

Some Docents do France

Bob Marshall

DOCENT MUSE

A Newsletter for the Docents of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Anyone wanting to know what happened to all those giant French Salon paintings that Impressionism drove out of favor would do well to tour the regional French museums that are part of FRAME (French Regional American Museum Exchange). Or to see war booty from Napoleon's conquests that never got returned because it had been dispersed from the capital. Oh yes, and numerous religious works from churches looted during the French Revolution.

Together with a lot of *foie gras*, this was the steady mid-April diet for 24 members of the MIA's Paintings Council who, with Paintings Curator Patrick Noon, visited five of the nine original French members of the consortium created in 1999 to share exhibitions with comparable American institutions. This is the program that sent *Sacred Symbols* to France and brought *Master of the Embroidered Foliage* to America.

Perhaps because we were the first official group from an American FRAME member to make such a trip, we were royally received at each stop. We were given a private tour at Rouen by the director, even though it was Tuesday and the museum was closed. Even more special: after the tour, we were allowed to wander the museum on our own, *sans* guards! At Lyon, two curators and the education director accompanied our group through the antiquities and old masters.

The Musée de Grenoble was an exception: it was the only one not called "Musée des Beaux Arts," not housed in a 19th-century or older building, and not offering an English-speaking director. Instead, Patrick led many of us around the spectacular 1994 building that also housed the only significant modern collection we encountered, reminding us of the Walker opening many were bypassing.

In Toulouse, the director and chief curator divided us into two groups, docent-style, and traded groups after one hour. The highlight was a

visit off-limits to see a remarkable *Madonna and Child* from the 15th century being restored to its original polychromed colors. We were also given a private viewing of the storage area in Bordeaux, because most of the museum was closed for renovations.

Probably our favorite museum stop, however, was the Museum of American Art at Giverny, established a decade ago by the Terra Foundation, which until just recently operated a wonderful museum of American art on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Just up the path from Monet's garden and lily pond, the museum was inspired by the American artists who came to France in the late 19th century, and their works were well represented, along with an exhibition of Mary Cassatt prints and works on paper from Princeton. Amid so much European Baroque, it was a pleasure to find the precise and more familiar landscapes of Cropsey and Richards.

We saw many school groups in the museums that we shared with the public and heard guides asking familiar questions "What do you see that is unusual in this picture?" In Lyon, instead of volunteer docents there are 12 guides on staff "We need 30," admitted the chief. Another difference: Lyon closes its picture galleries for two hours at lunchtime.

Other trip participants included Darlene Carroll, Patty McCullough, Shirley Nilsen and Marcy Shilling, all with their spouses. You can ask them for more details and their personal highlights. For me, it was coming across a small work by an obscure 17th-century Dutch painter in a special exhibition at Toulouse. In the foreground, a woman sat on a raised chair, knitting studiously, with a curtained bed behind her and attendants at her feet. Far in the background, three small figures lurked from behind a door, dressed in officers' raiment, peering at the women. According to the title, this was *Tarquin and his Companions find Lucretia at Work*, a prequel to the work we know so well.

Emaki, Form and Content

John A O'Keefe

Visitors to the Japanese galleries will find on view a handscroll entitled *A Story of Mice* attributed to Sumiyoshi Joki, c.16th century, in gallery 219. The Japanese call this type of narrative handscroll, *emaki*. Centuries of Japanese innova-

FRAME | French
Regional
American
Museums
Exchange

In this Issue

Some Docents Do France
Emaki, Form and Content
The Under-12 Perspective
How Many Originals are There?
Reflections on Docents, Book Clubs, and
Summertime
Art in Bloom
Keeping in Touch
Letter from the Docent Chair
From the Museum Guide Programs Staff
From the Social Chair
Honorary Docents' Doings
From the Editors...

tion and creativity are reflected in this handscroll.

