

**The Asian Art Experience:  
Visitor Preferences and Responses to  
*Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion***

**INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES**



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**THE ASIAN ART EXPERIENCE:  
VISITOR PREFERENCES AND RESPONSES TO  
*PUJA: EXPRESSIONS OF HINDU DEVOTION***

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## Abstract

This report presents the results of a 1997 study of the exhibition *Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion* at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. The aim of the study was to investigate visitors' responses to the exhibition's display techniques and to better understand the preferences that visitors bring to Asian art museums. The study used two principal methods: exploratory recorded interviews and a systematic survey.

Among *Puja* display elements, the texts and shrines were viewed by most visitors and found especially rewarding. The narrative video also was very highly regarded, although it was viewed by fewer visitors.

Exploratory conversations with visitors about previous satisfying experiences with Asian art in museums led to a list of ten categories, here called "approach modes." These categories, in turn, were used to create statements summarizing the different kinds of experience individuals said they found satisfying. These statements are abbreviated in the report as "information," "aesthetics," "spiritual," "imagination," "rare objects," "own," "professional," "social," "children," and "memories." Visitors were asked to choose from this list. Both a first and second choice were recorded.

The question about satisfying experiences with Asian art in general defined two equal-sized sub-groups among visitors who entered the Freer and the Sackler -- those who said they prefer information ("enriching their knowledge") and those who said they prefer aesthetics ("moved by beauty"). As a way of summarizing both first and second choices, we can say that out of every ten visitors entering the museum:

- two chose both aesthetics and information,
- three chose aesthetics but not information,
- three chose information but not aesthetics, and
- two chose neither aesthetics nor information.

Considering the first choice only, 31% chose aesthetics, 25% chose information and the remainder (44%) chose something else. The selection of either an aesthetic preference, an information preference or an alternative preference is significantly associated with five factors, 1) experience with the Freer and Sackler Galleries, 2) experience with art museums generally, 3) education, 4) age, and 5) country of residence.

Visitors to the *Puja* exhibition were asked to choose the kind of experience they found most satisfying in the *Puja* exhibition. Compared to the experiences entering visitors identified as most satisfying when viewing Asian art in general, *Puja* visitors were much less likely to choose aesthetics and much more likely to pick information as their first choice. This suggests that a number of visitors who usually prefer aesthetic experiences found enriching informational experiences in *Puja*. It is also possible, however, that the *Puja* exhibition might have drawn a disproportionate number of visitors interested in acquiring information.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the individuals who worked with us on this study of visitors to the *Puja* exhibition.

Sarah Ridley, Assistant Head of Education for the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, and project coordinator for the exhibition, suggested the study and worked with us in developing the study and thinking about the results. Lucia Pierce, Head of Education, provided valuable comments on a draft version of this report.

In the Institutional Studies Office (ISO), special thanks are due to ISO interns Eric Conrad, Sheri Klein and Charles Vogl who assisted with pretesting the questionnaire, data collection, and editing and coding of data.

Of course, without the participation of about 250 visitors to the Freer and Sackler Galleries, this study would not have been possible. Their participation in the survey and useful comments are appreciated.

Zahava D. Doering, Director  
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## I. Introduction

*Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion* opened at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery on May 12, 1996. The exhibition displays statues, ritual objects, and re-creations of shrines used in Hindu worship.<sup>1</sup>

This study began with a request from Sarah Ridley, Assistant Head of Education for the Freer Gallery of Art (Freer) and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Sackler), and project coordinator for the exhibition. She asked for help in understanding how visitors respond to the exhibition's display techniques. The exhibition uses methods commonly found in Sackler exhibitions, such as a narrated video in an adjacent room, a resource area with reading material and objects to handle, and explanatory wall panels and labels. *Puja* also incorporates some display techniques that are new to the Freer and Sackler Galleries -- videos displayed next to objects, altar arrangements showing how statues are clothed and garlanded during pujas, art objects that can be touched, photo albums of household shrines in the community, and puzzles for children.

This study was designed to extend the knowledge of Freer and Sackler visitors that had been gained through a year-long survey that the Institutional Studies Office completed in 1996.<sup>2</sup>

### Background

In museum visitor studies, the effectiveness of specific exhibition elements is usually measured by calculating the percentage of people that stop at a particular element, by recording the amount of time they spend there, and by asking visitors content questions about the element. These techniques are especially well-suited to science and history exhibitions, where the communication of specific information is usually a primary goal. But they are less useful for art exhibitions, where the aim is often something other than the transfer of information.

Art museum staffs typically maintain that the art museum experience has multiple meanings, including the aesthetic, the conceptual, the emotional, and the informational. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted on the ways that art museum visitors are actually affected by their time in the museum.<sup>3</sup> What do visitors get out of an art museum visit?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Puja is the act of showing reverence to a god or to aspects of the divine through invocations, prayers, songs, and rituals; spiritual connection is facilitated through an object: an element of nature, a sculpture, a vessel, a painting, or a print.

<sup>2</sup> Bielick, S., Pekarik, A. J., & Doering, Z. D. (1996). *America Meets Asia: A Report Based on the 1994-1994 Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Visitor Study* (Report No. 96-2B). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>3</sup> The Lesley College Program Evaluation and Research Group conducted a study of the Worcester Art Museum exhibition *Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World* that included a telephone interview with visitors three months after they had visited the exhibition. Over 30% of these telephone respondents implied that they had learned something in the exhibition, half of them remembered the works of art, and over a third referred to the feminist theme that was the main message of the exhibition. Hein, G. E.,

In order to understand what visitors get out of their visit, we need first to ask, "What do they want to get out of their visit," because what happens to an individual in a museum is strongly influenced by what that person anticipates and desires.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the *Puja* exhibition, we wondered what kind of experience visitors were seeking and how that orientation may have influenced their reactions to the exhibition.

We began this study with the hypothesis that visitors enter the Freer and Sackler galleries looking forward to a particular type of experience, and that this preference is based on a pattern of previous satisfying experiences in similar types of museums. According to this hypothesis, interest in the *Puja* exhibition and responses to it would vary according to these preferences.

## Method

The *Puja* study was conducted in two phases with complementary study methods. The first phase was an exploratory investigation, using qualitative techniques, of the preference patterns of visitors. Visitors in the *Puja* exhibition were asked to talk about previous satisfying experiences with Asian art in museums, about the apparent similarities among these experiences, and about their reactions to *Puja* and its display techniques. Altogether 25 interviews were tape-recorded and the analysis of these conversations produced ten categories of satisfying experiences. We called these categories "approach modes." (The results of this phase are further described in Appendix A.)

In the second phase, we conducted a systematic survey of visitors at three locations: the main entrance to the Sackler Gallery, the main entrance to the Freer Gallery, and the *Puja* exhibition exit. The core question in these surveys was a list of experience alternatives based on the "approach modes" identified in the first phase. One question, used at the entrance to the Freer and Sackler Galleries, asked which of these the visitor found most satisfying when looking at Asian art in general. The other question, used at the exit to the *Puja* exhibition, asked which of these the visitor had found most satisfying in the *Puja* exhibition.

Altogether 246 interviews were completed out of 269 attempts (72 at Freer, 76 at Sackler, and 98 at *Puja*), a response rate of 91 percent.

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Hughes, C. and Mello, R. (1994). *Evaluation Report Judith Leyster: A Dutch Master and Her World*. Cambridge, MA, Lesley College Program Evaluation and Research Group.

<sup>4</sup> We explored this question at the Smithsonian in our study of visitors to the Richard Lindner retrospective at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. Both entering and exiting visitors were asked to talk about a photograph of a Lindner painting not in the exhibition. The differences between their comments revealed the changes brought about by the experience of the exhibition and its texts. See Pekarik, A. J. and Bielick, S. (1997). *The Influence of Exhibition Texts on Visitor Responses to Richard Lindner: Paintings and Watercolors 1948-1977*. (Report 97-4). Washington, DC. Smithsonian Institution.

<sup>5</sup> Studies we have conducted at Smithsonian museums have shown the importance of understanding visitor motivations in entering an exhibition. See, for example, Doering, Z. D., Pekarik, A. J., & Kindlon, A. E. (1995). *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office: A Study of an Exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum* (Report No. 95-3). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.



## II. Key Results

The demographic characteristics of respondents to this study in September, 1997 were very similar to those of the much larger sample of September, 1995 visitors in the year-long study (See Table B-1). Visitors were almost all adults, visiting alone or with one other person, and about half were making a repeat visit. Visitors entering the Sackler were more likely to have come to see something in particular, compared to those entering the Freer.

Overall responses to the survey questions at the Freer and Sackler entrance locations are in Appendix C. This section will present and analyze the most striking of these results.

### EXPERIENCE PREFERENCES

Entering visitors were asked, "For a moment, could you think back on your experiences with Asian art and think about which ones were most satisfying. I'd like you to choose from this list the one kind of experience that has tended to be most satisfying for you when looking at Asian art." Visitors at the end of the *Puja* exhibition were asked, "For a moment look back on your experience in this exhibition, and think about what was most satisfying. I'd like you to choose from this list the one kind of experience that was most satisfying for you when looking at the *Puja* exhibition."

The same list was used for both questions. The list offered 11 options:<sup>6</sup> (The words in parentheses are the abbreviations used in this report.)

- I see my children learning new things. (children)
- I enrich my knowledge, gain information or understanding. (information)
- I feel a spiritual connection. (spiritual)
- I imagine myself in other times or places. (imagination)
- I am moved by the beauty of the art. (aesthetics)
- I think what it would be like to own such things. (own)
- I continue my professional development. (professional)
- I see old, rare objects and paintings. (rare objects)
- I share a relaxing visit with friends or family. (social)
- I recall my travels, childhood experiences, other memories. (memories)
- Other

After one of these statements was selected, the visitor was asked for a second choice.

