CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH
AND EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART:

EVALUATION OF THE PERIOD ROOMS REINSTALLATION

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Research, Development and Engagement to Improve Education

How to Cite this Report

Ingram, D. & Madrid, R. (2017). *Minneapolis Institute of Art: Evaluation of the Period Rooms Reinstallation.* Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.

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Executive Summary

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to reinterpret several of its historical period rooms dating from the 18th century: the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room; the Grand Salon; and the Providence Parlor. Mia contracted with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) to conduct an evaluation of the project.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of Mia's reinterpretation of the period rooms on museum visitors. The evaluation was designed to measure the impact of the reinterpretation on these three outcomes:

1. The reinterpretation encourages a greater connection between visitors and an historic inhabitant's story.
2. As a result of the reinterpretation, visitors feel surprised and curious by the room's history and events that may have occurred.
3. The reinterpretation contributes to visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

An intercept survey was used to collect data from 102 museum visitors at two points in time: 56 of them participated in the pre-survey in fall 2016 and 46 participated in the post survey in spring 2017. Data analysis procedures consisted of assessing visitors' responses according to pre-established criteria developed by CAREI in collaboration with Mia's staff.

Findings of the evaluation indicate that the reinterpretations of the rooms had a positive impact on museum visitors, particularly concerning creating a connection to inhabitants' stories and stimulating surprise about the rooms' history and events that may have occurred. Moreover, fewer visitors were curious about the rooms' history and events. One possible explanation for the smaller number of visitors who felt curious about the room's history and events after the reinstallations is that visitors may have been more satisfied with the information presented after the reinterpretations. Many of the aspects of the period rooms that generated curiosity before the reinstallations were related to the rooms' history and events. Thus, visitors might have felt that after the reinstallation their need and curiosity for information in these areas had been fulfilled.

Finally, regarding the third intended outcome of the reinstallation to increase visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention, the evaluation results indicated that there was not much gain. Although for some rooms there was a notable increase from pre to post in the percentage of visitors who indicated that the objects were from the same time period but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there, or an increase from pre to post in the percentage of visitors who indicated that the objects were reproductions, the scoring criteria for this item required that visitors endorse *both* statements. Based on these results, for future studies Mia staff may want to re-examine the scoring criteria for this indicator and explore alternative strategies for measuring visitors' awareness of the constructed nature of period rooms.

Introduction

The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to reinterpret several of its historical period rooms dating from the 18th century: the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room; the Grand Salon; and the Providence Parlor. Mia contracted with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) to conduct an evaluation of the project.

As declared by Mia, the aim of the initiative was "to reinvigorating its period rooms for today's visitors, placing the past in dialogue with the present, while simultaneously broadening the conversation to include other histories of marginalized people, of the senses, and even of time itself."[1]

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of Mia's reinterpretation of the period rooms on museum visitors. The evaluation was designed to measure the impact of the rooms' reinterpretation on these three outcomes:[2]

1. The reinterpretation encourages a greater connection between visitors and the rooms' inhabitants and their stories.
2. As a result of the reinterpretation, visitors feel surprised and curious by the room's history/events that may have occurred there.
3. The reinterpretation contributes to visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

An intercept survey was used to collect data from museum visitors at two points in time: before and after the reinterpretation of the three period rooms.

One limitation of the study is that although we used the same survey for the pre-and post-assessment, the participants in the pre – survey were different from the participants in the posts-survey. Therefore, at least some of the changes in museum visitors' perceptions from the pre- to the post assessment could be related to the fact that individuals surveyed after the reinterpretation were different that those surveyed in before it.

This report presents the analysis of the pre-and post-survey data collected in fall 2016 and spring 2017. The audience for the report is Mia's staff.

[12] These outcomes were taken directly from the logic model provided to CAREI by Mia staff (See Appendix A).

Focus of the evaluation

As part of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Grant to reinvigorate and reinterpret three Period Rooms from the 18th-century, Mia developed a series of interventions that modified the rooms regarding the objects displayed and the information provided in them. Some of the objects were taken out, and new objects were incorporated. The information presented changed with the intent of broadening the conversation to include other histories - of marginalized people, of the senses, and even of the time period itself.

