

## HURRY, CLOSES SOON! *EGYPT'S SUNKEN CITIES*

Kay Quinn

Don't miss it! The latest *Mia Highlights* mailing urges patrons to see it now. *Egypt's Sunken Cities* opened in November 2018 and quickly nears the end of its unprecedented six-month run. Docents, let's reflect: what has it been like, touring this very special exhibition?

### Rewarding

This is a beautifully staged experience for visitors and docents alike. Luminescent blue colors imitate an underwater excursion, enhanced throughout by stunning photographs and videos from Franck Goddio's underwater archaeological feat.

"A gem of an experience to have in Minnesota," *Egypt's Sunken Cities* tells the epic tale of two lost cities woven into a fascinating tapestry of broad themes: ancient cultural exchange, mysterious religious rites, natural disaster and modern underwater archaeology. We have had no difficulty at all in inspiring wonder on our tours. Docents have found *Egypt's Sunken Cities* to be warmly embraced by visitors of all ages, "from kindergartners to the elderly." Debbi Hegstrom, Mia Senior Educator, finds most rewarding the "thousands of school children who will see this amazing exhibition!"



Part of the docent's challenge is to avoid overwhelming visitors. One docent shares, "I find people getting a bit lost if I tell too many tales of the exotic deities, but they love the focus on Osiris and Isis." Ah, yes, Osiris and Isis – where good triumphs over evil, love triumphs over death. This captivating story, like a good movie, draws visitors into the drama of ancient Egyptian culture and beliefs. Well-prepared Art Adventure groups scramble excitedly to tell us the story.

### SAVE THE DATE

*Art in Bloom*

April 11 through 14

Docent Spring Luncheon

Monday, May 13

### UPCOMING

*Living Clay: Artists Respond to Nature*

Opening March 23

*Hearts of Our People*

Special Exhibition

Opening June 2

### ONGOING

*Egypt's Sunken Cities*

Special Exhibition

Through April 14

*Mapping Black Identities*

Through March 15, 2020

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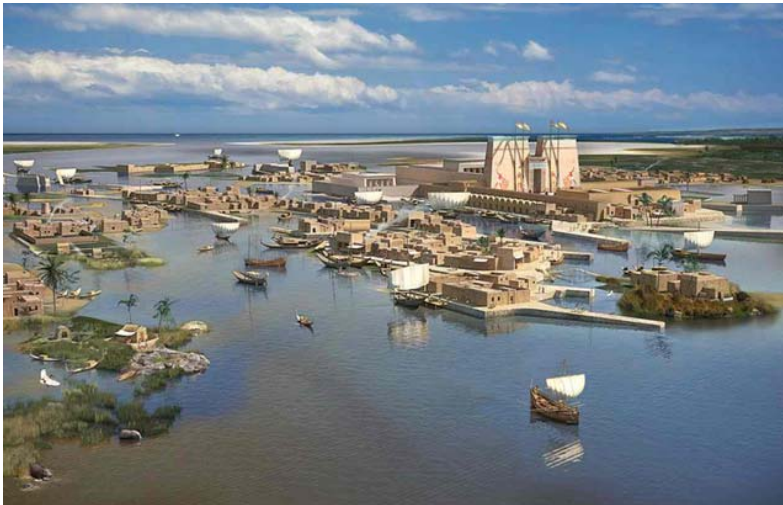
Finding JSTOR in Hennepin County

## Surprising

Beyond the religious mythology laced throughout, there are a myriad of fascinating, jaw-dropping, surprising elements in *Egypt's Sunken Cities*. Here are a few:

The most popular photo opportunities have been the *colossi* – the *Ptolemaic King and Queen* in our Mia Lobby; and *Hapy, God of the Nile*, in the Mia Rotunda. Each weighs as much as a bull elephant (+/-13,000 pounds) and stands as tall as a giraffe (~17 feet).

The city mural that graces the entire entryway wall, *Reconstitution of the Town of Thonis-Heracleion* by Yann Bernard, imagines what the lost port city looked like. In the mural, the artist has cleverly positioned our *Ptolemaic King and Queen* at the entrance of the temple. *Hapy, God of the Nile*, is featured in the right foreground. The mural is both orienting and thought-provoking, and the surprise *colossi* are a delight for visitors.



