

The Director's Corner

Merritt Nequette

*The editor of the Docent Muse recently had an extended conversation with MIA director **Bill Griswold**, to talk about topics of interest to the docents and guides.*

This is an incredible moment for the institution. The Twin Cities area is rich in diversity of religions and cultures, and the MIA has something to offer almost all of them. It is an encyclopedic museum, with great strengths in some areas, and a need of strengthening in others.

The new wing was completed one year ago, and the very successful capital campaign was completed within this past year. Seventy-eight new endowments were created, doubling the amount of money available for accessions. Building the collection for future generations is a high priority, and this will happen through purchase, but probably more importantly from private collectors' gifts and bequests.

For example, there are opportunities to purchase American painting and sculpture prior to the 1950s, but post-war and contemporary art is extraordinarily expensive, and there will be more reliance on gifts and bequests in this area.

With the need to engage new audiences (which is true for all the arts), one new area to consider is color photography. There is interest in acquiring Indian and Southeast Asian art, but this is sometimes proves to be difficult depending upon the restrictions of the home country. It would also be nice to obtain some great Old Masters.

As far as exhibition programs go, the MIA will begin to organize and travel its own shows. These could be focused exhibits arranged around an artwork in the permanent collection. The recent exhibition of our Chinese bells, complete with soundtrack and loaned objects comes to mind. Other possibilities could revolve around Native American beadwork or the Roslin *Comtesse d'Egmont Pignatelli*.

On the curatorial front, Mikka Gee Conway came on board April 16 as the new assistant director for collections and programs. She will be in charge of publications, programs, exhibitions departments, and the library. She will also be involved in strategic planning. We are very happy to welcome her to the staff.

The Department of Japanese and Korean art with Matthew Welch as curator was announced earlier in the year. We hope to be able to announce the new curator of African, Oceanic, and

Native American (AONA) art soon. There is a search currently underway for a curator of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture.

Some other ideas in the hopper: developing interpretive galleries; staying abreast of new technologies (interactive video programs are already in existence); in-gallery interpretation including object labels, text panels, and gallery titles.

Like all arts organizations, the MIA needs to engage younger audiences. We need to develop a cadre of young members. Over 100 new members joined in the week following the "Arty Party." So that's a great start.

We will try to do more collaboration with other museums and arts organizations. On that note, it can be reported that the Franz Marc *Blue Horses* on loan from the Walker will probably stay longer than originally anticipated – a marvelous temporary addition in the 20th gallery.

And of course, the work of the docents and guides is essential and greatly appreciated as we try to do all of these initiatives. They do a tremendous work in making our visitors welcome and encouraging them to return on their own or for additional tours.

Have a great summer!

A Trip to the National Docent Symposium

Patty McCullough

This biennial event was held in Phoenix, Arizona, from April 23 through April 25. Through the generosity of the Friends of the Institute, AA guide Karen Kletter, CIF guide Margie Crone, CIF Director Amanda Thompson Rundahl, and I spent three days at the Camelback Inn enjoying our "casitas," docent education, beautiful scenery and the exceptional hospitality of our host institution, the Phoenix Art Museum.

We began on Monday morning with the keynote speaker, Dana Gioia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, who spoke passionately about the systematic dismantling of the arts in public education, and what an important role docents play in arts education. We all took part in "Breakout Sessions," where docents from various museums presented ideas for touring children, high school students, at-risk youth, seniors, and the disabled, as well as dealing with controversial exhibits and technology. Each of us attended different sessions so we would have a good overview of what was being offered.

In addition to these docent-led sessions, we visited the Desert Botanical Garden on Monday evening where fifteen stationed docents told us about the myriad cacti such as the Blue Agave and the Crested Saguaro. We were even treated to rain that evening when clouds and winds appeared, but it was just a light spray which lasted a minute or two!

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On Tuesday we all visited a museum of our choice; mine was the Heard Museum where we were introduced to the museum director, the director of education, as well as docents who talked about the museum. We were given a tour of their newest exhibit called *Home*.

We were told they invited many American Indians (they specifically use this term) to the museum who felt they wanted to tell their story. The exhibit features a Navajo hogan, a huge mural, a large collection of Kachina dolls and many other treasures of their culture. That afternoon we all joined Amanda at the Phoenix Museum of Art where we toured the Rembrandt exhibit and some of the permanent collection. They were also having a vintage car exhibit, and the example in the lobby was slightly reminiscent of our Tatra, although not as sleek!

