

## INTRODUCTION TO ART CARTS

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The MIA's Art Carts are hands-on gallery stations outfitted with art objects, props and visual aids related to the museum's permanent collection.

Staffed by Museum Guide Programs volunteers, Art Carts provide visitors with a unique art museum experience where **"Do touch!"** is the rule. Guides use the objects on the Art Carts as tools for facilitating learning experiences that encourage careful looking, dialogue between visitors and volunteers and among visitors, critical thinking, and further exploration of the Institute's permanent collection. And, they are lots of fun for all ages!

### ART CART GOALS

The goal of each Art Cart experience is to provide a multi-sensory interaction with art objects during which volunteer museum guides help visitors deepen their interest in and experience with the museum's permanent collection. Each object on the Art Carts is thoughtfully selected for its connections to the collection and its ability to engage the senses and inspire questions and observations. Although there are limitless possibilities for each Art Cart, we are constrained by several factors including cost, availability, durability/fragility, and safety and security of art and visitors in the galleries (i.e. most messy or wet materials are not allowed, nor are sharp objects that could endanger visitors or works of art).

Each cart also has a general theme or focus to tie the selected objects together (e.g. Africa – pattern and decoration of everyday objects; China – artist as master craftsperson; Americas – adornment/dress, environment; Japan – tea ceremony; South and Southeast Asia – symbolism; Pacific Islands – relationship to the natural world; Ancient Greece and Rome – daily life; Renaissance – gold ground painting; Dutch – impact of trade and exploration on art; Impressionist Painting – impact of science and technology on 19<sup>th</sup> c. art and artists).

### BEST PRACTICES

A successful Art Cart-visitor interaction:

- Sparks curiosity and inspires exploration in visitors of all ages
- Engages visitors in conversation with volunteers and fellow visitors about the objects on the Art Cart
- Allows the visitor to direct the discussion/discovery and explore those things of interest to the individual
- Provides opportunities for visitors to handle art objects with care and to learn about the museum's role in preserving and protecting the world's rich artistic heritage
- Stimulates as many of the five senses as possible/practical

**BEST PRACTICES,  
CONT.**

- Encourages visitor exploration in the surrounding galleries to seek out related objects (ideas provided in the “Collection Connections” section of each Art Cart object entry)

Each volunteer is expected to:

- Study the written Art Cart materials before *each* shift and be prepared to discuss *all* objects on the Art Cart
- Arrive on time (20 minutes before the shift begins) and insure the cart is ready for visitors at the appointed time
- Exhibit an outgoing, friendly and welcoming attitude
- Be proactive and invite visitors to explore the Art Cart
- Engage visitors in informal open-ended discussions
- Help visitors see and experience connections to the permanent collection and/or special exhibitions
- Model safe handling of Art Cart objects and materials (distinguishing between the allowed touching at Art Carts and the ‘one foot rule’ elsewhere in the galleries)

**OBJECT STORAGE,  
HANDLING AND  
SECURITY**

Each Art Cart includes items that can be divided into two main categories:

1. Art objects
2. Props, visual aids and general supplies

The art objects themselves are the main focus of each Art Cart. They are generally the most fragile, costly and difficult to replace items. To protect these objects, each is assigned a designated storage container or space, usually. It is important each object is returned to its appropriate storage place at the end of each Art Cart shift.

The props, visual aids and other supplies are intended to support the art objects on each Art Cart, helping volunteers and visitors to understand or explore certain aspects of the art objects. These ancillary items are usually more easily replaced or repaired than the art objects themselves.

**How to keep Art Cart items safe and in good condition?**

All items (art objects and supporting materials) must stay on or near the Art Cart at all times. Visitors and volunteers are not allowed to walk away from the Art Cart with objects and props. (Art Cart items are not to be used as tour props.) It is imperative that one volunteer on duty is present at the Art Cart at all times to assist visitors in carefully handling the objects to insure object and visitor safety.

**What to do if an Art Cart object is damaged or broken by a visitor?**

Unless the intent was malicious (usually isn't), please be gracious. The museum realizes accidents happen and things to break occasionally from repeated use/handling or when accidentally dropped. If there are broken pieces, please try to collect them all and deliver them to the Tour Office so we can determine if the item can be returned to the cart as is, repaired, or replaced. If there is a safety concern when something has broken (i.e. glass or liquids) or you feel the visitor was acting maliciously, seek assistance

from Security.

