

Interactives for Adults

“I like the idea of being able to become more interactive with the art.”

—Visitor panel participant

While many of our novice visitors make use of family materials, we wanted to develop activities specifically for adults—ones that would give them a chance to express their opinions and develop their own interpretations of works. We also hoped to communicate that there are many ways to experience art, including ways that don’t involve information.

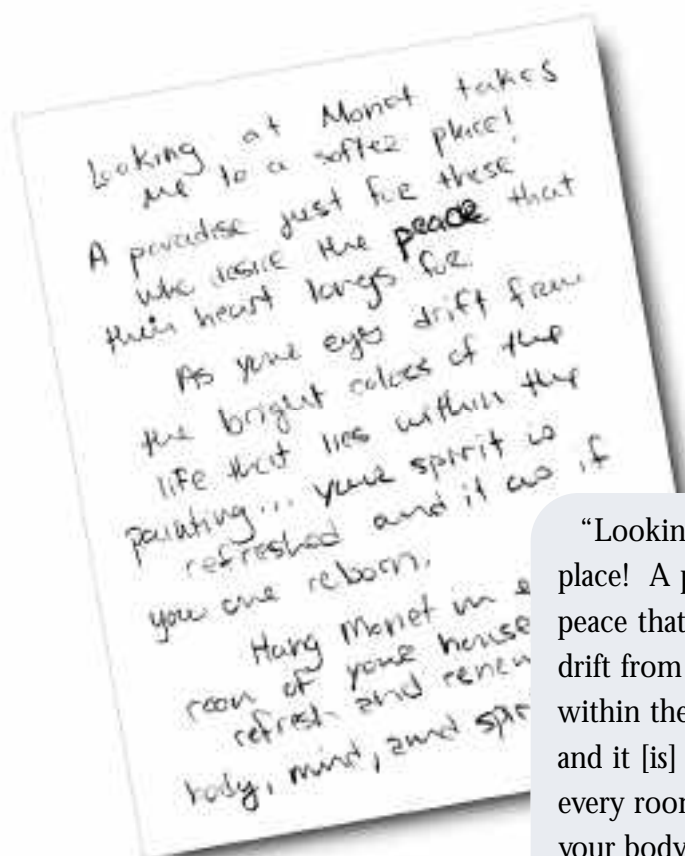
The team developed three in-gallery stations: a writing activity, a drawing activity, and a “Create Your Own Exhibit” activity. At the writing station, visitors are encouraged to imagine themselves in one of the landscape paintings and to record their thoughts and reactions in a journal. They are free to peruse others’ comments as well. Visitors’ writings have shown a range of creative and very personal responses.



The writing activity takes place in the gallery at a small table. A wooden box holds pencils and two journals.

“I love anything that tells you to use your own imagination. I think that draws you into it and it allows you to be intelligent, to participate in it—rather than always just being talked to.”

