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**Dialogue in the Galleries: Developing a Tour about Contemporary Art for
the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

DIALOGUE IN THE GALLERIES: DEVELOPING A TOUR ABOUT CONTEMPORARY ART FOR THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Elizabeth Reilly-Brown, Masters of Arts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011

Director: Dr. Margaret Lindauer,
Associate Professor, Museum Studies Coordinator, Department of Art History

This museum thesis project considers the challenges involved in developing engaging museum tours. The purpose of this project was to develop a fifty-minute, guided gallery tour that uses inquiry-based instruction to engage participants in dialogue and critical thinking about artworks. The tour was designed specifically for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond, Virginia, using artworks selected from the museum's twenty-first-century art collection that relate to the theme hybridity. This project contributes to the museum studies field by exemplifying how gallery tours can stimulate active learning, encourage visitors to find meaning in artworks, and form their own conclusions about objects in the museum. The project provides a model for integrating inquiry-generated dialogue within the gallery tour structure. Finally, it demonstrates that dialogue-based teaching can be used with teens and adults, audiences

that some educators perceive as more reticent than younger learners to engage with this style of education.

Introduction

This museum thesis project considers the challenges involved in developing engaging museum tours. The purpose of this project was to develop a fifty-minute, guided gallery tour that uses inquiry-based instruction to engage participants in dialogue and critical thinking about artworks.¹ The tour was designed for two visitor audiences: a teen school group (grades nine through twelve) and adults who take advantage of regularly offered opportunities at the museum. The tour was created specifically for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond, Virginia, using artworks selected from the museum's twenty-first-century art collection that relate to the theme hybridity.² The report of this project describes the process of development, and includes the written account of the tour as an appendix.

Since the 1970s, emphasis on the responsibility of museums to serve as educational institutions has steadily increased. A 1992 report by the American Association of Museums (AAM), *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, first articulated the organization's dedication to education in its policies. From that point forward, the American Association of Museums considered commitment to education central to museums' public service role and a mandate for

¹ The gallery tour will be designed with the assumption that audiences will be variously heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, educational background, economic status, and sexual orientation. Adult tours at the VMFA are provided to walk-in visitors of any background. The demographic make-up of a tour cannot be predetermined.

² The tour examines hybridity as an intentional artistic strategy. An in-depth definition and discussion of the term is included in the report of this thesis project.

AAM accreditation.³ By meeting standards of best practice, accredited museums gain a “widely recognized seal of approval that brings national recognition to a museum for its commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards, and continued institutional improvement.”⁴ Concurrent with AAM’s increased focus on education, museum professionals and scholars published numerous essays and texts over the last several decades critically examining learning in the museum, and suggesting best methods for its achievement.⁵ One increasingly popular position among scholars and educators suggests that museums ought to move beyond the educational model in which teachers dispense knowledge and facts to students through lecture-style instruction, to embrace a philosophy that fosters active, engaged learning.⁶ In the words of museum studies scholar George Hein, the goal of museum education should be to facilitate “meaning making,” by providing opportunities for visitors to make new and personal connections, expand the scope of their understanding, and express their own interpretations of museum collections.⁷ While many museums have taken efforts to implement this form of pedagogy, according to Pat Villeneuve and Ann Rowson Love,

³ Specified in AAM’s current museum accreditation guidelines: AAM. *Accreditation Program Standards: Characteristics of an Accreditable Museum* (Washington D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2004), 1.

⁴ American Association of Museums, “AAM Accreditation Program,” <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/accred/index.cfm> (accessed March 7, 2011).

⁵ For a comprehensive account of key texts, scholars, and movements in the museum education field from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century, see Eileen Hooper-Greenhill. *Museum and Gallery Education* (London & New York: Leicester University Press, 1991.)

⁶ Steven Weil, “From Being *About* Something to Being *For* Somebody: The Ongoing Transformation of the American Museum,” in *Making Museums Matter*, ed. Steven Weil. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 28-52.

⁷ George Hein, “Is Meaning Making Constructivism? Is Constructivism Meaning Making?,” *The Exhibitionist*. 18, (Fall 1999), 17.

the long-standing tradition of offering lecture-style museum tours remains pervasive.⁸ This thesis project contributes to the field by exemplifying that gallery tours should stimulate active learning, encouraging visitors to find meaning in artworks and form their own conclusions about objects in the museum collection. The project provides a model for integrating inquiry-generated dialogue within the gallery tour structure. Finally, it demonstrates that dialogue-based teaching can be used with teens and adults, audiences that some educators perceive as more reticent than younger learners to engage with this style of education.

From the outset, this project was conceived and carried out with assistance from Celeste Fetta, Manager of Adult and Higher Education at the VMFA. During an interview conducted as part of the planning phases of this project, Fetta noted the relevance of a tour that highlights the museum's collection of twenty-first-century art, which has been under-utilized for educational purposes in recent years.⁹ Fetta explained that some visitors who express feelings of intimidation or discomfort when viewing contemporary art also show interest in developing a greater understanding of artworks made during this period. Thus, the tour is intended to engage participants in discussion and critical thinking about artworks in the VMFA's twenty-first-century collection, enabling them to reach their own conclusions about, and find meaning in, works of contemporary art.

⁸ Pat Villeneuve and Ann Rowson Love, "Rethinking the Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry" in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education In The 21st Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve. (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007), 194.

⁹ Celeste Fetta, interview by author, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA, March 16th, 2010.

By taking on this project, I sought not only to answer a perceived programming need at the VMFA, but also to gain valuable professional experience in the field of museum education. After completing my Masters of Arts degree, I plan to pursue a career as a museum educator. Furthermore, this project provided the opportunity to investigate approaches to programming for two different museum visitor groups, and to present the tour I created to audiences at the VMFA. Finally, it afforded me the practical experience of implementing current museum studies scholarship and art education theory in the museum setting, while also contributing to the field of museum education.

Project Report

The report of this thesis project describes the development of a guided gallery tour. It begins with brief history of the VMFA and an overview of its educational programming. I then describe the educational theory of constructivism that informed the creation of this tour, and the teaching methods of dialogue and inquiry chosen to implement it. The report outlines the selection of artworks for the tour, and the articulation of a theme to provide a theoretical framework in which to consider the works. I also recount my observation of gallery tours at various museums and the conclusions reached. From that research, the report describes the process of writing the tour, beginning with key points and inquiry for each object. Next, I consider the characteristics of teens and adults as museum learners and how tours can best suit their needs. Finally, the report describes my presentation of the tour to audiences at the VMFA and conclusions these opportunities presented.

I. A Brief History of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and an Overview of Its Education Programming

In order to contextualize this project, it is useful to provide a brief history of the VMFA, and an overview of its educational services. The VMFA, as indicated in its mission statement, is a state-supported, privately endowed, educational institution founded in order to collect, preserve, interpret, exhibit, and encourage the study of the

arts.¹⁰ The seed for creating a public art museum for the state of Virginia was planted in 1919, when Judge John Barton Payne, a prominent Virginian politician, donated his collection of fifty paintings to the commonwealth.¹¹ In 1932, following additional gifts of art to the state from private collectors, Payne proposed a campaign to build a museum for this growing art collection. With the assistance of Virginia's governor, John Garland Pollard, funds from private donors and state revenue were raised, and Virginia's General Assembly approved legislation authorizing plans for the museum in March 1934. The VMFA opened on January 16, 1936, in an English Renaissance-style building.

Since then, the VMFA's collection has grown largely out of generous donations like that from Payne, including but not limited to, a collection of Peter Carl Fabergé jeweled objects, donated by Lillian Thomas Pratt in 1947; on-going gifts since 1970 of major examples of French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and British Sporting art from the Paul Mellon family; continued donations of modern and contemporary art, Art Nouveau, Art Deco furniture, glass and other decorative arts from the Sydney and Francis Lewis family; and on-going gifts since the 1970's of African art from Robert and Nancy Nooter. In addition to donations of artwork from individuals, the VMFA collection continues to grow through a program for new acquisitions funded entirely through private patronage.¹² Today, the museum houses an encyclopedic permanent collection containing more than 20,000 objects from cultures worldwide, and spanning roughly 6,000 years. Other significant collections include American art, with works by

¹⁰ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "Virginia Museum of Fine Arts 2007-2008 Annual Report," <http://www.vmfa.mediaroom.state.va.us/annreport2008.pdf> (accessed February 8, 2010): 2.

¹¹ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "About VMFA: History," http://www.vmfa.state.va.us/Visit/About_VMFA/History.aspx (accessed February 10, 2011).

John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer; Ancient American art; Indian and Himalayan art; and an internationally recognized collection of English silver. This thesis project focuses on the museum's growing permanent collection of twenty-first-century art.

Over the years, the museum has undertaken several expansions in order to house, preserve, and exhibit its ever-growing collections. The most recent expansion, unveiled in May 2010, added 165,000 square feet to the museum's pre-existing 380,000 square footage.¹³ Highlights from the expansion include new gallery spaces for the museum's collections and special exhibitions, a museum shop, a café and restaurant, a sculpture garden, a library, a school tour entrance, education studios and resource rooms, and a children's gallery.

In its mission and its activities, the VMFA exemplifies a commitment to education. Examples of the museum's regular educational programming include art historical lectures and symposia, visiting artist lectures, curator-lead gallery talks, workshops for teachers, preschool children's classes, after-school art classes for youth, weekend family events, adult studio art classes, and gallery tours. In addition to education programming conducted on the museum campus, the VMFA also delivers programs and exhibitions through its Office of Statewide Partnerships via a voluntary network of more than 250 nonprofit institutions across Virginia.¹⁴ Through outreach

¹² For more detailed information about art purchases and acquisitions, see the VMFA's most recent Annual Report. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "Virginia Museum of Fine Arts 2007-2008 Annual Report," <http://www.vmfa.mediaroom.state.va.us/annreport2008.pdf> (accessed February 8, 2011).

¹³ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "About VMFA: History," (accessed February 10, 2011).

¹⁴ "Virginia Museum of Fine Arts 2007-2008 Annual Report," : 39.

and on-site educational programming, the museum served more than 270,000 people during the 2007-2008 fiscal year.¹⁵

The VMFA regularly offers three types of guided tours of the museum's permanent collections.¹⁶ Free adult "Walk-In Highlights Tours" are typically delivered twice daily, and three times a day on Thursdays and Fridays, when the museum offers extended evening hours until nine p.m. Groups of adults may also schedule a private "Highlights Tour" for a charge of five dollars per guest. Tours of the permanent collection for school groups of elementary, middle, and high school students are available free of charge. These tours are described on the VMFA's website as "interactive, multidisciplinary programs for students in grades K – 12 that complement the Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools."¹⁷ Tour offerings are designed to correspond to curriculum by grade level, and often revolve around art historical periods or history, such as one tour, "Very Virginia," for fourth and fifth graders that considers the changing cultural landscape of Virginia from the post-Civil War era to the present day. Teachers who contact the museum to organize a school tour may request customized content to reflect specific curriculum connections. The majority of VMFA tours are led by volunteer docents and are fifty minutes long.

¹⁵ According to the VMFA's 2007-2008 Annual Report, the total number of guests served during the 2007-2008 fiscal year was 272,534, including statewide outreach programs but not visitors to the website. These are the most recent statistics available, but the museum's actual service is likely greater, as the statistics reflect a year when much of the museum was closed due to the expansion. Following its grand reopening in 2010, museum attendance rose dramatically but those figures are not yet published. "Virginia Museum of Fine Arts 2007-2008 Annual Report," 44.

¹⁶ The museum also offers other special event tour opportunities, but these reflect the regular tour programming given weekly.

¹⁷ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "Guided Tours for Students," http://www.vmfa.state.va.us/Learn/Educators/Guided_Tours_for_Students/Guided_Tours_for_Students.aspx (accessed February 14, 2011).

The VMFA's education department does not subscribe to one particular educational philosophy to inform programming. However, there are certain expectations and goals that are followed by educators and emphasized during docent training. VMFA docents are taught to deliver tours based upon a lecture-style model.¹⁸ Docent training materials rarely stress inquiry or dialogue, but suggest questions be used when appropriate, focusing specifically on the object of interest and refraining from making personal inquiries that cannot be answered by looking. Not surprisingly, many docents at the VMFA are less comfortable with dialogue and interactive tours.¹⁹ For this reason, I found it necessary to create a tour that fosters active learning through dialogue without alienating docents by radically deviating from the original structure. Thus, this tour was developed with respect to the specific expectations for education programming at the VMFA, and recognizes that such expectations vary from institution to institution.

II. Educational Theory & Teaching Methods

In *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums*, AAM articulates the museum's public service role, arguing it can no longer focus primarily focus on preservation, scholarship and exhibition.²⁰ Rather, AAM asserts that the intellectual rigor for which museums are known should be extended to a wider public dimension through the service of education, which includes exploration, study,

¹⁸ I base this statement on my observations of docent-led tours at the VMFA, personal communication with VMFA educators, and the docent training materials used for docent training that were supplied to me.

¹⁹ Fetta, March 16th, 2010.

²⁰ American Association of Museums, *Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1992), 9.

observation, critical thinking, contemplation, and dialogue.²¹ Thus, it is the purpose of museum education to serve as the bridge between communities and museums, enabling visitors to engage in looking at and thinking about artworks and artifacts in relationship to historical and/or contemporary events and issues. My goal was to create an enjoyable learning experience that suggests the relevance of contemporary art to participant's lives, and enables them to feel comfortable engaged in a process of finding meaning in works they encounter. To accomplish these goals I looked at constructivist learning theory for inspiration, primarily because it emphasizes the learner's central role in the construction of knowledge as one's prior experiences are challenged, reshaped, and augmented.

The foundations of constructivist theory rest largely on the scholarship of psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget examined learning through the cognitive structures of the brain that make it possible. In his scholarship, Piaget developed a dynamic, cognitive model of learning as a process of transformation of the learners' previous knowledge or conceptual structures through interactions with their environment.²² According to Piaget, learning occurs in a series of sequential and invariant developmental stages as children's naive epistemologies about the world are transformed and tested through their experiences.²³ Lev Vygotsky contributed to Piaget's work by emphasizing that learning is an inherently social process. According to Vygotsky, the social environment, rather than biology or development, accounts almost

²¹ AAM. *Excellence and Equity*, 9.

²² Catherine Twomey Fosnot, "Constructivism: A Psychological Theory of Learning," In *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practices*, ed. Catherine Twomey Fosnot (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996), 11.

²³ Greg Dimitriadis and George Kamberelis. *Theory for Education* (London: Routledge, 2006), 170.

entirely for the higher-level cognitive processes such as language, memory, and abstract thinking. Interpretation of constructivist theory varies widely among scholars, but for the purposes of this project I understand constructivism as a theory that views learning as an active process in which meaning is constructed as prior knowledge is transformed into new understanding through experiences with the social world.²⁴

Constructivism recognizes the diverse learning processes and experiences of students and emphasizes social interaction, validating multiple viewpoints, cultural experiences, and historical narratives. However, it should be noted that an educator's use of a constructivist approach does not advocate a radical relativism, in which 'anything goes.' Museum Studies scholar Margaret Lindauer clarifies this point by explaining that not all solutions are considered valid in a constructivist setting; they must meet certain pre-stipulated criteria.²⁵ For example, Lindauer writes, "in comparing competing interpretations of artworks, a learner might be expected to refer to factual, historical, and/ or cultural knowledge as a basis for claiming his or her interpretation is appropriate."²⁶ Thus, in the context of this tour, the constructivist approach encourages visitors to form their own interpretations of artworks through an informed discussion that provides a contextual framework of factual information about artists and artworks.

Constructivist learning theory is often regarded as oppositional to behaviorism, a learning theory upon which education programs (in museums and schools) have

²⁴ Graeme Sullivan, "Ideas and Teaching: Making Meaning from Contemporary Art," In *Contemporary Issues in Art Education*, ed. Yvonne Gaudelius and Peg Spiers (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc, 2002), 35.

²⁵ Margaret A. Lindauer, "From Salad Bars to Vivid Stories: Four Game Plans for Developing 'Educationally Successful' Exhibitions," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 20 (2005), 48.

²⁶ Margaret A. Lindauer, "From Salad Bars to Vivid Stories," 48.

historically been developed. The underlying assumptions of behaviorism rest on the work of psychologist B. F. Skinner, who applied laboratory findings about animal behavior to human learning on the principle that behavior can be shaped through a process of conditioning prompted by reward, or trial and error.²⁷ Behaviorist theory regards learning as a process of acquisition of knowledge and skills that are broken down hierarchically from basic to advanced, basing achievement upon a set of pre-determined objectives and rewards. Museum studies scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill discusses the differences between these two theories: “Behaviorist learning theory understands learning as the acquisition of facts and information in an incremental way, while constructivism sees learning as the selection and organization of relevant data from cultural experience.”²⁸ Museum tours based on the behaviorist model treat the audience as passive recipients of knowledge based upon the facts or truths associated with an artwork that the guide believes to be significant. Constructivist learning theory is a particularly appropriate educational model for use in contexts like museum tours, where critical thinking and meaning making are the primary goal, rather than memorization of factual information.

Dialogue is a central pedagogical strategy for implementing constructivist learning methods within the parameters of the gallery tour format. I consulted the work of a number of scholars who examine the power of talk as an educational tool using various terms such as “discourse,” “conversation,” “discussion,” and “dialogue.” While

²⁷ DC Phillips and Jonas Soltis, *Perspectives on Learning* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2006), 27.

²⁸ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *The Educational Role of the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 68.

these terms bear subtle differences in meaning,²⁹ each scholar emphasizes the significance of oral communication as a learning tool. Furthermore, the principles upon which these scholars base their assertions are compatible with one another. The work of several scholars significantly informed the selection of teaching methods that enable constructivist learning in this gallery tour: Pablo Freire's support for the use of dialogue, Terry Barrett's ideas about dialogue and interpretation, Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee's method of teaching through "guided interpretation," and Pat Villeneuve and Anne Rowson Love's suggestions for implementing inquiry.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Pablo Freire outlines an educational method he devised while teaching literacy skills to adults in oppressed and poverty stricken regions of Brazil.³⁰ Freire's critique of the traditional education paradigm rests on an analogy for the behaviorist teaching style that he termed the 'banking model,' in which the teacher is the active subject who deposits questions and supplies answers to passive students. According to Freire, not only does the banking model fail to engage students in meaningful learning, but it also contributes to the prevalence of illiteracy thereby extending poverty and upholding social hierarchies. In his text *Dialogs with Public Art*, Tom Finkelpearl relates Freire's banking analogy to the art world, asserting that the artist and museum take on "the role of moral/intellectual/aesthetic teachers, while the

²⁹ For an excellent discussion of the differences between these terms see Melinda M. Mayer, "Scintillating Conversations in the Art Museums," in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education In The 21st Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007).

³⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970.) Unsatisfied with traditional forms of education, Freire's methods reflect a social activist agenda which sought to "teach critical consciousness, learn from students, redefine the power relations between teacher and students, promote dialogue across the economic, political, and educational lines that divide society, and inspire action on the part of the underclass." Tom Finkelpearl, *Dialogs with Public Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 277.

audience takes on the role of the passive student.”³¹ In this scenario, the museum visitor is implicitly asked to accept the meaning and value assigned to artworks based upon institutional authority rather than being invited to engage as active agents in forming meaningful interpretations based upon an intellectual experience with the object.

For Freire, the antithesis of this model is grounded in dialogue, based on mutual communication among the educator and students, rather than a one-way model of transmission of knowledge between the teacher and pupils. Through problem-posing, as Freire referred to the process of asking questions that prompt participants to think critically, “people develop their own power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.”³² In a collaborative process between educators and local residents in areas of Brazil that he served, Freire instituted literacy programs designed to empower participants and stimulate a critical consciousness for understanding the political, social, and economic conditions in which they lived. Although Freire prescribes a politically activist agenda for the critical thinking he advocates, Finkelppearl argues that Freire’s philosophy of dialogue and method of problem-posing can also promote critical thinking and active learning about art.³³

Art Education scholar Terry Barrett discusses the power of dialogue in his research, emphasizing its importance to the process of interpreting and finding meaning in a work of art. According to Barrett, interpretation is an “articulated response based

³¹ Finkelppearl, *Dialogs with Public Art*, 278.

³² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970.), 83. (Emphasis Freire’s.)

³³ Finkelppearl, *Dialogs with Public Art*, 284.

upon wonder and reflection.”³⁴ When a museum visitor interprets a work of art, he or she engages with it meaningfully, intellectually and emotionally.³⁵ As described by Hooper-Greenhill, interpretation is the mental process an individual uses to construct meaning and understanding from experience. According to Barrett, enacting interpretation through dialogue

supports a paradigm shift from museums as the authoritative interpreters of works of art bestowed on passive visitors to a constructivist educational position that encourages visitors to build their own understandings of what they see in ways personally relevant to their lives.³⁶

Dialogue joins the individual viewer in a community of interpreters, providing the opportunity to expand upon his or her understanding of art and make meaningful connections between art and life.

Museum education scholars Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee discuss their work using dialogue in gallery teaching as “guided interpretation,” and draw inspiration from hermeneutic philosophy and the scholarship of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Hermeneutics, the theory or practice of interpretation, is derived from the name of the Greek God Hermes, whose task was to interpret the words of the gods for mortals. The philosophy developed as a discipline during the Renaissance to provide rigorous methods for interpreting Greek and Roman literature and religious texts.³⁷ During the late-twentieth century, Gadamer contributed significantly to hermeneutic theory by writing extensively

³⁴ Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and Responding* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), xv.

³⁵ Terry Barrett. *Why is That Art? Aesthetics and Criticism of Contemporary Art* (New York: Oxford Press, 2008), 7.

³⁶ Terry Barrett, “Interactive Touring in Art Museums: Constructing Meanings and Creating Communities of Understanding,” *Visual Arts Research* 34 (2008), 76.

³⁷ Rika Burnham and Elliot Kai-Kee, “Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation: Museum Education Practice and Hermeneutic Theory,” in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education In The 21st Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007), 153.

on aesthetics and the place of art in our experience of the world. According to Burnham and Kai-Kee, museum teaching about artworks shares with hermeneutics “the core premise that dialogue and conversation are the foundation of understanding and interpretation.”³⁸ Guided interpretation operates on Gadamer’s principle of the “Hermeneutic Circle,” which states that interpretation is fueled by anticipation for one’s observations and thoughts to come together in a coherent “whole,” yet is always provisional and incomplete.³⁹ Thus, the goal of guided interpretation is to explore artworks through a shared process of speculation and revision, searching for potential meanings in a discussion that encourages multiple viewpoints and expands individual understandings.

In their article, “Rethinking Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry,” Villeneuve and Rowson Love describe inquiry as the process of generating and answering questions in a dialogic manner in order to foster learning through social interaction.⁴⁰ An educator leads a dialogue through inquiry by posing questions and supplying information to augment the discussion and further spark participants’ interest. Terry Barrett articulates the types of questions that can contribute to interpretation and inspire dialogue,

What is this object or event that I see or hear or otherwise sense? What is it about? What does it represent or express? What does or did it mean to its maker? What is it a part of? Does it represent something? What are its references? What is it responding to? Why did it come to be? How was it made? Within what tradition does it belong? What ends did a given work possibly serve its maker(s) or patron(s)? What problems did it solve or allay? [...] What does it mean to me?

³⁸ Burnham and Kai-Kee, “Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation,” 153.

³⁹ Burnham and Kai-Kee, “Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation,” 153.

⁴⁰ Pat Villeneuve and Ann Rowson Love, “Rethinking the Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry” 194.

