

# The Docent Muse



February 2014

## On Giving Tours – The MIA’s Educational Vision and Philosophy

*Debbi Hegstrom*

From time to time, I receive emails or comment cards from visitors who took tours and didn’t want to be asked to share opinions and insights about the works of art they were looking at together. And, some have even stated that they’ve heard docents have been told not to give information on tours. I’ve thought a great deal about these comments and feel it would be worthwhile to examine and reiterate the learning-related philosophies that we embrace in Museum Guide Programs. Here are excerpts from one of my replies.

We know that our visitors want to learn about the works of art to increase their interest and understanding. We encourage docents to have conversations with the visitors using an interactive approach. We use a learner-focused model that involves asking questions and encouraging comments from participants. This is in keeping with teaching and learning methodologies that have shown that involving the visitors/students helps them retain more information and teaches critical thinking skills.

This is not a new approach; over 20 years ago we looked at the “shared inquiry” technique introduced by the Great Books program (*see below*\*), which borrows aspects from the Socratic method. More recently, we have looked at research conducted by John Falk (*Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*) and Nina Simon (*The Participatory Museum*) both of which speak to visitors’ motivations and desires within a museum setting. And, we have conducted our own visitor research that supports our visitors’ desire for more social, interactive experiences.

We do not discourage docents from sharing information with the group. Rather, we encourage them to find out what the group is interested in and then weave pertinent information into the tour during the conversation. Some docents are more interactive than others; every docent tour you attend will be different in some way.

However, we do acknowledge research that shows visitors want to find ways to make connections to the art and sharing their ideas and observations helps make those connections. We know that visitors respond differently to this approach and ask our docents to adapt the tours to suit their audiences. Some people love to share their ideas about a work of art. Others want an art history lecture. We appreciate that balancing these desires can be a challenging task for a docent.

The only program where we do not share information is Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). These are specific tours given to school groups that ask for and are participating in the VTS curriculum. They are used to foster critical thinking skills in young learners by having them make observations about works of art based on the visual evidence, rather than telling them what they should see. This methodology focuses on the learner and his/her stage of development.

\*Here is some information from the current *Great Books* website:

At the heart of all *Great Books* programs is *Shared Inquiry*, a distinctive method of learning in which participants search for answers to fundamental questions raised by a text. *Shared Inquiry* leaders guide participants in reaching their own interpretations by posing thought-provoking questions and by following up purposefully on what participants say. Through *Shared Inquiry*, participants learn to

give full consideration to the ideas of others, to weigh the merits of opposing arguments, and to modify their initial opinions as the evidence demands. They gain experience in supporting, testing, and expanding their own thoughts. In this way, *Shared Inquiry* promotes thoughtful dialogue and open debate, preparing its participants to become able, responsible citizens, and enthusiastic, lifelong readers.

In the same way, we seek to promote lifelong art appreciation skills through inquiry-based, interactive tours.

I applaud all of you for helping visitors develop lifelong looking and critical thinking skills. I'd enjoy hearing from you about your experiences with interactive tours and visitor reactions.

The following is additional information that has informed my responses to visitors about how tours at the MIA are conducted.

#### *L&I Educational Vision and Philosophy*

In a series of meetings, L&I staff members recently developed the following vision and philosophy statement:

Through diverse experiences, the division of Learning and Innovation invites participants to engage in dialogue, construct personal meaning, connect art to their lives, and create art that is original and self-expressive.

We value:

- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- Collaboration
- Curiosity
- Inclusivity and diversity
- Empathy, respect, and kindness
- Lifelong learning and reflection.

Through experiences with art and ideas, our audiences will:

- Discover themselves and the world
- Engage in playful and meaningful ways
- Connect through sharing and collaboration
- Create by experimenting and imagining possibilities.

## **First Impressions: Our African Gallery Transformation**

*Jane Grunklee*

Late in November on a Sunday and a weekday afternoon, I had the pleasure of chatting with museum guests about their initial experience in our newly installed African galleries. The following questions were asked of visitors who had spent at least fifteen minutes in the gallery reading labels, looking with care at the art and interacting with the technology.

- 1) What are your impressions?
- 2) What work(s) of art would you like to learn more about?
- 3) Is something absent that would enhance your enjoyment?
- 4) How often do you visit the MIA; are you a member?

Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, Curator of African Art, has responded to several of the comments raised by our guests.

*Guests #1 - A young couple*

We really like it; the layout, architecturally we like the space, the iPads, the map, you can see more things, the 360-degree view of the art is great! the masks are beautiful.

The masks intrigue us as does the lobster coffin. We want to spend more time with the art.

I noticed the small figures of the Egyptian gods and goddesses are missing.

J-LG: The small figures of Egyptian gods and goddesses will at some point be rotated into the new galleries.

The woman, who is a member, is an art history major at the University of Minnesota. She and her companion (not a member) come often to the museum.



*Guests #2 - A young couple*

I'm quite impressed with everything here, like the layout a lot, it's open – no traffic jams. There's a good balance, a lot of stuff to see but not too much.

Viewing the art from all sides is wonderful. The map and iPads are a 21st-century enhancement.

