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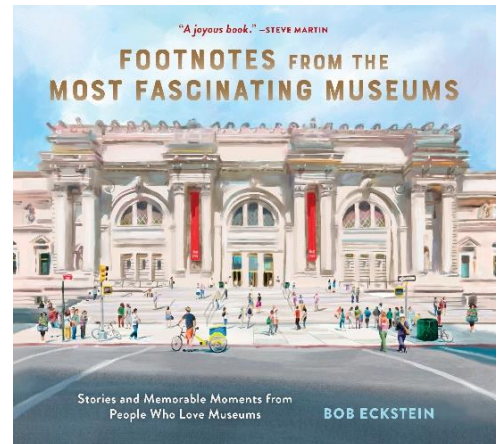
**“A joyous book.” –Steve Martin**

*A love letter to museums and museum-goers, filled with lush and whimsical illustrations paired with stories and anecdotes from curators, museum workers, museum visitors, and more.*

# Footnotes from the Most Fascinating Museums

Stories and Memorable Moments from People Who Love Museums

By **Bob Eckstein**



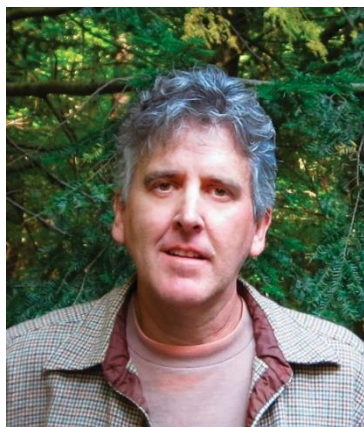
PA Press | 9781797224398 | \$27.50 | 176 p. | Travel

[Full Book PDF](#) | [Cover Image](#)

**On Sale: May 14, 2024**

We already know and love Bob Eckstein’s *New York Times* bestselling [Footnotes from The World’s Greatest Bookstores](#). Now, ***Footnotes from the Most Fascinating Museums*** looks at the most beloved museums in North America. More than 75 museums are featured here (full list below) including those specializing in art, natural history, academia, science, and more. Profiles from curators and museum workers appear alongside 155 original pieces of whimsical artwork that illustrate a story about the museum or showcase a particular work of art in its collection. This is a thought-provoking, inspiring reminder of why we go to museums and in the first place why we love them so much.

Artists, art lovers, students, travelers, and adventurers of all ages will delight in this highly giftable book.



**BOB ECKSTEIN** (he/him) is an award-winning illustrator, writer, and cartoonist for the *New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Reader's Digest*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *Atlas Obscura*, and many others. His *Footnotes from the World's Greatest Bookstores* was a *New York Times* bestseller and made many ‘Best Of’ 2016 lists and continues to be an ‘Amazon Most Wished for Title’ years later. He is also the author of *The History of the Snowman*, *The Illustrated History of the Snowman*, and *The Complete Book of Cat Names (That Your Cat Won't Answer to Anyway)*. He was editor for *The Ultimate Cartoon Book of Book Cartoons* series and is contributing editor for *Writer's Digest*. He lives in New York City.

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## An Interview with Bob Eckstein

**Q. *Can you tell us about yourself?*** I'm a true New Yorker. I was born in the Bronx, near Yankee Stadium, and my dad drove a cab and a city bus. I went to college in Brooklyn, while living in Queens and moved to Manhattan where I worked first for *The Village Voice*, then *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. I'm also a *New Yorker* cartoonist.

**Q. *Do you have any tips on how to win the New Yorker cartoon caption contest?*** That's the first question I always get at book events or talks. I don't have any advice except to try to make the captions as short as possible.

**Q. *Your new book is a collection of your paintings...*** And stories. I collected hundreds of stories from people who shared a memorable moment in a museum, and I chose my favorites.

**Q. *Why did you write Footnotes from the Most Fascinating Museums?*** I wanted to spend time making a book that I would really enjoy. I love art. I love learning. But I didn't always love museums... I kicked and screamed while being dragged through Washington D.C. as a kid, but somewhere along the line I gained a greater appreciation.

I read about how many museums suffered during the pandemic, and I thought a book that celebrates them would raise awareness. Selfishly, it's also a dream to visit and illustrate North America's great museums.

