The opening of the art museum was extremely successful in breaking the stereotypical atmosphere of distanced, passive viewing. The general noise level was much higher than normal, and not simply because of the musician in the Noel Gallery. He did contribute to the general festive atmosphere, especially as he appealed to the younger college student crowd. However, the night’s defining characteristic was the amount of engagement and interaction visitors had with each other and the art. Groups broke off to socialize and chit-chat, much of the noise coming from discussion. The night became less lively around 7:30 as more people paused to listen and reflect. The cross-gallery subject matter seemed to interest some otherwise disengaged visitors. One college male said, “I’ve got to take my dad, he loves birds!” indicating this gave visitors a point of identification, rather than only abstract art that can more easily intimidate. This audience seemed pretty evenly divided between ethnically diverse young college students and more affluent, less diverse middle- to retirement-aged community members. The music choice reached out to the students, while the more formal feeling of the food etc. appealed to community members. This mix created a space where many different groups could gather. Casual mingling and milling was the order of the evening, though with considerable variation among galleries. The permanent collections, especially the African and Asian galleries were nearly deserted. Even if the intention was to celebrate new exhibits, incorporating some activities in these galleries may have helped engage visitors with more of the museum. This way, they could feel a sense of comfort and interest in their entire institution, rather than just the temporary showings.

I was immediately struck by this woman’s expression, as it is not what I usually expect from a portrait. Both she and
her son look rather lost in thought, almost forlorn, and my thoughts immediately started churning out a story. Adding to this reaction was the Duchess’s apparent young age. She must have had her son, who appears to be around 10 years old, when she was still almost a child herself. Did she have a choice in her marriage? Does she love her husband? I could not help but examine the idea of marriage as a political contract and imagine her emotional state in this painting.

The work is made with oil paint on canvas, depicting an upper-class woman and her son. Their class is evident by their refined clothing: she wears a pristine cream-colored dress and he a sort of jacket with brass buttons. She sits in a chair of some kind, resting her head on her hand and staring at something beyond the painting’s border. She may, in fact, be gazing into space, reacting to the news of the letter in her hand. Her son’s gaze is directed at this letter, which he regards with a face of interest and possible worry. The finish is definitely more smooth and fine than some of the other works in the gallery, such as the more spackle-applied impressionistic works. This gives the piece an overall look of polish, a good compliment to the proper and elegant subject.

It is difficult to say whether this would have been commissioned as a portrait because, again, this is not the most flattering moment in life to remember. It is possible the master of the house desired his wife and son to be painted, or perhaps the artist simply found the concept interesting. It is, though, a good example of art without much utilitarian value and was most likely simply mounted on a wall for display. Compositionally, the woman is very much the focus of the painting. One cannot be sure where the two people are because of the divided background. The left of the painting shows a darkening sky with snippets of grass in the background. However, there are no bars over it to indicate a window view, making the dark interior in the background of the right of the painting rather confusing. They are in an odd transition space between inside and out. Both backgrounds, though the left does have some sunlight indicated, are rather dark, making the brightness of the Duchess’s dress the focal point for the eye.

She diagonally straddles this background transition space
as she rests in her chair, the brightest object of the composition. Her skin and the letter are also nearly white, making her hair the only darker aspect of her person. The artist also uses this light palette for her to indicate shadow, such as her arm over her neck or the folds of her intricate dress. Her beautiful representation potentially gave a different significance to her contemporary artist than it does today. To them, she may have been the picture of romantic and feminine beauty, perhaps made all the more beautiful by her soft and vulnerable gaze. To audiences today though, such as myself, the very nature of womanhood is relevant. As I did, a viewer may wonder how young she was when she had that son, if she wanted to, what it meant to her etc.

*Who and what do you see in this painting? What do you notice? How does this woman look? What about the boy with her? How is he related to her? Now know that the title is The Duchess of Gordon and her Son. Does this change what you think about them?

*Can you describe what their daily lives might be like? Where do these people live? What colors or objects in the painting make you think this? What is that paper in her hand? A letter? What does it say? What is she thinking about it?

*Why might the artist have painted this? Was it commissioned as a portrait? Was it imagined? Does it remind you of anything?

*How does this painting make you feel? What about the content evokes this emotion? What about the form? Are their aspects of the composition or color palette that make you feel a certain way?

Keywords:

Object Guide: Vanessa Bordo
ARTS 299
February 17, 2009
Object Guide

George Romney
England, 1734–1802
Jane, Duchess of Gordon and Her Son George, First Marquis of Huntley, 1778
Oil on canvas
24 3/4 x 20 inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Merle J. Trees, 1940–1–6

This double portrait features Jane, Duchess of Gordon, and her eldest son George. The boy stands behind his mother, who is slouched rather casually in a richly decorated chair. This more informal style of portraiture was becoming popular in late Eighteenth-century Britain and opposes the stiff, head-on images of the earlier portrait tradition. The piece is almost conversational, showing the two subjects captured in a moment of emotion. Therefore, the expressive narrative is very important for the couple. Jane is gazing pensively beyond the oil-painted canvas, her head propped up with her hand. She holds a piece of paper, perhaps the cause of her thoughtful expression. She is extremely pale, a fact that is augmented by her cream-colored dress. This both enhances her beauty according to the feminine ideal of Romney’s time and illustrates her high class in society. The richness of her dress, furnishings, and jewelry also reveal her wealth. The Duchess of Gordon was a very prominent member of British society and lived from 1749 to 1812. She was considered a very witty, intelligent, and attractive woman. Romney captures this depth of character and captivating beauty, particularly in his habit of including more detail and care in facial features that in the rest of his portraits. Her face appears simultaneously vulnerable, forlorn, and romantic, standing out against the rest of the work. The broader brush-strokes of the Duchess’s dress, for example, show this contrast. Other elements, such as the sweeping diagonal line of the Duchess’s body create grandeur appropriate to her stature. This corner-to-corner movement is highlighted by the fact that the Duchess is the brightest object in the painting. The folds of her pristine garment seem to almost gleam and are set-off by the dark background on one side and her son’s brown
jacket on the other. George Romney was born in England in 1734 and lived until 1802. He originally hoped to paint history scenes, but was always much more popular as a painter of portraits. He is especially well known for his portraits of wealthy women, some noting that his life’s work reads as a veritable “who’s who” of the British upper class. Portraiture was extremely important as a British art form and, along with landscape, characterized the national art world for many years. Romney was a great rival of more expensive and well-known painters, like the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds. Romney refused to exhibit there and instead made his name by painting such women as the Duchess. He worked most often on commission, as he did for this portrait of mother and son.

Bibliography


Who and what do you see in this painting? What do you notice?
I notice a woman and a little boy. He’s standing behind her, and she is sitting down.
How does that woman look? What about the boy with her?
How is he related to her?
The woman looks a little sad, and probably like she is rich. How do you know this? She is wearing a very fancy dress and has pearls in her hair. She looks very clean and pale like she has not been outside working to earn her money. Her chair is covered in a rich, plush material and even the little boy is dressed-up. He looks a little too old to be her son, but they seem close together in the painting, so they are probably related. Maybe they are brother and sister.
Now I’ll tell you that the title is The Duchess of Gordon and her Son. Does this change what you think about them?
Well now we know she is a Duchess, so we were right about her being wealthy. She probably has servants or other people to help her with her dress, which explains why it is so beautiful and pristine. She looks very young to have a son that age: she looks older than my mom. Maybe she got married when she was very young too. Perhaps she did not even have a choice. She looks comfortable in that house though, so she must be important in society.
Where do these people live?
They probably live in a big house, somewhere in the West. Why do you say that? The sky looks dark outside and the trees do not look tropical at all. Their clothes and style of dressing looks European, and probably somewhere in the North because they are wearing long sleeves and the Duchess has a shawl like it is a little cold. Maybe it could be England. Can you describe what their daily lives might be like? I imagine that the Duchess reads in her garden and has tea with other ladies in very fancy dresses. What about that piece of paper in her hand? What is it? I think it is a drawing, or maybe a note from someone. What do you think it says? It does not seem like good news because she looks thoughtful and possibly worried. Maybe it is private too because her son is looking at it but she is not showing him.
Why might the artist have painted this? Did someone ask him to or was it imagined?
I think the artist imagined the scene because it looks so
sad and emotional. It isn’t a very flattering way for a real person to be remembered. Does anyone else have a different opinion? I think the artist painted it just to look nice and be hung in the Duchess’s home. It is not like a painted bowl that can be used for anything but being looked at. So you think that the artist was asked to paint the picture? Let me tell you that the artist’s name was George Romney and he lived about 250 years ago. He painted many pictures of rich women in Britain.

How does this painting make you feel? I feel confused. You said the artist worked because men would ask them to paint portraits of their families. Why would he want to paint a moment like this? Why wouldn’t he paint them laughing together? Maybe he wanted to show an image that was more like real life? Do you have any other emotions after looking at this painting? I feel sad for the woman because she does not seem to have much power to change whatever the sad situation is. Why do you say she is powerless? Are there certain colors that make you (sad, thoughtful, curious, confused…)? Is there something in the story we just talked about that makes you feel that way? She is slouching in her chair and gazing off into the distance, not jumping up to take any action. The dark clouds coming in on the left side of the painting seem to hint that something bad is coming, like the brightness of the Duchess cannot last.

Great, thank you for your comments. I hope you all enjoyed learning about Romney’s The Duchess of Gordon and her Son.

Tour Stop: Vanessa Bordo
ARTS 299
February 23, 2009

Tour Stop
Overview: Students will engage in discussion about Jane, Duchess of Gordon and Her Son George, First Marquis of Huntley and, after we define the concept of a portrait, break up into pairs and draw portraits of each other.

George Romney
England, 1734–1802
Jane, Duchess of Gordon and Her Son George, First
Marquis of Huntley, 1778
Oil on canvas
24 3/4 x 20 inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Merle J. Trees, 1940–1–6

Supplies: One clipboard and one sheet of white paper per student. Selection of #2 and colored pencils. If the students are too old to sit on the floor, we will use the folding stools.

Procedure:
1. Questions: Who and what do you see in this painting? What do you notice? How does that woman look? What about the boy with her? How is he related to her? How do you know this? Now I’ll tell you that the title is The Duchess of Gordon and her Son. Does this change what you think about them? Where do these people live? Why do you say that? Can you describe what their daily lives might be like? What about that piece of paper in her hand? What is it? What do you think it says? Why might the artist have painted this? Did someone ask him to or was it imagined? Does anyone else have a different opinion? So you think that the artist was asked to paint the picture? Let me tell you that the artist’s name was George Romney and he lived about 250 years ago. He painted many pictures of rich women in Britain. How does this painting make you feel? Do you have any other emotions after looking at this painting? Are there certain colors that make you (sad, thoughtful, curious, confused⋯)? Is there something in the story we just talked about that makes you feel that way? Great, thank you for your comments. I hope you all enjoyed learning about Romney’s The Duchess of Gordon and her Son.

2. Intro to activity: We talked a lot about why this painting was made and decided it is a portrait of the woman and child. A portrait is a picture of someone that captures both who they are and what they look like. Please pick a partner and draw a portrait of them. Pay special attention to how they look, how they feel, what they are wearing, and any other clues you can see about who they are, just like we
saw in the painting of the Duchess.
3. Activity: Docent may divide students up into pairs if the teacher thinks it better to break up certain students. The activity may be easier though, in really capturing the essence of their partner rather than just a “picture” of them, if they know their partner a little. If there is an uneven number, set up a group of three. Pass out the materials to students, give them time to complete a relatively brief sketch of their partner, and walk around to answer questions or help students that are stuck.
4. Reconvene: Ask for a few volunteers to introduce their partner and their portrait. Ask why they chose to show their partner doing a certain activity, wearing a certain item of clothing, etc. How is their portrait more than just a “picture”? What does it tell us about their partner? Thank them for volunteering and tell all the students they may keep their portraits or give them to their partner.

