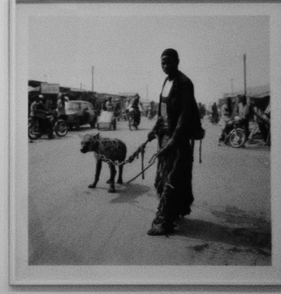


**ONCE INSIDE THE GALLERY, YOU ARE  
ON YOUR OWN, AS THE MUSEUM  
ASSUMES THAT THE ACT OF VIEWING  
ART IS SELF-EXPLANATORY.**



## CONTENTS

|          |  |           |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|          | <b>INTRODUCTION</b>  | <b>9</b>  | <b>FRIENDS YOU HAVEN'T YET MET</b><br>on the beauty of small talk<br>with strangers                              | <b>18</b> |
| <b>1</b> | <b>THE EYES OF THE MUSEUM</b><br>how to use the guards insight to<br>your advantage      | <b>10</b> | <b>CHEWING GUM STICKING ON<br/>THE INSIDE OF YOUR BRAIN</b><br>the importance of finding your own<br>masterpiece | <b>19</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>WALK SLOWLY, BUT KEEP<br/>WALKING</b><br>how to combat an achy pair<br>of museum legs | <b>11</b> | <b>THE PERFECT ANTIDOTES</b><br>why your kid is an excellent guide   | <b>20</b> |
| <b>3</b> | <b>PAINTINGS WITHOUT<br/>PEOPLE IN IT</b><br>on understanding landscapes                 | <b>12</b> | <b>REALITY FUNCTIONS AS MY<br/>FIELD OF ACTION</b><br>how to deal with artspeak                                  | <b>21</b> |
| <b>4</b> | <b>WHEN ART OCCURS</b><br>on the value of watching people look                           | <b>13</b> | <b>THE SOUL OF A MUSEUM</b><br>on the added value of collecting<br>staff picks                                   | <b>22</b> |
| <b>5</b> | <b>THE BEAUTY AND THE BULLSHIT</b><br>how to separate good from bad art                  | <b>14</b> | <b>THE UNDISGUISED VIEW OF<br/>THE HUMAN BODY</b><br>how to deal with nudity in the museum                       | <b>23</b> |
| <b>6</b> | <b>WHERE ART ENDS AND THE<br/>WORLD BEGINS</b><br>on frames and the theatrics of art     | <b>15</b> | <b>HE FELT SMOOTH AND FIRM</b><br>why you should get your hands on art   | <b>24</b> |
| <b>7</b> | <b>SHOCK ME IF YOU CAN</b><br>how to process provocative art                             | <b>16</b> | <b>UNTITLED #3, 1973</b><br>getting over minimalist art titles   | <b>25</b> |
| <b>8</b> | <b>BUT, IS IT ART?</b><br>managing your expectations of art                              | <b>17</b> | <b>NO PHOTOS!</b><br>how taking pictures enhances<br>your museum experience                                      | <b>26</b> |

## CONTENTS

|           |  |           |   |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>27</b> | <b>NOT JUST A GRAVEYARD FOR ART</b><br>expanding your perception of what<br>an art museum has to offer | <b>28</b> | <b>A SKULL, APPLES AND A BOTTLE</b><br>how to make sense of the still life                          |
| <b>28</b> | <b>SELFIES AVANT LA LETTRE</b><br>how to appreciate portraiture  | <b>29</b> | <b>BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN</b><br>on the added value of observing<br>the world from a museum window |
| <b>29</b> | <b>ASK ME ABOUT THE ART</b><br>on the added value of<br>encountering a gallery guide                   | <b>30</b> | <b>WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?</b><br>on pinpointing your underlying motives                              |
| <b>30</b> | <b>SLOW ME THE WAY</b><br>a plea for taking a longer look  | <b>31</b> | <b>ALSO AVAILABLE AS POSTCARD</b><br>why to take the museum store<br>more seriously                 |
| <b>31</b> | <b>ART IS A CONVERSATION</b><br>reframing what the museum<br>restaurant is about                       | <b>32</b> | <b>PAIRING PARKER WITH POLLOCK</b><br>how coupling music and art enhances<br>your art experience    |
|           | <b>THE CUBA FOLDING<br/>FLOWER CHAIR</b><br>how sitting down will help<br>you to see more              |           | <b>WHERE TO GO?</b>   |
|           | <b>YOUR LABELS MAKE ME<br/>FEEL STUPID</b><br>how to put up - or not put up -<br>with label texts      |           | <b>READ MORE</b>  |
|           | <b>ANY QUESTIONS?</b><br>how to guide your tour guide<br>towards delivering value                      |           | <b>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</b>   |
|           | <b>OPEN WELLS OF FEELING</b><br>on the perks of reading the guest book                                 |           | <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>   |
|           |  |           | <b>INDEX</b>  |

# STOP WANDERING, START ACTING

If it wasn't for the white cube, this book wouldn't have been written. That's why it's important for you to know a thing or two about it.

When the white cube first appeared in the 1970s, it was meant to be a large, clean, neutral – and thus pure – white space. A place free of context. Inside the white cube, it would be just you and the artworks, nothing in between, alone together, in silence. But something went wrong: the white cube became an end in itself. The white cube gave museums and artists an excuse to focus on art for art's sake. As a result, the white cube's enclosure started to feel like isolation, its cleanliness like sterility, and art museums in general like laboratory-like spaces. More than merely being a space, the white

cube came to represent a way of presenting art. And one that profoundly shapes your museum experience to this day.

Now, nearly fifty years later, you might think things have changed. Just look at all the wonderful art museums that have been built or renovated since, museum professionals will say. And they are right: some white cubes now have windows, while others boast spectacular architecture. What remains, however, is the etiquette museums follow to “serve” us their artworks. While art has reinvented itself in many ways throughout the past half-century – growing more diverse, complex and absurd than ever before – museums continue to display art in the same monotonous, minimalistic manner. This prompted famous art collector Charles Saatchi to describe the white cube as “antiseptic” and “worryingly old-fashioned and clichéd.” And it's even getting worse, as the white cube now seems to be regarded as the only way to present art.

## Drifting from artwork to artwork

Too much purity harms the museum. Art needs to be connected to the real world in order to have meaning. “It's not that art should be seen only in rutty bombed-out environments,” art critic Jerry Saltz justly remarks, “but there are other ways, both in space and behavior.” Paradoxically, the serenity and strictness of most art museums hardly tolerate for them to explain or contextualize art. Clean walls and silence don't allow for a proper story, conversation, performance, party, or any other approach that helps you to understand and appreciate art. Nevertheless, this may just be the kind of guidance that many of us need in order to feel more comfortable at the museum.

Most art professionals and aficionados have full faith in the white cube. They believe it encourages the best way to behave around art. There is, however, a much larger group of museumgoers that feels differently. They enter the museum with the hope or even expectation that they will have a worthwhile experience. Once inside, we see them drifting from artwork to artwork, spending an average of ten or perhaps twenty seconds with each object. Their faces reveal interest, but also weariness. Observe them a little longer and you will notice that many of them seem lost, overwhelmed, bewildered, or even bored. “Our encounters with art do not always go as well as they might,” philosopher Alain de Botton notes: “The way the establishment presents art to us doesn't invite us to bring ourselves into contact with works.”

## You can take charge

The museum functions as the prime location at which our ideas about art take shape. Why is it then that there are so many fabulous books on digesting art, but not a single one that informs you about how to use the museum in your best interest? Our encounters with art can be rewarding, even illuminating. But don't be fooled. It's a misconception that simply being in the museum, in the presence of great art and merely contemplating it means your art experience will be meaningful by definition. For that to happen, you'll have to forge a personal connection with the art, by somehow understanding it or by being touched by it. For many of us that spark doesn't ignite itself. While you would expect the museum to help you on your way, white cube protocol in fact often has the opposite effect: it prevents us from having a meaningful experience.





# THE EYES OF THE MUSEUM

The irony of the museum guard is that he is the most visible and yet most overlooked staff member of the museum. Perhaps that's because we tend to consider guards, often silent and stone-faced, to be more machine-like than human. That's a grave misunderstanding. "Museum guards find the lost, shepherd the confused and save toddlers from collisions with immovable sculptures," as journalist David Wallis puts it. In order to put up with picture takers, soda smugglers and amateur art critics, guards require both the alertness of a police officer and the empathy of a kindergarten teacher.

Consider museum guards the ground troops of the art world, who deserve your utmost respect. Some of them actually have amazing knowledge of art – former guards include painters such as Jackson Pollock and Sol LeWitt. Others have

impressive life stories to share, as they might well be refugee immigrants or former bodyguards. What makes guards particularly interesting is that they are the eyes of the museum. Day by day, they witness how we are fascinated, driven to tears or even bored by art – sights that provide them with many interesting insights.

As a resource of knowledge, inspiration or just plain fun, the value of museum guards is grossly understated. Many guards would speak with great passion, if only we asked them. Therein lies your opportunity. Have your questions ready and make your move when the gallery is quiet. Whatever the conversation, you will likely find that guards are able to offer what is often lacking in museums: human interaction and a proper conversation about art.



# PAINTINGS WITHOUT

# PEOPLE

# IN IT

Landscapes are paintings without people in it. Although this isn't entirely true, it does point out an essential challenge of landscape artists: how to convey a message with natural scenery being the only protagonist. →



# FRIENDS YOU HAVEN'T YET MET

“The ultimate model for an experience of art,” museum expert Amy Whitaker argues, “is a good dinner table conversation.” And she’s right. What a sensuous experience it would be to enjoy, for instance, a flamboyant Matisse painting with a tasty soufflé, great guests and a ruby red Zinfandel.

Food in the gallery is like rock music in church: a definite no-no. But what Whitaker really pleads for – great conversations about art – is possible. Still, museums are not exactly lively salons where we eagerly interact with each other about art. Instead, galleries generally bathe in silence. If we must speak, we do so modestly. It’s even possible to visit a museum, be among hundreds of like-minded art lovers, and yet not speak to a single person.

The barriers that prevent us from talking to strangers may be high, but the potential rewards of doing so anyway are higher. Especially during our museum visit. What may start off as small talk may end in a conversation about life. What’s particularly interesting about our casual dialogues about art is that we are then

less likely to feel the need to be right. This allows us to share our thoughts, criticisms, and enthusiasm more easily, without very much judgment, thereby deepening our art experience.

That’s why you should take on every opportunity you have to exchange thoughts with other visitors. Or better yet, create them, even if talking to strangers is not your thing. You might be surprised that, more than elsewhere, the museum turns out to be a place where people are open to conversation. Start off carefully by posing a simple question. Soon, you’ll find that someone else’s knowledge, or humor, may offer you new and surprising ways to understand a work of art.

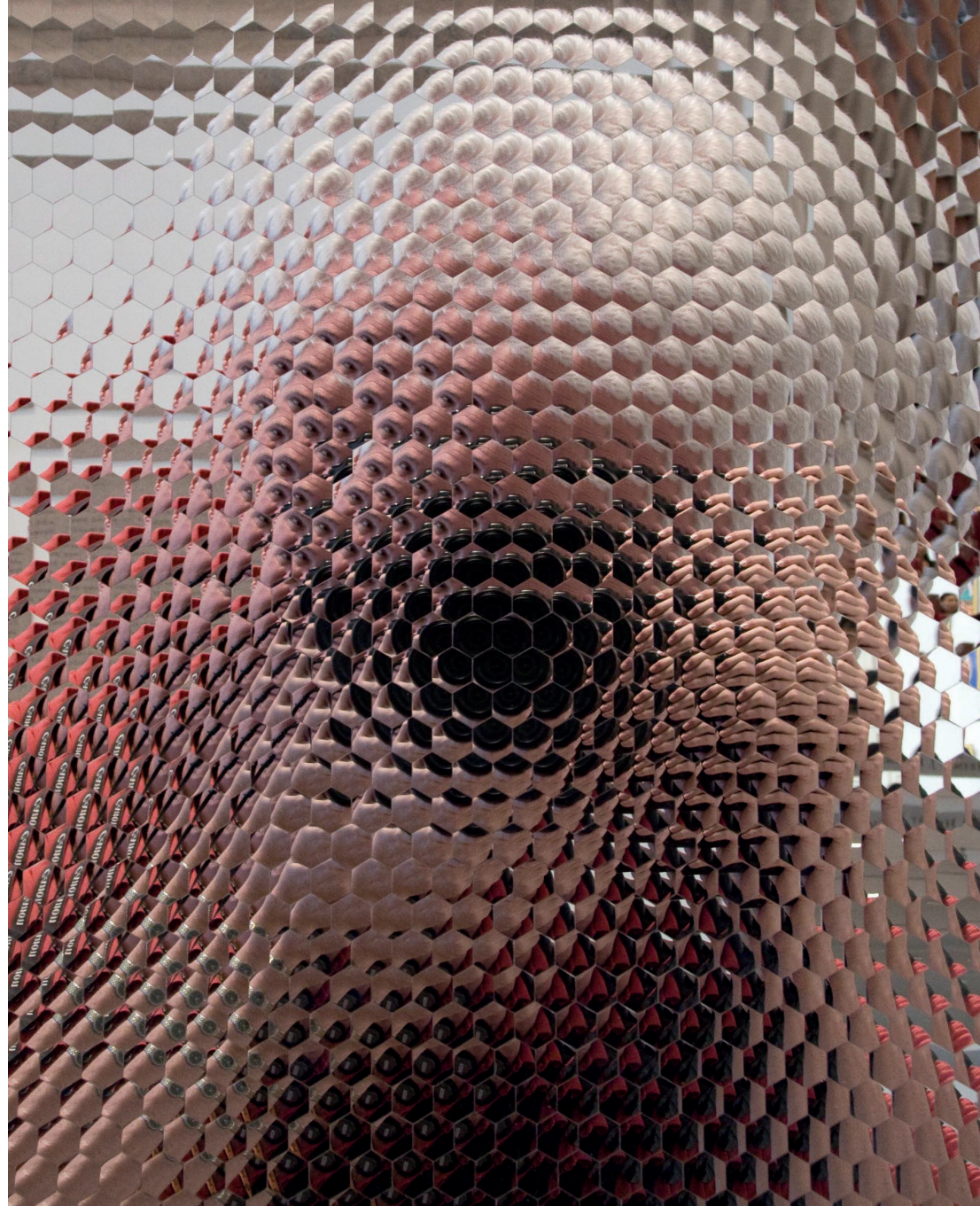
Some people don’t feel like talking in museums. That’s fine. A museum can also serve as a wonderful place to find peace and stillness. But the museum in its entirety as a quiet zone? Come on, leave your shell and connect with fellow art lovers. Try it twice or three times, and you’ll agree with poet William Butler Yeats that: “There are no strangers here, only friends you haven’t yet met.”





