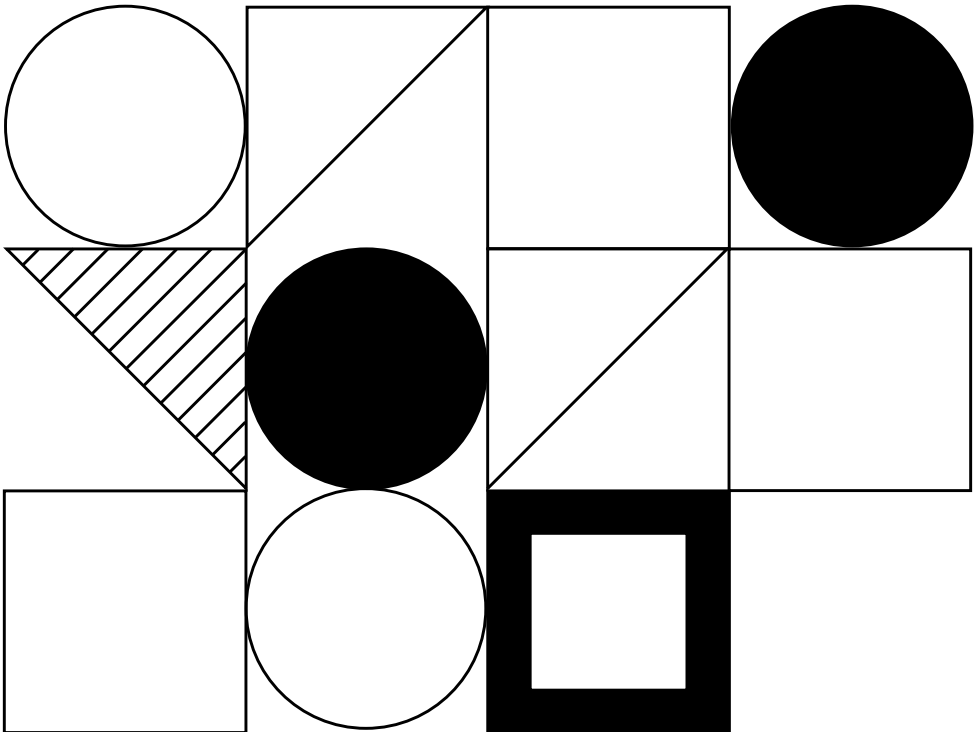


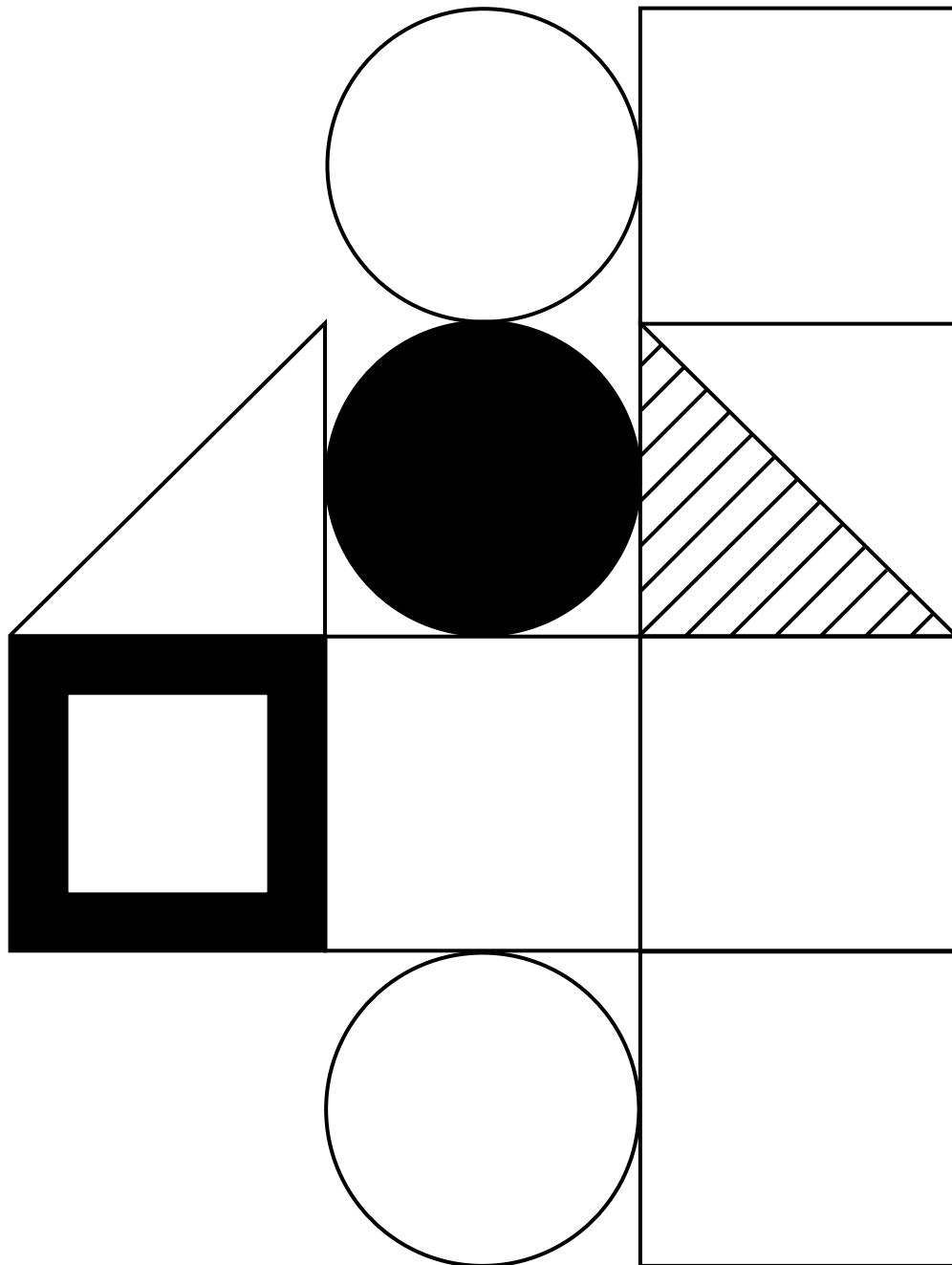


ASSOCIATION
FOR ART HISTORY

HOW TO FIND GREAT GALLERIES AND EXHIBITIONS

(AND WHAT TO DO WHEN
YOU GET THERE)





INTRODUCTION

Museums and galleries are important places for us to see and experience art, and in doing so they help us understand more about ourselves, the world around us and our place within it.

Great collections and exhibitions do more than that though. They also allow us to understand more about other people, other ideas, other times, and other places. They help us think about art, how it is made and what it means. These questions help us understand the *who, where, when, how* and *what* of art, but also the *why* and *for whom*.

This introduction to how to find great galleries and exhibitions (and what to do when you get there) is intended to help you think about, with and through the artworks you encounter. We want you to connect with new concepts, open up new areas of enquiry, but more than anything we want to help you to think about art and its histories in new and exciting ways.

The guide is divided into four main sections that cover why art and art history matter, how to find museums, galleries and other art spaces, some suggestions on how to get the most out of your visit, and ways in which you can develop your interests.

