

Margaret Cox  
Carnegie Mellon, Design CPID  
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Advisor: Dan Boyarski

# SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ARTS

**Designing for Meaningful Participation  
in Museums + Galleries**





## SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ARTS: Designing for Meaningful Participation in Museums + Galleries

A thesis submitted to the School of Design,  
Carnegie Mellon University, for the degree of Master of Design  
in Communication Planning and Information Design

Margaret Cox \_\_\_\_\_date\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Advisor Prof. Dan Boyarski \_\_\_\_\_date\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

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## SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ARTS: Designing for Meaningful Participation in Museums + Galleries

My thesis focuses on Social Media in the Arts. The motivation behind this research spurred from a recent boom in social media marketing and engagement by arts organizations. I began to survey the positive and negative attributes of current social media tools, while discovering a multitude of social media experiments created by museums and galleries. Through several explorative and generative research processes, I looked into the needs of stakeholders including visitors, curators, and artists. This process concluded with a project designed specifically to encourage meaningful visitor participation in the arts—a social media app called “ViewPoint”. It takes advantage of visitor’s natural instinct to point at interesting things. Pointing becomes a means to share artworks with friends and non-acquaintances. It then uses sharing as a catalyst for in-person conversations. ViewPoint is deceptively simple, however it leverages characteristics of in-person events and the power of social media to optimize the conditions for quality interaction. In researching the past year, I have been surprised by my findings and inspired by the power of the public voice. I have discovered first hand that each person sees art in his or her own way and that the best solution is one that allows a personal experience as visitors perceive, share and learn about art.

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Exhibition photos include photography by Robert Southard, Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University 2011





## INTRODUCTION

### What is the Problem?

In 2009, the National Endowment for the Arts released a survey showing a 3.8% drop in adult visitor participation in art museums and galleries. In a closer look, visitor trends since the 1990's expose a continuous decrease in participation.

Economic conditions, a gap in art's relevance to visitors, and elimination of art education programming across the U.S. are just a few causes of this decline.

Contemporary art organizations are struggling to respond to this drop in visitor interest. With decreased State arts funding and continued budget cuts, it is no surprise that many arts organizations are moving to "low cost" solutions like social media tools to reach out to audiences.

Can we design meaningful social interactions that motivates participation and creates a community of informed, invested art visitors?



## Relative Literature

I began to think about my thesis topic in 2008. In considering the role of design in the arts, the topic quickly becomes too broad to imagine. The Internet, accessible printing and our ever-broadening world have led to more opportunities for publishing art than at any time in human history. Art in our world is everywhere, expressing everything whether we like it, love it or hate it. Supporting all these forms of expression, design exists in the form of invitations, catalogues, websites and way-finding. What is the role of design in the context of these varying art forums?

Designers often say that when designing for art exhibitions you must let the work speak for itself. Pittsburgh designer Brett Yasko, well known in the art community says, “Each job is unique. There’s a voice there—not mine, the author’s. I just try to sweeten it. Make it attractive. I try to stay in the background.”<sup>1</sup> Paul Watzlawick would however insists that “all behavior...has message value, i.e., is communication”<sup>2</sup>. To put it succinctly, “one cannot *not* communicate”. With this in mind, can designers working for the arts let the work speak for itself or is design a filter providing another layer of communication? By analyzing essays by Katherine McCoy, Ralph Caplan, Hugh Dubberly and Shelley Evenson, I discovered that design must be a balance of persuasion and information to set the framework for art communication.

At this time, I began to think about past exhibitions I had seen. One in particular was a 2005 exhibit that highlighted the environmental projects of several artists. Though the artwork was left to speak for itself, the exhibit lacked an entry point into the rich research and imagery the artists had created. Serious

artists view their work as an exploration of truth. It can be difficult, then, to convince them that their work could use the power of persuasion. Katherine McCoy, professor of communications design, points out that, “The best thinkers in graphic design have long held that information and persuasion were oppositional modes, representing the competing cultures of graphic design and advertising.” From this viewpoint, persuasion has the negative connotation of false imagery and manipulation. However as an antidote to dense messaging, McCoy recommends persuasion as a connecting point for viewers to “get involved”<sup>3</sup>. She says, “Even ostensibly informational content—factual, objective, even numerical...must persuade...readers to pay attention, and to get involved.” It becomes obvious that design must work as an experiential guide to connect people to art.

On the other end of the spectrum, in 2006 the Carnegie Museum of Natural History’s *The Mysterious Bog People* featured bog mummies unearthed from northwestern Europe. This exhibition of artifacts was heavily submerged in a kiosk-like environment. Textured 3D information panels, dramatic lighting and holographic videos were all attempts to give a voice to the dead. A website describing the exhibition boasted, “Through its rich artifacts, creative design, interpretive programming and interactive displays, *The Mysterious Bog People* will educate visitors on...daily lives around the bog and the historical significance of their culture.” The experience, a joint project of the Drents Museum, the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Glenbow Museum, was so powerful that children screamed

<sup>1</sup> Abby Mendelson, Pop Star: Brett Yasko, (Pop City Media, February 8, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Watzlawick, *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1967), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine McCoy, *Information and Persuasion: Rivals or Partners?* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000), 81.

and ran from the exhibition, haunted by the startling imagery. The overload of sound and visuals made up a cinematic experience which drowned out any factual information or greater perspective on the events. It is surprising to find out that the exhibition had over 330 artifacts and 7 bog mummies, as they were nearly obscured by dramatic persuasion. What went wrong in this exhibition that hoped to educate? In accordance with McCoy, this exhibition used persuasive imagery to create an experience. However, like an exhibition that is all information and no persuasion, perhaps there exists an extreme where too much persuasion can extinguish learning. Ralph Caplan, a well-known designer, describes noise as, “visual pollution ...harmful not just because it is ugly but because it is distractive...A climate loaded with designs clamoring for your attention is a climate in which you end up paying attention to nothing.” Caplan’s analysis powerfully describes designers’ attempts to enliven environments with flashy elements. If Caplan could have commented on the *Bog People* exhibition and its attempts to resuscitate the dead he might have responded that, “Garishness is not in itself a sign of life.”<sup>4</sup>

In perfect balance, the Carnegie Museum of Art’s International *Life on Mars* is an example of the kind of successful exhibition designers can create with both persuasion and information. On the exhibition’s website the graphics poignantly ask, “Are we alone in the universe? Do aliens exist? Or are we, ourselves, the strangers in our own worlds?” The message is enigmatic and reminiscent of 1950’s sci-fi pondering into the unknown. It is the perfect compelling lead into an exhibition featuring 39 contemporary artists from around the world. The visual identity designed by Coma design in Amsterdam and New York as well as the detailed website by local design company Wall-to-Wall unifies the exhibition into

<sup>4</sup> Ralph Caplan “Notes on Attention”, 1.

one message. From the invitation to the gallery map and signage, the visitor is given the information needed to be oriented in the space and explore with curiosity. The overall design for the show is so powerful that visitors cannot help but to ask themselves, “What does this piece have in common with Life on Mars? What do all the artworks have in common?” The visitor is engaged and interacting with the exhibition by seeing and questioning. From artwork to artwork, the visitor is constantly reminded of the message and each artist’s work opens a door to the meaning of this message. It becomes generative and unfolds as the viewer experiences more. If a visitor would like more information about the artists or exhibition the website offers photos, bios, artist statement and video interviews. The combination of the persuasively mysterious message and access to flexible and rich information, allows the viewer a personal experience all their own. The power of this experience spreads by telling friends, family and colleagues – becoming a conversation in the community. What I have just described is not only a successful exhibition, but exemplifies *The Experience Cycle*, as defined by Hugh Dubberly and Shelley Evenson. The cycle “frames the producer-customer relationship from the customer’s point of view and aims to move well beyond a single transaction to...foster an ongoing conversation.”<sup>5</sup> This model was created to improve the retail experience for customers. However you can clearly see how applicable the same model is in describing an effective exhibition. These steps include the visitor “connecting”<sup>6</sup> to the “compelling” first impression of the show - the invitation. Secondly, the maps, signage and wayfinding methods help the viewer “become oriented”<sup>6</sup>. As the viewer explores the space they are “Interacting” with the show, having a direct experience. As

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Dubberly and Shelley Evenson “The Experience Cycle”, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Hugh Dubberly and Shelley Evenson “The Experience Cycle”, 14.



each work builds on the meaning of the exhibit as a whole, it becomes “generative (it unfolds, growing as user’s skills increase)”<sup>6</sup>. Lastly the visitor spreads their experience to friends and family; the message is “reverberating”<sup>6</sup>.

These three exhibitions all attempt to education visitors with the art displayed. The first exhibition, lacking in exhibition design and unity, was a text-heavy approach to learning. As a remedy, Katherine McCoy’s research on persuasion shows how catching the viewer’s attention can be a lead into dense information and an aid in learning. The second exhibition, though visually persuasive, loses the message in cluttered dramatization. As a diagnosis, Ralph Caplan points out that attention cannot come from clutter, that noise quickly defeats the understanding of information. Lastly, the third exhibition shows a perfect balance of persuasion and information. As a model, Hugh Dubberly and Shelley Evenson define *The Experience Cycle* to foster an ongoing conversation with customers. In a world where art communication is increasing, it is important for designers to understand their role in facilitating both the persuasive experiences and effective information. Through this analysis, designers in the arts can learn how to encourage curiosity, learning and most importantly conversation.

