I went to the Krannert Art Museum opening from about 6:30pm to 7:30pm on Thursday night, and was surprised at how many people were there. The majority of visitors were college students, especially from the School of Art and Design, but many families and groups of adults, too. There was a very social atmosphere to this opening, with nearly everyone talking, roaming through the museum, and the live music seemed to make everyone more comfortable to chat, especially about the artwork. From what I saw, groups would stand in front of a wall of pieces for about thirty seconds then move on. I thought it was interesting that, especially in the larger galleries, no one would stand any closer to the art than about three to five feet away, except for the children visiting the museum. I saw multiple kids fun right up to everything, especially the larger photographs for the Mylayne show, and look closely to see any small details that may have been missed from farther away. I was also happy to see the kids talking to their parents about what they were viewing and asking many questions about the art. The only exhibit that was not as crowded, and seemed to confuse visitors, was the WOW Design. Maybe it was just because the room was harder for casual visitors to see from the entrance, but in my opinion, the content was a bit too strange for some. I actually didn’t expect to see all of the wax pieces and machine, instead I thought I was going to see real shoes or at least prototypes of them. This emphasis on the design process was one that clearly interested those who were familiar with it, such as Industrial Design majors and faculty, but for the average visitor, especially ones with children, it may have been too much work to actively look and read the artist statement rather than passively look at photographs or paintings.

The painting I chose to explore was Christ After the Flagellation by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. It is oil on canvas from seventeenth-century Spain, measuring over four feet by four and a half feet. The simple composition depicts Christ after his flagellation. One figure is seen in the foreground of the picture with no definitive background space except for darkness and a pillar on the right hand side. The ground he is kneeling on looks like dirt or a dirty
concrete-like surface, and he is holding two pieces of fabric, one colored brown and the other a whitish-gray. Christ looks intent in his focus on these two cloths, not acknowledging the viewers of this painting observing him. This man has long, messy, wavy hair and a beard. He is only wearing a cloth that is very similar to the ones he is holding in his hands, except this one is white. His body is strongly lit from a light source that is coming from the upper left area outside of the picture plane, almost in the viewer’s space. This light emphasizes Christ’s muscular body while not giving him any heroic characteristics. The idea of Christ the man, not the divine, is emphasized by the naturalism of the body, limited color palette, and simple special construction of the composition. The careful description of anatomy most likely was created through a careful buildup of light and dark tones to enhance the luminosity of the flesh. There is a good chance the artist hired a model to pose for him during painting, since the body is quite naturalistic and has no places of awkwardness in the form. This painting caught my eye in the museum due to its size and dramatic composition. It seems to be a reflective piece that evokes feelings of meditation yet distress. I immediately noticed how different Christ After the Flagellation was from other religious images that often remove any human qualities from Christ. Although I am not particularly attracted to religious scenes, I enjoy the simple drama of this piece. The size of this painting makes me believe that a common citizen of the seventeenth century did not commission it. Possibly the owner was a wealthier man that was an influential member of the Church whose living space would be visited often by other people of faith. The subject matter fits in well with that assumption, since the human qualities of Christ are emphasized, the painting can connect with people in a way other religious imagery cannot. It sends a message that the trials of the partially human Christ were extremely difficult, but able to be endured with a faith in God. This sends a message to believers that they too can live like Jesus and get through any problems they may experience on Earth with a faith in God that will eventually lead them to salvation in Heaven. Even today, this message remains consistent due to the unchanging nature of the teachings of the Church.
Question Set 1

1. What do you think Christ is doing with the cloths?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to paint some of the cloths white, and the other brown?
3. Where did the cloths come from?

Question Set 2

1. Why do you think the artist chose to make the background so dark?
2. Based on what you can see in the background, where do you think Christ is?
3. Do you think this is an interpretation of what the event would actually look like, or is the artist creating an imaginary world/narrative? Why? (based on what you see in the painting)

Question Set 3

1. Why do you think the lighting on Christ’s body is so dramatic?
2. Why is Christ kneeling on the ground? Not wearing clothing?
3. What do you think Christ is thinking about/feeling in this painting?

Keywords:

Object Guide: Bartolome Esteban Murillo
Spanish, 1617–1682
Christ After the Flagellation, 17th Century
Oil on Canvas
Gift of Ellnora D. Krannert 1960–4–1

Object Description:

This simple composition depicts Christ after his flagellation. Here he is seen in the foreground of
picture with no definitive background space except for darkness and a pillar on the right hand side. The ground he is kneeling on looks like dirt or a dirty stone surface, and he is intently focusing on the two pieces of fabric he is holding, not acknowledging the viewer’s presence. His body is strongly lit from a source that is coming from the upper left area outside of the picture plane, almost in the viewer’s space. This light emphasizes Christ’s muscular body illuminated in the dark space while not giving him heroic characteristics. The idea of Christ the man, not the divine, is emphasized by the naturalism of the body, limited color palette, and simple spatial construction of the composition.

