Close encounters

Visitor responses to *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master*

Summative Report

August 2006

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Close encounters – Visitor responses to *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master*, Summative Report

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Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master was a sell-out success: a blockbuster exhibition responsible for attracting over 30,000 new visitors to the Museum.

The exhibition promised visitors the opportunity to get up close to Michelangelo’s work, and many came seeking new knowledge about an artist and period they knew on only a superficial level.

Rich thematic and contextual background information was successful in delivering a surprisingly emotional experience to visitors. However overcrowding and the sheer volume of information available became a barrier for some in terms of both enjoyment and engagement.
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1 Michelangelo Drawings

Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master was held in Room 5, the major temporary exhibition space at the British Museum, from 23 March to 25 June 2006.

Drawing on the collections of the British Museum, the Ashmolean and the Teyler Museum in Haarlem, the exhibition traced sixty years of Michelangelo's life, from intimate studies made when he was in his early twenties, to the visionary Crucifixion scenes carried out shortly before his death.

It reunited material not seen together since the dispersal of the artist's studio more than 400 years ago, seeking to offer a wholly different perspective on the defining genius of the Italian Renaissance.

Michelangelo's drawings offer a unique insight into how the artist worked and thought

From website: www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/michelangelo
What we did

Having carried out the formative evaluation,1 Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was commissioned by the British Museum to carry out a summative evaluation of *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master*.

The objectives of the research were to determine:

- Motivations for visiting
- Behaviour within the exhibition
- Levels of visitor engagement
- Impact of the visit
- Learning outcomes and ways to test these in the future

The following research techniques were employed:

1. **Exit surveys**

**Visitor surveys**

A survey was conducted at the exhibition exit to provide a basic profile of visitor demographics, levels of awareness, motivation for visiting and behaviour within the exhibition. We also used this survey to quantitatively measure visitors’ learning outcomes and to establish the economic impact of the exhibition. 183 Visitor surveys were conducted.

**Non-visitor surveys**

Alongside the exhibition survey, a mini-survey was undertaken with visitors who had been to the British Museum but not visited *Michelangelo Drawings* that day. The aim of this survey was to probe awareness of the exhibition and reasons for not visiting. 146 Non-visitor surveys were carried out.

2. **Fulfilment maps**

On arrival at the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition, visitors were asked to complete a ‘mind map’ in response to the question ‘What do you hope to get from your visit today?’ This produced a list of visit expectations. On exiting the exhibition visitors were then asked to annotate their map with details of which of their expectations were met, not met or exceeded, together with any unexpected outcomes and details of what they had learnt. 15 Fulfilment maps were completed.

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1 Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (October 2005) Up close and personal – Engaging visitors with *Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master*
3. Observation studies

Meaning making maps
Using observations, visitors’ behaviour was classified into three modes: Browser, Follower and Searcher/Researcher dependent on their level of engagement with the exhibition content. Visitors were observed in each of the themed sections comprising the exhibition and their behaviour mode noted. This gives a spatial overview of how visitors behaved within the exhibition.

The more engaged visitors are, the more rewarding their encounter with objects in the exhibition. Visitor engagement is therefore a valuable measure of success. 786 visitors were observed and their Meaning making mode recorded.

Headcounts
We undertook a series of half-hourly Headcounts in the exhibition. This entailed making a quick circuit of the exhibition and noting on a floor plan the number of visitors in each of the themed sections at that time. This reveals the relative popularity of the sections of the exhibition. Taken together with the results of the exhibition dwell time from the exit survey, we are able to calculate the length of time spent in each of these sections during an average visit to the exhibition. The positions of 2033 visitors were recorded via Headcounts.

Engagement matrices
Using observation we recorded visitors’ levels of engagement with selected elements in the exhibition: a cartoon; a case; a letter and the interactive computer screens.

Visitor behaviour was marked on a matrix mapping the depth of their engagement against the use of any materials provided. This technique enables us to identify which elements of display and interpretation were most successful at engaging visitors and how that level of engagement was achieved. 292 Engagement observations were carried out.

4. Accompanied visits and focus groups

Two groups each comprised of ten respondents were convened to take part in accompanied visits to the Michelangelo Drawings exhibition. The respondents were segmented into Current visitors to the British Museum who had visited in the last two years and had also already paid and been to see the Michelangelo Drawings exhibition, and Potential visitors, individuals who visit museums and galleries in London and will pay to see exhibitions.
but had not previously visited the British Museum or the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition.

The participants were issued with a pencil and pad of Post-it notes and asked to respond to the displays and interpretation in the exhibition via the Post-it notes. This technique allows us to capture the spontaneous responses of visitors as they move naturally through the space. The notes are then grouped according to their locations and transcribed. The result is a rich source of qualitative responses.

We then conducted focus groups with the participants to enable us to discuss their responses in greater depth and explore learning outcomes in more detail. These discussions were recorded and transcribed.

Full data tables and transcripts from the focus groups are available as separate documents. Where relevant, findings from *Michelangelo Drawings* have been compared with annualised findings from the British Museum rolling research (also carried out by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre), and from previous exhibitions; *Sudan: past and present*² held at the Museum in 2004 and *Forgotten Empire: the world of ancient Persia*³ held in 2005.

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² Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (March 2005) *Sudan Appeal - Visitor responses to the British Museum’s Sudan exhibition*

³ Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (February 2006) *They came seeking insight - Visitor responses to the Forgotten Empire exhibition*
Motivation for visiting

Hierarchy of motivation

We have identified four key drivers for visiting museums:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See museum as a...</th>
<th>Have this driver...</th>
<th>And they seek this from a visit...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHURCH</td>
<td>SPIRITUAL</td>
<td>Creative stimulation and quiet contemplation, they see museums as an opportunity to escape and recharge their batteries, food for the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>EMOTIONAL</td>
<td>May have a personal connection to the subject matter, want to see fascinating objects in an inspiring setting, seek ambience, deep sensory and intellectual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCHIVE</td>
<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
<td>Keen to encourage their children’s or their own interest and knowledge, may have professional interest in the subject, seek a journey of discovery, to find out new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>See museums as an enjoyable place to spend time with friends and family, seek ease of access and orientation, good facilities and services, welcoming staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These motives form a hierarchy: as visitors move up from Social through to Spiritual motivations they become more increasingly engaged with the museum and its collections. The further up the hierarchy they reach, the more fulfilling and rewarding visitors report their visit to be. That doesn’t mean that Social visits should be any less valued, it simply means that they result in lower levels of engagement with the content of the Museum.

At each level of the hierarchy visitors have different needs and they are only able to move up the hierarchy if their needs at the previous level have been met. The suggestion is not that visitors are forced or even led up this hierarchy, but that they get the opportunity to engage at the deepest level they wish to.

Main motivation

Using a series of statements on the exit survey, we asked visitors to the Michelangelo Drawings exhibition to identify their main motivation for visiting the British Museum. The chart below shows the main motivation of Michelangelo Drawings visitors compared to all British Museum visitors.
As the chart illustrates, two thirds of visitors to the exhibition were primarily motivated to visit the Museum for Intellectual reasons, while only 19% of visitors to the exhibition were motivated by Social reasons. This compares with 43% of all visitors to the Museum who are motivated by Social reasons. Visitors to the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition therefore approached their visit in a far more engaged mode than is typical for all British Museum visitors. This fits with findings from the *Forgotten Empire* research, where visitors were also highly Intellectually motivated. It seems that visitors who pay to see temporary exhibitions are typically highly motivated, going to improve their knowledge and understanding and keen to learn, rather than for a more socially motivated or spontaneous, incidental visit. Visitors were attracted by the fame of Michelangelo yet many only knew a little about him or his work. They came to fill gaps in their knowledge, with over a quarter of visitors (27%) rating their knowledge level prior to visiting as little or none.
Specific motivations

In addition to identifying visitors’ main motivation for visiting, it is also enlightening to look at the proportion of visitors motivated by each of the possible motivators. The chart below gives the proportion of visitors to *Michelangelo Drawings* who stated they were influenced by each potential motivator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Michelangelo</th>
<th>British Museum</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-improvement</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>+17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understanding of other people / cultures</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See fascinating, awe-inspiring things</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>+15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal / hobby interest</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>+17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic beauty</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see, to do</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulate creativity</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>+14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic / professional interest</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>+8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful contemplation</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally moving experience</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulate children</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal connection / identity</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a major attraction in the region</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I came to visit the shop / café</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To give my children an enjoyable time</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help children learn about art / history / culture</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To gain insight into the artists mind</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Michelangelo Drawings* visitors were most likely to be looking for self-improvement or for personal hobby / interest when visiting. For self-improvement, for personal hobby / interest, to stimulate creativity, to see fascinating, awe-inspiring things and for an emotionally moving experience were all notably higher amongst *Michelangelo Drawings* visitors than all British Museum visitors. The number motivated to see or do was much lower than all British Museum visitors.
These results mirror the outcome of the formative research, where a desire for insight into Michelangelo’s character came out strongly. Respondents were hugely enthused by the proposition of getting to know what the artist was like and the processes involved in producing the artwork. The majority of visitors to the exhibition were therefore looking to the Museum to provide them with context and an insight into the history and politics surrounding Michelangelo and his work. They sought understanding, personal connections, creative inspiration and an appreciation of what made his drawings and techniques unique. This is very different from the core Museum visitor who seeks a more social and reactive experience, desiring the Museum to pick out ‘wow’ objects for them to respond to.

