

FOOTNOTES FROM THE MOST FASCINATING MUSEUMS

Stories and Memorable Moments from
People Who Love Museums



BOB ECKSTEIN

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FOREWORD

We were ten. Perhaps our teachers thought: if you satisfy the bloodthirstiness of children, they will be less likely to stab each other with compasses during math class. This was 1975, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. It was the era of disaster movies: ships upside down, towering infernos, earthquakes. On the way to the mummies, we happened upon *Watson and the Shark* (1778). It's an odd painting, awful and hilarious, an eighteenth-century disaster movie. There's Watson, a naked figure fallen into a city harbor, hair streaming behind him. There's the shark, rising up with its awful mouth, getting ready to bite off the swimmer's head. You can tell the painter is not overly acquainted with sharks. This one has the sensual lips of a movie villain and slanted, prominent nostrils. At the same time, the shark is familiar, iconic, and it seems almost impossible that John Singleton Copley, son of Boston and portraitist of Paul Revere, among others, has not seen *Jaws*.

We, Miss Capuzzo's fifth-grade class, had not seen *Jaws* ourselves, but somebody's cousin had, and had related the plot, which had been passed around the fifth-grade class like samizdat. When you're a child, this can happen: you can know everything about a movie you've been forbidden to see; you've heard so many awful details you've made a new movie out of rumors and nightmares and jokes. We had all seen our own versions of *Jaws*. Now here it was again. We were never going back in the water.

Watson and the Shark is a disaster movie, but it's also a documentary. When he was sixteen years old, Brook Watson went swimming in Havana's harbor in Cuba—that's why he was naked—when he was bitten by a shark. The second bite took off his right foot. Watson was rescued, had the leg amputated and replaced by a wooden one, and grew up to become Lord Mayor of London. It's an unusual subject for the time, an actual event painted relatively soon after it occurred, with a character

of African descent depicted with compassion and care at the top of the painting's composition. The painting's an origin story, in other words, of both a man and his disability. This moment is the making of him. He was the one who had it commissioned.

I'm not even sure that I first saw *Watson and the Shark* on a field trip, though that's how I remember it. My parents did take me to the MFA pretty often. Perhaps my feelings of seeing it were so scalding and emboldening that I have had to mentally surround myself with all of the fifth grade to get at the actual feeling. What was that emotion? Uncanny hilarity, edged with dread and romance. Disbelief cut with overwhelm: there's too much to understand entirely; the artist is keeping me busy. I remember stepping back when I first saw the painting, as though if I got too close I would be implicated, even caught. I would step into the painting and the water would close up behind me. It was what I longed for. I fought it. I longed for it again.

I would recognize the painting anywhere, but seeing Bob's version of it for this book brings all that hilarity and dread and adds delight, and a feeling of having—in the best way—my privacy invaded. I'm not sure why. It's a public painting in a public place, and yet it belongs to me. Then again, I'm not sure I've ever seen a work of art I love in a museum and not thought, *Mine*. Copley's *Watson and the Shark* has been mine since childhood, and now so is Bob's.

All I can say is that certain art—my favorite sort—strikes a kind of private, glorious, shameful nerve in me, like a homely toy with a music box at its heart that plays my favorite tune.

My footfall still quickens when I'm in the MFA, approaching *Watson and the Shark*, as with any beloved. Will I feel the same way? Will I even find it? The museum has remade itself several times in the past forty years, and I'm never certain where it is.

Sometimes I think I was raised in museums—art, historical, house, science, tourist—in all those rooms, vast and cozy, dining rooms set for dinner,

photorealistic sculptures and tiny watercolors and lessons on how to dip candles and recreated séance rooms. I love them all. There's a family story: when my grandmother was little, she went with her older brother Louis and her older sister Edna to the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis, and as they looked up at a sculpture of a woman pointing down—an allegorical statue of a continent, my grandmother thought—Louis reached up, took hold of her finger, and snapped it off. I swear I can feel that finger in my own hand. I've been trying to get that finger into fiction but never have. Why do I love it? Because though I have never stolen or vandalized or touched what I shouldn't in any museum, I understand the impulse. What an astonishing thing, to display wonders to the public. How much I want to carry a piece home in my fist. I will have to settle for this book.

—Elizabeth McCracken, author of eight books including *The Hero of This Book*

INTRODUCTION

I remember my first museum visit, in Washington, DC. We stepped into our low wood-paneled station wagon that kicked and coughed up loud smoke and drove southbound from the South Bronx toward this place that was always on TV. Before long, the car was filled with secondhand smoke and a talk of safety from my dad, which included the danger of wearing seatbelts. Plopped on my mother's lap in the front seat was my sister, far too young to have any memory of this. While in the back seat my younger brother and I had no idea that in another time we would have been strapped into place by plastic car seats, or risk being prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Instead, we had the ability to bounce off the back seat in rhythmic unison, for hours, practicing some kind of early aerobic exercise we stumbled upon but never cashed in on. That was the highlight of our trip. Within a few short hours, we would be bored to tears.

My earliest experience with museums was no indication that I would later yearn for that time we were once together or that one day in the future I

would visit as many museums as possible. Just the opposite—at the time, I was hoping it would be my last museum visit ever. I had never seen so much text in my eight years—endless sentences and words carved into marble and plaques. In our family, the word *vacation* came after the word *teaching*, as in *teaching vacation*. Going on vacation was always a master class in boredom. In DC, Mom was determined that we, the kids, read every plaque on every monument. That plan, of course, devolved quickly into mayhem and was aborted. Mom sternly announced she would have to shoulder the blunt of the reading chores (adding inflection for dramatic effect) and got us back in line.

After each important monument was tackled, the last being Lincoln, which to us was just some bearded giant from the penny sitting down in an enormous chair, we finally made our way to something good. We were promised that, at the top of the tall concrete tower that looked as if it went into the clouds, we'd be able to see our city as well as all the way to Europe. As luck would have it, we were told the elevator in

the Washington Monument was busted. There would be no fun that day.

Plan B was to drag ourselves to the Smithsonian Institute, which could not have a less fun name to an eight-year-old. Exhausted and depleted, we spilled out of the last of what felt like forty buildings. Outside, we found ourselves, shockingly, in front of the longest swimming pool we had ever seen. Was this the hotel pool of a HoJo's or Holiday Inn? No, the pool was in front of that concrete tower with the broken elevator. No matter, all was forgiven as I removed my sneakers and started unbuttoning stuff.

Wait! What was this? Mom was saying we can't jump in these cool, clear waters, even after all that reading? This was just about as much a preteen could bear. There was no choice but to do the only sensible thing. Lying on the sidewalk screaming, I pinwheeled in circles until I was pulled up from the ground.

But we all know that the purpose of a vacation is to relax and have fun. And by fun, that meant, to my mom at least, an educational trip that raised

questions and piqued our curiosity about our country's history. And to relax we were bombarded endlessly with historical facts and quotes in her *Jeopardy* voice.

Alas, I only remember one quote from that trip to the capital, and this said by my father that very evening in a dining establishment best described as a I'm-sure-it's-long-gone-by-now greasy-spoon, "This chicken cutlet tastes like cardboard."

And the only question I recall was from my six-year-old brother constantly asking, "Are we there yet?"

Museums have changed. We'll always have the Louvre in Paris, but now there is a museum for everything and everyone. There's the Museum of Love and the Museum of Sex and the Museum of Broken Relationships. One can go to the International Banana Museum or the National Mustard Museum. Museums still teach but can do so in interactive ways by incorporating the latest technology that broadens our horizons and excites our senses. Museums can take us to another world. They can celebrate the past, or even

bring closure. They can inspire us and change lives, while simultaneously entertaining us. They can save a family road trip.

In North America alone, there are over 38,000 museums. That's not counting the upcoming Pickleball Hall of Fame and Museum in Arizona. There are over 35,000 museums in the US; 2,000 in Canada; and 1,086 in Mexico. If I were to keep up a pace of visiting up to three museums a day, which I frequently did, it would still take over thirty-one years to visit them all. My criteria—a nice way of saying why I left out such-and-such a museum—was based on historical significance, community importance, level of enjoyment, and the beauty of their collection and architecture. This book is not intended to rate the museums, otherwise I would have taken into account the three things travelers are most interested in: the museum café, the gift shop, and the bathrooms.

I did my best to represent different regions in North America but some locations are blessed with an inordinate number of exceptional museums.

(Massachusetts has over 800 museums, the most of any US state per square mile.) I hope that museums like DEVIL-ish Little Things Museum (located in an old church in Vancouver, Washington, and which welcomes visitors by appointment only) don't hold it against me that I didn't mention them in my book and put a curse on me. If I tried to include every interesting museum, this book would have wound up in the Brautigan Library, a collection of only unpublished manuscripts—inspired by Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, a novel about a library with such a collection that no one is allowed to visit.

I was contemplating the best way to wrap up this introduction, but I think it's best we start our journey. Because the most important question, to everything in life, is “Are we there yet?”

CHAPTER ONE

ACADEMIA & SCIENCE

AFTEL ARCHIVE OF CURIOUS SCENTS

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA · EST. 2017

This is a one-of-a-kind collection of antique aromatic materials with more than two hundred natural essences derived from fruits, flowers, trees, grasses, and animals. Highlights include a jeweled pomander from 1790, drawers of raw botanical materials, and the little ambergris cathedral.

At the start of each tour of the museum, you are given five scent strips to dip into your favorite perfume oils and take home as souvenirs, as well as a piece of wool. According to curator Mandy Aftel, “All you need to do is breathe in deeply three times through the wool strip. It works as an olfactory palette cleanser.”



“Ambergris is a special kind of whale poop that floats on the ocean and often washes up on the shore. It was once classed among the most lucrative items of trade, along with slaves and gold...The piece of ambergris called ‘fresh black’ is the most similar to poop. The white ambergris is one that’s tossed on the sea for years and gets bleached and transformed. We think when the sperm whale eats squid, the squid beaks irritate their stomachs, and they make ambergris.” —Mandy Aftel, curator



EXPLORERS CLUB

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1904

The Explorers Club is a meeting place for explorers and scientists around the world with the New York City location as its headquarters and museum. Members have included President Herbert Hoover, Teddy and Kermit Roosevelt, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Amelia Earhart. The thirty-four chapters in the United States hold lectures, monthly dinners, publish newsletters, and organize expeditions and educational events.

There are highlights displayed throughout the club: a man-eating tiger from Nepal that ate forty-nine people in 1968, delivered to the club by mail; a polar bear; the Henson and Peary sledge from the North Pole discovery expedition of 1909; the bullwhip belonging to Roy Chapman Andrews (real-life prototype for the character of Indiana Jones); and the club flag that has been to both the highest and the lowest points on Earth and everywhere in between, awarded to expeditions which have garnered important scientific results.



Dinners at the club are often trailblazing. For instance, there was at least one that served pickled eyeballs. In 1951 the club planned to serve 250,000-year-extinct woolly mammoth. DNA testing of leftovers proved it was just sea turtle.

*"So many stories here start like a bad joke: 'So today at work, an astronaut, aquanaut, and mountaineer walked into the club...' and it's true."
—Lacey Flint, The Explorers Club*

GREENFIELD VILLAGE

DEARBORN, MICHIGAN · EST. 1996

Also known as the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation and as the Edison Institute, this museum complex is the largest indoor-outdoor museum in the United States with nearly two million visitors a year. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Landmark.

Highlights include the Wright Brothers' bicycle shop, President John F. Kennedy's limousine, President Abraham Lincoln's chair from Ford's Theatre, Thomas Edison's laboratory, and the Rosa Parks bus.



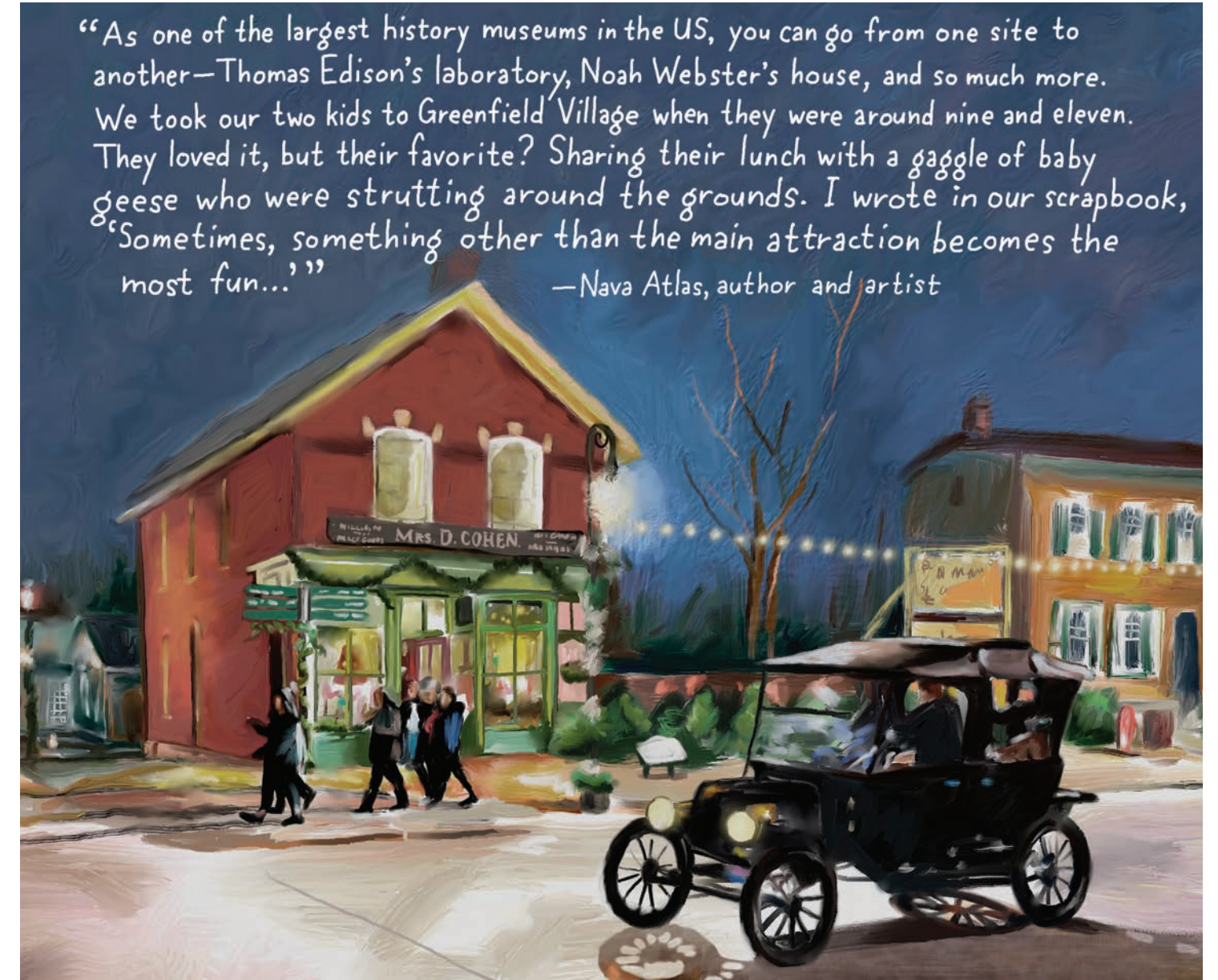
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Replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer



Incandescent lamp, 1929, Thomas Edison

“As one of the largest history museums in the US, you can go from one site to another—Thomas Edison’s laboratory, Noah Webster’s house, and so much more. We took our two kids to Greenfield Village when they were around nine and eleven. They loved it, but their favorite? Sharing their lunch with a gaggle of baby geese who were strutting around the grounds. I wrote in our scrapbook, “Sometimes, something other than the main attraction becomes the most fun...””
—Nava Atlas, author and artist



MÜTTER MUSEUM

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA · EST. 1863

This is America's largest museum of medical history. The Mütter Museum of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia started as a donation from surgeon Thomas Dent Mütter, MD (1811–1859), who wanted to improve medical education. It displays anatomical specimens, models, and medical instruments to understand the mysteries and beauty of the human body and has been featured on countless television programs and specials and two best-selling books.

Highlights include endless jars of wet specimens, wax models, the Dr. Benjamin Rush Medicinal Plant Garden, and slides of Albert Einstein's brain.



From the moment Carol Orzel met Harry Eastlack at the Mütter Museum, she was enchanted. Harry had been dead for twenty-two years, his skeleton on display since 1979. At that 1995 event, Orzel turned to her doctor and said, "When my time comes, I would like to hang next to Harry...only if my jewelry can be displayed, too."

"Carol Orzel was a disability rights advocate with fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, one of the rarest diseases in the world. In 2018 our staff gathered to greet her, in appreciation for Carol donating her body. Her skeleton is on display with her collection of tiaras, earrings, and brooches." —Erin Scheckenbach, director of development, Mütter Museum

"When my husband and I first began dating, he took me to the Mütter Museum. This was how I knew we were a match made in heaven. If you're not sure if the person you're dating is awesome or not, take them there and see how they react: it's a litmus test for sane and logical humanity." —Jessica Delfino, comedian, author

CHAPTER TWO
CULTURE

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK · EST. 1897

The Brooklyn Museum is one of the oldest and largest museums in the United States (560,000 square feet and over a half a million objects) and a pioneer in art education and community participation. Its collections focus on the artistic heritage of world cultures, like Egyptian and African art, ranging from paintings to sculpture.

The museum's history began from an apprentice's library in Brooklyn Heights in 1823. That library merged and became the Brooklyn Institute in 1843, showing paintings and sculptures. In 1890 it was reorganized as the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences and began planning for the establishment of the Brooklyn Museum. The original architectural plans in 1895 would have made the Brooklyn Museum the largest museum in the world.

Museum highlights include its diversity in representing cultures from around the world. It has a major collection of Asian art dating back to 4000 BCE, the largest collection of Claude Monet outside of France, the world's most acclaimed collection of nineteenth-century American art, and the largest collection of Egyptian Old Kingdom objects in the world. Artists of note in their collection include Edward Hopper, Judy Chicago, Edgar Degas, Georgia O'Keeffe, Max Weber, Winslow Homer, and Mark Rothko. Another highlight is the museum's location—between the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the Brooklyn Library.



OY/YO, 2015, Deborah Kass



“Whistling for Plover is a watercolor by Thomas Eakins of a hunter calling plovers by their distinct, plaintive call, a call that I know very well. Besides it being a beautiful little painting, it touches me because it is a painting I saw in books when I was a boy. At that time in my life, I was completely absorbed by salt marshes, hunting waterfowl, and learning everything I could about birds, decoys, and old hunting traditions. I would eventually replace bird hunting with bird-watching and bird carving. I have revisited plovers many times in my art and many more times along the beaches and marshes of the coast. As I hear plovers calling, I often think of Eakins and the first time I saw his original in the Brooklyn Museum.”

—Pete Palumbo, retired art teacher and world-class decoy carver

The only museum that greets you with both an urban salutation and the Yiddish expression for dismay—plus the Spanish pronoun for “I”—depending on which direction you come from. In 2022 the O in Deborah Kass’s OY/YO sculpture was draped in blue fabric to represent the Ukrainian flag in a sign of solidarity.

CHAPULTEPEC CASTLE

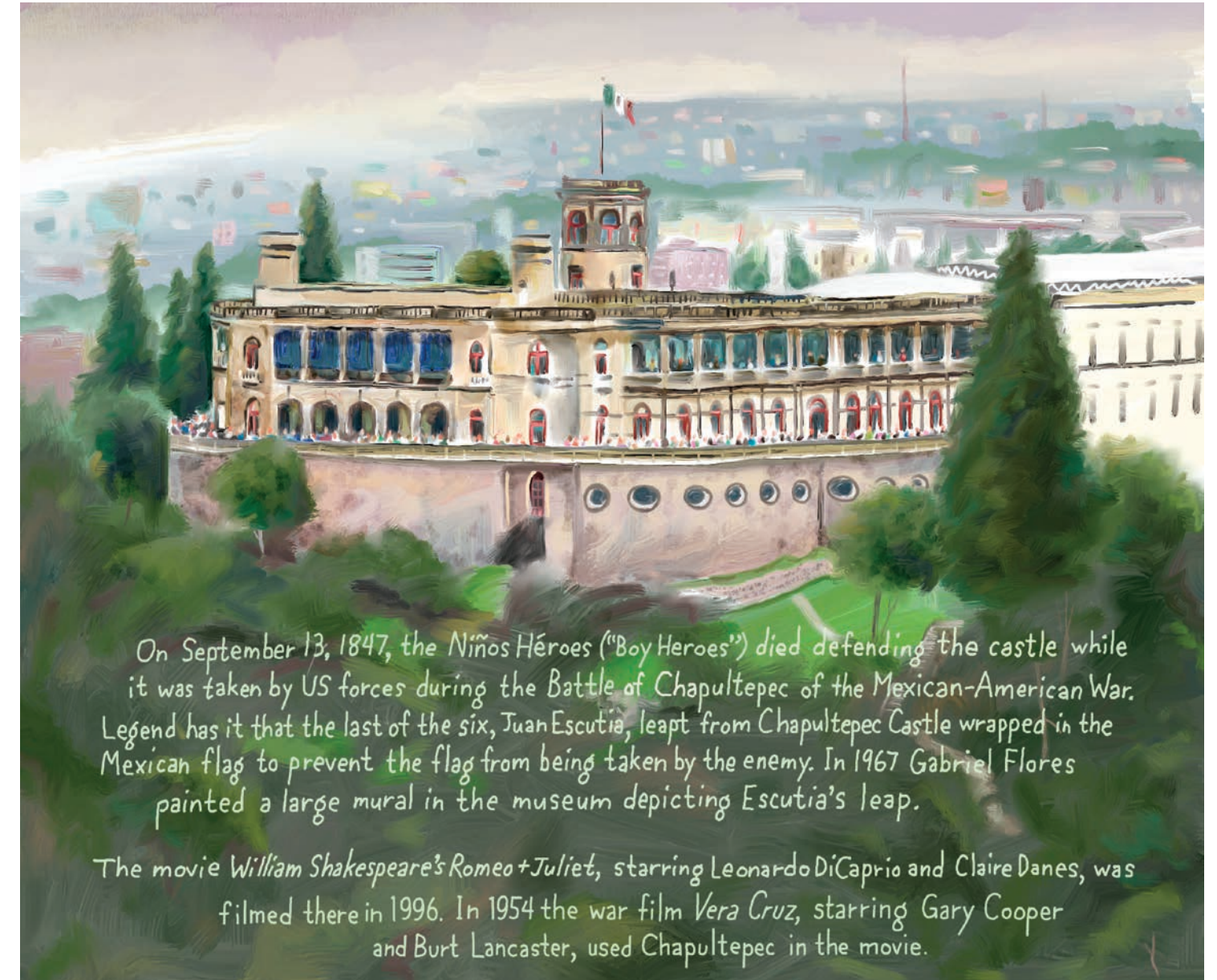
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO · BUILT 1785 TO 1864 · EST. 1944

The castle served as the home of the Mexican president until 1939, and now houses the famous Museo Nacional de Historia. It includes a fantastic collection of historic art, jewelry, murals, sculptures, and maritime hardware.

The highlight is the unparalleled views of the city from the castle. Explorer James F. Elton wrote the views “can’t be surpassed in beauty in any part of the world.” Located at a height of 2,325 meters above sea level, this is the only museum in this book that provides a solid aerobic workout. The hill was a sacred place for Aztecs. Tours can be booked or you can hire someone outside the castle and negotiate your price.



Niños Heroes, 1967, Gabriel Flores Garcia



On September 13, 1847, the Niños Héroes (“Boy Heroes”) died defending the castle while it was taken by US forces during the Battle of Chapultepec of the Mexican-American War. Legend has it that the last of the six, Juan Escutia, leapt from Chapultepec Castle wrapped in the Mexican flag to prevent the flag from being taken by the enemy. In 1967 Gabriel Flores painted a large mural in the museum depicting Escutia’s leap.

The movie *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes, was filmed there in 1996. In 1954 the war film *Vera Cruz*, starring Gary Cooper and Burt Lancaster, used Chapultepec in the movie.

INTERNATIONAL TENNIS HALL OF FAME

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND · EST. 1954

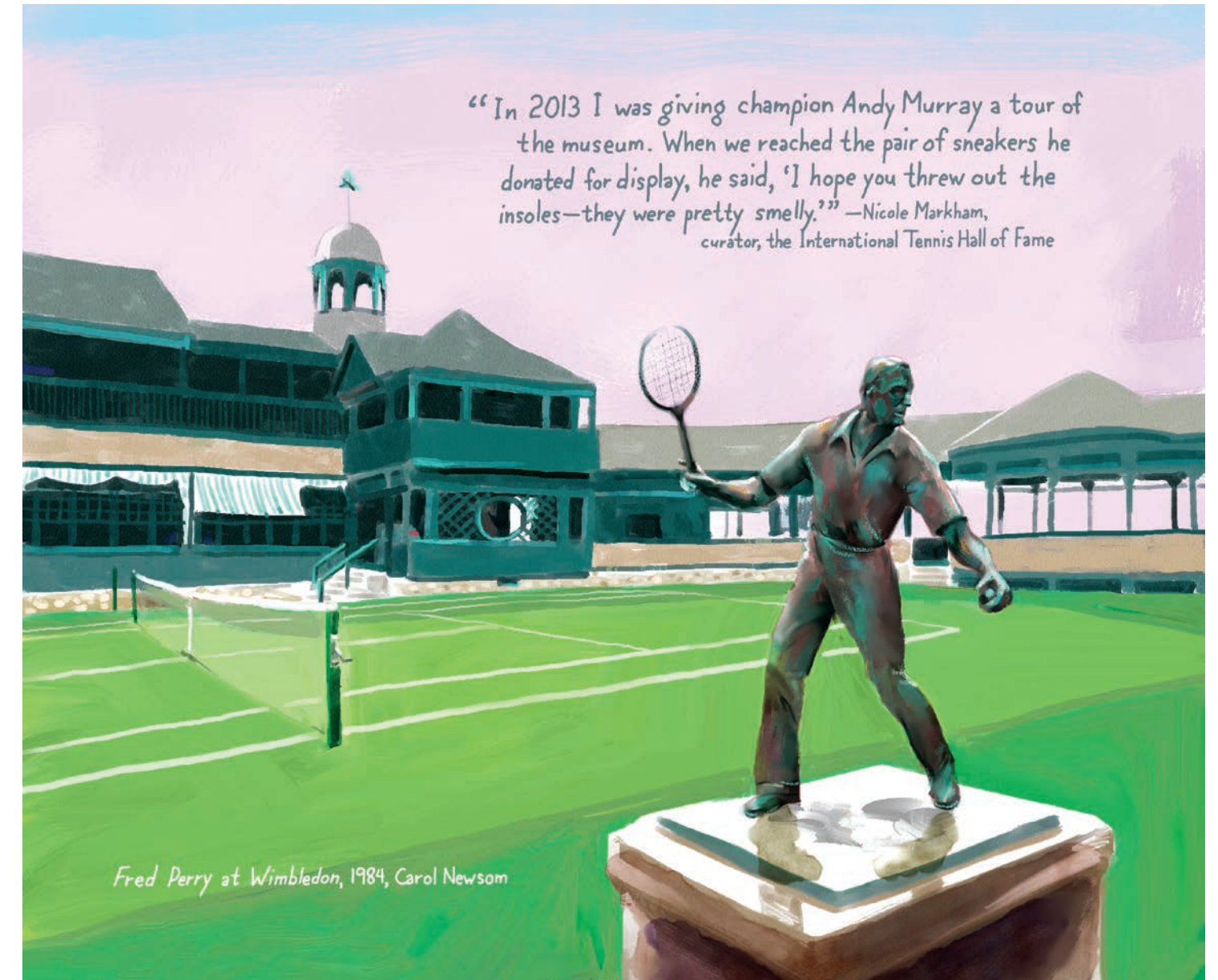
The International Tennis Hall of Fame was the site of the first United States National Lawn Tennis Championships in 1881 (which grew into the US Open in Flushing, New York). The grounds include twenty tennis courts, including thirteen grass courts. Along with the buildings, they make up the most regal of any tennis club in North America and rival Wimbledon.

A highlight is the large state-of-the-art interactive museum documenting the first days of the sport to modern tennis today. Another highlight is what they call a “Kings Court,” first played by monks and kings in religious buildings and courtyards. These courts bear little resemblance to a tennis court today and date back to 1538. It’s not so much a tennis court but an off-kilter rectangular-shaped room with surprising slopes and angles. The racquet used is small and curved. The ball is handmade with horsehair and cork. These balls are heavier and can bounce off walls and windows and still be in play. The net is intentionally drooping over a “moat” in the center of the court but there are also small nets surrounding the asymmetrical court.

There are only eleven such courts in North America, as they cost approximately \$3 million to make. What makes these courts even more special is that visitors can rent them with equipment and play this ancient game here at the museum.



Bowed racquets for Royal Court Tennis



“In 2013 I was giving champion Andy Murray a tour of the museum. When we reached the pair of sneakers he donated for display, he said, ‘I hope you threw out the insoles—they were pretty smelly.’” —Nicole Markham, curator, the International Tennis Hall of Fame

Fred Perry at Wimbledon, 1984, Carol Newsom

MET CLOISTERS

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1938

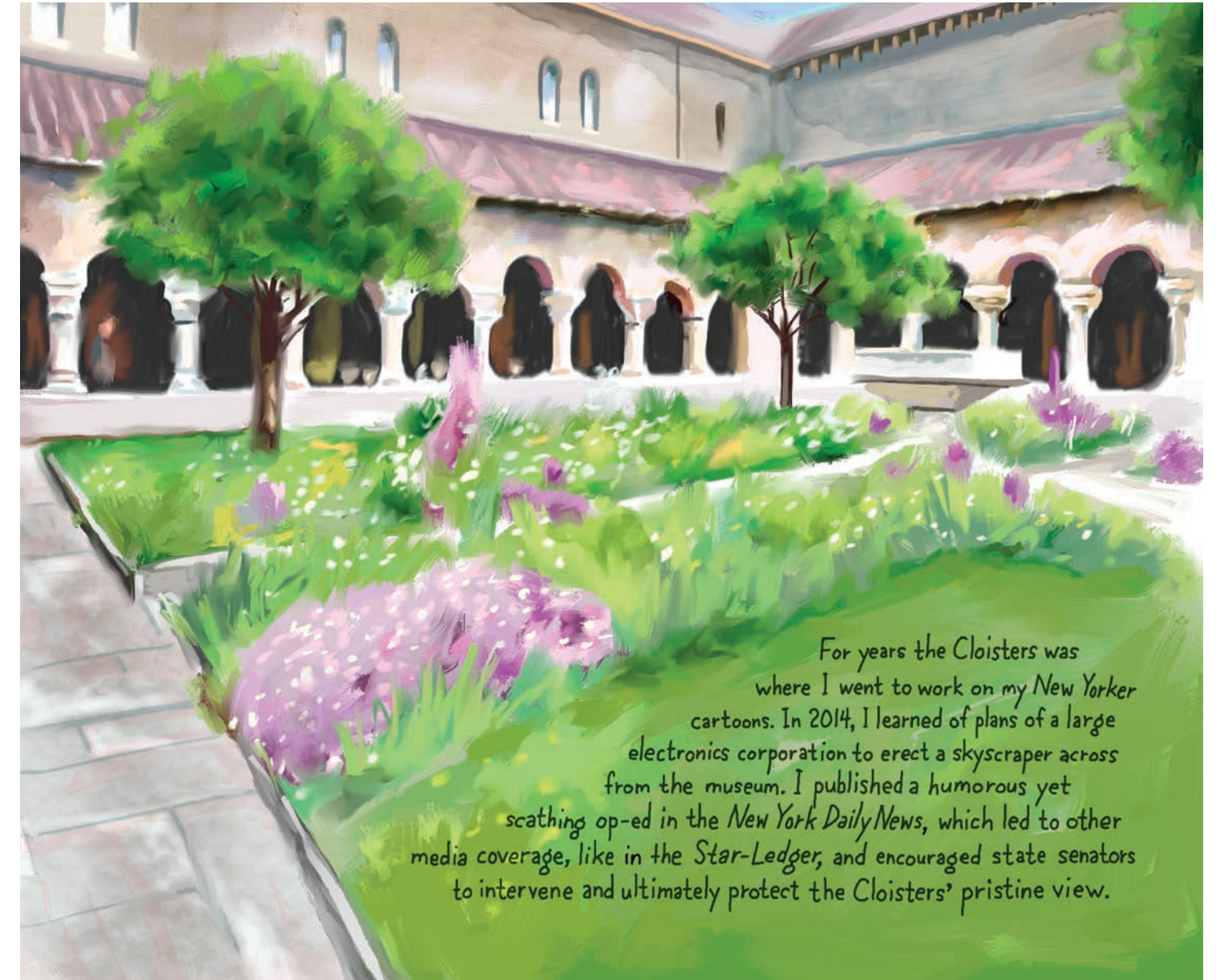


Located in Fort Tryon Park on the northern tip of Manhattan, the Met Cloisters is part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art but provide a different, tranquil experience. The collection of medieval artwork is showcased inside four monasteries that were shipped stone by stone from France and reconstructed into an integrated whole over five years by American sculptor and art dealer George Grey Barnard, who bought the four abbeys in 1913. Financier and philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. bought the 66.5-acre site in 1930 and also donated items for the new museum's collection, including purchasing Barnard's collection. Other major donors were art dealer Joseph Brummer and industrialist J. P. Morgan, founder of the Morgan Library & Museum.

Highlights certainly include the twelfth-century walrus-ivory Cloisters Cross and the renown *The Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries (the subject of my college thesis). But the real stars are the museum's three medieval outdoor gardens...and their sweeping views of the Hudson River. On May 10, 1938, the Cloisters opened "in a picturesque setting, which stimulates imagination and creates a receptive mood for enjoyment." Rockefeller bought several hundred acres of the New Jersey Palisades, which he donated to the state to preserve the view from the museum.



The Unicorn Tapestries, ca. 1500



For years the Cloisters was where I went to work on my *New Yorker* cartoons. In 2014, I learned of plans of a large electronics corporation to erect a skyscraper across from the museum. I published a humorous yet scathing op-ed in the *New York Daily News*, which led to other media coverage, like in the *Star-Ledger*, and encouraged state senators to intervene and ultimately protect the Cloisters' pristine view.

MOB MUSEUM

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA · EST. 2012

This 1933 former US post office and federal courtroom was bought by the city of Las Vegas in 2002 for \$1, with the condition it be used for something cultural...like a museum. Ten years and \$42 million later, leading museum designer Dennis Barrie (International Spy Museum and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame) created an immersive, engaging mob museum, which serenades visitors with Frank Sinatra singing “New York, New York” upon arriving.

Officially the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, this bilingual museum tells a bold and surprisingly compelling visual story of the war between the mob and the Feds. The museum’s mission statement is “to advance the public understanding of organized crime’s history and impact on American society.”



Dice roller from the 1920s



On the first part of the tour, there is a mock police lineup for tourists to take pictures, but this is also where more than one museum employee has seen a ghost. All three floors, it must be noted, also contain graphic depictions of violence. The museum ends the tour by inviting you into a fully operational, and legal, speak-easy.

NATIONAL COMEDY CENTER

JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK · EST. 2018

Designated the United States' official cultural institution dedicated to comedy, this American museum is based in Lucille Ball's hometown of Jamestown, New York. Comedy royalty has been involved directly and indirectly with memorabilia and donations from comedians like: Dan Aykroyd, the Smothers Brothers, Lenny Bruce, Johnny Carson, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, Carol Burnett, George Carlin, Andy Kaufman, Harpo Marx, Jerry Seinfeld, Betty White, and Lily Tomlin. The center's advisory board includes Paula Poundstone, W. Kamau Bell, Laraine Newman, Tiffany Haddish, Jim Gaffigan, Amy Poehler, Rain Pryor, Robin & Alan Zweibel, and many more.

Highlights include an interactive comedy karaoke stage, Jerry Seinfeld's puffy shirt, and Joan Rivers's catalog of sixty-five thousand jokes. For some, the highlight will be the downstairs Blue Room featuring comedy's raciest material.



Joan Rivers



“Before visitors go through the turnstiles, they create their ‘sense of humor profile.’ They choose what they find funny by tapping selections, and the data is collected on a digital chip they wear on a wrist called a Laughband so that the comedy content is customized, based on their personal taste.”

—Journey Gunderson, executive director, National Comedy Center

“I was blown away by the devotion to the art of comedy here. For example, the area devoted to George Carlin is much more than clips of his favorite bits but his actual handwritten notebooks filled with ideas.”

—Bob Mankoff, cartoonist, author, former *New Yorker* cartoon editor

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

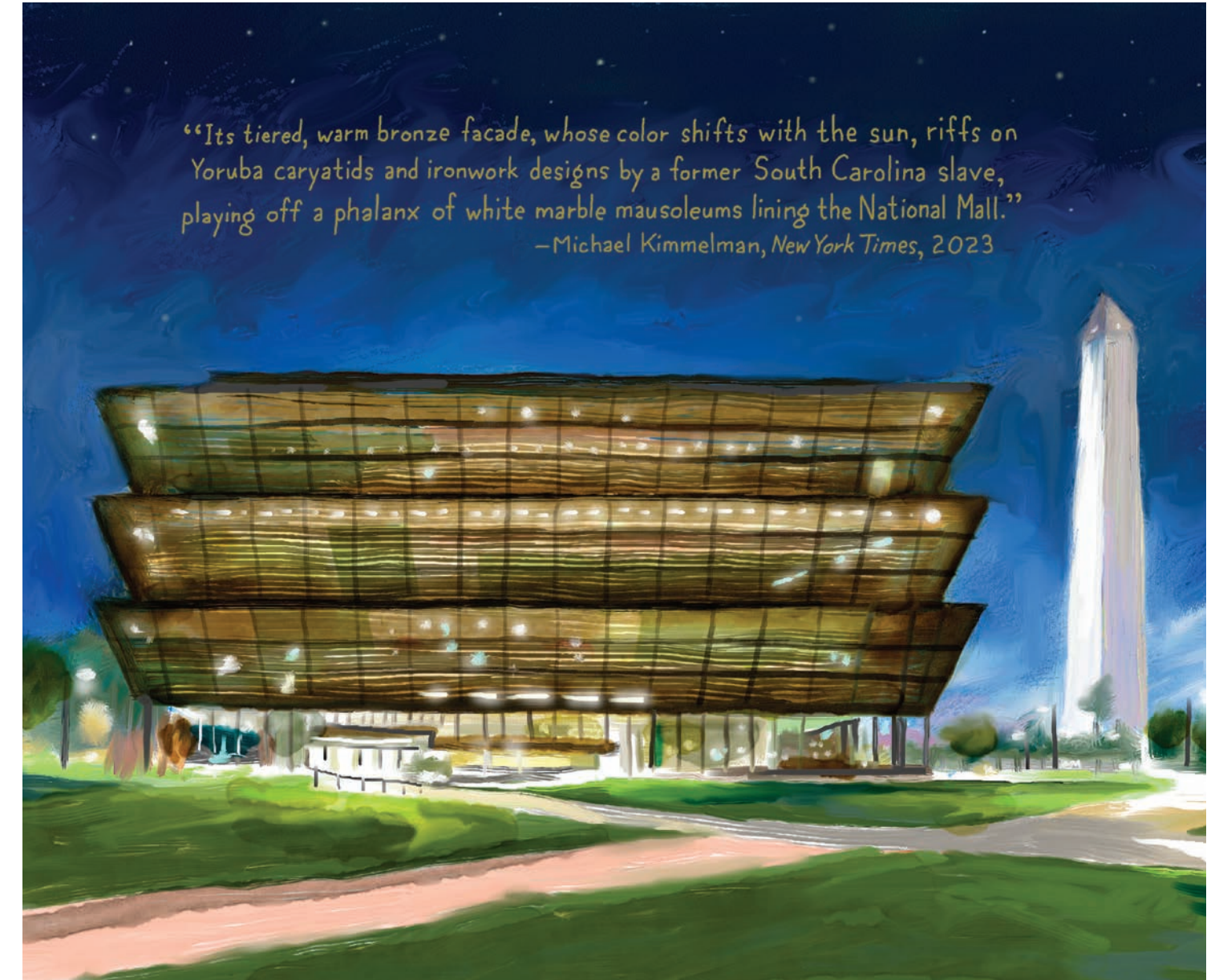
WASHINGTON, DC · EST. 2016

This is the only museum in the country devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture. After decades of efforts to highlight the contributions of African Americans dating back to 1915, it was established by an act of Congress in 2003. It opened as the nineteenth museum of the Smithsonian Institution on September 24, 2016. It was ranked as the fourth-most-visited Smithsonian Museum in its first full year of operation.

Highlights include the 350,000-square-foot building, of which architect David Adjaye was the lead designer. It's placed adjacent to the National Mall across from the Washington Monument. It is five stories high above ground and five below.

“The hole in the ground was several stories deep, more than three hundred feet wide and at least five hundred feet long. Temporary walls had recently gone up around the spot where the long-awaited National Museum of African American History and Culture was going to be built. Lonnie Bunch [Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, the first African American to serve as head] recalled standing on the edge of that hole one weekend, looking down at a steady stream of liquid. He pictured water seeping into galleries filled with precious artifacts. Exhibit designers had persuaded Smithsonian officials to dig an additional forty-five feet to create a more dramatic exhibit space, where the ceiling reached more than fifty feet high. From his time working at the National Air and Space Museum, Bunch knew people ‘really loved those moments to get intimate with large objects.’ He and the other curators had already found a Jim Crow-era Pullman rail car and a Tuskegee airplane to display. But now they needed to stop the water coming in. The museum sits on what was once the south bank of Tiber Creek, which was filled in late in the nineteenth century. Architects and engineers came up with a solution—erecting a kind of giant underground bathtub around the museum to help divert water.”

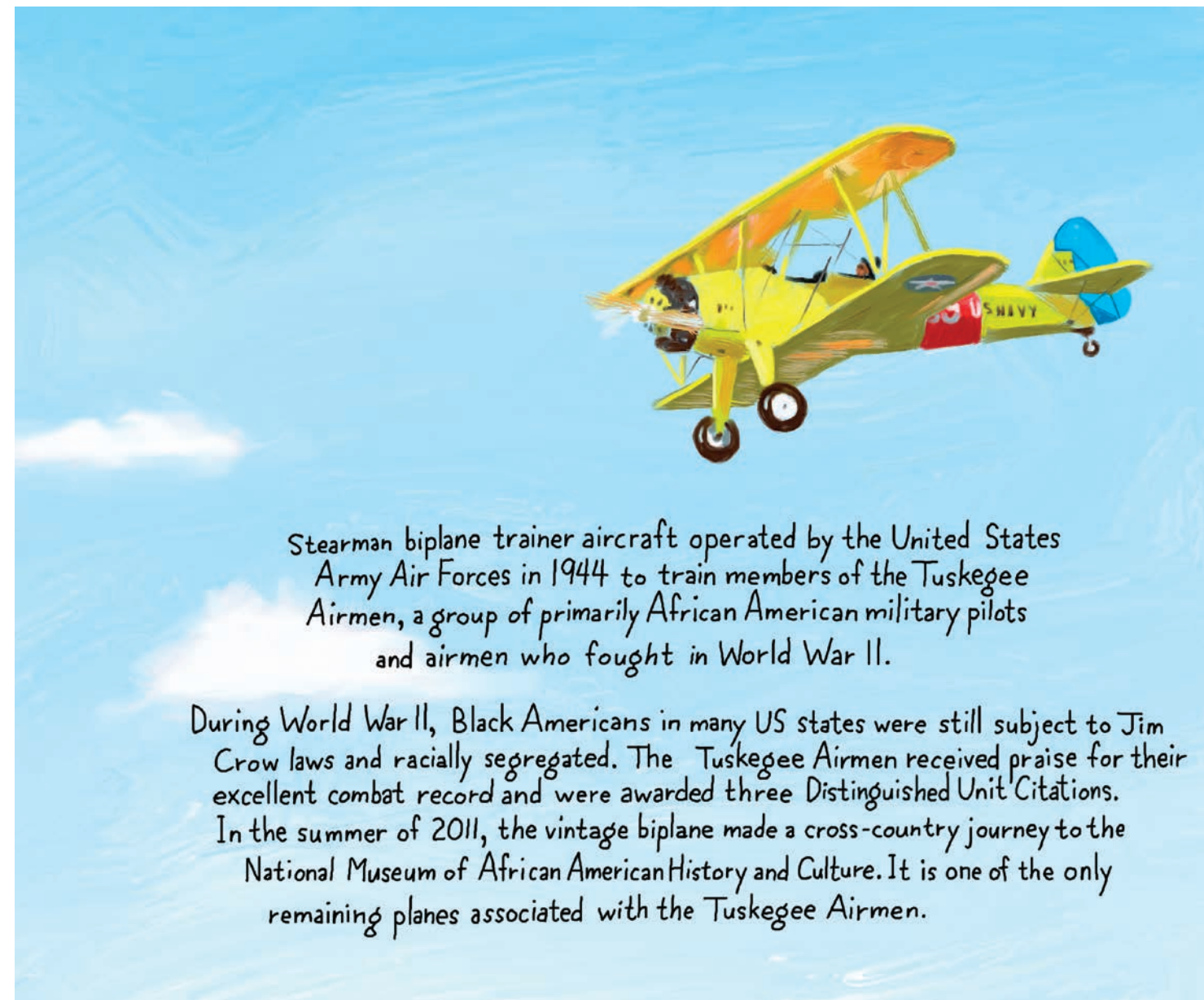
—Annys Shin, *Washington Post*, 2016





'Whites Only'-Men's restroom and smoking lounge on Southern Railway Company Coach from Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Built in 1922 by the Pullman Company, it was redesigned in 1940 as a segregated car used by African American passengers during the Jim Crow era.



Stearman biplane trainer aircraft operated by the United States Army Air Forces in 1944 to train members of the Tuskegee Airmen, a group of primarily African American military pilots and airmen who fought in World War II.

During World War II, Black Americans in many US states were still subject to Jim Crow laws and racially segregated. The Tuskegee Airmen received praise for their excellent combat record and were awarded three Distinguished Unit Citations. In the summer of 2011, the vintage biplane made a cross-country journey to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. It is one of the only remaining planes associated with the Tuskegee Airmen.

NEON MUSEUM

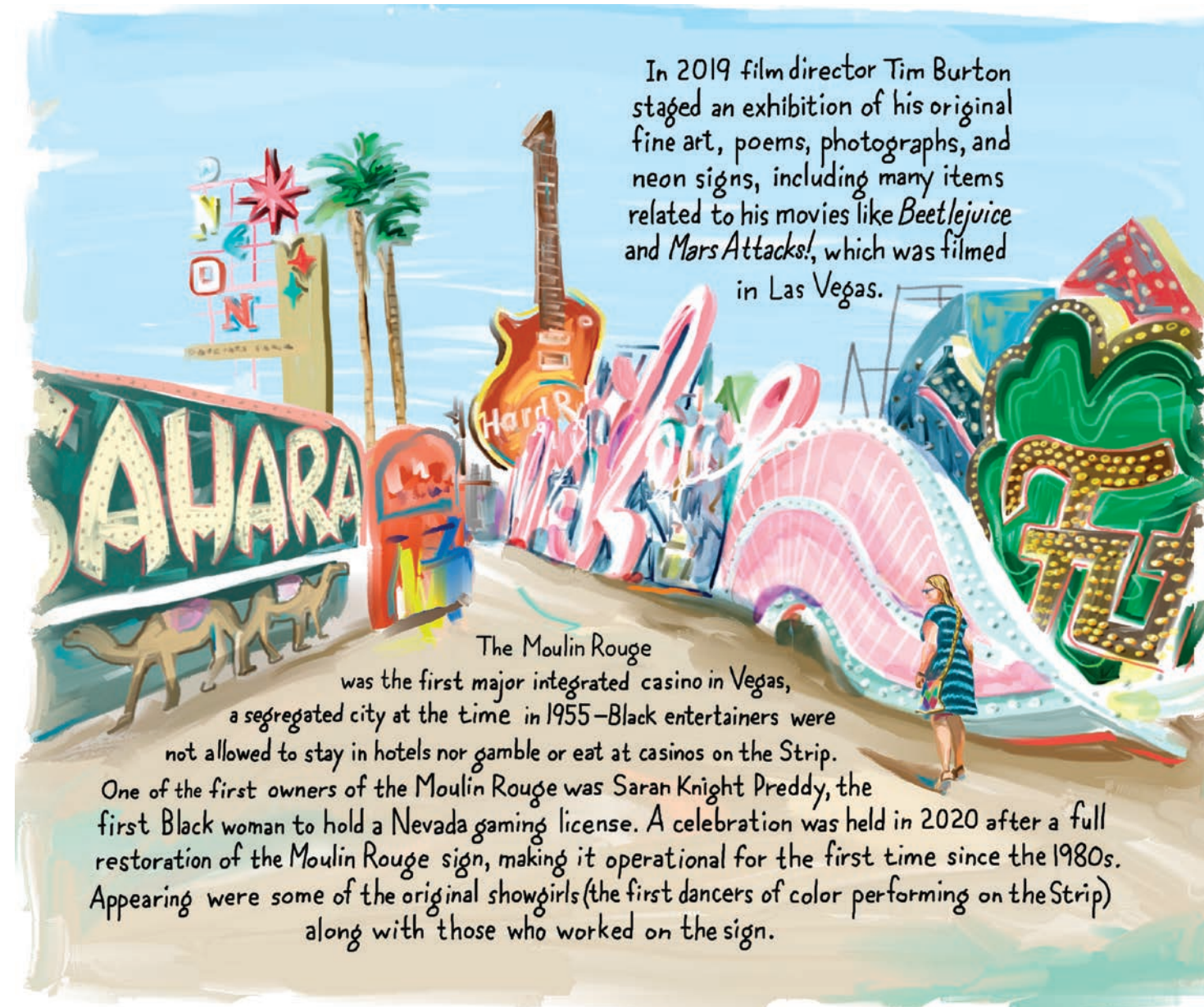
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA · EST. 1996

The Neon Museum is dedicated to collecting, preserving, and studying iconic Las Vegas signs, reminding us how beautiful old Vegas once was. It is part of Vegas's cultural corridor (which also includes the Natural History Museum and the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort Park) and is a member of Museums for All, which allows for free or reduced admission.

The crown jewel of the collection is the sign from the old Moulin Rouge designed by Betty Willis in 1955. Willis was a legendary female sign designer in a male-dominated field, a trailblazer best known for the iconic "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign at the end of the Strip, which in 2009 was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas, 1959, Betty Willis



In 2019 film director Tim Burton staged an exhibition of his original fine art, poems, photographs, and neon signs, including many items related to his movies like *Beetlejuice* and *Mars Attacks!*, which was filmed in Las Vegas.

The Moulin Rouge was the first major integrated casino in Vegas, a segregated city at the time in 1955—Black entertainers were not allowed to stay in hotels nor gamble or eat at casinos on the Strip. One of the first owners of the Moulin Rouge was Saran Knight Preddy, the first Black woman to hold a Nevada gaming license. A celebration was held in 2020 after a full restoration of the Moulin Rouge sign, making it operational for the first time since the 1980s. Appearing were some of the original showgirls (the first dancers of color performing on the Strip) along with those who worked on the sign.

SHELBURNE MUSEUM

SHELBURNE, VERMONT · EST. 1947

The Shelburne Museum is spread out in thirty-nine different structures across forty-five acres, each filled with beautiful, whimsical examples of American history, art, and design. The museum's collection includes everything from the first Monet in America to an articulated squirrel cage. Subjects range from French Impressionist paintings to historic New England architecture and American folk art, including duck decoys, trade signs, circus animals, dolls, furniture, pottery, quilts, and weather vanes. The museum offers special exhibitions, events, and educational programs.

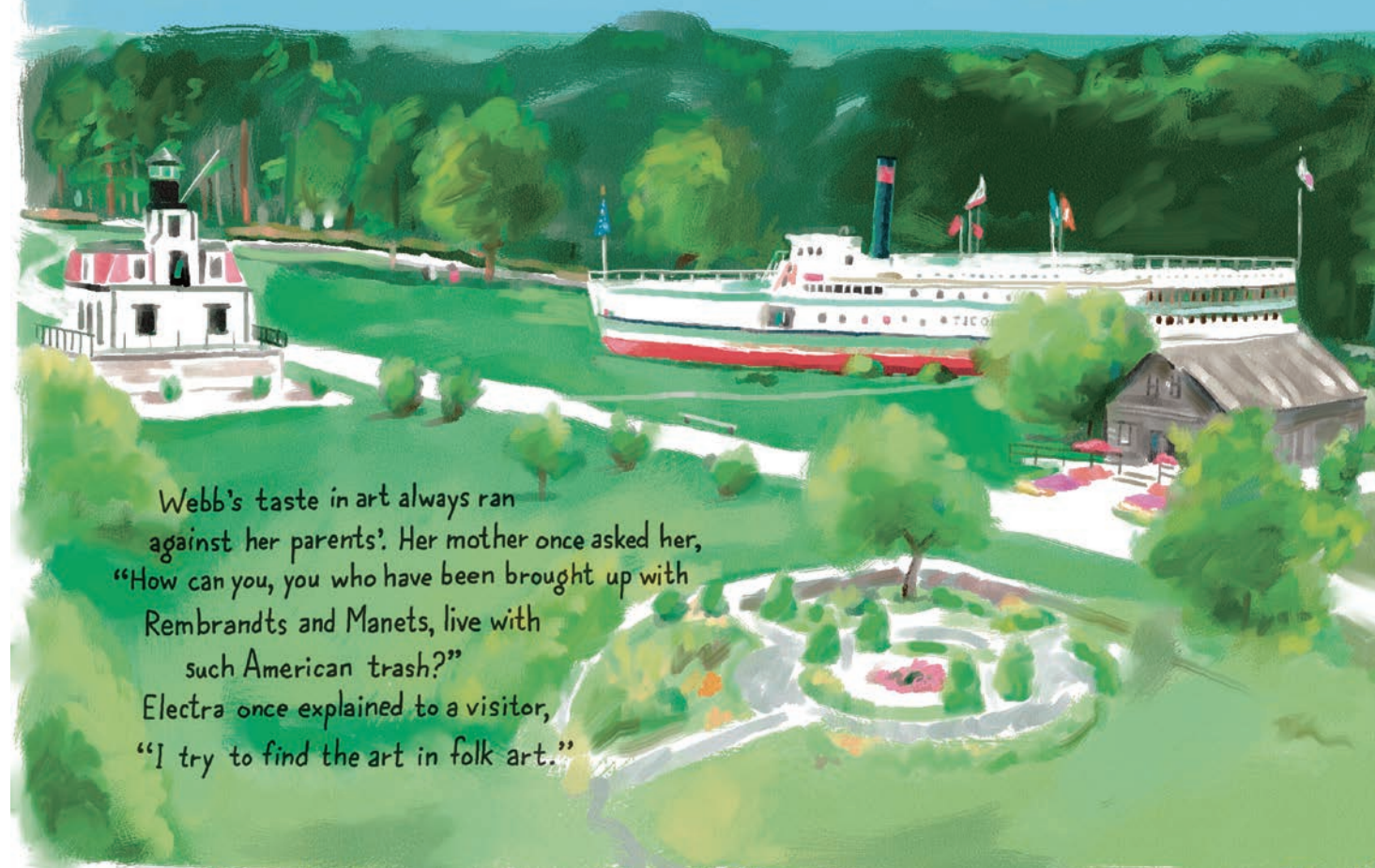
Highlights include a one-room schoolhouse, a lighthouse, a jail, a general store, the covered bridge, and the 220-foot steamboat *USS Ticonderoga* (which was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1964).

Electra Havemeyer Webb founded the Shelburne Museum to collect everyday objects that people were using—not just things that were thought of as art. In 1967 the museum opened the Electra Havemeyer Webb Memorial Building, with the interior a recreation of six rooms from Mrs. Webb's 1930s Park Avenue apartment in New York City. It includes a world-renowned collection of French Impressionist masterpieces and is a piece of New York City in Vermont.



Vintage squirrel cage

To bring the *USS Ticonderoga* to its final home at the museum, it had to be dragged almost two miles over land on new railroad tracks crossing a highway, a swamp, and through woods and fields. It began in 1954 when a basin was dug and the steamboat was floated over an underwater railroad carriage waiting on specially laid tracks. The water was then pumped out of the basin and the *Ticonderoga* sunk onto the carriage and then, in the winter of 1955, it began its last journey.



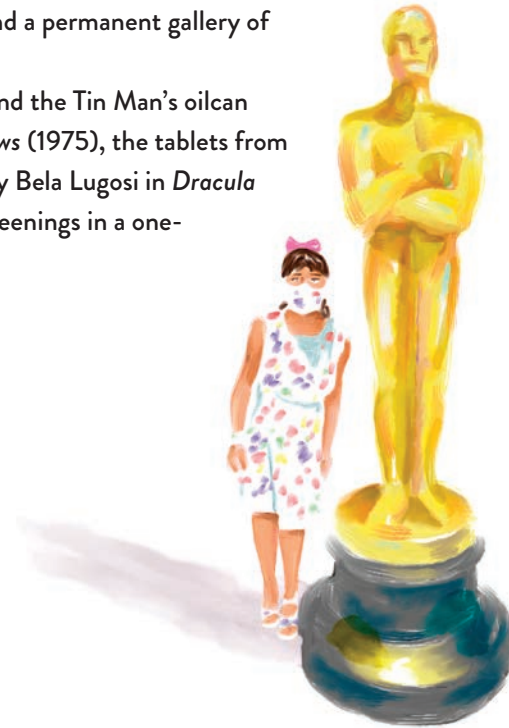
Webb's taste in art always ran against her parents'. Her mother once asked her, "How can you, you who have been brought up with Rembrandts and Manets, live with such American trash?" Electra once explained to a visitor, "I try to find the art in folk art."

ACADEMY MUSEUM OF MOTION PICTURES

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 2021

This new expansive facility is the largest museum in the United States devoted to the silver screen. This includes costumes, posters, film reels, screenplays, and movie props. Exhibits will include addressing challenging industry issues like Black Lives Matter, climate change, #MeToo, sexism in animation, and a permanent gallery of Hollywood's Jewish pioneers.

Highlights include Dorothy's ruby slippers and the Tin Man's oil can from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the shark from *Jaws* (1975), the tablets from *The Ten Commandments* (1956), the cape worn by Bela Lugosi in *Dracula* (1931), and a full schedule of historical movie screenings in a one-thousand-seat spherical theater.



CHAPTER THREE ENCYCLOPEDIA

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

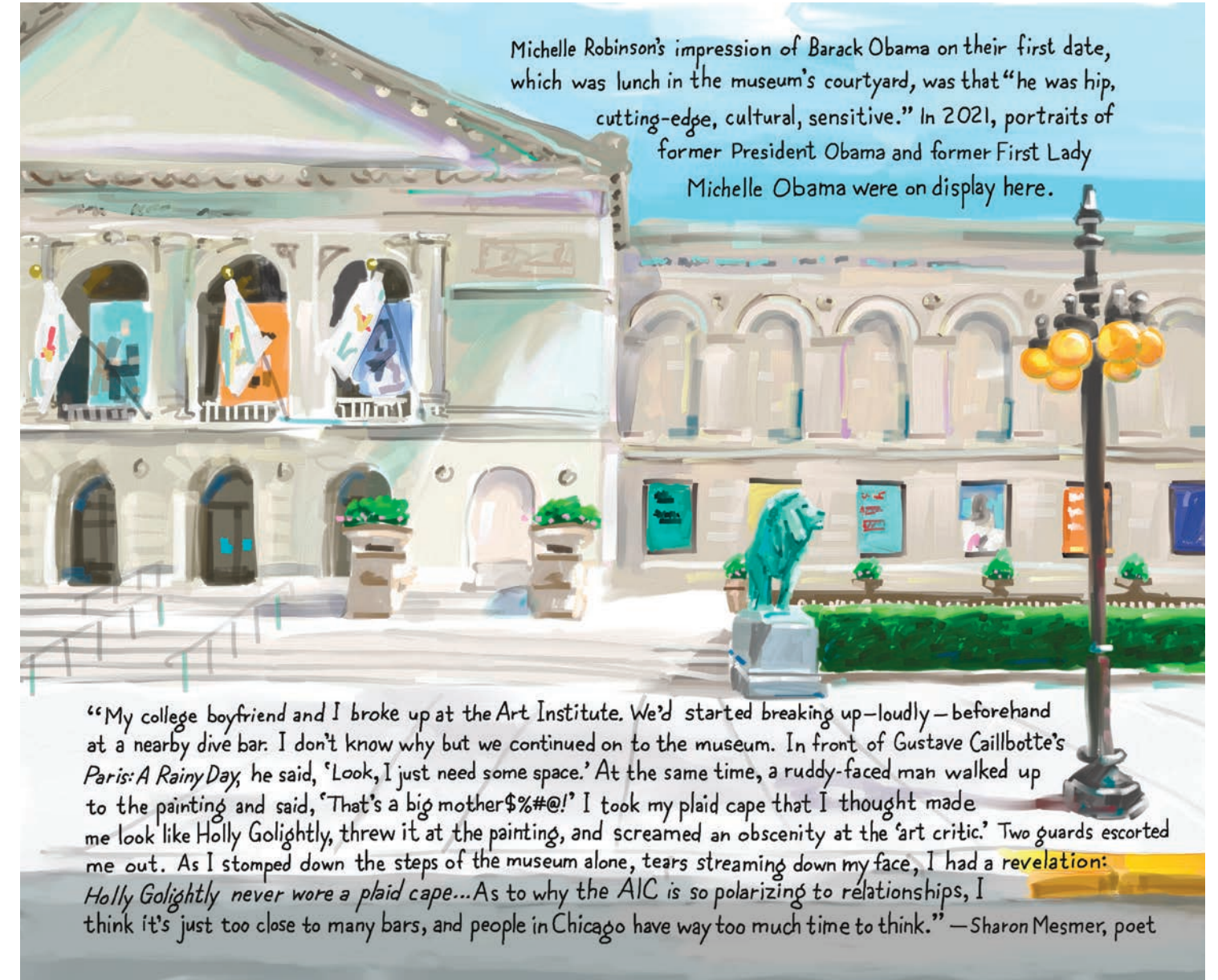
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS · EST. 1879

One of the oldest and largest art museums in the United States, it hosts, on average, 1.5 million people a year. The permanent collection consists of nearly three hundred thousand works of art.

Highlights include Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist*, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, and America's *Mona Lisa*—Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, a painting that has been parodied, redrawn, and repurposed more than any other American piece of work since it came in third place at the 1930 Art Institute of Chicago Annual and acquired for its collection.



American Gothic, 1930, Grant Wood



“The School of the Art Institute of Chicago is the school of the museum, the only school of its kind in the US with classrooms in the museum...My dad went to SAIC. I taught at SAIC. My son went to SAIC. When I was a kid, my dad used to take me there, first thing we'd do is head up the main stairs and he'd point to El Greco's *The Assumption of the Virgin*, transfixed. He claimed it was the greatest piece of art ever, but I couldn't understand it and would rush over to the Warhols. I was a young punk pseudo hipster know-it-all.

One day, almost thirty years later, it hit me...it's a masterpiece. Now I do the same thing with my kids.”

—Ken Krimstein, author



The Song of the Lark, 1884, Jules Breton

“I remember my first experience on the stage. I was so bad I just walked out, out on the street and started walking for a couple of hours and I realized I had walked in the wrong direction. Not just the wrong direction in terms of where I lived but the wrong direction in terms of the desire to stay alive, and I ended up in front of the Art Institute. I walked in and there is a painting, I think it's called *The Song of the Lark*. It's a woman working in a field and there is a sunrise behind her. I saw it that day and I just thought, 'Well, look, there's a girl who doesn't have a whole lot of prospects but, the sun's coming up anyway, and she's got another chance.' So I think that gave me some sort of feeling that I too am a person, and I get another chance every day the sun comes up.” —Bill Murray

COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART

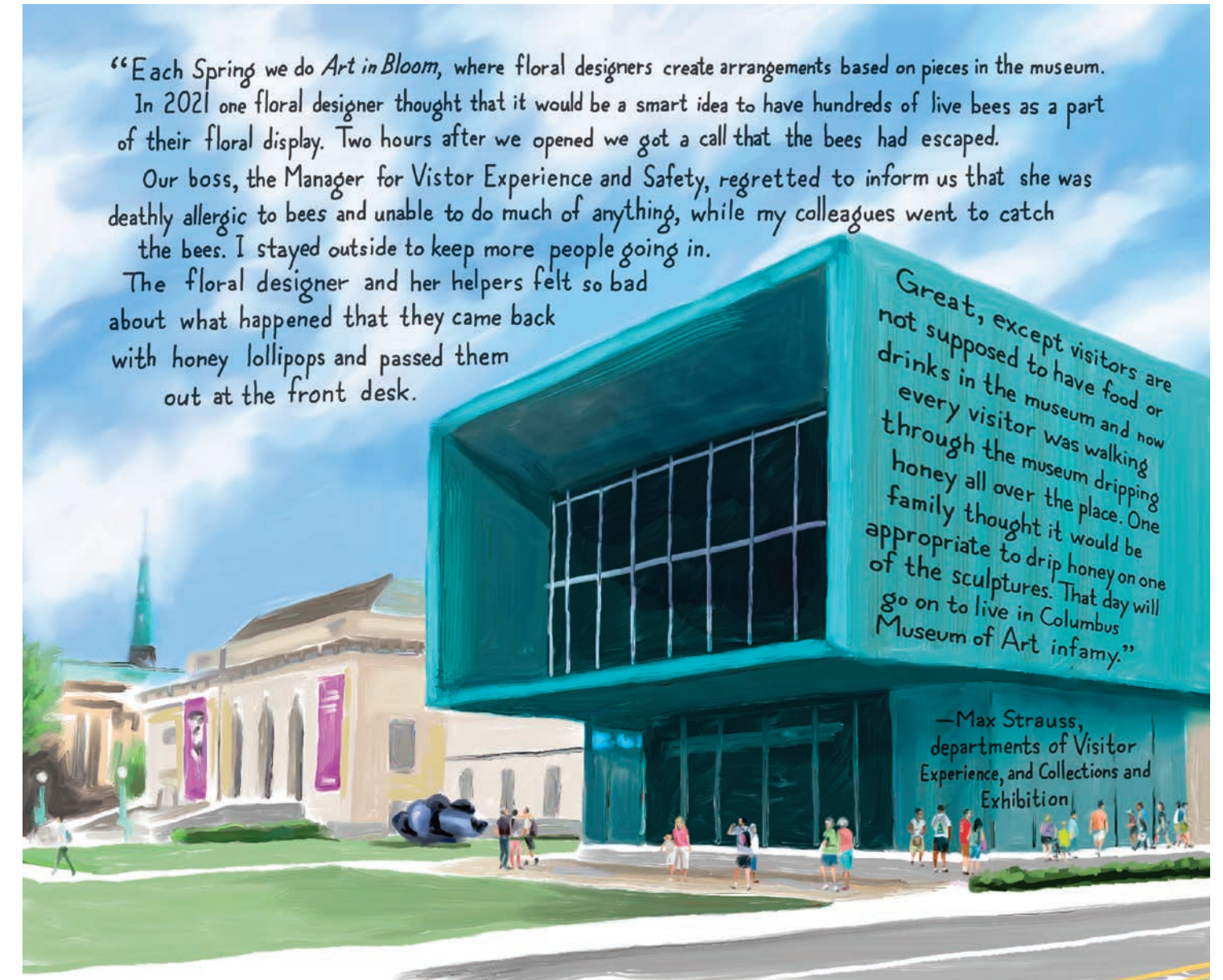
COLUMBUS, OHIO · EST. 1878

The Columbus Museum of Art is on the list of National Register of Historic Places and includes some of the best late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American and European art. The museum houses the largest collections of works by Columbus-born artists Aminah Brenda Lynn Robinson, Elijah Pierce, and George Bellows.

Highlights include Cubist paintings by Pablo Picasso, works by Paul Cézanne, Mary Cassatt, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Edgar Degas, Henri Matisse, Claude Monet, and Norman Rockwell. The museum's most iconic piece is *Morning Sun* by Edward Hopper.



