

Gallery Enhancement: Forging a New Partnership with the Public

Douglas Worts
Art Gallery of Ontario
Toronto, Ontario Canada

It is not news to anyone that museums everywhere are hurting as a result of intense pressures to change the way in which our cultural organizations operate. Serious staff layoffs, deep cuts in programming budgets, and heightened expectations for relevant cultural programming are now part of everyday reality for many museum professionals. Clearly, some of the pressures we are feeling are coming from outside the museum, largely in the form of scarce financial resources. By forging partnerships with corporations, schools, universities, and other cultural organizations, museums can help to achieve economies of scale while maximizing their human and financial resources.

But not all of the forces of change within the museum world are based on the scarcity of money. There are also significant pressures being applied from within museums—pressures to bring about serious changes in the way we understand and carry out our institutional missions. Reform-minded museologists around the world are doing what they can to redirect museums towards becoming hubs of cultural activity that play a vital role in the living identity of a society. Many new partnerships are being formed between museums and other cultural groups within society with the goal of making museums more relevant within the lives of people. From my perspective, this more philosophical reason to forge new partnerships is at least as important as the economic-efficiency rationale. In this paper I want to describe a particular kind of partnership which can help museums to better relate to their communities. Specifically, I will discuss the benefits of an honest and respectful partnership between museums and the public.

This period in the evolution of museums is both extremely exciting and extremely frustrating. It is a time of great uncertainty and great insight. I want you to know that this paper will reflect both my great hopes for important advances in the museum world, as well as my enormous frustration at the inertia that I often feel is working against positive change.

Over the past decade, I've been involved in developing some non-traditional interactive labels, computers and audio in special "education" exhibits. In concert with these initiatives we also developed a range of audience research techniques to better understand visitors and their reactions to both the traditional and the newer displays. Slowly but surely

the institution's staff is thinking about visitors more seriously and is attempting to meet public needs in sensitive ways. But now, more than ever, I feel the need for the Gallery to shift, in a fundamental way, to a new relationship it has with the public—to become true partners with our visitors and to *share* authority over the experiences which happen in the galleries.

Museums have long been considered special places where the authoritative insights of trained experts are shared with members of the public. It is true that we as an institution have something unique to offer the public—the collections we amass and our intellectual insights into the work of artists. However, to paraphrase Picasso—and many other artists, for that matter—in producing an artwork, the artist carries the creative process *half* way—it is the responsibility of the viewer to complete the process. This visitor-centered half of the creative process is based on the personalizing of symbolic objects, and this process is not prescriptive, so institutions cannot control how the personalizing occurs. Museums can, however, be supportive of visitors as they personalize their experiences with the artworks.

What does the visitor side of creativity look like? This creativity is idiosyncratic—sometimes tentative, sometimes dogmatic, at times intensely moving, other times shocking, while at other times it is insightful.

I submit that one of the core partnerships that needs to be fully developed in museums (and particularly art museums) is an honest and respectful relationship between the public and the institutions—a partnership in which the many meanings of art can be explored and honored. I want to give you an idea of the museum at which I work, which will provide a backdrop for later visitor-generated material I will be discussing

The Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto is one of the ten largest art museums in North America. A recent major capital project happened at the same time that the museum witnessed the retirement of its Director of 30 years, the development of a new strategic plan, massive organizational restructuring, and the surfacing of serious financial problems amidst a world-wide recession. In light of all this, the new AGO has emerged in remarkably good shape.

In describing its mission, the AGO uses all the right words—we are educational, we build, conserve and research collections, we even aim to meet the needs of our multi-cultural population. But the more of my life I spend at the Gallery, the more I wonder what our mission actually means. I ask myself what insights and knowledge we really have, and how those relate to visitor needs. And, for that matter, how do we understand the needs of the public? While we don't have the answers to such questions, I do feel that the Gallery is becoming more sensitive to the needs of visitors.

The museum was designed, both externally and internally, to feel friendlier and more accessible to visitors. For example, the new building provides at-grade access, rather than the old entrance which required

visitors to climb imposing stairs and cross over the moat-like, sunken driveway. The old building had a cold, white stucco facing, which has been replaced by warm, red brick. Passersby are more effectively invited in, not only to visit the exhibits, but also to shop in one of the large retail spaces which make up most of the building's facade. It is hard to make a city-block sized building approachable, but efforts are being made to do just that.

