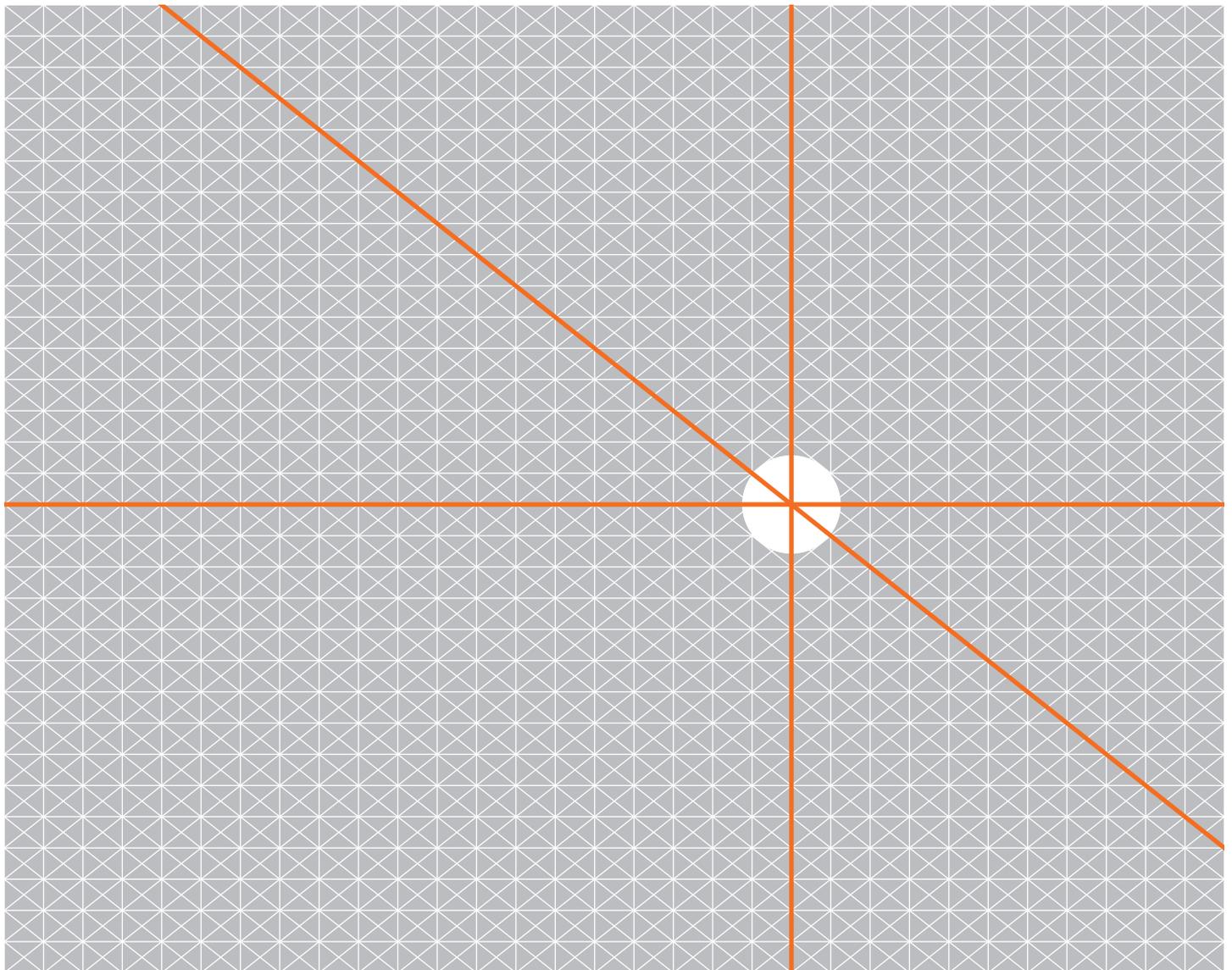


# FRAMEwork

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*Guide for Welcoming Museum Visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

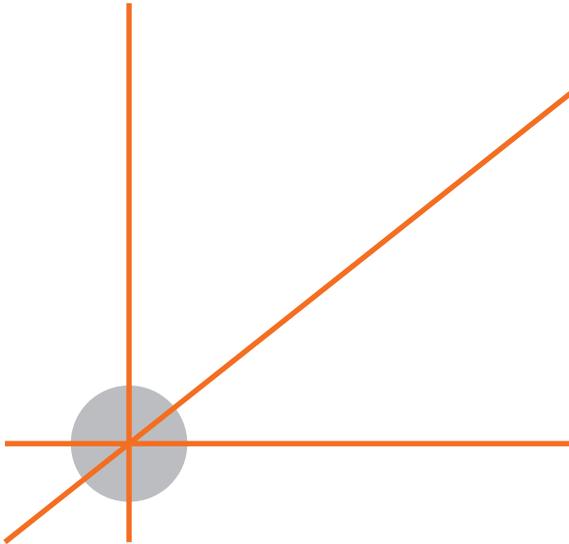
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PALAIS  
BEAUX-ARTS  
LILLE

 MUSÉE DES  
BEAUX-ARTS  
MONTRÉAL

**DMA**  
DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART



# FRAMEwork

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*Guide for Welcoming Museum Visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

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**Participating Museums** Dallas Museum of Art  
[www.dma.org](http://www.dma.org)

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
[www.mbam.qc.ca](http://www.mbam.qc.ca)

Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille  
[www.pba-lille.fr](http://www.pba-lille.fr)

**FRAME** FRENch American Museum Exchange  
[www.framemuseums.org](http://www.framemuseums.org)



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The Dallas Museum of Art, the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, all members of the French American Museum Exchange (FRAME), have been working together to develop a recognized expertise in welcoming people with autism spectrum disorder. In recent years, neuroscience has recognized the therapeutic benefits of artistic experience and cultural practices for autistic audiences. Medical studies have shown that works of art stimulate human emotions, foster empathy and help to develop self-confidence in visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

This publication, which is dedicated to helping other art museums develop programs to welcome people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, launches a series of FRAME initiatives called "FRAMEwork." This document offers practical advice to other museums based on the experience in Dallas, Lille and Montreal. Written in a flexible manner to be adapted to the specificities of other museums, this protocol is likely to evolve with scientific and human research and discoveries.

In compliance with the mission of the French American Museum Exchange, this "FRAMEwork" is a ground-breaking way to promote transatlantic cultural dialogue and to foster the development of innovative and worthwhile programs for museums of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are happy to share our findings with you and all of our global colleagues.

**William Beekman and Anne-Solène Rolland, *Co-Presidents of FRAME***  
**Marguerite d'Aprile Quigley and Emilie Vanhaesebroucke, *Executive Directors of FRAME***





*“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”*

Current Museum Definition, ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, on 24 August 2007<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>



Photo: Petra Hilleke





# INTRODUCTION

## Museums and their missions of inclusivity

The following guide is a compendium of museum-based programs and practices for working with neurodiverse populations. The descriptions and guidelines are rooted in developments by the education departments of three FRAME member-museums. While each museum team has gained expertise in collaborating with and providing programming for visitors with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the authors wish to acknowledge that there is a need for continuing education for themselves and other museum teams with the aim of striving toward best practices.

Museums provide a common ground for human diversity, embracing difference and promoting understanding and respect among people from different communities. As such, they have a distinct responsibility to the public to ensure equitable access to their collections through unique programs and services. In recent years, art museums have become increasingly committed to articulating their social value as agents of inclusion in the cultural sector. Museums continue to be a place where tailored programs can affirm the abilities of visitors with special needs and others who are frequently underserved. While aimed at addressing the unique needs of visitors, including those on the autism spectrum, these programs also benefit the museum. As the museum becomes more accessible, relevant and significant for its audiences, its operations are increasingly supported and sustained by the community. The museum — an inclusive environment that supports lifelong learning — promotes meaningful experiences that reflect the complexity of its artworks and visitors, supports multiple perspectives and builds lasting relationships.

In recent years, the vital role that cultural institutions play as agents of change, inclusion and social cohesion has become all the more significant. Art museums are now increasingly engaged in providing all audiences with equal access to their collection, thus welcoming difference and fostering understanding and respect through programs designed for visitors who have special needs.

As part of their efforts, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) and Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille (PBA) have established programs geared toward people who have autism or individuals with ASD: an underserved population that has historically lacked access to educational and outreach programs in the museum sector. In keeping with FRAME's mission to promote museum collaboration and exchange, as well as the development of innovative educational programs, these institutions now wish to establish an initiative whose aim is not only to share their expertise and knowledge to further develop their programming but, more importantly, collaborate on the creation of a cutting-edge practical guide, an ASD FRAMEwork that may be applied by museums around the world.



## DISCLAIMER AND PREAMBLE

### This FRAMEwork is an evolving document

This guide is intended for museums seeking to develop art-based programming for people with autism spectrum disorder and, more generally, neurodiverse audiences. It is our collective assertion that this work begins with understanding how autism is framed both clinically and culturally, bringing to the fore the challenge and importance of using terminology that bridges these domains. None of the authors identify as being on the autism spectrum. Their expertise is grounded in museum-based practice, program development and the trial and error that comes with opening the doors of the museum a bit wider. It should be noted that all three museums that contributed to the FRAMEwork are fine arts museums, but the tools here could apply to a variety of museums within the FRAME network, regardless of their scale or the nature of their collection.

Autism, from the Greek *autos* or self and the suffix *-ismos* of action or state, is contextualized within the dominant medical model that describes autism as a disorder with various presentations along a spectrum and often characterized in terms of degree of functioning. This model is typically employed in all clinical and educational settings, as well as in everyday language. It is therefore more often viewed as a disorder, a difference, a problem, an illness, a malfunction, a chronic state or a deficiency that requires treatment. This conceptualization can negatively encourage a distinction between neurotypical and neuroatypical individuals, leading to a dichotomy of *othering*, between us and them. At each of our museums, we have attempted to cultivate a culture of inclusion by working with, rather than for, our partners in neurodiversity. As the guide will show, this ever-evolving process calls for a humanist stance, a commitment to learning from our partners in both the community and clinical domains and a love of working with people.

Though the projects we have developed differ among the museums represented here, we have found common ground in our practices. These include our established practices and those we are implementing, such as including people with ASD on committees, piloting projects with people with ASD, consulting parents of children with ASD, teachers and clinical specialists and other museum teams, committing to long-term projects with our community partners, supporting museum-based research, providing training for staff and educating ourselves through literature and conferences.

Our goal for this FRAMEwork is to inspire other museums by our initiatives so they can learn from our experiences and create the content that is best suited to their contexts. We want this to be a living document: we strive to be constantly evolving, changing and learning from our participants and developments in the field. We present our reflections on what has worked for us with the understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all prescription. For a program to be successful, it must respond to the realities in your communities, and you must work with the unique resources and limitations of your institution.

