

## A Splendid Legacy

Tom Opem

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts owes its very existence to the foresight, generosity, and persistence of its founding benefactors. Many great patrons and donors are among these founding members – a name like James J. Hill, the railroad tycoon and “empire builder” of St. Paul, springs easily to mind. As early as 1889 he had donated six paintings to the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts for display in the small art gallery jointly operated by the Society and the Library Board in the new Minneapolis Public Library at Tenth and Hennepin.

Although Hill himself only donated one painting from his collection to the new museum as it neared its grand opening in 1915, Courbet’s monumental *Deer in the Forest*, he



had so instilled a sense of civic duty and love for the Institute and was so instrumental in its founding, that a great majority of works of art from his collection have

come to the museum through the generosity of his heirs.

Several years ago I was assigned a tour for a group of visitors from Chicago. Since I had

lived in Chicago for almost eight years during the seventies and was somewhat familiar with the Chicago Art Institute and other cultural institutions there I looked forward to doing this tour. Imagine my surprise when I received the tour sheet and learned that the tour was for a group of trustees and patrons of the Chicago Art Institute! I really had to scramble to do some research and prepare myself for the tour. My best resource turned out to be Minneapolis author Jeffrey A. Hess’ excellent account of the Society of Fine Arts first 100 years, published in 1985, *Their Splendid Legacy*. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in learning more about the fascinating history of the MIA.

As I began my tour, I quickly realized that these people were mostly interested in donors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art. When Richard Davis first arrived in Minneapolis right after the end of World War II, he was dismayed to discover that there was virtually no twentieth-century collection. He set about immediately to remedy this situation. As senior curator he was in a good position to encourage a new generation of collectors, one which was receptive to modern art.

Davis quickly found allies among the younger members of the Board of Trustees, especially Bruce Dayton, John Cowles and Putnam Dana McMillan. Since Bruce Dayton’s legendary generosity and importance as a major donor are widely known, we will concentrate on Cowles and McMillan and another longtime supporter of the museum, Donald S. Winston, an attorney and investor in western oil lands.

In 1955 Donald and Mrs. Winston had offered Beckmann’s *Blindman’s Buff* to the museum as a gift. The tricky part was gaining approval from the still somewhat conservative accessions committee. When that approval came in the fall of 1955, it signaled a new era for the MIA.

Richard Davis took over the directorship from Russell Plimpton in 1956. Two years later the Winstons performed an even more valuable service by advancing the Society \$200,000 so that Davis could quickly capture one of the greatest paintings to come up for sale, Poussin’s *Death of Germanicus*, painted in 1627. The institute’s bulletin trumpeted the acquisition by stating. “It must now challenge Rembrandt’s *Lucretia* as the supreme work by an old master in the collection.”

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Other significant gifts by the Winstons to the MIA include: Emil Nolde's *Evening Glow*, Otto Dix's *Little Girl*, Odilon Redon's, *Silence*, Yves Tanguy's *Through Birds*, *Through Fire, but not Through Glass*, and *Reply to Red*, Chaim Soutine's *Carcass of Beef*, Miro's *Head of a Woman*, Klee's *Hardy Plants*, Lovis Corinth's *Nude Girl*, Wassily Kandinsky's *Nymphenbourg*, and Oskar Kokoschka's *The Duomo, Florence*.

Putnam Dana McMillan became president of the Society of Fine Arts in the fall of 1948 and quickly became a vital ally to Davis. Under Davis' tutelage he began to assemble a very choice, though small, collection of modern masters. During the 1950's, through his company, the P.D. McMillan Land Co., he gave such treasures to the museum as Egon Schiele's *Portrait of the Poet, Paris von Gutersloh*, Rouault's *The Crucifixion*, and Ernst Barlach's sculpture *The Avenger*.

Upon his death in 1961, the rest of his collection followed: Andre Derain's *The Bagpiper* and *St. Paul's from the Thames*, Beckmann's *The Skaters*, Chagall's *Poet with the Birds*, Leger's *Smoke Over the Roofs*, Matisse's *The Bathers*, Kokoschka's *Tower Bridge*, Vuillard's *Place St. Augustin* and *The Sunny Room*, Signac's *Boulevard de Clichy*, Morandi's *Still Life*, Kirchner's *Bern with Belltower*, Luce's *Notre Dame*, Vlaminck's *The Blue House*, and Picasso's *Woman by the Sea*.

This magnificent bequest made Minneapolis the envy of museum directors and curators across the country. As John Maxon, director of fine arts at the Chicago Art Institute was quoted in an appendage to the article John K. Sherman wrote to report the legacy in the *Minneapolis Tribune*: "It is one of the most distinguished small collections of America, chosen with the greatest taste and sensibility. Its acquisition...puts Minneapolis far ahead in its holdings of important French art. Anything in the collection Minneapolis doesn't want we would be glad to get."

Besides the gift of works of art, Macmillan also left \$1,000,000 to establish the Patna Dana Macmillan Fund which has added many important works of art to the collection, such as Maxfield Parrish's *Dream Castles in the Sky*, Sir John Everett Millais' *Peace Concluded* and Maurice Denis' *Orpheus and Eurydice*.

The third distinguished collection of twentieth-century art was assembled by John and Elizabeth Cowles, who became intimate friends of Davis. John Cowles was publisher of the *Minneapolis Star* and later of the *Journal* and the *Tribune* under the Cowles publishing empire. Under Davis' tutelage, the Cowles acquired a small, but distinguished collection, which richly improved the Institute's holdings. Important gifts include: Derain's *Portrait of the Artist*, Gris' *Seated Harlequin*, Kirchner's *Dresden: Schlossplatz*, Miro's *Les Cartes Espagnoles*, Picasso's *Woman in an Armchair* and *Baboon with Young*, O'Keefe's *Pederal from the Ranch*, Modigliani's *Head of a Woman*, Sir Eduardo Pavlozzi's *Little King*, Henry Moore's *The Warrior with Shield*, and



Marino Marini's *Horse and Rider*. These gifts were especially important in enriching the museum's holdings in 20th century European sculpture.

This has been only a brief dip into the rich subject of our donors and how they help shape our collections. If you would like to learn more, consider reading Jeffrey A. Hess' *Their Splendid Legacy: The First 100 years of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts*. There is a copy in the docent library.

## Furniture: Things to put Other Things and People On

Lynn Teschendorf

Nowadays, houses are packed with furniture, some of it rarely used except to occupy space. But this wasn't always the case. If you lived in the Middle Ages, you didn't have much at all, maybe a chest or a cupboard or a stool. Cupboards and beds were luxury items, and textiles, plate and jewelry ranked far higher than furniture as status symbols. What pieces you did have were practical, and many of those forms are still in use today.

Take the entertainment center, for example. It's a form that derives from the cupboard – the French called it an *armoire*, the Dutch a *kas*, and in Germany it was known as a *schrank*. You can see one in Gallery 310 near the little stumpwork box. The *schrank* is enormous, which is why I'm sure it is always on view –

where else would you put it? In fact, it looks like a building, the palaces of Renaissance Italy in particular, with their arcades of arches and alternating pilasters. It's a style that became popular in Germany during the Renaissance. The designer was probably inspired by one of the illustrated books on antique Roman architecture circulating by the 1530s. Like a building, the *schrank* has a projecting cornice, supported by a frieze of carved scrollwork. The four large arches are topped with broken temple pediments, and are flanked by niches. The columns stand on bases. The entire façade is covered in bas-relief sculpture. All add to the impression of architectural solidity. You can also find lots of interesting details, like shells and a mask. But enough about design – what about function?

There are four drawers across the bottom and six smaller ones across the middle for little things, and you could put lots of big things in this cupboard. In fact, you could easily fit a television and sound system within its cavernous spaces.

The *schrank* is said to have developed from the custom of stacking chests on top of each other. A chest made around the same time as the *schrank* and probably also by German craftsmen is the *Nonsuch Chest*, standing against the wall between the portraits of the von Voorsts. (The term "non-such" stems from its resemblance to Henry VIII's palace of the same name.) Like the *schrank*, it has drawers across the



Dutch kas

bottom, illustrating the transition from the plain chest to the “chest of drawers.” It’s decorated with fantastic buildings in a technique called “marquetry” (a fancy term for inlaid veneer in which pieces of colored woods are arranged in spaces gouged into a larger sheet of wood like a jigsaw puzzle, and the entire sheet is then glued on to the chest). The bizarre perspective was intentional, and probably came from one of the many pattern books in circulation at the time showing decorative perspectives to be used in inlay and marquetry designs.

Marquetry panels could be prefabricated in standardized sizes, and pieces could be cut off and applied to a piece of furniture as needed. But sometimes, the patterns didn’t always match up perfectly – look closely at the corners of the bands framing the buildings and you’ll see what I mean.



Today the chest isn’t all that common, but the chest of drawers certainly is. There’s a really fabulous one in Gallery 303 (the Minnesota room). Think Gothic cathedral – massive, vertical, trefoil arches, pointed spires. The stepped pyramid or telescoping effect is quite unique. This dresser was part of a bedroom suite commissioned in 1844 by supporters of Henry Clay when he ran for the presidency. It was intended to adorn the White House, but Clay lost the election to James Polk. So

the suite was sold to wealthy plantation owner David Turnbull, who built an entire wing on to his Louisiana mansion in order to accommodate the thirteen-foot tall bedstead. The wing and the suite of furniture were made in the style known, astoundingly enough, as Gothic Revival.

Maybe you’ve never seen a Gothic cathedral, but you can use your imagination. It’s fun to imagine, for instance, that the chair you’re sitting on is similar to one an Egyptian pharaoh sat on thousands of years ago. Take a look at the green *fauteuil* or armchair in Gallery 309 (the room with 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup>c. neoclassical objects). The armrest supports are sphinxes. Other parts of the design draw on motifs made popular by the excavations at Pompeii begun in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. The tapering rear legs (sabre legs) recall the classical Greek chair known as the *klismos*. Other classical motifs can be seen in the scrolled crest rail, and in the rosettes lining the *guilloche* (the carved continuous figure-8 design). The chair is one of a pair, both carved from mahogany and made as part of a suite of furniture created for the royal chateau of Fontainebleau. The other chair is at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In contrast, the George Maher chair in the Architecture Gallery looks positively plain. And it’s supposed to – remember that Arts and Crafts emphasis on simplicity and hand-craftsmanship. Rather than being made from exotic mahogany, this chair is constructed of common oak and leather. The decorative motifs are also rather plain – the flattened arch of the crest rail and the overall trapezoidal shape. These motifs were repeated throughout the house this chair

was designed to occupy (Rockledge, near Winona, Minnesota). You’ll also find them in the nearby coffee and tea service, and on the large urn, along with another recurring motif, the tiger lily. Maher called it his “motif-rhythm” theory: harmony is achieved through the repetition of design elements. These three motifs began on the façade of the house and extended all the way through, helping to complete the harmonious whole.

Take a look around the museum and you’ll see lots of furniture you can compare to pieces you have at home. Besides cupboards/cabinets, dressers and chairs, there are clocks, sofas, desks, tables, mirrors, even a couple of pianos. You’ll be amazed at how unique and beautiful they can be – no, really!

Until next time...

(Many thanks to Cori Wegener and Jason Busch for proof-reading this article and saving me from embarrassing mistakes.)

## The Docent and The Exhibition

*Bob Marshall*

The interest, and perhaps even the excitement, starts when you first hear that the exhibition is coming to your museum. There will be the chance to see unfamiliar artworks, of course; better, the opportunity to study something new.

As opening day approaches, the catalogue appears in the museum bookshop. The pictures are intriguing – how much better the originals will be! – but the text, frankly, is work. There are essays by scholars, seemingly written for other scholars. The captions, for the most part, describe what you can see yourself and toss in trivia that you recognize will be of no interest to your tour groups.



*Eternal Egypt*

(“Lexicon’s depiction of the Val d’Este bears a striking resemblance to Smedley’s well-worn print in the Ashmolean.”)

The show is hung. The curator gives a lecture to the docents, laboriously identifying each object but generally saying nothing not to be found in the catalogue or on the wall labels. (After all, it’s not likely that the curator or the exhibition organizer would save a choice morsel for the docents!) And of course, he ties everything into the show’s theme, spelled out in the exhibition’s subtitle: how all these works contribute to the “point” that every show has to have to justify, not the public’s attention, so much as the curator’s scholarship and, indeed, the museum’s ability to borrow these works from other equally scholarly institutions.

Now comes the fun part – or, should we say, the most fun part. You take your notebook, and maybe your catalogue, into the exhibition, with its freshly painted walls and crisp new signage. It’s in a part of the museum you’re totally familiar with, but the space has never quite looked this way

before, and never will again. You spend as long as you want examining each object, if you're lucky, on a day when the museum isn't even open to the public. This is when you discover the artwork, what it says to you, and what you will say to your listeners.

Maybe you like the curator's story. Then all you have to do is compress it into your 50-minute tour time. Which objects are must-sees? Which are your personal favorites? Which ones are just too small, or too complicated, or too far in the corner to be useful to a group of ten or twenty visitors? Are there any tidbits you can add, more along the lines of gossip than art scholarship, that will personalize the tour experience for your group?

Just as possible, the headlined theme doesn't work for you, or you have another idea that you like better. Yes, Frazzoni was a "master of light," but what do you think of the unusual noses he put on his people? Your goal, after all, is to get your group to look closely at the art, and to have a good time. So Frazzoni and the Psychology of the Nose it will be for you. Or at least you will give it a try.

Your first tour you're a little nervous. I don't really have to remember all the dates, you tell yourself, but it helps if a few come casually tripping off your tongue. The group will be impressed and think you know what you're talking about. How long will the tour I've planned actually take? What if someone in the group knows more than me? What if, the biggest fear of all, they think I'm boring?

After the first tour, your jitters decrease each time out of the gate. You get a sense for what works, what doesn't, and you fine-tune your approach accordingly. A visitor will make an observation you hadn't thought of, and you will incorporate that into succeeding tours. After a few tours, your concern turns into confidence. I know this stuff, you say to yourself, and more to the point, the people on my tour know something they didn't know an hour ago.

Then it's gone. The works go on to another venue, or back to their lenders. The walls are repainted and the process starts all over. You are left with no outlet for your hard-learned knowledge and the clever details of your tour route. The catalogue migrates to a shelf in your library, where it sits like a scrapbook from a family vacation. But there will come a day, maybe when you're touring a museum in a distant city yourself, when you will recognize a familiar object, that Frazzoni nose, that was once on your tour. Something lives on, after all.

## Docent Study Group: *The World in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century*

*facilitated by Celia Stretmater*

The 17<sup>th</sup> century was a time of global change and ever-increasing prosperity as well as of exploration and pioneering settlement. Two words best describe the century: Commerce and Colonies. Stable governments and strong monarchies ruled, with the exception of England where there was civil war. This atmosphere allowed a widespread dissemination of knowledge and culture and led to a large scale

exchange of ideas in the art world. However, it was also a time of continuing religious wars and a daring new form of republican government in Holland, and people begin to change their thinking on how they wished to be governed. Japan was the commercial exception as they gradually began an almost 250 year period of isolation.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century would take all of these ideas to new heights – political, agricultural and industrial revolutions and advances in science, including classification of plants and animals and encyclopedias. The previous centuries could be likened to plowing the furrow and planting the seed and the 17<sup>th</sup> century to rapid growth. The centuries to follow would represent the blossoms and fruit – including a myriad of new "species" in art.

### SUGGESTED OBJECTS

#### China

Dish (18 <sup>th</sup> c)	Porcelain	Decorative elements copied from Ming
Monteith (1710)	Porcelain	Export for England market
Plate (1785)	Porcelain	Export for Indian market
Plate(1735)	Porcelain	Merian center design
Brush Pots (17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Bamboo, wood	Literati aesthetic
Ceremonial Hall (1590-1620)		Compare to Tudor
Folding round back arm chair (late 16 <sup>th</sup> c)	Huang Hua Li	Joinery, expertise
Standing screen with marble Panel (17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Huang Hua Li	Compare to Europe



#### India

Portrait of Fakir Khan and his sons (1685)	Mughal School	Status portrait opaque watercolors and gold on paper
Priming flask (17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Mughal dynasty	Gunpowder ivory with silver fittings
Flower vase (1650-1700)	Venetian glass	Venetian/Indian trade With Indian enamel décor

#### Iran (Persia)

The Lovers (1630-40)	Safavid Dynasty	Court taste ink, colors, and gold on paper
Dish (early 17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Safavid Dynasty	First to use cobalt blue meshed ware compare to Chinese

#### Japan

Audience Hall (17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Edo Period	Shogun era
Mirror stand and cosmetic boxes (17 <sup>th</sup> c)	Edo Period	"Japanning" in Europe

Screen, Show of Horsemanship  
(17<sup>th</sup>c) Edo Period Lifestyle, architecture

Tea bowl and whisk  
(17<sup>th</sup>c) Edo Period Interest in Tea ceremony

### Africa

Leopard aquamanile  
(18<sup>th</sup>c) Benin, bronze Large trade city

Asante objects (stool, Kente cloth) Ghana Rise of Asante culture

### Central Andes Region, Bolivia

Saint Isidore (San Isidro)  
(18<sup>th</sup>c) Native Painters Euro/Native mix

### Northwest Coast Region (US)

Comb (1670-1700) Wood, String Russian traders

### Italy

Self Portrait as a Lute Player  
(ca. 1615-17)  
Artemesia Gentileschi  
Lute from China (see Mandala)  
through Arab world



### France

Death of Germanicus  
(1627) Nicolas Poussin Royal Academy, art center from Rome to Paris

Chinese Fair (1742-45) Tapestry Euro/Chinese mix

### Flemish

An Allegory of the Union of England and Scotland  
(1633-34) Peter Paul Rubens English politics

### Germany

Butterflies, Caterpillar and foliage  
(early 18<sup>th</sup>c) Engraving, Etching To Surinam, Dutch colony  
Maria Sybilia Merian

### England

Barbers' Bowl (1690) Tin Glazed Earthenware Chinese influence  
Tudor Room (1600) Compare to Chinese Ceremonial Hall

### America

Connecticut Room  
Limner Painting,  
"Japanning" Mirror

### Holland

Still Life (1643) Pieter Claesz Chinese bowl  
The Four Days Battle  
(1666) Abraham Storck Shipping prowess, style

Portrait of a Lady  
(1667) Gabriel Metsu "Turkey" carpet  
Five Piece Garniture Set  
(1710) Delft, Tin glazed earthenware Chinese influence

## Southeast Asian Story Blankets

*Sharon Hayenga*

The Lao story blankets (usually displayed on the ground floor past the Guide Programs Office) are objects that generally tour beautifully for school children, especially up through grade six. For adults and older students these objects may simply be textiles, appreciated for the overall design, the quality of the handwork, the color, and the idea of them as cultural iconography.

For younger students, though, the best of these blankets turn into participation puzzles, a link to the past for Southeast Asian students, whose pleasure is palpable, and insight into an exotic land for others.

Unfortunately, the 1980 blanket on display for several months has been removed and the "new" one doesn't have a story. So those of us interested in using the blanket for safari, amazing animals, highlights, a taste of Asia, and as an object that reflects the cultural diversity in the area (second largest Southeast Asian population in the US) will find much less to share with young viewers.

But there are things that exist in most of these blankets that can be used universally as they rotate: People from Laos refer to themselves as "Lao" as in "ouch." That is the preferred pronunciation for the country name as well. Laotian is a widely disliked term. Laos (sounding the "s") is less offensive but is considered incorrect.

These stories actually belong to Vietnam and Laos, as well as some Cambodians and northern Thai. The ethnic groups (numbering about 40 in Laos and about 125 in Vietnam) are located in a region – which includes China – not a specific country. For instance, among the Laos there are the upper-Laos, middle-Laos, and lower-Laos – based on how high up the mountain they live. Hmong villages in the northern Laos have incorporated empty bomb cases from the Vietnam War into their architecture, something which is unavailable in other locales.

One of the easiest things to find is images of houses. Those that sit flat on the ground belong to the Hmong ethnic groups. Those that stand higher on posts belong to the Lao ethnic groups. Typically, both styles of house have a single room. The Lao use the space under the house to store equipment and supplies, to cook, and to do quite a lot of domestic



work, such as weaving baskets and sewing. The space provides protection from a hot sun and from rain.

The Hmong may cook outside in order to keep the smoke out of the house. They also do handwork outside since the interiors are very dark. The earthen floor may be warmer than the wooden Lao floor which sits up on stilts, letting cold air in from below, as well as the sides. Note: As local Southeast Asians send money and clothes back to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, a horizontally-sided midwestern style of house is emerging, with windows. It is also possible to see jackets and sweatshirts that have the name of Minnesota businesses on them.

The Lao diet is 90% rice, with the balance in greens, corn, and small amounts of protein – fish, chickens, and pigs. A person doing manual labor can be expected to eat five bowls of rice per meal. Many of the blankets show 3-4 scenes outlining the growing of rice. Most children from Minnesota are very aware of farming. It is a striking contrast to view the progression in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia: (1) the fields are flooded and a man can be seen walking in water up to his knees, plowing the field with a water buffalo. The water is cold, and full of leeches and snakes – dangerous snakes. These fields are frequently 50-foot by 100-foot and comprise one family's entire farm; (2) people take small rice plants and walk in the still-flooded field, planting each stalk of rice by hand; (3) as the rice matures, the water canals are closed and the fields are allowed to dry; (4) then workers go to the field, cut the rice off the plant with sharp knives; and (5) harvest the rice by smashing the cut stems onto the ground. The northern regions are colder and grow only one crop each year. In some areas of the south, it is possible to grow three crops, which has a great deal to do with why the south is wealthier and more developed. Occasionally, as in the 1980 blanket, a cycle of growing corn may be shown as well. That doesn't appear often.

A few people lead horses around, but most people are carrying crops and other materials in large baskets on their backs. There are no trucks or wheelbarrows. If you have students in grades 4-5-6, it is likely that the carrying is being done by people the size of the students. The main – often the only form of transportation – is walking, even if it means carrying loads in those baskets for up to 20 miles in a single day, just to get to market. And the countryside is mountainous, so there's a lot of going uphill.

Frequently, the blankets contain images of exotic animals. There are some in Southeast Asia, such as the tiger and the elephant. But they are very seldom seen. The most common animals are dogs, pigs, and chickens, all kept near and sometimes in houses. Few people have small sheds, so crop is stored in houses. It is not uncommon for a family that lives in the north and owns a particularly small piece of land to run out of rice and money, long before the next crop comes in. One advantage of village life is that people often share what they have. Most have to share ownership of the water buffalo: they can't afford to own one of their own.

Often there are buildings that are noticeably different from the houses: these are temples. Typically, they look

taller and more enclosed. Often there are dragons created around them to keep evil spirits away. Sometimes people are shown carrying small buildings toward the temple: for security from bad luck and evil spirits, most families have miniature temples near their houses, hoping they will have success at work, a good crop, good luck in getting a husband or wife, and good health. These, as well as gifts of burning incense, tea, oranges, bananas, rice and meat are taken to the temple almost daily.

Finally, the Hmong are often shown wearing the traditional black costume. The Laos do not have such specific clothing. All groups are moving toward wearing western clothing because it is convenient and cheap. Women, however, never wear shorts.

## Book Review:

### *Of Water and the Spirit*

by Malidoma Patrice Somé

reviewed by Susan Burnett

*Of Water and the Spirit* is a book which can be enjoyed from both cultural and spiritual levels. After my book group read it last summer I toured them through the MIA African galleries. Our collection is rich with objects which illustrate the themes and topics of this story and educate people about African culture.

This autobiography was written by a young man from Burkina Faso in West Africa. In the 1950s this country, known as Upper Volta, was under French colonial rule. At the age of four, Malidoma Somé was taken from his village by a Jesuit missionary. He spent fifteen years in a French Catholic mission school and seminary until he rebelled, ran away and made his way back through the jungle to his original home. Upon returning, he was viewed as an outsider because of this experience and the knowledge of European ways and worship to which he had been exposed. To become a part of his original culture he underwent a six week initiation that established him as a member of his Dagara people.



The description of his initiation takes up about one-third of the book's narrative and is fascinating to read. Malidoma had to get permission from the tribal elders to write about this and he describes in vivid and colorful details such initiation experiences as being buried alive, passing through a light hole to another world and coming back safely from the hole. This description (page 277) is just one example: "Soon I felt as if I were in the middle of a huge violet egg that had no shell. Inside the egg there was a whole world, and I was in it..."

After the successful completion of his initiation, Malidoma learned that his destiny would be to carry out the meaning of his name ("he who would be friends with the stranger/enemy"). In fulfilling the destiny of his name, Malidoma now speaks to people all over the world. The son of docent Marilyn Bockley has become friends with him and has been to Burkina Faso where this story takes place.

*Of Water and the Spirit* is a great inspiration for a tour as objects in our collection constantly come to mind as one reads the story. The Burkina Faso *Plank Mask* is an obvious piece to use because Malidoma comes from this country. Even though this mask is used by the Bwa people (Malidoma is from the Dagara group) it represents initiation in Africa. Malidoma's story includes the death of his grandfather and objects such as the *Duein Fubara*, the Vigango figures and the *Ife Shrine Head* illustrate African beliefs about death and ancestry. The mother and child figures tie in nicely because the Dagara culture is matrilineal and the roles of both men and women are discussed. Items from everyday life such as the granary door are mentioned throughout the story. "She rules the kitchen, the granaries where food is stored..." (pg. 24).



Malidoma's grandfather's fame came from his spiritual accomplishments. He had a medicine room and any of our divination objects would be appropriate. African spirituality is a big part of this story. In addition, I used the *Nkisi Nkondi* as an illustration of a powerful sacred object.



Colonialism is most important to the book's theme of the cultural clash between western civilization and indigenous cultures (Benin *Aquamanile* and *Tusk*). Horses (*Equestrian Figure*) and cowrie shells (*Yet Belt*) came to Africa from trade. Crocodiles appear in the book on clothing and as bridges Malidoma had to cross in his initiation. Be sure to mention staffs, scepters and stools – the book does.

I'm sure if you read the book you will find even more ideas for an African tour. Happy reading and happy touring!

## Reflections on Akacita Waste (Good Soldier)

Sharon Hayenga

*Akacita Waste (Good Soldier)* by Lakota artist Martin Red Bear (1991) seems to me to be underused in the Art of the Americas gallery. Admittedly, it is a more appropriate choice for adults and college/senior high students than for younger visitors. But, unlike many contemporary paintings, it is pleasantly approachable and very satisfying intellectually.

The images are clear and as symbols are recognized immediately by most adults in this culture: the black MIA silhouette, the camouflaged GI, the United States flag, and the majestic native American warrior. The image that may be less well recognized is the yellow and green stripe: it is the color of the ribbon given to soldiers who served in United States forces during the Vietnam conflict.

Because the symbols are so clear, Martin Red Bear has kept this picture from being about war in general. The top portion of the image identifies the painting as specifically about the Vietnam conflict, a war in which Americans of all

ethnic backgrounds (including native Americans) fought together. In this discrete limitation lies much of the picture's intellectual stimulation: the Native American warriors are at once both separate and included. They belong both to the top as standard GIs with traditional trappings, and to a bottom space showing only the majesty of the historically respected and venerated warrior riding across space, undefined by time. GI Joe has no place here.

