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So I'm not an art guy. I got into this business because I like antiques—which of course became material culture upon entering graduate school—I enjoy studying the past, and I like a good story. Its not that I don't like art, it's just that I can't discuss it academically, I doubt I could pull off creating a beautiful art exhibition, and I certainly am not qualified to critique art. However this fall I found myself in two art museums, which is precisely twice as many history museums I went to. I enjoyed each, and for vastly different reasons.

In late November I was in Washington D.C. for the NAME board meeting. After many hours of detailed discussions about the inner operating guts of our organization the NAME prez and I headed over to the newly reopened Smithsonian American Art Museum and The National Portrait Gallery. For most of the time that I lived in D.C. the building was under renovation, so I was excited and curious to see what the fuss was about, and perhaps try to understand what took so long. The wait was worth it. The building, which houses the two museums simultaneously, is an interesting mix of spaces. The first floor, where I spent most of my time, is occupied by many individual rooms placed off of a series of hallways, a clear result of the building's original use as the patent office. The exhibition layouts work with the building, using the hallways for long runs of portraits, and utilizing the rooms for topical exhibitions. Typical of many of the museums in D.C., it was far too large to consume in the two hours I had, and the rooms helped me to break up the experience into more digestible bites.

With my background in history, I was in awe of the rooms devoted to portraits of Civil War personalities. It was filled with the very paintings and engravings that had filled most of my text books and other readings throughout my education. Equally impressive was the room devoted to the exhibition *One Life: Walt Whitman, a Kosmos* which displayed many fine images along side some texts and

other materials related to his work. Especially interesting was the finale, which showed images of musician Charlie Parker, painter Jackson Pollock, and poet Allen Ginsberg, declaring them the heirs of Whitman.

Time being short, I had to skip most of the offerings of the American Art Museum and headed over to the Luce Foundation Center. Located in a truly beautiful public space, the displays were a technological tour de force, inviting visitors to see what often only those of us in the biz see, a behind the scene view of storage, and conservation and preservation. All was very well organized, explained, and laid out. I can only imagine if the public could see some of the offices of us creative types!

There was truly no way to see that entire place in one visit, and I must admit I left D.C. a bit glum. One of the pleasures of living there was having these mega-museums at my doorstep, which could be revisited over time, at my leisure. However my spirits were lifted several weeks later when I attended an exhibition at my new doorstep: *Monet in Normandy*, the first comprehensive exhibition of Monet's paintings to be shown in the Southeast. The paintings were amazing, and the text was approachable to us non-art people. The entire experience was a blockbuster for the Raleigh area, with tickets selling out, and a crowded last weekend "Monet Marathon" in which the museum stayed open 32 hours straight. For me the experience was transformative in the fact that as a student of U.S. history, Normandy means one thing, D-Day. Images from the D-Day Museum which I visited in New Orleans when the AAM annual conference was there are still fresh in my mind, and the opening sequence of Saving Private Ryan are hard to forget. Therefore it was incredible to see Normandy as Monet did, with its vibrant colors, sweeping landscapes and beautiful beach scenes. Normandy will now forever mean two things to me, and I am glad for the new vision. The experience was very different then in D.C., here was one subset of one artists work, on a dedicated visit, rather

then the pantheon of Americans as expressed in art. Each was impressive, and while I still cannot call myself much of an art expert, each of the visits were completely enjoyable, and educational.

I attended the Monet exhibition with my 14 month old daughter. I did get yelled at for putting her on my shoulders in the gallery, but it was fun to bring her to the museum, although she was much more interested masks and other figures in the Mesoamerican gallery. From Beth Redmond-Jones came this report of exhibitions and children:

“My family and I recently moved to Philadelphia so we have many new museums to explore on the eastern corridor. My three-year-old daughter often asks if we can go to the aquarium (referring to the Aquarium of the Pacific where I used to work) to touch the sharks and feed the lorikeets. I tell her that it is too far away, but we will visit a new museum today.

“So, we recently went to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. As we walked through the mammal hall looking at the dioramas, my daughter was incredibly quiet (which is very unusual for her). I asked her if she was okay, and she said “Yes. I’m just being very quiet so the animals don’t run away.” Ugh, what do I do? Do I tell her that the animals are dead and stuffed or do I just let it go? What if she asks how they got there? I know how I should respond as a museum professional, but as a mom (who is trying to keep a straight face after hearing her statement), is it better that I just let it go and let her enjoy the moment?

A couple weeks later, our family visited the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Prior to going in, I told my kids that they could not touch the paintings or sculpture, and then answered my three-year-old’s endless questions about why they couldn’t touch. The kids and I wandered through the galleries, and security guards seemed to follow us a lot closer than other visitors to be sure we were a “hands-off”

family. Since that experience, whenever we go, my three-year-old stops and asks me if she can touch here (even on the train and in our own home). I have to chuckle. I guess she got the concept and is trying to sort out the boundaries.”

Richard Duggan informed NAME about the International Vinegar museum (<http://www.vinegarman.com/Museum1.shtml>) located in Roslyn, South Dakota. According to the web site you can learn about the wide world of vinegar and taste vinegars from all types of plants. You get all this “for only \$2 for adults and \$1 for people under 18 years old. Instant scholarships for those too poor to pay.” So if you find yourself in South Dakota, be sure to make a point to stop by, and don’t forget to bring your own salad.

Ava Ferguson sent me a clipping about the U.S. Hemp Company Museum located in Santa Cruz, CA. Their web site, www.ushemp.us discussed the history of hemp, its over 25,000 uses, and its environmental benefits. Check it out dudes.

And from constant correspondent Eugene Dillenburg came news of the The Icelandic Phallogical Museum. According to its web site it “is probably the only museum in the world to contain a collection of phallic specimens belonging to all the various types of mammal found in a single country. Phallogology is an ancient science which, until recent years, has received very little attention in Iceland, except as a borderline field of study in other academic disciplines such as history, art, psychology, literature and other artistic fields like music and ballet. Now, thanks to The Icelandic Phallogical Museum, it is finally possible for individuals to undertake serious study into the field of phallogology in an organized, scientific fashion.” View the site at your own risk.... ❁

Thanks for keeping me up to date on the excellent and the weird. Keep sending you adventures in exhibitions to Kps529@msn.com.