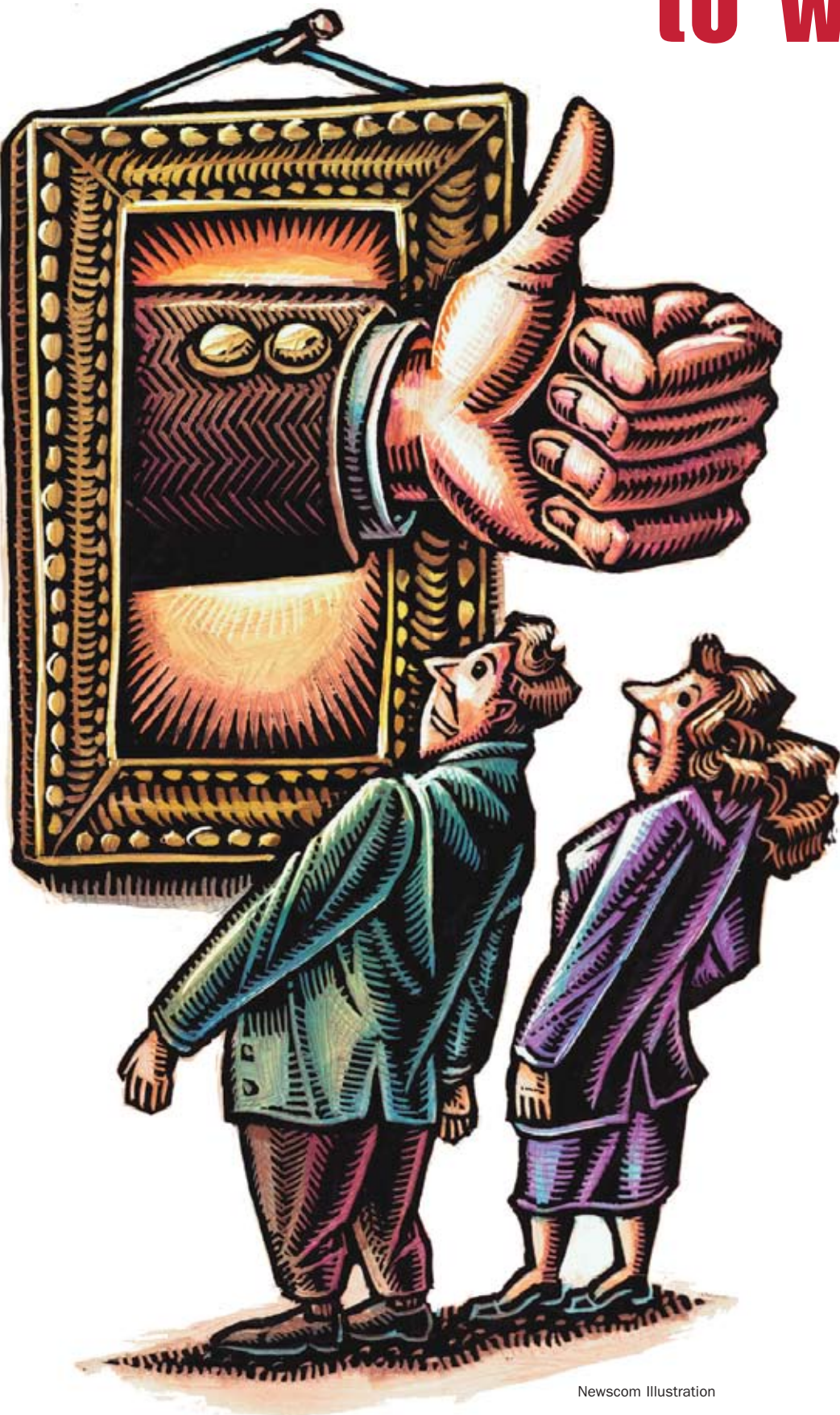


Are you

art-phobic?

You don't have
to be intimidated
to walk into a gallery



Newscom Illustration

By Abby Luby  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**G**o ahead. Go inside. It's only an art gallery, and the stuff on the walls won't bite.

And even if the art seems pretentious and obscure, it doesn't matter. What matters is your curiosity and what you think you see.

The immediate impact of images, lines, shapes and colors within a frame can become candy for the eyes and sweetness for the soul. It all depends on what agrees with you; sort of like food — if your senses smile at aromas and flavors, then it promises to be nourishing.

Craving food and taking in visual information work pretty much the same way — we need

Please see **ART**, Page D7



"Wheelabout" by Nancy Graves.



Contributed photos

"The Bath" by Mary Cassatt.



"Pleasures" by Vasily Kandinsky.



"Tutti-Frutti" by Helen Frankenthaler.

Going out on a
high note

Our picks for the best discs of 2006



Arctic Monkeys.

AP photos

By Ray Hogan  
and Jonathan Rougeot

STAFF WRITERS

**T**his was a great year to be a music lover. Bands both older and younger released some of the best, and most inventive, music of their careers. Bob Dylan is back on top of his game, and Red Hot Chili Peppers and Sonic Youth are still going strong in their third decades. And young hipsters such as Arctic Monkeys and TV on the Radio are continuing to push musical boundaries. Here is a sampling of some of the best music of the year, in our opinions.

"Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not," Arctic Monkeys (Domino)

Yes, it was one of the most overhyped bands of the year, but it was not undeserved. "Whatever People Say I Am" is



Red Hot Chili Peppers.

a cocky, swaggering debut from a bunch of Brits who aren't even out of their teens, and features some of the most catchy, danceable rock music of the past decade. The picture of a geezer smoking a cigarette on the cover says it all:

This band doesn't really care if it ticks you off. Lead single, "I Bet You Look Good On the Dancefloor," pounds like a freight train which, by the chorus, is

Please see **BEST**, Page D2



ART

NOT JUST FUN AND GAMES

Bruce Museum exhibit looks at toys through time



“Ice Cream Wagon.”



“Wind-up Steamboat.”

By Abby Luby  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

They are the touchstones of our childhood, the very precious items that cajoled us into the world of fantasy and play. They are our cherished childhood toys that teach us basic life lessons — how to play, share and laugh. And if you are a baby boomer, seeing older toys will jog your memory in a blast of nostalgia at the current show, “Zip, Bop and Whir: Toys of the 20th Century,” at the Bruce Museum.

REVIEW

The show, curated by the museum’s director of education, Robin Garr, and the museum’s design team, is not just for toy aficionados, or mom and dad. There are plenty of interactive games for the kids. Since playing is a large part of learning, the exhibit connects the two. A dozen hands-on discovery stations around the room tie in a

scientific message that corresponds to older toys in nearby display cases.