Visit expectations

Visitors were asked to articulate what they hoped to get from their visit to Michelangelo Drawings. Many mentioned the culture and history of the period in which Michelangelo lived as something they hoped to increase their knowledge and understanding of:

- Michelangelo’s place in history Fulfilment map
- As an artist in his historic background Current visitor post-it

There was also a desire for insight into Michelangelo’s character:

- Wanted to learn more about Michelangelo Fulfilment map
- Gain better insight into Michelangelo’s genius Current visitor post-it
- Greater knowledge about Michelangelo as a person Current visitor post-it
- Find out if Michelangelo is approachable Potential visitor post-it

His fame and reputation meant people anticipated high quality work and relished the opportunity to get up close, as the name of the exhibition suggests:

- I know Michelangelo did amazing paintings, but to get a chance to see the drawings Current visitor
- I sort of appreciated the privilege of being able to get up so close to these sketches Potential visitor

Visitors were also looking to the exhibition to provide them with a background and deeper understanding of Michelangelo’s artwork that they had seen elsewhere or perhaps just heard of. This could explain the high number of intellectually motivated visitors; they had specific information they were keen to gain more understanding and background knowledge of:
His sketches for Moses Fulfilment map
I was interested to see what the original drawings were like – I knew some reproductions – and how I would react to them Current visitor post-it
Any sketches for the Sistine Chapel Fulfilment map

Many were interested in learning about his drawing processes and techniques, and wanted to see how his drawings relate to finished pieces:

Wanted to see connection between drawings and final works Fulfilment map
Techniques and use of ink and chalks etc Fulfilment map
To gain a better understanding of Michelangelo’s working methods Current visitor post-it

Meaning making

Through our qualitative work into how visitors select and engage with objects in the museum environment, we have identified four modes of visitor behaviour. These modes classify how the visitor selects objects to explore and what kind of interpretation they need to make meaning from objects.

Hierarchy of Meaning making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Object selection</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCHER</td>
<td>Specific objects/</td>
<td>Focused, specialist museum visitors, select objects themselves based on their in-depth knowledge of the subject area, want access to expert information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEARCHER</td>
<td>Classification/</td>
<td>Have good general understanding of the topic, consume all the information available in the museum on that subject, want museum to select and present objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOLLOWER</td>
<td>Narrative theme</td>
<td>Require a narrative explanation, want the museum to select and present objects which illustrate themes to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWSER</td>
<td>Random objects</td>
<td>Select objects by browsing the exhibition, will wander until they find a ‘gateway’ object that catches their attention, require explanation of their selected objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four modes form a hierarchy, with each level of the hierarchy representing an increased level of engagement with objects. It is possible for visitors to move upwards through the modes of behaviour – the modes can be seen as stages in the development of a visitor’s meaning making skills.

Visitors who are continually Browsing an exhibition can only making fleeting connections with a limited number of objects. If the museum is committed to developing visitors’ levels of engagement it should seek to
encourage visitors to develop their meaning making skills by selecting objects and offering interpretation that propels visitors up the hierarchy and engages them pro-actively.

Visitors were asked a question on the exit survey to identify their entry mode; that is how they behaved on entry to the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition. The results are illustrated below and compared with *Forgotten Empire* visitors and all British Museum visitors.

**Meaning making mode**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michelangelo Drawings visitors</th>
<th>Forgotten Empire visitors</th>
<th>British Museum visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Searcher/Researcher 53%</td>
<td>Searcher/Researcher 43%</td>
<td>Searcher/Researcher 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follower 28%</td>
<td>Follower 51%</td>
<td>Follower 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browser 20%</td>
<td>Browser 6%</td>
<td>Browser 45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This demonstrates that visitors to the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition approached their visit in a much more pro-active and committed mode than all Museum visitors. A large number were in Searcher/Researcher mode, actively seeking information out from the exhibition. At the other end of the scale there was also significantly less approaching in Browser mode than for the British Museum overall.

The proportion of *Michelangelo Drawings* visitors at each end of the hierarchy approaching their visit in Browser or Searcher/Researcher mode is greater than for *Forgotten Empire* visitors. The fact that the exhibition attracts both
types of visitor could be due to visitor expectations of the exhibition content; Michelangelo’s works are well known so visitors come as Browsers, to see an iconic image, or as Searchers/Researchers, to seek out specific information on an item or object, rather than expecting to be told a story or follow a theme.
Interpretation

What visitors wanted

The formative evaluation allowed us to explore what visitors’ needs, expectations and hopes were for the interpretation in the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition. They wanted:

- Rich contextual displays
- Clear and simple language
- Facts, not opinions
- Layered, thematic interpretation

They were keen to understand Michelangelo’s drawing techniques in order to gain a deeper sense of understanding and engagement with the works, and to feel a sense of connection to him as a person. While respondents expected to see beautiful images, the drawings themselves with only technical explanations were felt to be insufficient, and they also wanted to see supporting images and materials. They felt this gave them a much deeper understanding of the drawings by understanding their context; both the political and religious circumstances in which the drawings were produced, and Michelangelo’s personal interests and experiences which influenced the works.

