

# Art Education and Art Museums: Visitors' Learning

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## ***Abstract***

*Art museums today have the opportunity to push the traditional museum paradigm to enable a broader approach to postmodern society. Since diverse visual images permeate through this society, traditional art museum communication approaches are no longer suitable. Artworks displayed in art museums not only suggest a single meaning, but produce multiple meanings in communicating with the public. The function of the art museum as a communicator demands new ways of thinking about issues of knowledge, power, identity, and language. This paper investigates communication methods and processes in art museums. Visitors in art museums are examined by focusing on the learning process. The conversation between visitors and art museums is discussed in order to understand how the meanings of artworks in art museums are constructed. Additionally, this study investigated the processes and aspects of diverse media that can be used in the exhibition spaces in art museums.*

*Key words : art museums, communication, visitors' learning, universal survey museum, contextual knowledge*

## **I. Introduction**

The meanings of art museums have been consistently constructed in the history of the museums. Art museums that collected, conserved,

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and exhibited the old masters' artworks and items of cultural heritage have been understood by the public as the institutions in which visitors obtain educational experiences. Artworks on display in the gallery space of an art museum are situated in an historical and cultural context when viewed by visitors. When viewing objects on display in art museums, viewers are the key element in producing the meanings of an exhibition. However, artworks in art museums do not suggest a single meaning, but produce multiple meanings for visitors. Conversation between 'subjects (visitors)' and 'objects (artworks)', that is, endless conversations between the viewers and the viewed, are part of the educational experience when the public visits art museums.

Therefore, this study asks several questions of how art museums function as the aesthetic institution of education mediating between these subjects and objects: Which educational effects can be obtained when visitors encounter artworks in museums?; How can we theoretically support visitors' experience with artworks in art museums?; How can we analyze visitors' experiences in art museums?; How can we develop the appropriate teaching methods for museums visitors?

Therefore, this study, first, examines the communication methods and process in art museums developed in the modern era. Additionally, a new communication paradigm in post-modern society is also discussed. Second, visitors in art museums are discussed by focusing on the learning process. Visitors move back and forth between, on the one hand, information and artworks provided by curators in art museums, and on the other hand, participate in the process of learning. Third, the conversation between visitors and art museums is discussed in order to understand how the meanings of artworks in art museums are constructed. Finally, this study investigates the processes and aspects of diverse media that can be used in the exhibition spaces in art museums.

## **II. Background of Modern Art Museums and Communication**

Enlightenment in the Modern period invoked rationality to supplant the superstitions and subjective knowledge of earlier times. Attempts were made to construct universal knowledge that could be relied upon at all times and in all places. Grand narratives (meta-narratives) were developed that stood as valid outside the context from which they were spoken (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 559). The belief in an objective reality is itself one of the meta-narratives that the Enlightenment invented. Reason became the new authority.

The epistemic structures of the Enlightenment were premised on a split between mind and body, with the privileged organ being the mind. This binary structure has influenced the system and thought of the West. These binary pairs, still in many ways the common sense of the Western world, can be observed in such concepts as mind/body, male/female, black/white, light/dark, line/color, and so on. In each of the binary pairs, one half is accorded greater value than the other. For example, the mind is in the privileged position within the mind/body binary pair. These mental structures, which have dominated our thoughts, have, naturally, influenced our daily lives as well. An example of this is apparent in modernist museums that are divided into private space and public space.

The private and public spaces of modernist museums, which were structured through deep rooted binary structures, can be analyzed as the spaces for knowledge production and knowledge consumption. According to Hooper-Greenhill, specialist knowledge was deployed in private spaces. Additionally, scholarly research was carried out and where products such as exhibitions and catalogues were fashioned,

the bodies occupying these spaces were highly specialized and differentiated, each with its own necessary mental freight which justified its presence within these austere spaces (p. 560).

On the other hand, the public spaces were the spaces of consumption for educating and exhibiting, in opening to the public. This was the space of undifferentiated bodies that assembled to partake of the specialist information laid out for them in the galleries. The visitors' behaviors in this space are important to making meanings of artworks (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004).