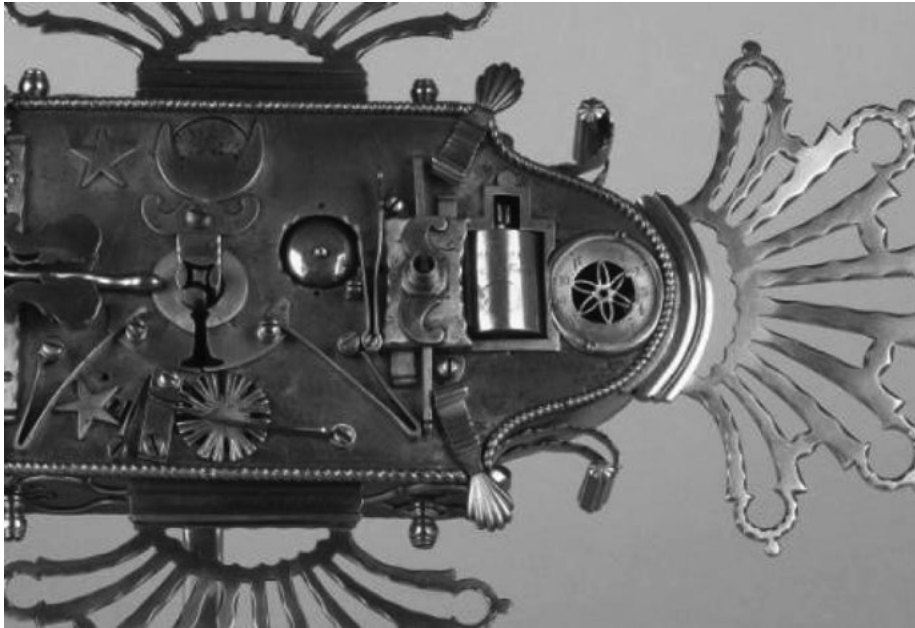
A work of art exists only when the spectator has looked at it.

Marcel Duchamp

At the end of the guide you'll find a list of links to useful websites which are also highlighted throughout. There's a downloadable version of this guide available on our website where you'll also be able to find more resources over the coming months.

Our huge thanks go to Jorella Andrews of the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London for writing this guide and for letting us share her insights with you.

CASE STUDY



A friend once dragged me to an [ironwork museum](#). 'You've got to be joking', I protested. But as soon as I stepped inside I was mesmerized, particularly by a collection of old, beautifully crafted locks and keys. Many were exceptionally ornate as well as mechanically complex (art and engineering were intertwined). They evoked intrigue and secrecy: the need to evade theft, surveillance and other dangers; the urgency to keep safe what was considered to be precious. Poetic as well as practical, they also evoked metaphors of hiddenness, revelation and surprise. Today, as a teacher and researcher working in the areas of art and philosophy, these objects and themes still play a central role in terms of shaping my ideas. I also see them as metaphorical for our experiences of learning: it often takes time and careful looking and thinking to unlock a difficult or unfamiliar topic.

HOW TO FIND GREAT GALLERIES AND EXHIBITIONS (AND WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET THERE)

Jorella Andrews, Goldsmiths, University of London

GREAT GALLERIES AND EXHIBITIONS ...

Can connect you with new ideas and current affairs

The aim of great galleries and exhibitions — whether large or small, publically-acclaimed or obscure, and whether historical or contemporary in terms of their content — is to focus attention on issues, ideas (including political ideas), trends and movements that may be important and insightful for us today: issues and ideas that are worth spreading!

Can help you identify and develop unique interests, knowledge and skills

Galleries and exhibitions — including ones you don't think you will like! — can lead you towards sets of interests you might not otherwise discover and help you develop existing ones. These might be in art, but also in science, technology, popular culture, music, writing, ecology, the entertainment industry, travel, ideas, and much more. Exhibitions, including art exhibitions, reference and reflect on diverse fields of human endeavour.

Can help you shape your own thinking and learning

Wherever you live (in an urban, suburban, rural, even remote setting, or you might be on holiday) and whether or not you are currently receiving a formal education (school, college or university, evening classes, etc.) visiting galleries and exhibitions can help you direct your own ongoing learning and develop independence of thought. This is important in our highly mediated world in which we are constantly, and often surreptitiously, being 'told' or 'shown' what and how to think, feel, and act.

What's more, many great galleries and exhibitions are free and many also have well developed, free online resources on offer: image collections, information, podcasts and videos, articles, blogs, online courses, and virtual exhibitions. By way of example, see the range of resources available just on the [V&A website](#). (You will see from this website that the V&A is no longer only London-based; among recent developments are the [V&A in Dundee](#) and at the [Design Society, Shekou, China](#).)

