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Reading the Gardner: Viewership, Readership, and Public Art

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It was a cold and windy January day as I stepped off the Green Line T at the Museum of Fine Arts station. As I pulled my scarf closer around my neck, I pushed my way around the bodies covered in North Face ski parkers and Ugg boots that were all heading to the large MFA building off to my right.

I had a different agenda.

With the sound of ambulance sirens ringing in my ears I looked up and saw a street sign that read Louis Prang St. I hurried down the sidewalk, crossing the street at the next intersection and saw the large sandstone building looming from behind a brick wall. The entrance to the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum was facing the sidewalk and required passing through an iron fence with an open gate to reach it.

The organization utilized by Gardner in her museum requires interaction from the visitor and exemplifies the importance of the “critical visitor” who is held in high regard in modern museum theory. New theories of museum practices emphasize the need for visitors to be active and engage themselves with museum surroundings. Margaret Lindauer, who specializes in museum studies, discusses the steps a critical viewer should engage in when attempting to learn from a museum, in her article *The Critical Museum Visitor*. A critical viewer, after choosing an exhibit, needs to become aware of what they are expecting from the exhibit. Lindauer suggests that the viewer “...consciously describe. . . expectations, hopes, and assumptions” (204). Lindauer stresses the need for visitors to pay attention to how their own personal background can affect their experience at the museum. These questions should be addressed before attending the exhibit.

Landscape, according to Lindauer, plays the next essential role in viewing and critical thinking at the museum. When examining landscape, visitors should take into account the community in which the museum resides. Is it a big city? Is it a small town? Then consider the landscape of the museum itself, both inside and out. What is the architectural structure of the building? Is it functional? Is it flamboyant? What kind of a message is it trying to convey? In other words, what a viewer sees on the exterior of the museum can affect the message a visitor receives from the interior. The Gardner Museum rests on the outskirts of the hustle and bustle of downtown Boston, along the Fenway.

As for the interior of the museum, the critical viewer pays attention to how exhibits are installed. Is the museum public and organized in a typical gallery fashion? Or is it the arrangement collective like a private house museum? These observations are clues as to how to make sense of the exhibits. For instance at a house museum like the Gardner, the installations are about the relationships between the objects and not just the objects individually. The house museum arrangement is a tip to the visitor to pay special attention to the exhibits as a whole and to question the relationships between the objects. I have made numerous trips to the museum and continue to study the exhibits closely looking for answers to that question.

On that first day, the entire courtyard was bright with natural light that filtered in from the glass sky lights above it and, despite the harsh weather outside, there were lush green plants on just about every inch of stone and granite. The walls glowed a peach color and the sound of water trickled through Chinese fighting fish fountain at the head of the courtyard. The fountain sat just below the double-sided staircase that leads from the courtyard to the second floor. Balconies hung off the second and third floors, with marble columns around the entire space. In the middle of the space sat a tiled mosaic with a depiction of Medusa in the middle. My eyes darted about in amazement. I had never seen such architecture in person before. The details in the balconies, the statues from centuries ago, and the lush gardens all combined to give Bostonians a taste of nineteenth century European High Society. Retreating from the glowing courtyard I turned down a hall near the exit, quickly left my coat with a young girl, and took a swing through a small room off the hallway.

The room was dim, lit only by a soft yellow glow. The walls were covered with paintings, some portraits and other landscapes, on every side and around every corner. Along one wall there were cases that held old letters, written to Gardner, in penmanship that was too difficult to decipher. Looking at the letters and paintings together I started thinking that Gardner was preparing to tell me a story. A story that was just as much about her own life as it was about art. My thoughts were interrupted by an older, chubby woman with grey hair, wearing a badge around her neck that identified her as a museum worker. She came over and asked, "Did you just get here or have you already been through the museum?" Upon hearing that I had just got there she told me to be sure I went to the information booth to borrow a guide book before going up into the galleries. She explained that nothing was labeled and that I wouldn't know what anything was without a guide.

Interestingly enough that is exactly why I was visiting the museum. Through the reading of numerous articles, The Gardner Museum website, and a biography of Gardner I learned about the history of the museum as well as its founder. The art and collectibles within the museum's walls all come from the private collection of Isabella Stuart Gardner and her husband, John Gardner (Jack for short), gathered over the years via their wealth. In addition, Mrs. Gardner designed and oversaw the building of the museum at Fenway Court in Boston's Back Bay, ensuring everything was to her exact specifications.

