

Enliven Your Museum Experience: Strategies for Engaging and Interacting with Art

by Mary Jane Oliveri

Every work of art can be seen as a complementary part of an undefined, unified whole of past human experience—a trail that leads to our doorstep and continues on with any of us open to exploring and continuing the conversation. Let's invite the conversation!



Use the following questions and activities to explore artwork. Whether in a museum, in front of an apartment building, in a park, or in your home, artwork invites dialogue. Art has something to say.

Open questions can be provocative, personal, and powerful. Open questions are a tool to engage and interact with art.

Before Your Museum Visit

In preparation for your museum visit, go to the website and preview the collections available. Select three or four works of art that you would like to explore more deeply during your visit. If this is challenging to do in advance, at least decide which collection you would like to explore more intentionally. You can decide which artwork to spend quality time with once you are in that collection.

Consider bringing a journal or notebook with you to record your thoughts and ideas, and to draw or doodle. If you are new to this tool for engagement, try it out with a few works of art and see how it feels. You may be surprised!

Photocopy or transcribe the below questions to take with you. Although you may not want to work through all the questions, having them at hand can be helpful.

Lastly, give yourself plenty of time—each artwork offers a world to reflect on, appreciate and learning from.

First Impressions

When answering these questions, look only at the title of the artwork and the name of the artist.

- *What is the first thing you notice about this artwork?*
- *What words or ideas come to mind?*
- *How does this artwork make you feel? Why might this be?*
- *What is going on in this artwork?*
- *What else do you notice?*

Going Deeper

- *What do you know about this artwork or the objects in it? What is familiar/unfamiliar?*
- *What more can you say about the different characters/elements of the artwork?*
- *What more can you say about where and when this is happening? Consider factors such as era, season, time of day, or moment of action.*
- *Where was the artist standing in order to create this artwork? Why may this be?*
- *What colours, textures, types of lines and shapes are used to communicate? Why may this be?*

About the Artist

As we consider the artist's perspective, read the information on the wall about the artist and the particular piece you are looking at.

- *What do you think interested the artist in this subject?*
- *What may be different had the artist created this artwork today? In your city?*
- *What would you like to ask the artist if she/he was here?*
- *What may the artist say about this artwork?*
- *What style or techniques did the artist use? Why may this be?*

It's Time to Draw

Take a closer look at the lines, colors, textures, patterns and shapes that you see in the artwork. Select a portion of the artwork that interests you and draw/re-create it in a 6" x 6" square. Use your impression and interpretation of the artwork. Be creative!

- *What do you notice about your drawing?*
- *How would the feeling of the artwork change from the original, if you drew the entire piece in this way?*

Stimulate Your Senses

- *How could you animate this artwork to show movement?*
- *What music does this artwork evoke for you?*
- *Place yourself in the artwork. What do you see, hear, feel, do, smell, or taste? Who are you in relation to the overall theme or topic in the artwork?*
- *What may have happened before or after what is depicted in the artwork? What suggests this to you?*

Sum It Up

- *What is the principal theme in this artwork, for you? What would you change or add to the artwork to have it be more related to this principal theme?*
- *What important message(s) does this artwork offer for you today?*

So, which museum are you going to visit next? Which 2-3 questions do you know you want to take with you to deepen the dialogue and learning?



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