



Tapping into CREATIVITY
& Becoming Part
of Something BIGGER

DENVER **ART** MUSEUM



This report is a Denver Art Museum publication. © 2014
On the cover: *Nick Cave: Sojourn*

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In this report, we've woven together several different stories that chronicle stages of an ongoing journey at the Denver Art Museum. We realize that our readers—museum colleagues from near and far, staff members at sister institutions in Denver, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the arts education community, museum evaluators and researchers, and others—will be more interested in some stories than others. We encourage you to pick a starting point, absorb the gist of our findings, then circle back to explore more deeply. If you desire even deeper levels of information about study design and findings please access the supporting documents listed on page 80.

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The Denver Art Museum is, first and foremost, a space for **creativity**—creativity as embodied in the works of art in our collections, **creativity** in our collaborations with living artists, **creativity** as a core value of our approach to public education, and **creativity** as a quality we aim to inspire in everyone who participates in our programs. **Creativity** is a tool for success in people’s daily lives and work. **Creativity** fuels the economy of our city, our state, and our region. **Creativity** is the bridge between the works of artistic imagination on display in our museum and the everyday experience of our citizens and neighbors. Our collections showcase the power and beauty of human **creativity** across time and cultures, and our programs are designed to inspire and unlock the creative potential of our visitors and our community.

—Denver Art Museum, planning document



Red, White & Bold exhibition

Preface

We chose to team up with the Denver Art Museum for this project for several reasons. First, we see the DAM as an institution that sets a high bar for best practices and continual innovation. Daryl has known the museum up close, first as a staff member and then as a consultant on numerous projects. Mary Ellen has long-standing relationships with colleagues at the DAM and has admired the work that has led to their well-earned reputation.

Secondly, the topic of creativity resonates for us personally; it felt like the right thing at the right time. In reading the DAM's grant application to the Institute of Museum and Library Services, it was clear that the museum felt that way, too. Their previous work on creativity has put them in the forefront of museums who are seriously investigating their contributions to public value, and we were delighted to join them in this journey.

Third, after many years of listening deeply to visitors' voices there was a critical mass of staff members at the DAM, especially within the education department, who had been involved in evaluation as part of their practice. We saw an opportunity to build on their internal capacity and our own by having them join us as partners. We chose developmental evaluation, which weaves innovation and adaptation into the evaluation process, because it allowed us to work together as practitioner researchers. With many years of experience doing front-end, formative, and summative evaluation, our Denver colleagues were ready to take the next step to doing developmental evaluation.

In reflecting on our 18-month project, we were surprised by the magnitude of the changes we observed in our colleagues—staff members from across the museum. Like many kinds of growth, the changes were not linear or incremental. There were moments when we feared that maybe we'd charted a course that was too challenging because we hadn't locked in a fixed destination.

But our journey gave us the opportunity to actually live what we were learning about, the creative process. The

momentum built slowly. There were times of struggle. The more we delved into the messiness of the data, the more we started to come to new understandings—individually and collectively. Sharing our discoveries created a collaborative energy and a growing appetite from which there was no turning back. The growing sense of excitement and importance led one staff member to confess that he had “drunk the Kool-aid.” Soon we were all using that metaphor as we looked for ways to share our newfound knowledge and enthusiasm with colleagues throughout the Denver Art Museum and the field at large.

We took an unconventional approach to explore the impact of creativity on visitors to the DAM. Since our study was not a traditional evaluation, this is not a traditional, linear evaluation report.

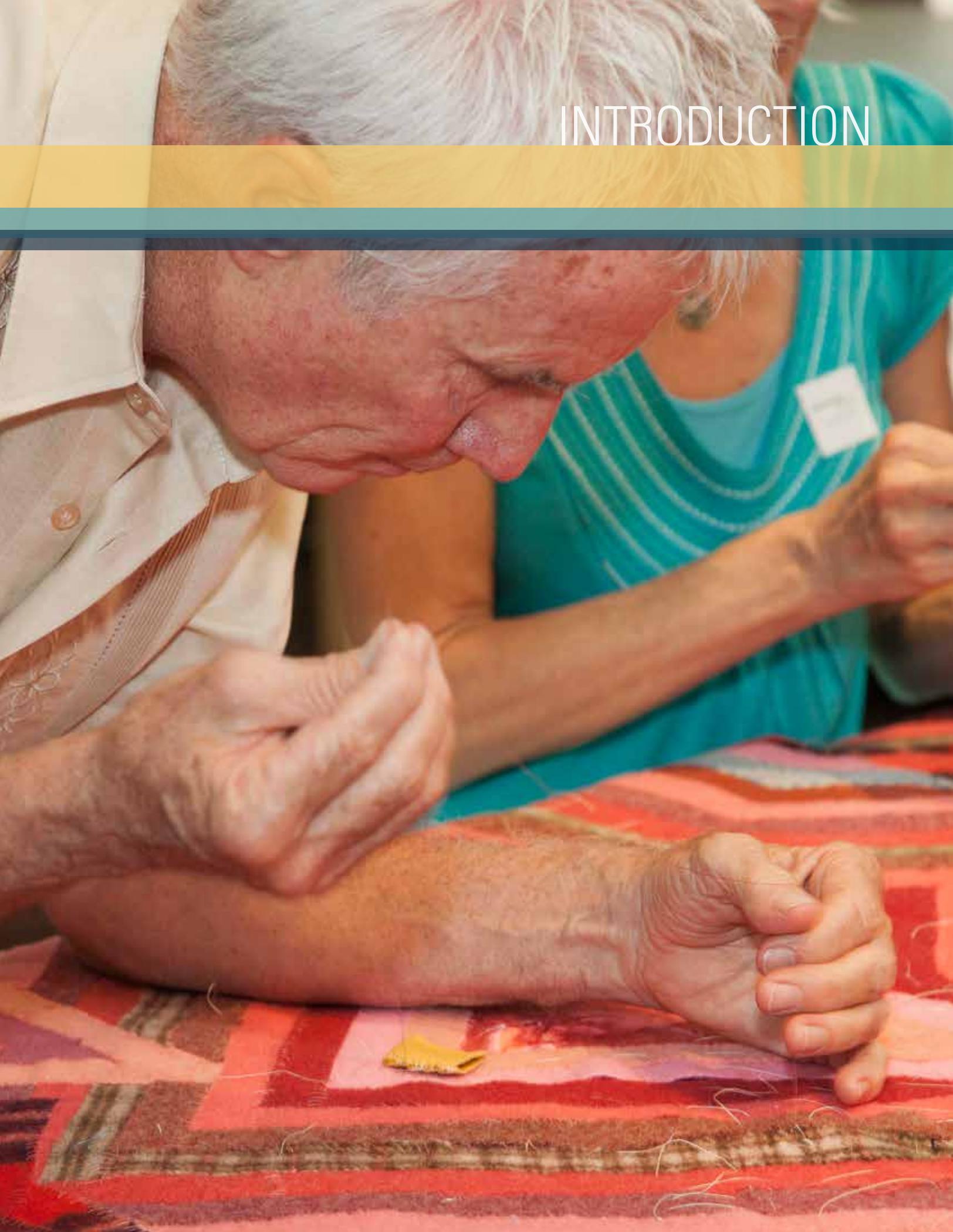
Consistent with the DAM culture and with developmental evaluation, this was not a one-time-only evaluation. The museum is already planning new institution-wide exhibitions and programs and developing a vision to renovate the North Building, designed by Gio Ponti, based on what they've learned about creativity. We are interested to see where these next steps lead our colleagues in Denver and others who choose to investigate the power of art museums to foster creativity.

The project we're about to describe was a collegial process in the truest sense of the word, so when we use the first person we are speaking for our Denver Art Museum colleagues as much as for ourselves. We came to know each other well over the course of this deep dive into creativity and we hope that we are being true to their discoveries as well as our own. We invite all of our readers to join us in this exploration of creativity as we broaden the circle and deepen our understanding.

Daryl Fischer
Principal, Musynergy

Mary Ellen Munley
Principal, MEM & Associates

INTRODUCTION



Introduction



Dye Garden on the Plaza



Artist Marie Watt's sewing circle

DAM's vision is built on the belief that art can make a difference in people's lives by celebrating and stimulating creativity and inspiring greater understanding and connection with our world. Our 18-month investigation of creativity affirmed that it is expressed in ways other than the production of works of art, and that creativity is not the sole domain of "creatives" or "artsy" people. Through a literature review, focus group sessions, interviews with visitors, and a survey of more than 600 people, we came to see creativity as an expansive way of thinking and approaching the world. And we began to see the uniquely powerful ways the Denver Art Museum—and perhaps other art museums as well—can leverage their resources to help visitors tap into the human capacity for creativity.

Spun: Adventures in Textiles was a museum-wide project in the most ambitious sense of the word—a suite of ten exhibits, one temporary exhibition, and dozens of programs—all focused on expanding people's notions of textiles while expanding their sense of creativity. Exhibits ranged from *Red, White & Bold: Masterworks of Navajo Design* to *Pattern Play: The Contemporary Designs of Jacqueline Groag*, and programs ranged from sewing circles led by Native American artist-in-residence Marie Watt to a dye garden that grew on the plaza outside the museum and culminated in a day of hands-on activities with local dyers. From May through September of 2013, *Spun* served as an incubator for creativity—an opportunity to explore myriad ways it was manifest in a full spectrum of exhibits and programs with a unifying theme.

SPUN EXHIBITS & PROGRAMS

In 6 months, the Exhibitions Department turned over nearly

48,500
square feet

between the two buildings
to produce....

2
ARTIST
INSTALLATIONS

3
INTERACTIVE
STUDIOS

3
SPUN
"MOMENTS"

1
"BEHIND THE SCENES"
INTERACTIVE SPACE

MULTIPLE
INSTALLATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACES



NORTH BUILDING
SQUARE FOOTAGE:

15,687

square feet

in **9** galleries, **2** studios,
and **1** outdoor space



HAMILTON BUILDING
SQUARE FOOTAGE:

32,800

square feet

in **5** galleries, **1** studio,
5 atrium spaces, **1** interior wall,
and **1** outdoor space

Run of *Spun: Adventures in Textiles* = **127 DAYS**

11
SPUN EXHIBITIONS

Planned by
12
curators

Approximately
13%
of museum square footage
reinstalled for *Spun* exhibitions

Approximately
64,000
people participated
in *Spun* programs

As we explored its many dimensions, our understanding of creativity evolved from being a broadly compelling, if somewhat vague, notion to a multidimensional concept that provided concrete guidance and direction for our practice. As our awareness became keener, we were able to see more in our actions and hear more from our visitors about their experiences.

Based on the review of literature, we discovered that among those who systematically study creativity, there is some consensus on what creativity is and is not.

- Creativity is a **process** that generates ideas or products that are both original and workable.
- The distinction between **creativity** and **innovation** is the difference between discovery of a new idea and the realization of an idea—rather like the relationship between science and technology. Coming up with a new idea is the creativity part. Applying the new idea to the real world is the innovation.
- The products of **imagination** can be anything that the mind can devise whether it has relevance to the real world or not; but creativity goes beyond mental musings.

These distinctions do not presume that creativity is of higher value than innovation and imagination; they simply clarify the relationships among them.



E-textile making at Untitled

A focus on the creative process has the potential to expand the Denver Art Museum’s role in the community. We now see that our work in designing for creativity has four dimensions:

1. **Exhibit** examples of creativity;
2. **Reveal artists’ creativity** by highlighting their process and technique;
3. Offer opportunities for **creative expression**;
4. **Foster creativity** among visitors and within the community.

We continue to believe that creativity is a vehicle for enhancing our visitors’ appreciation of great works of art, but now we understand that **we can do more**. We can also enhance their appreciation of creativity and its value in their lives.

This report shares what we are learning about how an art museum can foster creativity among our visitors and the larger community. Our work is infused with deep respect for and knowledge about art. When we add a deep respect for and knowledge about human creativity, we find even richer connections among artists, works of art, visitors, and our community. We now see that by intentionally focusing on the human capacity for creativity we can deepen our visitors’ appreciation of the multitudinous manifestations of creativity—not only among those labeled “artists,” but in the creative expressions in every human life.

The Denver Art Museum continues to design museum experiences that . . .

foster art appreciation through visitor engagement that reveals the human qualities of the artist for the purpose of greater appreciation of the art work.

Now, we also design museum experiences that . . .

foster creativity through visitor engagement that reveals the shared human qualities of the artist and the visitor for the purpose of greater appreciation of the human—and personal—capacity for creativity.



Nick Cave: Sojour exhibition



CHAPTER 1

Our Ongoing Journey Towards Creativity



Inviting Active Involvement through Personalized Experiences

Exhibits in the Hamilton Building also expanded hands-on ways to engage adult visitors through experiences that offered insights into an artist's technical mastery or reveal conceptual aspects of an artist's practice. Gallery activities provided visitors with opportunities to express their opinions and develop their own interpretations of works.

The breakthrough during this phase was introducing and supporting the idea that there are many ways to connect with art, including ways that don't involve information. Up to this point, we had been dabbling with ways to foster creativity in visitors but they were, frankly, baby steps. In the Hamilton Building, we began to be bold and intentional in carving out literal space—giving real estate to activities that inspired visitors to express, create, and respond. We also learned how to design for adults—using high quality materials, providing adult seating that was sophisticated (not childlike), and offering activities that allow them to create something tangible and purposeful.



Creature pin-making inspired by Brian Knep's *Exempla*

Involving Visitors in the Creative Process

While many museums, including the DAM, offered formal studio classes, we aimed to heighten our visitors' creative experiences through in-gallery and drop-in programs. Experiments with opportunities for personal expression included a monthly young adult program that combined gallery demonstrations with the chance for visitors to try their hand at artistic techniques and a Studio that invited visitors to have hands-on experiences with a variety of materials and techniques that corresponded to temporary exhibitions. Both of these experiments have been adopted as regular features of the DAM visitor experience.

Drop-in visitors also had opportunities to explore their own creativity through experiences such as making (and mailing) Western-themed postcards, constructing 3-D assemblages inspired by African artist El Anatsui, and drawing flowers inspired by European paintings.



Visitor drawings inspired by European paintings



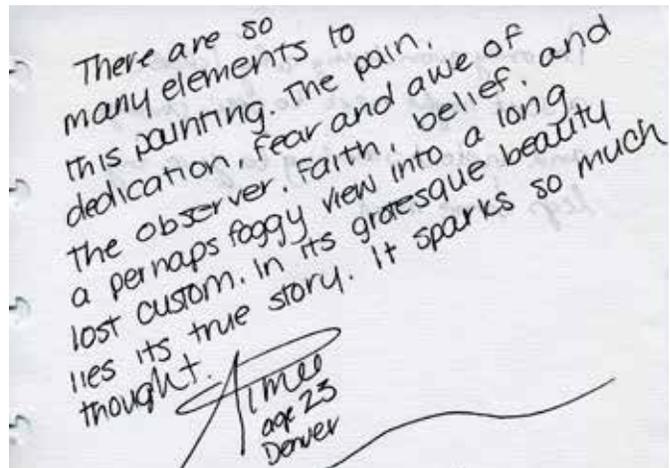
African Studio with artmaking inspired by El Anatsui's artwork

Adding Visitors' Creativity to the Mix & Moving into the Community

New Angles on Interpretation, our 2007 report to the IMLS that featured adult interactive experiences, described the DAM as a “different kind of museum.” Our visitor research documented the value these activities added to the museum experience and suggested different types of relationships between the museum and its visitors. These findings prompted museum staff to think about other activities that connect artists and personal creativity. With visitors adding to the mix, two-way communication became an option. The relationship changed from being one-way (we tell, you read and listen) to two-way conversation (visitors respond to one another through response journals).

