

MUSEUM MEMORIES

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Byron Kim, Alexandra Leykauf,
John Menick, Ara Merjian, Daisy Nam,
Jenny Perlin, Stephen Prina, Meg
Rotzel, Matt Saunders, Shelly Silver,
and Herb Tam

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Willie and his pal Eddie visit Eva, who lives in Cleveland. When they go out to see Lake Erie it is lost in a complete whiteout.

“You know, it’s funny,” says Eddie.
 “You come to some place new, and everything looks just the same.”
 — Scene from *Stranger Than Paradise*,
 a 1984 film by Jim Jarmusch

When I was a kid museums never changed. The Art Institute was where you went to see Impressionist paintings and Joseph Cornell boxes. The Museum of Science and Industry had the coal mine exhibit. The Field Museum? Tyrannosaurus Rex. (Judith Barry also remembers this imposing fossil from her childhood, p. 16.) And yet, even though these buildings and their contents were reliably constant, I always found them mysterious and weird. (Also: dark. What is it about murky light that stimulates the imagination?) Then, in 1996, the Museum of Contemporary Art opened a big new glass building in a pristine site on the Gold Coast, right behind the legendary Water Tower.

Since then, it seems like every museum is either moving or changing. (The Art Institute got its Renzo Piano extension in 2009.) Perhaps the people in charge of museums have something to prove—perhaps trustees demand a visible benchmark of progress. What better way to show success than the need for more space? What is alarming is how similar the new buildings are to one another, enveloping visitors in poured concrete blandness, smothering imaginations with UV-filtered natural light. There is often a case to be made for

the change; not every museum can stand the literal, not figurative, test of time.

But with every new building an old building is gone: repurposed or demolished. In *Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald records the movements of the titular protagonist, who is at a train station in Czechoslovakia when he spies a cast-iron column. Does he remember it from the train trip he took as a young boy fleeing the Nazis? Possibly. And yet he is less interested in whether he remembers the column from his childhood than whether the column might remember him. If so, it would be “a witness to what I could no longer recollect for myself.”

The motivation for this publication was simple: Since many museums—witness to much that we can no longer recollect for ourselves—are no longer around, we set out to capture memories of these museums, before they are lost for good.

—*Claire Barliant*

I remember visiting LACMA with my parents when I was growing up in Los Angeles.

My parents both loved art and my dad especially loved Matisse and Diebenkorn. I remember playing a game with him, I must have been eight or nine, where we would walk into a gallery in the permanent collection and try to identify the artist for each painting—David Hockney, Ed Ruscha, Judy Chicago, and so on. And, of course, Matisses, and Diebenkorn.

I went back to the museum a few years ago and the permanent collection rooms were not the way I remember them. I guess the museum was renovated in the late '80s, so this explains it. But I have a strong memory of seeing this painting in a specific room:

1



I think this painting formed my painting practice. Still think about it all the time.

—*Sarah Crowner*

Calder's *Circus* at the old Whitney was pure joy. The lion! I do not remember much from museum visits when I was a child but the *Circus* took a shortcut into

my brain like an ecstatic toy. I vaguely recall feeling like it was out of place, a bit of explicit fun in the midst of stodgy adult stuff.

—Jennifer Paige Cohen

2



Plenty has been lost and very little gained in the twenty-five years since I arrived in New York. If I had to remember one space that is no longer with us, however reluctantly, it would be the Guggenheim Museum SoHo. In my four years as a student during the 1990s, the Guggenheim's SoHo branch was a bland placeholder in downtown's terminal culture. But, in 1998, the museum hosted "Premises," an exhibition whose effect on me is still ongoing. Subtitled "Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, & Design from France, 1958–1998," the exhibition was organized by, if not bought readymade from, the Centre Pompidou.* Fittingly for this remembrance, the exhibition was devoted to virtuality of the francophone variety, with snapshots of Yves Klein leaping into the void (from multiple

angles), unbuilt utopian superblocks of all kinds, Deleuze's television *Abecedarium*, Delphine Seyrig sprawling across *Last Year in Marienbad*, plus my first glimpses of the work of Pierre Huyghe and Thomas Hirschhorn. (The latter, if I remember correctly, spent some time in the Prince Street windows making a typically deranged tin foil sculpture.) Every important element of my work in the last two decades owes something to that exhibition, and over the years I've bought and lost the catalogue three times. (The most recent purchase was an online edition labeled "collectable," a true sign of obsolescence.) The show closed sometime in '99, and the museum closed soon after that. Today the space is Rem Koolhaas's Prince Street Prada. One day soon, it too will be virtualized.

* I should also mention the curators here: Bernard Blistène, Alison M. Gingeras, and Alain Guiheux.

