

PERFECT FIT

Art Museums and New Perspectives on Active Older Adults

A Review of Literature

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Abstract

This review of literature revealed that there are two predominant ways of viewing older adults that have implications for institutions hoping to serve this burgeoning segment of the population. The traditional view emphasizes deficiencies and weaknesses. Those who work out of this tradition see their role as helping older people to retain their abilities and fight against illness and loss that often comes with aging. The new, contemporary view of older people is based on the notion that human development is an unending process and that older adults are interested, curious, vital people who wish to remain engaged in life and society and to make contributions to their families. Those whose work is based on this view of aging emphasize strengths rather than weaknesses.

Unfortunately, many art museum programs and activities are developed based on the older model. A typical major goal of such programs is to help those with diminished intellectual capacity (Alzheimer's and related diseases) to slow the loss of their ability to function fully. However, some museum programs are being developed out of the new view of aging. These programs are developed in the belief that participants are active adults, eager to learn about and engage with art as serious arts appreciators and practicing artists.

The literature suggests that engaging with contemporary art is a particularly appropriate activity for older adults as the benefits of arts engagement are a perfect fit when lined up with the goals, desires and needs of older adults. Arts engagement has been found to provide social, physical and mental health benefits. Older adults enjoy the expansion of their creative capacity that well-planned arts encounters provide, and in numerous research survey questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, they have said that they appreciate the ways arts programs help to make them more open-minded and willing to consider new and alternative points of view and possibilities. They also appreciate the fact that longer-term programs provide an excellent context for developing friendships with people with shared interests. This is also true when those people with shared interests are participants in intergenerational programs and are young enough to be the older adults' grandchildren.

When marketing to older adults, the literature suggests adopting an "age-friendly" approach that involves making interaction with the institution as smooth and effortless as possible, from provision of adequate seating in exhibition spaces to using "age-friendly" font sizes in signage and making the organizational website intuitively easy to navigate.

Examples of successful "new approach" programs are provided, as is a list of resource organizations that can provide useful information and potential partnerships for developing programs for active older adults and for marketing those programs to this large, dynamic, and growing segment of the population.

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SOME ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF OLDER ADULTS

A reminder of the potential for contributions and fulfillment in later in life.

Laura Ingalls Wilder published her first book in the Little House on the Prairie series at the age of 64. At 76 she wrote the final book in the series, *These Happy Golden Years*.

■

Ben Franklin signed the Declaration of Independence when he was 70. When he was 81, he affected the compromise that led to the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

■

Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa at 76.

■

Fred Davis won the world professional billiards title when he was 67.

■

Peter Mark Roget produced the first edition of a scientific ordering of language, *Roget's Thesaurus*, when he was 73, and oversaw the publication until he was 90.

■

At 85, Coco Chanel was the head of a fashion design firm.

■

At 78, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. gave his definition of the limits of free speech. He said the First Amendment would not protect someone "falsely shouting fire in a theater and causing a panic."

■

When he was 75 Warren Buffet set up a \$30B contribution to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for use in world-wide projects.

■

Arthur Rubenstein gave one of his greatest recitals at age 89 in Carnegie Hall.

■

At 100, Grandma Moses was painting.

INRODUCTION

Farsighted museum educators and public policy makers understood the changing nature of aging and saw its implications for all of society, including the arts, more than 50 years ago. The first White House Conference on Aging was held in 1961 and set the stage for Medicare and the Older Americans Act of 1965. Since then conferences have been convened every decade, with the next conference scheduled for 2015.

In 1981 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) brought together experts to articulate the importance of arts and humanities for older audiences. The group delivered a resolution to the White House Conference on Aging that year, and while it was received by the body, it did was not among the 50 resolutions approved for further action. It did, however, state the case for attention to the arts for older adults. The resolution, now over 30 years old, still resonates even though some of its language is dated. The resolution stated:

Research suggests that active participation in the arts and learning promotes physical health, enhances a sense of well-being among older Americans, improves quality of life for those who are ill, and reduces the risk factors that lead to the need for long-term care. Even though there is an interest and participation in the arts by many older Americans, there is a general lack of awareness in the public, healthcare, and social services communities about the positive physical and psychological impacts of arts participation. However, there is a valuable untapped resource of older artists who could be teachers or mentors in expanding arts programs for seniors. Older Americans may be encouraged to participate in dance, music, and visual arts activities and may choose to expand their horizons through art appreciation programs. Participation in arts activities may lead to intergenerational exchange of values and knowledge. For example, seniors may work together with younger populations to preserve the value of older adults' memories and life experiences by recording their experiences and life histories in various mediums.

Resolution: Increase awareness of the positive physical and psychological impact that arts participation can have on older Americans.

2005 White House Conference on Aging
Index of Resolutions

2001 saw the new National Center for Creative Aging (NCCA) receive funding from NEA to create a database of programs for older adults and to network, train, and advocate for the field of creative aging. That same year, the *Journal of Museum Education* dedicated a special issue to the topic of museums and the aging population. In her editor's notes, Gretchen Jennings (2001) recognized the aging of the Baby Boom generation, increases in average longevity, and the tremendous interest many older adults have in continuing to learn. The timeliness of the special issue was grounded in the inevitable prospect that the audience of older adults for museums will increase dramatically.

Now in 2013, those projections of increases in adults over 55 – and living active lives well in their 80s – have come to fruition. The National Center for Creative Aging has been collaborating since 2009 with Grantmakers in the Arts and Grantmakers in Aging, and they will hold joint forums in 2013 (Callahan & Mataraya, 2011). In addition, research now focuses on the positive as well as the diminished aspects of aging and a new perspective on aging is emerging. At the Denver Art Museum, the time is right for an updated look at the relationship between aging and art museums.

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a current statement about what is known about active older adults as it relates to their actual and potential interactions with art museums, and to provide examples of innovative and successful programming and other methods of engagement for an active older adult audience.

Parameters of the Review

The focus of this review is on peer-reviewed journal articles from 2000-present as well as classics in the field of gerontology and sources highly recommended by professionals in museum education and gerontology. Government and organizational reports were also consulted as appropriate.

In order to locate the best available sources, museum professionals, appropriate data bases and professional associations were consulted with the goal of identifying sources that define the distinctive characteristics of active older adults as individuals and as a segment of the overall population. Existing programs that are actively serving this population as well as ways to market programs and activities to this population were also reviewed.

Theoretical and data-based statements about the benefits of arts participation with a focus on those benefits that are particularly relevant to the interests and need of active older adults were also included.

Structure of the Review

The review begins by setting the context for understanding the aging population. There is a section on the rapidly growing older population, new ways to think about aging and current trends in arts participation among older adults. The review then examines the literature about the physical, cognitive, personal and social development in the later years.

Next, a section outlines what is known from research about the benefits of arts participation in general, and especially for older adults. Because of Denver Art Museum's interest in building a creativity platform, the next section takes up the topic of creativity and older adults. Finally, there are sections on programming and marketing for older adults. References are included at the end of the text, as is a list of organizations that are prospects for partnerships with

Denver Art Museum as it conceptualizes and expands its offerings for older adults.

THE CONTEXT: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Eric Erikson, a pioneer in the field of human development, and his coauthors, captured the all-too-frequent view of aging that has been prominent in our culture: “Young is beautiful. Old is ugly. . . After all, we throw old things away – they are too difficult to mend . . . old things are obsolete, valueless, and disposable.” And the authors go on to observe that “[t]he cruelest aspect of this cultural attitude is the elders’ vulnerability to the stereotype” (Erikson, Erikson & Kivnick, 1986, 301).

Today, more leaders in the aging field are using the term “productive aging,” and challenge older adults to manage the threat of marginality and to embrace the promise of freedom (Henretta, 2008). Productive aging means continuing to live life. It means that at age 20, 40, or 80, people want to:

- Achieve a sense of control and feel empowered through mastery of technique or topic;
- Be socially engaged;
- Exercise their bodies and brains to ensure high physical and mental function;
- Be healthy by reducing risk factors for disease and disability; and
- Express themselves creatively (Boyer, 2007,8).

The Rapidly Growing Older Population

The population of older adults is growing rapidly. The National Center for Creative Aging (2010), quoting Department of Labor Statistics, reports that the average lifespan was 47.3 years in 1900, and had reached 76.9 by 2000. According to a recent the Central Intelligence Agency (2012) World Factbook, estimated life expectancy at birth for 2013 in the United States is 78.6 years. Between 2000 and 2040, the number of people 85 and older will grow 300%, from 4.2 million to 19.4 million.

