

**Learning by Doing**  
**Adult Studio Activities in an Art Museum**

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## Abstract

### Learning by Doing: Adult Studio Activities in an Art Museum

Laurie Burdon

This study explores the learning context of studio activities in an art museum as it relates to adult learners. Six adult participants in studio activities were interviewed after having taken activities at the National Gallery of Canada. Their learning experiences are detailed and analyzed, and related to appropriate museum and educational theories, including adult education, experiential learning and memory theory. Among the findings are the following: some adults learn best by being given the opportunity to explore the subject through touch and by physically engaging with materials; contact with an original work of art is a vital component of the learning experience; studio activities act as a catalyst for the adult learner to seek further learning opportunities; and when the learner has been physically and emotionally engaged in the activity, they are likely to form strong memories of their museum experience.

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## Learning By Doing: Adult Studio Activities in an Art Museum

### Chapter 1

#### Introduction: "Hands-on" versus "interactive"

Adult learners make up a substantial number of the yearly visitors to an art museum. They attend lectures, conferences, films, artists' talks, guided tours, exhibition openings and studio activities. All of these activities are undertaken voluntarily, and not for credit, nor are these visitors attending these activities to upgrade their work skills. Why do these adults come to the museum? What are their goals as learners? Of particular interest are the adults who choose to participate in a studio activity, which combines the elements of looking, understanding and doing. My past experience in both teaching and observing studio activities is that many of these adults are entirely new to the experience of creating through art-making. Adult educational content is often spoken of in terms of utility, and the application of knowledge to real life situations (Knowles, 1984). Studio activities in a museum would not seem to fit directly into Knowles's description, as they don't necessarily provide the participants with obvious transferable skills. Yet for each adult participant, studio activities seem to be a museum learning situation which they deliberately seek out.

My own background as an artist, and museum educator has been primarily in the development and delivery of hands-on programs, or more specifically, museum studio activities. I've been involved in these for ten years in

a variety of settings, and have taught all levels of visitors, from children and families, adults, and visitors of all ages with disabilities. After having spent years as a modern dancer during art school, I gained an awareness of the physical process of learning. In dance, learning happens for the most part through the process of the body doing a movement and subsequently physically remembering it, rather than through consciously learning it and thinking about it, which would be the more traditional mode of learning.

On a personal level, learning by doing has always been my own preferred mode of information gathering. When visiting museums, I'm unlikely to spend long amounts of time reading wall panel and label texts. I'm more likely to be found in the didactic area of an exhibit, opening drawers or on a computer program. I even find many standard guided tours somewhat dull, despite the perhaps excellent animation skills of the tour guide. I'm much more comfortable in an intimate situation with a small group, with the flexibility to ask the guide questions about whichever object interests me. Had I not been teaching or developing studio activities at the National Gallery of Canada, I would have taken them, as they would seem to fit my own learning needs very well. Art museums pose a dilemma for a learner like myself, who prefers an immediate and active engagement with her learning tools. Studio activities would seem to fit those needs, as they require a full engagement of the senses, and a personal implication in the learning process.



## Definitions

Museums offer many different types of activities to their visitors with each designed to appeal to different age groups, learning styles, interests and group demographics. Included amongst these are what are known as “hands-on activities” or “interactive” programs. Within museum education circles, the terms “hands-on” and “interactive” seem to be used interchangeably to designate activities as varied in format as a CD-Rom computer program, a guided tour, or a painting class. For the purposes of this research, I will use the term “hands-on activities” to specifically refer to studio activities in which the visitor “creates” rather than “interacts” in the museum. Creation is defined here as a situation that enables the visitor to physically create an object or impression with materials or tools after having been in contact with an original work of art. In a creation-type activity, there are no pre-determined outcomes, nor are there pre-determined paths for arriving at a solution. Outcomes and ways of solving problems are determined by the individual, and limited only by the physical constraints of the environment or by the visitor themselves. By contrast, I define a situation in which a visitor is “interacting” as one which enables the visitor to temporarily affect or manipulate a pre-determined set of components, such as a CD ROM program, or objects and displays in an activity area designed to achieve a set of educational goals.

In this research, I would like to investigate what people learn in a hands-on situation in which they are able to problem-solve, and integrate didactic and

other types of information (eg: information received during the course of a guided tour) with a creation activity. I will refer to this situation as a "studio activity". To further clarify, I will refer to the "studio experience" as the entire experience of being in the museum, interacting with a guide and a work of art, and creating in the studio. It is participant determined. "Studio activities" on the other hand, refer to the activities themselves, or to the overall program, rather than being defined by the participants. It is important to note that the main concept behind the studio experience is that all elements become integrated into one learning experience for the visitor.

In order to investigate what people learn in a hands-on situation, this study will begin with a review of pertinent museum and educational research, followed by the results of the participant interviews. The results of the interviews will be discussed in subsequent chapters through an examination of various aspects of the learning experience in the art museum. The research will conclude with a synthesis of the previously examined theories and results.

## Research Question

My impression as a museum educator is that studio activities within the art museum offer a type of primary experience for the adult learner, through the full engagement of their senses. Learning in and about the art museum and its collections through art-making is therefore undertaken not only at a cognitive, visual level, but also through the non-visual and therefore less apparent sensory perceptions of touch: texture, pressure, movement (such as in painting, or moving around an object), sound (made by manipulating materials and tools), smell (of wood, clay, paint), and temperature, (of materials such as clay, or wood versus metal tools).

In the art museum, studio activities for the adult learner are different from those given within the continuing education community center or art school context, in that the primary focus is not the acquisition of a technical skill, or personal improvement, although these may be secondary goals. Studio activities in the art museum, or at least in the National Gallery of Canada, have as their primary goal facilitating the understanding of works of art within its collections, as well as the lives and creative processes of the artists who created them. In this sense, they do not fit into the more typical model of adult education courses, which have as their goals the acquisition of specific skills or knowledge, that are intended to be applied to real-life situations. Studio activities do however, constitute a form of adult education in that adults deliberately seek them out as a way of learning more about art works, artists or art techniques.

The National Gallery of Canada's studio activities have been chosen as the site for this study. The studio activities can be offered as either a single session or in a series, and sessions can be from one and a half hours long, to fifteen or more hours over several days. All studio activities begin with a guided tour that focuses on a selected aspect of the works on exhibition, followed by a creation activity in the workshop area. All activities are taught by artist-educators who are practicing artists, and who have years of experience teaching in the art museum. Participants register for these activities either in person or by phone. There is generally a maximum number of participants (usually twenty), though this number is not reached very often. The average participation in the adult workshops is twelve people.

From my experience, I can confirm that generally people are very enthusiastic about the studio activities. Negative comments about the experience seem to revolve mostly around practical details, such as the length of the session, difficulties with phone registration, etc.. Although it is always satisfying to receive positive feedback about the programs, questions arise regarding the nature of the experience. I have chosen to use these questions as the basis for this research. They are:

1. What do people learn when they take a workshop at an art museum?
2. Does this learning change, or augment their knowledge of an artist and their work?
3. Does it change learners' understanding of the creative process of art-making?

4. Does it change adult visitors' perception of the art museum or art work?
5. Why do people choose to take a studio activity over other types of museum activities?

Studio activities at the art museum are a complex interplay between the adult learner, the museum artist-educator, the art work/artist/art context, and the creation activity. For people who learn best through their sense of touch, studio activities seem to fill a basic need to learn by doing. Further, as will be discussed in the results of the study, studio activities can function as a stimulus or catalyst for further creative activity and inquiry.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

By researching some of these questions, I hope to develop a theoretical foundation for studio learning within an art museum context. I realized that in order to adequately answer the research questions, a method of research that enabled studio participants to relate their subjective accounts was required. My own learning biases, teaching experience, and the particularities of learning in an art museum are subjective viewpoints or situations, and yet are integral elements of the research. As the purpose of this study is to better understand the nature of the studio experience, how the individual perceives it, and the museum context, a qualitative approach to analysis seemed appropriate.

Researcher George Hein (1998) uses the terms “experimental design” and “naturalistic” to differentiate between objective and subjective research. The experimental-design model developed from social science research, and was meant to provide a means of gathering data which was independent of the researcher’s subjective opinions, responses or other influence. According to Hein, “The goal to strive for is research performed in such a manner that anyone with similar training, given the same situation, could repeat the research protocol, observe the same phenomena, and reach the same conclusions”. (p. 69) Hein states that the proponents of the naturalistic model argue that “not only is it impossible to remove the researcher from the research, but it is better to

acknowledge the inevitable presence of the self and capitalize on the researcher's own perspectives and biases". (p. 69)

Hein (1998) designed the following table to describe the attributes of experimental-design and naturalistic paradigms:

Experimental- Design	Naturalistic
quantitative	qualitative
atomistic	holistic
objective	subjective
laboratory model	real-world based
experimental	naturalistic
hard	soft
confirmatory	exploratory
explanation	understanding
decontextualized	contextual
deterministic	responsive
analytic	synthetic

Figure 1. Hein (1998, p. 69)

For the purposes of this study the naturalistic model is used, rather than the experimental-design model. This enables both the participants in the study and myself to expand on our thoughts as they relate to the studio experience and to learning in museums.

In order to retrieve the amount of qualitative information required to address the research questions, I have used two types of tools with the study's participants: the pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and the participant interview (see Appendix 2). The pre-interview questionnaire was used in order to provide demographic type information, such as the frequency of the participants' visits to the National Gallery and their previous participation in various museum

activities. This data situates the participants' level of experience with different formats of information transmission, as well as their level of education. It also helps to contextualize their comments regarding their current studio experience in relation to those prior experiences. The second tool, the participant interview, was tape-recorded and transcribed for study. Each interview was approximately half an hour in length, with the exception of one interview of two people, which was forty-five minutes in length. The interview questions covered a range of topics, from what motivated people to take a studio activity, to how they felt when they were taking the activity (see attached Appendix 2 for complete list.) The questions were open-ended to enable participants to expand on their thoughts when they wished to. The interview transcripts have been analyzed and compared to relevant educational theories. The analysis of the interviews is qualitative, rather than quantitative, in order to allow for the variety of participants' learning experiences, and their possible similarities and differences.



## Participants

Participants were recruited from two different studio activities, both of which had fairly low attendance (eight participants in one activity and ten in the other.) Eight participants were initially recruited for this project from past National Gallery of Canada adult studio activities. Three of the participants were from the studio activity which had a total of eight adults, while the other five participants were from the subsequent activity. At the beginning of each activity, I explained the purpose of my research to the entire group, and the level of commitment required from recruited participants. Further, I handed out a description of the research, and a short consent form, which studio registrants could sign if they were interested in being contacted by myself to be interviewed. Those who chose to participate were subsequently contacted, and were interviewed within five months of having taken a studio activity in order to ensure memory retention. Two of the eight interviews were discarded, one due to the poor sound quality of the recording. The second interview was not used because the person being interviewed is an elementary school teacher who used the Gallery workshops to re-vitalize her own practice as a teacher. Though this is a very interesting use of the Gallery studio activities, and though we did occasionally touch on this teacher's own learning, I felt the results obtained from the interview were too far from the purpose of this study.