The form of handscrolls dates to before the first century CE when handscrolls in China were made of strips of silk or bamboo strips joined together. Paper invented in China, during the 1st century CE was adopted quickly by the Chinese for handscrolls. Paper and silk, used separately or together became the favored materials for handscrolls.

The structure of a handscroll is a continuous horizontal strip of silk or paper averaging from two feet to more than thirty feet in length. Sheets of paper would be joined together to create length. The height averages from nine to fourteen inches. Silk or paper were attached at the left to a round wooden roller around which the scroll was wound. A semi-circular wooden stretcher was attached on the right around which the scroll would be wound when being viewed. Extra silk or paper at each end of the scroll prevented the scroll from being wound too tightly, provided protective covering when completely rolled up and allowed space for commentaries by individuals.

In use, the scroll would generally be placed on a flat surface for viewing and unrolled from left to right and viewed right to left. Handscrolls were never intended to be seen fully unrolled as they are often displayed in museum settings or pictured in books. The scroll would be unrolled in convenient arm-reach sections and viewed bit by bit. The viewer controlled the speed of viewing, passing over some sections quickly while lingering over other sections. Much like a motion picture the handscroll has the potential of depicting the passage of time and for moving the viewer to different locations.

In 894 CE, Japan ended diplomatic relations with T'ang China and entered a period of isolation that lasted several hundred years. The termination of diplomatic relations with China reflected a new and growing sense of self-confidence and an awareness of an emerging national identity. During this period the Japanese assessed and processed the influences of Chinese culture assimilating or rejecting elements of Chinese culture to suit their own needs and distinctive sensibilities.

One of the most significant cultural developments of the late Heian period was the development of *kana* script in the early ninth century. The system consisted of a small number of characters that represented the phonetic sounds of Japanese speech. The *kana* system allowed the Japanese to record everyday speech in a simple and practical way and provided a new freedom of expression. *Kana* played a major role in the artistic developments of the period. *Kana* was the well-spring for the development of a literature that reflected Japanese society and tastes.

A parallel development encouraged by the development of *kana* was *Yamato-e*, Japanese painting. *Yamato-e* is a distinctly native style of painting that is purely Japanese. The style includes flat dramatic asymmetrical compositions, bright, rich colors, use of expensive materials such as gold and silver and the "bird's eye view." Subjects and themes illustrated with *Yamato-e* were drawn from Japanese literature, events of daily life, the four seasons and famous scenic locations in Japan. *Yamato-e* does not fit into the three major

categories of Chinese painting: portrait, landscape or bird and flower.

The development of *kana* is a classic example of the way the Japanese have modified, adapted and incorporated an idea for their own use. The handscroll was also modified to serve Japanese artistic needs. The first handscrolls seen in Japan were Buddhist *sutras*. The *Sutra of Accumulated Treasures*, c.12th century is on view in gallery 218. Familiar with *sutra* handscroll format Japanese artists adapted and used the handscroll for recording and illustrating the poetry and literature of their time in the *Yamato-e* style. The written narrative was enhanced with illustrations with both complementing the other to create a pleasing design.

A number of distinct elements to be considered when viewing a handscroll include the story being told, the elegance of the *kana* calligraphy, the carefully drawn and richly colored pictures, the blending of both scenes and calligraphy into a unified whole, the quality of the paper/silk and the sequential development and pacing of the story events. Japanese narrative handscrolls were created over the centuries reflecting a variety of themes such as popular and classical literature, Buddhism, biographies and historical events.

The narrative picture scroll called *emaki* developed into a powerful art form that represents both Japanese pictorial art and literature melded into one. The narrative becomes the result of a combination of both text and illustrations. *Emaki* is the subtle and successful interweaving of three forms of artistic expression, literature, calligraphy and painting that is purely Japanese.

The Under-12 Perspective

Hope Bouvette Thornberg

At Mother's Day brunch recently my daughters asked their four children if they would be visiting the MIA this year. Three kids responded, "Unfortunately yes!" The 6th grader who is in a Minnetonka middle school added, "Thank goodness that's over with!" The other three are grades 4 in a Minnetonka grade school and grades 5 and 6, both in a Hopkins grade school.

