

WHITNEY

ART AS EXPERIENCE



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With the opening of the new Whitney Museum of American Art in May 2015, the Education Department launched expanded programming featuring a broad spectrum of activities designed to engage diverse audiences. Borrowing the idea of “art as experience” from the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952), these programs demonstrate our approach to museum education as an experimental process through which art can help us to better understand the world around us and inspire creative thinking far beyond the walls of the Whitney.

A classic text for artists and educators alike, Dewey’s 1934 book *Art as Experience* considers the necessity and singularity of art in affecting how human beings interact with their environment. We are inspired by Dewey’s idea of “learning by doing” and his belief that the material process of making is integral to the development of each individual. Dewey also approached the work of art as an interface between an artist and a viewer, which led him to a profoundly democratic concept of culture. Our programs draw on these ideas to offer a range of experiences with art, from personal reflection and contemplative study to collective conversations and participatory events.

Laurie M. Tisch Education Center

For the first time in its history, the Whitney has a dedicated space for education: the Laurie M. Tisch Education Center. Comprising the Hearst Artspace, the Seminar Room, and the Education Department offices, the center is a hub where visitors of all ages can engage with artists and enliven and enrich their experiences at the Museum. Centrally located on the third floor and adjacent to the Susan and John Hess Family Gallery and Theater, the Laurie M. Tisch Education Center brings visibility to the Whitney’s educational mission and provides opportunities for museum educators to work in new ways, offering spaces for an array of drop-in activities, hands-on learning experiences, and in-depth and interdisciplinary programming.

Cover: Museum visitors in the fifth-floor galleries with (from left to right) Peter Halley, *Blue Cell Triple Conduit* (1986), Susan Rothenberg, *For the Light* (1978–79), Charles Ray, *Boy* (1992), and Sherrie Levine, *Large Gold Knot: 1* (1987). Photograph by Nic Lehoux

HAVING AN EXPERIENCE

Aesthetic experiences present us with unique opportunities to integrate perception and knowledge in profound and lasting ways. Our programming encourages visitors to slow down, look closely, and engage directly with works of art. Amid the distractions of today's increasingly fast-paced, technology-driven world, the museum environment has become all the more exceptional, offering encounters we can't have anywhere else. Our programs include multi-session courses that facilitate deep exploration of artistic practices and art historical themes and offer our audiences tools and techniques for close looking. We have designed our multimedia guide so that the technology facilitates a "heads up" experience that enables visitors to focus on art rather than providing an additional distraction. Our in-gallery teaching begins with artworks themselves, building visual literacy skills and introducing new ways of looking at art that encourage contemplation and sustained attention.



On a touch tour, visitors use a tactile map to explore Charles Demuth, *My Egypt* (1927). Photograph by Matthew Carasella

THE ARTISTS' MUSEUM



Since its inception, the Whitney has been a space for artists to learn from and support each other. From the intimate Studio Club on West Eighth Street founded by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney to the Marcel Breuer–designed building on Madison Avenue to today, the Whitney has grown considerably over the past century; however, a collaborative spirit remains at the center of the Museum's mission. Our Education Programs continue this legacy by providing opportunities for artists and audiences to develop connections and by fostering collective experiences of art making and viewing.

At the Whitney, artists are deeply involved in developing interpretive content and programming, and they are also an important part of our audience. The Education Department works to share artists' insights with a broader public. For example, the videos produced by our team offer direct access to the voices and ideas of exhibiting and collection artists. Our Public Programs invite artists to explore new ideas and present work in progress, while our Guided Visits for school groups encourage students to think about the ways that artists approach their work as critics, experimenters, observers, and storytellers.

Artist Fred Wilson conducts a critique in his studio with teens in the Youth Insights Program. Photograph by Jason Mandella

MAKING COMPLEXITY ACCESSIBLE

The Education Department both challenges visitors to think critically about art and supports their efforts to do so. Contemporary art, in particular, can require us to stretch our usual habits of mind, yet rather than simplifying artworks to make them more digestible, we approach their complexity as an opportunity. We seek to create a space where visitors can learn, question, and make sense of the works on view, fostering open-ended thinking and acknowledging that there are no easy answers. Moving away from an emphasis on the transmission of ideas in one direction and simple art appreciation, our approach is interactive and emphasizes the viewer's role in creating a work of art's meaning.