Visitors’ reactions

Visitors commented on the fact that this was an art exhibition held in a museum space, and felt this gave a different slant to both the way the work was presented and the way they viewed the work:

*There was more insight. There was more analysis.* Current visitor

*It was the British Museum and not an art gallery and that the emphasis was just a little bit different. Especially the information right at the very beginning before you got into the drawings I started to see these things not simply as works of art, but as historical artefacts, which had to be cared for and preserved.* Current visitor

*Rather than things being presented as this is the finished piece...to actually really get behind the skin of it I thought was great.* Current visitor

*When you go to an art gallery you go to the product which is the artwork and this is just more showing the process.* Potential visitor
The chronological presentation of the drawings and use of a timeline meant visitors felt they could see how Michelangelo’s work developed as they went through the exhibition:

I like the way the exhibition is structual with band of important dates and division of years as relate to M’s career Current visitor post-it
Like the timeline of his life Potential visitor post-it

But felt that the layout of both timeline and display went against what they were used to:

Timeline should run from left to right Visitor survey
Exhibition started from right to left – prefer left to right Visitor survey
Running right to left is already a bit counterintuitive because usually it is left to right Potential visitor

Seeing original letters and poetry in Michelangelo’s handwriting alongside translations enabled visitors to feel a connection to the artist as a person. Many found the letters and poetry to be very emotionally moving:

Thank goodness you’ve translated and am able to read! Potential visitor post-it
The poem right at the end I thought that was amazing, the death of his work as well as himself Current visitor

The text summaries of each themed zone provided an introduction to Michelangelo. This was essential in aiding understanding, especially for those visitors who came with little background knowledge, as many did:

As I came into the exhibition in a state of ignorance about Michelangelo’s work, I found this section (The Early Years) very useful Current visitor post-it
Great to have a background into his life in his early years, and intro to each part Potential visitor post-it

And explained how the interpretation aided their understanding of the work and gave a deeper insight into Michelangelo’s character:

It is amazing to read his poetry because it offers a completely different insight into the emotional side of his work Potential visitor post-it
Useful description of technique helped me to appreciate drawing Potential visitor post-it

In the formative evaluation visitors liked the Sistine chapel interactive and were happy for technology to be used to enhance engagement with Michelangelo’s drawings. Visitors felt that the use of immersive, audio visual techniques and engaging interactives could help new or less confident visitors make meaning from the work. More use of such technology may have helped visitors to engage more:
I would prefer it if the sculptures were viewable from more than one direction

Current visitor post-it

Visitors were not put off by the idea of using technology and thought there was scope for more use of it:

If they really wanted to do something with technology I suspect you could do a lot more with that exhibition

Potential visitor

Visitors who used the Sistine Chapel interactive liked the fact that it helped them to see the process from drawing to finished piece:

You were able to press the button and you saw where it was and what the finished bit was

Potential visitor

The computer was very helpful, because it showed me the actual pieces of work

Current visitor

You could actually see how he drew and how he used that which he drew

Current visitor

Good use of technology without it being technically obtrusive or complex

Potential visitor post-it

Overall the technology used in the exhibition was very well received, with 77% of visitors saying they were satisfied and only 4% saying they were not satisfied with the projections and computer interactive displays. One suggestion for improvement was that it could have been bigger:

I think it needs to be larger, its too close

Potential visitor post-it

96% of exhibition visitors said they were either satisfied or quite satisfied with the amount of information available, and 95% said they were either satisfied or quite satisfied with the tone and language used in the information provided. Comments from visitors reflect how well the interpretation worked for them, and many made positive comments about the amount of information available in the exhibition:

It has a depth which I found quite rewarding

Current visitor

There is such a wealth of information

Current visitor

The formative report found that specialists weren’t put off by large amounts of text and were happy to skim to find out information they didn’t already know. However it seems that the amount of text and labels in the exhibition was off-putting for a small number, especially non-specialist visitors. The large amount to read combined with the small size of the drawings meant that some felt there was too much to see in a small space:

A bit too much writing on this wall (Early Years Summary). Drowning out the drawing

Current visitor post-it
Cluttered, too much to take in at once Potential visitor post-it
Many of the drawings seem crammed in Potential visitor post-it
I feel that it is a lot to take in Current visitor

It could be that the amount of information in the exhibition did need to be provided, but in a more layered way. This would prevent visitors being put off by large amounts of text which is immediately visible but still enable them to delve deeper and find out more. Using a wider range of multi-media in the interpretation would communicate the information but in different ways. This could be achieved by:

- Encouraging the use of audio guides by promoting them more heavily or making them less costly
- Having selected audio at points around the exhibition
- Using more computer interactives to give access to information
- Providing pick-up laminated information sheets around the exhibition
- Avoiding duplication of information, for example anything that is in a free exhibition guide does not necessarily need to be displayed in the exhibition as well; as long as use of such supporting elements is encouraged and promoted information only needs to be accessible from one source.