Once inside the building, after navigating through the somewhat austere entrance hall, visitors encounter an introductory exhibit that discusses the many meanings of art and which encourages visitors to explore their personal reactions to the works. This installation reflects the new general attitude of the museum regarding the visitor experience—that the personal perspective, whatever that may be, is important.

All of the new and refurbished galleries were developed by teams of professionals, with curators, educators, designers and conservators making up the core teams. Wide-ranging discussions within these teams led to a new institutional commitment to creating exhibit spaces that are modulated in scale, color and atmosphere, which is a major departure from the normally white-walled, no-seating, everything-looks-more-or-less-the-same kind of art gallery which the Art Gallery of Ontario has been in the past. So, we now have many types of spaces for visitors to explore. Some exhibit halls are dramatically lit and intimate: the elegant Old Master galleries now have vibrantly colored walls and comfortable seating; the contemporary galleries take a variety of forms, but with a traditional austerity to them. Many new spaces are intimate, domestically-scaled rooms for lingering and exploring.

Seating has never been more abundant—even though we can always use more. And now, every gallery space offers at least some form of interpretive material, with some exhibits containing a wealth of materials for visitors to use. A new print and drawing center provides the public with access to any of the works on paper that are in the collection. Additionally, a new hands-on gallery has been built for visitors of all ages to explore many different creative processes, as well as aspects of the collection. All of this has led to high levels of satisfaction amongst our visitors.

Much of the initiative for the progressive approach to the new AGO evolved from work done by the team responsible for the Canadian Historical Galleries. In 1988, this team of educators, curators and designers was the first such group in the Gallery to form a partnership that was dedicated to improving exhibition techniques based on visitor experiences of the exhibits. As part of this undertaking, this team also developed, for the first time, audience research projects dedicated to exploring the complexities and variations of visitor experiences in exhibits. Based on research results, many interpretive strategies, such as the use of computers, audio and interactive labels integrated into the displays, were developed to support visitors in focussing on, enjoying, and making sense of the displays.

The results were very positive and have been summarized in several publications (Worts 1990a, 1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c).

In 1991, the Canadian Historical Collection team understood that most of its efforts at improving the visitor experience up to that point had been geared towards making it easier for people to be more focussed with the artworks and to help them to explore contextual or analytical issues related to the art. Still, the team wanted to improve the interpretive systems it had developed and extend its understanding of the nature of symbolic experiences with artworks. One of the leading areas for the team to explore was how personal meanings related to viewing an artwork—ones that do not necessarily fit into the critical framework for understanding objects—functioned in an art gallery setting.

With funds received from the Government of Canada, the Canadian Historical Collection team hired three consultants to assist in exploring three areas of psychology that were felt to be important to understanding how people make meaning with artworks in museums. These areas were environmental psychology, cognitive science and depth psychology. The team met regularly with the consultants for a period of about a year, working through a set of exhibit-related issues and strategies that were to become critical to the development of the new Canadian Historical Wing (which opened in January 1993).

As for the Canadian Historical Collection galleries themselves, they developed as 15 uniquely designed rooms that are varied in scale, color and lighting. They range from the intimate to the grand, and all spaces have seating. The purpose of this diversion from the art gallery tradition of white-walled spaces with even lighting is to keep the visitors' senses engaged so that museum fatigue does not set in. In addition, this approach offers the chance to use space to create something of an historically appropriate context for the artworks.

All of the new galleries in this wing reflect our visitor-oriented philosophy that there are many meanings to a work of art. This approach has become manifest in several ways. One is the use of binders in which questions are asked concerning the importance of an artist or his/her artwork, and for which answers are provided from many different and often conflicting perspectives. This approach is supplemented with a request for visitors to reflect on what the artwork(s) mean to them. "Share Your Reaction" cards are dispensed in about two dozen locations throughout the Canadian Historical Wing for written and drawn responses to the exhibits. Additionally, audio programs, computers, visible storage, wall signs, and text panels have been added to the displays to encourage greater focusing on the artworks.

One of the biggest challenges to the re-installation of the Canadian Historical Collection was deciding how to organize the overall hanging. Eventually, the team decided on a chronological organization, but with four considerations:

- 1) Although the chronology would be evident, it would not dominate the interpretive strategy. The interpretive emphasis would be placed on local foci in each area (e.g. a specific theme, an artist, etc.), leaving the chronology as a backdrop.
- 2) No assumptions would be made about visitors having clear associations with any given period of Canada's history.
- 3) We would provide a visual sense of what life was like in Canada during these periods, using images from popular culture. These installations would be called "Signposts."
- 4) We would encourage visitors to relate the personal associations they have with the time periods, using "Share Your Reaction" cards.

