

The Docent Muse

November 2007



Dear Docents,
I am thrilled to be your Muse for the next three months. I hope I can be of help.

The darkest months of the year can be dark. If you know what I mean.

Music is my specialty. Let me

suggest that you fill your life, your days, your nights with music. Write it, play it, listen to it, dance to it. Build a tour around it!

I think it will brighten your life. I hope you enjoy this issue of *The Docent Muse*.

Euterpe

Georgia on Their Minds

*Georgia, Georgia, the whole day through
Just an old sweet song
Keeps Georgia on my mind*

Hoagy Carmichael wrote these words and Ray Charles made them famous. Our fellow docent, Susan Burnet has been finding out what people have on their minds as they tour Georgia O'Keeffe: *Circling Around Abstraction*.

The picture I get the most varied responses for is *Lake George, Coat and Red, 1919*. I say it is a portrait and the quizzical and disbelieving expressions (which I see) are wonderful. Then we get into what do you think it is? – “whale,” “I see a smile.” It’s a clown hat.” The white circle is an eye, a button.... Some people don’t like the black, the rainbow colors.

The swirl in *Blue II, 1916* is always an embryo or a fetus. (When I mention the top of a violin or a fiddlehead fern they nod their heads in recognition.)

No 20 – From Music – Special, 1915 People more easily see musical imagery: notes, mandolins,

tops of violins (black areas) and the wiggly lines are seen as the movement of the music.

Pelvis with Shadows and the Moon, 1963 a sand colored egg.

Inside Clam Shell, 1930 a mountain. They like this one as well as *Abstraction, White rose, 1927*.

Black Abstraction, 1927 – black circle is a phonograph record

Untitled Abstraction (Blue Circle and Line), 1976/77 – the earth and the sun.

Green, Yellow and Orange, 1960 – a lima bean.

Abstraction, 1917 a chair, a seashell, Van Gogh’s *Starry Night*.

At the Rodeo, 1929. This one gets a lot of responses which are not related to a rodeo. – an eye, fire, Native American connections. They also like the outer circular swirling lines and comment on them..

People are enjoying the show, and curious to learn about Georgia’s life and work. They comment positively about seeing some of her works they haven’t seen before.

So What Was Georgia Listening to?

Merritt Nequette

In the lecture on Georgia O’Keeffe, Sue Canterbury mentioned that Georgia was obviously listening to music and expressing her feelings through her painting. What music was available to her? First of all, she was not listening to music on an iPod, nor an LP, nor was she listening to a radio. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, one heard music live.

As she traveled from Wisconsin to Virginia to Chicago to Texas to New York, she had a wide variety of music to choose from. In Chicago, particularly, she was likely to hear ragtime, blues, and maybe some early swing. In New York, she would have a variety of opportunities. Since she associated with some of her contemporary visual artists, she may have been interested in their musical counterparts. The enormous symphonies of Mahler would have

been available with the composer as conductor of the New York Philharmonic. The orchestras would have also played works by Beethoven, Liszt, and others that we might not hear much of anymore.

The “new” music of Schönberg, Webern, and Berg did not receive much attention in this country, and the attention they did receive was uniformly negative. But there may have been some small ensembles that tried out these new techniques and she might have been intrigued to listen to music that dealt more with sounds other than traditional melody and harmony.

If she attended the opera, she could have heard very new music by Giacomo Puccini who in his own right was fascinated with the United States. *Madama Butterfly* is based on a play produced by David Belasco in New York. And of course, she would have resonated with his strangest Italian opera *La fanciulla del West*. Although this girl of the golden west may not have been from Texas, it might have been fascinating to her as a subject taken from the open plains that Georgia loved so much.



On the lighter side of theatrical music, the Ziegfeld Follies and music by George M. Cohan would have provided a popular entertainment and tunes that could be whistled and hummed throughout the day.

With the exception of Beethoven, all the music and composers mentioned here would have had detractors – it was too long, it was trite, it was not really music, it was downright terrible. Essentially, the same comments would be made about the visual artists. And so how did this affect Georgia’s painting? I invite you to listen to some of the music and see if you find any connections. And if so, let’s hear your comments for the next *Docent Muse*.

The Search to See, Part I

Michele Yates

I recently had the good fortune to be assigned the Fred Scheel photography exhibit, *The Search to See - Part I*. Fred Scheel’s generous gift to us of 600 master photographs, including his own, is a great opportuni-

ty to explore the connections inspired by the two acts of creating and collecting.

During the training, we were exposed to the history of photography, the context or function of photography, and Fred Scheel’s lifelong passion for collecting. There were many ways to approach this tour, but I finally focused on the human connections. It seemed to me, as I spent time with these images, that there was a very strong humanistic tone to the photographs that Scheel had chosen for his collection, as well as for his own subject matter.

Visitors have responded to the quiet power of many of these photographs. There are glimpses into the personal lives of some of the photographers, such as the loving portraits by Paul Strand and Andre Kertesz of their wives, the intimate portrait of Edward Weston’s lover, Tina Modotti, or the heartbreaking *Melancholy Tulip* created by Kertesz after his wife’s death.

There are universal images, such as Salgado’s *Coal Worker, India*, and Bischof’s *On the Way to Cuzco, Peru*. Viewers have been particularly moved by an ironic 1972 image of New York taken by Kertesz from his apartment which includes a view of the World Trade Center behind his sculpture of a rooster, a symbol of renewal, and which was also taken in 1978 by Scheel as a tribute to his friend.



Early on, I was inexplicably drawn to Strand’s *Tailor’s Apprentice*, a portrait of a quiet, dignified, young Italian woman staring straight out at the viewer. She seems very contained but vulnerable. I eventually realized she reminded me of my mother as a young woman. Fred Scheel wrote, in his book, *Search to See II*, of searching for the “unknowable but recognizable,” and I’ve observed that kind of looking in our visitors as well.

On a practical note, there have been some interesting challenges in touring this exhibition.

It’s difficult to move the tour group from one image to your next planned image. I think it must be because the photographs are relatively small in scale and hung so close to each other that they just pull the viewer in. It’s hard for visitors to skip some photographs, so I’ve had to learn to let go of my planned “route” and just join them where their eyes want to

look. Also, really compelling transitions create curiosity and help to move people!

I was unnerved on several occasions by visitors trying to touch the photographs, in spite of the introductory rules. I think there's a familiarity with this medium, perhaps, that visitors don't normally have. Not everyone paints, sculpts, *etc.*, but nearly everyone has taken a photograph, so possibly it seems comfortable to get very close! I've had to remind them of the rules, and have noticed the guards have had their hands full doing the same!

Here's a fun way to end the tour. I invite visitors to go back and look on their own at the first three Scheel photographs hung just outside the gallery, and see if they notice a connection to other photographers' images we've looked at. Some who go ahead and see influences are delighted in their ability to recognize those connections. This little exercise hopefully leaves the visitor with the confidence to know they have the tools to come back and appreciate photographs on their own.

The *Search to See Part I* has been a joy to tour. Once again, the docent program enriches and broadens my world. I didn't know a lot about photography before getting this assignment, but I'm now looking forward to learning a lot more and including more photographs in future tours. Don't miss Part II!

Take a Tour!

The Search to See Part II: Photographs from the Collection of Frederick B. Scheel

Join with your docent and guide colleagues to take a tour of this extraordinary exhibition, starting December 4. It highlights the work of a virtual "Who's Who" of photography, from the late 19th century to the 1960s. See photographers involved with the Stieglitz circle, including Georgia and Alfred's friend Paul Strand.

Tours will be given Tuesdays through Fridays at 2 p.m., December 4 through 28 only. Don't miss this opportunity!

Iki Aesthetic

Jacque Foust

The catalog for the Zeshin show defines *iki* as "an aesthetic and moral concept held in high regard by Zeshin and his audience." The catalog further defines *iki* "...as the quality of being light and unconstrained, gallant, but not obstinate, playful but never tire-

some." Curator Matthew Welch described *iki* as subdued elegance in both objects and in how people lived their lives.

In the mid 1800s there was an economic slowdown which left only merchants with much money. As merchants were low in the order of social standings they apparently had to be discrete in using and displaying expensive objects. Thus objects such as those created by Zeshin were appealing in their simple yet sophisticated design but costly execution.

Top Ten List of the Week

Bob Marshall

Here is my personal Top Ten (actually twelve) List, from a recent circuit of the Third Floor, of paintings I had never noticed before, or hadn't seen in awhile, along with their accession year but not their gallery location (Treasure Hunt, anyone?).

Master of Tavernelle, *Two Muses* (1967). Why is the happy mask underfoot, as in *Shiva Nataraja* or a *lokapala*?

Bartolomeo Schedoni, *The Penitent Magdalen* (1962). Do the saccharine figures remind you of Bouguereau... or John Currin?

Gioacchino Assereto, *St. Augustine and St. Monica* (1960). The only figures in a whole gallery of portraits who look like real people.

Master of the Procession, *Gathering of Gamblers with Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (1937). Experts have little idea who painted this, or what he was painting.

Camille Corot, *View of St. Peter's, Rome* (1996). This is as good as *Silenus* is bad, and it was painted twelve years earlier.

Adolphe Felix Cals, *Still Life with a Cucumber and a Pitcher* (1992). Reviving the Dutch 17th century; look at the glass dissolve.

George Stanfield Walters, *Wallow Crag, Cumberland* (1971). Blink – and you missed it! Meet *Mlle Dubois*.

Johan Barthold Jongkind, *Landscape from Lake Leman to Nyon* (1964). Why were we deprived of this beauty for so long?



Musing

Sheila McGuire

You all bring music to my ears. I have been spending a lot of time in the galleries preparing for my lectures and simply trying to keep up with the constantly changing rotations. Needless to say, perhaps, but definitely worth saying, I can't tell you how fun it is to see all of you touring groups through the museum. I am always impressed by your abilities to share our wonderful collection with visitors of all ages and interest levels. We need to have a notebook in the study where each of you could write down the best artistic connection you made each time you tour. Imagine what each of us would learn!

I was so sorry to miss the Docent Annual Meeting because I was "sick as a dog!" If you were at the meeting you know Debbi explained my absence with these very words when an image of the giant Nara dog popped onto the screen. This was my fun slide announcing that we were so glad you were there. I enjoyed reading the "Break the Ice" interviews you did with one another and look forward to moving forward on our MGP volunteer Web site in the near future. Thank you for all of your great ideas.

As the leaves fall off the trees and the words "flurries" enter the weatherperson's vocabulary, I get to thinking about the inevitable change of seasons. With this I also think about how fortunate we are that we have volunteers so dedicated that you are never hindered by the changing seasons, weather, and exhibitions. In December alone we will have docents touring many areas of the permanent collection, the O'Keeffe, Zeshin, and Scheel exhibitions, and Holiday Traditions in the Period Rooms and at the Purcell Cutts House. Wow! Thank you!

Thank you for another terrific year and best wishes to each and every one of you for a fantastic 2008!

Holiday

(as sung by Madonna way back in 1983)

If we took a holiday

Took some time to celebrate

Just one day out of life

It would be, it would be so nice.

While we, the Docent Executive Committee, sincerely regret the end of a tradition, the December Holiday Luncheon, we hope you will join us for a celebration of each other and all our holiday traditions at our December 10 Continuing Education lecture.

We will be joined by Collection in Focus and Art Adventure Guides in the Fountain Court during the lecture break. We hope to see you there and hope we can express the joy in the season, the joy of knowing each other, and the joy in art that has brought us all together.

Marianne Yoshida

Joanne Platt

Honorary Docent News

On October 23rd, Nancy Gethin hosted the annual Honorary Docent meeting. We were privileged to hear Corine Wegener, associate curator of Architecture, Design, Decorative Arts at the MIA and retired major in the US Army Reserve, speak about her art restoration work and art recovery efforts at the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad. It was an incredible learning experience for all of us.

Georgia George and I will be sending out our program for the coming year. Stay tuned for more challenging experiences.

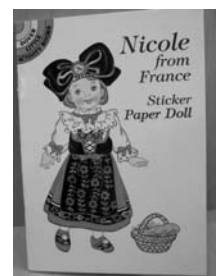
Arlene Baker

Odds and Ends

Could you use a little help around the house? Who couldn't? This Robot Lilliput is available in the Gift Shop. Take it home with you today.