Rolling, floating, flying, pushing and pulling and explored as basic scientific concepts. From the simple toys that you pull or push to the Matchbox cars on the loop-the-loop driven by centrifugal force, connecting fun and science is key for this show.

How do wheels, a lifelong fascination, put other things in motion? The childhood mystery of how quacks bleep out from Fisher-Price’s Dr. Duck is solved by pressing a pedal beneath the display case holding the duck and through a small, clear plastic window in the duck’s throat, seeing the connection between the duck’s moving wheels and his bill. According to the adjacent explanation, the 1931 duck reproduction is replete with wheels, rods, axels and a tiny bellows that make Dr. Duck honk that memorable quack.

About a dozen large, plastic gears in primary colors are magnets on a large surface. Kids can turn them and watch the white dots on each gear to see how

they intertwine and move. The lesson: how gears transfer energy and make things move. Combine the gears with motors you have a revolution in toys such as Erector sets or Meccano with assorted pulleys, gears and small electric motors — all of which can be seen at the show.

Although the exhibit is small — it inhabits only one room — the bright blue and orange space is cheery and the whir of electric trains comes from a circular track mounted to the ceiling in the center of the room, providing playroom ambience.

Toys not only have a very distinct place in our personal history, they have a place in world history as well. Before World War II, American toy companies used rubber, metal and wood to manufacture most of their toys. But as World War II approached, these materials had to be abandoned because they were needed by the military. In fact, if a toy factory didn’t become a military supply or ammunitions factory, it usually went out of business. The companies that

Please see **TOYS**, Page D4



“Chicken Push Toy.”

Contributed photos



“Marx Komikal Kop.”

MAKING THE ART SEEN

ADMISSION TO EVENTS FREE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Museums & Nonprofit Venues

**THE ALDRICH CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM** No Reservations: **Native American History and Culture in Contemporary Art** Works by Native and non-Native artists, including “Dwelling,” a collection of blankets in a pile more than 6 feet high. Through Feb. 25. Free for members, \$5 for nonmembers. Tuesday-Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 258 Main St., Ridgefield. 438-4519 or [www.aldrichart.org](http://www.aldrichart.org).  
**BRUCE MUSEUM** **Zip, Bop and Whir: Toys of the 20th Century** Favorite toys from the 1900s. Through July 8. **In Response to Place** Photographs of nature taken at conservatories. Through Jan. 28. **Black and White Since 1960** Prints from the collection of Reba and Dave Williams. Through Feb. 25. **Jan van der Heyden** Works by the Dutch painter. Through Jan. 10. Paintings by more than 20 artists, including William Merritt Chase, Joseph DeCamp, Daniel Garber, Childé Hassam, Willard Metcalf, Theodore Robinson, John Singer Sargent, Robert Spencer, John H. Twachtman and J. Alden Weir. \$7, \$6 for seniors and children 5-12; free to children younger than 5. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. 869-0376 or [www.brucemuseum.org](http://www.brucemuseum.org).  
**THE DISCOVERY MUSEUM** **Imagination** Paintings by Ed Rath. Through Jan. 31. \$8.50; \$7 for children, seniors and students; free for children younger than 5 and members. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 4450 Park Ave., Bridgeport. 372-3521 or [www.discoverymuseum.org](http://www.discoverymuseum.org).  
**RICHARD AND DOLLY MAASS GALLERY — PURCHASE COLLEGE** **Woodworks** exhibit Works by Francis Cape. Through Jan. 7. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Purchase College, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y. 914-251-6951.  
**HOUSATONIC MUSEUM OF ART** **Abstractions and Figures** Works by Matthias

Alfen. Through Feb. 21. Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; open Thursday until 7 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; Sunday, noon-4 p.m.; closed all state and major holidays. 900 Lafayette Blvd., Bridgeport. 332-5052 or [www.hctc.commet.edu](http://www.hctc.commet.edu).  
**KATONAH MUSEUM** **Ancient Art of the Cyclades** Devoted to the craft traditions from the Greek Cyclades Islands during the third millennium B.C. Through Dec. 31. **Wonder Women: Idols in Contemporary Art** Images of women from the film, pop music and fashion industries. Through Dec. 31. **Tracey Moffatt: Love** 21-minute video installation exploring Hollywood conventions, turning a critical eye on relationships between men and women. Through Dec. 31. **Sara Fanelli: Mythological Monsters of Ancient Greece** A retelling of Fanelli’s book, “Mythological Monsters,” through drawings. Through Dec. 31. **Michael Krondl: Rising Water, Falling Water** An outdoor, site-specific installation along the museum’s low retaining wall facing Route 22. Through April 8. **Michael Steiner** Sculptures and paintings by Steiner. Through April 22. Changing exhibitions and educational programs, featuring six major exhibitions a year. Free, 10 a.m.-noon; \$3, noon-5 p.m. Always free to members and children younger than 12. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. Route 22 at Jay Street, Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-9555 or [www.katonahmuseum.org](http://www.katonahmuseum.org).  
**KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS MUSEUM** **Crosses and Crucifixes** Exhibit being shown through June 17 as a celebration of the Christian faith. Wednesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. 1 State St., New Haven. 865-0400.  
**NEUBERGER MUSEUM OF ART — PURCHASE COLLEGE** **Transitional Objects: Contemporary Still Life** Examines the phenomenon of still-life as a genre

Please see **ART SEEN**, Page D4

OPENINGS

ADMISSION TO EVENTS FREE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Openings

**ARTS + LITERATURE LABORATORY** **Loud** A juried exhibition of recent works by 19 national artists whose work is clamorous and colorful. Saturday through Feb. 4. Saturday and Sunday, noon-5 p.m. Erector Square Building 2, 319 Peck St., New Haven. 671-5175 or [www.allgallery.org](http://www.allgallery.org).  
**EXPOSURE GALLERY AT ONE WHITNEY** **Photography exhibit** Photographs by Andrew Hungaski. Thursday through Jan. 30. Opening reception Jan. 11, 6-9 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, noon-6 p.m. or by appointment. 1 Whitney Ave., New Haven. 494-9905 or [www.ExposureGalleries.com](http://www.ExposureGalleries.com).  
**MAYOR’S GALLERY** **Abstractions and Attractions** Works by Donna L. Hargrove and Kwamé Henry Jones. Wednesday through Feb. 28. Artists’ reception Jan. 9, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Stamford Government Center, 10th floor, 888 Washington Blvd. 325-8259.  
**RIVER ROAD GALLERY** **A Walk into Floral Splendor** Paintings by Elizabeth Pena. Tomorrow through Jan. 31. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. 21 River Road, Wilton. 762-3887.