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the impact of Mia's reinterpretation of the period rooms on museum visitors. The evaluation was designed to measure the impact of the reinterpretation on these three outcomes:

1. The reinterpretation encourages a greater connection between visitors and inhabitant's story.
2. As result of the reinterpretation, visitors feel surprised and curious by the room's history/events that may have occurred.
3. The reinterpretation contributes to visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

Thus, the evaluation question that guided this study was:

- How has Mia's reinterpretation of the three period rooms impacted Mia's visitors?

Methods

CAREI collaborated with Mia's staff to design the study and the data collection tools. This section provides details about the study's methodology.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

To assess how museum visitors might be affected by Mia's reinterpretation of the period rooms, CAREI staff designed a brief intercept survey to collect data from visitors to the three rooms before and after the reinterpretation of the rooms. This data collection method is called an *intercept survey* because the data collector stands in a fixed place in the museum and intercepts potential participants to participate in the study as they exit a gallery. CAREI staff used the same survey before and after the reinterpretation of the rooms to measure the change in how museum visitors experienced the period rooms after the reinterpretation.

The survey was designed to gather information about Mia's outcomes for the reinterpretation, which were as follows:

1. The reinterpretation encourages a greater connection between visitors and inhabitant's story.
2. As result of the reinterpretation, visitors feel surprised and curious by the room's history/events that may have occurred.
3. The reinterpretation contributes to visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

The survey included the four questions listed below:

1. Please tell me about your most important take away from visiting the room. (If a visitor's initial response does not include any mention of a person or persons associated with the room and/or their stories, then gently interrupt them and ask the following question: How about anything related to the people who lived there or their stories?)

2. Please, complete the sentence: I was surprised by _____

3. Please, complete the sentence: I'm curious about _____

4. In your opinion, what would you say is a true statement about the objects in this room?
    a) The objects in the room belonged to the people who lived there.
    b) The objects in the room are from the same period, but the objects did not necessarily belong to the people who lived there.
    c) The objects in the room are reproductions
    d) None
    e) All
    f) b and c

To administer the survey, the data collector stood directly outside the exit door of each room for one hour on four different dates: two dates before the reinterpretation and two dates after the reinterpretation (a total of four hours per room). The length of time allotted for data collection was based on the budget available for data collection. The data collector would intercept visitors after they left the room and let them know about the evaluation, and ask for their participation in the survey. After visitors had consented to participate, the data collector asked the four questions shown above.

To ask the visitors the fourth question, the data collector showed them a piece of paper that listed the fourth question and the six response options. The purpose of this step was to make it easier for the visitors to understand the differences between the response options by giving them an opportunity to read the statements multiple times. All of the survey responses were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Mia's staff selected the dates for data collection, the second Sunday and third Thursday of the month, because the number of visitors typically increased on those days in comparison to the other days of the month. Mia offers special activities for family and adult audiences on the second Sunday and third Thursday, respectively, of every month. Pre-survey data collection occurred on September 11 and 15, 2016. Post-survey data collection occurred on May 14 and 18, 2017 after the reinstallation of the rooms was completed.

Participants. A total of 56 people participated in the pre- survey and, after Mia's staff had completed the reinterpretations of the three rooms, 46 different people participated in the post-survey. Table 1 shows the number of visitors who completed a survey in each room before and after the reinterpretation.

Although the goal was to complete 20 pre-surveys in each room and 20 post-surveys in each room, we did not have control over how many people visited each room, nor how many of those people would agree to participate in the study. We approached every person (or group of persons, if they were visiting together) possible during the specified data collection interval for each room and invited them to participate. Ten visitors that were invited to participate both in the pre and in the post survey did not agree to participate. Because the pre- survey and the post-survey occurred at separate times, it was not possible to invite the same participants to complete both surveys, which is one limitation of the study. Also, to make it more likely that people would agree to participate, we did not collect any information about the participants' gender or age when responding to the survey.

Table 1 shows the total amount of visitors surveyed by period room during the pre and post reinterpretation.

Table 1. Visitors surveyed in the Pre and Post-Intercept Survey

Period Rooms	Visitors in the pre-survey	Visitors in the post-survey	Total visitors
1. The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room	20	10	30
2. The Grand Salon	21	21	42
3. The Providence Parlor	15	15	30
Total visitors	56	46	102

Data Analysis Procedures. Visitors' responses were assessed according to pre-established criteria that were developed by CAREI in collaboration with Mia's staff. Although the analysis was focused on the number of visitors who said something associated with inhabitants' stories and the room's history and events, the content of visitors' responses was also reviewed to identify the two most frequent themes in the responses for each question. To support the analysis, Mia created a document for each of the three period rooms at the time of the pre-survey and again at the time of the post-survey with the following information: a) a list of the room's objects, and b) a list of the inhabitants' names that the visitor might encounter.

First question: What was your most important take away after visiting the room? (Prompt: How about anything related to the people who lived there or their stories?) This question and the prompt addressed the extent that visitors talked about inhabitants from the period room and their stories. We kept track if there was the need for asking specifically about inhabitants or if there was something that emerges naturally from visitors' responses when describing their impressions. We also tracked the "I" statements or any other expression that demonstrates that visitors connected their lives and experiences to those inhabitants of the period room.

Question #1 was analyzed by counting the following:

- How many people said something about the people associated with the room and/or their stories without a prompt from the data collector
- How many people said something about the people associated with the room and/or their stories after at least one prompt from the data collector
- How many people only said something about the room's objects or the physical space
- How many people used one or more "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the room's inhabitants

In addition, we analyzed the content of their responses to identify 1-2 of the most common themes.

Second and third questions: Please complete the sentence "I was surprised by…" and "I was curious about…" The second and third questions asked visitors to tell the data collector what surprised them about the room and what they were curious about in the room. To analyze the responses, the analysis counted the number of visitors who described something related to the room's history or events that may have occurred.

Question #2 "Please complete the sentence "I was surprised by _____" was analyzed by counting the following:

- How many people provided an example of something that surprised them about the room's history/events that may have occurred
- How many people provided an example of something that surprised them, but was not related to the room's history/events that may have occurred

Question #3 "Please complete the sentence "I was curious about _____" was analyzed by counting the following:

- How many people provided an example of something they were curious about that was related to the room's history/events that may have occurred
- How many people provided an example of something they were curious about that was not related to the room's history/events that may have occurred

In addition, we analyzed the content of their responses to each question to identify 1-2 of the most common themes.

Question #4 was designed to determine how many of the visitors were aware that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention. The data was analyzed by counting the number of people who chose the correct answer from among the six alternatives. The correct answer was alternative "f", which indicated that both statements "b" and "c" were correct.

Results

This section describes results of the pre- and post-surveys in the three period rooms. A total of 102 people participated in the study: 56 participated in the pre-survey in fall 2016, and 46 participated in the post-survey in spring 2017. The results are presented room by room, in this order: the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room, the Grand Salon, and the Providence Parlor.

The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room

A comparison of the pre- and post-survey data indicated that after the reinterpretation, more visitors said something about the people associated with the period room and their stories, and fewer visitors only said something about the room's objects or the physical space itself. In addition, after the reinterpretation, more visitors used one or more "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the room's inhabitants, which suggests that they may have felt a connection to those inhabitants (See Table 2).

Table 2. The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room - First Question

	Pre (N=20)	Post (N=10)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who said something about the people associated with the room and their stories	50%	60%	+10%
2. Percent of visitors who said something about the room's objects or the physical space	80%	60%	-20%
3. Percent of visitors who used one or more "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the room's inhabitants[3]	30%	50%	+20%

Before the reinterpretation, most of the visitors of the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room said something about the room's objects or the physical space (80%). Half (50%) of the visitors surveyed mentioned people and people's stories evoked by the rooms. Of this group, forty percent mentioned it without the need for the specific question about "people" (Prompt: How about anything related to the people who lived there or their stories?), and 10% did it after they were asked directly about the people who lived there or their stories (for detail, see Appendix B).

Moreover, when participants talked about people or people's stories most of the time, they did not relate to the actual people represented in the room but to aristocratic groups in the 18th-century in the U.S in general. For example, one visitor said, "It felt like being in the White House, like a room in the White House." Another commented, "Well, I was born in Minnesota, so this is a very different look of a family life than what I would it have, we were simpler people than that, we did not have all those wonderful things."

After the reinterpretation, visitors seemed more impacted by the specific individuals associated with the room and their stories. More visitors talked about people than before the reinterpretation (10% more). Out of the 60% of visitors that referred to people and people's stories, fifty percent did it spontaneously, and 10% of the visitors did it in response to the prompt about "people." (for detail, see Appendix B)

[3] The percentages in items #1, #2 and #3 are NOT mutually exclusive.

