



WITH THE KIDS

A framework for art play

The Getty's new Family Room lets kids be kids as they explore creativity

By Brenda Rees
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The newly designed Family Room at the Getty Center invites kids to become part of a painting, think like a sculptor or pretend to be a French aristocrat relaxing on an 18th century-inspired bed.

The revamped Family Room (the old one has been closed since May) is an interactive space that seeks to introduce parents and kids to artworks in the Getty's collection.

At the Family Room, kids and adults work together to "create their own works of art as well as experiment with artistic concepts," says Peggy Fogelman, assistant director for museum education and interpretive programs. "It's our main educational space for families here."

While the space is small, the Family Room packs a lot inside. The layout is simple: An outer "treasure hunt" wall encircles five small discovery "coves."

Guests entering the room are immediately met with steel "treasure hunt" walls that contain nearly 70 peepholes at different heights. Peer into the holes and see details from art elements and museum artworks. Then roam the galleries later in your own treasure hunt to find those details in their original form.

Each cove highlights a different artistic expression — painting, photography, sculpture, decorative arts and manuscripts and drawings — and includes a hands-on activity as well as educational information.

For example, the painting cove features a huge photographic reproduction of James Ensor's "Christ's Entry Into Brussels in 1889." Kids can make masks and — poking heads through a backdrop — become part of the painting's colorful procession.

Families can experiment with fragmented images using mirrors and photographic lenses in the photography area, which contains an enlarged copy of David Hockney's "Pearblossom Hwy., 11-18th April 1986, #2."

Take a relaxing break in the decorative arts cove, where families can read books about beds as they sit on an 18th century-inspired French bed complete with silks, fabrics and pillows. In the sculpture cove, visitors can create their own version of Martin Puryear's metal tubular sculpture "That Profile" (1999). Families can crawl down low and stretch up high to insert pliable foam pieces into a grid of holes lining the walls that feature a photographic enlargement of Puryear's sculpture.

In the manuscript and drawing cove, children can create their own version of a nature study by tracing a bugs-and-berries original done by Jan van Kessel in the 17th century. Nearby, families can design and color giant portions of an illuminated manuscript. On display also is a facsimile of an original 15th century Book of Hours manuscript, which gives families a sense of the scale at which medieval illuminators worked.

Overall, learning how to see and interpret art is something families can use not only at their visit to the Getty but also at other museums and galleries, Fogelman says. "Art rewards those who take a closer look," she says. "Learning in a way that is playful and exploratory is not limited to classrooms or age."