



Museum Visitor Studies, Evaluation & Audience Research

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Summative Evaluation:
*Through African Eyes: The European
in African Art, 1500-Present* Exhibition

Prepared for the
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) contracted Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) to conduct a summative evaluation of the exhibition *Through African Eyes: The European in African Art, 1500-Present (TAE)*. This evaluation sought to explore visitors' experiences in the exhibition, including the meanings visitors took away from the exhibition, the effects of the interpretation, and personal connections made. RK&A conducted 50 interviews with visitor groups using a purposeful sampling method to capture feedback from African/African American visitors and visitors of other ethnicities. More than one-third of interviewees self-identified as African/African American, while the other two-thirds self-identified as other ethnicities, including White/Caucasian, Asian, and American Indian.

The findings presented here are among the most salient. Please read the body of the report for a more comprehensive presentation of findings.

Visitors had an intense, highly stimulating experience in the exhibition.

- ◆ Overall, most of the interviews were in-depth, rich in reflection, and nuanced. Interviewees tended to speak in a highly specific, individualized way about their experience.
- ◆ The exhibition's intentions were top-of-mind for many visitors. When asked for their initial thoughts about the exhibition, many immediately talked about how perspective affects the presentation of a story or history.

The various interpretative strategies supported the artwork, helping visitors to interpret the art and make sense of the complicated history and ideas presented in the exhibition.

- ◆ Interviewees were asked to describe a work of art they found most interesting. El Anatsui's work Still More Come Back was named most frequently, followed by Owusu-Ankomah's Movement #27, Willie Bester's Bantu Education, and Willie Bester's Speelman. Some interviewees identified types of art, especially masks, carvings, furniture, contemporary works, and textiles.
- ◆ Cultural significance and aesthetics emerged as the primary reasons interviewees found works of art interesting.
- ◆ Overall, about three-quarters of interviewees referred to works of art, either specific works or the art in general, to explain or support their understanding of the various exhibition ideas.
- ◆ Overall, interviewees responded positively to the various interpretative strategies.
- ◆ Almost all interviewees said they read interpretative text in the exhibition, and a few said it was the form of interpretation that enhanced their visit most.
- ◆ Many interviewees said they listened to the audio guide, describing it as explanatory, accessible, and manageable.

- ◆ Almost one-half of interviewees said they watched some video, saying it brought the exhibition to life.
- ◆ Almost one-half of interviewees said they utilized the maps, and several found them to be extremely powerful in their ability to demonstrate change over time.
- ◆ More than one-half of interviewees talked about the quotations, saying the quotations personalized the content of the exhibition.

Visitors were open to exploring the difficult topic of the exhibition and did not experience any needless discomfort; the greatest discomfort occurred around the issue of slavery.

- ◆ About two-thirds of interviewees said that they were not uncomfortable in the exhibition. When asked if they could imagine any aspect of the exhibition causing someone discomfort, interviewees most often named ideas or events presented in the exhibition, such as children abandoning their heritage, slavery, perceiving white men as monsters, and apartheid.
- ◆ About one-third of interviewees said they felt uncomfortable in the exhibition, although no one expressed outrage or unbearable discomfort. The majority described discomfort related to aspects of the slavery section.
- ◆ Overall, African/African American interviewees responded more emotionally than non-African/African American interviewees when describing their level of comfort in the exhibition; though, again, their discomfort was not intolerable.

The exhibition was successful at achieving its outcomes for the majority of visitors; however, there are some notable, subtle differences in the degree to which outcomes were achieved.

- ◆ Two-thirds of interviewees came to understand that relationships between Africans and Europeans were more complex and complicated than is typically known; of these, half had a more highly developed understanding that the relationships varied from group to group and placed that variation within a larger historical context.
- ◆ Three-quarters of the interviewees recognized that the exhibition was presented from a highly unique perspective. Of these, most demonstrated an understanding that the exhibition was presented from the African perspective. On the other hand, a portion believed the exhibition presented a “balanced” perspective, representing both Europe and Africa.
- ◆ About three-quarters of interviewees recognized that the art in the exhibition expressed various ideas; of these, a portion more fully understood the art as social and political commentary, identifying an audience that is intended to see and interpret the art.
- ◆ More than one-half of interviewees made a personal connection in the exhibition. Of these, some made deep, reflective connections, placing their own experience within a broader socio-historical context such as race relations then and now. Others talked about personal connections more as personal resonance, describing the way the exhibition broadened their perspective and opened their minds.

DISCUSSION

One of the greatest achievements of any museum is to help visitors come to a new understanding or way of thinking about an idea. Museum practitioners sometimes refer to these as “ah-ha” moments, moments when an individual sees something through a slightly different, enhanced lens. Achieving this is harder than it seems. For one, visitors come to museums with varying degrees of prior knowledge, experiences, and interests. In other words, all visitors bring with them their own personal entrance narrative, which is a person’s internal storyline or framework used to process topics or ideas; this framework reflects the way visitors think about the world (Doering, 1999) and, thus, interpret and make meaning from experiences. Through experiences in exhibitions like *Through African Eyes*, visitors assimilate new ideas and perceptions with their pre-existing ideas and perceptions and create new meaning (Falk & Dierking, 1992). Ideally, the meaning they create is what the museum intended, but that certainly is not always the case. Sometimes visitors remain “fixed” in their ideas, even “fixed” in misconceptions, and showing them otherwise through an exhibition can be extremely difficult.

The summative evaluation of *Through African Eyes* indicates that the exhibition was successful in helping visitors create new meaning and new ideas about Africa’s history and the role that art played in it. Specifically, the majority of visitors came to understand that looking at African history through African art and from an African perspective reveals an extremely complicated history of relationships between Africans and Europeans or Westerners. Notably, there are some nuanced differences in the degree to which visitors understood this complex idea, with some understanding to a greater extent than others. For instance, while most visitors came to understand that relationships between Africa and the West were more complicated than they had previously known, only some demonstrated a highly developed understanding that the relationships varied from group to group and over time. Even fewer demonstrated knowledge of the variety of relationships among distinct African nations—almost all visitors talked about Africa as a whole rather than more specifically by cultural groups or countries. Also, while most visitors recognized that the art in the exhibition expressed ideas and feelings Africans held about the West, only a portion fully understood the art as social and political commentary. This varying degree of understanding is to be expected in a museum setting where, as described earlier, visitors enter with diverse motivations, knowledge, and interests. Furthermore, as stated previously, the perspective taken by exhibition was a new way of thinking for most visitors, thus it is not surprising that they did not grasp specific details and intricacies.

Regardless of these subtle differences in degree of understanding, the number of visitors who experienced a new way of thinking about Africa is remarkable. Front-end evaluation conducted during the exhibition development process indicated, not surprisingly, that visitors had very narrow understandings of Africa’s relationship to Europe and the West, with few knowing anything beyond the slave trade. Even then, knowledge of the slave trade was superficial and limited (Selinda, 2007). *Through African Eyes* expanded visitors’ knowledge greatly, giving them a new, deeper appreciation of something about which they had only vague, stereotypical ideas. Furthermore, visitors recognized this shift in their understanding, with many commenting on the exhibition’s unique, enlightening perspective. Also telling was the nature of the interviews conducted for the evaluation. In interviews, visitors talked in a highly personalized, in-depth way, often trailing off to tangents and losing their train of thoughts, indicating that visitors’ thinking had been highly stimulated.

As stated in their visitor outcomes, the DIA also intended for visitors to personally connect with aspects of the exhibition. In this area, the exhibition was less successful than it was for the outcomes related to ideas and content described previously. This is partly because the notion of personal connections has many connotations, and it was unclear exactly what a personal connection meant in the context of *Through African Eyes*. For purposes of evaluation, we equated personal connections with the notion of

“what does this have to do with me?” A relatively small portion of visitors made this kind of connection, such as those who placed their own experience within a broader socio-historical context like race relations past and present. It is not surprising that so few visitors identified with the subject matter of the exhibition, given the sensitive and inflammatory nature of topics like slavery and colonialism—it may have been too difficult or too painful for visitors to see themselves reflected back in the exhibition. Perhaps personal connections in the context of an exhibition like *Through African Eyes* should be thought of more broadly, and it is, in fact clear that most visitors experienced personal resonance and personal meaning-making, as evidenced by the number who reflected on their own learning and surprise at seeing Africa from a perspective they had never considered before. If the exhibition aimed for visitors to identify more personally with aspects of the exhibition, one strategy could have been to explicitly prompt visitors to reflect on their identity in the context of the subject matter through a “Talk Back” exhibit or facilitated in-gallery experience.

One last outcome of the exhibition was to create a safe space where visitors could explore potentially uncomfortable ideas. The DIA certainly took a risk in presenting complex and provocative ideas, yet findings show that visitors were not uncomfortable; instead, they were challenged and stimulated. Museums have the advantage of being considered trust-worthy sources of information by the public (Lake, 2001). Furthermore, the exhibition was presented in a non-confrontational, considerate, and accessible manner, enabling visitors to take in and process the material at their own pace.

To reiterate, it is remarkable for an exhibition to have such a strong effect on visitors. Changes in understanding typically require repeated exposure and facilitation by a live person (such as in programming). Since observations were not part of the summative evaluation, it is impossible to know exactly what about the exhibition was so effective. Yet, one can speculate. Most significantly, the art affected visitors, and the selection and presentation of the works of art were crucial to telling the exhibition story. Findings indicate that visitors looked closely at the works of art as they explored the ideas of *Through African Eyes*, demonstrated by the fact that most of them discussed the artwork and ideas in relationship to one another. Yet, art alone cannot convey complicated ideas and history to the novice, non-art historian visitor. Not surprisingly, the front-end evaluation for the exhibition showed that visitors struggled to make meaning from selected works of art without any context or interpretation. Thus, the role of interpretation is critical for an exhibition such as *Through African Eyes*, and findings suggest that it was effective. The exhibition contained multiple modes of interpretation, such as text, audio, video, first-person quotations, among others; presenting the material in a variety of ways allowed visitors to select the method(s) that best suited their learning styles, increasing the odds that there would be something for everyone. Furthermore, the interpretation was not included just for the sake of it, but rather the curator and interpreters thought carefully about which method would be most appropriate for conveying the various messages and ideas. For instance, first-person wall quotations seem to have been very effective at clearly conveying the “African” perspective and allowed visitors to connect to individuals. Further, double-sided pull-out showed that an artwork may have multiple interpretations depending on the viewer.

The DIA deserves high praise for *Through African Eyes*—not only for the final visitor experience outcome, but for the way Museum staff approached exhibition development. From the outset, the team showed a desire not only to create a groundbreaking exhibition that would be valued by the art history community, but also to ensure that the visiting public would appreciate and understand the exhibition’s complicated ideas. The DIA team acted on their dedication to the public by working collaboratively as a multi-departmental team (curatorial, interpretation, and evaluation departments collaborated throughout the process) and by implementing audience research at all critical phases of exhibition development. This commitment paid off, as is evidenced by the exemplary findings of this evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) contracted Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. (RK&A) to conduct a summative evaluation of the exhibition *Through African Eyes: The European in African Art, 1500-Present (TAE)*. As described on the DIA Web site, “*Through African Eyes* will illustrate how African artists from diverse cultures have used and continue to use visual forms to reflect their particular societies’ changing attitudes toward Europeans, as the latter evolved from stranger to colonizer to the more inclusive Westerner.”

The objectives of the evaluation were to explore:

- ◆ How various forms of interpretation and exhibition design played a role in visitors’ exhibition experiences;
- ◆ The general meaning visitors create from the exhibition;
- ◆ To what extent visitors understand the rich diversity and changing nature of different African groups’ relationships with various European and Western peoples;
- ◆ To what extent visitors align themselves with African ways of thinking about the art and its meaning;
- ◆ To what extent visitors see how art can be an effective tool for social and political commentary;
- ◆ Whether (and if so how) visitors connect personally with aspects of the exhibition;
- ◆ Whether (and if so in what ways) visitors feel the exhibition is a safe space for them to explore potentially uncomfortable ideas; and
- ◆ Whether (and if so how) people from different racial backgrounds react to the exhibition differently.

METHODOLOGY

All data were collected at the DIA on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in June and July 2010 by a specially trained data collector. The data collector used a purposeful sampling method to select interviewees, since one of the objectives was to compare responses of African/African American visitors and non-African/African American visitors. To select interviewees, the data collector intercepted adult visitors (18 years or older) exiting the exhibition from the gift shop, using a continuous random sampling method. If the visitor declined, the data collector logged the visitor’s gender, estimated age, ethnicity, description of the visit group, and reason for refusal. If the visitor agreed, the interview was conducted. Following the refusal or interview, the data collector intercepted the very next visitor to exit the gift shop. Purposeful sampling was initiated once the data collectors finished 30 interviews with non-African/African American visitors. From then on, the data collector only intercepted African/African American visitors (i.e., visitors who appeared to be of African descent).

The data collector interviewed a total of 50 visitor groups¹ who visited the *TAE* exhibition; visitors in 21 groups identified themselves as African/African American, and visitors in 30 groups identified themselves as non-African/African American.² The data collector conducted the interviews using a

¹ RK&A interviewed visitor groups, which included one to three visitors.

² One visitor group contained both African/African American visitors and non-African/African American visitors.

structured interview guide (see Appendix A). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING METHOD

All data were analyzed qualitatively. That is, the evaluator studied the data for meaningful patterns and, as patterns and trends emerged, grouped similar responses.

Findings are organized according to evaluation objectives. Within each section, trends and themes in the interview data are presented from most- to least-frequently occurring. Exemplary quotations are presented to elucidate the trends. The interview group is identified in brackets following the quotation. If there is more than one speaker in the quotation, the first speaker is identified by one asterisk (*), the second speaker by two asterisks (**), the third speaker by three asterisks (***), and so on.

SECTIONS OF THE REPORT:

1. Exhibition Overview
2. Principal Findings: In-depth Interviews

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Through African Eyes: The European in African Art, 1500-Present was exhibited in a temporary exhibition space at the DIA between April 18 and August 8, 2010. *TAE* was a timed-ticket exhibition; the exhibition was 12 dollars for adults and six for children, but free with museum admission on Fridays.

EXHIBITION DESIGN

The exhibition was organized in a linear fashion. Visitors entered the exhibition through a distinct entrance, where visitor service representatives collected tickets. Just inside the entrance was a brief introductory video with accompanying dynamic text and a table at which visitors could take an audio guide and a map depicting pre-colonized Africa. In the video, the curator addresses the visitors:

Hello, I am Nii Quarcoopome, curator of *Through African Eyes*. In the late 1400s, Europeans landed on the west coast of Africa. Since then, Europeans explored the continent, set up trade relations, and colonized Africa until Africans gained independence. This story is most familiar through Western sources.

But a Ghanaian proverb says, ‘*Kɛ okɛɛ atato yɛ fɛu ɛ, edzɛ eni odam.*’ ‘When you speak of the beauty of the horizon, it is only from your side of the earth.’

This exhibition invites you to see that story—that same horizon—from African perspectives. You will see works by African artists expressing memories, observations, or emotional reactions to European contact.

As you go through the exhibition consider whether the work of art you are looking at memorializes or mocks, praises or satirizes the European. I leave you with these questions as you explore *Through African Eyes*.

The designers used fabric walls to create distinct spaces within the gallery. The fabric walls were slightly transparent and gently curved. The color palette was described by one staff as, “earth tones bumped up a few notches to vibrant colors” to create a dynamic atmosphere.

EXHIBITION SECTIONS

While the exhibition followed an approximately chronological order, the exhibition was organized by thematic sections. The exhibition sections were as follows, listed in order from the first to the last section encountered:

- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans as Spirits and Strangers;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans as Traders;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans as Foreign Settlers;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans and Spirituality;

- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans and Technology;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans and Knowledge;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Europeans as Colonizers;
- ◆ Through African Eyes . . . Looking Back on European Rule; and,
- ◆ Through African Eyes Now . . . The West and Beyond.

INTERPRETATION

There were many forms of interpretation in the exhibition, including:

- ◆ Introductory video;
- ◆ Multimedia Acoustiguide tours (with audio, pictures, and videos);
- ◆ Object labels (some objects with tombstone information only and most with tombstone information and explanatory text);
- ◆ Section and summary panels;
- ◆ Pull-outs (panels and two-sided cards)³;
- ◆ Videos;
- ◆ Dynamic maps projected on the walls;
- ◆ Quotations painted on the wall; and,
- ◆ Empty display case.

³ “Pull-outs” are used to describe enlarged photographic reproductions of works of art on which the DIA photographically highlights sections of the works of art (sections of interest in color and other parts in grayscale) and describes the meaning or significance of the highlighted sections.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

RK&A conducted 50 interviews with visitor groups that included 67 visitors. More than two-thirds of interviewees are female, and the median age of all interviewees is 53. More than one-third of interviewees self-identified as African/African American, while the other two-thirds self-identified with other ethnicities, including White/Caucasian, Asian, and American Indian. Three-quarters of the interviewees are repeat visitors to the DIA, and about one-quarter are members of the DIA. Three of the interview groups were visiting the exhibition with children under 18 years of age. The respondent rate was 57 percent.⁴

OVERALL RESPONSES

During the analysis, a trend that was not represented by the evaluation objectives emerged. Overall, the majority of interviewees' responses are in-depth, rich in reflection, and nuanced. This richness and complexity did not emerge in response to any one particular question, but rather, overall from each interviewee's holistic response. These interviewees tended to speak in a highly specific, individualized way about their experience, often talking in a stream-of-consciousness manner, sometimes losing their train of thought, having to ask the interviewer to repeat her question. No excerpted quotation can fully illustrate this phenomenon; thus we have included three complete transcribed interviews in Appendix B.

INITIAL THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

This section of the report describes interviewees' responses to open-ended questions that elicit unprompted, top-of-mind responses to the exhibition.

Interviewees were first asked for thoughts they had as they walked through the exhibition. This question is used often in open-ended interview guides, primarily as an ice-breaker, and it typically elicits simple positive, neutral, or negative comments. However, many *TAE* interviewees responded with highly sophisticated, nuanced thoughts and ideas. About one-half provided responses indicating thoughtful reflection about the exhibition's intentions, such as how perspective affects the presentation of a story or history, the injustices of colonialism, or the richness and diversity of African culture (see the first quotation below). About one-fifth shared general, but positive remarks about the exhibition, such as it is "great," "beautiful," or "interesting." A few responses were emotionally charged (see the second quotation). One interviewee said it was the most interesting exhibition he had seen in a long time.

