

How does Information about Creative Process Affect Audience Appreciation of Artwork?

Takumitsu Agata (t-agata@xg8.so-net.ne.jp)

Graduate School of Education and Human Development,
Nagoya University, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan

Takeshi Okada (okadatak@p.u-tokyo.ac.jp)

Graduate School of Education,
The University of Tokyo, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan

Abstract

In this article, we proposed an exhibition style which shows visitors not only the artwork itself (i.e., art exhibit) but also information about its creative process (i.e., process exhibit), and examined the effect of this exhibition style. Thirteen pairs of participants were encouraged to talk freely while looking at the art exhibit (their conversations were recorded with IC-recorders), and were also asked to complete questionnaire surveys before and after looking at the process exhibit. The results showed that after getting information about the creative process, they were able to consider the artist's concepts and thoughts more actively and appreciate this artwork more deeply. The process exhibit also facilitated the audience's connection of the exhibit to their life experiences. Thus, our study shows that knowledge about the artist's creative process did, in fact, deepen their understanding without disturbing their aesthetic experiences.

Keywords: museum learning; art appreciation.

Introduction

Recently, learning in museums has been in the spotlight as a sort of informal education. A museum is a place where people visit with their families or friends to enjoy themselves, and to learn through intellectual curiosity.

What are the unique characteristics of learning in museums? The answer can be roughly classified into two categories. One category includes features of objects exhibited in museums. Leinhardt & Crowley (2002) claimed that objects in museums facilitate a kind of example-based learning. They also identified four features of objects that make them unique opportunities of learning: veridical resolution and a density of information, actual scale, authenticity, and high level of value. The other category is about collaborative learning. By interacting with others such as families, friends and curators, people can learn from exhibits more effectively (Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004).

In recent years, studies concerning visitors' activities in museums have increased (e.g., Leinhardt, Crowley, & Knutson, 2002), and fruitful findings have accumulated. However, these studies mainly dealt with science museums, historical museums, or children's museums, and few studies shed light on art museums. In addition, most studies targeted children or the parent-child unit, and adult museum learning has not been well analyzed.

Considering an art museum as a learning environment, there is a situation needs to be improved. Especially in Japan, many people think modern and contemporary arts difficult or incomprehensible, and it seems that visitors are puzzled about how to appreciate and learn from it. Many educational programs for children that support their appreciation of artwork have been developed through linking museums to schools (e.g., Housen, 1992). However, while over 90 percent of visitors to art museums are adults (Falk & Dierking, 1992), few practices or programs for adult visitors exist. How can we help adult visitors to appreciate modern and contemporary arts?

Concerning the style of exhibiting artwork, the question of whether or not information about the curator's interpretation should be provided to visitors has been a controversial issue in the art museum world (McLean, 1993). People who claim that artwork should be displayed without any other information stress the importance of visitors' free interpretation, that is, meaning-making. Though we agree with the idea that museums should respect visitors' meaning-making, situations often occur in which viewers are so bewildered that they can't even begin the process of making a meaning. On the other hand, people who insist that information about the curators' interpretation of artwork should be presented assert that it is nonsense to think that visitors can understand artwork adequately by just seeing it. We also think that visitors need some kind of information about artwork for appreciation. However, it is also true that the curators' interpretation easily compels visitors to think as the curators do and to interrupt visitors' process of meaning-making.

Although both approaches to exhibiting art have problems, most artwork has been exhibited in one of the two styles mentioned above. This situation may play a role in making visitors think modern and contemporary arts are incomprehensible. Thus, it is meaningful to develop a new exhibition style that will enable adult visitors to appreciate artwork more happily and learn from it more effectively. In this article, we present the exhibition style that shows artwork with information about the artist's creative process, and investigate the effect of such a style on visitors' appreciation. Artworks are usually exhibited in museums without such information even though they are sometimes situated in art history as well as in the past works of those artists. In order

to facilitate audience understanding of artwork, it would probably be useful to exhibit not only artwork itself but also information about the creative process. Moreover, showing an artists' series of artworks chronologically, has become a standard style in art museums in recent years (Schubert, 2000). In such a monographic way of exhibiting, visitors naturally turn their thoughts toward the artist's creation. Thus, the new exhibition style which shows the artist's creative process matches with this trend.