**Q. *What was your favorite museum?*** I'd give a different answer every day of the week. I live next door to the tranquil Cloisters, the old Medieval castle. But there is nothing like bringing a kid for their first time to the American Museum of Natural History. I am planning to revisit The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art as soon as my schedule allows. I was blown away by their collections. But it's impossible to pick one as they are all always changing. Museums are more organic than people realize.

**Q. *What was the most challenging part of writing this book?*** There are so many wonderful museums, and I felt bad that I couldn't include them all. As it was, I created over 175 illustrations within a year. There came a point where I had to stop and get some rest.

**Q. *So how did you choose which museums made it into the book?*** Massachusetts alone has over 800 museums, but I tried to spread the wealth, geographically, and to vary the museums by size and subject matter. I wanted to appeal to the largest audience and give love to all sorts of places.

**Q. *What art inspired you?*** I saw more artwork in one year than most folks have seen in a lifetime. I'd come home very inspired. Despite what I saw, my work always looked like my work. I was trying to get as loose as possible, get very Henri Matisse or at least get close to some great American illustrators like Robert Weaver and Robert Cunningham, but my work looks like my work, for better or worse.

**Q. *What can readers hope to learn from this book?*** Where to visit this summer. I hope the book gets used as a travel bucket list. Also, that museums are not stuffy, but rather places for events and all avenues of culture and happenings.

**Q. *What is it about museums that people love?*** They're giant selfies. People love selfies, and that's what they are. Since prehistoric times, man has had two primal instincts: depicting ourselves through art and 'Show & Tell.'

**MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON**

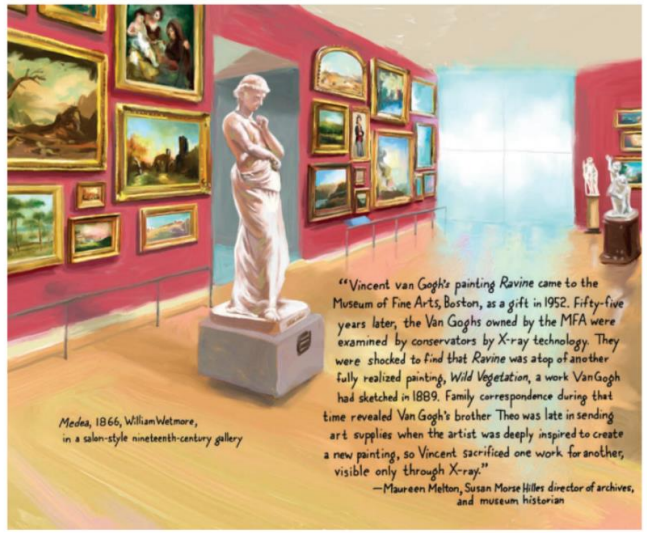
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS · EST. 1870

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 *Los Meninos* (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.