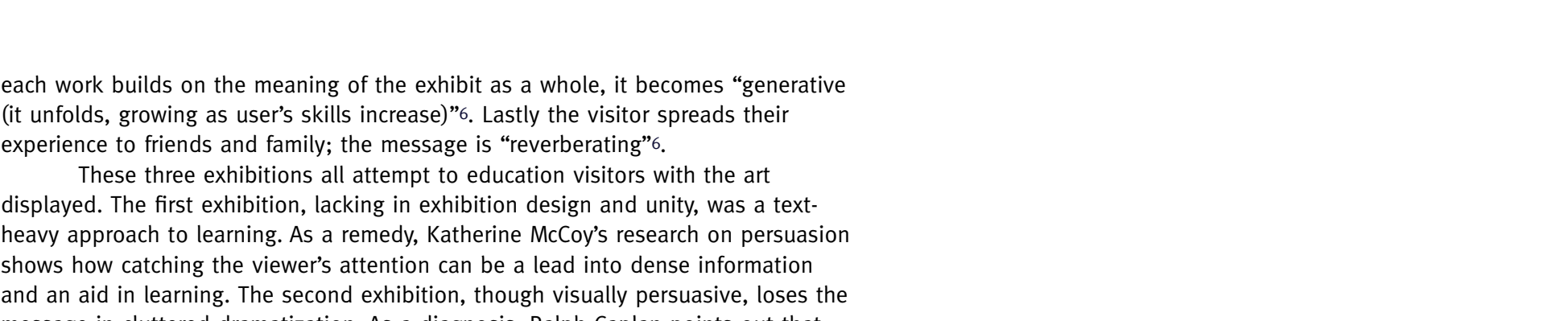


Figure 1: A large, light-colored, textured rectangular object, possibly a piece of art or a large card, with a small, dark, circular mark near the top left corner.

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Figure 20: A collage of images including a magazine cover titled 'ybsca' and 'PAPER POLITICS', and a brown paper bag with the word 'NEXT' printed on it.

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## New Tech, New Tools Conference

Two years after doing these readings, I was still forming the focus for my thesis work and had begun to notice a trend in social media in art organizations. Social media had indeed changed our world and the signs were everywhere.

In March 2010, I attended a conference called “New Tech, New Tools: Growing Digital Communities that Support the Arts.” Panelists included Shelley Bernstein, Chief of Technology at the Brooklyn Museum, Justing Heideman, New Media Designer at the Walker Art Center and Jefferey Inscho, Director of Media and Public Relations at the Mattress Factory. I attended this conference with skepticism about social media and its uses in the arts. However, this panel discussion would become the major inspiration for my thesis topic.

Shelley Bernstein started by professing, “there are no experts” in the field of social media. And yet we are seeing a boom of social media use in the arts – more and more each day. She went on to describe these projects as “experiments”- some successes and some failures.

Jeffrey Inscho began by showing several Mattress Factory projects including iConfess, my Gzo, and the Is This Art app. All of these projects are specifically targeted to visitors in the arts. They also ask the visitor to participate. Inscho explained, “Engagement is not marketing.” Marketers think in “metrics and numbers,” how many visitors and how many dollars. However when you engage visitors as a community, museums begin to “create community liaisons in a trust relationship”. In a powerful statement, Inscho concluded that, “when you loose touch with communities, organizations fall apart. And when organizations invest in communities they grow.”

Bernstein continued by describing the motivations for the Brooklyn Museum to pursue social engagement methods. She verbally painted a portrait of the museum fighting audience decreases, lack of visitor diversity, and stereotypes of the elitist, stodgy museum. At that time the Brooklyn Museum overhauled their mission which had focused on the exhibition of artwork to include a community focus. She began to describe what seemed like an endless, impressive list of projects including connecting to Foursquare, Freeze Tag, Quick Capture Video Kiosks, all intended to “leverage existing tools” to “take people with us”. She described successes and failures, things they learned about visitor behavior and what works. I became completely inspired and sold on the idea that to “take people with us” meant to invite visitors to not just be the audience, but invite visitors to partake in a community.

After this seminar, I wanted to learn more about engagement in the arts. In meeting with several members of the faculty to find a thesis advisor, one professor recommended Nina Simon’s book *The Participatory Museum*. She wrote about the staggering statistics just released by the National Endowment for the Arts, “Over the last twenty years, audiences for museums, galleries, and performing arts institutions

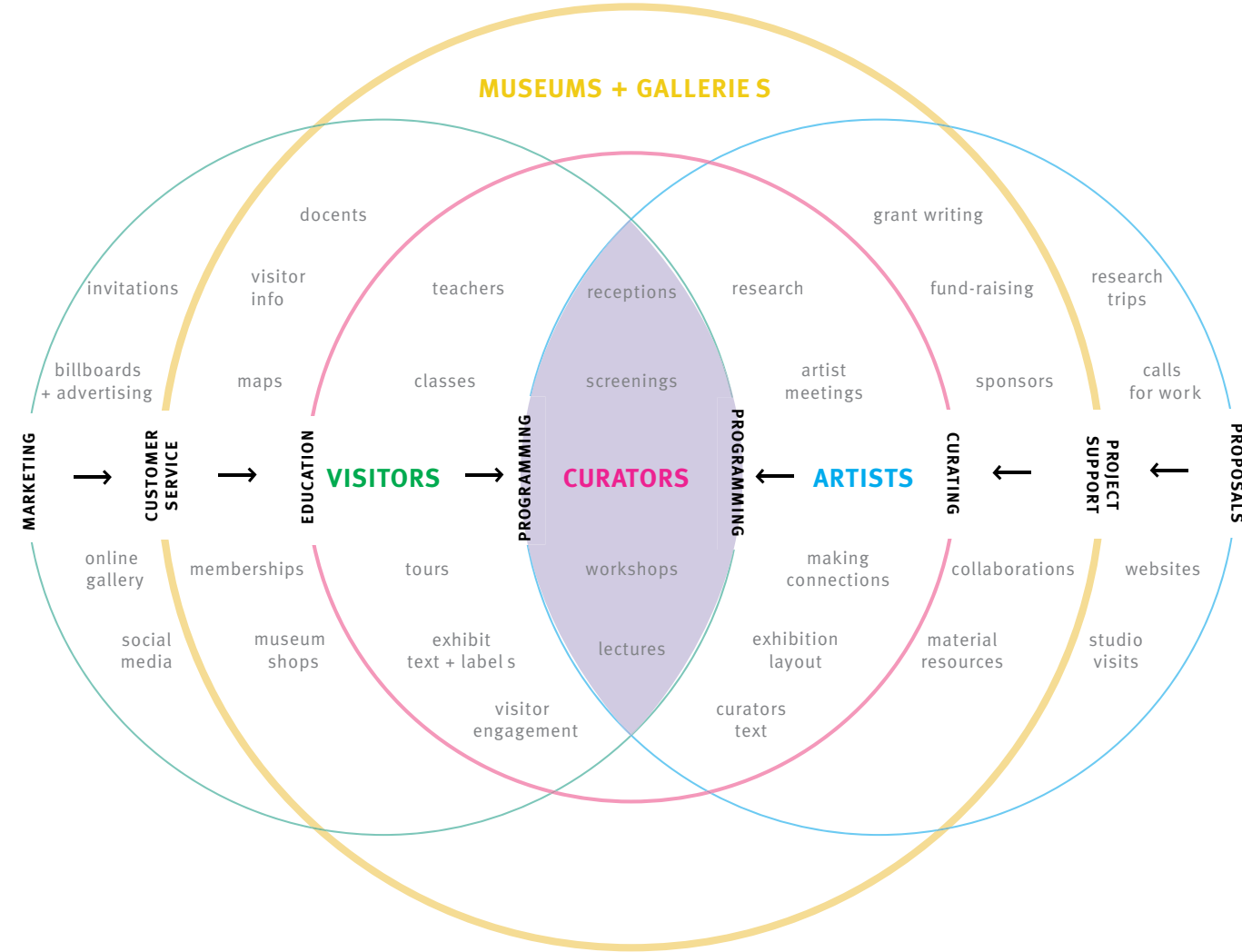
have decreased, and the audiences that remain are older and whiter than the overall population.” She went on to say, “Cultural institutions argue that their programs provide unique cultural and civic value, but increasingly people have turned to other sources for entertainment, learning, and dialogue.” For Simon, her mission was to show museums how they can survive in this changing world. She asked, “How can cultural institutions reconnect with the public and demonstrate their value and relevance in contemporary life? I believe they can do this by inviting people to actively engage as cultural participants, not passive consumers.”

Nina Simon also outlined several stereotypes of museums. “Cultural institutions are irrelevant to my life,” “the institution never changes,” “The authoritative voice of the institution doesn’t include my view,” “The institution is not a creative place where I can express myself and contribute,” “The institution is not a comfortable social place for me to talk.” She went on to state firmly that these common visitor dissatisfactions are “all reasons to pursue participation, whether on the scale of a single educational program or the entire visitor experience.”

Through reading Simon’s book and blog, it is clear that for her the in-person experiences are the most effective way to engage visitors. She would often criticize social web, even monitors and digital displays as being distracting and not effective enough for deep meaningful interaction. I would later attend a lecture by her in December of 2010 at the Children’s Museum in Pittsburgh. I spoke with her briefly about the use of social media in the arts and strongly got the feeling of her skepticism about the use of technology and social interaction. I was inspired by the discussion of participation in museums. It was also interesting to me that social media in the arts was emerging and unresolved. It became clear to me that it may make a challenging and exciting focus for my research.