In order to make the Whitney's exhibitions and collections accessible and welcoming to a broad range of visitors, we offer programming along a spectrum that includes traditional formats of museum learning, such as conversations and tours, as well as innovative, participatory approaches, such as hands-on workshops and large-scale events. The Hearst Artspace, our studio classroom in the Laurie M. Tisch Education Center, enables visitors to experiment with art making and materials. We also offer more drop-in experiences and events in light of the shift in our audience demographics—more domestic and international tourists as well as an unprecedented number of first-time visitors.



Participants in a community program with ELESAIR (English Language and Employment Services for Adult Immigrants and Refugees) discuss Jasper Johns, *Three Flags* (1958). Photograph by Danielle Linzer

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND RESEARCH

We foster public engagement through programs that use the Museum's changing exhibitions and permanent collection displays as jumping-off points to explore and expand upon critical ideas. We are building a broad base of visitors who are not only engaged with the Museum but who also use the Whitney as a resource for their own intellectual and cultural exploration.

Our commitment to public engagement is rooted in a dialogic model for interactions among visitors, artists, and the institution. As part of our ongoing effort to recognize and develop the role that audiences play, we create programs that invite discussion and debate as vital forms of cultural practice. Panel discussions, symposia, and lectures emerge from research developed in collaboration with artists, curators, and outside partners such as artist-run organizations, academic institutions, publishers, and other cultural organizations. We understand research to be a form of collective work that foregrounds the museum as a space for intellectual exchange and knowledge production.



Andrea Geyer,
Time Tenderness.
Left to right: Lily Gold
and Omagbitse
Omagbemi. Photograph
by Andrea Geyer

A MUSEUM FOR NEW YORK CITY



The architecture of the Whitney's building (particularly in its transparency and outdoor areas, free gallery in the lobby, and welcoming public spaces) suggests a porous relationship between the Museum and the surrounding community. Our programming likewise strives to remove barriers—whether economic, social, physical, sensory, or linguistic—that historically have prevented some audiences from accessing all that the Whitney has to offer. In turn, we work to make the Whitney an accessible resource for all of New York City's students, teens, families, artists, educators, seniors, and neighborhood residents, providing cultural and educational opportunities for underserved audiences and exploring what an art museum can be and do for our community. Our downtown home is set within a diverse area with a rich artistic and industrial history. Amid the rapid transitions and growth that continually reshape the city, the Whitney aspires to become a community and cultural anchor in this evolving neighborhood.

Students on a free Guided Visit for New York City Public Schools. Photograph by Andrew Kist

Following spread: A visitor uses a multimedia guide to experience Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning* (1930). Photograph by Filip Wolak



BUILDING AN AUDIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

Art plays a transformative role in society, and by helping to build and broaden cultural participation, an art museum like the Whitney can have a powerful role in sustaining and advancing a democratic society. Our educators believe that access to art should be a right, not a privilege. This drives us to develop long-term relationships with the Whitney's audiences by fostering their understanding and love of art and enabling them to build personal connections with the Museum.

Groundbreaking research on the long-term impact of our teen art programs reveals that education programming can not only enrich the lives of participants, but also have a lasting effect on them. From the teens who take part in our multi-semester Youth Insights programs to the blind and low-vision visitors who attend our monthly touch and verbal description tours, the sustained connections we nurture over years of programming will help to build an audience for the Whitney now and in the future that is as diverse and dynamic as New York City itself.



Youth Insights Leaders
in the galleries.
Photograph by Filip
Wolak

Opposite:
HarvestFest celebration
in Gansevoort Plaza.
Photograph by Danielle
Linzer



Students from a partnership school in the Whitney's elevator, *Six in Four-E 3*, (2012-2015), designed by Richard Artschwager. Photograph by Andrew Kist

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Public Programs and Public Engagement

Public Programs engage audiences in critical conversations about art and cultural practice around the Whitney's collection and current exhibitions. Artists, curators, critics, writers, and scholars participate in panel discussions, symposia, lectures, performances, readings, and other events that offer nuanced and in-depth perspectives on American art and culture. Programs reflect research developed in collaboration with artists, curators, and outside partners such as artist-run organizations, academic institutions, publishers, and other cultural organizations.

