

## Learning How to See, *Really* See, in a Jam-Packed, Visual World

We live a world of visual information. Every day, a relentless stream of messages is hurled our way in the form of billboards, camera phones, CD packaging, even tattoos. To keep our heads from exploding, we learn to scan, to pay attention only to the messages we need, and to ignore those we don't.

What gets lost in that process is our ability to analyze or evaluate any of those images. We've learned how to deconstruct words pretty well, but we lack the ability to think critically about visual images, experts tell us. Jane Gronau and Lenore Reilly Carlisle are working to change that.

In charge of the MHC Art Museum public schools programs, Gronau is always looking for ways to get more students in the doors and then help them cultivate the ability to look closely at an object and understand what's there. (So are the curators, who in recent years have gotten MHC faculty members across the disciplines to double their use of the collections in their curricula.)

Why not come at this from the back end, Gronau thought, and encourage MHC students in the college's teacher certification program to think about making object-based learning, especially objects in a museum, part of their classroom curriculum here and when they begin teaching?



"People learn in different ways and a museum should be part of the skill set that can be used in teaching," said Gronau. So, last year, she and Carlisle, director of the early childhood and elementary teacher preparation programs, designed a three-part learning experience for the fifteen students in the licensure track.

In the fall, MHC teachers-in-training visited the galleries to learn the theoretical underpinnings of object-based learning. In spring, they participated in docent-led museum programs for school children. Finally,

as part of their assignment to design a curriculum unit, the MHC students learned how to include a field trip to a museum in a lesson plan.

"In this fast-paced world ... a museum slows things down in a powerful way. They are quiet places that stimulate observation. We try and help our students understand that's important," said Carlisle.

This year, she hopes to get her teachers-in-training together with student outreach volunteers whose training Gronau oversees at the museum. Those student volunteers

Young students learn how to really see a painting in the MHC Art Museum.

know which school children have been well prepared by their teachers for the museum visit, and together, the two groups will hash out what techniques and approaches result in a stellar museum experience.

Learning to look closely and think deeply, says Gronau, is not only part of a museum's mission but is also "essential to living a life that's worth its salt." —M.H.B.