Lectures/Tours

**BRUCE MUSEUM** Docent-led gallery tours Weekly guided tours of the

Please see **OPENINGS**, Page D4



# Movie clock

Any inaccuracies in these listings may be the result of last-minute changes by the movie theaters.  
**SUNDAY, DEC. 31**

## BEDFORD, N.Y.

**Clearview's Bedford Playhouse, Route 22, 914-234-7300**

Happy Feet: 11:30, 3, 6:30, 10  
Night at the Museum: 11:45, 2:15, 4:45, 7:15, 9:45

## BETHEL

**Bethel Cinema, 269 Greenwood Ave., 778-2100**

The Good Shepherd: Noon, 3:35, 7:20  
Little Children: 1:10, 3:55, 6:50, 9:35  
The Pursuit of Happyness: Thu: 7, 9:30; Fri/Sat/Sun: 1:40, 4:20, 7, 9:30  
Volver: Thu: 6:45, 9:15; Fri/Sat/Sun: 1:20, 4, 6:45, 9:15

## BRIDGEPORT

**Showcase Cinemas, 286 Canfield Ave., 339-7171**

Bhagam Bhag: 11:30, 3:15, 6:30, 9:40  
Black Christmas: 10:40, 12:55, 3:10, 5:30, 8, 10:15  
Blood Diamond: 12:40, 3:45, 6:50, 9:55  
Casino Royale: 12:45, 3:50, 6:55, 10  
Charlotte's Web: 10:05, 10:35, 11:05, 12:20, 1:25, 2:45, 4, 5, 7:30, 9:45  
Deck the Halls: 10:30 a.m.  
Deja Vu: 7, 10:05  
Eragon: 10:10, 11, 12:35, 1:35, 3, 5, 25, 7:55, 10:25  
Night at the Museum: 10, 11:10, 12:25, 1:50, 2:50, 4:30, 5:20, 7:20, 7:50, 9:50, 10:20  
Rocky Balboa: 11:25, 12:15, 1:55, 2:40, 4:35, 5:05, 7:10, 7:40, 9:35, 10:10  
The Queen: 4:10, 6:40, 9:20  
Unaccompanied Minors: 10:15 a.m.

## DARIEN

**Darien Playhouse, 1077 Post Road, 655-7655**

Charlotte's Web: 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45  
Night at the Museum: 1:30, 3:45, 6, 8:15

## FAIRFIELD

**Fairfield Cinemas, 41 Black Rock Turnpike, 339-7151**

Apocalpyto: 9:45  
Dreamgirls: 10:30, 12:15, 1:20, 3:30, 4:15, 6:40, 7:30, 9:40, 10:25  
The Good Shepherd: 11:30, 1, 3, 4:30, 6:30, 8, 10 1, 2:35, 4:30, 6:30, 8, 9:50  
Happy Feet: 11:25, 2, 4:45, 7:15  
The Holiday: 11:45, 2:45, 6:20, 9:20  
The Nativity Story: 10:35 a.m.  
The Pursuit of Happyness: 11, 12:40, 1:40, 3:15, 4:20, 6:50, 7:20, 9:30, 10:10  
The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause: 10:50  
We Are Marshall: 10:55, 1:50, 4:40, 7:40, 10:20

## GREENWICH

**Clearview's Greenwich Twin, 356 Greenwich Ave., 869-6030**

Happy Feet: 1:15, 3:30  
The Pursuit of Happyness: 1, 4, 7, 10  
The Queen: 6:30, 9:30

**Bow Tie Cinemas Plaza 3, 2 Railroad Ave., 869-4030**

Charlotte's Web: 12:45, 3:30, 7:15, 9:40  
The Good Shepherd: 12:15, 4:30, 8



©Paramount Pictures

**Anika Noni Rose, left, Beyonce Knowles, center, and Jennifer Hudson**

Night at the Museum: 1:15, 4, 7, 9:30

## NEW CANAAN

**Bow Tie Cinemas New Canaan Playhouse, 89 Elm St., 966-0600**

The Holiday: 12:30, 3:30, 6:45, 9:30  
Night at the Museum: 12:45, 3:45, 6:30, 9:15

## NORWALK

**Bow Tie Cinemas Royale 6, 542 Westport Ave., 846-8797**

Blood Diamond: 11:45, 3:30, 6:40, 9:50  
Casino Royale: 3:15, 6:30, 9:40  
Charlotte's Web: Noon, 2:30, 5, 7:20, 9:30  
The Good Shepherd: 12:15, 4, 7:45  
The Holiday: 12:45, 3:45, 6:50, 10  
The Nativity Story: 1

Night at the Museum: 11:30, 2:10, 4:50, 7:30, 10:10

**Bow Tie Cinemas SoNo Regent, 64 N. Main St., 899-7979**

Call theater for schedule.

**Garden Cinemas, 26 Isaac St., 838-4504**

Babel: 3:40, 8:40  
The History Boys: 2:10, 4:30, 6:50, 9:10  
The Painted Veil  
The Queen: 1:30, 6:30  
Volver: 1:30, 4, 6:40, 9:10  
**IMAX Theater at Maritime Aquarium, 10 N. Water St., 852-0700**  
Hurricane on the Bayou: 11, 1, 3, 7:30  
Ocean Wonderland: 2  
Whales: Noon

## PLEASANTVILLE, N.Y.

**Jacob Burns Film Center, 364 Manville Road, 914-747-5555**

The History Boys: 2:15, 4:45, 7  
The Painted Veil: 12:10, 2:25, 5, 7:20  
Volver: 12:05, 2:35, 5:10, 7:40  
The Witches: Noon

## PORT CHESTER, N.Y.

**Loews The Waterfront at Port Chester, 40 Westchester Ave., 914-510-1000**

Apocalpyto: 12:20, 7:25

Blood Diamond: 6:25, 9:40

Casino Royale: 4:15, 10:30

Charlotte's Web: 11:10, 1:50, 4:35, 7:20, 9:50  
Dreamgirls: 11, 12:15, 2, 3:15, 5, 6:15, 8, 9:30

Eragon: 11:20, 1:40, 4:05, 6:45, 9:15  
The Good Shepherd: 11:50, 3:30, 8:30  
Happy Feet: 10:35, 1:15, 3:55

The Holiday: 10:45, 1:45, 4:50, 7:55  
Night at the Museum: 10:30, 11:30, 1:10, 2:10, 4, 5:05, 7, 7:50, 9:45

The Pursuit of Happyness: 10:50, 11:45, 1:30, 2:30, 4:15, 5:30, 7:15, 8:25, 10:15

Rocky Balboa: 10:55, 1:35, 4:20, 7:05, 9:55  
We Are Marshall: 12:25, 3:50, 7:10, 10:25

