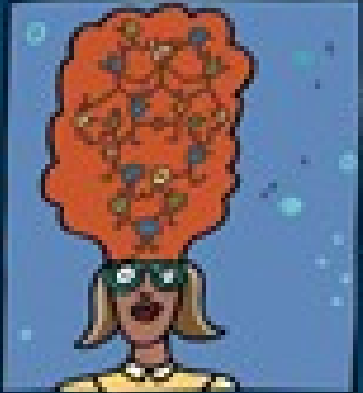
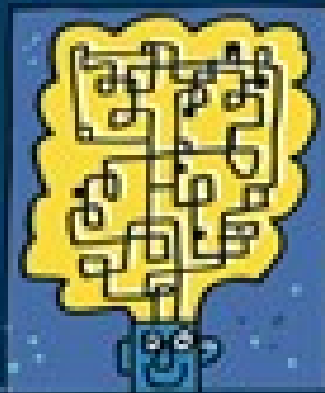
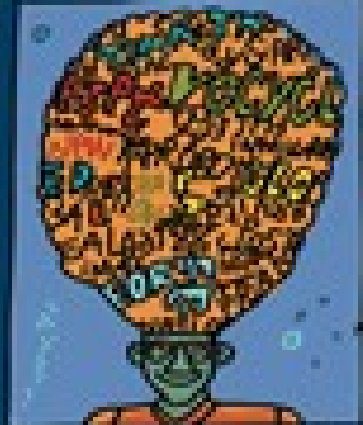
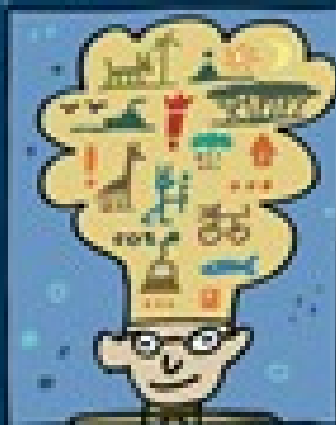


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Montreal at Christmas. I would stay here and hope to God that someone would ask me into their home. And usually I was lucky, but there were moments." Plummer laughed. "God! Jesus! How could anyone as attractive and desirable as myself be ignored at Christmas? I did feel those moments. Which is why I was always in search of a lady."

He married for the first time in 1956, but did not commit to the couple's duplex, on Bank Street. "And I didn't exactly commit to the marriage. There was no discipline," he said. "I never really stayed there. I usually ended up here, in an old bed." When his wife wanted to draw his attention to the marriage's end, after a few years, she had all his possessions delivered to a room in the hotel. "When I opened the door, I banged into my entire life, in boxes." He went on, "I realized, pathetically, Thirty years and this is all I've got? A few boxes? This is when I said, I've got to have a house. This is ridiculous."

He married Elaine Taylor, his third wife, in 1970. "I'm just lucky I'm still married," Plummer said, laughing. If not, he'd be "a bitter old actor, alone in a hotel." Instead, he is taking strolls across his Connecticut acres, and wearing a beard in "The Last Station" (he plays Tolstoy) and in Terry Gilliam's "The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus." "Two different long beards—it's the year of the beard," he said, putting his hand to a smooth chin. Next summer, he will play Prospero onstage, with some anxiety. "Prospero sounds like 'Oh, he's getting on now. I guess this must be his last role.' Then I'll do something very quickly afterward, so I don't die."

Plummer ordered a blueberry dessert, and the room began to fill with lunch guests.

—Ian Parker

DEPT. OF ORIENTATION EL SUPER



Sometimes in New York you see a whole lot of people gathering in a state of high excitement and you have no idea what's going on. That happened on a recent Friday at the Bronx Museum, 165th Street and the Grand Concourse, at about

five-forty-five in the evening. Crowds started to show up and converse animatedly in Spanish and English—hugs, laughter, elders exclaiming over beautiful grownup women who had been girls in grade school the last time the elders saw them, etc. Turned out that everybody was there for a screening of the beloved Cuban-American movie "El Super." Generations of Spanish-speaking immigrants have watched and rewatched this movie since it came out, in 1979. The screening, part of the Bronx Museum's "First Fridays!" program of evening events open to the public, was to celebrate the movie's thirtieth anniversary. Free admission, free empanadas (soy meat, or ricotta with spinach), soft drinks for two dollars and beer or wine for three—why not?

Every exhibit in the Bronx Museum has to do with the Bronx. One room is devoted to the ideas of artists and city planners for redesigning the Grand Concourse, the Bronx's main street. Another has works by artists who live in the Bronx or are otherwise connected to it: graffiti paintings, Willie Cole's famous "America" blackboard, relics found by Lisa Kahane (a bus driver's coin dispenser, made vestigial by rust), photographs of salsa stars, a video in which Balozzi Dola, the Tanzanian rapper, walks into a Bronx barbershop and dazzles some old hip-hop pros with high-speed raps in Swahili; images of the D train, big splashes of color, photos of flames, a display of spray-paint cans . . .

"El Super" was shown in an upstairs gallery that seated about a hundred and fifty and stood thirty or so more along the walls. Faces turned upward to the screen with the expectant, half-smiling expressions of those waiting to be shown a favorite magic trick. English subtitles helped the few who needed them. Sometimes the crowd laughed at lines the subtitles didn't provide. "El Super" 's story is about a Cuban exile named Roberto, who has taken the job of super in a Washington Heights apartment building, where he lives in the basement with his wife and teen-age daughter. The movie's first line, shouted from upstairs, is "Super, turn on the boiler!" The time is winter, late nineteen-seventies. Every time the family closes the apartment door, they rearrange a strip of carpet put there to block the drafts. A great feature of the movie is that it records, by meteorological happenstance, the huge New York City snowfalls of the winter of

1978-79. The camera carefully follows the super on his errands, in his incompletely zipped-up coat and earflap hat, as he negotiates the immense and real heaps of plowed snow at every intersection. The shivery authenticity is far beyond anything special effects could do.

The super gets more and more fed up. He has to listen to the anti-Communist tirades, accompanied by big gestures with a cigar, of his vehement friend Pancho, a Bay of Pigs veteran. His daughter is possibly pregnant, possibly by a local gym teacher whom his wife refers to as "Kinny or Kenny." A New York City building inspector shows up, and Roberto's friend Cuco is called upon to translate, sort of. Soon after, in near-total exasperation and surrender, Roberto describes for another friend how he has just discovered the body of a frozen thief stuck in the window grate of an unoccupied apartment. Raymundo Hidalgo-Gato, the actor who plays Roberto, somehow can make even dismal situations funny. The loud, fall-off-your-chair laughter many of his remarks produced seemed an unusual sound for an art museum. The movie has sad parts, too, and lifelike scenes where the super just sits and watches television. The ending revolves around a question about whether or not to move to Miami.

Afterward, there were speeches and commentary. Iván Acosta, who wrote and directed the play on which the movie is based, noted that he had arrived in America from Cuba forty-eight years ago on this very day. He spoke affectionately about Raymundo Hidalgo-Gato, who died nine years ago. Leon Ichaso, one of the movie's directors, described how he had been making TV commercials for Goya Foods back in '78 and had used some money from that to help produce the movie. People talked about how the movie had helped them understand their lives. A young man said that he had seen "El Super" for the first time after immigrating from Cuba, five years ago, and he now believed that a DVD of this movie should be given to every immigrant on arrival. Someone asked Leon Ichaso if the play had as much snow in it as the movie does. "The play has less snow," he said. "I wanted the movie to be not so much about politics and more about the weather. When we filmed the movie, it was just luck that we had so much snow."

—Ian Frazier