# The Docent Muse

#### September 2009

## A New Year

#### Sheila McGuire

The beginning of the school year is a great time to reflect on what we do and the impact we have on the lives of everyone we come into contact with in the museum's galleries.

I often think with fondness about visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a child. The bus ride through New York City was fascinating and exciting, but nothing compared to walking into the museum, through the hallways and up the grand staircase. I always hoped to see the picture of the little boy in the red outfit with the cats and birds. Now I know that it is Goya's painting of *Don Manuel Osorio Manrique* 

*de Zuñiga*, but back then that didn' t matter much to me. I especially remember the time I even got to show "my" painting to my mother who came along as a chaperone. I held her hand going up the stairs and proudly told the tour guide she was my mom. The guide expressed such



excitement about meeting my mom. In retrospect, I suspect she probably wasn't really excited, but she knew her reaction meant the world to one nine-yearold girl. That same day I bought a mini poster of my favorite painting and one of sunflowers in a vase by Monet for my mom. We both put our pictures in frames when we got home. They hung in our home for years.

I' m actually going somewhere with this. As museums today are looking to the future, there seems to be renewed attention being paid to how critical early childhood visits to museums are for building a future audience. But it is not enough to just let kids in the doors and count them on a clicker. It is imperative that every experience every child has here is *enjoyable* and *memorable*.

No matter how you feel one day, or how bad traffic getting here is, you have the "power" to make or break their museum experience, to make it so great that they can't wait to come back, hopefully with someone else, and often. Set a positive tone right away! Smile before the children even walk in the door. Make sure your voice is "smiling" when you welcome them. When possible, use their names, ask them about themselves, ask them where they' re from (even though you know!), and ask them "what's going on here?" or what they think at every work of art you share with them.

Children are as precious as the objects you are showing them, so never forget to treat them that way. You won't like the way every child behaves, but he or she might just be unaccustomed to being in a museum, or need a little extra attention. This tour is our chance to welcome every child, not just that day, but for the rest of his or her life.

## Welcome to a New Year of Touring

#### Debbi Hegstrom

I have always treasured the return of fall and the new school year. I guess it's the perpetual student in me. It's so great to see the return of old friends, and this year, the arrival of a whole group of new friends!

#### NEW Mentoring Program

A new flock of junior docents means an opportunity to foster new mentor-mentee relationships. We greatly value the role a mentor plays as a junior docent develops the necessary skills to become an active senior docent. Toward that end, we will be selecting about 25-30 senior docents to serve as mentors. If you accept our invitation, we are looking for an *ongoing*, *two-year* commitment to this role. In some cases we may ask you to mentor more than one person.

Marge Buss, class of 2001, will serve as our mentor liaison. She will work with us and you to

accomplish the goals of the mentoring program. Having juniors follow your tours will be an essential component of the program, as you model the conversation-based experiences that reflect the mission of our department:

The Department of Museum Guide Programs provides volunteer-facilitated learning experiences that inspire visitors to discover personal meanings in art and explore museums confidently on their own.

In our new approach to the mentoring program, we regret to say that Wednesday docents will not be asked to serve as mentors. We need the juniors to be able to follow tours with you on days other than those when they are in training. We also will be asking people who are here for most of the touring year.

The notebook with pictures and descriptive paragraphs about the members of the new docent class is available in the docent and guide lounge. On October 8, many of them will be attending the continuing education related to "In Pursuit of a Masterpiece" training, presented by Kaywin Feldman. Please reach out to the fresh faces you will see in the crowd, introduce yourself, and extend a warm welcome to your new colleagues!

#### Bookmarks for Students

Courtesy of the Friends, we have a new supply of "Ask me what I saw today at the MIA!" bookmarks. Grab a stack before your tour and give them to teachers and chaperones of every school group to give to the students as a take-home reminder of their day at the MIA!

#### **Recent Changes over the Summer**

As you have no doubt observed, there have been quite a number of changes in the galleries this summer. Here is a list of some of the more noteworthy changes you might want to keep in mind as you plan your tours for this fall season.

- 1. First floor galleries (G110) are empty except for banks and children's art.
- 2. *Wu Family Reception Hall* (gallery 218) contents and theme have changed.
- 3. *Djenne Equestrian Figure* is temporarily not on view in gallery 250 (to be included in the *In Pursuit of a Masterpiece* exhibition).
- "Warmth and Whimsy" Josefina Aguilar exhibit in gallery 261a. Adam & Eve, Noah's Ark, and Nativity.
- 5. Horse and trappings in place of tepee in gallery 216.

