

# The Docent Muse



March 2009

## A Tour to Remember

Martha Bordwell

I felt more than my usual level of anticipation as I made my way to the museum's entrance on a rainy July afternoon several years ago. The group I was to lead comprised a group of teenage boys from an adolescent shelter sponsored by the Salvation Army, boys who (I was told) were not able to live with their own families because of child protection issues. When I reached the group, I was met by a young female chaperone and two young men, one African-American and one Caucasian. Although I was expecting twelve boys, these were the only two who had decided to come. And a cynic could have questioned their level of enthusiasm as well: one was reading a book and didn't even look up when I introduced myself, and the other muttered "I doubt it" when I suggested cheerily that they were really going to enjoy their time at the museum. It was probably the least promising start to a tour in my experience.

But such is my faith in our collection and museum that I don't recall being too discouraged as we headed up the stairs. I had chosen a theme, *Symbols of Power and Heroism*, that I was sure would appeal



to teenage boys. And my confidence was rewarded as the boys started to become engaged with the very first piece, *Winged Genius*. They seemed genuinely surprised by what our museum had to offer. Their interest never flagged. What I didn't expect, though, was how much these two young men would engage me.

As we moved from piece to piece, both boys responded to the inquiry method amazingly well.

They relished being asked to look deeply at a work of art, being asked their opinion of the artist's intentions, and being listened to. They noticed details in the works that I had never seen.

And they surprised me with what they knew, whether it be aspects of first century Roman history



(Poussin's *Death of Germanicus*), symbols of the military (*Akicita Wasté* from the Native American gallery), or details from the great depression (*Migrant Mother*). Slowly it occurred to me that the boy with



the book might not have acknowledged my introduction because he loved to read, and to learn, rather than that he was giving me a hard time. The fact that there was a little competition going on between the boys only enhanced their level of participation.

When we reached our final piece, *Lucretia*, both boys became quiet, dropping their competitive edge, while I told her story. As I looked from Lucretia's face to the sad faces of these young men, it seemed like they might be identifying with her. The gender was different, but the ages were similar. And the loneliness and despair evident in Rembrandt's painting might well resonate with young men who were separated from their families and who might also have



experienced betrayal from people in whom they put their trust.

As I summed up the tour and said my goodbyes, I heard the words which always gladdens our docent hearts, "Can we stay longer?" The startled chaperone said that they could. One of the boys wanted to look at Christian paintings so I directed them down to the west wing of the third floor. And I reluctantly pulled myself away.

I have now lead almost 300 tours at the museum. I have been inspired by practically all of them, some to the degree that I feel like skipping down the hall when I am finished. But none have affected me quite like this tour. I felt such a mixture of emotions when I walked away. I was pleased that they had become so involved, of course, but I also felt very thoughtful and a bit sad. I was aware that some of my assumptions about these boys had been challenged. I have no illusions that this afternoon at the museum made a major difference in the undoubtedly difficult lives of these young men. But I wish they could know what a difference spending that hour, talking about art and culture and history together, made to me. I was enriched in ways I hadn't expected to be that July day.

## **Art in Bloom 2009**

### *Pam Friedland*

As the winter is finally giving us its last bursts of snow and cold, we can now look forward to Art in Bloom, a fragrant and fresh beginning to spring. This year we celebrate this new beginning in choosing a photograph by internationally renowned photographer Cy DeCosse. Never has an image for *Art in*



*Bloom* recognized the achievements of a living artist nor has it ever acknowledged the work of such a charming and brilliant gentleman as Mr. DeCosse. His depiction of the white lotus is truly splendid. What a wonderful addition to our American Classic emphasis.

### *Preview Party April 29th*

Mr. DeCosse will be present at the gala and will be attending the featured *Art in Bloom* presentations. Along with him, you can enjoy music from the past mid-century and reminisce of the supper club era gone by. Think Frank Sinatra, think Vic Damone, think "Rat Pack!" A silent auction will precede the dinner promoting a host of wonderful events, opportunities, and gifts. Smell the flowers at their freshest and be one of the first to view the *Art in Bloom* shop.

