

## 12.4.14 Docent Forum, Part 2: Continuing Education Topics

Below is a summary of the suggestions and issues raised. A sub-group of DEC members met 12/17 to plan the best way to address your concerns. For each topic there is a section on how we are taking action, the progress we are making, and the limitations we have. Expect to hear more later!

### Difficult to handle artwork

- **PROBLEM:** Fishing Party Off Long Island is placed between two nude busts. Berenice Abbott's NYC photo is difficult to access behind the desk near the photography gallery entrance. The Caillebotte is a distraction in the Impressionist gallery.
- **RESPONSE:** Debbi will contact the curators about the placement of the nude busts and the Abbott photo (is this a temporary spot?). As a significant Impressionist painting, the Caillebotte will most likely remain within the Impressionist gallery.
- **STRATEGY:** Docents have handled the distraction of nudes in a variety of ways. Comparing approaches could be a possible docent forum topic!

### When curators speak on artwork, what information would be helpful to hear?

- **DISCUSSION**

**Why was this particular piece purchased?** How does it fill a need to complete our understanding of an artist's career, a time period, or a particular culture?

**What are the stories behind the objects? Specifically, docents value information that can't be easily found by research or using Google.** What inspired the artist to create something this way or at this time: relationships or competition between artists, personal/family relationships, health issues, politics or social events, etc.? Was there an interesting provenance visitors would enjoy hearing? How much do large sculptures weigh?

**Curator presentations on new acquisitions and "over-looked treasures"** would be helpful. Two new acquisitions, both in G373, were mentioned: Senegalese artist Maimouna Guerresi's "Supha" and Frank Big Bear's "Untitled" (Patti Smith collage).

**Could David Little speak on the new photography galleries?**

**Can presentations by curators be taped?**

- **RESPONSE:** Debbi will give a list of questions to curators when she asks them to speak on new accessions. She will request proposals written for new accessions and distribute them via the mgpvunteers website. The proposals are often brief, but now also contain the label copy for when the work goes on view.

The current photography exhibition ends on 3/1, so Debbi will talk with David Little about creating a presentation on the next photo exhibition. At the DEC meeting in

January, there will be a discussion about reviving monthly study groups. Each month there could be a study group in preparation for the “tour of the month” that follows.

Filming gallery talks has its limitations with our technology. We will still do this on occasion but the sound and visual quality cannot be guaranteed.

Note: Although Liz Armstrong (curator of contemporary art) has recently left the MIA, the contemporary galleries will not be changed until a new curator is hired.

### **School tours starting in Target Wing**

- **PROBLEM: It is a long walk from the Target Wing to the east end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors to start a tour. Tours are now 45 minutes, not 1 hour. Docents at the forum would like the decision to start school tours in the Target Wing to be reconsidered.**
- **RESPONSE: The Official MIA policy is that all school tours must begin and end in the Target Wing. Docents may not take a group across the courtyard and enter the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave entrance.**
- **STRATEGY:** We are changing expectations of the “traditional” one-hour tour. Plan for a 45-50 minute tour with one or two fewer objects to reduce the frustration of not seeing everything. If docents are interested and if the teachers and students have the time, tours can be longer. Some docents and guides have expressed that they like beginning tours in the Target Wing. It is an opportunity to use objects from special exhibitions like “Nature of Nature” that may have been “too far to go” when tours began in 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. If you are headed for the East end of the building to start your tour, plan for one or two short stops along the way.
- **NOTE: “Chihuly” lobby.** Debbi, Ann, and Karleen Gardner (Director of Learning & Innovation) will meet soon to discuss specific school group issues. Next spring, the “Chihuly” lobby will be redesigned and it will be closed for a period of time. The link will remain open. The next building renovation will affect where school tours begin. Debbi says things change, nothing is forever!

### **Future plans for the OTIS elevator**

- **QUESTION:** Will a modern elevator replace the old one? How will only one elevator at the entrance affect tours? How about tours with wheelchairs?
- **RESPONSE:** The elevator has been recently upgraded and passed a code inspection. There is no plan to replace or close it at this time.

### **Folding stools available near the front lobby elevator**

- **RESPONSE:** The main challenge is finding storage that is not unsightly. Stacked chairs near the entrance would be unattractive. The area under the stairwell is very visible and sometimes used for tables for surveys, etc. Debbi will check into the storage issue as well as the cost of more chairs.

