

## An Appreciation of American Folk Art Portraiture

Patty McCullough

My husband, Sam, and I collect American folk art portraits. To most art lovers, this is an acquired taste. We began to come across these portraits as we pursued our collecting of early American furniture. Our admiration for them was galvanized in 1974 when we saw an exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York entitled *The Flowering of American Folk Art (1776-1876)*. Among the weathervanes, cigar store figures, shop signs, quilts and coverlets were striking likenesses of citizens of our newly independent nation.

At the time of the American Revolution a strong group of Connecticut painters, along with other artists from New England and New York state, entered into the production of portraiture. At this time a new, independent middle class was emerging which was devoted to the rights of the individual. In this milieu, in which each person was considered an integral part of society, the middle class began to record its appearance.

A painting by the artist Charles Bird King is a wonderful illustration of this phenomenon. Entitled *The Itinerant Artist*, it shows a traveling painter capturing the likeness of a country matron. King creates a densely populated rural household. The father, who is heading out the door, leaves eleven others to watch the artist's performance. There are eight children, ranging in age from a young woman to an infant in a cradle; and a young African American girl who

was most likely a domestic. An older woman, probably the grandmother, leans over the canvas to offer constructive criticism to the artist. Along the northeastern border of the United States, there was an explosion of this type of portrait painting; and husbands and wives, children, as well as adults – young, old, and middle-aged – were all eager consumers.

These were the “folk,” the not-quite wealthy but prosperous merchants, doctors, lawyers, ministers, ship captains and their wives and children. Their portraits, generally produced in oils, were much less expensive than the academic paintings the wealthy and socially prominent would commission. An academic version might cost \$100, five or ten times the price of a non-academic portrait. However, a \$10 portrait was worth a week's salary for a country parson in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a set of family members' portraits could cost \$40 or more – enough to purchase a good horse or rent a house for a year.

Most portrait sitters wanted the artist to catch the true likeness of their features, devoid of flattery, including signs of age and facial flaws. However, the likeness often mirrored the increasingly comfortable abundance of the subject's domestic interiors. After 1820 the sitters were often shown seated on a painted fancy chair of that period. Others were seated next to mahogany-veneered tables or were pictured against the background of figured Brussels carpets, symbols of a prosperous American parlor. Pocket watches appeared as icons of prosperity, and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of book production produced a plethora of letters, papers, quill pens and writing tables in portraits of both men and women. However, men were usually shown in the act of writing or pursuing information, while women were portrayed reading small books, clearly suggesting the New Testament or a work of devotion. A significant number of masculine portraits displayed emblems of the work that shaped their lives. Children had a different iconography. Boys played with dogs, holding small whips, knives



Portrait of a Young Boy  
attributed to Samuel Miller

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or hammers; girls had cats or small lap-dogs and were shown wearing coral beads, holding flowers or dolls – objects for later ornamental, nurturing roles.

Portrait painters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were responsible for their own sales and production. Some pioneered the rapid production of likenesses using stylized two-dimensional designs. One ingenious artist of the time, Rufus Porter, offered four styles of portraits ranging from a double “common profile” for 20¢ to an \$8 miniature painted on ivory. Side views painted in “full color” were \$2 and front views at \$3 were other options. Porter also constructed a *camera obscura* which could be used for tracing onto paper as the basis for a portrait. Thus he reduced the time necessary for a portrait to 15 minutes.

With the development of the daguerreotype in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the “flowering” of American folk art gradually faded; and many ancestral portraits found their way to dusty attics and were forgotten. Then in the early 1920s many of these works were rediscovered, and they were appreciated and assessed in a way that was very different from the reasons for their original creation. As artists, collectors and dealers searched attics, barns and junk shops of New England and the Middle Atlantic states, they compared the paintings of the professional, self-taught artists with new directions in modern art. Their flatness, abstract quality, directness and realism was thought to be innovative and exciting. During this period a number of the large collections were formed such as those at Shelburne Museum, the New York Historical Association at Cooperstown, and Colonial Williamsburg.

Today most major museums have representations of this type of art. Many folk art exhibitions have been organized, most often in New York or throughout New England. In 1997 the MIA hosted an exhibit *Hearth and Home*, featuring objects from the collection of Bert and Nina Little. The MIA also has several examples by folk artists Joseph Badger, William Jennys, Samuel Miller and Sheldon Peck. Perhaps there will be more to come in the 21st century!

## Where’s the Fish?

Joy Erickson



During the last year our Nazca fish has gone global and entered the virtual world as well. The Nazca vessel has been traveling all over France as part of the FRAME exhibit, *Sacred Symbols: Four Thousand Years of*

*Ancient American Art.*

FRAME (French Regional American Museums Exchange) is a coalition of nine American and nine French regional museums. It was created four years ago to encourage cooperation between institutions. This included facilitating loans, joint exhibitions and general sharing of technology, education and computer Web resources.

These exchanges focus on the strengths of the individual museums. By sharing their resources and planning joint exhibits, FRAME members can bring objects into their museums that would not be possible for them to obtain otherwise.

The museums gain attention for their own collections and increase their appeal to new audiences without the prohibitive costs of mounting a show on their own.

*Sacred Symbols* is a major exhibition created through FRAME. The MIA has had a strong role in producing this show. Director Evan Maurer, and Curatorial Assistant for Africa, Oceania and the Americas, Molly Hennen, organized the exhibition and edited the catalog. The show was drawn from the collections of



seven American museums. All of the approximately 180 objects are masterpieces reflecting the strongest works available throughout the United States. The majority of the art comes from our own collection. In addition to the Nazca fish, 90 other pieces from the MIA have traveled to four venues in France, the *Musée Fabre* in Montpellier, *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Rouen, *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Lyon and *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Rennes.

The exhibit, the first of its kind in Europe, has drawn large crowds in France. Fascination with the unfamiliar has been a big attraction. The French museums outside of Paris have relatively small collections of Native American art, so this show provides a unique opportunity to see a great variety of artistic styles created by the people of the ancient Americas. An art editor for the *New York Times* covered the opening in Rouen and wrote a feature article which appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* in January. The writer noted that European viewers were enthralled and dazzled by the ingenuity, complexity, and beauty of the gold, jade, stone and ceramic figures and vessels in the exhibition.

*Sacred Symbols: Four Thousand Years of Ancient American Art* comes to the MIA on October 26 and will run through December 28, 2003. To preview this show, click on the FRAME web site: [www.on-frame.com](http://www.on-frame.com). The catalog is online with photos and detailed descriptions of the objects. Maurer and Hennen have provided lots of information for your docent object files. Unfortunately, the Website is in French, the English version is still a work in process. However, even if you’re not a francophile, it’s fun to scroll through the objects and pick out the works from our collection. It’s also a good way to test your “really looking” learning skills if you can’t read the label copy! When it opens here, our curators will augment the FRAME exhibit with recent acquisitions to the MIA collection as well as additional textiles that were too difficult to transport to France. Educational materials for children and families to do together, developed by the French museums, will be used in our programming, another way to share FRAME resources.

## Crossing the Channel

Bob Marshall

*Crossing the Channel must rank as the most important loan exhibition of paintings ever assembled by an MIA curator. It is no surprise, then, to learn that it is the culmination of 20 years’ work by Patrick Noon. To learn something about the genesis of this exhibition and the mechanics of putting togeth-*

er such a show, as well as to give Docents a sneak preview of the summer's Big Event, Muse Reporter Bob Marshall sat down with Patrick for the following behind-the-scenes report:

I first got the idea for this show in 1984 when I was a curator at the Yale Center for British Art. In fact, I still have a draft of my original proposal. The real impetus came from their collection of Richard Parkes Bonington, an absolutely fabulous painter who worked in France and was a close friend of Delacroix and his circle. My college training was in French art, so I felt I could approach this subject from both sides. I received my first research grant for the project in 1985; then in 1986 I was fortunate to be the first recipient of an NEA fellowship offered to promote Anglo-French relations. This not only enabled me to study in Paris for six months, but it opened doors in Paris and Normandy for my research.

When I approached the French with my idea for a show on the influence of Bonington and the British on the French Romantics, they said they weren't interested in seeing British and French art together, but they would be interested in a Bonington show. So from 1988 to 1991 that was my focus, and the resulting show was exhibited at the *Petit Palais* in Paris and then in New Haven.

A year or two later the Tate approached me about doing a show on Géricault in England. I counter-proposed this show, although, frankly, I didn't know how it would fit into the gallery at Yale. The Tate liked the idea and scheduled the exhibition for the '98-'99 season. But then the Tate went through a major reorganization (splitting itself into Tate Britain and Tate Modern), and my show got moved to 2003. This gave me needed breathing room – since, in the meantime, I had moved here from Yale and had to reinstall the MIA's entire paintings collection. I also now had a home for the show in America.

