THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

DOCENT MUSE

A Newsletter for the Docents of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Fall 2005

A World's Fair Gallery

Bob Marshall

As part of the ongoing reinstallation, Gallery 322, behind the old Impressionism gallery, no longer features Tissots and mysterious bat paintings, and you may have noticed a number of decorative arts treasures moving in. Although in early August the layout was still in transition, Christopher Monkhouse described for the Docent Muse *some of the gallery's key works and themes.*

The whole concept of this gallery is to showcase mid-19th century design, particularly as presented at the succession of world's fairs held in Europe. It was a transitional time in terms of patronage: luxury objects were no longer solely commissioned by the church and monarchs, but were sought by the newly-endowed merchant and industrialist class. And while the design elements invariably look backward – to the Classical, Gothic, and Renaissance eras – the techniques of manufacture often represent technological breakthroughs.

Most of the objects here were shown, or are equivalent to pieces that were shown, at international exhibitions, beginning with the first true world's fair, London's Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. Ours is now one of the best public collections of world's fair material in the world. It started with the Carrier-Belleuse torchères that once graced Louis Hill's house on Summit Avenue. They were shown at the London International Exposition of 1862 and have been at the Institute since 1974.

Another pair of objects already in the collection when I arrived, thanks to my predecessor Michael Conforti, were the Pelagio Palagi chairs, made in the late 1830s. These were a royal commission, but they resemble chairs Palagi later exhibited at the Crystal Palace as the height of Italian design and quality. When this suite of Palagi furniture came on the market in 1987, Michael assembled a consortium of curators from around the world to purchase it. Thanks to them, you can see other pieces from the set at the Getty, the Victoria & Albert, the Metropolitan and the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Parisian monstrance is of absolutely top quality. It, or one just like it, was also exhibited in London in 1851. The design goes back to the Middle Ages, particularly its use of Limoges enamel. The Crystal Palace featured an entire space dubbed the *Mediaeval Court,* designed by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, a very important architect and designer who at this time was working on interiors for the Houses of Parliament in London. We don't know for whom Pugin designed the dwarf cabinet on the north wall; the inset initials AB and IB are probably the owners and suggest it may have been a wedding present. The piece's relief carving, marquetry and metalwork panels are typical of the Gothic Revival pieces Pugin showed at the 1851 fair.

The great Baccarat punch set is one of the pieces that looks backward and forward at the same time. The decoration is purely classical: we see Bacchus, the god of wine, on his chariot, holding a rod called a *thursis* topped by a pine cone. On the bowl's lid are palmettes, and the finial is another pine cone, symbolic of Bacchus. The set closely relates to *Silenus,* the great 1838 Salon painting by Corot. But the different layers of colored glass were not made by copper wheel engraving, as in centuries past, but a technique new to the 19th century called acid etching. The catalogue for the International Exposition of 1867 in Paris which illustrated this set (or perhaps a similar set now in the Corning Museum of Glass) spent as much time talking about this new manufacturing method as about any of the decoration.

The same is true for the pair of Klotz vases, also made in Paris for the 1867 fair. In form and decoration they are historically oriented: the swan motifs recall the Institute's swan service by Meissen. In the 18th century, though, this decoration would have been handpainted. Here it was printed

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with color lithography, a breakthrough boasted of in the 1867 catalogue. The Victoria & Albert considered color lithography such an important development in manufacturing that it bought a similar example for its collection.

Color lithography was important to 19th-century design in another way: in mid-century, Owen Jones's design source books were published in color. They exposed designers to a rich palette from around the world. The French designer Philippe-Joseph Brocard worked with Jones, and a great example of Jones-influenced style are the flasks from 1872 on top of the Pugin cabinet. Brocard is best known for reviving an enamel-on-glass technique that had been perfected in Syria in the 14th century, particularly for mosque lamps. Brocard exhibited similar glass at the 1867 fair. Our pair, while not from a world's fair, has an important history. From the "AM" entwined in the decoration we know they were made for Alfred Morrison, whose townhouse, 16 Carlton House Terrace, was one of the greatest design showcases in London. We also show a marquetry door panel Jones designed for a bookcase in that house. Again, this demonstrates the shift in patronage from ecclesiastical and royal to the mercantile class.

When the remarkable Etruscan table came on the London market in 1997, I thought Owen Jones must be the designer. Fortunately, it was important enough to have been illustrated in the catalogue for the 1872 London World's Fair, so we could correctly identify it. Its designer, Alexander Prignot, was a Frenchman who worked for firms in England, on the Continent, and even in the U.S. He very much followed in Jones's footsteps, and we have just acquired some original drawings by Prignot for books on ornament from around the world. As the century progressed, sophisticated design became more polychromatic – note the vivid contrasts in the tabletop decoration. The motifs, as elsewhere, are historicist: palmettes, lyres, scrolls, – very "Neo-Grec." But once again the catalogue description focused more on the innovative, labor-saving machinery used to produce the piece. It was made with a new machine for cutting veneers that made marquetry inlay more efficient and economical to produce.

Another masterwork of inlay from another European design center is this coffer, or jewelry box, made for the 1873 Vienna World's Fair by a great Italian craftsman, Giovanni Battista Gatti. This inlay technique was perfected during the Italian Renaissance. When paired with our Foggini *pietre dure* jewelry box from 1730, this shows how a tradition of luxury objects continued through the 19th century. The box also contains a pun: "Gatti" means "cat" in Italian; look for the maker's "signature" on one of the panels.

The gilded frame of the Maestosi painting is another example of how traditional skills of carving and ornamentation continued in this period – as is a newly acquired folio cabinet that may be on display by the time you read this. I'm convinced it is by Luigi Frulini, an Italian with an international clientele, including American plutocrats in Newport. I can't imagine how this piece, probably made in Florence in the 1870s, got to Asheville, N.C., where I found it at auction last winter. But it is a reminder of how this era of world's fairs spread design ideas and luxury objects not only throughout Europe but also to America.

With the addition of Clesinger's marble *Bacchante and Satyr* and two bronzes by Carrier-Belleuse, walking into Gallery 322 will be like entering an exhibition hall at one of the great world's fairs.

Opening of French Room

Pamela Friedland

Bastille Day was celebrated July 14 at the MIA with the opening of the Grand Salon from the Hôtel Gaillard de la Bouëxière in Paris.

The Grand Salon originally (c.1735) was the formal reception space in a Paris hôtel or mansion near the *Place Vendôme*. Jean Gaillard de la Bouëxière, a wealthy fermier general who collected salt and wine taxes for the crown, owned it. Elegant private homes such as what housed this salon, and adjacent cabinet (study) now part of the Saint Louis Museum of Art, were part of many fashionable Paris neighborhoods in the early 18th century. Shortly after purchasing the hôtel, Jean Gaillard modernized the original 1682 building, expanding to the corner of the street, and bettering the view of the *Place Vendôme*. The salon of this hôtel and others were primarily used for enjoying music and literature, card playing, and conversation.

Many of the lavish homes were decorated in the *régence* (first phase of the French Rococo or Louis the XV) and rococo styles popular during the earlier part of the 18th century. The fluid, naturalistic style of the rococo design seen in the Grand Salon compliment the arabesque fanciful foliage, both evident in the abundant wall decoration.

Two large trophies adorn corners of the room suggest an interest in the hunt and the arts, specifically music. Monkeys are amusingly portrayed on the cornice suggesting an interest in *singerie,* a popular decorative art form of dressing up this animal aping the actions of men, as well as many other symbols inspired from popular Far East culture of the time, referred to as *chinoiserie*. The massive French glass mirrors, which have been painstakingly reproduced, are surrounded by gilded carvings of gods and goddesses suggesting another 18th century interest, that of mythology. Gilded medallions of female heads placed throughout the room symbolically imply

the four regions or continents of Asia, Africa, America and Europe.

The brilliant chandelier, not room centered, is placed in the axis of the large mirrors to create more ambiance and light, reflecting optimally in all of the glass. It was produced recently in France, modeled after a chandelier in a French chateau. The original chandelier would have had candles of all the same height, thus when all the candles burned out, it was time for the company to be on its way home! Also, reproduced from descriptions in the 1759 inventory of the room are draperies woven with gilded thread, trimmed with silk cords. With the windows shuttered to protect the room from excessive sun, it is likely the draperies were nonfunctional.

Asian inspired motifs are found again within the iron fireback as well as Turkish, Chinese and Japanese decorations surrounding the frame of the fireplace inset. Again, the reference is to the popular *chinoiserie* style of the period. To the left of the door next to the fireplace are barely noticeable hinges perhaps suggesting a hidden storage space.

With the death of Jean Gaillard in 1759 the hôtel ownership changed hands many times, eventually purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art only one week before the stock market crash in 1929. The Met, never uncrating the room, sold it to a New York antique dealer in the 1950s, where it remained until the Groves Foundation and Carolyn and Franklin Groves purchased it and generously gifted the salon to the MIA in 1983.