The careful description of anatomy was created through a layering of light and dark tones to enhance luminosity of the flesh. Likely the artist hired a model to pose for him during painting, since the body is quite naturalistic and has no places of awkwardness in the form.

Although this piece is of larger size and dramatic composition, it is a reflective and evokes feelings of meditation yet distress. The human qualities of Christ are emphasized letting the painting connect with people in a way other religious imagery cannot. It sends a message that the trials of the partially human Christ were extremely difficult but able to be endured with a faith in God. This sends a message to believers that they too can bear any problems they may experience with the faith that will eventually lead them to salvation in Heaven.

Context:
Bartolome Esteban Murillo was a very famous painter of portraits and religious scenes, so Christ After the Flagellation is a piece typical of the type of work by this artist. The chiaroscuro, the intense lights and darks seen here, is not unique to Murillo but rather influenced by other artists that used extreme light and shadow to enhance the drama of scenes.

This painting was once owned by King Louis Phillipe of France, and hung in the Louvre before the Revolution of 1848. Through the painting Louis Phillipe was able to express his devotion through ownership of a scene from the Bible while displaying this piety to anyone visiting his court. Murillo’s fame also is important to the royal
ownership of this piece: the king could showcase his wealth, and therefore power, by possessing paintings from famous artists.

Another version of Christ After the Flagellation was done by the artist in 1665 and is now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston. It may seem strange to some that the same artist would paint the same scene more than once, but the two paintings differ in composition slightly. In the Museum of Fine Arts version, Murillo includes a group of angels standing near Christ, who is in a similar position to the one seen here at the Krannert Art Museum. It is interesting to think about what changes in the way the picture is perceived when it is known that another version of the same painting exists with different imagery.

Bibliography
Works Cited

Annotated Question Plan:
Christ After the Flagellation
Bartolome Esteban Murillo

Question Set 1

1. Based on what you see, do you have any idea who the man in the painting is?
2. What is Christ doing?
3. Can you describe his posture and facial expression?
4. What do you think he is feeling?

Responses Expected: Many children, especially if they are older, should know it is Christ. They should understand that he is hurt and/or upset, and that his body is weak.

Interesting/Relevant Info: Murillo explores the combinations of the divine and human parts of Christ in this image. His posture is weak, his body is lean, and face shows he is worn down, but the luminosity of his skin has much warmth and glow for someone who is so physically drained. Also, a human model most likely posed for this painting to achieve the anatomically correct proportions and description of flesh and muscle tone.

Question Set 2

1. Why do you think the lighting on Christ’s body is so dramatic?
2. Why is Christ kneeling on the ground? Not wearing clothing?
3. What do you think Christ is thinking about/feeling in this painting?

Responses Expected: Many will say the lighting is dramatic to bring attention to Christ since he is the most important part of the picture. They will pick up on the fact that he is upset and physically stressed, but won’t know much about the act of flagellation.

Interesting/Relevant Info: The method of painting the lighting is called chiaroscuro, and was a style used by many painters to increase the drama of a scene to a theatrical level. Also, Christ is kneeling on the ground because this is a scene painted to show him moments after his flagellation, an act of whipping oneself or someone else for religious purposes. In this case, Christ has just been whipped by a group of men.
Question Set 3

1. What do you think Christ is doing with the cloths?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to paint some of the cloths white, and the other brown?
3. Where did the cloths come from?

Responses Expected: The kids will say he is paying a lot of attention to the cloths, and will most likely look at the different colors of the two as being an artist’s choice or that they just happened to be that way since it isn’t unusual to have different color fabrics.

Interesting/Relevant Info: The cloth Christ is holding that appears to be brown was actually painted purple but the hue altered due to the aging of the oil paint. A purple cloth symbolically represents royalty, and the cloth in this painting is supposed to be the royal cloak the prosecutors of Christ used to mock his status as the savior before his crucifixion.

Question Set 4

1. Why do think the artist chose to make the background so dark?
2. Based on what you can see in the background, where do you think Christ is?
3. Do you think this is an interpretation of what the event would actually look like, or is the artist creating an imaginary world/narrative? Why? (based on what you see in the painting)

Responses Expected: The kids might say the background is so dark so the viewer can focus on Jesus, and that they don’t know where he is. Maybe a cave? A dark room
anywhere? Many will not notice the pillar/rope in background, and even if they did, won’t know why it’s there.

Interesting/Relevant Info: Murillo painted this scene to be one that is very personal, a snapshot of an emotional moment Christ was experiencing that is not described in the Bible. Also, notice that ropes are hanging near the pillar in the background and there is red paint scumbled in the ground, both clues to his flagellation (being whipped before his crucifixion)

Tour Stop: Overview: In this activity students will discuss Christ After the Flagellation and then participate in an activity that encourages them to closely observe the painting.

