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New exhibit invites kids into classic paintings **BY JEN BANOWETZ**

If you've ever wondered what you'd look like as the *Mona Lisa*, here's your chance.

Leonardo da Vinci's 1503 masterpiece is one of the works featured in a new immersive exhibit at the DuPage Children's Museum (301 N. Washington St., Naperville). Created by the Minnesota Children's Museum, the traveling show *Framed: Step Into Art* lets young visitors experience paintings in a fresh way—including glimpsing themselves as the enigmatic subject of the most famous portrait in the world by placing their own face in a cut-out of a replica.

"The exhibit is designed to give children the opportunity to step into the time and space of a piece of art," explains Julie Carlsen, the museum's chief of creativity and strategic communications. "It provides opportunities for dramatic play while also exposing children to some classic artists."

Kids can also jump in and explore three-dimensional settings for classic



works such as: Grant Wood's 1934 *Dinner for Threshers*, depicting rural life; John Singer Sargent's 1916 *Camp at Lake O'Hara*, set in the Canadian Rockies; and Diego Rivera's 1924 *The Corn Festival*, celebrating the harvest.

Children learn by imagining and doing, so the scenes allow for plenty of hands-on activities, from gathering chicken eggs to cooking over a campfire.

"Young children love pretend play, and we do too," Carlsen says. "Children enjoy dressing up in period costumes, preparing meals and setting the table, building forts, and playing with farm animals."

The DuPage Children's Museum has created its own complimentary exhibit featuring modern and diverse expressions in art, in an effort to

promote inclusive belonging. "The *Interact with Art Gallery* exhibit features 12 different artworks chosen by staff members," explains Kimberly Stull, the museum's chief of building and making. "We asked staff to recommend a piece of artwork that features a scene that feels like one can step

into and also has some significance to the person suggesting it. The exhibit development team then curated the suggestions to create a gallery featuring diversity by artist, style, time period, and subject, although the themes of outdoor life, music, everyday life, and celebration run through the pieces." As an accompaniment to the works, the gallery offers conversational prompts and seek-and-find activities to promote visual-thinking strategies and art appreciation, Carlsen adds.

Topping off the companion exhibit is a large custom piece by a contemporary female African American artist, Lynn Lucien. Interactive musical instruments and a performance stage for more pretend play will tie it all together. The exhibit runs through January 8. ●