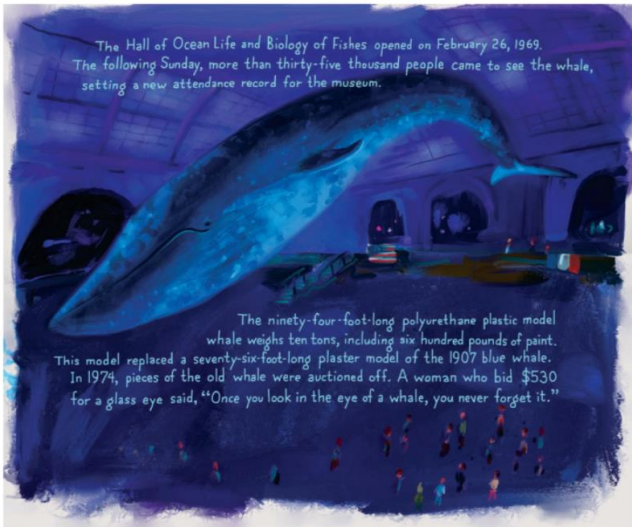


98 Ravine, 1889, Vincent van Gogh



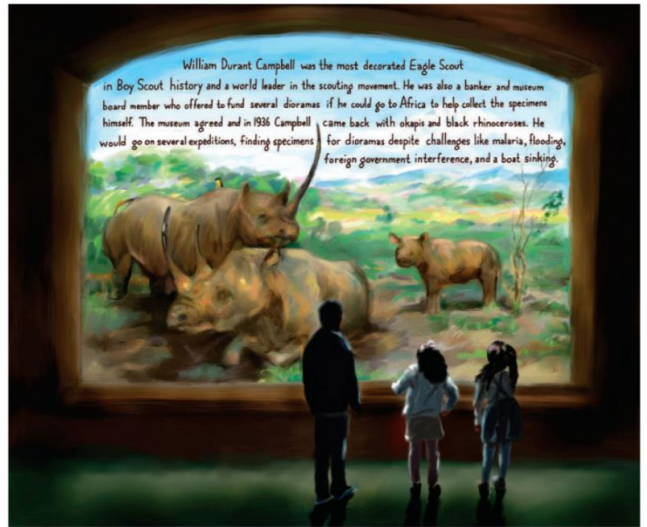
*Medea*, 1866, William Wetmore, in a salon-style nineteenth-century gallery

"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 Hillier director of archives, and museum historian



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.

**INTERNATIONAL TENNIS HALL OF FAME**

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND · EST. 1954

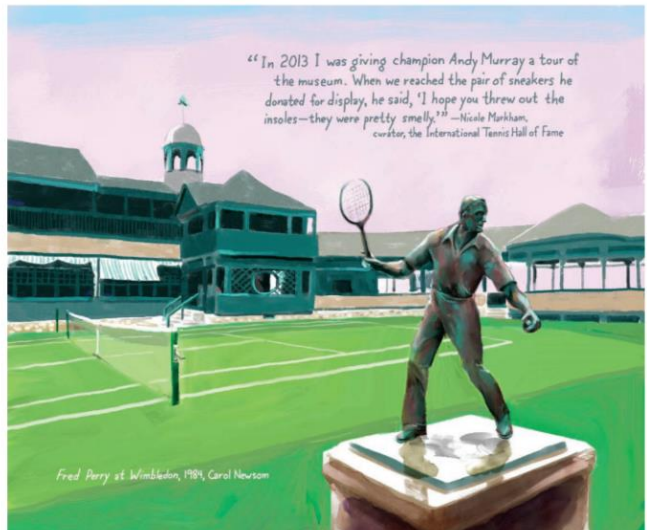
The International Tennis Hall of Fame was the site of the first United States National Lawn Tennis Championships in 1881 (which grew into the US Open in Flushing, New York). The grounds include twenty tennis courts, including thirteen grass courts. Along with the buildings, they make up the most regal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



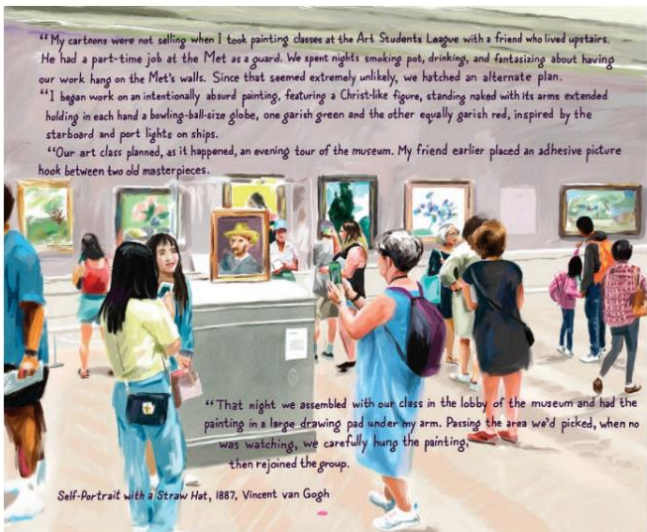
Bowed racquets for Royal Court Tennis

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"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 Markan, curator, the International Tennis Hall of Fame

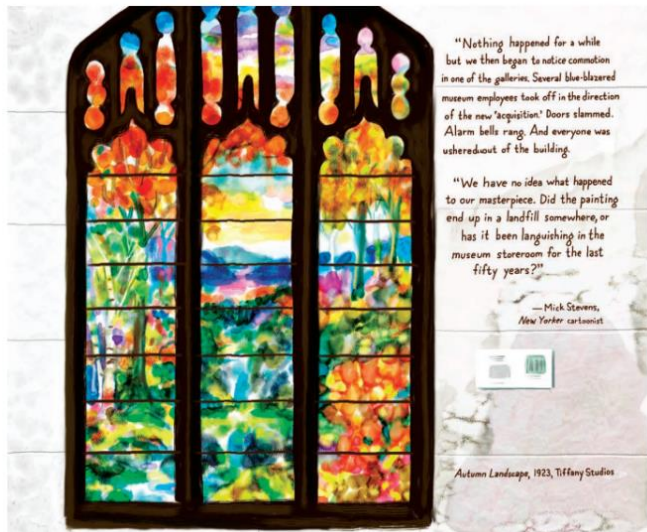
*Fred Perry at Wimbledon*, 1984, Carol Newton



