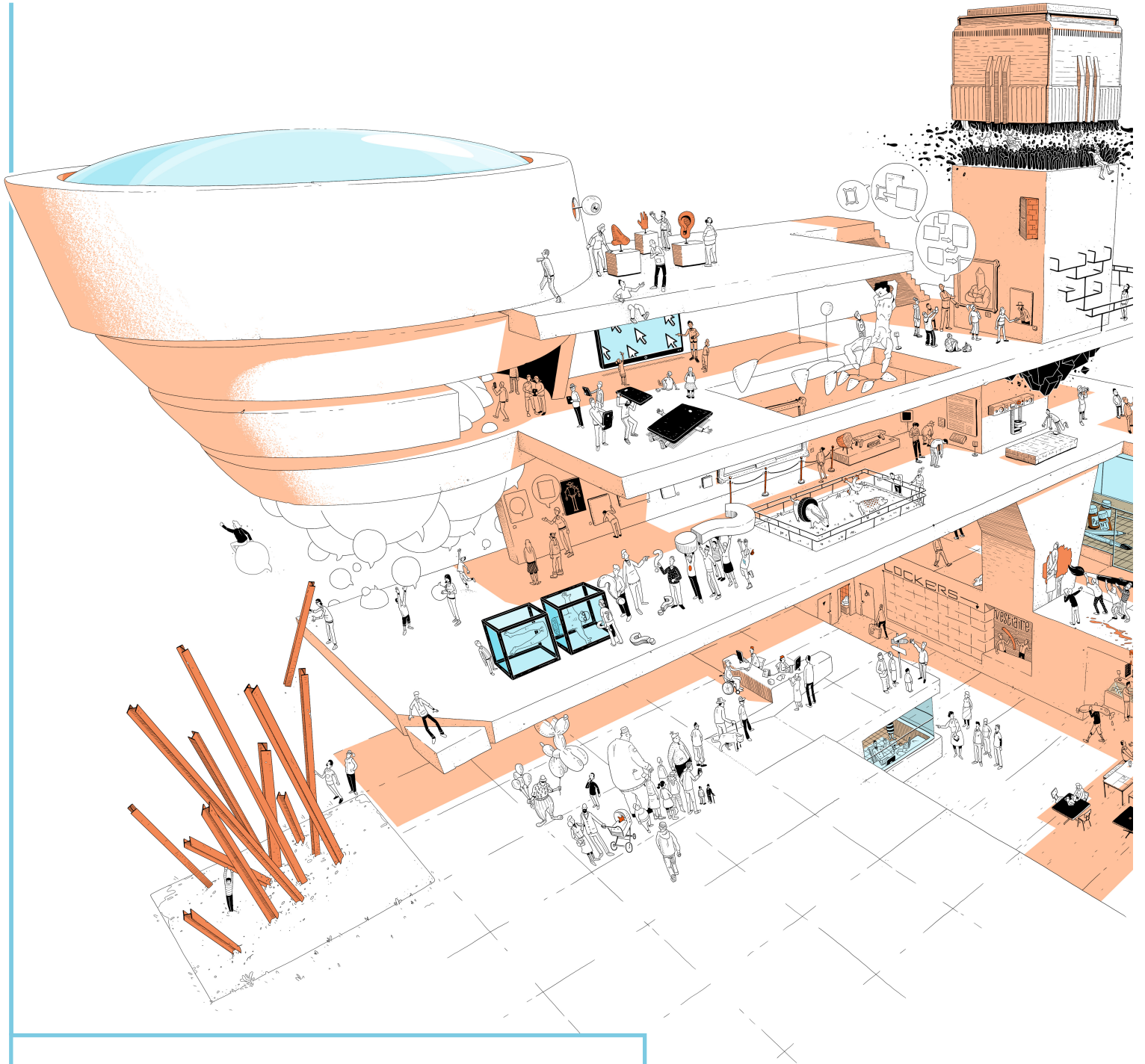


age
10-14
years

YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR ART MUSEUM?

HOW TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VISUAL LEARNING



This document is part of the RETINA research project (2018). The aim of the project was to support art and design museums in defining strategies to make them more attractive for the hard-to-reach audience of young teenagers (age 10-14). More specifically, the research explored opportunities to support the visual literacy competences of young people in museums. This was done by organizing co-design workshops with over 40 young people in museums in Belgium and abroad. The results of the project are summarized in this booklet.

Visitors' experience

Curate for all ages, not only for adult visitors

Why?

Youngsters have different expectations and different interests than adults.

Suggestions:

- Be prepared. Be informed about the skills and knowledge of specific age groups and provide information that is adjusted.
- Make their experience an adventurous one. Combine different materials and combine old and new, big and small, the familiar and the unusual/weird, etc.



What's in a number?

Don't treat youngsters as a homogeneous group

Why?

A 10-year-old is not a 12-year-old and a 12-year-old is not a 14-year-old.

Suggestions:

- Make different subgroups according to age and formulate age specific expectations when developing booklets, activities, etc.
- Young people of the same age have different personalities (like adults). There are dreamers, thinkers, doers, talkers, etc. Differentiate between these types by giving them diverse tools.



What do you say?

Stimulate the youngsters to communicate

Why?

Human interaction is key when experiencing art. A conversation can make an interpretation richer.

Above that, young people love to talk and hear what others think. They love interaction, they love being social.

Suggestions:

- Don't avoid digital tools. Make sure young people can use digital devices that connect with the artworks/museum and communicate about it (e.g. instant messaging).
- However, do not focus on wall texts and digital tools exclusively. Involve the human aspect as well.
- E.g. show them that it is ok to ask questions to museum guards. Guards should be trained for this and they should learn how to engage with this age group.
- E.g. emphasize that their words are just as good as your words when discussing art.
- Give examples, introduce specific discussions, gradually give new information, gradually make assignments more difficult.
- In case of a group visit or workshop: work with small groups and monitor participation in the groups.



Put the 'muse' back in museum

Use your museum as a tool for visual creativity

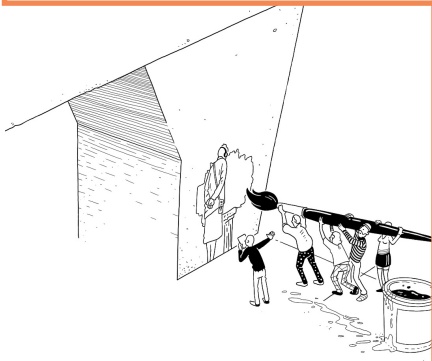
Why?

Youngsters like to 'do and make stuff'. A museum was originally a seat for the muses. But how welcome do the muses feel in a building that does not enhance creativity?

Suggestions:

Offer specific (short!) assignments with well-defined expectations, for example:

- Encourage youngsters to blend different observations.
E.g. ask them to make a Warhol painting in an impressionist style.
- Enhance divergent thinking by looking at a problem or topic from different perspectives.
E.g. the artist-approach, the curator-approach, the visitor-approach, etc.
- Use restrictions, challenges and barriers in a clever way.
E.g. challenge them to create an artwork with only a spoon and paperclips.
- Make sure that production and critical reflection go hand in hand.



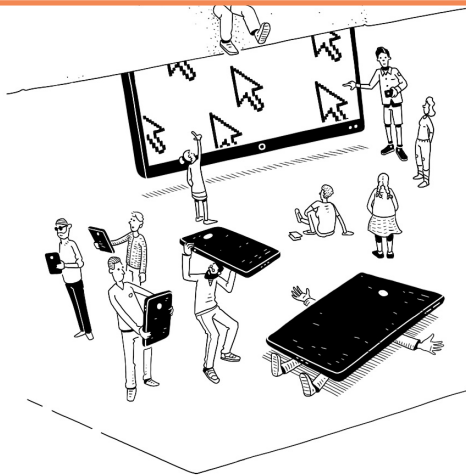
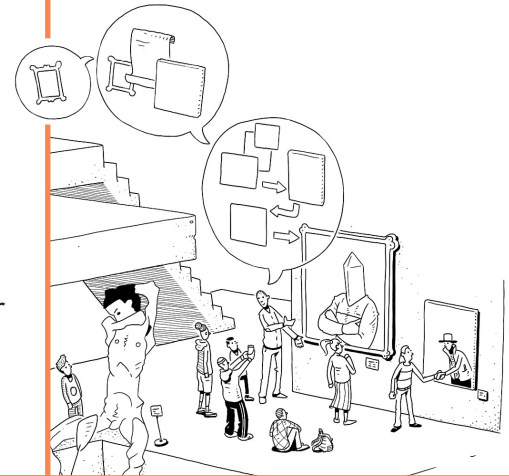
Provide context and stories

Why?

Youngsters love to know the context and are often intrigued by embeddedness. Meanwhile, they are uninterested in contexts that consist of 'academic' timelines, dates, factual information, artistic jargon, etc.

Suggestions:

- Explain the role of museums in society and the mission of your museum.
- Explain how a museum works (how you collect, buy and sell, how you present, who works in the museum). Take youngsters "behind the scenes".
- Provide a general context in terms of specific information (time and place) and, above all, good stories. Present such context also visually. This way, you show that the visual aspect is key. Often there tends to be a focus on the written word or on oral analysis. Don't solemnly focus on the understanding of the artwork.
- Provide background information on history, literature, religion, mythology, popular culture, etc. Also focus on issues of the self. On life itself. Let them see the "big picture".
- Adding simulation/stimulation/multisensorial dimensions to artworks might help contextualisation.



Use digital technology, but don't use it because youngsters like digital stuff

Why?