An author and an artist both work to construct text and, although they have no control in deciding what the reader of the text will take from it, they choose the words or elements that make up that text. Theorist Louise Rosenblatt says, "the artist using the medium of words must, like other artists, make his appeal primarily to the senses if his desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions" (48). Similarly the artist decides what he or she will paint, draw, or sculpt, then chooses the materials and colors for the project. Isabella Stuart Gardner can be thought of as the author of the Gardner collection. She personally composed and installed each of her exhibits throughout the building; the resulting relationships of art and space should be considered a text.

Gardner arranged her collection in a way that she thought would be most effective to the viewer. The style she implemented in her private museum is what is known as a house museum setup and could be compared to the arrangement of a living room. Currently, the Gardner is one of only six art museums in the world that use the house museum arrangement. The other five include "Musée' Conde' in the Chateau Chantilly near Paris, the Wallace Collection in London, the Huntington Art Collection in Pasadena, the Frick Collection in New York City, and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C. (Higonnet 135).

According to museum theorist Andrew McClellan, this organization involves "thematic arrangements that disobey normal sequences of school and period and new contextual approaches to nonwestern and religious art" (xvii). Gardner didn't pay attention to classifying according to genre, artist, or date, but rather paid attention to shape, color, and light. In this way the Gardner Museum is an intimate space in which viewers can experience art in a different way than at a traditional museum. Gardner did things, creating unheard of combinations of elements like Italian and French furnishings, that no one else dared to do. She left the labels out of her collection, unlike traditional museums, because she thought visitors shouldn't like something based on who it was attributed to, but rather that they should pay attention to each work and decide what they thought of it on their own.

She dared visitors to think for themselves when they came to her museum. The Titian Room on the third floor was Gardner's favorite room of all those in her home, housing her greatest masterpiece, Titian's *Rape of Europa*. After the painting finally arrived from Europe Gardner sat in the Titian room and admired the work for hours. She wrote in a letter:

I am breathless over the *Europa*, even yet! I am back here tonight... after a two days' orgy. The orgy was drinking myself drunk with *Europa* and then sitting for hours in my Italian Garden at Brookline, thinking and dreaming about her. (Goldfarb 118)

I climbed the marble staircase to the third floor, passing through the dark blue and gold of the Veronese Room where the angels in *The Coronation of Hebe* by Paolo Veronese dance across the ceiling, into the Titian Room glowing with afternoon sunlight from the courtyard. Immediately I was immersed in a sea of burgundy and gold which I associate with wealth.

The Titian Room is always buzzing with visitors. On an April afternoon, I wandered within the room's burgundy walls splashed with sunlight. I watched a guard in a dark suit hasten toward a tour guide as she enters with her group from the Long Gallery. The man is an older gentleman with a beard that matches the few white hairs that still cling to his head. He maintains a serious and almost intimidating expression at all times. Pointing toward the tour group already in the corner he motions the petite woman toward the exit. There were already about twenty five people in the room before the second group entered, and my guess is that more than one tour group can't be in a room at once.

As the second group crowds neared the exit I made my way over to the first tour group gathering in front of Gardner's favorite *Europa*, listening intently to their tour guide. A young woman with dark hair pulled back from her face pointed to the painting and explained, "You see how the tail of the bull here is not straight and leads the eye directly to Cupid?" She went on to discuss how Europa's body appears as if it is about to fall off the bull into the water and how Titian painted in a circular pattern, as all the elements of the work are in a circle.

The guide then talked about the elements surrounding the masterpiece and why Gardner installed them that way. My eyes glanced beneath the painting as I heard the guide mention that hanging below the painting is a piece of green fabric with a tassel pattern that was once part of a dress belonging to Gardner. Gardner had placed the textile there to reflect the green color in the water of *Europa*. The woman pointed out how a ceramic plate decorated with a blue wave pattern that rests on the table mimics the waves crashing on the shore in the Titian. She also

pointed out a sculpture, called a *putto*, sitting next to the plate, resting in the same position as the body of Europa. Listening to the guide I realized that the object surrounding this painting are not there just for a pleasing color display. The sculpture, fabric panel, plate, and other objects in the arrangement are positioned to help the visitor understand the painting better. By mimicking colors and positions the objects help reinforce and point out the details in the painting that a viewer might miss. Finally, the young woman said Gardner installed the painting in this location on the wall, near a window, so the morning sun could illuminate it each day.

