

Overall Mark: 92

General feedback:

This was an excellent response to the exhibition proposal assignment which dealt with issues of personal photography in museums and galleries. If I saw this display at the Whitechapel Gallery I don't think it would look at all out of place.

You set out a really good idea in an accomplished Summary and go on to skilfully present your arguments for and against personal photography in galleries in a well argued Context and Rationale section. I particularly liked your first paragraph and the way that you presented thoughts on this topic within the museum industry. Your idea that the exhibition would promote itself via social media is fantastic and would be popular with museums because it would cut costs. Your Introduction does well to encourage interaction before visitors move along to the section that provokes them to think about what they've just been doing.

Your choice of objects in Section 1 is very good - although I did think that the wording for the wall text on Kusama was slightly strange. I think I see what you're getting at but your comments fall between lightweight and ironic so they don't quite work. Your choice of Koons and Kapoor is great. Section 2s objects are great. Frizia is an excellent choice, illustrating your key point perfectly. Selfie Domino (I had never seen this) also perfectly illustrates a number of key issues including integrity of layout and visitor responsibilities. The text panel that accompanies the Von Tease take on *American Gothic* is very good. The final poll is thought provoking and would be a great talking point to encourage self reflection as well as attendance. Fantastic work - very well done indeed!

Summary

The exhibit I am proposing, *Recycling Reflections*, is an analysis of the use of personal photography in museums. Once finished with the exhibit, visitors should have a more clear idea of their perspective on taking pictures of art in museums. The exhibit focuses on both photography of art itself and “selfies” with art, although there is a greater emphasis on the latter. Section One of the exhibit is a series of reflective or mirrored art pieces, where interaction through the execution of creative photography is not only permitted, but encouraged. Section Two of the exhibit is a critical analysis of the role of photography in museums in recent years, presenting the more negative aspects of allowing photographs. These sections should function together to present to visitors both the positive and negative aspects of museum photography. Once visitors have experienced both sections, the exhibit will conclude with a live poll questioning visitors’ stances on the topic. The live poll results will be digitally displayed at the conclusion of the exhibit so guests can see where they stand compared to other museum visitors. In the rising digital age of constant documentation and camera access, this exhibit is critical in the debate of museum photography. Rules of personal photography vary per museum, and sometimes there is variation between exhibits even within one museum. This exhibit will shed light on the motivations and psychological pressures that compel visitors to photograph pieces, and investigate whether this behavior is appropriate in the context of a museum. It will also be informative to visitors, who can evaluate the complex pros and cons of a museum permitting photography within its institution.

Context and Rationale

In this day and age, documentation of life events has become nearly as important as experiencing the event itself. The psychological factors that contribute to this human behavior are seldom discussed, despite the fact that personal photography has greatly altered the museum experience over the last two decades. Since the mid-2000s, digital cameras have been a commonplace item for many families. For years, these cameras were staples on vacation as individuals documented moments from trips to preserve memories, share experiences with

friends and family, and artistically express themselves. Since the dawn of the smartphone era, these digital cameras have slowly been replaced by cell phone photography; technological advances in phone camera quality have eliminated the need for a second separate device for the average picture-taker. Smartphones allow for instantaneous access to a camera, increasing the rate at which people are able to document their lives¹. This perpetual documentation extends itself to museum visits, where visitors are frequently seen taking photographs both with and of the pieces displayed. However, introducing personal photography into museums opens a critical debate about the visitor experience, the sanctity of art and collections, and museums as institutions.

There are strong arguments presented by experts to support both sides of this debate. On the one hand, photography introduces an interactive element for visitors that can engage them with the collection. As Robert Kozinets argues, “Selfies turn museums into playgrounds...[they] encourage physical engagement with museum objects. They involve poses, contorting the body in order to get the poses right, waiting in line to get to the important work of art, waling through the museum with cameras, and walking around other visitors wo are taking their selfies”². Clearly, a visitor focused on achieving a certain photograph will dedicate a large portion of time and energy to this endeavor. While it perhaps enhances a creative involvement with the piece, the focus on selfies may also detract from the original museum experience where the entire focus is aimed on absorbing the exhibit. Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert presents an opposing argument, asserting that “the use of photography in art museums is superficial, intrusive, and creates an environment where one is unable to quietly contemplate and have an intimate encounter with art”³. In this viewpoint, the physical action of documenting the exhibit detracts from the real-time experience of viewing the exhibit. This new exhibit aims to explore these contrasting opinions and guide visitors as they formulate their own opinions on the topic.

¹ Budge, Kylie. “Objects in Focus: Museum Visitors and Instagram.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 60, no. 1 (2017): 81-86.

² Robert Kozinets, Ulrike Gretzel, and Anja Dinhopf, “Self in Art/Self As Art: Museum Selfies as Identity Work,” *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017): 731.

³ Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert, “Photographing in the Art Museum: Visitor Attitudes and Motivations,” *Visitor Studies* 20, no. 2 (2017): 114-137.

While it does not appear as though an exhibit on this topic has been attempted in the past, there is an (albeit limited) amount of literature available that does discuss the merit of photography in museums. This literature, like the exhibit, comes at a critical time as the rise of social media has furthered the tendency to capture images of our lives⁴. The explosion of photography in museums is a recent phenomenon of just the last few years. Caterina Presi summarizes the issue well when she explains that the debate is two-fold, as consideration must be given for both ownership and experience; that is, who has the right to reproduce these images/works and what kind of experience is optimal in a museum⁵. There is certainly not a consensus on these issues in the museum industry. Some recent pop up museums are entirely dedicated to creating “Instagram worthy” photo opportunities, while other museums have begun to ban any form of personal photography entirely. There are a wide range of factors that influence a museum in making these decisions, and this exhibit hopes to shed some light on those considerations.

This exhibit is important to the larger theme of the museum because it analyzes a crucial component of audience interaction with collections. Photography is perhaps the most common interaction visitors have with pieces⁶, and yet the behavior is largely underrepresented in the discussion surrounding museums. Section One is interactive in itself as the reflective surfaces of the art pieces are designed to encourage creative use of personal photography. Like E.B. Hunter claims, “intrusion of the live visitor’s body into the frame of a museum selfie and the broad social media circulation of the resulting photograph add a new layer of interactivity to digital-age museum spectatorship”⁷. This section will likely attract a younger crowd of social media users who value the experience of executing selfies and incorporating themselves into the artwork through photography. Section Two shifts towards an educational component of the analysis, offering pieces representative of the implications of museum photography. It will

⁴ Caterina Presi, Natalia Maehle, Ingeborg Astrid Kleppe, “Brand selfies: consumer experiences and marketplace conversations,” *European Journal of Marketing* 50, no. 9 (2016): 1814-1834.

⁵ Nicola Bruno, Katarzyna Pisanski, Agnieszka Sorokowska, and Piotr Sorokowski, “Editorial: Understanding Selfies,” *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018): 44.

⁶ John Pearce and Gianna Moscardo, “Social representations of tourist selfies: new challenges for sustainable tourism,” *Conference Proceedings of BEST EN Think Tank* (2015): 59-73.

⁷ E.B. Hunter, “In the frame: the performative spectatorship of museum selfies,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2016): 55-74.

provide documentation of the effects of this behavior, including exhibits that suffer from damage or overcrowding as a result. It takes a cultural approach to the issue, highlighting how personal photography may impede upon the average visitor experience. This section emphasizes the greater obsession with documentation and selfie photography in general, and how this may affect visitors' relationships with art in a broader sense. Section Two will likely attract museum enthusiasts interested in the educational and cultural aspects of the consequences of this ongoing behavior. Ultimately, both sections will serve to critically address a popular form of audience engagement with museums.

This exhibit would primarily be promoted by visitors who share their photographs on social media. While it is not possible to control or monitor this type of promotion, people often share enjoyable experiences on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and even word of mouth while including the location or name of the exhibit. Due to the largely photographic element of Section One, we expect many of these "mirror selfies" taken to be shared online. The introductory wall text will provide a hashtag, which visitors can use when sharing their photographs online so their post may be easily found by others. This action will spread awareness of the exhibit and incite followers to check out the exhibit themselves⁸, perhaps to emulate the photographs they see online. Hopefully this publicity, paired with standard promotion efforts by the exhibit itself in print and online, will galvanize new audiences to visit who otherwise may have not been interested.

Introduction to the Exhibit

Welcome to *Recycling Reflections*, a unique exhibit that aims to spark thought and discussion about the role of personal photography in the museum experience. More often than not, we leave museums with at least one photograph of some aspect of our visit. People use cameras in museums to varying degrees, and this exhibit aspires to highlight how these choices affect the experience for the individual, for other visitors, and for the museum.

