Gallery One, Cleveland Museum of Art

by Anne Helmreich, Jessimi Jones, and Jason Jay Stevens

Gallery One Critique
by Anne Helmreich

The Cleveland Museum of Art's *Gallery One* has recently garnered a number of media prizes and much attention from the field, as this series of articles attests. *Gallery One* opened in January of this year, and is part of the museum's larger renovation and expansion project that began in 2002. Located in the Marcel Breuer designed education wing of the museum, which received extensive upgrades during the first phase of the project (c. 2002–2006), the space that currently houses most of *Gallery One* was the last in this wing to open to the public. This afforded the museum a long planning period for *Gallery One,* and eventually the project drew upon staff from the Information Technology, Design, Curatorial, and Education/Interpretation departments. The result is not only prize worthy but also a lesson learned for the field in terms of flexibility.

The Education department at the Cleveland Museum of Art has a long, distinguished history. In 1931, the museum hired Thomas Munro, a follower of the educational theories of John Dewey, as the curator of education, a position he held until 1967. Just as Munro's publications, such as *The Arts and Their Interrelations* (1949), offer a snapshot of current philosophies of art at the time, including notions of evolutionary progression, *Gallery One* offers an insight into the predilections of our time.

Foremost among these are audience engagement, which includes attracting new and diverse audiences. As numerous commentators have observed, art museums are embracing this task at a moment when arts education in K-12 schools is being cut because of declining budgets that have become particularly acute in the post-recession era. At the same time, the digital has transformed both the education and entertainment sectors, and museums realize that their audiences have come to expect museum content delivered electronically via easily accessible means. This has placed considerable pressure on museums, particularly in education departments; as the 2012 Museum Edition of the *Horizon Report* indicates, "museum educators do not have the training, resources, or support to address the technological opportunities and challenges they face" (p. 10). For art museums, the rapid rise of the digital has also caused intense internal debates driven by the question: if we provide audiences with the digital technologies they desire, will they no longer engage with the art object itself?

With this question in mind, it is worth remembering that while much of the buzz in the museum world around *Gallery One* focuses on the "Collection Wall," a forty-foot multi-touch screen described by the museum as the largest in the United States, much of the gallery is given over to the presentation of physical artifacts. The museum considered many different concepts and designs for the space, including an immersive theater, a design based on the concept of a Wunderkammer (the historical origin of museums), and an installation by a contemporary artist, but finally decided on a tripartite division of the space in order to accommodate three programs: "Studio Play," aimed at young children and families; a central gallery

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Through ArtLens *visitors' potential questions, such as* "*Where was this Made?*" *and* "*Where is it From?*" *are answered through visual and textual explanations. Photo by Anne Helmreich.*
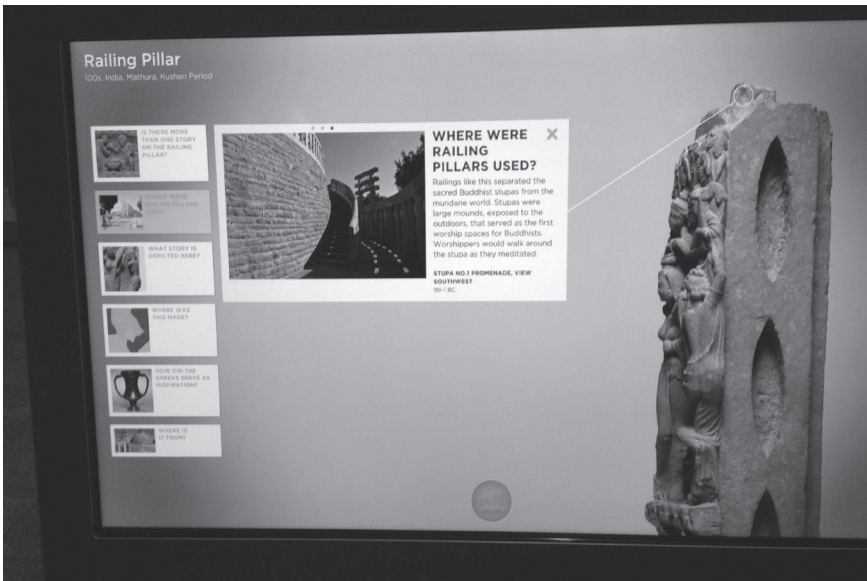
"*Railing Pillar,*" *as contextualized by the* "*Where Do Stories Come?*" *from* ArtLens. *Photo by Anne Helmreich.*

devoted to a thematic presentation of art works from the collection, intended to prepare the visitor for exploring the other galleries of the museum; and a set of interactive displays capped by "Collection Wall," which features digital surrogates of museum objects.