Due to the fact that participants were gathered from a small group of museum goers, (maximum participation in workshops is fifteen to twenty,

depending on the studio activity. The approximate age of the participants in studio activities has in the past, usually been between 40 and 60 years, with an approximate ratio of men to women of 1:8. The participants recruited for this study were in the same age bracket, and it was not possible to have an equal number of men and women. It is important to note that all of the participants had registered for a studio activity, and therefore had a prior motivation for being there.

The interviews with the participants are treated as individual case studies, followed by a synthesis of the main similarities and differences between each participants' learning experience. The analysis of these interviews will help to form a picture of how people learn by taking a studio activity in an art museum, and to some extent, what they learn when they do so.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review: Museum learning and the adult visitor

We know that visitors' needs and adults' motivations are as varied as their personalities, and that many different approaches are required to provide learning opportunities in the art museum. Some visitors will come on their own, or as part of a family or other group. Whether alone or in groups, all visitors have expectations for their learning and come with their own particular knowledge and set of experiences (Falk and Dierking, 1992). The atmosphere of the museum and its possibilities for accommodating multiple learning styles will also affect how the visitor feels about their visit, and will affect their learning. Visitors' previous museum experiences, perhaps as an adult or a school-age child, will affect their current expectations of their visit. As with most adult learning experiences, museum visitors' learning is greatly affected by their own life experiences. In order to present as broad a range of hands-on learning situations as possible, I will examine the research that has been undertaken in a variety of art museum situations within the context of adult learning, as well as related educational theories.

The most relevant art museum research for the purposes of this study was the thesis done by Andrea Weltzl-Fairchild (1984) entitled, Meanings Found by Participants Engaged in Museum Educational Strategies: A Study of Four Situations in Relation to Museums and Art Education Objectives. Weltzl-Fairchild

was interested in gaining insight into the meaning a museum/gallery viewer gains from their experience in a participatory situation. She studied viewer response to several participatory situations: the hands-on activity area at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Discovery gallery at the Royal Ontario Museum, (Toronto), a participatory tour at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), and an adult drawing class at the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto).

The results of her observations and interviewing are divided into two main categories:

Empathy: Do these strategies lead the viewer to an understanding of the artist's concerns? Did the viewer learn something new and/or interesting from participating?

Information about the work: Does the viewer acquire art historical information and/or knowledge of visual language as a result of having participated in this activity? (p. 5)

Weltzl-Fairchild's results showed that overall, people enjoyed their experiences in these situations. She proposes that this enjoyment stems from a feeling of having accomplished something, that they had been "active agents rather than passive bystanders". (p. 87)

Weltzl-Fairchild also found that a crucial factor in the success of these experiences was the contact with a human interpreter and/or teacher. In three of the museum situations studied, an interpreter or teacher was available to interact with the public by providing instruction and guidance. The context of a gallery or museum, particularly art museums, is that there is no touching, therefore the

presence of and dialogue with an interpreter gave people a measure of confidence to proceed with their activities. In the case of the Discovery Gallery at the ROM in Toronto, no interpreter was available to provide guidance. As a result, the visitors lost interest in the printmaking and textile exhibit (the two units observed by Weltzl-Fairchild), very quickly. In addition, these two units were the only two that did not provide any sort of hands-on component, though all the other units in the gallery did include them (ie: archeology, gemology, paleontology, etc.). In discussions with the educator responsible for the Discovery Gallery, Weltzl-Fairchild concluded that a lack of knowledge and awareness of art education and history was responsible for the failure of these two units.

The adult drawing class at the ROM had a high degree of participant satisfaction, due in large part to the enthusiasm and coaching abilities of the teacher. Weltzl-Fairchild concluded however, from participant comments, that little knowledge or “empathy” was gained towards artists’ work or concerns (p. 82), as most of the focus was on the acquisition of technical skills. The results of this project as they relate to my area of inquiry are quite pertinent. It suggests that if a museum activity has as one of its objectives the understanding of objects, their provenance etc., the primary focus of the activity should be the content as it relates to the objects, with the acquisition of technical skills taking second place to the understanding of that content. Weltzl-Fairchild's research also emphasizes the importance of the participant's contact with an enthusiastic and competent teacher, in order for there to be a sense of satisfaction with the activity.

Participant observation research was done by Rose Montgomery-Whicher

(1987) in her thesis entitled Visiting an Art Museum: An Inquiry Into the Experiences of Eight Adults. She interviewed eight adults about their “best” or most meaningful art museum experience. From the participants’ comments, a list of twelve common themes which contributed to a successful visit emerged, including the theme of the relationship between looking at art and making art. Montgomery-Whicher’s participants were often inspired or challenged to return to their own art-making after viewing works of art. (p.111) One participant described the “feeling of well-being” she gets from seeing works of art that please her and from making works of art that please her. (p. 111) This suggests that there could be a strong link between thinking about or visualizing the act of creation, and creating one’s own work. Montgomery-Whicher interviewed people who were already comfortable in an art museum, had visited many times before, and who were, in some cases, artists. These informants would most likely be pre-disposed to respond to a visit to a gallery with thoughts of creating their own works.

Montgomery-Whicher’s 1987 results are also consistent with Dufresne-Tassé and Lefebvre’s (1995) research into the psychology of the adult museum visitor. For apparent benefits to the museum visitor to be realized, Dufresne-Tassé and Lefèbvre found that one essential condition was required:

Pour que le visite soit profitable, le type de musée ou d’objet doit correspondre aux goûts du visiteur ou susciter son intérêt et le toucher. (p. 112)

The results of Montgomery-Whicher’s interviews clearly indicate that her participants experienced a high degree of satisfaction from their visit to the

museum. During her initial interviews with participants, they remembered very little of what they had seen, as the interviews took place away from the gallery spaces of the museum. She quickly adopted a format of re-visiting the gallery spaces with the participants, and essentially re-living the experience with them. In one instance, the interview participant even took the tape recorder from Montgomery-Whicher in order to be more spontaneous in her responses. (p. 42)

Visiting the actual works of art cued recollection on the part of the participant, and enabled her to more fully recall previously unremembered details.

Dufresne-Tassé and Lefèbvre (1995) found that the general benefits of a museum visit manifested themselves in the following ways:

La visite est une expérience valable en soi. Elle «nourrit», procure un dépaysement salutaire, un bon moment, ou du bien-être. (p. 117)

This particular statement is based on the observation and interviewing of adults in a museum context, and applies to members of the general public. However it does call to mind Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) description of the "flow" experience, which he uses when describing the performance of elite performers:

... It provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. (p. 74)

Ideally, a studio experience will offer participants the opportunity to create their own meanings, increase their knowledge, build on past experiences, offer challenges, and create conditions which facilitate all of the above. When the conditions are optimal, successful studio experiences can be considered "flow experiences" when a participant is transported outside themselves, to the world

and work of the artist, and when they feel a sense of enjoyment and personal connection with the activity.

Ginette LeBel's (1993) museum research with adults is based largely on the aesthetic theories of Concordia University (Montreal) professor, Stan Horner. LeBel's project took place at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in the gallery spaces. Her research applied Horner's theory (1988) that looking at art should be a dialogue between the viewer and the work, that the importance of one shouldn't outweigh the other, and that viewers move through various imaginary spaces when in this dialogue. LeBel created a learning situation for adults, in which she tried to answer the following questions, using Horner's metaphor of a "voyage" for looking at art:

1. What transformations have been observed in the participants' attitudes towards art appreciation?
2. What are the practical and theoretical implications of an approach based on a description of aesthetic responses?
3. What is the potential of this approach for museum education?

(p. 3)

LeBel worked with adults who had little, if any experience with the visual arts, a demographic which closely parallels the adult clientele at the National Gallery of Canada. LeBel divides her participants' responses into Horner's four stages of aesthetic response:

1. Forgetting - being 'in the moment' with the work, including all held attitudes and beliefs.



2. Remembering - verbal reconstruction of the visit to the work, retracing the voyage.
3. Reflecting - visitor reflects on their own response and on others' reactions to the same work.
4. Revealing - the viewer identifies with and becomes the artist, and can put forward changes or modifications to the work. (pp. 30-31)

Applying this method seemed to work with some participants, though not all. Two of her four informants experienced major changes in their attitudes towards art, while two remained relatively unchanged. LeBel concluded that no single approach works best with adults, but that a variety of approaches serves the public best. (p. 102) LeBel's research also suggests that the variety of activities offered to adults should provide varying levels of engagement, in order to fill the range of adults' learning needs.

In relation to LeBel's results, could a studio activity be seen as a metaphoric "voyage"? Participants are guided through a creative process, an artist's and their own. Relying as it does on full perceptual engagement, the studio activity can be considered a multi-dimensional voyage, with the participant moving simultaneously between several layers of experience, memory, and revelation.

Louise Pelland's thesis, Kinesthetic Stimulation as a Method For Improved Drawing-Skill Acquisition (1980), explores the connection between touch and learning to draw. Her research is based on the work of Johannes Itten, the Bauhaus teacher who believed that the sense of touch must be educated. Itten's

teaching method developed a sense of feeling rather than intellect (Pelland, p. 3). As an example, for a study of texture he would have his students touch a variety of material before drawing. Pelland refers to the work of Kimon Nicolaides (1975) who used the senses in his teaching. Nicolaides felt that the sense of touch informed the visual, and consequently developed exercises in contour drawing which he felt would bring the sense of touch more in line with the sense of sight. Nicolaides asked students to draw by imagining that their pencils were touching either the object or model, rather than their drawing paper (Nicolaides, 1975.)

For her study, Pelland divided a class of teenagers into four groups. All groups were given the verbal instructions to draw an artichoke half, but with several differences in how the instructions were delivered, and in how the exercise was to be carried out. Group one was encouraged by tape recorded instructions to touch an artichoke half that was placed in front of them, before drawing it. Group two was told by a person, rather than a tape recorder, to imagine what the artichoke feels like, and to draw it. Group three was asked by a person to touch the artichoke before drawing it, while Group four was instructed by the tape recording to imagine touching it before drawing. The students' works were judged by a panel of artists, who were not aware of which drawings had been done by which group. The criteria for judging was the degree of realism achieved by the drawings. The results of the judges' decisions showed that both groups who had touched the artichoke had significantly more realistic work than the non-touchers, with the group instructed by a person having somewhat higher quality work than the group who had been instructed by the tape recorded

message.

John Kennedy's (1993) research found that people who are blind need to learn how to read raised-line drawings with their hands, just as sighted people learn how to visually read paintings. Both Itten's teaching and Kennedy's research support the notion that the sense of touch is not only important for information-gathering, but that it can be as sophisticated a tool as the sense of sight.

This has great implications for museum programming, in that we could assume that some, if not many visitors to the museum needs to touch objects in order to learn about and understand them. Art galleries are traditionally places where one can look but not touch. Because of this, they might not be meeting the needs of an unknown percentage of their visitors. A studio activity would therefore enable the haptic or hands-on person to engage in active learning within the museum.

Museum exhibits and programs support mostly the information-gathering modes of hearing and seeing words, or the symbolic information styles. This is particularly true of art museums, where the opportunities to touch objects are restricted, and where hands-on activities often must be booked ahead of time, reducing their availability for drop-in visitors. Hands-on activities without any kind of personal interaction with an interpreter are not ideal either, as visitors often don't feel confident enough to engage in an activity without guidance and instruction (Weltzl-Fairchild, 1984). A combination of elements must therefore be combined to satisfy visitors who prefer to learn by touching.

