

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Project

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Each work in this series depicts a selection of actual works, chosen and photographed by me, from the collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Each represents the reconstruction of cultures as showcased by the actual museum: Modern art, Western religious painting, Western painting, Tribal art, East Asian art, Persian art, Egyptian art, Greek and Roman art, and Western sculpture. There is no need for the viewer to have visited the actual museum to appreciate this project; it embodies my own imaginary museum from the perspective of a creative and critical curator, rather than being an artist's rendering of the collection as it exists.

The nine works in the series exaggerate the sizes of the real-life exhibition space, makes changes to the displays and lighting, and enhances color saturation and contrasts in order to create a vivid visual image of the megalomaniacal "personality" of institution. In addition, these nine images intentionally are the same size and similar in presentation in order to question the "importance" of the cultures represented in the museum, based on the relative size allotted to each cultural collection in the actual museum, and to critique the hegemony of this particular Western institution. The suspicion is that Metropolitan Museum of Art has historically contributed to the construction of art historical knowledge and provided the spectacles of American collection culture through particular categorization and arrangement. In this regard, the museum cannot claim that it presents history as it is, but provides a subjective interpretation of history based on the particular point of view of its political and cultural interests that makes particular sense of the world.

Along these same lines, the project draws attention to a particular emerging worldview, of hierarchical departmentalization. For instance, the Tribal art section of the actual museum presents all the primitive cultural art and objects from all over the world, whereas other sections are more or less categorized by their cultural/geographical locations. The Egyptian section contrast itself with the real Egypt, which is in a constant battle to reclaim its' own cultural assets. The relative shortage of East Asian and Persian artifacts casts doubt on the Western institution's legitimacy in representing other cultures. Fragments of ancient statues, relocated from their native lands, are displayed in modern modes of installation, on frames and pedestals, giving the impression that the modern museum is the natural home for these cultural belongings from all over the world. These display styles also make it difficult for people to imagine the artifacts in their original contexts.

The impressive collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art have always commanded my attention, and the issues above have long lingered in my mind, triggering this project. The project has encouraged me to explore back and forth between the real and the virtual, the actual and the simulated, the original and the manipulated, and the analog and the digital. As a complex human being, I wholeheartedly admit that the cultural spectacle still fascinates me as I criticize it. The museum is a problematic yet amazing place to experience. Hatred and affection are perfect traveling companions.