Accessing your creativity to see your museum differently

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The power of both these roles is in the choices we make.

Image Source: Know Your Own Bone,
http://colleendileen.com
Choices = Connections

- Color and tone
- Proximity and juxtaposition
- Size and weight

“Juxtaposition” by Richard Croft, creative commons license

Practicing Creativity

- No matter what your role in your organization is, there is need for creativity.
- Taking time to participate in a creative activity, alone or in a group, can shake up your thinking and bring you new energy.

From http://thereconstructionists.org/
What is Ekphrasis?

Art created in reaction to or inspired by another piece of art, frequently in a different form

(AKA fanfiction, fanart & the Renaissance)
Franz Marc's Blue Horses
by Mary Oliver

I step into the painting of the four blue horses. I am not even surprised that I can do this.

One of the horses walks toward me. His blue nose noses me lightly. I put my arm over his blue mane, not holding on, just commingling. He allows me my pleasure. Franz Marc died a young man, shrapnel in his brain. I would rather die than explain to the blue horses what war is. They would either faint in horror, or simply find it impossible to believe. I do not know how to thank you, Franz Marc. Maybe our world will grow kinder eventually. Maybe the desire to make something beautiful is the piece of God that is inside each of us. Now all four horses have come closer, are bending their faces toward me as if they have secrets to tell. I don’t expect them to speak, and they don’t. If being so beautiful isn’t enough, what could they possibly say?

Hear Mary Oliver read her poem at:
https://soundcloud.com/onbeing/franz-marc's-blue-horses-by
But I don’t write poetry!

Poetry Forms for ‘Non-Poets’

- Found poetry
- Deeply detailed description using all senses
- Lists
- Comparisons
- Questions
- Dialogue/Personification
- Concrete to abstract
- Haiku
- Rhyme and meter are ‘black tie optional’
Longfellow’s Ekphrastic Poems (a few!)

- “A Dutch Picture” (painting)
- “The Four Princesses at Wilna” (photograph)
- “From my Arm-Chair” (furniture)
- “The Iron Pen” (commemorative historical object)
- “Sonnet on Mrs. Kemble’s Reading from Shakespeare” (theater)

Your Task: Find Your Art

- Find 1-2 art works in your space (historic house, gallery, archive) that draw you in.
  - Any medium!
  - The space you are sitting in also counts
- Brainstorm a list of words and phrases provoked by each work.
- Take photos for future reference if you need/want.
- Bring your notes to your favorite thinking spot to write your poem draft(s).
- Revise as necessary and as it gives you pleasure.
How do we get there?

- Visual Thinking Strategies
  - What do you see?
  - What makes you say that?
  - What else?
- Be aware of your reactions, artists’ choices

Possible connections

- Theme
- Visual qualities
  - Tone
  - Texture
  - Composition
  - Color
  - Movement
- Emotional reaction
- Resonances (or dissonances!)
  - Personal memories
  - References to artistic/literary tradition
  - Historical context
  - Using one as metaphor/frame for the other
  - Timelines (cause & effect, before & after)
Your turn!

You will have 5 minutes to look at the following artwork, brainstorm, doodle, draft, and discover.

If you are interested in sharing, great! It is by no means required, and this is a judgement free zone. We ❤️ first drafts.

Bearden’s art is exceptional for the way in which it expands the jazz and blues idioms into the visual realm through the medium of collage. In *Tomorrow I May Be Far Away*, the artist created the visual counterpart of improvisational jazz intervals—marked by shifts in scale, breaks in color and pattern, and disarranged perspectives—and employed repetition, a characteristic of the blues, through the juxtaposition of cuttings from his own hand-painted papers along with those from magazines, catalogues, wrapping papers or wallpapers, and at least one art reproduction—a snippet of a photo reproduction of Henri Rousseau’s *The Dream* (1910), from the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The result is a rich and varied surface, further enhanced by the artist with charcoal and graphite additions.

Bearden said: “People have asked me why I use the collage. I find that when some detail such as a hand or an eye is taken out of its original context and placed in a different space and form configuration, it acquires a different quality. In such a process the meaning is extended.”

*Text and image from the National Gallery, Washington DC*
Henri Matisse painted Open Window, Collioure in the summer of 1905, when he and André Derain worked together near the Spanish border. The light-filled scene is vibrant and inviting. Blue-hulled boats float on pink waves below a sky banded with turquoise, pink, and periwinkle. These unnatural colors—Derain would later liken them to “sticks of dynamite”—provoked an outrage that year at the Salon d’Automne in Paris.

Eyewitness accounts tell of laughter emanating from the room where this painting hung with similarly bold works by Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, and others. Gertrude Stein, avant-garde writer and collector, reported that some people scratched at the canvases, and a critic, noting the presence of a Renaissance-style statuette in the center of the room, quipped, “Well, well, Donatello among the wild beasts (fauves).” Soon these artists were being called the fauves.

Text and image from the National Gallery, Washington DC

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**Refining and Redirecting**

- How do you get a better poem?
  - Practice
  - Conversation
  - The punchier word
  - The succinct phrase

- How does this help your daily museum practice?
  - Exhibit labels
  - Program ideas & descriptions
  - Tours & visitor interactions
  - Marketing language
  - Why you went into museums in the first place
Poetry with Visitors

- Programs for various audiences, collaborative or individual
  - Student groups
  - Intergenerational groups
  - Adult learners
- Label invitations & interactive elements
- Evaluation & feedback
Further Reading

Poetry
- “Shirt” by Robert Pinsky
- “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning
- “Some Questions You Might Ask” by Mary Oliver
- “American Sonnet” by Billy Collins
- “Anne Hathaway” by Carol Ann Duffy
- “California Prodigal” by Maya Angelou

Articles
- “Everybody Should Write Poetry” by Peggy Rosenthal
- “Reading a Poem: 20 Strategies” by Mark Yakich

Thank you!

Things I’ve written about creative writing & museums:
- “Art Heists for Art’s Sake”
  https://allthesins.co.uk/2017/02/16/art-heists-for-arts-sake/
- “5 Tips on Using Museums for Inspiration”
  https://allthesins.co.uk/2017/03/02/5-tips-on-using-museums-for-inspiration/
- “And I must follow if I can”
  https://allthesins.co.uk/2017/04/06/and-i-must-follow-if-i-can/