

Magellan Family

[The Greene Family Learning Gallery] is an indoor place where [the children] can run around and have open-ended play and they can do what they want with the materials. They can be creative and interact with other kids – Isabella Magellan

The Magellan family made their first visit to the High Museum in the summer of 2007; Amelia was five, Christopher two, and Alexander was just a few months old. After reading about the High Museum's Thursday and Saturday art studio activities, Isabella decided to explore the activities with her children. On their first visit, Isabella vividly recalls discovering the Greene Family Learning Gallery and thinking that it was "cool"—she says, "I liked the open-ended play areas and the dress up and how the children could do whatever they wanted and drawing things." On that same day, Isabella purchased a membership to the High and the family has been attending frequently ever since.



Magellan Family (from top left), Alexander, Isabella, Christopher, and Amelia.

Marco Magellan has a background in art and is currently the creative director at Cartoon Network. Isabella says she and her husband rarely visit the High Museum on their own. She explains: "Sometimes, if we go on a weekend, my husband and I may take turns to look at something, but we visit pretty much to take care of the kids." Currently a stay-at-home mother, Isabella is almost always the parent facilitating family visits to the High.

Determined mostly by the older children's school schedules, the visits occur more in the summer when Amelia (age 7 at the beginning of this study) and Christopher (age 5) are home during the day. Other ways the Magellans enjoy spending time together include visiting other museums, going to the beach, playing with friends at Mom's Club and play dates, hiking, and visiting Stone Mountain Park. Amelia also plays the piano and is on soccer and swim teams.

For this study, the Magellan family made three accompanied visits to the High Museum, and for their like-site visits they chose to be accompanied on two visits to the Fernbank Museum of Natural History and one visit to Zoo Atlanta, as they visit those sites frequently on their own.

Visits to the High Museum of Art Galleries

On all of the Magellan family's visits to the High, Isabella sets an agenda and adheres to a mostly predetermined schedule of events and timing. Throughout a typical visit she provides her children with an advance organizer, informing them about what they will do and roughly how long it will last. During the visit she uses a strategy that many mothers of young children have found to help children make smoother transitions: that of telling the children they have five minutes, three minutes, and, finally, one minute left to go. When a child asks to do or see something not on the agenda, Isabella tries to accommodate the request if it fits into the

schedule. On two of the visits, the Magellans visited a special exhibition spending about 15–20 minutes exploring the artwork. An avid reader, Amelia enjoys reading the labels aloud to the group. Isabella focuses on making sure everyone stays together and that the baby, Alexander, is happy. Overall, while their visits to the galleries are short, the family seems to enjoy looking at the art and discovering new and interesting objects.

Visits to the Greene Family Learning Gallery

Christopher and Amelia tend to play together in The Greene Family Learning Gallery while Isabella watches and plays with Alexander. From time to time, the older children play with or “coo” at the baby and often they help Isabella carry him and/or alert her if he starts to crawl off or put something in his mouth. Despite being occupied with the youngest child, Isabella keeps a close eye on the older children and sometimes offers suggestions or provides support as they play and create. When building or creating something together, Amelia tends to take a “director’s role,” leading Christopher through what they should be doing, where he should put things, and so on. In response to that behavior, on a few occasions Isabella instructed Amelia not to be too “bossy.”

Motivation & Values

Isabella describes visits to the High Museum as “low maintenance...something for everyone,” and a place where Amelia, Christopher, and Alexander can interact with other children and be creative. She also says that having a place to take the children to play and run around during the winter and summer when it is either too cold or too hot to play outside is an important benefit. Spending most of their time in the Greene Family Learning Gallery, Isabella says the space is the most important aspect of their visits, “more important than the exhibits.” When Marco or other adults are present, Isabella says the adults take turns watching the children in the Greene Family Learning Gallery while the other adults go upstairs to view the galleries or special events. She says without the Greene Family Learning Gallery her family would go to the art museum much less frequently and would not have a membership because the children are too young to last long in the galleries, which would make visiting not worth the cost of admission.

The Magellan family enjoyed many aspects of their art museum visits. In some cases, their enjoyment focused on specific objects or exhibitions. For example, the Magellan children were particularly impressed with the exhibition of Chinese terra-cotta warriors and the paintings in the Monet exhibition. Frequently, the children remembered with pleasure the art-making activities in the family programs. Isabella did note that she wished there had been more seating for the parents in one of the art-making programs that was held outside on the plaza, as she had Alexander with her. Isabella particularly likes situations where the children can engage in creative open-ended play opportunities in the interactive gallery.

During the like-site visit to Zoo Atlanta, Isabella noted that at the zoo:

...they have their favorite things, their favorite animals, and they love the playground there. I know the Mom’s Club [I belong to] sometimes just do the playground and we meet there and have lunch.

At the Fernbank Museum of Natural History, Isabella said that the children particularly liked what she referred to as “the big interactive room” and her daughter enjoyed the bubbles. She added:

I love watching them...[my daughter] was helping [the baby] and they all had fun together and I hadn't brought Alexander probably since he was walking, so he was having a lot more fun than usual.

Shared Characteristics—Art Museum & Like Sites

Isabella reflected on the ways in which the experiences of the like sites were similar to their experiences in the High Museum of Art and, in particular, the Greene Family Learning Gallery. For the Magellan family, the shared characteristics of these family outings was that the experience was enjoyable for the whole family and the activities were fun places where there were not a lot of rules. The experiences allowed the children unique opportunities for creative play, to “burn energy,” and to interact with other children. As Isabella said:

It is something the whole family can do and enjoy together and it is different from playing at home and they get to see things they normally don't get to see and run around.

Isabella remarked that while the interactive spaces, which she called “playrooms” in the High Museum and Fernbank were similar, the museums themselves were quite different. She explained it this way:

Fernbank seems to be more kid friendly—I mean it basically is a kid's museum, adults go but the High is the opposite—it is primarily an adult museum with things for kids.

She also noted that she could see where many families who were mainly interested in a place for their children to “play with trucks and build Legos” might not see the art museum as an option for their children's play. In her experience she found that mothers with sons often found it difficult to get them to even draw or color, although her son likes to create art.

Connections & Effect of Participation in the Study

Isabella noted that it is sometimes difficult to trace ways in which her children were connecting the art museum experience to other family experiences. The connection was more evident when her daughter's school had a visiting artist program related to Monet so there were clearer opportunities to connect to the Monet exhibition at the High. The mother noted: “we come here really often, so it's difficult to distinguish one place and visit from another.”

Although the family did not talk much about the visit to and from the museum or like sites, Isabella said:

They are always really excited to recount to their dad about what they did that day, but they don't go back and say 'remember what we did' that day.

When reflecting on how participation in this study might have influenced their family outings, Isabella felt that she probably did more things together, with all three children. Because of the difference in ages she said she often takes her two preschool sons to Fernbank while her daughter is in school and takes her daughter to the art museum because of her interest in art. Isabella noticed that getting her daughter “to hang out with her brothers more was kind of nice.”

VISIT PATTERNS

	High Museum of Art	Like Sites
Average time spent	123 minutes (Entire visit) 29 minutes (Greene Family Learning Gallery)	90 minutes
Timing of visits	Two visits were made on Fridays and another on a Thursday. The family always visits around lunch time (roughly 12:30 - 2:30 pm).	Two visits were made on Fridays and another on a Thursday. The Friday visits were in the late afternoons and the Thursday visit was around lunchtime.
Order of visits	On two occasions, the family visited the Greene Family Learning Gallery first, and on another, they visited the family space somewhere in the middle of the visit. On every occasion, the family took a "lunch break" during the middle of the visit and participated in an art-making event (Summer Break Studios and Toddler Thursday). During two visits, the family viewed a special exhibition (<i>First Emperor and Monet Water Lilies</i>).	First visit was to Zoo Atlanta with the second and third took place at Fernbank Museum of Natural History. The second and third visits offered more interactive opportunities for the children.

Snapshot

THREE VISITS TO THE HIGH MUSEUM OF ART

Visit 1



April 2009
2 hours 15 min.
First Emperor

Visit 2



June 2009
2 hours 21 min.
Monet Water Lilies
Richard Misrach: On the Beach

Visit 3



July 2009
1 hour 15 min.

THREE VISITS TO LIKE SITES

Zoo Atlanta



April 2009
2 hours 17 min.

Fernbank Museum of Natural History



October 2009
59 min.

Fernbank Museum of Natural History



January 2010
1 hour 15 min.