Sunflower, 2021, Christopher Ries

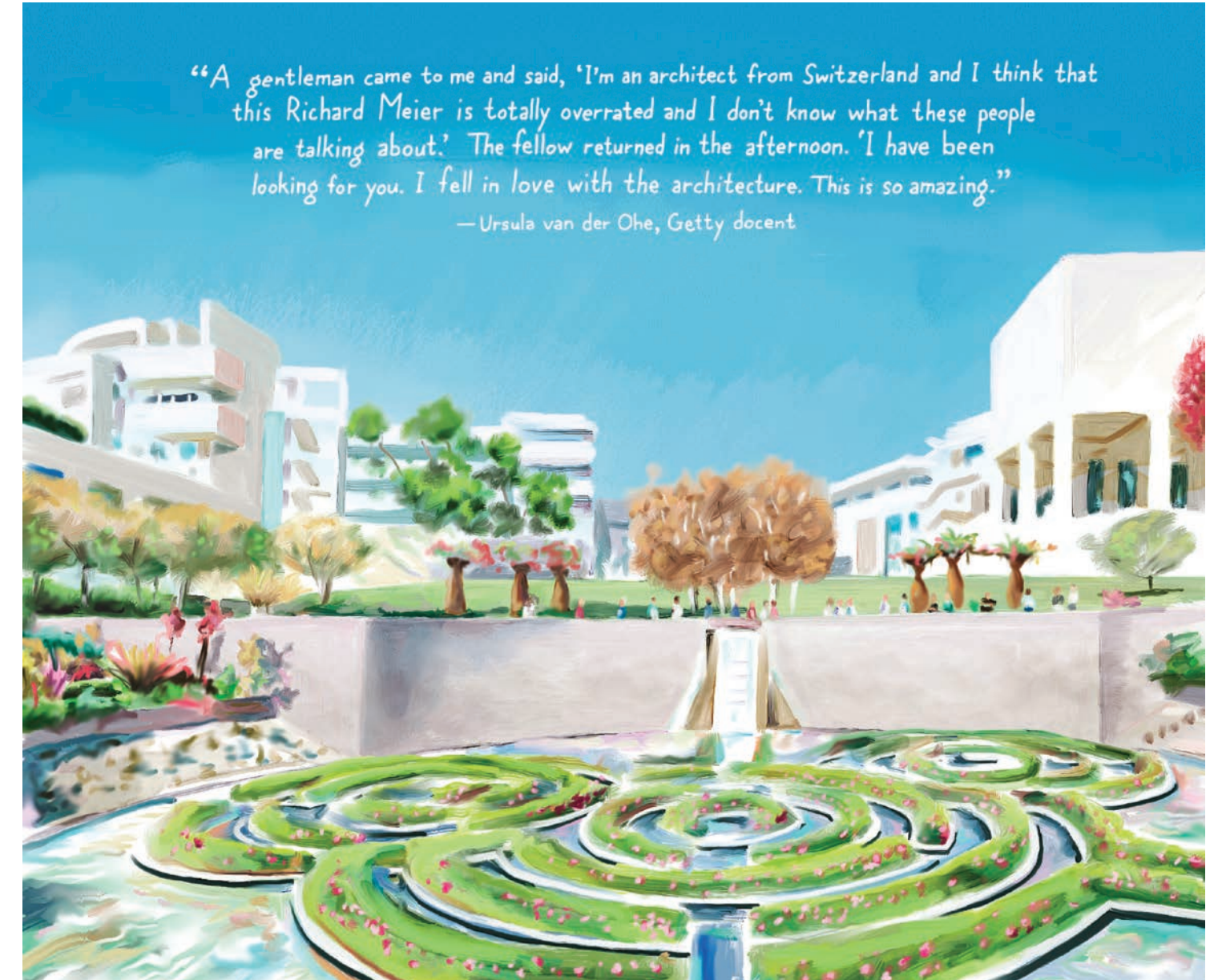
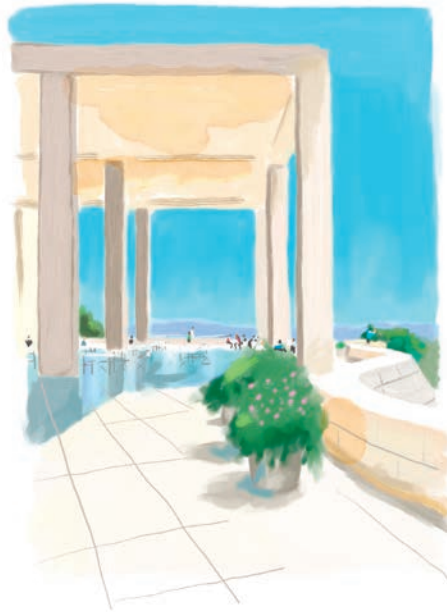


GETTY CENTER

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1997

Well known for its architecture, hilltop gardens, and views overlooking Los Angeles, the Richard Meier–designed center is entered by a tram. It is one of two locations of the J. Paul Getty Museum. The other location is the Getty Villa in the Pacific Palisades. Here, the Getty displays pre-twentieth-century European paintings, drawings, illuminated manuscripts, and photographs from the 1830s through present day.

The artwork that most people seek out is Vincent van Gogh's *Iris* and the Central Garden designed by artist Robert Irwin. But the crown jewel is Meier's architecture.



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

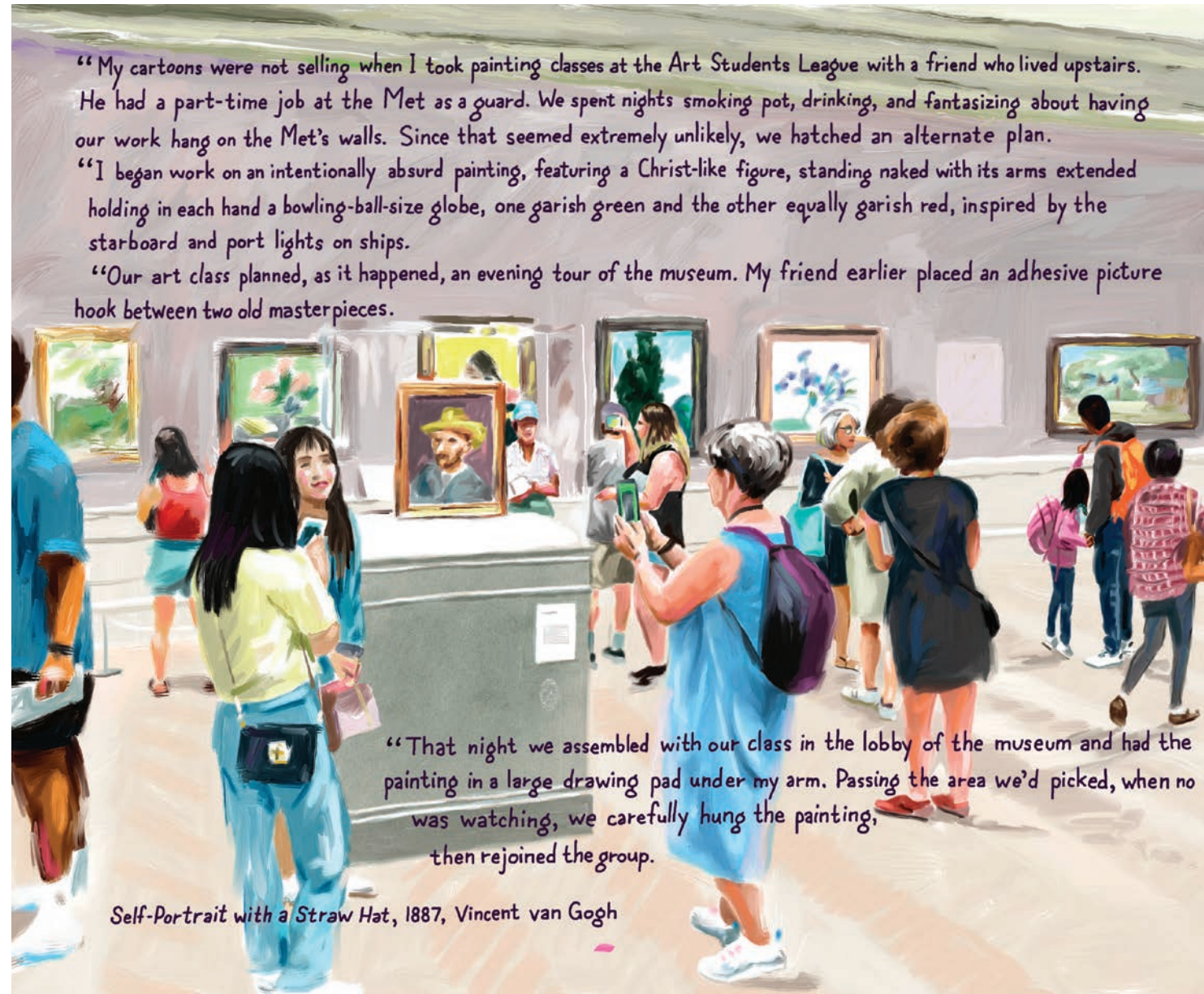
NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1870

The Met has over two million works and is the largest art museum in the Western Hemisphere. The collection includes classical antiquity; ancient Egypt; paintings and sculptures from nearly all the European masters; African, Asian, Oceanian, Byzantine, and Islamic art, as well as a vast collection of modern art; and an encyclopedic array of musical instruments, fashion and costumes, furniture, stained glass, drawings, prints, vases, photography, and antique weapons and armor from around the world. There is also a roof garden that overlooks New York City's Central Park and showcases a different artist every summer. The museum has major drawings by Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Rembrandt, as well as prints and etchings by Anthony van Dyck, Albrecht Dürer, and Edgar Degas. In 1986, the Met was designated a National Historic Landmark for its monumental architecture and cultural importance.

Popular favorites include the Temple of Dendur, Jules Bastien-Lepage's *Joan of Arc*, the stained-glass *Autumn Landscape* by Tiffany Studios, the whole nineteenth-century French landscape painters section, and the Met gift shop.



“Still snug in my loft studio bed, I was listening to Will Shortz’s puzzle segment on NPR. The hint for the following week’s puzzle was ‘What’s a thirteen-letter word in which the letter ‘i’ appears three times, specifically in the first, seventh, and eleventh letter positions?’ I showered, dressed, and walked across Central Park to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Looking at a large abstract by Kandinsky, I see the title: *IMPROVISATION #27*. Thirteen letters, with ‘i’ at the first, seventh, and eleventh letter positions. That’s my idea of a Sunday in New York City.” —Jan Stone, retired attorney



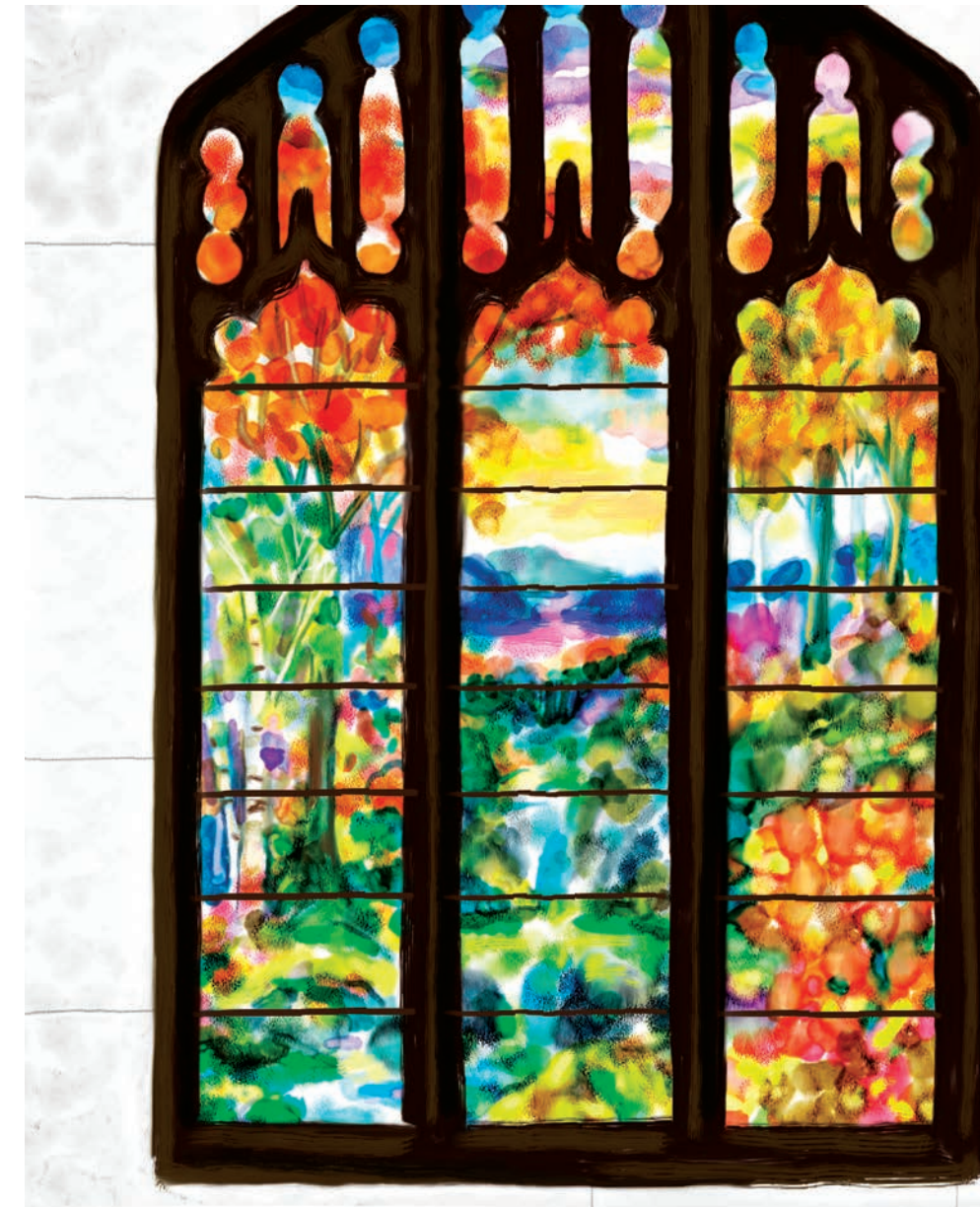
“My cartoons were not selling when I took painting classes at the Art Students League with a friend who lived upstairs. He had a part-time job at the Met as a guard. We spent nights smoking pot, drinking, and fantasizing about having our work hang on the Met’s walls. Since that seemed extremely unlikely, we hatched an alternate plan.

“I began work on an intentionally absurd painting, featuring a Christ-like figure, standing naked with its arms extended holding in each hand a bowling-ball-size globe, one garish green and the other equally garish red, inspired by the starboard and port lights on ships.

“Our art class planned, as it happened, an evening tour of the museum. My friend earlier placed an adhesive picture hook between two old masterpieces.

“That night we assembled with our class in the lobby of the museum and had the painting in a large drawing pad under my arm. Passing the area we’d picked, when no was watching, we carefully hung the painting, then rejoined the group.

Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat, 1887, Vincent van Gogh



“Nothing happened for a while but we then began to notice commotion in one of the galleries. Several blue-blazered museum employees took off in the direction of the new ‘acquisition.’ Doors slammed. Alarm bells rang. And everyone was ushered out of the building.

“We have no idea what happened to our masterpiece. Did the painting end up in a landfill somewhere, or has it been languishing in the museum storeroom for the last fifty years?”

— Mick Stevens,
New Yorker cartoonist

Autumn Landscape, 1923, Tiffany Studios

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO · EST. 1964

The Museo Nacional de Antropología is the national museum of Mexico and has the world's largest collection of ancient Mexican art. The museum has twenty-three rooms for exhibits and is almost twenty acres including the grounds and gardens.

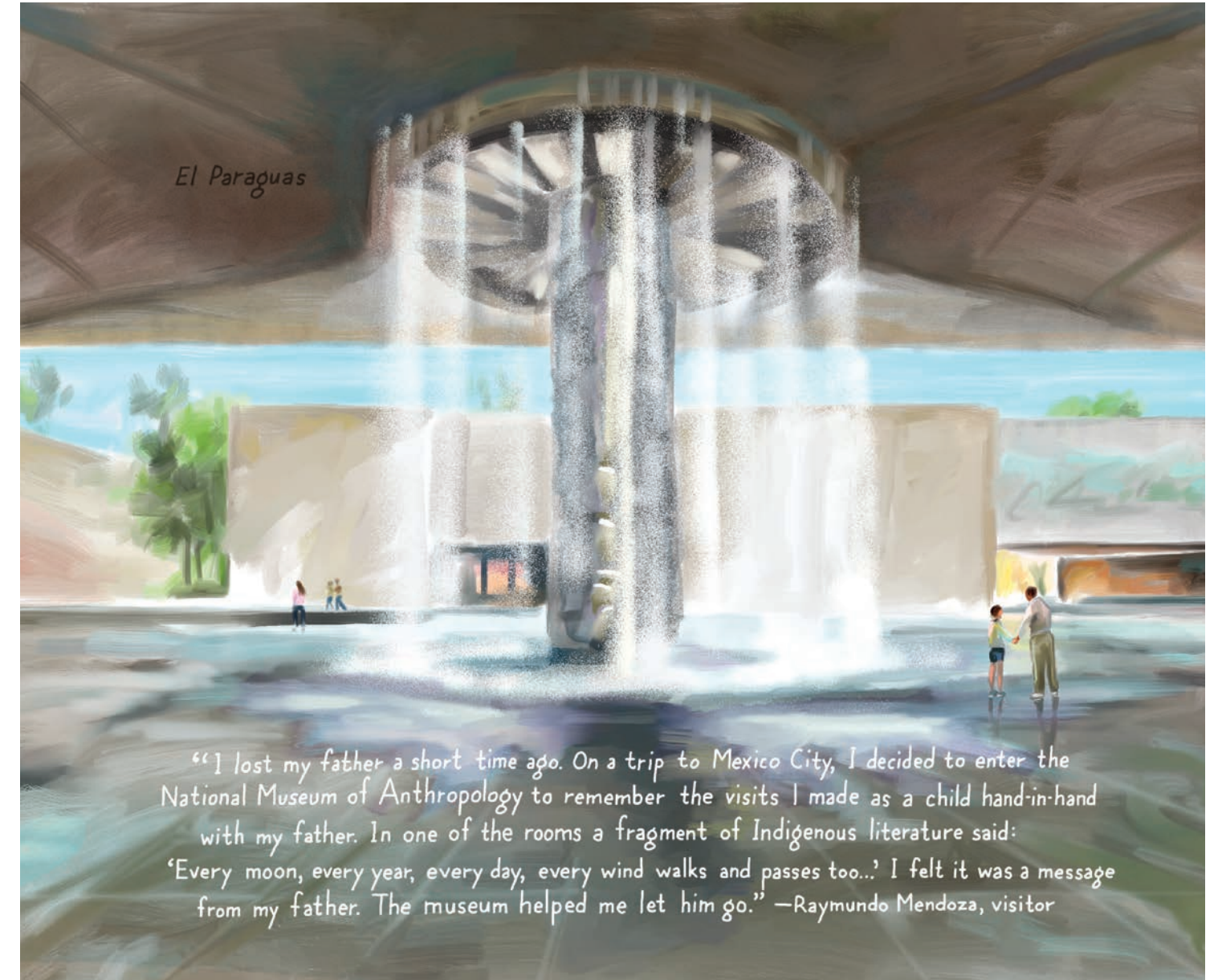
A major highlight is El Paraguas, the emblematic raining umbrella installation in the central courtyard.

“When renowned archaeologist Francisco González Rul was visiting the construction of the National Museum of Anthropology in 1962, several archaeological pieces were found here: pieces of plates, pots, obsidian glass, and a fragment of white coral. He wrote, ‘A great coincidence that people of that time occupied the land where, in some distant future, such significant samples of the cultural legacy of the country’s inhabitants would be deposited.’”

—Jorge Ruvalcaba Salazar, deputy director of cultural promotion



Maya Chac-Mool from Chichen Itza, ca. 1000 CE



“I lost my father a short time ago. On a trip to Mexico City, I decided to enter the National Museum of Anthropology to remember the visits I made as a child hand-in-hand with my father. In one of the rooms a fragment of Indigenous literature said: ‘Every moon, every year, every day, every wind walks and passes too...’ I felt it was a message from my father. The museum helped me let him go.” —Raymundo Mendoza, visitor

PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM

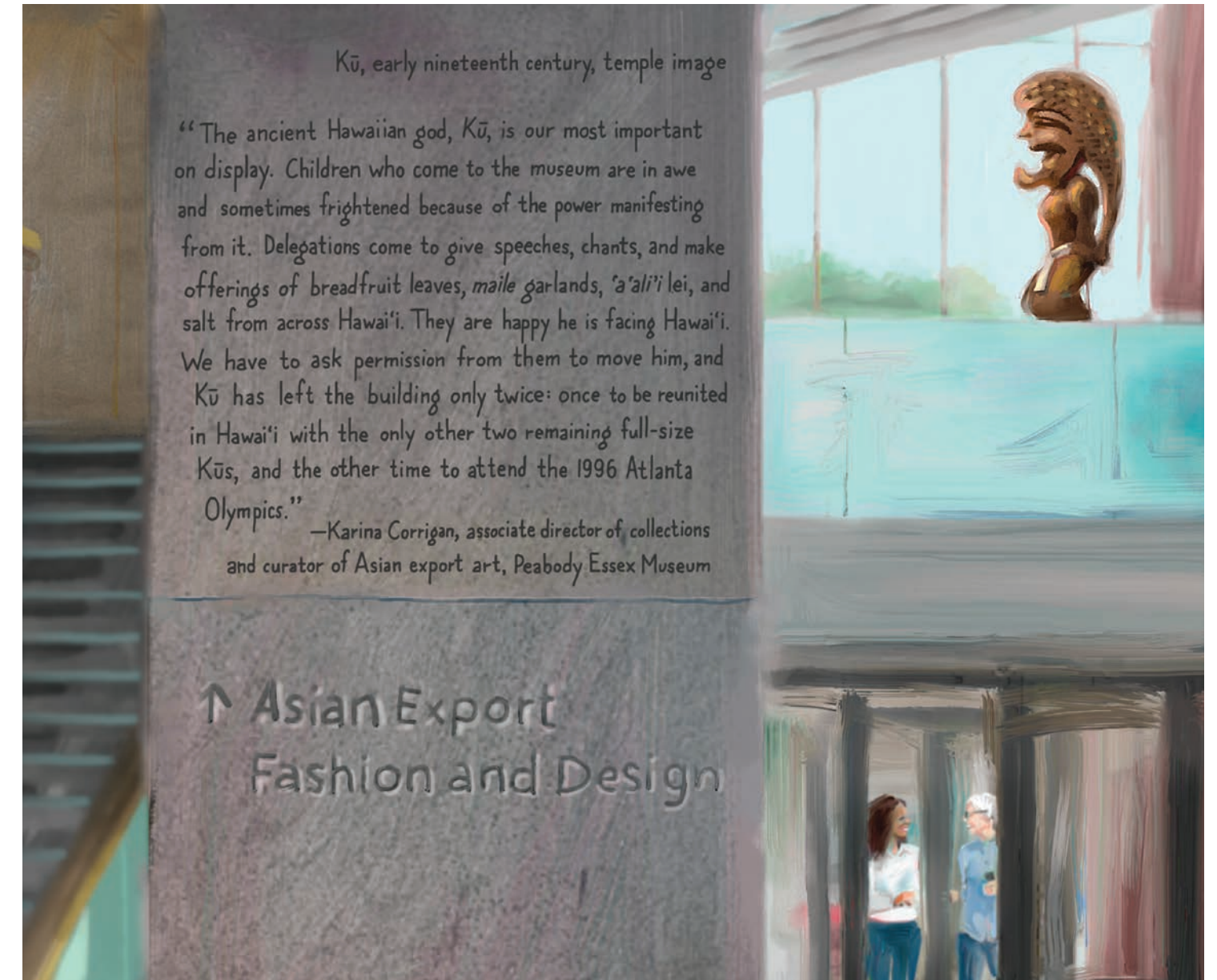
SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1799

The Peabody Essex is the oldest operating museum in America. Founded by Salem sea captains who had sailed beyond either the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn, this beautiful museum initially inspired me to create a book on museums.

Highlights are the Chinese House, the Asian art galleries, and the maritime art wing.



Soundsuit, 2013, Nick Cave



Kū, early nineteenth century, temple image

“The ancient Hawaiian god, Kū, is our most important on display. Children who come to the museum are in awe and sometimes frightened because of the power manifesting from it. Delegations come to give speeches, chants, and make offerings of breadfruit leaves, maile garlands, ‘a‘ali‘i lei, and salt from across Hawai‘i. They are happy he is facing Hawai‘i. We have to ask permission from them to move him, and Kū has left the building only twice: once to be reunited in Hawai‘i with the only other two remaining full-size Kūs, and the other time to attend the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.”

—Karina Corrigan, associate director of collections and curator of Asian export art, Peabody Essex Museum

↑ Asian Export
Fashion and Design

1 An armor helmet and cuirass used for the *gioco del ponte* (contest on the bridge) in Pisa before 1807.

2 Captured king penguin collected in 1820 on the Falkland Islands that later died on board a ship. A gift of Captain George Hodges in 1821 to the museum, this penguin was the first exhibited in North America. The taxidermist had clearly never seen a penguin before and gave it the stretched-out neck of a heron-like bird.

3 Adjacent to that, a piece of the Great Wall of China from before the sixteenth century.

4 Coco de mer nut from Seychelles, 1800.



“The Yin Yu Tang House is from the Qing Dynasty. A prosperous merchant built the sixteen-bedroom house in a remote village in the mountainous Huizhou region of southeast China where it was home to the Huang family for hundreds of years until 1982 when the last relatives moved out and left the village.

Yin Yu Tang, ca. 1825-1850,
Chinese house



“In 1996, an eighty-two-year-old man and his wife, descendants of the family, moved from their modern apartment in the city into the empty home to retire, which is the same time we were looking for a house to bring to the museum. We returned weeks later to the Chinese village to learn that they missed modern conveniences and were not ready to slaughter pigs each day for food—it was suddenly available. In 2002, piece by piece, we brought it to Salem. This cultural exchange with the Chinese government gives a rare glimpse of Chinese daily life.” —Karina Corrigan

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

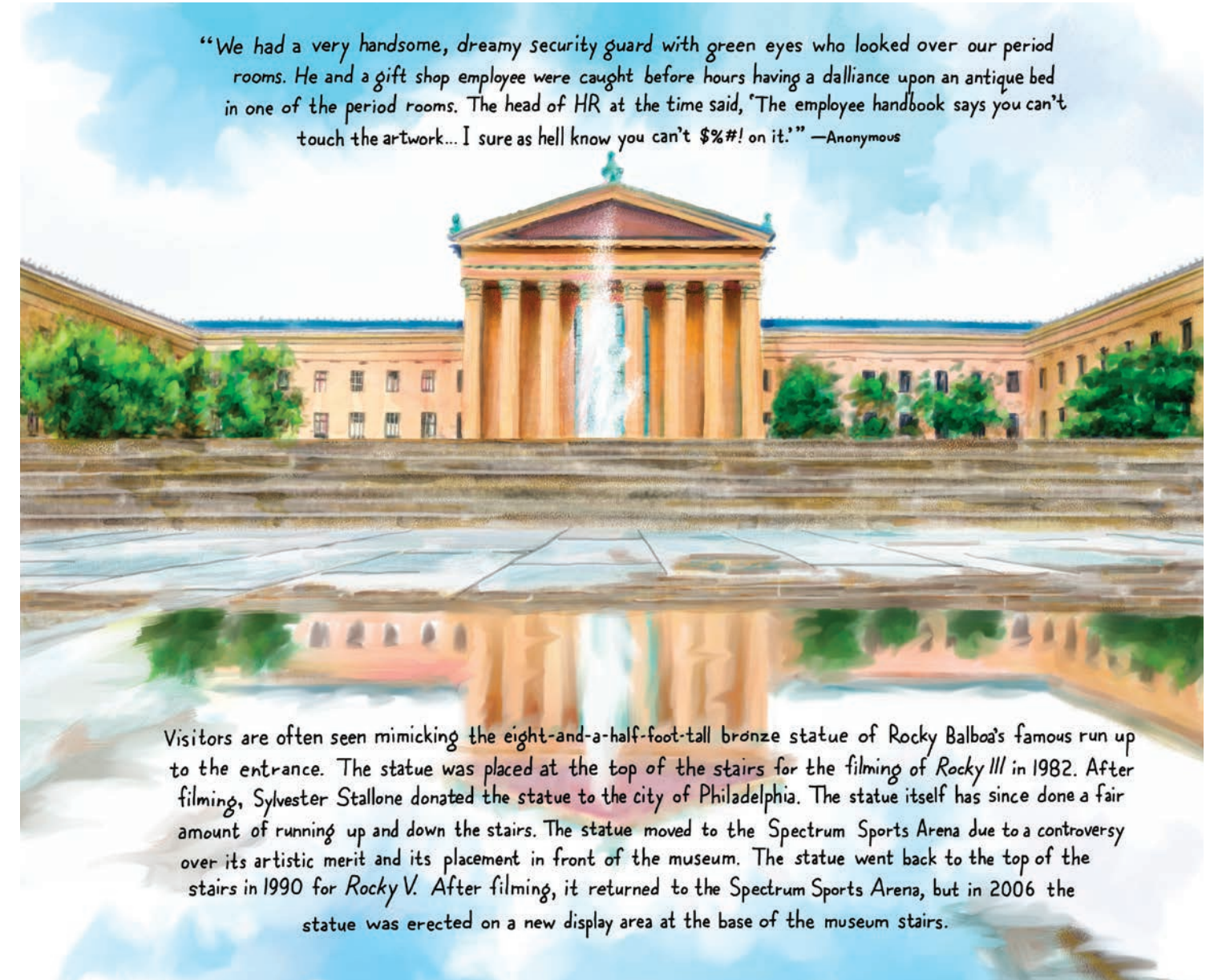
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA · EST. 1928

The museum has over 240,000 pieces of art and includes the Rodin Museum, containing one of the largest collections of sculptor Auguste Rodin's works outside Paris. The Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building houses exhibitions, offices, and labs.

Highlights from the collection include Pablo Picasso's *Nous autres musiciens* (*Three Musicians*), *After the Bath* by Edgar Degas, and *Fifty Days at Iliam* by Cy Twombly, and the museum's special collection of master sculptor, Rodin.



At the Moulin Rouge: The Dance, 1890,
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec



“We had a very handsome, dreamy security guard with green eyes who looked over our period rooms. He and a gift shop employee were caught before hours having a dalliance upon an antique bed in one of the period rooms. The head of HR at the time said, “The employee handbook says you can’t touch the artwork... I sure as hell know you can’t \$%#! on it.” —Anonymous

Visitors are often seen mimicking the eight-and-a-half-foot-tall bronze statue of Rocky Balboa's famous run up to the entrance. The statue was placed at the top of the stairs for the filming of *Rocky III* in 1982. After filming, Sylvester Stallone donated the statue to the city of Philadelphia. The statue itself has since done a fair amount of running up and down the stairs. The statue moved to the Spectrum Sports Arena due to a controversy over its artistic merit and its placement in front of the museum. The statue went back to the top of the stairs in 1990 for *Rocky V*. After filming, it returned to the Spectrum Sports Arena, but in 2006 the statue was erected on a new display area at the base of the museum stairs.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

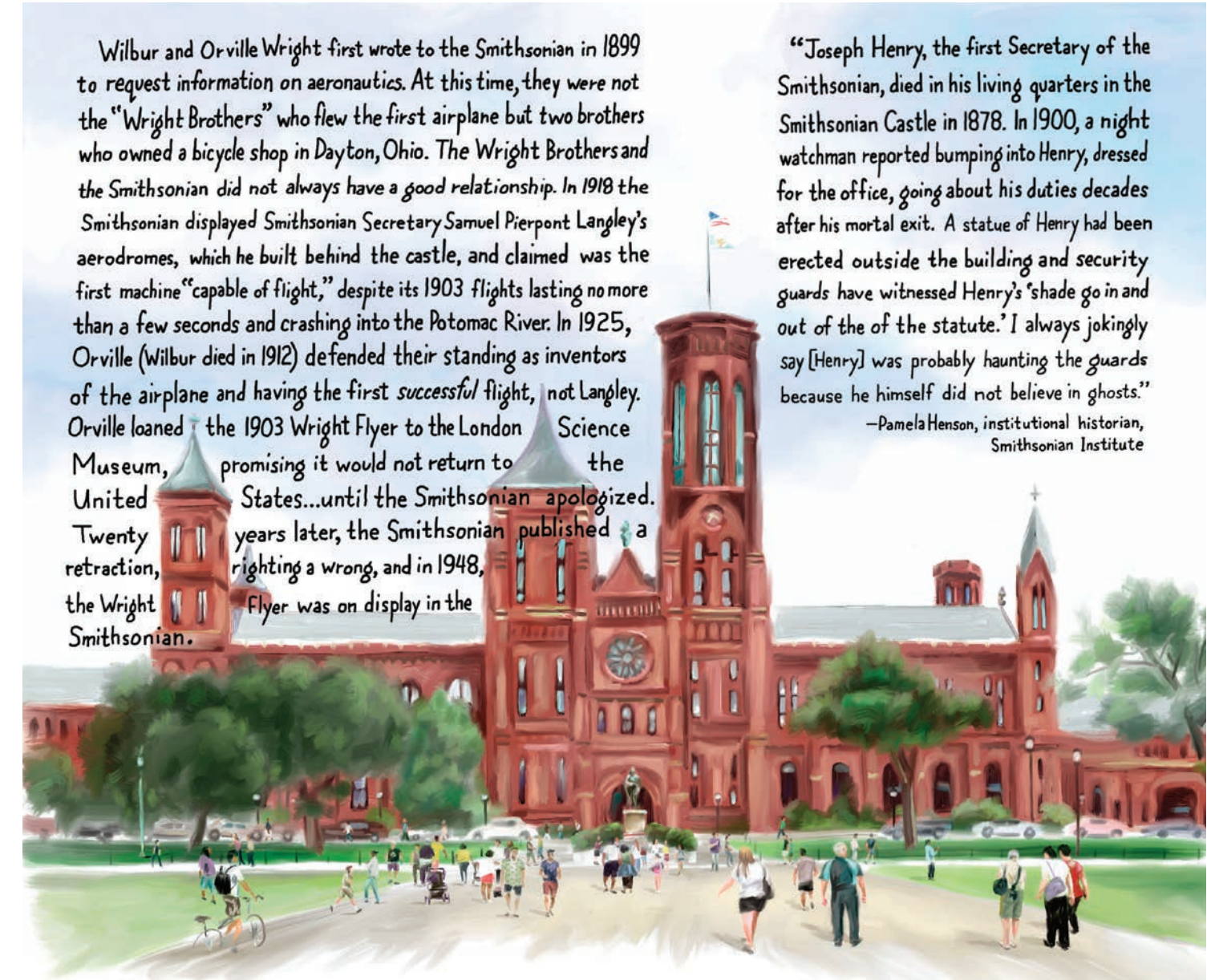
WASHINGTON, DC · EST. 1846

The Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum, education, and research complex. It is part of twenty-one museums and galleries and includes the National Zoo. It's so large that a couple of the specific areas of discipline are focused on separately in this book. The Smithsonian was established by Englishman James Smithson (1765–1829) under the name of the Smithsonian Institution for, in his words, “the increase and diffusion of knowledge.”

The most popular items may be the over two-hundred-year old flag, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” the 1902 Wright Brothers flyer, the 3.5-billion-year-old fossil, the Apollo lunar landing module, or Archie Bunker's chair, but the cutest thing is the Smithsonian's panda cam.



Panda cam



Wilbur and Orville Wright first wrote to the Smithsonian in 1899 to request information on aeronautics. At this time, they were not the “Wright Brothers” who flew the first airplane but two brothers who owned a bicycle shop in Dayton, Ohio. The Wright Brothers and the Smithsonian did not always have a good relationship. In 1918 the Smithsonian displayed Smithsonian Secretary Samuel Pierpont Langley's aerodromes, which he built behind the castle, and claimed was the first machine “capable of flight,” despite its 1903 flights lasting no more than a few seconds and crashing into the Potomac River. In 1925, Orville (Wilbur died in 1912) defended their standing as inventors of the airplane and having the first successful flight, not Langley. Orville loaned the 1903 Wright Flyer to the London Science Museum, promising it would not return to the United States...until the Smithsonian apologized. Twenty years later, the Smithsonian published a retraction, righting a wrong, and in 1948, the Wright Flyer was on display in the Smithsonian.

“Joseph Henry, the first Secretary of the Smithsonian, died in his living quarters in the Smithsonian Castle in 1878. In 1900, a night watchman reported bumping into Henry, dressed for the office, going about his duties decades after his mortal exit. A statue of Henry had been erected outside the building and security guards have witnessed Henry's ‘shade go in and out of the of the statue.’ I always jokingly say [Henry] was probably haunting the guards because he himself did not believe in ghosts.”

—Pamela Henson, institutional historian, Smithsonian Institute

SOUMAYA MUSEUM

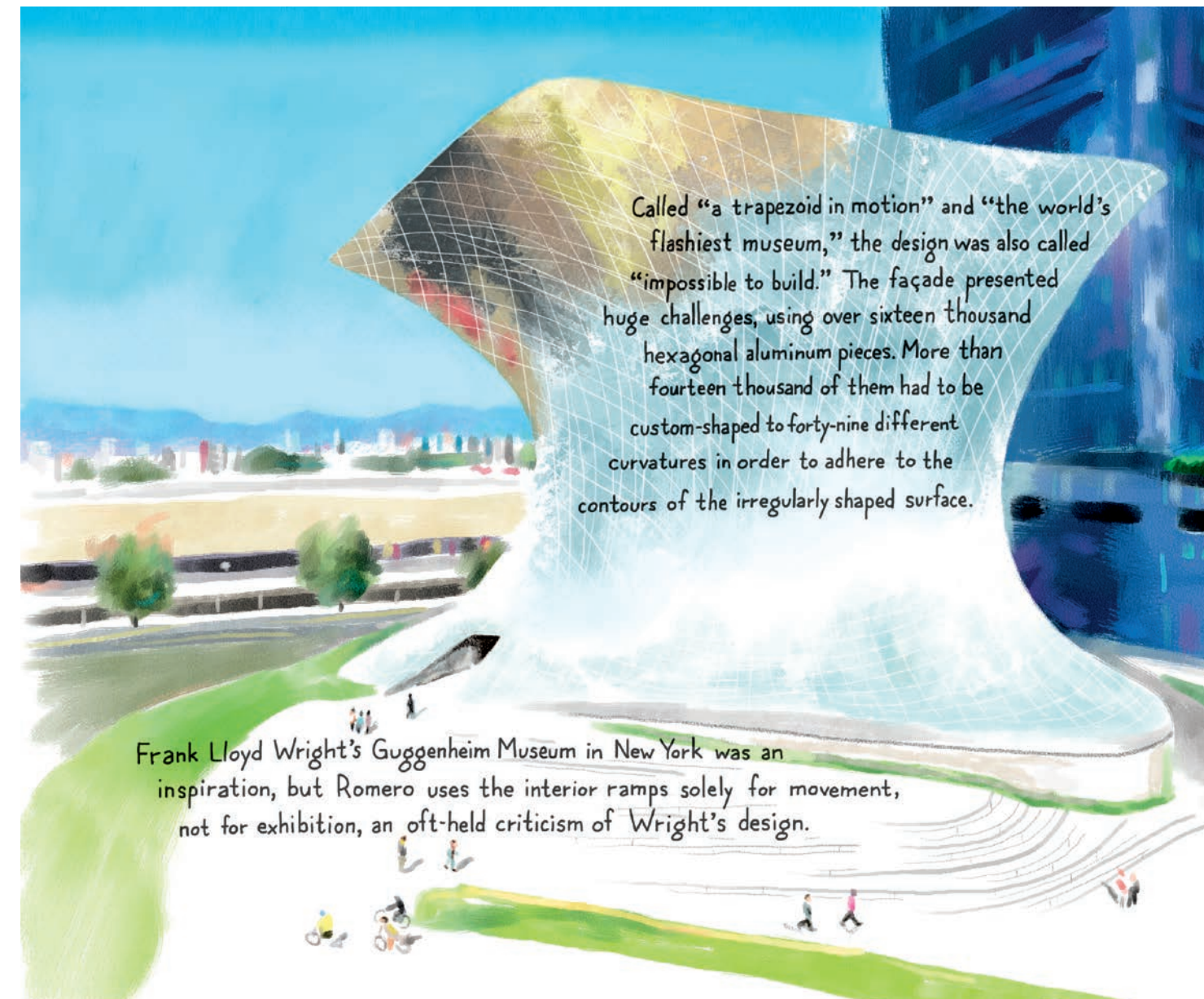
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO · EST. 1994

A private museum created by Carlos Slim Helú, Museo Soumaya is the most visited museum in Mexico. It has over sixty-six thousand pieces of art, with a majority being fifteenth- to twentieth-century Europe, as well as Mexican art, religious relics, and historical documents and claims that total over \$700 million in value. The museum contains the world's largest collection of pre-Hispanic and colonial-era coins. Well-represented artists include Auguste Rodin, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Joan Miró, Vincent van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Claude Monet, and Tintoretto.

The highlight is the new building that was completed in 2011, a work of art in itself. The architect, Fernando Romero, was dedicated to using supplies manufactured in Mexico. A parametric steel and aluminum exterior gives the building its deflated-soccer-ball appearance and provides twenty thousand square meters of exhibition space among five floors, as well as an auditorium, café, offices, gift shop, and lobby.



66 *The Thinker*, 1904, Auguste Rodin



Called “a trapezoid in motion” and “the world’s flashiest museum,” the design was also called “impossible to build.” The façade presented huge challenges, using over sixteen thousand hexagonal aluminum pieces. More than fourteen thousand of them had to be custom-shaped to forty-nine different curvatures in order to adhere to the contours of the irregularly shaped surface.

Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum in New York was an inspiration, but Romero uses the interior ramps solely for movement, not for exhibition, an oft-held criticism of Wright’s design.

BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND · EST. 1914

For more than one hundred years, the Baltimore Museum of Art has been a highly respected institute around the world. Housing ninety-five thousand objects, including over one thousand works by Henri Matisse and eighteen thousand French pieces of mid-nineteenth-century art, it is regarded as “among the greatest single holding of French art in the country,” many from the George A. Lucas Collection.

The Cone Collection is considered the highlight of the museum. Baltimore sisters Claribel and Etta Cone amassed one of the most important collections of modern art and then gifted it to the museum in 1949. Their prized collection includes works by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

“On a train ride back to Florence, I was in a cabin with an old English couple. The gentleman, Mike, asked, ‘What did you like about Venice?’ I told him the light was just like Turner’s paintings. Mike bolted upright, ‘Turner’s my man! In 1964 I took the train from Bristol to London just for an exhibition of his paintings.’

A few weeks later when I returned to New York I wrote notes to Mike but no word. A month later I got a note from England. Mike had passed away a week after that train ride. We knew each other for only an hour, but it was a gut punch. Three years later there was a Turner exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art. I realized that the train from NYC to Baltimore would be about the same length as the Bristol to London trip, so I decided to get a train ticket and took the trip in honor of Mike.”

—Benjamin Wolf, cinematographer



Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway, 1844, J. M. W. Turner

DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

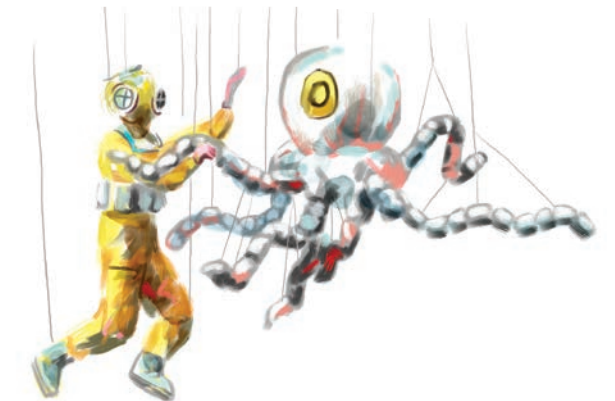
DETROIT, MICHIGAN · EST. 1927

Located in Midtown Detroit, the Detroit Institute of Arts has over one hundred galleries, sixty-five thousand pieces of work, and covers 658,000 square feet, making it one of the largest art collections in the United States. It’s encyclopedic collection spans from ancient Egypt to contemporary art.

One highlight is their Performing Arts Collection, which contains more than ten thousand original film and theater photographs, posters, and ephemera from all over the world dating back to the early 1900s.

“My father saw an ad in the newspaper regarding an exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts of a man called Vincent van Gogh. [My father] worked for Fisher Body as a wood model maker. He sometimes stood for twelve hours on a wooden leg working overtime to support our family of ten. But he took me to the exhibit so I could see the work of a man who was a master of impressionism. He loved the farm scenes painted by Van Gogh. He was an Iowa farm boy before his war injury and missed farming. It wasn’t long before a Van Gogh print was hanging in our home. This was a special day for father and daughter and I was so touched he took the time to do this with me.”

—Janet Poeppe Bertling, retired nurse



Diver and Octopus, 1903, Walter E. Deaves

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, DC · EST. 1937

Located on the National Mall, and including the National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden, it is considered one of the greatest museums in the world. Among the top three most visited museums in the United States, it is the only one that is free. The museum's mission statement is simply, "Of the nation and for all the people." It displays works of some of the greatest artists of all time, including Pablo Picasso, Diane Arbus, Henri Matisse, Theaster Gates, Jackson Pollock, Eva Gonzalès, Andy Warhol, Alice Neel, Joan Miró, Jan Vermeer, Rembrandt, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Titian, and Raphael. TripAdvisor suggests budgeting two to three hours to visit. A more accurate estimate would be two to three months.

Highlights include the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in the Americas and sculptor Alexander Calder's largest mobile.

"My brother and I had been let loose by our wives inside the National Gallery. We found in the East Building, *The Lackawanna Valley* by George Inness—Scranton as it was 160 years ago. We pointed all over the canvas. That clump of trees... the Electric City Building... that patch of dirt?... the Greyhound Station... A security guard marched over and scolded us, 'You boys are going to have to back off.' 'Sorry,' I frowned, 'we live there.' The guard folded his arms, 'Not in that painting, you don't.'"

—Bear Savo, former auctioneer



The Lackawanna Valley, 1856, George Inness

SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON · EST. 1933

The Seattle Art Museum has three components: the main museum downtown, the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park, and the Olympic Sculpture Park on the Seattle waterfront.

Highlights include paintings by twentieth-century American artists Jacob Lawrence and Mark Tobey and the museum's large collection of Aboriginal Australian art. Another highlight is walking the vibrant sculpture park along the Seattle waterfront.

"Every weekend my very pretty coworker Tonja would frequent one of Seattle's museums, like the Seattle Art Museum or the Seattle Olympic Sculpture Park or Burke Museum, in search of cultural enlightenment and a husband. She would saddle up to an appealing museumgoer and strike up a conversation. After six months she met an art lover that exhibited potential and one month later they were engaged. Today she is happily married with two children. Not sure if she takes the kids to museums."

—Catherine Widmark, chief audit executive



CHAPTER FOUR

FINE ARTS

AMERICAN VISIONARY ART MUSEUM

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND · EST. 1995

American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM) specializes in outsider art. Baltimore granted the land to the museum under the condition it would remove the pollution from the copper paint factory and whiskey warehouse that was there previously. Congress has designated it America's national museum for self-taught art.

The one-acre campus contains sixty-seven thousand square feet of exhibits, features three floors of space, the Tall Sculpture Barn, the Wildflower Garden, and the Jim Rouse Visionary Center. The museum uses guest curators for its shows and focuses on themed exhibitions with titles like *Wind in Your Hair* and *High on Life*. The museum's founder, Rebecca Alban Hoffberger, ran AVAM "pretty un-museumy" and, at the time of its 1995 opening, rejected academic scholarship and museum "tradition," reportedly upsetting prominent members of the art world. But the museum has since won the support of collectors, critics, and the public.

AVAM has a long list of programs to service the community. Several of AVAM's full-time employees were hired directly from local homeless shelters. The outside murals were created by members of AVAM's youth-at-risk and youth-incarcerated mosaic apprenticeship program. In 2010, AVAM started an after-school program giving students access to the museum's collections and art workshops. AVAM was also the site of Steps for the Cure, a breast cancer awareness fundraiser.

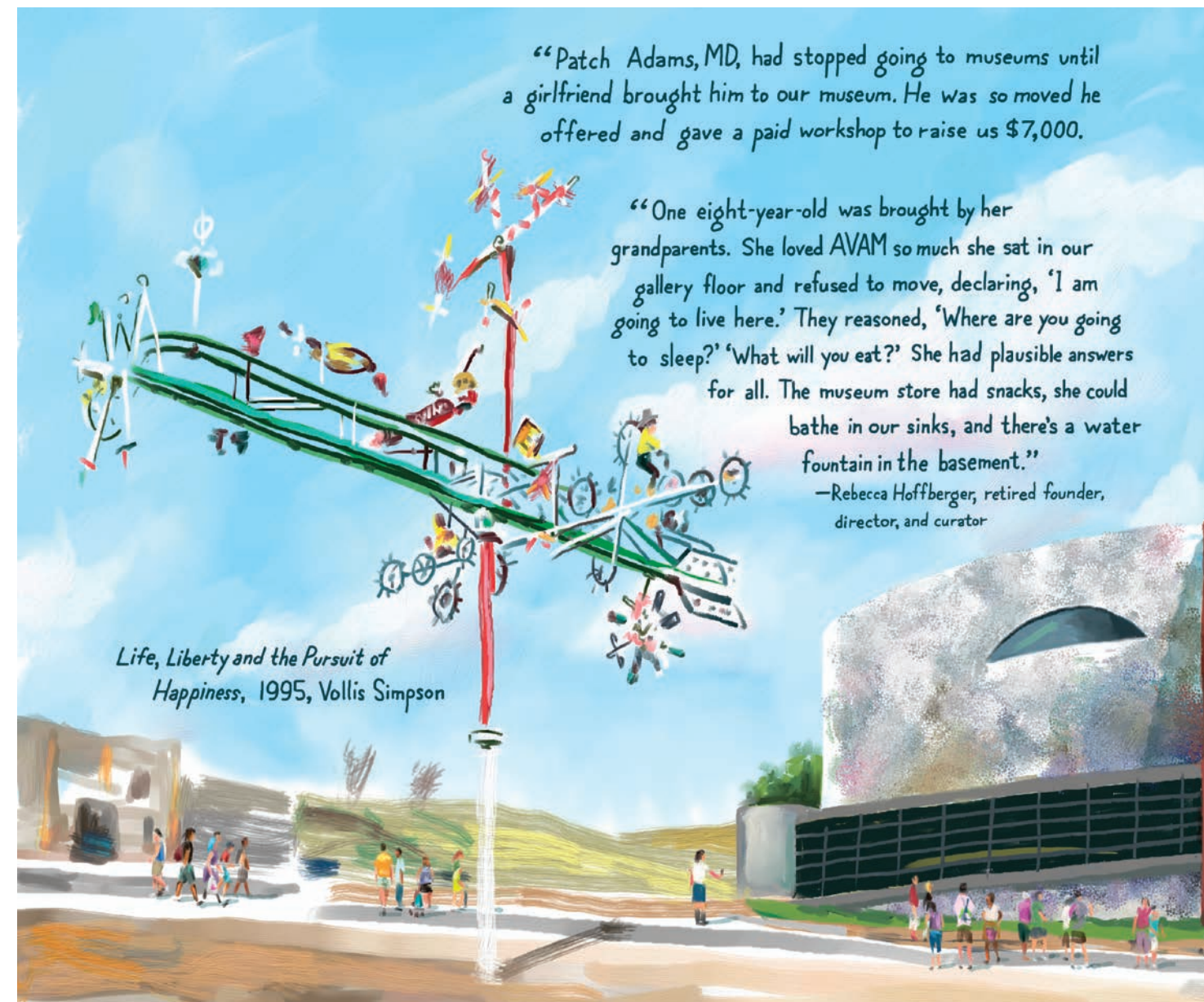
Highlights include the parade of art cars at Baltimore's Artscape event every July.

Guest curators have included *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening and Ariana Huffington. For the exhibit *Race, Class, Gender ≠ (Do Not Equal) Character* in 2006, the curators were Rosie O'Donnell and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The first person to enter AVAM on opening day in 1995 was the Black visionary matchstick artist Gerald Hawkes.



Fifi, 2001, Theresa Segreti



"Patch Adams, MD, had stopped going to museums until a girlfriend brought him to our museum. He was so moved he offered and gave a paid workshop to raise us \$7,000.

"One eight-year-old was brought by her grandparents. She loved AVAM so much she sat in our gallery floor and refused to move, declaring, 'I am going to live here.' They reasoned, 'Where are you going to sleep?' 'What will you eat?' She had plausible answers for all. The museum store had snacks, she could bathe in our sinks, and there's a water fountain in the basement."

—Rebecca Hoffberger, retired founder, director, and curator

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, 1995, Vollis Simpson

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND MUSEUM

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, WASHINGTON · EST. JUNE 2013

The Bainbridge Island Museum of Art is a fast-growing museum situated as the gateway to Bainbridge Island and the Olympic Peninsula, showcasing contemporary art and craft of the Puget Sound. It's a popular destination for locals or day-trippers from Seattle for exhibitions, museum classes, tours, films, workshops, lectures, concerts, and events.

Highlights include the Artists' Book Collection and the Sherry Grover Gallery that houses over three thousand artist books from artists around the world, and it continues to add to its collection.



"I was fairly new as the director when we opened a beautiful photography show, including a photographer known for her striking black-and-white portraiture. Struck by the beautiful contemporary curves of the building, this renowned photographer asked if she could use the space after hours for a photo shoot. That evening I was at a nearby restaurant when a friend called, advising me to get back to the museum ASAP. As I pulled up, I noticed that all the people sitting outdoors on a summer evening at the local Alehouse had turned their chairs to face the museum, where inside the photographer was conducting a very creative, completely nude photo shoot of a very pregnant woman on the grand staircase through the two-story curved windows of the museum." — Sheila Hughes, executive director

THE BROAD

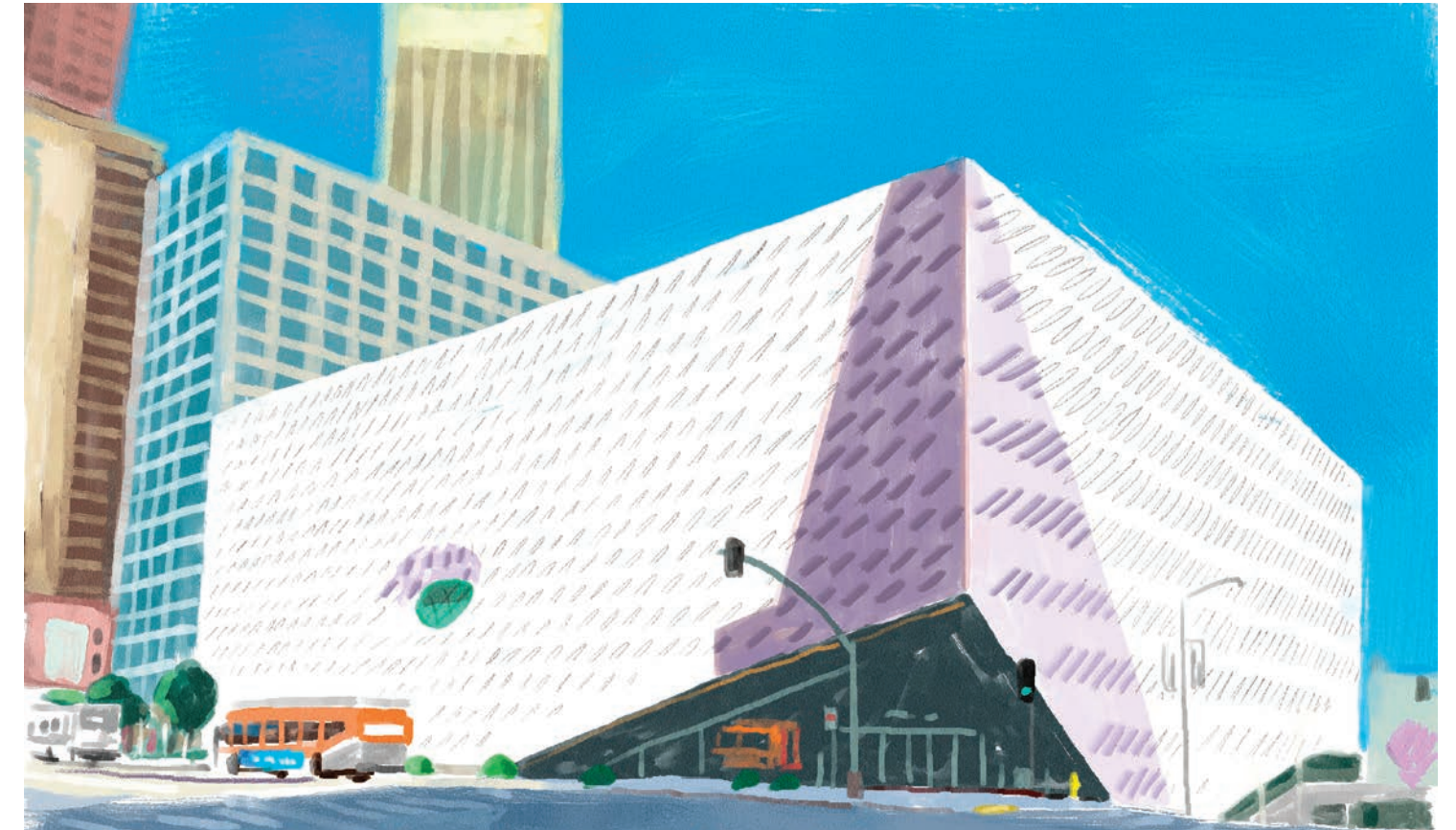
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 2015

Named for the philanthropists Eli and Edythe Broad, who financed the creation of the museum, the Broad houses nearly two thousand pieces of contemporary art. The Broad Foundations have assets of \$3 billion and have provided over five hundred museums and university galleries worldwide with more than 8,700 loans of artwork since 1984. Mr. Broad died at the age of eighty-seven in 2021. He is survived by his wife, Edythe, who continues this vision of work.

Highlights include Jeff Koons, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol. Plus, the largest worldwide collection—129—of Cindy Sherman photographs.



Untitled (Skull), 1981, Jean-Michel Basquiat



The Broad Museum has done a magnificent job of getting youths excited about art, encouraging kids to make art a part of their lives—it's impossible to spend a day there and not want to pick up a paintbrush.

“One visitor had a duck in his pants. And let it out. We said, ‘Sir, you cannot let a duck in the museum.’ He said its name was Gucci Mane, and we said, ‘Well, that’s very nice but please take your duck outside.’” —Alex Garcia, manager visitor services



Under the Table, 1994, Robert Therrien

“We’ve had attendees take a running start to try to sit on the chair. These are adults who can’t keep their hands to themselves. We ask they don’t touch the artwork.” —April De Leon, manager



*Infinity Mirrored Room - The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away
2013, Yayoi Kusama*

Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama is known for her infinity installations, polka dot dresses, and artwork that deals with her obsessive-compulsive fixations. “People come from everywhere to see her room of mirrors. We instruct them to stand only on the platform and not venture off on the floor, which was water. But we’d still see wet footprints coming out of the room and so the floor was replaced with a reflective material. Worried, we tell children that that area is hot lava,” says April De Leon.

CLARK ART INSTITUTE

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1955

The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute is the only museum where world-class masterpieces share a space with over 140 acres of hiking trails, meadows, and pastoral cows. It is home to one of the largest art history libraries in the United States, a research program with international fellowships, and a graduate program in art history. The Clark conducts a beekeeping initiative on campus with over two hundred thousand bees. The honey is available in their museum store.

Highlights include the John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer collections, the Rodin sculptures, and the one-acre reflecting pool.

Founder Robert “Sterling” Clark was an heir to the Singer Sewing Machine* fortune and an American art collector, horse breeder, and philanthropist. Following service in the US Army, Clark conducted a scientific expedition to China in the early 1900s, creating the first recorded cartography and photographic documentation of the rural villages and towns just below the Great Wall. His brother, Stephen, established the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1936 in response to increasing tourism to Cooperstown during the Great Depression.

*Coincidentally or not, Clark had many Renoirs, Boldinis, and Millets in his collection—paintings of women doing all types of needlework.



Fumée d'Ambre Gris (Smoke of Ambergris),
1880, John Singer Sargent



“The Clark has the largest privately held collection of works by Winslow Homer. Ruth Bader Ginsburg frequently visited the Clark’s galleries and told our curators that Homer’s seascapes were her favorites.”

—Victoria T. Saltzman, director of communications

Critics have called John Singer Sargent’s *Fumée d’Ambre Gris* a confluence of the mysteries of the sensual, erotic, religious, and material worlds. It shows a woman capturing the perfume of smoldering ambergris, a substance extracted from whales used in religious rituals and said to be an aphrodisiac. Over the years, this painting has been the go-to place to ask for someone’s hand in marriage.

FRICK COLLECTION

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1935

The Frick originally started in the home of Henry Clay Frick as a high-quality collection of old masters and fine furniture and became one of the preeminent small art museums in the United States. Housed in nineteen galleries of varying size within the former Frick residence, the Frick Collection has a typical annual attendance of 275,000 to 300,000. The Frick Art Reference Library (est. 1920) and mansion (built 1914) were distinguished as a National Historic Landmark in 2008.

Highlights include its Gilded Age art collection, with some of the best-known paintings by major European artists as well as numerous works of sculpture, porcelain, eighteenth-century French furniture, Limoges enamel, and textiles from throughout the world. Another highlight for visitors is a view of the Grand Staircase. The Grand Staircase has been blocked off from the public by a silken cord since the museum opened in 1935. The mystique of the unviewable upstairs floor will finally end with the completion (planned for 2024) of the museum turning the private living quarters on this floor into galleries.



left: *Thomas Cromwell*, 1532, Hans Holbein the Younger
center: *St. Jerome*, 1590–1600, El Greco
right: *Sir Thomas More*, 1527, Hans Holbein the Younger



“I had my job interview twenty-four years ago and spent a lot of time, as one does, preparing for the usual questions like, ‘What is your vision for this position?’ I had not actually thought about *where* the interview would be, and it never occurred to me that it might be upstairs. When security led me to that silken rope at the base and I found myself walking upstairs, I nearly fainted [at the beauty of the staircase].”

“I adore the Frick— I even asked if I could have my ashes placed in one of the two Chinese covered jars in the Fragonard Room. The museum docent at the desk replied, ‘Are you a member?’” —Laura Rose, visitor

“Giovanni Bellini’s *St. Francis in the Desert* is our most famous work. We know this in a couple of rather charming ways...from both enthusiastic postcard sales and the fact that the carpet wears quickest beneath this work versus any other.” —Heidi Rosenau, communications, the Frick Collection

LACMA

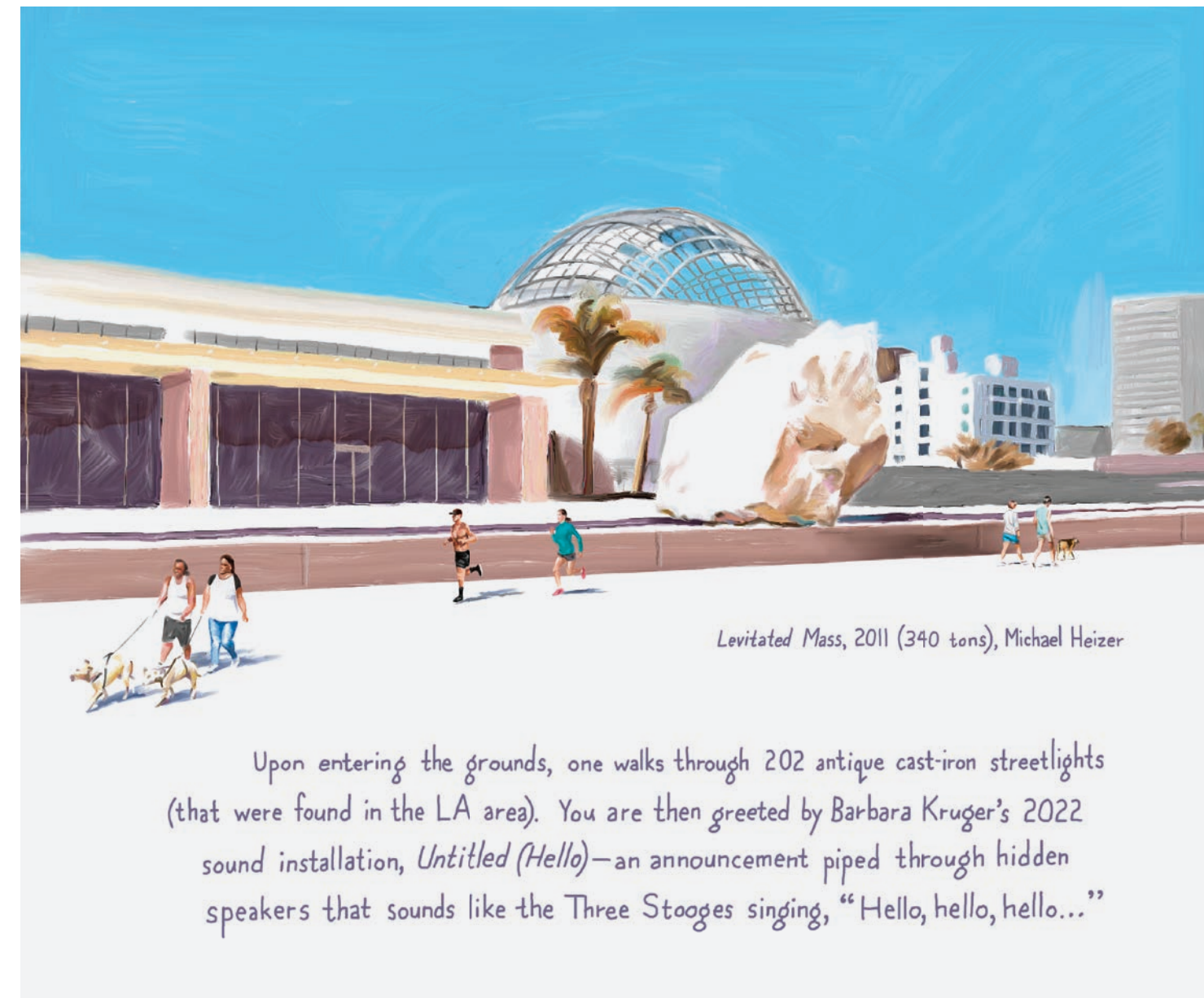
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1910

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is the largest art museum in the western part of the United States. One million visitors attend annually to engage with the 150,000 works that span a historical period covering six thousand years.

Highlights include works by Man Ray, Cindy Sherman, Willem de Kooning, Joan Miro, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Titian, Bernardo Strozzi, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Georgia O’Keeffe, Rembrandt, and Edgar Degas. Its most famous exhibit was the treasures of King Tut in 1978 and again in 2005.



Urban Light, 2008, Chris Burden



Levitated Mass, 2011 (340 tons), Michael Heizer

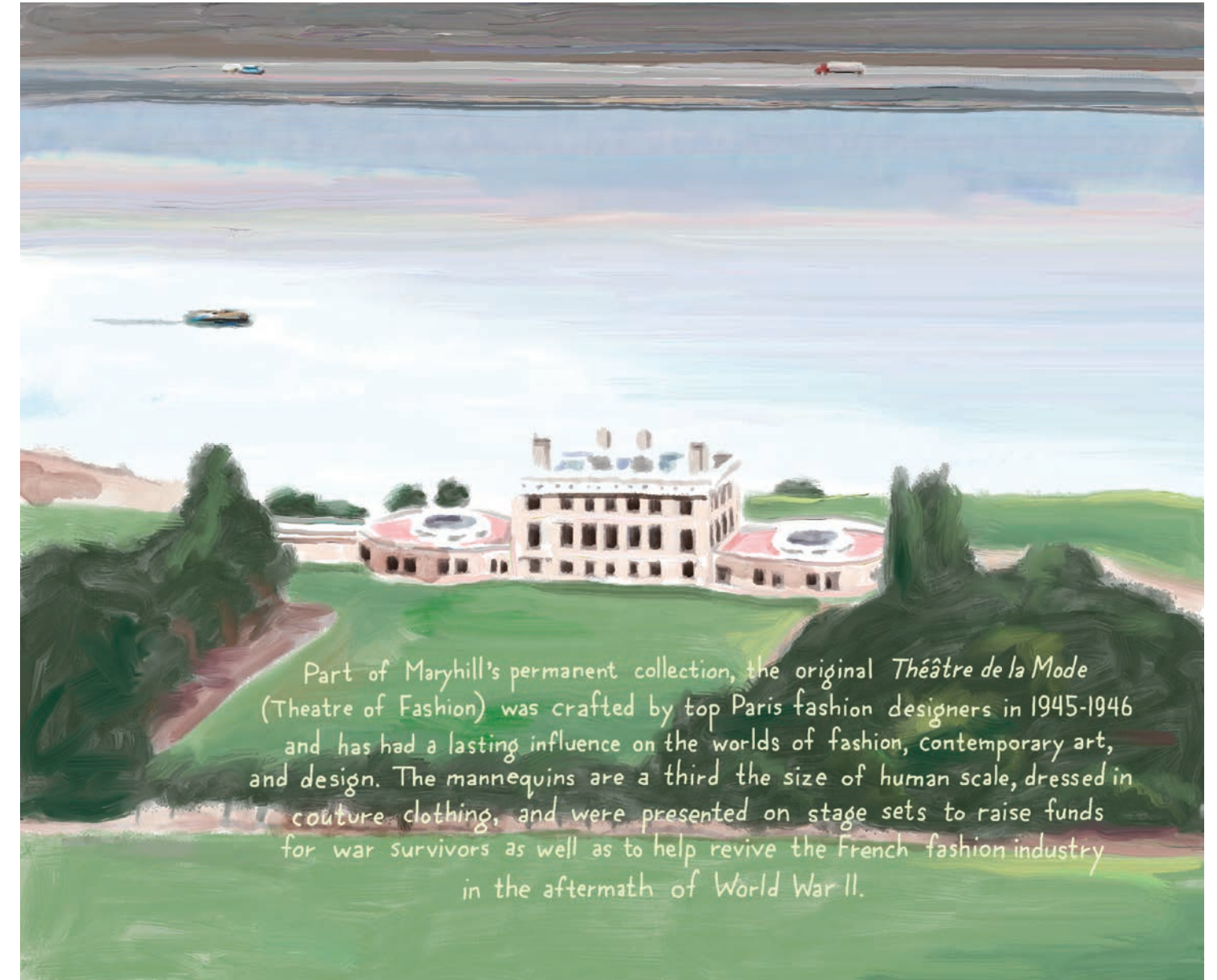
Upon entering the grounds, one walks through 202 antique cast-iron streetlights (that were found in the LA area). You are then greeted by Barbara Kruger’s 2022 sound installation, *Untitled (Hello)*—an announcement piped through hidden speakers that sounds like the Three Stooges singing, “Hello, hello, hello...”

MARYHILL MUSEUM OF ART

GOLDENDALE, WASHINGTON · EST. 1940

Maryhill Museum of Art is one of the most fascinating destinations in the Pacific Northwest, a Beaux Arts-style building on a 5,300-acre site that overlooks the scenic Columbia River Gorge. Maryhill is often said to have an “eclectic” collection. It was conceived in 1917 as an institution “for the betterment of French art in the Far Northwest of America.” Its four founding patrons were a group of unlikely friends that included Sam Hill (entrepreneur), Queen Marie of Romania (granddaughter of Queen Victoria), Alma de Bretteville Spreckels (San Francisco philanthropist), and Loïe Fuller (modern dancer). Together, in 1917, they convinced Sam Hill to turn his home into a museum (which opened to the public in 1940). In addition to European and American fine and decorative arts, Maryhill is home to Romanian palace furniture and folk textiles, Russian and Greek religious icons, and art by Indigenous peoples of North America. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and in 2001 listed as an official site of the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail.