In this way, visitors would be able to keep track of where they were in the chronology of the overall display, build/reaffirm/challenge their sense of Canada's histories, relate the artworks to the life of Canada (or question the absence of an apparent relationship), and bring their own knowledge/associations to bear on the visiting experience. These were all new dimensions in the AGO's installation of its permanent collections.

One of the most interesting outcomes of the re-installed galleries relates to the use of the "Share Your Reaction" cards. Over a period of about nine months, approximately 12,000 cards were used—and about 5,000 of these were left in the drop-off bins in the galleries. The cards have proved to be quite remarkable for their diversity of form and content. We are finding that comments are not superficial judgements such as "loved it" or "hated it" remarks which often characterize comment books. Instead, the bulk of comments are personal and reflective. Many provide insight into how visitors are interacting with particular objects or groups of artworks. Often there is great sensitivity and intensity in the responses. A large number of visitors who use the cards choose to draw imagery of one kind or another. Some people copy pictures on display. Others adapt images on display to their own creative ends. Still others will create wholly new images, presumably inspired by their time in the gallery, or which reflects what is on their mind at the moment. Often, people seem to want to see themselves reflected, either literally or symbolically in their imagery—and in their writing for that matter. This has been an important psychological phenomenon for Gallery staff to become aware of—people want to see themselves reflected in their visits to museums. This has the potential to affect dramatically the way in which art displays are conceived and installed.

Figures 1-6 present some of the responses of the public to their experiences in the galleries, as reflected in the "Share Your Reactions" cards. These examples will give you a sense of the range of responses—both drawn and written—which have often left me quite speechless because of their power and mystery.

As you can see, the range of responses is quite remarkable—and none of them really reflects the kind of insight into the art experience that the Gallery itself could articulate. These images and comments deserve to be not only seen by the Gallery, so it can learn more about the felt power of the objects in our collections, but these reactions deserve to be integrated into the interpretive strategy of the exhibits themselves. One possible outcome of such an integration is that other visitors may find greater comfort in entering the realm of personal meaning-making in a more conscious way.

One particularly exciting installation which is attempting to empower visitors to reflect very specifically on the personal and idiosyncratic meanings of visitors is an installation called "Explore a Painting in Depth." It contains a single picture by J.E.H. MacDonald entitled *The Beaver Dam*. The viewing facility consists of a seating unit with sound-proofing material on three sides and the painting, located directly in front of the seats and surrounded by three walls.

This area was designed to block visual and auditory distractions from the rest of the room. Three audio programs can be selected by visitors. One program carries the curator's engaging insights into the painting. A second provides some dramatized comments about the artist, by friends and family of MacDonald. The third, which is the most innovative technique currently in use at the Gallery, is a reflective imaging exercise that leads visitors into a reverie with the painting—encouraging their imaginations to create highly personal links with the painting. In it, the 12 minute tape encourages the viewer to relax and enter into a semi-dream-state with the picture. The first task is to establish a strong mental image of the painting, and then the viewer is invited to enter imaginatively into the space of the picture and to experience the sights, sounds, smells and potential of being in the setting. The wide range of response cards filled out in this facility have proven to be a very rich resource that provides many insights into the viewing process, the painting, and the visitors. Figures 7-12 illustrate the range of creative variations relating to this picture.

All of these cards show to me how powerful and creative the personal experience is in the viewing of art. It is something that we as institutions have not actively encouraged before.

I believe that our institutions can learn a great deal from the so-called "idiosyncratic" responses of visitors. When people engage their own subconscious, a process of personal creativity begins. Within museums, this process can extend the meanings offered up by the experts in very exciting ways. Perhaps museums need to acknowledge that a major dimension of meaning-making, one that is complementary to the institutional perspective, can be found within the public's own creative responses to the art. And there is a missing complement to our perspective on art—the art of the 20th century has made that painfully clear. One need only spend some time in the contemporary galleries of any art museum to experience this reality.

I don't think that anybody reading this would argue that the art of the 20th century generally leaves many visitors feeling hostile and frustrated—and these visitors are often representative of the most educated people in our society. Yet our institutional arguments in defense of particular artworks often feel to the public more like empty rationalizations for what they see as a sham. From my years of touring in the galleries, I know how hard it is to talk convincingly about certain types of art.