ASD professional day at the PBA de Lille, with the MMFA and DMA, led by Professor Delion/June 18 - 20, 2019





## WHAT IS AUTISM ?

### Definitions and observations

Misunderstanding and misinformation about autism continue to negatively impact the lives of persons on the spectrum and their families. When striving to create museums that are more and more adapted to the sensory needs of people with autism, it is essential to develop an understanding of how autism is framed both clinically and socially. The following paragraphs present current medical definitions and recent changes in terminology that reflect the shift to humanize and depathologize autism spectrum disorder. Our understanding of autism has evolved significantly in recent years, most importantly that it is not an illness but a condition. Museum programs can therefore best address the need for adaptive environments and attitudes and see autism as less a behavioral issue and more as one related to communication. Additionally, autism-related terms have changed, and it should be assumed that the trend will continue as our understanding grows and people's lives are improved.

## Clinical definition

The most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5)*<sup>2</sup> provides the following criteria to evaluate for autism spectrum disorder.

### **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER 299.00 (F84.0) (ADAPTED FROM DSM—5)**

- A. Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts.
- B. Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities.
- C. Symptoms must be present in the early developmental period (but may not become fully manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities or may be masked by learned strategies in later life).
- D. Symptoms cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of current functioning.
- E. These disturbances are not better explained by intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorder) or global developmental delay. Intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder frequently co-occur; to make comorbid diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability, social communication should be below that expected for general developmental level.

It is important to note that *DSM — 5* no longer uses the following diagnoses: autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder or pervasive developmental disorder. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is now used.

<sup>2</sup> American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association; 2013.

## SEVERITY LEVELS FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

### Level 3: Requiring very substantial support

> Social communication:

Severe deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills cause severe impairments in functioning, very limited initiation of social interactions, and minimal response to social overtures from others. For example, a person with few words of intelligible speech who rarely initiates interaction and, when he or she does, makes unusual approaches to meet needs only and responds to only very direct social approaches.

> Restricted, repetitive behaviors:

Inflexibility of behavior, extreme difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors markedly interfere with functioning in all spheres. Great distress/difficulty changing focus or action.

### Level 2: Requiring substantial support

> Social communication:

Marked deficits in verbal and nonverbal social communication skills; social impairments apparent even with supports in place; limited initiation of social interactions; and reduced or abnormal responses to social overtures from others. For example, a person who speaks simple sentences, whose interaction is limited to narrow special interests, and who has markedly odd nonverbal communication.

> Restricted, repetitive behaviors:

Inflexibility of behavior, difficulty coping with change, or other restricted/repetitive behaviors appear frequently enough to be obvious to the casual observer and interfere with functioning in a variety of contexts. Distress and/or difficulty changing focus or action.

### Level 1: Requiring support

> Social communication:

Without supports in place, deficits in social communication cause noticeable impairments. Difficulty initiating social interactions, and clear examples of atypical or unsuccessful response to social overtures of others. May appear to have decreased interest in social interactions. For example, a person who is able to speak in full sentences and engages in communication but whose to-and-fro conversation with others fails, and whose attempts to make friends are odd and typically unsuccessful.

> Restricted, repetitive behaviors:

Inflexibility of behavior causes significant interference with functioning in one or more contexts. Difficulty switching between activities. Problems of organization and planning hamper independence.

The reader is encouraged to refer to the latest research in neuroscience to best appreciate how the brain with autism differs in the ways it specializes and processes information. A model developed by Dr. Laurent Mottron, MD, PhD and neuroscientist at Université de Montreal, explains that brain plasticity refers to the brain's ability to respond and remodel itself, and this model is based on the idea that autism is a genetically induced plastic reaction. The model confirms that the brain with autism develops with enhanced processing of certain types of information, which results in the brain searching for materials that possess the qualities it prefers and neglecting materials that don't. <sup>3</sup>

While museums may rely on these definitions to frame their programs, it is essential to remember that there are almost as many presentations of ASD as there are people affected by it. Thus, ASD's parameters can be very complicated to define, and it is recommended that clinical criteria be used only as guidelines to understand the condition. Indeed, the most essential and rewarding information is gained when these definitions are left aside in working directly with people on the spectrum.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2014-08/uom-ooo081214.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2014-08/uom-ooo081214.php)



## TERMINOLOGY AND SEMANTICS

### Or how should we refer to people with autism in this document ?

Person with pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), autistic person, person with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), neurodiverse, neuroatypical, person with Asperger syndrome, high functioning, disabled... What terminology should we use when we want to do better and treat the individuals who take part in our programs with respect, without offending or upsetting them ?

For the purposes of this guide, it is important to define the terms used here and point out some noticeable differences at our museums on either side of the Atlantic. We have agreed to use the terms *person with autism*, *person on the autism spectrum* or *person with ASD* (autism spectrum disorder).

To begin, we consider the following comment by Pascaline Bonnave, art therapist at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille: "When you enter the museum, you become a visitor, a guest of the works of art."

Forget labels like *patient*, *caregiver*, *disorder* and *pathology*. Every measure will be taken to ensure the visit goes smoothly, without stigmatizing participants. A subtle approach is required.

At the MMFA, we tend to speak of neurodiversity, as defined by the following: "neurodiversity is the concept that humans don't come in a one-size-fits-all neurologically normal package. Instead, it recognizes that all variations of human neurological function need to be respected as just another way of being, and that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal/natural variations in the human genome."<sup>4</sup>

The MMFA also uses specific terminology (e.g., person living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), person with autism, neuroatypical, neurodiverse, etc.) depending on the context. We have observed, however, that most of the members of our Committee for Neurodiversity, who come from schools, universities or medical institutions and are themselves living with autism, use the word autistic more often than neurodivergent or neurodiverse.

Similarly, the DMA refers to its dedicated days as *Sensory Days*, bearing in mind that they must be developed and adapted specifically for visitors with ASD. Designing an event from a universal perspective makes it accessible to a broader audience and more inclusive.

<sup>4</sup> <https://autismawarenesscentre.com/un-adopts-new-goals-disabilities/>



# AUTISM AND MUSEUMS

## An Overview of collaborative efforts at our three museums

People living with autism can manifest different/divergent ways of communicating in social situations and establishing relationships and have particular sensory motor functioning. In addition to these differences, they frequently have high levels of anxiety or depression and may be taking medication. This anxiety or depression may also be prevalent in families and add a level of daily stress that can last for years. Any effort to reduce stress and anxiety is therefore welcomed. This is where suitable arts programs at museums have a part to play for people living with autism and their families, friends and allies.

Here are some of our observations while facilitating activities and talking with people who have ASD, their families and caregivers.

From the outside, a lack of understanding can unwittingly give way to many prejudices, such as the contrasting presentation of two types of people with ASD: those who are severely affected and non-verbal at one end of the spectrum and the intellectually gifted at the other. The reality is much more nuanced, as participants in museum activities each have their own characteristics. They all have different personalities, just like anyone.

Even so, there are certain constants observed during the museums' shared activities:

- > Difficulty regulating and expressing emotions (which can cause frustration, anger, sadness and muteness, including during sessions at the museum), anxiety and stress, especially at the beginning of the project when they have not yet mastered all the contextual elements ("I'm in a new place, the noises around me are unfamiliar or too loud"; "I don't know the museum contact person well yet."). This stress may be reduced by following the instructions on the tip sheet on the page 21.

If the sessions take place under relaxed conditions and the art activity is enjoyable, the anxiety may decrease as the sessions progress.

- > Still, it will not disappear, perhaps because of the hypervigilance that is common in people with ASD: it takes considerable effort for them to adapt to the world of non-autistic people. If they are too focused on what is expected of them, they ignore things that disturb the main attention channel (i.e., the thousands of small visual and sound details that surround us, which the brain of someone without ASD naturally sorts out so they can stay focused on a single action or exchange). Achieving this can be more or less challenging depending on the person, but it calls for extreme vigilance and attention.

- > This hypervigilance produces fatigue and irritability that must then be managed. For this reason, it is important that people on the spectrum take short, unstructured quiet breaks in a secluded or designated area (e.g., a quiet room or blackout tent) to reduce stimuli.
- > Each session will have its share of surprises and anxieties, as well as relaxing moments, depending on factors that cannot always be controlled.

Museum staff are never alone in their projects and always rely on other adults present (family, companions, caregivers) to step in if things get out of hand. In this way, they remain in control of the group while another person focuses on the participant on the spectrum who needs reassurance (anxiety may be expressed by repetitive gestures or words, very piercing shrieks, anger, deep sadness, hiding, aggressive behavior, etc.).

- > People with ASD are hypersensitive: it is as if they do not have the protective envelope that enables non-autistic people to absorb and tolerate peripheral sensory pollution.
- > Because we always learn from others, the hours spent together in the museum give rise to limitless patience, tolerance and openness to a different sensibility.

## Tips to reduce stress in people with ASD during museum activities

Note: These tips are guidelines and should be adapted based on the needs of the group and level of support participants require.

### Start of the session

Welcome participants, preferably in a calm space, always in the same location. Greet them and head to the workshop or museum gallery together. The sequenced activity establishes a ritual that is defined in time and space.

### The Museum Visit

- > Choose works associated with the art project.
- > Present the works in simple, fun terms. Encourage participants to sharpen their observational skills, communicate and express themselves.
- > With groups of children, suggest they sit down around the work to focus their attention and avoid slipping and falling in the galleries.
- > Be active and move around in the galleries. Use the body and its expressions. With children, encourage play so they do not feel overwhelmed in the gallery (e.g., hunt for animals, mime the figures in the paintings).

### Workshop

- > Give clear, concise step-by-step instructions, illustrated with an example.
- > Hand out only the necessary materials, step by step, to avoid information overload.
- > Identify difficulties, provide help and support. Do not do it for them to intervene in the process.
- > Encourage dialogue.

### End of session

- > Restore calm by displaying the participants' creations. Admire the works and congratulate each participant.
- > Tidy up the space together: put away materials and projects, clean the tables and tools. Wash hands.
- > Escort the group to the exit and say goodbye.

### Studio, materials and products

- > Use a well-lit room with dividers adapted to the size of the group to make it safe and containing, prevent anyone from wandering away and help maintain focus.
- > Arrange the tables in a U shape, where you can stand in the center facing the children so as not to startle them or appear intrusive.
- > Prepare the materials and hand them out to the participants once the project has been explained to keep their attention and so they don't start the project before you have finished your presentation.