Pelland's research has interesting implications for understanding the work of an artist through doing a studio activity. Is it possible to gain a greater understanding of an artist's work by touching materials similar to those the artists used, and working with similar technical or theoretical concerns to theirs? I would argue that a work of art can take on an even deeper meaning for a participant who has experienced some of the same concerns and challenges as the work's creator.

A portion of a studio activity as I define it requires its participants to have a direct experience with an original work of art, before their own act of creation. John Dewey (1934) wrote about the beholder or viewer of art, and their relationship to a work of art. Though it was not his intent to speak of an act of physical re-creation of an art work by a viewer, the following statement implies an interactive relationship between the beholder and a work of art:

For to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced. Without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art.  
(p. 54)

The experience of viewing art therefore becomes an active engagement, rather than a passive experience. I further suggest that for participants on the

guided tour portion of their studio activity, the act of visualization they undertake in front of the art work is strengthened by the anticipation of the actual physical act of creation in the workshop.

Learning in the art museum and during a studio activity involves a combination of direct experience with works of art and materials as well as reflection about the concepts or subject matter. The studio activity challenges its participants by introducing them to new ideas and art techniques while enabling them to personally explore their own creativity.

Experiential learning theory is based on the idea that “learning is best facilitated in an environment where there is a dialectic tension and conflict between immediate, concrete experience and analytic detachment.... Of central importance here is the idea that learning is by its very nature a tension and conflict-filled process. “ (Kolb and Fry, 1992, p. 35.) This kind of dialectic tension could describe the relationship between the studio participant's previous knowledge, and their introduction to new concepts. Kolb goes on to list the various phases or abilities that the experiential learner must go through, in order to fulfill the requirements for learning to happen. Concrete experience abilities require the learner to be fully open to new experiences (readiness to learn); reflective observation requires the learner to consciously think and observe the experiences from different perspectives; abstract conceptualization skills require the learner to conceptualize the observations into logical conclusions or theories; and active experimentation skills require the learner to apply those conclusions to new experiences in decision-making and problem-solving (see Figure 2).

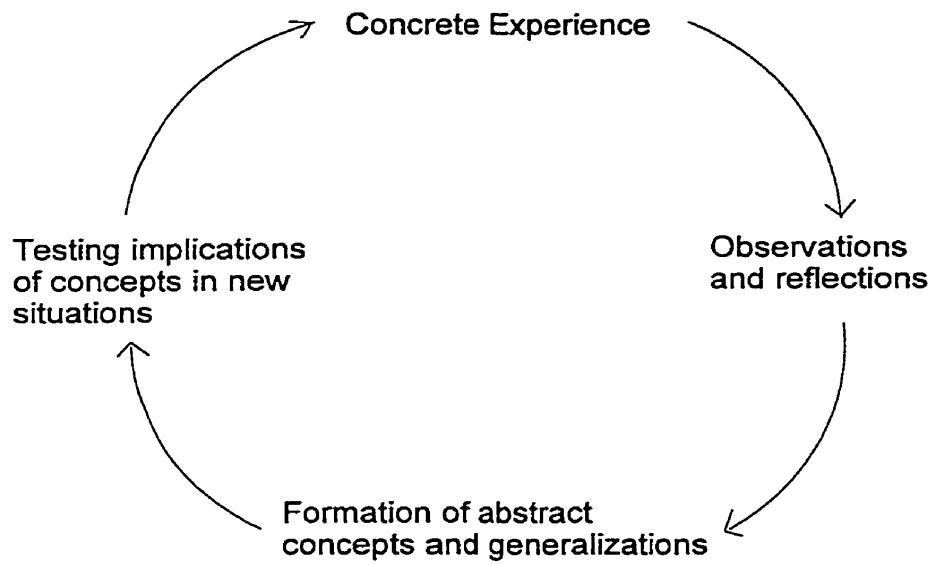


Figure 2. Kolb and Fry's (1992) Experiential Learning Model

As it applies to the studio activity, the adult learner is required to use each of those four abilities. Concrete experience skills are the adult learner's willingness to confront new subject matter, or art techniques, and are engaged in during the guided tour which precedes every studio activity. Reflective observation and abstract conceptualization skills are both in use during the guided tour, as the learner reflects on the new knowledge, and applies it to their knowledge of the upcoming studio activity. Discussion and questioning during the tour and studio activity also utilize both skills. Active experimentation skills are fully engaged during the hands-on portion of the studio experience, in which the participant is able to apply the previous skills to the synthesis of the art-making experience. The learning experience is therefore an integrated process of action, reflection and knowledge acquisition.

Katherine Sayoko Dewey (1974) studied the value of a Gestalt Art Education program as a crucial contributor to the creation of the "whole" person. She believed that "the integration of cognitive and affective experiences fosters gestalt comprehension." (p. 4) Dewey also quotes Carl Rogers, "if a child is 'taught' a foreign language in school, in a manner which involves intellect without emotional interplay, he has difficulty remembering or mastering the language." (p. 4)

K.S. Dewey developed a rationale for a Gestalt art workshop and a Gestalt Interdisciplinary Art Education program, based on the ideas of Frederick Perls, who developed Gestalt therapy. She asserts that the Gestalt art workshop and Gestalt Interdisciplinary Art education programs will:

1. Free students from cognitive indoctrination by integrating affective modes of learning into the educational processes.
2. Develop personal aesthetic taste by facilitating the creative processes of becoming involved in the actual creation of art(s) (eg. composing poetry, visual and plastic arts and music).
3. Aid students in the realization of self-confidence in their decision-making with the result of a self-supporting person responsible and accountable for his life.
4. Produce genuine human beings (free from games, defenses and perceptual distortions) endowed with empathy and compassion thus aiding in developing a healthy society promoting mutual trust and understanding.

5. Encourage participants to become responsible members of those communities in which they live and interact. (p. 11)

As it applies to museums, we know that visitors see the museum as a “whole”, or gestalt experience (Falk and Dierking, 1992), which could involve not only their aesthetic taste, but also social, cognitive and affective needs. Of further interest is the second statement, which suggests the value of learning and discovery through active involvement in activities, and the integration of the “whole” person in a learning experience.

Further, when there has been a complete engagement of the museum visitor in their experience, the creation of strong museum memories result. We tend to remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 70% of what we say, and 90% of what we say and do (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). From the point of view of creating lasting museum memories, it seems that learning by doing does have some advantages. I would suggest that learning during a studio activity happens not only at a conscious level, but at a primal physical level, much as a dancer remembers body positions and postures. Pelland's (1980) research with her drawing students confirmed that students who touched the object to be drawn had a stronger physical memory of it, which translated into a more realistic drawing. Further, when people are emotionally engaged in an experience, they are more likely to remember it (Conway, 1990). Given that part of the process for studio participants takes place on a personal level, as they explore their own skills and creativity, I would argue that part of their learning and memory-making happens at the affective level during their



experience.

The work of adult educator Malcolm Knowles was pivotal to the comprehension of adults' learning styles and needs. Knowles (1980) defined the pedagogue as one who is concerned with the transmission of content, and the andragogue as one who is concerned with the acquisition of content. Knowles determined that most adult education programs were based on the pedagogical style, or traditional children's school style, in which the teacher imparts knowledge to the empty vessels of his or her students. By contrast, andragogy involved for Knowles an interaction between the teacher and the learner, with each being equal partners in the learning process. Knowles also suggested that a more andragogical style of teaching-learning would benefit all levels of education, not only that aimed at adults. He further differentiated between pedagogy and andragogy, in that he saw pedagogy as an ideology, and andragogy as an alternative set of assumptions. Pedagogy's ideology included a set of beliefs which touted for example such standards as the dependence of the learner on the teacher, the competition for grades, and the normal distribution of grades across a class. Androgogy's alternative set of assumptions includes some of the elements of the ideology of the pedagogue, while helping the learner take increasing responsibility for his own learning. (p. 62)

At their worst, art museums would seem to be using only pedagogical models of teaching, with the art museum and its representatives being the authoritative holders of knowledge, which is then imparted to the learners (eg. school children, adults, seniors etc.). At their best, art museums could fit into the

andragogical model. Art museum studio activities in particular are designed to foster inquiry and interaction on the part of their participants, and to offer them opportunities to increase their understanding of particular contents. Given that adults are there by choice, studio activities need to engage learners by offering them an experience that is informative, interesting, and interactive. A studio activity would seem therefore, to fit the andragogical style of teaching-learning, in which participants and teacher define goals together.

With the exception of organized group activities, visitors to the art museum are usually there by choice. Having chosen to go to the museum, these visitors are somewhat more pre-disposed to learning from this experience than those who haven't chosen to be there. One of the characteristics of adult learners is that they are self-directed (Tough, 1979) and prefer to choose their own tools and paths for learning. Furthermore, adults learn best from actual situations and from being actively involved in their learning (Tough, 1979, Hiemstra, 1981).

### Summary of Literature Review

In summarizing the literature reviewed regarding adults and their learning in art museums, several main points reccur:

1. The visitors studied in art museums derived satisfaction and feelings of well-being by being in contact with works of art, or by engaging in a hands-on art activity (Dufresne-Tassé and Lefebvre, 1995; Montgomery-Whicher, 1987; Weltzl-Fairchild, 1984).

2. Certain people can learn about objects and their environment through touching and engaging physically with materials, and some people might even learn better by being able to do so (J. Dewey, 1934; K.S.Dewey, 1974; Falk and Dierking, 1992; Kennedy, 1993; Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1982; Pelland, 1980).
3. Adult learners require that they be treated as active participants in the learning process, by determining their learning outcomes in partnership with a teacher, and by feeling comfortable in their environment (Hiemstra, 1981; Knowles, 1980; Tough, 1979).
4. A studio experience can fully and actively engage the learner on many levels, and by doing so, can create strong memories for the museum visitor (Conway, 1990; Kolb and Fry, 1992; Falk and Dierking, 1992; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

In reviewing the above points, it appears that the following could be true:

If the studio activity is able to engage participants physically, cognitively and affectively through contact with works of art, art materials and a qualified teacher, and when participants are given the freedom to determine their learning outcomes, they will learn about works of art, an artist or style, the museum itself, and they will seek further learning opportunities either in the museum or beyond it. As well, they will form strong memories of their experiences.

## Chapter 4

### The participants

Six participants were recruited from two different adult studio activity series. Of the six, two participants were male, and four female. As mentioned previously, they were recruited on a volunteer basis, and were unknown to me before this research. The interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon time in the participants' homes, with the exception of one interview which took place at the National Gallery.

The participants' names have been changed to protect their identities. Elizabeth, Len and Anna were interviewed after a studio activity on contemporary art, while Karen, Pierre and Helen were interviewed after a workshop on the work of artist Honoré Daumier. The interviews took place within five months of each workshop. The first three interviews (Elizabeth, Len and Anna) were longer than the subsequent ones, due to the participants' previous experience with studio activities and their ability to detail their learning experiences. The interviews with each participant will be discussed individually, followed by a synthesis and analysis of all interviews.

## Elizabeth and Len

These two participants were married, and were, for convenience's sake, interviewed together. Both Elizabeth and Len are frequent visitors to the National Gallery of Canada, having attended over sixteen different activities in the past year. They've participated in almost every kind of activity, from concerts and guided tours, to film screenings and studio activities. They've both attended approximately five studio activities each (over the course of the past couple of years). Neither have trained as artists, however both have taken continuing education art courses as adults, and later in the interview mentioned that these had been at the Ottawa School of Art. Both Elizabeth and Len are university graduates, and Len has post-graduate training in the health profession.

They are members of the National Gallery, and Elizabeth mentioned that becoming members had been pivotal to changing both of their perceptions of the Gallery, and it made them feel they could give their opinions on things. They had also met the National Gallery's previous Director at a members' event, and Elizabeth mentioned how approachable she was, which further contributed to their sense of feeling welcome. It was clear from our discussion that both Elizabeth and Len felt a strong sense of ownership of the National Gallery and its activities.

Later in our interview, they said that they had found the studio activity descriptions too vague, the wording too high-brow, and that they would like additional, more concrete information available in advance of the workshops.

Despite this potential pitfall to participation, it was interesting to see that their familiarity with the Gallery was such that they felt extremely comfortable undertaking whatever kind of learning experience was offered, even without adequate advance information.

*Len: I think we've said before, the instructors, the tours themselves are worth the price of admission, because it's so enjoyable, and there's so much information and you know, the stuff you learn. But you know the thing that is difficult to understand a little bit was the description, it wasn't very clear so I mean but we went anyway because we knew it was worth it.*

Both Len and Elizabeth's confidence in the quality of the instructors and the activities was high based on past experience. In the context of the same discussion, Elizabeth said, "...Len and I were already addicts before..." and "We had a pre-conceived conception that we would like it very much." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts)

For Len, studio activities in conjunction with an exhibition offered "the chance to have a much deeper look at the works being exhibited." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts) The combination of experiences involved in a studio activity; a tour, contact with works of art, a knowledgeable teacher, and contact with art materials and creation were exciting for both Elizabeth and Len. Len had this to say:

*...But what I found was that it was a much richer experience, the activities were so diverse, there was a greater opportunity to learn about different media, different techniques, this is one of the wonderful things. You know,*

*a chance to do painting, acrylics, and watercolours, and then sketching, printmaking, woodcarving, stone carving... The teachers are all enthusiastic and knowledgeable and willing to share, not too critical and encouraging... And then you know the experience of, apart from the activities in the studio, which are hands-on and which give all the different experiences I just mentioned, the tours of the galleries and the comments of the work by the different instructors, that was very, in my opinion, gives a whole new dimension to what you're looking at.*

Understanding of the artist's process seemed to be very strongly linked to the hands-on activity. Furthermore, there seemed to be almost an anticipatory learning experience taking place during the guided tour, as mentioned by Len when I asked him if he found there was a difference between a simple guided tour and a tour combined with a studio activity:

*Len: There is a difference, no, there's a difference. I think the guided tours usually focus on a particular work or series of works and it was just on the works themselves, whereas you know with the studio activities, the works were viewed and explored with respect to what we were going to use in the studio later so it adds a special dimension to that.*

*Laurie: Ok, yeah, yeah.*

*Len: It's much more meaningful. They say oh look at what Betty Goodwin does with her drawings, and the use of mylar, and you actually went to the studio and used some mylar, you know, and it's part to try and do some of the things that the artists that were discussed.*

His comment about the work of artist Betty Goodwin is significant for the reason that the adult studio activity on her work had taken place in the winter of 1996, two to three years before our interview. The fact of his using this particular workshop as an example suggests that there is a significant recall of experiences when they have been meaningful, and when there is a "hands-on" or personal involvement on the part of the learner.

For Elizabeth, the process of experiencing the works in a holistic way, through the use of all the senses, was important to her own learning:

*Elizabeth: ..it was kind of both doing and seeing at the same time, which is one of the things I enjoy, so you are sort of experiencing things as well as looking at them.*

*Laurie: Oh, okay, so a combination of the two was what...*

*Elizabeth: A combination of touching and feeling and seeing.*

The lack of time, or the sense that time was too short to finish the studio projects was commented on by both Len and Elizabeth. Having said that, they said that the workshops were just enough to get you going.

*Elizabeth: It's a catalyst, and it's put back on you to carry it forward afterwards, which is a typical artistic thing, you've got to do it yourself.*

*Laurie: Oh okay, yeah.*

*Len: Maybe that's enough, you know, I think in many instances the activities were just an introduction, you know to the use of a particular medium, you know, or a technique or whatever, and to me at least with a drawing, there's a spurt of your own work...*



For Elizabeth and Len, the studio activities acted as a motivation to undertake further learning in art techniques. This was perhaps more evident for Len, who admitted that he hadn't stopped drawing since he took his first drawing workshop at the Gallery in 1997.

*Len: And it was very very short, it's probably, we spent probably an hour, hour and a half, just, you know, just quick sketches, whatever, but then, I was so inspired, I haven't stopped drawing since then... It's wonderful, you know. It just opened my eyes, and got me fired up, I found that, so the drawings are useful when I do clay modelling, and when I'm working with little clay figures and so on the drawing's helpful in getting me started. But I'd like to do some more life drawing, you know.*

Elizabeth and Len knew that the Gallery studio activities were an introduction to techniques, rather than a substitute for a full art class. When I questioned Elizabeth on the difference between the Gallery activities and courses offered by the Ottawa School of Art, she replied, "I think they complement each other." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts) For her, the workshops at the Gallery were distinguished by the value of having contact with an original work of art, they had, as Elizabeth put it, an "in-awe-of-the-masters kind of feeling." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts) She also realized that the advantage of this was that you could "even sort of incorporate some of the elements into your own style, and how you look at things can be different." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts) Elizabeth said that there were artworks in the Gallery that she just loved walking by, and that it made her feel good to do so.

The aesthetics of the National Gallery building were important, and of all the participants in this research, Elizabeth mentioned it specifically as being an attractive place to be in: "It's a very positive location in terms of being close to the Market, in being close to beautiful scenery. I mean it's a very positive kind of place." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts) It seems clear from this statement that Elizabeth is responding to more than just the practical aspects of the Gallery's location. The description of "a positive kind of place" suggests that the Gallery is not only well located, but is also a place where Elizabeth is engaging in emotional and sensory experiences during her visits.

Both Elizabeth and Len are experienced learners, with the confidence to engage in new subject matter and activities. Based on their comments, they both seek opportunities to learn about art by making it, and require that the learning situation involve contact with an original work of art, along with quality instruction.

### Anna

Anna is an experienced Gallery visitor, having attended over sixteen activities in the past year. The activities she participated in were varied, such as guided tours, lectures, concerts, gallery talks, exhibition openings, and studio activities. Anna is a member of the Gallery, and had attended six previous studio activities (over the course of a few years.) Anna had not trained as an artist, but like Elizabeth and Len, had taken some general interest courses in art.

I asked Anna what her motivation had been to take her first studio activity,

and she replied:

*My motivation, I thought 'Ooh!' well I'd like to know more about it, I like to learn and to have the hands-on activity, I thought 'that is great!' You're exposed to materials that you haven't got, or you have never worked with before and then in connection with what you see, I think to me, it was most revealing. I just loved it. I found them very stimulating."*

It became apparent during our interview that Anna is highly motivated to learn about art. She consistently tries new activities, though she might have initial hesitations about the subject. When questioned about her response to a studio activity on contemporary art:

*Was it, that was another workshop with the Brazilian, country, no no South American countries. That workshop and that was with all unusual materials. Dog bones, soap box, lettuce, food, you name it, you name it. Well to me that was, first of all, you know, having lived through a war and you know, I thought, oh, that waste, that waste, and the eggs, and the flour, and that rubbing on paintings, you know. But it also gave me a little bit extra excitement, a little freedom. But I had to overcome that one first.*

I asked Anna if she remembered the first studio activity she took, and she immediately recalled having taken the studio activity on Betty Goodwin's work, as well as the drawing activity that had so inspired Len to further his drawing instruction. Anna was motivated to take her first studio activity simply because it was a hands-on workshop on art, rather than on a specific artist or subject.

*Laurie: Was it the subject of the first one that made you think, oh, this*

*looks kind of interesting? Or were you looking for it when you came to the Gallery?*

*Anna: Well, whatever, it was a workshop, and usually if it's connected with art, to me I love it. Because I'm not what you call an artist, I don't know. It's very very amateur, whatever I do. But I love it, I love it.*

Anna felt that studio activities gave her “an understanding of what the show was all about, teach me to see, to understand things that I don't know anything about.” (Anna, transcript) The knowledge gained during this activity built on what was previously known, and satisfied her initial motivation for taking the activity.

As with Elizabeth and Len, Anna knew that she would learn something from taking a studio activity, regardless of the subject. She went into them without pre-conceived notions of what she would learn, simply that she knew she would learn something.

*Anna: I'm very free, very open there. Yeah, I go and I know I will learn something... I know it's done by qualified people that are enthusiastic or they wouldn't be there.*

I questioned Anna about the difference for her as a learner between taking a guided tour or taking a studio activity.

*Anna: I think there is a big difference. A tour most of the time I go back on my own anyway. A tour is for me more, not superficial, that's not true, but a day is more intense and especially as the hands-on is applied. Well, you know, like printmaking, I had never done it. I didn't realize, and I didn't see*

*the beauty of it... You know, I just saw the artistic viewpoint, I liked them or I didn't. But I didn't see anything beyond that because I had never done it. I sort of look at the things I like to see and that I relate to easily. So yeah, it makes a big difference.*

For Anna, learning through active engagement with the subject is what interests her about the studio activities. Anna: "It's much more, intense maybe is not the right word, but it's 'wholer'." (Anna, transcripts)

The combination of touching, seeing and doing creates a Gestalt experience of the museum for Anna. Unlike Elizabeth and Len, she felt no need to take art courses at an art school, she was very happy to continue with museum studio activities in order to fulfill her need to learn about art. Contact with original works of art is very important, and the combination of works of art and an activity enabled her to experiment with ideas related to the exhibits.

*Anna: Having the examples is very important, and then it's related to the show. And then I can-the activity, hey, then I can sort of play on my own a little bit, because very often you find out, oieoieoie it's much much harder than it looks.*

Anna felt that the studio activities offered her the opportunity to "nibble" at things, and to play with ideas. She did not have any pre-conceived expectations when beginning these activities, and found them very stimulating. She had no need to know exactly what would be done during each session. She was confident that she would learn something. When asked whether she had taken any art courses since beginning to take workshops at the Gallery, she replied she

hadn't, and that "... if I would take a course, it would have to be very specific, something that I want to learn or want to do. But the Gallery I go just free."

(Anna, transcripts) Clearly, Anna felt a freedom to experiment that she felt would be lacking in an art course.

### Pierre

Pierre was motivated to learn through studio activities by his increasing interest in art. An engineer by trade, Pierre had recently retired and was becoming more involved in taking art history and practical courses in art techniques. He had only participated in one museum studio activity, though he had taken many guided tours, and lectures, and had become a member. He had also taken two art history courses which had been given by a local continuing education college, but had been held at the Gallery.

