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## Discover the Trail! Group of institutions connect art, history, literature, science and natural world

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By Rob Montana

*Tompkins Weekly*

Cayuga Nature Center. Cornell Botanic Gardens. Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Johnson Museum of Art. The History Center in Tompkins County. Museum of the Earth. Sciencenter. Tompkins County Public Library.

While all of these organizations have the opportunity to learn in common, the thread holding them together is less obvious. But they are all connected by their inclusion in The Discovery Trail, which promotes awareness of their programs and collections to help highlight the connections between art, history, literature, science and the natural world.

With International Museum Day taking place on Thursday, May 18, the time seemed opportune to spotlight The Discovery Trail and what its institutions have to offer. Originally known as the “Partnership for Lifelong Learning,” the eight collaborating organizations under The Discovery Trail umbrella work to promote awareness of their programs and collections through Tompkins and surrounding counties, and New York state.

“The eight world class venues of The Discovery Trail offer visitors the opportunity to explore their passions and spark curiosity to develop new ones,” said Star Bresler, executive director of The Discovery Trail. “Our partner’s offer a diverse range of activities, lectures, and exhibits for children and adults to explore art, science, nature, culture and history.”

The objective of International Museum Day is to raise awareness of the fact that, “Museums are an important means of cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures and development of mutual understanding, cooperation and peace among peoples.” To give a sense of magnitude for how many museums feel it is important to highlight the importance of what museums have to offer, in 2016, more than 35,000 museums participated in the event throughout 145 countries.



*Photo provided by Museum of the Earth  
A view of a Heliocoprion created by paleo-sculptor Gary Staab, part of the Museum of the Earth’s summer exhibition, “The Buzz Saw Sharks of Long Ago,” which opens on Friday, May 19.*

The theme of International Museum Day this year is: "Museums and contested histories: Saying the unspeakable in museums."

So, what do The Discovery Trail sites have going on currently? Read on ...

### **Johnson Museum of Art**

The Johnson Museum has an appropriate exhibition currently on display – "Identity Crisis: Reflections on Public and Private Life in Contemporary Javanese Photography."



*Photo courtesy Arum Tresnaningtyas Dayuputri*

*One of the images showcased in "Identity Crisis: Reflections on Public and Private Life in Contemporary Javanese Photography," on display now at the Johnson Museum of Art. The Digital C-print is by Arum Tresnaningtyas Dayuputri (Indonesian, born 1984), from the series The Goddess Pantura, 2011.*

"This exhibition is the first in the United States to focus on the recent emergence of photography as an art form in Java, Indonesia," said Ellen Avril, curator of Asian art at the Johnson Museum. "Ten artists each attempt to bring greater clarity to fundamental issues, from freedom of expression and popular music to homelessness and autism."

Editorial Manager Andrea Potochniak also highlighted several other Johnson exhibits on view at the museum.

"Escaping the Ordinary: Artistic Imagination in Early Modern Prints," which looks at three centuries of great European printmakers and the exotic landscapes and narratives they created," she said. "The War to End All Wars: Artists and World War I," which brings together art and propaganda posters from the Johnson's collection and other Cornell collections; and 'Empathy Academy: Social Practice and the Problem of Objects,' which presents a participatory installation that creates a crowd-sourced still life through donated objects."

The Johnson Museum also is hosting a pair of events on Thursday, May 18 – "Let's Look, Baby," which will take place from 10-11 a.m., and "Happy Hour at the Museum," which will take place from 5-7 p.m.

"The idea behind the Happy Hour is to invite local and Cornell young professional staff (of any kind) to visit the Museum, especially if they've never visited before," said Julie McLean, coordinator of public programs for the Johnson Museum, "to get people in the building and meeting each other to advance their knowledge of available local resources."

There will be a cash bar, free appetizers, a gallery talk from 6-6:30 p.m. and a networking game.

### **The History Center in Tompkins County**

The History Center will host an all-day Italian-American Community Forum from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 20. The forum's goals include understanding the experiences and roles of Italian-Americans using 1910 as a starting point, exploring a sense of place, connecting people across the generations, and adding new archival material, such as the family stories and photos that were collected during a similar event in 1983.

"The Italian-American forum day invites the community members to share and identify their families' photographs," said Ksenia Ionova, community outreach and visitor services for The History Center. "Besides the photo-sharing session, the forum will offer talks and discussions relevant not only to the local Italian-American community, but also to those who are interested in how immigrants and refugees have become an integral part of the county community.

"We will host one or two forums each year to focus on an ethnic, racial, or otherwise unique community in Ithaca and Tompkins County," she added. "We are a mosaic of communities, each with its own story and perspectives on sense of place and sense of community. A key goal of the community forums will be to preserve the unique historical and cultural heritage of Tompkins County's community through photographs, archival materials and stories."

The History Center is also currently celebrating the Tompkins County Bicentennial with the current exhibit "Altered and Preserved Landscape," which explains what makes Tompkins County a unique place through the lens of the growth and changes to the area through geological time, human activity and social conditions.

Additionally, in conjunction with the New York State Women's Suffrage Centennial, The History Center has planned multiple programs and collected resources, which can be found on its website.

### **Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Cornell Botanic Gardens**

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Cornell Botanic Gardens are teaming up for a pair of weekend walks to discover both the birds and wildflowers of spring. They will take place rain or shine and pre-registration is not required.

The Bird Walk will take place at 8 a.m. Friday, May 19, starting at the Sculpture Garden in the Newman Arboretum, while the Wildflower Walk will take place at 1 p.m. Sunday, May 21, starting at the Lab of Ornithology Visitor Center. Both walks are free of charge. The Garden and Arboretum hike will take place from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, May 20, starting at the Cornell Botanic Garden's Nevin Welcome Center. The walk will include some steep slope and stair climbing; there is a \$5 suggested donation.

"The Cornell Botanic Garden is awakening with spring. Participating in one of the Museum Weekend hikes is a great way to experience spring unfurl in the gardens, arboretum, and natural areas," said Shannon Dortch, associate director of communications and marketing. "Both walks will likely take you through the tranquil Mundy Wildflower Garden. Nestled at the foot of a bluff, it has rich soils, and a high diversity of native plants, abundant wildflowers, and rare species."

In addition to the weekend's scheduled walks, visitors to Cornell Botanic Garden can take advantage of self-guided tours using their cell phones at points of interest scattered throughout the gardens, arboretum, and natural areas. The Cornell Botanic Gardens also offers tours for Beebe Lake, Fall Creek Gorge and Mundy Wildflower Garden via the free Pocketsights Tour Guide app.

"Late May is a great time to explore the botanic gardens' three physical spaces – gardens surrounding the Nevin Welcome Center, arboretum, and natural areas," said Dortch. "Early rhododendrons are splashing color on Comstock Knoll, adjacent to the welcome center, while the herb and flower gardens bring forth more verdant green and bright flowers every day.

"Flowering trees are blooming in the arboretum, and warm days make for a pleasant – and educational – stroll in its 100 acres of paths," she added. "The natural areas of the Cornell Botanic Gardens' offer more than 30 miles of walking and hiking trails, including those in the iconic Cascadilla and Fall Creek gorges, and lesser-known paths through old-growth forest and quiet, wildflower strewn fens."

### **Museum of the Earth**

The Paleontological Research Institution's Museum of the Earth will open its summer exhibition – "The Buzz Saw Sharks of Long Ago" – on Friday, May 19. The exhibit is a family friendly, multimedia exploration of the mysterious spiral-toothed shark fossils that have baffled scientists for decades.

The exhibit, according to the Museum of the Earth website, "blends art, science and humor to tell the story of Helicoprion, the prehistoric shark nicknamed the 'Buzz Saw Killer' after its intimidating 360-degree spiral of teeth.

"This dynamic exhibit has something for the whole family," the site states, "featuring kids' activities, an array of fossils and a short video, original artworks by Ray Troll, life-sized sculptures by paleo-sculptor Gary Staab, music and more."

### **Sciencenter**

The Sciencenter opened its summer exhibition – "Grossology" – last weekend, just a few days prior to International Museum Day.

The interactive exhibit, based on the book "Grossology" by Sylvia Branzei, includes discoveries about why a person's nose runs, where warts come from, what causes a burp and why a person's body produces so much "gunk."

"Grossology harnesses kids' natural curiosity about themselves and their bodies by teaching them how the human body works through fun and interactive exhibits that promote learning while having fun," said Amy Gaulke, public and media relations manager for the Sciencenter. "Guests can discover why the nose runs, what causes a burp, where warts come from, and more through models of the human body, fun and colorful illustrations containing scientific information, and interactive exhibits such as a skin climbing wall, a scent matching game, and a giant 'Operation' game."

In addition to the featured exhibition, Gaulke said, Sciencenter Mini-Golf, the Science Playground, and the Curiosity Playground are now open for the season.

"Indoors, guests can test their lung power in the Scream Chamber, hone their engineering skills at Dam the Creek, take an underwater tour in the Yellow Submarine, meet ocean animals at the Tidepool Touch Tank, and more," she said. "The Sciencenter also offers interactive and family-friendly programming throughout the week."

### **Tompkins County Public Library**

TCPL will offer an event on International Museum Day with its World Cinema Screening of "Woman in the Dunes, directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara, which will take place from 5:30-8:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 18, in the Borg Warner East room. The film follows an entomologist who, through a series of events, finds himself stuck at the bottom of a sandpit at the hands of the local villagers.

"World Cinema Day screenings are a new initiative of the library and provide a great opportunity for film enthusiasts to enjoy a free afternoon screening of a film they might not otherwise have heard about or had access to," said Carrie Wheeler-Carmenatty, TCPL's public relations and external communications coordinator. "Program facilitator Ron Krieg has been presenting world cinema classics in Ithaca for more than six years – most recently at Lifelong – and has such a knack for selecting films and an enthusiasm for discussing them with viewers."

The library has been undergoing renovations and is awaiting the opening of its teen center and digital learning lab, but does have a full slate of reoccurring and special programs taking place every week.

"In addition to our incredible reoccurring and special programs, we are currently hosting the Tompkins County Bicentennial Exhibit, 'Mapping Tompkins,' said Wheeler-Carmenatty, noting it will be on display through June 15. "Through illustrated maps created by more than 50 county residents, Mapping Tompkins showcases – for this and future generations – what it means to live, work and study in Tompkins County.

"Participants were asked to design pre-printed Tompkins County maps to reflect the places important to their lives – from where to get the best ice cream to where they met their spouse," she added.

Wheeler-Carmenatty also highlighted TCPL's Little Free Libraries that were recently unveiled at Southside Community Center.

"These libraries – one for children and teens and one for adults – provide community members with an opportunity to share the joy of reading by borrowing from or adding a book," she said, adding the LFLs were made possible with support from the family of Michael and Carol Kammen.



*Photo by Dede Hatch  
The Tompkins County Public Library*

## Kids Discover the Trail!

In addition to these events, the Discovery Trail is committed to bringing children to experience hands on learning at our museums through its largest project – Kids Discover the Trail!

The program – which began in 2004 as a pilot program and collaboration between Ithaca Public Education Initiative, The Discovery Trail and the Ithaca City School District – provides elementary students access to a sequence of annual field studies at the eight Discovery Trail organizations. Now in its 13th year, KDT! has served 34,122 students and expanded to include every elementary student in the Ithaca City School District, Trumansburg Central School District and, for the first time during the 2016-17, students from Dryden Central School District, Groton Central School District, Lansing Central School District and Newfield Central School District. The Discovery Trail's goal is to extend this educational opportunity to all elementary students in Tompkins County.

For more information about The Discovery Trail and its member organizations, visit its website at [DiscoveryTrail.net \(http://www.discoverytrail.net/\)](http://www.discoverytrail.net/).

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