

The Docent Muse



September 2010

You too can be famous!

I am very pleased to be your new *Docent Muse* editor and look forward to a fun year working with Merritt Nequette to put this newsletter together. It goes without saying that I couldn't do this "job" without his knowledge, wit and expertise. Thank you Merritt!! It also goes without saying that Merritt and I need all of YOU to make the *Muse* worth reading. Indeed, writing an article for the *Muse* can be fun, and not too painful at all. Have you been to a fascinating museum, come up with a tremendous idea for a tour that swept your guests off their feet, or just have something to share with fellow docents? Please e-mail your ideas to me, submit a Word document as an attachment to an e-mail, or drop a note in my mailbox in the tour office. The next issue of the *Muse* is scheduled for December 15, but you don't have to wait until Thanksgiving to submit something. If I hear of something, I may bug you too.

Emily Shapiro

A Message from the Chair

Marge Buss

Greetings to all and welcome to a new year of inspiring wonder through the power of art.

As Chair of the Docent Executive Committee I'd like to dedicate this year to reaching out across the spectrum of museum guide volunteers, creating bridges that connect us together as a group through our public service and passion for art. Providing enthusiastic, committed endeavors to bring art alive for our audiences in the galleries is the bond that ties our programs. Let's cultivate that. We can be the conduit to do this within our department, now called the Division of Learning and Innovation. Translated, our department will provide knowledge acquisition (learning) through new methods (innovation). It's an apt collaboration within the museum guide program. There is strength in numbers and our numbers are strong.

Innovation embraces the future. In the letter I enclosed to you last month in the Docent Program mailing, I spoke about embracing the future and referenced a study done by the Center for the Future of Museums titled, *Museums & Society 2034*:

In 2034 museums are among the few institutions that bring together people of all economic classes. They are increasingly valued for their ability to redistribute wealth in the form of access to scientific, cultural and artistic resources, mitigating the culture gap that arises from income disparities. Museums promote global education for the nation's children and global perspectives for all Americans. In the process, museums literally enrich America, because income is correlated with education and the ability to profit from economic globalization.

Trends and Potential Futures. I again will highlight one of these predictions in the caption box to the left. I invite you to read it and think about it. If you would like to make a comment, or start a conversation with your colleagues, there is an area in the back room of the tour guide lounge where you will find a bulletin board that invites your thoughts.

Have a fabulous year. Thank you for everything you do to make this museum world class. May all your tours bring you sparks of innovative notions and learned encounters. I am honored to represent you, the incredibly talented and wonderfully giving docents of the MIA.

A New Year of Touring

Sheila McGuire & Debbi Hegstrom

Welcome to a touring year filled with new faces, new ideas, and new tour opportunities! If you haven't heard the buzz, we have some great new ventures already beginning, or on the horizon. See *Arts* magazine and the MIA website for more information.

- Celebrate Mexican Independence Day and Day of the Dead with tours given in Spanish, from now into November. Tours in

Spanish will then continue monthly on a variety of topics.

- Participate in Third Thursdays with shorter, focused gallery conversations and highlighted objects. September 16's topic is design, including "Chairevolution!" in Cargill gallery, and the opening of *Embarrassment of Riches: Picturing Global Wealth*. For October 21, which is also Educators' Evening, visitors are encouraged to wear costumes inspired by a favorite work of art, while docents in costume will be stationed at specific works.
- Keep your eyes open for public tours in September and October that include use of the museum's iPad to provide digital, interactive "props." You'll see and hear more about this program soon.
- Wear a colorful, new "Ask Me," "Let's Talk Art," or "Art Spoken Here" button when you do object spotlights or gallery talks. Hold up a tour sign with a great art image to attract attention and gather a crowd for a public tour. Buttons and signs are available in the tour office.
- Look for junior docents giving tours in the galleries. They will once again be following their mentors and later presenting tours to school groups. As part of their second year of training, they will each complete 10 tours. Some of them will begin with the October public tour of the month, *Mysteries of the Ancient World*.

Be sure to review your Continuing Education calendar to see our upcoming exciting and informative training sessions. We will prepare for lots of school children and adults here to view the stunning array of objects on view for *Art of the Native Americans: The Thaw Collection*. Our guest speaker for the Sylvia Druy lecture is Nii Quarcoopome, Curator of African Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts. We will workshop ideas for tours building on the work of Nina Simon, creator of Museum 2.0 and author of *The Participatory Museum*. We hope there is something for everyone!

We look forward to seeing and hearing from you at the Docent Annual Meeting on October 7. Kristin Prestegaard, Director of Marketing, will talk

to us about new initiatives at the museum as we continue to study and explore ways to reach out to established and future audiences. Please be sure to let us know if there are other topics relevant to all docents that you would like to address at the meeting.

This fall, as we celebrate a cornucopia of anniversaries ranging from 5 to 45 years of service, we can't help but reiterate how grateful we are to all of you for your devotion and commitment to the docent program. You are tops among the many treasures at the MIA.

Remembering Bob Jacobsen

Bob Marshall

Bob Jacobsen came to the MIA in 1977 as the museum's first curator of Asian Art, and he retired last May, almost 33 years later. You needn't have been here very long, however, to have a sense of his accomplishments, for the growth in the MIA's Chinese collection has been rapid and constant. The official museum count for his acquisitions between 1979 and 2010 is 5,931 – more than 190 objects a year. But quantity is not the true measure. His installation of the two Period Rooms in 1998 was a transformative event not only for the Asian collection but for the MIA itself. Everywhere you turn are remarkable pieces: the Sung Dynasty *Kuan-yin* at the top of the stairs, the bronze *Celestial Horse*, the Taoist *Money Tree*, the oft-repaired folding arm chair and Huanghuali screen, and a complete timeline of Chinese ceramics from prehistoric times up to the Ming Dynasty. Bob is quick to deflect credit to his donors, above all Bruce Dayton. But someone had to find these objects, someone had to know what was needed, someone had to have a blueprint for a collection that would be academically strong but would also tell a story to the public. As Bob says, "We can't just buy something because we like it. It is the public's money and we have an audience."

For the docents, Bob has been a teacher and a lecturer par excellence, although his sentences sometimes seemed to start at 9:30 a.m. and end around noon. Not only did he seem to know everything there was to know about China, he was equally at home when talking about India and Southeast Asia and whatever else fell under his curatorial purview, including ancient Rome, Egypt and the Islamic world.

“What can I say,” notes Sheila McGuire, “the man is brilliant!”

Docent Sally Lehmann, one of the few who has been at the MIA longer than Bob, points out that although Bob always knew his content and was enthusiastic in his lectures, he came across as very shy outside the lecture hall and, in recent years, has changed a lot. The training sessions, she notes, have improved along the way. She also credits Bob, as do many others, for the extraordinary job he did as interim director before Bill Griswold was hired and while the museum expansion was in full swing. “When the Tange wing was added,” Sally remembers, “the museum was shut down. During the construction of the Graves addition, by contrast, the museum not only stayed open, all its programs continued in full swing.”

Speaking of construction, Bob, with his architecture background, was the museum’s in-house liaison for the 2007 expansion and the earlier “in-fill” that created space for additional Asian galleries. His tours for donors were instrumental in raising funds for the \$100 million capital campaign that made the Target Wing possible. And speaking of tours, Honorary Docent Glenn Keitel comments, “Laurel and I were fortunate in being able to travel with Bob to places like China, India, Kashmir, Tibet and Nepal. Everyone in our group benefited from Bob’s insights into local arts and architecture. We also got to enjoy Bob’s fun side. (Yes, hidden behind the scholarly façade there is a fun side!)”

Docent Carol Burton recalls Bob’s enthusiasm during the expansion of the Chinese galleries. “Bob came into the Friends Office with a hardhat and said, ‘You’ve got to come and see this.’ There on the floor was the Wu Room, still in bundles. His explanation of how every piece had been carefully taken apart and labeled was terrific. He pointed to a section of the ceiling and told me that there was the writing giving the Wu family permission to build with a diagonal floor, because their status warranted this privilege. I still tell the story whenever I give a tour of the room.”

Sheila McGuire praises Bob’s “gift at helping those of us who are not connoisseurs to see the differences between good, great and exceptional works of art. I love looking for that exquisite application of glaze, perfect form, or dynamic brushstroke when I study works of art from China, India or Southeast Asia at our museum and others. He helped train our eyes and develop our vocabulary to see and articulate

what makes our collection so special.”

Another docent echoed Sheila’s implicit point: “I most admired Bob’s respect for connoisseurship. Unlike the kindergarten where every child is special, or

Minnesota, where every child is above average, Bob was willing to evaluate art and tell us why one piece was great and another wasn’t.”

In retirement, curator emeritus Jacobsen graciously spoke with the *Docent Muse* about the highlights of the MIA collection and his philosophy of collecting. “Everything we collect should have beauty in it, or you shouldn’t have it in a museum,” he said. *(The author’s complete interview with Jacobsen is attached to the e-mail version of the Muse and will be posted on the MGP website).*

What’s new at the MIA?

Merritt Nequette

Kaywin Feldman graciously made some time available in mid-August for the two of us to talk about some new things happening at the MIA in the coming year.

As we all know, a number of new curators are now on board. There had been several vacancies before Kaywin arrived, and many of those have now been filled. Additionally, more new curators are on the way. As a result of a challenge grant from the Mellon Foundation, there will be a new associate curator for Indian and Southeast Asian Art, in anticipation of an expansion of the South & Southeast Asian art collection. This challenge grant also will add an associate curator to work with Matthew Welch on Japanese and Korean art. Additionally, the website shows openings for a curator of Chinese art (replacing Bob Jacobsen), and an associate curator for Latin American art.

A Docent’s Remembrance

A high school teachers’ tour group once credited me for “[i]ntegrating history, culture, religion, society and other dimensions to present a vibrant picture of life in traditional China.” I was enabled to do this because I studied Chinese art by attending Bob’s lectures, training sessions and gallery talks for many years. Bob’s presentations were always meticulously prepared, well organized and rich in detail. Under his influence, many docents traveled to China, and studied Chinese art at colleges and on their own. We all take great pride in the Chinese galleries at the MIA, which will forever bear the footprints of Bob Jacobsen.

Betty Berman

I noted to Kaywin that the exhibits in some of the “older” collections – in particular the Greek and Roman galleries – seemed to be following the example of the modern galleries, namely that there is more space between objects. She explained that the apparent emptiness of these particular galleries is partly due to the challenges museums currently face with their antiquities collections. The UNESCO guidelines, originally written in 1970, and which the U.S. signed in 1983, put heavy restrictions on collecting anything that “comes out of the ground.” It really doesn’t make a difference which country’s “ground” it may have come out of. The American Association of Museums (AAM) and the Association of Museum Directors (AAMD), of which Kaywin is the current president, have agreed that American museums will only acquire or borrow for long-term loan, objects that have a provenance dating back to at least 1970.

An example of a group of art objects that doesn’t meet this standard is the Miller Collection (formerly in gallery 242), which was on long-term loan to the MIA, and which the Miller family intended to give to the Institute over time. Sadly, the objects on loan had to be returned to the family, and they now have become “orphans” because no other American museum can accept them either. Museums and collectors across America are facing similarly difficult situations with many of their antiquities.

Additionally, as you may have noticed, gallery 242 has been undergoing some renovation during the summer, with the addition of cases mounted along one of the walls. Although the casework seems to be complete, nothing has been placed in it as of the time this article was written. The plan is to use a portion of these cases to display objects – glassware, jewelry, *etc.* – that formerly were in the vitrines in the corridor outside galleries 241 and 242.

Why have the vitrines been removed? Kaywin explained that the second corridor vitrines were moved often for various events. Moving art objects frequently is something that the Institute likes to avoid. Changing over an exhibit on a semi-annual or longer basis is not a problem, but moving art for a very short time – like a week – can be problematic. Some of these vitrines may return on occasion, but not permanently. The good news is that the second floor corridor now allows for easier flow of visitor traffic.

However, the loss of the vitrines in the “jade corridor” on the east side of the rotunda means that there presently is no Chinese lacquerware or jewelry on view. I also noted that there have been no Chinese imperial robes on view for almost three years. (It’s hard to find a dragon these days in the MIA!) Kaywin assured me that some of these issues will be addressed once the new curator of Chinese art is hired.

Moving to the west end of the museum, we can see that a tsunami has hit the South Pacific once again! Many of you remember that the Pacific Islands collection used to reside in the present Taoist gallery. Then it moved to the other end of the building in the Target Wing. Now it is rolling back more to the center of the complex, into the gallery where the “White Clay People” exhibit was located most recently. Although this is a smaller space, it will have enough room to display objects that are part of the MIA’s own collection. Many objects exhibited in the Target Wing space were on loan and have been returned to the lenders. The new space also will make the Pacific Islands collection more contiguous with those of Africa and Japan. Look now for the *bisj* pole, which had already been prominently installed in its new home at the time of this writing.

Another area of change at the MIA relates to the English and American Period Rooms, which will not be decorated for the winter holidays in the same way as they have been in past years. However, the museum plans to display holiday themes in other ways that are still under discussion. There are a number of reasons for this decision, including the problem previously mentioned of moving art objects around for short periods of time. It was also felt that some of the holiday decorations were anachronistic.

Experimentation may become the name of the game in the coming years. Try something, and see if it works. If it does, that’s great; if not, try something else. *Art ReMix* was a good start on experimenting with “mixing” periods of art and finding out what the reaction might be. For the most part, this effort seemed to be successful. For instance, Kehinde Wiley’s *The Father of Aviation II* received “really liked it” comments 70% of the time and “really didn’t like it” comments only 30% of the time. If nothing else, the *ReMix* objects got people looking at the art!

Experimentation in the near future might include contemporary photography juxtaposed with featured exhibitions in the photography galleries. Additionally, the second floor corridor west, bordering the Greek/Roman and Islamic galleries on one side, and the African galleries on the other, might feature masks and busts from several different areas. From a touring perspective, this will allow for a “compare and contrast” experience and also serve as a lead-in to more in-depth viewing in surrounding galleries.