My thoughts on it [*TAE*] were that it was very insightful. It was also very thought provoking and the perspective that was given was something that was refreshing. I've been to an exhibit on Egyptian artifacts and they were presented from the European viewpoint, and it was somewhat bothersome, whereas here—because it was represented through African eyes—I felt almost

⁴ The response rate is lower than our typical response rate for art museums. The reasons for refusal were often lack of time or interest. A comparison of the demographic characteristics of respondents and refusals indicates that gender, age, and ethnicity are not factors.

more of a kinship with how they were feeling. Again, as the story goes, ‘unless you tell the story, it’s not your history, it’s his story.’ And so now it’s become part of my story because of the perspective. [female, 54, African/African American]

(So as you walked through this exhibition, what thoughts did you have?) Wow, [I] sort of vacillated back and forth between a little anger and a little history. I learned some new things and it reinforced some old things. [male & female, 52 & 52, African/African American]

WORKS OF ART

WORKS OF ART OF MOST INTEREST

Interviewees were asked to describe a work of art they found most interesting. More than one-half of interviewees named one or more specific works of art. Of these interviewees, almost one-fifth talked about El Anatsui’s work Still More Come Back (often referred to as the “bottle top piece”), making it the most frequently named work of art. A few each talked about Owusu-Ankomah’s Movement #27 (often described as “black and white” work with “symbols”), Willie Bester’s Bantu Education (often referred to by title or described as a machine), and Willie Bester’s Speelman (often referred to as a “soldier”).

Conversely, almost one-half of interviewees generally talked about types of art they liked (as opposed to naming specific works), sometimes describing more than one type of art. One-fifth talked about the various tusks, while a few each talked about masks, carvings, furniture, contemporary works, and textiles or garments. A couple each mentioned sculptures, canes, and works depicting the slave trade. One interviewee talked about the bronze pieces from West Africa, and one commented on the variety of art.

COMPELLING ASPECTS OF THE WORKS OF ART NAMED

Two characteristics emerged as the primary reasons interviewees found works of art interesting—cultural significance and aesthetics. More than one-half of interviewees talked about the way the art demonstrated African culture and history. For example, some interviewees described the meaning of specific symbolism, cultural context, and/or cross-cultural integration (see the first three quotations below). Also, more than one-half talked about the aesthetic appeal of the works of art, such as the art’s beauty or visual appeal (see the third, fourth, and fifth quotations). Additionally, a few talked about the art historical significance of the works (in Africa or elsewhere) (see the fifth quotation).

(Was there any one work of art that stood out for either of you?) This one [Owusu-Ankomah’s Movement #27] I really, really liked. I like how the two men look like they’re going towards the future, and there [are] all these different symbols over there. You have the modern symbols and then you have the authentic African symbols, I would say. I don’t know, but that’s what it looked like to me. [male & female, 28 & 24, non-African/African American]

(Can you think of one work of art that interested you the most?) The sculpture of the South African policeman [Willie Bester’s Speelman] because it was so graphic. (What about that work interests you or what drew you to the work?) Just [that] it captured some of the whole violence of the situation. It was the government machine, and here’s this machine of a guy. I assume a guy. [male, 62, non- African/African American]

I think some of the thrones were sort of breathtaking . . . and how they took cultures and [integrated] the culture from the European into the African cultures—as the [audio] tour depicts through African art. [female, 58, African/African American]

One work of art in particular? I liked one of the carved ivory tusks from Benin [Kongo], and I really liked the fact that it's very visually stimulating to look at it. I also was really appreciative that there was a chart [pull-out panel] next to it where in certain registers they were pointing out to the audience this is what's happening. [female, 38, non-African/African American]

(Were there any particular works or one particular work that stuck out the most?) Absolutely. The bottle caps—the last piece in the show. [It's a] phenomenally beautiful piece, and it's so African, as Africa [is] today. The pan-African art movement makes use of everything; from villages to the cities, everything is picked up and everything is turned [into something]. That's a perfect piece, and it's so beautiful and so well done. It so much reflects some of the older textiles that you see in West Africa. . . . I've seen another one of his [El Anatsui] pieces in person but it was so nice to be able to get so close to see what the material is because, from a distance, it's really gorgeous, stunning. And then, you get up close and you say, 'Huh? What's really making it up?' [It] is really a nice treat to be able to get that close. [male & female, 60 & 61, non-African/African American]

ART'S CONVEYANCE OF IDEAS

Though not a specific objective of this study, we analyzed the ways that interviewees referred to works of art in their discussions of the various ideas central to the exhibition (i.e., outcomes presented in previous section). Overall, about three-quarters of interviewees referred to works of art, either specific works or the art in general, to explain or support their understanding of the various exhibition ideas.

Of the three-quarters of interviewees who made connections between the art and ideas, many discussed the way the art expressed the unique African perspective. For example, a few talked about the way specific works of art demonstrated African perceptions of Europeans and the West (see the first quotation below). Another said the art gave him/her a way of understanding what it was like to be African (see the second quotation). Others talked broadly about art as expressive, such as its ability to tell a story about Africa (see the third quotation).

And I think that really—you get that perspective of the West from the African eyes, which is so—it was really great. That portrait with Queen Victoria—it was a beautiful piece. [female & male, 61 & 60, non-African/African American]

[The art] actually gave me a better sense of what it was like to be African at that time. There was more to it than just slavery. See, I hear the slavery story all the time, but to be able to see and feel their emotions and kind of how that was interpreted [through] art, I thought was pretty neat. [male & female, 54 & 54, African/African American]

The ivory tusks . . . showed on the top of it there's a little gorilla and then like a little baby person and as you went along, it spiraled down into [the] market, people like trading and selling and being happy. And then at the bottom, you saw people all chained up, like slavery and stuff. It kind of went through the whole history, and I thought that was really interesting. [male & female, 28 & 20, non-African/African American]

Another portion of these interviewees, who also said the art represented the African perspective, demonstrated a more in-depth understanding of the arts' expressive capacity. These interviewees spoke about how the African art conveyed messages intended for a particular purpose or population. They described these messages in various ways—as critique, alignment, resistance, subversion, and/or an exertion of power in relationship to Europeans or Westerners. These interviewees were the same ones

who demonstrated an understanding of art as social and political commentary (as described earlier on page 13) (see the two quotations below).

(So what does the exhibition show you about the relationship between Africans and Europeans?) What did it show me? Well, it was interesting because I think that some pieces of art [in the exhibition] depicted the [Africans'] dislike or disdain for the European people, but some also mimicked or dressed or posed like them, so I guess it went both ways. [female, 43, non-African/African American]

I like the fact we were [seeing] expressions from people who had to face [oppression] up close and personal. For instance, that mechanical soldier from South Africa gave a picture of someone expressing, 'This is how we felt about how we were treated, and this was the kind of entity that we had to deal with.' *Artists knock us out of our complacency when they express what the . . . I mean, when you look at the elephant tusk that they carved. If somebody just looks at it from a shallow perspective, they're like, 'Oh, this is very skillful; this is very artful. The carver had great skill.' But if you look at the story that was deeper, the expression that was given, it's going to make you uncomfortable. [male & female, 52 & 52, African/African American]

The remaining one-quarter did not refer to works of art in connection to an idea from the exhibition—some because they did not articulate any understanding of the ideas (these are the interviewees who tended to fall in the lowest level of achievement of outcomes, “below beginning”) and others, who did grasp the ideas, but made no explicit connection between the art and ideas. For instance, some of these interviewees talked about the art as a demonstration of a particular craft or skill (see the first quotation below) or the way it showed the diversity of African culture (see the second quotation), but they did not connect the works of art to ideas of social commentary, African perspective, or other ideas of the exhibition.

I saw a lot of the types of art that some of my family participates in as far as some of the painting, some of the basket weaving, that type of thing. [female, 42, African/African American]

I think the exhibit really did a good job displaying the differences between—for example—a West African nation and art forms as opposed to what [art from] southern or eastern African art forms might look like. [female, 22, non-African/African American]

INTERPRETATION

RK&A asked interviewees for their thoughts about the types of interpretation used in the exhibition, such as text, audio, video, maps, and quotations. Overall, interviewees responded positively to the various interpretative strategies. A few said they especially liked being able to choose from a variety of interpretative strategies (see the first quotation below). On the other hand, a couple interviewees said some strategies were unnecessary (see the second quotation).

[I] utilized all of them [the interpretative strategies]. I liked it because you had the multiple media, and so, there was a break so you didn't get too tired of any particular one [interpretative strategy]. And, people learn in different ways. [female, 54, African/African American]

I looked at almost everything. I will say, when there was an audio number and then an explanation as well, it was a little distracting because I was reading and listening at the same time.

. . . It's hard because you can't do both. I feel like it would have been fine just to have to read or just have audio. I didn't really need both. [female & female, 68 & 29, non-African/African American]

TEXT

Almost all interviewees said they read interpretative text in the exhibition, and a few said it was the form of interpretation that enhanced their visit most. While most visitors did not talk in-depth about the text, one interviewee mentioned the pull-outs on the two-sided cards as being especially illuminating (see the quotation below).

I liked the little explanation cards. In fact most of them were about the duality of the pieces—how they might be praising the Europeans, [or] they might be mocking the Europeans. [male & female, 39 & 69, non-African/African American]

AUDIO

Many interviewees said they listened to the audio guide, and several described the audio as being explanatory, accessible, and manageable (see the quotation below). Additionally, a few said the video and/or pictures that accompanied the audio were particularly useful.

I feel like the audio accompaniment was really well done, and it did a lot to bring the pieces to life and explain more than would have been possible if you had just [read] the words there. It would have become tedious to read that after a while so I really appreciated having the audio accompaniment. [female, 22, non-African/African American]

VIDEO

Almost one-half of interviewees said they watched some video, introductory video or otherwise, and a few described the way the video brought the exhibition to life (see the quotation below).

