

The Docent Muse



June 2013

MIA Docents – 50th Anniversary Year

*Fran Megarry,
Chair of the Docent Executive Committee*

“We stand on the shoulders of others.” That is the phrase I used at the 2012 Docent Fall Celebration. I thought about 50 years of docent life. Yes, there are those of us touring today but consider all the docents who have in many ways shaped what we do today at the MIA.

For nearly 50 years there has been someone who has kept notes for docent meetings. If we know one thing about docents it is we like to talk. Secretaries are able to express the essence of each meeting. The Docent Executive Committee (DEC) secretary for 2012-2013 was Lynn Brofman. Lynn noted our regular meetings and within the day had them ready for all of us on the DEC to review. It was Lynn we looked to for clarification of our discussions. And, this year Lynn was involved with other DEC members in writing several new docent documents.

For nearly 50 years we have had someone responsible for docent money. Money making isn't the function of our group, so, we offer break-even events. Through our Sunshine Fund we offer encouragement to docents going through difficult experiences. Our treasurer who made great spreadsheets and kept us on track for 2012-2013 was Bill Bomash. This year, in addition to taking care of the docent finances, Bill gave regular expert input on computer problems and possibilities for docents.

For nearly 50 years we have had slightly over 50 people who have organized events. Events that bring us together to uplift us and give us opportunity to learn and share friendships. When you see Jean London please show your appreciation for this years wonderful events. Jean organized luncheons, a trip to Winona, film meetings and a fabulous theatre evening.

For nearly 50 years we have had people who were the glue for the hearts of docents. Through sick-

ness and loss our communication people have expressed our friendship to those in difficult situations. This year we give a very special thank you to Maurine Venters who sent the cards and flowers on behalf of all of us. Maurine always went the extra mile through calling to bring a very personal salve to the hearts of our docent friends.

For not as many as 50 years (My research suggests the Docent Newsletter started in 1979) we have had someone each year gathering our writing and editing a newsletter. As much as we love talking, we seem to love writing even more. So our current *Docent Muse* editor had her work cut out for her. Please tell our 2012-2014 *Muse* Editor, Marilyn Smith, how very much you appreciate her successful efforts to provide us with an amazing literary document.

I want to add at this point that we are so richly blessed to have a person formatting all these *Muse* articles to fit nicely into paragraphs with a standard font and print size, and, who often finds appropriate images for many of the articles as well. For nearly 12 years Merritt Nequette has served a publisher of *The Docent Muse*. Merritt certainly deserves a hearty handshake when you see him.

We have been fortunate over these 50 years to have had 50 Docent Executive Chairs. Our 2013-2014 chair has been a docent for many years and has served on the Docent Executive Committee several times. Linnea Asp will lead the MIA docents into our 51st year. This year Linnea headed up the committee that wrote a Docent Discipline document that will serve our docent needs while adhering to MIA policies.

We stand on the shoulders of others, those docents before us. We are so fortunate to have on the DEC an individual who represents all those docents who are honorary. Helen Bowlin has graciously served several terms on the DEC. Helen brought Honorary Docent ideas to the DEC which resulted in a document and information that clarifies the role of Honorary Docents. We are so grateful to all

Honorary Docents for their inspiration and leadership, so, we want to warmly welcome them as they return for visits to MIA.

Debbi Hegstrom accompanied us as we went through the 50th year. Debbie was our liaison with the Learning & Innovation team and the MIA. DEC would not be DEC without Debbi's knowledge, dedication and leadership.

You probably noticed how many times I mentioned 50 years. I am most grateful to my nearly 170 docent colleagues for selecting me to lead the docents in their 50th year. My gratitude also goes to members of the DEC. They are all amazing, dedicated docents and leaders. They gave of their time in so many ways during 2012-2013. We are all about being docents. That is the bond that continues to hold us together. I am pleased that the DEC is dedicated to supporting that bond and enhancing the docent experience here at the MIA. I think all docents would agree that there is a sense of personal fulfillment gained from associating with people who share a common interest in one of the ten greatest encyclopedic art museums in the country. I am also pleased that the DEC helps stimulate collegiality among docents, our docent leader, Debbi, members of the Learning and Innovation Department, the Friends of the MIA and the MIA organization as a whole.

