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IN ART

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# The Guardian

Art and design

## Art obscured by a forest of phones

Guardian readers contribute to an ongoing discussion about the role of the smartphone in cultural experiences

*Letters*

Fri 30 Aug 2019 16.51 BST Last modified on Fri 30 Aug 2019 16.55 BST



Van Gogh. Is it what he would have wanted? Mel Shewan thinks so. Photograph: Stuart C Wilson/Getty Images

I returned from Paris on Saturday and was very pleased to find the correspondence in the Guardian ([Letters](#), 24 August) about switching off the phone in art galleries. I visited the Louvre last Friday and foolishly joined the queue to see the Mona Lisa. The queue was well-managed and I reached the hallowed subject in about 30 minutes. There were signs everywhere that said “no camera” and “no flash”. These were completely ignored and there was a forest of phones as people snapped the Mona Lisa and took their selfies with her. The security staff appeared to have

completely given up on the subject of phones and my friend was told by one that “just one” photo could be taken.

If anyone in authority at the Louvre reads this letter, please implement the no-camera policy in an effective way or introduce “no-camera” sessions for those of us who would like to look at the painting without getting angry about the behaviour of others.

**Sally Lynes**

*London*

- I was at the Van Gogh exhibition too ([Opinion](#), 22 August), but I wasn't getting annoyed by all the photography going on around me. On the contrary, I felt it enhanced the lively, celebratory atmosphere I was enjoying so much, and I could get up close and personal with the pictures so long as I waited a little while for folk to move on. But I sensed from the tone of some of the other correspondents that perhaps patience isn't one of their strong points; ironic really, given the general complaint against the snappers was that they weren't taking enough time to look at the work. And was I the only one reading those letters to get a strong sense of that uniquely angry intellectual snobbery peculiar to the English liberal left? They did get me wondering though what Vincent would have made of it all. I like to think he would have enjoyed the bustling, egalitarian shebang as much as I did.

**Mel Shewan**

*Edinburgh*

- I am in awe of the clever people who can retain the images of the often very large exhibitions I visit. I just don't have that kind of visual memory, and can't afford £25 for a catalogue, especially if I have to pay for entry. I have only recently been introduced to the mysteries of the smartphone by my grandson, and although I have no intention of taking selfies in front of *Starry Night*, just by reviewing my photos on the bus home I've fixed them in my mind. I've also been able to share these images with interested family members and friends, and take part in conversations. I'm grateful for the opportunity to take photos at exhibitions – the problem for me is people wearing headphones who hog the space in front of artworks.

**Lesley Fox**

*London*

- Yesterday I received the following email concerning BBC prom 57 which my husband and daughter will be attending on 1 September:

“We will be trialling the LiveNote web app at prom 57 which allows you to receive bite-sized programme notes on your smartphone or tablet during the performance, synced to the music. To take advantage of this feature please click [here](#) and then click ‘launch LiveNote’ when prompted. When using the app, please silence your phone during the performance....”

If I were not living in the 21st century I would have thought this to be an April fool. What an earth can have possessed the BBC to come up with such an appalling idea?

**Patricia Baker**

*Saffron Walden, Essex*

- Your editorial ([Mass tourism brings long queues – and a reason to seek out less famous works](#), 26 August) brings to mind my visit to the Hermitage in St Petersburg

last month. I had chosen a guided tour at “slower pace”, supposedly giving more time to see the works of art on display, albeit in a smaller area than the “faster tour”. In the event I became part of a shuffling stream of human traffic more akin to a football match, but with the streams going in different directions. We were miked up with the guide at the head of the group stopping briefly to comment on a particular item and then moving on before the tail of the group had reached it. A minute in front of the Mona Lisa begins to sound rather generous!

**Leslie Jones**

*Cirencester, Gloucestershire*

- Thanks to Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett and several Guardian readers for reassuring me that I am not just being a grumpy old woman when I feel increasing rage at the photo-snappers, selfie-takers and (Musée d’Orsay, last week) video-filmers in art galleries. I spotted a person taking the perfect photo of L’Étoile by Degas on a fridge magnet in a [Paris](#) gift shop. Surely the ultimate simulacrum?

**Dr Karen Postle**

*Titchfield, Hampshire*

- Overheard in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence: “Oh for God’s sake, George; if you’re going to stop and look at everything, we’ll never get round!”

**Jimmy Hibbert**

*Manchester*