### *Thursday, April 30 10:00*

#### *Rick Darke and the "Art of Observation"*

Rick Darke is a professional photographer, author, and landscape designer. He will lead his audience on a visual tour of global gardens and urban landscapes while at the same time teaching the value of observation.

### *Thursday, April 30 1:30*

Joe Smith will demonstrate his southern, sassy, and superb floral creations. Known to many from the pages of *Architectural Digest* and the *Martha Stewart Show*, Mr. Smith promises a lively afternoon of entertainment.

### *Friday, May 1 10:00*

Hitomi Gilliam from Vancouver will create colorful and bold contemporary floral designs. Ms. Gilliam is internationally known, recently receiving top prize in Singapore for Best of Shows at the International Floral Display.

### *Thursday, April 30 evening*

Thursday evening will once again play host to *Flowers After Hours*, featuring a movie quiz event with Colin Covert of the *StarTribune* highlighting American Classic movies. Stick around for music by honky-tonk band Trailer Trash. Fill up on food, wine, and beer featuring local trends. Compete in American-inspired art games. A fresh way to focus on food, flowers, and of course art! The pedestal floral artists will be available during this evening to discuss their creations.

*Saturday May 2 10:30-1:30*

#### *Family Day*

Delight in children's activities featuring the locally written book *A Ferret in the Garret*, an ode to Jackson Pollock.

#### *Ongoing Events*

Enjoy over 150 pedestal floral interpretation as well as many professional floral displays throughout the museum. Learn about the connection between the art masterpieces and the flowers by joining a docent tour.

Browse the *Timeless Art Appreciator* notebook in the museum guide office to select your piece of art to sponsor. Gather a group of guides from your class, or just yourself and select a piece of floral-interpreted art with a special significance to you. Honor that someone important in your life, give a special Mother's Day gift, or simply express your admiration for a special piece of art you have always loved. Your contribution of \$100 will benefit the Friends Children's Fund.

Please stop in the Friends office,  
call 612-870-3279,  
or register online for activities at  
[www.artsmia.org/art-in-bloom](http://www.artsmia.org/art-in-bloom).

This year so many museum guides are involved with planning *Art in Bloom*. Such involvement can only mean an incredibly successful and memorable event. Volunteer opportunities always abound. If you're not touring *Art in Bloom* and wish to broaden your ambassador role, check in with Fran Megarry and Michele Yates for the perfect *Art in Bloom* assignment. Your help as guides is always appreciated.

We hope to see all of you soon to enjoy our beginning of spring.  
Cheers,

*Pam Friedland and Mary Merrick*

### **Notes from Sheila and Debbi**

---

As we transition into Thursday afternoon and evening Continuing Education, we are aware that this change presents both challenges and opportunities. Monday mornings have been a special time for many of you for years and we recognize that they are missed. As your friends and advocates, we regret having to make this decision, but fully support the museum's efforts to save money during difficult economic times. As Kaywin Feldman told us recently, the muse-

um anticipates saving about \$100,000 by being closed to all but staff on Mondays.

We have had good attendance for the Thursday sessions. This is an opportunity to get to know people you may not have seen at Continuing Education before. And perhaps a "social hour" can evolve on days when there are both afternoon and evening trainings. One never knows where change will lead us.

One thing we do know is that we are truly grateful to have such meaningful and stimulating jobs, working with all of you!

In case you don't have them in writing, we wanted to pass on the new MIA mission, vision, and values statements.

*Sheila McGuire  
Debbi Hegstrom*

### **MIA Mission**

---

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts enriches the community by collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world's diverse cultures.

### **MGP Mission**

---

The Department of Museum Guide Programs provides volunteer-facilitated learning experiences that inspire visitors to discover personal meanings in art and explore museums confidently on their own.

### **MIA Vision**

---

Inspiring wonder through the power of art.

