Chasing the Muses: Visitor Experiences with Inspiration in Art Museums

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Abstract

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The word inspiration is regularly referenced in museum mission statements and strategic plans as a component of institutional goals and priorities. So far, some research has been done in museums to define the concept of inspiration or measure visitors' feelings of inspiration during a museum visit. The purpose of this study was to determine how art museum visitors experience and describe inspiration. Interviews were completed with 105 visitors at three museums nation-wide. It was found that most art museum visitors reported experiencing some level of inspirational feelings during their visit. Visitors were inspired by many different aspects of their visits, most frequently citing specific works of art, visual and technical aspects of the art on view, and the art as a representation of the artists' own inspiration and action. Visitors also indicated that feeling inspired positively impacted their museum visits. Visitors who did not feel inspired overwhelmingly provided other positive emotional responses to their museum visits. This study provides evidence that art museums are inspiring to their visitors, and could inform the expansion of emotion-based research in art museum spaces.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What does it mean for someone to be inspired? Inspiration is felt by individuals in unique and diverse ways. It can come from almost any source and can come from an individual or from the intermixing of a group (Chadborn & Reysen, 2018). Psychological research has only established that inspiration is a distinct and measurable psychological construct within the last 15 years (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Studying inspiration presents unique difficulties in any field, but most prominently is the question what the process of feeling inspired looks and feels like.

Inspiration is, as a concept, difficult to define. The Oxford English Dictionary defines inspiration as

> A breathing in or infusion of some idea, purpose, etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening, or creation of some feeling or impulse, esp. of an exalted kind.("Inspiration, n.," n.d.).

While this definition may provide a useful point of general reference, it does not provide any obvious entry points for research. How can we measure an infusion? Is an awakening of an idea quantifiable? Psychologists avoided tackling inspiration directly as a subject for years because of this exact difficulty (Oleynick, Thrash, LeFew, Moldovan, & Kieffaber, 2014). Instead of creating a concise definition of what inspiration means, the relatively small body of research focusing on the psychology of inspiration has relied on a multipart conception of inspiration, first developed by Todd Thrash and Andrew Elliot. This conception consists of three frameworks that identify various component experiences and cognitive processes that together encapsulate the experience of inspiration. The conception is described in detail in Chapter 2.

In the public eye, art and the emotional experience of inspiration are strongly inter-related (Harding, 1940). Whether it's the inspiration of looking at art or the inspiration of creating art,

people are constantly exploring the relationship between the two. Art is used to inspire young STEM leaders to pursue astronomy-focused careers (Foundation, 2017), art is installed publically to disrupt and protest to inspire political change ("How Public Art Can Be a Powerful Protest," n.d.) and artists themselves have been discussing the relationship for centuries. Pablo Picasso is credited with saying "Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working," Leonardo Da Vinci, "Where the spirit does not work with the hand, there is no art." Salvador Dali had a slightly different perspective, saying "A true artist is not one who is inspired but one who inspires others."("400 Art Quotes That Will Inspire The Artist In You," 2018) Hundreds of these quips, quotes and aphorisms – correctly attributed or not – are shared across the internet at an almost constant pace as users seek tidbits of wisdom. Art's ability to inspire crosses type, as Jonathan Jones wrote in a collection of writings in 2007 about art and inspiration published in The Guardian:

> "If you want inspirational art, I could show you paintings that call for revolution, or promise a new heaven and a new earth, or even raise the dead. If you want a utopia, try Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the Third International, the spiralling, Tower of Babel-like structure he unveiled in 1920 to symbolise revolutionary hope. Or there are Christian visions of renewal and eternal life such as Mattias Grunewald's Resurrection, with its revelatory burst of colour that looks both psychedelic and somehow psychotic. And for the ultimate image of success against all the odds, there is Caravaggio's Raising of Lazarus…All works of art have the power – if they are soulful or profound or just very funny – to fill you with energy, optimism, hope and zest" (Jones et al., 2017).

Today, many museums across different genres include references to the idea of "inspiration" in their statements of mission, vision and values, though often expressed in different ways:

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art:

> "The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. The museum strives to engage and inspire a diverse

> range of audiences by pursuing an innovative program of exhibitions, education, publications, and collections activities. International in scope, while reflecting the distinctive character of our region, the museum's exhibitions and programs present and interpret compelling expressions of visual culture"("SFMOMA Overview · SFMOMA," n.d.).

Museum of Science and Industry Chicago:

> "Our mission is to inspire the inventive genius in everyone. Our vision is to inspire and motivate our children to achieve their full potential in the fields of science, technology, medicine and engineering"("Museum of Science and Industryâ□"GuideStar Profile," n.d.).

Brooklyn Museum

> "To create inspiring encounters with art that expand the ways we see ourselves, the world and its possibilities"("Brooklyn Museum: About the Museum," n.d.).

National History Museums of Los Angeles County

> "To inspire wonder, discovery, and responsibility for our natural and cultural worlds" ("Strategic Framework NHMLAC," n.d.).

But when museums say that they want to inspire visitors, what do they really mean? How do they measure success? What sorts of practices are they implementing to meet this institutional goal? So far, the industry has not tackled what inspiring visitors truly means and what its implications may be. There have been initial studies of different emotional experiences like happiness and creativity in art museums and academia (Fisher, 2018; Reed, 2018; Tröndle & Kirchberg, 2012) and work linking climate change education to visitor motivation and behavior change in zoos and aquaria has been presented and published in conference proceedings (Gwynne, 2007). However, no work has yet been done to examine the relationship between visitor experience in art museums and the feeling and experience of inspiration, despite the fact that research in psychology has identified that feeling inspired is associated with positive emotional outcomes (Oleynick et al., 2014) and museology research has identified links between positive emotional outcomes and overall satisfaction (Del Chiappa, Andreu, & G. Gallarza,

2014) and increased visitor satisfaction with increased return visitation and higher rate of encouraging new visitors (Harrison & Shaw, 2003).

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how art museum visitors experience and describe inspiration. The study was guided by four research questions:

1. To what extent do visitors in art museums experience inspiration?
2. If visitors in art museums are experiencing inspiration, how do they describe it?
3. What, if any, aspect of the art museum experience triggers feelings of inspiration?
4. Does feeling or not feeling inspired during an art museum visit impact visitors' perceptions of their overall experience?

Understanding if and how visitors are inspired is a significant first step into a new body of fascinating and valuable research for the museum field. Inspiration is already acknowledged in museums across the country, often explicitly referenced in museums' mission statements. This research will ground those goals in the reality of visitor experience. It will help institutions determine if they are practicing the values they have chosen for their institution and the impact that those values may have on visitors' experiences, emotions and opinions. This study may serve as a starting point to explore inspiration in museums with much greater depth, including a focus on long-term motivation or behavior change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to determine if and how art museum visitors experience and describe inspiration. The bodies of literature that supported this study were a) the psychology of inspiration, b) the physiology of emotion in art museums, c) current research on inspiration in museums, and d) standards and best practices for museum mission statements. A review of this literature demonstrates the opportunities available to apply the study of inspiration to the museum context and the potential pitfalls of trying to plan for and predict emotional responses.

The Psychology of Inspiration

The History of Inspiration

The earliest mentions of inspiration come in texts published in the late 1600s. Early discourse around inspiration was intimately tied with metaphysical and religious theories. Scholars at the time could not conceive of another source for inspirations beyond the divine. Countless works exist exploring divine inspiration in the Old and New Testament (Horton, Wilmot, & Lowth, 1699), but as the date stamps move closer to the rational atheism of the Enlightenment, more works emerged specifically referencing inspiration in defense of the authenticity and credibility of Christian religious doctrine (Alexander, 1836). Well into the 1950s, works like John Lansing Raymond's *The Psychology of Inspiration: An Attempt to Distinguish Religious from Scientific Truth and to Harmonize Christianity with Modern Thought* (Raymond, 1908) were seeking a through line from the divine spark to the growing influence of Freudian psychological research – specifically the concept of the unconscious mind (Freud, 1913). Almost simultaneously, inspiration was appearing for the first time in conversations in very different contexts – poetry (Thomas, 1911), investment advice (McGregor, 1915), teaching

guides (Owen & Owen, 1922) and many others. Some of the earliest work on inspiration within the field of psychology was in the field of psychoanalytic theory. T.S. Knowlson published "The Psychology of Inspiration" in The Psychoanalytic Review in 1922. He "characterized inspiration as a positive synthesis of unconscious thoughts and ideas that is marked by intense emotion" (Jennings II, 2012). Ernst Kris compared inspiration with the feeling of ecstasy in "On inspiration" published in the International Journal of Psychoanalysis in 1939, arguing that "In ecstasy the [psychological] process results in an emotional climax only, in states of inspiration it leads to active elaboration in creation" (Kris, 1939, p. 389). In his doctoral thesis at VCU, David Jennings II argued that "these early psychological investigations of inspiration's nature were largely conjectural and anecdotal. Empirical investigation of the construct remained largely absent until recently. One explanation for the lack of empirical study into the nature of inspiration could be psychology's preoccupation with ailments for most of its history" (Jennings II, 2012, p. 4). He also argues that the preoccupation with divine inspiration may have contributed to the lack of empirical research. (p. 4). Even psychological research on inspiration into the 1990's avoided empirical assessment. Mary Councill (1988) and Sharon Hymer's (1990) work explored self-awareness, communication and the unexpected nature of inspiration in the contexts of individual therapy and the creative process (Councill, 1988; Hymer, 1990).

Defining and Measuring Inspiration

Though inspiration has been much-discussed, empirical methods for accurately measuring it as an independent psychological construct have only been developed in the past 15 years, by a very small body of inter-connected psychology researchers. One article published in 2003 laid the groundwork for studies of inspiration across academic disciplines. Thrash and

Elliot (2003), working from the University of Rochester, published "Inspiration as a Psychological Construct" to "offer a conceptualization of inspiration, to validate the inspiration construct, and to establish its importance in mainstream empirical psychology" (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, p. 871). The paper contained the results of four independent studies, each building on the last. The purpose of Study 1 was to "develop a trait measure of inspiration and to evaluate its psychometric properties in two samples" (p. 873). Based on this study, Thrash and Elliot created the Inspiration Scale (IS), which they analyzed for internal consistency, correlation, and stability of results across time. The IS is a series of Likert Scale questions intended to measure the intensity of a participant's inspirational feelings and their relative frequency. The strength of the results of Study 1 allowed researchers to explore the relationship between inspiration and motivational psychology in Study 2, compare inspiration in highly creative individuals (patent holders) and competent, less-inspired individuals (university alumni) in Study 3, and validate how the IS measures the daily experience of inspiration in Study 4.

The generalizability of Thrash and Elliot's conceptualization of inspiration is grounded in the work of Hart (Hart, 1993). In his work, Hart showed that "participants across populations have fundamentally similar conceptions of inspiration: 'despite the great many shades of meaning the term has in common usage it appears to represent a clear and consistent event'" (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, p. 886). However, the definition Hart developed, while consistent with his participants' responses, is similar to the Oxford English Dictionary definition of inspiration provided in Chapter 1 in that it does not provide solid entry points for further empirical research and analysis. Hart defines inspiration as "a specific epistemic process that provides psychological and spiritual sustenance and is characterized by a remembrance or recognition of

some knowledge or perspective valuable in the social or psychological context given" (Hart, 1998, p. 32).

In an attempt to move away from these definitions that lack psychological specificity, Thrash and Elliot, as well as others working on the psychology of inspiration (Chadborn & Reysen, 2018; Konecni, 2015; Latham, Narayan, & Gorichanaz, 2018) avoid using a standard definition of inspiration to guide their work. While the Oxford English definition is helpful for framing, Thrash, Elliot and other researchers rely on a framework of inspiration, rather than a definition (Thrash, Moldovan, Oleynick, & Maruskin, 2014). The three components of the framework are less prescriptive and account for a greater range of individual experiences than a set definition could, and create more measurable variables than Hart or the OED definition provide. The first framework is called the Tripartite Conceptualization. (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Based on their early studies using the IS, Thrash and Elliot identified three major components that make up an experience of inspiration – transcendence, evocation and motivation.

