

The Humanities in Our Lives



THE VALUE OF MUSEUMS

Many studies of the benefits of art have focused on school children. When the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art opened in 2011 in Bentonville, Arkansas, researchers took the opportunity to survey thousands of students—both those who went to the museum on school trips and those who did not visit. Their findings suggest that viewing art helps museum-goers improve critical thinking, including skills such as observation, comparison, and interpretation, as well as their ability to analyze other works of art.

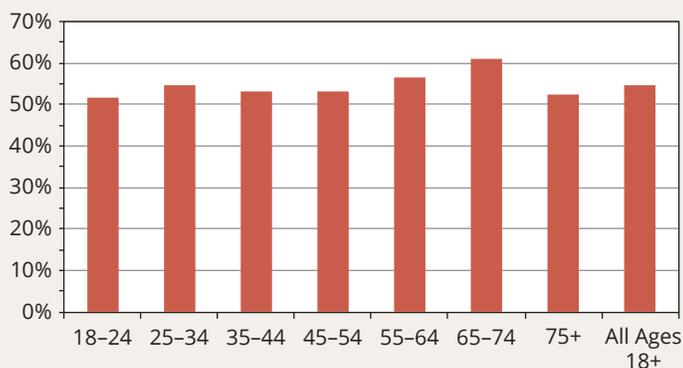
MUSEUM ATTENDANCE

Americans visit art museums less and less often. In 2002, the National Endowment for the Arts found that people took in art at museums or galleries an average of 3.5 times a year; a decade later, that number had dropped to 2.7 annual visits. That's significantly fewer Picassos, O'Keefes, Rembrandts, and Warhols.

KEY FACTS

- In 2012, 21% of the U.S. adult population reported a trip to a museum or art gallery in the previous year—the lowest level ever recorded over the three decades that data have been collected.
- With the exception of seniors, visits to art exhibits fell across all populations from 1982 to 2012.

Share of Americans Who Visited an Art Museum or Gallery in Past Year, by Age Cohort, 2012



INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

The Smithsonian Institution, in collaboration with state humanities councils, hosts “Museum on Main Street,” traveling exhibitions that have visited over 14,000 towns (with average populations of 8,000) across the United States since 1994. The small displays—from 500 to 800 square feet—include photographs, folk art and other objects, interactive exhibits, and videos.

“Our exhibitions are designed to engage communities and become a catalyst for conversation about life in small-town America. We want to start dialogs, build excitement, facilitate connections, and open doors to your community’s history, culture, people, and sense of local pride.”

In addition to offering compelling explorations of topics such as water, work, and hometowns, Museum on Main Street hosts digital story collections that let both adults and students share their experiences more broadly.

The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.



For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