### **MIA Values**

---

#### *Accessibility*

The MIA's commitment to equal access for all is expressed through free admission, a welcoming atmosphere, excellent visitor service, diversity of interpretation, and programming for a broad audience.

#### *Excellence*

We demonstrate excellence in our collections, exhibitions and installations, our educational programs and events, a beautiful and well-maintained museum facility, attractively designed publications and Web sites, a tradition of fiscal responsibility, and a well-trained, visitor-focused staff.

### *Respect*

Dedicated to inclusiveness, the MIA welcomes diverse opinions and honors multiple voices. We believe that treating our colleagues and visitors with respect is of the greatest importance.

### *Preservation*

We have a responsibility to preserve the collection – representing the world’s diverse artistic heritage – for future generations to enjoy and learn from. We are also dedicated to maintaining the MIA’s important buildings and grounds.

### *Creativity*

As we collect and preserve the best examples of human creativity, we likewise value and support the creativity and innovation of our talented staff.

### *Learning*

The museum and its collections are a resource for the life-long learning of our community. We are dedicated to fostering greater understanding of human creativity and cultural awareness through discussion, research, and the interaction of many voices and viewpoints.

### *Integrity*

We are committed to honest and ethical practices in all that we do, believing that accountability and transparency optimize our effectiveness as a publicly supported institution.

## **“The Best of Philadelphia”**

*May 7 - 10, 2009*

Friends of the Institute Art & Architecture Chair Judith Benton invites you to join other Friends members for a four-day, three-night excursion introducing you to the very best of the Philadelphia region’s celebrated art museums, galleries, and private art collections. A special tour of the *Cezanne and Beyond*

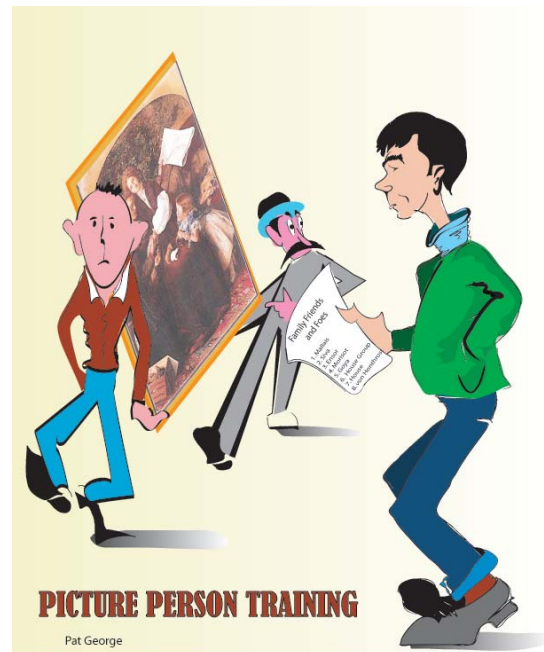
exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; a day in the beautiful Brandywine Valley; and a visit to the world-renowned Barnes Foundation, one of the finest private collections of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early-modern art in



the world, are highlights of this exclusive and fabulous Friends adventure.

The cost per person (based on double occupancy) is \$1,998, which includes round trip air from MSP, airport to hotel transfers, three nights’ accommodations at the luxurious Inn at the Union League, breakfasts, three private lunches, sightseeing and entrance fees, deluxe motor coach, driver and guide throughout.

To request a brochure, please contact Nicole in the Friends office. The deadline has been extended. Twenty-five people must sign up for the trip to take place. Registration is not guaranteed until a registration form is submitted to Vanguard Travel. For assistance at Vanguard, please call Joenie Haas at (763)-225-8782.



## **Next issue**

The last issue of *The Docent Muse* for this season will be distributed in mid-May. The deadline for submissions of articles is May 8. Articles and ideas may be submitted anytime to the editor by e-mail or in my mailbox.

*Merritt Nequette, editor*  
[mcnequette@stthomas.edu](mailto:mcnequette@stthomas.edu)