Museum highlights include eighty works by Auguste Rodin, artifacts from Queen Marie of Romania, unique chess sets from around the world, and nine *Théâtre de la Mode* stage sets. Its life-size Stonehenge Memorial was made as a symbol to the human sacrifice of war, the earliest World War I war memorial in North America.



Part of Maryhill's permanent collection, the original *Théâtre de la Mode* (Theatre of Fashion) was crafted by top Paris fashion designers in 1945-1946 and has had a lasting influence on the worlds of fashion, contemporary art, and design. The mannequins are a third the size of human scale, dressed in couture clothing, and were presented on stage sets to raise funds for war survivors as well as to help revive the French fashion industry in the aftermath of World War II.

MASS MOCA

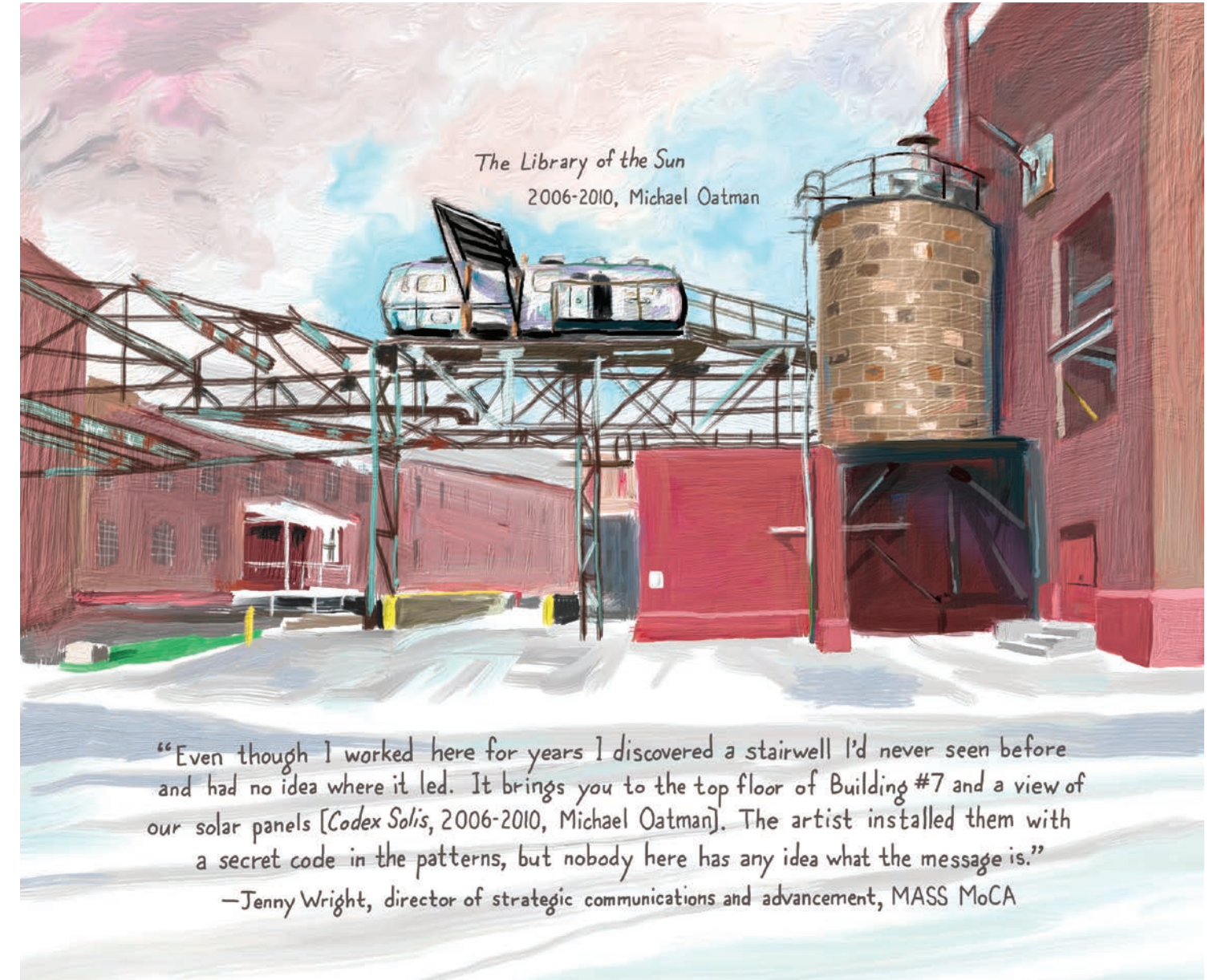
NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1999

The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art is in a former print factory building complex and is one of the largest centers for contemporary visual art and performing arts in the United States. It consists of twenty-six buildings and encompasses about a quarter of a million square feet of exhibition space. The museum is the subject of the 2018 documentary *Museum Town*.

Highlights include the virtual-experience installations by avant-garde artist and film director Laurie Anderson, the Anselm Kiefer Building, and the comprehensive archive of Sol LeWitt's body of work (1968–2007) that is spread out over twenty-seven thousand square feet. Don't miss the alien spaceship (*The Library of the Sun*, 2006–2010, Michael Oatman) that crashed atop the Boiler House (which is in an ominous sound installation). Visitors are welcomed at the front entrance by a row of trees hanging upside down (*Tree Logic*, 1999, Natalie Jeremijenko).



The Knitting Machine, 2005, Dave Cole





Into the Light, 2017, James Turrell

James Turrell's light installations are a major part of MASS MoCA, providing unearthly experiences and a favorite place for marriage proposals.

"Protective booties are required for entering a Turrell installation to protect the art, which includes the floor. When I'm asked for a third bootie, I know it means they will be going down on one knee."

—John Marlowe, museum attendant



Art enthusiast and Instagram star Corinne Warner, age ninety-two, taking a spin on EJ Hill's 260-foot-long pale pink roller coaster, *Brake Run Helix*, 2022.

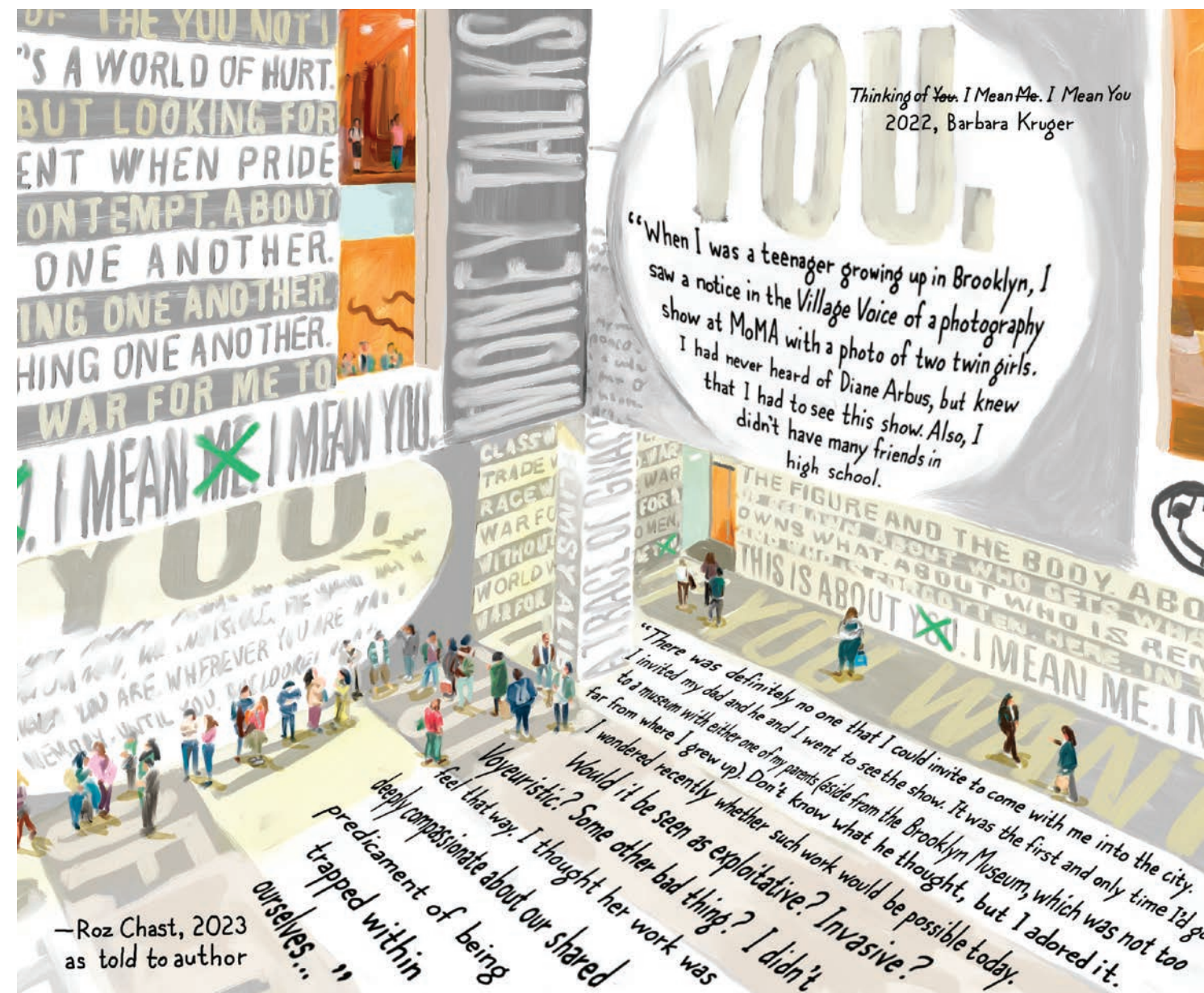
MOMA

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1929

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is considered one of the largest and most influential museums of modern art in the world. It includes not just drawing, painting, and sculpture but design, architecture, photography, prints, artists' books, film, and electronic media.

The idea for MoMA was developed in 1929 by Abby Rockefeller and her two friends, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan, collectively known as "the Ladies." They rented a modest space in the Heckscher Building in Manhattan for the new museum, and it opened to the public nine days after the Wall Street crash. Abby's husband, John D. Rockefeller Jr., hated modern art and was adamantly opposed to the museum. But her husband eventually donated funds, and the land for the current building, becoming its biggest benefactor. Their son Nelson was made president of the museum in 1939 until he was elected governor of New York in 1958, when his brother David filled in for one year.

Highlights are too many to name as MoMA has arguably the finest collection of modern Western art in the world, with more than 150,000 individual pieces. There are masterpieces by Berenice Abbott, Francis Bacon, Louise Bourgeois, Elizabeth Catlett, Paul Cézanne, Marc Chagall, Willem de Kooning, Marcel Duchamp, Vincent van Gogh, Frida Kahlo, Paul Klee, Franz Kline, Roy Lichtenstein, Morris Louis, Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Georgia O'Keeffe, Mark Rothko, Henri Rousseau, Cindy Sherman, Frank Stella, Florine Stettheimer, and Andy Warhol.



MUSEUM OF BAD ART

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1993

The mission of MOBA is to collect, exhibit, and celebrate art that will be shown in no other venue. The museum's new location, in the Dorchester Brewing Co., assumes visitors would need a drink after seeing this work.

"We look for sincere artistic efforts that have gone wrong in a way that results in a compelling image. We are not interested in kitsch, schlock, works on velvet, tourist art, or paint by numbers. About 10 percent of the pieces in the collection were donated by the artist who created them. Despite operating with no salaried staff, MOBA has sent traveling exhibitions to New York, Virginia, Utah, Texas, New Mexico, Taiwan, Tokyo, Calgary, and Quebec."

—Louise Reilly Sacco, Permanent Acting Interim Executive Director

Highlights include *Lucy in the Field with Flowers*, a painting found in 1993 leaning against a trash barrel, waiting for garbage collection. This painting was the seed and the first of the MOBA collection. A low point, and a must-see, is the painting *Our Lady of Perpetual Housework* in their *Oozing My Religion* section.



Current location, Dorchester Brewing Company Tap Room



MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

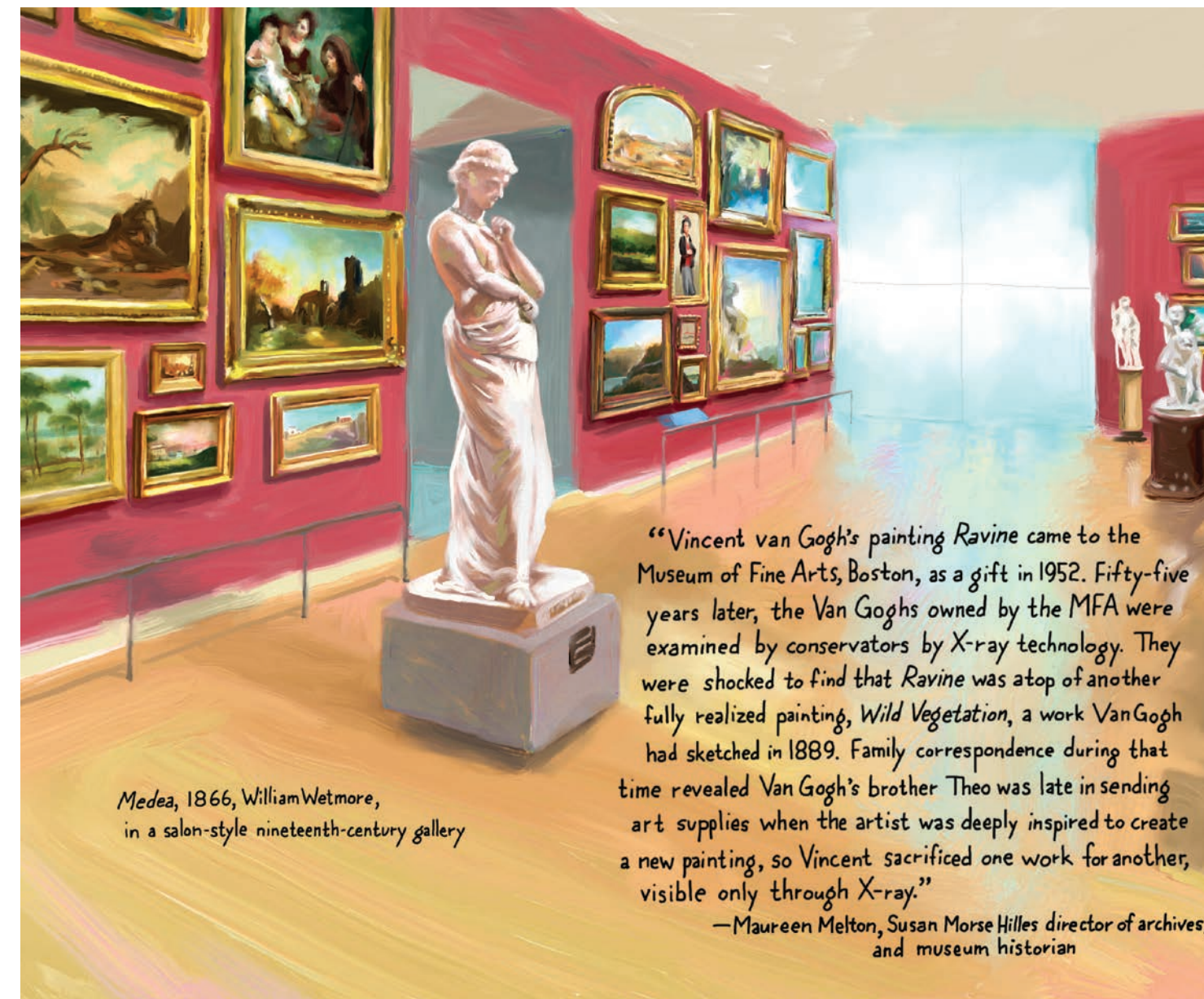
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1870

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or the MFA, was founded in Copley Square in 1870 and moved in 1909 to its new location in Fenway just down the street from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. It has since become one of the most comprehensive art museums in North America.

Highlights include John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778) and *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (1882) by John Singer Sargent. At the top of the stairs, it is flanked by the very vases depicted in the oil painting. The pair of large blue-and-white Japanese vases traveled with the Boit family and were later donated to the museum. While clearly influenced by the master Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (critics have made the comparison), Sargent goes further, creating a Freudian drama of adolescence, abandoning traditional modes of portraiture through the use of light, composition and body language. The painting certainly means different things to different people depending on their own family upbringing and relationships with their siblings. "It's the MFA's *Mona Lisa*. No composition or portrait was ever executed like that before," wrote Sargent scholar and author Richard Rosen.



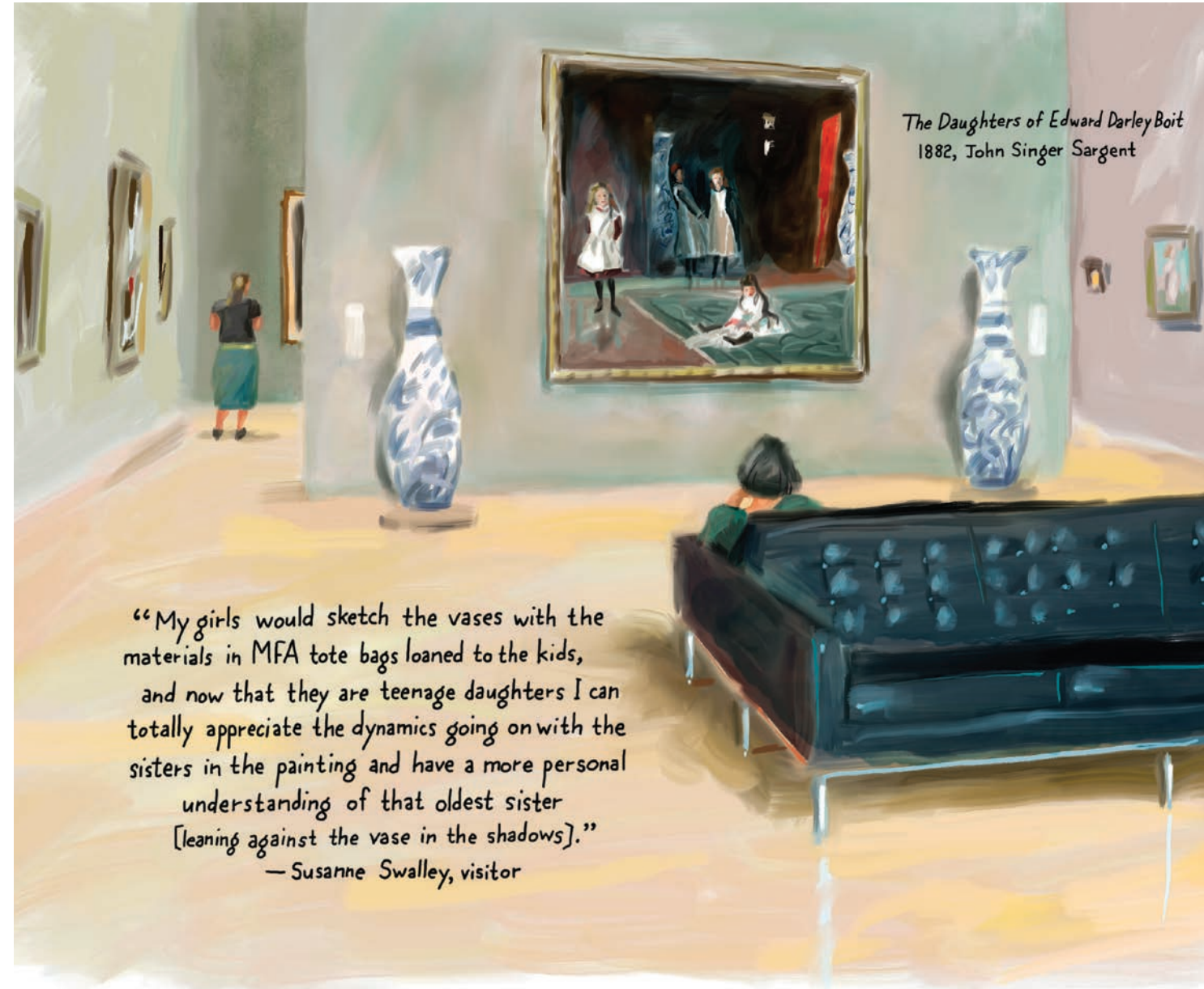
98 *Ravine*, 1889, Vincent van Gogh



Medea, 1866, William Wetmore,
in a salon-style nineteenth-century gallery

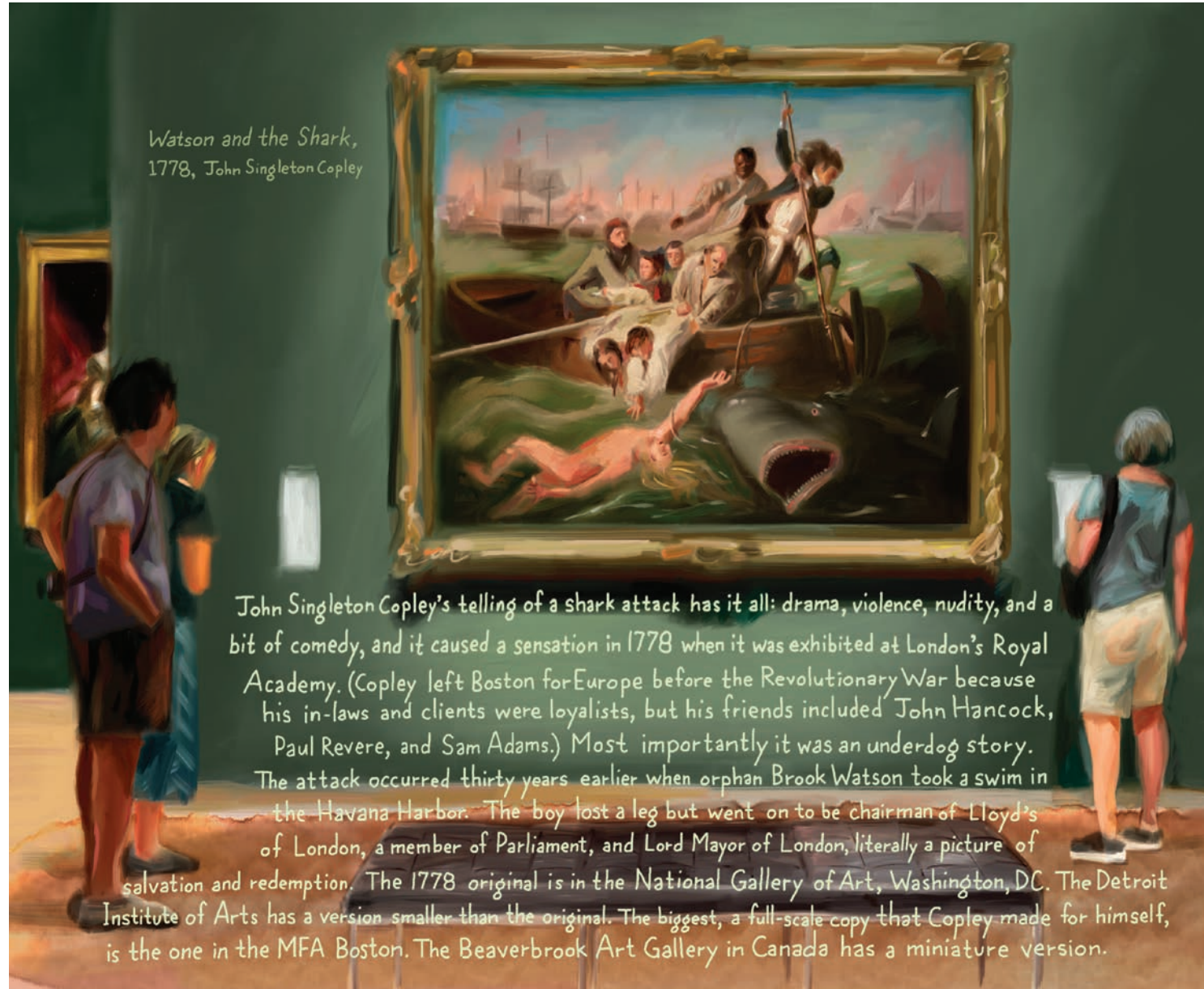
"Vincent van Gogh's painting *Ravine* came to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, as a gift in 1952. Fifty-five years later, the Van Goghs owned by the MFA were examined by conservators by X-ray technology. They were shocked to find that *Ravine* was atop of another fully realized painting, *Wild Vegetation*, a work Van Gogh had sketched in 1889. Family correspondence during that time revealed Van Gogh's brother Theo was late in sending art supplies when the artist was deeply inspired to create a new painting, so Vincent sacrificed one work for another, visible only through X-ray."

—Maureen Melton, Susan Morse Hilles director of archives,
and museum historian



The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit
1882, John Singer Sargent

“My girls would sketch the vases with the materials in MFA tote bags loaned to the kids, and now that they are teenage daughters I can totally appreciate the dynamics going on with the sisters in the painting and have a more personal understanding of that oldest sister [leaning against the vase in the shadows].”
— Susanne Swalley, visitor



Watson and the Shark,
1778, John Singleton Copley

John Singleton Copley’s telling of a shark attack has it all: drama, violence, nudity, and a bit of comedy, and it caused a sensation in 1778 when it was exhibited at London’s Royal Academy. (Copley left Boston for Europe before the Revolutionary War because his in-laws and clients were loyalists, but his friends included John Hancock, Paul Revere, and Sam Adams.) Most importantly it was an underdog story. The attack occurred thirty years earlier when orphan Brook Watson took a swim in the Havana Harbor. The boy lost a leg but went on to be chairman of Lloyd’s of London, a member of Parliament, and Lord Mayor of London, literally a picture of salvation and redemption. The 1778 original is in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. The Detroit Institute of Arts has a version smaller than the original. The biggest, a full-scale copy that Copley made for himself, is the one in the MFA Boston. The Beaverbrook Art Gallery in Canada has a miniature version.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ILLUSTRATION

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND · EST. 1998

The 1898 Carrère & Hastings–designed mansion is the home of the National Museum of American Illustration and its founder, Judy Goffman Cutler. (The New York Public Library and the Frick Collection are the more well-known buildings designed by Carrère & Hastings.) It opened to the public in 2000 and contains one of the largest, if not *the* largest, collection of Maxfield Parrish paintings as well as the largest collection of J. C. Leyendecker paintings and over a hundred works by Norman Rockwell, N. C. Wyeth, Charles Dana Gibson, James Montgomery Flagg, Howard Chandler Christy, and John Falter. These are just some of the over 150 illustrators from the golden age of American illustration (from the 1880s through the 1930s).

The first room you enter in this thirty-thousand-square-foot building is the Marble Hall, whose highlights include the painting *Miss Liberty* (1943) by Norman Rockwell and eight of the eighteen *A Florentine Fete* murals by Maxfield Parrish (1910–1916).



A pair of *Florentine Fete* murals, 1910–1916, Maxfield Parrish



“The museum had been closed for renovation and COVID.
One day I was picking up garbage in the parking lot across the street.
A man asked me if the museum was open? I said, ‘I’m going that way. I can show you the museum.’ I gave him a private tour.”
— Judy Goffman Cutler, founder

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

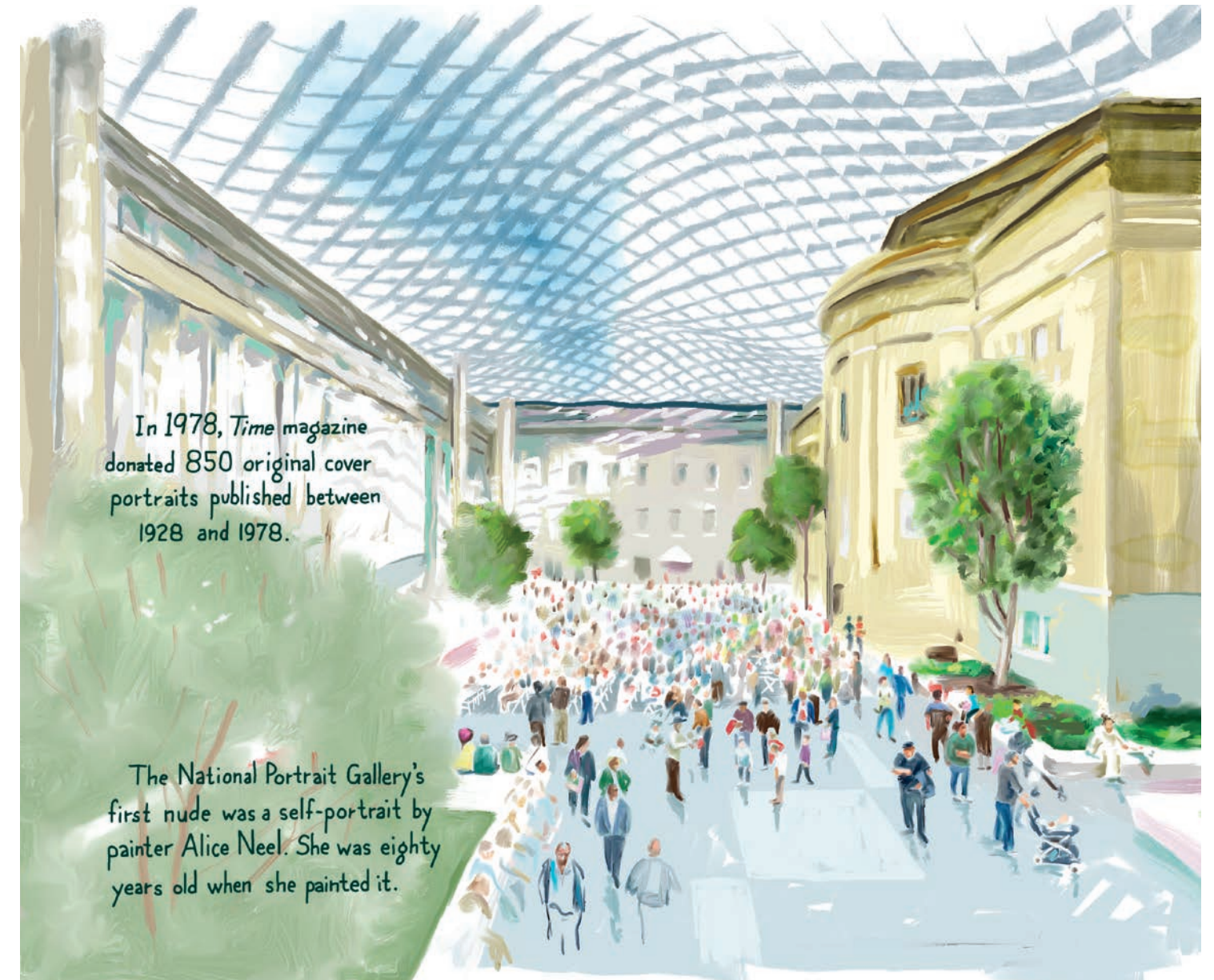
WASHINGTON, DC · EST. 1962

The only museum in the United States dedicated to portraits, the National Portrait Gallery is part of the Smithsonian Institution in the historic Old Patent Office Building. It opened to the public in 1968 with a collection that focuses on famous Americans.

Highlights include the renowned unfinished Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington; photographer Irving Penn's 120 platinum prints of fashion and celebrity portraits he shot over fifty years; and two rare photographs, one of formerly enslaved African American abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass (one of only four known to exist), and another by African American photographer Augustus Washington of abolitionist John Brown, who led the 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry that triggered the Civil War.



Athenaeum Portrait, 1796, Gilbert Stuart



In 1978, *Time* magazine donated 850 original cover portraits published between 1928 and 1978.

The National Portrait Gallery's first nude was a self-portrait by painter Alice Neel. She was eighty years old when she painted it.

NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM

STOCKBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1969

This museum is dedicated to, arguably, America's most popular historian, Norman Rockwell, whose artistic skills held a mirror to our social history in the twentieth century. The museum of Rockwell's work also has changing exhibitions of other artists. There is a tour of Rockwell's relocated studio (he spent the last twenty-five years of his life in Stockbridge). The focus of the rotating exhibitions is a celebration of American illustration—when I attended, I saw a selection of illustrations on race and a show of the work of Kadir Nelson, painter, illustrator, and author whose work has been featured on the cover of the *New Yorker*, on album covers for Michael Jackson and Drake, and elsewhere.

Highlights include Rockwell's iconic painting *Four Freedoms* (1943). Another highlight is the museum's generally beautiful presentation and grounds. From its displays and facilities to the gift shop, this museum is truly exemplary. You may also notice Steven Spielberg's name displayed over one of the entrances as you walk in. A trustee emeritus, he, along with George Lucas, has donated to the Rockwell collections as well as financially to the museum. Whether you like the director's movies or not, no one ever accused him of shoddy production, and the museum, intentionally or not, has a Spielberg touch.



“Rockwell brings out so many emotions. Some people cry, some laugh, but they all want to tell their story. I try to listen or just give them a hug. I was in the *Four Freedoms* galleries and a lady wanted to discuss them with me. She finally asked, ‘Where are the originals?’ I said, ‘Of course, these are the originals.’ ‘Oh no,’ she said, ‘I have seen the real paintings and they are much bigger than these.’ I asked where she had seen them. ‘In the old museum and they were much bigger.’

“I tried to explain that the gallery was made for the *Four Freedoms* and in the old gallery, the paintings would have reached from ceiling to floor and, therefore, looked larger. Nothing I said convinced her.” —Judy Daly, museum guide, Norman Rockwell Museum

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

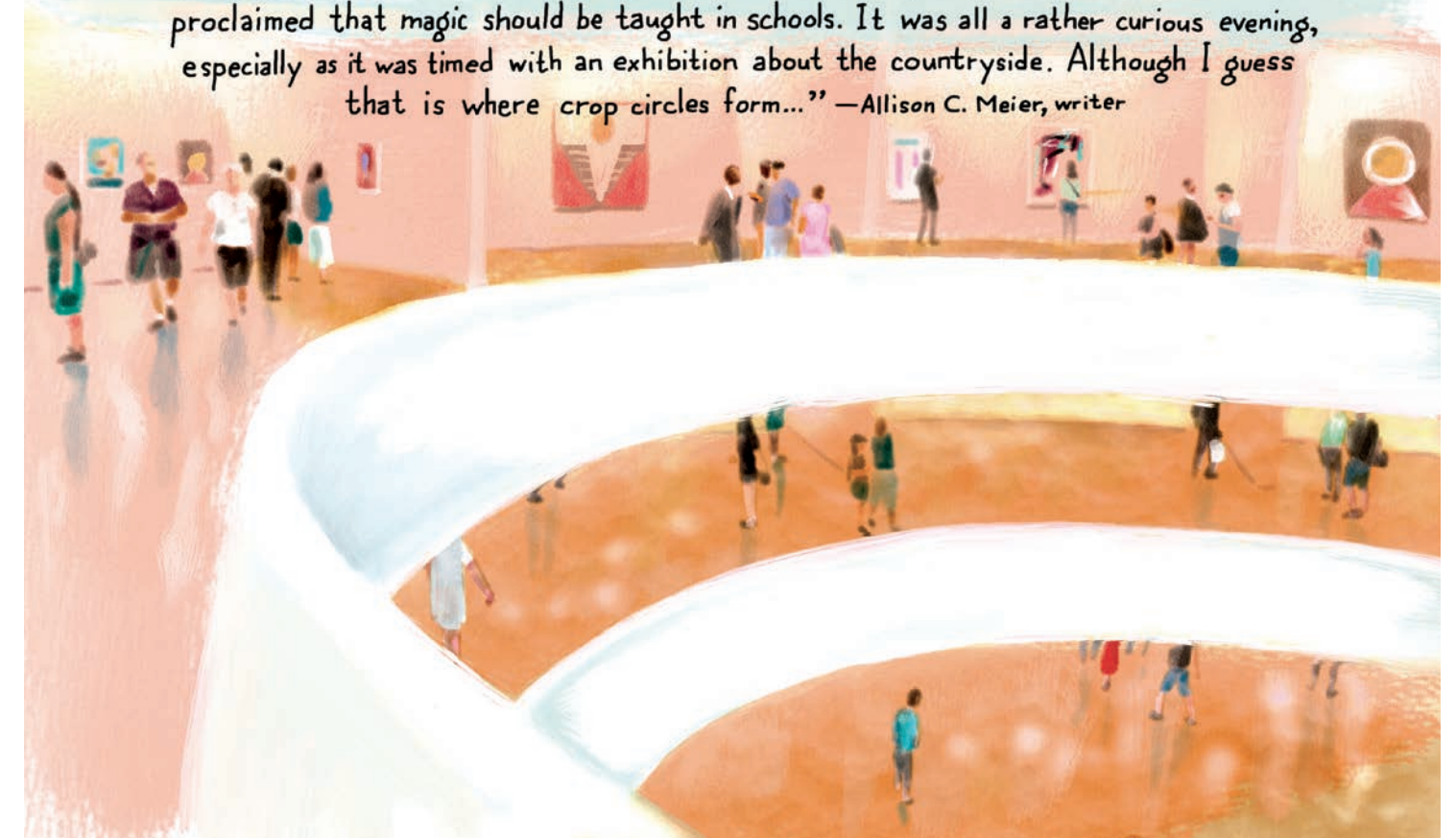
NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1939

Commonly known as the Guggenheim Museum, or just “the Guggenheim,” it is considered to have a premier collection of Impressionist, Postimpressionist, early modern, and contemporary art, showcased in Frank Lloyd Wright’s most famous work, a building which initially drew great criticism.

