

Dave McKenzie



Born 1977 in
Kingston, Jamaica

Lives in
Brooklyn, NY

Dave McKenzie



Dear, Dearest,

There are no highlights to report from my trip into the interior of that uncircumcised state known as Florida, except I am happy to report a little gem of a museum on the perimeter of the outskirts. There are only three works in this museum's "collection"—all permanently on view, all conspicuously untitled, and all attributed to Unknown. I have decided the collection is afflicted with Goldilocks Syndrome: one work is terrible (although in vogue at the moment), another all right, and yet another might truly be called great (although I more and more suspect it of being a broken kinetic sculpture). Should I say more about the work? Well, I guess I am hoping you'll one day visit. Also, I don't know if you'll find this interesting or not, but I wanted to break the museum down into basic parts for you. Three floors, four windows, and one door—I am not yet ready to describe portholes as doors. Though not technically an artwork, a diorama is on display. I know how you feel about dioramas, vitrines, and really anything too *mise-en-scène*—so perhaps the less said the better. There's a cafe as well, but apparently they don't use it. A sign in that room reads, "We prefer you to take this moment to contemplate the earth the sea and the sky. May you never know hunger may you never know despair." This may sound like I'm pulling one over the eight, but I did feel like I had heartburn all day there.

As for the staff, I'd describe it as something of a royal contingent. There are four curators and a guard. The guard makes slightly more money than the curators (you can learn a lot by saying hello to people), which means either he is well

paid or they are poorly paid. (I guess there are more possibilities, but those are the two that leap to mind.) Two of the curators specialize in the Pre-Raphaelites.

Which means,

- a) You have one too many Pre-Raphaelites experts or
- 2) one Pre-Raphaelite expert isn't pulling his or her weight.

And, yes, I used a and 2 instead of 1 and 2 or a and b because I know you find it so cute when I do that. Anyway, it seems that terms like *curator* and *guard* are used loosely there. In fact, I would swear the guard costume is shared by different staff members and rotates in forty-minute intervals. In fact, I imagine everyone has to pitch in a little with all sorts of tasks and that nobody looks at anybody's name tag or business card too closely.

I should point out, in case you want to recommend this museum to your dad (and just so we are clear I am strongly recommending it to you), that there is no entrance fee, but you will be asked for a donation on exit. My strategy for skipping out was twofold. When I saw they were about to raise a stink about supporting this and that, I put my headphones on and used the woman in front of me as a kind of shield. I wasn't quite quick enough to avoid the questionnaire that was shoved in my face, "to be completed at [my] earliest convenience." Mostly it's boilerplate, but question thirty-six reads, "Describe in detail a sexual fantasy (use another piece of paper if

II. Anthony Elms



necessary).” I assume some young ass slipped that in, but the questions do get a little weird from thirty-six on. Anyway, wait until they read what I have to say. Extra sheet of paper?! I’ll give them three sheets of fantasies that will make their eyes water and their heads droop. Don’t worry, I won’t reveal anything—I’ll just Google something up, copy, paste, print, and that will be that.

I don’t know why, but I’ve been picturing you and your old man visiting said museum. Your father will touch one of the three works and the guard will interject, “Sir, you can’t do that!” But he’ll also wink like maybe you *can*. You’ll learn that there is wifi but they don’t give out the password. Still if you have the right connections—again, the guard—you’ll learn that the password is “password1234wordpass.” It’s stupid, yes, but you wouldn’t have guessed it either. You’ll ask why they put a museum like this here and be told that’s a question that comes up often. In general, you’ll learn a lot by talking to the guard. You will learn that, years ago, the local free press ran a story on this museum, that the headline ran *Quaint Museum Outshines Its Neighbors*, and that the guard was pictured above the fold. Your father will scoff and say, “There are no other museums for a hundred miles!” On the way out, you’ll both notice that there is a copy of said article behind the visitor’s desk. You will point

at the walls, noting that they are covered in a fine layer of soot—owing to a grease fire some years ago. (An explanation for the cafe?) You and your father will agree that the institution is better for the soot, which says, *patina*. Affectionately if a little mockingly, one of you will describe the museum’s size as jumbo shrimp. You will both paw through the books in the bookstore. I say “bookstore” but laugh because it’s really just a crammed rolling cart, like the kind you might find in a library. Father and child will learn from one of these “books on the museum” that the staff has hosted its share of world leaders and dignitaries. The woman behind the desk, who you’ll suspect is one of those misplaced curators, will smile and say, “You haven’t lived until you’ve seen a guard put a dictator in his place.”

When you get home you’ll ask why I didn’t mention that the middle floor is carpeted. I’ll reply, “It didn’t affect the work did it?” We will debate affect and effect. You will say, “I think it is a real credit to Mr. or Ms. Unknown.” I’ll ask what your father thought of it all and you’ll say, “He was glad that none of his tax dollars went to support it.”

May you and I never know hunger,

D

Dave McKenzie

