



This time,

Exhibits Newsline

features an eclectic range of exhibitions on baseball, capitalism, and political asylum.

Paul Orselli

Exhibition

The Hall of Fame Tour

Institution

Created by the National
Baseball Hall of Fame,
Cooperstown, New York

Location

On view at Principal Park, Des Moines, Iowa



fig. 1. “We Are Baseball” celebrates the diversity of the baseball community.

Among the many pressing concerns in today’s museum field are how to reach new audiences, how to embrace diversity and inclusiveness, and how to best harness technology to provide visitors with unique experiences. I did not expect these issues to be so wonderfully addressed at a baseball game.

The National Baseball Hall of Fame’s traveling exhibition – *The Hall of Fame Tour* – visited ballparks across the United States in the summer of 2017. I viewed it at Principal Park, a minor league stadium in Des Moines, Iowa, before an Iowa Cubs game.

Museums have toured their collections and exhibitions for decades to reach new audiences, but this often means visiting a museum to see the tour. The Baseball Hall of Fame brought their collection and experiences directly to the place where interested audiences are located: the ballpark.

The exhibition is contained in five semi-trailers, which are decked out as exhibit galleries. One of the trailers is an IMAX® movie theater, an impressive technological achievement in itself. The tour’s theme was “We Are Baseball,” and the big

idea is that the most important thing about baseball is how everyone experiences it, whether as a fan or player. It was clear the exhibition's creators sought to acknowledge, celebrate, and enhance the public's experience of baseball through this exhibition.

One way this is accomplished is highlighting the diversity among baseball players. In fact, one gallery is completely devoted to diversity, and features a variety of objects that address inclusion and exclusion. A beep baseball – a softball-sized ball that emits a sound when thrown – reflects efforts to help the blind play the game. Vivian Kellogg's suitcase from the All-American Girls Baseball League is next to one of Roberto Clemente's jerseys (fig. 1). A Japanese-American semipro league jersey worn by a player after he'd been forced

into an internment camp during World War II and Jackie Robinson's cap from a World Series game: both are reminders of our country's long history of racial discrimination, and that not everyone was welcome to play baseball.

The exhibition is heavy on the use of technology throughout, but the objects hold equal drawing power. In one gallery, the helmet that Cal Ripken wore in the game he broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive-games-played record provides as much a thrill as one of the computer-based interactives. One interactive allows visitors to photograph themselves and compose their own Baseball Hall of Fame plaque. Another interactive photographs visitors and places them into historic moments in Major League Baseball history (fig. 2). Visitors may send their plaque and photos to their email address. The email includes

brief educational information about the historic scene, and having the image allows visitors to share their experience on social media, which I did (fig. 3).

It's rewarding to see a museum have success addressing major issues in our field. The National Baseball Hall of Fame is reaching people outside Cooperstown, New York, the museum's home. It is an inclusive exhibition that acknowledges "We Are Baseball," no matter who you are. The use of technology is engaging and informative. It is a 21st-century exhibition for a game and people of the 21st century.

—Eric Morse is a museum professional in Des Moines, Iowa. He is not currently affiliated with any museum.



fig. 2. One interactive uses a green screen to photograph visitors and places them into historical moments in Major League Baseball.

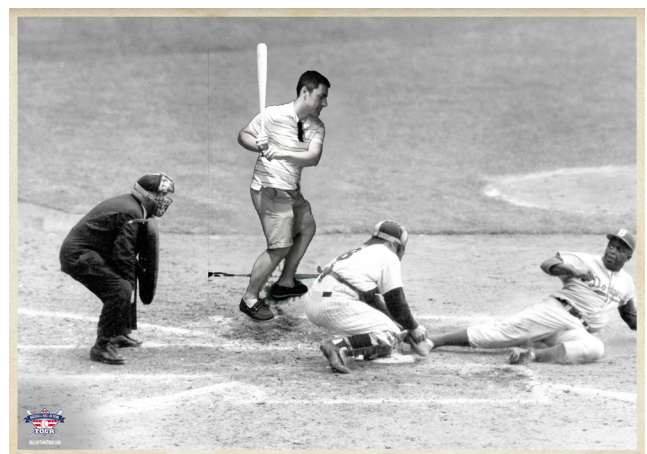


fig. 3. One of the choices in the historical moment photo interactive is Jackie Robinson stealing home during the 1955 World Series. Visitors are able to send the photos to their email address, and the author is pictured here.

Exhibition

Opening Exhibition

Institution

Museum of Capitalism

Location

Oakland, California

Aptly located in Oakland's Jack London Square, itself an oft-faltering capitalist venture, the Museum of Capitalism (museumofcapitalism.org) was spawned by the curatorial collective FICTILIS (artists Timothy Furstnau and Andrea Steves). I visited to see its opening exhibition, which was on view from June to August 2017.

The exhibition sat on the top floor of an unoccupied building, where a central air well allowed visitors to look down on the failed commercial space below, while colorful banners sporting logos of failed banks waved overhead. The puffed glass ceiling lights were accompanied by an explanation of the impact of industrial lighting on the downtrodden workforce, and if you were really fascinated, you could have attended one of a series of workshops on "The Light that Elongated the Day." A range of programs, events, workshops and performances ran parallel to the show, including lectures, screenings, scavenger hunts, game nights, panels, and protest-sign making.

There were many opportunities to voice your own views, including a video interview booth (fig. 4) and a range of surveys with various slants, including one that offers

self-selecting identifier pins indicating whether you have been a giver or a taker in society. I walked away with one that said "guilty."

Over 60 artists and art collectives had works on display, and the result was eclectic and constantly surprising. A display of shopping bags crafted to look identical to the petroleum-based plastic bags from the capitalist era were fashioned out of leather, offering a visual show stopper as you walked in the door (fig. 5). A hand-cranked minimum wage machine constructed in honky-tonk style spit out a penny after you put in a lot of elbow grease (fig. 6). There was a pile of fire bricks artfully crafted from hundreds of credit card mail solicitations, and a wall display/give-away of universal handcuff keys that would open, the show's creators claim, any handcuff used by law enforcement in America. There was a display complete with how-to instructions and an invitation to join in by an art collective working to identify and patent endophytes (fungi and bacterium that live inside plants) before agribusiness giant Monsanto does.

Yes, there were a lot of reader panels: informative, engaging, intriguing, and absolutely necessary reader panels. In most

cases if you didn't read the panels you would have had no idea what you were looking at, but the works were well worth the read. There was also a library where you could read works on capitalism, and a conference table where you could read transcripts of interviews with white-collar financial workers. A back room had an intriguing wayfinding system that used quotes on tape on the floor that led you to corresponding videos with headsets, each delving into a pitch on an alternate economic system.

Outside the bathroom you could pick up a free zine offering an enthralling read: "The Capitalist Bathroom Experience." There were lots of other giveaways in the best counter-capitalistic spirit, and the museum itself was free.

—Catherine McEver is the VCP at *The Bureau of Common Sense* in Oakland, California.



fig. 5. A leather shopping bag replaces the earlier petroleum-based version.

PHOTOS BY CATHERINE MCEVER



fig. 4. Video interview booth.



fig. 6. Hand-cranked minimum wage machine.

Exhibition

Leon Trotsky's Living Quarters

Institution

Museo Casa de Leon Trotsky

Location

Mexico City, Mexico



PHOTOS BY MARJORIE SCHWARZER

fig. 7. Leon Trotsky's famous wire-rimmed glasses on display at the Leon Trotsky House Museum.

On August 20, 1940, one of the world's most intense political persecutions ended in Mexico City. Russian exile Leon Trotsky was assassinated in his home by one of Josef Stalin's agents. Fifty years later, the site was turned into a museum. Today, it is a place of pilgrimage. Tourists from around the world come to pay homage to a man who was admired in some corners of the world and reviled in others.

In August 2017, I visited the Leon Trotsky House Museum. Unlike Frida Kahlo's bustling Casa Azul museum five blocks away, my approach to the Trotsky museum felt lonely, silent, and ominous.

I purchased my ticket at a small kiosk that doubles as a souvenir stand. I then entered a vestibule where I perused a wall display of yellowed newspaper articles detailing Trotsky's murder and photocopied images of his family and friends, many hung crookedly. In a wooden vitrine badly in need of dusting, I spied an array of haphazardly-arranged artifacts including a pair of Leon's famous wire-rimmed glasses (fig. 7).

I chose not to visit the upstairs gallery of contemporary artwork about political asylum, which was presumably more carefully curated than this makeshift entry display meant to introduce visitors to the eminent revolutionary.

Rather, I spent my time within the museum's most powerful artifact: Trotsky's living quarters. A hallway led into the tightly guarded living space that had ultimately been penetrated by an assassin. I felt the adjacencies of Leon's daily life with Stalin's relentless pursuit.

The museum freezes the moment that Raul Mercader, Stalin's agent, entered Leon's study and drove an ice axe into his brain. The kitchen, dining room, office, bedrooms, and study are presented almost exactly as they appeared at that fateful moment. Leon and his wife Natalia's drab clothes hang limply in the closet. Papers, books, maps and dictation machines stretch across shelves and tables. One can't help but notice the abundance of security measures: steel doors, bars, and window shutters, even in the bathroom. In two rooms, bullet holes pockmark the walls, evidence of an earlier, unsuccessful assault by Soviet sympathizers.

As I walked out of house and into the garden, guard towers (fig. 8) framed a large concrete headstone decorated with a hammer and sickle. It contains Leon and Natalia's ashes. Questions swirled in my head, many of which I would later research. How did Mercader



fig. 8. A makeshift guard tower still hovers above the largely hidden Trotsky house.

gain entry? Where was Natalia during the attack? Why did I feel such sorrow for Trotsky, who despite being a brilliant writer and orator was also a brutal demagogue? I sat on a bench (likely where Leon himself used to sit) and gazed at the cactus specimens that he had collected on clandestine outings in the Mexican countryside. They are still alive. Then my eyes turned to the rows of rabbit hutches; some were eroding. I envisioned a caged man finding brief moments of solace in front of the cages while he cared for his beloved pets (fig. 9.)

The very best museums combine spaces and objects to provide a setting for further contemplation. A visit to the Leon Trotsky House Museum won't show you everything about the man, his deeds and his death. But it bears witness to the profoundly unsettling experience of political asylum.

—*Marjorie Schwarzer teaches in the MA in Museum Studies program at University of San Francisco.*



fig. 9. Crumbling rabbit hutches in the museum's courtyard.

Have you seen an interesting exhibition you'd like to share through Exhibits Newslines? If so, email me at paul@orselli.net.

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