Method

Target Exhibition

The target exhibition of this study, which was called "Conversation Piece", was held at the Nagoya University Museum, from January 19th to February 18th, 2005. This exhibition consisted of two sections: one was the art exhibit, and the other was the process exhibit. The two exhibits were physically separated so that all visitors could see the art exhibit first, then the process exhibit.

Art Exhibit. The artwork is based on a collaboration between the artist Shinji Ogawa and eleven undergraduate students of Nagoya University. Shinji Ogawa is a contemporary artist, who has exhibited his paintings and digital video works at many museums and galleries in Japan and several places in the United States.

The workshop was conducted in the classroom of a freshman seminar course at Nagoya University that the second author organized. The overview of the workshop is as follows:

- 1) Ogawa showed the students sixty old photographs of people from Europe and the United States.
- 2) The students who were divided into three groups created fictional family stories based on the photographs.
- 3) Students were then given old clothes, bags, and other "historical" objects to use as evidence of their stories to make them look like real historical events.

This workshop started October, 2002 and ended March, 2003. However, Ogawa spent two years in total for this project including the planning, workshop, and exhibition.

The art exhibit roughly consisted of three parts:

a) Introduction

Panels described an overview of this project and the sixty old pictures mentioned above were displayed.

b) Three fictitious family stories created by the students

In this section, students' works were exhibited. It consisted of three fictitious families' stories, family trees, and relics.

c) Fictitious painter's works created by Ogawa

After students' workshop ended, Ogawa created a fictional painter, Raymond Chaucer, who connected all three family stories. Ogawa made paintings and drawings and signed "R. C." on these pictures as if Chaucer made them. In this exhibition, Ogawa played the role of Chaucer as if he really existed and Ogawa's name was intentionally concealed. In

this part, Chaucer's personal history, pictures, and stories of how he related the three fictitious families were exhibited.

Process Exhibit. In the process exhibit, information about the creative process of this artwork was exhibited. For about two years, we have collected data about the process of making "Conversation Piece". We videotaped each class and the staff meetings before and after the class. Also, we collected materials and notes that the artist prepared for this project. In addition, we interviewed Ogawa at his studio for six times, approximately four hours each. In the interviews, we asked him to recall what he was thinking while making the artwork. With using these data, we described Ogawa's creative process of "Conversation Piece" to show at the exhibit. The displayed information consisted of four parts.

a) The summary of Shinji Ogawa's personal history and his previous artwork

Because Ogawa played the part of a fictitious character in the art exhibit, we introduced him to the audience in the process research section. Information about his previous artwork was added to explain the making process of "Conversation Piece" because some sources of this artwork's ideas were his previous works.

b) The framework of "Conversation Piece"

Ogawa wrote for this section about what he wanted to express in "Conversation Piece". Below is the summary of his explanation which was exhibited.

- *This art project expresses "Branching and Integration" following a weaving metaphor.*
- *Warp: "Branching" off three fictional worlds from the same 60 photographs through collaboration between the artist and 11 students.*
- *Woof: "Integration" of those worlds through the 101 year old fictitious painter, Raymond Chaucer.*

c) Description of the making process of "Conversation Piece"

We described Ogawa's making process of "Conversation Piece", focusing on how he "wove" the concepts in this artwork. The process was displayed in the form of a chart and eight episodes. Overall, we described how Ogawa came up with new ideas and threw them away again and again.

d) Three hypotheses on artistic creative process

We analyzed Ogawa's creative process and summarized it as follows:

- 1) *Artists create a new concept of artwork through applying ideas from their past works and discarding them. Through this process, they gradually become aware of what needs to be abandoned and what must be kept.*
- 2) *Others take important roles in their decision about what to discard and what to adopt.*
- 3) *Artists create a new concept of artwork by linking it to their own "theme of representation".*

Participants

Thirteen pairs (undergraduate and graduate students, mainly Humanities and Social Sciences majors and also their

friends) voluntarily participated in this study when we recruited in classrooms. They were not paid for this participation. In addition, since this exhibition was held at the Nagoya University Museum, university students were regarded as an authentic audience. The mean participant's age was 23.2 years. Females comprised twelve. Thirteen participants described themselves as infrequent art museum visitors (0-1 visits per year), and the rest as occasional visitors (2-3 visits per year). Almost all participants answered that they like to appreciate art. None of the participants knew Ogawa's artworks at that time.