Does it affect my life? Does it change my view of the world?⁴¹

According to Barrett, an educator should view his or herself as the facilitator of dialogue, concentrating on furthering the discussion rather than being the expert on the topic.⁴²

Facilitating an inquiry-initiated dialogue requires the educator to listen carefully and respond to the course of the discussion and participants' statements. Museum education scholar Melinda Mayer explains, "Through improvisation based in active listening, educators flavor their conversations with questions, morsels of information, and possibilities of direction."⁴³

The tour I developed uses inquiry to initiate an interpretive dialogue as participants visually examine artworks closely, consider open-ended questions, share their thoughts, and listen to others in order to potentially expand and deepen their individual interpretations. The guide facilitates discussion by posing questions and offering factual information about artists and artworks to build a contextual framework that helps participants make informed interpretations. For example, while discussing Shahzia Sikander's *Monsters Within* the guide begins by asking participants to visually describe the painting. Responding to their observations, the guide then notes that some of its visual characteristics are a result of the artist's training in the Pakistani miniature painting tradition. After sharing a reproduction a miniature painting from the VMFA's South Asian collection and discussing the formal characteristics of the painting style, the guide encourages participants to consider, based upon their visual examinations, how

⁴¹ Terry Barrett, *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, Responding* (New York: McGrawHill, 2002), 201.

⁴² Terry Barrett, "Interactive Touring in Art Museums," 83.

⁴³ Melinda M. Mayer. "Scintillating Conversations in Art Museums," 192.

Sikander's painting might bend the rules of that art making tradition by introducing contemporary methods of representation.

III. Selecting Artworks & Theme

After researching educational theory and teaching methods, I selected artworks and articulated a theme for the tour. While tours I observed (described below) covered between eight and ten objects, this tour focuses on fewer objects for a longer period of time, in order to allow time for discussion and reflection about each work. I began by conducting preliminary research on the twenty-four artworks currently on display in the VMFA's twenty-first-century gallery. This process involved consulting information about the artists' biographies, artmaking practices, interpretations and scholarship written about their artwork, and research compiled by VMFA staff about the artworks in their collection. Some contemporary artists represented in the collection have yet to be significantly studied or published, thus a number of artworks were excluded because insufficient information about the artist or artwork was available to support a rich discussion. I selected what I felt were the most visually and intellectually engaging works of art with the potential to stimulate a lively and rich discussion, narrowing the possible inclusions from the original twenty-four objects on view to eight.

My next step was to create a concept map to explore how the eight potential artworks relate to one another visually and conceptually. A concept map is a schematic tool that allows the maker to graphically represent a nonlinear visualization of ideas and then draw connections between them and other concepts.⁴⁴ My map started with

⁴⁴ Concept maps can be powerful tools for understanding concepts and graphically representing knowledge. Several scholars have written about their usefulness. See

reproductions of the eight possible artworks placed on a large sheet of paper. In the blank space around each artwork I wrote words or brief phrases that identified key concepts associated with the work. For example, around the reproduction of one artwork, Julie Mehretu's *Stadia III*, which references the spectacle of sporting events and mass media by alluding to a frenzied sports arena, I wrote the terms "media, spectacle, capitalism, sports, arena, space & non-space, power, colonialism, nationalism." For some artworks, the map also included a short statement by the artist about his or her work that I found relevant and/or interesting. For example, Ravinder Reddy's statement, "I draw inspiration from my surroundings" seemed related to the artist's large-scale sculpture, *Krishnaveni 1*.⁴⁵ Finally, I drew lines between the artworks on the map that shared similar themes or subject matter. For example, a line marked "identity" ran between several artworks that seemed to share subject matter concerning self-hood or cultural backgrounds. By exploring the eight works in this manner, I was able to narrow the selection down to the five works that connected to one another most strongly: Kehinde Wiley's large-scale portrait painting, *Willem Van Heythuysen*; Iona Rozeal Brown's painting *a3 blackface #59*; Ravinder Reddy's monumental sculptural head, *Krishnaveni 1*; Shahzia Sikander's modern reinterpretation of Pakistani miniature painting, *Monsters Within*; and Farhad Moshiri's calligraphic abstraction, *S4M53*.

Focusing on these five works, I set about articulating a theme to frame the discussion. A theme is an umbrella topic that guides teaching and helps students see

Lillian Hill, "Concept Mapping to Encourage Meaningful Student Learning," *Adult Learning*, 16(2008), 7-13. David Hay, Ian Kinchin and Simon Lygo-Baker, "Making Learning Visible: The Role of Concept Mapping in Higher Education," *Studies in Higher Education* 33 (June 2008): 295-311.

⁴⁵ John Ravenal, *Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2007), 170.

relationships among concepts.⁴⁶ Art education scholar Sydney Walker endorses the use of themes in her research on “big ideas.”⁴⁷ Walker defines big ideas as broad and important human issues that are characterized by complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity.⁴⁸ Examples of big ideas include identity, justice, relationships, power, survival, conflict, celebration, emotions, communication, and environment. Walker argues that using big ideas generates curricula that consider human concerns, offering students a way to find meaning beyond aesthetics, formal problems, and technical matters in art. Used in conjunction with museum tours, big ideas help connect the discussion of artworks to one another and relate the art context to the real world.

While referring to Walker’s text *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, which lays out guidelines for choosing big ideas, I examined my selection of artworks for potential themes. Walker advocates that big ideas should not explicate an idea, but represent a host of concepts that form and connect an idea. I found several relationships among the five artworks selected for the tour. By conducting research on each, I contemplated the potential relationship as a guiding conceptual framework for a museum tour. Themes I considered include “environment and place,” “transculturation,” “globalism,” and “identity.” However, one connection emerged as the most prominent and intellectually engaging potential theme. Each of the five artworks shared a quality of being created as the result of the artist combining or juxtaposing disparate imagery, iconography, artistic styles, or cultural references within the work of art. In other words, they shared a

⁴⁶ Gary Keller, Mary Louise Erickson, Pat Villeneuve, “Educator’s Resource: A Thematic, Inquiry-based Approach,” in *Chicano Art for Our Millennium: Collected Works from the Arizona State University Community*, ed. Gary Keller, Mary Louise Erickson, Pat Villeneuve (Tempe: Bilingual Press, 2004.), 155.

⁴⁷ Sydney Walker, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking* (Worcester: Davis Publications, Inc, 2001), 1.

⁴⁸ Walker, *Teaching Meaning in Artmaking*, 1.

degree of hybridity. Accordingly, I turned to literary philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of hybridity to articulate a theoretical framework for the tour.

The tour explores *intentional* hybridity, as defined in Bakhtin's compilation of four essays concerning language, dialogue, and the novel, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin identifies two types of hybridity. The first, organic hybridity, corresponds with many post-colonial scholars' interpretation of the term: an unintentional, unconscious process of blending languages (or other cultural forms) into new forms.⁴⁹ Conversely, an intentional hybrid "is first of all a *conscious* hybrid."⁵⁰ According to Bakhtin's literary philosophies, it is an encounter between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by time, social differentiation, culture, or some other factor.⁵¹ It is a "collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms (language or texts)."⁵² For Bakhtin, the historic life and evolution of language represents organic hybridity, while the deliberate mixing of languages that happens as an artistic device, such as in novels, defines intentional hybridity. Thus, the intentional hybrid results from deliberate actions taken to join disparate, and sometimes conflicting, forms of language and culture.

Criticism of the term hybridity in post-colonial discourse stems from its use during the colonial and imperial eras regarding widespread condemnation of the mixing or creolization of races. However, the notion of intentional hybridity transcends prior associations with an empowering definition. Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha

⁴⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Michael Holquist, ed, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michel Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 360.

⁵⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 358-359.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 358-359.

⁵² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 360.

upends the negative connotations of hybridity in his seminal text *The Location of Culture*, noting that hybridity generates the liminal spaces that unsettle and subvert the cultural authority of the structures they reference.⁵³ Robert Young writes that Bhabha transforms hybridity into “an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant colonial power.”⁵⁴ For example, in his portrait painting, *Willem Van Heythuysen* (discussed in further detail below), Wiley deliberately uses hybridity to implicitly critique the dearth of positive representations of African American men in the history of art and contemporary society. Other artworks use hybridity in a subtler manner, engaging hybrid strategies to create statements that are not necessarily political.

In the context of this tour, hybridity is considered an *artistic strategy*, an intentional method for resistance or exploration of social structures, traditions, and assumptions in art and society.⁵⁵ The tour explores this theme through discussion of five artworks in the VMFA’s collection, beginning with Wiley’s large-scale portrait of a young African American man. Subtle clues in the portrait allude to the hybrid strategies involved in the artist’s process. On first view, the young man appears to belong to the contemporary period based upon his wardrobe; he wears a Sean Jean tracksuit and Timberland boots, both expensive clothing brands that can be seen as status symbols in

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102-122.

⁵⁴ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 23.

⁵⁵ It is relevant to extend the definition of intentional hybridity from literature to the visual arts, such as in the exhibition *Hybrids: International Contemporary Painting* at the Tate Liverpool in 2001, and a subsequent conference of the same name from which the anthology *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism* was produced. While essays in the resulting anthology do not necessarily agree on one definition of the term, many consider hybridity a deliberate action on the part of the artist. Jonathan Harris, ed, *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting: Hybridity, Hegemony, Historicism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003.)

contemporary hip hop culture. However, the figure also carries an ornate, gold sword and stands in front of a red, richly brocaded backdrop covered in a flora patterned tendril motif, details that seem incongruous with the modern appearance of the person portrayed. These seemingly anachronistic characteristics are modeled after a 1625 Frans Hals painting of a Dutch merchant, also titled *Willem Van Heythusyen*. For all his paintings, the artist hires African American men that he encounters on the streets of Harlem. When the model visits Wiley's studio, the artist asks him to choose a historic portrait out of an art history textbook to inspire his pose.⁵⁶

In Wiley's *Willem Van Heythusyen* the young man wears his own clothing, but adopts the attitude, stance, and sword of the Frans Hals version. Other paintings by Wiley depict the contemporary sitter in the guise of a saint, king, or even Jesus. Wiley's large-scale paintings present the beauty and spectacle of the European portrait tradition with a new twist: men of color. Wiley's hybrid portraits tacitly pose questions about the social class of people traditionally represented in art versus those who have been historically marginalized and are largely absent from works the art historical cannon. *Willem Van Heythusyen* implicitly points out the absence of positive imagery of African American men in contemporary society and in the history of art, while simultaneously inserting them into those very contexts.

The second artwork in the tour, *a3 blackface #59*, by American artist iona rozeal brown, explores what the artist refers to as "cultural borrowing," or the adoption of the customs or characteristics of one culture by a different cultural group.⁵⁷ In her

⁵⁶ Joe Houston, "Kehinde Wiley Columbus," in *Kehinde Wiley Columbus* (Columbus and Los Angeles: Columbus Museum of Art and Roberts & Tilton, 2006), 6

⁵⁷ Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. "Minds Wide Open 400 Years of Women Artists," <http://vmfa.museum/fhyowaacts>. (accessed August 25th, 2010).

paintings, brown appropriates iconography and aesthetics from Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints, a form of Japanese art that began in the sixteenth century. In *a3 blackface #59*, brown assumes the aesthetic of ukiyo-e prints (rather than the method), incorporating their typical flat perspective and lack of depth, interest in patterning, and strong linearity. She also appropriates ukiyo-e subject matter, such as samurai imagery, theater, and fashion.

