

The Docent Muse



December 2011

From the Editor on December 4

Mary Bowman

The lovely snowfall we had last night finally removed the silly notion from my head; summer is not coming back for a while! I'm counting *Muse* contributors as one of my most appreciated gifts this season. Thank you to all of this issue's contributors and to our unflappable online publisher, Merritt. I hope more of you will consider sharing your experiences and ideas with our large docent community. Other gifts come when doing tours in which unexpected moments make all the preparation seem the proverbial drop in the bucket.

One such:

While halfway through a tour with a large group of 4th graders, one solemn little boy stuck close to my side, but didn't seem particularly enthused about anything we'd seen. On a longer walk to the next object he confided, "One of my friends at school told me I'd HATE this." I mentally gulped, then dared to ask, "Do you?" He looked up at me and replied, "No, I just love it."

Volunteering, by definition, means giving. It also means getting back.

Happy Holidays, everyone!

Musings from MGP

Debbi Hegstrom

At the half-way point of this touring year (already?), I'd like to reflect on some of the new opportunities I mentioned in the September *Docent Muse* and take note of many things that are happening in the galleries. Here's an update and some observations.

- *Winterlights* tours are going strong, with two decorated period rooms and several participatory activities added to the tours this year.
- Book tour attendance is growing – the word has gotten out! New titles have been announced for December through May. See your latest *Arts* magazine and take a tour.

- *Bonjour Japon* and *EdoPop* docents are engaging visitors and making great connections among the works of art.
- The new tour office computers are in use. A few docents and guides have used the portable data projector to give presentations at offsite locations.
- Six curators talked about recent accessions in November. We will hold more sessions like this in the next segment of Continuing Education.
- MGP staff conducted a contemporary art tour in the galleries, looking at new accessions related to our Asia, Americas, and Africa collections. We had lively conversations and the consensus was to spend more time together in the galleries.
- The Docent Forum was a good opportunity to discuss issues of concern to docents and brainstorm new ideas about resources and tours. JeanMarie Burtness's report on the National Docent Symposium gave us some potential new tour ideas to explore.
- We plan to start organizing and digitizing object files in January. Let me know if you can help.
- We will hold participatory activities and improvisation workshops in the next semester of Continuing Education. More to come about that!

As I watch and participate in the myriad of activities around the museum, I know that none of it would be possible without our dedicated and passionate group of volunteers. I wish you the happiest of holiday seasons and (some) downtime to re-energize for the unfolding potential of the New Year!

National Docent Symposium Highlights

JeanMarie Burtness,

Docent Executive Committee Chair

In early October, I had the good fortune to attend the four-day National Docent Symposium, hosted by the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Saint Louis Art Museum docents with over 400 other docents from the United States and Canada. Part of the conference was spent attending and participating in docent-led

breakout sessions. I'm always on the lookout for touring techniques that encourage in-depth observation and extended discussion with our visitors, particularly high school students. Here are two sessions that I thought were interesting.

Docents from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art presented a technique that they have found to be successful with upper grades. The docent has students sit down and take time to look at all the paintings in one gallery. The docent shows students a different painting created by one of the artists in that same gallery on the iPad (although it could be a large photo prop). The docent asks, "In what ways is this painting like some of paintings in this room? Follow-up questions can be "...in terms of the content? Colors used? Brushwork? Landscape? Facial features?" and so on. Students are asked to compare and find similarities in four or five artworks in the room with "...and what else do you notice?" and "Tell me more." The tone is thoughtful but light-hearted and sort of game-like.

We docents know that curators place art objects in galleries because they are related in some way. Here students discover similarities through their own collaborative investigation. The docent can end with "As a matter of fact, this painting on the iPad was painted by the same artist who painted that one. Like art historians, you noticed a variety of similarities in the style and content in all these paintings." The point is for visitors to think, talk, and be actively involved in increasing their own awareness about art. They are also practicing a type of analytical thinking.

The Carnegie Museum of Art docents offer a tour titled "Art Inspires Narrative Writing." Each student receives an Idea booklet to jot down short observations during the tour. They stop at four to six artworks in an hour, and open-ended questions are used to stimulate conversations. Then, to generate imaginative thinking, the docent uses more questions,

referred to as prompts. The goal is to use the artwork as motivation for storytelling and creative writing activities when the students leave the museum. After the tour, students have another thirty minutes to go back to one or two favorite works to begin writing. With "Art Inspires Narrative Writing," docents do meet and talk with the teacher prior to the museum visit so that students are prepared to do writing both in the galleries and back at their school. The teacher does the follow-up, but occasionally The Carnegie Museum of Art docents have received short stories and poems related to their collection.

Carnegie docents select artworks that focus on characters, setting, theme, and plot. Here are some of the questions that they shared with us. These questions could also be used to promote speculation and interpretation on other tours.

Character: After you carefully examine this character, list at least ten details that tell us about the character. What is this person thinking? If this character could tell you about his/her life, what would he/she want you to know? Artists create characters in the same way writers do, by providing details. What details in the painting support your response?

Setting: What is special about this place? What does this place sound like? How does it smell? Would the character from the previous painting fit into this setting? Why or why not?

Theme: What idea do you think the artist is trying to communicate? How does the artist express attitudes about life through the work?

Plot: What seems to be happening at this moment? What events may have led up to the moment shown? What will happen next? Is there a conflict here? What is the conflict?

