The Disabling Art Museum
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Abstract
This article examines museums and their furnishing, arguing that benches, seats and the very notion of comfort have a disabling or enabling function. A little studied aspect of visuality in museums, furniture admits some visitors and not others. Using New York’s Museum of Modern Art as the basis for its critique, the author gives an impressionistic account of how furnishing and comfort shape the museum visitor’s experience, but also reflect broader conceptions of the museum’s role in society.

Keywords
disability • furnishing • modernism • museums • wheelchair

It was in an art museum that I first learned that I was disabled. Born with mild cerebral palsy, I was never good at heights; stairs without handrails presented a challenge, and uneven sidewalks were something that I had to negotiate carefully. Still, I had backpacked across Europe, played tennis, and traveled alone through Asia, not to mention the hundreds of museum exhibitions I attended. Several years ago, however, when walking through *Counter Space* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), my legs grew stiff and heavy. I needed to rest and catch my breath; waves of feverish nausea swept over me and it was hard to take a step. Somewhere towards the middle of the exhibition I found myself unable to get back to the main hallway, and I began to panic about falling down. One of the guards informed me that if I went downstairs I could get one of the wheelchairs provided by the museum (see Figure 1); but I soon realized my problems were only just beginning. Having never even sat in a wheelchair, I had no idea how to move one around; having to maneuver the wheelchair around the groups of tourists and school children that filled the gallery space was like parallel parking a minivan in the middle of
a playground. Finally, I worked out a workable rhythm: I would push the chair to a viewing point away from the flow of traffic, sit down, look at the work as best as I could, find another out-of-the-way spot, get up, push the chair to the next point, sit down … again, and again, and again. Afterwards, I returned the wheelchair to the guard and walked out of the museum. It was perplexing: I had walked into, and out of, the museum able-bodied, yet inside the museum I had been ‘disabled’. Now, back on the street, I was able-bodied once more.

Of course, experiencing fatigue in a museum is not equivalent to being legally or medically disabled. Nor does sitting in a wheelchair immediately mean that one is incapacitated. But how is it that these very different experiences overlap? While virtually anyone who has visited a museum experiences museum fatigue, museum seating is still too much of an afterthought. Benches are often pushed aside in installation and publicity photographs. When administrators expect
large crowds at an exhibition, seating is one of the first things to be jettisoned; even gallery-goers who bring their own seating are discouraged from using it by security-conscious museum personnel. This article examines the dearth of public seating in museums, and explores how etiquette and comportment in museums can be at odds with issues of bodily comfort.

In recent years, scholars and museum professionals alike have opened the institution to critique, assessing what scholar Andrew McClellan (2008: 155) has called the 'relationship between the museum and its publics'. Moreover, scholars like Constance Classen and Fiona Candlin argue that museum ‘manners’ and behaviors can be historically situated. Today, demands that museums be sensitive to the needs and comfort of their audiences is all the more urgent as ‘external pressures have compelled museums to make public access and outreach an equal (and in some cases a greater) priority than collecting and preservation of objects' (McClellan, 2008: 155). They also raise serious questions about the institution's fundamental mission, and its role in society. Given this attention to public access, it is all the more striking how some museums have remained remarkably trenchant to the question of accommodating seating in galleries. At a time when governments increasingly present disability within the legal framework of civil rights, and with ‘universal access’ a social priority, it may seem odd to focus on this particular detail of museum experience. In many ways, museums have become increasingly accessible: raised braille signage appears in exhibition spaces, restroom access is clearly marked, and wheelchair ramps replace steps. Surprisingly, the problem of where to rest – and how this impacts habits of viewing – remains little discussed.

This is not a history of museum furnishing. All the same, we have too few discussions of museums, disability, and seating today; my first goal here is to discuss these issues – and their impact on visuality – as an impressionistic account. But I also want to examine how conventional approaches to museum seating draw on the rhetoric of modernist aesthetics and its suspicion of features – including seating – that distract from a museum's attempt to provide a pure autonomous interaction with the artwork. I would suggest that a particular antipathy towards seating has evolved in modernist museums. I refer specifically to the ideas of Alfred Barr, director of MoMA in New York from 1929–1943, and Kirk Varnedoe, curator at the same museum from 1988–2001. In his 1990 book, *A Fine Disregard*, Varnedoe seeks to expand our understanding of modern art: in order to become truly modern, artists must let go of moribund tradition. But the term ‘fine disregard’ can also be applied to the provision of seating within MoMA (see Figure 2). Amid the platitudes and practicalities, many of the decisions about seating in museums are driven by a similar modernist rhetoric – a set of attitudes that presumes and privileges a particular type of visual experience that even the able-bodied can find disabling.

