



onestar press   **navid nuur**   at this museum i damaged navid nuur's art



At This Museum  
I Damaged  
Navid Nuur's Art.

I Failed as a Visitor.

**Navid Nuur**  
onestar press

Navid Nuur's portion of The Knight's Tour, a multi-artist touring exhibit most recently seen at De Hallen Haarlem, contains a sculpture made of florist's foam and crushed by his hands into a pock-marked wall. The sculpture sits in the open, without barriers, offering a tempting place for museum visitors to leave their fingerprints. I know *I* can't walk past floral foam without sticking my fingers into it. If a visitor does cross that line, irreparably altering Nuur's art, they have two options: a 200-euro fine, or stand outside the museum with a sandwich board, declaring: *At This Museum I Damaged Navid Nuur's Art. I Failed as a Visitor.*

posted by AzraelBrown (71 comments total) 3 users marked this as a favorite

<http://www.navidnuur.nl/>  
<http://aptglobal.org/view/event.asp?ID=423>  
[http://www.dehallen haarlem.nl/tentoonstellingen/archief\\_detail/279/the-knight's-tour](http://www.dehallen haarlem.nl/tentoonstellingen/archief_detail/279/the-knight's-tour)  
<http://www.southernliving.com/home-garden/solutions/flower-arranging-made-easy-0040000008473/page5.html>  
<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/33287/flink-of-an-eye/?page=2>

**24 hours**

**71 comments**

“The reproach was sincere. Nuur really does consider his work to be that fragile”

Oh really? Then maybe a bit of proactive protection is in order.  
*Unless the whole point is just to shame people.*

Gee, I wonder.

posted by oddman at 6:12 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?

posted by winna at 6:25 AM on December 8, 2009

They made me stand outside the museum with a sign that said  
“I failed as a visitor by not understanding your art.”

Nobody understood why they made me do that.

posted by twoleftfeet at 6:26 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]

Since Navid Nuur is so insistent on the fragility of his art, I wonder what the guys who urinated into Marcel Duchamp's Fountain would do with it.

posted by jonp72 at 6:26 AM on December 8, 2009



sounds like a metaphor for free will and sin amirite

posted by toodleydoodley at 6:27 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

Option 1: Nuur is testing you as a visitor, expecting you to fail  
Option 2: Nuur is using this as a method of making you, the visitor,  
part of his artwork  
Option 3: Nuur is trying getting free advertising and publicity  
Option 4: a mix of Options 1-3

posted by filthy light thief at 6:46 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]

*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

A lot of people don't know it, but this is the real reason Conan was sent to be a gladiator, boy couldn't stop touching art.

posted by Brandon Blatcher at 6:48 AM on December 8, 2009 [9 favorites]

*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

Reminds me of the guy who does the stack of prints on the floor, and people can take one if they wish.

posted by smackfu at 6:50 AM on December 8, 2009

How can the “reproach” be anything but metaphorical when the purpose of the work was for the artist to atone for his own sin of appropriation by way of entrapping his own viewers into appropriation?

I’m also curious to hear from anyone who has incurred the fine/ punishment - are there cops on hand to enforce that you cough up 200 euro (\$295 USD) or wear the sandwich board of shame, or is this more like a premium that rich art enthusiasts pay for the privilege of “collaborating” with a hot artist?

posted by toodleydoodley at 6:56 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

**or what filthy light thief said**

posted by toodleydoodley at 6:57 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

All sorts of people. My very first photo exhibit, I couldn't afford glass for the frames. I stood and watched at least a dozen people, over the course of two days, touch my emulsions. (These were fiber paper, black and white darkroom prints...not exactly anything where I could knock another one off the ink jet if anything happened.)

It must be some basic human instinct difficult to surpress.

posted by availablelight at 6:57 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

If I were there and couldn't resist the free finger sculpting, I would choose the 'sandwich board' option. Only I'd bring a marker (or more florist's foam), and change the sandwich board to read "At This Museum I Was *Criminalized* by Navid Nuur's Art. *He Failed as an Artist.*"

posted by Hardcore Poser at 6:58 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]



*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

I do, if they don't look delicate. Touching objects helps you to "connect" with them.

posted by Jinkeez at 6:59 AM on December 8, 2009 [4 favorites]

How long do you have to stand there? Because Nuur could end up starting a Flickr fad. If more than one person does it, do they stand out there at the same time? What about a flash mob?

posted by Halloween Jack at 7:03 AM on December 8, 2009

At the opening of the MOMA, in Manhattan, I watched a five/six-year-old plop his finger down on *The Starry Night*. There was a crowd of people around it, including a guard, but no one did a thing. It had glass over, but many of the paintings didn't.

posted by SirNovember at 7:07 AM on December 8, 2009

<http://moma.org/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Starry\\_Night](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Starry_Night)

Christian Marclay's *Fred Astaire* was composed of the popping sounds made by the scratches on the vinyl surface caused by visitors to the installation walking on the records. The scratches and pops mix in with the tapdancing on the original recording nicely, I hear.

posted by idiopath at 7:18 AM on December 8, 2009

My mother was reprimanded by a museum guard for blowing on the mobiles at an exhibit of Alexander Calder's work. I understand the desire to preserve works of art, but the definition of mobile is mobile.

Note: if you go to see Calder's work, be sure to watch the shadows of the mobiles, they are extremely beautiful.

posted by sciencegeek at 7:25 AM on December 8, 2009

*How long do you have to stand there? Because Nuur could end up starting a Flickr fad. If more than one person does it, do they stand out there at the same time? What about a flash mob?*

And can you imagine fifty people a day, I said fifty people a day walking in, sticking their fingers in Navid Nuur's "interimodule", and walking out. Friends, they may think it's a movement. And that's what it is, the Navid Nuur's Anti-Interimodule Movement, and all you got to do to join is wear a sandwich board in front of the museum for an hour making a weepy face.

posted by phooky at 7:27 AM on December 8, 2009 [5 favorites]

A few years ago I was at an art exhibit which involved a light shined onto a mobile. The projection was then projected onto a screen. So naturally, after a few moments, I naturally started to make shadow puppets.

I stepped out of the exhibition, and there was a very excited reporter standing there. What was it, he wanted to know, about the art exhibition that specifically engaged my sense of play?

Oh, I wanted to say. It's nothing to do with the art exhibition. I'm just very *immature*. Seriously, every time I walk by a projector it's getting at least a shadow bunny rabbit.

But I couldn't say that, so I let the girlfriend handle it.

posted by Comrade\_robot at 7:32 AM on December 8, 2009 [9 favorites]

I do not think connecting with a piece of visual art requires touching it. Maybe I was just too repressed as a child by a mother who required me to keep my hands behind me when we went to the museum, but I can't think of any pieces that didn't explicitly say that one could touch them if that was the artist's intent in twenty-four years of goggling at art. That's maybe three or four pieces out of thousands, not including the signs everywhere that say PLEASE NO TOUCH.

It's disrespectful and potentially damaging to touch art, whether or not you think you're going to hurt it. You may as well go to the zoo and feed candy to the animals and rip flowering shrubs out of national parks.

Yes, Conan was a fiend in the art galleries. He was always rubbing his fingers over the bronze nudes and tracing the lines of the ladies in the frescos! The guards tried to stop him, but he just hacked them in two with his mighty sword and kept on fiddling with things.

mighty sword!

posted by winna at 7:33 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]



*It must be some basic human instinct difficult to surpress. [sic]*

Very much so. I badly wanted to run my fingers along the giant Assyrian carvings I saw at the British Museum in the 90s...in fact, I did surreptitiously touch them with one fingertip because there was no barrier preventing it. Which even then I thought was odd.