So, while *Gallery One* may have come to be associated with innovative technology—and I will return to this point in a moment—it is built around the display of objects and themes that can be changed. This decision may, in fact, be one of the most critical ones made about the gallery. An artist's installation, while initially attractive, could quickly appear dated. Giving the entire space over to technology could be fiscally irresponsible given how quickly technology changes. So the hybrid approach taken here may be the most judicious. I add a caveat here: the most judicious if the collection data used to populate the interactive displays is both clean (i.e. error free) and separate from the presentation layer itself so that it can be repurposed and re-used in the future with different interfaces. Flexibility is critical to the current and future success of this installation.

Space does not permit me to describe each of the thematic displays housed within *Gallery One*, so I will focus on drawing out a few key points that complement those found in the other critiques of *Gallery One*. Most significant, given the popular reception of *Gallery One*, is to reinforce that while technology is an important part of its interpretative program, it is not the only strategy deployed to help museum visitors engage more meaningfully with the objects on display. The *Gallery's* sub-themes, for example, are framed by wall labels, most of which pose a question, as in the case of what I found to be one of the most successful themes: "How does Art Express Identity?" While this particular theme did not include an interactive technology, it makes apparent to the visitor meanings of works of art that might not be immediately obvious.

It also brings together a provocative juxtaposition of objects that includes *A Child's Throne* (1822) by Pierre-Marie Balny le Jeune, *Anne Frank* (2007) by

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Frank Mayerson, and *The Red Light* (1972) by George Segal. This theme also invites the viewer to think about the work of art beyond surface resemblance to the external world, which is the conceptual framework that tends to dominate several other themes (e.g.,"How do our Bodies Inspire Art?" and "What does a Lion Look Like?") and threatens to reduce the cultural complexity of the artifacts.

While the thematic displays are not solely dependent upon interactive technology in order to produce meaning, the interactive displays, called ArtLens, do offer enriching and multi-layered content that would be otherwise difficult to convey in traditional gallery installations. For example, "Where do Stories Come From?" includes a culturally diverse range of objects and each is contextualized in the accompanying ArtLens. Here, visitors' potential questions, such as "Where was this Made?" and "Where is it From?" are answered through visual and textual explanations.

However, not all the ArtLenses offer a more in-depth or focused engagement with the work of art. For example, the Sculpture Lens, which accompanies "How do our Bodies Inspire Art?" invites viewers to scrutinize themselves more. Here visitors are asked to adopt the poses presented in the digitized works of art. Given human nature, do we find ourselves looking more closely at the sculpture or ourselves as a result of the opportunity to see our mimicking behavior on screen? That said, the display engages in a teaching technique—modeling— that is often the most effective way to communicate complex concepts.

Visitors are given further opportunity to identify favorite works of art and to explore thematic content via "Collection Wall," which offers curated themes by which the over 3500 works of art from the collection are subdivided. In addition, from the vast array displayed before them, visitors can identify works of art on view in the galleries and transfer their selections to an iPad in order to create their own tours. (Visitors can download the app to their own iPad or borrow one from the museum.) Given the museum's strengths in visitor surveys, one hopes that the institution is tracking the use of the iPad app in the galleries to assess the relationship between "Collection Wall" and the other features of *Gallery One*, and the experiences visitors have in the galleries. Indeed, do visitors feel encouraged by *Gallery One* to visit other spaces in the museum, or has *Gallery One* satisfied their curiosity?

The physical layout of the museum enhances the complexity of the question of whether *Gallery One* drives visitors to the rest of the museum. While *Gallery One*, situated near the main entrance, occupies prized real estate within the entire museum complex, it is at some distance from the rest of the galleries, separated by the recently enclosed atrium. From *Gallery One* there are no direct sight lines to the main galleries themselves—no art work, glimpsed down a long corridor, beckoning the visitor to explore.