Informed by the work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, we were comfortable with the idea of different types of creativity—high quality art (big “C” Creativity) and everyday expressions (little “c” creativity). We know that people benefit from engaging with both. And that the world benefits from both big “C” Creatives like Picasso and little “c” creatives who use Pinterest. Creativity is not only manifested in outstanding works of art, but in universal ways of approaching the world. We understood that being open to new experiences, making time for reflection, and increasing the complexity of what people enjoy can enhance individual lives. And we saw that art museums like the DAM are well-positioned to provide these life-enhancing experiences—not only in the museum but in the community.

In 2012, we invited Denver residents to share creative solutions to common challenges in our *Open for Design* exhibition. The invitation was intentionally open to anyone, “no hardcore qualifications, no degrees, no resumes.” It also encouraged collaboration, inspiring residents to “work with my neighbors to make my neighborhood a better, more beautiful place, while creating a work that could improve our community and be seen at the Denver Art Museum.” The impact of this project extended far beyond the museum, changing people’s ways of seeing the environments where they live. As one participant said, “It made me actually look around my neighborhood and see what needed improvement and what is already in place that I have not noticed yet.”



Visitor opinion in a response journal



Featured artwork submission at *Open for Design*

Co-creation Continues to Evolve

The DAM's deep dive into creativity as a means of audience engagement was further informed by a number of successful experiments around co-creation, where members of the community were invited to join DAM staff in the design of programs and work side-by-side with artists.

A project for young adult audiences, funded in part by a 2008 IMLS grant, provided the initial testing grounds. A centerpiece of the project was *Untitled*, a monthly Friday evening event. Now in its seventh season, *Untitled* is produced with community partners across disciplines, including activists, crafters, artists, scientists, writers, and musicians. Incorporating the creativity of others has helped us connect to new audiences and made us a player in Denver's larger creative community. At a session entitled "Meet Here: An Evening of Untitled Idea Brewing and Creative Criss-Cross," local creatives were invited to brainstorm ideas for the upcoming *Untitled* season using the DAM collections as inspiration.



Speed Brainstorming at Meet Here



Actors from Buntport Theater perform in galleries

Clayground



Clay animation Create-n-Take



Embrace! artist Katharina Grosse at work in the DAM

Teaching Ourselves & Visitors New Ways of “Doing Museum”

The 2009 exhibition *Embrace!* brought the human connection to life through opportunities for visitors to watch artists at work. Seventeen international and local artists created on-site artworks that “embraced” the newly built Hamilton Building. Artists set up studios throughout the galleries and publicly created and installed site-specific artworks. In some cases, artists worked during the museum’s open hours; in others, their process was captured on video and available to visitors in the DAM’s Time-Lapse Video Lounge.

With *Embrace!*, live interactions with artists became an institutional priority. Insider Moments were born, in which an educator and an artist engage visitors in dialogue about the artist’s process, project, and next steps. We were ready to break down boundaries created by traditionally installed artworks and galleries and to not just display creativity, but to be a place for creativity.

What would happen, we asked ourselves, if we used all we had learned about ways to engage visitors and spread it across the entire museum? And then in 2011, 25 years into our explorations of human connections, came *Marvelous Mud*.

Marvelous Mud: Clay Around the World was a suite of eight exhibitions exploring clay across the museum’s collections with a range of activities to spark visitor participation. Interactive experiences included Mud Studio, a workshop where visitors could build with clay, try out a pottery wheel, and watch artist demonstrations; collaborations with artists like adobe experts Bill and Athena Steen to create an outdoor Clayground; and an in-gallery Create-n-Take where visitors could contribute to a clay animation film that brought Sandy Skoglund’s *Fox Games* to life. We also used DAM_SCOUT, a smartphone application providing access to multimedia content that we’d been experimenting with, to reveal the creative process behind selected clay works.

An artist residency concept began with Roxanne Swentzell's eight-month, on-site creation of *Mud Woman Rolls On*, a nine-foot adobe sculpture created from start to finish in the American Indian galleries. Numerous visitors made multiple trips to see Swentzell's progress and followed news of her visits through social media. As one surveyed visitor explained, "[it] is inspirational to see somebody working at their art so easily . . . It causes me to think about how creativity is or isn't as much a part of my life as I'd like it to be." Now, when these people come back to see this work at the DAM, they share in memories of its creation and its meaning to the artist, to themselves, and to others who also contributed to its creation.

In interviews, visitors helped us understand how *Marvelous Mud* was a new way of experiencing the museum holistically rather than one exhibition at a time. They gained a new and deeper appreciation for art and they felt a connection to being part of something bigger. One woman expressed her feeling that, "We're human. It [creativity] is part of our need for expression and creation. Each one of us has that need."

We were at a new threshold in our understanding of the power of art museums in people's lives. And we had new questions. What would it mean to be a museum that was about culture and creativity as well as art history and art appreciation? What might that look like? How do visitors respond to the new experiences we're creating? Do they enjoy them? Does a focus on creativity attract new visitors? Are we adding value for individuals and for Denver with a creativity focus?

The success of *Marvelous Mud* set the stage for a second museum-wide themed extravaganza. In 2013, *Spun* provided opportunities for us to be more intentional in designing exhibitions and experiences that tapped into creativity in new ways. The eleven exhibits and related programs that focused on textiles also provided the perfect case study for a deeper exploration of how creative experiences at the museum impact our visitors.



Artist Roxanne Swentzell at work in the DAM

CHAPTER 2

The *Spun* Case Study



The *Spun* Case Study



Visitor panelists exploring the Quilt Studio



Visitor panelists share feedback from museum visit

Creativity continued to seep into our everyday conversations and planning meetings, and it infused the museum’s vision statement. Staff shared a general sense that a focus on creativity would be an essential element in the DAM’s future, helping us break down the barriers some people feel about Art with a capital “A.” By making art more accessible and relevant, creativity could help the museum deliver even greater value to those who live in and visit Denver, a growing creative hub in the country.

With this case study, we set out to conduct visitor research and evaluation so that we could better understand how—and even if—*Spun* exhibitions and programs contributed to the museum’s strategic focus

on creativity. This was not a traditional evaluation of a particular exhibition or program; it was an investigation of an overarching idea—the potential for an art museum to spark, nurture, and “live” creativity as a defining feature of its public value.

External Study Participants

There were four groups of visitors whose voices can be heard throughout this report. Profiles of several members of each group appear throughout to remind us of the diverse life experiences and perspectives of our visitors. The Study Design (p. 29) describes the composition of the groups, evaluation methodology, and analysis.

SPUN Exhibitions

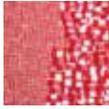


Cover Story

Level 6, North Building

The inaugural show for the new textile art galleries invites you to explore the myriad ways that textiles envelop, embellish, and enrich human lives.

Spend time exploring the new Thread Studio and enjoy an insiders' perspective in our innovative Textile Art PreVIEW space.



Bruce Price: Works on Paper, 2007-2012

Level 3, Hamilton Building

View 30 drawings utilizing fabric and acrylic paint by Colorado artist Bruce Price in our works-on-paper gallery.



Common Threads: Portraits by August Sander & Seydou Keita

Level 7, North Building

Meet two very different twentieth-century artists, both of whom used clothing and environment as signifiers of cultural change in portraits.



Fashion Fusion: Native Textiles in Spanish Colonial Art

Level 4, North Building

Investigate the influence textile motifs played in colonial society through our Spanish colonial art collection. *Disponible en español.*



Material World

Level 4, Hamilton Building

Discover the wide range of materials—from Mylar to charred tree limbs—contemporary artists use to challenge our concept of what art can be.



Irresistible: Multicolored Textiles from Asia

Level 6, North Building

Eye-dazzling resist-dye hangings, coverings, and garments from various cultural traditions from Uzbekistan to Japan.



Pattern Play: The Contemporary Designs of Jacqueline Groag

Level 2, North Building

View original works on paper alongside lively, bold designs for furnishing textiles, dress fabrics, and other decorative surfaces.



Red, White & Bold: Masterworks of Navajo Design, 1840-1870

Level 2, Hamilton Building

Often considered the highpoint of Navajo weaving artistry, the middle of the 19th century saw an explosion of color and design.



Cuppelletti & Mendoza: Transposition

Level 4, Hamilton Building (Fuse Box)

An artistic collaboration, *Transposition* explores the intersection of craft and technology.



Western Duds: How Clothing Helped Create an Archetype

Level 7, North Building

Delve into the importance of textiles in the colorful history of the American West—from blue jeans to serapes.

There's much more Spun to explore. Look for this symbol throughout the museum:



See & Do

Activities are included in general admission, which is free for members. For more information, please visit www.denverartmuseum.org/calendar.

Quilt Studio

Level 1, Hamilton Building

Explore the innovative world of contemporary quilting. Watch weekend demonstrations by local artists and by your hand at assorted techniques. *Observe demostraciones con artistas locales los fines de semana e intente diferentes técnicas textiles. Información en español y personal bilingüe.*

Open Window

Level 6, North Building

May 18 & 19, 1-3 pm

Thursdays, 12:30-2:30 pm (May 23-September 26)

Enjoy an open window to the Textile Art PreVIEW space for a behind-the-scenes glimpse at how the museum staff prepares works of art for display. For two hours each week, visitors can learn about tools, processes, and equipment straight from the experts.

Second Skin

Level 2, Hamilton Building

An immersive, interactive environment developed by contemporary artist Nick Cave. Decorate felt silhouettes and 3-D mannequins inspired by Cave's *Soundbites*. *Nick Cave: Sojourn* is also on view June 9-September 22.

Artist-in-Residence: Marie Watt

Level 3, North Building

July 16-28, 11 am-3 pm

No experience necessary to join the sewing circles led by artist-in-residence Marie Watt. A great opportunity to learn a new stitch and have fun working together—open to all visitors and all levels of sewers. Space is limited.

DAM_SCOUT

Download our free, interactive smartphone app, DAM_SCOUT, to see video interviews with artists, behind-the-scenes footage about art objects, and more. Look for DAM_SCOUT QR codes in galleries and more throughout the museum. *Información en español en el nivel cuatro, Edificio Norte.*



Fun for Families

From backpacks to playdates, there is so much for families to enjoy at the DAM this summer. Museum admission for children ages 5 and younger is always free.

Create-n-Takes

Saturdays & Sundays, May 19-June 9 & August 24-September 22, 10:30 am-4:30 pm

Tuesday-Friday, June 11-August 23, 11 am-3:30 pm

Facilitated in-gallery creative activities. Look for the Create-n-Take sign or ask for locations at the welcome center. *Información y materiales disponibles en español.*

Totspot Sunday

June 9, July 14, August 11 & September 8, 10 am-noon

Bring your little ones and join us every second Sunday of the month for in-gallery performances with Burport Theater at 10:30 and 11:30 am. Check in at the Family Activity Cart.

Create Playdate

June 12, July 10, August 14 & September 11, 10 am-1 pm

The second Wednesday of every month, drop by with your little ones (ages 3-5) for artmaking, story time, and gallery games.

CelebrARTE

On the third Sunday of the month, there are even more adventures for *la familia*. Find the *fiesta* throughout the museum. *Bilingüe.*

CelebrARTE: Traje

June 16, 1-4 pm

CelebrARTE: Recuerdos

July 21, 1-4 pm

Tours

Spun Highlights

Daily at 1 pm, May 19-September 22

Vistas guiadas en español disponibles el primer sábado del mes a las 2 pm Junio 1, Julio 6, Agosto 3, y Septiembre 7 en español

Cover Story

Daily at 2 pm, May 19-June 28

Nooner Tour

Explore a different textile exhibition every week in a thirty-minute tour. Wednesday & Friday, noon

Tactile Tables

Experience *Cover Story* with multisensory access stations.

2-4 pm, July 13, August 10 & September 14

All tours begin on level one, Hamilton Building by the elevators. To book private group, Spanish, or school tours, call 720-913-0130.

Las vistas guiadas comienzan en el nivel uno del Edificio Hamilton, cerca de los elevadores. Para reservar una visita guiada para grupo, con guía en español o para grupos escolares, llamar 720-913-0130.



Conversations with Curators

Fridays: May 24, June 7 & 21, July 12 & 26
August 2, 16 & 30, September 6 & 20

Enjoy lively discussions with different museum curators highlighting the various textile exhibitions on view.

All Conversations begin at 4 pm. No reservations needed. Check the website for specific topics.

Untitled Final Fridays

Join us on the final Friday of every month when the museum stays open late. Get your offbeat art fix, pick up a creative skill, and meet local movers and makers. Curate your own experience from a full menu of activities, from crafty projects to tours with a twist. For more information, visit www.denverartmuseum.org/untitled.

Untitled #57 (Dam)

May 31, 6-10 pm

Untitled #58 (Getup)

June 28, 6-10 pm

Untitled #59 (Undercover)

July 26, 6-10 pm

Untitled #60 (Signature)

August 30, 6-10 pm

Untitled #61 (Harvest)

September 27, 6-10 pm

Don't Miss

Denver Satellite Reef (A Collaborative Crochet Project)

Level 3, Hamilton Building

Saturdays & Sundays, May 19-September 22

You won't believe your eyes when you see The Institute For Figuring's Crochet Coral Reef Project, an installation that combines mathematics, marine biology, hyperbolic crochet techniques, and community art practice. Visitors are invited to crochet their own reef creations to add to the Denver Satellite Reef.

Ladies Fancywork Society: The Secret Garden

North Building

August 30-September 27

See a crochet garden grow over the entrance of the museum's North Building during this special month-long installation. Visit the museum website for related final Friday Untitled programming.

24th Annual Friendship Powwow

Acoma Plaza, North Building

September 7

This one-day event features American Indian dancers, artist demonstrations, hands-on activities, and more. Artist-in-residence Marie Watt will lead a sewing circle.

Day at The Dye Garden: Flowers to Fabrics

Martin Plaza, Hamilton Building

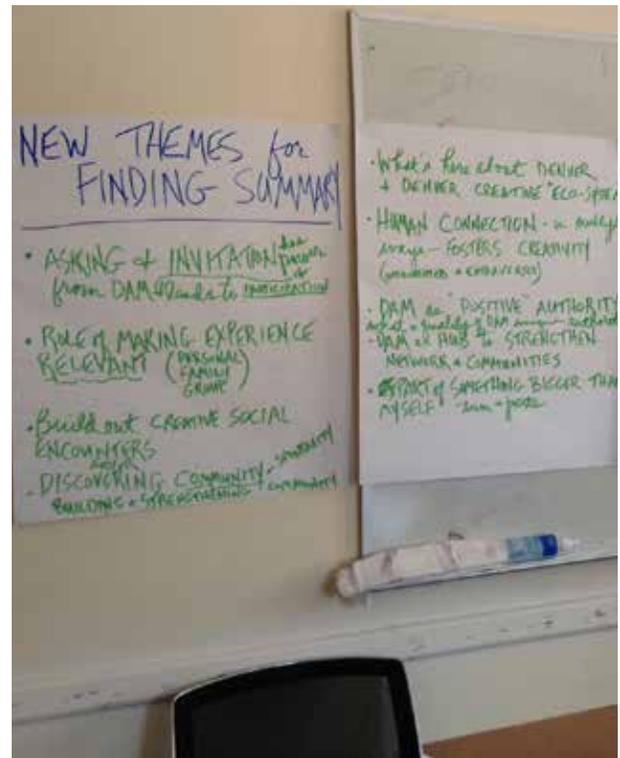
September 14

Come see the changes that have taken place in our plaza dye garden over the summer and watch experts demonstrate the basics of natural dyeing. Families can learn how to transform plants in your garden into natural dyes for your own textile projects.



