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The Secret Museum: Some Treasures Are Too Precious to Display...

Molly Oldfield

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60 unseen artifacts from the world's best museums.

In Manhattan, priceless books sit on rows of shelves under traffic-jammed streets; at the Museum of Sacred Art in Brazil, a 17th century bejeweled processional cross is squirreled away under the floor; body bags in Washington protect spacesuits covered in moon dust; and in an unvisited aircraft hangar sits Auguste Piccard's extraordinary invention, the balloon gondola.

In fact, a great many of the world's most precious objects are kept in secret locations, protected from public view and safe from harmful conditions. Too fragile to be handled or exposed, too likely to be stolen, or too big to display, they hide in secure darkness or locked rooms, waiting for an obsessive treasure hunter to find them.

Museum enthusiast and researcher Molly Oldfield is just that. Consumed by curiosity about what is behind the closed doors of museums' back rooms, she spent two years touring the world in search of the most extraordinary inventions, legacies and artifacts hidden from the public. She has curated the best of what she found into this remarkable collection.

The Secret Museum reveals sixty unseen artifacts whose stories touch all five continents, for example:

- An original Gutenberg Bible printed on vellum in the Morgan Library and Museum in New York City
- A piece of Newton's apple tree at the Royal Society in London, England
- The artist's sketchbooks at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam
- Charles Dickens' favorite feline letter opener at the New York Public Library
- Vladimir Nabokov's cabinet of butterfly genitalia at Harvard University Logbook of the Kon-Tiki expedition in Oslo, Norway
- Livingstone and Stanley's hats at the Royal Geographical Society
- Christmas telegram from double agent Little Fritz aka Agent Zigzag, at Bletchley Park, the top secret World War II MI6 decoding location

Delightful illustrations accompany Molly's descriptions and the lively stories of how she came to see the artifacts. Like the very best mornings spent exploring a museum, ***The Secret Museum*** is enlightening and enormously good fun.

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