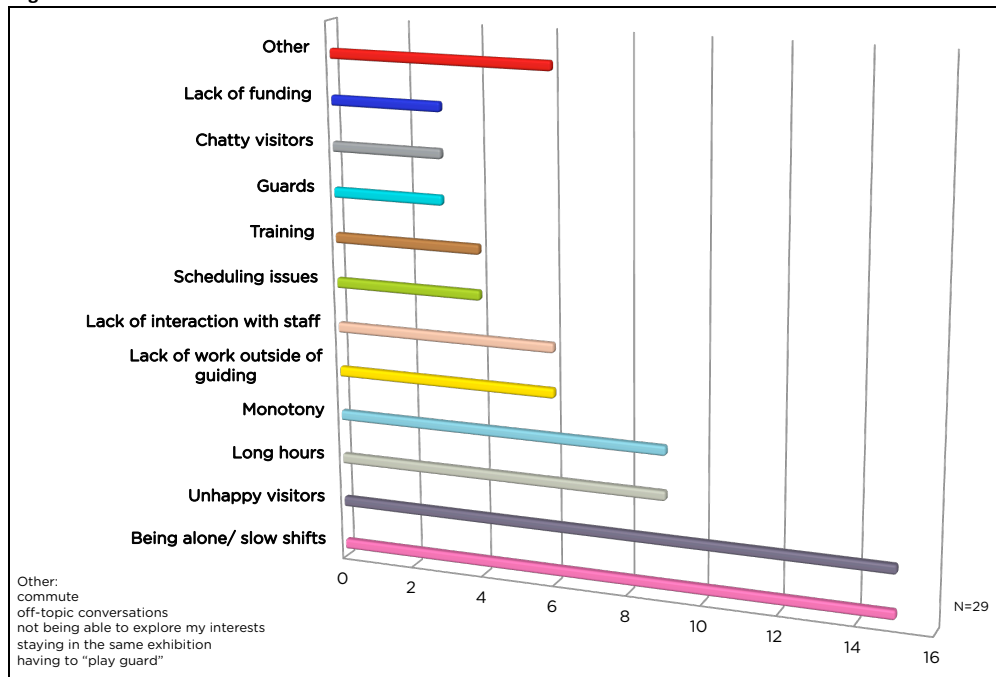
### WHAT IGs ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Fig. 16



### WHAT IGs ENJOY LEAST ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Fig. 17



## APPENDIX Y

Impact on how IGs think of museum education  
Mind-mapping results – Prompt 1

Fig. 18

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Impact on how IGs think of Museum Education</b>	31	<b>8.7</b>
<b>Anecdotes from Interpretive Guides</b>		
“Being an IG wasn't about lecturing or "teaching" instead it was and is a way to interact with a human being- to make a connection of sorts- both fruitful for the guide and visitor.”		
“The program forced me to reevaluate the possibilities of museum education, and its place in the larger field of pedagogy. My ideas about museum demographics and visitor intention were turned on their heads. At this point, I am trying to be much more flexible about how I approach the subject, and suspect that the idea of set learning outcomes could be better replaced by a broad understanding of individualized learning possibilities, which educators would then have to take upon themselves to foster and develop.”		
“The process of treating guests as agents of, rather than vessels meant to be filled with, interpretation effectuates the aesthetic experience of education--the moment when the visitor's senses are fully engaged and resonating with what she/he is witnessing.”		
“I now never underestimate a visitor, their intellectual capabilities, and their willingness to "work" towards understanding.”		

### MIND-MAPPING RESULTS – PROMPT 1

Fig. 19

<b>How would you describe what you do to a friend?</b>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>
Conversational, fun, interactive, spontaneous, transformative, freeform, stimulating, exciting, dynamic, inclusive
I go up to people in the galleries and ask if they want to talk about art
Equitable (I have information, but don't use it to dominate)
Helping visitors arrive at informed interpretations of art
Engage every visitor with meaningful interactions
<b>NOVEMBER</b>
We try to get people to leave with a new understanding of what they saw, and arrived at on their own terms
I help people define their own questions and reassure them about asking them
I engage visitors in a dialogue to support their unique interpretations
Reading people as much as interpreting art
I help people look at art in a new way
<b>JANUARY</b>
I engage visitors in conversation that creates meaningful connections
Create a social atmosphere in the gallery
I act as a bridge into the museum
Being there for people

## APPENDIX Z

Mind-mapping results – Prompt 2

### MIND-MAPPING RESULTS – PROMPT 2

Fig. 20

<b>Why is the IG program important?</b>
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>
Uses art as a means for connecting with people
It will help me learn how to talk about abstract art with anyone
Helps the museum get a better idea of how they're reaching people
Builds a sense of safe space in museum, but still fosters intellectual rigor and curiosity
Because everyone involved can have an informative, inspiring experience in the museum and hopefully leave with a new understanding of their interpretive potential
<b>NOVEMBER</b>
Teaches visitors that the art belongs to them
Makes the museum more responsive to the community
I'm learning new ways to talk about art with people with all levels of knowledge
Establishes level of comfort for all visitors who could otherwise be uncomfortable
Allows/fosters human interaction in what can otherwise be a sterile/isolating space
Creates a safe space for art novices and an intellectually and aesthetically challenging space for art aficionados
It gives visitors a halfway ground between formal tours and the ordinary museum experience, we can give them as much time as they want, the exact info they want and tailor the experience to their needs
<b>JANUARY</b>
An enriching personal experience
Gives a human/relational face to the museum
Helps visitors feel that the museum is a safe space
Because it regards the public as agents of interpretation
It makes people more likely to talk about art with friends in the future

## APPENDIX AA

Group interview with Interpretive Guides  
Ideas for how to inform other departments at the museum

### GROUP INTERVIEW WITH INTERPRETIVE GUIDES

Fig. 21

<b>Tell me about the arc of your experience.</b>
"When I first was interviewing for this position I thought that it would be more art historical. I read the description and knew it said 'conversational,' but thought it would be more like what I had seen docents do in museums before. I knew that there was some new angle here, but I didn't really have a handle on what that was. Then, in the gallery over the course of these four months, what it has become is kind of a way to be all things to all people but from a defined viewpoint. So, instead of standing and delivering information, or guiding people through an explicit narrative that was predetermined, it was really working to meet people where they were."
<b>Any great revelations?</b>
"Whatever you have in your mind that you think is important to tell them, wait until they're done talking first. Wait until they've completed an arc and then begin."
"I came into this very much with an expectation that I wanted to find the "truth" about this work and find the definitive narrative of this thing so I could tell people. But what I ended up finding was that all of my research became useful in actually broadening my potential narrative."
"If you have faith in the people around you, they'll have faith in you way more often than you expect and that really is a beautiful testament to the truth of what this program offers."
"This program exposes you to what can be, that's the beauty of it because if you don't know what can be, you're content with what is."
<b>How about your individual styles? How did you use information?</b>
"I think the hardest part about using information is knowing how to steer it back towards interpretation, because it can so easily fall into this trap of Q&A."
"One of the most challenging things is using information to lead to critical thought, as opposed to just inquiry after fact."
"Having a stockpile of questions prepared didn't work because I could tell that the visitor could tell that this was no longer a conversation."
"I think it was almost better if you could get them to talk without asking a question."
<b>How has it impacted you?</b>
"This has dramatically changed what I think museum education is. I feel the way museum education is structured in this country is fundamentally, deeply, flawed. I think it's aligned to things that have nothing to do with people and aligned with ideas and ideals that have more to do with statistics and curatorial decisions, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but when that doesn't take into account that the institution was founded with the core value of the dissemination of knowledge but that's not represented in the galleries I think there is something fundamentally wrong. And I think this program is a magnificent first step towards redressing this. It has made me realize that if I want to pursue Museum Education as a capitol "P" profession, I want to be an agent of change."

Fig. 22

<b>Ideas for how to inform other departments at the museum</b>
"Interpretive Guides were often the first point of contact to any visitors to the Hirshhorn. For a National institution whose primary concern is providing a public service, I think every department in the museum could use feedback gathered from Interpretive Guide conversations to help develop their departments."
"If we were able to quantify the experience more, then I think that other departments could see the value more concretely."
"I believe guides have the practical in-gallery experience that would be really valuable to curators to let them know what is working and what doesn't, even with things as minute as how the placement of sensors affects the overall experience."

## APPENDIX AB

Level of bonding amongst IG group  
Level of IG fatigue  
Overall rating of IG program experience

Fig. 23

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Level of bonding amongst IG group</b>	30	<b>8.3</b>
<b>How could the museum help facilitate greater bonding?</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More trips outside of the museum</li> <li>▪ Always have 2 IGs in the galleries</li> <li>▪ Ensure that all IGs have a shift with one another</li> <li>▪ Provide housing suggestions</li> <li>▪ Give IGs a joint project to work on</li> <li>▪ Meet more frequently and in different locations</li> </ul>		

Fig. 24

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Level of IG fatigue</b>	30	<b>6.2</b>
<b>Ideas for combating fatigue</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More tours to break things up</li> <li>▪ More substantive and continued reading on museum education</li> <li>▪ Option of shorter, more frequent shifts</li> <li>▪ Weekly technique experiments/ goals</li> <li>▪ Being in more than just the temporary exhibition</li> <li>▪ Develop “games”</li> <li>▪ More professional development opportunities</li> </ul>		

Fig. 25

	Sample size	Rating (10 point scale)
<b>Overall rating of IG program experience</b>	30	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Suggested changes to the program</b>		
“I think my main issues were with the relationship the IGs had to other departments in the museum. I felt very ignored by those departments.”		
“Perhaps IG's could venture more into the permanent collection to break up some of the monotony on slower shifts.”		
“The research days could be a little vague so a more solid explanation of what those should involve might have been nice, but at the end of the day I was glad to be able to tailor those to my own interests.”		
“Morale was the big problem for me; mine flagged halfway through just because I felt cut off from the staff.		
“It might be possible to extend the time that IG's are employed and have them work for a year rather than for a single exhibition.”		
“As always: more readings, more interaction, and more conversation.”		
“I would find some money for stipends!”		
“I would have liked more structured time to discuss pros and cons of how individual guides are approaching the problems of guiding.”		