All art activities, such as drawing, painting and collage, are adapted to explore connections with the works discovered at the museum. The following are guidelines and positive outcomes associated with creative activities:

- > Externalize through art, turn outward to spark curiosity and observation ;
- > Dare, experiment, play, learn, memorize, choose ;
- > Develop sensory, intellectual, spatial and motor skills ;
- > Work together, become aware of self and others ;
- > Feel empowered by a project ;
- > Become aware of the body ;
- > Learn to decode the emotions ;
- > Pay attention to the individual and group experience ;
- > Reveal abilities: a risk-free training ground for life ;
- > Develop fine motor skills ;
- > Learn to communicate ;
- > Remember the rules for getting around the museum: no running, jumping or shrieking, no touching the works ;
- > Take pride in a project ;
- > Take the time to do things right ;
- > Get into the activity.

By adapting their behaviors and the ways they manage activities and seeing participants in a resolutely positive, encouraging and compassionate light, museums can provide a moment of genuine enjoyment.

All those involved in the projects (artists, guides, mediators and art therapists) describe how deeply rewarding it is to carry out the activities and the surprise and joy they feel seeing participants come in through the museum doors feeling at home and at ease with their surroundings. Participants are proud of what they have seen and created in the museum and heartened by the positive reactions to everything they were able to achieve during their time with the works and through hands-on art activities.

## Autism: the positives

If we only focus on the challenges that autism presents, we miss the multitude of positives that people with autism possess and the contributions they make to our lives and societies. The University of Leeds offers the following asset-based model to understanding autism through commonly-shared positive traits:<sup>5</sup>

### Attention to detail

- > Thoroughness
- > Accuracy

### Deep focus

- > Concentration
- > Freedom from distraction

### Observational Skills

- > Listen, look, learn approach
- > Fact finding

### Absorb and retain facts

- > Excellent long-term memory
- > Superior recall

### Visual Skills

- > Visual learning and recall
- > Detail focused

### Expertise

- > In-depth knowledge
- > High level of skills

### Methodical approach

- > Analytical
- > Spotting patterns, repetition

### Novel approaches

- > Unique thought processes
- > Innovative solutions

### Creativity

- > Distinctive imagination
- > Expression of ideas

### Tenacity and resilience

- > Determination
- > Challenge opinions

### Accepting of difference

- > Less likely to judge others
- > May question norms

### Integrity

- > Honesty, loyalty
- > Commitment

Like anyone, people with autism may or may not possess these qualities in different combinations. However, those of us in museums will quickly notice the potential for working with and learning from people with autism.

<sup>5</sup> Cannon, Harriet. (2018). Autism: the positives. University of Leeds. [https://www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/download/downloads/id/1485/positives\\_of\\_autism](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/forstaff/download/downloads/id/1485/positives_of_autism). PDF download.

24



## ARE MUSEUMS FOR VISITORS WITH ASD?

Yes, absolutely!

“ For someone who is autistic, making choices is really complicated. It’s interesting to see how sessions at the museum expose them to choices: preferring one color over another, choosing a pattern or expressing an opinion. ”

Cécile Causiaux, mother to autistic sons Léo, aged 22, and Max-Hélios, aged 20.

“ I see the practice of visual arts in museums as a risk-free training ground for life! ”

“ The museum provides an opportunity to make personal, cognitive, sensory, historical, artistic, emotional, imaginary and social connections when viewing the works in the collection and when making art. It becomes an opportunity to discover personal artistic and expressive qualities that those around them are not always aware of. ”

Pascaline Bonnave, art therapist.

“ A withdrawn little girl gradually began talking to the adult next to her. As the sessions progressed, she appeared to be less depressed in what she produced and in her attitudes, taking up more and more space on the page and even tackling a blank page. ”

Cerise Fontaine, psychologist, CATTP de Saint-André-lez-Lille.

In their ongoing efforts to provide inclusive experiences, many museums have created programs for visitors with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Since autism is a spectrum, it appears differently in each person. As Stephen Shore, autistic professor of special education, famously said, “If you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism.” Because the characteristics of ASD are so wide-ranging, people on the spectrum require varied and multifaceted supports to accommodate their diverse needs. While their learning challenges and needs vary widely, people with ASD also share some commonalities, such as the limited development of communication and social skills and need for a comfortable learning environment.<sup>6</sup>

As a condition, it appears the most effective intervention for autism is educational support that addresses behavioral, social and communication challenges.<sup>7</sup> It should come as no surprise that museums — informal learning environments that foster the development of behavioral, social and communication skills — are naturally suited for autism programming. Furthermore, an art museum’s collection, in particular, reflects its position as a cultural entity that promotes inclusion and celebrates difference and diversity.

Museums are investing more and more efforts to address the specific needs of the public, including visitors with autism. As outlined by Lois H. Silverman in *The Social Work of Museums*, “museums are turning their social activism inward to effect much needed change by readdressing the exclusion and/or misrepresentation of historically excluded groups like people with disabilities”<sup>8</sup> Access, however, is not only of interest to the public but also to the museum, whose concerns for serving the needs of its entire community and making its institution accessible, relevant and sustainable, are paramount.

<sup>6</sup> Margo A. Mastropieri and Thomas E. Scruggs. *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2000), p.92.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Dempsey and Phil Foreman, “A Review of Educational Approaches for Individuals with Autism”, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 2001, .vol. 48, no 1, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> Lois H. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 20.



## WHICH ACTIVITIES COULD MY MUSEUM OFFER AND ADAPT ?

### History and development of neurodivergent/autism-sensitive programming at the Dallas Museum of Art, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille

The following pages recount how each of the three FRAME member museums developed their own unique autism-friendly programs. These examples will hopefully serve as inspiration and reference for museums seeking to create or expand their programming. For a more extensive list of museums that have developed tools, projects or programs for people with autism, both inside and outside of FRAME, see *Exemples of programming at Other Museums*, p.75.

#### THE DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

The first autism program initiated by the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) in 2010 is called Sensory Days. The Sensory Days program is a collaboration between local arts and culture organizations to provide sensory-friendly programming. Participating organizations — the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas Zoo and DMA — provide activities at every event and take turns hosting Sensory Day. For each event, the host institution opens two hours early with free admission for children with ASD and their family members. Welcoming these children and their families to a museum during private hours is not an attempt to separate the population from the rest of the community but rather an opportunity to provide individualized support by adapting or removing barriers that would otherwise hinder the museum experience. This private time enables children with ASD and their families to socialize and explore the museum in an understanding and supportive environment. An early-open gallery time may help people with autism become more familiar and comfortable in the museum and even encourage integration into daily museum programming. In an effort to reduce sensory overload, attendance is limited to the first 500 registrants. Knowing that participants with ASD can be sensitive to various stimuli, the DMA offers an immersive, autism-friendly, low-sensory space staffed by occupational therapy students from Texas Woman's University. The area has low lighting, comfortable seating and therapy tools such as weighted blankets (**Fig.1**).

Before each event, participants receive event-specific narratives and images on visiting the DMA to help them become acquainted with the museum and its scheduled activities prior to their visit. During Sensory Day, families choose from a variety of activities in the DMA's Center for Creative Connections (C3), an interactive and experimental gallery space. They can explore at their own pace, taking part in sensory experiments and art-making activities in the studio, playing games in the sculpture garden and enjoying an interactive musical performance led by a music therapist. Families can also explore the museum's galleries through staff-led experiences, such as *Story Time* or *Teen Tours*.

Activities at each event are tied to a specific theme chosen in collaboration with a local autism specialist. The DMA often brings in special guests, such as the Dallas Symphony Orchestra (DSO), which collaborated on a music-themed event. Former DSO music director Jaap van Zweden spoke to children about movement in music and used a colorful streamer to show how he conducts (**Fig. 2**).

Following Maestro Van Zweden's instructions, participants joined him in conducting while the DSO performed. Van Zweden's wife, Aaltje van Zweden-van Buuren, talked to parents and caregivers about her family's experience using music therapy with their son, who has autism. The DMA has also collaborated with other local organizations that offer autism programming, such as the Dallas Children's Theater, which hosts information tables at each event to share its resources with the community.

### DMA Programs: Sensory Scouts

While museums and other cultural institutions now offer more and more programs for children with ASD, there are very few programs designed for adolescents with ASD as they begin navigating the challenges of adulthood. Feedback from participants demonstrated the need for an informal learning environment in which teens could strengthen their social skills.

In January 2017, the DMA established Sensory Scouts, a monthly workshop that addresses the specific needs of teens with ASD to enable them to explore works of art through gallery discussions, sensory explorations, art-making in the studio and social skills activities designed in collaboration with a specialist.

At the start of each program, museum staff explain the day's activities with an illustrated schedule. The pictures in the schedule depict the day's events in easily identifiable graphics, which can help alleviate participants' anxiety. The theme of the program changes from month to month but always focuses on a specific social skill. For example, participants learn about expressing their feelings and understanding the moods of others in the Emotions in Art program. In the Stories in Art program, they practice improvised speech through storytelling. Following each program, parents and caregivers are provided with a summary of the conversations and skills explored during the program, including ideas for extended learning.

In Sensory Scouts, the museum functions differently from a typical classroom. Museum staff act as facilitators rather than teachers and consider themselves to be among a community of learners along with the program participants. They enable and encourage the learning process through dialogue and engagement in which participants bring value to the program through their unique identities and experiences. While works of art act as a catalyst for conversation, staff members do not place great importance on participants acquiring a discrete body of facts, such as the title of the work or date of creation. Rather, the value lies in the participants contributing to a learning community and discovering individually meaningful pathways to make connections between the art and the world around them.

After spending time in the galleries, participants return to the studio for a hands-on art activity. Art projects are designed to relate to the program's theme and emphasize experimentation and discovery over a final product. For the Stories in Art lesson, participants created story dice: wooden blocks on which they drew images to represent the different elements of a story, such as character and setting (**Fig. 3**). They then took turns rolling their dice and telling stories to one another in a way that combined their story dice elements. Through art projects such as this, Sensory Scouts participants explore their self-identity and have the opportunity to express themselves creatively to others.

### DMA Programs: Hands-On Art Camp for Children with Autism

The DMA offers an annual weeklong summer art camp co-taught by an autism specialist, a music therapist and a DMA educator. Hands-On Summer Art Camp for Children with Autism provides an experience for children on the autism spectrum that integrates sensory elements and fosters social integration among participants while focusing on works of art from the DMA Collection.

### DMA Programs: exhibitions

Co-organized by the Dallas Museum of Art and High Museum of Art, Atlanta, *Speechless* is an exhibition that merges research, aesthetics and innovative new design to explore the vast spectrum of sensory experiences and new approaches to accessibility and modes of communication in the museum setting. *Speechless* debuts new works by six leading and emerging international designers and design teams, whose projects were informed by conversations with specialists from prominent academic and medical institutions. Their site-specific installations and new commissions create participatory environments and distinct situations in which senses merge or are substituted for one another. *Speechless* offers audiences unconventional multisensory experiences that foster understanding of the varied ways in which people experience the world through their senses. The rooms of the exhibition are connected by a central introductory space, through which visitors must pass as they move between sections.