[I] did [watch] a couple of the videos and [watched] the curator's welcoming video at the beginning. That I thought was fantastic. [female, 38, non-African/African American]

MAPS

Almost one-half of interviewees said they utilized the maps, and several found them to be extremely powerful in their ability to demonstrate change over time (see the first quotation below). However, a few thought the maps changed too quickly; a couple suggested slowing the transition between maps, while one recommended static maps displayed side-by-side (see the second quotation).

For me, the most stunning thing was to see those maps change from the early kingdoms of the African culture, and then, the Europeans come in and divided it up any way they wanted, just like the U.S. has done in Vietnam and Korea and now Afghanistan and Iraq. And then to see over the course of time, the African nations forming back—I assume similar to what their original kingdoms were. Because of all the culture and relationships, it's heartening to see that happening again. [male, 64, non-African/African American]

I think it might be helpful to have the maps that were flashing on the wall, maybe to have them side-by-side rather than. . . . It's kind of like you're standing there waiting to see, where you could just have them side-by-side and see them as soon as you look. [female & female, 42 & 23, African/African American]

QUOTATIONS

More than one-half of interviewees talked about the quotations, and about one-quarter said they especially appreciated the way the quotations personalized the content of the exhibition (see the quotation below).

I really liked the writing on the wall [quotations]. It really gave a personal touch, because these were people who had actually really lived in various parts of Africa, and you could get a feel for what they thought. Yeah, I thought that was great. [female, 55, African/African American]

LEVEL OF COMFORT

RK&A asked visitors whether they found themselves feeling uncomfortable at any point in the visit or surprised by what they saw or read.

About two-thirds of interviewees said that they did not feel any discomfort. These interviewees were also asked whether they could imagine anything that would be uncomfortable or surprising to other visitors. Most often, interviewees named ideas or events presented in the exhibition, such as children abandoning their heritage, slavery, perceiving white men as monsters, and apartheid (see the first and second quotations below) as potentially uncomfortable. Additionally, several said they were not uncomfortable but expected that the content would make other visitors feel uncomfortable, and a few of these interviewees said the exhibition did not make them feel as uncomfortable as they expected or that they have seen exhibitions that have made them feel more uncomfortable (see the third quotation). A few referred to specific objects, such as the Kifwebe Society Mask, the ivory Figure Group that depicts a naked African woman, and the European Trader in Hammock as potentially uncomfortable. A few did not talk about aspects of the exhibition, but rather, said that the exhibition may be uncomfortable for people who are not familiar with the history or who have certain beliefs (see the fourth quotation).

(Can you imagine anything that would've been that way [uncomfortable] for some of the visitors?) Yeah, I think a lot of the different interpretations of the colonizers—just how they shifted—some of them seemed to shift between looking like a real European person and some looked really scary and monster-like. I could see that troubling some people. [female & female, 42 & 23, African/African American]

I think, if you were South African, you might have a little bit of stress about some things that depict the apartheid experience. I think it depends on where you're coming from. I think for some people who may not know a lot about Africa, they could be surprised by European and Western commercial influences. [female, 38, non-African/African American]

Actually, I feel like there wasn't enough about what was done [to Africans]. And, I don't think it's fair to always focus on the atrocities which occurred, but I felt like, in a lot of ways, some stuff was glossed over, especially in regards to the raids and what was going on during the period of colonization in regards to the plantations and all of that stuff. The labor that occurred and a lot of that stuff, I felt, wasn't really focused on as much, but that's not saying it needed to be. [female, 22, non-African/African American]

(So can you imagine any part of the exhibition actually being difficult or uncomfortable for someone?) Definitely. . . . I feel like for someone who might have a lot of pride in Western

culture, to see that we have blood on our hands would be difficult for some. [male & female, 23 & 21, non-African/African American]

About one-third of interviewees said they felt uncomfortable in the exhibition, although no one expressed outrage or unbearable discomfort. The majority described discomfort related to aspects of the slavery section (see the first and second quotations below). While a couple spoke generally, a few mentioned the Elephant Tusk with Scenes of African Life, and a few (all African American women) referred to the account of mothers being forced to leave their children to die so they could carry ivory (see the third quotation). Additionally, a couple recalled the Figure Group, which depicts two European men and a naked African woman and may indicate rape, a couple referred to the Queen Victoria pieces, one referred to Bantu Education, and one referred to President Mugabe's Private Aircraft (see the fourth quotation). Overall, African/African American interviewees responded more emotionally than non-African/African American interviewees.

I have to go back to that same tusk; it was such a strong piece technically, and yet, it was depicting slavery and it was depicting Africans selling into slavery other Africans, and that's always hard. [male & female, 60 & 61, non-African/African American]

I guess the ivory. I was looking at one of the exhibits with the ivory, and there was a little plaque where it talked about—I guess they used to, during the time they were enslaving the African people, the women were raped. That was very hard to sit through and look at that. And not only that, but it was a way for the young boys also to use their masculinity or their sexual prowess. It was kind of difficult to see that. [female, 55, African/African American]

The one with the ivory tusk, which was a big part of the trade, and how the women would carry a baby and carry the tusk. And, it said if women became too weak to carry both they would [leave] the child, and she would continue to carry the tusk. It was the ivory first and then the child. [female, 54, African/African American]

*Yeah, like that piece of artwork of . . . the machine with the people going in, and they go in dark [skinned]; they come out white, and they have wires in their head. I don't know. Maybe I didn't really didn't understand that. **That was about brainwashing. *Yeah, brainwashing. [female & female, 40 & 30, African/African American]

VISITOR OUTCOMES

The evaluation explored four visitor outcomes:

- ◆ Understanding the diverse and changing relationships between Africans and Europeans or Westerners
- ◆ Aligning with African ways of thinking about the art and its meaning
- ◆ Seeing art as a tool for social and political commentary
- ◆ Making personal connections

Responses to questions designed to assess the achievement of these outcomes were nuanced and emerged along a continuum from a beginning level of accomplishment to a highly developed level of accomplishment. Thus, findings for each outcome are presented in order from highest achievement to

lowest achievement. RK&A placed them along a four-level continuum: “highly developed,” “developing,” “beginning,” and “below beginning.”

UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSE AND CHANGING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICANS AND EUROPEANS OR WESTERNERS

RK&A explored to what extent visitors understood the diverse and changing nature of Africans’ relationships with Europeans or Westerners.⁵

HIGHLY DEVELOPED: MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees demonstrated an understanding that Africans’ relationships with Westerners and Europeans were complex, diverse, and changing. They explained and described the ways the relationships varied and placed that variation within a larger historical context or timeline, indicating an understanding that the relationships change over time (see the three quotations below). Mostly, these interviewees did not refer to particular African or Western peoples by nationality, although a few did so, in particularly naming Portugal and the Benin people (see the third quotation).

It shows that there was a multiplicity of relationships. There were some Africans who joined the Europeans. There were others who were opposed [to Europeans]. And so, you couldn’t just say that there was one relationship. There were multiple relationships depending on the time. [male, 66, non-African/African American]

[The exhibition showed] that there was a complex response that Africans had to the interplay with Europeans and how it changed over time, and it was different in different places, and how European elements were incorporated into African lifestyle and religious . . . and how they [Africans] used the Europeans for power in some senses; they mocked them in other ways. [female, 43, non-African/African American]

You had different tribes; you had different cultures; you had different countries within the continent of Africa that were affected. You had some [Africans] who embraced colonialism; you had some who said, ‘No, there’s a problem with this. This is what’s going on.’ Because of the belief system about the whiteness and what that meant of the spirit world, there was at first the acceptance and there was—with the Benin people and I believe the Portuguese people, which later turned into something nasty and something ugly. It just shows the diversity of the African people. . . They [Africans] were a smart people—although oppressed—they had their own hierarchies; they had their own levels; they had their own culture. Whenever someone comes into a culture, there is . . . a change, but not only is the change wrought by the people coming in to the culture, but also the culture itself wrought a change on those people. [female, 54, African/African American]

DEVELOPING: MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees demonstrated an understanding that relationships between Africans and Westerners or Europeans were/are very complex and complicated, especially noting the way many Africans resisted or undermined Westerners. However these interviewees spoke of the relationships in a generalized way and did not articulate an understanding of change over time or that there were many different types of relationships (see the two quotations below).

[The exhibition showed the African] resistance to colonization. A lot of times we don’t see that other side to colonization so that’s interesting. . . . I think it kind of explained how some

⁵ We did not ask visitors whether they recognized the transition from describing the relationships of Africans and Europeans to Africans and Westerners. However, several visitors did indicate such awareness.

[Africans] were so easily taken, based on what they perceived the European to be—they saw them as being angelic and it was easy enough to sway them. (How do you feel the exhibition demonstrated the relationship between Africans and Europeans or westerners?) It wasn't an equal relationship, most definitely—but I'm going to say in some aspects there was some togetherness, but for the most part—in my mind—the Africans still appeared to be subordinate to the Europeans. [female & female, 42 & 23, African/African American]

(What does the exhibition show you about the relationship of Africans and Europeans?) I think it's always ambiguous. . . . There were some benefits in terms of power for certain sectors with African groups and there was a kind of ambiguity in the relationship between the Africans and Europeans. [female, 51, non-African/African American]

BEGINNING: NEARLY ONE-FIFTH OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees did not indicate an understanding of the diverse nature of relationships between Africans and Europeans/Westerners. Rather, they focused on one type of relationship: the oppressor (Europeans or Westerners) and the oppressed (Africans). Further, these interviewees did not demonstrate an understanding of the complexity within that one type of one relationship. Rather, these visitors described the Europeans or Westerners as always exploitative and Africans as always exploited (see the quotations below).