Despite the uniqueness of the physical situation of *Gallery One*, the question of how effective such interactive interfaces are for linking visitors to the collection is one shared by other institutions and might

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Portraiture Theme, "*Collection Wall.*" *Photo by Anne Helmreich.*

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benefit from a collaborative analysis. The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, for example, in 2011 launched uExplore, which presents the collections online in an interface akin to a light table, in conjunction with uCurate, an application that allows visitors to create virtual exhibitions using objects from the Clark's collections. As of April 2013, the Clark had transformed three of these online displays into physical exhibitions, making the visitor a curator. What have we learned from these projects? Technology is neither cheap nor easy; have these investments paid off? In hindsight, would museums change how they approached or implemented their projects? How might these lessons learned be transmitted to the field at large?

Gallery One: A Lens for Understanding?
by Jessimi Jones

I t was a Saturday afternoon the first time I visited *Gallery One,* the Cleveland Museum of Art's technology driven interactive gallery. I had been reading quite a bit about the gallery, which has been described as, "one of the most technologically advanced art hubs in the world" by *The Wall Street Journal* (March 21, 2013) and "truly groundbreaking" in

The New York Times (February, 2013). The press coverage and the impressive $10 million price tag made me all the more curious to experience it in person. More importantly, as an educator I had been wondering about the impact of all of this technology on the visitor's learning experience. Would this significant investment of time, space, and funding benefit the visitor's ability to make meaning of and find personal relevance in the works of art? How did the Cleveland Museum of Art use technology to assist visitors in the construction of meaning during the *Gallery One* experience? Does this technology work effectively as a teaching tool in an art museum? I was about to find out.

Entering *Gallery One* from CMA's lobby, I walked through the giant sliding glass doors into the space before me. Physically the exhibition is spacious and beautiful. The space is dimly lit with spotlights highlighting various thematic groupings of artwork and the accompanying embedded multi-touch screens. On a wall to my left a large non-interactive screen welcomed me to the space with images and directives such as "express yourself." Straight ahead was a couple, one of whom was posing to imitate the stance of a sculpture that was presented to her on one of the multi-touch screens. To my left was "Studio Play," a dedicated space for families with children to create and explore using technology and hands-on materials. Through another set of glass doors across the gallery lay the already iconic 40-foot multi-touch MicroTile "Collection Wall." The "Collection Wall" is synched with CMA's digital assessment management system, allowing visitors to view all of the art currently on view along with a few favorites that are in storage.

Upon selecting my choice [of the most sinister lion] I was presented with the percentage of other visitors who also selected my image. I had to wonder about the value of this information.

During that first visit I spent about an hour and a half exploring "Studio Play" and testing out the six interactive screens known as "lenses" in the main section of *Gallery One*. Each lens is aligned with one of the thematic art displays—such as Painting, Globalism, Stories and the 1930s—and provides information, games, and interactive tools designed to engage visitors. I decided to try one out. I walked up to the Sculptural Lens where another visitor was being prompted to make a face. A picture was then taken and face-recognition software selected images from the collection that were similar to the expression found in the visitor's photograph. In another activity the visitor was instructed to mimic the pose of a figure in an image. A motion sensor monitored the pose and rated how closely it mirrored the stance in the image. Groups of people were constantly at this lens, and each group was laughing, smiling, and pointing to the images presented. All seemed to be genuinely enjoying the experience as a group. When it was my turn to try I also found myself engaged, interested, curious, and having fun. To stop and enter the pose takes effort and requires additional thought on how the user is interpreting the art. As an educator I could see this activity expanded to include a follow up question or perhaps a prompt to reflect on the experience.

At another lens I was asked to select the image of the lion that was the most sinister. I imagined what a sinister lion might look like and then looked for the lion that most closely represented that image. Upon selecting my choice I was presented with the percentage of other visitors who also selected my image. I had to wonder about the value of

this information. While it was vaguely gratifying to see that I agreed with most visitors, I was also presented with the idea that I was somehow correct about my interpretation. Instead of challenging me to slow down and wrestle with an idea and to look for complexity I was presented with an experience that prompted me to press a button, get the right answer, and move on to the next thing. As an educator I don't want to see the museum experience become the next multiple choice test.

