

THE CENTER FOR  
ART AND SOCIAL  
ENGAGEMENT

COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART

# CASE AUDIENCE PANEL REPORT

SUMMER 2019



Produced by:  
Audience Focus  
November 2019

# BACKGROUND & CONTEXT



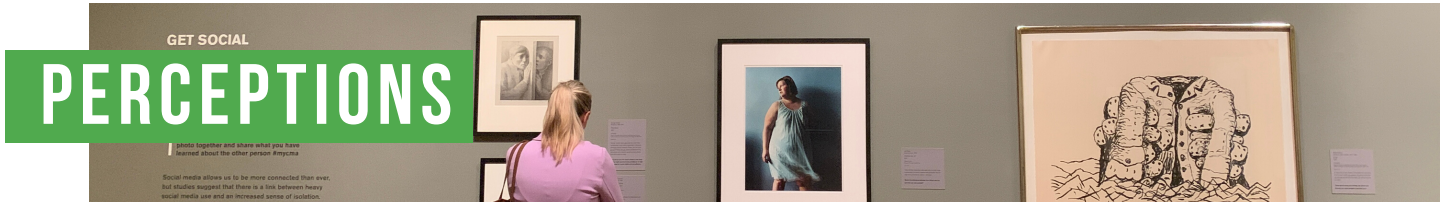
In 2018, the Columbus Museum of Art (CMA) received an IMLS Museums of America grant to launch the Center for Art and Social Engagement (CASE). CASE fosters nuanced consideration of complex social issues through engagement with art, artists, and one another.

## EVALUATION FOCUS

The purpose of this evaluation was to hear from diverse voices in the community about the further development and implementation of CASE, receive critical feedback and suggestions as a way to make improvements to the overall project and activities, and begin the process of measuring the success and impact of CASE on individuals and communities. Audience Focus conducted four audience panels in July of 2019. Participants were given time to explore CASE before discussing their experience and engaging in reflective writing activities. A total of 33 people participated in the study.

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are panel participants' initial reactions to the first installation of CASE?
- 2 What are panel participants' perceptions of the overall approach taken in CASE? What is working well and what would they do differently?
- 3 What are their perceptions of specific interpretive choices in CASE, namely the question prompts and different Connectors? What is working well and what would they do differently?



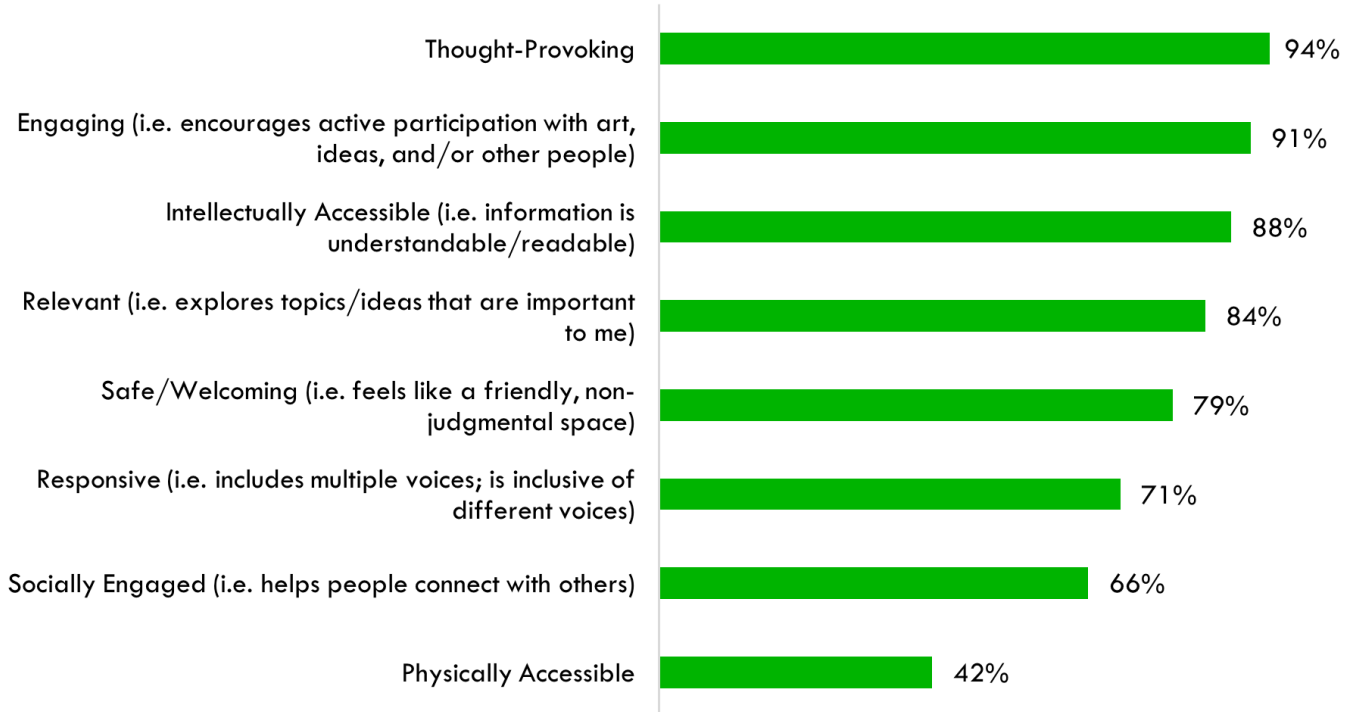
Participants perceive the current iteration of CASE as...