At the same time, the percentage of visitors who said something about the room's objects or the physical space decreased 20%. Half (50%) of the visitors used "I" statements and compared their lives to the lives of the room's inhabitants, which represents a 20% increase from the pre-installation survey.

Questions 2 and 3 of the survey sought to determine if visitors were surprised and curious about inhabitants and their stories after visiting the room. Data indicated that after the reinterpretation, more visitors seemed surprised about the room's stories and events related to people. However, slightly fewer participants expressed they would like to know more about the story of inhabitants of the room (See Table 3).

Table 3. The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room - Second and Third Questions

	Pre (N=20)	Post (N=10)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that surprised them about the room's history/events that may have occurred	15%	30%	+15%
2. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that they were curious about that was related to the room's history/events that may have occurred	35%	30%	-5%

Before the reinterpretation, visitors of the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room declared not being surprised about the room's inhabitants or their stories; they were most surprised about the objects in the room. For example, some said, "I was surprised by the very bright chess pieces," or "The barometer surprised me I guess because there is not something that you expected to see."

At the same time, visitors declared being curious to know more about the stories of the people who owned the objects or who were related to the people who owned the objects. As one visitor pointed out, "When I see these rooms, I wonder if this is really the way in which people lived. And that apply to any of the rooms. I do not know anything about people in this room." Visitors also were curious about the sociocultural and political context to understand better the scene represented in the room, and some declared being curious about the function of some of the objects were presented in the room. One participant mentioned he would have liked to know the story of how the objects got here.

After the reinterpretation, more visitors were surprised about the room's history and events related to the people who had inhabited the room. One person noted, "It makes people seem more real than reading about them from a book; history comes more alive." Nevertheless, the majority of visitors surveyed still were surprised about the artifacts and the objects, the use of art materials, and the number of objects that were in the room, but not necessarily by the room's history. Similarly, regarding curiosity, fewer visitors expressed they would like to know more about the story of inhabitants of the room. They expressed curiosity related to the art techniques deployed by artists that created some of the objects that were part of the room (i.e. baskets).

The fourth question asked visitors to choose the correct answer from among six statements about the objects in the room. After the reinstallation, 5% more of the visitors selected the correct response (See Table 4). This change from pre to post suggests that after the reinterpretation more people who visited the room were aware that the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room were constructed spaces mediated by the museum's intervention.

Table 4. The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room – Fourth Question

	Pre (N=20)	Post (N=9)	Change
a) Percent of visitors who said objects belonged to the people who lived there	25%	0	-25%
b) Percent of visitors who said objects are from the same period, but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there	30%	30%	0
c) Percent of visitors who said objects are reproductions	10%	10%	0
d) None of the above statements are correct	10%	0	-10%
e) All of the above statements are correct	0	20%	+20%
f) Percent of visitors who said the first AND second statements are correct	25%	30%	+5%

The Grand Salon

The analysis of the data from the pre and post survey, suggests that visitors did not connect with the inhabitants and their stories much more than before the reinterpretation (only 10% increase). The main impact of the reinterpretation was allowing visitors to feel transported in time and place. Such impact might be reflected in the notable increase of "I" statements (62% more visitors used "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the rooms' inhabitants) (See Table 5).

Table 5. The Grand Salon - First Question

	Pre (N=21)	Post (N=21)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who said something about the people associated with the room and their stories	61%	62%	+10%
2. Percent of visitors who said something about the room's objects or the physical space	67%	90%	+23%
3. Percent of visitors who used one or more "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the rooms' inhabitants[4]	19%	81%	+62%

Before the reinterpretation, the objects and the physical space captivated visitors, (67% of them mentioned it). Half of the visitors (61%) mentioned inhabitants and their stories: 33% percent of them when asked directly (for detail, see Appendix B). Visitors described imagining parties full of rich people from England or France. One visitor, for example, pointed out, "It makes me imagine people being in it. I cannot see it like this without imagining it being filled with people in a party. That's how I see it."

After the reinterpretation, visitors kept focusing on the room's objects or the physical space. Indeed, the percentage of visitors in this category increased by 23% from the pre-assessment (90% of them mentioned it).

Sixty-two percent of visitors referred to inhabitants and their stories; fourteen percent mentioned it spontaneously and forty-eight percent when asked directly about people (for detail, see Appendix B). One visitor said that what caught her attention was,

[4] The percentages in items #1, #2 and #3 are NOT mutually exclusive.

How much they could burn their hair when playing cards; I really liked the chandelier; how dark it was at that time; my mind was to all the labor that was invested in doing this; thank God that I did not live in that period.

It is important to mention that although more visitors noted the objects and the physical space in both the pre and the post-assessment, in the post-assessment, it seems that visitors could connect easier with inhabitants' stories when the data collector prompted them by asking: How about anything related to the people who lived there or their stories.

Questions 2 and 3 of the survey sought to determine if visitors were surprised and curious about inhabitants and their stories after visiting the room. Visitors' responses to these questions suggest that after the reinterpretation, more visitors were surprised by the room's history and events (5% increase). The percentage of visitors who were curious about the room's history and events decreased by almost 40% in the post reinterpretation survey (See Table 6).

Table 6. The Grand Salon - Second and Third Questions

	Pre (N=21)	Post (N=21)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that surprised them about the room's history/events that may have occurred	9%	14%	+5%
2. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that they were curious about that was related to the room's history/events that may have occurred	43%	5%	-38%

Before the reinterpretation, only 9% of the visitors the Grand Salon were surprised by something about the room's history and events. Most of the visitors were surprised by the objects such the mirror or the chandelier or by the height of the walls. At the same time, almost a half of visitors (43%) expressed being curious about the room's history and events. For example, one of them pointed out, "This was in a hotel right? I think I want to see it lit up; it'd be -- you know, I want to see – because, right, this is like four in the morning, the building's shut down, you know, I want to see it lit up. I want to see it in full swing." And another visitor commented, "We want to know what the rest of his home looked like too. Like where was it located?"

After the reinstallation, more visitors were surprised and less visitors were curious about the room's history and events that may have occurred.

The fourth question asked visitors to choose the correct answer from among six statements about the objects in the room. After the reinstallation, there was a small increase of 2% of visitors who selected the correct response (See Table 7).

Table 7. The Grand Salon - Fourth Question

	Pre (N=21)	Post (N=20)	Change
a) Percent of visitors who said objects belonged to the people who live there	28%	15%	-13%
b) Percent of visitors who said objects are from the same period, but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there	14%	20%	+6%
c) Percent of visitors who said objects are reproductions	5%	15%	+10%
d) None of the above statements are correct	0	0	0
e) All of the above statements are correct	5%	0	-5%
f) Percent of visitors who said the first AND second statements are correct	48%	50%	+2%

Before the reinterpretation, the data suggests that most of the visitors understood that the room was mediated by the intervention of the museum, responding that some the objects were reproductions and others corresponded to the same period (48%). Nevertheless, almost one-third of the visitors (28%) thought the objects belonged to the people who lived in the room.

After the reinterpretation, there were more visitors who said that they believed the objects were from the same period but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there (6% more) and more visitors saying that the objects were reproductions (10% more). Fewer people thought that objects belonged to the people who lived there (13% less). However, only a small percentage more responded that some of the objects belonged to the people who lived there AND some objects were reproductions.

The Providence Parlor

Data from the pre- and post-survey shows that most of the visitors of the Providence Parlor were still focused on the room's objects or the physical space (73% and 87%, respectively), but after the reinterpretation, many more of them mentioned something about the people associated with the room and their stories (40% increase). Another important change in visitors' reactions to the room was the increase of "I" statements that compared the visitors' lives to the lives of the room's inhabitants. In the pre-survey, only 13% of the visitors included "I" statements while 53% of the visitors included these statements in the post-survey (See Table 8).

Table 8. The Providence Parlor - First Question

	Pre (N=15)	Post (N=15)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who said something about the people associated with the room and their stories	33%	73%	+40%
2. Percent of visitors who said something about the room's objects or the physical space	73%	87%	+14%
3. Percent of visitors who used one or more "I" statements to compare their lives to the lives of the rooms' inhabitants[5]	13%	53%	+40%

[5] The percentages in items #1, #2 and #3 are NOT mutually exclusive.

In the pre- survey, most visitors to the Providence Parlor Room said the most important takeaway was about the room's objects and the physical space (73%). One visitor mentioned the woodcarving in the walls and the resemblance to Greek columns.

Out of the 33% of visitor that said something about inhabitants and their stories, 20% did it without the need for the question about people and people's stories, and 13% did it because of the data collector's specific question about inhabitants and their stories (for detail, see Appendix B). One of these participants declared, "My takeaway is, I think the type of business that would have been conducted there and the period of the Revolutionary war (…) I thought about the types of conversations that they might have had in a room like that."

It is interesting that in the pre-survey; at least one-third of the visitors to the room talked about how the room generated feelings of rejection and emphasized there was nothing attractive about it. One participant said, "I felt the room was very cold and did not invite people to want to know more about the history behind it." Furthermore, another visitor said, "It seems removed, not very welcoming. It seems like I am in someone's personal space."

In the post-survey, most of the visitors mentioned people associated with the room and their stories (73%); most of them did it spontaneously (53%), and only twenty percent after they were asked directly (for detail, see Appendix B).

Data indicated that even visitors who highlighted the physical space were sometimes connected with people's stories. For example, one visitor said, "I like the energy of the room. I love wood paneling, and I wonder how much work was really involved in creating these panels. I just tried to imagine life in that era, and what was the life of someone that lived in that time. I love the spices you put in it! I just feel the energy." Other visitors emphasized how the room made them think about "The critical nature of Providence and Rhode Island in earlier colonial days" or "The life on a wharf like that."

The second and third questions of the survey sought to determine if visitors were surprised and curious about inhabitants and their stories after visiting the room. Data shows that after the reinterpretation more visitors were surprised about the room's history/events, however, fewer visitors expressed curiosity about things linked to the room's history and events (See Table 9).

Table 9. The Providence Parlor - Second and Third Questions

	Pre (N=15)	Post (N=15)	Change
1. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that surprised them about the room's history/events that may have occurred	0%	13%	+13%
2. Percent of visitors who provided an example of something that they were curious about that was related to the room's history/events that may have occurred	33%	20%	-13%

Before the reinterpretation, none of the visitors indicated surprise about the room's story/events that may have occurred in it. Visitors declared being surprised by things that were not related to the room's story. One of them was surprised by the color of the room, "The color, it is an interesting thing. I wonder why it was picked up because it does not seem attractive" and another said he was surprised by the fact

that the room had few objects in it. “Maybe the only thing that surprises me -- it just maybe because of -- but there’s so little furniture. It’s not very inviting. Not too cozy in any way.”

Furthermore, in the pre-survey one-third of the visitors (33%) were curious about knowing more about the room’s history and events because they felt did not have enough information about the room’s history and events. As someone declared, “I wonder if this was a real house or someone just put things together because they were from the same period, I would like to know the history of the room.”

After the reinterpretation, 13% of the visitors provided examples of things surprised them about the room’s history and events, which reflects an increase from the pre survey. One participant said, “The very direct connection between the Providence room and slavery. I was not aware of the Providence room’s role. Although this gentleman did not directly participate in the slave trade, these ships were going to the places where the sugar was growing so, there was an indirect participation.” Others connected the room’s history with the objects, “The entire room when it shows the slave figure that the indigo dye was a property of slave people, the birds on the ceiling.”

Fewer visitors were curious about the room’s history and events than before. Visitors who declared being curious about the room’s history and events stated they would like “To hear more about the people here and how they connect more with the trade,” and have more information about the origin of the objects. People that visited the room, after the reinterpretation, felt more curious about the way the objects were presented in the exhibit, for example, knowing why Mia’s staff choose to use shadow puppetry in a period room.

The fourth question asked visitors to choose the correct answer from among six statements about the objects. A comparison of the data from the pre- and post-surveys shows that after the reinstallation 14% more visitors chose the correct response (See Table 10). This result suggests that more people who visited the Providence Parlor after the reinterpretation were aware that the room is a constructed space mediated by the museum’s intervention.

Table 10. The Providence Parlor - Fourth Question

	Pre (N=15)	Post (N=14)	Change
a) Percent of visitors who said objects belonged to the people who lived there	13%	14%	-1%
b) Percent of visitors who said objects are from the same period, but didn’t necessarily belong to the people who lived there	47%	14%	-33%
c) Percent of visitors who said objects are reproductions	27%	36%	+9%
d) None of the above statements are correct	0	0	0%
e) All of the above statements are correct	0%	14%	+14%
f) Percent of visitors who said the first AND second statements are correct	7%	21%	+14%

The largest change from the pre- to the post-survey was on the percentage of visitors who said the objects were from the same period, but did not necessarily belong to the people who lived there at the time. Before the reinterpretation, almost half of the visitors (47%) said this was true while after the reinterpretation only 14% said the same. One potential explanation for this shift might be the fact that as part of the reinterpretation, new contemporary objects (trade goods displayed in an interactive cabinet, spices, and fabrics) were added, so it may have been more evident for visitors that some of the objects were not from the same period.