The major highlight is the unique viewing experience in the interior spiral for its visitors.



“I once went to what I thought was an ordinary talk at the Guggenheim and it turned out to be basically a die-hard crowd of people who believed in the presence of UFOs and extraterrestrial influence on our society. One of the speakers compared the practices of tech CEOs with those of ancient mystics who would go out into the desert and fast and commune with nature to make contact with the divine. The speaker dramatically held up an iPhone, declaring that that is why this device we all carry looks like a totem! I admit that I often think of the monolithic nature of my iPhone since that experience. At the Q&A, someone proclaimed that magic should be taught in schools. It was all a rather curious evening, especially as it was timed with an exhibition about the countryside. Although I guess that is where crop circles form...” —Allison C. Meier, writer



WHITNEY MUSEUM

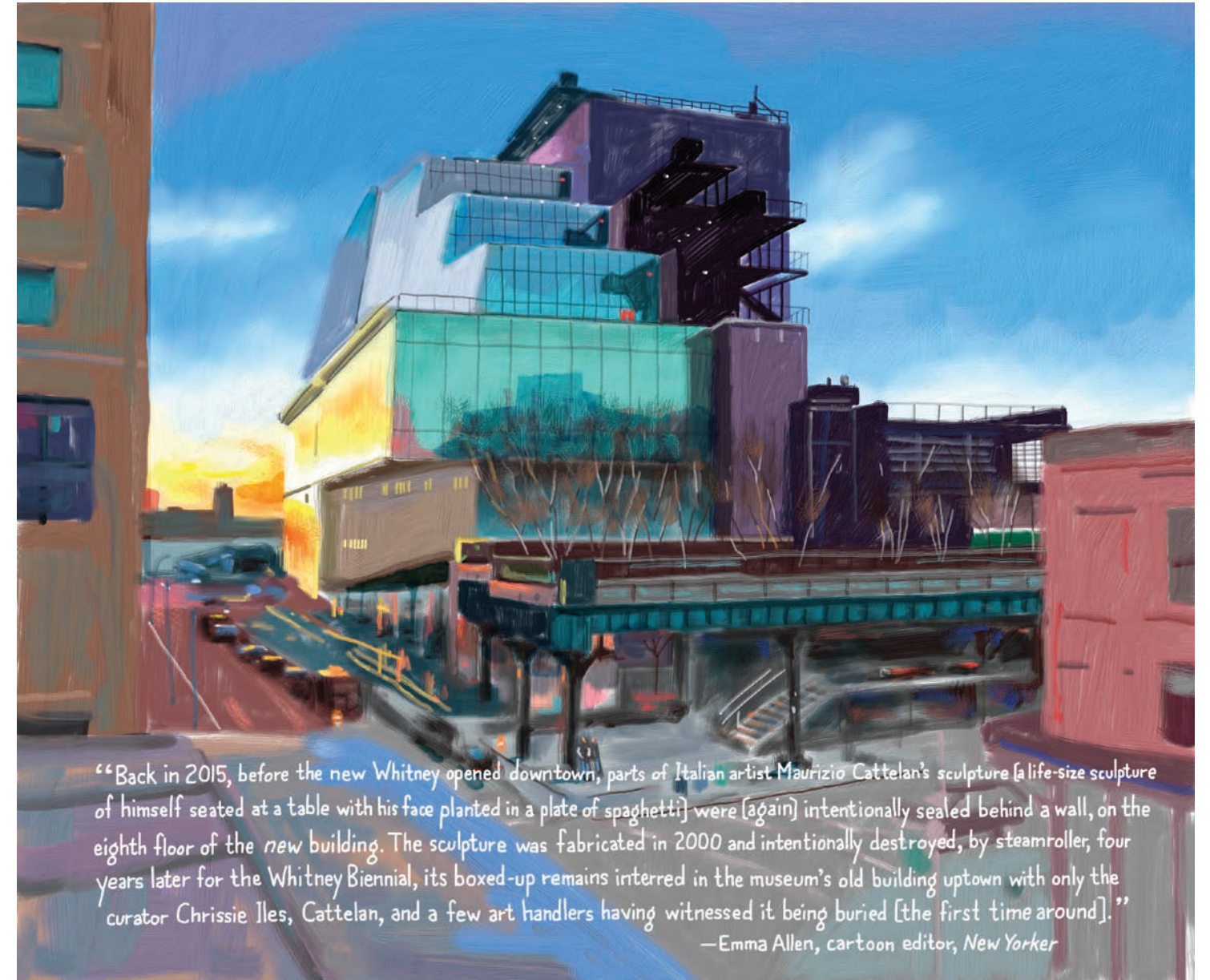
NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1930

The Whitney, or officially the Whitney Museum of American Art, was founded by socialite Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930. The museum is most famous for its Whitney Biennial exhibition, which showcase up-and-coming artists. Its latest location is in the Meatpacking District in Manhattan. Its eight stories and two-hundred-thousand square feet consist of New York City's largest column-free exhibition spaces. The museum includes an education center, library, theater, conservation laboratory, and observation decks. Their famed Independent Study Program, which boasts a list of accomplished artists, curators, and art historians as their alumni, is free and located in Roy Lichtenstein's Greenwich Village studio. Michelle Obama attended the ceremonial ribbon-cutting of the new Renzo Piano-designed building in 2015 with Mayor Bill de Blasio.

One of many highlights is George Bellows's painting *Dempsey and Firpo* (1924). Also, one piece of artwork easily missed is outside the Whitney Museum—a manhole cover with the words “IN DIRECT LINE WITH ANOTHER & THE NEXT” (NYC Manhole Covers, 2011, Lawrence Weiner) rather than “NYC Sewer.”



Untitled, 2000, Maurizio Cattelan



WINTERTHUR MUSEUM

WINTERTHUR, DELAWARE · EST. 1951

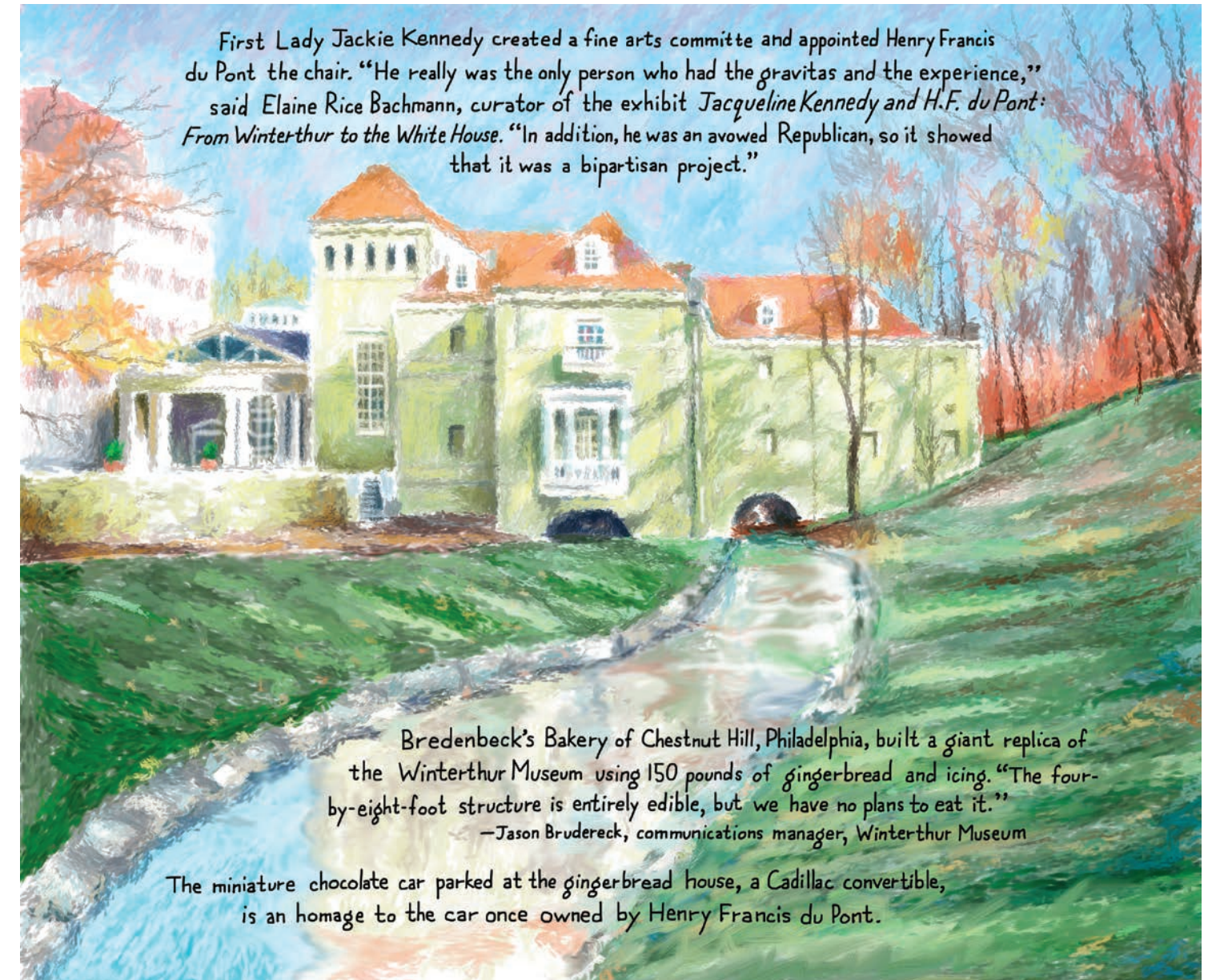
Winterthur is a 175-room mansion turned museum housing over ninety thousand objects dating back as far as 1640, and representing American decorative arts. The Winterthur was once the home of industrialist Henry Francis du Pont.

The site includes one thousand acres of protected meadows, woodlands, ponds, waterways, and a sixty-acre garden that is considered among America's finest.

Winterthur also has an extensive research library and is an important center for the study of American art and culture with graduate degree programs.



Winterthur Museum gingerbread house



AMERICAN WRITERS MUSEUM

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS · EST. 2017

“The mission of the American Writers Museum is to engage the public in celebrating American writers and exploring their influence on our history, our identity, our culture, and our daily lives.” The museum was inspired by the Dublin Writers Museum in Dublin, Ireland. The museum conducts exhibitions, holds programs and classes, hosts events, and, like many of the museums in the book, can be visited virtually.

“In our *Story of the Day* exhibit visitors and students have a chance to write their own stories on a collection of antique manual typewriters. They can type out a line, a poem, or a whole story. We have had two marriage proposals typed on our typewriters. For most of our younger visitors this is something they have never touched, and they were extremely excited by them. The best response to the experience came from a sixth-grade student who said ‘This is great. It’s like an instant printer.’”

—American Writers Museum



CHAPTER FIVE

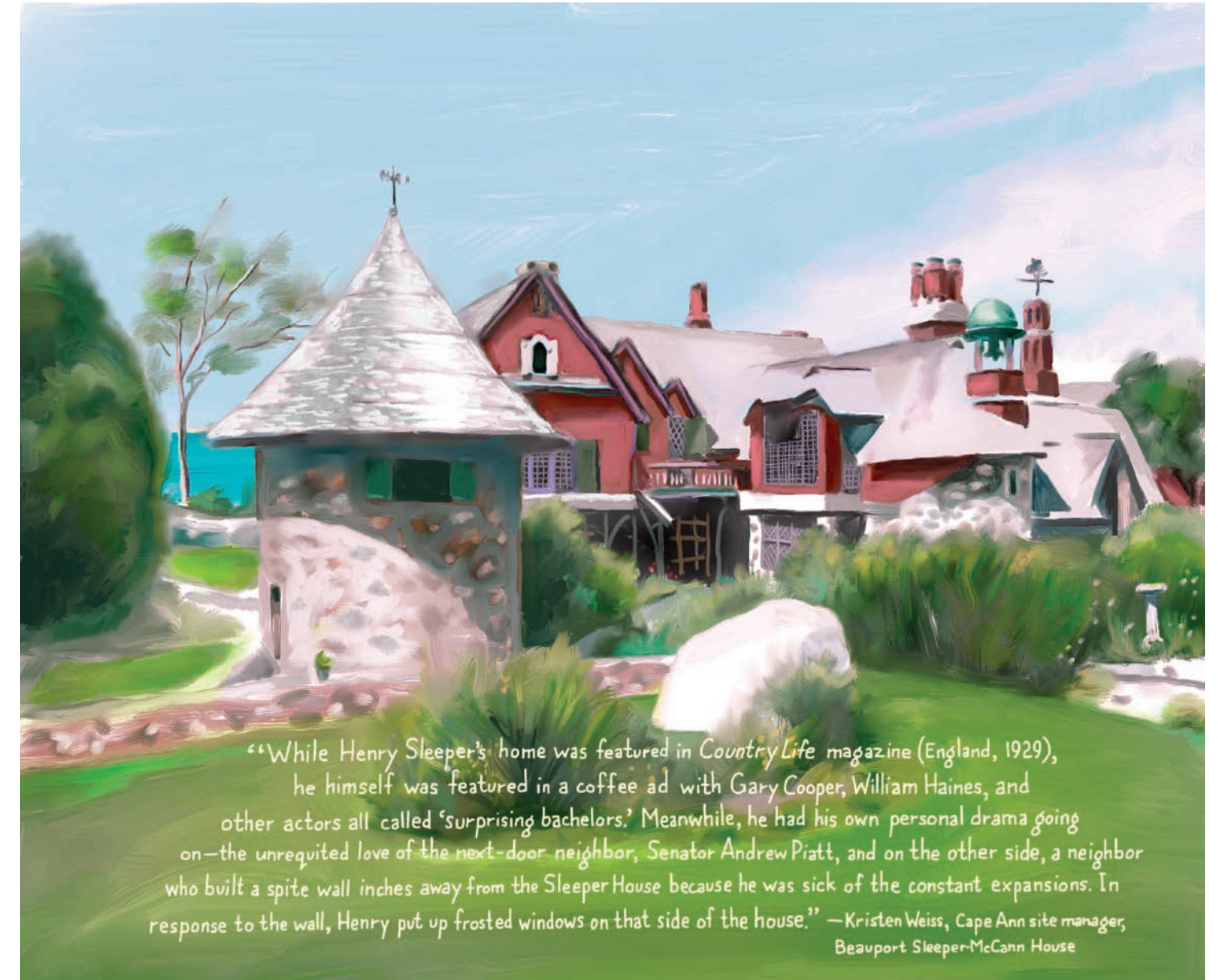
HISTORIC HOMES

BEAUPORT SLEEPER-MCCANN HOUSE

GLOUCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1947

Beauport Sleeper-McCann House started as one man's vision and became a work of art and historical landmark. Henry Sleeper, one of the country's first interior designers, created the forty-two-room house, each room with a different theme, between 1907 and 1934. Its guest book was a who's who in the arts and society of the Edwardian period: President William Taft, Henry James, John Singer Sargent, Ethel Barrymore, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eleanor Roosevelt, King Gustave of Sweden, Helen Hayes, and John D. Rockefeller.

Highlights include some of the house's homemade wallpaper, unusual stained glass displays, ocean views, secret passages, stunning objects of interest, and a large-hearth colonial kitchen. The house incorporates features that were not commonplace for its time like skylights, full-length mirrors behind doors, and closets in every room.



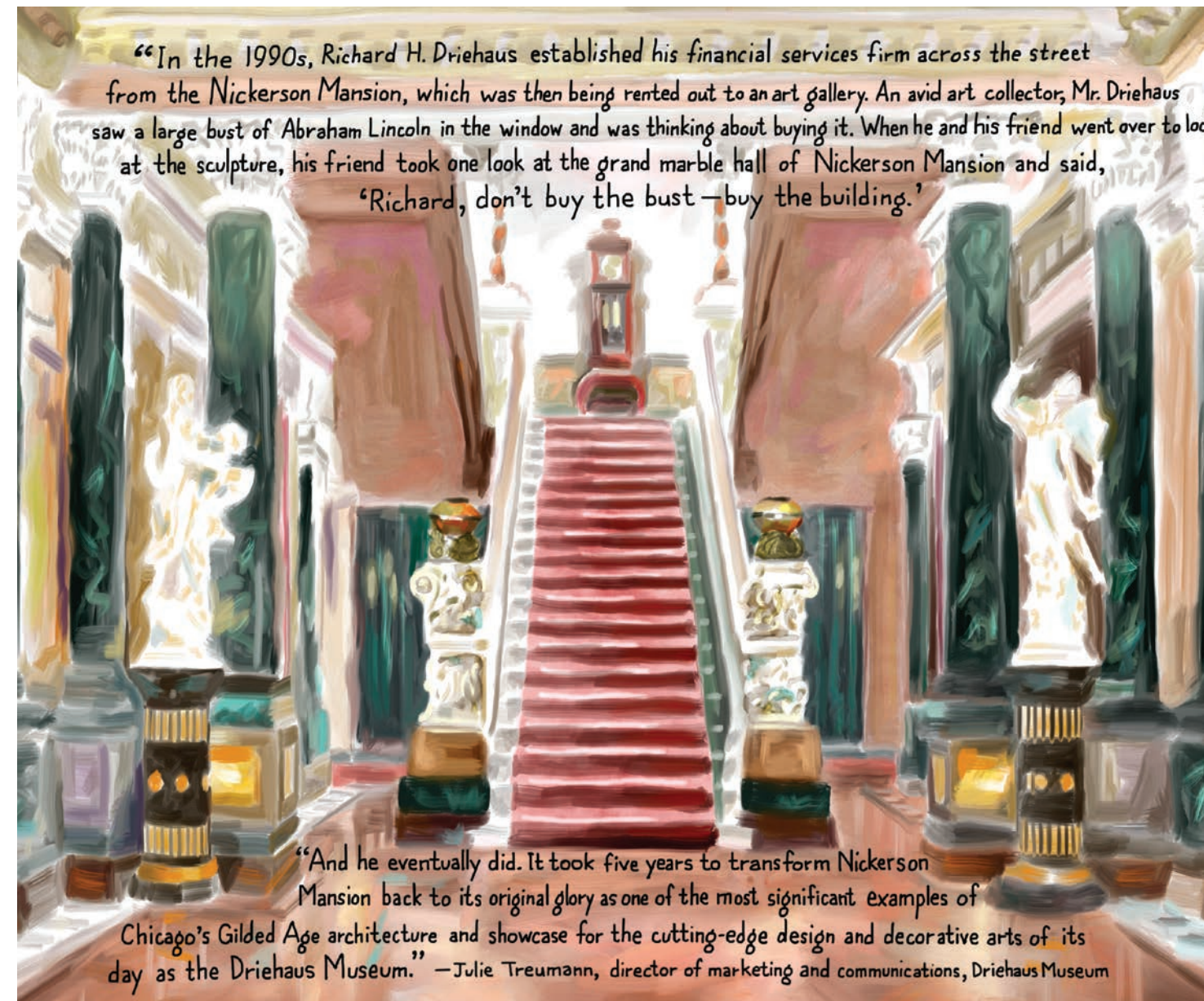
“While Henry Sleeper's home was featured in *Country Life* magazine (England, 1929), he himself was featured in a coffee ad with Gary Cooper, William Haines, and other actors all called ‘surprising bachelors.’ Meanwhile, he had his own personal drama going on—the unrequited love of the next-door neighbor, Senator Andrew Piatt, and on the other side, a neighbor who built a spite wall inches away from the Sleeper House because he was sick of the constant expansions. In response to the wall, Henry put up frosted windows on that side of the house.” —Kristen Weiss, Cape Ann site manager, Beauport Sleeper-McCann House

DRIEHAUS MUSEUM

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS · EST. 2008

The Richard H. Driehaus Museum is named after its founder, a Chicago businessman, philanthropist, and art collector, and features his collection of American and European decorative arts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the natural environment of the restored 1883 Nickerson Mansion. The building is on the National Register of Historic Places and a designated Chicago landmark.

Highlights include its exquisite interiors—great examples of Chicago’s Gilded Age—with a stained glass dome and works by Tiffany Studios, including eight enormous and rare nautilus shells that function as bud vases.



“In the 1990s, Richard H. Driehaus established his financial services firm across the street from the Nickerson Mansion, which was then being rented out to an art gallery. An avid art collector, Mr. Driehaus saw a large bust of Abraham Lincoln in the window and was thinking about buying it. When he and his friend went over to look at the sculpture, his friend took one look at the grand marble hall of Nickerson Mansion and said, ‘Richard, don’t buy the bust—buy the building.’”

“And he eventually did. It took five years to transform Nickerson Mansion back to its original glory as one of the most significant examples of Chicago’s Gilded Age architecture and showcase for the cutting-edge design and decorative arts of its day as the Driehaus Museum.” —Julie Treumann, director of marketing and communications, Driehaus Museum

GRACELAND

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE · EST. 1982

Graceland, Elvis Presley's former 13.8-acre estate, was voted the "World's Best Musical Attraction" in *USA Today* and joins the ranks of homes such as the White House and Mount Vernon as a National Historic Landmark.

His daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, who inherited Graceland after his death in 1977, was laid to rest at Graceland in 2023 along with her father and her late son, Benjamin Keough. Others buried at Graceland include Elvis's parents, Gladys and Vernon Presley, and his paternal grandmother, Minnie Mae Presley. Graceland was inherited by Lisa Marie Presley's three surviving daughters.

The home's main highlight has to be the legendary Jungle Room, which has remained mostly untouched from the days when Elvis lived there. Aside from the exotic Polynesian decor, fountain, and green shag carpet on both the floor and ceiling, it also has musical significance. In February 1976, RCA brought its studio to the Jungle Room during the last eighteen months of Elvis's life for recording sessions where he recorded "Moody Blue," "Solitaire," and "Hurt." Reasons for this choice varied depending on who was asked and included Elvis wanting to spend as much time as possible in Graceland to wanting to create an informal setting for musicians.



In April 1976, Bruce Springsteen performed in Memphis and, after the show, decided to drive by Graceland. When he saw that lights were on, he jumped the fence and raced to the front door. Elvis wasn't home, and Springsteen was politely led away by security.

"I was born and raised in Memphis but possessed little of the fanatic adoration for Elvis expressed by so many. But a pilgrimage to Graceland with the family as a kid was inevitable. As an unusually fast-growing teenager, I was prone to dizzy spells caused by low blood sugar and found myself doubled over on the verge of passing out amidst a display of the King's costumes. Everyone thought I was a fan swooning with grief at our collective loss, but I was just hungry. Thankfully everything is for sale at Graceland, including ice cream, which cured my devastation."
—Laura Splan, artist

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1903

Built in 1901, Fenway Court was the former home of Isabella Stewart Gardner. Two years later it became the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, a must-see attraction in Boston filled with excellent examples of European, Asian, and American paintings, sculpture, tapestries, and decorative arts. “We were a very young country and had very few opportunities of seeing beautiful things, works of art. I decided that the greatest need in our country was art. . . . So, I was determined to make it my life’s work if I could.” Ms. Gardner went on shopping trips with her friend interior designer Henry Sleeper (of the Beauport Sleeper-McCann House) creating a cross-pollination of tastes in their decorating schemes.

The new wing of the museum, designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, opened in 2012 and will help preserve the original historic building by hosting all the museum’s public performances and events. There is a near vertical three-hundred-seat performance hall chamber, an adjustable height special exhibition gallery, restaurant, gift shop, classroom, expanded outdoor garden spaces, two artist apartments, conservation labs, and art workshop.

The museum highlight is a magnificent fifteenth-century Venetian palace courtyard. The courtyard has a glass roof that illuminates the museum’s galleries by diffusing the natural light. Gardner purchased eight Venetian stone balconies that overlook an exceptional Roman tile mosaic for the parameter of the center sanctuary.



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MARK TWAIN HOUSE AND MUSEUM

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT · EST. 2003

The grounds consist of the twenty-five-room American High Gothic home of the national treasure Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)—where he lived with his family from 1874 to 1891. A separate museum focuses on the writer's career and work. Celebrities who have visited the museum include Dan Brown, Laura Bush, Judge Judy, Stephen King, Denis Leary, Spike Lee, David Letterman, and Bruce Springsteen.

The site is made up of three buildings and the historic 1874 home is seen by tour only and reservations are recommended. (Note: there are a lot of stairs and no elevator). The highlight of the tour is the dream library—grand, ornate, it includes a large oak mantelpiece from Ayton Castle in Scotland. The museum, unlike the house, is handicap accessible. The third building, Mark Twain's historic carriage house, is generally not open to the public.



“Jimmy Buffett played in the Billards Room of the house to five lucky visitors during the guided tour. He was touring at the time and brought a guitar with him to the museum for the sole purpose of singing two of his songs that reference Mark Twain.

“A few times I had to stay overnight, due to storms, and once Patti* and I were designated to ride out an October snowstorm in the TwainHouse. We gathered the necessities—pillows, blankets, laptops, books, and most importantly, snacks. While prepping our campout in the house's library we both heard a clear male voice greet us, ‘Hello.’ We radioed our security guard manning the museum center, a separate building that took several minutes to get to and turned pale when we got no response. Both shaken, we bunked in the same room instead of separating. It was, ironically, in the bedroom of George Griffin, the family's butler, our number one suspect. I didn't sleep that night, thanks to the storm creating shadows and noises...and the ghost.” —Mallory Howard, assistant curator, Mark Twain House & Museum

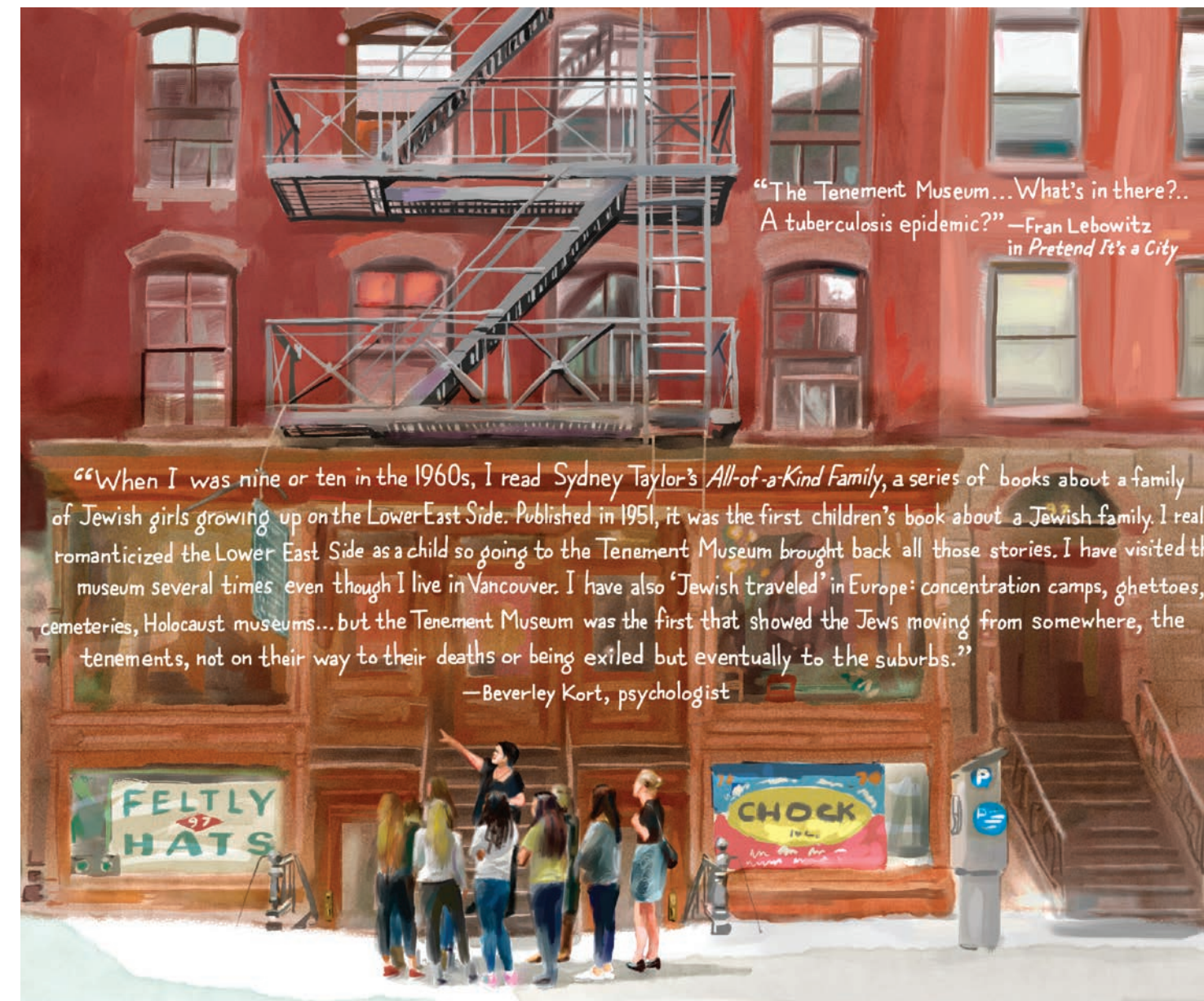
*Patricia Philippon, former chief curator at the Mark Twain House & Museum

TENEMENT MUSEUM

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1988

The museum is made up of two historical tenement buildings that housed, combined, an estimated fifteen thousand people, from over twenty countries, between 1863 and 2011. Also called the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, the tenement at 97 Orchard Street was designated a National Historic Site in 1994. In 2015, this would include a second location at 103 Orchard Street, which was home to over ten thousand immigrants up until 2011.

Modifications to the buildings over the years, to conform to the city's developing housing laws, included indoor plumbing (cold running water, two toilets per floor), an air shaft, and gas followed by electricity. In 1935, rather than continuing to modify the 97 Orchard Street building the landlord evicted the residents, closed off the building, and boarded the windows, leaving only the first floor and basement open for stores. It stayed that way until 1988, when the Lower East Side Tenement Museum became established and adopted the dilapidated building.



WENHAM MUSEUM HOUSE

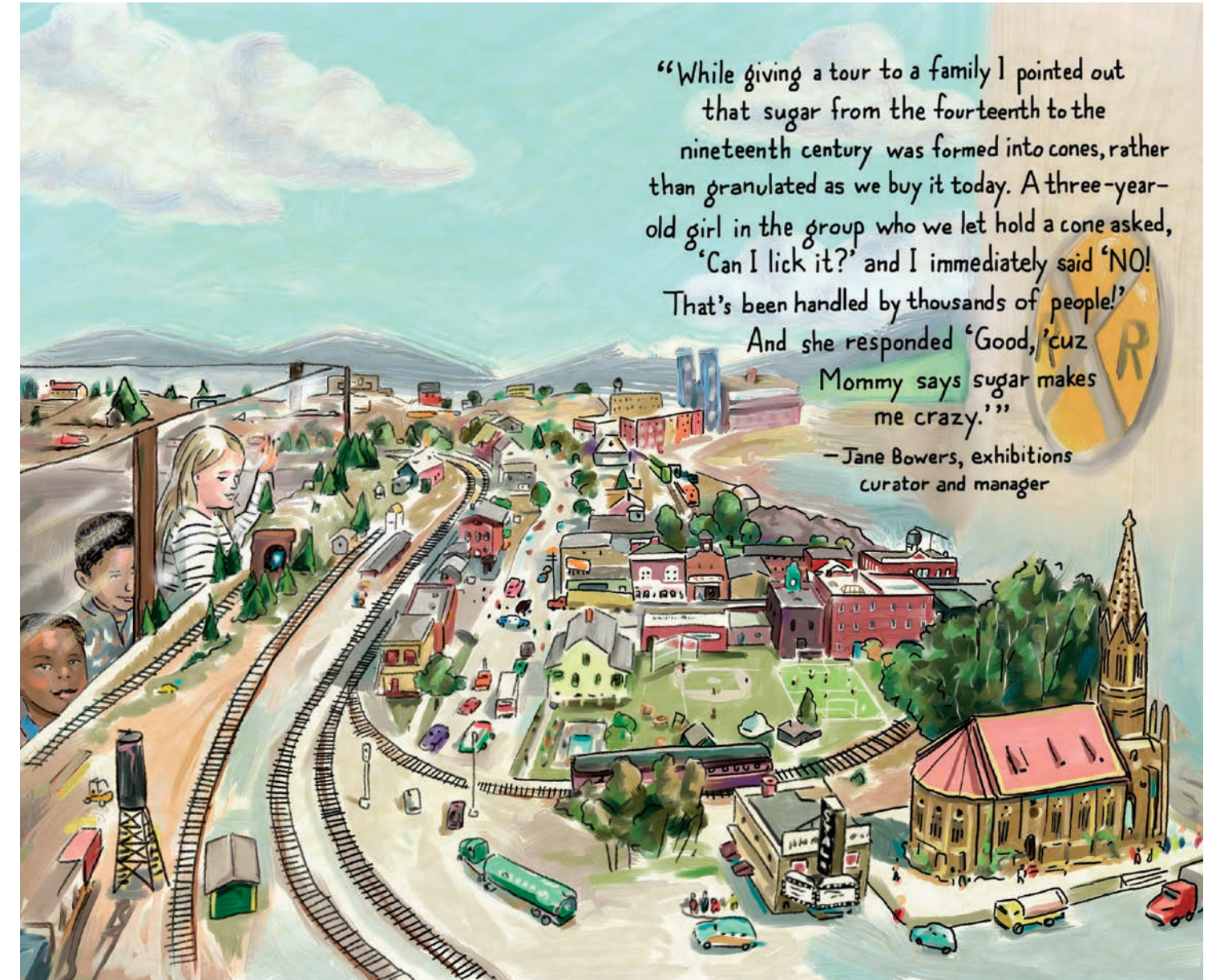
WENHAM, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1922

The Wenham Museum was one of the first American museums to be accredited by the American Association of Museums, an honor bestowed on only 5 percent of museums for ethics, collections management, education, exhibit design, financial stewardship, and strategic planning. It is unique in that it's both a children's hands-on museum and a historical museum. Most of the visitors are families with children under eight years old. The museum is in a 1662 colonial house, which includes furnishings from the era, and is included in the National Register of Historic Places. The sixty thousand objects in its collection include textiles, costumes, photographs, one thousand dolls, and over six hundred mechanical toys, with the earliest dating from 1780.

Aside from the 1662 Clafin-Richards House, which teaches what seventeenth-century New England life was like, the highlight is the over nine operating train sets of different scale.



Ginny doll, 1957



CHAPTER SIX

THE HUMAN CONDITION

MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

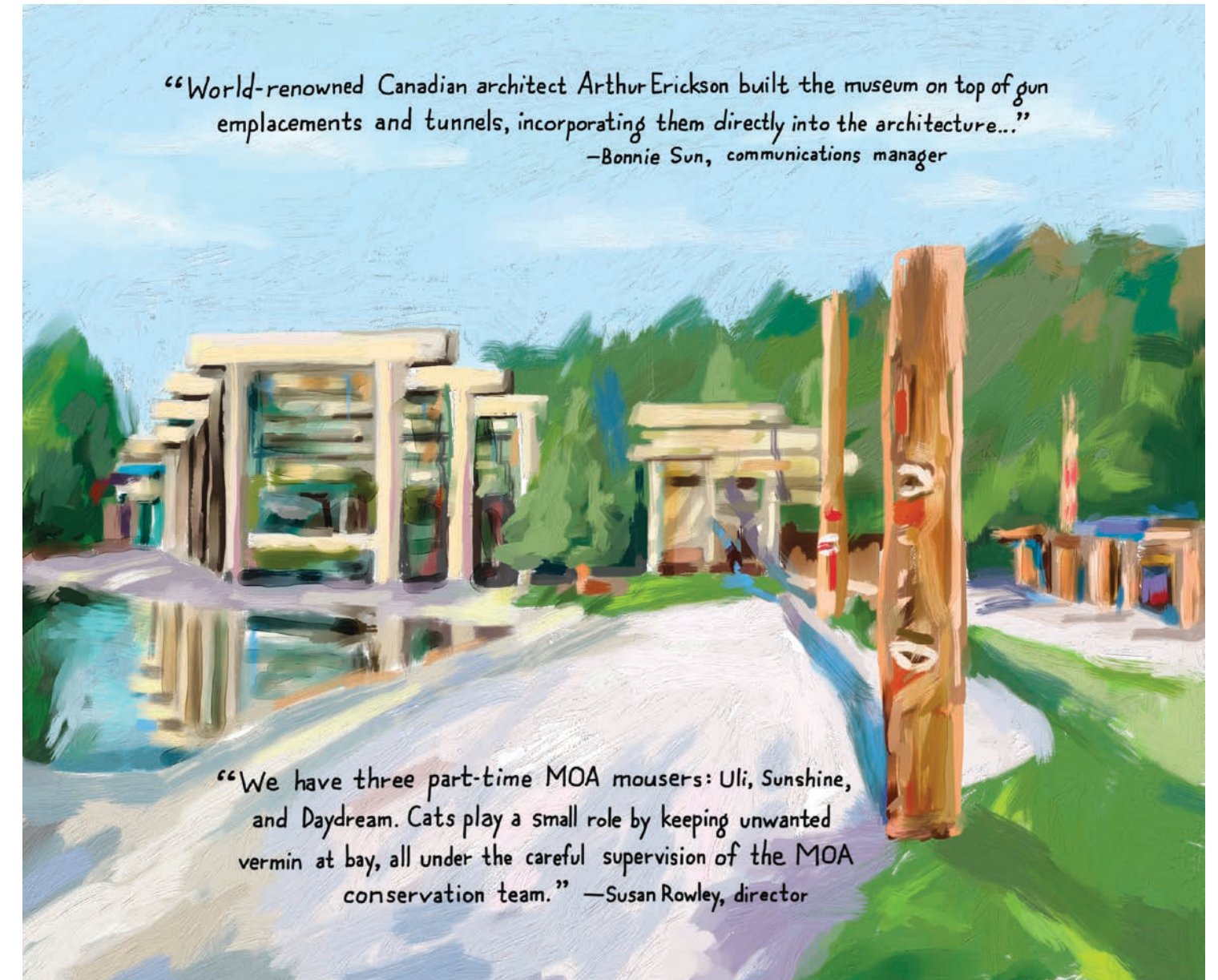
VANCOUVER, CANADA · EST. 1949

The Museum of Anthropology (MOA) is a research and teaching museum where the University of British Columbia gives courses in anthropology, archaeology, art, and museum studies. Its collection includes over five hundred thousand archaeological objects.

To safeguard their treasures from earthquakes, the museum's Great Hall was seismically upgraded in late 2021 and should be completed and the museum reopened by the time this book is released. This project was prepared years in advance, as carved poles and figures had to be moved carefully and respectfully with families' approval and consulting the artists. The museum was advised, "When you are moving or bringing a pole down, think about how you will feel if someone moved you," said Museum of Anthropology director Susan Rowley. "[Master carver, Joe David] asked that we cover the eyes, so the figure would feel more comfortable."



Sankofa figure



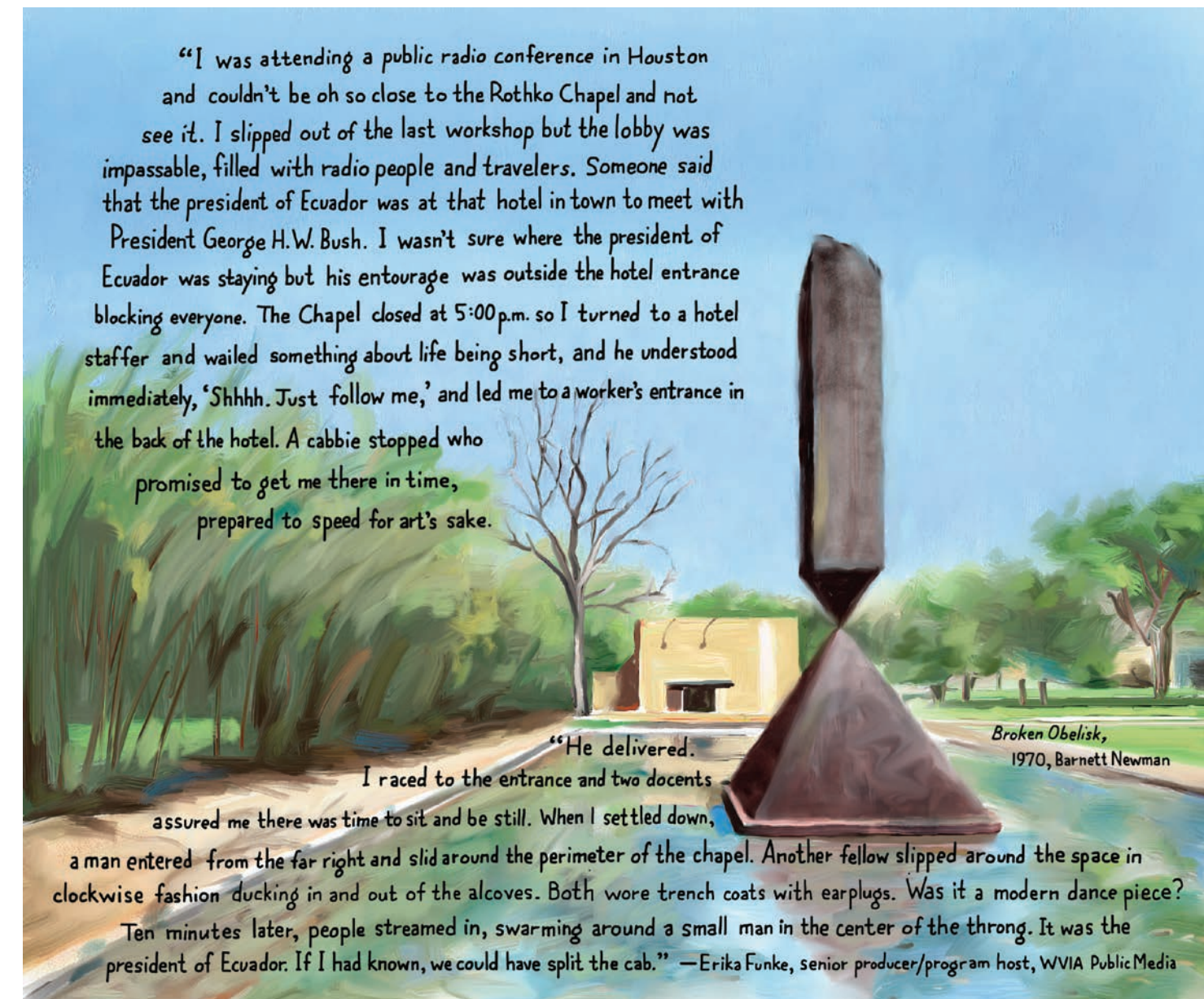
ROTHKO CHAPEL

HOUSTON, TEXAS · EST. 1971

The Rothko Chapel is a nondenominational chapel in Houston, founded by John and Dominique de Menil. The interior serves not only as a chapel but also as a major work of modern art. On its walls are fourteen black but color-hued paintings by Mark Rothko. About fifty-five thousand people visit the chapel each year.

Susan J. Barnes (author of *The Rothko Chapel: An Act of Faith*) states, "The Rothko Chapel . . . became the world's first broadly ecumenical center, a holy place open to all religions and belonging to none." In 2000, the Rothko Chapel was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1964, Rothko was commissioned by John and Dominique de Menil (also founders of the nearby Menil Collection in Houston) to create a meditative space filled with his paintings. As Rothko was given creative license, he clashed with the project's architect, Philip Johnson, over the plans for the chapel. Before it was completed, Rothko committed suicide in his New York City studio after a long struggle with depression on February 25, 1970. The musician Peter Gabriel wrote a 1992 song called "Fourteen Black Paintings" inspired by a visit to the chapel.



MUSEUM OF MOTHERHOOD

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA · EST. 2002

The Museum of Motherhood is the first of its kind—a museum and educational center devoted to mothers, mothering, and motherhood in the world, covering the art, science, and history of mothers.

“By understanding the complex nature of family and women’s place in society, we become more compassionate and inspired in everything we do,” said Martha Joy Rose, the founder. “I watched a couple of kids from the local high school try on the pregnancy vests and then waddle around groaning. Within five minutes they begged to take them off. One of the kids lamented how much they weighed. ‘Can you imagine doing that for nine months?’ the one asked. Is *that* how long they take to cook?’ the friend replied.”

The founder’s vision of the new building is that it will be in the shape of a womb with a front entrance symbolizing where motherhood all begins.



The museum’s current location

MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1993

The Museum of Tolerance (MOT) focuses on the goal of how society can live together peacefully. It challenges visitors to understand all forms of discrimination and human rights violations. The institute was recipient of the Global Peace and Tolerance Award from the Friends of the United Nations. The museum features interactive workshops and exhibits that explore the issues of bigotry and racism.

“One year I went along to chaperone my granddaughter’s eighth-grade class. Our group was led by a docent who was a Holocaust survivor. Muriel, almost ninety years old, had us sit on benches in a low-ceilinged, dimly lit room that was a facsimile of one of the Nazi gas chambers. She told us how, when the train arrived at the concentration camp, she and her mother were directed to the right but that an elderly woman pulled her into the line heading to the left. In a while they saw smoke coming from a building’s chimneys and they all knew what that meant. The women prisoners were then led into a room and told to disrobe. They all stood there trembling when water burst out of the shower and they all collapsed sobbing to the floor.”

—Gil Menendez, visitor



CHAPTER SEVEN

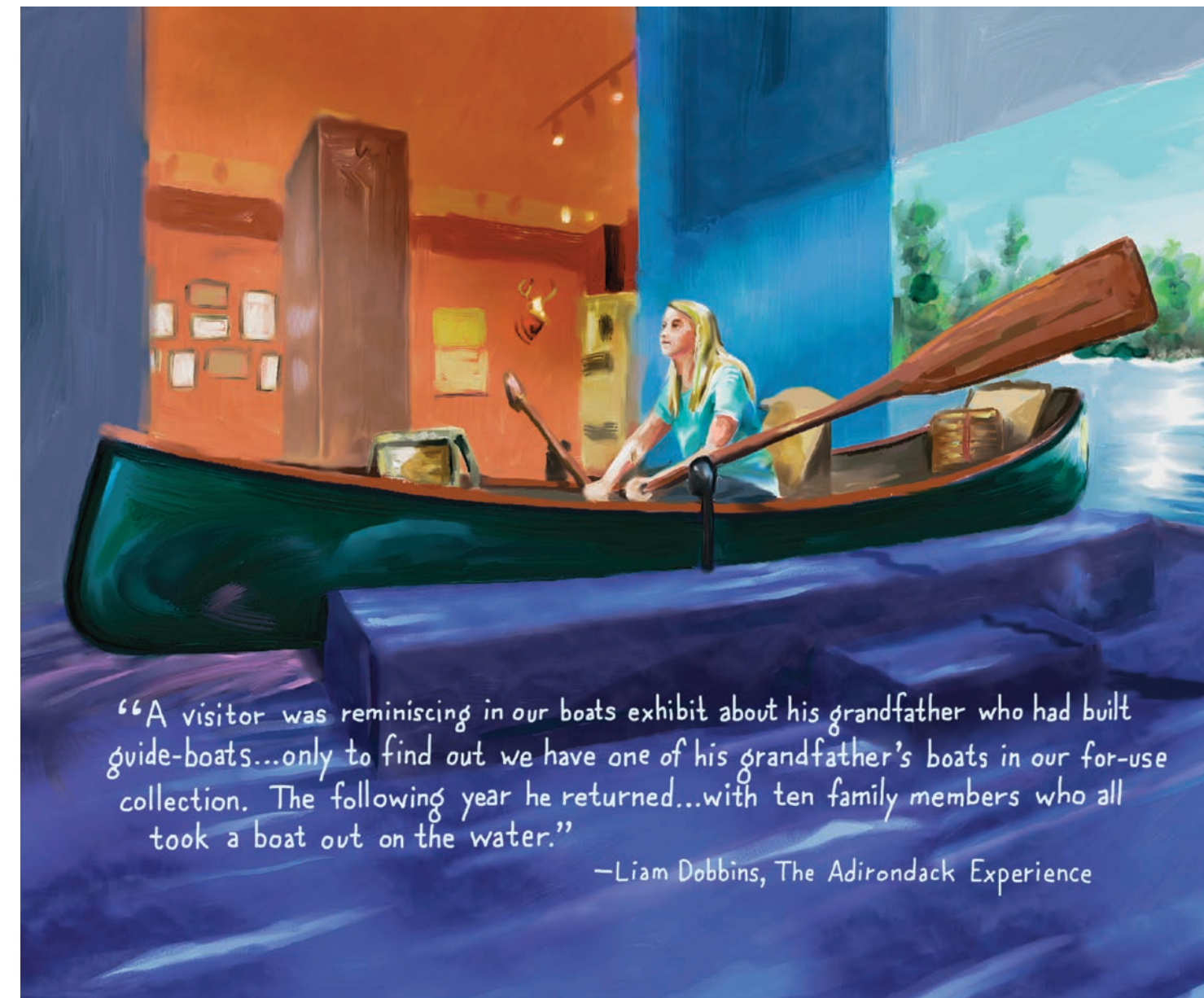
**NATURAL HISTORY &
THE GREAT OUTDOORS**

ADIRONDACK EXPERIENCE MUSEUM ON BLUE MOUNTAIN LAKE

BLUE MT. LAKE, NEW YORK · EST. 1957

The Adirondack Experience (formerly known as the Adirondack Museum) shows the history and beauty of the Adirondacks, a six-million-acre region in upstate New York that was once a premier vacation spot for the rich and famous. Interest in the Adirondacks was triggered by the art and literature of the Romantic Movement (1800–1900), which changed people’s perceptions of nature from the frightening unknown to a safe haven for spiritual awareness and rest. The museum is located on the site of an 1876 summer resort hotel, the Blue Mountain House, which stopped operating as a hotel in the late 1940s and became a National Historic Landmark in 1977. Now the museum has over sixty thousand square feet of exhibition space spread out over twenty-three buildings on 121 acres. The seeds for the museum began in 1948, with two abandoned railroad cars and a steam locomotive.

Highlights include the Sunset Cottage, one of three remote cabins ecologist Anne LaBastille built, and the largest collection of rustic Adirondack-style furniture and highest number of historic inland wooden boats in North America.



“A visitor was reminiscing in our boats exhibit about his grandfather who had built guide-boats...only to find out we have one of his grandfather’s boats in our for-use collection. The following year he returned...with ten family members who all took a boat out on the water.”

—Liam Dobbins, The Adirondack Experience

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1874

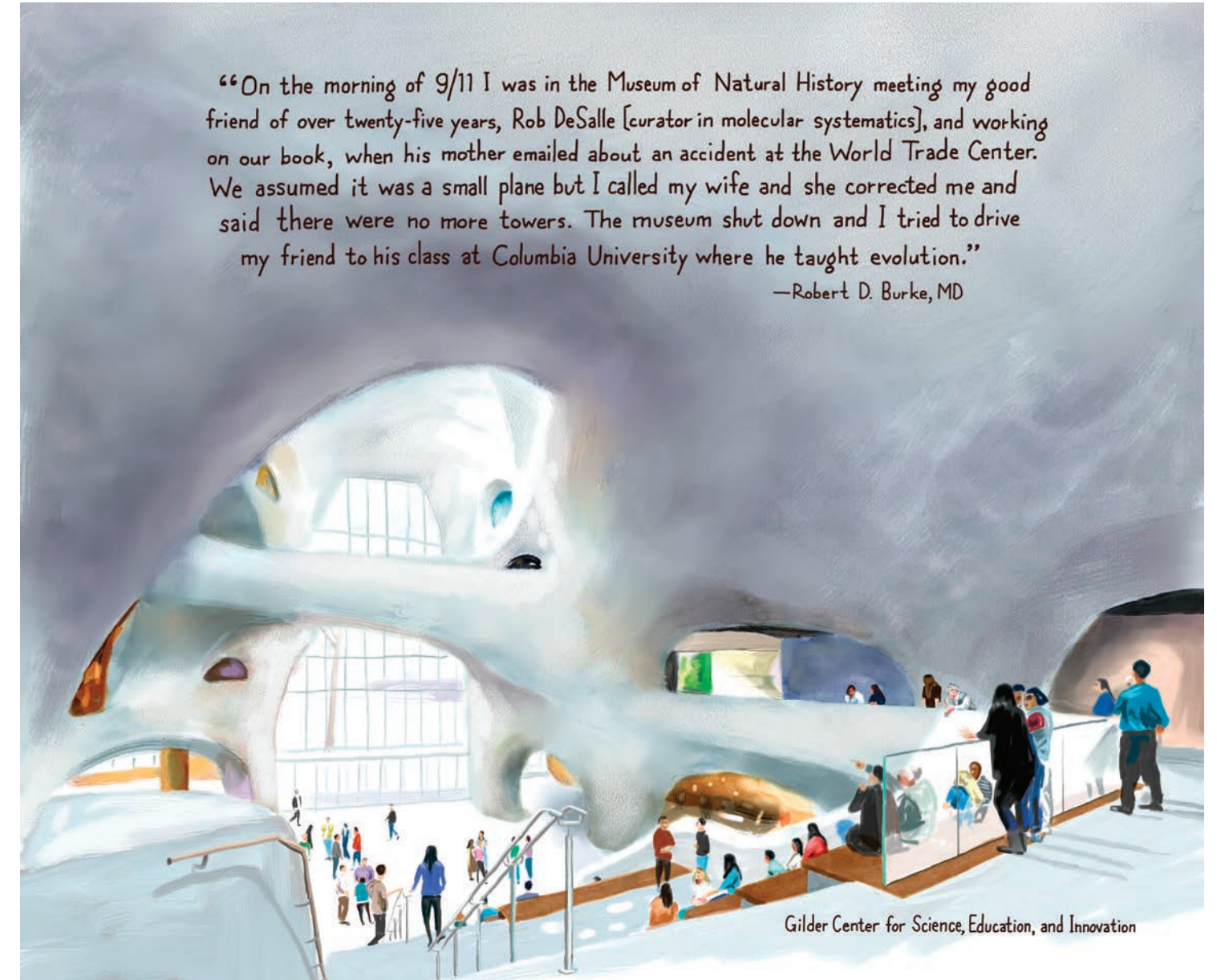
The American Museum of Natural History houses over thirty-four million examples of plants, animals, fossils, meteorites, and human remains. Only a small fraction can be displayed at any given time. The museum is more than two million square feet. The new Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation opened in 2023, a spectacular new addition designed by architect Jeanne Gang.

The main entrance consists of an arch measuring sixty feet, flanked by thirty-foot-tall columns that hold figures sculpted by James Earle Fraser of American explorers John James Audubon, Daniel Boone, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark. In 2022, the museum removed the controversial Theodore Roosevelt sculpture that presided over the entrance, as it depicted Roosevelt proudly on a horse with two shirtless men walking on either side, one Native American, the other of African descent.

Highlights include: two hundred dioramas, the famous ninety-four-foot-long model of a blue whale suspended from the ceiling, and the largest collection of fossil mammals and dinosaurs in the world. Most of the dinosaur collection is in storage in the basement and lower seven floors of the Frick Building. The top three floors contain laboratories and offices. The new Gilder Center houses an impressive butterfly vivarium featuring eighty species of butterflies.

“It’s not just a museum but a working research center with a full-time scientific staff.”

—Robert D. Burk, MD, Albert Einstein College of Physicians, American Museum of Natural History



The Hall of Ocean Life and Biology of Fishes opened on February 26, 1969. The following Sunday, more than thirty-five thousand people came to see the whale, setting a new attendance record for the museum.

The ninety-four-foot-long polyurethane plastic model whale weighs ten tons, including six hundred pounds of paint. This model replaced a seventy-six-foot-long plaster model of the 1907 blue whale. In 1974, pieces of the old whale were auctioned off. A woman who bid \$530 for a glass eye said, "Once you look in the eye of a whale, you never forget it."

William Durant Campbell was the most decorated Eagle Scout in Boy Scout history and a world leader in the scouting movement. He was also a banker and museum board member who offered to fund several dioramas if he could go to Africa to help collect the specimens himself. The museum agreed and in 1936 Campbell came back with okapis and black rhinoceroses. He would go on several expeditions, finding specimens for dioramas despite challenges like malaria, flooding, foreign government interference, and a boat sinking.

FIELD MUSEUM

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS · EST. 1910

The Field Museum of Natural History is one of the largest such museums in the world, maintaining collections of over twenty-four million specimens and objects. The museum's library contains over 275,000 books, journals, and photo archives focused on biological systematics, evolutionary biology, geology, archaeology, ethnology, and material culture for the museum's research faculty and exhibition development.

One highlight is Sue, the largest and most complete (90%) *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeleton yet discovered. Sue is estimated to be sixty-seven million years old and named after the scientist who discovered it, Sue Hendrickson. Although it is commonly referred to as female, the dinosaur's sex is unknown. The original skull is not mounted to the body thirteen feet off the ground due to its weight and so scientists may have easier access to continue studying it.



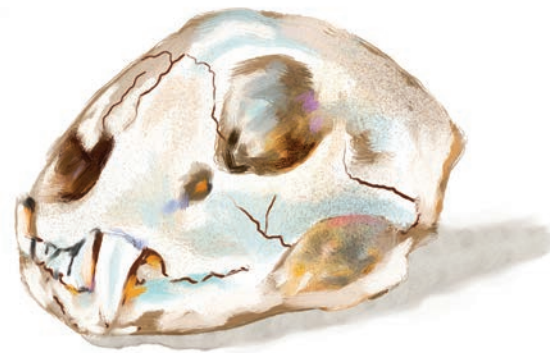
Sue, *T. Rex*



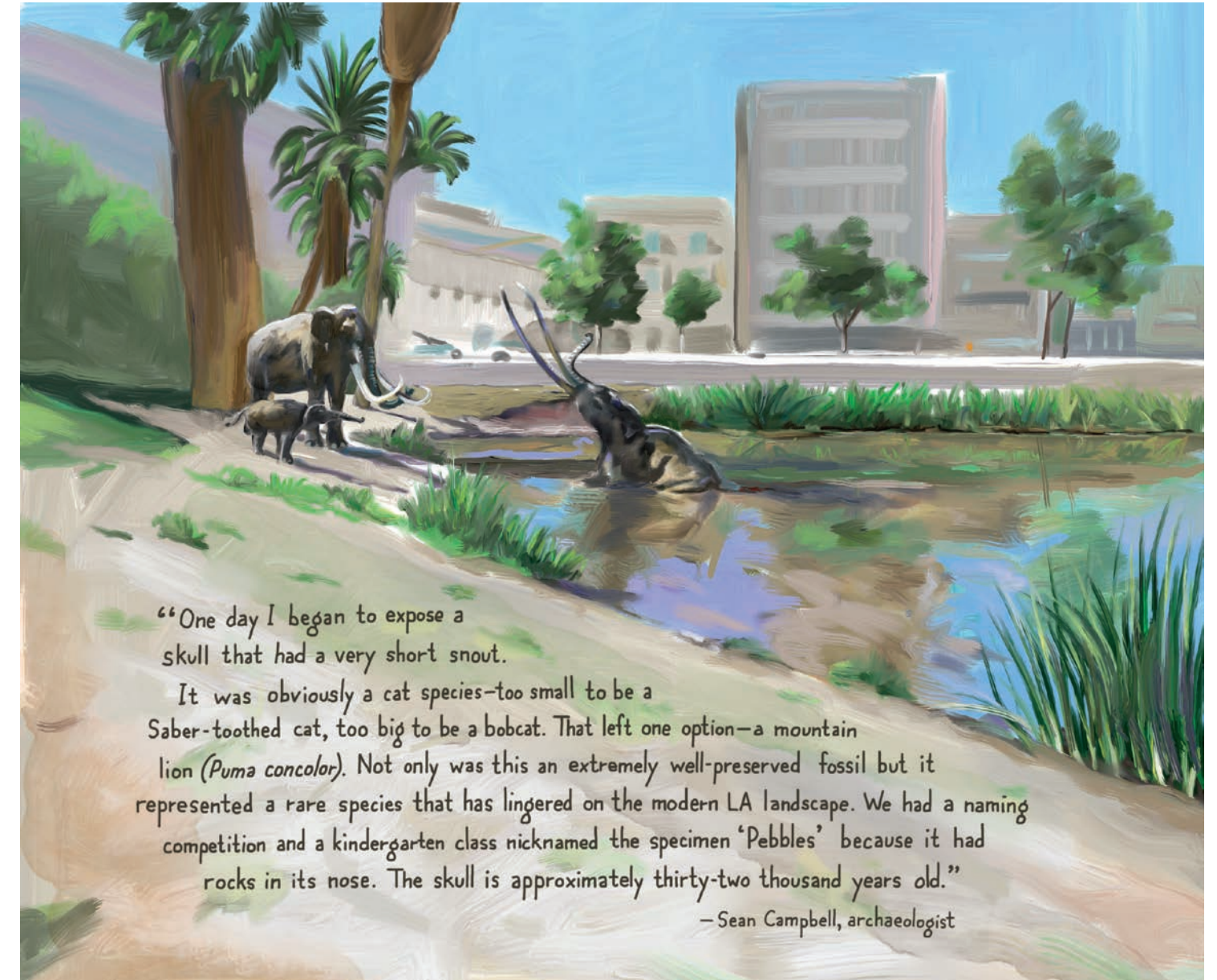
LA BREA TAR PITS

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EXCAVATION AND SITE MUSEUM BEGAN IN 1913
GEORGE C. PAGE MUSEUM OF LA BREA DISCOVERIES · EST. 1977

The Tar Pits are an active research site where natural asphalt has been seeping up to the surface for tens of thousands of years. Tar-covered bones were found for years on what was once a ranch; until 1901 they were thought to be just trapped farm animals like horses, cattle, dogs, and even camels. It was a petroleum geologist named W. W. Orcutt, a pioneer in the use of geology in the oil industry, who discovered that fossilized prehistoric animal bones were preserved in pools of tar. The oldest known material found on the site dates back thirty-eight thousand years. La Brea Tar Pits is a registered National Natural Landmark.



Puma concolor



“One day I began to expose a skull that had a very short snout.

It was obviously a cat species—too small to be a Saber-toothed cat, too big to be a bobcat. That left one option—a mountain lion (*Puma concolor*). Not only was this an extremely well-preserved fossil but it represented a rare species that has lingered on the modern LA landscape. We had a naming competition and a kindergarten class nicknamed the specimen ‘Pebbles’ because it had rocks in its nose. The skull is approximately thirty-two thousand years old.”

—Sean Campbell, archaeologist

STORM KING

NEW WINDSOR, NEW YORK · EST. 1960

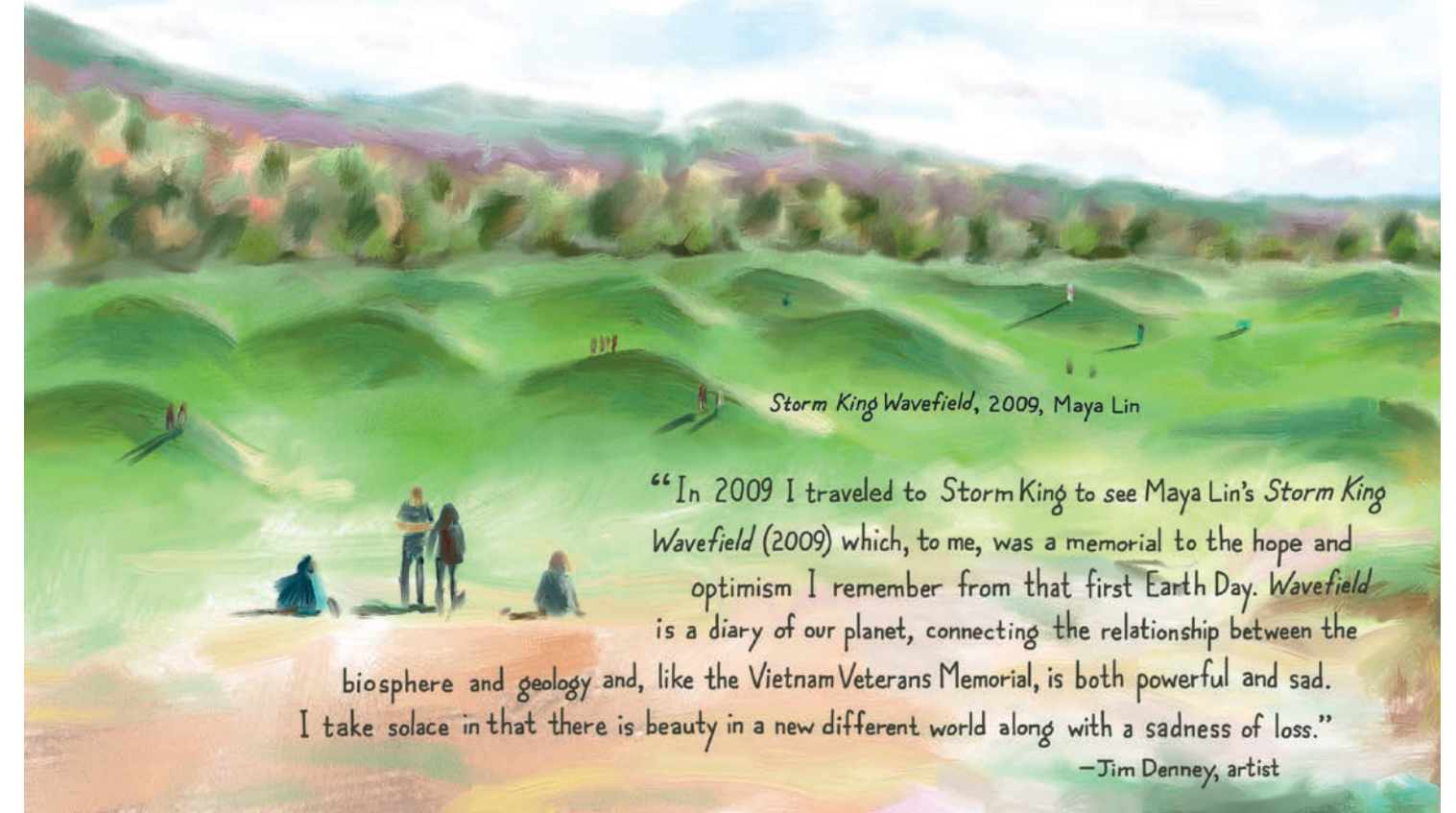
The Storm King Art Center is a nonprofit five-hundred-acre outdoor museum where visitors experience large-scale sculpture, supporting artists' most ambitious works. Storm King was originally planned as a museum for Hudson River School painting, but by 1961 its founders had become committed to modern sculpture and it's now among the world's leading sculpture parks. There are 115 sculptures on the ground including Maya Lin's *Storm King Wavefield*, 240,000 square feet of undulating hills that can take a full day to wander over.

Highlights include abstract expressionist David Smith's thirteen colorful steel, iron, and bronze sculptures and Alice Aycock's sunken house, *Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)* (1973, rebuilt for Storm King in 2010).



The Oracle of Lacuna, 2017, Heather Hart

“In my teenage years I had participated in anti-war demonstrations as well as the first Earth Day in 1970, an event which ignited a lifelong obsession with environmental concerns. In the early '80s I was very interested in the controversy surrounding Maya Lin's proposed Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and I saw it during one of my first trips to DC. I visit it every trip I have made to the capital since, and it remains for me a very powerful and emotional work.



Storm King Wavefield, 2009, Maya Lin

“In 2009 I traveled to Storm King to see Maya Lin's *Storm King Wavefield* (2009) which, to me, was a memorial to the hope and optimism I remember from that first Earth Day. *Wavefield* is a diary of our planet, connecting the relationship between the biosphere and geology and, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, is both powerful and sad. I take solace in that there is beauty in a new different world along with a sadness of loss.”

—Jim Denney, artist

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK MUSEUM

FURNACE CREEK, NEVADA · EST. 1933

Furnace Creek is the headquarters and visitor center for the Death Valley National Park—the largest national park in the Lower 48 and the hottest place on the planet—consisting of a small museum and bookstore. There is a second museum in the park that shows what life was like there in the Roaring Twenties and Depression '30s called Scotty's Castle, a historic house and museum, but it has been closed since 2015 due to flash floods. Repairs are ongoing from damage due to unprecedented rain—a year's worth of rain in five hours—and a fire in 2021, but there are plans for reopening it soon.