> Transcendence refers to the fact that inspiration orients one toward something that is better or more important than one's usual concerns;…Evocation refers to the fact that inspiration is evoked and unwilling;…inspiration involves motivation to express or make manifest that which is newly apprehended (Thrash & Elliot, 2004, p. 957).

These three components are meant to encapsulate the experience of emotion while distinguishing it from other emotional experiences.

In their follow-up research, Thrash and Elliot dug deeper to identify "functionally distinct processes that compose an episode of inspiration"(Oleynick et al., 2014, p. 2). According to their 2004 study, the process of feeling inspired is actually two separate Component Processes – being inspired *by* and being inspired *to*. This means that:

> "Inspiration represents a juxtaposition of two component processes: (a) being inspired by, which involves transcendence and denial of responsibility on

> encountering an inspiring influence (e.g., a role model) and (b) being inspired to, which involves motivation to transmit or extend the inspiring qualities toward a motivational object (e.g., a future self)" (Thrash & Elliot, 2004, p. 969).

What this means practically is that inspiration has a trigger, and that the experience itself triggers a response. But the triggers and responses are not as simple as external stimuli. Inspiration can come from almost any source and can arise within an individual or from the intermixing of a group. Chadborn and Reysen's (2018) study of inspiration targeted the concept from a social identity framework, and identified that stronger in-group identification (i.e. stronger group relationships) was positively related to feeling inspired: "when made salient, an individual's in-group can act as a strong determinant for the frequency and intensity of inspiration gained when thinking about one's group" (Chadborn & Reysen, 2018, p. 630).

The third framework in Thrash & Elliot's conceptualization is focused on the theoretical function of inspiration, and is referred to as the Transmission Model.

> "Whereas simpler forms of approach motivation serve the function of movement toward and attainment of desired goal objects, inspiration is posited to serve a unique approach function: it motivates the transmission or expression of the newly appreciated qualities of the evoking object (Thrash and Elliot, 2004; Thrash et al., 2010)" (Oleynick et al., 2014, p. 2).

In this framework inspiration acts as a mediator leading toward action in some way.

Despite all of this promising research on art, emotions and inspiration, there are limits to how applicable the research is as it currently exists to the museum context. The majority of this work has been done in the context of a university laboratory. Several different research teams have tried to pinpoint and describe the differences between the aesthetic experiences of "real" art vs. digital reproductions (Pelowski, Forster, & Tinio, 2017; Tinio, Smith, & Smith, 2013) concluding that there is "a significant effect of context on aesthetic experience, with people in the museum having more enhanced aesthetic experience than people in the laboratory" (Specker

& Tinio, 2017) which is further supported by the aesthetics research of Pelowski and a team of European and American psychologists who specifically identified 13 different factors that can influence a visitor's emotional and aesthetic experience that are unique to a museum, including the frames, the lighting, museum fatigue, movement in galleries and time (Pelowski et al., 2017). This is not to say that the psychology literature referenced above is invalid, or that it has no applications to this current research. Rather it more clearly sets the stage for why emotional studies based in museum spaces are so vital for both psychology and museology moving forward.

The Physiology of Emotion in Art Museums

While our understanding of visitors' emotional experiences in art museums is currently limited, pioneering work has been done in Europe into the physiology of an emotional, in-museum experience and the impacts of certain genres of work, curatorial choices and physical arrangement on the physiological conditions of museum visitors that signal emotional processing. This work has been led by Martin Tröndle and Wolfgang Tschacher, both working in Switzerland, as part of a five-year research project called "eMotion – mapping museum experience" (Tröndle & Tschacher, 2012) in partnership with the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland and the Swiss National Science Foundation. The study sought to identify and compare participants' physiological responses to works of art in different arrangements, groupings and displays and relate those physiological responses back to the participants' emotional experience in the gallery (Tschacher et al., 2012). The ultimate goal of the study was to measure participants' physiological and emotional reactions to specific works or types of art to track their behavior patterns to determine the impact of curatorial arrangements on visitor experience.

What sets Tröndle and Tschacher's work apart from the work of the psychologists studying aesthetic emotion and inspiration mentioned above is that data for the eMotion study was collected in situ in art museum galleries. This dramatically changes the type of information available and the different scenarios the researchers could create for data collection. The researchers were given total control of their research gallery space to arrange real works of historical and modern art in a variety of different ways. They measured responses to works arranged chronologically, thematically, by artistic medium, by artistic style and in random, art historically meaningless arrangements (Tröndle, Greenwood, Bitterli, & van den Berg, 2014). They used several cutting-edge data collection strategies including fitting each participant with a glove that allowed researchers to monitor participants' heart rates and perspiration, as well as their physical location in the gallery. This allowed the researchers to draw highly accurate paths of visitor behavior and visualize what part of the galleries triggered heightened physiological responses. They also collected surveys from each participant to qualitatively assess their emotional experiences and personal preferences within the gallery. Their results also "showed that physiological measures were significantly and meaningfully associated with aesthetic-emotional assessments" collected through the surveys (Tröndle, Greenwood, Bitterli, et al., 2014; Tröndle, Greenwood, Kirchberg, & Tschacher, 2014; Tröndle & Kirchberg, 2015). This would indicate that there is a strong correlation between autonomous physiological responses and emotional experiences in gallery spaces.

When groups of art were shown in different arrangements or patterns, visitors responded to the same pieces differently. Some were seen for longer periods of time, some were ranked as having a higher "aesthetic quality," and the researchers found that changes to physical arrangements of the space often contributed to "museum fatigue" and decreased positive

measures of visitor experience (Tröndle & Tschacher, 2012). For particularly famous or identifiable works of art – in this case Andy Warhol's "Campbell's Condensed Tomato Soup" – visitors spent more time engaging with the work and had much higher rates of physiological response. In turn researchers found "strong correlations of [heart rate fluctuations] with factors "Aesthetic Quality," "Surprise/Humor," and a moderate correlation with "Curatorial Quality"(Tröndle & Tschacher, 2012). It was also possible to identify two subgroups of visitors who responded to the Warhol piece – those who were "affected by viewing the work itself" and those who were affected by reading the label. They assume that the strength and consistency of these responses was in part due to the works popularity and the "originality" of the piece on view in the gallery.

Tröndle and Tschacher's analysis showed that visitor attention and movements depended on the physicality of the gallery itself, and the conditions in which art is shown. In one experiment, they measured viewer responses to a work of art spotlighted by a spotlight and the same work without that visual highlight. Visitors reacted physiologically and rated the experience differently during follow-up interviews depending on how the art was lit.

> The phenomenological experiences, spatial arrangements and their atmospheres, or the "strengths" of single works or work groups are not only aesthetic-philosophical concepts, they indeed have a strong impact on the physiological response of the beholder: art reception as sensing an atmosphere is an embodied-cognition process (Tröndle & Tschacher, 2012, p. 108).

They ultimately conclude that the arrangement of the gallery spaces did impact how visitors interacted with the space and their physiological responses to individual works. They further concluded based on cross-analysis of physiological and survey data that the physiological responses measured were strongly correlated with emotional reactions to works of art as described by the participants. However they only could identify a general link between physiology and emotion. Palm sweat and heart rate were not so strongly correlated with

participant emotional responses as to identify specific physiological connections to specific emotions.

The study, while fascinating and groundbreaking, does come with some drawbacks for applicability. Some psychologists object to the fact that Tröndle and Tschacher equate certain physiological responses – in this case heart rate and perspiration on the palms of the hands - to their internal emotions (Konecni, 2015). There could be many reasons why a visitor's heart rate fluctuated at a certain time or in a certain place, and there is no way to control the experiment so closely that that reaction could only be related to the act of viewing a work of art on a wall in a museum.

Yet many of Tröndle and Tschacher's conclusions have been expanded on by Pelowski et al. (2018) and his team's research focused on emotion, meaning-making and appraisal with contemporary installation art (p. 1). Using eye-tracking technology and in-person interviews, the research team sought to understand the viewing experience of immersive installation art. By tracking which aspects of the environment drew participants' attention and assessing their emotional responses, the research team hoped to "capture the eclectic, the embodied, and often the emotionally-charged viewing experience" (Pelowski et al., 2018, p. 1). The study specifically focused on Olafur Eliasson's "Baroque! Baroque!" which consists of two separate rooms with intensely different moods. One room, titled *Eye See You* "provided a sense of staring into a warm sun, with a slightly shimmering "moiré effect" (Eliasson, 2017), suggested by the artist and critics to potentially elicit positive and/or melancholic emotion." (Pelowski et al., 2018, p. 6). The other, *Wishes vs Wonders* "was expected to provide a 'perception of dizzying completeness' or 'produc(e) a virtual ring that appeared to float or pass from the actual space. . ., uncannily traversing the surface of the mirror image' (Husslein-Arco and Habsburg, 2015), but also

potentially calling to mind cognitive aspects of war or the human condition as reflected in the design" (p. 6). The team was able to combine the follow-up interviews with the eye-tracking data to identify which emotions were elicited by the different aspects of the work that commanded visual attention:

> Participants, even when viewing both rooms in a counterbalanced order, tended to have a more positive and emotional experience with Eye See You, with them reporting significantly higher happiness, feeling of pleasantness, and active nature of the art. In contrast, for Wishes vs. Wonders, participants reported more sadness, less pleasantness, but also more meaningful, potent, intimate and serious encounters, as well as more feeling of understanding the intention of the artist. These differences appeared to be due to the specific installation elements in conjunction with the pre-existing room features, as well as at least partially the artist intention (Pelowski et al., 2018, p. 19).

The different characteristics of the installations, and their immersive qualities, elicited emotions in study participants, in different often divergent ways.

Current Research on Inspiration in Museums

Inspiration has not yet been addressed as a standalone topic in the museum literature. However, zoos and aquaria have been heavily invested in motivation and behavior change, especially in visitor mobilization efforts around poaching, climate change, overfishing and other conservation issues. While these studies do not refer to inspiration specifically, the phenomena they are discussing mirror the dual process of inspiration – there is a motivation (inspired by) and a desired subsequent behavior change (inspired to).

More so than any other type of museum, zoos and aquaria have significant opportunities to make interventions to change the future behavior patterns of their visitors beyond just motivating them to return to the museum. These opportunities often revolve around issues of climate change and conservation, including habitat protection, poaching, and preservation of endangered and threatened species (Khalil & Ardoin, 2011). Zoos in particular are able to

motivate visitors to respond to climate change because they help overcome the physical and temporal remoteness of climate change. Research led by Clayton et al. (2014) has shown that "a sense of connection to animals or nature in the zoo is related to attitudinal and behavioral responses to climate change" and that this response cuts across political, cultural and socio-economic boundaries that traditionally divide individual perceptions of climate change (p. 472). The emotionally rich experiences zoos can provide make audiences more receptive to pro-environmental ideas and give them a more tangible way to relate to issues that may be spatially or temporally difficult to fully grasp (Moser, 2010). Not to mention the fact that zoos and aquaria have grown into roles as public authorities on issues related to wildlife over the last century, so when they tie conservation issues back specifically to that expertise, visitors fall back on their high level of trust in the institution and its information (DeGregoria et al., 2014).

But moving audiences to care is more complex than just show and tell (Gwynne, 2007). How that is accomplished looks different in different situations, and is never guaranteed to actually change visitor behavior in the long term. Many sites have struggled to implement and evaluate conservation-oriented exhibits that both educate and purposefully motivate. The Monterrey Bay Aquarium presented climate conservation action through the lens of private consumer activity in their *Hot Pink Flamingos* exhibit, but this focus singled out consumer capitalism as the primary means for visitors to engage in climate activism

> "…to the extent climate change is caused by humans, institutions, industries, commercial principles, and infrastructures, it would seem to require responses beyond the reach of individual actions to involve political leaders, public policy experts, and other civil society actors (Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-Renouf, & Smith, 2011). Focusing on the consumer removes these civic players from the equation" (Katz-Kimchi & Atkinson, 2014, p. 770).