Courses

Whitney courses are multi-week programs that examine key issues in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American art and culture. Courses offer participants the opportunity for close study of works of art on view in the Whitney's permanent collection galleries and in special exhibitions with instructors who are experts in the field of art history. During the fall and spring, courses related to special exhibitions include sessions with artists and curators. Additional courses focus on introducing key issues in contemporary art as well as methods of visual perception and formal analysis.

Interpretation

Developed in collaboration with Museum curators, the Whitney's interpretive program produces interdisciplinary resources including wall texts, video content, and multimedia guides that foreground artists' ideas and creative processes and make the Whitney's collection and special exhibitions accessible to Museum visitors on-site and online. Whitney Docents and Joan Tisch Teaching Fellows welcome and engage visitors through introductory tours that explore the ideas behind the works of art on view in current exhibitions.

School and Educator Programs

New York City public schools visit the Whitney free of charge. Our thematic, guided visits for K-12 students explore the multifaceted roles artists play in our culture—as experimenters, observers, critics, and storytellers—and forge thoughtful connections between K-12 classroom learning and the art on view. Long-term, multiyear partnerships with a small number of New York City schools engage the whole school community; programs include tours, professional development, and parent involvement. Programs for K-12 teachers include special preview events, conferences, and Teacher Exchange, a yearlong, paid program in which participants trade ideas with colleagues, Museum educators, artists, and curators.

Teen Programs

Youth Insights (YI) is an after-school program that connects New York City high school students to contemporary artists, providing opportunities to work collaboratively, discuss art critically, think creatively, and make art inspired by the exchange. Semester-long programs introduce students to the Whitney's art and artists, while participants in a yearlong Leaders program plan events and tours for their peers. Offered in the summer, Youth Insights Arts Careers introduces teens to careers in the arts and practical job skills, and Youth Insights Introductions provides experiences at the Whitney for high school students who are English Language Learners and recent immigrants. Large-scale and drop-in teen programs, including teen openings, workshops, and artist-led events, reach additional New York City teens.

Family Programs

Family Programs offer interactive tours, art-making workshops, artist-led programs, interpretive materials, and special events that encourage kids and families to learn about art together. In Open Studio, our drop-in art making program, families get creative and experiment with different forms and materials. Family openings and events feature art making activities and other fun ways to celebrate and learn about current exhibitions.

Community Programs

Community Programs build sustained connections that go beyond the single museum visit, bringing art, ideas, and dialogue to classrooms, senior centers, and community-based organizations around the city. Community Partnerships offer extended programming tailored to the needs and interests of partner organizations, promoting the Museum as an essential resource. Since 1994, the Whitney has partnered with some of New York's most vital community-based senior organizations, such as United Neighborhood Houses, to create customized programs that challenge seniors to actively engage with the Whitney's collection and exhibitions, make art, share ideas, and relate what they learn to their own lives and experiences.

Access Programs

The Whitney invites visitors of all abilities to experience the richness and complexity of American art in an inclusive, welcoming environment. Access Programs include Whitney Signs, tours in American Sign Language led by expert Deaf educators; Verbal Description and Touch Tours that allow visitors to experience the Whitney's exhibitions with a highly skilled museum educator trained to provide vivid, detailed verbal description of the works on view, while introducing a selection of objects through touch; and the Vlog Project, the Whitney's award-winning, open-captioned, online video series in American Sign Language.

We are grateful to all past and present staff of the Education Department who contributed their ideas and passions to help develop these programs for the Whitney. A special thank you to Adam D. Weinberg, Alice Pratt Brown Director, and to Randi Korn of Randi Korn & Associates, Inc. for their guidance and advice along the way.

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**Whitney Museum
of American Art**
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whitney.org/Education

