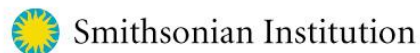


Brian Jungen: Strange Comfort

**A report on the findings of a visitor survey for the exhibition
Brian Jungen: Strange Comfort at the National Museum of the American Indian**



Office of Policy and Analysis
Washington, DC

May 2010

BACKGROUND

Brian Jungen (b. 1970) is a critically acclaimed contemporary artist of Swiss-Canadian and Native American heritage. He is a member of the Dunne-za First Nation in British Columbia, Canada. Jungen's artwork draws on popular culture and its icons; it has been described as challenging society's relationship with Native stereotypes, globalization and the environmental toll levied by consumerism.



Detail of Brian Jungen's *Crux* (as seen from those who sleep on the surface of the earth under the night sky), 2008

His work has shown widely in Canada and at international venues including the Tate Museum (London), the New Museum (New York), the Biennale of Sydney, the Gwangju Biennale (South Korea) and Secession (Vienna). *Brian Jungen: Strange Comfort* (*Strange Comfort*) at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington D.C. (October 2009 – August 2010) represents the artist's first major exhibition in a museum dedicated to Native culture.

This report presents an analysis of data gathered from visitors exiting *Strange Comfort*. In addition, this report compares these findings with those of another Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) visitor study about the exhibition *Fritz Scholder: Indian / Not Indian* (*Scholder*), an exhibition of the work of another contemporary artist, Fritz Scholder, which was presented at the NMAI in Washington D.C. (November 2008 – August 2009).¹

METHOD

The OP&A study team² designed a nine-question survey (see Appendix A) and administered it to visitors exiting the *Strange Comfort* exhibition on December 18 to 29, 2009. The principal objective of the survey was to capture information about the visiting public's experience, most importantly how visitors rated the exhibition. The study also focused on some of the factors that may have affected their experiences, such as their levels of interest in contemporary art and demographic information (e.g. gender, age and address).

¹ The *Scholder* exhibition was also on display at the George Gustav Heye Center (GGHC) in New York City (November 2008 - May 2009). Only the data collected at the Mall location will be compared with the data from the *Strange Comfort* survey.

² The study team included Ikuko Uetani, team leader, and Claire Eckert, both research scholars at the OP&A. They were responsible for the survey design, data collection and analysis, and report preparation.

Using a random selection process, a total of 259 people were intercepted.³ Out of this total, 234 people completed the questionnaire for a response rate of 94 %. The *Strange Comfort* questionnaire was modeled after the *Scholder* study with the addition of one question on age and one sub-question about how children rated their experiences. Appendix B includes frequency distributions from both *Strange Comfort* and *Scholder*. The data collection for *Scholder* on the Mall was conducted April 7 to 9, 2009 using the same procedures as *Strange Comfort*.

The questionnaires were designed to maximize the amount of meaningful demographic and experiential information that could be gathered with the least amount of questions thus minimizing the time and energy required of the study participants. The study team notes that this survey model strikes a desirable balance. By and large, the questions were brief, concise and not too demanding. The cooperation rates were high and useful data was collected quickly and efficiently. This evaluation method may be applicable to other exhibitions or programs.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics

A large majority of individuals interviewed were US residents (91%) and one in five respondents lived locally⁴ (19%). Slightly more women (52%) than men (48%) attended the exhibition. Most people visiting the exhibition identified themselves as non-Native (88%).

Of those eligible to be interviewed, the average age was 41 and the median age was 40. Visitors can be divided into three approximately equal age clusters: ages 12 to 34 (39%), ages 35 to 49 (32%) and over the age of 49 (29%).

