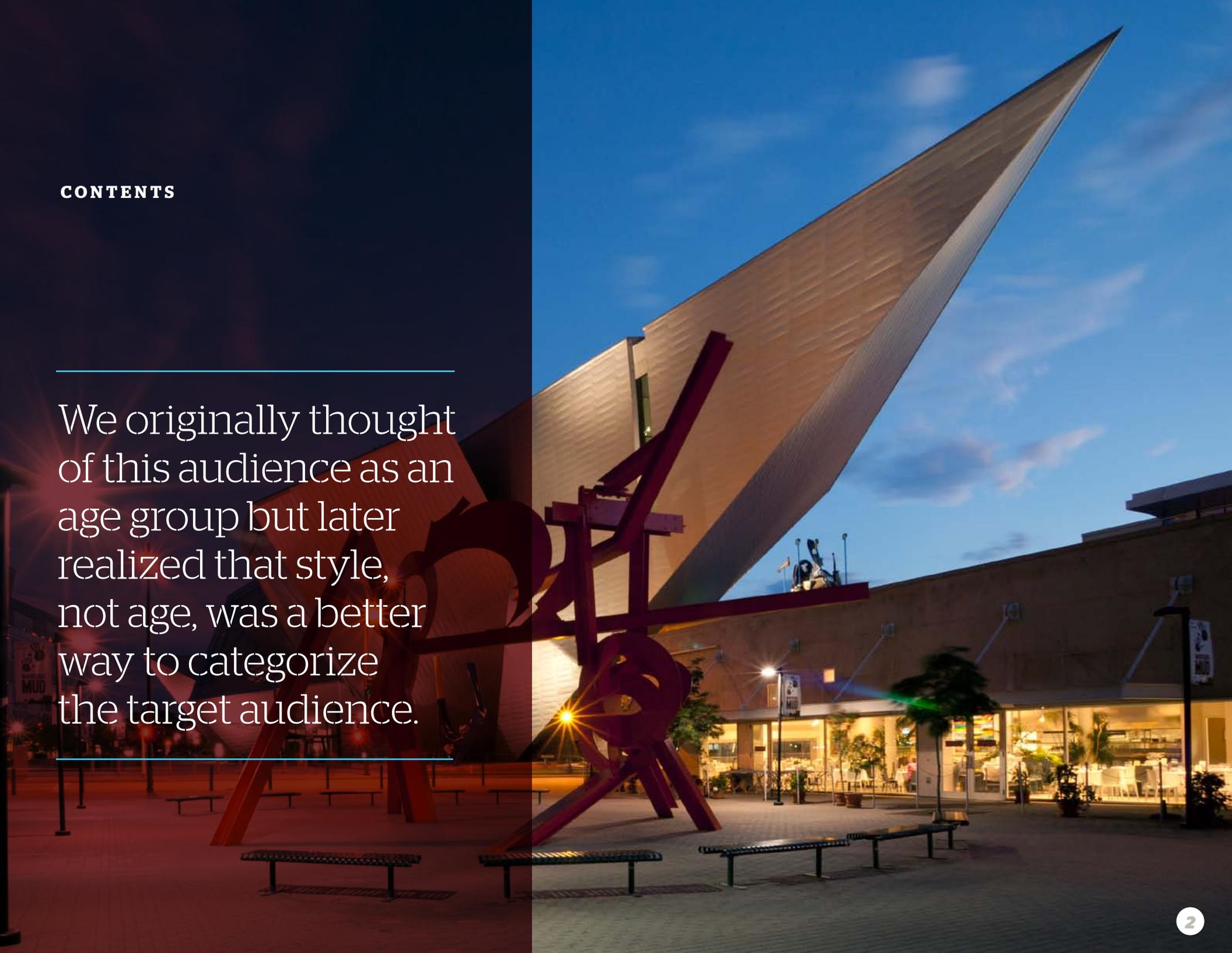




CREATIVITY, COMMUNITY, AND A DASH OF THE UNEXPECTED
adventures in engaging young adult audiences

CONTENTS

We originally thought of this audience as an age group but later realized that style, not age, was a better way to categorize the target audience.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a patterned jacket, holds a dark rectangular sign with white text. The sign contains the words 'moorlit skies', 'hot summer', and 'bullfrogs croak'. The background is a warm, reddish-brown color. The title 'Part 1. Introduction' is overlaid on the sign.

Part 1. **Introduction**

Like many museums across the country, the Denver Art Museum has been working to identify underserved audiences and design programs to attract, engage, and retain those audiences. A recent focus of ours has been young adult audiences—a demographic that the National Endowment for the Arts and our own research shows is underrepresented among museum-goers. A three-year grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services allowed us to conceptualize, try out, put into place, and expand programs that create relationships with people between the ages of nineteen and thirty-five.

This report explains what we did and our thinking behind our choices, in hopes that other museums interested in developing programs for young adults will find some food for thought here.