Research completed at the Assiniboine Park Zoo in Winnipeg, Canada explored if "post-visit action resources affect sustainable behavior change after a wildlife tourism experience" and

found that only a few of the materials and follow-up content they developed and shared incited visitors to change their behavior, and that small, one-time changes were the most likely to be implemented after a zoo visit (Bueddefeld & Van Winkle, 2017, p. 1207). Moss et al. (2017) at the Chester Zoo in the United Kingdom attempted to verify the common assumption that "increased knowledge will lead to changes in proenvironment [sic] behaviors" by studying biodiversity-related knowledge in visitors at 30 zoos in 19 countries around the world. He found that "biodiversity understanding is related to knowledge of actions to help protect biodiversity, but it is by no means the strongest predictive variable" and that the link between that biodiversity understanding and self-reported conservation behavior was tenuous at best (p. 38).

What these diverse studies show is that despite best intentions, it is extremely difficult to plan and implement strategies to expressly encourage motivation and behavior change. Museums can provide information and context in any format or context imaginable, but there will always be the challenge of connecting both beyond the walls and within visitors' homes and heads.

Inspiration was also identified as part of a key outcome of museum-based coursework for students by the Generic Learning Outcomes study conducted by the Arts Council in the United Kingdom. The GLO study identified 5 outcomes or groups, Knowledge and Understanding; Skills; Attitudes and Values; Enjoyment Inspiration, Creativity; and Behavior and Progression ("Generic Learning Outcomes | Arts Council England," n.d.). The GLOs were developed to aid museums and cultural institutions evaluate educational outcomes and directs museum professionals to look out for visitor indications of having fun, being surprised, innovative thoughts, creativity, exploration, experimentation and making and being inspired as indications of possible indicators of student learning ("Generic Learning Outcomes | Arts Council England,"

n.d.). What the GLOs don't provide is a framework for unpacking the experience of inspiration as a singular, total experience rather than as an indicator of another – in this case learning.

Inspiration was also a component of research conducted by La Placa Cohen in their latest CultureTrack study published in 2017. CultureTrack is an ongoing "national research study of the changing behaviors of cultural audiences" (La Placa Cohen, 2017, p. 3). Based on 3,013 interviews with respondents who had "participated in at least one activity per year that they define as culture" (Pp4), 69% of respondents indicated that "Being Inspired" was a Motivator for Cultural Participation, the sixth most popular answer out of fourteen. The top five Motivators were "Having Fun," "Interest in the Content," "Experiencing New Things," "Feeling Less Stressed," and "Learning Something New" (p. 11). The 2017 CultureTrack study clearly shows that inspirational experiences are something the public seeks out and desires. Museums stand to majorly benefit from a clearer understanding of the relationship between their visitors' emotional experiences and the content on view in their galleries.

Mission Statements in Museums

Mission statements are vital to the work of any museum. They help guide priorities, shape practice, and steer institutional decision making. According to the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), "a mission statement drives everything the museum does; vision, policy-making, planning and operations are all extensions of a museum's mission. The mission gives the governing authority a foundation from which it can strategize" (Developing a Mission Statement, n.d.). They are carefully crafted and regularly revised to ensure that the museum is setting and meeting the proper expectations for its governance and operations (Walhimer, 2015).

The process of creating an institutional mission statement is often undertaken as part of a museum's larger strategic planning process, or as a required part of AAM's accreditation process

("Accreditation – American Alliance of Museums," n.d.). For many museums, being forced to define their roles and identities in their communities within the rigid "Core Standards for Museums" can lead to a certain lack of creativity. Most mission statements – especially art museums – are variations on the theme of education, conservation, and curatorial research, and not necessarily in that order. The language a museum chooses must be highly intentional in order to "articulate the museum's understanding of its role and responsibility to the public and its collections, and reflect the environment in which it exists" ("Mission and Planning Standards," 2017, para. 1).

So why does it matter what a museum says its goals are? In their process of (re)accreditation, AAM states that two questions guide their institutional reviews: "How well does the museum's performance meet standards and best practices as they are generally understood in the museum field, as appropriate to its circumstances?" and, more importantly, "How well does the museum achieve its stated mission and goals?"("Accreditation – American Alliance of Museums," n.d.) When museums set benchmarks for visitor experience within their mission statement, they are expected to either provide evidence that those benchmarks are being met and surpassed, or alter the language of the mission statement to bring expectations and reality into alignment ("Mission and Planning Standards," 2017).

Summary

In the last two decades, we have learned so much about how and why humans experience emotions and how those feelings manifest in our daily lives. But even knowing how closely the ideas of art, emotion, and inspiration are linked has not motivated museums to explore that relationship more specifically. The works of Tröndle and Tschacher (2012 & 2014) and Pelowski

et al. (2018) has shown that curatorial and spatial decisions museums may have a direct impact on their visitors' overall emotional experience during museum visits. Not to mention the fact that inspiration in particular is a positive emotion (Thrash & Elliot, 2004) and research has additionally shown that museum visitors with higher positive feeling and emotions perceived "the museum to have a higher level of attractiveness and uniqueness, and of being more satisfied," confirming that emotions and museum visitor satisfaction are intertwined (Del Chiappa et al., 2014, p. 420). If specific curatorial choices can trigger emotional responses including inspiration, being inspired makes visitors happy, and being happy makes visitors more satisfied with their museum visits, the desire to connect the dots should be obvious.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

To better understand if and how visitors experience inspiration in art museums, the study was designed as a mixed-methods survey. Qualitative methods allowed visitors to reflect and talk through their own feelings and experiences to provide authentic and organic responses. Quantitative methods allowed the descriptive experience to be tied back to a more concrete measure of inspiration. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a more complete understanding of visitors' experiences of inspiration both in and outside of the museum setting.

Research Sites

Several criteria were used to select research sites. First, the sites were limited to art museums because of the strong connections between art and inspiration in popular culture. Then the list was further narrowed by the following criteria:

1. Scope of museum collections;
2. Institutional mission statement.

The initial criteria – scope of museum collections – was intended to focus data collection on sites with generalist collections. Institutions that focus on a single genre of art – Modern Art, Contemporary Art, Southern Art, Sculpture etc. – attract a self-selecting audience (Falk, 2008; Gross & Pitts, 2015) based on individual perceptions of accessibility and intellectual comfort. Museums with broad, generalist collections allow many points of entry for visitors (Labrador, 2000; Schouten, 1993) and may encourage them to stay and browse rather than target a single outcome (Gross & Pitts, 2015; van Paasschen, Bacci, & Melcher, 2015).

To establish the final criteria, the language of museum mission statements were screened for use of the derivatives of "inspiration." The language of museum missions is carefully chosen

to reflect the values of each institution, and inclusion of references to inspiration should reflect institutional priorities. This screening also eliminated potential sites where the mission statements referred to inspiring a specific, measurable outcome. For example, several museums refer to "inspiring creativity" in their missions. In these cases, the goal is *creativity*, not inspiration. This study does not address outcomes of feeling inspired – like creativity - only the experience of feeling inspired in and of itself.

These criteria narrowed the list of potential sites to a shortlist of 10, which was in turn narrowed to three final research sites, listed here with their mission statements:

1. Carnegie Museum of Art – Pittsburgh, PA

   "CMOA collects, preserves, and presents artworks from around the world to inspire, sustain, and provoke discussion, and to engage and reflect multiple audiences" ("Carnegie Museum of Art: About," n.d.)

2. Seattle Art Museum – Seattle, WA

   "SAM shares its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to engage, educate, and inspire"("Seattle Art Museum: Careers," n.d.)

3. Speed Art Museum – Louisville, KY

   "The Speed Art Museum invites everyone to celebrate art, forever. Whether you're an art aficionado or don't know a Dali from a Degas, you can find fresh inspiration and meaning at the Speed Art Museum. With modern architecture, expanded programming, interactive exhibits and inviting outdoor spaces, the Speed offers countless opportunities for everyone to create their own connections and experience art at their own speed." ("About – Speed Art Museum," n.d.)

Of the 10 shortlist sites, these sites were selected due to staff availability during the data collection window and to represent geographic diversity of art museums across the United States.

Study Methods

Interviews were conducted to measure visitors' first-hand experience of inspiration in the museum. Questions were designed to capture individual definitions of inspiration, inspirational experiences outside the museum visit, if participants felt inspired during their visit, what may have triggered those feelings, and the impact of that experience (or lack thereof) on their overall museum visit (See Appendix A). Participants were asked what might have triggered their feelings to position the data consistently with the Inspired By/Inspired To framework discussed in Chapter 2 (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

After Interview Question 1, participants were provided with a brief questionnaire with four, two-part Likert Scale questions and basic demographic questions (See Appendix B). The scale was adapted from the Inspiration Scale (IS) developed by psychologists Thrash and Elliot (2004) for their own inspiration research (See Appendix C). Their work is firmly grounded in lab-based data collection, so adaptation was required to implement the IS in a museum. The framing language from the IS was preserved to preserve the validity of the instrument but was adapted to address current and past experiences, and was presented in a different visual format for ease of use. After completion of the questionnaire, the interview continued with questions 2 through 5.

For this study, there is no set definition of inspiration. While the methods are derived from Thrash and Elliot's conception of inspiration, this study set out to capture participants' own understanding of what inspiration means and their experiences in the gallery. As such, participants were asked to define inspiration for themselves, rather than compare their experience against ascribed definition, to ensure that the "definition" of inspiration was consistent within each individual participant's response. The definitions participants provided were profound and

diverse, and many touched on the ideas Thrash and Elliot introduce including motivation to act, the spontaneity of the feeling and the sense that inspiration was somehow beyond their individual control. However, the lack of direct measurement against the entire conception of inspiration used by psychologists means that this study primarily deals with individual perception. When a participant indicated that they felt inspired by their visit, there was no way to determine the psychological validity of their statement due to the limited scope of data collected, time constraints and limits on analytical capacities. Did participants meet the psychological criteria of inspiration? For the purpose of this study, that metric is not a central concern. If a participant says they were inspired by their visit, they are considered inspired.

Data Collection

Data Collection Planning

Data were collected on the following days:

- Carnegie Museum of Art – March 2 & 3, 2019
- Seattle Art Museum – March 9 & 14 and April 6 &7, 2019
- Speed Art Museum – March 16 & 17, 2019

Data collection at the Seattle Art Museum was more spread out because it was a more physically convenient data collection site. Data were only collected on Saturdays and Sundays to keep the collection windows consistent with the other sites, but were collected across several weeks rather than a single weekend.

On-Site Location Selection

Data collection points were selected with input from staff at each institution. Data were collected near popular exit points to increase the likelihood of approaching visitors at the end of their visit. At the Carnegie, data were collected on a ramp leading toward the parking lot exit. At the Speed, data were collected at the single entrance/exit to the museum. At the Seattle Art Museum, data were collected near the main entrance/exit next to the coat check exit point.

