

MAKING NEW TOUR CONNECTIONS

Ingrid Roberts

The connections we make in the course of a life - maybe that's what heaven is.— Mr. Rogers

Two students stand in front of Delita Martin's *Between Sisters*. One student has arms crossed over her chest; the other's right hand protectively covers her left elbow. They are imitating the postures of the two women in the painting. The students' facial expressions also mimic the faces in the frame on the wall. The group has been discussing whether it is possible to communicate without using any words. These third graders enthusiastically agree that our body language can tell a lot about feelings and interactions without even opening our mouths.

Deciphering how people depicted in art are feeling and what they are communicating through their facial expressions and body language is just one of the many ways students visiting Mia can relate to the art. This is a core piece of the *Partnership* tours for Minneapolis Public School (MPS) third graders, building on *Social Emotional Learning (SEL)*, a current educational approach to teach students the skills of social and self-awareness. Our new SEL focused tours are titled *Human Connections: You, I and the World*.

Mia has coordinated with MPS for several years with the goal of offering every third-grader in the district a guided tour of the museum. The Friends of the Institute support this effort by providing free bus transportation. Historically, partnership schools have had the option to choose between two tour themes: VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) or Ancient Cultures; however, this year the *Human Connections (SEL)* tour is the primary partnership tour focus. What about VTS and Ancient Cultures? Never fear: both of these topics can be easily integrated with the *Human Connections* theme by weaving key concepts into object selection and lines of questioning.

Social Emotional Learning is a wonderful vehicle to elevate the conversation for all tour opportunities at Mia, regardless of grade level, age or cultural background. By integrating ideas such as relationships, respect, feelings, and cultural pride into tours, docents help to enhance understanding of the individual and others. Designing tours through the lens of SEL also pairs nicely with Mia's work through the [Center for Empathy and Visual Arts](#) and corresponds directly to Mia's current strategic plan. Although a data-based assessment of these efforts is still in process, the comments and feedback from SEL and empathy-focused tours suggest that a one-hour tour at Mia can help students (and people in general) develop empathy. It is a measurable fact that empathy can be learned; what better tools for teaching this concept than Mia's vast collection of diverse artworks!



Between Sisters, 2018

Delita Martin

Acrylic, charcoal, colored pencil, decorative papers, and hand-stitching on paper
Gifts of Funds from Lucy Mitchell, Julie Steiner, and Kaywin Feldman
2019.35.2
G374

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Musings from IPE

There are many resources available on the IPE website to help plan a *Human Connections: You, I and the World* tour. Sheila McGuire, Head of School and Teacher Programs, has created a detailed tour [description](#), including specific tour goals and objectives, as well as a list of activities and strategies. From role playing, striking poses, and using problem solving skills, there is plenty of room for creativity and group interaction. Third graders can practice conflict resolution and helping skills by addressing questions like, “What would you do in this situation?” or “How might you help a person if you were there?”

Looking for help in choosing tour objects? You will find a list of suggestions, including works from a variety of cultures and time periods, in the *Human Connections* tour description. To aid in making cultural connections with your third-grade group, be sure to consult the resource document on IPE indicating the ethnic breakdown for each Partnership school. This same spreadsheet also shows the MPS [schools](#) already participating in the Social Emotional Learning Initiative being rolled out incrementally district wide.

Finally, check the IPE site for Sheila McGuire’s meeting notes from the recent *Human Connections* conversations to capture thoughts and ideas for these new tours. Docents may continue sharing successful tour ideas and objects directly with [Kara ZumBahlen](#), who will add them to a group document, also available on IPE.

Good luck with this new and important tour theme, *Human Connections: You, I and the World!* And thanks to Mr. Rogers, who always had a way of explaining things so nicely.