## RIDGEFIELD

**The Ridgefield Playhouse, 80 E. River Ave., 438-5795**

Charlotte's Web: 12:30, 3, 5:30

## RYE BROOK, N.Y.

**Clearview's Rye Ridge Cinemas, Rye Ridge Shopping Center, 914-939-8177**

The History Boys: 1:30, 4:15, 7, 9:30  
The Queen: 1, 3:45, 6:30, 9

## STAMFORD

**Avon Theatre, 272 Bedford St., 967-3660**

Little Children: 1:45, 4:20, 6:55  
The Painted Veil: 1:55, 4:30, 7:05

**Bow Tie Cinemas Landmark 9, 5 Landmark Square, 324-3100**

Casino Royale: 12:45, 3:45, 6:45, 9:45  
Dreamgirls: 12:30, 1, 3:30, 4, 6:30, 7, 9:30, 10  
Eragon: 1:50, 4:30, 7:10, 9:35  
Happy Feet: 12:30, 2:50, 7:20  
The Holiday: 12:50, 3:50, 6:50, 9:45  
The Pursuit of Happyness: 1:20, 4:20, 7:15, 9:50  
Rocky Balboa: 12:40, 3, 5:20, 7:40, 10:05  
Unaccompanied Minors: 5:10, 9:40  
We Are Marshall: 1:10, 4:10, 7:05, 9:55

**Bow Tie Cinemas Majestic, 118 Summer**

## St., 323-1690

Apocalpyto: 12:40, 3:40, 6:50, 9:50  
Blood Diamond: 12:50, 3:50, 7, 10  
Charlotte's Web: 1:10, 4:10, 6:40, 9:30  
Deck the Halls: 12:30  
The Good Shepherd: 12:50, 4:30, 8:10  
Night at the Museum: 1:30, 3, 4, 5:30, 7:10, 8, 9:40, 10:25  
**State Cinema, 990 Hope St., 325-0250**  
Babel: 5  
Deja Vu: 8:30  
The Departed: 7:45  
Flushed Away: 1, 3  
The Queen: 4:30, 6:30  
The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause: 12:30, 2:30

## TRUMBULL

**Bow Tie Cinemas Marquis 16, 100 Quarry Road, 365-6500**

Apocalpyto: 3:10, 6:40, 9:45  
Black Christmas: 8:10, 10:20  
Blood Diamond: 1, 3:40, 6:30, 7, 9:20  
Casino Royal: 7:10, 10:10  
Charlotte's Web: 11:30 12:10, 1:45, 2:45, 4:20, 5:20, 6:40, 9:10  
Deck the Halls: 11:30 a.m.  
Dreamgirls: Noon, 1, 3, 4, 7, 7:40, 10  
Eragon: 11:45, 2:20, 5:10, 7:30, 10  
The Good Shepherd: 12:20, 4:10, 8  
Happy Feet: 11:40, 2:10, 4:45  
The Holiday: 12:10, 3:20, 6:30, 9:20  
The Nativity Story: 1:20  
Night at the Museum: 12:30, 2:10, 3:30, 5, 7:10, 7:45, 9:50  
The Pursuit of Happyness: Noon, 2:45, 3:45, 5:20, 6:45, 8, 9:30  
Rocky Balboa: 1:20, 4:10, 7:30, 10:10  
The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause: 12:30  
Unaccompanied Minors: 1:30  
We Are Marshall: 4:20, 7:20, 10:20

## WHITE PLAINS, N.Y.

**City Center 15 Cinema de Lux, 19 Mamaroneck Ave., 914-747-6000**

Apocalpyto: 1:15, 4:15, 7:15, 10:30  
Blood Diamond: 12:45, 4:05, 7:30, 10:35  
Casino Royale: 9:10, 12:15  
Charlotte's Web: 10, 11, 1:25, 4, 6:30, 9:05, 11:20  
Dreamgirls: 11:45, 12:15, 2:40, 3:10, 6:10, 6:40, 9:15, 9:55, 12:10, 12:45  
Eragon: 11:05, 1:35, 4:10, 6:50, 9:25, 11:55  
The Good Shepherd: 11:20, 2:55, 6:35, 10:10  
Happy Feet: 10:05, noon, 12:35, 3:40, 6:35  
The Holiday: 10, 12:50, 3:45, 6:55, 10:05  
Night at the Museum: 10:10, 12:35, 2:30, 3, 4:55, 5:25, 7:20, 7:50, 9:45, 10:15, 12:10, 12:40  
The Pursuit of Happyness: 10:15, 10:45, 1, 1:30, 3:55, 4:25, 7, 7:25, 9:50, 10:25, 12:20  
Rocky Balboa: 11:30, 2:10, 4:45, 7:45, 10:20, 12:40  
The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause: 10:30 a.m.  
We Are Marshall: 10:50, 1:40, 4:35, 7:35, 10:35

## WILTON

**Bow Tie Cinemas Wilton 4, 21 River Road, 761-0767**

Casino Royal: 3:30, 6:30, 9:20  
Charlotte's Web: 12:30, 4, 6:15, 8:30  
Happy Feet: 12:40  
Night at the Museum: 12:50, 3:45, 7:15, 9:40  
The Pursuit of Happyness: 1, 4:15, 7, 9:35

## Toys

■ Continued from Page D3

survived reverted to wooden toys until the war ended.

When and where toys were invented and how long they lasted is fun and fascinating information learned at the exhibition. For instance, Fisher & Price started in East Aurora, N.Y., in 1930 with a dictum that said all its toys had to be "happy looking, make noise, and move"; and the Erector Set was invented by A.C. Gilbert in 1911 in New Haven. Another fascinating toy history nugget is about the all-American Frisbee. Did you know that today's Frisbee started out as a pie plate? On display at the show is one of the original pie tins that says "Frisbie" and was used at the Frisbie Baking Company in Bridgeport. The tins were apparently tossed for fun on college campuses, but it wasn't until Walter Morrison patented the "Morrison Slope" that a curved lip was added to the pie tin shape. Morrison produced the plastic "Pluto Platter," which is on display next to the pie tin and then the fun-filled flying saucers really took off.

During a recent viewing of the show, a handful of children ages 2 to 5 were happily handling everything offered them, from wooden blocks to remote control units to Matchbox cars. No one

## Art Seen

■ Continued from Page D3

recast in recent years. Through Jan. 21. **Renée Green: Wavelinks, 1999-2002** Video-installation series exploring the interactions people have with sound. Through Jan. 21. **Crossing the BLVD: strangers, neighbors, aliens in a new america** Multimedia show presents the personal stories of new immigrants and refugees living in Queens, N.Y. Through Jan. 7. \$6, \$4 for seniors and students with ID, free to members and children younger than 12. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y. 914-251-6100 or www.neuberger.org.