Can connect you with one or more 'communities of shared interest'

Galleries and exhibitions can inspire you to ask questions of yourself and others that you might not otherwise ask and can be a first step in connecting you with 'communities' of people, from different times, places and backgrounds, who have congregated around a common enthusiasm. These people have a history of sharing their differing observations and experiences in many ways including books, blogs, essays, artworks, experiments, exhibitions (of course!), talks, discussion groups, workshops, documentaries, and more. Such contexts of debate can be challenging, but whether you get actively involved yourself or decide to familiarize yourself with them from an interested distance, they open up new horizons: a reminder, too, that real learning nearly always involves having our minds changed about something.

FINDING GREAT GALLERIES AND EXHIBITIONS

Start where you are

Online art maps such as the [Art Fund Art Map](#) are great resources. They can help you discover galleries and exhibitions in your own locality and elsewhere. In many cases, art maps include links to specific gallery websites where you can find out more. You might also like to try the [Art Monthly: London Gallery Map](#). If you live in less urban areas you may not have as many obvious gallery and exhibition options, but there may be alternative, do-it-yourself, or pop-up art initiatives taking place in which you can get personally involved (see the 'Look for exhibitions everywhere' entry opposite).

Consult exhibition listings

Check out listings in community newspapers and magazines as well as published 'what's on' guides and look out for notices in your local library or in shop and cafe windows. Read reviews in the local and national press (these are usually also available online). And of course there is word of mouth.

Look for exhibitions everywhere

Think about moving between: **(1)** big public galleries (whether the [Tate](#), which is based in London, Liverpool and St Ives, or the [National Galleries Scotland](#), the [National Museum Cardiff](#), or [National Museums Northern Ireland](#)); **(2)** commercial galleries where you will find a lot of great contemporary art. These might be small local businesses or international enterprises (like [Hauser & Wirth](#), with galleries in London, Somerset, New York and other global cities). Do be aware that some commercial galleries are closed at weekends. These galleries can feel a bit intimidating from the outside but do take the plunge and go in; staff are usually very open to answering questions if approached; **(3)** independent, university -and charity-based spaces (like the [Freud Museum](#) in London, [Compton Verney](#) in Warwickshire, [Kettles Yard](#) in Cambridge, the [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#), and [The Shetland Gallery](#), Britain's most northerly art gallery); and **(4)** alternate, informal, or pop-up spaces which might be artist run open studios, art fairs, specialist archives, projects in parks or other public or unusual spaces. In London, these range from ventures like [Art on the Underground](#) to [Tate Exchange](#) (Tate Modern) where participatory, shorter term projects take place. Street art, including graffiti, is incredibly rich and varied: see for instance work by [Retna](#) or Rachel Sussman's [Sidewalk Kintsukuroi](#) project. Commercial outlets, major brands and businesses also often collect art, collaborate with artists and art foundations, and hold exhibitions (I still recall with pleasure when [Burberry](#) celebrated their autumn/winter 2017 collection with the exhibition 'Henry Moore: Inspiration & Process', a collaboration with the [Henry Moore Foundation](#)). Try picking a relatively small geographical area and aim to find and visit as many conventional and unconventional spaces of display as you can.



Follow up on existing interests

If you are interested in a specific topic (this need not be immediately art-related) or if, as an artist or viewer, you are interested in a particular medium or process — involving paint, metal, stone, glass, paper, or detritus (rubbish) and recycling, for instance — then use this as a prompt for selecting exhibitions and visiting specialist museums or archives. Likewise, follow up on topics, artists, writers or researchers of interest to you — you may discover permanent or temporary exhibitions, collections or archives dedicated to them that you can access online or visit in person (in some cases you may need to phone or email in advance and make an appointment).

Look near — and far

You can also get a sense of what is happening in other places, from as far afield as Sydney, Kabul and Seoul, via blogs and other online sites. See for instance the online journal [Art Radar: Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond](#). Also check out the [Galleries Now: Worldwide Exhibitions and Art Galleries](#) art map. (Note the dearth of references in this resource to galleries and exhibitions in Africa).

MAKING THE MOST OF EXHIBITIONS

Take an independent route through

Both physical and virtual galleries and exhibitions use a variety of strategies to direct the attention of their visitors perceptually, aesthetically, and conceptually. These include decisions about how works are positioned and prioritized within a given space (which works will be seen first?), questions of size and scale, the information and ideas that are made available by means of exhibition and image titles, texts, handouts and catalogues, and of course audio or interactive electronic exhibition guides. Notice all of this, but also pay attention to how you are navigating, or would like to navigate, the space. What is attracting your attention? What connections are you making? How does this compare with the navigational prompts offered by the exhibition organizers?