There are lots of cute things for sale in the Gift Shop. Docents get 20% off books.



Introducing E-Muse

Later this month you will receive by e-mail the first installment of *E-Muse*, the electronic version of *The Docent Muse*. Bob Marshall will bring back the popular feature, “Curator’s Corner,” with an interview with Matthew Welch on Japanese *surimono*. In the future, *E-Muse* will allow us to present lengthy or scholarly pieces without a concern for running out of paper. We can also offer subjects on a timely basis that may not coincide with the normal publishing schedule. If you do not have e-mail but would like to receive paper copy of Bob’s piece or a future article you hear about, please send Allison Thiel an *e-mail* at the following address:

allisonthiel5@gmail.com

New Year’s Resolution Number One

Find a bank, put pennies in.



Music is the Joy of Life



Max Weyl, *Temple Woods* (1991). Is that a person in the middle – or a tree stump?

Ralph Albert Blakelock, *The Vista* (1947). So intense it makes the Inness look tame; this artist was committed.

Bruce Crane, *Blue Landscape* (L.1984). Crane was roasted by his peers for “purplish snow scenes.” This one is nice.

Birger Sandzen, *Evening* (2001). It’s not just the Morisot or Prendergast you have to look at from a distance.

Holiday Traditions

By Patty McCullough



Before the ghosts and goblins come out for Hallowe’en, and brightly colored autumn leaves still fall in great heaps on the sidewalks and lake paths, docents gather for that venerable institution, the Holiday Traditions lottery.

Since 1951, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts has decorated the American and European Period Rooms to show the winter holidays as they were once celebrated. The decoration of these rooms has been the responsibility of the Decorative Arts staff with financial help from the Friends of the Institute for decorations and costumes. In 2001 in celebration of the 50th anniversary, a number of historic photographs of the decorated rooms were displayed, and it was fascinating to see some of the changes to the rooms and docents in now retired costumes.

The lottery this year found only eight of us at a round table in the new Reception Hall. Eight docents is a small number, considering the amount of tours scheduled between the day after Thanksgiving and January 6 of the new year. Paula Warn presides over this meeting, and she is totally unflappable. Usually the number of docents is more than double this amount, but we gamely began the lottery. Paula firmly stated we would fill what we could today, and she would take it from there

I have been doing these tours off and on since 2000. Many of the docents with whom I tour have been doing it for years. You get to know these docents well, as costumed docents cannot leave the third floor and are relegated to the costume room between tours. These are female docents only; male docents must change in the restrooms, although they are probably able to walk the stairs being free from skirts that drag on the floor!

The costumes are made very much like they might have been during the times in which they were worn; so there are no zippers, just snaps, hooks and eyes and laces. Some costumes can be challenging. The Tudor dress is a favorite, but getting into it is labor intensive. While buried in yards of heavy velvet and quilted cotton, someone needs to retrieve your arms and then lace you up the back. To finish it off, there’s a hat. I would avoid a hat at any cost, but it looks charming. One retired, but quite young docent, came back my first year to give us a sample tour. She confided she had learned to get in and out of the Tudor dress by herself. That, to me, sounded like Houdini, and I was very impressed.

We usually have a special exhibit in the Bell Court designed by the Decorative Arts Department. In the past we have had punch bowls, presidential Christmas cards, shopping bags, and last year the delightful “Design for Dining.” This year the department is somewhat depleted with the loss of Christopher Monkhouse and Jennifer Carlquist. I understand, however, there will be a reinstatement of permanent objects, including the Paul Revere Tea Service, which should be good news to everyone doing an American art tour.

After about an hour, we had gone around the table fourteen times, and Paula decided it was time to stop. She assured us she would fill in the rest of the tours with substitutes, and a few days later she was well on her way to doing just that.

So, the show will go on as usual. Beginning November 23, you will find costumed docents in the Bell Court with all the decorations in place. They will be ready to tell you everything you ever wanted to know about feasting in 17th century Tudor England, Thanksgiving in Connecticut, or a Victorian Christmas in Boston. They may add some pertinent facts about a couple of Christmas trees and throw in a crèche or two for good measure. Happy Holiday Traditions 2007!