The Administration on Aging (2011) reports that the 65 and older population in America is becoming more diverse. In 2000, the minority population was 5.7 million (16.3% of the population). IN 2010, it was 8.1 million (20% of the population). By 2020 it is projected to reach 13.1 million or 24% of the population.

In a recent Pew Research Center study (2013) that polled more than 2,000 adults in all 50 states, 69% of adults reported that they would like to live to somewhere between 79 and 100, with the median ideal age being 90 years old. Understanding this large and growing population of older people is critical for institutions hoping to serve them.

As of 2013 the large Baby Boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, has a mean age of 54-56 years old. As members of this generation move into their later years, they will be unlike any generation before them. Smith and Clurman (2007) of the firm Yalkelovich, Inc. - the firm that coined the term "baby boomer" - surveyed a national sample of 1023 boomers. Their results revealed three beliefs that are universally endorsed by boomers and characterize their world view:

- **Youthfulness.** They want to maintain a youthful spirit.
- **Impact.** They want to continue to make a difference.
- **Possibility.** They crave ongoing personal development based on empowerment and continuous progression.

When talking of health concerns, they focus on "vitality." They want to be energized and invigorated; they want to keep having fun. They say family is very important, and that grandchildren are especially important (Smith & Clurman, 2007, p 166). On average they are healthier, wealthier and share beliefs and values that differ from older generations who preceded them. In their relationships, boomers desire connection but retain a strong focus on the self and self-development. Co-housing senior developments such as Silver Sage, in Boulder, Colorado, for example, provide a living arrangement that matches boomer's preferences. As the promotional literature states, "Co-housing communities are small-scale neighborhoods that provide a balance between personal privacy and living amidst people who know and care about each other" (Wonderland Hill Development Company, 2008).

Along with demographic changes, attitudes regarding age and aging are also changing. Old age today is not viewed the way it was back when the boomers were born. Aging is no longer seen as a time of disengagement, rather it is seen as a time of *re-engagement*. Research reported by Westerhof & Telle (2007) indicates that while realistically recognizing physical health difficulties and concerns in their later years, along with the inevitable losses, 50-80 year-olds, also view the later years as a period of increased freedom, new interests and fewer demands.

Gene Cohen was a pioneer researcher, and his work is attributed to bringing about a sea change in how we think about and understand aging. Cohen (2005) notes that the old view of old age places an emphasis on a person holding on to pre-existing strengths while the newer view emphasizes developing new strengths and recognizing that development can be continuous. He points out that even cognitive capacity does not decline across the board.

New Ways to Think About Aging

As part of contemporary thinking about aging, Cohen has conceptualized the latter portion of life as consisting of four stages. The exact ages associated with the stages overlap due to the range of individual differences, and there is

even some overlap of characteristic behaviors and concerns among the four stages (Cohen, 2010, p. 191). The stages are:

Early 40s to late 50s, Midlife evaluation. This period is what has been referred to as the “midlife crisis” phase, but in actuality it is a time when one's mortality is confronted and the person asks herself the hard question: “Am I doing what I really want to be doing with my life?” As a result of that question, new behaviors may develop and the person may try to put her life on a new path.

Mid 50s to mid 70s, Liberation Phase. This time of life is filled with a sense of new-found freedom when the person asks: “If not now, when?” and people have great energy to try new things

Late 60s through 80s and beyond, Summing Up Phase. This stage is permeated with a desire to share wisdom, an interest in autobiography and personal storytelling and to deal with unfinished business and unresolved conflicts. In this stage, the famous choreographer Martha Graham, for instance, worked to leave a legacy of her works.

Late 70s to the end, Encore Phase. This phase is characterized by a desire to restate and reaffirm major life themes, and also to attend to unfinished business and unresolved conflicts.

Successful aging is now understood to be about more than maintaining physical health. Adding years to life is not the same as adding life to years. A study of adults 65 years and older, those who gave attention to the psychological aspects of successful aging had higher levels of quality of life as measured by perceived self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth, confidence, optimism, purpose in life, coping, facing up to problems, and overcoming difficulties (Bowling & Iliffe, 2011).

Arts Participation among Older Adults

National Endowment for the Arts' Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts have been conducted in 1982, 1992, 2002 and 2008. In 2008, 20% of 64-75 year olds, and approximately 11% of those 75 and older had attended an art museum in the last 12 months. The amount of art museum visits among the entire U.S. adult population was only slightly higher (23%) than attendance among 64 – 75 year olds (American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2012). This suggests that among this group of older adults, the proclivity to visit art museums remains about the same as for younger adults. The drop-off in attendance comes relatively late in life, and even among those over 75, there are substantial levels of museum going.

Based on an analysis of surveys conducted by the NEA Stern (2008) found that there had been a general decline over time in: attending arts events; consuming arts events through media; and personal or creative involvement with the arts. Gender and educational attainment are the most important

determinants of arts participation; the effect of age is quite modest. The youngest and oldest adults are the lowest participating groups while those who are middle aged are the highest.

A survey of older adults in the UK indicated that levels of arts engagement generally decline among older people. Still, those aged 55-74 make up a substantial part of the audience for arts events of all types and “the 55-64 age cohort is among the most actively involved in the arts” (Keaney & Oskala, 2007, 323).

Among boomers, there are indications that overall participation in the arts and other creative endeavors is a priority. Smith and Clurman (2007) asked 1023 boomers about the kinds of activities they were likely to focus their energies and invest their time in over the next five to ten years. Sixty-three activities were included on the survey, and Table 1 below, lists several of them that are of relevance to art museums. It has been noted that boomers are more interested in active participation in the arts and while the rate at which they volunteer is steady, the number of hours is diminishing (Williams, et.al., 2010. The percentage in the table below is the percent of respondents who marked an item with the top three of seven ratings, indicating that they agreed that the activity is something they plan to do in the future.

Table 1: Boomer Plans for Future Activities Relevant to Art Museums

Activity	Rank Order	Percentage Rating Activity 5,6, or 7 on 7-point scale
Spending more time with grandchildren	1	80%
Spending time with family	2	77%
Getting more out of life	4	75%
Doing things I've always wanted to do	6	74%
Learning a new skill or hobby	8	71%
Developing new skills and expertise	16	65%
Expressing self in more creative ways	18	64%
Exploring own potential in new and innovative ways	22	62%

Reading more books and taking more control over one’s future were also ranked in the top 5, as 3 and 5 respectively. An item that asked specifically about getting more involved with art was rated relatively low (36%; ranking 54th out of 63 items). However, given the way the item was phrased, it is impossible to tell if respondents understood the question to imply that IF they were *already* involved in the arts, they plan to get *more* involved (italics added). Thus, the survey did not really include an item about arts participation in general.

The American Time Use Survey (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009) shows that retired older adults generally spend more time than those under 65 years old participating in civic and religious activities, leisure activities, reading, and leisure computer use (Brandon, 2010).

Summary

New views of aging emphasize lifelong development of strengths, and research with the large Boomer cohort suggests their priorities for future activities includes several related to the arts and art museums. The most effective programs for older adults will take into account the changes that accompany the aging process. The next section describes the features of human development in the later years.

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE on the LATER YEARS

There is a great deal of variation in the ways individuals experience changes related to the aging process, and one cannot pinpoint when a particular person will, for example, begin to experience hearing loss. However, there are general trends in the changes that are experienced that most people go through as they age. Not all of the changes are negative. Successful marketing and programming for active older adults requires an understanding of all of these changes, both positive and negative. Such an approach is compatible with “the new paradigm that articulates the idea of seeing older people for their potential rather than their problems” (Herman, 2011, p. 3).

Physical Development

Physiological aging refers to “the systematic change to the body's ability to function caused by age related changes to the mind, body and senses (Stroud & Walker, 2012, p. 34). All of our senses weaken with age, but individual rates of decline differ among individuals. Approximately half of those over 60 have some hearing loss. Ambient sound in an environment becomes particularly troublesome, even if it's only loud conversations in a cafeteria or music intended to be “background.” Vision loss makes light levels and color contrasts, on signs for example, of special importance to older adults. Smell and taste also decline so that the older adult's experience of food is not the same as it is for younger people. Diminishment of the sense of touch brings up a variety of issues as the somatosensory system allows us to sense the movement of the body, stimulation of muscles and joints and sensitivity to temperature, pain, itching and pressure.

Cognitive Development

All aspects of intellect do not decline with age (Cohen, 2005), and in fact, there is growing attention to the importance of balancing physical fitness with brain fitness. Fernandez (2009) surveys 15 articles on the topic of brain fitness, which he defined as, “the general state of feeling alert, in control, productive, especially as the result of mental and physical exercise and proper nutrition.” He goes on to explain that the feeling of brain fitness is based on having the mental abilities required to function in society, in our occupations, and in our communities. Brain fitness is not about IQ. It is about skills such as attention, memory, emotional self-regulation, planning, and overcoming distractions.

While fluid intelligence, associated with on-the-spot reasoning independent of experience, does slowly decline with age, crystallized intelligence based on accumulated information and experience, improves with age (Cohen, 2005). Other aspects of the ways people think, also change in positive ways as people age. For example, Cabeza (2002) found that as people age, there is what he calls, “hemispheric, asymmetry reduction in older adults.” Simply put, by recording neuroimaging of the brain during cognitive activity, Cabeza found that when solving problems, both the left and right sides of older subjects' brains were simultaneously more active. Cohen (2005) suggests that this physiological

evidence about how older people approach and solve problems might account for what is commonly referred to as wisdom. As he notes: “For most people, wisdom connotes a perspective that supports a long-term common good over the short-term good for the individual...Wisdom is also generally understood to be informed by multiple forms of intelligence—reason, intuition, heart, and spirit (Cohen, 2005, p. 95). Cohen notes the tendency toward relativistic thinking as one ages, as well as increased ability to see the big picture and to uncover and resolve contradictions in opposing, and seemingly incompatible viewpoints.

Strauch (2010), in a book written for a lay audience, summarizes research showing that human brains hit their prime among people between their early 40s and late 60s. This is much later than previously thought. A recent study of 118 pilots aged 40 to 69 showed, for example, that the older pilots outperformed their younger colleagues when avoiding traffic collisions using simulators. One reason Strauch gives is that humans begin to use a larger portion of our brain as we age. Based on the research she reviewed, Strauch advocates for us to rethink how we make decisions and structure our lives. She notes that now we tend to have people “get out of the way” in their early 60s, viewing them as too old to teach, be a doctor or perform so many other demanding tasks. Yet, research demonstrates that the early 60s is a time when the brain’s performance reaches its peak. It is, in the words of Strauch, “ripe, ready, and whole.”

Personal Development

Cohen notes other important developmental imperatives that continue into later years, and sometimes even emerge with age. Obviously, all older people do not exhibit all of these characteristics, but it is important to remember that many do (Cohen, 2005, p 31).

- Getting to know one's self and becoming more comfortable with one's self;
- Feeling whole despite pain and loss—psychologically, interpersonally, spiritually;
- Increased curiosity;
- Learning to live well;
- Having good judgment;
- Giving to others;
- Desire to tell one's story;
- Desire to live life to the fullest right up to the end;
- Continuing the process of discovery and change;
- Maintaining hope despite adversity.

Social Development

Social relations are another consideration. Isolation becomes an issue for older adults as health problems and difficulties with transportation increase and as friends and relatives die. However, older adults express a desire for relationships and social activity, suggesting that the period of active older adulthood might be extended for many if transportation and health issues can be

accommodated. As Askam and his colleagues point out (Askam, et.al. 2007), in today's world, non-kin partners and associates, friends and neighbors are becoming more significant in the lives of older people than they had been in the past. They note an increased role for cultural institutions and educational programs to provide opportunities for older people to meet others and form friendships. A significant aspect of specific museum programs reviewed in a later section of this report is the social bonds that they help people create and maintain.

Boomers' Perceptions of Themselves

Smith & Clurman (2007) point to a number of attitudes and values that, while not necessarily universally associated with aging, are characteristic of the huge cohort of aging adults known as the baby boomer generation born between 1946 and 1964 (age 55 +/-1 in 2013).

Baby boomers, as a group, see themselves as aging but still active and "in the game." They don't want to be called old or elderly, but acknowledge that they are growing older. Vitality is a prime characteristic they attribute to themselves. As such, they are prime candidates for lifelong learning opportunities as they continue to value exploration and personal reinvention. Continuing to be curious, flexible and learning is important to them. AARP even has a section on its organizational website entitled Life Reimagined (AARP Lifereimagined, 2012-2013) devoted to helping visitors conduct a self-assessment as a way to determine new directions and interests they might like to explore in their personal and/or work lives.

Socially, boomers prefer being with like-minded people. They want to connect with others who share their lifestyle interests and they want those connections to fit their private interests. According to Stroud and Walker (2012), they retain their youthful focus on themselves and are interested in the wider community to the extent that the interest serves their personal agendas. Family relationships, and especially grandchildren, are particularly important.

Summary

There is a near perfect fit between many of the developmental aspects of later life and the benefits people and communities experience from participation with the arts. The next section describes what research tells us about the benefits of the arts.

BENEFITS of the ARTS

Given the new views on aging that recognize that adults successfully engage in active rewarding lives throughout the years, it is reasonable to assume that the benefits of art participation experienced in early adulthood will continue into older age. This section of the literature review summarizes current thinking about the instrumental and intrinsic benefits of the arts.

It should be remembered, however, that not all people attend an arts event or a museums for their own benefit. Those who don't experience art frequently often participate for extrinsic reasons such as accompanying someone else to an art event. Grandparents who attend arts events "for the kids" fall into this category, as compared with others who attend for the benefits they directly derive from an experience they personally find exhilarating and challenging.

In the classic book, *Gifts of the Muses: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, McCarthy and his coauthors (2004), from the RAND Corporation, reported on an extensive review of literature that included published evidence for instrumental effects of arts, theories that might explain how such effects are generated and literature on intrinsic effects of arts, including aesthetics, philosophy and art criticism. They identified factors that give individuals access to arts and the benefits they provide.

The authors noted that research about benefits of the arts suffers from some methodological weakness, and while more recent work, especially on the intrinsic benefits of the arts, is quite rigorous, there is still much to be accomplished in this new field of research. Most of the available studies are correlational and don't demonstrate causal relationships; terms are sometimes ill-defined, and exactly how benefits are produced and related to the arts experience are not fully articulated. Nevertheless, there is increasingly sophisticated discussion about the benefits of the arts, and the patterns and classification system McCarthy and his colleagues derived from available literature are noteworthy.

Instrumental Benefits of the Arts

Something is said to have instrumental value if it is good because it provides the means for acquiring something else of value. Early studies about the instrumental benefits of the arts, for instance, focused on economic impact of arts participation on a city or region. One of the advances contributed by McCarthy and his colleagues was a broader understanding of instrumental benefits for individuals and for society. These benefits include development of learning skills, increased academic performance, changes in attitudes and behaviors that produce positive results, and the physical and mental therapeutic benefits of the arts.

Cognitive Benefits. Engagement with the arts increases understanding of the world. This outcome is most often considered in research when

studying school children encountering the arts. However, with older participants, arts engagements have been shown to delay the onset and progress of dementia and to reduce stress and improve performance of caregivers. Strauch (2010b) reports many older adults thrive when learning new material and seek out cognitively rigorous learning experiences.

Attitudinal and Behavioral Benefits. Arts participation increases self-understanding and openness to others, alternative points of view. It is associated with higher levels of empathy and tolerance.

Health Benefits. Studies report improved quality of life and improved physical health (Camic, et. al., 2013) when people are involved with the arts. Most of the quality-of-life benefits research has been conducted among the elderly, many of whom exhibit signs of dementia from Alzheimer's (Hanna & Perlstein, 2010; Kent & Li, 2013), but the findings are assumed to be true for anyone. The health benefits studies tend to focus on the ways arts therapies improve performance on health indicators and reduce stress among patients and caregivers.

Social/Community Level Benefits. The arts can create a sense of community identity and participants in longer-term arts programs tend to bond positively with one another and create significant new friendships – a valued benefit among older adults who find their long-established work and friendship networks changing and diminishing. Arts activities also often empower communities to organize for collective dialogue and action. People who do not live in the same sections of a community might gather and make art together and share their stories. Art exhibitions and theater productions can bring people together around important community issues like race, human understanding, and the best ways to support the full development of young children.

Intrinsic Benefits of the Arts

Something is said to have intrinsic value if it is good "in and of itself." It is not, in comparison with instrumental value, seen as a means for acquiring something else. Happiness might be an example of an intrinsic value, because being happy is good just because it's good to be happy, not because being happy leads to anything else.