Artwork:

Bartolome Esteban Murillo
Spanish, 1617–1682
Christ After the Flagellation, 17th Century
Oil on Canvas
Gift of Ellnora D. Krannert 1960–4–1

Supplies: Pencils, blank paper to write on, clipboards, and stools (for older students)

Procedure: It would be best to have the children sit around Christ After the Flagellation, close enough so they can see details and not have any of the painting obscured. Give them a minute to sit and observe the object since the gallery activity is very much about seeing. Once they have looked for a moment, ask any of the following questions to facilitate a discussion:

Question Set 1
1. Based on what you see, do you have any idea who the man in the painting is?
2. What is Christ doing?
3. Can you describe his posture and facial expression?
4. What do you think he is feeling?

Question Set 2
1. Why do you think the lighting on Christ’s body is so dramatic?
2. Why is Christ kneeling on the ground? Not wearing clothing?
3. What do you think Christ is thinking about/feeling in this painting?

Question Set 3
1. What do you think Christ is doing with the cloths?
2. Why do you think the artist chose to paint some of the cloths white, and the other brown?
3. Where did the cloths come from?

Question Set 4
1. Why do think the artist chose to make the background so dark?
2. Based on what you can see in the background, where do you think Christ is?
3. Do you think this is an interpretation of what the event would actually look like, or is the artist creating an imaginary world/narrative? Why? (based on what you see in the painting)

The gallery activity for this painting is the Police Description. Imagine the artwork was stolen and the kids must write a description of it for the police.

To start the activity, tell the kids to imagine that they are the detectives of a mystery! Someone just broke into the Krannert Art Museum and stole Christ After the Flagellation! Take a few moments for them to individually write a list with everything they can think of to describe the painting. Try to get as many as you can! After they are finished they can either compare their lists with a partner or share with the entire group, depending on the size of the group, how well they responded to the Question Sets above, etc.
Audience Study – Kids@Krannert:
The Kids at Krannert Event on February 28th focused on the Mylayne and Audobon exhibits, both involving birds. The activities planned were the drawing of live birds in the Link Gallery, origami birds, finding ‘hidden’ birds in the Mylayne photographs, making bird masks and identifying bird calls. Based on the attendance the target audience for the event was approximately 3–8 year olds and their families, but children even older seemed to come too. The demographic was often middle class white or Asian parents or just the mother who were looking for something interactive and fun to do with their kids. It seemed like those who attended Kids at Krannert participated in all of the activities in the museum, but especially enjoyed seeing the live birds in the Link Gallery.

In my observations of the Mylayne exhibit, where actively looking at the works was the point of the exercise, everyone seemed to be quite engaged. Some kids even began to look for the birds in all of the photographs, not just the five planned reserved for the activity. The environment was also quite lively and social, with, unfortunately, many kids so excited that they would run up to the photographs and touch them. That lack of museum etiquette missing from the many sets of families whose children would touch the artwork and not be told that it was wrong was shocking. I always assumed that not touching the art was common knowledge to museum-goers.

Overall I believe Kids at Krannert was a very valuable event for children and their families. It let them come out together to interact in the museum doing creative and educational activities. Some improvements that the audience members I interviewed said could be made was altering the origami because it was a bit too difficult for the younger children, having more museum events for families more often. Their favorite activity overall was seeing the live birds, but one interviewee said some educational material about the birds, like a talk or brochure, would have been a nice addition. Other than that, everyone had a very positive response to the event, which they said was skill and age-appropriate for their
All of the students that I interviewed happened to be seniors at U of I but were in diverse majors: Technical Systems Management, Consumer Economics and Finance, Speech and Hearing Science, Mechanical Engineering, and Media Studies. Of the five interviews, one was done with a group of four friends, while the fifth was a one-on-one. Many of the group interviewees never went to the Krannert Art Museum without being there for a school sponsored activity such as a class or residence hall activity, and were very disinterested in attending events there. I thought it was interesting that although none of them wanted to suggest any events or programs that they would want implemented to get them to go to the museum, they also said they haven’t seen any publicity for it besides articles in the Buzz. From what two of the students remembered about their last visit, the museum did seem to leave a bit of an impression on them. One remembered seeing a big pink painting of an atomic bomb three years ago, and the other commented on Krannert’s bronze sculptures.

The other interview I conducted was with a student that wasn’t necessarily into art and art museums, but was open minded about Krannert. They said they went there for the Artzilla last semester with some friends that heard about the event, and also commented that although they were not a regular, it is nice to go in every once in a while to see what new art pieces were being exhibited. The Noel Gallery was the person’s favorite space because the art seemed more exciting and modern, rather than looking at older paintings that all seem to look the same to those not educated in art.

All of the students said that art museums are made for the public, but it interested me that one student said that to attract more college students to Krannert, the museum should exhibit more traditional, classic art pieces (like figure paintings and landscape). I was surprised because I always thought that these types of art were too boring for those not deeply interested in the subject, but apparently it is more familiar than contemporary art. The traditional painting techniques and scenes can be more easily
appreciated because they are mostly narratives or landscape, and a value judgement can be made based on artist skill and how nice the object looked. There is less to figure out than in contemporary art that often has layered meanings that need to be understood to appreciate the piece.