

## Evaluation of the Asian Human Connection Labels South Gallery of the Fifth Floor Denver Art Museum

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Through research the Denver Art Museum (DAM) found that art novices and average visitors want to make a human connection when looking at art. Labels were created to fulfill this need. The subsequent label evaluation focused on how the human connection label met this need. Information the evaluation wanted to obtain was:

- Were the labels being used?
- How were the labels being used?
- Did the labels help the audience to make the human connection?

To answer these basic questions, two evaluation instruments were used: (1) unobtrusive behavioral observations and (2) personal interviews. Each instrument was pre-tested and designed for ease of use by trained evaluators and for the least amount of intrusion into the audiences' museum visit. Both samples were taken at random, and one-half of each sample was "cued." There was a 50-person sample for the direct observations and a 40-person sample for the personal interviews. Previously established DAM demographics and visitor patterns were used as guides to validate the audience samples.

It was found that the labels were being used and the use depended on:

- The labels being found. (Their subtle design makes them blend into the surrounding environment.)
- Audience interest in the art object associated with the label.
- The amount of time the audience is willing to spend in the gallery.

Those who used the labels valued most the label information concerning use of the object, how the object was made and how the object fit into the culture.

From this information it was determined that the labels are fulfilling their goal to make the human connection. However, it was recommended that the DAM audience needs to be made more aware of the presence of these labels. □

## Creating and Evaluating the Asian Landmark Map Fifth Floor Denver Art Museum

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Using orientation research from other museums and research information from the DAM's audience, it was found that the DAM visitor wants and/or needs certain information about the Asian Collection:

- Clarification of which countries are included in the term "Asian."
- Information on where to locate the "ancient objects."
- Identification of collection highlights, key themes and ideas.
- Physical layout of the galleries.
- Interpretive aides to carry, such as self-guides or gallery maps.

To help meet these needs and wants, a self-guide "bird's-eye view" map was created to orient the visitor, especially the art novice, to the Asian Collection. Information to be included on the map was selected through previous visitor behavior pattern studies and input from curators, docents and guards. This information focused on those objects most valuable to the collection, those objects which were the oldest and those objects which were the most popular. Also to aid in orientation were locators and facilities.

Evaluation was through personal interview. Because this was an experimental project, a formative testing system was used. There were 10 interviews, revisions to the map and then 10 more interviews. After 20 interviews, it was determined that a valid map was in place.

Interview questions concerned how the map was used, ease of visitor comprehension for the map, ease in physical use of the map and commitment to use maps of this type on all floors of the museum. Interviews were pre-tested by trained interviewers and necessary revisions to the interviews were made. Interviewees were selected at random, given a map to use while in the galleries and interviewed after using the map. To prevent biasing, no instructions were given to visitors about using the map.

Findings were that visitors had little trouble in "reading" the maps; they noticed the drawings first; they used it as a guide and orienteer; they preferred the "bird's-eye view" over a flat map; and they would use other maps of this type. One recommendation was to add text concerning "why" the art objects were important to the Asian Collection. □