

The Docent Muse



December 2010

Holiday Greetings from the DEC Chair

Marge Buss, Docent Class of 2001

As we prepare to say farewell to 2010 and welcome in 2011, I'd like to share some thoughts with you.

We had to say goodbye a few times this year. A beloved curator retired. A dedicated educator retired. A cherished docent, who was my mentee in 2005, passed away too soon. A long held tradition came to an end.

Without the mention of any names, we all have a sense of whom and what the above paragraph is referring to. Why? Because we are a family. We share together, play together, learn together, and disagree with one another from time to time. This is what families do. The really good families stick together. The excellent families reach out to give their gifts in life to others. Every tour you give is a gift in the life of another.

As I sit back and reflect on this, I'm moved to have seen so many emotions ebb and flow this year. I'm grateful to those of you who have shared your thoughts with me. Your thoughts are my gift. I'm privileged to represent you as your DEC Chair. I want the best for you always because we are a family.

So thank you for everything you do and all you have given to enrich our community. You are the beating heart of public outreach. There is no better gift to give than that.

May you all enjoy the best of the holiday season.

Sunshine Fund Appeal

Docent Executive Committee

Throughout the year, docents who are ill, hospitalized, or who have lost a loved one are remembered with a floral arrangement or card. The Sunshine Fund provides the money to carry out this activity. Because the current balance in this Fund is very low, we are asking all docents to contribute a small amount (\$5.00) to this important part of our docent experience. Please put your contribution (cash or check made out to "Docents of the MIA") in the envelope marked "Sunshine Fund" on the bulletin board in the Docent Lounge. Thank you so much!



The Participatory Museum: An Exploration in the Galleries

Debbi Hegstrom

Last summer, the museum's Wallace Leadership Grant enabled us to bring blogger, consultant and museum experience designer Nina Simon to Minneapolis for a week of workshops with MIA staff. Her focus is on helping museums become places where people "create, share, and connect around content," and she promotes the concept of museums as places people "use" not just "visit." Many of Nina's ideas are directly applicable to tours, so we wanted to experiment with some of them with your help. We designed a two-part workshop to share new ideas based on Nina's visit and also to further explore types of participatory activities you are already doing in the galleries.

Simon offers the following guidelines for encouraging and enhancing visitor participation:

- Be personal – help visitors identify with works of art
- Scaffold – give support, guidance, and parameters for visitors' experiences in the galleries
- Design questions for thoughtful responses
- Offer multiple points of engagement – participation doesn't look the same for everyone
- Connect to known frameworks – capture the spirit of the "neighborhood coffee shop" experience.

In "Part 1: Visitor Engagement," several docents and guides set out into the galleries to inspire and encourage museum visitors to participate while looking at works of art. Here are some of the things that happened:

- Playing musical recordings of Mozart and Haydn in the *French Grand Salon* prompted visitors to propose other types of sounds that would attract interest, such as voices speaking in French or the sounds of feet dancing.
- Displaying images and video on an iPad of the Chihuly *Sunburst* installation or bronze casting in Benin generated discussion and questions about these objects.
- Making noise with a grogger in the Judaica gallery caused a visitor to ask, "Where's the party?" and remain to chat about the festival of Purim.

- Clinking a metal rasp outside the Tibetan gallery raised curiosity about the sound being made and how it relates to the creation of a mandala.
- Zooming in on the detailed features of the *Hothouse* prints with a magnifying glass caused visitors to look even more closely.
- Taking digital photos of visitors in the galleries got them excited about looking themselves up on Flickr by going to the museum's website.
- Inviting children to make drawings inspired by objects in the Thaw gallery prompted the comment, "I didn't know the museum did things like this."
- Listening in on visitors' conversations in the Japanese galleries led to a discussion about Japanese calligraphy and how to form various characters.

By the time you read this, we will have completed "Part 2: Asking Questions People Really Want to Answer," a session building on what you already do so well, as we seek to provide even richer participatory experiences in the galleries. Look for a future summary of that session.

Spotlight on the Tour Coordinators

Emily Shapiro

They grew up within six miles of each other in the suburbs of Milwaukee, but never met until they started their jobs at the MIA. Now, every day they work within six feet of each other in a small office next to the Docent Lounge. One studied art history and classics in college and grad school and was once able to read the first book of the *Iliad* in the original Greek. The other studied painting and drawing in college and, currently, is a photographer who shuns modern gadgets and loves being outdoors.

Did you recognize our loyal, hardworking tour coordinators, Jennifer Curry and Paula Warn, in the above description? Have you ever wondered how they manage to maintain both their good humor and their sanity while simultaneously juggling tour assignments, answering teacher phone calls and fielding random questions from the docents who constantly swarm past their door? Or how they can get *any* work done at all while we sit endlessly on the couches in the lounge, loudly comparing our object lists and conducting our tour "post mortems?" If so, read on.

Jennifer and Paula (or “JP” as they are called by some) love their tour coordinator jobs! They enjoy working with the teachers who call them for tour suggestions and scheduling, particularly those teachers whose classes return to the MIA year after year. They are amused by our conversations in the lounge; indeed, their tour scheduling decisions are assisted by hearing us discuss our successes and failures, our likes and dislikes. They are inspired by working in an environment where they are surrounded every day by art and by art appreciators. And they are challenged and invigorated by the diversity and unpredictability of both their work and of the many people with whom they interact each day.

