



This is a man. He is the type of animal that reads.

Don't tell him that he is an animal, because he doesn't like to hear it.

He would say, "But I have fire!"

And you would have to remind him that this was stolen.

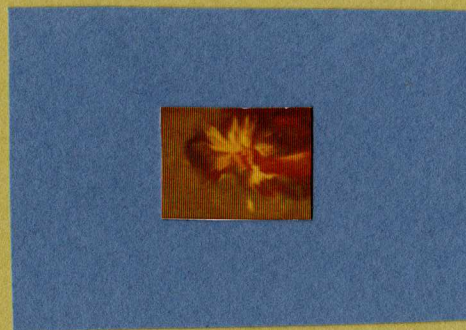
He may reply that there is evidence in his paper that the fire was always his.

You would have to correct him.

Later someone will burn the paper to keep warm.

That's when, even with the fire and the words, a person remembers that he is an animal, and not somebody's pet, but a wild animal. And no one is going to take care of him.





Prometheus



The most remarkable thing is not that there are gods, it would be astounding if there were not. Nor is it that there was a man who had the foresight to steal fire because he was convinced that it would be the salvation of mankind. It wasn't that there was a man who was willing to suffer through eternity, regenerating his own punishment like an octopus in captivity, or a pacing bear at the zoo, just because he wanted you and I to roast marshmallows under unimaginable forests in summer nighttime chill, or Mowgli waving his dubious superiority at that unfortunate tiger, or light for Thomas Edison to work by (they say that his first bulb still burns in Menlo). No, certainly not. His guts can keep growing, his liver a sweatshop. Even the holding of the fire and needing not to burn, godlike himself, though this feat is uncanny, is not the winner. The thing is that we once lived without it, like animals. But writing is forgetting.

In a stodgy and serious dimly lit lobby, with high ceilings and ornate design, it is often a little thing, like an odd shoe that garners the most curiosity—especially if the shoe is at the eye level of the future ghost. And of course, it is.



People started to wear shoes several hundred years after they learned to read.

This is what the first shoe looked like.



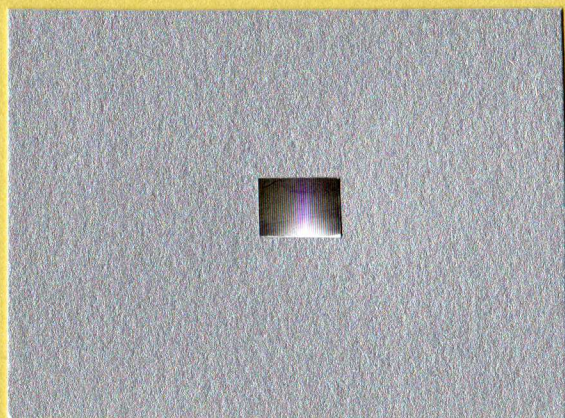
It was fancy.



Before 1938, people often ate fungus that caused a phenomenon known as "dance-o-mania." The eating of the fungus was usually accidental, which is understandable considering that the individual who ate the fungus almost always danced to death. In 1938, the WPA decided that shoes and literacy are somehow related, and decided to put a stop to the medieval practice of dance-o-mania through education, art, and fancy shoes.

But more than that, it was necessary. It was a way to separate classes. It was also a way to show off your personal style (a form of expression less complicated than writing—though complicated still). And of course, it was a way to dance without hurting one's feet so much.







Kipling was sitting in a wicker chair on a porch, smoking a pipe and ordering young Indian servants around, thinking how beautiful they were and so like the sleek tigers he would go and hunt—in the grace of their movements and the watery way their skin moved over their muscles. Kipling thought he was superior to Indians, but not by very much, just by a few words and letters. He thought that they were more like animals than he, but much more like him than animals. The complexity of this thought and his own discomfort with his singularly British brand of racism created *The Jungle Book*.

Because humans are animals and uncomfortable being so, and because there are zoos, we have these reliefs. They are obscured by the fact that we did not invent fire, that it was stolen—you can see it all day, bright even as a background.







2 April, 1936

Dear Mia,

I'm ragged. Somewhere along the way I think my spirit broke. This work was supposed to be a panacea, but my frailty is showing through—every time I raise the chisel I feel the last bits of my humanity cringe in horror, as though poisoned and cramping. Is it possible that my aching guts know more than I? About something other than cirrhosis? My friend here (the one doing the horses) would say it isn't suitable to talk to a woman like this—but Mia, I am becoming closer to transparent every day. And besides, no one knows as intimately as you the details of my banal retreat into the puissance of whiskey.

My dog and my bear were meant to be jolly, but the bathos has overflowed and the lines have become sulky. And now, pathos has created some deprivation—the children will be able to sense the war and my fatigue. Every day when they take their wooden trains out into the courtyard, they will sense under their small vocabulary the melancholy man whose desperation built bear and dog. In ten years time they may be cynical enough to joke. In twenty years time the weakness of my convictions, the frailty of my constitution, the irreparable dappled corners of the small playgrounds of this nation will come through in the eroded, soft lines of dog and bear.

But what of it? It's what I wanted, yes? The chisel brings bread and shoes to our children. Bread and shoes, bread and shoes, bread and shoes. I think I'll call the dog Bread and the Bear Shoes—no, reverse that.

I'll be home in time for Easter, dear. Perhaps it's not too much to hope for some sort of resurrection?

Lovingly yours,

Edward







At around 1130 hours, apprehended white male, mid-to-late-thirties, obviously intoxicated. When I arrived at the scene the perpetrator was leaning over the top of the six-foot fence around St. Catherine primary school during second and third grade recess. The individual was yelling at children to prepare themselves for a lifetime of war and suffering, and to keep their expectations low throughout their lives and always "stay strong enough to fight—you will always need to fight." Call was placed by Sister Mary O'Brien at about 1100 hours. She described the man as bellicose and obscene, and stated that he was frightening the children, driving many of them to tears.

When I searched the perpetrator, I found a nearly empty bottle of whiskey, a hair come, pomade, and a book by Nietzsche (well worn). When I asked to tell me what was going on he said he was preparing children for the realities of the world, When I asked him what made him think he ought to do that, he stated that it was his philosophical mission, and that he held some ancient Roman spirit or some malarkey. At the time of arrest the individual refused to get in the police vehicle, claiming he had some Trojan horse job or something. I ultimately had to use force to get this guy to the station.

Police Report:

Cooper, Jonathan  
E 3<sup>rd</sup> St and Ave A

Incident: Drunk and disorderly conduct.

Arresting Officer: Hughes      Date of Report: 1130

April 5, 1937





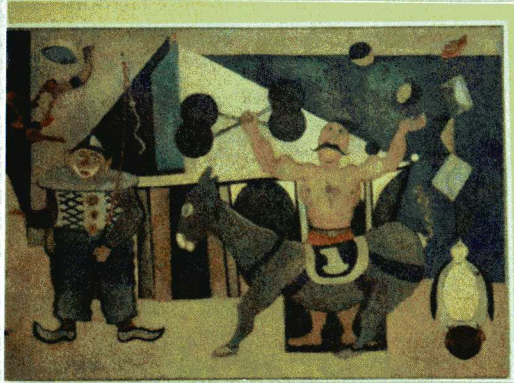


Eliza Smith  
Journal Entry  
April 7<sup>th</sup> 1936

It's peculiar how life creates opportunities for some while removing them from others. It was the strange atheist man who has been working on the Trojan horse that got me thinking about the divine balance of the world and my faith in Christ, Isn't it marvelous how my prayers have been answered? And it isn't a mystery this time, what God's message is—that atheist has been arrested! All the Peter Rabbit books I admired as a child, all my years of longing to be a true artist, all my prayers and service to God, are finally paying off. It really is peculiar how this depression has taken away so much from so many, and yet it has created this marvelous opportunity for me (and the other artists as well, even if they don't all see it just yet). And for children! My goat will smile down on children playing for years to come like God's love!

I shouldn't judge that sorry man, after all, he doesn't have the love of God in his heart, and so what can you expect really, from someone like that. And though it hurt to be called a "frigid, sanctimonious, frustrated prohibitionist," I realize two things now: one, that that poor man is deeply unhappy and profoundly envious of my relationship with God, and two, I am being rewarded for my work with the Social Houses. Praise God in his wisdom and let his light shine. I feel an overwhelming sense that the next few years are going to be great for this country, and God's will be done throughout the world. I see peace and harmony just around the bend! Hallelujah!