**What to do if an Art Cart object goes missing?**

Should a visitor intentionally or unintentionally leave the Art Cart with art objects, props, or visual aids and the volunteers on duty are unable to recover these items themselves, security should be notified immediately. (Locate the nearest guard or call Security via a gallery phone at x3225.) *Please note that this has never happened, in more than a decade of Art Cart use.*

If an object is missing when you set up the cart for the day, it may have been removed by a staff member for cleaning, repair or some other reason. Check the inventory log for information and/or follow up with MGP staff after your shift.

**BRINGING PERSONAL OBJECTS**

Guides must refrain from bringing personal items from home to use on the Art Carts. All objects used on the carts a) must be vetted by Museum Guide Programs staff to insure they are appropriate for the Art Cart and b) need to remain on the cart/in the museum, so that Security is not put in the position of having to judge whether or not items are guides' personal property or the museum's property. Additionally, the museum cannot assume responsibility for the loss or damage of guides' personal property.

Museum Guide Programs is happy to consider your suggestions for possible additions to any of the Art Carts.

**ART CART INVENTORY**

Each Art Cart is stocked with a binder containing inventory worksheets listing each of the *art objects* or other main components of the cart. (Not all supporting props, visual aids and general supplies are listed on the inventory.) A thorough inventory of the Art Cart should be conducted at the beginning and end of each shift.

At the end of each shift, any damaged or missing objects and/or depleted supplies should be recorded on the inventory *and* reported to a staff member in the Tour Office. (Please leave a note or a voicemail if you're in when the office is un-staffed.)

There is also space on the back of each day's inventory sheet to record any questions, comments or suggestions docents, guides or museum visitors may have about the Art Cart. Please take a moment to share your experience with fellow volunteers and staff! An intern in the department does a weekly check of all the Art Carts and attends to and/or reports any questions, comments, or needs to staff.

**DIGITAL CAMERA AND**  
[WWW.FLICKR.COM](http://WWW.FLICKR.COM)

Please take photos of visitors at the Art Carts!

- Borrow a digital camera for your Art Cart shift (stored in bright blue bucket inside the top drawer of the low cabinet just inside the tour coordinators' office in the Tour Office).
- When you pick up the camera in the Tour Office at the beginning of your shift, also grab a stack of the small printed cards that direct visitors to the MIA's Flickr page to see and share their photos later.
- *Always* get verbal permission before taking *any* visitor's photo. This is especially important when taking photos of children. You should obtain permission from an adult responsible for the child(ren). We do not collect or publish the names of visitors pictured in photos taken at the Art Cart.
- Please do not adjust the camera's settings. They have been pre-set for low-light gallery conditions.
- Return the camera and remaining Flickr cards to the Tour Office when your shift ends.
- Museum staff will upload the photos you take at: [www.flickr.com/minneapolisinstituteofarts](http://www.flickr.com/minneapolisinstituteofarts). New photos are uploaded monthly.

**ART CART PASSPORTS**

Travel the globe via the Art Carts! There are 10 permanent collection MIA Art Carts, and visitors who pick up an Art Cart Passport and get it stamped at all (or most) of the 10 will receive a prize (an "I ♥ MIA" bracelet).

Each Art Cart is stocked with a passport stamp, inepad, and a supply of blank passports and prizes. Please stamp the passports for visitors, to try and keep the messiness of the ink somewhat contained! The stamps can be set to today's date.

All of the Art Carts are only very rarely all available at the same time, so encourage visitors to begin their passport today and to bring it back each time they visit to collect more Art Cart stamps. The complete schedule of Art Carts is online at [www.artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org).

If a visitor to your Art Cart has a full (10 stamps +/-) passport, give them one of the prizes also supplied on each Art Cart (brightly colored rubber bracelets). Visitor and Member Services (VMS) also has a small supply of Art Cart passports and prizes at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor Information Desk.

## MGP Volunteer Policies and Procedures for Art Carts

### **Confirmations**

When you sign up for or are assigned an Art Cart, you will receive a tour confirmation form in the mail for each assignment approximately 3-5 weeks before the date of the assignment.

Art Cart confirmations will include the following information:

- Date, time and subject area/gallery of the Art Cart shift
- Names of assigned guides (usually 2; occasionally more for special events)
- Special information

### **Substitutes**

The expectations are the same as for tour assignments. If you are unable to give an assigned Art Cart, **it is your responsibility to find a substitute. If you are substituting for another guide, it is your responsibility to let the Tour Office and the lead guide know of the change.**

### **Emergency Absences**

If an unforeseen emergency (i.e. sudden illness, car trouble) arises on the day of your assignment and you are running late or are unable to make your assignment, please call the Tour Office (weekday assignments) at 612-870-3140 or Visitor and Member Center (evening and weekend assignments) at 612-870-3131 as soon as possible. The Tour Office is only staffed Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m., so it is most important you call the Visitor and Member Center if an emergency arises outside of regular museum business hours, impacting an assignment that is to occur before the Tour Office is again staffed.

### **Checking Out**

To avoid being scheduled for a tour when you know in advance you are unable to guide due to travel plans, work commitments, etc., please advise the tour office in writing by the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month in advance any month in which you are unable to volunteer on one or more days (e.g., notice in writing by June 1 for dates you are unavailable in July). If you have travel plans, please allow yourself plenty of time to return/recover from your trip before being assigned tours. Sign out for an additional day or two after your return. Checkout forms are available in the Tour Office or online at [www.mgpvolunteers.org](http://www.mgpvolunteers.org).

## Art Cart Checklist for All Guides

### Arrival

1. Before coming to the museum, check the weekly events schedule posted at [www.mgpvolunteers.org](http://www.mgpvolunteers.org) (Calendars) for other tours and Art Carts scheduled to be in the galleries during your Art Cart assignment. (It's also posted as a hard copy on the bulletin board in the Tour Office.)
2. Arrive 20 minutes before your shift is scheduled to begin in the gallery. ***Because of the set up involved for Art Carts, being at least 20 minutes early is essential.*** It's also important because you're volunteering as a team with another volunteer who is depending on you to help with set up. Wear your security badge while in the building.

### Set-Up and Take-Down

1. Meet with the other guide(s) assigned to the cart in the Tour Office 15 minutes before the shift is scheduled to begin.
2. Pick up the key to the Costume Room (if staffing Renaissance, Dutch or Impressionist Painting Art Carts) and a digital camera (if all are not already in use) and cards with information about accessing photos in the MIA's Flickr pool online. Both the key and camera are kept the top drawer of the low cabinet just inside Jennifer and Paula's office door. (On Thursday evenings and weekends, it is ok to open the door if it is ajar or closed. Please close it again, if it was closed when you went in.)
3. Pick up an iPod touch and a set of speakers from the museum guide library in the Tour Office. There are 2 available (first come, first served) , and they are kept plugged in on the bottom bookshelf on the right side of the room.
4. Go as a team to get the cart out of storage and position it in the designated spot in the gallery. Unless asked to set up in an alternate location for a special event, or if unforeseen circumstances arise (i.e. loud music filtering up from ArtsBreak on a Third Thursday), please always set up in the designated spot. The museum calendar and events programs list the Art Cart location, and we want people to be able to find you.
5. Set-up the cart as quickly and as quietly as possible, especially if there are visitors in the gallery. Using the inventory sheets provided, check to make sure all the objects and supplies are there and in good condition. Make note of anything that needs attention.
6. You may take short breaks during your shift, if necessary. **Be sure one of the guides on the shift stays with the cart at all times. The cart should never be left unattended.**

7. Keep a running tally of the number of people you interact with in the gallery. (There is a tally counter on each cart to help you keep track.)
8. When your shift is over, pack and store the objects as you found them. Make a note of any missing or damaged objects. The Art Carts are typically checked weekly by an intern responsible for their upkeep. If there is an urgent need for a repair or supplies, please also leave a note in the bin on the outside of Jennifer and Paula's door in the Tour Office and/or send Amanda an email.
9. **Stop in the Tour Office to return the iPod touch/speakers, Costume Room key (European painting Art Carts), and/or digital camera (if appropriate), and to record your name and the number of visitors who stopped at the cart.** This is important for statistical purposes as well as to insure you receive credit.
10. *Thank you for all you do help engage museum visitors with art!*

For more on cart objects and techniques for facilitating the Art Cart, consult the materials specific to the Art Cart(s) you facilitate. They are posted at [www.mgpvolunteers.org](http://www.mgpvolunteers.org) under Downloads>Art Carts>Art Cart Object Information.