## During an evening tour half the museum was closed for an event and disrupted tours.

- RESPONSE: Karleen has handled this with management. In future, if parts of the museum are to be closed off, we will be notified well in advance so that you can plan accordingly for your tours.

## Discover Your Story Tours (DYS)

- PROBLEM: Each person in a wheelchair needs someone to push it. The responsibility to find “people to push” has unfairly fallen to the docents leading the tours. Whose responsibility is it to make those arrangements? Another issue was what door DYS visitors use to enter the MIA. Some use the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave entrance. Rakhma Home comes through the west facing doors on Stevens because the driver Carol is in charge and is the chaperone for the group. Sarah is on top of what happens, some other greeters have not been aware of where people are entering. Some of the hearing devices malfunctioned. Is this a common problem?
- RESPONSE: The contacts for DYS tours have been informed that two docents will be available for each tour, a lead and a helper. The rest of the people needed must be supplied by the organization. Currently, Rakhma Homes is the only facility authorized to park in the roundabout. Adding other facilities will be discussed at the next Access Team meeting. The hearing devices will be looked at for recharging.

## Behavior issues on tours

- PROBLEM: Students are distracted by their **cellphones**. **Some chaperones talk and don't chaperone**. **What is the Lead's responsibility** when talking to the contact and setting up our expectations for students and chaperones? **What ground rules can docents set** for the tour? Could there be more chaperones on **preschool tours**? What are guidelines for **refusing a tour**?
- RESPONSE: MIA policy is to welcome cellphone use to check on information and take photos. One exception: objects on “loan” which many not be photographed. Policy on all tours, including preschool tours, is to have one chaperone per group of 10 students. Debbi would welcome more feedback from preschool tour docents on this subject.
- Policy is that docents may refuse a tour if there is not a chaperone present, but we are reluctant to do this. If students on a tour are disruptive, the tour can be ended early. If one student or a small group is disruptive, they may be sent with a chaperone to wait in the lobby. If there is no chaperone, the docent must wait with the group until another adult arrives. Docents always have the option of ending a tour if the students are disruptive, but it is a last resort. Schools have paid for busing and well-behaved students miss out on the experience.
- STRATEGY: Many docents have developed clever ways of setting expectations for students and handling behavior issues. Most docents have an opinion on what makes a “good lead.” With such a wealth of experience, it may be helpful to have a roundtable discussion to share ideas.

## Variability of days/times for Continuing Education

- **PROBLEM:** Some “seasoned” docents were trained on Mondays and miss the continuity and social cohesion of having a single day/time for CE. With trainings on Wednesdays and Thursdays, docents assigned tours are always unavailable. Some feel having CE on different days provides opportunities for more docents. Some docents prefer mornings and some prefer afternoons. The consensus was that the variability is unsatisfactory, but there was no agreement on a common day/time.
- **RESPONSE:** It is estimated that the MIA saves thousands of dollars annually by having the museum “dark” on Mondays. The days/times of CE are quite often determined by factors outside Debbi’s control; for example, when curators and speakers are available. There does not seem to be a solution that pleases everyone.
- **STRATEGY:** DEC will discuss consistent days and times for CE. There might be a time for meeting socially before CE. (Would people like this?)

## Information desk/bar changes

- **PROBLEM:** The current “info desk” feels cold and sometimes no one is there. Docents miss the old information desk with its maps and brochures, as well as the people (often retired docents) who staffed it. Many feel they were wonderful promoters of our tours! There will be a January training for the volunteers who work in the lobby but we do not know the goal of that training. There is concern about the volunteers, even the young ones, who must stand for several hours at a time.
- **RESPONSE:** The MIA vision of the lobby is to be “Apple Store” clean, lean, modern.
- **STRATEGY:** Mary Bowman, DEC Chair, and Pam Friedland, Friends President, will meet with Eric Bruce (Head of Visitor Experience) on February 3 to discuss changes at the information desk and how they affect docents and visitors. Send any comments you have on the topic to Mary.

**Tour confirmation form:** include docent email addresses on confirmations

- **RESPONSE:** The form does not allow the fields that were set up to be changed.

## Postscript: Compare, Contrast & Coffee

A helpful docent CE session could begin in a specific gallery. Docents could compare and contrast their views, approaches, and questions on a single artwork. Certainly, a good opportunity to test out some Artful Thinking strategies! A series of artworks could be handled in one gallery. At the end of the session, docents could meet for coffee downstairs. (Idea presented by Linda Phillips and Lynn Dunlap.)

**NOTE:** DEC could create a study group signup form and process.