Gardner wanted to educate her museum visitors and expose them to all the great cultures in the world that she and her husband were able to visit. When visitors come to the Gardner they are not just able to view masterpieces from renowned artists such as Rembrandt, Sargeant, and Botticelli, but they also step into rooms that hold unique collectibles from a variety of cultures. Visitors are able to see collections of original manuscripts, tables and chairs from Italy, France, and a handful of other countries, and , among other things, classic architecture of Spanish and Venetian design. To walk through the Gardner is like taking a voyage across the seas. It is this mixing of genres and elements that engages visitors and allows them to learn about cultures other than their own.

It is a difficult task to promote learning in an art museum. According to Falk and Dierking, authors of *Learning From Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, in order to intrigue a potential learner, a museum exhibit must present a certain challenge to the visitor as well as require skills in line with those of the visitor. In essence it must offer enough to capture and hold a viewer's attention. Not every exhibit will interest every visitor at a museum; instead visitors must freely choose what they want to look at, and if they want to learn from it. The exhibits picked are, "ones that interest the visitor and provide appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, and emotional challenge" (Dierking 25). The kinds of exhibits that generally ask a visitor to do work to make meaning are commonly found at Science and Children's Museums. For instance the Museum of Science in Boston has numerous hands on exhibits to help visitors, including an entire room where there is nothing but hands on experiments to learn about sounds, bones, and dinosaurs, among other things. Interactive exhibits promote learning and help viewers to commit facts and ideas to memory. Art museums tend to be a different experience because touching the collections is forbidden. Gardner tried to find an analogy to the interactive exhibit by asking her visitors to do work with her collection.

As I moved throughout the museum I participated in the kind of interactive work that Gardner had promoted. After exiting the lecture in the Tapestry Room I found myself in the Dutch Room among portraits of many important European figures including Mary Tudor and Queen Isabella. This room is dark, but the few fixtures and the sun from the courtyard provide enough light to view what was important just as Gardner, via Fenton, suggested to me. On the same wall as the doorway leading to the Tapestry Room, on the opposite end, hangs a portrait by Anthonis Mor of Queen Mary Tudor, whose face depicts a serious and strong demeanor but is softened by the light of the museum. She wears a dress of a deep green and rests upon a chair of red satin with gold embroidery.

Beneath this painting is a sofa, and to the right sits a chair of the same red satin and gold embroidery as in the painting. From the portrait of Queen Mary Tudor the light takes the viewer's attention around the corner, passed another painting, and to a portrait of a young boy who stands draped in a cape of red satin. Three chairs of the same color rest below. In this corner Gardner uses light to guide the viewer through important paintings, but she has also set up an installation that is pleasing to the eye and emphasizes the color red yet again. The furniture within this room, a sofa and chairs with intricate red and gold embroidery, reflect upon the lifestyle of those in the paintings. Lavish furniture could only have been afforded by those of a particular social class. By placing these expensive objects next to the portraits not only does Gardner provide a visually pleasing color palette, but she also helps to explain to visitors the social class and lifestyle of those in the paintings. Each element of the displays in this room come together to speak this story and, in this way, the entire exhibit, furniture and all, not just the paintings, becomes the masterpiece.

Multiple elements like those Gardner used for her installations wouldn't be found together in a public art museum, and that is what makes the experience of the Isabella Stuart Gardner Museum unique. A public art museum can be thought of as a traditional art museum in its set up. The characteristics that would constitute traditional museum design include classification among genres and time periods, as well as labels for each piece. In the introduction to the book *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* McClellan explains that, "In the modern era, the rational classification of art has meant the separation of art types and media, high from low, western from non-western, and organization by nationality, or 'school,' and historical period" (xvii). The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston is an example of the traditional museum.

Each piece at the MFA has a label that gives its title, artist, medium, and size. I visited one of the special exhibits entitled

Degas to Picasso which looks at modern works. I moved along the flat gray walls while the bright spot lights led my gaze from canvas to canvas, my eye consistently drifting to labels, some rather large with as many as 25 lines of text, next to each painting. After the standard information mentioned above, there was a paragraph that discussed what the painting was about and what the artist was trying to attempt. I moved to the next canvas and found the same thing.