The Dinka corset and the Egungun costume.

I need an illustration on how the corset is worn as well as (how) the Egungun costume is danced. The young man was particularly interested in learning more about the Egungun costume and the traditions behind it.

J-LG: We will add images on the iPad of Dinka corsets being worn; images of an Egungun costume being danced are already featured on the iPad. It is a different kind of Egungun, so we will replace it with a better one!

This woman studied art history in college, is a member and visits a couple times a year, 'not enough.'

*Guests #3 - A mother and her son*

Better than ever! the eight-year-old boy eagerly stated. His mother likes the flow and colors, they pull you through (the gallery), there is tons of movement. The technology is fabulous.

Kara Walker's silhouette struck an emotional chord. 'It's elegant but also deceiving; a silhouette of an African slave? Usually a silhouette depicts portraiture of royalty.' She would also like more information about 'tapestry and weavings.' More information about tapestry and weavings is a request heard often; something to think about for the future!



Several interesting comments about how the gallery experience could be enhanced were offered. 'There should be something to touch such as musical instruments or textiles.'

J-LG: Both are offered by the Art Cart, but the latter is certainly something that could be featured in the Designing Form and Function gallery.

A 'sitting spot' to contemplate a work of art would be nice. Back stories about ivory, the looming extinction of elephants and other animals and conservation efforts. The son wants to see 'more gold.'

The family comes often to Target Family Day, stops in after a Children's Theater performance and the mother attends *Art in Bloom*. However, they are lapsed members.

*Guests #4 - Two middle-aged women*

One woman stated with a dramatic sweep of her arm, 'I love the flow, it's beautiful, the way it's arranged is one of the best I've ever seen! I've been here twice in three days!'

I'm intrigued by all of the anonymous art.

J-LG: Anonymous art probably refers to the fact that most labels have Artist Unknown. This is something we are thinking about tweaking.

'No' was her response to my third question.

My husband and I come to the MIA once a week on average and spend about an hour at a time.

Her friend visiting from North Carolina offered one comment. 'The silhouette drawings (of the objects) on the labels is a brilliant idea'.

*Guest #5 - An older man*

It's marvelous. There is an interesting mixture of historical periods and works from all over the world. The iPads are great. I haven't used the map yet. It's very informative and impressive.

No, the explanatory material is well done.

Not particularly...but the juxtaposition of African art and Cubism such as a Braque or Picasso might be fun to see.

The gentleman, a first time visitor to the MIA, lives in Houston.

*Guest #6 - A young mother*

It's easier to see what's here due to the open floor plan. There's not as much art on display, but it's good because too much can be overwhelming. I enjoyed the religious pieces. The gold weights are good, something for the family to experience. We try to diminish too much exposure to technology.

*Mami Wata Figure.* I then showed her how to learn more about this object on the map, which her husband and children were already using.

'No'.

They come to the MIA as a family after attending the Children's Theatre about six times a year, but aren't members.

*Guest #7 - A middle-aged man*

I'm very impressed, comfortable and entertained. It holds your attention. The labels are more readable. I don't find myself walking away after a few seconds.

The map is very super. I wanted to locate the area where Captain Phillips was hijacked by pirates.

This visitor felt the need to spend more time here to honestly address the third question.

He is a member and visits the museum about twelve times a year.

*Guest #8 - A middle-aged woman*

I'm enjoying it. It's nicely spread out and a great learning experience.

The Egungun costume. I want to get it on and conjure up my relatives!

I want to touch the Egungun costume. (Don't we all!)

A member, she views the special exhibits and comes about six times annually.

*Guest #9 - A middle-aged man*

The gallery is open and inviting. The display of objects is bold, they stand out in relief.

This guest wasn't curious about any particular object.

Nothing is missing. The gallery is a healthy cross-section of styles and periods. Twentieth-century works aren't ghettoized.

A member, he frequently visits the MIA.

*Guests #10 - A grandmother with her grandson*

Really cool! responded the 11-year-old boy. I like the drum carved from one piece of wood, the lobster coffin and the masks are realistic, detailed and the beads are exactly in the right spot!

His grandmother commented, I love the space and the lighting. I can wander around. I'm not standing in line waiting. Being able to look at the objects from all angles is great. I'm aware that most of the art is contemporary and I like that.

Twice she stated she wants to take home the Tabwa feathered, beaded diviner's mask. (That makes two of us).

It would be helpful to transfer the iPad information to our own iPhone. We can't carry the iPads with us.

She is a member and visits the MIA six times a year.

These insightful conversations were further enhanced by my observations. One of the guests I interviewed actually approached me and asked if I was a sociologist. "No, I'm more of an amateur anthropologist, I said with a smile ... may I ask you some questions"?

The iPads and map engaged young and old alike. Families gathered around the technology and gold weights. It was common to see people wait patiently in line or nearby to explore the map.

Guests were indeed spending quality time with an object, not slowly walking past, as was the experience with Guest #7. Body language and comments overheard were additional indicators of positive impressions.

An observation I will never forget came from a tiny, older woman who, with a strong accent and a big smile, compared our beloved *Ife Shrine Head* to Angelina Jolie! The MIA's newly-installed African Gallery appears to be a fun destination where the wonder of learning and entertainment go hand-in-hand.



## Edging Toward The Sacred

Kay Miller

At the heart of the sacred is the universal human desire to connect with something larger than ourselves, some great “other” outside of ourselves. Drawn as we are to capture the ineffable through sacred objects, we lurch toward the edge of the sacred abyss. We seek certainty, but like Japanese Zen ink painters, discover that the world is an illusion. The truly divine cannot be named, tamed, touched or photographed.

“Every sacred tradition says there is a mystery that you cannot master,” says Dr. Wayne Roosa, an artist and art history professor at Bethel University in St. Paul. “There’s a tension: ‘Can I define the sacred? If I define it, have I got it?’ Definitions are good. But don’t mistake them for the real thing. The sacred is still the sacred.”

Roosa loves the “weirdly diverse” way that the MIA’s *Sacred* exhibition, spread over ten galleries of the Target Wing, echoes that tension across cultures and time. Roosa has frequently been invited to speak to MIA docents because he brings a level of art scholarship and insight, expressed in ways both profound and digestible. In October, as the speaker for Joan Herreid Memorial Lecture and Evening Social, Roosa talked MIA guides through *The Sacred* exhibition’s plethora of sacred objects. On March 29, he will join psychotherapist David Hawkinson to discuss Spiritual Psychology as part of the *Sacred Salons* series. And on April 19 he will collaborate with Maren Ward, from Bedlam Theater, in a session on death and the sacred. The free weekly salons will be held on Saturdays at 3:00 p.m. on the first floor of the Target Wing atrium.

The *Muse* wanted to capture some of Roosa’s ideas in a way that MIA guides could really use. So we asked him to walk the exhibition with us, as if he were creating a tour, selecting those objects he finds most compelling and offering questions, key ideas and discussion to spur guides’ thinking as we compose our own tours. That combination tour-and-interview is now available on MGP Volunteers website as a download. Roosa suggested starting tours by asking what visitors regard as sacred.

“I’ve watched people go through the show,” Roosa said. “They would gravitate toward certain things and feel comfortable there. But you could see them puzzling over other things. Just their body lan-

guage tells me that they are grappling with the question, “What does this mean, this sacred idea?”

During the walk-through, Roosa offered a number of tantalizing reflections:

### *The Empty Vitrine*

“Every religious tradition that I know of has some notion of the Holy of Holies,” to be entered only by the initiate – the high priest, shaman, rabbi, imam or ritual specialist who understands and reveres it.” In Islam, that place is the Great *Kaaba*, the Black Cube in Mecca; in Shinto, the Golden Mirror at the heart of the temple. Every religion has some form that is actually only present as an absence – the sacred void – “the implication that something is too sacred to be touched by the uninitiated.” The paradox: If you want real life, you must first, on some level, die to yourself or your claims.

### *Shiva Nataraja*

“Many sacred traditions say the universe is a dance. Most religious traditions have a liturgy or ritual that is dance-like or actually is dance. Shiva is both a creative and destructive force – the *yin* and *yang*, life and death, good and evil.” Humans have long grappled with these polarities: “The idea that deities are involved with creation and destruction, is beautiful and disturbing. It puts us in our humble place.”

### *Show and Tell, by Andy DuCett*

“These are things that we handle daily. For example, these little Soap Box Derby cars. A kid uses those when he’s in Boy Scouts, then he outgrows them. Why don’t we throw them away? Because they hold deep memories. They become personal sacred touchstones of our life, our history, our memory: ‘I did this with my dad, my grandpa.’ Surely those



are sacred connections...For me, this is the sacred through the quotidian, the mundane. If you go to church or temple, you’re reminded of all the saints who are part of your tradition. But this is your family. These are your saints.” These objects are not inherently valuable. So, how does meaning get attached to them?

## Guanyin

Light and shadow, long-standing symbols of the sacred, have been curated in this gallery to create a meditative space that invites museum visitors to participate. “In the Buddhist tradition, one way you escape desire, pain, striving and failing – all those tensions that leave us in darkness – is through a centralized meditation. There are two primary forms. One is visual: That’s the mandala or a figure like Guanyin. The other is aural: a mantra, where you center yourself around a word or a sound. With that you shed the stream of consciousness – everything from shopping lists to anger at your neighbor. In that way, you get outside yourself.”

## Warrior with Shield and Some/One

This Sacred/Profane gallery is about war and warriors. The wars listed on the wall were typically conducted in the name of God or cultural ideals and ambitions. “The etymology of the word profane is ‘outside the temple.’ If the temple implicitly is where everything is sacred, then is everything outside the



temple not sacred?” A wonderful paradox runs through the exhibit: “The sacred requires humility and encountering something bigger than you, more important than

you. The irony is that that religion is often about power and control.”

I love the dialogue between these two pieces: Two warriors from two very different traditions. One is wounded and damaged. The other is more triumphant. *Warrior* portrays a terrible pathos: A soldier defiant to the end, raising his shield despite horrific suffering. “Even if I didn’t think we should have gone to Iraq, even if I thought Colin Powell lied, the individual soldier still has



shown courage, valor, commitment and sacrifice” – attributes of the sacred.

*Some/One* is a single figure that stands for an entire army, larger-than-life, but hollow inside.

## Transmission

These short video clips are about pilgrimages to places such as the Vietnam Veterans War Memorial or to a site in Jerusalem where Christ is said to have walked. Pilgrims bring their crosses, hoping to touch the untouchable. Is this the stuff of superstition? Are pilgrims transformed by miraculous places? Or does belief transform the profane into the sacred?

## Untitled (*Large Walking Book, Chicago*), by Stan Shellabarger

This artist reminds us that life is a journey, a path we travel from birth to certain death. He starts with red rosin paper, a mundane construction material related to the building trades. The etymology of the word



“journey” goes back to Medieval French *ournée* for “one day’s work.” A journeyman is someone who is hired for a day. We all are here for just one day. Shellabarger lays the paper over diamond-plate metal sheets, walking his own labyrinth with a laborer’s boots until the paper is cut to lace in those raised places. This symbolizes the journeyman’s mundane work, cutting sod or laying stone every day. But it’s also a labyrinth, which is sacred. Poetic associations are one of the big ideas in this show. This is not a sacred object made of gold, silk or lace. “But through the activity, it was transformed into a beautiful object. This is the trace of it – the manuscript – the text - that recorded the activity.”

## *Pedestrian: Walking as Meditation and the Lure of Everyday Objects*, by Annette Weintraub

“This video is also about walking as a meditation,” but it is a virtual stroll through some very trashy, kitschy or commercial places filled with neon, garbage, signage, sirens and urban excess. Weintraub

appropriates spiritual terms – meditation, icons, reverie, oracle, shrines – to create her cyber “labyrinths.” But are they sacred? Do they invite prayer or contemplation? These are not the journeys recognizable to most pilgrims. Yet, these urban and virtual spaces are where most of us spend our time. Is there not something sacred here?

*Slow walking garment from  
With Nothing to Give, I Give Myself,  
by Marcus Young*

Religious liturgy is full of garment metaphors: “We come to God in filthy rags.” “Clothed with the robes of righteousness.” Every religious tradition sets aside priests or priestesses as intercessors between us and the divine. Chances are that a priest wearing ordinary street clothes would be ignored. But clothed in liturgical garments – often loose, luxurious and filled with symbols – they are transformed. You no longer think, ‘Oh, that’s just John, my neighbor.’ Now he’s playing the role of intercessor, looking after your welfare. Sometimes religious garments remind us of the “fond stories” of our religious upbringing or are read as “visual Bibles.” Artists in this gallery use clothing to raise questions about spiritual practice.



Performance artist Marcus Young lived in the Minnesota Artist Exhibition Program Galleries for ten days in 2011. Each morning he meditated. Then he donned a filmy, flowing blue garment and silently walked the MIA halls. He looked



priestly, monkish. Puzzled museum visitors stopped, many trying to engage him in conversation. Then, in the afternoon, Young switched to janitorial garb, cleaning windows in the MIA link. These efforts drew little notice. “Maybe the person cleaning up is doing something just as priestly as the person who is meditating. Both are serving us,”



Roosa said. “In the medieval monastic and Buddhist traditions, it was thought you really should strip yourself of status. That was a high spiritual calling. It was also a way to shed yourself of all that nastiness – desire, pain, striving and failing – that leaves us in darkness.”

*Atomic Bomb Damage: Wristwatch Stopped at 11:02,  
August 9, 1945, Nagasaki, by Shomei Tomatsu*

One of Roosa’s loves is deep history, such as the cave paintings in France. They cause him to reflect on what distinguishes human beings from other creatures. “One of the distinctions is how we deal with death. Neanderthal graves provided one of the first ritual burials. They not only took the time to create a place for the body, but they positioned it and left objects with it,” suggesting rituals to ease passage into an afterlife.

“This photo of a watch concerns a super weapon that kept on killing with radiation deaths long after the specific bomb fell. It is also very poignant because you bring in the element of time: ‘Time is up.’ ‘What are you doing? I’m just killing time.’ This image is about the time that a lot of people’s time stopped...To me, this is haunting: People were going about their daily lives in the city and suddenly kaboom! This isn’t about bombing soldiers. This is about weapons dropped on cities, on civilians. It’s also about history. In the other room, we have a list of wars through history. Time is such a powerful dimension. At the end of your life with so little time left, you rarely talk about killing time.”



The objects chosen for this gallery are provocative, asking about human response to death of celebrities, of noncombatants and other innocents. Only the *Funeral Torch* is a liturgical object tying the viewer to the question of how we bury? But they do deal with our consciousness of death. There are many objects in the museum, such as the Goya painting where Dr. Arietta nurses Goya back from the brink of death, that could have been included in this gallery. You could have a good time going through all the galleries and thinking about what else you and visitors would have put here.

