Interpreting Ethiopian Culture: Connecting Process, Product, And Artist

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Abstract

The major purpose of this study was to explore visitors' experiences with the exhibit, "Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity" in general and the role that the video interpretation played in particular. The exhibition team was concerned that African art is often seen as primitive, anonymous, and devoid of creativity, and they developed individual videos for the 11 featured artists in an effort to counter those stereotypes. The major finding is that the videos helped the visitors who watched them to connect the creative process, the artist, and the final product. Visitors also reported that the videos made the people seem more real, personal, and contemporary.

Introduction

In the summer of 1994, the exhibition team at the Michigan State University Museum opened an exhibit on Ethiopian culture that they hoped would break stereotypes about African peoples, cultures, and creative expression. In particular, the team wanted to develop an appreciation for the relationship between the creative process, the products, and the artists who produced them. The exhibition team felt that video interpretation could effectively show this complex relationship. They decided that the exhibit would center around eleven different artists and that each artist would be featured in a separate video. For example, the video of potter Tabita Hantute shows her walking around a large container, pulling up the sides of the pot with her hands. Visitors could also see scenes of Tabita during her interview, as well as her family and neighbors in the village, while listening to an English translation of Tabita's interview about her life, the tradition she practices, and the role that it plays in her life. Through interviews with 20 visitors, this study investigated visitors' experiences with "Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity" and the part that the videos like Tabita's played in their visit. In particular, the interviews explored the effectiveness of the

chosen interpretive strategy as well as visitors' viewing habits and their reactions to the design elements of the videos, such as the first-person narrative.

The completed video interpretation was naturally the result of many difficult decisions and was several years in the making. In creating "Ethiopia," the curators had to face the challenges of interpreting not only culture, but creative aesthetic traditions as well. In an effort to answer these complex challenges early in the process, members of the exhibition team asked visitors in preliminary studies if they would like to see an exhibit about Ethiopian aesthetic traditions and what they would want to see in it. Visitors indicated that they would be interested in the art objects but also wanted to know who had made them, how they made them, and to learn about the artists themselves. With this kind of input from visitors, the curators began to plan the design of the exhibit and the field research required to make it happen.

In addition to visitor input, the exhibition team wanted to address specific concerns regarding the interpretation of Ethiopia's creative traditions as they were articulating the goals for the exhibition. Specifically, the team was concerned that African art is often displayed and seen by the public as primitive, anonymous, and devoid of creativity, and the preliminary visitor studies indicated that this was the case. Robbins (1994) described the phenomenon that African art, such as sculptures, everyday objects, textiles, and articles of personal adornment, serve to communicate meaning within and across generations. In "Ethiopia," the exhibition team wanted to communicate the same richness and complexity described by Robbins which surrounds the creative traditions of Ethiopia. This input from visitors and curators led to the interpretive strategy of shifting the focus from the objects to a more balanced approach that emphasized the artists and the creative process through the videos.

Creating the Exhibit

As the exhibit's focus was on Ethiopian traditions of creativity, the research team wanted to share traditions which the Ethiopians felt were important and which represented a diversity of locations and cultures within Ethiopia. In fact, Volkert (1991) predicted that museums would begin to create exhibits with a recognition of the curatorial bias that is inherent in the choices made for any exhibition. This is one of the reasons that the research team decided to ask Ethiopians which traditions they valued rather than relying on traditional Western perceptions. Once they determined which traditions would be featured, they went to the areas in Ethiopia that were well known for the tradition and asked the Ethiopians there who they felt was especially good at practicing a particular tradition. In that manner, the 11 artists were chosen. Researchers conducted interviews with them and then commissioned or purchased works.

Additional objects produced by artists other than the 11 were also collected for comparison in the exhibit. In its final form, the exhibit was spread across the two University museums in a total of four galleries. Examples of the artists' works were grouped around separate video viewing stations with the comparative works displayed nearby. For instance, many visitors talked about the part of the exhibit that featured the work of Tolera Tafa, who made sorghum stalk models. His video was flanked by cases in which visitors could see his models of the White House, Ethiopian Orthodox churches, and airplanes. Models made by other artists were displayed in a nearby case for comparison. Photographs and labels were also used as complementary interpretive devices, and a printed profile of the artist was attached to the viewing station as well (see note 1). This display structure was consistent across the featured artists and the videos shared a common format; they were all about 2 minutes in length and showed close-ups of the artists creating some of the objects in the exhibit, as well as views of them talking about their traditions and scenes that included their families and homes. The audio portion of the videos consisted of excerpts from the artists' interviews, which were all told from the first-person point of view. Ethiopian graduate students at Michigan State University provided the translated audio so that the narration was in English. In the interviews, the artists talked about the traditions they practiced, how they learned to perform them, and how their work had affected their lives. The video monitors at the viewing stations were placed on pedestals about 3 1/2 feet off the floor, and the exhibit staff set the volume at an intermediate level so that it could be heard by visitors near the station, yet wouldn't interfere with the other videos. Complementing the individualized nature of the exhibit were kiosks that addressed the general themes of traditions and creativity, and explained why the exhibit was created. In one gallery of the MSU Museum, the illusion of an Ethiopian marketplace was created by placing a wall-sized photo-mural of a typical market scene, complete with buyers, sellers and their wares, opposite a display of objects which might be found there. A wall-sized mirror was placed above the objects to reflect the photo mural scene and effectively place the objects in a context.

Decisions About the Video Interpretation

Several factors influenced the choice of video interpretation in the exhibit. The exhibition team hypothesized that the video interpretation would be more widely used by visitors than text labeling. Additionally, they believed it would be the interpretive medium that could most effectively tie together the creative process, the product, and the artist. Motion video, like a live demonstration, is a natural choice to show the creative process. Visitors watching a video can gain an appreciation for the skill and dexterity required to make a woven milk

container by watching the artist carefully weave the fibers tight enough to hold liquids—in contrast to a still photograph, which captures only an instant in that process.

The team also felt that choosing to use a first-person narrative style for the video's audio track would help achieve the goal of bringing the artists into an exhibit that primarily consisted of objects—something that is not traditionally accomplished when the end products of African creativity are exhibited. The decision to use the narrative format instead of a third-person explanation of the process was a bold one for the team to make. They hoped that the individual stories would personalize the exhibit with a face and a voice, and that these individual accounts might activate visitors' narrative mode of thought. This narrative mode was proposed by Jerome Bruner (1985). The team also believed that the narratives themselves might become artifacts, surpassing the status of mere interpretation, a phenomenon which was nicely described by Snyder-Grenier and Caldwell (1992). Chadbourne (1991) argued as well that storytelling is an effective method of interweaving objects and a context, and the team intended that the narratives might convey the rich cultural context of meaning and importance that Robbins (1994) and Cerny (1990) advocated.

The last design decision that shaped the videos was to create a physical context by varying the angles of the scenes so that viewers could see close-up shots of the artist working on the objects as well as wider shots, which included the larger personal and physical environment in which the artists worked: their homes, families, and friends. Even though the focus of the videos was on the individual artists and their traditions, the contextual elements included in the videos were important to the larger theme of interpreting a small piece of several diverse cultures in Ethiopia.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

The decision to use videos as the key interpretive strategy in the exhibition was of major importance, not only in terms of relative expense but also of breaking new ground for interpreting creative traditions. The major purpose of this study was to explore visitors' experiences with the exhibit in general, and the role that the video interpretation played in particular. Even though the exhibition team expected the videos to communicate several themes to visitors, it was not a certainty that visitors would watch the videos in their entirety, or even if they would watch them at all. One might answer that question by conducting a simple observation study, but my informal observations indicated that most visitors watched at least some of the videos during their visit. I decided to use the interview method to ask visitors about their experience in the exhibit to see if they mentioned the video interpretation without prompting and to get a feel for

what it was like to visit "Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity" from the public's perspective. An interview would provide a window to the richness of visitors' experiences that might otherwise be lost through observation only. The first half of the interview protocol was then developed to probe for general experiences. The second half was constructed to elicit visitors' perspectives on the video interpretation specifically. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix and was designed to investigate how visitors perceived the exhibit, as well as to see if the aforementioned goals and design decisions of the exhibition team were successful.

