

Exhibition and museum attendance figures 2009

Japan's love of exhibitions proves recession-proof

Change at the top of the European blockbuster tree in Paris, London and Moscow, but business as usual in New York

In Paris, London and Moscow young museums have toppled long-established ones from the top of the exhibition tree in each respective city. But globally Japan's museums remain in a league of their own when it comes to organising blockbuster exhibitions. In *The Art Newspaper's* 15th annual survey of attendance figures three Tokyo museums and one in Nara, 300 miles south west of the capital, fill the top four places.

As in 2008, the average visitor-per-day statistics from Japan are staggering. When the Tokyo National Museum displayed *Ashura*, one of the nation's most famous Buddhist statues, along with other treasures from the Kohfukuji temple, Nara, on average 15,960 people a day went to see them. In Nara itself, the capital of Japan in the eighth century, almost the same number of people went daily to see Shoso-in treasures, which included objects belonging to Emperor Shomu (701-756), at the Nara National Museum. When the Tokyo National Museum borrowed treasures from the Imperial Collection to mark the 20th anniversary of the coronation of Emperor Akihito, it attracted a "mere" 9,473 visitors a day.

The huge crowds flocking to see Japan's spiritual treasures has a spiritual as well as artistic dimension—with some people praying in front of the objects in the museums. This phenomenon was the subject of a symposium at the Tokyo National Museum last month. Greg Irvine, the senior curator in the Japanese department of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, who attended the symposium and the *Ashura* exhibition, says the popularity of such shows is increasing, and it mirrors the popularity of open days in the temples. "The negotiations involved in getting [such treasures] to the museum are endless," he says.

European old master paintings remain a big draw in Japan. The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, borrowed paintings from the Louvre, including work by Rembrandt, Poussin and Velázquez, to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The show attracted more than 850,000 visitors.

There is a museum new to the blockbuster list in fifth place: the Musée Quai Branly in Paris. The ethnographic museum attracted an average of 7,868 visitors a day to the second edition of its Photoquai Biennale, a celebration of international photography, just ahead of "Picasso and the Masters" at the Grand Palais. A third show in Paris, the Pompidou's "Kandinsky", proved almost as popular, which put the venue in seventh place, a rise of 30 places on its Giacometti show in 2008.

In terms of strength in depth from one institution, New York's Museum of Modern Art



Tokyo's top draw: *Ashura* statue and other national treasures from the Kohfukuji temple, Nara

(MoMA) is unrivalled. In 2009 its exhibitions provided seven of the top 16 shows. Joan Miró attracted 6,299 visitors a day, and Pipilotti Rist's "Pour Your Body Out (7345 Cubic Meters)", a sensuous multi-media makeover of its otherwise chilly atrium, attracted almost the same number of visitors. "Van Gogh

and the Colours of the Night" attracted more than 436,000 visitors in total, but when the average visitor per day is calculated, the show comes after James Ensor, Ron Arad, Martin Kippenberger and Marlene Dumas exhibitions. This may be reflection of the effectiveness of MoMA's timed-entry ticketing

for Van Gogh, however. Staying in the US, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "Vermeer's Masterpiece *The Milkmaid*", the latter on loan from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, came next after MoMA's best seven.

In recent years, the Royal Academy of Arts, the British Museum, Tate and the National

Gallery have staged London's crowd-pulling exhibitions. But in 2009, as in Paris, a new kid on the block jumped to pole position. The gallery of collector Charles Saatchi, rehoused in the former Duke of York's barracks, has shifted the centre of gravity westward in London to fashionable Chelsea. The new gallery's opening exhibition, "The Revolution Continues: New Art from China", and its follow-up, "Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East", put it in first and third spot in the UK list. Tate Modern's Rothko exhibition, albeit a charging show whereas the Saatchi Gallery's are free, came eighth in the UK listings. The National Gallery's "Corot to Monet" show was ninth.

In second place in the UK is a museum never before ranked in our survey. Bristol's municipal museum and art gallery was "remixed" by its local street artist made good: Banksy. Nearly 4,000 people a day turned out to see the results, trumping the London-based nationals.

In Melbourne, Australia, as in Bristol in the west of England, people who do not ordinarily go to museums were tempted by Salvador Dalí at the National Gallery of Victoria. The Spanish surrealist drew 332,000 people,

Methodology

All figures were calculated automatically by our database, which computes the number of days an exhibition was open using the following formula: total number of days between start date and end date, divided by seven, multiplied by the number of days per week the institution is open, minus exceptional closures. As this formula always produces an imperfect number (a division of seven) all figures are out by a potential margin of 2%. As the same margin applies uniformly to all averages given, the list represents a fair comparison, however. All data used was supplied by the institutions concerned. Many institutions have one ticket for the entire museum and cannot provide individual attendance for temporary exhibitions. Some institutions offer a number of exhibitions for a single ticket: these are shown as one entry. Institutions with more than one building were asked to provide separate total museum attendance figures for each venue. These venues are marked with an asterisk (*). Institutions that could not provide separate figures were excluded from this portion of the survey.

just short of the art museum's record set in 2004 with an impressionist show. Joaquín Sorolla does not rank among the giants of Spanish art, and yet an exhibition of his narrative paintings and portraits of the late 19th and early 20th century broke a ten-year-old attendance record at the Museo del Prado, Madrid.

