

## Working hands off

by Svava Riesto



Inspiring children (and adults for that matter) to sharpen their senses is very important. But is it possible to stimulate other kinds of encounters between children and cultural expression? This story is about arts education, which has a longer history and in many countries is generally better supported than is unfortunately still the case with architectural education.

Statens Museum for Kunst (the Danish National Gallery) launched the Children's Art Museum in 1998. The museum collection includes paintings dating back to the 14th century. To make these artworks relevant to the youngest visitors, a supplement to the hands-on activities in the ubiquitous museum workshop was important.



### **A new and traditional museum for children**

A section in the museum has been furnished especially for children aged 6-12. Here, original artworks from the collections as well as loaned pieces are exhibited. This is unusual, since the main exhibition strategy in western arts education since the 1970s has been to show objects especially made for children. But this other strategy meant 'hands-off' - no touching. Can children experience art with their eyes only? Of course they can. You don't understand a still life any better if you touch it. Children can look, discuss and relate the content to their own lives. Guided tours were an important arena for such discussions.



The Children's Art Museum is based on the principle of limitation as aid to concentration. Sometimes there is only one artwork in a room. The exhibitions are often structured like those for grown ups: thematic, in terms of technique/materials or content/subjects. But there are no periodic or geographic parameters, since they mean very little to children at that age. Instead, themes that concern children are brought up, such as the Life and Death exhibition in 1999-2000.

I was an educator at the Children's Art Museum from 1998 to 2002. Today, I work with communications at SLA Landskabsarkitekter, Architects, teach architectural history at Copenhagen University and hold workshops on architecture for pupils at different schools.

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