I interviewed 15 visitors to gain an appreciation for the range of viewing habits and experiences in the gallery. After I conducted the interviews, I discovered that there would be a short period of time between the exhibit's advertised official closing and its actual removal. The exhibit department agreed to remove the video monitors in the gallery used in the study so that I could interview visitors who wouldn't have seen a major piece of the interpretive strategy. With such an opportunity, I was able to get some comparative data; I interviewed 5 additional visitors with the first half of the interview protocol. I expected that visitors who watched the videos would successfully connect the process, product, and the artist, and visitors who did not watch would focus on the objects in the exhibit. I also thought that the video watchers would connect to the artists and be able to talk about them and the traditions in more detail than the non-watchers. Some of the information I did not know and was hoping to get out of the study were visitors' viewing habits and the reasons behind them, as well as what elements in the carefully constructed videos that visitors did or did not respond to. This information has major implications for other museums that are considering different technologies or media to accomplish their interpretive goals. One of the major decisions for the design of this study was to interview visitors in groups, particularly families visiting the exhibit. As family groups are a large portion of the visitors to many museums, I hoped that this study would illuminate the experiences of this particular population.

Method

Participants

For this study, I interviewed 20 adult visitors over the age of 18 for the general experiences portion of the interview protocol, and I systematically recruited both single adults and adults in groups as they exited the main gallery of the MSU Museum. In the full-interview group of 15 in the video condition, there were 4 single adults visiting alone, 2 adult couples, 3 single adults with

children and 2 couples with children. The 5 visitors who did not see the videos included 1 couple, 1 single adult and 2 single adults with children. I approximated the ages of the interview participants to range from 19 to 70 years old. The visitors were interviewed at different times of the day as well as during different days during the week and on weekends in an effort to include a diverse group of visitors.

Procedure

The main gallery of the Michigan State University Museum was chosen as the focus for the interviews because it offered seating nearby, and it was the only gallery at the MSU Museum or the Kresge Art Museum that included both female and male artists, and it featured diverse aesthetic traditions. I recruited the first adult or group of adults who exited the gallery after I was ready to begin the interviews. Subjects were informed that the interviews were voluntary and could be terminated at any time and then were asked if they would mind being audio-taped. All of the subjects were audio-taped and 1 of the 15 full interviews was cut short because of a recorder malfunction. At the completion of the interview, subjects were given a set of artist profiles for taking part in the interview. After I finished the interview and field notes, I recruited the next adult or group exiting the gallery. Fifteen of the visitors were interviewed while the exhibit was fully in place, and 5 were interviewed after the video interpretation had been removed. All of the participants were asked questions about the general nature of their experience in an effort to draw out their reflections without specifically prompting for talk about the video interpretation. The 15 visitors who were interviewed when the videos were in place then were asked to reflect on the role of the video interpretation in their experience.

Results

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and the data were analyzed according to the recommendations for qualitative data analysis outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1992, chap. 5). Regularities and patterns which emerged from the data formed the coding categories for analysis and these categories comprise the major parts of this section.

The Videos: Connecting Process, Product, and Artist

Perhaps the most significant and gratifying finding from this study was that the video interpretation appeared to be successful in helping the visitors who watched them to connect the individual artists with their creative traditions and

the objects that they made. As mentioned previously, the exhibition team set out to break stereotypes of African creative traditions by using videos to present this balanced interpretive approach. In traditional exhibits featuring African art, the emphasis is generally on the objects chosen to satisfy Western aesthetics, and the artists and the traditions remain in the background, if they are addressed at all.

Of the 15 visitors who were interviewed while the videos were in place, 3 made this connection between the process, the product, and the artist in the general section of the interview, and 8 others described this particular relationship in the video-specific section, all without prompting. A 70-year-old woman had this to say,

> But when you hear something and you watch it being erected or structured, it kind of puts the whole thing together, it meshes it when you have that video. Because I can be looking at the object, and then look at the video, and watch him or whoever making their particular piece of work, listen to the video and then see the finished piece—I think that's really well done.

Many visitors also felt that this connection between process, product, and artist created a context of meaning for them, why the tradition is important to that culture:

> I think the video allowed us to see how she was dressed, to actually watch her do her craft, to have her *explain* [emphasis added] why she did it, why she was making this object, what this object was for, how long it took as opposed to standing there and reading it. (A 40-year-old woman with a young boy)

> I liked the videos . . . going back and forth and looking at the people and then seeing what they'd done . . . it was like learning about the culture but also learning *through* [emphasis added] people—actually that these people were real . . . . it gave it some depth, some dimension. (A woman with two middle-school-aged children)

Several visitors emphasized the importance of seeing the artists make the objects that were actually featured in the exhibit:

> I liked the videos because you can see the people in action as they're making whatever it is they make—I think it is a great way to have both where you can see the person who produced it and how they did it and

> then see the art they created—I like that combination. (A woman who had actually been to Ethiopia in 1968)

> I knew that the person in the video made the objects that were there . . . . in fact the one with the guy making all the models they showed him actually making the White House that was there [on display]—you could see him making it and I thought that was neat. (A 20-year-old woman)

For the exhibition team, a key piece of this three-part relationship was the apparent inclusion of the artists in sharp contrast to the faceless, anonymous artist stereotype. Many visitors felt the videos made the artists "real" people and that they personalized the exhibit. In fact, 7 of the 15 used those very words to describe the videos, as did this young woman in her 20's, "I think just because it [the video] does make it more real. The people are real people and not just somebody across another part of the world." A woman with two young children explained,

> It seemed real to me versus when you go to a traditional museum—you just go to see something; it's sometimes hard to relate. But it was easy to relate because these people were *real* [emphasis added] listening to their interviews. They had families, they had children, and there were traditions and culture and something that I thought was tangible.

Several visitors took the metaphor of the artists as "real people" a step further: "It was like her telling her own story and then it was an interpreter. It was kind of like pretending that person was there visiting and telling about what they made—not someone else telling about her," said a woman with two young children. Her husband added, "It's almost like having a guided tour—you know '*I* [emphasis added] make these things and this is how *I* make them.'"

Similarly, a woman with a small boy noted:

> You could actually feel as if for a short period you were right there listening to them or you were having a conversation with them. But you wouldn't have felt that with a picture . . . . you can't have a conversation with a picture.

Effective Elements of the Videos

That visitors felt the videos helped them imagine they were having conversations with the artists or that they were real people with families and

stories to tell begs the question of what elements in the videos engendered those feelings. Nine of the 15 visitors reported that they responded to the first-person narrative format of the videos. For example, one woman in her early 20's reported that she didn't "watch" the videos but was attending to the parts of the audio track while she was looking at the objects in the exhibit, "I was just listening when they were talking about their lives, not the basket itself type of thing. You can hear them saying what *they* [emphasis added] think, it's not someone else." Two additional visitors who watched the videos also focused on the artists' stories:

> It was the people who have things on display here and they were talking about what they have there and you gain some insight about the objects just by talking to the people who create them—it's more personal. I think people just like to know what's behind things, and it's interesting to find out how they make this and why. (Woman with 3-year-old boy)

> There's something else about the video that I can tell you is helpful, it wasn't like *you* [emphasis added] saying and doing a video about something, it was more helpful because it was *that* [emphasis added] person telling about *that* [emphasis added] thing. (A woman with two young children)

The exhibition team and I expected that visitors would connect strongly to the first-person stories and there is evidence that visitors particularly like a narrative format in video, as shown in a study of the live video presentations at the Monterey Bay Aquarium (Connor, 1991).