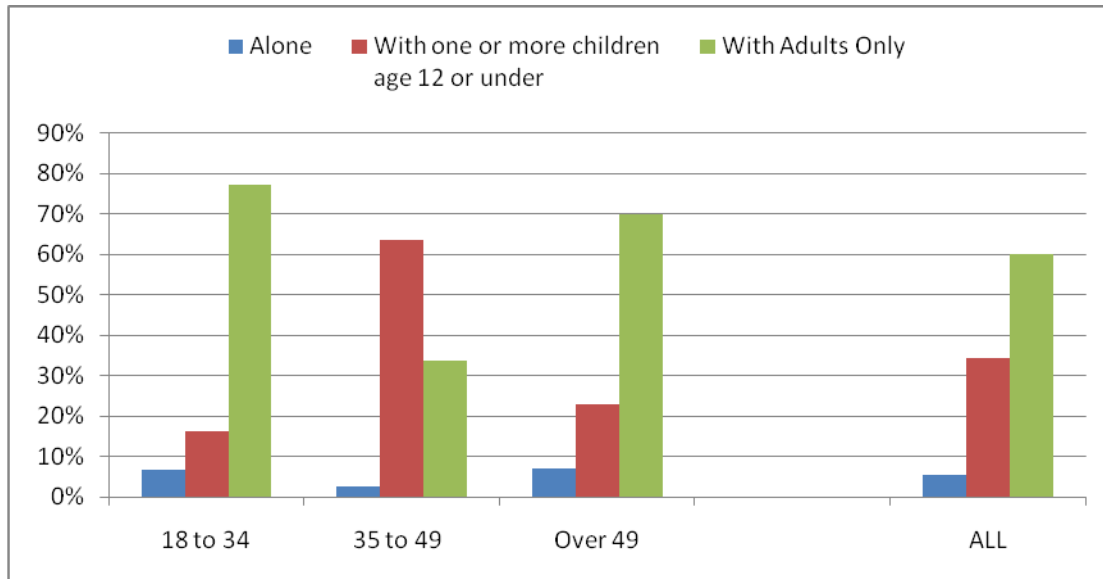
Most respondents were at the museum with other people; three in five made the trip with one or more adults (60%), while one-third of visitors were accompanied by one or more children (35%). Only five percent of visitors were unaccompanied. Not surprisingly, among adult⁵ visitors, those between the ages 35 to 49 were much more likely than others to be with one child or more (64%), while those in the other age groups (under 35 and over 49), were much more likely to be visiting the exhibition only with adults (74%) (See Chart 1).

³ Only visitors age 12 or over were eligible to participate.

⁴ Local refers to people living within a 20-mile radius of the museum.

⁵ Adults refer to those aged 18 or over.

Chart 1: Age and Group Composition



The majority of visitors to *Strange Comfort* were at the museum for the first time (74%); the rest visited at least once before (26%). Repeat visitors were more likely to live locally (30% vs. 14% of first-time visitors).

Interest in Contemporary Art

Most visitors to *Strange Comfort* indicated that they were very interested (34%) or somewhat interested (59%) in contemporary art. Less than one in ten said they were not interested at all.

