

Questioning the Art

A participatory exercise

This participatory exercise is a different way of engaging the viewer with the art object. Typically when viewing objects on a tour, the docent will ask the viewer questions about their feelings, thoughts, ideas regarding the art objects. This participatory exercise turns the tables and asks the art a question.

What you need for this exercise:

1. A thought provoking question that would appeal to a wide range of viewers. We came up with this question, "What should I be focusing on over the next six months?"
2. Slips of paper and something to carry them in.

Process

This exercise would fit in well after about 3 or 4 objects have already been viewed. Choose a gallery that has art work that could fit your theme, or that has thought provoking objects. Choose 2 or more objects for this exercise and number them accordingly (1,2,3...) Typically you will want no more than 3-4 people per object so a group size of 10 you could do 3 different objects.

Print your question ahead of time on individual slips of paper. On the reverse side put the number of the object. For example, if you want 4 people per group, you will have four slips with "1" printed on the reverse, four slips with "2" printed on the reverse, et cetera.

Optional - We also included a numbering system to prompt someone to go first, then second, then third.. So four slips for object 1 would have these numbers on the reverse: 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, 1-4.

Introduce the exercise to the group:

"So far we have looked at 4 art objects and I have asked you questions about the art and your ideas and thoughts. For the next fifteen minutes we are going to work in small groups and ask the art a question. This exercise will hopefully provide some answers for you and will get you to look at the art in a completely different way. Just look, listen, and let the art speak to you. In your small groups we encourage you to share any insights you may have with your group.

"The question you will be asking the art is "What should I be focusing on over the next six months?" Within this bag are slips of paper, one for each of you. On one side is the question, "What should I be focusing on over the next six months?" On the other side is a number which corresponds to the piece of work to which you will ask the question and the order in which the group will answer the question (optional).

"So, let's take a few moments to collect ourselves, take a deep breath, close your eyes if you'd like, silently consider the question "What should I be focusing on over the next six months?". [Pause; count to 5]. When you're ready, quietly step forward and pull your slip from the bag.

Next steps

Guide the groups to their art object coinciding with the number on the slip of paper. Have them spend one whole minute viewing the art (time the groups) before telling them to begin their discussion.

Conclusion

"We need to bring this exercise to a close now. We hope that you've gathered some insights from your artwork. As with anything intuitive, there are no right or wrong answers. Also, like with dreams, sometimes insights may come to you later. We thank you for participating today, and encourage you to use this exercise anytime you are in the museum... selecting your own question and inviting the art to speak to you. Thank you."