Summary and Discussion

The evaluation assessed the impact of Mia's reinterpretation of the period rooms on museum visitors. Specifically, the evaluation assessed the impact of the rooms' reinterpretation on museum visitors in three areas:

1. The reinterpretation encourages a greater connection between visitors and an historic inhabitant's story.
2. As a result of the reinterpretation, visitors feel surprised and curious by the room's history and events that may have occurred.
3. The reinterpretation contributes to visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room

Data from the pre- and post-surveys indicated that the museum's reinterpretation of these rooms affected museum visitors' connections to the historic inhabitants' stories. After the reinterpretation of the rooms, more visitors talked about people associated with the room and more visitors used "I" statements than before, which suggests that they may have felt a stronger personal connection to the stories and the objects presented. At the same time, after the reinstallation fewer visitors talked about the room's objects and the physical space.

The evaluation results also show that after the reinterpretation more visitors were surprised about the room's history and events than before the reinterpretation. Fewer visitors were curious about the story of the inhabitants of the room, but more visitors were interested in the work of the artists presented in the room (e.g. portraits by the Cherokee Indians, baskets, and clothes).

The reinterpretation in the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room involved the addition of contemporary artwork from Native American, African, and African American artists. These changes might have influenced the results for the fourth survey question, which was designed to measure visitors' awareness the period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention. A comparison of responses on the pre- and post-surveys showed that there was only a small increase (5%) in the percentage of visitors who selected the correct response to this question. However, there was a 25% decrease from pre to post in the percentage of visitors who said the objects belonged to the people that lived there. Given the contemporary nature of the objects that were added to the room in the reinstallation, it was likely more obvious to visitors who participated in the post-survey that the objects did not belong to the people who lived there.

The Grand Salon

In the Grand Salon, the evaluation results indicated that the reinterpretation evoked museum visitors' sensations of being transported in time, which was usually manifested by visitors talking about the room's objects and the physical space. These perceptions were expressed in visitors' capacity to compare their lives to the lives of the room's historic inhabitants. However, data indicated that this connection to the historical moment represented in the room did not necessarily mean that the visitors talked about the specific people associated with the room and their stories.

After the reinterpretation, more visitors to the Grand Salon were surprised about the room's history and events. However, the most important change after the reinterpretation was that fewer people

were curious about the room's history and events (38% decrease). Furthermore, most visitors were curious to know more about the light's effects and the sounds that were part of the reinstallation. One explanation of the fact that fewer visitors declared being curious about the room is that the new reinterpretation might have helped visitors feel more satisfied with the information presented after the reinterpretations.

The changes observed in visitors' responses to question four suggested that after the reinstallation more of the visitors were aware that some of the objects were reproductions and therefore the objects were mediated by museum's intervention. However, the data showed that there was only a small increase (2%) in the percentage of visitors who selected the correct response to this question, which was that some of the objects were from the same period of time, but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there and some of them were reproductions.

The Providence Parlor

The evaluation results showed that the reinterpretation of the Providence Parlor affected visitors' connections to the inhabitants' stories. After the reinstallation, more visitors said something about the people associated with the room and more visitors used "I" statements to compare their lives with the lives of the room's historic inhabitants. This shift, however, was not associated with a decrease in the number of vistors who offered comments about the room's objects and physical space. In fact, those comments increased by 14%, and the references to the objects in the room were more aligned and connected to the room's historic inhabitants, the overall history of trade among Europe, Africa, and North America, and the role of slavery in the trade.

Moreover, after the reinstallation, more visitors were surprised about the room's history and events, but slightly fewer visitors were curious about the room's history and events. Visitors were curious about the objects displayed and the rationale for including shadow puppetry in the room.

The reinterpretation in the Providence Parlor involved the addition of objects that represented the kind of objects that had been offered in the Russell brothers' store. This fact might have influenced the 14% increase from pre to post in the percentage of visitors who chose the correct answer to this question. The nature of the added objects may have made it easier for visitors to understand that the Providence Parlor is a constructed space that was mediated by museum intervention.

Conclusions

The evaluation assessed the impact of the reinterpretation of the three period rooms in three areas:

1. The connection between visitors and an historic inhabitant's story.
2. Visitors' surprise and curiosity about by the room's history and events that may have occurred.
3. Visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention.