Regarding the cities' disappearance, especially amazing is the concept of *liquefaction*: moisture-laden soil liquefying when under stress (e.g., earthquakes, heavy temple buildings, tsunamis). My favorite, inelegant demonstration video is [here](#). *Take a look!* As Dr. Martin Pepper, American geologist, says in the video, "That's what happened in Mexico. That's what happened in San Francisco. That's what happens all over the globe...when the earth shakes." This is what scientists think happened to Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus about 1300 years ago.

## Popular!

*Egypt's Sunken Cities* has been hugely popular. Per Eric Bruce, Mia's Head of Visitor Experience, "We're right on track to hit our attendance goal. We've had a little over 90,000 visitors over the last 16 weeks! [as of 2/21/19]. We've been set back just a touch by the unrelenting snow this February, but feel confident the show will hit or exceed all of its marks."

Eric is pleased the show "has the highest 'NPS' in Mia's exhibition history, since we've been measuring it. So, people love it." He explains,



## LET THE SUNSHINE IN

Our Docent community has for years utilized the Sunshine Fund to extend support and condolences to one another in times of loss, grief and illness. A thoughtful card or bouquet can mean so much.

But now, our Fund needs your help! Please consider a gift to the Sunshine Fund today.

Make checks payable to  
Docents of the MIA  
c/o James Allen  
2 Ironwood Lane  
Saint Paul, MN 55127

Or Venmo to 'Mia Docents.'

And thank you!

*Sunburst*, 1999  
Dale Chihuly  
Blown glass, neon, metal armature  
Gift of Funds from  
Donna and Cargill MacMillan Jr.  
99.132  
G100

“An NPS or ‘Net Promoter Score’ is a tool used...to measure the popularity of a product, etc. It essentially measures the willingness to recommend something to a friend.” He adds, “98% of exhibition visitors say they’ve had a ‘Superior’ or ‘Excellent’ experience. We’ve converted nearly 10,000 new Mia members.” Impressive, indeed!

Our esteemed Tour Coordinators, Jennifer Curry and Paula Warn, report that the Tour Office has served over 25,000 *Egypt’s Sunken Cities* visitors. Our Guided Tours have served almost 13,000 visitors; Stop & Chats over 5800; and Public Tours almost 1600. Special Event “Ask Me” docents served another 1200, and we’ve had almost 4000 self-guided visitors. Jennifer summed it up, “As you can see, it’s been busy!”

### **Collaborative**

When asked what she found most memorable about this exhibition, Kara ZumBahlen, Mia Associate Educator, cited three successful partnerships: the Art Adventure (AA) program, Collection in Focus (CIF) guides, and Visitor Experience (VE) volunteers.

It was a brand new experience for docents to lead AA tours, necessary due to other AA obligations and the current AA guide training program. Kara commended docents on how great it was “to see how you all took on that challenge. Kudos go to you all for touring it so well!”

For this exhibition, there have been no guided tours during peak times (e.g., weekends, holidays). Instead, docents and CIF guides partner at the Stop & Chat station, which has been abuzz with activity. According to Debbi Hegstrom, Stop & Chat has proven successful and will probably be used in the future, when resources allow. For adult tours, VE volunteers have been welcome partners in efficiently organizing visitors and managing headset usage. We would be lost without them. [See Terry Keir’s article about VE elsewhere in this issue. -Ed.]

### **The Final Word**

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to all who have so willingly and adeptly contributed their time and talent – and continue to do so – over what may be the longest-running special exhibition. Debbi adds, “People have stepped up to the challenge and given Mia many hours of their time. We are grateful for your good work!”

Only about 10% of Abukir Bay has been excavated; perhaps one day we will be back showing *Egypt’s Sunken Cities II*. Who knows?

PS: Don’t miss [The Making of Egypt’s Sunken Cities](#), Meg Ubel. *The Docent Muse*, December 2018.

## WAY BEYOND POTS

*Mary Ann Wark*

In just a few days Mia will open an exhibition featuring the work of some remarkable artists. Aaron Rio, the Andrew W. Mellon Associate Curator of Japanese and Korean Art, has assembled both Mia-owned and privately-collected ceramic objects from the last decade or two to introduce emerging Japanese clay artists. Now, if you’re thinking



“more pots,” think again. These works positively glow with the vibrancy of the natural world in ways guaranteed to surprise.

The Mia exhibition *Living Clay: Artists Respond to Nature*, beginning on March 23, coincides with the opening of the convention of the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) in the Twin Cities (March 23-30). The NCECA website lists several other local exhibitions that have been organized to coincide with this convention, as well.

Rio noted, as he curated this show, that so many of the objects shared inspirations: they celebrate nature with biomorphic and organic forms usually found in the laboratory, under the microscope, or deep in the woods or the ocean. Here you will find shapes inspired by cells and mold, flora and exotic natural growth. Here are nature's bounty, diversity and fecundity.

As you tour this exhibition, your reverie in the natural world might be interrupted by the recurring question, “How did they do that?” Building an object in clay requires extensive knowledge of material science, combined with the skill to process the piece through the many steps required for completion. Any poor choice or misstep along the way can doom the piece.

Because clay is malleable but turns out stiff, and because the clay body varies in composition, the ceramicist is constantly testing the limits of the material. Porcelain is very floppy, earthenware less so, and stoneware quite stiff. Porcelain and stoneware are fired at higher kiln temperature than earthenware. Hand coiled, pinched, wheel thrown, or slab-built techniques influence shape and surface. Surface designs are added by incising or applique. A surface can be finished with burnishing, slip (thin clay and water), underglaze color and glazes, overglaze enamel, luster, etc. Kiln fuel and type add other dimensions of variability. These works show great skill in pushing clay to do things it can't do easily.

Men have dominated traditional Japanese ceramics, but since World War II, women have been trained in universities as artists, outside of the traditional Japanese workshop structure. All of the ceramic artists here are living women; a single screen by a man, entitled *Foundation of Light*, is a 2006 work of Kanbe Tomoyuki.

Nakaigawa Yuki lives in an oak forest and is inspired by tiny creatures. In *As they Gather, they Separate*, she imagines the momentary gathering of cells before they divide and replicate. Ironically, the size of this piece is a *tour de force*, created by hand coiling each cell before abrading the surfaces with her fingers and small tools, then covering them in numerous layers of slip. After firing, the pieces were assembled with screws. Enlarging nature, she awakens the viewer to something “missed by the naked eye” (a la Georgia O’Keeffe). The subtle texture and the slightly irregular shape bring this piece to life.

Another monumental piece, Mori Aya's *Physarum*, was inspired by the branching and movement of slime mold. When Mia acquired this sculpture, it was the 26-year-old artist's first piece owned by a mu-



*The Foundation of Light*, 2006  
Kanbe Tomoyuki  
Gold leaf and color on paper  
Gift of Willard and Elizabeth Clark  
2015.114.43



*As they Gather, they Separate*, 2005  
Nakaigawa Yuki  
Stoneware  
Gift of Carol and Jeffrey Horvitz  
2017.139.4A-J



*Physarum*, 2017  
Mori Aya  
Glazed stoneware  
Gift of David T. Frank and  
Kazukuni Sugiyama  
2017.140.1

seum. This hand built and pinched piece bears the fingerprints of the artist and the traditional deep blue Japanese glaze *namako* (“sea cucumber”).

Tokumaru Kyoko taught at the Northern Clay Center in Minneapolis in 2012. The unglazed porcelain work *Cosmic Plants* is slab rolled, delicately thin and shaped – and very fragile. The fluid movement implied by the sculpture is all that much more astonishing.

Katsumata Chieko uses the Shiga clay that is used in Shigaraki, with its naturally rough texture, to hand build sculptural forms inspired by sea life and mineral formations. In *Akoda*, she achieves her soft looking, subtly colored surfaces with great texture and subtle color by applying several layers of colored liquid slip pushed through cheesecloth.

Koike Shōko was the first woman to attend the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in the late 1960s. Though *Shell Vessel* might be considered a functional vase, the snail like twisting progression of the form makes it sculptural as well. She starts with wheel-thrown stoneware vessels and then by hand-building, adds many layers of Shigaraki clay, creating undulating, pinched, irregular edges. The creamy white, opaque slip gives a thick covering while the white and iron oxide glazes define the edges.

*Living Clay* runs through December 8 in galleries 251, 252 and 253. Make sure you check it out, and include it on your tours.

## BUDDHISM: THE POWER OF TRADITION AND THE NOW

*Bruce Robbins*

Winter visitors to Mia pass through three sets of glass doors. They climb into a spacious area of welcome and meet friendly greeters. If they can fend off the temptations of coffee, wine and pastries, attractive gifts, books and cards, and a gallery beckoning on the right, they may climb the stairway ahead into a new and foreign realm. Upon arrival on the second floor, thrust into an ancient world peopled by men with benign smiles, downcast gazes, elaborately draping robes, exotic crowns and remarkable earlobes, these new guests must be wondering! Here is a forest of ancient, Buddhist leaders. Not just a few but more than twenty, counting the ancient heads on the wall.

Close label reading will inform guests that some of the figures are the “Buddha,” the one who had the name Shakyamuni or Gautama or Siddhartha, and who was an actual “person” who lived 2500 years ago and is still revered today. Next, they might read about the Bodhisattva (in Sanskrit, *Avalokiteshvara*), one who achieved Buddhahood but chose to remain attached to the world to help others. They may note parallels to their own religious traditions. And, perhaps, they might begin to distinguish between the Buddha and the Bodhisattva (the Buddha has much simpler clothing!) Then they move on, interested in so much else.



*Cosmic Plants*, 2008  
Tokumaru Kyoko  
Unglazed porcelain  
The Louis W. Hill, Jr. Fund  
2011.82.1



*Akoda*, 2012  
Katsumata Chieko  
Glazed stoneware  
The Ted and Roberta Mann Foundation  
Endowment Fund  
2012.72.2



*Shell Vessel (Kai no utsuwa)*, 1995  
Koike Shōko  
Stoneware with white and brown  
iron oxide glazes  
The Louis W. Hill, Jr. Fund  
2008.17.1A,B

Yet, one might notice, watching the visitors, that during the last few years, three special Buddhist objects have captured their attention in unique ways. These objects are often crowded! No longer was the interest contained to admiration of a sculpture created centuries ago of an even more ancient Buddha. The viewers now discover themselves confronted by works evoking a different kind of realization. The creators (for the makers of Buddhist images are typically not “mere” artists, but ones actively engaged in acts of obeisance, reverence and veneration) meet us in the present moment: today... now. They use history to teach us about the present, and how we should act in the future. Visitors have taken note because these contemporary art objects are so different from their traditional counterparts. Yet there is no doubt they are related.

The first of these special objects is the *Yamantaka Mandala* by monks of the Gyuto Tantric University. This object attracts people of all ages. Without even knowing the story, viewers notice a very colorful, eight-foot square containing a circle of life. Young and old find themselves living around the edge. And further information leads to new wonders: Tibetan Buddhist monks coming in 1991 to teach Twin Cities Tibetans about their own culture and religion; learning about the ephemerality of mandalas, since typically they are destroyed upon completion; 3M's success in creating a more colorful, unique, acrylic sand that could be preserved; remembering and honoring the 1.2 million Buddhists who lost their lives to 20th-century persecution. It's no surprise that this mandala is called *Yamantaka*: the Lord of Death, he commands this universe.

The second object is a sculpture of a Bodhisattva called *Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva (Jūichimen Kannon)*, 2012 by Yūji Honbōri. This eleven-headed figure is very different from the 8th-century older one it copies, currently at a temple in Kyoto, Japan. Both are beautiful. But the contemporary one is made of cardboard. If you look at it one way, it is transparent; look another way and it is opaque. The artist thus exquisitely shows our impermanence – we are all mortal and exist ever so briefly. But the ancient Buddha tells us: you have me and ten Bodhisattvas to help you toward Enlightenment! And the colors! This sculpture is full of colors; so were many of the ancient ones.

The last object is another sculpture, this one of Buddha and called *Reduction 1* by Kondō Takahiro, 2013. The artist's parents were artists and specialized in blue and white porcelain. The label tells us the artist created his own work with new techniques. Takahiro's Buddha seems to glow with shiny droplets on a cobalt body. Takahiro became the Buddha by using his own body as a model for the Buddha. But what finally caused my passion and enthrallment was the glow of Buddha's skin (with perfect lighting for this effect). This sculpture is Takahiro's



*Yamantaka Mandala*, 1991  
Monks of the Gyuto Tantric University  
Colored silicate and adhesive on wood  
Gift of Funds from the Gyuto Tantric University; 3M;  
Construction Materials, Inc.;  
and The Asian Art Council  
92.44  
G212



*Eleven-headed  
Avalokiteshvara  
Bodhisattva (Jūichimen  
Kannon)*, 2012  
Yūji Honbōri  
Cardboard, wood, plastic,  
pigments  
The Joan and Gary Capen  
Endowment  
for Art Acquisition  
2012.32A,B  
Not on View

*Reduction 1*, 2013  
Kondō Takahiro  
Porcelain with blue and green under-  
glazes and "silver mist" overglaze  
The P.D. McMillan Memorial Fund  
2014.64  
G200



response to the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011. The Buddha/Takahiro glows with Enlightenment. Perhaps someday we may all glow from radiation.