⁸ Alexandra Weilenmann, Thomas Hillman, Beata Jungselius, "Instagram at the museum: Communicating the museum experience through social photo sharing," *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (2013): 93-103.

Recycling Reflections is broken up into two sections. In Section One, you will find a series of rooms that each contain one piece of mirrored artwork. We encourage you to bring a camera along and spend time capturing yourself in the art pieces, however you see fit. Feel free to experiment with lighting, angles, and poses whether you proceed in a large group or completely solo. This is a chance to explore your photographic creativity, engage yourself with the reflective surfaces, and appreciate the art itself in real time. Once you finish this series of rooms, you will find yourself in Section Two. This room is dedicated to presenting the implications, both tangible and cultural, of the recent rise in photography in museums. Spend time reading the stories of damage and distraction. Think about the ways in which our compulsive need to document our lives may enhance or detract from our experiences. Contemplate the broader cultural consequences of documentation, particularly of ourselves, and what it may show about human behavior. Reflect. Consider your experiences in both sections of the exhibit. Then, feel free to participate in our concluding poll which evaluates visitors' stance on the role of photography in museums. The live results will show you how you compare to other visitors of the exhibit. Remember, there is no right answer!

If you choose to share photographs taken in this exhibit, make sure to tag them #RecyclingReflections so that others can explore the original content you were able to produce using our reflective art.

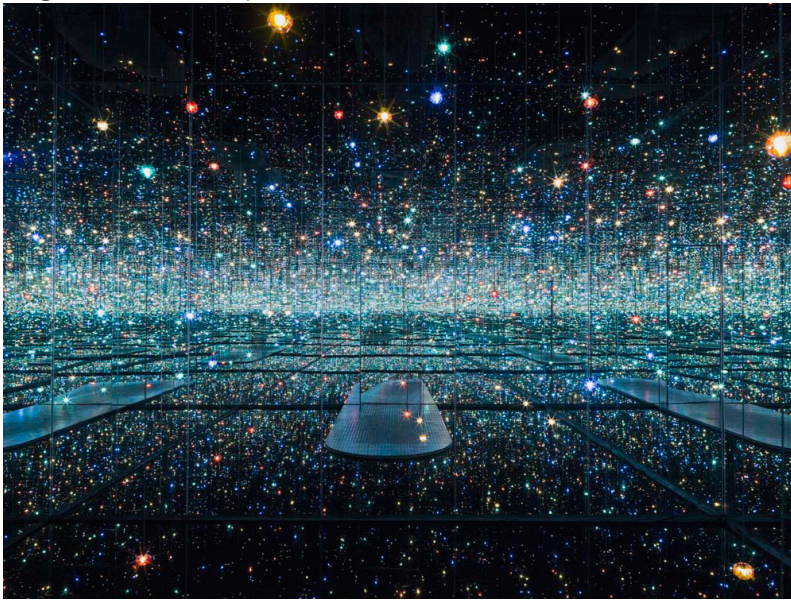
Object List and Accompanying Text

Section One

Listed below are three of the six pieces that will be displayed in this section

1. Yayoi Kusama; *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*; 2013; glass mirrors and LED lighting system; currently: The Broad (Los Angeles, California); origin: The Broad (Los

Angeles, California); accession number: F-KUSA-2014.004



Link: <https://www.thebroad.org/art/yayoi-kusama/infinity-mirrored-room-souls-millions-light-years-away>

Wall Text: Yayoi Kusama, once a relatively obscure Japanese artist, has recently risen to international fame for her creation of a series of Infinity Rooms. Born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Kusama moved to New York City in 1958 after being inspired by American Abstract Impressionism. She was widely active in the 60s and 70s avant-garde movement and has continued to create art to this day. Each visitor/group can enjoy up to 60 seconds of absorbing the magic of this room before allowing fellow guests to appreciate Kusama's creation. Make sure to snap a photograph of yourself in the scene, but don't forget to put the lens down for a moment and relish in the beauty of this room.

2. Jeff Koons; *Tulips*; 1995-2004; high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating; currently: Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa (Bilbao, Spain)



Link: <https://www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/works/tulips/>

Wall Text: Jeff Koons is an American pop culture artist most known for his large-scale steel replications of balloons. This piece, *Tulip*, is one of five versions of a similar arrangement. Koons' ability to capture the soft, rubbery texture of a balloon through hard metal is what makes this piece so impressive. Try photographing yourself in the different balloons and at different parts of each balloon to play with color and distortion.