Brown began this series, which she calls Afro Asiatic Allegories, after traveling to Japan in 2001. There, she witnessed a fad called *ganguro*, in which Japanese youth imitate African American hip-hop fashion and lifestyle, to the extent of altering their appearances.⁵⁸ brown's exploration of that phenomenon can be seen in *a3 blackface #59*. The painting depicts two figures wearing a combination of Japanese kimono robes and American clothing, including a scarf by the American brand Burberry, and a tee shirt sporting the logo for the Harlem Giants, a historic African American baseball team. One figure wears a large blonde afro and appears to be braiding the other figure's hair into cornrows, both hairstyles that have traditionally been worn by African Americans. The figures' faces, reminiscent of ukiyo-e representations both in their physiognomy and artistic style, reveal a distinct line at the chin where skin-darkening make-up has been applied, sometimes a component of the *ganguro* trend. *a3 blackface #59* explores cultural borrowing in the context of performance, through the combination of Japanese aesthetics and iconography with imagery of African American culture.

⁵⁸ John Ravenal, *Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, 100.

The third artwork, Ravinder Reddy's *Krishnaveni 1* is a large-scale, gilded, sculpture of a female head. Reddy was born in the Andhra Pradesh region of India, where he continues to live. In his brightly colored sculptures, the artist pays homage to traditional Indian art forms. In particular, Reddy finds inspiration in goddess temple sculptures that decorate places of worship in the town where he lives and works, Visakhapatnam.⁵⁹ The stylized, almond-shaped eyes of *Krishnaveni 1* recall Hindu goddess sculptures, and the sculpture's gilded finish imparts a divine quality or appearance of otherworldliness. However, some characteristics of Reddy's work diverge from traditional Indian art practices. For instance, *Krishnaveni 1* is made of fiberglass, rather than of stone used in traditional temple sculptures.

Reddy's use of this modern, industrial material points to another of his inspirations. The artist studied in London during the 1980's and was particularly interested in pop art, an art movement led by artists who questioned conventions of the art world, related to materials and subject matter for artworks.⁶⁰ During the 1950s and '60s, American and British Pop artists blurred the distinction between fine arts and popular culture, with new mediums and subject matter that merged art with mass media forms like television, movies, comic books, magazines, advertisements, and packaged goods. Reddy's work incorporates references to Indian popular culture in the sculpture's boldly painted lips and braided hair, which reference contemporary fashion and the popularity of Bollywood films. The sculpture's title *Krishnaveni 1* draws a connection between divine and the everyday; Krishnaveni is a ubiquitously popular

⁵⁹ Jérôme Neutres, ed. *New Delhi New Wave* (Bologna: Damiani Editore, 2007), 36.

⁶⁰ Jérôme Neutres, ed. *New Delhi New Wave*, 36.

female name in the region where Reddy lives.⁶¹ However, the name also refers to the legendary consort of the Hindu god Krishna, reiterating the sculpture's connection to traditional Indian art and the divine. Reddy's hybrid sculpture is a merging of a celebration of divinity, traditional temple sculpture, and everyday popular culture.

The fourth artwork is by a Pakistani artist who now lives in New York City, Shahzia Sikander. Compared to other artworks in the tour, this painting, measuring fifteen by eleven inches, is small and intimate. The painting's size and highly detailed quality are a product of Sikander's training in the tradition of miniature painting. This method began about 500 years ago in Pakistan and India, where, for centuries, it was the favored art form among royalty. Primarily used to represent stories and myths, or to recount the lives of kings and gods, miniature painting is a highly formalized artmaking tradition with specific rules and methods. Such artworks are typically carefully detailed and brightly colored, and depict figures, costumes, landscape, and architecture with precision in order to present specific narratives.

Sikander began studying miniature painting while in art school in Pakistan, and apprenticed with an expert to learn the formal properties and process. She makes her own paper, brushes and paints in the traditional processes, and works methodically on each painting, which often take up to a year to complete.⁶² When Sikander moved to the United States for graduate school in 1994, she began to bend the rigid rules of this artmaking tradition, by introducing methods and motifs from contemporary Western

⁶¹ Collette Chattopadhyay, "Ravinder Reddy," in *A Sculpture Reader: Contemporary Sculpture Since 1980*, ed. Glenn Harpe and Twylene Moyer (Hamilton: ISC Press, 2006), 198.

⁶² Sikander, Shazia, "Shazia Sikander: Gods, Griffins, and Cowboy Boots," *MoMA Red Studio*. <http://redstudio.moma.org/interviews/shahzia/shahzia.html>. (accessed October 1, 2010.)

art.⁶³ *Monsters Within* illustrates this exploration. Unlike traditional miniature paintings, the work does not tell a clear narrative; rather areas of abstraction and pattern make the painting difficult to read. Areas of overlapping pattern create a border around a central rectangle where unidentifiable forms blend with random images, such as human legs, a basket, pillars of smoke, and a ball, to create hybrid creatures and clouded chaos. The painting's title alludes to a personal and emotional subject matter, supported by a self-portrait head in the lower left side of the painting. In *Monsters Within*, Sikander introduces self-expression and abstraction into miniature painting method, questioning the definition and boundaries of this traditional mode of artmaking.

Finally, the fifth artwork is by Iranian artist, Farhad Moshiri. *S4M53* derives its unusual title and subject matter from Abjad, an Arabic coded writing system used to inscribe Islamic religious texts. The calligraphic quality of the shapes in Moshiri's painting is quickly recognizable to many viewers. However, greatly enlarged and repeated in various directions, in this context the script becomes unintelligible. Thus, even for those who can read Arabic, the sacred words become purely decorative rather than communicative. In this painting, Moshiri combines an ancient art form, calligraphy, with the Western art historical development of abstraction. VMFA curator John Ravenal writes that Moshiri "makes works that reference the interface between Islamic and non-Islamic cultures while refraining for political reasons, from direct critique.... [He] brings past and present together in an uneasy union, commenting

⁶³ Sikander, Shazia, "Shazia Sikander: Gods, Griffins, and Cowboy Boots," (accessed October 1, 2010.)

indirectly on the tensions in contemporary Iran between traditions and modernity.”⁶⁴ Moshiri plays with ambiguity in his paintings, merging Islamic tradition with abstraction; he never favors one over the other but provokes questions about the ramifications of their union.

Through a discussion of these five artworks, the tour engages the audience in thinking about hybridity and contemporary art. Educational objectives for the tour explain that participants will consider hybridity as an intentional artistic strategy and will discuss how contemporary artists combine, juxtapose, and contrast disparate formal, iconographic, and cultural ideas within works of art. Tour participants will recognize different formal, iconographic, and cultural elements within artworks discussed, and the ideas that those elements communicate. Participants will consider possible motivations behind the artists’ decision to engage in those hybrid strategies. Potential motivations include exploring issues of identity, critiquing accepted social structures, and stretching the boundaries of certain modes of artmaking.

IV. Research: Museum Tour Observations

After articulating the tour’s theoretical framework, I observed tours at various museums in order to discern common and/or atypical tour practices. I observed a total of fourteen tours between December 2010 and February 2011. At the VMFA, I observed five tours, one for a high school group of tenth-grade sociology students, and four adult “Walk-In Highlights Tours.” In Norfolk, Virginia, I visited the Chrysler Museum and observed two tours, one for high school students and one general audience adult tour.

⁶⁴ John Ravenal, *Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, 104.

In New York City, I visited the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and observed one general audience tour. At the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, I observed one tour for high school English students, and one general audience adult tour. Finally, in Raleigh, North Carolina, I visited The North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA) and observed one tour for high school students and one adult general audience tour. With the exception of the MOMA and the Tenement Museum, all tours were docent-led.

During these observations, I followed along with the group, taking mental notes and paying particular attention to the tour leader's style of teaching, his or her interactions with participants, and participants' reactions. As an observer, I usually refrained from interacting with the group. After the tour, I spent time writing my observations regarding objects chosen, tour format, and the guide's method of presenting the artworks. I paid special attention to the guide's teaching method and whether he or she asked the group questions. I also noted my personal reaction to the tours, for example, if I felt interested, curious, entertained, challenged, bored or confused. I also noted, at the end of the tour, whether or not I felt that I learned something new. From these observations I was able to form personal opinions about what instruction methods and tour formats I find educationally successful and engaging. For instance, if I found myself curious to hear more about a work of art, or other group member's responses to questions posed by the guide, I reflected that the guide's method was successful, and I took notes about his or her strategy. On the other hand, if I found that I was unengaged by a guide's presentation of an artwork or was confused about how artworks related to one another or the tour, I concluded that the guide's method was less successful.

From the sampling of museums I visited, it can be concluded that many (though not all) tours embraced a lecture-style behaviorist teaching philosophy, rather than engaging participants in active learning. One exception was a tour I observed at the MOMA in January 2011, which provided an excellent example of an inquiry-initiated dialogue. This tour was for a class of English students from a New York City public high school. The tour was lead by a MOMA educator⁶⁵ and focused on three artworks during the fifty-minute period: Barnett Newman's large-scale red canvas with an orange stripe, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*; Jackson Pollock's paint splattered canvas, *One: Number 31, 1950*; and Franz Klein's black and white painting, *Chief*. From the outset, the educator explained to the group that the tour would be exploring Abstract Expressionism. While an art movement does not qualify as a theme, his approach of focusing on Abstract Expressionism aligned more closely to thematic instruction than any other tour I observed.

The educator began by asking the students to describe Newman's painting. He also asked them to view it up close for a minute and describe the experience. The educator and students then spent several minutes talking about seeing the artwork in close proximity, how the experience affected their vision, and the physical sensations they noticed. After reiterating the student's comments, the educator provided contextual information about Newman and his paintings, explaining the artist's background and how he began creating large-scale artworks like *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. Throughout the tour, he continued to intersperse factual information about the artists and the Abstract Expressionist movement with questions that prompted the students'

⁶⁵ All of the MOMA's tours are provided by paid educators, rather than volunteer guides. The debate concerning the benefits of tours given by educators versus docents is an important one, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

reactions. He would listen closely to their remarks, repeat them back to the group, and then respond by posing additional questions or by giving more information about the painting. Several times, the educator read remarks that the artist made about his artwork and asked the students what they thought the statement meant or whether or not they agreed with the artist. Throughout the tour, students were actively engaged in a dialogue, they eagerly considered the educator's questions and one another's responses, and they posed their own questions about the artworks. This tour provided an excellent example upon which to model the tour I created because the educator effectively engaged the participants in a lively, informal, and educational conversation.

V. Writing the Tour

Following my tour observations, I applied the outcomes from the research and planning stages of the project to writing the tour. I began by articulating a set of key points I felt the tour should communicate about each work and its relationship to the theme hybridity. It was important to strike a balance between providing factual information that builds a conceptual framework, and posing inquiry to foster dialogue and critical thinking. I decided to begin the discussion of each object by asking participants to visually examine the artwork and make observations about what they see. I then crafted questions designed to prompt participants to think critically about the key points for each work.

Crafting inquiry is a challenging project, because there are many factors to take into account when intending to create questions that engage audiences. Discussion is necessarily structured to focus on visual observations of artworks in order to avoid making presumptions about visitor's previous knowledge or alienating participants by

asking personal questions, such as their emotional reactions to the artwork. Because the goal of the tour is to encourage participants to reach their own conclusions, successful inquiry should challenge the viewer to think critically and reflectively about the objects, but should refrain from leading to deliberate conclusions or prescribed views, such as asking the audience to like the artwork or agree with an artist's social statement.

I consulted Villeneuve and Rowson Love's article, "Rethinking the Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry," which provided suggestions for writing inquiry-based programs.⁶⁶ Based on the scholarship of art educator Mary Erickson, the authors describe four types of questions about art.⁶⁷ Considering the authors' advice, I used a range of questions from these categories. The first type includes questions that examine the visual features of an artwork. For each object on the tour, inquiry begins by asking participants to describe the artwork and then poses specific questions building on observation, such as this question concerning Wiley's portrait: "based upon his appearance, what time period do you imagine he belongs to?" The second type, contextual questions, focuses on the sociohistorical perspective of the artwork. For example, inquiry concerning Moshiri's painting considers artists' personal expression in the political climate of post-revolutionary Iran. The third type of question considers different interpretations of an artwork. For example, in discussing Reddy's sculpture, opposing opinions about whether the sculpture represents divinity or popular culture are debated. Finally, the fourth type of question searches for connections among artworks. One way the tour poses this type of inquiry is by comparing artworks to one

⁶⁶ Pat Villeneuve and Ann Rowson Love, "Rethinking the Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry."