## Design Process/Approach

In the summer of 2010, I began to conduct research to explore the needs and opportunity spaces surrounding the topic of social media in the arts. Over the course of several weeks, I used a range of research methods to learn about museum visitor experience and how to create meaningful visitor participation using social media. Using design thinking, I began to model observations I saw in the current state of social media in the arts in the form of diagrams. As well as these visualizations, I used human-centered design research to listen to the needs of stakeholders in the field. This exploration led to findings and implications I used to generate a project.



## TERRITORY MAP: How Museums + Galleries Work

## Territory Map

To begin exploring the immense realm of social media in the arts, I created a territory map and hunt statement as my guide to the problem. The goal of this stage was to narrow the scope of research and to create a visual understanding of the problem.

In creating a territory map, I started to identify the structure of how museums work to create exhibitions. In doing this task, several ideas emerged. There are three main stakeholders, visitors, curators and artists. The curator is the central figure pulling together artists works and creating meaning from varied pieces in the form of curating. Exhibitions are framed by this curation, supported by education and customer service, and promoted by marketing and outreach.

In analyzing the map, I began to think about the two instances of social media use. In one way, it is used for marketing and promotion. In another way, it is used for visitor engagement or participation in the form of contests, submissions and feedback.

Another observation I saw is how little the overlap is between artists and visitors. There are only a few events or lectures where visitors may be able to interact with artists.

These observations become the beginning ideas for my research and help me to develop a hunt statement to guide the project.



## HUNT STATEMENT

**Promote meaningful participation using social media that enables multidirectional communication between visitors, curators and artists.**

## Stakeholder interviews

During three weeks of exploratory research I conducted several expert interviews. I met with directors, curators, museum visitor attendants, arts media experts as well as artists who use visitor participation in their work. These interviews revealed a vast range of topics surrounding the role of museums, motivations for visitor participation in the arts, and the shortcomings and strengths of social media projects/experiments.

## Directors and curators

I spoke with two directors and one curator of the arts. In my discussion with a director we talked in detail about the goals and strategies for reaching visitors with exhibitions and programming. In this interview I discovered that exhibitions are created with different types of visitors in mind. Directors take into consideration that visitors may look briefly at images, while other may want to read into more details, while others may want to take part in workshops and lectures. Currently lectures are one of the main ways directors initiate discussion with visitors. During this particular discussion I gained insight on what directors hope to give to artists who they support. For example, visitor feedback in the form of comment sheets and even notes taken during lectures.

I also attended a lecture series for the Carnegie Museum. Lynn Zelevansky talked in depth about her career and journey to become the Director of the Carnegie Museum of Art. She mentioned how important it is to create discussions with a museum audience. She also talked about making exhibitions accessible to reach audiences on different levels. A humorous point she made was that if a visitor doesn't understand a work of art, they either think, "I'm stupid" or "that artwork is stupid," often choosing the latter. I thought

it was interesting that Lynn brought up the topic of accessibility in art and creating more discussion in museums. She also mentioned that a goal of hers for the museum is to break down social barriers and stereotypes often associated with large museums. During the Q+A section of the lecture and briefly after, I asked Lynn what plans she may have to implement greater use of social media and if she thought it may be a good way to break down social barriers and create discussions. She briefly said that it is definitely something that the Museum needs to do.

## Museum visitor attendants

I spoke with an attendant who works at a local museum. She said that visitors would often leave the exhibit and ask her what certain installations mean. For her, she wishes that visitors didn't feel like there was a right and wrong answer to art. She would like to see a world where people have better abilities to critique the world around them. If people were as comfortable around art as they are around sports for example, we would see a new pop culture explosion of arts.

## Arts media experts

I spoke with two professionals who work in positions that use social media marketing and visitor engagement in the arts. It is clear from our meetings that I underestimated the time that media staff put into marketing and enlivening visitor participation in the arts. We talked at length about their social media projects, successes, things that didn't work, things that were surprising.

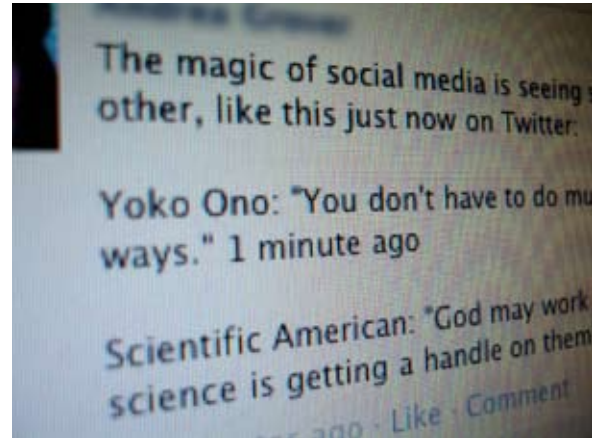
In my first conversation with a consultant for social media arts involvement, it was instantly clear that she became involved in harnessing the public voice with social media, because it truly inspires, enlivens and empowers people to become a part of an arts community. She mentioned that visitors see art in different ways, subjective, formal language and contextual. In our discussion, it became clear to me that exhibitions must meet visitors at these different levels in order to be effective and reach a wide audience.

Next, I spoke with a social media expert who holds a long list of social media achievements in the arts. Working at a local museum with an experimental mission, he talked to me at length about how each social media project supported transparency of the museum's process. In fact, everyone at the museum focused on visitor engagement and were encouraged to tweet, facebook and blog about their exhibitions in order to show visitors what they do. At the museum, video kiosks, contests and apps were all designed to give visitors a voice at the organization. From our discussion, I learned the importance of experimentation and freedom of expression to create an honesty in what organizations do. This transparency becomes a key factor in gaining visitors' trust and their involvement.



## Contextual Inquiry

I began to explore the needs of stakeholders in this realm by observing museum and gallery staff in context and learning about motives and goals for what they do. I spoke with docents, museum guards and visitor services staff. They all seemed to be focused on the visitor experience, helping visitors at different points and in different ways through the exhibitions.



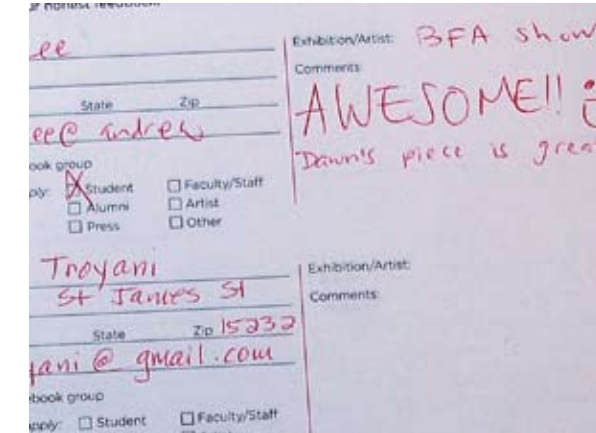
## Online Research

I experimented with online discussions. Much like real life, online conversation starters included, asking questions for help or advice. I posted contests and quizzes and was surprised by the enthusiastic response to join in the game. I took note of how social media tools limited the length and depth of conversations. However it was clear the strengths of social media lie in its speed and ability to cross social boundaries.



## Fly-on-the-wall Observation

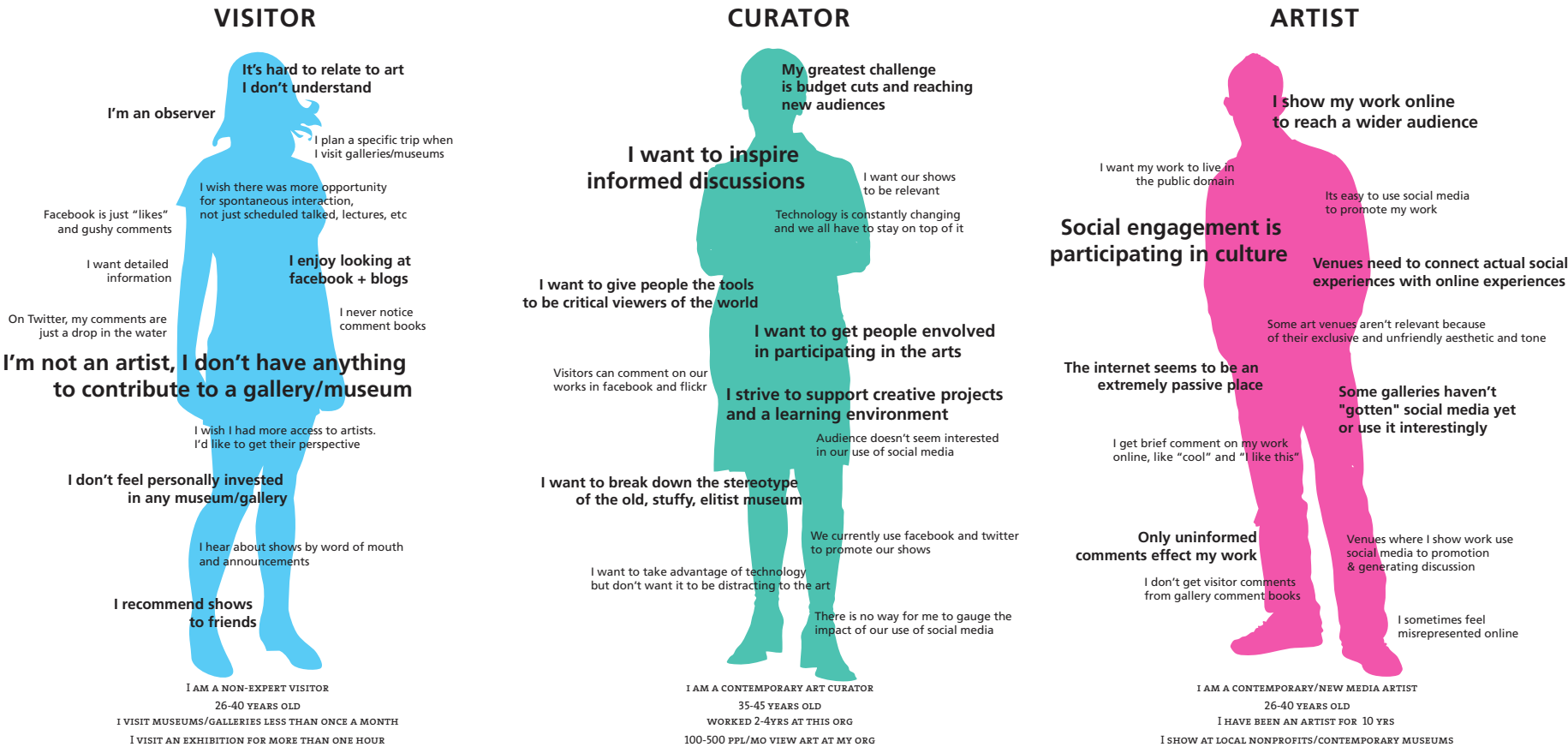
I began to watch visitor behavior in the gallery and museums. Visitors look at each artwork an average of 15-30 seconds. Although curators spend a long time creating exhibition text and labels, few visitors spend time reading them. Video monitors and moving displays created the most attention from visitors. Most people did not comment in comment books, however the visitors who did spend a few minutes doing so.