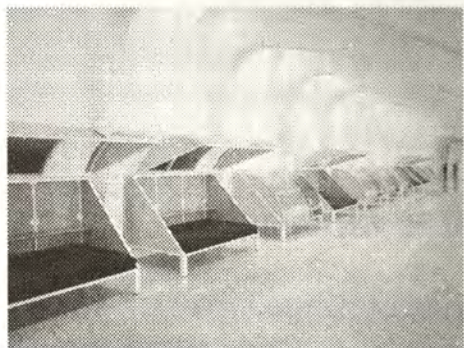
—John Menick



The image of cool white pitted marble keeps coming to mind, a mashup of architectural memories. Low-slung gallery spaces, accented with darkened brass, walnut railings, black leather

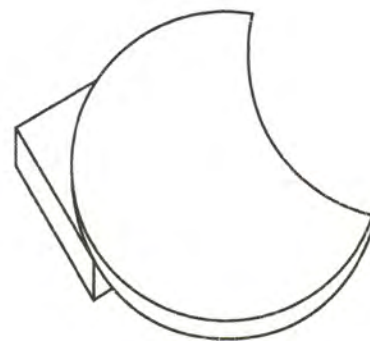
upholstered benches, floating stairs. The marble is cold on the cheek and I can feel my little teeth pressing into stained wood. My little girl legs pull sharply from the stick of leather. These interior details are from early childhood—the Walker Art Center, the Chicago Art Institute, MoMA—and the local museums—Bergstrom Mahler Museum of Glass in Neenah Wisconsin with the kiln in the basement, the Appleton Association of Artists in their downtown co-op where my father showed his prints with his bearded friends.

3



The Milwaukee Art Museum was/is a favorite walk into the past: the Eero Saarinen's view finders on legs, the brutalist Kahler concrete, and the (sort of) recent Calatrava wings that unfold and tighten with chalky interior walls. Andrea Zittel's *A-Z Wagon Stations* (2003) are forever backing up against them in my mind, an opportunity to sleep over alone. I know there is now a Shield's Building, but I can't sense it in my body, so perhaps it doesn't exist?

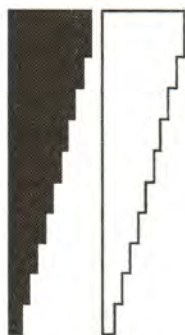
—Meg Rotzel



It seems like the Museum of Modern Art is always under construction. In late 2002, not long after I'd moved to New York from Boston, MoMA was renovating, so they moved their film screenings from the movie theaters in the Museum to the Gramercy Theatre on East 23rd Street near Lexington Avenue. The Gramercy was "dark" at the time – a fully-equipped movie theater that wasn't showing movies. Few today remember this short but sweet period in New York City moviegoing.

The Gramercy was an old theater that seated close to 700 people and had a balcony. The air-conditioning was not up to cineplex standards. It had an odd lounge area, with the red sofas and upward-pointing wall lamps of the apartments in a David Lynch movie. During this period, all the cinephiles who had to switch to the Gramercy from the Museum, me included, had the same realization at the same time: this is way better than MoMA. This is where they should always show the films. My God, this is fun – we've been let out of school! This communal reaction said something about seeing films in a museum setting, no matter how well-designed the theater and how good the programming.

I had a full-time job in publishing then, but I used to ditch work sometimes to go see films at the Gramercy MoMA, even though my job was in Midtown right next to the actual Museum of Modern Art and the Gramercy was over thirty blocks away. I never would have considered leaving work early to go to MoMA on 53rd Street, but the MoMA Gramercy called to me. I distinctly remember slinking off one afternoon to see Agnès Varda's *Les Créatures*. And I had one of the great moviegoing experiences of my life there, seeing *We Can't Go Home Again* as part of a complete Nicholas Ray retrospective. It was a film I'd been waiting to see for years. It's an intense, emotionally volatile, experimental film Ray made in the 1970s with his film students after his Hollywood career had ended. Seeing it at the Gramercy was like being a part of the film in a way I don't think I would have felt at MoMA.



Before the renovation at the Museum was done, in the spring of 2004, MoMA stopped screening films at the Gramercy and never showed another movie there. Instead, they should have bought the theater. But maybe continuing to run it would have shown them up. A ratty old stand-alone

theater with sluggish air-conditioning and old sofas was in its way a better venue for seeing movies than what they had and what they built.

The MoMA Gramercy was one of the great missed opportunities in this city. If MoMA had continued to operate it, it would have done away with the awkward weirdness of the MoMA screenings, with their separate entrance and separate ticket-sales desk, with the indifferent-to-hostile security guards, and the random-seeming showtimes, half of which start after the museum is closed. The Gramercy is now a minor music venue still called the Gramercy Theatre. They ripped out the seats under the universal assumption that everyone prefers to stand for hours to see rock bands.

—A.S. Hamrah

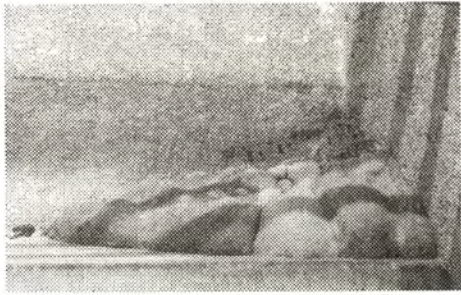
The Whitney Museum of American Art. It's the late '70's-early '80's. Enter a young girl, her older brother, her parents. They visit four or five times a year. Maybe more.