In an effort to make the experience of the exhibition more comfortable for visitors with sensory processing disorders, education staff designed a sensory de-escalation space within the exhibition, with rocking chairs, weighted lap pads and noise-cancelling headphones. They also developed a mobile activities cart, the Pop-Up Art Spot (**Fig. 4**), to provide additional resources and activities for all visitors. The Pop-Up Art Spot provides *sensory shift* materials and games that all visitors can use, free of charge, to experience the installations in a different sensory way. It includes items such as scent jars, headphones, textured gloves and colored glasses. The goal of developing these materials is twofold: to make the experience of the exhibition more comfortable for visitors with sensory challenges without having to ask for special accommodation, and help neurotypical visitors better understand the different ways we experience sensory stimuli to build their sensory empathy.



Fig. 1 Participants in Sensory Day take a break in the Sensory Room, staffed by occupational therapy students from Texas Woman's University.



Fig. 2 Jaap van Zweden uses a colorful streamer to demonstrate the importance of movement in his work as an orchestra conductor.

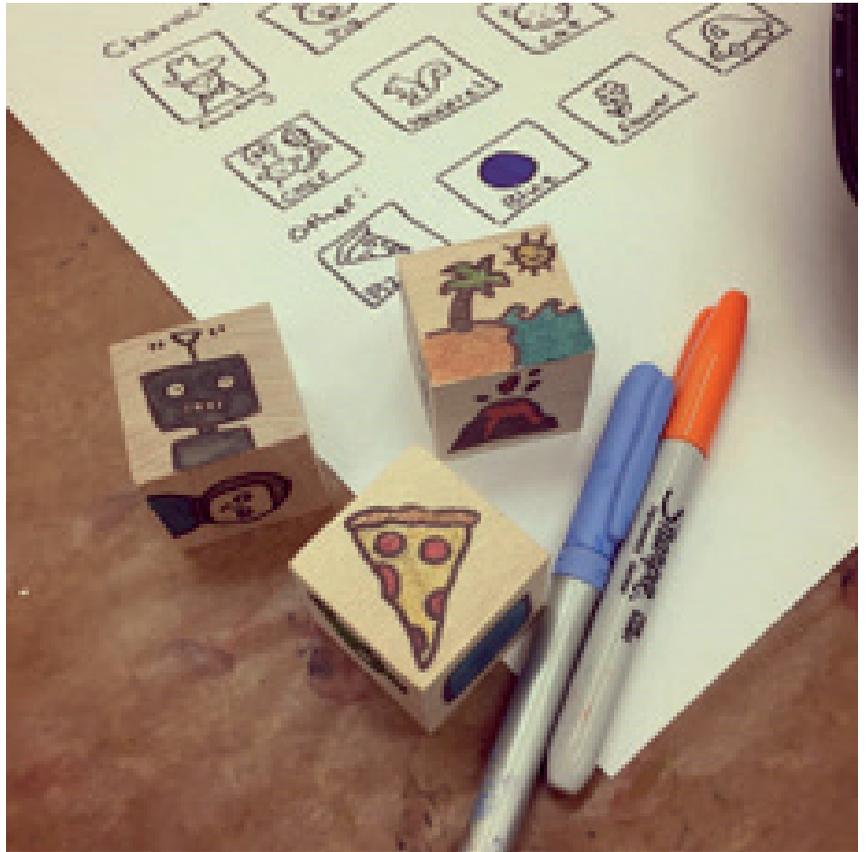


Fig. 3 Story dice created by Sensory Scouts participants to practice storytelling.



Fig. 4 Pop-Up Art Spot with sensory shift materials.

## MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Programs at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) often develop organically out of the one-on-one encounters we have with parents, teachers, funders, staff from other museums and members of various communities. The origins of our programming for people with ASD are rooted in the inspiring programs in other museums, such as those that were in place at the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille, and the advocacy of parents of children with autism.

### MMFA: initial pilot project

In 2015, the MMFA's education department launched a partnership with Les Petits Rois, a foundation that supports children 4 to 21 who are living with intellectual disabilities and/or autism and attending specialized schools. The goal of this new partnership was to create ongoing activities at the museum for the children and potential employment opportunities for young adults on the spectrum and/or living with intellectual disabilities. The development of specialized art activities was enhanced by the participation of a school-based art teacher working with these populations. The practice of co-creation was congruent with the spirit of community partnerships that the MMFA had established more than 15 years earlier.

### MMFA: second pilot project and first exhibition

A fine arts course was developed for a small group of young adults with autism who possessed a certain artistic talent and interest. The intensive 12-week course was taught by three artists who each gave four classes according to their specialization, medium and technique and made connections with works in the museum's collection. An exhibition of their works completed the project, and a new program was launched: "The Art of Being Unique."

The two pilot projects led to a number of other activities and partnerships. The MMFA established an advisory group: the Committee for Neurodiversity. It brings together various stakeholders, including the parents who helped set the program in motion, educators from specialized schools, researchers, museum representatives, partnering foundations and museum staff.

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the different types of activities that the Direction of Education and Wellness has undertaken to respond to the mandate of neurodiversity.

### MMFA: groups for education and well-being

The MMFA has developed ongoing partnerships with three schools for children with autism: an elementary school and two specialized schools for adolescents. The projects incorporate gallery visits and creative activities, and the school's educators, special education technicians and social workers are involved in co-development. Mediators are selected to lead the groups, and social narratives are sent to the students prior to their first visit. For short pilot projects, two visits are scheduled at the schools and three or more at the museum. Longer-term projects will have students visiting more frequently. Themes are developed to link the gallery visits with the art-making activities (Fig. 5). The MMFA has also developed a similar project in collaboration with a community organization that offers leisure activities for adults with autism.

### MMFA: art therapy

Beginning in 2017, the MMFA partnered with Autisme sans limites (ASL), an organization that fosters the personal fulfillment and social inclusion of autistic adults without intellectual disabilities to develop an ongoing museum-based art therapy group for young adults that combines psychoeducation and art therapy practices.

ASL partners with pillars of our society to create socially balanced life and training environments to ensure participants develop their autonomy and reach their full potential, while preventing isolation and subsequent mental health problems.<sup>9</sup>

The format for the group has evolved over the past three years but its elements remain constant. Participants begin their visit by having lunch together in the studio, a basic act of social inclusion. This activity enables them to chat about topics of interest and serves as a way to gauge their therapeutic progress. Lunch is followed by a presentation on one or more dimensions of emotional life and a visit to the galleries. The themes for the visits may be based on emotions, communication goals, treasure hunts or formal presentations by a guide on specific works. Participants then move on to an art therapy workshop led by the resident art therapist or art therapists in training. Arts-based activities are chosen according to group goals, and the session concludes with a discussion in which each participant is given time to share their work, feelings, associations and experience.

<sup>9</sup> [autismesanslimites.org/en/our-organization/mission-and-vision/](https://autismesanslimites.org/en/our-organization/mission-and-vision/)

### MMFA: guided tours

At the MMFA, volunteer guides will sometimes lead tours for special wellness projects or art therapy. Their main role is to guide the visitors through the collections, provide information about the works and engage in conversations with the participants while they are visiting. Since the tours require an adapted approach, the guides who work with neurodiverse visitors receive support from museum staff and the community partner. Among the MMFA's ongoing volunteer guide collaborations is an experienced guide's weekly participation in Autisme sans limites (see art therapy).

### MMFA: annual Event

What began as an annual celebration of autism has evolved to become a sensory inspired full-day event. Coordinated around Autism Week in Canada, the event highlights and celebrates the presence of neurodiverse people and their families. It mobilizes the entire museum and features a specialized program including self-guided and guided tours, creative activities, public education, dissemination of research and opportunities to meet with stakeholders.

### MMFA: work placements

Between 2015 and 2018, the Direction of Education and Wellness (DEW) hosted three internships for young adults on the autism spectrum and/or living with intellectual disabilities. Each was individually supervised by Louise Giroux, who coordinated their training, work tasks and, most significantly, their social integration into the larger museum community. The interns typically worked twice a week for 10 hours a week, for up to two years. The DEW is currently working with the human resources team to review the strengths of the program and identify areas for future development (**Fig. 6**)

### MMFA: next steps

- > Review the recommendations in this document ;
- > Improve access to social stories ;
- > Include at least one member who identifies as autistic/neurodivergent on our Committee for Neurodiversity ;
- > Increase opportunities for staff training, including mediators, volunteer guides and security ;
- > Evaluate the galleries in terms of sensory demand (See Pushkin Museum, p. 77) ;
- > Create and offer specialized programming for individuals, families, and schools.



Fig. 5 Children explore materials related to a sculpture with a team of special educators and museum mediators.  
Photo: Mikaël Theimer

Fig. 6 An intern at work in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.



## PALAIS DES BEAUX-ARTS DE LILLE

Activities for visitors with ASD date back to a 2008 meeting between the museum, a corporate foundation (Fondation Auchan pour la Jeunesse from 2008 to 2014 and Fondation Anber from 2014 to 2020) and Dr. Pierre Delion, child psychiatrist and head of pediatric psychiatry at CHRU de Lille. All these shared the feeling that art could at least provide comfort and perhaps serve as a vector for progress for people with ASD, and this convinced the museum to experiment with welcoming people with autism for tours and dedicated workshops.

And so began twelve years of exploration and experiences that resulted in concrete outcomes with respect to the children's behaviors and the development of temporary and lasting tools: a documentary film in 2009, a tablet with adapted content in 2013, a fresco that is still on display on one of the Foundations in 2014, a *wolf on wheels* cart containing adapted games in 2016, animated tableaux, a puppet show and a goose game.

Still today, Dr. Delion's support is vital to the museum's actions. Acknowledging the primitive naïveté with which we addressed the challenge of welcoming people with autism to our museum, we deemed it essential to call upon an expert in the field to guide us as we moved forward and help us respond to the questions we asked ourselves about the legitimacy of our efforts. Were we going beyond our professional role as a museum? How could we overcome the barriers we were facing?

Very often, a conversation with Dr. Delion strengthened our resolve or made us rethink our choices. His expertise, kindness, commitment, unfailing thoughtfulness on our projects and involvement in our high points and training for museum representatives and mediators were key to the success of our actions and development of our guide.

Even today, the main goal is to have children and adults discover the museum's world through well-established adapted activities. A joint effort was made to adapt the workshops to their needs (studio layout, materials, frequency of workshops, supervision), and participants were introduced to artistic practices outside their usual environment.

The sessions are special in that they are adapted to the challenges of visitors with autism. They introduce participants to various art techniques that they can then try out, and participants are encouraged to interact so they can act and react. In doing so, they also discover what they are capable of. The entire process helps empower them and develop their sensory, intellectual and motor skills (**Fig. 7**).