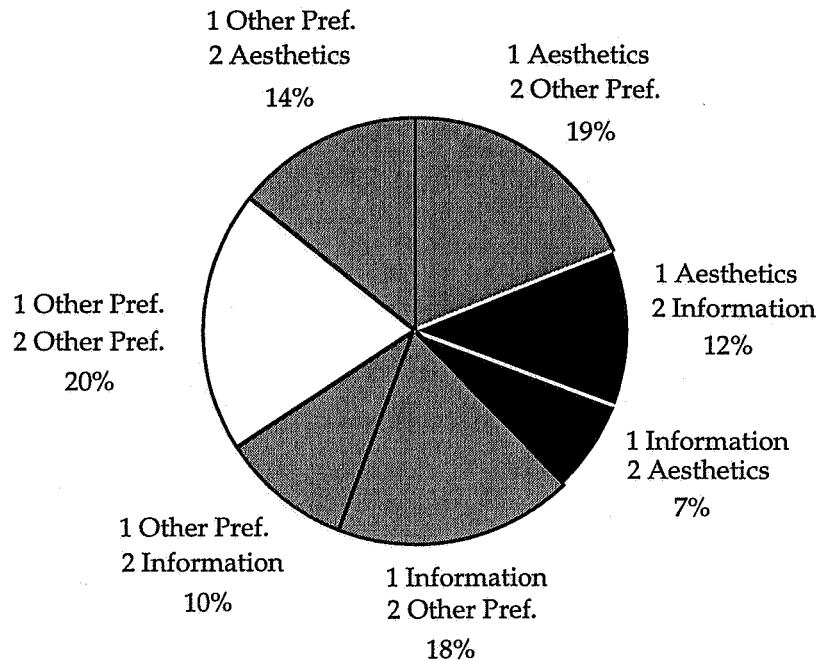
Answers to the question about satisfying experiences with Asian art defined two equal-sized sub-groups among all the visitors who entered the Freer and the Sackler -- those who said (either in their first or second choice) that they find information satisfying ("enriching their knowledge") and those who said they find aesthetics satisfying ("moved by beauty").

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<sup>6</sup> The list was presented in different orders, to minimize "order effect," i.e., visitors selecting statements near the beginning of the list.

If we graph both the first and second choices that visitors made on entering the Galleries, we find considerable overlap in these two preference categories, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1  
Most Satisfying Asian Art Experiences  
 First and Second Choice  
 (In Percent)



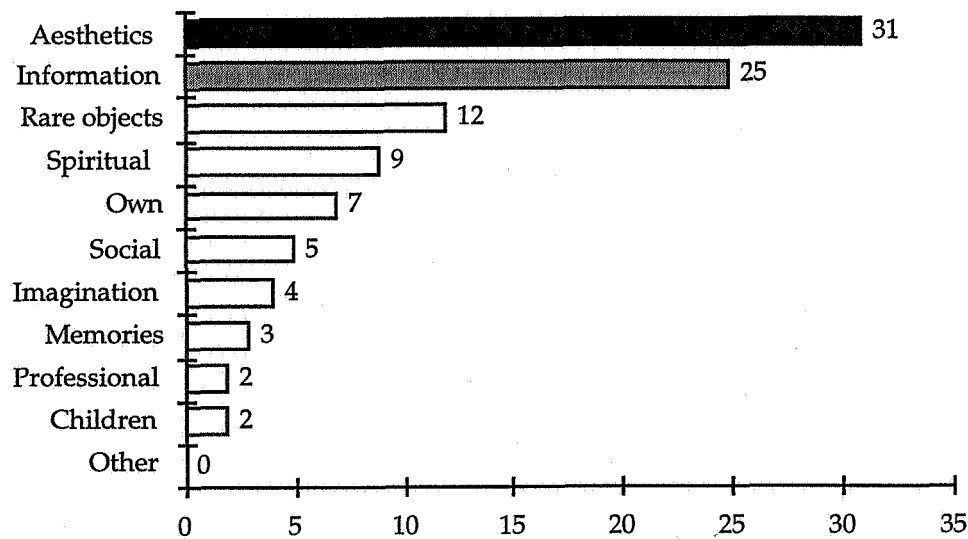
[Note: 1= first choice; 2 = second choice.]

These sub-groups are very balanced in size. Out of every ten visitors, two chose aesthetics and information (solid black slices on the right in Figure 1); three chose aesthetics but not information (upper shaded slices); three chose information but not aesthetics (lower shaded slices); and two chose neither aesthetics nor information (white slice on the left).

There is no substantive difference between the preferences visitors selected at the entrance to the Freer Gallery and those they chose at the entrance to the Sackler Gallery. If we take all entering visitors together and look at their first choice of satisfying Asian art experience, we find that approximately one-third (31%) chose aesthetics (black bar in Figure 2), one-quarter (25%) chose information (shaded bar in Figure 2) and the remainder (44%) chose something else (white bars in Figure 2).<sup>7</sup> See Table B-2.

<sup>7</sup>This report will focus on the first choice that visitors made or on combined first and second choices. It will not discuss second choices in isolation because second choices are constrained by first choices and because there are indications that the second choice by itself is less meaningful.

Figure 2  
Most Satisfying Asian Art Experiences (First Choice Only)  
(In Percent)



Source: Table B-2.

#### FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PREFERENCE

The selection of either an aesthetic preference, an information preference or an alternative preference (i.e., one of the other nine options) is significantly associated with five factors, 1) experience with the Galleries, 2) experience with art museums, 3) education, 4) age, and 5) country of residence.

#### Experience with the Galleries

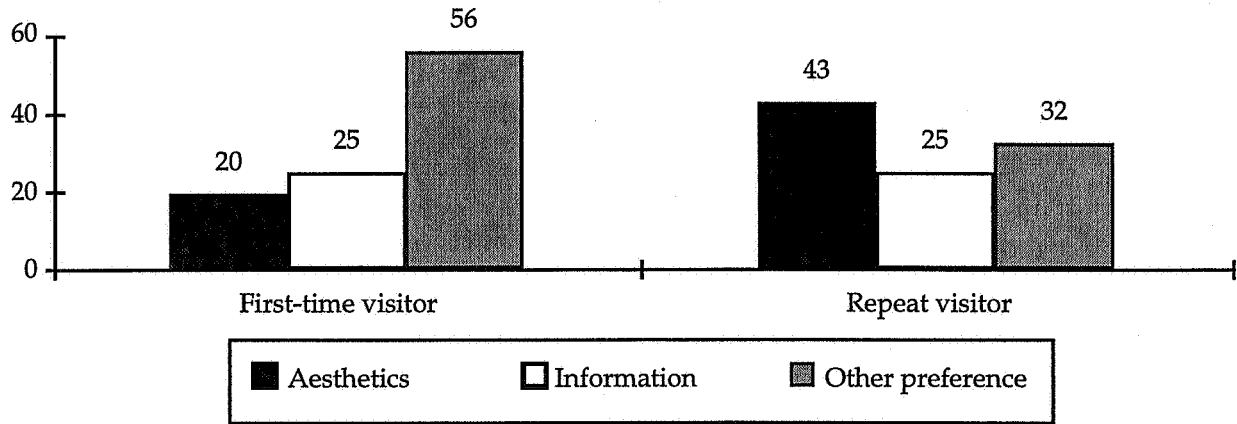
- First-time visitors to the Freer or Sackler were more likely to choose something other than aesthetics or information while repeat visitors were more likely to choose aesthetics (Figure 3). First-time visitors and repeat visitors were equally likely to choose information.

#### Experience with art museums

- Those who visit art museums less than once a month on average were more likely to choose an alternative other than aesthetics or information. Those who visit art museums once a month or more on average were about equally likely to choose either aesthetics, information, or one of the other alternatives. (See Figure 4.)

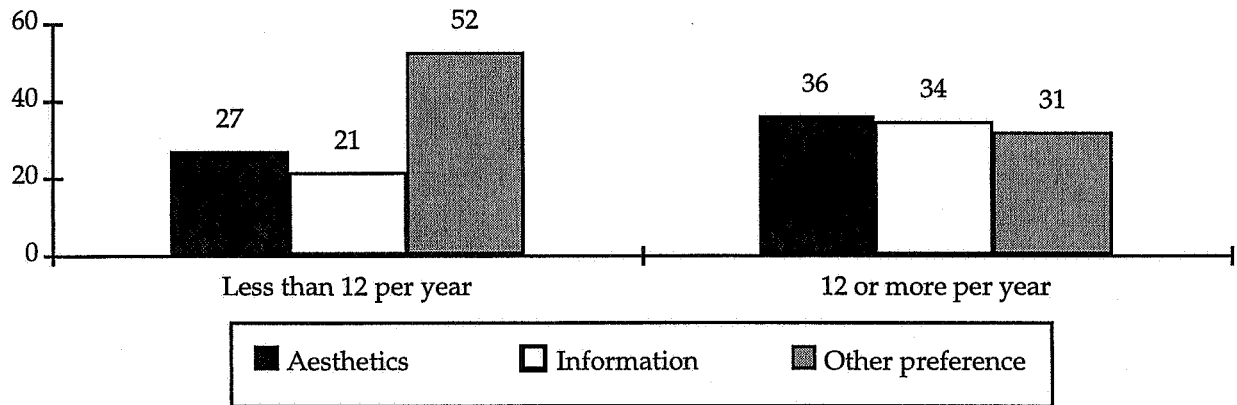
In particular, the less-active art-museum visitors were five times more likely than other visitors to have selected "I imagined myself in other times or places" as either their first or second choice (21% vs. 4%).

Figure 3  
Most Satisfying Experience by Type of Visitor  
 First Choice Only  
 (In Percent)



Source: Table B-3.

Figure 4  
Most Satisfying Experience by Frequency of Art Museum Visits  
 First Choice Only  
 (In Percent)

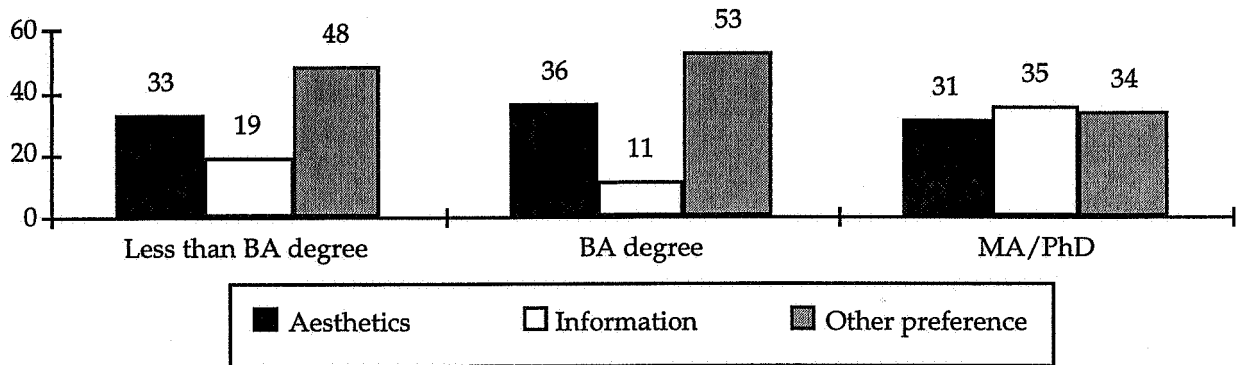


Source: Table B-3.

