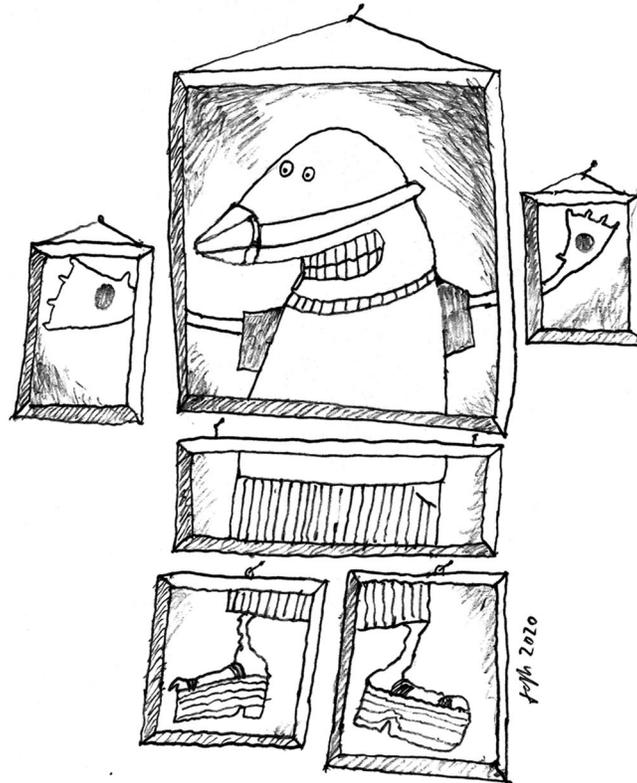


STICKY WICKET

Corona XXI – outside the frame

Mole



FRAMED.

Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - www.peterjeffsart.com

Mask? Check. Hand sanitizer? Check. Gloves? Check. Wallet? Where did I put my wallet? Oh, here. Check. (Why was my wallet in the refrigerator? Mole, get a grip!). I'm all set to go to the store for some 'tea.' Yeh, I wear gloves, because you just can't be too careful. And when I get home, I'll wash my hands after I put the, um, tea away. I hope you're being careful too, when you go out. It's not a big deal, after all, and I'm really used to it. When I go to work, and into my office (where I am allowed to remove my mask, provided I'm alone) it feels a bit strange to *not* wear it. You know? Even though all of us at my place are tested every week, and we observe all safe practices, well, you never really know. I just know that I want to stay negative.

I know that not all of us are working in such safe conditions. Quokka can't go to work at all, since he's down under. Dolphin and Red Fox work at terrific institutions that don't test. Dolphin seems to be okay with that. Red Fox, not so much (she just doesn't physically go into work). She told me that she quit her COVID-19 task force because of their refusal to consider a testing strategy (especially irksome since her place is not very big). I understand.

Meanwhile, it is another b-e-a-utiful day, with the sun so bright and the sky so blue that the wooded area I'm looking at is an

impressionistic tableau. Which puts me in mind of frames. Not picture frames, per se, but the *edges* of paintings, the parts we don't get to see past. (Or, the parts beyond which we don't get to see? I know, I'm rambling, but there actually *might* be a point here. As usual, I'm going to take the long way to get to it.)

I'm certainly no art expert (ask my friend Tortoise, who very much is). But to my very inexpert way of thinking, there was a change towards the end of the 19th century in terms of what things *outside* the frame were permissible. This started, I think, with the Impressionists (of course, I could certainly be wrong, but at least it's my impression. Get it?). Before that time, if an artist painted a group of people, for example, all of the *bits* of those people were inside the painting. Sure, it was okay to paint a portrait from the waist or chest up, but if you could see the arms of the subject, you would see their hands. With the Impressionists? Not necessarily. Take a look at a few of these paintings (you can look them up on the internet, easy). In Georges Seurat's 'A Sunday on La Grande Jatte' (1884), a man lying on the grass in the foreground has thrust his legs outside the scene (while you're at it, do look for the monkey. I mean, really, taking your monkey for a walk? What can I say? France. Where were

we?). In Paul Gauguin's 'Contes Barbares' (1902) the strange figure in blue is only half there, and half outside the frame. Edgar Degas painted 'The Ballerina' (1876) with her hand and one foot thrust out of the edge of the painting. There are so many other examples (pretty much any group by Auguste Renoir, and examples from Edouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, pick your faves).

So, what gives? Why was this cutting of people with the edge of the painting suddenly okay? My friend Tortoise suggested that it was because the Impressionists were strongly influenced by Ukiyo-e, the wonderful Japanese woodblock prints that proliferated in the 19th century. Indeed, Claude Monet had so many of these that if you visit his house in Giverny, they are the only art you see (definitely worth a visit if you're in the neighborhood – assuming, of course, that *visiting* is something we'll do someday). But I've looked through a book I have of Monet's Ukiyo-e collection (I'm not an expert, for sure, but I'm a bit of an art *geek*) and I'm not seeing this out-of-the-frame thing. Besides, despite being one of the pre-eminent Impressionists (master of light and movement, and all), Monet didn't really subscribe to cutting people off with the painting's edge. I'm thinking it might be something else.

So of course, I have an idea. In the second half of the 19th century, there was a technical innovation that was all the rage: photography. And when you take a photo, bits of people get left outside the frame. Maybe (and again, I reiterate that I am the opposite of an expert on such things) this way of looking was either intentionally or unintentionally brought into this art movement. We got used to seeing what wasn't within the frame.

Which brings me back to testing for SARS-CoV2. Yesterday, I read a paper (in a very good journal) that suggested that the inaccuracies in testing, resulting in false negatives and some false positives, rendered most testing problematic, and probably pointless in many settings. There were a lot of assumptions, and I could argue (a lot) with the analyses and a lot more (way more) about their conclusions. But that isn't what I'm on about. It's about what this

paper says that is *outside the frame* that really bothers me. And what is outside the frame is as obvious as Degas's dancer's foot.

I am living in a country that doesn't really want to test for the virus. This is for a number of reasons. First, what difference does it make if you're sick anyway and are going to stay home? And if, as the authors said, you test negative (but it is a false negative) and you decide to interact with people? Or (and this was another point they raised in probably their weakest argument), you receive a false positive result and remove yourself from the workplace? But, perhaps more importantly, people just don't want to *know*. We're tired of this and tired of the failures, and the people who caused the failures especially don't want to know.

But here's the thing. Where Red Fox works, this is exactly the sort of paper they read to tell them that it's *okay* not to test (and their lawyers affirm that it's legally better to not test). So, if someone goes to her institution and infects several others, they just won't know (and, hey, who knows where someone gets infected?). But here's the thing. Where I work, we get tested, and we follow up with any potential contacts, and to date (so far) we have had zero transmission within my institution (and we are *testing*, so we'd know). Fingers are crossed that this continues, but so far, so good. A friend of mine who works for a major film production company says that they are all tested *every day* so that they can effectively work on the set. And they are film makers, not world-class scientific institutions, like Red Fox's.

When the role of HIV in AIDS was still controversial, there was an article entitled 'It's the virus, stupid.' Now we need an article that says, 'Testing works, stupid.' Sure, if you are negative today you could be positive in a few days (actually, I think this is something we can really improve upon in our testing, but we'll talk about that some other time). But if you are positive, and you self-isolate, you are far less likely to infect anyone else. Look outside the frame when someone tells you otherwise. What, really, is their agenda?

But I have to go buy some 'tea.' Now, where did I put my car keys?