## Cultural Inventory

I looked at comment sheets that museums traditionally use to gather visitor feedback. These books are often near the entrance of exhibitions. I noticed three main shortcomings of comment sheets. Visitors don't see them or take time to fill them out. Anonymity can lead to rude comments. And most importantly, comments are disconnected from the works they describe putting distance between the art and the moment of the visitors reaction.





## Surveys

To survey a large cross-section of arts stakeholders, I created surveys using the online service Qualtrics. I created three unique surveys, one for visitors, one for curators/directors/media staff and one for artists. I posted the surveys on social media sites and distributed links to the surveys through emails and mailing lists. The results were surprising.

Curators said that their biggest challenge was dealing with budget cuts and reaching out to larger audiences. They felt their main goal was to support and create discussions about art. They were all using social media mainly for marketing. They were interested in using social media for visitor engagement, however they were unsure how to start and didn't receive a large response from their attempts.

From the artists surveys, I found that a new type of artist is emerging. This isn't the mysterious, reclusive artist of the past, but an artist with a mission to reach out to new audiences. These artists have work online and use social media to get feedback from viewers. They feel that social engagement is participation in culture and they are interested in seeing more museums and galleries use social media in creative ways.

The most surprising results were the visitor surveys. The average museum visitor goes to exhibitions on holidays or vacations. They also view web and social media sites for arts organizations. They wished they could touch artwork and have more opportunities to ask artists questions. However, when asked about participating in museums, visitors didn't feel they had a voice saying, "I'm not an artist. What would I have to say?"

These surveys were used to create archetypes of the three stakeholders. In showing the dominant needs across each archetype, it is easy to see similar and conflicting voices.

What is your role at the arts organization?

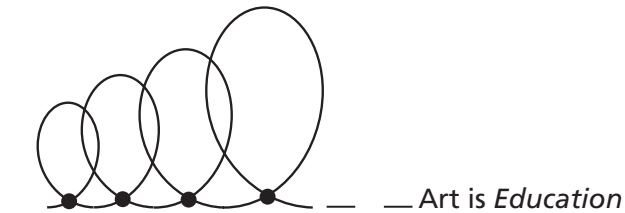
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<a href="#">Curator for an organization</a>	<div></div>
<a href="#">Director of an organization</a>	<div></div>
<a href="#">both Curator and Director</a>	<div></div>
<a href="#">Web and Media Staff</a>	<div></div>
<a href="#">Marketing and Promotion Staff</a>	<div></div>
<a href="#">Other</a>	<div></div>



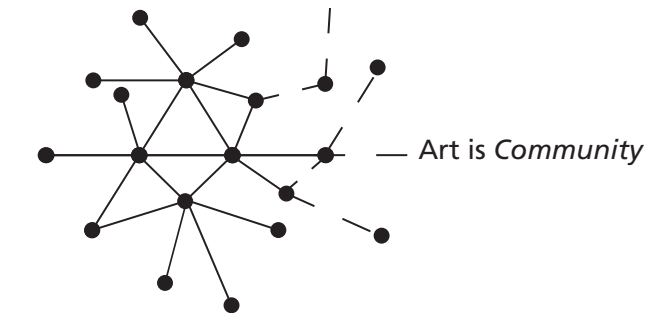
## SUBJECTIVE

● — ● — ● — *Art is Entertainment*

## FORMAL LANGUAGE



## CONTEXTUAL



## Collage Making

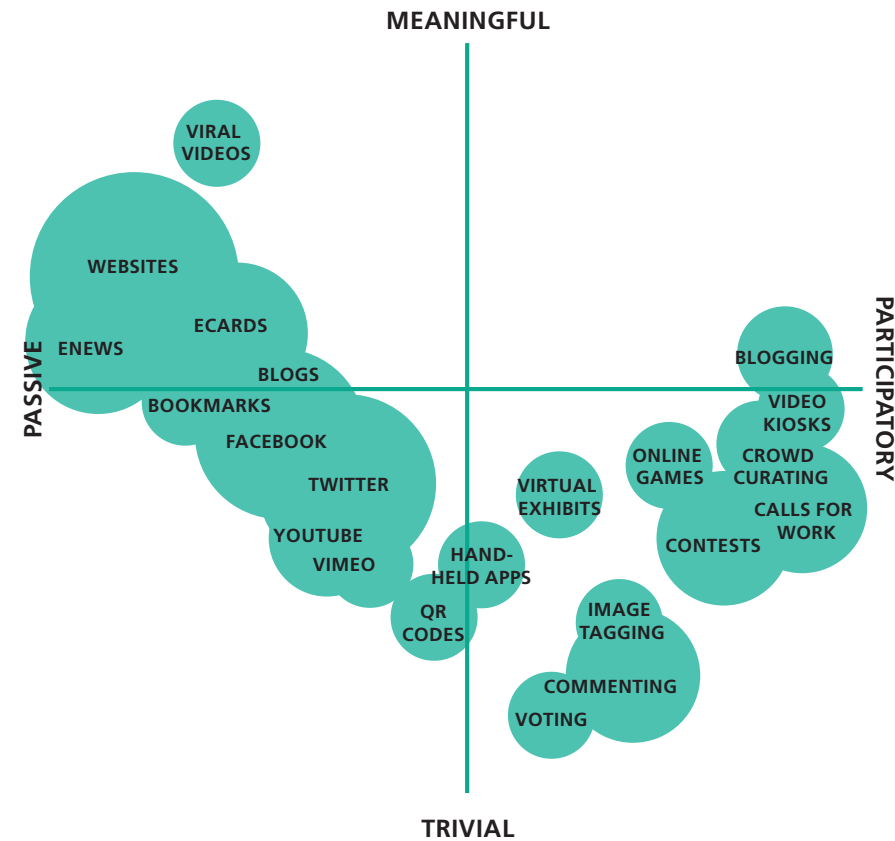
In order to diagram the visitor experience, I decided to conduct a collage-making session where I selected four art visitors with different types of interest in the arts.

The task was to collage their last museum or gallery visit, from the time they heard about the exhibit to the time they went home afterwards. The collages were revealing!

Two visitors who visited on vacations and holidays had a linear experience that starts with an invitation or billboard, then went to the exhibit to see that particular piece and maybe some others, then going home. Sometimes they would leave with questions but as the experience became distant their questions would become less important.

One visitor was enrolled in art classes at the museum. Her experience built on each class she attended. As she took each class an understanding of the formal language of the arts grew.

The last visitor was a regular at museum and gallery events and receptions. He saw going to museums, reading reviews, comparing shows as part of his lifestyle. He felt comfortable in the museum environment. The art world was his community.



## Analysis

Concurrently with my research, I analyzed data, extracted major findings and sought out opportunity spaces. I did this via literature review, market trend analysis and competitive analysis.

## Market Trends

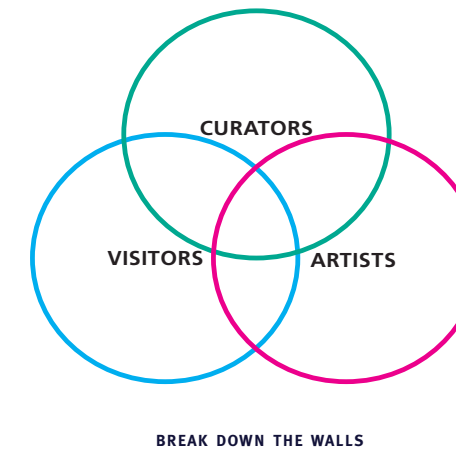
I looked at projection and forecast reports. I gained insight into the increase in popularity of social media and found out more about who is using it. In fact, the young, millennial generation spends 31 hours a week online and send about 50 text messages per day! This is the future generation of arts visitors and organizations must learn to speak their language.

## Competitive Analysis

To visualize the existing landscape of social media use in the arts, I conducted a competitive analysis. The majority of social media projects used by museums were often passive forms of marketing or unpredictable, less meaningful types of interaction. I would use this insight as motivation to create a project that encourages meaningful participation in the arts.

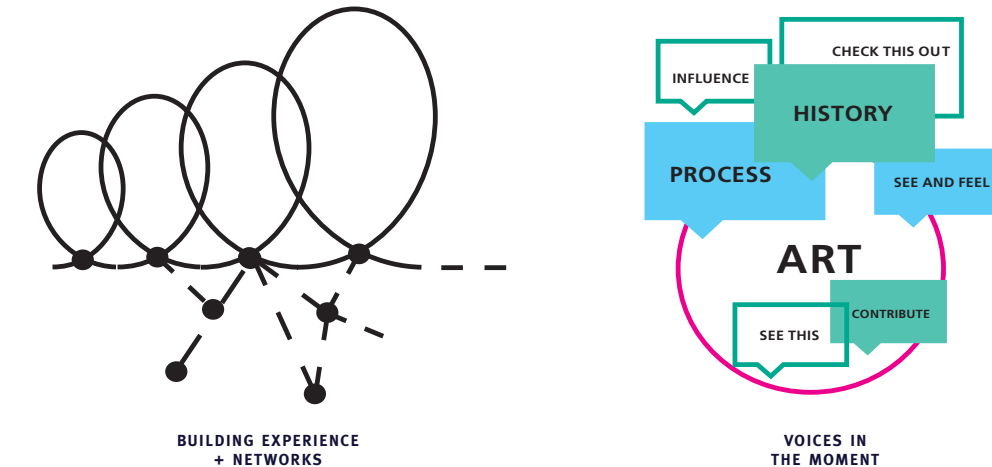
## Implications

- Visitors need **diverse levels of participation**
- **Interest** in art **leads to participation** in arts
- **Participation leads to deeper understanding**
- **Without value**, interaction is considered work
- **Online participation** is more successful when reinforced by **real world interaction**
- **Current social media tools do not encourage rich dialogue + participation**



## Initial Concepts sketches

The exploratory process has lead to three initial concepts. One is *Break Down the Walls*, where all stakeholders have access to discussions with each other. *Building Experience + Networks* is an idea where each visits to the museum builds on the next, where visitors learn more and further their connections with each visit. *Voices in the Moment* is an idea that harnesses visitor feedback right at the moment they see the artwork.





# social media

## + THE ARTS

DESIGNING FOR MEANINGFUL SOCIAL PARTICIPATION IN MUSEUMS + GALLERIES

### WHY SOCIAL MEDIA?

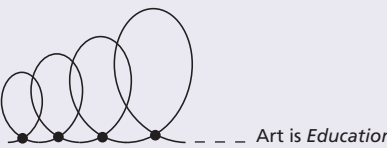


### VISITOR JOURNEY

#### SUBJECTIVE



#### FORMAL LANGUAGE



#### CONTEXTUAL

### LITERATURE + THEORY

- *The Participatory Museum*, by Nina Simon
- *2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* National Endowment for the Arts
- *Brooklyn Museum Community Blog*
- *Walker Art Center New Media Initiatives Blog*
- *Mattress Factory Weblog*

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- *The Experience Cycle, Interactions*, by Hugh Dubberly and Shelly Evenson
- *Thoughts on Teaching & Learning*, by Carl Rogers
- Experience and Education, by John Dewey
- *The Hidden Influence Of Social Networks*, TED Talk by Nicholas Christakis:

### FIELD RESEARCH

- Observations
- Expert Interviews
- Surveys
- Participatory Design

### STEREOTYPES



## Winter Poster Session + Feedback

At the winter poster session, second year graduate students displayed our research so far. I created a poster about social media in the arts and outlined key issues that have lead to implications and my initial concepts. Dan Boyarski, my advisor, recommend that I make survey cards to hand out. I received a lot of great feedback during this poster session and enjoyed the variety of discussions I had with guests.

I spoke with one person about how receiving a letter from her favorite author was one of her most cherished moments. This discussion made me think again about the importance of breaking down the barriers between stakeholders. There may be great value in opening the lines of communication across these groups.

I also spoke with someone who described going to a performance in the arts and leaving with many unanswered questions. We talked about the lost opportunities for people to connect after an event. This topic was inspiring to me and I decided to research the potential for social media during an event or lecture.



## PARTICIPATORY DESIGN: COLLAGING

LOOK CAREFULLY  
AT THIS PAINTING.

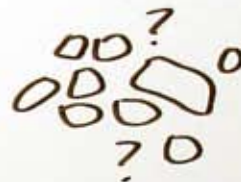


WHAT DO  
YOU REMEMBER?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



MAKE A COLLAGE  
DESCRIBING HOW  
YOU FELT REMEMBERING  
THIS PAINTING.

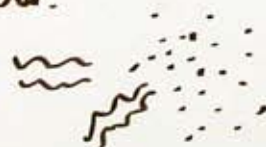


LOOK AT THIS  
PAINTING AGAIN

SHARE THINGS YOU  
REMEMBER + @  
DISCUSS THIS  
PAINTING TO  
A PERSON YOU  
DO NOT KNOW



MAKE A COLLAGE  
DESCRIBING HOW  
YOU FELT SHARING  
THIS PAINTING WITH  
SOMEONE YOU DON'T  
KNOW.



NOW WHAT DO YOU  
REMEMBER?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



GENERATIVE

## Generative Research

As my exploratory research was coming to an end, I moved on to conduct generative research. Over a three-week period I used participatory methods like collage-making, focus groups and talk-aloud protocol to engage visitors in the arts. Through this research I gained insight into the latent needs of my target audience. This feedback has been valuable and has allowed me to generate concepts that fulfilled their needs in creative ways.



## Pointing! The Ah-Ha Moment

Over the winter break, I attended a lecture at the Pittsburgh Children’s Museum by Nina Simon author of the *The Participatory Museum* and the *Museum 2.0* blog. The lecture was exciting and though I had read her book, her mission was so much clearer in person. I began reviewing notes and rereading parts of Nina Simon’s *Participatory Museum* and bumped into a new portion of her blog about “Pointing at Exhibits.” It described something you see every time you enter a museum. People point at things. People point to things they like, things they don’t like, things they’re interested in for complex reasons. “People point at things because they want other people to see them” . Simon goes on to say in a follow up post that “Pointing is a no-tech version of the favoriting system.” When Simon discusses the idea of pointing in a virtual setting, she says, “I comfortably “point things out” to different people remotely by clipping articles, sending links, and flagging online content.” However she reinforces that “Pointing is a social behavior that works best in physically proximate, real-time situations.” I came away fully inspired by this blog post, although wondering if I might be able to create something inspired by what was working in the physical world and apply it to social media.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Simon. (May 20, 2008). Message posted to Museum 2.0| Webblog:at <http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2008/05/design-how-to-for-social-engagement.html>

## Lectures + Focus Groups

At this time, I was going to a large number of exhibition lectures and events. I had continued to think about the visitor’s “lost questions” after a performance and wondered whether there was an opportunity space connected to events and lectures. I went to the Paul Thek lecture and discussion at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Paul Thek died of AIDS in 1988. For this event another artist, Paul McCarthy would talk about his work and similarities with Paul Thek’s work mediated by Director Lynn Zelevansky. During the lecture I noticed that people were struggling to take a few notes in the dark. The lecture was largely one-directional, with a brief question and answer afterwards. During the question and answer section, a few visitors were called on, a CMoA staff member would run up to them with a microphone. Paul McCarthy and Lynn would discuss the topic, then choose another person’s question. Only a few questions were asked. Afterwards, visitors were invited to a reception and were able to see the exhibition of Paul Thek’s work.

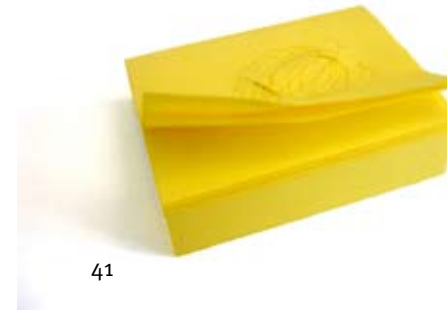
I observed the event closely. There were people pointing and sharing what they saw with friends. I talked to several people who I didn’t know and attempted to use pointing to share a printed piece. The woman I shared the work with then called out to her boyfriend and said, “look at this”. This was a great example of Nina Simon’s “no-tech” social media. I noticed that the museum had cellphone tours that you could follow by texting a number, however no one was using them during the event. Instead visitors were all in a very social mood. I spoke briefly with a guard. She mentioned that “young people are always texting at the museum”.

This was such an interesting opportunity I decided to choose a few people to interview and perhaps have them partake in a participatory design session. I chose five people with different levels of interest in the arts. I asked them a series of questions about the sequences of event around the Paul Thek lecture. I found that they all seemed to feel that they had unanswered questions after the lecture. All of them except one said they thought it would be rude to use

digital devices during a lecture. Several of them mentioned that they felt people were in a comfortable mood to mingle and talk about the artwork after the event.

I learned several things from this observation and inquiry. One, people have unanswered questions after a lecture. Secondly, people really do use pointing as a means for sharing with friends and also with non-acquaintances. And thirdly, after the shared experience like an event, people are more likely to talk across social groups – to mingle.

I could not get this focus group together for a participatory design exercise. I attempted to do a tool making task where they could create a dream-tool they could use during lectures like the one they attended. I gave them an abstracted image of a smart phone and unlabeled buttons. Then I asked them to glue down and describe how they would use this tool. I knew right away that I had not framed this task properly. It was too much to ask of people to create a tool without the right setting. Because I wasn’t there with them in-person, I wasn’t able to guide the task and ask pertinent questions that arose. Many of the responses I received back were quite interesting, however I could see that their dream-tools were more literal and influenced by existing social media devices. I took this as a lesson learned and began to review research methods and techniques for the next task.







