

Visitor Panel Study of Poetry Writing Activities
in the Special Exhibition
FREDERIC REMINGTON: THE COLOR OF NIGHT

Prepared for the Denver Art Museum

Daryl Fischer, *MUSYNERGY*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Visitors to the Denver Art Museum's special exhibition, "Frederic Remington: The Color of Night" had the opportunity to engage in new types of writing activities in the galleries. Staff members conducted a visitor panel study with two goals in mind: 1) to conduct a summative evaluation of visitors' interest in poetry writing activities in the Remington exhibit and consider implications for similar activities in the new galleries and 2) to provide professional development for the staff by using this study as an opportunity to explore new ways of analyzing the findings of visitor panels. Specific goals for visitor panel discussions and staff development are outlined on page 6.

Four two-hour visitor panels were conducted on two weekends in March. A total of 30 panelists participated in the discussions. Demographic data are summarized on page 7 and detailed in Appendix D. Moderated by a staff member who was not directly involved in the project, the discussions were taped and transcribed.

My initial viewing of videotapes revealed the following key issues:

- New types of museum experiences like the poetry writing activities have the potential to change visitors' views of the Denver Art Museum in particular and of art museums in general.
- Creating activities that look and feel age appropriate is key to visitor use and enjoyment. As the Museum continues to develop interactive experiences for adults and children it must choose materials, formats, and settings that intuitively suggest appropriate age levels.
- Examples of other visitors' activities provide important clues to visitors. They must be carefully chosen and presented in thoughtful, creative, and engaging ways. In addition to showing visitors what to expect, these examples will bring the visitors' voice into exhibitions.
- What we call things has a profound effect on how they are perceived and used. The word "poetry" creates hurdles for many visitors who don't see themselves as gifted enough to engage in that kind of activity. Other names for creative writing activities should be considered.
- Panelists pointed out the pros and cons of extended labels, referring to them as "double edged swords" and reminding staff of the "fine line" between information about works of art and personally meaningful experiences. Panelists also offered suggestions for several alternative label formats that staff would do well to consider.

Staff from the education and publications departments were integral to the next step in the visitor panel analysis. A group of approximately ten staff members received transcripts of all four visitor panel discussions and were asked to read them through the lenses of several "filters" in preparation for a debriefing meeting. Described on page 11, the filters are

- Changes in visitors' attitude, attention, perspective or behavior
- Expanding visitors' comfort level
- Making activities age appropriate
- Expectations about visitor decorum and the museum experience
- Surprises

The debriefing meeting, which took place in June, was as critical to this study as the visitor panel itself because it brought staff members together to process the feedback they had gathered and use it to plan for the future. We might summarize the process with the following equation:

$$\text{visitor panel discussions} + \text{staff reflection} = \text{visitor centered action plan}$$

In the debriefing meeting staff members selected the most important comments made by visitor panelists, based on each of the above filters. Then they grouped the comments in clusters and identified three types of action steps for each filter—things to continue, things to modify, and new ideas to explore. Selected comments and action steps are outlined on pages 13-21.

The action steps identified by staff members are not only relevant to creative writing activities; they will have broad application to the development of exhibitions and visitor experiences in the new building. Action steps outline concentrated effort in the following areas, described on pages 21-22:

- **Change.** To change visitors' experience in the museum we must first change their perception of typical museum behavior by promoting the Denver Art Museum as a different kind of museum and creating an environment where visitors feel safe engaging in new activities and exploring new ideas.
- **Comfort.** To expand upon visitors' comfort zones we must accommodate both their physical and psychological needs, creating activities that are ergonomically designed and user friendly, encouraging them to stretch beyond their normal experiences, and helping them find a balance between challenge and success.
- **Choice.** Mass customization has become an expectation in 20th century America. To compete for ever shrinking amounts of leisure time we must present options for diverse museum experiences and help visitors make the right choices to tailor each visit to their needs and interests.
- **Communication.** Effective communication must occur on two levels: museum to visitor and visitor to visitor. To improve museum to visitor communication we must aim for verbal and visual clarity; to facilitate visitor to visitor communication we must explore new channels for sharing visitors' reactions in the museum, on-line, and in the community.
- **Collaboration.** Education and publications staff must work with marketing and public relations staff to articulate and promote a visitor experience that is as dynamic and innovative as the new building.

I recommend that staff continue to use the visitor panel process to plan, test and refine new museum experiences for visitors, incorporating the techniques of using filters to analyze transcripts and deriving action steps from visitor panelists' comments. Incorporating staff expertise and visitor preferences will allow the Denver Art Museum to build on its well earned reputation as a visitor centered institution and create museum experiences that are as dynamic and innovative as its new building.

INTRODUCTION

The Denver Art Museum's special temporary exhibition, "Frederic Remington: The Color of Night," provided an opportunity for museum staff to develop new types of writing activities for visitors. Two different types of poetry writing booklets were placed at each of two seating areas in the gallery, encouraging visitors to reflect on Remington's paintings of nighttime themes and subject matter. Since a poetry writing activity is also planned for the Western galleries in the Museum's new wing, the Remington activities were used as a pilot study. Education staff members conducted visitor panels, a familiar audience research technique that was pioneered at the Denver Art Museum over ten years ago.

In 1996 I was contracted by the Museum to write an article for *Museum News*¹ describing the benefits of visitor panels and a handbook outlining the nuts and bolts of the process.² Since that time, I've been using visitor panels in my own practice as a museum consultant and have found them to be effective in a wide variety of museum settings—from art museums to botanic gardens—and contexts—from interpretive planning to exhibition design. Each project has required inventing slightly different techniques for gathering information, analyzing discussions, tabulating written feedback, and using the findings to help staff plan exhibitions and programs. Returning to the Denver Art Museum eight years later to share my work with visitor panels has provided the opportunity to continue the mutual learning process.

The goals for the current study were twofold: 1) to conduct a summative evaluation of visitors' interest in the poetry writing activities in the Remington exhibit and consider implications for similar activities in the new galleries and 2) to provide professional development for the staff by using this study as an opportunity to explore new ways of analyzing the findings of visitor panels. These dual goals called for a synergistic approach that combined my experience with reflective practice on the part of the staff.

My role was not just to share information and make recommendations, but to collaborate with staff members by posing questions that would lead them to discover the right solutions for the Denver Art Museum and modeling a process they can adapt and use in the future. This approach is based on a model known as process consultation, which is defined as "a set of activities on the part of the consultant that help the client to perceive, understand, and act upon the process events that occur in the client's environment in order to improve the situation as defined by the client."³ It comes as no surprise that the rate of implementation of a consultant's recommendations is far greater in projects like this where staff members participate directly in discovering the solutions than in projects where the consultant identifies the solution for them.

Visitor panels increase the synergy of process consulting by adding the visitors' voice to the mix of consultant and staff expertise. Throughout this report the words of visitor panelists, which are italicized, ring loud and true.

¹ Fischer, Daryl. "Connecting with Visitor Panels." *Museum News*, May/June 1997: 33-37.