—Visitor panel participant

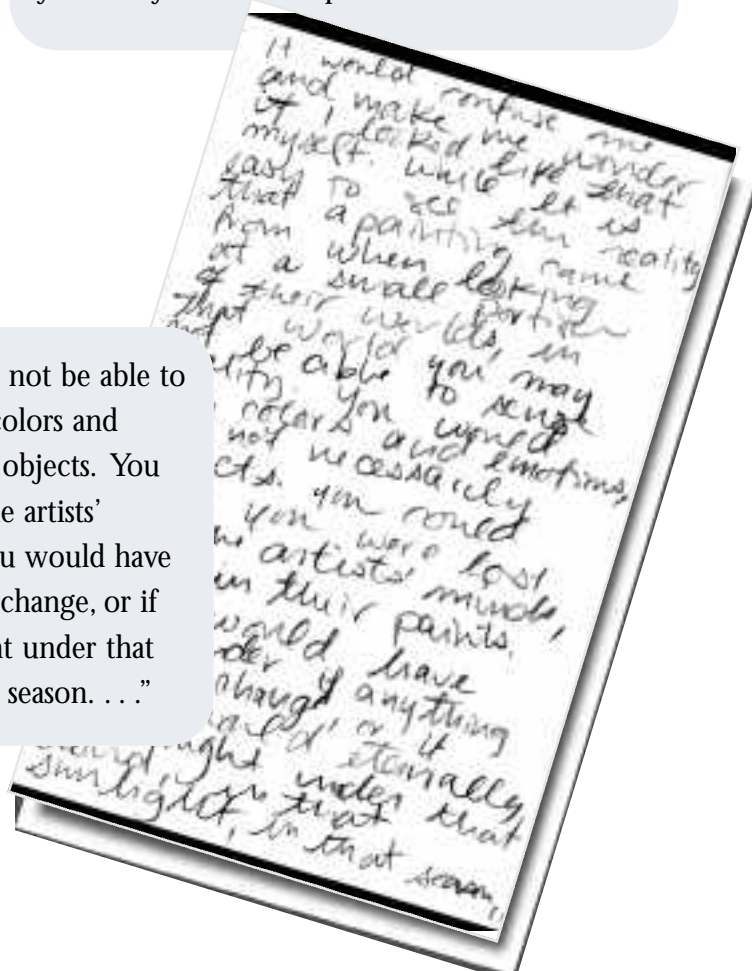


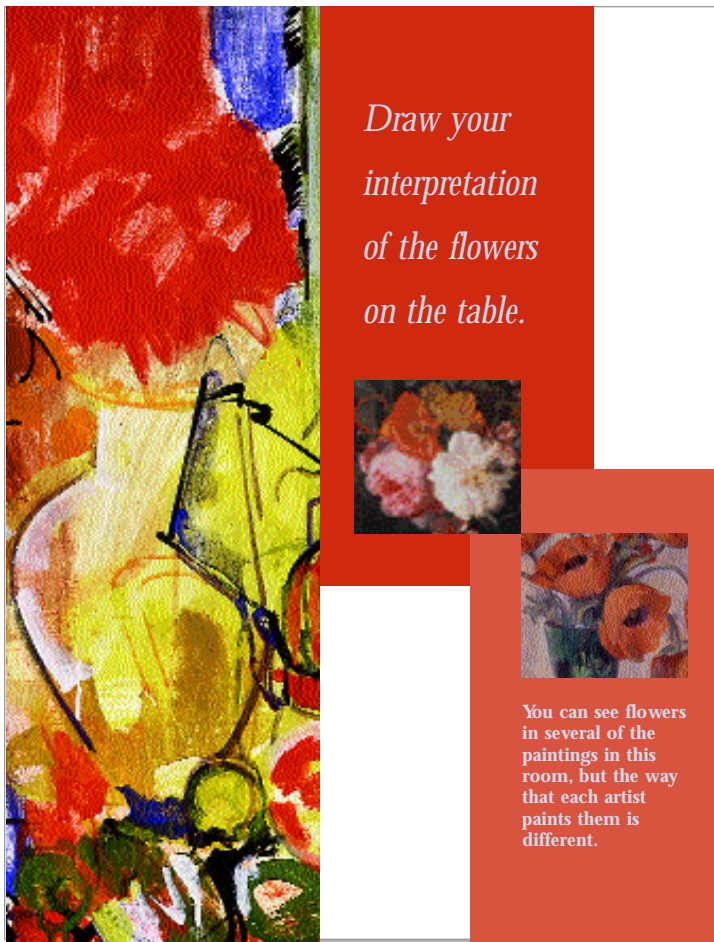
Writing Activity

The writing activity asks visitors to “imagine how it would feel to be in one of the landscapes in this room.”

“Looking at Monet takes me to a softer place! A paradise just for those who desire the peace that their heart longs for. As your eyes drift from the bright colors of the life that lies within the painting . . . your spirit is refreshed and it [is] as if you are reborn. Hang Monet in every room of your house to refresh and renew your body, mind, and spirit!”

“... in that world you may not be able to sense reality. You would see colors and emotions, but not necessarily objects. You could feel you were lost in the artists’ minds, and in their paints. You would have to wonder if anything would change, or if you would eternally be caught under that cloud, in that sunlight, in that season. . . .”





