

# Art as experience

DANCING MUSEUMS, 7th November, National Gallery, London

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To visit a museum in an active way you should be curious and use your imagination.

Exploring the museum is like travelling through time and space, it means you can move freely back and forth through all sorts of borders - between different cultures, for example, or between the real world and the world of imagination.

The workshop Art as experience considers museum galleries as a hypertext, a network of explorable links, a space for freedom to make connections between artworks, ideas and emotions, following what interests you more.

Discovering artworks (and the world) with new eyes.

Exploring requires movement.

The first movement is to open your eyes.

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- What kind of knowledge should the experience of art aim to produce?
- How can we stimulate encounters between people and artworks that are both sensuous, meaningful and transformational?
- What constitutes truth in the experience of art?
- What is the place for emotion and imagination in the experience of art?
- What is the place for irrationality and surprise in the experience of art?
- How can we create a structure or atmosphere that fosters a sense of explorations and discovery?

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## From the *vision* of art to the *experience* of art

Usually, within the confines of an exhibition hall, the museum visitor is encouraged to be contemplative rather than to explore actively.

How can we seek new ways to live the experience of art?

To search for a more dynamic involvement of the participants it is necessary to recover the dimension of *feeling*, as opposed to the rational dimension of *thinking*.

The journey starts from the desire to reconsider the format of the guided tour and the transmission of knowledge. The purpose is not only the transmission of knowledge but the experience of the original work. The live and direct contact with the artworks.

The tool to bring the people closer to art is the *body*.

Putting at the centre of the experience the participants's body means to recognize the complex nature of each person.

Each person is a whole, made up of body, personal memories, emotions, ideas, culture.

During the museum experience it is necessary to foster participant's sensory perceptions, encouraging physical sensations, stimulating the imagination and the emotions because they are the most valuable ways to produce knowledge.

To do that it is essential to shift the focus from the *objects* (the artworks) to the *subjects* (the visitors).

The relational space between the visitors and the artworks is the place where museum education occurs.

Museum mediation means to be at the centre. Between two parties. It means creating *meeting spaces*: meeting between objects, themes and people, meeting between people, between generations of artists, a space of encounter between different opinions or between ways of seeing and ways of being.

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## **Experience**

The concept of experience is crucial. For example according to John Dewey, "an experience is a product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world". It's important to distinguish between an *intellectual experience*, rational and abstract, compared to the *sensory experience*, bodily and concrete.

## **Aesthetic experience**

### **(sensorial)**

The experience of art should produce an aesthetic experience. The museum is the ideal space to make an aesthetic experience, the best place for a live and direct relationship with works of art. In the aesthetic experience we are engaged with all our senses (thus with our body), our emotions, our memories and our thoughts. It's an experience that involves one completely. Today we are used to living with our senses "anesthetized". We 'see' a lot of things but we can't observe them, we listen but can't hear, we are subjected to many stimuli, but we can't seem to pay attention.

## **Relational experience**

### **(encounter)**

*A work of art is born from the encounter between the object and its observer.*

The encounter with art is an individual experience that is strengthened when it's shared. Art can foster relationships in all directions. The relational space is not only between artworks and visitors but above all and foremost between people who shared the experience.

It's an encounter between objects and subjects, between people and ideas, between generations, etc.

## **Transformative experience**

### **(change)**

The experience of art has to be a space for individual and social transformation and not just mere transmission of knowledge.

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Every artwork we look at exists on an infinite horizon of possible interpretations. In the moment we begin to speak about it, that horizon of interpretation begins to contract. Every piece of information we present to a group of viewers – every idea, every point of view- changes and limits the way the participants see the work of art and interpret it.

## **How to explore the museum?**

**There are no rules, just suggestions.**

Treat everything as if it was an experiment.

Know your environment, observe the works for a long time and look for original connections.

Read, study, then come back to observe!

Observe the behaviour of other visitors...

To what are they attracted?

On what do they dwell? For how long?

Exploring the museum

Exploring your senses

Know yourself

Know the world

## **Engagement**

There are two dimensions of engagement: a more rational one, the pleasure of *understanding*, and another one, much more intense, that involves emotions and personal memories, the pleasure of *feeling*.

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## BREAKING THE CODE OF BEHAVIOUR.

The process of designing an art mediation format should be a shared one.

The design of a mediation sequence is a creative process - every single interaction with the public is creative and to a certain extent, an intuitive performance.

On the following pages, you will find a first aid kit for designing art mediation formats.

The kit consists of a set of 48 messages, each with a strategy to consider, or reject.

**CHANGE THE STRUCTURE OF COMMUNICATION.**

**GET CLOSER TO THE CONTENT.**

**SENSE THE NEEDS OF THE BODY.**

**REFRAME THE EXHIBITION.**

**PAY ATTENTION TO AUDIBLE SIGNALS.**

**USE SOMETHING KNOWN AND PROVEN.**

**TAKE YOUR FIRST IDEA SERIOUSLY.**

**CHANGE THE RHYTHM.**

**BELIEVE IN CRAZY IDEAS.**

**BE REALISTIC WITH THE SCHEDULE.**

**DO SOMETHING HANDS-ON.**

**DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVE MORE PRECISELY.**

**CREATE A RELAXED ATMOSPHERE.**

**KEEP AVAILABLE RESOURCES IN MIND.**

**CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE.**

**WORK VISUALLY.**

**FOLLOW SECRET DESIRES.**

**SUPPORT EACH OTHER.**

**CHANGE THE MATERIAL.**

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BE MYSTERIOUS.

START OVER AGAIN.

CHANGE THE METAPHOR.

CHANGE THE LOCATION.

GO MORE INTO DETAIL.

RELOCATE THE ROUTE.

CHANGE THE FOCUS.

TRY UNUSUAL COMBINATIONS.

BE MORE POETIC.

ASK FOR HELP.

STIMULATE ACTION.

PRETEND TO BE FREE.

USE CLICHÉS.

SWITCH GENDER ROLES.

CREATE A BIGGER PICTURE.

BE FRIENDLY.

BE RUTHLESSLY ECLECTIC.

IT'S SIMPLER THAN YOU THINK.

BECOME SENSUOUS.

SLOW DOWN AND BE CURIOUS.

DO WHAT IS FOREIGN TO YOU.

BE AWARE OF SOCIAL STRATA.

THINK IN EXTREMES.

CHANGE THE FORMAT.

SORT SOMETHING OUT.

GIVE CLEAR AND PRECISE MESSAGES.

ALLOW THINGS TO MATURE.

PAY SPECIAL REGARD TO THE START AND THE

RESPECT SPACE.

END.