After recovering from my initial shock and dismay (doesn't everyone, child as well as adult *love* the MIA?), and taking a deep breath to calm myself and dispel any thoughts of speaking unkindly to my darling grandchildren, I asked why. What had happened (or not happened) during previous visits to provoke such strong feelings? Oh, my. Here is what they said. The "they" referred to is us!

- They rush us around from one place to another and we don't get to spend enough time at each thing.
- They read from pieces of paper or little cards and tell us all sorts of stuff about the artists—when they were born, where they were born, where they lived, where the picture was painted, how long they lived, what other pictures they painted. We don't want to know all this stuff. And can't remember it anyway.
- They don't talk TO us—they talk AT us.
- We don't get to talk or ask questions.
- EVERYBODY(?) in my class thinks the Art Institute is BORING!

The fourth grader has a tour scheduled for the end of May. I hope his opinion will change. By the way, these kids are all “above average” Minnesota kids with “A” or “Excellent” grades. I am critically examining my elementary school tour protocol in hopes of making upcoming tours exciting, adventuresome and fun for children. My son’s three kidlets soon will be visiting the MIA. I’d like them and all our kids to leave the MIA wanting to return. And establish a habit which will become a part of their lives for all of their lives.

How many originals are there?

Merritt C Nequette

During the opening weekend of the *Saint John’s Bible* exhibit at the MIA, the Church of St Olaf in downtown Minneapolis had a program of music and readings using the full-size facsimiles of the three volumes. The book of *Gospels and Acts* was also used at all the weekend services. Since I am quite active in the music ministry and other activities at the church, I was involved in this Bible event as well. For five hours on Sunday afternoon, I stood behind the Gospel book and turned pages (with white gloves of course) and commented on the various aspects of the Bible to an ever-changing audience. My favorite exchange of the afternoon went as follows:

“Is this the original?” “No, the original is in the exhibit at the MIA.”

“Well, then, what’s this?” “This is a full-size facsimile of the original.”

“How many originals are there?” “Only one.”

“Will there be any copies?” “You’re looking at one here.”

By the end of my tour of duty and about six or seven times through the entire volume, I was getting pretty good at recognizing everything upside down.

There may be some interest in knowing about the full-size facsimiles. These are reproduced on very heavy (I would guess about 200-lb) acid-free paper. St. John’s had wanted to have some of these made, and eventually found a small printer about a half-hour away from the abbey. The pages are scanned (takes about 28 minutes to scan a page) and checked against the original for color accuracy. The paper is almost 100% cotton content. (One cannot buy large quantities of 100% cotton paper, because the government becomes suspicious that it might be used in counterfeiting currency.) The page is about the same thickness as the original vellum.

Obviously, even if all the colors are as accurate as possible, the gold leaf cannot be reproduced by scanning. Eventually, gold foil will be applied by hand to the illuminations. The last price I heard for a complete set was \$200,000. These will be sold to large libraries (like the Library of Congress, which has ordered two copies), and rare book collections. The total number may be between 250-300 copies. The printed copies will have to be sent back to Europe for the gold-foil treatment since there is no one in the US that does this kind of thing.

One correction that I should make about a section in the “World Religions” paper I wrote on the *Saint John’s Bible* has to do with the direction of the “spine” of the vellum. The version in the paper is one I heard from Tim Ternes in an earlier presentation. The description works for less monumentally-

sized codices (the “spine” of a modern book comes from the “spine” of the calfskin). However, in his presentation to the docents, he indicated that the spine of the skin ran horizontally through the middle of the page to provide greater stability. So I asked Sally Mae Joseph which version was correct. She assured me that in the Bible, the spine runs horizontally, and using the page in front of which we were standing, she pointed out that it was “obvious” that the butt side of the animal was at the left side, and the neck at the right. I took her word for it.



Just a comment on the wonderful exhibit of these pages that has been set up by Jane Satkowski and the MIA staff. Most of the pages displayed will actually be facing pages once the volumes are bound. One page that can not be shown is the left page of the Garden of Eden facing the right page with Adam and Eve. The Garden of Eden is on the back side of the beginning of Genesis in another case. Thus the illumination of the Garden is on the wall poster and will become the left page of the Adam and Eve display in the case. My first group of theologians noted that the text didn’t follow from one page to the next.

Reflections on Docents, Book Clubs and Summertime

Tom Byfield

As a group, docents present a curious ensemble, one that Margaret Mead might find a fascinating study. It is a varied tribe of dedicated characters with one common denominator: they are bright. Some I suspect have IQ’s that would make mere Mensans run screaming into the hills. That said, it is a mystery to me why they are willing to spend an inordinate amount of time in study, preparing tours, attending lecture after lecture and generally volunteering for all the extra-curriculars, such as Art in Bloom, Friends and the *Docent Muse*. They give presentations to other docents on occasion, they form study groups and even book clubs. One wonders if they have any outside life at all. It is the ubiquitous book club that we will address here.

Book clubs ideally are a conclave of like-minded seekers of information, truth, and fresh new viewpoints. Of course, some are only there for the sex. In the past one club had read *The DaVinci Code* and *Brunelleschi’s Dome* (the church, not his pate). In an effort to answer the age old question, “What is

Art?" our book club selected for its March meeting, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* by A. Danto, which no one had read including the member who proposed it. Bad mistake. He told us the review was glowing and right then we should have stood up and fanned it and the book into a full-blown bonfire, incinerating both. The members dutifully bought it and began the eager pursuit of enlightenment. Now I have to admit that I enlighten about as fast as a dyspeptic snail on fly paper. But I leaped into the tome with the zeal of a caffeinated cheerleader. I was going to find out "What is Art!" The author, in an effort apparently to display his erudition, wrote in polysyllabic terms which were mostly incomprehensibly turgid. After reading one paragraph through three times without registering a glimmer of its meaning, I read it to Jeul who did something I hadn't seen her do since I asked her if a moustache would make me look more debonair. She fell out of her chair laughing so hard that I ran to fetch the Depends. Here is a sample from the book that might illustrate the point.

"Duchamp is the champion of anti-mimesis. He is indebted to the semiotic paradigm, so self-conscious that it almost exemplifies a Hegelian ideal in which matter is transformed into spirit." Huh?

We all know that Duchamp hung a urinal in a museum as a result of an ultimatum made by Mrs. Duchamp. She said, "Marcel, unless that thing comes off the living room wall this instant, I'm putting you into a home for the terminally unpleasant and your picture will begin appearing on milk cartons." Now a urinal on the wall in the men's room is just a urinal on the wall in the men's room. It stirs no deep felt emotions, at least with me it doesn't. Its utility is that it keeps one from spattering his shoes. Move it to a wall in a museum and, to quote Shakespeare, the gleeking, flap-mouthed, maltworm critics proclaim it a work of art, a modern icon superceding the Christian Trinity and symbolizing a supreme reality.

Well, the book club met at the appointed time. I mentioned earlier that by and large docents are very astute. Not one of them got beyond the first fifteen pages before giving up in disgust. They must have remembered a review by Dorothy Parker: "This book should not be put aside lightly, it should be flung with great force." I, however, dutifully plowed through the book from cover to cover, wishing there was less breadth between them. My doggedness was driven no doubt by the fear I would be the only one unable to finish it, the insecurity of a lesser mind. I kept hoping it would get better and make sense. Neither happened. Maybe next time we will choose a book that will let us get by the sesquipedalian Gorgon by the gate. Good Lord, now I'm doing it!

This is the last *Docent Muse* for the year. One can, if you listen very carefully, hear the editors' sighs of relief. They deserve your thanks. The summer doldrums will soon be upon us. The school buses will be cocooned and we will begin to drift languorously in the horse latitudes of our summer vacations. As for me, I plan to grow out my bangs and maybe add highlights.