This massive concrete structure didn't look much like a building to a kid. It was more like the approximation of a building that might become a building someday if they ever finished it. Each time they made the trip inside, its heavy walls enfolded her like a cave. Ominous and foreboding but with a dull hum.

Despite her broad dismissal of the hovering behemoth there were two spots in the museum she eagerly anticipated. Pockets of magic. Here she would drag her feet to slow the steady pace of the rest of her family. As they moved on she

would hang back, basking in the warmth of these familiar faces.

4



One sat in the lobby. The other was tucked into the stairwell. Each was a miniature world hovering in the micro/macro expansion/contraction of a kid-sized imagination. Both were made by adults. But the girl couldn't be sure whether or not they were designed for children. This made her question her judgment as she recognized herself in them so completely, surrendering to delight each time she revisited.

In the lobby, given pride of place before reaching the elevators, Alexander Calder's *Circus* was frozen in a vitrine, adjacent to an accompanying video of the pieces in motion. Nested in a corner of the stairwell (on which floor it was, exactly, she could never figure out, but was always made giddy by the confusion) was Charles Simonds's *Dwellings*.

Amid the dark and smothering weight of the museum she would be buoyed in a lightness, tickled by these two works seeming both out of place but positioned just right.

—Anna Craycroft

I grew up in the suburbs of San Francisco and I always loved visiting the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I was in high school and just getting interested in art, and the museum was located in a bureaucratic-feeling building in the Civic Center area. I remember SFMOMA being quiet and sleepy. Security guards seemed surprised when anyone came in wanting to see the exhibitions. I would always go alone and I would often be the only person in a large gallery of paintings, drawings, or sculptures. Because it was so quiet, I really learned how to have internal conversations with art and to wonder why an artist would do this or that.



SFMOMA owns some incredible Robert Rauschenberg combine paintings and those were the pieces that blew me away. They made me think that almost anything was possible with art and they showed me that one doesn't have to paint to make a painting. Nowadays, because I work in a museum, I realize that SFMOMA back then was quiet and slow for many reasons. Maybe they didn't think so much about accessibility and outreach—these weren't major priorities for museums like they are today. Nowadays, museum-going is a mainstream entertainment option and running a museum is often akin to running a business or corporation.

I've been to the newly renovated SFMOMA and it's nothing like the version of my high school days. Every gallery was filled with people with varying degrees of interest in the art. Even though most of the art was stationary, being in any of its galleries was dizzying and distracting because of all the visitors moving around. I miss those days of being completely alone with the mysteries of an artwork and asking myself questions about intention, quality, context, and history.

—Herb Tam



Thinking back to the Whitney of the Breuer days, the space that taught me the most was the film and video gallery on the second floor. It wasn't fancy at all. In this simple room the museum showed what appeared to me a miraculous range of films, videos, and moving image installations. What this room performed seems nearly impossible to do today in museums that insist on renovations making modularity and multi-purpose space their greatest priority.

The film and video gallery was a room with a door. One door to go in, same door to go out. A door that could open and close. The room was completely dark (okay, maybe there was an

exit sign, but it was dimmed). Its dimensions were that of an overgrown shoe-box. It had dark gray carpet and rows of chairs that could be moved or rearranged if needed. It had a good screen and a real projection booth with all film and video formats, including Super-8, 16mm, and 35mm. And it had an excellent, professionally trained projectionist or two. A projectionist who cares knows what to do with whatever moving image media comes their way. (Richard Bloes is the one I met at the old Whitney who is still at the new one and still amazing.)

In that unencumbered room I saw complex, challenging film programs that rotated every single day and expanded creative horizons and historical knowledge. I saw incredible multi-projector installations. I saw Oskar Fischinger's *Raumlichtkunst* for the first time. I got a fantastic education while visiting that room that had a door and a screen and a projection booth and not much else. (Outside of that room, Chrissie Iles's *Into the Light* exhibition in 2001 revolutionized what I knew of moving images.)

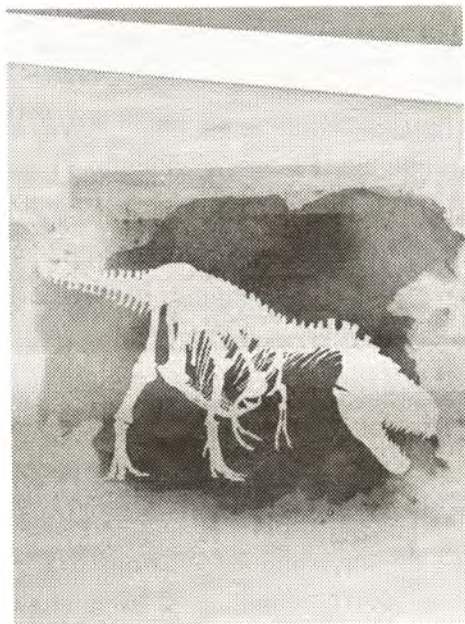
Most screening rooms in museums these days seem to rely on the wide angle throw of a video projector to save space; they're shallow so as not to take up too much space in the floorplan and you can get more stuff into the rest of the galleries. If there are rows of chairs you can be almost sure no one is going to sit in them. Chairs mean commitment and in a museum (especially at current ticket prices) you inevitably feel the clock is ticking and you really need to see everything. You edge your way in, take a quick, squished peek and then fumble your way through the light lock or curtain so other people can peek around the corner

to have a glance and then say "I'll come back. No, really, I will." And the you I'm writing about isn't just you, it's also me.