As docents we all become ambassadors for the MIA as we do what we do best here at the museum. Congratulations on a successful 50th year!

An Interview with Liz Armstrong

Kay Miller

Liz Armstrong remembers walking into the California house, ominous with the acrid smell of burned cotton. A young woman sat at a table, methodically ironing a man's shirts until every collar was singed dark brown. Opera music filled the room. The iron was heavy and the woman looked dazed. As she finished burning each shirt, she folded it, stacking it deliberately. Like a ritual. Or maybe like therapy.

That was in the early 1980s, when Armstrong was a curator at the Walker Art Center. She had heard of artist Ann Hamilton and her pioneering installations and performance art, most of them about women and almost all with a domestic, ritualistic feel. For this project, a local museum had gotten permission to do installations in Santa Barbara homes based on

their conversations with the owners. At the center of this piece was the real story of the woman who lived in the house, working out her grief over her husband's recent death.

Hamilton took something deeply personal and cracked it open for every viewer who stepped through the door. To this day, whenever Armstrong smells burned cloth, she recalls that installation. For her, Hamilton's work was a revelation about the power, relevance and scope of contemporary art.

"I've always been a museum goer, and I always thought museums could do more to engage visitors in meaningful ways," said Armstrong, who came to the MIA in 2008 as its first Curator of Contemporary Art. "That's why I'm here now. It's why I like working with Kaywin [Feldman]. She's a museum director who is focused on questions of how museums are going to thrive in the 21st century and she understands that we have to make our cultural institutions more exciting, relevant places to younger audiences."

In a wide-ranging interview, Armstrong talked about her passion for contemporary art, the museum's strategy for acquiring new works, upcoming changes to the *Globalization* exhibit and reactions to her current exhibition, *More/Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*.

Like many curators, Armstrong started out thinking she would be an artist, working across media: print-making, bronze casting, sculpture and painting. "Making art was therapeutic and I realized that was a problem: I loved it. It was relaxing. It was exciting. It was creative." Then in college, she took a hard look at her work and concluded she wasn't going to change the world with it. But she was electrified by great art and the possibilities for exploring different cultures and world history through it.

That was especially true for art of our times.

"You can't tell the whole story if you don't keep collecting," Armstrong said. For many years a few MIA directors collected contemporary work, seeing it as essential to any

encyclopedic museum. That's the reason we have such seminal works as Francis Bacon's *Study for*



Portrait VI and Larry Rivers's *Berdie in the Garden*, Armstrong said.

"We can collect contemporary art and provide a historical context for it across cultures," Armstrong said. "That's huge! It's something no contemporary museum can do." That's also a major reason that such contemporary artists as Mark Dion, Vik Muniz and Jennifer Steinkamp want to work at the MIA. All of them draw inspiration from historical art. Armstrong regularly hears from docents who delight in drawing parallels between new objects and the long line of historical objects that paved the way for them.

Consider David Reed's tall, shimmering abstract, 563. Although Reed is primarily a colorist, he's very conscious of the light in Renaissance and Baroque painting that comes from above, Armstrong said. "It's a religious light. It's the light of God" much as you see in Castiglione's *The Immaculate Conception with Saints Francis of Assisi and Anthony of Padua*, placed near it in the Baroque gallery during one of the *Remix* projects.

But what to collect? How do contemporary curators make decisions about the art of their time that will still have relevance 100 years from now and beyond? One of Armstrong's decisions in building the MIA's contemporary collection is to focus on artists who are connecting with the historical canon.

"A good contemporary curator needs to know the historical material and also must be able to channel contemporary cultural trends and ideas. It's a bit like trading in futures on the stock market," Armstrong said. "OK, who does well with that? People who really study contemporary culture in all its forms, high and low. People who have been working in the field for a long time and have seen enough to understand how an artist's work survives over time, and whether that artist is growing and thriving."

Armstrong's earlier curatorial challenge at contemporary museums in Orange County, San Diego, Berkeley, San Francisco, and the Walker was to spot up-and-coming artists while their work was still inexpensive. The MIA collecting strategy is more conservative – and it should be, Armstrong said.

"For the most part, we're buying artists who are pretty well proven. I'm not buying a work by a young Mark Dion in the 1980s when he was just starting out. I'm buying his work as it has evolved in

2012." Each accession reflects a comprehensive collecting plan that Armstrong, the museum director, and its trustees have mapped out: Works that are global in scope, that don't duplicate the Walker's holdings, and that are indicators of key ideas in today's culture.