# NO PHOTOS !

You are standing in front of  
a famous Marlene Dumas  
painting: a grotesque,  
deformed image of a  
human face. You take out  
your smartphone. →





# ANY QUESTIONS?

When it comes to guided tours, there is one particular thing that makes or breaks your experience. →



## ART OPENS UP TO US WHEN WE ENGAGE WITH IT, AND WHEN WE TALK ABOUT IT.

It's not what you're touring that counts, but who is showing you around – the tour guide. If your tour guide is charismatic, passionate, smart, articulate, and knowledgeable – and, why settle for less? – he can make even the worst art exhibit interesting.

When it comes to art, it's particularly easy to just reel off a list of bland art history facts regarding which genre an artwork belongs to or what materials the artist used. But for many of us that does not bring art to life. What does do the trick is the tour guide's ability to turn facts into engaging stories and relevant wisdom. Which famous politician adored this drawing and why exactly? What does this video teach us about the struggles in our personal lives? Effective guides also invite thoughtful and challenging questions and comments from you. A popular tour at Tate Modern in London

features tour guides that ask everyone for their impressions and opinions at each artwork. They then fine-tune their story based on the answers given.

If there's one place where guided tours can make a difference, it's at an art museum. Art opens up to us when we engage with it, when we talk about it, when we find out how others see it, and when we exchange our thoughts about the meaning of the work. That's why you should always take a shot at a guided tour, in the hopes of catching that one brilliant guide. Why not explicitly ask for him or her at the information desk? The excellent ones are always well known.

Being assigned a less talented guide doesn't mean things are out of your hands. You are part of the tour, which offers you the chance to turn a mediocre experience into a meaningful one. Here's how.

Contributing, as a visitor, to a guided tour is all about having the right mentality. Never be afraid of asking questions, especially the 'stupid' ones your co-visitors are afraid to ask. They will be grateful to you (whether they'll admit to it or not) and it might even encourage them to let loose.

The same goes for guiding your guide from feeding facts to delivering value. You can do so by asking him pragmatic, user-oriented questions. What can 'we as a group' learn from this installation? Why

do I need to remember this particular artwork? Sharp, unexpected inquiry will add to your guide's alertness – and that of your co-visitors as well – and stimulate wit and creativity in the answers. Try to make things personal as well. Ask your tour guide about his own opinion, his favorites, his fetishes, and involve other group members. Soon enough, you'll find that a great tour guide never works alone. He is actually a team player and needs you and other bright visitors to fuel his excellence.

## GUIDE YOUR GUIDE FROM FEEDING FACTS TO DELIVERING VALUE.



# OPEN WELLS OF FEELING

The guest book is one of the most curious items in the museum. You will find it on a reading desk, strategically positioned near the museum exit. Lying face open with a pen in the fold of the creamy, white pages, it invites you to write down – well, what exactly?

In the age of Twitter and Facebook, the guest book could easily be regarded as an anachronism. Why write down what you can tweet or post? Nevertheless, the guest book still serves a strong need, especially in art museums. It allows visitors to express their thoughts on the brilliant, boring or mind-boggling art they just saw. And – this may truly explain the guest book's success – we finally get a chance to talk back to the museum!

Visiting an art museum can be quite an individual experience. We stand in front of artworks mostly by ourselves and in silence. No *oohs*, *aahs* or applause. Nevertheless, if you are eager to find out how your fellow visitors experience the museum, the guest book offers you a

fascinating opportunity. It is a wonderful open space, where young and old, 'dummies' and experts, share their enjoyment, suggestions, jokes and criticisms regarding the museum and the art on display.

Museum guest books are a thrill to read. They are entertaining, inspiring and instructive. You will find strong public opinions on art and museums in three sentences or less. Or, as historian Bonnie Morris puts it after researching many guest books: "These books are open wells of feeling – some of the humblest, yet most dangerous outlets for anonymous writing in public places. Some signatures have the literary quality of a drunken phone call, while others contain eloquence worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize."

On your next visit, sign but also *read* the guest book. Make it your regular stop – a final, exciting reflection on what you just saw – before leaving the museum. You won't be disappointed.