## Sharing Art with Non-acquaintances

To learn more about sharing art with non-acquaintances, I designed a task for five strangers. First, I showed them a painting, *Nerv* by Neo Rauch chosen for its multiple levels of interpretation. I then removed the image from sight and asked the participants to write down everything they remembered about the painting. Most wrote about six to seven items. Then they collaged about how it felt to remember a painting. They remembered a few details first and then used relationships between details to remember more of the whole image.

For the next task, they received a copy of the painting and cut out the details they remembered. They then used the details as conversation starters to talk to someone they didn't know. Conversations began slowly and included phrases like, "I remembered this," and "what do you think of that?"

I didn't predict what happened next. Everyone was talking comfortably with each other, using the details to bring up new topics. The discussion evolved from esthetics, to the formal language, and then continued to more contextual conversations. They began talking about politics and current events and were so engaged in the art that I had to tell them time was up to stop the conversation.

Next, I had them make a collage about sharing art with someone they didn't know. Their collages described the idea of working together to build something that didn't exist before, like a build-up of layers of conversation. One showed conversations merging to form a new pattern. Another built paper into a 3D structure.

Lastly, I asked them to write things they now remembered about the painting. They all wrote more things than they had before. Some commented that their memory of the art was now connected to conversations they had. It became clear to me that this conversation was more effective and deeper in nature because it was in person. This idea became a key issue in my final design.

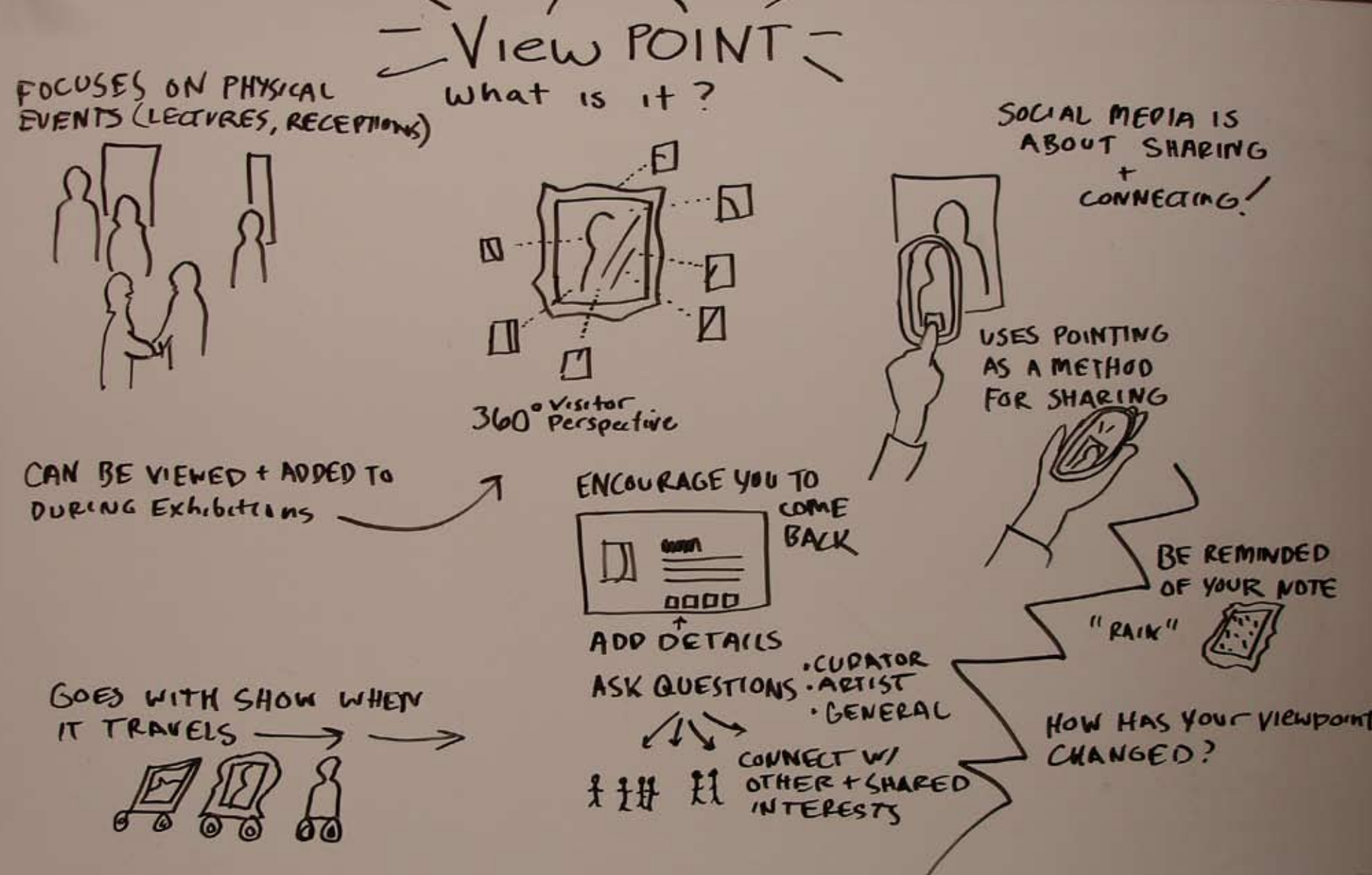




## EVALUATIVE

### Feedback And Validation

As design is an iterative process, I conducted multiple rounds of evaluative research to test and refine my concept. Over the course of this process, my goal was to ensure that my project solution supported the needs and desires of the target audience. In this case I am focusing on the visitor experience.



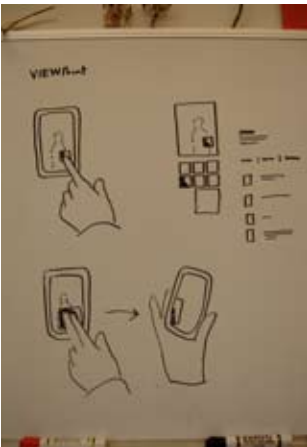
## Wireframes

I began to sketch out my thesis project solution. The idea was to create a tool that allowed visitors to point to art, share art and then discuss art with different groups. It would be important that the interaction take place during an in-person event at the gallery.

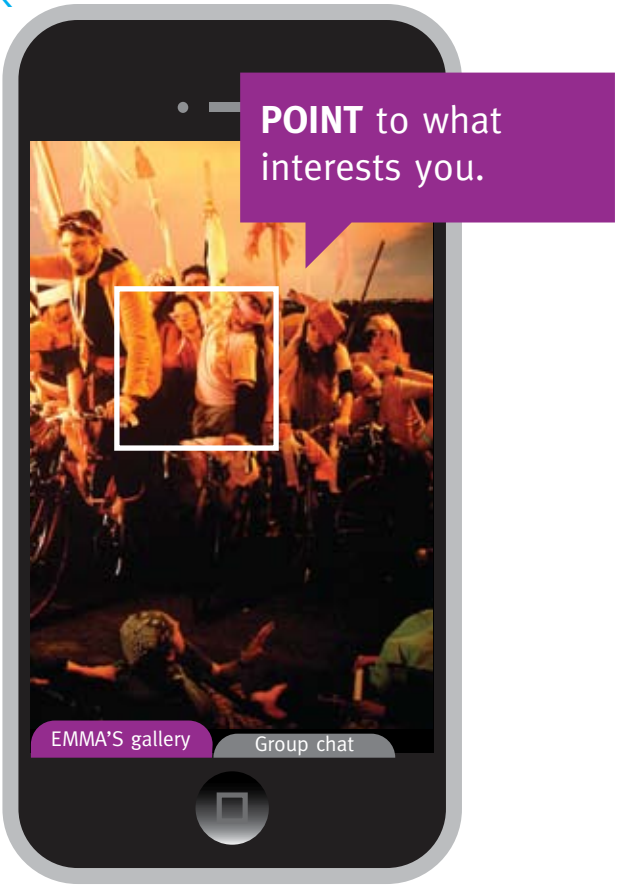
I created several sketches for logos and tried different names for my idea. ViewPoint became a perfect match for the concept. ViewPoint tells you how to use it, as it tells you what it does!

In order to test this idea, I began developing a prototype in the form of wireframes. I created interfaces for each part of the tool that I wanted to test, including the log-in page, the sharing functionality, the commenting function, the group view, the question and answer page, the online gallery, and a page showing how your view point has grown.

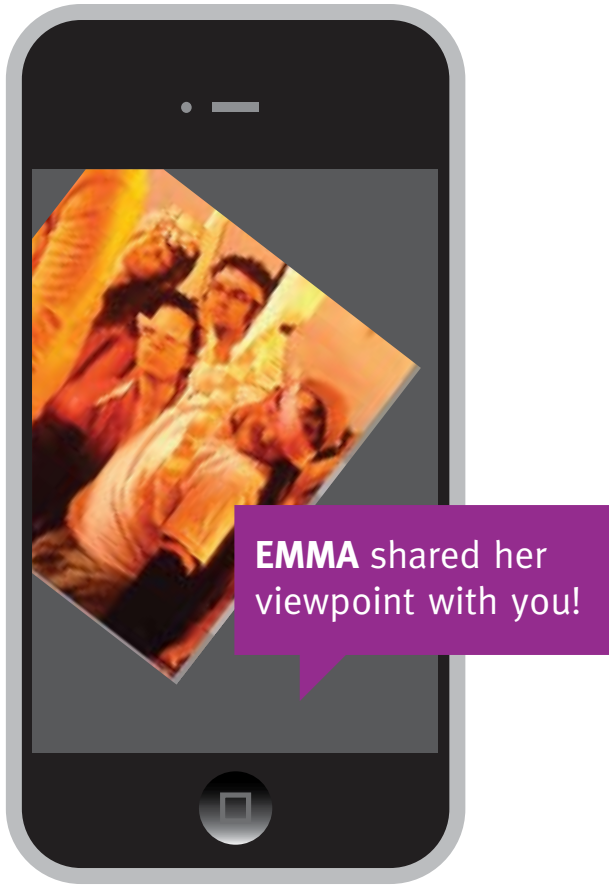
Because I wanted to explore the physical nature of interacting in an exhibition, I created several foam-core prototypes. These models would be used to experiment with gestures and interactions in the space and with other visitors.



