

Seth Kugel, "Small Gems in City Big on Museums - Finding Art, Not Crowds, in New York", *New York Times*, Travel Section, Sunday April 16, 2006

JOURNEYS | SPECIALTY MUSEUMS NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2006
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Finding Art, Not Crowds, in New York

By SETH KUGEL

VISITORS who have stood in the main hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, gazing at a floor plan and realizing that they could never, ever see everything inside, should know this: New York museums come in all sizes. While you could spend an entire weekend in the Greek and Roman section of the XXI Met, you could also pack six XS museums in a single weekend, see every single display, and eat like a king nearby.

Mideast Art in Midtown

Viewing a collection of 19th- and 20th-century European academic art may not sound like the most diverting cultural activity, but the works on display at the Dahesh Museum in the I.B.M. Building on Madison Avenue are not the scribbles of great artists who were bored in math class. Instead, according to the Dahesh's visitor's guide, they are the result of "rigorous training, historical subject matter and polished execution," and include works like Gustav Bauernfeld's "Jaffa, Recruiting of Turkish Soldiers in Palestine" (1888), crammed with intricate details of a dramatic forced conscription by the Ottoman army. Bauernfeld's work is but one example of the Dahesh's Orientalist art, which reflected Europe's fascination with the Middle East at the time. Even toddlers who have not yet shown an interest in European academic art may enjoy sitting on a "magic carpet" for story time at 11:15 a.m. on April 27 and May 18. For the older crowd, the show "Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists and the Rediscovery of Egypt," from June 8 to Sept. 3, will include plates from the 36-volume "Description de l'Égypte" that opened European eyes to Egyptian style.



TOP The Nicholas Roerich Museum is in an Upper West Side brownstone.
MIDDLE Visitors at the Dahesh Museum of Art in the I.B.M. Building.
ABOVE Fabian Marti oversees installation of his works at the Swiss Institute.



The Swiss in SoHo

In SoHo, the Swiss Institute-Contemporary Art is hidden on the third floor of an Art Nouveau building with a copper mansard roof, without the benefit of even a sign outside to distract the public from the neighborhood's galleries and shops (or the Eckerd Pharmacy on the ground floor). The one-room space is easy to take in — you could do it in five minutes or two hours — and features mostly European (and, naturally, many Swiss) contemporary artists. The Swiss artist Valentin Carron's first New York show, "Déchance, Elegance, Déhanchement," opened this month, featuring sculptures that make a "sardonic commentary on the collectively imagined mythology of Switzerland." In June, the Swiss contemporary artist Philippe Decrauzat will open his first solo exhibition in the United States at the institute.

Clothes, Captioned

The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Chelsea has an enormous permanent collection of 30,000 textiles and 50,000 items of clothing, including 4,000 pairs of shoes and 15,000 accessories. It is, thankfully for the fashion unconscious, pared down in the main gallery to a continuous rotating four-room exhibition that is a historical whirlwind from 1750 to the present. The exhibition is full of odd and beautiful pieces that are sure conversation starters whether your intentions are serious ("Five layers of

tulle!"), frivolous ("I'd look great in those 18th-century curved heels") or lascivious ("whoa, check out the see-through Jean Yu silk chiffon underpants!").

Through April 22, "Textiles from the Garden of Eden" displays a wide-ranging collection of textiles with flower and plant images. To the untrained eye, they look like a very, very high end display of beautiful beach towels, and that's a compliment.

Chinatown Explained

The tiny two-room Museum of Chinese in the Americas will not be tiny much longer: if all goes as planned, it will be moving to a much bigger space on Center Street — designed by Maya Lin, who did the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington — next year. But for now, it is still rough around the edges and up on the second floor of an old school building in Chinatown.

The first room is a gentle if haphazard introduction to the Chinese-American experience, with artifacts including an old Chinese laundry sign and a cool cash register from a Chinatown general store that requires you to pull a specific combination of "finger pedals" for the drawer to open. Mixed in are multimedia features, like "Ground One: Voices from Post-9/11 Chinatown," featuring videotaped interviews with local leaders and everyday people. Somewhat less compelling is the computer program that allows you to take a virtual tour through the streets of Chinatown, which is somewhat odd, considering that the real thing is right outside. Until Aug. 27, the second room displays "The Virtual Saloon: Chinese Transnational Photographers in the Digital Age," a collection of wildly divergent images of China, from the dreary and industrial landscape of Xie Wenye to the fantastical circus-themed concoctions by Ma Liang.

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