Data Analysis

Data from all three museums sites were combined and analyzed in order to describe the overall trend of inspiration in art museums. Due to the mixed data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods were implemented. Each interview was fully transcribed and the responses were coded using an emergent coding system. The questionnaire responses – including both the Likert Scales and demographic questions – were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Description of Sample

Data for this study were only collected from individual adults over the age of 18. Verbal consent was obtained before initiating data collection and recording. A total of 105 visitor interviews were conducted, 20 at the Speed Art Museum, 35 at the Seattle Art Museum and 50 at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Of 104 participants who completed the questionnaire, 46% were 19-35 years old and 42% were age 36-64. Thirty-five percent of respondents were visiting the data collection sites for the first time, and 23% of respondents were members of the sites.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Study Participants by Age and Gender

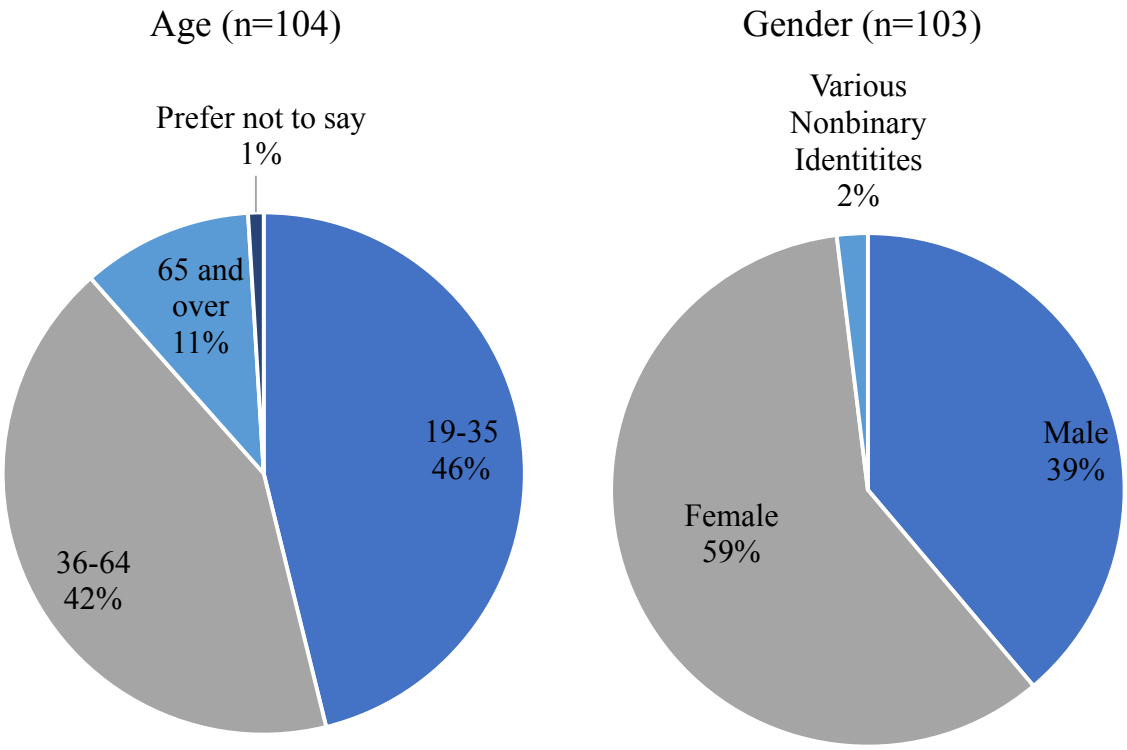
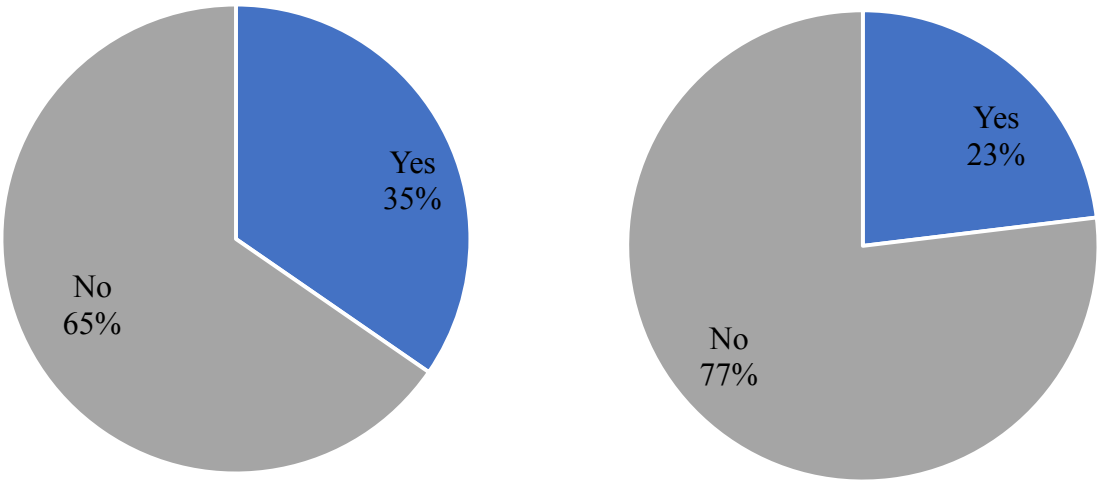


Figure 2: Percentage of Study Participants who were First Time Visitors & Members



Limitations

Inspiration is a big concept, and finding an efficient way to describe it can be difficult for anyone. This study sought to ensure internal consistency within individual responses by having participants define inspiration in their own words before exploring their experience within this context. 105 interviews yielded 105 different descriptions of inspiration. Some checked many of the boxes identified in Thrash and Elliot's conception. Others relied on metaphor to capture an ephemeral experience. There is no way, based on the definitions provided, to create a clear, consistent and all-encompassing definition of inspiration that respects and allows for the diversity of participant responses.

A major limitation of this study is the time constraint and the inability to follow-up with participants about their behavior post-visit. The Component Process framework clearly delineates follow-up action as a vital piece of an inspirational experience (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). Even if participants indicated their intention to perform a specific action this study does not have a mechanism to verify if there was any follow-through behavior.

Another challenging aspect of this study is that it is based on participants' own perceptions of their inspirational experiences. There is a chance that these do not meet the psychological standard of what it means to be inspired, but with the data collected for this study and the analytical capacity there is no way to know for sure. Therefore, this study heavily relies on perception of emotion, and it is unclear how perception of inspiration vs psychologically-verified inspiration impact outcomes. In the La Placa Cohen Culture Track study, respondents indicated that Feeling Inspired was a major motivator for cultural participation (La Placa Cohen, 2017). Does perceiving an experience as inspirational have the same impact on cultural

participation as an experience that a psychologist would rate as inspirational? Are those impacts similar? This study did not have the capacity to explore this question.

These findings are from very specific populations – weekend visitors to art museums with the time to participate in the study. The participating institutions charge for admissions, and visitors with small children or large groups may have had more difficulty taking the time to participate in this study. Each data point represented a unique individual experience. The data for this study was collected at narrowly tailored sites, and broader data collection could produce more specific and generalizable results.

While this study implemented an adapted Thrash and Elliot's (2004) Inspiration Scale, it was created without their input. Thrash refers to "modified versions" of the IS in his later research, but those instruments are not provided in the published manuscripts. For this study, the original language was modified as little as possible and questions were built in to the interview to independently verify many of their underlying conclusions. Thrash, Elliot and others who have implemented variations of the Inspiration Scale have had the time, expertise and resources to perform statistical analysis to determine validity quotients for each study. This level of analysis was not possible for this study, which means that the psychological validity of this modified version of the IS has not been verified.

Chapter 4 – Results

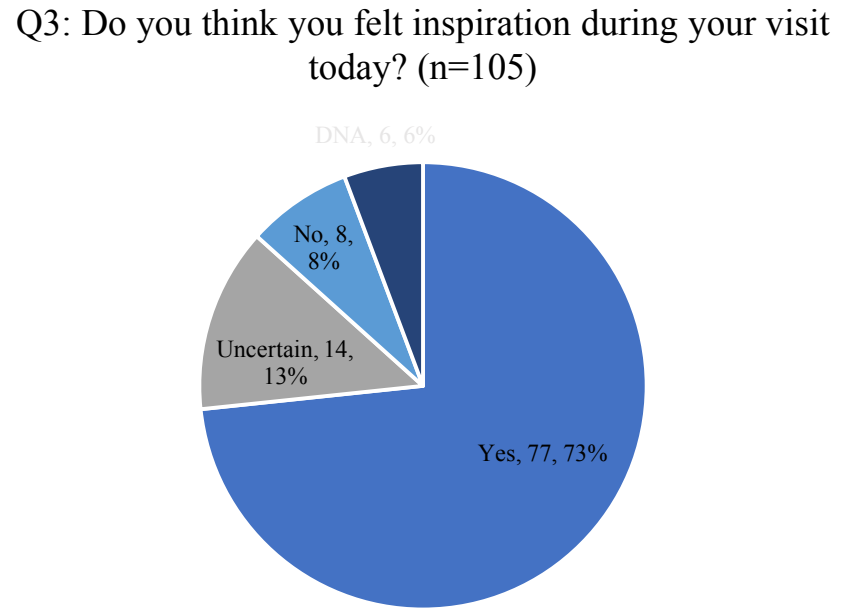
This chapter presents the results of the qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaire to determine if and how visitors experienced inspiration during their art museum visit. The results provide answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent do visitors in art museums experience inspiration?
2. If visitors in art museums are experiencing inspiration, how do they describe it?
3. What, if any, aspect of the art museum experience triggers feelings of inspiration?
4. Does feeling or not feeling inspired during an art museum visit impact visitors' perceptions of their overall experience?

R1: To what extent do visitors in art museums experience inspiration?

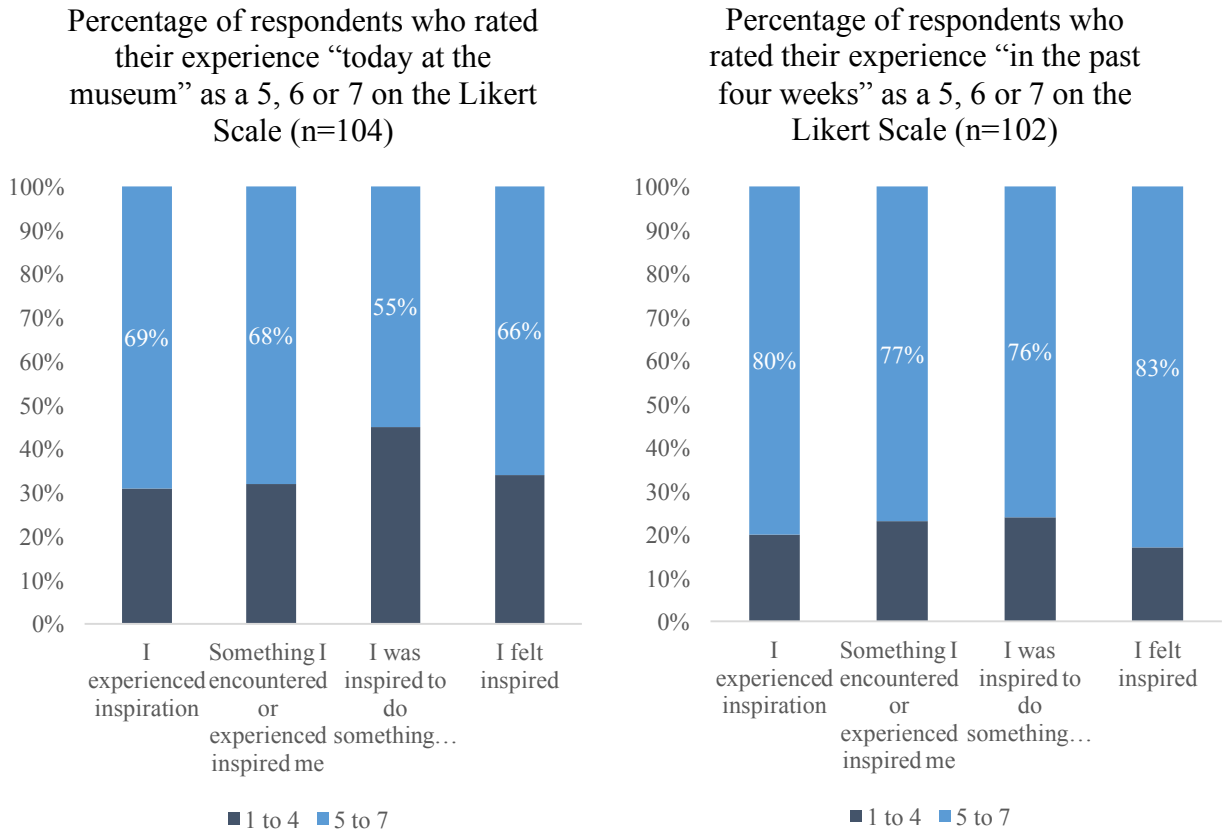
Of the 105 study participants, almost three quarters indicated that they felt inspired during their visit. Half of those participants who were unsure if they felt inspired indicated that they experienced other emotions with positive associations during their visit: "*I think yes and no... I really enjoyed it and there were some cool pieces, but it didn't inspire me to do anything*." (S-8).