Education

- Those who had obtained graduate degrees were equally likely to choose either aesthetics, information or another preference. By contrast, visitors with lower levels of educational attainment were inclined away from information, as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**  
Most Satisfying Experience by Highest Level of Formal Education  
 First Choice Only, Age 25 and Above Only  
 (In Percent)



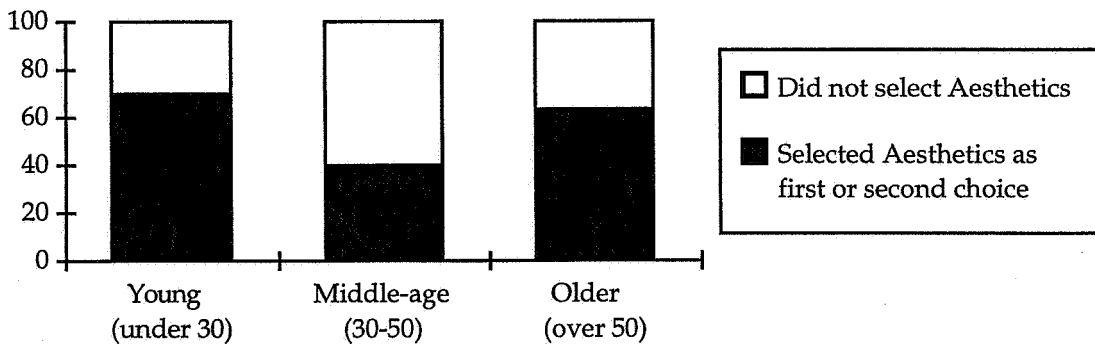
Source: Table B-3.

Age

Age also has a significant association with the kind of experiences visitors identified as satisfying.

- Middle-aged visitors (ages 30 to 50) were much less likely to choose aesthetics as either their first or second choice, when compared to other age groups. (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**  
Most Satisfying Experience (aesthetics) by Age  
 First or Second Choice  
 (In Percent)



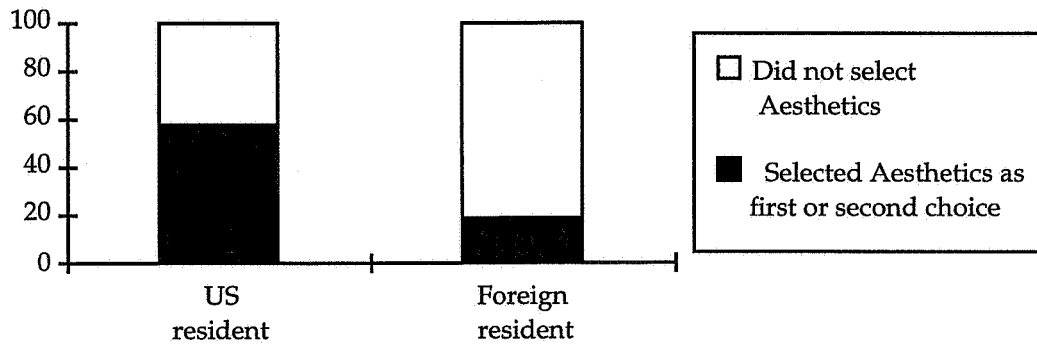
Source: Table B-3.

## Country of Residence

Finally, there is a marked difference between US residents and foreign residents.

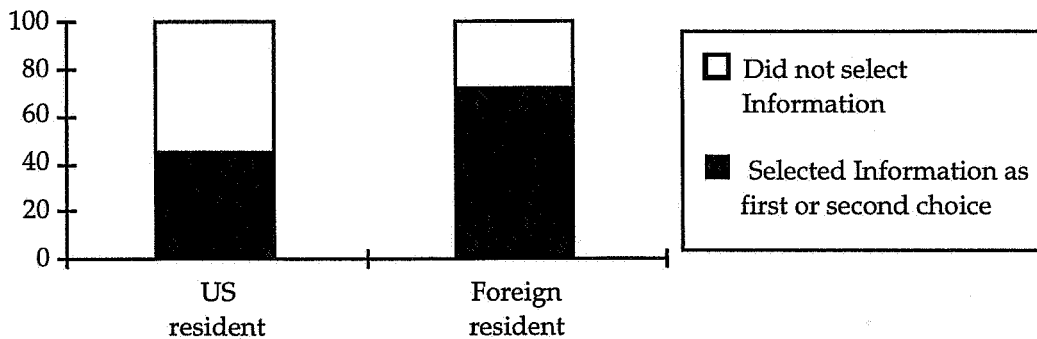
- Foreign residents were less likely than US residents to select aesthetics as either their first or second choice and more likely to choose information. (See Figures 7 and 8.)

Figure 7  
Most Satisfying Experience (aesthetics) by Residence  
First or Second Choice  
(In Percent)



Source: Table B-3.

Figure 8  
Most Satisfying Experience (information) by Residence  
First or Second Choice (In Percent)



Source: Table B-3.

## EXPERIENCE PREFERENCE AS A WAY TO THINK ABOUT VISITORS

If we group entering visitors according to whether their first preference selection was aesthetics, information, or another alternative, we create three audience segments. When we compare these three segments (see Table B-4), we notice that those who selected an alternative other than information or aesthetics visited significantly fewer art museums in the last year and were less likely to have seen Asian art elsewhere. In

addition, when they read object labels, they are much more likely to read the key information only.

These visitors with "other preferences" seem to be the least experienced with art museums in general and with the Freer and Sackler in particular. Two-thirds of them were making their first visit to the Gallery in which they were interviewed. Nonetheless, these visitors with preferences other than information or aesthetics did not rate themselves as more or less knowledgeable about Asian art than other visitors,<sup>8</sup> they were just as likely to enter the Freer as the Sackler, and they included the same percentage of local residents (one-third).

Those who chose aesthetics first were more interested in the Galleries. They were more likely to be repeat visitors both to the Gallery where they were interviewed and to the other Gallery, compared to both those who chose information and those who indicated another preference.

Visitors who chose information first have the highest level of education and reported reading a higher percentage of labels and texts in exhibitions generally.

These differences can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1  
Summary of Differences Among Segments Determined by the  
First Choice of Most Satisfying Experience with Asian Art

	<u>First Choice of Most Satisfying Experience with Asian Art</u>		
	<u>Aesthetics</u>	<u>Information</u>	<u>Other</u>
Visit history	more repeat visitors	-----	more new visitors
Education	-----	higher level	lower level
Reading	-----	read more	read less
Preferred reading pattern	-----	-----	more read key info only
Asian Art viewing	-----	-----	have seen less
Art museum visits	-----	-----	less frequent

Source: Table B-4

### *PUJA VISITORS*

*Puja* exhibition visitors did not differ from visitors at the Freer and Sackler entrances in any demographic characteristics. They were different in some other ways, however (see Table B-5). Exhibition visitors were, for example, more likely than all Freer visitors or

<sup>8</sup>Visitors were asked to self-rate their level of knowledge of Asian art on a scale from one (low) to ten (high). These scale values represent self-impressions rather than actual levels of knowledge and are best interpreted as a measure of the degree of confidence that individuals have in their knowledge of Asian art.

Sackler visitors to be making a first visit to the Sackler, and more likely to be visiting both galleries. Three out of five *Puja* visitors had come to the Galleries to see something in particular, but only two percent had come to see *Puja*. Two-thirds of them had come to see *King of the World* or miniature paintings in general. Clearly, much of the *Puja* audience during the study was drawn to the exhibition by the proximity of *King of the World*. (The entrances to these two exhibitions were facing one another.) Thus the high proportion of first-time visitors in *Puja* might be due to the attracting power of *King of the World*, rather than to the nature of the *Puja* exhibition itself.<sup>9</sup>

*Puja* visitors were asked what kind of experiences they found most satisfying in the *Puja* exhibition. Their choices were made from the same list of experiences that visitors at the Freer and Sackler entrances used to indicate their preferences for most satisfying experiences in viewing Asian art in general. When we compare the distribution of first choices made by entering visitors about Asian art with the distribution of first choices made by *Puja* visitors about the exhibition, we see that 67 percent of them "overlap."<sup>10</sup> The major differences are in the percentages that chose aesthetics or information. As their first choice, exiting *Puja* visitors were much less likely to select aesthetics and much more likely to pick information as experiences they found most satisfying in the exhibition.

This suggests that some visitors who usually prefer aesthetic experiences when looking at Asian art might have found informational experiences most satisfying in *Puja*. We cannot be certain of this interpretive conclusion, however, because the *Puja* exhibition might have drawn a disproportionate number of visitors interested in acquiring information. That is, there may have been self-selection into the *Puja* exhibition. Only by verifying the preferences of visitors at the entrance to the *Puja* exhibition could we have definitively established the degree to which the exhibition provided visitors with satisfaction in an area different from the one they usually prefer.

For their second choice, *Puja* visitors were somewhat more likely to choose information, social, or "other," and less likely to choose rare objects and imagination.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *King of the World* is an exhibition of Mughal paintings from a manuscript in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. The paintings show events from the reign of Shah-Jahan.