I feel bad about that, but there is a kind of thrill in touching something so old and hallowed, and it's really hard to resist. I have to wonder if that isn't what drives some collectors, that thrill of connection to the past, and of touching something so rare and beautiful.

I would probably not touch Nurr's piece (it doesn't sound particularly enticing anyway), but I can't say I think much of his forcing poorer transgressors to humiliate themselves. Let the museum handle security or make everyone use the signboard, jerkoff.

posted by emjaybee at 7:36 AM on December 8, 2009 [4 favorites]

*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

I take it, winna, you've never been dumb enough to drag a much too young rambunctious kid to a massive modern art museum because you thought it would be good for him?

It was some absolutely gigantic brown concrete place on the Hudson (name escapes) with endless large white rooms and the exhibits, oddly, very high on the walls (mainly squiggly neon tubes and the odd steel girder projection) and our short, bull-headed seven-year-old went almost berserk with boredom. Of course, he knew not to touch *"anything at all with his hands"* on pain of death - so he sort of stuck his back to the wall with his slippery winter jacket and slithered in a half crouch around the entire museum without once breaking contact with the surface, around corners, up and down stairs, in and out of stairwells - holding out his little hands and piping continuously: "see, I'm *not* touching anything with my hands, I'm *not* touching...". We could see he was in one of his states of ecstatic stubbornness (the museum guards and other visitors could too, even though they clearly thought him insufferable) and it took us almost two hours, trailing behind him, to get to the exit.

(He's 19 now & still doesn't much care for modern art.)

posted by Jody Tresidder at 7:43 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

This is so weird. The cops in my hometown have a hidden observation post by the highway with the exact same artistic purpose.

posted by Navelgazer at 7:47 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

**Note to artists: If you have to make up words like “flink” to explain your art, you are not allowed to take yourself this seriously.**

posted by Johnny Assay at 7:48 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

Oasis foam has the nastiest, grainiest texture anyway. Did you ever have a very old sofa where the aged interior foam had started to break down, simultaneously crusty on the edges but crumbling and rotten-soft? That's what oasis foam feels like, but on purpose. It's like a giant brick of solid bread mold. And when you get the crumbs on your arms, it itches *forever*.

posted by Lou Stuels at 7:58 AM on December 8, 2009

One of my early jobs in the museum world was teaching people not to touch the art. It isn't really difficult; even small children respond well when you pass around a pocket mirror, ask everyone to touch it and then get them to look at the difference between a clean mirror and one that has been streaked with fingerprints. Actually, I've rarely had a problem with kids - it's adults who have issues. I led an after hours flashlight behind the scenes tour one time (okay, okay, they bring people in but it is just possible that the free martini bar and the art didn't mix all that well) where an older lady, all excited, leapt up and kissed a wooden medieval statue of St. Barbara and her tower. I wish I could have put her out in the cold with a sign.

That said, those were paintings and sculptures of the kind that are consensually recognized as "high art" by our entire culture and people know they're not supposed to touch. When you're working in a weird medium in a contemporary art center where last week people may well have been encouraged to interact with the work, it might be a good idea to either talk with museum security and put stanchions in place so nobody can touch your stuff or get way less precious about it. There are a million ways to deal with art in public spaces and nobody wants their work to be damaged but still, that whole flink thing pretty much lost my sympathy.

posted by mygothlaundry at 8:11 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

*Since Navid Nuur is so insistent on the fragility of his art, I wonder what the guys who urinated into Marcel Duchamp's Fountain would do with it.*

Stick flowers in it?

posted by burnmp3s at 8:27 AM on December 8, 2009 [6 favorites]

*'Let the museum handle security or make everyone use the signboard, jerkoff.'*

Christus, wat een domoor.

*'I badly wanted to run my fingers along the giant Assyrian carvings I saw at the British Museum in the 90s...in fact, I did surreptitiously touch them with one fingertip because there was no barrier preventing it.'*

I got kicked out of the British Museum in 1988 for touching the Rosetta Stone.

posted by kirkaracha at 8:32 AM on December 8, 2009



I wonder what kind of sign they make you wear if you get caught trying to make a glory hole.