Art and technology from the Lion thematic display in Gallery One. *Photo by Jessimi Jones.*

That afternoon I tried out all of the lenses and found similar experiences. The screens often physically blocked my view of the art as well as drawing my attention to the screen instead of the art. As I inspected the gallery I found many visitors looking at the screens and very

But after spending time with the technology I again found myself wondering if it was providing the necessary support to promote deeper levels of visitor learning and meaning making, a key institutional outcome for *Gallery One.*

Mingling art and technology in Gallery One. *Photo by Jessimi Jones.*

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few observing the art. The lenses enabled me to access a lot of information and choose limited multiple choice selections but failed to invite me to expand upon my interpretation or use the interpretation of others to deepen my own meaning. Additionally, I was never encouraged to reflect on why I made my choices or how the information presented might help me to make meaning about the art. As it is already often challenging for visitors to create personal relevance and understanding with works of art, I would be interested to see CMA engage in visitor research to better understand how patrons are currently using the technology to connect with the artwork.

A few weeks later I ended up making a second visit to *Gallery One* to explore the "Collection Wall" and experiment with ArtLens, the iPad app. ArtLens provides expert information about the art while allowing you to select images to build your own tour of the collection and access tours other visitors have created. I began by renting an iPad for $5 and went to the

"Collection Wall" where I synched my iPad. As images floated by on the giant multi-touch screen I selected ones that I liked and saved them for my own tour.

As on my previous visit to *Gallery One* I was immediately struck by the gadgets, the giant screen, and the elegant design. The "Collections Wall" photographs like an Apple advertisement. But after spending time with the technology I again found myself wondering if it was providing the necessary support to promote deeper levels of visitor learning and meaning making, a key institutional outcome for *Gallery One*.

While exploring the rest of the museum on my personal iPad tour I stumbled onto a intriguing use of technology in the form of a sound installation by Janet Cardiff titled *Forty-Part Motet*. Located in the Italian Baroque gallery, the installation is comprised of 40 speakers on individual stands arranged in an oval in the middle of the gallery. For this piece the artist recorded each member

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of a choir individually so each speaker emits only one voice. I saw some visitors sitting on benches located in the middle of the oval of speakers enveloped by song. Others moved around the room, almost in a dance, listening to the sound of each individual voice. As I sat in the middle of the room experiencing this work of art I was overcome. It was powerful, emotional, almost religious. In addition to the piece being a work of art that engaged me in a new way of hearing, it also provoked a strong visceral connection with the art in that gallery. It encouraged me to slow down by employing my hearing, sight, feelings and whole body while exploring the space. As the song ended and the sound of the voices faded away, I read the museum's brochure about the work. At one place Janet Cardiff is quoted saying "Technology is a tool for us, but it's not interesting enough to say 'Look at all of this technology.'" After spending two afternoons in *Gallery One* this quotation resonated with me.

Gallery One provides an initial wow factor that is sure to impress many with its sleek look, wealth of information and novel experience. A few rough gems such as "Sculpture Lens" actively engage visitors with a physical component. Personally, I often found myself struggling to create deeper understanding of how the art and the information presented connected with my own life. Regardless of how clearly information is presented, people have to make their own meaning, and most do so by connecting new information to what they already know and believe. In this realm *Gallery One* has room to grow. This experience has left me wondering, how can museums

use technology to build a bridge between the information we present and personal meaning that visitors create? Moreover when is technology the best way to do so? I'm not at all against technology, but I do agree with Cardiff and feel that technology is at its most valuable when it is used as a tool. Technology should be a means not an end. There are very few museums in the world that have the infrastructure and financial capacity to experiment on this scale. My hope is that CMA will invest in visitor research to find out how and if visitors are currently creating meaning through the technology and share those findings for the benefit of the field. We should all attempt to learn from their effort. I'm interested to see what comes next.

