

## *Photo Figures for Part II*

# Exhibit Labels

An Interpretive Approach

*Third Edition*

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**Plants are up to something.**

Simple, but not simplistic. The big idea is announced on the door leading into the conservatory. The subject is plants: They are up to something. What could that mean? You'll find out inside.





"Pot is fun."  
—ALLEN GINSBERG, POET

# altered state

## marijuana in california

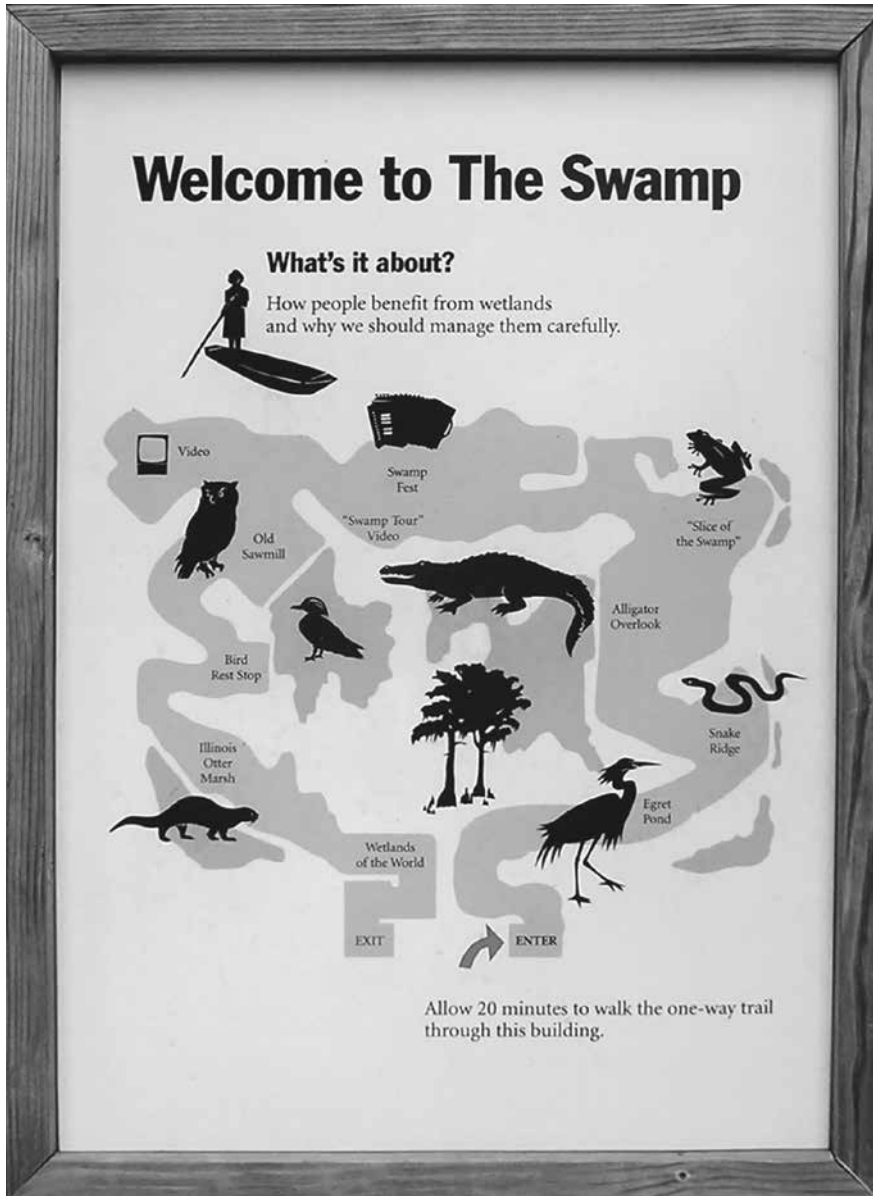
Californians can't seem to agree on cannabis. They hold strong, ever-evolving beliefs about the plant and these views are often in conflict. This exhibition is divided into ten sections that explore different perspectives on how marijuana is used and what it means for our state.

Share your thoughts  
@oaklandmuseumca  
#AlteredState

### Altered State

In just forty-six words, this introductory label explains the thesis of the exhibition and the rationale behind laying out the content in ten sections.

Putting a paragraph break after the second sentence would help to separate the two ideas (thesis, layout) for quicker comprehension.



### Welcome to the Swamp

Visitors can read the big idea at the top of this floor plan that indicates a one-way flow through the exhibits and the expected amount of time. "You Are Here" should be added to reinforce the arrow and improve orientation.



## Beautiful Science

A beautiful title panel announces the exhibition name, subtitle and the four topics that will be explored in a nice combination of type styles, sizes, and fonts.

Inside the doorway, the title is repeated on a curved wall. The adjacent introductory label looks dauntingly long.



From 1887 to 2012, the Bethlehem Steel mill at Sparrows Point provided steady if dangerous work for tens of thousands of men and women. Steelmaking was more than just a job to these workers—it was a way of life that built stable communities, strong human bonds, and a unique industrial landscape. With the shuttering of the Point's blast furnaces, the world local steel workers inhabited took a number of hits, and the effects continue to reverberate today.

The grandson of a steel worker, photographer J.M. Giordano has spent more than 15 years capturing the impact of Bethlehem Steel's decline and closure. What do you do, Giordano asks, when the only lifestyle you've ever known—an industrial lifestyle passed down by family, friends, and coworkers for generations—becomes obsolete?

## Shuttered

This intro label has very readable type that tells an interesting story in not too many words and asks a very empathetic question at the end.

The use of steel for a bench in the gallery is a nice touch.





## Mirror, Mirror

A well-written caption in a conversational tone and with easy-to-read typography.

Would the seventy-word label be even better divided into two paragraphs? Start with "A Black woman looks . . .," which is what the visitor sees. Make the second paragraph begin with "Mirror, Mirror is part of . . ." the crucial background story.

**Carrie Mae Weems (American, born 1953)**

*Mirror, Mirror*

1987/2012

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery,  
New York

*Mirror, Mirror* is part of Carrie Mae Weems's 1987-88 *Ain't Jokin'* series. The series turns racist humor on its head to call attention to negative stereotypes of African Americans. Weems combines images of Black people with "jokes" drawn from popular culture to make clear that psychological violence that can be inflicted through language, specifically things deemed "just a joke." *Mirror, Mirror* invokes and subverts the fairy tale *Snow White*. A Black woman looks into a mirror, on the other side of which a White woman, dressed as a fairy godmother, looks back at her. Rather than receiving an affirmation of her beauty, the Black woman is cruelly reminded that she does not meet the European beauty standards implied in the name *Snow White*.



## Wine Jug with a Drunk Man Singing



Greek, made in Athens, about 470 B.C.

Terracotta

Red-figured *chous* attributed to the  
Oionokles Painter

With his mouth open in song and his arms outstretched, the man depicted on this pitcher shows the effects of a night of drinking. His young servant is ready to minister to his needs, holding the man's belongings as well as the jug into which he urinates.

### Wine jug

This short caption—only forty-seven words—tells an animated story with a punchy ending, drawing attention to a detail visitors might otherwise miss. The title and identification information are clearly separated from, and do not compete with, the caption text.



### Compassionate Saint

There are many details in this painting, and an extended caption label with “callouts”—chunks of text with a reference graphic—do that job well.

Located on a pedestal rather than on the wall, this style gives visitors plenty of room to look back and forth from the label to the art.

### Find the Compassion of a Saint

Peter Paul Rubens shows a widow and her children begging for help from Saint Ives, the patron saint of lawyers. Rubens's tender representation of the saint, who defended widows and orphans, was new; earlier depictions show Saint Ives by himself, holding a book.

Discover how Rubens invites viewers to connect with Saint Ives's compassion.

The angel crowning Saint Ives with a wreath symbolizes divine acknowledgment of the saint's good deeds.

Red-rimmed eyes show the widow's anguish and emphasize her sickly yellow skin.

Rubens painted these figures life-sized, which makes them—and their urgency—more real.

