

## Ask the Artsperts by Kristine Meek and Juliana Meek Harmon-Meek Gallery, Naples, FL

### Introducing Fine Art to Children

#### Dear Artsperts:

My husband and I would like to ensure our daughter is exposed to fine art but she is only four years-old, is that too young and how should we go about introducing her to paintings and sculpture?

Signed,  
Preschool Picasso

#### Dear Preschool Picasso,

Who would ever think that an Army officer and his wife, stationed in France and Italy for a total of six years might lead their son to a life in the arts? That's exactly what happened in the case of our father William Meek. As a child and early teen our grandparents took him to most of the art museums in Western Europe and opened his eyes to the world of art.

Perhaps that is why our gallery has always hosted tours of the gallery for children of all ages since the mid 1960's. Harmon-Meek Gallery was once the only place for school children to see fine art until the Friends of Art started doing art exhibitions at the Naples train depot in 1984, then later at the Philharmonic Center for the Arts starting in 1986, the von Liebig Art Center in 1997, the Naples Museum of Art in 2001 (now Baker Museum), and Loos Art Gallery at the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples in 2005. Our gallery even paid for school buses to come so that private and public school children could visit. Our dad would hang special exhibitions with paintings hung lower and with subject matter that would interest younger audiences. One of our favorite exhibitions was the animals in American art exhibition that included works by Milton Avery, Will Barnet, Darrel Austin, Hunt Slonem, and Robert Vickrey.

To this day we continue to enjoy seeing children's eyes light up when they see fine art. From young adults studying graphic design at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology to summer middle school students at Grace Place for Children & Families to grandbabies visiting their relatives on spring break, we encourage school groups and families to bring young audiences to the gallery.

Aside from visiting the gallery, there are three public art collections that our father has started in Naples and of those, he is proudest of the permanent collection at the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples (C'MON). There he set forth standards based upon lifelong experiences of looking at art as a child himself and observing how children react to art.

The paintings in the Loos Art Gallery at C'MON are all hung at four foot centers so most of the children can view the collection without tilting their head upward and all the paintings are framed with Optium Plexiglas, which appears without reflection and is scratchproof so the children can get as close as they want to without concern about touching the surface, and finally, all of the works depict animals and/or children as a subject so toddlers and young children can easily relate to the images. Ours is the first children's museum in the country to have a dedicated art gallery with permanent collection.

Studies have shown that even newborns can determine differences in colors and enjoy looking at bold contrasting colors. Works that have easily recognizable forms and shapes are also more accommodating for very young eyes.

You probably wouldn't be surprised to hear that Kristine's son John William was in the gallery at four days old looking at the art and she herself was caught staring at a color spectrum painting by James Twitty as an infant.

Sincerely,  
The Artsperts



Upper Left - J. William Meek III at age 7 in 1958 in Mont Marte, Paris, France.  
Lower Left - Kristine Meek as a four week old studying a work by James Twitty (1916-94) in 1978.  
Upper Right - Juliana Meek giving a gallery tour to students from Grace Place for Children and Families in 2016. Work by Bob Kane (1937-2013) in background.  
Lower Right - Barbara Meek showing a work by Eliot O'Hara (1890-1969) to her 4 day old grandson, John William. Works by Stephen Scott Young in far background.