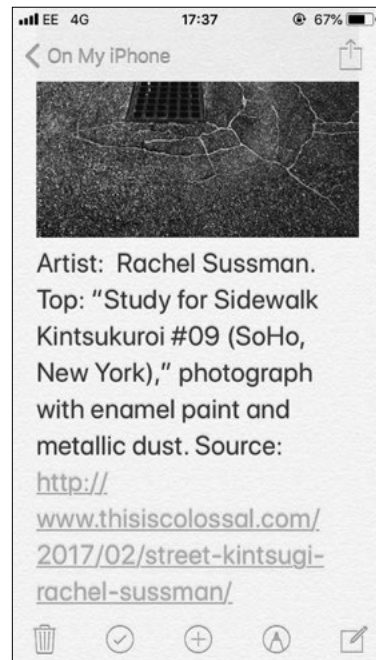
Less is often more

It is easy to get overwhelmed or over-saturated when visiting exhibitions. Don't feel you have to look at absolutely everything with the same level of intensity; often it's good to get an overall sense of an exhibition and then to spend longer with just one or two examples or in one particular section of the display.

Document your visit

If you don't already do so, keep an exhibitions notebook — I like using the 'Notes' App on my phone because I can insert photos and videos as well as notes and easily add further material or thoughts later on. You can also use the Notes App (or indeed Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, etc.) to create your own versions of what the art critic John Berger called 'Pictorial Essays' (see his 1972 book *Ways of Seeing*). In this way you are effectively creating personalized exhibition catalogues. These documents need not be extensive; they could be short, impressionistic, or to the point, like memos.

When visiting exhibitions, pick up whatever free exhibition documentation happens to be available — this can be annotated and also photographed and incorporated into your electronic exhibition notebooks. Ask gallery or exhibition staff whether photography is allowed within the exhibition space for reference purposes. Often this is fine provided you don't use a flash. If you are in a hurry and a lot of textual material is incorporated into an exhibition you can photograph some of it and read it more carefully later. When documenting exhibitions, don't just focus on the works themselves but remember to make notes about the space of display itself. Consider the exhibition layout (some galleries usefully



provide printed exhibition floorplans), wall colours, lighting, the atmosphere, style, formality or informality of the space, and so on. Also consider how works have been positioned and grouped and how you are being invited to engage with them. A further tip: making your own drawings, sketches or diagrams helps you get even more from exhibitions. Even if you don't consider yourself to be particularly skilled at this, drawing helps you look more slowly and closely and enables you notice details you might otherwise miss. As you draw, unexpected questions or insights may emerge.

**Instead of looking at things,
look between things.**

John Baldessari

Don't worry if you don't initially know how to respond to an exhibition

Many exhibitions — especially of contemporary art — can feel disorientating at first, often because the work is unconventional or because the concepts at issue are unfamiliar. In addition, relatively little contextual or explanatory information may have been provided. Often this is a conscious curatorial strategy, the belief being that a lack of navigational prompts encourages viewers to make up their own minds, and/or that feelings of confusion help viewers challenge their habitual ways of perceiving and thinking. Focus on noticing and describing what you perceive. Understanding or explaining can come later. Sometimes this will occur quite naturally, with time. Often you will need to carry out some background reading or additional research. Here, reading reviews and articles (see below) can help. Some galleries keep collections of press cuttings which are available for visitors to consult. Just ask.

Ask questions

Gallery and exhibition staff are usually more than happy to answer questions. Finding out what other visitors think — by asking them — can be extremely interesting although this may not always be welcomed; play it by ear! You may not immediately find the answers you are after so consider writing down your questions and figuring out how and where you might find the help you need.

WIDENING YOUR SCOPE

Go to talks or listen online

Gallery websites list talks, gallery tours and other events. Many are free. Galleries often also livestream talks via Facebook. For instance, even if you don't live in London (where there is a tremendous concentration of art and art galleries) you could consult artmap.london, another great resource, to find a list of upcoming talks and other events taking place in the capital. Many of these you could attend virtually if not in person.