Before the modernist art museums, private spaces were central to the function of art museums. However, after the French Revolution, the collections of art museums came to be open to the public, and the notion of museum education and conservation came into being.<sup>1)</sup> The British Museum, the Louvre, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art were the representative public art museums in which collections covered the achievements of time and space in human history. Carol Duncan (2004) calls these modernist art museums 'universal survey museums.'<sup>2)</sup>

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<sup>1)</sup>The French Revolution, with its egalitarian objectives, led to the conditions for the emergence of a new paradigm of museology, which was realized in the Louvre. The Louvre maintained a collection of great artworks and at the same time became a strongly democratic educational institution by providing greater access to all people. Linda Nochlin asserts that the Louvre was an apparatus with two deeply contradictory functions; that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education (Nochlin, 1972:8). In keeping with the notion of democratic education, everyone could visit without charge. This was in great contrast to other museum that restricted entry only to the educated people whose interest and good behavior could be assumed (Hudson, 1987:42). Explanatory texts were attached to the works of art displayed in the museum. Inexpensive catalogues were written for the visiting citizens not for scholars or curator (Hudson, 1987: 42, 186; Bazin, 1959: 51). The Louvre became a people's museum in the eighteenth century. However, even though we have defined it as a democratic museum in the context of the eighteenth century in Europe, the Louvre had some limitation in its focus on elegant artworks.

<sup>2)</sup>Carol Duncan discussed universal survey museums in her article entitled *The Universal Survey Museum* (Duncan & Wallach, 2004). For instance, the display methods in the Louvre were new achievements. The treasures were displayed for the public, and artifacts such as sculpture, architecture, tombs, and decorations from the church were arranged in seriated rooms by chronological order. Additionally, the collections were divided into the work of living and deceased artists. Previously, collections had displayed both old pieces and the works of living artists together. The paintings were hung together in geographical and historical groupings and schools of artists, rather than by the morphological similarities of the works themselves. The visible features emphasized in the previous era were no longer the determining factors in establish in the method of displaying objects in the museum. Paintings were hung in 'schools' in order to show their histories. For

Before the French Revolution, the public was not permitted access to the collections. The objects were collected, preserved, and displayed for the particular classes who had some social and economical power. However, following the French revolution, the Enlightenment and democracy heightened the role of museum education in public art museums. In fact, civic education came to be the main function of public art museums. It was the significant moment in the beginning of communication between the public art museums and visitors who came to look at the artworks in the gallery spaces. Here, the modernist art museum adopts a particular stance towards its visitors. The communicative aim of the modernist art museum is to enlighten and to educate, to lay out knowledge for the visitor.

### III. Learners' Communication with Artworks in Art Museums

In modernist art museums, communication between visitors and museums was fostered when the collections were viewed in the art museums. The paintings in the modernist art museums were grouped and displayed in order to materialize 'art history'. The educational aims of the modernist art museums were to transfer or transmit information on art history to the public. For instance, representative of modernist art museums, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre, and British Museum, displayed artworks in chronological order. These 'universal survey museums' or 'public art museums' aimed to educate the public about art history. Visitors to these public art museums communicate with the artworks which were the representation of art history in the galleries of art museums. These public art museums revealed the glory of the nation by displaying the artworks in the gallery space.

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instance, the Louvre organized and displayed its paintings according to the four schools, the Italian, the Flemish, the Dutch, and the French. Each work of art was given an explanatory text, which gave information about the artist and the subject. This was an entirely revolutionary approach to the method of displaying artwork (Hudson, 1987: 41-42).

Communication in art museums has been discussed in the field of art education, focusing on museum education. George E. Hein (1998) observes the communication between visitors and art museums, describing the visitors' learning process in the environment of museums in light of educational theories and methods in his book, entitled *Learning in the Museum*. Hooper-Greenhill deals with the issue of communication in her book *Museum, Media, Message* in a different perspective than that of Hein. While Hein discusses the educational role and constructivist theories of art museums, Hooper-Greenhill builds a theoretical framework based on communication theory by investigating the communication between visitors, objects displayed, and curators in art museums. She asserts that the methods and processes of communication in museums are not simple or one way, but there are multiple ways.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, cabinets of curiosities and galleries were special, limited spaces for communication to the public. These private places were not open to everyone, but to the merchant classes, that contributed to the rapid growth of banking and trading activities. Through the collection of expensive and curious objects and the construction of elaborate spaces, they constructed the new subject position in society.<sup>3)</sup> This kind of museum was one way of