To find out more about the National Docent Symposium organization, please go to their new website www.nationaldocents.org.



The Red-Coated Hunter v. the Provenance Detective

Kay Miller

Ever look at that quirky little red-coated hunter in Meindert Hobbema's splendid 1665 *Wooded Landscape with a Watermill* (G311) and think that he seems oddly out of place?

"For years, MIA paintings curators have suspected that the hunter was an interloper, added a century or so after Hobbema completed the piece," said Erika Holmquist-Wall, assistant paintings curator and head of the MIA's Provenance Project. This makes her the museum's chief detective in documenting the often-elusive ownership histories of art objects.

There were lots of tip-offs that the hunter was a later addition. First, his hunter's 19th-century costume is that of an upper-class British gent in the late 18th or early 19th century, not a huntsman from Hobbema's 17th-century Holland. Second, the hunter's stance was enthusiastic, but wrong: Although he aims vaguely in the direction of birds in flight, his gun also points willy-nilly at three boaters floating in a nearby stream. Third, the awkward figure is completely unlike other figures appearing in Hobbema's many paintings.

So, when might the red-coated hunter have been added? And why?

Detailed answers about the Hobbema came – almost accidentally – in the last two or three years as Holmquist-Wall combed through 18th- and 19th-century auction catalogs, working to establish complete ownership records – provenance – on all the MIA's Dutch and Flemish works.

"For ten years I've been handling provenance for the collection, assisting other departments, if necessary, especially related to World War II claims," she said. In 1999, the Association of Art Museum Directors and the American Association of Museums agreed on a set of guidelines that all museums have to publish the provenance of any works with ownership gaps, especially those between 1933 and 1935. The MIA has made its findings publicly available through its online Provenance Project.

Wooded Landscape with a Watermill is an "incredibly significant" work by Hobbema – one of the three top classical Dutch landscape painters in the 17th century – created at the height of his artistic powers, Holmquist-Wall said. "It is quintessential Hobbema if you subtract the hunter."

Hobbema was born in Amsterdam in 1638, the son of a carpenter. At fifteen, he and his younger brother and sister were sent to an orphanage. Within two years, he was apprenticed to the famous landscape painter Jacob van Ruisdael. Hobbema specialized in elaborate woodland scenes. Watermills were a favorite theme. In 1668, he married, and through his wife's connections obtained the post of Amsterdam's Sealer of Weights and Measures, weighing and measuring imported wines. With a wife and job, his output of paintings slowed. The last years of his life were grim. His wife and two children died in 1704. Five years later, he died in poverty and was buried in a pauper's grave.

It is said that Hobbema painted the soul of a landscape. He loved Holland and it showed. Billowy clouds emit patches of sun light over a meandering stream, watermill and cottage rooftop. Such scenes were in great demand by wealthy patricians in Amsterdam. Given Holland's flat topography, images of verdant, woodlands were especially desirable. This particular watermill is in the hilly part of Holland, at Singraven, near the German border.

"We know exactly where this is," according to well-known Netherlandish art expert Alison Kettering who teaches at Carleton College.

This was the Golden Age of Holland, a time in which people hungered for spiritual meaning, security and stability, Kettering said. Hobbema supplied it, creating a niche for himself in a highly competitive art market. With a new sawmill in the center and an oil mill at the left, the MIA's landscape is a meditation on Dutch prosperity – on the human ingenuity of harnessing nature's forces, Kettering said. The mills signaled Dutch industrial strength and national pride. Here were lush and loving depictions of the Dutch countryside, with people going about the tasks of their ordinary daily lives: men unloading bags of grain and a cowherd driving his cattle down a deeply rutted road.

For the most part Hobbema didn't paint his own figures, but collaborated with fellow figurative artists. But who worked with him on this piece? A number of contemporary candidates had been proposed, including Philips Wouverman and Johannes Lingelbach. So Holmquist-Wall pulled hundreds of images of their work and began close comparisons.

She discovered that a Dutch painter named Dirck van Bergen, did most of the background figures in

the MIA's landscape. By tracking down much of van Bergen's work, she was able to match the cows, dogs and the strange little birds in our Hobbema landscape with those in other van Bergen works. And that helped convince her that the man in scarlet was a fraud.

"You see the farmer driving the cattle along and there's an elderly hound trotting in front of him and then the little dog has sort of run ahead and scared up the birds, right off of the coast in the marsh – which is why the hunter is now stuck in there with the gun, pointing right at it," she said. "But the range, the proximity, is so strange. We really wrestled with, 'Is the dog original?'"

Then Holmquist-Wall came across a painting by van Bergen where the cattle, herdsman, even the strange little birds looked *exactly* the same. "The [drover] figure even wears the same kind of hat.

"We could definitely attribute the second hand in this painting, working with Hobbema as Dirck van Bergen. It made sense with the birds flying out like that, that the birds would also be original. And, that the hunter was just dropped in, with his gun pointing at the birds. Behind him are three men sitting in a rowboat," Holmquist-Wall chuckled. Imagine their conversation: "There's a man with a gun pointed at us across this little creek."

So how did Holmquist-Wall discover all those things? And what will the MIA do with her findings? She coupled modern investigative techniques, including ultraviolet light examination, with international research.