Figure 3: Percentage of Study Participants Inspired during Their Visits to Art Museums



Participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire consisting of two sets of the same four statements, asvseen in Appendix B; “I experienced inspiration,” “Something I encountered or experienced inspired me,” “I was inspired to do something,” and “I felt inspired.” For each statement, participants were asked to select a number between 1 and 7, where 1 meant the statement did not apply to them at all and 7 meant they related to the statement very deeply or strongly. They were asked to rate each statement twice, once for their visit to the art museum that day and once for their general experience over the past 4 weeks. Participants’ ratings are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Visitor Inspiration in the Museum and Visitor Inspiration in Everyday Life



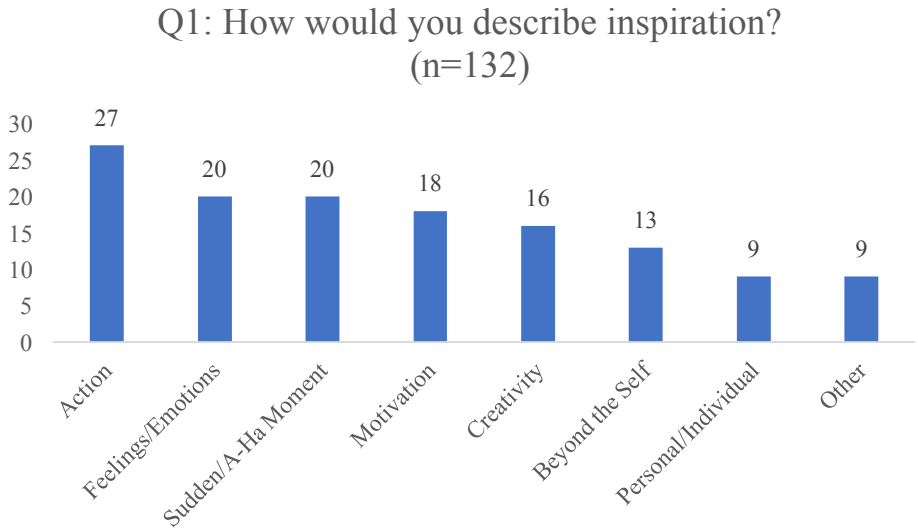
Based on the Likert Scale results, art museum visitors felt a consistently high level of inspiration both during their museum visits and outside of the museum in their everyday lives, but with higher general rates of inspiration during their museum visits. While the exact distributions differ, 5, 6 and 7 are consistently the top responses across the categories and timeframes available. These Likert Scale results are consistent with visitor self-assessments of their visits to the museum as well as their descriptions of inspiration outside of the museum context, addressed in question two of the survey.

R2: If visitors in art museums are experiencing inspiration, how do they describe it?

Definition of Inspiration

The very first question of the interview asked participants how they would describe inspiration. Asking participants to define inspiration for themselves allowed them to identify an internal point of reference to measure their experience against. This means that the responses of individual participants across the interview are consistent with their internal definition. Participant responses were coded into 8 emergent categories. Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses across these categories.

Figure 5: Respondent Definitions of Inspiration



The largest percentage of respondents referred to Action in some way while describing inspiration. This was most commonly manifested in language reflecting a desire or need to "do something." What that something is was often undefined: *"It's a visual response to something that makes me think about wanting to do something with the information" (S-27).* Respondents who specifically referred to Motivation in their answers were coded separately because of that

specific language's strong ties back to the literature: *"I think inspiration motivates me to take action. Something that causes me to think and feel like there's something that I can't ignore the desire to take action on something" (S-12)*. Creativity was also strongly related to Action and Motivation. Many visitors specifically tied their definitions to creation or creativity: *"The first word that comes to mind is creativity…Inspiration for me is something you might see anywhere that gives you the drive to create something" (S-5).* Once again, the goal or outcome of the inspired creativity was often undefined.

One of the largest categories of responses was references to Feelings/Emotions. Participants often described inspiration as "moving" or "visceral," or declined to specify a feeling at all: *"It's seeing something and then feeling something and then making something from it…" (P-20)* or *"Inspiration for me is a very visceral feeling. Like it feels like this bubbly, effervescent-like liquid in my brain that I feel when I look at particular visual stimuli" (S-15).* This category heavily overlaps with Creativity and Motivation as many participants framed their desire to act or create in the context of how they feel: *"Inspiration is feeling motivated to create something" (L-6).*

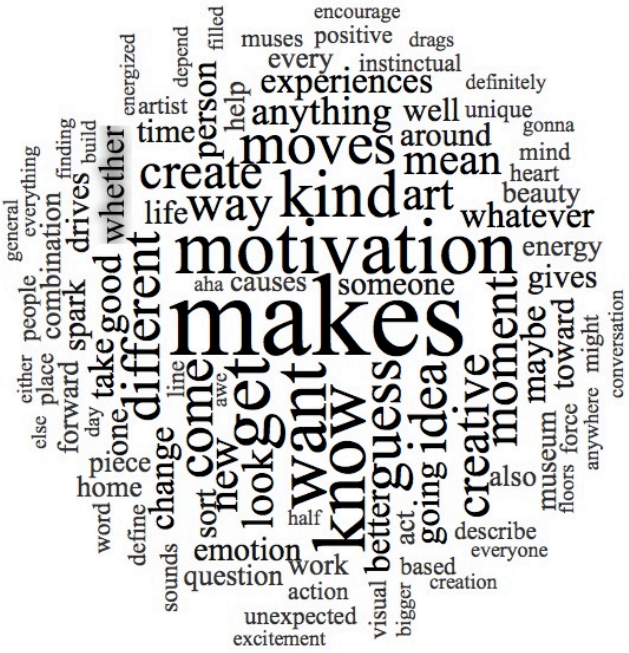
Many participants related their descriptions of inspiration to the Individual or Personal experiences: *"I would say that it's entirely personal and is different for everyone, different at every stage of your life…so that's a difficult thing to explain" (L-19).* Other participants tried to approach the ephemeral nature of inspiration in their responses. Those that referenced feelings of instantaneity are represented in the Sudden/A-Ha Moment category and often identified the unexpected nature of the experience: "*It's something of value that comes instantly and unexpectedly" (P-11)*. Participants also tried to capture the idea that inspiration goes Beyond the Self, or is an experience outside of their individual control: *"Inspiration to me is something that*

is bigger than myself that causes me to want to grow and learn and be larger and better than where I am right now." (L-13)

Some participants provided responses that did not fit any of the emergent categories described above. Some of these responses were highly visual, or relied on metaphor to approach an understanding of inspiration: *"Something that gives you a will to live" (L-5*) or *"A distant flame that is warm when you are very cold"* (L-18).

Participants' definitions of inspiration were also analyzed for word frequency, using word cloud. Action-oriented words were the most commonly used within definitions, reflecting the motivational dimension of inspiration discussed above (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Inspiration Definition Word Cloud

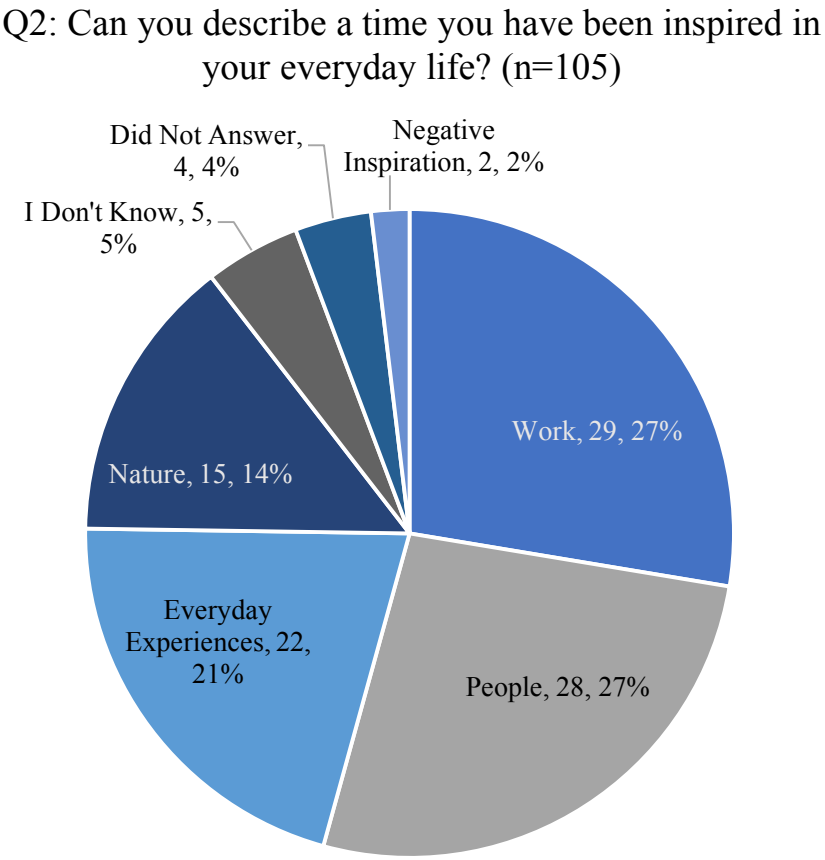


Everyday Inspiration

Participants were asked to describe a time when they were inspired in their "everyday lives," meaning any time outside of the context of their current museum visit. Because

participants are measuring this experience against a personal definition, they may be measuring differently. Yet we can still compare across these individual definitions, because they are all ultimately targeting the same experience. Responses were coded into 7 emergent categories, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6: Sources of Everyday Inspiration



Participants who were inspired by their work specifically cited professional success as inspirational, as well as seeing innovation and positive change manifest in their workplaces:

"I am an entrepreneur and I am inspired by hearing other entrepreneurs tell their stories and I guess its inspiring and motivating to just talk to others who are doing it" (L-11).

Those who were inspired by people often referred to inspirational conversations, members of their family or other people as models for professional and personal success: *"Seeing someone like perform an act of kindness like holding a door open or letting someone go through first kind of inspires me to also be kind" (P-6).*

In this analysis, Everyday Experiences included responses that referred to "being inspired by the little things in life" or specific contexts for inspirational thoughts, like while driving or planning a meal. Among participants inspired by Nature, 20% specifically called out gardening as an inspiring activity.

How Inspiration Feels

After being asked if they had experienced inspiration during their visit to the museum, study participants were asked to identify what their experience felt like. Responses were coded into 5 categories, as seen in Figure 8. Of respondents who felt motivated to carry out a specific action, many revolved specifically around art-making activities (ex: "We're actually going to go to the art store right now to get paints"). Responses recognizing the hand of the artist often referred to the visual manifestations of the artists' creativity as inspirational:

> *"I felt emotional looking at the Gibson exhibit and grateful that someone was able to use that force that inspires them to put something out so that other people could see it and then feel something from it…the time put in with the Gibson works is…it's hundreds of hours for each of those pieces and it's very inspiring to me" (S-2)*

Several respondents identified that the presentation of different perspectives was inspirational: *"One of the pieces right down the hall here I felt was very inspiring – it makes you think about the world a little differently and about how people feel,"* (L-9).