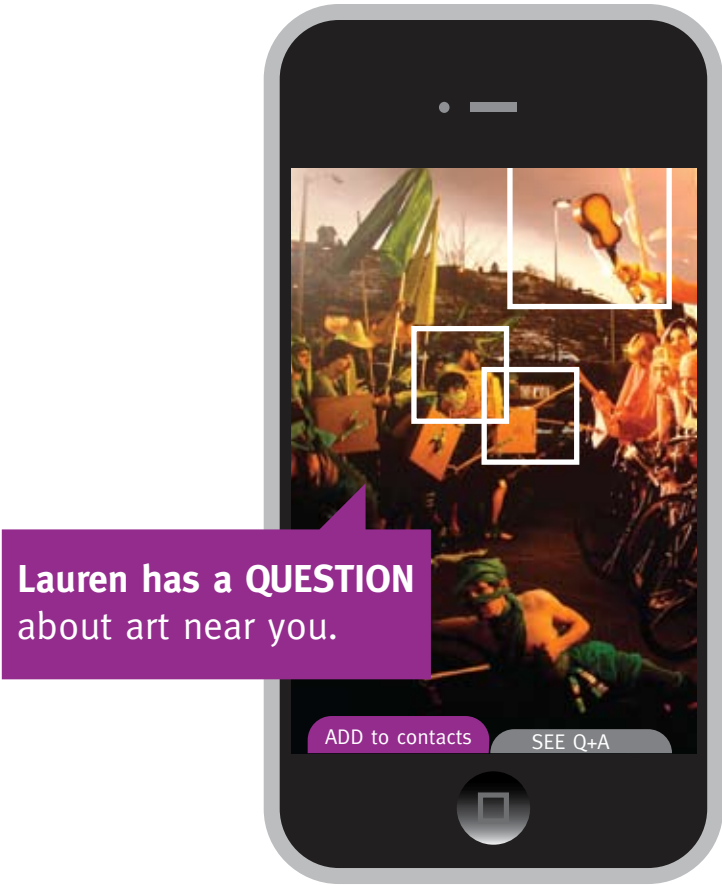
“ Click Click ”



“ BONK! ”



“ Buzz Buzzzz ”



Your ViewPoint has changed.







## Sharing Art with Physical Gestures

I created a task to test the wireframes and prototype. I chose an art organizer and an art visitor. First we pretended they were at home and saw an invitation to the event. Then they used a QR code to go online and sign up for an account. They then went to the gallery's event.

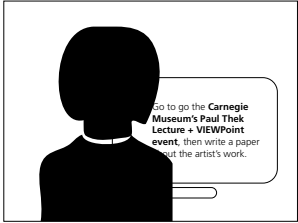
Inside the gallery they were asked to use the prototype smart phone to point to images that interested them. At first this action was fuzzy and the gestures unclear. I then placed a finger-tip sized shape at the end of their finger. Then I asked them to point to things that interested them now. It was remarkable. They placed their fingers on the highlighted area and used the phone to “point” to details in the paintings.

I replaced the dots with details of the photos that I had printed out. Then I asked them to pretend that they were close friends, and use their bodies to physically show me how they would share the image with their friend. They bumped phones and swiped the image to their friends phone. Then I asked them to pretend that they were strangers. Their actions changed, they shot the image and tossed the image to each other.

I asked them to talk about this sensation. They enjoyed the physical activity in an art environment that is often static. They also liked the idea of sending an image to someone they didn't know. They imagined sending an image to an artist or curator who they would feel less comfortable approaching in person.



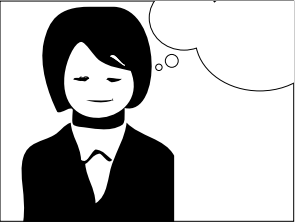
# VIEWPOINT



**EMMA** is a Liberal Arts student at the University of Pittsburgh.

Today, she gets a assignment from her college writing instructor.

“Go to the **Miller Gallery’s MFA exhibition Lecture + VIEWPoint event**, then write a paper about an artist’s work.”



**EMMA:** “Hmm, I like art + sometimes go to museums with friends. I don’t know anything about these arts though, I hope I’ll have something to write for the assignment.”

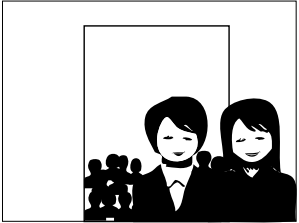


**EMMA** clicks the invitation, gets details about the event + signs up for a VIEWPoint account.

She sets her privacy settings and answers some questions about her interests in the arts.

There’s a button to invite a friend. She sends an invitation to **Lauren**.

**EMMA:** “Better to bring a friend,” she thinks.



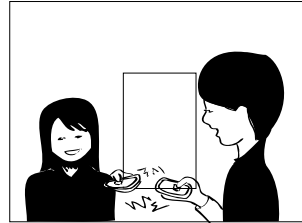
Cut to **EMMA + Lauren** just after the lecture.

**EMMA:** “That was an interesting lecture, although I had some questions I didn’t ask.”

**Lauren:** “Hey, let’s go to the VIEWPoint event.”

At the entrance of the show, they’re greeted by a docent who explains the event.

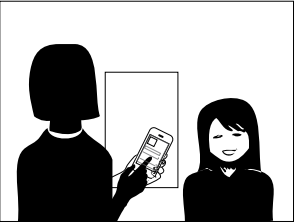
**Docent:** “Welcome, use your smart phone with VIEWPoint app to view + point at artworks that interest you. Share images to start conversations + ask questions. Let me know if you need any help.”



**EMMA + Lauren** enjoy the **VIEWPoint app**. It creates an album of images and shows where they pointed on the screen. **EMMA** views a painting and points to the image of the earth. She sees **Lauren** and with a tossing gesture shares the image with her.

**EMMA** “Look at this!”

**Lauren:** “Wow I didn’t see that. What else have people been looking at?”

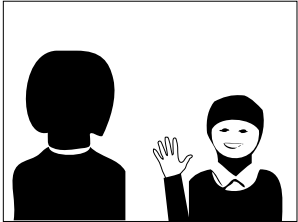


**EMMA** looks at the images from the group.

**EMMA** “Wow a lot of people are looking at the work of Robert Southard. These photos look like battle scenes I wonder if they have anything to do with current events in Egypt?”

**Lauren** “You should ask the group”

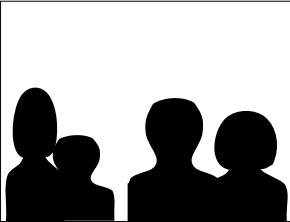
They asks a question by texting and dragging the image to the questions box.



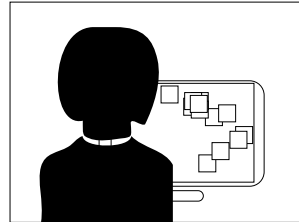
**Jacob** is standing next to them. He is an art major and sees their question pop up on his VIEWPoint app.

**Jacob** “Wow, that’s a great question. I was just thinking about paintings of battles from the middle ages. Hi I’m Jacob. I heard the artist is also interested in his childhood reenactments of war.”

**EMMA** “Wow, I didn’t know that. Now I see the cardboard and costumes that kids would play with. Hmm, this could make a great paper about make-believe and reality. Nice meeting you Jacob.”



spontaneous conversations occur among visitors. In the group view, you can see albums of visitors points of interest, comments, descriptor tags relating themes of the work and questions.

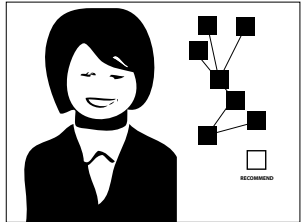


At home, **EMMA** is writing her paper. She logs on to the VIEWPoint event page.

**EMMA:** “Wow, all the visitor albums + comments are online. I can really relate to some of these viewpoints.”

She looks through the albums and sees a gallery with visitor’s points of interest. Descriptor tags allow her to see relationships between works.

She sees an alert that someone has answered a question. Its Robert Southard the artist of the work she liked.



**EMMA**’s finished with her paper and checks her VIEWPoint app again. She clicks **Your VIEWPoint’s expanding!**

She shares the connections between works she shared and people she talked to. It recommends she sees and exhibit by Cai Guo-Giang.

**EMMA:** “It looks like Jacob who I just met is going to that event too. I should tell **Lauren**. I could get into more art like this.”

## Scenario

I created several ideations of scenarios to best show how my idea corresponded to natural visitor behavior and promoted meaningful participation in the arts. Then I showed these scenarios to several of the people who participated in my expert interviews.

