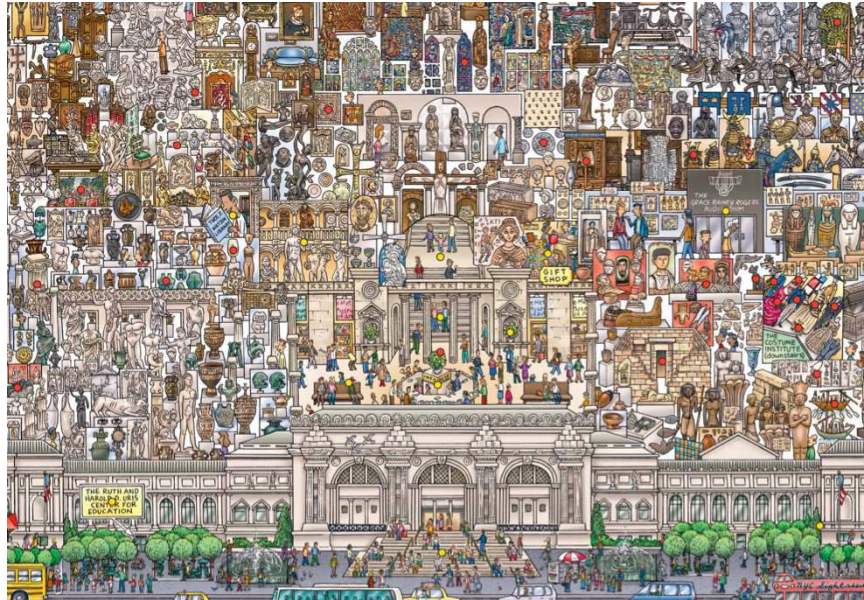




Don't Believe Everything You Hear... Real Eyes Realize Real Lies<sup>1</sup>



On Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, The FLAG Art Foundation hosted a conversation between artist Jeff Koons and FLAG founder Glenn Fuhrman. Artemundi's CEO Javier Lumbreras was invited and participated in the discussion centered on the contemporary art's theocratic temper. It is widely known that Koons turns banal objects into high art icons as part of his sarcastic modus operandi, which in fact trifles on the almost-sacred character that has been developed by the contemporary art followers. Despite how much coeval Koons' practice is, it still borrows widely from art-historical techniques and styles; although often seen as ironic or tongue-in-cheek, Koons artworks are earnest and optimistic. When Koons was asked if he had suffered in his life (as if artists had to suffer in order to create relevant works), his answer was "Not really". He did discern how some people are often empowered from negativity, specially the press.

It is our belief to focus on the positive and not only to degrade the past. This proactive feeling has not been shared with some media players, who instead of being forthcoming and positive, they do cherry picking with the negative perspective. They believe that the pessimistic attitude bestows an advantage from its destructive power. An example of this is the *New York Times*' article titled: "2 Art

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Tupac Shakur



Worlds: Flush MoMA, Struggling Met” written by Robin Pogrebin and Published on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016<sup>2</sup>. The original purpose of this article was to entail the sharp contrast of the economic situations between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the MoMA. On one side –the contemporary and fancy one-, the MoMA has just received a \$100 million USD donation by David Geffen, the epitome of the new rich stereotype with a prestige-purchasing pathology.<sup>3</sup> On the other side, the writer assumes that the Met is a time bomb full of “ballooning deficits, possible staff cuts and a hold on the planning of a new wing dedicated to Modern and contemporary art.”<sup>4</sup>

For some time, museums have become stewards of contemporary art as objects of worship, and to some degree, they have replaced the function of explicitly religious spaces as forums of indoctrination. Museums have become into the cathedrals of the twenty first century architecture, thanks to their magnificent structures and to the fact that they are a meeting place for millions of “faithful” who arrive from nearby and on pilgrimage and fill forums dedicated to the art worship.<sup>5</sup> As any other religion, art’s worship has developed sects. In this case, the superiority of contemporary art over the rest of the artistic periods has become a critic doctrine.

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<sup>2</sup> To read the complete article, please refer to: Pogrebin, Robin. "2 Art Worlds: Flush MoMA, Struggling Met." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Apr. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/arts/two-art-worlds-rich-modern-and-struggling-met.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone>>.

<sup>3</sup> David Geffen has been called by the press as “America’s Worst Philanthropist” because of his narcissistic gifts always are conditioned to the placement of his name, for example:

- A \$100 million donation to UCLA to “establish a private middle and high school on the Westwood campus partly for the children of faculty and staff” had to be called The Geffen Academy.
- He gave \$100 million to Lincoln Center for the express purpose of putting his own name on the concert hall—going so far as to pay \$15 million to the family of Avery Fisher, the guy whose name was already on the concert hall. Person, and Hamilton Nolan. "David Geffen: America's Worst Philanthropist? ." *Gawker*. 12 Nov. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://gawker.com/david-geffen-americas-worst-philanthropist-1742100198>>.

<sup>4</sup> Pogrebin, Robin. "2 Art Worlds: Flush MoMA, Struggling Met." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Apr. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/arts/two-art-worlds-rich-modern-and-struggling-met.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone>>.

<sup>5</sup> Lumberras, Javier. *The Art of Collecting Art*. México, Barcelona: Artemundi. 2011. Print. p. 147



Pogrebin recall the art critic Holland Corret –also from the *New York Times*- in his article. Corret once called the Met collection “an institutional embarrassment, in part because it’s longtime former director Philippe de Montebello was wary of following trends”.<sup>6</sup> After this comment, Mr. Montebello should receive another medal for keeping the Met’s integrity intact. Conceived as a “library of art”, why should the Metropolitan Museum of Art follow trends? Since it was founded during the Illustration era, the encyclopedic character of the venue has held its statement for over 140 years. Furthermore, on January 13<sup>th</sup> 2015, the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art reaffirmed this statement of purpose and supplemented it with the following statement of mission: “The Metropolitan Museum of Art collects, studies, conserves, and presents significant works of art across all times and cultures in order to connect people to creativity, knowledge, and ideas.”<sup>7</sup> Should Thomas P. Campbell – the current director, following the thirty-one-year tenure of Philippe de Montebello– compromise the \$300 million budget given by reason of its encyclopedic temper, just to be “trendy”?

The current \$10 million deficit presented in Pogrebin’s article might look shocking at first glance; but it is actually a 3.3% from its \$300 million budget. This a financial achievement if we take in account the renovation of the current location, the rebranding and the creation of the Met Breuer building for Modern and Contemporary art. The sensationalist approach of the *New York Times*’ author puts under doubt the ability to raise money for the new wing and puts on the table the necessity to reduce the museum’s personnel “by dozens”<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, Thomas Campbell, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, told the New Yorker this year: “I can’t raise \$100m for a single work of art, but what I can do is raise \$600m to rebuild the Modern wing. That’s easier to do.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> "About The Met." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, I.e. The Met Museum*. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met>>.

<sup>8</sup> Pogrebin, Robin. "2 Art Worlds: Flush MoMA, Struggling Met." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Apr. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/arts/two-art-worlds-rich-modern-and-struggling-met.html?smprod=nytcore-iphone>>.

<sup>9</sup> Halperin, Julia. "US Museums Spent \$5bn to Expand as Economy Shrank." *US Museums Spent \$5bn to Expand as Economy Shrank*. 4 Apr. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://theartnewspaper.com/news/news/us-museums-spent-5bn-to-expand-as-economy-shrank/>>.



In addition, the numerous entrance tickets are constant asset entering to the Met’s wallet. There are approximately 850 million visits each year to American museums, more than all major league sporting events and theme parks combined.<sup>10</sup> As Pogrebin comments, it is true that the audience for MoMA’s art has grown exponentially in the last decade, and so the press scope for this sector’s market.<sup>11</sup> Modern and Contemporary art has become a fashion statement publicly sponsored by the press, which empowerment has increased substantially in recent years. The power of today’s media, governments, and large corporations in control and distort the information that they give to the public in order to promote consumerism, materialism, frivolities, etc. The massive media coverage on “trendy” events has influenced the new-rich collectors, who still have the necessity of cultural recognition,

intellectual legitimization, and social status that art may offer. Nevertheless, if we turn off the spotlights for a second, the Metropolitan continuous attendance success reveals. That is, New York’s Metropolitan Museum drew in 6.5 million annual visitors to its permanent collection, helping the venerable institution to jump to third place form last year ranking, making it the most visited museum in the US.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, MoMA’s attendance only reached the 2.81 million visitors last year<sup>13</sup>, far from the top 10.

