

A Visit from St. Francis

Bob Marshall

Observant docents may have noticed a new visitor in the southwest corner of Gallery 341, a traumatized St. Francis in his familiar brown habit, supported by a very physical angel. On extended loan from a prominent Old Master dealer in New York, the painting is a work from around 1600 by the Italian artist Orazio Gentileschi.

Although eight years older than Caravaggio, Gentileschi was heavily influenced by the younger artist, whom he knew in Rome, and his reputation today rests largely on his Caravaggesque style. Anyone familiar with Caravaggio's great paintings of *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* in Rome's *Santa Maria del Popolo* (1601) will see the similarities: the strong lighting, the dark background, the boldly diagonal composition, the foreshortened saint pressing to the front of the picture plane.

Orazio, however, is probably more famous today for being the father of Artemisia Gentileschi, undoubtedly the best-known female artist of the 17th century – known for her life story as much as her art. Having *The Lute Player (Self Portrait)* on loan from Myron Kunin's Curtis Galleries gives us the wonderful opportunity to see works by father and daughter together. Interestingly, both of these works were among 80 by the two artists in a 2002 exhibition devoted to the Gentileschis at the Metropolitan Museum.

More coincidences will abound when the show *Renaissance to Rococo: Masterpieces from the Wadsworth Atheneum* arrives at the MIA in October. That exhibition includes Caravaggio's first major religious painting, *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, in which a beautiful, less-clad male angel supports the collapsed St. Francis. If Orazio was not copying Caravaggio's work, he was obviously influenced by it. For instance, you will notice a tiny white spot in the background above the saint's knee in each picture: it's a campfire in the Caravaggio, the flower of a thistle in the Gentileschi.

There's an intriguing historical tidbit that also connects the paintings. At a libel trial in 1603 Caravaggio testified that he had loaned some swan's wings to Orazio. Whether the wings that Caravaggio used to paint his angel in the 1595 Wadsworth picture are the same ones used by Gentileschi in his presumably post-1601 work is not known, but for angel's wings they do look rather worn.

Also in the traveling Wadsworth show – it is coming here from Santa Barbara after stops in Florida, Texas, Nebraska, Tennessee and North Carolina – is one of Orazio Gentileschi's greatest works, *Judith and her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*. That should ring a bell: we have a work by Agostino Carracci of the same subject, also on loan, hanging between the paintings by Gentileschi *père et fille*. The Carracci, of course, were working in Rome at the same time as Caravaggio but re-introduced a calmer, classical style, and *Portrait of a Woman as Judith* contrasts vividly with the more dramatic, tenebrous work by Orazio arriving here this fall.



But there is no need to wait till October to find uses for *Vision of St. Francis* on your tours. Standing in the middle of Gallery 341, you can not only see Gentileschi's St. Francis, but through the door to your left, the same bearded, brown-robed figure at the foot of Castiglione's *Immaculate Conception*. Why are they so visible from such a distance? Because both were products of the Counter-Reformation, which called for large-scale art that evoked emotional responses from the viewer. Look more closely for some common

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symbolism, such as the three knots in Francis's belt, representing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

And for anyone who starts a tour with our old friend Daddi, point out St. Francis in the left panel, kneeling to receive the stigmata. Then when you come to Gallery 341, have your group find the resulting marks on the left foot and right hand of the saint. Want one more coincidence? Agostino Tassi, an artist colleague whom Orazio accused of raping Artemisia when she was 19, was also the teacher of Claude Lorrain.

Research Resources

Pamela Friedland

There are an incredible number of resources available to research art objects, many within the comfort and ease of our own museum. I will begin with the most obvious and friendliest place during my experience of researching art objects for the new wing of the museum.

The newly-built and expanded Art Research and Reference Library is located off the first floor main lobby of the new wing. The library will reopen to the public on June 13 and its hours will be Tuesday through Friday, from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Telephone reference assistance will also be available during these hours by calling 612-870-3117. Docents and Museum Guides are currently able to schedule appointments other than these public hours if desired.

Janice Lurie, head librarian, and Sarah Quimbly, associate librarian, are available to assist you with your research needs. They will retrieve books from the new storage area located one floor below the Reading Room as well as advise on search techniques. Available for your own retrieval are many volumes of reference books, incredibly useful as a source for bibliographic material. With a collection of over 55,000 volumes it is almost assured many of your questions will be answered.

