



**BOSTON YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ASSOCIATION**

NETWORK  
SOCIALIZE  
EXPAND YOUR PROFESSIONAL HORIZONS

[www.BostonYPA.com](http://www.BostonYPA.com)

### allston skirt gallery

450 harrison avenue, storefront #65  
boston, ma 02218 • 617.482.3652



**shelter from the storm:  
artists make forts and ponchos**

sarah braman ellen brooks  
orly cogan chris duncan  
tory fair emily isenberg

opens may 6, 5 - 8 pm • may 6-28, 2005

wednesday-saturday 11 am - 5 pm  
[www.allstonskirt.com](http://www.allstonskirt.com)

**NEW ENGLAND  
COMICS**

[www.newenglandcomics.com](http://www.newenglandcomics.com)

**Can it be true?**

**Free  
Comic Book  
Day is here again!  
Saturday, May 7**

Visit any of our  
7 NEC locations  
to pick up your free comics

Allston 131 Harvard Ave 617-783-1848  
Harvard Sq. 14 A Eliot St 617-354-5352  
Coolidge Corner 316 Harvard St 617-566-0115

[newenglandcomics.com](http://newenglandcomics.com)

## ART MEETS WAL-MART

Amid a monster expansion, the MFA moves to gut its guards' benefits

BY PAUL MCMORROW

I had a near-death experience last week. Walking through the Museum of Fine Arts' Chinese sculpture galleries, I narrowly avoided being trampled by a stampede of schoolchildren. The little bastards came tearing around the corner, flailing their limbs wildly and howling gibberish. They did a few frantic laps around some 2000-year-old Buddhist statues and then disappeared into another gallery. It's dumb luck that that room is still in one piece; the closest guard on duty was stationed halfway across the building.

Gallery guards are an increasingly rare sight at the MFA. Although they were an overwhelmingly full-time workforce when Museum Director Malcolm Rogers arrived in Boston in 1994, full-time guards are now outnumbered by part-timers (many of whom used to be full-time, but had their hours cut). As a result, museum guards must now watch over several galleries at a time.

If museum management has their way, it will soon be an army of low-wage, part-time rent-a-guards watching over the MFA's galleries. The guards' contract has expired, and the MFA has asked their union, the Museum Independent Security Union (MISU), to accept a radical contract proposal that would slash hours and endanger benefits, making guards do more work for less pay.

The guards argue that this contract fight isn't just about money; it's also about making sure that the museum, a place they love, stays in one piece.

Watching over one of the museum's European galleries, one unnamed guard told the Dig, "Our job is to protect the museum's art objects and to provide a service to visitors. With fewer guards on duty, it's more difficult to keep an eye on things. There are times when one guard is responsible for as many as 12 rooms, and unfortunately, that's becoming fairly common."

"When it's busy, we have a billion kids running around a museum full of million-dollar paintings," adds guard John Storrow, a 17-year museum veteran. "We work here because we care about this place and we want it well-protected."

"[The MFA administrators] have a plan to turn us into a benefit-less, part-time



People before buildings argue for putting people before buildings.

workforce," argues Michael Raysson, who heads the guards' 115-member union, and believes the MFA's proposed contract would essentially price guards out of their own jobs.

According to Raysson, the MFA's current contract offer would cap overtime pay at eight hours, sever health care and retirement benefit packages from the collective bargaining process, pare down full-time positions in favor of part-timers, abolish the guards' seniority-based pay scale and provide for a 2 percent pay raise for each of the next three years; after a few months of negotiating, MISU's only progress is that 2 percent figure, which is up from the museum's initial offer of 1 percent.

Currently, guards make between \$11.45 and \$14 per hour, based on seniority; without overtime, the MFA's most senior full-time guards make under \$30,000 per year, before taxes and health insurance. In Boston, that's not much to live on.

"We're a low-wage workforce," Raysson explains. "A lot of people work 50 or 60 hours a week to get by. Many of them are working people with families."

"A lot of people rely on overtime to make ends meet," Storrow adds. "I don't think [management] understands the financial constraints that this would put on people—they have no way to relate to it."

That may be true, with Rogers and his top deputies pulling in six-figure salaries,

but the tactic that the MFA is employing is hardly new; in attempting to cap overtime and assemble a low-wage, part-time (and thus benefit-less) workforce, the MFA is emulating the kinds of labor tactics that have made large corporations like Wal-Mart immensely profitable and universally reviled by labor advocates.

However, it's understandable that the MFA would be interested in belt-tightening. The museum is a nonprofit and depends on giving for the bulk of its operating costs, so it's in the museum's interest to keep these costs low. Moreover, the MFA is in the midst of a massive expansion and a \$425 million fundraising drive, so it may not want to be seen as having loose pockets.

But, Raysson argues, the MFA is not a capitalist retail entity; it's supposed to be a beacon of enlightenment, a haven for beauty, progressive philosophy and inclusiveness. "I'm dumbfounded," he says. "This is supposed to be an institution dedicated to the highest principles of humanity, and they're acting like a draconian corporation."

Dawn Griffin, an MFA spokeswoman, declined to comment specifically on the negotiations because they're ongoing. "We've been able to negotiate contracts successfully in the past," she did however note, "and we hope to do so this time as well." ⊗