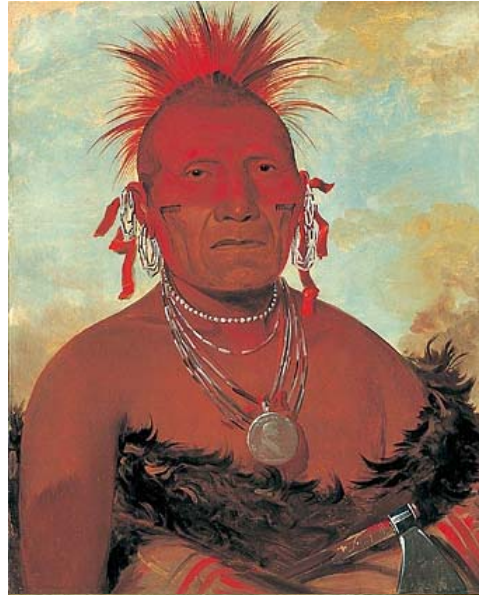



# “The Finest Expedition”

## A Program Evaluation of Art a la Cart At the Smithsonian American Art Museum

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 Smithsonian Institution

Office of Policy and Analysis  
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## FOREWORD

Over the years, the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) has implemented many innovation education programs. Since its recent reopening, one such program has been “Art a la Cart,” a hands-on learning cart focused on the paintings of George Catlin, which aims to reach children between the ages of approximately seven and twelve.

In January 2007, SAAM education staff asked the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to evaluate Art a la Cart. During the pilot testing period from March 30 through April 9, 2007, OP&A staff and interns devoted considerable time to observing cart presentations and interviewing participating children and parents.

Ioana Munteanu and James Smith designed the study, analyzed the data, and wrote the report. Assisting with the observations and interviews were OP&A analyst Andrew Pekarik and OP&A interns Allison Drury, Nikoo Paydar, and Marilyn Reis.

OP&A wishes to thank Susan Nichols, the head of SAAM’s education department, for providing the opportunity to conduct this study; Eileen Faust, a graduate education intern at SAAM, for coordinating the logistics of the study with the study team; the other Art a la Cart presenters for their cooperation during the observation and interviewing phase; and all of the visitors who consented to interviews, and whose frank and insightful comments form the backbone of the study.

Although this study deals with a relatively small initiative, the issue of finding ways to better engage families at art museums is an important one at the Smithsonian, and OP&A is gratified to see the SAAM education department taking the lead in this area. My staff and I have attempted to support SAAM by providing a thorough and professional evaluation of its current efforts with Art a la Cart.

Carole M.P. Neves  
Director  
Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In January 2007, staff from the education department at the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) approached the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to request an evaluation of a pilot program: a hands-on learning cart focused on the work of George Catlin and aimed at children ages 7-12, “Art a la Cart.”

The use of learning carts is well-established at science museums and centers, and common at cultural museums as well. However, such carts are not widely used at art museums, which generally have a reputation for being less child-friendly. The Art a la Cart program represents an effort to make SAAM more accessible to a young audience that might otherwise have difficulty connecting with the subject matter. But while children were the main audience for the cart and the primary focus of the program evaluation, SAAM educators indicated they also had an interest in exploring how adults respond to the cart, both as parents of participating children and in their own right.

The testing period ran from March 30-April 9, 2007. For logistical reasons, the OP&A study team decided against a survey-based approach, opting instead for observation and semi-structured qualitative interviews aimed at addressing the following questions:

- Why do parents bring their children to a museum like SAAM?
- Why do visitors choose to participate in the cart activity?
- How do visitors interact with the cart presenter and materials?
- Do visitors grasp the main messages of the presentation?
- What do visitors learn from the presentation?
- How does participation affect visitors’ experience of Catlin’s art, and of the museum in general?
- What factors account for the cart’s effectiveness?

- How might the activity be improved?

On all days that the cart was tested, at least one OP&A observer/interviewer was present, working loosely off the interview and observation guides reproduced in Appendix A. The study team, consisting of three OP&A staff members and three OP&A interns, conducted a total of 47 post-presentation interviews, ranging in length from monosyllabic exchanges of less than two minutes to in-depth conversations of 15 minutes or more.

In total, the study team spoke with 111 cart participants, representing almost half of all visitors present during cart presentations. Seventy-seven interviewees were children (69 percent), ranging in age from 3 to 15 years old and divided almost equally between girls and boys, and 34 interviewees were adults (31 percent). The study team estimated through observation that about two thirds of the interviewees (71 individuals) were white non-Hispanics (64 percent), and about one third (40 individuals) fell into other racial/ethnic categories (36 percent).<sup>1</sup> Most were not from the local area; only 13 of the post-presentation interviews were with groups residing in the metro Washington D.C. area. (See Appendix B for summary figures.)

Over the course of the pilot testing period, the study team also observed and took notes on 45 individual cart presentations for approximately 250 visitors. These were conducted by nine different presenters, including SAAM education staff, education interns, and volunteers. The presentations observed ranged from just under 10 minutes to well over 20 minutes, and appeared to average about 10-15 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

With the exception of a few uncommunicative children, the tenor of visitors' comments was overwhelmingly positive—in some cases, enthusiastically so. Children generally seemed to find the presentation fun and engaging; parents appreciated the opportunity it afforded for increasing their kids' connection to the art; and both kids and adults claimed

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<sup>1</sup> The representation of groups other than non-Hispanic whites among interviewees was considerably higher than in the Donald W. Reynolds Center as a whole (10 percent), according to a recent visitor survey conducted by OP&A. OP&A believes the reason for this is that Art a la Cart targets families with younger children, and in the general population, these are statistically more likely to be non-white and/or Hispanic.

<sup>2</sup> The study team was not able to precisely time presentations, as study team members were typically busy interviewing previous participants at the start of subsequent presentations.

to have learned something. As one enthusiastic young participant declared at the end of the presentation, “This is the finest expedition I’ve had so far!”

## BACKGROUND

### Why Families Come to SAAM<sup>3</sup>

In general, it is fair to say that art museums are not the first item on the agenda for most families exploring the cultural environment of the nation's capital—in part because they are perceived as having little to spark the interest of children. Thus, families that find themselves in the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture<sup>4</sup> often arrive there only after having visited the memorials and other more family-oriented museums such as the National Air and Space Museum:

We did some of the more popular [museums] yesterday—Air and Space and Natural History. We thought it would be cool to do something different; [but my 9- and 10-year old sons] would never choose to come here on their own, I'm afraid.

Indeed, a number of the family groups interviewed by the study team were in the Reynolds Center almost by accident. For example, a number of interviewed groups were biding time there because their intended destination—the International Spy Museum across the street—did not have tickets available at that time.<sup>5</sup> However, the study team also heard several reasons why families had a specific interest in the Center's offerings.

First, the Presidents exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery exerts a strong pull on families. Not only is the subject of America's leaders (suitably scrubbed and polished, of course) of interest to many children, but the Presidential portrait collection is seen by some visitors as an iconic Washington attraction in its own right.

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to talking to participants in the cart activity and their families, the study team talked to family groups in and around SAAM during the week before the Art à la Cart testing period, to get a sense of why parents bring their children to the museum. The following section draws on comments of both groups.

<sup>4</sup> Home to both SAAM and the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

<sup>5</sup> Some other examples of "accidental visitors" included a father who suggested that the Reynolds Center was serving as a substitute for the closed National Museum of American History, and another interviewee who admitted that the Reynolds Center was simply the closest attraction to the hotel where his family was staying, and that they were "working their way toward the Mall."

