ArtEDGE at OU, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Combines Art, Technology for Norman Students

NORMAN, Okla. – Where do art and technology collide? Select Norman seventh- and eighth-grade students spent the fall visiting the University of Oklahoma to find out. The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, Bizzell Memorial Library and School of Visual Arts at OU collaborated to offer ArtEDGE to 50 students who spent a day on the Norman campus viewing, discussing and creating artwork. Student work from the event is now on display in the Education Gallery inside the museum.

“The program’s name is about pushing against the perceived boundaries of art,” said Melissa Ski, director of education at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. “What happens when you reimagine art using technology? How can a group collaborate to push that idea even further? That’s art at the edge.”

During the first hour of their visit, students practiced “close looking,” or the use of observational skills, discussion and drawing exercises, to interpret or think deeply about an art object in the museum.

The central work for ArtEDGE was one of the oldest in the museum’s Asian art collection: a Tang dynasty-era horse sculpture from China. The students were asked to imagine the Tang horse in another space outside of the museum. They created sketches, stories and poems to describe this space, and their work reflects one of the program’s most important goals: to connect with art in a personal,
meaningful way.

Next, students moved to Bizzell Memorial Library’s EDGE space, an experimental lab that centers around the latest technological tools. Under the guidance of Emerging Technologies Coordinator Matt Cook, the students interacted with a scanned model of the Tang horse using virtual reality workstations. Additionally, they received 3D-printed models of the horse that became the basis of a collaborative art project.

“The most amazing thing is seeing how quickly the students take to the virtual reality,” Cook said. “Most of this hardware hasn't even hit the mass market yet, but they can walk in, sit down and navigate an immersive 3D learning space within the course of five minutes.”

Whereas museums prohibit touching artwork, virtual reality gives students new ways to interact with art.

“Students are quickly manipulating what is typically seen as fragile or secure museum objects to gain fresh perspectives on a piece of sculpture and make new discoveries about what constitutes art,” Cook said. “The library is proud to support interactive learning at all levels, and ArtEDGE is pioneering such initiatives.”

After a lunch on Campus Corner, the students visited the sculpture studio at the School of Visual Arts. Working with Daren Kendall, assistant professor of sculpture, the students created an art installation inspired by their 3D-printed Tang dynasty horses. This group project reinforced the collaborative nature of the program and put the students’ imaginations back to work.

“Like the parable of the blind men feeling all sides of the elephant, these students work from the same object yet invent respective interpretations, stories and ideas,” Ski said. “Through the art-making process, the students unite diverse viewpoints in the group. When working from ‘all sides of the horse,’ in this case, they discover that meaning making is a shared effort.”

Evin Hughes, an eighth-grader at Longfellow Middle School, said the focus on creativity was rewarding.

“Today was a lot of team-building and mostly exercises like that,” she said. “It taught us how to think creatively, which I really liked. I had a great time, I love the museum, I love what they’re doing for this particular age group and school, and I think that they should continue doing this.”

Whittier Middle School Gifted Resource Coordinator Cindy Castell said her
students enjoyed the day of exploring art.

“Each piece of the ArtEDGE program was so meaningful,” she said. “I smiled so many times hearing my students squeal with delight, sigh with wonder and literally say out loud that this is the best day of school they have ever had. This is by far the most amazing opportunity I have taken kids to in the four years that I have been doing this job.”

ArtEDGE was funded by the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art Association.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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**IMAGE CREDIT:**

Daren Kendall, OU assistant professor of sculpture, helps students with an art project as part of ArtEDGE, a hands-on program for Norman eighth-graders being offered this fall at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, Bizzell Memorial Library and the OU School of Visual Arts.