"I have another litmus test – that the works have a very strong connection with something in our historical or cultural collection," Armstrong said, pointing to Do Ho Suh's *Some/One* dogtag coat as a stunning extension of the MIA's superb Asian collection. "It is a military robe and deals with issues around war, death and sacrifice, which many objects in our collection do. On top of that, it is by a young Asian artist who has lived in various parts of the world – who has a global perspective."

In just six months *Some/One* has drawn extraordinary reaction from military veterans and school children. "We've been getting letters from teachers saying that when they get their classes back to the classroom, that's the piece they want to talk about." Similarly, when Wiley's *Santos Dumont – Father of Aviation* was in the Baroque gallery for the first *Remix* show, visitors crammed eight notebooks full of reactions ranging from the erudite to street lingo. Conversations in the gallery and the notebooks were inspired, personal, passionate.

"We're really good at [compiling attendance] numbers," Armstrong said. "But what is the deeper impact of our collection and exhibitions?"

Armstrong is seeking an even deeper, perhaps riskier, impact this summer when virtually all the galleries included in the *Globalization* exhibition in the Target Wing will change over – this time to a focus on notions of the sacred. This new round of installations, under the heading of *Sacred*, will emphasize the ongoing connections between contemporary and historical objects. The pairing of *Some/One* with Henry Moore's *Warrior with Shield*, is the one gallery that is likely to remain intact.

Not only is Armstrong focusing on bringing contemporary art to the MIA, she's looking for innovative, collaborative ways of displaying and interpreting works in the collection. "It used to be that if a curator had an idea and they were a good scholar, they would get the green light to do an exhibition. We're much more aware now of asking questions about, 'What's the rationale? Why is this important now?

To whom? How will these ideas be conveyed to our visitors?’

For *Sacred*, Armstrong sought proposals from curators and staff working across disciplines and even beyond the museum walls.

“A group of curators proposed a full installation on sacred clothing and other wearable objects – from amulets to liturgical vestments. Looking at what is deemed sacred in terms of clothing will be fascinating to see across cultures. They will also be looking for ways to make analogies between ‘What is sacred?’ now and in the past. ‘What is an example of a contemporary amulet?’ for example, is a question that we asked. I’m encouraging curatorial colleagues to include objects that question our assumptions and that will surprise and engage visitors, hopefully expanding their ideas around what is sacred.”

With every major exhibition, Armstrong has pushed her own boundaries by consulting people who know more about a subject that she does. For *More/Real?*, she brought together a symposium of a dozen global artists and scholars to discuss theories of reality. In thinking about the sacred, she invited Krista Tippett, host of American Public Media’s *On Being* radio show to the MIA.

“We talked about the sacred. I walked her through the museum. She hasn’t been here in a few years. She was thrilled... She confirmed that [exhibits on the sacred] would have tremendous impact because so many people are rethinking their religious beliefs and what they mean by spirituality,” Armstrong said.

“In the context of the sacred, I wonder about the origins of life on earth,” Armstrong added. Among the MIA’s most recent acquisitions, Jennifer Steinkamp’s *6EQUJ5*, the asteroid-like video projection, addresses both the origins and the end of life as we know it. It draws on the theory of *panspermia*: that asteroids collided with ancient earth, seeding it with microscopic organisms frozen inside the rocks. But it also alludes to the danger of life in the asteroid belt, a kind of galactic shooting gallery. On Feb. 15, a “tiny” asteroid, just 50 feet across, exploded over Russia, injuring 1,000 and rocking buildings. NASA and other scientists constantly track the trajectories of asteroids, while scientists at SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) use the “Big Ear” radio telescope to listen for signs of intelligent life in the universe. Steinkamp drew the *6EQUJ5* name from

coordinates of the single “Wow!” signal SETI scientists heard in 1977.

“I think it’s great that she’s been thinking about something so timeless yet so topical,” Armstrong said.

With *More/Real?* nearing the end of its run, Armstrong is delighting in its impact. Most exciting was the way that MIA staff got into the spirit of it, creating a buzz through social media, setting up grown-up field trips for downtown workers, and adding docent *Liars’ Tours*. There was the blogger who came to the museum for a week and created podcasts of visitor reactions, including Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak’s wry assessment of truthiness in politics today. At the University of Minnesota, Professor Jane Blocker has focused her “Twentieth-Century Theory” art history class on “Theories of the Real,” inspired by Armstrong’s exhibit with readings drawn from the show. The last three weeks of class were held at the MIA with student presentations combining readings with specific works from the show.

Although Armstrong’s acquisitions budget isn’t large, she has found acquisition support to keep Vik Muniz’s *Verso (Lucretia)*, and Mark Dion’s *Curator’s Office* at the MIA.

Armstrong thinks constantly about visitors to the MIA. Contemporary work, she knows, has a way of insinuating itself into consciousness. Will *More/Real?* crack open meaning the way Hamilton’s haunting installation did for her so many years ago?

There are indications it will. Visitors are spending lots of time absorbing *More/Real?* ideas – upwards of 45 minutes per visit. And as Armstrong eavesdrops in the galleries she hears visitors importing its ideas to works old and new: Is this real? Or is it *More/Real?*

More/Real? – Dueling Tours

Morry Rothstein (Kestle) and David Fortney

Morry Rothstein and David Fortney sat down to discuss their experiences with regard to *More/Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*. Morry has been assigned to tour this exhibition. David has not been assigned any tours, so he is touring virtually.

DF: So Morry, why did you want to tour this show?

MR: It might come as a surprise, even to Liz Armstrong, although all of you know me as Rothstein, that is not my real/birth/given name.

Rothstein is my adoptive name. My name is actually Morry Kestle. My birth father was Barton Kestle. Barton Kestle actually was the first Curator of Modern Art at the MIA. After he was declared legally dead, my mother remarried, to a man named Joseph Rothstein, who adopted me, and I took his surname.

Barton Kestle did not disappear after having been subpoenaed by the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. He was actually abducted by aliens from outer space. He eventually appeared, alive, in Roswell, New Mexico, where he resided until his untimely death in 1966.

DF: That certainly explains a number of things. So, what is your favorite piece in the entire show?

MR: I have several favorites, but in the category of “pure” Art, my favorites are all by the artist Dario Robleto, especially, *The Melancholic Refuses to Surrender*, and *Men Are Now Women*.

David, you seem surprised. You should not be. You mentioned to me that you thought those pieces were bogus. That they could not have possibly been made with the materials listed on the label – things like bone (carved and dust), ground coal, horse hair, dirt, lead salvaged from the sea, string, rust and melted vinyl record. That’s exactly what Robleto used to create these wonderful and creative objects.

DF: Seriously? You want me to think the artist used body parts to make this piece? I’m surprised the label copy doesn’t go further and claim that the “broken male hand bones” are from the hands of Rocky Grazziano.

MR: Dario Robleto is a “materialist poet.” He employs a variety of media in his artworks, creating intricately handcrafted objects that reflect his passionate exploration of music, popular culture, science, war and American history. Most often incorporating everyday found objects, Robleto transforms artifacts from a vast inventory of our collective past into delicately layered objects that are personal meditations on love, death, and healing.

My other favorites in the exhibition are the ones that, in my mind, best identify and define what “Truthiness” is all about.

My first example is Inigo Manglano-Ovalle’s *Phantom Truck* – because it conveys the true sense of “Truthiness.”

George W. Bush knew the facts when he felt them in his gut. As Nietzsche said, “All things are subject

to interpretation. Which interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power, and not truth.”

The Bush administration sometimes was candid about its efforts to manufacture its own version of reality. In an oft-quoted interview, a Bush adviser said the idea of making decisions based on a “judicious study of discernible reality” was rejected outright. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore. We’re an empire now, when we act, we create our own reality.”

Continuing in the political vein, other favorite objects of mine include Trevor Paglen’s chromogenic prints. Paglen is into making images of so-called “black sites” – secret U.S. government sites that don’t appear on any maps. Places that are hidden, unacknowledged, and unmapped by the U.S. Government. He also has captured on chromogenic prints surveillance satellites that he contends are continuously watching all of us, everywhere, all the time.