Maybe something like "At This Museum I engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior with Navid Nuur's Art. I Failed as a Visitor. But I entertained and disturbed as a spectacle."

posted by quin at 8:37 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

**Fact: The best time to get away with touching art in a museum is when the guard is busy yelling at somebody else for touching the art.**

posted by Faint of Butt at 8:38 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

If this exhibition ever comes by my city? I'm making a sandwich board saying "Navid Nuur's Art had it coming." On the back it will say "Also, Navid Nuur is a prat."

posted by emperor.seamus at 9:09 AM on December 8, 2009

*It's disrespectful and potentially damaging to touch art,*

Poor widdle art!

Art gets simultaneously too little and way too much “respect” in our society. Someone put up a wall of green foam; what, precisely, is the big deal if someone touches it? “but it’s ART!” isn’t a good answer.

posted by kenko at 9:09 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]

So it's a-okay to damage something only an idiot would think wasn't easily damaged?

What, precisely, do you think is the correct amount of 'respect' for art, if your version of respect doesn't include not damaging it? Perhaps we're supposed to damage it 'respectfully'?

posted by winna at 9:14 AM on December 8, 2009

**I've got to stop reading art threads on here.**

posted by cmoj at 9:23 AM on December 8, 2009

*Folks, they'll think it's a movement*

I can't favorite that enough.

posted by Michael Roberts at 9:44 AM on December 8, 2009

Respecting art is... fine, but I notice that the people in my life who had Respect for Books drilled into them never read for pleasure, and the people in my life who were yelled at to Never Waste Food can't cook.

posted by stuck on an island at 9:45 AM on December 8, 2009 [5 favorites]



*So it's a-okay to damage something only an idiot would think wasn't easily damaged?*

The point is that a lot of modern art is intended to be interacted with, I've seen students who've built delicate walls which are designed to crumble away when touched, or paintings which are supposed to be touched so that viewers can feel the textures of them. If there's no barriers up and no signs up saying that it's not to be touched, then it's easy for people to look at the fingerprints that the artist made and assume they were made by other viewers, or that they were SUPPOSED to be made by other viewers. Even if they don't even assume that much, it's probably safe to say they assume that their touch won't actually make that much of a difference.

That aside, I think that if an art gallery has signs up saying not to touch the work, or there's some indication that this is a pure piece of sculpture then it's only realistic to fine people for damaging the work, but even in this case I agree with earlier posters who say that It should be either one or the other, shaming people who touch your work, but only the ones who are too poor to pay their way out of it, is a really shitty thing to do.

posted by emperor.seamus at 9:49 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]

It's not that it's OK to damage obviously fragile things. No one is arguing that.

But, one cannot make something that is so obviously fragile, *take no measures to protect it, put it in an easily accessed public space, and get all pissy and self-righteous when it's damaged.*

My laptop is valuable, and it's clearly not OK for someone to take it, if I leave it unattended in a coffee shop. If someone takes it, they are entirely in the wrong.

But I'd still have to be an idiot to leave it unattended in a coffee shop.

posted by oddman at 9:50 AM on December 8, 2009 [6 favorites]

Someone should send along a coachload of florists with poor impulse control and observe the ensuing chaos.

posted by malevolent at 10:00 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

Maybe the art isn't about the foam wall looking just so in a particular, preservable way forever.

The art is actually in seeing how many people can be caught acting out their urges. The wall's the substrate, you're the medium being manipulated.

As far as I'm concerned, if I'm going to touch the sculpture, I'm going to get my money's worth. It's not getting a finger poke, it's getting a chunk ripped out and moulded into a green craft foam bunny. That's closer to being worth three hundred bucks.

posted by argedee at 10:19 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

**No one wants to touch his nasty foam. Now if he'd made it out of bubble wrap...**

posted by Biblio at 10:42 AM on December 8, 2009

*As far as I'm concerned, if I'm going to touch the sculpture, I'm going to get my money's worth. It's not getting a finger poke, it's getting a chunk ripped out and moulded into a green craft foam bunny. That's closer to being worth three hundred bucks.*

I know, right? Look at the thing-- it's just a bunch of foam blocks, stacked up like bricks. Are they attached to each other somehow, or are they just sitting there? Because I want to do a shoulder tackle through that sucker. It would be awesome.

I'd probably shout "Oh, yeah!" while I did it, too.

posted by Faint of Butt at 10:45 AM on December 8, 2009 [5 favorites]

I usually ponder news about conceptual art for about one flink before I lose interest.

I mean, I get that this floral foam stuff is fragile, and using it as art invites others to interact with it in a physical way. And this highlights the fragility and ridiculousness of art. It's fun to put ideas together in this manner. But I just can't actually care to take it further than that.

I'm just a philistine that way. I understand people gotta do what people gotta do, and fully support letting folks grow their ideas like this (in a variety of ways -- I hoonestly don't care my tax dollars might be used create these pieces.) I just don't find it all that engaging once you see the central notion.

Conceptual art is so often about the art pieces itself and "art" in general. And I find that sort of introspection so last decade.

But, you know: philistine and all that.

posted by clvrnmnky at 10:45 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

*On the other hand, what kind of barbarian touches art exhibits?*

LOTS of people, apparently, including some of you. People do it all the time. Not just touching, either - people scrape the surface of paintings with brochures (a Gericault, one of the most beautiful paintings I've ever seen) poke at them with ball point pens, idly pick at the tacks on a two-hundred year old dowry chest while leaning against it, talking on the cell, lean full force into paintings, kiss ancient sandstone sculptures on the cheek with lipstick lips, draw a crude phallus on a Roman faun in pencil... I could go on and on.

It doesn't matter if you don't think it's fragile, either. I have seen a metal sculpture irreparably damaged by touching, fingerprints permanently etched into the the brass finish.

I'm a bit twitchy, because I actually do work in museum security, but I couldn't help but read this as a piss-take on people being asked not to touch art. Because lot of people think it's too picky and unnecessary, that they are being repressed for no reason.

*I do, if they don't look delicate. Touching objects helps you to "connect" with them.*

Not really.

Imagine a marble sculpture, a portrait bust carved by a master. It's a portrait of a middle aged man, a senator, perhaps. It's flattering, but not idealized - the man's face is lined, his jaw is strong, his eyes spark with determination and life.

There are no guards around to yell at you, right? C'mon, touch it.

Now it's just a rock.

posted by louche mustachio at 11:07 AM on December 8, 2009 [8 favorites]



Reminds me of the National Gallery of Art's famous knife-edge that people can't keep from touching:

People react viscerally to the building, which was designed to fit on an oddly shaped plot of land. There's one particularly sharp corner that has attracted a lot of attention. Over the years, so many people have felt the urge to touch the corner that the lavender-pink marble has developed a dark stain just below shoulder height where countless hands have deposited their oils.

And I also found this when I was looking for that:

While critics have hailed the East Building of the National Gallery of Art as "one of the great architectural draws of its time" and "an enormously successful place for seeing art," not once have the accolades been followed with "and it begs to be touched." Yet near the Fourth Street entrance, an engraving done for the building's dedication has been rubbed repeatedly to the point that a dark haze has accumulated over the name of the building's architect, I.M. Pei.

posted by Evilspork at 11:09 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

It's like when the guy who made the Bean in Chicago got upset that people called it the Bean. Dude: it looks like a jellybean. People like it.