⁶⁷ Villeneuve and Love, "Rethinking the Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry," 195- 196.

another, such as the stylistic differences between Wiley and brown's portraits.

Additionally, Villeneuve and Love suggest that learner-generated inquiries can lead to a rich discussion and deep levels of learning, so the tour also suggests that the docent encourage discussion of participants' questions.

Terry Barrett explains that when using inquiry, the desire is for learners to construct meaning "based upon what they see, what they hear from others in the group, and what they already know about life."⁶⁸ Thus, in order to truly engage participants, the discussion must relate to their lives and personal experiences. Gauging a learner's previous knowledge and history is nearly impossible during most museum tours because the background of walk-in visitors cannot be predetermined. I believe the best way to address this issue is to choose a tour theme that relates to life in the twenty-first century; experiences that many visitors have in common. For example, the theme hybridity and the artworks selected for the tour raise issues relevant to contemporary life like identity, race, and culture. Furthermore, while some art historians advocate an approach that avoids considering artists' intentions, I felt that discussing artists' backgrounds and statements about their artwork helps demystify contemporary art, presenting it in a manner that viewers can relate to their own lives. For example, the discussion of Reddy's monumental sculpture *Krishnaveni 1* considers how the artist combines different inspirations from his personal history, a point to which participants might relate based on their own sense of personal history.

After writing suggestions for questions and factual information to be posed in the tour for each object, it was important to connect the discussion of artworks to one

⁶⁸ Terry Barrett, "Two Questions with Variations," in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education In The 21st Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007), 197.

another and reinforce their relationship to the theme. These connections are emphasized in the introduction, through transitions between objects, and during the conclusion. In the introduction, the guide is instructed to greet visitors and describe the tour's discussion-based format and contemporary art topic. Before moving into the galleries, the guide explains that the tour will consider hybridity as an artistic strategy through the discussion of five works of art. To introduce the idea of hybridity and provide an icebreaker that encourages interaction, the guide asks each participant to imagine a scenario in which it is his or her birthday and a close friend or loved one is preparing a special meal. Participants imagine that they cannot choose between two favorite foods, and therefore, decide to combine them into a hybrid meal. The guide asks participants to brainstorm what foods they would combine (assuring that in this scenario all combinations would be delicious), and then to share their hybrid creations once they move to the gallery. This discussion encourages the group to begin thinking about hybridity with a topic, food, that is relatable to everyone. Furthermore, the playful subject is intended to set an informal and conversational tone for the tour.

Transitions between artworks create cohesiveness during a tour. Museum Educator Anna Johnson characterizes transitions as a way to move the tour from one object to the next, while making connections between them.⁶⁹ Transitions reinforce an artwork's relationship to the theme, while foreshadowing the next tour stop. Sandy Rusak, Chief Educator at the NCMA explained that transitions "maintain the audience's attention, keep them wondering about what's to come, and give them a sense that there

⁶⁹ Anna Johnson, "Building Effective Tours: Taming Wild Docents," in *The Museum Educator's Manual: Educators Share Successful Techniques*, ed. Anna Johnson, Kimberly A. Huber (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2009), 48.

is something new to discover.”⁷⁰ According to Johnson, transitions should be simple statements or questions that highlight an important point relative to the topic of the tour and, if possible, create anticipation or interest in the next object. For each artwork, I wrote transitions to provide clarity about the work’s relevance to the theme and to facilitate the tour flow. For example, when moving from Reddy’s sculpture to Sikander’s painting *Monsters Within* the suggested transition notes, “By combining traditional Indian art influences with the influence of pop art, Reddy creates sculptures that merge the divine and the everyday. Now we will examine an artwork that uses hybridity to push the boundaries of a specific tradition of art making, but on a much smaller scale.”

Finally, the tour offers a brief conclusion. I observed that by the end of the best hour-long tours, many visitors were tired of standing in the galleries, wanted to find a restroom, or seemed eager to explore the museum on their own. Johnson explains that the conclusion should be brief, but as the final step, it is important to reiterate the tour’s main ideas.⁷¹ Thus, the guide concludes the tour succinctly by restating the relationship between hybridity and artworks discussed. The guide may welcome participants to remain after the tour to continue the conversation or ask additional questions. Finally, the guide thanks participants for their contributions to the discussion and encourages them to visit the museum again.

⁷⁰ Sandra Rusak, interview by author, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC, February 11, 2011.

⁷¹ Johnson, “Building Effective Tours: Taming Wild Docents,” 50.

VI. Considering Audience: Teens & Adults

An important question posed by this thesis project considers the learning needs of different audiences, and how they should be taken into account when crafting tours. In *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, John Falk and Lynn Dierking describe what they call a “contextual model of learning,” which posits that all learning is situated in three partially overlapping contexts: the personal, the sociocultural, and the physical.⁷² Their conceptualization of the personal context rests on the principle associated with constructivist learning theory, that each person learns in a unique way and interprets information through the lens of previous knowledge, experience and beliefs.⁷³ Learning is also influenced by the way that people interact with one another, the sociocultural context, and with the physical environment in which they learn. According to Falk and Dierking, each of these contexts shapes the individual’s learning process, and thus, learning is profoundly personal and influenced by the learner’s past, cultural and physical experiences.

Understanding the learning needs of a specific audience based upon age groupings (e.g. teen versus adult) is difficult because it assumes a certain degree of homogeneity within the group in terms of educational background, emotional and cognitive development, and learning preferences. While overly general assumptions about learning groups are problematic, one goal of this thesis was to consider the distinctions between adult learners and teens in order to discern how the design of the tour might be tailored for different audiences. I consulted a number of scholarly sources that examine the learning needs of teens and adults. Additionally, I informally

⁷² John Falk and Lynn Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and The Making of Meaning* (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2000), 10.

⁷³ Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 13.

interviewed museum educators to learn about their perceptions of the differences between adults and teens as museum learners. They shared insights about these learning groups, but our discussions also prompted me to question my previous assumptions about the extent and/or nature of the learning differences between teen and adult audiences. The educators I interviewed generally agreed, based upon their years of experience, that the differences among teen and adult learning groups are less significant than distinctions among individual learners based upon personal preferences for different learning methods.

Since the late 1990s, the number of museum programs for teens has risen, yet little scholarship examines teens as a museum learning group.⁷⁴ Much of the literature considering teens' learning needs emphasizes the fact that in terms of cognitive function they are quite mature. Capable of thinking in abstract terms, adolescents are able to engage in discussions about complex topics. In her article "Museums and Healthy Adolescent Development: What We Are Learning from Research and Practice," Deanna Banks Beane explains,

In cognitive terms, during adolescence the ability to engage in abstract thought and moral reasoning is developed. As adolescents mature intellectually, their repertory of problem-solving skills becomes more sophisticated. They can examine situations, develop hypotheses, and mentally manipulate possible solutions.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Catherine Arias, and Denise A. Gray, "Adolescents in the Art Museum: Key Considerations for Successful Programs," in *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, ed. Pat Villeneuve (Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007.) 238.

⁷⁵ Deanna Banks Beane, "Museums and Healthy Adolescent Development: What We Are Learning from Research and Practice," in *Adolescence: Growing Up in Museums*, *Journal of Museum Education* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2000) Museum Education Roundtable, Washington D.C., 4.

Accordingly, it is appropriate for museum educators to broach abstract and complex topics or themes with teens.

During adolescence, a period of cognitive, sexual, and emotional maturation, teens seek to define and assert their identities. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson write that teens “go through great emotional, cognitive, and social transformations. Out of these changes emerges a pattern of thought and volition that defines the self.”⁷⁶ Much of teens’ growth involves the formation of worldviews and independent thought. Some museum educators I interviewed mentioned the importance of being sensitive to teens’ opinions and their need to assert their independence, an observation also reflected in the scholarship. In her research on docent-led tours for adolescents, Karen Miller Morgan interviewed teens about their feelings towards museum tours.⁷⁷ Morgan noted that the teens were particularly “sensitive to being talked down to when on museum tours,” evidence that adolescents value having their opinions and knowledge respected.⁷⁸ Morgan’s findings illustrate that teens are socially sensitive to and aware of their own cognitive maturity; they wish to be regarded respectfully by adults.

Educators I spoke with noted that teens are diverse and learning preferences among them vary. In “Adolescents in Art Museums: Key Considerations for Successful Programs,” Catherine Arias and Denise A. Gray articulate this observation: “Understanding the teen audience requires sensitivity to its diversity.... Such differences spring from teens’ individual and community histories, including their access to creative

⁷⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson, *Being Adolescent: Conflict and Growth in the Teenage Years* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 8.

⁷⁷ Karen Miller Morgan, *Docents and Docent-Led Tours for Adolescents at Two Suburban New York Art Museums: Theory, Practice and Change*. MA Thesis (Bank Street College of Education. 2000.)

⁷⁸ Karen Miller Morgan. *Docents and Docent-Led Tours for Adolescents at Two Suburban New York Art Museums*, 26.

resources and to people who encourage cultivation of their interests.”⁷⁹ Likewise, adults are an equally complex group. In regards to the characteristics of museum visitors, ‘adult’ may refer to any visitor between age eighteen and older. Thus, the range of education, life experience, and personal history is vast. Generalizations about this broad and diverse learning group can be problematic. However, there are some features of adult learning that museum educators generally acknowledge.

For the most part, adults visit museums during their leisure time. While childhood learning is almost always parent or teacher-directed, adults are independent learners. Not coincidentally, adults often come to learning environments with personal goals and objectives.⁸⁰ Additionally, adults tend to be pragmatic, seeking to understand how concepts and material apply to their learning and their lives.⁸¹ Adult learners have a rich and wide degree of experiences and knowledge. Often, learning takes on heightened meaning when it relates to adults’ past experiences and individual identities.⁸²

A common view among museum educators holds that adults are sometimes reticent during tours and unwilling to engage in inquiry.⁸³ For this reason, it is much more common to see inquiry used in museum programming with young children. Yet, not all educators and scholars agree with this view of adult learners. Fetta notes that

⁷⁹ Catherine Arias, and Denise A. Gray, “Adolescents in the Art Museum: Key Considerations for Successful Programs,” 245.

⁸⁰ Sachatello-Sawyer, Bonnie, Robert A. Fellenz, Hanly Burton, Laura Gittings-Carlson, Janet Lewis-Mahony, and Walter Woolbaugh. *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences* (Plymouth: Altamira Press, 2002), 2.

⁸¹ Sachatello-Sawyer, et al, *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences*, 4.

⁸² Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Burlington, MA, 1973, 2005), 4.

⁸³ Sandy Rusak: “Adults often dislike that kind of questioning (inquiry) and would rather listen to a lecture.” Rusak, February 11, 2011.

she often experiences adult learners who are eager to talk and engage with one another during museum programs.⁸⁴ In their text, *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences*, Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, Robert Fellenz, Hanly Burton, Laura Gittings-Carlson, Janet Lewis-Mahony, and Walter Woolbaugh assert “adults prefer to be actively involved in the learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge.”⁸⁵ Perhaps this difference of opinion is more reflective of the heterogeneous nature of adults as a learning group and their personal preferences as independent learners. As Sandra Rusak explained,

So much depends on your audience. You can't force a group to participate. Every group is different and a good museum educator responds to a group's comfort level with regard to participatory discussion and interaction.⁸⁶

Thus, respect for adults' preferences and comfort level during a museum tour is an important part of addressing their needs as a learning group.

While determining how to address these different learning groups in each tour was a component of this thesis project, I decided to begin with one written version of the tour and planned to make adjustments, if necessary, after presenting the same version to both audiences. At the same time, it was necessary to address the state of Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOLs) in order to develop a tour for teens.⁸⁷ SOLs are a legislative framework for instructional programs intended to raise the academic achievement of students in public schools. Because school fieldtrips are required to address SOLs, it was necessary to illustrate the relevance of the teen tour to the

⁸⁴ Fetta, March 16th, 2010.

⁸⁵ Sachatello-Sawyer, et al, *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences*, 4.

⁸⁶ Rusak, February 11, 2011.

⁸⁷ Virginia Education Department, “Standard of Learning,” Commonwealth of Virginia, 2009. <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/go/Sols/home.shtml> (accessed March 15, 2010).

standards for grades nine through twelve in various academic disciplines.⁸⁸ Thus, corresponding SOLs are included, in the standard format for the museum education field, as an appendix of this report and will be made available for the educator's reference.

VII. Presenting the Tour

After creating the tour, I presented it to an audience of teens at the VMFA. The group included twenty high school students who are part of the VMFA's Museum Leaders in Training (M. Lit) program. Because the M.Lit group is a voluntary after-school program that teaches students about museum practice and art related careers, this group did not represent a typical high school tour. However, the M.Lit group presented a valuable opportunity to present the tour and receive feedback. On the evening of February 2nd, 2011 I presented my tour to the M.Lit group. During the tour, participants were initially quiet, but became more willing to discuss the artworks and theme as the tour progressed. They seemed interested in the theme and in hypothesizing the ways each work related to it.

I later met with Fetta who had observed my tour presentation and offered positive feedback. Specifically, she felt that the theme and objects selected for the tour were appropriate and that the inquiry guided the group to look in an effective manner. She particularly liked the icebreaker activity at the beginning of the tour, and provided several ways that she felt the tour could be improved. For example, she thought it would be a good idea to include more information about the VMFA and its collection during the introduction. Specifically, she suggested explaining that the recent expansion

⁸⁸ Fetta, March 16th, 2010.

provided the twenty-first-century collection with its own exhibition space for the first time. Fetta also noted that the transitions between objects could be strengthened to be more specific and engaging. We also discussed issues that had more to do with my performance as a new tour leader than the strength of the original written tour. After meeting with Fetta, I made some revisions to the original transitions, in the written tour. At the same time, based upon my discussion with Fetta, I became more aware that no matter how well the tour guide knows a tour script, during a tour he or she always works from memory and must adjust the plan in response to the audience. Thus, no gallery tour will mirror the original tour plan. Accordingly, I structured the tour in a detailed outline form as an example of the process of dialogue that suggests potential points for discussion. Ideally, this format will allow the guide to access the information easily while varying the tour as he/she responds to the differences among tour groups.

Thus far, I have had three opportunities to present my tour to an adult audience of walk-in visitors at the VMFA. Unfortunately, the first two tours included only one participant each, and there were no attendees at the third presentation. I gave the first two tours as planned despite the low attendance. During those tours, both of the single attendees and I enjoyed a lively conversation about the artworks and discussed hybridity in contemporary art. Regardless, these two presentations do not represent a valid group discussion, thus, it is difficult to draw further conclusions about the differences between teen and adult audiences based upon these experiences. Furthermore, these presentations did not provide the type of group experience necessary to warrant additional changes to the original the tour based upon perceived learning differences in the two audience groups. I anticipate further opportunities to offer scheduled tours at the VMFA, however based upon my interviews with museum educators and review of

relevant research, I no longer believe that there are significant cognitive differences between age groups that would warrant two separate written versions of the tour.

Conclusion

This project documents the process of conceptualizing an inquiry and dialogue-based gallery tour and provides a model for integrating this type of teaching into the gallery tour format. It favors shifting the learning theory that informs gallery tours from behaviorism to constructivism, arguing that inquiry and dialogue are appropriate and engaging teaching methods for the gallery tour context. Insofar as stepping out of the comfort zone of lecture-style teaching might be intimidating for some docents and educators, this thesis project offers an example of how to go about the process. Although I was unable to fully perceive the differences between teen and adult audience groups based on my presentations, I successfully developed the tour and illustrated the feasibility of teaching through dialogue to both teens and adults by presenting it to those populations at the VMFA.

Future development of this research could include creating supplemental pre- and post-visit materials on the subject of hybridity and contemporary art. Materials for the teen tour could be developed for use in the classroom. Additionally, a brochure or packet of information for the adult tour could draw connections between the artworks discussed and other works of art in the VMFA's collection. Such materials would encourage participants to continue thinking and talking about hybridity when they leave the gallery, and to further explore the museum.

While some museum educators and docents consider tours to be an occasion for presenting factual information about artworks and museum collections, tours can also offer the opportunity to engage visitors in active learning and meaning making. It is my hope that this thesis project contributes to that effort.

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Appendices

Appendix A

CONTEMPORARY ART & HYBRIDITY

A fifty-minute, five object, guided gallery tour of twenty-first-century art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Using This Tour

Note to tour guide: This tour is based upon a model of learning that uses group interaction through dialogue to enable learning. The tour guide acts as the facilitator of an exploration of artworks in which the participants and the guide learn from one another. If interested, additional resources are listed at the end of this document to provide further information about the theories that informed the development of this tour.

Tour Style (Inquiry Initiated Dialogue):

- Asking open-ended questions and supplying factual information, you will facilitate a dialogue that encourages participants to think critically and find meaning in works of contemporary art.

Theme:

- The theme relates artworks to one another, guides discussion, and connects art concepts to the real world.
- “Hybridity” refers to an *intentional* artistic strategy of combining, juxtaposing, or layering different cultural influences, imagery, and artistic styles.
- This tour dialogically explores how artworks incorporate hybridity and poses questions about artistic motivations.

Structure:

- The tour begins with an introduction followed by information and inquiry relevant to each of the five objects included in the tour.
- The script also suggests transitions between objects.

Note to tour guide: For comparison purposes, the tour refers to artworks not on display in the twenty-first-century galleries. Laminated reproductions of those works are provided and may be passed around, as noted.

INTRODUCTION

Note to tour guide: This description of the tour is formatted to serve as an example of what questions may be posed to facilitate dialogue, but it is anticipated that each tour will be unique and vary based on the flow of conversation and participant's preferences.

Greeting:

- Hello! Welcome to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.
- My name is ____, I'll be your guide today.
- Have any of you visited the museum before?

- Before we go up to the galleries and begin the tour, I would like to tell you a little bit about the museum.
- The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
 - opened in 1936.
 - was the first state-supported museum in the South.
 - is an encyclopedic art museum, meaning that it contains artwork from all over the world.
 - currently, has 22,000 objects in the collection.

- Over the years, the museum has expanded several times in order to house and display its growing collection.
- The most recent expansion opened in May 2010. The lobby, where we stand, and the atrium adjacent to us, are part of the 165,000 square feet added to the building at that time.
- The recent expansion incorporated a number of new features, including gallery space for the museum's growing twenty-first-century art collection.

Topic & Theme:

- Today we will explore the VMFA's new twenty-first-century art gallery during a fifty-minute tour.
- We will focus on a theme -hybridity- that links the artworks to one another.
- Hybridity as an artistic strategy of combining, juxtaposing, or layering different cultural influences, artistic styles, and imagery.
- We will examine five artworks and consider how and why artists incorporate hybridity in their work.

Format & Icebreaker:

- During this tour we will examine works of art and discuss them together. I will ask questions and I hope you will tell me your thoughts and opinions. There are no wrong answers. I also welcome your questions.
- Before we go to the twenty-first-century art gallery, I'd like us to start thinking about hybridity in relationship to something that everyone likes: food.

- Imagine this scenario: It's your birthday and a loved one wants to prepare your favorite meal for dinner, but you cannot choose between your two favorite foods. So, you suggest combining them into one dish! Think of your two favorite foods and imagine making a hybrid out of them. What two foods would you choose? And don't worry, in this scenario, whatever you combine will be delicious!
- I'll start: my two favorite foods are blueberry pie and the noodle dish "Pad Thai," so I would make a Pad Thai blueberry pie.
- Think it over as we walk to the twenty-first-century art gallery together. We can share our imaginary hybrid meals with the group when we get there!

Rules:

- Before we go, I want to remind you of gallery rules: please refrain from touching the artworks and keep about an arms-length distance from them at all times. Also, if taking notes, please use pencil (not pen).
- Ok, let's think about combining our favorite foods as we head to the gallery.

Note to tour guide: You may now lead the group to the VMFA's twenty-first-century gallery. Once assembled in the gallery, ask group members to share their imaginary hybrid meals.

Transition:

- Great! Thank you for those wonderful contributions. While imagining hybrid foods may feel silly, it gets us thinking about hybridity as a combination or juxtaposition of two or more disparate things that creates something new. Now, let's start thinking about this concept in relation to contemporary art by examining our first artwork.

Note to tour guide: Direct the group's attention to the first object: Kehinde Wiley's "Willem Van Heythuysen."

OBJECT 1

Kehinde Wiley. *Willem Van Heythuysen*. 2006.

Oil and enamel on canvas. 2006.14

About the artist:

Kehinde Wiley was born in Los Angeles, California in 1977. He studied art at the San Francisco Art Institute and then earned a graduate degree from Yale University in 2001. He currently lives and works in Harlem, New York.

Visual Examination:

- Lets begin our discussion of this painting by simply looking and describing what we see.
- What do you see? What kind of artwork is it?
 - It is a portrait.
 - A portrait is a painting, drawing, or photograph of a person. Portraits are common throughout art history.
- What else do you see? (Instead of describing everything, we can list characteristics and elements of the work, such as: red, large, ornate, etc.)
- Let's focus on the figure's appearance: what do you notice?
- What time period do you think he belongs to?
 - We could assume he lives in the current period based on his clothing: a Sean Jean pantsuit and Timberland boots, both contemporary clothing trends.
- If that's the case, does anything seem out of place?
 - The ornate, brocaded backdrop.
 - The figure's gold sword.
- So, the figure seems to belong in 2011, but his accessory is something we do not see everyday, a clue that points to the artist's process for making these paintings.

Artist's Process:

- The artist's name is Kehinde Wiley.
- The models Wiley paints are always young African American men that he encounters on the streets of Harlem, where he lives.
- Before painting them, Wiley asks his models to choose portraits from art history books that they would like to use as inspiration.

In this first point of inquiry for *Willem Van Heythuysen*, encourage participants to visually search for clues about the portrait sitter's identity and hypothesize about their meaning.

A portrait is a painting, drawing, photograph, or engraving that depicts a person.

Portraits follow sets of conventions, for instance, kings are often shown in ways that communicate their power.

In this second section of inquiry, explain Wiley's process of recreating of historical portraits and encourage participants to compare his painting to its original referent.

- For example, the model in this painting chose a portrait by a Dutch painter, Frans Hals, called *Willem Van Heythuysen*.
- Here is a reproduction of the original portrait, made in 1625.

Note to tour guide: Show participants a reproduction of the Frans Hals portrait “Willem Van Heythuysen” for comparison.

- The figure in this painting was a wealthy Dutch merchant.
- Wiley’s painting takes the same name, *Willem Van Heythuysen*. Can you see anything else that it adopts from the original?
 - The pose and sword.

Note to tour guide: Reproductions of two other Wiley paintings (“King Charles I” and “Napoleon Crossing the Alps”) and their original referents are included, in case you want to show the group additional examples.

Hybrid Portraits:

- Remember, hybridity is the combination of different cultural influences, imagery, or artistic styles to create something new.
- What do you think this painting combines?
 - It combines the pose, style, and imagery of a historic portrait with an African American man and contemporary imagery.
- How do you think emulating the historic portrait changes to the contemporary model’s image?
- How would you describe his attitude?
 - He appears powerful, bold, and proud.
- So, why do you think the artist re-creates these paintings?
 - Wiley creates positive images of African American men that he feels are absent in contemporary society and in the history of art.
 - By doing so, Wiley inserts African American men into the contexts where he feels they are missing.