Staff Participation

Since *Spun* was a museum-wide endeavor, it made sense that the conversation about what creativity means in the context of the Denver Art Museum now and in the future be institution-wide. As in previous projects, the evaluation was structured as a partnership between the outside evaluators and decision-makers from across the institution. Staff capacity building has long been a goal for projects that involve outside consultants, and taking a practitioner/researcher approach had added benefits in this project as well. The critical mass of staff members with first-hand experience in conducting and analyzing audience evaluation grows year by year, in the education department and across the museum. Both the researchers and the project lead observed that cross-departmental participation, collaboration, and buy-in reached an all-time high.



Themes emerged in debriefing meetings



Education Core Group meeting



Creativity Task Force meeting

A **Creativity Task Force** was composed of staff members from six departments—curatorial, education, marketing, development, guest services, and exhibitions—and charged with advancing the museum’s understanding of creativity by:

- **Defining What:** Exploring research and ideas about creativity in an interdisciplinary, cross departmental manner and come to an understanding about what “creativity” means in the context of this art museum and the communities it serves.
- **Answering Why:** Articulating the value that engagement through creativity has for visitors, for those who do not visit, and for the larger community.
- **Articulating How:** Defining the ways the museum could approach its work with creativity to maximize impact. Developing an initial Road Map of guiding principles or features that will aid decision-makers, program/project designers, and evaluators in imbedding creativity into our practice.

The task force, which met regularly over the 18 months of the project, was asked to adopt an attitude of inquisitiveness. Members observed focus groups, contributed to the design of study questions, and added their perspectives to the analysis of data. This infused our research with a broad understanding of the museum’s mission and real work.

CREATIVITY TASK FORCE

INTERNAL TEAM MEMBERS

- **Darrin Alfred**, Associate Curator of Architecture, Design, and Graphics
- **Alison Bowman**, Manager, Foundation and Government Support
- **Nancy Blomberg**, Chief Curator and Curator of Native Arts
- **Jill Desmond**, Associate Director of Exhibitions
- **Ben Griswold**, Contract Exhibition Designer, Spatial Poetics
- **Andrea Kalivas Fulton**, Deputy Director, Chief Marketing Officer
- **Melora McDermott-Lewis**, Director of Education
- **Greg McKay**, Associate Director of Retail Operations, Membership, and Guest Services
- **Heather Nielsen**, Associate Director of Education and Master Teacher, Native Arts and New World (Project Lead)
- **Eric Paddock**, Curator of Photography
- **Katie Ross**, Associate Director, Marketing

CONSULTANTS

- **Daryl Fischer**, Principal, Musynergy
- **Mary Ellen Munley**, Principal, MEM & Associates

2012

August

Project kicks off—the first of 65 calls with the Evaluation Steering Team (EST)

October

Project grows to reflect institution-wide buy-in

December

CTF and ECG meetings kick off and the groups define creativity as we know it

November

Two internal teams form—Creativity Task Force (CTF) and Educator Core Group (ECG)

2013

February

CTF and ECG meet to define success for *Spun* projects

March

CTF & ECG meet again to discuss the literature review

Study design is approved

June

3 Focus Groups spend 3 hours at the DAM

July

On-site interview protocol is developed

May

Focus Group participants are recruited, while the Focus Group discussion guide is written and revised

July–September

DAM Staff members interview visitors

Evaluators conduct first round of on-site interviews with visitors

Evaluators train DAM staff in conducting interviews

March–April

EST continues to analyze data

November & December

On-line survey goes live

October

CTF and ECG meet to discuss transcripts from Focus Groups

On-line survey is developed

2014

May–June

EST writes Report to the Field

February

CTF and ECG meet to discuss findings from Interviews and Online Survey

TIMELINE



Education Core Group meeting

An **Education Core Group** brought together several generations of museum educators to reflect on their goals in creating *Spun* programs. Their tenure at the DAM ranged from 6 months to 33 years. The synergy of fresh enthusiasm and mature wisdom helped everyone to plumb the literature and the responses of evaluation participants to better understand the essential design features and specific impacts of creativity experiences.

The two groups worked concurrently throughout the project, convening for debriefing meetings after each phase of the evaluation. Their ongoing discussions and discoveries were synthesized and distilled by an **Evaluation Steering Team** that included the two evaluators, the project coordinator, and the Associate Director of Education. This team coordinated all aspects of the project—preparing communications, setting agendas for meetings, and incorporating feedback into the study design and data analysis. This group of four became intimately familiar with input from internal and external stakeholders. In reviewing the transcripts from focus groups and interviews they developed coding systems, which they continued to refine. The team met on average of every two weeks throughout the 18 months and more frequently during data coding and report preparation.

EDUCATION CORE GROUP

INTERNAL TEAM MEMBERS

- **Lindsey Housel**, Manager of Digital Engagement Programs and Master Teacher, Architecture, Design, and Graphics
- **Jaime Kopke**, Manager of Adult and College Programs
- **Jenna Madison**, Manager of Studio and Artists' Programs
- **Kristina Mahoney**, Special Projects Coordinator
- **Melora McDermott-Lewis**, Director of Education
- **Molly Medakovich**, Master Teacher, Western American Art and European & American Art
- **Heather Nielsen**, Associate Director of Education and Master Teacher, Native Arts and New World
- **Jill Orr**, Manager of School, Teacher, and Tour Programs
- **Natalie Ruhe**, Special Projects Coordinator
- **Danielle Stephens**, Master Teacher, Modern and Contemporary Art
- **Stefania Van Dyke**, Master Teacher, Textile Arts and Special Projects
- **Patterson Williams**, Master Teacher, Asian Art

CONSULTANTS

- **Daryl Fischer**, Principal, Musynergy
- **Mary Ellen Munley**, Principal, MEM & Associates

EVALUATION BY THE NUMBERS

STAFFING MANAGEMENT

11

CREATIVITY TASK
FORCE MEMBERS

10

EDUCATION CORE
GROUP MEMBERS

5

TRAINED
INTERVIEWERS

4

MEMBERS OF EVALUATION
STEERING TEAM

2

EVALUATION
CONSULTANTS

1

PROJECT
COORDINATOR

DATA COLLECTION

3 Visitor Focus Groups



28

PARTICIPANTS

Interviews



38

INTERVIEWEES

Online Survey



634

PARTICIPANTS

7.5

HOURS OF
FOCUS GROUPS

488 + 23

MINUTES SECONDS
(RECORDED INTERVIEWS)

DATA ANALYSIS

248

PAGES OF FOCUS GROUP
AND INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

51

GRAPHS & CHARTS

6

WORD CLOUDS

4

EVALUATION FINDINGS
DOCUMENTS

1

REPORT TO
THE FIELD

412,858

PIECES OF DATA FROM
ONLINE SURVEY

STUDY DESIGN

FOCUS GROUPS

Number:	3
Facilitator:	Daryl Fischer
Size:	28 participants
Participants:	Three groups: Visitors to <i>Spun</i> locations in North Building; visitors to <i>Spun</i> locations in Hamilton Building; and non-visitors to <i>Spun</i> recruited from Denver Public Library, local creative businesses, and other locations in the community
Length:	2 hours and 15 minutes for time in galleries and focus group discussion
Data:	Audio recording and written transcripts of focus group discussion; brief questionnaire completed by participants in the galleries
Analysis:	Line-by-line and axial coding of transcripts; tabulation of written responses
Schedule:	June 21–22, 2013

INTERVIEWS

Number:	38
Interviewers:	20 conducted by evaluators, 18 by DAM staff
Interviewees:	8 visitors to North Building <i>Spun</i> elements 24 visitors to Hamilton Building <i>Spun</i> elements 6 co-creator participants
Length:	Varied. For intercepted visitors, 5–10 minute interview; for itinerary interviews, 30 minutes in galleries followed by 10–15 minute interview; for co-creators, 45 minutes in galleries followed by 30 minute interview.
Format:	In-person interview at the DAM after experiencing one or more aspects of <i>Spun</i>
Data:	Audio recordings and written transcript for each interview; very brief questionnaire completed in galleries
Analysis:	Line-by-line and axial coding of transcripts; tabulation of written responses
Schedule:	July–September 2013

ONLINE SURVEY

Number:	634 participants, of whom 244 identified they had not attended <i>Spun</i> , 232 identified they had attended <i>Spun</i> once or twice, and 92 identified they had visited three or more times.
Platform:	Survey Monkey
Length:	10–15 minutes to complete survey
Format:	2 online surveys (one for <i>Spun</i> visitors and one for non-visitors) including multiple choice, ranking, rating, and open-ended questions
Analysis:	Tabulation of survey responses and graphs generated by Survey Monkey; statistical t-test analyses
Schedule:	Launched November 13, 2013 through e-newsletters from the DAM, the Denver Children’s Museum, and Create Denver. Closed December 31, 2013.

Developmental Evaluation

Audience evaluation and practitioner research have been consistent features of our practice, especially in the education department. But *Spun* and creativity are larger than education. They epitomize the interconnectivity and innovations of the entire DAM staff.

Wanting to incorporate the perspectives of staff members from across the museum and knowing that we would all benefit from deeper involvement in data collection and analysis, we realized that traditional models for formative and summative evaluation were not quite right. We selected developmental evaluation as an approach that combined the rigor of evaluation with flexibility and imagination, allowing us to develop new approaches based on what we were learning. Rather than starting by articulating a theory to prove or disprove, we started by listening deeply to our growing body of audience feedback, incorporating the reflective practice of staff members who were gaining a deeper knowledge base, and then building a theory from the ground up.

In the narrative of our grant application to IMLS, we said that one of our aims for the evaluation would be a first draft of a grounded theory about the role of an art museum in relation to creativity. Thus, the design of the evaluation activities was guided by well-established, though nontraditional, evaluation and social science practices. Several tenets of developmental evaluation¹ and grounded theory methods anchored our work:

- **Sensitivity to the data is the most important guiding principle.** We began with as few predetermined ideas as possible. This allowed us to be sensitive to the voices of visitors as we asked them to express their experiences in their own words and to be open to listening to what they were saying, not what the researchers chose to investigate.
- **An open mind is not an empty mind.** We began the process with a literature review (see Supporting Documents). The resulting report, *An art museum as a platform for creativity*, informed the deliberations of the Creativity Task Force and Education Core Group as they grappled with defining creativity and understanding what they were learning about it from the study participants.



Scattergram of early ideas about creativity

- **The closer the researchers and evaluators are to the project and data, the more sensitive they are to nuances in study participants' stories and experiences.** Evaluators and staff become more sensitive to what the data have to reveal by exploring their own understanding and beliefs about the topic and by immersing themselves in the data. An early exercise asked both groups to share examples of creativity and to name all of the "dimensions of creativity" reflected in those examples. This generated a scattergram of ideas that depicted the richness of the idea of creativity, the collective enthusiasm for doing more of "it," and the need for a more sophisticated and useful way to understand how creativity can come to life in a museum setting.
- **Data collection and data analysis are done concurrently.** Using an iterative process, the Evaluation Steering Team involved the Creativity Task Force and the Education Core Group in designing the study and analyzing data at several points throughout the 18 months. Questions for the interviews were informed by the focus group results, and questions for the survey followed analysis and discussion of the interview reports. There were several rounds of data coding as greater familiarity with the data suggested refinement of the coding system.

Data Analysis

Focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a two-step coding process. First, the Evaluation Steering Team did line-by-line open coding. This yielded a first draft of coding categories that were grounded in the data from visitors. A summary report of findings-to-date was presented to the Creativity Task Force and the Education Core Group for discussion after each round of data collection. Informed by debriefing discussions and by the literature review, modifications were made to the codes.

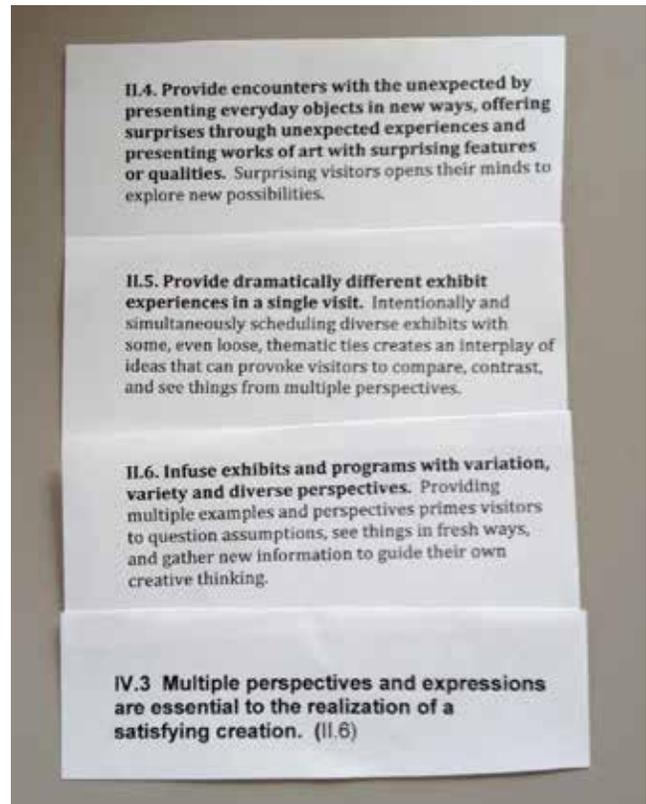
The second round of coding—axial coding—involved another reading of the entire set of transcripts, this time coding statements into the established codes. Findings are based on this axial coding process conducted independently by three members of the same team. A high level of inter-rater reliability was achieved by arriving at agreement on the code for each visitor statement by at least two of the three coders.

Based on this analysis we grouped our findings into four categories:

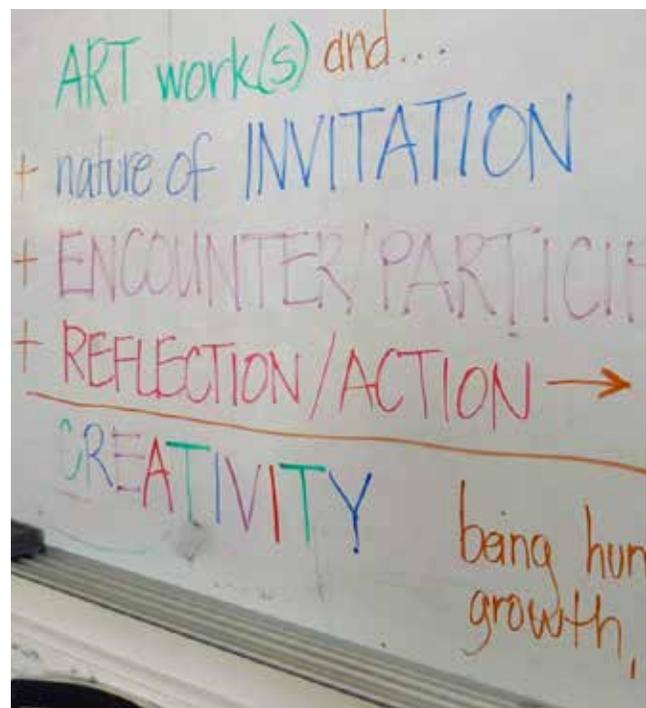
1. Outcomes and impacts for **general visitors**;
2. Design features that foster creativity for **general visitors**;
3. Outcomes and impacts for **co-creators**, those visitors who worked with museum staff members to create experiences for other visitors;
4. Design features that foster creativity for **co-creators**.

