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The Average Person Spends 27 Seconds Looking at a Work of Art. Now, 166 Museums Are Joining Forces to Ask You to Slow Down

Museums in Australia, Canada, the UK, the US, and elsewhere are holding special events for Slow Art Day on April 6.

Sarah Cascone, April 4, 2019



There are slow art tours of "Pierre Bonnard: The Colour of Memory," currently on view at the Tate Modern. Photo courtesy of the Tate Modern.

Moving through an exhibition, it often feels like visitors are in a race to the finish. They are certainly rushing: the average person spends just over 27 seconds looking at a great work of art, according to a study published in *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* in 2017.

If that seems remarkably short to you, we have good news: Slow Art Day, which aims to encourage people that it's the quality, not quantity, of art-looking that matters, takes place this Saturday, April 6. Its self-described mission? “[To] help more people discover for themselves the joy of looking at and loving art.”

Founded in 2009 by Phil Terry, the CEO of the consulting firm Creative Good, Slow Art Day asks museum-goers to spend ten minutes looking at a single work of art, focusing intently on the piece before them. The initiative is “counter-cultural to the smartphone and its growing dominance in culture, but also to blockbuster exhibits and the focus on absolute numbers,” Terry told the *Art Newspaper*.

Over the last decade, over 1,500 Slow Art Day events have been held on all seven continents, and a literature professor even published a book on the concept.

The idea is that such close attention will spark new appreciation for and discoveries about a work of art, forcing the viewer to notice small details they might otherwise overlook in a rush to see every piece on view. It's a compelling suggestion, especially when one considers exhibitions like Yayoi Kusama's traveling “Infinity Mirrors” show, which instituted a strict 30-second time limit for visitors to the kaleidoscopic “Infinity Mirror Rooms”—literally making “slow art” impossible.



Yayoi Kusama, *INFINITY MIRRORED ROOM: LET'S SURVIVE FOREVER* (2017) at David Zwirner, New York. Photo courtesy of David Zwirner, New York.

“To view art slowly is to take the time to be fully present and to initiate a meaningful conversation between one’s own mind and heart and that of the artist,” said Jiawen, a docent at New York’s [Rubin Museum](#)—one of this year’s Slow Art Day hosts—on the museum website.

Each participating museum selects a group of works for the occasion. After extended encounters with the art, participants are encouraged to talk about their slow art experience. Some museums host discussions in the galleries in front of the art, while others arrange a meeting point where participants can exchange thoughts with one another over lunch. All events are free with museum admission.

It might feel like you’re missing something to limit your museum experience to just a select few artworks, but for slow art evangelists, it’s all a matter of perspective.

“When you go to the library,” James O. Pawelski, the director of education for the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, said to the [New York Times](#) back in 2014, “you don’t walk along the shelves looking at the spines of the books and on your way out tweet to your friends, ‘I read 100 books today!’”

Here’s a sampling of some of the 166 museums and institutions participating in Slow Art Day around the world.

Australia

National Portrait Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Canada

Remai Modern, Saskatoon

Aga Khan Museum, Toronto

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto

Ireland

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

UK

Tate Modern, London

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton

US

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas

SFMOMA Artists Gallery, San Francisco

Denver Art Museum

The Wolfsonian FIU, Miami Beach

The Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum @ FIU, Miami

Hawaii State Art Museum, Honolulu

Art Institute of Chicago

Des Moines Art Center
New Orleans Museum of Art
Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams
Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Massachusetts
Saint Louis Art Museum
Center for Italian Modern Art, New York
Museum of Arts and Design, New York
Rubin Museum of Art, New York
Hofstra University Museum of Art, Hempstead, New York
Cincinnati Art Museum
Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland
Philadelphia Museum of Art
The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC