



Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America

Andrea Stulman Dennett

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Dioramas and panoramas, freaks and magicians, waxworks and menageries, obscure relics and stuffed animals--a dazzling assortment of curiosities attracted the gaze of the nineteenth-century spectator at the dime museum. This distinctly American phenomenon was unprecedented in both the diversity of its amusements and in its democratic appeal, with audiences traversing the boundaries of ethnicity, gender, and class. Andrea Stulman Dennett's **Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in America** recaptures this ephemeral and scarcely documented institution of American culture from the margins of history.

Weird and Wonderful chronicles the evolution of the dime museum from its eighteenth-century inception as a "cabinet of curiosities" to its death at the hands of new amusement technologies in the early twentieth century. From big theaters which accommodated audiences of three thousand to meager converted storefronts exhibiting petrified wood and living anomalies, this study vividly reanimates the array of museums, exhibits, and performances that make up this entertainment institution. Tracing the scattered legacy of the dime museum from vaudeville theater to Ripley's museum to the talk show spectacles of today, Dennett makes a significant contribution to the history of American popular entertainment.

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