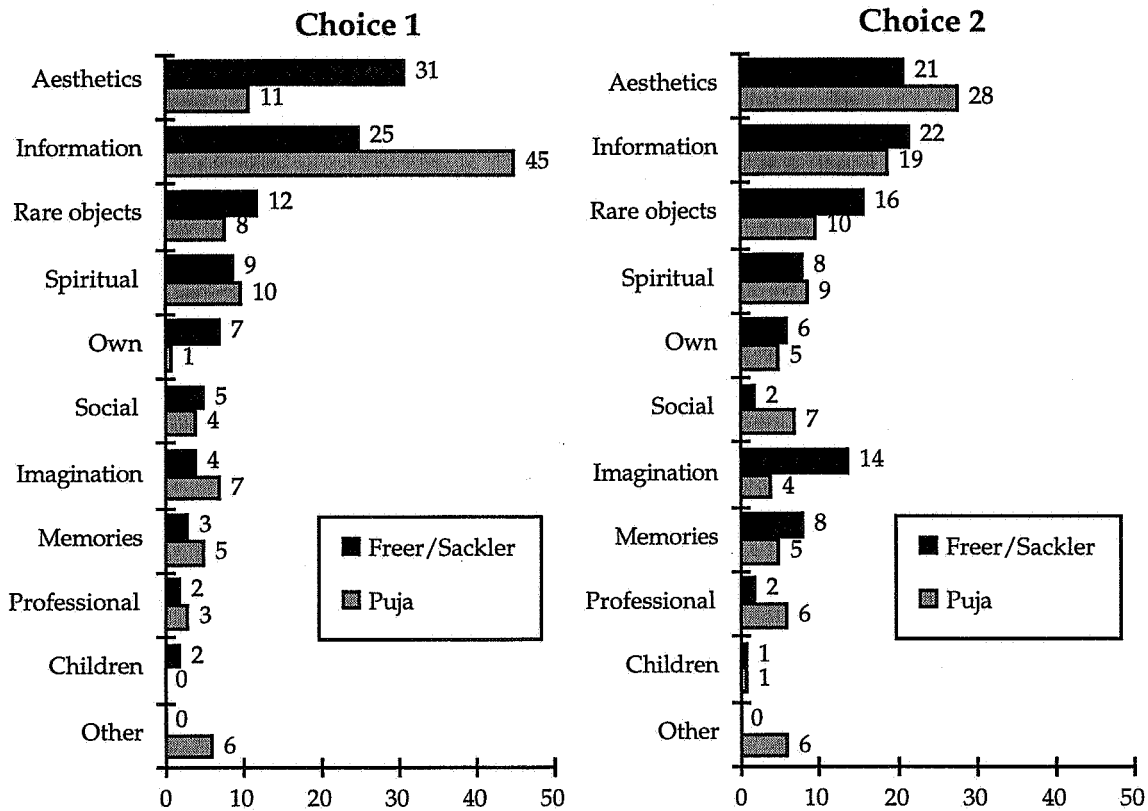
<sup>10</sup> This 67% "overlap" is calculated by adding the 11% of both groups that chose aesthetics, the 25% of both groups that chose information, the 8% percent of both groups that chose rare objects, the 9% of both that chose spiritual, the 1% of both that chose own, the 4% of both that chose social, the 4% of both that chose imagination, the 3% of both that chose memories, and the 2% of both that chose professional.

<sup>11</sup> This is not obvious from the right side of Figure 9 or from Table B-2, because the figure and table do not show the restrictions on second choices. For example, since 31% of entering visitors had already chosen aesthetics as their first choice, only 69% of them had the aesthetics option available for a second choice. Out of that 69%, 21% of all visitors selected it. The ratio of those who selected to those who could select is thus .30 (.21 divided by .69). Thus the likelihood that an entering visitor would select aesthetics as second choice was .30. By the same kind of calculation, the likelihood of a *Puja* visitor selecting aesthetics as second choice is .31. In other words, *Puja* visitors were just as likely to make aesthetics their second choice as entering visitors were. For information as second choice the likelihood among *Puja* visitors is 6% greater than the likelihood for entering visitors. For "other" it is 6% higher and for social it is 5% higher. For imagination as second choice the likelihood for *Puja* visitors is 11% lower than for entering visitors. And the likelihood of making rare objects the second choice is 7% lower for *Puja* visitors than for entering visitors.



For first and second choices combined, *Puja* visitors, compared to entering visitors identifying satisfying experiences with Asian art in general, were more likely to choose information as a satisfying experience in the exhibition (64% vs. 47%) or to mention something that was not among the ten options (12% vs. 0%), and were less likely to choose aesthetics (39% vs. 52%), rare objects, imagination, or own (see Table B-2).

Figure 9  
Most Satisfying Asian Art Experiences at Freer/Sackler Entrances  
vs. Most Satisfying Experience in the *Puja* Exhibition  
 First and Second Choices (In Percent)



Source: Table B-2

Answers to questions about specific exhibition elements confirm the positive response of *Puja* visitors to the informational aspects of the exhibition. *Puja* visitors were asked separately about the narrative video, the display videos, the shrines or altar set-ups, the texts or signs that explained things, the touchable objects, the reading materials, the puzzles and photo album, and the colors in the exhibition design. In each case visitors chose one of the following responses:

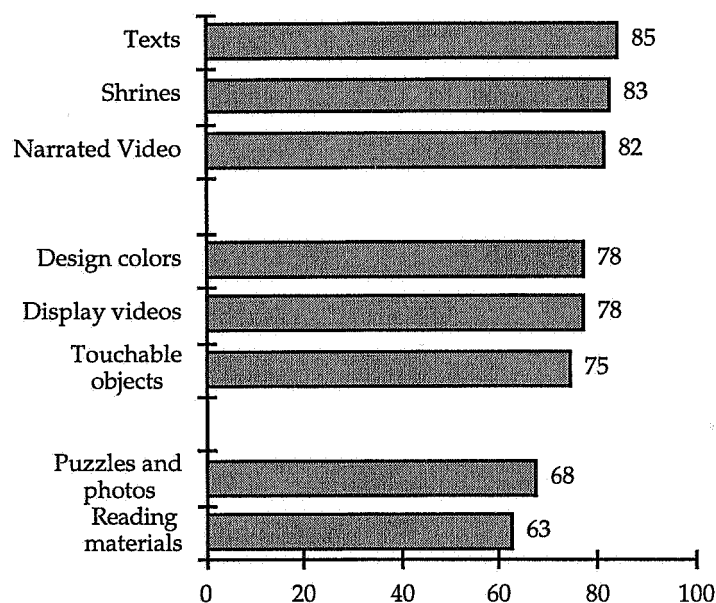
- I didn't look at it.
- It detracted from my experience.
- It somewhat detracted from my experience.
- It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience.
- It somewhat enhanced my experience.
- It enhanced my experience.

The results (Appendix C, Q8) show that most visitors looked at the shrines, the texts, the color scheme, and touchable objects. Somewhat more than half viewed the videos, and about one-third or less looked at the reading materials, puzzles and photo album.<sup>12</sup>

We can also approach these data by considering only visitors who saw a particular item, and examining the proportion of them who indicated the highest level of value, "it enhanced my experience." By this measure, as shown in Figure 10, the texts, shrines and narrated video were the most highly regarded elements.

We found significant associations between several of these responses and the choice of information as a satisfying experience in the exhibition. First, those who chose information as their most satisfying experience in *Puja* were much more impressed by the shrine and altar set-ups than other visitors -- 91 percent of those who chose information as their most satisfying experience in the exhibition said that the shrine and altar set-ups enhanced their experience, compared to 69 percent of those who chose aesthetics and 65 percent of those who gave other preferences. Second, those who selected information as the most satisfying experience in the exhibition were significantly more likely to have looked at the touchable objects -- 95 percent of those who chose information had looked at touchable objects, compared to 67 percent of those who chose aesthetics and 69 percent of those who gave other preferences. See Table B-6.

Figure 10  
Percent Of Visitors Who Said The Element Enhanced Their Experience  
Among the Visitors Who Said they Looked at the Element



<sup>12</sup>Repeat visitors were more likely to look at the reading materials than first-time visitors (53% vs. 27%); those who chose a preference other than aesthetics or information were more likely to look at the reading material (53% vs. 20% or 24%); and Asians were much more likely than either Caucasians or other visitors to look at the reading materials (76% vs. 42% or 22%). Data on File, ISO.

The strong association between the information experience and the altars persists even when we combine first and second choices. Those who gave information as either their first or second choice for satisfying experience in *Puja* had been significantly more interested in shrines -- 87 percent of those who chose information said that the shrines had enhanced their experience, compared to 63 percent of all other visitors. (They also had been more interested in the narrated video about puja -- 61 percent of those who chose information said that the narrated video had enhanced the experience, compared to 36 percent of all other visitors.) See Table B-7.

## OTHER RESULTS

Self-ratings of Knowledge Levels. Visitors in this study rated their knowledge of Asian art relatively low. This may reflect a relative lack of confidence in the extent of their knowledge rather than actual low levels of knowledge. On a scale of one to ten, where one is low and ten is high:

- over half of the entering visitors (54%) rated themselves between 1 and 3,
- one-third (34%) rated themselves between 4 and 6, and
- the remaining 12 percent of visitors rated themselves between 7 and 10.

This is very similar to the knowledge-of-modern-art self-ratings that were given by Hirshhorn Museum visitors during the Lindner exhibition (1-3: 53%, 4-6: 30%, 7-10: 18%).<sup>13</sup>

Text. Freer and Sackler visitors appear to be positively disposed to reading text information, in general.

- 43 percent of entering visitors say they typically read nearly all of it;
- 44 percent of *Puja* visitors said that they read more than half of all the *Puja* texts.

This, too, is comparable to the Lindner exhibition, where 41 percent of exhibition visitors said that they had read more than half the texts in the exhibition.

Attendance at Art Museums. Freer and Sackler visitors attend art museums frequently. In the last year:

- one-third visited 1 to 3 times,
- one-third visited 4 to 10 times, and
- one-third visited 12 or more times.

Visitors in the Lindner study attended art museums in the past year with nearly identical frequency.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Pekarik, A. J. and Bielick, S. (1997b). *Supplementary Notes to The Influence of Exhibition Texts on Visitor Responses to Richard Lindner: Paintings and Watercolors 1948-1977*. (Research Note 97-3). Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., page 27.

<sup>14</sup>Pekarik and Bielick (1997b), page 24.

Museum Visiting and Socialization. In the sociological literature, museum-going is linked to childhood experiences and the guiding influence of parents. In order to test the relevance of this claim in the case of the Freer and Sackler audience, we asked visitors at the end of the interview to tell us whether or not their parents had taken them to their local art museum when they were children. A follow-up question asked whether such visits were rare, occasional or frequent.

Out of every five visitors entering the Freer or Sackler: three had not been taken to their local art museum as a child or had visited only rarely; one had gone to the local art museum occasionally as a child; and one had gone frequently (Table B-8).

Visiting the local art museum as a child was linked to experience and self-rated knowledge. As Table B-8 indicates, the more frequently an individual reported going to art museums as a child, the more likely that individual was to rate their knowledge of Asian art above average. Those who rarely or never went as a child were less likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher degree, and less likely to visit art museums 12 times a year or more.

Finally, the more an individual went to art museums as a child, the more likely that person was to enter the Sackler rather than the Freer.