In *Gifts of the Muses*, McCarthy and his coauthors identified these intrinsic benefits: captivation, thinking, emotional resonance, spiritual engagement, aesthetics and social bonding. Brown & Novak (2007), working in the arena of the performing arts, built on earlier work and emphasized that intrinsic impacts go beyond the level of pure entertainment to a level of mental, emotional and social engagement. The intrinsic benefits represent, in sum, how an individual is transformed by the art experience. An instrument to measure intrinsic benefits is based on these benefits:

Captivation. The arts often provide a deeply satisfying, pleasurable and imaginative experience. New ways of seeing the world are opened through art experiences, and the capacity to “perceive, feel and interpret the world of every day experience” is enhanced.

Intellectual stimulation. This comes about through the experience of a person being challenged to think, to ask questions and find meaning. Intellectual stimulation can be a private, personal experience of the art, and it can also be achieved through interactions with others.

Emotional Resonance. Being moved emotionally, regardless of the specific emotions experienced, is a valued outcome of participating in the arts. Art experiences vary in their level of emotional intensity.

Spiritual Value. This benefit is derived from the aspect of the experience that goes beyond engagement and leaves an individual with a sense of personal renewal. The renewal is often expressed as being inspired or empowered by a work of art.

Aesthetic Growth. People value being exposed to a new artists and new artistic styles and media. They feel aesthetically stretched by the experience.

Social Bonding. A sense of connection and belonging occurs when people feel a connection with others who are sharing the experience, when the experience allows them to celebrate their own cultural heritage or learn about cultures outside of their own life experience, thus being left with new insights on what it means to be human.

Expanded empathy and cognitive growth tend to be the long term impacts of recurring arts experiences, and they have a sustained effect on the individual's sensibility, understanding and overall approach to the world. McCarthy et.al. (2004, p. 34) make the case that the most important benefits to be derived from the arts *are only gained through a process of sustained involvement*. The greater the involvement, the greater the chance of realizing benefits. Their logic is that the benefits do not accrue linearly. They accrue slowly at first and then “build sharply once [a person] gains familiarity with the artistic discipline and greater capacity for mental, emotional and social engagement through the experience” (McCarthy et.al, 2004, p.53).

Access to the Benefits of the Arts

As McCarthy et.al. see it, there is a three step process to participation and involvement in the arts: 1) a gateway experience that requires initial access; 2) the quality of the experience must be high in order to engage the participant; and 3) the individual comes to perceive the intrinsic worth of the experience because it is stimulating, uplifting and challenging. They argue that it is the work of arts organizations to communicate about the benefits of the art and to introduce

greater numbers of people to engaging arts experiences. Initially, they observe, newcomers need to be taught how to experience, appreciate and understand art. People need – and deserve – assistance in developing their capacity to gain benefits from arts experiences.

Research about the Benefits of the Arts for Older Adults

Fortunately a number of carefully executed research studies have examined the benefits of creative art activities for older adults. The most compelling in terms of scope and quality of methodology was conducted by Cohen, et.al. (2006), who used genuine control groups to create a multi-site study to determine the effects of participation in arts activities led by trained professional artists on overall health, mental health and social functioning.

Arts Participation and Improved Physical and Mental Health In this study, 166 ambulatory older adults 64+ with a mean age of 79 and healthy enough to participate in community-based activities were assigned to either the intervention, a chorale group, or to the control, ordinary activities. All were tested beforehand to establish a baseline, and they were tested again after 12 months. The singing group was a professionally conducted chorale with 30 weekly rehearsals as well as several public performances during the intervention period. In order to recruit participants, notices were sent out requesting volunteers for the comparison or intervention group. Notices stated the project goals. The only difference was that the chorale notice sought singers for a chorale with no experience necessary. Data was collected using questionnaires and self-report measures (e.g. record of doctor visits, use of medications).

The following findings, based on responses from the 166 participants, are from the Washington, D.C. site as presented in the research executive summary (Cohen, 2006). Preliminary analyses of data from the other two sites, Brooklyn and San Francisco, indicate similarly striking results.

Older adults who participated in an arts activity experienced the following positive results.

- **Improved overall health.** After a year, those participating in the cultural program reported an increase in overall health, while those in the control group reported a decline. After two years, those in the cultural program essentially reported stabilization in overall health, while those in the control group report a decline.
- **Fewer Doctor Visits.** Those in the control group reported a greater increase in the number of doctor visits than those in the cultural program.
- **Less Prescription Medication Usage.** Those in the control group reported a greater increase in the number of prescription medications utilized than those in the cultural program.

- **Less Over-The-Counter Medication Usage.** Those in the control group reported a greater increase in the number of over-the-counter medications utilized than those in the cultural program.
- **Fewer Falls.** Those participating in the cultural program reported a decrease in falls, while those in the control group reported an increase.
- **Better Morale.** Participation in the cultural programs had a more positive impact on morale than being a part of the control group
- **Less Depression.** Over a two-year period, those in the cultural programs improved on the depression assessment, while those in the control group did less well.
- **Less Loneliness.** Data on participants in both the cultural program and the control group revealed a trend toward improvement.
- **Participation in More activities.** Over a two-year period those participating in the cultural program reported an increase in the total number of activities they were involved with, while those in the control group reported a reduction.

The overall conclusion is that participatory arts programs provide “important health promotion and prevention effects and reduce risk factors driving the need for long-term care” (Cohen, et.al. 2006, p. 726).

Engagement in Discussion about Art and Increased Social Interactions.

Another carefully conducted study found that discussions of art have positive effects on older adults (Wikstrom, 2002). For this study, 20 closely matched pairs of older women were randomly assigned to either an art discussion group or the control group. The mean age of participants was 82.6 years old, with a range of from 70 to 97 years.

The participants were visited in their homes by a researcher for one hour per week for four months. In the art discussions, participants were encouraged to describe the painting, (color, form, movement, people, action, objects), use their imagination in relation to the painting (pretend you're artist and talk about how, why and when you made the painting, and talk about associations that come to mind when looking at the painting (feelings, thoughts, memories). The control discussions were about current topics from the news, radio and television programs, and hobbies and topics of interest to older women.

Self-reports about the nature and types of social interaction they had, as well as the level of satisfaction they had from their social interactions were collected before the program began, immediately after the session ended, and again four months later. The results indicated that the art discussions increased social interaction in the lives of participants compared to the control group. The intervention encouraged reminiscing and stimulated participants to be generally more socially active. There was also a decrease in time spent watching

television in the art discussion group. These effects remained four months after the intervention. Wikstrom admits to not knowing exactly why art discussions seem to create more motivation for social interaction when compared to discussions of hobbies, interests and topics of the day. However, it might be conjectured that the use of imagination stimulated by the art discussions and the originality of thought and experience might be more pleasing and therefore creates an urge for interaction in general.

The arts – especially contemporary art - provide unique benefits. A number of non-experimental descriptive studies provide evidence of the benefits of arts participation for older adults. Just as the art discussion study described above found that it's not the discussion format, but discussion of *art* that makes the difference, other studies offer further evidence for the distinctive benefits of arts engagement.

Positive effects of experiencing contemporary art were revealed by Goulding's (2012) study of 43 people aged 60-92 who visited art galleries. Seventeen males and 23 females, some active and some very limited, participated. Some of the participants were already engaged in art through a film club or a writers group. Others, recruited from a voluntary group at a senior residence, were not. They visited three exhibits of contemporary art in NE England over twenty-one months. The gallery visits included a talk by a curator or museum educator, refreshments and facilitated discussion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get a baseline prior to the start of the program, and then before and after each of the museum visits in order to get reactions to the experience of visiting the exhibitions. Based on the interviews the following benefits were identified:

- **Stimulation** from the experience and having new ideas brought into their lives. Participants said they want to be engaged, contributors to society, and interacting with the art made them feel as if they are still part of society. Sharing views, and debating points when they disagreed with others, was part of what made the experience stimulating.
- **Gaining knowledge** they could share with grandchildren made them feel more like they were making a contribution to their children and their families.
- **Personal pleasure.** All of the elements of the program—the art, the guided tours, the discussions--were seen as contributing to an enjoyable experience. The museum visits provided a much appreciated break from routine as well as an opportunity to get out of the house. This was especially important for the 92-year-old and other less active participants.

- **Positive reminiscences** were sparked as people relating the art and issues to their own life experiences.

Goulding (2012) notes that contemporary art museums are particularly apt for stimulating new ideas and knowledge. Many older people prefer informal forms of learning, and galleries are supportive learning environments. Art that is less representational tends to provoke different responses from different people, giving participants something to think about, discuss and debate. Being contemporary, the art brings up issues of life and society such as social class, gender, and war, thus making a connection to participants' lives and their sense of being vital members of their communities.

