

# DATEBOOK



**S.F. International Asian  
American Film Festival**

**Artist William  
Kentridge  
at SFMOMA**

**Béla Fleck  
traces banjo's  
African roots**

**A preview of  
the SFJazz  
Spring Season**

# Where learning is fun

By Christine Delsol  
Special to The Chronicle

When my husband and I walked into to MY Museum, the young woman at the front desk was cordial, but she kept scanning the empty space around us. Our appearance without a child had caused a bit of a stir, and weekend manager Michelle Spence was summoned. But when we explained that we were in Monterey anyway and thought we'd scout it out, despite our child-free state, the staff recovered and gave us a tour.

MY Museum, which reopened in November in new quarters, shares with children's museums everywhere a commitment to engaging young minds by teaching through play. The difference here is that kids climb and crawl and poke around in a world of sandy beaches, vegetable fields and golf courses that look awfully familiar on this stretch of coast. The kids we saw charging the 100 percent hands-on exhibits never suspected they were getting an education about the world, and particularly about Monterey County.

Turns out it's a pretty good way for adults to learn about the region, too. My husband, Ken, and I couldn't help plucking artichokes and chard from the neatly plowed "soil" and triggering all the sound effects in the well-equipped theater. It was all Spence and I could do to keep Ken from crawling through the gopher tunnel to pop up in a clear dome in the middle of the golf course and surprise a few diminutive duffers.

While we were trying our hand at some impromptu surgery in the hospital, though, some genuine kids bounced in, and we felt duty-bound to let them take the plastic scalpel.

The nonprofit museum began as a Junior League project in 1997, occupying space carved out of the Wave Street garage near Cannery Row. Its new home, more than triple the size of the original, houses 80 exhibits. Now out of hiding in a new location near Fisherman's Wharf, the Monterey



MY Museum

Kids play in the MY Day at the Beach exhibit at Monterey's MY Museum, which is all about hands-on learning.

**MY Museum:** \$7 (younger than 2 free); \$2 on the first Tuesday of each month. Open 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Tues. and Thurs.-Sat., noon-5 p.m. Sun. 425 Washington St., Monterey. (831) 649-6444, [www.mymuseum.org](http://www.mymuseum.org).

Sports Center and Jacks Park, the museum attracts visiting as well as local families. It has reciprocal family memberships with children's museums all over the country, including the San Jose Children's Discovery Museum, the Bay Area Discovery Museum in Sausalito and Habitot in Berkeley.

Exhibits are arranged in seven galleries based on aspects of Monterey County. MY Day at the Beach is especially for tots up to age 3, who doff their shoes and romp on a water-bed "sea," troll in an SS Cannery Row boat and slide down the face of a wave. At MY Healthy Farm, kids harvest, process and deliver produce to the farmers' market.

In MY Hospital, kids administer shots, assist an X-ray tech or preside over an operation. In the child-size theater, they can mount a stage production and then watch it on TV. The museum's centerpiece is MY ImagiTree. Kids can mark their birthdays on the big tree's rings and learn about local habitats and the creatures that dwell there.

The museum also maintains an exhaustive lineup of classes, activities and field trips. On March 29 at 1 p.m., Vegging Out Day will pay homage

to National Nutrition Month. Under the tutelage of Chef Brandon Miller of Mundaka in Carmel, kids will cook purple, orange and green cauliflower and make macaroni and cheese with veggies instead of noodles. Parents will get recipe cards and an organic tote bag for complimentary shopping in the farmers' market stand sponsored by Salyer American Fresh Foods, a local grower.

But in an era in which children are scheduled to the gills with soccer practice, gymnastics and singing lessons, the museum's primary mission is providing unstructured play. The busiest place in the museum is the Creation Station, a nook with tables and bins piled high with multicolored paper, fabric scraps, buttons, feathers, string and bits of just about everything. Parents and kids can create original treasures together, and the museum staff conducts occasional arts and crafts projects. But mostly, kids just settle in on their own and make, you know, stuff.

Some of the innovators wielding scissors and glue guns were conspicuously older than 12.

"Oh, yeah," Spence said. "Sometimes the parents get so involved that they're here the whole time their kids are exploring the rest of the museum." ■

*Freelance writer Christine Delsol is a former Chronicle Travel editor. E-mail her at [pinkletters@sfcchronicle.com](mailto:pinkletters@sfcchronicle.com).*