Finally, the job search to replace Kate Johnson as the head of the former Education Department is one that will have a direct impact upon us docents. The search for the director of the Division of Learning and Innovation (the new title of the department) is proceeding apace, with a number of résumés in hand.

Thanks, Kaywin, for taking time for this interview. We docents look forward to seeing your “experimentation” and new directions in the coming years.

Checking Out With the Junior Docents

Kay Miller

A massive thunderstorm, tornados crisscrossing the state, weather-delayed guests and a jamming Third Thursday band made junior docent Jane Grunklee’s checkout tour a real challenge. Liz Short coped with an out-of-town guest who was off her meds and spun out-of-control during her tour. Beth Karon’s group decided to take the stairs, instead of the elevator; her inverted tour undermined all her tidy planned transitions. Linda Krueger warmly welcomed an uninvited drop-in participant who took a cell phone call and stayed through her post-tour evaluation.

The notion of adapting quickly to small crises and rising to the occasion marked many of the junior docents’ summer checkout tours. Through it all, we discovered what our senior colleagues have long known: Becoming a docent means learning to delight in the unexpected.

Anna Bethune was literally a front-page headliner after a Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reporter and photographer unexpectedly showed up at the MIA, looking for an engaging example for a quick news feature on Twin Cities volunteerism and found it in the loquacious Bethune. “Anna didn’t blink an eye” before agreeing to the two tagalongs, said Debbi

Hegstrom. The reporter’s pre-tour interview with Bethune meant she had no time to walk her tour route and the photographer kept propping his large lens within a foot of Bethune’s face.

“I was very tempted to reprimand him sharply and ask him to respect the one-foot rule and stay away from the docent!” Bethune quipped afterward. But her willingness to put herself on the line placed the MIA’s volunteer guide programs front-and-center under the laudatory headline: “We’re the Tops as Volunteers.”

To see a photo of Bethune and read the *Star Tribune* article, click on the following link: <http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/96390394.html?elr=KArksUUUoDEy3LGDio7aiU>.

Nerves and melted butter

Before our tours, Marge Buss, mentor program chair, sent each junior docent an encouraging e-mail note: “You will be nervous for your first object and then the rest will flow like melted butter,” she predicted.

A humor-loving group of friends blew away Susie Housh’s early jitters at her tour, “A Little Face Time,” asking, “Do we get to touch the faces?” “Are we just looking at your face, Susie? I’m not sure that is going to take an hour.”

“I was nervous,” Housh said. “But the moment I met my crowd/friends, they started in with the humor and I was fine.”

Mentors played a major role in helping junior docents shape their tours – sharing files, supervising preview tours, winnowing props and streamlining questions.

Jim Allen found himself repeating verbatim ideas that his mentor, Merritt Nequette, had shared during Allen’s preview tour.

“I usually made eye contact with him as I quoted his suggestions without (often) giving him credit,” Allen said. “He merely smiled and nodded his approval.”

Sue Hamburge, who simultaneously prepared for her daughter’s wedding, the descent of out-of-town guests from as far away as Australia and her tour, was so preoccupied mentally “rehearsing” tour that she completely passed the exit from the freeway to her home.

But Grunklee wins the prize for overcoming the most obstacles on her check-out tour. “Being totally absorbed with facts, questions and transitions, I was oblivious to the weather,” Grunklee said. “When I

thanked Roberta, my first guest who seemed a little anxious, for coming she responded by saying, “Yes, in spite of the tornado warnings.” Another hoped that a tornado alert might give them an excuse to seek shelter in the MIA basement where they could scope out the stored art.

Making it personal

Doryphoros was the first stop on Nancy Kelly’s tour. “We discussed his perfect muscles and sculpted



body. Did *Doryphoros* remind them of any modern-day heroes? Kelly asked, assuming they’d name an Olympic medal recipient. “My friend, Annette, said with a gleam in her eye, that it reminded her of her husband,” drawing delighted laughter. “I explained to the rest of the group that Annette’s husband is training for a triathlon and is *quite* buff right now.”

Standing before the *Celestial Horse* for his tour, Terry Nadler wondered whether people still buried objects for the afterlife today, as they did during the Han Dynasty. A member of his group talked about the death of her mother, who was cremated. “The children decided to place a treasured item in the mother’s coffin, along with her ashes,” Nadler said. “Objects were chosen that meant something to each of them and reminded them of their mother. The coffin itself was fashioned from an old wooden crate that their father packed his books in when they moved from place to place years ago.”

Sheila-Marie Untiedt, our Arabian horse expert, focused her tour on “Horses in World Art,” discussing the various functions of horses through ancient history. Using horses from the T’ang tomb retinue, Untiedt talked about how Confucian teachings helped stop the ancient practice of sacrificing servants and family members to serve the deceased in the afterlife. “Well,” her friend Lisa responded, “*that* practice would *really* make it hard to get good help!”

Discovery and comment

Often, junior docents experienced light bulb moments when one of their guests offered an observation that was a revelation. At the *False Door*, one

of Deborah Shatin’s guests noticed that the figures of Iry were smaller at the center, where the Ka enters. Could this have been early form of perspective, pointing the Ka toward the entrance? the visitor speculated.

Ziya Tarapore invited her teenaged sons on her tour. Looking at the *Bodhisattva Kuan-yin*’s fingers curled into a mudra, 16-year-old Arshan mused that the fingers actually spelled out OM. “When we looked,” Ziya said, “the thumb and forefinger are an O and the three fingers do form an M.” It was a lesson within a meditation within a tour.

By the time Jim Allen’s group reached Castiglione’s *Immaculate Conception of Mary*, guests followed his lead and posed questions of their own: How did curators know this was Mary? What iconography was used? How did this painting fit into the Counter-Reformation? “As there were some learned bibliophiles in the group,” Allen said, “I was the student, not the teacher, much of the time.”

Surprises –Naughty and Nice

For her tour, Liz Short was delighted that the vibe of her group – a mix of five friends who didn’t know each other and her husband – approximated a real tour. “What I hadn’t realized was that one of my friends, in town for the week, had been off the meds she’d been taking for years in her struggle with mental illness.”

“By the time we hit *Doryphoros*, it was clear that ‘taking a minute to just look at the art’ was not going to be a quiet experience,” Short said. “At one point (and I am not proud of this), I glared at her when she was talking to others while they were supposed to be looking at the art. She looked me right in the eye and said, ‘What? You have to learn to deal with people like me, you know.’ And you know what? She was absolutely, 100% right.” Short calmed down, accepting the experience she had – not the one she wanted.

“So, when she started texting during the discussion and let us wander off without her, I just went on doing the tour. She caught up again. When she starting clowning for some kids in the Otis elevator, picked up the phone and inadvertently called the security guards over, we just all moved forward and went on to the next piece (after Ann Isaacson assured the guards that all was well).”

When Isaacson asked for group feedback at tour’s end, the friend talked about how welcome and

safe she felt to say anything and take a break when she felt overwhelmed. “Luckily, the others had nice things to say as well,” Short said. “So, while this was not the tour of my dreams, I feel happy to know that everyone felt welcome and safe to speak their thoughts out loud.

One year down ...

Not only did each of the 39 docents complete their tours, “in general, they were great!” said Amanda Thompson Rundahl. Themes, object choices and transitions were creative. Fun, wit and humor were widespread. “We were especially impressed with the interconnectedness junior docents were able to convey to visitors about the objects, time periods and cultures.” Most evident, she said, was the confidence all the junior docents exhibited in their new “docent skin.”

“It feels so fantastic and liberating when you are finished,” Paula Sanan said. “One year down, one to go!”

A Taste of Asia Tour Experience

Tom Byfield

With the state of the world as it now presents itself, many of us are not surprised to find we are in that proverbial hand basket going somewhere we don't want to be. We worry about the insurmountable national debt and the stock market that hasn't seen such unrest since the Great Dentist's Strike of 1904. The government printing presses are spewing out dollars like an unstoppable Gulf of Mexico oil leak. And that's another thing. We are like tar babies stuck in the morass that is Iraq and Afghanistan and seem to be making the same kind of progress one gets when teaching a cannibal to use a fork. Take heart, there are lesser problems that we can solve. One of them involves tours right here in our own cemetery of tax-deductible wealth, the MIA. What follows is an experience common to us all.

I came into the docent lounge this summer and found a curl of white paper in my box like a newly-laid egg by the Mother Hens in the tour office. I was instructed to do a public tour, *A Taste of Asia*. Because I had, in the past year, returned from an eleven-day sojourn in China, I considered myself an expert on all things Oriental and welcomed the chance to spread my largess of knowledge in Asian artifacts to an enthusiastic and thrilled public.

I had two weeks to plan which pieces to use. Being anal-retentive, I started immediately. I would begin with the *Amida Buddha* and finish with a flourish at the suit of *Japanese Armor*. Somewhere in the tour I wanted to squeeze in our amazing *Wu Family Reception Hall*, lifted *in situ* from a Suchou courtyard house. The position of the house's entrance was prescribed by Feng Shui experts of the time. It is my understanding that powers at the U of M also consulted with Feng Shui practitioners to orient the U's new football stadium – no doubt to give it an edge when the Big Ten Chinese Checker championships are held there. But I digress.

I read and reread my notes for a week, crafted seamless transitions, and came to the museum ready to educate and entertain. The tour was announced on the PA system, the sound of which was and always has been inaudible to the unaided ear. I was in place ten minutes early and began casting about for my group. There was no one there who seemed interested. Putting on my most winsome and charming smile which, in retrospect, may have looked more like a grimace brought on by gas, I announced that I was about to lead a tour called “A TASTE OF ASIA!”

That elicited a groundswell of indifference. I considered breaking into a soft shoe dance while singing a chorus of “Three Little Maids From School Are We” from *The Mikado* but, whether through inertia or some mysterious instinct that protects the feeble-minded, I decided not to upset the decorum of our prestigious shrine with such base buffoonery. I sidled up to seemingly unattached loiterers around the Information Desk. “Psst, wanna see some Oriental beauties?” Nothing.

In desperation, I approached a blue-haired girl who was leaning insouciantly against the black leather sofa and who appeared to be at loose ends. I noticed she sported an ear with enough rings to hang a shower curtain and had tattoos on her arm that resembled an Asian landscape. Hoping to exploit this aesthetic connection, I gave her a hello and she gave me a look that would freeze a penguin. Now I'm not above paddling into sensitive waters but she looked as mean as tight underwear, so I retreated, backing away like Michael Jackson doing his moonwalk.

Finally, after I had hung around long enough to need another shave, I slunk back to the lounge, deflated and unfulfilled, feeling much like the fellow who discovered his Viagra wasn't going to work and

thinking that this problem of public tour no-shows cries out for some kind of solution.

So, listen up docents, let's work on this! File your remedies with the tour office or with any other of the MIA powerful you think might be receptive to constructive criticism. I have no idea where to find such remedies. I suspect the only sure way for me to attract a large crowd is to come either completely unprepared or in the nude.



Docent Summer Camp 2010

Charlie Ellis and Emily Shapiro

Photos by Allison Thiel

Some readers may recall that a number of docents spent the sultry days of summer, 2009, at “Nude Summer Camp.” They shared their past experiences touring artworks depicting nudes, exchanged touring techniques, and scoured the MIA’s galleries to view and discuss nude art pieces (See *Docent Muse*, Sept. 2009). Contrary to some rumors, the campers were, themselves, fully clothed throughout.

This summer, docent summer campers occupied their time with tamer subjects, perhaps to avoid shocking or scaring away the junior docents too soon. But boy, were these campers busy! They went

to three separate “camps:” Music and Art Camp in June, Public Art Camp in July and Photography Camp in August. Here’s some of what they learned.

Music and Art Camp

Lead camp counselor Merritt Nequette, accompanied by his boom box, showed campers how fun and instructive it can be to view art while listening to music from the same time period. Focusing on European art and music, we learned that ALL art reflects the culture, not just the visual art contained in the museum’s galleries. Consider, for a moment, the following connections:

- The impact of the Christian religion on both the visual art and musical styles of medieval Europe (e.g. Madonna figures; Gregorian chants) and how, as time went on, both styles got increasingly more complex;
- The prominence of the violin and its vine-like, winding string of notes during the rococo art period (e.g. Venetian writing desk; Vivaldi);
- The emotional, dramatic, and less-structured style of the Romantic composers during the Romantic art period (e.g. Mendelssohn; Fanatics of Tangiers); and
- The dreamlike, unstructured, atmospheric music of the modernist composers during the age of Impressionist painting (e.g. DeBussy; Grain Stack in the Mist).

(The complete list of Merritt’s paired musical selections and art pieces is attached to the e-mail version of the Muse and will be posted on the MGP website).

Public Art Camp

How much do you know about public art in the Twin Cities? Not much? Neither did the summer campers until Honorary Docent, Glenn Keitel, gave them an early peek at his new book, *Scene from the Sidewalk*, at a lecture on July 13th. Glenn, a retired college administrator and engineer, started his research in 1996 by taking pictures of public art around town. With the help of a couple of websites (see accompanying box) and visits to the Minneapolis city office charged with the care of public art, his project took off and occupied the next several years of his life. Glenn’s book is due to be published this fall by Adventure Publications in Cambridge, Minnesota, a regional publisher of guidebooks and trail books. It is designed to be kept in a backpack or car glove compartment for easy access, and is organized both by neighborhood and by walking tours of varying lengths. “Kid-friendly” objects are designated by special icons.

All of the photographs in the book were taken by Glenn, except for a few exceptions where artists insisted he use their photos. He had to get permission from the artist or artist's executor to publish photographs of any art work less 70 years old, often a difficult task because public art works usually do not have information labels identifying the artist. For one piece, Glenn tracked down the name of the artist, only to learn that the artist was deceased and that the executor of his estate lived in Italy. Even after all that effort, Glenn was denied permission to use a photo of the work.

Public art, Glenn found, is everywhere. It sits in downtowns and city parks and in front of businesses. It even exists on small islands where streets intersect, such as the wood carving of *Winnie the Pooh* he found at a St. Paul street intersection. The trick, he said, is to look both up and down, around corners and inside ordinary, utilitarian structures. Take nothing for granted!

A few weeks after his lecture, Glenn led campers on a walking tour of public art on the Nicollet Mall. This tour began in front of Brit's Pub



and headed south toward the start of the Loring Greenway. There, Glenn pointed out the art under our feet: a series of works by Ta-coumba Aiken and Seitu Jones, called *Shadows of Spirit*: shadow figures cast in bronze and laid flush with the sidewalk.

They memorialize political activists and activities, such as the 1934 trucker's strike and the work of Nellie Stone Johnson, an early African-American woman who was influential in DFL politics.

The tour then crossed the street toward Westminster Presbyterian Church and headed north. Glenn pointed out the bus stop shelters decorated with the design motifs of significant architectural styles throughout history. We saw the *Tetrados* pyramids in front of the IDS Center as well as a statue of Minnesota waterfowl (heron, ruffed



grouse and loon) and a skyway designed by Siah Armajani. Once past the IDS, Glenn had us look down at our feet again and search for the many manhole covers decorated with artist's renderings of Minnesota flora and fauna: loons, walleye, oats, corn, lady slippers, wild rice, wheat, pine cones and wolves. After looking at the *Maze of Care* in the Cancer Survivor Park by the old Federal Reserve Building, we



headed back south and found the George Morrison mosaic, *Tableau: A Native American Mosaic*, which used to be by the IDS Center but now is in front of



the new Minneapolis (now Hennepin County) Library.

The rest you can discover on your own with the help of Glenn's book when it reaches book stores in the first weeks of September. Oh, wait. One more thing: west of the Mall on 7th Street are a few more arty brass manhole covers. One of them has GPS coordinates and the words, "You are exactly here." Precisely!

Here's some websites that will lead you to maps of public art in the Twin Cities.

Minneapolis:

<http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/dca/artinpublicplaces.asp>

University of Minnesota:

<http://www.weisman.umn.edu/public/public.html>

St. Paul:

<http://www.publicartstpaul.org/>

For more information about Glenn Keitel's book, e-mail him at gkeitel@earthlink.net

Photography Camp

In early August, summer campers met with David Little, Curator of Photography and New Media, to discuss the MIA's photography collection and upcoming exhibits. They learned that the MIA's extensive photography collection continues to prosper under his care, particularly with respect to photographs dating from the 1970's to the present day and photographs by lesser-known artists. Because the art of photography was invented less than two centuries

ago, Little said, he believes it is his role as curator to create a history of this art form rather than to document its history. This role gives him more freedom to move beyond the “big names” and, instead, to curate exhibitions that educate the public about lesser-known artists, newer methods and technologies and different artistic visions. Little also emphasized that his prior background as a museum educator at New York’s Whitney Museum inspires him to organize his exhibitions thematically instead of as “greatest hits” shows. The campers agreed that this is great news for docents, as it makes touring photography exhibits particularly rich.

Little emphasized that the semi-annual *New Pictures* exhibition series illustrates this thematic and educational approach. For example, *New Pictures 1*, on view during the fall of 2009, demonstrated a new vision of landscape art through the new media photography of Japanese artist, Noriko Furunishi.

Similarly, last spring, *New Pictures 2* examined both a different vision of abstraction and a different definition of photography through the art of the German artist, Marco Breuer. See <http://www2.artsmia.org/blogs/new-pictures/exhibition-archive/>

Most recently, *New Pictures 3* examines a different vision of architecture and the depiction of interior/exterior spaces through the lens of American artist, James Welling, and Philip Johnson’s *Glass House*. See <http://www2.artsmia.org/blogs/new-pictures/> Watch for this New Pictures series to continue and to culminate in a few years in an overview exhibit that pulls the entire series together.

After Little’s remarks, the summer campers were particularly excited to see some of the MIA’s newer acquisitions and, then, to go inside the Photography Department’s “cold storage” room to see how the MIA works to preserve and maintain its extensive collection of photographs in between public showings. The latter room also helped them recover briefly from this summer’s steamy hot and humid weather.

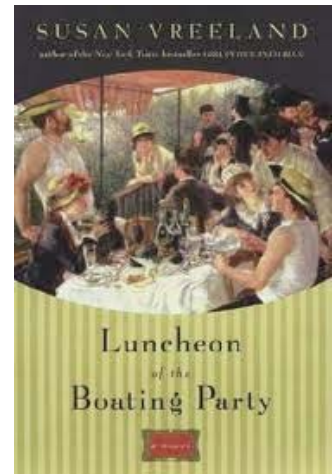
See how much fun Docent Summer Camp was in 2010? Please join us for Docent Summer Camp in 2011; all are welcome!