In another study of active older adults engaging with contemporary art, the researchers suggested that participants used the art exhibitions in relation to their personal identities (Newman, et.al. 2012). In this study, active older adults aged 53-72, visited the British Art Show 6 which consisted of art made within the last five years. One group of four visited the exhibit and heard talks by an artist. A second group of 15 visited the exhibit and participated in a workshop in which they created art. Focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured format. Participants were encouraged to "discuss their ideas, understandings and uses of art and to talk about their intellectual, affective and artistic responses to the British Art Show 6" (Newman, et.al. 2012, p.33).

Results indicated that some responded to the art in ways that led to maintenance of identity while others were stimulated to identity revisions as their views of the art were altered. While the authors acknowledge that the results are not generalizable, this brief summary of the study appears here because an interesting point emerged from their data that is worth keeping in mind when programming for older adults. Outcomes and motivations for engagement with the art were personal, and not necessarily related to the educational goals of the museum, suggesting that they cannot be determined by institutional goals and/or preferences.

Matarrasso (2012) conducted a large qualitative study focused on art and agency in old age. He interviewed a variety of old people with a wide range of expertise in the arts, from lifelong professionals to those coming to art late in life. Those he interviewed were a varied lot--dancers, painters, actors, musicians and writers.

Matarrasso argues that our personhood is exemplified by our agency in the world and that ". . . Art is a remarkable source of agency. Through its practice, human beings bring meanings into the world, impose interpretations on it and find common spirits" (Matarrasso, 2012, p. 4-5). Through art we act and induce others to act as we share our imaginations. Art as a capacity for agency can continue throughout life and flourish in old age. In fact, art as a form of agency is increasingly important as capacities for actions are weakened or lost with age. Matarrasso's interviewees asked participants "the basic question:

whether having an identity and a practice as an artist helps people retain a sense of agency in old age” (Matarrasso, 2012, p. 5)

All of the people interviewed consider themselves active artists, even though some came to art later in life after retirement. As one interviewee put it: “professional is about attitude.” In the later years, the professional/non-professional distinction is less important; they are all equally committed to producing art. The biggest distinction is that professionals have more experience in arts practice from doing it longer. Lifelong professionals are similar to artists who come to art later in life in that both groups are seriously devoted to creating original work about their own ideas and experiences. In this, both groups exemplify in their lives the newer view of aging as a natural process that includes continued personal development.

In reporting his findings, Matarrasso acknowledges that each individual's life story and relationship to art is unique. However, taken as a whole, his data leads to two important generalizations about arts participation by older adults. First, the mere fact of older people seriously practicing art reinforces the newer view of aging that says it can be a time of continued personal exploration creativity and development of new talents. As Matarosso puts it: “the act of creating art can be in itself a form of resistance to the idea that with age comes passivity and resignation” (Matarrasso, 2012, p.38). Secondly, the practice of art increases feelings of agency because it is an act of bringing something into existence that had not existed before. Even if others do not hear or agree with an artistic statement, the artist has taken action to put his vision into tangible form, and it is agency of this type through which we are fulfilled as human beings.

One other project merits brief mention. The Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin was interested in involving older people in as many ways as possible including influencing museum policy. Elements of the program included making art, meeting artists who discuss the conceptual basis of their art and visiting the exhibitions at the museum. Eleven females and two males participated. Ages ranged from 62 to 83. Most had not completed secondary education. All but three had been members of the group since it began in 1991 (Fleming & Gallagher, 1999).

Data from individual interviews and a focus group indicated that participants felt that the program enhanced their overall well-being. They became more confident and less shy, felt less isolated, felt they were generally in a better mood and that they'll live longer being active. They felt the museum particularly valued them as visitors and that, despite their lack of formal education and working class backgrounds, they were treated as equals by staff and teachers. Much of their lives had been limited by financial circumstances, family responsibilities and work. Now, in retirement they were taking time for themselves, developing new talents and becoming more confident to face challenges.

The program also contributed to a sense of connectedness. Interacting with the artists and teachers and discussing the art made them feel more connected to the modern world. Their views broadened as a result of the experience and even their attitudes toward nudity and sexuality became more open which, given their personal histories, is a fairly huge impact.

The program was particularly powerful given the participants' personal history. The museum building had previously been a British hospital so that when they were growing up, being Irish, they were prohibited from entering the grounds. This unique history contributed to the impact of the program for the participants (and seriously limits generalizing from the findings).

However, one aspect of the program through which the participants gave back to the museum could readily be adopted by other institutions. The participants served as outreach workers for the museum, helping to promote it and sometimes served as greeters and volunteer docents. They were involved in advertising museum events, appeared on television, advised tourists to visit the museum and took their own art on tour to groups of older adults around the country. They have worked with numerous art groups of older people, introducing the experience of making modern art, and in that capacity are significant contributors to the museum's policy of bringing its education programs to community groups.

Future Directions for Research. Existing high quality quantitative research clearly supports the idea that art provides older adults with social, physical and mental health benefits. Yet, many studies do not use experimental or quasi-experimental designs that could provide stronger evidence for the benefits of the arts. There is continued need for such research in order to establish and specify the benefits of arts participation. There is also a need for qualitative research to help understand the experience of art participation from the participant's point of view. In 2007, the research journal, *The Gerontologist*, provided a set of guidelines for potential contributors about how to deal with common problems for those who wished to contribute high quality, qualitative research studies that might be appropriate for the journal (Schoenberg & McCauley, 2007). A few years later in an editorial statement, Kivnick and Pruchno (2011) announced that the journal has an explicit interest in promoting scholarship on aging, humanities and the arts as important to the overall study of aging. They noted that “frameworks and methods of the arts and humanities focus on interpretation and expression of the multiple, the elusive, the awe inspiring, the disturbing, and even the ineffable aspects of growing older” (Kivnick & Pruchno, 2011, p. 143).

Summary

Both instrumental and intrinsic benefits of art participation are particularly well-matched to the developmental needs of older adults. Intrinsic benefits of spiritual and aesthetic growth and emotional resonance match the growing reflective interests that rise during later adulthood. Intellectual stimulation and the imaginative experiences provided by art are especially appreciated as are

opportunities for making social connections. It is noteworthy that the important intrinsic benefits are gained through sustained involvement with the arts suggesting that development of longer term programs are especially important when working with the older adult population as are gateway programs that help people to experience, appreciate and understand art. Quantitative and qualitative research support these benefits; more research of both types is needed.

OLDER AGE and CREATIVITY

There is a critically important distinction that needs to be understood between brain development and cognitive development in older age. There is a large body of accepted research that demonstrates that people's cognitive functioning decreased over time, beginning in middle age. Yet, Timothy Salthouse, Lab Director at The Cognitive Aging Laboratory at the University of Virginia, cautions readers of that research to take a close look at the approaches and methods used by researchers. He notes (Salthouse, 2004), for instance, that most of the cognition and aging research has been conducted in laboratories – stripped of context and with controlled conditions that do not require research participants to call on accumulated experience or knowledge.

Furthermore, mental activities requiring speed and recall are featured in the laboratory studies, and there is a significant decrease in capacity for these types of activities with age. Activities that test identification of synonyms (vocabulary) and solving crossword puzzles (which benefits from accumulated knowledge and experience), show no such dramatic decline with age.

New Brain Research and Capacity in Older Years

As reported in the human development section of this literature review, brain research, not just cognitive functioning research, is beginning to inform our knowledge about cognitive, affective and emotional capabilities among older adults. That research paints a different picture from the one of dramatic, continual decline. Enayati (2012) reviews current research and subtitles her summary report, "Why getting older just might be awesome."

Older people have a greater capacity for empathy because empathy is learned through experience. An aging brain can better tease out patterns and see the big picture, and older adults are found to be better able to anticipate problems and reason things out. Enayati points out that what is even more interesting is that many of the advanced abilities in old age correlate with key conceptual elements of innovation and creativity. In an interview with Enayati, Gary Small, Director of the UCLA Center on Aging, agreed that the older brain is primed for creativity: "The older brain is quite resilient and can be stimulated to innovate, create and contribute in extraordinary ways." He goes on to say that it is important for individuals and organizations to provide incentives to encourage older people to continue to be creative because what they have to offer is so tremendous.

Creativity in Later Life

Creativity in later life appears to happen in three ways:

- **Continuing creativity.** Practicing artists simply keep producing ;
- **New creative work** that begins or becomes apparent later in life, sometimes when a person returns to an interest from her younger days; and

- **Creativity spurred by grief or loss** (Cohen, 2000).