Jennifer is the art history and classics buff. She grew up in Brookfield, Wisconsin, and received a B.A. in Art History and Classic Civilizations from Lawrence University. Following graduation, she moved to Minnesota and got her M.A. in Art History from the University of St. Thomas. While in graduate school, Jennifer worked as an intern at the MIA and, in 2002, she began working for Museum Guide Programs as a tour coordinator. Along the way, she met her husband-to-be (Mike Curry) at the museum, received his marriage proposal here, and had their wedding pictures taken here. Their two children, Dylan (3-1/2) and Rebecca (6 months) likewise call the MIA home.

Paula is the painter/photographer. Her hometown is Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. She got her B.F.A. in Painting and Drawing from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, with a minor in Art History. Following graduation, Paula began working at the Milwaukee Natural History Museum, doing essentially the same tour coordinator job as she currently performs at the MIA. Both she and her husband, Tom Warn, are artists and “outdoorsy types” and, when they lived in Wisconsin, would often travel to Minnesota to visit family and take advantage of Minnesota’s parks, hiking and skiing trails. In 1997, they pulled up their Wisconsin roots and moved to the Twin Cities. The following year, Paula began working as a tour coordinator at the MIA. Paula’s current artistic pursuits focus mainly on medium format black and white photography. One of her photographs was included in the latest Art Perchance auction!

Although Jennifer and Paula work together closely on the tours they schedule (they are tour *coor-*

dinators, after all), they divide up the tour guides and tour topics in a systematic fashion. For example, you may not know it, but if your tour day is Tuesday, Wednesday, or Sunday, Paula schedules your tours. The rest of you belong to Jennifer. Nevertheless, they can (and do) answer questions about or deal with crises concerning any of our tours, regardless of our tour days.

Paula and Jennifer also keep careful track of each tour guide’s preferences. When they ask “how did your tour go?” they are not just being polite. They are also listening for cues as to our likes and dislikes, problems we encountered, unexpected successes, preferences for future tours, etc. And don’t worry about having lively conversations in the lounge. Jennifer and Paula love the human contact and the liveliness and enthusiasm that we bring into that space. When necessary, they assure us, they know how to tune us out.

In sum, besides letting “JP” know how much we appreciate their work on our behalf, you might also wonder what else we can do to keep them happy. When asked this question recently, their answer was remarkably modest: please send them postcards of our travels and have patience with them during busy times. Pretty easy, huh?

Using iPads on MIA Tours: A Pilot Project

JeanMarie Burtness

“Oooh! Aaaaah!” is usually the response of visitors viewing the short 40-second iPad video about granulation while standing by the *Lion Statuette* (G243). After visitors speculate how an artist might produce the hundreds of tiny perfectly round golden balls on the statuette, the iPad shows the process. Heating bits of irregularly shaped gold or silver causes the metal to change into a liquid. Then the hot little puddles “pop” to form small beads that hold their shape due to surface tension. Not 11th-century alchemy but physics!



The sounds of chanting Tibetan monks fill Gallery 212 as yellow-robed Tibetan monks gently scrape their cone-shaped tools. Watching the video excerpt on the iPad, visitors are enchanted as the colored sand sprinkles out and forms the lines and shapes of the *Yamantaka Mandala*. More questions

and observations follow about the overall design and symbols in the sand painting. (Click on this link to see the complete video: <http://www.artsconnected.org/resource/97182/yamantaka-mandala>)

Students bump their noses on the glass case trying to get a better glimpse of Hercules and the three-



headed dog at the top of the John Baer *Masterpiece Cup* (G350). Close-ups on the iPad show them details of the hero and of the dog they think looks like the one

in Harry Potter. Another high school student tries to read the magnified inscription in German. The iPad also lets them see close ups of what cannot be seen: the inside bottom of the cup with a rose bud in gold and the gold cup liner.

Emily Shapiro, JeanMarie Burtness, and some of the museum guide staff recently have experimented with the museum's iPad in about 20 tours, using videos, photographs, maps, graphics, and music to add additional content to their tours. They have found the iPad particularly helpful in showing how something is made, showing magnifications of the object, and showing an alternate view of the object or a comparable object. They've even used its Internet capability to respond to unexpected questions during a tour.

One way in which the iPad can enhance a tour experience is by allowing a guide to "take art objects out of their cases and off the museum walls" and bring them to life. For example, in a "Living Arts of Africa" tour, Emily used a couple of photos and videos to demonstrate how particular objects would have been used or displayed in real life (e.g. the Luba *Kabila*, the *Benin Memorial Head/Tusk*, and the *Sande Society Mask*). This demonstration was particularly important with the "living arts" theme because it highlighted the historical and present-day function of the objects in different African cultures.

Additionally, some images from the MIA's collection can show visitors hidden features of the art objects, such as the engraved drawer bottom from inside the Coaci *Inkstand* (G310) and views from inside the 18th-century writing desk in G308. In order to retrieve these photos, JeanMarie worked with Ann

Isaacson who, as a staff member, had access to additional photos of MIA art objects not otherwise available on the website.



Ann talks about how videos can be particularly helpful. "For example, the lost wax video explains a complex process in a visual way that isn't easily done with words." Another example of such a video is one of Dale Chihuly, in which he directs his workshop workers to create and assemble the glass "flames" of a sculpture similar to the MIA's *Sunburst* (G100). This brief video effectively illustrates not only how blown glass is made, but how an artist can direct workshop workers to implement his "vision." As useful as these videos can be, however, Ann warns that the tour guide must be careful to keep the iPad as a supplement to and not the focus of a tour. "Short videos, no longer than 60 seconds, seem ideal," she said, "because they don't take too much time in an hour-long tour."