The Disabling Museum

Over the years, I have become something of a connoisseur of museum seating. The only seat I could find at The National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, was in front of a short orientation film. At The Drawing Center,
New York, I arrived to find no seats at all; I had to sit outside on the street curb in order to take a break, staying just long enough to regain my composure, before rather laboriously returning to the gallery, then back to the curb to rest. I arrived at the Whitney Museum, New York, whose spacious galleries rarely accommodate seating of any kind, with low expectations. But the Whitney's

Figure 2 Massachusetts 2, © Walt Hubis, https://www.flickr.com/photos/walthubis/4406541940/in/photolist-7HoFp3-4NkKQ4-4pSn5g-aTKqki-aTKqbp-aTKreF-aTKrSH-aTKtaR-aTKsEn-aTKoKM-aTKsQk-aTKrVk-aTKrPV-aTKsTa-aTKqAM-aTKrHe-aTKpEB-aTKtkn-aTKqgt-aTKtFx-aTKs1T-aTKr1c-aTKt1P-aTKs52-aTKrF4-aTKtAF-aTKppR-aTKoG6-aTKqED-aTKrK4-aTKqdz-aTKskD-aTKrAH-aTKoZi-aTKpm2-aTKttB-aTKpxD-aTKp5i-aTKpSZ-aTKrvK-4kkuzZ-97935q-fkTa7C-63PWcJ-6xRNou-7ZzaRt-7v8KfU-o85Aj6-7FpE3w-pkV7Ui (CC BY 2.0).
exhibition for the deaf poet Joseph Grigely (‘White Noise’, 28 June – 9 September 2001) at the museum was a revelation. There, in the midst of a small inner gallery whose four walls were covered by the handwritten messages that Grigely often uses to communicate with others, I finally felt comfortable. The museum had placed a bench in the room, allowing visitors to linger over the post-it notes, scrawled paper napkins, and doodles on the backs of taxi receipts that covered all four of the gallery’s walls. Engulfed in this graphic shrine to Grigely’s disability, I began to understand another more fully: mine.

With this experience in mind, I have developed a more agile approach to viewing exhibitions: I walk into the room, make a quick calculation based on the sheer scale, size, and type of art on display, but especially the availability and placement of seating. On entering, I try to find the nearest seat. If the gallery has none, I quickly pass through, making a note of anything that interests me; I push forward, passing room after room in this manner. Some galleries arrange seating at intervals, sometimes placing benches every three or four rooms. For example, at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, buried deep in the museum, the European Sculpture Court can always be counted on for its park-like green metal chairs, while the surrounding galleries have none. One floor above, the museum has peppered its European painting galleries with heavy oak benches; reminiscent of church pews, these appear every three to four rooms. If I am lucky – and plan ahead – I can sit down and take stock. If I have passed something worth returning to – and not too far from the bench – I will wait until I am fully rested, and do a further calculation. What is the distance between the bench and the work that interested me? How tired am I, and how likely is it that I might exhaust myself returning to stand in a benchless room? My biggest fear is of being ‘stranded’, with no seats in sight. At the point when fatigue is overwhelming, my muscles simply stop working. No amount of concentration, no exertion of willpower can unfreeze them; I simply cannot move one foot in front of the other without falling. Facing this very real possibility, I must ask myself if it is worth returning and sitting on the floor of an art gallery? Would that disrupt other people’s viewing experiences? Is it worth the effort?

If I am lucky, and an exhibition provides some sort of seating, this equation works. At other exhibitions, however, I am simply out of luck; many exhibitions, like Counter Space (MoMA, 15 September 2010 – 2 May 2011), provide no seats at all. If they accommodate seating in the museum’s lobbies, but not in the show itself, the stakes are higher. I move quickly through the entire exhibition, hoping I can hold out until the end and remember what works to return to. And yet here is an even greater distance – the entire museum exhibition – to be retraced and the risk of exhaustion grows; not only must I recall the artworks I want to return to, but I also have to remember where in the exhibition they are. Often enough, I scale down my hopes and chalk the entire experience up to one more missed show.

**Modern Art’s Disregard**

The casual museum-goer may miss the connection, but experiences of museum fatigue – a concept that I will discuss in more detail shortly – and discomfort are
implicated in questions of art theory, the culture of display, and the 20th-century rhetoric of modernist aesthetics. The architecture of the modern museum is set up to deliver aesthetic experiences that cater to the ideal, super-fit, gallery-goer, where subjective corporeal sense is subsidiary to objective visual experience. But at MoMA, in particular, it is hard to forget curator Kirk Varnedoe’s notion of modern art’s ‘fine disregard’. Varnedoe’s argument reminds us of the swaggering virility that underlies modernism; his term refers to the legendary William Webb Ellis, whose ‘fine disregard of the rules’ of 19th-century English football paved the way for contemporary rugby and American football. This kind of rulelessness, Varnedoe (1990: 9) insists, underlies ‘what cultural innovation is all about’. As Varnedoe threads his ideas through an examination of modern art’s recent history, he also tries to answer the book’s subtitle and fundamental query ‘What Makes Modern Art Modern?’ His answer provides a revision of modern art’s origins. Artists like Degas, Gauguin and Van Gogh, Varnedoe argues, made individual decisions to attack old ways of doing and seeing things; the choice ‘to be an outsider within one’s own world to try new meanings for old forms, and attack old tasks with new means’ (p. 22) pushed modern art toward its most serious and enduring innovations.

Varnedoe’s critique is limited to fine art. He does not discuss curation or museum inclusiveness. Yet, in extending his ideas in a different direction, such a fine disregard for seating in museums suggests a significantly different kind of challenge. The more I began to notice how grudgingly unaccommodating modern art and design exhibitions were, the more I realized how they were disabling to us all. Moreover, my experiences at MoMA can be related to a continuing subtext just below the plainly stated arguments that spell out Varnedoe’s ideas on modern art.

This subtext caught the attention of many cultural critics. Journalist Hal Crowther praised Varnedoe’s ‘fine disregard’ as an invocation against ‘ferocious philistines’ who can drive art theory today (Crowther, 2005: 115). As the music journalist and critic Greil Marcus summarized Varnedoe’s ideas, he insisted that

… the determinant word here is less disregard – for rules, expectations, and so on – than fine. That is, we are being reassured that modern art remains art – and we are being reassured that it remains the province of the sort of people who for centuries have attended the Rugby School, or who sit on the boards of art museums. (Marcus, 2011: 124)

Inching back to charges of elitism, Marcus insists, ‘art remains the province of those fine enough to appreciate it on the terms on which it should be appreciated, not to mention those in a position to disregard the rules, as opposed to those who aren’t.’ ‘A Fine Disregard’ may refer to modernist artistic rupture, but it might also describe an attitude in which comfort and accommodation are mere afterthoughts to aesthetic experience.4
Fatigue in the Museum

The problem of museums, comfort, and viewing experience has been widely discussed and was even given a name, ‘museum fatigue’. Benjamin Gilman, an influential museologist who worked as secretary at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, popularized the term. Born into a wealthy banking clan, Gilman left the family business for graduate studies in psychology with Charles Sanders Peirce at Johns Hopkins University. Gilman returned to Massachusetts and taught briefly at Clark University, but began working at the MFA in 1893; he was joining a growing number of American museum professionals who tried to open museum doors to all classes of visitors. But, where colleagues like the Newark Museum’s Charles Dana stressed the importance of educational programs, Gilman aimed to enhance visitors’ aesthetic experiences. The well-read Bostonian aimed to make his museum accessible to all classes, and insisted on writing long, educational labels and opening the institution’s doors on Sundays, so that working-class visitors might come. Drawing on his own studies, Gilman used his 1918 treatise *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (1916) to argue that seating was essential to any museum-going experience; noting how tiring museum visits could be, Gilman took careful stock of what he called ‘museum fatigue’ (p. 251).5

Based on simple observation, Gilman (1916: 252) noticed that, ‘after a brief initial exertion’, the typical museum visitor who has nowhere to rest ‘will resign himself to seeing practically everything and by passing glance.’ Furthermore, Gilman noted,

the problem of the use of the museum by the public becomes a problem of inducing visitors to stay ... with a development in the seating accommodations of museum galleries, we may expect to see fewer wander gradually becoming exhausted and more spectators gradually becoming interested. (pp. 275–276)

He argued for the accommodation of seating throughout, including outfitting niches and bays with chairs and benches; ‘central vantage points from which to look about’ should contain seats, while ‘single exhibits must be arranged for study from seats set apart for that purpose.’ Even small vitrines or cases ‘demanding minute inspection’ should be outfitted with low stools that could be pulled out at a moment’s notice’. Gilman and others fostered a more efficient and comfortable viewing environment; at the same time, however, their ideas on gallery seating were becoming increasingly outdated.

Even during Gilman’s own tenure at the MFA, critics began to challenge his methodologies and assumptions.6 Basing his 1928 monograph on a series of empirical studies, the Yale psychologist Edward S Robinson took issue with some of Gilman’s findings, arguing that museum fatigue was as much psychological as physical (Robinson, 1928); in his own studies, Robinson found that visitors’ interest increased when viewing varied exhibitions, for instance, or when they were given pamphlets to read while visiting shows. As Robinson and his students would continue to research visitor experience for years to come, some museums...
made it a goal to attract and hold visitor attention and combat distraction. But museum fatigue was addressed in some museums and not others.

Barring Rest? An Aesthetic Remove

While museum trustees and professionals like Gilman urged the public to come into museums and rest, a modernist revolution in gallery space was already beginning to take shape. In the interwar years, the flagship site for this upheaval was New York’s MoMA, launched under the direction of the scholar Alfred Barr in 1929. The museum was founded with the resolve to show only works of ‘quality’, and set the highest standards for museums exhibiting modern art (Kantor, 2002: 214). A dedicated formalist, Barr believed in contemplation utterly freed ‘from subjectivity and its impure desire’. The museum was tailored to the specific wants of modernism, all the while fostering a ‘fine disregard’ for established aesthetic traditions – as well as established viewing habits – and issues of comfort and access were less important. Indeed, in this approach, curators may not be actively seeking to make visitors uncomfortable, but an assumption of bodily removal in museums like MoMA often ends in the same result.

This is part of the singular vision of Barr and a small group of associates who would shape attitudes toward museum display (and seating) for several generations to come, and remains the standard for modernist museums throughout the world. For his part, although trained by Paul J Sachs at Harvard University, Cambridge, Barr’s installation design was deeply influenced by his own experiences of the Bauhaus. In 1927, Barr traveled to Europe and fell under the spell of the German avant-garde and its ideology of ‘art into life’; the clean, functionalist vision propounded by the multi-disciplinary Bauhaus – as much a social mission as an exercise in aesthetics – was to influence the remainder of his life’s work. Barr was so attracted to the Bauhaus that he would write a thank you to the Bauhaus founder, Walter Gropius, years later, claiming ‘I regard the three days which I spent at the Bauhaus in 1927 as one of the most important incidents in my own education’ (Barr, 1938). The whitewashed walls and absence of ornament at the Dessau-based school were based on vanguard designs already taking shape in Russia and the Netherlands; Le Corbusier is associated with this approach in France, while members of the German Werkbund experimented with it as well. Taken together, they set forth a powerful aesthetic precedent for displaying modernist art and design.

For Barr, and the generations of museum specialists and audiences who were to follow, the perfect museum space would follow this simple and sparse aesthetic; this was what Brian O’Doherty would later call a perfect ‘white cube’ (O’Doherty, 2000). As O’Doherty observed, curators and the public alike found these sparse interiors to be inseparable from the experience of viewing art: barely furnished, austere interiors became the norm. They also suggested a kind of transcendence, freeing the museum-going experience from the realm of the everyday, and aiming to realize a
Kantian state of disinterested contemplation. Indeed, as the former student of Barr and notable curator and critic Katherine Kuh proposes, the museum offers us ‘islands of relief where we can study, enjoy, contemplate and experience emotional rapport with man’s finest man-made products’ (Kuh, 1969: 58). However, Kuh’s words account for intellectual, not bodily, relief. At MoMA, Alfred Barr and Kurt Varnedoe often approached art and curation very differently. But Barr’s ideas created the museum that Varnedoe would later direct. And both men shared a fundamental appreciation, not only for modernist art, but also for the institutions in which it was shown. Under Barr, the ‘fine disregard’ of curators led to further attempts to isolate their visitors’ encounters with art: introductory texts were dropped, and even prompts such as exhibition labels were, at best, considered only as an afterthought and at worst, an obvious distraction. Notably, the museum’s curatorial staff pushed aside a previous generation’s preference for exhibition design that enables wider public access. While ‘the primary purpose of the Museum is to help people enjoy, understand, and use the visual arts of our time’ (Barr, 1944: 14–15), in practice, MoMA became far less accessible than museums like Gilman’s Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This is not to say that Barr – or Varnedoe for that matter – never allowed seats into exhibition spaces. Both directors curated shows with benches. But seating in museums like MoMA was and remains a secondary consideration.

Alfred Barr’s Wheelchair

The absence of benches in gallery spaces may emerge from the logic of modern art, forming part of a larger ‘fine disregard’. But it also communicates a clear message: visitors are not meant to linger. Indeed, I term my approach to gallery going – which involves rapidly scanning an entire exhibition in order to then return for a more careful examination of selected works – ‘drive-by viewing’. This system of gallery going is, of course, subjective. But I wonder if, as Rees Leahy (2012) suggests, we should all join ‘a specific culture of spectatorship’, with a ‘precise set of socio-cultural coordinates’.

Of course, ‘drive-by viewing’ refers to the fast pace of viewership that a lack of seats implies, but it encompasses more than comfort and need. With no seating available, or at least near at hand, the implication is that visitors rush hurriedly through galleries; the spaces where seating is available are the places where visitors will linger. Intriguingly, museums like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as well as science and natural history museums, offer relatively plentiful seating. But modern art museums tend to avoid this approach, and this derives from their history; when MoMA’s permanent home opened in 1939, one critic observed, ‘Apparently, in the new museums, we shall be expected to stand up, look quickly and pass on. There are some chairs and settees, but the machine-like neatness of the rooms does not invite repose’ (McBride, 1975: 371). Writing some 40 years later, Brian O’Doherty experienced a similar effect: MoMA, he suggested, encouraged its visitors to feel like ‘trespassers’ (O’Doherty, 2000: 76).
If MoMA’s austere interiors tire even the most determined viewers, it’s all the more curious to discover that Barr himself experienced museum fatigue; he would regularly use a wheelchair when installing large exhibitions. Barr’s use of a wheelchair has received little critical interest, but was widely known among his circle; it is commonly cited as evidence of his unique devotion to his calling as curator. In her 2003 biography of Barr, Sybil Gordon Kantor describes how he ‘built a reputation for showmanship in installing exhibitions for which, wearing dark glasses to protect his weak eyes, he would exhaust himself – finishing the job by propelling himself around in a wheelchair’ (p. 358). A second biographer, Alice Goldfarb Marquis, mentions the wheelchair was a necessary precaution, if only ‘to save wear and tear on his feet’ (Marquis, 1986: 308).

These stories suggest the ambivalence around museum access and seating accommodation at MoMA. In recent years, for example, the museum has begun
to collect wheelchairs – like Bob Hall’s 1986 *Racing Wheelchair* (which featured in the 1989 exhibition *Designs for Independent Living*), and Kazuo Kawasaki’s *Carna Folding Wheelchair* (1989) – as part of its collection, for exhibition and preservation, not use. Furthermore, the museum’s in-house design team has boldly created its own variation of the *International Symbol of Disability*; at MoMA, visitors are directed towards restrooms, door access, and other amenities by a streamlined stick figure sitting on a half-circle symbol, which denotes the wheelchair itself. More recently, the museum has exhibited a different variation of the symbol, a figure reworked by the *Accessible Icon* project. If you venture into the museum’s design galleries, as I did on a recent visit, it’s possible to see this symbol mounted on the walls, represented on parking signs, and presented in photographs depicting the symbol in various urban settings (see Figure 3).

Although progress has been made for disabled access more broadly, what visitors will not find in MoMA, however, is an abundance of seating. I am not suggesting that the museum ignores this issue: in recent years, seating has been donated, bought and sometimes even commissioned; notably, MoMA has introduced *Unity*, a series of modular, amoeba-shaped benches that can be reconfigured to fit a wide range of spaces. I encountered *Unity* in the Museum’s main floor spaces and lobbies, but was left disappointed; the new seating is not located throughout the museum but only in designated, high-volume areas like the ground floor lobbies. As I made my way up towards the special exhibition galleries, nothing had changed. Once inside the museum’s actual exhibition spaces, room after room, there was nowhere to rest.