IT'S A NEW WORLD OUT THERE

NEA news release, June 25, 2010;

<http://arts.gov/news/news10/new-media-report.html>

According to James Chung:

- Young adults are abandoning museum-going behaviors in favor of participating with grassroots arts and culture offerings like small collectives, community-based galleries, DIY arts and crafts, Friday artwalks, and pop-up galleries.
- Museums must adapt by entering into meaningful collaborations and partnerships with these grassroots organizations while finding relevant ways of offering programs and content.



Nina Simon says that young adults

- like to be in the know
- are curious
- are connected and very social
- want choice and the ability to customize their experiences
- value things that are local, authentic, transparent
- value “jointly constructed knowledge” (the wiki model rather than museum as dictator/giver of knowledge)

The rise in social media and changes in how people get information are a huge societal shift that museums need to adapt to, and nowhere are these changes more obvious than among people in their twenties and thirties. But change can be good. We were encouraged by an NEA finding that people who participate in the arts through electronic media are nearly three times as likely to attend live arts events as non-media participants. In addition, they attend twice as many arts events on average and in a greater variety of forms. To sum up: “Media-based arts participation appears to encourage—rather than replace—live arts attendance.”

James Chung, of the marketing firm Reach Advisors, believes that museums are becoming increasingly irrelevant to young adult audiences because many museums do not recognize or understand new audience patterns and behaviors. We were also interested in work that Nina Simon, principal of Museum 2.0, was doing, in particular her concept of the “participatory museum.” We invited her to come to DAM and talk with us about what this meant (some of what came out of the three-day workshop was included in her book *The Participatory Museum*.)

www.participatorymuseum.org



THE MUSEUM AS FRONT PORCH



Lindsey was manager of adult & college programs during the IMLS grant and is now manager of digital engagement programming.

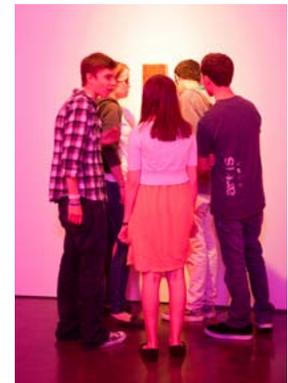
Sonnet is head of adult & college programs.

The Collective is an umbrella website for DAM's YA initiatives.

In the course of working on her master's thesis, DAM educator Lindsey Houseel researched public and private spaces and came up with the idea of the front porch as a meeting place that's neither wholly private or public. "It's like having a party at your house," she explains. "It's your space, but you don't entirely control what happens. It's also about the people who are coming and what they bring to the table. You can't always be sure of the outcome, but as long as you are being true to who you are, that's okay."

That part about being "true to yourself" is important.

It can't be a forced effort; it has to resonate with an institution's overall values and mission while at the same time welcoming other perspectives and remaining open to collaboration and co-creating. "The underlying instincts of listening, valuing, and inviting multiple voices already inform our labeling and interpretation in the galleries; we're just catching the wave of social media," Sonnet Hanson says. She's referring specifically to DAM's new [Collective website](#), but she could be talking about any of our YA initiatives.



INCUBATORS & ITERATIONS

What makes an incubator? Incubators need space, time, staff, a budget, and a representative audience. Also, a good incubator needs ongoing audience research.

We borrowed the term “iteration” from mathematics and use it to mean repetition of a procedure, typically as a means of obtaining successively closer approximations to the solution of a problem.

For a complete archive of Untitled events, visit <http://collective.denverartmuseum.org/category/untitled>



What differentiates a successful program from a less successful one? What is the right balance when collaborating with community groups to present programs? Can the museum “brand” programs held offsite—on someone else’s front porch, so to speak?

Answering questions like these—finding the “sweet spot”—is an ongoing process of designing and testing prototypes, taking chances, and recalculating the mix. To do this we relied on incubators—places where programs could be introduced, evaluated, iterated, and then if successful launched in larger arenas. In particular, a program we premiered in February 2007 called Untitled has been fertile ground for numerous offshoots. Offered on the final Friday of each month from 6 to 10 pm and included with regular museum admission, Untitled engages adult visitors with the museum’s collections in unconventional, unexpected, and unscripted ways. Live music, free nibbles, a cash bar, and a schedule of activities that people can customize to their liking create a low-key, social ambiance. Not surprisingly, this style of programming draws young adults in higher percentages than overall museum attendance:

	OVERALL MUSEUM ATTENDANCE: (10/06-1/07)	UNTITLED ATTENDANCE: (3/07-7/07)
18-24	13%	23%
24-34	17%	33%

INCUBATORS & ITERATIONS *cont.*



One of the DAM's Detours was led by a jazz trumpeter who improvised in front of various works of art, riffing off the qualities and characteristics he noticed. His choices, his melodies, and phrasing got some interesting conversations going that might not have happened otherwise about details in the artwork.

DAM_SCOUT, Demo & Do, Happenings, and Digital Do-It-Yourself are all described and illustrated in the Programs section of this report.

