

Art Post 9/11

We've been spending much of the past few months reporting that September 11th was a catastrophic event for many industries: airlines, hotels, rental cars, but what is coming to light now is how the shockwaves from that day have done extensive damage to areas not so obvious, like the business of fine art. From the Arts Desk of WHYY in Philadelphia Beatrice Black reports.

For the past three months one hundred thirty paintings, drawings, and sculptures by Vincent VanGogh and Paul Gauguin have been living at the Art Institute of Chicago. More than five dozen collectors from around the world loaned out pieces for the special show. It's a crowd pleaser; an estimated three quarters of a million people will have bought a ten to twenty dollar ticket to see the exhibition before it closes on January 13th. The Chicago museum will then ship the blockbuster collection to the VanGogh museum in Amsterdam for a February opening. Spokesperson Heidi Van Damm expects it will be the last big show she'll work on for a long time.

HVD-The whole scenery of temporary exhibitions of this size will change in the future. It's very expensive to organize exhibitions of this size and, with the events of the 11th of September, insurance will go so much higher.

BB-Art insurance has already gone so much higher says Edward Abel president of The American Association of Museums.

EA-I've heard estimates of the cost increases of insurance of anything from a hundred percent to five hundred percent.

BB-The runaway premium increases are in the re-insurance industry. That's the insurance the insurance companies buy for themselves. Abel hasn't heard of any shows being canceled, but he says several have been postponed. In addition to the insurance cost, transporting has gotten harder because of tighter air travel security; and says Detrick Von Frank, president of the Axa Art Insurance Company; art owners have turned skittish.

DVF-Some institutional and private collectors are hesitant to loan major art works for exhibitions because they are afraid of terrorist attacks.

BB- Von Franks believes that reluctance will pass if there isn't another act of terrorism. Owners have an incentive to loan works because their prestige and value appreciate when chosen for a major show. Comprehensive traveling exhibits contribute more to a museum's bottom line than ticket revenues. Museum gift shops thrive on sales of exhibition posters, books, and baubles. More importantly, says Edward Abel at the American Association of Museums, big shows build customer base.

EA-They generate new audiences who come because it's a special thing to do. They find that art museums are very attractive to them and they come back.

BB-Museum directors won't give up on such a powerful business strategy without a fight. Jay Gates at the Philips Collection, a modern art museum in Washington, has no plans to cancel two shows he has in the works.

JG-It may be a more expensive proposition but I don't think that that signals a dramatic change in the commitment of major cultural institutions to go about presenting their mission of putting people in touch with great works of art.

BB-The art world may get a hand from Congress. Legislation to create a federal program for terrorism insurance would likely bring down the cost of insuring fine art exhibitions. In Philadelphia, I'm Beatrice Black for Market Place.