TOP 100 ART MUSEUM ATTENDANCE THE TOP 10			TOP 100 ART MUSEUM ATTENDANCE THE TOP 10		
1	Louvre PARIS	9,260,000 —	1	Louvre PARIS	8,600,000 —
2	British Museum LONDON	6,695,213 —	2	British Museum LONDON	6,820,686 —
3	National Gallery LONDON	6,416,724 ▲1	3	Metropolitan Museum of Art NEW YORK	6,533,106 ▲1
4	Metropolitan Museum of Art NEW YORK	6,162,147 ▼1	4	Vatican Museums VATICAN CITY	6,002,251 ▲1
5	Vatican Museums VATICAN CITY	5,891,332 —	5	National Gallery LONDON	5,908,254 ▼2
6	Tate Modern LONDON	5,785,427 —	6	National Palace Museum TAIPEI	5,291,797 ▲1
7	National Palace Museum TAIPEI	5,402,325 —	7	Tate Modern LONDON	4,712,581 ▼1
8	National Gallery of Art WASHINGTON, DC	3,892,459 —	8	National Gallery of Art WASHINGTON, DC	4,104,331 —
9	National Museum of Korea SEOUL	3,536,677 ▲5	9	State Hermitage Museum ST PETERSBURG	3,668,031 ▲4
10	Musée d'Orsay PARIS	3,500,000 —	10	Musée d'Orsay PARIS	3,440,000 —

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<sup>10</sup> "Museums: Did You Know?" *American Alliance of Museums*. 2015. Web. <<http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/infographic-2-pg-color.pdf?sfvrsn=2>>.

<sup>11</sup> For a deeper analysis of this change of taste, please refer to: Edid, Giovana, and Federico León De La Vega. "Why Great Art Bores You." *Artemundi*. 16 Dec. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://artemundiglobalfund.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Why-great-art-bores-you-.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> Neuendorf, Henri. "Museum Attendance 2015 Survey Released - Artnet News." *Artnet News*. 31 Mar. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/exhibition-and-museum-attendance-survey-463415>>.

<sup>13</sup> "Museums: Compare." *Wandervat*. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://museums.wanderbat.com/compare/443-445/The-Metropolitan-Museum-of-Art-vs-The-Museum-of-Modern-Art>>.



Furthermore, with the exception of the Tate Modern, all the top 10 worldwide most visited museums are not focused on modern or contemporary art.

MoMA's marketing team has done a great job publicizing its temporal exhibitions, which have dominated the New York art scene. It organized 14 of the city's top 20 most-visited shows in 2015 at the cosmopolitan city. Its Robert Gober exhibition (5,380 visitors a day) eclipsed the controversial Björk show (5,221 a day). But this was not enough to beat the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition on the influence of China

on Western fashion, which had 6,581 visitors a day and 815,992 in total.<sup>14</sup> Worldwide, *The great Masters of the Ming Dynasty* dominated the museum attendance in 2015 at the National Palace Museum with over 1,131,788 visitors. If we continue analyzing the rest of the top 20 most popular exhibitions, we would find that 16 out of the 20 are not related to contemporary art.

MOST POPULAR EXHIBITIONS				THE TOP 20	
Daily	Total	Exhibition	Venue	City	Dates
* An asterisk indicates that entrance to the exhibition and the museum was free					
12,861	1,131,788	Great Masters of the Ming Dynasty: Tang Yin	National Palace Museum	Taipei	4 JUL-29 SEP
12,727	1,170,862	The All Complete Qianlong: Emperor Gaozong	National Palace Museum	Taipei	8 OCT 13-7 JAN 14
10,622	1,699,499	Qianlong C.H.A.O.: New Media Art Exhibition	National Palace Museum	Taipei	8 OCT 13-16 MAR 14
9,782	973,995	* Salvador Dali	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	30 MAY-22 SEP
9,470	447,799	* Head: Milton Machado	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	6 AUG-29 SEP
8,936	522,136	* Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Obsession	Instituto Tomie Ohtake	São Paulo	21 MAY-27 JUL
8,702	754,565	* Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Obsession	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	12 OCT 13-20 JAN 14
8,617	697,937	Great Masters of the Ming Dynasty: Shen Zhou	National Palace Museum	Taipei	10 JAN-31 MAR
8,329	386,708	National Treasures of Japan	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	15 OCT-7 DEC
8,120	530,088	* Visions from the Ludwig Collection	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	7 MAY-21 JUL
7,957	471,730	* Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Obsession	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Brasília	19 FEB-28 APR
7,547	696,442	The Birth of Impressionism	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	9 JUL-20 OCT
7,317	629,233	* Tracing History	Shanghai Museum	Shanghai	7 JUN-31 AUG
7,239	255,427	* These Associations: Tino Sehgal	Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil	Rio de Janeiro	12 MAR-21 APR
6,524	654,291	Van Gogh/Artaud	Musée d'Orsay	Paris	11 MAR-6 JUL
6,224	753,071	* Melbourne Now	NGV International	Melbourne	22 NOV 13-23 MAR 14
6,131	643,783	Magritte: the Mystery of the Ordinary	Museum of Modern Art	New York	28 SEP 13-12 JAN 14
5,853	485,832	Isaac Julien: Ten Thousand Waves	Museum of Modern Art	New York	25 NOV 13-17 FEB 14
5,576	402,241	Treasured Masterpieces	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	24 JUN-15 SEP
5,498	137,438	* Premonition: Ukrainian Art Now	Saatchi Gallery	London	9 OCT-2 NOV

2015 ©The Art Newspaper

It is often assumed, and sometimes deplored, that a concentration on visitor numbers is a contemporary phenomenon, as if modern museum managers have invented a fetish around these figures, thereby making it difficult for conservative museum curators to pursue their more specialist interests. Ralph Rugoff, Director of the Hayward Gallery, London declares: "We all want people to see shows, but the total number of people who went is just one metric." Rugoff stresses the quality of visitors' encounters with art. "If 20,000 people each spent two hours in a show, that's [worth] more than if 100,000 each spent only 20 minutes," he says.<sup>15</sup> First, we have to consider that the Metropolitan

<sup>14</sup> Hard data taken from: Pes, Javier. "Visitor Figures 2015: Jeff Koons Is the Toast of Paris and Bilbao." *Visitor Figures 2015: Jeff Koons Is the Toast of Paris and Bilbao*. 31 Mar. 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://theartnewspaper.com/reports/jeff-koons-is-the-toast-of-paris-and-bilbao/>>.

<sup>15</sup> Pes, Javier. "It's Not All about Attendance: Five Museum Directors on How They Measure Success." *It's Not All about Attendance: Five Museum Directors on How They Measure Success*. 31 Mar. 2016. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<http://theartnewspaper.com/reports/the-numbers-game/>>.



Museum has over 427,095 objects on display in its two-million-square-foot building, and compare it with the MoMA's 200,000 collection. Furthermore, a study made in 2001 by Jeffrey and Lisa Smith at the Metropolitan Museum of Art discovered that the average time spent on a piece is 17 seconds. On the contrast, the same study done at the MoMA unveiled that it doesn't really hold visitors attention as much as one might think since the average viewing time is a mere 10 seconds.<sup>16</sup> In this case, the Met have everything to gain.

Finally, we should not forget the museum's perpetual role as guardian of art, in contrast with the fashionable art market environment. Both should not be considered as excluding and hold the same importance. The difference relies in the acquisition strategy between both museums. On one side, the MoMA seeks for artworks that will become emblematic pieces of the collection in the future. In order to be successful, the MoMA's market approach needs to buy a broad and diverse selection of art pieces from which only a few of them will consummate. On the contrary, the Met invests only on artworks that have been already considered as iconic. Since time decides which are the best representatives of an artistic period, the Met's acquisition program for contemporary art have been waiting enough to realize the outstanding artists of our era. Here relies the reason why the Met has scarcely begun collecting modern and contemporary. Following with its encyclopedic code, Met's approach delimits quantity and upraises quality. For this reason both museums should be considered as supplementary and not as rivals.

Notwithstanding all of the above, the Metropolitan Museum's situation is far from what Robin Pogrebin has published. Other museums may surpass the Metropolitan in certain areas of collecting—there are better Renaissance paintings in the Uffizi, more French masterpieces in the Louvre, and more Flemish paintings in the Prado Museum—but for depth and comprehensiveness the Met has no equal. The Met's audience does not have to be sold on the trends, because the audience is, a priori, a cultural élite. Ironically, "traditionalists" like Montebello are the true rebels that fight against the contemporary art sect full of oblivious players.

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<sup>16</sup> Orensanz, Angel. "Archive Tag Archives: The Average Time People Look at a Painting." *The Angel Orensanz Foundation*. 21 Aug. 2012. Web. 27 Apr. 2016. <<https://orensanznyc.wordpress.com/tag/the-average-time-people-look-at-a-painting/>>.



By Giovana Edid and Javier Lumberras

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