



Reena Makes Lists

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# Museums In Crisis

I really wanted to talk about cat lawyers and rapping ambassadors but here we are.



Reena Devi

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You're reading Reena Makes Lists, a weekly newsletter by [arts journalist Reena Devi](#). This post will go out every Thursday, unless said writer is swamped with commissioned assignments or life in general. If you like this, subscribe [here](#).

## In this second issue

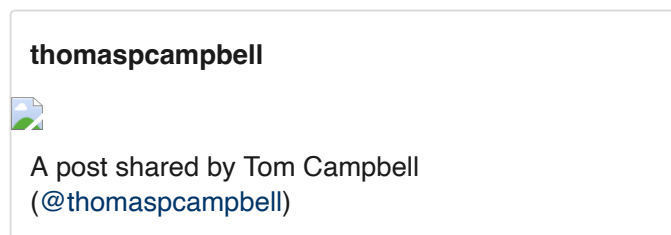
1. Museums in the Hot Seat
2. Curious: Super Bowl
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What I really wanted to talk about this week but no, art museums had to continue being controversial.

## Lately, museums being in the hot seat is sort of an understatement. (Warning: this is a very long list.)

- The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) is facing a great deal of backlash about following in the footsteps of other US museums taking advantage of the Association of Art Museum Directors loosening its regulations regarding deaccessioning last spring, in a bid to cope with fiscal deficits.
- Apparently dealing with a US\$150 million shortfall, even though it has the Met Gala and an endowment, the Met would be “one of the wealthiest, largest, and best-attended museums in the world” to sell off their artworks. The various reasons this is such a colossally bad idea is best summed up by the IG caption of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco Director Thomas Campbell.



- The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA) has been in the news quite a bit lately. First came the announcement of senior curator Naomi Beckwith’s departure to take on a new role as Guggenheim’s first Black deputy director and chief curator in June. Then, Michael Darling, the institution’s chief curator, leaving after a decade to join a startup called Museum Exchange.
- Reported a few days later, 17 full-time and 24 part-time staff were let go from the museum “due to budgetary constraints.” This month, artists Hương Ngô and Hồng-An Trương reportedly canceled their performance at MCA in support of the staff who were laid off.
- The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) is not doing any better. Director Neal Benezra will be stepping down after 19 years. While no immediate successor has been named, whoever takes on the role will have their hands full. The museum has been under fire since last year for “large personnel cuts, staff experiences of racial inequity and SFMOMA’s handling of criticism during last summer’s protests against police brutality.”
- Leadership issues abound over at the The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as well. Over 150 artists, art workers and activists are calling for the removal of Board Chair Leon Black for paying US\$158 million to sexual predator Jeffrey Epstein, “well after his sex

crimes conviction,” as well as his ownership of a private military company that operated in Iraq.

- A few days prior, anonymous feminist art collective The Guerrilla Girls canceled their book contract with prestigious art publishing house Phaidon owned by Black.
- On the other side of the pond, French museum directors have been appealing to open their spaces with “robust health and safety measures” in place, in spite of a nationwide ban to combat COVID-19, and more recently, a populist leader even acquiesced.
- Then, there is the Uffizi Gallery purchasing an artwork (allegedly street art but it is a canvas work created in a studio) featuring a seminude Mark Wahlberg. Yes, I swear, I did not write this while in a fever dream inspired by my largely redundant Renaissance postgraduate degree.
- I do wonder about museums in other parts of the world such as Latin America, Africa, UAE, and different parts of Asia, including Southeast Asia. It can't be all peaches and cream or fighting fit for them in these times right? Well, this reporter is always open to tips and leads.



Me waiting for tips and leads.

## Curious: Super Bowl

- American football and Tom Brady were the talk of the town this week, even infiltrating my protests and coups filled newsfeed. For art world people seeking a relevant and nuanced understanding, science writer Ferris Jabr's thread is exactly what you need.

**Ferris Jabr**

@ferrisjabr

A thread of very good, wonderful, truly Super Bowls.

Translucent agate bowl with ornamental grooves and coffee-and-cream marbling. Found near Qift in southern Egypt. 300 - 1,000 BC. 📷 Getty Museum

[bit.ly/36TbmPB](https://bit.ly/36TbmPB)



February 7th 2021

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## Articles worth reading for their prescient views or for pointing out the sheer absurdity of the art world:

- It is a rare occasion when an art writer moves me: [In a New Novel, Critic Yxta Maya Murray Stakes a Claim for Women Artists of Color Who Get Erased From Art History.](#)
- Heartening to see more books being published in the art world by people of colour (but it is still not enough, it won't even be enough when I finally get a book deal): [“We Are Advocating for Us”: A New Book Centers BIPOC Artists and Educators.](#)
- The art world is just absurd. Case in point: [Virgil Abloh auctions upcycled clothing customised by Damien Hirst.](#)
- The headline says it all: [Will it ever happen? Art SG postponed for the fourth time.](#) I will be discussing more about this, and art fairs in general, in one of the next few issues so

stay tuned.

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