Like reading a painting! Luncheon of the Boating Party

JeanMarie Burtness

Inspired by the Auguste Renoir painting, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, Susan Vreeland’s novel conveys the internal creative struggle and practical difficulties that Renoir had in creating this monumental painting. Much of the story takes place on the balcony of the restaurant *Maison Fournaise* on the banks of the Seine, west of Paris at the end of summer, 1880. On Sundays, Parisians would take a 45-minute train ride from Gare St-Lazare to the riverside town of Chatou to enjoy the pleasures of fine food, conversation, friendship, swimming, and boating. Renoir wanted to paint this dynamic and joyous spirit of *la vie moderne* that a variety of social classes and professions were celebrating.

Vreeland’s book gives readers a view of how Renoir’s painting might have developed to include portraits of his friends, a background landscape glimpse of the bridge over the Seine, a lovely still life of a just-finished luncheon, and a festive moment of everyday life.



The novel includes back stories and details about the fourteen people who appear in *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. The casually handsome man in a sleeveless rowing shirt and straw boater hat is



Renoir’s friend, artist Gustave Caillebotte. The woman kissing a terrier is Renoir’s future wife, Aline Charigot, a young seamstress. Her profile resembles the MIA’s painting, *Head of a Young Woman*, by Renoir (G351).

The friends leaning on the balcony railing are the children of the proprietor of the restaurant: the handsome Alphonse Fournaise who helps tourists with their skiffs and his sister, the beautiful red-haired widow Alphonsine, who assists with the family restaurant. The other women are

famous actresses who posed for Renoir in previous paintings. There are many characters with stories that give the reader a feel for life in Paris: a baron, a poet, a journalist, a financier, and an editor.

To help keep track of who was who, I used the extensive Phillips Collection website, which identifies each of the figures in the painting by name and occupation. See <http://www.phillipscollection.org/collection/boating/index.aspx>.

Vreeland's use of description and detail gives the book a strong sense of place and of the time that influenced the Impressionist painters who were Renoir's artist friends: Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, and Edgar Degas. In the book, Renoir recalls conversations with Caillebotte and these artists. Renoir's thoughts give us a hint of what choices artists make when thinking about compositions and choosing colors, forms, brush strokes. The details help the reader see images of the riverbanks of the Seine, the streets and shops in Paris, and understand that life was on the verge of something new and modern.

The MIA has pieces that could be used to design a tour in conjunction with this book. In addition to *Head of a Young Woman*, I'd use Renoir's *The Piazza San Marco, Venice* (G355), painted in 1881 when Renoir and his friends were traveling, which is suggested in the book. I find it interesting that *Nude on a Couch*, by Caillebotte (G355), was also painted in 1880. In the book, Jeanne Samary, one of the actresses, complains to her husband-to-be that having her portrait painted by Eva Gonzales does not have the status of being painted by Renoir. The MIA has a still life, *Pommes d'Api*, by Eva Gonzales (G351), that could be worked into a tour as a comparison. *Le Pont de Moret*, by Alfred Sisley (G355), shows another river painted with the broken brush strokes of the Impressionists, and Camille Pissarro's *Place du Theatre Francais, Paris: Rain* (G351) gives viewers a feel for the Paris of the time.

Congratulations to all Docents who are celebrating an important anniversary in 2010!

45th anniversary

Sally Lehmann

40th anniversary

Suzy Vogt

35th anniversary

Betty Berman

25th anniversary

Theresa Carufel
Maureen Lannan
Pam McDavitt
Dillon McGrath
Shirley Nilsen
Judy O' Donnell
Barb Pinto
Diane Redfern-Ross
Barbara Rubin-Greenberg
Betty Wright

15th anniversary

Mary Ellen Alden	Shari Boehnen
Tom Byfield	Peggy Dietzen
Georgia Engebretson	Beverly Fiman
Pam Friedland	Mary Gilbert
Ron Hovda	Sharon Johnson
Glenn Keitel	Gerry Kozberg
Borgny Lee	Bob Marshall
Lyn Osgood	Jane Piccard
Rose Stanley-Gilbert	Lynn Teschendorf
Jane Tygesson	Maurine Venters

5th anniversary

Barbara Aiken-Ali	Annie Arkell	Cheryl Barnes	Lisa Berg
Sharon Bestrom	William Bomash	Mary S. Bowman	Jean Burke
JeanMarie Burtness	Mary Costello	Wendy DePaolis	Gep Durenberger
Charles Ellis	David Fortney	Jacque Foust	Grace Goggin
Mary Grau	Carreen Heegaard	Linda Jeffrey	Jane Mackenzie
Merritt Nequette	Karen Nerison	Antra Pakalns	Joanne Platt
Anastasia Pydych	Sally Rice	Marcia Rinek	Cindy Roselle
Kathleen Rothenberger	Morry Rothstein	Emily Shapiro	Marilyn Smith
Vicki Sperry	Allison Thiel	Florence Walklet	Colleen Watson
Mary Westra	Ginny Wheeler	Michele Yates	Joy Yoshikawa