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SENSORY FRIENDLY PROGRAMMING AT THE NEW CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Phase 1 of Michelle Montjoy's Breathing Room Now Open

SAN DIEGO – June 13, 2022. The New Children's Museum is putting a greater emphasis on providing sensory-friendly programming, services and healing spaces for neurodivergent individuals and others needing a sensory friendly experience. As part of this effort, the arts-based children's museum commissioned Michelle Montjoy for *Breathing Room*, a new art installation that provides a calm respite in an otherwise highly interactive environment. The first phase of the installation opened Saturday, June 11.

"The New Children's Museum has an opportunity as the world evolves post-pandemic to further establish itself as a place of creativity, play and comprehensive learning for all audiences," said Elizabeth Yang-Hellewell, Executive Director and CEO. "We're seeing a much greater need for safe, welcoming, sensory supportive spaces for children and adults. At The New Children's Museum, we are moving towards an arts-based model that can support a diverse array of sensory preferences and needs."

Breathing Room is a quiet space on the Museum's main level that welcomes visitors with calming colors and hanging textile sculptures that gently move up and down. The rhythmic movement of the soft, hand-knitted elements replicates breathing cycles, allowing visitors to slow down and relax.

"It has been deeply moving to work with The New Children's Museum to make this warm and welcoming space," said artist Michelle Montjoy, who was onsite Saturday observing how visitors reacted to her installation. "With the mesmerizing movement overhead, soothing colors, soft pillows and comfortable spots to cozy up in, *Breathing Room* gives visitors a chance to lie on their backs, take a pause and just breathe."

As part of the creative process, Montjoy and the Museum will observe how visitors engage in the space over the next two months, which will help inform the next phase. Planned for September, phase two will include additional hand-knitted elements, made of repurposed T-shirts to match the initial sculptures: pods to climb into, puddles to relax in, and weighted sweaters to be wrapped in, each providing additional opportunities for calming comfort and a sense of security.

Sensory Guide

Concurrently, the Museum is working with Xenia Sholl from Sensory Friendly San Diego to create a Sensory Guide that will help guests with neurodiversity, autism and other special needs navigate the Museum and locate the installations, spaces and services best suited for the experience they are looking for.

“Our Sensory Guides help folks of all ages with sensory or social needs prepare for what to expect, ways to participate, and how to seek out resources if they need support,” explained Xenia Sholl, Founder and Project Director at Sensory Friendly San Diego. “Made by and for the neurodivergent community, Sensory Guides include 3-D tours, audio clips, and visual guides to help create an inclusive space even before people come visit!”

In addition to *Breathing Room*, the Museum currently offers several quieter, more sensory-friendly spaces, including *tikitiko* (Tanya Aguiñiga), *The Rain House* (Ernest Silva) and the outdoor Clay Studio. The Museum also offers noise cancelling headphones and provides other special accommodations upon request. The Sensory Guide is set to come out later this summer.

Link to Photos

- Examples of *Breathing Room* hanging knitted sculptures by Michelle Montjoy at The Seabird Resort in Oceanside, CA. *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*
- *Breathing Room* at The New Children’s Museum, *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*
- Hanging knitted sculptures in *Breathing Room*, *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*
- Children in the large sweaters in *Breathing Room*, *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*
- Michelle Montjoy portrait, *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*
- Accessibility Mornings at The New Children’s Museum on Clay Studio, *Courtesy of The New Children’s Museum*

About Michelle Montjoy

Michelle Montjoy is an Oceanside-based artist who works in a combination of installation, textile, sculpture and socially-engaged practices. A former public school art teacher, her work approach is based in humor, generosity and sustainability. Her work has been shown at MCASD, Art Produce Gallery, San Diego International Airport, Oceanside Museum of Art, Athenaeum Music and Arts Library and others. michellemontjoy.com

About Sensory Friendly San Diego

Sensory Friendly San Diego believes that acceptance of the neurodivergent community is the key to a more vibrant world. They provide a safe, inclusive environment that fosters creative expression, creative play, skill-sharing, and encourages all forms of communication. Sensory Friendly San Diego was founded in Barrio Logan by Xenia Sholl in 2018 to foster the passions of

the neurodivergent individuals and create innovative opportunities for radical inclusion.
sensoryfriendlysandiego.org

About The New Children's Museum

The New Children's Museum is a new model of children's museum whose mission is to stimulate imagination, creativity and critical thinking in children and families through inventive and engaging experiences with contemporary art. Located downtown, the Museum collaborates with contemporary artists to design and create art installations and educational programs for children. The Museum brings families together in a rich educational environment that fosters creativity — blending the best elements of children's museums, contemporary art museums and community resources. In addition to the downtown San Diego location, the Museum now has a satellite location called the Art + Play Space in Del Mar. To learn more, visit thinkplaycreate.org or follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#).