Extensive water and fire damage necessitated an incredible amount of restoration, with funds also from the Groves Foundation and Mr. and Mrs. Groves. Two Parisian conservator firms conserved and restored the gilded panels in France, necessitating visits by Grand Salon Curator, Jason Busch, every three months to check the progress. The Upper Midwest Conservation Association was involved in resculpting the plaster reliefs on the cornice, ceiling medallion, and repairing the fireplace. Many other conservation organizations in the United States were also involved in providing expertise in this major effort. All restorations, of course, strived to display the room as aged appropriately for the time.

The Grand Salon from the Hôtel Gaillard de la Bouëxière, the 15th period room in the MIA, provides a tremendous opportunity to transport visitors back to 18th century Paris. Combine the salon with some of the newly exhibited treasures such as the *Louis XV Wall Clock with Bracket,* c.1725, French *Commode,* c.1745, or the one of the eight French *Armchairs,* c.1756, also generously given to the MIA from the Groves Foundation.

We can only imagine similar treasures such as these may have been found in this room at some time and what tales the rooms of the hôtel may hold.

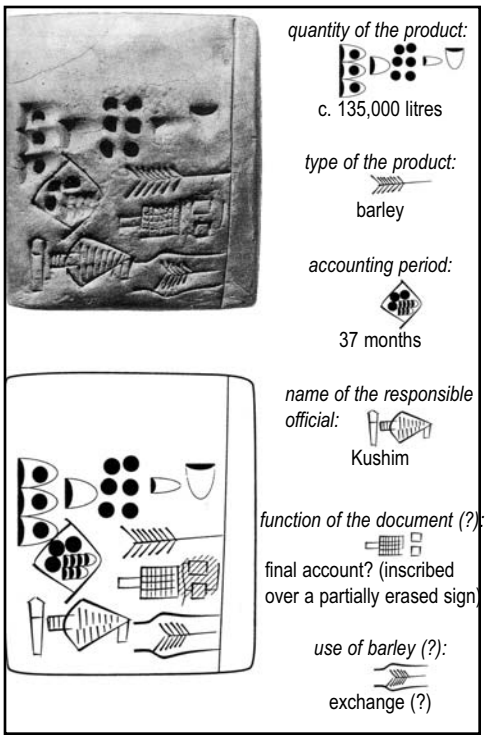
Cuneiform Text

Sharon Hayenga

Nearly everyone is fascinated by Egyptian hieroglyphs, but few know much of anything about a nearby language, cuneiform, that once facilitated life in Iraq and its surroundings for the 3,500 years that preceded the current era. There are important distinctions between cuneiform and hieroglyphs. Less than 5% of Egyptians could read hieroglyphs, while cuneiform was used widely as the official language of business. Even more interesting, the visual aspects of cuneiform changed dramatically over time, while hieroglyphs did not. In fact, contemporary pictographs, as they appear on this page, have become prominent as forms of communication again today,[1] but cuneiform lost its pictographs and moved into oblivion.

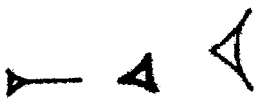
By far the largest example of cuneiform at the MIA is the *Winged Genius* (9th century BCE, 41.9), with the language running across a large area in the middle of the limestone plate that hosts the carving. That carving is not easy to read, but it is easy to understand when associated with some more accessible examples. Two types appear in this article: clay tablets associated with the making and selling of beer and an illustration based on Hammurabi's Code.

Prior to the creation of visuals in Mesopotamia, Sumer and Assyria, spoken language existed. But with economic development in the region, documents that could be transported with information about transactions and privileges became necessary: in short cuneiform was created for purposes of accounting. The earliest applications were clay tablets and seals. The first illustration is about materials for making beer,[2] and can be translated using the associated legend.[3] It has been written with early, fairly literal pictographs, the first incarnation of cuneiform.



Pictographs were modified steadily into more stylized characters. The second example included is a more recent clay tablet, this one about the selling of beer.[4] There is no legend for reading it, but the change in the presentation is apparent.

The largest of these tablets were approximately one foot square, with information inserted in columns, and appearing only in reed wedge-shaped forms,[5] the most obvious change. The reeds were plentiful and simply pressed into damp clay.

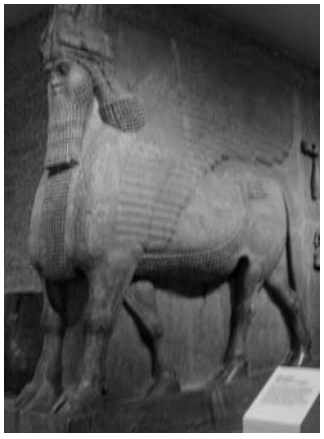


Gradually, it became apparent that pictographs alone were too inefficient to carry the burden of a written language. Each pictograph typically represented only a single thing and too many sounds and concepts could not easily be represented by pictures. Finally, by the time of the Assyrian empire in the 1st millennium, cuneiform symbols bore almost no relationship to earlier, more literal pictographs. It was about this time that the *Winged Genius* was carved. An easy way to look at the progression from pictograph to stylized-pictograph, and from early Babylonian to Assyrian is to look at the included grid representing the evolution of the language.[6]

From the grid, it is clear that pictographs first were turned 90 degrees to the left as the language became a horizontally written (rather than vertically written) script (still often in columns) and began to be read from left to right (rather than vertically). In this process the symbols began to stand for more than a single noun: a phonetic, somewhat alphabetic dimension was added. Many of the pictograph-based symbols functioned as one or more among three different possibilities for interpreting the language: (i) the highly transformed "picture" retained its historical effectiveness; (ii) symbols came to stand for two-to-four consonant-only combined phonetic sounds (such as *gsh* or *mn*); and/or (iii) some became a single letter consonant representation (such as *n*).

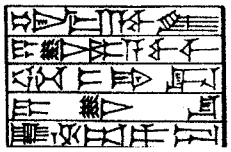
Original Pictograph	Pictograph in position of later cuneiform	Early Babylonian	Assyrian	Original or derived
				bird
				fish
				ox
				grain
				orchard

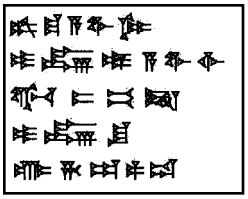
As the language evolved its uses expanded beyond business transactions. Rulers, such as Ashurnasirpal II, king of the city of Nimrud (Iraq) (MIA *Winged Genius*), built castles and monuments for political reasons. Inscriptions such as those on our *Winged Genius* explain Ashurnasirpal's military conquests, the king's cruelty to his enemies, and his intimacy with the gods. Intimidating and awesome as they were – and were meant to be – these massive structures often functioned like today's propaganda. An Assyrian palace depicted a mighty battle in which the Assyrian king won; the Hittite king also created a self-aggrandizing castle showing the Hittites to have won the same battle.

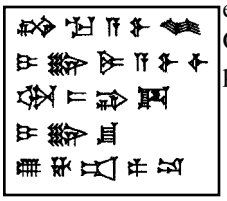


There are free-standing examples of Assyrian power as well, such as the centaurs found in the British Museum, which has a very large collection of Assyrian art.[7]

One of the most legendary kings to create a cuneiform document was Hammurabi, the Babylonian King (1792-1750 BCE) who codified the laws of Mesopotamia and Sumeria as the Hammurabi Code. These laws had a positive functional impact, rather than being self-aggrandizing, and remained effective until 50 BCE, approximately 250 years after Hammurabi wrote them. They were written on a large, black basalt stone, now in the Louvre.[7] What follows is the 196th Law from the Code (an eye for an eye) in three versions of cuneiform, followed by an English translation.[8] They offer a concise look at the changes in script over less than 2,000 years. First is the original Old Babylonian used around 1750 BCE, the beginning of Hammurabi's reign. Second, the Neo-Assyrian (c.1000 BCE) is from about the time that the cuneiform was written on the MIA's *Winged Genius*. The last example is the Classic Sumerian, which was in use just prior to Hammurabi's reign.







If a man
the eye of a son of man
destroys
eye his
they will destroy.

Cuneiform is interesting. And shown through examples that are accessible, visitors are likely to reveal they had known virtually nothing about the language and that they find it interesting. It will almost certainly make the *Winged Genius* more interesting to the many school groups who view it each year. The language also creates a terrific transition or comparison/contrast with the Egyptian galleries. The bequest to the MIA of small-size Sumerian art included some clay tablets, which are not now on view.[9]

[1]Robinson, Andrew. *The Story of Writing*. Thames & Hudson, UK, 2001, p 210.

[2]*Beer Production*. Pictographic script Uruk III, Sumer 31st c. BCE, MS 1717, http://www.nb.no/baser/schoyen/5/5.21/ms1717.jpg

[3]Robinson, p 63.

[4]Quantities of beer for offering, Sumer 2034 BCE. MS 2020/08, http://www.nb.no/baser/schoyen/5/5.21/ms2020.jpg

[5]*The Cuneiform Sign* (http://www.etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/edition2/cuneiform writing.php.

[6]Bonewitz, Ronald L. *Hieroglyphics*. McGraw Hill, Illinois, 2004, p 3.

[7]Nequette, Merritt C (Photographs, British Museum, London, 2005; *Musée du Louvre,* Paris, 2002).

[8]*Cuneiform Script Examples*. http://homepage.mac.com/thgewecke/cunei.html, pp 1,2. *Note:* could not confirm the dates from a secondary source. At issue is whether Hammurabi's Code was written in Classic Sumerian or in Original Old Babylonian.

[9]Director of Conservation, Science Museum of Minnesota.

Book Review: Matisse Picasso

Victoria Veach

Matisse Picasso. Anne Baldassari, Elizabeth Cowling, John Elderfeld, John Golding, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, Kirk Varnedoe. Tate Publishing, 2002.

The bright blue book cover on the docents' library shelf caught my eye and the portraits on the front intrigued me. Once I started to explore the comparisons of the artists' work, starting with their self-portraits from 1906, I couldn't relinquish the book until I had studied all 34 sections. What a great exhibition this must have been! It was a collaboration between the Tate Modern of London, the *Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Musée Picasso* with the *Musée National d'Art Modern* in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Of course, one would have had to spend days in the museum to be able to appreciate all the subtle relationships between the objects in each group. The book has an essay for each section written by one of the six curators who worked on the exhibit. I could understand much of what five of the six wrote, sometimes with the aid of my dictionary. After the first paragraph I usually recognized the essays by the sixth, and knew even Webster's would be of little help. (How did a French woman come up with such obscure English words?) But the pictures were there to be admired even without an understanding of the relationships between them.

Some of the comparisons are between a well-known painting by one artist and a less familiar one by the other. Section 3 compares Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) with Matisse's *Bathers with A Turtle* (1908). Imagine the *demoiselles* staring across the page at the bathers. No wonder the bathers are focusing on a turtle. The composition of this Matisse painting from the St. Louis Art Museum is similar to the MIA's *Three Bathers* (1907) with more details to the figures (there could hardly be fewer) and very different colors in the background. (I wonder how these two similar paintings came to the American midwest.) Matisse's *Nasturtiums with 'Dance' II* (1912) and Picasso's *The Three Dancers* (1925) in Section 17 provide a similar contrast between the figures. Matisse's are all curves, holding hands in a circle; Picasso's are made up of angles. One can imagine very different music for each group.

Although the essay for Section 23 suggests some similarities between Matisse's *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Background* (1925-6) and Picasso's *Large Nude in a Red Armchair* (1929), the mood of the two figures seems drastically different. The artists' attitude toward the women may be the reason. Picasso's *Woman in an Armchair* in this section and the MIA's painting of the same name, both from 1927, have similar backgrounds but seem to depict figures with different levels of stress. Matisse's sculpture of a *Large Seated Nude* in this section also looks very familiar.

Section 9 contains another pairing of a well-known work by Picasso, his *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1905-6), with Matisse's *Portrait of Auguste Pellerin II,* painted more than a decade later. The two look like members of the same family! The faces of each are mask-like against dark backgrounds. Both of the seated figures wear dark clothing with white at the neck and tiny touches of red.

I must include two sets of still lifes. Section 29 contrasts Matisse's "radiant and appetizing" *Still Life with Oysters* (1940) with Picasso's "terrifying" *Still Life with a Sausage* (1941). Matisse's painting has a simple arrangement and beautiful colors. Picasso's arrangement of objects is complex and "sinister" in shades of grayish-brown.

Section 21 has two still lifes with fruit. Matisse's has a bowl of oranges, a fruit he painted so often it became "an emblem of his art." Picasso used very subtle shades of grey and green to create a stunning painting of a pitcher with a plate of apples on top. Some viewers have seen a "hidden woman in this work."

Matisse painted many "make-believe harem scenes" related to Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*. One of them is the *Decorative Figure* mentioned above. Shortly after Matisse died in 1954, Picasso painted a series of 15 variations on *Women of Algiers*. The essay for Section 33, which has three of these works, suggests this is "an imagined collaboration with Matisse on the subject of Delacroix." Picasso's painting *Las Meninas, after Velazquez* is one of 44 variations that Picasso produced in 1957. It could be used to contrast with the MIA's Dali on the same theme. In the same group of paintings of artists' studios in Section 30, Picasso's *The Studio at 'La Californie'* (1955) painted in tones of brown and grayish-green contrasts with Matisse's many colorful interiors. The sculpture of a head on a table is quite a different object from the reclining nudes Matisse often has in his interiors.

Other sections compare the artists' nudes in paintings, sculptures, woodcuts, watercolors, and drawings. There are several groups of women's portraits and a section of sculptures of women's heads. One section contains 3 landscapes. In another Matisse's cutouts are compared to Picasso's sheet metal sculptures. The book includes a detailed chronology and pages of notes in very small print. The last section ties back to the first with two self-portraits of the artists. Matisse stands with his back to the viewer playing a violin before an open window. Picasso's image is a shadow cast into a bedroom. Each of these poignant images was painted at a time of crisis. The personal stories in the essays add to the reader's understanding of the contrasts and similarities in the lives of these two major figures in modern art. It's a big beautiful book and it's finally back on the shelf.

Return From Fargo

Tom Byfield

Folks, we have a dilemma facing us for this issue of the Muse. At least for me, summer has provided a break from touring and thus no fertile fodder to plumb for a column. Face it, sometimes the little hamster of inspiration falls asleep in his wheel and his brain-wave activity is flatter than an Amish phone book. So this once we will depart from the usual twaddle about the MIA and dwell instead on an event that you all have enjoyed or suffered, (pick one), – Reunions.

We have just returned from Fargo, which is the only thing one can do if you find yourself up there. It was in Fargo that my high school class had its 60th reunion. It was only the third one in those 60 years so it was with curiosity and a bit of

apprehension that we decided to go.

I grew up believing my high school years were going to be the best of my life because adults told me so. They lied. The truth is that teenage years are terrifying. You worry about not being popular. You worry that you will need only three friendship pictures at graduation. You worry that you will have only four signatures in your senior annual and three of those are teachers. You hate the way you look and aren't ready for the invasion of the hormones from hell. You live in fear that you will end up being the graduate "Most Likely to Stay in the Shallow End."

In the opera that was high school I was one of the spear bearers in the back row. But after leading a reasonable successful life, which means I don't pick my teeth in public and have learned the rules of the stylized gavotte that passes for rational social intercourse, I was concerned that regression might occur the minute I entered the room. I wondered if I would revert back to that socially incapacitated adolescent lost in the shadows of "the in crowd." I also wondered if we would be tripping over canes and walkers, bumping into wheelchairs and attendants waiting to take some for their walk. We all were old enough for our parents to have been hunter-gatherers. I needn't have worried. Of the 50 or so alumni there, most looked younger than they had any right to be. Some even recognized me. One woman (girl?) obviously suffering from macular degeneration said, "Oh Tom, you look just like you did in school. Of course now you don't have any hair." The good Lord giveth and the classmate taketh away. One fellow asked me what I was doing now that I was retired. Rather than puffing up and telling him that I was doing some research for the government on neo-natal stem cells, I told him the truth, that I was a docent at the MIA. His response was, "Oh, were you a prisoner of war?" I said, "No, I'm a prisoner of the scheduling office."

I was asked to say a few words at the banquet. They didn't know that I have the dynamic speaking style of an Alan Greenspan. They suggested that I be funny. They might just as well have proposed that I be handsome. I told them that I wasn't sure I deserved to take up times at the podium but I have arthritis and I don't deserve that either. I told them they were a fine looking group despite pushing 80 with an ever-shorter stick, evading the calcifying tartar of time. Some of the women were still beautiful enough to make a strong dog break its leash.

The years have been kind to my classmates and they have become really nice people to know. Except for one chap whom I thought was a real bore in school and after talking with him that evening I found he was still a bore. One has to admire consistency. This was the last reunion my class will have unless the program committee becomes completely senile and plans a 70th. In which case you can bet that Jeul and I will be there. The kids have promised to bring our ashes.

Phoenix Rising (a true story)

Terry Edam

I was busy planning my two tours for the following week when I received the e-mail from Sheila titled: "Impressionism and Modern Galleries Closing." I thought of not opening it but decided that wasn't very mature. It announced Galleries 351, 355 and 357 were closing. We do roll with the changes because we know the outcome of the renovations will be wonderful…but I now know that even so our subconscious is rebelling. I went to sleep that night thinking; "I can handle it…I can handle it…"

I dreamed that as I approached *Doryphoros* on my tour a crew took him down and replaced him with a large wooden statue of Mickey and Minnie Mouse!! I then had to decide on the spot whether to talk about the new sculpture or to have them imagine *Doryphoros*. I decided on the latter having them close their eyes as we talked about his calm expression! When we finished we began our search for the *Roman Matron* amid rubble. I woke with a start and began reworking my tours.

As always, it turned out just fine. For the Book Club's tour of "Passion and Scandal" all we lost was Dali's *Aphrodisiac Telephone*. As for my second tour we stuck with the Good Ol' Dutch.

Proving once again we docents are phoenix rising!

On The Road

Fran Megarry

Many people look to Midwest United States as "fly over country." This summer my daughter, Heather, and I took our first road trip since she and her sister were about 5. Yes, in past years we have boarded flights for 12 hours or more to various parts of the world, but this year the Jeep Liberty provided us with the ability to stop when desired. Time and again we mentioned we could buy that wonderful souvenir or book "because we aren't flying."

We attended Royals and Cardinals baseball games and visited no less than four Presidential Libraries and studied at three Civil Rights History Centers. My comments for this short article involve the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the St. Louis Art Museum.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is a gem. Although under construction (we know what that is about), one could still see the many Henry Moore sculptures on the grounds and get lost within the galleries. Before our public tour I introduced myself to Thomas Hart Benton. The day before I saw a picture of Benton and Harry S Truman, at the Truman Library, painting a mural together. On the public tour our docent asked the group, "What would you like to see"? It was an interesting way to start a tour since none of us knew what our choices were. Although I didn't contribute I hoped to see some highlights of the museum. One guest wanted to see the Japanese and Chinese areas. We ended up seeing one tapestry in the Chinese gallery and the Japanese room. The docent suggested that scholars consider the objects in these areas very rare. I became nervous, avoiding eye contact, when our docent started asking specific (one answer) questions about the tapestry and furniture. After the tour we spent hours leisurely enjoying

this wonderful museum. It is worth the seven-hour drive from St. Paul to Kansas City, MO.

The St. Louis Art Museum is a beautiful facility built for the 1904 World's Fair. It has had revisions since architect Cass Gilbert constructed this building free of windows. (It now has windows.) Gilbert didn't want people to be distracted by the outside when viewing the art.

Again we took the public tour. This time we had the docent to ourselves. The theme was "Decorative Arts in the Home." It was a very fun tour led by a first-year docent in training. When we were finished I asked where the French Study was located and was cheerfully taken to the area. I doubt we would ever have found it on our own. I expected and was not surprised to find the room slightly smaller than our French Salon. It is full of furniture so we could only peek into the area through a door width. It is so nice that we can walk in our French room. What did surprise me was that the walls and ceiling are painted pale green similar to our Providence Room. Although carved images are on the walls and on the cornices we saw no gilding. There are no drapes. The area above the doors does have small paintings. Our docent was quick to say that this room had not been covered in training yet. I too have more to learn about this room and may require another 11-hour drive from St. Paul to St. Louis, MO.

I encourage docents to write of their "Art Travels." Send your articles to Fran Megarry at megar003@tc.umn.edu

Keeping in Touch

Let's Celebrate!

I am making an appeal to all of you to plan on attending this year's fall luncheon on September 12th. We will be recognizing many docent anniversaries and want all of you to be a part of the celebration. Thirty docents will be celebrating their 10th anniversary and 13, their 20th. In addition, we will celebrate Betty Berman's and Marilyn Bockley's 30 years of service, Suzy Vogt's 35 years, and Sally Lehmann's 40 years!–a docent first!!!!

We continue to celebrate with the beginning of a new docent class. At the time of this publication the Docent Class of 2005 will have begun their program. Debbi and I encourage all docents to take time to welcome and introduce yourselves to the Jr. Docents. Remember you will recognize the new class with those "red dots" on the name tags.

Sheila McGuire

Letter from the Docent Chair

On behalf of the members of the Docent Executive Committee, I would like to greet you again and wish you a fun new year of touring. I also invite you to call on any of the members of the Board if we can be of assistance during this year in which the Museum is going through its transition.

Debbi and Sheila discussed some of the challenges we can expect to encounter during the transition at our last board meeting. These conversations are summarized in the minutes of the Board's meeting; these minutes are available to you. They are in a binder near the coffee pot in the Docent Lounge.

During the past year, on behalf of all the docents, the board sent a number of bouquets to members who have suffered health problems and to the families of those who have passed away. These tributes are paid for by your contributions to the Sunshine Fund. Unfortunately, the balance in the Sunshine Fund is getting low and we must appeal to you for additional support. If you can contribute, please give it to Linnea Asp, our treasurer, or place it in the sunshine envelope on the docent bulletin board. Thank you for your generosity.

Patrick George

From the Museum Guide Programs Staff

MIA Docents Beyond the Crossroads

In May I attended the American Association of Museums conference in Indianapolis. I was intrigued by a session called "Docents at the Crossroads: Rethinking the Role of Volunteer Interpreters." Diane Arkin, the Lecturer and Adult Program Docent Coordinator at the National Gallery of Art, spoke on "how are museums rethinking who our docents are?" She basically said the time has come to ask ourselves what is an educational experience and how do we want to deliver it, and how do docents factor into this rethinking? She said we had to rethink how we measure success.