**STAMFORD MUSEUM & NATURE CENTER A Life in Quilts** A series by Teresa Barkley portraying contemporary life in her quilts. Through April 1. \$8; \$6 for seniors and students; \$4 for children ages 4-17; free for children 3 or younger, members and Stamford residents on Wednesdays. Monday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. 39 Scofieldtown Road, Stamford. 322-1646 or www.stamfordmuseum.org.

**WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART Picasso to Pop: Aspects of Modern Art** Some of the atheneum's holdings, including works by surrealism and super-realism and pop artists. Through Nov. 18. **Soul Food!** An exhibition by The Amistad Center for Art & Culture on African-American Cooking and Creativity. Through April 7. **Samuel Colt: Arms, Art and Invention** Arms from Colt's collection, split between the museum and the Museum of Connecticut History. Through March 4. **Falconry and Fencing** Photographs by Michelle Elzay. Through Jan. 7. **American Splendor** Hudson River School Masterworks returns to the Wadsworth collection. Through December. \$10, \$8 for seniors (62 and older), \$5 for students; \$3 for children younger than 12 and members. Wednesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 600 Main St., Hartford. 860-278-2670 or www.wadsworthatheneum.org.

## Galleries

**ART SPACE and NINA BENTLEY Room for Reflection** Works by Nina Bentley. Through April 29. Call for hours. Art Space, 50 Orange St., New Haven; 772-2709. Nina Bentley, 88 Hillandale Road, Westport; 226-1343 or www.ninabentley.com.

**BARTLETT ARBORETUM & GARDENS Worlds Near and Far** Acrylics and watercolors by John Newcomb. Through Jan. 29. Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 151 Brookdale Road, Stamford. 322-6971 or www.bartlettarboretum.org.

**FLINN GALLERY Birds** Works by five artists depicting birds. Through Jan. 25. Monday-Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sunday, 1-5 p.m. Greenwich Library, 101 W. Putnam Ave. 637-0525 or www.flinngallery.com.

**GREENWICH ARTS COUNCIL New York in the '70s/Postscript 9/11** Photos by Allan Tannenbaum, photo editor for the SoHo Weekly News. Through Friday. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, noon-5; Sunday by appointment. 299 Greenwich Ave. 622-3998 or www.greenwicharts.org.

**GREENWICH WORKSHOP GALLERY Small Works III** More than 50 renowned contemporary artists display their miniature art. Through today, Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. 1657 Post Road, Fairfield. 255-4613 or www.greenwichworkshopgallery.com.

**KARL SODERLUND GALLERY & STUDIO Seascapes & Marine Art** Paintings by Karl Soderlund. Through today.

## Openings

■ Continued from Page D3

museum's galleries. Friday, 12:30-1:30 p.m. Free with museum admission: \$5, \$4 for seniors and children 5-12; free to children younger than 5 and members. 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich. 869-0376 or www.brucemuseum.org.

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF GREENWICH — BUSH-HOLLEY HISTORIC SITE Guided tours** of National Historic Landmark, deeded circa 1732, that became the site of the first Impressionist art colony in America in the late 19th century. Three exhibition galleries and related historic buildings. Tuesday-Sunday, 12:15, 1:15, 2:15 and 3:15 p.m. \$6, \$4 for seniors and students. Scheduled group tours of more than 10 people receive a discounted rate of \$4. 39 Strickland Road, Cos Cob. 869-6899 or www.hstg.org.

seemed to mind the absence of video games, so perhaps even hi-tech toys don't hold a monopoly on fun and kids can still enjoy basic toys. And many of those basics joining Dr. Duck were such favorites as pull toy Snoop 'n Sniff, a Marx Komikal Kop, a Marx train set, wooden picture blocks and alphabet blocks, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs, Classic Erector Set, Hot Wheels and Matchbox cars.

Since exhibits in the show had a built-in learning piece, dolls and stuffies, the springboard for a kid's imagination into fantasy worlds, were unfortunately missing. Although not a thematic fit, it would have been a nice addition to see the original Raggedy Ann and Andy for some of us adults to pick up where we left off so many years ago and for kids to hug and talk to. At least it gets kids into a museum, the best experience and lesson of all.

• *"Zip, Bop and Whir: Toys of the 20th Century" will be on view at the Bruce Museum, 1 Museum Drive, Greenwich, through July 8. \$7, \$6 for seniors and students, and free for children younger than 5, free admission on Tuesdays. Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday, 1-5 p.m. and closed Mondays. 869-0376 or www.brucemuseum.org.*

Tuesday-Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-5 p.m. 1657 Post Road, Fairfield. 319-1929.

**LES BEAUX ARTS GALLERY Painting exhibit** Works by folk painter Anne Strasberg. Through Jan. 7. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-noon. Round Hill Community Church, 395 Round Hill Road, Greenwich. 869-1091.

**MATTHEWS PARK 14 Sculptures** Traveling exhibition of sculptures uses contemporary styles and materials. Through July. Daily, dawn-dusk. West Avenue, Norwalk. 212-966-5790 or www.14sculptures.com.

**RIVER ROAD GALLERY A Gift of Art** Landscapes from New England, Provence and Tuscany; still lifes; equestrian photography; and other diverse styles. Through today. Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. 21 River Road, Wilton. 762-3887.

**ROCKWELL ART AND FRAMING — NORWALK An Odyssey with Lisa Black** Paintings, photography, prints, poetry and handmade paper pottery. Through Jan. 10. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 235 Main Ave. 846-2212 or www.rockwellartandframing.com.

**ROCKWELL ART AND FRAMING — WESTPORT Photography exhibit** Works by Robert Preston. Through Jan. 9. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. 379 Danbury Road, Wilton. 762-8311 or www.rockwellartandframing.com.

**STAMFORD ART ASSOCIATION Holiday Art and Craft Show** Boutique-style event showcasing more than 45 artisans from throughout Connecticut. Through Thursday. 39 Franklin St. 325-1139 or www.stamfordartassociation.org.

**UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT STAMFORD CAMPUS ART GALLERY Selections for Winter** Works by Suzanne Benton, Elisa Khachian, Tara Kovatch and Ines Villanueva. Through Jan. 14. Monday-Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-noon. Broad Street and Washington Boulevard. 251-8400.

**WADSWORTH ATHENEUM Photography exhibit** Works by Edward Weston. Through today. \$10, \$8 for seniors, \$5 for students, free for children 12 and younger; \$5 for ages 13 and older first Thursdays of each month. Wednesday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; first Thursday of the month, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. 600 Main St., Hartford. 860-838-4070 or www.wadsworthatheneum.org.