*OP&A: Why did you bring your sons out here today?*

To see the President portraits.

*OP&A: Why did you come to see those?*

They learn about them in school, so it's cool to see their pictures.

*OP&A: So your visit is more for history, or art?*

For history. Its not that the art isn't nice, but the history is the reason we came.

Second, some parents were bringing their children for educational or cultural exposure. In such cases, the visit may not have been considered a "fun" activity for the kids so much as an enriching experience to be endured in the present and appreciated later.

*OP&A: Why bring the girls?*

In school, the oldest is learning about the Civil War, so it is interesting for her to see things that relate, and learn about the Presidents.

Third, in a few cases, children with an interest in art or history were the motivating force behind a family visit:

We have two sons; one considers himself a budding artist and one draws a lot of portraits and caricatures. He was the one that put the museum on our list of things to do in D.C.

*OP&A: How come you're here today?*

Girl, 9: Because I really like to draw and when I see painting it gives me ideas.

My son wanted to come; he's 16. I'm not sure if he saw it on the map or if someone recommended it to him. But he really wanted to come over, so we all did.

In addition, some visiting families simply want to visit as many Smithsonian museums as possible, on the assumption that anything offered by the Institution is worth seeing:

*OP&A: Why did you come here today?*

I just know there are a lot of famous paintings here and I wanted to see them.

*OP&A: How did you know there were a lot of famous paintings here?*

It's the Smithsonian.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that museum visits are often simply a way for a family to spend time together. In such cases, the subject matter may be a secondary consideration, and an art museum is as likely a candidate for a visit as any other—perhaps even more so for local visitors, who may have already paid multiple visits to the

more obvious family venues. Several of the family groups interviewed by the study team seemed to be motivated primarily by such social considerations.

## **Pedagogical Literature**

An extensive body of theoretical and qualitative literature exists on children and informal learning in museums, although there appears to be surprisingly little hard data on the educational outcomes of museum visits. In part, this is because measuring such outcomes presents daunting obstacles to the researcher.

A full review of the relevant literature is not within the scope of this study, but the study team would direct the reader to the January 2007 OP&A report, *Enhancing the Visits of Middle-School Tour Groups to the Smithsonian*, which covers much of this territory, albeit with a focus on an age group (approximately 11-13) slightly older than the target audience for Art a la Cart (7-12), and in the context of structured field trips rather than family trips.<sup>6</sup> That study identified some generalizations that are widely shared by specialists in the field, some of which are relevant to the current study. They include the observations that informal learning tends to be most effective for children when it

- Combines fun activities with learning objectives;
- Includes elements (such as hands-on activities) that engage multiple senses;
- Provides opportunities for contact with knowledgeable and helpful adults;
- Is conducted in a physical environment that children find comfortable and inviting;
- Connects with issues familiar to children, either from their personal experience or from classes at school; and

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<sup>6</sup> Available online at <http://www.si.edu/opanda/docs/Rpts2007/MiddleSchoolTourGroups.final.pdf>



- Is conveyed through appropriate teaching methodologies, which typically means inquiry-based (rather than lecturing) approaches.

Other relevant generalizations noted in this study concern the importance of relating to children on their own level (for example, through appropriate language), avoiding any hint of patronizing, and designing educational experiences that go beyond the cognitive dimension of facts and figures to engage children on the emotional, social, kinesthetic, and aesthetic levels.

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS: CHILDREN

Young interviewees generally offered favorable assessments of Art a la Cart, with many calling it the highlight of their visit. Participants described their experience with the cart as “a lot of fun,” “cool,” “interesting,” and “educational.” In the following section, we will discuss what the comments of young interviewees<sup>7</sup> suggest about

- Whether children grasped the *main messages* of the activity;
- The specific *experiences* children had with the activity;
- The *impact* of the activity on how children thought about Catlin’s art, art in general, the museum, or wider issues;
- The reasons for the activity’s *effectiveness*; and
- What *improvements* might be made.

### Did Children Grasp the Main Messages?

According to the training materials for Art a la Cart, the main message of the activity was that Catlin’s art reflected the challenges faced by the artist as he sought to document American Indians in the field: “In order to document the lives of Native Americans, Catlin had to make choices about what he would bring, as well as how he would paint.” Two specific educational goals derive from this main theme:

- “The visitor will better understand how and why Catlin painted his Indian Gallery.”

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<sup>7</sup> A few of the quotations given below are from parents speculating about what their children experienced. Quotations from parents are clearly noted as such; all others are from interviewed children themselves.

- “The visitor will better understand that Catlin’s paintings are a result of both his artistic preferences and the conditions under which he painted them.”

The study team’s interviews with the children who participated in the cart activity suggest that the “why?” element of the first educational goal was successfully attained. When asked why Catlin painted his paintings, children of all ages were usually able to articulate the basic idea that the artist wanted to preserve the memory of the American Indians for posterity:

He wanted people to see how Indians were.

He thought [Native Americans] might leave and become extinct and never come back, and he wanted us to have a memory of them.

[T]he President didn’t want the Indians in that area. And if they went off to the areas where the other Indians were, they might all die or something. They might get in a big fight. And then they would be gone, and people wouldn’t remember them. So it was important that they had paintings of the Indians, to remember them.

*OP&A: Why do you think he was painting these paintings?*

He wanted to preserve Native American Indians’ history.

*OP&A: Why?*

Because [they were] a vanishing culture and a disappearing ethnic group.

With regard to the second educational goal and the “how?” element of the first, essentially all of the young interviewees grasped the message that the conditions under which Catlin painted his Indian Gallery were challenging. When asked to elaborate, children cited a variety of issues raised by the presentation, most commonly involving the technical difficulties of procuring, transporting, and using art supplies in the field in a time before modern transportation was available:

It was a lot harder to paint back then than it is now.

It was hard because he didn’t have tubes of paint and he had to go out and find the paint and also had to fold up all of these other things. They didn’t have cars or anything, and it [was] hard to take everything with you. They said he had to go back multiple times to get what he needed.

He used a lot canvass and he really had to make just about anything he used. So it wasn’t just like he could just go out and buy anything that he needed.

He was painting Native Americans, and the Native Americans have the culture to use what is around them. ... He was using all that stuff because that is what he had to bring with him, and because he didn't have other ways like containers and tubs and stuff like that.

It was cool to see how he traveled light, and how he made use of the environment that was around him to keep his paints and his tools and everything.

He did it in the wilderness; he brought his pain brush and his canvass in the woods.

Some interviewees discussed other challenging aspects of Catlin's project that were mentioned in the cart presentation, such as the time constraints he faced and the dangers he might have encountered in the wilderness from hostile Indians or European enemies.

The issue of Catlin's artistic preferences *per se* was rarely mentioned by younger interviewers.<sup>8</sup> However, children did discuss artistic choices such as focusing on facial expressions and details of clothing and accessories, using thin layers of paint, and making different color combinations by combining a few basic colors, many of which were at least partly dictated by the circumstances under which the works were created:

He made a lot of pictures with just a little bit of color.

He did well capturing all sorts of different kinds of people and expressions. ... He really *captured* their feelings, and you could tell if someone was really motherly and nice and sweet, and other people were serious and straightforward and not so friendly.

We got to learn how you paint, and how you blend the colors.

*OP&A: What do you think was most important to George Catlin when he was painting the Indians he met?*

Maybe how they were dressed and how their expressions were. ... It's important to see their face and how it was. I thought he spent a lot of time on how they *really* dressed—not just like drawing a brown thing. He really made an effort to draw a symbol of their tribe, which would be their clothes. Because there's feathers on some of them, or there's beads. So that's what's special.