Figure 7: Positive Feelings Associated with Feeling & Not Feeling Inspired

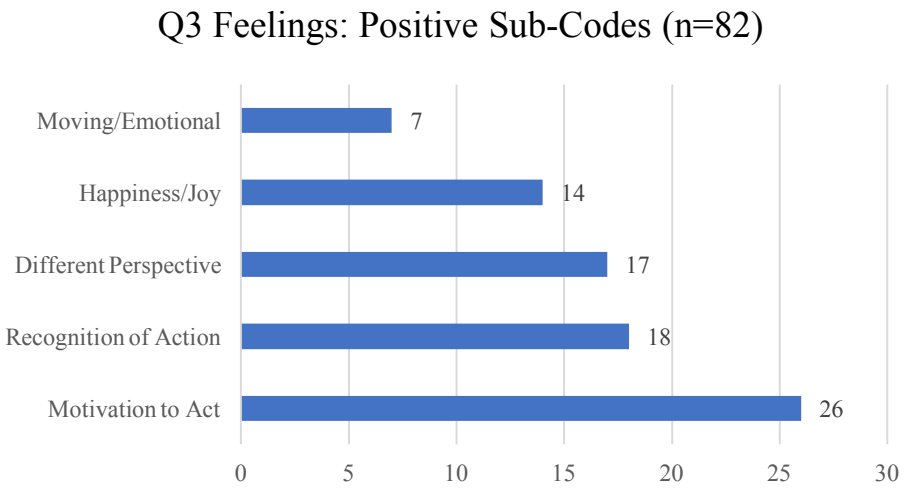
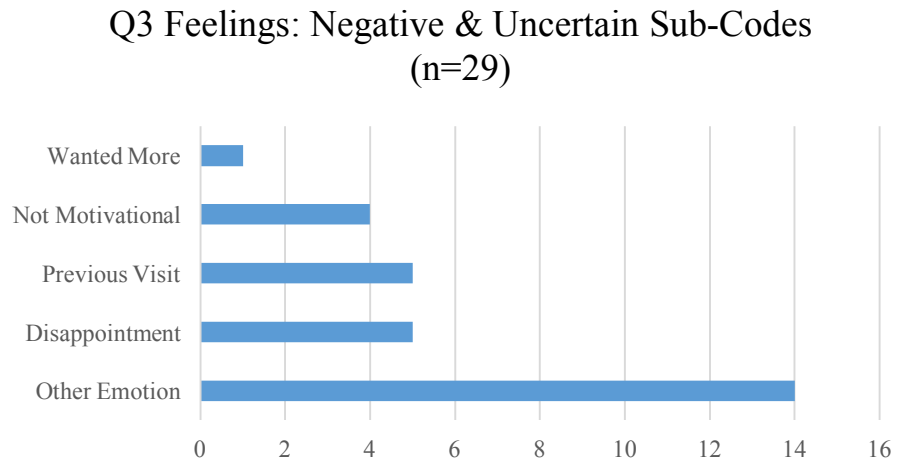


Figure 9 shows the distribution of responses from participants who were not inspired during their visits or who were unsure about their feelings. Their comments were coded into 5 categories. Participants who were not inspired were often quick to reassure the data collector that they enjoyed their experience or that it improved their day despite not feeling inspiration:

"I really enjoyed it and there were some cool pieces, but it didn't inspire me to do anything."

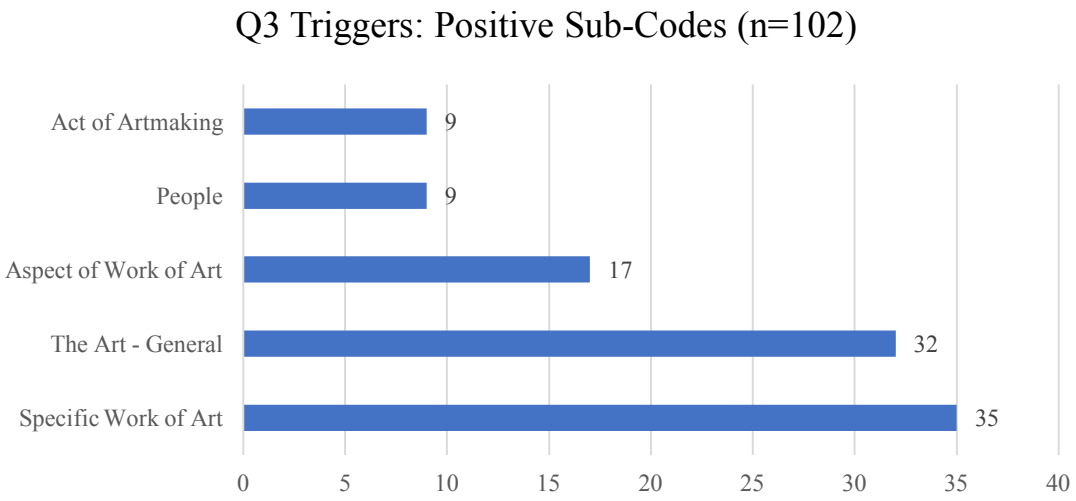
Figure 8: Negative Feelings Associated with Feeling & Not Feeling Inspired



R3: What, if any, aspect of the art museum experience triggers feelings of inspiration?

Participants were asked to identify aspects of their museum visit that may have triggered their feelings of inspiration, or lack thereof. Responses were coded into 5 categories as seen in Figure 10. Of participants who felt inspired by specific works of art, artists or exhibitions, the majority provided either a name or some other contextual information to identify said source (ex: "the current exhibit," "the one with the birds"). Those who referred to in an extremely generic context (ex: "I was inspired by the art") did not provide any additional information to identify a more specific source. Participants who identified specific visual characteristics of works of art as being inspirational referenced color, texture, medium and technique.

Figure 9: Triggers of Feeling Inspired

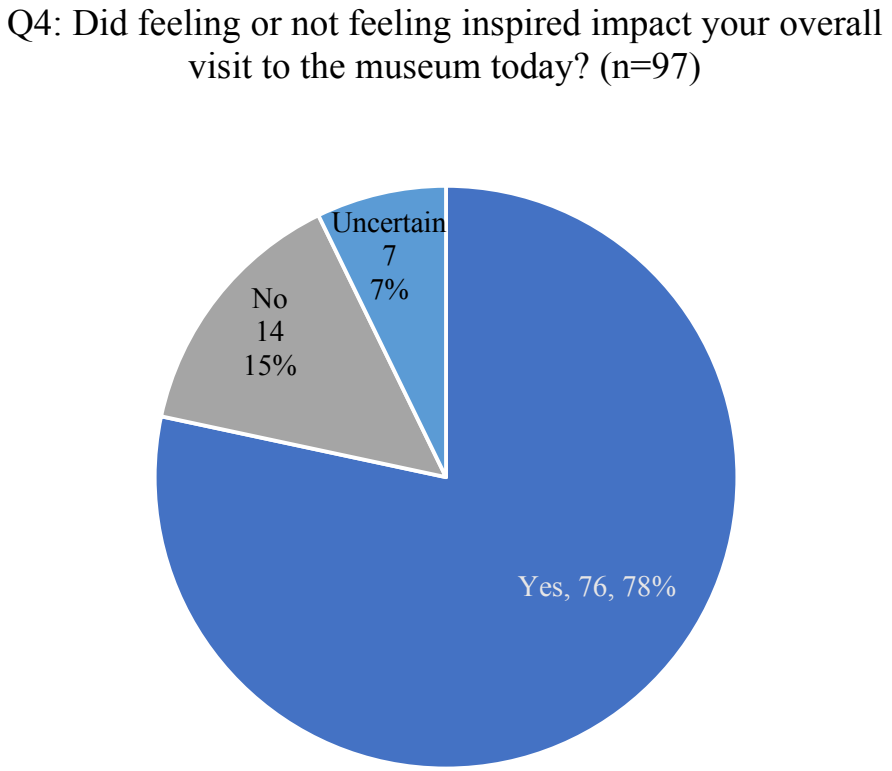


Among visitors who reported that they were not inspired during their visit (n=8), 3 reported that they were inspired in other ways, like by their work or by other people rather than by art and 2 indicated that personal factors outside the museum visit impacted how they felt inside the museum. 2 respondents negatively responded to curatorial choices, one at the Carnegie Museum of Art and one at the Speed Museum of Art.

R4: Does feeling or not feeling inspired during an art museum visit impact visitors' perceptions of their overall experience?

Study participants were asked if they thought that feeling or not feeling inspired impacted their overall museum visit. Results are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 10: How Inspiration Impacted Museum Visits



Of the 76 participants whose feelings impacted their visit, 5 were impacted by their *lack* of inspiration. Their responses were grounded in personal taste and enjoyment of the works on view:

"I just feel like if I had seen maybe an artist I'm familiar with maybe more of the type of art that I like in general, I probably would have been more inspired, more excited about doing artwork myself again" (S-7).

Of the remaining 67 participants who did feel inspired, 33% associated the impact of feeling inspired with positive or uplifting outcomes for their visit:

"I mean its comparable to going to church. You walk out feeling better than when you came in." (P-27)

More specifically, study participants' responses were coded into 5 categories, as seen in Figure 12.

Figure 11: Positive and Negative Impacts on Museum Visits

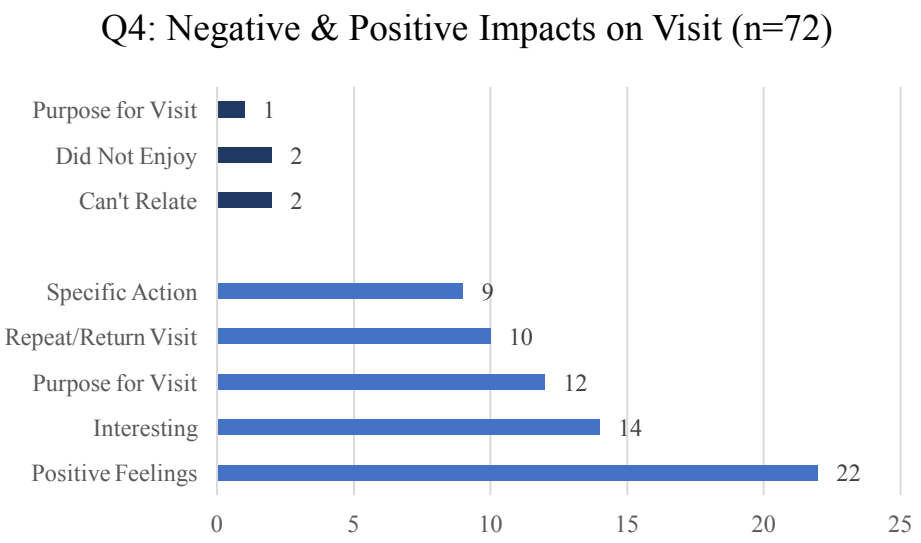
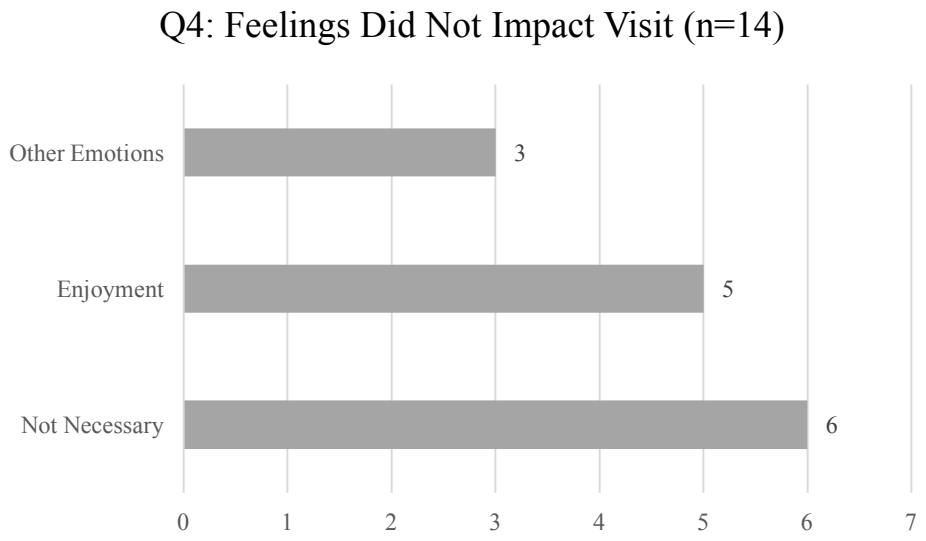


Figure 13 shows results from those participants who said that feeling or not feeling inspired did not impact their museum visit. Their responses were coded into three emergent categories.