One very popular program that we “incubated” at Untitled is a series of tours given by experts in fields other than art—neurologists, cartographers, chefs—from the perspective of their own expertise. These Detours, with their offbeat and unexpected content, became a springboard to DAM_SCOUT. Similarly, artist demonstrations and performances at Untitled led us to develop, evaluate, and iterate until we came up with Demo & Do and Happenings. Icebreakers at Untitled—quick and easy hands-on activities or quizzes that are among the first things people see when they enter Untitled—served as inspiration and a testing ground for Digital Do-It-Yourself.

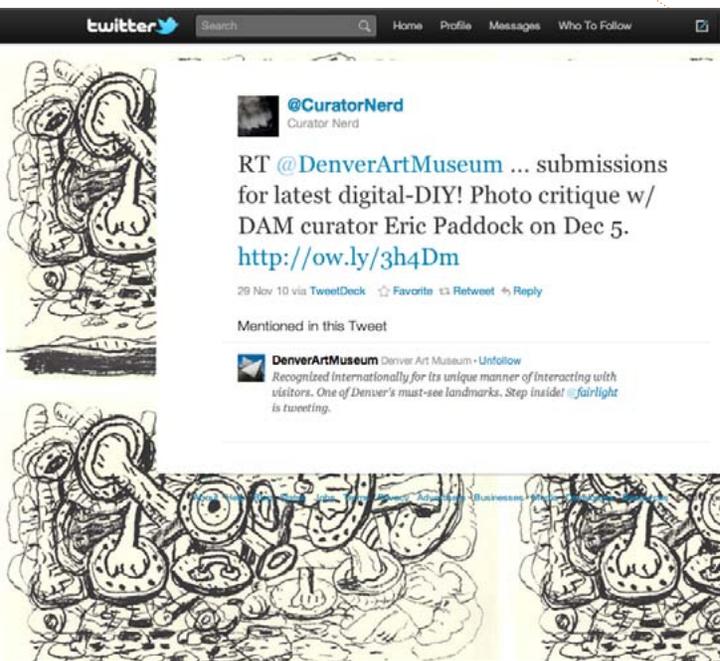
We keep an eye on what’s happening throughout this whole process. We learn a lot about what’s working and what’s not through simple observation or informal surveys. Before taking a major step, we conduct more formal, quantitative research. But even the traditional focus group can be fun if you invite people to a “Whine and Dine” rather than a “Panel Discussion.”

At a certain point it’s time to move a program out of the incubator and into the larger world. Because the program already has a track record of success, museum staff in other departments tend to notice it and begin to think about how they might use or vary the components for their own purposes and audiences. “It’s like we are building a toolbox, and other people see what’s in the toolbox and come up with their own ideas of what they can do,” Lindsey Housel says. But it’s not just the “tools” that get borrowed; we are seeing attitudes like playfulness and irreverence transfer to the general museum culture along with the programs.

EASY MOMENTS OF CREATIVITY & UNEXPECTED CONTENT

What defines an “easy moment of creativity”?

- An easy starting point
- Just the right dose of structure
(Nina Simon calls it “scaffolding”)
- No previous expertise or artistic skill required
- Can be completed in a limited amount of time
- Ideally, no fee (or a nominal fee) for participation



Although most of what we learned we learned by doing, “Easy Moments of Creativity” and “Unexpected Content” were two concepts we knew from the start that we wanted to build programs around. We’d seen these work in installed gallery interpretives and at Untitled, where Icebreakers in the form of quizzes or easy-to-make projects worked to readjust perceptions about the museum being a stuffy place where the creativity is on display and visitors are just supposed to bask in it—not respond to it with creativity of their own. Perhaps the biggest leap we made was to apply this concept to online programming in the form of Digital Do-It-Yourself.

“Unexpected Content” overlaps with “Easy Moments of Creativity” but also includes things like Detours (explained above).

But although irreverence is good, irrelevance is not.

When polled, visitors consistently express a preference for rich, meaningful, object-based content. We try to keep this in mind when writing Blog entries and DAM_SCOUT scripts.



ONSITE/ONLINE CONTINUUM

DAM's Membership Department is working on a way to create an individual membership category that would be branded with the Untitled/Collective look and be customizable.



Young audiences are accustomed to going online for information and socializing, so programs designed for young adults clearly need to tap into this mode of communicating. Yet museums have long prized the actual encounter with a work of art as their unique and exclusive asset (and rightly so). However, remembering the NEA finding that people who participate in the arts through electronic media are nearly three times as likely to attend live arts events as non-media participants, we envisioned our YA programming as a continuum that people drop into at multiple points.

“Some programs are mostly online, like the Digital Do-It-Yourself, and others are mostly live, like the Happenings,” says Sonnet Hanson, “but it is useful for us to conceptualize this as a continuum because that’s the way we think our users see it and we are branding the experiences with the same characteristics.” Those characteristics include a distinct, contemporary graphic identity; a playful, inviting tone; and lots of options so visitors can customize their experience.