In Moscow, the new Garage Centre for Contemporary Art was the most visited venue in the Russian capital, attracting three times the number of visitors per day to the Moscow Biennial than the Tretyakov did with a thematic exhibition of flowers in Russian art.

As large-scale exhibitions can take several years to prepare, the effects of the financial recession—and the scarcity of business sponsorship to mount them—will begin to become apparent in next year's list. The silver lining for many museums during a tough 2009 funding wise has been that total attendance figures have generally held firm or dipped only slightly. **Javier Pes**

Figures compiled by Emily Sharpe and Helen Stoilas with Rob Curran, Megan Empey, Alessandra Franzini, James Hobbs and Josephine Von Daele

THE TOP 30 EXHIBITIONS

Daily	Total	Exhibition	Venue	City	Dates
15,960	946,172	Ashura and Masterpieces from Kohfukuji	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	31 Mar-7 Jun
14,965	299,294	61st Annual Exhibition of Shoso-in Treasures	Nara National Museum	Nara	24 Oct-2 Nov
9,473	447,944	Treasures of the Imperial Collections	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	6 Oct-29 Nov
9,267	851,256	17th-century Painting from the Louvre	National Museum of Western Art	Tokyo	28 Feb-14 Jun
7,868	419,256	2nd Photoquai Biennale	Musée Quai Branly	Paris	22 Sep-22 Nov
7,270	783,352	Picasso and the Masters	Grand Palais	Paris	8 Oct-08-2 Feb
6,553	703,000	Kandinsky	Centre Pompidou	Paris	8 Apr-10 Aug
6,299	377,068	Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting	Museum of Modern Art	New York	2 Nov-08-12 Jan
6,186	391,476	Pipilotti Rist: Pour Your Body Out	Museum of Modern Art	New York	19 Nov-08-2 Feb
5,609	390,219	Treasures of the Habsburg Monarchy	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	25 Sep-14 Dec
5,137	379,408	James Ensor	Museum of Modern Art	New York	28 Jun-21 Sep
5,128	347,995	Ron Arad: No Discipline	Museum of Modern Art	New York	2 Aug-19 Oct
4,945	305,894	Martin Kippenberger: Problem Perspective	Museum of Modern Art	New York	1 Mar-11 May
4,939	51,505	12th Japan Media Arts Festival	National Art Center Tokyo	Tokyo	4 Feb-5 Feb
4,864	266,821	Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave	Museum of Modern Art	New York	14 Dec-08-16 Feb
4,856	436,343	Van Gogh and the Colours of the Night	Museum of Modern Art	New York	21 Sep-08-5 Jan
4,820	459,267	Joaquín Sorolla	Museo Nacional del Prado	Madrid	26 May-13 Sep
4,735	329,446	Vermeer's Masterpiece <i>The Milkmaid</i>	Metropolitan Museum of Art	New York	10 Sep-29 Nov
4,735	317,233	Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from Kabul	Museum of Fine Arts	Houston	1 Mar-17 May
4,717	408,990	Frank Lloyd Wright: from Within Outward	Guggenheim Museum	New York	15 May-23 Aug
4,688	474,821	Warhol's Wide World	Grand Palais	Paris	18 Mar-13 Jul
4,533	323,132	Aernout Mik	Museum of Modern Art	New York	6 May-27 Jul
4,486	450,521	Picasso-Manet	Musée d'Orsay	Paris	8 Oct-08-1 Feb
4,416	473,800	Alexander Calder	Centre Pompidou	Paris	18 Mar-20 Jul
4,303	151,833	Masterpieces of Zen Culture from Myoshinji	Tokyo National Museum	Tokyo	20 Jan-1 Mar
4,178	448,208	Egypt: the Great Civilisation	National Museum of Korea	Seoul	28 Apr-30 Aug
4,150	256,714	Into the Sunset	Museum of Modern Art	New York	29 Mar-8 Jun
4,139	405,612	The Revolution Continues	Saatchi Gallery	London	9 Oct-08-18 Jan
3,927	129,583	Six Billion Others	Grand Palais Nave	Paris	10 Jan-12 Feb
3,859	308,719	Banksy vs Bristol Museum	City Museum and Art Gallery	Bristol	13 Jun-31 Aug

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Nara's Ashura




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