Dinner and a tour of the permanent collection at the Heard completed Tuesday, and we were happy to rest very tired feet. Wednesday we packed to go home, but we all attended our two breakout sessions and listened to another speaker, the dean of the College of Design at Arizona State University. Wellington Reiter spoke about our global society and how airports are the first things people see when they come here. He had drawn a dozen sketches envisioning the airport as more or less the hub of the community.

Four hundred fifty docents attended this symposium. They came from all over the United States and Canada. They represented art and natural history museums, historic houses, zoos and a lighthouse museum just to name a few. The Phoenix Art Museum docents in their turquoise bandanas planned an exceptional symposium. We were given a large bag when we arrived that had to weigh at least ten pounds. It was equipped with their very impressive delegate handbook, a catalogue of the Phoenix Art Museum's collection, and various useful articles such as cold medicine, a sun visor and many snacks.

The next symposium is in Toronto in 2009, and Saint Louis steps up to the plate in 2011. Minneapolis, with all its newly designed and expanded cultural institutions, would be a perfect destination for this event, but it would require a huge amount of time, energy and fund-raising. (Their list of contributors spanned eight pages.) I leave this thought with the new docent graduating class who seem more than eager to accept any new challenge!

For those of you fortunate enough to attend the Toronto conference in 2009, I have no doubt it will be wonderful. As we ate our final lunch on the Camelback patio, the Toronto docents were busily distributing questionnaires which hopefully will enable them to come up with an equally stellar event.

When I have time to get to it...

Tom Byfield

I have been retired for eighteen years but have been intellectually unemployed all my life – unprovided with original thinking, untaught in phonics, and unskilled in the arts of composition. Nevertheless the Editor believes that humor is merely tragedy standing on its head and that I can whip out a column that is mildly funny on demand. What he does not know is that humor has a gestation period, and I am a card-carrying procrastinator.

Because I ignore deadlines and put off that which should be addressed immediately, I often find myself lost in a reverie, cavorting with the beautiful Houris or lying in an imaginary canoe, drifting languorously down a lazy stream, one arm training in the cool water oblivious to the infestation of the dreaded Deadline piranhas lurking under the surface. If you don't get back to work immediately they will chew up your behind as quick as you can say, "Rump's your uncle." You remember the little fat guy on TV promoting mediocrity in the public school system? My fleshy Falstaff advocates procrastination. "tomorrow would be the ideal time to get to writing the old column, Tom, or maybe the day after would be better." No one who really knows me will deny that I have a life-long paid-up subscription to that philosophy. I admit to being an example of a genetic flaw which has produced a physical defect called "Lazy Foot Syndrome," causing me to drag my feet. among docents this is a rarity. Now once again a deadline is sneaking in the back door like some black sheep relative, grinning nervously, bowing and tugging at his forelock., apologizing for the intrusion. This column is due NOW. When the summer issue of the *Docent Muse* comes out and you aren't reading this, you will know I missed that deadline.

Most of you are paragons of promptness. When you discover a tour in your box, you get to it like a vampire to a hemophiliac picnic. You select your theme and immediately start planning the pieces you will use, pulling their respective cue cards from their properly labeled boxes. You draft your opening remarks appropriate for the age group. You draw your rout on the museum's give-away maps and walk it out the day before to make sure everything is where it should be. You write out your insightful transitions and memorize the many thought-provoking asides that will make your presentation sparkle with gems of priceless knowledge and *bonhomie*, endearing you to all who were fortunate to be in your scintillating company. Had you been asked to write this column, you would have had it composed, neatly typed, double spaced and tucked into a presentation folder a month ago. You make me sick!

This piece, exciting and amusing as it has been for all of us, I am sure, has drawn us a long way from the theme of this treatise, which was ... what exactly? I've forgotten. No matter, it stands as proof that when ideas fail, words come in very handy and we have gotten through this entire ordeal without having said much of anything at all. Now, if you will excuse me, I'm going to put my quill back in the goose, go outside and clap to save Tinkerbell.

Keeping in Touch



Letter from the Docent Chair

As we prepare for this crop of docents to graduate this month, it is also time to touch upon some opportunities all of us docents share.

Continuing to attend Monday morning lectures is indeed a valuable means to refresh, restore, and invigorate our minds: not to speak of catching up with those fellow docents we do not normally see on our specific tour days. Introduce yourself to the new junior docent class members graduating this month, welcoming them to our group. This year, I started sitting in different seats to chat with different friends. I must say it was difficult adjusting to being different distances from the speaker and screens. I am such a creature of habit!!! It reminds me of how I sat in the same chair for two years during my docent training.

