



## Good Things Come In Small Packages

LILIANNE MILGROM

Being of short stature, I was often the recipient of the reassuring sentiment that good things come in small packages. I myself have used this timeless cliché in countless scenarios and situations. It came to mind again when I was comparing various museums during a recent visit to Paris. Perhaps my 5'2" frame has shaped my opinion that "less is more" when it comes to art as well. Smaller, more intimate museums can be as enriching as some of the oversized museums-cum-art warehouses which should provide golf carts along with every entrance ticket.

As an artist, it is no surprise that art-gazing often places first on my to-do list when I visit Paris, or any other city for that matter. But few activities can prove quite as draining as a visit to a museum. Shopping malls come in at a close second. Researchers in museums have found that 10 to 30 seconds is the average range of time visitors spend in front of works of art. With that sort of pace, it is no wonder we soon succumb to a bad case of sensory overload. While our brain is taking in the concepts and our eyes are gorging on the visual feast, our feet are rapidly getting tired and sore. We soon find ourselves worn out and distracted. The very thought of the Louvre's 35,000 (!) works on exhibit makes me numb with exhaustion. I painted this familiar scene at the Tate in London a few years ago.



Lilianne Milgrom **Museum Blues** (gouache on board)

So how does one overcome the mental and physical fatigue which seems to accompany a visit to a museum? Phil Terry of Creative Good Inc., a New York firm, has recently taken up this challenge by launching the first [Slow Art Day](#) in August 2009 at New York's MOMA, then in October at 16 other museums. The movement to be “inspired not tired” has taken off worldwide.

Michelle Moon, assistant director at the Peabody Essex Museum (one of Slow Art Day’s participants) explains that museum visitors may often be in a hurry to accommodate a crowd behind them, particularly at blockbuster shows where entrance may be timed. Or likewise, they may be rushed by a sense of obligation to take in every painting in every wing once they have paid the entrance fee. These behaviors prevent us from really *looking* at the art and actually enjoying it. Rather than trying to conquer a museum, we should try to lower our expectations and get rid of the guilt in order to fully savor the experience. Slow Art Day encourages focusing on five or six works and spending ten minutes on each work to experience a different type of museum visit.

Another way to counteract the museum blues is to opt for smaller, more intimate museums which can provide just the right amount of culture and pleasure. Three of my favorite small to mid-sized Paris museums are the Musée Bourdelle, the Musée Maillol and the Musée Jacquemart-André. One of the most exciting and thought-provoking exhibitions I was fortunate enough to see this summer was *Vanités (Vanitas)* at the [Musée Maillol](#). If skulls and thoughts of death are not your cup of tea, then don’t feel badly about having missed this exhibition. The Maillol Museum was filled to the brim with artistic representations of *memento mori (remember your mortality)*, from Ancient Roman to contemporary examples of Death as part of Life. It was comforting to see some artists put a humorous twist on the subject. After all, we are born to die so we may as well face the fact!



Nicholas Rubenstein  
*Mickey is also a rat*



Daniel Spoerri  
*The Lioness and the Hunter*

*Vanités* provided a visual cornucopia of artworks inspired by our inevitable and imminent demise. Strange as it may seem, this exhibition was actually pleasurable as long as one managed not to take Death too personally. Marcel Duchamp kept the Grim Reaper at arm's length by tattooing this sentence along the side of his own body: *It is always others who die*. The Maillol Museum is known for its superb curatorial staff and is currently exhibiting treasures from the Medici legacy.

For a cozy and classy museum experience the [Musée Jacquemart-André](#) is worth a visit. In June, the museum debuted the *Greco to Dali* exhibition of Spanish masterpieces from the collection of [Pérez Simón](#). I was dumbfounded by [Joaquin Sorolla's](#) stunning, lush paintings. But as enjoyable as my cultural experience was, my feet soon felt sore and my stomach started to growl. Not to worry. One of the perks of this museum is the Old World café with its Brussels tapestries and Tiepolo-frescoed ceiling.

So by all means visit museums large and small, keeping in mind the maxim "less is more" in order to be assured of an enjoyable experience rather than an exhausting chore.