3. Anish Kapoor; *Untitled*; 2011; stainless steel; currently: Lisson Gallery (New York City, NY)



Link: https://www.lissongallery.com/artists/anish- Kapoor/artworks/untitled--16?image_id=138
Wall Text: This “mirror” reveals a different reality with each angle and distance you approach it from. Designed and created by Anish Kapoor, the creator of the Chicago Bean sculpture, this piece welcomes visitors to explore its uneven surface and concave makeup. Born in Britain in 1954, Kapoor studied art at various institutions in London and has won a variety of awards for his artwork, including a knighthood in 2013.

Section Two

Below are three of the ten pieces that will be displayed in this section

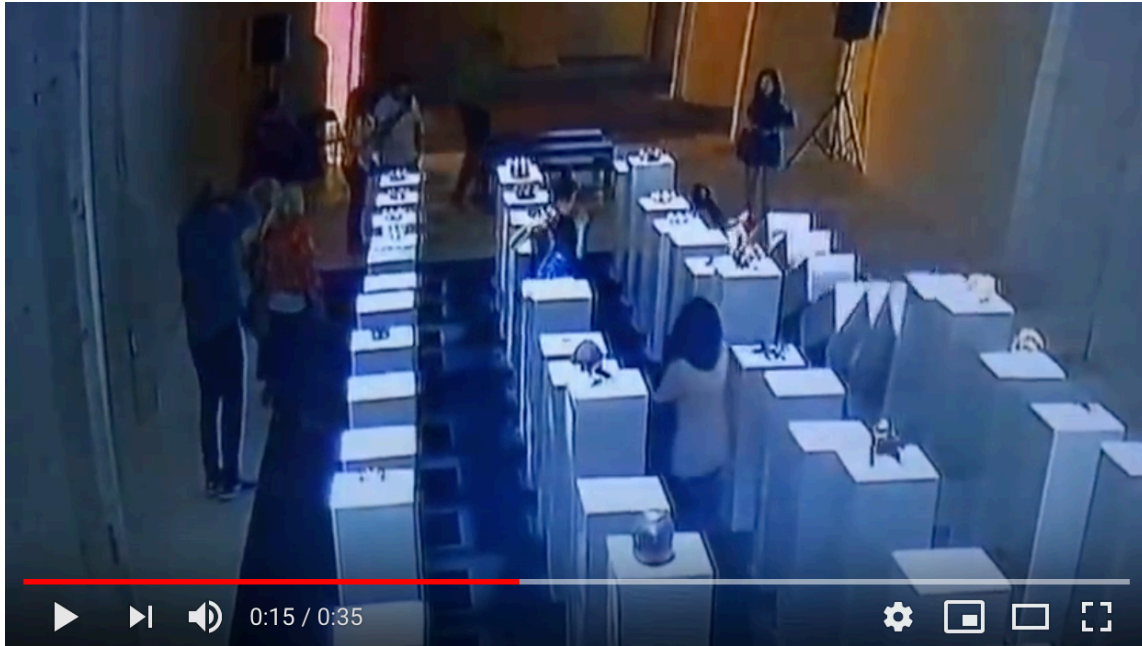
4. Pedro Fuiza; *Untitled*; 2018; photograph



Link: <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/visitors-take-pictures-of-la-joconde-a-1503-1506-oil-on-news-photo/944564060>

Wall Text: This powerful photograph by Pedro Fuiza captures the experience of visiting the famed Mona Lisa painting at the Louvre Museum in Paris. While large crowds during peak hours at museums are inevitable, the number of phone and camera screens photographing the very small painting highlight the compulsion to document experiences. Surely none of these devices can capture the crowded painting well, and great quality photographs are available online. Nonetheless, this photograph depicts the everyday viewing experience of the Mona Lisa in the digital era.

5. *Seflie Domino*; 2017; video on television; featured art: *Hypercaine* by Simon Birch at The 14th Factory (Los Angeles)



Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsKyxf12QVo> (to be played on a television on loop)

Wall Text: Take the time to watch this short 35 second video in its entirety. As you cringe through it, be sure to consider the potential for damage in pursuit of the perfect museum photograph. These institutions often hold pieces totaling millions of dollars which can be completely destroyed if visitors are distracted. How much is a good picture worth?