The Vietnam War visited upon all who fought a particular burden. Instead of being respected and welcomed back, our soldiers were forced to absorb the burden of failure and shame. Cloaked in the mantle of the historical warrior – with its status and self-fulfillment – the aftermath has been particularly cruel for native Americans, who became warriors without reward. They not only participated in an unpopular war at the national level, but they had taken from them the modern-day incarnation of the venerable warrior of their history. It raises the question of whether the native American culture can expect to have the modern warrior image validated.

## Musings

Tom Byfield

I have been gently prodded to produce a bit of persiflage for the *Muse*, but the guilt I felt in not responding did not exceed the pleasant state of lethargy I was enjoying. However, I began to feel a kind of shame ennui and decided to shed the lassitude and pretend that I could write. Besides, I need the money.

When I first began touring, I looked forward to the joyful communion of docent and groups of excited students and adults that were thirsting for knowledge in our revered sanctuary that is the MIA. I could picture them gazing and murmuring, "Praise God, we've been invited to Xanadu." Reality, however, with heavy *impasto*, paints a different picture, a suitable metaphor considering the topic. I have found that in touring as in life, expectation often exceeds the realization. Murphy's Law reigns. So, what has gone awry in my touring experience? I'll site just a few examples.

After planning a tour, packing in as many objects as possible, invariably some groups are late and the hour is cut to 45 minutes. I am reduced to a rapid fire delivery suitable for the machine gun staccato of the disclaimers tacked on to the end of some TV ads.

I forget at the beginning of a tour to address those elemental bodily functions by pointing out the bathrooms which at midpoint leads to open desertion and half the group leaves to hunt for the restrooms, a football field away. Sometimes I get lost myself. Heaven help us when the new addition opens.

Occasionally my mind slips into neutral and I find myself searching for a word while the group waits with hushed expectancy, finally realizing they are witnessing incipient Alzheimer's. Often finding my next object surrounded by another tour, my smooth transition is reduced to: "Let's go over there next." Trying VTS with Elderhostels only produces hostile elders. But, on the other hand, our col-

lective hearing loss and subsequent misunderstandings can lead to the hilarity of a Molière farce.

So, if you are looking for a tour to monitor, a tour where the transitions flow like a seamless tapestry, where the descriptions of priceless *objets d'art* are filled with fascinating facts, witty asides, and insightful perspectives, where titillating tidbits of the artists' personal lives hold the group spellbound, mouths agape and eyes sparkling with the joy of newfound knowledge, a tour that ends with a feeling of camaraderie and enthusiastic applause, where handshakes are exchanged as are addresses destined for Christmas card lists. If that's what you are looking for, boobie, then avoid my tours as you would a fetid Ayatollah with a loose burnoose. On the other hand, one can always learn from the mistakes of others.

## Docent Effort to Acquire a *Noh* Robe for the MIA

As you already know, the Docent Executive Committee is supporting the purchase of the first gift from the MIA docents to the museum's permanent collection. Our goal is to acquire a fine 19th century *Noh* robe – purple silk with an overall tortoise shell pattern, embroidered with large phoenixes on paglownia trees. The robe has been deacquired from a prominent Tokyo museum and we have the opportunity to purchase it at the reduced price of \$18,000, if we can raise necessary funds by December.



By reaching our goal of acquiring this auspicious object for our collection we can pay homage to our docent group and honor Matthew Welch.

Many thanks to those who have already contributed. If you have not yet given to this important project, please consider doing so. It would be wonderful to be able to offer this robe to the museum as a gift from all of us. Remember – your donation will be completely tax deductible.

Docently,

*Barbara-Kvasnik-Nuñez  
Kathleen Wanner  
Lesley Ackerberg*

P.S. Please feel free to contact us if you wish more information about the robe or about the process for making a contribution.

## Keeping in Touch...



### Letter from Docent Chair

I just saw a fabulous exhibit at the new wing (and I mean that literally) of the Milwaukee Art Museum. The incredibly clever curator of *Earlier European Art*, Laurie Winters, persuaded a number of museums in Poland to lend their masterpieces to Milwaukee. More than just a survey of great pictures from Polish collections, this show of 77 paintings examines the role art and art collecting played in the history of Poland.

