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Last October, my five-year-old daughter and I made a trip to Boston to check out museums. The highlight for both of us was the Tara Donovan exhibition at ICA. Tara was a recipient of the 2008 MacArthur "genius" award. Her installations were as simple as the common materials they were created from, but as you looked at these pieces, there was an elegance about each one. My daughter loved trying to figure out what each piece was made of, and she was amazed to find that they were everyday items that she uses in her own life. The exhibition is currently traveling and will be at the Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati from February 7-May 11, 2009, and then at the Des Moines Art Center from June 19-September 14, 2009.

Dan Spock of Minnesota History Center Museum sent this... *This summer, I went to the new museum at the Bethel Woods Performing Arts Center, the site of the 1969 Woodstock Festival and I thought it was really well done. I recently saw a new exhibition on haute couture at the Chicago History Museum [Chic Chicago: Couture Treasures from the Chicago History Museum] that I thought was really well curated and realized. The big Aztec exhibition [The Aztec World] at the Field Museum had great objects and solid curation, but fell short of being inspired.*

Tina Cosby of the Palo Alto Junior Museum and Zoo submitted the following... *I visited the recently reopened Brooklyn Children's Museum. I was greatly impressed (as was my friend who has no kids and is not a museum geek) by their World Brooklyn exhibition. It did a wonderful job of melding glimpses of different cultures, activities for kids that were age-appropriate and diverse, collections that were appealing to kids and adults, and celebrating the diversity of their own neighborhood. Really cool and well-done! I also enjoyed their Neighborhood Nature. I was less impressed with Totally Tots as it did not*

really seem to break any new ground. But had I been there with toddlers, I am sure they would have had a blast.

I received a few comments about the newly reopened California Academy of Science in San Francisco. Tina Cosby said, *I had the chance to visit Cal Academy, and the folks I was with loved the Planetarium show and were very inspired by it. The building was impressive as were the crowds. I worry about the rising price tags of our museums becoming a barrier. Maybe museums should scale back a bit on fancy exhibits and impressive buildings so they don't have to charge so much. Although we paid the \$25 admission price, I would certainly have second thoughts if I had a family of four.* Dan Spock added, *I went to the new Cal Academy too, but with a friend and his toddler so I spent most of my time there in the toddler room and café and only formed a general, casual impression. The ticket prices were memorably high and they aren't doing any AAM reciprocity either.* And a third colleague (who asked to remain anonymous) said *I was incredibly disappointed from the moment I arrived and had to pay an enormous admission fee for me, my wife and three kids. Then there were the exhibits—they were the same old California Academy of Sciences exhibits. Here, they had an opportunity to do something new, branch out from their old paradigm of exhibitry, and what did they do, spend a crap load of money on the same thing. The building however was beautiful—that was the only worthwhile aspect of the visit.*

Gene Dillenburg sent a video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaFbmuEUdwl>) from *The Pinky Show* (www.thepinklyshow.org) that you should definitely check out. Recently Kim (a friend of Pinky's) has been obsessing over museums, her new "hobby." In the video she reads from her latest report, "The Creation of Value: Meditations on the Logic of Museums and Other Coercive Institutions."

Robert Garfinkle of the Science Museum of Minnesota sent this... *Recently I visited a childhood favorite, the Gettysburg National Military Park. The Gettysburg Foundation and the National Park Service recently completed a brand-new, relocated visitor center that includes a restored version of the Gettysburg Cyclorama, the largest painting in the U.S., measuring 377 feet by 42 feet. The painting depicts those fateful three days in 1863.*

As a child the Cyclorama was this fantastic spectacle, larger-than-life and full of drama. We'd walk up the circular walkway, having the painting unfold as we walked toward the central platform. We'd watch the show over and over, discussing the battles and finding the little gems of events, people, and stories that the artist, Paul Philippoteaux, had inserted in the painting. It deteriorated badly from years on display, so it has been restored in what is billed as the largest art restoration project in history. It reopened to the public in September 2008.

I was half-expecting to be underwhelmed. How could it be as dramatic as I remember it as an eight-year-old? But the painting did not disappoint. It was vibrant, beautifully restored, and the sound-and-light show was only slightly melodramatic and still great theater. The modern requirements of throughput and popularity put the only damper on the experience. To handle the large crowds they've designed a sequence: first you see a new film in a sit-down theater, then you proceed up escalators to the Cyclorama—no more circular ramp to traverse. You get to the platform, everyone scrambles for a place on the railing, and the show begins. After the show, you are nicely shooed back down the escalator, leaving no time for exploring the other parts of the painting. I wanted to stay for a few shows but I'm an adult now, so I moved along.

And while the Cyclorama is what I most anticipated, the visitor center exhibits were very well done, using both broad battlefield

perspectives and detailed stories of individuals to bring stories to life. I know I'm a sucker for American history exhibits but I think even the more casual visitor will be impressed by Gettysburg and the incredible hold the place and the event still have on our national collective memory.

As I complete this edition of *Exhibits Newsline*, there are six inches of fresh snow on the ground and it's 32 degrees. But by the time you read this and you're packing your bags for AAM (which this year is in my new hometown of Philadelphia) the grass will be green, flowers will be blooming, and the sun will actually feel warm again. I hope you will have time to stroll around the city, dine at some of our fabulous restaurants, and check out some of our museums while you're here. Here are a few museums that I'd recommend:

- The new Please Touch Museum (<http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org/>) in Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park is architecturally beautiful, and my five year old daughter gives the exhibits two thumbs up.
- For those who like historical museums, be sure to check out the Eastern State Penitentiary (<http://www.easternstate.org/visit/>), one of the former residences of Al Capone. There is also Independence Hall (<http://www.nps.gov/inde/>), the Liberty Bell (<http://www.nps.gov/inde/liberty-bell-center.htm>), and the National Constitution Center (http://constitutioncenter.org/ncc_home_Landing.aspx).
- For those of you, like myself, who are fans of the more unusual museum, be sure to check out the Mutter Museum (<http://www.collphyphil.org/mutter.asp>), which displays human anatomy specimens and human medical anomalies.

I look forward to seeing you at AAM. And remember, if you see an exhibition that others should (or should not) see, send me an email for the next issue of *Exhibits Newsline*. ☀

ExhibitFiles continues to grow!
The Association of Science-Technology Centers' (ASTC) community website for exhibition designers and developers, has grown to more than 1,094 members, who collectively have contributed more than 175 case studies and reviews. Check it out and become a member at www.exhibitfiles.org.