Critique of Gallery One & ArtLens, Cleveland Museum of Art
by Jason Jay Stevens

*G*allery One* is not a provocation. As a display of artworks it contains some unconventional juxtapositions, but the groupings follow elementary themes, and there is no surprise or mystery here. There is no meta-narrative, though I won't say there is no Big Idea. The exhibition exists purely as an instrument of interpretation, and viewed through that lens, it is amongst the most daring and far-reaching multimedia augmentations of a museum collection to date. As an experiment in radical technology-based accessibility, granting new pathways to the art, *Gallery One,* including the ArtLens tablet app, is a watershed. For ten years the exhibition field has been on a quest for The Golden

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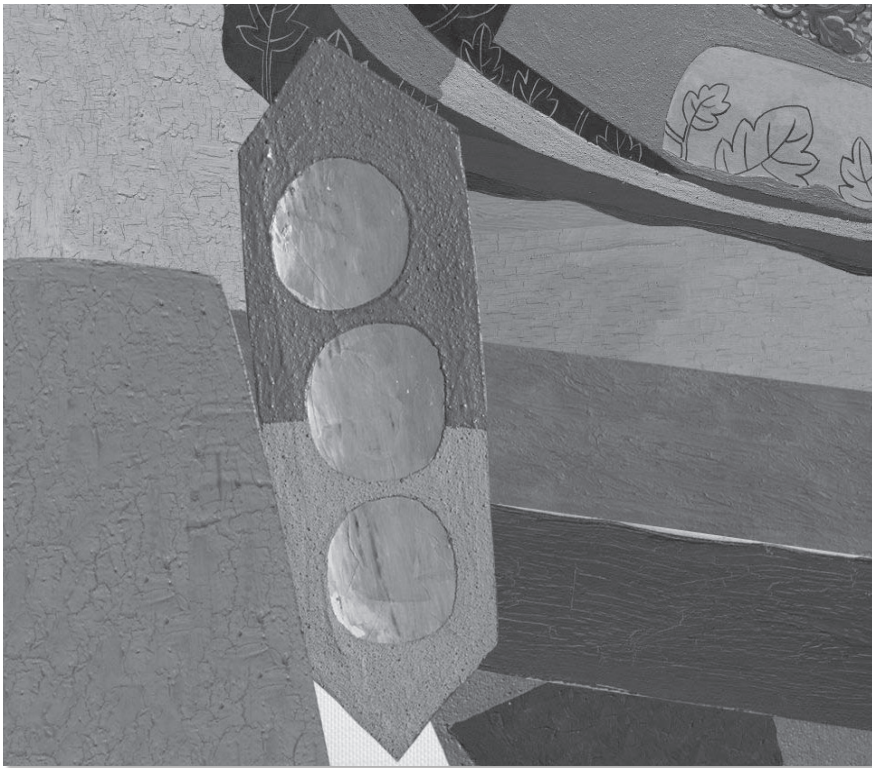
Visitors can "remix" Picasso's "Still Life with Biscuits" (1924) in Gallery One. Photo by Jason Jay Stevens.

[Gallery One] stands as a testament to institutional buy-in and interdepartmental cooperation, good research and thorough prototyping, and a team of talented consultants, designers, and contractors.

Museum App, the one that will blow access to the museum collection wide open and provide a platform for intellectual and social exchange, all with a low-barrier user interface. *Gallery One* and ArtLens make an intriguing proposal.

Work on *Gallery One* started earnestly only 18 months before opening in January 2013, though the concept was born in 2005 with a donation from the man behind the International Spy Museum. It stands today as a testament to institutional buy-in and interdepartmental cooperation, good research and thorough prototyping, and a team of talented consultants, designers, and contractors. Early on, the purpose of *Gallery One* was specified: to draw new audiences with the implementation of new technology. It has been coordinated with a much larger renovation involving a massive expansion, a handsome atrium, and galleries not entirely complete at the time of this writing.

Gallery One encompasses a lot of different things—apps, mostly—in addition to the art gallery. This includes half a dozen multitouch displays a.k.a.

"Lenses," the already-famous "Collection Wall," a family area called "Studio Play," and the ArtLens app.

The Lenses are installed throughout the gallery, each at the center of a grouping of objects. They offer clever games that explore the group's theme and the individual works of art. The quality of interaction is as smooth as any well-designed tablet app, and the activities they enable sometimes induce strangers to socialize; some are popular enough with visitors to call them smash hits. In one, the user draws a line of any shape across the screen, and the system locates an item in the collection that contains roughly the same line. Sounds weirdly fantastic, doesn't it? Another game will do the same with your facial expression. In another, visitors strike poses similar to that of sculptures and are rated on their attempts.

