

What Do You Think of That?

MUSEUM
STAFFERS
BLOG ABOUT
MUSEUMS

BY LYNN GRANT


MOST OF US who work in museums usually entered the field because of a love for museums.

One of the unfortunate occupational hazards, however, is that, after working in a museum, one's museum-going experiences are permanently affected. I first became aware of this as a conservation student in London when I vis-

ited the Royal Academy to see a major exhibit with a classmate. While the rest of the visitors clustered around the periphery of the room, admiring the magnificent paintings on the walls, there we were—in the middle of the room—looking at and discussing the air-handling unit—the device that controlled humidity and temperature in the galleries. It was a sobering moment.

Since then I have become reconciled to my split personality as a museum-goer—one side enjoying the art and artifacts presented in their scholarly or artistic context and my alter ego critiquing the design elements, the case construction, the mounts, the lighting, and the labeling. That side of me notices the most arcane details. For example, during the Matisse exhibit years ago at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), I remember pointing out to a colleague how one lender obviously had special requirements in their loan contract with the MoMA since only these works of art had raised plinths in front of them that prevented visitors from approaching too closely.

A benefit of this preoccupation occurs when one shares these experiences with colleagues: “Oh, I saw something like that and it really did not work” or “That museum had a really great idea for interactive displays—maybe we could adapt it for our upcoming exhibit.” Until recently, this sharing has been catch-as-catch-can, but after a recent trip to England I decided

to take advantage of current technology and communicate more broadly what I had seen by setting up an internet blog devoted to museum ideas. It is my hope that my Penn Museum colleagues will participate, adding their impressions—positive or negative—from visits to other institutions. To view the blog *At Other Museums*, visit <http://pennmuseumstaff.blogspot.com/>. I have already learned that “if you build it, they will blog.” 

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The British Museum has transformed the former King's Library into a period-appropriate homage to the founding of its collection.



The interesting use of interactive audio commentary at the Wellcome Collection impressed me.