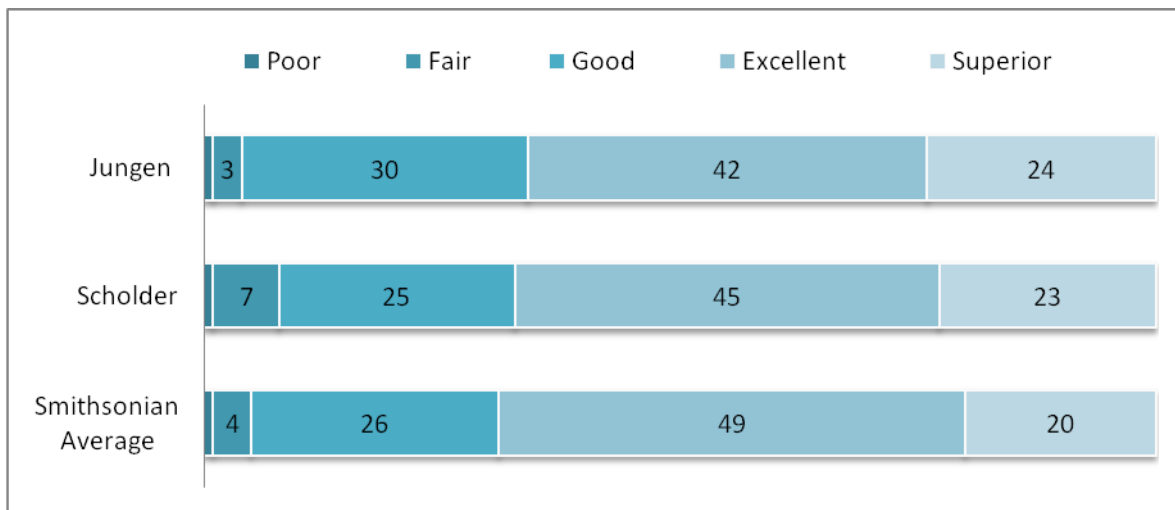
Visitor Rating

People were asked to rate their experience in the exhibition on a 5 point scale: Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent and Superior.⁶ OP&A has found that, in general, visitors to Smithsonian exhibitions tend to rate their experience in a manner that tilts the results towards Excellent; that is, if their visits are believed to be fine the way they are, they gravitate towards an Excellent rating. If they feel there is room for improvement, they tend to rate an exhibition Poor, Fair or Good. If they had an exceptional experience, they will choose Superior.

Strange Comfort was rated as follows: 24% of visitors rated it Superior, 42% Excellent, 30% Good, 3% Fair and 1% Poor. The results align with the *Scholder* rating and the Smithsonian average (see Chart 2).

⁶ This scale is used by OP&A for all museum visitor surveys.

Chart 2: Visitor Rating (percent)



Previous visits and high interest in contemporary art were linked to higher satisfaction ratings for *Strange Comfort*. Repeat visitors were more likely to rate the exhibition Superior (40% vs. 19% of first-time visitors). Individuals who indicated that they were very interested in contemporary art were more inclined to give a Superior rating to *Strange Comfort* (35% vs. 19% of those stating they were somewhat or not at all interested).

Adults who attended *Strange Comfort* in an adult group of two or more, were more likely than solo adult visitors or visitors with children to give the exhibition low ratings, that is, Poor, Fair or Good (40% vs. 23% of other visitors).

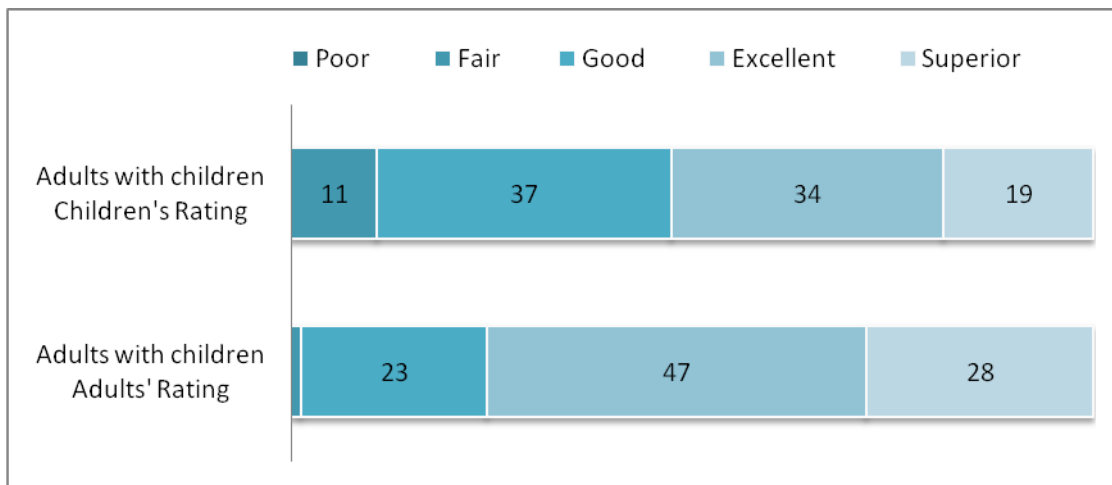
Children's Ratings

The *Strange Comfort* questionnaire, unlike the one used in the *Scholder* study, also requested adults with children to rate their child's experience based on the 5 point scale rating system. While handing out the survey, OP&A staff observed that most often adults completing the survey asked the child how they would rate the exhibition, but sometimes they filled it out on their behalf without consultation.

One third of the completed questionnaires included a response to this question for a total of 74 responses. This number of responses does not permit accurate comparisons of the adults' and children's ratings. Chart 3 shows the results. It appears that children, or parents on their behalf, rated *Strange Comfort* lower than their adult guardians; children were more likely to have their encounters described as Fair or Good while their guardians tended to describe their own experiences as Excellent or Superior.⁷ In other words, parents may not have viewed the exhibition as appropriate for children.

