

MYSTIC MUSEUM OF ART

News & Views | Winter 2018

INDUSTRIAL SCENE, MONTVILLE STACKS
BY BEATRICE LAVIS CUMING

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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REMEMBERING HARVEY FULLER

Notwithstanding the global events that have marked 2017 as an extraordinary one for the history books, Mystic Museum of Art made news of its own this year. However, before reminding ourselves of those notable events, I would like to briefly focus on one of the Museum's outstanding contributors, whose life ended in December at the age of 99. This individual was Harvey Fuller, about whom you will be hearing more about in the new year. I had the good fortune of meeting Harvey a couple of times, and I am told by those who knew him well that he was a multi-talented man, who enjoyed all of the arts. He will most likely be best known for his generous contributions to, and aesthetic vision in, both the visual arts and music arenas. He was extremely fond of, and dedicated to, this organization. We extend our condolences, as well as our enormous gratitude, to his family.

Harvey Fuller serves as an exemplar of what it means to commit oneself to the collective efforts of an organization. Going forward this year, we seek to renew, and strengthen, our commitment to the betterment of the Museum, most importantly, in ways that benefit the greater public. I look forward to working with the MMoA Board, our invaluable staff, the artists who contribute to our exhibition programs, and the greater community, in furthering the mission of the Museum.

Innovative changes were been made at the Museum this past year, fulfilling and enriching our mission. Those changes include the opening of the 15 Water Street Gallery—dedicated to contemporary, site-specific exhibitions, special projects, and lectures—and the continuing introduction of curated projects at the Museum, all of which are intended to blend the new with the past in an environment full of challenges. We hope that through these efforts, all those who visit the Museum will leave with a renewed sense of inspiration, introspection, and enlightenment.

Best wishes to all for 2018.

George G. King
Executive Director



MMoA NEWS & VIEWS

Winter 2018

Sarah S. King
Editor

James Kaczman
Graphic Designer

Cover: Beatrice Lavis Cuming
*Industrial Scene: Montville
Stacks*
Oil on canvas, 31½ x 23¼ in.
Mystic Museum of Art
Permanent Collection

DAWN SALERNO ELECTED PRESIDENT OF NEMA



Mystic Museum of Art's very own Dawn Salerno was elected as President of the Board of the New England Museum Association (NEMA) at its annual meeting in Falmouth, Massachusetts, in October. NEMA is the largest regional organization representing museums and museum professionals in the United States. NEMA provides tools for leadership innovation, and for empowering museums to continue their growth as organizations essential to their community.

"When I was an emerging professional in the museum field, working in my first job at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum (New London, Connecticut), I happened upon a NEMA workshop. I think it was about volunteer recruitment. I remember feeling so grateful that there were some very smart people in the field who were willing to share their experience and knowledge. I've been inspired ever since. Giving back to the field, for me, is a way of paying it forward."

Dawn was elected to the Board of NEMA in 2009 and served on the Nominating, Advocacy, and Program Committees, among others. Previous to her board service, she volunteered as Co-Chairperson for NEMA's Education Professional Affinity Group where she developed and implemented annual workshops for NEMA membership.

"This is a very exciting time for NEMA as it enters its 100th anniversary year in 2018," said NEMA Executive Director Dan Yaeger. "Dawn's leadership and commitment to our association will help us focus on the future and provide our region's museums with the tools to succeed for many years to come."

Deputy Director for Public Engagement and Operations of the MMoA since 2015, and Director of Education since 2008, Dawn has been fundamental to the growth of the Museum, and most importantly, to the growth of its educational role within the community. In addition to her work at the Museum, she consistently contributes to the museum field through presentations at regional and national conferences, and publication of articles and research. She recently completed the prestigious Getty Leadership Program, an executive leadership program for museum professionals.

MUSEUM FACES: ANNIKA BURGESS



Annika Burgess joined MMoA this fall as a Press and Marketing Intern. She will graduate this winter from the University of Connecticut with a degree in English, and a minor in Art History.

