

THEY'RE OUR STEPS. ROCKY IS WELCOME – TO VISIT

Philly loves to love. We passionately love our Eagles and our Phillies, and sometimes we express our passion by projecting colored lights onto our beloved art museum, which stands atop the steps at the end of the Parkway: red for the opening day of baseball (as in 2022 and 2024) and green for the Eagles when they have soared to the Super Bowl, as they did in 2023 and again in 2025, when they won it.

We love Santa Claus, too, and although we once (in 1968) pelted the jolly man with snowballs, we have warmly welcomed him to our city every year in America's oldest Thanksgiving Day parade. The parade finale comes when Santa climbs the steps to that same art museum to begin the holiday season.

And we Philadelphians also love each other in our big, diverse city, and in 2020 we massed together at the foot of those iconic museum steps to assert that here, Black Lives Matter. Then we marched up the Parkway to spread the word.

The art museum, whose collections are rated even higher than our sports teams, has presided in a welcoming way over all these expressions of brotherly love—and sisterly affection. And it hasn't had to rename itself or permanently change itself in any substantial way to provide that welcome.

But now, only a moment after, in a befuddling move, the just departed leadership of the museum decreed that the institution had to rebrand itself as an "art museum" and not a "museum of art," we are also being told that the great building and the treasures that it contains will be made the "permanent" backdrop for a movie prop statue that depicts a wealthy Hollywood mogul in the guise of a boxer.

"Rocky" is undeniably popular. Four million people a year have been coming to visit the statue that the famous actor and producer gifted to the city, where since 2006, it has stood where then museum director Anne d'Harnoncourt negotiated its placement--discreetly but by no means hidden at the foot of the stairs that the fictional boxer climbed in the first of the much sequeled Rocky movies.

Its current location offers visitors a prelude to the experience of running the iconic steps without overshadowing the significance of the museum or impacting on the views to and from this important landmark. The location also plays a key role as a visual cue for people, many of whom are visiting Philadelphia, to use the crosswalk and traffic lights to cross safely from Eakins Oval. Without this guidepost, visitors used to frequently risk their lives scrambling across the then five traffic lanes to get to the steps.

Culturally, logically, and architecturally, the relationship between our city and this great public space is unequivocally worthy of preservation. Until now, we have not had to sacrifice the grandeur of its architecture or trivialize the magnificence of the museum's globe-embracing, people-engaging collections for it to serve as the bright (and occasionally re-colored!) symbol of all of us and our many passions.

The make-believe Rocky does not deserve to replace us real Philadelphians at the top of the steps, at the center of the magnificent architectural stage that symbolizes our city and its people. Of course, we should ensure that Rocky can continue to meet his many fans at a convenient place for making memories, but we should not allow this activity to displace us.

Because whatever we call the steps, they are not Rocky's, they are ours.

The DAG Steering Committee