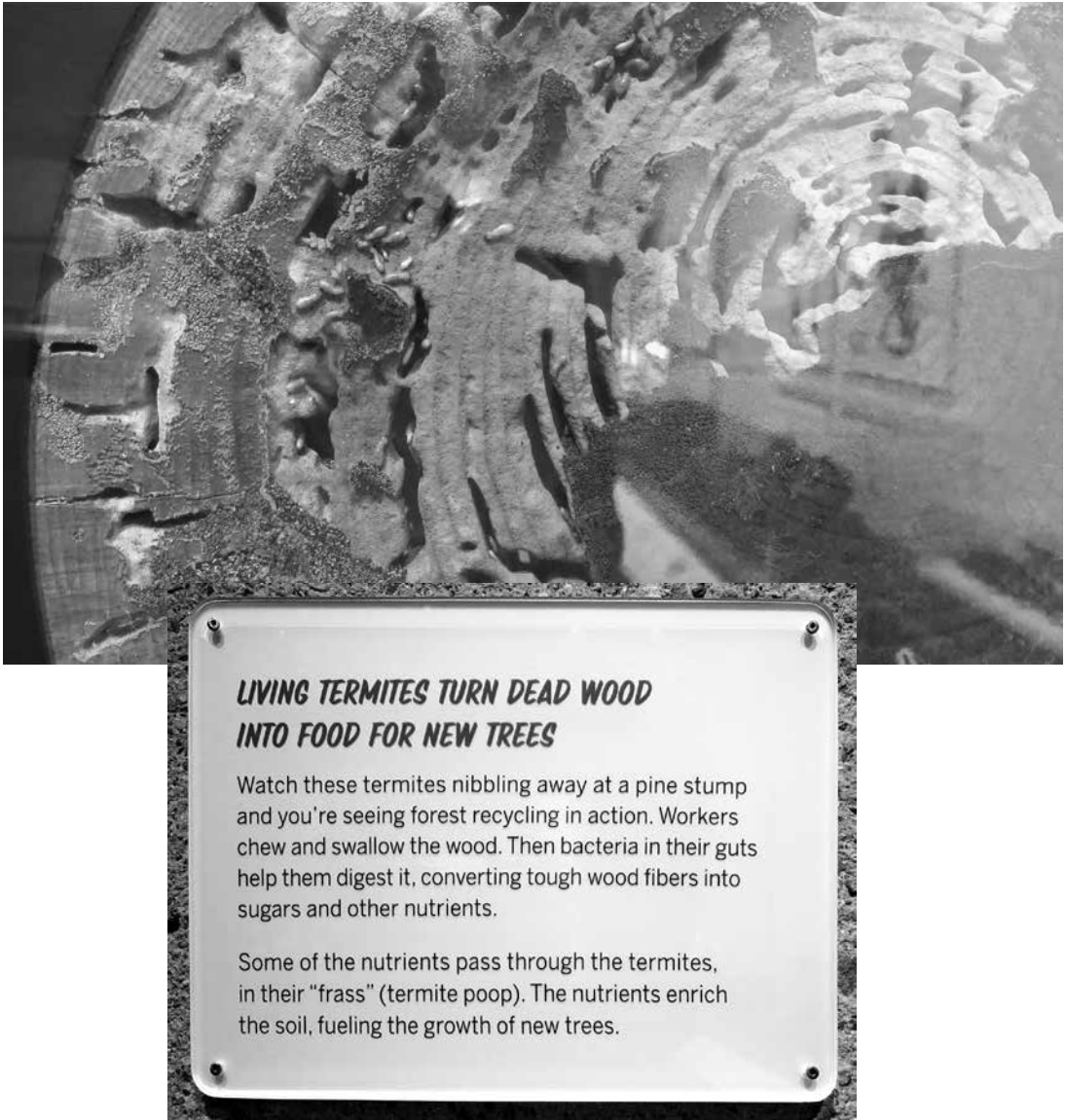
The mother and children are barefoot to dramatize their extreme poverty.

Rubens shows Saint Ives bent forward, attentive to the widow and children.

One hand rests on a law book, the other holds the widow's petition for help, suggesting Saint Ives's effectiveness.

A discarded bishop's hat represents the high church office Saint Ives declined in order to help people directly.

*Saint Ives of Treguier, Patron of Lawyers, Defender of Widows and Orphans, 1633–36, Peter Paul Rubens*



### **Living Termites**

Live animals (even sleeping or dead ones) always win in terms of attracting and holding visitors' attention.

In this display, the termites are so small that the label has to tell people to watch closely because they might otherwise miss the action.