Her coursework and experience studying the arts in London, prepared her to write about art for the Marketing Department. She wrote regular previews for MMoA's speaker series, features about exhibitions and artists, website and social media content, and press releases.

Annika previously interned for non-profit *Horses Healing Humans* in Stonington and *Globe Pequot Press*, a publishing press in Guilford, where she developed her dexterity to critically read, write, and create.

Raised in Mystic, Annika was familiar with the Museum. "The Museum has a special place in this small town," she said.

Growing up, she took art classes both at Stonington High School and outside of school, submitting her work to MMoA's annual Young at Art Exhibition.

Before pursuing her undergraduate degree, she dabbled in the sciences, fine arts, and education, even taking a semester off to work on an organic farm. She realized her passions for reading and writing in college, but does not regret the variety of courses she sampled along the way.

The Museum's staff in education and marketing was grateful to have benefitted from Annika's talent and dedication this fall.

LISA LYMAN ADAMS: CHALLENGING ART'S BOUNDARIES

BY ANNIKA BURGESS

The main spectacle in Lisa Lyman Adams's studio is her art desk with a built-in light box. It is here where she begins her paintings and drawings, transferring inspiration onto a canvas with a high degree of realism. The perimeter of the light box is lined with jars of colored pencils, graphite, and paintbrushes, and the surrounding walls are no less colorful. Lisa has been drawing since she could hold a pencil, and has been passionate about illustration since she could open a book.

"As a child I used to sit and study every page, every little line of Hilary Knight's *Eloise* illustrations. I was fascinated."

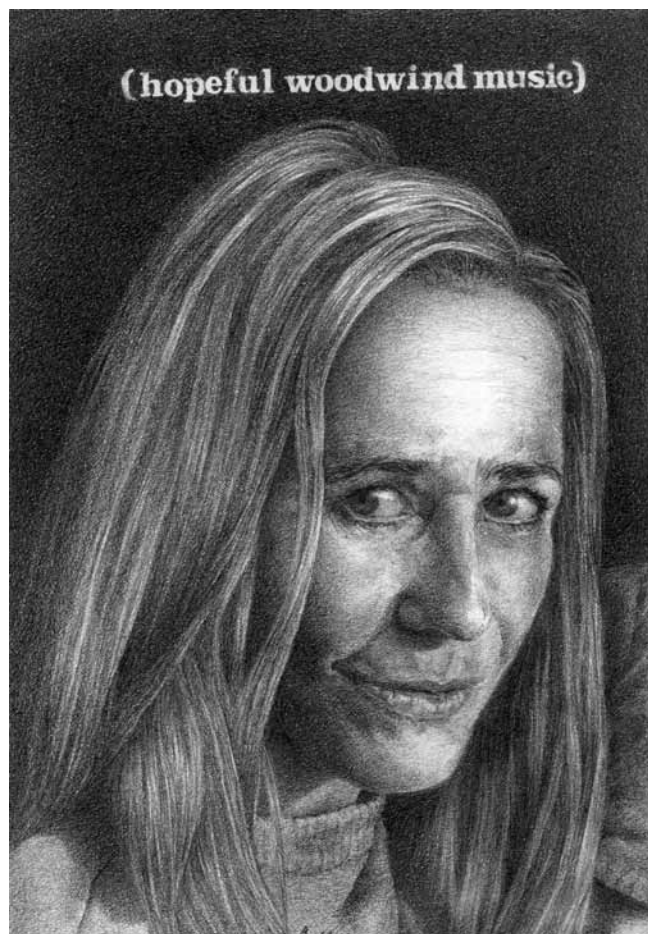
Despite her love for illustration, Lisa graduated from Pratt Institute with a degree in Fine Arts and immediately began to work for a design firm. Noticing her mastery in drawing, her colleagues persistently called her into design meetings for visualizing strategies, and she eventually realized that it was a sign to pursue a career in illustration.

Now an award-winning illustrator, she completes commissions for newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, as well as magazines, including *The New Yorker*. She has written and illustrated her own children's book, *The Twelve Days of Christmas in New York City*, and is often commissioned to illustrate book covers for the "tween" market for publishers Random House, Simon & Schuster, and Penguin.

Born and raised in Vermont, Lisa went on to spend twenty-four years in New York City before moving to Mystic, where she now keeps a studio. In addition to her work in illustration, she juggles commissions for paintings, drawings, and murals, as well as pursues her own personal work. She has been heavily involved in the education department at the MMoA for the past five years, as well as the Museum's community outreach programs. She currently teaches several drawing courses, a watercolors course for adults, and a fundamentals class for children.

Her training in Fine Arts at Pratt, where she focused mainly on drawing and painting, and her subsequent career in illustration, has inspired her to produce art that breaks down the defining characteristics of the two artistic styles. Now a painter, illustrator, and graphite artist, her pieces often display collaboration amidst the three elements.

"There's so much overlap between illustration and Fine Arts. Some of my favorite artists challenge the boundaries and develop it into their own unique style."



From David Hockney, a figurative artist known for his landscape and portrait paintings, to Vija Celmins, a photo-realistic graphite artist, the variety of styles that inspire her work is indicative of Lisa's artistic dexterity and fluidity. Working mainly from photographs, Lisa transfers them to her canvas and combines super-realism with naïve drawing styles through the mediums of collage, paint, and graphite.

Often times her paintings include hand-written words or phrases. Lisa describes these tendencies, "When I paint a flower, I have a compulsion to write 'a flower' in the painting. I think it is because I am not at all a sentimental or romantic painter. I like super-realism with a wry twist of humor."

As an artist, Lisa keeps her eyes open to all types of visual art and visual material that could potentially be incorporated into her own work. She values creativity and the subversion of artistic boundaries—it is inherent to the cultivation of life as a fine artist and illustrator.

Above: Lisa Lyman Adams
Self Portrait / Closed Caption, 2017
Graphite pencil on paper, 7 x 5 in.

BEATRICE CUMING: A RECORD OF THE MID-CENTURY INDUSTRIAL SCENE IN SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT



BY LOIS H. CONSTANTINE
AND PRISCILLA W. PRATT

Beatrice Lavis Cuming (1903–1974) was a familiar figure at the Mystic Art Association, which later became Mystic Museum of Art. She served on the Board of Directors for fifteen years, as Vice President and, in 1960, as President. The oil painting titled *Industrial Scene, Montville Stacks* by Cuming, reproduced on the cover, is part of MMoA's Permanent Collection.

Cuming was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 25, 1903. Following her graduation from Pratt Institute, she worked as a freelance illustrator and commercial artist while saving enough money to finance a trip to Europe. She lived for several years in France, where she worked chiefly in Paris and Marseilles, with sojourns in Brittany, North Africa, and Italy.

In the spring of 1934, Cuming stepped off the train in New London, Connecticut, for a short break during her trip from New York to Boston, where she intended to make her home. She was so excited with the New London area that she decided to stay there and immediately abandoned her Boston plans.

Cuming, herself, said, "Upon my return to America, to my own surprise, I was overwhelmed with the wealth of material for an artist here, my own keenness for it and the feeling of belonging and wanting to be nowhere but here."

Cuming worked as a WPA artist in the 1930s. In the dynamics of the urban-industrial scene she found the artistic inspiration for her work. New London and its environs provided her with subject matter which she found powerful and beautiful. Smoke stacks in Montville, submarines in Groton, locomotives and street scenes in New London, were recreated on her canvases with drama and excitement.

She maintained her studio on the top floor of the Savard Building on State Street in New London, where she performed janitorial duties to help pay the rent. She later established a home studio in Montville. A noted teacher and director of the Young Peoples Art Program at the Lyman Allyn Museum in New London for fifty years, Cuming also taught adult art classes at her studio.

This article was originally published in the Fall 1997 edition of Mystic Art Center's News & Views.

Above left: Unknown photographer
Beatrice Lavis Cuming, 1946
Mystic Museum of Art Permanent Collection

TRANSFORMING MEMORY INTO WORKS OF ART



BY ERIKA NEENAN

"A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle."

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

November 11, 2018, will mark one hundred years since the First World War ended—one hundred years since the conflict brought the collapse of Empires and the birth of new states. How can artists begin to memorialize such an event or pay remembrance to it? What is the role of the artist in capturing the shared human experiences of loss and tragedy? These questions led to the choice of *memory* as the subject of MMoA's 2018 juried theme show. Memory can be collective. It can also be personal. This article will look at two artists who transformed their experiences, memories, and loss into powerful works of art.

Winslow Homer was a contemporary witness to the American Civil War, who reported from the front lines of the conflict for *Harper's Weekly*. The Civil War remains one of the deadliest wars in American history. The estimates of those who died in military service range from 620,000 to 750,000. And, as in most wars, the soldiers were young. The average age of the Union soldier was 25.8 years.

Homer painted *The Veteran in the New Field* just a few months after Robert E. Lee surrendered in Appomattox, Virginia, on April 9, 1865. After the surrender, both the Union and Confederate armies were disbanded and the soldiers were allowed to return to their homes. In this work, Homer has painted a former Union soldier at work as a farmer in a field of wheat. The veteran uses a scythe to cut the tall wheat—a tool that would have been considered out-of-date in 1865. The inclusion of the scythe was a deliberate choice by Homer, casting the former soldier as the figure of death. Many battles in the Civil War took place on farmland. The veteran in this work cuts down the new wheat in a quiet and discreet reflection on the loss and trauma of the War that so deeply affected the young nation.

Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991, by Félix González-Torres, is a conceptual work of art by an artist personally impacted by the AIDS crisis, and who, himself, died of the disease. HIV/AIDS became a national crisis in the 1980s. It was not until 1997 that death rates related to AIDS would start to decline due to breakthroughs in drug therapies and as a result of activism and the recognition of the disease as a global epidemic.

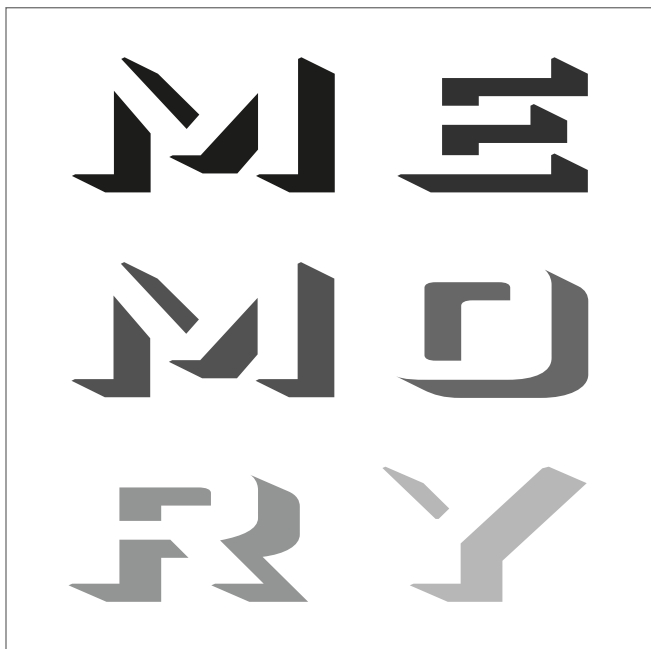
Untitled consists of 175 pounds of individually wrapped candies. That specific weight reflects the ideal weight of González-Torres' partner, Ross Laycock, who died of complications related to AIDS in 1991. As viewers come to see the work, they are encouraged to take a piece of candy. The pile of candy diminishes, just as Ross became thinner, and weaker, as his health problems intensified. González-Torres stipulated that the pile of candy should always be replenished, ensuring the work, and the memory of his partner, would endure time.

The works by Winslow Homer and Félix González-Torres were created in response to specific events. Both artists were impacted by a national crisis—the American Civil War, and the HIV/AIDS Crisis. Their memories were both collectively shared and intensely personal. They transformed their experiences into works of art that are both a monument to the tragedies provoked them, and to their own personal loss.

Memory, MMoA's Annual Juried Theme Exhibition, will run from January 12 through March 10, 2018.

Above left: Winslow Homer
The Veteran in the New Field, 1865
Oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot
67.187.131

EXHIBITION CALENDAR



JANUARY 12 - MARCH 10

Juried Theme Show: Memory

Selections from the Permanent Collection

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 18, 5:30pm - 7:30pm

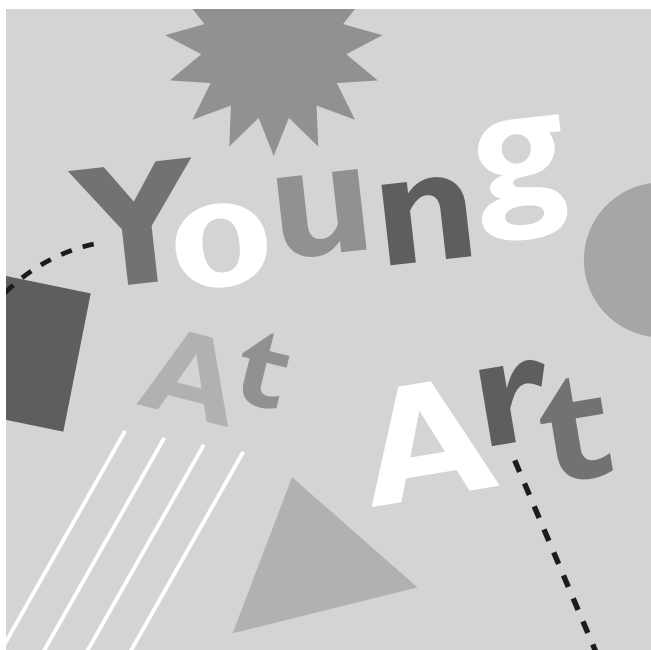


APRIL 20 - JUNE 2

Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts

107th Annual Exhibition

Opening reception: Thursday May 3, 5:30pm - 7:30 pm



MARCH 16 - APRIL 14

Young At Art

Opening reception Saturday March 17, 1 pm - 3pm



JUNE 15 - JULY 28

Elected Artists / Members Exhibition

Selections from the Permanent Collection

Annual meeting / opening reception:

Thursday, June 21, 6pm - 8pm

To view prospectuses and submission guidelines for specific exhibitions visit MysticMuseumofArt.org.

EVENTS



Artini Hour

Mix cocktails and your creativity for your next happy hour. Take on a creative project with one of our instructors in the studios and galleries. We provide instruction, supplies, a tasty beverage, and plenty of time to socialize.

Thursdays, 5:30pm - 7:30pm
\$18 Members / \$23 Public
Season pass: \$50 Members / \$60 Public
Call to register: 860.536.7601 x209

January 11

Somethin's Fishy!

Carol Dunn

Draw a Zentangle fish on a round tile.

Tonight's martini: The Zentini

February 8

Valentine's Cards from the Heart

Sean Kane

Make heart-shaped greeting cards for family and close friends.

Tonight's martini: Chocolate

March 8

Weathergrams

Gail Turgeon

Compose, pen, and decorate your own weathergram, a poem of ten words or less written on a strip of paper, then hung on an outdoor branch to weather with time.

Tonight's martini: The Pomegranate Cosmo

April 12

Upcycled Tee

Judy Pettini

Transform a basic t-shirt into a scarf.

Tonight's martini: Apple

Langston Hughes Poetry Reading

The Langston Hughes Community Poetry Reading celebrates its tenth anniversary at MMoA. All are welcome to read. Call Gretchen Higgins at 860.857.1060 to read.

Sunday, February 4, 2pm

Free

Family Night

Games and art activities await you at MMoA Family Night. Drop by for face-painting, hands-on art making, and a gallery game. View Young At Art, an exhibition of artwork from local young people up to age 18.

Thursday, March 15, 6pm - 8pm

Free

Supply Swap

One artist's trash is another one's treasure. Come and trade your unwanted art supplies for something you can use.

Welcome items include: paints, brushes, paper, canvases, marking-making implements, craft supplies, and art books, as long as they are in good working condition.

Saturday, April 7, 10am - 12pm

Slow Art Day

Some estimates say that people spend only eight seconds looking at a given artwork in a museum. Phil Terry, founder of Slow Art, started this project in the summer of 2009 to encourage people to spend about ten minutes looking at fewer artworks. Slow down and enjoy the artworks of the annual Young at Art Exhibition. .

Saturday, April 14, 11am - 5pm

Free

A Night at the Museum

Save the date for Mystic Museum of Art's annual summer fundraiser.

Saturday, June 9, 2018

I Feel Voxish Speaker Series

I Feel Voxish is a forward-looking monthly speaker series in which figures in ideas and culture present topics representing their passions. Each event concludes with refreshments.

Members: \$12, Public \$15, Children 4 - 12 \$3, Children 3 and under are free.

Parking validation provided with admission.



**No Beans About It:
Making a Meatful Chili**
Chion Wolf

One of the most recognized voices in Connecticut media, Chion Wolf is the technical producer, announcer, photographer, and on-air personality with WNPR and The Colin McEnroe Show. She also produces and hosts The Mouth Off, a live storytelling event in Hartford, and Chion Wolf's Advice Show, a live advice show at Sea Tea Improv. Wolf is an actor and member of the Board of Directors of Night Fall Inc., an annual public performance in Hartford. Wolf is also a certified judge with the International Chili Society and is unapologetic about her love of onions.

Sunday, February 25, 5:30pm - 7pm
**Charles H. Davis Gallery,
Main Building, 9 Water Street**

**From Collector to Curator:
The National Black Doll Museum
of History and Culture**
Debra Britt

Opened in Mansfield, Massachusetts, in 2012, the National Black Doll Museum features approximately 6,000 dolls and is the nation's only museum of its kind. The collection was accumulated over decades by Debra Britt, the museum's founder and executive director, and her sisters with the goal of promoting cultural diversity, nurturing self-esteem in children and adults, and of sharing Britt's passion to educate the public on the significance of collecting black dolls. Britt has presented on, and widely exhibited on her museum and its collection, and received numerous commendations, including two resolutions from the Boston City Council. Previous to her founding of the museum, Britt studied art history at Northeastern University and was the Director of the RAMA Day Care Center, the first bilingual day-care provider in Massachusetts.

Sunday, March 18, 5:30pm - 7pm
15 Water Street Gallery

**The Art We Hate to Love /
The Art We Love to Hate**
Christopher Steiner

Christopher Steiner is Acting Chair of the Art History and Architectural Studies Department at Connecticut College and Director of the college's Museum Studies Program. In this illustrated talk, Steiner tears down with impunity the artificial barriers that try to keep trash aesthetics and bad taste out of the history of art. From Velvet Elvis to Thomas Kinkadee, the Painter of Light®, Steiner explores the wonderful world of kitsch, cheesiness, and garish sentimentality. Attendees will get to taste the winners of our "worst food ever" contest.

Thursday, April 19, 5:30pm - 7pm
15 Water Street Gallery

MAKING WALLPAPER COOL AGAIN

BY DAWN SALERNO

It wasn't so long ago that a museum experience consisted of standing in front of an artifact, reading the text, and quietly contemplating it. Being in the presence of a work of human creativity was worth the visit.

But audiences are changing. According to the 2017 Culture Track report, 81% of audiences attend a "cultural activity" to "have fun." Forty-six percent of those who don't participate in art museum offerings reported the reason as, "It's not for someone like me." A staggering 81% said that digital integration would enhance the art museum experience. The museum community has responded with technologies that allow visitors to learn more, stay longer, interact, and yes—have more fun.

The title of this article is from a blog post by Leslie Wolke focused on Cooper Hewitt Museum's high-tech "pen." When the museum reopened in 2014 after a major renovation, a "groundbreaking suite of digital experiences" was introduced. The "pen" allows the holder to interact with exhibitions, collecting metadata on objects or engaging with other technology. The gallery called "The Immersion Room" contains a touch table that allows visitors to browse wallpaper from the collection or use the pen to draw their own wallpaper designs. The design is projected on the walls of the room. The wallpaper collection which some had deemed irrelevant is now papering (pun intended) the internet in the form of selfies. As one of the design team notes, "The wallpaper collection lent itself to a more immersive environment. And social media has exploded with selfies of visitors posing in the Immersion Room, dipped head to toe in the light of their own creations."

The museum describes it as "more than an entertaining interactive experience, the Immersion Room gives museum visitors their first opportunity to discover Cooper Hewitt's wallcoverings as they were intended to be installed."

The ability to experience and appreciate wallpaper in the Immersion Room is very different from seeing a fragment of wallpaper under glass and low light, with no means (other than your own memory) to take the experience home with you. As one blog describes it, well-executed museum technologies allow visitors to "expand their connection beyond the physical space."



Gallery One at the Cleveland Museum allows visitors to explore digital versions of the artworks and create their own works of art, learning about the creative process first-hand. Another feature of their technology allows visitors to put themselves into the experience, matching poses with figurative sculptures.

The Brooklyn Museum addressed visitor engagement with a phone app named, "Ask Brooklyn Museum" and the tag line, "You're in control." The app allows visitors to ask questions or share comments directly via live texting with a staff member. They get responses in real time within minutes.

Visitors, themselves, are the main exhibit at the Museum of Ice Cream (MoIC), a pop-up museum with locations in four US cities. Its mission is to "design environments that bring people together and provoke imagination." In San Francisco, the space is filled with giant cherries and marshmallow clouds. In LA, the room has strings of pink and yellow bananas suspended from the ceiling. In New York, the confetti which was to mimic ice cream sprinkles was being trailed all over the city. Millennials are visiting in swarms, uploading their Insta shots by the thousands. Its co-founder Maryellis Bunn says about the San Francisco location, "... My initial thought was to build it to be all technology installations. [Technology] is driving the conversation... but I wanted to do something different, and analog, in response." There is no technology in her exhibitions other than what the visitor brings: their phone. While other museums provide the technology to enable interactivity, this museum capitalizes on the selfie-trend and social nature of its visitors to foster interactivity, engagement, and fun. Is this even a museum? Ponder that. Or just click and share.

Photo courtesy of Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum

THE HOWLING INFINITE

BY DAN PEARSON

A professor of mine in Scotland shared my enjoyment of Evelyn Waugh, but remarked that the author should only be read in small doses. “There’s only so many pages I can be that English,” said the Glaswegian-born professor. Waugh is indeed quintessentially English, but he brings to his travel writing a vitality, wonder, and humor (particularly about food and wine) that differs from many of the most English of English travel writers yawning through the world with the tedium that comes from inheriting centuries of cultural and colonial hegemony. I mention Waugh here specifically because of his Mediterranean travelogue, *Labels*, in which he describes the difficulty of an authentic experience in a place like Paris or Venice where any visitor entering does so carrying all the previously accumulated impressions, stories, and memories, whether it be *Roman Holiday*, Ruskin, Edith Piaf, and on and on. Some places, thinks Waugh, are so done they cannot be undone, so that any visitor arrives to inevitable disappointment, seeking something that cannot exist or, if it does, is not theirs in the first place.

