

# Kids can love art

*MCA Family Guide helps*

**A**rt museums don't usually make kids' lists of Top 10 Places To Spend An Afternoon. You can't play in the galleries, you can't touch the paintings and you have to speak in your quietest voice.

Regardless, the Museum of Contemporary Art is striving to connect kids with art. It publishes the MCA Collection Family Guide, a booklet designed to guide families through the museum as they "look, talk, and think about contemporary art."

"Parents wanted some developmentally appropriate strategies for looking at the art with their kids," says Wendy Woon, director of education at the MCA.

The Family Guide, which families can pick up for free on the second floor of the museum, is a 10-by-7-inch folder designed to help parents teach their children about art and art museums. Included is a series of 12 cards depicting artwork from "Life Death Love Hate Pleasure Pain," a collection of some of the museum's most significant works, which opened in November. Each of the cards features a color photo of the work along with its title, the year it was created, the medium used and the artist's name. The back of each card contains suggestions for talking about the art with your children and tips for helping them create their own art at home.

"It gives you an opportunity to interact back and forth with your kids," Woon says. "It's a great tool for both parents and kids."

The collection's many paintings, drawings, photographs and sculptures provide kids with a unique opportunity to exercise their creative muscle. For instance, when looking at an untitled sculpture by Tom Friedman, a robotic-looking contraption made from cardboard and Styrofoam that resembles a pair of legs, the Family Guide encourages children to jog their imaginations by thinking of a name for the robot, deciding how it would move or wondering what noises it might make. Kids, the guide suggests, can then go home and build their own robots out of household materials such as egg cartons, boxes, aluminum foil, paper plates and straws.

The card for another work, "Alien Obsessives, Mum, Dad and the Kids," a series of metal armatures decorated in wax-printed fabrics by Yinka Shonibare, encourages kids to think about the word "alien" as describing foreign objects and people, a way to introduce kids to multiculturalism. It suggests kids go home and look at the labels on their clothes and toys to see where they were made, then locate those places on a globe.

The idea, Woon says, is to get kids thinking about art. "It gives kids a sense of discovery," she says. "It's not just making things, but thinking about them."

The Family Guide not only teaches kids about art, it teaches them about art museums. The guide

provides a brief history of the MCA, which was founded in 1967 and today has 2,632 works by 630 different artists in its collection.

And it illuminates the intricacies of museum life. The guide explains why people aren't allowed to touch the art (finger oils and salts destroy the artworks' surfaces), how to read the wall labels that accompany artworks (they provide everything from the artist's name and date of birth to the materials used to make the piece), why there are guards at the museum (they protect museum patrons and art) and how climate control boxes, called hygrothermographs, help preserve artwork (they monitor the temperature and moisture in the gallery so the air isn't too dry or moist for delicate art).

"A museum is a new experience for many kids and it gives you a sense of control to know how things work," Woon says.

Finally, the guide includes tips for parents on how to make the most of their child's visit so the art museum, even with all its rules, can make the family's new Top 10 list. Parents should let their kids' interests guide them through the museum, encouraging them to make personal connections with the artwork and to express their own opinions about it. Let kids take their time, even if it means looking at fewer works, Woon suggests. Most of all, she says, parents should talk about the art with their children.

"One of the great things about a museum is that by talking about the works, by sharing your opinions, you can learn new things about each other and about the world," Woon says.

For information, call (312) 280-2660 or visit [www.mtchicago.org](http://www.mtchicago.org). The MCA is at 220 E. Chicago Ave., Chicago. Admission is \$10; seniors, students and military pay \$6; children 12 and under, free. Admission is free on Tuesdays.

*Matt Alderton*