The show's premise is simple: how the exposure to British painting in the 1820s changed the course of French art. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo there was a vacuum in the French art world. David and Napoleon were in exile, the school of history painting had collapsed, there was an expectation of change, and in walked the British – to the Paris Salons of 1824 and 1827 – with a different esthetic. Constable's six-foot paintings of English countryside scenes had enormous impact: think how different they were, in both content and technique, from the history paintings exalted by the French Academy.

The French were also fascinated by British literature – above all, the works of Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron (the quintessential Romantic), and Shakespeare. Scott was so popular there that *Ivanhoe* (which was set in France) and his other novels were published almost simultaneously in French, and there were hundreds of Salon paintings depicting scenes from his works. There was hardly a year in which

Delacroix didn't draw on Byron as an inspiration for a work.

The third impact of British art was its undercutting of the Salon's ranking of what constituted "important" art. The British simply didn't do mythological scenes. By contrast, they specialized in contemporary genre scenes, landscape, sporting art, portraits. Alexander Descamps, for instance, followed the British lead in painting hunting scenes, for which there was a large market in England.

Art history books traditionally say that Constable's works in the 1824 Salon profoundly affected French artists of the time. My goal was to test and explore that thesis, by putting Constable's work next to French paintings from the same period, and to show both the works that were influenced and those that weren't. This contrast was endlessly discussed by French critics of the time, who wrote about the opposition between the old school and the new school in French art, between the conservatives and the Romantics.

At the same time, I didn't want a pedantic purpose to drive the exhibition. I wanted to have pictures of the highest quality that everyone could appreciate, even if they weren't interested in the interplay between the two cultures. If there was a painting that maybe made a point but wasn't in the best condition or wasn't the best work by an artist, I didn't include it. I only wanted to show great works by the 70 or so artists involved.

I had a good idea of the works I wanted, and where they were located, largely because I had been thinking about this project for so long, building a file from exhibition and auction catalogues, for instance. Planning an exhibition in your head is one thing, however; being able to borrow the paintings for a year is quite another. Fortunately, many of the institutions and individuals who owned relevant works believed in this project and were willing to participate. Then comes the horse trading. Having as partners the Tate and the Metropolitan, which joined us as the third presenter, was a great help, of course. But whenever you've seen a favorite painting disappear from our walls in recent years, chances are it was a trade-off for something you will see in this show.

It was a hard decision to lend the *Olive Trees* to Chicago's van Gogh exhibition, but in return we were able to borrow *The Millinery Shop* for the Degas show and now important works by Ingres and Delacroix. Our El Greco went to the Frick last year, and now we're getting the Frick's *White Horse* by Constable. The other major Constable is coming from the Huntington in Pasadena, and they have a loan from the Tate to take its place. We lent our Goya and Delacroix's *Fanatics* to Philadelphia; and in return will be able to show a major Delacroix from that collection. The Met helped secure several works from the National Gallery in London. You may be surprised, but the MIA has more clout with French museums than the Tate, largely because of our association with FRAME, including all the works we contributed to the *Made in America* show and Evan's show of Indian art.

In all, we secured 108 paintings and 40 watercolors. The greatest of the French Romantic works, like Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, could never leave the Louvre, but we were able to borrow a copy, which we will isolate and highlight in a separate gallery as you enter the exhibition. Thereafter, the



Crossing the Channel:  
British and French Painting  
in the Age of Romanticism  
June 8 through September 7, 2003  
Yale Center for British Art

works will be arranged by themes: History and Literature in one gallery, Modern Life in another; then the Watercolors, which we have to group together for conservation reasons; and Landscape. The last two galleries will be combined into a space that will replicate the Paris Salon, with twelve huge pictures, many of them chestnuts of art history. It will be five times as powerful as the last gallery of *American Sublime*.

This is not just another Monet show; it is challenging material. And I don't expect everybody to like everything. But there should be something for everybody, starting with some really great painting. We're planning an eight-page insert in *Arts Magazine* that will be a kind of reader's guide to the key plots, to orient visitors to the cultural language of the 1820s before they arrive. There won't be an audioguide, so there should be plenty of work for the Docents. See you in June!

## Silver: The Ultimate Eclectic Material

*Lynn Teschendorf*

Today almost everyone owns something made of silver, whether it's jewelry, flatware, or a tea service. And in times past, these were also common usages for silver. But people have additionally used it for eating and drinking, conducting worship and ceremonies, expressing status and as a convertible form of wealth. Silver is beautiful, durable, pure, re-workable, sterile, and transmits heat efficiently.

All these characteristics have made silver the medium of choice for many different kinds of objects. But let's take a look at some of the more unusual forms silver has taken, starting with something called a **monteith**. You'll find one just outside of the McFarlane Room, and it makes an excellent stop on a "Mysteries of the Museum" tour. It consists of



a footed silver bowl with dropping handles and a notched or scalloped rim. And what was it used for? You filled it with water and ice, and cooled your wine glass by suspending its foot from one of the notches so that the bowl would rest in the ice

water. The rim could be detached so that the monteith could double as a punch bowl. This particular piece has lion masks on the handles and the Clinton family crest on the body (the crest was engraved some time after the monteith was made, and belongs to the British Clinton family, not the American one). And where did it get its rather odd name? It supposedly was named after a Scotsman called Monteigh, who affected a cloak with a scalloped hem.

Another unusual form is the **book cover**. Near the Daddi triptych, you'll find a beautiful cover from a book of Gospels made in Renaissance Italy. It's made of eleven small silver plates of various shapes and sizes, and decorated in a technique called *niello*. This technique uses engraved lines filled with a black powdered mixture of metallic sulfides which are fused to the underlying silver by heating. The whole thing is then polished, and you have to picture what it would have looked like when new, with the bright shiny sil-

ver contrasting sharply with the black engraved lines. The scenes on the cover depict episodes from the life of Jesus Christ, very appropriate since the Gospels contain the teachings and stories of Christ. At the top you'll find Christ's first miracle, changing water into wine at the Cana wedding feast; the middle shows Christ's baptism; and at the bottom is his last miracle, raising Lazarus from the dead. This is actually the back cover of the book. The front cover is at the Cleveland Museum of Art, and depicts the Annunciation, the birth of Christ and the adoration of the Magi.



We all know about coffee and teapots, but what about the **chocolate pot**? Chocolate was first introduced to Europe by the Spaniards, who brought it home with them from Central America during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Within 100 years, it had become a very popular hot drink (as did coffee and tea – just think of the luxury of a hot flavored beverage if you lived in a drafty, unheated castle). But it wasn't exactly like drinking Nestle's Quick. First you had to laboriously shave chocolate curls from a large block, or you could grind it in a mill. Then you boiled it in red wine thickened with egg and mixed with sugar and spices like vanilla, almond, cinnamon, aniseed or cloves. The chocolate was prone to settle, so you had to keep stirring it up with a rod or *molionet* (muddler) inserted into the pot through a hole in the cover. No one thought about mixing it with milk till about 1725.

So what makes a chocolate pot different from a coffee pot? In general, they take the same form – a tapering cylinder or octagon with a hinged domed cover, a spout and a handle. But look closer at the little finial on top of the cover. Do you see the extra hinge? This allows the finial to be tipped open, exposing the small aperture for inserting the *molionet* to whisk up the chocolate. Another way that silversmiths concealed the aperture was to make a finial that screwed on to the lid, making it virtually indistinguishable from the coffee pot. Some chocolate pots also had hinged caps over the spout opening to keep the chocolate as warm as possible. You can find an example of a typical chocolate pot in the vitrine outside of the Providence Room.

Here's another oddity you might enjoy – sterling **flatware** covered with bugs. And flowers and veggies and shells and lobsters and seahorses. The set of 159 pieces was made by Tiffany around 1880 for Edwin Denison Morgan, former governor of New York and U.S. Senator. Inspired by then-fashionable Japanese motifs, the organic designs were made of gold, silver, copper and copper alloy, and were applied separately to the handles of each knife, fork and spoon. The handles themselves were hand-hammered, and their uneven surfaces reflect that technique. Besides the standard dinner knives and forks, the set also contained three kinds of spoons (table, tea and serving), dessert forks and two other kinds of knives (butter and fruit). Selected pieces can be seen in the corridor behind the McFarlane Room.

If you could see some of the silver pieces that came in

through the Norwest collection, the Tiffany flatware wouldn't look odd at all. The Art Nouveau movement often expressed itself in silver through the imagery of a "strange and creepy menagerie," and the museum acquired lots of pieces that are covered with creatures, both real and imaginary. Still they weren't entirely without precedent. Outside of the Tudor Room, you can see what may be my favorite silver object – a small **box** in the shape of a scallop shell.

And in fact, a real scallop shell was probably used to create the mold from which the lid was cast. The scallop motif is repeated on the base of the hinged cover, and in the feet. The box itself probably held sugar or spices, and its shell format was very popular with the upper crust during the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Samuel Pepys supposedly had one with feet in the shape of snails).

For a silver object this old to survive is unusual. By 1600 there was a lot more silver in circulation due to the Spanish seizure of Peruvian silver deposits, and the Protestant seizure of the Catholic Church's liturgical silver. Even the lower classes in England were able to acquire silver objects. But remember, silver was portable wealth and could easily be melted down. It was also melted down to create new pieces in more fashionable designs. So enjoy this little box for the exquisite rarity it is.

And that's it – my last word on Dec Arts. I hope you have found my little series helpful, and I am most grateful to all of you who have faithfully plowed through each one.

## Mosaic Magic

*Liz Wahlstedt*

How many of us go to Italy and enjoy the artistic wonders of Rome, Florence and Venice? Maybe we even venture to a smaller city like Ravenna, gaze in awe at the jewel-like splendor of the mosaics in San Vitale or Sant' Apollinare and then, after a couple of hours or even a day, move on to other places. Do we ever think of spending a week in Ravenna getting hands-on experience creating our own copy of an ancient mosaic? In February I was fortunate enough to do just that.

I arrived in Ravenna on a chilly but sunny day, checked into my small local hotel and set out to explore the city that would be home for the next week. I immediately found the *Scuola Arte del Mosaico* (School of Mosaic Art) where I would be in class along with five other people. I met our instructor, Luciana Notturmo, who has been studying, working with and teaching mosaic art for about forty years.

We began with a lecture (in English) on the tools and materials needed to create mosaics as well as on the basic techniques. Then we chose a mosaic detail we would like to copy. There was an assortment of fairly simple designs from which we could choose. I selected a geometric detail from the Tomb of Galla Placidia. Having never done a mosaic, I thought this design looked easy. It had mostly vertical and horizontal lines, some diagonals but no curves. I thought

curved lines would be difficult, but straight lines should be no problem. However, one of the assistants told me that the design I had chosen would be difficult. I should have listened.

After lunch we met in our instructor's studio at her home. This is where we would work for the rest of the week.

Our first step was to make a cartoon by tracing each *tessera* (small pieces of glass, stone or tile used to make mosaics) in the original design we had selected. Then we traced the pattern on the back of the paper so it could be transferred onto a bed of lime which would be a temporary binder for our mosaic. We worked in lime rather than directly in cement because cement hardens too quickly to allow enough time for the painstaking copying that could take weeks. Once this was done we spent the next two days cutting *tesserae* and creating our mosaics.

Did you know that the wall and ceiling mosaics in Ravenna are glass with occasional bits of mother-of-pearl or other stones? The pieces are purposely left with uneven edges and sides so they better reflect the light. The glass, called *smalti*, is still manufactured as it was in ancient times. It is made into large pieces that are cut down into *tesserae* of whatever size is needed. Of course the Romans and Byzantines did not have nippers but neither did we. We learned to cut the *smalti* into squares using a hammer and *hardie* (it's like a chisel). Fortunately, there were Band-Aids on hand if we needed them.

I found that the problem with my pattern was the diagonal lines. I got to be very good at cutting triangles to shape the diagonals. It took us one or two days to finish a piece about 12" x 16". But laying the *tesserae* was only half of the process. Once the picture was complete, the next step was to glue cheesecloth to the face of the mosaic so it could be removed from the limestone and cemented to a permanent backing. Although any strong, water-soluble glue would work, we used rabbit skin glue, a method which has been used for centuries. The glue was heated, spread over the cheesecloth with a brush, and dried. The limestone was then removed so the only thing holding the mosaic together was the glue-soaked cheesecloth.

A cement bed was prepared in the final frame and a thin layer of cement was spread on the back of the mosaic. The two were then pressed together and dried in the sun. Of course ancient mosaicists were not making copies so they would have had fewer steps to go through. As a result, they could work directly in cement.

This is what we were going to do in our next project.

We could either make a cartoon and work from that or lay our *tesserae* freestyle. It was an anything goes experience. I chose to work in marble with small pieces of mirror for accents. We had about four hours to complete our 8" x 8" masterpiece.

On our last day we packed things up and carried or shipped



our mosaics home. What GREAT souvenirs! Seeing these works in my home evokes wonderful memories. I gained a new understanding of and appreciation for the ancient artisans and the legacy they have left us. I'm looking forward to going back to Ravenna someday to learn about floor mosaics.

## Book Review:

### ***Squeaking of Art: The Mice Go To The Museum* by Monica Wellington**

*reviewed by Toni DuFour, junior docent*

Is there a preschooler in your life you've been longing to introduce to art? Or maybe you're just looking for fresh ideas to engage our youngest museum visitors. If so, check out *Squeaking of Art*. This delightful children's book follows ten



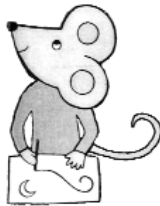
playful mice friends as they tour an imaginary art museum filled with the author's versions of eighty masterpieces. Each gallery in this imaginary museum groups paintings by subject matter that is sure to capture the hearts and imaginations of the young as well as the young at heart. The subjects include music and dance, children playing, fantastic creatures, sleeping and dreaming, and many more! Don't these

sound like terrific themes for youngsters' tours?

As the mice enter each new gallery, the accompanying text poses age-appropriate questions and offers suggestions to spark discussions with young children. In fact, the book is a treasure-trove of open-ended inquiry questions, and who among us wouldn't be grateful for a few new ideas along that line? I particularly enjoyed the section on abstract art, because the suggested questions could easily be adapted to our adult visitors as well. As a junior docent who often finds herself somewhat intimidated by modern art, I welcome any help I can get!

The book includes a glossary of the actual artworks which provided the inspiration for the author's whimsical illustrations, along with the museums where each painting is located – a handy reference for readers of all ages.

This book would make a charming and educational gift for a grandchild or favorite preschooler – and a great addition to your personal art library. But don't take my word for it. To quote Ellie, my three-year-old granddaughter, "Grandma, this book is soooooo fun!" – a persuasive testimonial if ever I heard one! But why not judge for yourself? Share this book with your favorite preschooler, and follow up with an exciting exploration at the MIA!



## **Docenting at the MIA and Doing the M.A. in Art History at the University of St. Thomas**

*Beth Ellwein*

If anyone had peered into my future and told me that I would combine docenting at the MIA and the Masters in Art History at the University of St. Thomas, I would have argued against the prediction. Taking on such a workload for the unemployed, happy-go-lucky volunteer would be pure foolishness. Why would I harness my carefree lifestyle with study and papers to write? But burden myself I did, and I must say for the better all around, both at the MIA and at St. Thomas. Sure there are deadlines for papers the same week you have three tours and a walk-through, but one manages. I do not know how, but one manages.

It's a win-win situation. You feel empowered in your classes because of what you learned as a docent. And you can share in your tours what you have learned in your classes.

For example, African Textiles, particularly northern Africa, Moroccan textiles, have become my area of interest. I spent a January Term (Winter break) in Morocco. There I traveled with a group of students, my professor Cynthia Becker, and her husband Addi Ouadderrou, who is a native Berber from the desert area of Morocco. I now feel I know something about the culture of Morocco and the rugs and fabrics of the area.

I feel I also know something about Moroccan jewelry, since I had an opportunity to collect and admired many pieces of traditional Berber jewelry, some of which is similar to pieces we have in our MIA collection. Some examples are the beautiful fibula with which Berber women fasten their garments, or a silver amulet necklace.

I love to share my Moroccan experience on my tours whenever it is appropriate and I almost always include a piece from Morocco.

I highly recommend the St. Thomas masters program in Art History. I am planning to do at least one more January Term trip. The Orient would be fun.

For those who are interested, the requirements for the M.A. in Art History at the University of St. Thomas are as follows:

- Four seminar courses in specific areas
- Seven additional elective courses
- Qualifying paper
- Oral examination
- Reading knowledge of one language other than English

## What Questions Does Art Ask?

DeDe Leither

What question do you ask art? What questions does art ask you? Ask us all? Art is inside of our bodies and souls. It's in our wishbones, our minds, and our hearts. There's art in our fingertips and in our toes too. There is art all around and within. The artist reaches out for it, tries desperately to take hold of it and make it hers. It is art that our souls reach for and art that supports the soul's reach. It is art that tells the world who we are and why we're still driving on.

From an article DeDe wrote for a St. Cloud publication also called *The Muse*.

## Jenny Byfield Memorial Gift

Jenny Byfield, a member of the docent class of 1975, died last fall after a three-year battle with cancer. With her determination and love for the MIA, she toured up until a few months before her death.

Recently the class of 1975 gathered at the MIA for *A Presentation Tea* to give the museum a special gift purchased by the class in Jenny's memory. It is a Turkish textile which was obtained thanks to the expertise and contacts of curator Lotus Stack.

Lotus looked for a distinctive piece "to remind us all what a truly special individual Jenny was." She found a 19<sup>th</sup> century Turkish napkin – almost 19 feet long and 27 inches wide. It is off-white cotton with stylized multicolored and silver floral with foliate motifs at the short ends (remember the lecture 5/5 on Moroccan textile embroidery). Somewhat thicker threads are woven in to create a self-striped pattern. In a practical sense, Lotus pointed out, these "stripes" would absorb more oil and grease!!