## PROVOKING, PROVOCATIVE, & RELEVANT

Participants believe CASE encourages them to think deeply about complex social issues and make connections between the themes presented in CASE and their own lives. Participants also see CASE as an intentionally provocative and inspiring gallery that veers from traditional galleries in that it explores relevant, complex topics using a very “bold” approach. Many participants say they appreciate and/or are inspired by the risk CMA is taking in addressing the topics in CASE, which they believe are “necessary” and “relevant.”

**"I think it's really nice to see the museum push the boundaries of what museums conventionally believe."**

**Figure 1.** Distribution of participants who **agreed** or **strongly agreed** with the following descriptions of CASE



Some participants **suggest improving physical accessibility in CASE**, including expanding the size of the gallery and/or arranging the gallery to provide better access for wheelchairs and improving the lighting and color for those with visual impairments.

# PERCEPTIONS

**When asked how they feel in CASE, some participants say they experience conflicting emotions at the same time.**

For example, some mention feeling connected and isolated, or sad and hopeful simultaneously. Some participants, especially those who self-identify as “introverts” say they feel anxious or awkward about socially interacting with others, especially strangers. A few people say they feel overwhelmed as a result of the space having too many things to see, do, and/or consider. Many participants also say they feel proud that CMA is taking the risk in addressing topics like social isolation and alienation and that they feel determined to make positive change in the future.

**Many participants are conflicted as to whether CASE is meeting its goal to stimulate social engagement among visitors.** These partners provided suggestions for improvement. Issues and potential solutions are listed below.

ISSUE	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Feeling unprepared to talk to others, especially strangers, about complex social issues	Include “trigger warnings” about content & suggestions for ways to engage with others; have facilitators in CASE (staff or artists)
Introverted personalities - unsure how to start conversations with others	Acknowledge that it is a challenge; consider ways the design could help create a space that seems more natural for social engagement; have facilitators in CASE (staff or artists); create more “low risk” activities to ease tension
Uncomfortable breaking social norms of art museum visitation where visitors historically have been asked to engage in quiet reflection and not touch anything	Design the space to look less like a traditional gallery to signal to visitors that something other than quiet reflection is supposed to happen in the space; have facilitators in CASE (staff or artists)
Space does not seem to “welcome” social engagement	Expand the size of space; make it stand out from other “traditional” galleries; insert other design functions like music or friendlier seating that invite social interaction

**Table 1.** Issues with Social Engagement and Potential Solutions

# EXHIBIT ASPECTS

## The Community Resource Board, Discussion Guide, and Refugee Stories appear to be the Connectors participants enjoy the most.

Many say they enjoy reading the visitor-generated content provided on the Resource Board, especially comments left by children. Refugee Stories appears to generate the most “ah-ha” moments and those who play it seem highly affected by it – saying it opens their eyes and makes them really think about the lives and experiences of refugees.

## Some participants express confusion about the point of Checkers and/or say they would not play it due to time restrictions.

Feelings are mixed about Get Social – on the one hand, those who play it find it effective in helping them connect with others – on the other hand, many feel uncomfortable playing it due to social anxiety and/or because of where it is located and not wanting to interrupt other visitors’ art viewing experience.

## A majority of participants say they enjoy the question prompts embedded within the wall text.

Most participants say the question prompts help them connect with the art and themes in CASE, and encourage them to consider their own perspectives as well as the perspectives of others. Participants say the invitation to consider their own viewpoints makes them feel like their ideas are valued and that they are active participants in the conversation.



## Participants really seem to enjoy the selection of artworks.

Participants describe how the artworks in CASE stimulate deep thinking and reflection. In particular, the photograph of the two monks chained together and lunch counter painting seem to impact visitors in powerful ways. Beyond that, most participants are able to find one or more artworks that resonate with them personally.



# PERCEIVED IMPACTS

Participants agree that CASE creates...

## EMPATHETIC THINKING AND FEELING.

As a result of their experience in CASE, participants say they **feel compassionate, try to imagine how other people think or feel, and try to place themselves in someone else's shoes.**



**Figure 2.** Percentage of participants who "agreed" and "strongly agreed" that their experience in CASE impacted them in the following ways.

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



The Columbus Museum of Art is deeply grateful for the participation and collaboration of the 33 community thought partners who contributed to the evaluation study.

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