For Pierre, the studio activity was attractive because of the subject matter, which was the work of the artist Honoré Daumier. He was not initially aware whether this was an activity he could participate in himself or whether it was simply a demonstration of techniques that he would be observing. He had enjoyed visiting the Daumier exhibition, and was curious to know more about this artist's work.

The excitement of taking the workshop came from the feeling of understanding Daumier's work by going through some of the same processes he did.

*Pierre: It gave me a lot more knowledge because I was able to learn how Daumier did it... And in the galleries they brought us to the places where they could explain to us how Daumier was doing it, and they did explain it in the gallery, and then we went in the class and tried to do what Daumier did way back when. So it was, you know, we were right on top of it, because we were sitting in Daumier's chair during these four weeks.*

As with the previous participants, Pierre felt that learning through a studio activity gave him information that he couldn't have gotten through any other method of transmission.

*Pierre: There was no other way of getting it. Because just reading the paper, they, or even the audioguide they just explain to you as to why he did it this way, but there's never any explanation of the techniques of how he did it and what was his thought, what he had to think before going into this, all the reasoning. So that was a great, very good experience. I really enjoyed that.*

Pierre's interest in art and the Gallery had developed to the point where, at the time of our interview, he had just applied to the National Gallery's docent program to become a volunteer guide. In his case, his interest in the Gallery began by attending public and special exhibition tours, and by getting to know the docents who were giving the programs. The more tours he took, the more he enjoyed it. The tours also stimulated his interest in learning more about art techniques. He began taking art courses, and eventually a studio activity at the Gallery.

The Daumier studio activity involved cartooning and caricature, and was taught by a professional cartoonist. Pierre discovered through the caricature exercises that he enjoyed drawing people.

*Pierre: And the other part where we did the cartoons, it was very interesting. And I found out that I like drawing some people in paintings. Because in my watercolour courses, we were always doing landscapes, and I'd like to include more people. I haven't started yet, but definitely.*

The studio activity served as a catalyst for further learning. For Pierre, taking the activity confirmed that the Gallery was a dynamic place, and he was pleased to have taken the studio activity.

*Pierre: Because, I learned so much more about Daumier through that workshop, than I would've learned only visiting the exhibition.*

### Helen

Helen was an experienced museum goer, but new to the National Gallery, having recently moved to the area. She painted, and had a small studio set up at home, but was a health care professional by trade. As with all the previous participants, she had attended other activities such as tours and lectures. She had been a member at the art museum in her previous place of residence, and quickly signed up for membership at the Gallery when she first arrived in Ottawa.

When she registered for the studio activity, she had initially thought it was an activity for the Van Gogh mini-exhibition, and not for Daumier. She felt that



her own paintings had a “Van Gogh-ish” quality to them, and was hoping to learn some of his techniques. She was initially disappointed when she learned that it was a workshop on Daumier.

*Helen: I thought, well, my brother should've been here, he's the caricaturist in the family. And I never attempted that. Never. So I thought, well, this is gonna help me, because what I do is mainly faces and I have.... Every one of my paintings has faces... so I thought I'll learn technical skills, frowning, high cheekbones, and like it wouldn't be so terrible to do something like technically knowledgeable instead of just experiential.*

Helen enjoyed certain aspects of the workshop, though not all. She was the only participant of the six who found the repeated visits to the exhibition tedious. Her interest was for the art activity itself, rather than in the information given on the tour. She found that information was repeated from visit to visit, and as she had done a complete tour on her own before the workshop, she felt little need to stop at certain works again.

Despite this, there were several highlights during this experience for Helen. One of the instructors had done a basic sketch of facial musculature which Helen found very useful, in terms of its application to her own paintings. She enjoyed sketching in the galleries, which took place during one of the sessions.

*Helen: I loved it physically, sitting on a stool, I loved that, the experience, it's like the first time you take your paints outdoors. And you set up your easel and stuff, and boom, you're a painter outdoors! So to be a painter physically in the galleries was fun.*

Helen also enjoyed the sculpture portion of the studio activities, as it was so different from her painting experiences. It gave her the opportunity to physically create the musculature that had been touched upon in the facial sketch earlier in the workshop. When I asked her how she had enjoyed it, she replied:

*Perfect... Because it's like I was painting, you know and the sculpture, I mean I had no idea what I was going to do and if it turned out to be caricaturish, how much better, you know and I used the muscle sketch to make huge cheeks and when the tongue stuck itself out I thought oh this is wonderful, I'll keep it here.*

Helen found the quality of the teachers excellent, as well as the studio activity itself. As an experienced museum goer, she commented that with both teachers "you felt comfortable asking individual questions and look at how the art, the light shines in here, you wouldn't do that with a docent. Oh there's no question." (Helen, transcripts) Helen felt that she had learned equally well from taking an audioguide tour of the Daumier exhibition, though she enjoys hands-on activities very much. Despite her comments about the tour portion of the activity, she was enthusiastic about taking other studio activities in the future, particularly any dealing with sculpture.

Unlike the other five participants, Helen was spending time developing her personal painting techniques, and clearly had technical needs that she wanted fulfilled by taking a studio activity. While the other participants were more focussed on the subject of the activity (eg. Daumier, or contemporary art), Helen was more interested in the technical aspects of the artist's work, which perhaps

accounts for her disappointment with the repeated gallery visits.

### Karen

Of all of the participants, Karen was the least experienced in terms of the frequency of her participation in art museum activities. A friend of hers who is a member of the National Gallery, had, in fact, talked her into taking the Daumier workshop. Karen is the only non-member of the six participants. Similar to Elizabeth and Len, neither Karen nor her friend were quite sure whether the activity was a demonstration or a lecture. As Karen said, "We were astounded when we found out what it really was." (Karen, transcripts) Karen was part of an art group, and had taken art classes for two years prior to the Gallery studio activity. Karen and her friend (who is not part of this study), had a strong initial reaction to the subject of caricature:

*Karen: A cruel way to depict people and we looked at one another and thought oh my god what have we just done. And when we finished that night, we were so excited. We couldn't believe how interested we were in it. It was wonderful.*

The quality of the instructors and her interest in the subject of Daumier were important factors in Karen's change of opinion about caricature. Both instructors were able to bring out the interesting aspects of Daumier, which were not obvious to Karen at first glance. As a consequence, Karen admitted that without having taken the studio activity, she might have rushed through Daumier

to get to the Van Gogh exhibition.

*Karen: I might've by-passed a lot of it to get straight to Van Gogh. And of course, he's the big name, and you know so many of his works and I think that you know you probably would've zoomed by, and am I ever glad I didn't.*

For Karen, the studio activity changed her whole way of thinking. She wants to do more caricature, and plans to sign up for a drawing course. The studio activity increased the importance for Karen of learning how to draw, particularly as it relates to portraying people. She also started drawing on her own: "I started drawing my great grandson's face with his grandfather and stuff. Having a ball. I would never have expected that." (Karen, transcripts) Karen loved sketching in the galleries, and was surprised that such an activity could take place. She was also surprised at how interested she was in one of the characters shown repeatedly in Daumier's paintings.

*Karen: I don't know what painting it is, he used that face over and over again, it's a little sort of a diamond shaped face, and little slanty eyes, and this chap, and he has the impression of a little devil. And it gives me the impression of a little devil, and normally, I don't like fantasy... But ah, when I see that face I would be inclined to bypass it, because I would think that perhaps it wasn't real. I don't even know why. I didn't even think about it now that you're asking this. But now there's no way I'd pass anything, I'd look at everything.*

Karen couldn't believe how enthusiastic she remained, though the activity

had taken place in September, three months before our interview. As with all the previous participants, the studio activity motivated her to continue her learning beyond the museum.

Throughout our discussion, Karen had strong memories of the activities and what had happened during them, including how enthusiastic one of the instructors had been to her sculpture. She remembered another participant in the class rushing to finish a sculpture and his reactions to that situation, as well as remembering the details of the sculpture he was trying to finish.

#### Summary of participants

Of the six participants in this project, five were frequent museum-goers, four having visited the Gallery over 16 times, and one between 10 to 15 times in the past year. One participant had been to the Gallery around three times, and was encouraged to register for the studio activity by a friend, who had also registered for it. It was determined during the interview portion of this project that five participants are members of the National Gallery, with membership being credited in three instances as an important motivator for frequent visits. The single participant who was not a member had been encouraged to take the workshop by a friend who was a member. Three participants also said that membership had been very important to them in their perception of the National Gallery ("pivotal" was the word one participant used). They felt that they belonged, were welcome at the Gallery as members, and that their opinions were

important. These factors are consistent with the motivators that cause adults to seek out learning opportunities. Successful adult learning situations are based on adults' experiences, and build on what they already know (Knowles, 1984). Many adults also learn better in situations in which each member can contribute something to the group (Tough 1979) and when the situation is co-operative (Hiemstra, 1981). Furthermore, adults learn better when they are comfortable in a situation and don't feel anonymous (Carr, 1992). Becoming members enabled these participants to feel comfortable at the Gallery, and that they had a valuable contribution to make.

Three of the participants had taken between five and six studio activities at the National Gallery, while one had taken one previous activity. For two of the participants this had been their only experience thus far. All six of the participants had taken interest classes in either art appreciation or in a particular technique (ie. watercolour painting), through continuing education or art schools. One participant was a high school graduate and none of the participants had ever trained as artists. Five participants had post-secondary education, and two of those had completed post-graduate training in psychiatry or health training. These results are fairly consistent with those found by Alan Knox (1981). Knox found that a full 39% of museum goers have a college degree, while 47% have some form of post-graduate education, compared to 15% who have high school education. Though I would need to survey more studio participants, it is possible that there is a correlation between the level of education of the visitor and their level of involvement in museum activities.

The main motivation for the participants to take a studio activity was the desire to learn more. Their impressions were that taking a studio activity would give them a more in-depth experience of an exhibition. Five of the participants felt that their curiosity about the works and/or artist had been satisfied. One of the participants had taken the Gallery workshop hoping to learn more about a specific technique rather than the artist, and was somewhat satisfied that she had received the information she required.

Four of the six participants were motivated by the studio activities to take further art classes outside the museum, one participant was already painting at home, and the sixth participant was happy to continue her experiences taking studio activities at the Gallery.

Five of the participants preferred the mode of learning by doing and experiencing, while one participant learned equally well in the art museum by either doing a hands-on activity or by taking a public or audioguide tour. All six participants enjoyed the experience of taking an art activity in the museum, and were impressed with the quality of instruction, to the point that it enhanced their overall enjoyment of the activity.

All six of the participants retained strong memories of their studio experience. Details of themes, activities and how they had felt while taking the activities were easily and quickly recalled. Three of the six participants were able to recall experiences in the museum dating back several years, while one of the three remembered taking her children to the Gallery and enjoying it some forty years earlier. This suggests that when the visitor has a positive and personal

involvement in the art museum, they are more likely to remember their experience, the details of it, and will want to repeat it.