These objects have been used in *You, I and the World* SEL tours with Minneapolis Public School third-graders:



Monkeys in Pine Trees, 1853
Kishi Renzan
Ink and color on paper
Gift of Elizabeth and Willard Clark
2013.30.15
Not on View



Basket, early 20th century
Unknown artist, Somalia
Fibers, leather, beads, cowrie shells, cloth
The Mary Ruth Weisel Endowment for Africa,
Oceania, and The Americas
2010.73
G254



Cape, c. 1840-1890
Dakhóta
Hide, beads, cotton, silk
The Robert C. Winton Fund and Gift of
Funds from Constance Kunin
2007.102.1
G259

INTERVIEW WITH PAULA WARN AND JENNIFER CURRY

Kathryn Schwyzer

If you could interview anyone at Mia who would it be? As a docent my choice would be Jennifer and Paula in our tour office. I was thrilled when these two paragons of discretion agreed to sit down with me one afternoon and answer my questions.

KS Where did you work before Mia? How long have you worked here?

PW I came from the Milwaukee Public Museum where I did pretty much the same thing I'm doing at Mia. I've been at Mia for over 20 years. I am myself an artist. Art and art museums are my thing.

JC I studied art history in college and came to Mia as an intern. I've been here for eighteen years and it's the first and only grown-up job I've had.

KS How did you end up in Minnesota?

PW I went to art school in Milwaukee. I came here because there is a more vibrant art community. We considered Chicago but we're outdoorsy people and so Minnesota made more sense; also we have family here.

JC I have a twin sister and a brother who were both moving to Minnesota.

PW Interestingly, Jennifer and I grew up in different suburbs of Milwaukee but only about 20 minutes from each other. We didn't know each other or go to the same high school.

KS I marvel at how you know everyone's name. How do you do it?

JC It's one of the things we happen to be really good at. We have an easier time with first names. Last names take a bit longer.

PW I never forget a face. Of course, the badges help. I always say Good Morning with the name to help reinforce the name with the face. It's how we get to know people.

KS What is your favorite work of art?

JC I can't decide, and it changes all the time.

PW It changes weekly, daily. I get inspiration from a lot of different artworks.

KS What drives you up the wall about your job?

JC I don't know that I have an answer to your specific question but what makes the job tricky is the weather. Snow and weather issues delay the volunteers and the school groups. It's difficult knowing that you're going into a day that's going to be crazy. And winter is coming.

PW It's quiet in the summer and then busy busy busy in the Spring.

KS Do special exhibitions create more work or difficulties?

PW They create more work but not more difficulties.

JC There is a different energy with a special exhibition. But every exhibition is different.

KS Do you ever attend the lectures in the Pillsbury Auditorium?

JC Sometimes we do. We sneak in and sit in the back.



KS What is the most unusual request for a tour you've ever gotten?

PW We get some interesting requests, for example, wedding groups or furniture groups. We try our best to assign appropriately.

JC One of my favorites was a group of medical students who wanted a VTS tour. They wanted to learn how to look really deeply – what do you see? – to help with diagnostic efforts. It was a cool intersection of the medical and art world.

KS How do you assign docents to tours?

JC Docents talk about tours they are working on and we listen to them. We try our best to accommodate people.

PW We get to know people. We know who likes to be challenged or not. We do get a sense of what docents like to do. For example, if we know someone is a quilter or ceramicist we do our best to match them with those tours.

JC As we've gotten to know the volunteers, we get to know their interests. We try to match docents with their strengths and likes. For example, if you don't like 5-year-olds, we won't schedule you for that tour.

KS How do you manage to stay calm?

JC Experience and perspective. We've been here long enough so that we know that some things that may seem catastrophic, in the grand scheme of things, are not. We're both pretty calm people.

KS What scheduling software do you use?

JC It's an in-house system called Artifax. It was a ticketing system customized for us.

PW We schedule over 300 volunteers and when it crashes we do have to work at staying calm.

KS When you are assigning tours, are you keeping track of the number of tours each of the docents has had for the year? Is there any effort on your part to make sure we're all relatively equal, or is that something you are not involved with?

JC Yes, Paula and I try to manage volunteer credits for everyone as well. Our scheduling system has a running tally that allows us to see everyone's credits when we're assigning. We do our best to try and get everyone to their required tour credits.

KS What is your favorite time of year?

JC We love April and May. So many tour groups come in and it's very busy. The day goes very fast. It's constant. Then when June comes it's nice to have a break.

KS How do you two get along?