- 6. Shaping Reality: Geometric Abstraction after 1960 in gallery 263.
- 7. *Study for Portrait VI* by Francis Bacon is temporarily not on view in gallery 377 (to be included in the *In Pursuit of a Masterpiece* exhibition).
- 8. American Nudes from the Villa America Collection in gallery 360.
- 9. *Mrs. T. in Cream Silk* by George Bellows now in gallery 361.
- 10. *Pleas and Thank* Yous: 100 *True Stories* by Gwendolyn Knight now in gallery 361.
- 11. *The Wash* by Clementine Hunter now in gallery 361.
- 12. Inkstand in the form of the Quirinal Monument now in gallery 350 (to be included in the In Pursuit of a Masterpiece exhibition).
- Large contemporary painting Santos-Dumont The Father of Aviation II by Kehinde Wiley is now on display in the Baroque gallery 330.
- 14. Portrait of Captain Samuel Chester Reid by John Wesley Jarvis now in gallery 333.
- 15. Portrait of George Washington by Thomas Sully now in gallery 333.
- 16. Paul Revere Tea Service now in gallery 333.
- 17. *Boys Bathing* by Alexander Grinager now in gallery 303.
- 18. *The Smoker* by Edouard Manet now in gallery 321.
- Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta by Francisco Jose de Goya is temporarily not on view in gallery 321 (to be included in the *In Pursuit of a Masterpiece* exhibition).
- 20. *Deer in the Forest* by Gustave Courbet is temporarily not on view in gallery 321 (to be included in the *In Pursuit of a Masterpiece*).

#### Overheard in the Galleries

I was with a group of 4th graders standing in front of "Mrs. T. in Cream Silk, No.2" by George Bellows. It was a VTS tour. The question: What's going on in this painting"?

I gave the students "looking time" and told them to think hard before they put their hands up. They had been a really impulsive group in the classroom, so I wasn't going to put up with any nonsense!

Finally, a brave hand came up. Then, she put both of her hands defiantly on her hips, and said: "Well, she FINALLY got permission from her parents to get married"!! It caught the group so off guard, we all broke up. Then, we proceeded to have the best VTS discussions at the MIA. -- Antra Pakalns

# The Summer of the Nude

#### Allison Thiel

June July and August found the members of the Docent Discussion Group enrolled in Nude Summer Camp.



For three months these campers devoted themselves to the study of the nude. June and July were spent at a secluded table placed deep in the vegetation of the Black Forest Café's outdoor dining area.

At this table many things were discussed. Many things about Nudes!

I should make clear that my fellow docents brought their serious minds to our discussions. So therefore we talked about serious things.

We exchanged stories about our experiences touring nudes (the good, the bad, the funny and the sad).

We discussed specific artworks and the challenges they gave us.

We talked about what makes our tours work and we

talked about those things that had not worked out so well for us.

All the time we kept our focus on The Nude. And we were very focused!

For our third meeting the campers decided to leave



the friendly confines of the Black Forest and venture out on a hike.

All good campers like to hike.

But of course, our hike had to include nudes. Many Many Nudes.

Our August meeting found us hiking the halls and galleries of The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

There, as you very well might know, a hiker will find many nudes displayed for viewing purposes. So our trusty campers put them to good use. We looked at them, thought about them and discussed them.

Along the way the campers remembered how much fun and also how rewarding it is to be with friends and colleagues.

So here is what some of us did on our summer vacation.



We went to Nude Summer Camp.

## Overheard in the Galleries

I was leading a tour for a 3rd grade class. We went into the gallery to look at Olive Trees, and, of course, passed by the Caillebotte, and the two male Rodin sculptures, which elicited many giggles and comments. So we had the talk about art and nudity, and I think I said something like we wouldn't be looking at any such objects on our tour today, but we may pass by some and they did not have to look if they didn't want to. Then this sweet little third grade girl sidled up to me, took my hand, and whispered, "OK, but sometimes, I really want to look!" – Mary Costello

## The Louvre is landing!

#### A Sneak Peek with Kate Johnson

*The Louvre and the Masterpiece*, the eagerly-anticipated exhibition of 62 works spanning 4000 years from the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris will finally open at the MIA on October 18, 2009. Kate Johnson, Chair of the MIA's Education division, will be speaking to docents about the objects and themes in the Louvre show on October 9. In the midst of flurry of preparations for the exhibition, Kate graciously made time to e-chat with the *Muse*.

*Muse:* Can you tell us about one or two pieces in the show that you are most eager to share with mia visitors?

*K.J.*: Interestingly, two gems, in terms of their histories and the craftsmanship involved in making them, are works in metal. The first is the *Boscoreale* 

had not worked out se



*Dish,* a piece of Roman silver (with gilding) that combines pretty much every technique used by silversmiths (then or now!) plus some wonderfully intriguing and evocative imagery. The other is the Islamic *Basin* from the 13th century.

The scenes depicted on the inner curving surface of this vessel are like miniature paintings, complete with riders, foot soldiers, and animals foreshortened so that they seem to be plunging out into your (the viewer's) space. Both works of art are reminders that we seriously underestimate the technological sophistication of earlier civilizations and shouldn't be so smug about our own.

*Muse*: I was surprised to find out that in the exhibition, alongside some of the masterpieces, viewers will also see some similar "non-masterpieces" to provide context and allow visitors to explore first hand exactly what makes a work of art a masterpiece. What objects in the show came as a surprise to you?

*K.J.*: In terms of surprises, I was stunned to see the Rouchomowsky *Tiara*, because it was lent by the Louvre 36 years ago to the mia's *Fakes and Forgeries* exhibition, the first I ever worked on! It is a grand example of an art forgery that speaks to all the desires of a moment in history. The other surprise is the Voiriot portrait of a mature woman, clearly a beneficiary of the privileged life of pre-Revolutionary France yet possessing such an open, intelligent countenance. You really want to know who she is but, alas, her identity remains a mystery. This exhibition, like no other in recent memory, has reminded me the number of unanswered questions in the history of art *far* outnumbers the number of answers we possess.

*Muse*: What is your favorite piece in the show?

*K.J.*: My favorite piece is one I was initially disposed to dismiss as too small to attract much attention. It is the earliest of the four Mesopotamian cylinder seals. With little more than stick figures, it depicts - from right to left - two attendants to the Sun God opening the doors to the East, and then the Sun blazing through the opening between two very schematically engraved mountains. The majesty and

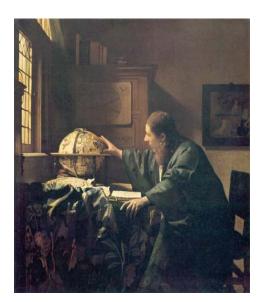
the power of the sun - along with water, the source of all life - is , to my eye, breathtakingly concrete.

*Muse:* There are so many wonderful connections that can be made between this exhibition and the mia's collection. Are there any connections that you find particularly meaningful?

*K.J.*: Ah, connections to the MIA's collection. Actually, more than parallels, I would say *The Louvre and the Masterpiece* reminds me that each museum collection is distinct, representing national or regional agendas and the largesse of specific donors. The objects in this exhibition, with only a few gaps, tell a fairly continuous story of French history beginning with the Romans. Even the Mesopotamian cylinder seals are here because in the early 19th century the French Consul in Mosul was intrigued by the pile of earth on the opposite bank of the Tigris and began excavating what was a seat of the ancient Assyrian kingdom.

*Muse:* What would you like to see our visitors take away from this exhibition?

*K.J.*: One of the essays in the catalogue (excellent, dense fodder for future pondering, by the way) introduced me to Sigmund Freud's idea that knowledge enables one to manipulate a concept or a thing in one's imagination. I have always instinctively believed that to know something about anything meant that I would enjoy that "anything" much more. I hope that visitors to the exhibition experience the joy of learning and knowing, and take away a thirst to learn more about everything in life.



# The Louvre and the Masterpiece Fun Facts

#### Kate Johnson

1. The exhibition includes works of art from all eight of the Louvre's curatorial departments (Egyptian antiquities, Greek/Etruscan/Roman antiquities, Near Eastern antiquities, Islamic arts, graphic arts, decorative arts, paintings, sculpture).

2. A whopping 29 curators and/or their assistants contributed catalogue essays! Does anyone know how many curators the Louvre has?

3. The schedule for Louvre curators acting as couriers for works of art was a travel agent's dream (or nightmare!). Eight Louvre curators are coming to Minneapolis with their objects.

4. One of the most beautiful fakes (the *Vasters Incense Boat*) was given to the Louvre by one of the world s richest men - Baron Adolphe de Rothschild.

5. The Pre-Dynastic *Nagada Vase* (Egypt, 3800 - 3500 BCE) is made of basalt, one of the hardest stones on earth, and yet, it was made with stone tools

6. The Lady of Auxerre (Crete 7th cent. BCE) originally appeared painted in brilliant colors - notice the designs carved onto her garments and imagine them in color. The Lady's story alone is filled with fun and amazing facts.

Come on a tour to hear them all!

# ArtsConnectEd: An Old Friend Just Got Better

An old friend just got better. As many of you know, one of the best sources for information on the collections of the mia is the Web site, *ArtsConnectEd* (http://www.artsconnected.org/). This site is a joint project of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Walker Art center. ArtsConnectEd is a great tool to use when you prepare your tours. From this single site you have access to all of the digitized resources of both the MIA and the Walker. You can search for or browse through high quality photos of works of art, text-based support material (including gallery labels, articles and commentaries), audio files that include the audio recordings created for the museum audio tours, short video clips, and online interactive resources. The original ArtsConnectEd site was launched in 1998 as a site to help K-12 educators, students, and scholars research the MIA and Walker collections, create and manage educational content and develop instructional modules. The new ArtsConnectEd, which debuted in May of this year, greatly expands the capabilities of the original site by allowing users access to a much larger body of digitized material and providing them with more sophisticated tools to research, produce and manage online art collections and instructional materials.

Even though ArtsConnectEd is intended primarily for use by classroom teachers and museum educators, many MIA docents and guides are using it to research particular works of art and prepare tours. There are a number of ways you can use the site to help you prepare for your tours. When you first enter the site, you have two choices: you can access the ART FINDER to begin searching for particular works of art and support materials, or you can launch the ART COLLECTOR to begin assembling a collection of art works for your tour.



In the ART FINDER you have a number of options available to help you locate individual works of art and a wide array of supporting materials. Nearly 94,000 works of art are cataloged in ArtsConnectEd together with over 1,000 audio and video files and nearly 3,600 text-based resources. The site has sophisticated search capabilities that allow you to focus your search, for example, on those works for which online images exist, or on works that are currently on display at the MIA. Say, for instance, you want to find out how many works by the artist Picasso are in the MIA collection. You can search the entire MIA collection for works by Picasso and you will discover that that 22 of the works have online images available. Through further refinement of your search you can discover that the MIA owns a total of 71 works by Picasso, of which 11 are currently on view.

One of the most valuable features of this site when you are planning a tour is your ability to limit your search to a particular gallery to refresh your mind about what items are on display there. For example, entering "G<sub>371</sub>" (for gallery 371) in the keyword search field will return a list of all 16 items currently on display in that gallery. Be sure to uncheck the "has image" box, to see all of the works in the gallery.

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Hint: If you want take a virtual walk through the entire MIA online to see what is currently on display, go to http://www.artsmia.org/directories/art-finder/ and click on the "by Gallery" button in the "Browse" section.

There is another feature of the program that you might find valuable as you look through a collection of items. Once you see something that interests you, let your mouse cursor hover over the picture of

the object for a moment and a popup window will appear giving you the basic information for that object as well as its gallery location if the item is currently on display. If you want more detailed information, you can click on the item and go to a screen with a larger photo of it (assuming an image is available) and an excellent zoom feature that allows you to magnify portions of the image for closer examination. Try looking at the images in full screen mode by clicking the "FULLSCREEN" button beneath the image. On the same page

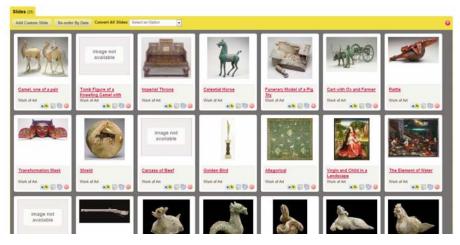
you' ll find detailed information as well as a brief description of the object and links to other background information (text, videos audio files, related items, etc.). You' ll also find a wonderfully useful feature, "Scale", designed to give you an idea of the approximate size of the object by depicting an outline





of an easily recognizable object that is roughly the same size as the

item in question. Once you' ve found an item you want to include in your tour, you can begin building a Set (a collection of works of art, audio, video, text, and interactive resources) in the ART COLLECTOR. Some features are only available to registered users; click the "register" button at the top of any page to register. Before you begin using ART COL-LECTOR take time to register and sign in. If you click on the little yellow plus sign in the lower right-hand corner of an item you' ve found in the ART FINDER, a small window will open up inviting you to add it to one of your existing Sets or to create a new Set. You can find out much more about using both the ART FINDER and the ART COLLECTOR by clicking on the red HELP button at the top and bottom of each screen.