As a provenance detective, Holmquist-Wall seeks as complete a trail as possible. The work can be tedious. She starts with old exhibitions histories and auction catalogs that may not be cited in the curatorial record, often checking several versions of catalogs from a single auction. One copy might be at the Frick Museum in New York, another at the Getty in Los Angeles, a third at the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD)

in Amsterdam. Because different individuals owned the catalogs, they have different side-margin notes – prices paid,



who owned the works, dealers, intermediaries and gossipy little anecdotes – written in by hand.

Holmquist-Wall checks official descriptions. Many of Hobbema's works are described simply as landscapes. So she compares dimensions, whether the picture was been cut down or remounted on panels. Often there are typos. "People get things wrong." All must be figured into her calculations.

While Hobbema included small patches of red in some of his paintings, none featured such large areas of red as this hunter. Such a prominent, unavoidably standout feature as a red-coated hunter should have been included in every catalog description of such an important piece, she realized.

That's when the epiphany came: "It was just by reading through and comparing these early catalogs that it occurred to me that what's *not* mentioned is just as important as what IS mentioned," Holmquist-Wall realized. "*Nobody* brings up the hunter until 1828!"

Two Dutch families owned the Hobbema before it made its way to England. Neither sale description, in 1768 and 1781, mentioned the hunter. Nor was mention made of him in an 1806 catalog, despite otherwise detailed descriptions of Hobbema's landscape for an estate sale of a Mr. Crawford, who apparently had frequent business dealings in Holland, bought the piece there and later brought it home with him to England. Again, three years later, a similar description of the landscape omits any mention of the hunter in the 1809 sale of art owned by a Charles Offley.

Finally, twenty years later "a sportsman dressed in red shooting at wild fowl" suddenly pops up in an estate catalog for a Mr. Michael Mucklow Zachary of London. Tellingly, the entry otherwise uses language that is largely identical to that in the 1809 catalog. Yet, this is the *very first mention* of the hunter

The unavoidable conclusion: The hunter was added between 1810 and 1828 at a time that hunting

pictures were wildly popular in England. But why?

"It's impossible to know the exact reason,"

Holmquist-Wall



said. “We can only assume that hunter was added to make the picture more saleable for a certain market.”

The next step was bringing the public into the discussion.

“We were looking for something we could present via social media – to engage the public on Facebook or Twitter,” said Holmquist-Wall, who is also the curatorial representative on the MIA’s Social Media Team. What would the painting have looked like originally? “With digital technology, it’s so easy to take the little hunter out and see what the painting looked like when it was first painted.”

Data in hand, Holmquist-Wall went public on the MIA’s online “Bubbler” showing visitors how the painting would appear if the quirky figure were removed or masked. Then she asked: Should the red-coated hunter be removed?

http://www.artsmia.org/index.php?section_id=107

Online opinions were strong, thoughtful and, occasionally humorous:

“The hunter is indeed part of the paintings history.

To remove something, even though it is objectionable, seems false, a bit like a rewrite of history,” wrote Lauren.

“The addition of the hunter destroys the proportions as well as the peace of the original. I voted to mask it,” suggested Ron.

“I think you should add another hunter,” added Matthew, “people should never hunt alone.”

A slim majority of online visitors – 52 to 48 percent – thought the hunter should stay. Erasing him permanently is not an option. The figure’s long tenure in the landscape of nearly two centuries have made it part of the painting’s history. More importantly, UV light showed that pigments have become too deeply embedded with Hobbema’s original paint to safely remove.

Thrilled at how the painting looked without the add-on, the paintings curatorial staff headed by Patrick Noon, Aimee Butler Chair of Paintings, decided to have the hunter painted out – “masked” – making it appear much as it did when it left Hobbema’s studio. “The picture is transformed without the later figure,” Noon said. “And the landscape becomes luminous and open.”

“You’re just painting over it in his style and leaving the dog in,” said Holmquist-Wall. “We’ve determined that the dog was likely original. It makes sense with the birds.”

The restoration will be done in the next 1½ years by the Midwest Art Conservation Center downstairs and will be 100 percent reversible – as is most restoration. A picture of the painting with the hunter will accompany the wall label. The idea is to help museum visitors see the piece as close to its original condition as possible – without permanently changing the work itself – in all the glory of its Dutch Golden Age.

“Projects like this remind me of why I chose to work in a museum.” Holmquist-Wall said. “Even though the entire issue is rather quirky and humorous, we’re contributing to the serious scholarship and historical record of the painting. It’s the best of both worlds!”

The MGRC Literati Rug

Many museum volunteers do not know the history of the beautiful rug in what is now the Museum Guide Resource Center (MGRC). What follows is the original article (*Docent Muse* Spring 2004) describing why and where it was created and how it came to the MIA.

History - 1996

Carol Wedin & Darlene Carroll

In 1996, Docent Supervisor Diane Levy decided to improve conditions and replace the dangerously worn rug in the existing docent lounge, present location of Arts Break Café (sales and prep area only). Because of our interior design backgrounds we, Carol Wedin and Darlene Carroll, volunteered on this project. No sooner had we begun drafting plans, were we notified that the docents would soon relocate to a larger area in the MIA expansion project. As the scope of the project grew, so did our ideas.

Several years earlier, Carol attended a lecture at the MIA sponsored by the Asian Arts Council. The speaker was Rita Lama, a young Nepalese woman who had started a small carpet business on the outskirts of Kathmandu. Carol dreamed of designing a rug to be woven in Nepal. Sharing this idea with Darlene led to the dream of designing a rug that symbolized docent ideals.

A letter to Rita resulted in an enthusiastic partnership. We began to develop the design of the rug in the context of the entire space. We drafted floor plans, designed banquette seating, researched fabric, and garnered paint chips and carpet samples. Bob Jacobson assisted in the selection of Tibetan and

Buddhist symbols. A packet of ideas and samples was sent off to Nepal.

The Docent Literati Rug, as we were now calling it, would be the focal point in the new docent lounge. But how were we going to pay for it? Our meager budget would only cover basic bookshelves and a few files. Yet, we really wanted a welcoming, aesthetically pleasing space where docents could both congregate and prepare for tours. Hoping to build community spirit, we sent a letter to each docent explaining our idea and asking for a contribution to the rug. Not surprisingly, we received an overwhelming response from docents and staff.

With generous contributions, we could proceed. Rita had communication capabilities in Kathmandu, so when electricity functioned, faxes and emails circled the globe. In May, the longed-for email arrived. Our “strike-off,” or small woven sample, had been shipped for our approval. With hearts pounding and great anxiety, we opened the package and unrolled the square meter sample. It was indeed finely woven, but something was lost in translation somewhere between the Mississippi and Vishnumati rivers. The rug seemed to be trying to satisfy American tastes, but our goal was for the rug to reflect the culture of its creators.

Bob Jacobson responded to our anguished plea for help. Bob knew Rita, her work, and even owns one of Rita’s rugs. Bob agreed that the rug was beautifully woven, but he strongly advised that if we intended to have the rug by our deadline, we needed to become more involved in the actual design process. Carol’s husband was even more direct. Walt suggested that we immediately apply for visas and personally oversee the creation of this Docent Literati Rug. Before leaving, we needed a drawing of our mental images. Richard Rehl, a local graphic artist and rug designer, worked closely with us to put our ideas into a tangible reality to be hand-carried to Nepal.

Kathmandu, Nepal - July 1997

Carol made arrangements for a reasonable monthly rental in a Kathmandu Mission House. We bargained for an unused concrete classroom on the top floor of the building. Our furnishings were spindly and spare, but the view of the heavenly Himalayas from the large windows took our breath away.

We were humbled by our simple abode, but shopping was convenient. Outside our door was a

fresh meat market with live chickens, a goat, a concave chopping block, and a bloody axe. And next to that, a garbage dump that attracted wild dogs, sacred cows and hordes of flies and mosquitoes. Traveling during the monsoon season had its advantages, too. There were few tourists and we could easily hail a *tuk-tuk*, a three-wheeled polluter driven by young Nepalese men, who were as foreign to driving as they were to Kathmandu. By the second day, your two MIA docents were directing their own tours!

The rug was to be made in a village a half-hour *tuk-tuk* ride to the end of the road and a trudge through monsoon mud away. No one spoke English but Rita, the owner of Trina Carpets, which she founded and named after her daughter in hopes of Trina having a better life. After introductions, a cup of tea and lots of smiley nods, we started our work. Needed was a full scale (5’x8’) graph to be produced from Richard’s drawings. The artist lived several miles away, reached by walking a path through rice fields. Communication was accomplished with paper and pen. Within a couple of days, the full-sized graph was finished and we all gave a sigh of relief. The first step was accomplished.

Workers took us under their wings. We assisted a grandmother whose job was to card and spin the wool. Her young granddaughter sat by her side and spun when she got home from school. Most village children didn’t have the opportunity to go to school, but Rita personally paid for the education of the children of her workers. Rita also provided housing for her workers. Trina Carpets was a large extended family, and we were readily adopted by our new teachers and friends.

We cleaned, combed, carded, spun and dyed the wool. We helped hang the hot and heavy skeins out to dry on tin roofs. We repeated the entire process when colors didn’t materialize as we had envisioned. We worked most days of the month, but also found time to



learn our way around Kathmandu and regularly visited a yogi for private instruction. *Om mani padme om.*

Despite our meditative sessions, we were feeling more and more anxious about our rug. We originally hoped the rug would be completed in a month, but actual weaving had yet to begin. The “factory” was a tall structure with a corrugated tin roof over a densely packed dirt floor. Lighting consisted of two bare fluorescent bulbs hanging precariously from thread-like wires. Weavers sat on wooden benches with their babies beside them in plastic tubs. Mothers nursed as they wove; toddlers played at their parents’ feet. Children were well-cared for and adored. Rita’s workers were proud and hardworking, grateful for their jobs, and pleased that their children were getting an education. We learned a great deal from them during our month in Kathmandu.

Our last days in Nepal we watched the rug rise up the loom in slow motion. Two weavers sat side by side, each with large, colored graph paper in front of them directing their every move. By the time we said our last good-byes, ten inches of the Docent Literati Rug was on the frame, enough for us to be assured that we – and you – would be pleased.

We hosted a farewell party for workers, passing out Horlick’s food supplements to every man, woman, and child. Tears welled up in the workers’ eyes as they received these gifts. The women were especially grateful since the supplement was packaged in a decorative glass jar with a colorful plastic screw top. A gift within a gift! We also handed out trays of candies that were a real treat for everyone, especially the children. All of this, we told them, was a gift from the docents of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. As we waved farewell, we knew we would never see our friends again, but their spirits would always be with us, woven into our memories and the Docent Literati Rug.

Unveiling the Rug - November 1997

On November 17, 1997, the long-awaited Docent Literati Rug was the focus of the Monday morning lecture. We presented a slide show, “Nepal, Land of the Literati Rug”, featuring photos that Carol had taken during our stay. And, thanks to the generous donations from docents and staff, we were able to have Rita Lama, owner of the rug factory, visit from Nepal. Wearing her native dress, Rita explained the step-by-step process of creating our rug.

Next came the dramatic unveiling of the rug in the Wells Fargo Room where Tibetan prayer flags and Nepalese artifacts were displayed. After an Indian/Nepalese luncheon, the rug was ceremoniously installed in the Docent Lounge.

Literati Rug Symbols

Four Signs of the Scholar:

- scrolls – mastery of painting and calligraphy
- chessboard – skill at chess
- lute – proficiency at music
- books – mastery of language and poetry

Other Buddhist Symbols:

- endless knot – interweaving of lives
- fish – freedom from restraint
- artemesia leaf – dignity and protection
- mirror – wealth in art
- wheel of life – Buddha’s teaching of the universe
- lotus – purity and perfection
- clouds – universe in miniature
- jewel – supreme value of truth
- floating scarf – connection of all things



Docent Holiday Party - December 1997

Upon hearing the plight of the people of Nepal, especially those involved in the creation of our rug, docents Dorothy Geis, Angela Sangster, and Holly McDougall spearheaded a campaign to share our holiday blessings with those in the small village. (At that time, Rita employed 35, twenty of whom had young families.) Generous as always, docents welcomed the challenge by donating dollars for food supplements for the families and used clothing for infants and toddlers. A large box of donations was shipped off to Nepal. Pictures of Nepalese children dressed in clean American clothing were returned along with words of gratitude and joy.

Adventures Abroad - or, Docents Really Get Around!

Fran Megarry & Toni DuFour

Paradores and Pousadas? A trip to Spain and Portugal with a focus on sleeping arrangements??? When the brochure from the University of Minnesota Alumni Association arrived in the mail last spring, we were as intrigued by the tour’s title as by the itin-

erary. Who could resist bedding down in a 15th-century convent or a 14th-century Moorish fortress?

Lured by the promise of fairy tale lodgings, we signed on, and this past October began our two-week Iberian adventure. Yes, we certainly enjoyed staying in our historic lodgings, but first and foremost we discovered a multi-layered culture steeped in Roman and Moorish history.

Our adventure started in Portugal, where we visited the wonderful city of *Lisbon*, finding the site



where early explorers including Vasco de Gama set sail for unknown destinations hundreds of

years earlier. We enjoyed a night of traditional *Fado* music, savored wonderful fish dishes and a special treat that Fran has since tried to make with no success – *Pasteis de nata* or custard pastries. Our travels continued to *Evora*, a UNESCO World heritage site and one of Portugal’s architectural gems. This ancient walled town contains both Roman and Moorish ruins.

Leaving Portugal, we journeyed next to *Merida*, a Spanish town that was once the Roman capital of Lusitania and boasts more Roman ruins than any other city in Spain. The Roman museum there was a special treat. We even picked up a few touring tips as we watched a docent keep a group of youngsters enthralled by the artifacts!

Seville was our next stop where we explored a Moorish palace and a 16th-century cathedral, an opportunity to compare both *mudejar* and Gothic architecture. Traveling on to *Cordoba* we visited the Mezquita, an 8th-century mosque whose roof is supported by more than 850 stone arches and pillars – a stunning vision! *Ronda* was next on our itinerary. Our cameras were put to good use as we captured photos of the incredible views. The town is perched high above a dramatic gorge and offers magnificent vistas of the surrounding countryside.

Granada brought us to the Alhambra, the superb palace/fortress of Spain’s last



Moorish rulers. Exploring the Moorish architecture and exquisite gardens was truly a highlight of our journey. *Toledo* found us in yet another city steeped in both Roman and Moorish history. We visited the church where El Greco’s famous painting *The Burial of Count Orgaz* can still be viewed in its original setting.

Our trip concluded in *Madrid* with a visit with friends of Terry Edam who treated us to a personal tour of the Prado’s greatest treasures – not to mention *tapas* and a night of flamenco! What could be better? We managed to squeeze in visits to several other museums in Madrid, including the Reina Sofia Museum which houses Picasso’s *Guernica*.

On impulse we also walked into a temporary exhibition of Delacroix works on display in a Madrid bank. Rounding a corner in the gallery space, we were confronted with our very own *The Fanatics of Tangier*, on loan to the exhibition. What a treat to see an old familiar friend so far from home!

Although our Iberian adventure lasted only two weeks, we took home many memories to share in the months ahead.

Did You Know?

JeanMarie Burtness,
Docent Executive Committee Chair

The Friends of the MIA are celebrating their 90th anniversary on Thursday, January 12, after the Friends Lecture. All Friends members are invited to this festive event, which includes light refreshments. Even though there is not a charge, please RSVP by January 2.

The MIA docents will celebrate their 50th anniversary next September. The Friends of the Institute founded the Docent Training Program in 1962. While giving public tours during December and January, docents can wear “I’m a Friend” button in honor of the Friends 90th anniversary. Buttons are available in the Friends office.

The bags with the sets for Artful Stories, a Pre-school Experience, are now stored in the cabinet in the Museum Guide Resource Center.

