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Risking Munch

The Art of Balancing Accessibility and Security in Museums

Siv Rebekka Runhovde

Abstract

The art of expressionist painter Edvard Munch has been the target of numerous thefts in Norway. This article considers the history of risk management in two victimized museums, and the influence of past challenges on contemporary views regarding the role of security. Empirical research suggest that the institutions studied, by giving priority to accessibility and art mediation, combined with unawareness of risk and lack of funding, have compromised security and inadvertently made the art a suitable target for crime. Demonstrating a reactive rather than a proactive approach to risk management, victimization and public exposure of security oversights have led to gradual policy changes in the museums. While stricter security has deterred thefts, several respondents described the response as over-securitization, with counterproductive effects on staff and visitors. Findings reveal that the responsibility to ensure public access, stimulate art appreciation and safeguard collections represents a conflict of interest between professionals working in museums that continue to challenge the development of preventative measures.

Keywords: art theft, Edvard Munch, security, risk management, museums

Introduction

When Edvard Munch died in 1944, he bequeathed the City of Oslo his estate and a vast collection of his paintings, woodcuts, aquarelles, drawings and lithographs. The bequest comprised nearly 28 000 works and today, the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway houses the majority of the collection and more than half of Munch's total production. In addition, his works are displayed across Oslo and beyond in museums, galleries, hotels, restaurants, public buildings and private residences. The art of Edvard Munch is perhaps Norway's most important contribution to international art history and in 2012, his pastel-on-cardboard version of *Scream*

(1895)¹ sold for US\$119.5 million, making it the most expensive painting ever sold at auction at the time (Aftenposten 2012). Not surprising then, that heists such as the 1994 theft of *Scream* (1893) from the National Gallery and the 2004 robbery of *Scream* (1910?) and *Madonna* (1894) from the Munch Museum received worldwide attention in academic and journalistic literature. Both thefts uncovered severe deficiencies in the security around the exhibited artwork (Mackenzie 2005, Houpt 2006, Tjihuis 2009, Andersen 2018, Dolnick 2008). However, in Norway, these two thefts represent a fraction of the reported criminal incidents involving Munch's art and supplement a long tale about an exceptional legacy that repeatedly has been the target of crime. To study perception and regulation of risk in the two victimized museums before and after the thefts, this article combines information from qualitative interviews and secondary literature. First there will be a presentation of the article's conceptual framework, which centres on opportunity-based theories of crime, organizational theory and perspectives from critical security studies. Next is the methods section, followed by presentation and discussion of the data, before the conclusion.

An Opportunity Perspective on Art Theft

Central in caring for Munch's legacy is the adoption of routines that will safeguard the art. When developing security measures for museums, many threats must be taken into account including accidents, natural disasters, vandalism. There is a shortage of empirical studies focusing on the security and care of art collections (Salomon et al. 2018, Burmon 2017, Bessette 2016, Grove and Thomas 2016) and to date, there has been no systematic inquiry into why security at the two museums was so poor. Thefts from museum collections are influenced by many factors, not all of which can be controlled (D'Ippolito 2012) and crime is the product of many causes. However, opportunity-based theories on crime highlight that offenders must not only be willing to break the law but also have the opportunity to act on their desires (Cohen and Felson 1979, Felson and Clarke 1997). Focusing on how characteristics of the physical and social environment serve as crime opportunity facilitators, proponents of opportunity theories maintain that situations are not just places in which crimes occur; they play a causative role in initiating crime and shaping its course (Wortley 2010). The 'Routine activities theory' (Cohen

¹ Munch created four versions of *Scream* between 1893 and 1910 in a variety of media, from crayon to pastel to tempera. Two separate versions of *Scream* have been stolen, both from museums in Oslo. The painting sold at Sotheby's to an anonymous telephone bidder in 2012 is the only version that is privately owned.

and Felson 1979) underpins such ideas, positioning that in order for crime to occur, three perpetually recurring factors must converge in time and space: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of capable guardians. Studies on repeat victimisation teach us that the best ‘characteristic’ to predict who will become a victim of crime is prior victimisation (Mackenzie 2005) and institutions that have been the subject of theft should be alert to the fact that they may be seen as soft targets (Kerr 2016, 13). As this article will demonstrate, the thefts of 1994 and 2004 were not the first time either museum lost Munch works to thieves. Based on the premise that a lack of security rendered the art a suitable target for theft and provided motivated offenders with opportunity, this article seeks to identify and reflect on factors that might explain this apparent disregard for preventative measures.