Depth of engagement

Using observation, we measured the degree to which visitors became engaged with four different displays in the exhibition. The top line score shown in the chart below is the proportion of visitors who, after approaching the display, became engaged with its content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Display</th>
<th>Not engaged</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoon</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Medici Zone</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sistine Chapel interactive</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most engaging displays we have encountered engage between three quarters and all of visitors, as the Letter does here. All of the exhibits were successful in engaging over 50% of those who approached them.

Visitors’ comments give some insight into why these exhibits worked for them and what appealed:

This letter spoke volumes about him and his relationships – brilliant to see it and to read his handwriting. Current Visitor post-it, Letter

Wonderful to see this! Current Visitor post-it, Cartoon (of Michelangelo painting Sistine Chapel roof)

This display works really well – allowing us to view objects that would be otherwise impossible to see together. Likewise the wax and terracotta models give us greater understanding of Michelangelo’s working methods. Current Visitor post-it, Case in Medici Zone

Excellent. This was very illuminating, showing how the work is built up Current Visitor post-it, Sistine Chapel Interactive

Usage of interpretation

For each of the elements tested, visitors’ usage of the interpretation materials provided was noted. ‘Written’ comprises any written interpretation or operating instructions, while ‘Human’ is insight provided by a member of staff or a fellow visitor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Written</th>
<th>Human</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoon</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Medici zone</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sistine Chapel Interactive (no written interpretation)</td>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the chart illustrates, the most engaging element tested, the Letter, also had one of the highest levels of use of the written interpretation; a translation which people became deeply absorbed in reading. In this case...
the written interpretation was key to engaging the visitor in the work and obviously succeeded in doing so, with 82% using the written interpretation and 97% of those who used the written text engaging with the exhibit.

The Sistine Chapel interactive was highly intuitive and did not have any written instructions. A large proportion of visitors conversed with one another when using this interactive, and the success rate of human interaction was the highest for this element, with 67% of those visitors who interacted at that level engaging. The interactive was designed to allow others to view what users were doing on screens above, and the fact that many seemed to like and use this feature perhaps explains why it was popular despite its engagement level being lower than the others tested. Visitors could appreciate the interactive from a distance, and despite not using it in a hands-on manner and engaging in this way, they were still able to benefit from the interactive and its features:

I watched other people, I didn’t get to the front, but it was good to see Current visitor
It was good that you had thought about the fact that we wouldn’t be able to get at it, but you could actually sit and watch other people doing it...that was great Current visitor
If you couldn’t get at them you could actually sit and watch somebody else playing with them, which was splendid Current visitor

Supporting materials

Visitors to the exhibition were asked to state whether they were aware of the themed talks, events and printed materials produced to support the exhibition, and awareness of the supporting materials was very high:

• 84% were aware of the free exhibition guide
• 79% were aware of the exhibition audio guide
• 41% were aware of the exhibition catalogue
• 16% were aware of the large-print guide
• 15% were aware of the tactile / braille drawings
• 13% were aware of the ‘Michelangelo money’ exhibition
• 13% were aware of the tours
• Between 6% and 9% were aware of the various talks and events

This shows a marked increase in the number of visitors aware of the audio guide compared to visitors at Forgotten Empire, which was only 59%. This could possibly be a reflection of the numbers visiting in搜索引擎 / Researcher mode, looking for ways to find out specific information.
In terms of usage of each of these elements, 31% did not use any, which is higher than the 19% of visitors to Forgotten Empire that did not use any, and is more similar to the 36% of visitors to Sudan who didn't use any.

Although more visitors to Michelangelo Drawings used the audio guide than at Forgotten Empire, a significantly lower proportion used the free guide during their visit to the exhibition. In total:

- 51% used the free exhibition guide
- 3% visited the ‘Michelangelo money’ exhibition

Between 0% and 3% of visitors used each of the other supporting elements.
5

Display

Entrance

Visitors liked the way the exhibition was designed to introduce Michelangelo as a person and provide background information to his life and work:

*Good that these portraits were at the beginning of the exhibition – allows one to imagine / visualise him at work while looking at other pieces Current visitor post-it
Informative and nice introduction to set stage Current visitor post-it*

Layout

The ropes and layout of the exhibition encouraged visitors to follow the narrative and themes:

*The ropes are good because you have the division of space...it really led you along Current visitor*

During crowded periods the roped areas were changed to allow for increased visitor flow, and this may have increased or altered the use of certain areas, such as the Sistine Chapel centre zone. When most of the ropes were hung and only two exits / entrances were available to the central Sistine Chapel zone many visitors were observed not using this central area or stepping over the barrier ropes to access it, perhaps not able to find the correct route into the space.