Other visitors mentioned elements that would be difficult to get from text or photographs, as exemplified in this comment from a man with middle school-aged-children:

> To actually sit here and watch her make the milk jug, that's what intrigued me. She had two tools in her hands, and it didn't explain that. OK, why those tools were there. It wasn't explained but you know what they were, they were punches.

And a woman with a 4-year-old boy added:

> We watched her and they never explained that she put the reeds in her mouth to moisten them when she started to weave them. But by watching the video, that's what she was doing before she started to weave on that piece of weaving.

A man in his 60's reported that he appreciated the video's ability to zoom in and out through different shots:

> I guess I liked the surroundings and the intricacies of making whatever they were making, there was a lot of detail . . . . you get movement and people's expressions and their families and things that you can't get from still pictures. The videos are more complete.

Five visitors felt that the videos were effective by placing the artists and the objects in a current time context. Two visitors illustrate this point especially well:

> The video gave you a feel for their life, they were real people instead of just—if I had looked at just one of those baskets—I could have looked at it and thought 'Well, that person could have made that 100 years ago or something' but you had the video there of the people actually making those objects and it made it more real. (A woman about 20 years old)

> I don't think I understood the crafts that they did and how important they were . . . . and they are doing these crafts *today* [emphasis added], and I guess you know that but when you actually see it, you know it's a real thing going on today. (A 30-year-old woman)

Another woman in her late 30's with a small boy mentioned several of the elements together:

> We got to see the house that she lived in, her dress, and we got to hear the interpreter who obviously had a dialect that was different than mine. We got to experience a whole lot more by watching the video than just looking at the object in the case. And even a 4-year old can sit through a 2-minute video. I mean, he could see that there was movement in the video and it was forever going and changing and inflection in her voice and all those,

whereas to look at an object, he just breezes by and is done! The video caught his attention for a lot longer than the exhibit.

One last component of the videos seems very simple, yet it has great impact on whether the videos are watched or not. All of the videos were about 2 minutes in length and they repeated in loops. Five of the 15 visitors specifically mentioned the length, as one man in his 40's explained, "I liked them because they're only 2 minutes—you don't have to stand there for 10 minutes or half an hour. They're real compact and you get a good idea of what you're looking at." A 30-year-old woman with two children added, "I liked that they were short because I looked at it [the label on the monitors; see note 2) and it was only like 2 minutes and I said, 'OK, I have time for 2 minutes.' But if it had said 15 . . . ."

Viewing Habits

Even with so much evidence pointing to the videos as an effective interpretive strategy, they are useful only if visitors choose to engage them. As indicated previously, the 2-minute time length played an important role for several visitors as they were making decisions about viewing the videos. Two of the 15 visitors reported that they did not "watch" the videos. One woman in her early 20's listened to parts of the videos that interested her but didn't watch because "I don't like standing still that long, I was listening so that I didn't have to stand there and watch." A man in his 30's with a 6-year-old girl reported that he did not watch any of the videos but listened in the back of his mind and knew that they were interviews with the artists. He didn't know how long the videos were and he described his visiting preferences, "Usually we'll go through here [the Museum] in about 15 to 30 minutes. I didn't have time to sit down and watch them, and I don't like sitting in one place—I like to just waltz through and leave." Other factors also affect visitors' reports of their viewing habits, and chief among those is the presence of young children. Of the 7 visitors with children who were interviewed before the videos were removed, 4 of them reported that they didn't watch as much of the videos as they would have liked and cited their children as the reason. A woman with a 3-year-old explained, "I didn't have a chance to watch them, but just catching a glimpse . . . maybe if I had a chance, I would know more, but this little guy . . . ." One visitor had children of middle-school age and didn't mention that they hindered her viewing. The other 2 visitors with children toured the gallery when only one of the videos was playing, and they reported that the other videos were rewinding in their loop cycle. At the other end of the spectrum were 2 visitors who wished that the videos were much longer and they enjoyed watching them several times over.

Visitors also showed great variance in how they watched the videos. Some only listened sporadically, others caught glimpses, and several people watched each video several times through. Visitors cited several factors that influenced their viewing habits, including other people in the group, time constraints on the visit, level of interest, and naturally, whether the videos were playing (the nemesis of electronic technology.)

Comparing the Two Groups: With and Without the Videos

I noticed many similarities and differences in the answers to the first section of the interview, which was given to visitors in both conditions (with and without videos.) The first question on this general section of the protocol asked what visitors were thinking or feeling or doing as they were going through the exhibit. Over half of the visitors were trying to imagine or visualize what it would be like to live in Ethiopia, using their own culture as a reference point. "I was trying to visualize what it must be like in reality to be in that place compared to here, I guess feeling somewhat lucky I live here as opposed to there and also a little curious about what it would be like to experience life there," said a man in his 40's. And a woman of similar age said, "I was trying to imagine living and making the baskets and *using* [emphasis added] them . . . to imagine myself doing that and it's very hard in our society." Several other visitors reported that they were curious about the objects and the materials of which they were constructed.

An interesting pattern developed when several of the visitors were asked to elaborate on what parts of the exhibit helped them answer the previous two questions about an artist and the focus of the exhibit. Most of the visitors in both groups identified the visual interpretive media as being supportive: the videos, still photographs, or the large photo-mural of the marketplace.

The two groups differed, however, in their views of what the exhibit was about. Most of the visitors who saw the videos believed the exhibit was mainly about individual artists, how they made a living and the crafts that they produced. The answers of the visitors who didn't see the videos were more general in nature; they believed that the exhibit was about craftsmanship and Ethiopian culture as a whole instead of traditions practiced by individuals with names and families. Similarly, many of the visitors who saw the videos were able to provide detailed answers when asked to tell about an artist they remembered. A young woman about 20 years old was fascinated by the milk container maker: "I thought that it was something that she had to know how to make before she could get married and also that she was married when she was 14! That's kind of young. And her mother taught her how to make the baskets when she was 10—and it was just so incorporated into her life." And a visitor in his 40's recalled

the sorghum stalk model maker: "I don't remember his name, but if I recall him he's standing next to them [the sorghum stalk models] trying to sell them to make money to go to school and take care of his folks." In contrast, only 1 of the 5 visitors who didn't see the videos remembered anything beyond the sex of the artist and the tradition he or she practiced. This particular visitor happened to read the printed artist's profile, which remained on the viewing station after the monitors had been removed.

The final difference between the visitors in the two conditions arose not as a comparison of answers to a single question, but rather emerged through the answers that they gave to other questions in the interview protocol. Museum professionals know that visitors bring a wide array of experiences to an exhibit, and sometimes these experiences help them connect to or engage the exhibit on a personal level. In an exhibit that features the products of creative traditions, you would expect that visitors who have actually made baskets or pottery or models would have an important avenue for understanding; this was the case for several visitors. However, two visitors mentioned that the videos helped them connect from a perspective other than that of having created similar objects in the past. A man in his 60's who was an engineer by profession remembered the model maker because he wanted to make money to go to school and become an architectural engineer. The other visitor, a woman in her 30's, volunteered, "It was actually in the videos and how they were made, it seemed very real to me and I'm more of a feeling type learner versus an intellectual . . . . I'm not saying everybody connects that way but that's the way I think it becomes meaningful . . . . you know, one of them's a mother and *I'm* [emphasis added] a mother." These two visitors "connected" with the artists because they shared similar roles in their lives and they discovered these similarities through the video interpretation.

Summary and Conclusion

The results of the interviews indicate that the balanced interpretive approach of presenting the process, the product, and the artist was indeed successful in breaking through the stereotypical presentation of African creative traditions for those visitors who engaged the videos at some point. It was not surprising to the exhibit staff that most of the visitors who made the connections among the traditions, the displayed objects and the artists who created them, indicated that the videos were instrumental in that process. Several of those visitors talked about the artists as real people who had identities and families and who cared about the tradition that they practiced, thus presenting strong evidence that the artists were successfully integrated into the exhibit. Even though this study was

not originally designed to include two conditions, the results from the five comparative interviews without the videos provide some evidence that those visitors viewed the exhibit in more general terms, and that the artists as individuals played a lesser role in their experience with the exhibit.

