

Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian (DC in the Movies)

A new motion picture now in town offers ample Washington material. It's *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, but this Smithsonian is a very different enterprise from the one on the Mall. It is, of course, a fantasy, so no one should go in expecting a realistic portrayal.

Though the audience learns in passing that the Smithsonian is really comprised of 18 different entities, the film quickly ignores the institution's diversity and stages the action in one multifarious building. The action seems to start at the Castle, but once inside, there appears a chamber with a fanciful window that looks like a medieval chapel. The same building, it seems, also contains a "deep storage" facility right under the Mall! (just last year, in the comedy *Get Smart*, the nation's spy agency was also housed under the Mall).

Moreover, in running around this mystical museum, lead Ben Stiller runs right into what looks like the National Gallery—technically, as all good Washingtonians know, NOT a part of the Smithsonian. The reproduction of the rotunda area is a nice—if small--replica, but locals will be surprised to see its holdings. A major statue of Rodin's "The Thinker"?—I don't think so. A wax figure of Amelia Earhart? -- Nahhh. Also, two iconic pictures grace the walls of the Gallery (and even cutely come alive): Grant Wood's "American Gothic" and Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks." Both renowned paintings, of course, but both in the Art Institute of Chicago! Couldn't they have used one of the Gallery's Vermeers or its Leonardo?

The film does have one sequence actually filmed inside the National Air and Space Museum, but during action sequences (like Earhart flying the Wright biplane inside the museum), the film has to resort to special effects. And, speaking of special effects, there are some surprising ones, like Honest Abe stepping out of his Memorial to trod the Mall, and—a personal favorite—the lead characters, jumping from their Technicolor world right into the famous Alfred Eisenstadt photograph of a sailor kissing a nurse on V-E day in New York—and themselves melding into a black-and-white 1945 world. Lovely stuff.

However mixed up it is, local filmgoers and their families (it is rated PG) should be amused by how it plays with our treasured museum complex.

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