

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Work-in-Progress Project

Summative Evaluation

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Introduction

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (the Gardner) received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in support of *Work-in-Progress*, a series of 12 short films designed to make the work of the museum transparent to “entry level” museum visitors. The Gardner contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG) to conduct formative and summative evaluations of the project. In this report, findings from both the formative and summative phases of the evaluation are summarized.

The formative evaluation focused on the first three Work-in-Progress films, and was used to inform the production of the nine final films. The initial report explored the relative advantages and disadvantages of each film’s approach to engaging visitors, the viewers’ experiences by viewing platform (online vs in the Living Room), and the lessons learned from the first three films. This report briefly summarizes the formative findings and then describes the final, summative phase of the evaluation, which focuses on the nine newest Work-in-Progress films.

The focus of the summative evaluation was to explore the effectiveness of the films in making the work of the museum more accessible or transparent, informing public perception of the quality and quantity of the ongoing public and behind-the-scenes activities, increasing visitor comfort level and confidence in their museum experience, and helping visitors make personal connections to works of art. These questions were also part of the formative evaluation, and where relevant, those results are described alongside the summative findings.

Methods

In the initial formative evaluation, GRG used a combination of two methods to collect data: (1) visitor intercept surveys, and (2) an online survey. GRG conducted brief surveys with a total of 83 visitors after they viewed one or more films on-site at the museum. A majority of visitors viewed the films via iPad, and some viewed the films at the museum’s Living Room kiosk or on a large screen at a Gardner’s After Hours event. The intercepts were conducted on three different days in July: once during the museum’s After Hours evening program, once on a weekday, and once on a weekend day. (See Appendix A for a copy of the intercept survey.)

GRG also programmed an online version of the intercept survey and provided the Gardner with a survey link, which was posted through various media the Gardner uses to communicate with its audience, including the website, social media, and a newsletter. The survey was hosted on GRG’s survey platform for three weeks during August, and 58 respondents completed the survey online.

In the summative evaluation, GRG designed an online survey to assess the effectiveness of the nine newest Work-in-Progress films. To ensure each viewer watched films at random, GRG used Javascript to create a button that, when clicked, directed respondents to one of the nine videos at random. Each respondent viewed two films, answering questions about each film immediately after viewing it. The online survey was launched via an email invitation from Gardner staff to the Sounding Board, an internal group of Gardner museum members who have opted to provide

periodic feedback to the Gardner. Over the course of several weeks between October and November 2014, 94 respondents completed the survey.

- Respondents ranged in age from 21 to 85; the median age was 61 years.
- 60% of respondents were female.
- 94% were members of the Gardner museum.
- All respondents (100%) had previously visited the Gardner; 92% had previously visited the Gardner website.
- 70% reported that they were *very* or *extremely* familiar with the Gardner.

Appendices A and B present the data on which findings are based and a complete description of responses to the summative survey.

Findings

In the summative phase of the evaluation, each survey respondent viewed and answered questions about two films. Films from the formative phase, which had been previously evaluated, were not shown. Table 1 displays the percentage of respondents who viewed each of the nine newest Work-in-Progress films. The distribution was slightly imbalanced, with more respondents than expected viewing the *Urban Oasis* and *Visitor Voices* films and fewer viewing *Looking to Learn* and *Artist in Residence*. However, sufficient numbers viewed the latter films to draw at least initial conclusions about them.

Table 1: Work-in-Progress Films Viewed	% viewed	N
Urban Oasis: The Redesigned Monk’s Garden	17%	31
Visitor Voices	15%	27
Performing in Calderwood Hall	14%	25
Hidden Collections	12%	21
The Gardner Goes Green	12%	21
A Choir Book Comes to Life	11%	20
A Tale of Two Objects	10%	18
Looking to Learn	6%	11
Artist in Residence: Carla Fernandez	4%	8

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE FILMS: FORMATIVE

- The initial three films covered the behind-the-scenes topics of *Conservation*, *Education*, and *Horticulture* at the Gardner.
- The films evoked interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and feelings of enlightenment among respondents.
- The *Conservation* film elicited the strongest positive emotions, while, in comparison, the *Education* film drew a slightly less passionate response.
- Older respondents (50+) and those who were less familiar with the Gardner were slightly more moved by the films than their counterparts (those under 50 and more familiar with the museum).
- Female respondents and those who viewed more than one film responded more enthusiastically than others.