I think that’s why my father Barton used to tell me that the government wants to keep us in the dark. To quote Vice President Dick Cheney, “we also have to work, though, sort of on the dark side, if you will. We’ve got to spend time in the shadows of the intelligence world. A lot of what needs to be done here will have to be done quietly, without any discussion.”

DF: Speaking of being in the dark, I am intrigued by the work of Chinese artist Cao Fei titled *i.Mirror*. It lasts almost 30 minutes and I have yet to see it from start to finish, but over multiple visits I think I have seen the entire work. It so playfully explores the thin line between RL (real life) and SL (second life or virtual reality). The graphics are stunning. I thought it was very creative of Cao to provide the viewer with a running narrative that takes the form of text messages between China Tracy and Hug Yue, two friends in the SL world. They are very intimate with one another and yet I have the clear impression that they have never actually met in the “real world.”

MR: As Leandro Erlich, the creator of *Stuck Elevator* is quoted in the catalogue, “Reality is as fake and constructed as the art; it’s a fiction. Although it’s the fiction that we all agree to live in.”

DF: That reminds me of the final text message from China Tracy: “To go virtual is the only way to forget about the real darkness.”

MR: David, my theme for my tours has been “Seeing is Disbelieving.” As a conclusion for my tours, I usually remind the tour participants that art

alters our way of thinking about reality. Liz Armstrong pointed out that an artist always tries to “smuggle” his/her reality into their art. I remind them that Liz Armstrong’s curatorial style (according to her), is that the works of art in *More/Real?* (and all Contemporary Art, for that matter) are based on “themes that inspire the artists of our time.”

DF: I think I now have some idea about what inspired your father. The physical space containing your father’s curatorial office is part of the original building, the same as the walls of the Grand Salon were once part of a Parisian townhouse, only the Curator’s Office didn’t need to be transported to Minneapolis. Barton filled it with authentic objects from the early 1950s or before and they are of a type that would have been seen in a 1950s professional office. Although harking back to *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, more than *Mad Men*, it even has a vintage cocktail cart. While authentic Ming and Ching pieces fill our Wu Reception Hall, they too would not have occupied a common space until they were used to create an upper middle class Chinese room at the MIA. Both rooms serve the same teaching purpose.

MR: David, as this interview concludes, I must tell you that I have been hearing voices. Voices, I believe from outer space. I am being watched and followed. My mind is being read. Extraterrestrials are telling me to take action. Telling me to request having my rightful inheritance returned to me. I will sue the museum, if necessary, to recover possession and ownership of my father’s, Baron Kestle’s, personal property contained in his old curatorial office. After all, I am the rightful heir to his personal possessions.

An Interview with Joe Horse Capture

Marilyn Smith

On Thursday evening, May 9, MGP volunteers, MIA staff and friends gathered to say thank you and goodbye to Joe Horse Capture and to wish him well in his new position as Museum Specialist at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. After cake and beverages were served an open mike allowed some in attendance to personally express their thanks to Joe for his contributions to the MIA. Later, Joe and many of those from the first gathering joined even



more well wishers for one last gallery talk with Joe. As usual, Joe shared many interesting tidbits about objects that you won’t find on the label copy like how the bent wood box from the North-west Coast was made.

Prior to this event I had decided to try and interview Joe for *The Docent Muse* before he left the MIA for his new job in Washington D.C. As luck would have it, I ran into him as I was entering the museum for his farewell get-together and Joe agreed to answer a few questions that might be of interest to the MIA docents the next day.

So, here is what I learned.

MS: If you had to pick one object in the MIA’s Native American Collection as your favorite, what would it be?

JHC: I couldn’t pick just one object, there are so many – the *Dakota Shirt*, the Morrison *Red Totem I*, objects from my people, (A’aninin-Gros Ventre Tribe), Kevin Pourier’s *Mixed Blood Guy*, the show stopper *Naskapi*



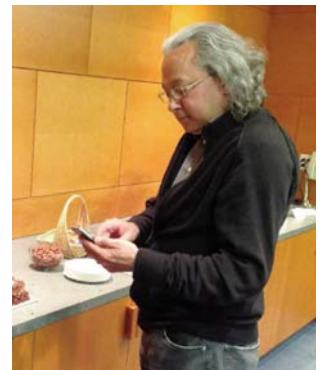
Hunting Jacket, MIA’s beaded sole moccasins and the *Pouch* from my People with the metal cones that make a jingly sound like a meadowlark on the plains.