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it appears that this issue was rarely if ever explicitly raised in presentations, in the sense of comparing what Catlin would have *preferred* to do, as an artist, under less trying circumstances, and what he was forced to do by circumstances.

## Children's Experiences

Interviewed children indicated that participation in the cart activity gave them a wide variety of experiences. Learning and having fun (through touching and interacting) were mentioned by the majority. Other mentioned experiences included recalling something they had learned in school, and reflecting upon art or history.

### *Learning*

As discussed above, most children understood the main messages of the cart. In addition, many children indicated that they learned about Native American culture:

[The Native Americans] don't use the things we use. They used canoes and bows and arrows; and we use boats with engines. They live in houses and we live in cities.

[The Indian portraits] are very historical. You don't see many [Native Americans] now, so it's very nice to have an exhibit where you can actually see all the different cultures of Native Americans. ... You actually get to see not just one picture of a Native American that you might see in a movie; you get to see all different cultures, and what's the same about them and what's different. Because they all might have the same style of clothing, but they might have different color hair. So it's nice to see how they're different, and how they're the same.

*OP&A: Why do you think you'll remember [the Native American paintings]?*  
Well, because I like Indian stuff, and you can't really see that much around here anymore. So it's something you don't get to see a lot.

*OP&A: What was interesting about it?*  
To learn about the Indians and to see the pictures.

*OP&A: What did you learn about the Indians?*  
What they could wear. The culture. In [one] picture, [I saw] the how they were fighting.

Others mentioned that they had learned something about the process of creating art:

*OP&A: Would you have gotten as much out of those pictures without the cart presentation?*  
No. I wouldn't have known very much. I'd just be like, "Okay—there's some more paintings." But now, I really *know* more about what went on, and I feel like I know more about the artist. And now I feel that at other times I can go into art [museums, and] look at pictures and maybe know *how* the artist did that a little better, after learning all those really interesting techniques and stuff. So I really did learn a lot.

They must have had skinny brushes.

*OP&A: Why skinny brushes?*

Well, the tips. They [must have been] really small, because [the paintings] have a lot of details in them.

I got an art set for Christmas, so I thought it was really neat to learn how he did his layers and stuff. ... So I thought it was just an interesting experience to learn about that.

Others stressed that they had learned something about Catlin and his historical circumstances:

*OP&A: What did you learn?*

How artists did what they did in the 1830s, before railroads and cars.

*OP&A: How did they do that?*

They put in their supplies and traveled.

*OP&A: Why did they have to put in supplies?*

It's not like you can find a Wal-Mart out there!

*OP&A: Did you learn anything today?*

Yes. I didn't know [Catlin] painted a lot of Native Americans. I didn't even know he existed, actually.

*OP&A: What was the main thing you learned from this?*

He was a lawyer by profession, but he sold all of his law books in order to do this.

A few children also remembered specific details from the presentation, such as the number of trips Catlin took and the number of paintings he made.

### *Touching*

The opportunity to touch objects was clearly a satisfying experience for most of the children interviewed. Many of them referred to it as their "favorite thing" about Art a la Cart, and several compared the hands-on experience favorably to the default alternative of simply walking around the museum and looking at art. Young interviewees liked the hands-on experience either because it was something they had never done in an art museum before, because it helped them to connect with the subject matter, or simply because of the novelty of the objects they touched:

You can get creative and see how it is like holding it—as oppose to just looking and looking.

*OP&A: How would you compare your time here with your time in other museums?*

In most museums you just walk around. But in this one, we did some stuff.

*OP&A: And is that better or worse?*

Better

*OP&A: Why?*

Because it's more fun doing the things than just looking, and because I like doing things.

*OP&A: How is this activity different than what you've done before?*

Because I never felt that kind of stuff before. I never saw that kind of paper before.

*OP&A: What did you think of that presentation?*

I thought it was pretty cool, 'cause you get to touch everything.

*OP&A: So what did you like best...?*

My favorite thing about it was that you got to open and shut it—the [stretch board] edge. That was really cool.

I touched canvass and it's kind of surprising how much different it is than regular paper that we use today. It's a lot rougher and thicker.

A variety of touchable objects captured the attention of participating children, including maps, brushes, the canvass, the palette, the color sample strip, and the stretch boards. But predictably, the bison bladder was the biggest hit, thanks to children's well-known fascination with all things creepy, crawly, icky, and slimy. The bladder generated some extreme reactions, garnering appraisals such as “gross,” “weird,” and “disgusting”—however, these were invariably delivered with a guilty smile or giggle that betrayed the child's true feelings.

In this area, comments from interviewed parents strongly reinforced the impression that tactile opportunities are very helpful for children in museums. All of the following comments are from parents:

When you're in an art museum, it's usually very stiff and stuffy, and kids definitely can't touch anything. So having something that is hands-on is a positive thing for kids.

For kids, it's different than for us. When they put their hands on something—when they touch, they feel—they can relate to it in a different way.

They were able to use their hands and interact. ... Putting the frame together, putting the canvass up, taking it down again—I think it helps them to feel like a painter, and what it must have been like. It's easier to experience that hands-on than by just looking at a painting.

It was great that you could touch everything, and that [the presenter] encouraged the kids to pass the stuff around. I thought that was really good.

## *Reflecting*

Participating in the cart activity stimulated reflective experiences in several of the interviewed children, who discussed how Art a la Cart led them to reflect on what it was like it was to live and paint in the 1800s, to undertake a project such as Catlin's, or simply to be an artist:

If I didn't come to an art museum like this one, I don't think I would have ever been able to draw a horse. It's nice to see how others think horses are drawn. Some people think horses should be blue and some think they should be brown in the moonlight. So it's really cool to see how different artists think about the same thing. Even if they both draw a picture of mountains, what *really* stands out in the mountains: is it a waterfall or is it the people mining or is it the trees? What's most important to them?

I think it must have been really exciting [for Catlin], because he got to see Native Americans. I've never seen a live Native American in my whole life. He got to see what they did, and how they ate, and what their culture was. And not only did he get to see it, he got to bring it back and show it to other people.

Looking back from 2007, it is really hard [to imagine what it was like for Catlin] because we have planes and cars and other stuff, but back then all they had were boats. ... I don't even think that they had boats—[it was more like] canoes and stuff. And they also had to ride horses; they didn't have cars or anything.

So [the Catlin paintings] show you how interesting it can be to go to an art museum. You won't just see art—you'll see what our ancestors have been, and what people *do*. Art really explains the nature [of people] and how people think.

## *Recalling Information Learned in School*

Finally, a few interviewees indicated that their "aha!" experience while participating in Art a la Cart involved recalling something they have previously learned in school:

[These painting] make me have a better understanding. We learned in school that [Native Americans] were not treated well at all, and it's about how we think we have power over other people, like African Americans and other people who are different. [Catlin] painted each one individually as if they were an important character in history—a president or a person important to government. Each person, when you look at it, it looks more important than they were made out to be.

I thought it was pretty fun. I didn't know most of that stuff. We're studying stuff like that in social studies—but I didn't know most of it. But now I know it.



## Impact

In some cases, participation in Art a la Cart appeared to have a profound impact on some of the interviewed children, affecting their attitudes toward the Catlin pictures, art, and even life in general. Several said that participation in the cart activity changed their views of art museums:

*OP&A: Do you go to art museums much? Do you like art museums?*

Not usually, because you don't get to *do* anything. So that's kind of what I like about this. Because I'm not just standing and looking at a painting, but I'm understanding it—I'm understanding what this whole section is about.