Art in Bloom

The 2005 *Art in Bloom* was a spectacular success! We welcomed over 25,000 visitors, 4,000 more than had attended in the past. Minnesotans and their out-of-town guests are hearty folks who are undaunted by construction, lack of close-by parking and changeable April weather.

Wednesday evening's Preview Party attracted 400 guests, many wearing vintage clothing.

Over 200 attended a new event held Thursday evening featuring New York florist and floral performer David Beahm. Miss Spider entertained 900 children and families on Saturday at her Tea Party.

Docent Barbara Edin arranged for 200 volunteers for the three-day event, including twenty docents who conducted over 80 tours.



Keeping in Touch

Letter from the Docent Chair

The year is coming to a close and so is my tenure as the chair of the Docent Executive Council. I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity. There are several perks that go with the job. One of is that I have had the chance to become better acquainted with more of you. I have enjoyed that aspect of the job.

Another perk is that I have been more involved with the inner workings of the museum where the docents are concerned. We are a very fortunate group to have a staff that listens to us. Because you voiced a desire and need to learn more about the new Chinese galleries, we got extra training in the galleries. Amanda, Ann, and Sheila spent time with Bob Jacobsen in the galleries. They put together a presentation that was so well done and popular that they had to add a session. That is only one example of what they do for us. Their jobs are complex. They really care that we have a high quality program. They of course are not alone in the tasks. We are fortunate to have Debbi, Paula, Jennifer, Kristine, and Kate.

There will be a new class of docents beginning in the fall. I am very pleased to be a part of the interviewing process. The applicants were asked to go on one tour before their interview. Their comments about the tours have been very positive. The applicants say that you are well prepared and bring a lot of knowledge to your tours. They also enjoyed the questions that are asked and the chance for group interaction. I wanted to pass the comments on so that you will know the skills you have worked on have paid off.

The members of the Docent Executive Committee have been a joy to work with. They are creative, dependable, and thorough. My thanks go to Joy Erickson, Larry Simon, Fern Miller, Dillon McGrath, and Hope Thornberg. Sharon Hayenga has assisted Hope with the *Muse*. Shirley Nielson has helped with the social. A special thanks to Dillon's daughter for doing the invitations for this year's social functions. You will be in good hands next year under the leadership of Patrick George.

The year has certainly been one for flexibility and fun. Without it we would have gone mad when the objects for a tour turned up missing. The focus has been on learning new objects and new galleries. The friendships that are an important part of the program continue to grow.

Thank you all for a good year.

Kati Johanson

From the Museum Guide Programs Staff

My how time flies! It's been nearly seven years since I joined the MIA staff and the Collection in Focus Guide Program had its official beginnings. I thought I would share a few "fun facts" about the program. Since its inception in 1998:

- The CIF Guide Program has grown to include, at present, more than 70 active and sustaining guides who lead evening and weekend tours and Art Carts for more than 13,000 visitors annually. Representing a wide variety of educational, professional and cultural backgrounds, nearly three-quarters of current guides work or attend school full-or part-time.
- The majority of CIF guides have continued to volunteer well beyond their one-year minimum commitment. Twelve guides from the CIF class of 2000 recently celebrated 5-year anniversaries.
- Eight Art Carts have seen their debuts in the galleries. (Number nine, a Pacific Islands Art Cart, is planned for 2006.)
- CIF training has been offered on the arts of Africa, China, the Americas, Japan and Korea, and South and Southeast Asia. Guides who completed one or more of these trainings lead tours and facilitate Art Carts for the collection area(s) in which they're trained.
- CIF guides and docents participate in joint training and volunteer together on the European Paintings Art Carts and for some special exhibitions.