Cover of floral arrangement sketchbook.

For the drawing activity, we created two alternating still-life arrangements for visitors to sketch in the gallery. The first is a floral arrangement similar to the one seen in *Poppies* by Andrew Dasburg. The second includes apples, lemons, and grapes—fruits found in several paintings in the gallery. As with the writing activity, visitors can browse through each other's drawings in a sketchbook. We hoped that this exercise would encourage visitors to look at our still lifes in a new way.

Drawing Activity



Poppies, 1931, Andrew Dasburg, 1989.149



Visitors make drawings of a flower arrangement based on Andrew Dasburg's *Poppies*.



While reinstalling the galleries, we became intrigued by the many possibilities for arranging the works and noticed that this process led us to look and notice more. We decided to design an activity that would provide adult visitors with a similar experience. “Create Your Own Exhibit” invites visitors to design their own mini-exhibit using magnetic reproductions of paintings in the museum’s collection. Visitors arrange their selections on metal panels and can share their favorite ideas in a book stationed alongside the activity. According to Lisa Steffen, master teacher for special projects, “The works were chosen to provide multiple possibilities for combinations. Even simply shuffling the paintings around on a table helps you see things: what it is that museums do, the thought process of deciding what goes on the walls and where. But it all comes from the visitor’s own logic—it’s totally personal.”

Participants’ arrangements show a mix of approaches: “I like paintings that show human and family relationships,” says a visitor whose “installation” includes only two works. Another’s arrangement of four portraits reflects the fact that she likes “portraits from all periods mixed.” Still another visitor arranged diverse works across her display, stating simply that “I used artwork that I liked: women/still-life paintings.”

Create Your Own Exhibit Activity



Visitors choose from about fifty miniature “paintings” for their arrangements. At their request, we included works both on and off view.

Random Access Audio

“I love the audio tour. It gave me more eyes than I had before.”

—Visitor comment book

Unlike text on the wall, audio messages can guide looking experiences in an uninterrupted way; they can evoke other times and places through sound environments and music; and they can be an extremely effective vehicle for aural learners. Intrigued by these unique capabilities and a desire to experiment with the format, we developed a self-serve, random-access audio program for the installation.

Listeners can select from forty-two messages indicated by numbered icons next to the objects. We deliberately varied the stops to test a variety of approaches (evaluation of this project will be the basis for a museum-wide audio initiative). **First-person stops** feature narration by the museum’s curators and outside experts—including a painter, a frame expert, a foundry owner, a geologist, and, in the case of Georgia O’Keeffe, even the artist herself.

Comparison stops encourage visitors to compare works of art. A **mini-tour** explores the theme of a gallery with brief stops at four works. One visitor particularly enjoyed this approach “because it gave me an opportunity to just get a little bit of flavor to the room—to understand what [it’s] about.”



This **comparison stop** begins, “Most art historians would hang these two paintings a safe distance from each other.” It then guides visitors in looking at similarities and differences.

“I saw through my ears!”