Balancing Accessibility, Mediation and Protection

For a museum, it is an ongoing challenge to protect the art while simultaneously making it accessible to the public. Displays must allow objects to be visible, somewhat within reach, but unremittingly protected (Tubiana 2015). The key lies in getting the right balance between access and security, namely security that is minimally intrusive and maximally effective (Nahakpam 2013). The suitability of art as a target for criminals may depend upon certain factors inherent to the object such as size, value, rarity and marketability (Mackenzie 2005). Suitability may also refer to situational aspects, including poor or absent safety measures that provide an opportunity to commit theft or vandalism (Korsell et al. 2006). The concept of ‘target hardening’ refers to decreasing the suitability of the target (Hollis, Felson, and Welsh 2013), making it more difficult to steal or damage, and according to Kerr (2016), ‘self-policing’ is the best way for art institutions to deal with security, which can begin with being proactive in creating anti-theft barriers around art. Other situational measures include guards, alarms, motion detectors, CCTV, glass on paintings, ropes etc. (Salomon et al. 2018). Most forms of target hardening are taken in response to victimization rather than as preventative measures (Layne 2009, Salomon et al. 2018). Looking to the field of policing studies, this is comparable to the divide between police measures and activities initiated before a crime occurs, so called *proactive policing*, and police activities after the incident, so called *reactive policing*. Usually, reactive policing is defined as responding to day-to-day demands, while proactive policing gives more weight to intelligence-led, long-term planning (Maguire and John 2006).

Environmental pressure in the form of legislation and policy, and in the form of public opinion and media attention, have direct influence on the policies and practices of organisations (Bromley and Powell 2012). Such pressure forces organisations to adopt new policies to

increase legitimacy and avoid criticism, and play an important role in shaping risk perception and risk regulation (Uggla 2008). The question of how far museums should go in securing their collections is not straightforward, as enhanced physical security can change how we view and experience art and greatly affect the experience of museum visitors (Brisman 2011). Museums are places for ‘alone time’, Buchholz (2000) writes, that should play a restorative role by creating a sense of peace and calm. The opportunity for tranquil, personal reflection is likely compromised by jarring physical security measures. Proponents of so-called ‘anti-security’ criticise the new dominant ideology of security consciousness in society, and warn that anything done in the name of security appears as an unquestionable good, rendering it nearly unthinkable to be opposed to security (Rigakos 2011, Zedner 2009, Neocleous 2008). Yet, risk awareness can create uncertainty and insecurity (Beck 2009) and the more security we consume, the less secure we may feel (Johnston 2000). Safeguarding the collection is central in the management and operation of museums. Museum staff, including those responsible for security, are considered to be professionals in their field (ICOM 2020). Museums are ‘professional organisations’ where people with proficiency for carrying out certain tasks with high levels of knowledge and skills are required to work together in a complex collective process (Mintzberg 1991). In such organisational forms, professionals exercise considerable control over their own work and the work of others (Mintzberg 1989).

Drawing on the above perspectives and on interviews with respondents representing three key professions in two victimized art museums; curators, conservators and security personnel, the article will explore the dynamics of the collaboration between the three groups and consider the intricacies in developing safety measures that meet the demands of each respective professions. Theft from museums may be the result of many dysfunctions that combined create a favourable situation for thieves, as described above. In order to shed light on the process of developing museum security in the past and the present, this article employs an opportunity perspective on art theft and seek to 1) understand the influence of theft on risk perception and regulation, and 2) discuss to what extent museums’ mandate to ensure accessibility, art appreciation and protection of precious objects conflict and compromise risk management.

Methods

This article draws on qualitative research conducted in Norway intermittently between October 2018 and January 2020. The empirical data includes nine individual interviews with museum professionals representing the Munch Museum and the National Gallery: three curators, three

conservators² and three senior security specialists. Recruitment of respondents took place through managers, directly through email or by snowball sampling, i.e. identifying additional respondents through existing ones (Yin 2011, 89). The sample includes respondents who were employed by the museums at the time of the thefts or after, and both current and retired employees. Written consent was obtained from all respondents by providing information about the purpose of the project prior to commencing the interviews, guaranteeing anonymity and freedom to withdraw. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that a degree of structure existed through certain broad key issues/questions that revolved around the characteristics of the thefts, the subsequent security response and the overall responsibilities and priorities of each profession. A challenge in most research is to ask relevant questions and being able to identify and follow up on key issues that arise throughout the data collection. By continually revising the interview guide, the data collection and analysis were partly concurrent. As proposed by Miles and colleagues (2014), this helps the researcher generate strategies for collecting new and better data.