"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 one 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

## Full List of Museums

### Academia and Science

- Aftel Archive of Curious Scents (Berkeley, CA)
- Explorers Club (New York, NY)
- Greenfield Village (Dearborn, MI)
- Mütter Museum (Philadelphia, PA)

### Culture

- Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn, NY)
- Chapultepec Castle (Mexico City, Mexico)
- International Tennis Hall of Fame (Newport, RI)
- Met Cloisters (New York, NY)
- Mob Museum (Las Vegas, NV)
- National Comedy Center (Jamestown, NY)
- National Museum of African American History and Culture (Washington, DC)
- Neon Museum (Las Vegas, NV)
- Shelburne Museum (Shelburne, VT)
- Academy Museum of Motion Pictures (Los Angeles, CA)

### Encyclopedic

- Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago, IL)
- Columbus Museum of Art (Columbus, OH)
- Getty Center (Los Angeles, CA)
- Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY)
- National Museum of Anthropology (Mexico City, Mexico)
- Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, MA)
- Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia, PA)
- Smithsonian Institution (Washington, DC)
- Soumaya Museum (Mexico City, Mexico)
- Baltimore Museum of Art (Baltimore, MD)
- Detroit Institute of Arts (Detroit, MI)
- National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC)
- Seattle Art Museum (Seattle, WA)

### Fine Arts

- American Visionary Art Museum (Baltimore, MD)
- Bainbridge Island Museum (Bainbridge Island, WA)
- The Broad (Los Angeles, CA)
- Clark Art Institute (Williamstown, MA)
- Frick Collection (New York, NY)
- LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Los Angeles, CA)
- Maryhill Museum of Art (Goldendale, WA)
- MASS MoCA (North Adams, MA)
- MoMA (New York, NY)
- Museum of Bad Art (Boston, MA)
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Boston, MA)
- National Museum of American Illustration (Newport, RI)
- National Portrait Gallery (Washington, DC)
- Norman Rockwell Museum (Stockbridge, MA)
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, NY)
- Whitney Museum (New York, NY)
- Winterthur Museum (Winterthur, DE)
- American Writers Museum (Chicago, IL)



### **Historic Homes**

- Beauport Sleeper-McCann House (Gloucester, MA)
- Driehaus Museum (Chicago, IL)
- Graceland (Memphis, TN)
- Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (Boston, MA)
- Marc Twain House and Museum (Hartford, CT)
- Tenement Museum (New York, NY)
- Wenham Museum House (Wenham, MA)

### **The Human Condition**

- Museum of Anthropology (Vancouver, Canada)
- Rothko Chapel (Houston, TX)
- Museum of Motherhood (St. Petersburg, FL)
- Museum of Tolerance (Los Angeles, CA)

### **Natural History and The Great Outdoors**

- Adirondack Experience Museum on Blue Mountain Lake (Blue Mt. Lake, NY)
- American Museum of Natural History (New York, NY)
- Field Museum (Chicago, IL)
- La Brea Tar Pits (Los Angeles, CA)
- Storm King (New Windsor, NY)
- Death Valley National Park Museum (Furnace Creek, NV)

### **Planes, Trains, Automobiles, and Ships**

- Hollywood Car Collection (Las Vegas, NV)
- Maritime Museum of San Diego (San Diego, CA)
- Petersen Automotive Museum (Los Angeles, CA)
- Steamtown National Historic Site (Scranton, PA)
- Art Car World (Douglas, AZ)
- Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum (New York, NY)

### **Miscellany**

- Museum of Jurassic Technology (Los Angeles, CA)
- National Lighthouse Museum (Staten Island, NY)
- Noah's Ark Encounter (Williamstown, KY)
- SPAM Museum (Columbus, OH)