The idea of a continuum also elevates the online experience from a supporting role (i.e., a one-way communications vehicle) to a valid experience of its own. “What we are doing is online programming. There is content that visitors engage with and to some extent create. They are not just consumers of information,” Lindsey Housel says.

We’ve also been experimenting with an onsite/offsite continuum, as described later in the section about Happenings.



AGE REALLY IS JUST A NUMBER

As we were creating programs with a young adult audience in mind we began to notice the broader appeal they had and to question our assumption that certain types of experiences and content and tone were speaking heavily to YAs. Pretty quickly we saw that this program style (co-created experiences, socially alive environments, access to real content, self-directed experiences, and a dose of the unexpected) spoke to a wider range of people. “In part, this may be because the prevalence of social media and how people get information was creating a changed set of behavior and expectations for a much broader group of adult visitors,” Lindsey Housel says, noting that this is something DAM has pegged for further exploration and testing.

When programs designed for young adults consistently attracted audiences older (and younger) than the target demographic, we realized that style rather than age is a more useful way to think about audiences.

Although we began by targeting young adults ages 19 to 35, this approach, while convenient for statistical research, quickly revealed its limitations when a core participant we'd singled out for a post-evaluation in-depth interview turned 36 and aged himself out of eligibility.

We developed Demo & Do with young adult audiences in mind, but families and older people like these combinations of artist demonstration with a hands-on element, too. Plenty of couples in their forties and fifties (and older) and families with young children show up at Untitled. As long as these programs continue to attract the target audience, the fact that they engage a larger audience is a good thing, which sparks discussion about other ways they can be implemented and marketed.

STYLE & TONE

Some factors that attract young audiences are obvious. Serve food and drinks. Keep the doors open and schedule programming at times that are convenient for them, like evenings and weekends. Use the internet and social media to inform people about what's going on.

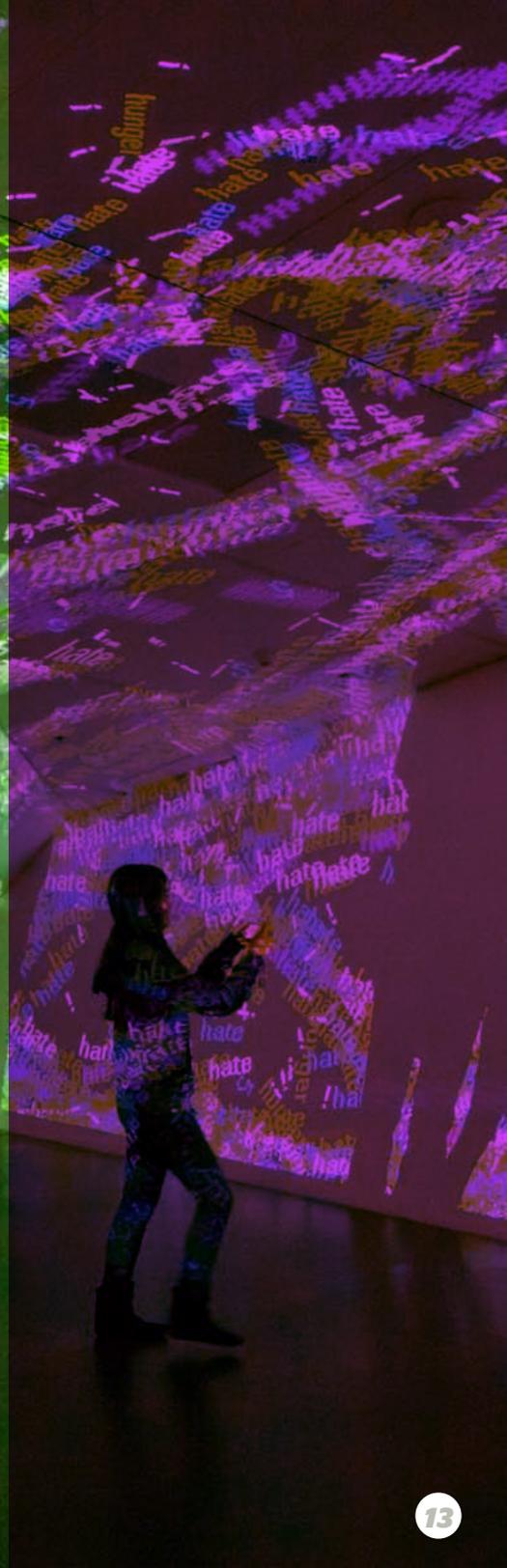


Programs aimed at young audiences should have a distinct style and look that quickly sets them apart from other programs. We created entirely new graphics with a colorful, contemporary LED look (and a robot mascot named Chauncey) to indicate that our new programs and Collective website are anything but business as usual. We also choose our words carefully—young audiences tend to be highly sensitive to, and turned off by, language that sounds “canned” or authoritarian.