Findings from the evaluation indicate that the reinterpretations in the Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room, the Grand Salon, and the Providence Parlor, had a positive impact on museum visitors. Specifically, the evaluation found an increase in the rooms' potential to help visitors create a connection with the stories of the rooms' historic inhabitants' and feel surprise about the histories and events associated with each of the rooms.

In the three period rooms, more visitors were encouraged to connect with inhabitants and their stories after the reinstallation; however, sometimes the connection was not direct. For example, visitors did not necessarily talk about John Stuart or the Russell brothers, but in most of the cases, they were able to connect with the general stories of British colonists and Native Americans or the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Before the reinstallation more people referred to the objects and physical space and after the reinterpretation, more participants compared their lives to the lives of the rooms' inhabitants.

In general, after the reinstallation and across the three period rooms, more visitors were surprised about the rooms' history and events. In contrast, fewer visitors were curious about the rooms' history and events. One possible explanation for the smaller number of visitors who felt curious about the room's history and events after the reinstallations is that visitors may have been more satisfied with the information presented after the reinterpretations. Many of the aspects of the period rooms that generated curiosity before the reinstallations were related to the rooms' history and events. Thus, visitors might have felt that after the reinstallation their need and curiosity for information in these areas had been fulfilled.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the evaluation only measured visitors' surprise and curiosity related to the room's history and events. However, most of the visitors' responses to these questions were related to things that were not associated directly with room's history or events. This suggests that the visitors were in fact surprised and felt curious after they visited the rooms, but not about the specific things we assessed through the evaluation. Therefore, the reinterpretation of the period rooms may have affected visitors in ways that were beyond the focus of the evaluation.

Finally, regarding the third intended outcome of the reinstallation to increase visitors' awareness that period rooms are constructed spaces mediated by museum intervention, the evaluation results indicated that there was not much gain in this regard. Although for some rooms there was a notable increase from pre to post in the percentage of visitors who indicated that the objects were from the same time period but didn't necessarily belong to the people who lived there, or an increase in the percentage of visitors who indicated that the objects are reproductions, the scoring criteria for this item required that visitors endorse *both* statements. Based on these results, for future studies Mia staff may want to re-examine the scoring criteria for this indicator and explore alternative strategies for measuring visitors' awareness of the constructed nature of period rooms.

Appendix

Appendix A. Logic Model provided by Mia staff.

We Do What?
Name of Program, Institution, Brief description of exhibition or program activities/products/services
Living Rooms Initiative: In this multi-year initiative, Mia is reinvigorating its period rooms for today's visitors, placing the past in dialogue with the present, while simultaneously broadening the conversation to include other histories—of marginalized people, of the senses, and even of time itself.

For Whom?
Target Audience(s) + needs/considerations

Outcomes	Indicators/Evidence	Methods
Attitudes and Values • Empathetic connection to inhabitant's story	• Visitors discuss people and their histories and stories, not just the room's contents or physical space • "I" statements compare their own lives to those of the original inhabitants	• Observation • Intercept
Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity • Being surprised by the room's history/events that may have occurred	• "I didn't know. . ." statements that demonstrated piqued interest and curiosity in the period	• Interview • Survey
Knowledge and Understanding • Increased awareness that the rooms exist • Visitors will understand that they are constructed spaces/mediated by museum intervention	• Express knowledge of the room • People get it: visitors understand that some objects are original to rooms, some objects are examples of those items that may have been in the room in its original setting, and others are reproductions	• Interview • Survey

Appendix B. Percent of visitors by period room who said something about the people associated with the room and their stories with and without prompt by the data collector.

	Pre Survey		Post Survey	
Percent of visitors who said something about the people associated with the room and their stories with and withou the following prompt: How about anything related to the people who lived there or their stories?	Without Prompt	After Prompt	Without Prompt	After Prompt
The Charleston Dining Room and the Charleston Drawing Room	40% (n=8)	10% (n=2)	50% (n=5)	10% (n=1)
	50% (n=10)		60% (n=6)	
The Grand Salon	28% (n=6)	33% (n=7)	14% (n=3)	48% (n=10)
	61% (n=13)		62% (n=13)	
The Providence Parlor	20% (n=3)	13% (n=2)	53% (n=8)	20% (n=3)
	33% (n=5)		73% (n=11)	

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