Part of the problem with contemporary art, I believe, is the absence of collective meanings associated with many of the images. Much of the artwork created in recent decades flies in the face of public expectations for the comprehensibility, beauty and quality traditionally associated with the fine arts—there appears to be no collective symbolic language for people to follow. From the non-expert's viewpoint, if there is a knowable language of art, it seems like a remote phenomenon that must: 1) be acquired through academic degrees in art history, 2) sound like "art speak", and 3) remain rather unconvincing. Further, most of what experts have to say about contemporary art is extremely intellectual in tone and does not often address the artwork itself, but rather its context. Many visitors experience this scenario as an impossible hurdle within the framework of a museum visit. It may be that one solution to the seemingly unbridgeable gap between visitor and museum is to respectfully invite visitors to engage the works idiosyncratically, to reflect on their personal reactions, and to share these reactions with the museum and with other members of the public. Adding the personal dimension of meaning-making to the museum experience, as a complement to the expert vantage point (hopefully expressed in clear, direct language), may provide many new insights.

Several months ago, I received a "Share Your Reaction" card from a visitor that has strengthened my resolve to formally integrate personal meaning making processes into the interpretive strategy of the museum. In this card, a woman reflected her powerful and personal response to a 1959 Canadian abstract painting. In my years in this business, I have never heard any convincing insights into this painting. I had heard and read several art historical tidbits: that it represented part of the Canadian version of the New York School of abstraction; that it was a coming of age of Canadian art; that it represented a rejection of naturalistic depictions of the world in favour of the embodiment of the inner creativity of the artist, and so on. All of this is fine, and perhaps there is even a fascinating side to the artistic context of the 1950s, but none of it means much if there is no personal connection with the artwork. The woman's idiosyncratic associations with the picture provide a vivid example of how the personalizing of an art object can bring it life in a very powerful way:

Jock MacDonald's "Fleeting Breath" (which suggests a hand emerging from rubble—or fragmentation as the essential quality of the 20th century) reminds me that my father built a bomb shelter

when I was 12—in 1956—in our 1920s double-brick home on tree-lined Park Avenue. The street was valued for its street lights that still looked like gas lights. My father felt a little silly, but wanted more to keep his family of four children safe: he returned from navigating for the RAF in WWII, cramped in metal surroundings on 16 hour flights, coastal reconnaissance along the Baltic. He returned, but nothing since matches the terror and heightened emotion of WWII. In the 50s, I grew up on war stories, and occasionally went down and stood in the shelter: raw, smooth, concrete, with a maze-like entrance. He never bothered to stock it. There was a wild pink lady's slipper that came up, tiny, every spring in our backyard. I would rather died above, with "fleeting breath", than go alive below. That's what it was like, and it was never simple.

We, as an institution, cannot fabricate this powerful form of personalized experience. If museums decide that there is merit in integrating the many meanings that individuals experience with artworks into the collective wisdom relating to our collections, as I believe we should, then our organizations will have to re-negotiate the authority structures relating to the meanings of culturally significant objects. Such a step will demand that effective partnerships be formed with the public.

Part of the reform that museums need to undergo is to re-assess and re-express their core mission. In my view, a new mission for museums might be *to relate to the public in a meaningful way, through the vehicle of symbolic experiences, which reflects/mirrors the cultural identity of a community and which supports individuals in affirming and evolving their personal identity.*

With such a mission, museums could thoroughly re-examine and re-balance the ways they *do*, and the ways they *could*, function in society through the public programs they organize. Exhibitions of objects and information is certainly one way to achieve this goal. Publications are another. Television is a third, and event programs is a fourth. Whichever vehicles are chosen to realize the mission of the museum, a thoughtful reassessment of the communication strategy for each must also ensue, leading to a revised communication strategy that might look like that shown in Figure 13.

Many museums are working hard at addressing two of the components of the communication strategy suggested here: contextual information and institutional valuation. New approaches to writing supporting information with a view to clarity and relevance, and sometimes presenting the information in a number of "voices," is exciting. But, for me, the most radical and most exciting challenge lies in the open integration of idiosyncratic meanings into the process of meaning-making.