Making art is a way of enjoying time in a group and becoming aware of others. By sharing time together and doing an activity, each person collaborates with the other and participates in a social group, which in turn entails communication. The various projects encourage a specific way of working that fosters concentration, experimentation and application leading to positive results and self-affirmation through the emergence of a style. During the sessions, participants also develop a desire to make art, which then contributes to well-being.

### PBA : collaboration with partners from outside the museum

By including guest partners in the projects, the museum adds other perspectives and breathes new life into its art-making sessions. One of the keys to success is making these activities regular and sustained over time, with some groups coming to the museum for years. Although the collections are huge, continually renewing the original activities can be a difficult challenge for the staff. Guest artists can provide a breath of fresh air from outside the museum, which is welcomed by everyone. For the participants, discovering other artistic disciplines is always a source of surprise and delight (**Fig. 8**).

Those partnerships lead to remarkable activities and tools that will benefit everyone, based on a universal concept. Such is the case with the *Loup du musée* [a wolf on wheels] designed by Compagnie Rabistok and visual artist Vincent Herlemont through contact with students with ASD from the Unité Localisée pour L'Inclusion Scolaire Samain-Trulin in Lille who have visited the museum every Thursday since the program was launched in 2009. Together, they designed this cabinet on wheels lled with children's games to discover the works in the museum's collection (**Fig. 9**). This is also the case for the app *Museo+PBA Lille*, created by the association Signes de sens and developed in collaboration with the museum. Available on tablet, it charts a course through the museum's collection. Pre- and post-production evaluations by children with autism allowed for the creation of content that is accessible to all, notably audiences with challenges tied to communication or comprehension. <sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://pba.lille.fr/Visiter/Individuel>

“ Since the students have been taking part in this project, they have been making definite progress in creating art: they willingly draw on a blank sheet of paper, drawings figures, houses without the need for a model and accepting that everything can be represented in a different way. ”

Fanny Rimbaux, specialist teacher, École Samain-Trulin de Lille from 2008 to 2011



**Fig. 7** A short stroll through the galleries before, during and after the workshop breaks up the sessions.



**Fig. 8** Printmaker Alain Buyse brings his materials to the museum and teaches children with ASD about printmaking. Together, they will create a six-metre fresco on Plexiglas.

**Fig. 9** Loup du musée designed by Compagnie Rabistok.



### PBA: topics to address during tours and hands-on workshops

Any topic can be addressed once you become familiar with your group and respect the fact that it takes time to adapt and develop trust among the participants and awareness of the spaces. You can then propose a variety of techniques and topics based on the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions, from the old masters to contemporary art. Of course, it is imperative to stick to topics adapted to the participants' age and be mindful of any trauma they might have experienced.

Topics such as my body, my place in space, the five senses, nature, me and others, looking, sensations and exploring emotions (**Figs.10 and 11**) are just a few suggestions that often spark interest among children, teens and adults with ASD. Defining the workshop's goals together with participants when possible or with the supervisory staff when it is not enables individuals on the spectrum to gradually reach these goals or at least to contribute to them. The museum becomes a vector for achieving results (e.g., working on motor skills, learning to look at the general rather than the specific, improving relationships between group members, reducing the stress associated with change, discovering unfamiliar techniques, learn to make choices, discovering a new technique, exploring painting, drawing, modelling, learning how to draw a face, exploring the seasons, etc.).

By adding a small element of surprise to each topic, the museum staff always manages to spark participants' interest.

Fig. 10 & 11 Topics explored at the BPA include my body, my place in space and looking.



### PBA: art therapy

In 2012, after three years of experimenting with specialized classes and various structures, the museum felt the need to hire an art therapist for a number of reasons:

- > Articulate the observations made during the workshops. Apart from the fact that the participants seemed to enjoy them, it was complicated for the museum's teams to attest to the well-being experienced by some and report their findings to other museums. The art therapist's training made it possible to put their observations into words and better adapt the sessions to the participants' profiles.
- > Support the museum's artists in confirming their feelings when working with people with ASD: working on making them feel safe, sequencing the instructions and avoiding repetition or confusion.
- > Gradually, by integrating the art therapist, the PAB was also able to accommodate increasingly challenging groups of children, including those whose behaviors had been deemed unsuited to very busy public places, which can be noisy and may appear hostile to them. The ongoing initiative with children from CATTTP dispels these preconceptions. With the weekly work done by the children, their parents, the art therapist and CATTTP's care team, the children now show a definite interest in the activity. There has been noticeable progress in their activities and behaviors, as well as their delight in seeing each other and embarking on a new activity each week. The children's delight is communicative, and parents can now bring their children without worrying and leave at the end of the session proud and even quite surprised by the abilities they have demonstrated.
- > It is important to note that, unlike the visual artists who work with the groups, the art therapist takes part in the quarterly supervisions at the specialized center (CATTTP) along with other care professionals. The museum's perspective is therefore taken into account when observing the children's behaviors and progress, and the process enables the integration of the therapeutic objectives initiated during the museum sessions into a broader approach to support the children and enhance their well-being.

“ Over the years, the ways in which I work with individuals on the autism spectrum has evolved. It’s important to adapt to them. It often takes me by surprise: I intend to dedicate a session to a topic and they will require three, or the opposite. You need to know how to adapt the content. Sometimes, they love it and want more. I’ve been asking them to work more with their bodies. I get them to be active by miming the works. I place more emphasis on the creative process rather than the outcome. It’s almost performance art. ”

Vincent Herlemont, visual artist

“ I want to remind facilitators about what is essential: be compassionate, stay open to being amazed, let yourself be surprised and always take away something positive from our sessions. And eliminate words like *fail* and *copy* and use words like *transform* and *find inspiration* instead. ”

Pascaline Bonnave, art therapist

“ That the children could build on their experiences in one place — the museum — in another place — in classroom — and use them as interesting cognitive and affective investments. This capacity to decontextualize is essential for everyday learnings and takes root in spaces that become more familiar: a key challenge for children with autism. It helps the children acquire a narrative function and significantly enriches their representations skills. Here, visual focus facilitates long-term effort. ”

Dr. Pierre Delion, child psychiatrist

“ An 8-year-old boy with considerable cognitive potential was experiencing such severe integration difficulties at school that he was at risk of exclusion. Only the workshop at Palais des Beaux-Arts enabled him to see himself in a positive light. There, he found calm and could interact with the tools he was offered. ”

Testimony of a child psychiatrist.  
Children's hospital  
of Saint André-lez-Lille





# ADAPTING SPACES FOR VISITORS WITH ASD

## Between the ideal and the real

### DMA: SENSORY ROOM

The Dallas Museum of Art offers a sensory room during its Sensory Days. It also provides a sensory room info sheet for parents who attend the Sensory Day event and may be interested in creating their own sensory room at home.

At the DMA, sensory-sensitive materials consist of:

- > Gym mat/carpet (something soft for the floor)
- > Tent or ice-fishing tent (Fig. 12)
- > Rocking chair
- > Noise-cancelling headphones
- > Weighted blanket or lap pad
- > Twinkle lights/light source to create softer light (so the overhead light can be turned off)

### MMFA: THE ART HIVE

The Art Hive is an art studio open to the public twice a week that also hosts closed groups. During open studio hours, it is a non-programmed space in which participants are free to explore the materials provided, make whatever they choose and spend as long or as little time as they wish. The space practices arts-based social inclusion where everyone is welcomed as an art maker. There are opportunities to make meaningful social connections, especially for those impacted by social isolation. A number of participants have different and specialized needs, including those who are neurodivergent. The staff, which comprises an art therapist and a museum mediator, greet and support participants and adapt to their needs as required. The Art Hive welcomes about 3000 participants a year, including those who have taken part in other programs. It is connected to a network of community art hives across the city and a growing number globally.

(Figs. 13 and 14)

## PBA: WORKSHOP SPACES

Art workshops are set up in a large area divided into four subsections that each accommodate about 15 people without any actual dividers. Up to 60 people could be taking part in activities at the same time, and the noise and agitation can affect the conduct of workshops for participants with ASD. To address the situation and create a space using the means at hand, white drapes were hung to provide visual insulation.

With Association Mascotte, which works with children, teens and adults with ASD, the museum adopted the habit of hosting visitors on the spectrum during recreational time on Sunday mornings. The entire studio space is theirs, and when they feel ready, they may set out to discover works in the museum's galleries.

The workshops were launched over a decade ago, but the lack of dedicated space remains a problem. By integrating participants with behaviors deemed to be poorly adapted to public spaces, the museum faces a larger challenge: accommodating very young preschool children whose reactions are sometimes difficult to manage in a shared space. For example, a girl who screams when noise levels are too high or a boy who writes on the floor to express his unhappiness. The results are remarkable and encouraging but call for awkward gymnastics by supervisors and facilitators.

Still, the museum is encouraged and hopes to develop a space that will allow groups with very specific needs to thrive, as is the case at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

“ A tent can be a place where participants can go if they feel overstimulated.

But, in my experience, the tent can either overexcite a group or have a calming effect: it depends on the group. So sometimes the tent “ rules ” need to be explained and agreed upon. ”

Louise Giroux, Program Officer,  
Wellness MMFA



Fig. 12 At the DMA and the MMFA, a tent is available to visitors with ASD as a place to rest during a session when they feel the need. An ice-fishing tent is a foldable and inexpensive solution to sensory space needs.



Fig. 13 & 14 The Art Hive hosts closed groups and open studios every week. Photo: Mikaël Theimer



## IS SPECIAL TRAINING REQUIRED TO WORK WITH VISITORS WITH ASD ?

Special awareness is essential, and training and education can help!

### DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

Since the inception of autism programming at the DMA, the museum has partnered with Dr. Tina Fletcher and her occupational therapy students at Texas Woman's University (TWU). As an expert in the field of autism, Dr. Fletcher consulted in the development of these specialized programs and continues to inform best practices as the programs evolve. She also gives annual training sessions focused on ways to improve the museum experience for visitors on the autism spectrum for DMA staff and docents.

Occupational therapy students at TWU develop activities and help to staff Sensory Days at the DMA, Nasher Sculpture Center and Dallas Zoo. Their participation in Sensory Days is built into their course curriculum and gives them an opportunity to apply their studies in hands-on ways. The involvement of the TWU students has been critical to support the growing number of participants in each event. Approximately 30 students staff each event, which welcomes between 500 and 1000 participants.

### MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

For over two decades, providing training and access to continuing education has been an important tenet to all accessibility programming at the MMFA. Thus, it was natural to offer training to different museum teams, including security guards, front desk representatives, museum mediators (educators) and volunteer guides, who are in direct contact with our ASD groups, families and individuals. The sessions present ASD as a condition rather than an illness, emphasize the strengths and positives of people living with ASD and provide tips to adapt museums to enhance accessibility and inclusion. The training is given by a PhD student in education and specialized training at Université du Québec à Montréal whose research focuses on advocacy among parents of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

## PALAIS DES BEAUX-ARTS DE LILLE

When the Palais des Beaux-Arts (PBA) launched its workshops for autistic visitors in 2008 with a lot of enthusiasm, but without foreseeing what they would involve for the teams, guides and artists. Although the museum had welcomed people with mental disabilities or psychological disorders for many years, the project was set up with caring staff but without specialized training in autism. Being among the works of art was, for all, a starting point and a source of inspiration. From this principle, the artists set up simple but conclusive strategies of welcoming visitors: to test, to experiment while relying on the knowledge of the accompanying persons.

As we explained on page 44 of this guide, the museum hired an art therapist in 2012 in order to extend the welcome to autistic people experiencing serious challenges. With the support of professional caregivers (psychologist, doctor, speech therapist, educator, nurse, caregiver...), the art therapist strives to reveal each participant's skills by working on their own internal mechanisms and she helped them develop their artistic abilities. Finally, she helped them to realize how the behaviors they draw on at the museum will impact their lives beyond the institution. It is as if the museum becomes a place where people with autism can safely train to live good or better lives.

The experiences recounted in the following quotes demonstrate how the stakeholders instinctively adapted their behaviors to those of the visitors. Professor Pierre Delion's comment shows how the multiplicity of approaches to an artistic work impacts the visitors with ASD.

“ The first meeting with a group is very important. I say hello, keeping things quite neutral. People with autism tend to avoid looking you in the eye, since they find it unsettling. I adapt to their way of greeting me as I go along: some will hug me, shake my hand or avoid touching me. I am never intrusive. ”

Vincent Herlemont, artist

“ Among the things that characterize the children is their inclination to perceive the world visually (...). Professionals then promptly deploy a range of options to help children familiarize themselves with the works: emotional expressions, comments, imitations, drawings, models and facilitation. These soft approaches enable children to choose their own way of approaching things. The art activities are therefore an optimal means to support children on the autism spectrum as they enter the world of communication through this opportunity to express their emotions and joy and also sometimes their distress. ”

Dr. Pierre Delion, child psychiatrist

“ My sons don’t handle their emotions like other people. Something they experience one day can have repercussions two hours or two months later. The works must be chosen carefully: they must be adapted to their emotional maturity. Plus, they see everything in the first degree. They’re very down to earth and have a hard time with imagery and humor—even if I use it myself! ”

Cécile Causiaux, mother to autistic sons Léo, aged 22, and Max-Hélios, aged 20.

“ Every time we get together, we say hello. We call each other by our first names. We climb the stairs, touch the cold railing, stroke the warmer stone. The rooms are very big; the participants are attracted by the color red. The kids spread out through the galleries, but there are no concerns. I ask them to draw in front of a painting that speaks to them: the Nativity by Philippe de Champaigne, a family scene. They write before they start to draw: everyone, mom and dad, the baby. Time to write at school, time to draw what they discover at the museum. Keiji draws empty outlines. ”

Brigitte Cuignet, artist



## ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO BETTER SERVE VISITORS WITH ASD

Pictograms, lesson plans, and visits

### IMAGES AND PICTOGRAMS: SUPPORTING NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Tools such as pictograms and social stories are often used to enhance communication with people with ASD. Some of the different ones used by the DMA, MMFA and PBA are outlined here. For more ideas, there is also a list of museums both in and outside of the FRAME network that have specialized programming for people with ASD.

#### Dallas Museum of Art

For visitors with sensory processing disorders and those on the autism spectrum, the DMA provides a downloadable social story. Social stories can help an individual and their family plan for a museum visit. The information is presented in a concrete, step-by-step way and illustrates what and who to expect and what behaviors are appropriate. This helps prepare the visitor for the museum experience and assists with the change in routine that many individuals with ASD find difficult or distressing. <sup>11</sup> (Fig. 15)

#### Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille

The art therapist at the PBA developed a series of pictograms to help visitors understand the rules of the museum and structure of the activities. She also created a series to assist with different communication styles. Some people on the spectrum are very chatty, others are shy, and others still are non-verbal. To encourage dialogue and comfort, pictures are used to illustrate different feelings, needs and reflections. (Fig. 16)

<sup>11</sup> <https://dma.org/programs-access-programs/visitors-autism-spectrum>

# My Visit to the Dallas Museum of Art

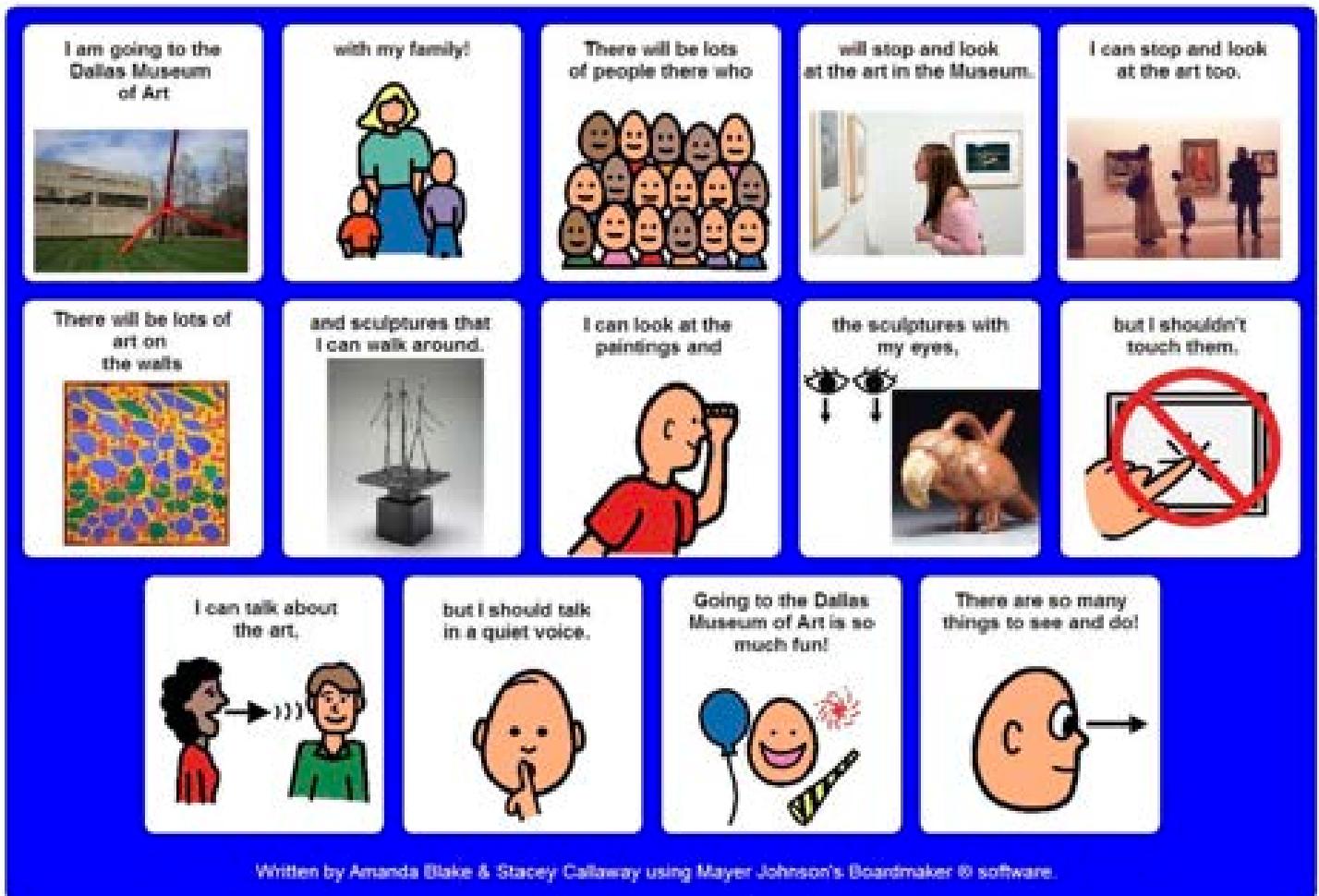


Fig. 15 Social story from the Dallas Museum of Art.



Fig. 16 Pictograms from the PBA.

## ACTIVITY SAMPLES FOR GROUP VISITS

When designing programs for people with ASD, there is no one way to welcome individuals, families or groups. Sensory days, creative activities, gallery visits and art therapy groups are just some of the creative activities the DMA, MMFA and PBA have designed to make their museums autism- and sensory-friendly.

### Dallas Museum of Art

#### **DMA: Sensory Day**

On selected days, the DMA opens early for children with autism and their families to enjoy art together in a fun environment. Families can participate in staff-led gallery experiences and activities provided by our Sensory Day partners. The following is a sample of a flow of activities.

**> Drop in between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. to enjoy the DMA before public hours. Have fun at the fair at the museum today!**

#### **Art Studio: art amusement park**

Join us for state fair themed art-making activities and sensory play!

#### **Fleischner Courtyard**

Step right up and try your hand at midway games in our outside space, including games led by the Dallas Zoo and Texas Woman's University!

#### **C3 theater: interactive musical performance | 10:00 – 10:30 a.m. |**

Join us for an interactive performance with our music therapist, Diane Powell!

#### **C3 gallery: art making with the Nasher Sculpture Center**

Join the Nasher Sculpture Center to make a work of art using soft fabric and colorful yarn!

#### **C3 Gallery and Art Spot**

Explore artwork in the Center for Creative Connections, then use a variety of materials to create your own work of art at the Art Spot!

#### **Young Learners Gallery**

Explore the theme of color in the newly redesigned Young Learners Gallery!

#### **Arturo's Nest**

Drop in and explore Arturo's Nest, our space designed for visitors ages four and under and their families!

#### **Tech Lab: TWU Sensory Haven**

Relax and explore quiet activities and therapy tools in the TWU Sensory Haven.

#### **C3 Center Space**

Stop at the informational tables in C3 to learn more about resources available for families with children on the spectrum.

## **DMA: Information for parents on creating multisensory environments**

### **What is a multisensory environment (MSE) ?**

A multisensory environment is a space for a person with sensory sensitivities. It is a predictable, controlled area that helps a person interact with objects and other people without distractions. When everyday sensory experiences become overwhelming, multisensory rooms allow a person to explore at their own pace.

### **What are the benefits of a multisensory environment ?**

A multisensory environment provides a relaxing and calming effect by using sensory supports in a controlled and predictable space. The MSE can help improve concentration, focus attention and improve memory for people who need help with self-regulation. MSEs have also been shown to promote brain and motor development and coordination. There are often opportunities to develop social interactions and communications with peers and caregivers.