² Fischer, Daryl and Carr, Jackie. *Visitor Panels: A Handbook for Improving Interpretive Materials Through Audience Input*. Denver Art Museum.

³ Schein, E.H. *Process Consulting: It's Role in Organizational Development*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. 1988.

PROJECT GOALS

In January, Lisa Steffen, Master Teacher for Western Art, contacted evaluator Randi Korn to ask for help in creating a script for visitor panels that would 1) enable staff to use the Remington activities as prototypes to help them develop poetry writing activities that are appealing, easy to use, prompt reflection and produce pleasing results; 2) provide a sense of how “nugget labels” contribute to the visitor experience. (See Appendix A, Visitor Panel Script.) The visitor panel protocol created by Randi Korn and Associates lists the following objectives:

- determine whether the poetry writing activity enhances how visitors experience the artwork
- identify any other effect (positive or negative) the poetry writing has on visitors
- identify how much structure visitors need to feel comfortable with the poetry writing activity
- determine how nugget labels contribute to the visitor experience and to what extent visitors would like to see them in exhibitions

In March, Patty Williams contacted me to ask for advice on interpreting the visitor panels since several education staff members will be using this technique to develop interpretive approaches in the new building. She was interested in having the panel discussions transcribed and exploring techniques for analyzing the transcriptions. I recommended a focused reading of the transcript by staff members, followed by a debriefing meeting.

In the debriefing meeting, which was held on June 9, staff shared their own goals, which fell into two categories. Those related to the visitor panel process in general included:

- Gain a better understanding of visitors’ responses
- Learn how to interpret panels and figure out where to go from here
- Look critically at what visitors say to open up possibilities in the museum
- Become reflective practitioners
- Explore how the experience of serving on a visitor panel impacts these and other visitors and whether it can be replicated in an exhibition or program

Project specific goals included:

- Figure out whether writing experiences are important/valid and why
- Learn how to make adults feel more comfortable doing kidlike things
- Develop ways to nudge people outside of their comfort zone, expand their range of acceptable and enjoyable museum experiences
- Explore the fine line between comfort level and deeper experiences
- Figure out how information and looking interact (or don’t) for visitors
- Serve those who value expert opinions and those who don’t
- Determine specific details that will make this kind of experience more effective in the reinstallation

METHODOLOGY

Visitor panelists were recruited in February and March while visiting the Denver Art Museum. The recruiting tool was a short questionnaire (see Appendix B, Recruiting Script) administered by museum interns. Four two-hour visitor panels were conducted, two on Saturday, March 6 and two the following week on March 13.⁴ The March 6 visitor panels, which were composed of individuals who self identified as visiting the museum one or more times per year, had eight in the first panel and ten in the second; the March 13 panels, composed of those who self identified as visiting once every two to four years, had five in the first group and seven in the second, making for a total of 30 participants. While the findings of visitor panels must be viewed as qualitative data, the impact of small studies multiplies when combined with the reflective practice of experienced staff members.

The March 6 panels were thought of as frequent visitors; the March 13 as infrequent visitors. In my experience, the threshold for frequent visitation is more likely to be 2+ visits per year. In future studies I would recommend considering three categories of visitation:

- Nonvisitors: those that have never visited
- Occasional visitors: those that visit less than once a year
- Frequent visitors: those that visit 1-3 times a year

Demographic data were gathered through a participant survey (See Appendix C). Overall, the March 6 and March 13 groups were quite consistent with one another. (See Appendix D. Note: this replaces the original Excel spreadsheet, which miscalculated totals and percentages). The following characteristics apply across four panels:

- There was an even gender distribution with 50% female and 47% male participants.
- In terms of age distribution, there was greater representation of young adults (30% ages 18-24) and middle aged (23% ages 45-54) than other age groups, especially older visitors. Only 10% of panelists ($n = 3$) were over 55 and none were over 65.
- The majority of panelists were Caucasian (80%), while 13% were African-American ($n = 3$). Panel 3/13A included one Asian panelist and 3/13B, one Hispanic.
- Highly educated, the majority of panelists (47%) had a college degree and a significant number (27%) had advanced degrees. Ten percent of the panelists had high school degrees ($n = 3$) and 7% had junior/technical college degrees ($n = 2$).

All panel discussions were moderated by Patty Williams, who was not a member of the Remington exhibition team. The sessions were initially videotaped; the videotapes were subsequently converted to audio tapes for transcription.

⁴ In this report the four panels will be referred to as 3/6A, 3/6B, 3/13A, 3/13B.

CONSULTANT'S ANALYSIS OF AUDIOTAPES

Before reading the transcripts, I received videotapes of all four sessions and shared my initial reactions and recommendations in two emails. Generally, the responses of the four panels had much in common, as would be expected from their similar demographic profiles.

Poetry Writing Activities

In talking about the activities, many panelists in both the March 6 and March 13 groups said they weren't used to having this kind of experience in an art museum. Considering most peoples' perceptions of art museums as proper places where visitors must be quiet and follow the rules, activities like these have tremendous potential to change public perception. With its well established reputation for being a visitor-centered institution, the Denver Art Museum can take the lead in redefining visitor experiences, just as it has in redefining museum learning. Several panelists emphasized the importance of telling visitors before, during and after the activity that this is not their typical museum experience. They need to know that the Denver Art Museum is different than other art museums they've visited and encouraged to move beyond their initial reservations to try something new.

The issue of age appropriateness came up again and again in the first three groups. Panelists noted distinctions between kids' and adults' responses throughout the discussions with both positive and negative comments. For example, in response to the question of what they disliked about the poetry books, one person said it looked like children had written in them. On the other hand, a panelist said that a kid's poem reminded her of when she was a child. Whether their associations were positive or negative, the issue of adult-like versus child-like was an important one for the first three panels. There seemed to be a basic assumption in the minds of many panelists that interactives are for kids or families rather than adults. When asked how the museum might improve the experience for other visitors, a member of the third panel said, *Tell that it's not just for kids*. Since people of all ages learn by doing, adults are likely to enjoy and benefit from interactive experiences if they can overcome stereotypical assumptions.

Though few adults relish anything that reminds them of school, the poetry writing activity called up associations with formal education for several panelists. A teacher said the acrostic writing activity was something she uses often with her 3rd graders, while another panelist said the poetry reminded him of his 10th grade English teacher.

The fourth panel differed from the first three in that no one mentioned the difference between adults' and kids' responses until the very end of the discussion when the moderator asked whether there was anything else they wanted her to know. When it came up, it didn't seem to be as much of an issue for this group, some of whom expressed a preference for separate kids' and adults' activities and others who said they enjoyed seeing kids' responses along with adults'.

Deeply seated values and expectations about museum decorum play a big factor in visitors' use of interactives. A conversation about whether they tore their pages out of the books led one member of the third panel to say that in the museum setting you're not inclined to touch anything, much less pick it up and tear it apart!

Several panelists mentioned the impact of examples—both good and bad—and the importance of presenting good examples in a conspicuous, thoughtful, and engaging way. Making more of carefully chosen examples would not only show the range of positive, thought-provoking responses to works of art; giving the visitors’ voice a prominent place in exhibitions would create a dialogue between the museum and its audiences.

How we refer to museum experiences has a huge impact on visitors. For example, using the word “poetry” created a challenge for many panelists, who said it scared them, especially *if you’re not gifted*. They associated poetry with fear and with using your brain. One panelist said, *When I think of poetry, I think I can’t possibly do that*. Another felt that the name poetry wasn’t accurate. *Usually when you say poetry you think in terms of rhyming lines. I didn’t think it was poetry at all, just a simple description*. This suggests that staff should consider alternative names for creative writing activities. The following definitions from Webster’s New World Dictionary may help.

- Poetry: the art, theory, or structure of poems. (This sounds quite pedantic and not very intriguing.)
- Poet: a person who expresses himself with beauty of thought and language. (Many people might aspire to this. Notice that there’s no mention of rhyme or structure—just beauty.)
- Poem: an arrangement of words, written or spoken, traditionally a rhythmical or metrical composition, sometimes rhymed. (The idea of an arrangement or composition suggests a nice correlation with visual art.)
- Poetic license: disregard of strict fact or rigid form, as by a poet, for artistic effect. (This might be more in keeping with the goals for creative writing activities. It might even be a fun name!)

As several panelists observed, poetry is associated with creativity. Everyone is creative in some ways, but many people need help seeing themselves in this way. In future visitor panels, try incorporating an icebreaker question like, “Although we’re not all artists or poets, we’re all creative in some ways whether it’s how we dress, how we plant our gardens, or how we see connections between things. How do *you* exercise your creativity?”

All in all, there were far more positive comments than negative. Many comments suggested that once panelists engaged in the poetry writing activity, it enhanced their appreciation and enjoyment of the paintings. One appreciated the opportunity to *give a little art back*. Another said that once you start to write about a painting, you think about *all the stuff that’s in there*. Yet another used the term *forced art appreciation* and explained that the activity caused him to look at the paintings more and focus on the details, which, in turn, inspired his ideas.

Panelists considered the blank pages of the “black book,” which told visitors how to create an acrostic poem, and the fill-in-the-blank format of the “blue moon book,” which helped them create a poem from different figures of speech. They identified pros and cons to both formats. Many felt that the more prescribed approach of the blue moon book was a good warm up for the more open ended approach of the black book. The alternative format of a blank journal—particularly a nice, leather bound volume—appealed to many panelists as being more adult.

The majority of the negative comments expressed were about details of execution rather than the concept. The impact of the physical aspects of the booklets on the visitors' experiences was mentioned repeatedly by all four groups who said that the booklets are awkward to handle and hard to write on because of their flimsy backs. Several panelists suggested that chairs and desks would make writing easier and that even portable folding stools could make visitors more inclined to sit down and spend time on these activities.

Nugget Labels

Though only object labels were used in the Remington exhibit, visitor panelists were asked to give their feedback on three sample "nugget labels". Several said the extended labels helped them notice details they would have missed in the paintings, such as the ricochet shots in *Fired On*. Panelists also expressed appreciation for the artist's quotes. *"Stampede by Lightning" was particularly interesting to have a quote from Remington. Because it gave you some idea about his feelings as he was doing that work. I thought that was another dimension that you don't typically get.* (3/6B)

One panelist said *I enjoy reading the BS that's next to paintings. And the bizarre take that art historians have on paintings. That's always enjoyable to me. But besides putting the painting on the wall giving it your imprimatur of goodness, you are also telling a person how to look at the painting. And there's always a danger or maybe that's what you want to do.* (3/6 A) Comments like this emphasize how different the perspective of museum staff members is from that of museum visitors.

A college professor who tries to train adults to look at works of art before reading labels and to form their own opinions referred to information as a *double edged sword*. Talking about a specific label she'd read, a panelist said that labels, if not clearly related to the paintings, could throw off what she was looking at, causing her to lose her train of thought. *As I first focused on this picture I'm looking at what's going on and then I went over here and then I'm reading so I'm moving my picture now. And then I get down here and I lost what I was concentrating on.* (3/13A) Talking about labels in general, another panelist said, *Sometimes it directs you in such a specific way to look at the work that if you allow it to it can be somewhat limiting.* (3/6B)

At least two panelists mentioned the "fine line" that exists between information about works of art and personally meaningful experiences with art. *[M]ore information about the painting is good but you're always sort of traveling that fine line where it can become distracting from the painting itself if you have a big poster next to it telling you all the historical information about it.* (3/6B) In the words of another, *We're really walking a fine line between too much information and not enough information. And then we have to say what type of information we want.* (3/6A) By developing a taxonomy of art historical information and presenting examples from different categories, it's possible to evaluate visitors' preferences for different types of information.

All in all, panelists expressed more positive than negative comments about nugget labels. Many said that they were "necessary" while others said they were "enjoyable;" but there seemed to be consensus that extended labels are a basic expectation of museum visitors. The Museum would be wise to consider alternative label formats suggested by panelists, such as placing large section labels away from the works of art. *I'm a big fan of the blurbs. But I don't necessarily like them*

right next to the paintings. In the El Greco to Picasso exhibit you walked into a room, there was a big deal on the wall about the gist of the room and then it pointed out a few of the paintings in the room. That I like because it does allow you to focus more on the paintings themselves and if you're interested in the information you can go to that point and see it. (3/6B) An alternative to wall mounted labels is printed guides visitors can carry with them, perhaps incorporating thumbnail images to help them key into individual works. This approach would give visitors much appreciated choices—*something that you can pick up if you'd like to*—and help to avoid the bottle necks that often occur at labels in temporary exhibitions. Whatever label format is used, it's important to suggest that visitors look at the works of art before reading the labels.

STAFF ANALYSIS OF TRANSCRIPTS

Staff members read unedited transcripts, which require more work on the part of readers than edited transcripts. They were encouraged to reread comments that seem important, sifting out unnecessary words and highlighting the most important words, as in the following example:

Mostly the amount of people that were there. For me at least. Just—I got really...I don't pretend to be good at poetry. I mean I don't necessarily read it all the time either. But I just felt so intimidated maybe that like people were reading over my shoulder or just that I couldn't just sit there and focus. Like you said before that you're blocking someone else's view or that you're blocking someone's view. (3/6A)

Staff members will come up with their own ways of organizing their observations of visitor panels, as the notes from individual staff members revealed; but these are often idiosyncratic and if everyone uses the same filters it makes for a better dialogue and a more strategic use of the findings. That's why staff members were asked to read the transcripts with several “filters” in mind, looking for comments and suggestions that fell into each category. After viewing the videotapes I proposed several possible filters to Patty Williams, who gathered input from staff members and selected the following:

- **Changes in visitors' attitude, attention, perspective or behavior.** Defining learning as “an experience that leads to a change in behavior or attitude” is relevant to the kind of lifelong learning that can occur in museums.
- **Visitor comfort level.** To expand visitors' comfort zone in the museum, staff considered both enhancements, e.g., human mediators or creature comforts, and impediments, e.g., feelings of competition, judgment, or the crowds and congestion that often accompany special exhibitions.
- **Age appropriateness.** One of the biggest hurdles for visitors, the perception that museum activities are for kids, is rooted in two factors: 1) the nature of the activity and the associations visitors have of school, work, and play; 2) the appearance of the interactive devices themselves and the responses of other visitors that are recorded in them.
- **Expectations about appropriate visitor decorum** and the museum experience. The old “Look but don't touch” rule is one of the first things kids learn about museums and it's deeply engrained by the time they get to be adults, creating an obvious disconnect with interactive experiences.

- **Surprises.** Staff members looked for those responses that surprised them the most— comments that might make them think differently about something in the future.⁵

In addition to color coding responses with highlighters or Post-It flags, I recommend that staff members each make a list of the visitor panel comments that fall into each filter. That will make it easy for them to select the most important responses to bring to the debriefing meeting.

DEBRIEFING MEETING OUTCOMES

On June 9 I met with staff members from education and publications to analyze the transcripts and use them as the basis for future plans. The debriefing meeting was attended by education staff members Sonnet Coggins, Gretchen DeSciuse, Carla Hartman, Melora McDermott Lewis, Heather Nielsen, Lisa Steffan, and Patty Williams. They were joined by Lisa Levinson and Jena Stanford Siedler from the publications department and interns Elizabeth Tucker and Sarah Allen (See Attachment E, Agenda.)

Staff shared their observations about the differences between analyzing video tapes and transcripts. Videos afford the opportunity to identify the speakers and observe body language, like nods and gestures, and to hear the points of emphasis in verbal comments. Transcripts allow readers to focus more attention on panelists' words and to sort them into categories of responses. One person talked about loving the words panelists used, saying that they were "almost poetic" in themselves. Ideally, staff members will have both the first hand experience of attending visitor panel sessions and the reflective experience of reading transcripts of the discussions.

To lay the foundation for an understanding of visitors' perspectives, I shared copies of an article entitled "Exhibit Evaluation: Taking Account of Human Factors."⁶ It introduced the concepts of

- **Short term memory**, which translates the images we perceive, begins to recognize and organize them, and holds limited amounts of information for a fraction of a second
- **Long term memory**, which activates information and experiences by remembering them, serves as a vast network of information, and holds infinite amounts of information
- **Chunking**, a way of relating information in short term memory to long term memory through existing connections and may help to explain the differences between novice and expert museum goers
- **The external myth**, which is the staff's understanding of an exhibit or experience conveyed in terms of items, terminology, ideas, relationships and operations.
- **The conceptual model**, which is the visitor's understanding of what s/he sees and experiences in the museum

Understanding how visitors process new information and the differences between the external myth and the conceptual model are useful concepts for staff to keep in mind as they interpret the comments of visitor panelists. In order for exhibits or experiences to be effective the external myth must match the visitors' understanding. This is not likely to happen unless the staff can understand and guide the conceptual model.

⁵ In the debriefing meeting time did not permit an in-depth discussion of the fifth filter.

⁶ Alter, Paul and Rita. "Exhibit Evaluation: Taking Account of Human Factors." *Curator* 31/3: 167-177.

With this background in mind, staff analyzed the transcripts by considering the five filters one by one. Each staff member selected two of the visitor panelists' comments they thought were most relevant to each filter, wrote them on Post-It pads, and stuck them on a flip chart. Together the group arranged the comments in clusters, which they described with words and phrases.⁷ Finally, the group brainstormed a list of action steps for each filter—things they will continue, things they will modify, and new ideas they will explore. Following is the work of the group in each of the five filters.

FILTER 1: CHANGES IN ATTITUDE, ATTENTION, PERSPECTIVE OR BEHAVIOR

Staff members each selected two highlights from transcripts of the four visitor panels and grouped them into the following clusters:

- **It changed their perspective of the works.**
 - *I thought the activities in a very concrete way put me in the painting. I was in there. I was trying to imagine what they were feeling. How the cool night air felt on their cheek, what they were listening for. For each of those paintings I was in the painting. So that was very different. Before I just looked at it academically. Technique, materials. This time I was in it. That was different. I had never done that. (3/6B)*
 - *It was kind of like forced art appreciation. Because it causes you to focus more when you're having to write a poem about it. It causes you to focus more on the detail of the painting to inspire your ideas. (3/13B)*
 - *Usually when I come to an art museum I look at the pictures and I just try to visualize all the details that went into it. But for the poetry activity it took a different perspective. I was more into what I could see in it, what it meant to me. To write something about it, instead of just looking at the designs and all the details. (3/6A)*
 - *I'm usually not really interested in the story that a painting might be presenting. I'm just looking at how it's painted. And this I kind of got a little bit more into that narrative quality of the work. (3/6B)*
 - *Those kind of interactive exercises really help you become more involved in what you're seeing. (3/13B)*
 - *I would be very likely to look for these the next time I come to the museum. To help me have a deeper experience, to help me look further into what I'm seeing. (3/13A)*
 - *It's not necessarily the words I wrote that impressed me; it was the thought process behind it because I'd been to the show before and just my new ideas and my new connection with it. (3/6A)*
 - *You can change your experience every time you come. (3/6A)*

⁷ These have been expanded into sentences that describe each cluster on pages 12-20.

- **It helped them to see connections, both with other visitors and among the works in the exhibit.**
 - *Once you've seen the essential that can be really profound. Sometimes that can take you away from an experience with—I don't want to use the word epiphany, but I can't think of a word that's scaled down from that. The scales might fall from your eyes, you might be standing beside someone and they look at a painting and they say, Oh, my God! And you're thinking the same thing. Right away I think, Man, I've got a connection with this person. And I think it's important for us to have connections like that. (3/6A)*
 - *That's interesting to read other people's writing. It's interesting to read their understanding of all these paintings. I just read something, I never thought about it. (3/13A)*
 - *It's just another way of opening up, responding to what you're seeing and pulling everything together. It's not just a visual thing, it's an emotional thing, a spiritual thing. (3/6A)*
 - *It made me go through the whole—all the paintings and I kind of pulled a theme out of them. (3/6A)*

- **They thought the experience was good for them and were met with success.**
 - *My initial reaction was annoyance. I thought I was in tenth grade again. But once I got into it I thought, You know, this is like exercising chunks of my brain I don't use very often. So at the end of it I found it quite enjoyable. You have to pierce that wall of skepticism first. (3/6B)*
 - *You know, it's also good for us. What followed my mild panic was the thought of Okay, so you're a little out of your zone, you're going to try something new—why not? (3/6B)*
 - *I found I could do this and felt I was creative by the time I finished. (3/13B)*
 - *[W]hen I finally figured it out I thought that was pretty enjoyable. It came out successful. It's not a professional thing, great poetry. But it was a challenge to actually figure out how to solve it. It was fun. (3/6B)*

After exploring these clusters, staff members identified steps they will take in three action areas.

1. Things we will continue:

- Entice visitors to step outside of their comfort zone; to expect different types of experiences at the “extreme art museum”
- Change peoples' notions of typical museum behavior, encouraging them to seek out new kinds of experiences, such as writing
- Offer experiences that not only challenge visitors but let them feel successful
- Revisit Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow and its application in museum setting
- Have a long term impact on visitors, helping them to create new habits and build new skill sets they will use beyond their museum visit
- Encourage visitors to become more self reliant
- Encourage constructivist thinking
- Offer other lenses for looking deeper

2. Things we will modify:

- Rethink our use of the word “poetry” for writing activities
- Explore ways to reduce visitors’ initial feelings of intimidation
- Promote the benefits of new ways of looking

3. New ideas we will explore:

- Test the correlation between acquiring information and having expressive experiences
- Offer poetry and other methods of writing that help people tap into personal meaning
- Help visitors to make the right personal choices among the many activities available to them
- Use human beings as mediators/facilitators
- Use testimonials to convey the change from fear to success.
- Make more of opportunities (in gallery, on line, in print) for visitor-to-visitor communication.

FILTER 2: EXPANDING VISITORS’ COMFORT LEVEL

Staff members each selected two highlights from transcripts of the four visitor panels and grouped them into the following clusters:

- **Providing visitors with options increases their comfort level.**
 - *Even though I think I would personally leave it. Just having the option to take it. (3/6B)*
 - *I don’t think I would have intentionally wrote in it if I didn’t know if I could or could not take it. (3/13A)*
 - *I like to write but if anybody says it, I’m not going to do it. (3/13A)*
 - *People in general have a natural hunger to be served with choice. Say a security guard was standing at an entrance to the floor and gives you a pamphlet with choices that you could do for that exhibit, I think people would tend to be attracted to that and not really feel like they’re being forced to do something. That served thing is very important. (3/13B)*
 - *I think there should always be more chairs. Every museum I’ve ever gone to I’ve always wished for that. (3/6B)*
- **We need to be perfectly clear in giving visitors permission to participate and letting them know what to expect.**
 - *Something that definitely says to the viewer you have permission to do this. You’re welcome to do this. (3/6A)*
 - *(Neither of these) tell me that I have permission to pick them up and do something. This looks like something people sign at a wedding or a funeral. (3/6A)*
 - *In neither case was it clear that you could tear it out. It doesn’t say that at all. Unless somebody told us we wouldn’t know. (3/13A)*
 - *Better signage...or an example blown up or something saying this is what you can do and feel comfortable to tear it out. It’s something more for you than for everyone. (3/6A)*

- *I'm a little bit of a writer myself so it didn't bother me. I just didn't know for sure—more fear of not knowing what you really wanted. (3/13B)*
- **Creating a sense of privacy increases visitors' comfort level.**
 - *I think that if you had an atmosphere that was a little more private you would get different results. (3/6A)*
 - *Mostly just the amount of people that were there...I don't pretend to be good at poetry. I don't necessarily read it all the time either. But I just felt so intimidated that maybe people were reading over my shoulder that I couldn't just sit there and focus. Like you said before, that you're blocking someone else's view. (3/6A)*
 - *I felt like to do this I wanted to look at the poem myself and I brought a little chair over and sat down. I wanted to be and look at the picture. But with all the people walking around I felt a little rushed. (3/6B)*
 - *I felt like I was multi-tasking and when I got to a museum I don't want to be multi-tasking. I want to look at that piece of art and appreciate it the way I want to but in that room I felt like I was multi-tasking with all those people there. You're listening, you hear this and that. This wasn't my ideal experience, let's put it that way. (3/6A)*
 - *I kept hearing peripherally what the tour guide was explaining about the painting and it wanted to make me go back and look at that one rather than looking and focusing on the one I was looking at. (3/13B)*
 - *I work in sales and I have most of my life so I've learned to block out a lot of distraction because you have to when you're trying to make a sale and you learn to listen to what your prospective customer is saying. So the crowd was just going in front and behind me and I was just focused on that. (3/13B)*
- **Physical aspects of the space and the activity impact visitors' ability and inclination to participate.**
 - *I did the poetry outside. I stepped out when I was writing. But in terms of the light and the atmosphere in the room, I thought it was great for viewing the paintings. (3/13B)*
 - *Maybe toward the front. Where is it? Is it in the back where the chairs are? By that time you've already gotten in your little zone. You're not going to stop and say, Oh, now I can pick this up. (3/13A)*
 - *I had to settle down long enough to figure out what I was supposed to do.*
 - *They were very hard for me to hold on to. Trying to flip the sheets...because you get into this and they already have some in here. And you have to get to the next page. You've got to find—and some of them were pretty full. So you're trying to flip and you're trying to hold them pen and my pen fell apart. It was just very awkward for me. (3/13A)*
 - *I would like to say something about the black one. I found the two pens at the bottom very difficult. My ribbons kept getting tangled and I kept losing the caps and I found it really difficult to function with it. (3/6B)*

- **Visitors want to look competent, to feel that they belong.**
 - *It was real busy up there. And that makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable. Am I standing in somebody's way? Is somebody getting in my way? This gave me something to focus on—and I felt like I more belonged in the room. I felt almost important writing something. (3/6A)*
 - *My initial thought was I'm intrigued with this. And just a bit intimidated because now all of a sudden if you choose to participate you don't want to look like an idiot. You want to look like you've got something on the ball. (3/6A)*

After exploring these clusters, staff members identified steps they will take in three action areas.

1. Things we will continue:

- Offer experiences that create a feeling of belonging

2. Things we will modify:

- Increase options for customized experiences by providing a variety of options for privacy, proximity, timing, prompts (metaphor of a well equipped kitchen)
- Make it clear that there are no wrong answers
- Be clearer in giving permission to participate
- Be clearer about options for participation, e.g., taking or leaving writing
- Develop more ergonomically designed and user friendly formats
- Allow adequate time and resources for design and production (including development and testing of prototypes)

3. New ideas we will explore:

- Create options for privacy and/or connecting with other visitors through
 - Egg chairs, partitions, desks
 - Interactive locales/zones within the galleries
- Create options for responding in the museum and beyond, e.g., leaving, taking, sharing, broadcasting and responding to other visitors
- Incorporate visitors' responses in the gallery fabric
- Make it easy for visitors to identify interactive experiences throughout the museum
- Use human beings as mediators/facilitators
- Use humor to overcome the fear of appearing foolish

FILTER 3: MAKING ACTIVITIES AGE APPROPRIATE

Staff members each selected two highlights from transcripts of the four visitor panels and grouped them into the following clusters:

- **Some visitors appreciate kids' perspectives and feel they add to their experience.**
 - *I like to have kids' stuff sprinkled through adults. Because sometimes kids can give you a whole new perspective on things. Because the older we get sometimes the more tunnel vision we get and kids are just wide open. (3/13B)*