Figure 12: Other Outcomes of Museum Visits



Almost half of participants whose visit was not impacted by inspiration stated that feeling inspired is not a necessary component of an art museum visit. Other participants referred to other emotions as the primary outcome of their museum visit, and enjoyment and other positive emotions were the largest portion of these responses:

"I loved it. Honestly, I don't come to the museum to feel inspired, I just enjoy them. They're where we've been and sometimes it helps me think of where we're going forward." (P10).

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

This study set out to determine to if and how art museum visitors experienced inspiration during their time in museum spaces. Data were collected through 105 interviews with visitors at three art museums across the country. Each data collection site explicitly calls out inspiration in their mission statements. Quantitative data from Likert Scales were analyzed to measure visitors' inspiration both inside the museum and in their everyday lives. Qualitative interview responses were analyzed through emergent coding to establish if visitors their art museum visits as inspirational, what about that experience may have triggered those feelings and how those feelings impacted their overall visit to the museum. The word inspiration is increasingly referenced in museum mission statements and strategic plans as an institutional priority. This study contextualizes what it actually means to inspire a visitor and the ways that feeling inspired can improve visitor experience. These results have implications for museum practice and future research to understand the relationships between visitors, museums and emotions.

Conclusions

Participants perceive their visits to art museums as inspirational.

Almost three-quarters of participants indicated that they had experienced some level of inspiration during their visit to the museum. Participants identified different components of feeling inspired including motivation to undertake specific actions or behaviors, recognition of an artist's own inspiration, the presentation of different or new perspectives and general positive emotions, all of which reflect Thrash & Elliot's inspiration framework (Thrash & Elliot, 2004). These results are based on participants' perception of their emotional experiences, and have not been analyzed to verify their psychological validity.

Participants perceived themselves as inspired by both tangible and intangible aspects of art on view.

Participants were overwhelmingly perceived the art on view in the museums as inspirational, though not everyone could point to a specific work or show that triggered their feelings of inspiration. Many participants were inspired by visual elements of artworks including color, shape and medium and others were inspired by works of art as representations of techniques they personally want to replicate.

A significant percentage of participants were inspired by the ideas and physical actions the art ultimately represents, confirming what Matravers laid out in Art and Emotion (2012). To these participants, the art on view represents the final stage of someone else's creative process – a process that they respect, value or want to emulate. This was expressed as both a trigger of inspiration and an aspect of the actual feeling of inspiration. These ideas reflect the fact that "the influence of role models who lead one toward virtue or success was one of the dominant themes in inspiration narratives investigated by Thrash and Elliot (2004), suggesting that the elicitors of inspiration encompass those of elevation and admiration" (Thrash et al., 2014, p. 503). While the lack of a consistent pattern among inspirational triggers may be confounding to an institution seeking to encourage inspirational experiences with its artistic holdings, the fact that the art was a central focus for visitors' emotional experiences should be heartening. It means that the museum itself is central to the emotions and experiences described by participants and is not just a backdrop or set piece for inspiration to strike from elsewhere.

Participants felt that inspiration impacted their museum experience, mostly positively.

A large majority of participants indicated that feeling or not feeling inspired impacted their visit to the museum. Most visitors who were not inspired did not consider it a necessary part of their visits, and many cited other positive emotions other than inspiration that they

experienced during their visits. A minority of respondents were uninspired during their visits and disappointed or upset with that aspect of their museum experience. Feeling inspired during a museum visit was most strongly associated with positive emotions – feeling inspired made them happy or improved their overall visits – and with personal engagement with the work on view. Museum visitors who experience positive emotions during their visits are more satisfied with their time spent in the museum (Del Chiappa et al., 2014), and more satisfied visitors are more likely to return to the museum or recommend the museum to a friend (Harrison & Shaw, 2003). to.

Implications

Museum Practice

There are ways to measure visitor perceptions of inspiration

This study presents one avenue for determining if museum visitors feel inspired and what aspect of museum experiences inspire them. The methods of this study can be modified to address participant follow-up actions and museums could partner with interested researchers to address the possible divide between perception of inspiration and inspiration as defined and verified by Thrash & Elliot's frameworks.

Inspiration is tied to positive museum outcomes

Participants in this study who perceived their visits as inspirational often related their visits to generally positive emotions and outcomes. Del Chiappa, Andreu and Gallarza (2014) showed that positive emotions are related to increased overall satisfaction with a museum visit, and other research has found that visitor satisfaction is related to an increased desire for a return visit and

increased likelihood of referring new visitors (Harrison & Shaw, 2003). In this study, participants specifically referenced repeat visits as an outcome of their inspirational visit The CultureTrack study indicated that Feeling Inspired is one of the top 5 motivators for cultural participation (La Placa Cohen, 2017). If possible visitors perceive art museums as places where they can be inspired, that could drive attendance and participation, which could in turn lead to the outcomes addressed above.

Further Research

Are certain works of art – or types of work – more inspiring than others?

This study was meant to capture triggers of visitors' experiences with inspiration at a very high level. There was no guarantee that the art in the museum would be the trigger of inspirational experience. Now that this study has shown that art in museums does inspire people, more detailed questions about inspirational triggers would be fascinating for the field. This current research can provide very little insight to museum staff about specific causes of inspiration within their institutions, but further research may be able to isolate individual artists or artistic movements as particularly inspirational.

What inspires visitors in other museums?

This study had a very narrow scope of potential data collection sites. For this research, the focus was art museums, and much of the language used by participants reflects this visual and informational context. Future research could apply the same concepts and structure to different types of museums. How does inspiration look different in a history museum? In a science museum? A cultural or community museum? Inspiration may look very different depending on these contexts. This study also only addressed art museums with general

collections. Future research could explore inspiration and its triggers in subject-specific art museums like museums of modern art, contemporary art, sculpture or museums devoted to the work of a single artist. As research measures visitor inspiration within a greater number specific contexts, there will be more opportunities for cross-comparison and potentially a generalized theory of how inspiration functions in museums.

What impact does inspiration have on visitors in the long-term?

This research is a potentially valuable building block for further research exploring visitor experience and inspiration in museums and the impact of inspiration beyond the museum's walls. A limitation of this study is its confined scope. Due to limited time and data collection capacity, this study could not address participants' potential actions outside the museums. Many visitors referenced being motivated by their visits to do specific, often art-related, things. Research is needed to determine how feeling inspired to act inside the museum translates to action after additional time has elapsed. Further research could identify which inspirational triggers lead to greater action and which begin and end within the museum's walls.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Visitor Interview Questions

- *For my thesis, I'm exploring visitor experiences at [museum]. I could really use your help. Would you be willing to chat with me? It will only take about five minutes.*
- *Is it okay that I record our conversation? I will be the only one to hear it, and while I may use quotes in my research, your identity will remain completely confidential.*
- *I want to make sure you know that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions - I'm interested in learning about everyone's individual experiences.*

1. To start out, I'm curious how you would describe "inspiration?"

Before we move on to the next question, I'd like you to quickly answer these questions

[hand out Visitor Instrument]

Again, there are no wrong answers! You only need to fill out as much as you're comfortable with.

1. Can you describe a time where you have been inspired in your everyday life?

2. Do you think you felt inspiration during your visit today?

3. IF YES
    a. What did that experience feel like, to you?
    b. What made you feel that way?
        i. PROMPT: Was it a particular object? A space? Something more?
    c. Do you think that impacted your visit to [museum]

4. IF NO
    a. Why do you think that may be?
    b. Do you think that impacted your visit to [museum]?

Appendix B – Visitor Interview Questionnaire

Please fill this out to the best of your ability:

1 = not at all
7 = very deeply or strongly

	…in the past four weeks	…today at the museum
I experienced inspiration	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Something I encountered or experienced inspired me	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I was inspired to do something	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
I felt inspired	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please tell me a little about yourself:

Age: [ ] 18 and under [ ] 19-35 [ ] 36-64 [ ] 65 and older [ ] Prefer not to say	Gender: _____	Is today your first visit to this museum? [ ] yes [ ] no Are you a member of this museum? [ ] yes [ ] no

Appendix C – Thrash & Elliot's Inspiration Scale

Below are four statements, each followed by two questions. The questions concern how often and how deeply/strongly you experience what is described in the statement. Please answer both questions after each statement by circling numbers from 1 to 7.

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1. I experience inspiration.

1a. How often does this happen?	1 never	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often
1b. How deeply or strongly (in general)?	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very deeply or strongly

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2. Something I encounter or experience inspires me.

2a. How often does this happen?	1 never	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often
2b. How deeply or strongly (in general)?	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very deeply or strongly

---

3. I am inspired to do something.

3a. How often does this happen?	1 never	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often
3b. How deeply or strongly (in general)?	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very deeply or strongly

---

4. I feel inspired.

4a. How often does this happen?	1 never	2	3	4	5	6	7 very often
4b. How deeply or strongly (in general)?	1 not at all	2	3	4	5	6	7 very deeply or strongly

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Appendix D – Coding Rubric

DATA ID #s
P – 1-50 = Pittsburgh, Carnegie Museum of Art
S – 1-35 = Seattle, Seattle Art Museum
L – 1-20 = Louisville, Speed Art Museum

Q1 – I'm curious how you would describe inspiration?

CODES		***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLES***
1	**Motivation**	Visitor ties the feeling of inspiration to a motivation to act	"I would define it as a sort of spark that makes you want to create or do something…some sort of internal motivation." (P-24) "Something that motivates you to be better." (L-16) "I think inspiration motiveates me to take action. Something that causes me to think and feel like theres something that I can't ignore the desire to take action on something." (S-12)
2	**Feelings/Emotions**	Visitor primarily describes inspiration as a feeling	"It's seeing something and then feeling something and then making something from it…" (P-20) "Something that moves you to move yourself' (P-33) "Just something that makes you feel good, Kinda uplifts you, enhances your life." (S-14) "Inspiration for me is a very visceral feeling. Like it feels like this bubbly, effervescent-like liquid in my brain that I feel when I look at particular visual stimuli." (S-15)
3	**Creativity**	Visitor specifically ties inspiration to creativity	"Inspiration is feeling motivated to create something." (L-6) "Something that can help me to be more creative, feel more motivated" (S-4) "The first word that comes to mind is creativity…Inspiration for me is something you might see anywhere that

			gives you the drive to create something." (S-5)
4	**Action**	Visitor mentions a desire to do or make something	"To me inspiration is an idea that stimulates you to act in some way" (P-25) "When you see something and want to go do something (L-8) "It's a visual response to something that makes me think about wanting to do something with the information." (S-27)
5	**Beyond the Self**	Visitor references a feeling of inspiration being outside of or beyond themselves	"Inspiration to me is something that is bigger than myself that causes me to want to grow and learn and be larger and better than where I am right now." (L-13) "I like the force idea…something that's there that either you see or hear or anything in your life really that moves you forward in some way." (S-1)
6	**Sudden/A-Ha Moment**	Visitor references inspiration as an instantaneous, sudden, or A-Ha moment	"It's something of value that comes instantly and unexpectedly" (P-11) "A-ha moment, you know…AHA!" (P-14) "When I think of inspiration I think of almost like a sudden, powerful motivation." (S-8) "I would describe it as a rare and quickly fleeting feeling that can come at an unexpected time or at any time really and leave very fast as well." (S-26)
7	**Personal/Individual**	Visitor identifies inspiration as a personal or individualized experience	"It's unique. Definitely your own perception with everything." (P-21) "I would say that it's entirely personal and is different for everyone, different at every stage of your life…so that's a difficult thing to explain." (L-19)
8	**Other**	Visitor answer is uncategorizable	"That which moves you forward" (L-4) "Something that gives you a will to live (L-5) "A distant flame that is warm when you are very cold." (L-18)

Q2: Can you describe a time you have been inspired in your everyday life?