Having trouble figuring out why this is called a "napkin?" The accompanying image from a book about 16<sup>th</sup> century Istanbul may be helpful since it shows a very long napkin. (Note: this is *not* a piece from the MIA collection.)



Jenny was Armenian/Turkish and an accomplished needlewoman who was well-versed in textiles. She was also a gourmet cook with great entertaining skills. As a result, this piece is truly a representation of our dear friend.

*The Class of 1975*

## Musings

Tom Byfield

Have you ever wondered how some phrases got started? Like "eating high off the hog" or "pick a bone with." I haven't either but I need the latter as a lead-in to this piece. I'm told that "Pick a bone with" started in France with an obscure king, Louis the Fat, whose prodigious eating habits were legendary. He would start with an aperitif, *pâté de foie gras*, a small salad with asparagus tips, a cold vichyssoise and an ox. Any guest invited to dine with him was expected to keep up and gorge themselves senseless. Most did all they could to avoid this experience and coined the expression "to pick a bone with Louis the Fat" as a way of showing their distaste. Now the French have given the world many wonderful blessings: French toast, Brigitte Bardot, the Eiffel Tower, (the Chrysler building after taxes), French kissing, singers with that dreadful Edith Piaf warble, and the guillotine. But I would like to pick a bone with them – their language to be specific.

There is no correlation between their written and spoken tongue. In fact they are not even acquainted. For many years this was not a problem for me as I used French about as often as Swahili which was pretty darn seldom as I rarely traveled to Swahili. However, about the time I started losing my hair I began to interject the odd French word or two into my conversation, thinking the brilliance of my repartee would somehow make me appear suave and debonair. Bad idea. It just proved what a provincial yokel I really was. For instance, I pronounced *ménage à trois* as written. It was a shock to find "trois" was "twa." *Oui, oui* became "Ooie, ooie" in my fanciful interpretation. Why in the name of all that is good couldn't they just write it, "We, we" as it should be?

Becoming a docent only compounded the problem with all the French artists the museum seems hell-bent to collect. Who would believe *Georges Seurat* would be Zhorzh Su-ra or *Eugène Delacroix*, a straightforward name as ever there was, would be twisted into O-zhen Delakwa? What they have done to *Caillebotte* doesn't bother me as I studiously avoid him anyway. The French have even invented new letters like that pathetic little "ç" with its tongue hanging down which turns a perfectly fine Francis into a wimpy Franswa.

I realize that many languages have their peculiarities. Dutch sounds like ax blades dropped into a cement mixer. You should hear how they pronounce *Van Gogh*. For the French to speak it properly, both sexes must have grossly enlarged adenoids and very thin mustaches, two addenda I don't plan on incorporating anytime soon. So, if anyone is wont to ask me for help in pronouncing the name of a beloved French artist, I will just say, "who, MUAH?"

## Art Achieves Immortality!

Glenn Keitel

Art apparently visited *Eternal Egypt* many times, absorbing all of the religious rituals and preservation routines. During 70 days of the exhibit, Art was preserved and provided with his own “Book of the Dead.” Art passed all the tests. He must have been good. While Art watched in his white flowing gown and his wife stood by, shaking her sistrum – his heart floated above the balance pan while Mat’s feather of truth forced the other balance pan to the ground. Anubis surely was elated. And the evil, devouring monster – part alligator, part leopard and part hippopotamus – was once again thwarted.

Art moved on to everlasting life.

Now, you ask, “How do you know that Art has achieved this wondrous everlasting life?”

Despite assurances to eliminate Art, he is still there, protecting the volunteer parking spaces. Professional-looking signs were carefully installed above “Art’s Volunteers Permit Parking Only”. Yes, Art and his bad punctuation live on, seemingly forever.



## A Special Thank You

*Domo arigato gozaimasu* to the docents for making the purchase of the gorgeous, lavender Noh robe a reality. It is currently on view in gallery 219. We should be proud of making our first contribution to the MIA collection. Thank you.

Barbara Kvasnik-Nuñez  
Kathleen Wanner  
Lesley Ackerberg



## Keeping in Touch...



### Letter from the Docent Chair

It has been a pleasure for me to serve as Docent Chair during this past year. For a while, it seemed that the role was largely ceremonial, perhaps even routine. However, that changed when my friend and fellow-classmate Barbara Kvasnick-Nuñez caught up with me the day Matthew Welch exhibited some incredibly beautiful Japanese robes – and you know the rest of that story! Thanks to all of you who were able to contribute to our purchase, and especially to Kathleen Wanner and Lesley Ackerberg for coordinating the effort.

The role of Docent Chair also gained some meaning in the wake of the “Egypt affair.” I am truly glad that many of you called or e-mailed me with your worries and frustration. I was able to generalize your comments and pass them along to Debbi. Be assured that she was extremely responsive and caring, as was Sheila upon her return.

Thanks to everyone on the Docent Executive Committee – it was a great opportunity for me to get to know these terrific people. You are in good hands next year, and I wish Peggy Dietzen a happy, successful and even “routine” year!

Carol Burton

### News from the Museum Guide Office

#### World Religions Slide Series

In the spirit of providing “news you can use” I want to share a new resource with you. If you are looking for a great resource to help you understand and discuss some of the world’s religions and integrate relevant art works into your tours, keep reading!

In the library/study is a binder containing the World Religion Slide Series produced by the museum with help from many people involved with religious studies in the Twin Cities. The series includes five sets of images drawn primarily from the Institute’s collection, accompanied by very useful texts that introduce each religion and interpret the selected objects.

The impetus for the series came from Evan Maurer, Director, and the project was coordinated and supervised by Kate Johnson, Chair of the Education Division. The primary writers were interns who worked with curators to select the works of art chosen and check the reliability of references, and with individuals identified by their communities as knowledgeable about the religion and as practitioners. Those advisors who wished to be listed are cited in the credits. The entire set was edited for consistency.

The five sets in the series introduce readers to Judaism and Jewish art, Islam and Islamic art, Hinduism and Hindu art, Christianity and Christian art, and Buddhism and Buddhist art. Although the binder does not include the actual slides, a digital image illustrates each art work discussed.

“Judaism and Jewish Art from the Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” written by Dana Kanter, considers objects in four categories, Decorations



for the Torah, The Sabbath, Hanukkah, and Passover.

“Islam and Islamic Art from the Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” written by Erin Gleeson with assistance from Naheede Khan, Librarian, Islamic Center of Minnesota, Beenish Malhi, and Jean Ehling, discusses pages from the Koran from north Africa and Iran, bowls, wall tiles, and other objects.

“Hinduism and Hindu Art from the Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” written by Stephanie Cardon with assistance from Anu Jayaraman, includes Indian sculptures and architectural fragments, as well as objects from Cambodia and/or Thailand.

“Christianity and Christian Art from the Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” written by Annalise Nelson, looks at objects in many media from across Europe from the 14th through the 20th centuries.

“Buddhism and Buddhist Art from the Collection of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts,” written by José Villedas with assistance from James W. Laine, Ph.D., Professor, Religious Studies, Macalester College, considers Buddhist images and ideas from India, Thailand, Burma, Japan, China, and Tibet.

*Sheila McGuire*

### **Honorary Docents' News**

We continue to meet on the third Wednesday of the month for Book Club and on the fourth Wednesday for tours and lunch. All Honoraries are welcome. A schedule of tours for the summer is as follows:

#### **May 28<sup>th</sup>**

Meet at the MIA at 10:00 a.m. There will be a tour of the Historic Minneapolis Riverfront with Dory Rose. Carpool to the Nicollet Island Inn where we will have a brief history of the area. Then we will go on to tour the Stone Arch Bridge, archeological reconstructions, etc. Lunch will be at Kramarczuk's, 215 East Hennepin (authentic Polish food.)

#### **June 25<sup>th</sup>**

Meet at the MIA at 10:00 a.m. There will be a tour of the Alfred Pillsbury mansion and the original home by the present owner. It includes the marble storage room which held objects now at the MIA. Tea and light refreshments will be served

#### **July 23<sup>rd</sup>**

Meet at MIA at 10:30 in the Wells Fargo Gallery on the third floor to tour “Counter Revolution.”

#### **August 27<sup>th</sup>**

Meet at 10:30 for a tour of the new School of Art building on the U of M West Bank. More information on this later.

## **Special Thanks from the Co-editors of the *Docent Muse***

The Co-editors, Karen Boe and Pauline Lambert, wish to thank all those who contributed to the *Docent Muse* during the past year. We are grateful to you for the time and talent you brought to the task. The work of all docents is the richer for the research and personal expertise you have shared with us.

Thanks to the generosity of Merritt Nequette, his skill in manipulating text and illustrations using his computer, scanner and digital camera, this year's newsletter had a polished appearance. We are grateful that he was willing to share his expertise in desktop publishing which is a new endeavor for him. He retired less than a year ago from the University of St. Thomas where had been an associate professor of music and an administrator. Merritt donated his time as helpmate and husband to co-editor Pauline Lambert.