## Chapter 5

### The learning experience

Based on the participants' comments, it is clear that learning is happening on many levels, and they are using many different skills. They are fully engaged in their learning, on physical, affective and cognitive levels. Further, the complexity of the participants' learning is demonstrated by their ability to move between the various levels of their experiences, from looking, to doing, to reflecting, to doing again. In their description of experiential learning theory, Kolb and Fry (1992) state that learners need four different kinds of learning abilities if their learning is to be effective. These are:

1. Concrete experience abilities, which enable the learner to be open to new experiences;
2. Reflective observation abilities which enable the learner to think and reflect on their experiences;
3. Abstract conceptualization skills, which enable the learner to integrate the learning into new and relevant theories;
4. Active experimentation skills, which enable the learner to use these new ideas to problem solve.

It would be a mistake to compartmentalize the learning that goes on in a studio activity. However as mentioned previously in this research, it is possible to find evidence of the various abilities at work during some of the various phases of

the studio activity. Studio participants use concrete experience skills when deciding to register for a studio activity, and then when confronting new ideas and art techniques during the course of a guided tour and hands-on activity. Reflective observation skills are in use during the guided tour as the participant reflects on the artist's or critic's viewpoint, and during an activity as they contemplate the various possibilities for their creative project. Abstract conceptualization skills are in evidence both during the tour and the activity, as the participant develops their own opinions or conclusions about an artwork, art style or technique. Finally, active experimentation skills are in use during a guided tour as the participant takes part in discussion and debate about the subject matter, and in the studio as they make they apply their new knowledge to their choice of creative project.

In the context of their experiential learning theory, Kolb and Fry (1992) state that learning becomes an integration of the emotional, the cognitive and the conceptual faculties, which in turn facilitates change in participants. An experience such as a studio activity, which offers the possibility for the use of all of these faculties, could therefore become a catalyst for further change for its participants.

As mentioned previously, studio participants view their experience as a whole, rather than as compartmentalized areas of memory or learning. It is a combination of elements that interest studio learners: contact with a work of art, a qualified instructor, new art materials, information about the work of art, artist or technique, the environment of the museum, and the dynamics of the learning

group. Several of the studio participants mentioned how the integration of elements, of seeing and doing, facilitated their learning experiences. These learners are aware of their preferred learning mode. Though they had all attended other types of activities at the Gallery, it seemed clear that taking a workshop was, for them, an ideal way to learn.

*Elizabeth: ...it was kind of both doing and seeing at the same time, which is one of the things I enjoy, so you are sort of experiencing things as well as looking at them.*

*Laurie: Oh, okay, so a combination of the two was what...*

*Elizabeth: A combination of touching and feeling and seeing.*

*Anna: Well, the thing I learnt the most, and that's what my main interest was, the interest (was) more the understanding of what the show was all about, teach me to see, to understand things that I don't know anything about. You know, to learn something, to appreciate more what I see in the Gallery and then of course the hands-on experience. I find that fantastic.*

*Pierre: ... I learned so much more about Daumier through that workshop, than I would've learned only visiting the exhibition.*

*Helen: Well, it's hands-on, which for me is interesting, yeah, instead of just being the spectator, I learn by participating.*

Participants in studio activities experienced changes in their own points of view, in their perception of the Gallery, and in their perception of specific subject matters. As Hermann and Plude (1995) point out, by offering other points of view and ways of perceiving the world, museums can be the catalyst for causing

change in personal perceptions or values.

*Len: ...you know we did have a brief look at the work of Jamalie Hassan which has to do with you know, her Lebanese roots and her you know the misunderstanding of at least she claims misunderstanding of what Westerners think of Middle Eastern people, Arabs.*

*Karen: In the beginning we both looked at one another and thought oh gosh, both of us felt the same way about caricature. Both of us felt it was a cruel medium. A cruel way to depict people and we looked at one another and thought oh my god what have we just done. And when we finished that night, we were so excited. We couldn't believe how interested we were in it.*

Further, the whole experience of participating in a studio activity caused not only a shift in perspectives but proved to be a catalyst for further learning. Clearly encouraged by their success and pleasure in the learning that takes place during a studio activity, these highly motivated participants wanted to continue the experience beyond the museum into art classes and further learning.

*Len: ...we spent probably an hour, hour and a half just you know, just quick sketches, whatever, but then, I was so inspired I haven't stopped drawing since then.... And I'd never drawn before. So that's encouraging to me... It's wonderful, you know. It just opened my eyes and got me fired up... But I'd like to go on to do some more life drawing, you know.*

*Elizabeth: It's a catalyst, and it's put back on you to carry it forward afterwards, which is a typical artistic thing, eh, you've got to do it yourself.*

*Karen: It changed my whole way of thinking. I want to, I'd like to work in caricature now. Oh yes, even drawing. I'm going to take a drawing course now from somebody I know who's an excellent excellent artist and I've never taken a drawing course. I've taken lots of art courses and thought maybe I'd learn to draw somehow some way, but you don't realize until you see things like that, just how important it is to really draw so you can get the feel of the character of people. I was never interested in faces or anything like that really. But now I am.*

As learners, these studio participants are highly motivated to undertake new experiences. The participants also had a high degree of confidence that whatever activity the Gallery was offering was bound to be of high quality and that they could take it, even without sufficient information available ahead of time.

*Len: I think we've said before, the instructors, the tours themselves are worth the price of admission, because it's so enjoyable, and there's so much information and you know, the stuff you learn. But the thing that is difficult to understand a little bit was the description, it wasn't very clear, but we went anyway because we knew it was worth it.*

It is clearly very important to each of the participants that their chosen learning experience include a variety of modes for information gathering, and that it be highly experiential. Museum educator Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1994) confirmed through her own research that it is vital for museums to offer multiple learning modes to their visitors, preferably using objects and experiences to stimulate interest and enhance learning. A studio activity within the art museum

can offer the adult visitor, and particularly one who learns through touching objects or doing an activity, a primary, experiential, learning opportunity.

All six participants experienced a high degree of enjoyment during the hands-on portion of the studio activities. Five of the six participants were stimulated by the combination of the gallery visits followed by the hands-on activity, and enjoyed returning to the galleries at the beginning of every session. Of the six, only Helen found the repeated gallery visits repetitious. Her preference was to focus on the hands-on activity, and on the acquisition of particular technical skills.

Based on their comments, it appears that for the participants learning seems to take place on a number of levels. On a conscious, visual level, information about a work or artist is being received, processed, and stored, while learning is also taking place at the haptic, or sensory level. An appreciation for the process, as well as a physical understanding of the skill required have come out of the hands-on activity. A more personal relevance is added to the information given on a guided tour, as the participant realizes that they will be soon be undertaking some of the similar processes that the artist did.

Writer/researcher Jennifer Fisher talks about the "haptic aesthetic" (1997), in the following way:

The haptic sense, comprising the tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses, describes aspects of engagement that are qualitatively distinct from the capabilities of the visual sense. Where the visual sense permits a transcendent, distant and arguably disconnected, point-of-view, the haptic

sense functions by contiguity, contact and resonance. (p .6)

I would argue that for the studio participants, the “haptic sense” as described by Fisher is doubly engaged during the guided tour, and during their interactions with works of art, as they anticipate their upcoming involvement in a hands-on activity. They are learning through more than their sense of sight. They are also learning through their immediate physical engagement with their environment, through “contiguity, contact and resonance,” (Fisher, 1997) and through the anticipatory learning that takes place during the guided tour. It also seems that there is an element of personal discovery that is enhanced through the process of creation.

*Elizabeth: ... it was kind of both doing and seeing at the same time, which is one of the things I enjoy, so you are sort experiencing things as well as looking at them... A combination of touching and feeling and seeing.*

*Len: There is a difference... I think the guided tours usually focus on particular work or series of works and ah, it was just on the works themselves, whereas you know with the studio activities, the ah works were viewed and ah explored with respect to what we were going to use in the studio later, so it adds a special dimension to that.*

A Gestalt experience seems to be taking place for studio participants: all the senses are utilized in order to make the learning meaningful for the participant. Falk and Dierking (1992) found that visitors to museums experience the museum in its entirety, from finding parking, to enjoying an artwork. The context of their visit is physical, (what is their state, their physical needs etc.),

social, (are they with family or friends, etc.) and personal (what are their expectations for the experience, what are their past experiences? etc.). Hooper-Greenhill (1991) also suggests that museums should include as many of the senses as possible during programming, and that this "broadens and deepens both the experience itself and the type of information that can be assimilated." (p. 104) The studio experience is a complex interplay of many influences, and not easily distinguishable for the visitor.

Falk and Dierking have noted that "visitors are strongly influenced by the physical aspects of museums, including the architecture, ambiance, smell, sounds, and the 'feel' of the place." (p. 147) For one of the studio participants, the aesthetics of the building were an important appeal. Elizabeth mentioned the fact that the gallery was well-located, and close to beautiful scenery, and that for her it was "a very positive kind of place" (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts.) The above information fits into the visitor's context, and includes their physical comfort and sense of safety, and haptic engagement. The statement "a very positive kind of place" includes a feeling, or a haptic sense that the visitor has, which is not easily definable simply through the location, which is sensed visually.

Having contact with a work of art seemed to be important for the participants. Elizabeth said that contact with the work of art through a studio activity made you feel that you could "even sort of incorporate some of the elements into your own style and how you look at things can be different" (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts.) For Elizabeth, just being around certain works of art made her feel good. Anna said that "having the examples there is very



important, and then it's related to the show. And then I can-the activity, hey, then I can sort of play on my own a little bit, because very often you find out, oieoieoie, it's much harder than it looks" (Anna, transcripts.) It seems that contact with original works of art is still very important for the visitor, despite the availability of reproductions. A fully blind visitor to the Renoir exhibition at the National Gallery several years ago was thrilled with the descriptive tour he took with a Gallery interpreter. He said what a wonderful opportunity it had been to see the originals, and that this kind of chance probably wouldn't come again. There is a power in the original works that is manifest in more than their visual aspect, in order for someone who is blind to be so moved by his contact with them. Clearly, an essential part of the studio experience also involves contact with an original work of art. Without this, the experience becomes simply an exercise in technique and skill building, which does not rely on the visitor developing an empathy or understanding of a work (Weltzl-Fairchild, 1981), and which does not rely on the museum as a setting.

The participants had similar approaches to how they perceived their learning experiences. For Len, Elizabeth, Pierre and Karen, the studio activities stimulated them to pursue certain techniques outside of the museum. They felt that the role of the activities was to serve as an introduction to artists, their work, and art techniques. In Len's words: "It just opened my eyes, and got me fired up" (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts.) Elizabeth found that the activities acted as a catalyst, and that "it's put back on you to carry it forward afterwards, which is a typical artistic thing, you've got to do it yourself" (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts.)

Anna was quite happy to continue with studio activities at the Gallery, which she felt allowed her to “nibble” at ideas, while Helen was motivated to pursue future National Gallery activities which involved sculpture. In all instances, the creation activity becomes a catalyst for future learning.

Participants were pleasantly surprised by how much they learned, and were able to discover about their own abilities. In speaking about an earlier studio activity he had taken in conjunction with an exhibition of drawings, Len said “...we spent probably an hour, hour and a half just you know, just quick sketches, whatever, but then, you know, I was so inspired I haven't stopped drawing since then...” (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts.) Karen was thrilled with her experience, and was surprised with how much she had enjoyed it and with the skills she had learnt.