In concluding a tour, Roosa suggested circling around to the beginning idea: “We came in here today, asking what was sacred to us. Now that you have interacted with a wild diversity of objects that people chose in response to what we consider sacred, have your definitions of sacred changed? Do you see it differently? What do you take away with you today, as you leave the museum?”

## Reflections on The Sacred

### *Merritt Nequette*

Last year, the use of the Target Wing for the exhibit on *Globalization* was intriguing to me. It brought a number of objects from various parts of the museum’s collection for display in contexts other than where one might ordinarily see them. And it included a number of objects that were perhaps on view for the first time.

When it was announced that there would be a second year-long exhibition this year on the subject of *The Sacred*, I was so excited that I scheduled two tours during the summer before it opened, for a group that returns annually in October. I was hoping it would be in place by the time October came around, and indeed it was. Since it occupies ten galleries, it offers ample opportunity to select items for a first tour, and then a chance to invite people to return for another tour to find other connections before the July closing. These kinds of exhibitions make a wonderful use of the space, and I hope the curators will continue this new “tradition.”

Officially, I have toured this exhibition with my original two groups in the fall, and since then have taken groups of docents on “my” tour. The editor of the *Muse* asked if I would write a few thoughts about these tours. Touring with other docents is always fun. They engage in conversation, ask questions that bring about discussion, and in general do all the things that we wish would always happen on a tour.

On my first walk through the show, as I approached the first gallery I saw an empty vitrine and wondered what would be there eventually. When I read the label, I found a real stroke of genius. Some sacred items should not be shown out of context. I have used this thought to say that some objects are sacred in themselves. They cannot be de-consecrated to be seen outside that context. I will add Liz Armstrong’s comment that some sacred objects are

not to be seen by anyone who is not an initiate in that community of believers.

There are two objects in the exhibition that I then use to expand on this concept of de-consecration. The *Shiva Nataraja* in the first gallery is one example. The removal from its original place in a village in India was sanctioned by the community, and thus its placement in a museum was approved, although everyone left the village while it was carried out on poles – just in case. The other object in the exhibition is the chalice in the “Sacred Fluids” gallery. This was obviously used in the celebration of the Catholic mass at some point, and was a consecrated vessel for that use. However, when it was determined that it was no longer to be used, it was de-consecrated and is now available as an art object. It was acquired by the MIA in 2011.

The installation of Do Ho Suh’s *Some/One* and Henry Moore’s *Warrior with Shield* has to be one of my favorites of all time. It was added to the *Globalization* exhibition last year as an additional gallery, and since then I have learned it is so difficult to set up, it may stay for a while longer. I have always had a difficult time using the *Warrior*, but in this context, there is no problem.

The majestic “robe of state” with its innumerable individual dog tags is the anonymous “army” or “the troops” to which we often refer. We think of it as a kind of machine, rather than people.

Facing it with the Moore sculpture, we have the individual in that “army” who will not give up. He has lost his shield arm; he transfers the shield to his right arm to deflect blows from above. Moore’s original idea was to have a fallen warrior – in the position of the *Dying Gaul* perhaps. But, then when he sat the warrior up, he tells us that the rectangular space between the inside of the shield and the chest of the warrior is significant. He does not say why that is so, and my interpretation is that his shield has not collapsed upon him. He is still defiant. He is still defending himself.

This gallery is named “The Sacred and the Profane.” I see the idea of war in different ways. There have been many sacred wars. Just reading the *Iliad* list on the wall, one finds any number of them. These wars are going on today in various parts of the world – between and among various religions. There are many who find the “sacred” worth dying for. We speak of “sacred duty” when defending one’s own



country. I understand that this gallery is particularly prominent in the tour given for veterans.

The Ethiopian gallery has to be one of my favorites for a very different reason. I just love the eyes in all of the paintings. (On ArtsConnectEd, this is called an *Album Leaf*. It states that the 44 individual paintings were received framed and mounted in



four rows of eleven paintings, each row attached together with two string loops. If you count them in this gallery and discover one missing in this gallery, you will find it in the African galleries.)

I like to make as many connections as I can when looking at artworks. In this gallery, I use the tradition of painting an icon or a Buddhist *thangka*. When an icon is painted, the last thing is putting in the eyes. This allows the painting to “come alive.” It is similar to what is said about painting Buddhist *thangkas*, because once the eyes are there, the spirit may inhabit the painting, should it so choose.

Following this logic, the concept becomes apparent when one comes to the crucifixion of Christ on the cross. Besides the fact that he is smiling, his eyes have no pupils, because he is no longer alive. The same is true for the two thieves at the bottom of the painting.

Docents on tours ask a lot of questions. There is a *Stoup* in the “Sacred Fluids” gallery that has been on view for a number of years. It was cleaned up recently, and just in time for a special showing here. There’s a lot of gold and silver here, but the figures in the center (in silver) are a familiar grouping of the Madonna and Child with John the Baptist. However, there is an elderly male figure standing behind them

who may be reading a book. Any ideas? There is no prize, but suggestions will be taken.

In the “Sacred Garments” gallery, I like to point out that the “vestments” from all these various traditions are usually not what one wears for daily chores. These garments are reserved for special individuals leading the services, and within a tradition may point

out what position that person holds. The two Daoist robes are labeled as worn by a “mid-ranking priest” and a “high-ranking priest.” In my tradition, the dalmatic (with sleeves) is worn by a deacon, whereas the chasubles (always sleeveless) are worn by priests. In my irreverent manner, I do recall growing up with chasubles such as the ones on view. As Jennifer Komar Olivarez pointed out, they are very heavy. I can also verify that they are very stiff. I have not

seen any of this style (which we knew as Roman chasubles) in this country for many years, but I did see one on a trip to Rome (of course they still have them there). The priest was quite short, and when he genuflected, his head disappeared within the garment, and then popped out again as he stood up. It looked a bit like a turtle.

My tour manages to get to the nine galleries on the second floor, with a mention of the *Tibetan Sand Mandala* in the gallery on the ground level of the Target wing. I end with the *Bodhisattva Guanyin*. Here it is in such a different context from where we are used to seeing it. After having spent some time talking about labyrinths and “finding oneself,” the bodhisattva’s gallery creates such a calming atmosphere and a wonderful place to end a tour.



Shinto priest

## Dragons in Chinese Culture

*Lynn Dunlap*

I took my first ride in a Dragon Boat at the Summer Palace in Beijing. Maybe these boats have a theme-park appeal, but they are the workhorse equivalent to the racing boats of the Dragon Boat Festival. Held usually in June, the third most popular festival in China celebrates the life of the patriot poet Qu Yuan.



According to one story, fishermen jumped into their boats and raced to rescue the drowning man. They weren't fast enough then, but for 2000 years since, dragon-prowed boats race in honor of the revered Qu Yuan. Now the Dragon Boat Festival has gone global. You can attend festivals from Rome to San Francisco or Bemidji to Lake Phalen.

Dragons date back at least 7000 years in Chinese culture. These rulers of water and rainfall are considered symbols of power, strength and good luck. The dragon is the traditional emblem of the emperor, who slept in a dragon bed, wore a dragon robe, and was enthroned on the dragon seat. If the dragon's image had five claws, it was exclusively imperial.

Dragons must look out or upward since they ascend to the sky; bad luck would come if the dragon faced downward. Dragon images in our collection range from pendants to finials to roof ornaments.



Dragon Boat Racing at Lake Phalen Asian Festival  
<http://www.dragonfestival.org>



*(Editor's note)* To make the puppet in the picture for Chinese New Years Celebrations for the year of the Green Horse you can go to the following website for directions and a free template [www.craftjr.com/dragon-paper-craft/](http://www.craftjr.com/dragon-paper-craft/). I use large craft sticks instead of dowel rods.



Long Beach Dragon Boat Race  
<http://www.lbdragonboat.com>

## The Audacious Eye - All About Bulls

*Marilyn Smith*

When I first heard about the MIA's acquisition of the entire Clark Collection of Japanese art, I was, to say the least, very excited. I have visited Japan several times and like Bill Clark, I love the country, the people, the culture, the customs and am very intrigued by the art. I have also hosted Japanese visitors from Ibaraki, the Japanese sister city of Minneapolis, many times. So, when it was announced that this touring year we would have an exhibition featuring highlights of this collection, I was determined to give at least one tour even though I was not officially assigned to tour the show.

It is a lot of work to plan a tour for just one occasion, but I decided now that these were all objects in our permanent collection I could use again and again. So, I looked forward to how much I would learn as I prepared my tour. Some of you may know that since I became a docent, I have given a tour to a group of friends and art lovers at the MIA on the third Friday of every month. The fact that I have been able to give a new tour each month with very few repeated objects speaks to the depth and breadth of the MIA's wonderful collection. This group would receive my one tour of the exhibition.

Shortly after *The Audacious Eye* opened, I determined to make objects in the exhibition one of those monthly tours. I would like to share some of my research on a few objects that I found particularly interesting. My theme was *Bulls, Boys, Birds and a Very Big Boar*. I will address only the objects with images of bulls and provide other information that pertains to these. I will include information that I think might be of particular interest, or that was in some instances difficult to find. I began the tour with information about Willard Clark and the MIA's acquisition of the his collection.

The MIA's director, Kaywin Feldman, was at one time Director of the Fresno Museum of Art. It was while serving in that position that she met Bill Clark who lived nearby. Kaywin became a prime mover in the MIA's acquisition of the Clark Collection. I found the following information in an article in the *Fresno Bee* newspaper or on the Clark Center website. The acquisition of 1700 objects is part gift and part purchase.

The acquisition will increase the MIA's holdings of Japanese art by approximately one third.

The acquisition nudges the MIA into the top five museums in the U.S. in their Japanese art collections. The MIA is up there with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Smithsonian and Freer/Sackler Galleries. For my tour, I chose objects in the exhibit which depict bulls partly because Bill Clark seems to have an affinity for bulls (he is a fifth-generation dairy farmer and owns a business in the San Joaquin Valley called World Wide Sires which deals with bull semen), and partly because there is a connection between bulls and Buddhism.

