

In Praise of a Cup Half-Full Education

I don't visit museums often, but when I do, I feel out of place and frustrated, like trying to put the dishes away in someone else's kitchen. I walk slowly with hesitant steps. I stand too close to a painting, or too far, then I move a few feet to the side, stop, move again.

I sense I'm going to get yelled at just for being there, for touching something I'm not supposed to touch, for entering through an exit. I imagine a security guard at wit's end. "Sir... sir. We walk clockwise after 4:00PM on odd numbered days."

I say sorry way too many times. "Sorry, am I in your way? Sorry."

I try not to sneeze, but the overhead lighting has other ideas. Someone's high heels echo. The bathroom is three floors away.

I read everything I could — the small plaques next to each painting with the artist's name and year it was completed. I found a typo on one and I got excited because this is a moment where I'm in control, I'm needed. I'm here to make the museum and therefore the world a better place and I'm the youngest of three boys so I never got good at concealing excitement when I sensed a potential transfer of power in my direction.

They spelled Monet wrong, and I thought I would approach the curator and whisper the blunder to shield her certain embarrassment. She would say, "Oh my god thank you, what a tragic oversight." And since I just saved her job, she'd hug me so hard my feet would lift off the ground. They'd name a whole floor of the museum after me. They'd commission a 12-foot bronze sculpture where I'd hold a magnifying glass to signify that no mistake is too paltry to escape my notice and they'd put it in the lobby where I'd be the first thing donors and dignitaries see when they enter.

But then I saw three more plaques with the same typo. It turns out there's someone else named Manet.