New museum theory stresses that, "object labels start with concrete visual information and extend to no more than 50 words" (Lindauer 213). Private museums, such as the Gardner, use no labels or labels with very little text like that proposed in new museum theory. The labels used at the MFA prohibited me from trying to make any separate meaning from what I was viewing. Each label was so large that my eye was immediately drawn to it and as a result I read the museum's interpretation of the painting before I even had the chance to analyze it. I found myself looking for the interpretation written on the label instead of attempting to make my own.

Back at the Gardner there are more than enough opportunities to make meaning, connections and interpretations. The Early Italian Room on the second floor is currently closed while the collection undergoes preservation and new lighting is installed, but I have visited it many times and find it a very intimate space. Walking to the wall on the right of the stairwell I see a large rectangular painting with a blue background labeled *Pessollino (1423-1437) Cassoni Panels*. The museum guide book explains that this is one of two panels (the other hangs on the other end of the wall), originally the decorative front panel of a *cassoni* chest that held the valuables of an Italian family. This particular panel is called *The Triumphs of Fame, Time, and Eternity* and was painted by Francesco di Stefano. Glancing to the case below the painting, I lean in closer to get a better look at the jewels inside it. There are a number of beads on the left of the case that appear Chinese in style and contain colors that are all visible in the *Cassoni Panel* above. There are blues and warm tones of pink that reflect within both items. The case also contains a table cloth the same shade of blue as the background of the painting and the two chairs to the left of the case and two to the right are upholstered in this blue.

The Early Italian Room may be small and feel rather crowded with the combination of furniture, art work, and other collectibles, just like in all of the galleries of the Gardner, but color, arrangement, and light guided my eyes through the aspects of it. The small space also works because it creates a very intimate atmosphere, similar to that of a chapel, which is suitable for the numerous religious works on display in this room. Again the experience was different than the MFA because it is about all the elements working together to produce a meaning larger than sum of its

many parts. Looking at the *Cassoni Panel* in combination with the case of beads and the chairs around it is different than just looking at the panel alone. It becomes more about understanding why the items are together rather than just about one piece of art.

When viewers put to work making meaning from an exhibit it is what museum theorists Falk and Dierking call a “flow experience.” The flow experience satisfies museum visitors’ thirst for knowledge. Visitors are left with a sense of accomplishment which encourages them to continue searching for meaning from other exhibits (Dierking 25). That is exactly the feeling I had when I made the connections between the items in the Raphael room and their reflections upon the standing in society of those depicted in the portraits hanging on the walls. I was excited that I had understood the challenge Gardner had presented me with. I was in charge of the process of interpreting and composing.

As I sought to make meaning at the Gardner I realized the experience was very similar to the interpretations I make when reading. I dig through the pages of a novel, pulling out bits and pieces of information, trying to make meaning. I pay close attention to some characters and discard others. I make lists of themes that interest me in a novel and focus in on them while casting others aside. As a reader I am in charge of the text and of what I choose to do with the material I take in, just as I am in charge of understanding the exhibits at the Gardner. The author of a text has put the elements all together for the reader but it is the reader who decides what to do with them.

What readers do with texts is to infer from their own knowledge of the world to fill in gaps and blanks in texts. Critic Terry Eagleton refers to this process as reception theory (64). With reception theory, “The text itself is no more than a series of ‘cues’ to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of knowledge into meaning” (Eagleton 66). The process of inferring meaning from a text is how a reader communicates with it. When a reader infers meaning from a text, or an art exhibit, they do so based on their own knowledge and that means that each interpretation will be different, because each reader has their own personal set of beliefs and knowledge that make up the background which they will use to infer meaning. According to Rosenblatt, the reader, “must draw on his past experience with life and language as the raw materials out of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the page” (25). In other words the reader relates what she reads on the page to her own life and interprets using what she knows from her own life experience. Since each reader has different values and experiences each interpretation of a text will be different.

Reception theory is applicable to more than just written texts. Its ideas lend nicely to museums as well and the role of the critical museum visitor, which involves examining the written aspects of the exhibit. A critical viewer should consider how much is said and how much is not said in writing. Lindauer suggests, “Read between the lines. Whose knowledge is presented? What is explicitly asserted and what is implied or unspoken. . . .To whom does it speak and for what purpose?” (213). These kinds of questions provoke emotions about the exhibit and help to give an understanding of its purpose and theme. Because the Gardner Museum relies very little on the written word, its visitors must ask a lot of questions about the *theory* behind Gardner’s exhibits and follow the steps of a critical museum visitor.