JC It's a very small office and we do work well together. I see Paula more than I see my husband. Paula is one of the most detailed people I've ever met. That's a huge strength. We both have access to the schedule. If I can't get into something, she's got it

PW We keep up a running commentary with each other throughout the day.

KS Jennifer, I see you walking around the museum in your lunch hour. How many steps do you walk every day?

JC I try to get 15,000 a day.

DOCENT FORUM / SPRING 2020

Tamara Meyer

The Docent Executive Committee is looking for your assistance in planning the 2020 Spring Docent Forum. On behalf of the DEC, we are asking for your ideas and thoughts on topics, discussions, presentations or conversations.

Please contact any of the following committee members with your suggestions and ideas:

Board Chair - Tamara (Tammy) Meyer

Chair-Elect - Sheila-Marie Untiedt

Secretary - Kathryn Schwyzer

Social Chair - Karen Kletter

Communications - Jan Lysen

Treasurer - Jim Allen

Muse Editor - Mark Catron

Honorary Docent Representative -
Pat Wuest

Senior Educator - Debbi Hegstrom

We hope to hear from you. Thank You.

KS What do you do with the money for the photocopier?

JC We really do send it to the accounting department.

KS What rules would you post on the whiteboard in the docent lounge?

JC & PW Clean up after yourself. Please don't leave cups around.

KS Can you hear what people are talking about in the lounge?

JC We hear the voices but don't really listen to them.

PW As soon as I hear the door open, I say hello. The volunteers are why we're here. I think they are fascinating individuals. Working here so long, we've been able to build relationships with them.

KS Speaking about the lounge, how many times a day do people ask you about the weather?

JC It's non-stop. Not just volunteers. Even the staff ask us because they work in offices without windows. Sometimes we get phone calls from other departments about the weather.

KS Is there anything else you'd like to add?

PW I personally love my job. I think what we do is important and far-reaching.

KS Who is your favorite volunteer?

PW and **JC** (Silence and *Mona Lisa* smiles)

DOCENTS REFLECT ON *ARTISTS RESPOND AND* *ARTISTS REFLECT*

Although unfortunately somewhat sparsely attended, this special exhibition, far more than most, packs a powerful punch. Many of these artists make dramatic, direct, visceral and emotional statements. These works were generally not meant to please wealthy patrons or hang on sterile museum walls, but to slam deeply into the consciousness and conscience of a passively blasé American public. Their messages are meant to sway opinion and move viewers to active response. And many of our visitors have expressed strong reactions. Here's what touring docents are saying.

—Ed.

Each tour has been unique, driven by visitors: Vietnam Vets with very personal perspectives; young people who know very little about that time in history; an older couple who spoke of the ways the war fundamentally changed our culture and family life. A grim intensity predominates the exhibition, so I have tried to offer an occasional reprieve by showing something in each gallery that is more on the light side, e.g. Corita Kent's screenprints, Yoko Kusama's *Anatomic Explosion on Wall Street*, and Philip Guston's *San Clemente*. I make it part of my pre-tour routine to read some of the remarkably varied responses that visitors have taken the time to write, reminding me to really stop and listen as we go.

Sara Wagner

I've toured AR only three times. Prior to the first tour, I prepared as much as I have for any special exhibition. I tried to be as exhaustive as possible (hoping not to be exhausting), as if the assembled group would pretty much follow me, and my every word, through each gallery. But as soon as we passed W-A-R/R-A-W, I noticed people starting to scatter. What – they weren't waiting to hear all my acquired wisdom! Occasionally, they would circle around and listen to what I was saying. But they wandered around the galleries, drawn to one thing or another as memories or shocking images drew them in. From the looks of things, their memories were about as old as mine. Many were "of a certain age" and remembered first-hand the Viet Nam conflict.

I quickly adjusted my style. From then on, I presented one or maybe two objects from each gallery. Then I gave them a green light to wander. I suggested that when they saw me waving my hand, we would all move to the next gallery. This has worked well, with positive feedback.

Though an avid supporter of VTS, I am happy with this BC (Border Collie) approach for *Artists Respond*. It gives me a little time to put forth a theme for each gallery, and it gives the guests time to wander around and contemplate art that perhaps brings forth deep memories that flood our hearts and minds when we think about war.

Bill Wilson

Re: Artists Reflect

During the first week of the exhibition, I invited Lee Pao Xiong on an informal walk-through. We first met after one of the preparatory sessions for touring *Artists Respond/Artists Reflect*. He is the director of Hmong Cultural Studies at Concordia University in Saint Paul. During our conversations in the galleries, I learned so much. Lee told me the story of the CIA "secret war" in Laos and Cambodia; this is not just history for him; it is personal. As a child, Lee fled his country, lived in refugee camps, and eventually settled in the United States. I learned the effect of the war on the Hmong people and how they responded, artistically and culturally. The photos of Pao Houa Her capture the dignity and honor of the men who served, standing tall and proud, per the label, "wearing uniforms that make their experience visible in the manner of traditional U.S. military portraits."

Nor will I forget the work of Tuan Andrew Nguyen, a three-part sculpture commemorating the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc, who set himself on fire and burned to death in Saigon on June 11, 1963, protesting the brutal policies against Buddhists carried out by a corrupt South Vietnamese president who was set up by the U.S. government. The object consists of three carved Louisville Slugger bats full of flames. They connect baseball, America's pastime, to the horrors of war. I am grateful for curators at Mia and their wisdom for connecting the "then and now" of the war and the community of Hmong who are our neighbors and friends.

Bruce Robbins

Random observations...

At *House Beautiful* and *The Eleventh Hour Final* we spoke of how the information going directly from newsmen and photographers in the war bypassed the Pentagon's propaganda machine. Several guests mentioned the modern concept of "fake news," and some were nostal-



Civilian Victim, 1967
Philip Jones Griffiths
Gelatin silver print
Gift of Stephen Daiter
88.92
Not on View



22, 1993-2001
From the 50-panel series *Hmong Migrations*,
1993-2001
Cy Thao
Oil on canvas
Gift of Funds from Anonymous Donors
2010.55.22
G266-G274

gic for news one could trust. We longed for a father figure like Walter Cronkite again.

At *Vietnam Inc* a guest noted the story of GIs trying to show local peasants better hygiene and demonstrating by giving an infant a bath. She berated the GIs for poor hygiene as they had chosen a bin for storing vegetables to give the bath and were grossed out by a dirty infant having a bath in it. That created a chuckle.

At Q. *And babies?* many remembered the horror of learning about Mi-Lai and anger at the cover-up.

At Golub's *Vietnam II*. there were discussions about the tradition of creating art to visualize the horrors of war going back to *Guernica* and Goya.

At Hedrick's *War Room* some felt that the black box would be a good place to stuff all the bad news and distortion.

Everyone loves *Mi Vida*.
Jim Allen

I immediately felt at ease as the guests were acquainted and had walked through the exhibition prior to the tour. They were engaged, and the images generated constant conversation as they shared memories of time, place, and events during that chaotic period of history. This tour could have easily lasted much longer. I believe the fact that the guests had wandered through the exhibition prior to the tour impacted the high level of inquiry. This is the only tour I have completed upon writing this reflection.

Tamara Meyer

I have led two public tours for *Artists Respond and Artists Reflect* and found the attendance numbers small, but the guests, emotionally involved and eager to talk – both about the exhibit and their own life experiences. At the end, when I ask which pieces were particularly meaningful, the floodgates open and visitors start talking about the pieces and relating them to their own lives.

I've learned remarkable things, from both vets and those who stayed home. Different pieces trigger different feelings. One man talked about the shame of coming home and how *Mudman* exemplified that for him. A woman was moved by Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* that signified to her women's helplessness before the male war machine. Another woman reacted to Tiffany Chung's *Flight Routes*, remembering a happy moment in California when she met the first plane of orphan children coming from Vietnam and describing the joy of holding a refugee baby for the first time.

These images are what will stay with me from this exhibition and I am glad Mia is hosting it. I have invited a number of people I know to this exhibition. Many turn it down, because they say they "lived" that period and found it too painful. There may not be the highest attendance for this exhibition, but I believe those who come do so because they need to reflect on things both good and bad, and Mia enables them to do this.