I waited with baited breath for the revolutionary ideas that promised to roll off her lips. When she was done I was still waiting. We have already made critical and often difficult changes and challenged ourselves to rethink what our role as gallery teachers really is. We are already doing nearly everything she suggested or recommended – admittedly some better than others. It was abundantly clear from the questions that followed her talk that many museums had not thought about her ideas or shied away from making difficult changes. As you might already know, even the National Gallery of Art itself, until very recently, remained very conservative in its approach to leading tours.

I will do my best to paraphrase Ms. Arkin's major recommendations and observations here so that we can consider our individual success with each and challenge ourselves to do even better where needed.

- Refocus on the visitors—it is their tour.
- Acknowledge that individual learning styles drive us to need to provide a variety of tools for learning.
- A tour is not just about talking; it is about the silences, really looking, and building personal relationships with our collection.
- Tours are about give and take.
- Volunteer docents are the human contact, the valuable interface between the public and technology.
- Volunteers foster contact with our collections. They foster understanding.
- Docents welcome people and set the tone for museum visits.
- Docents build the community environment that allows for collaborative learning.
- Docents engage visitors. They can make people smile. Groups still talking even after the docent leaves is a measure of real engagement.

- The most outstanding docents can heighten visitors' awareness of the relationships between art and their own life experiences.
- Focus on universals; the human component is so important in these times of change.
- Be flexible and open to diverse responses.
- Promote discovery. Linger on an aspect of discovery.

Ms. Arkin also talked about ways that docents in the future might be able to integrate media tools like audio guides into their tours and recommended making docents available for non-linear types of tour experiences. She urged museum staff to recruit diverse guides and to communicate early and often with their volunteers. She encouraged us to develop study groups so that docents could learn from their peers, to do even more training in the galleries, and to help docents shift their focus from "I don't know that" to "How do we address the unknown?"

I am so proud of our program and all of you for making us the national leaders we are. I wish I had been up there telling all those people how great you are!

Sheila McGuire

Endowment for Museum Guide Education

Last year, Sara Hobart Homeyer from Wisconsin established an endowment fund at the Institute in memory of her mother, Catherine Carey Hobart, who served as a docent at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Wishing to honor her mother's devotion to the museum and its tour guide programs, Mrs. Homeyer created the Endowment for Museum Guide Education. Its purpose is to help diversify the museum's corps of docents and guides by supporting their participation in tour guide programs. Income from the fund will help us provide docents and guides with educational materials and supplies that support participation in our programs, such as training materials, textbooks, exhibition catalogues, membership fees, Internet access, and recruitment costs. The Institute is thankful for this thoughtful gift and new endowment.

A gift to the Endowment for Museum Guide Education may be the perfect way to honor or remember a friend, family member, or loved one who has enjoyed participating in the Institute's docent or museum guide programs. All contributions to this fund add to its ongoing value, and help increase its future impact for our guides and docents. To make your own contribution or memorial, please contact Sheila McGuire, Director of Museum Guide Programs, at 612-870-3206, or Kim Bowman, Director of Endowments and Planned Giving, at 612-870-3023.

Sheila McGuire

New Library Titles

Amr Hussein. *ABC Hieroglyphics*
James C.Y. Watt. *China: Dawn of a Golden Age 200-750 CE*
Richard F. Townsend. *Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand*
Andrew Causey. *Sculpture Since 1945*
Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*

Book Club

The book for discussion at the September meeting of the Docent Book Club will be Umberto Eco's *History of Beauty*. It's quite a heavy volume in more ways than one but uses an amazing array of art to illustrate his thought on the concept of "beauty." The exact date and room at the MIA is yet to be decided. Contact Dale Swenson for further information.

Honorary Docent News

The honorary docents were pleased that so many docents joined us at Orchestra Hall for interesting talks with music director Osmo Vanska, concertmaster Jorja Fleezanis and musicologist Michael Steinberg.

Over the summer we toured the Walker Art Center with former MIA docent, now a Walker docent, Norma Hanlon. We also toured the Museum of Russian Art and the Mill City Museum. The fall schedule of tours has not been set yet. Possibilities are a return to the Museum of Russian Art for a tour of the Russian Icon exhibit and a visit to the Minnetonka Art Center.

On Wednesday, September 28, we will be going to GAYTEE Stained Glass Co., 2744 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis for a tour. Following the tour the group will go on to the Basilica of St. Mary to see the stained glass windows the company has installed.

The book group has chosen the following for fall reading:

September: *Middlesex* by Jeffery Eugenides
October: *The Native Son* by Richard Wright
November: *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse.

Nancy Pennington

From the Editor…

Articles or ideas for future *Docent Muse* issues may be sent via e-mail to megar003@tc.umn.edu. The deadline for the next *Docent Muse* is November 16.

Fran Megarry