### III. Discussion and Interpretation

This study extends the results of the year-long Freer-Sackler study by looking closely at responses to a single exhibition and by suggesting a possible new way to conceptualize the Galleries' audience.

The year-long study pointed out the complex character of the joint Freer and Sackler audience, noting that the two Galleries seemed to evoke different images in the minds of their visitors. The *Puja* study confirms that those entering the Freer differ from those entering the Sackler in their experience with the Galleries and with Asian art in general. (See Appendix C.) Those entering the Freer were less focused, and less likely to have seen Asian art in a museum elsewhere. They also visit art museums less in general and have lower levels of education. As in the year-long study, visitors new to both galleries were more likely to enter the Freer while visitors familiar with both galleries were more likely to enter the Sackler (Table B-1). Over half of those entering the Freer had never been to either gallery before, compared to one-third of those entering the Sackler. Some of this difference can be attributed to the physical position of the Freer Gallery facing the National Mall, where it can readily draw tourists from the Smithsonian Metro station. The Freer Gallery might also draw more new visitors because it has been around longer and has a more extensive reputation both for its Asian and American collection.

At the same time, the Sackler Gallery is known for its changing exhibitions -- a factor which would encourage familiar visitors and those with more experience with Asian art generally. During the period of this study the exhibition *King of the World* was a major factor in drawing visitors to the Sackler gallery.

This study suggests dividing the Freer and Sackler audience into three segments -- aesthetic preference, information preference, and other preference -- based on the kind of Asian art experience that visitors report as most satisfying. This segmentation, because it involves the attitudes of visitors towards the appreciation of Asian art in museums, might be useful.

The *Puja* exhibition seems to have been especially satisfying as an experience that enriched knowledge and provided information or understanding. Other Freer and Sackler exhibitions might be seen or appreciated more as aesthetic experiences.

The third segment could not be well-described here because of the limited number of people interviewed in this study. This segment might be a special challenge for exhibition planners, because its members are least familiar with the Freer and Sackler and with art museums in general, but consider themselves no less knowledgeable about Asian art. They seem to have a different approach to museums. They are less interested in reading labels and panels (primarily noting key information only), and they favor experiences of seeing old, rare objects, imagining themselves in other times and places, and feeling a spiritual connection (Table B-2). What type of exhibition best serves these visitors?

Future Directions for Research. Other exhibitions at the Freer and Sackler should be studied to see how they relate to the kinds of experiences with Asian art that visitors report as most satisfying. These studies should include samples that are large enough to give a clearer picture of the visitors who prefer something other than information or an aesthetic experience. Ideally the next exhibition studied in this way would be one directed towards an aesthetic preference just as *Puja* was directed towards an information preference. If the study were able to include both an exhibition entrance and an exhibition exit sample, it should be possible to distinguish more definitively the relationship between entrance preferences and the exhibition experience.

Implications for Exhibitions. Any museum that wishes to serve a broad range of visitors needs to take into account the preferences of those visitors. These preferences can have some mutually contradictory characteristics. Although it is possible, for example, to balance aesthetics and information, it is also true that an emphasis on one is likely to negatively affect the other. A philosophical question naturally arises: how large is the framework within which the spectrum of preferences should be balanced? Should each display equally meet all needs? Each room? Each exhibition? Each Gallery? Both Galleries as a whole?

In part, the answer to this question lies in the minds of visitors and prospective visitors. What are the conceptual structures of the visit experience? Are individuals satisfied if their preferences are met in some but not all exhibitions? In some but not all rooms? How flexible are they? To what extent does an exhibition experience modify preferences?

This study marks a first attempt to grapple with these issues. The instrument on which it primarily depends, the preference choice question, is a tool that can be used to describe where an audience stands within the overall range of visitor interests and expectations. As exhibition planners become increasingly sensitive to the differences among visitors, they can be expected to provide ever richer and more rewarding experiences for all visitors.

## Appendix A

### Observations from Conversations with Visitors to *Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion*

In the first phase of the *Puja* study we conducted semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with visitors in the galleries about their past experiences with Asian art, including prior visits to the Freer and Sackler Galleries. When the interviewer recognized a pattern in these discussions, it was presented to the interviewee for confirmation or alteration. In the final section of the conversation, visitors were asked about their reactions to the *Puja* exhibition, including how they would compare the display to the presentation of similar materials elsewhere in the Sackler Gallery. Twenty-five interviews were recorded over several months.

Most of the visitors had no trouble remembering satisfying museum experiences with Asian art, both in the Sackler Gallery and elsewhere. The different ways that they found their Asian art experiences pleasurable formed distinct categories. On the basis of these conversations we identified at least ten different ways that visitors approach Asian art in museums. These are listed in Table A-1.

Table A-1

#### Approach Modes Encountered Among Visitors to the *Puja* Exhibition

Approach Mode	Key Issues Characterization	Summary
Informational Interpretive	Richness, clarity Conceptual scope	"Informative. I learned." "It made me think."
Experiential Identity-based	Authenticity Accuracy	"It enriches the memories." "I remember..."
Aesthetic Spiritual Imaginative	Artistic quality Transcendence The Unknown	"Beautiful. Magnificent." "I was filled with awe." "I wondered..."
Real thing Acquisitive	Age, Rarity Value, Desire	"How old they are." "I fell in love with it."
Instructional	Response of children	"Exposing him/her to this."

Most of the visitors were aware of the ways that they approach objects of Asian art and a few even had rather well-worked out ideas on the matter.

One visitor volunteered her own view:

"People come into exhibitions with different frames of reference. I come in to learn because I don't know anything. They [my friends visiting with me] are much more advanced about this type of art, so they come to confirm or re-confirm or question. That's the next level. We're all getting something out of it at a different level."

A major distinction can be drawn between visitors whose approach seemed to be enhanced by a contextual presentation, namely, Informational, Interpretive, Experiential and Identity-based, and those whose approach was not particularly enhanced by illustration and explication, such as Aesthetic, Spiritual, Imaginative, Real thing, and Acquisitive.

Some individuals seem to be strongly committed to just one approach. One visitor, for example, was so deeply involved with the Informative mode that she would not stay in an exhibition that was poorly explained. Here's some of what she said,

"I think people pick and choose what they want to read, and having more there is better than having not enough. But I also think that these [*Puja* texts] were really well written. I've gone to exhibits before where they just made no sense whatsoever. I couldn't figure out what was going on, and I ended up getting frustrated and leaving. We went to that Potlach exhibit a few years ago. They had beautiful masks and beautiful everything, but I couldn't understand -- they never explained what a potlach was....They never explained. So everything made no sense. So I thought, this is pretty but I just don't understand."

Visitors with a clear preference for the Informational mode often described successful museum experiences as those that provided "understanding." This understanding was not seen as an intellectual or conceptual exercise, but as something that communicated human values. They described the *Puja* exhibition as "personal," "animate," "realistic," and "accessible," making a clear distinction with traditional art museum display.

One such visitor, for example, said: "I feel that [*Puja*] was put together by a group who wants people to know and understand what their religion is all about. It has a more personal touch to it. "

Another visitor used the same word, "personal," to describe a level of engagement with both the objects and the illustrative materials:

The exhibition "is a little more personal [than most]. You can interact with the material a little bit more, through the films, being able to actually touch some of the objects, better explanation of some of the materials, and stuff like that."

"I'm always looking for that personal angle [in museums] but a lot of time you don't get it. It's somewhat more impersonal -- like a museum -- like you're looking at objects rather than interacting with them."



Another visitor uses the word "realism" to draw a similar distinction:

"I don't find it particularly interesting to go and look at displays of porcelain or silk-screen or whatever. I find that a little boring, to be honest. I really like the way it's realistic here and set into a context. It's an excellent way to see it. And I've actually enjoyed this exhibition here more than the rest of the museum. Because it is more accessible."

Yet another visitor emphasized the accessibility of the Puja exhibition.

"You could have made it cluttered and academic and technical...and there are times when you want something more formal and academic. .... When you have a first experience of something like this -- what's the word that the kids use now with computers? -- user-friendly -- That's what an exhibition like this is, because it gets you into the idea very quickly."

For visitors who are just as strongly committed to the Aesthetic approach mode, the Puja exhibition compared unfavorably with traditional displays.

One visitor, a collector of Asian art, said,

"I don't like [the videos in the *Puja* exhibition]. It's disturbing. I don't need that. Maybe in the second room [where the narrative video is], but not combined with these things. It's too much for me. I like the very basic way of exhibiting things. This is quite much. A bit overloaded."

A visitor who is especially drawn to both the Aesthetic and Spiritual approach implied that she got more out of a traditional display of Indian art because she had to put more into it:

"They're very different experiences. Somehow I'm more.. I'm not filled so much with awe by the things I see here as I am by some of objects out there [in the traditional display].... When I look at something that is, 'ahh that is a beautiful object' or a beautiful statue or has something that even whatever it is in it and I have a very strong sense sometimes of the spirit of the people who made it. That comes through so strongly....Somehow [the traditional display is] a little more, maybe, inaccessible, like you have to go to more trouble to see those things, while these things you kind of have around you..."

A visitor who visits contemporary art museums frequently, but had never been to the Sackler Gallery before, prefers an Imaginative approach mode and disliked *Puja* precisely because everything was so well explained:

Respondent: I spend a lot of time looking at these [abstract paintings in the Hirshhorn]. You try to figure out what the artist was feeling, and what he

was trying to -- if there was a message and all that. And you get your own ideas from it.

Interviewer: Does that happen as much for you here, in this [exhibition]?

Respondent: Not really, because it's definitely -- it's only -- you have information about it and everything..."

While some individuals expressed clear preferences in approach mode, one visitor seemed to be so flexible that she engages the Aesthetic, the Imaginative, and the Real thing modes, depending on the kind of art:

in Modern art -- "It's the colors, the prettiness of it."

in Chinese art -- "I like the peaceful look."

in Japanese art -- "I like the calligraphy. I see different figures. Even if I can't understand what they're saying. That is why it ties in with the Modern."

in the *Puja* exhibition -- "I think about how old they are. I think it's great that they're from centuries ago and look so new."

In addition to the typology of approach modes we also need to consider the degree of preference that individuals exhibit for particular approach modes.

The relatively strong distinction between informational and non-informational approaches found in these conversations may reflect the special character of Asian art museums. There is evidence here of visitors who see a museum of Asian art as being more about Asia than about art --

"Here [in an Asian art museum, as opposed to a contemporary art museum, for example] it's not about art so much. It's about you and some cultural aspect. I mean real people held these things and did things with them. It's not necessarily the case in aesthetic art. It makes looking at that [object] even more real when you see something like this [video]."

I come "to be informed about the background. It's not just aesthetic objects but it's also something that explains what meaning they have in the culture."

Another visitor was drawn to the Sackler because "it's not a typical art museum. Not just pictures. It seems to have more history behind it, where[as] contemporary art is a person's interpretation."

A number of visitors related their interest in the Sackler Gallery and its exhibitions to their own experience in Asia or with Asians:

"I deal with Asia a lot. I'm just trying to learn about it. They don't teach it in school."

"I saw pujas fairly recently in Bangkok. I know nothing about it as a system -- presenting things to the gods. So that was very interesting. In Bangkok it was

just pretty, and it was a local activity. I didn't know that Puja was a whole series of worship collectives."

"I look at the shrine [in the exhibition] and think, 'it's not quite what I saw.' It's very different. Most of the shrines there were in stone and this is wood. Of course it wasn't this clean. Here you can see every detail of the artifact."

This led to some critical comparisons:

"[These altars] are somewhat different from the household altars in India and Sri Lanka. They're using sari material that is new. It's not the kind of sari material I saw being used. They tend to use older saris and they look different. They don't wrap them quite that way....I'm surprised that there's not more Kali stuff in the exhibit. Because I ran into a lot of Kali in India. There's no mention of blood sacrifice, which I also found a lot of. I think the exhibit is a little 'cleansed.'"

### Conclusion

These visitors had such diverse backgrounds and approaches that no single exhibition or display method could be expected to satisfy them all equally. The same density of information that some visitors find personal, accessible and real, other visitors find cluttered and disturbing. The same emphasis on objects that some visitors associate with aesthetic, spiritual and imaginative responses, other visitors consider boring and inaccessible.

## Appendix B

### Tables

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Table B-1  
Demographic Characteristics  
1994-1995 Study and Puja Study  
(In Percent)

	Sept. 95 Total	Sept. 97 Entrance Total	Freer Entrance	Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	49	51	52	49	47
Male	<u>51</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>53</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Age</b>					
12 to 19	3	4	3	4	1
20 to 24	10	3	5	1	1
25 to 34	14	14	15	13	24
35 to 44	19	17	14	21	20
45 to 54	26	32	33	31	28
55 to 64	19	13	11	17	18
65 or older	<u>9</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Racial/Ethnic Identity</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	12	7	18	15
Minority	5	7	10	4	9
African American/Black	1	3	5	0	6
Hispanic/Nat. Amer./Mult.	4	4	5	4	3
White	<u>82</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>76</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Racial/Ethnic Identity -- US only*</b>					
Asian/Pacific Islander	8	6	3	11	14
Other Minority	4	8	11	4	9
African American/Black	1	3	6	0	6
Hispanic/Nat. Amer./Mult.	3	5	5	4	3
White	<u>88</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>77</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
*Statistically significant difference between Freer and Sackler					
<b>Residence</b>					
Washington, DC	9	16	13	20	13
MD/VA Suburbs	23	18	18	19	33
Other US	49	55	56	52	44
Foreign	<u>19</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table B-1  
Demographic Characteristics  
1994-1995 Study and Puja Study  
(In Percent)  
(cont'd)

	Sept. 95 Total	Sept. 97 Entrance Total	Freer Entrance	Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<u>Group composition</u>					
Alone	49	39	38	40	41
Pair of adults	34	42	40	46	36
Several adults	12	14	16	11	18
Adult(s) and child(ren)	3	5	6	3	5
School/Tour/Teens	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
<u>Education (ages 25 or older)*</u>					
High School Graduate or less	1	7	11	2	3
AA/Jr. Coll./ Tech/ Some College	14	11	15	6	6
Bachelor's/Some Graduate	34	34	31	37	42
MA/PhD/Professional	<u>51</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>49</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100
*Statistically significant difference between Freer and Sackler					
<u>Visitor Type</u>					
New to both galleries	43	47	55	35	46
New to Sackler only	8	12	12	6	16
New to Freer only	10	4	2	8	6
Familiar with both galleries	<u>39</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>32</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Table B-2  
Most Satisfying Asian Art Experiences in General vs. in Puja Exhibition  
(In Percent)

	Choice 1		Choice 2		Choice 1 or 2	
	Freer/Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit	Freer/Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit	Freer/Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<u>Preference</u>						
Aesthetics	31	11	21	28	52	39
Information	25	45	22	19	47	64
Rare objects	12	8	16	10	28	18
Imagination	4	7	14	4	18	11
Spiritual	9	10	8	9	17	19
Own	7	1	6	5	13	6
Memories	2	5	8	5	10	10
Relax	5	4	2	7	7	11
Children	3	0	1	1	4	1
Professional	2	3	2	6	4	9
Other	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>12</u>
Total	100	100	100	100	200	200

Table B-3  
Experience Preferences for Selected Visitor Characteristics  
Freer and Sackler Entrance Only, Significant Associations Only  
(In Percent)

Characteristic	Aesthetics Preference	Information Preference	Other Preference	Total
<u>First visit to this gallery</u>				
First-time visitor to Freer or Sackler	20	25	56	100
Repeat visitor to Freer or Sackler	43	25	32	100
<u>Number of visits to art museums in the past year</u>				
Less than twelve visits	27	21	52	100
Twelve or more visits	35	34	31	100
<u>Age</u>				
Young (under 30)	69	31		100
Middle-age (30-50)	39	61		100
Older (over 50)	62	38		100
<u>Residence</u>				
US resident	56	44		100
Foreign resident	18	82		100
<u>Residence</u>				
US resident	44	56		100
Foreign resident	71	29		100
<u>Number of visits to art museums in the past year</u>				
Less than twelve visits	21	79		100
Twelve or more visits	4	96		100



Table B-4  
 Selected Visitor Characteristics for Three Principal Experience Preferences  
 Freer and Sackler Entrance Only, Significant Associations Only  
 (In Percent)

	Preference First Choice		
	Aesthetics	Information	Other Pref.
<u>Education (Age 25 or older)</u>			
High school or less	4	0	13
Some college	9	16	9
BA degree	39	15	41
MA/PhD	<u>48</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>37</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Number of visits to art museums in the last year</u>			
Below average (0-11)	59	55	77
Above average (12+)	<u>41</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>23</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Seen Asian art elsewhere</u>			
Yes	81	83	65
No	<u>19</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>35</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Label Reading</u>			
Tend to read key info	30	29	62
Tend to read most of text	53	59	20
Other	<u>17</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>18</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>First Visit to This Gallery</u>			
Yes	32	50	64
No	<u>68</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>36</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Visit to Other Gallery Today</u>			
Yes, visited	3	8	16
No, haven't visited	60	56	71
Intend to visit	<u>37</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>13</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Visited Other Gallery in Past</u>			
Yes	60	45	28
No	<u>40</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>72</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Percent of Text Info Typically Read</u>			
Less than half	21	16	36
Over half	<u>79</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>64</u>
Total	100	100	100

Table B-5  
Significant differences between Puja Exit, Freer Entrance, and Sackler Entrance  
(In Percent)

	Freer Entrance	Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<u>First Visit to This Gallery</u>			
Yes	56	42	63
No	<u>44</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>37</u>
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (2, 246) = 7, p < .04)$			
<u>Visited Other Gallery Today</u>			
Yes	8	15	21
No	67	59	45
Intend to	<u>25</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>34</u>
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (4, 246) = 10, p < .05)$			
<u>Visited Other Gallery Before Today</u>			
Yes	68	43	52
No	<u>32</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>48</u>
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (2, 242) = 11, p < .01)$			
<u>No. of Times to Other Gallery Before Today</u> (Repeat visitors to other gallery only)			
1 to 3	37	28	63
4 to 9	11	42	21
10 or more	<u>52</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>16</u>
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (4, 101) = 19, p < .01)$			

Table B-5 (cont'd)  
Significant differences between Puja Exit and Freer or Sackler Entrances  
(In Percent)

	Freer Entrance	Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<b>Came to See Something in Particular</b>			
Yes	26	52	58
No	<u>74</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>42</u>
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (2, 235) = 20, p < .01)$			
<b>What They Came to See</b>			
(Those with specific purpose only)			
<b>Asian</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>
General	39	14	10
Chinese ceramics	15	0	0
Khmer ceramics	0	3	1
Cambodia	0	1	3
<b>Indian Exhibition</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>78</b>
King of the World	15	51	42
Puja	0	8	2
Shah Jahan	0	5	3
Mughal art	0	2	3
Miniature painting	0	0	22
Indian exhibits general	0	2	6
<b>Other</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>
Whistler/Peacock Room	18	0	0
Professional development	6	1	3
ImaginAsia	0	1	0
Amenities	4	4	0
Gift shop	3	8	2
Ethiopian	0	0	3
Total	100	100	100
$(\chi^2 (4, 112) = 30, p < .01)$			

Table B-5 (cont'd)  
Significant differences between Puja Exit and Freer or Sackler Entrances  
(In Percent)

	Freer/Sackler Entrance	Puja Exit
<u>Most Satisfying Asian Art Experience in General vs. in Puja Exhibition (First Choice)</u>		
Aesthetics	31	11
Information	25	45
Other	<u>44</u>	<u>44</u>
Total	100	100
( $\chi^2 (2, 243) = 15, p < .001$ )		
<u>Most Satisfying Asian Art Experience in General vs. in Puja Exhibition: Information as Either First or Second Choice</u>		
Yes	47	65
No	<u>53</u>	<u>35</u>
Total	100	100
( $\chi^2 (1, 239) = 6, p < .02$ )		
<u>Preferred Order of Reading/Looking in General vs. in the Puja Exhibition</u>		
Read and look	7	19
Look and read	79	64
No preference	<u>14</u>	<u>17</u>
Total	100	100
( $\chi^2 (2, 238) = 8, p < .02$ )		

Table B-6  
Significant Associations Between Most Satisfying Puja Experience and Exhibition Elements  
 Puja Visitors, First Choice  
 (In Percent)

	<u>Most Satisfying Experience</u>		
	Information	Aesthetics	Other Preference
<u>Responses to Altar and Shrine Set-ups</u>			
Altars enhanced the experience	91	69	65
All other responses to Altars	<u>9</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>35</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Responses to Touchable Objects</u>			
Looked at touchable objects	95	67	69
Did not look at touchable objects	<u>5</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>31</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Responses to Reading Materials</u>			
Looked at reading materials	24	20	53
Did not look at reading materials	<u>76</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>47</u>
Total	100	100	100

