

# The Permanent Collection

SETTING: A square room in an art museum. Two brass stanchion posts, bridged with a thick red velvet rope, block the entrance upstage center. The entrance is framed by two curtains. There are 13 non-visible paintings of various sizes on the non-visible walls.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE: To help block the action, a floorplan is included with the paintings numbered clockwise around the space.

*The stage is dark.*

*MUSEUM GUARD enters upstage center, switches on lights. He is a large, middle-aged man dressed in a black suit coat with a museum monogram on upper left sleeve. He unhooks the thick rope from one of the posts to open the room for visitors and hooks the end to the other post. Then he goes to his standing place upstage right.*

*AFFIRMATION WOMAN enters. She nods at the MUSEUM GUARD. He nods back. She's plainly dressed, keeps her hands pressed together in a self-fist bump as she moves stage left whispering things to the paintings, clockwise. A monthly ritual. She solemnly bows her head to painting #1. She can barely be heard.*

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

May warm blessings be upon you.

*She slowly steps to the next painting #2.*

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

May your heart find solace at last.

*She moves to painting #3.*

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

May time melt away all scars, visible and hidden.

*LOVERS 1 and 2 enter. LOVER 2 is all over LOVER 1 with hands and kisses. Seeing them, AFFIRMATION WOMAN flinches, gives LOVERS a stern look.*

LOVER 2

What say we do it here!

*Lover 1 peeks back at MUSEUM GUARD as she shakes off LOVER 2's clutches.*

LOVER 1

Shhh.

LOVER 2

Come on. What better place for a public display of affection than a public display?

LOVER 1

*(Goes to painting #1.)*

Look at that.

LOVER 2

What about it?

LOVER 1

The cast of light. The richness of the colors. Wow. The clarity is like 3D.

LOVER 2

*(Puts his arm around waist of LOVER 1.)*

Well, how 'bout me. I got 3D love.

*LOVER 1 breaks the embrace. Moves to painting #2. Reads plaque.*

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(To #4.)*

May love conquer all misery and misunderstanding.

LOVER 2

*(Stares at AFFIRMATION WOMAN.)*

What is she saying?

LOVER 1

Leave her be.

LOVER 2

She's talking to them?

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(Moves to painting #5.)*

Allow others the innocence of a delayed evolution.

*LOVER 1 physically turns LOVER 2's face to painting #2 they just passed.*

LOVER 1

Hey. That portrait. *(She steps to the side.)* See how the eyes follow me.

LOVER 2

*(Goes to painting, points finger.)*

Take your eyes off her, dude. She's mine.

MUSEUM GUARD

*(Approaches LOVER 2.)*

No touch.

LOVER 2

Wasn't even close, mister.

LOVER 1

*(Pulls him away.)*

God, must you be so irritating?

*MUSEUM GUARD returns to his place.*

LOVER 2

Let's get out of here.

LOVER 1

*(Moves to next painting.)*

Wait.

*OLD MAN (71) enters with rolling walker, nods to MUSEUM GUARD, scans the room. His fly is open.*

OLD MAN

Little bit of everything, ey?

*MUSEUM GUARD merely blinks at him. OLD MAN moves stage left.*

LOVER 1

*(At painting #3.)*

You can almost feel the blast of wind in your face.

LOVER 2

You like that smear?

LOVER 1

Look how he captures the full force of nature unleashed.

*Lover 2 encloses his arms around her. Kisses her cheek.*

LOVER 2

Like your love making.

LOVER 1

*(Peels off his arm.)*

Stop it!

OLD MAN

*(Leans into portrait painting #2.)*

Christ, the wretched frame is three times the size of the painting.

LOVER 2

*(Eyeballs OLD MAN.)*

Do I tell the dude his fly's down?

LOVER 1

*(Moves to next painting.)*

No.

LOVER 2

Or do I unzip, and we like start a new fashion trend? *(Chuckles.)*

LOVER 1

Go ahead, laugh. You'll be there soon enough.

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(At painting #6.)*

May mercy rain down on you its golden light.

LOVER 1

*(Moves on to painting #5.)*

Oh, this is what's-his-name.

LOVER 2

Holy shit. The sewer exploded.

LOVER 1

*(Steps back to take it in.)*

Outrageous. And beautiful in its own way.

LOVER 2

Butt ugly. In its own way.

LOVER 1

To you.

LOVER 2

No, that is beyond dispute ugly.

LOVER 1

I love the swirlie play of colors. The reds and blacks. Like they've been freed to do whatever they want.

*LOVER 1 Steps up to painting to read plaque.*

LOVER 2

Ugly is ugly. That's not a judgment, it's an is.

LOVER 1

An is to you.

LOVER 2

An is is an is is an is.

LOVER 1

*(Shakes head.)*

No, it isn't.

LOVER 2

Doesn't make it bad or wrong. We need ugly in the world to see the beauty. They probably hung this eyesore to make the others look better.

LOVER 1

You can't change what I feel...

LOVER 2

How about decay. You find that beautiful? No. *(Points at painting.)* Roadkill is roadkill.

OLD MAN

*(Overhears. He's between #3 and #4.)*

Oh? And how does roadkill look to a buzzard?

LOVER 1

Exactly. See!

OLD MAN

Eye of the beholder.

LOVER 2

*(Squares off with OLD MAN.)*

Who the hell asked you, old man?

OLD MAN

*(Backs away to #4.)*

Sorry, I just ...

*LOVER 2 goes to LOVER 1.*

*NANNY (21) enters with bored BOY (12) He bobs his head to music in his ear buds.*

LOVER 1

*(Through clenched teeth.)*

Don't touch me. *(Moves away.)*

LOVER 2

*(Glances at guard. Goes to LOVER 1. Pleads.)*

Come on.

*MUSEUM WALKER (mid-30's) enters. She wears black yoga pants and white running shoes. She orbits the room swiftly, not looking at paintings, stops midway, steps in place as she checks the Fitbit on her wrist. Then continues clockwise and exits.*

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(At painting #7.)*

Be not alone in your suffering, Lucretia. I am here for you always.

NANNY

*(To boy)*

Do you like any of these?

BOY

Huh? *(Lifts ear bud.)*

*LOVER 2 catches up to LOVER 1.*

LOVER 1

I hate that about you.

*(LOVER 1 and LOVER 2 whisper intensely.)*

NANNY

Do you like any of these?

BOY

Eh. Paintings ...

NANNY

Think of them like windows. Some reflect the times they were painted and some dare you to see the world in a different way.

BOY

I liked that thing on the floor in the other room.

NANNY

The installation?

BOY

Yeah.

NANNY

The labyrinth of flattened grocery carts?

BOY

No. The tower of bloody sponges.

NANNY

*(Checks pamphlet in her hand.)*

Oh, "The Autopsy of Heaven."

BOY

Yeah. That was cool.

*NANNY and BOY walk on.*

*ART BUFF enters, notebook in hand. He scans the room and turns to FRIEND.*

ART BUFF

We got the gamut here, neo to post with all the isms in between.



AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(At painting #8.)*

Maintain forbearance and compassion in the face of evil.

ART BUFF

*(Moves to center stage.)*

A juxtaposition of the pictorial and the abstract.

BOY

Where's my dad?

NANNY

Said he'd meet us here.

OLD MAN

*(To painting #6.)*

Ah. Here we go. The radiance of the everyday.

BOY

That security guy, he just stands there all day.

NANNY

He's an art watchman.

BOY

What do you do for a living? *(Deepens voice.)* "I stand in a room."

NANNY

Not just any room. Each one of these is worth millions.

BOY

*(Points to #4.)*

That?

ART BUFF

*(Gestures to painting #2.)*

See how the traction of shadow steers the perspective.

FRIEND  
*(Faces painting.)*

Definitely, Bee R and R.

ART BUFF

Be what?

FRIEND

Before Rock and Roll.

*BOY'S FATHER (45) in suit and tie, stands in doorway, talks loud on phone, turns heads of visitors.*

BOY'S FATHER

Still waiting on the punitive damages. What? No. No fuckin' idea.

*MUSEUM GUARD shushes him. He pauses conversation, sneers at MUSEUM GUARD.*

Got to go.

*BOY'S FATHER closes call. Sees his son. Goes to him.*

LOVER 2

Half of these need rehab.

ART BUFF

*(To FRIEND referring to painting #4).*

A flamboyant depiction of inert solids. The classic reductivist's vision. The feathered aura almost prayerful in how it mellows the edges. Don't you think?

FRIEND

Yeah, if I overthink.

BOY'S FATHER

Hey kiddo.

BOY

Hey, Dad.

LOVER 2  
(At #10.)

Selfie time. Let me get one of you in front of Hocked Loogie Head.

LOVER 1  
(*Emphatic whisper.*)

No!

BOY'S FATHER

So, what we got here?

BOY

Paintings.

ART BUFF  
(*Leads FRIEND across floor toward #8.*)

But that's not what ...

BOY'S FATHER  
(*Scans the walls.*)

Anything you like?

BOY

I dunno.

BOY'S FATHER

I'll get one for you.

NANNY

They can't be bought.

BOY'S FATHER  
Who says? Of course, they can. Everything's got a price.

OLD MAN  
(*At #9.*)

A clean fire.

*He hatchets his hand as if mimicking the strokes of the painter.*

Fierce, passionate brush strokes.

LOVER 1

*(Stops before painting #11.)*

Gold. Spangles of luscious gold. You can't say that's not lovely.

LOVER 2

Yeah, alright. So, how about a shot of you in front of it?

FRIEND

*(follows ART BUFF.)*

What makes something like that a masterpiece?

ART BUFF

Ah, the question of questions.

BOY'S FATHER

*(Points to #2.)*

Get a load of that gilded frame.

FRIEND

And?

ART BUFF

Could be the artistry, or when it was painted. How it broke the mold and influenced others.

OLD MAN

*(To painting #10.)*

Oughta stretch crime scene tape around you. *(Moves on around LOVERS at #11.)*

*NANNY leans over, plucks something off the floor.*

BOY

What's that?

NANNY

*(Holds up a leaf, stares at it.)*

A leaf. Somebody must've brought it in on their shoe.

ART BUFF

*(Points to another painting)*

Or it has a timeless quality.

AFFIRMATION WOMAN

*(To painting #12 – above a whisper.)*

You cannot stop me from caring about you.

OLD MAN

*(Thinks she is talking to him.)*

How sweet.

*AFFIRMATION WOMAN realizes she was overheard by OLD MAN and shyly moves on #13.*

BOY'S FATHER

*(At #5.)*

Hell, you could paint that crap.

FRIEND

I'm more into the *un*-timeless.

ART BUFF

How's that?

FRIEND

The here and gone. Like Navajo sand paintings. Sacred and poof!

ART BUFF

Ephemeral.

FRIEND

The majesty of immediacy.

ART BUFF

Le moment décisif.

*MUSEUM WALKER enters.*

*The following voices overlap as the visitors move about the room.*

NANNY  
*(At painting.)*

Grace.

ART BUFF

Here you go.

NANNY

That's what's missing.

LOVER 2  
*(Directing LOVER 1 for a photo.)*

Back up a couple steps.

ART BUFF  
*(#8.)*

All facets of a face in an instant.

FRIEND  
*(Points.)*

You saying that's ...?

LOVER 1  
*(Almost bumps into MUSEUM WALKER.)*

Oh!

*MUSEUM WALKER evades her and continues orbit to the exit.*

OLD MAN  
*(To #12.)*

Deftly and dutifully bland.

LOVER 1  
*(Snaps photo of LOVER 2.)*

One more.

ART BUFF  
Free expression. That's sacred.

FRIEND  
If it harms?

BOY  
*(To BOY'S FATHER.)*  
Buy me that one!

*The entire scene speeds up in time-lapse with jerky-swift movements of the visitors. Their words become gibberish. EXTRAS come into the room, go around to each painting. All the while the MUSEUM GUARD remains immobile. This will take some choreography. The named characters exit first, (a few with exit lines or gestures), then the EXTRAS. As the last one leaves, MUSEUM WALKER speed-walks in, stops 2/3rds around (#10) the room, checks the Fitbit on her wrist.*

*BLIND GIRL (17) enters. She wears dark glasses and taps a cane on the floor. The MUSEUM GUARD straightens, even more attentive now.*

BLIND GIRL  
*(Senses his presence.)*  
Has someone been looking for me?

MUSEUM GUARD  
No.

BLIND GIRL  
What is here? Sculpture?

MUSEUM GUARD  
Painting.

BLIND GIRL

Paintings. *(A couple steps in, she stops.)* They're talking.

*BLIND GIRL taps cane on floor as she walks stage right, crossing in front of MUSEUM GUARD. MUSEUM WALKER overhears BLIND GIRL who softly taps wall with cane to bottom of a picture frame—#13.*

*Alarmed, MUSEUM GUARD moves to tell her not to tap the paintings. She lifts her palm close to the painting, but doesn't touch it.*

BLIND GIRL

*(To MUSEUM GUARD.)*

Oh, do you hear that?

*MUSEUM WALKER quietly approaches BLIND GIRL.*

MUSEUM WALKER

Did you say the paintings are talking?

BLIND GIRL

This one. I can hear coughing as he applies the paint.

MUSEUM WALKER

*(Looks at painting.)*

Really ...

BLIND GIRL

There's a sadness. It's in the lungs. The artist lost someone. Misses them deeply.

MUSEUM WALKER

You can hear the artist?

BLIND GIRL

Yes. *(She taps her cane as she moves to painting #12. Again, holds palm up. Asks painting.)* And who are you?



MUSEUM WALKER

*(Refers to plaque under painting.)*

The painter's name is ...

BLIND GIRL

Nothing. No emotion. Only for the money.

MUSEUM WALKER

A commission?

BLIND GIRL

The craft is there. But there's no spirit.

MUSEUM WALKER

No "spirit." That's interesting. May I ask about another?

*MUSEUM WALKER gently escorts BLIND GIRL to painting #9.*

MUSEUM WALKER

What does this one say?

*Curious, MUSEUM GUARD strolls toward them, within earshot, between #10 & #11.*

BLIND GIRL

*(Lifts her palm to painting.)*

Vibrating ... in a fever. The painter's mind, it verges on madness.

MUSEUM WALKER

Oh, yes. Yes, it does. I sense it, too. *(Pauses.)* You open to another?

*BLIND GIRL nods. MUSEUM WALKER guides BLIND GIRL to painting #7.*

BLIND GIRL

*(Moans.)*

Oh ... oh ... a tragic story. He is speaking to himself. It's a foreign language.

MUSEUM WALKER

Okay ...

BLIND GIRL

He is saying, "May it crackle like fire."

MUSEUM WALKER

You're right. It does that. Wow!

*MUSEUM GUARD closes in to listen better.*

*MUSEUM WALKER eye-checks the MUSEUM GUARD. He nods.*

MUSEUM WALKER

Okay, there's another one I'd like you to ... um, hear.

*MUSEUM WALKER guides BLIND GIRL to #6.*

BLIND GIRL

*BLIND GIRL lifts her palm to painting. Then turns to MUSEUM WALKER.*

I hear a sound like shimmering. It rings in my hand, sssss ... like rubbing cymbals. Can you hear it? Behind the paintbrush? Listen. Not just with your ears but with your whole body.

*MUSEUM WALKER closes her eyes.*

*BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE enters room, doesn't see BLIND GIRL at first. She's hidden behind MUSEUM GUARD and MUSEUM WALKER.*

BLIND GIRL

The artist says, "It's without walls. Without skin. There's no inside. No outside. It is the place where light meets light."

*BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE goes over to #11. Cranes neck.*

BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE

Oh, there you are. I looked all over.

*BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE nods at MUSEUM GUARD, takes BLIND GIRL'S arm. BLIND GIRL smiles, bumps the CHAPERONE'S shoulder with her head.*

BLIND GIRL

Jeffrey ...

BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE

Come along now.

*BLIND GIRL'S CHAPERONE ignores MUSEUM WALKER and leads BLIND GIRL out of room.*

*MUSEUM WALKER, as if coming out of a trance, follows in their wake.*

MUSEUM WALKER

Wait ... wait! You don't understand!

*MUSEUM GUARD also wants to stop them and hear more. He takes a couple steps toward them but holds up. After they exit, he walks to painting #6 downstage center. He shuts his eyes and lifts his palm to the painting as the BLIND GIRL did. He wants to feel the energy of the artist. After a few seconds, he opens his eyes, lowers his hand, checks his watch, walks back to his place by the entrance.*

*Two EXTRAS peek in the doorway.*

EXTRA

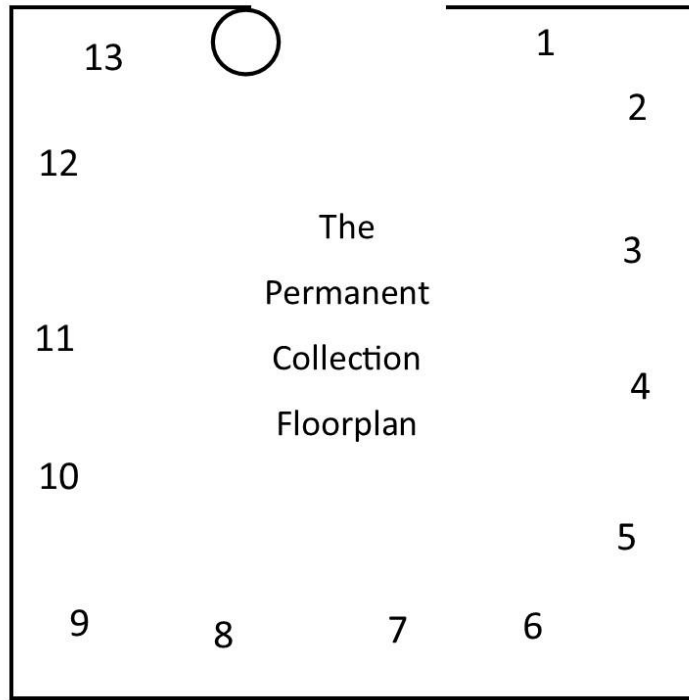
Oh, we were here before.

*They leave.*

*MUSEUM GUARD comes to his place, pivots, straightens, takes in the room.*

*Stage goes dark.*

END



The numbers represent the painting locations.  
The circle is where the Museum Guard stands.