Design and Procedure

A student was asked to bring his/her friend to the museum. They were encouraged to talk freely while looking at the art exhibit (their conversations were recorded by using IC-recorders). They were also asked to complete questionnaire surveys (1) after looking at the art exhibit (pretest) and (2) after looking at the process exhibit (posttest). In addition, after looking at all sections, we conducted brief interviews with each of them. Participants' conversations and responses from the interviews were transcribed and used for analysis.

The mean time for appreciation of the art exhibit was 48.3 minutes ($SD=11.37$) and that of the process exhibit was 26.8 minutes ($SD=7.43$). Perhaps this relatively long time for appreciation indicates that participants of this study were highly motivated and there was a lot of signage to read in both the art and the process exhibits. The experiment procedure (including art and process appreciations, questionnaires, and interview) lasted approximately two hours.

Results and Discussion

What kind of effect does the information about the artist's creative process have on visitors' art appreciation? We examined this question from the following three aspects.

- 1) Effect on visitors' view of the artwork "Conversation Piece"
- 2) Effect on visitors' view of the artist, Shinji Ogawa
- 3) Effect on visitors' images or ideas of arts and artists in general

We first compared the difference between the data from two questionnaires to see whether or not information about creative process affected visitors' art appreciation. Then, to investigate how it affected them, we analyzed what visitors learned and talked about at the process exhibit.

Effect of showing information about creative process on visitors' view of the artwork "Conversation Piece"

Did participants change their view of this artwork after learning its creative process? We asked them this question directly in the posttest with scales ranging from 1 (not changed) to 5 (changed). The mean answer to this question was 3.81, with twenty-one (81 percent) responding that it

changed. Thus, information about the creative process influenced participants' appreciation of this artwork.

We also asked them how it changed in the form of free-description and interviews. The responses were divided into three categories. Cohen's Kappa as the inter-rater agreement statistic was ranging from .80 to .82. The most frequent answer fell into the category of "awareness of artist's creative process" (15 instances), followed by "awareness of the artwork's concept" (14 instances) and "awareness of the artwork's structure" (7 instances). Maybe it was natural that participants became more aware of the creative process because they were provided with that information. However, this new viewpoint of appreciation seemed to interest many visitors. After seeing the creative process, one of the pairs had the following conversation:

7B: *Well, I have never seen artworks in such way.*

7A: *Yeah, I had no viewpoints of "why he drew this" or "why he did such things" before. It is interesting to appreciate art from such a viewpoint. (deleted) I now know that I can appreciate art in this way.*

7B: *Yeah.*

This pair found a new way of appreciating this artwork that they had never noticed before.

See also the following conversation that one of pairs talking during reading episodes of making process.

6A: *He (the artist) considers many things (during creating artwork) after all, doesn't he? [with laughter]*

6B: *Yeah, but he is captured by his past ideas.*

6A: *Oh...Yeah.*

6B: *[with laughter] He is captured by his life.*

6A: *But it is difficult to discard them, isn't it?*

6B: *Yes. He needs to deny himself more or less.*

It seems that the participants relived the artist's mental experiences of creation. They thought about the feeling of the artist during creating the artwork and tried to analyze it. This deep and active appreciation was not found at the art exhibit. Perhaps, to facilitate such an activity, this exhibition style is particularly effective especially in the appreciation of conceptual or abstract art because it is often difficult to grasp artists' creative process in those types of works.

