

The Museum of **Neue Art**

created by **Nature**
cultivated by Hope
curated by You

Submission For the 2024 Golden Cobra Challenge

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Introduction

Welcome to the Museum of Neue Art (MONA)! We are an inside-out, perpetually regenerating operation, and we rely upon you to curate our galleries. The creative impulses of Nature Furnish the materials For our collection; meanwhile, you supply the magic that liberates the otherwise overlooked works of wonder that she provides.

At the heart of MONA is a spirit of hope—an optimism that we all harbor the creative imagination to see our world in new and renewing ways. At MONA, you are not simply a guest: Your vision and insight conjure up our museum, bringing it into being.

What do you need?

Before opening the Museum, gather the Following:

- One or more small- to medium-sized picture Frames. These Frames can be improvised affairs built by duct-taping, lashing, or gluing together whatever cool sticks you have at hand. Rulers, Fallen branches, dowels, or discarded cardboard rolls will do the trick.
- A pack of stickers and/or sticky notes with sufficient space on them to write a few words and phrases
- Pens
- Cell phones and/or laptop computers

Location

The Museum can exist virtually anywhere you choose. Before proceeding with your visit, ensure that the area is safe and accessible to everyone. Since Nature is our creative source, a convenient, nearby, outdoor space is ideal. Check in with your guests to ensure that they feel secure moving through the location. Make modifications or relocate as needed so that all can participate.

MONA contains Flexible virtual and hybrid galleries (see “MONA Unbound” below), allowing guests to view and display artworks remotely and ensuring that all can safely participate. If choosing an indoor space and curating in person, limit numbers so that guests can maintain a safe distance.



Capacity

The Museum has no set occupancy requirements or restrictions. It can accommodate as few as a single, solitary guest wandering its halls. Its upper limit is theoretically limitless.

Most find a group of 3-8 to be a good opening crowd. That number can wax and wane during open hours according to the desires, schedules, and whims of our guests.

Safety and Security

Public exhibits and galleries are welcoming for guests of all ages, identities, and persuasions. Both museum staff and guests share a responsibility for maintaining the friendly environment. Should you witness something that threatens to disrupt our mission, please declare “Pause” and alert a museum staff member of the situation.

Prior to opening, museum personnel should acquaint themselves with standard safety procedures such as the X-Card by John Stavropoulos (<http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg>) or the Script Change Toolbox by Beau Sheldon (<https://thoughty.itch.io/script-change>). The role of Security Guard (see below) invests someone with a special charge to bolster the inviting, welcoming culture that is our trademark.

While our public galleries contain subject matter, topics, and themes safe for general audiences, Nature erupts with adult material fit to satisfy the most adventurous of tastes. Those interested in exploring more erotic, irreverent, or spicy offerings should feel free to venture into the museum's special private exhibits. Before opening those doors, please gather your intrepid party together to establish desired themes and to set acceptable lines and veils. Everyone should consent to the gallery parameters in advance, and curation should proceed in a suitably discreet fashion.

Off the Legal Grid

According to the U.S. Copyright Act, "To qualify as a work of 'authorship' a work must be created by a human being. . . . The U.S. Copyright Office will not register works produced by nature, animals, or plants."

MONA begins where the legal road hits this dead end. We affirm and embrace the products of all origins and types—without prejudice to the presumed sentience or classification of our artists. In our galleries, the splendor of a sunbeam twinkling across a wet leaf and the vibrant graffiti adorning a park bench are equal products of creative genius.

Hours of Operation and Admission

MONA is always at hand, and admission is free of charge.

To open the Museum, someone dramatically lifts a picture frame overhead and declares, "*Welcome to the Museum of Neue Art—created by Nature, cultivated by Hope, curated by You!*" With this incantation, MONA is summoned. Those currently inhabiting the space instantly become the staff and guests of the Museum. Everything in the surroundings becomes charged with the magical potential to become a new work of art.

If unaware bystanders seem intrigued by the proceedings, invite them into the gallery to observe and participate. With a brief orientation, anyone can take part in a museum tour on the fly. But there is no pressure. MONA is filled with guests who don't even realize that they are treading on our grounds. People may enter and leave our exhibits freely as they desire.

*"And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things . . ."*
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"



When you wish to cease operations, lift up a picture frame and declare, "*The Museum of Neue Art is temporarily closed. Please come and curate us again!*" Then, slowly lower the frame. This brings the viewing experience to an end. But MONA always stands at the ready, prepared for the next group of guests to enter its space—wherever and whenever that might be.

Roles

Roles are optional. It is perfectly fine for someone to wander MONA's galleries as themselves. It can be fun, however, to mask your real identity and to experience the Museum under the guise of one of the following:

- The Security Guard: They sincerely want the museum to remain safe for the guests (see Safety and Security above), and they are highly effective in that area. At the same time, they are sticklers for a host of unwritten museum rules which they don't fully remember or understand.
- The Art Critic: They can be stuffy, prudish, flamboyant, or hip as you so choose.
- The Museum Skeptic: They question whether these works can even be classified as art. They spout silly, dismissive statements like "I could do that!" and "That looks like a child's drawing!" They become nervous and evasive when asked to examine their assumptions.
- The Aspiring Artist: They are hoping to gain inspiration for their own work. They are enthusiastic, though they harbor doubts about their adequacy.
- The Lost Guest: They are trying to find a game convention, a meditation retreat, a business meeting, or some other important venue. They are confused about what they have walked into.
- The Federal Investigator: They have been tipped off that MONA is engaged in copyright violations, forgeries, and false pretenses. They are determined to get to the bottom of these suspicions.
- The Director of a Rival Museum: They are deeply concerned by the potential rivalry that MONA presents and are assessing whether their fears are valid.
- The Art Collector: They are interested in acquiring dazzling works to increase their status.
- The Innocent: They are intrigued by what they see, but lack any preexisting knowledge of art. They call attention to the obvious—which sometimes leads to humor, sometimes to insight.
- Another role of your own creation.

"Nature is like one of those line drawings of a tree that are puzzles for children: Can you find hidden in the leaves a duck, a house, a boy, a bucket, a zebra, and a boot?"

—Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

How does this work?

The core activity of the Museum of Neue Art involves identifying, discussing, and curating new works for its collection. Here are the steps:

1. Someone holds aloft a picture frame and declares, "Beauty is in the mind of the beholder." This incantation designates them as the temporary Curator of MONA. The Curator can be anyone involved, regardless of whether they are playing a role (see above) or playing as themselves.
2. The Curator identifies an interesting, beautiful, or otherwise notable image in their surroundings. Holding the frame at comfortable arms length, they use it to bound the image. Looking through the frame, they briefly discuss the merits, qualities, and significance of the artwork they have identified. In cases where subjects are kinetic or ephemeral (for example, living creatures or objects in motion), you may need to take a photo or short video to preserve the artwork.
3. Continuing to hold the frame, the Curator invites others to view the bounded image (or their photo or video capture).

Each should briefly offer their initial observations, reactions, and insights.

4. After all have had a chance to view the image through the frame, the group holds a brief discussion about this newly discovered work.

Topics might include the

image's symbolism, its relationship to an artistic movement, its genre, its provenance, its unique traits, or any other matter deemed relevant.

5. The final stage of the discussion focuses on assigning a title and credits to the image. Most works in our Museum are produced by diverse hands and forces, both visible and invisible. When discussing who and what has brought the piece into being, do so without constraining yourself to preconceptions about authorship or genius. The bird who unwittingly contributed its molted feather to an image deserves as much credit as the unknown couple who carved

their initials on the park bench. If consensus about the title or the credits cannot be achieved, the Curator makes the decision.

6. Write the title and credits on a sticker and affix to the Frame. Invite everyone to silently appreciate the work for a final moment. Then, the Curator asks, "Next Curator, where art thou?" This ends their tenure. The Frame passes hands to another guest, and the tour proceeds to the next image under the tutelage of this new Curator.



MONA Unbound: Asynchronous, Online, and Solo Options

For **asynchronous online experiences**, set up a server on Discord and provide each guest a text channel to use as their designated gallery. Each guest is the Curator of their own gallery. Curators frame and photograph newly discovered works from their respective locales and then post their bounded images to their galleries. Steps 3-5 occur through the text channel. To push the process along, agree to deadlines for posting the images, providing commentary, and deciding upon titles and credits.

For **synchronous online showings**, create a Discord server and set up a voice and a text channel. Each locale becomes a gallery of the Museum, and new works are framed and then displayed either through a live video feed and/or through a posted image. The different galleries may be occupied by single guests or by groups as you desire. Continue to rely on the incantations and organizing, sequenced procedures outlined in "How does this work?" (see above). These will help to manage the activities and discussions online just as they do when visiting a gallery in person. Encourage use of the Museum's text channel to facilitate broad participation across the people in different galleries. To provide opportunities for everyone to participate, consider naming a temporary Museum Facilitator who can help to ensure that nobody is left out of the online proceedings. This role is especially useful for larger groups, and it also helps to acclimate new guests who have dropped in after a curation session has already begun.

You are invited to walk and **curate our galleries alone**. If you wish, you can record your discoveries using a Discord server, on Instagram, or through a suitable platform of your choice. You may wish to include your musings (whether written, spoken, or videoed) concerning the aesthetic merits and meaning of the works you have liberated.

Acknowledgments and Inspiration

My friend Robin Grenz unknowingly sparked the idea for this game. It was she who brought my attention to the so-called "Monkey Selfie" dispute. The arguments in that case involve the macaque named Naruto, photographer David Slater, PETA, Wikimedia Commons, *Techdirt*, and the Ninth Circuit Court. They have given me curiously rich soil for reflecting on creativity, nature, art, inspiration, and authorship.

Virginia Woolf's "Death of a Moth," Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* served as my mental playlist during this ludic sojourn.

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