In this third section of inquiry, encourage the group to hypothesize why the artist re-creates historical portrait paintings.

Transition:

- This painting uses conventions and imagery of historic portraits combined with contemporary symbols to critique the representation of African American men. Now, we will look at a painting by another contemporary artist who use hybrid strategies to examine an idea she calls “cultural borrowing.”

Note to tour guide: Direct the group to move to the second artwork: Iona Rozeal Brown’s “a3 blackface #59.”

OBJECT 2

iona rozeal brown. *a3 blackface #59*. 2003.
Acrylic on paper. 2004.67

About the Artist:

iona rozeal brown (who purposefully spells her name in all lowercase letters) was born in 1966 in Washington, D.C. and now lives and works in New York City.

Visual Examination:

- Let's begin our discussion of this artwork again by looking. What do you see?
 - Another portrait with two figures.
- Do you see other differences between this and Wiley's portrait?
 - This painting is much flatter and stylistic than Wiley's. Wiley's portrait is more realistic.
- Let's also think of this work in comparison to a Japanese ukiyo-e print.

Present the group with a reproduction of a Japanese ukiyo-e print for comparison with brown's painting.

- Before talking about what *ukiyo-e* means, let's identify similarities between this painting and the print. Both works
 - display a quality of flatness, and a lack depth and shadowing.
 - emphasize linearity, outlining shapes.
- The artist who created this painting borrows from ukiyo-e, a traditional Japanese printmaking art form, which originated in the late seventeenth century and uses carved wood blocks to make images.
- brown's artwork is a painting, however, not a print. Therefore, artist does not actually borrow the ukiyo-e method.
- What do you think she is borrowing from ukiyo-e prints?
 - The artistic style and imagery.

In this first point of inquiry for *a3 blackface #59*, encourage the group to visually examine the painting and compare it to Wiley's portrait. Then discuss the work in comparison to a Japanese ukiyo-e print.

In art, *realism* refers to a manner of representing familiar things in a way that closely resembles them as they actually are.

Conversely, *stylized* refers to something that is depicted in a mannered or nonrealistic style.

In this second point of inquiry, encourage the group to consider how the painting explores phenomenon of ganguro and "cultural borrowing."

Cultural Borrowing & Ganguro:

- The artist, Iona Rozeal Brown, also plays with the idea of borrowing in the subject matter of this painting.
- Brown traveled to Japan in 2001.
- There, she encountered a fad called “ganguro,” that involves Japanese teens imitating African American culture and hip-hop style.
- The artist began making a series of paintings that explore ganguro, as part of a greater phenomenon she refers to as “cultural borrowing.”
- In ganguro, Japanese youth alter their appearances; do you see any evidence of that in this painting?
 - The figures wear Japanese kimono robes and American clothing (including a Burberry scarf, and tee shirt with the logo of the Harlem Giants, a historic African American baseball team).
 - One figure wears a large blonde afro and appears to braid the other’s hair into corn rows, hairstyles traditionally worn by African Americans.
 - A distinct line marks where the brown of the figures’ faces ends and a lighter skin tone appears, suggesting they wear skin-darkening makeup.
- Based upon what we see in the image, what do you think cultural borrowing means?
- How is it related to hybridity?

Cultural appropriation, or cultural borrowing, is the adoption of some specific elements of one culture by a different cultural group, including forms of dress, personal adornment, music and art, religion, language, or social behavior.

Note to tour guide: Participant posed questions can also lead to rich and insightful conversations. For example:

- Does anyone have any questions about this artwork that they wish they could ask the artist?
- Can we hypothesize about how the artist might respond?

Transition:

- Brown juxtaposes Japanese style and iconography with imagery of African American culture to explore cultural borrowing, how one group appropriates cultural elements from another group. Now we have seen how two artists engage with hybridity in their paintings, next let’s look at an artwork that involves hybridity on a very large scale.

Note to tour guide: Direct the group to move to the third artwork: Ravinder Reddy’s “Krishnaveni 1.”

OBJECT 3

Ravinder Reddy. *Krishnaveni 1*. 1997.

Painted and gilded polyester-resin fiberglass. 2001.230a-b

About the Artist:

Ravinder Reddy was born in 1956 in India. He studied art in London during the 1980s, and then returned to India where he runs a sculpture studio in Visakhapatnam, a town in the Andhra Pradesh region, on the southeastern coast.

Visual Examination:

- Let's begin again by looking.
- What do you imagine might inspire an artist to make a sculpture like this?
- Ravinder Reddy, the artist who made this sculpture, is from India.
- His inspiration comes, in part, from traditional Indian art. Specifically, goddess sculptures that decorate religious temples in his hometown.
- I brought a photograph of a sculpture from a temple in the region that Reddy lives, Andhra Pradesh, for us to consider.

In this first point of inquiry, encourage the group to visually examine *Krishnaveni 1* and imagine the artist's inspiration for this sculpture.

Note to tour guide: Show participants a photograph of an Indian temple sculpture that depicts a Hindu goddess.

Comparison:

- Do you see any similarities between the goddess sculpture and Reddy's sculpture?
 - Both have almond-shaped, stylized eyes.
 - Reddy's sculpture's gold finish gives it a divine quality or otherworldly appearance.
- What differences do you see between Reddy's sculpture and his inspiration?
 - Reddy depicts just the head, instead of the entire body.
 - Reddy's sculpture is bolder; the gold and red stand out visually.
 - The traditional sculpture is made of stone, but Reddy's uses fiberglass.
- Fiberglass is a modern material that was invented during the late-twentieth century.
- Reddy's interest in newer materials calls attention to another of his inspirations: pop art.

In this second point of inquiry, ask participants to compare Reddy's sculpture to one of his inspirations—traditional Indian temple sculpture.

Fiberglass is a material made of a plastic matrix reinforced by fine fibers made of glass. It is commonly used for commercial purposes.

Pop Art Influences:

- Pop art is a movement that began in the mid-twentieth century in England and the United States by artists who questioned various conventions of the art world, such the acceptable materials for artmaking.
- Reddy's use of industrial materials instead of traditional materials recalls pop art notions.
- Pop artists also questioned the acceptable subject matter for art and were interested in popular culture.
- During the 1980s, Reddy studied art in London, and was interested in the work of pop artists, particularly Claes Oldenburg.
- Oldenburg makes sculptures of everyday items, enlarged to a huge scale.
- Here are some examples of Oldenburg's sculptures.

In this third point of inquiry, introduce Reddy's interest in pop art and the work of sculptor Claes Oldenburg.

Note to tour guide: Show participants photographs of several of Oldenburg's sculptures, "Shovel," "Fork" and "Banana," focusing on "Shovel" for comparison.

- Let's compare one of Oldenburg's sculptures to Reddy's. What similarities do you see?
 - Both sculptures are very large.
 - Both are bold and colorful.
- Also, like the Oldenburg, Reddy's sculpture references popular culture.
- For example, one form of popular culture that Reddy draws upon is the movie industry. In India, a popular film industry called Bollywood produces many films each year.
- What do you see that could be inspired by the movies or movie stars?
 - The red lipstick and braided hairstyle are common fashion trends in India popularized by Bollywood films.
- But, there are some differences between their sculptures too.

Hybridity:

- Do you see any differences between these sculptures?
 - Oldenburg represents an everyday object.
 - Though it references popular culture, Reddy's artwork represents a goddess.
- Do you agree?
- When we consider the title of this artwork, it seems to have a double meaning, complicating this discussion,
- The name of the sculpture is *Krishnaveni 1*. *Krishnaveni* is a common female name in the area that Reddy lives. So, the artist has given this sculpture name that could belong to any contemporary woman.
- However, *Krishnaveni* also refers to the legendary lover of the God Krishna in the Hindu religion.

In this fourth point of inquiry, encourage the group to think the differences between Reddy and Oldenburg's sculptures, and how Reddy uses hybrid strategies.

- Thus, it is unclear whether the sculpture represents an everyday woman, or the divine. Which do you think it represents?
 - Perhaps it is both, everyday and divine.
- How do you think this double meaning of the artwork's title *Krishnaveni 1* relates the idea of hybridity?
 - Reddy's sculpture is a combination of an art form that celebrates divinity, traditional temple sculpture, and an art form that celebrates the everyday, pop art.

Transition:

- So, this artist combines inspirations from his personal history and from different experiences he's had during his lifetime. As we move to our next artwork, it might be interesting to consider how you would represent aspects of your own personal history in art. Now let's examine an artwork that uses hybridity to push the boundaries of a certain tradition of artmaking, but on a much smaller scale.

Note to guide: Direct the group to move to the fourth artwork: Shahzia Sikander's "Monster's Within."

OBJECT 4

Shahzia Sikander. *Monster's Within*. 2001.

Watercolor, dry pigment, vegetable color, and tea on handmade paper. 2002.535

About the Artist:

Shahzia Sikander was born in 1969 in Pakistan. In 1994, she moved to the United States for graduate study at the Rhode Island School of Art and Design and eventually settled in New York City, where she currently lives.

Visual Examination:

- Let's begin again by visually examining this artwork.
- What are some of your first impressions of this work? What do you see?
 - This painting is very small and detailed, qualities associated with the artist's painting style.
- While in art school, Pakistani artist Shahzia Sikander decided to study miniature painting, a traditional art form.
- Miniature painting.
 - is an art form with a long history.
 - first began about 500 years ago, and for centuries it was the favored art form in Pakistan.
 - was used to represent stories and myths and to depict the lives of kings and gods.

During this first point of inquiry for *Monsters Within*, encourage the group to visually examine the painting and introduce information about the artist and miniature painting.

- Here is an example of a miniature painting from the VMFA’s South Asian art collection.

Note to guide: Pass out the reproduction of a miniature painting from the VMFA’s collection, “Page From a Harivamsha Manuscript: The Arrival of Nanda and His Family in Vrindavan.”

- Let’s list some of the characteristics of miniature painting based upon what we see in this example.
- Characteristics of miniature paintings:
 - Use bright colors.
 - Represent figures and backgrounds (landscapes and architecture) in intricate detail.
 - Often depict many figures.
- Do you think this painting represents a story or event? Why?

During this second point of inquiry, encourages participants to consider how Sikander uses miniature painting methods, and compare *Monsters Within* to other miniature paintings.

Comparison:

- Sikander was trained in this tradition, and she uses miniature painting methods in her paintings.
- Do you see any similarities between her painting and this traditional example?
 - Both are small and detailed.
 - Both depict a lot of imagery and information within a small space.
 - Sikander uses traditional materials, hand makes her paper and paint, and uses animal hair paintbrushes to achieve this level of fine detail.

In this third point of inquiry, prompt participants to consider the artist’s interest in breaking the rules of miniature painting.

Bending the Rules:

- Do you see any differences between Sikander’s work and traditional miniature painting?
 - The traditional painting appears precise and orderly.
 - In Sikander’s painting areas where patterns and images overlap and blend with one another are hard to identify and read.
 - Thus, Sikander’s painting does not appear to tell a clear narrative.

In art, *abstract* refers to a visual language of form, color, and line used to create a composition that exists independently from direct references to recognizable forms.

- I would like to read you a statement by the artist. She says, “my whole purpose of taking on miniature painting was to break (with) tradition, to experiment with it, to find new ways of making meaning, to question the relevancy of it.”⁸⁹
- Miniature painting is a tradition with many rules. How do you think this painting breaks those rules?
 - By not depicting a clear story Sikander diverges from tradition.
 - Instead, Sikander creates unclear, abstract spaces.
- If you could imagine what this painting depicts, what would you guess? Does anyone agree or see something else?
- The title of this painting is *Monsters Within*. If we look at the painting, what do you think the title means?
 - One interpretation is that *Monsters Within* refers to inner demons or emotions, something personal or psychological.
- When you look at this painting, do you see imagery that may reference something personal for the artist?
 - For example, in the lower left side of the painting there is a self-portrait of the artist with two horns coming out of her head.
- Are there any images or parts of the painting that you find particularly interesting and/ or confusing?
- How do you think that Sikander’s inclusion of self-expression and abstract space change the miniature art form?
 - Because miniature painting focused on relaying stories or depicting events in a rigid and methodical style, the tradition did not include overt references to the artist’s experience. By introducing these topics, Sikander makes the miniature tradition personal.

