

7. *The Rules of Perspective* by Adam Thorpe
PR6070 .H73 R84 2005 at Robarts

Thorpe's novel is set in a small German town in 1945. In the final days of World War II, Heinrich Hoffer, acting director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, takes refuge in the museum's vault along with several other museum staff members. Meanwhile, an American corporal named Neal Parry (who is himself an artist) finds and attempts to preserve an undamaged painting from within the remains of the mostly-destroyed museum. The story is told from the alternating perspectives of Hoffer and Parry, thus telling the tale from literally opposing sides. Published in 2006, this work of historical fiction looks back at World War II from our contemporary vantage point. While its tone and subjects are necessarily heavy, it is ultimately a story about the redemptive power of art in the face of extreme tragedy. This novel will be of interest to any museum scholar who wonders about the significance of art and the modern museum in the face of war.

8. *The Murder Room* by P.D. James
PR6060 .A56 M87 2003 at Robarts

This novel by master of the mystery genre P.D. James takes as its subject the Dupayne Museum, a British museum devoted to representing England between the wars. The eponymous "murder room" is a room in the museum displaying artifacts from high-profile murders that took place during the inter-war period. The mystery at the heart of the novel involves the murder of Neville Dupayne, one of the trustees of the family-run museum, who was hoping to sell the museum against the wishes of his siblings. The murder, which at its base seems to concern the ownership and stewardship of the museum itself, pulls Scotland Yard Commander Adam Dalgliesh into the intimate world of the museum. The novel conforms to the conventions of its genre and is in many ways similar to James' other mysteries, but readers who are particularly interested in museum studies might enjoy reading about a familiar subject through the lens of the mystery genre.

Continued on outer flap →

9. *Bringing Art to Life: A Biography of Alan Jarvis* by Andrew Horrall
N910 .O7 H67 2009 at Robarts

This readable, well-researched biography of Canadian museum legend Alan Jarvis is sure to delight anyone who is interested in the past and future of Canadian museums. The fiercely intelligent, outspoken, and homosexual Jarvis served as director of the National Gallery of Canada from 1955 to 1959. Jarvis led a fascinating life and travelled in many spheres; he was a Rhodes scholar who was deeply engaged in art, film, and literature, in addition to drinking and socializing with celebrities around the world. Before his forced resignation in 1959, Alan proved himself as an innovator and advocate for museum accessibility; he championed the idea of the "museum without walls" and pushed for a greater representation of modern art in the gallery. Jarvis was an extraordinary figure whose life is worth reading about by anyone who is interested in the history and development of Canadian culture; this biography will be of special interest to the future curator.

10. *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* by Tom Griffiths
DU196 .G75 1996X at Robarts

This fascinating work of non-fiction illuminates the world of collecting objects in Australia. The book examines the practices of people who collect for all kinds of reasons: Griffiths writes of amateur collectors who hunt and collect for personal satisfaction or monetary gain, as well as museum curators and auction house representatives who hunt and collect objects and artifacts as part of their profession. In his book, Griffiths also thoughtfully explores the desire to preserve the past through object-collecting; in particular, he writes about Australia's history and the history of its indigenous people, and how the objects that remain from the past shape and inform our understanding of that history. As a work of literary non-fiction, Griffiths' book will provide a breath of fresh air to the museum studies student: this book will likely prove to be a more relaxing read than a scholarly book or journal article, but still manages to be both informative and entertaining.

MSL 2000: Curatorial Practice

A READERS' ADVISORY GUIDE



RA Guide by:
Melissa Bell ©2011



1. *An Object of Beauty* by Steve Martin
PS3563 .A7293 O25 2010X at Robarts

This novel tells the story of the rise and fall of Lacey Yeager, a young, ambitious, and beautiful woman who attempts to make a name for herself in the sometimes cutthroat world of art dealership and curatorship. As Lacey makes friends and enemies in New York and around the world, the reader gets an inside look at the world of buying, selling, and curating valuable works of art. The book includes coloured plates of the art works that are integral to the plot; by choosing to include these plates, the author “curates” the story for the reader, adding an enriching visual element to the experience of reading a story that is very much about the visual pleasure obtained through works of art. Though many readers might know Martin better from his movies, this novel demonstrates his talent for working in various media – a talent that will be appreciated by any scholar of museum studies.

2. *The Museum of Innocence* by Orhan Pamuk
PL248 .P36 M3713 2009 at Robarts

Turkish Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk examines the relationship between obsessive love and the collection of objects in this innovative and unusual novel. Against the backdrop of 1970s Istanbul, the wealthy Kemal, engaged to an unremarkable girl from a prominent family, becomes obsessed with a poor girl to whom he is distantly related and whom social strictures would prevent him from marrying. Further, the girl herself rejects Kemal’s affections, only serving to deepen his obsession. Kemal copes with his situation by collecting seemingly mundane objects belonging to his love – earrings, ticket stubs, cigarette butts – which he then dubs a “museum of innocence.” The novel explores questions related to the emotional impact of artifacts, and what we can gain from collecting, viewing, and otherwise experiencing objects that are meant to recreate a real-life experience. Though not about a conventional museum, the novel raises questions that get at the heart of museum studies.

3. *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* by Etienne van Heerden
PT6592.32 .A5235 S9413 2002 at Robarts

In this novel, curator Ingi Friedlander travels to Yearsonend, a remote South African town, in the hopes of purchasing a unique wooden sculpture called the Staggering Merman. While she attempts to buy the sculpture, Ingi experiences Yearsonend by building relationships with its strange and colourful inhabitants, among them a deaf and blind old man--the eponymous Mario Salviati--who is believed to hold knowledge about treasure hidden in the town. Through her interactions with the town’s residents, she ultimately ends up learning more about Yearsonend--and indeed South Africa--than she originally intended. The novel is a quest story with a mystical tone, and it plays with the genre of magical realism. It is translated from Afrikaans and takes place in South Africa. As a result, it provides a first-hand perspective on the process of procuring museum artifacts in South Africa, which will no doubt be edifying for the Canadian museum studies scholar.

4. *The Hound in the Left-Hand Corner* by Giles Waterfield
PR6073 .A78 H68 2004X at Robarts

This British satirical novel will be sure to add levity to the museum scholar’s reading list. It centres around a new exhibit on the eighteenth century being launched at BRIT – the recently renamed Museum of British History. The exhibit, entitled “Elegance,” includes an impressive Gainsborough portrait and is designed to create a new buzz in the fusty old museum. The opening is intended to be a lavish affair, populated by distinguished guests and displaying celebrated and valuable works of art. However, things do not go as smoothly as the museum staff had hoped, and the reader is sure to enjoy the over-the-top ways in which things go awry. Waterfield’s writing may be light and amusing, but it is still wholly intelligent. The novel is ultimately a hilarious caper, and museum scholars and future curators will enjoy reading this comic novel that gently pokes fun at their profession.

5. *The Museum Guard* by Howard Norman
PS8577 .O472 M88 1992 at Robarts

This intriguing work of Canadian literary fiction centres around the orphaned DeFoe Russet, who works as a museum guard in Halifax, Nova Scotia alongside his alcoholic uncle who became his guardian after the death of DeFoe’s parents. The novel is set in 1938, and the terrifying events occurring in Europe pervade its plot and inform its tone. DeFoe’s love interest is an unusual woman named Imogen who works as a cemetery caretaker. When the museum where DeFoe works obtains a painting called “Jewess on a Street in Amsterdam,” Imogen becomes obsessed by the notion that she is the woman in the painting. The novel plays with the notions of art imitating life and life imitating art, and poses provocative questions about the potential impact of paintings in a museum. Well-reviewed in a variety of publications, the novel will surely provide a meaningful reading experience to anyone who is interested in the role and impact of the museum and its contents.

6. *Kraken: An Anatomy* by China Mieville
PR6063 .I283 K73 2010 at Robarts

Classified by many reviewers as a fantasy, this novel’s rich plot and confident prose have the potential to attract readers who may not normally choose books from the fantasy genre. The novel takes place in London (albeit a fantasy version of the British capital) and concerns the incredible series of events following the theft of a giant squid from a museum exhibit. Following the squid’s disappearance from the museum, curator Billy Harrow becomes entangled in a magical underworld about which he previously knew nothing; he encounters members of a squid-worshipping cult, magic-practicing police officers, and other characters whose lives are infused with the supernatural. Though real museum curators are unlikely to have on-the-job experiences like those of Billy Harrow, the novel weaves an intriguing tale about the meaning and consequences of museum thefts.

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