If you have forgotten the codes for the copier or the computer, please ask Jennifer or Paula in the tour office. They also can review how to log into the Museum Guide Program website.

If you would like to contribute to the Docent Sunshine Fund, please place your check or cash

in an envelope labeled “Docent Sunshine Fund.”
Give the envelope to Jennifer or Paula to give to
our DEC Treasurer Toni DuFour.

In 2012 there will be three new art carts: Modern,
Contemporary, and Photography.

On Bonjour Japon

Joanne Platt

Tucked into the Cargill Gallery on the first floor of the MIA, the intimate exhibition *Bonjour Japon: A Parisian Love Affair With Japanese Art* beautifully illustrates the stylistic impact Japanese artwork exerted on Parisian art production in the late 19th century. Curated by Lisa Michaux, a former associate curator in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the MIA, *Bonjour Japon* tells the history of Japanese cultural influence in Paris after Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Edo (Tokyo) Harbor in 1854, effectively ending 250 years of self-imposed Japanese isolation.

Within a few years, Japan had concluded trade agreements with the Netherlands, Russia, England, the U.S., and France, and economic and cultural exchanges between Japan and the West began. A tidal wave of Japanese scrolls, screens, ceramics, fans, metalwork, lacquers and textiles soon began pouring into Paris, which was the center of the 19th-century European art world. On the crest of this wave were *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, which captivated French artists with their different and refreshing style.

Ukiyo-e referred to pictures of the “floating world” of pleasure and everyday life, which reflected the tastes and amusements of the rising class of Japanese merchants during the Edo period (1615-1868). Japan had a strict social hierarchy, which placed these newly wealthy merchants on the lowest rung of the social ladder – below the military (samurai), farmers and artisans. Since they could not buy titles or land, the merchants found entertainment in the pleasure districts of the cities, which offered such hedonistic pastimes as *Kabuki* theater, courtesans, street entertainment, fashion and restaurants.

Ukiyo-e artists sensed the great potential for monetary gain and created vibrant woodblock prints for the merchant class. It was considered a low art form created exclusively for the merchant class, but it reflected their pastimes – theater, street entertainment, courtesans, actors, fashion, scenes of daily life and famous places. *Ukiyo-e* woodblock prints pos-

sessed many stylistic conventions foreign to Western artists. These included broad, flat color application with bold outlines and no shading or modeling, asymmetrical compositions, strong diagonals, daring use of foreshortening, novel vantage points, cropped views and multiple patterns.

The wealth of visual information found in these woodblock prints reached the West and brought electrifying new ideas of design, composition and color. An artistic revolution of sorts was already simmering in Paris at the latter half of the 19th century – a move away from the rigidity imposed by academic realism and towards something entirely new, something which reflected contemporary interests.

Japanese art informed this artistic revolution, and artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas eagerly began collecting these artworks, studying them and interpreting them in their own unique manner. Japanese artworks were exhibited at international expositions in Paris every eleven years – 1867, 1878, 1889, and 1900.

These expositions further ignited artists’ imaginations, as well as the public demand for any Japanese *objets d’art*. When French artists in Paris discovered *ukiyo-e* prints, they found a model for art which reflected their interests in the contemporary world, and they enthusiastically incorporated Japanese themes into their art, which depicted French landscapes, lively entertainment in Montmartre, the cafe culture of the Parisian streets and everyday activities.

It is important to note that French artists didn’t just copy from the Japanese; each artist was inspired by different stylistic aspects found in the colorful woodblock prints. They cherry-picked what captivated them and used that to create something new and exciting.

Bonjour Japon showcases works by Vincent van Gogh, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and many others. It includes the only etching van Gogh ever made, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* (1890). He admired Japanese printmaking for its clarity and simplicity, and he tried his hand at printmaking because he was inspired by the Japanese woodblock prints he loved to collect. His effort is slightly awkward in style and messy in the corners, probably due to the unfamiliar difficulties of working in reverse for etchings. Still, he is really trying to incorporate his love of Japanese printmaking into his own artwork.

American artist Mary Cassatt moved to Paris to pursue her art in a more accepting environment. She specialized in intimate scenes of mother and child, and scenes of daily life and family life. As a woman artist, these were the models available to her, but they allowed her to become a valued and important artist at a time when the Academy was controlled by men. *The Barefooted Child* (1896-97) shows her incorporation of Japanese stylistic elements such as flat areas of color and pattern, simple outlines, and beautifully meticulous pastel colors. The faces of the mother and child engaged in a game of patty-cake are still modeled and more three-dimensional than flat, but it is apparent that Cassatt was looking at Japanese prints and trying to figure out a way to make her own unique statement.



Edgar Degas was one of the earliest proponents of Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints. In 1865, he joined a group of illustrious artists, writers and collectors who met at Mme. Desoye's famous shop, *La Porte Chinoise*, to discuss and admire Japanese art. He became quite the collector, and by the time of his death he owned more than one hundred *ukiyo-e* prints. Stylistically, Degas was most impressed by the use of line, unusual organization of space, and foreshortened or cropped views.

The most Japanese of Edgar Degas' prints was *Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Paintings Gallery* (1879-80). This print is tall and narrow, like a Japanese screen, and utilizes an unusual off-center arrangement of the subjects. Lydia Cassatt is seated in the foreground next to a pillar, reading a book, while her sister Mary is in the process of turning the corner, her back to the viewer. A standing and a seated figure were commonly found in Japanese prints, and Mary's back to the viewer constitutes a very Japanese perspective.