	CODEs	*DESCRIPTION*	*EXAMPLE*
1	**PEOPLE**	Visitor refers to "other people" first	See Below
2	**NATURE**	Visitor refers to nature	See Below
3	**WORK**	Visitor refers to their job first	See Below
4	**EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES**	Visitor refers to everyday experiences as a source of inspiration	". I usually try to be inspired – and I am – by the most ordinary things in my immediate surroundings, in my own backyard as it were." (P-14)
5	**NEGATIVE INSPIRATION**	Visitor refers to being inspired to act against something (Politics)	"I guess social political situations inspire me to maybe do something about it." (S-11)

	PEOPLE Sub-CODES	*DESCRIPTION*	*EXAMPLE*
1.1	**Family**	Visitor mentions being inspired by their family	"My mom is 42 and she just went back to school and is doing really well and I think it's really inspiring" (L-12)
1.2	**Coworkers**	Visitor comments about characteristics of works on view – including but not limited to color, subject matter etc.	I work with two immigrants… they both came from parts of the world where there was war happening, and they came to this country with – not nothing, but they had to restart. They were just willing to do whatever job was necessary for them and coming from completely different war-torn parts of the world like doing whatever they needed to do. And now they're both well established." (S-2)
1.3	**Doing Good**	Visitor mentions being inspired by other people "doing good"	"Seeing someone like perform an act of kindness like holding a door open or letting someone go through first kind of inspires me to also be kind" (P-6)
1.4	**Success**	Visitor mentions seeing other people succeed	"I'm inspired by others more than anything. Just when others are achieving things or doing things that are great it inspires me to want to push myself or do things better." (L-6)

1.5	**Conversations**	Visitor refers to conversations with people as a source of inspiration	"Just in having conversations with people I just ran for mayor so I was inspired a whole lot talking to different people who've found ways around barriers" (L-15)

	NATURE Sub-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
2.1	**Nature - General**	Visitor mentions being inspired by nature generally	"So, I'm a big nature guy and there's a waterfall in the woods behind my house and I often go there it's awe inspiring I don't know if any product comes from it it's just like beautiful being there" (P-11)
2.2	**Gardening**	Visitor mentions being inspired by gardening	"Gardening, I find gardening to be really inspirational just being like…in nature. It's peaceful." (P-2)

	WORK Sub-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
3.1	**Co-workers**	Visitor mentions being inspired by their co-workers	"I'm surrounded by very intelligent people and that inspires me to do better, to better myself." (P-41)
3.2	Innovation/Change	Visitor references being inspired to make change or innovate in their jobs	"I'm a nurse, so dealing with the things in the hospital kind of inspires me to notice things that I think we could have done better" (L-3)
3.3	**Passion**	Visitor refers to their or their co-workers' passion for their work	"I am an entrepreneur and I am inspired by hearing other entrepreneurs tell their stories and I guess its inspiring and motivating to just talk to others who are doing it." (L-11)
3.4	**Success**	Visitor refers to their own success or the professional success of others as a source of inspiration	"I want to become a commercial pilot and so I work at the airport. Whenever I see commercial pilots walking around I get my little sense of "I want to do that" (S-32)

GLOBAL CODES		*DESCRIPTION*
77	**OTHER**	Truly odd responses that don't fall into a category described above and don't match up with other response codes.
88	**I DON'T KNOW**	Visitor simply could not come up with an answer. CAREFUL: if a visitor initially says: "I don't know" or "no idea" followed by an answer, you should code for the response given, not the initial "I don't know…"
99	**DID NOT ANSWER**	Visitor responded but did not answer the question at all. They may have provided a comment on something unrelated to the question you asked.

Q3: Do you think you felt inspiration during your visit today?

	CODES	*DESCRIPTION*	*EXAMPLE*
1	**YES**	Visitor says they were inspired during their visit	See Below
2	**NO**	Visitor says they were not inspired during their visit	See Below
3	**UNCERTAIN/UNCLEAR**	Visitor does not provide clear yes or no answer	"I wouldn't say I was whole-y inspired because I don't create art so this kind of thing doesn't create my kind of inspiration to do my kind of work" (S-32)

Q3A: What did that experience feel like, to you? (feelings)

	POSITIVE SUB-CODES	*DESCRIPTION*	*EXAMPLE*
1.1	**Happiness/Joy/Enjoyment**	Visitor specifically references a positive emotion	"Just the visual experience makes you feel good makes you feel the joy based on what you're seeing (L-19)
1.2	**Moving/Emotional**	Visitor references being moved or other similar emotional expressions.	"I actually had tears and visual art does not do that to me" (P-11)
1.3	**Recognition of Action**	Visitor recognizes the hand of the artist in what they saw at the museum. Art as a reflection of someone else's inspiration and action	"To be able to achieve something to that magnitude so far back in time whenever they didn't have the technology to do that is amazing." (P-28).

			"I felt emotional looking at the Gibson exhibit and grateful that someone was able to use that force that inspires them to put something out so that other people could see it and then feel something from it. (S-2)
1.4	**Motivation to Act**	Visitors express a personal motivation to do something or act on a feeling	"You know I really want to try painting on glass because I really haven't thought about that for a while. And I saw some paintings on glass. So I thought that would be cool." (P-18)
1.5	**Different Perspective**	Visitor specifies that feeling inspired offered a new or different perspective	"it makes you think about the world a little bit differently and about how people feel." (L-9)

	NEGATIVE SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
2.1	**Other Emotion**	Visitor identifies a different primary emotion during their visit	"I wouldn't say inspired I mean it was enjoyable it was maybe uplifting but I wouldn't say inspired" (L-16)
2.2	**Not Motivational**	Visitor specifically references a lack of motivation to do something after their visit	"I saw a lot of things that were visually interesting to look at or read but I wouldn't really say they inspired me to go out and do anything differently or change anything" (L-8)
2.3	**Disappointment**	Visitor identified some aspect of the visit as disappointing	"I get very little viscerally and aesthetically from it as art." (P-14)

	UNCERTAIN SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
3.1	**Other Emotion**	Visitor identifies other emotions as the primary experiences during the visit	"I don't know that I've felt inspiration per say. Probably not a ton, but I've enjoyed looking at everything." (P-6)
3.2	**Wanted More**	Visitor states that the visit did not meet their expectations and that they were left wanting more from the experience	"I would have loved to have seen was more about the artist like how was the artist selected we have their name but we don't know anything about their lives that maybe would have inspired them to create the artwork they created" (L-15)

3.3	**Previous Visit**	Visitor negatively compares their inspiration this visit to their feelings during a previous visit or a visit to a different institution.	"Last week we did the international so I was probably a little more inspired last week than I felt going through today it was a little rushed today going through with a two-year-old." (P-2)

Q3B: What made you feel that way? (trigger)

	POSITIVE SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
1.1	**Specific Work of Art**	Visitor mentions specific work of art or artist on display	"They have two Kerry James Marshall's here right now and I would cut one of my fingers off to see just one of them, but I didn't even have to do that!" (P-1) "the neon Mr. rogers exhibit" (P-11)
1.2	**Aspect of Work of Art**	Visitor comments about characteristics of works on view – including but not limited to color, subject matter etc.	"I think for me a lot of times whenever I notice the light whenever artists use different forms of light in their works and like the whites that they highlight things I always think it's so interesting and that was something that was very inspiring for me" (L-20)
1.3	**The art**	Visitor generally refers to "the art" as being inspirational	"I would say I did Because of all the beautiful works of art" (P-32)
1.4	**People**	Visitor refers to being inspired by other people during their visit	"So it was nice to see the younger generation and that kind of makes you feel more inspired. so what's to come I guess." (P-20)
1.5	**Act of Artmaking**	Visitor refers to the act of making the work of art as inspirational	"I think that the things that the artists are able to create whether its sculpture or paintings its inspiring that someone would work on their craft to a level that they can create these things for us to enjoy" (L-13)

	NEGATIVE SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
2.1	**Curatorial Choices**	Visitor mentions curatorial choices including layout, labels, art choices etc.	"Uh no. I think that the challenge here is I felt like I was walking through a patchwork quilt and would go from one gallery that was maybe an American Indians theme, and then step into another gallery that was a continent away and

			centuries away and there was just no rhyme or reason." (L-1)
2.2	**Outside Factors**	Visitor refers to factors outside of the museum environment	"I would say a lot of things just feel a little bit unobtainable in the climate right now so it's even hard to draw inspiration I just feel kind of shut off" (L-12)
2.3	**Don't Relate**		"Maybe because I'm in the arts and I'm aware of a little bit more, but nothing hit me." (P-13)
2.4	**Inspired in Other Ways**		I mean I'm a textile person. The paintings the drawings everything seem like there's a level of texture that was appealing to me, but as for something that made me stop and stand and think? I didn't have that." (P-44)

Q4: Did feeling or not feeling inspired impact your overall visit today?

	Y/N CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
A	**YES**	Visitor indicated that feeling/not feeling inspired did impact their visit	See Below
B	**NO**	Visitor indicated that feeling/not feeling inspired did not impact their visit	See Below
C	**UNCERTAIN/UNCLEAR**	Visitor was unsure how feeling/not feeling inspired impacted their visit	"Semi inspired" (L-18)

	YES SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
1	**POS - Purpose for Visit**	Visitor indicates that they visited the museum specifically to seek inspiration and felt inspired	"I often come to museums feel inspired." (P-20)
2	**POS - Specific Action**	Visitor Describes a specific action they are going to take in response to their visit to the museum	"I feel like after that I'm gonna go to the store and buy a book maybe to draw something or to paint" (S-10)
3	**POS – Repeat/Return Visit**	Visitor mentions that they have specifically returned to the museum to seek inspiration	"I think anytime you have like a strong connection to an experience and to a place that drives you to want to come back." (P-29)

			"I think so. Because I think we'll come back more often" (P-30)
4	**POS - Enjoyment**	Visitor refers to enjoying their visit	"Because I enjoyed what I saw therefore it translated into me enjoying my time" (L-19)
5	**POS - Interesting**	Visitor relates inspiration to interest in their visit	"Just being inspired and just made it more intriguing." (P-21)
6	**NEG – Purpose for Visit**	Visitor says they came to the museum specifically to seek inspiration and did not feel inspired	"Yeah that was my sole purpose of coming" (P-9)
7	**NEG – Can't Relate**	Visit was not inspired and referenced a struggle to relate to the work on view	"I just feel like if I had seen maybe an artist I'm familiar with maybe more of the type of art that I like in general, I probably would have been more inspired, more excited about doing artwork myself again" (S-7)
8	**NEG – Did Not Enjoy**	Visit was not inspired and did not enjoy their visit as a result	"I'm not too impressed generally with this museum…This is too mass-oriented" (P-13)

	NO SUB-CODES	***DESCRIPTION***	***EXAMPLE***
9	**Not Necessary**	Visitor stated that feeling inspired isn't always part of the experience	"I just like to look at the stuff, it doesn't matter if it moves me or not." (P-6)
10	**Other Emotions**	Visitor references other emotions	"I don't think so. I think I was able to appreciate it just as much." (S-3)
11	**Enjoyment**	Visitor specifically references enjoying their visit despite not feeling inspired	"No, I had a wonderful time at the museum. I wasn't even thinking about it." (S-8)

GLOBAL CODES		***DESCRIPTION***
77	**OTHER**	Truly odd responses that don't fall into a category described above and don't match up with other response codes.
88	**I DON'T KNOW**	Visitor simply could not come up with an answer. CAREFUL: if a visitor initially says: "I don't know" or "no idea" followed by an answer, you should code for the response given, not the initial "I don't know…"
99	**DID NOT ANSWER**	Visitor responded but did not answer the question at all. They may have provided a comment on something unrelated to the question you asked.

LIKERT SCALE:

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
P	In the past four weeks….
T	Today at the museum…

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
1	I experienced inspiration
2	Something I encountered or experienced inspired me
3	I was inspired to do something
4	I felt inspired

P1-4 and T1-4 each have a numerical value assigned between 1 and 7
1 = not at all, 7= very deeply or strongly

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Age:

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
1	18 and Under
2	19-35
3	36-64
4	65 and Older
5	Prefer Not to Say

Gender:

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
1	Male
2	Female
3	Various Non-Binary Identities

First Visit to Museum:

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
1	Yes
2	No

Member of Museum:

CODES	*DESCRIPTION*
1	Yes
2	No