

‘The feeling of exclusion’: Young people's perceptions of art galleries.

Abstract

This article first looks at the relationship between museums and art galleries and their potential audiences and in particular the under-represented sector of young visitors. It examines the main findings from the limited research available on young visitors, and goes on to discuss theories delineating the differences between the cultures, identities and values of culture consumers and culture providers. The second part of the article looks at what specific museums have done towards being more inclusive in their appeal, and then reports the findings of a survey of young people in relation to New Zealand's Auckland Art Gallery. The survey found that young people's ideas of what constitutes modern, relevant art does not match standard art criteria, and that most exhibitions and marketing methods do not mesh with their worldview. The article concludes by using data from the survey to suggest ways of engaging more young people with public art galleries.

Keywords:

Art galleries, museums, audience research, visitor survey, youth perceptions, social exclusion

Introduction

Why don't many young people go to art galleries? This article discusses the findings of a survey of young people's perceptions of Auckland Art Gallery. It was found that of the thousands of young people who walk past the Auckland Art Gallery every day, few go in, and some could not even say where it was - even when they were standing outside it. This article finds support for the view that cultural institutions such as museums, publicly funded and free of charge, maintain the illusion of democratic access, while in fact catering mainly to the interests of particular social groups and unintentionally excluding others (McLean, 1999). There is no sign over the door barring young people from visiting art galleries, but we argue that there might as well

be, because these institutions effectively deter young visitors by making them feel that they do not belong. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggested that, despite theoretically being open to all, 'the inheritance of cultural wealth...only really belongs (although it is offered to everyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves' (Bourdieu 1973, 73). Bourdieu concluded that the 'love of art is the clear mark of the chosen' which is meant to separate them out from other people, and that therefore the 'true mission' of museums is to 'reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion' (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1991, 112).

Most public art galleries and museums in New Zealand were founded in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when education was regarded as an important aspect of their function (Thomson, 1981).¹ However, like many cultural institutions that developed in the British cultural tradition, art galleries have suffered from an antipathy towards entertainment – visiting a gallery was meant to be good for you rather than being a pleasure, a duty not unlike going to church (Greenhalgh, 1989). Today it is recognised by museums worldwide that entertainment, as well as education, is a legitimate part of their repertoire (Harrison, 1997), and public museums and galleries have increasingly come under pressure to act more like businesses (McLean, 1997; Kotler & Kotler, 1998). Since the advent of the new museology in the 1990s, many in the museum sector have come to see themselves as part of the leisure industry, modifying their practices and policies in order to become more audience focused (Vergo, 1989; Anderson, 2004).

While history, natural history and anthropology museums have taken steps to increase and diversify their audiences, questions remain over what success art galleries have had in this regard. Some art galleries may appear to have a healthy youth audience, but if organised school groups are taken out of the equation we might ask whether

they attract many young people outside this ‘captive audience’? What proportion of art gallery audiences are made up of young people? Do young people see art galleries as an attractive destination in their leisure time? Do art gallery collections and exhibition programmes reflect the identity, interests and values of young people? Suspicions that their core audience is middle-aged and well-heeled are reinforced by a number of longstanding perceptions about art galleries – the historical links between the culture of art and social elites, the membership of Friends organisations, the crowds who attend gallery openings and events – but there is little empirical evidence. Some of these questions can be answered by the literature but much remains to be done (Fyfe, 2000; Prior, 2002). The survey analysed in this article provides data that highlights issues of museums and social equity, issues that need to be addressed before art galleries can justifiably claim to cater for ‘the general public’.