We prepared four findings reports—one on focus groups, one on interviews with on-site visitors, one on interviews with co-creators, and one on the online survey—to highlight the results of our analysis. These reports served as the intermediate step between the coding of our two qualitative studies and the analysis of our quantitative study, an online survey. The reports and a document highlighting findings from the tabulation of survey responses (available online, see Supporting Documents) were shared with the Creativity Task Force and the Education Core Group in their final meetings. The Evaluation Steering Team identified high level study findings, which in turn, led to the development of a grounded theory. A summary of findings appears in

chapter 3. The Art Museum as a Creativity Platform road map, which emerged from reflection on the entire set of data, is presented in chapter 4.



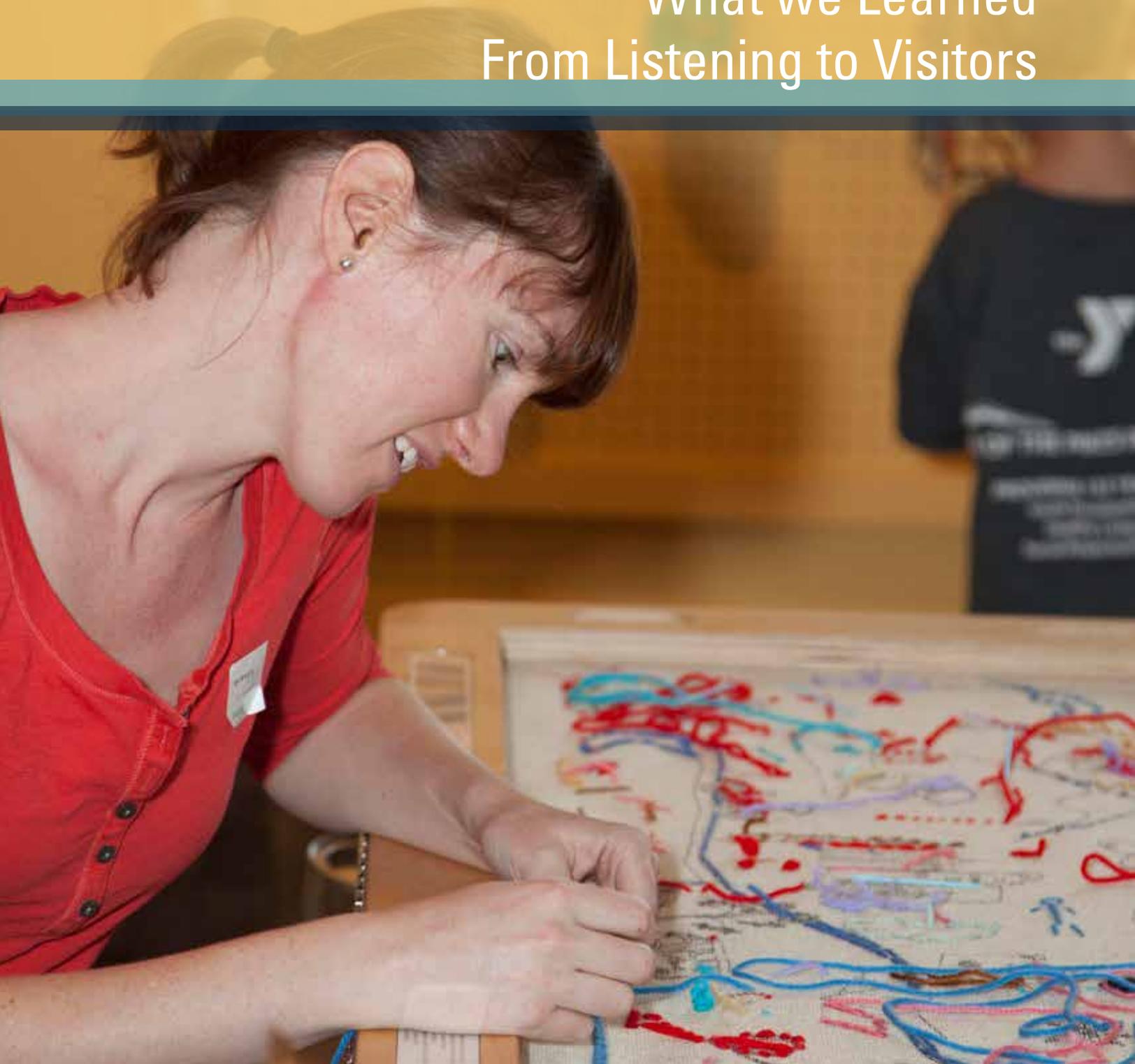
Sorting codes to identify patterns



Evolving draft of developing framework

CHAPTER 3

What we Learned From Listening to Visitors



What We Learned From Listening to Visitors

WHY CREATIVITY MATTERS

Creative experiences led to a wide variety of **positive impacts and outcomes for our visitors, some anticipated and some that took us by surprise.** We expected that visitors to *Spun* exhibits and programs would gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the creative process of artists who work in the broad realm of textile arts. We thought these insights about creativity might transfer to other art forms as well.

What we could not have anticipated was the frequency with which, and the degree to which, visitors were inclined to take what they learned about the creativity of artists and **apply it to their own lives**, translating what they saw and experienced at the museum into their own terms.

Visitors speak in personal terms that continue to resonate in the minds of museum staff members. Their words **provide evidence of benefits the museum couldn't claim if it were speaking to visitors in an institutional voice.**

Some visitors were impacted in quiet, reflective ways such as writing down things they saw that inspired them or thinking about the amount of creativity in their own lives. Others were moved to take action, whether in rekindling previous creative endeavors by picking up a project that had lain dormant for months or in trying something brand new by experimenting with a creative outlet they'd never before dreamt of.

Rather than describing what visitors said we want you to hear it in their own words. On the following pages we will share quotes from [visitors who participated in focus groups](#), [visitors who participated in on-site interviews](#), [co-creators who participated in on-site interviews](#), and [visitors and non-visitors who participated in an online survey](#).



Artmaking at Untitled

Creativity is a Catalyst for Change

In addition to immediate enjoyment, *Spun* exhibits and programs served as catalysts for meaningful change in individual lives, changes that can only be described as transformative. Visitors were affected in profound ways that go beyond artistic expression to enhance all aspects of life, from how they dress and decorate their homes to how they relate to their families and interact with coworkers. Regardless of their previous artistic experience, **people saw opportunities to flex their creative muscles and recognized the benefits of adding creativity to their daily routines.** Seeds were planted that helped individuals in all walks of life to see that creativity is not limited to artists and that it doesn't require any special training, materials, or environment.

Something happened to people who came to the Denver Art Museum during the summer of 2013—something we're calling "**the *Spun* phenomenon.**" The people we talked with tended to define creativity more broadly and to see how it plays out in their environments and their relationships. But beyond that, they realized that creativity enriches their lives in deeply meaningful ways. A focus group participant described it as a need that was satisfied at the museum.

If there was one thing that I took away from today, it's that you can create something without having to spend two months locked in the studio. Through this exhibit, I've decided to dress a little louder and take some risks there and also to apply some patterns and textures to my own home. —ALLISON

Whether you can create it or not doesn't so much matter. I think it is just allowing it in your life. Allowing it to fill you up; if it fills you up with something maybe that is what creativity is. It is just letting yourself be affected by it. —CASEY

In terms of other ways of being creative, I'm able to do that in my gardening . . . making my house clean and doing interior design . . . But, in my own line of work it's like I need something to help me jump-start my day. Just to jump-start my work process. I need to recreate myself, and I found it here. —TONI



Marie Watt's sewing circle

The Relevance of Creative Experiences Goes Beyond Works of Art

One of our goals for the project was to learn whether creativity has broad relevance to individuals, families, and social groups in our community. Comments from visitors suggested that *Spun* experiences expanded their thinking about everyday expressions of creativity. They were quick to see the **value it can add to aspects of their lives that, on the surface, seem to have no relationship to an art museum.** In thinking about how creativity applies to their daily lives, people in all walks of life pushed their own boundaries a bit.

But my value added is that, in organizational leadership, being creative in solving problems... It's a different aspect. It's not artistic per se. But it's finding new ways, even within our government, to solve old problems... The museum doesn't look anything like my house or my government issued office. Just getting out and seeing different things... interacting with all of you... —KATHY

I do law, which requires me to be creative in a certain area of words and concepts, but I don't really do tactile things so for me that was kind of a shift. To be honest, I didn't really want to sew when I came in here but I just sat down and did it, and it was fun. —BRIAN



Purses and Pouches Create-n-Take



Satellite Crochet Coral Reef

Viewing the creative products of accomplished artists certainly has its own merits, but creativity gurus like David Kelley and Ken Robinson believe that widespread **participation in the creative process is what is most important to the well-being of individuals and the sustainability and health of our society.**ⁱⁱ This finding in our literature review led some staff team members to wonder: How can we ignite creativity outside traditional “making” ways? Others grappled with notions of a creative lifestyle or what we referred to as “generalist creativity.” One asked, “What if there’s no direct connection to art . . . are we getting off base? Or do we maybe want to get off base?”

We came to understand the distinction between **creative specialists** and **creative generalists**. Creative specialists typically focus their energy and attention on a single domain and make creative breakthroughs that are appreciated by others working in their discipline and those outside their realm of creativity. According to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “What counts is whether the novelty produced is accepted for inclusion in the domain.”ⁱⁱⁱ Creative generalists are people who can figure out a new way to organize a successful benefit bake sale, devise new and better methods to recruit students to their alma mater, participate in Maker Fairs or knitting circles, or make their own jellies.

SHUBHRA is an architect who sees herself as very creative. A DAM member, she looks to the museum for **diverse experiences**. “I like the juxtaposition [of *Nick Cave* and *Red, White & Bold*]. It’s just really engaging. Diversity was what I was thinking. We have so many different ways of interpreting, so many different materials [in *Material World*].” Her comments also highlight her awareness of how exhibits can spark interesting dialogue. “I like the show because it creates this conversation on what is craft and what is art; what is folk art and what is high art?”

BRIAN is an attorney who doesn’t think of himself as particularly hands-on. “I do law, which requires me to be creative in a certain area of words and concepts, but I don’t really do tactile things so for me that was kind of a shift.” Nevertheless, he walked into Marie Watt’s Artist-in-Residence studio, sat down, and found that he enjoyed the experience of sewing. “It’s a very inviting environment and there wasn’t a sense of having to prove my prowess as a sewer.”

JANE is a lace artist in Denver, who contributed samples to the Thread Studio. She relished her involvement because “How many people do you know that have things on display in an art museum? Most of us don’t know anybody. So the idea of having our own thing [on display], that’s a . . . once in a lifetime experience.” Her participation in this project and the development of the Human Bobbin Experiment for the DAM’s Final Friday Untitled program **expanded her view of the museum**. “I’m thrilled with the approachability and the outreach . . . that they have done. That to me, I think, is thrilling.”

Our online survey asked the question, "How do you express creativity in your own life?" Anonymous respondents gave a sense of the breadth of expressions of creative generalists.

Being creative in everything I do, living with my whole heart; specifically, painting, sewing, beading, working, psychological, physical, mental, and emotional growth

Photography, painting, drawing, writing, fly rod crafting, videography, sculpture, assemblages, comedy, and acting

Making things, sketching, writing scenarios to help me through my day, practicing architecture in a tough environment

Journaling, women's spirituality retreats, mixed media artwork, jewelry making, talking with artists, jazz, and dance



Satellite Crochet Coral Reef Workshop



Local fiber artists at Untitled

Creativity is an Expression of our Humanity

Many people who are not themselves artists felt a profound sense of appreciation for traditional forms of artmaking, which led them to marvel at **the human urge to create and the capacity for creativity**. Visitors saw diverse works as individual and collective expressions of our humanity that transcend time and place. Staff members found their words to be an eloquent expression of tapping into “the greater human beingness” of all of us.



Tupu Pins Create-n-Take activity

It was unexpected. I come from Australia, and I didn't know anything about the Navajo people, so it was really good from that perspective. It's interesting to contrast it with native Australian people difference and similarities. —ANDREW

It's just interesting to see how we're all the same. We're all creative, we all use color, we're really not that different. We just use things and see things differently. —LU

It's not just about looking at these pretty pictures but it taps into the collective unconscious of humanity, of culture and history, and then walking away thinking “What is possible? What can I do?” —KARISSA

ALEXANDER has honed his eye for design through his work as a web designer and photographer. He looks for inspiration in the environments around him, and in the museum he noted “How everything is very nonlinear, very angular . . . it forces you to explore because there's these rooms tucked away in the back.” In the Thread Studio he appreciated “the cozy living room atmosphere . . . I really liked it. It helped prime me for what I would characterize the whole exhibit as: very Zen.” Additionally, he finds the museum to be a way to engage his creativity through social interaction. “I'm . . . always striving to surround myself with more creative people, which is one of the reasons I love coming to the museum. You meet very creative people. It's a creative Mecca.”

AMY is very active in the textile community as a quilt artist and blogger. She created a quilt for the Thread Studio incorporating the fabric from her grandfather's World War II military parachute. She describes her participation as “the honor of a lifetime,” an experience that shifted her conception of the museum. “Contributing to this exhibit did sort of change my view on what a museum is and what it offers the community and how it involves the community.” In her art she aims to “make things that are timeless. I want to make things that move people and that influence people. That's why I create things, it's an expression and to have that be not just appreciated but be honored by the community in such a timeless way is unbelievable.”

The research shows that a supportive social environment can encourage curiosity, risk-taking, and playfulness, qualities that are essential for creativity.^{iv} To facilitate human connections in *Spun*, we were intentional about creating **opportunities for creative social encounters** at the museum. Programs such as Marie Watt’s artist residency and textile artist demonstrations in the Quilt Studio were designed to bring together artists—professional and aspiring—with one another and with museum visitors who had never before seen themselves as artistic. Artists benefitted from synergies with fellow creatives; visitors enjoyed experiencing and contributing to the creative vibe that reverberated throughout the DAM.

Whatever their artistic background, visitors told us that they value **connecting with others in a creative environment**. In fact, some come to the DAM for just that purpose.

Once a dialogue starts occurring other people step in, and you start finding out how much experience is standing along the table with you.
—ROBIN

It’s just great. [Guild members] tell stories, they help you out, they are creative, it’s just really awesome to be around a group of people like that, so that’s the most important part.
—RACHEL

I just feel like people are happier when they’re creating. —ASHLEY



Local textile artist at Untitled

Our visitors saw **expressions of creativity that involve big acts**, like Nick Cave’s performances, **as well as small acts**, like Marie Watt’s sewing circles. Observing and working with artists, they were able to appreciate both the big energy of Cave’s HEARD · DAM and the thousands of stitches visitors contributed to Marie Watt’s sewing circle. Often small, repetitive steps and practice over time is what leads to creative breakthroughs. It can take years of practice and experimentation to create something new. But there are also times when a single museum experience can propel a surge of creativity.

Creative experiences at the **museum provided the springboard for creative encounters with family and friends outside the museum**—in the community, at work, and at home. A father of three children, one of whom is critically ill, drew inspiration from hands-on experiences at the museum that he planned to share with his family. Perhaps most importantly, he saw that the challenges he faces are opportunities to express his own creativity.

I had been stuck on creating and spinning blue wool for a winter coat . . . and I came here on my birthday in May. I said I’m in a brain fog, I can’t design. I went in [*Cover Story*] the first time and saw that blue Japanese coat, and I said “That’s it.” It was like creativity sparked again. —NADINE

I have one daughter that likes to sew, I have another daughter who likes to paint, and my son, he can just draw a picture, like a portrait of us just sitting right here. He has half a brain so I’ve been learning about all these different things right now. There’s a lot of creativity in my life right now. I’m learning how to respect each new thing because today has taught me a little bit more about respecting each of them, not just my own self. —CHARLES

JOE works at a neighboring library and values the active engagement that the museum offers, as well as the way the art can inspire him. “Coming to the museum and seeing all the art that other people created inspires me to go out and do the things I do. I’m not going to go make a quilt, but I’m going to go home and play some guitar . . . it’s like, ‘Got to go do something.’”

CASEY is a former nanny who still thinks about what might be fun for kids when she visits the museum. Very attuned to her environment and her fellow visitors, she’s enthusiastic about trying new things herself. “There were these three ladies that I am sure would never touch these gross things. But they were like, we are going to dig up old railroad spikes and wrap silk around them and get the rust . . . And I was like, ‘Really? But OK, neat! Me too. Why not?’”

Reflection Leads to Creative Reverberation

During our interviews with visitors we came to realize that reflection plays a big role in appreciating and understanding the impact of creative experiences. Visitors told us that simply by thinking about the questions we posed in our interviews about *Spun* exhibits and programs, they saw things in new ways. Sometimes our questions were as basic as asking them to share a word or two that came to mind when they engaged in a creative experience.

Themes . . . I guess it's all wearable art in a way and different cultures have sort of taken on the same sort of things. Yeah . . . so *Cover Story*, I really liked that. It was basically from all corners of the earth. Some magnificent pieces of clothing . . . some practical things that were made beautiful. —ELAINE

Survey respondents also reflected on creative experiences. In response to the question, "How do you express creativity in your own life?" a respondent said "This survey." This led us to wonder. If something as simple as engaging in a one-on-one conversation, or even responding to an online survey, can encourage thoughtful reflection, **how might we be more intentional about creating catalysts for reflection?**

Well, I think I said this before, it opened my eyes a little bit more about this particular area.
—JERRY



Community Quilt making at Untitled

Play Inspires Exploration & Imagination

Young children are not the only ones who learn through play. Research on creativity indicates a **strong connection between play and fun and innovation**, which was born out in the comments of adults who talked about “bringing out the kid in me.” In coding hundreds of individual comments we found a large cluster centered on active participation through playful experimentation and exploration on the part of visitors and more intentional innovation on the part of co-creators.



Thread Studio Creative Process Station with large-scale weaving loom and alternative weaving materials

It was such an open space, where it was like very inviting and saying, “Come play with us, come do it, you can work all these different stations.” You almost feel like a kid again . . . What I love about the Denver Art Museum is they’re not saying the art is up here, it’s unapproachable and untouchable. It’s accessible to everyone and you can be a part of it.
—KARISSA

As a computer teacher, Jacquard’s loom is a major, major foundational. What’s so great about this material is that once you play with materials you can do things with wood, you can do things with paper, you can do things with metal, you can do things with pastry, you can do things with vegetables. Wow, it’s so fundamental to putting things together!
—DENNY

RACHEL is a fiber artist who likes to experiment, making her own dyes with gel medium and acrylic paint as well as more unconventional materials she saw in a Dye Day demonstration. “She uses ordinary leaves and not necessarily a dye bath. She just works with the plants on the fabric, which I’ve never seen before . . . She squishes the blueberries and she mentioned that you can use cranberries and oranges, and that just kind of opened up my mind.” Rachel used Google to connect with the Rocky Mountain Lace Making Guild, who she describes as “an incredible group of women . . . It’s just great. They tell stories, they help you out, they are creative. It’s just really awesome to be around a group of people like that, so that’s the most important aspect of it.”

MARKUS is a professional dancer who expanded his ideas about dance based on his participation in Nick Cave’s performance and HEARD · DAM. “Because sometimes as a dancer I’m thinking of these quick steps or tricky maneuvers, but with [this experience] it’s like simple is best. And you can say what you want to say with just a breath of the arm or you know, a look.” Working with Nick Cave, Markus got a sense of shared authority in the creative process. “Getting [his] feedback, I was kind of creating movement to capture what he wanted. So it’s not 50/50, it’s more a collaboration. He allows the other artists to give what the piece really needs.”

Co-creators Experienced a Heightened Sense of Engagement

There were many people besides museum staff members who played active roles in creating experiences for our visitors during *Spun*. They may have donned Nick Cave's costumes and danced in one of his performances, created quilt squares or embroidery samples that were installed in Thread Studio, or invited visitors to participate in experiments such as The Human Bobbin Project. We referred to these people as co-creators, although this was not necessarily a term they would have chosen. As one of Nick Cave's dancers said, "Co-creator feels like taking way too much credit, but I was definitely a part of creating the experience and it was definitely what he wanted too, because there were large improvised sections. It's like those are pieces where he sort of creates the tools, and you need to be the living people in there."

As our study unfolded we observed that this group of participants was speaking in different terms than other people we talked to. We realized that we needed to create new categories to describe the impact of *Spun* experiences on co-creators. **The quality of their experience was deeper, perhaps because they took a deeper dive into creative experiences at the DAM.** While their experiences varied widely, the degree of their engagement was more active and more intentional than casual visitors. With support and encouragement from big "C" Creatives like Nick Cave, they slipped into a playful mindset and made new discoveries.

I had never done any kind of try-out before so it was pretty fun . . . I felt liberated by the whole thing. —CASEY

He's just like, "jump around" and "I want it to really flow. I want the skirt to really flow and flare all over the place." . . . He allows the other artists to give what the piece really needs. —MARKUS

He [Cave] would be like, "I'm experimenting with this, I might not like it at all, I might throw it all out and make something new." But it was a cool glimpse into the process of trying things out and those were the kind of things you [as an artist] need—a bunch of dancers to really perform it and try it out. —MITCH



Performers at HEARD • DAM

Creative Experiences Generate Synergy

Co-creators talked about how their active participation helped them relate to others. They described benefits that range from feeling a part of something bigger to forming long-term bonds with fellow creators to experiencing the altruistic joy that comes from doing something for others.



Co-creator at try-out for Nick Cave's performance at Untitled

It was like a recital sort of, but like in a totally different way so I almost felt like my friends were coming to support me in this thing that I did but it wasn't really me doing it. It was me being part of someone else's bigger picture.

—CASEY

We've stayed in touch . . . I do think some real connections will come out of this . . . Now I know these people who are involved in the professional dance world, which means most of them are teachers [for me].

—MITCH

To share it . . . with other people, and my love of it. Some of the pieces of lace that are on display here I have personally made so to be able to show what I have done, not just to say "look at me, aren't I great," but people will marvel at the craft of it itself. We all feel, lacemakers really feel, that we stand on the shoulders of the giants who came before us.

—JANE

Creative Experiences Change People's Views of the Museum

Many people, be they casual visitors or active members of Denver's creative communities, have preconceptions about art museums—about the kinds of behaviors that are expected there, the kinds of experiences that are possible there, and the kinds of people who work there. By providing experiences that are not broadly available in art museums, the DAM was able to break down stereotypes.

In projects like Thread Studio **museum staff members worked hand-in-hand with local creatives, achieving common goals and demonstrating shared authority.** In sharing its authority the museum was able to interact with individuals and communities in authentic ways. Genuine, mutually respectful relationships and opportunities for co-creators to tap into their curiosity often led to a heightened appreciation of the DAM.

I thought, "well these are the experts, the historians, the curators. They know art, they know what they want the display to look like, they know the feeling they want it to have, they can just tell me." I kind of thought they would just dictate, you know, "we want it to be geometric and modern, etc." I expected them to tell me, and it couldn't have been more opposite. They actually adjusted the placement of the items, based on what I turned in, and not begrudgingly. They were excited to do it.
—AMY

I would do anything for the museum . . .
I got to see how people, even the people who work here, how kind they were and how professional everybody was and involved as much as they needed to be—but only as much as they needed to be—with everything.
—CASEY

NADINE began exploring more creative projects after her diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis and now plays an active part of Denver's textile community. She has a strong belief that kids should be encouraged to find a creative outlet. "I'm a real proponent of teaching kids how to engage their hands and their minds together with crafts of any kind." Her visits to the museum act as inspiration for personal projects. "I went in [*Cover Story*] the first time and saw that blue Japanese coat, and I said 'That's it.' It was like creativity sparked again."

MITCH, an actor with Buntport Theater in Denver, was selected from his tryout to participate in both Nick Cave's performance at Untitled and HEARD · DAM. He appreciated Cave's experimental approach and the opportunity it gave him to explore another realm of performance. "The one I was involved in primarily was an iridescent web that all the [other] dancers would get tangled with, and play with tension, and stuff. It was very cool. It was choreographed, but loosely. It was more like letting us find our way, and then directing it when they thought it could go a better way."

Relationships built on safety and trust, and the appreciation of everyone’s contributions have another benefit; they tend to enhance people’s creativity. We heard about many examples where the whole was greater than the sum of the parts in synergies that developed among co-creators, collaborators, and visitors. **Individual creations were “made more” by being part of something bigger** than any single expression. In the words of a staff member, “We can get somewhere together that we can’t get on our own.” And in the words of co-creators . . .

I felt like I didn’t own the project, but . . . like I took some ownership in it. It didn’t belong to me and it didn’t belong to anybody but there was a piece of everybody in it. —CASEY

I want to make things that are timeless, I want to make things that move and influence people. That’s why I create things . . . and to have that be not just appreciated but honored by the community in such a timeless way is unbelievable. —AMY

SPUN CO-CREATORS

Thread Studio
174 contributors

Denver Satellite Crochet Coral Reef
85 core + 415 community contributors
(300 adults, 115 kids)

Nick Cave’s performance at Untitled
36 dancers, 8 musicians

Community Quilt
75 contributors

Nick Cave’s performance HEARD • DAM
72 dancers, 5 musicians

Artist Demonstrations
35 artists

Marie Watt’s Sewing Circle Participants
186 adults, 60 kids

Dye Garden
5 contributors

Untitled
91 community creatives

Ladies Fancywork Installation
4 contributors

Those who participated in Nick Cave’s performances experienced such strong connections with others—those with whom they were co-creating and those for whom they were performing—that they lost all sense of self. Their words articulate the feeling of being a part of something bigger.



Co-creator at rehearsal for HEARD • DAM

Usually when kids are younger they don’t understand what’s coming towards them, but I think that’s the creativity with Nick. He designs these things, these figures, these horses, so that they’re not intimidating, they’re just . . . they’re friendly. Because you gotta think it’s coming from him. It’s almost as if the energy is embedded in the work. —MARKUS

I could tell she [a young audience member] was a little freaked out. So I laid down and then we got really low, and she came over and then she petted us. I could hear everybody at the same time go “Ahhh!” It was like when you hear the sound track on a sitcom, except it was real life. It was like someone had hit Play on the soundtrack of real life and . . . I don’t know how I was a part of it. —CASEY

MADLINE says that she’s so creative in her work as a circus artist that she tends to forget about creativity in her daily life. Her visit to *Spun* reminded her “how to take everyday things and make them more pretty—not only pretty but put them in a different context where you realize, ‘Oh yeah, I see that everyday, but now I see it for real.’” She notices and enjoys variety. “It’s nice to see all different kinds of ways for people to express [themselves]. All the versatility, everything they use and put it in their own way, and then they express their own message.”

TOM is a professor of fiber art at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, whose students created textile pieces to contribute to the Thread Studio. He welcomed the opportunity to introduce his students to the DAM and the learning opportunities the project provided. From a more personal standpoint, he applauded the museum for focusing so much attention on textiles. “As a textile enthusiast insider, to see an institution supporting and championing and showcasing our field, instead of just putting it into a shrinking little space . . .”

Experimentation & Freedom Lead to Creative Confidence

When an artist's vision is built on experimentation and freedom of expression it creates new ways of interacting with and for visitors. Positive responses from the artist and the audience helped performers to develop their own creative confidence, letting go of comparison and fear of failure, and embracing the collaborative outcome.

The comments in this chapter are evidence of the breadth and depth of life-changing benefits that casual visitors and co-creators derived from engaging in creativity experiences at the museum. In describing the essence of creativity, our literature review asserted that it is not so much a product or an activity in one of the domains that we think of as the creative arts, but a "process that humans engage in in all disciplines and in all realms of life."^v It's one thing to make that claim based on the work of scholars; it's another thing to hear it demonstrated in the voices of our visitors.

It allowed me to open up and know that nothing is wrong and that everything, whatever I say, whatever they say, I don't have to think about the expectation. Just let it happen . . . It doesn't matter if we are on cue or not, the fact is that it is magic and people allow themselves to just let it be magic for them, regardless of whether or not we hit the right counts. —CASEY

It's not 50/50, it's more a collaboration. But I never felt stifled and I never felt like I was stifling him, it definitely was a coming together and that was what was so beautiful about what he does. He allows the other artists to give what the piece really needs. —MARKUS



Purses and Pouches Create-n-Take

DESIGNING FOR CREATIVITY



Marie Watt with blanket contributor

Exhibit and experience design features can **ignite appreciation for the creative expressions of artists and inspire expressions of personal creativity**. When we began this project we had a strong sense that some environments are more conducive to creativity than others, more inclined to get the creative juices flowing, but we wanted to identify specific conditions that can “oil the wheels of creativity.”

The research suggested that those experiences that “allow individuals to witness creative thinking and behaviors, to recognize characteristics of creative activity, and even to experience some of the activity themselves, are the types of experiences that will open people to higher levels of creativity. Thus programs, installations, and practices that transcend dichotomies, focus on problem finding, introduce multiple perspectives, and migrate ideas from one arena to another . . . are likely to showcase the museum as a place for creativity.”^{vi}

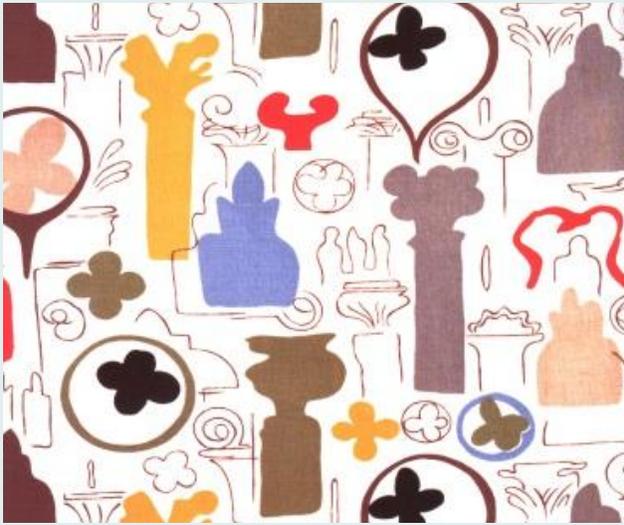
Feedback from focus group participants, interviewees, and online survey respondents helped us identify features of exhibitions and programs that inspired creative thoughts and actions. In coding a wide variety of visitor responses we identified exhibition techniques and hands-on activities that focused on the **creative products** artists make as well as the **creative processes** they engage in. These often inspired visitors to think about their own personal creativity.



Pattern Play exhibition

Expose the Creative Processes of Artists

When visitors come to an art museum they typically see works that artists have deemed complete. Occasionally exhibits include sketches as evidence of the steps involved, but the focus is usually on the finished product. **Pulling back the curtain on the creative process** of artists, as in the Jacqueline Groag exhibit, *Pattern Play*, made the art more approachable and expanded visitors' sense of possibilities. By getting a glimpse into the artist's thought processes, some visitors were able to make a leap of imagination and wonder if they might be able to do similar things.



Jacqueline Groag's designs

Just seeing [the sketches] is inspiring, because when you see a finished product it's like "OK that's really great." But when you see a sketch of something it makes it less intimidating.

—SEAN

If I'm looking for some inspiration, I like the way [*Pattern Play*] was organized, the way you started with how the artist came up with the concepts at the beginning . . . then we saw the finished work and how the artist evolved.