All of the "Share Your Reaction" cards demonstrate to me how much creative energy exists within the public. It is powerful energy that has many faces—unpredictable, moving, and insightful. Often, but not always, it is idiosyncratic. However, despite the idiosyncrasy, we (and here I mean both individually and as an institution) *can* relate to these visitor experiences empathically—and, I believe, it enriches everyone's experiences when we do so. As an institution, we do have something to offer—insights based on research—and we need to share these insights more effectively. But, as an institution, we cannot experience artworks creatively—we must rely on the public.

For me, the new look of museums will include a new form of partnership where the many ways of making meaning are encouraged, supported and respected. If museums are truly the place of the muses, then we must realize that the physical and intellectual place of our current museums must function more symbolically as a trigger that supports visitors in activating the muses which exist within all of us. It is this inner space that, in my view, is the real museum.

So, in the museum of the future that I imagine, effectively presented information will blend into social dynamics. All this will help to encourage the establishment and relationship of personal standpoints to those of collective perspectives. In this way, museums may become a vehicle for the identity development of visitors. We do have a lot to learn about making meaning in museums, but for me, the possibilities are extremely exciting.

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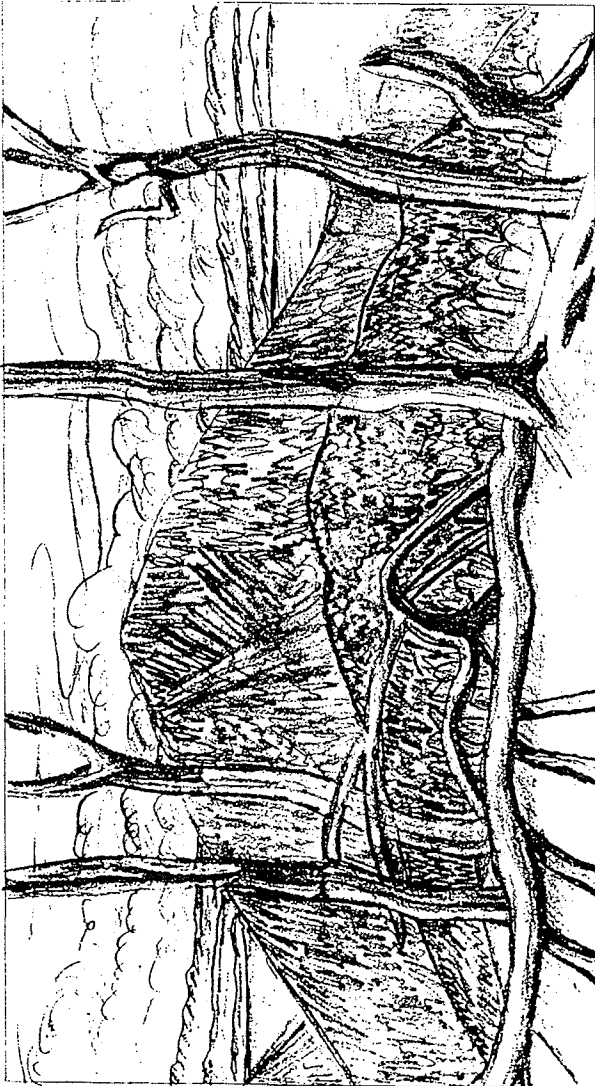
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Figure 1

A copy of Lawren Harris' *Above Lake Superior* by a 14 year old girl. This fine detail of this image suggests that the visitor had a deeper than average level of experience with the painting (research has indicated that visitors in the past spent an average of 7 seconds with paintings that they stopped to look at). Also, the detailed description of herself suggests that she felt quite comfortable during this experience.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: Lawren Harris

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.): I am 14 with Red hair. I am 5'3 1/2
love to draw and paint. I am from Toronto. I don't take lessons.
I also am a singer. I am try out for Claud Watson (vocal)

NAME (optional): Ariela DATE: Jan. 23, 93

Figure 2

An image that bears no resemblance to any painting in the collection. It is a powerfully drawn image that seems to have come from the visitor's imagination. Being in the gallery seems to have inspired not only the image, but also the emotionally-charged text which speaks of the Canadian landscape as the basis of the soul of the Canadian spirit.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO:

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.):