Margo Squire



Mi Vida
Jesse Trevino

SHADOWING TOM

Boyd H. Ratchye

"I've learned that there are times that we all misspeak – times when our train of thought seems to have left the station without us. At moments like these, it's always good to remember the best thing about being wrong: it brings great joy to others." Tom Byfield, from *The Making of a Docent*

In the early autumn light at Lakewood Chapel, Tom Byfield's children honor him with loving candor, how he could be howling great fun but also a demanding and intimidating father. As they shared their memories of his life with them and their mother, they were as honest with us as he had been in their lives.

In 2010 Tom's skills as a Mia docent were well known, and the staff employed him to train wannabe docents in training, me among them. To "shadow" a docent is to observe the senior docent plan a tour, select some art to show, create a theme, meet the tour group, welcome them and then lead the tour. The shadowing junior is to learn and then to return to Wednesday class better prepared to work up a tour and do one of their own...and while shadowing to keep out of the way and keep your mouth shut.

Tom had some gifts for me that day. We met in the lounge; he knew what he was to do; no planning that I observed; I knew what I was to do, and we started off. At this distance in time and place, I cannot remember the theme of the tour or where he took us.

The tour began. And in the first twenty minutes every single date Tom mentioned was wrong. Not in error by a decade or two, wrong by a century or two. No one on the tour said a word. Finally, I said, "Tom, the Spanish Armada was in 1588, not 1688." Someone said, "You know, your date wasn't the date of the Glorious Revolution. You know?" Finally, another woman on the tour: "I wonder. Actually, Churchill was Prime Minister in 1941, not 1914. Really."

I turned away; in a finger snap I figured full well he had lost control of the tour: it would spiral downhill and none would enjoy the time or the place or the art. It was going nowhere. I thought, "Oh great, I'm shadowing a failure of a tour."

Turning back to Tom I caught his eye. Saying nothing, I looked at him with my eyes wide and surprised and I am sure with "What the Hell?" on my pursed lips. Tom met my look directly and shrugged his shoulders; he was smiling and gave me a non-verbal, full caps 'SO...'

He then turned back to the tour, frisky and engaged, thanked all for the comments, said they were helpful and he was glad to be corrected and told them to speak up as we went along. I have no memory of where we went, but we were on tour and on the move.

And we, the docent, his shadow and his group did just that: we walked along and we just kept on task, no defensiveness, no challenges to any one, no sense of anything out of the ordinary. We just finished the tour, and Tom enjoyed himself and the Mia guests enjoyed him and his tour.

LOOKING FOR WRITERS

Do you have a Mia story to tell? Perhaps an idea for a great tour, or some really deep research on a favorite art piece? Have you received inspiration from a fellow docent or staff member you think deserves some attention? The next issue of the Muse will come out in March (writers' deadline February 21, 2020), and we're holding space for you. Contact for questions, comments, guidelines: [Mark Catron](#).



*A Young Man Seated
at a Desk Writing,
18th-19th century
Attributed to
Pierre-Paul Prud'hon
Graphite and esstompe
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund
68.53.6
Not on View*

What an instant lesson for the junior docent: stay on task, solicit input, accept unfiltered comments and be open for them even if they challenge what you just said. You are giving a tour to interested friends, and you accept them and they accept you. This was his first gift to his shadow, even though I broke the rules and helped along a cascade of unlikely comments.

I did not know it in 2010, but in a few years I realized Tom's shrug had a broader meaning and impact for me than I sensed that day. From the get-go I had wanted docent work to be much more than an immersion in art and touring, more than learning and sharing. My mission was to grow out and away from the practice of law and its ways of thinking and being. I had a good run as a trial lawyer; that life and work had encouraged me to be competitive, combative, aggressive. I thrived; elements innate to me fit well in the law. They were encouraged whenever I tried lawsuits for clients. In those cases, I strove to get the edge and control. But I was ready to move on.

Docent work at Mia was to be something new. I did not know what exactly I was looking for, but 'it' was out there, and I was going to get 'it' at Mia, to create a different life after the law. (Since 2010 I have learned most of my class shared unspoken hopes of shaking loose from a rewarding past to meet an unknowable future.)

In a few years doing tours, I came to understand that Tom showed me what I was looking for. He signaled that I could live my life fully and more quietly. I did not have to be in control. I could accept a challenge without defensiveness, live through a criticism I did not like. Tom's enjoyment in finishing the tour in the face of his errors showed me another way to live. His shrug opened the gate to new ways of reacting or, perhaps, ways of not reacting, not seeking an edge, not angling for control of the people in my life and my daily reality: stay on task and enjoy the journey, wherever it happens to go, up or down or planned or lurching off to somewhere unforeseen.

Tom taught a good lesson for tours and the reality of my own life beyond Mia – well beyond the practice of law. All in one tour – instant recognition of his high docent skills and then for the slow revealing of a new way for me to live and think.

Now Tom is gone. But his shadow falls on my every tour, reminding me to keep on task, telling me to enjoy it. And his shadow guides me in a new life.

Thank you, Tom. Good-bye,
Your loving friend, Boyd



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

LET'S TALK TOURS

Karen Kletter

One of the greatest things about being a docent is chatting with colleagues about their tours in the "Let's Talk Tours" Study Group. We gather informally to exchange ideas and facilitate learning from each other. We typically hear from a docent who has given a tour that may have an interesting theme, has great research, or uses objects that are usually ignored. If you would like to be part of the group, check for meeting times on the bulletin board in the lounge or contact [me](#).

The study group met in November to hear from Jeanne Lutz about her October public tour, *Non-Conforming Art*. Debbi Hegstrom provided touring docents a preparation sheet with suggestions for objects. Debbi's final tour is posted on the IPE website under "Research Resources/Tour Topics and Themes/Shared Tour Outlines." Scroll down to "Public tour outlines..." where you will find "2019.10 Non-conforming art." What follows here is how Jeanne designed her tour. (Other *Let's Talk Tours* outlines are also found on the same web page.)

Jeanne began her tour by soliciting from her groups a definition of what it means "to conform." They generally noted that to conform is to adhere to "socially accepted standards and expectations." Jeanne reminded her group that past experiences in museums and viewing art might influence what art an individual considers "acceptable" or conforming. Jeanne emphasized that the goal of the tour's conversation was to look at works that didn't conform to personal or cultural expectations. The hope was that the group would gain a greater awareness and deeper understanding of each other as they navigate an ever-changing world. Here are some of her selections.

Reduction I, 2013 Kondô Takahiro, 2014.64.

The group began by discussing the overall feel of G200. How does it feel? (answers: meditative, reverential, quiet). While the figure of *Reduction* is in a quiet meditative pose, it is non-conforming because it represents the horrible reality of the tsunami and nuclear disaster at Fukushima in 2011.

Orchids, 1870, Okuhara Seiko 2013.29.349 (not now on view)
Seiko was a Japanese woman artist of the late 1800s. She eschewed a feminine persona, wearing masculine clothing and short hair. She was a highly respected artist and successful teacher. Her work was considered 'masculine.' Though non-conforming, she made art that conformed to the Japanese literati ideal. For Seiko, orchids represented hardiness. The new Mia label for this object used the pronouns "they" and "their" instead of she or hers. Jeanne spoke about revision of the didactic label, pronouns and gender expression. Unfortunately, Mia's website hasn't caught on: It still shows the old label.

Fantasy Coffin, 1993, Sowah Kwei, 2010.72

Again, Jeanne asked the group to assess the feel of the gallery. They discussed how objects in the gallery were based on old traditions while the coffin was a relatively recent tradition. How does a tradition like this begin? Some viewers enjoyed the object and saw it as bringing joy at a dark time while others saw it as inappropriate.



