

Up for grabs: Tokyo art exhibit invites theft



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AFP | Tokyo

The Tokyo art exhibit opened to enthusiastic visitors, but many of those circulating weren't just there to soak in some culture -- they were casing the joint for a midnight raid.

Hours after the gallery closed for the night, a crowd had gathered ready to pounce on the artworks. The police station was nearby, but officers only intervened for crowd control, because all the pieces at the Stealable Art Exhibition were up for grabs.

The event was intended as “an experiment”, to alter the relationship between artists and visitors, organiser Tota Hasegawa told AFP.

It was originally conceived

as a low-key event that might attract some covert thievery, but word spread so fast on social media that a crowd of nearly 200 people packed the streets near the gallery hoping for a chance to grab a prize.

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Yusuke Hasada, 26, was a rare winner, gripping a crumpled 10,000 yen (\$93) banknote in a frame, which was part of the “My Money” installation by Gabin Ito.

He arrived an hour before midnight only to see a crowd had already formed.

Since there was no apparent queue, he manoeuvred himself into a spot right in front of the gallery.

“The moment the staff said they should open early due to the big crowd, people rushed in from behind me. I was in the front, and I almost fell over,” he

said. “It was scary.”

Auction resales

Hasada said he plans to hang the work, among those on display supplied by 10 contemporary artists, in his home.

But not everyone stealing the items appeared to have the same idea, with several artworks appearing on online auction sites within hours with price tags as high as 100,000 yen.

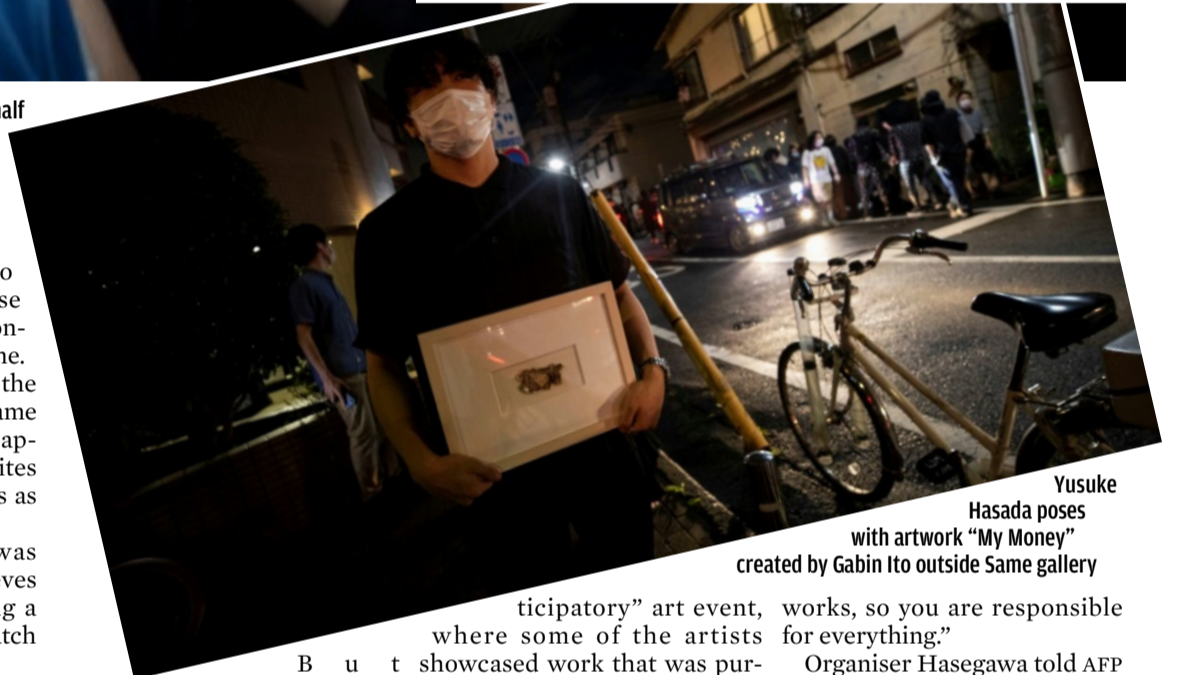
Even after the exhibit was emptied out, would-be thieves continued arriving, forcing a nearby police station to dispatch officers for crowd control.