The first object on the tour was the *Daiitoku Myōō*. The information is in list form to make it easier to access.

Bill Clark stated in an interview that today Japan would not allow this object to be exported to the U.S. or anywhere. Even with its repair, it would be considered too precious to the Japanese people to reside outside of Japan. It would be designated a Japanese National Treasure.

This deity is one of five Wisdom Kings – each of which is an emanation of a Buddha. The Buddha for the *Daiitoku Myōō* is the Amida Buddha. Four of the five *Myōō* are situated at the four cardinal directions. The fifth *Myōō* sits alone in the center. In Buddhism the role of all of the *Myōō* is to assist devotees on their journey to enlightenment. The



*Daiitoku Myōō* is situated in the west and is the Wisdom King responsible for helping believers into the Pure Land Paradise.

Believers in Buddhism learn from mantras, mudras and mandalas. I like to incorporate, if possible, how each of these might be used with an object like the *Daiitoku Myōō*. In researching mandalas on Google,

I was able to find an image of *The Womb Mandala*. This is exciting because the Five Wisdom Kings are pictured on it. And, the article has provided a map that shows the position of the Wisdom Kings on the mandala. It also gives some information on how the mandala would be used by believers.  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womb\\_Realm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womb_Realm)

### *The iconography on the Daiitoku Myöo*

The flames around its head burn away all material desires and represent the purification of the mind.

The sword which is special and not flat slashes through ignorance and is used to combat the three poisons – greed, anger and ignorance. With a flashlight you can see the sword has gold on it.

This was done using the *kirikane* process.

The *Daiitoku Myöo* is holding a snake because he has the power to subdue snakes and dragons.

One of his hands is empty, but it would have held a rope used to subdue evil and demons.

The *Daiitoku Myöo* carries a trident which is called a *triratna* or *vajra* in Japan. The three prongs stand for the three jewels of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the community of believers. These three jewels are sometimes compared to diamonds since they are indestructible.

This deity has three eyes made from crystal. They shine in the light of a flashlight. Two look like normal eyes, but the third eye is vertical. He is all seeing and this allows him to have greater up-and-down vision.

The mudra of the *Daiitoku Myöo* is the mudra of supreme enlightenment. All fingers are tucked in like the children's game "Here's the church, here's the steeple." The thumbs are included. Then only the longest fingers are brought out to make a steeple. It's fun to have the tour participants try making this mudra. In Buddhism protruding fingers like these, on the the *Daiitoku Myöo*, when tipped down are used to symbolize the pouring out of the blessings of enlightenment.

This object was carved from cypress wood using the same process that was used for our 13th c. *Jizo - yosegi zukuri*. It is hollow inside and if you shine a light into the open mouth you can see that the head is empty inside. Cypress wood is used for carvings because it is soft and easy to carve, and when it is seasoned or cured it is sapless.

After it was carved, this *Daiitoku Myöo* would have been covered with a gesso-like substance and

then polychromed. Evidence of colors and gold can still be seen by using a flashlight.

My second bull object was *Black Bull* by Mochizuki Gyokusen, late Edo-Meiji period.

I was intrigued that lapis lazuli was used in this painting. I found it in the blue color for the blue cord holding the very large bull. The chord dazzles and shines with the use of a flashlight.

The label for this object mentions the "Ten Oxherding Songs," a series of Zen parables describing the disciple's journey from initiation to enlightenment." These ten steps are depicted by Tokuriki Tomikichiro in his "Ten Bulls." You can view all of these images and read their stories at [srivathsan-margan.blogspot.com/2010/03/10-bulls-by-kakuan.html](http://srivathsan-margan.blogspot.com/2010/03/10-bulls-by-kakuan.html).



Cows and bulls are special in Buddhism because they provide milk, meat and muscle.

My third object with a bull was Ueda Kochu's (1819-1911) *Boy on a Bull*.



In this painting Ueda also used lapis lazuli. Again, a flashlight will make the boy's blue shirt dazzle and sparkle.

If you look up the "Ten Oxherding Songs" mentioned above you will see in picture #6 that a boy is "Riding the Bull Home." Perhaps, this is what the MIA *Boy on a Bull* is doing. "Mounting the bull, slowly I return homeward. The voice of my flute intones through the evening. Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony, I direct the endless rhythm. Whoever hears this melody will join me."

*Tenjin* mentioned in the label copy for this object is a unique word. The word refers to a real person who became a *Tenjin*, a sky deity. His story told in the reference below is interesting and includes a 15th century painting of him and a photo of the plum tree that is said to have flown to him in his exile. This tree now marks the site of his actual grave. I used both images in this article as props on my tour.  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenjin\\_\(kami\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenjin_(kami))

*Tenjin* is a sky deity. He is the *kami*, or Japanese Shinto spirit, of scholarship, and is the deification of a scholar, poet, and politician named Sugawara no Michizane.