Can I ever convey the sense of excitement I feel knowing the power of art can teach and transform our lives? Not adequately. I do know Buddhism is a great paradigm to explore how the past and the present are inexorably intertwined. I am thankful for these artists and, of course, for this museum.

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE VOLUNTEERS

*Terry Keir*

In our focused, single-minded and perhaps somewhat harried efforts to prepare and present the best possible tours, we docents may lose sight of the Big Picture at Mia. Among other things, we likely over-gauge our own roles and under-appreciate the amazing contributions of our volunteer colleagues. And so, the next time you race through the front doors on the way to the Docent Lounge and pass that smiling face, give a smile back, and think, "VEV" (Visitor Experience Volunteer). -Ed.

There's an old saying: "You have only one chance to make a good first impression." At Mia we have a staff, a Visitor Experience (VE) Strategist and hundreds of trained and eager volunteers to assure that impression (not just at the front door, but throughout the visit) is superb.

According to Jenny Rydeen, VE Strategist, Mia couldn't provide great experiences without volunteers. Rydeen stated, "Our job as VE volunteers is to prepare people to have an experience of wonder in the galleries. We do everything we can to make visiting Mia easy and fun. We want people to be able to focus their time and energy on the art, and so we focus on creating an easy entrance and exit experience by welcoming everyone; helping people know that we are a free museum; offering ways they can participate in My Mia; and locating the elevators and specific tours and galleries. We are hosts, and we will bring people to specific locations rather than pointing in one direction and making people locate places on their own."

VE is tasked with taking care of visitors, helping them any way it can, and making the experience at Mia feel seamless. Among the services VE provides: selling tickets and memberships, running the coat check, answering phone calls and emails, greeting school groups, and managing the entrance to special exhibitions. VE has a paid staff of about 30 with temps hired for special exhibitions.

VE volunteers support and supplement the VE paid staff. There are approximately 200 current VE volunteers including corporate volunteer participation from U.S. Bank, Bank of America and community partners like Make It MSP. To date, 150 individual volunteers have participated in *Egypt's Sunken Cities*.

Rydeen stated that Mia is fortunate in having many people interested in volunteering. Volunteer recruitment occurs through an application on the Mia website; [Benevity](#) ("The Benevity Goodness Platform"), which connects corporate employees to volunteer opportunities; Volunteer Match, which matches nonprofit organizations with interested volunteers; information tables at Third Thursdays; and outreach in the neighboring communities. Amazingly, everyone who submits a volunteer application receives an interview. Volunteers who are accepted

attend a three-hour orientation where they are introduced to Mia. They then are paired with an experienced volunteer for their first three shifts.

The VE goal for volunteers is to create easy and enjoyable experiences for visitors. For the volunteer's own experience, VE focuses on making sure that VE volunteers feel cared for, have fun, and feel they have a purpose. There is no promise that the volunteer role will always be easy! Volunteers are asked to respond to an experience survey to rank their experience based on the three goals described above.

Currently VE volunteer efforts are focused in three areas. The first is the Lower Lobby area where volunteers help de-stress first-time visitors by welcoming them, informing them of the coat check location, and guiding them through the entrance. Next, in the Upper Lobby volunteers provide resources for visitors at the Info Bar and answer questions about tours, museum layout and art objects that visitors may wish to view. Finally, in the rotunda on the second floor volunteers move visitors through to lessen congestion for tours, answer questions, provide directions, and assist with listening devices for special exhibitions.

Volunteer shifts range from 2.5 to 4 hours, with the first half-hour used to meet together with the volunteer team to coordinate efforts and meet with Jenny Rydeen or Volunteer Coordinator Michael Bennes for updates. On an average day there are six VE volunteers at Mia, though there may be up to 30 volunteers on busy Thursdays. Volunteer schedules are based on ticket sales, predicted attendance and special events. Visitor Experience staff is always exploring new and varying roles for VE volunteers and different ways volunteers can engage and assist visitors.