“I'm impressed that the Gardner is using both up-to-date and cutting-edge techniques in conserving their works of art.”
–Survey respondent, formative evaluation

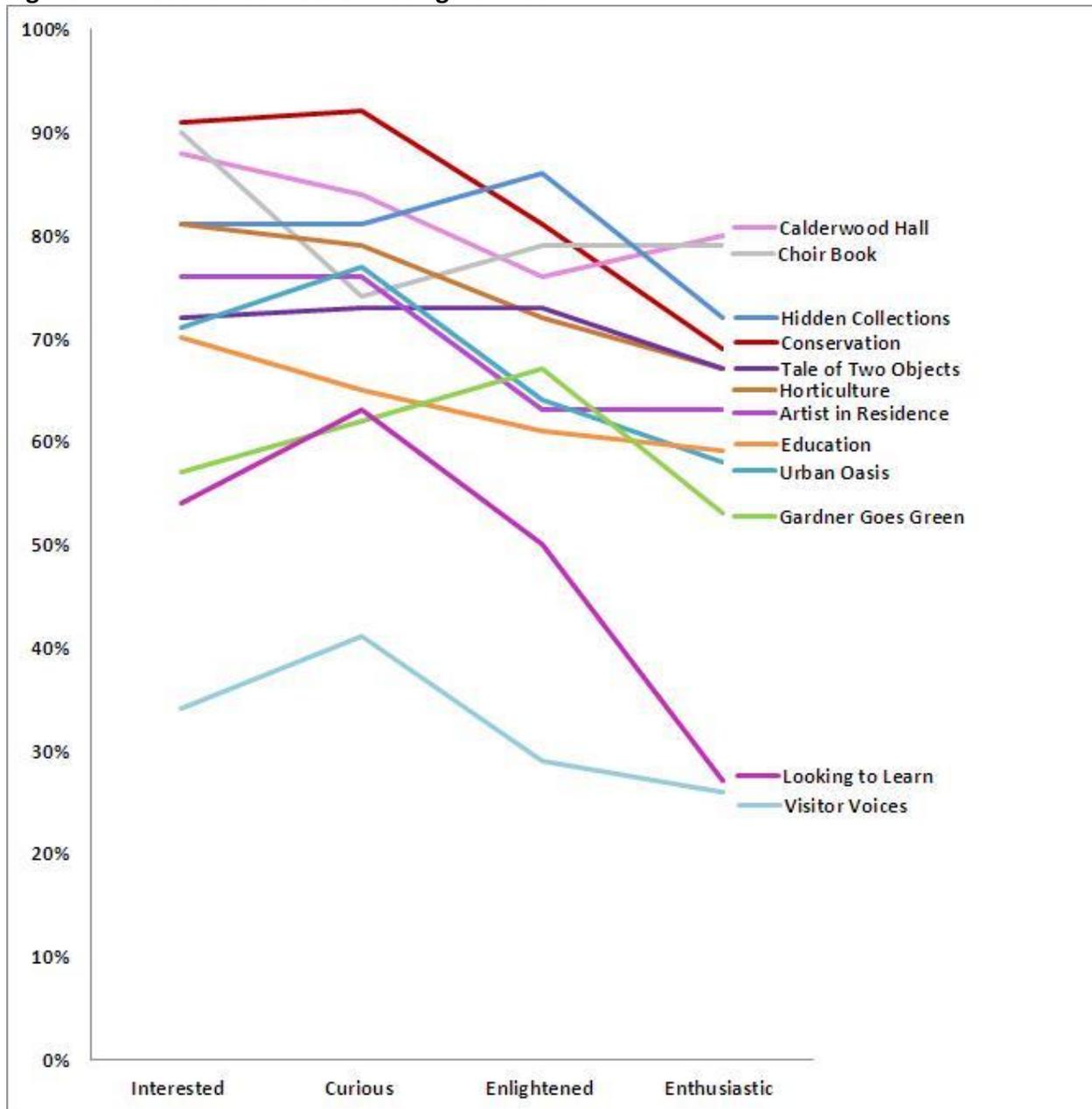
EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE FILMS: SUMMATIVE

- As with the initial three films, the second set of nine films also evoked interest, curiosity, enthusiasm, and feelings of enlightenment among viewers.
- The *Calderwood Hall*, *Choir Book*, and *Hidden Collections* films elicited the strongest positive emotions, while, in comparison, the *Visitor Voices* film drew the least enthusiastic response.
 - *Choir Book* and *Calderwood Hall* drew the most **interest**.
 - *Hidden Collections* and *Calderwood Hall* elicited the most **curiosity**.
 - Respondents felt most **enlightened** after viewing *Hidden Collections* and *Choir Book*.
 - Respondents were most **enthusiastic** about *Calderwood Hall* and *Hidden Collections*.
- Older and younger respondents were equally moved by the films, as were men and women; nor did familiarity with the Gardner appear to impact emotional responses to the nine films.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE FILMS: OVERALL

The figure below shows the emotional connection ratings for all 12 films, including those rated in the formative as well as the summative phase of the evaluation. As the figure shows, most of the films were quite successful at engaging the audience in various ways, with the majority of viewers giving top ratings of interest, curiosity, enlightenment, and enthusiasm. *Visitor Voices* and, to some extent, *Looking to Learn* were somewhat less engaging in these ways, although a third to half of the respondents still found these two films quite engaging. Taking the dozen films as a whole, they were especially successful at stimulating interest and curiosity.

Figure 1: Emotional Connection Ratings for Each Film



Note: Percentages represent proportions of respondents rating film 6 or 7 (the two highest ratings) in each category.

QUESTIONS SPARKED BY FILMS: FORMATIVE

There were many questions viewers wanted to follow up on after watching the three films in the formative phase of the evaluation:

- **Conservation**
 - *Conservation* viewers wanted to know more about other conservation techniques and technology, as well as conservation of other media. There was also a great deal of interest in the conservation department, conservation process, and the conservators themselves.

- **Education**
 - *Education* viewers had many questions about the museum's educational programs and offerings. Regarding the film, they were most interested in knowing more about the effects of the VTS program and were very intrigued by the medical student program.

- **Horticulture**
 - Those who watched the *Horticulture* film wanted more information about the plants and their selection and the museum's seasonal displays. There was interest in the greenhouse and inquiries about visiting it. Viewers were also curious about the garden's history.

QUESTIONS SPARKED BY FILMS: SUMMATIVE

As with the first three films, viewers of the second set of films were asked what they'd like to learn more about. Again, these films piqued respondents' curiosity in various ways, as summarized below:

- **Urban Oasis: The Redesigned Monk's Garden (n=30)**
 - Respondents inquired about details for how to see the Garden in person (e.g., its location, when it is open to the public) and more details about the Garden itself; for example, its design, the types of plants that are in the garden, and why they were selected.

- **Visitor Voices (n=24)**
 - Many respondents indicated there was nothing additional they wanted to learn about after viewing this film. Of those who had questions, these varied widely, but all fell under the general heading of wanting to know more details about the visitors' experiences with the Gardner.

- **Performing In Calderwood Hall (n=11)**
 - Respondents were interested in learning about the design and acoustics of Calderwood Hall. Others were curious about the music itself, or wanted to know how they could see a performance in the hall.

- **Hidden Collections (n=21)**
 - Respondents were interested in gaining a better understanding of the cases, including their role, how they were put together, and where they are. Some were also curious about Mrs. Gardner’s role in assembling the cases and her correspondence with artists.
- **The Gardner Goes Green (n=18)**
 - Respondents had questions about the green technology used (e.g., cost, savings in water and energy, details about how the technology works) and the relation of this technology to the museum; for example, the potential for expansion, or the promotion of its green design.
- **A Choir Book Comes to Life (n=19)**
 - Respondents expressed curiosity to learn more details about the book itself; for example, the illustration inside of it, and its condition). They also expressed interest in actually seeing the book used by a choir in real life.
- **A Tale of Two Objects (n=17)**
 - Several respondents expressed newfound appreciation for the objects and an interest in visiting again to see them anew; others wanted to know more about the back story; for instance, the history, details around the exhibit’s installment, and the reaction when it was first displayed.
- **Looking To Learn (n=11)**
 - Respondents were interested in details about which schools are involved and the criteria for schools’ and students’ involvement in the program, as well as in the effects of the program (e.g., how much information students retain, impact on student museum attendance).
- **Artist in Residence: Carla Fernandez (n=7)**
 - Respondents were interested in more information about the Gardner’s textile collection; for example, the processes by which the textiles are made, their sales, and so on.

“[The film] humanizes the museum more because we get to see how an individual acquired such remarkable works instead of just seeing them in a museum setting.”

–Survey respondent, summative evaluation

QUESTIONS SPARKED BY FILMS: OVERALL

As a group, then, the dozen films were very successful in sparking questions and interest in viewers. This is consistent with the high numerical ratings on the “curiosity” and “interest” emotional connection items. Not surprisingly, the *Visitor Voices* film was somewhat less likely to spark questions than were the other films.

PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FILMS: FORMATIVE

- As a group, the first three films of the Work-In-Progress project were most effective in the following ways, with over 70% of viewers rating them as *very* or *extremely* effective:
 - Informing visitors about the quality of behind-the-scenes activities
 - Helping visitors feel more attentive to particular aspects of the museum
 - Informing visitors about unique aspects about the museum
 - Making the work of the museum more accessible

Over half of viewers found the films *very* or *extremely* effective in these ways:

- Informing visitors of the quantity of behind-the-scenes activities
 - Informing visitors' perspectives on the collection
 - Helping visitors feel more comfortable in their museum experience
- Viewers with a greater emotional connection to the films thought the films were more effective.
 - Females were more positive about the films' effects on making the work of the museum more accessible, and making them more comfortable and attentive.

“I never thought of developing my power of observation more strongly, and yet in the video we see medical students doing just that. It's the same thing happening with the children. When I return to the Gardner, I think I will have more mindfulness.”

–Survey respondent, formative evaluation

PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FILMS: SUMMATIVE

- As a group, the second set of nine Work-in-Progress films were most effective in the following ways, with over 60% of viewers rating them as *very* or *extremely* effective:
 - Helping visitors feel more attentive to particular aspects of the museum
 - Informing visitors about unique aspects about the museum

Over half of viewers found the films *very* or *extremely* effective in these ways:

- Informing visitors of the quality of behind-the-scenes activities
- Compared to the first three films, effectiveness ratings for the second set of nine differed more from film to film. However, six of the nine films were rated as quite effective in at least one way, with more than 70% of respondents rating the film as *very* or *extremely* effective in that way.
 - As in the formative evaluation, viewers who had a greater emotional connection to the films thought the films were more effective across the board.
 - There was a tendency for younger viewers (under 50) to say the films helped them feel more comfortable in their museum experience and informed them about unique aspects of the Gardner.
 - Men were more likely to say the films helped them feel more attentive to particular aspects of the museum.

“This film affects how I see the Gardner because it confirms what I've intuited on my visits to the museum, that the vision of the Gardner includes a non-authoritative invitation to open yourself up to its beauty and calm.”

–Survey respondent, summative evaluation

PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FILMS: OVERALL

The table below shows the most and least effective films in each category, including all 12 films. In terms of effectiveness, *Horticulture*, *Education*, *Artist in Residence*, *Choir Book*, and *Two Objects* were reported to meet the largest numbers of different objectives.

Table 2: Objective categories	Most effective ^a	Less effective ^b
Making the work of museum more accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conservation</i> • <i>Education</i> • <i>Horticulture</i> • <i>Artist in Residence</i> • <i>Looking to Learn</i> • <i>Choir Book</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor Voices</i> • <i>Gardner Goes Green</i> • <i>Two Objects</i>
Informing about quality of museum activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conservation</i> • <i>Education</i> • <i>Horticulture</i> • <i>Artist in Residence</i> • <i>Choir Book</i> • <i>Two Objects</i> • <i>Gardner Goes Green</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor Voices</i>
Informing about quantity of museum activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Horticulture</i> • <i>Artist in Residence</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor Voices</i> • <i>Calderwood</i>
Creating comfort in museum experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Education</i> • <i>Two Objects</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Looking to Learn</i> • <i>Gardner Goes Green</i> • <i>Visitor Voices</i>
Creating attentiveness to aspects of museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Conservation</i> • <i>Education</i> • <i>Horticulture</i> • <i>Choir Book</i> • <i>Two Objects</i> • <i>Hidden Collections</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor Voices</i>
Informing perspective on the collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Artist in Residence</i> • <i>Hidden Collections</i> • <i>Two Objects</i> • <i>Choir Book</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gardner Goes Green</i> • <i>Looking to Learn</i> • <i>Calderwood</i> • <i>Visitor Voices</i>
Informing about unique aspects of the museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Education</i> • <i>Horticulture</i> • <i>Artist in Residence</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Visitor Voices</i>

^aMore than 70% of respondents rated the film as *very* or *extremely* effective in this regard.

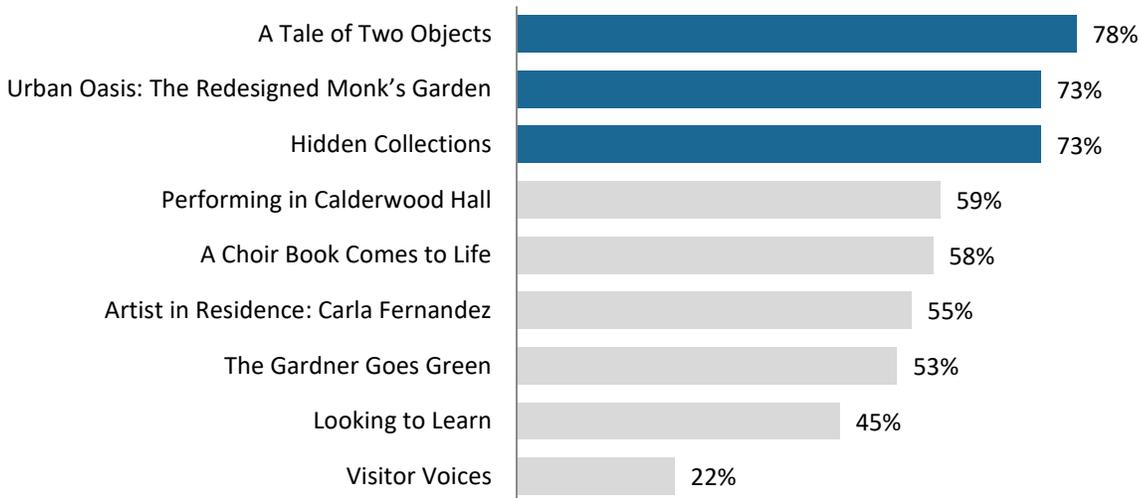
^bFewer than 30% of respondents rated the film as *very* or *extremely* effective in this regard.

Visitor Voices was rather less effective in meeting these objectives; surprisingly, this was true even of “helping you feel more comfortable in your museum experience.” However, it is important to note that the respondents who rated that film had all visited the Gardner before. It is possible, even likely, that people who are unfamiliar with the Gardner might find this film more effective in that regard.

FUTURE TOPICS OF INTEREST: SUMMATIVE

Almost all (97%) of the respondents were at least *somewhat* likely to view an additional film aside from the two they watched as part of the evaluation; 61% reported being *very* or *extremely* likely to do so. The figure below shows the interest drawn by each films, with the top three being *Two Objects*, *Urban Oasis*, and *Hidden Collections*.

Figure 2: Additional Work-in-Progress films respondents were interested in watching



Note: Respondents who were at least *somewhat* likely to watch an additional film indicated which film(s) they thought they might watch.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Both the formative and summative evaluation results revealed that the Work-in-Progress film series worked as intended. Viewers gained new information about the work of the museum, were engaged and inspired by the films, and found them effective at meeting a variety of objectives. Moreover, the deeper the viewers' emotional response to the films, the greater the perceived effectiveness of the films.

Many people mentioned questions that they had after viewing the films. These questions indicate areas of interest for follow-up activities or future films. For example, the Gardner may consider providing a list of answers to frequently asked questions near the kiosk and on the website, or offer a way for viewers to submit questions. Many of the questions viewers had were about ways to further explore the museum in ways suggested by the film topics; for example, how to attend a concert in Calderwood Hall, see the Monk's Garden, or get a particular school involve in the Looking to Learn program. Providing this type of information could promote greater interaction and connectedness between visitors and the Gardner museum.

List of Appendices

APPENDIX A: FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE RESULTS IN TABULAR FORM

APPENDIX B: ANNOTATED SUMMATIVE SURVEY