Bookmark and read blogs and other relevant sites

See for instance: [Contemporary Art Blogs: Top 100 Art Blogs](#). One of my favourites is [We-make-money-not-art](#). You could also consult artists' web-pages and look out for forthcoming exhibitions. Bookmark the galleries that particularly interest you and keep an eye on their programmes.

Find relevant scholarly essays, articles and books

You can try the [Open Content section of Jstor](#) for open source access to thousands of articles. Use the names of artists or the titles of exhibitions or works of art (as well as other key words) as search terms. Instead of purchasing expensive books, try school, college or local libraries in the first instance; librarians can help you track down useful material. Reading one or two essays slowly and thoughtfully is often more helpful in the long term than skimming through lots of them: again, less is often more. Look out for contrasting points of view as well as points of agreement.

Periodically review your own notes

Are any particular themes or areas of interest coming to the fore that you may wish to pursue further? Notice which images and ideas seem to be becoming part of your own personal archive (or what the French art critic André Malraux would have called your 'museum of the mind' or 'museum without walls').

Consider curating and sharing some of your ideas and observations

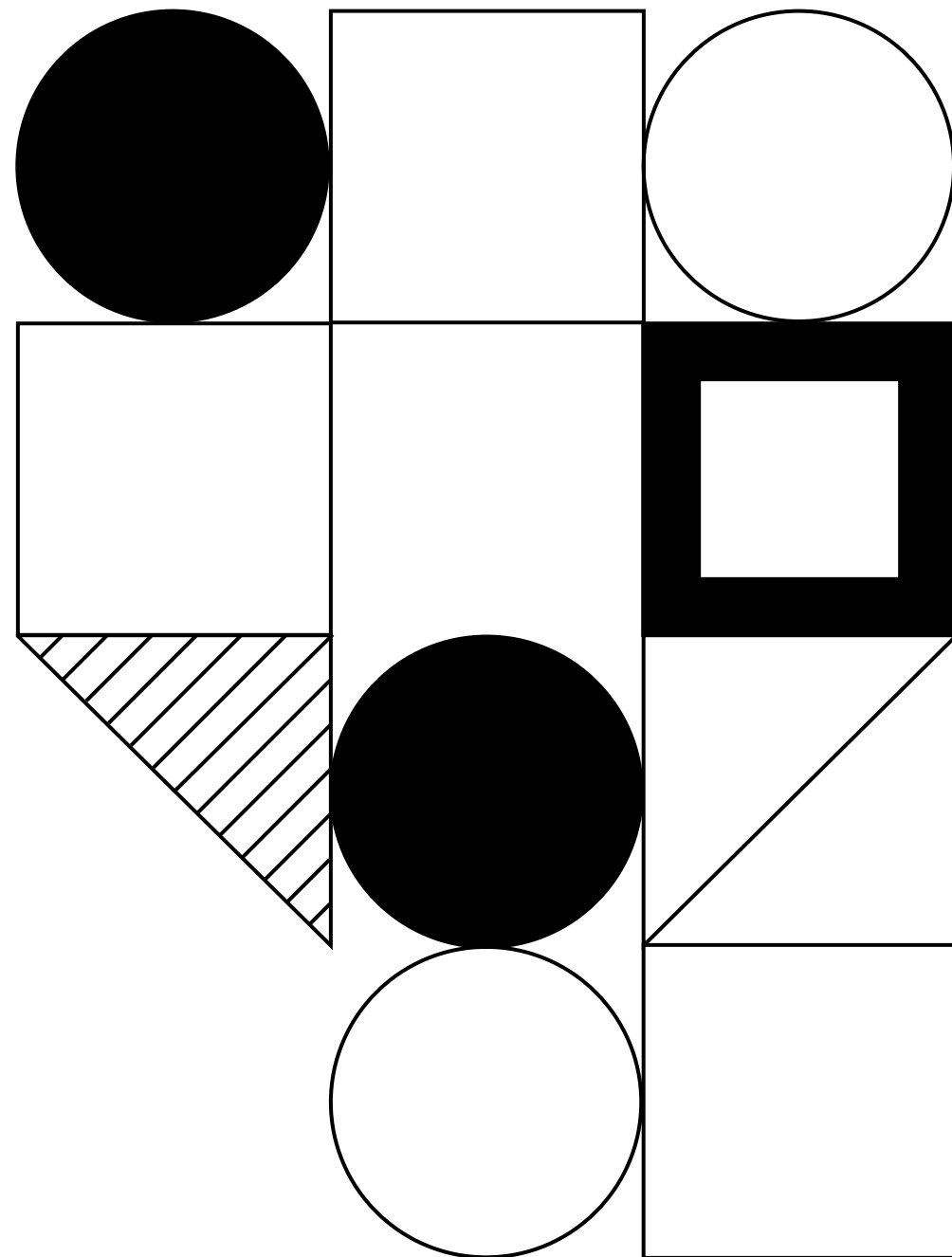
You could write your own reviews. These are often organized around a change in perception or the discovery of a surprising fact and usually include a mix of (1) description of the exhibits, often with one or two works selected for a more in-depth consideration, (2) background, contextual and explanatory information and (3) your interpretations and evaluations; perhaps an expression of what you learned or what surprised you. For examples of reviews see [a.n \(the artists' information company\)](#). Alternatively, your notes and observations might become the basis for various forms of creative writing and art-work.