—TONI

Coming to a museum and seeing somewhat of a journey of an artist's life gives me that reassurance to stick with it. And everybody has to start somewhere. —ASHLEY



Pattern Play exhibition

Provide Variety & Variation

Artists help people to see familiar things in new ways, whether it's plants growing in their gardens that artists use to create natural dyes or flea market finds that Nick Cave turns into dramatic "sound suits." In like manner, an art museum can present everyday objects in ways that **encourage people to take a second look**. In the words of one visitor, "I see that every day but now I see it for real."



Nick Cave: *Sojourn* exhibition



Visitor discovers interviews and behind-the-scenes insights by using the DAM_SCOUT smartphone app

In creating a suite of eleven exhibits, **DAM curators took innovative approaches** that ran the gamut from contemporary drawings using fabric and acrylic paint (*Bruce Price: Works on Paper, 2007–2012*) to traditional resist-dyeing techniques (*Irresistible: Multicolored Textiles from Asia*) and fresh looks at classic items of clothing like blue jeans and serapes (*Western Duds: How Clothing Helped Create an Archetype*). By presenting familiar objects in a new way, the museum helped visitors to see textile art in a different light.

The Dye Garden is finding new uses for plants. The other two [*Coral Reef* and the *Nick Cave* exhibit] are finding uses for skills or crafts in a different way, like instead of crocheting doilies or a scarf, they're crocheting coral. Instead of using buttons to do-up your clothes, you're making a whole sculpture out of buttons. Um, it's re-use. —MARGI

Does anybody go into *Nick Cave* and not want to go to a thrift store and buy little figurines? I notice my house, well ok I've got a whole bunch of new little figurines here, I'm totally glomming onto his ideas. —ROBIN

Textiles are a really good subject matter for the museum because most people don't see fabric or fiber or textiles as art. And it really is. —VINDA

Seeing such **dramatically different, but related exhibits** in a single visit to the DAM, our visitors were quick to notice, and appreciate, connections that were not expressly stated. That's because juxtapositions help visitors discover connections among diverse expressions. Some of the experiences were so strikingly different that they couldn't help but compare and contrast, which is itself a creative act. Discovering new relationships between seemingly disparate objects, ideas, and environments is one type of "lateral thinking," which happens when familiar things are seen from different perspectives.^{vii}



Red, White & Bold exhibition

Going from one exhibit to the other gives you a new perspective on looking at say, the Navajo rugs . . . I saw it as "Oh my gosh, these people are wearing their art!" —CEIL

I liked the contrast between the thread room and this room [*Pattern Play*]. When I think of crocheting and lace . . . I think of a warm cozy fireplace feel. And this reminds me of a fashion showroom. —ALYSSA

After that kind of calming, somber experience we went in there and it was this barrage of sensory experience where there's a lot of light . . . and it had a lot of visual activity, and there was auditory activity, and there were people that were talking, and there was that buzz again. People were excited, and there was conversation. Little kids were running around and being excited . . . —SHANNON



Nick Cave: Sojourn exhibition

Simultaneously scheduling diverse exhibits with thematic ties is an intentional experience design practice that can spark creative thoughts and actions. For all of the diversity of experiences our visitors encountered in *Spun*, they appreciated the themes that tied their experiences together. We want to learn more about the importance of unifying themes in future exhibits. Do they make juxtapositions more evident or more dramatic? Do they heighten the experience and stimulate conversations? Visitor feedback suggests the resonance of variations on a theme.



Common Threads exhibition

The one that I've been talking about to a friend has been the variety between the *Nick Cave* show and the *Red, White & Bold* show next door . . . Nick's work is very showy and it touches you in a really affective way . . . And then to see this sort of more classic serenity next door, that invites a conversation. —TOM

I like the juxtaposition [of *Nick Cave* and *Red, White & Bold*]. It's just really engaging. Diversity was what I was thinking. —SHUBHRA

Having that juxtaposition of the interactive part of the gallery and then examples of work that's been done through the centuries gives you a better appreciation . . . —ALEXANDER

ALYSSA earned a marketing degree in her undergraduate studies and is now pursuing a masters degree in elementary education. In visiting the museum she looks for personal relevance, which can lead to inspiration and powerful memories. "I needed that personal connection." During her time at the museum, she valued self-directed opportunities, such as the Thread Studio, as . . . "it gave you the freedom to explore in your own capacity."

SUSAN expresses her creativity as a ballroom dancer so she was intrigued by seeing pattern and rhythm applied in new ways. "I'm familiar with being creative in the music area with the body, but this was something . . . to see a pattern develop just from two over one, three over four, repeated patterns. It's fascinating to see it appear before my eyes." The physical experience of bobbin weaving resonated with her because "I could actually feel the rhythm of the bobbin movement and I could begin to anticipate the pattern, which was really fun."

Variety and diversity help people to see and reflect on the panoply of creative artistic expression. With exposure to diverse perspectives visitors were inclined to see things in unconventional ways, building on existing frameworks and expanding their sense of possibilities. We were intentional about including **multiple manifestations of common materials or techniques** to suggest ways of expanding personal creativity. Whatever their starting point in terms of artistic experience, visitors saw ways to flex their creative muscles.

Being an artist and designer, what fascinated me was the menagerie itself [in Thread Studio]. It addresses the different areas of learning, whether it's in the arts, things like materials, techniques, visual perception . . . —TONI

I think just how vibrant [Thread Studio] was and how diverse it was. You could find what you wanted to find in it. You weren't directed in a certain way. It gave you the freedom to explore in your own capacity. —ALYSSA



Cover Story exhibition



Thread Studio

Design for Surprise, Feature the Unexpected

Many visitors described feelings of surprise in *Spun* exhibits and programs, which led staff members to think that **cultivating surprise may be a key to kindling creativity**. We asked ourselves: Does surprise open people's minds to see new possibilities? How can we use design intentionally to reach people in unexpected ways? How can we best focus on works of art that have surprising features or qualities?

Comments suggest that we were able to capture visitors' attention by presenting exhibits and experiences that made them scratch their heads or think twice. This encourages curiosity, invites exploration, and facilitates discovery, all conditions that lead to creative energy.

I was impressed because the Dye Garden . . . It wasn't full of super colorful flowers, which I guess I would think would be required to make such an array of different colors for the fabric, so I guess I was impressed you can get those colors out of just those little things. —AMY

It is much different than what I had originally thought of as textiles. —CASEY

It wasn't what I was expecting; it caught me off guard . . . I thought I was going to have a little lecture about Rothko and I had a fun theatrical experience. —CLARA



Pattern Play exhibition

Create Opportunities for Participation

Spun's two primary hands-on activity areas, Thread Studio and Quilt Studio, not only displayed authentic tools—the kinds used by practicing artists whose works were on view—but provided open-ended opportunities for visitors to use them. Seeing and handling tools and materials helped people to envision the creative process of artists and start exploring their own creativity.

These tools were offered in comfortable, informal settings and casual invitations were extended to use them in low-threshold, low-pressure activities. The **setting and the invitation helped motivate visitors to try something new or to build on previous experience.** Hands-on experiences and the freedom to explore lead to active engagement and growing confidence on the part of visitors, whatever their artistic skills.



Dye Workshop with local textile artist

You come into the studio and you see this stuff out here and you start playing with it and using it. With a lot of people, they don't just generate ideas and start putting stuff down like some of these artists that you hear about. A lot of people need inspiration, so you have the books sitting in areas where people could grab them and read them, you had the videos going where people could watch this art being made, and then the combination of that starts making people think, "What would this look like?" So then they could come up to the table, start trying it, and I thought it was a very creative, thought-provoking place where you could actually try some of the stuff that you saw.
—KEN

Realizing the tools are out there, because . . . you need to have the right equipment in order to keep doing whatever. It gets frustrating when you don't have the right equipment. But showing that they had all of the right equipment up there [in Thread Studio], it's just a matter of "Alright." —MARY

I don't own any of the equipment necessary to continue doing anything like this. So, if there was an open studio somewhere with sewing machines that we can use, or looms, or things like that . . . —ALEXANDER

Create Environments that Put People at Ease & Experiences that Promote Risk-taking

Comfort—physical and psychological—is necessary to get the creative juices flowing. In the words of one of our focus group participants, “Creativity comes when you’re comfortable.” Providing friendly invitations and letting people know that the DAM is a criticism-free zone helps to build participation. Telling visitors what to expect and providing clear guidelines, such as what to touch and what not to touch, can mitigate the intimidation factor in what may be an unfamiliar environment.



Thread Studio

While warm and homey environments encourage engagement and risk taking, **sometimes people need to push beyond their comfort zones to spark their creativity.** In the words of Google executive Lorraine Twohill, “Pushing the boundaries of creativity means saying ‘yes,’ taking risks with new things, learning, and being surprised.”^{viii} To accommodate this paradox we can design spaces that encourage visitors to slow down, reflect, and engage. At the same time that we refer to familiar experiences we can include everyday objects that are used in radically new ways.

Oh, it’s a very inviting environment. And there wasn’t a sense of having to prove my prowess as a sewer . . . It made me more comfortable. Everyone is doing it and talking and just enjoying the moment. —BRIAN

The couch here against that blue, you know that’s a living space accommodation. That’s a conversation place accommodation. And that didn’t used to be museums. —ROB

I like the bookshelf type arrangement to have all the different works. It definitely seems like something you would see at a house. —KAYLA

[Thread Studio] was warm, it was cozy, and it felt like you were supposed to spend some time there. —ALEXANDER

There are the ceramic dogs. There’s an old barrel chair in the one of the exhibits as well. I mean, you’re recycling, you’re inspiring, you’re putting together old memories. Those are fresh ideas to me, using old stuff. —MARKUS

For many people, a supportive, affirming social environment kindles creativity. We can **create conditions that foster social connections** when we extend invitations and offer creative human interaction to drop-in visitors. Inviting design features, such as Thread Studio and sewing circles make the most of opportunities for people who may not know one another to connect over shared activities. Spaces that are flexible, open-ended, and maybe even a little bit chaotic, will attract attention, facilitate experimentation, and invite conversation.

There was a sign on there that said “Gently Touch” or something like that. I got super pumped that I could go around and play with all of them and squeeze them and see what they were made out of it. It was really fun. Very playful. —CASEY



The only thing that started to change my thoughts about *[Cover Story]* was the interactive section where the staff member was really engaging and entertaining. She’s the one that really pulled it together for me. —ASHLEY

I think the thing that drew us to that one was she was in the process of doing it, and so her doing it made us want to see it and there were a lot of people there so you knew it was something interesting. —ALISA

Thread Studio



Marie Watt’s sewing circle

Accentuate Elemental Qualities of Human Expression

Spun exhibits included textile art from every area of the DAM's collection, showcasing the **universality of creative expression in vastly different cultures and time periods**. Visitors were quick to make cross-cultural connections and comparisons and to find personal associations with things familiar and new. Creativity was manifested in very different ways in exhibits ranging from *Fashion Fusion: Native Textiles in Spanish Colonial Art* to *Irresistible: Multicolored Textiles from Asia*, but whatever the theme, essential qualities of the artworks resonated with visitors and led them to see connections to their own lives.

In the *Cover Story* exhibit I enjoyed seeing pieces from different areas of the world and different time periods. —NATHAN

To go back to the travel aspect, there were so many countries, different cultures represented in that room. . . you mentioned connection. I like the variety of things, that's what appeals to me when I go to see these things, and that scratched my itch. —KATHY

CHARLES is a father of three, one of whom has a serious brain injury. He is constantly considering how to engage all of his children. "I have one daughter that likes to sew, I have another daughter who likes to paint, and my son he can just draw a picture, like a portrait of us just sitting right here. The bicycle wheel loom [in the Thread Studio] just got me . . . I was thinking that was something I could actually try working with . . . [and] that's something [my kids] could do, that's something they would enjoy." The process-oriented and interactive experiences at the museum were most intriguing to him, as they reframed his sense of an object. "Then when she started explaining it and pointing out these different things and what they meant. It made me look at the piece of art in a whole different way."

CASEY was selected to participate as a community dancer in Nick Cave's performance at Untitled and HEARD · DAM, based on her enthusiastic audition. Reflecting on the tryout she says, "We had five minutes [in the try-out] to just go crazy and afterwards people were like 'What did you do?' and I was like, 'I don't even know! I have bruises though!' . . . I felt liberated by the whole thing." She describes her participation in the performance in terms of her interactions with the artist, her fellow dancers, and the audience—something bigger than she alone. "I felt like I didn't own the project, but . . . like I took some ownership in it. It didn't belong to me and it didn't belong to anybody but there was a piece of everybody in it." Additionally, the project heightened her appreciation of the museum. "I would do anything for the museum . . . I got to see how people, even the people who work here, how kind they were and how professional everybody was and involved as much as they needed to be—but only as much as they needed to be—with everything."

Define Creativity in Universal Language

Listening to the words visitors used to describe their experiences, we realized that we could help everyone to see themselves as creative by **talking about creativity in layman's terms**.

This might mean describing Nick Cave's performances in terms of movement rather than dance. Or characterizing Jacqueline Groag's fabric patterns in terms of arrangement rather than design. Common language emphasizes common experiences. One staff member used the metaphor of the X Games to make the point that while not everyone can participate in extreme sports, with a common vocabulary we can all enjoy watching the games.

Throughout the project we kept a running list of words that we used to describe our goals and that our visitors used to describe their experiences. We've tried to incorporate them in a shared language that is becoming the DAM's creativity lexicon.

Think about the things you wear as a piece of art and not just a piece of clothing. —ELAINE

My son, he is very good at picking up everything outside and doing something in the house. Everything is art. So I have a few boxes with stuff, I would say trash, but for him it's art. It's a collection, his collection for art. —SYLVIA



THE *SPUN* PHENOMENON

The responses of 634 people to our online survey revealed interesting differences between those who experienced *Spun* and those who did not. These differences were even more pronounced in those who visited *Spun* more frequently. We were struck by the fact that 92 of the 324 people who visited *Spun* did so three or more times during the six months it was on view, and their answers to questions about themselves and creativity are markedly different from those who came to *Spun* one or two times.

Visiting *Spun* & Viewing Self as Creative

Most striking is the relationship between the number of times people visited *Spun* and the degree to which they rated themselves as creative and as having a high degree of confidence in their creativity. When comparing respondents' estimations of their own creativity, we found a statistically significant difference between the people who had not visited *Spun* and those who visited three or more times ($t=3.88$, $df\ 333$, $p<.001$). There was also a statistically significant difference between those groups' levels of confidence in their creativity ($t=3.26$, $df\ 329$, $p<.001$).

Interestingly, respondents who visited *Spun* once or twice were most similar to non-visitors in considering themselves creative and having confidence in their creativity. Though there was some difference between the two, we found no statistically significant differences between the two groups' responses to these questions.



Local artist demonstrates in the Quilt Studio

Our study is not able to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between experiencing *Spun* and seeing oneself as creative. However, the distinct pattern is intriguing and raises several questions for future research. Do a broad definition of creativity (like the one communicated by the DAM through *Spun*) and invitations to try new things and be creative in everyday life enable more people to see themselves as creative? Does an intentional effort to offer something out of the ordinary attract more creative people to the DAM and thus, increase its contribution to Denver’s creative landscape?