Labels

Several mentioned that the angle of the glass and lights wasn’t ideal and hindered them reading the small labels in particular:

*For me to read the text without reflection I need to be about one metre from the drawing – far too far to see the detail Current visitor post-it
I find that commentary and description placed in this position is difficult to read because of light reflecting glossy surface Current visitor post-it*

Text

Many mentioned liking the text used, and commented on how it added to the images and what they thought of it:
Lighting

Lighting in the exhibition space was an issue for some, and potential British Museum visitors in particular found it off-putting:

*Does the lighting have to be so subdued?* Potential visitor post-it
*Too dark* Potential visitor post-it
*I expected a brighter room and bigger displays than this* Potential visitor post-it

Drawings

Some visitors mentioned the fact that some cases were empty or had gaps and this stood out for them as a contrast to the comparative crowding in other areas:

*Why is this space going to waste when other areas are cluttered?* Potential visitor post-it
*There was very small photos with large amounts of empty space around them and that could have been used* Current visitor
Engagement

**Meaning making**

Visitor behaviour was observed in each of the themed sections of the exhibition and their level of engagement with the displays in these sections noted. The chart below illustrates the proportion of visitors displaying engaged behaviour in each section of the exhibition, that is those visitors who displayed Follower or Searcher / Researcher behaviour.

As the chart shows, with the exception of The Crucifixion Drawings section and the exit corridor, at least three quarters of visitors were engaged at any one time.

The most engaging areas were The Florentine Republic, The Private Michelangelo and the Working for the Medici sections. The least engaging sections, The Crucifixion Drawings and The Final Years, were both situated at the end of the exhibition. This is possibly due to earlier overcrowding.
which meant visitors had spent a long time in early sections and ran out of time before they reached the end of the exhibition. Visitors may have speeded up towards the end, therefore engaging less in the final sections. Comments from respondents in the focus group reflected this:

_At the end the benches were practically empty_ Current visitor
_A lot of people seemed to leave before the end I think_ Current visitor
_I am always slower at the beginning of any exhibition and I will speed up as I go round_ Current visitor

The crowding in the exhibition space meant some felt they weren’t able to use the timeline and text panels as much as they would have liked and perhaps impeded the success of visitors’ attempts to engage:

_When you are in a crowd you cannot see the timeline below_ Current visitor
_Difficult to read captions, people in the way_ Visitor survey
_Timeline would have been better above exhibits, obscured by bodies_ otherwise Current visitor post-it

As with _Forgotten Empire_ the last section suffered from being situated in the exit corridor after visitors had walked though the shop. Some commented they hadn’t noticed the section on their initial visit:

_Difficult to get space to see and read this info. I didn’t notice it all when I first saw the exhibition_ Current visitor post-it

Although when visitors did see this it was appreciated:

_The info is enlightening_ Current visitor post-it
_Interesting technical info re preservation and watermarks_ Potential visitor post-it

There was a similar level of Browsing behaviour recorded in _Michelangelo Drawings_ as in _Forgotten Empire_, and considerably less than in the _Sudan_ exhibition. Visitors to _Michelangelo Drawings_ exhibition overall sustained high levels of engagement. This is likely to have been a consequence of visitors being pro-active, intentional and motivated by a desire for insight and understanding; they were therefore willing to persevere with the exhibition despite the issues identified with overcrowding. Paying to visit may also encourage visitors to persevere as they will be more committed to the visit than if it were free.
Highest mode reached

Visitors were asked to respond to a series of statements on the exit survey that identified the highest mode of meaning making mode they reached during their visit to the exhibition.

The chart shows that the exhibition sustained and slightly increased the proportion of visitors with initial high levels of engagement. 14% of visitors to the exhibition did not get beyond Browsing, compared to 30% of all visitors to the Museum who do not get beyond Browser mode during their visit, but is more than the 2% who stayed at Browser level at Forgotten Empire.

An explanation for the number staying at Browser level could be that the large amount of information on display meant some visitors felt overwhelmed, and 'cherry picked' their way through the exhibition. Queues also meant visitors went round in different routes so didn’t feel they were seeing the exhibition in order or following any themes:

- I diverted I think to the end and started going backwards Potential visitor
- There is quite a lot of information and stuff to see so I just went to the things I see straight away Potential visitor
- There were so many bodies that you had to do the best you could at the time
Close encounters

Current visitor

*I ended up looking a things out of order anyway, because of crowds* Current visitor

Time spent

The chart below shows the length of time visitors spent in *Michelangelo Drawings*. Time spent is a useful indicator of engagement as the more engaged visitors become in an exhibition the longer they are likely to spend in it.

![Time spent chart]

The calculated average length of time spent in the exhibition was 86 minutes, longer than the 64 minutes spent by visitors in *Forgotten Empire*. For the majority of visitors (72%) the length of their visit to the exhibition was as expected. 11% of visitors felt that their visit was shorter than expected, and 16% that it was longer than expected. The high engagements levels recorded along with the amount of information available may be an explanation for the longer visit times recorded:

*I feel that it is a lot to take in and if you are going to view everything properly you need a couple of hours* Current Visitor

Usage of the audio guide made some difference to the length of time spent in the exhibition. 98% of those visitors using the audio guide spent over one hour in the exhibition, as compared with 87% of visitors who did not use the audio guide.