You can continue to search for items you think you might want to include in your tour and add them to your Set. When you' ve finished adding items, you can annotate them with your own notes, delete items you no longer want, rearrange the remaining items in the order you will present them on your tour, and finally, print out your tour complete with images and notes. There are a number of options for printing your tour; try each of them to discover which one best meets your needs.

One of the best things about the ART COLLECTOR is that it is easy to modify a Set and your changes are automatically saved when you quit. That means that you can come back later and refine your tour by adding or deleting items or modifying your comments. And because your tours are saved, you can select a previous tour and update it to give again. Sets can also be shared with other users. Consider using the "submit" button to share your Sets with other users of ArtsConnectEd or with the visitors who attend your tours.

The new ArtsConnectEd Web site is an excellent tool to help you plan your tours. By bringing all the museum's art works as well as the audiovisual and text support material together in one place, ArtsConnectEd makes it easy to assemble tours and provides an easy and efficient way to save them for future use.

One last note for those who want to find out more about the new ArtsConnectEd Web site. Several training sessions will be offered for beginners on September 24 and October 1 (2:00-4:00); and for intermediate users on September 24 (6:30-9:00) and November 19 (2:00-4:00). Contact Stacey Thompson at *sthompson@artsmia.org* or call her at 612-870-3013 for more information and to sign up for one of these sessions.

Many thanks to Marcy Rinek and Treden Wagoner for contributing to this article.

#### **Discover Your Story tours**

with the 3Ms - Michele (Yates), Marcy (Rinek), and Marilyn (Smith)

*Muse:* What is the most challenging aspect for you about *Discover Your Story* tours?

*M1:* Logistics - pinning down how many wheelchairs, hearing devices, helpers, etc. are needed for each tour. It can take easily 20 minutes to get everyone organized for the tour. I've found one just needs to be persistent about reaching the contact person and getting the advance information. Also, be sure the driver knows where the Steven's Ave. entrance is.

*M2:* Logistics - I' ve found if everyone is in a wheelchair, it is easier to keep the group together and the tour is often more relaxed.

M3: Logistics.

*Muse:* OK, Logistics! What is most rewarding for you about this experience?

*M1:* My experience has been extremely satisfying. I've been delighted by how engaged and honest about their feelings participants are. They often have rich stories and life experience to share. The tours also have been such a gift to the caregivers, who enjoy the tours as much as the persons with dementia. This is an activity they can share together.

 $M_{2:}$  I' m amazed at the clarity and vividness of some of the memories shared by participants on these tours .

*M3*: My mother had Alzheimer's and I was unable to do things like this with her because we lived far away from each other. So, I really enjoy being able to do this for someone else's mother/loved one with dementia. So many of the participants and caregivers are appreciative after the tours and they let you know it!

Muse: What has worked really well on your tours?

*M1:* A Love and Marriage theme has worked well for me. At the *Tatra* we talk about first cars and first dates. At Ensor's *The Intrigue* participants are pretty forthcoming about the troublesome people they' ve had in their lives! De la Fresnay's *Married Life* always brings out lots of discussion, humor, and laughs. Sometimes criticism of the style. Bonnard's *Dining Room in the Country* never fails to delight and it brings out the gardeners in the group.

M2: In the training, engaging the senses was emphasized. A Summer Pastimes theme has worked well for me in that respect. We spend time at the Seashore at Sainte-Adresse with Monet walking barefoot on the beach with sand between our toes, picking up seashells and listening. We run Catching Butterflies in the Field with Wendell, smelling the lavender growing there. And we rest, lying in the cool grass, looking up at the blue sky with Chagall's poet.

*M3*: When I was a girl, going on a road trip was one of the best times that could be had. So on one tour that is fun to give we "jump in" the *Tatra* and head down the road out to the country for a boat ride with Tissot's girls *On the Thames* river and see a Heron. We stop for lunch at Vuillard's sunny café. Then we see friends and family on *Holiday* with Prendergast. And in between our stops, on the road we read and laugh those old, wonderful, corny Burma Shave signs that appear on all the best road trip roads. We really have a wonderful time! *Muse:* Thank you, Michele Yates, Marcy Rinek, and Marilyn Smith, for sharing your *Discover Your Story* experiences with the *Muse.* It's clear doing these tours has been rich, rewarding and a load of fun! We will all look forward to future *Discover Your Story* trainings with our own Docent Executive Committee chair Jane Tygesson and Sheila McGuire.