Next, we want to talk about awareness of the artwork's concept. We counted the number of pairs who talked about "Branching" or "Integration" during seeing the art exhibit and the process exhibit. The results showed that although there were only a few conversations that discussed "Branching and Integration" in the art exhibit, almost all pairs talked about the concept in the process exhibit. Precisely, during appreciating art, only three out of thirteen pairs uttered these words, while eleven pairs used it during seeing the creative process ($\chi^2(1)=9.90, p<.01$). Note that the word "Branching and Integrations" were described also in the art exhibit, so they had an opportunity to talk about this concept there. We also asked them if they understood the concept or framework of "Conversation Piece" in the pre and the post questionnaires in the form of 5-point Likert scaling. A *t*-test revealed a significant difference between the two scores (3.58 vs. 4.00, $t(25)=2.28, p<.05$). Thus,

Table 1: The number of participants in each category for impressions of Shinji Ogawa

Category	Definition	pre	post	χ^2	p
Searching for something new	Participants only describe that Ogawa tries to do something new or interesting.	10	5	2.34	=.13
Impression or evaluation of his painting technique and style	Participants describe impressions or evaluations about Ogawa's painting techniques or style.	5	0	5.53	<.05
Impression or evaluation of theme or the world of Ogawa's artwork	Participants describe impressions or evaluations about Ogawa's creation theme or view of world.	3	12	7.59	<.01
Impression or evaluation of Ogawa's creative process	Participants describe impressions or evaluations about Ogawa's creative process.	0	14	19.16	<.01
Nothing	Participants describe that they didn't have any particular impression.	9	1	7.92	<.01

information about the artist's creative process helped visitors to understand the art concept.

This understanding also linked to the activity of meaning-making.

7A: [read label] *He (the artist) came up with the phrase "Branching worlds and Integrating Consciousness" but he didn't know how to integrate them concretely (when he started).* [with laughter] *Well, so...*

7B: *You know, didn't you feel something like incarnation when you saw the paintings of the characters of fictitious stories next to the paintings of the students in that artwork?*

7A: *Ah...*

7B: *Ogawa is great. Because in his mind, he created interaction between himself and students, and made Chaucer integrate it.*

The word "incarnation" did not appear in the exhibited text, and Ogawa did not reflect on this artwork as such. This example indicates that although they read the same texts about the concept of this artwork or about the creative process, each of the participants interpreted this artwork in their own way. In other words, showing the creative process didn't disturb visitors' meaning-making but did deepen their appreciation.

In sum, at first almost all participants appreciated this artwork without considering the concept. However, after getting information about the creative process, they became able to relive the change of the artist's feelings actively and appreciate this artwork more deeply. Also, they saw this artwork over again by taking the art concept into account. Because of these activities, they became more impressed by the artwork and appreciated it differently from before. Thus, as a whole, we can say that information about the creative process affects visitors' appreciation of the artwork positively.

Effect of showing information about creative process on visitors' view of the artist, Shinji Ogawa

The next question is how an understanding of the creative process affects visitors' impressions of Shinji Ogawa. In both the pre and the post questionnaires, we asked

participants whether or not they understood his view of the world and the artistic expression that he was trying to achieve. The *t*-test showed significant difference between the two scores of the questionnaires (2.65 vs. 3.54, $t(25)=5.53$, $p<.01$). The result indicates that they could understand better after seeing the process exhibit.

To investigate the effect more clearly, we asked participants about their impression of Shinji Ogawa in both questionnaires. We categorized their responses and coded five different categories as shown in Table 1. Cohen's Kappa was ranging from .76 to 1.00, indicating that the reliability was pretty high. Before having appreciated the making process of this artwork, the most frequent answer was "searching for something new" (10 instances), and next "nothing" (9 instances). Thus, by just being exposed to this artwork, they got only shallow impressions. They didn't seem to have interests in the core of Ogawa's originality.

In contrast, in the posttest, the most frequent description was "impression or evaluation of Ogawa's creative process" (14 instances), followed by "impression or evaluation of theme or world of Ogawa's artworks" (12 instances). The Chi-square test revealed significant differences of both categories between the pre and the post questionnaires. Thus, by getting the information about the creative process, they became to think more about the artist's creative process or theme. It is interesting that showing the creative process was linked to the understanding of Ogawa's theme or the world of his artwork. But how did it come about? The following conversation is helpful in answering this question.

4B: *I don't know the connection between "Interference" (Ogawa's previous work) and "Conversation Piece".*

4A: *"Family" is a motif here, isn't it? The students made stories through constructing pictures of various people as families. The viewpoints of people who are making stories were "Interference", aren't they?*

4B: *The viewpoints of people?*

4A: *Well, the viewpoint of this artist? It might be the viewpoint of Ogawa...*

4B: *What is the meaning of "interference"? That is, the thing that should exist, but doesn't exist or...*

4A: *Yeah. They link each other in this way.*

4B: *Oh, linking is just that ("Interference").*

Table 2: The number of participants in each category for the changes of images or ideas of artists

Category	Definition	pre	post	χ^2	p
Affinity to collaborative artist	Participants describe that they came to feel an affinity with the artist because they saw the artwork created by collaboration with students.	5	1	3.01	=.08
Recognition of artists' talent	Participants describe that they thought that the artist is a genius who has a great talent.	2	1	0.35	=.55
Change of definition of artist	Participants describe that they extended their definition of artist because they discovered artists who create artworks in such a style that they had never knew.	3	1	1.08	=.30
Affinity to artists caused by changes of images of artists' making process	Participants describe that their image of artists' creative process was changed or that they felt affinity to the "human heart" of artists because of the change of the image of the creative process.	0	14	19.16	<.01
Others	Descriptions that were included in none of the four categories mentioned above.	2	1	0.35	=.55

4A: *I think that it is a little different from linking...*

Here, participants were talking about the connection between Ogawa's previous works such as "Interference" and "Conversation Piece". Through this conversational elaboration, they gradually understood the consistent theme in Ogawa's artworks. They became able to grasp Ogawa's creative process of this artwork more broadly, situating it in Ogawa's life-long creative process.

Moreover, many participants said that they became interested in the artist Ogawa at the process exhibit. For example,

5B: *After seeing his work, I think I want to meet Mr. Ogawa.*

5A: *Me too.*

5B: *I want to see him once.*

In sum, information about creative process made visitors pay more attention to the artist. After having appreciated the making process, they became able to focus on the conceptual aspects of Ogawa's art creation. Also, they started to take Ogawa's long term process of art making into account. After getting to know Ogawa, some of them became strongly interested in the artist.

Effect of showing information about creative process on visitors' images or ideas of arts and artists in general

We set up two questions on this matter: one was how this information affected visitor's images or ideas of art, and the other was how it affected visitor's images or ideas about artist. We investigated them respectively, but the results were quite similar and closely related to each other, in consideration of space of the paper, we introduce only the latter here.

We asked whether and how their images or ideas about artists changed by visiting this museum in the pre and the post questionnaires using 5-point Likert scaling and free-description. To start with, we compared two scores to see whether or not they recognized that their images and ideas of artists had changed through appreciating the art making process. The *t*-test revealed a significant difference between

the two scores (2.96 vs. 3.38, $t(25)=2.28$, $p<.05$). Thus, although about half participants changed their images of artists through appreciating the artwork, more participants changed them through getting information about the making process.

In order to examine this change qualitatively, we compared free-description data. Their answers were coded into five categories as shown in Table 2. Cohen's Kappa was ranging from .83 to 1.00. In the pretest, the most frequent change was "affinity to collaborative artist", and then "change of definition of artist". It reflects that they used to feel artists were distant people or a painter or sculptor. Because the target exhibition, "Conversation Piece", was a conceptual installation consisting of various fictitious materials, and a result of collaboration between an artist and novices, it was a new experience for most of the participants.

In the posttest, the most frequent answer was "affinity to artists caused by changes of images of artists' making process" and this is the only category that indicated a significant difference between the pre and the post questionnaires by Chi square test ($\chi^2(1)=19.16$, $p<.01$). That is, showing the creative process encouraged visitors to feel familiar with the artist's creative process. The following conversation will help us to understand the meaning of this result.

5B: *I had thought that artists are so different from us. But, they are actually similar to us.*

5A: *Yah, Yah, Yah.*

5B: *It (making art) is similar to living a life.*

5A: *Though artists might be embarrassed if I say that they are like us... But, you know, we usually think that artists are special, don't we?*

5B: *Yah. He just worries like us.*

5A: *Yah! [deleted]*

5B: *Yah. Like we worry about job searches and graduation theses, he also thinks in the same way as we do. I feel closer to the artist now.*

They came to think that artists were similar to themselves. As Weisberg (1986) indicated, people still believe the genius myth of artists. Namely, many people thought that

artists create ideas in some mysterious way and make artwork by sparks or flows. Moreover, they think that artists are so different from common people that general people can't understand them. Because most participants of this study had had these beliefs, the exhibited information that Ogawa created artwork with trial and error might be a very surprising one. As a result, many participants answered that their images of artists' creative process were changed, and that they came to realize that the artistic creative process was not special but ordinary and similar to their own thinking processes.

Furthermore, when reading about Ogawa's art making process, they linked it to their own life experiences. In the episode mentioned above, both of the participants were seniors, and had just finished job searches and graduation theses. They remembered their important experiences and connected them to the exhibit. Also, some pairs of graduate students discussed similarities or differences between the artists' creative process and their research process. These are examples of active appreciation in a museum setting. Leinhardt & Knutson (2004) found that visitors who had a personal connection to the content of exhibition were more likely to have powerful learning conversations about art. That is, the phenomena found here was especially important for informal learning settings, including art appreciation in a museum.

In sum, showing the creative process of art made people change their ideas and images of arts as well as artists, and also made them feel closer to artists. By thinking of artists as familiar, people may increase their motivations for understanding art and artists, and begin to appreciate artwork more actively. Furthermore, people came to appreciate exhibits relating with their life experiences.

General Discussion

In this article, we presented a new exhibition style which shows visitors not only artwork itself but also information about the creative process, and examined the effect of this exhibition style. We analyzed it from three viewpoints one by one. The results indicated that showing the art making process brought various positive results to museum visitors.

First, information about the creative process influenced the visitors' view of appreciation of "Conversation Piece". By learning about Ogawa's creative process, many people talked about the concept of the artwork or the creative process, and made meanings differently from before getting to know about it. That is, information about the creative process facilitated active learning, and brought out visitors' deep conversational elaboration. Second, showing creative process made visitors consider the connection between a series of Ogawa's previous artwork and "Conversation Piece". This enabled them to grasp Ogawa's view more clearly. In addition, to appreciate artworks from such a viewpoint would match a monographic way of exhibiting that is in fashion (Schubert, 2000). Third, when reading about Ogawa's art making process, visitors linked it to their own life experiences. They also felt familiar with art or

artists, and became able to see the artist's activity as similar to theirs. We expect that these mental activities will enhance their interests in modern and contemporary arts which they had felt difficult and incomprehensible before.

What can this study suggest to improve the present ways of museum exhibition? For the people who insist that artwork should be exhibited without any other information in order not to interrupt visitors' meaning-making, we can say that this exhibition style helps their appreciation by respecting their feelings or interpretations. For people who claim that some kind of information should be displayed for visitors' understanding of the artwork, information about the creative process would be a strong candidate for deepening their understanding. Thus, showing information about artists' creative process somewhat solves a controversy among art museum people.

However, because these findings were the results of a case study, many questions remain to be answered. Examples of such questions are as follows: How does this exhibit affect visitors' learning longitudinally?; How does this exhibition style influence more experienced visitors? In order to elaborate and generalize the findings of the present study, further studies are needed to examine the effect of this exhibition style on visitors' learning.

Acknowledgments

We thank Shinji Ogawa, the eleven students, and other staff members of the "Conversation Piece" project as well as the subjects of this research for their cooperation. We also thank Kevin Crowley, Karen Knutson, and Brenda Mitchell for their insightful comments on our earlier draft.

References

- Falk, J. & Dierking, L. (1992) *The museum experience*. Washington, DC: Whalesback Books.
- Housen, A. (1992). Validating a measure of aesthetic development for museums and schools. *IVLS Review*, 2, 213-237.
- Leinhardt, G. & Crowley, K. (2002). Objects of learning, object of talk: Changing minds in museums. In S. G. Paris (ed.), *Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations.
- Leinhardt, Crowley, & Knutson (2002) *Learning conversations in museums*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations.
- Leinhardt, G. & Knutson, K. (2004). *Listening in on museum conversations*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- McLean, K. (1993). *Planning for people in museum exhibitions*. Washington, DC: Association of Science Technology Centers.
- Schubert, K. (2000). *The curator's egg: The evolution of the museum concept from the French Revolution to the present day*. London: One-Off Press.
- Weisberg, R. W. (1986). *Creativity: Genius and other myths*. New York: Freeman.