“You are blocking traffic!” officers shouted.

Yuka Yamauchi, a 35-year-old systems engineer, showed up 15 minutes before midnight but was too late.

“I entered with my husband and it was just packed with so many people... We saw larger artworks taken out by those who came earlier,” she said.

“I haven't seen so many people in a long time as we have been refraining from going out due to the coronavirus.”



Yusuke Hasada poses with artwork “My Money” created by Gabin Ito outside Same gallery

But Yamauchi didn't leave completely empty-handed.

“I've got a clip... It must have been one of those used for the cloth installation. I found it dropped, so I picked it up as a souvenir,” she said with a laugh.

‘Well-mannered’ thieves

Yamauchi recognised the clip because she was at a preview of the artwork six hours earlier to “case” the venue.

She said she would happily come back for a similar “par-

ticipatory” art event, where some of the artists showcased work that was purpose-made for those hoping to make off with it.

Naoki “SAND” Yamamoto's work “Midnight Vandalist” was composed of a stack of peelable pages with printed illustrations.

Another work was a large cloth printed with lines to be cut along with scissors.

But would-be thieves were responsible for organising their own getaway vehicles. A notice was posted at the entrance: “We do not assist art thieves with packing or transporting art-

works, so you are responsible for everything.”

Organiser Hasegawa told AFP he later met with police -- perhaps not used to such large-scale larceny in Japan, with its ultra-low crime rate -- to clear up any misunderstandings about the event and the crowd it attracted. He said the budding thieves had proved to be “well-mannered.”

They might have been there to stage robberies, but when “someone lost a bag with a wallet in it, it was passed onto a staffer and safely returned to the owner.”

Race to rescue turtles entangled in plastic on Bangladesh beach

Cox's Bazar | Bangladesh

At least 20 turtles were dead and dozens more were rescued Sunday after being entangled in plastic waste washed ashore on one of the world's longest beaches in Bangladesh, officials and conservationists said.

Locals said waves of waste -- mostly plastic bottles, fishing nets and buoys -- floated ashore late Saturday. They spotted turtle carcasses among the sand dunes early Sunday.

Bangladesh's forestry department said it was the first time such a large volume of plastic had washed onto the 120-kilometre (75-mile) beach along the Bay of Bengal.

“Hundreds of locals rushed to the beach since early morning to rescue the wounded turtles,” forestry spokesman Sohail Hossain told AFP.

“We have buried the dead ones



A rescued turtle is released back into the sea at Cox's Bazar. At least 20 were killed and dozens trapped in tonnes of plastic waste washed ashore

and are trying to release the rescued turtles back to sea.”

Beach clean-up charity Plastic Bank Bangladesh said their volunteers found and buried at least 20 Olive Ridley turtles

among the estimated 50 tonnes of waste spread out over a 10 kilometre stretch of the beach at Cox's Bazar.

“I haven't seen these many dead turtles lying on the beach



At least 20 dead sea turtles were found among piles of plastic waste washed along the Bay of Bengal beach near Cox's Bazar

in my life and also haven't seen such a massive pile of waste floating ashore,” fisherman Jashim Uddin told AFP.

Leading Bangladesh turtle and tortoise expert Shahriar Caesar

Rahman of the NGO Creative Conservation Alliance said most of the turtles were at least 30 years old.

“The turtles often get trapped in gigantic waste patches float-

ing in the sea and eventually die of suffocation. This seems to be a similar case,” he told AFP.

About 26 tonnes of waste produced from ships and neighbouring countries float into Bay of Bengal every year, said Moazzem Hossain of local conservation charity Save the Nature Bangladesh.

“This is a unique case of plastic invasion. It sends a great danger signal to our marine biodiversity,” he said.

It was not clear how many turtles were rescued.

Local district administrator Kamal Hossain said authorities were investigating the incident.

Olive Ridelys are the most abundant of all sea turtles around the world, according to conservationists.

But their numbers have been declining and the species is recognised as vulnerable by the IUCN Red list.