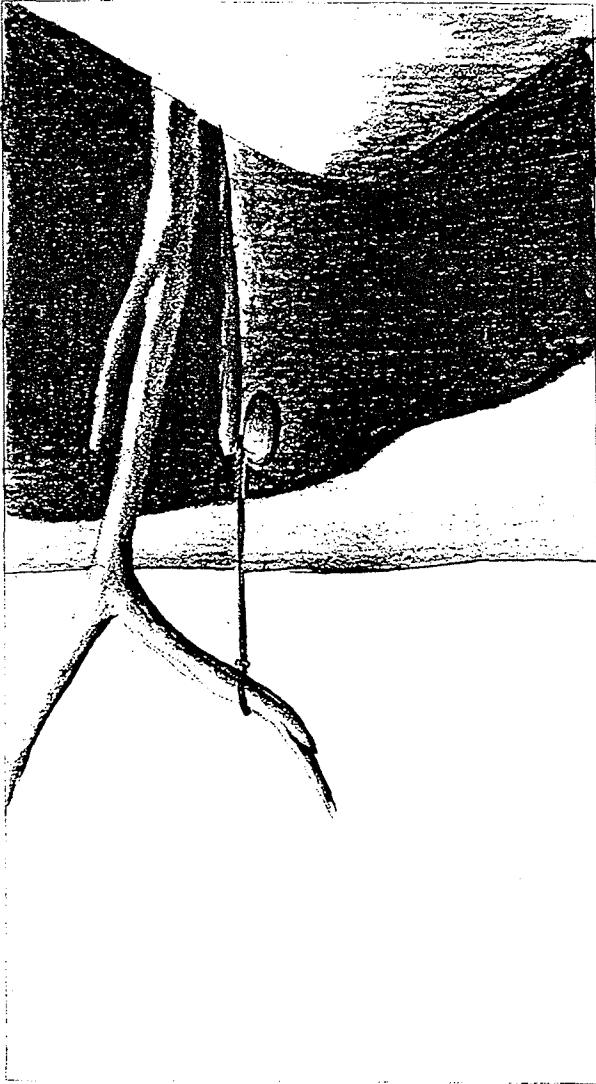
The Canadian landscape is a part of the soul of the Canadian spirit: the power of the land.
NAME (optional): to create vision as a waking dream. Jan 23/93
Dorota M.

Figure 3

An adaptation of a Lawren Harris painting in which the exquisitely drawn image has an additional element—a stylized dead figure hung from the tree. It is hard to know what this means, but I feel the institution needs to understand that some visitors make very powerful, idiosyncratic meanings with the collection.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



(6 of 7)

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: _____
PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.): _____

NAME (optional): _____

DATE:

Feb 24/93

Figure 4

A visitor's reflection on a picture in the permanent collection which depicts the town in which her grandmother was born. The experience has filled a gap in an important personal relationship.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

My paternal grandmother was born in Glace Bay.
 For my entire life I have wondered what her childhood was like. Until very recently, I have been able only to communicate with her in Shoutis & sign language. She is 92. She will die soon, but now, now I have seen her home. Now the words are not as necessary. Thank-you.

EVERETT
 PERSON
 1901-199
 1992-1994

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: Lawson S. Harris "Mines' Houses - Glace Bay"

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.): Vancouver, B.C. / 20 / Student / English - Vancouverite

NAME (optional): Brook DATE: May 19 / 1993

Figure 5

A very critical attack on the institution resulting from this visitor not seeing herself reflected in the collection. She raises a very strong point that the institution needs to address if it really wants to be the art gallery for the people of Ontario. She makes it clear that there is a problem, and the solution must be negotiated between the public and the institution.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS....

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

I would like to know why in this entire Art Gallery people of colour are not represented. I would like to see more art about the Indian culture and also art on the Black race.

I am really disappointed that in a city where we are so multicultural only European cultural are seen in the art gallery. I would not bring my child here, because we are not represented, we are not recognized for any of our talents.

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO:
PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (e.g. where you are from, background, age, etc.)

I am a Black woman, who
is a Canadian (born)

NAME (optional):

DATE: March 26/93

Figure 6

A very positive response by a visitor who sees the new galleries as engaging and intimate, as a "joyous" experience compared to the old galleries, which he visited as a "duty."

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

THE "NEW" GALLERIES ARE A TREMENDOUS
 IMPROVEMENT OVER THE OLD. COMING HERE IS
 NOW AN ENGAGING AND INTIMATE EXPERIENCE.
 ONE FEELS ABLE TO CONCENTRATE MORE
 CLEARLY ON WORKS OF ART OR PRACTICAL
 PERIODS WITHOUT FEELING OVERWHELMED OR
 ALIENATED. COMING HERE IS NOW A JOYOUS
 EXPERIENCE WHEREAS BEFORE IT FELT LIKE
 A DUTY! THANK YOU.