⁷ It is worth noting that *Strange Comfort* was not an exhibition particularly designed for children.

Chart 3: Children Rating and Adult Rating (percent)



Comparison to Scholder Exhibition

Comparing the findings of the *Strange Comfort* and the *Scholder* visitor surveys, the demographic characteristics are dissimilar in two ways: first, visitors to *Strange Comfort* were more likely to live locally (19% vs. 7% of *Scholder* visitors) and second, to have visited the NMAI at least once before (26% vs. 14% of *Scholder* visitors).

The time of year that the surveys were administered differed. The data collection for *Strange Comfort* coincided with the holiday season in December, traditionally a time spent with family. Conversely, the *Scholder* survey was conducted on weekdays in April, which is a popular time for tourists to visit the capital. Nevertheless, the rating of the two exhibitions was essentially unaffected by the demographic differences listed above.

OBSERVATIONS

The data suggest that *Brian Jungen: Strange Comfort* was well received by its audience. Although the exhibition was not child-oriented, NMAI's interest in obtaining information regarding children's satisfaction was worthwhile. The data imply that children (on their own or as perceived by their guardians) and their guardians give different ratings to the same exhibition. In order to better understand the reaction of children, the museum may consider a study that emphasizes children's and parents' reactions.

Scholder and *Jungen* share similar satisfaction ratings, despite demographic and seasonal differences that exist between the two data sets.

Questionnaire

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National Museum of the American Indian
Brian Jungen: **Strange Comfort**

1. Is this your first visit to this museum,
the National Museum of the American Indian?

- Yes No

2. Please rate your experience in this exhibition today:

- Poor Fair Good Excellent Superior

3. How interested are you in contemporary art?

- Very interested
 Somewhat interested
 Not interested at all

4. Do you live in the United States or another country?

- United States, Zip Code:
 Another country, specify: _____

5. Are you male or female?

- Male Female

6. What is your age?

7. With whom did you visit this exhibition?
[Choose one]

- I am alone
 With adults only
 With one or more children age 12 or under

**If your children are with you,
how do they rate this exhibition?**

- Poor Fair Good Excellent Superior

8. Do you identify as a Native American?

- Yes No

9. Are you a Charter Member of NMAI?

- Yes No

Thank You!

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Appendix B
Frequencies

	Scholder MALL (%)	Strange Comfort (%)
1. Is this your first visit to this museum?		
Yes	86	74
No	15	26
Total	101	100
2. Please rate your experience in this exhibition today		
Poor	1	1
Fair	7	3
Good	25	30
Excellent	45	42
Superior	23	24
Total	101	100
3. How interested are you in contemporary art?		
Very interested	34	34
Somewhat interested	54	59
Not interested at all	12	7
Total	100	100
4a. Do you live in the United States or in another country?		
United States	87	91
Another country	13	9
Total	100	100
4b. Distance of Residence from the museum		
Less than 5 miles	4	6
5-10 miles	1	4
10-20 miles	2	9
20-40 miles	2	7
40-100 miles	4	7
100-250 miles	18	14
Elsewhere in the US	56	45
International	13	9
Total	100	101
4c. Local resident (within 20 miles)		
Local	7	19
Non-local	93	81
Total	100	100

	Scholder MALL (%)	Strange Comfort (%)
5. Are you male or female?		
Male	45	48
Female	55	52
Total	100	100
6. What is your age? (Jungen only)		
Mean	n/a	40.5 years
Median	n/a	40.0 years
Under 35	n/a	39
35-49	n/a	32
Over 49	n/a	29
Total	n/a	100
7a. With whom did you visit this exhibition?		
I am alone	8	5
With one or more children age 12 or under	33	35
With adults only	59	60
Total	100	100
7b. If your children are with you, how do they rate this exhibition? (Jungen only)		
Poor	n/a	0
Fair	n/a	11
Good	n/a	37
Excellent	n/a	34
Superior	n/a	19
Total	n/a	101
8. Do you identify as a Native American?		
Yes	14	12
No	86	88
Total	100	100
9. Are you a Charter Member of NMAI?		
Yes	2	1
No	98	99
Total	100	100