The Association for Art History is a subject association, membership body and charity. We bring people together to share knowledge, inspire new thinking and advance research.

Since 1974 we have been committed to promoting the value of art history and visual culture for all. We work with the education and culture sectors to ensure that art history continues to be supported, understood and enjoyed.

You can find out more about our work in education, get access to resources and sign up to our mailing list at www.forarthistory.org.uk

Keep up to date with our latest news on social media by following [@forarthistory](https://twitter.com/forarthistory)



USEFUL WEBSITES

The Musée Le Secq des Tournelles Ironwork Museum
www.museeilesecqdestournelles.fr/en/the-museum-6

V&A
www.vam.ac.uk/whatson

Art Fund Art Map
www.artfund.org/what-to-see/art-map

Art Monthly: London Gallery Map
www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/london-gallery-map

Tate
www.tate.org.uk/

National Galleries Scotland
www.nationalgalleries.org

National Museum Cardiff
<https://museum.wales/cardiff/>

National Museums Northern Ireland
www.nmni.com/home.aspx

Hauser & Wirth
www.hauserwirth.com/

Freud Museum
www.freud.org.uk/

Compton Verney
www.comptonverney.org.uk

Kettles Yard
www.kettlesyard.co.uk

Yorkshire Sculpture Park
<https://yvsp.org.uk>

The Shetland Gallery
www.shetlandgallery.com

Art on the Underground
<https://art.tfl.gov.uk/>

Tate Exchange
<https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/tate-exchange>

Retna
<http://www.digitalretna.com/>

Rachel Sussman's Sidewalk Kintsukuroi project
www.rachelsussman.com/portfolio/%23/sidewalk-kintsukuroi/

Burberry
<https://ca.burberry.com/london-fashion-week/february-show-2017/>

Henry Moore Foundation
<https://www.henry-moore.org/>

Art Radar: Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond
www.aradarjournal.com/

Galleries Now: Worldwide Exhibitions and Art Galleries
www.galleriesnow.net/exhibitions/worldwide/

USEFUL WEBSITES

artmap.london

www.artmap.london/artevents

Contemporary Art Blogs: Top 100 Art Blogs

www.contemporaryartblogs.com/blogs/

We-make-money-not-art

www.we-make-money-not-art.com/

Open Content section of Jstor

www.jstor.org/open/

a.n (the artists' information company)