Working with older adults, Cohen (2000) noted some of the important benefits of creativity for the older person and those around him. Creativity strengthens morale. When people are emotionally engaged, their mood is lifted. Creativity also enriches relationships. As an older person is engaged, others gain a fuller perspective on him, and relationships with family and caregivers generally become more comfortable.

When experiencing the creativity of a person, it is easier to recognize that everything around aging is not negative. Finally, creative activity by an older person serves as a role model that can help younger people gain a more accurate and complete view of aging.

Summary

The older brain is primed for creativity. Developments in the brain as well as accumulated knowledge and life experiences are associated with high levels of empathy and a capacity to think with both sides of the brain simultaneously. In addition, some older adults introduce more creativity into their lives as they move into retirement and find more time available to them.

MUSEUM PROGRAMS for ACTIVE OLDER ADULTS

More and more, museums are joining other community organizations and offering programs for active older adults (International Council on Active Aging, 2010). In this section we provide some examples of some of the varied formats and content of existing programs. First, however, we will consider two frameworks that might be useful when conceptualizing offerings for active older adults. The first comes from Cohen (2005) who describes what he considers the elements of a good “social portfolio” in a person’s later years. We then turn to a framework developed by Spiers (2012), a senior vice-president of Road Scholar (previously known as Elderhostel).

Optimal Components of a Social Portfolio for Older Adults

Cohen's (2005) concept is quite simple. He believes that active older adults should look to the future for their social lives in much the same way one might plan ahead financially. Knowing that powers eventually diminish with age, he suggests active older adults develop a life that includes a variety of types of activities, some of which might be continued even with greatly diminished strength and health. His simple framework suggests a balance of individual and group activities that call for either high or low mobility. These categories yield a 2x2 matrix of activities.

Table 2: Example of Cohen’s Social Portfolio of Activities for Older Adult

	Individual Activities	Group Activities
High Mobility High Energy Activities	Do nature photography; Attend festival or special event with multiple activities	Travel with a lifelong learning group, like Road Scholars; Be a docent
Low Mobility Low Energy Activities	Create a memoir; Listen to lecture online	Take a drawing class with a group of students

Cohen’s recommendation is for older adults to “manage their social portfolio” so that they have a balance of all four types of activities for as long as possible. This will, he argues, maximize the chances that some meaningful and enjoyable activities will continued to be a part of life even as mobility and energy wans and the number of friends and acquaintances diminish. For a museum, Cohen’s social portfolio model suggests that a variety of program formats for older adults will best suit the variety of types of experiences people seek in their later years.

Types of Experiences Desired by Older Adults

The second framework is based on Spiers (2012) research with 2,000 baby boom-aged active adults. Spiers listed the major types of activities engaged in by active older adults and then had his respondents rate the activities

on a scale from 0 to 3 on four dimensions. The dimensions were: socializing; moving; creating and thinking. Based on his years of work with Road Scholar (formerly called, Elderhostel), he observed that those older adults who seemed to be the most healthy and happy, participated in a balance of types of activities that utilized their various capabilities and expressed their interests.

He argues that it takes a holistic approach involving all four dimensions for maximum personal satisfaction and cognitive health. For examples, see the following table for ratings of some common activities he asked older adults to rate during interviews. Note that in his interviews many respondents spontaneously commented on how much they enjoyed working as volunteer docents because they liked the social nature of the work and also greatly appreciated all that they learned in their training.

Table 3: Older Adult Ratings of Four Types of Activities

	Socializing	Moving	Creating	Thinking	Total
Join a play-reading group	3	1	3	2	9
Volunteering as a docent	3	2	1	2	8
Writing poems, family history, etc.	1	0	3	3	7
Bicycle with friends for exercise	2	3	0	1	6

NOTE: Each feature of an activity (socializing, moving, creating and thinking) was rated on a scale from 0 – 3, with 3 as the highest rating and 0 the lowest. Thus, the highest possible score for an activity is 12.

Spiers emphasizes that it is desirable for a person to get a balance in types of activities and to engage in them every week so that totals in the four categories are generally similar week to week. For museum practice, this framework suggests that one consideration in developing a repertoire of programs for active older adults is to identify what the programs demand of participants in light of the four categories articulated by Spiers, just as Cohen's framework provides another way to look over a set of offerings to see how it divides up in terms of the energy, mobility and presence of others.

Programs for Older Adults in Art Museums

Patterns in the types of programs offered for older adults by art museums in the United States emerged from an online search for programs for seniors, elders and older adults. The most common offering for older adults across all museums is a discounted admission or membership fee. Otherwise, there is no specific attention or specialized programming, other than regular adult programs. When programming for older adults is specified, it falls into three categories: regularly scheduled senior programs; programs for adults with special needs and conditions (many of whom are elderly); and outreach programs for seniors.

Regularly Scheduled Senior Program. Most common is a Senior Gallery Tour, Gallery Talk or Lecture program presented during weekday, day time hours. Programs for adults, including older adults, tend to use a lecture format and on occasion they provide unique access to objects and staff (Sachatello-

Sawyer & Fellenny, 2001). These programs generally have a regular schedule – once a week, once a month or once a season, for instance. Some examples are:

Seattle Art Museum offers First Friday lectures for seniors.

The **Rubin Museum of Art**, NYC every Wednesday presents *Lunch Matters*, a lunchtime screening of a short documentary film focused on themes and ideas present in Himalayan art, followed by a moderated discussion.

The **Queens Museum of Art** offered a Film Series on Thursdays during the Spring at 2:00pm. *The Cinema of Immigration* was a 10-week series that explored the immigrant experience in the U.S. through films that reflect its ethnic and cultural diversity.

The **Wichita Art Museum** participates in *Senior Wednesday*, a collaboration of ten cultural institutions throughout Wichita designed to promote cultural awareness and continuing educational needs of active adults over age 55. The Museum offers a program to seniors on the first Wednesday of every month. The program at the Museum consists of refreshments followed by a docent lecture or gallery talk about art and/or artists in the Museum's collection and a supplementary video.

Programs for older adults with special conditions and needs, particularly those with memory or nervous system disabilities, are offered by some, though not a majority, of museums surveyed. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City pioneered work in this area with its *Meet Me at MoMA* program for adults with dementia. Programs modeled after MOMA's are offered by The Rubin Museum in New York City, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the American Folk Art Museum and the Jewish Museum, all in New York. The Frye Art Museum in Seattle, the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis also offer programs for the elderly with dementia.

Off Site Programs/Outreach Programs. A handful of museums specify that they have programs for groups of seniors that are presented away from the museum. These programs often take the format of a lecture, with images, about the permanent collection or a special exhibition. In one case, seniors are invited to participate in a conversation about art via free conference calls.

The Frick in Pittsburgh schedules *Senior Outreach Programs by request*. This is a series of themed programs presented at retirement centers, senior care facilities and for community groups.

The **Philadelphia Museum of Art** offers *Art Talk: Art by Phone*, lively conversations via a free conference call with 10 – 15 participants and a facilitator from museum. The calls last 45 minutes to an hour and include

two to three sessions per series. Participants receive a booklet to view as they listen. If a participant prefers to only listen and not participate in the conversation that is acceptable.

Road Scholar Programs at Art Museums

Road Scholar (2013), is the name of programs developed and offered by Elderhostel, a not-for-profit leader in educational travel since 1975. It offers 5,500 educational tours in all 50 states and 150 countries. The programs are often marketed as “learning vacations.” The format is a planned itinerary for a group of participants who travel to a specified location (at their own expense) and experience in-depth and behind-the-scenes learning opportunities guided by local and renowned experts. Group lodging and most evening meals are included in the package.

Though museums do not organize and administer *Road Scholar* programs, they are often part of the itinerary. In a few cases, an entire *Road Scholar* program takes place over several days in a single museum. These experiences include:

- Hands-on glassmaking at the Studio of the Corning Museum of Glass.
- Treasures of the Art Institute of Chicago

More typical is the inclusion of time at a museum as part of a themed or site-specific program. Examples of these types of programs for older adults are:

- *A World of Art*, takes place in Philadelphia and is several days of explorations at the Barnes Foundation, the Philadelphia Museum, the Rodin Museum and others.
- A program exploring Richmond, VA includes time at the art museum as a part of Road Scholar program, as does a program that explores the cultural gems of San Diego, CA.