Table B-7  
Most Satisfying Puja Exhibition Experience and Exhibition Elements  
 Puja Visitors, Combined First and Second Choices, Significant Associations Only  
 (In Percent)

	<u>Most Satisfying Experience</u>	
	Information	All other Preferences
<u>Responses to Altar and Shrine Set-ups</u>		
Altars enhanced the experience	87	63
All other responses to Altars	<u>13</u>	<u>37</u>
Total	100	100
<u>Responses to Narrated Video</u>		
Narrated video enhanced the experience	61	36
All other responses to narrated video	<u>39</u>	<u>64</u>
Total	100	100
<u>Responses to Touchable Objects</u>		
Touchable objects enhanced the experience	85	55
All other responses to touchable objects	<u>15</u>	<u>45</u>
Total	100	100

Table B-8  
Childhood Museum Visiting and Puja Study Variables  
 Freer and Sackler Entrance Only, Significant Associations Only  
 (In Percent)

	<u>Visited Local Art Museum as a Child</u>		
	<u>Never or rarely</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Frequently</u>
<u>Education (Age 25 or older)</u>			
Less than BA	27	3	7
BA or more	<u>73</u>	<u>97</u>	<u>93</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Self-rated Knowledge of Asian Art</u>			
Below average (1-3)	65	43	36
Above average (4-10)	<u>35</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>64</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Group Composition</u>			
Alone	36	43	44
Pair	39	50	45
Three or more adults	18	7	6
Adult(s) with child(ren)	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Gender</u>			
Female	53	37	60
Male	<u>47</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>40</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Entrance Location</u>			
Freer Gallery	67	63	23
Sackler Gallery	<u>33</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>77</u>
Total	100	100	100
<u>Number of Visits to Art Museums in the Last Year</u>			
Below average (0-11)	75	47	60
Above average (12+)	<u>25</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>40</u>
Total	100	100	100
Total	58	23	19

## Appendix C

### Responses to Questions in the Puja Study

Total completed interviews: 246

Puja: 98 Sackler Entrance: 76 Freer Entrance: 72

Note: Freer and Sackler results are combined whenever there is no statistical significance to the differences. They are shown as separate whenever there are differences.

**Q1:** Is today your first visit to this gallery?

Freer/Sackler:

50% Yes

50% No

**Q4:** Was there something in particular that you came to see or do in this museum today?

Freer:

26% Yes

74% No

Sackler:

52% Yes

48% No

$(\chi^2 (1, 163) = 11, p < .001)$

**Q1:** How many times have you been here before?

(repeat visitors only -- N=84)

Freer/Sackler:

39% 1-3

20% 4-9

41% 10+

**Q4:** What was that?

(only those who said 'yes' to the previous question (N=68))

Freer:

15% 68%

15% 51%

0% 8%

0% 5%

0% 2%

0% 2%

Sackler:

Indian exhibits

*King of the World*

*Puja*

Shah Jahan

Mughal art

Indian exhibitions

39% 14%

15% 4%

15% 0%

0% 3%

0% 1%

18% 0%

6% 1%

7% 13%

0% 1%

4% 4%

3% 8%

$(\chi^2 (5, 68) = 25, p < .001)$

**Q2:** Did you visit the other Gallery today?

Freer/Sackler:

11% Yes

63% No

26% Intend to go

Asian exhibits

Specific Asian exhibits

Chinese ceramics

Khmer ceramics

Cambodia

Whistler/Peacock Rm.

Professional development

**Q3:** Before today, have you ever visited the other Gallery?

Freer:

32% Yes

68% No

Sackler:

57% Yes

43% No

$(\chi^2 (1, 169) = 10, p < .001)$

**Q3:** How many times have you been there before today?

(repeat visitors only : N= 68)

Freer:

37% 1-3

11% 4-9

52% 10+

Sackler:

28% 1-3

42% 4-9

30% 10+

$(\chi^2 (2, 68) = 8, p < .02)$

**Q5: Aside from the Freer/Sackler, have you ever seen Asian art in a museum or gallery elsewhere?**

Freer:	Sackler:
66% Yes	87% Yes
34% No	13% No

( $\chi^2(1, 171) = 10, p < .001$ )

**Q5: Where was that? (1st answer) (only those who answered the previous question -- N=121)**

Freer/Sackler:

- 22% East Coast (NY, Boston, Phila.)
- 12% Met. Museum of Art
- 11% Worldwide (3 continents or more)
- 11% National Gallery of Art
- 8% West Coast
- 8% Midwest (Chicago, St. Louis)
- 7% London/Europe
- 6% Japan (Tokyo)
- 4% Asia
- 3% can't remember/not sure where
- 2% New York City (MMA/Asia Society)
- 2% Canada (Toronto)
- 1% Southeast Asia
- 1% Texas/SW
- 1% South (Atlanta)
- 1% South America

**Q5: Where was that? (2nd answer) (only some of those who answered the previous question -- N=32)**

Freer/Sackler:

- 31% East Coast (NY, Boston, Phila)
- 21% Asia
- 18% West Coast
- 7% London/Europe
- 6% Southeast Asia
- 4% Texas/SW
- 3% Metropolitan Museum of Art
- 3% Midwest (Chicago, St. Louis)
- 3% Japan (Tokyo)
- 2% Canada (Toronto)
- 2% National Gallery of Art

**Q6: How knowledgeable would you say you are about Asian art on a 1 (low) to 10 (high) scale?**

Freer/Sackler:

- 17% 1
- 14% 2
- 23% 3
- 15% 4
- 17% 5
- 5% 6
- 4% 7
- 2% 8
- 2% 9
- 1% 10

Average score: 3.6 (SD=2.0)  
 Median score: 3  
 Middle 50% range from 2 to 5



**Q7: Chose the one kind of experience most satisfying for you**  
(choice1)

Freer/Sackler:

- 31% I was moved by the beauty of the art
- 25% I enriched my knowledge, gained information or understanding
- 12% I saw old, rare objects and paintings
- 9% I felt a spiritual connection
- 7% I thought what it would be like to own such things
- 5% I shared a relaxing visit with friends or family
- 4% I imagined myself in other times or places
- 3% I saw my children learning new things
- 2% I recalled my travels, childhood experiences, other memories
- 2% I continued my professional development

**Q 7: Chose the one kind of experience most satisfying for you**  
(choice2)

Freer/Sackler:

- 22% I enriched my knowledge, gained information or understanding
- 21% I was moved by the beauty of the art
- 16% I saw old, rare objects and paintings
- 14% I imagined myself in other times or places
- 8% I felt a spiritual connection
- 8% I recalled my travels, childhood experiences, other memories
- 6% I thought what it would be like to own such things
- 2% I continued my professional development
- 2% I shared a relaxing visit with friends or family
- 1% I saw my children learning new things

**Combined responses to Q7**

(i.e., the percentage of visitors who gave these experiences as either of their two choices:)

Freer/Sackler:

- 52% I was moved by the beauty of the art
- 47% I enriched my knowledge, gained information or understanding
- 28% I saw old, rare objects and paintings
- 18% I imagined myself in other times or places
- 17% I felt a spiritual connection
- 13% I thought what it would be like to own such things
- 11% I recalled my travels, childhood experiences, other memories
- 6% I shared a relaxing visit with friends or family
- 4% I continued my professional development
- 4% I saw my children learning new things
- 2% Other

**Q8: To what extent did it detract from or enhanced your experience of the exhibition:  
(Puja Visitors Only)**

**The Narrated video on Puja.**

- 37% I didn't look at it
- 3% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 8% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 18% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 33% It enhanced my experience

**The videos next to the display cases in the Puja exhibition**

- 45% I didn't look at it
- 2% It detracted from my experience
- 2% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 9% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 20% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 23% It enhanced my experience

**The shrines or altar set-ups**

- 8% I didn't look at it
- 1% It detracted from my experience
- 1% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 14% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 34% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 42% It enhanced my experience

**The texts or signs that explained things**

- 11% I didn't look at it
- 2% It detracted from my experience
- 1% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 11% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 24% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 52% It enhanced my experience

**The touchable objects in the exhibition**

- 20% I didn't look at it
- 1% It detracted from my experience
- 1% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 19% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 23% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 37% It enhanced my experience

**The reading materials in the book rack**

- 64% I didn't look at it
- 2% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 12% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 14% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 9% It enhanced my experience

**Q8 (cont.)** To what extent did it detract from or enhanced your experience of the exhibition: (Puja Visitors Only)

**The puzzles and photo album.**

- 72% I didn't look at it
- 1% It somewhat detracted from my experience
- 8% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 12% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 7% It enhanced my experience

**The colors used in this exhibition design**

- 11% I didn't look at it
- 3% It detracted from my experience
- 17% It neither detracted from nor enhanced my experience
- 30% It somewhat enhanced my experience
- 39% It enhanced my experience

**Q9:** What percentage of the text information on labels and wall panels did you read?  
(Puja visitors only)

- 11% - 0 percent
- 23% - 5 to 40 percent
- 23% - 50 percent
- 34% - 55 to 95 percent
- 10% - 98 to 100 percent
- Median: 50%

**Q11:** Do you tend to read a label first and then look at the object, or do you tend to look at an object first and then read the label?

- Freer/Sackler:
- 7% read&look
  - 78% look & read
  - 15% no preference

**Q10:** When looking at Asian art, how much of the text information on labels and wall panels do you typically read?

- Freer/Sackler:
- 4% almost none
  - 22% less than half
  - 27% more than half
  - 43% nearly all of it
  - 5% differs

**Q11:** When reading object labels, do you tend to read most of the text on the label, or do you tend to read for key information such as date and style?

