

The Met Breuer's Opening Moves



By James D. Balestrieri

NEW YORK CITY — Before the Met Breuer even opened to the press, volumes of expectant words had been written about it in print and on the web. In the days since the press preview, the mountain has grown exponentially, much of it, not unsurprisingly, a kind of piling on of expectations unmet. By the time you read this, so much will have been written that any points to be made might seem moot. Like all worlds, the art world will have moved on to its next meme, its next crisis, its next gotcha moment.

"Head and Shoulders of a Woman (La Scapigliata)" by Leonardo da Vinci (Italian, 1452–1519), circa 1500–1505, oil, earth and white lead pigments on poplar, 9¼ by 8¼ inches. Galleria Nazionale di Parma.





"Do It Yourself (Violin)" by Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987), 1962, synthetic polymer paint and Prestype on canvas, 54 by 72 inches. Private collection. ©2015 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Perhaps, in light of the various aspects of the Met Breuer's opening (Marcel Breuer's building; the two inaugural exhibitions — "Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible" and "Nasreen Mohamedi"; the artists in residence — composer, performer

and filmmaker Vijay Iyer and artist Kerry James Marshall; and John Luther Adams's piece of music, "Soundwalk," composed especially for the Met Breuer), it might be worthwhile to think about museums: how they came to be, what they are, what they want to be, what they mean. After all, if you are reading this, you probably collect something, which means, in effect, that the place where you live,

"Street in Auvers-sur-Oise" by Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890), 1890, oil on canvas, 29 by 36³/₈ inches. Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, Collection Antell.





"Lick and Lather" by Janine Antoni (American, b 1964), 1993–1994, chocolate and soap; Head I 24 by 13 inches; Head II 16 by 13 inches; base 45 by 13 inches. Collection of Jill and Peter Kraus. ©Janine Antoni, courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

and perhaps where you work, is a kind of museum — or, at least, a cabinet of curiosities.

What you want to have happen when people (and when you yourself) enter the world you have

created is not unlike what the curators of the Met Breuer — or any museum — want to have happen when people step into theirs. You want them to appreciate the artistry of the works, the context and manner of their creation. You want the juxtapositions of objects to inspire new connections that throw bridges across time, over distances and between disparate people. You

"Carafe and Candlestick" by Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), 1909, oil on canvas, 21½ by 28¼ inches. The Leonard A. Lauder Cubist Collection. ©2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York





want to inspire curiosity, but not to sate it entirely. You want them to want more. And so, in a museum that works, everything — the space, the exhibitions, the individual objects, the catalogs, the wall labels, the audio interpretations — should be doors that remain open, with the light of new questions shimmering in the cracks...

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"The Hand of God" by Auguste Rodin (French, 1840–1917), modeled circa 1896–1902, commissioned 1906, carved circa 1907, marble, 29 by 23 by 25¼ inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Edward D. Adams, 1908.

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