*So it's a-okay to damage something only an idiot would think wasn't easily damaged?*

How, precisely, is one to tell that one *isn't* allowed, or even supposed, to touch it? It's just the kind of thing that one might erect with precisely that in mind (and evidently it was erected with precisely that in mind, except with an added dash of punitive superciliousness). You know—to see what kind of interesting patterns emerge, or whatever.

That said, no, I don't think it's a-okay to damage things that are sitting around and obviously easily damaged. But I don't think that the reason it's not ok to do things that has anything to do with the damaged object's status as some kind of visitor from the realm of profundity and the transcendent. It's not ok to key cars, but not because they're art.

posted by kenko at 11:10 AM on December 8, 2009

*Now it's just a rock.*

Maybe for you, maybe not for others.

posted by kenko at 11:10 AM on December 8, 2009

I should add that Pei very much intended the first effect on the Gallery's edge, and specifically didn't sheathe it in metal or something similar to prevent people from messing it up.

posted by Evilspork at 11:11 AM on December 8, 2009

*It doesn't matter if you don't think it's fragile, either. I have seen a metal sculpture irreparably damaged by touching, fingerprints permanently etched into the the brass finish.*

The amusing thing is that some of this stuff is really old. And 100 years ago, it was treated however the owner wanted. Dark coat of varnish because the colors didn't match the room? Sure! Exposed to sunlight? Why not, you can see it better. Kids touch it? Heck, they're just kids, at least they didn't smear anything on it. And who needs that original frame; it doesn't match the other furniture.

And heck, most of the ancient marble sculptures and pottery you see were smashed at one point or another.

posted by smackfu at 11:15 AM on December 8, 2009

for me it's about the artist being kind of a punk about this. if it were clear that the touching and sandwich boarding were part of the concept, then i could get behind it. but as described, it all feels a little brittle to me.

posted by rude.boy at 11:27 AM on December 8, 2009

*It's not that it's OK to damage obviously fragile things. No one is arguing that.*

*But, one cannot make something that is so obviously fragile, take no measures to protect it, put it in an easily accessed public space, and get all pissy and self-righteous when it's damaged.*

It's not just that - it's that the art in question comes complete with a consequence tree for transgressors. that is, the artist so much expects people to touch and damage his art that he has come up with a response for the expected transgressions, and this in itself implies that the transgression is part of the work itself.

in other words, a floral foam demonstration of free will, sin, etc.

posted by toodleydoodley at 11:41 AM on December 8, 2009 [1 favorite]

*in other words, a floral foam demonstration of free will, sin, etc.*

Complete with the asshole deity.

posted by kenko at 11:48 AM on December 8, 2009 [3 favorites]



*I should add that Pei very much intended the first effect on the Gallery's edge, and specifically didn't sheathe it in metal or something similar to prevent people from messing it up.*

Evilspork,

I wonder if I. M. Pei's intention there is because of his Chinese birth and upbringing?

This is barely more than a tourist observation, but I've always noticed the national fetish for vigorously rubbing what appear to be any handy bits of public statues in China for "luck" (usually wealth and/or health) - and being actively encouraged to do so myself when I've had a one-on-one guide.

(It's an odd coincidence that the city I know - just a little - from repeated visits, happens to be Suzhou, where Pei's family comes from!)

posted by Jody Tresidder at 11:53 AM on December 8, 2009

**I would question whether that is a purely Chinese thing.**

posted by Comrade\_robot at 11:59 AM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

Comrade-robot,

Oh that's a lovely link!

(I may well be wrong about it being a notably Chinese fetish - but I was struck by seeing the habit with so many different statues etc in just one town. Maybe Suzhou just happens to have a ton of lucky stuff!)

posted by Jody Tresidder at 12:11 PM on December 8, 2009

I forgot to mention the statue of Churchill in Parliament where the toe is all shiny from being rubbed for luck...and which our guides encouraged us to rub, also.

louche, you are exactly right to be peeved, but I would guess that this human impulse to Touch Pretty Things is deep-seated...in some cases, almost unconscious. So maybe museums just need to take that into account and put up different kinds of barriers?

/not anti-preservation, and I haven't touched any piece of museum statuary since, I swear...

posted by emjaybee at 12:24 PM on December 8, 2009

*> The amusing thing is that some of this stuff is really old. And 100 years ago, it was treated however the owner wanted. Dark coat of varnish because the colors didn't match the room? Sure! Exposed to sunlight? Why not, you can see it better. Kids touch it? Heck, they're just kids, at least they didn't smear anything on it. And who needs that original frame; it doesn't match the other furniture.*

So you can do whatever you want with art, as long as it's yours or has been put out for the public to do with as it pleases.

This means that we are both in agreement that once it's in a museum, though, it's no longer public property even if it remains publicly accessible. And this means you have to abide by the museum's rules, not your own. Right?

posted by argedee at 12:36 PM on December 8, 2009

I love reading these art threads, where everyone just pours out all this utter dripping contempt and derision. Good god, did you all get bad grades on your finger paintings in kindergarten or something?

posted by thegreatfleecircus at 12:55 PM on December 8, 2009

Well, now the museum owns it, so they decide the rules of course. But museums also deal just fine with works of arts where the rules weren't followed, by necessity. So I do wonder about "touching the paintings will ruin it" position.

posted by smackfu at 12:57 PM on December 8, 2009

*I love reading these art threads, where everyone just pours out all this utter dripping contempt and derision. Good god, did you all get bad grades on your finger paintings in kindergarten or something?*

It's a little-known fact, but every considered position anyone's had, no matter how much thought has been put into it, is determined entirely by that person's kindergarten grades. You've done a great service in reminding us of that, thegreatfleecircus; it helps us ignore people.

posted by kenko at 1:38 PM on December 8, 2009



*I love reading these art threads, where everyone just pours out all this utter dripping contempt and derision. Good god, did you all get bad grades on your finger paintings in kindergarten or something?*

I carried a 4.0 all through kindergarten, and it's been all downhill ever since. Not that it's made me bitter or anything.

Art. Don't talk to me about art.

posted by toodleydoodley at 3:32 PM on December 8, 2009

I would assume that the purpose of the piece is to make you consider at what level you're 'allowed' to interact with art - especially art that has been selected to be shown at a museum. Judging from the content of the thread it's been a success.

posted by codacorolla at 3:43 PM on December 8, 2009

Damnit, I meant to include this...

In a world that seems largely dematerialised by a wide range of digital developments, these artists work to arrive at new sculptural approaches to 'the object'. Each of them asks the question: 'what is an object, and how can we know it?' The creation process plays a key role in their work, and specifically in the exploration of this question. The choice of materials holds a special significance for these artists. For example, organic materials such as animal brains and wood, and minerals like semiprecious stones and copper, are used for their 'magical' aura. The works are not just a concrete form, but acquire a meaning that transcends their appearance. These artists manage to breathe new life into the Modernist notion of the aura of the artwork.

So there you go. You can say what you want to about the quality of this purpose, but you can't ignore the fact that the piece is successful.

posted by codacorolla at 3:46 PM on December 8, 2009

Having worked in galleries myself, I defy anyone who's seen somebody knock a \$65 000 sculpture just to watch it swing - despite its obvious fragility, despite the bollards, despite the signs, despite me and another gallery host verbally shouting at them to stop - and then get *huffy* about it, "I just wanted to touch it!", not to cringe at the prospect of this.

