Museums aren't really haunted.

yeah?

Cat Museum

Adil Soh-Lim
This zine was created on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who have told their stories here since time immemorial, continue to do so today, and will go on telling their stories in time to come.

Cat Museum
Vol. 1

by
Adil Soh-Lim
Welcome to the National Cat Museum

No one can tell you exactly when the cats took up residence at the National Cat Museum. Selina says they were already here when she first started, twenty years ago, and staff from earlier knew little enough about pest management that they took no notice of the cats, for better or worse.

We are a small museum and have only three cats (fewer than the British Museum once boasted): Sprout is a bold and sociable calico cat; a strong muse: Bean is a sweet black cat; slow but affectionate; and Oleta is a light-footed tabby cat, quick to scale a wall. I am, admittedly, fond of them.
Since I first started here six months ago, Kenneth, the old Museum Technician, has made it my responsibility to feed and water the cats each morning and afternoon. The Board of Directors likes the cats for their luck and good publicity, and Kenneth says they keep the rats away.

Even though it's not the usual job of a Collections Officer and I know that animals have no place in a modern museum, I'm still happy to look after the cats. Kenneth is always kind to me and we are, after all, a museum about cats.
Cats through the Ages

Still, I haven't thrown away my training wholesale. Sprout, Bean, and Okra may be cute, but they also leave fur, fleas, and—God forbid—vomit wherever they go. So, I keep them out of exhibitions to the best of my ability, and out of the collection room at all costs. The little bells on their collars make this an easy job.

Bean, in particular, looks at me with big, sad eyes when I shoo him out. I have to remind myself that, ultimately, cats can't read and cats can't research. The exhibits and collections are really for our human guests, who can understand them with intelligence and objectivity.

Besides, the Senior Curator will end me if she finds pawprints on our documentation!
The Collection Room can be a wonderful sanctuary—dimly lit and crowded, yes, but also tidy, well-labeled and, contrary to popular belief, dustless. However, it can also be a lonely and even frightening place, especially when the rest of the building is quiet.

Last night, for example, I stayed back late to make a list of likely candidates for an upcoming exhibition (the Senior Curator would like this as soon as possible). While I inspected old collars, bowls, toys and cat specimens, entering them into my spreadsheet, the old building's usual creaks and knocks startled me, amplified in the silence.
I fed and watered the cats this morning, like usual. They didn’t seem particularly hungry, so I packed away their leftovers and saved them for the evening.

Unfortunately, Sprout followed me around for the rest of the day, meowing loudly with Bean in dejected tow.

The room’s usual shadows flickered in the dim fluorescent light and chased the corner of my eye, spooking me so much that I packed up before even finishing the task. I resolved to complete it tonight instead, but am not really looking forward to it.
Little jingles followed me on my rounds when I went to clean the cases and top up the kids' activity tables. I found Okra in all unlikely places — on top of cases, behind plinths, behind temporary walls and, just once, trapped inside a costume chest. I've evicted the little gremlin from the exhibition halls seven times or more today.

Ding!
Ding ding!

The cats got their leftover food just now, to keep them occupied while I head back upstairs to finish the exhibition longlist. To soothe my nerves, I remind myself that the creaks, knocks and flickering shadows are perfectly normal, that museums are haunted only metaphorically and not literally, and that I know, thanks to our database, the make, location and provenance of every artefact.
What was that?

cr-cr-THUMP!

Pull yourself together. Museums aren't really haunted.
Hefting my notebook, I flick the workbench lights on, shut the door behind me and resume work.

Leather collar, accession number CM1989.11.05. Overall condition good. Faint brown stain on proper left side. Notable owner, founding President of
Leather collar, accession number CH1989.11.05, overall condition good.
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Oh no...

THUMP

Ding-

...ding-ling!

Ding!

Those goddamn cats!
shift-shift-dingaling

click!

Where are you?!
A bright pair of eyes flashes back from the shadows, caught in my torch beam.

Okra, the rascal!

Then, another pair. I count.

One, two,

three, four—

And an odd-looking fourth pair, too. Two round voids in a pale, translucent body, swallowing the beam's light.
A chorus of shuffling, and the flickering shadows emerge from the corners of my eyes. There are countless pale cats, an entire colony—one for each item in this room. Bean purrs.
Sprout, Bean and Okra gently guide the fourth cat forwards, urging it up onto the workbench and resting around it for support. The pale cat sniffs then nuzzles the leather collar arranged before me. It lays a soft paw on my notebook.

I continue my notes.

Leather collar, accession number CM1989.11.05, overall condition good. Faint brown stain on proper left side. Notable owner, founding President of Australian Cat Federation.

Cat named Azuki. Favourite food: cheese. Born feral, litter of five. Runt. Adopted at one year, now...
The rest of our ghostly colony gathers around, some springing onto the bench with soft thumps, shadows no longer shy or elusive. The evening stretches ahead, warm and friendly.

Thank you for reading 😊

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