A formal tone creates distance. We try to sound more like a person than an institution—the way you’d talk to someone on your front porch.

“We’re not so serious all the time. We’ll poke fun at ourselves. We want people to know it’s okay to laugh in an art museum,” Lindsey Housel says.





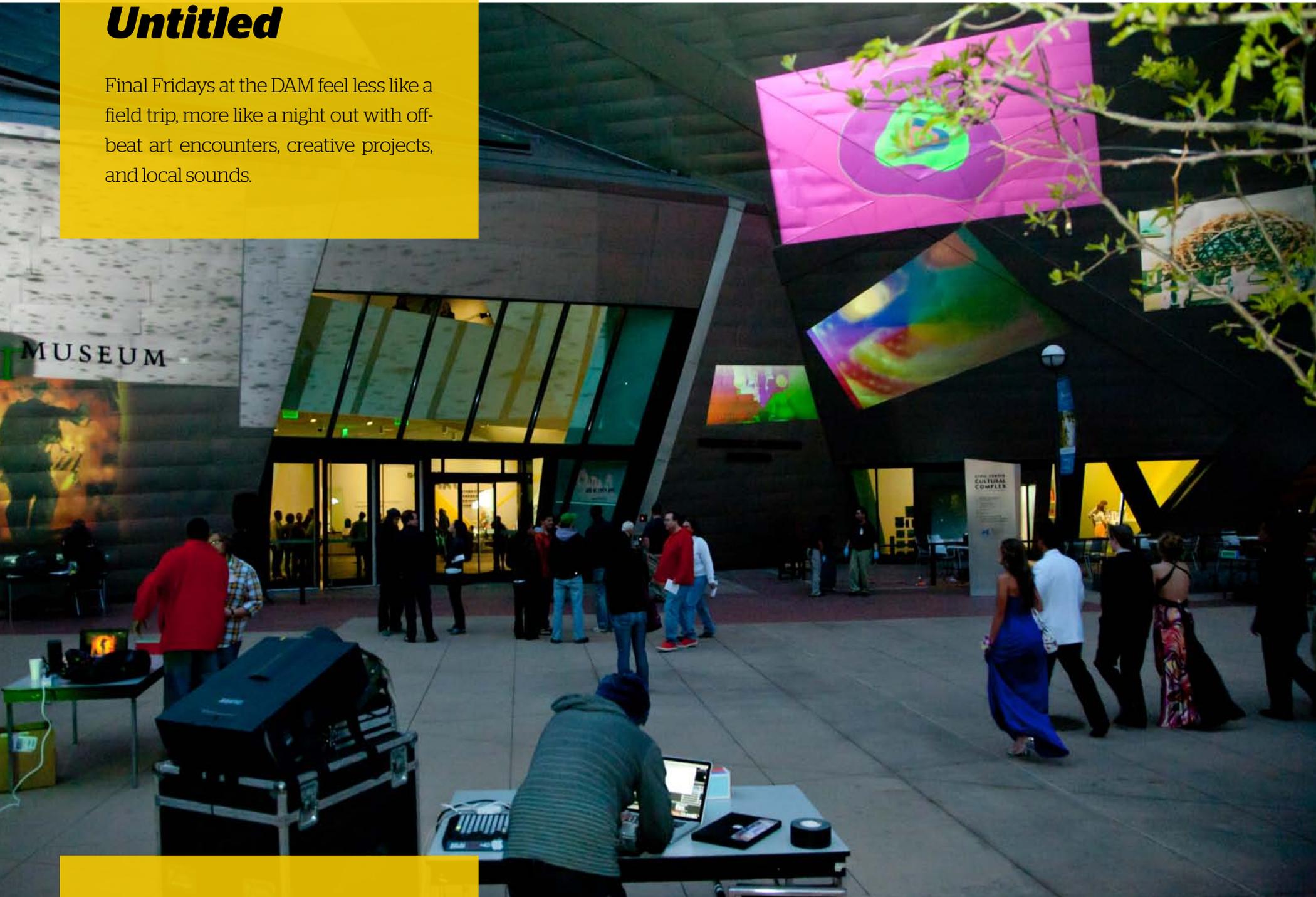
Part 2.

Programs



Untitled

Final Fridays at the DAM feel less like a field trip, more like a night out with off-beat art encounters, creative projects, and local sounds.



Easy moments of creativity set the tone for a different, more participatory kind of museum experience.

Icebreakers at Untitled provide easy moments of creativity. Here, guests write creative pledges on a sticky note and wear them on their sleeves...or wherever. A roving photographer took pictures of people wearing their pledges, which were then projected onto the ceiling of the atrium.

Digging in at the Mud Studio. The theme that night was "Grounded," based on a museumwide exhibition called *Marvelous Mud* that featured ceramics from different cultures and times in a dozen or so different galleries.

Firing raku tiles on the plaza outside the museum with local raku master Bob Smith.

Geologist Bob Raynolds leads a Detour of a photography exhibit called *Dirty Pictures* (a pun in itself, since the photos aren't pornographic but show various ways photographers have depicted mud in their works) at the "Grounded" Untitled on 8/26/11. The "detour" metaphor suggests a gentle slowing down, an unexpected message that tells you, hey, there's something new going on here that requires your attention.



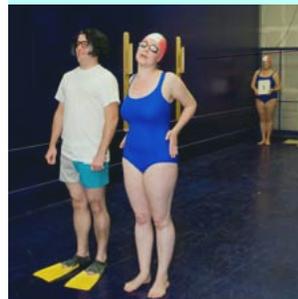


Meditating in the India gallery. Although “Grounded” was themed around a ceramics exhibition, any possible connotation of the word was fair game: here, it’s about getting grounded in the sense of centering oneself.

The Fine Gentlemen’s Club, a comedy troupe, leads a Detour with “inappropriate” content that might get you “grounded” in an art museum. Although the guys joked about objects, they focused on specific details, which got folks laughing and looking more closely. “We had 100+ people on that Detour and had to repeat it,” Lindsey Housel says. Detour leaders do a pre-event walkthrough with museum staff to get the tone right.



Megan Quicke, a local author who’s writing a book about coffee, gives visitors a Mini Talking To about coffee grounds at the “Grounded” Untitled. Titles like “Mini Talking To,” “Finger Wagging,” and “Curator Soapbox” signal a lighthearted approach to the typical expert-led tour or talk.



Erin Rollman as Joan and Brian Colonna as Charlie in an ongoing partnership between the museum and Buntport Theater. The actors created the characters based on a painting in the museum’s collection titled *Joan and Her Swim Coach*, by Joan Brown. Each month Joan and Charlie jump into the pool (the freight elevator) and improvise around that evening’s theme.

The Collective

<http://collective.denverartmuseum.org>

DAM's umbrella website for its young adult programs provides not just information, but also online content and ways to participate.

SUBMISSIONS FROM COLLECTIVE MEMBERS



COLLECTIVE:

The Collective is a community of 553 members (and counting) who come together to create, converse, and connect.

WHAT'S NEXT



Untitled 2012 Season Announced!

Sunday, December 18, 2 am – Tuesday, February 7, 1 am 2012

Like Comments Share

Let's cut to the chase shall we? Untitled 2012 season is going to blow your mind. There will be Yves Saint Laurent lunacy, Van Gogh madness, Design debauchery, and performances, DIY projects, detours and more at your favorite

participatory art party. Without further ado, your 2012 Final Friday lineup:

dDIY

Try a digital Do-It-Yourself project, then upload and share it. Dig it.

[Learn More](#)

OUR PARTNERS



Demo & Do

A visitor to the Collective's home page is encouraged to register/log in (although anyone can browse the site, only registered users can contribute or comment). "We felt that having people join would create more of a sense of community and make it feel like a safe place to put up your work," says Lindsey House. "However, we have also considered lowering the barrier to entry—even though anyone can see the whole site, are we discouraging people who don't want to register?"

COLLECTIVE:

The Collective is a community of **553** members (and counting) who come together to create, converse, and connect.

[Join the Collective](#)

The Collective home page features examples of participants' Digital Do-It-Yourself (dDIY) uploads, photos of community partners, and quick links across the top bar to dDIY, Untitled, Demo & Do, Happenings, and the Blog.

Each category is defined on the right side of the screen. The Denver Art Museum is mentioned only briefly at the top of the screen, although someone who scrolls down to the bottom sees a larger DAM logo and sketch of the museum's distinctive roofline.

Also at the bottom are links to Twitter, an RSS feed, and Facebook page.

dDIY



Try a digital Do-It-Yourself project, then upload and share it. Dig it.

[Learn More](#)

Demo & Do



Hands-on art demonstrations at the DAM! Come on, try it. Everyone.

[Learn More](#)

Happenings





Digital Do-It-Yourself

Digital Do-It-Yourself missions to do and share. Knit it, speak it, play it, act it, tape it, snap it, paint it. Then upload and share it. Dig it.



When a King Tut exhibition visited DAM in 2010, dDIY invited people to make a still life for the afterlife featuring four things they'd want to accompany them to the next world.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it? Grab your favorite mug and snap one fabulous photo still life, complete with your hand(s), pinkies, and mug arranged just so.



So far, dDIY has a fervent but small group of people who actually upload projects, but many more people are looking at the projects. This is pretty typical, according to Nina Simon, who notes in *The Participatory Museum* (page 9) that the number of online spectators is always far greater than the number of online creators. For example, only .16% of visitors to YouTube will ever upload a video, and only .2% of visitors to Flickr will ever post a photo.

People who live outside Denver are more likely than locals to participate in dDIY projects, according to audience research conducted for us by Randi Korn and Associates.