### **What is a multisensory environment at the DMA ?**

Sensory Haven at the Dallas Museum of Art, our multisensory environment, is located in the Tech Lab. It contains objects that provide touch, sound, sight, smell and movement: a variety of sensations, such as back and forth movement, deep pressure touch and body warmth. Some of the items that you might see in a Sensory Haven:

- Light displays
- Sound systems
- Furniture with textures
- Swings and rockers
- Weighted blankets
- Lightweight comforters
- Aromatherapy

Encourage the person to:

- Touch different objects as they explore the Sensory Haven
- Listen to different sounds that are in the room
- Experience the equipment by rocking, climbing and crawling

### Sensory Haven Agreements

- Take care of the items in the Sensory Haven
- Put items away neatly after using them (they stay in the Sensory Haven)
- Give broken items to a staff member
- Take off your shoes if you want to share the items with others
- Have fun!

### What can I do when someone is overstimulated at the DMA?

- Decrease sensory stimuli to a minimum
- Visit the Sensory Haven, which has calming sensory tools
- Allow him/her to come out of the Sensory Haven on his/her own terms

## Montreal Museum of Fine-Art

### **MMFA: Education and wellness activity.**

> **Audience:** ASD students from Notre Dame des Victoires' school

**Age:** 4-5 years old

**Number of students:** 10 plus 3 teachers

**Progress in the project:** Third meeting out of six

**Duration of activity:** 2 hours

**Theme:** Animals

#### > **Objectives:**

- Explore the different sensory mediation tools linked to the works
- Feel comfortable in new spaces at the museum
- Develop links with other adults
- Create a sculpture by assembly
- Experience moments of pleasure

#### > **Artworks to visit:**

- Barry Flanagan, *Tambourine Player*, 1988
- Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Portrait of a Gentleman*, 1644
- Alexander Phimister Proctor, *Large Panther on the Lookout*, Model 1891 -1892, reworked in 1894 (cast 1905)

#### > **Art Activity:** Assembly, modeling

Note: The lesson plan, images of the artwork and step-by-step instructions for the art making activity are sent to teachers a few weeks before the visit. The information enables them to find pictograms that correspond to each step, creating specific visuals to better prepare their young students for each museum visit.

#### > **Welcoming the group:**

- The three mediators welcome the children and teachers. After going through the locker room, everyone goes to the workshop. Each person receives a sticker with their name.
- The mediators show examples of what they will do and explain the process of the visit.

#### > **Mediation in front of artwork:**

- Each mediator leaves with their small group and goes to an artwork. They will present the three works in turn.
- Mediation in front of the works will explore the senses related to the works.
- Participants will hear various animal sounds and try to identify and imitate them. They will touch various materials and textures. They will make music with small musical instruments and mimic the movements of animals such as a dog, hare and tiger.

**> Return to workshop:**

- The three mediators meet in a large room so that everyone is together to support each other and share the experience.
- Students put on an apron and sit down.
- First, they do a texture exercise by exploring various tools and materials before diving into the final creation. This step is done as follows:
  - The mediators distribute a ball of modeling clay to the children and then give the instructions:
    - › Squeeze the clay with your hands
    - › Print marks on it with the different tools
    - › Color the clay with felt-tip pens
- The mediators invite the students to create an imaginative animal from the modeling clay in which they can insert small pieces of cardboard, foam and pipe cleaners to make the details of the animal (eyes, ears, whiskers, wings, legs, tails etc.).
- Adults will then insert a wooden skewer to allow manipulation like a small puppet. A base of modeling clay will allow the creations to stand on the table. Here are the steps:
  - Model the clay, make shapes for the head and body
  - Assemble the pieces
  - Insert details (paste, insert)
- The mediators do a step-by-step demonstration and make sure to pay attention to each student.
- When students have finished, they are free to explore the various free play or object manipulation stations in the workshop. These stations are installed beforehand in the workshop space. For example, in a corner, there is a tent in which they can relax. There is another corner for construction with foam shapes, a reading corner, a puzzle corner, a corner of various objects to handle such that noise-cancelling shells, sunglasses, kaleidoscopes, heavy cushions and more.

**> Material:** Modeling clay (Model Magic), felt pencils, tools for texturing the material, construction paper, foam sheets, feathers, pipe cleaners, wooden skewer, etc.

**> End of the visit:** The mediators bring the students together in a large group. The teachers indicate the end of the activity by showing the corresponding image. Each student leaves with their creation, and we say goodbye and see you next time.

**MMFA: Art therapy/psychoeducation session**

> **Participants:** Young adults with ASD, Level 1

**Age:** 18-24 years old

**Number of students:** 8-10 plus 1 mediator and 1 art therapist (group may also include volunteers of same age as participants and interns in art therapy)

**Progress in the project:** 8th meeting of twenty-six

**Duration of activity:** 3 hours

> **Objectives:**

- Explore different emotions and different ways of communicating them
- Practice socializing/decrease social isolation
- Develop a familiarity with the museum
- Develop links with other young adults
- Discuss emotions through the use of the museum's collection
- Express emotions and thoughts through art therapy activity

> **Theme:** Joy/Sadness (every week a different pair of emotions are explored)

> **Welcoming the group:**

- The group gathers together every week for lunch in the art therapy studio. This informal gathering of participants, staff and volunteers serves to encourage prosocial exchanges and build group cohesion.

> **Psychoeducation (30 mins):**

- Group is presented with an overview of how different experiences shape emotional responses, and the uniqueness of everyone's experience is emphasized.
- Participants are invited to share experiences that made them feel joy and how that contrasts with feeling sad.
- Participants collectively identify tools to help during periods of sadness or depression.
- Common sadness is differentiated from depression and both are presented as normal experiences, though depression may require support and intervention.

> **Gallery Visit (1 hr):**

- Works to see: figurative works depicting figures with expressions of joy, abstract works whose colors represent joy and sadness.
- Works are preselected by the education team and or/guide. Participants are invited and encouraged to respond to the works and relate them to the theme of the day.
- Participants are invited to make their own spontaneous selections of works in the surrounding gallery and say something about their choice. Participants are supported at each step, and the team models using their own reflections and comments.

> **Art Therapy (1 hr 15 min):**

- Activity: Expressing emotions through line, shape, color
  - Participants are presented with a variety of materials to choose, from fluid such as gouache paint to the more rigid like colored masking tape.
  - Using standard-size card stock, each participant is asked to represent the two emotions of the day (e.g., joy and sadness) using only line, shape and color.
  - Following the creative activity, each participant is invited to share their work with the group and include any personal reflections or experiences they may relate to the theme.

> **Closing:** The participants are provided with information about the theme for the following week. Questions and reflections on the session are invited and answered.

### Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille

Pascaline Bonnavé recounts her first session with a new group. She demonstrates how she progressively learns about the participants throughout the session, remains consistent and caring, provides support and freedom to explore and guides them toward a goal they can be proud of while avoiding any intervention in the children's artwork.

> **Theme:** Rain Cloud

> **Session:** 1

> **Number of children:** 5

> **Age:** 6 years

> **Length of activity:** 90 minutes

> **Number of accompanying adults:** 3

> **Type of activity:** Chalk pastel on paper

> **Materials:** Paper A3 format, chalk pastels

> **Objectives:**

- Request attention
- Encourage calm movement
- Develop a sense of observation
- Land in the activity
- Stimulate notions of space/time
- Develop concentration, application and fine motor skills
- Acknowledge being capable of doing and be recognized for it

> **Reception:** The meeting point is in the hall of PBA. While waiting for everyone to arrive, children begin to explore and take over the space. The group is full. It's time for parents to leave, and they seem a little worried.

> **Start of session:** We leave with the small group to sit in a small quiet corner of the atrium to introduce ourselves and the activity. The children are already comfortable. They are reminded of the rules for moving around the museum.

- > **Gallery Visit:** We leave in search of clouds in the Impressionist gallery (Eugène Boudin) and landscape gallery (Barbizon school). It is difficult for the small group not to run in this immense space! The children quickly spot the works and we sit down to watch the big rain clouds. Participants observe the shapes of the clouds. Can they use their hands to make the shapes? The small group is fairly homogeneous, and the children seem to enjoy the visit. We go down to join the workshops, trying not to run too much!
- > **In the Studio:** Everything is ready for the small group. Children and adults will participate. Step by step, I hand out instructions and adapted material and, if necessary, I illustrate by example. The subject is, of course, the clouds in the landscapes. I chose the technique of soft pastels so as not to take any risks, since I do not know the children. I invite them to put the blue color of the sky, to apply it horizontally. Then, the gray chalk for the clouds where you have to draw tight circles for the cottony rendering. I distribute the light and dark green chinks for the grass, which will reach the sky in small vertical lines. We let the flowers bloom. There are dots for those in the distance and real flowers in the foreground. We become familiar with the concept of distance. Finally, the rain is rendered thanks to the black pastel that descends from the clouds to the ground in diagonal lines. The children are engaged in the activity. They sometimes need encouragement or help to stay in place to continue, but they all follow the instructions. One of the children has to leave the session before the end due to a family obligation. On his way out, he turns to us, waves and says: " Goodbye friends, hello girls! "
- > **End of session:** The end of the session is approaching. We put all the works on the floor to admire them from a distance. The children adapted well to each other. We put away the equipment and take the children back to the reception. Parents sense their child's energy and immediately know that the session was positive.



# HOW TO CO-CREATE A MUSEUM-BASED PROJECT FOR VISITORS WITH ASD

## Steps in developing ASD-sensitive programming

Based on the evolving history of collaboration with parents and schools, educators, researchers, therapists and other stakeholders, the MMFA has developed a protocol to co-create projects with its partners. The following steps illustrate the process for every new and current project to provide an informed approach based on best practices to serve neurodiverse visitors and those on the autism spectrum in particular.

### 1 - Making initial contact

The initial request from a school, community organization, parent or health care center may come from a formal project proposal or a less formal inquiry through email, telephone or a mutual connection. It is important to meet with the potential partner, as well as some of the museum's staff, specifically program officers, to review the initial request. The meeting should be held at the museum and include a visit of the spaces where the project could take place. This will give all parties involved the information they need to design the participants' experience.

### 2 - Evaluating the request

Following this initial contact, a committee of colleagues reviews and obtains approval for the costs and feasibility from senior administration. A follow-up meeting should be planned to inform the partner of the project boundaries and conditions. This meeting should take place offsite, in order to get to know the community (circumstances, etc.). It is very important for the museum staff to go out into the community.

Planning dates, time, frequency and meetings for evaluation and feedback should be established at this meeting. Moreover, it is important to establish each partner's responsibilities to determine where their respective expertise lies and where they can come together. It should be clear where one partner leads and the other supports and when the opposite occurs. This horizontal sharing of strengths is crucial to a successful project.

### 3 - Piloting the project

Once the staff has been chosen, site visits may be included to observe the future participants in their setting and get to know them (classroom, hospital setting, community venue). Prior to the first visit, visual aids such as photos of the museum staff with their names should be sent to the partner as along with social stories to better prepare for the visit. These images may be printed by the school staff and cut into small pictures with Velcro on the back so they can then be organized in sequence for the participants to understand.

### 4 - Stay connected

Throughout the project, troubleshoot, observe and check in with partners but always keep the participants' experience in mind. While the project is ongoing, concrete steps are continually being evaluated to ensure the objectives are met. After each session, feedback from the partner and participants provides guidance to tweak the next session. Any major changes call for a special meeting. Acute awareness of the participants' well-being must always remain top of mind.

### 5 - Evaluating the outcomes

After each session, time should ideally be set aside for the group leaders' feedback. If not, keep the conversation going through emails. At the end of the project, ask for the group leader's evaluation and participants' feedback and write a report to document the project. Also, request permission to use any photographs of the participants and their artwork prior to the project. Questionnaires should be tailored to the intended audience and may be facilitated verbally or written. The following is a sample of questions adapted from the MMFA's *Sharing the Museum* feedback program.

**Questions for participants on a scale from *very often* to *rarely*:**

- Did you make interesting connections with the other participants?
- Did you experience new practices, new ways of expressing yourself?
- Did you gain more confidence in your creative potential?
- Did you find yourself interested in something new?

**Qualitative questions for participants**

- Did taking part in the activities have any positive effects on you? How?
- Did the proposed activities make you want to express yourself outside the framework of this project? How?
- What do you take away from this experience?

**Qualitative questions for community partners**

- What were the effects of the project on you and your group?
- Did the activities have an impact on the participants' capacity for expression, on your group dynamics? Explain.
- Would you be interested in a new collaboration? Why or why not?
- What were the elements that worked less well in the project and explain why.



Research in autism and the lived experience, perspectives and creativity of people with autism has been multiplying in the last decade. From neuroscience to education and art therapy, there is a wealth of information for clinicians, educators and artists. In addition to the example here that highlights the exciting advancements in eye-tracking technology, there is a host of references in the Bibliography and Internet Resources. This momentum creates exciting opportunities for museums to collaborate in ASD research.

## Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

### MMFA: How people with autism perceive works of art

Introduced in September 2017, this research project aimed to explore cognitive and emotional mechanisms involved in the perception of works of art — in this case, paintings — among people with high-functioning autism or neurotypical people. As part of this study, participants took part in observation tours and discussions about works in the MMFA's collection, along with art workshops. The study found that the two groups look at art very differently. While neurotypical people have a very similar way of looking at a painting, focusing their attention on figurative and social elements (e.g., a face), researcher Bruno Wicker observed highly variable centers of interest among people with ASD. These results show they have a different way of perceiving information in an artistic context. Even more interesting, the analyses revealed significant changes in the gaze behaviors of people with ASD before and after they participate in observation and art workshops at the museum, suggesting that the workshops influenced their perception of works of art. This could be a result of the integration of information previously learned in the workshops, which would influence the processing of perceptual information (top-down processes).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mbam.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/MBAM-Communique-Recherche-Final.pdf>



## EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMING AT OTHER MUSEUMS

### WITHIN FRAME

#### Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA, USA

LACMA has developed activities for its art camp with tools inspired by those developed by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

#### Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, VA, USA

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) has developed an exciting new summer camp program designed specifically for children on the autism spectrum. Budding artists explore the museum's collections, experiment with art materials, learn through specialized teaching methods and interact with peers. The camps are taught by a national board-certified teacher Sandi Wiley, who is passionate about art and working with ASD children.

The instructor also offered training to all the adjunct faculty and VMFA educational staff. In the interactive gallery and early childhood classes, noise cancelling headphones are provided.

## MUSEUMS OUTSIDE FRAME

### The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, USA

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) has developed an extensive program of tools for individuals, families and groups to address the needs of neurodiverse visitors and participants.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/access/visitors-with-developmental-and-learning-disabilities/for-visitors-with-autism-spectrum-disorders>

### The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

The Access Programme provides “bespoke tours and talks for individuals and groups that are hard of hearing, have visual impairment or are living with dementia or autism.”

<https://www.nationalgallery.ie/access-programme>

The Gallery, which adapts some of its space to sensory needs on mid-term school breaks, provides both an accessibility map on its website and social guide for families and people with specific sensory needs.

[https://www.nationalgallery.ie/sites/default/files/2017-06/NGI\\_Access\\_Map\\_pages.pdf](https://www.nationalgallery.ie/sites/default/files/2017-06/NGI_Access_Map_pages.pdf)

[https://www.nationalgallery.ie/sites/default/files/2018-06/Social\\_Guide\\_National\\_Gallery\\_of\\_Ireland.pdf](https://www.nationalgallery.ie/sites/default/files/2018-06/Social_Guide_National_Gallery_of_Ireland.pdf)

### Pushkin State Fine Art Museum, Moscow, Russia

The Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum developed a sensory security map for individuals and families with sensory sensitivities. "The map allows visitors with sensory perception to feel more at ease in the museum. The museum premises on the map are divided into halls with a minimal sensory load, which are recommended for the first visit by visitors with a reduced threshold of sensory sensitivity."

<https://gallerix.org/news/dom/201806/gmii-im-a-s-pushkina-predstavlyaet-pervuyu-v-rossii-kartu-sensornoy-bezopasnosti-muzeynogo-prostranstva/>

Inspired by monument works in the museum's collection, artists with autism created a special collection of souvenirs for sale at the museum to benefit their special ceramics workroom.

<https://pushkinmuseum.art/news/archive/2019/04/ceramics/index.php?lang=it>

The museum has also presented research on the sensory perception of fine art by people with developmental disabilities.

[https://pushkinmuseum.art/events/archive/2019/others/11\\_03/?lang=fr](https://pushkinmuseum.art/events/archive/2019/others/11_03/?lang=fr)

### Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia

Partnering with the Vykhod Foundation, the museum co-developed *Museum. Autism. A Friendly Environment*. The program is "supported by organizations founded by parents of children with ASD. The program aims to facilitate the access of people with ASD and other mental disorders to public spaces." It includes talks, training and specialized tours.

<https://garagemca.org/en/course/museum-autism-a-friendly-environment-sophia-rossovsky-and-cindy-vandenbosch>

Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA

**Sensory-Friendly Mornings**

This program is designed especially for children on the autism spectrum or with other sensory sensitivities. The lights, volume and crowds are turned down but not the fun or creativity.

<https://philamuseum.org/calendar/event/sensory-friendly-mornings-5>

Smithsonian Institution, DC, USA

How museums are becoming more sensory-friendly for those with autism:

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/how-museums-are-becoming-more-sensory-friendly-for-those-with-autism-180967740/>

**Educator, museum mediator, visual artist mediator, expert guide**

Educators, mediators, visual artists who work as mediators and expert guides are paid staff members who work directly with diverse audiences in groups. They generally lead tours for school groups according to a planned curriculum and written script and teach art techniques in workshops. Over the years, museums have become more democratic and taken on a more social role. With this new incentive to meet people at the museum, talk about the works, create social links and enable the public to find personal meanings in the works, the term *museum mediator* is better suited to these flexible roles, which can involve teaching specifics on connecting the public with art history as well as with their personal history.

**Volunteer guide**

Like many North American museums, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) uses the term volunteer guide for a person who leads guided tours of the collections and major exhibitions. Guides complete a two-year training course before they can join the volunteer guide group. There are nearly 250 guides at the MMFA (English- and French-speaking). Exceptionally, some guides are involved in projects aimed at special audiences. Recently, a guide was included in a year-long project with a group of young adults with autism.

In France, a guide is a professional and is referred to, in French, as *guide*, *guide-conférencier* or *médiateur*.

**Art therapist**

Art therapists in Canada, the United States and France differ in terms of their historical development but share common ground in the rigours of professional training. They typically combine their knowledge and training in human psychology, the creative arts and therapeutic change to support clients/ participants in their goals. They work with clinical staff, families and stakeholders to provide holistic care based on best practices.

Museum-based art therapy is a relatively new field. In addition to the traditional tools of art-making and reflection, art therapists in a museum context use works of art and objects from the collections to enhance the participants' experience. To learn more about art therapy, refer to the websites of the following professional associations:

<https://www.canadianarttherapy.org/>

<http://art-therapie-tours.net/>, <https://arttherapy.org/>.



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Art Hives Network

[www.arthives.org](http://www.arthives.org)

A Sensory Life!

<http://asensorylife.com/sensory-meltdowns.html>

Culture Health and Well Being Alliance.

« Creative Health : The Arts for Health and Wellbeing »

<https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>

Dr. Motton's Research

[https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub\\_releases/2014-08/uom-ooo081214.php](https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2014-08/uom-ooo081214.php)

Giant Steps: School for students aged 4 to 21 with ASD

<https://giantstepsmontreal.com/resource-training-centre/links/>

Museum Next Conference on Autism

<https://www.museumnext.com/article/making-the-museum-autism-friendly/>

Psychomédia

<http://www.psychomedia.qc.ca/autisme/2015-04-03/criteres-diagnostiques-dsm-5>

World Health Organization: « What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review (2019) »

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/what-is-the-evidence-on-the-role-of-the-arts-in-improving-health-and-well-being-a-scoping-review-2019>

### Websites about autism

<https://www.cra-npdc.fr/>

<https://autismcanada.org/about-autism/diagnosis/diagnostic-criteria-dsm-5/?lang=fr>

<https://autismcanada.org/about-autism/evolution-of-autism/?lang=fr>

<https://comprendrelautisme.com/lautisme/les-pathologies-associees/>

For more detailed information for setting up spaces, sites such as CRA (Centres Ressources Autisme) offer very specific documents with expert advice that can provide inspiration.

[https://cra-alsace.fr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AUTISME\\_v\\_interactif\\_2018.pdf](https://cra-alsace.fr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AUTISME_v_interactif_2018.pdf)

[Groupement national des centres ressources autisme \(Paris\)](https://gncra.fr/)

<https://gncra.fr/>

Haute Autorité de Santé (Saint-Denis-La Plaine, France). Recommandation de bonne pratique. Trouble du spectre de l'autisme : signes d'alerte, repérage, diagnostic et évaluation chez l'enfant et l'adolescent. Méthode Recommandations pour la pratique clinique. Saint Denis : HAS, 2018.  
[https://www.has-sante.fr/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-02/trouble\\_du\\_spectre\\_de\\_lautisme\\_de\\_lenfant\\_et\\_ladolescent\\_recommandations.pdf](https://www.has-sante.fr/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-02/trouble_du_spectre_de_lautisme_de_lenfant_et_ladolescent_recommandations.pdf)



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