There was no confusion with any of the participants as to the role that the museum played in their experience, (compared to an art school for example). They felt that each had very different objectives. These participants were interested in the direct contact with the works of art, and the “catalytic” experience, rather than the longer commitment for an art course. Like Len, they knew they could have access to more in-depth resources on techniques by taking courses outside the Gallery. Pierre pursued art history classes and technique classes at other learning institutions, and Karen had been taking art classes. All of the various elements of the studio experience combined to create an effect beyond the museum, which the participants carried onto other outside activities.

All six participants mentioned the quality of the experience at the Gallery,

both in terms of their positive attitudes towards it, and regarding the level of the teaching, which was felt to be very high. The enthusiasm of the instructors was praised, as was the organization of the studio activities. The instructors for the workshops were seen as being professionals, who wouldn't be teaching at the Gallery if they weren't. These comments demonstrated a high degree of confidence on the part of the participants who believed that they would have a quality experience. The subject matter of the workshop didn't seem to matter much to each participant, they trusted that the Gallery would deliver an interesting activity.

Studio participants are highly motivated learners, who undertake learning for the pleasure of the experience and who build on their prior museum experiences in order to undertake new ones.

## Chapter 6

### Remembering the Museum

The element of memory and the subjective recounting of museum experiences was one I had not originally accounted for in this research. I was aware that the participants' recollections of their learning during studio activities would necessarily be subjective, as I was asking them to recount their personal impressions rather than their memories of exact details of the activity. I had not anticipated that their personal impressions of studio activities would be remembered so vividly not only five months after the activity, but in some cases, several years after the activities. Through the process of conducting the participant interviews, I realized that the creation of memories through museum experiences was a further area for investigation.

In organizing the participant interviews for this study, I had ensured that these were conducted within five months of the last studio activity the participants had taken. I was initially concerned that they might not have sufficient recall of their learning experiences if I were to conduct the interviews beyond a period of six months or over. It became clear during the interviews that participants could recall not only how they had felt while doing an activity, but what their thoughts had been on an artist or exhibition, what the instructor had been like and how the instructor had taught the activity. Furthermore, participants could remember these details for studio activities going back several years. Some of their

memories of being in the museum went back not only several years, but in one case, decades. It would seem that learning and subsequently remembering had happened on many levels for these participants.

What are the particular conditions that enabled these participants to remember their experiences so far back and so vividly? Presumably, unlike the family home or other personal environment, a museum is a place that is outside of the person remembering, somewhere they might visit occasionally or often, but a public space nonetheless. As we have seen thus far, participants are engaged in a studio activity to further their knowledge, and to immerse themselves in a complete learning experience, through the use of all their senses. What motivates these adults to continue and repeat their experiences at the museum? It would seem that because the participants had memories of their experiences as being personally significant, and which engaged their whole self, they were encouraged to continue their contact with the museum.

Autobiographical memories involve the self, and its implication in the memory (Hermann and Plude, 1995.) The information recalled can be of different types, a childhood home address, or an interpretation of a complex event (Conway, 1990). Hermann and Plude (1995) suggest in their research that museum memories are similar to autobiographical memories, yet with some important and distinguishing differences. Museums serve unique purposes in our society, different from schools or universities. Because they have rare and precious collections of objects, people must visit the museum itself, rather than have the museum travel to them (Falk and Dierking, 1992). They can therefore

offer an experience not available elsewhere in a person's everyday life. This, combined with the access to a precious or rare collection, can evoke feelings of awe and reverence (Hermann and Plude, 1995). Exhibits may encourage visitors to explore other cultures or points of view, or to access subjects that might be outside their usual sphere of existence. Visitors might, in this case, experience a shift in their personal values or thoughts. Museum memories therefore, "may include philosophic content concerning one's relationship with the topics exhibited, in addition to other content, such as factual information about the exhibits and episodic information about various events surrounding the visit." (Hermann and Plude, p. 55). Feelings of awe, reverence, and a shift in personal values are just some of the qualities in a museum memory which make it quite different from an autobiographical memory.

The participants in this study had built up strong relationships with the Gallery, through repeat visits, by becoming museum members, and by taking repeated studio activities. I questioned Len on the last studio activity he had taken, which had dealt with contemporary art and asked him how he had felt about the subject matter. He was able to remember a fair amount of detail regarding the thematics of the activity.

*I think what Maureen's focus was more on the work of First Nations and Inuit artists so that the interest was in a particular direction so, it was less about contemporary well, you know, certain aspects of contemporary art, the art with the political messages, you know the First Nations was all about the reclamation of lost heritage and lost (unintelligible) another*

*culture and so on, inner and outer. I don't know, it was more, you know less to do with politics and more with form and expression of cultural beliefs, mythology, mythological beliefs and so on, shamanism.*

Conway's (1990) description of autobiographical memories includes the key feature of the memory being an interpretation of the meaning of an event that a person has experienced. Len's statement fits in well with this description, as he remembered the meaning of the activity foremost, rather than the particularities of what they did, such as specific works or galleries. It is possible as well that the creation activity may have enhanced his understanding. Len was able to remember past activities that had dealt with contemporary subject matter, some going back three to four years. In remembering these, he was also cued to remember a lecture series on contemporary art that the Gallery had held the year before his last studio activity.

Memories become personalized for each individual, as they recall their own relationships with the museum or with certain works of art. Falk and Dierking (1992) assert that "museum visitors do not catalogue visual memories of objects and labels in academic, conceptual schemes, but assimilate events and observations in mental categories of personal significance and character, determined by events in their lives before and after the museum visit." (p. 123) Anna remembered experiences going back approximately thirty-five years, when she would bring her three children to the National Gallery:

*I go around, and they have their paintings they just had to go, they had to go and see. They had their favorites. They were very young then. 5, 6, 7,*

8, 9. *Yeah, they had their favorites. It's most, most— they love the Flemish art because I'm from Belgium, and you know that was very important, and they related to the old masters, you know. They like that.*

Anna and her children had adopted the old master paintings at the National Gallery as their own, and related them to their own heritage. This strongly suggests that people go to museums to see some small part of themselves reflected within the collections, and that programs need to make efforts to bridge the gaps between their publics' personal experiences and those reflected in the exhibits (Falk and Dierking, 1992). Elizabeth had also adopted certain paintings, which she re-visited whenever she could at the Gallery.

Elizabeth: "There are a couple of pieces of art in the Gallery that I just love and I just feel good to walk by them." (Elizabeth and Len, transcripts)

Museum memories for Elizabeth and Anna involved visiting "old friends", and re-living past encounters with favourite works of art. They had expectations that they would be able to re-visit these works on their Gallery visits, and these visits created feelings of well-being. Montgomery-Whicher's (1987) research participants experienced a high degree of satisfaction from their visits, though they couldn't always recall the details. One of her participants described the "feeling of well-being" she gets from seeing works of art that please her (p. 111.) When visitors continue to have positive experiences, they are intrinsically motivated to repeat the experience, despite the lack of external rewards (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995).

Repeat visitors are different from others not because they have well-



formed expectations, but because their expectations are formed by direct and repeated museum experience. When these expectations are not met, such visitors can become highly critical. (Falk and Dierking, 1992, p. 27)

Falk and Dierking (1992) confirm that the museum is remembered and seen as a whole experience, from finding parking to looking at exhibits, and that visitors might not always remember the things intended by the museum. Further, this means that the entire experience of being in the museum must be carefully looked at by planners and programmers to ensure that visitors are comfortable and that their experience within exhibits enables them to seek out information at their own pace (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

The studio participants clearly remembered their museum experience as a whole:

*Pierre: ...it gave me a lot more knowledge because I was able to learn how Daumier did it. Whether it was a little statuette or whether it was because both professors that we had took us to the gallery first before the start of each session. And in the galleries they brought us to the places where they could explain to us how Daumier was doing it, and they explained it in the gallery, and then we went in the class and tried to do what Daumier did way back when.*

Anna remembered visits to the Gallery with her children, thirty-five years earlier:

*I can remember at that time there were some, well the floors, it was, I don't know what you call it, a linoleum, but you have little circles here and there*

*and my youngest that was then three, four, that was his thing, walking on the little circles. He loved it, to go there. To just step on those little marks. Oh but he watched too.*

By being personally involved in the learning process, through questions and answers, by having contact with knowledgeable instructors and original works of art, and through trying techniques themselves, studio participants gained a greater understanding of the art, artist and/or exhibit in question, and retained a strong memory of the experience. A vital component of remembering the museum is the studio participant's physical and personal engagement in the activity, and their ability to apply the knowledge acquired to their own lives.

## Chapter 7

### Bringing it all together

The studio experience for its participants is a complex interplay of elements: the art, the instructor, the hands-on component, and the physical environment of the museum. As the present study has demonstrated, the effects of learning by doing a studio activity are felt at the affective, cognitive, and physical or haptic level. Learning by doing can contribute to the creation of lasting museum memories, and demonstrates many of the features of experiential learning theory.

In order to bring together the many points that have been raised by the participants' interviews and by the supporting theories, I would like to review the research questions as they were initially raised in the introduction. The primary questions were:

1. What do people learn when they take a workshop at an art gallery?
2. Does this learning change, or augment their knowledge of an artist and their work?
3. Does it change learners' understanding of the creative process of art making?
4. Does it change adult visitors' perception of the art gallery or art work?
5. Why do people choose to take a studio activity over other types of

museum activities?

It has become apparent to me while conducting this research that these questions are all interrelated and are difficult to answer separately. The participants responded to questions in a very integrated way, and it was not possible for them to compartmentalize their learning in the museum. I will however, address the questions separately as much as possible. Due to the similarities between questions 2, 3 and 4, they will be addressed together.

1. What did the participants learn through taking a workshop at the art gallery?

Participants felt they had learnt more about particular artists, who they might not have been drawn to previously. The opportunity to partake in a guided tour followed by a studio activity was felt to be a format which enhanced their learning experience. The method of learning by doing was agreed by all to be the best way to learn about an artist or an art style. Learning by taking a studio activity enabled the participants on a personal level to put themselves in the artists' shoes, and to imagine what the artists' concerns must have been.

Further, the studio activity fits Kolb and Fry's (1992) experiential learning model, in which they describe that "learning and change result from the integration of concrete emotional experiences with cognitive processes: conceptual analysis and understanding" (p. 34). The combination of looking at art, reflecting on it, combined with the studio component clearly presented an integrated experience for the studio participants. Interestingly, this combination of activities is often happening simultaneously for the participants both during the

gallery tour and during the studio activity. Kolb and Fry's (1992) experiential learning model as introduced in the literature review thus fits the studio activity learning experience very well, as it enables the learner to move simultaneously between the different stages of learning.

During the interviews, participants related the general theme or idea of a workshop, but their primary interests during our conversations were to talk about their own enthusiasm, their revelations about their learning processes, and how their new knowledge applied to their current learning. They remembered using certain materials during specific hands-on activities, but this was always accompanied by comments about their own learning during that activity, or some change in thinking that happened.