A computer workstation area and wireless technology in the Reading Room will ensure the ability to easily access information from such sites as Arts Full Text and Art Retrospective. These sites will access the abundant selection of periodicals, exhibition catalogues, gallery guides, auction catalogues, as well as a myriad of other resources. A comfy window seat under huge windows is inviting as well as plenty of study tables and lots of natural light. No more dark and windowless library!

If desired, you can begin your search on your own computer by accessing the library's Web site:

<http://library.artsmia.org/>.

This can also be accessed through the general museum Web site. An incredible amount of information is now at your disposal!

I found if I needed additional information, especially on rather contemporary artists, I did quite well at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design library, located just across Target Park from the MIA. The advantage of this library is ease of accessing books, periodicals, and catalogues. The collection is available without the assistance of a librarian, however not as extensive in all eras of art history. The stacks are nicely organized with research easily accessible with the assistance

of a few available computers. A large wooden drawer system is incredibly useful when searching for gallery catalogues. So often, similar images of the piece of art I was researching guided me to the proper resource.

The Walker Art Center was my final library visit. To meet with librarian Rosemary Furst, a private appointment must be made by calling 612-375-7600. Upon arrival you will be given your own chair, desk, and a brief overview of the library. I happened to be there on Valentine's Day and was able to sample a piece of chocolate from a gallery in France. It was filled with French wine. WOW! What an incredible collection of contemporary art information awaited me here. What is unique about this library is the collection of clippings Rosemary has compiled on many artists. These include gallery openings, newspaper articles, and the like.

Of course we cannot forget to mention that many Web sites are available using your own computer. I found the many Web sites from individual museums to be rather helpful. I especially enjoyed sites from the Tate Modern, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim Museum. I also obtained a large amount of information from the online site of the New York Times Archives. Many interesting articles may be easily accessed also using Google search tools. The county library system is also helpful and accessible either from a home computer or the library itself. Useful sites here include ProQuest and Groves Art Online.

The hardest part of researching art objects was deciding when to stop. There is so much information available, with just so much time to gather and read it all. Enjoy the process though; I certainly did.

Art Information Detectives Needed

The Museum's Art Research and Reference Library is looking for volunteers to work in its new research facility, which opens to the public on June 13.

The volunteer position requires a commitment of at least four hours per day and a minimum of two days per month between the hours of 11:30 -4:30 on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Some tasks include: searching the library's online catalog, assisting librarians in helping the public find information, pulling books from storage for the public's use, answering the telephone, filing, checking out books, and processing library material. Please contact Janice Lurie at 612-870-3116.

Flying Years and Delightful Memories

Tom Byfield

Jeul and I recently celebrated our 54th wedding anniversary. "Celebrated" is perhaps too strong a word. "Observed" would be a more august term as befits our age. We are old enough for the government to have discontinued our blood type. We dressed up; I even wore a tie, and went to a fine restaurant. We ate wonderfully tender steaks, the cost of which easily



could have funded four years at Harvard Medical School. We were fawned over by a wait staff that obviously had prayed to Ganymede, the patron saint of waiters. We answered those prayers and left a sizeable tip. One must be very careful when dealing with saints you know.

While we ate we congratulated ourselves that we still have most of our faculties, sense of adventure and teeth. We agreed that those 54 years have passed with the speed of a roadrunner of Dexedrine. Jeul opined as she sipped her wine that maybe our marriage just might last. We spoke to the highs and lows of those years and were surprised to find our recollections of many events didn't agree. We realized that over time our memories have become less distinct, a hazy amorphous collection of half-recalled episodes. They have become skinny like a bag of bones drawn tight. They sit like lonely old men on the park bench of our minds. Other of our memories however are still so sharp we could pick your teeth with them. What follows are a couple of examples of tours at the MIA that I recall with exceptionally clarity.

Most of us have given hundreds of tours which often are forgettable. I know mine are, but sometimes you finish a tour and say, "Wow!" One that I will long remember was an *Ooh-La-La* tour with a group of college girls from a French class. Now I have nothing against the French other than their language. How it is pronounced has little to do with how it is written. I'm sorry but that's the truth. I believe in calling a spade a spade and when pressed can also name other garden tools. For me French is as mysterious as the back alleys of the Kasbah. When I explained to the group that my knowledge of French was hopeless they smiled tolerantly. When I asked them for help in pronunciation, they giggled in anticipation. When I mangled names and places during the tour they became positively gleeful in correcting me. Rarely have I had a tour where students had something to offer and relished their French 101 instructions for me. When we ended a most delightful hour their proud instructor had a grin that could have swallowed a banana sideways.

Not all tours are a walk through Elysian Fields. I cringe when thinking about one that was a disaster. I drew the teacher for my group and after the opening remarks I lost control. This was early in my career(?) when the yoke of insecurity hung heavy on my shoulders. The teacher disputed my facts and began selecting her own pieces to discuss. I was left in the background floating anxiously on the periphery like a wayward helium balloon. When the hour was up I thanked her for the tour in a voice dripping with a hint of sarcasm, which nobody bothered to wipe up. Now my backbone is considerable stiffer and not just from arthritis. I will not allow such wanton hi-jacking again. I would riposte and as the Quakers would say, "Up Thine!"

Keeping in Touch

From the Museum Guide Programs Staff

Open-ended Questions vs. VTS

I am going to use this *Muse* opportunity to clarify the difference between VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) tours and all other tours facilitated using open-ended questions.

The only tours that are VTS tours are those given to groups that specifically request a Visual Thinking Strategies tour. The docents leading these tours use the three basic VTS questions and the additional questions that students learn to use as they work through the VTS curriculum (e.g. "what more can you say about this person?" or "what more can you say about when this was happening?"). We have a core group of docents who partner with thousands of Minneapolis Public School students who are learning and doing VTS in their classrooms. These students are our biggest audience for VTS tours. We have other schools that also request VTS tours for their beginner-learners, and on occasion we offer VTS tours to families on weekends.

All other tours are not VTS tours. When we ask you to use open-ended questions to engage visitors – young and old alike – we are not saying that you cannot give information. We are asking you to tailor the information you share to the interests of your group. Some groups want information; others love to talk for an hour; yet others fall somewhere in between. Open-ended questions provide a great way for you to learn about your groups' levels of interest and experience.

As I mentioned in my *Muse* article a few months back, this kind of teaching requires you to know a lot about every object on your tour. The skill of asking open-ended questions, including VTS questions and a broad range of other possible questions, also enables you to look at any work of art your group is interested in even if you don't have the information. While you are exploring the artwork together, you are also modeling skills they can use to look at artworks on their own – a key aspect of our department's mission.

In case you still have questions regarding the difference between these two types of tours, I am including here the chart that is in your Docent Handbook. It shows the different parts of a VTS tour and how they relate to other tours that are not VTS.

How does VTS relate to other tours?

A tour that uses *only* pure VTS (in which the docent does not introduce any information) is not appropriate for all tour groups. On regular tours, audiences expect you as the facilitator to share information about the objects; also many non-Western artworks lack strong narrative content and/or prompt gross misinterpretation by visitors without the guidance of the tour facilitator. However, the pedagogical theory underlying the methods of VTS – that learning is developmentally driven and the good teacher listens carefully for clues about what the learner is ready to know – applies to all learning situations. The habits of active looking and active listening promoted by VTS provide those clues, and are essential elements of a meaningful learning experience with art.

Pure VTS Tours	Other Tours
Goals for participants	
Build upon the story-telling instincts of beginner viewers to foster engaging, meaningful interactions with unfamiliar works of art, to promote critical thinking skills and practice respectful group interactions.	Provide participants with experience looking at and engaging with art to find personal relevance and to gain insight into the diversity of art produced by various cultures across time.
Art works used	
Depictions of actions, settings, and emotions that are recognizable by and of interest to beginning viewers; strong narrative content; open to multiple interpretations	A well-crafted tour should include objects that are inherently interesting to the group, represent diverse cultures, and sample a variety of media. Many non-Western art objects are not appropriate for pure VTS because they lack narrative content and/or because they are culturally specific and not open to or appropriate for multiple interpretations.

These differences acknowledged, however, many of the methods employed in a VTS discussion may be fruitfully applied to other group discussions of works of art.

VTS method	How does it apply to other tours?
Begin with a moment of quiet looking	A quiet moment helps orient the group to the object they will be discussing and discover their initial observations. It encourages them to really look rather than simply rely on being told what they are seeing. The more they see for themselves, the more confidence they will have in their own ability to make sense of art.
Open with the question, "What's going on in this picture?"	Use this question ONLY when the work of art lends itself to an accurate reading. Do not use it if the group's interpretation is likely to need "correction" or lead to cultural misinterpretations. Other generic open-ended questions to start a discussion might include, "What observations can you make about this work of art?" "What do you recognize here?" "What does this remind you of?" "How does this compare to what we just looked at?" "Based on what you see, how might this work of art relate to the theme...?"

VTS method	How does it apply to other tours?
Follow up participant responses with, "What do you see that makes you say that?"	When used consistently, the question encourages thoughtful comments that are grounded in the work of art. Try to maintain a genuine curiosity about the reasoning behind each observation to keep the question fresh.
Encourage further discussion with, "What more can you find?" or "Does anyone see something different?"	Use these questions to generate further comments that help you gauge the understandings and experiences of the group. It lets them know that the process of discovery isn't over yet. Because your job is to integrate relevant information according to their interests, this is a great way to stimulate further thinking.
Paraphrase comments and point to details of the work of art as they are mentioned	This technique confirms that you have understood and value someone's comment and helps others in the group to notice things they might not have noticed on their own. Paraphrasing also gives you the opportunity to introduce new vocabulary words.
Make links between the comments of different participants	Similarly, information you introduce should reference the group's comments and observations.
Accept all comments as reasonable	Use "What do you see that makes you say that?" to understand the reasoning behind an interpretive comment. The reasoning behind interpretations should always be acknowledged, and contradictory information presented respectfully. "You're really noticing the surface of this sculpture. The artist has treated it in such a way that it looks deceptively like metal, rather than the wood from which it is carved." "Yes, that figure does seem to have some very feminine qualities. People who have studied this body of Kandinsky's work connect the long hair and gown to Christ." "Yes, many people believe/tend to see/associate this with...but in the artist's culture..."
Refrain from providing information group members do not already know or ask for	Refrain from providing information that isn't really helpful for understanding the work of art. Make new information relevant to the group by relating it to an observation they have made. Continue to exercise judgment regarding what information will be interesting to your audience and will enhance their understanding.
Dispel the notion of teacher as expert	Find ways to reinforce the idea that information comes from a variety of places by indicating the source of your information. "I learned this from a book about..." "People who have studied this say..." "You can learn more about this by..."

Sheila McGuire

Book Group



Docent Book Group will meet on May 22 after the morning lecture. This will be one of the Reinstallation Training lectures with Matthew Welch. The books suggested for discussion are two: *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* by Henri Nouwen and *How Rembrandt Reveals Your Beautiful, Imperfect Self: Life Lessons from the Master* by Roger Housden.

These are two books that will probably never appear on any reading lists at the MIA but are wonderful accounts of what happened to two people who encountered Rembrandt's genius and how this helped change their lives. Both are well known authors but not in the field of art. Our discussion should provoke a lively debate on the role of such experience and whether this should enter into our touring at the MIA. If you won't go there, they are fine books that deal with the greatest questions of what our lives are all about.

Housden declares "that the true purpose of art is the enhancement of self-perception." A review states: "Part biography, part history, part art appreciation, it takes the example of Rembrandt's life and work as inspiration for the strength we need to live with passion and unflinching acceptance of who we are."

"*The Return of the Prodigal Son* is a beautiful book, as beautiful in the simple clarity of its wisdom as in the terrible beauty of the transformation to which it calls us."

Don't become frightened by two books as they are both very slim and worth comparing. They are also authors who have a wide readership. Books are available, new and used, on the Internet and in the library systems. Hope this works out for all.

Dale Swenson

Summer Reading

Jonathan Harr, *The Lost Painting*

It's generally called a work of narrative nonfiction. He details, but not laboriously, the search by two art history graduate students and the larger art historical profession as they search for a "lost" Caravaggio painting. While the subjects of the book are the processes of art historical investigation, authentication of paintings, and the politics/intricacies of professional relationships, it is told in a remarkably non-stuffy, straightforward way. It was a fun read, not a hard read, and enormously engaging for anyone interested in art, artists, and art history, not to mention glimpses of Italy and Ireland.

Sarah Henrich

Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered America*
Publisher's Note: According to Gavin Menzies, New World discovery began before Christopher Columbus was even born. Menzies, a former submarine commander and a full-time amateur historian, has constructed a persuasive case that Chinese exploration reached deeply into the Western Hemisphere and began more than 70 years before 1492. Described by colleagues as "a brilliant maverick," the author contends that the fleet of the admiral Zheng circumnavigated the world a full century before Ferdinand Magellan.

Terry Edam

David Liss, *The Coffee Trader*

Take a walk through Rembrandt's Amsterdam in the 17th century. Meet up with real "Night Watchmen" with a look into business and daily life back then. I loved it.

Terry Edam

Dominique Lapierre, *City of Joy*

(This book is not about art) One of the most moving books I've read about the struggle for survival and the social and cultural practices of a ghetto in Calcutta, India.

Terry Edam

Faith Sullivan, *The Cape Ann* and *Gardenias* (sequel)

Immerse yourself into the years of the Depression and World War II as you follow a family's struggle to stay together. "*Like To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Cape Ann* is the story of a child's loss of innocence, of a growing awareness of just how complex life can be" the *Washington Post* Book World.

Iaian Pears, *Art History Mysteries*

A highly knowledgeable detective series by an art historian about the art world. Titles include: *The Titian Committee*, *Bernini Bust*, *Giotto's Hand*.

Suzanne M. Wolfe, *Unveiling*

A conservateuse at a Manhattan art gallery is given a dream assignment of restoring a medieval painting in Rome.

Janet Gleeson, *The Arcanum*

The Extraordinary True story. The #1 British bestselling author tells the story of the secret formula to 18th century Europe's most precious commodity – fine porcelain.

Susan Vreeland, *Passion of Artemisia*

This book chronicles the extraordinary life of Artemisia Gentileschi, the first woman elected to the *Accademia dell' Arte* in Florence.

Lisa See, *Snowflower and the Secret Fan*

It's a novel set in rural China during the 19th century. Two very young girls from different backgrounds become life-long friends called *laotong*, or *old sames* through a formal arrangement negotiated by a matchmaker. Over their lives, Snowflower and Lily communicate in secret women's code-language called *nu shu* with messages sent back and forth on a fan and embroidered on handkerchiefs. The book is about friendship with a historical and cultural background that was new to me.

JeanMarie Burtness, Jr Docent

Thomas Cahill, *Why the Greeks Matter*

The author brings ancient Greek society and culture to life through an in-depth look at the literature, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, speeches, and plays. Literature and selected pieces of art are connected which create an impression of what ancient Greek life was like. The chapter about being a warrior is particularly vivid in this non-fiction book. There are other sections about "How to Think" and "How to See" that our docents may find thought-provoking.

JeanMarie Burtness

Karin Muller, *A Year in Search of Wa. Japanland*
Karin is a freelance documentary filmmaker. She hosted a four-hour documentary series on Japan on public television in fall 2005. She had been with the peace corps, worked in America, “lived life on her terms,” but thought to herself “something has to change.” From years of judo practice she knew that the Japanese had a word for the seemingly effortless state of harmony she longed for: *Wa*. Yes, *wa* is what she wanted. So, she went to live in Japan to experience how complicated it is being Japanese. While there she became acquainted with the cultural biases and the interesting cast of characters, which she very eloquently describes and discusses in her book. A wonderful description of a colorful country. Enjoyable reading.

Bernie Folz, CIF Guide

Laila Lalami, *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*
A gripping book about what propels people to risk their lives for a better future”.

Fran Megarry

Fatema Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems*

“The author is widely recognized as the greatest living Koranic scholar and Islamic sociologist and has shed unprecedented light on the lives of women in the Middle East”. (Publisher’s note)

Fran Megarry

Honorary Docents

May Book Club selection:

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Wednesday, May 17

Hostess: Barb Diamond.

Tour:

May 24, at the MN Landscape Arboretum. Visit the Lake County Pastel Society art show, view the spring gardens and enjoy lunch in the cafeteria.

June Book Club selection:

Simon Winchester, *The Professor and the Madman*

Wednesday, June 28

Tea Party at the gracious home of Diane Levy.

The group would like to thank Barb Diamond for her many years of hard work planning activities for the Honorary Docents. Arlene Baker and Georgia George take over as chairs of the Honorary Docent group. Jeane Eastman and I continue sending out e-mail notices of monthly meetings.

Nancy Pennington

Docent Executive Board

A big **thank you** to all the members of this year’s board...

Patrick George, *chair*

Pam Friedland, *vice chair*

Patty McCullough, *secretary*

Linnea Asp, *treasurer*

Cynthia O’Halloran and Ann Davis, *social chairs*

Eleanor Nickles, *communication*

Nancy Pennington, *honorary docents*

Fran Megarry, *Muse editor*

...and a big **welcome** to next year’s board

Pam Friedland, *chair*

Patricia McCullough, *vice chair*

Carol Stoddart, *secretary*

Vicky Veach, *treasurer*

Terry Edam, *communication*

Lyn Osgood, *hospitality*

TBA, *honorary docents*

Merritt Nequette, *Muse editor*

From the Editor(s)...

Thanks to all the people who worked on the *Muse* with me this year, particularly all those people who wrote the wonderful articles.

Fran Megarry

If you would like to write an article during the coming year, or if you have an idea for someone else to write about, put a note in my box (not sure what category I will be in, but somewhere in the office) or send me an e-mail:

mcnequette@stthomas.edu

I look forward to working with all of you in my expanded capacity on the *Muse*.

Merritt Nequette