**WESTCHESTER ARTS COUNCIL Expression of the Spirit** Folk arts showcase. Through Jan. 13. Wednesday-Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Grand Banking Room of the Arts Exchange, 31 Mamaroneck Ave., White Plains, N.Y. 914-428-4220, ext. 232; or www.westarts.com.

**WESTPORT ARTS CENTER Global: Twenty artists utilize the globe as a metaphor for our times** New artworks by 20 artists who have used globes as their medium. Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon-4 p.m. The Gallery, 51 Riverside Ave., Westport. 222-7070 or www.westportartscenter.org.

**YALE CENTER FOR BRITISH ART Chandos Portrait** A lifetime portrait of William Shakespeare by John Taylor to hang through April 1 before residing in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. **Canaletto in England** A survey of work Canaletto produced while living in England from 1746 to 1755. Through Dec. 31. **Art & Music in Britain: Our Encounters** Explores the relationship between art and music in Britain at four historical moments: Handel's London, Music and Polite Society, Romantic Landscapes and Aspiring to the Condition of Music. Through Dec. 31. Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m. 1080 Chapel St., New Haven. 432-2800.

**NEUBERGER MUSEUM OF ART Group tours** For 10 to 50 people by reservation three weeks in advance. Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. \$5, \$3 for students, and seniors; free to members and children younger than 12. Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y. 914-251-6115.

**PEQUOT MUSEUM — MASHANTUCKET GALLERY Guided tours** Weekends at 2 p.m. Free with museum admission. \$12, \$10 for seniors, \$8 for children ages 6-15, free for children 5 and younger. 110 Pequot Trail, Mashantucket. 860-396-6835, 800-411-9671 or www.pequotmuseum.org.

**SILVERMINE GUILD ARTS CENTER Lunchtime lectures** Artists of current exhibits explore their work. Bring a bag lunch. Wednesdays, noon. 1037 Silvermine Road, New Canaan. 966-





# Met's 'First Emperor' tells an ancient story that resonates today

**BY JEROME R. SEHULSTER**  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Tan Dun's "The First Emperor" had its world premiere at the Metropolitan Opera last week after a decade-long creative gestation.

So to say that the opera is another example of a new direction for the Met under new General Manager Peter Gelb is not quite accurate. But everything about "The First Emperor" is consistent with the new direction: Something new and important is happening at the Met these days. Tan Dun's opera is a big part of the scene.

Dun, who conducts the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, draws on Eastern and Western musical traditions to weave the fabric of his score. Add to this that he is a contemporary composer who uses the musical techniques of today and the past. As a result, the sound picture is at once ornate, complex, new, familiar, lyrical and magnificent. It can be a big sound, too: The score is far less spare than his Oscar-winning movie soundtrack to Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon." The blend of East and West tips toward the former in the very early scenes, a prologue of sorts, where the Yin-Yang Master,



Metropolitan Opera photo

**Plácido Domingo, left, plays the title role in "The First Emperor" during the final dress rehearsal, with Hao Jiang Tian, right, as General Wang Jong.**

danced and declaimed in Chinese by Wu Hsing-Kuo, performs to the accompaniment of the Zheng by Qi Yao and a row of drummers. But the balance tips toward the latter in the lyrical scenes with the emperor's daughter, the Princess Yueyang, hauntingly sung by soprano Elizabeth Futral. Most of

the opera is sung in English.

"The First Emperor" is staged by Zhang Yimou, who directed Puccini's "Turandot" in the Forbidden City. His film credits include "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Hero," both visually arresting. Those familiar with "Hero" will remember its grand,

vast vistas, especially the long symmetrical ranks of warriors. Yimou and set designer Fan Yue achieve similar effects on the Met stage. Large blocks suspended over risers that span the stage can be raised or lowered to create various settings. Side lighting designed by Duane Schuler and

## This week on Broadway

**BY MICHAEL KUCHWARA**  
AP DRAMA WRITER

**NEW YORK** — When writer John Gregory Dunne died suddenly, his wife, Joan Didion, channeled her grief into a compelling and best-selling memoir, "The Year of Magical Thinking."

Now a stage version, written by Didion and starring Vanessa Redgrave, is coming to Broadway, opening March 29 at the Booth Theatre. Preview performances begin March 6 for a six-month engagement.

"Magical Thinking" will be directed by David Hare, whose latest play, "The Vertical Hour," is currently on view at Broadway's Music Box Theatre. This solo show will be Redgrave's first Broadway appearance since winning the best-actress Tony Award for her portrayal of Mary Tyrone in the 2003 revival of Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey into Night."

For tickets to "The Year of Magical Thinking," call Telecharge, 212-239-6200, or visit [www.telecharge.com](http://www.telecharge.com).

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Broadway ticket availability and capsule reviews of shows as of Dec. 25. Unless otherwise noted, tickets are available at the theaters' box offices for the shows listed. Details about how to obtain tickets appear at the end.

### "A Chorus Line"

Michael Bennett's classic musical about dancers auditioning for a big Broadway show is back. Gerald Schoenfeld. Telecharge.

### "Avenue Q"

Love blossoms among the 20-something set — a group that includes puppets — in this very funny, adult musical comedy. Golden. Telecharge.

### "Beauty and the Beast"

For those who want a lavish, literal live-action version of the delightful Disney animated feature, this is the ticket. Others may be content to rent

the film. Lunt-Fontanne. Ticketmaster, a special Disney hot line, 212-307-4747.

### "Butley"

Nathan Lane stars in a fine revival of Simon Gray's play about a university professor whose life is falling apart. Booth. Telecharge. Closes Jan. 14.

### "Chicago"

An entertaining revival of the 1975 Bob Fosse musical with a sassy Kander and Ebb score. Broadway's longest running musical revival and deservedly so. Ambassador. Telecharge.

### "Company"

Raul Esparza heads the cast in this revival of the Stephen Sondheim-George Furth musical about a bachelor who can't make a commitment. Ethel Barrymore. Telecharge.

### "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas!"

A musical version of the popular children's book about a green meanie who absconds with the holiday spirit. Hilton. Ticketmaster. Closes Jan. 7.

### "Grey Gardens"

A musical version of the haunting film documentary about a reclusive mother and daughter who were relatives of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson star. Walter Kerr. Telecharge.

### "Hairspray"

The cult John Waters movie set in 1960s Baltimore has been turned into a hilarious, tuneful musical. Neil Simon. Ticketmaster.

### "Jersey Boys"

The musical story of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. Winner of four 2006 Tony Awards including best musical. August Wilson. Telecharge. Difficult.

### "Les Miserables"

The musical version of Victor Hugo's sprawling novel is back. Alexander Gemignani stars as the heroic Jean Valjean and Norm Lewis is Javert. Broadhurst. Telecharge.