Working in Mystic, for the first time in some time, this year at the reincarnated Mystic Museum of Art, I’ve reconnected with several people with whom I’d previously fell out of sustained contact. The conversations are alarming, as you sit down and realize it’s been twenty or even thirty years since we were middle school kids playing street hockey down in Noank or going to see bands at the German Club. Whoever we were, however, and whoever we now are, a key element in our connection and conversation is always about Mystic itself, and what it means to grow up here, live here, leave here, and return here, because it is a unique place—unique in part because people who grow up here are so conflicted about their *sense of place* that they are often forced to have an intense sense of it.

Once upon a time, there was a cobbler downtown, a convenience store, a sporting goods, and an A&P. You bought school clothes, sheet music, comic books, and fabric. Don’t get me wrong. Mystic is still very much alive. Densmore, Smith plumbing, and the banks are all still here. There’s Mystic Disc and Bank Square Books. But anybody who lives here knows what I mean. Mystic is now also a brand, a destination, a service economy, a place that exists but in some ways does not. So it is, I now welcome whatever is tasteful and serves the community and economy. Bring on boutique hotels and restaurants and taffy. Yet because of our divided selves and souls; because we are a suburb of no city; because we are precious and somewhat seasonal; people who grow up and live in Mystic tend to look both outward and deeply inward for culture and identity.

For all that, however, I mentioned Waugh because Mystic, like the European sights he describes, is also a place of what was and not what will be. And here I think I am writing for younger readers when I say the history and “labels” may detract, but they must also inspire, particularly if those young people are racing to escape, or are indifferent to the past. And if Mystic does one thing, it is to document and preserve its past. Go along the streets, see the widows walks, the iron fences, the placards telling you of noble and daring captains. The heroes, the people who continue to define this town, in many ways, are sealers, shipbuilders, and anonymous whaleship deckhands. We go on school field trips to rub their headstones, but that, more than anything, should remind us they are gone and we best respect the legacy that gives us the audacity to create our own.

Since we are talking in part about whales and whaling, let me talk then about Herman Melville and *Moby Dick*. Misunderstood and dismissed in its own time, *Moby Dick* is now often considered the most important novel in American literature, one that continues to prove insightful and prescient in any era. But *Moby Dick* would not have existed if it were not for Melville obtaining an edition of the collected works of Shakespeare or if he were not introduced to Nathaniel Hawthorne and his writing. Under Hawthorne’s influence, the book that had been *Moby Dick* was rewritten. Melville dedicated the novel to Hawthorne. But what is most relevant here is that he also included a stand-alone chapter, called “The Lee Shore,” in which Melville, talking about a character named Bulkington (modeled on Hawthorne) explains how Hawthorne’s own artistic courage gave him the power to write what he wished, however subversive, and to feel “as spotless as a lamb” in doing so. In reflecting on Bulkington, Melville says one benefits by pushing off into the unknown and freedom of open seas. “So better is it to perish in that howling infinite,” he writes, “than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety.”

We look at Mystic and we see it cluttered with its own new and old “labels.” But we must look beyond those to the core of this place, a core based on daring, on navigating new waters, on risk, on ingenuity, a place of uncertainty with the chance for success. When I see the historic placards, I feel a strength and an obligation to those before. The labels fall away and we are left with universal and existential truths, which tell us that the pivot foot we always keep in Mystic, whether we are here or not, anchors us to something noble and real, and gives us the courage to speak our mind, to express ourselves with conviction, to go out into the world as Mystic ambassadors, an entire navy of Bulkingtons entering our own “howling infinities” where we must, as Melville admonished, “take heart, take heart...Up from the spray of thy ocean—perishing—straight up, leaps thy apotheosis.”

MYSTIC MUSEUM OF ART

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