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<sup>3)</sup>The cabinet of curiosities was made possible by the collecting activities of the French Medici family. The Medici family was the most successful of the merchant families, at a time in Florence when the rapid growth of banking, trading, and mercantile activities was producing large fortunes (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:24). As their economic power grew, the merchant class needed culture, connoisseurship, and ostentatious display in order to support their social and economic positions. This collecting activity around the mid-seventeenth century can not be considered an accident, but was inevitable with the change in the economic conditions. In the mid-seventeenth there was a rapid extension of trade. Shipping and navigation improved and facilitated a flow of luxury goods, from the east through Venice and into Italy and Germany. It is this trade that allowed the growth of a wealthy merchant class. Traditionally in Europe the merchants were not the holders of wealth; wealth was held by the aristocracy. It was this economic boom that initiated the collecting frenzy (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). The various items that were collected by the nouveau riche displayed their wealth and social status. Thus, collecting activity was an economic venture and a symbol of social status. The development of

representing their glory and the success of their families, and was accessible to the same socioeconomic classes.

The cabinets of curiosities and galleries which were defined as the Renaissance art museums were one of the earliest and most comprehensive attempts to represent the entirety of nature, to picture the world through the arrangement of material things, both natural and artificial.<sup>4)</sup> Museums were to become central to the task of the representation of the world as a view at the end of the sixteenth century (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 45).

The function of these museums was twofold: first, to bring objects together within a setting and a discourse where material things could act to represent all the different parts of existence; and second, having assembled a representative collection of meaningful objects, to display, or present, this assemblage in such a way that the ordering of the material both represented and demonstrated knowledge of the world (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 82).

However, the methods and processes of communication in the modernist museums are different from the cabinets of curiosities and galleries in the sixteenth century. The modernist art museums overcome the limitation of communication in private space—the cabinet of curiosities and galleries—and tried to communicate to the public in the public space. It is a major significant change in the method of communication during the modern period.

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the nouveau riche merchant class and the decline of the aristocracy represented the decline of the intellectual and institutional power of the church and the new development of early capitalism (Pearce, 1992:92).

<sup>4)</sup>The collections of the cabinet of curiosities were arranged partly in response to the size of the pieces and partly to differentiate between natural and artificial(man-made) materials. The collections of the cabinets of curiosities were assembled as representative groups of meaningful objects, with the material ordered to represent knowledge of the world. As Hooper-Greenhill asserts, the collection found in the cabinet of curiosities can be characterized as places for keeping and sorting the products of Man and Nature and . . . promoting their significance . . . in a program whose aim was nothing less than universality"(Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:80). The cabinets of curiosities brought objects together within a setting and constructed a discourse where the material things represented all the different parts of existent.

The modernist art museum adopted a particular stance towards its visitors. As we have mentioned, the communicative aim of the modernist art museum is to enlighten and to educate visitors so that knowledge may be absorbed. The information provided in the art museum is that of the art historical discipline from which the collections are exhibited. In the exhibition space of art museums, artworks are grouped in order to visualize art history.<sup>5)</sup> The aim of modernist art museums is to transmit knowledge of art history to the public. Knowledge and learning are represented by this notion of a transmission model of communication. This model of communication is a linear process of communication in delivering authoritative information to the uninformed receiver. Here, knowledge is understood as objective, singular, ultimate, and value free.

The transmission model of communication is straightforward: a transmitter sends a message through a medium to a receiver (Figure 1). This process is focused on the technical act of transferring data from a source to a receiver. However, this approach to communication is limited, since it ignores the social and cultural aspects of the communication process. It cannot explain the complex processes of communication between the transmitters and receivers. The transmission-model approach applied in art museums is unidirectional, in which transmitters (curators) deliver the messages of artworks to the receivers (the public) in a linear path.

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<sup>5)</sup>The invention of art history played a role in structuring the museum experiences. As a product of Enlightenment thought, art history rationalized the experience of art. Through the history of art, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, could appropriate the experience of art. For the bourgeoisie, cultural achievement and individual genius were the essence of human history. Art history was primarily understood in terms of the claim that history was the history of great men. The museum was organized as an art historical monument--art expected to speak of individual genius and achievement. Art history could justify the appropriation and exhibition of art by the state: art appeared as art history only in the museum, and only art history made the spiritual truths of art visible. Thus, the museum was the only proper repository of art objects (Duncan & Wallach, 1980:456).

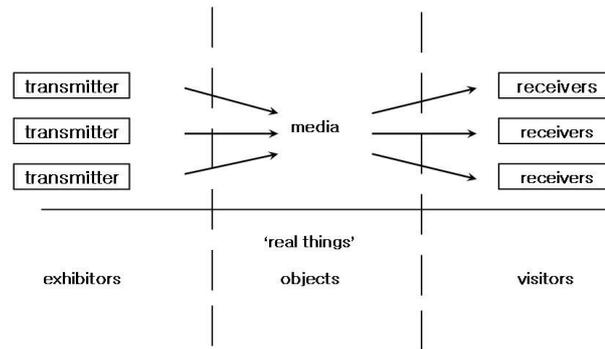


Figure 1. Transmission Model of Communication by Cameron, 1968  
(Hooper-Greenhill, 1994)

Cameron (1968) introduced the transmission model of communication to the museum world in North America in the late 1960s, and proposed the debate over whether objects were the most important aspects of a museum's communication system, or whether objects were merely one form of communication. Cameron asserts that there are many transmitters, many media and many receivers. In the art museums, the primary medium used is that of objects (artworks) (Hooper-Greenhill, 1996: 46).

The transmission model of communication is related to stimulus response formulations of learning which are at the heart of early behaviorist psychology. Behaviorism proposes that learning takes place through a response following a stimulus. Learners are 'empty vessels' to be filled, and teachers are knowledgeable and authoritative people who structure the subject matter to be mastered so that the learners may absorb it. From this perspective, teaching and learning in educational environment are separate from the world outside. The learner structures the content of learning according to the internal logic of the subject matter. Knowledge is conceptualized as something that can be transferred from one mind to another.

The behaviorist view of learning which can provide theoretical support to a transmission model of communication assumes that the content of the message is received without modification by the receiver. Each individual receiver and learner is understood to receive the same message in the same way. Learners are considered to be individuals without curiosity, without capacity to change, and as merely the absorbers of external stimuli (Hein, 1998: 25).

The transmission model of communication is an appropriate theoretical framework for museums explaining modernist art museums. One of their most prominent functions lay in the field of education (Roberts, 1997). A significant function of art museums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to provide moral education.<sup>6)</sup> The transmission model of communication can be applied to the exhibition of an art museum. The curator, as transmitter and expert on the collections and knowledgeable about the relevant discipline, leads the project, chooses objects for display and decides what to say in the text panels and labels. Artworks in the modernist art museums are exhibited sequentially, with a clear beginning and end, and an intended order for pedagogic purposes (Hein, 1998: 29). In modernist art museums, communication between visitors and art museums is considered from the perspective of a technical process: which artworks shall we display, in which arrangement, with which attached texts?

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<sup>6)</sup>The concern for moral education emphasized in the Peale Museum allowed it to experiment with popular education. To fulfill the high educational purpose, Peale, in 1821, offered free admission to 'Teachers of School.' This effort was the first recorded partnership in the U.S. between museums and schools for the purpose of popular education. Additionally, the significant steps toward making the museum a more educational institution were made possible by the education reforms that took place during the industrial revolution. The majority of the working poor fled to the cities looking for a better life. With the influx of the working poor, crime, prostitution and drunkenness became serious urban problems. Social reformers soon recognized the miseries of the cities. Unfortunately, they ascribed the conditions to the low morals and ignorance of the poor class. Education was demanded as the remedy to both poverty and criminal behavior. Museums and schooling were considered as a moral agency that would assure the orderly conduct of society.

Here the communication method is one way and linear. The curator as a transmitter excludes the visitors in the process of planning the exhibition, proceeding with no consultation as to whether the selected approaches will be accessible to those who do not already recognize the display codes and the art historical references. In this transmission model of communication, the curator has the ultimate power, while the visitors are disempowered.

In overcoming the limitation of modernist art museums, the new art museums in a pluralistic society focus on two aspects: first, what is said and who talks about issues of narrative and voice, and second, who is listening and what is an issue of interpretation, understanding and the construction of meaning. The aim of the modernist art museums is to create art historical narratives visible on the walls of the museums. The narrative is constructed within the parameters drawn up by the traditional written texts and the exhibitor. Hooper-Greenhill asserts that the parameters of the narrative from which the collections and displays are constructed have, in the past, rarely been challenged because the curatorial voice was the only one to be heard (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004: 563).

However, more recently, narrative construction in modernist art museums has been challenged. The art museums represent specific accounts of the past through the artworks they chose to collect and the expository juxtapositions they choose to make. In other words, art museums and their collections embody and exhibit particular social value for artworks in the exhibition. This is related to narratives and voice from inner(curators) and outer(visitors) art museums. Also, narrative and voice lead to questions of the construction of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge construction and power.

Therefore, here, the issue of interpreting the relationship between subject and meanings is raised. An art museum needs to be concerned with the audience's interpretation of artworks and with the construction of knowledge when the audiences look at the artworks. This process accompanies understanding and interpretation. In explaining how viewers' interpret artworks, the following artwork of Dias and Riedweg's *Funk Staden* at Kassel Documenta in 2007 would be persuasive. When an Asian woman looked at the artwork, whose creators revise the story of *Wahrhaftige Historia*, the meanings which

she produced for the artwork were different from those of the curators at Kassel Documenta. Dias and Riedweg depicts the source of the “savage cannibal-infested tropics” that haunted the European imagination and became the stereotype that contributed to legitimizing the violence of colonization (Kassel, 2007). Dias and Riedweg’s artwork *Funk Staden* presents three cameras placed on top of a wooden stick, inspired by the ritual object that the Tupinambá women ornamented to be used to kill the enemy before devouring him.

Dias and Riedweg rewrite the *Wahrhaftige Historia* as a video installation. Their artwork sets forth the issue of interpretation by the viewers who have different cultural, social and political backgrounds. The perspective of the curator can be different from that of the viewers. In other words, for the Asian woman’s eye as a viewer, this video artwork represents the Western-centered ideology which interprets non-Western culture as savage. Different interpretations from a cultural diversity perspective were not considered in this exhibition, since the space of traditional exhibition in Kassel Documenta was focused on transmitting ultimate knowledge, that is, a West-centered ideology to the public.

Even though the transmission communication theory explains the linear process of communication between artworks, audiences, and art museums, this model has been challenged by Knez and Wright (1970). Knez and Wright agrees that the museum is a communication system, and also agree that a professional museum officer is the ‘transmitter,’ and visitor was the ‘receiver.’ However Knez and Wright assert that primary medium and secondary medium decide the function and role of museums. Additionally, this communication model stress that visitors actively interpret their experiences of the museum in the light of many individual and social factors, including their backgrounds, cultural assumptions, levels of knowledge and personal agendas for the museum visit (Figure2).

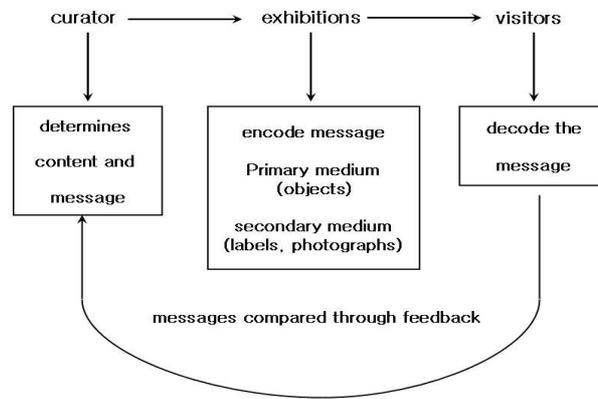


Figure 2. The Communication Model by Knez and Wright, 1970 (Hein, 1998)

Meanwhile, Peter Vergo (1989) asserts a new museology and pays attention to the relationship between artworks and audiences in art museums. In her book entitled *From Knowledge to Narrative*, Lisa Roberts (1997) also compares the concepts of modernist art museums with those of postmodernist art museums and proposes a new paradigm of art museums in a plural society. She focuses on visitors' diverse responses and the process of communication between art museums and visitors (Roberts, 1997: 21–33).<sup>7)</sup> In modernist art museums, the messages of exhibitions which are directed by curators

<sup>7)</sup>Her argument is largely derived from two opposing positions that the dual path museum have taken in their responsibility for both public and scholarly uses. The first position, 'Professional Criticism' criticizes the early American museums of the cabinet type for subordinating the entire goal of the museum to popular entertainment. This position held that the early American museums ignored the legitimate needs of the scholar and directed the level of presentation of the museums to the unrefined populace. The other critique of the early museum, which might be called the 'Democratic Criticism', was in complete contrast to the first criticism of early American museums. This criticism charges that as museums catered to more scholarly purposes, too little was done for the public; in other words, that the early American museums overlooked the needs of the general public, serving instead the desires of such elitist groups as highly educated historians, scientists, or artist (Roberts, 1997: 21-33).

are delivered to the visitors in one way through artworks, whereas in postmodernist art museums the messages of exhibitions are not transmitted to the visitors passively, but are produced between the visitors' responses to the works of art in art museums.

