



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interactive Learning in *Building Books*:

The Art of David Macaulay

Summative Study for the Speed Art Museum

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The Speed Art Museum has a long-term commitment to visitor studies and this summative study in the most recent effort to use evaluation findings to further refine their professional practice. To enhance the *Building Books: The Art of David Macaulay* exhibition (February 4 – May 13, 2007), the Speed Art Museums educators, curators, and designers, experimented with ways to more fully engage visitors through five interactive areas. The staff worked together to enhance the existing graphics that came with the traveling exhibition originated by the Norman Rockwell Museum, to integrate the interactive areas into the displays of Macaulay's art, and to display the works in the exhibition at a height more accessible to both children and adults. To assess the effectiveness of these interactive areas and provide useful feedback to the interdepartmental exhibition team, the Speed Art Museum enlisted the services of Dr. Marianna Adams, to design and implement a summative evaluation study to address the following questions: How do visitors engage with and use the interactive experiences in the exhibition? and To what degree do the interactive experiences enhance visitor learning and social interaction?

The evaluation questions were addressed through a mixed methods design involving observation and exhibition exit interviews with a written survey to capture learning over time. In addition, drawings created in three areas and photographs of constructions made in the block building area will serve to round out the picture of the visitor experience.

Clearly, the interactive experiences enhanced visitors' overall experience in the David Macaulay exhibition. The majority of visitors used all five interactive areas to some degree. People were drawn to the interactive areas because they were visually appealing and, once there, immediately realized they could touch, manipulate, and participate in a variety of ways. Through these sensory experiences, visitors made personal connections, engaged socially with those around them, and enjoyed challenging their intellect with meaningful and unique tasks. The relaxing, family-friendly atmosphere put people at ease and encouraged visitors to remain in the areas a bit longer than they normally do in a traditional exhibition. The museum staff believes that the exhibition attracted new visitors because of the layers of interactivity. However, the scope of this study did not encompass data collection that spoke to this issue.

Although all of the stations were effective for visitors on some level, they each had their own strengths. The *How Does it Work*, *Reading, How to...*, and *Scrambled Stories* areas were effective in encouraging visitors to take a closer look at the artwork on display, as well as the displayed work other visitors left behind on display. Unsurprisingly, the *Build* area was effective in encouraging visitors to actively engage and explore, creating a variety of unusual constructions. The *How to...* area was also particularly successful at enticing visitors to engage fully in the task of creating a sequenced drawing and was the station with the highest average time spent. Visitors spent the shortest time, on average, at *Scrambled Stories*. Many visitors chose to display their drawings at the three stations that provided drawing tasks and materials. Consequently, the drawings were a rich source of data, and the variety, thoughtfulness, and inventiveness of their creations was remarkable.

When asked to rate their learning across seven dimensions, visitors tended to give all the dimensions above-average marks, suggesting that the presence of the interactive areas heightens visitor learning in the broadest sense. To summarize, the interactive areas:

- stimulated visitors to feel a sense of awe and wonder for the art and artist on exhibition;
- stimulated visitors' sense of curiosity and their desire to know more about the art and artist;
- enhanced and expanded upon visitors' prior knowledge of the artist and his themes;
- encouraged social interaction and dialogue about the art and artist;
- facilitated visitors as they made connections between their own experience and the work of the artist;
- stimulated visitors to look more carefully and thoughtfully at the art in the exhibition; and
- communicated to visitors something new about the art and artist.