Demo & DO

Master artists and crafters set up shop in the museum. Pick up some skills in a pint-size apprenticeship. Come on, try it. Everyone.



Ceramic artist Christy Hengst demonstrates how she screenprints cobalt glaze onto her porcelain birds at Untitled “Tea Party,” 6/25/11.

A visitor samples Christy’s technique on an unfired porcelain tile. The tiles were later fired and people could pick them up and bring them home.



A flock of Christy Hengst’s gorgeous ceramic birds at rest on the plaza. “Choosing an artist in the same demographic as our target audience, or at least part of the same creative community, supports our commitment to using local resources and builds a program that has meaning to our audience,” Lindsey Housel says.

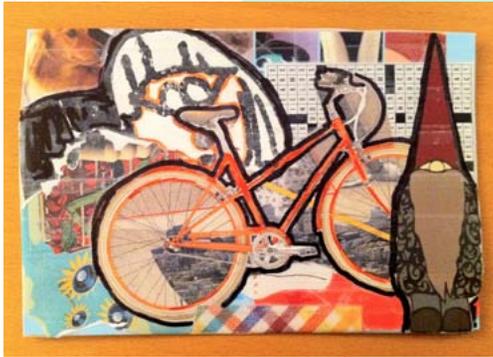
Online, the Demo & Do section of the Collective announces upcoming Demo & Dos and allows visitors to comment or upload their photos of past events or what they made at the events. The museum can also add related content online—interviews with the featured artist, for example—and maintains an archive of past events.





Happenings

One-of-a-kind happenings co-created by members of the Collective. Convene with creative movers and shakers.



Visitors show off the personalized postcards they made during Create Denver Week, sponsored by the Denver Office of Cultural Affairs. “Branding” programs held offsite with the DAM identity is one of the challenges of Happenings. One way to make the connection is to tie in with an online dDIY, like this one did.



Photography curator Eric Paddock discusses work submitted via dDIY at the museum’s first-ever Crit Session, 12/5/11. Inspired by the Robert Benjamin photography exhibition *Notes on a Quiet Life*, dDIY participants uploaded photographs of people near and dear to them. Paddock then selected work to be discussed at the Crit Session. This combined dDIY and Happening was one of our most successful ever in terms of online participation and live attendance.



DAM’s first Happening was an Urban Poetics Poetry Slam during Black History Month (February 2008). Co-created with Podslam.org and Café Nuba, the two-hour evening event featured sixteen top competitive poets and live music.

Blog & Other Social Media

Blog entries exemplify “unexpected content” and typically focus on behind the scenes stories. Here Fairlight Baer-Gutierrez of the Communications Department reports on a new sculpture—a bright red dinosaur—installed by Chinese artist Sui Jianguo.

BLOG POST

Meet the new red dinosaur at the DAM

Posted by [Fairlight@DAM](#) on Wednesday, November 23, 8 pm

Like Comment Share

Last week, we installed a red dinosaur named *Made in China* in the atrium. You could say it is as subtle as a Sichuan dish. Here is its label copy:

Sui Jianguo finds inspiration from tiny toy dinosaurs mass-produced in China. The artist transforms these cheap, plastic objects into a monumental work of art. The phrase “Made in China” featured prominently on the dinosaur’s stomach is well-known. In fact, “Made in China” is more recognizable than any Chinese brand name. Sui Jianguo’s work participates in the politics of high art and consumerism and raises questions about what has value, who is selling, and who is buying.



The artist lives and works in Beijing and was at the DAM for *Made in China*'s installation. The painted resin sculpture complements the two Chinese exhibitions currently on view, *Xu Beihong: Pioneer of Modern Chinese Painting* and *Theresa of Heaven: Silken Legacy of China's Last Dynasty*.

Sui Jianguo. *Made in China* 2005. Promised gift of Vicki and Kent Logan to the Collection of the Denver Art Museum.



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Add Photos

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Related

Xu Beihong's Connections
The Denver Art Museum's world-wide destination...

Meet Jill Desjardis School to So New...
Jill Desjardis des...

New Acquisitions Honor of Cur Standring
We got a request a... Read more

Interview with artist, Yunn P
Great news! On 5 from 10-4pm, no...

Talk about unexpected and behind the scenes—communications coordinator Ashley Pritchard shares the story of a surprising discovery on the back of a Clyfford Still canvas. Blog entries have a point of view, vary in content and emphasis, and are signed by an individual rather than by the institution.

New entries post two to four times a week, but there's no regular schedule. Whoever feels like writing something does, and two other people read it before it's posted.

When people comment on Blog posts they tend to do it via Facebook rather than on the Blog itself. “It's a way of taking that content and making it their own,” Sonnet Hanson says, noting that this is a very common online practice in general. It's also a way to share content with people who aren't already reading the Blog.

