## Museum treasures imperiled by klutzy visitors

BY LEANNE ITALIE

trip here. A misplaced elbow there. The stumbling art student who tore a Picasso tapped into the worst fears of clumsy grown-ups and every well-intentioned parent who dares venture into bigpeople museums with small children.

Signs demanding DO NOT TOUCH don't mean much when accidents happen, especially when the culprits aren't old enough to read but are small enough — and antsy enough — to dash through barriers.

The Moment for Julee Morrison of Taylorsville, Utah, came at Elvis Presley's Graceland, a huge attraction in Memphis, Tenn., with more than 600,000 visitors a year. All she wanted to do was feed her then 4-year-old son's interest in the King. The boy was regaling his family with fun facts when his little brother disappeared.

"We were in line at the grave site when I glanced around and there on top of Elvis' grave was my 18-monthold. He had squeezed through the rodiron gate. I was horrified!" she said.

Morrison was too big to follow him, resorting to bear crackers as a bribe to get him in her clutches. "Eyes were burning on my neck."

On the same three-week, cross-coun-

**YOUR** Are near misses common

try trip, her little escape artist climbed over faux boulders to get to a dinosaur at a museum out West. "I bent over to tie my 4-year old's shoe. When I stood up, Zac had scaled the boulders and headed into the exhibit to touch the dinosaur," she said.

Politely worded rules for kids and adults on occurrences? how to avoid damaging

sometimes priceless work are plastered on museum Web sites, especially those that have opened their doors to splashy, crowd-pleasing exhibitions, special

events that sometimes include alcohol service — and tipsy guests — and art appreciation classes for young and old.

The woman who lost her balance and fell onto Picasso's "The Actor" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art last week was attending an art class when she stumbled. The museum's director, Thomas P. Campbell, is pursuing a review of policies and procedures in the aftermath of the 6-inch tear that restorers will repair.

While near misses are more common than direct hits, serious damage has been done by the clumsy.

In 2008, a 9-foot-tall ceramic totem by Costa Rican artist Tatiana Echeverri Fernandez and on view at the Royal Academy of Arts in London broke into pieces after a visitor tripped into it. Two years prior, at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, a man who had bent over to tie his shoes tripped over a lace and fell down a flight of stairs into a nearly 100-pound Qing Dynasty vase and two others dat-

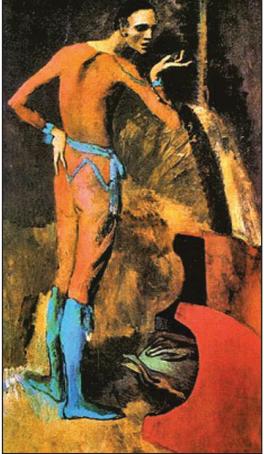
ing from the late 17th century or early 18th century.

The vase was left in 113 pieces that were put back together, but its value was seriously compromised.

"I snagged my shoelace, missed the step and crash, bang, wallop — there were a million pieces of high-quality Qing ceramics lying around underneath me," Nick Flynn told the AP at the time.

Steve Wynn knows the feeling. The casino mogul was about to sell Picasso's "Le Reve" for \$139 million in 2006 when he elbowed the work while showing it to friends, poking a thumb-size hole through the canvas. The portrait of a Picasso mistress was repaired and Wynn decided to keep it.

'We have near misses every day," said Michelle A. Lehrman Jenness, security chief at The Art Institute of Chicago. "The officers are trained in reading body language. If somebody is waving around a brochure, pointing at a painting, for instance, we'll ask them to step back before anything happens."



"The Actor," a painting from Picasso's rose period. A 6inch tear occurred in the canvas' lower right-hand corner when a woman lost her balance and fell on the painting. - AP PHOTO/METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, COPYRIGHT ESTATE OF PABLO PICASSO/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK