

FROM THE CASTLE

Life Lines

G. WAYNE CLOUGH

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED Van Gogh's work. For years I have admired his *Starry Night*. One day at New York City's Museum of Modern Art, I turned a corner and there it was, so spectacular I almost had to sit down. I could see the brush strokes and sense the artist's emotion as he created the painting. It was an overwhelming experience that could have been improved only if I'd been able to pursue my Van Gogh interests further, either on the



*Paradisee raggiana* is one of the many images at the Galaxy of Knowledge Web site.

spot or later at home. Today, that is becoming increasingly possible for anyone with a computer, anywhere on the globe, thanks to digitized museum collections and museum libraries.

This summer I attended a National Academies planning meeting on libraries and museums in the 21st century. A vice president of a leading software company argued that academic libraries as we've traditionally known them are a "dying breed," too often pursuing a "lost cause." Fortunately, at their best, museum libraries are quickly transforming themselves—from information providers to connectors, of people with common interests with each other, and with millions of images of scientific specimens, historic artifacts, works of art and all kinds of digitized documents about them. The iPhone generation is "visiting" museums in many new ways. "Real artifacts," explained Museum 2.0 blog founder Nina Simon, "are gaining new lives in personal memory sites, blogs and collections-based social networks."

One dramatic example of the new digital diffusion is the Encyclopedia of Life (EOL), which is building Web sites for each of the 1.8 million known species on earth. The EOL already has links to 7.4 million pages of books and journals via the Biodiversity Heritage Library portal ([www.biodiversitylibrary.org](http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org)). The lead partner in this fast-growing portal is the Smithsonian Institution Libraries (SIL), which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary. Actually 20 libraries in one system, it holds more than 1.5 million volumes, including 50,000 rare books, 10,000 historic manuscripts and over 3,000 electronic journals and databases. Its rich Galaxy of Knowledge Web site ([www.sil.si.edu](http://www.sil.si.edu)) is a gateway to the Libraries' collections. SIL began its digital library in 1996; today it contains items from one of the world's largest collections of trade literature, American industry catalogs from 1875 to 1950, and 15,000 pages of reports about collections from the 1838-42 U.S. Exploring Expedition.

This winter I will host a group of leading creators of interactive learning experiences and online games to help us imagine the future, including the use of high-definition 3-D holograms. The Smithsonian's digital libraries will continue to enhance our visitors' experiences with real objects. And will provide the next best thing to being here to a huge audience worldwide.

G. WAYNE CLOUGH is Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.



Smithsonian Institution

SECRETARY

G. Wayne Clough

BOARD OF REGENTS

CHANCELLOR

The Chief Justice of the United States

CHAIR

Roger W. Sant

MEMBERS

Vice President of the United States, Richard B. Cheney

- Hon. Thad Cochran
- Hon. Christopher J. Dodd
- Hon. Patrick J. Leahy
- Hon. Xavier Becerra
- Hon. Sam Johnson
- Hon. Doris Matsui
- Mr. Eli Broad
- Dr. Phillip Frost
- Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson
- Mr. Robert P. Kogod
- Mr. John W. McCarter, Jr.
- Mr. Alan G. Spoon
- Ms. Patricia Q. Stonesifer

SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL BOARD

- Mr. L. Hardwick Caldwell III, CHAIR
- Mrs. Peggy P. Burnet, VICE CHAIR
- Mr. Paul Neely, VICE CHAIR

NATIONAL BOARD: Mrs. Claudia R. Allen, Ms. Valerie Anders, Ms. Judy Hart Angelo, Mrs. Jane Lipton Cafritz, Mr. Thomas H. Castro, Mr. Wilmer S. Cody, Ms. Abby Joseph Cohen, Mr. James F. Dicke II, Mr. John G.B. Ellison, Jr., Ms. Sakurako D. Fisher, Mr. Michael R. Francis, Mr. Bradford M. Freeman, Mr. John French III, Mrs. Shelby M. Gans, Mr. Richard W. Herbst, Mr. Robert F. Higgins, Ms. Irene Y. Hirano, Mr. Steven G. Hoch, Mrs. Judy S. Huret, Ms. Anne B. Keiser, Mrs. Betsy Lawer, Mr. Robert E. Long, Jr., Mr. Robert D. MacDonald, Mrs. Dorothy S. McAuliffe, Mr. Chris E. McNeil, Jr., Mr. Gary B. Moore, Mr. Morris W. Offit, Mr. Russell E. Palmer, Jr., Mr. William M. Ragland, Jr., Mrs. Kristin Richardson, Hon. Ronald A. Rosenfeld, Mrs. Theiline P. Scheumann, Mrs. Marna Schnabel, Hon. Rodney E. Slater, Mr. Douglas C. Walker, Mr. Mallory Walker

HONORARY MEMBERS: Mr. Robert M.C. Adams, Mr. William S. Anderson, Hon. Max N. Berry, Mr. Richard P. Cooley, Mr. Frank A. Daniels, Jr., Mr. Charles D. Dickey, Jr., Mrs. Patricia Frost, Mr. Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., Mr. I. Michael Heyman, Mr. James M. Kemper, Jr., Mrs. Jean B. Mahoney, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Mr. Francis C. Rooney, Jr., Mr. Wilbur L. Ross, Jr., Mr. Lloyd G. Schermer, Hon. Frank A. Weil, Mrs. Gay F. Wray

\* Ex-Officio

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES