

Global Children's Museums: Art, Story & Play

Jewish Museum London: Tiger, Mog and Pink Rabbit – A Judith Kerr Retrospective. Photograph by Naomi Hamer, 2015



Preface

Over the past decade, our research has taken us to children’s museums, museums of childhood, and specialised exhibits in museums in over ten countries around the world. While visiting these sites, we documented their exhibits and noted their approaches to interactivity and immersion.

In our observations of these sites, we focussed our attention on their unique contributions and cultural specificity. We asked questions about how art, story and play were embedded in their installations and how these could tell us about local cultures and understandings of children and childhood.

This booklet is a collection of a few of our highlights illustrating specialised exhibits and museums in the United States, Japan, England, and Korea.

Table of Contents

The New Children’s Museum	
San Diego, United States	3
Ghibli Museum	
Mitaka, Japan	5
The Strong National Museum of Play	
Rochester, United States	8
Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children’s Books	
Newcastle upon Tyne, England	10
Chihiro Art Museum	
Tokyo and Azumino, Japan	12
Hyundai Museum of Kids’ Books and Art	
Seoul, Korea	14

The New Children's Museum

San Diego, United States

Visited by Ann Marie Murnaghan, 2015

Photographs By Ann Marie Murnaghan

<https://thinkplaycreate.org/>

This art focused museum located in downtown San Diego integrated the work of artists into their exhibits through purpose-built and site-specific installations. Drawing on both didactic instructions on the wall and completely interactive play opportunities, this museum was both popular and engaging. I particularly liked the larger than life dinner table under which to play (Dinner T.V. by Joe Yorty and John Brady), the baby pictures of the artists, and the chickens that were fed daily.





Ghibli Museum

Mitaka, Japan

Visited by Ann Marie Murnaghan, 2018

Photographs By Ann Marie Murnaghan

<https://www.ghibli-museum.jp/en/>



The Ghibli Museum in Mitaka, Japan, is located just outside of Tokyo. A popular tourist venue for local and international fans of the work of Hayao Miyazaki and his animation studio (Ghibli) which are known for their path breaking work in animation that integrates the fantastic (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, 1985) and the mundane (*Whisper of the Heart*, 1997). The museum site is an immersive space that contains artifacts from the films productions like animation cells, and exhibits on film production like how the colours in the films retain their consistency from scene to scene in different lighting and environmental conditions. In an interactive way, the visitor experiences Miyazaki's inspirations for the story and look of the films by leafing through photo albums and documents. For the younger set there are active spaces like



a room sized cat bus from *Totoro* (1988) to climb on, and a larger than life robot on the roof that people take portraits with. There is a cafe, shop, library, and theatre on site which function to bring all elements of a field trip into Ghibli-land. There are no photos allowed of the interiors of the museum, in order to keep the audience present in their experience, and to retain the sense of mystery and excitement of a visit.



The Strong National Museum of Play

Rochester, United States

Visited by Ann Marie Murnaghan, 2020

Photographs By Ann Marie Murnaghan

<https://www.museumofplay.org/>



The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York has a long history as a museum of children's cultures. Margaret Woodbury Strong's collection and endowment to the museum laid the foundation of this huge site in downtown Rochester dedicated to learning, and the preservation and promotion of play. Recently updated (and continuously expanding), the site displays artifacts in thematic and chronologic exhibits, contains the Brian Sutton-Smith Archives of Play for students and researchers, The Woodbury School for three to five year olds with curriculum inspired by Reggio-Emilia, and also acts as an arm of the local library system so residents can borrow and return books on their visits. The rotating exhibits integrate reading, educational mandates, and contemporary youth culture while retaining an historical angle with a vintage carousel, and a Skyliner dining car restaurant, an outlet of local Bill Gray's. Video games and toys have pride of place in this venue, which originally built on Strong's collection of dolls and dollhouses that are still displayed in vast exhibit halls that entertain and interest children and adult alike.



Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books

Newcastle upon Tyne, England

Visited by Naomi Hamer and Ann Marie Murnaghan, 2014

Photographs by Naomi Hamer

<https://sevenstories.org.uk/>



Seven Stories: the National Centre for Children's Books founded in 2005 is the first museum in the UK dedicated solely to children's literature and contains an extensive archive of books, artwork, and artifacts of British children's book publishing including the largest public collection of Enid Blyton (see photograph from a special exhibition of the Blyton collection in 2014). Seven Stories is located in Newcastle upon Tyne as part of the regeneration of the Quayside. The museum is located in a converted Victorian mill with seven floors that house touring exhibitions, book-related performances, and thematic events such as the "Matilda Eat-A-Long" inspired by Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. The exhibitions draw upon a combination of interactive stations (see photograph of

Viking dress-up), tactile environments (see photograph of a sensory garden at an Enid Blyton special exhibition in 2014), alongside the display of collection material. The museum also includes permanent immersive exhibitions such as Judith Kerr's original kitchen from the 1960s for tea with the tiger similar to her well-known picture book.



Chihiro Art Museum

Tokyo and Azumino, Japan

Visited by Naomi Hamer, 2023

Photograph by Naomi Hamer

<https://chihiro.jp/en/tokyo/>

The original site of the Chihiro Art Museum Tokyo (previously Chihiro Iwasaki Art Museum of Picture Book Art) was established in 1977 to commemorate the work of Japanese picture book artist Chihiro Iwasaki. The museum is built on the site of Chihiro's house where she worked between 1952 and her death in 1974. The museum houses the Chihiro Iwasaki collection and an international collection of children's book art with rotating exhibitions on different art genres, themes and artists.

The museum includes "Chihiro's Garden" filled with flowers and plants found in Chihiro's own garden (see photograph of the museum garden). In 1977, the museum expanded to a second site the Chihiro Art Museum Azumino in Matsukawa Village in Nagano Prefecture. This site is considered the artist's spiritual home where her Chihiro's parents' settled following World War II. This museum is built in a more picturesque setting with exhibitions from the international collection and the history of picture book illustration. The museum is diligently focused on the preservation and conservation of the artwork in the collection with care and attention given to temperature, lighting, and special copies made of collection material. The Chihiro Art Museum was an inspiration to children's picture book artist Eric Carle and his wife Bobbie who founded the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Massachusetts and a close relationship continues between the two sites (see additional resources)

More information on the collections and past exhibitions may be found in this booklet from 2017 in honour of 40 years of the museum.

https://chihiro.jp/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/04/40years-of-chihiro-art-museum_new.pdf



Hyundai Museum of Kids' Books and Art

Seoul, Korea

Visited by Naomi Hamer, 2023

Photographs by Naomi Hamer

<https://www.hmoka.org/en/main/index.do>



The Hyundai Museum of Kids' Books and Art (MOKA) is the first museum focused on children's book and art in Korea with the mission to expand children's knowledge and imagination through experience with the picture book collection and engagement through reading and writing activities to create art and books themselves. Located in the Hyundai department store in Pangyo Southern Seoul in 2015, the architectural design of the MOKA is very striking and modern. It features

an open and bright gallery space including a "Bubble Step" stairway where children and adults can read, relax and reflect and an origami-shaped education room.



The museum also includes the award-winning Jaime Hayon Garden, an indoor garden that includes both plants and sculptural installations of imaginary animals.

The museum features exhibits on international picture book artists. For example, a recent exhibition on Jon Klassen and Mac Barnett with information on Klassen and Barnett's creative process as well as life-size immersive settings inspired by the characters and settings in their picture books (See photographs of the Klassen and Barnett exhibit above and below).



Acknowledgements

We have taken care not to include identifiable individuals in these photographs. This work has been partially funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Development Grant, Toronto Metropolitan University, and York University.