Visitor studies: Putting youth on the agenda

Who visits museums and who does not? Contrary to popular perceptions, it is not a case of those who want to and those who do not: users are not simply characterised by their motivation and good taste, and non users by their apathy or ignorance. Marilyn Hood suggests social factors - education, class, ethnicity, age group - determines who visits museums (Hood, 1983). International research has supported Bourdieu’s argument that the relatively narrow socio-demographic profile of the art museum audience reflected the ‘cultural capital’ of those fractions of society familiar with high culture art forms (Dimaggio & Useem, 1978; Merriman, 1989; Bennett & Frow 1991; Bennett et al, 1999). However, John Falk points out that museums today have much larger and more diverse audiences than fifty years ago when they catered for a small elite (Falk, 1998, 43). However, though participation has widened, Nick Merriman argues that the expansion in museums has not been accompanied by an expansion in

the range of visitors, and that the 'democratic potential of museums' was still not being fulfilled: the typical visitor is in the older age bracket (Merriman, 1991, 2). One of the groups that museums continually fail to cater for, despite their efforts to broaden and diversify their audiences, is the younger age group - teenagers and young adults. Surveys of the literature focusing on youth and art museums suggests that they consistently make up a small percentage of visitors overall (Xanthoudaki, 1998; Australian Museums Online, 2005).

Much of the research in this area has focused on investigating what it is in the visitors' preconceptions, preferences or behaviour that deters them from museum visiting. It has been suggested, for example, that differences in perception of galleries vary with age. Caldwell & Coshall (2002) found distinct differences in the individual's mental constructs associated with galleries in visitors aged under and over 35 years. They argue that whereas older visitors tended to have fewer criteria when judging the 'goodness' of a gallery, younger visitors used many more aspects of their experience when evaluating the galleries. Individual motivation, expectations, and satisfaction and their effect on visitor behaviour have been explored by Jansen-Verbeke & Van Redom (1996) and Thyne (2001). One theory about museum non-visitation is the notion of 'threshold fear', a kind of psychological barrier which dissuades people from entering spaces where they feel uncomfortable (Prince & Schadla-Hall, 1985; Fleming, 1999). Bartlett & Kelly (2000) have reported that youth audiences have poor perceptions of museums, which they see as boring, didactic, unapproachable and preoccupied with the past, in contrast to young people's interest in the present and future. Young people, they point out, do not feel as if they are a part of museums. This work all points to dissonance between the culture of museums and the culture and identity of young people.

Another strand of research suggests that social exclusion from museums is closely related to collective and personal identity (Karp, 1992; Kaplan, 1996; Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996; Coombes, 2004). The question of museums and social equity has become more than an academic issue in the UK: changes in government funding are putting pressure on institutions to increase their minority audiences by catering for their diverse cultural identities (Dodd and Sandell, 2001; Sandell, 2002). As Sandell has argued, the representation of a community's culture 'might affirm community identity, generate increased self-esteem amongst individuals and help to promote tolerance and understanding within the wider society' (Sandell, 1998, 412).

Studies of audience reception remind us that the individual perceptions and responses that make up museum visiting are shaped by social processes that have to do with culture, representation, and power (Wolff, 1981; Greene, 1996). Merely tinkering with policies will not change the underlying structures that produce museum cultures. It is not simply a case of young people *choosing* not to go to museums, or indeed *correcting* bureaucratic shortcomings in museum programming in relation to youth leisure preferences, but a more complex matter of considering the fit between different cultures – the culture of those who present art and the culture of those who might view it. We believe that in this case the key habitus of museum visiting as a social phenomenon is not *class culture* but *age culture*.

Social theorists argue that youth culture is a way of life for its members which develops in opposition to institutional or adult culture (Willis, 1981). Most young people, Paul Willis points out, see art as something 'special, remote and institutional', something that is set apart from their common, everyday culture (Willis, Jones, Joyce & Hurd, 1990). It seems that museums are not for them. Because 'art is in the art gallery,' Willis argues, 'it can't be anywhere else' (Willis, 1989, 131). Young people

have their own art, a symbolic culture that finds expression in alternative images, music or fashion that is not reflected in the official art world. The formal types of gallery art deprive other art forms of their artistic status and legitimacy. There is therefore a clash between the culture of art galleries and museums, both in terms of the art culture that they display and their organisational culture (values, assumptions and ways of doing things) which is fundamentally at odds with the identity and culture of young people.