For many of the participants, the studio activities stimulated their interest in certain subjects, and became a catalyst for engaging in further learning experiences. In most cases, this meant taking more in-depth courses beyond the museum, though all were interested in continuing to take studio activities.

2. Does this learning change, or augment their knowledge of an artist and their work?
3. Does it change learners' understanding of the creative process of art making?
4. Does it change adult visitors' perception of the art gallery or art work?

All of the participants in this study underwent a shift or change in their perceptions of either the museum, the art works, the artists, or the creative process. They experienced revelatory moments in which they discovered that

they enjoyed certain types of art which they hadn't before, or became interested in techniques they would never have thought of trying. For all of the participants, the museum became or was confirmed to be a dynamic place, and one in which they felt comfortable.

A combination of excellent instruction, interesting subject matter, quality materials and contact with original works of art created positive experiences which encouraged participants to explore and experiment with art in ways they hadn't previously thought of. For participants, the activity created feelings of excitement and well-being. By enjoying the experience, yet being challenged by the subject matter, art technique or art work, participants experienced conditions similar to those described by Csikszentmihalyi as being characteristic of a "flow" experience, (1990):

When goals are clear, feedback is unambiguous, challenges and skills are well matched, then all of one's mind and body become completely involved in the activity. Attention is focused and concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. In the flow state, a person is unaware of fatigue and the passing of time: hours pass by in what seems like minutes. This depth of involvement is enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding. (p. 70)

Participants experienced changes in their perceptions about the gallery, the artists, the art works and the creative process, and in all but one of the cases, each participant had expectations that the experience would be enjoyable. For one participant, who was not sure what to expect, the experience was surprising

in its content initially, but became enjoyable. It could be that for that single participant a greater change took place than for the other participants, based on the fact that she had no prior experience with studio activities, and very little prior contact with the art museum.

Participants developed a more in-depth understanding of the artists' creative process, and gained a deeper appreciation for some of the challenges that the artists had experienced in their lifetimes.

5. Why do people choose to take a studio activity over other types of museum activities?

All but one of the participants was a frequent gallery visitor, and had attended many different types of gallery activities, such as tours and lectures. It is clear from their comments that they are involved in many of the educational offerings of the Gallery, and that studio activities were not engaged in to the exclusion of other types of activities. As mentioned previously however, the learning experience of taking a studio activity was felt to be unique within the educational offerings of the Gallery, and one which they deliberately sought out. For these learners, learning by doing was their preferred mode of information gathering, one which deepened their understanding of an artist, an art-work, and the creative process.

The studio activity was a deeply personal learning experience for each participant, which was facilitated by contact with original art works, professional instructors and challenging, yet manageable activities and interesting subject matter.

It was clear to me while conducting this research that in order to evaluate art gallery activities that have hands-on or creation elements as basic components, the entire visitor experience must be accounted for, otherwise an incomplete picture of what is learnt by the visitor will emerge.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

These participants had a curiosity and a desire to learn that was quite impressive. They were comfortable in the learning environment of the museum, and trusted in its ability to provide a quality experience. Studio participants felt a strong sense of ownership of the Gallery through being members, and through personally identifying with aspects of the museum (ie: works of art, particular studio instructors, positive encounters with other staff.)

Cyril Houle (1961, in Knowles, 1984) has divided adult learners into three categories:

1. They are goal oriented and undertake education to accomplish clear goals;
2. They are activity oriented, who enjoy educational settings for their own sake;
3. They are learning oriented, and seek knowledge for its own sake.

The participants in this study seem to be both activity oriented and learning oriented adults. They begin their Gallery experience with a high level of motivation, interest, and previous knowledge, yet they welcome and are stimulated by new experiences and challenges. They are comfortable in the learning format of the art museum studio activity, and seek it out for its own sake.

Learning during the museum studio experience occurs on many different levels: affective, physical and cognitive, creating a whole or gestalt learning

experience. Studio participants are motivated to engage in activities which enable them to “learn by doing”, and will seek these out over other types of activities whenever possible.

As previously stated, contact with original works of art, qualified instructors, interesting content, activities, materials and good workshop organization are all essential components of the activity. The success of the learning experience depends on the integration of all of these. In particular, the contact with original works of art appears to be of vital importance for the participants. It is the element that distinguishes the studio activity from other fine arts learning experiences, such as those available through an art school or continuing education course. The environment and context of the art museum is thus of vital importance for the success of the activity. It is clear from the results of the interviews as well that the studio experience is not a substitute for other types of learning, but that it is an important and unique way of learning within the museum.

Based on this research, studio activities seem to fill a need that art museum visitors have to learn by doing, and they may be one of the few opportunities for creative expression within the art museum for the adult visitor. Further, they offer an ideal opportunity for the museum visitor to personalize their art museum experiences, and to encourage longer-term relationships with the art museum through the creation of strong and positive memories.

## Future research

We have a whole culture which is starving for more direct sensory contact, particularly touch. Children now grow up on television instead of the way that I was raised, learning about the world by picking up objects, holding them, breaking them, seeing what they were inside and outside... Now it's sitting in front of an image which you cannot touch, which doesn't respond to you. Think of what an extraordinary flattening and distancing that involves for a whole culture.

Rudolf Arnheim (Sculpture Magazine, 1995)

The above statement by Rudolf Arnheim, though applied to children, is an interesting comment on the current ways we have of learning. Although I try as much as possible to be in the studio with participants and instructors, a much larger part of my work requires that I sit in front of a computer screen developing, administering, and sometimes, justifying programs. Contact with materials, studio participants, and with their learning has become an infrequent, though valued experience for me. If this is true of myself as an art museum educator, it is most likely equally true for many of today's professional adults. In studying the context of hands-on learning for museums, I was aware that people had enjoyed them, that they found them stimulating, and that they were interested in further learning experiences. I was not prepared for how profound a change studio activities could have on participants' perceptions of art, art techniques or the museum, nor on how strong a catalyst the activities could be for seeking future learning

opportunities. One of the participants in this research was thrilled with how much her perceptions had changed in so little time (four lessons of two and a half hours each): “Just imagine. Don’t you wish you could change someone’s life?” (Karen, transcripts). A statement like Karen’s is a powerful motivator for my own practice as an art educator, in that it deepens my understanding and belief in the profound importance of the existence of quality programs that enable creative and personal encounters between individuals, works of art, and materials in the art museum.

The current research has examined one aspect of hands-on learning in the museum, that of adult studio activities. However, a further area for inquiry could be an examination of the learning that occurs in art museums with a variety of other hands-on and interactive situations. There is currently a large amount of research on the use of “interactives” in science and nature museums, but we know very little about how effective the use of computer programs, multi-media displays and discovery areas are in art museums. We know the public seem to enjoy them, but are they actually learning something about the intended subject? Weltzl-Fairchild’s (1984) research would suggest that these areas are not very effective at communicating the intended content, nor at providing visitors with a greater understanding of exhibits. There is currently an expanded use of interactive and discovery areas within art museums, yet there is little concrete research about the implications that these areas have on the visitor’s overall enjoyment, understanding and learning within the museum. Further research therefore needs to be done that accounts for the unique learning environment of the art museum, the learning goals and purposes of interactive and discovery

areas, as measured against the actual learning experiences of the visitors in these areas.

In order to account for the whole person, the researcher must be aware of and open to the multiplicity of personal experiences and potential responses to open-ended methods of questioning. In the case of this research, I was fortunate that all the participants were largely hands-on learners, who were highly motivated and who were, for the most part, experienced gallery visitors. A studio activity which included learners who traditionally don't seek out studio activities would offer an opportunity to study the various similarities and differences between learners in a hands-on situation, and to evaluate what their learning was after their experience. Would they benefit from a studio experience, and be interested in pursuing other, similar experiences, or would these learners maintain their interest in pursuing non-hands-on activities at the gallery? Art museums don't often have a clear picture of how their own programs are interconnected and complementary, and this research could elucidate this issue.

Museum memories and the long-lasting potential of positive museum experiences are an area worth investigating, particularly as museums are required to justify funding and programs. Some initial research has been done on the long-lasting effects of museum and interpretive hands-on experiences with children who are involved in intensive museum or interpretive experiences over a period of time. In the case of the studio participants in this study, and their strong memories of previous museum experiences, it is clear that more attention should be paid to how visitors personalize and remember their visits to museums, and

how they integrate it into their future learning experiences and museum visitation. A review of current research in this area, followed by a study of visitor memories and experiences in Canadian and American museums would contribute valuable information to future museum educators and planners.

With diminishing budgets, there seems to be a prevailing tendency in museums to measure the success of programs by the number of visitors or the amount of revenue generated. The learning goals and contexts of the programs, and the visitors' experience in relation to these, at times seem to be of secondary importance. Throughout all of this, one factor remains constant, and that is that the participant in any program must feel that their learning needs are being met, and that the museum itself provides a stimulating environment, or he or she will not return.

As a museum educator who is deeply interested in the various people who visit the Gallery, it is sometimes tempting to intuit what visitors require, rather than examine these requirements in a more structured or rigorous fashion. The uniqueness of the experience of a visitor with a work of art, and of the art museum itself needs to be acknowledged by museum administrations to be qualitatively different from what is available at other types of museums, such as science and nature museums. Though there are many excellent programs aimed at specific audiences, further art museum research that is both reflective and qualitative, and which accounts for the multiplicity of the visitor's experience is required, and needs to be made widely available to all levels of museum administrations.

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Appendix 1

Pre-interview questionnaire for research into hands-on learning

1. Is this your first visit to the National Gallery of Canada ?
2. If not, how many time would you say you have visited the Gallery in the past year? (Circle one)  
1-3                  4-6                  6-10                  10-15                  16+
3. On those previous visits, did you ever participate in an organized activity?  
(Circle one)  
Yes                          No
4. If yes, please tick any of the following activities that apply.  
Guided tour                        Exhibition opening                        Blue Moon Thursday        
Lecture                                Mini-talk                                    Video screening                
Film Screening                        Studio Activity for:                  Demonstration                
Concert                                Adults                                    Other: (please list)  
Gallery talks                          Families
5. If you have previously attended studio activities, please give an approximate number of activities you have attended.  

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6. At the time of you participation in a National Gallery studio activity, did you have any prior art experience or training?

Yes

No

7. If yes, please list what kinds of art experiences you have had. (For example: adult evening art classes, university degree in visual art, or high school art, etc.)

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8. What is the highest level of education you have reached?

High school  Undergraduate degree  Graduate degree  Other

If you checked "other", please describe \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire. Laurie Burdon, Researcher

## Appendix 2

### Questions for interview:

1. How long have you been taking studio activities?
2. What made you think of doing a studio activity in the first place?
3. Have you taken a lot of tours at the National Gallery?
4. Can you tell me how you felt, or what you felt you learnt by taking a studio activity?
5. Did you have any expectations about what you were going to learn?
6. Is there ever anything that you feel when you take a studio activity that you could have learnt more about if you'd one another type of activity?
7. Have you taken any art classes since your studio activities at the Gallery?
8. If you have, is there anything for you that makes each experience different, in terms of what you learn?
9. Did you have any previous experience in art before taking the studio activity?
10. When you took the studio activity, did it change your idea of the Gallery, or a work of art or artist?