Visitors' communication with the artworks in art museums enlarges the horizon of interpretation of artworks within political, social, and economic contexts. The meanings of artworks do not exist strictly within artworks, but emerge from a floating conversation among artworks, visitors, and exhibition spaces. The borders of art museums today stress the process of visitors' interpretation in response to artworks in the gallery spaces. Visitor centeredness is a primary issue in art museums. Art museums do not present artworks which are curated by exhibitors, but also participate in the negotiation between artworks and visitors, which constructs the meaning of artworks.

How then can visitors appreciate and understand artworks in gallery spaces? In an exhibit space, artworks hang on the wall, or stand on a pedestal or on the floor of the gallery. Certainly, the ways in which the artworks are arranged are influential in educating the public as mentioned previously. However, Michael Baxandall pays much more attention to artworks which are displayed with accompanying labels, leaflets, or a catalogue. These are the significant media that contribute to transmitting the meaning of artworks in an exhibition (Baxandall, 1991).

What the labels in art museums usually say is the visual character of the artworks such as the size, some information related to the artworks, and the artists' names. However, the label stands as an explanatory relation to the artworks. What the viewer sees in the artworks is in first instance a form of the artworks. However, the interpretation offered by the label explains the artworks. For instance, the object <Mask> (Figure 3) has a name, even though the viewer's ignorance of the language prevents him from construing any signification or connotation in it. It signifies that it is an object that plays a defined or established cultural role. If the viewers look at this object focusing on its beauty, techniques, and formal quality with a formalist's eye, they fail to fully understand this object. However, when a label is displayed in the gallery space, the viewers can

understand the cultural context of this object, which is the cultural production of Etonmbi region--the worship of ancestors. Additionally, viewers can understand that this object had an effect on early Cubism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Figure 4).

The label is not just a note card, but includes the briefing given in the catalogue entry and even a selection that aims to make a point. The object and its label in a gallery space produce a kind of intellectual space in which the viewer makes a connection between the label and the object. The label describes the exhibitor's thoughts on the object, or that part of his thinking that he feels is to be his message to be communicated to the viewer.



Figure 3. Mask, Etonmbi Region,  
People's Republic of the Conge



Figure 4. Pablo Picasso,  
Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907

What should be emphasized here is that the viewers are mostly active. They move with great vitality between visually curious objects and simultaneously pleasurable finding of causes. Then, the viewers move back from information about reasons to visually interesting objects, scanning the objects for applications of these reasons. Baxandall explains this process in the following way:

It can be seen as an attempt to reconcile two propositions about a culture the participant's culturally conditioned action, or practical proposition, on the one hand, and the observer's implicit explanation, by selection of an item of information that potentially is a cause, on the other. It can also be seen as a case of the viewer demanding a certain kind of art criticism. He uses this or that item of information about cause to sharpen his perception of the object attending anew to a manner of ornament or the significance of an open mouth, material or final cause at hand (Baxandall, 1991: 38).

Meanwhile, in the process of communication between artworks and viewers, the exhibitors (curators) serve as an important role to help viewers understand artworks. The exhibitor or curator plays the role of deciding the theme of an exhibition, selecting artworks, displaying them, and educating the visitors. In traditional art museums, the curator was the most important factor in the creation of the meaning and message of art museums which could be delivered by exhibitions. In the art museum in plural society, viewers should grasp the curator's intention of planning the exhibition, in order to understand artworks in the gallery space of art museums. Constructing the meaning of artworks is a process of negotiation between the curator's intention which is imbedded in the art exhibition and viewers. Viewers are one of the most important factors in the construction of meaning of artworks in art museums.

#### **IV. Interpretation and Understanding in Art Museums: Producing Contextual Knowledge**

Communication today in 'new' art museums emphasizes the importance of interpretive strategies in the construction of meaning. The process of interpretation by viewers is considered as a meaning making process. It is concerned with coming to a fuller understanding of what artworks mean in the art museums. The 'hermeneutic circle' proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer explains the way in which meaning is constructed. His thoughts on how meaning is made from objects are particularly useful in understanding the relation between

art works and viewers in the art museum. When the viewers make meanings of artworks, they move back and forth between the whole and the part of the object and between the present and the past, and so on. A dialogue is produced between the whole and the part, the past and the present, which enables continual checking and rechecking, revising ideas, trying new ones and rejecting those that do not work. In this process, Gadamer(1976) emphasizes the importance of previous knowledge. The process of constructing meanings of artworks in art museums is circular and dialogic, which depends on viewers' previous knowledge. Viewers construct the meanings of artworks throughout this circular process of questioning and answering about artworks (Gadamer, 1976: 117).

Interpretation is necessarily historically situated. The viewer's position in history and culture has an effect on constructing meaning. What we see, what we choose to remember, and what we think about the object logically are different depending on the viewer's social, cultural and political contexts. Prior cultural, social, political, and historical knowledge and experience contribute to differentiated meanings. In this context, art museums need to acknowledge that a major sense of interpretation is that of an active process of making meaning, where the viewer's prior knowledge and historical, political, social, and cultural background play a part in assigning significance.

This perspective on interpretation is close to the constructivist perspective on learning and teaching theory. Both hermeneutics and constructivism propose that knowledge is constructed through the learner's active interpretations of experience (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 118). Knowledge is not a single, ultimate, self-contained body of facts that can be transmitted from teacher to learner. Rather, knowledge is plural and fluid, brought into being by the processes of knowing. Not only mental activity, but bodily activity is important in the process of learning. In this learning process, learners use differentiated learning strategies both to perceive and to process information and experience. While hermeneutics focuses on the receivers, constructivist theory pays attention to the processes of learning rather than the processes of teaching. The role of the teacher is to provide a stimulating environment for learning that takes account of the existing knowledge of the learner, and that enables the construction of knowledge

throughout both the use of prior knowledge and the development of new knowledge. In the context of constructivism, teachers are regarded as learners. The teacher needs to work jointly with other learners in a collaborative and consultative way, to develop new approaches to learning processes.

In art museums, the processes of teaching and learning occur in the perceptual area as well as the logical area. Artworks in art museums are objects that can be tangible, visible, and legible. Learning and teaching in art museums includes tangible, visual, as well as linguistic processes. The process of understanding artworks in art museums accompanies the process of interpretation. This is the process of conversation between schemata and new knowledge by viewers. The viewers as learners go back and forth between the past and the present, perception and logic, language and non language, and so on.

Both hermeneutics and constructivism suggest that knowing is culturally inflected, and that in this sense, knowledge is relative. We can see the same events with different perspectives. This position is related to multicultural and inter-cultural issues in that viewers in art museum construct their interpretation of artworks depending on their cultural and social context. The processes of making meaning and interpretations have social dimensions. Each viewer's meaning making is constructed in the context of interpretive communities. Within constructivism, learning is not only personal, but also social. What we know is produced not just through interpretation of individual experience, but also through the testing of our interpretation within significant communities. Here, 'interpretive community' is suggested by Stanley Fish (1980). What we know is constructed within the process of personal experience, and it is evaluated and elaborated within the interpretive community. Fish defines an interpretive community as those who share the same strategies for reading texts and assigning meaning:

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions (Fish, 1980: 171).

According to Fish, meanings of artworks are not inherent within the artwork itself, but are brought into being through the interpretive strategies used by the viewers. These meanings are to some extent controlled by the validation accorded them by the relevant interpretive community. The Asian woman's response to the artwork at the Documenta Kassel is due to the different interpretive community in which the curator is involved. If we accept the complex and multiple approaches to communication as culture, and think about art museums as cultural borderlands where power and knowledge are unequally deployed, the questions above resonate within the context of the politics of museum communication. The Asian woman's experience at Documenta Kassel demonstrates, as mentioned previously, how opposing world-views exist, and it shows how art museums are active in creating them. Professional practices by art museum professionals are the political dimensions in constructing the meanings of artworks.