The caveat for the balanced interpretive approach is that visitors have to take advantage of interpretive media in order for it to be effective. This study provides strong evidence that there are "ideal museum visitors" who have few constraints on their time and who do engage the various forms of interpretive media, which have been so carefully crafted by exhibition teams. However, the interviews also indicate that it is common for families with small children to enjoy "abbreviated" visits. Connor (1991) noted a similar pattern for a live video program at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. There are also visitors who "don't like to watch TV" or read labels indicating that personal preferences for interpretive media also play a role. Even though several visitors had shortened experiences with the video interpretation, 13 of the 15 visitors interviewed engaged the videos on some level and many quite deeply. Judging from the abundance of data from visitors with children whose visits were cut short, it seems that the videos do offer a lot of information in a small amount of time. In fact, the majority of visitors with children reported that if they were able to take advantage of the interpretive media provided, they watched the videos.

A closer look at the videos revealed that the first-person narrative format appeared to be the strongest of the video elements that affected visitors' perceptions, and the evidence to support that claim was quite rich. It may be that visitors naturally respond to the narrative format in a manner which Bruner (1985) described. Additionally, the attempt to incorporate both context and detail by changing camera angles and the short length of the videos (with accompanying labels) contributed favorably to visitors' experiences. Motion video is uniquely suited to show the creative process, and many visitors remarked that they were quite interested to see and to know how the objects they encountered were created.

It is important to note that the focus of this study was on video as an interpretive strategy, not the video technology itself. The use of the videos in this particular interpretive strategy was successful primarily because the exhibition team articulated the goals for the exhibit first and then chose to create the interpretive technology that would best achieve these goals. This recognition of the integral and inescapable nature of the interpretive strategy to the exhibit itself is consistent with the course recommended by Rabinowitz (1991). This study clearly adds to the understanding of visitor experiences, particularly those of families with children. Furthermore, this research has also contributed to the use

of technology in informal settings, particularly as it is viewed from the perspective of visitors.

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Notes

1. Written profiles, each including a statement by the object maker, photos, and a brief essay, develop a sense of the object maker's personality, provide information about the aesthetic tradition s/he represents, and place the individual in a specific physical and social setting.

2. A small label was placed on top of the video viewing monitors with the text, "Videos about 2 minutes in length."

Appendix

Interview Guide

General Experiences:
PP stands for possible probing question

1. Every visitor experiences exhibits differently. Imagine that you are watching a video of yourself going through this gallery, can you describe what you were thinking, doing or feeling?

2. How would you describe this exhibit to someone who hasn't seen it yet?
   PP What parts of the exhibit help you think that way?

More Specific Experiences:

3. What sticks out in your mind most when you think about the exhibit?
   PP Why is that memorable?

4. What can you tell me about an object that you remember looking at in the exhibit?

5. Was there anything in the exhibit that was helpful to you or enhanced your experience?

6. Do you remember any of the artists?
   PP Which one(s)?
   PP What helped you remember her/him?
   PP What do you remember about her/him?

Focus on Video:

7. I am trying to understand why the videos might be different than photographs or labels and I would like to learn what you thought about the use of videos in the exhibit.
   Was there a particular video that you liked?

8. What did you like most about this video?
   PP How is it similar to or different from the other videos?

9. Did the video(s) influence the way you looked at or interacted with the objects which are displayed in the exhibit?
   PP In what way?

10. There were four videos in this gallery.
    Did you watch some or all of the videos?
    PP Did you watch any all the way through or did you only watch parts of them?

11. Why did you watch (all of the videos) or (just some of the videos?)

12. The last few questions that I have asked focus on the videos in the exhibit which is really the heart of my research. I have a hunch that videos enhance visitors' experiences but it is not clear why. From your experience with the videos just now, can you think of why the videos were helpful to you?

13. I have one last question and it is about something more general. What did you learn about Ethiopia from the exhibit?
    PP Do you have any questions that the exhibit didn't answer?