

Sacred Touch — Part 02 — Excerpt

Key

Text said live by me

Scenic directions

—

[...]

Start Prado Interactive Live Tour through the spaces of the museum

As I was wandering through those huge rooms, I noticed a painting.

And I noticed two men, probably in their thirties, standing in front of it.

In the virtual tour, stop in front of the painting of Felipe II by Titian

Stand up and start talking

By then, I knew I was gay. I wasn't out to anyone. Not even fully to myself. But I knew it very well.

I also knew these two men were gay. A couple. But they didn't look gay in the camp way I had seen on television, which was more or less the only place where I had ever seen gay men.

They looked like very "ordinary" men. And yet, I recognized them. I couldn't explain how. I just knew. My desire knew how to read before it learned how to speak. It felt inspiring. Like. Oh. I can also be like them.

You know, they were, the Decathlon gays.

Talk to the audience

Liam and Josse, can I get you for the reenactment?

Yeh, please, join me. You're good.

You stand here. Like this.

Thaaaank you!

The painting is a portrait of Felipe II of Spain, painted by Tiziano in 1551.

He later became king of Portugal, under the name Felipe I.

And, by the way, Matera was also ruled by him.

Close browser window, pick up blanket with Felipe II

Can you hold this blanket? Like this (back turn to the audience, each hold an end)

Go behind the blanket and talk, my head in the place of the head of Felipe II
I remember this painting because after walking past hundreds of paintings and feeling a bit dumb because I didn't recognize anyone, suddenly I knew who this one was! And I felt proud!

Because in school we learn to hate the Felipes as the bad Spanish kings who ruled Portugal for sixty years.

So I knew this face from my school books.

Place pillow with the face of Felipe II in front of my face
I was doing the museum correctly.
I was doing history right.

Talk to the face on the pillow, which will mirror mine
Look, he's 24. Sexy plump red lips. Semi-closed eyes.

Please hold the face here.
I will now stand here to complete the reenactment.

And then, one of the men said to the other, very casually, in a thick Spanish accent:

Oye, mira! Pero qué guapo!

Look. How handsome he is.
Look. How handsome he is????
Look. How handsome he is???!!!

What. Do. You. Mean? What is this language??!!
My teenage brain short-circuited.

I felt dizzy. Ashamed. Almost attacked. The ground collapsed. I collapsed.

You don't say that in a museum! You don't talk about painting in that way! Not from this period!
History is sacred. Museums are sacred.

And worse: these were the men I thought I might become. My Decathlon gays!

Is this what being gay is? Going to museums and lusting over dead kings?
These men were embarrassing. They were the reason people hated us!

And I was going to become one of them.

Because look at me here.

[...]

I also asked GPT to prepare the image. This is what it told me.

"We're so sorry, but this image violates our guardrails around nudity, sexuality, or erotic content. I get why this feels arbitrary, so let's unpack it calmly and precisely.

The guardrails are blunt instruments. They ask: could this be read as an eroticized depiction of a real person, even if there are no cues of arousal?

Two important clarifications:

- 1. Classical nudity itself is allowed. Greek statues, museum context, idealized anatomy — all fine.*
- 2. The shift toward photography + full body attractiveness is what makes the system nervous.*

I'm going to be very straightforward: this is about how the image system classifies intent.

So the fix is not to argue with it, but to change how the intent is encoded, while keeping the visual outcome you want.

Here are some workarounds:

- 1. Describe the result as clearly a marble statue, not a living body that happens to look like one;*
- 2. Mention "idealized classical proportions" or "canonical Greek features";*
- 3. Request a technical anatomy study, with a purely clinical and neutral framing.*

Pick water bottle with dick print and drink from it for a loooooong moment.

The trick is to make the ambiguity unmistakably art."

[...]

So I also learned to split myself.

What I felt versus what I was told I was supposed to be seeing.

Until I learned to see without feeling.

And, just like that, the cut between the two was done.

Pick up water bottle, place it at the croth, and simulate taking a dickpic
I've been asking friends about their experiences.

Water bottle as a dickpick. Little silence
And one told me that for him it was scientific illustrations in schoolbooks.

So. Why did these temporal ties of affect got cut?

One of the first things you hear in a history class is that “the past is a foreign country.”
I find it curious that the foreigner is the benchmark of disconnection both in time and space.

Place pillow with Felipe II head up on the table

But affect is everywhere. In history. In politics.

Sit on the pillow

What I am proposing is that we use the body as a bridge to connect to a past that is inevitably mixed in the present. I can say: these images work in my body in ways I still recognize. Maybe we share more than I was told?

I also notice that a lot of art and discourse in art departs from pain, trauma, loss, grief. I find that this can be quite Protestant. As if pleasure could never ground anything generative at all, let alone historical or political consciousness.

But I believe bodily enjoyment can intervene in the damage done in the name of civilization and progress. Because pleasure travels. It ignores borders. It ignores chronology.

In a world where atomizing us into isolated individuals serves a very useful political purpose, these recognitions can build connections between people who are presented as irreconcilably different. Maybe the universal is the shared compulsion to ask: I recognize something in you. What does it feel like?

And that the same mechanism of cutting temporal continuity, vertically speaking, is the same mechanism that cuts horizontal solidarity, in the present. And I need some shared universality in order to live.

[...]