

Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, Interpretive philosophy

The mission of the University of Florida's Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art is to promote art as a vehicle to inspire, educate and enrich lives of the museum's diverse university, community, national and global audiences. As such, interpretation at the Harn seeks to engage all of our visitors in meaningful experiences that promote pleasure, learning, visual literacy and transformative encounters with art.

The museum approaches interpretation as a communication process that reveals aesthetic, cultural and social meaning through involvement with objects, programs and creative activities. We foster this engagement through a broad range of interpretive activities that may take place in the museum, at remote sites such as schools or elder care facilities, and on-line. These interpretive activities are broad and include, for example, gallery labels and printed guides, lectures, discussion-based tours, creative activities and digital technologies. Such varied approaches, which serve the interests and aptitudes of different audiences, may begin in the gallery or with an auditorium lecture, a hands-on activity or a poster employed at a remote site, but the common goals are to enhance the experience of works of art and to enrich lives.

We affirm that the direct encounter with original works of art possesses the capacities to

- connect with emotional and spiritual experiences;
- inspire creativity;
- promote pleasure;
- illuminate cultural beliefs, ideological perspectives and social practices of varied places and times;
- sharpen visual acuity (observation and description) and visual literacy (analysis and interpretation);
- and open dialogues on significant topics, leading to mutual understanding.

To promote these capacities of art to enhance lives we pursue an interpretive practice that engages all audiences with art. To do so, we begin development of programs and exhibitions by asking ourselves "who is the audience for this?" In focusing on specific audiences, museum educators and curators regularly collaborate with community and campus representatives and confer with advisory boards. This inclusion of diverse voices supports an interpretive practice that is relevant to those who benefit from the museum's activities, and supports the Harn goal to be broadly welcoming, inclusive, accessible and relevant.