To complement the interviews, the analysis draws on international and thematically wide-ranging secondary data in the form of scientific literature, court verdicts, biographical books, one film documentary, three art exhibitions and finally, newspaper articles and journalistic inquiries. Attention to the role of the media is relevant here for a number of reasons. First, the media coverage of the thefts in 1994 and 2004 was extensive and provides important insight to the events. Second, for the other recorded crimes there is very little scientific research to draw on. Journalistic inquiries and separate news media reports therefore constitute a significant source of information. Third, the archive at the Munch Museum contains documents accumulated over the years providing information about many of the criminal incidents involving Munch's works, including correspondence from law firms and insurance companies, police reports and internal letters and memos, *and* newspaper clippings. Being granted admission, one day was spent in the archive searching for information regarding the thefts. While this makes the knowledge base somewhat fragmented, it does provide insight to publicly

² While working closely together, a 'curator' and 'conservator' differ in their duties, responsibilities and respective education and training. For the purpose of this article, the respondents referred to as *conservator* hold the Norwegian title *konservator*, with duties that include the care, development, study, enhancement and management of the museum collection. Respondents referred to as *curators*, have a degree in art history and is selected based on their work with both permanent and temporary exhibitions and displays.

expressed opinions on issues of security at the time of the thefts. Users of media sources must pay attention to the methodological issues that dictate the reliability of the information (Balcells 2016), but they nonetheless provide valuable knowledge in a still under-researched area (Kerr 2016, 5). For clarity, it will be indicated when the information derives from a media source.

All collected data was anonymized per agreement with the respondents, who were also given the opportunity to review quotations before the article was submitted for publication. The interviews and most of the available writing related to the thefts are in Norwegian language. This work thus represents a translated compilation of public information about the crimes, making it accessible to an international audience. While this author has tried to the best of her ability to stay true to the original meaning of interview respondents and written sources, as with all translation, there may be some unintentional loss of meaning and nuance. To increase transparency, quotes from individual respondents are numbered in order to clarify the frequency of quotes from each respondent.

Results and Discussion

Privileged Access and Lack of Inventory Records as Inside Theft Facilitators

Having a level of privileged access may transform an item of art into a 'suitable target' for a particular offender (Mackenzie 2005), as illustrated by the following case. In 1967, experts became suspicious when they received two lithographs for valuation over a few months, one from a private collector and the other from an arts dealer. On the back of both prints was the mark of the city, which meant that they were part of the donation made by Munch to Oslo in 1944. The deputy director at the Munch Museum, upon recognizing that the lithographs were genuine and part of their collection, reported the theft to the police (Middlemas 1975, 95). Shortly after, according to the national newspaper *Dagbladet*, a curator at the museum confessed to having stolen the two pieces from the museum collection. The investigation later revealed that over several years the curator had made unlawful sales to art dealers in Oslo, London, Paris and Switzerland, finally resulting in charges of aggravated theft, fraud and document forgery in relation to 71 prints, and five years' imprisonment (Dahl 2004). In the face of popular outrage that the most famous national collection could be so easily ransacked, the public demanded answers to questions about security and the absence of a proper inventory (Middlemas 1975).

Keeping well-managed and current inventory records is a vital security aspect for museums. In addition to their usefulness in keeping objects organised, details from inventory records are

required by the police in order to identify recovered objects (Korsell et al. 2006, 98). Conservator (1) pointed to the Munch Museum's lack of a proper inventory as the key enabler for the crimes of the convicted curator, allowing years to pass before anyone noticed the thefts:

‘Registration is just as important as perimeter security. Because then the art is not saleable. The most important security measure is keeping order’.

Keeping accurate inventories of every object in a collection however, is a resource intensive task that in many museums is compromised by a lack of funding (D'Ippolito 2012). According to Conservator (1), the theft eventually led to a thorough recording of the Munch Museum's entire graphic collection, allocating to each print a stamp and its own individual number. This response thus exemplifies how victimization and the disclosure of a security risk led to altered security practices. More recently, in order to prevent theft by staff or others with access to the collection, such as curators, conservators, scientists or security officials, Security specialist (1) revealed that when learning that a member of staff were having personal difficulties that may tempt them or others from exploiting their position, he would take preventative action by calling the person to a security awareness meeting and often restrict their access to the art work. The possibility that security measures may also protect staff from e.g. false accusations of wrongdoing is exemplified by Curator (1) who said that:

‘When I'm in the archive, I'm sometimes glad there are cameras that can document that I'm not doing anything wrong (...). It's for my own safety’.

Security specialist (2) added that part of any security strategy should be ensuring that employees are content in their work to help foster loyalty and dedication. Nevertheless, according to Security specialist (3), ‘If you are to have a practical working environment, it is difficult to eliminate this threat.’ A situation where security measures caused an *impractical* working environment was indicated by Curator (1) in regard to the new restrictions from the Chief of Security concerning access to the archive of the Munch Museum following the 2004 robbery:

‘People who had worked at the museum for decades were not given security clearance, yet they let in 20 year old security guards who knew nothing about how to conduct themselves around the art work. They brought in cola bottles and ate food in the archive.’

This counterproductive response to the robbery not only made work conditions more difficult, it eliminated one perceived threat to the collection while introducing another.

Risk and Experimental Art Mediation

All forms of guardianship are ultimately fallible (Salomon et al. 2018). However, the city's decision to place part of a private donation of 900 paintings (with the donor's authorization) in Sogn Studentby, a residential area for students, raises questions. In the 1950-, 60- and 70s, original works by Munch and other prominent artists were hanging in the hallways, in the kitchens and many of the dormitories, unsecured and unprotected from 'cigarette smoke, cooking fumes and beer foam' (Grindem 2018). Munch's painting *Kiss on the beach* hung on the wall in the toilets behind the reception. When thieves stole the painting *History* valued at £177 thousand during a break-in at the student canteen in 1973, the city finally removed the collection from the student lodgings.³ While artworks certainly were lost during this period, the details are unclear because records on the contents of the collection were poor according to Conservator (1), with the continuous removal, exchange and addition of individual works. For a time, a large selection of prints from the Munch Museum collection also hung in schools and municipal offices around Oslo. Seventeen prints were lent to the social welfare office in the suburban area of Tveita, from where they were all stolen during a single night in 1974.⁴

In hindsight, the decision to place such a valuable collection in student dormitories and public offices seems astonishing and naïve, and fears for the safety of the art was expressed by a number of people at the time. Lack of space to display the works in the museum was an instrumental factor in the decision to use these external 'showrooms'. Conservator (1) however, suggested that an additional motive was that the museum, in a spirit of inclusiveness, lent the art to these institutions in order to make the art available to people who typically would not visit the museum. In a letter to the city council in 1973, the director for Oslo Art Collections referred to the decision to place the art in the student village as a 'promising and exciting experiment in art mediation'. He nevertheless acknowledged a contradiction between the collection's safety and its accessibility noting the extreme increase in the financial value of Munch's paintings.⁵ Arguably, the decision to place part of the collection in various public buildings was a way for the museum to fulfil its mandate to reach the widest possible audience, stimulate appreciation for art and spread knowledge. It may also be interpreted as a countermeasure to the general

³ The following year, the painting was found in a garbage bag in the public Frogner Park.

⁴ All the prints were later recovered, found wrapped in brown paper in a basement in Oslo.

⁵ Information from the Munch Museum archive.

perception of art as something reserved for the privileged, upper class, which is one reason why art crimes tend to warrant little sympathy both from the public and from law enforcement (Clarke and Szydł 2017). Unfortunately, the museum failed to balance the accessibility with protection of the art from harm and crime.