Of course it is highly doubtful that visitors self-consciously follow the steps of the critical visitor, checking them off as they complete each one. It is a lot of work to ask a visitor to do such a thing. However, the Gardner uses the visual to evoke questions of its visitors so that they subconsciously follow the steps of the critical visitor. In the book *Picturing Texts* the authors, who focus on the study of visual rhetoric, explain that, “In addition to thinking about the immediate and broader contexts, you also need to read with an eye for intertextuality, the way the texts build upon and consciously refer to other texts” (Faigley 16). The Gardner asks that visitors build upon each object that they examine and decide why things are relational to one another. The idea of building upon the visual messages speaks back to reading theory and the building upon gaps and cues in the text.

From what I have seen over the past months, there are those who visit the Gardner with the mindset that it is a typical museum; they simply come to look at the great masterpieces that call it home. Still there are others that meander through without guidebooks, open to all Gardner has to offer as a unique, one of a kind experience. They learn to appreciate the museum in the way I have come to.

On a visit early this summer I was walking through the Tapestry Room and noticed two women juggling guide books and maps, long, black, telephone-shaped audio guides pressed to their ears. The women were both about 5’5” and looked to be in their 50’s, wearing cropped pants, blouses, and walking sneakers. Standing in the back of the room I busily read a sign informing visitors that the Early Italian collection is being stored in the Tapestry Room while the room is closed and notice the two women by the windows glancing from their books up to the walls. Clearly they were searching for something. After a few moments the two women stop in front of the *St. Engracia* painting and press their audio guides to their ears. After they are finished they move on to the next room, the Short Gallery, which I entered moments before them. They stopped to look at nothing else along the way.

As I flipped through the cases of pencil drawings on the right side of the room, just to the right of the entryway, one of the women says to the other, "What room is this? It must be the Little Salon." Not convinced with her guess, she asked the guard who is seated in a small chair near the other door way. "This is the Short Gallery," answers the petite dark haired woman in an unidentifiable accent. The two women go back to their books and press their guides back to their ears as they move to the painting of Gardner in Venice by Anders Zorn, hanging on the opposite end of the wall where I continue to peruse the drawings. A minute or so passes and the women move out of the corner having looked at nothing else.

On that same summer afternoon I noticed a family, an older balding gentleman with silver hair, a middle-aged woman of Asian descent who could possibly have been his wife, and a young dark haired girl, about fifteen. The group moved through the museum at a slow pace, admiring everything closely, without guides of any kind. I first came across them in the Short Gallery while the two women viewed the Zorn painting, and I watched them yet again in the busy Raphael Room. As I stood on one of the small balconies looking down into the courtyard, the family examined the *Tragedy of Lucretia* by Boticelli. Turning around to leave the balcony I saw the silver haired man and young girl bend down to get a better view of a painting that lay across the front of a chest which sits on the ground beneath the Boticelli. I saw the family again upstairs on the third floor where they walked down the Long Gallery and lifted the cloths that cover the display cases that line each side of the narrow room, examining the letters and books displayed in each.

I am sure Gardner would have happily befriended the family of three as they made their own meaning as she had wished. But was either of these groups doing anything wrong? Maybe not. The two women simply felt they got more out of the museum by studying the masterpieces, while the family enjoyed the whole experience of the museum. Each group had their own beliefs that guided them through their viewing and reading of the text of the Gardner. However, according to reception theory, those that worked to make meaning on their own learned more. The family at the Gardner didn't bother with maps or audio guides that colored their views and told them what to think. They took the text as it was and built connections based upon what they were given. They engaged in the steps of a critical viewer and examined and questioned the landscape of the museum. As readers continue to infer and make connections with a text, they are building knowledge. Making meaning from a text involves building up knowledge as you read through it or, in the case of a museum, walk through it. Eagleton writes:

Reading is not a straightforward linear movement, a merely cumulative affair: our initial speculations generate a frame of reference within which to interpret what comes next may retrospectively transform our original understanding, highlighting some features of it and back grounding others. (67)