### "Mamma Mia!"

The London musical sensation featuring the pop songs of ABBA makes it to Broadway. Die-hard ABBA fans will like it best; others may be puzzled. Cadillac Winter Garden. Telecharge.

### "Martin Short: Fame Becomes Me"

The ever-energetic comedian explores

celebrity in this very funny musical revue. Bernard B. Jacobs. Telecharge. Closes Jan. 7.

### "Mary Poppins"

The world's most famous nanny comes to the stage after her great success as a P.L. Travers book and a Disney movie. New Amsterdam. Ticketmaster, a special Disney hot line, 212-307-4747. Difficult on weekends.

### "Monty Python's Spamalot"

A musical inspired by that demented film comedy, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail." Shubert. Telecharge. Difficult on weekends.

### "Rent"

Jonathan Larson's touching and now nostalgic look at struggling artists in New York's East Village. Loosely based on Puccini's opera "La Bohème." Nederlander. Ticketmaster.

### "Spring Awakening"

A new rock musical based on Frank Wedekind's classic drama about a dozen young people discovering their sexual identities. Music by Duncan Sheik. Book and lyrics by Steven Sater. Eugene O'Neill. Telecharge.

### "Tarzan"

A Disney musical about Edgar Rice Burroughs' vine-swinging hero. The score is by Phil Collins. Richard Rodgers. Ticketmaster, a special Disney hot line, 212-307-4747.

### "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee"

A sweet-tempered, often hilarious new musical by William Finn and Rachel Sheinkin about youngsters competing in a local spelling bee. Circle in the Square. Telecharge.

### "The Apple Tree"

Kristin Chenoweth stars in a revival of three one-act musicals by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick. A Roundabout Theatre Company production. Studio 54. 212-719-1300.

### "The Coast of Utopia," "Voyage" and "Shipwreck"

The first two parts of Tom Stoppard's trilogy about a group of 19th century Russian intellectuals, are now playing in repertory. The large cast includes Brian F. O'Byrne, Billy Crudup and Ethan Hawke. Vivian Beaumont. Telecharge.

### "The Color Purple"

A musical version of Alice Walker's novel about one woman's triumph over



AP photo

**British actress Vanessa Redgrave will star in stage adaptation of Joan Didion's "The Year of Magical Thinking."**

adversity. Broadway. Telecharge.

### "The Drowsy Chaperone"

A big fan remembers his favorite musical from 1928 — and it joyously comes to life. Marquis. Ticketmaster.

### "The Lion King"

Director Julie Taymor is a modern-day Merlin, creating a stage version of the Disney animated hit that makes you truly believe in the magic of theater. Minskoff. Ticketmaster, a special Disney hot line, 212-307-4747. Difficult on weekends.

### "The Little Dog Laughed"

Douglas Carter Beane's comedy about an ambitious Hollywood agent and her closeted movie-star client. Cort. Telecharge.

### "The Phantom of the Opera"

The one with the chandelier. The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical about a deformed composer who haunts the Paris Opera House is the prime Grade A example of big Brit musical excess. But all the lavishness does have a purpose in Harold Prince's intelligent production, now the longest

colorful costumes designed Emi Wada recall "Madama Butterfly," this season's opener.

The story of "The First Emperor," co-authored by Dun, concerns the efforts of Emperor Qin to unify and protect the territory he has conquered. For one thing, Emperor Qin wants an anthem to bring about and celebrate this new unity. He remembers the music of his childhood "brother." Gao Jianli, who now lives in lands as yet unconquered. The expedition that brings Jianli to Emperor Qin also kills Jianli's mother, and for this, Jianli, who is sung by tenor Paul Groves, cannot forgive the emperor. Yueyang, however, woos Jianli out of his hunger strike so that he can compose. To Emperor Qin's dismay, they become lovers.

The emperor's other effort is to build a Great Wall shields his people from the barbarians. Many slave and there is much hardship in the land.

Veteran tenor Plácido Domingo sings the role of Emperor Qin. Unlike the case of Puccini's "Turandot," where the role of the Emperor Altoum is given to an aging tenor, Dun's emperor calls for a dramatic tenor the likes of Verdi's Otello. Domingo brings his ever-remarkable voice and stage savvy to the fore for an intense tour de force. While the noose of Emperor Qin's well-

intentioned commands tightens around his neck, as he loses those he deeply loves or respects, his despair becomes overwhelming. The loss of one's soul for the good of the cause or the state: The themes in "The First Emperor" resonate in our world today.

Others in the cast of "The First Emperor" include Michelle DeYoung as the Shaman who warns Emperor Qin of the errors of his ways and Haijing Fu as his Chief Minister. Basso Hao Jiang Tian, familiar to Met audiences, is General Wang Jong, who, in death, pledges to lead the vast army of clay figures Emperor Qin has sculpted to protect his burial site.

As is the case of most complex contemporary operas, "The First Emperor" will continue to yield its treasures with repeated exposure. These are treasures worth experiencing.

*"The First Emperor" is performed again on the Met stage on the evenings of Jan. 2, 5, 9, 22 and 25, with a matinee on Jan. 13. Tickets are available at [www.metopera.org](http://www.metopera.org) or the Met Box Office, 212-362-6000. The Tuesday performance will be broadcast live on Metropolitan Opera Radio, channel 85 on Sirius Satellite Radio. The Jan. 13 matinee will be broadcast on traditional radio FM frequencies, including WQXR (96.3 FM).*

Ticketmaster. Difficult.

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The Telecharge number is 212-239-6200 unless otherwise indicated. There is a \$6 service charge per ticket, plus a \$2.50 handling fee per order.

Ticketmaster is 212-307-4100. There is a \$6 service charge per ticket, plus a \$3 handling fee per order.

All theaters owned by Jujamcyn — the St. James, Martin Beck, Virginia, Eugene O'Neill and the Walter Kerr — have a \$1 surcharge per ticket for theater restoration. Shows that opened in Shubert theaters after Jan. 1, 2001, have a "facilities" surcharge for theater restoration: \$1.25 per ticket.

Both Telecharge and Ticketmaster will provide information on specific seat locations.

The League of American Theaters and Producers has a special telephone line called the Broadway Line for information on most Broadway shows (except "The Lion King" and "Beauty and the Beast") and how to purchase tickets. Calls must be made on a touch-tone phone. The number is 888-BROADWAY. The line also will provide information on Broadway touring productions. Consumers in the New York tri-state area may call 212-302-4111.