Another way the iPad can enhance a tour in a unique way is by adding musical content to it. For instance, as an experiment with a college group, Joy Yoshikawa used her iPad to play music from the movie *Slum Dog Millionaire* while her visitors viewed *Shiva Nataraja* (G211). "It was great," she said. "They said it really helped them see Shiva dancing!"

Responses to the iPad by museum visitors have been largely positive, so far. They report that the iPad can easily be seen in the galleries, particularly when the images contain high contrast, and that its clear graphics and photos add to their understanding of the art works. All seem to like the short videos.

According to Sheila McGuire, the success of this project is due to the input received from volunteers. She noted that many of the initial ideas used to determine what kind of content to prepare and how the iPad might be used grew out of responses to a survey she e-mailed to MGP volunteers when the project was still in the idea stage. Following the survey, MGP staff worked with a subcommittee of a few volun-

teers who helped brainstorm ideas for the Chihuly chandelier, the Hunt *Transformation Mask* and the *Wu Reception Hall*. “And now volunteers are contributing all kinds of terrific ideas,” she said. “I am very excited by what I see happening in the galleries.”

“Seeing volunteers in action confirms my belief that the ability of tour guides to be responsive – that quality that explains the popularity of live tours – is further enhanced by their ability to integrate digital media content,” Sheila continued. “Using multimedia to put art works into context takes visitors beyond the museum walls and provides even more opportunities to establish personal connections with tour content. I also love the fact that visitors can contribute to the tour content in yet other ways, by recommending images or ideas that volunteers can access via the wireless web or by questions guides can search ‘on demand’ so to speak.”

So...what’s not so great? First, currently, the MIA has only five iPads on which guides can practice before using them on tours. This can make it difficult to do advance preparation for an upcoming tour. “I like to feel very comfortable using the iPad and to be able to find pieces quickly,” said JeanMarie. “I do not want to be fumbling around and having visitors watch me futz to find a graphic that they’ll look at for ten seconds. Watching someone else search for something is very boring and detracts from the art work and tour.”

Additionally, it does take some time to find images that might enhance a tour. “For my *Mysteries of the Ancient World* tours, I first selected objects for the tour and then considered aspects of the art that would benefit by use of the iPad,” commented JeanMarie. “I didn’t want to overuse the iPad just because it is something new.”

Technical knowledge of downloading and editing videos is also an advantage. For example, although it is possible to edit the MIA’s video of David Ryan sitting inside the *Tatra* (G379) to show only its dashboard and seats, a working knowledge of how to do so requires some training and practice. The question of where and how museum guides might obtain such training is an issue yet to be solved. (Click on this link to see the Ryan video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEbjXcd6LZY&feature=channel>)

Other, as yet unresolved, issues include the following: How will the five iPads be checked in and out? When can guides practice with the iPads? How

will they know what’s available on the iPads and who will be authorized to add material to them? Would two guides on an iPad-assisted tour be helpful? Are there additional ways to use the iPads on tours?

Answers to these and other questions are on their way. “The iPad is one more tool for us to use. I’m really excited about this innovation,” said Ann. “It’s going to be the future!”

Book Club Tour “Clues”

Joy Yoshikawa

The Sargent did it – in the gallery – with a book!

It’s no mystery. Some of you even know the story. You’ve seen me jumping up and down with excitement in front of the portrait of *Madame X* (*Madame Pierre Gautreau*), by John Singer Sargent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and jumping up and down in front of the MIA’s portrait of Mrs. Nathaniel Allen (Sargent’s great-great aunt) with the same excitement. (*Portrait of Sarah Allen, nee Sargent*, by John Singleton Copley, G306.)

But the real story starts with a docent at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. While we were looking at a gorgeous portrait they have by Sargent, she suggested I read *Strapless: John Singer Sargent and the Fall of Madame X*, by Deborah Davis. I read it, loved it, and thought, “There is a tour in here!” Thus was born my first book tour, *Sargent, Scandal and the French Salon*. Since then, I have used nine more books (and counting) in nearly 20 tours for book clubs.

The idea of a book club is not new to museums but I believe it is rare that a museum offers *tours* based on books a book group is reading or has read. The idea of giving book club tours is not new to docents but I believe it is rare that a museum promotes and supports their docents in this endeavor. What a rich opportunity!

Many of you have created your own book-related tours. What I would like to suggest is that we spread the word – make it go “viral” as they say, by word of mouth. We can encourage our friends, neighbors and co-workers to request book tours through the MIA tour office. Also, please note that the MIA plans to offer a public (or, perhaps, members-only) book tour starting in March, 2011!

In the coming weeks, three of us will be putting together a *Three-for-All* sampler tour for anyone interested in how these tours can work. One tour,

three very different books, three very different docents, three objects per book! Watch your e-mail for notices.

Here is the current list of books I've used or plan to use in tours.

Mysteries

The Savage Garden, by Mark Mills

The Picture of Dorian Gray, by Oscar Wilde

Fantasy

The Discovery of Chocolate, by James Runcie

Historical Fiction

The Lady and the Unicorn, by Tracy Chevalier

The Passion of Artemesia, by Susan Vreeland

When Nietzsche Wept, by Irvin Yalom

Fiction

Bel Canto, by Ann Patchett (music tour)

The Madonnas of Leningrad, by Debra Dean

Non-fiction

Strapless: John Singer Sargent and the Fall of Madame X, by Deborah Davis

In-the-works

Planet of the Blind, by Stephen Kuusisto, (visual impairment/touch tour) (non-fiction)

My Name is Asher Lev, by Chaim Potok (fiction)

Eat, Pray, Love, by Elizabeth Gilbert (memoir)

The Forger, by Paul Watkins (historical fiction)

So if you are looking for some "clues" about these tours, find me in the docent lounge, with a lead pencil, trying to pass muster!

P.S. Concerning book tours and iPads: For my tour of *Bel Canto*, I introduced music into the tour using my iPad. I had selected opera arias that were mentioned in the book and selected art objects that supported the theme. I used the music as an interlude for my tour participants to look at the art, then introduced a bit of "voice over" as I read a passage from the book. High drama, yes, but that is opera, after all! The iPad's music feature worked well. Although the volume is on the low side, it is sufficiently audible for use in the galleries.

Giving a Tour at the MIA to Deaf Visitors

Marilyn Smith

On September 28 I had the opportunity to participate in tours that were part of a celebration week for Minnesota's deaf community recognizing the anniversaries of several groups: the Minnesota Department of Human Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division, the Commission of Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, the Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens, and Gallaudet University's Alumni Association.

I volunteered for this project because I had enjoyed working with a deaf sixth grade student when I was teaching and I was curious to see how giving a tour to deaf people at the MIA would work. This experience was and will definitely remain a highlight for me as a docent. I feel extremely rewarded by the great amount of time and effort expended by so many people to ensure the success of this project. These include representatives of the deaf community, many of our fabulous MIA staff, and a cadre of excellent American Sign Language interpreters. I am grateful to all of them for helping make my role as docent a successful reality and would like to express publicly my sincere and heartfelt thanks.

Each of the participating docents gave a tour to high school students in the morning and a tour to adults in the afternoon. Each tour consisted of two 40-minute segments. One of the segments took place in the Print Room and the other took place in the third floor galleries. The length of each segment allowed for extra time to travel between objects and to have questions and discussion signed by the interpreters. The participants requested to see works in the MIA collection that were created by deaf artists. So, we viewed works by James Castle, Cadwallader Washburn, and Francisco de Goya in the Print Room and works by Maurice Prendergast, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Francisco de Goya in the third-floor galleries.

The MIA Print Room staff were very accommodating. In addition to viewing prints by deaf artists that were located around the room and on all the tables, participants were able to view and handle implements used in printmaking. Many of the participants found these objects very interesting and several in-depth conversations about them resulted. MIA staff also made available, for comparison with

Goya's prints, our large work by Yinka Shonibare, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Australia)*. In viewing and discussing this work, the participants were very interested to learn that Shonibare has a physical disability which, like deaf artists, he must overcome as he creates his art.

In addition to the artists previously mentioned, I included Gilbert Stuart's *Portrait of James Ward*, which hangs next to Reynolds' *Lady Strafford* (G324). Not



only did these two artists know each other, Stuart painted a portrait of Reynolds after he had lost most of his hearing later in his life. I also included Sully's *Portrait of George Washington* (G333) because of its connection to Gilbert Stuart, and the *Tudor Room* (G325) because it was given to the MIA by the Washburn family.

Five incidents from the tours are fixed in my memory. The first happened when several of the high school students lost interest in the discussion and hands began to fly as they carried on their side conversation. Unlike with a hearing group, I was not able to use my voice to reengage them! The second incident occurred when I observed a deaf blind student become so engaged with Lady Strafford's costume that he got within four or five inches of the painting in order to count the number of ermine tails visible on her cloak. The third occurred when I watched, in awe, as a deaf woman simultaneously signed information into the hands of a deaf blind participant while watching the ASL interpreter sign. Fourth, I enjoyed seeing the astonishment on the face of a high school girl when she learned that the strange look of George Washington's mouth might have been caused by his wooden false teeth. The questions and discussion that followed were memorable!

The last incident occurred when I showed a prop of Goya's famous painting of a firing squad, *The Third of May 1808*, during our discussion of his *Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta* (G321). The participants literally danced



with joy because there was a copy of this painting hanging on a wall in their St. Paul gathering place, Thompson Hall! They proceeded to share with me how special it was to them and how it connected them with our painting in a deeper and more personal way. I think that the prop helped them make this important connection.

There are two final bits of information I found interesting. The first is that American Sign Language is not word-for-word interpretation. Some of it is concept-based. This results in some loss of information. So, talking slowly and clearly for the interpreters and those who read lips is really important. Secondly, there are no fewer than six works by Cadwallader Washburn in Thompson Hall (located at the corner of Fairview and Marshall Avenues). Visitors who call in advance are welcome to come and view them.

From the MIA tour preparation sessions to the preparation and giving of the actual tours, the whole experience greatly exceeded my expectations. Sometimes on my tours at the MIA, I feel like I have been the giver, but I came away from these tours with a profound realization that I was the one who had been rewarded. They were delightful and enriching experiences for me as a docent and I will hold them fondly in my memory as a highlight of my docent tenure. I hope that I will have an opportunity to do more tours for the deaf community in the future.

Spreading the VTS Magic

Barbara Edin

In September, Mary Lewis and I were asked to assist the VUE (Visual Understanding in Education) regional director in a Visual Thinking Strategies Workshop at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. What a rewarding and affirming experience!

Mary and I were very pleasantly welcomed into the fold and immediately accepted by all at the JMKAC. Even though their acronym is much longer than the MIA's they have just as noble a mission: To encourage and support innovative explorations in the arts and to foster an exchange between a national community of artists and a broad public that will help realize the power of the arts to inspire and transform our world. (Click on this link to see the JMKAC website: <http://www.jmkac.org>.)

Two of the JMKAC Education staff had traveled to the MIA earlier in the month to observe our docents doing *Discover My Story* tours for those suffering with Alzheimers. They were very impressed and wanted to develop a further relationship with our museum. After visiting with Sheila McGuire, they decided to solicit help from our corps to introduce the VTS initiative to their docents and staff as an additional educational tool.

Margaret Groff had been recently hired as Education Program Manager and had been impressed with VTS when she attended her own training with Yoon Kang-O' Higgins, VUE regional director. Yoon was mentored by Phillip Yenawine, now retired from VUE, and is attempting to succeed him in preaching his gospel.

The workshop at JMKAC followed the VTS agenda with which we were very familiar. After introducing the concept, viewing the teaching video, modeling a presentation, followed by a Q & A, the group was divided and taken into galleries where they could practice VTS and be coached by us, their "more capable peers."

While in the galleries, one could literally observe the transformation from doubters to believers. The collection at the JMKAC is unique in that it is primarily contemporary folk art, some of it regional. The rotating feature exhibit at the time was entitled *A Sense of Humor*. Imagine doing VTS in front of an enormous nine-foot moving, talking sock puppet. Or, in a gallery surrounded by four life-size three dimensional white cloth elephants inflated and slightly moving by an air blower inserted inside each separate body part. There was lots of relaxed sharing, fun, and laughter. You could feel the energy and excitement growing with each presentation. Final evaluations of the workshop were mostly positive. There were also two visiting docents from the Milwaukee Art Museum who were very excited to go back and

share their newly-acquired VTS knowledge and expertise.

The art was not the only observable innovation. The original Arts Center started in the historic Italian Revival style home and carriage house built in 1882 by John Michael Kohler. The interior spaces were converted to house some galleries on the main floor where you can still appreciate old world charm of stained glass windows and beautiful original woodwork, chandeliers, and multiple fireplaces. In 1996, a dramatic contemporary expansion was built and creatively connected to the old mansion. The new single entrance to the JMKAC is now through an atrium with a soaring glass ceiling. Behind the Visitor Service Desk is the Matrix, a spacious hall that can be customized to suit different needs, whether it be receptions, performances, or large-scale presentations. This was where we enjoyed socializing each day with morning coffee and delectable box lunches provided by the ARTcafe.

Absolutely enchanting are the *six* completely different artist-inspired and created world-famous restrooms. Of course, we visited all of them, cautiously knocking on the Male door before entering. Even the professionally photographed postcards available for sale in the ARTspace (shop) do not do them justice.

There is also a light-filled, inviting ARTery which beckons all to enter, no matter the age, to let creativity loose with freely-provided arts and craft supplies and a full time art specialist to help or offer ideas. Such a happy place, and very well used, whether it be for a short drop-in or all day project. We observed many "guests" cutting, sewing, and stuffing "monsters" from Wigwam socks donated by the company. This ongoing community project benefits surgical patients in the local hospitals.

There is another amazing collaborative with Kohler called Connecting Communities Program that brings renowned artists to the region to collaborate with individuals from the area's diverse communities on the creation of new works, which are displayed in the galleries and other public spaces after completion.

Neither Mary nor I had ever visited this charming city on Lake Michigan and found so many other elements, besides the JMKAC, to make the area a worthy destination. What a wonderful adventure we had in Sheyboygan. The greatest reward, as always, was sharing in VTS. This enlightening participatory

experience, whether it be facilitating or coaching, was a great way to expand the reach of the MIA...by spreading that VTS magic.

Eike Schmidt: In Search of the "Wow"

Kay Miller

Away from Washington, D.C., and visiting friends in Northfield, Minnesota over a long weekend in 2004, Eike Schmidt made a detour to visit the MIA. He knew of its world-class reputation. But he was startled to find a real jewel of a museum, with its broad and often deep collection sprinkled with gems.

"You wouldn't expect Minneapolis to have such a grand collection," Schmidt said. He was impressed by Poussin's *Death of Germanicus* (a "super star"), captivated by the *Jade Mountain* and amazed to see *Ganymede and the Eagle*, the first and best of many versions turned out by Bertel Thorvalden's workshop. Knowledgeable as Schmidt is, those brought an involuntary "WOW" to his lips.

So when MIA director Kaywin Feldman called to recruit him from Sotheby's London, where Schmidt headed the European Sculpture and Works of Art Department, he was intrigued. During his interview, he insisted on a tour of the basement to see objects not on view. Among many works of scholarly interest, Schmidt was delighted by German sculptor Adam Lenckhardt's exquisite ivory *St. Jerome* (G312), "universally recognized as important." Schmidt is an expert on sculpture and spent seven years in Florence studying the archives for his PhD on ivories from the Medici collection. In September, 2009, he joined the MIA staff as James Ford Bell Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture.

While it contains many excellent pieces, the sculptures collection is not on a par with the paintings collection, Schmidt said. That leaves room for him to use his knowledge of sculpture (colleagues at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles dubbed him "Eikepedia" for his near-photographic memory) and put his distinctive stamp on it.

Already Schmidt has purchased some stellar objects: a rare 16th century Italian knife and fork with coral handles (G350), Johann Friedrich Baer's *Masterpiece Cup* (G350), *The Ludovisi Saint Peter*



(G340), Spanish statues of the *Christ Child and John the Baptist as a Child* (G341), Jose Montes de Oca's *Saint Benedict of*



Palermo (G330), and a *Bust of Emperor Hadrian* (G240), that Schmidt realized was a much earlier and



more valuable work than the catalog suggested. "The MIA paid less for it than I did for my car," Schmidt chuckled. "And it's not a fancy car – a VW Jetta."

In the MIA collection, Schmidt has changed the attribution for the *Bust of Clement X*, wrongly credited to Bernini (G310). And through some international detective work carried out in tandem with New York University professor Louise Rice, he discovered that the monumental *St. Paul the Hermit* (currently off-view) was misdated and mounted in an odd position – "as if he were diving toward the Otis Elevator" – instead of praying upright.

But before Schmidt knows what major gaps to fill, he has to learn what the collection of 18,000 objects under his purview contains. So he makes regular forays to the basement storage area. What is Schmidt looking for? Objects that stop visitors in their tracks. The WOW factor.

"That's the ultimate test of whether it works or not," he said. *Jade Mountain* was arresting to him during his 2004 visit. "It's such a true masterwork." Its appeal cuts across cultures, age and gender. People don't glance at it and move on quickly. They are compelled to stop. And really look. "I've seen that happen a lot with *Saint Benedict of Palermo* and I'm very pleased. Obviously, I can't stand in the galleries and observe," Schmidt says with a grin that suggests he's done just that.

On an October day, Schmidt is in the basement with intern Jen Gates and me, looking at 16th- and 17th-century Venetian glass, with the thought that

they might find something suitable for a companion exhibit to the upcoming *Titian and the Golden Age of Venetian Painting* exhibit. He has an easy, down-to-earth way about him and great humor, as he describes what he's looking for and why.

"One of the biggest claims of fame for Venice in the art world is the glass, which was blown – and still is being blown – according to the old techniques," Schmidt said. "Glass was very much collected in the beginning of the 20th century." Many of the pieces he will examine today were accessioned in 1916, shortly after the original building opened its doors.

"Venetian glass has a very modern feel to it. The ornamentation was very simple, abstract forms. But Venetian glass was also immediately seen as the best glass in Europe and the most sought after. After less than 100 years they tried to imitate it in the Netherlands. That's called *façon de Venise*. It means Venice-style."

We pass through racks of hanging paintings, neatly balanced and spaced 18 inches apart, into a large area filled with rows of locked white cabinets with glass windows. The room is warm – a constant 71 degrees and 47 percent humidity. There's no sprinkler system, just fire extinguishers because it's easier to clean smoke from paper, scrolls and textiles than to repair water damage, Gates says.

Schmidt's most thrilling basement find to date was a highly evocative Spanish ivory crucifix (G341).



Corpus was mounted on faded brown velvet, more suitable for an Elvis painting, and encased in plexiglass covered in dust. The label suggested that it was "probably French." It had been briefly on view just once in the early 1980s.

"I realized what it was before it came out of its case"

– a great example of the extreme realism of Spanish Baroque sculpture, Schmidt had explained earlier. The arms were carved separately, as with almost all ivory crucifixes – tusks are not wide enough to permit carving Christ's body and outstretched arms from a single piece. The face reveals tears, sweat and blood. The mouth is deeply carved, the hair sculpted into individual strands. Flesh has been pushed aside by nails driven into the underside of Christ's detailed

feet. "This was the Spanish artist's depiction of the suffering human Christ, uttering his last words on the cross," Schmidt said. He has identified two other works, including a Madonna, created by the same Spanish sculptor, known only as the Master of Guadalcanal.

"He's a very important artist," Schmidt said. "I haven't found his name yet. I'm still looking." Given the quality of the crucifix and the new acquisitions, the MIA has become within just a few months "one of the foremost museums in America for Spanish sculpture," Schmidt said. "If in a few years we have a dozen or so pieces, I think we will have a very good representative collection of that culture."

Schmidt brings a printed list and a camera with him to the basement. Many objects on his list have descriptions but no photos.

"Let's get a cart." Schmidt peers through the glass of the tall, white metal cabinets and, with a key, opens up one with Venetian glass. Then he pulls on gloves – black ones this time. Delicately, he pulls out a dusty, smoky-colored flask with a stopper. It has pumpkin-shaped lobes at the bottom and thin vertical strips of turquoise glass. If it were perfect, it would be worthy of consideration. But some of the blue strips are broken and have aged yellow glue from repairs. A second look convinces him that the flask is too coarse and doesn't illustrate the exquisite craftsmanship of Venice. "A craftsman would have thrown this away and not even offer it in his shop!" Schmidt says.

He's far more excited about the next piece – an elegant flask the color of smoke. Three-fifths of the way down the slender neck, a twisted ring was affixed. "This has a very contemporary feeling. This is what makes Venetian glass in the 16th century so appealing to collectors today – you can mix it with contemporary glass." Holding the flask up with a practiced eye, he gives it an approving look, counting eight perfectly formed lobes.

"Nowadays, only the best of the best glass blowers could achieve that. So this is already highest-end craft. The amazing thing is this was done over the fire by blowing the glass, blowing and modeling. Then, while this is orange-glowing glass, this ring was cut and applied in this vibrant way – a Jackson Pollock way. This must have been done in a few seconds. And to put it just there on the neck – not an

inch higher or lower, which would have destroyed the effect – is quite amazing!”

Exhibit possibilities begin to form. “Maybe we could put (contemporary Dutch designer) Marcel Wanders next to it.” As he talks, Gates starts thinking about display materials that would be needed – a base, a display case – and enough advance warning to the registration staff to prepare them.

During this basement trip, Schmidt will see a simple Venetian Glass *Fruit Dish*, where worn enamel on the rim suggests lots of use, but the cardinal’s coat-of-arms in the center is suspiciously pristine. “It looks like it was done yesterday,” Schmidt says. “If it were original, it would be rubbed even more because it’s in the middle.”

He examines a beautifully crafted white footed fruit plate, decorated with a blue, double undulated line. Blue was one of five or six colors glass blowers typically used in the 17th century. By the 18th century, glass objects became very colorful. “There are no breaks – perfect!” Schmidt says. “It’s not as important as the flask, but it would be No. 2.” Still, neither is as exciting and spectacular as works that really illustrate the skill of Venetian glass blowers.

“We would not want to put something very, very simple there just because it’s old. We’d want it to be something that that the public would stop and say, ‘WOW!’ ”

A winged goblet draws just such a reaction. “This is spectacular!” Schmidt says. The stem is composed of four crenulated wings and the bowl of the goblet has very high quality engraved images that “look like actual little children with round bellies,” Schmidt says, placing his black glove behind the images to highlight them. “This is very difficult to do. If you make one mistake you cannot go back.”

He shuffles objects around in the case, mentally rejecting pieces as too new, too uninspired. He is about to conclude the search when he gives a cry of delight.

“Oh, beautiful! This is the most beautiful of them all. It’s good we did not give up too early,” he says, gingerly rearranging objects on the shelf to extract a 16th-century filigreed Venetian goblet. It is painted with enamel and has pumpkin-like lobes, much like the first flask. Ornate as it is, the goblet would have been functional – used for a drink or fruit on a very special occasion. Not only is it gor-

geous, it gives a feel for the era in which it was created.

Schmidt leaves storage pleased, having found four or five pieces worthy of exhibit. Now, he’ll begin planning in earnest. Will it be a glimpse of Venetian decorative arts through several centuries? Or a vibrant *ReMix* with modern objects?

Over the next month, ideas will compete for attention as he drives through a traffic jam or awakes in the middle of the night, his mind searching for just the right approach – something that stops visitors in their tracks, a tiny “WOW” escaping from their lips.

Hiding in Plain Sight: the Bradstreet Fireplace Surround

Joanne Platt

I have a confession. With so many wonderful objects in the collection at the MIA, not every piece on view receives the attention from me that it deserves. I am as guilty as anyone of walking past intriguing pieces that have their own story to tell. In order to rectify this glaring oversight, I decided to select one of these less-celebrated objects for careful consideration, and to share my observations with my colleagues. It is my hope that we can all benefit from a deeper examination of some objects in our collection that are sometimes overlooked, but are nonetheless excellent illustrations of the depth and breadth of our collection at the MIA. For the winter issue of the *Muse*, I have selected the fireplace surround attributed to John Bradstreet (G334) – a seasonal selection with a Minnesota connection and one that I hope will brighten our winter days with cheery warmth.

John Scott Bradstreet was one of Minnesota’s premier interior decorators at the turn of the nineteenth century. His name was synonymous with the finest in interior design, and he drew inspiration from numerous trips to Asia and Europe. He is best remembered for his innovative and unique style of furniture based on the traditional Japanese technique of carved and treated cypress wood – *jin-di-sugi*. In this process, cypress wood would be placed underground for many years; the resulting decay would produce a naturalistic pattern in the hard grain.

Bradstreet began to experiment with reproducing these organic effects through a shorter chemical process. After artificially distressing the surface of the wood, he would carve enlarged oriental floral patterns into it, combining the Japanese technique with

the Arts and Crafts movement's appreciation for wood carving. Our *Duluth Living Room* from the Prindle House (G320) provides an excellent example of Bradstreet's signature *jin-di-sugi* technique.

In 1904, Bradstreet opened his Craftshouse in downtown Minneapolis, a workshop and showroom of decorative arts that combined his admiration for the Asian/Japanese aesthetic with the formal design principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. The establishment of the Craftshouse was noted in national journals and the publicity brought Bradstreet commissions from around the country.

The Craftshouse was unusual in that it was both a workshop and a showroom, and all commissioned works were created on the Craftshouse premises by a staff of artisans mostly of Scandinavian descent, but also including some Japanese. His interiors included furnishings, draperies, carpets, lighting, tile and stained glass. The Craftshouse showroom included wares from Tiffany, lighting from Steuben, tiles and ceramics from Grueby, and handmade objects produced by the Minneapolis Crafts Guild.

Alongside these objects, Bradstreet displayed a collection of antiques and fine art selected by him on his travels, which provided his Minneapolis clients with an education in taste and refinement. Indeed, he hosted art exhibits (including one of art by Robert Koehler in 1900) and assisted in the development of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, which later became our own Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

In 1902, Captain Joseph Sellwood, a mining contractor and mercantile owner, commissioned the Duluth architectural firm Palmer, Hall, and Hunt to design a house for his daughter, Othelia, and her new husband, Leslie Leithhead (a prominent Duluth pharmacist), in celebration of their marriage. The exquisite fireplace surround in Gallery 334 is from that home, and its design is attributed to John Bradstreet. Framed in oak, the surround is composed of buff terracotta tiles from the Grueby Faience Company, with a press-molded design of two trees flanking the fireplace's mouth.