I look at it [the relationship between Africans and Europeans] as another example of the haves victimizing the have-nots. [male & female, 52 & 52, African/African American]

That [a] way of life was forced upon them [Africans]. The Westerner's way, the European way of life was forced upon them [Africans]. It kind of ignored their own [African] history. [female, 85, non-African/African American]

(What do you feel the works of art show you about the relationship between Africans and Europeans or Africans and Westerners?) That the Europeans tended to—it was exploitative, whether they were actually taking people or ruining their lives and their environment. [male & female, 39 & 69, non-African/African American]

BELOW BEGINNING: A FEW INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees did not articulate any understanding of the relationship between Africans and Europeans. Rather, they saw the exhibition as simply African art or African history.

ALIGNING WITH AFRICAN WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT THE ART AND ITS MEANING

RK&A explored to what extent visitors aligned themselves with African ways of thinking about the art and its meaning. To do so, RK&A explored from what perspective interviewees felt the exhibition was presented.

HIGHLY DEVELOPED: ONE-HALF OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees demonstrated an understanding that the exhibition was presented from the African perspective. A few indicated the title of the exhibition, "*Through African Eyes*," (see the first quotation below) had made that clear. A few of these interviewees cited the Ghanaian proverb, and a few cited the Mina culture's proverb about hearing the hunter's side of the story versus the lion's. Most of these interviewees recognized what a unique perspective the exhibition was taking and found it refreshing.

I guess the perspective would be the title of the work; it would be Africa through the eyes of Africans. As the exhibit says, and as most people know, usually things are presented by those who conquer, so you hear the conqueror's side of the story, like it said in the exhibit. No one

talks to the lion; they talk to the hunter. So this was the perspective of the people who were actually there. [male, 64, non-African/African American]

I think [the exhibition] shifts perspective for a lot of museum goers because so much of what we [are used to] see[ing] in African art is things that are brought back by the white man, sort of bounty and treasure. So I think it's really wonderful that [the exhibition was] able to shift the perspective and see it from . . . the African [perspective]. [male & female, 60 & 61, non-African/African American]

That the 'other' also has a voice and vision and a perspective and intelligence and understanding and interpretation. [Africans are] not the invisible 'other' [as they are usually portrayed]. [female, 51, non-African/African American]

DEVELOPING: ONE-QUARTER OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees said the exhibition presented an “unbiased,” “neutral,” or “balanced” perspective. These visitors said the exhibition represented both European and African perspectives (see the quotations below).

They did a great job. I think they explained it very well. They didn't seem to take one side or the other. It was very neutral. [female, 42, African/African American]

I think there is equally the African perspective as well as the European perspective. [female, 53, African/African American]

I definitely thought that it was somebody [the curator] that had a very balanced view because, again as I was saying before, we usually fall into stereotypes of black versus white and slavery was horrible. . . I also thought it was somebody that didn't take the opposite stance. It was someone that was showing again, what were the different relationships that Africans had with Europeans. Some people cooperated. Some people could identify with different power structures. And, some people obviously were treated horribly and had very negative types of relationships. [female, 38, non-African/African American]

BEGINNING: SEVERAL INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees commented skeptically about the perspective. For instance, one questioned whether it is possible to present an unbiased perspective, and a couple thought the exhibition was from a Western perspective (see the quotation below).

The main point of the exhibit was how it affected Africans during the European colonization period. But, I felt like it almost was told in a very white way because it was structured in a white way. . . . [male, 25, non-African/African American]

BELOW BEGINNING: A FEW INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees did not comment on perspective or provided idiosyncratic responses.

RECOGNIZING ART AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY

RK&A explored to what extent visitors recognized art as a tool for social and political commentary.

HIGHLY DEVELOPED: ONE-QUARTER OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees concretely described art as social and political commentary. While they did not use the word “commentary” or “satire,” they described the works of art as having particular messages

(whether overt or symbolic) intended for certain populations to see and interpret (see the quotations below).

Definitely, [art] seemed like an outlet and a way to get messages across to each other without being so forward so that the Europeans wouldn't know what was happening amongst the smaller groups. [female & female, 42 & 23, African/African American]

It just helps people show whatever they're dealing with at the time or the certain time period. It helps them convey the problem at hand and show other people, 'Okay, this is wrong,' or 'Hey, we're being mistreated,' or any message they're trying to convey, they convey it through their art. And, I think that's why it's important. [male & female, 28 & 20, non-African/African American]

Art was and is very much a part of African culture. Not only is it utilitarian in forms, some of it is symbolic, some of it designates power, title, prestige—those kinds of things—and it speaks to what the artist is trying to [convey] to the person who is looking at it, depending on who it is—who sees it. [female, 54, African/African American]

DEVELOPING: SLIGHTLY LESS THAN ONE-HALF OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees described art as expressive, but did not go so far as to describe political and social commentary, nor did they suggest that the art contained messages or commentary meant for others (see the quotations, next page).

I think it shows that they express—the role of art expressed how they felt about colonization, which is how—I mean which is very . . . used. They were very victimized. [male, 24, non-African/African American]

Art expressed all kinds of aspects of life in a more central way than Europeans traditionally have. It just expressed power as well as the relationships that people have with each other. [male, 50, non-African/African American]

I think it's [art is] very vital. I think it's the one thing as a people . . . that can really speak to us, regardless of whether you're African, European, or whatever. It [art] just emotes some really deep emotional feelings, and I think it's really essential that we do keep these kinds of things going on, so that we can stay in touch with our emotions because we still deal with a lot of these issues of "Us" and "Them" today. [female, 55, African/African American]

BEGINNING: A FEW INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees described African art as documenting history. They indicated that the object may be interpreted in retrospect, but did not indicate that the object served any expressive purpose at the time it was made (see the quotation below).

To me it was the same throughout the world. The art tells the story. Tells the story of the people who make the art and their impressions of the world. [male & female, 73 & 73, non-African/African American]

BELOW BEGINNING: ALMOST ONE-QUARTER OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees did not indicate that African art was used for social and political commentary nor that art is expressive. These interviewees talked about art as utilitarian only, or provided idiosyncratic responses.

PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

To explore what personal connections visitors made, RK&A asked interviewees to identify how, if at all, the exhibition resonated with them personally. Personal connections also came up naturally in other parts of the interview as well. RK&A asked probing questions to explore the depth of personal resonance.

While the other outcomes were coded along a continuum from below beginning to highly developed, it is more appropriate in the case of personal connections to code them by degree of intensity. Thus, findings for this outcome are presented in order along a four-level continuum of: “highly intense,” “intense,” “moderately intense,” and “no connection.”

HIGHLY INTENSE: ONE-QUARTER OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees talked about personal connections in a way that indicated deep and personalized reflection of aspects of the exhibition. These interviewees tended to describe their personal connections within a broader socio-historical context, such as reflecting on race relations then and now. For the most part, the non-African American interviewees in this group tended to reflect on what it means to be part of a majority culture (see the first two quotations below). The African American responses were more individualized, although some placed their experience within race relations of the United States (see the third and fourth quotations). Furthermore, these responses were often marked by emotions, including empathy, pride, and shame.

[The exhibition] reminded me of how Europeans just went over and felt like they could colonize a people who were not like them. It doesn't mean it was right, but it just reminds me like, 'Who do these people think they are? Why do they think that their way was better?' . . . And then I thought, 'Well you know what? If I was a doctor and I went over and I saw sick babies and I knew that there was a way I could help them, I probably would get involved, too and try to change the way people did things and change health practices.' I'm talking about that doctor [referenced on the audio guide]. [female & female, 68 & 29, non-African/African American]

(How did this exhibition resonate with you personally?) I mean, basically, [I'm] sort of glad I'm not black because it's such a hard thing. . . You know what I mean? That is, I feel very privileged but also ashamed. [male, 58, non-African/African American]

As an African American female who grew up in the '70s, and I'm a baby boomer—and so I was not a young adult in the '60s—I was a little girl, but I did know about the Civil Rights Movement and those things. I did have some issue with identity. 'What does beauty mean in a basic European culture as an African American female?' It spoke to me, the beauty of the African people, of my ancestors. The beauty of the thought processes, the intelligence. It helped me with that. [female, 54, African/African American]

It resonated with me personally still [despite that] I came through the Jim Crow era. It still pulled at some deep emotions relating to race relations then and what we're dealing with now. It really did take me to a place that I hadn't visited in a long time. I'm aware of it—the differences here still in our country and in the different parts, even here in the Detroit area. It made me think about [how] we still have a long way to go in terms of race relations. [female, 55, African/African American]

INTENSE: MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees described personal connections in deeply reflective but less intimate ways. Many talked about broadening their perspective and opening their mind (see the first quotation below).

Additionally, these responses were less emotive, even though some mentioned emotions and feelings (see the second quotation).

I just felt that it's a very—moving almost sounds trite. It was very enlightening. [It is a] very full experience and a much-needed exhibit, not only from the perspective of this is about Africa, but this is also about every side that isn't told. It's about the other view—the alternative view—‘So what else aren't they telling?’ So this represented all the stuff that they never told. [male, 64, non-African/African American]

It actually gave me a better sense of what it was like to be African at that time because there was more to it than just slavery. See, I hear the slavery story all the time, but to be able to see and feel their emotions and kind of how that was interpreted in art, I thought was pretty neat. [male & female, 54 & 54, African/African American]

MODERATELY INTENSE: ONE-QUARTER OF INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees talked about personal connections in a way that lacked depth; they did not seem to think beyond their personal beliefs or knowledge. These interviewees said that the exhibition “affirms” their previous ideas, “reminds” them of things they learned or experienced, or “interests” them (see the quotations below).

I guess just going back to having the African art class I remembered a lot of things that I didn't think that I would remember or names that I recognized. A lot of the pieces—I was able to think back to things that weren't displayed in the exhibit and why certain pieces were the way they were and why shapes—some masks were shaped the way they were and things like that. [female & female, 42 & 23, African/African American]

I've traveled a lot in Africa so I think it's interesting to see the ways the different paths of the story have been put together. [female, 51, non-African/African American]

NO CONNECTION: A FEW INTERVIEWEES

These interviewees did not demonstrate personal connections.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

REMOVED FOR PROPRIETARY PURPOSES

APPENDIX B: THREE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

MALE, 64, NON-AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN

(Interview 1. Okay, so what were your overall thoughts walking through the exhibition?)

I was almost overwhelmed, just by the vastness and multiple cultures that compose Africa and a thumbnail sketch of their history and how magnificent their history is and how European countries come in and think they own it and just ignore all the people and they just—it's like they don't exist because they don't look like us, they don't act like us. We got all these thousands and thousands of years of tradition and family and beliefs. It's like they're not human and to see that transpiring and a lot of it associated with God—it makes you—on the one hand it's frustrating to see it happen, on the other hand I'm glad someone presents it so people can wake up and go, people are people wherever they are and you got to respect who they are with what they do, what they believe. It was beautiful; absolutely beautiful.

(What about you?)

*----.

Well, go ahead. You want to say anything? Oh, our son's going to South Africa. He got a grant to do an oral history project. He'll be there in a couple weeks, so we're going to try to just give him a little more ----. He's read quite a bit about it but he's given more information. I was amazed that Portugal was one of the first—or maybe the first—country that came in and basically invade Africa. You think if little, tiny Portugal. You know, what gives them this feeling of “We can come down and invade your country and take your people and steal your riches”? Where does that come from? And then the African people were so open, expecting these people who they never saw before to be friendly—just like Columbus. They come in and just terrorize the indigenous population. Hope it's not genetic.

(You may have answered this already, but what aspects of the exhibition did you find most interesting?)

Well, for me the most stunning thing was to see those maps change from the early kingdoms of the African culture and then the Europeans come in and divide it up any way they want just like the U.S. has done in Vietnam and Korea and now Afghanistan and Iraq. And then to see over the course of time to see the African nations forming back—I assume similar to what their original kingdoms were because of all the culture and relationships—it's heartening to see that happening again. So the bottom line would be the maps and the changing “boundaries” of the countries that, and then towards the end, the artwork at the end was amazing. Just amazing.

(Well throughout the exhibition, there were different methods of interpretation. There were text, quotes, the maps. There were also videos, audios. What from that do you feel like you used the most or how many of those do you think that you used throughout your journey?)

For me the visual information was probably the most stunning and then augmented by the audio headset information and the little quotes that appeared—or the quotes that were on the wall by various

people—I thought that was very informative. In a couple spots they had the ones that changed—there'd be a quote that was on the wall and it would change and give you some tidbits of information in nice, summary statements. The actual printed text for me was further down the scale; very important, but the other information stuck in my mind more.

(Were there parts of the exhibition that you had difficulty following or understanding?)

Not following or understanding. I mean it was laid out very well and the flow was good. It was enough information that you gained a lot but there wasn't so much that you're overwhelmed and just say, "I can't take anymore; I gotta leave." I didn't get that feeling. It was just very concise. I thought it was very well done.

(Overall, what do you think the museum is trying to tell the visitors through the exhibition?)

I guess it tells you what you feel and what I felt was a real appreciation for people as people and the culture of the people. To wake up and realize that just because somebody looks different than you or has different beliefs doesn't mean that they're bad—the good/bad thing—it just means that they're different and you really have to expand your frame of reference to appreciate all of that. So I suspect that's what they're saying; just be aware that there's thousands and thousands of years of history and it's not—Africa as continent—I think some people in this country think that Africa is a nation, as opposed to a continent. It's composed of thousands and thousands of cultures within Africa. You can't stereotype any—even within a culture you can't stereotype individuals.

(Can you give an example of how you feel that was conveyed in the exhibition?)

Well there were a number of spots where they would say—like when the Europeans came, some people within that area accepted them, some rejected them. Some fought them, some ran away and I guess that's how it ----. There were so many different cultures and then within each culture there were divisions how they reacted when—I hate to say it—the white people came.

(So what does the exhibition show you about African people?)

What I got out of it, they're a beautiful—it sounds like a generalization—it's just a beautiful—can't even say culture because it's so diverse—well, I would say that in general what I got from this was that the people were basically peaceful. Very similar to the indigenous people from North America. They were very in tune with the Earth, they were very in tune with their ancestors, and they didn't need all the clocks and chains and stuff like that. I felt that they were very natural and in tune with Mother Earth. The Europeans were very out of touch to try to convert them—to convert those savages to our way. It's sad.

(What do you think the artwork shows you about the relationship between the African people and Europeans or westerners?)

Well, I think it shows that initially the African people were very accepting because they didn't know who they were. On the one hand they were accepting and then on the other hand they were afraid because they didn't know who they were. But it didn't say anything about the African people being violent. The violence was very one-sided. It came from the European towards the Africans. And then the Europeans coming in and saying—having the Bible—and you know, "God said it's our land" and ---- "what are you talking about? We've been here thousands of years." So I'd say the power of love versus the power of violence. It seems like there's a huge division there.

(What do you feel the works specifically show you about the role of art in African culture, for lack of a better word?)

It certainly is a way to express when you can't express it verbally. Some people certainly have the talent to put immense emotions and immense messages in a medium that is personal and then it becomes public. You take all this stuff that's inside of you and put it into a piece of art of some form. It's a wonderful way to get it out of you and then affect other people. They're very creative, very talented, as artists from any culture are. Artist folks are ----. ---- to be able to conceive of ---- sculpture or painting—the black and white one with the figures—I can't even imagine how that person's brain works to be able to do that.

(This question is going to sound a little test-ish, I guess. Do you have any thoughts about whose perspective is presented in the exhibition?)

Whose perspective?

(Mm-hm. Who's telling the story.)

Well I guess the perspective would be the title of the work; it would be Africa through the eyes of Africans. As the exhibit says and as most people know, usually things are presented by those who conquer, so you hear the conqueror's side of the story, like it said in the exhibit. No one talks to the lion; they talk to the hunter. So this was the perspective of the people who were actually there.

(How did that impact your experience in the exhibition?)

It gives you a broader view, it reminds you that there's another side to every story. Just like slavery in the United States or war. Like you hear the U.S. side of the story in war, you don't hear the victims' side. Our history books are very one-sided. It takes a lot to figure out that there are two sides and everybody's human. Hearing the other side is always very important and often not conveyed.

(How—if at all—did that affect your experience with the artwork?)

How did that affect my experience with the artwork? I don't know if I can get my brain around your question.

(From that particular perspective—did that affect how you saw the artwork at all or is it more—how did it affect how you felt about it?)

How did seeing both sides of it affect--

(Mm-hm.)

How I view the artwork? I don't know. I don't know if I can answer that. Can you answer that? I don't know. I guess that's where I came into it. I guess being aware that there's two sides of both stories. So when you look at artwork—artwork is very personal, so the artist projects what they feel at the time from their side and quite often that's the side that doesn't make Fox News. That's the real stuff and then how it's conveyed is usually somebody's interpretation that's blasted over the airwaves so we're supposed to believe what they're telling you versus what the artist is doing. Art's very personal.

(I think you stated this before but in what way—if any—do you think the exhibition personally resonates with you?)

Yeah, I think I said that ----. I just felt that it's just a very—moving almost sounds trite—it was very enlightening. Very full experience, and a much-needed exhibit. Not only from the perspective of this is about Africa but this is also about every side that isn't told. It's about the other view—the alternative view—so what else aren't they telling? So this represented all the stuff that they never told.

(Some aspects of the exhibition may be uncomfortable for some people. Were there any moments during the exhibition where you maybe felt uncomfortable or surprised by something that you saw, read or heard?)

Yeah, the uncomfortable part is that even though I know something about slavery, it's always uncomfortable to see that it went on for 350 years. It's uncomfortable to envision a whole industry—I think they said \$1.2 trillion worth—of industry in enslaving people. I mean to see those numbers and then think about all those hundreds of years. It's generation, generation, generation of people taking other people, enslaving them. I was surprised that the lack of African art depicting slavery. To read that one display that was called “Absence”—that the people really didn't know that slavery was going on, that people would just disappear and they wouldn't know where they went or what happened and it must have went on for years and years and years. They just didn't realize that people were actually stealing their neighbors and they're going away—they probably couldn't even envision the conditions that those people were going into because they didn't have a clue. How would they know? How would you know because there was no TV or radio; they didn't write letters back; they just were gone—poof. That was a wake up or realization I hadn't thought about before.

(Do you have any thoughts about the way the museum presented that portion of the exhibition?)

I thought it was great; I thought it was great to have “Absence” as an exhibit. I thought that was a really cool way to make you think about the lack of information. That was very well done.

(Well those are all the formal questions I have. Do you have anything that you'd like to add? Any final thoughts?)

You've done a good job. You're very pleasant. It was well worth the time, well worth the ----.

(Thank you.)

Well, I would like to suggest somehow that they condense—not condense it down—but put it on a DVD so you can take this experience and share it with other people somehow. As I said our son's going to Africa and I kept thinking, ‘Boy, it'd be great if we could get him here’ but he's in Chicago so --- not going to get here, but it'd be cool to somehow get this on a DVD and sell it for less than the \$55 for the book. I'd pay 20 bucks for a DVD of the exhibit. Have the little clips from the audio portion and show it. That would be nice. That'd be a great thing, actually. There you go.

FEMALE & FEMALE, 68 & 19, NON-AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN

(Interview number 21. Okay, ladies, as you walked through the exhibition, what thoughts did you have?)

Well, I thought it was interesting that it was from the viewpoint of Europeans' relationship with African culture. It wasn't just African culture. It was really more about the relationship. And I really enjoyed the quotes from the kids, like the 12-year-old kid. That was interesting. It wasn't just all one thing. I thought it was interesting that it was a lot of different types of art, genres. How about you?

*It was quite a variety of art, so interesting and creative they were.

(Okay. I know you mentioned the quotes for you. Were there any other aspects of the exhibition that you found really interesting?)

I really loved the photography. I didn't think there was that much of it. There was only I think like four or six different pictures. That's personally what I like. I enjoy photography, so I really like that. And I thought it was really cool like in the one frame it was four African women and you could see how it was staged, so heavily influenced by European photographs and how they were sitting upward and smiling. It didn't say, however, how typically Africans would have posed without that input, so I don't know what the difference would have been.

(Right.)

But yeah, that was what I liked. What did you like?

*I liked also the textile art. And also the colorful aspects.

(Can you pick one particular work that interests you most? I know you mentioned the photographs.)

I'll tell you two other things that I liked, but if you want to go first...

*No, go ahead.

I liked the three different wooden sculptures of the one doctor and then the other thing I thought was interesting like through my little audio tour was like the brief history of that one doctor who came in and said that colonization was not necessarily good but then found himself actually kind of doing that and maybe subconsciously trying to make changes and help.

*Was that Dr. Albert . . . ?

Yeah, that was really interesting.

*Yeah, and it was interesting also the humor that they depicted with the sculpture or portrait or with the masks.

Yeah, that was cool.

(So throughout the exhibition, I know that there were several different forms of interpretation. You mentioned the quotes and the audio. Also, there was the text that accompanied some of the larger portions and then there were also videos that enhanced some of the portions. And then also maps. So how many of those do you feel you utilized during your journey through the exhibition?)

Well, I looked at almost everything. I will say when there was like an audio number and then an explanation as well, it was a little distracting because I was like reading and listening at the same time. I think for the audio things you don't—see, I don't know. It would be tough. It's hard because you can't do both. I feel like it would have been fine just to have to read or just have audio. I didn't really need both.

(Okay. How about for you?)

*I enjoyed the audio interpretation. And I didn't read everything there was to read; however, what I did read I found very interesting.

I love the quotes. I did like the quotes a lot.

(Did you have a favorite that you liked? Like from the quotes, the maps, the videos on that?)

*You know, there was so much. I can't.

My favorite quote was from the 12-year-old boy who said like the white children played separately from us, do everything separately from us, but if they would have played with us, they would have had a great time.

(I remember that one.)

Yeah, it was kind of sad. Poignant.

(It was very poignant for a 12-year-old. It's like wow. So spot on.)

Yeah, really.

(So throughout the exhibition, were there any parts that you found that you had difficulty following or were maybe a transition that you didn't quite get?)

I don't know. I thought the interactive map that showed the territories. I thought that was a little hard to figure out or to follow. I had to concentrate on it for a while before I figured out what they were doing?

(Is there any particular reason why?)

There was a lot going on maybe and it was big. I think maybe if it wasn't moving it might have been better. I don't know. Maybe if it was still and it had them next to each other rather than going back and forth.

(How about for you? Did you find anything particularly difficult or having trouble following anything?)

*I didn't really focus on those maps.

(Well, I mean anything within the exhibition. Was there anything that was a little troubling?)

*I mean, I didn't think about it.

(No problem. So overall, what do you think the museum is trying to tell or show the visitors through this exhibition?)

*The history and all the white man and slaves. The Africans. You know, it's history that we need to know and to see.

(How about you?)

I think probably they're trying to tell us that there was a lot of creativity that stemmed from the influence and how that kind of came about. It wasn't just African art and it wasn't just European. It was the collaboration of the two and what came of that. I don't know if there was tons of history. It might have been if there was more historical reference. Yeah, just more of a reference point in some areas. Maybe that would have been nice. Because the years skipped around a lot. Like the photographs were in the 60s and then you had some other stuff which was earlier.

(Okay.)

A large time period.

(Yeah, I would say from the 1500s up until now is pretty big and significant.)

Yeah.

(So what does this exhibition show you about African people?)

About African people?

*Their creativity and determination ----.

Be productive or move forward?

*Move forward.

I think it shows the ability to adapt, like adapt to what was going on and to be able to welcome people into their community and actually create things based on that and adapt. Just like have new people infiltrate them and also be able to welcome people even though they know that the similar kinds of people have removed parts of their family at different points in their life and they still welcome some people into their community and create art based on them. So that's what I learned.

(Kind of using this as a jumping off point, what do you think the exhibition demonstrated about the relationship between Europeans and Africans or Africans and Westerners?)

I think probably on an individual basis when people sat down to dinner, were welcomed to communities, and go to know each other, they probably go along I think. But I do think there was a lot of heavy-handed influence by Europeans that changed a lot of things that maybe should not have been touched. I don't know. That's a hard question.

(It's more opinion based.)

Yeah. Well, some great art came out of it, but at the suffering of tons of people who probably were colonized. I mean, I don't really agree with the Christian influence. Like another quote that I thought was interesting was the boy who was—what was he talking about? That the chief didn't mind that he was Christian, but he was like don't forget all the ancestors that came before you. Just because this one person wants you to be Christian, don't forget your grandfather and your grandfather's father and all those other people. So yeah, I don't agree with that part.

*What was the question?

(Just what the exhibition shows you about the relationship between Africans and Europeans or Africans and Westerners.)

*The relationship?

(Mm-hm.)

*It certainly was not the best.

And also, I think that the white people came in and took like a very patriarchal role and felt like it was their—

*I was surprised at the impressions the African people had when they first saw the white-skinned people.

Which was?

*Which was they used to put powder on the images that they created.

Right.

*And because that made them more spiritual thing.

It was a spiritual thing.

*And then when they saw the white-skinned people, they were in awe of them.

Oh, right. Yeah.

*Unfortunately, they didn't know what they were in for, unfortunately.

Yeah, right. Right, right.

(So what does the exhibition show you about the role of art within African culture?)

It seems like it was more like a craftsman's activity rather than—it's not like in European culture where it's like very lofty and people went off to art school and did these impressionist paintings. It's more like they used what they had. They took everyday life. They had the materials, the textiles, wood. They created art with what they had and maybe there wasn't a lot of formal training.

*However, I was amazed at the creative abilities. I mean, some of the carvings were incredible.

(It's intricate.)

*I mean, these were gifted people.

(So do you have any thoughts about whose perspective is presented within the exhibition, like who's the storyteller?)

*Pretty unbiased I thought.

I think it was balanced between European and African as far as the storytelling goes. I don't know. You know, a good balance.

*It seemed to like I said be unbiased. I mean, it was the way it was. Just unfortunate.

(You mentioned that it was sort of a balanced perspective. How so? Can you tell me a little bit more about what kind of made that balance for you?)

Well, I mean, I don't know. I guess there were a lot of quotes from Africans, but then I guess the sculptures of the Europeans that went over and the reaction to them...I don't know. Yeah, I don't know....I guess it was....I don't really know. That's all I have. ----.

(Oh, that's fine. So with that in mind, the perspective that you got, yours being unbiased and yours being more or less balanced, did that affect how you saw the exhibition or how you experience it or experience the works of art?)

Truthfully, I would have liked to have heard more African voices. Like more quotes. I mean, like the narration was a British guy. The audio was like a British guy. And there were some quotes, but I don't know.

*I'm trying to remember whether there was any African music. That would have been nice in one of those segments to have African music in the background.

(So we can move on to the next one. So in what way, if any, did the exhibition resonate personally? Was there anything personally that you took from it?)

Well, I think it just reminded me of how Europeans just went over and felt like they could colonize a people who were not like them. It doesn't mean it was right but it just reminds me like, "Who do these people think they are?" Like why do they think that their way was better. So yeah. I'm trying to think of what else personal I can think of. And then I thought well you know what? If I was a doctor and I went over and I saw sick babies and I knew that there was a way I could help them, I probably would get involved too and try to change the way people did things and change health practices. I'm talking about ----. Was that Dr. ----?

(Yeah.)

So I guess I was kind of torn in that sense, what I would do.

(Kind of difficult.)

*I'm sorry, what's the question?

(In what way, if any, did the exhibition resonate with you personally?)

*I just reminded me of history, of our history and the persistence of the white people to bring their religion and force it on these communities, the Africans.

Mm-hm.

*Which was so wrong to me as far as I'm concerned.

(Well, some aspects of the exhibition may have proved to be uncomfortable or maybe a little surprising for people. Was there anything that made you feel uncomfortable or a little surprised as you walked through?)

No, I didn't experience that at all.

(How about for you?)

*Well, I guess I was surprised at the way religion was forced on them and how on one hand they tried to show the Africans a new life, and then on the other hand, they were doing terrible things.

Yeah, but that's just history. That's not ---- exhibition.

*It's history but it's difficult to see, to be reminded of these things.

(So since you did find a portion that was maybe a little uncomfortable, how do you think the museum did with handling that aspect within the exhibition?)

*I think that it was well told, well illustrated.

(And for you? I know your mother mentioned that one aspect. Was there anything you can think of that any visitor may find a little bit disturbing or troubling?)

I mean, ---- I really can't think of anything that stuck out that was troubling. No.

*Well, I think—

No, I mean, what happened was troubling, but the art is not troubling.

*Well, it is.

Which part?

*Right in the beginning the ----.

(The tusks.)

*To see the depiction of the slaves with chains around their necks.

Oh, I didn't see that.

(I think that was the ivory tusks.)

*Yes, yes, yes. It's disturbing to see that.

All right.

(Well, thank you, ladies.)

FEMALE, 54, AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN

(Interview number 42. So overall what thoughts did you have as you walked through the exhibition?)

My thoughts on it were that it was very insightful. It was also very thought provoking and the perspective that was given was something that was refreshing. I've been to an exhibit on Egyptian artifacts and they were presented from the European viewpoint and it was somewhat bothersome, whereas here—because it was represented through African eyes—I felt almost more of a kinship with how they were feeling again, as the story goes, 'unless you tell the story, it's not your history, it's his story.' And so now it's become part of my story because of the perspective.

(So what aspects of the exhibition did you find to be the most interesting?)

There was a lot of it. I liked how they covered the religious aspects, the connection between colonialism, Catholicism, the spiritualism—that piece. There were some parts that were painful, but honest, which was into the slave trade. It was really difficult to see and read about the choice between a child and an ivory tusk that they chose the ivory tusk. I don't know—just as a mother, if that were me, and it could've been one of my ancestors, how that made the woman feel because she was just too weak to carry both.

(Can you tell me about one work of art that interested you the most? Or even a few, if you can think of any.)

Oh, gosh. The ivory tusk that depicted the different stages in African history; I won't buy anymore ivory. I don't have any, I don't want anymore. That was a big. Different masks that spoke about—how did they put it—masquerade—masquerade and what they did. Some of the thrones of the chairs were interesting. It was just so much.

(Now throughout the exhibition there were many different forms of interpretation. There was the audio tour, the text, the quotes on the wall, videos and maps. Did you utilize any of those?)

All.

(All of them?)

Yes. Utilized all of them. I liked it because you had the multiple media and so there was a break so you didn't get too tired of any one particular one and people learn in different ways; some people are more visual and with the audio that added—that was an addition but even without it say someone that took the tour who was deaf and couldn't hear, they could still enjoy the tour because of the different mediums that were used. I enjoyed them all.

(Do you think any one of those enhanced your experience more so than the others?)

The audio really did. It helped put a little more emphasis and then along with the audio there was another visual on the—I don't know what you call it—

(The little pad that)

Right, right. The little pad where you saw people speaking and then the play between. The quotes on the wall I thought were great, and map, when it had—it would change, you would see the different countries and then how it was changed by the Europeans and then how it changed back after Africa gained its independence.

(Now with all of those methods, was there anything that you found difficult to understand or had trouble following?)

No.

(No? So overall what message do you think the museum is trying to tell to the visitor through the exhibition?)

Oh, the other thing that I liked was the connection that this exhibit gave to the Charles Wright Museum of African-American history. I really liked that they acknowledged that this is certain piece and a certain era and if you want to go beyond that—the exhibit that had the emptiness, that represented Absence—that was very powerful because there was not that voice that happened after their kinsmen disappeared. That really spoke volumes and then along with that to say, “If you want to continue this and see where we went, where we’re going to” etc, and then they showed a picture of the Charles Wright. I thought that was great.

(I think that was a good key point. I think a lot of people mentioned it afterwards, too. People I’ve interviewed say, “I am going to go there” if they haven’t been already to see it.)

Right, right. And I have. And so this was a nice piece to go along with that, which I didn’t realize it. I really didn’t. I’ve seen it, it’s been advertised or what have you, and I was like, “Oh, okay. Here’s some figures.” And we’re down here tonight because this is part of the first day of the Concert of Colors and the Detroit Symphony is playing at—well anyway they’ve started already. Part of it was this exhibit and so we said “Okay, let’s go see it” and it was really, really—.

Yes. It was more than worth it.

(Okay, good. So as far as with regards to this exhibition, what message do you think the museum is trying to give to the visitor?)

The message that I received from this exhibit is one of total objectivity as far as the exhibit. They were—the message showed me that there was value and honor for the perspective of the African experience during this. They didn’t sugarcoat what went on or what the thoughts were or feelings of the people who experienced what was going on. They gave different perspectives and they showed a tie-in with being oppressed under colonialism and the oppression of slavery in America by use of symbols, paintings—what have you—to convey one message but having an underlying message going on and so that’s another connection in the African American experience. So I thought it was a very fresh, honest exhibit and it showed that 1) they’re—I don’t want to say embracing—but they’re just very honest about that particular period and then also talking about the Charles Wright, it’s not a competition. We’re both showing artwork and it’s about the enjoyment of the artwork and the evoking of thought.

(And you touched on this a little bit so if you just want to paraphrase, that will be fine, but if you want to add to it that will be, too. So what do you feel the exhibition shows you about African people? You kind of touched on it a little bit.)

That the African people were not, number one, how do I put it? They are not just one glob of thoughts, feelings—what have you. You had different tribes, you had different cultures, you had different countries within the continent of Africa that were affected. You had some who embraced colonialism, you had some who said, “No, there’s a problem with this. This is what’s going on.” You had—because of the belief system of the whiteness and what that meant of the spirit world, there was at first the acceptance and there was that ---- with the Benin people and I believe the Portuguese people, which

later turned into something nasty and something ugly. It just shows the diversity of the African people varies. Like any people, we're all intelligent but they were equal. Racism existed then, it exists now to a certain extent. They were a smart people—although oppressed—they had their own hierarchies, they had their own levels, they had their own culture and that whenever someone comes into a culture there is an ---- and a change but not only is the change wrought by the people coming in to the culture but also the culture itself wrought a change on those people.

(What do you feel the works of art themselves show you about the relationship between Africans and Europeans or the relationship between Africans and westerners?)

It depicted, mostly—except for a few figures—I'm trying to think. Queen Victoria, there was one of ---
- I believe it was—

(Yeah.)

--St. Anthony—those were people that were either loved or revered but for the most part they were very wary of the Europeans and didn't really particularly embrace or weren't glad with some of the changes and influences that were ----.

(Okay, so what do you feel the exhibition showed you about the role of art within African culture?)

Oh, art was and is very much a part of African culture. Not only is it utilitarian in forms, some of it is symbolic, some of it designates power, title, prestige—those kinds of things—and it speaks to what the artist is trying to interpret to the person who is looking on it, depending on who it is. Who sees it?

(Right. So do you have any thoughts about whose perspective is presented in this exhibition?)

I thought that the African perspective was presented well.

(Did that have any influence on how you experienced the exhibition or how you viewed the works of art?)

Yes, I think it does. Any work of art as the view or perspective of the artist that creates it—whether they're African, European, what have you. Now for me though, this is where the audio came in, was very helpful because I am western and an American. I was not able to right off see a lot of what the artist was doing because that's not my culture, but after getting that in whatever form it was in—whether it was written or verbal or seeing it—helped me and so then I make my own judgment based on that.

(That makes sense. Okay, and you touched on this in the very beginning so if it's not too much trouble, if you could just paraphrase for the sake of the question. And if there's anything else that comes to mind. In what way—if any—do you think the exhibition resonates with you personally?)

Ooh. To paraphrase, as an African-American female who grew up in the '70s and I'm a baby boomer—and so I was not a young adult in the '60s—I was a little girl but I do know about the Civil Rights Movement and those things. I did have some issue with identity. What does beauty mean in a basic European culture as an African-American female? It spoke to me, the beauty of the African people, of my ancestors. The beauty of the thought processes, the intelligence. It helped me with that.

(Now some of the aspects of the exhibition were a little uncomfortable or maybe even surprising, difficult to deal with. I know you mentioned a few portions that were ---- and can you reiterate which portion was that?)

The one where the ivory tusk—which was a big part of the trade—and how the women would carry a baby—carry the tusk—and it was said if women became too weak to carry both they would ---- the child and she would continue to carry the tusk. It was the ivory first and then the child.

(How did that make you feel?)

Oh, that made me feel so sad. I almost cried. It really was, because it was, again, material things take place over human life and they didn't see the potential of a child that would grow up. All they saw was that the child was a burden right now and the ivory was way too expensive to leave, and the child was not. And then if you fast-forward to now, we have elephants who are on virtual extinction in India, in Africa, because of ivory and poachers, and for what? So we can decorate some stuff?

(Houses.)

Exactly.

(How do you think the museum did with handling those difficult topics like that?)

I thought they handled it well. They said it like it was. Whoever was speaking on it or was written, they put the perspective out there, it is what it is—that's what it is.

(Well that was the last formal question, but is there anything you want to add or a suggestion? Anything like that? A final thought?)

*I'm hungry.

(That's his final thought.)

No. Yeah.

(Well, thank you so much.)