The Denver-themed *Road Scholar* program does not focus on art; it brings groups into the natural world adjacent to Denver. The program description is as follows:

Denver: Gateway to the Mountain West: Denver, Estes, and Rocky Mountain National Park. At Denver’s U.S. Mint, experience the 1904 building’s grandeur — murals, chandeliers, marble— and see presses that produce 40 million coins each day. Ride over America’s highest continuous highway, Trail Ridge Road, and watch for rutting elk, mountain goats, mule deer and bighorn sheep. Discover the historic town of Estes Park, with visits to MacGregor Ranch and the Stanley Hotel — setting for the novel “The Shining.”

Innovations in Art Museum Programming for Older Adults

As the above examples of museum programs for older adults demonstrate, the majority of current programming is more aligned with older perspectives on aging and the desires, needs and capabilities of people in their later years than they are consistent with newer perspectives of active, capable and vibrant older adults. However, examples of programming grounded in this newer perspective are beginning to emerge:

Seniors Exploring Photography, Identity and Appreciation at the **Museum of Photographic Arts** (2013), San Diego, CA., is a series of programs with three formats: creative photography courses; art talks; and interactive museum tours.

The **Crocker Art Museum** (2009) in Sacramento, CA held a *Senior Art Social*, a lively, theme-based multi-activity arts social event for active older adults. It was a celebration of the life, work and times of Maxfield Parrish. Programming included storytelling; live music by a Swing band; tours of the exhibition, *Maxfield Parrish and the Art of the Print*; gallery games; and an opportunity to try creating art in the style of Parrish. Many older adults grew up with Parrish prints, calendars and magazine illustrations in their homes. This program gave them an opportunity to rediscover some of the artist's most renowned works, with possibilities for personal stories and reminiscences.

The **Michener Art Museum** in Bucks County, PA works with senior artists. The museum partners with the Senior Artists Initiative (SAI), a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization that assists artists in understanding the need for and processes involved in organizing their life's work. The SAI educates artists about the process of documenting and inventorying their work, legal issues pertaining to their art, estates, and artists rights. An annual Inventory and Oral History Project produces video interviews of established artists for online. Another program features programs led by older artists (Elders Share the Arts, 2013).

Best Practices in Arts Programming for Older Adults

Through a project funded by the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), Thomas and Lyles (2007) began compiling *Creativity and Aging: Best Practices*, a description of high quality arts programs for older adults. The variety of program topics and formats in their listing serve as inspiration for art museums wishing to break from the older models of programming and embrace newer approaches to serving active older adults. The types of programs listed include:

- Outreach to Day Care and other facilities;

- Opportunities to learn about and make art;
- Art as a vehicle to foster self-expression (i.e., memories become art as people make a record of their legacy);
- Art school, training and progressive development through classes, lectures and performances;
- Opportunities to teach and mentor young people;
- Programs for aging artists;
- Training in the arts for care givers; and
- Intergenerational programs with the intention of bridging the gap and promoting positive attitudes toward aging (Eady, 2011).

DOROT is an organization dedicated to enriching the lives of the elderly and bringing the generations together. One of DOROT's fastest-growing programs is *University Without Walls*, New York's largest continuing education and support network for the homebound. Its classes and support groups provide an extensive social, educational, health, and spiritual forum for the homebound. Professionally led sessions connect students to the intellectual and cultural life beyond their homes, stimulate their minds, lift their spirits, help to forge new friendships among classmates, and build a sense of community within the group.

Using its own teleconference system, DOROT conducts more than 200 courses and support groups a year, meeting weekly for one hour, for four to 12 weeks. The Arts Programs for elderly at DOROT bring music, poetry, theater, painting, and other arts into elders' lives through alliances with New York City's leading educational and cultural organizations. Arts subjects are included in teleconference classes that may culminate in a volunteer-escorted visit to a museum, where students enjoy a private tour and a lecture on a current exhibit.

Summary

Current patterns in programming for older adults at art museums tend to be based on an older paradigm of aging that gave primacy to the limitations and ailments experienced as people age. New perspectives on aging inform frameworks for conceptualizing the scope and types of programming that is beneficial for a vibrant, aging population of adults. Some innovation is emerging in art museum programming, yet the NEA list of best practices in arts programming for older adults only includes two examples from museums.

MARKETING and ACTIVE OLDER ADULTS

Marketing to attract a specific audience requires knowledge of that audience's needs, desires and motivations. In the case of older adults it is also important to be aware of physiological, intellectual and social changes – both negative and positive - that are a part of natural aging. Marketing, just like programming, needs to be informed by “the new paradigm that articulates the idea of seeing older people for their potential rather than their problems” (Herman, 2011, p. 3).

Age-friendly Accommodations

Morrell and Echt (2001) were among the earliest museum professionals to call attention to the accommodations museums need to make to assure that older visitors are comfortable. Comfort and attention to physical aspects of the museum experience influence older adults motivation to participate in programs (Thongnopnua, 2013). As noted earlier, Stroud and Walker (2012) provide an excellent overview of the older population and contribute the concept of “age-friendly” as a way to think about an institution's approach to this group. They define age friendliness as “an environment in which the unique physical needs of older people are satisfied in a way that is natural and beneficial for all ages” (p.3). An organization that is age-friendly will take into account the changes that are happening for older people. For example, all senses weaken over time, though the rate of decline differs by individual. In terms of vision, the age-friendly organization will be sensitive to color contrasts in signage and to illumination levels. It will make adequate seating available. For museums, this might mean raising the height of benches in galleries a few inches, or making more seating available with arms that would make it easier for older patrons to get up and down. Small changes of this nature can make a big difference for some visitors without detracting from the gallery experience for others. Reich and Borun (2001) conducted formative evaluation for the exhibition, *Secrets of Aging*, and found that testing lighting, text and other aspects of a comfortable experience with older adults ahead of opening, increased ratings of satisfaction among older adult visitors. Such satisfaction is a key to a museum's success and reputation, especially given the large role that word-of-mouth plays in driving museum attendance.

An age-friendly organization is sensitive to *the entire customer experience* as that customer interacts with the organization. Stroud and Walker (2012) identify five “touch points” where the customer has contact with the organization and where the organization can do things to be more age-friendly. While their emphasis is on retail sales operations, their framework is relevant to thinking about museums and the museum experience for older visitors.

- **Age-Friendly Communication.** Ads that are easy to read, see, and hear. Strive to have recipients feel included by the message, perceive benefits

of the offer and understand the offer as relevant to them. Make it is easy to understand how to respond to the message.

- **Age-Friendly Online Presence** Have a website that is easy to search with easily readable text, easy-to-hear associated sounds, easy to navigate, with most common types of material quickly accessible. The website or app needs to be tested to assure it is easy to interact with, and if there is a commerce function, it is also clear and easy to use.
- **Age-Friendly On-site Presence.** Access to the establishment calls for minimal physical effort. Conversations should not be affected by background noise. Signage needs to be easy to find and read. It's easy to access assistance and to select and reach desired items.
- **Age-Friendly Support Experience.** If they need support or explanations, visitors should be able to find a person and feel as if have time to explain their problem or question without feeling rushed or pressured.

Communicating Age Friendliness

The successful museum will not only be age-friendly in its various contacts with its audience, but will also effectively communicate the fact that it is age-friendly to that potential audience. What is known about the active aging adult population provides some guidelines for promotion of programs and activities to them.

Be Language Sensitive. Boomers are sensitive to their aging and will respond poorly to programs aimed at the “old” or “elderly.” Given that they see themselves as active, they are more likely to respond positively to programs that are marketed as being for curious, exploratory, adult learners.

Emphasize the Experience. An approach that marketers advise for all audiences, including active older adults, is that people today seek *experiences*. This means that any marketing of a specific exhibition or program will benefit from noting the benefits to be derived from the *experience* of the exhibition or program. When viewed in this way an exhibition becomes more than a set of galleries where one can look at excellent paintings. Instead an exhibition might be said to offer the visitor a unique opportunity to experience a particular time or place through art, to be transported from the everyday and to encounter a world view that might change the way a person sees. Marketing must keep in mind that boomers make choices with the “what's in it for me” criterion front and center (Smith & Clurman, 2007).

Remember the Importance of Relationships. Longer-term programs and projects are particularly meaningful for active older adults because they provide opportunities to meet and befriend others who share their interests. Being sure that program offerings include programs of various durations is a plus when marketing to the older adult audience.