For instance when readers are working with a text, they are dealing with themes, characters, setting, and plot. If a character is introduced on page four and is not spoken of again until page fifty-four, the reader needs to remember what they learned about the character back on page four. A reader needs to cue up that knowledge and bring it back into the frame of what they are working with. Readers then have to decide what parts of a text are important on the journey to making meaning and what parts they don't need to consider at that moment. For instance in the novel *Edgar Huntly* by Charles Brockden Brown, the reader is introduced to the character Saresfield for the first ten or so pages of the book and then he is gone. There is no explanation of where he went or what happened until he reappears again some 200 pages later. What's a reader to make of that? A similar situation occurs in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Here the author continuously moves back and forth between multiple story lines, which requires the reader remember the details of each one even if a particular situation hasn't been talked about in 50 pages. A reader also needs to be aware of what is said in a text and what is implied or left out. According to Iser, "what is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light" (34). The blanks between what is revealed and what is not work as a space for readers to create meaning.

At the Gardner Museum visitors have to keep track of all information, just as readers of a text do. I constantly learn new things or see new things each time I visit. Recently I noticed that in the Gothic Room, on the third floor of the museum, the top of the wall all the way around the room is adorned with miniature portraits. Somehow I had missed those paintings each time I had previously visited. So now the room had more to it that I had to think about. There were all the things I had seen prior to this recent discovery and these new paintings to add along with that knowledge. Reading is a constant movement back and forth; it is a process of intellectual growth. The mind is challenged to decide what is important, what is not, and what those important elements mean. So to with the Gothic Room's furnishings: the small paintings on the very top of the wall help to break up the dark wooden rafter ceiling and dark browns of the room. Gardner has drawn attention to the architecture of the room that is above eye level by using the paintings to lure the eye up.

Building knowledge, making connections, and filling in gaps in a text results in learning new knowledge that could not have been gained otherwise. When readers are asked to do work with a text they receive more information from it. The same can be said of museum visitors who learn more from an exhibit in which they are asked to participate. Eagleton says of this kind of work that asks for participation from the reader:

Rather than merely reinforce our given perceptions, the valuable work of literature violates or transgresses these normative ways of seeing, and so teaches us new codes for understanding. (68)

A reader that puts work into a text will be rewarded with meaning from that text. That meaning is developed only through stages of building knowledge while working with the text. The key though is for the work to be put in. If a reader has no interest in a particular work, or no knowledge of the subject, he or she will not be able to find that meaning. Also there are simply some readers that won't be willing to do the work. I constantly passed visitors at the Gardner, such as the two women, who were not putting in the work to get the most meaning. I myself have read books that I have no interest in and don't bother to engage in the effort to develop meaning. It is the readers' choice whether or not he or she will attempt to make meaning. But that is the choice of the reader and that is the point of the whole argument of reception theory and free-choice learning: the reader has been presented the opportunity to learn.

Today more and more Americans are visiting museums in search of new information. Falk and Dierking write, "Today...somewhere between two and three out of every five Americans visit a museum at least once a year" (2). They argue that Americans are realizing the important role museums can play in their lives if they choose to participate in the learning process. Of course this learning can only occur if the museum exhibits are set up to challenge the visitor. A museum like the Gardner does more than simply motivate visitors to participate; it *requires* them to. When visitors can interact with an exhibit and it engages them intellectually, they are more likely to remember it. Thus, their experience stays with them beyond the length of the trip and becomes a part of their working theory of the world, a working theory made richer for interaction with the remarkable text of the Gardner.

In recent years curators have begun to implement elements of the private museum into their installations. Theorist McClellan acknowledges:

Lately we have come to recognize what has long gone unseen, namely that public museums are also the product of individual choices and curatorial vision, and we now find curators acknowledging authorship of installations (in the form of signed wall labels) and museums experimenting with alternative, in some cases pre-modern ordering systems. (xvii)

He goes on to state that, "ironically, private collections like Gardner's, once the embodiment of everything rejected by the large survey museum, have become a model of sorts for progressive installations" (xvii). It has taken almost a century for museum curators to embrace a new concept for museum organization. Perhaps they have realized that Gardner, who implemented the house museum style in her own museum over a century ago, was right all along when it came to immersing people into the world of art. In her article "Museum Insight" Anne Higonnet says, "class, gender, nationality, and race" play a role in the construct of private museums (135). Having these elements within the Gardner result in museum visitors that leave not only with a better understanding of art, but also with knowledge pertaining to the social construct of the world they live in.

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