We talked with VE volunteers to hear their perspective on volunteering at Mia. Nancy Goldstein enjoys connecting with visitors at Mia who look a little lost or may need guidance in navigating Mia. She appreciates the connections she makes with visitors and mentioned the many times visitors come back to thank volunteers at the end of their visit and talk about specific art or artists they saw during their visit. Nancy said, "Art is personal and many times visitors want to talk and return to volunteers to share stories." Nancy appreciates her fellow volunteers and admires their knowledge, diversity of background, deep commitment, service orientation, and love of art, art history, and the museum.

VE volunteer Andy Handler is, in his words, "crazy about Mia." He feels Mia is a gem of the Twin Cities, and he wanted to be a part of the organization. Andy especially likes volunteering at Third Thursdays, where he really enjoys manning the photo booth. His goal at the photo booth is to encourage fun, get people to interact, and coach poses so the line moves quickly and visitors have a nice souvenir. He enjoys the different themes and the festive nature of Third Thursdays, the balance of age groups, and the non-traditional visitors. He said he feels like a special host.

Mia is fortunate to have Jenny Rydeen, the Visitor Experience staff, and the many VE volunteers who make sure visitors have a "wonder experience." Please thank them at your next opportunity.



Susan and Andy



Sue with two visitors at the *Egypt* photo booth



Make It MSP volunteer, Kate and Andy



# DEAR DIARY – NEVER SINCE WE LEFT PRAGUE

Jeanne Lutz

after the painting by Leonora Carrington

Mrs. Stackabones calls to say, "Why don't you  
knuckle down and knock out a novel?" Hypochondriacs  
are always the last to die. The mud-caked mother ship  
too heavy to get off the ground sits there solid  
as a mountain although everyone believes it is flying. He says  
the right words at the right time, frozen lakes are traversed  
by wearing special shoes, we regain power  
to respond to the stars, the past piles up like laundry,  
someone makes an irrevocable choice, tame snakes  
make us wild and another wave reaches the shore.  
Someone spots goldrush leftovers, she opens  
her purse and hornets fly out, the mailman clears  
the hedge in one elegant leap, everything is forgiven,  
and winged things rule the world.



*Dear Diary—Never Since We Left Prague, 1955*

Leonora Carrington

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Maxine and Kalman S. Goldenberg

2005.127.2

G376

## FINDING BLACK IDENTITY WITH DELITA MARTIN

Brenda Haines

In today's fractured civic discourse, raising the subject of "identity" is sure to cause dissension. The notion of belonging to (or the companion power to exclude someone from) a particular cultural or racial group raises strong feelings in just about everyone. There is no consensus about what concerns are legitimate or who should have the right to decide, or even discuss, such issues. The controversy over Senator Warren's DNA test provides just one example.

We face (or choose to ignore?) in these discussions of identity the persistent damage caused by Colonial practices, which uniformly assumed the superiority of anything Western, Christian, White and straight. These ethnocentric assumptions, narcissistic and baseless as they may be, shamed people for using their own language or participating in their own cultural heritage, rendering damage both deeply felt and difficult to rectify. We all live with the ongoing consequences today.

*Mapping Black Identities*, the exhibition now open in G373 and G374, explores post-colonial Black identity in a "layered, complex, intersectional, and deeply personal" way that seeks to counter the notion that Blackness is monolithic. The exhibited works showcase the multidimensional nature of Black identity by reminding us that each group is as diverse as the differences among its individual members; and conversely, that human kind's regrettable tendency toward exclusion and stereotyping unfairly limits our access to the wonderful richness and variety of existence that is our human heritage.

Docents will find information on the IPE website about the artists, photos, artist statements, and definitions of the terms used in the exhibit. Clearly, knowledge of these artists' biographical information is important to encourage the type of conversation the exhibit hopes to provoke – one that looks at the panoply of Black identities "through an intersectional conversation that takes into account race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion and more."

Such conversations are crucial to breaking down stereotypes. One such conversation concerned Delita Martin, whose works, *The Soaring Hour (Self Portrait)* and *Between Sisters* are featured in *Mapping Black Identities*. Martin has been criticized in the past for works featuring Black women in headscarves, which some viewers complained were reminiscent of "Mammy" images, a long-standing stereotype in white media. Such criticism is ironic given that Martin's career has focused on addressing media stereotypes of black women. Her response, however, is specific and personal: "This is my heritage, where I come from, which is very important to me... The women in my family were so powerful..., pillars in the community and in the home..., quilt makers, storytellers, and this is my way of visually telling these stories and recording my history."



*The Soaring Hour (Self Portrait)*, 2018

Delita Martin, American

Relief printing, charcoal, acrylic, colored pencil,  
decorative papers, hand stitching  
Gift of funds from Barbara Longfellow  
On view in about six months in G374



*Between Sisters*, 2012

Delita Martin, American

Acrylic, charcoal, colored pencil, decorative papers,  
hand stitching  
Gift of funds from Lucy Mitchell, Julie Steiner,  
and Kaywin Feldman and Jim Lutz  
G374

By addressing the rich and multi-dimensional nature of the woman beneath the head-scarf, Martin's art, in effect, reclaims a cultural artifact and directly counters the stereotype the symbolic headscarf evoked. Martin frequently employs symbols in her art as part of the layering process she uses to give her portraits of black women dimension and substance. Her portraits are not individuals, but composite characters, richly imagined, who take on the iconic nature of characters in a novel. Martin says she discovers her women through an intuitive process in which they "come alive" and tell her their "story."

Like Wanda Gag, Martin had a "magical" childhood, growing up in a large, extended family with an artistic father who was a major source of inspiration and support for her artistic ambitions and who gave her the freedom to make discoveries on her own. Making quilts with her grandmother gave her an appreciation for layering and how personal history can enhance a work. Her grandmother knew where each scrap of fabric came from and always had a story to go with it. When she discovered printmaking, Martin discovered a process that facilitated the layering that helped her multidimensional characters come alive. In her words:

"Working from oral traditions, vintage and family photographs as a source of inspiration, my work explores the power of the narrative impulse. My process of layering various elements, printmaking, drawing, sewing, collaging, and painting techniques allow me to create portraits that fuse the real and the fantastic."

Find the rich diversity of the Black experience in the work of Delita Martin and the other artists featured in *Mapping Black Identities*, running until March, 15, 2020.

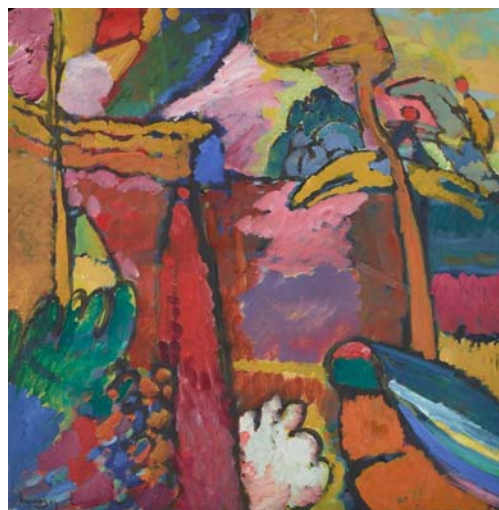
## THE COLOR AND SPIRITUAL INNER RESONANCE OF VASSILY KANDINSKY

Lucy Hicks

Suddenly, Mia and its website are awash with brilliant, random, eye-catching primary colors. Are the signs at the entrance and on the online "Art+Artists" screen designed to convey a substantive (even apocalyptic, according to the gallery label for *Study for Improvisation V*) message, or, instead, merely to provide frozen, snow-challenged Minnesotans some relief from their grim landscape?

In some sense, the work of Vassily Kandinsky was the product of, but also the antidote to, a very grim landscape, indeed – that of repressive Russian and German regimes, and the horrors of "the war to end all wars." A new world opened in the first decades of the new century for artists to reject established norms and to express themselves, their thoughts, emotions, politics and spirituality in unfamiliar ways. Kandinsky led the way.

Born in Moscow in 1866 to a well-to-do family, Kandinsky learned to play the piano and cello, and he took to drawing. "I remember that drawing, and a little bit later, painting lifted me out of my reality," he later wrote. Although he found some success in the legal career his



*Study for Improvisation V*, 1910  
Vassily Kandinsky  
Oil on pulp board  
Gift of Bruce B. Dayton  
67.34.2  
G371



parents chose for him, ultimately he was drawn to art after exposure to Monet's *Grainstacks* at an exhibition and Richard Wagner's Romantic opera, *Lohengrin* at the Bolshoi Theatre.

In 1896, Kandinsky began art studies in Munich, painting first in a classical style and later moving to impressionism [*Nymphenburg* (1904)]. Gradually his objects became mere patches of color, as his goal of reflecting the world of emotions on canvas seemed stifled by the tether to objective reality. His forms evolved from fluid and organic to geometric, and finally to pictographic [*Kleine Welten IV* (1922)]. He is credited as the first painter of pure abstraction (a claim that is now much in question – see *Hilma af Klint, Paintings of the Future*, currently showing at the Guggenheim).

Kandinsky strove for a painting in which colors, lines, and shapes, freed from the distracting business of depicting recognizable objects, might evolve into a fuller visual language as abundantly expressive as the abstract vocabulary of music. Early on, Kandinsky “saw all my colors in spirit before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me,” leading to the notion of painting as pure color, creating an imaginary world, like the world of a symphony. That world was a spiritual realm, a hidden truth. He said “Color is the keyboard. The eye is the hammer and the soul is the piano with its many strings.” In fact, Kandinsky may have experienced synesthesia, a condition where colors and painted marks trigger particular sounds or notes. This cross-wiring in the brain, found in one in 2000 individuals, might explain Kandinsky's childhood experience of “mixing colors in a paint box and hearing strange hissing sounds.”

In his 1911 text, *Considering the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky elevates this notion to a spiritual “inner resonance” evoked by the artist's use of colors.

As World War I began, Kandinsky returned to Moscow and soon married. Those were chaotic times in revolutionary Russia, and Kandinsky's various efforts to settle in, as professor at the Moscow Academy of Fine Arts, a member of the arts section of the People's Commissariat for Public Instruction, as director of the Moscow Museum for Pictorial Culture, professor at the University of Moscow and founder of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences, all proved to be short-lived. The *avant garde* soon gave way to repressive, Leninist Social Realism, and Kandinsky decided to return to Berlin, where he was offered a teaching post at the already famous Bauhaus school of architecture and applied art.

At the time, the Bauhaus was not concerned with the formation of “painters” in the traditional sense of the word, so Kandinsky lectured on the elements of form, gave a course in color, and directed the mural workshop. It wasn't until 1925, when the school moved to Dessau that he had a class in “free,” non-applied painting. The climate was one of research and craftsmanship combined with a certain amount of aesthetic puritanism.

In 1933, the Nazis forced the Bauhaus to close and fired Kandinsky, as the work of the artists in residence was considered “degenerate.”



*Nymphenburg*, 1904  
Vassily Kandinsky  
Oil on canvasboard  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Winston  
81.106.1  
G351



*Kleine Welten IV*, 1922  
Vassily Kandinsky  
Color lithograph  
The Herschel V. Jones Fund, by exchange  
P.79.57  
Not on View

He moved with his wife to Paris where he became a citizen and remained productive until his death in 1944.

It is hard to overstate Kandinsky's influence on 20th-century art. And we at Mia are fortunate to have several examples, from different periods of his development, to study that. But on a cold winter day, with the wind howling and the snow flying, perhaps it's just as well to simply admire the colors, imagine the music playing in the artist's mind, and feel the hum of the spiritual "inner resonance."

## FINDING JSTOR IN HENNEPIN COUNTY

*Lynn Brofman*

Docents: Looking for scholarly information on that object or artist...arcane, curious story, journals, conference proceedings, even primary sources? Perhaps Wikipedia isn't quite getting you to where you want to go?

Time to turn to JSTOR (short for "Journal Storage"). This research resource allows full text searches for 2000 journals, papers, conference reports, and humanities, arts and social science sources. Much of it is fee-based, but there are countless search results that are "public domain," and freely available to anyone.

These instructions apply when using an Apple computer (OS) and Safari browser. I've also done this using an iPad. The process using Windows and Explorer should be similar. The Hennepin County Library has an "Ask Us" on the menu bar. You can access via phone, email, text, or chat. If you're stuck, contact me; I'm happy to help.

We start with the Hennepin County Library [website](#). Log In using your Hennepin County Library card number (bar code) or user name and PIN.

Once in the system,

Option 1: In the search window click on the "Website" tab. Type JSTOR in the search box. If you do this in upper case letters it won't automatically change it to "jester."

Or, Option 2: From the home page menu bar: Click on-line [resources](#). You can then scroll through the alphabetical on-line resources list or you can do a search in order to get to JSTOR more quickly.

The following will then [display](#): "Full-text articles from scholarly journals, conference proceedings, primary sources, and books covering the humanities, social sciences, math and sciences."

Next, Click on the word JSTOR; Then, click on "Connect to this resource." On the JSTOR home page, ("Access provided by Hennepin County Libraries") you will see a search window. There you can type in your subject, e.g. "prairie school," the title of a specific journal or book or other research objective; a list of journal articles will come up.

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