Finally, my fourth bull object was *A Cowboy* by Kamisaka Sekka (1866–1942), a color woodcut. This was initially part of a large portfolio of works by the



artist consisting of 60 individual woodblock prints known as *Momoyo-gusa* or *A World of Things*. The woodcut shows

a young boy playing his flute to a bull. It is interesting that he has a blue shirt like *The Boy on a Bull* and a flute like the boy in the sixth image from the “Ten Oxherding Songs.” I’m wondering if there isn’t more to find out about these coincidences. I would also like to know how many complete sets of these 60 woodcuts are still in existence. Our new curator of Japanese art, Andreas Marks, may know the answer. He has written a book about Kamisaka Sekka titled *Kamisaka Sekka: Rinpa Traditionalist, Modern Designer*. Sekka led a revival of a Japanese artistic style from the 17th century called Rinpa as well as being an innovator in modern design

The lack of a written language in the early history of Japan is important when studying very old objects like the Daiitoku Myöo. Similar to Europe in the Middle Ages, for many centuries in Japan only the elite could read and write. So, the religious meanings and teachings of objects had to be illustrated in the iconography of the object itself. People could then read them “like a book.” During the time that our Daiitoku Myöo was made, very few Japanese could read, so all of its teachings had to be visual and very detailed.

Some additional information about writing in Japan: Writing didn’t come to Japan until the 6th-7th centuries CE.

It came via the Chinese, in the form of Chinese symbols or characters for writing Chinese. The Japanese called these *Kanji* characters. Initially, educated Japanese learned the Chinese language and communicated in written form with the Chinese symbols.

However, Chinese and Japanese are two distinct languages which work in very different ways concerning sounds and/or meanings. So, to use the Chinese *Kanji* characters, the Japanese could either use them only by their sounds, or only by their meanings.

Eventually the Japanese developed their own use of characters to fit the Japanese language, *kana*. Each *kana* character (syllabogram) corresponds to one sound in the Japanese language. And *kana* is what is used in most of Japan today although many Japanese are able to read in *Kanji*.

*Some thoughts that I find most intriguing*

In my research, I came across a blog written by Inge Klompmakers who is the Acquisitions Editor of Asian Studies at Brill Academic Publishers. Her blog is called *Yoyogi Park*. She is a Lecturer / speaker on Japanese art at various institutions and museums. Previously, she was a Japanese Art Specialist at Sotheby’s and she received her training at Leiden University. Her comments made me think that perhaps the MIA and The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, with this acquisition, are setting a precedent for how museums can thrive in this time of diminished revenues and that they are way ahead of what may be in the future for many museums.

“The acquisition can be called remarkable as the Clark collection was not a ‘homeless’ collection. It was part of an active private museum, situated in a beautiful Japanese-style complex in central California. Andreas Marks, director of the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, will move with the collection to Minneapolis and becomes the new Head of the Japanese and Korean Art department as well as Director of the newly established Clark Center within the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.”

Does this acquisition mark a new development in the art world? Often private collectors are frustrated or unhappy with regular museum practice and think that their collection and the general audience is best served through a private museum. Here however, a major private art collection, which was kept, studied and exhibited within the infrastructure of a private museum, now becomes part of a ‘regular’ museum. The reasoning behind this particular acquisition is that it is in fact

in the interest of the Clark collection and now this collection can prosper even more within the environment of an established art institution.

So I am interested to learn if this will become a trend and whether in due course more private museums will join forces and collaborate with established museum collections. The Clark Center for Japanese Arts and Culture and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts have set an interesting example. The Clark Center in Hanford will remain a location for Japanese art exhibitions, among others as a venue for the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

### **JSTOR at your fingertips!**

*Mary Bowman*

What is JSTOR? By its own definition: JSTOR offers a high-quality, interdisciplinary archive to support scholarship and teaching. It includes archives of over one thousand leading academic journals across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, as well as select monographs and other materials valuable for academic work. The entire corpus is full-text searchable, offers search term highlighting, includes high-quality images, and is interlinked by millions of citations and references.



Docents will find access to JSTOR and its thousands of scholarly articles via the Hennepin County Library website – [www.hclib.org](http://www.hclib.org). JSTOR is listed alphabetically under the heading “Databases” on the left side of the HCL home page.

Of course, all of us don't live within the boundaries of Hennepin County. No problem.

If you have a valid card from another Minnesota library and you've registered it with HCL, you will be able to connect remotely (from home) to the majority of databases in the list. The exceptions will be the very few databases that are accessible only from library computers.

One more *caveat* – if you have purchased a non-resident card because your Minnesota library is not a member of one of the regional systems (e.g., Clarkfield, Crosby, East Grand Forks, Hendricks, Lake Elmo, and Taylors Falls) you will not have access to HCL subscription databases...from home.

But there's a solution! Come into any of HCL's forty-one branches and ask for a day pass which will allow you to access JSTOR from a library computer. Happy info hunting!



---

*A big  
THANK YOU  
to all docents for your generous support  
of the Sunshine Fund.  
Don't forget, if you know someone who could  
use our support,  
contact the tour schedulers  
or someone on the Executive Council.*

---

*The  
Wandering  
Muses  
are  
the  
work  
of  
Tom  
Byfield*