The new Whitney has done a better job than most of the other museums in New York at handling video work in its new space. But watching moving images in multi-purpose spaces with floor-to-ceiling windows incompletely covered with blackout curtains is simply different. The dark carpeted shoebox of my starry-eyed-new-to-New-York experience (surely romanticized in this brief essay) engendered a sense of trust and commitment that I haven't experienced since.

—Jenny Perlin

5

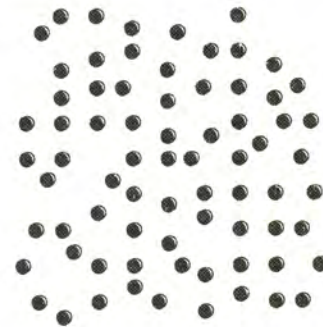


One of my earliest memories is of dinosaur skeletons in a museum. It must have been the Field Museum in Chicago as that's where we lived when I was three years old. Apparently, I was both terrified and excited seeing large dinosaur

skeletons, and when I could escape my cage, the stroller, I would hide among their bones. The bones became an early obsession and no drawing was complete without a bone. But all of this changed after I saw monsters and ghosts in movies. Soon I was afraid to sleep indoors for fear our house would be stomped out. Fortunately, this condition subsided after repeated visits to the Natural History Museum in New York. It became my sanctuary. I spent hours imagining myself in Carl Akeley's dioramas where, in the midst of his bucolic naturalism, it seemed all the animals were my friends.

Then I discovered horses.

—Judith Barry



What I recall most strikingly about the "old" MoMA was the the escalator rising prominently from the lobby, at whose base appeared permanently affixed a painting by Paul Signac bearing a mouthful of a title: *Opus 217: Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890* (1890). The lanky Fénéon holds before him a no less spindly flower, gripping in his other

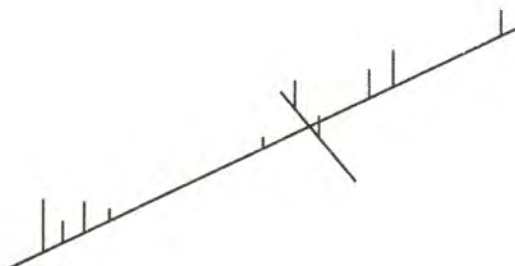
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hand a hat and cane, suggesting a prestidigitator before a kaleidoscopic burst of hallucinatory forms. His unfathomable gesture seemed to usher the visitor up the stairs to awaiting, unseen marvels. Of course, my “old” MoMA—site of sporadic undergraduate forays—had been updated on various occasions since its original opening on 53rd street, most notably in the 1980s. For me, that expansion never offset a fundamentally intimate, even cozy encounter with the works on display. Most mesmerizing was the lone, small room dedicated to the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, pioneer of Metaphysical aesthetics and erstwhile godfather to the Surrealists. Though his early, groundbreaking work matured in Paris on the eve of World War One, his painting remains to this day often erroneously hung alongside the Surrealists rather than the Parisian avant-gardists—Léger, Mondrian, Cubist-epoch Rivera, Matisse, etc—alongside whom he worked on the Rue Campagne-Première. MoMA has long since rectified such oversight; the painter’s work rightly appears in the same gallery as works by Modigliani and Ozenfant and Brancusi. But pre-2004, he had his own room—a cluster of large-scale cityscapes which offered—even

in a diminutive space—windows onto other worlds. The old-new MoMA of Tanuguchi’s renovation buried any such intimacy under antiseptically tidy lines and a re-branding of spaces in the image of some airport lounge. That re-branding was undertaken quite literally, with practically every water fountain and door knob bearing the title of some benefactor. I recall reading Yve-Alain Bois’s review in *Artforum* of the re-opened museum and chuckling at his cheeky insistence upon naming each newly dedicated facet of the building design—names which had come to rival in prominence the artists on display.

—Ara Merjian



In the summer of 2002, before I started grad school, I worked for an art moving company to pack up MoMA’s print and photo departments in advance of the museum’s temporary move to Queens. This was MoMA’s last major renovation.

It was interesting to get an intimate sense of these two collections. The print department was particularly exciting because of the broad terms of what a print could be. Ephemera from performances, invitations, and

correspondence, as well as silkscreens and etchings, were removed from numerous flat files. The curatorial team, barring one or two employees, were much more stuffy than the Photo staff. The manner in Prints was more like a library than what I expected of a contemporary art institution. Photo's collection was still largely under the shadow of John Szarkowski, and as a young artist I was surprised by how much contemporary photography seemed to be missing from the department's holdings.