6. Dito Von Tease; *Classicool 006*; 2018; digital editing



Link: <http://www.ditovontease.com/classicool/>

Wall Text: The Italian digital artist behind the *Classicool* series goes by Dito Von Tease, although his real identity is unknown. He selects well known, classic pieces of art and digitally alters them so the paintings appear to be photographed by the subjects themselves in a “selfie style”. This juxtaposition of a modern photography technique portrayed in old artwork is entertaining and clever. It makes a commentary of the already-shifting future of self-documentation.

Display

As mentioned earlier, the exhibit will be divided into two main sections. Section One is dedicated to a truly interactive photographic experience. It will consist of six relatively large rooms. Each room is dedicated to one piece of art, which will be the focal point of the room. After reading the introductory text panel, visitors will walk through an open doorway into the first room. Each room will be as minimalist as possible; the walls will be white, the ceiling will be white, and the floors will be white. This decision is made with the intention of maximizing the aesthetic created by the visitors for photographs. The visitors essentially can curate pictures with a “white” backdrop, minimizing any distractions in the reflection. There will be a small text panel at the entryway of each room that provides information for the piece including the name of the work, the author, and some biographical content. The only other thing displayed on the walls will be small signs next to the text panels that read “Photography permitted and encouraged”, to reinforce the interactive element of the section. Exact lighting techniques will be specific to each room due to the large variation in pieces and the unique reflective nature of the surfaces. However, the goal will be to produce neutral lighting that is sure not to create a glare on the surfaces of the art. Not all of the pieces are compatible with this arrangement. For example, Kusama’s *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* will deviate from this format and require specific composition due to the specialized nature of the piece. In general when designing the rooms, thought, the number one priority is making them suitable for high quality mirror photographs of visitors.

There will be a limit to the number of visitors that can explore Section One at the same time. By virtue of being a photographic opportunity, the rooms should to be open enough to

allow visitors to arrange pictures in a timely manner without large numbers of guests in the background or shot. In order to ensure this is the case, an employee will be outside the exhibit to limit the number of visitors that can enter at once. This number will be determined once the exhibit is in operation, at the discretion of the museum curators. Again, Kusama's room must be monitored individually as it requires a shut door to function properly. A museum employee will monitor the line outside of that room, and allow each visitor/group up to 60 seconds to experience the piece. By preventing an overcrowding in the exhibit, especially during peak hours, visitors will have a better and easier experience in forming photographic moments.

After making their way through the six rooms, visitors will enter through the last doorway and emerge in Section Two. This section will be one larger room with a variety of pieces displayed at eye level against the walls. Similar to Section One, this room will have white floors, white walls, and a white ceiling for consistency. The goal of this room is to contextualize museum photography on a broader scale. After having participated in and enjoyed the environment of Section One, Section Two invites visitors to critically evaluate their behavior in the context more negative aspects of the action. The pieces in this room are pulled from many different sources, and should comment on a repercussion in the museum industry or in a broader cultural context of the human compulsion of documentation. Most pieces will take the form of flat pages, which will be hung on the walls and spaced uniformly. Each piece will be accompanied by a large wall text, as this section is designed to be more informational than aesthetically pleasing. The wall texts are a major component of this section and are what really add value to the visitor's understanding of the exhibit. Visitors will be encouraged to follow the pieces clockwise upon entering, where they will be arranged relatively chronologically. By arranging the pieces chronologically, the section can reveal a timetable that demonstrates the issue as increasingly pertinent in most recent years. The heavier concentration of pieces in later years should subconsciously affirm for guests that this issue seems to be reaching a climax.

Once finished with Section Two, visitors must pass through one final doorway to leave the exhibit. Next to the walkway in bright, clear black letters should read, "How do you view the role of photography in museum exhibits?". Below this question will be two buttons against the wall. The top button will be red, and next to it will read "Negatively". The button below that will

be green, and next to it will read “Positively”. As they leave the exhibit, visitors are encouraged to share their personal view on the debate presented. By pressing a button, they will contribute one vote for that viewpoint. The live results of this poll will be projected next to the question, which will be shown in a meter format. The goal is to keep the poll alive from the first day to the last day of the exhibit in order to gather a sense of public opinion from guests. Of course, this data will not be perfectly accurate as there will be no monitoring of the buttons and there is a self-selecting bias in only recording the results of guests who choose to visit this specific exhibit. It does, though, add another interactive element to the museum that can spark thought and debate among visitors who may question each other’s’ responses.

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