Eaten up by its neighbors, Poland disappeared from the map from 1795 until 1918. As the curator shows, it was its art collections that served to maintain the country's national identity during this long period. And what collections! One of the highlights of the show is a stupendous 15<sup>th</sup> century triptych by Hans Memling, *The Last Judgment*. To help persuade Poland's National Museum to lend it, Laurie Winters offered to build for it a new \$25,000 climate-controlled case that allows visitors to see both sides from close range. Works from Dutch and Flemish artists, as well as those of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, cover the walls. But the star, and what a star, is Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine* (*Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani*). Wonderfully displayed in a shallow case (with a constant guard alongside), the picture is fantastic. You all know it, of course, but reproductions just don't do it justice (how very trite, but in this case, absolutely true). *Mona Lisa* is fine, but this work (painted several years before) is fabulous!

You may be curious about how the *Lady* traveled. An article in the *Chicago Tribune* ("Exhibit captures spotlight for city," Thomas Connors, 10/8/02) refers to the 17-page contract on just its travel arrangements. It was packed in a fire-proof, waterproof crate with a "ping" device that would identify it if the plane went down. As the curator Winters tells it, "The day it shipped out they closed the entire museum and...we had a military escort to the airport, Polish soldiers in uniform with machine guns." It flew first class, along with Winters and two emissaries, and was met by Chicago police who escorted it to Milwaukee. "Believe it or not," laughed Winters, "we were out of O'Hare in five minutes." Now that's the way to travel!

The site of the show is fantastic. As some of you may know, the Milwaukee Art Museum opened a new wing just a year ago, in October 2001. Designed by Santiago Calatrava, the Quadracci Pavilion, as it is called, resembles an enormous, graceful white bird (that's the wing I referred to above). Lest anyone think I can get through a message without mentioning the computer, go to [www.mam.org](http://www.mam.org) and click on the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel's* slideshow. It's terrific.

I wish you all good holidays.

*Carol Burton*



## News from Museum Guide Office

### Mummy News

*Lady Teshat* left the ancient galleries last week to prepare for her journey to the Mummy Room. The Mummy Room, which will be set up in the Target video theatre, is an added bonus for visitors to *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* in Minneapolis. In this special room, you will have an opportunity to view *Teshat* as never before and accompanied by three other mummies. Roxy Ballard, exhibition designer extraordinaire, plans to display *Lady Teshat* upright; the two pieces of her coffin will stand behind her. *Teshat's* x-ray, which many of you remember from years ago, is also scheduled to be on view.

Two mummies that normally reside in the storage area downstairs will be displayed horizontally in cases that should bring them to just-about-eye-level for young people. One of the mummies is a closed coffin with broadly painted designs, including a stunning representation of Horus on the shoulder, a writhing snake, and two bold silhouettes of Anubis at the base.

The horizontal fellow will give visitors an opportunity to see the linen wrappings and a small fragment of an exposed toe. A gauze cloth will obscure his face, which is also exposed from the linen wraps. Some painted panels made to lie on top of the mummy and around its feet will be included. Another mummy, on loan to the museum, will feature a more extensive set of these mummy trappings.

Visitors must have a paid ticket to *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* in order to experience the Mummy Room. If visitors inquire about *Teshat's* whereabouts, be sure to let them know about the exhibition and the special room!

As always, thank you for the great job you do!! Happy Holidays!

*Sheila McGuire and Debbi Hegstrom*

## Social Committee Announcement

### Celebrating the Holiday Season and *Eternal Egypt*



Docents, Junior Docents and Art Adventure Guides are invited to a special luncheon Celebration of the Seasonal Holidays and *Eternal Egypt*, at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, December 9, in the Villa Rosa Room.

Anyone wishing to bring items from their travels, especially Egypt, that could be used for table centerpieces, are invited to do so.

The menu will feature a Middle Eastern theme including salad, dessert and beverage. Information about the price of the luncheon and the deadline for reservations will be announced soon.

*Mary Labrosse and Candy Gravier*  
Social Committee Co-chairs

## Honorary Docents' News

- Honorary docents began this year with a luncheon in September and a tour in October by Curator Ted Hartwell of the Ruth Bernhard exhibition: *Photographs 1930-1970s*.
- The book clubbers are enjoying reading, discussing and being together. All honoraries are welcome and invited to join their friends and colleagues for book club on the third Wednesday of the month and for the activity/tour on the fourth Wednesday – both at 10:30 a.m.
- We'll take a break in November and December for the holidays but will gather again in January 2003. Please save these dates:
  - January 22
  - February 26
  - March 26
- Questions? Need information? Call Barb Diamond, Pudge Christian, or Liz Boylan.

## Spring Docent Muse Deadline

Many thanks to all the people who wrote articles for this issue of the *Muse*.

If you are interested in contributing articles to the *Docent Muse*, please contact Karen Boe, Co-editor, at your earliest convenience. **The deadline for the submission of articles for the Spring issue is February 10, 2003.**