



The Heat Is On

Museums under pressure, NFT tech bros and more.



Reena Devi

Apr 22, 2021



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 eleventh issue

1. Museums Under Pressure
2. Back to the Future (Museum Edition)
3. Curious: NFT Tech Bro Culture
4. Worthwhile Reads Beyond the Art World



Museums feeling the heat. (All gifs via giphy.com)

Slightly over a year into the pandemic, with a surge of COVID-19 cases currently sweeping across the world and lockdown measures being put in place, museums are grappling with unforeseen pressures on multiple fronts.

- In the midst of its third pandemic lockdown, UK museums are undergoing major organisational restructuring with layoffs, slashed budgets and stretched staff, calling into question the very future of the sector.

- French museums, on the other hand, are still attempting to nail down their reopening date since their closure last October.
- A fifth of US museum workers surveyed in a recent report on lockdown impact are looking to change career paths long-term, with burnout and compensation cited as reasons for doing so.



Museum workers performing Bad Blood. Probably.

- Both the senior curator and human resources director at LA's **Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)** resigned in March, citing "hostile" work culture and leadership's reluctance to embrace inclusion and diversity.
- **The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)** may have recently become the world's most followed museum on social media but it's getting quite a bit of heat regarding director Glenn Lowry's tone deaf email about the recent Strike MoMA protests.
- There's also the fact that Epstein associate Leon Black is still serving on the board after his highly publicised removal as board chair.



Likely a major museum director.

- In a bid to reduce their losses over the past year, **MoMA, the Whitney Museum of American Art** and **Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)** are refinancing debt by taking advantage of current low interest rates.
- This would make financial sense on its own but let's not forget that most of these major museums have also laid off staff and pushed to loosen deaccessioning rules.
- Also, whatever moves renowned museums in established art centers make (and get away with), lesser known and/or smaller museums around the world are likely to follow suit, especially in these tough times. It's already happening in the US itself.

Back To The Future (Museum Edition)



- Kentucky's largest and oldest art museum **Speed** pulled off its latest exhibition Promise, Witness, Remembrance in the span of four months through collaborative and community efforts.
- A direct response to the police killing of Breonna Taylor last year, the show features Amy Sberald's iconic portrait of Taylor as its centrepiece, amongst various works from the museum's collection and loans from artists and galleries.

asberald



- This choice quote from the show's **New York Times** review says quite a bit about its future implications:

People talk a lot about getting back to pre-Covid normal. But our traditional art museums can forget about that. After a year of intense racial justice reckoning, a paralyzing pandemic and crippling economic shortfalls, aging hidebound institutions are scrambling just to stay afloat. And the only way for them to do so is to change. Strategies for forward motion are needed. One is in play here at the **Speed Art Museum**, in the form of a quietly passionate show...which might, with profit, be studied by other institutions in survivalist mode.

Curious: NFT Tech Bro Culture



NFT Bros reading this sub-segment. Probs.

- It should come as no surprise that pioneering NFT whales seem to be all men.
- From Eric Young, a fintech businessman who owns around 350 NFTs amounting to more than \$1 million and an artwork by Pak from **Sotheby's** recent sale, to Miami-based art collector Pablo Rodriguez-Fraile and venture investor Colborn Bell who established **The Museum of Crypto Art (MoCA)**, the leading virtual reality art gallery of the Metaverse.
- With crypto billionaires likely to impact the very focus of philanthropy, their diversity (or lack thereof) matters a lot.
- In fact, a drop in sales across NFT platforms at the end of March was partly attributed to the hyper-masculine culture around some prominent digital art.
- Artist and technologist Drue Kataoka summed it up rather aptly:

Another driver for the pullback, without question, is the unfortunate association of crypto art and digital art with 'tech bro' culture of geeky weirdness, often accompanied by distinctly sexist and racist overtones.

It was clearly exposed in Beeple's Everydays. I'm surprised that it took so long and that it slipped past **Christie's** safeguards, but I'm also not surprised, given the well-established sexism and racism of the traditional art establishment.



When I say not all bros, I specifically mean these two. ([Sebastian Source](#))

Articles worth reading for their prescience in describing contemporary issues and developments beyond the insularity of the art world:

- According to this [Atlantic piece](#), immense wealth erodes one's sense of compassion.
- Case in point, Bill Gates adversely [affecting](#) public health data and Peter Thiel [going on](#) about China, bitcoin and maximalism.
- Another example, the [Sacklers](#). Though I doubt Patrick Radden Keefe's exhaustively [researched](#) book on the family behind the opioid crisis will end the divisiveness in the art world regarding their contributions.
- If you're interested in finding out more about the impact of **Substack** on traditional media, this [thread](#) of articles is for you.
- Neurotechnology could [imbue](#) visions in our psyche some day. Also, there could be [flying cars](#). Soon.

Thank you for reading the newsletter. Please share and subscribe. Feedback is always appreciated. You can also hit reply and email me with any tips, leads and typos.

♡ Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



Write a comment...

© 2022 Reena Devi. See [privacy](#), [terms](#) and [information collection notice](#)



Publish on Substack

Reena Makes Lists is on [Substack](#) – the place for independent writing