Thank you to the many CIF guides, Art Adventure guides, docents and staff who have supported and contributed to the success of the Collection in Focus Guide Program over the course of its brief history to date. The museum and its visitors are very fortunate to have a team of dedicated, professional museum guides who complement one another with the skills and expertise to meet the needs of many different audiences.

Amanda Thompson Rundahl
Collections in Focus Guides Coordinator

A warm welcome to a new class of Art Adventure guides—the class of 2004. After a six-month training, and successfully competing their checkout tours, 29 new graduates will celebrate a graduation lunch on May 18. Congratulations and best wishes.

In April, the Art Adventure guides took a tour of the Minnesota State Capitol. Many of us had not been there since sixth grade. The Capitol celebrates its centennial this year. It was fun to revisit the architecture of Cass Gilbert, see the Senate and House chambers, climb to roof to view the *Quadriga*, and have coffee in the *Rathskeller* Cafeteria, recently restored to its original 1905 German décor.

For more information on the Minnesota State Capitol's history go to: www.mnhs.org/statecapitol

Ann Isaacson
Art Adventure Guide Coordinator

From the Social Chair

Our Docent Spring Luncheon on Monday May 2 was a smashing success. Although the weather was anything but spring-like, we chatted and ate inside the cozy James J. Hill Mansion. The delicious food and beautiful organ entertainment was topped off by a tour of the house and its lovely art collection.

We look forward to next year's luncheons to be led by the new co-chairs, Ann Davis and Cynthia O'Halloran. Thank you for the wonderful year!

Dillon McGrath
Social Chair

Honorary Docents' Doings

The Honorary Docents picked a cold and raw day for an excursion on the light rail in April. The ride was exciting. We boarded at 50th & Hiawatha & headed for the Mall of America stop. From there we rode downtown and back to the Hiawatha station, viewing the city skyline, interesting sculptures and places many of us hear about but had never seen. Lunch followed at Cap's Grill.

On May 18, the Book Club will meet at the home of Arlene Baker to discuss *The Devil in the white City: Murder, magic and Madness at the Fair that changed America* by Erik Larson.

The Honorary Docents invite all MIA docents to join us, Thursday, May 26 to meet Minnesota Orchestra Director, Osmo Vanska; concertmaster Jorja Fleezanis, and musicologist Michael Steinberg. They will discuss the orchestra, programs, recordings and their vision for the future of the orchestra.

Place: Orchestra Hall, Green Room

Time: 1 p.m.

Entrance to the Green Room is on Marquette Ave. The person inside the door will direct you to the Green Room. From inside the auditorium on the Nicollet Ave side, go to Tier 1. Rest rooms are on the right, and the Green Room is straight ahead of you. An usher should be there to direct you if necessary.

Please contact Barb or Georgia for a reservation by May 24.

Barb Diamond, 612-925-9025

Georgia George, 952-922-4992

This will be an exciting, complimentary event! A donation to the Minnesota Orchestra isn't necessary, but will be appreciated.

Optional. The orchestra will perform an all Beethoven program at 11:00 a.m. Tickets are available at the Orchestra ticket office.

Nancy Pennington

From the Editors...

The whooping, honking and yodeling you hear is the Swan Song of Sharon and Hope as we hand over our pens to incoming editor Fran Megarry. We have enjoyed our term as editors but it is time for fresh ideas and a new perspective on our many lives as MIA docents.

We thank the many docents and others who contributed to the *Muse* this past year, including the MIA Guide Programs' staff. We wish also to thank our production person Merritt Nequette who, in addition to preparing the *Muse* for publication, serves as photographer and third proof-reader. And we thank our readers for your support, encouragement and the many kind comments received throughout the year.

We look forward to continuing our writing, Sharon and Merritt with their series about world religions, and Hope with the more pragmatic task of working with others to edit and proof a publication of the Minneapolis Woman's Club.

Tom Byfield's article in this issue refers to the "editors' sighs of relief." Sigh, indeed! How about a good whoop!?

*Hope Thornberg
Sharon Hayenga*