Towards an inclusive museum culture

From the late 1980s cultural organisations in Australia and New Zealand started conducting systematic research about their existing public in an attempt to reach new publics. The first study on the demographic characteristics of art gallery visitors found that, compared with history museums, they constituted a small elite group of regular visitors with 13% aged 15-19 and 26% aged 20-29 (Bennett & Frow, 1991, 4). The authors recommended that galleries 'operate with more diversified conceptions of what art is, of how and why it should be displayed ... and at whom it should be directed...' (Bennett & Frow, 1991, 38-9). In a major survey conducted in 1994-5, it was found that 'tastes are social' and that 'differences in cultural preference are used as markers of social distinction' (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 1999, 1). People who participate in 'public culture' activities such as visiting museums, galleries and libraries, are more likely to be older, highly educated, with a higher income and class origin. About a quarter, or 23% of the 18-25 age group, participate in public culture compared to 40% of the 60+ age group (Bennett, Emmison & Frow, 1999, 236). Other studies suggest that the youth audience (aged 15-25 years) makes up about the same proportion of audiences for major Australian museums as the general population

– about 15% - but it is not clear whether this is the case for art galleries (Environmetrics, 2002, 3).

Visitor research in New Zealand museums is still uncommon but since the early 1990s more information on attendances has been available. For example, evaluations of exhibitions at the National Art Gallery and Museum in Wellington (Cockburn 1989, 1990) give demographic profiles, and show that in general the audience was mature, well educated, and well paid (Cockburn 1990, 1). One study of public art institutions found that across New Zealand young people aged 15-24 years made up 25% of the audience, but this finding has to be viewed cautiously because of the small sample (Stafford, 1991, 18). A survey of users and non-users of museum and art galleries found that 12% of users were from the 15-19 age group, compared with 5% non-users, whereas in the 20-29 age bracket 14% were users, and 18% non-users (McDermot Miller, 1996, 9). A number of other studies concluded that, rather than any particular pre-disposition towards museums, the visitor profile (particularly age group) is influenced by exhibition content. In 1996 an evaluation of the *Bob Marley* reggae exhibition at the National Museum suggested that the appeal of the topic seemed to attract an unusually high proportion of young Maori visitors (McLennan, 1996, 4).

Efforts to target a broader museum audience culminated with the opening in 1998 of the new national museum in Wellington, The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Te Papa exceeded its annual target of 700,000 in three months, attracting one million visitors in five months, and over two million by the end of the first year (Museum of New Zealand, 2000). The profile of visitors after the first year was broadly representative of the New Zealand population at large, indicating that Te Papa did not just cater to an educated Pakeha (European) elite but to a cross section of New

Zealanders (Museum of New Zealand, 1999; 2004). In contrast to earlier surveys at the museum, the 'traditional' visitor profile made up a smaller proportion of the overall audience: visitors who had completed a tertiary qualification comprised only 38% whereas those who had not completed secondary school made up as much as 12%; while visitors from professional occupations were only 17% and those from management just 6% of the audience (Museum of New Zealand, 1996; 1999). Most surprising of all, Maori were represented at 13%, roughly equivalent to their proportion of the general population (Museum of New Zealand, 2000). Te Papa's innovations in museology, including popular temporary exhibitions, diverse permanent displays spiced up with interactives and events, and intensive rebranding and marketing, has evidently appealed to a genuinely diverse audience including a high proportion of young people. Exit surveys show that 22% of its huge audience is made up of those in the 16 – 24 year age group (Museum of New Zealand, 1999; 2004). This is particularly the case with Maori people, usually under-represented amongst New Zealand museum visitors. Maori visitors are more likely to be young - almost 30% are aged 20 – 29, and 13% are teenagers aged 15 – 19 (Museum of New Zealand, 2000).

Surveying young people at the Auckland Art Gallery

This section discusses the results of visitor research conducted in 2003 for the Auckland Art Gallery of Auckland, New Zealand (AAG). Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki is a prominent art institution in New Zealand's largest city housing the country's major art collection - some 12,000 works of painting, sculpture and mixed media (Reeves, 2003). It consists of one nineteenth century building designed in a grand Victorian style, which houses the main galleries and the permanent collection, and one modern building directly across the street housing temporary exhibitions of contemporary New Zealand art (Thomson 1981, 16-25). The buildings are two blocks

from Auckland's main street and the gallery dominates the view from one of the city's busiest intersections. There are two large universities (with approximately 12,000 students each) within two blocks and innumerable small private institutes within easy walking distance – comprising at least 20,000 students in the immediate vicinity who could be patronising the AAG. There is heavy and constant foot traffic in front of the gallery and yet it does not have anything like the patronage the pedestrian numbers would suggest. The gallery management, aware that many young people did not visit the Gallery, wanted to survey these young potential visitors and find out what their perceptions and expectations were. In particular the management wanted to know: What young people think the art gallery has to offer, what would encourage them to visit the gallery and what attractions would appeal to them?

The research design was based on a stratified sample of 200 people aged between 16 and 26, with equal numbers of males and females. The sample was designed to match the demographic make up of the area with respect to ethnic origin (Statistics New Zealand 2003). Over a three week period in May 2003, two researchers approached pedestrians in the vicinity of the gallery who looked to be in the target age group and asked them their views. Given the proximity of the universities, most of the people in the sample were studying, but these were not targeted particularly and the sample included the unemployed, overseas backpackers and others. The respondents in the sample were aged between 16 and 26, with a mean age of 20.6 years and a standard deviation of 2.56 (n=200).

The questionnaire consisted of restricted answer and open-ended questions. The restricted answer questions established the basic demographics and visitation patterns to various Auckland attractions. The remainder of the questionnaire asked open ended questions designed to assess perceptions without prompting. These non-directive,

open ended questions allowed the research to use a qualitative approach. The open ended questions were transcribed into a database and then went through a process of content analysis. Answers were initially sorted and grouped into broad first level classifications. For example, '*art isn't my thing*', '*no interest*', '*most art is boring*', '*not felt compelled to go*' were all classified under the heading 'No Interest'. All the first level classifications were again sorted and grouped more broadly into a second level classification, looking for common concepts or relationships. The process was repeated for a third classification which extract the basic constructs represented in the respondent's mental models of the gallery (Kelly, 1955). Once extracted, the classifications were checked for logic and consistency by other academics not involved in the research but knowledgeable about tourism research.

The demographic questions provided data with which to compare visitation patterns, and cross-check the findings in the literature discussed above that suggest young people are under-represented in art galleries. Looking just at the ethnicities who were likely to be long term NZ residents, (European New Zealanders and Maori/Pacific Islanders), only 43% said they had visited some NZ art gallery in the last twelve months, but 60% said they had visited the Auckland Art Gallery at some time in their life. These findings support the proposition that young people do have a lower rate of recent visitation: 42% in this sample as opposed to 59% in the population as a whole. Further analysis reinforced this. Comparing respondents 20 and under with respondents aged 21 and over there is a significant difference: 66% of under 21's had not been to any art gallery in the previous twelve months, but 54% of over 21's had. These figures agree well with the Todd and Lawson (2001) survey of 3400 NZ households which reported that 41% of the households surveyed never went to a gallery, 51% went once a year and 7.5% went monthly or more frequently. This research supports the observation that art gallery visitation tends to increase with age.

In particular, it is clear that teenagers are not the 'natural' audience of the Auckland Art Gallery.

The findings of the survey also confirm that the Auckland Art Gallery does not have a strong appeal for young people in relation to other visitor attractions in Auckland. Asking the respondents which attractions they had been to within the last year produced a league table of destinations by popularity. The top four (of the 22 listed) were associated with outdoor recreation and excursions, such as the beach (n = 174), followed by local leisure favourites such the Auckland Zoo (122) and well known landmarks such as the Sky Tower (119). Of the cultural institutions, Auckland Museum was ranked 6th, but Auckland Art Gallery was firmly in the second tier of attractions at 15th (80), just above the Museum of Transport and Technology (71) and the Maritime Museum (57). Closer analysis shows that this lack of profile was not a question of awareness: 30% of the sample said that they knew where the Auckland Art Gallery was but had not been there. When asked if they had heard of the Auckland Art Gallery, 96% said they had, and 84% said they knew where it was – conversely this suggests that 16% did not know where it was, despite in most cases being interviewed on the pavement outside, or within sight of the gallery itself.

For users and non-users art galleries obviously do not feature amongst their preferred leisure activities. When asked why they haven't been to the gallery recently, those who had heard of the gallery but not visited it said they had '*no time*' (45%), or '*no interest*' (32%). While 13% of users offered '*no particular reason*' for not going, 4% said they hadn't been because they didn't know where it was. The respondents who had never visited produced a range of statements in response to the question '*what would convince you to go?*' Apart from six diehards who insisted they would not visit the gallery under any circumstances (3%), most of the non users said they *could* be

persuaded to go: the majority (39%) said that a particularly interesting exhibition would get them to attend, a significant proportion (34%) said they would go if their friends or family went, and a number (8%) would go if they had more time, or if they had more money or got *'free stuff'* (6%).

Young people's perceptions of art

The survey produced strong evidence that many young people have common-sense but ambivalent images of art galleries. To understand the mental pictures that teenagers and young adults have of the Auckland Art Gallery the survey asked respondents *'What three things come to mind when I say 'Auckland Art Gallery'?'*. As expected the commonest category of things which came to mind (Art and Artists 55.4%) consisted of neutral or positive descriptions of art, specific exhibitions recalled from the past, or mentions of types of art, artists, paintings, or sculptures.

That an art gallery contained art was a natural observation, but the responses in the remaining categories tell us a great deal about the fit between the mind set of young people and the institution because of the way in which they reflect personal attitudes to the gallery. In the category *'architecture'* (8.9%) young people recalled impressions of the building and its appearance which ranged from *'nice old classical style'*, through *'you don't know that it's an art gallery'* to *'not creative enough'*. The category *'relevance'* (7.9%) covered statements about how the person related to the gallery – here the commonest words given were *'boring'* and *'old'*, *'old fashioned'* but at the other end there were several instances of people calling it *'interesting'*. A number of respondents commented on the *'atmosphere'* of the gallery (5.8%). Here the commonest negative terms were related to noise, or rather the lack of it (*'silent'*, *'quiet'*, *'peaceful'*), though many expressed positive feelings (*'classy'*, *'bright'*, *'professional'*). A few expressed negative preconceptions about the ambience of the

gallery, using terms like '*dusty*', '*cold*', '*don't touch anything*'. Some young people said the gallery made them think of people such as '*my dad*', '*old people*' and even '*people who wear berets*'.

The categories found in the responses show that there is little immediate negative bias toward art galleries in the minds of these young people. They expect to find art in an art gallery and for them 'art' means paintings and sculpture. Those who had been to the gallery had mostly positive images of the building itself and its facilities, but some of the other categories suggest that the gallery is seen as irrelevant for young people. The large number of comments that the gallery was '*boring*', the repeated mention of '*old stuff*' and the recollection of its '*quiet*' atmosphere suggest that the gallery's ambience is far from appealing to youths as a space for leisure activity.

Young people's perceptions of gallery visitors

The impression of a youth culture alienated from art culture was reinforced by the young peoples' conceptions of the natural audience for art galleries. When asked '*What kind of people go to art galleries?*' the answers convey a picture of the gallery mainly as the purview of 'artistic people' (40.2%), such as '*people who like art*', '*cultured people*', '*classy people*', '*sophisticated people*', even '*arty farty people*'. Although some had a notion of galleries being for '*everybody*' (15.9%) a number of respondents used words reflecting an association with age and class culture. Only 14.6% thought students typically went to galleries, and 17.2% identified galleries with 'old people' or people from a certain 'social class', e.g. '*middle class*', '*upper class*', '*wealthy people*', or people who were seen to be '*rich*', '*educated*', and '*cultured*'. The category 'Old People' (8.6%) included eighteen instances of the exact words '*old people*' or '*older people*'. The category 'Personality' (5.6%) contained almost equal

numbers of people who were *'boring, 'educated', and 'sophisticated'*. Eight respondents thought art galleries were for *'tourists'*.

The 'Other' category (3.7%) included an interesting miscellany of stereotypes and assumptions about those who go to art galleries, including *'fancy people', 'people who get invited to openings', 'people with time', and 'gay guys'*. Clearly, the young people in the sample were not including themselves in their image of who went to art galleries. Even those respondents (14.6%) who described typical gallery users as *'students'* mostly specified school groups and *'art students'* or a similar specialist group, leaving only 7.3% specifying *'students'* like themselves.

Young people's choice of art

When asked *'What kind of exhibition would like to see in the gallery?'* those who gave definite answers (n = 221) not only reflected a general antipathy for the canon of modern New Zealand art and contemporary practice - that is to say the prevailing taste for abstraction and other modernist styles, experimentalist postmodern art, installation art and new media - but showed a preference for non-traditional art forms as well. 'Contemporary art' and 'non-painting' accounted for 55.7% of the responses, but in this context contemporary art (42.1%) meant visual things like *'graffiti', 'street art', 'pop-art', 'comic animation' and 'fantasy art'*. Non-painting (13.6%) meant *'big name fashion', 'music', with a high proportion wanting 'photographs'* plus respondents suggested *'have a connection to modern day things like politics' and 'weirder stuff'*. Those styles categorised under 'conventional art' (12.2%), clearly at odds with the kinds of cutting edge contemporary work displayed at the gallery, mostly wanted more *'international exhibitions' and 'big overseas artists'*. The remainder mentioned either a *'specific artist'* (5.4%) e.g. *'Dali'* or a *'specific subject'* (26.7%) such as *'Pacific Island art'* or in one instance *'Lord of the Rings'*. These comments reinforce the

suggestion that young people conceive of contemporary art in quite different ways to the art world – their perceptions of visual culture today are out of step with the art gallery orthodoxy, with what are seen as the current ideas, styles, and concerns of curators, critics, art professionals and art historians (Dunn, 2001; 2003).

Young people's marketing of art

In the survey, we asked '*If you were the manager and you wanted to make the gallery more attractive to young people, what would you do?*' The results (n = 303) allowed categories to be grouped under 'Types of Art', 'Advertising', 'Youth Focus', and 'Incentives'. The largest category consisted of suggestions to exhibit particular Types of Art (40.9%) consisting of subcategories *specific type of art* (30%), *specific art subjects* (6.3%) and *Interactive Art* (4.6%). The art suggested in these categories was very similar to the previous question. The most common specific art types requested were '*graffiti*', '*more modern stuff*', '*up to date art*', '*pop culture*'. Specific art subjects included '*Have young people's art in there*', '*let young artists exhibit*', '*more exhibitions of what students study at school*' even '*extreme, go against adult rules*'. The Interactive Art category included suggestions such as '*virtual gallery tours*', '*create more activities where students can participate*', and '*throw art parties*'. Contrary to what art lovers would define as contemporary New Zealand practice, these categories reflect a preference for current visual culture of a broad and diverse kind quite different to the kind of art sanctioned within the culture of art today.

Many of the young people thought that the gallery should do more advertising. Advertising was mentioned in 21.1% of the responses, and consisted of three categories, Increase advertising, (11.6%) Advertising at young locations, for example '*promote it in schools and at Uni*', and '*advertise at rock concerts*'. and 'Target young people.' for instance '*advertise in teen magazines*', '*advertise in bars*'. The Youth

Focus category comprised three subcategories: Use Music, Appeal to Youth and Change the Building. Use Music (8.6%) included music inside '*different rooms, different music*' and music piped outside as an attractant '*speakers on the outside*' and even '*put a bar at the front*'. The Appeal to Youth (7.6%) included the suggestion '*try to show that art galleries are not only for old people*' and '*ask young people what they want*'. Changing the Building included '*make it more colourful*', '*display pictures on the outside so we know what's inside*', '*computer screens on the outside*', and '*make it more funky*'. The final category, 'Incentives' (5.9%) were mainly suggestions to have the entrance fee waived for students or to supply food and alcohol and other '*freebies*'. Further analysis showed that there were distinct differences in perceptions between those who had visited the gallery and those who had not visited it but knew where it was. People who had not visited were twice as likely to ask for incentives, and to suggest more advertising. On the other hand, people who had actually been there were more likely to want to see more contemporary art and young artists.