The design uses glazes in shades of green, matte brown and rust to create an organic composition. Each tree's roots are exposed, sinuously curling at the bottom of each side. The trees' trunks propel upward, with angular branches reaching for the mantel, and green foliate leaves creating a canopy of lush growth. Looking closely, one can almost feel the rough bark and the silky texture of the leaves. Each tree extends its foliate branches towards the other, creating a third leafy covering centered over the fireplace opening. Perhaps the design was intended to remind the newlyweds that they were two families joined together in hopes of bringing forth fresh life and a succession of new beginnings? I imagine the couple, sitting in front of this fireplace on a cold Duluth winter night, watching the flames dance and the light reflect off its beautiful and symbolic tile.

This fireplace surround is attributed to Bradstreet for a number of reasons. The tree motif is similar to documented Bradstreet designs found in Duluth's Congdon mansion, Glensheen, as well as in the Edson Woodworth residence in Minneapolis.

Although most of Bradstreet's work in the first decade of the twentieth century was domestic, he did accept a commission from Donaldson's department store to design six tearooms/cafes for a new wing that opened in 1906. One of these tearooms, the Silver Grey Room, contained stained glass windows depicting angular trees with leaf and branch patterns similar to those on the fireplace surround. Bradstreet was originally from New England, and the Grueby Faience Company, based in Massachusetts, used outside artists in its early years. It is possible that the company may have come to Bradstreet for the design of this fireplace surround, since he did maintain his connections on the east coast, and was the most prominent interior designer in Minnesota.

This is but one of the many treasures in the halls of the MIA, hiding in plain sight, which merit a closer look. I resolve to spend more time getting to know these objects and sharing that knowledge with you. I encourage you all to do the same!

Note: If anyone would like more information about John Bradstreet and the Craftshouse, former Decorative Arts Curator Michael P. Conforti has written a highly informative article, entitled "Orientalism on the Upper Mississippi: The Work of John S. Bradstreet." A copy of this article is on file in the docent library.

Highlights of the Docent Discussion Group's Fall Activities

Emily Shapiro & Charlie Ellis

As most docents know, there exists an energetic group of docents, self-named the “Docent Summer Camp” during the summer and the “Docent Discussion Group” the remainder of the year. This group is engaged in a variety of supplemental activities designed to increase their knowledge and awareness of art-related places around the Twin Cities.

The group is open to all docents. All you need to do is contact Charlie Ellis and ask him to put you on his e-mail list (charlesbellis@gmail.com). Many venues place a limit on the number of people who can participate in a given event, so keep an eye out for Charlie's e-mails and RSVP to him quickly, when necessary!

Here are some highlights of the group's activities this past fall:

- In September, 20 docents toured Westminster Presbyterian Church, seeing the art the church has collected, the careful restoration of the sanctuary, the expansion of the original building, and the archives managed by the church curator. This visit introduced “architecture” as a possible art topic for future trips.
- In October, a similarly-sized group of docents visited the Weinstein Gallery in South Minneapolis and were treated to an hour-long tour by its owner, Martin Weinstein. The gallery is about 15 years old and focuses mainly on photography. It serves as artist's representative for such major artists as Chuck Close and Robert Mapplethorpe and has placed its represented artists' works in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Walker Art Center, Weisman Art Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Most recently, it has contributed two photographs to the MIA's current photography special exhibition, *Embarrassment of Riches*.
- In December, docents enjoyed learning about the MIA's registration department from its head, Brian Kraft, and then received a superb tour of the museum's main storage area led by Ken Krenz, who is in charge of the safety and storage of the MIA's permanent collection. Watch for a retelling of some of Ken's great, often hilarious, stories in a future issue of the *Muse*!

Some examples of upcoming Discussion Group events include the following:

- January 17: a tour of the Target Corporation's private art collection (20-person limit has been filled; waiting list available)
- February 2: a tour of the Northern Clay Center (no limit)
- March 14: tours of the Gallery of Wood Art and the Schubert Club Museum at the Landmark Center, St. Paul (no limit).

For specific times and other details, get your name on Charlie's e-mail list!



Vacationing Docent overdosing in Florence

Pat George

Meet the Junior Docents – Class of 2009



Front Row, left to right: Wendi Chen, Nancy Kelly, Ziya Tarapore, Lin Stein, Linda Krueger, Sue Hamburge, Lynn Dunlap, Susan Rouse
Second Row: Marge Buss, Jane Grunklee, Sheila-Marie Untiedt, Deborah Shatin, Paula Sanan, Pamela Pevon, Suzanne Zander
Third Row: Gail Gresser-Pitsch, Mary Samuels, Anna Bethune, Debbie Done, Helen Leslie, Susan Housh
Fourth Row: Kay Miller, Jim Allen, Carolina Zarate, Lynn Brofman, Roma Calatayud-Stocks, Sue Marty, Beth Karon, Clyde Steckel
Fifth Row: Bob Brusic, Terry Nadler, Dick Ploetz, Boyd Ratchye, Karen Kletter, Lora Weinstein, Liz Short, Carol Joyce,
Jean London, Debbi Hegstrom
Not Pictured: Tamara Meyer, Nancy Anderson

Photo credit: Susan Rouse