Death Valley is a living museum and its highlights include the desert bloom, which lasts about two weeks, and the stargazing. One employee shared it was bright enough to jog to work at night, even with no moon. Because of light pollution from nearby Las Vegas, the best spot and darkest skies are in the northwest of the park.

But perhaps for many, the biggest highlight is taking selfies. “The most popular exhibit at Furnace Creek Visitor Center is outside the museum; it's the thermometer. There is often a line of people waiting to take a selfie at the hottest temperature they've ever experienced in their lives . . . before they retreat to the air conditioning inside the visitor center,” shares Abby Wines, a management analyst at Death Valley National Park. Furnace Creek holds the record for the highest recorded air temperature on Earth at 134°F on July 10, 1913, and the record for the highest recorded natural ground surface temperature on Earth at 201°F on July 15, 1972.



“It has also been known to be cold in Death Valley—I have even seen it snow. I got chewed out by a visitor who thought it was always hot and said the snow was false advertising.”

—Pat McKnight, park historian

CHAPTER EIGHT

PLANES, TRAINS, AUTOMOBILES & SHIPS

HOLLYWOOD CAR COLLECTION

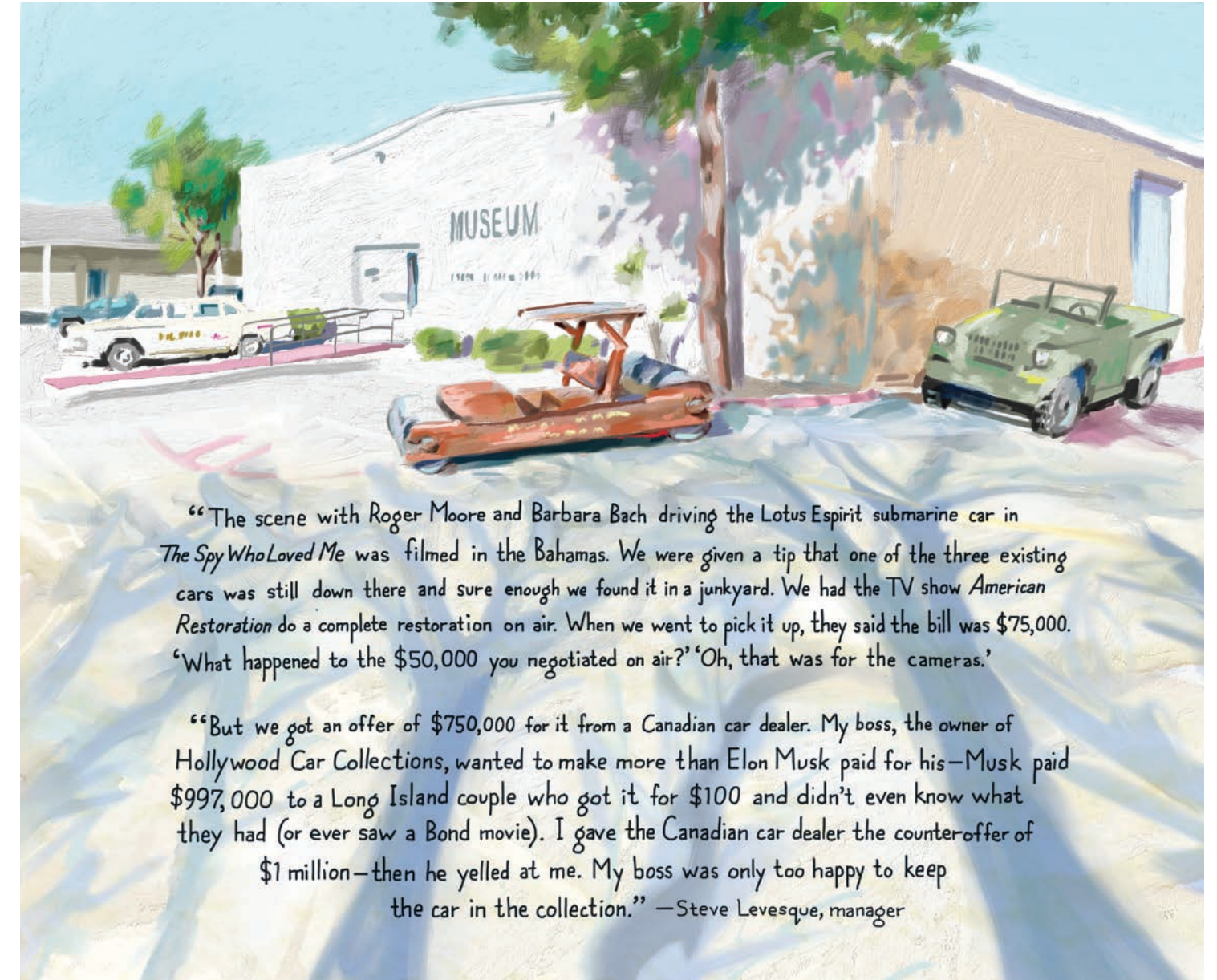
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA · EST. 2014

This Vegas stop is an impressive collection of famous vehicles from movies and TV—the best are from real estate mogul Michael Dezer’s private collection of over two thousand cars. Adjacent to Dezer’s collection is the Liberace Garage, Liberace’s car collection. Those of a certain age will remember when elaborate cars would make an entrance on a stage, like a Hollywood star, on Liberace’s televised specials.

Highlights include the General from *The Dukes of Hazzard*, Batmobiles from the Batman TV show and movies, the lifeboat from Tom Hanks’s *Captain Phillips*, and the former world’s longest limo (yes, it has a hot tub).



James Bond’s Lotus Esprit submarine car in *The Spy Who Loved Me*



“The scene with Roger Moore and Barbara Bach driving the Lotus Esprit submarine car in *The Spy Who Loved Me* was filmed in the Bahamas. We were given a tip that one of the three existing cars was still down there and sure enough we found it in a junkyard. We had the TV show *American Restoration* do a complete restoration on air. When we went to pick it up, they said the bill was \$75,000. ‘What happened to the \$50,000 you negotiated on air?’ ‘Oh, that was for the cameras.’

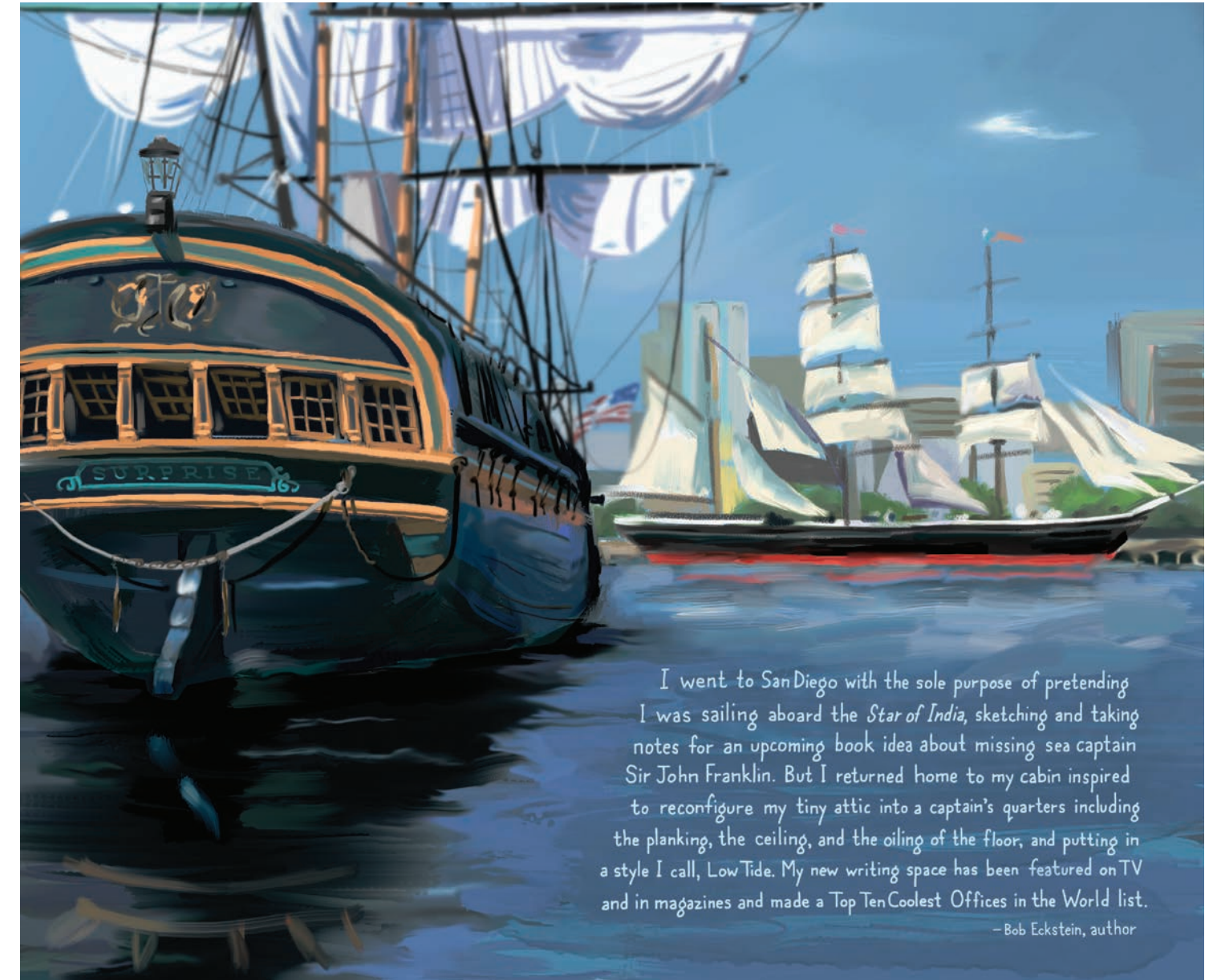
“But we got an offer of \$750,000 for it from a Canadian car dealer. My boss, the owner of Hollywood Car Collections, wanted to make more than Elon Musk paid for his—Musk paid \$997,000 to a Long Island couple who got it for \$100 and didn’t even know what they had (or ever saw a Bond movie). I gave the Canadian car dealer the counter-offer of \$1 million—then he yelled at me. My boss was only too happy to keep the car in the collection.” —Steve Levesque, manager

MARITIME MUSEUM OF SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1927

The Maritime Museum of San Diego hosts one of the world's finest collections of historic ships, which visitors can board, walk around on, and take guided tours of. The museum has interactive exhibits and participates in award-winning educational outreach programs.

Highlights include the oldest active sailing ship in the world (1863), *Star of India*; the star frigate featured in the film *Master and Commander*; and the USS *Dolphin*, the US Navy submarine with the record for the deepest dive.



I went to San Diego with the sole purpose of pretending I was sailing aboard the *Star of India*, sketching and taking notes for an upcoming book idea about missing sea captain Sir John Franklin. But I returned home to my cabin inspired to reconfigure my tiny attic into a captain's quarters including the planking, the ceiling, and the oiling of the floor, and putting in a style I call, Low Tide. My new writing space has been featured on TV and in magazines and made a Top Ten Coolest Offices in the World list.

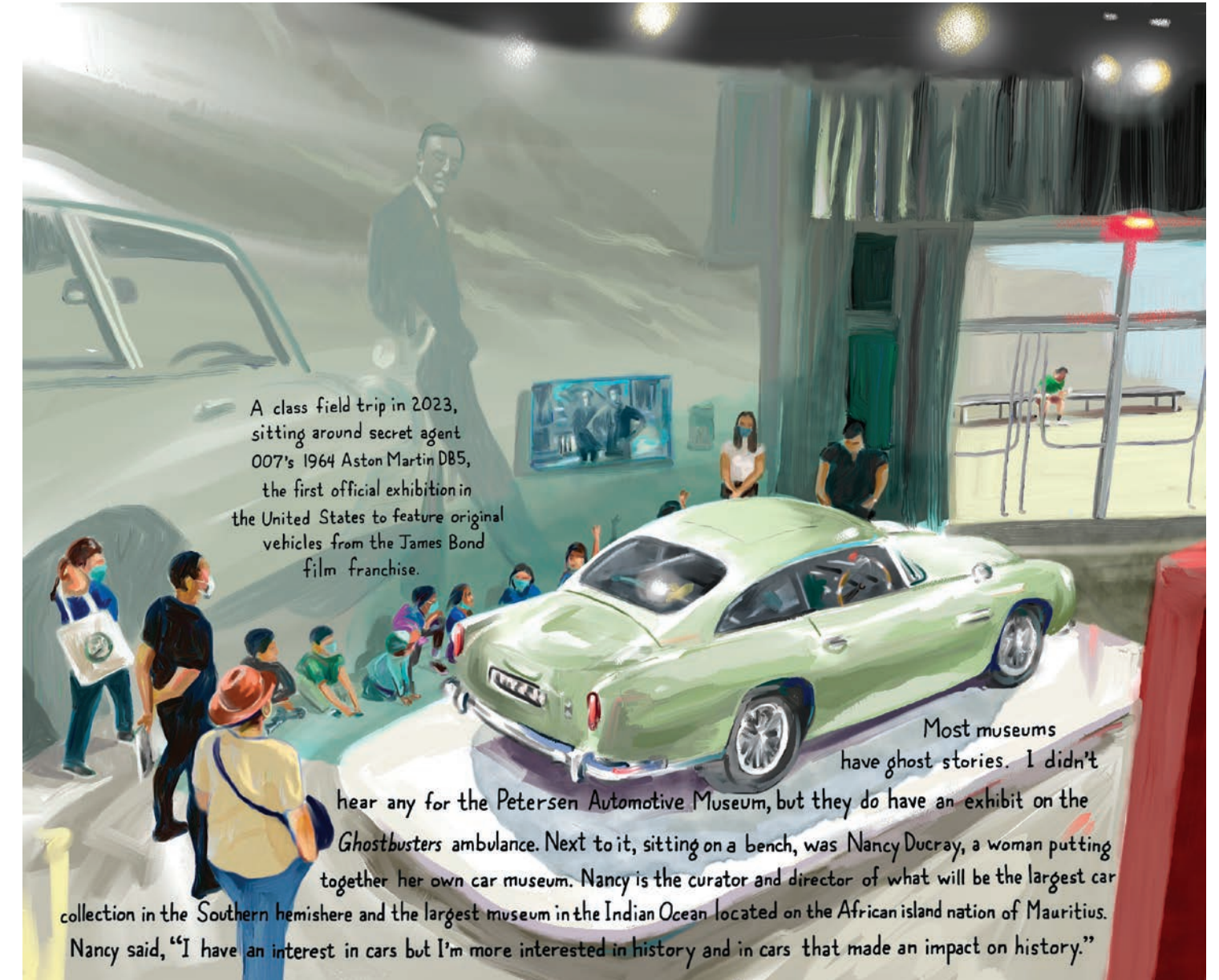
— Bob Eckstein, author

PETERSEN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1994

One of the world's largest automotive museums, the Petersen Automotive Museum is a nonprofit organization specializing in automobile history. They conduct educational programs as well as a program to support and promote women-led businesses in the automotive sector, providing them with hands-on mentorship.

Highlights include a rare 1939 Porsche 64, one of only two in existence; an exhibit on the history of the Japanese automotive industry; and their collection of sports cars of the future.



A class field trip in 2023, sitting around secret agent 007's 1964 Aston Martin DB5, the first official exhibition in the United States to feature original vehicles from the James Bond film franchise.

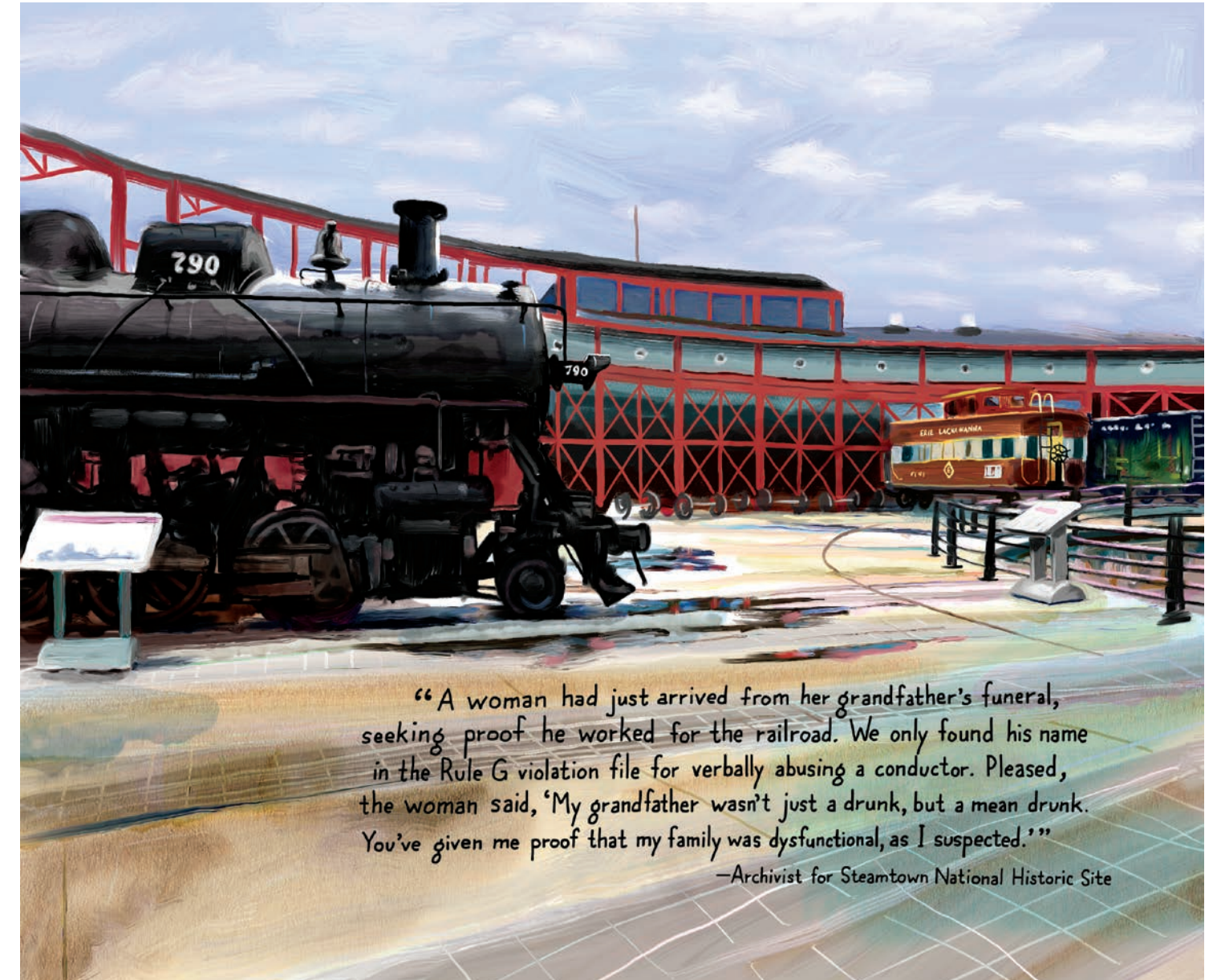
Most museums have ghost stories. I didn't hear any for the Petersen Automotive Museum, but they do have an exhibit on the *Ghostbusters* ambulance. Next to it, sitting on a bench, was Nancy DuCray, a woman putting together her own car museum. Nancy is the curator and director of what will be the largest car collection in the Southern hemisphere and the largest museum in the Indian Ocean located on the African island nation of Mauritius. Nancy said, "I have an interest in cars but I'm more interested in history and in cars that made an impact on history."

STEAMTOWN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA · EST. 1986

Located in the heart of Scranton, Steamtown National Historic Site is a national park but also a modern interactive museum that preserves and interprets the history of steam railroading in America and demonstrates how important railroading was to this country. The historic railroad yard includes a working turntable, locomotive preservation shop, and extensive collection of historic locomotives. Next door is the Electric City Trolley Museum, covering the history of transportation in Scranton.

Highlights include the enormous steam engines on display and the size of the collection and site.



“A woman had just arrived from her grandfather’s funeral, seeking proof he worked for the railroad. We only found his name in the Rule G violation file for verbally abusing a conductor. Pleased, the woman said, ‘My grandfather wasn’t just a drunk, but a mean drunk. You’ve given me proof that my family was dysfunctional, as I suspected.’”

—Archivist for Steamtown National Historic Site

ART CAR WORLD

DOUGLAS, ARIZONA · OPEN 2021

This is one of the newest museums in this book, a destination dedicated to the celebration and preservation of car art, but currently expanding its scope of what it will include. The museum will be bilingual and conduct international festivities in the future.

Founder Harrod Bank, who is also a documentary filmmaker and artist, says, “Art Car World celebrates the art car which is a decorated vehicle. [But] it could be almost anything as long as it’s artistically embellished... a world of art making including a performance center and an outdoor pavilion for music, barbecue, dance, and celebrating life. I’m someone who is all about identity. My mom was an erotic ceramist and my father was documentary filmmaker Les Blank. I was inspired by Akira Kurosawa’s *Ikiru* [a 1952 movie about a man who learns he has only one year to live, changes his ways, and decides to do something more meaningful with his last six months by building a playground]. This movie I saw at age fifteen changed my life. I want to build my playground, a park to park yourself and your car. A huge eighty-six-foot monument made with the arches from the 1994 Atlanta Olympics called the *Eye of God*... at the base shrines to meditate and EV charging stations. Hanging from the eye of God (a large wagon wheel) is a black 1949 Hudson, like a Moroccan light.”

A highlight is the Camera Van, a car covered in cameras, which spells SMILE on the roof.

The California Fantasy Van, 10,400 pounds of brass, which got eight miles to the gallon, was made by the late Ernie Steingold, a bodybuilder. Every time it hit a pothole it would set off the cowbells and chimes but nothing ever fell off.

“[The Camera Van] was inspired by an actual dream that I covered my car with cameras and took pictures of people with the cameras on the van and they didn’t realize that they worked so they acted naturally, and it got great candid shots.”

—Harrod Bank, founder



Mondrian Mobile, 2007, Emily Duffy

INTREPID SEA, AIR & SPACE MUSEUM

NEW YORK, NEW YORK · EST. 1982

The Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum is docked along the Hudson River and includes a maritime history museum, a collection of ships, thirty aircraft displayed on the flight deck or inside the hangar, the cruise missile submarine USS *Growler*, and the space shuttle *Enterprise*.

Intrepid served as temporary headquarters for the FBI during the investigation of 9/11 because the FBI’s New York Field Office was located at the World Trade Center. Five hundred agents worked around the clock aboard the *Intrepid*, fielding a half million calls. A pair of twelve-foot-long pieces of steel recovered from the World Trade Center point skyward on the southwest corner of the *Intrepid*’s pier, representing how the towers once stood.

Highlights include a reproduction of a World War I biplane, a spy plane from the Cold War, the Avenger torpedo bomber, a prototype space shuttle orbiter, and a couple of Concordes...all set with the New York City skyline behind them.

“I went to the Navy School of Music and performed on the *Intrepid*. Later I moved to California and became a car salesman for Dodge. One day I told this customer the coincidence that one of the Dodge models I was trying to sell her was called the *Intrepid* where I was once stationed. She then told me the *Intrepid* was a museum in New York City. I had no idea it became a museum!”

—Alan Porter, Seaman, Musician Striker,
(Naval Rating)



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CHAPTER NINE

MISCELLANY

MUSEUM OF JURASSIC TECHNOLOGY

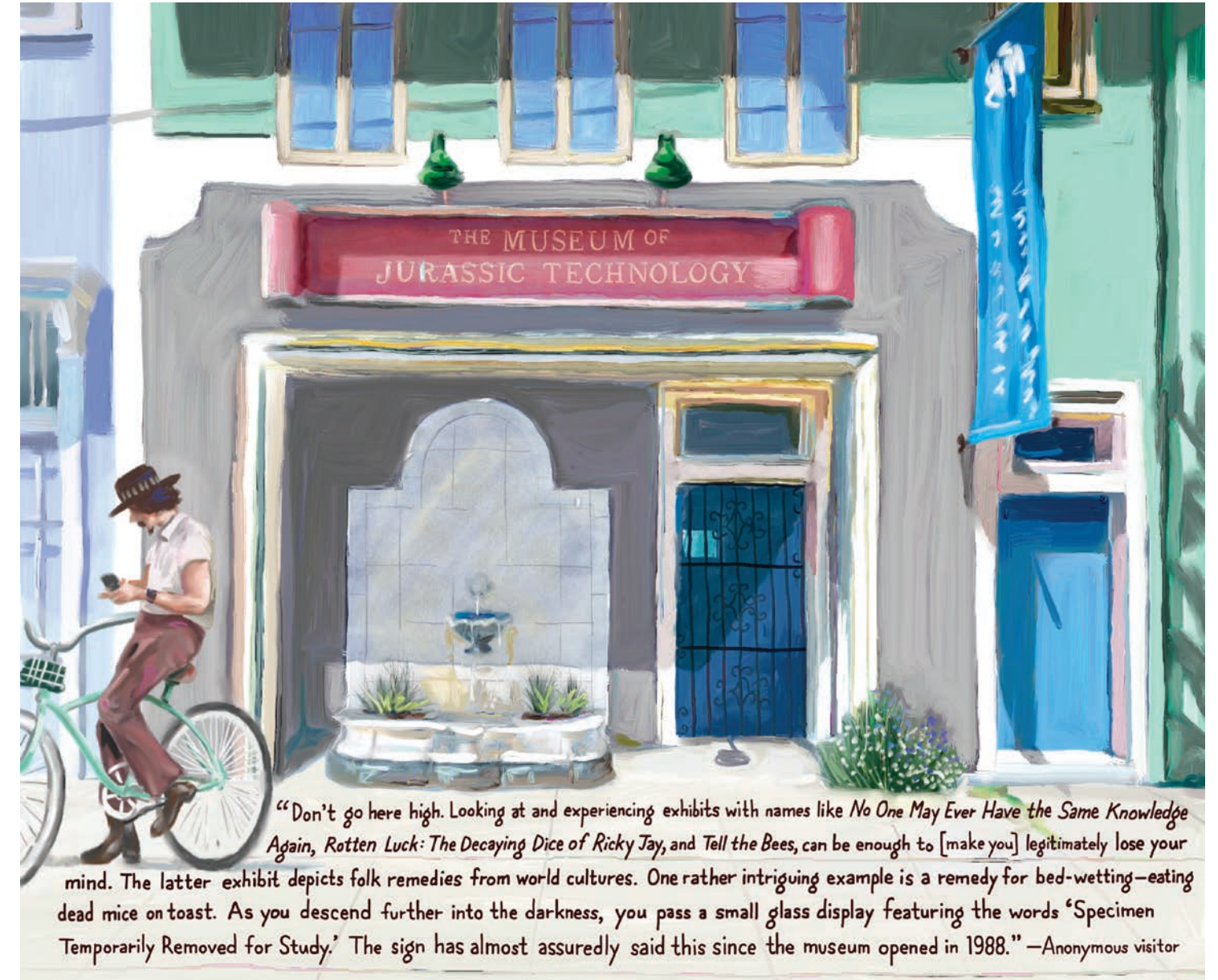
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA · EST. 1988

No museum is more committed to defying categorization or turning its back on any exposure...instead, every visitor is to define for themselves what they are experiencing. The *New York Times* critic Edward Rothstein described it as a “museum about museums.” *Smithsonian* magazine called it “a witty, self-conscious homage to private museums of yore.” It is truly one of the most compelling museums I frequented.

The museum is the subject of the book *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology* by Lawrence Weschler (1995), which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction and *Slate* ranked it one of the fifty best nonfiction works of the past quarter-century.



Magnetic Hydromancy, seventeenth-century, Athanasius Kircher



“Don’t go here high. Looking at and experiencing exhibits with names like *No One May Ever Have the Same Knowledge Again*, *Rotten Luck: The Decaying Dice of Ricky Jay*, and *Tell the Bees*, can be enough to [make you] legitimately lose your mind. The latter exhibit depicts folk remedies from world cultures. One rather intriguing example is a remedy for bed-wetting—eating dead mice on toast. As you descend further into the darkness, you pass a small glass display featuring the words “Specimen Temporarily Removed for Study.” The sign has almost assuredly said this since the museum opened in 1988.” —Anonymous visitor

NATIONAL LIGHTHOUSE MUSEUM

STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK · EST. 2014

The neighborhood of St. George, Staten Island, New York, was selected for the National Lighthouse Museum and Educational Resource Center over other locations in 1998. It was a former 1912 foundry building and the United States Lighthouse Service General Depot.

One of the museum's highlight is Patches, the museum guide who explains the rich history of lighthouses from the first lighthouse dated 280 BCE in the harbor of Alexandria, Egypt, to the first electric lighthouse in 1860 (the Statue of Liberty), to present-day lighthouses like the largest Fresnel lens in the world located in Hawaii (which can be seen from twenty-seven miles out—no more due to the curvature of the Earth). Another highlight is their collection of hundreds of miniature model lighthouses illustrating the beautiful diversity of styles and architecture of lighthouses.



In 2022 the museum had a visit from the world's leading supporter of lighthouses, Princess Anne, which had been delayed first by COVID-19 and then the death of her mom, the Queen of England. Princess Anne came by Staten Island Ferry to launch a campaign to expand the museum to an adjacent \$35 million facility. She was presented with a miniature replica of her parents' Needles Lighthouse, which is located off the Isle of Wight in the English Channel.

Staten Island Rear Range Lighthouse,
1910, taken over by the
National Lighthouse
Museum in 2019



NOAH'S ARK ENCOUNTER

WILLIAMSTOWN, KENTUCKY · EST. 2016

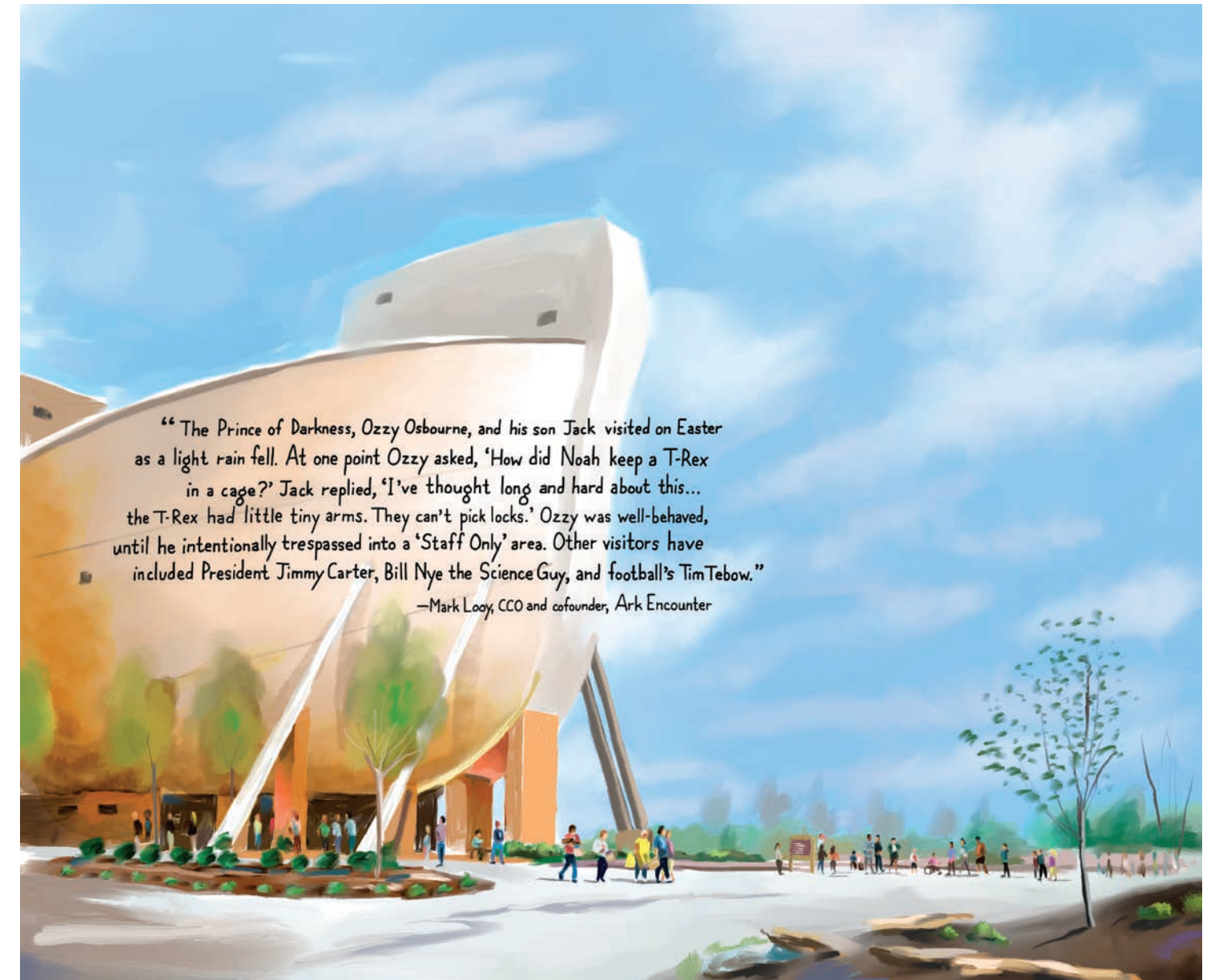
Ark Encounter is a theme park operated by a group called Young Earth Creationism (YEC), which includes both Jews and Christians (that follow the Book of Genesis). While there is a museum component to it, the centerpiece is a 510-foot-long replica of Noah's Ark based on the story of the Genesis flood in the Bible.

There are no live animals inside but a petting zoo on the grounds. The three levels of the exhibit speculate as to what may have happened on such an ark using virtual-reality technology. Throughout there are artifacts on loan from the Green Collection in the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC.

One highlight will certainly be the new "baptismal" log flume ride being built, which is described as "the water rapids of sin before experiencing a 3-story drop into the water so they can be raised to walk in newness of life." Of course, the best part is having an ark ready to go with the current weather being what it is and all. This time around there would be Wi-Fi.



Baptismal log flume



SPAM MUSEUM

COLUMBUS, OHIO · EST. 1991

Here is a museum dedicated solely to a brand of precooked meat. This free museum tells the history of the Hormel company, the originator of Spam, and its mark on the world. The 16,500-square-foot space includes a theater, historical displays, gift shop, and Spam-themed family activities and games.

Highlights include a re-creation of the set of *Monty Python's* famous "Spam" sketch with an endless loop from the show originally performed by Viking characters. The other highlight is that free "spamples" of spam are given out by volunteer guides, who are known as the Spambassadors.



Monty Python spam sketch set display

"A gentleman emailed us to ask how we suggest cutting Spam, because he planned to serve Spamples at his upcoming wedding. He revealed that just a month before, he and his girlfriend had visited the Spam Museum and he had proposed to her here. I discovered that both he and his girlfriend had lost their spouses within the last four years. The couples had been lifelong friends, knowing each other for over fifty years. Now eighty-two and eighty-seven years old, they knew they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together. As a gift we sent them all the Spam they needed to serve at their wedding."

—Chris Anderson, Hormel Foods corporate communications



"Because I entered the museum wearing a 'DON'T KNOCK IT 'TIL YOU FRY IT' T-shirt, I was gifted a can of Spam. Which I gave to a food bank." —John Kascht, artist

For the longest time I couldn't reach the museum only to learn that my emails were going into their spam folder.

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