The TKTS booth in Times Square is in a temporary location just outside the New York Marriott Marquis hotel on West 46th Street, between Broadway and Eighth Avenue. It sells same-day discount tickets to Broadway, off-Broadway, music and dance productions. There is a \$3 service charge per ticket. Cash or travelers checks only. Hours are Monday through Saturday evening performances, 3-8 p.m., matinees Wednesday and Saturday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

The downtown TKTS booth is in the South Street Seaport at the corner of Front and John streets. Hours are Monday through Friday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; Saturday, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Matinee tickets must be purchased at South Street Seaport the day before, meaning Wednesday matinee tickets are available Tuesday, Saturday matinee tickets are available Friday and Sunday matinee tickets are available Saturday.

Full-price tickets and information on Broadway and off-Broadway shows are available at the Broadway Ticket Center, on the east side of Broadway between 46th and 47th streets. There is a \$4.50 service charge per ticket.

## Art

■ Continued from Page D1

both to survive. Think about cave art painted before the Earth cooled; cave walls were the canvases of the day and scenes of hunted animals re-created the image of what was needed to exist. Since then, visual art has had a unique impact because it jump-starts our imagination. Any marks, color or lines on rock, in sand, carved in wood or stone or painted on canvases elicit an immediate response. And whether you like what you see or not, there is always something else going on and it's going on right now.

For example, take "The Bath" by American painter Mary Cassatt (1845-1926). A child is being washed by her mother — simple enough. But how does Cassatt make the intimacy of this moment so immediate? It's a combination of muted colors, simple lines and shapes — like the long, plain stripes on the mother's dress — that draws the eye to the soft flesh of the child. That the painting is flat with little or no depth makes the two figures subtly press forward, just enough to sense the moisture on the child's skin. And can't you feel the mother's delicate, almost sensuous handling of the child's foot? So really, hanging out with a piece of art for a few extra moments lets you see more than what was first apparent.

Representational art, such as "The Bath," uses real, rec-

ognizable images. "The Bath" is endearing, almost blissful. Other paintings, such as "Attachment" by English artist Edwin Henry Landseer (1802-1873), elicit raw emotion. The work, recently shown at Greenwich's Bruce Museum in the "Best of Show" exhibit about dogs, has a true story behind it. But even if you didn't know the story, and especially if you are a dog lover, seeing the dog pawing at his master's chest shows the unique bonding and devotion of pet dogs, and we're both moved and curious. Look at the light on the dog, how it illuminates her tail and her face. She is very much alive, saddened, desperate. The other light accentuates the man's forehead and nearby rock, leading our eye to the man's cape — a taut, diagonal line that goes to the man's arm pinned underneath. It's the tension in the cape that suggests the man accidentally fell. Surrounded by the darkened precipice conjures romantic melodrama. The painting was based on a true story of a young artist who fell to his death while climbing a mountain with his female terrier. His body was found three months later by someone tracking the sound of a dog barking who discovered the faithful terrier still at the dead man's side.

Some visual artists are known to be colorists — but aren't

we all? Aren't we seduced by that luscious lavender or deep mahogany? Psychological color associations tells us that red is about anger and green is about relaxing. Knowing how to use color is a very powerful tool and is probably the first thing we relate to in art.

Look at "Pleasures" by Russian artist Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944). Even though familiar forms are initially indistinguishable, the colors hit you first. Look at the hot orange pushing in from the upper right corner — see how it peaks the energy instead of fading out with a dark, muted color? Notice the two lower-right talons, one burnt-yellow, the other vermilion, snaking in and pulling your eye to the center. The motion in the colors makes everything gravitate toward the large "hill," or fiery citadel, in the center. With colors blurring and running into each other, you start to see shapes and forms — like the boat with three oars on the right-hand side and people toward the top. Lines here are like broken borders punctuating the painting with an incredible aural quality. Do you hear wild drums or scintillating strings skirting chromatic scales?

If the very act of making art seems like some obscure, ritualistic voodoo, just check out a piece of sculpture. If you think about it, walking around

a three-dimensional object is a furtive chance for your alter ego to be an artist. How so? If you can pick out your favorite angle to look at the sculpture, or consider how you would do it differently, you're greasing the wheels of your imagination. Look at "Wheelabout" by American sculptor Nancy Graves (1940-1995). This is all about motion propelled by sharp colors and swinging curves. Ask your inner artist if the piece could work with a fan blowing attached, wiggly streamers? Can you see lines and forms that suggest a passenger? What else could it be?

Because creating sculpture is very hands-on, you can almost hear the artist working. Take Henry Moore's famous "Reclining Figure." Moore started out with a large piece of stone, one of the hardest materials on Earth, and tackled it by chipping, carving and sanding day in and day out until the stone succumbed to his will. Although the piece's final destination is sitting silently on a pedestal, the fact that it took endless days of hammer and chisel clicks and scraping back and forth with coarse sandpaper gives us a subconscious sense of physical energy.

But most art implies different tactile approaches. Some artists become contortionists just to get that perfect painting. Look at the ungirdling dance of

Jackson Pollack, who swayed over a floor-based canvas, splashing paint from cans and brushes. American artist Helen Frankenthaler, (born 1928) also pours paint onto a flat canvas, which allows the paint to do its thing but leaves a lot to chance. Thinking about how fast or slow paint is applied to the canvas is another way to look at art. In "Tutti-Frutti," did Frankenthaler splash paint on fast and spontaneously, or pour it on slow and carefully? See how the colors spread as if they are saturating the canvas, then lighten up in other spots? When the colors run into each other, they vibrate, moving your eye in a circular direction. But do the shapes look like anything? Could the large asparagus-green swath in the center be a forest? Notice how the green feels cool and is surrounded by the heat of Persian pink and saffron oranges, allowing the shapes to inhale and exhale.

So if you're a novice to all this or just burned out from the last art appreciation class and want to try again, where do you start? Preferably at the nearest art gallery, because it offers smaller spaces than, say, the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Modern Art. Small spaces are less overwhelming and easier to take things in. It's like putting your toe in the hot tub to see whether you can survive full immersion.

If you like a little bit of art, you can always work up to the larger museums.

So what do you do when you get inside? Before you proceed sequentially from right to left or front to back, take in the long view, or step lightly around without stopping at any one piece. Then see where your eyes linger. It could be a piece at the end of the gallery — or the third or fourth work down — but whatever piece seems interesting — go to that one first. Also, if you can bear it, take a child with you — the younger the better. See where he or she goes first, then follow. Children are uninhibited enough to respond impulsively to what they see without thinking about it — and often for an interesting reason.

And beware of titles. If a work is abstract, immediately checking the title is like going for the security blanket. It robs you and your imagination. Hang out with the piece for a few seconds and see what you come up with. Who knows, maybe your title is more interesting than what the artist intended. Some artists neglect to name their work and give them numbers for just that reason. The most important thing the artist is telling you is right in front of your nose and if you connect to it in any way, then you've completed the creative circle from artist to viewer. Congrats and happy viewing!