Throughout the exhibit, the curator Lisa Michaux has created opportunities for comparison by pairing the Japanese and Parisian works of art together. Utagawa Hiroshige II's *A White Cat Playing with a String* (1863) cleverly uses a fan shape upon which to create his image of a plump cat playing with string. In a few skillful lines, Hiroshige II



brings the cat to life, giving it mass and form. Directly above hangs Francis Jourdain's *The White Cat* (1900), which was

obviously influenced by Hiroshige II's use of line and background color. Jourdain's cat consists of a black outline on white paper. One can actually feel the weight and the heft of this animal through the outline. Another opportunity for comparison is Utagawa



Hiroshige's *Iris Garden at Horikiri* (1857), which demonstrates a reversal of importance in a close, ground-level vantage point. The iris are huge both in proportion to the tiny people in the background but also to the viewer. Similarly, Charles-Louis Houdard's *Frogs* (1894) utilizes Hiroshige's extreme close-up, which finds the viewer's vantage point is again on the ground with the frogs in the forefront. In both works of art, the importance of the natural world is elevated over that of the human.

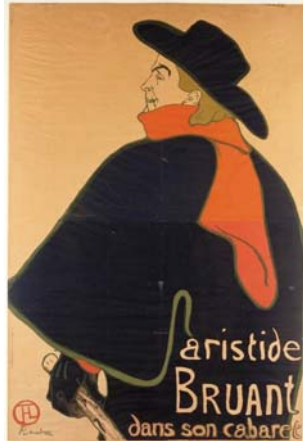
An interactive element allows the visitor to see every page from Henri Riviere's *Thirty-six Views of the Eiffel Tower* on a computer screen in the gallery. Riviere modeled his book after Katsushika Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mt. Fuji*, a series of woodblock prints in which Mt. Fuji, the symbol of Japan, appeared somewhere in every image. Riviere captured the iconic symbol of modern Paris in all weather conditions and stages of construction. He was so inspired by the process that he even printed his woodcuts on Japanese paper with handmade ink. Riviere adopted the unconventional cropping and asymmetrical compositions found in Hokusai's woodcuts, and he celebrated the Eiffel Tower from every conceivable perspective.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's iconic posters of cabaret life in Montmartre are perhaps most familiar to the viewer. Two of these posters feature his good friend, Aristide Bruant, a singer-comedian famous for wittily insulting and degrading his audiences, to their great amusement. Many wealthy bourgeois Parisians came "to slum it" in Montmartre, and they were

helpfully warned by a sign at the door to Bruant's club, *Le Mirliton*, which read: "For people who like to be told off." Toulouse-Lautrec was the only patron Bruant consistently treated with respect, and when Bruant performed at the club *Les Ambassadeurs*, he asked Lautrec to paint an imposing portrait of him for the poster.

Les Ambassadeurs:

Aristide Bruant (1892) and Aristide Bruant in his



Cabaret (1893) were posted all over the streets of Paris, and drew considerable attention not just to Aristide Bruant but also to the young painter who had so accurately and strikingly portrayed him. Both posters feature the singer's signature costume: black jacket and wide-brimmed black hat, dashing red scarf, and sturdy walking stick. The bold design of these posters owes much to the Japanese prints so admired by Lautrec. The artist used broad areas of flat color and bold outlines to create a composition striking in its simplicity. By using only four colors and a few economical lines, Lautrec distilled Aristide Bruant down to his essence and captured the brash character of the performer. Lautrec so extravagantly admired Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints that he ordered his own set of calligraphy tools from Japan and even developed his own chop mark, or artist's stamp, which incorporated his initials and was very Asian in appearance.

Bonjour Japon, on view until January 22, 2012, offers a wonderful opportunity to explore the pervasive influence of Japanese woodblock prints on the artwork of late 19th-century Parisian artists. Its introduction liberated these artists from the old traditional concepts of classical modeling found at the Academy, and anticipated some of the central concepts of 20th-century modernism.

Fab Four



Docents Julie Bolton, Mary Merrick, Barbara Edin, and Fran Megarry visited the Friends Luncheon. Each explained a little about the period costume that she was wearing and showed guests details of the dresses. For *Winterlights* on the weekends, docents wear costumes to talk about the Christmas decorations in the *Duluth Room* and the Hanukkah table in the *Providence Room*. Tours at the decorated Purcell-Cutts house are given by docents in period finery. The Friends of the Museum purchased many of the costumes for the MIA.



30-year Honorees



On December 9, Debbi Hegstrom, Senior Educator of the Docent Program, hosted two very special 30-year docents who were not able to attend the annual Fall Docent Luncheon. Standing is Rose Linnihan, who was traveling in Israel. Rose is a sustaining docent and is very involved in Picture Person training. Seated is Mary Jo Kjell who just went honorary because she will be splitting her time between Minnesota and Phoenix.

JeanMarie Burtness, Docent Executive Committee chair, and Fran Megarry, chair-elect, also attended the luncheon.

Have a concern? A problem? A dilemma? Everyone is invited (via the editor) to ask...

The Decent Docent

Dear Decent Docent:

How should a decent docent behave when tour routes conflict? Is there a code of etiquette or, at least, an accepted sign language?