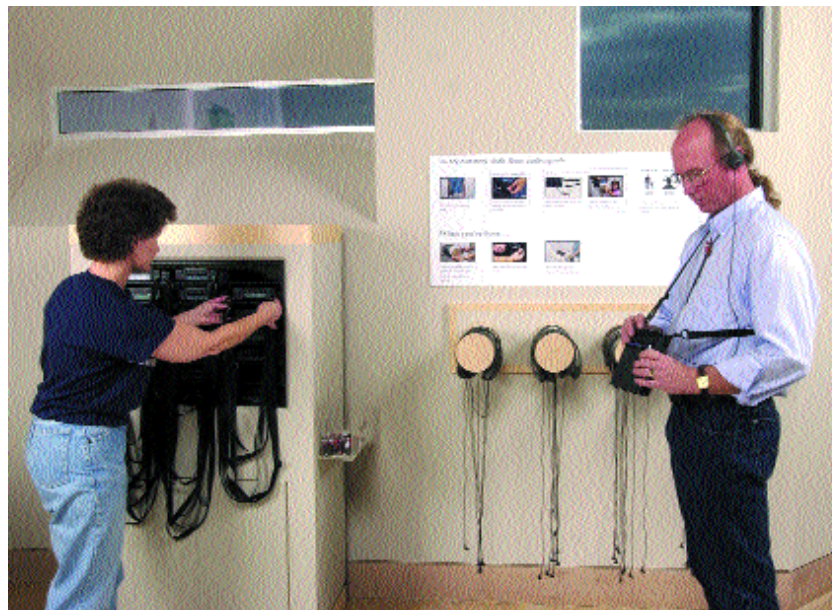
—Visitor comment book

Music stops—consisting of a brief introduction followed by extended musical selections—“provide fuel for the imagination,” in one visitor’s words, or “set the mood,” in the words of another.

Interactive stops invite visitors to “jump into” and explore a landscape, complete a story based on a painting, or test their looking skills. And **character stops** make the art come alive while incorporating humor—as in the case of a talking chair. While the character and interactive stops are ostensibly for families, they have proven very popular with many novice visitors as well. One visitor found the family program to be the most entertaining simply because “it was a total surprise.” Another points out that “my perspective is geared toward family and children, so as much as I enjoyed the other ones, I appreciated those because I thought they were lively and I thought they were fun.”

“It’s very helpful to go around with one of those things instead of just on your own [with] your silent brain.”

—Visitor panel participant



Photos and step-by-step instructions help visitors outfit themselves at the self-serve audio pickup station.

“It was trying to draw you in to see the picture for yourself, and then at the end it said, ‘And then you make [the ending] up.’ And I liked that.”

—Visitor panel participant



“Truthfully, on my own, I would not have gotten it. . . . The audio gave me something to think about.”

—Visitor panel participant

A **first-person stop** uses an interview format to give the visitor an insider’s perspective. Here, the curator reveals the reasoning behind the hand-painted cloud patterns in the pre-1900 design gallery. (Design arts were included in the audio program through a separate funding initiative.)

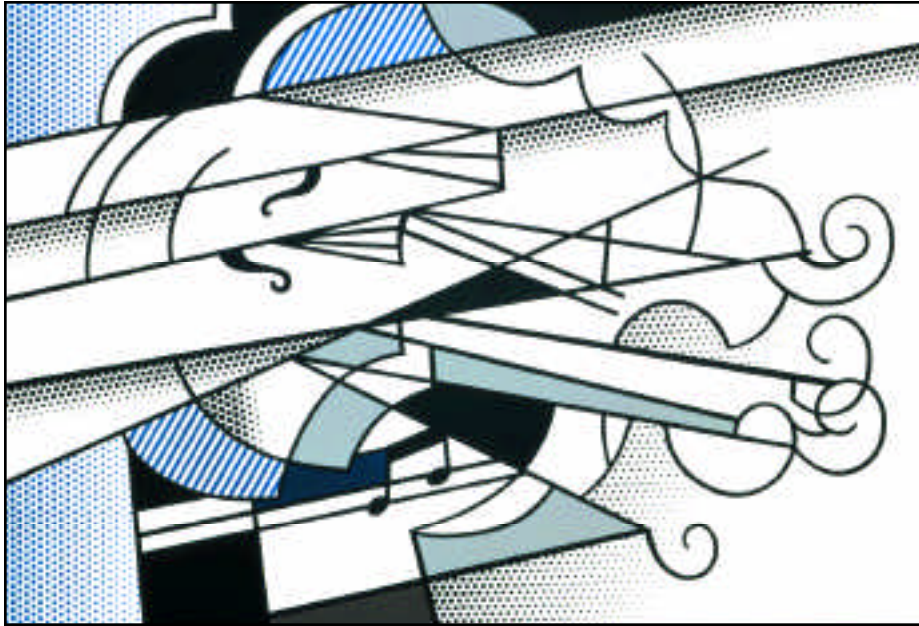
“Music and dramatization are wonderful additions. I found I enjoyed the ‘family’ narration as well as the adult format. The sound effects (and music) put you right into the painting.”