If I had been in the Gallery without [the cart] I would not have known anything. I would said "Oh, this is a nice painting of a person—I'm done in here," and moved on. And I would find it kind of boring, too. When people say "museums," I think about going into a gallery and not knowing what it is I'm looking at, then saying "good bye" and going to the next one.

*OP&A: How do you feel about going to museums now?*

I like it better knowing that they are going to do interactive [things] and learning in different ways that [appeal to] other people.

Other interviewed children indicated that participating in the cart activity made them better understand the art and how it is made. This understanding often appeared to lead to a greater appreciation for the final result:

I think about how hard it really was to paint [them], and how much time it probably took. So I think about [them] as more special, sometimes. It just makes me think more about what's behind the paintings.

It looked like the paintings were a little bit more crude than some of the paintings outside. Now I've figured out why. He probably could have painted [more refined works], but he probably did not have enough time—he just had to keep moving.

*OP&A: Do you think differently about the paintings now?*

Yeah. ... I didn't think that they were that hard to make.

I think after this, I'll be probably like "Oh! Look at this painting! I'll bet they put three layers of peach and orange and yellow on!" [I'll] just be able to decipher more about them, instead of just looking and saying "okay, it's a scene," and moving on. I will be able to pick out details that I wouldn't have been able to before.

I [could see] all the art, [but] I really wanted to be able to actually see *how* the art was done. I know the art is beautiful. ... And [now] I realize what preparation it takes—how *long* it takes. Not that it's just ten minutes to finish this beautiful picture.

A few young people with artistic predilections mused about an artistic career, or indicated that they might change the way they approach their own creative work as a result of what they saw in the Catlin Gallery:

*OP&A: Did doing the activity make you want to do anything?*

It makes me want to be an artist. I learned a lot about art and how it was back then and to draw art.

I just like to sort of draw things out. But after doing this presentation, I might be more interested in using more paints and stuff.

I am going to try to paint on canvass now, now that I have felt it and I know about it.

I really like to draw, and when I see a painting it gives me ideas.

A few children suggested the presentation taught them a lesson about the wise use of natural resources, and made them reflect on the contrast between Catlin's self-sufficiency and our current off-the-shelf consumer culture:

*OP&A: What was the connection between the large suitcase and the paintings? What was the connection between the bladder and the paintings?*

They area all about nature and his surroundings. Everything was natural resources that he used, because it was [a long time ago] and he didn't have all the stuff we have now.

He really had to make just about anything he used. So it wasn't just like he could just go out and buy anything that he needed.

It taught me a lot—that you can make things without buying them.

Some of the parents the study team interviewed were pleased so see some important messages being imparted to the children through the story of Catlin and his art: messages about the rewards to hard work, sacrifice, and tenacity:

The pictures on the wall are not taken from a camera. I know that [the kids] know that—but [it adds something for them to hear] that [the artist] traveled in a canoe or on a horse, and brought these art materials. That it isn't all instant gratification, like it is out there today. That it took time to develop a picture like this, and there's also a lot of thought behind it, in terms of drawing and transporting. I think [the presenter] got that across.

Here was a man of high education who dropped it all and saw the need for preservation of many tribes for history. Because it was being blown away, little by little. For

somebody to have a law degree at that time was a big deal. So for a man to have the foresight to see the Indian culture disappearing, and wanting to preserve it for mankind, was a really important step in those times.

Finally, some of the most unexpected but gratifying spontaneous comments heard by the study team—albeit more from parents than from the children themselves—concerned the *memorability* of the Art a la Cart activity. For example, a girl visiting with her sister and father said:

When I go to most galleries and look at a lot of different things, I don't remember unless I have something to connect it with—[something] I learned in school or [read in] a book, or something I knew about. ... But this altered my day because I stayed here longer to do this presentation, and I am going to remember that there is a man [who] painted Native Americans; and why and the way artists think, the way they represent [people], what they do and how they paint each detail and that it means something different.

Several parents also commented on the likelihood that their children would remember something about Art a la Cart:

I really like to see the kids get involved with something like that. And even though it seems like they won't take much away from here, believe me, they'll remember a lot of this, and we'll be hearing about it.

We were just about to walk out, and it brought them back. They're going to remember this. Little things—kids remember details. And this is a detail they'll remember.

Just having something in here that engages children in that way, and brings these works alive, will create some kind of memory for her. Maybe in the future, she'll remember that and she'll make the connection. It might not happen right now; but it's there.

## **Effectiveness**

The interviews with young Art a la Cart participants suggest that the activity was successful in informing, inspiring, delighting, and challenging its target audience. What accounts for this effectiveness? Interviewees' comments suggested several answers to this question.

First, Art a la Cart gave students the opportunity to have fun while learning:

I thought it was really interesting. We got to learn how you paint, and how you blend the colors. And I thought it was fun to learn about different cultures and just sort of a little bit about how he painted his pictures and how many he did and his different journeys and stuff. I thought it was really cool.

I can learn more by talking to someone else about what [artists] do, and I think that is really fun.

Second, it engaged multiple senses (touching, hearing, and seeing):

*OP&A: Do you think that being able to touch things made it different?*

Yeah ... It just gave you more knowledge and made you wonder about the paintings

[I enjoyed] being in a gallery where all his paintings were, looking around and finding visually other things that were in common with what she was saying about what he did and the ways [he did it].

*OP&A: How does it help to be able to touch something?*

Child 1: It's more of an experience, because you have more time to actually look at it and see it.

Child 2: It makes me feel more a part of the exhibit. So when you're working with the stuff, you can actually remember what you *did*—not just remember looking at it.

*OP&A: So participating in some way helps you to remember more...?*

Child 2: Yeah.

Third, it offered children the opportunity to interact with knowledgeable and approachable adults:

*OP&A: Why was it educational for you?*

Because it was a different approach to learning.

*OP&A: What was different about it?*

Instead of wandering around and trying to guess for yourself about all the paintings and not really having any structure, it was being explained to us better.

[The presenter] was good. She explained it well.

[The presenter] was educated and she let us interact.

[The presenter] asked questions. She took what I already knew and she sharpened it.

Parents also commented frequently on the positive effect of the interactions between the presenter and the participating children:

I thought it was good the way [the presenter] drew [my son] in by asking questions and saying, "Are we missing something?" So it got him engaged. It wasn't just a straight lecture kind of thing; he liked the fact it was interactive.

I thought [the presenter] did a nice job asking the kids a lot of questions. In that way, it was interactive; she engaged the kids a lot.

It was good interaction between [the presenter] and the kids. ... If you get them involved, they don't tune you out. They hung on every word; so the interaction is very important.

The presenter was terrific. Not everyone can work so well with kids, just cold like that.

As noted above, a few children also indicated that making a connection with something they had learned in school, or with personal interests, made Art a la Cart especially effective. One interviewed parent also commented on the value of tying the activity into curricular subjects, in the following words:

I see how this could be given to children of all ages, but it might be *best* to target it to children who are in that age group that are studying about this period. For example, for this particular gallery, I would think about 3rd, 4th, 5th grade is when they learn about the Western Expansion and so forth.

Parents and children seemed to agree that Art a la Cart was accessible for children in the target age range (7-12). However, it clearly became problematic for younger children, and may have even been somewhat difficult for some children toward the younger end of the target range:

Father: For the younger ones—maybe they needed a little more interesting stuff to draw their attention.

*OP&A: How old is [your daughter]...?*

Father: She's eight. So she noticed the bladder, but I think the other stuff was sort of lost.

*OP&A: [Your five-year-old daughter is] actually a little younger than the target audience for this presentation.*

Father: That's probably why she doesn't want to be interviewed. She looks like she's eight. At the age of eight, she might actually be having a conversation with you.