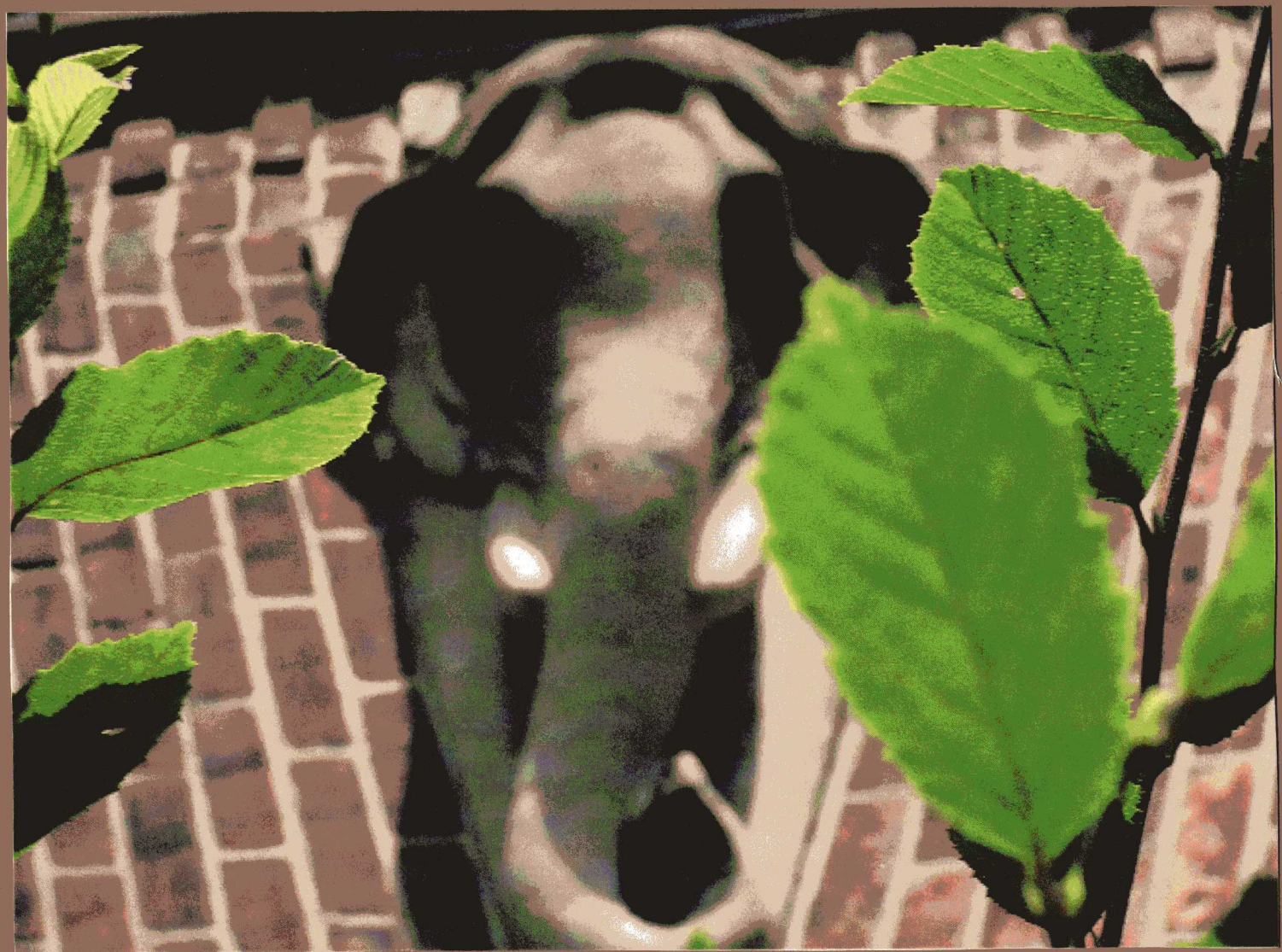
## Grants Tomb

I knocked over an anthill. I did it out of pure malice. I once heard that if you took all the people in the world and put them on one side of a great scale, and then took all the ants in the world and put them on the other side of the scale, it would balance. The ants are our greatest competitors, and in sense we have always been at war with them.

When I knocked the anthill over, I knew that the hive would not be destroyed. It was a single battle and I destroyed many of the ant's resources and took many lives. I was trying to distract them from their work, make them suffer the inefficiency I feel every day as a human—the inefficiency that makes me suffer in a way the ants never seem to. I have always been envious of the ants reckoning with time. so I knocked over their hill and called it a battle won. a strike from chaos.

I went home and read the comics, ate cold cereal, groomed myself for sleep, and retired. this is when the ants retaliated. they rebuilt their hive in a single evening, but they didn't stop with the punishment there, they continued to build. They built a great tomb for their war heroes, they constructed, that very same evening, a wonderful mausoleum out of little bits of quartz and mica. a grand palace with dragonfly sentinels, and I realized I had made a thousand little martyrs. I am losing this war.







fgr was commissioned or settled, whichever mood he was in. the elephants began as someone else's idea, but they did not last in that form.

fgr was plenty vulnerable. there was a place to put his fears. there was a brick wall to hang them on.

make us some elephants.

there were three on each wall, there are three on each wall. most of what occurs happens below them, and this is not an accident. fgr created a creature that never lurks, and prefers to be obscured by the thickness of the air, and the transparency of the visitors.

fgr had a place to hang his disappointments, like waking up to the nurse he often dreamed of, and for once, the dream finishing: she takes his hat and coat into her smiling hands. he found a place to hang his inadequacies (the last in his kindergarten class to tie his shoes to the face turned just in time to make it a cheek kiss to today—that day in the outdoors at the zoo, naturalized dreams on a cold front).

fgr made the elephants and gave them names and placed them high enough not to be noticed by those of us who aren't looking for a bit of dignity that wears well from one disappointment to the next—beads on your grandmother's choker.

but what capability! what a perfect animal for this disguise. what a perfect culpability, camouflaged in the humidity.



By Mary Brigid McHugh

Notes: If it isn't already obvious, none of this is true. Of course, the idea is to create an inherent truth for the reader, but it's always a gamble.

All the photos are of WPA art.

These are the artists:

F.G.R. Roth, Edward Laning, Louis Lozowick,  
Joseph Kaplan, George Girolami, Muriel Brennecke,  
Hugo Robus, Bernard Walsh, Edna Guck,  
Max Spivak.

The photo of Max Spivak's mural at  
the Queens Borough Public Library  
(my favorite) is illegal. I took  
it without permission, so please come  
and visit me in jail.

Thanks Greg Wardle for your support!