—Visitor comment book



“Bloemenwerf” Side Chair, 1895–98, Henry Van de Velde, 1994.641

In **character stops**, works assume identities to convey their unique qualities. One visitor enjoyed the “personality” of this chair: “I would have walked right by it if she hadn’t tried talking to me. . . . It was just like it was alive. . . . I remember thinking, I wish the table were talking to me now.”



The Violin, 1976, Roy Lichtenstein, 1981.632

In this **interactive stop**, the listener is presented with three violin selections and asked to “choose the one you think sounds like the violin in this painting.”

“Number one, it’s informative. Number two, it’s interactive. And number three, it’s entertaining.”

—Visitor panel participant



The narrator of this **interactive stop** challenges listeners to determine which of the five sculptures he is thinking of by offering clues that require careful looking. “Splitters” for the audio players allow two visitors to listen simultaneously.

The Discovery Library

“I love the discovery library! The den I always wanted. A comfort zone in beautiful surroundings. What a nice way to spend the afternoon—thanks for the environment/experience.”

—“Tell Us What You Think” comment card

We envisioned the privately funded Bernadette Berger Discovery Library as a new kind of gallery. The library is a casual place where visitors can enjoy a more personal experience with art. From the comfort of a sofa, visitors can sit back and look at paintings on the walls and ancient Greek and Egyptian objects in cases. American and European prints are tucked away in drawers for visitors to pull out and discover. The library is furnished with books, computers with CD-ROMs and links to the Denver Public Library, and a costume closet that has proven as tempting to adults as to children. “You can discover for yourself, go in and play,” a visitor explains. Visitors can also pick up “connection cards” suggesting videos to rent, great biographies to read, even cookbooks to sample, all related to works in the galleries.

In *Travel Holiday’s* review of the top twenty-five art museums in the country, the Denver Art Museum ranks sixth. The review notes that our innovative



Visitors to the Discovery Library try their hand at CD-ROM activities, discover works from the museum’s print collections, or simply find a comfortable place to rest while looking at or reading about art.

“A great place to escape, that’s the way I feel. Like I need to remember that I can come here if I just need to get away from things.”

—Visitor panel participant

renovations have made us “a model of a comfortable, user-friendly museum.” Yet, we believe we’ve only begun to scratch the surface. We hope that the strategies we developed with this project will inspire even more creative ways of engaging visitors, both novice and more sophisticated, in the future. We already see signs of this. The success of our first Discovery Library has led to a second, even richer one in our western art galleries—and ideas are being developed for a new variation of mini-libraries scattered throughout our Asian collection. The drawing activity in the still-life gallery has grown into a “plein air” sketching area in a special exhibition. As we begin planning for a new 146,000 square foot addition and the reinstallation of our design arts, modern and contemporary, and native arts collections, we hope to build on what we’ve learned in this project and develop even better ways to make our galleries visitor-friendly.



Drawers containing British miniatures give visitors a chance to view the art up close.

“How can any kid (no matter how old) resist opening drawers, trying on costumes, and seeing videos?”

—“Tell Us What You Think”
comment card



The Discovery Library features two rotations of costumes: one keyed to our British painting collection, the other to our Renaissance works.

“This is a great thing—nice and cozy and inviting and informative.”

—“Tell Us What You Think”
comment card

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

We're interested in your opinions and comments about your experience here at the Denver Art Museum. Leave this card at the Information Desk or mail it to us.

Thank You.

Office of the Deputy Director
Visitor Services
Denver Art Museum
100 W. 14th Avenue Pkwy.
Denver, CO 80204

Date 1-3-98

What a wonderful visit!
I am not normally into
art but am so glad I
stopped. The place feels
like home w/ reading
areas, the libraries, videos.
Also, seeing the kids + their
families doing activities
together + enjoying it is
a treat. I plan to
return many times.

For more information
about this project, write:
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