THE COLLECTIVE HOME UNTITLED DIY DEMO & DO HAPPENINGS BLOG

BLOG POST

On the Back of a Clyfford Still Canvas

Posted by [Ashley@DAM](#) on Thursday, November 17, 2 pm

Like Comment Share

The Denver Art Museum is excited to welcome our new neighbor, the **Clyfford Still Museum**, to the neighborhood. Still was, basically an art world recluse who moved with his family from New York to Maryland in the 1950s. Even though he was away from the art world, he continued to work prolifically. If you're interested in learning more about the artist, I included a brief biography at the end from the museum's website.

Related Posts

- In the Hot Seat: Artist Theresa Anderson**
Artist Theresa Anderson answers our burning questions... Read more
- Charles Deas: International Man of Mystery**
We are about to open Charles Deas and DAM's America... Read more
- What's Under Your Bed**
In this post, we discuss the discovery of Long John... Read more

Still kept 94 percent of his output and stored it at his house in Maryland until his death in 1980. When the dust settled around his will and the decision was made that Denver would be the home of a museum dedicated solely to his work, the fun really got started. Get the [back story](#) about Still and the museum from Kyle MacMillan, the Denver Post's art critic.

By [Fun 3](#) from [exhibition of the artwork](#). Museum will find the opportunity to show his work.

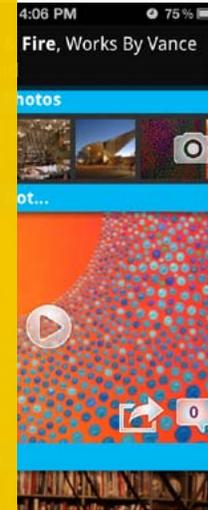
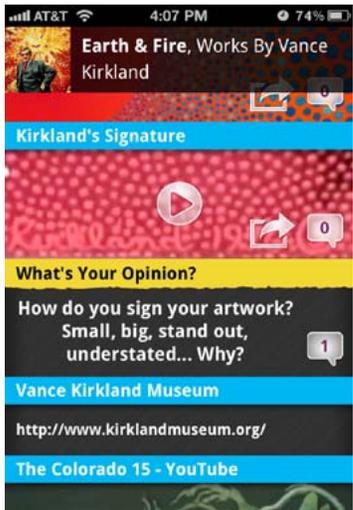
DAM_SCOUT

If anything exemplifies changing technology, it's the evolution of the DAM_SCOUT, which we originally conceived of as a podcast and then a cell phone audiotour before developing its current form as an iPhone and Android app.

DAM_SCOUT is meant to be experienced primarily onsite. But early users of the app told us that they want access to the material outside the museum so they can refer to it and share it with their friends. We adapted and developed their feedback in our most recent version of the app. Users can now

- (1) comment on the content in the app,
- (2) share content via social media,
- (3) see featured DAM_SCOUT content without being on site and
- (4) access previous content from an earlier onsite visit from any location in or out of the museum.

QR codes alert those in the know. Research showed that most of the young adult audience we were trying to reach had smart phones, but future development will tackle how to make this kind of content experience available to a broader audience.



DENVER ART MUSEUM



A photograph of an art gallery. The room has white walls and a dark floor. A large, bright yellow artwork is mounted on the wall. Several people are gathered around, some standing and talking, others sitting on a bench. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting and a green exit sign. The text "Part 3." is overlaid in orange script, and "Resources" is overlaid in white bold sans-serif font.

Part 3.

Resources

RESEARCH

Arts Participation 2008: Highlights from a National Survey.
PDF or hardcopy available from the NEA at
http://www.nea.gov/research/research_brochures.php

Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation.
Multimedia version available from the NEA at
<http://www.arts.gov/research/new-media-report/index.html>

The Participatory Museum, by Nina Simon;
<http://www.participatorymuseum.org>

Museum 2.0
<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com>

Audience Research: Study of Young Adults to the Denver Art Museum, report prepared for Denver Art Museum July 2011 by Randi Korn & Associates.

Museum Audience Insight: Audience research, trends, observations from Reach Advisors and friends;
<http://www.ReachAdvisors.typepad.com>

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LINKS WE LIKE

<http://www.soulpancake.com>

Creative questions.

<http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com>

Formerly a creative missions site, now no longer accepting new material but archived by SFMOMA.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our most sincere thanks to the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for its generous funding over the past three years. With funding from IMLS we have been able to make connections with over 70,000 visitors online and onsite and develop rich experiences for visitors that connect them with art in unexpected and delightful ways using new technology and innovative programs. Additionally, we have built meaningful connections with our local community and the broader creative community of Colorado and have grown the DAM's institutional capacity in ways that will continue to benefit staff and partners in the future.

We would also like to thank James Chung and Susie Wilkening of Reach Advisors, Randi Korn & Associates, and Nina Simon for their invaluable expertise and wisdom in guiding, informing, and inspiring us. Heartfelt thanks go out to our community advisory committee and app development user group for offering their ideas, insight, and enthusiasm in developing new programs, bettering existing ones, and making co-creating so much darn fun.

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