www.a-n.co.uk/reviews/

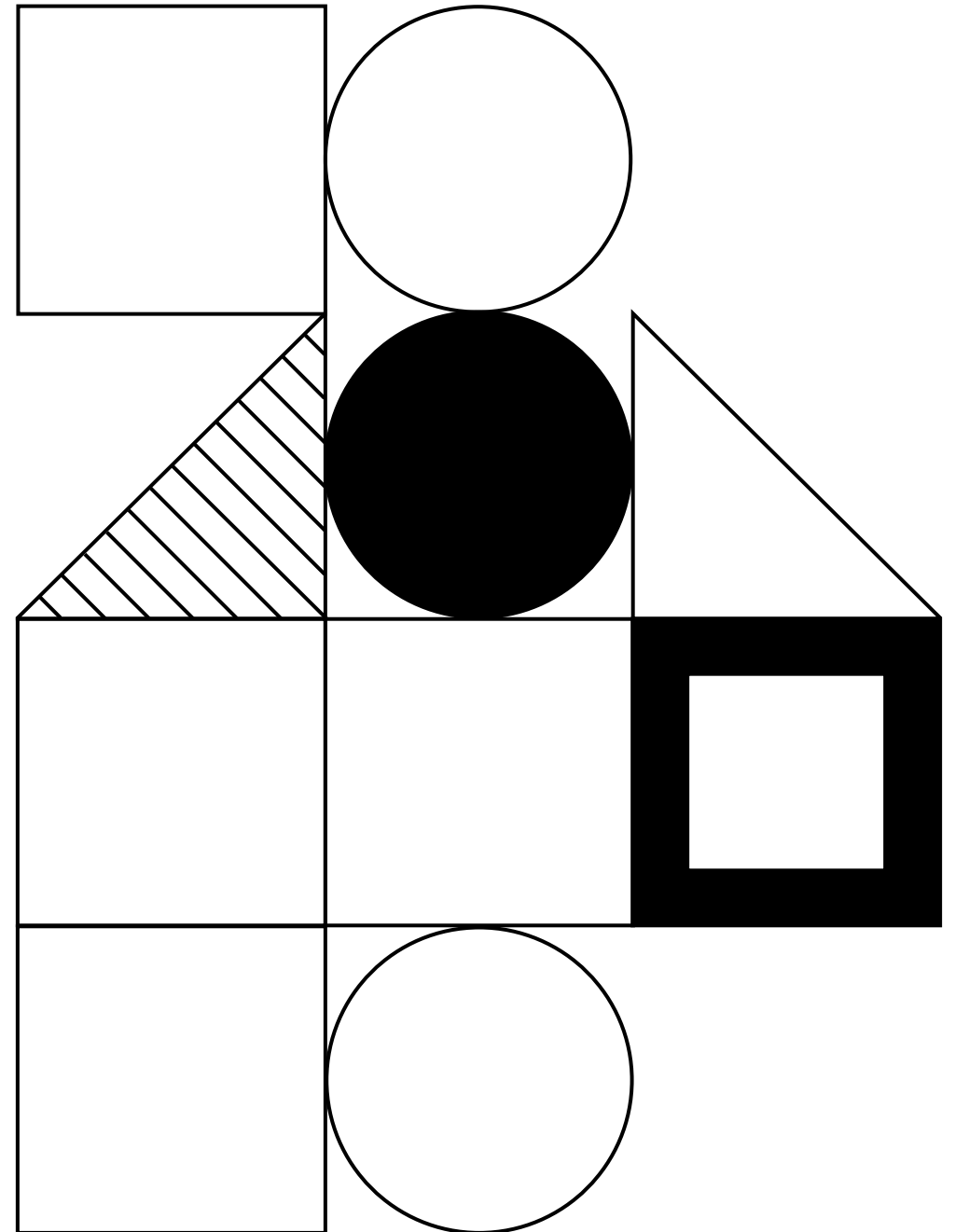
Images:

Detail of 19th-century combination lock with sun and moon symbols and key, wrought and cut iron, engraved brass, silver, Le musée Le Secq des Tournelles, Rouen, France

Retna, **Big Walls** - New York City (NY), March 2012

(Thanks to my student Theodora Malekou for bringing this artist to my attention)

Notes App screenshot with detail of Rachel Sussman's *Sidewalk Kintsukuroi* project.





www.forarthistory.org.uk
[@forarthistory](https://twitter.com/forarthistory)