The guy's a douche, obviously, signs etc are a must, but when I think back to those delicate Keiko Kimoto screens, it saddens me that we would have to a) put that beauty behind glass or b) not exhibit it at all, simply because a surprisingly large number of people cannot exercise the self-restraint many children possess, and in the process contribute to the destruction of something many other people could -and should - be able to enjoy.

posted by smoke at 3:52 PM on December 8, 2009

*I would assume that the purpose of the piece is to make you consider at what level you're 'allowed' to interact with art - especially art that has been selected to be shown at a museum. Judging from the content of the thread it's been a success.*

Thesis art is the worst art.

posted by kenko at 4:25 PM on December 8, 2009

I'm one of those awful people who touch art. I know better; I've had an art history education, had a long marriage with a paid visual artist, and have been hostess in multiple galleries. I don't even know I'm doing it, but if something touches me deep inside I find that I have unconsciously reached out for it, as if to make further connection. As the weird parent on a field trip given the ADD kids, I was the one that got in trouble for touching - to the children's wild amusement. The older or grander something is, the more likely I'll touch. If it's in the public domain, I may even rub my cheek against it (like old buildings, huge statuary, etc.) Luckily, many precious things were behind glass and I didn't get my corroding oils or marring fingerprints on them. A rope to keep distance is also a handy reminder to behave myself.

I would probably touch it now that I know I could get away with just by wearing a dumb sign. I'd plan my day around it. It sounds to me like he WANTS people to touch it or he'd make the effort to protect it. His choice indicates a desire to have people in sandwich boards. But mostly I'd probably touch it because the artist sounds like a jerk-wad.

posted by [\\_paegan\\_](#) at 4:33 PM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

Err... by If it's in the public domain..., I meant "out in a public environment", not the legal meaning of "public domain".

posted by \_paegan\_ at 4:38 PM on December 8, 2009

Just to up the ante on this one a bit, I'd like to get a sandwich board that says something like, "My friend here is the coolest performance artist ever" and start standing in front of the museum before it even opens for the day.

posted by Kid Charlemagne at 4:44 PM on December 8, 2009



The following is a paid advertisement for DON'T TOUCH!

I've also found it's the adults and not the kids who are the real problem in galleries - kids you only need to tell once, for the most part, and they carry on with looking at the things that interest them. I've had to walk out onto slightly unusual floors just to make sure they knew that this kind of touching was okay. But adults that do it seem to have justified their desire to get physical, and have a much tougher time being told no.

I've worked a few shifts at a show of Yayoi Kusama's work (not this work, but like it), and we've had people argue at length that "Kusama would want me to touch it!" Well, Kusama's work is fragile, pricey, and not nearly as friendly to the human body as it looks. One guy deliberately fell back onto one of her 'cloud' shapes, I guess assuming it would feel like a beanbag. Being, rather, a vinyl balloon full of air, it dumped him on the floor and ricocheted off to the other side of the room.

The museum I also work at has a stuffed lion that shows pretty clearly what touching can do - he was out in the open at his old museum home, and people always loved to rub his mane and nose. Now he's all worn and unhappy looking, which is a real shame.

Anyway, for this work: it does sound like the artist wants people touching it. Though enforcing participation (fines and sign-wearing) makes him a dick. I'd like to combine the flashmob idea and Kid Charlemagne's idea above. Hundreds of people in sandwich boards of all kinds, advocating political positions, describing the end of the world, advertisting Joe's Diner - ideally obscuring the work.

posted by Dandeson Coates, Sec'y at 9:20 PM on December 8, 2009 [2 favorites]

I'm an absolute fanatic about not touching art and would jump across the room to stop a total stranger from touching an exhibit.

But reading about this makes me REALLY want to touch it. I'll even bring my own sandwich board if I need to.

posted by mmoncur at 3:54 AM on December 9, 2009

I'm one of those ADD people. I've never touched art in a gallery, but that's because it's in a gallery, not because "it's art". Really good art is best appreciated by rubbing yourself all over it. So, this "I Failed as a Visitor" thing is a wee bit offensive. Modern art should be inviting visitor participation, not building up that wall of separation.

posted by shii at 6:07 AM on December 9, 2009

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December 2009 / January 2010 issue of Modern Painters

Printed and bound in France

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onestar press  
49, rue Albert  
75013 Paris France  
[info@onestarpress.com](mailto:info@onestarpress.com)  
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