

March Public Tour: **Look Beyond the Label**

Art challenges us. Artists make 100s of choices—often without explanation. And the museum label may not help, either. Learn to **Look Beyond the Label** in a conversation about how to approach a work of art for better understanding.

Look Beyond the Label: A Guide for Crafting the Public Tour

Goal: create a tour that empowers visitors to look at art to make their own discoveries—without relying on label copy.

1. **Use a variety of approaches** (try 3-4). One approach doesn't fit every object or every visitor.
2. Briefly **explain your approach** with each object to help visitors remember it later.
3. **Follow-up after each object.** Ask visitors if they have questions about an object. Ask if there is one thing they are curious about. Share what you would explore on your own. For example: Why do you think the surrealists painted this way? How did Henry Moore's life affect what he made? The Chinese and Japanese consider calligraphy to be an art form. What about it suggests that it is art? Mention your favorite website or other ways to search. A great one for artists and movements is theartstory.org
4. **Use art history facts sparingly, like salt.** A little bit enhances, too much dominates. If the docent poses as "the authority," visitors become less confident to approach art on their own. Do share facts about the artist, movement, formal qualities, etc. that support viewers' comments or take them further into the work.

Approaches

Remember, your tour is your own. The ideas below are only suggestions.

- **Use our 5 senses to look at art** (and mention how this relates to Robert Wilson's Power & Beauty exhibition).
- **Ask VTS questions** (and add information as it relates) to provide a solid technique for visitors to use on their own.
- **Compare & contrast** 2 objects in a gallery. What do they have in common? How has each artist approached things differently?

- **Explore an Element of Art: shape, line, form, texture, value, space, color.** This [NY Times website](#) has a series of videos and ideas about presenting each visual element.
- **Include scale as an element of art.** How does our size compare to the size of the object? How would it be different if it were larger? smaller? What about small things fascinates people? How does the scale of Mia's architecture make you feel? What do you think was the architect's purpose?
- **Help visitors connect an object to personal experience.**
 - Try an idea from the **Museum Sage** program at Mia: "Ask a question about your life and receive insight from a museum piece." The introductory page of their website <https://www.museumsage.com> gives a good summary with a couple of videos showing how to use the technique. (Docent Joy Yoshikawa participates in this program and can answer questions about it.)
 - Ask "What first caught your eye?" Often this relates to something in a person's life experience.
- **Ask additional questions that help visitors see the object in a different way.**
 - **How would it be different if ...?** For example: How would Sargent's Birthday Party be different if it were yellow? What does the color red say to you? If Henry Moore's Warrior with Shield were made of polished stainless steel, how would you look at it differently? How would that medium change his message?
 - **If you were the art teacher for this artist...** What would you tell her or him they did well? What would you recommend they change? How did you decide?
 - **If this painting was your inspiration for making a movie...**What would the sound track be like? What would the light be like? The colors? What do you see that makes you say that?