

The Bench

Cast of Characters

PATRON #1: A middle aged or older person

GUARD #1

GUARD #2

PATRON #2: partner or friend of PATRON #3

PATRON #3 partner or friend of PATRON # 2

Gender/ethnicity/age open for all roles except Patron #1, although performers would need to be college-aged or older. Pronouns will need to be adjusted accordingly.

Set, Prop, Costume Requirements

- A bench
- Walkie-talkies and uniforms for GUARD #1 and GUARD #2
- Some paintings or drawings affixed to walls (optional)

SETTING: A gallery in an art museum.

AT RISE: An empty stage with a bench at or near its center.

PATRON #1 ENTERS AND WALKS SLOWLY AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE STAGE, STOPPING, AND SOMETIMES MOVING CLOSER, AS IF LOOKING AT ART.

PATRON #1 SIGHS AS IF TIRED, GLANCES AT HER WATCH, AND NOTICING THE BENCH FOR THE FIRST TIME, SITS DOWN WITH A SLIGHT “AH.” PATRON #1 GLANCES AT THE MUSEUM BROCHURE IN HER HAND, TILTS HER HEAD BACK, EXHALES, AND LIGHTLY CLOSES EYES.

MUSEUM GUARD #1 ENTERS BRISKLY.

GUARD #1: (*Aggressively*) Hey, hey, excuse me, no sitting on the artwork.

PATRON #1: (*Startled*) What do you mean? ... I thought this bench was here so that--

GUARD #1: Didn't you see the sign?

PATRON #1: (*GETTING UP AND LOOKING AROUND*) No, I ... I don't see anything.

Plus, usually they'll tape a perimeter to indicate— (*GESTURES AT FLOOR AROUND THE BENCH*).

GUARD #1: That would ruin the aesthetic.

Can you stand *away* from the art?

PATRON #1: Uh ... sure.

GUARD #1: The camera caught all this (*POINTS UPWARD TO A CORNER OF THE CEILING*).

PATRON #1: There's nothing to catch, I wasn't *doing* anything, and the signage is *lacking* by the way.

I *am* sorry though, lesson learned.

(*PATRON #1 STARTS WALKING AWAY*).

GUARD #1: Not so fast, I need to see if there's any damage, and I'll have to make a report.

PATRON #1: There's no *damage*. It's a bench. I sat on it; that's what they're for.

GUARD #1: Can I get your name?

PATRON #1: No, you cannot.

I'm a member of this museum you know.

GUARD #1: So that entitles you to manhandle the art?

PATRON #1: No, but I've been coming here for over 20 years. I know how to conduct myself.

GUARD #1: Still going to need your name.

PATRON #1: *Really? ... Fine ...* that would suit me wonderfully, because I'd like to make a complaint, and you can feel free to append it to your report.

GUARD #1: It's the same rules for everyone – doesn't matter if you're a bum off the street, or your name's on the side of the building.

PATRON #1: I'm not asking for special consideration. And I'm sure you can understand my confusion, it (*GESTURES AT BENCH*) doesn't exactly *look* like a piece of art.

GUARD #1: Oh really, so *you* know what *is* and *isn't* art.

Perhaps you're a critic or curator, or maybe an artist yourself?

PATRON #1: No, I don't claim special expertise, but come on ... (*GESTURES AT BENCH*).

GUARD #1: It's a piece of art.

PATRON #1: Look, just *saying* something's art doesn't make it so.

GUARD #1: I think it does.

PATRON #1: Oh, so *you're* an authority.

GUARD #1: Yeah, I made this.

PATRON #1: Made *what*?

GUARD #1: This (*GESTURES AT BENCH AND AROUND ENTIRE GALLERY*).

PATRON #1: But you just *stand* around all day watching people come and go.

GUARD #1: I'm not a guard.

PATRON #1: You're *not*?

GUARD #1: Nope.

I'm an artist, and I created this interactive piece.

And you're correct, there *is* no sign.

PATRON #1: So, I wasn't sitting on the art?

GUARD #1: Yeah, technically you were, because I put it here and called it art. This installation explores the transaction between museum-goer and art institution. It interrogates the practice of labeling and naming art.

PATRON #1: Does that mean I'm *in* the show?

GUARD #1: Yes, as soon as you walked through the door. I'm trying to stimulate discussion around what constitutes art, and who gets to make that decision.

PATRON #1: Huh.

I think I get it: a bench is a bench, but if you *call* it art that changes our understanding of it.

GUARD #1: Exactly; if I'd affixed a sign that read, "The Bench," your reaction would've been totally different. You'd ask, why is it placed here? What is it made of? What is the artist trying to say?

We're trained to have somebody tell us what art is, but since nobody *told* you the bench was art, you sat down.

PATRON #1: How often do you do this?

GUARD #1: An hour or two here and there, depends on my schedule.

Some days it goes better than others; seems like you kind of get what I'm doing.

PATRON #1: I do now.

GUARD #1: I know you weren't too thrilled at first, and I don't blame you. Some people get upset, or angry. One lady even started crying, I felt bad about that. She was *not* interested in deconstructing the hegemonic lens of the museum, she just wanted to see some nice pictures.

PATRON #1: I like doing that myself.

GUARD #1: Of course, but do you think that decoration should be the *only* role of art?

PATRON #1: Maybe not the *only* role, but certainly *a* role.

I know you'd probably argue that art should make us uncomfortable and challenge our assumptions, but isn't it elitist if that's *only* for a narrow audience familiar with contemporary conceptual tropes?

GUARD #1: I'm glad you raise that issue because—

GUARD #2 ENTERS RUNNING AND GUARD #1 IMMEDIATELY EXITS AS IF BEING PURSUED. GUARD #2 FOLLOWS GUARD #1 OFFSTAGE.

PATRON #1 LOOKS AROUND, CONFUSED. GUARD #2, OUT OF BREATH, ENTERS.

GUARD #2: (*Speaking into a walkie talkie*) Yeah, she's headed to the south wing; stop the elevators and get somebody in the stairwells on one and three.

(*Addressing PATRON #1*) What she'd tell you?

PATRON #1: I don't understand ... I thought she was the artist so why—

GUARD #2: Just tell me what happened.

PATRON #1: Well, I was sitting here (*POINTS AT BENCH*) and she came in and said I was ruining it, that it was a piece of art. Then she said she was an artist who made this whole thing (*GESTURES AROUND ROOM*).

GUARD #2: Oh Christ, not again.

PATRON #1: What do you mean? I don't get what—

GUARD #2: Did she start talking about the *hedgy*-something discourse surrounding art?

PATRON #1: Yeah, she got really into explaining how the *label* you affix—

GUARD #2: This is a very disturbed individual.

It's her standard M.O. *First*, she claims to be a security guard, *then* she says she's an artist. Last time, she went to the museum café, picked up a discarded paper cup, and *insisted* that it was art.

PATRON #1: So she's *not* an artist?

GUARD #2: Not at all. And she's *certainly* not part of the security team.

What she's doing is a federal offense known as criminal impersonation.

PATRON #1: My God.

GUARD #2: We don't know how far she'll go. So far, no one's been hurt, physically at least.

PATRON #1: I had no idea, I thought this was a clever kind of ... artistic prank.

GUARD #2: Would you be able to provide a description?

PATRON #1: Sure, uh . . . she was like *this* tall, and she had short black hair and glasses.

GUARD #2: No, I don't mean *her*; I'd like a description of the art.

PATRON #1: *What* art?

GUARD #2: This art (*GESTURES AT BENCH*).

PATRON #1: It's right here in front of you. And I thought it *wasn't* art, that the *artist* was some kind of scammer. *Now* you're saying that . . . wait . . . ohhh, I get it.

You're in league with her. This chasing stuff and your little questioning routine; it's a big act, right?

GUARD #1 ENTERS AND BUMPS FISTS WITH GUARD #2.

GUARD #1: We're the Art-Varks.

GUARD #2: It's like Aardvark, but it's Art-Varks; we're an artists' collective.

PATRON #1: Art-Varks Artists Collective?

GUARD #1: AVAC [A-Vee-A-See].

PATRON #1: What happened to fool me once?

GUARD #2: There's no right or wrong response. It's about transforming the museum from a passive space into an active one.

PATRON #1: You succeeded, this has been quite a . . . workout.

GUARD #1: We appreciate your willingness to participate. We're on Instagram at Art-Varks AVAC.

PATRON #1: Okay, good to know.

GUARD #1 AND GUARD #2 EXIT.

PATRON #1 LOOKS AT BENCH, SHAKES HER HEAD, AND SMILES SLIGHTLY AS SHE SITS DOWN. SHE LOOKS AT THE BROCHURE IN HER HAND.

PATRON #2 AND PATRON #3 ENTER AND REMAIN AT SIDE OF STAGE.

PATRON #2: (Addressing PATRON #3 quietly so as not to alert PATRON #1) (Pointing) See!

PATRON #3: Isn't that just a lady on a bench?

PATRON #2: Precisely, she's enacting (*grandly, pretentiously*) "Woman Slumped on Bench."

PATRON #1 LOOKS UP. PATRON #2 AND PATRON #3 MOVE CLOSER.

Do you stay here all day?

PATRON #1: All day? No, I just sat down a few minutes ago . . . then this guard, or someone *playing* a guard, came in and—Who are you?

PATRON #2: (Addressing PATRON #3) She *acts* like she's not part of it.

PATRON #3: This is too weird. I wanna go to the other wing, the one with the boat pictures.

PATRON #2: Come on, we can do that *any* time, this is a special installation with a real, live, out-there *artist*.

PATRON #3: I guess.

PATRON #2: So, Bench Lady, what's it feel like to *be* art?

PATRON #1: Feel like to ... what?

PATRON #2 You get paid for this?

PATRON #1: Paid? No, I'm just sitting here.

PATRON #2: He said you're part of it, and we should engage you.

PATRON #1: Who is the "*he*" you're referring to?

PATRON #2: The guard, (*GESTURES OFFSTAGE*) he told us we'd see a woman sitting—

PATRON #1: GETS UP FROM BENCH.

PATRON #1: I'm *not* part of this . . . well, I didn't plan to be anyway. I just happened to be in this gallery, on this bench, when these *people*, the Art-Varks, they're an artists' collective, *supposedly*.

Anyway, they've staged this whole . . . something. I have *nothing* to do with this. If they're telling people that I'm in on it, that's incorrect and—

PATRON #2: (*Addressing PATRON #3*) This is awesome; you don't get this in the maritime gallery, that's for sure!

PATRON #1: Look, you two have been duped. These nut-jobs are running around acting like guards, then artists, then guards ... then ... God knows what.

I thought it was all pretty cute at first, but I draw the line when they claim I'm part of this charade.

PATRON #2: But how do we know you're *not*? Why would the guard say that you are?

PATRON #1: I have *no* idea. Take it from *me*, not *him*.

PATRON #3: This is why I like a picture of a sail-boat ... or even a dock.

PATRON #2: So that guy was lying?

PATRON #1: *Yes*, certainly about me, and probably about everything.

PATRON #2: It's not right. He looked like a museum guard, so I believed him.

PATRON #1: There's a federal offense known as criminal impersonation you know.

PATRON #2: Geez ... I was excited to be involved; now I feel deceived, violated almost.

PATRON #1: Yeah, well ... join the club.

PATRON #3: I don't think that'll be necessary ... we're *already* a club!

PATRON #3 AND PATRON #2 BUMP FISTS.

PATRON #3 AND PATRON #2 (*in unison*): ART VARKS!

GUARD #1 and GUARD #2 ENTER AND FIST-BUMP/HIGH FIVE PATRON #2 AND PATRON #3; ALL FOUR SAY "ART-VARKS."

PATRON #1 SITS DOWN AND HANGS HEAD AS THE ART-VARKS MILL AROUND IN A CELEBRATORY MOOD.

END – BLACKOUT