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**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON
BEHIND THE SCENES GALLERIES AND GALLERY INTERACTIVES**

OVERVIEW

Visitors to the new wing for the Art of the Americas are able to enjoy a more in-depth gallery experience with new multi-dimensional platforms placed throughout the new wing. In addition, patrons can gain an inside view into Museum life by exploring the MFA's four Behind the Scenes galleries, which show how curators and conservators collect, classify, and care for works in the Museum's collections and make choices about what to put on view. These galleries and added learning spaces represent a new component of the MFA's multi-dimensional approach to the appreciation of art and offer a change of pace by providing an innovative mix of interpretation and discovery. Activities on touch screens range in size and complexity. From small touch screens allowing visitors to "curate" their own gallery to a large communal coffee-table that provides the opportunity to explore how artists create their works, each display aims to deepen the experience with the art.

Henry Luce Foundation Gallery / Behind the Scenes: Collecting—Level 1 (125)

This gallery reveals the ways in which works of art are acquired by the Museum and what inspired collectors at particular moments in time, such as Denman Waldo Ross, one of the MFA's early supporters. In keeping with Ross's belief that a museum should provide inspiration for designers, this gallery gives visitors the opportunity to use an interactive screen to create their own designs with motifs from nearby objects. The gallery also traces the story of MFA collecting since its founding in 1870, following the shifting focus in such areas as Native American ceramics, Tiffany glass, and art deco.

- *Media Wall*
Images are displayed from conservation, storage, and other hidden aspects of the Museum's daily work, showing the care and scholarship required to maintain the collection. Staff members are seen studying works of art in storage, caring for them in conservation studios, choosing frames, building mounts and display cases, and installing the chosen pieces in the new Art of the Americas Wing.
- *Design Motifs*
Denman Waldo Ross, a Harvard design professor, collected objects from around the world to serve as sources for designers. Visitors can create a virtual plate or textile pattern on an interactive touch screen, using design motifs from Mexican ceramics and metalwork Ross gave to the Museum.

- *Acquiring Works of Art*

Visitors examine trends and perspectives to understand the history of the Museum’s collecting, contemplating how objects ranging from Native American ceramics to modern design have entered the collection. Visitors also hear from curators how tastes and collecting patterns vary over time.

Behind the Scenes Gallery: Caring for Works of Art—Level 1 (125A)

Questions about conservation principles and processes are explored by looking at the condition of various works of art. Two portraits by John Singleton Copley (1738–1815) are a major focus—one painting has been cleaned, the other has not. The comparison of the two highlights the issues under consideration. An interactive table guides visitors through the process of examination and discussion that precedes decisions about treatment. Two other interactive touch screens allow visitors to explore the questions posed by missing areas in needlework, or understand the challenges faced in restoring Maya ceramics. A beautifully carved 18th-century chair, badly charred in a fire, raises further conservation issues for visitors to contemplate.

- *Should Copley’s Portrait of Lucy Rogers Be Conserved?*

Visitors explore techniques and decisions in painting conservation, understanding concepts and perspectives through viewing X-Rays and infrared views, watching videos of techniques in action, and hearing directly from a curator and conservator. Activities on the touch table relate to two Copley portraits hanging above: *Dorothy Quincy (Mrs. John Hancock)* (about 1772), which has been cleaned, and *Mrs. Timothy Rogers (Lucy Boylston)* (1766–67), which has not.

- *Should We Replace What’s Missing?*

In this activity, visitors investigate a damaged embroidery sampler and understand how it might be conserved, including how repaired areas might look if they were restored.

- *Considering Conservation*

In this activity, visitors can examine more fully, through rollout photographs, the surfaces and imagery of the four Maya vases displayed nearby, learn what sort of repainting may have occurred before they reached the Museum, and what treatment MFA conservators might employ now.

Behind the Scenes Gallery: Classification—Level 2 (225)

A plaster cast of a Greek sculpture, a Maya ceramic figure, and a late 19th-century sewing machine prompt the primary classification question, “What belongs in the Museum of Fine Arts?” While plaster casts filled the galleries when the MFA first opened its doors in 1876, they have since been replaced by original sculpture from ancient Greece and Rome. Works by indigenous peoples, such as the Maya, were once considered more appropriate for ethnographic study and have only recently been collected by the MFA for their artistic merit. A 19th-century sewing machine might be seen as a utilitarian object, but because of its interesting design and ornate decoration, could be considered a work of art. Visitors can also test their knowledge of changing styles by sorting a sequence of teapots on a touch screen, using hints provided by furniture and costumes from the corresponding stylistic periods.

- *Media Wall*

As on Level 1, a bank of flat screens shows images from conservation, storage, and other aspects of the Museum’s daily work focusing on 19th and 20th-century works.