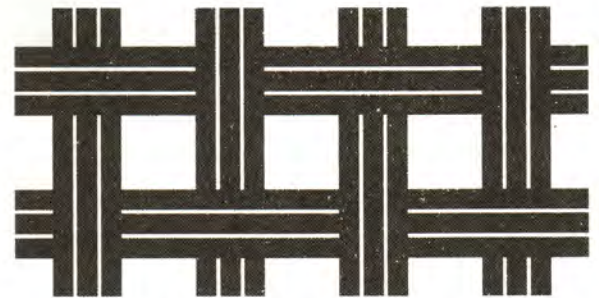
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Seventeen years is a long time, and I can't remember all of the artworks that we wrapped or even what stood out at the time. What I do remember is that a co-worker, Erik, and I created a fake gay bar that we would either "go to" after work or talked about seeing each other at and who we were making out with and so on. We named it The Garbage Can, and it seemed to be an amalgam of my older gay co-worker's experiences and my fantasy of pre-Giuliani New York. As the name suggests, it was a dive bar, but it had exactly what we needed after a monotonous day of wrapping items in glassine and making archival folders and boxes. The Garbage Can was our escape from the mainly (all?) straight staff, and provided a very unarchival alternative to the materials we were surrounded by seven hours a day. Were

we engaging in an oral history project, generating our own archive in the midst of all these artworks? We definitely had fun. Too much fun in Erik's case, because he was fired for being frequently tardy (late nights at The Garbage Can). We still see each other and, without fail, we always say, "I haven't seen you at The Garbage Can in a while!"

—Matt Keegan



The museum that continues to haunt me is the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg. Pretty scary name, but my favorite museum, still.

My parents took me there when I was a child. Later, during my studies at the art academy in Nürnberg, I had a job there as a weekend guard. Back then, in the late '90s, it was still a very quiet place. The triumph of the weekend was always to be assigned to the department Frömmigkeit (Piety). While the museum generally didn't have many visitors, the Piety department often had none. I sat there with my little counter (one of those metal things where you press a button for each visitor) and counted up to eight intruders on a busy weekend. The rest of the time I spent

reading books and studying every single object until I could have written an inventory of them. Piety still mostly contains devotionalia like tiny legs, lungs, and hearts, made from wax or lead; mandrakes, relics; miniature paintings of the virgin Mary and the saints and so forth.

Piety was my favorite department to work in, for the sake of peace and quiet, but the two objects I like best are in different depart-

ments (the museum holds 1.3 million objects and is the largest museum of cultural history in the German-speaking countries).

One is Martin Behaim's globe from 1493 (the oldest surviving one). News of Columbus's "discovery" hadn't spread to Nürnberg

and the Americas aren't on it. As a child, I loved all kinds of maps. Most of all the map of Stevenson's *Treasure Island* but also the world-map puzzle I had, and the school Atlas. I even jig-sawed the map of Europe once and painted every country in a different color.

Yet I never asked myself how we come to know what the world looks like from above until I saw Behaim's globe with all its faults. The idea that it had to be produced only with the knowledge gathered on voyages, that there wasn't the possibility of an overview from the sky, blew my mind. My second favorite object is the tusk of a unicorn in the



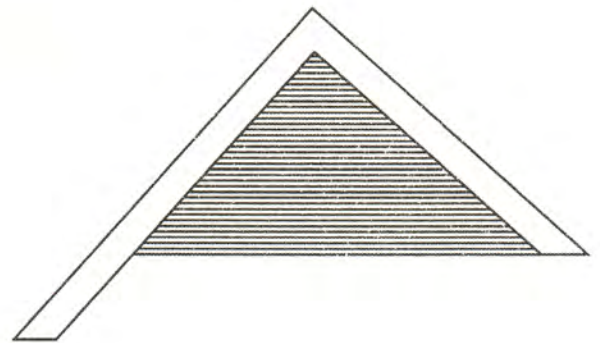
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pharmaceutical collection. I have never been fully convinced that it is actually the tusk of a narwhal.

In the '90s the renovation of the museum was already almost concluded. A new glass façade and entrance area, space for changing exhibitions, bookshop, café . . . the usual. There are still quieter areas since the whole museum is a maze of buildings from different eras, including a medieval monastery and a brutalist block from the seventies.

I guess, in spite of all the restructuring, the museum's new floor plans still aren't apt to lead visitors to all the hidden corners I discovered during my time there. Nowadays there are half a million visitors per year, the library is popular, and the museum has an affiliated research center. That's all very well. And yet I liked it better when it felt like it was mine.

—Alexandra Leykauf



I grew up in NY & from my child point of view, museums were local affairs. Quiet & a bit dusty. Even if they were visited by tourists, this didn't seem to be their raison d'être. Why were they there? They were there for me.

Closest to my heart, tillage to, were the dark rooms of the Brooklyn Museum, where I'd go on Saturdays for art classes. The best. Then we left Brooklyn. I'd go to the Met & get lost, wandering past broken things that looked recognizable but older, misshapen, their original purpose denied. Chairs I couldn't sit on; jewelry that no longer touched skin. It was through this cumulative experience of solitary walking through hushed gallery spaces, projecting whatever fantasy of the moment, that my idea of ownership grew. It included the space, objects, footsteps, smell.

The Treasures of Tutankhamon (the exhibition you've been waiting for since 1325 B.C.) changed everything. Who can resist the incessantly advertised call of a young king, gold & death. Publicized years in advance, kept but arrived at the Met on December 1978, after circulating the country. Months before, Steve Martin had sung about Tut on SNL, the song sold over a million copies. And so, the first museum blockbuster, in my memory anyway, was born. Suddenly all museums were trying to follow in Tut's footsteps & have been trying to do so ever since. Crowds register as success. Mystery or even artist agency replaced by ever bigger wall text. But I digress.

I was and still am clingy. I was disgruntled by MoMA's renovation in 1983, but can't remember why. After seeing the 1997 renovation, the part of MoMA I missed most (small knife in heart) was the grand swirls of escalators by the windows in the garden hall which had, in fact, been added in '83. I still miss them, with their people-watching opportunities & view to the internal garden, as opposed to the back-and-forth shopping mall escalators which the 1997 renovation brought. Above all, the old escalators celebrated movement & changing perspective, while revealing the organization of the museum into discrete floors.

With notorious founders & trustees, a lack of diversity among leadership, curators & artists, & highly questionable labor practices, museums are now being forced to go through an interesting & well-deserved reckoning. The museum world, it turns out, is no different than the surrounding society. What are museums? What & who are they for? What is or should be housed inside? Who gets to choose? What stories get to be told? I will ask another question.

Why should I, a middle class kid from deepest Brooklyn, get to have her own personal museums? These objects & spaces were a part of me, my private world, even as they came from the outside, other times, places, spaces that I could never, & could have never had entry to. And is this feeling of possession what gave me the indignation, the agency, to tempt becoming an artist? Should all children grow up w/ this feeling?

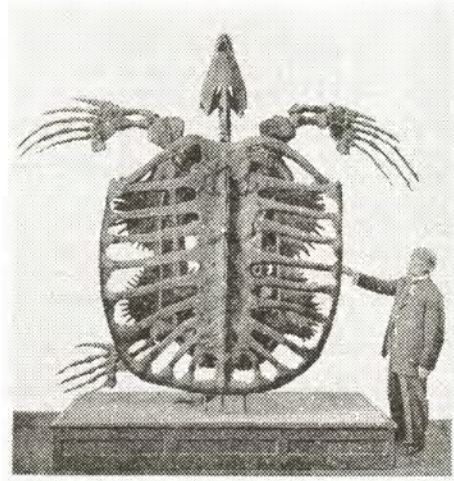
In my memory, there was no lack of women portrayed - mostly impossibly large, unclothed & in precarious positions. They didn't portray me, & yet they were wormed into my brain. I took them over & over again, the objects remaining the same, my thoughts & judgments wildly changing. I grew up with them, some given father or closer, though even the far-off ones, glimpsed out of the corner of my eye, were mine.

Interestingly, I didn't see museums as communal space until much later.

Shelly Silver, Berlin, 2019

The fossilized remains of a gigantic turtle took hold of my imagination when I was young. It's called Archelon, is from the Late Cretaceous, and is one of the first things you see when you enter the Peabody Museum at Yale. If memory serves, it's behind you as you enter the museum in a dark niche, so it can take you by surprise. I think my father took me there and my childhood romance with turtles started there. I'm not prone to revery of this sort, but Archelon's missing rear flipper inspired daydreams of ferocious dinosaurs vs. Archelon.

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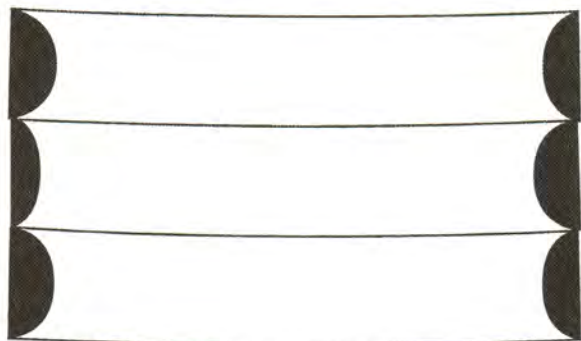


The Great & Terrible Archelon
A contemporary of the dinosaurs
From the galleries of the Yale University Museum

And then the other, more prosaic, attachment is to the library of the New Museum when it was on Broadway, just south of Houston. The museum was housed in an awful space, really. Not good for art. If I recall correctly, the library was in the basement, also not a distinguished space, architecturally, but it served its purpose, which was to make documents about contemporary art available to the public. It specialized in ephemera such as exhibition announcements and pamphlets. Russell

Ferguson worked there, and it was there that I discovered the writings of Ad Reinhardt and Robert Smithson. This moment would make a prominent entry in a chronology of my life. Smithson loved natural history museums and B-science fiction movies, especially ones like *Godzilla*, where distant pasts and futures collide. My youthful musings over Archelon might have amused Smithson.

—Byron Kim



I loved his legs. Green like the skin of an avocado; spindly; prickled with sharp hairs; one knee bent like a balletic leap; both ankles capped with four long, taloned toes—that's almost all we can see of this unfortunate demon, ignominiously squashed under the broken door to Hell. Christ strides by looking placid. He has just thrown it off its hinges like the telekinetic star of some Netflix show. This is *The Descent into Limbo*, a small panel painting by the Master of the Osservanza, which used to hang in one of the first floor galleries (go in the front door, turn right and then right) of the old Fogg Art Museum on Quincy Street.

9



When I was about twenty I had my first exposure to real and spontaneous art criticism standing in front of this work. The Las Vegas art historian, Libby Lumpkin, who I was nervously shepherding through the museum, stopped short when I pointed out my favorite painting. “Well,” she said, “look at *that!*”

I did look at it. A lot. And looking again today I'm struck by another detail: The unfortunate demon's right hand still clutches what must have been his weapon or prop—it's a long, thorny stem that makes me think of nothing but a rose. Was this a bad end to his first date with Jesus? I think of that rose too as a kind of painted offering to the Fogg—now only an organ in the consolidated Harvard Art Museums (HAMs). One can never stand in the way of progress (or of the redemption of the Saved) but our experiences at the threshold of old and new are often poignant. Although thorny.

Architecture and encounter are forever entwined, and I can't think of the Fogg, pre-renovation, without thinking of my first stop on nearly every visit to nod to that painting. The building used to feel like stone. A cool cavern on a hot day outside or a thick fort

against the snow, the first floor galleries were particularly staid and sodden. Like the protagonists in Thomas Bernhard's *Old Masters*, who frequent the Kunsthistorisches Museum for the air, the atmosphere of the Fogg (a fortuitous name if there ever was one) was a calming retreat in my spazzy early twenties.

There was a processional logic to the old galleries. I was a right-turning guy, but if you went left you might find a *Drunken Silenus*, or Ribera's earthy *St. Jerome*, a man, whose body looks like clay, about to whack himself with a stone. Mounting the stairs to the second floor, you passed St. Francis, really feeling his stigmata. Upstairs, I'd say you could surprise Raphael getting too cozy with his Fornarina, but from his look I'd say he didn't mind. Through the passage to the Busch Reisinger Museum you might find Joseph Beuy's *Felt Suit*. Beckmann would always be there in his tuxedo. Below all of this hummed the Fine Arts Library, where you'd flirt or hang out in the Reading Room, or wander in the dark, twisty stacks, jealous of those with secluded private carrels.

The other spot of society was the Mongan Center, just off the courtyard where the ticket counter and gift shop are now. Here you might find the eminent print curator, Marjorie (Jerry) Cohn, or any of the staff, eager to pull work on paper to view. You could walk in without an appointment, and it was open and cheery. This often felt like the most welcoming part of the museum, as the galleries were often empty and hushed.

The new HAMs still have a "museum-like" atmosphere, but "hushed" is a better word for the old ways. I remember feeling a vibe of reverence, the kind

you get from something sleepy, and at times this felt like the closest I'd come to a religious experience, a leaden and slightly musty sort. I liked the dimness of the Fogg. Though I'm sure it was properly lit, I somehow remember it being dark; maybe because I felt happily invisible there. Somehow calmly, beautifully, comfortably invisible. Even the dramatic, Italianate courtyard had a dimming quality. The false-skylights gave the impression of being dusty, with soft light that was murky and diffuse.



Today the Harvard Art Museums are full of light. The building is lofty and clean and—although I complain about fussiness in some of Renzo Piano's metal bracketing—very elegant. I am there at least four days a week. I frequent the café, I use the bathroom, I visit old friends in the galleries, I teach there and I spend countless hours using the study rooms to look at artworks like the world's coolest library. The Fogg has been redeemed as an

accessible, open space of community encounter, teaching and learning. I would never turn back the clock. But some days, as I stride through perfectly climate-controlled air, I try to map over it that wonderful temple to private pleasures. The lonelier, dimmer pleasures that liked the dark.

—Matt Saunders

It was the fall of 2001. I was a gallery guard at the Santa Monica Museum of Art working at the opening of *Freestyle*, a group show that had traveled from the Studio Museum in Harlem to Los Angeles. Getting to the Museum was always an enormous pain. I lived on the east side of the city and the Museum was on the west. But somehow it was thrilling to drive through the main gates at Bergamot Station, where the Museum was located. Maybe it was because this was my first art job, and everything was new to me. Bergamot was a former railroad station that had been developed into an art complex in the mid '90s. Dominating the center was a huge parking lot with dozens of warehouse-galleries lining the perimeter. Corrugated metal siding was everywhere, an architectural trend à la Frank Gehry.