## Wayside sign

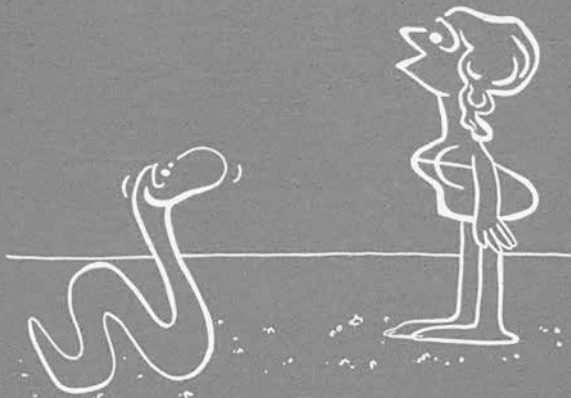
The image of the Goat Mountain landscape matches what visitors can see.

When a wayside sign successfully interprets the view in front of you, looking and reading are reinforced and enhanced in an engaging mental dance.



# Avoiding the Reptiles?

We've noticed that some visitors wait outside while the rest of their group goes inside. Fear of reptiles is common to many people. This fear is learned and not instinctive. People can learn to like reptiles, too. Why not give it a try?



## **Avoiding the Reptiles?**

A warning label can help visitors decide whether to proceed as well as be informative.

**Layered story**

The use of three type sizes and fonts—in a title, a subtitle, and a paragraph—suggests that the content is presented in three levels. Is it helpful or just a design gimmick? The content would work with just the subtitle and a short paragraph.

# a layered story

**Vertebrate skin is composed of layers**

Mammals, fishes, birds, amphibians, and reptiles have skin made of two main layers. The thin epidermis is skin's outermost layer. It covers the thicker dermis, home to blood vessels, glands, nerves, and more. The dermis makes up 90 percent of skin's total weight in some animals.

## Fern Room

**This room provides a glimpse of what Chicago might have looked like millions of years ago.**

Designer Jens Jensen loved midwestern landscapes; the Fern Room is his imaginative tribute to prehistoric Illinois. So natural looking was the result that when the Conservatory first opened, visitors thought it had been erected over an existing lagoon. One of Jensen's chief contributions to greenhouse design was to display plants in a naturalistic setting rather than in groups of pots. This revolutionary approach became known as "landscape gardening under glass."

**The Fern Room is home to some of the oldest species of plants on earth.**

Many of the plants in this room date to the time of the dinosaurs. They have changed little from their ancestors over the last 200 million years. Our plants, of course, are not that old. The oldest are about 300 years of age.

### Fern Room

A title, two subtitles, and two paragraphs introduce the Fern Room. This style responds to the assumption that most visitors will read the headlines, and if they want more information, they will read the details. Actually, the bold statements tend to draw readers' eyes away from the nonbold type. Once distracted, will they go back?



# Double V: Fighting for Victory at Home and Abroad

**Protesting  
Against  
Racism  
at Home**

The Army Air Forces suddenly relocated the 477th Bombardment Group and the replacement pilots for the 332nd Fighter Group in May 1944. This event sparked a turning point. Tuskegee Airmen stationed in the United States began more organized action. Their fight for equal treatment as fellow officers climaxed with arrests at Freeman Field the next year.

While the 332nd Fighter Group fought against fascism overseas, the Tuskegee Airmen fought against racism at home. From 1943 to 1945, they protested the "separate but unequal" conditions on and off bases across the United States.

**443**

U.S. and British aircraft bombed after completing over 16 missions. Because there was a shortage of African American pilots, many were assigned to ground crew. In August 1944, the Tuskegee Army Airfield was established at Freeman Field, Indiana. The Tuskegee Army Airfield was the only Army Airfield in the United States to be named after an African American. It was the only Army Airfield to be named after an African American. It was the only Army Airfield to be named after an African American.

## Double V

Despite a hierarchy in the size of the type for the different labels on this panel, all the content is general information, none of which directly relates to the background photograph. Not a good system.

# Silver and Gold

## California Daguerreotypes

**The first photographs made in California, daguerreotypes recorded the Gold Rush on silver-plated sheets of copper.**

When I was twelve or thirteen, my best friend's father was an artist who had a small collection of daguerreotypes. I was completely bewitched by the seemingly impossible combination of antiquity and razor-sharp detail. To me they were like tiny time machines. I was hooked. It was that early glimpse of daguerreotypes that put me on the path to becoming a photography curator.

Drew Johnson  
Curator of Photography

### **Silver and Gold**

The same font in different sizes in this label suggests the distinct roles or purposes of the content: a title and subtitle to identify the topic; a sentence stating a fact; and a personal, signed quotation.