Time distribution

Using the information generated via the Headcounts and the average visit length, it is possible to map the average length of time spent in each of the sections of the exhibition.
As the chart illustrates, 46% of an average visit was spent across the three sections The Early Years, The Sistine Chapel and The Private Michelangelo. These were all near the start of the exhibition, which reflects visitors’ comments that they spent longer in the first sections and speeded up toward the end. They are also the sections that most clearly reflect the motivations, needs and engagement levels of visitors. The Early Years, for example, provides background information, which would have been important for the 27% visiting with little or no knowledge of Michelangelo. The Sistine Chapel could be seen as the artist’s most famous work, so this section would suit those Browsing for something to catch their attention as well as those looking for background information on something they have a superficial knowledge of already. The Private Michelangelo was the second most engaging zone, with 94% displaying engaged behaviour here, so this would explain the longer time spent in this section.

The Crucifixion Drawings section, which despite having a large area and therefore more room for visitors, had an average dwell time of only 9 minutes. This reflects comments made by visitors who said they sped up towards the end or ran out of time for their visit.
7 Visit Impact

Impact

Visitors were asked to identify a series of statements to say what they had got from visiting the *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition. The profiles below compare visitors’ main motivations of visiting the British Museum against the highest level of engagement they reached with the exhibition. This gives a raw measure of the degree to which their visit expectations were met.

**Overall impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main motivation</th>
<th>Visit impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results demonstrate that the exhibition far exceeded visitors' minimum requirements from a visit to the Museum. While only 21% of visitors demanded Spiritual or Emotional engagement as a minimum requirement for their visit, 85% of *Michelangelo Drawings* visitors reached a Spiritual or Emotional level of engagement within the exhibition. This compares with the
75% of Forgotten Empire and 57% of Sudan visitors who reached these top levels of engagement within the exhibition.

The chart below shows the end outcome for visitors who came with each motivation:

This shows that the exhibition exceeded visitors’ expectations in terms of its Emotional and Spiritual impact. The only sections of visitors who moved down the scale was of those who came with Spiritual motivations, of which 34% left with an Emotional outcome, and some visitors who came with Emotional motivation, of which 5% came away with an Intellectual outcome. No one moved down the scale and left with an unexpected Social outcome. The biggest proportionate moves were of Intellectually motivated visitors, 39% of which left with a Spiritual outcome, and Socially motivated visitors, 39% of which had an Emotional outcome.

This illustrates the strong and surprising emotional impact the exhibition had on visitors, many of whom came expecting to learn and better their knowledge and went away instead with a strong emotional connection to Michelangelo and his work, which can only help to facilitate learning further:

*You could see his passion through his drawings* Potential visitor

*I feel like I know him* Potential visitor

*I did get a sense of the man...and so there was the pleasure in the intimacy of that* Potential visitor
I felt that the work itself was quite moving Potential visitor
You’re really starting to see into the man Current visitor

Looking at the individual motivational statements, it is possible to measure the impact of a visit on specific expectations. The chart below compares pre-visit expectations of the exhibition with post-visit experience for the top five motivators.

**Impact on specific motivations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-visit</th>
<th>Post-visit</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-improvement</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal / hobby interest</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight into artist’s mind</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See fascinating, awe-inspiring things</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see beautiful things in an attractive setting</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that the exhibition delivered only slightly under what visitors were expecting. Additionally, the biggest increase in specific motivations was in visitors having an emotionally moving experience, which had a 5% increase. The surprisingly emotional impact of the exhibition was something that came out strongly during the focus groups:

*Very emotional actually, and I found the last ones quite moving* Current visitor
*I found it enthralling and very, very moving* Current visitor
*I said to a friend afterwards it is so personal and so surprising* Current visitor
*I was very surprised in the way that it affected me* Current visitor
*I didn’t realise the impact it would have. It was so personal* Current visitor

The interpretation was key in delivering this emotional experience, with visitors connecting emotionally with Michelangelo’s work through the translations of letters and poetry, and the thematic way the exhibition showed stages of his life and work progressing:

*I was tremendously sad at the end of the exhibition seeing the declining quality of his work and the letters and poems near the end* Current visitor
*You get a really good feel for Michelangelo...they painted him in context* Current visitor
*To see a letter in his own handwriting. Somehow it mattered more than seeing a drawing* Current visitor
*It has a depth that I found quite rewarding* Current visitor
*It did pull you in more, because they were more skilled as you went along* Potential visitor
Impact on future behaviour

We asked visitors to *Michelangelo Drawings* if seeing the exhibition had affected the way they would use the British Museum in the future.

- 70% said it had made them more likely to visit special exhibitions at the British Museum
- 63% said it made them more likely to visit the British Museum generally
- 40% said it has made them more likely to find out more about the British Museum
- 37% said it has made them more likely to use the internet or British Museum website
- 19% said it would make them more likely to use the new print and drawing exhibition space
- 10% said it has made them more likely to use the study room
Learning outcomes

We asked *Michelangelo Drawings* exhibition visitors to tell us if they felt they had learnt anything new about the exhibitions main themes and key messages, and to give us an example of what they had learnt.

The responses given show the range of learning that took place and demonstrates that the exhibition was successful in delivering its key messages:

**87% learnt about Michelangelo’s drawings:**

- Didn’t know the quantity of his drawings
- How he only drew parts of the body and put it together
- Surprised how many I had seen before in other contexts
- His work with anatomy
- It revealed the wide range of methods he used
- How his drawings evolved
- How he was inspired
- How much time he spent preparing
- That he liked males, his women were masculine
- His fascination with anatomy
- The way he destroyed many of them after their use
- His technique and who trained him
- In context - how different his drawings were compared to his contemporaries
- How they were used for the paintings, like the Sistine Chapel
- All from visitor survey

**74% learnt about Michelangelo’s character:**

- A multi-talented individual. More political than I expected. Lived longer than I realised.
- A difficult person to deal with, selfish
- So devout, good writer and very funny
- Was a bit difficult to deal with
- His ordinary family background
- He was very introspective towards the end of his life
- He now seems like a real person
- Didn’t know he was a poet
- He was ambitious and had time for his family
- He was pragmatic - went with the flow politically
His competitiveness amongst his peers
He feels like a real person rather than just a genius
About his sexuality and religious side
Fiery temper, gigantic ego, fondness for boys, deeply religious
Doesn’t come across well - played mind-games with his students. Liked to be ‘top dog’
All from visitor survey

56% learnt about the time in which Michelangelo lived
An unstable period
Art was important
What life was like for Italian artists
The church was very powerful and influential
The changing allegiances and the political instability and the power of the church
The political situation - his conflict in later life with the Medicis
Better overview (timeline) of the period
Homosexual relationships weren’t seen as odd
It was very political and challenging
More about history of Florence, Medici, Popes
Prevalence of homosexuality
Religion and politics were a big thing
When it was
All from visitor survey

34% learnt about conservation and research into Michelangelo’s work
A lot of his work hasn’t survived
The way the drawings were re-mounted
Amazed that his work has lasted 500 years. Thoroughly researched
How they preserved them
The difficulty of preserving paper
It shows how well things have been conserved
Was struck that they had acquired drawing from the 19th century
All from visitor survey
Conclusions

A blockbuster exhibition

Michelangelo Drawings: closer to the master was a sell-out success, responsible for attracting thousands of new visitors to the British Museum. The promise to get up close to work from such a well-known artist combined with the ‘never seen before’ appeal of the exhibition was successful in attracting large numbers of visitors. The marketing and press campaign delivered well, generating the positive word of mouth and high exposure needed to gain a ‘blockbuster’ reputation.

A surprisingly emotional experience

Overall reactions to the exhibition were incredibly positive. Visitors came with intellectual motivations, hoping to fill gaps in their knowledge and get to know the real Michelangelo, and came away surprised at the emotional level that they were engaging at. Rich contextual and historical interpretation painted an in-depth picture of Michelangelo and the Renaissance for visitors, and for many it was connecting on an emotional level that drove their understanding and learning. Visitors felt that holding an art exhibition in a museum space gave a different slant to both the way the work was presented and the way they viewed the work.
Recommendations

1 Use more layered interpretation
The large font size on walls worked well, enabling visitors to read text even in crowds and from a distance. However the amount of text and labels combined with the small size of the large number of drawings meant some felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount on display. Employing a wider range of media to deliver the supporting contextual information would give visitors access to the same amount of information without overloading them visually as soon as they enter the gallery.

2 Increase usage of supporting materials
The numbers aware of the audio guide and free exhibition guide were much higher than the numbers using them, and these are both ways of delivering large amounts of information in a subtle way. Use of audio guides could be encouraged by promoting them more heavily or making them less costly, and reasons for the low use of the free exhibition guide compared to awareness levels could be investigated further to try to increase take-up in the future.

3 Avoid duplicating information
Anything that is in a free exhibition guide or on a free audio point does not necessarily need to be displayed in the exhibition as well; as long as use of such supporting elements is encouraged and promoted, information only needs to be accessible from one source. This would again possibly cut down the amount of information on display and prevent visitors feeling overwhelmed by text.

4 Increase use of technology
The Sistine Chapel interactive was a resounding success. Visitors liked the use of sophisticated technology, appreciating the way it aided their understanding of the work. They would welcome more interactive exhibits, for example to give access to images of models or sculptures from different angles.
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