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO:

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.):

TENNIS ILLUSTRATION & PAINTER.

NAME (optional): GEMALP

DATE: MAR 11/93

Figure 7

A response that demonstrates how some visitors use their imaginations to enter the world of the painting and create personal meanings for themselves. Many people experience smells, sounds and textures of nature as well as other powerful associations.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

Enjoyed the sensual journey into the painting. Light, smell, cool/cold autumn day was evoked clear air & water - Love lines - the empty canoe vaguely depressing.

The suggestion(s) of human form in the rocks, and strokes of the dam add another dimension of questioning the artist's interpretation of the scene.

Thank you for making me enter the world of the Canadian north!

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: JEH MacDonnell 'The Beaver Dam'

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (i.e. where you are from, background, age, etc.):

Some art training

DATE: 02/27/93

NAME (optional): Debra

Figure 8

Not everyone likes the imaginative approach to viewing artworks—or at least not the approach taken here. This visitor is expressing a desire for “content,” as presented by the experts in the institution. By referring to the tape as “heely-feely” the visitor is clearly dismissive of the subjective approach in this program. A certain portion of our audience has difficulty with, and perhaps even feels threatened by, a non-analytical approach. However, a significant portion of the audience feels very good about making personal connections with artworks.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS....

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

I hate to be negative, because on the whole the new gallery is wonderful - but #1 female voice - The ~~Female~~ ^{Female} ~~Damn~~ - exploration is very silly. I was hoping to hear about art - and maybe the other selections cover this - but this ~~heely~~ - feely approach to art is just a bit much! Less new age, more content, please.

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: tape #1, The ~~Female~~ ^{Female} ~~Damn~~

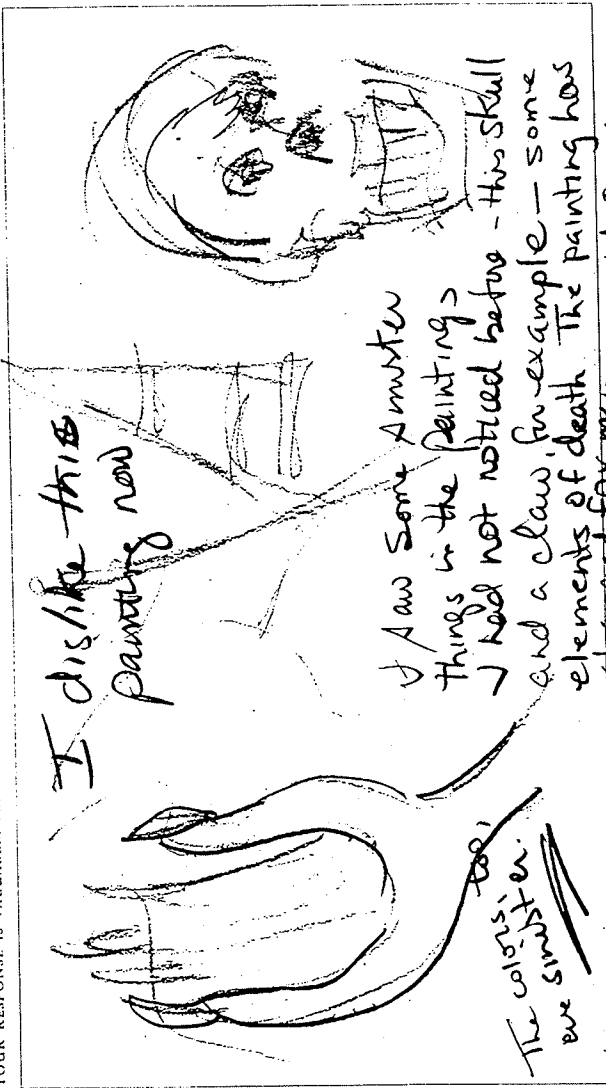
PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.):

NAME (optional): _____ DATE: Feb 20/93

Figure 9

A visitor who describes him/herself as “intellectual-type, creative” experienced the transformation of the painting from an image that was enjoyable to one that is off-putting. The imagination led him/her to see sinister images of death, which is what the viewer responded negatively to. This strong reaction is intensely personal and testifies to the transformative power of the imagination.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...
YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



I dislike this painting now

I saw some Amster things in the painting - I had not noticed before - this skull and a claw, for example - some elements of death. The painting has changed for me. Donald Redmond, Canadian - born, Fortis,

The colors are so...
are simple

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO:
PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.):
intellectual-type, creative.