The Sunshine Fund is utilized to purchase flowers when family deaths or medical issues affect our docent family. Donations of any amount to the fund are always so gladly accepted and appreciated.

Do not become a stranger to the museum this summer. Many of us check out for the summer or simply do not receive as many tours. Take advantage of this respite for a journey to some of your favorite galleries just for your own personal satisfaction and enjoyment. The museum can be such a calm and peaceful summer haven. But do remember to bring a sweater. It can get a bit chilly in some spots.

If you have not been down to the first floor lobby of the new (can we still call the Target Wing new anymore after almost a full year?) wing, head over that way and check out Yoshitomo Nara's *Your Dog*. Would it be so bad to refer to the dog as Mia, the dog (get it...MIA!?!?)?

I have enjoyed my tenure as docent chair. Patty McCullough has been a supportive chair elect, also helping with many tasks when other committee members require assistance. Carol Stoddart has so accurately recorded minutes of our meetings and assures us the minutes are always available in the docent lounge for anyone to read. Vicky Veach balances our account monthly allowing us all to understand the finances of our committee. Terry Edam so efficiently remembers when to send flowers or cards to docents when needed as well as always offering to relay any other type of message. Merritt Nequette has done such a super job with the newsletter. Just wait until he graduates from the docent class – watch out literary world! Lyn Osgood has planned three super lunches, enabling us to catch up with our docent friends. Sandra Wethers and Coleen Watson have kept us informed of the junior docent activities, which are many. Arlene Baker has filled us in of all the programs the honorary docents enjoy. Of course, I have to mention Sheila and Debbi, relaying information on upcoming docent programs and pertinent issues, and of course always sincerely thanking us for our many hours spent at the museum in whatever capacity. Many thanks to a wonderful committee I have thoroughly appreciated.

One last thought, albeit a trite one, but nonetheless still important, when life gives you lemon tours make lemonade or in this case lemonade cookies! Pour yourself a glass of iced tea, have a cookie, and enjoy the summer!!!

Lemonade Cookies

Makes 4 dozen

One 6-ounce can frozen lemonade concentrate
Two large eggs
1/2 pound (two sticks) unsalted butter, softened
2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1-cup sugar, plus extra to sprinkle over cookies
1-teaspoon baking soda
1/8-teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Fill a large bowl of water and plop in the unopened can of lemonade to thaw while you mix the cookie dough. In large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar with mixer. Add the lemon zest if desired. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Continue beating until the mixture is light and creamy, 4 to 5 minutes, and then set aside. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, and the salt. Measure out the 1/2 cup of the thawed lemonade and set the rest aside. Add about one third of the flour mixture to the creamed butter and sugar. Stir, and then add about 1/3 of the 1/2 cup lemonade. Continue adding the flour and lemonade alternatively, stirring after each addition, until the mixture shows no streaks of flour. Beat on low speed with the mixer just until all the ingredients are combined. Drop rounded teaspoonfuls of the dough 2 inches apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake the cookies, checking them after 8 minutes. When the edges are just starting to brown, remove the cookies from the oven. The centers will look soft. Using a pastry brush, immediately brush the top of each cookie very lightly with a little of the remaining lemonade concentrate, then lightly sprinkle with sugar. Cool completely on a rack.

Recipe courtesy of Good Morning America Recipe Web site
Pam Friedland

Honorary Docents

Georgia George and Arlene Baker, co-chairs of the Honorary Docents, will be working on a new calendar for the coming year. We will try to involve more of the membership and will be appointing a calling committee so docents will be apprised of the great programs we will schedule.

The Honorary Docents enjoyed tours of the Children's Theatre in March and the Sleeper House, a private museum of gilded age decorative arts in April.

Arlene Baker

From the Editor...

Hail and Farewell

Pam listed all the members of this year's docent executive committee in her letter, and here are the winners in the election for the board 2007-2008:

Patty McCullough, chair

Martha Bordwell, chair elect

Linda Phillips, secretary

Marge Buss, treasurer

Allison Thiel, newsletter

Marianne Yoshida and Joanne Platt, social chairs

Patti Bartlett, communication

And a special welcome to Allison as the new *Docent Muse* editor. We have an e-mail newsletter in the junior docent class (called the *Musette*), and if that is any indication of what she can do, I expect there will be about 800 submissions for the Fall Newsletter of the *Muse*.