

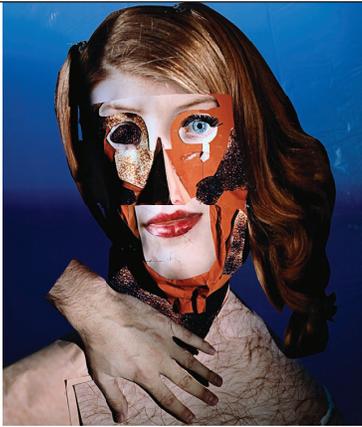
Private Eyes

By RACHEL WOLFF

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CULTURE



Private Eyes

Let art professionals take you on a customized tour of the museums and galleries BY RACHEL WOLFF

It was a whirlwind of a Friday morning—two museums, two galleries, all in precisely two hours. We examined miniature paintings at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, perused the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s highly underrated Asian holdings and learned about contemporary artists living and working in Iran today. Needless to say, it was an enriching and educational way to learn about art.

With more than 500 galleries and dozens of museums and cultural institutions, the New York City art world can be hard to navigate—even for locals. That’s where Art Smart comes in. Founded by Columbia University-trained art historian Judith Walsh, Art Smart offers private, customizable tours of New York City galleries and museums, led by a crop of well-trained doctoral students from schools around the city.

Provide a theme, interest or venue, and Walsh and her associates will devise a plan of attack. “We’re interested in connecting to what our clients are passionate about—not just in the art world, but in general,” Walsh says. “We want to know: What can we surprise you with?”

In terms of venues, the spread-out postindustrial Chelsea gallery district is a favorite for customers, as are the larger and harder to navigate museums. “Some people hire us just to break down the Met,”

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Walsh says. Art Smart also concocts a handful of tours in conjunction with new hot shows. Up now: “Digging up the Dirt: Inspired by the Natural World,” with stops at Georgia O’Keeffe: *Abstraction* at the Whitney Museum of American Art and Urs Fischer’s literally groundbreaking installation at the New Museum. They also offer a Paris-themed art tour that takes guests by the newly-installed *Monet’s Water Lilies* at the Museum of Modern Art, as well as a new show at the Met dedicated to the French artist Jean-Antoine Watteau.

The typical Art Smart tour is a jam-packed two hours, though they can curate longer and shorter programs, depending on your wants and needs. Tickets are bought in advance to save time, and Walsh has schooled her team in all the side entrances, back stairwells and peak hours to ensure optimum flow. Expect VIP treatment at some of the city’s galleries, and, thanks to Walsh’s long-standing connections, the occasional behind-the-scenes tour. ■

OPPOSITE: Daniel Gordon’s *Red Headed Woman*, now on display at MoMA. ABOVE: Judith Walsh explains the history of both the artwork and the artists to clients. BELOW: Monet’s *Water Lilies*, currently at MoMA.

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