

## CONSIDERING ART AND THE SACRED

*Bruce Robbins*

Bear with me as I begin with definitions and ask yourself, “Do these words include my understanding?”

ART is a diverse range of human activities dedicated to creating artifacts that express the author’s skill and are intended to be appreciated for beauty and/or emotional power (Wikipedia, edited). Artifacts are objects made by persons. SACRED suggests an extra-human connection, such as with god/s, spirit, soul, psyche, demon, universe or other possibilities known or unknown. BEAUTY refers to the qualities in a being or thing that give pleasure to the senses, or to the mind and spirit. And, of course, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

Why do I add the word “beauty” to Art and the Sacred? I remember how John Keats closed the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” saying: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all /Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” And he wrote “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” as the first line of the poem *Endymion*. Many believe in this connection. I guess visitors come to Mia because they find beautiful art they love!

How do we consider these terms together? For years, I have tried to let go of my predilection for logical consistency and the conviction that I can sort out truth systematically. I struggle to let go. Rather, let me learn from Eastern thought: from *The Book of Changes*, from the Dao, from aesthetic values such as suggestion, perishability, asymmetry and irregularity. Maybe the two approaches interwoven can be my yin and yang. Maybe I, too, could make a cardboard copy of a 1250-year-old sculpture to show how things always change and remain the same.

Perhaps these brief stories will help you connect these three, fertile terms together:

Recently, Dr. Johan van Parys lectured to the Friends on *Art of the Sacred: Beauty that Shatters and Saves*. He is the Director of Liturgy and Sacred Arts at The Basilica of Saint Mary. His lecture connected art and beauty brilliantly. I was invited to lead a tour before the lecture on the saving and shattering character of beauty. Mia’s 12th-century *Crucifixion* at the top of the great stairs shouts out devastation and redemption simultaneously because of the power of the Christian story. I remember standing in a long line at the New York World’s Fair in 1964 to see Michelangelo’s *Pieta*. How can one forget love and violence so intertwined?

Several months ago, I soaked up Japan on the Junior Docent graduation trip. I discovered a museum as beautiful as any I’d seen: The Miho

### IN THIS ISSUE

page 2

Accurate Pronunciation Study Group  
Spread the Sunshine

page 3

From the Land of Bards

page 4

Increasing Participation on Public Tours

page 5

From Raku to Raccoon Dogs:  
Mia Docents take Japan by Storm

page 7

Musings From IPE

page 8

2017-2018 Docent Executive Committee



Yūji Honbōri  
*Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara*  
(Jūichimen Kannon), 2012  
Cardboard, wood, plastic, pigments  
The Joan and Gary Capen Endowment  
for Art Acquisition  
2012.32A,B  
G200



Unknown artist, Spain  
*Crucifixion*, c. 1180  
Limestone  
The John R. Van Derlip  
Fund  
2015.69A-D  
G340

Museum. I.M. Pei designed it and 2017 is the 20th anniversary of the museum (and the 100th anniversary of the architect's life!). Mihoko Koyama, the founder of the museum, also founded a religious organization called *Shinji Shumeikai*. The heart of the movement teaches: Beauty and Art offer the truest path to spiritual fulfillment, and it is also a path to civilized society. I cannot think of a better way to correlate sacred art and beauty.

Somewhere, fifty years ago, I heard a Zen koan/story (now available online) that is a good closing to this modest message. A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled and the tiger chased after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine held him. Two mice, one white and one black, little by little, started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted!

How fortunate we are to have such opportunities at Mia.

## ACCURATE PRONUNCIATION STUDY GROUP

*Lynn Dunlap*

The Accurate Pronunciation Study Group (APSG), created by the Docent Executive Committee in 2015, has produced pronunciation guides for French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. It has also provided pronunciation tours for the Burke galleries and the *Delacroix*, *Martin Luther* and *Eyewitness Views* shows. Each pronunciation guide includes names and terms that appear in both the special exhibitions and our permanent collection.

APSG members include Wendi Chen, Lynn Dunlap, Gail Gresser-Pitsch, Carol Joyce, Jean London, Jane MacKenzie, Sheila-Marie Unteidt, and Ginny Wheeler.

Thanks to Ginny Wheeler for the French pronunciation guide and Florence Walklet for the tour, Eri Shiraishi and Brian Hanninan for both the Japanese guide and tour, and Jerry Delgehausen (contacted through Jane Odin Stull) for the German guide and tour. Maria Egge-meyer created the Spanish pronunciation guide and Lynn Dunlap created the Italian.

The APSG suggests these “best practices” when using names and terms in a foreign language:

Ask if anyone in the group is fluent in the language you will need to pronounce. If so, have that person pronounce the word(s) for the group.

Follow the language's pronunciation guide as closely as possible without pretending to be a native speaker.

When a pronunciation is widely understood and accepted, but not



The Miho Museum, near Shigaraki, Japan

---

### SPREAD THE SUNSHINE

*Suzanne Zander*

The Sunshine Fund is used to purchase cards and flowers to be sent to docent colleagues experiencing surgery, severe ill-health, or the loss of a loved one. In the cabinet where we put our bags, etc. will be a container marked Sunshine Fund. Please give a suggested \$5 donation (Of course, more would be welcome and checks can be made payable to Docents of Mia.)

If you know of a docent who is in need of sunshine, please contact [Suzanne Zander](#).

Thanks in advance for keeping the sun shining brightly!



Dale Chihuly

*Sunburst*, 1999

Blown glass, neon, metal armature

Gift of Funds from

Donna and Cargill Macmillan Jr.

99.132

G100

necessarily accurate for the language, use the generally accepted pronunciation (example: Van Gogh).

Use pronunciation websites and apps, such as Forvo, Howjsay, and iTranslateVoice, to hear native speakers pronounce the name or term.

These practices as well as links to individual language guides and artists' names are on the IPE website under Research Resources/Peer Sharing/[Pronunciation Guides](#).

## FROM THE LAND OF BARDS

*Jeanne Lutz*

Despite the river of bright fabric with its larger-than-life eye, the pair of energetic abstractions, and scenes of colorful village life, the first object I was drawn to in the *I am Somali* exhibition was the large, wooden camel bell. As a farmer, I love the simple tinkling of a cow bell or sheep bell, but seeing this bell on display brought a new joy and curiosity.

Although Somalia is a country where language, story-telling, and poetry have been the preferred choice of artistic expression and vital means of communication, the exhibit in Gallery 255 (open until April 29, 2018) celebrates the visual art of three Somali artists living in Minnesota: Ifrah Mansour, Hassan Nor, and Aziz Osman.

Ifrah, born in Saudi Arabia but raised here, prefers performance art. Her multimedia artwork in the gallery titled *Can I Touch It?* addresses the cultural ignorance and stereotypes she encounters in her daily life. "Performance art is real and in the moment," she said during a panel presentation held in the Pillsbury Auditorium in October where all three artists were on stage to discuss the issues they take to heart. She tries to find unique ways to document Minnesota's Somali community and use that documentation for community upliftment.

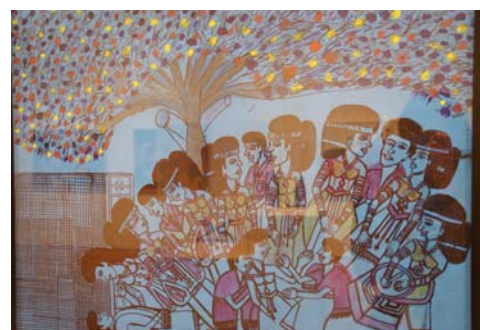
Hassan, at 81, is considered an elder in the community. He is a self-taught artist who uses the "muscles of memory" to convey the social components of life in Somalia, the Somalia he remembers before the civil war that began in 1991. His vivid collage-style art is full of neighbors of all generations, goats, and camels. The camel bell in the display case is just one of five traditional items on loan from the Somali Museum of Minnesota that puts context to these artists' contemporary work. As Hassan's art makes clear, camels are vital for many Somalis. His piece *Untitled (Livestock)* alludes to the system of six kinds of bells placed on camels based on their age, gender, and position in the herd.

The piece *Untitled (Dhaanto Dance)* depicts dancers mimicking the movements of the camel. During the panel discussion, he stated that it is his love for Somalia that makes him create art, allowing him to share his memories with viewers. "When you have knowledge, you have to pass it on," he said.

Born in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, Aziz began painting when he



Somalia, 20th century  
Camel bell  
Wood, leather  
On loan from Somali Museum of Minnesota  
L2017.140.4  
G255



Hassan Nor  
*Untitled (Dhaanto Dance)*, 20th century  
Marker and colored pencil on poster board  
On loan from Somali Museum of Minnesota  
L2017.122.5  
G255

was eight. In his teens, he won a scholarship to study art in Italy. There, he was “amazed and mesmerized by the human mind,” and focused on displaying the art he produced. But displaying visual art is a Western concept, he explained during the panel discussion, so it was a challenge to have exhibitions back in Somalia, and now in Minnesota as well, where there are not a lot of opportunities.

All three artists feel the backlash of 9/11 but believe their art is vital to the Twin Cities community. The artists, as well as the audience, agreed that the *I am Somali* exhibit is vital for Somalis visiting Mia. As docents, we know that exploring art, stories, images, and ideas by artists who share the same culture as people on our tours is essential for connection.

“Minneapolis is home to the largest Somali community in the U.S.,” said Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, Head of the Arts of Africa and the Americas and Curator of African Art at Mia. “It is an honor to showcase three generations of Somali artists who live in the Twin Cities. Their work counters the widely-held idea that art by Muslims is non-figural, and they examine identity in a personal, vulnerable way, which is recognizable across cultures and religions.”

## INCREASING PARTICIPATION ON PUBLIC TOURS

*Kathleen Steiger*

Have you ever prepared an inspired public tour only to find that no one has shown up for the tour? I certainly have and like most of us, was very disappointed. Is there anything that we docents can do to increase participation by museum visitors? Here are a few suggestions:

When you receive your assignment and the tour title, research. Visit the galleries that you think might work well for the tour and be sure to check IPE to see if any similar tours have been posted for the tour title. Brainstorm some possible tour themes on your own or with other docents and be sure to come up with a catchy theme that would attract visitors. Which one would attract your family or friends? Which one might appeal to young adults or museum regulars? Try to make it appeal to a broad range of Mia visitors.

Select the objects that work for a logical route and tell a story. One of the best words of wisdom that I received while in training was “Only include objects that *you love*.” Your enthusiasm will be obvious and will attract potential tour participants.

Do some advertising. Yes, *advertising*. Tell everyone you know about your tour and what a great time you are having preparing it. Don't limit yourself to your family. Include emails to neighbors, coworkers, friends at church or your volunteer organizations, your bridge club or book club members, everyone you know! And be sure to let friends know if the tour is during the day rather than in the evening. Many older adults would prefer driving in daylight hours and may shy away from a 6:30 p.m. tour, especially in the winter.

On the day of your tour, tell all the Mia staff on duty on the first floor

about your tour including the tour title as well as your theme so they can pass the word. I always include guards, coat check staff, volunteers at the Info Bar and if it is Family Day, include the young people who are at the Scavenger Hunt table and other activity rooms. Your tour title will be listed on the Family Day Handout, but this will not include your theme.

Stop by the Info Bar and pick up a "Public Tour" handheld sign. They may need to hunt for one but I recently found them in the closet behind the desk. And drop off a copy of your tour route so the volunteers can direct latecomers to the correct gallery.

And finally, circulate through the lobby and Cargill Gallery holding up your sign, introducing yourself to everyone and letting people know when the tour will start. Be visible to visitors and wear your biggest smile. After all, you are selling our fabulous museum and making sure all visitors have a wonderful time at Mia.

## FROM RAKU TO RACCOON DOGS: MIA DOCENTS TAKE JAPAN BY STORM

*Meg Ubel*

You might have noticed some docents wandering around the museum the first week in November looking a bit groggy and possibly a little windblown and damp. These were probably some of the recently returned travelers from the 2017 Mia Docent trip to Japan, which took place October 18-29. A group of fourteen docents (all but one a member of the recently-graduated class of 2015) and five spouses packed in visits to museums, Buddhist temples, and Shinto shrines while dodging frequent rain showers and the occasional typhoon. The group also experienced a traditional tea ceremony and a night in a Japanese *ryokan* (inn) beside a mountain lake, and there was time for shopping, bicycling and roaming the streets for those who were interested. Overall "the entire trip was fantastic" commented Debbie Koller. "I enjoyed something about every place we visited, and I loved getting to know my classmates better."

The itinerary included all of the historic capitals of Japan: Nara, Kyoto and Tokyo. We traveled by bus, subway, foot and bullet train, and were accompanied throughout by our knowledgeable and patient Japanese guide. Akira-san was a fount of information and ably fielded the barrage of questions that inevitably come from a group of docents, while teaching us a few Japanese phrases and slipping in some useful background information about Japanese culture.