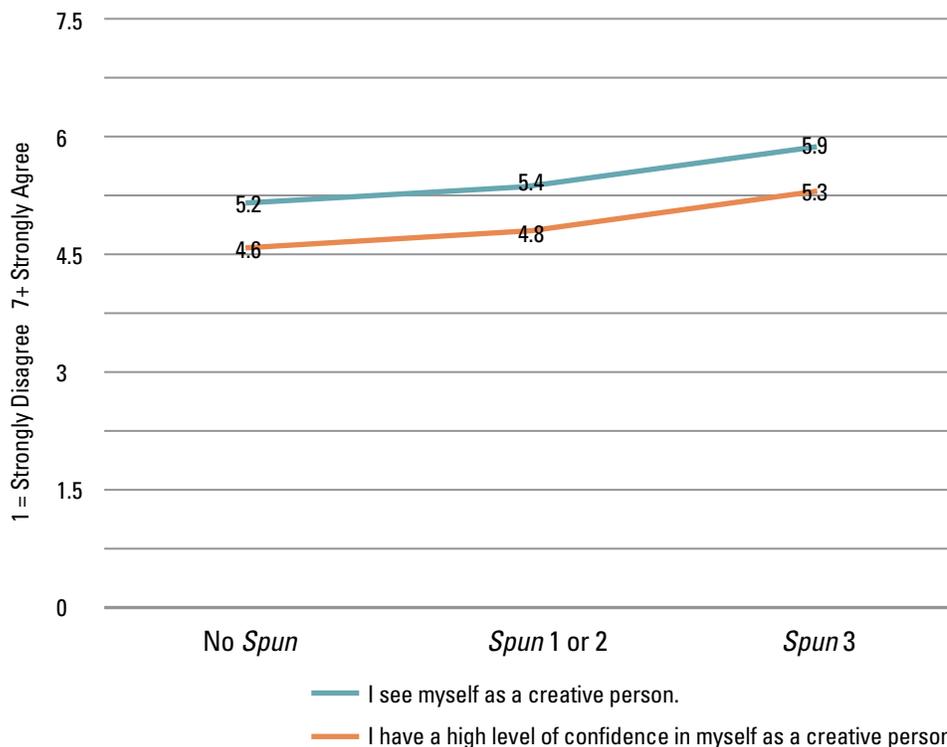
The data suggest that *Spun* was particularly appreciated (as evidenced by repeat visits) by those who see themselves as creative and have high levels of confidence in their creativity. Chart 1 shows the emerging pattern of a correlation between attending *Spun* and seeing oneself as more creative.

Not only are people who visited *Spun* more likely to describe themselves as creative; they also describe how creativity fits into their daily lives differently from those who did not visit. All groups mentioned a wide variety of creative activities that fell under the general categories of:

- Household activities (cooking, gardening, decorating)
- Professional activities (teaching, management, research, entrepreneurship)
- Self expression (projects that express uniqueness, such as dress)
- Amateur engagement with the arts (painting, photography, woodworking, music)

CHART 1: THE SPUN PHENOMENON

The more frequently a person reported visiting *Spun* the more likely they were to see themselves as creative and to have confidence in their creativity.



Exploring New Possibilities & Relating to Others Through Creativity

Unique among those who visited *Spun* three or more times was the frequency with which they talked about how they sought out opportunities for experimentation and engaged in conversation about art with others. These are people who ask questions, use familiar items in new ways, experiment with materials, and are generally open to new possibilities.

There was a statistically significant difference between those who didn't attend *Spun* and those who visited three or more times in the degree to which they want to make connections with others who are creative ($t=3.13$, $df\ 332$, $p<.002$). Those who connect with others who are creative share their appreciation of creativity by discussing movies, theater, writing, and poetry. They visit creative venues with other art aficionados. They even organize art appreciation experiences for others.

In addition to naming specific creative activities, frequent visitors to *Spun* described creativity as an integral part of their lives, relationships, and worldview. A similar (though not as strong) thread was found among those who visited *Spun* once or twice. The integration of creativity into all aspects of life was not a theme that emerged among those who hadn't visited *Spun*. We wonder if *Spun* attracted a certain kind of person and/or if the *Spun* experience contributed to visitors enlarging their definitions of creativity and the ways it is a part of their personal lives.



Spinning workshop with local fiber artist in Thread Studio



Weaving at Untitled

Visiting *Spun* & Inviting Others to Visit the DAM

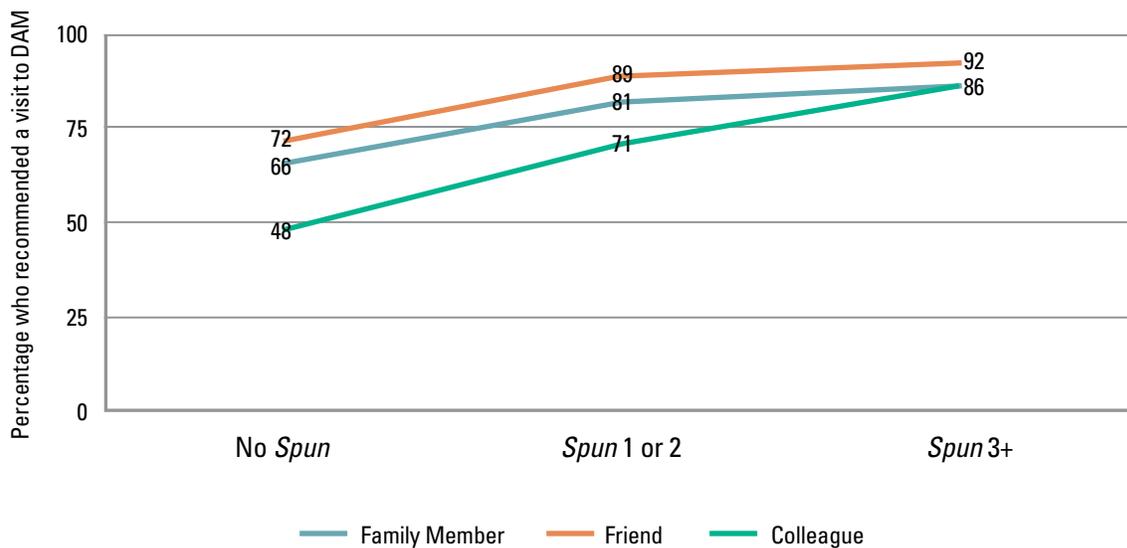
We also found a relationship between the frequency of visits to *Spun* and the likelihood of talking about the DAM with family and friends and recommending a visit to the museum. We wonder, does the creativity platform have the potential to drive attendance? Chart 2 shows the positive relationship between the percentage of survey participants who recommended a visit to family members, friends, and colleagues and the number of times the participant experienced *Spun*. While we cannot know whether people actually followed through on recommendations to visit, we are impressed by the high percentage of *Spun* visitors who talked about the experience and thought someone they knew would also benefit from it. We do know that 53 percent of survey participants returned to the museum during *Spun* and brought another person with them.



Thread Studio collaborators

CHART 2: THE *SPUN* PHENOMENON

The more frequently a person visited *Spun* the more likely they were to recommend a visit to the DAM to someone.



Visiting *Spun* & Amount of Creative Activity

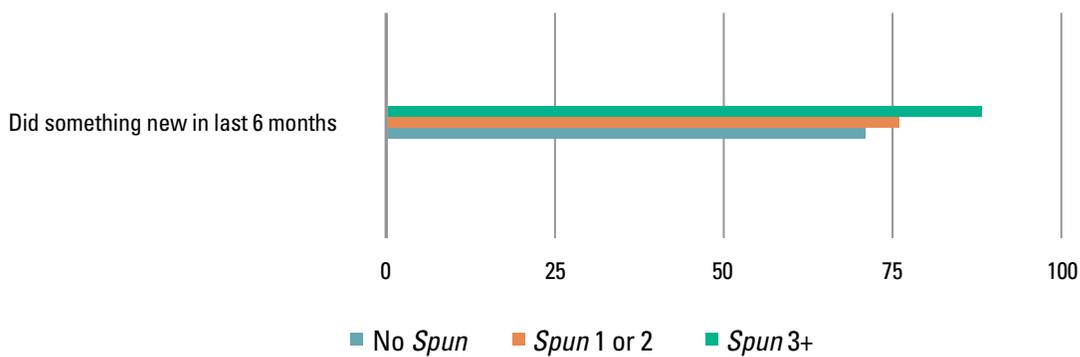
Finally, the data also demonstrate a relationship between the number of reported visits to *Spun* and the amount of new creative activity during the six months it was on view. Chart 3 shows that 70 percent of those who hadn't visited *Spun* reported that they engaged in a new creative activity during the six-months, while 87 percent of those who visited 3 or more times engaged in new creative activities during the same time period. In response to a direct question, 35 percent of those who visited *Spun* and had engaged in a new creative activity reported that the activity was inspired by their experience at the DAM.



Pin-making at Untitled

CHART 3: THE *SPUN* PHENOMENON

The more frequently a person reported visiting *Spun* the more likely they were to report that they engaged in a new creative activity during the six months *Spun* was on view.





CHAPTER 4

Maximizing an Art Museum's Capacity to Foster Creativity



A Road Map for Maximizing an Art Museum's Capacity To Foster Creativity



Nick Cave's performance at Untitled

The Creativity Task Force and the Education Core Group “lived” with the content of the literature review and the findings from the visitor research for several months. Findings were presented to them as they emerged—first from the literature review, then from focus groups and interviews, and finally from the online survey. The sense of an emerging understanding of the museum’s role in fostering creativity was palpable.

During debriefing meetings we began to identify emerging patterns, confounding questions, and relationships between findings about visitor impact and design features. From this deep, iterative, and collective investigation of data systematically obtained from visitor research came the articulation of the foundational elements of the art museum as creativity platform.

In writing this report, the Evaluation Steering Team delved deeper and deeper into our meeting notes and reports from focus groups, interviews, and surveys.

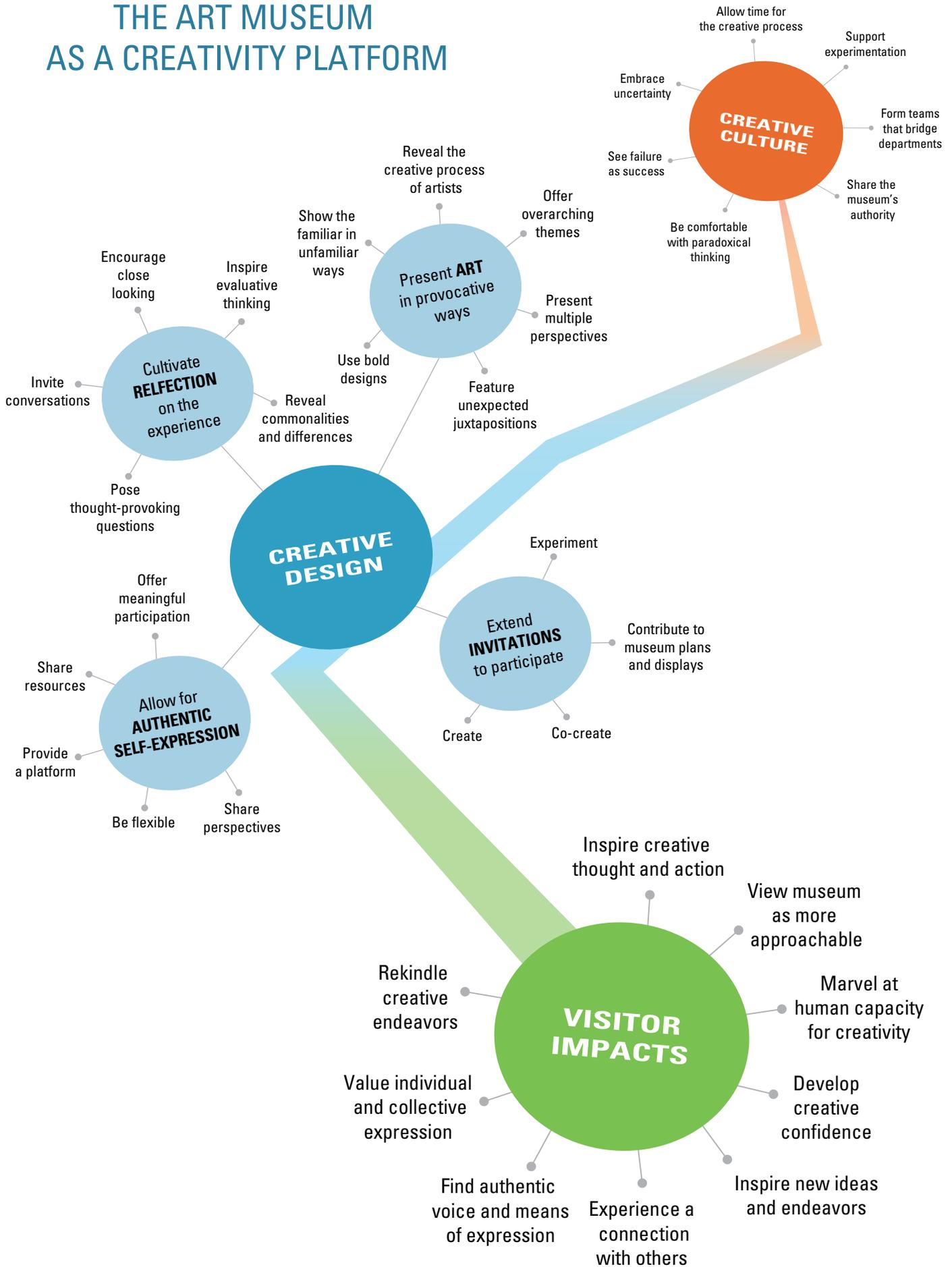
Three foundational elements emerged, all of which we can use to build a platform for fostering creativity.

1. **Instill a creative culture.** Because staff members across the museum need to be creative, value creativity, and support creativity in one another in order to provide creative experiences for audiences, we must instill a creative culture within the museum.

2. **Design for creativity.** With so many resources at our disposal—exhibitions, programs, interpretive materials, and online experiences—we identified specific features of experiences with art that can be manipulated, resulting in different types and different magnitudes of creative outcomes. These help us to be more intentional as we design for creativity.
3. **Impact visitors through creativity.** Thanks to the participants in our study, we came to a deeper understand of what our museum can add to the creative lives of individuals and the larger community. Ultimately, it is this potential to impact visitors through creativity that inspires our work.

The graphic on page 69 is intended as a road map for continued exploration of how to maximize the capacity of an art museum to foster creativity. It is necessary to attend to both the organizational culture and the specific design features of art experiences in order to maximize creativity in the lives of individuals and communities. The set of creativity impacts described to us by those who experienced different elements of *Spun* are, in essence, our destination—they set our sights on where we want to be and how we wish to describe the value the art museum contributes.

THE ART MUSEUM AS A CREATIVITY PLATFORM



FOSTERING A CULTURE OF CREATIVITY

We've learned that in order to foster creativity we need—as an organization—to embrace three important tenets of creativity that ran throughout visitor comments and were echoed in our team discussions. Attention to these guiding principles creates an organizational culture in which creativity can flourish.

Paradox is an Element of Creative Thinking & Action

Far more than witty or amusing statements, paradoxes point to the truth and have serious implications. Following are some of the paradoxes we grappled with in our discussions.

- There's no such thing as **failure** if it leads to **learning**.
- **Risking failure** is sometimes a path to **success**.
- **Being responsible and respected** does not rule out being **boldly creative**.
- We need to be **structured** enough to create a platform and **open** enough to allow for creative expression.
- **Authority is a double-edged sword**. It's perceived as positive by many visitors but it can squelch creativity.
- By sharing authority with visitors we do not **relinquish authority**, we **gain authority**.
- While we seek to maintain **heightened experiences** for visitors, we can increase participation by **lowering thresholds** to participation.
- Embracing **multiple perspectives** leads to more essential, **unified understandings** and meaning.
- **Divergent thinking** is at the heart of creativity, but we need **consensus** to move projects forward.