Including young visitors in museums

The findings from this survey of the Auckland Art Gallery adds to the general picture emerging from the literature of social exclusion from museums, and more specifically of age group exclusion from art galleries. This survey supports the assertion that young people do not attend art galleries in large numbers because their identity, tastes, lifestyles and preoccupations are often at opposition with what art institutions offer. If this is the case, what steps may be taken to democratise art gallery audiences? How might art galleries address the under-representation of this key age group, who are, after all, the visitors of the future?

The first step is probably to acknowledge there is a problem and to undertake research. At the Auckland Art Gallery, analysis of these results led to a greater

awareness of the need to be more inclusive. Now when planning exhibitions the appeal to younger segments of the demographics and targeted marketing are factored in, although no figures are available yet on changes in visitation patterns. Elsewhere in New Zealand, the Dowse in Lower Hutt has taken a leading role in developing multi-media exhibition and event programmes featuring the youth culture of hip hop: visual culture, music, apparel, fashion, gaming, publishing and film (Regnault and Walker, 2005). In Australia, several museums pitch special exhibitions at a target audience of teenagers and young adults, and consult with them about the content and display of permanent exhibits and services. One example is the Victoria Youth Access Project run at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (Komesaroff, 2004). A particularly successful pilot programme in Tasmania was run by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston (French & Savage, 2002). Going beyond simply providing *for* young people, they tried to do things *with* them by listening to what they had to say about the institution. Several radical measures: focus groups, professional development for staff, youth officers, an advisory group and new website, plus dedicated exhibit area and studio, all brought about a dramatic change in the use of the space by the youth audience.

In Europe, some art galleries have tackled this issue by improving their educational provision for young people who are independent visitors – that is by setting up specialised exhibitions and informal education programmes catering for this age group that tap into their interests and needs (Xanthoudaki, 1998). In America, the *New York Times* has reported a number of successful programmes in major art museums designed to turn teenagers – that ‘vast, varied and finicky audience’ – from irregular visitors into a regular clientele. The prestigious Museum of Modern Art was recently quoted as saying: ‘We want to work more with adolescents, to build an audience, so that they can come here and make it their own place’ (Leimbach, 2005).

Conclusion

This survey found clear evidence that young people visit art galleries less often than the population as a whole. Our analysis of the responses adds to the understanding of youth perceptions of art galleries. Clearly many young people do not feel at home in art galleries or are inhibited from visiting them by the very way in which these institutions collect and display art. Aspects of their architecture, exhibition content and design, atmosphere, programmes and advertising contribute to this feeling of exclusion. The calls for a greater variety of art styles and different types of exhibitions, for changes to the atmosphere and layout, and more advertising and promotions, all contained clear messages for museum management.

The evidence presented in this article adds to a small but growing body of literature on an important audience which is sometimes overlooked. When museums and art galleries exclude young people, they do so in the same way that they exclude other social groups, by failing to legitimise young peoples' values, identity and ways of doing things – in short their youth culture. Just as certain social groups are over-represented in museum visitation, the make-up of museum staff, collections and exhibitions betray the preferences of the age-groups which dominate these institutions. Since museums have been able to attract a broader cross section of the population by shifting from a collections-based focus on the interests of a cultural elite to a wider appeal based on the visitor experience, it seems there is every likelihood that these publicly funded institutions will be able to reach the young people they currently fail to serve. The success of the initiatives described above shows that, with the will to realise its democratic potential, museums can serve as both educational and entertaining attractions, as places where young people feel

included, valued and welcomed. If the culture of museums – their content, values and ways of doing things - can successfully be transformed to cater for new constituencies, then there is every likelihood that museums, by finding a place for youth culture, will make room for young visitors.

Endnote

¹ New Zealand has followed British usage preferring 'art gallery' to 'art museum', but recently the American usage has become popular. In this article, I use the term 'museum' to refer to the general group of cultural institutions including those collecting and displaying art, and 'art galleries' specifically for those which, like the Auckland Art Gallery, designate themselves as such.

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