Should art exhibitions in art museums thus represent the curator's interpretive community? Or, should art museums exhibit for a diverse interpretive community that is beyond the interpretive community in which the curator is personally involved? For the non-specialist's interpretive community, should the art museum apply the same strategies that are used in the interpretive community in which the curator is involved? These questions raise the issues of access, of learning and teaching, and of visitor research.

Art museum visitors are no longer considered to be an abstract mythical body, 'the general public', but are regarded as being made up of diverse individuals who have characteristics, agendas and desires that can be researched. Visitors to art museums are categorized as a range of groups, classified by age, where they have come from, and their purpose for coming. Art museum visitors are divided into diverse groups: children, students, family, older people, people with disabilities, local people, tourists, and people with a range of cultural or religious backgrounds.

Therefore, art museums develop different teaching and learning strategies for the different visitors. If students visit art museums, how should the museum educator determine a teaching and learning method toward artworks for the students? Rika Burnham (1994)

asserts that group dialogue is appropriate for producing meanings of artworks in art museums. Group dialogue can empower audiences to collectively discover layers of meanings in works of art, and is closely related to art criticism, as interpretation is the central activity.

In the process of group dialogue, contextual knowledge is produced which opens the students' perception and helps them to appreciate works of art. In understanding artworks in art museums, students who just look, see, and respond as audience cannot reach authentic understanding of artworks. Just seeing and making artworks without providing the contexts of artworks prevailed in creative-self expressionism in art museum education during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8)</sup> Vitor D'Amico in the Museum of Modern Art in New York encouraged students to appreciate and criticize formally the works of art without providing any context for the artworks (Kim, 2001: 26).<sup>9)</sup> However, students could not arrive at the authentic

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<sup>8)</sup>Creative Self-Expression was one of the significant art education movement in the 20th century. The central notion of it was freedom from control, the child initiative, the child's interests as the basis for the program, and focus on his personality and social adjustment. To promote the child's freedom of expression, the Museum of Modern Art in New York provided various kinds of studio instruction. It was believed that the child could enhance his expressive capacity by working with various media and materials. For instance, in the MoMA, children aged six to twelve were guided by the teachers to experience more challenging art activities that had an emphasis on design and craftsmanship. Reproductions of artworks in the MoMA's collections were placed around the studio to stimulate recognition about the cultural and social contexts, although the children were not given specific information about them. These classes for developing art appreciation supported D' Amico's belief that the "visual arts through properly directed experiences can help to develop the visual, the emotional, and the kinesthetic senses, which must be developed along with the verbal and intellectual powers, if an integration of personality is ever to be realized through education (Morgan, 1995 156). However, without being given any information regarding particular artworks, the individual could not derive any understanding on artworks as an expression of a culture and society.

<sup>9)</sup>Vitor D'Amico played a pivotal role in the history of art education in museum environment. His central conviction was that art education for children should be based on making art and throughout his career he

understanding of artworks without providing social and cultural context for the artworks. In this context, group discussion and conversation about artworks can enhance students' understanding of artworks through the interpretation of social and cultural contexts of art objects.

## V. Conclusion

The art museum today has the opportunity to push the traditional paradigm of the museum, to enable a broader, more comprehensive art educational approach to artworks, curators, and visitors. Since diverse visual images are floating through this plural society, traditional communication approaches to the art museum are not an appropriate model in developing art museums as art educational institutions. In order to investigate the process of learning and teaching about artworks in art museums, this study examined theories of communication between art museums and visitors, and proposed methods of teaching and learning in art museums; how visitors read and interpret artworks is the site of art education for art criticism and appreciation.

Discussions on communication between art museums and visitors demand new ways of thinking about collection, exhibition, and education, and a new paradigm of museum education. The challenges of narrative, voice and difference go to the heart of the issue of communication between curators and visitors that currently operate in art museums. Finding ways to integrate visitors and their worlds means finding new methods of communication.

In this context, the function of the art museum as a communicator cannot be separated from cultural issues of knowledge, interpretation, power, and language. Developing their communicative functions by means of creative and innovative partnerships with their visitors

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established and taught scores of art workshops, classes and programs based on this idea. Relying upon the theories of John Dewey regarding learners and art, D' Amico developed and elaborated educational programs and activities at the MoMA for a diverse public: children between the ages of 3 and 18, veterans, and a large class of adults.

requires attention to current key issues of access, of learning and teaching, and of visitor studies of art museum education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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