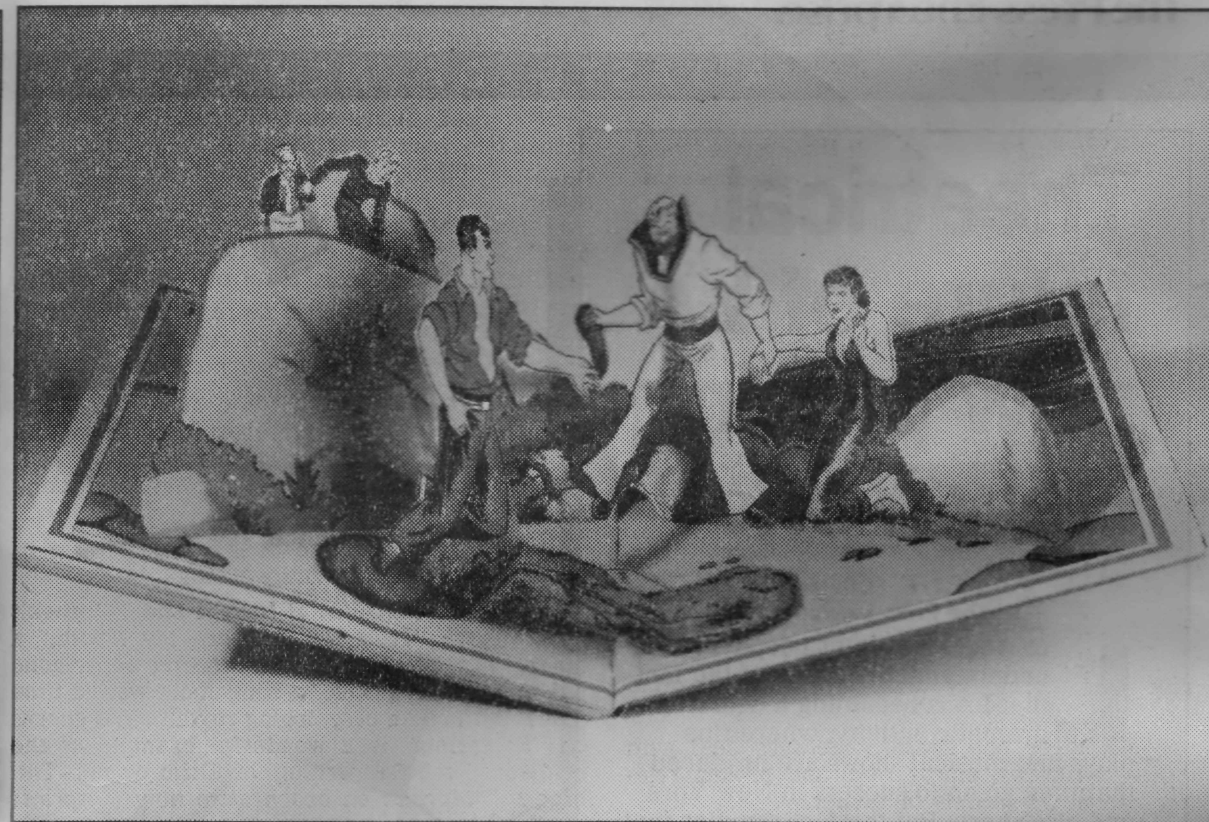




Left, the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, a Smithsonian Institution museum outside of Washington, D.C. makes its home in the 1898 Andrew Carnegie mansion. Right, a Terry and the Pirates "Pop-up" from Cooper-Hewitt's "Surprise! Surprise! Pop-up and Moveable Books."

A rewarding tour of 4 little-known museums in New York

There's a regular circuit of major museums any art-minded visitor in New York must make: the Metropolitan, the Guggenheim, the Whitney uptown, the Museum of Modern Art midtown (a great standby on Mondays, when all the others are closed) and perhaps the New Museum as part of a Saturday tour of the SoHo art galleries downtown.

But the true museum junkie — the type who looks not only at the art but also at the building, and even the display cases, in a passionate quest for the total museum experience — never stops there. The city, after all, is The Source.

I made some notes during a recent tour of four important but little-known institutions, each a major national centerpiece of its kind. Two are probably on the way to some other places you would visit in New York; the others require a special trip.

A growing controversy over the fate of this country's most important remnants of native culture has brought the **Museum of the American Indian** to public attention in recent months. Inadequately housed and underfunded, the museum considered a move to Texas where a private donor had offered substantial help.

On Art



Charles Desmarais

The suggestion of such a move was a catalyst for city, state and federal action to keep the museum somewhere in New York or, as Sen. Daniel Inouye and others would have it, to build a new home for it along the Washington, D.C., Federal Mall.

The Museum of the American Indian is currently located far uptown in a busy commercial district at Broadway and 155th Street. It occupies one of several buildings at the former home of the now-defunct American Geographical Society. Here, a once-sumptuous Beaux-Arts grouping of stone buildings is gathered around a brick plaza, at the center of which one finds a somewhat tattered sculpture garden.

Even to a non-expert in Indian art and design, the rarity and importance of the collection is apparent. Sadly, most of the objects are jammed into inadequate display cases, and the labeling of objects leaves the visitor with many more questions than answers.

Still, a visit is fascinating for the discoveries one makes on one's own. Compare, for example, the birch bark pictographic scrolls — apparently made before contact with Europeans — to a set of birch bark playing cards. Or the 1-inch ivory carvings of Northwest tribes to their 15-foot totems and gates.

On hand are such treasures as the wampum belts given to William Penn in 1683, which resulted in the founding of the state of Pennsylvania, and the Lt. Andrew Foster Collection, one of the oldest collections of datable North American Indian ethnology, assembled just 16 years after the American Revolution.

Museum Mile is a famous stretch of Fifth

Avenue that has a wealth of museum resources, including the Met, the Guggenheim and a number of smaller gems. One of the brightest of these is the **Cooper-Hewitt Museum** at 2 E. 91st St.

The Cooper-Hewitt, the only Smithsonian Institution museum outside of Washington, D.C., bills itself as the National Museum of Design. As such, it could not have found a better home than the 1898 Andrew Carnegie mansion, an architectural wonder restored in 1976.

Typical of the Cooper-Hewitt's eclectic programming is the current exhibition array: a large show of printed fabrics produced between 1760 and 1860; an exhibition examining temporary arches designed by major architects for the Galveston, Texas, Mardi Gras; a survey of the work of set designer/architect Joseph Urban; and "Surprise! Surprise! Pop-up and Moveable Books."

"Surprise!" (on view through Feb. 21) features the charming, colorful children's books one might expect, along with 15th- and 16th-century items on cosmology and perspective. Also shown are original drawings and models for "The Human Body," a popular item published in 1983.

Television and radio may not generally be considered fine arts today, but with time we are coming to appreciate such artistic geniuses as Ernie Kovacs. Moreover, the historical value of our electronic media heritage is indisputable.

The 12-year-old **Museum of Broadcasting** was created to preserve such materials. It boasts an impressive board of trustees, with supporters such as Lucille Ball and Norman Lear. Housed in a slick midtown headquarters at 1 E. 53rd St., the museum cares for some 20,000 programs donated by the industry.

The museum has an extensive exhibition schedule — through Feb. 6, the program features "Jackie Gleason: 'The Great One'" — and also sponsors seminars with performers, critics and professionals in the field.

Copies of all the museum's holdings are available for viewing or listening. Consult an extensive library-style card catalog, then call up your choice of programs to a space-age individual console.

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One subway stop out of Manhattan and into Queens brings you to **P.S. 1**, at 46-01 21st St., Long Island City. Not a traditional museum — it has no collection, mostly unfinished walls and few gallery-type floodlights — P.S. 1 is perhaps the best-known "alternative space" in the United States.

A rambling, former grammar school, P.S. 1 is the kind of place where artists reign as final arbiters of their own gallery installations. As a result, one is apt to see some very innovative and exciting works, as well as a fair share of failures.

James Turrell created the only permanent piece in the building, one similar to his work currently at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. It is a stunning room with only a plate of sky for a ceiling, a still environment where the squealing wheels of passing trains become an eerie music.

Also on view are seven "special projects" and five additional exhibitions, including a huge and spectacular Michael Tracy show of mixed media, quasi-religious work — some of the most disturbing being done today.