- Freer/Sackler:
- 44% read key
  - 40% read most
  - 2% read key, then most
  - 3% read most, then key
  - 11% no preference

**Q11:** Which do you prefer to read, wall panels or object labels?

- Freer/Sackler:
- 32% panels
  - 29% labels
  - 39% no preference

**Residence**

- Freer/Sackler:
- 16% Washington, DC
  - 18% MD/VA Suburbs
  - 55% Other US
  - 11% Foreign

## Age

Freer/Sackler:

4%	Under 20
3%	20 to 24
14%	25 to 34
17%	35 to 44
32%	45 to 54
13%	55 to 64
17%	65 and over

Average age: 47.5 (SD=14.5)

Median age: 47.5

Middle 50% of visitors range from ages 37 to 57

## Education

(Age 25 or older, N=154)

Freer: Sackler:

11%	2%	HS grad or less
15%	6%	Some college
31%	37%	Bachelor's
43%	55%	MA/PhD/Professional

( $\chi^2 (3, 154) = 9, p < .03$ )

## Visit group

Freer/Sackler:

39%	Alone
42%	Pair
14%	Three or more adults
5%	Adult(s) with child(ren)

**Q16:** When you were a child did your parents take you to your local art museum?

Freer:	Sackler:
45% Yes	60% Yes
55% No	40% No

( $\chi^2 (1, 169) = 4, p < .05$ )

**Q16:** How often?

(only those visitors who answered the previous question -- N=86)

Freer:	Sackler:	
27%	8%	Rarely
56%	33%	Occasionally
17%	59%	Fairly frequently

( $\chi^2 (1, 169) = 4, p < .05$ )

**Q17:** In the last year, how many times did you visit an art museum of any kind?

Freer:	Sackler:	
8%	3%	0 times
36%	25%	1 to 3 times
24%	15%	4 to 6 times
11%	21%	7 to 12 times
5%	20%	15 to 20 times
10%	13%	24 to 40 times
7%	7%	50 or more times

( $\chi^2 (6, 164) = 14, p < .03$ )

Freer: Average number of times: 8.7 (SD=12.4)

Sackler: Average number of times: 13.9 (SD=14.2)

Freer: Median number of times: 4

Sackler: Median number of times: 9

## Race/ethnicity

(US residents only -- N=155)

Freer: Sackler:

3%	11%	Asian/ Pacific Islander
86%	85%	Caucasian
11%	4%	Other

( $\chi^2 (2, 155) = 6, p < .05$ )

## Gender

51%	Female
49%	Male

## Appendix D Survey Design and Implementation

### Introduction

The Asian Art Experience: Visitor Preferences and Responses to Puja: *Expressions of Hindu Devotion* is one of a series conducted by the Institutional Studies Office (ISO) to increase our knowledge of the museum visit experience and provide information for future exhibition planning. This appendix contains a brief discussion of the questionnaire, the rationale for the sample design, the survey's implementation, and response bias.

The study was designed (i) to investigate visitors' responses to the exhibition's display techniques and (ii) to better understand the preferences that visitors bring to Asian art museums. The study used two principal methods: exploratory recorded interviews and a systematic survey.

### Methodology: Phase I

In the first phase of the Puja study we conducted semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with visitors in the galleries about their past experiences with Asian art, including prior visits to the Freer and Sackler Galleries. Visitors were intercepted either in the area outside of the Puja exhibition or as they were leaving the exhibition.

Visitors were encouraged to describe previous visits to Asian art museums or galleries of Asian art in art museums and highlight aspects of the visit which they found satisfying or rewarding. When the interviewer recognized a pattern in these discussions, it was presented to the interviewee for confirmation or alteration. In the final section of the conversation, visitors were asked about their reactions to the *Puja* exhibition, including how they would compare the display to the presentation of similar materials elsewhere in the Sackler Gallery. Twenty-six interviews were recorded over several months. The results of these interviews and our interpretation are summarized in Appendix A.

### Methodology: Phase II

The second phase of study, the subject of this report, was based on personal interviews with respondents who were selected using a "continuous" systematic sample design. Depending on the time of day and day of the week, interviewers intercepted visitors who were identified through a special procedure developed for sampling a mobile population.<sup>1</sup> We used teams of two or three people (one to select respondents for interviewing plus one or two interviewers) to conduct the study. Interviewers

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<sup>1</sup> The procedure and its rationale are described in Z. D. Doering, A. E. Kindlon and A. Bickford, *The Power of Maps: A Study of an Exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design*. Report 93-5. (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

administered a questionnaire, with both pre-coded and open-ended questions, to eligible respondents and thanked the participants with bookmarks from previous exhibitions at the Sackler.

Data were collected from three systematic scientific samples: visitors entering the Sackler Gallery, visitors entering the Freer Gallery (Entrance Surveys), and visitors exiting the *Puja* exhibition (Exit Survey).<sup>2</sup> Interviewing was conducted between September 13 and September 25, 1997.

Interviews were conducted on each day of the week. Exit and Entrance Surveys were coordinated so that the same people could not be selected for both. Visitor cooperation with the study was high, 88.6% percent of eligible respondents completed interviews in the Entrance Surveys and 96.1% percent in the Exit Survey, for an overall response rate of 91.4%.<sup>3</sup> Altogether 246 interviews were completed out of 269 attempts (72 at Freer, 76 at Sackler, and 98 at *Puja*). The intercepted individuals represent a population of over 2100 visitors to the exhibition during the survey period.

### Questionnaire

The initial portion of both the Entrance and Exit Survey questionnaires collected general information about the visit. Aside from asking about prior visits to the Freer and the Sackler, we asked for visitors' previous experience with Asian art and their self-rated level of knowledge about Asian art.

The core of the questionnaires was a question about satisfying experiences with Asian art. A list of experience alternatives was attached to two different questions. One question, used at the entrance to the Freer and Sackler Galleries, asked which of these the visitor found most satisfying when looking at Asian art in general. The other question, used at the exit to the *Puja* exhibition, asked which of these the visitor had found most satisfying in the *Puja* exhibition.

We used the "approach mode" categories as the basis for constructing a list of satisfying experiences, most of which were derived from statements made by visitors in the phase-one interviews. The analysis of interviews produced ten categories of satisfying experiences. We called these categories "approach modes," and labeled them Informational, Interpretive, Experiential, Identity-based, Aesthetic, Spiritual, Imaginative, Real thing, Acquisitive and Instructional.<sup>4</sup> The informational and interpretive approach modes were combined in the statement, "I enrich my knowledge, gain information or understanding." (This statement is abbreviated from here on as "information.") The experiential and identity-based approach modes were both represented by the single statement, "I recall my travels, childhood experiences, other memories." (Abbreviation: "memories") The aesthetic approach mode was represented by "I am moved by the beauty of the art." ("aesthetics") The spiritual approach mode was represented by "I feel a spiritual connection." ("spiritual") The imaginative

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<sup>2</sup> The samples were independent.

<sup>3</sup> See below for a discussion of these response rates and the response bias in the study.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A, Table A-1.

approach mode was represented by "I imagine myself in other times or places." ("imagination") The real thing approach mode was represented by "I see old, rare objects and paintings." ("rare objects") The acquisitive approach mode was represented by "I think what it would be like to own such things." ("own") Finally, the instructional approach mode was represented by "I see my children learning new things." ("children")

After discussing these with Sackler Gallery staff and others, we realized that our interviews had failed to capture two types of experience that we know about from other conversations with Freer and Sackler visitors. These were represented by the statements, "I continue my professional development," ("professional") and "I share a relaxing visit with friends or family." ("social") In addition we wanted to allow for the possibility that visitors might have had types of experiences not included in the list, so we added an open option, "other."

This list of experience alternatives was attached to two different questions. One question, used at the entrance to the Freer and Sackler Galleries, asked which of these the visitor found most satisfying when looking at Asian art in general. The other question, used at the exit to the *Puja* exhibition, asked which of these the visitor had found most satisfying in the *Puja* exhibition.

In addition to these experience-preference questions, visitors were asked about their responses to specific elements in the *Puja* exhibition, their reading behavior in exhibitions, their visit intentions, their past visits to these and other museums, their level of knowledge of Asian art, and their basic demographic characteristics.

An identical set of personal background characteristics was collected from all visitors: residence, who accompanied the respondent on their visit, age, educational attainment, experience visiting art museums as a child, racial/ethnic identification and gender.

The questionnaire also included a section for recording administrative information. This included the time, date and location of the interview, and the reason, if applicable, that an interview was not completed (e.g., Smithsonian employee). An interviewer training manual was developed for the study.<sup>5</sup>

#### D. Completion Rates and Response Bias

As shown in Table D.1, overall 8.6 percent of all persons intercepted refused to participate in the survey. While a few refusals were due to language difficulties (1.5%), the majority of refusals (7.1%) were for "other" reasons (e.g., visitors in a hurry, not wanting to detain companions, etc.).

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<sup>5</sup>General interviewing instructions were based on Institutional Studies, *A Manual for Interviewers*. Prepared for the 1988 National Air and Space Survey. Report 88-3. (Washington, D. C. : Smithsonian Institution, 1988). The general instructions and question-by-question specifications for this study are available from the Institutional Studies office.

Table D.1  
Results of Data Collection: Puja Survey  
(In Percent)

Type	Total		Freer		Sackler		Puja	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>A. Composition</u>								
SI staff/contractors*	7.0	2.5	1.0	1.2	4.0	4.5	2.0	1.9
Visitors	<u>269.0</u>	<u>97.5</u>	<u>82.0</u>	<u>98.8</u>	<u>85.0</u>	<u>95.5</u>	<u>102.0</u>	<u>98.1</u>
Total	276	100.0	83.0	100.0	89.0	100.0	104.0	100.0
<u>B. Disposition, All Eligible Visitors</u>								
Interviews	246.0	91.4	72.0	87.8	76.0	89.4	98.0	96.1
Non-Interviews	<u>23.0</u>	<u>8.6</u>	<u>10.0</u>	<u>12.2</u>	<u>9.0</u>	<u>10.6</u>	<u>4.0</u>	<u>3.9</u>
Total	269	100.0	82.0	100.0	85.0	100.0	102.0	100.0
<u>C. Reasons for Non-Participation, Eligible Visitors</u>								
Refusal, Language difficulty	4.0	17.4	2.0	20.0	1.0	11.1	1.0	25.0
Refusal, Other	<u>19.0</u>	<u>82.6</u>	<u>8.0</u>	<u>80.0</u>	<u>8.0</u>	<u>88.9</u>	<u>3.0</u>	<u>75.0</u>
Total, Non-interviews	23	100.0	10.0	100.0	9.0	100.0	4.0	100.0
<u>D. Response Rates</u>								
All eligible visitors**		91.4		87.8		89.4		96.1

\* Includes Freer/Sackler, other SI staff, and contractors

\*\* From B above

There are no statistically significant differences between participants and non-participants in any of their basic characteristics.<sup>6</sup> The high response rate and our analyses of response bias suggests that there is no need to weight for non-response. However, since in our procedures respondents are not selected with equal probability, each respondent's record received a weight corresponding to the sample selection intervals.

<sup>6</sup> Data on file, ISO.