- *I kind of like the idea of combining both of them. It's a little more creative to have both in one book. Having both adult ideas and kid ideas in the same book just seems more interesting and more appealing I guess. More fun. (3/6B)*
 - *It's not something necessarily that's just for kids or just for adults. You know obviously little kids have done the drawings and then there's much more intelligent writing that's obviously by older people. So it's kind of a broad experience that can bring the whole thing together. (3/6A)*
 - *There was a little third grader who had written in mine and her poem was beautiful. At first I thought it was a little elementary, but then you realize that everybody thinks the same way and the third grade poem, my poem, you know. I really enjoyed that. (3/6A)*
 - *There's one poem in that black book probably written by a kid—it reminded me of something when I was a kid. (3/13A)*
 - *I actually had empathy, because I teach third grade. And I ask my third graders to write these exact type of poems, the acrostic poem and the other type, and so I could relate to how they probably felt. You know, with me saying You need to write a poem about this as a teacher giving an assignment like that you're like, All right, get it done. But all of a sudden having to do it myself... (3/6B)*
- **Some visitors have negative associations of childhood and are more interested in adults' responses.**
- *There you are playing with crayons. You know, that's beneath me to be with children's. (3/6A)*
 - *I just don't want to see crayon in it. If the kids were writing in pen it wouldn't bother me. (3/6A)*
 - *I looked at them and...it was like children has written in it. So I'm thinking, I can't write in a children's book. I didn't want to be intellectual so I'm trying to...make it childlike when the rest of them seemed so childlike. So that was probably a challenge. (3/13A)*
 - *If I saw other adults and some of their thoughts or drawings then I'd be more inclined to do it. (3/6B)*
- **By providing intuitive clues we can help visitors gravitate to activities geared to adults or kids.**
- *[I]f it were displayed in certain ways like maybe a desk—something adults might naturally gravitate towards, an atmosphere that's kind of kid repellant. And then other things that were kid attractive, you might just naturally... (3/6A)*
 - *Make it for the adults. You know bring in a nice antique desk. Put it in the corner somewhere. Have a couple of them, arrange it where people are literally sitting at a desk and writing. And being comfortable. (3/6A)*
 - *Maybe if you had something that was specifically for children and specifically for adults. Because if I saw a bunch of children's drawings then I don't know if I would be as inclined to write my thoughts down. But if I saw other adults and some of their thoughts or drawings then I'd be more inclined to do it. (3/6B)*

- *I think if you had something where the cart is, something that advertised it a little bit more. Normally if I walked by that I would have said this was an activity for children—so maybe some kind of a placard or something.*
- **We need to send the message that it's good for adults to play.**
 - *As we get older it's really hard to pull yourself out of your comfort zone and just play. Yeah, play and just kind of let go and do something that you aren't a master at and experiment. I don't know how you get people to try to do that more. (3/6B)*
 - *I think more adults need to be encouraged to do this. The kids don't need to be encouraged. The kids will jump to it right away. They love that. But adults, it's good for us to get back to that. (3/6A)*
 - *I guess I felt like mine was kind of childish. It's not very in-depth or anything or deep. (3/13A)*

After exploring these clusters, staff members identified steps they will take in three action areas.

1. Things we will continue:

- Offer interactive experiences to both kids and adults
- Use Seymour to attract kids
- Display examples of adults' and kids' activities separately and more prominently
- Encourage creative play for all ages

2. Things we will modify:

- Develop different styles and visual vocabularies for adults' and kids' materials and environments
- Encourage exploration of both adults' and kids' activities
- Encourage visitors to try something new, to experiment

3. New ideas we will explore:

- Choose materials (books, writing implements, furnishings) that suggest appropriate age levels
- Create settings that suggest age levels through intuitive clues
- Use artists' quotes about the value of childlike perspectives
- Learn more about adult creativity
- Identify the benefits of play and creativity for adults
- Distinguish between big "C" and small "c" experiences
- Share testimonials about the value of play and learning new things
- Give examples of where and how adults play
- Explore live programs where adults can play
- Give adults permission to take risks, try something new
- Create mini opportunities to "break the rules"
- Incorporate thumbnails or other visual images with writing

FILTER 4: EXPECTATIONS ABOUT VISITOR DECORUM AND THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

Staff members each selected two highlights from transcripts of the four visitor panels and grouped them into the following clusters:

- **Museum Rules: No Way, Man!**
 - *There's no way that people are going to come in a museum—they kind of understand that it's a different kind of protocol. You can't be touching things and ripping stuff out and picking up stuff. No way man, unless it has little kid things on it. (3/13A)*
 - *If it's inside the exhibit room there is a disconnect about maybe I'm not supposed to touch anything. (3/13B)*
 - *Most people in a museum would think if you tore a page out it would be like defacing property or something like that. (3/6A)*
 - *There's an etiquette that you bring to church, to a museum, whatever. (3/6A)*
 - *Lots of people draw at a museum. You know this isn't that much different. It doesn't involve you being very loud or anything like that so it's not disruptive to anyone. (3/6A)*

- **The DAM is not your typical art museum.**
 - *This is not something that the Metropolitan Museum in New York would do. They might sort of laugh at it, but a smaller venue like the DAM, I think this is great. I mean, the fact that you even have these little places where you can sit and read the books. That's a whole learning experience. (3/6A)*
 - *I had a feeling that when I walked into this show this was a new way of presenting. You haven't presented any other show in this way before. I feel you're experimenting somehow. (3/6A)*

- **In the tension between museum values and visitor values lies the potential for stimulation.**
 - *The other thing the museum does is preserve. So you have those two—you have that tension, plus you have some other authority by putting it on the wall as good. (3/6A)*
 - *To me the point of a museum is to stimulate. Now what is it that you want to stimulate? Do you want to stimulate interaction? Or do you want to stimulate thought? Or stimulate emotion or controversy? The things that endure are art. Art endures. Architecture. Thoughts. Why are governments so afraid of thoughts and ideas? (3/6A)*
 - *Don't tell me what I'm looking at. Put it in context and ask me some questions. Think about it over a glass of scotch and a cigar. (3/6B)*

- **The social context of a visit impacts interactive experiences.**
 - *If I was here with my wife, she would have been impatient with my leisurely stroll through the museum indulging myself in writing my thoughts. So I think you just have to be careful who you come to see exhibits with. (3/6A)*

- *If I had the time to sit I'd want to look more at an adult type of thing. Now if I was with my daughter I'd draw more toward my daughter and we'd go more toward the children's aspect of it. (3/13A)*

After exploring these clusters, staff members identified steps they will take in three action areas.

1. Things we will continue:

- No touching of artworks
- Facilitate physical engagement
- Build on our reputation for offering different types of visitor experiences
- Instill “Colorado Style” museum decorum

2. Things we will modify:

- Reexamine and clarify messages about places where it's OK to break the rules
- Provide formats that make it easy for visitors to remove and/or post their work

3. New ideas we will explore:

- Consider the optimum number of experience choices
- Develop promotional and point-of-purchase messages about how the DAM is different
- Offer drawing/writing materials and folding chairs to all visitors
- Plan live programs designed to change visitors' perception of museum experiences, e.g., sketching month
- Incorporate interactive responses and activities in docent tours
- Feature interactive experiences at exhibition openings
- Explore new roles for artists in the galleries

RECOMMENDATIONS

The lessons learned from the visitor panels and the action steps identified by staff members have broad application to the development of exhibitions and visitor experiences throughout the new building. The action steps can be summarized by thinking in terms of five areas of emphasis: Change, Comfort, Choice, Communication, and Collaboration.

Change

Changing peoples' notions of typical museum behavior is among the Museum's greatest and most important challenges. Consider developing and promoting "Colorado Style" museum experiences or positioning the Denver Art Museum as the "extreme art museum." Look for ways to encourage risk taking and make it clear that the museum is a safe environment for experimentation, actively and articulately promote the benefits of new ways of looking, share testimonials about where and how adults play, and encourage creative play for all ages throughout the museum. In addition to in-gallery experiences, live programs provide excellent opportunities to change peoples' perceptions. Interactive experiences can be featured at exhibition openings and incorporated in docent tours.

Comfort

The importance of comfort in the museum environment cannot be overemphasized. Developing more ergonomically designed and user friendly interactive formats will certainly increase visitors' comfort level. This will require additional resources of time and money for design and production, including the development and testing of prototypes. But beyond the physical aspects of comfort it's important to consider the visitors' psychological needs. Sherman Lee's analogy of the museum as a "wilderness" may help staff members understand why it's difficult for visitors to take risks in such an unfamiliar environment. Visitors need to be encouraged—gently and repeatedly—to step outside their comfort zone, which will vary from visitor to visitor. Each person needs to be able to find that delicate balance between challenge and success that occurs in "flow" experiences.

Choice

Directly related to comfort is choice. Today, people are used to the mass customization that is available in so many realms of business and pleasure. In order to compete for ever shrinking amounts of leisure time, the museum must offer options that will enable a wide variety of visitors to customize their experiences. People expect to have choices of what, when, where, and how to engage in activities. They want to find options for experiences that provide privacy or opportunities to connect with other visitors, for ways to respond in the museum and in the world beyond. By clearly identifying and describing interactive experiences throughout the museum, staff can help visitors to understand their options and make the right personal choices for their visit. Since timing is an important element of choice, I recommend that writing and other interactive experiences are promoted at times that aren't so likely to be crowded. It may be a good idea to put activities that require quiet concentration away during peak tour times.

Communication

Communication with visitors must occur on two levels: 1) museum to visitor and 2) visitor to visitor. To communicate more effectively with visitors, make no assumptions, be explicit in giving permission, explain options for participation, choose clarity over subtlety. Use different styles and visual vocabularies for adults' and kids' materials in order to send intuitive messages about appropriate age levels. Use testimonials to put faces on Denver Art Museums visitors—faces visitors can recognize themselves in. Use the human presence to enhance communication with visitors whenever possible. Staff, interns, docents, other volunteers, and members of community groups can all help the museum to communicate with visitors.

Speak clearly in labels and other interpretive devices. I believe the question of how extended or “nugget” labels contribute to the visitor experience and how many labels are optimum requires further study. In the debriefing meeting I suggested a quick and versatile technique for gathering visitor feedback on label drafts that can be used in future visitor panels or in less formal studies. I also showed several applications for thumbnail images, made easy and cost effective by recent advances in the technology of scanning and color printing. Small reproductions of works of art can be incorporated in labels and other interpretive devices, making alternative label formats clearer and more attractive. They might also be an integral part of writing activities, letting visitors choose small digital images printed on Avery labels to stick on their pages.

To enhance visitor to visitor communication, create new channels for visitors to share their museum experiences. Explore in-gallery, electronic and print media. For example, visitors who need more time to complete poems and other activities could email their finished work to the Museum and see it posted on the website. Weave visitor responses into the gallery fabric by prominently displaying examples of adults' and kids' activities. This will create a sense of dialogue, a two-way conversation that is at the very heart of a new kind of visitor experience.

Collaboration

Coupled with the dynamic architecture of the new building, interactive experiences can help redefine the Denver Art Museum. By collaborating with marketing and public relations staff, museum educators and writers can create effective ways to send the message that visitors will find “Not just a new museum—a new museum experience” or “Not just a new building—a new way of seeing.” Even before they get to the front door, the public needs to know that interactivity is one of the things that sets the Denver Art Museum apart from other museums they've visited.

Where to go from here

As staff members develop new interactive experiences and interpretive devices for visitors, they should refer back to the action steps outlined on pages 14-15, 17, 19, and 21. Prioritize these steps according to High, Medium, or Low urgency/impact and then assign responsibilities and time frames to the top priorities. Assign someone the responsibility for monitoring progress on a quarterly basis and updating action steps as needed.

Staff can expand upon their extensive visitor panel experience by incorporating the techniques described in this report. The recent visitor panels have provided valuable input from current visitors. I recommend that future visitor panels incorporate feedback from target audiences that

are not currently visiting the museum. Phone recruitment by a telemarketing firm is the most effective way of recruiting nonvisitors if funds are available; if not, museum volunteers or interns can be trained to use telephone screening interviews. Even when recruiting from current visitors, they can seek out those in under represented age and ethnic groups.

I recommend incorporating the use of written feedback in the visitor panel process. Asking visitor panelists to do written assignments (in addition to sample activities like the poetry writing) while they are in the galleries has several benefits. First, it allows you to gather feedback on important issues from all panelists, whereas not everyone responds to all the questions during the discussions. Secondly, it helps panelists to individually weigh in on issues before they participate in the discussion. Having thought about questions in the gallery and recorded their responses on short questionnaires, they're better prepared for the discussion and less likely to be influenced by others. Written feedback also allows you to collect more data, tabulating the responses to ratings and coding open ended questions.

In Conclusion

The words of David Carr have inspired museum professionals engaged in a wide variety of visitor centered endeavors, but the poetry writing activities considered in this study are particularly aligned with his interests in reading and museums. Carr challenges the museum to “remind us in every way that the contents of the museum are not complete, that the environment still evolves, that art continues to be made, and that history is never in the past.”⁸ Creative writing activities demonstrate that “new acts of language—new words, new combinations, and new descriptions of knowledge and feeling—are essential parts of museum learning.” Carr sees the museum as a “perfect venue for learning to express halting words in a safe, non-didactic environment.” I can think of no museum better positioned to realize this potential than the Denver Art Museum.

⁸ Carr, David. “Reading Beyond the Museum.” Unpublished essay for a forthcoming issue of *Journal of Museum Education*.

Appendix A, Visitor Panel Script

Introduction

Welcome to this focus group to discuss some new ideas we have for visitors in our galleries. My name is XX, and I'm a (job title) at the Denver Art Museum.

I know all of you must be very busy, so I want to thank you for taking time out of your schedules to be here today.

There is a formal name for this kind of gathering. It is called a visitor panel. Visitor panels are used to test public response. We are meeting today because the Denver Art Museum wants to hear your feedback about ideas we are developing for our new galleries.

Although I work for the museum, I am not the person who created the activities and labels we will be discussing today. I am telling you this because I want you to feel comfortable to have an honest discussion. All that you say, positive and negative, will help the Museum. Do not worry about hurting my or anyone else's feelings.

We are audio and video taping the discussion to ensure that I have an accurate record of our conversation. No names will be included in any reports. Your comments are confidential. We have name tents in front of us tonight. They help me remember names, but they can also help you. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Don't feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions. I am here to ask questions, to listen, and to make sure everyone has the chance to share. It is important that everyone has a chance to speak.

Our session today will last about two hours. After we have all introduced ourselves, we will take the elevator up to a gallery featuring a Remington exhibition. We would like you to spend as much time as you like in the gallery, but no more than 45 minutes. While you are in the gallery we are asking you to give special attention to two particular elements of the exhibition because they are the topic of our visitor panel today.

First, we would like you to spend time with two poetry activities in the gallery. [At this point, hold up the two poetry writing books and show them to all participants]. They look like this. We would love you to try the activities, please write in them and read through them. If you have already visited the Remington exhibition on a previous visit to DAM and tried the poetry activities, please look carefully at them or try them again. Don't worry; you will not have to show or share your work with anyone else unless you want to. Once you have completed the activities, you can tear off the pages you were working on and take them with you. When we come back to this room, we will be asking you questions about what you thought of the activities, but again, you will not have to share what you wrote unless you want to.

Secondly, you will notice once you are in the gallery that most of the paintings have brief identification labels only; they list the title of the painting and the year it was produced. But for purposes of this visitor panel, we have included two additional labels with a bit more information. We will point them out to you, and we ask that you please read these two extended labels because we will be talking about them when we return to this room.

In addition to those two tasks, make sure you spend some time in the gallery looking at the paintings as you would on a normal museum visit.

As I said, you can spend up to 45 minutes in the gallery. If you finish before then, you are free to come back to this room. Someone will be around to show you how to get back. When we've all returned to this room, I will ask you a series of questions about the poetry activities and the extended labels. Also, we ask you to complete a brief survey in between your time in the gallery and returning to this room.

Now, let's go to the gallery. When we return, I'll have you introduce yourselves.

[45 minutes in gallery]

POETRY ACTIVITIES

To get everyone warmed up, let's first go around the room and have each of you tell us your first name, the last museum you visited, and what you liked about that visit.

First I want to talk about the two poetry activities [show them the two books again]. For purposes of clarity, let's refer to the two books as the "black book" and the "full moon book." And remember, we want to hear your honest feedback.

1. When I first said you would be trying a poetry activity in the gallery, what was your initial reaction? How did that make you feel?

And now, having done the activity, what are your general reactions?

What did you like about the poetry writing activities?

What did you dislike?

What did you like about reading the poems?

What did you dislike?

Was there anything about the overall gallery atmosphere that affected your experience?

2. How many of you completed at least one of the writing activities?

What were you thinking as you completed the writing? Please give examples.

How do you feel about your finished product? What makes you feel that way?

How important is it to you that you be able to take your poem with you? How comfortable or uncomfortable would you be leaving your poem in the gallery?

3. For those of you who did not complete a writing activity, please tell us what you did.

What was it about this activity that made you not want to do it?

Is there anything we could have done differently in our presentation to interest you in writing a poem?

4. Now I would like you to compare the two books.

Was one better for you than the other? Why? [Probe for ease of use, design, final product]

Tell me about the physical aspect of the books and how these things work.

Which, if either, inspired you to write more readily? Why? Please give examples of what you mean by being inspired (share your writing with the group if you want).

Let's imagine that a third activity would have been a blank journal, which posed a question such as "What does the West mean to you?" [Show them an example of journal and question]. Please now compare the poetry writing activities to the journal activity in terms of ease of use and inspiration. What if the prompt asked you to write a freeform poem in response to that question?

5. Now thinking of the poetry activities overall, how did they affect the way you experienced the exhibition? [In other words, how was this experience different, if at all, from experiences you've had in art exhibitions without poetry writing activities?]

Please give me concrete examples to explain what you mean.

[Probes if necessary: did the poetry writing activities affect the way you looked at, felt, or thought about the paintings or exhibition as a whole? If yes, please give examples]

6. Based on everything we've discussed, how could we improve the poetry writing activities?

How could we make them easier to use?

How could we motivate you to use them?

How could we make it mean more to you?

EXTENDED LABELS

Now I am going to ask you a few questions about the two extended labels. To remind you, here they are [pass out the text of the two labels along with a photocopy of the paintings they correspond to].

7. Overall, what did you think about the extended labels? Explain why you think that.

What specifically do you like and/or dislike about the labels?

8. How did the extended labels affect the way you looked at or thought about the paintings in comparison to the paintings with no extended labels?

9. How did the extended labels affect the way you looked at or thought about the exhibition as a whole?

10. How many of you would like to see more labels like this in this exhibition? Why? Why not?

[Depending on what is said in response to this question, probe to find out if participants think the labels are necessary, just enjoyable, or wouldn't miss them]

11. About how many paintings in a show of this size should have extended labels: less than $\frac{1}{4}$, about $\frac{1}{4}$, about $\frac{1}{2}$, about $\frac{3}{4}$, or it does not matter to you?

Appendix B

No. _____
Date : _____

Recruiting Script – Remington Visitor Panel

My name is _____ from the Denver Art Museum. We are conducting a brief survey to find out how we can better serve our visitors.

Have you already been asked to participate in a survey today? (If yes): Thank you and have a nice day! (If no):

Do you have one minute to answer some questions? Thank you.

1. Is this your first visit to the Denver Art Museum as an adult? (18+ years)

- Yes No

2. Which of these two statements are closest to describing you?

- I visit an art museum every 2-4 years.
 I visit an art museum 1 or more times each year.

3. We're going to be having a couple of short discussions in early March. I can offer you a \$25 honorarium if you'd like to participate. Can we call you with the details?

- No – Thank you and enjoy your day.
- Yes – There will be a discussion on Saturday, March 6th and another on the 13th. Does one of those sound realistic for you?**
- Yes – have them write down their full name, email and phone number. Thank you. We'll be calling you within the next week. Enjoy your day.
- No — Thanks.

Name _____	Phone: _____
Email: _____	

Appendix C

Participant Survey

1. Gender Female Male

2. Age 18 – 24 25 – 34 35 – 44 45 – 54
 55 – 64 65 – 74 75 +

3. With which group do you most identify?

- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Puerto Rican
- Caucasian/Euro-American
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander/Samoan/Native Hawaiian, etc.

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- No diploma or degree
- Bachelor's degree
- High school diploma
- Master's or doctoral degree
- Junior college or technical college
- Other