While the use of digital devices can certainly be attractive and must not be overlooked these devices can, however, also be distracting.

Suggestions:

- Be aware that the museum experience of young people is partly shaped by the internet. Youngsters are able to see what is in a museum before they are even there. Therefore, you have to create added value for the actual visit. The use of technology in the museum can make the visit more real!
- However, don't turn the museum into an amusement park of digital devices. It will take the focus away from the core business of a museum. So limit the time that youngsters can spend on a digital device and make sure that the devices are meaningful.
- Clearly explain what the digital devices are for, not just how they work.
- Be aware that some devices lead to specific expectations (e.g. an iPad is for gaming and fun).
- Take another look at the digital devices you already use. Often there are already technological mediums present in the museum but they lack a child-friendly option.

S(t)imulate

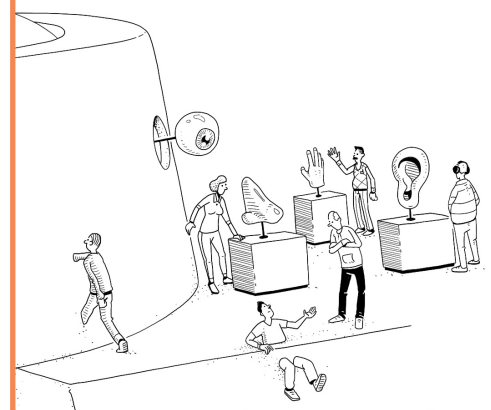
Engage the different senses and the body of the young visitors

Why?

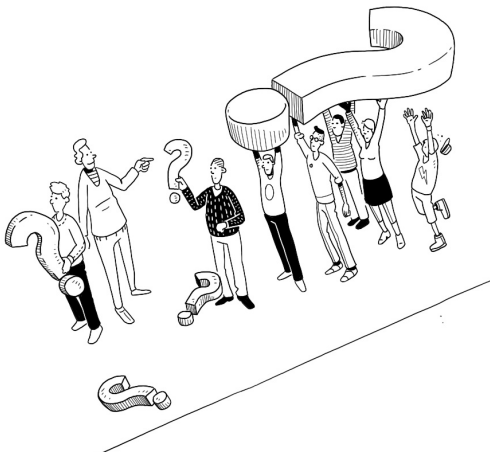
Youngsters like to move, they like to run, they like to use their bodies, use their senses, ... they like to experience.

Suggestions:

- Looking is more than opening your eyes. Challenge youngsters with specific visual assignments.
E.g. look for a detail, look for something nobody else will notice, complete an artwork yourself, try to find an artwork based on a piece of music or a poem, figure out how a title influences the way we look.
- Make them look from different perspectives.
E.g. lying on the floor, sitting down, viewing from above, etc.
- Let them experience how the use of different senses can influence the meaning of an artwork.



Are there any questions? Actively ask for questions



Why?

A deep conversation is most likely driven by good questions.

Suggestions:

- Ask questions in order to get questions back.
- Ask reflective and open-ended questions (not the typical: “do you like this artwork?”).
- Don't act like an expert. One of the best questions to ask young people is a question even you don't know the answer to. In other words, offer an open framework for their interpretation. That way, the Q&A is not a test but rather an expression of willingness to learn.
- Use Socratic questioning to lead to critical thinking.
- Questions should not only be about the works of art. Questions can also be about the museum. About society. About life. Often, questions about life (their lives) are the best starting point for a conversation about art.

Space matters Use space for looking and learning

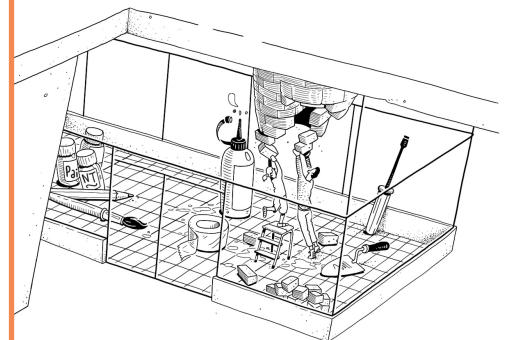
Why?

Because space is important in order to maximise learning potential; it can be a catalyst or an obstacle in the learning process.

Suggestions:

If you take the children to a specific room or studio within the museum, make sure:

- there is a clear connection between the studio and the museum;
- the studio has the look and feel of a museum (not too business-like);
- there is art hanging in the studio (posters, images, objects, etc.);
- there is enough space to move, walk, talk, breathe, dream;
- there is ample daylight and lots of fresh air. Large windows can also connect the museum with the outside world (and vice versa, everybody loves to peek in);
- there are plenty of materials but no distractions (e.g. mobile phones being charged, bags on the floor, etc.).



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More information on the project:
www.kuleuven.be/retina --- lode.vermeersch@kuleuven.be

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