Reconsidering Barr’s use of the wheelchair, I wonder whether he was inadvertently teaching us a lesson, not in art criticism, but rather in art viewing. Even Benjamin Gilman, who advocated for more comfortable museums, believed that the best solution for museum fatigue might be the ‘tabouret’ or small portable stool that could be issued to visitors on entering the institution. But the wheelchair itself would seem a more comfortable alternative, even to the most able-bodied of guests. William Lieberman, who began working as Barr’s assistant in 1945 before moving on to become the chief curator of 20th-century art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, would often boast about how Barr had taught him to see. As he put it, ‘Alfred created me’ (quoted in Larson, 1986: 40). In a 1986 interview with *New York Magazine*, he also revealed that Barr taught him how to sit. Stating rather wearily, Lieberman boldly declared that he often ‘likes to sit in a wheelchair’. But this had little to do with disability; instead, it allowed him ‘to hang art’. The wheelchair, he claimed, afforded the rest he needed ‘in order to think’ (p. 48).

The ‘eye’ of vanguard artists and museum curators may be part of a broader ‘fine disregard’. But Barr, Lieberman, and generations of curators before and since would, I believe, have no problem agreeing when Helen Rees Leahy (2012: np) suggests, ‘The eye of the spectator was always attached to a body.’ Moreover, as Rees Leahy continues, this body ‘was often tired, uncomfortable or standing in the “wrong” position’. Did Barr and Lieberman finally find the ‘right’ position – from the vantage point of a wheelchair? Or is sitting itself the most natural position for really, truly viewing? Or rather, will curators and visitors ever find the ‘right’ position? And what, I wonder, about the rest of us?
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Notes

1. These include, but are not limited to, Carol Duncan (1995), Andrew McLellan (2003), Peter Vergo (1989) and Alan Wallach (1998).
2. For example, in ‘Museum Manners’ (2007), Constance Classen cites a series of letters, journals and other reports from the early modern era to argue that museums were not always considered ‘inviolable and untouchable’. More extensively, in Art Museums and Touch (2010), Fiona Candlin explores how fine art became ocular-centric, specifically examining how touch was excluded from museums themselves and noting how audience behavior and experience changed as well.
3. A rare example is Helen Rees Leahy’s Museum Bodies (2012).
4. The history of gallery seating is yet to be written, but we are left with a number of intriguing insights from gallery-goers who attended the first public museums. Once housed in private palaces or homes, the treasures of Renaissance collectors began to be displayed in studios or cabinets like the Federico de Montefeltro’s mid15th-century Urbino Studiolo, which were often conceived as spaces for study and reflection appropriate for humanist scholars; these rooms were furnished with benches, chairs and tables similar to a private library today (Findlen, 1996: 112–113). By the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the private collections of Europe were more and more frequently housed in large halls or galleria like those found in the 16th- and 17th-century Uffizi or Borghese museums; these vast spaces were conceived as more social spaces, and better suited to courtly sociability and personal status. As Rees Leahy (2012: np) discusses, these corridors were less likely to offer seating and were instead designed to keep viewers moving, and even went so far as to develop a measured ‘rhythm of walking and looking’. The British Museum was officially opened to the public in 1759, but visitors had to apply for free entry in advance, were assigned entry at seemingly random times, and were grouped together into fast-moving walking tours, run by museum guards. As one disgruntled 18th-century visitor reports:

   If a man spends two minutes in a room, in which are a thousand things to demand his attention, he cannot find time to bestow on them a glance a piece. When our leader opens the door of another apartment, the silent language of that action is, come along.

Discouraged from asking the names of artists, forced to condense their entry into 30-minute visits, and wrangled through the museum's halls by impervious guides, few museum guests had the opportunity to even worry about seating.
5. Gilman was so concerned with museum fatigue that he authored an essay on the subject in Scientific Monthly, and later republished parts of it in his 1918 treatise Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method.
6. Stephen Bitgood (2013: 21), for example, notes that Gilman’s study ‘was anything but an objective examination of “museum fatigue” because of his biased procedure of promoting the one participant to do whatever it takes to read exhibit labels while photos were being taken.’
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