Signed,
Confused

Dear Confused,

Indeed, my dear Confused, I *certainly* sympathize with your dilemma. We all work so hard on our lovely tour routes that it is *devastating* when we turn a corner and find that one of our compatriots has just set up shop in front of the very object that is the *linchpin* of our entire theme! How, you ask, *how* can we stifle that small gasp of incomprehension? Contain that sinking sensation of disappointment? Mask the completely-channeling-Chernobyl-melt-down of our *exasperation*?

First we breathe. Then we smile. Yes! *Smile!* Because all of us who are beyond a certain age (one that ends in a zero and begins with...well...begins...) remember the spiritual 70s when some eastern yogic traditions inched their way into our midwestern consciousnesses. (No, I am NOT talking about those nasty hallucinogenic experiences, NO!) But remember *biofeedback*? That lovely, do-it-yourself-any-time practice of instant serenity? Based on the simple wonder of *pretending!* Act calm and you WILL be calm! Smile! Breathe!

Now, don't we all feel better? I know I do!

But that still leaves us with our dilemma. Fear not, dear ones! We are docents! We are *flexible!* And resourceful! As such, there are ALWAYS a myriad, a cornucopia, a panoply of ways to leap this small hurdle.

You inquire about a signal, a sign. I personally *love* the art of non-verbal communication. An arched eyebrow, a flourish of a feather boa, a well-placed wiggle. We all know that 90% of communication is *physical!* And I, for one, am always in favor of the *physical!*

...except in this case. While I am not beyond the wee wave in the direction of the other docent, let us think of what *we* would want if, indeed, we arrived at the object first. It is, after all, the icing on the torte of our tour! We must give it its due! And so we also

must allow our colleague her/his opportunity to explore with his/her visitors the magic and nuance of the work. After all, our dear object is simply being *appreciated*, as it so well deserves! It is still THERE! It won't *combust* before we have a chance to extol its many merits. *And remember!* Patience is a *virtue* and we all must exercise *that* elusive trait whenever we can!

And, really, my dears! This is not a *problem!* It's an *opportunity!* A chance for spontaneity! Creativity! *Dance!* (Okay, maybe *not* dance.) Raise your eyes and *look* around you. There is an abundance of ART everywhere! Indeed, inanimate intimate friends populate every wall, niche, corner! The real dilemma is what amazing piece will you visit while you wait for your seminal object to once again be free? The possibilities are more abundant than those sweet, tiny bubbles in my glass of champagne!

Speaking of champagne, my loves, please know as the year exhausts itself I look forward to arching my eyebrow at YOU in the galleries in 2012! *Cheers!*

Bah humbug

Tom Byfield

The editor has requested a column. "Write about anything you want," she said. Oooh, be careful what you ask for, young lady. Since this has nothing to do with the MIA, you may regret it.

Once again Christmas has descended upon us like an uninvited guest. Standing on our thresholds, tugging at his forelock and apologetically asking to come in. Wasn't he here just six months ago? Such is the internal time clock of our aging bodies. Once again we must bow in deference to the cadence of *The Little Drummer Boy*. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a skeptical Scrooge or a grumpy Grinch. No, I revel in the mystique of this season, the glorious holiday music, the bustle of preparation, the tantalizing smell of scorched credit cards. I still remember the exquisite agony of waiting until the big people finally deemed it time to open those intriguing presents. But there are a couple of burrs under my beard, like sand in your swimsuit, that have long irritated me this time of year.

For months they have lurked in the shadows, sodden with alcohol, their massive bodies bulging with strange glistening green protuberances, attacking us in our homes, at our offices, even in our churches – there is no escape. It is the hour of *The Fruitcake*.

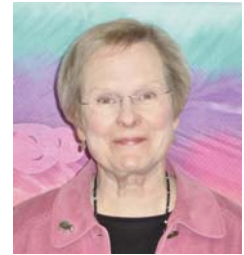
In 17th-century England they were wild about plum pudding, the precursor to our fruitcake. They threw in whatever was available, soaked it in brandy and served it aflame. Plum puddings lasted forever as they were laced with suet. Animal fat! Could we today be eating that anathema filled with some poor critter's subcutaneous tela? I hope not, but I have my doubts.

Now let's discuss another abomination that infests this season. The dreaded *Printed Christmas Letter*. The format, which can be purchased on eBay, is predictable. First the obligatory recital of trips taken to exotic climes such as Cowpies, Montana. This is followed by a depressing litany of the surgical indignities suffered during the year, including a visit to Dr. Peter Pokemon, a Jamaican proctologist. Then on to the children, apparently manger-born, and their triumphs. "Hermione plays center and has an athletic scholarship to Harvard. She will be in the seventh grade next year." Wouldn't it be refreshing to just once read, "We don't know what to give Siegfried this Christmas, there are so many rules about what you can send to someone in prison." Can you say "schadenfreude?"

Now if you will excuse me, I'm going to park my fundament in my favorite chair and listen to my collection of *The Chipmunk Christmas* carols.



Nan Lightner, communication



Mary Bowman, newsletter



Elizabeth Short, social committee



Sue Marty, social committee

Docent Executive Committee



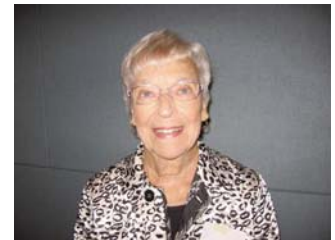
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