Gone in 60 Seconds

In 1972, thieves stole the copper plate for the etching *Puberty* from the Munch Museum. Part of a temporary exhibition of 24 copper plates, the theft happened during opening hours.⁶ A member of staff noticed the plate missing from its frame just after midday. As a municipal institution, the Munch Museum is dependent on the city for funding. The museum director explained the theft by maintaining that the museum had repeatedly pleaded to the politicians for additional security funds, but the answer had been ‘no’ (Andersen 2018). The theft however, led to i.a. an increase in the number of guards, a secured locker room for visitors to leave bags, umbrellas etc. and instructions for guards to check regularly that displays were intact.⁷

On a January weekend in 1988, thieves broke a window at the Munch Museum, reached in and snatched the oil painting *Vampire* off the wall. Despite barely entering the museum, thieves had managed to steal the £1.3 million painting. Apprehended later, the thieves explained in court that they had broken the wrong window and that *Scream* was their intended target. They maintained that committing the theft was easy because of the low security.⁸ Following the theft, police expressed concern at the lack of security in the museum, stating to the media that it was easier to take the painting than to steal a case of beer in the supermarket. While the museum director explained that they had been aware the building was insecure and that the paintings were at risk of theft (Andersen 2018), Conservator (1) admitted that:

‘We had not considered the windows as a security risk, the idea that someone could break the window and pull out a painting like that’.

Newspapers at the time also highlighted that the deterioration of the building itself threatened the art, with moisture penetrating the ceiling and windows (Aftenposten 1988). A museum representative explained to one reporter that despite numerous promises from politicians, none

⁶ Information from the exhibition *EXIT!* at the Munch Museum, 11.5.19 — 8.9.19 by curator Elisabeth Byre.

⁷ Information derived from the Munch Museum archive.

⁸ Supreme Court verdict Rt-1989-394 (118-89), p. 395.

had so far committed to raising the funds to extend and repair the museum (Hovdenakk 1990). Respondents confirmed the difficulty in communicating to the granting authorities the importance of preserving and restoring the collection. Finally, in 1991 a donation from a Japanese oil company enabled a security upgrade, but alterations, such as exchanging the wood panels for concrete, were said to have ruined the elegant 60ies atmosphere of the building and made it less inviting (Grønvold 1994).

The most notorious incident at the Munch Museum took place shortly after opening hours one morning in August 2004, when robbers stole at gunpoint, the museum's versions of *Scream* and *Madonna*. Again, the lack of security surrounding the collection shocked the public, leading to new demands for improved security. When asked what had allowed the thefts at the Munch Museum to take place, Security specialist (3) was clear that, 'inadequate security has played a part in every theft that has happened here'. Security specialist (1) attributed the 'complete lack of security' to insufficient funds and poor understanding of security. As such, he highlighted the absence of two key factors: a want of risk assessment, stating that 'they lacked emergency plans, check lists, a plan for emergency drills,' and second, scarce finances, which had led to a financial situation in which the museum 'could barely afford pencils.' An independent security analysis at the time concluded that the building was 'highly unsuited' for housing Munch's works (Nerdrum 2019) and again, perhaps illustrating that the more security fails, the more it succeeds as security breaches are met with security enhancements (Rigakos 2011), a £4.3 million security upgrade was granted, closing the museum for six months.

The state-owned National Gallery in Oslo holds a valuable collection of Munch paintings. In 1993, thieves cut the painting *Portrait study* from its frame on the wall during opening hours. The staff did not discover the loss until the next day and the exact time of the theft is unknown. According to Security specialist (2), since this event, guards now count every object in the museum regularly, several times a day, and there are cameras installed in each room. Again, the response exemplifies target hardening as a result of victimization. The following year, in 1994 during the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games, thieves stole the museum's version of *Scream*. The surveillance video shows two individuals breaking a first-floor window to gain entry to the museum, having fallen off the ladder on the first attempt. Seconds later, the thieves slide the painting down the ladder and make off with it. The video quality is too poor to reveal their identity. The thieves left a note saying 'Thanks for the poor security'. Nerdrum (2019, 239) attributes the lack of safety measures to an underestimation of the symbolic significance of the painting. While other authors have highlighted how security personnel made

the error of ignoring the alarm (Dolnick 2008, Mackenzie 2005, Houpt 2006), Security specialist (2) informed that:

‘It took 58 seconds. The whole incident. The guard was sitting in the basement. I doubt he would have been able to stop it even if he had noticed’.

Instead, Security specialist (2) suggested that the fault lies with the museum management:

‘In 1994, the windows were made of ordinary glass. *Scream* hung next to the window. The Chief of Security had advised against the placement but the museum director insisted based on artistic considerations’.

Curator (2) explained that the director had demanded that the painting be moved from the second to the first floor so that tourists visiting Norway for the Olympic Games could see it easily. While being opposed to the move, Curator (2) nevertheless confessed that, ‘we did not understand that this could happen’. Today, the museum places its most valuable art furthest into the room and away from staircases. The recovery of the painting three months later and the apprehension of the same individual convicted for stealing *Vampire* in 1988 from the Munch Museum - is well documented (Tijhuis 2009, Monsen 2018).

Conflicts of Interest in Inter-Professional Collaboration

Publicly, museum representatives mainly cite a lack of funding as the reason for the insufficient security. However, the use of student flats and welfare offices as ‘experimental’ showrooms and the disagreement concerning the placing of *Scream* in 1994 indicates that there are additional factors that influence the exhibition and safeguarding of museum collections. As Mintzberg (1989, 1991) denotes, in museums, individuals with different professional backgrounds are expected to collaborate. Preceding each temporary exhibition in the two studied museums, joint staff meetings are held to plan the exhibitions, and interviews suggest that reaching agreement is not always straightforward. Describing this inter-professional collaboration, Conservator (3) outlined that conservators are concerned with the wellbeing of the art, the curator with its display, and security with its safeguarding. Matters relating to security are mostly a discussion between curators and security personnel according to Conservator (3), who also emphasized that being part of a team is an advantage and that it *is* a collaboration. Curator (2) however, stated that:

‘The curators are at the mercy of what the security personnel say (...). At times demands are unreasonable. Not just from security, but also from the technicians [conservators]

regarding lighting and climate (...). We are always in a squeeze between accessibility and security’.

Illustrating conflicting concerns, Curator (1) wanted visitors to:

‘...experience an open and welcoming space. We do not want a lot of visible security measures (...). At the same time, we want security to be satisfactory’.

Curator (3) expressed an understanding that:

‘When you work on security, perhaps it is tempting to go for the extreme version - whatever is new and exciting’.

This curator felt that the collaboration could be improved if security personnel were better at explaining their rationale for tighter security, so that their demands would seem more logical.

Security specialist (1) said:

‘In general, there is often disagreement, particularly with the curator. Security and curators have conflicting interests’.

While acknowledging that recent years have seen significant developments in museum security with i.a. a turn towards less intrusive, more discreet measures, Security specialist (1) felt that ‘security should be visible. Because it is a deterrent’, while also admitting that ‘physical barriers are preventative but they are not visitor friendly’. The most palpable risk in both museums today is vandalism. Security specialist (2) said:

‘Vandalism, deliberate or accidental, is a bigger problem than theft. It is hard to argue internally for wilful vandalism, it seems so unlikely (...), but we try to make sure that people will not cause damage by accident’.

Security specialist (3) commented:

‘You could destroy a painting with very simple means. Every day guards report that people knock into paintings or touch them’.

A fitting provision therefore is safety glass inside the frame. Security specialist (3) maintained that:

‘It reduces risk related to practically any threat, including theft because it shields the painting from damage’.

Respondents across professions agreed that glass covers are necessary due to the fragility of many of the pieces, for example, Conservator (3) argued in favour of glass primarily for climate

and preservation purposes, and admitted to often seeing fingerprint marks from museum visitors touching the glass. Several acknowledged however, that despite the use of advanced, non-reflective glass, it still alters the appearance of the work, and according to Curator (3), it sometimes poses challenges for the lighting. Conservator (1) stressed that the glass likely contradicts with how Munch intended his work to be seen, given that Munch strived to achieve matte colours and was opposed to varnishing his paintings.

Once again, this helps to perceive the challenge in balancing security and exhibition of the art in a way that both protects it from harm and respects the vision of the original artist. Working to fulfil their respective responsibilities, each professional exerts their own specific demands on safeguarding policies. Despite disagreements however, all respondents emphasized that they will usually come to an agreement through compromise and that they *are* working towards a common goal. Curator (3) stated:

‘As a rule, we will reach a decision that everybody can live with. One might not be totally satisfied, but it’s no crisis’.

The curator referred to the previous thefts as an experience lingering in the back of everyone’s mind that helps in accepting security measures and understanding their importance. The final decision regarding security instalments lies with the director in both museums. If they cannot reach an agreement then, Curator (1) said:

‘We must go to the director. Perhaps that leads to less security than security personnel want, because the director doesn’t want the museum to look like an airport with checking, scanning and controls by uniformed guards’.

Illustrating the potential severity of such conflicts, Security specialist (1) finally resigned because of what he experienced as lacking acceptance for security:

‘It was the general attitude at the museum. I felt it was more important for the curator to have a nice exhibition than to safeguard the museum (...)’.

Knowing he would be held personally accountable if he conceded and something untoward happened, ‘they would point the finger at me. I wasn’t going to let that happen on my watch’ Security specialist (1) said.

Security: A Balancing Act

While the myth that art theft is a sophisticated type of crime is persistent, the recorded thefts from Norwegian museums lend little support to the stereotype of the ‘gentleman art thief’ (see

Mackenzie, 2005). Rather, they indicate an astonishing absence of security surrounding exhibitions in two of the country's major art museums, posing little hindrance to motivated offenders. Hence, drawing on Kleinig (2000, 55), what does 'providing an opportunity for crime' actually mean, and is the mere provision of an opportunity a responsibility-incurring act? The propensity of the media to portray institutions as careless and incompetent (D'Ippolito 2012) actualizes one of the critiques against situational crime prevention; the tendency to shift part of the responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim. The implication is that those who fail to take reasonable preventive precautions are partially blamed for what befalls them, and moreover will diminish the responsibility of those who have victimized them (Kleinig 2000, 53). While refuting that the Munch Museum is to blame for the thefts, Security specialist (3) nevertheless emphasised:

'When entrusted with managing such values on behalf of the public, you are obligated to protect them'.

The robbery in 2004, and the subsequent negative publicity was, according to Conservator (2) an 'eye-opener' for the politicians. Gradually, victimization and public exposure of security oversights led to major changes in safeguarding policies in both museums, and there have been no recorded thefts from either since 2004, implying that increased security measures have deterred potential thieves. Interviews suggest however, that in the Munch Museum the changes gave rise to much debate and introduced new problems. Curator (1) highlighted that the robbery created a sense of panic among the officials, who felt forced to take security to an extreme level:

'First, sliding doors made from thick glass were installed from floor to ceiling in front of the most valuable paintings, in addition to the non-reflective security glass. But the panes of glass were narrow, resulting in joints in front of the paintings'.

Additional measures mentioned by Curator (1) were individual alarms attached to each painting that went missing, had multiple technical problems and could not be transported:

'We spent so much time and resources on this. They failed to coordinate this with our [the curators] needs'.

In a state referred to by the curator as hysterical, the museum installed excessive security measures that frustrated visitors, reduced the aesthetic value of the art and created difficult working conditions for the staff. The phrase 'airport security' was used by several respondents to describe what was regarded as 'over-securitization' following the robbery. Some respondents questioned the actual effectiveness of the new security measures. For example, Security

specialist (3) emphasized that security demands must be validated and customised and pointed to a discrepancy between the now identified threat of robbery and the chosen preventative responses:

‘Following the robbery, they installed a metal detector portal and x-ray machine [at the visitors’ entrance]. Robbers do not care about that. But it may prevent people from bringing in harmful objects, if that is the risk.’

By 2010, the security department at the Munch Museum was about to collapse according to Security specialist (1) stating that, ‘there was much discontent, conflict’. Similar to Security specialist (3), Security specialist (1) highlighted a lack of thorough risk assessment as foundation for the museum’s continuously inapt security, and emphasized preparedness and crisis management as vital elements in security work:

‘You need to do security assessments with scenarios. Then you see what risks there are against the museum. Then you need to rehearse (...). And not least evaluate the rehearsals, because you will always discover areas you are not sufficiently good at. There was none of this [at the Munch Museum] before I started’.

The statements above are consistent with Bromley and Powell’s (2012, 499) argument that external pressure and taken-for-granted assumptions may encourage organisational behaviours that have limited impact on the organisation’s effectiveness, a concept known as ‘means-end decoupling’. In response to external pressure, the Munch Museum implemented practices with limited utility for the intended outcome and overall goals of the organisation, which includes deterring any harm against the collection, building, museum staff and visitors. Crucially, freedom from fear of crime is unattainable and as in the case of vandalism, preventing art theft is almost impossible if the attacker is determined enough, regardless of resources (Salomon et al., 2018; Scott, 2009). Besides being displeasing to visitors, strict situational security may also make thefts more violent (Kerr 2016, 12, Tjihuis 2006, Conklin 1994, 126), encouraging offenders to escalate their efforts or simply commit the crime in other museums where such measures are not in place. However, displacement is not an inevitable outcome of focused crime prevention efforts and might also lead to a ‘diffusion of crime control benefits’ to areas outside the immediate targets of intervention (Clarke and Weisburd 1994, Weisburd et al. 2006). Ideally, learning that art is protected against theft and vandalism in one museum, could lead criminals to view it less as a suitable target in other museums.

In 2020, a new Munch Museum is due to open in Oslo, and in 2021, the National Gallery will become part of a new National Museum. Predominantly, respondents across professions saw this as a new opportunity to balance security and exhibition, anticipating state-of-the-art solutions and more spacious venues. Illustrating a modern-day preference for discreet security measures, Curator (1) explained that:

‘In the new [National] museum, we have asked for floor markings rather than physical barriers. The floors will be of wide oak boards with inserted copper lists. And invisible alarms that are triggered when people come too close. Preferably silent alarms on the ear of the guards’ who can then intervene (...). The guards *are* important, and they must be friendly, but clearly present’.

Security specialist (1) also expressed a strong belief in the preventative potential of trained guards and had encouraged the use of profiling in the new Munch Museum. By identifying individuals who exhibit divergent behaviour before they enter the museum, or when inside, sitting on a bench and monitoring the guards instead of looking at the art or inspecting behind paintings etc., guards can efficiently intervene. The security specialist thus implied that of the three primary elements of security - human, electronic and mechanical resources (Tubiana 2015), the first is a key asset, insofar as guards directly interact with the public and access collection space.

With a purpose-built new National Museum, security has been considered in the construction from the beginning according to Security specialist (2), who described a fruitful relationship with the building commissioner:

‘We have been making security recommendations from the start. We have contributed to defining the security level of the building itself, cameras, admittance, and alarms. (...) We don’t get everything we want, but we are listened to.’

A final security risk emphasized by respondents concerns the logistics of art transports, in relation to loans to/from other museums in Norway or abroad, and recently, in moving the collections to new museum buildings. Curator (1) emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between upholding security and practical sharing of information during transports:

‘It is best that as few people as possible knows the details of the transports. We are a small group who decides how to distribute the most valuable paintings. How many in each truck? If we move all the Munch paintings in one car and something happens ... At the same time, we have to fill the trucks, we can’t transport each painting separately.’

In general, art transports are described as vulnerable, and as being specialised and technically challenging operations.

Conclusion

This analysis has provided a limited but timely account of risk management in two Norwegian art museums preceding, and following thefts of art. The recorded criminal targeting of art by Munch is remarkable, not because the thefts are sophisticated but due to the ease with which many of these national icons were stolen. The results lend no support to the pervasive myth that art thefts are ingenious crimes. Based on a small and selected number of cases and respondents, findings strengthen the claim that inadequate or absent situational security measures have made the art a suitable target. The state of these measures have led to minimal hindrance and increased opportunity for motivated offenders, thus supporting an opportunity-based perspective on art theft.

By identifying discords in inter-professional collaboration in the museums, the analysis has provided some much needed context to the past lack of security around Norway's most prized artworks. Besides deficient perception and regulation of risk, and in the case of the Munch Museum, a continuous lack of funding, results demonstrate that an additional explanatory factor is the prioritization of accessibility at the expense of protection. While museums manage to balance accessibility, mediation and safeguarding more successfully today, these considerations represents a conflict that continues to challenge the development of modern-day museum security. The solution is often a compromise that everyone can live with, but with which no one is completely satisfied.

Each incident of theft and the succeeding criticism and public exposure of security oversights, have led to target hardening through gradual changes in security in both institutions, demonstrating a reactive rather than a proactive approach to risk management. Exemplifying the difficulty in achieving the right level of security, for the Munch Museum, external pressure and criticism and lack of proper risk assessment led to an overcompensation, with introduction of excessive security measures with negative effect on visitors and staff. Given the questionable effectiveness of some of the chosen measures, the organizational behaviour is also indicative of means-ends decoupling.

Traditionally considered places of solemn contemplation and quiet inspiration, art museums need unobtrusive and customized security with a tangible preventative impact, without compromising the mandate of museums to preserve and present art to the public for the purpose

of education and enjoyment. The opening of new museums in 2020 and 2021 provides a new opportunity to balance security and exhibition, and hopefully will mark a new era in the relationship between Norway and her most treasured artist, Edvard Munch.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that he/she has no conflicts of interest.

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