Transition:

- By introducing abstraction and self-expression into miniature painting, Sikander pushes the boundaries of the art form. Let’s now take a look at an artwork by an artist who uses hybrid strategies to make paintings that are a bit mysterious.

Note to tour guide: Direct the group to move to the fourth artwork: Farhad Moshiri’s “S4M53.”

OBJECT 5

Farhad Moshiri. *S4M53*. 2004

Oil on canvas. 2004.68

About the Artist:

Farhad Moshiri was born in 1963 in Iran. He studied art at the California Institute for the Arts during the 1980s, and afterwards he returned to Tehran where he continues to live and work.

⁸⁹ Sikander, Shazia, “Shazia Sikander: Gods, Griffins, and Cowboy Boots,” *MoMA Red Studio*. <http://redstudio.moma.org/interviews/shahzia/shahzia.html>. (accessed October 1, 2010.)

Visual Examination:

- Let's begin again by looking.
- What do you see? Do they remind you of anything you have seen before?
 - They resemble a type of writing or calligraphy.
- The name of this work is *S4M53*, which is a variation of a word from a writing system called Abjad.
- Abjad is shorthand of Arabic, used to inscribe Islamic religious verses.
- This painting depicts a small segment of Abjad writing, the symbols that represent the five letters and numbers in the title.
- The artist, Farhad Moshiri, enlarged the script and then scrambled its normal orientation, so that the symbols run in multiple directions.
- Thus, we see the Abjad writing system enlarged and scrambled across the canvas.

During this first point of inquiry for *S4M53*, encourage participants to visually examine the painting and consider how the artist created the image.

Abstraction:

- How do you think this treatment changes the original meaning of the symbols?
 - The symbols or letters become more of a pattern than words.
 - They could be interpreted as abstractions of the original words, meaning they do not represent anything.
- Do you agree?
- The Abstract Expressionists, a group of artists who worked in New York in the 1940s and '50s, believed that artists should reject representing images in paintings and should express themselves through lines, shape, and color.
- One of the artists associated with this movement was named Franz Kline. Moshiri's paintings are sometimes compared to Kline's.

During this second point of inquiry, ask participants to consider whether Moshiri's paintings are abstractions.

Note to tour guide: Show participants a reproduction of a Franz Kline painting from the VMFA's collection, "Untitled."

- Here is an example of Kline's work from the VMFA's collection, on display in the twentieth-century galleries.
- To make paintings like this one, Kline enlarged his carefully drawn sketches by projecting them onto a canvas, and painted them in black and white.
- His paintings look spontaneous, but were usually carefully planned.
- Do you see any similarities between *S4M53* and Kline's painting?
 - The paintings' large scale.
 - Black and white color palette.

Franz Kline (1910-1962) was a painter associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement who created large-scale black and white abstract paintings from detailed sketches during the 1940s and '50s.

- What differences do you see between these paintings?
 - *S4M53* is more textural; notice the cracked paint layers.
- The artist gives it this look on purpose. He applies many layers of paint and then folds and crushes the canvas to achieve this look.
- Do you think there is any connection between the textured appearance of the canvas and Moshiri’s subject matter?
 - Moshiri’s process gives the canvas an aged appearance.
 - The calligraphy Moshiri distorts is an ancient writing system that originated about 3,500 years ago.
 - In comparison, abstract art is a modern concept.
 - So Moshiri brings together the old and the new.

During this third point of inquiry, prompt participants to consider possible motivations for Moshiri’s hybrid strategy.

Ambiguity:

- Why do you think he does this?
- I want to read you a statement from Moshiri. He says: “ambiguity is the strongest weapon artists have at their disposal. You can play with the layers of interpretation and avoid getting in trouble.”⁹⁰
- The word ambiguity refers to something being unclear or unspecific.
- What (if anything) do you find ambiguous or unclear in this painting?
 - One interpretation suggests that because we do not know what the original words meant, the ramifications of their abstraction is unclear.
 - Also, Moshiri combines tradition and modernity, but it’s unclear which one he prefers, or what their melding means.
- What do you think Moshiri means when he says he “avoids getting into trouble?”
 - One interpretation is that artists in Iran are not free to make the make direct political, social, or religious statements in their art.
 - A statement about tradition versus modernity could be considered political. For this reason, Moshiri values ambiguity and subtlety, an under-the-radar approach.

Transition:

- Using hybrid strategies, Moshiri brings the past and the present together, commenting indirectly on the tensions between tradition and modernity. In this painting, we see how hybridity can be a powerful form of expression.

⁹⁰ John Ravenal, *Modern and Contemporary Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, 104.

CONCLUSION

- This brings us to the end of our tour. Thank you for exploring the VMFA's twenty-first-century art galleries and discussing hybridity with me today.
- We have examined how five different contemporary artists create artworks by combining and juxtaposing disparate cultural influences, imagery, and artistic styles to create something new.
- Would anyone like to share any last thoughts or questions for us to consider before we go?
- Part of what makes twenty first century art exciting is that these artists are responding to the same societal issues and current events that we are also encountering. As you leave this tour, it may be interesting to think about how hybridity relates to your own life, and whether any of these artworks relate to experiences you've had in your own life.
- Ok, I can escort you back to the front desk or give directions if there are other galleries you would like to explore.
- I hope you enjoyed our tour today, and visit the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts again in the future!

Note to tour guide: These suggestions for dialogue cover five artworks during the fifty-minute period. However, the order and number of artworks that you discuss during your tour may change based upon the liveliness of conversation and questions posed by your group. Have fun!

Additional Resources:

- Twomey Fosnot, Catherine ed. *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practices*. New York: Teachers College, 1996.
- Barrett, Terry. *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, Responding*. New York: McGrawHill, 2002.
- Burnham, Rika and Elliot Kai-Kee. "Gallery Teaching as Guided Interpretation: Museum Education Practice and Hermeneutic Theory." In *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education In The 21st Century*, edited by Pat Villeneuve. Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007.
- Villeneuve, Pat and Ann Rowson Love. "Rethinking Gallery Learning Experience Through Inquiry," In *From Periphery to Center: Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, edited by Pat Villeneuve. Reston: National Art Education Association, 2007.

Appendix B

Corresponding Virginia Standards of Learning Requirements

Visual Arts:

- AI.4 The student will recognize and identify technological developments in the visual arts.
- AI.12 The student will describe connections among media, elements of art, principles of design, themes, and concepts found in historical and contemporary art.
- AI.13 The student will describe works of art, using appropriate art vocabulary.
- AI.14 The student will identify major art movements and influential artists according to locations, cultures, and historical periods.
- AI.17 The student will describe and analyze the function, purpose, and perceived meanings of specific works of art studied.
- AI.18 The student will identify and examine symbols in works of art and discuss possible reasons for their use.
- AI.19 The student will employ critical evaluation skills and use appropriate art vocabulary when evaluating and interpreting works of art.
- AI.20 The student will critique works of art with reference to the elements of art and the principles of design.
- AI.21 The student will analyze an original work of art by describing, responding, analyzing, interpreting, and judging or evaluating.
- AI.22 The student will differentiate between personal preference and informed judgment when discussing works of art.
- AI.25 The student will classify works of art as representational, abstract, nonobjective, and/or conceptual.
- AI.29 The student will discuss current problems and issues of the art world.
- AI.31 The student will speculate on the intentions and choices of those who created a work of art.
- AII.13 The student will identify works of art and artistic developments that relate to historical time periods and locations.
- AII.15 The student will identify and examine works of art in their historical context and relate them to historical events.
- AII.16 The student will describe distinguishing features in works of art that may be used to differentiate among a variety of historical periods and cultural contexts.
- AII.17 The student will examine and discuss societal conditions that influence works of art.
- AII.18 The student will identify the function and interpret the meaning of a work of art

or an artifact in its original context.

- AII.19 The student will describe symbols present in works of art in relation to historical meaning.
- AII.20 The student will describe, analyze, interpret, and judge works of art, using an expanded art vocabulary.
- AII.21 The student will use an expanded art vocabulary to assess the effectiveness of the communication of ideas in personal works of art.
- AII.22 The student will demonstrate orally and in writing, the ability to interpret and compare historical references found in original works of art.
- AII.23 The student will identify and analyze characteristics of works of art that represent a variety of styles.
- AII.24 The student will participate in class critiques and criticisms based on one or more established models (e.g., Feldman, Broudy, Barrett).
- AII.25 The student will describe how the perception of quality in works of art has changed over time.
- AIII.15 The student will analyze and discuss the influences of one culture upon another.
- AIII.26 The student will debate the perceived intentions of those creating works of art.
- AIV.20 The student will use an extensive, high-level art vocabulary related to design, composition, aesthetic concepts, and art criticism when discussing works of art.

English:

- 11.1 The student will make informative and persuasive presentations.
 - a) Gather and organize evidence to support a position.
 - b) Present evidence clearly and convincingly.
 - c) Support and defend ideas in public forums.
 - d) Use grammatically correct language, including vocabulary appropriate to the topic, audience, and purpose.
- 11.2 The student will analyze and evaluate informative and persuasive presentations.
 - a) Critique the accuracy, relevance, and organization of evidence.
 - b) Critique the clarity and effectiveness of delivery.

History and Social Science:

- WHI.4 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the civilizations of Persia, India, and China in terms of chronology, geography, social structures, government, economy, religion, and contributions to later civilizations by
 - a) describing Persia, including Zoroastrianism and the development of an imperial bureaucracy;
 - b) describing India, with emphasis on the Aryan migrations and the caste system;
 - c) describing the origins, beliefs, traditions, customs, and spread of Hinduism;
 - d) describing the origins, beliefs, traditions, customs, and spread of Buddhism;
 - e) describing China, with emphasis on the development of an empire and the construction of the Great Wall;
 - f) describing the impact of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

WHII.15 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the influence of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism in the contemporary world by

- a) describing their beliefs, sacred writings, traditions, and customs;
- b) locating the geographic distribution of religions in the contemporary world.

WHII.16 The student will demonstrate knowledge of cultural, economic, and social conditions in developed and developing nations of the contemporary world by

- a) identifying contemporary political issues, with emphasis on migrations of refugees and others, ethnic/religious conflicts, and the impact of technology, including chemical and biological technologies;
- b) assessing the impact of economic development and global population growth on the environment and society, including an understanding of the links between economic and political freedom;
- c) describing economic interdependence, including the rise of multinational corporations, international organizations, and trade agreements;
- d) analyzing the increasing impact of terrorism.

World Geography:

WG.3 The student will apply the concept of a region by

- a) explaining how characteristics of regions have led to regional labels;
- b) explaining how regional landscapes reflect the physical environment and the cultural characteristics of their inhabitants;
- c) analyzing how cultural characteristics, including the world's major languages, ethnicities, and religions, link or divide regions.

WG.6 The student will analyze past and present trends in human migration and cultural interaction as they are influenced by social, economic, political, and environmental factors.

Vita

Elizabeth Ann Reilly-Brown was born in Gainesville, Florida on August 13, 1984. She graduated from Gainesville High School in 2003. Elizabeth attended college in Gainesville at the University of Florida, majoring in Art History with a minor in Anthropology. She graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelors Degree in 2007. In 2008, she began graduate school at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, where she will earn a Masters of Arts Degree in Art History. While in graduate school, Elizabeth has taught undergraduate Art History courses at VCU, served as a member of the Art History Graduate Student Association, and interned in the curatorial and education departments at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.