Okuhara Seiko



Orchids, 1870

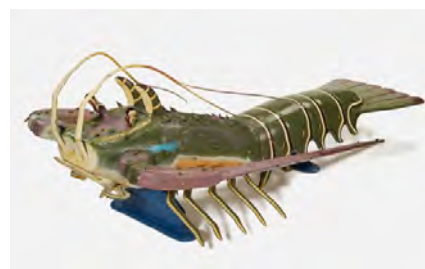
Okuhara Seiko

Ink on mica paper

Gift of The Clark Center for Japanese
Art & Culture; Formerly Given to The Center
by Marjorie Bissinger

2013.29.349

Not on View



Fantasy Coffin, 1993

Sowah Kwei

Wood, plaster, acrylic paint
The Robert C. Winton Fund

2010.72

G250

At 25 (recto and verso), 2010, Tim Lowly, 2016.95

Questions Jeanne asked: Why B&W? Why cut it up? What is the purpose of this art? Is he an advocate for people with severe physical disabilities? The gold on the recto was compared to Byzantine icons making Lowly's daughter Madonna-like. This would challenge our idea of the ideal female in art. Does the subject have agency if she has no choice in her portrayal?

Vatican Cafe, 2008, Jim Denomie, 2017.94.5

Who is at the table? Is this what you would expect from a Native American artist? Why or why not? Do Denomie's style of painting and color choices 'take the edge' off of heavy topics? Have we 'colored' history to avoid the hard truths? One viewer observed that they considered Mia and other art museums to set the standard for what is 'good art,' but some did not see *Vatican Cafe* as worthy. To allow Denomie to speak for himself Jeanne showed a two-minute video [interview](#).

Curator's Office, 2012-2013, Mark Dion, 2013.17

This period room raises questions. The label does not explain to viewers that the room is the art. The artist's intentions are a mystery. Some people found this unsatisfying and annoying. Only after the group stood back and looked at the whole wall as well as the room, could they see it in its entirety and know it was all part of the art. Lots of questions are possible here. What do you think happened to the curator? What era is this from? Why this selection of books? Why is there a suitcase in this office? What was going on in that era? Why did the artist do this? What would the purpose be? There were also questions challenging the authority of institutions. It was noted that museums are not neutral. When archeologists unearth artifacts, they may make judgments based on insufficient evidence or knowledge. The takeaway was to remember to question things in institutions such as Mia, and even docents!

Dear Diary - Never Since We Left Prague, 1955, Leonora Carrington, 2005.127.2

Surrealism is non-conformist art. Surrealism is like a dream; there is no plot. As a female surrealist artist, Carrington was a non-conformist in a non-conformist genre. Regarding the title, the group observed that as we move forward, we leave things behind.

Santos Dumont - The Father of Aviation II, 2009, Kehinde Wiley, 2010.99

Jeanne asked, "What do you see? What do you think? What do you wonder?" One viewer wondered if it was a depiction of police brutality. Wiley's depiction and practice is non-conforming in that it inserts young black males into the Western art canon.

Jeanne's tour offers a great example of the sort of enlightening exchange of tour themes and ideas we enjoy in "Let's Talk Tours" Study Group. Join us when you can.

MUSINGS FROM IPE

Debbi Hegstrom

We have a new set of *Current Conversations* and *Book Tours* for January through June 2020. Spread the word among friends and family.

Current Conversations

Every day at 1:00 p.m. No reservation necessary.

January – Snow Days

Venture boldly into images of snow and cold as artists depict the beauty and challenges of winter.

February – Celebration of African American Art History

Discover African American artists' contributions to art history in the United States.

March – Women in Art

During Women's History Month, discuss how women, as both creators and inspiration, have influenced and changed art-making around the world.

April – Finding Home

Explore ideas of home as artists reflect on the universal desire for safety and acceptance.

May – Points of View

Express yourself while viewing artworks from multiple perspectives.

June – Pride

Celebrate the LGBTQ+ community through artworks that explore gender constructs and identities.

Book Tours

Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Thursdays and Fridays at 6:30 p.m.

Third Sundays of each month at 3:00 p.m.

No reservation necessary.

January

A Great Reckoning by Louise Penny

February

The Story of Arthur Truluv by Elizabeth Berg

March

Exit West by Mohsin Hamid

April

Logical Family: A Memoir by Armistead Maupin

May

Washington Black by Esi Edugyan

June

Virgil Wander by Leif Enger

Enjoy the holiday season as we await the return of the light and find new opportunities for regeneration and renewal. We thank you for the many gifts you share with Mia and your good will toward all our visitors!