

Artist-In-Residence Program at the Exploratorium

The Exploratorium, San Francisco's museum of science, art, and human perception, was founded in 1969 by Dr. Frank Oppenheimer, a noted physicist and teacher. From the beginning, the museum has used the observations made by artists as a means of developing a clearer understanding of nature among our visitors.

The museum's central theme is human perception. Perception is not just the basis for science, but also the basis for sculpture, painting, poetry and literature. Though the Exploratorium is best known as a science museum, the museum has used the perceptions of both artists and scientists to establish notions of how we see, know and understand the world around us. Artists' works illustrate the reoccurrence of natural processes in a multiplicity of contexts, and they thus convey a sense of the unity between nature and culture which encompasses both art and science.

The works of artists who communicate the possibilities of human experience are an integral part of the Exploratorium's exhibitry. In the words of Dr. Oppenheimer:

"Art is included, not just to make things pretty, although it often does so, but primarily because artists make different kinds of discoveries about nature than do physicists or biologists. They also rely on a different basis for decision-making while creating their exhibits. But both artists and scientists help us notice and appreciate things in nature that we had learned to ignore or had never been taught to see. Both art and science are needed to fully understand nature and its effects on people. The art in the Exploratorium is therefore blended with the science as a part of the overall pedagogy."

The Exploratorium has involved artists in all aspects of museum programming. Public programs held at the museum have explored the common bonds between art and science. Through the museum's School-in-the-Exploratorium program, artists work with teachers to teach about light, vision, and color to elementary and secondary students. On the museum floor, art and art works are interspersed with other didactic exhibits. These art works make subtle connections between the nature of art and science. Families, children, seniors, the handicapped, and countless other groups have the opportunity to develop an appreciation for art in a playful, unusual, and less intimidating context.

Artists-in-Residence-Program

Many of the art works on display at the Exploratorium were built by artists participating in the Exploratorium's Artists-in-Residence program. Since 1974, the Exploratorium has invited four to six artists a year to produce works to be installed permanently on the museum floor.

The Artists-in-Residence Program is coordinated by artist Peter Richards, under the guidance of an advisory panel. The Exploratorium receives inquiries about the program from all over the country and from other countries as well. As most of these inquiries come from the major U.S. art centers, Peter Richards initiates contacts with artists outside these localities whenever possible. The Exploratorium seeks out artists who like to experiment and who are interested in the kinds of natural phenomena that make up the thematic content of the museum.

A residency at the Exploratorium is an opportunity for an artist to learn new skills in a high quality electronics and machine shop, and to develop new ideas and insights through collaboration with a staff that is sympathetic to aesthetic and technical problem solving.

Artists who share common interests with the Exploratorium are encouraged to submit an informal proposal. The proposal should include a project description, a preliminary budget, a personal history, and, when appropriate, a working prototype. A group of interested staff people then review the proposal with the artist. If the proposed project seems compatible with the museum's current interests, the proposal is referred to the Advisory Panel.

The Advisory Panel reviews proposals, disseminates information about the program, refers artists to the Exploratorium, and provides invaluable artistic direction. This panel is made up of prominent people from the Bay Area arts community.

Once the artist is selected, the budget is reviewed to ensure that adequate funding has been allocated for the artist's stipend, materials, and technical assistance from Exploratorium staff members. The project is divided into three phases: an experimental phase, resulting in a working prototype; a construction phase; and a shake-down phase. The artist works with and consults staff members during all phases and has access to all museum facilities and technical and scientific staff.

Time schedules for projects are determined by the scope of the project. There are no deadlines for proposals, although scheduling for the year usually occurs in December and January.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPLORATORIUM'S ARTIST RESEARCH PROGRAM

The Exploratorium's Artist Research Program supports artists working primarily in a temporary medium whose interests are relevant to the thematic concerns of the Exploratorium. This includes music, dance, theater, research, storytelling, puppetry, temporary installations, poetry, etc. This research program promotes the development of new ways of seeing and thinking about the relationship between nature and culture. Research is done in a collaborative atmosphere of the museum's workshop and laboratories. The artists are invited to interact with staff, conduct workshops, give public presentations and to talk informally with visitors. It is hoped that this process of research and exchanging ideas with staff and visitors will uncover useful information and will inspire new directions for the artists and richer exhibits for the museum. A primary focus of the program is to provide a window for the public to see, and to some degree, to participate in the museum's creative process. It also creates a mechanism for engaging and supporting a larger spectrum of community artists.

The Artists Research Program supports two types of working relationships with artists:

1) Research Projects: Intensive process-oriented research projects of short duration whose focus is directed towards shared interests by both artist and staff collaborator.

2) Project Development: The museum supports a limited number of projects of longer duration and larger scope. The artists are expected to engage in a research and development process that will result in a new performance or installation. The artists are expected to develop this work through collaboration with the museum staff. They will also create a series of opportunities for the public to follow the progress of their work. (i.e. workshops, presentations, open studios, etc.) A performance, installation or presentation of the new work will be given at the end of the residency.

Artists are invited to participate in the program through an informal process which includes preliminary conversations with the staff to determine areas of common interest, the submission of a letter of interest, and the submission of appropriate background material (audio cassettes, video, slides, etc.), and a resume. Selection of the artist is based upon:

- quality of past work
- ability to communicate
- willingness to share new ideas
- relevance of project content to other current projects or investigations at the museum
- expressed staff interest in the project and artist

The Exploratorium will provide work-space, access to shop facilities, materials budget and artist stipend.

Send letters of inquiry to:
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