#### Saying So Long to Sin and Salvation

Sin and Salvation - William Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision made a big splash at the MIA this summer. In preparation for the exhibition, 29 MIA docents immersed themselves in the art of the Pre-Raphaelites and the science, literature, politics, and social life of Victorian England. About 3500 people participated in one of the 150 docent-led tours given in the Target galleries this summer.

The *Muse* tracked down several enthusiastic docents and learned that museum visitors were captivated by stories of the personal lives of the Pre-Raphaelite artists. The portrait gallery became a favorite spot for telling the tales of love and love triangles, losses, struggles and triumphs. Visitors were often surprised by the richness of the color in the paintings, and amazed at the gaudiness of some. Many children toured the show through the *Art in the Parks* program and especially enjoyed seeing the actual lanterns, rugs, robes, and artist's palette that they could identify in the paintings on view. In general, audiences were especially engaged in exploring the symbolism in the artworks.

Docents were surprised by the large groups that turned out to take tours - often 20-30 on the weekends. Doctors of Literature, art historians, fabric artists, a prayer shawl specialist, English teachers and many other deep thinkers came to see Hunt's art and enriched everyone's touring experience by participating in the lively discussions that unfolded on tours. To get these great discussions started, MIA docents used a tremendous variety of themes to great effect in the galleries. Of the seven docents I talked to, I was impressed that no two used the same theme! Here is just a sampling - *William Hunt's Spiritual Journey, Search for Symbols, Society and politics in Victorian England, The Quest for Truth, and Good Yarn* (as in the tangly stuff, textiles, and stories).

The combination of closely observed representation and rich symbolism of Hunt's work was clearly a winner with MIA docents and visitors this summer. *Sin and Salvation* may have left us, but here are a few of the wonderful memories that will remain with our docents.

"A group of four visitors were so enthralled by the show they bought me a cup of coffee just so we could continue our discussion after the tour was over" -Judy

"Gravity has left the room!" - exclaimed by an excited 11-year-old viewing *The Lady of Shallot* - Wendy

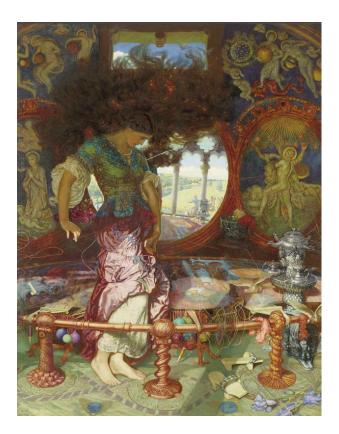
"A favorite of mine and the MIA guides on my tour was our own *Peace Concluded*. I had never included it on a tour prior to this exhibition because it gave me a bit of a creepy feeling. Finding out that it has been interpreted as addressing some of the ' uncomfortable truths and controversies' of that time and was seen by some as a critique of English society validated the intuitive feelings I had always had. The MIA docents on my tour enjoyed discussing the different interpretations of this masterpiece in our collection" - Joy

#### Overheard in the Galleries

It was a VTS tour for 2nd graders and at the Peace Concluded, in response to my "what's going on here", a little boy raised his hand right away and said, "That's God, and that's his girlfriend, and she's sitting on his lap because he just gave her those little animal toys"!!!!!! I just moved right on and said, okay, what else do you notice?! – Michele Yates

"[The Lady of Shallot] has given me more pause than most art I' ve encountered. Hunt sees the lady as a type of unfaithful artist, her inspiration, even her life taken by her sudden turn to the world. A visitor and I puzzled over this harsh interpretation of the poem and of the life of art. 'I don't see how an artist could be so objective, so distant from the world.' he said. We talked a bit more, then he said, 'No, encumbered by the world.' Then I saw it too. Hunt believed the artist had to remain free from the entrapment, the enchantment of the material world, to stay in the tower and reflect on the world as best he/she can. That is, as Hunt saw it, the artist's high calling and grave responsibility. Perhaps it's what Yeats meant when e said, 'Art is the social act of a solitary person." - Charlie

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