Get plugged in.

Visiting a museum doesn’t have to be intimidating—especially when it’s the Carter

All are welcome here, and to be honest, you don’t need a special guide to navigate an art museum. However, just in case you’re nervous (or if you want to learn more about museums in general), we’re here to help!

This quick guide will tell you everything you need to know to “museum” with the best of ‘em.

How much time do I have?

The beauty of exploring art museums is that you can go at whatever pace is best for you. Are you a see-it-all kind of gal? Or a graze-and-go kind of guy? However you spend time in our galleries is the right way.

Crack the Code!

“I don’t like labels.”
– Every person ever on a reality TV show

We get it. But in this case, the label next to an artwork doesn’t define it. It just gives it a deeper meaning. You might learn when and where the artist lived, what factors influenced their work, or what was happening in America’s history when the work was created. Even if there isn’t any text about the work, the label can still give you some helpful clues.
Raphaëlle Peale
(1774–1825)

Peaches and Grapes in a Chinese Export Basket
1813
Oil on canvas

Acquisition in memory of Ruth Carter Stevenson, President of the Board of Trustees, with funds provided by the Ruth Carter Stevenson Memorial and Endowment Funds
2014.17

Raphaëlle Peale hailed from a family of Philadelphia artists highly regarded as skilled portraitists, including his brother Rembrandt, whose portraits of the Washingtons hang nearby. Raphaëlle, however, developed an affinity for still-life painting and, despite his father’s initial disapproval, persevered and effectively established the genre in America. This is one of his earliest signed and dated paintings.

The Peale family’s experimental farm featured heated greenhouses, providing Raphaëlle with the luxury of painting fruits and flowers even when they were out of season. These peaches sit in a porcelain export basket, a costly item that signaled to viewers of the day the world of the 1810s.
I’m in front of an artwork. Now what?

Here are some general questions to help you think about the works on the walls.

What type of art are you viewing? Is it a painting? A sculpture? A photograph? Something else? When was it made? Sometimes that can help you put it into historical context.

For example, let’s look at William Merritt Chase’s *Idle Hours* in the America as Landscape galleries on the second floor. This is a painting from 1894, a time when modernization was just around the corner. Described as an American impressionist, Chase used vibrant colors and loose brushstrokes to capture this wealthy family enjoying America’s economic boom.

Try using these questions on another artwork in this room.
William Merritt Chase
(1849–1916)
Idle Hours
ca. 1894
Oil on canvas
Just a little closer.

(But not too close!)

What do you see? Animals, buildings, people, trees? Where are they? What do you think is happening? Has the artist used color or a technique to make you feel an emotion? Is it working?

Find the Legacy Galleries on the second floor. In the painting *In Without Knocking* by Charles M. Russell, we see a setting straight out of the Old West, with men on horseback shooting guns and rushing into the Hoffman Hotel.

Playing cards and a bottle of alcohol litter the dirt road, so we can assume something rowdy has been going on.

Russell used shades of brown to help us place the setting in the American frontier. The blurred brushstrokes underneath the horses’ hooves let us feel how fast they’re moving, kicking up dirt while they storm the hotel.

Try to decipher the artwork next to this one in a similar way.
See a work that makes you say, “huh?”

It just might be an abstract work.

Abstract art can range from a simplification of something recognizable to an artwork that does not represent anything at all. If you’re standing in front of an abstract artwork, follow the lines with your eyes. Where do the lines lead? Look at the shapes. Notice the texture(s). How do the colors mix and collide? Does it add to your understanding or feelings about the artwork?

Find the artwork Series 1, No. 1 by Georgia O’Keeffe in the Make It New galleries on the second floor. Those of you “in the know” may assume this is another flower painting (O’Keeffe was famous for them), but it could also be a cloud or a wave. Trace the blue and orange lines around the painting with your eyes. Do you notice the strokes of purple and green? This painting might make you feel all kinds of glowy, warm, and calm.

Find another abstract painting or sculpture, and do some clue searching.

Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986)
Series 1, No. 1
1918
Oil on board
© 2012 The Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation/Artist Rights Society (ARS), NY.
Raphaelle Peale
(1774–1825)
Peaches and Grapes in a Chinese Export Basket 1813
Oil on canvas
Acquisition in memory of Ruth Carter Stevenson, President of the Board of Trustees, with funds provided by the Ruth Carter Stevenson Memorial and Endowment Funds
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Raphaelle Peale hailed from a family of Philadelphia artists highly regarded as skilled portraitists, including his brother Rembrandt, whose portraits of the Washingtons hang nearby. Raphaelle, however, developed an affinity for still-life painting and, despite his father's initial disapproval, persevered and effectively established the genre in America. This is one of his earliest signed and dated paintings.

The Peale family’s experimental farm featured heated greenhouses, providing Raphaelle with the luxury of painting fruits and flowers even when they were out of season. These peaches sit in a porcelain export basket, a costly item that signaled to viewers of the day the world of luxury.

Nope. Don’t like that.

It’s okay! You don’t like every style of music or every movie you’ve ever seen, right? Don’t be surprised if you come across something you don’t like in the galleries. If an artwork doesn’t appeal to you, focus on why: is it the way it was made, or the subject matter? Or, maybe you just hate the color yellow?

Louise Nevelson’s ceramic sculpture Untitled, found in the Make It New galleries on the second floor might be a little difficult to figure out. There’s no obvious subject matter, and the title doesn’t give us any clues. The lines scratched into the surface could tell us that maybe Nevelson is referencing something here. Maybe she’s mimicking the human body, or maybe it’s a whale? Could it be a ship with tall masts? Or maybe it’s just an experiment all about the process. What do you think?

Do you like it?

Find a different work that makes you go, “Huh?” Take a pic and share it on social using #CarterArt.

Louise Nevelson
(1899–1988)
Untitled
ca. 1947
Painted ceramic with rods
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