The responses to ViewPoint were positive. From the discussions of these scenarios, there seemed to be several opportunities for using this type of tool in museums and galleries. These included, use as a collaborative learning tool, a teaching tool, use as a decentralised question and answer session after a lecture and use as a themed scavenger hunt!

Though there were broad possibilities for the tool, I edited the scenario to be more precise and focus more on the important interactions including pointing, sharing and discussing after a gallery lecture.





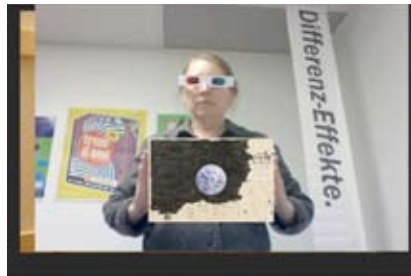
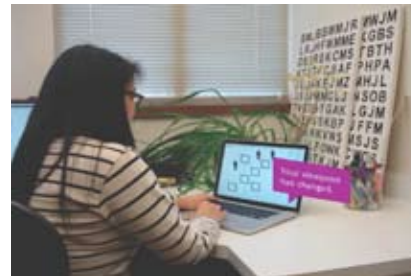
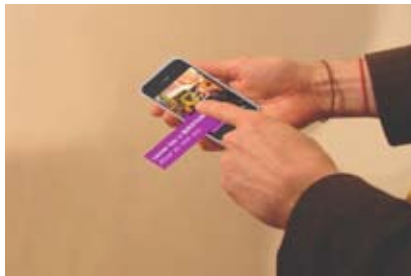
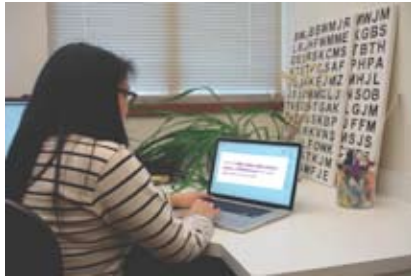
Point to what interests you.

## Implementation

Since the scenario tested well, I decided to show ViewPoint in context by creating a short video sketch. This video would be included in my pre-final poster presentation. I rewrote the scenario to show my final interface designs in relation to the visitor experience. I took several photographs that would visually explain each scene. Using Illustrator, I overlaid the ViewPoint interfaces for each laptop and smart phone. A recording session was arranged and participants read dialog for each character. After a few days of editing, I felt that the video described how Viewpoint works, but perhaps because of its information dense nature didn't really show how my solution will make people feel.

I decided to post a call on facebook for participants to send me a photo of themselves as if they were holding their favorite work of art. I received 32 images in just a few hours! I then created an emotional frame-by-frame video to show everyone with their unique viewpoint, holding the same piece of art.







## Final Design

The solution is a social media app called ViewPoint. ViewPoint takes place at a museum or gallery event. It uses pointing as a means for sharing and sharing as a catalyst for in-person discussion. The experience is expanded with an online gallery and social network that shows how your view point has changed over time.



### Point

CHOOSE

LABEL

REMIX

**VIEWPOINT** uses the human instinct of pointing at interesting things.

- Easy to use, accessible
- Shows rich information about visitor interests
- Gives the sensation of “touching” artwork
- Initiates a choice in the viewer



### Share

WITH FRIENDS

NON-ACQUAINTANCES

**VIEWPOINT** uses points of interest as conversation starters. Share by bumping or tossing images to someone near by.

- Active motion in static environment
- Fun and interesting connections
- Helps break down social barriers



### Discuss

COMMENT

ASK

ANSWER

**VIEWPOINT** is used during an art event to encourage visitors to talk about works in-person and in-context.

- Extends a lecture and decentralizes Q+A
- Works as a collaborative learning tool
- Museums can set tasks + create categories for exploration



### ReVisit

ONLINE GALLERY

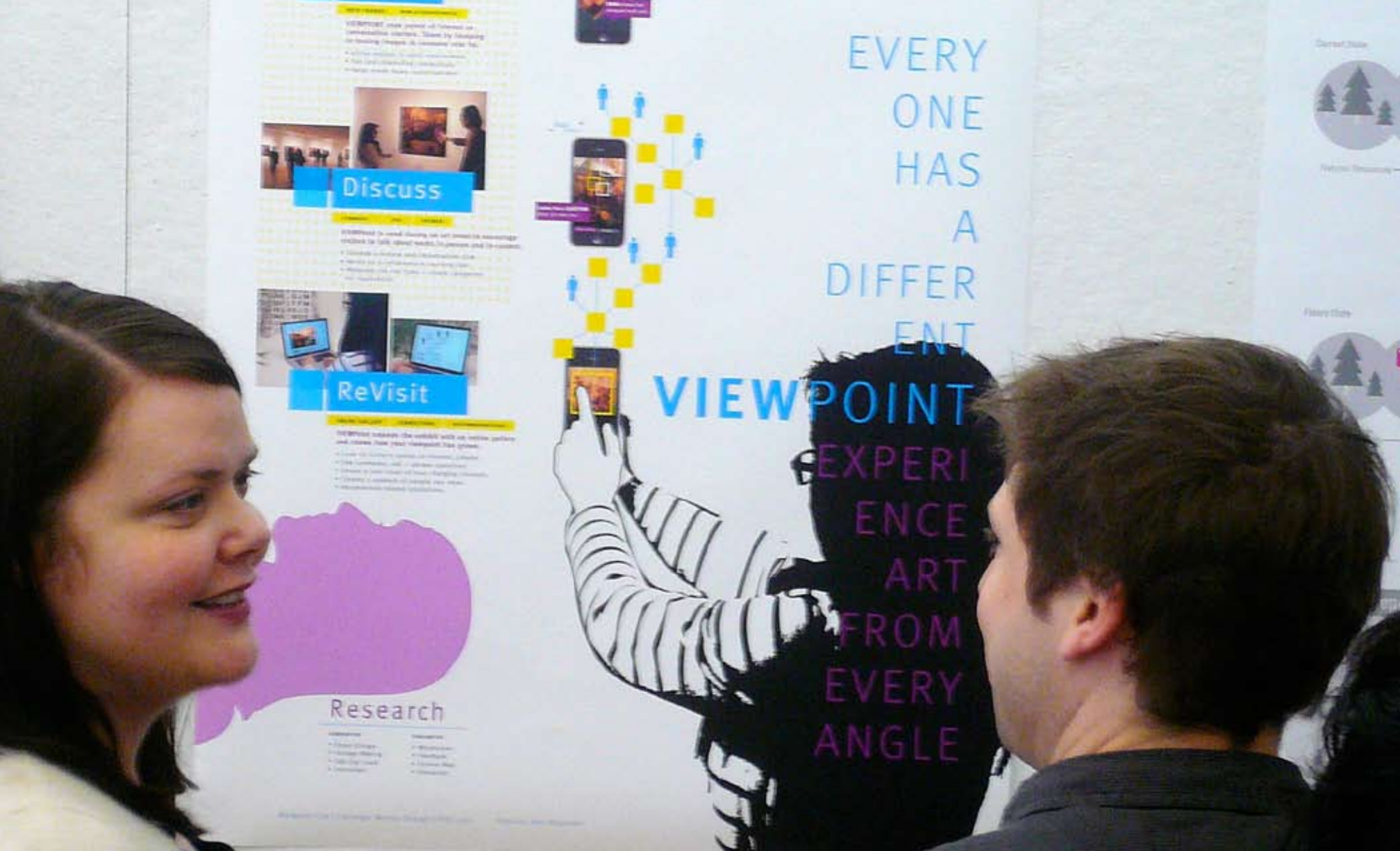
CONNECTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

**VIEWPOINT** extends the exhibit with an online gallery and shows how your viewpoint has grown.

- Look at visitor’s points of interest, albums
- See comments, ask + answer questions
- Shows a text cloud of your changing interests
- Creates a network of people you meet
- Recommends related exhibitions





## Pre-Final Thesis Poster Session

Creating a poster for the pre-final poster session really helped to clarify the basic concept for ViewPoint. The main steps Point, Share, Discuss, Revisit were shown and described in relation to the visitors experience. I showed photos of visitors using ViewPoint and across from each section I displayed the interface.

At the poster session, I shared my project with guests and received feedback. One suggestion was to consider how the actual device could prompt in-person discussions. For example, the phone could become a honing device to draw people with similar interests together. Other feedback included, making sure to show the final project in terms of its positive effect on the problem. For example, I should show how it would benefit curators and directors and then show how it would increase visitor participation. Lastly, I was advised to ground my video more to my research by showing how each part of the scenario is connected to the steps Point, Share, Discuss and Revisit.



## Reflections

Can we design meaningful social interactions that motivates participation and creates a community of informed, invested art visitors?

My design process and final design were developed to address this question. By promoting meaningful participation using social media, ViewPoint does several things. One, it enables multidirectional communication between visitors, curators and artists which breaks down social barriers. Two, it meets visitor interests at varied levels to create a personal experience. And lastly, it takes advantage of the instinct to point at interesting things in order to guide visitors through the process of sharing and connecting with others. Together these attributes help to create an entry point in experiencing art and developing a sense of community and belonging.

I think my project takes a look at one possibility that could impact the current decreases in visitor participation in the arts. I have learned through this process that there is no single solution to the problem but instead there need to be a cultural change in the arts. By shifting their missions towards visitor experience, museums and galleries can become places where communities will grow.

## Conclusion

To further develop this project, I would have a prototype of the application created and then conduct generative research tasks that using the tool during an actual event. I would like to take a close look at how people would use the application and would focus on its use for educational purposes. I would fine-tune the device behaviors by including attributes like a honing system.



## Resources

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