Our first stop was Tokyo where we were met by the rain that would figure in many of our days to come. Akira-san first guided us to the National Art Center and Mori Art Museum in the Roppongi area for a look at contemporary Japanese art and architecture.

The next several days included a visit to the comprehensive Tokyo National Museum (with an excellent audio guide in which one could create a virtual lacquer design and dust it with gold embellishments). We visited Meiji Shrine, a Shinto place of worship set within forested

grounds, which is dedicated to Emperor Meiji and his wife. After practicing the proper way to purify ourselves and call for the gods' attention upon approaching the shrine, we discovered that a traditional wedding was underway inside with the bride wearing a white kimono decorated with cranes (a symbol of long life) and an elaborate white head piece.

Another highlight in Tokyo was a visit to the Nezu Museum, a small museum focusing on pre-modern Japanese and Chinese art from the collection of the railway executive Nezu Kaichiro. Docents saw a fabulous and diverse collection of Chinese bronzes, and an interesting exhibit viewing the pantheon of Buddha, bodhisattva and other deity figures from the perspective of the vehicles or pedestals that support them. In the realm of Buddhist art, support matters - and the Buddha doesn't sit only on a lotus [blossom!](#)

The following day, escaping Tokyo just before Typhoon Lan was due to arrive, we struck out for the hinterlands. Viewing a shrine near the town of Hakone, on the shores of Lake Ashi in a volcanic hot springs area, we used our new-found knowledge to enter and pray at the shrine. The afternoon brought a visit to the Hakone Open Air Museum, which featured a captivating array of outdoor sculpture in a mountainous natural setting. As we strolled among the installations, the mist was rising through the valleys below, reminiscent of a Japanese ink painting.

As an unexpected bonus, the museum also included an indoor pavilion with 319 works by Pablo Picasso, centered around a collection of his ceramics inherited by his daughter, Maya. Cathie Wemlinger found the whole museum, indoors and out, to be "stunning." After taking in all that art, we were ready for a respite and it came in the form of that night's accommodation at the *ryokan* Ryuguden, also located on Lake Ashi. We experienced the *onsen* (natural hot springs bath) overlooking the lake, an elaborate multi-course Japanese dinner clad in *yukata*, a cotton kimono-like robe, and a restful night on futons made up on the tatami-matted floor as the rain continued to fall.

By morning the clouds were breaking up a bit, and we continued our odyssey at the Mishima Skywalk, a pedestrian suspension bridge, where Mt. Fuji revealed herself intermittently. After a bullet-fast ride on the *shinkansen*, Kyoto awaited where we were based for the remainder of the trip. As the weather had thankfully improved, we were able to see Kyoto's numerous Zen and Pure Land Buddhist temples under sunny skies. One of the most memorable was *Kinkakuji*, The Golden Pavilion. The temple, its upper two stories entirely clad in gold leaf, was built as a retirement villa for the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and became a Zen temple after his death in 1408 at his request.

Our tea ceremony experience commenced one afternoon at the Four Seasons Hotel in Kyoto, where we gathered in successive small groups and were ushered into the calmly-lit tea house in the garden behind the hotel. The tea master's movements were slow, controlled, and almost meditative as he dipped water out of the kettle, measured powdered tea with the bamboo tea scoop (which we were told is over 400 years old and was made by the Edo-period tea master Kobori



Docents in front of the Mishima Skywalk, the longest pedestrian-only suspension bridge in Japan

Enshu), and briskly stirred the tea with the bamboo whisk. Our beautiful tea bowls ranged from understated Raku ware to a whimsical bowl decorated with bears playing soccer, reportedly once used by David Beckham. As our guide pointed out, the tea ceremony is about enjoying the moment and everyone certainly did.

A day trip into the surrounding countryside began with a quick stop in the town of Shigaraki, in Shiga prefecture, which is one of the “Six Ancient Kilns” or pottery centers of Japan. The area is known for making quirky ceramic *tanuki* figures, popularly known as “raccoon dogs.” The souvenir store we visited was populated by thousands of these squat creatures with round cheeks and wide eyes, considered to be a symbol of good luck and prosperity, especially for businesses. Once aware of them, we began to see them everywhere: large and small, in parks, outside homes and in small back-alley Shinto shrines.

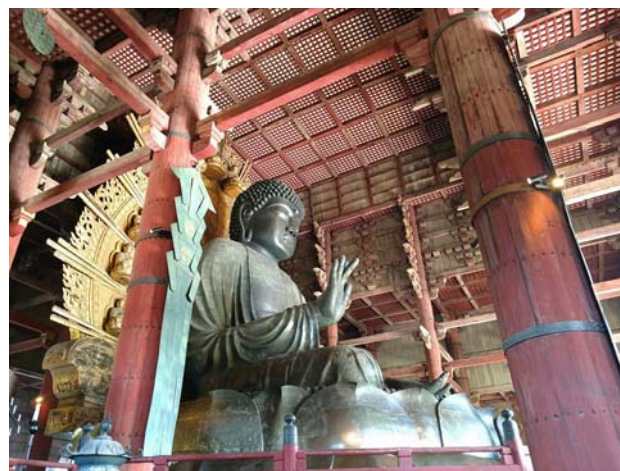


Raccoon dog (*tanuki* in Japanese)

The next stop that day was another small museum tucked into the hills, and it turned out to be one of the highlights of the trip for everyone. The Miho Museum houses the private collection of Mihoko Koyama in a spectacular building designed by I.M. Pei. The museum “mesmerized me,” said Lucy Hicks, with “the location, the building cut into a mountain, the walking path to the facility through a tunnel and over a suspension bridge, and the small but thorough collection of Asian, European, and Arabic objects.” These included an Egyptian hippopotamus statuette, which captivated Lucy, and a *Winged Genius* and *Celestial Horse* similar to those in the Mia collection.

In the short time remaining, we managed two visits to Nara, the first capital of Japan (710-794). The Todaiji Temple notably contains Japan’s largest *Daibatsu*, or Buddha figure, cast in bronze and towering nearly 50 feet tall. The figure, originally cast in 752, has been partially rebuilt twice due to fires and earthquakes.

As our trip wound to a close, the rains returned. While many in the group headed to Osaka airport to begin the long journey back to Minnesota, others remained to continue their Japan experience a bit longer. Everyone was left with a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Japanese art, culture and history, and more excited than ever to present Mia’s Japanese art objects on our tours.



*Daibatsu* figure in the Todaiji Temple, Nara

## MUSINGS FROM IPE

*Debbi Hegstrom*

We recently had the annual Continuing Education session for *Winterlights*, the December tour of the month. There was great energy in the room as we discussed ways to create a meaningful dialogue that invites voices from many different cultures. At this time of year, I’m reminded of how many commonalities and shared values there are among the various traditions represented in our worldwide collection.

Mia has embarked on a major initiative to insure we are a welcoming

and inclusive place for all of our visitors. We've had some great discussions with you about how to make tours and art cart experiences open and welcoming. We'll continue the conversation through reflection and feedback as we accompany you on tours and at art carts. I appreciate the time and energy many of you have invested in attending our required trainings and your participation in the discussion. For those of you who didn't attend or have not yet watched the video, I invite you to embrace this opportunity to learn more about the good work we will all do together.

We currently have two museum professionals from China spending time with us in Learning Innovation and with other staff in the museum. It's a remarkable opportunity to talk and learn about similarities and differences in the way we experience the museum world. It's rewarding to talk about issues we all face in recruitment, training, and retention of volunteers. As I've discussed the docent program with them, I'm proud of the passionate commitment so many of you have made to lifetime learning and to making our museum a place where people want to return time and again.

As we anticipate the return of the sun and longer days of light ahead, I wish you the happiest of holiday seasons and lots of rest and refreshment for body and soul with your friends and family.

---

**2017-2018 Docent Executive Committee**

Chair	Lin Stein
Chair Elect	Nancy Kelly
Treasurer	Gail Gresser-Pitsch
Secretary	Susan Burnett
Communications	Suzanne Zander
Social Co-Chairs	Michele Yates and Kathy Rothenberger
Muse Editor	Jeanne Lutz
Honorary Docents	Pat Wuest*

**2017-2018 Team *Muse***

Publisher	Merritt Nequette
Editor	Jeanne Lutz
Associates	Charles Botzenmayer Brenda Haines Bruce Robbins Meg Ubel

\*New Honorary Docent representative