Dye Garden on the Plaza



Cuppetelli & Mendoza: Transposition installation

Creativity Requires Experimentation

Perfection, control, and certainty—qualities that are seen by many as the marks of outstanding museums—can be detrimental for a museum that strives to foster creativity. Releasing control, getting comfortable trying new things, tolerating ambiguity, and living with uncertainty are the hallmarks of creative people and creative organizations. The tension between doing it “like we always have” or “the way it is supposed to be done” and taking a risk without knowing the exact outcome is healthy for an organization.

Experimentation is not recklessness; it is the purposeful act of trying something different with the intention of discovering something new. Ironically, museum audiences are often more receptive to experimentation than are museum staff members. The fear of failure, which may stem from an attempt to protect the museum’s reputation, might just be what’s preventing us from being seen as an exciting source of creative expression, a place that not only displays the products of creativity but manifests a creative culture.

Fostering Creativity in Others is Only Possible if You Live Creatively Yourself

In personal terms, this means that you can’t inspire a sense of creativity in others unless you have a spirit of creativity within yourself.

For a museum, that means intentional investment in igniting and supporting creativity internally—for staff at all levels, for board members, and for museum volunteers. This requires conscious attention to traveling across departmental silos and up and down the ladder of organizational structure. It means talking about creativity and the conditions that foster it regularly and routinely. It means allowing time for the stages of the creative process to unfold—preparation, incubation, inspiration, and verification. It means honoring healthy friction, and rewarding bold plans and decisions with the support they require in order to flourish.

DESIGNING FOR CREATIVITY

As we examined the stories visitors and co-creators told us about their *Spun* experiences with creativity, it became clear that there were **four essential features** that existed in every experience:

1. **Art** presented in ways that **provoke new ways of thinking and acting**
2. An **explicit invitation to engage** in some aspect of the creative process
3. A set of conditions that allow **authentic self-expression**
4. The **opportunity for reflection** on the value and meaning of the experience

Experimentation with these four design features can provide focus when creating experiences that have the likelihood of enhancing individual and community creativity.



Marie Watt's community blanket donation



Community Quilt with contributions from community members

Provocative Presentation of Art

Spun taught us that how art is arranged and presented impacts our visitors in different ways, provoking new ways of thinking and acting. So far we have evidence that overarching themes like *Marvelous Mud* and *Spun*, which provide a way for visitors to connect seemingly unrelated parts of the museum and collection, are effective in generating new ideas. Similarly, bold design and unexpected juxtapositions—of objects and of entire exhibitions—get people thinking in new ways. What will change in our practice—and in our visitors’ experiences—when we select and display art in service of helping visitors to discover new connections? What if we—and our visitors—become more comfortable with being jarred by the unexpected?

Explicit Invitations

People like to be asked, and in the case of museums, the invitation is best when it is explicit and engaging. The norm is for people to approach a museum experience in a relatively passive role. Museums are places to see exhibitions, and while this posture as “viewer” is changing, it is highly effective when the museum takes the first step in inviting new ways to behave and new ways to interact with the museum and its collections. People need—and respond very positively to—invitations to experiment, create, co-create, assist with planning, and even contribute to collections and programming, both at the museum and within their communities. How do different types of invitations (expected, unexpected, literal, implied) effect creativity outcomes?



Red, White & Bold exhibition



Day at the Dye Garden

Authentic Self-expression

Creativity is inextricably linked with self-expression. Thus, to the extent that a museum fosters creativity, it will be conscious of establishing conditions that respect—and even require—the authentic expression of a person’s ideas, stories, beliefs, and values. Rote repetition of a tour guide’s description of a painting or completing a project that has one pattern and a similar finished product for all are not examples of self-expression. Based on our interviews with visitors and co-creators, we learned that some of the conditions that foster self-expression are respect for individual points of view and lived experience, permission to fail and to begin anew, and being asked to contribute something personally meaningful. The greater the authentic self-expression contributed by a Spun visitor or co-creator, the more deep and lasting impact the experience had on the person.

Opportunity for Reflection

Research about the phases of the creative process points out the critical role of evaluation and reflection—a creator steps back and examines what she’s produced, learns from that, and then moves on from a new place. Indeed, people who participated in the *Spun* study remarked that the opportunity to reflect on their experience was much appreciated. By reflecting, they found greater meaning.

When talking about their experiences, co-creators articulated the profound effects their museum experiences had on them as people. During interviews, visitors who experienced the galleries began to reflect on the commonalities and striking differences among the exhibits and artists. Both co-creators and casual visitors remarked that they don’t usually have the opportunity to reflect on a museum experience.

We were struck by the importance of reflection. We know that it is an essential part of any learning process. But the focus during a museum experience is usually more on doing than on reflecting. We wonder, how could we encourage more reflection? Through more skillful use of questions in interpretive materials? Through new roles for staff members in the galleries? Through conversation lounges or online forums?

IMPACTING MUSEUM VISITORS THROUGH CREATIVITY

Visitors to *Spun* reported impacts that ranged from subtle to profound through experiences that ranged from quiet observation to active participation. As the quotes in chapter 3 suggest, their reactions ran the gamut from admiration of the creative talents of weavers to the transformative experience of discovering an inner “permission” to create.

The creativity road map on page 69 will guide us in our next series of exhibition and experience designs—and the accompanying visitor research. With this framework, we see possibilities for experimenting with our practice in bold ways while being anchored in the four features of designing for creativity. Our ongoing journey will lead to new ways of impacting individual visitors and our community at large.



Satellite Crochet Coral Reef harvest at Untitled



Nick Cave's *Second Skin* installation

Building On What We've Learned



HEARD • DAM

This study was by no means a summative evaluation of *Spun* exhibits and programs. Rather, it was a case study that provided the opportunity to develop a new theory from the ground up. So, at the end of this report, we are at the point of beginning again, figuring out how to apply what we've learned to future projects, be they institution-wide exhibitions or small, single-focus exhibits, ambitious program series or individual program offerings. And we're asking new questions about the impact on ever-widening circles.

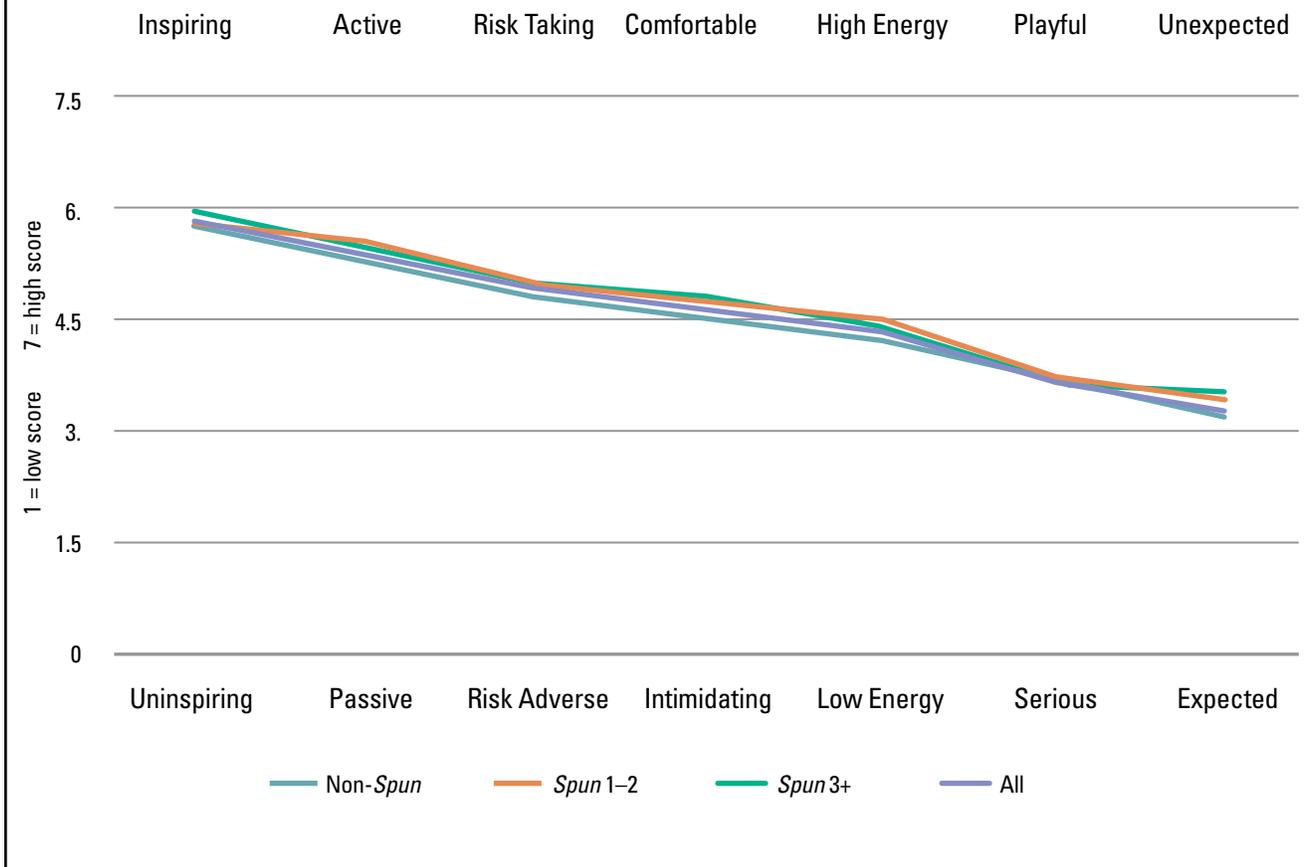
On a **personal level**, how can we continue to inspire creativity in individual visitors who express themselves in myriad ways? How can we leverage the authority of the museum to celebrate individual expressions of creativity?

On an **institutional level**, how can the DAM build on this creative momentum to strengthen its relationships with co-creators, sustain the planned and unplanned outpouring of creativity, and build on new perceptions of the museum as a hub of creative community activity?

On a **community level**, where do we fit into the local "creative ecosystem" and how can we best contribute to its growth? How can we leverage our role as an influencer to engage other creative groups, formal and informal? Can we make our facilities available as a gathering place so the DAM is perceived as a convener of creatives?

In a discussion about the acceptable amount of risk for the DAM to take, members of the Creativity Task Force pointed out that we take risks all the time, in the sense that we are constantly reinventing and taking chances. The data suggest that what we might consider risky and experimental is not viewed that way by those outside the museum. Chart 4 indicates that all of the survey respondents view the DAM as an inspiring place, but far fewer see it as a place of high energy, playfulness, and unexpected happenings—all features of highly creative organizations. These findings tell us that even though the museum is seen as a large presence on the creative landscape of Denver, there is room for growth, which will require change among ourselves and within the organization.

CHART 4: THE DAM AS A CREATIVE ORGANIZATION
NON-SPUN/SPUN COMPARISON



Synthesizing our research findings and collective experience into a framework allows us to mindfully manipulate a finite set of essential ingredients that, when varied, could produce a wide-range of outcomes and provide value to individuals, the Denver community, and the museum field. At the Denver Art Museum we can proceed with greater confidence in our choices for experimentation and their prospective impact on creativity—for visitors, for the museum, and for the communities we serve. We hope that others will find this framework useful in their work, and that as a field, we might begin to establish some consistency in language and knowledge so that we can move from hunches and preconceptions about the role for art museums in fostering creativity to better informed decision-making, practice, and collective advances in knowledge.

New Areas for Experimentation & Investigation

As we conclude this 18-month deep dive into creativity at the DAM, we believe we’ve made progress in identifying some of the critical variables that enhance creative museum experiences and the mutually rewarding relationships that develop between museums and the communities they serve. There is more work to be done to craft a grounded theory about art museums and creativity, and we hope that this synthesis of our work is a step in the right direction. For now, the road map on page 69 will help us to explore new possibilities for experimenting with our practice in bold ways while being guided by its three foundations: fostering a creative organizational culture, designing for creativity, and impacting visitors’ creativity.

Spun taught us that works of art can be **presented and interpreted** in ways that have different effects on our visitors' expressions of creativity. Having started to identify factors that lead to those different impacts, how can we build on them? Purposeful juxtapositions and jarring contrasts can stimulate creative thought and new possibilities.

Invitations to participate can take many different forms. We need to determine how different types of invitations (expected, unexpected, literal, implied) effect creativity outcomes. And we want to aim for the sweet spot between making our visitors comfortable enough to venture into unknown territory and challenged enough to be boldly creative.

Our research with typical *Spun* visitors and co-creators suggests that the more **authentic self-expression** was involved in their experiences, the deeper and more lasting the impact. Future work needs to focus on refining our understanding of the various types of authentic self-expression, which may range from contributing to the creation of a work of art that will become a part of the DAM collection to conversing with others about personal experiences.

An Invitation to Co-create

In the process of sharing our reflections and discoveries with colleagues at the DAM we've been nourished by a spirit of enthusiasm and a creative frame of mind that is contagious. It is our hope that now our readers will "drink the Kool-aid" and pass it on to others who have a yearning to feature the creativity in artists in order to inspire creativity in everyone.

We invite museum colleagues everywhere to join us in this investigation of the role of art museums in fostering creativity. Together, let's broaden the circle of investigation and deepen our collective understanding of the powerful ways that art museums can tap into the human capacity for creativity. Let's explore creative ways to advance our practice, contribute to research-based knowledge, and make a difference in people's lives by celebrating, understanding, and stimulating creativity. To continue the dialogue, please contact any of us:

- Heather Nielsen, hnielsen@denverartmuseum.org
- Daryl Fischer, daryl@musynergyconsulting.com
- Mary Ellen Munley, Maryellen@mem-and-associates.com

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In this institution-wide engagement with creativity, DAM staff played an integral role in producing eleven exhibitions and 321 programs. It was an immensely collaborative effort to advance our thinking around creativity in an art museum from listening to visitors' responses. Therefore, we thank all **DAM staff** members, especially the 18 people who participated in the Creativity Task Force and Education Core Group.

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Katie Ross, Associate Director, Marketing

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Supporting Documents

The following materials associated with this report are available by clicking the links.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Art Museum as Creativity Platform, Prepared for the Denver Art Museum Creativity Task Force, Munley, M.E. and Rossiter, C., 2013

FINDING DOCUMENTS

Focus Group Findings

On-site Visitor Findings

Co-Creator Findings

Online Survey Findings

TECHNICAL REVIEW

Focus Group Discussion Guides

Focus Group Participants Spread Sheet

Interview Discussion Guides

Interviewee Spread Sheet

Survey Instrument

End Notes

- i Coined by evaluation consultant Michael Quinn Patton, developmental evaluation differs from more conventional research agenda, which are divided into discrete stages: front-end, formative, and summative.
- ii Kelley, D. (2012) Build your creative confidence. A TED talk. Retrieved on Feb. 21, 2013 from: www.ted.com/david_kelley_how_to_build_your_creative_confidence.html.
- iii Csikszentmihaly, M. (1999) Implication of a systems perspective for the study of creativity. In R.J. Sternberg, (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity*. (p. 312) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- iv Dacey, J.S., Lennon, K. & Fiore, L.B. (1990). *Understanding creativity: The interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- v Munley, M.E. & Rossiter, C. (2013) *An Art Museum as a Platform for Creativity: A Review of the Literature*. Prepared for the Denver Art Museum Creativity Task Force. p. 8.
- vi Munley, M.E. & Rossiter, C. (2013) *An Art Museum as a Platform for Creativity: A Review of the Literature*. Prepared for the Denver Art Museum Creativity Task Force. p. 17.
- vii deBono, E. (1973) *Lateral Thinking: Creativity step by step*. NY: Harper.
- viii Twohill, L. "The Curious Case of Creativity." *Think Quarterly*. Retrieved Jan. 31, 2013, from: <http://wwwthinkwithgoogle.co-uk/quarterly/creativity/the-curious-case-of-creativity.html>