- *Style*
The hallmarks of key historical styles on view in the galleries, from neoclassical to modern, are explored in the activity. Using a touch screen, visitors can try their hand at arranging a selection of teapots from the Museum's collection in chronological order by style, finding clues in chairs and costumes of the same period.
- *What Belongs in the MFA?*
This activity focuses on why an object—even a surprising object—is in the collection of a fine arts museum such as the MFA, challenging visitors with provocative examples already in the Museum's collection. *This interactive will be available in late 2010.*

Gail and Ernst von Metzsch Gallery / Behind the Scenes: Choices—Level 2 (225A)

The role of the curator involves making important decisions daily, especially about what objects should be displayed and how they should be presented. This gallery allows visitors to consider these choices and make some of their own determinations using a variety of resources. Three portraits of women, painted from 1805 to 1815, are the focal point of an interactive touch screen that encourages visitors to select which painting should be included in exhibitions highlighting a specific theme. Also on view are two sofas from the 1830s with similar frames. One was reupholstered in the 1980s after extensive curatorial research; the other has yet to be re-covered. Visitors can reference pattern books to research the textiles and upholstery forms used for such pieces in the early 19th century, decide whether they agree with previous curatorial choices, and consider what would be appropriate for reupholstering the second sofa. Additional opportunities in the gallery involve ancient Andean textiles and mid 20th-century radios.

- *The Art of Choosing Art*
Visitors inherit the decision making as they decide which of three paintings to install in a gallery started by a curator. Interactive features also allow them to gather additional information and hear perspectives from curators about possible choices that could be made.

Interactive Activities in Art of the Americas Wing Galleries

In addition to the Behind the Scenes galleries, the Museum's multi-layered effort to engage visitors includes a variety of other educational initiatives in the wing for the Art of the Americas. Labels identifying objects in the collection have been enhanced, providing additional background information and visuals, and interactive touch screens are positioned in seven galleries to give visitors new ways to appreciate the collections. These include:

- **Ancient Mesoamerica Gallery—Level LG (LG32)**
Exploring Maya Ceramics
Inspired by the MFA's renowned collection of Maya vessels, this activity encourages visitors to literally take the rich content painted on the vessel and pull it flat, allowing them to "read" the figures, drawings, and symbols to learn more about Maya beliefs.
- **Norma and Roger Alfred Saunders Gallery / John Singleton Copley Gallery—Level 1 (128)**
Comparing Copley Portraits
John Singleton Copley's painting style in America and England is examined, using a touch screen to zoom in and look closely at details. In addition, visitors explore the decisions to be made in having a portrait painted by Copley.

- **Amelia Peabody Gallery / 18th-Century Furniture: Design and Construction Gallery—Level 1 (137)**
Techniques in Construction and Decoration
A pair of touch screens allows visitors to see techniques used in cabinetmaking, from dovetail and mortise-and-tenon joints to carving and inlay.
- **Lisbeth L. Tarlow and Stephen B. Kay Galleries / Oak Hill—Level 1 (121A–121D)**
Oak Hill
In the reconstructed lobby of the Oak Hill period rooms, a series of images on a flat screen reveal the history of the the Derby-West family’s Oak Hill country estate.
- **Waleska Evans James Gallery / The Gothic Revival and the American Landscape—Level 2 (236)**
Who Were the Karoliks?
Through photos, videos, and related collection objects displayed on a touch screen, visitors learn about Martha Codman Karolik and Maxim Karolik, a unique couple with an interesting personal story, who formed three major American art collections that they gave to the MFA.
- **The Heide Family Galleries / Roswell Gleason Dining Room and Parlor—Level 2 (238A and 238B)**
Roswell Gleason & Sons
Visitors can explore the catalogue of Roswell Gleason, a Dorchester manufacturer working during the Industrial Revolution, to see prices and details related to the various wares that his company produced. During this time, through innovations such as Gleason’s silver plate, elaborate decorative table settings became available to members of the middle class.
- **Sandra B. and William H. Lane Gallery / American Modernism: The Lane Collection Gallery—Level 2 (334)**
Artists’ Choices Table
Visitors can gather around the large communal touch-screen coffee table to participate in activities that illuminate the processes of four 20th-century artists, with a focus on abstraction. Audiences can experiment with the scale and arrangement of natural forms like leaves and shells, as Georgia O’Keeffe did; try out combining transparent photographic overlays to build architectural compositions in the manner of Charles Sheeler; or rearrange the objects in a Hopper scene.

Visitor Engagement

The creation of the MFA’s innovative Behind the Scenes and in-gallery interactive activities is the result of extensive research conducted by the Museum to determine how to encourage active engagement between visitors and the collection, making art more accessible. Through focus groups and in-depth interviews, visitors indicated that they were interested in learning how the MFA makes decisions about its collections; they wanted to see real works of art, not reproductions, in the MFA’s educational galleries; and they wanted interactive experiences with these works, aided by technology and other means. By posing questions about works of art, offering choices, and explaining processes, the interactive activities provide new insight into the works and the Museum as a whole.

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