DATE: April 20/93

NAME (optional):

Figure 10

Another perspective on the death-imagery evoked by the painting, which is reflected in the response above, is the perception that nature is a holistic force—yes, it has death and decay as an aspect of life, but with a powerful and counterbalancing will to survive.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



For me, the figure at the right became a person - a forest god, deep in thought, willing the survival of the scene of which she is a part, but sensing ~~the~~ its imminent decay. I could easily imagine being in the scene, feeling a cool breeze. It's late summer, and things are beginning to die.

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: The Beaver Dam
 PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.): Toronto, student of art history, 28

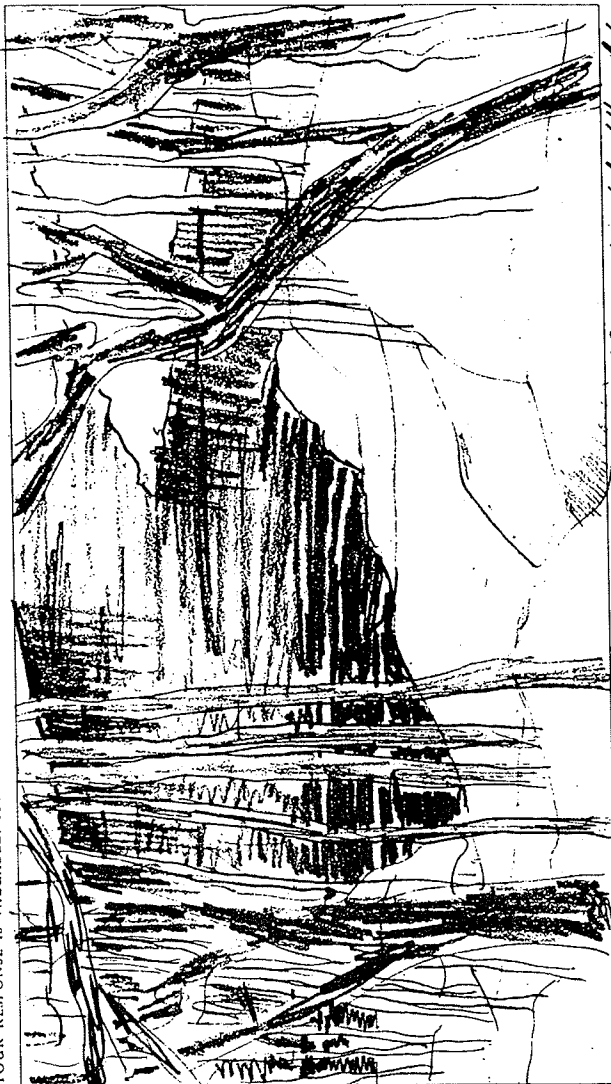
NAME (optional): Jennifer DATE: June 9 93

Figure 11

This visitor entered into the world of the painting, took up an imagined vantage point and drew the scene from the new perspective. She wrote of her experience, "I'm in the woods behind the rock, (I) climbed up and am looking down. Fresh. Wondrous."

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS...

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.



ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: *MacDonald's Cave by William Blake - 1800*
 PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.): *Allyson is a year 10 student at Redwood Secondary School in Victoria and I am right front student in the class.*
 NAME (optional): *Gita* DATE: *Jan 21, 1993*

FRANÇOIS

Figure 12

One visitor's experience of "The Beaver Dam" led him to reflect about the importance of personal experience (as opposed to "patriotic harangues by groups and politicians") in developing a sense of identity.

SHARE YOUR REACTIONS....

YOUR RESPONSE IS VALUABLE. SELECTED COMMENTS AND DRAWINGS WILL BE ADDED TO THE DISPLAY.

How do we learn to love our land, our
 landscape, our country? Not by patriotic harangues
 by groups and politicians - but by living in it, the time
 watching and observing it and then taking the time
 to reflect, ponder and integrate. Thank you AGO
 for giving me a few minutes of serenity and
 intense viewing - Making me Look and Think!
 Making me love my land more than I know!

ARTWORK, ARTIST OR GALLERY EXPERIENCE REFERRED TO: BEAVER DAM - J.E.H. McC Dada

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF (eg. where you are from, background, age, etc.):

BARTENDER in Small town Ontario

NAME (optional): ROBERT B

DATE: April 93

Figure 13

A Revised Museum Communication Strategy