What of the Lenses' efficacy? One busy day, I observed, over time, no fewer than a dozen children, each enthusiastically drawing lines on a Lens in the "Studio Play" room, and rarely glancing at the work of art they conjured. I likewise observed half a dozen people play the strike-a-sculptural pose game, and, rapt in play, seemingly no one read the name of the sculpture they were imitating, and absolutely no one clicked into further interpretation. Sometimes what is popular is also the most superficial; but other apps in the collection make up for this. One accompanies the "Narrative" grouping and invites you to remix the elements of a medieval tapestry to reconstruct its story. Another has you rearrange a Picasso, one of my favorite-ever art class exercises. Doing it in front of an actual Picasso is cool. The range of current apps is wide,

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and though it makes for a lot of "fancy framing" in the hallowed halls of art, it is difficult to imagine formal evaluation will yield less than a complex but overall glowing picture.

The "Collection Wall" is the HQ of the ArtLens database interface. It is a 5ft by 40ft multitouch display in a room that is otherwise situated as a kind of lounge-library. With an array of 150 LED projector cells with good color (however, color representation is too complex a topic for this critique), deep blacks, and some mesmerizing animations

comprised of 3,500 collection images, the "Wall" dominates the room. Little pictures shuffle amongst each other in a breezy stream, and variously magnify, forming momentary mini-exhibitions. It is multitouch by way of a plane of invisible light projected over the screen surface which detects interruptions and sends x-y coordinates to the system's computers. Using iPad-like gestures that scale beautifully to the big screen and are relatively intuitive, users activate a multimodal set of interactions, including a heart button for "likes." Sixteen people can interact at once.

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Young visitors have a lot of fun imitating the poses of sculptures with a "Lens" in Gallery One. Photo by Jason Jay Stevens.

ArtLens is, in fact, a manifestation—a jukebox—of the CMA's massive, ongoing deployment of a dynamic inventory management system, including everything from provenance to location to interpretative media.

An RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) system enables iPads loaded with the ArtLens app to dock to the "Collection Wall." Users can browse and build custom tours, and share them with everyone else, by swiping art from the "Wall" towards their tablets. Custom tours generally have many ingredients for generating dynamic cultural exchange, and *Gallery One* has made a straight forward, if hampered, implementation. Aside from sharing some Big Data about ourselves (tracking tablet location makes the app-guided tours possible), sharing a tour is how the visitor has any lasting 2.0-style participation. However, the eccentric decision to deny users a tool to search by keyword is a practical deal breaker for anyone with a scholarly bent. The museum has some antique Liu Bo bronze mirrors I am dying to see, and while they are still in storage, I will never find them on the "Collection Wall." The flow is too random and the pool too huge, the pictures of artworks too tiny. If the idea is to encourage creative tunneling into the museum collection, this restriction dents shovels. Random meandering is easy enough without the gizmos.

As a tour guide, ArtLens provides access to several years' worth of interpretive media. It can also accompany you as you wander freely, even far away from Cleveland. In fact, at home, the app is as extraordinary as it is in the gallery, maybe better because mediation invariably chips away at the experience of the gallery. Because the art is dynamically tracked, you can visit the CMA exactly

as it currently is from anywhere. The only major user interface annoyance I experienced is that object dimensions are omitted, and there is no scale indicator on the otherwise nice zoom feature.

The user-generated tours, however, are nearly useless due to the fact that the users are denied any ability to describe their choices. So why did the author of the "Reminds Me of My Family" Tour chose to include the Face Mask from the Guinea Coast? We'll never know, but it could have been random. The CMA may reconsider the choice to bar visitors from offering commentary as well. This is exactly the place where unique cultural dialogs can thrive.

ArtLens is, in fact, a manifestation—a jukebox—of the CMA's massive, ongoing deployment of a dynamic inventory management system, including everything from provenance to location to interpretative media. So having a column for visitor comments in the database is not so unfathomable. Of course, only a fraction of the collection has accumulated interpretive media; even though the CMA has proven it can work fast, this project is a long one. Allowing the public to tag artworks with keywords (and then a search function) would begin tying links between works in the collection quickly, increasing its utility. Other institutions have been experimenting with this for several years. Most importantly, it permits us, the public, to help. The distance between museum and Wikipedia is a lot shorter than some people think. ☀