Intergenerational Programs Have Unique Appeal. Family, and especially grandchildren, are highly important to older adults. In many of the varied programs reviewed here, participants remarked about how it was important to them that they were encountering experiences and information that they could take to their families. By being actively out in the world and learning new things they could bring home, they felt that they were contributing positively to their children's families. As noted earlier, many people participate in arts programs for extrinsic reasons such as accompanying someone else to the event (such as grandparents and grandchildren). Intergenerational programs provide an institution with the potential to move the older person toward developing her own intrinsic motivation for visiting the museum if that intergenerational program includes activities and experiences of value to both the child and the older person.

Directly Target Promotional Efforts at Active Older Adults. In addition to the usual avenues of publicity and promotion, promotional information should also be distributed through organizations that work with older adults. Reciprocal promotion through newsletters and other membership communications can be of benefit to all. There is a need at all times to assure that promotional communication is age-friendly, following the straightforward principles outlined just above.

Use Social Media. Any marketing campaign will want to use all of the relevant media it can afford and, when it comes to cost, the internet trumps other media. With every passing year, an increasing number of older adults are using the internet as a regular part of their daily lives. A nation-wide survey of over 2,000 adults in Spring, 2013, by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2013) indicated a rapid rise in use of social networking sites by older adults when compared with a 2009 survey. Those 65 and over who were online roughly *tripled* their use of social networking sites from 13% in Spring, 2009 to 43% in Spring 2013 (Brenner & Smith, 2013). As boomers continue to move into retirement with more free time on their hands, this trend is expected to continue. A page on Facebook, and active accounts on other social media sites such as Twitter and Pinterest is essential and will reach people that other media might miss. Similarly, organizational websites and blogs are useful for informing people about programs and activities and, coincidentally, showing through snapshots and videos, how enjoyable the activities are for participants.

Summary

When marketing to older adults, the literature suggesting adopting an “age-friendly” approach that involves making interaction with the institution as smooth and effortless as possible, from provision of adequate seating in exhibition spaces to using “age-friendly” font sizes in signage and making the organizational website easily intuitively easy to navigate. Cooperative partnerships with other organizations that work with the older adult population can be helpful as can social media which is being increasingly used by older adults.

CONCLUSION

Active older adults represent a large and growing segment of the population that is ready and eager for experiences, programs and activities that will contribute to their leading happy, healthy, creative lives. Supporting lifelong learning as well as honoring and encouraging creativity and the creative process are the Denver Art Museum's *raison d'être*. Thus, it is uniquely well positioned to provide these experiences.

While overall art museum attendance has seen a slight decline in recent years, those who are recently retired are among the highest users. With the new view of aging that says the post-retirement years are a period of *re-engagement*, rather than disengagement, more active older adults than ever before are pursuing new interests as well as returning to passions from their younger days that were abandoned to the needs of daily life. For many older adults, these interests and passions are related to art.

Age friendliness in all aspects of consumer contact is essential if the museum is to do the most effective job of attracting active older adults. Marketing efforts need to reach older adults who are ready to expand their horizons and try new things. Connecting with other institutions that are serving active older adults should be one part of any overall communication plan.

While many museums offer older adults discounts on admission and membership fees, there is surprisingly little innovative work being undertaken to serve the growing, active older population. The Denver Art Museum is likely to provide leadership in this area regionally and nationally.

AFTERWORD
A Reflection on Museums and Active Older Adults
One Mature Visitor's Perspective

“The millions of “boomers” who have more riches, more leisure, and more education are now contemplating how they will use their energy, time, and capacity for active engagement through the decades of “retirement” that beckon.

More important from the museum's point of view, they have a lifetime of museum-going experience, an investment measured in more than time.

Their investment is one in personal growth: in historical and esthetic understanding, in their appreciation of the human condition, and in a sense of relationship to the community at large that is often manifested in gifts and endowments.

Whether that investment can be harnessed and deployed depends on the value, respect, and consideration the mature museum visitor is accorded.”

Marjorie K. Sheen, 2001, 23
Communication professional for 30 years, avid museum goer for 50 years

RESOURCES

Organizations That Offer Resources and/or Opportunities for Collaboration

The many organizations that focus their energies on active older adults vary greatly in their purposes. The organizations described in this section represent a highly selective group. They appear here for one or more of the following reasons: 1) they offer possibilities for program collaboration; 2) they are particularly useful sources for program ideas and formats; or 3) they are potential partners through which to connect to active older adults in the Denver area in order to promote DAM's programs and activities. Links to the organizations' websites appear in the list of references.

Bernard Osher Institute

The Barnard Osher Foundation sponsors Bernard Osher Institutes on college campuses across the country with at least one in every state and Washington, D.C. The purpose of the Institutes is to offer lifelong learning opportunities (The Bernard Osher Foundation, 2011).

In Colorado, there are Institutes at Denver University and Colorado State University. The Institutes offer the potential for possible collaboration with programming and audience outreach. In Fall, 2012, the Institute at CSU offered a course entitled "Textiles as Ornaments of the World. Two staff members of the Avenir Museum, Linda Carlson and Megan Osborne, led the workshop.

Colorado Seniors4Kids

Colorado Seniors4Kids is an organization of activist older adults (50+) working to encourage social policy that favors children and families. The local group is affiliated with the national organization, Generations United (Generations United, 2012).

While the organization's focus is not the arts, Colorado Seniors4Kids brings together active, concerned older adults and, as such, could provide an avenue for reaching out to that group with information about museum programs.

MagicMe

As the UK's leading provider of intergenerational arts projects, MagicMe is dedicated to bringing generations together to build a stronger, safer community" (MagicMe, 2012b). They team up young people age 8+ with adults aged 60+ for shared creative activity. The idea is to share activities that stimulate conversation and exchange of ideas. Projects are led by practicing creative artists in a variety of disciplines. Project groups, meeting weekly, are housed in a variety of institutions, including museums. MagicMe notes that museums are ideal for their programs because "museums offer age-neutral places for participants to meet, and wonderful resources from which creative projects can grow" (MagicMe, 2012a,11)

MagicMe is a good source of intergenerational arts project ideas. They are constantly innovating. Each year they include trials of new ideas and projects along with tried-and-true offerings. Their “Go and See” project is an intergenerational group that meets weekly to plan and go on outings around London to museums, zoos and other places of interest (MagicMe, 2012c).

MagicMe's mission includes ongoing research on the subject of intergenerational arts programming.

National Center for Creative Aging

The National Center for Creative Aging is dedicated to fostering an understanding of the vital relationship between creative expression and healthy aging and to developing programs that build on that understanding (National Center for Creative Aging, 2012).

The Center provides technical assistance, education, research and advocacy through a variety of programs. Their overall focus is three-fold: health and wellness; lifelong learning; and community engagement (National Center for Creative Aging, 2012). The Center also maintains a Directory of Creative Aging Programs in America that is a good source for finding out what kinds of programs are happening across the country.

Oasis Institute

Oasis is a pioneer in the field of successful aging that emphasize lifelong learning, healthy living and social engagement. Today, this non-profit organization is active in 43 states across the U.S. Adults 50+ are the target audience for Oasis, and there is an Oasis Institute branch in Denver.

Oasis seeks to impact the lives of older adults “through partnerships to share knowledge, offer evidence-and research-based programs, conduct evaluations and adapt to meet the needs of diverse audiences” (Oasis Institute, 2011). Oasis encourages volunteering and currently sponsors the Intergenerational Tutoring Program that places seniors in public schools. Oasis is a potential partner for both programming and outreach to active older adults. Their interest in research might also make them possible collaborators for program evaluation projects, e.g. as a source for “control” participants to compare with participants who take part in an arts program.

Road Scholar

Elderhostel (2013), founded in 1975, is probably the best known and largest provider of programs designed to help older adults remain active after retirement. In 2010, Elderhostel changed its name to Road Scholar to broaden its appeal. The organization's offerings are constantly evolving. In 2012, they began to offer FLEX programs that allow participants more independent time and the opportunity for meals independent from the travel group. Family programs for three generations were also first offered in 2012. Road Scholar offers a wide

range of programs in every state of the U.S. And 150 countries on nearly any imaginable topic, including the arts.

Road Scholar offers the possibility for program partnering as it often collaborates with area organizations to create its offering. In 2013, Road Scholar is offering a five night painting program in ancient southwest archeological canyons near Cortez, Colorado. The program is being coordinated by the McElmo Canyon Research Institute.

Another Road Scholar program that could be replicated in any culture-rich city is “The Best of San Diego Cultural Gems.” This program promises participants the opportunity to discover “native, colonial and national histories and observe the ways in which they have converged to create this multicultural city with a reputation for excellence in the arts.” The program is coordinated by San Diego State University.

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