



Chapter 1

Artistic Interventions in Museums: Problematizing the museum and its collections

Introdução ao Capítulo

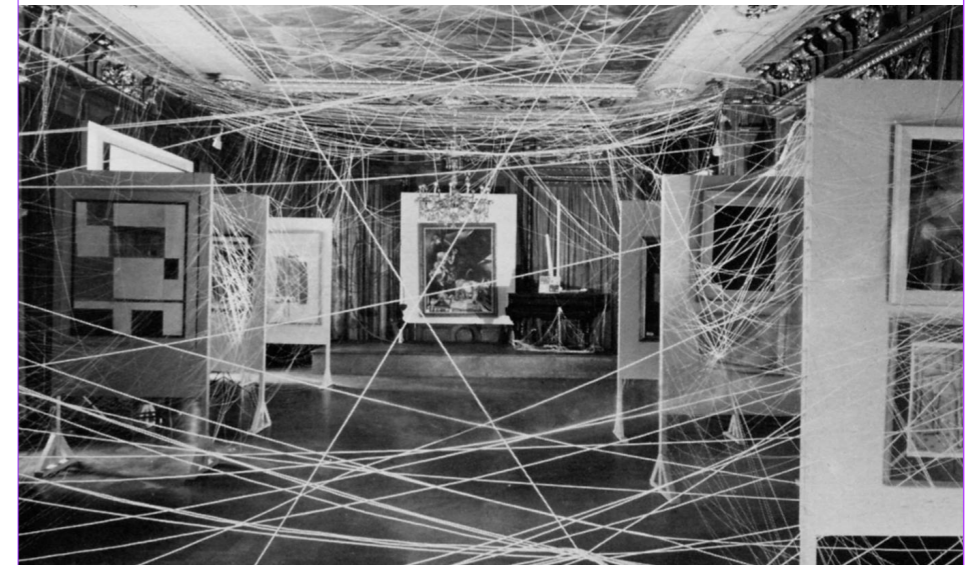
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Miles of String

Artist: Marcel Duchamp
Location: New York, USA
Date: 1942
Museum?

In 1942, André Breton invited the artist Marcel Duchamp to participate in a retrospective exhibition of surrealist art in New York. For the “First Papers of Surrealism” exhibition, Duchamp presented an installation made of strings of twine hanging across the exhibition space. ‘Miles of String’ had a significant impact at the time because it created an entire atmosphere of surrealism and mystery, intervening in how the audience would perceive the other works that composed the exhibition and the exhibition space as a whole. Considering that this exhibition took place in the 1940s, one must ponder how radical it is for an artist to fill an exhibition with strings that “obstruct the passage and contemplation of other works” and to consider this as art. Nevertheless, the string installation was not the only reason the exhibition generated so much attention. As part of the work, Duchamp ensured that children were present during the opening of the exhibition.



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Descrição da Imagem

Six boys dressed in baseball, basketball, and football uniforms were present during the exhibition's opening, playing and tossing balls among themselves. Six girls were also present, playing games like jump rope and hopscotch. The children were instructed to continue playing throughout the event and, if questioned, were to inform that they were playing under Marcel Duchamp's instructions. With the collaboration of the curator, Breton, the artist's intention was for the audience to genuinely exert effort to see the exhibited works, creating a situation entirely different from what an audience accustomed to visiting museums and galleries encounters when attending an art exhibition and highlighting the Surrealist movement's interest in childhood.

Credits: EM FALTA



Raid the Icebox

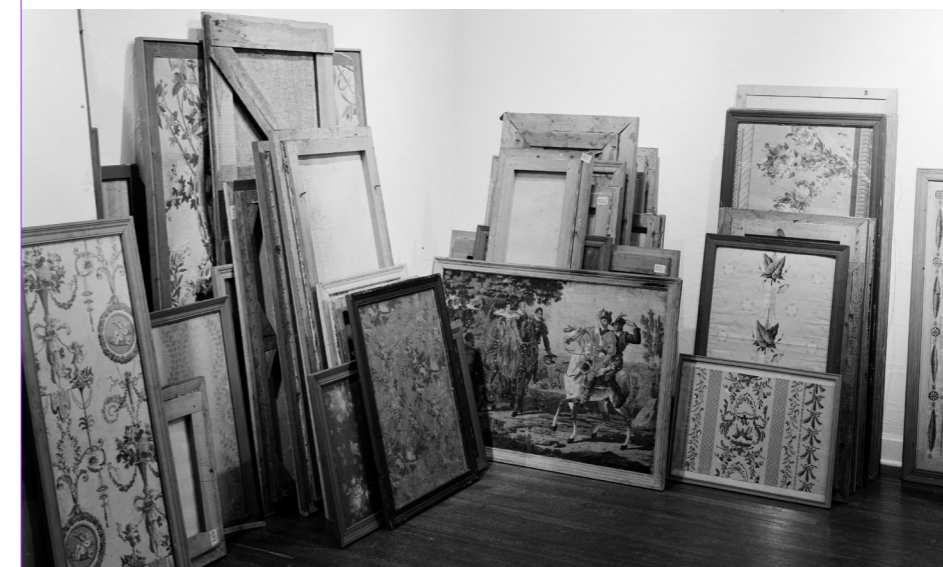
Artist: Andy Warhol

Museum: RISD Museum Houston at Rice University's Institute for the Arts

Location: Providence, Rhode Island, USA

Date: 1969

In 1969, the RISD Museum invited Andy Warhol to organise an exhibition with the museum's collection. The project, titled "Raid the Icebox I," was one of the earliest known international experiments in which a contemporary artist intervened in a museum space, using the pieces that make up its collection to generate new interpretations of the museum and its collection. Jean and Dominique Menil, a collector couple who promoted the exhibition, came up with the idea to invite the artist during a visit to the RISD Museum's storage area. Warhol was invited to act as a curator, but it becomes clear that his curatorial gesture was still an artistic one. This artistic gesture was primarily manifested through the reorganisation of the objects in the exhibition. Shoeboxes, old auction catalogues, hatboxes, and other objects considered irrelevant and non-"museum-worthy" were displayed side by side with works



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by renowned artists. Paintings by Cézanne, Rodin, and Degas suddenly found themselves alongside ordinary objects and forged paintings. Instead of being hung on the walls, the works were displayed without any consideration for their formal characteristics, leaning against the wall, as they might be stored in a museum that ignores necessary preservation measures. This reorganisation, or rather, the lack of reorganisation in the exhibition, constituted a radical act of reevaluating aesthetic values, and as a result, it challenged the values by which museums and the history of art judge and analyse works and collections.

Credits: Courtesy of the RISD Museum, Providence, RI



Mining the Museum

Artist: Fred Wilson

Museum: Maryland Historical Society in the United States

Location: Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Date: 1992–1993

“Mining the Museum” is an installation by the American artist Fred Wilson, presented in February 1993 at The Contemporary and the Maryland Historical Society museums in Baltimore. The Contemporary Museum, with its mission to explore the connections between contemporary art and the contemporary world, invited the artist to work with the permanent collection of a local museum. Wilson accepted the invitation and chose to work with the MHS collection. The artist, who has Afro-American and Caribbean heritage, clearly addresses the colonial history of the United States of America. “Mining the Museum” highlights how the curatorial practice of the museum significantly influences how museum collections are interpreted by the public. While Wilson had previously worked in other museums through educational initiatives and had collaborated with museums as a curator, this was the first time the artist created a piece for a specific institution. “Mining the Museum” employed exhibition techniques to offer reinterpretations of the museum’s own collection. For example, in “Modes of Transport,” a section of the museum’s per-



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manent exhibition dedicated to transportation throughout history, a Ku Klux Klan hood was placed inside an antique baby carriage. This provocative juxtaposition allows the audience to understand that in the past, during the time when that baby carriage was used, racism and oppression of Black individuals were entirely accepted and perpetuated within American society. Another example: The museum's numismatic collection displayed in a showcase was added to a whip used for torturing enslaved people. Wooden colonial armchairs and chairs were arranged toward a cross, also used for whipping enslaved Black individuals. In these two examples, domestic objects from white American families were simply presented in a way that is unsettling due to what becomes evident.

Credits: © Fred Wilson, courtesy Pace Gallery

