Avant-garde artist Arthur Koepcke’s 1965 art work Reading-work-piece, which depicts part of a crossword, is displayed at Nuremberg’s Neues Museum. It features the phrase “insert words.”

A tour group recently came to visit. One of its members took out a ballpoint pen and started filling words in the blank space.

The “vandal” was soon stopped by horrified staff. But what could you do when she was a 91-year-old woman who explained that she was just following instructions. It did say “insert words,” didn’t it?

The piece has an insurance value of 80,000 euros (HK$694,200), and museum officials believe the work can be restored.

Museum chief Eva-Christina Kraus filed a criminal complaint nonetheless, saying the case had to be reported for insurance reasons though there was no malicious intent. “It’s clear to us that the older lady didn’t mean any harm,” Kraus said. What the old lady has done can be called “無心之失” (wu2 xin1 zhi1 shi1).

Terms containing the character “失” (shi1) include:

- 失望 (shi1 wang4) – disappointed
- 失敗 (shi1 bai4) – failure; to fail; to lose
- 失業 (shi1 ye4) – to be out of work
- 失眠 (shi1 mian2) – insomnia