Audience Study – Kids@Krannert:
Vanessa Bordo
ARTS 299
March 3, 2009
Audience Study–February 28th Kids @ Krannert
The February 28th Kids @ Krannert event, from 10am–12pm, took the form of a community arts festival in a museum setting. One of the most notable qualities was the breaking down of typical museum stereotypes. Though guards made sure children were not unsafe and did not touch the art, the noise level from bird calls, crying and laughing children, and chatting parents made the space much more casual than the gallery setting could have felt. The activities were geared towards children, with simple crafts and prizes awarded. Most attendees appeared to be families of one or two parents and children 5–10 from the community. They responded that they had received info from fliers brought home from their children’s schools. Aside from a few couples that seemed to have stumbled in to the event expecting a regular afternoon at the museum, most families came to the galleries with the specific intent of attending the event. The families also seemed to be closer to the middle or working classes than the audience of an event like the museum opening. One mother even remarked that her attendance was greatly influenced by
the fact that Kids @ Krannert provided a bit of free entertainment for her two little girls. Many of the families did not appear to be particularly knowledgeable of the art world, having not visited many art museums in the past year (if any). However, everyone seemed very much at ease and enjoying the festival-like atmosphere; there was no pressure to be “of the art world” while at the event. Though the event was focused on children’s activities, an effort was made by the staff to appeal to a wide range of ages. At the Bird Call activity for example, the youngest toddlers just listened to the animal sounds and played with stickers, while the bingo game attracted some older children that were engaged in matching all twelve of the potential sound–photo pairs. Therefore, the event was interesting as a family activity, not just one for children. One of my additional questions asked the parents what other family and children’s festivals they had gone to in the past, to see if this kind of activity was a common one for them. The public library and Orpheum Science museum have evidently hosted similar events encouraging families to go out into the community and interact together. I specifically wanted to know what the adults were able to find engaging in the event, perhaps something that these other community festivals could not offer. One parent responded that he felt secure enough about the surroundings to leave his children while they were engaged with an activity to view some of the other artwork, like the Warhol, not featured for the kids activities. All of the parents commented on enjoying the other artwork the museum offers, such as the Renaissance collections. In fact, one parent expressed a desired to see even more exhibits, to have the museum more “full of art,” as she put it. Part of the beauty of the event seemed to be its versatility of engagement, satisfying three year olds with stickers and frazzled parents with some quiet artistic observation. It was a good transition to bring new audiences to the museum in a non-threatening way, as well as reach many age–levels and demographics at once. Hopefully, Kids @ Krannert inspired some children and families to become more engaged with art and the opportunities in their community.
Student Audience Development
Though the five participants interviewed varied in major, sex, age, and race, the main issue across the board was a lack of information about the museum. The two males interviewed had never been to the museum at all, one saying, “I only vaguely know it exists” and the other “Is KAM the same as Spurlock?” The three females were not studying art–related fields, but did seem to have more interest in the institution. They had all been to the museum, but usually just for class. Two students were aware of the building initially because of a course held on the premises, not because of any Krannert events. In fact, one of the bonus questions was “can you suggest any possible events to attract more students?” and many participants responded with events that do already exist. Free classes, discusses, workshops etc were all offered as possibilities to draw university students to the museum. When told that these opportunities already exist, all of the participants were surprised.
As a follow-up then, they were then asked how they could be better informed of these events. Again, suggestions made were frequently media that already exist on some level, like fliers and facebook. The reach of these seemed to be the problem though, so perhaps they could be better utilized (or perhaps just in a larger capacity) to inform students of KAM activities. Other suggestions included incorporating more student artwork into the space. One student commented on the lack of student artwork in a campus with such a strong art and design program, while another desired to see more workshops to encourage those students not majoring art to be able to participate in hands–on art creation. This lack of engagement with the space was remarked upon numerous times, especially by the three students who had visited the museum.
The two males commented upon the general “elite” nature museums can have and the three females confirmed this feeling at KAM. They mentioned that it felt “cold,” “empty,” and “quiet,” and more than one participant called attention to the guards. They were called “hovering”
by one, discouraging interaction with the art because the visitor felt afraid of doing anything wrong. Another student said, “tell the guards to be nicer!” because she had a backpack, but no way to drop it off at the front door or knowledge it was not allowed, and was reprimanded. Students commented that the museum consequently felt closed off and less inviting than they were expecting because it is on a university campus. Everyone did seem excited by the possibility of these free events (the males advocating free food too) though and would like to attend them should they receive more information. Hopefully events like “Art After Hours” can begin this process.

Audio Guide Script: Vanessa Bordo and Deborah Shub
ARTS 299

Audio Guide: Utsusemi Screen in the Asian Gallery

Welcome to the Asian Gallery of the Krannert Art Museum. We are going to take a look at the Japanese screens, and we will discuss the left most screen of the pair.

This six-panel Japanese screen depicts a scene from the Tale of Genji, a work considered to be the first novel ever written. The screen was painted during the 17th century by an unknown artist from the School of Iwasa Matabei.

Prince Genji was a son of a Japanese emperor during the Heian period, which lasted from the late 8th to late 12th centuries. This story details the majority of Genji’s life, but this screen focuses on part of the third chapter “Utsusemi.” It utilizes Japanese tankas or poems that describe the different scenes.

Unlike Western traditions, viewers “read” these panels from right to left. The three panels on the right illustrate Genji’s servant party waiting outside Utsusemi’s mansion. If you move to your left, you see Genji crouching, aided by Utsusemi’s younger brother. They are spying on Utsusemi and her friend who are depicted in the last panel, where you see two females sitting in front of a low table that looks like a board game. They are playing a strategic game
called Go.

You may notice the roof is removed from the scene. This helps to display a bird’s eye view of what is happening inside. This angle puts viewers in the position of spying upon these scenes, just as Genji is spying upon Utsusemi.

The story told by the screen stops there, but in the novel, Utsusemi senses Genji watching her and flees, leaving her outer robe behind. When Genji finds her gown, he writes a poem about it, comparing her gown to the empty shell of a locust and thus giving her the name Utsusemi, which literally translates to “Shell of the Locust.” Genji names her this because during the Heian period, naming a person in court society was considered rude, so the female characters were referred to by their clothing.

The style of painting, yamato-e, was characteristic of this time and of the School of Iwasa Matabei. The School of Iwasa Matabei is based on an artist who specialized in historical genre scenes or scenes from everyday life. According to this style, the subjects are given dashes for eyes and hooks for noses.

Japanese folding screens (known as byobu, or “protection from the wind”) became very popular and distinctive in the 17th century. These screens not only served the aesthetic functions of settings for special events, but provided practical functions as room partitions and moveable walls. You can see examples of this in the first panel where the screens are depicted in blue.

Thank you for listening to our discussion of the Utsusemi screen from the Tale of Genji. This has been Vanessa Bordo and Deborah Shub. Please feel free to wander through the rest of the galleries.
from 7–11pm at the Krannert Art Museum. It was designed as a classier alternative to another museum event, Artzilla. Both events were intended to encourage college students to attend the museum and interact with the art in an engaging and unique way. From a demographic perspective, the event fulfilled its aims, as almost everyone appeared to be either in college or lower twenties. While I did not attend an Artzilla, from the pictures, it appeared that it was perhaps more successful in linking the activities to the art itself. As with Kids@Krannert, activities there were designed to at least loosely relate to the exhibits. A main issue with Art After Hours appeared to be this disconnect. Every research participant cited at least one of the activities of the night, such as the fashion show or musician’s performance, as their favorite part, without mentioning the art. The huge popularity of the fashion show, with over 300 attendees, indicates that it was the main draw. These attendees did not appear to connect with the art in the space. One student commented that she “glanced” at the art in the room where she sat for the show, and only “on her way out.” This theme appeared to be consistent as very few students actually stayed longer than a few minutes after the show, with the exception of a group that listened to the musician. The mass exodus of students left the galleries feeling very empty, as if everyone came to watch the show and forgot completely about the space they were visiting. In terms of an event to encourage learning about art then, Art After Hours requires a little rethinking. However, as an event to just get people into the doors of the museum and become aware of KAM’s existence, perhaps it could be considered a success. None of the students interviewed were regular museum goers, some not ever having visited the art museum before. They all also had a positive impression of the event and said they would attend a similar one in the future. Its “classy” nature appears to be part of its positive impression, as they all remarked that that was part of what made the event so fun. The main issue then appears to be a finding a clear vision for the event’s intended purpose. Holding various events in KAM and using the space almost as a rental party space (which was even suggested by one of the students) is one
idea. However, totally separate from that is the concept of an event that Kids@Krannert or Artzilla, in which students are encouraged to participant in activities that are based on the art around them. The huge disconnect with the art, though disturbing to the event organizers, did not appear to bother the event attendees, who all greatly enjoyed themselves. Perhaps then, a reconsideration of the aims of the event is in order. Ideally, a event that is highly attended, greatly enjoyed, and that also encourages real interaction or engagement with the art can be developed.

Event Response – Vanessa Bordo, ARTS 299, April 21, 2009

The April 16th SPEAK café at the Krannert Art Museum was one episode in a series of open mic nights co-sponsored by the UIUC African American Studies, the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, and 40 North. Not surprisingly then, the audience was generally African American and young. However, there appeared to be a group of high school students from Rantoul in attendance, some of which were more demographically diverse. The high school students were the youngest in the audience (with the exception of one twelve year old performer), the rest of the audience being composed of quite a varied range of community members.

SPEAK stands for “Song, Poetry, Expression, Art, and Knowledge,” a wide mix of concepts that was present in the performances. Some were classic hip-hop, some more vulnerable free-verse poetry, but everyone seemed relatively comfortable sharing their artistic expression in the casual space of the Palette Café. This most likely had a lot to do with the emcee of the event, who interacted both with audience and performers. He set a precedent of no typical “fourth wall,” that is to say the boundary between stage and audience was quite fuzzy. Performers would talk back and forth with friends in the audience, start clapping, apologize for a missed word, and generally connect with those around them.

However, they did not connect with the art of the museum, as KAM functioned purely as a venue. I did not see any guests of SPEAK in the galleries, with the exception of one very nervous teenage performer who was using the Noel
Gallery to pace back and forth before he was called to the mic. This brings us back to the same dilemma: is this lack of interaction a negative thing or is the simple fact that these people, many of whom may not have attended the museum otherwise, enjoyed a casual, fun night at KAM enough to call the event a success?

Final Paper: Vanessa Bordo
ARTS 299
May 04, 2009
Making a University Art Museum “Relevant” to High School and College Students

As an art museum located on a university campus, as well as within a thriving community, Krannert Art Museum has a unique opportunity to reach youth that is not as easily available to other institutions. However, after a semester of interacting with museum visitors and studying the campus understanding of KAM, it is evident that full advantage is not being taken of this potential benefit. In examining the offerings of Krannert Art Museum, much of the educational programming appears to be directed at young children. The most popular events, like Kids@Krannert Teens and the Art-to-Go programs are focused to a decidedly young population (Kids & Families). This is certainly a very valuable use of resources and time, as education of the arts at a young age will hopefully instill in the next generation an appreciation and respect for creativity.

However, if this initial interest is inspired in grade school, it must be nurtured continually up through a child’s subsequent years. Teens and young college students are faced with myriad options for the extra curricular time, many of which are “cooler” than going to a museum. Therefore, if programming does not consistently maintain their interest, all the effects of the work done for these children at an early age may fade or disappear completely. Consequently, in order to stay “relevant,” for youth, a word used so frequently by dissatisfied museum visitors, attention to the high school and university student appears to be necessary. This is not to say that there is no programming for teens at Krannert Art Museum. College students have the opportunity to attend lectures, film series, concerts, and
yoga classes, which could also be attended by teens. High school students, though conceivably invited to these events as well, have fewer opportunities. Some local students were in attendance at the April 16th SPEAK café event, an open mic night co-sponsored by the UIUC African American Studies, the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center, and 40 North. High school students from Rantoul and other surrounding communities both read poetry and enjoyed the performances of “Song, Poetry, Expression, Art, and Knowledge” from the audience. However, these events treat the museum as a venue for events rather than the focus of the experience itself. In order to maintain the important relevancy so frequently referred to in audience studies, audiences must engage directly with the art. Therefore, a certain number of teen and youth focused events that more closely interact with the museum and its art would be beneficial. Taking notice of the considerable marketing and educational values of the teen audience, many museums have started to do just this. In fact, some museum educators feel they have reached an “obvious progression in [their] work: to continue to work with these children as they grow into the later phases of their pre-adult lives” (Schwartz). Though still not up to the number of children’s programs, museums here in Illinois, like the Art Institute of Chicago, do have programs in place for teens. Some are classes through which students may earn credit for Chicago Public Schools, while others are after school or weekend workshops. One workshop program takes teens through a tour of the galleries to find inspiration, and then helps them create an animated short using both technology and traditional art materials (Teens). This all day–event directly connects teens to the art on the walls, rather than using it as a backdrop for a concert or, as KAM experienced in Spring 2009, a fashion show. Still, teens appear to be a secondary consideration after very young children. The Art Institute of Chicago has a calendar full of family and children’s programming. In fact, the family events search yields nine pages of results, far more than for teens (Family Events). The museum does attempt to encourage teen patronship with a student admission rate. Krannert Art Museum goes even further though by opening its doors free of charge to everyone. However, as with much of the
student programming at the museum, this gesture of community outreach is lost on throngs of students that are not event aware of KAM’s existence. In interviewing college students at an event created specifically for them, as well as more in-depth in their living environments, a severe lack of awareness of KAM was evident. Some of the research participants responded with such statements as “Is KAM the same as Spurlock?” or “I only vaguely know it exists.” Of the college students that were aware of the art museum, most had initially encountered the building because of class tour or course held in the lecture hall, not because of any Krannert-planned events. This ignorance of events was made even clearer when they were asked about suggested events for the museum that they, as students, would enjoy. Many responded with free classes, workshops, etc., which, in fact, already exist. When given information about the existing events at KAM, they were quite surprised. Many of these issues appear to be tied to preconceived notions that young adults have of art museums in general, including Krannert. They do not expect an art museum to be a fun space with events for their age group. When asked for whom art museums exist, many students said “everyone.” However, when asked who actually goes, many acknowledged the stereotypical older, more affluent, “elite” community member. Especially because of the atmosphere of the museum during the day, when students visit for class, they were surprised that parties do occur in the space. Nearly everyone remarked on the “cold,” “empty,” and “quiet” feeling of the galleries, especially the intimidating manner of the guards. Consequently, no one’s first reaction was to anticipate student-oriented, lively events at KAM.

However, most of the participants did seem to desire a museum that was more “relevant.” This ambiguous term, however, was not well defined by the participants using it. The general feeling was that art can be “inaccessible,” be it modern art that is too abstract, or more traditional paintings that are too old to seem pertinent. The most enthusiastic suggestions involved student work, something that KAM, as a university art museum, has a unique opportunity to include in its exhibits. One participant commented that we have a wonderful art school, yet the
museum has intimidating open spaces that are not filled with any student work. She said that incorporating student work into the museum, and not just the link gallery, might be a good way to connect KAM to the youth of the campus. Another participant suggested having a space in the museum where visitors, not just formal art students, could create art in a casual setting. She said this would increase the level of interaction and “relevance” of what is easily considered a removed and uninteresting place for the elite.

In terms of younger teens, KAM is even more lacking in programming. Conceivably, teens from local high schools could attend events like the film series to be introduced to the museum. However, many of the more engaging events that bring students to the museum for longer periods of time leave out the teen population. Kids@Krannert is successful because events are directly based on the artwork and engage the children in the art. Events like ArtZilla may have functioned in a similar manner. However, teens are not included in either of these large-scale events, especially now that the second event, ArtZilla has been adapted to a classier, more adult atmosphere in Art After Hours. As a high school student then, the potential ways to stay engaged with Krannert Art Museum are rather sparse. The volunteer opportunities that exist, though, are positive. The student volunteers provided from Rantoul High School have been invaluable to the execution of events like Kids@Krannert. However, this takes on an almost professional context for the students, rather than creating an event for them where they can have fun and engage with the art. Many of the aforementioned suggestions for college students could also be applicable to high school teens. Studio space especially, or an area where teens can observe work, become inspired, and then create pieces themselves, would be fantastic. In the American educational system, art classes generally stop by high school, if they are offered at all. Therefore, some teens may never have the opportunity to express themselves in a creative manner. This could be compensated for with an artistically nonjudgmental space, perhaps in the basement of KAM to encourage visitation to the lower level.

A museum in Arizona has experimented with this idea,
creating an event called “young@art” (Computer Generation). The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art operates a gallery in the local performing arts center that is “devoted to the creative work by youth.” It is a great way for young artists to feel truly validated by a professional organization. The themes of the exhibits are also aimed towards teens to be accessible. January 24–April 29, for example, was “Computer Generation: High School Art in the Digital Age.” In displaying young artists’ work in such a positive way, it could also encourage more interaction and interest about the museum and the concept of art itself. The Krannert Art Museum Link Gallery space operates similarly, but for university art students. Creating a space for high school students would help the museum education staff reach teens, drawing them to the museum for viewings of friends work, perhaps then leading to other activities. Allowing university non–FAA students to participate as well might further encourage an “engaged” museum experience, especially if teen/student studio work could be inspired by existing KAM exhibits. Interactive, creative events such as these could be part of the solution to engaging the elusive teen visitor, along with other traditional methods of museum education. These low–pressure, fun situations are also ideal for accommodating varying levels of interest, knowledge, and skill in art. In this way, KAM can strive to follow the ideals of the constructivist museum, that which allows for different types of learning, such as when a visitor can make connections to the familiar and the unfamiliar (Hein 77). Hopefully, by recognizing the need for teen and young adult programming, KAM can take advantage of its unique position as museum located in both a community and on a university campus. Unlike many of its counterparts, Krannert Art Museum has a large pool of students available to educate and can hopefully further develop the interest it generates in young children with tours, events, and other outreach programs. With some more interactive and engaging program, KAM should be able to fully realize its potential.

“Computer Generation: High School Art in the Digital Age.” SMoCA’s Young @ Art Gallery. 2009. Scottsdale Center for
the Arts. 05 Mar. 2009.