My task for that night was to make sure that no one touched the work. My post was in the room with Louis Cameron's floor painting. The work was made of colorful plastic tiles that fit together like a puzzle, and laid directly on the floor. Throughout the night visitors accustomed to seeing paintings on walls would accidentally kick the

tiles, sending them flying across the room. Every few minutes I'd run and retrieve them, and piece the work back together. Nearby was a beaded sculpture by Kori Newkirk. That work was also hard to look after. The beads, usually used as accessories for braids, formed a curtain. The various colors made an image of a sunset, or was it the city on fire? Both plausible scenes of L.A. Before I could stop them, people would run their hands through the beaded curtain. How could they resist? Breaking through the illusion of a picture-perfect (or nightmare) scene of Los Angeles was irresistible. The bustle of the room was amplified by the Michael Jackson song *Working Night and Day* as the soundtrack for Susan Smith-Pinelo's seductive and incisive video. On the monitor was a woman's cleavage clad with a gold necklace that spelled out "ghetto" as she bounced to the funk-disco-pop beat.

10



Even though I can remember parts of works, the architectural and spatial details are fuzzy. In my memory, the floors were wood, but in actuality they may have been concrete. Was the video work in the room I was stationed in, or the next room? My mind attempts to map out all the details and unsuccessfully rebuild the space of the exhibition.

What comes with extreme clarity though are the sounds and emotions. They guide me through my memories: music from the works, sounds of people talking and laughing, and the atmosphere of feelings—a mix of nervousness, or maybe anticipation, and exuberance—that filled the air and the space.

Since that night in 2001, things have changed. Santa Monica Museum of Art is now called Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA). It's now in Downtown LA. Since then, I've lived on the East Coast and done many, many other art jobs. At the time I couldn't comprehend the exhibition, or the feelings from the exhibition. Now I know I was witnessing a generation of artists that broke apart forms, used new materials, found different ways to articulate what it meant to live and be. When works or exhibitions create that atmosphere of feelings, it becomes embodied. It starts in my stomach and burrows deep into my bones. It first happened then, and sometimes happens now.

—*Daisy Nam*



When the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, opened in 1967, at 237 East Ontario Street, it was housed in a 1908 brick-clad building that had initially been the site of a wholesale baking facility and, at one point, the offices for *Playboy* Enterprises. The façade of the building had been transformed with stucco so that it would promote the image of a modernist architecture appropriate for a contemporary art museum, although a view down the adjacent alley revealed its true history in the form of red brick, albeit painted black. In 1978 Michael Asher was invited to make an exhibition at the museum at the time it was in the process of being redesigned by Booth, Nagle, and Hartray, the architectural firm contracted for the renovation. Asher was able to consult directly with Laurence Booth, a principal with the firm, discussing the details of the façade redesign, which was to incorporate the raised, glass-faced Bergman Gallery that was placed in front of the original building and would function as an exposed, second-floor bridge, connecting the east side of the building to the west. The façade would also be faced with a grid of aluminum cladding. For the exhibition which took place June 1–August 12, 1979, Asher's work entailed removing the ten panels of cladding on the east side of the building and the eight panels on its west side—the panels continued around the side of the building approximately fifteen feet—exposing the painted cement block behind, and placing them within the Bergman Gallery on channels designed to install them, identical to the channels on the exterior that had been modified to allow both installation and

deinstallation. In the thirty feet of wall space that remained between the panels, Sol Lewitt made a wall drawing. After the exhibition concluded, the panels of cladding would be restored to their original position on the exterior of the building, placing them on public view, in open storage, until their next installation in the Bergman Gallery. The work was acquired for the permanent collection of the museum, on the condition that, if the façade of the building would be altered in any way in the future, the contract would be rendered null and void and the work would no longer be extant. In 1996 the Museum of Contemporary Art moved to 220 East Chicago Avenue. In 2017 the building at 237 East Ontario was demolished to make way for the 19-storey, Aloft Mag Mile Hotel.

In preparing this text, it is unclear to me if I witnessed the exhibition that Michael Asher made June 1–August 12, 1979, or if I witnessed it after deinstallation, when it was in storage, more public than it had been when it was officially “on view.”

—Stephen Prina

- 1 Richard Diebenkorn, *Freeway and Aqueduct*, 1957
- 2 Alexander Calder, *16 Circus Drawings (Calder's Circus)*, 1964
- 3 Andrea Zittel, *A-Z Wagon Stations at Milwaukee Museum of Art*, 2003
- 4 Charles Simonds, *Dwellings*, 1981
- 5 Judith Barry, *for the birds...*, 2014
- 6 Paul Signac, *Opus 217: Against the Enamel of a Background Rhythmic with Beats and Angles, Tones, and Tints, Portrait of M. Félix Fénéon in 1890*, 1890
- 7 MoMA QNS, 2002
- 8 Archelon specimen with its discoverer, American paleontologist George Reber Wieland, 1901
- 9 Master of the Osservanza, *The Descent into Limbo*, c. 1445
- 10 Susan Smith-Pinelo, *Sometimes*, 1999

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