*OP&A: Five is a little young. They're shooting for about 7-12...*

Father: Right. But sometimes, she'll get pulled in because she's so tall for her age. ...

The two boys [participating with her] were older, and they knew how to conduct a dialogue by themselves.

The study team would also note that the Gallery typically presented a physically comfortable environment for participating children. It was relatively quiet at most times, the lighting was subdued and relaxing, visitor through-traffic was rarely heavy, and children frequently availed themselves to the option to sit down during the presentation.

All this provided a degree comfort that seemed to enhance children's experience with Art a la Cart.

All of the factors discussed above are consistent with the basic elements that support learning in museums setting, as described in the literature survey conducted by OP&A for the January 2007 report *Enhancing the Visits of Middle School Tour Groups to the Smithsonian*. (See the section on Pedagogical Literature above.)

### **Suggested Changes**

The interviewed children's opinions of their experience with the cart were almost universally positive. Only a few children with whom the study team spoke suggested improvements.

A few suggested they would have liked a higher level of participant involvement, specifically through more objects to pass around, more activities, or an opportunity to actually paint or draw something:

*OP&A: Was there anything you would change about this presentation that would add to your experience?*

Maybe a few more things, to have enough to go around to everybody to see.

[It would help to have] enough materials for everybody to be looking at at the same time. And more [objects], to try to involve everybody. [The presenter] was calling on just one person to do everything.

A few participants mentioned that they would have liked more authenticity in some of the objects:

I think it would have been nicer if the things [the presenter] had—like the paint brushes—could have looked more like the ones he used. And maybe if there was some paint in the bladder and [we could] use it.

Finally, some expressed a desire for more discussion of Native American history and culture, supported with more touchable objects and visual aids, or more attention to specific paintings in the Gallery:

*OP&A: These presentations are geared for children your age. What would you to change them?*

Child 1: Maybe I would add a little. Maybe a picture of what they did.

Child 2: I think I would keep it the way it is and maybe add more about the Indians' culture and what they do.

*OP&A: What do you have in mind?*

Child 2: Did they travel a lot and have a lot of festivals? What was their culture like?

They could demonstrate or explain what they thought the Indians were doing, and explain the paintings more.

*OP&A: So you want to know more about the Indians themselves in the paintings?*

...And what they were thinking about.

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS: ADULTS

All of the interviewed parents offered a positive assessment of Art a la Cart, ranging from modest approval to raves. They also offered comments on what seemed to appeal to their children about Art a la Cart, how the activity might be improved, and several other issues.

### **Appreciation for Art a la Cart**

Interviewed parents praised the museum for providing an activity that helped their children to appreciate and connect with the art. Some noted frankly that art museums can be tedious for children, and that activities that engage children at their own level make an enormous difference in kids' interest and enjoyment levels:

It was really, really helpful. I thought it was amazing to bring the children into it— [instead of just] walking through a gallery and looking at a painting, having them participate and getting them interested in art.

A lot of kids are lost in the gallery unless they are brought into it.

It has made the [museum] more interesting to the kids. For children, after they go from gallery to gallery—it's just another picture, another display, another piece of modern art, another photo. They get lost in it, and you find them sitting on cushions.

[A museum like this] wouldn't hold the attention of a child for long; so something like the activity carts gets them interested. This museum appeals to adults. If you are trying to appeal to kids, you need to have something to engage them or attract their attention. This is very much an adult museum.

It brings it alive, anytime you have an interpreter in a place like this. ... I'm really quite pleased that you guys are doing this. To be able to come to a place that doesn't cost anything—I'm used to paying every time I go in a place—that's amazing. And then to have [the presentation]—that's just a blessed thing, really.

Several parents talked of children with flagging energy and interest levels who were brought back to life when given the chance to learn by participating rather than simply observing:



[The children] were walking around; they were looking, they were getting fidgety, they were arguing with each other. But this caught their attention, and now they are over there and they're speaking and learning and involved. And they're not clinging to my leg!

Father: [The children] were getting tired. Remember you said you wanted to go get a snack?

Daughter: Yeah.

Father: But this really pepped you back up, right...? It makes it more interactive.

One highly complimentary parent even suggested that Art a la Cart had the potential to change her children's appreciation for art in the long term:

[The children were] starting to get a little bored, just looking. Interacting and actually understanding what it's all about really made a difference. So I'm really appreciative about those ten minutes they gave to the children, because I think it's going to change their perception of art for the rest of their lives.

## **Adults' Experiences**

As discussed in the observations section below, some parents sat out the activity or wandered off in the middle of it. However, others watched or even participated alongside their children. When interviewed, these parents discussed a variety of experiences they had while watching their children participate, or while participating themselves.

### *Learning*

Whether with or without kids, many adults indicated that they too learned something about art or history from the presentation. For example, parents with children offered the following comments concerning the educational value of Art a la Cart:

I learned so much about George Catlin in the last ten minutes. I've read about him and heard about him, but just seeing what he actually did—how he did the art, the layers of the painting, the quick drying, traveling behind Lewis and Clark—I didn't know all of that. So I learned a lot too.

I didn't realize that the Indians had never seen a likeness of themselves before, and they were threatened by that. I had never thought about that.

*OP&A: What do you think about presentations like this? Do you learn anything from them? Or is it too basic for you?*

No, I definitely learned something. I hadn't put it all together with Andrew Jackson getting the Indians to leave, and George Catlin working to preserve them.

*OP&A: How about the technical side of painting back then?*

Yeah, I would have probably guessed that paint was maybe a powder and they had to mix it as they went along. But I guess it also left me with a few more questions, because you had that big bladder, but then how do you get all the different colors? She didn't really go into that.

I learned something, because of the subject-matter—how they painted in those days, and how they made everything portable and worked with thin glazes. It's fascinating from a technical point of view.

Even adults without any children found the cart educationally valuable. For example, a 20-year-old exchange student from France (interviewed on the first testing day, when few children were present, no formal presentations were given, and the cart presenters mainly engaged in informal discussions with people of all ages who seemed interested in Catlin's art) noted,

[The cart presenter told me] about the Native American traditions and habits. For instance, the initiation rites of passage. Interesting! And also the way [Catlin] worked—how he had to keep his paints and his canvasses. I mean, it wasn't very easy for him to travel and to paint; they explained to me some details about that.

...I already had some exposure to his works; I already knew some stuff. But I think for most people, it is probably more interesting [if there is a presenter], because they enter this room and see the paintings, but don't have explanations. There's not that much written on the walls, and if you don't have a guide, or a book guide, you can't really understand a lot. What was his purpose? That's why it's very useful to have people.

On the same day, a young woman visiting alone from Atlanta noted:

The docents were there to give you a little bit of the history behind the paintings. If you're a tourist, it's hard to be there for [organized tours]. So I appreciated that they had people there to tell you about the paintings and the history behind them. ... You're not looking at [the art] with a blind eye. You're getting more of the history behind them, and exactly the effort that went into each of the paintings.

I think that was the general theme—to capture *everything* about that group of people: their culture, the way they dressed, what they did, everyday activities. That's the theme I got from that. It makes you think about other artists doing the same thing to groups of people we have today.

### *Emotional Response*

Several adults also indicated they had an emotional response to the presentation, typically dealing with feelings of loss concerning Native American culture, or anger about the treatment of Natives peoples at the hands of past U.S. governments:

I'm saddened to think that there was this beauty and these people, and—well, they're not completely gone, but they are remnants. They disappeared as a people, and that is emotional to me. It's incredible just to go in there and see that; to have that kind of introduction to it. The [presentation] doesn't focus on that; but because it doesn't, it allows you to go "Oh my God; these people were amazing, and he recognized that very early on, in the 1830s, and was painting them." I didn't realize it was that early. And they were still in all their power and glory; and now they're gone. So that's very poignant to me; that brought it home to me.

The Seminoles [in my home state of Florida] were downtrodden, and I think they were looked down upon. And we have pushed them so far out into the Everglades. ... So they have really, just like most Indians, been pushed aside. For whatever reason, we have looked down our nose at the American Indian

### *Family Bonding*

Several parents indicated that they appreciated having an activity that all family members could enjoy together, which they saw as a rare opportunity in an art museum:

*OP&A: Did you get anything out of that presentation?*

Absolutely. Number one, it engages my daughter, so I feel that the experience is for the whole family, and not just for me; that's important.

When museums decide to do a family event, it is so rare that you get swamped—and then it is not so enjoyable. So if you do this regularly, it would be a godsend.

I like to do things that are unusual; I don't like just to stay on the playground with the kids.

I'm a painter and I exhibit work, and I've always heard about this museum. [My daughter] wasn't too keen about it. ... [But she enjoyed this cart presentation] because there was someone interacting with her and interested in her. That's a relationship that she can have right away. [Ordinarily,] she can't develop relationships with the things I'm interested in.

## *Imaginative Experiences*

Several adults also reported having imaginative experiences as they looked on at an Art a la Cart presentation:

It just takes you back in time. It educates you about how [the Native Americans] lived, how they dressed, how they traded, how they got their food. It just broadens the horizon for you.

I was surprised to learn someone followed Lewis and Clark's trail to try to document the things in those paintings. It makes those paintings much more meaningful. You can try to imagine what happened during his trip, during each painting.

## **Time of Presentation**

The study team observers saw little behavioral evidence (for example, expressions of boredom, fatigue, or wandering attention on the part of children who had initially been attentive) to suggest that any of the presentations were too long for participating children. But the team did initially note what appeared to be some behavioral signs of restlessness among parents during longer presentations. However, none of the parents who talked to the study team complained about the length of the presentation, and in the few cases where the length of the presentation was explicitly discussed, adult interviewees had no complaints. For example, the following exchange took place with parents who had appeared somewhat weary during an unusually long presentation:

*OP&A: How was that in terms of length?*

Father: As long as it's hands-on, it doesn't really matter. If [the presenters] get the kids involved, [the kids] can stay there and be captivated a little longer. But if you were just *talking*, I think the kids would go "uhhhhhh..." [*sound of boredom*].

*OP&A: But how about for you—for the parents?*

Mother: The time was good.

Father: I like it longer, because you get more.

## **Suggestions**

The study team would not characterize anything it heard from adult interviews as a complaint. Nevertheless, some interviewees did offer thoughts about how the activity

might be improved. The two suggestions most commonly heard from adults were similar to those heard from children.

The most common of these was the suggestion that the activity include some type of actual art creation. Of course, this would not be possible in the Catlin Gallery, and interviewees recognized this, with several indicating that perhaps such an activity could be taken up in another venue within the museum where the consequences of inevitable “accidents” (with paint, chalk, crayons, markers, drawing pencils, or whatever) would not be catastrophic. The following are typical comments on this possibility:

Mother: Maybe if the children could actually make something, and have something to take away at the end of it all. If there was an actual project that they could work on. I don't know if you have a space like that, where they could go into an art room and create something...

Father: Actually put some paint on the canvass...

*OP&A: Can you think of anything that might be added to presentation like this that would help make it more engaging for the younger ones...?*

Father: I don't know whether it's doable or not: maybe they could try to draw some really simple things. That might grab their attention.

The other area where some constructive criticism was offered concerned the focus of the presentation. A few interviewees mentioned that they found the presentation a bit too skewed toward discussion of the process of painting, at the expense of historical context on the American Indians, biographical information on Catlin, and even exploration of the specific paintings surrounding visitors:

There probably could have been a little bit more about the paintings or the history of what [Catlin] did. [The presenter] didn't talk much about the actual paintings or his work; it was focused on the materials. ... Maybe just a little background on him—you know, [why] he went out in the 1830s and painted all these Indians. I guess she did that a little bit at the beginning—but somehow beef that up a little bit.

I think that the one [idea] kids should get—which I don't think they totally got—is not just the nuances of how this fellow had to travel, but also the big picture. That there was a big problem at the time and that this big problem was that the Indians were being hurt; and this man was frightened that [the Indians'] culture would disappear and that nobody would ever see what he thought was a really fantastic thing. Then everything else can flow from that. That one story line.

## **OBSERVATIONAL FINDINGS**

### **Operational Specifics**

During the course of the testing period, the study team offered comments and suggestions on several operational issues, such as seated versus standing presentations, the placement of the cart within the Gallery, the length of the presentation, and the height of the easel relative to the children. All of these were addressed in some form over the course of the testing period.

One of these issues deserves some comments: stretch board assembly and disassembly. Here, concerns about minor accidents (with splinters, dropping or swinging boards, and so on) run headlong into the observation that children seemed to find stretch board assembly one of the more engaging parts of the presentation. In almost all groups, children immediately got down on the floor to assemble the stretch frame, in many cases with obvious relish. The compromise of offering the children a single sample frame edge seemed to elicit less engagement. Perhaps the best solution is therefore to allow children to assemble the stretch board themselves, but to ensure that this takes place flat on the floor from beginning to end—which greatly reduces the risks relative to the alternative of having many tiny pairs of hands manipulating wooden boards in three dimensions. Disassembly poses greater risks, with the possibility of stuck boards flying apart suddenly and unpredictably as participants tug at them from various angles; it is therefore probably best left entirely in the hands of the presenter.

### **Artwork Security**

The greatest concern among some at SAAM about Art a la Cart pertains to the safety of artwork. This is a legitimate issue whenever children and original artworks come into proximity. However, it is not clear to the study team why this concern would be greater with regard to a children's group activity than with regard to the summed activities of the

same children wandering through the museum separately. Indeed, the study team would suggest that artwork in the Catlin Gallery during an Art a la Cart presentation is *more* safe from the depredations of young visitors than art elsewhere in the museum. In the former case, two staff persons are present to keep an eye on the children; by contrast, at any given time, many other galleries are completely unsupervised.

Following this reasoning, the study team believes that once the decision has been made to allow children into the museum at all, an activity such as Art a la Cart does not add significant additional risk to the artwork as a whole—assuming, of course, that cart presenters are responsible and properly trained. If greater security is required, it would be a simple matter to set up rope or rail barriers in front of the art in the Catlin Gallery during presentations.

However, there is one caveat the study team must add. Parents quite frequently took photographs of their children as they participated in Art a la Cart, raising the possibility of the Catlin paintings receiving additional exposure to flashes as a result of this activity.<sup>9</sup> This might require the posting of particularly prominent warnings against flash photography in the Catlin Gallery during presentations.

If the fundamental concern is not with the immediate dangers to the Catlin artwork during cart presentations, but rather the more general worry that the activity will, in the minds of the participating children, subtly undermine the “no touching” taboo, this too can be explicitly addressed. For example, presentations could easily incorporate a brief mention—reiterated at both beginning and end, if necessary—of the important distinction between cart objects and the artworks themselves. (“Items on the cart are for you to touch and explore, but please don’t touch any of the museum’s art itself. It is very fragile and valuable.”) Indeed, this might be a good opportunity to provide a lesson in art museum etiquette that children could carry with them into other galleries and museums.

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<sup>9</sup> The problem is usually ignorance of the museum’s policy on flash photography, forgetting to turn off a camera’s auto flash feature, or, in some particularly pathetic cases—including that of one author of this study—simply not knowing *how* to disable an auto flash.

## Planning for Worst-Case Scenarios

In eight days of observing, the study team saw only one presentation that qualified as an unmitigated disaster. The participating children—two siblings who appeared to be about 8-10 years old—were hyperactive, inattentive, and prone to wandering off. A parent was present, but seemed unwilling or unable to control the kids. In the study team’s judgment, the presenter handled a difficult situation with considerable skill. Nonetheless, observing this presentation prompted the study team to consider whether training for cart presenters systematically addresses “worst-case scenarios” and how to handle them. What if a child is unruly or rude? What if a child bullies other participants? What if a child is particularly careless with touchable objects? What if a child seems inclined to touch the paintings?

Given that there are typically two museum personnel present, the study team would suggest a “good cop/ bad cop” division of labor during the presentation. In this scenario, the main presenter would refrain from efforts to control or place limits on the children, striving instead to win them over with friendliness and helpfulness. The support person, in addition to assisting with aspects of the presentation such as setting up and breaking down the stretch board, would be primarily responsible for maintaining order by firmly intervening to let children know if they are acting inappropriately.<sup>10</sup>

Also, it should be noted that it is not necessary to offer the presentation to *all* family groups that cross the path of an Art a la Cart recruiter in the halls of the museum—or even, for that matter, to all family groups that pass through the Catlin Gallery. If children in a particular group appear especially rambunctious, indifferent, or uncontrolled, it might be wisest not to approach that group at all. Likewise, presentations can always be shortened in mid-stream if children are misbehaving or clearly uninterested.

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<sup>10</sup> The study team noted that the two-person presentation arrangement was highly desirable in another respect. If a lone presenter had to wait for families to wander into the Catlin Gallery, the cart would be seriously underutilized. Having one person to go out into the museum’s halls to “recruit” families ensures that the cart spends less time sitting idly in a gallery without children. If some personnel are uncomfortable in this recruitment role, they should perhaps be aware that a number of parents with whom the study team spoke were in fact pleased someone approached them to tell them there was an interactive activity for kids.



## Differing Presentation Dynamics and Styles

Every presentation had a slightly different dynamic, emerging from the unique combination of presenter, participants, and circumstances. On the basis of observation alone, some presentations *appeared* more successful, in the sense of children demonstrating more outward signs of engagement and interest—asking and answering questions, examining touchable objects carefully, and so on. However, appearances are not always a reliable barometer of interest and impact. For example, when study team members interviewed children after presentations that *appeared* less successful, they sometimes found that the participating children were simply shy and retiring by nature, and that their failure to exhibit as many outward expressions of engagement did not necessarily denote a lack of interest. Indeed, in some cases, parents assured the interviewer that their children got more out of the presentation than they were likely to say to a mysterious stranger holding a recording device.

In the eleven days of observation, the study team had the opportunity to witness a wide variety of presentation styles. The study team did not attempt to reach any consensus about who was more effective; not only was the number of presentations by any given presenter too small to form such judgments, but every style of presentation had its advantages and disadvantages. The study team sees no need to standardize presentations. To the contrary, the team would suggest that the overall success of the cart is maximized to the extent that individual presenters go with the personal style with which they feel most confident and comfortable, and retain the flexibility to adjust the presentation to specific circumstances (such as the age, size, and extroversion of the participating group).

However, opportunities for systematic interchange among presenters would potentially be valuable for all. Familiarity with what others do broadens the range of pedagogical tools at each presenter's disposal, and different tools may work better for different audiences. For example, while the literature on informal museum education generally holds that a facilitated (inquiry-based) approach works better with children than a didactic (lecturing) approach, when faced with a particularly shy and quiet group, a presenter might wish to

shift somewhat in the latter direction, reserving the interactive dimension of the presentation for touching objects rather than question-and-answer exchanges.

Among some of the contrasts the study team observed in various presenters' styles were the following:

- *“Telling a story” versus “engaging in a discussion.”* As mentioned above, the literature recommends an inquiry-based approach to informal learning in museums. However, the study team would not advise imposing such an approach on presenters who are more comfortable with telling a story. Indeed, one presenter in particular gave lecture-type presentations that study team observers judged to be quite effective and well-received by the children.
- *Sitting versus a standing.* A few presenters sat on the floor with the children for most of the presentation; several stood the whole time; and many were somewhere in the middle, getting down to the children's level at a few strategic points in the presentation such as mounting the canvass on the stretch board. Conducting a presentation from a seated position did appear to have certain advantages, such as encouraging the children themselves to sit, and therefore to be more comfortable and less fidgety.<sup>11</sup> But again, the study team would not say that one approach was categorically superior to the other; some very well-received presentations were given by standing presenters. Moreover, the study team gathers that it takes a certain type of individual to be physically and psychologically at ease when sitting among children, and most cart presenters cannot be expected to be so inclined.
- *Stationary versus moving.* Most presenters remained anchored to the cart throughout the whole presentation, although perhaps encouraging the kids to look at a particular painting to observe some detail relevant to the discussion—the thin

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, presenters can invite the children to sit down during the presentation even if they themselves remained standing. Also, a stool might be used by older presenters who would not be physically comfortable sitting on the floor.

layers of color, the palette or canvass tacks in the portrait of Catlin, and so on. However, a few presenters were more mobile, moving to different paintings to illustrate points. The latter approach had the advantage of drawing the surrounding artwork more deeply into the presentation.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, since all of the touchable objects were situated on the cart, this approach required repeated trips back to “home base.”

- *Presenter as “teacher” versus presenter as “big sister/brother.”* Most presenters assumed the demeanor of a kindly elementary school teacher; a few approached their task more in the style of an older sibling helping out a kid brother or sister. The distinction was not invariably a function of the presenter’s age; many of the younger presenters played the teacher role.

In all of these cases, it is not the study team’s intention to recommend one approach over the other. Rather, the team merely wishes to point out interesting differences in style that it observed, and to suggest that future Art a la Cart presenter training should encourage an awareness of such variations—and their relative pros and cons—among presenters.

One last observation about presentation style is that presenters typically had to contend with the challenge of keeping as many children as possible actively engaged, despite sometimes considerable differences in age, knowledge, and extroversion among those participating in a given presentation. In some cases, the study team observed that there was a tendency of one or two children to dominate the presentation unless the presenter acted to counter this. Usually, the presenter was aware of this, and in most cases it was managed reasonably well. But once again, this might be an area where sharing of ideas among presenters would be fruitful, as some were particularly adept in this area.

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<sup>12</sup> Recall that a few adult interviewees suggested the need for greater integration of the surrounding artwork into the presentation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study team believes that Art a la Cart offers a promising approach to engaging children with art. It appeared to greatly enrich the museum visit for a substantial fraction of the interviewed family groups who participated in it.

Specifically, the study team reached the following conclusions:

- Children of all ages generally had little difficulty grasping the main messages of the cart presentation, and often learned something on top about Catlin, art and the process of creating it, Native American culture, or American history. Further, children generally had fun while learning.
- The cart presentation helped children to relate to, understand, and appreciate Catlin's art better than they would have in its absence.
- The success of the cart in its learning objectives was largely a function of its ability to engage children through
  - Appealing to multiple senses, especially the tactile exploration of touchable objects;
  - Encouraging personal interaction with the cart presenter; and
  - Connecting to children's personal interests, memories, and experiences.
- Adults who observed or participated also generally found Art a la Cart to be informative and enjoyable.
- Art museums can be difficult for children, and parents appreciated having an interactive activity to help their children relate to the art.
- Cart presenters employed a variety of pedagogical techniques and styles, all of which had strong points.
- While participants' enthusiasm and engagement varied widely, most presentations appeared to at least minimally engage and interest young audiences.

- The only areas where improvements were suggested involved
  - More (and more varied types of) interactive experiences; and
  - A greater focus on history, Native American culture, and the specific works in the Catlin Gallery (relative to the technical aspects of field painting).

Only the future can tell what the children who participated in the cart will remember from their experience, or if they will approach art or museums differently as a result.

However, several children and their parents did express their present belief that the cart was a memorable experience, or that it is likely to affect the way the participating children will think about art, history, or museums in the future.

The responses of adults also suggested that an activity such as Art a la Cart could be a valuable resource for *all* audiences in selected galleries of the museum. For example, rather than engaging in discrete presentations specifically geared to children, volunteers might be stationed in certain galleries at peak visitation times with relevant objects and informational resources, and charged with striking up informal discussions with visitors who seem interested in the gallery subject. (This was the approach used on the first day of Art a la Cart pilot testing.) This might be explored as an alternative to the traditional use of volunteer resources primarily to conduct lecturing tours of museum highlights or specific exhibitions.

On the sensitive issue of artwork security, the study team acknowledges that concerns in this area must be taken very seriously. However, the study team believe these concerns are manageable, and should not prevent SAAM from developing and implementing activities such as Art a la Cart that promise to greatly enhance many families' appreciation and enjoyment of the museum.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Future Development

- Subject to personnel and other resource limitations, SAAM educators should consider
  - Introducing Art a la Cart as a permanent offering in the Catlin Gallery at peak times.
  - Expanding the model of formal activity cart presentations for children to other galleries.
  - Exploring the possibility of using a modified cart model as an informational resource for visitors of *all* ages in selected galleries.

### Presentation

- SAAM educators should consider the following modifications of the standard cart presentation “script”:
  - Insertion of a clear statement of art museum etiquette, explaining to children why cart objects may be touched and art on the walls may not (e.g., value, fragility, irreplaceability).
  - The inclusion of more material on historical and cultural context, relative to material on the technical side of field painting in Catlin’s day.
- If possible, anecdotes about (the individuals or tribes in, or circumstances surrounding) specific paintings in the Catlin Gallery should be provided in background materials to presenters, to be drawn upon at presenters’ discretion.
- Touchable objects might be augmented to include Native American artifacts similar to those shown in Gallery paintings, in addition to the Catlin-era painting supplies currently offered.
- Although the study team saw no evidence that anyone’s patience or attention was stretched by an overlong presentation, presenters should nonetheless alert parents to the approximate length of the presentation before it begins.

- Assembly of the stretch board should always be done flat on the floor; participants should not be involved in taking the stretch board apart at the end of the presentation.
- Presenters should encourage children to sit down for the presentations if they wish to do so.

### **Presentation Styles**

- Presenters should be encouraged to watch presentations by their peers.
- Mechanisms should be created to facilitate the informal exchange of ideas and suggestions among presenters—for example, occasional informal coffee-and-doughnuts workshops or a web-based forum.

### **Training**

- Training of future cart presenters should include
  - Observation of and discussions with more experienced presenters.
  - Some consideration of “worst-case scenarios” and how to deal with them.

### **Artwork Security**

- In the interest of maximizing artwork security, the following should be considered:
  - Temporary, removal barriers (security ropes or rails) in front of the art in the Catlin Gallery during presentations.
  - Temporary, removal written notices concerning flash photography in the Catlin Gallery during presentations.
  - Maintaining two personnel in the Gallery for the duration of all presentations, and assigning a role to the support person that focuses on providing security and maintaining discipline (if necessary).
  - The incorporation of a short statement on art museum etiquette in all presentations (see “Presentation” heading above).

# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION GUIDES

## Qualitative Interview Guide

(Modify as appropriate to age of interviewee; probe short answers)

### Background

- Where are you from? Is this your first visit (SI/SAAM)? What brought you to this museum today? Do you like art? Do you like history?

### General

- How would you describe your **experience in this museum** so far? What did you like best? What did you like least? Why?

### Cart-specific

- Please describe your **experience with the activity cart**. Was there anything different about it, in comparison with other things you have seen here?
- What do you think was the **main theme** of the cart presentation? (Actively probe short answers)
- Did you **learn** anything from the cart? What did you learn? How did you learn it?
- Does it make you **think differently** about the paintings in this room (art in general, art museums, etc.)? How?
- Does seeing this cart presentation make you want to **do** anything? (Prompts: Does it make you want to learn more about the art or artist? Does it make you want to see more art?)

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## Observation Guide

**Observer:**

**Date and Time:**

**People at cart at beginning of presentation:** Children \_\_\_\_ Adults \_\_\_\_

**People at cart at end of presentation:** Children \_\_\_\_ Adults \_\_\_\_

**General levels of interaction:**

<b>Verbal<sup>13</sup>:</b>	Low	Medium	High
<b>Non-Verbal<sup>14</sup>:</b>	Low	Medium	High

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<sup>13</sup> Asking or answering questions; making solicited or unsolicited comments, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Pointing, taking photos, smiling/laughing, general demeanor (expressions of restlessness, interest, excitement, etc.) etc.



**General Observations:**

Are people lingering at cart to talk with docent after presentation?  
Are people lingering in gallery and observing paintings after cart presentation?  
Are groups talking among themselves about what they've seen?

**Comments:**

## APPENDIX B: BASIC FIGURES

	<i>Basic Statistics:</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b><i>Presentations</i></b>	<b>Total number of days<sup>15</sup></b>	10
	<b>Total number of presentations<sup>16</sup></b>	45
	<b>Total number of visitors served<sup>17</sup></b>	254
	<b>Total number of children, early teenagers</b>	157
	<b>Total number of adults</b>	97
	<b>Average number of children/presentation</b>	3
	<b>Average number of adults/ presentation</b>	2
<b><i>Interviews</i></b>	<b><i>Total number of interviews</i></b>	<b>47</b>
	<b><i>Residence of interviewed groups<sup>18</sup></i></b>	
	<b>Washington D. C. Metropolitan Area &amp; Virginia</b>	13
	<b>United States (outside the metro area)</b>	26
	<b>Other Countries</b>	2
	<b>Unknown</b>	6
	<b><i>Participants Total</i></b>	<b>111</b>
	<b>Children/early teenagers</b>	77
	<b>Adults</b>	34
	<b>Girls</b>	37
	<b>Boys</b>	40
<b>Females</b>	21	
<b>Males</b>	13	
	<b><i>Race of interviewees</i></b>	
	<b>White, non-Hispanic</b>	81
	<b>Other</b>	40

<sup>15</sup> First testing day did not include formal presentations, and is not included in this count.

<sup>16</sup> Presentations observed by study team; because of late arrivals and early departures, this number falls a few presentations short of the actual total.

<sup>17</sup> Sum of individuals *present and clearly participating at the end of presentations*. This number is approximate and conservative for two reasons: (1) some people watched most of a presentation, but left before the end; and (2) if it was unclear whether someone in the Gallery was participating, the study team did *not* count that person. The drop-out rate among people present and participating at the beginning of presentations was low. The study team counted a total of less than 30 people who left in the middle of a presentation.

<sup>18</sup> In a few cases, an interviewed group included one person with a residence other than that of other group members. This usually involved one out of area visitor with a group of locals.