MS: What was the first object you accessed for the museum.

JHC: The first object I brought into the museum collection was, *We’re Not Your Indians Anymore* by Francis J. Yellow.

MS: What do you consider your most important achievement while at the MIA?

JHC: Working to make the museum more accessible for everyone, especially for Native Americans.



The MIA is an encyclopedic museum and its audience should be encyclopedic. I don't see my work here as being about me. It's about working in a community of great people – Native American art is for all people.

MS: What hinders Native Americans' involvement with the MIA?

JHC: I think the problem with Native Americans and museums is historic. It comes from an old collecting culture that was less than honorable – most of these type of museums focus on anthropology. Art museums have very a different type of collection, and have a great opportunity to reach out to Native communities – to make them part of what we do.

MS: I was interested in the comment that you are one of only two Native American curators of art in the U.S. What have you done to open museum work to more Native Americans?

JHC: I worked with the Mdewakanton Sioux Community to stipend internships in museum work for Native American art students. These positions can be museum-wide, in all areas of museum work. One recipient is currently working at the MIA. Any Native American student regardless of tribal affiliation can apply.

MS: Thank you for bringing the exhibition, *Art of the White Clay People*, to the MIA. I thought it was wonderful.

JHC: It was important to me because it was the last exhibition I worked on with my father.

MS: What is your hope for the future of the MIA?

JHC: I hope that the MIA will maintain a positive relationship to the Native American community in a culturally appropriate manner. It is important to see Native American art as traditional but also contemporary.

MS: What would you like the docents to remember about Native American art?

JHC: In making the Native American art accessible, be respectful. Explore the human experience. There are traditions, ideas through time that have always been there.

Thank you Joe for your time and for your work here at the MIA. You will be missed!

Inspiring Wonder Through the Power of...Books

Joy Yoshikawa

It's hard to believe that we are now in our third year of the *Inspired by Books* public book tours. These tours combine the art of the museum, art of the written word, and the fabulous performance art of our guides and docents.

Growing ideas

Started as an experiment by a few hardy and hearty docents in 2007, book tours have developed into the highly popular public tour program, *Inspired by Books*. The "official" start date for these tours in March 2011 featured *Seven Days in the Art World* by Sarah Thornton and *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert. During each quarter after that, two different books were featured with tours for each book being offered twice a month. That was a total of eight different books and 48 public tours for the year. Due to growing interest, in March 2012 we went to a schedule of one book per month offered every Tuesday and Thursday. This increased offerings to 12 books and 96 tours per year.

In August 2011 and 2012 we wrangled our way into *Art Per Chance* to promote the tours with our "Match Book Game – Set Your Mind on Fire!" Participants matched up pictures of art from the museum with titles from books toured that year. Winners (there were no losers!) were rewarded with ringing bells, bookmarks, and a "You're Smokin' Hot" sticker.

In September 2011 a new partnership with the University of Minnesota was initiated. Incoming freshmen who signed up for the First Year Experience program were asked to participate in a "common read." Although it was too late to get active participation with the U of M for Fall 2011 (the book was *Outcasts United* by Warren St. John), the program for 2012 fell into place with, *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore. Groups of students from the U attended tours based on thematic subjects established by their professors. Plans are in the works for Fall 2013 featuring the book, *The Latehomecomer* by Kao Kalia Yang.

Future plans include adding a "Summer Read" program geared for young readers, an enhanced presence on the new MIA website, and adding informal after-tour discussions. The museum is also experimenting with pop-up book tours promoted through

social media. And the hard-working selection committee is well on the way to determining the reading list for 2014!

Growing attendance

News of the book tours has been primarily by word of mouth, but docents and guides are seeing an increasing number of “regulars.” From 2011 to 2012 attendance was up by 260%, and we now assign two guides per tour to accommodate the growing attendance for some of the more popular titles.

March 2011 to February 2012.

Grand total attendance: 949

Public: 553

Private/Guided: 396

March 2012 to February 2013.

Grand total attendance: 2,490

Public: 1,420

Private/Guided: 1,070

Growing enthusiasm

Not only has our attendance grown but also the enthusiasm of those participating in this program.

What our docents and guides have to say:

“As a docent, the book tours open new avenues and a very close look at not-often-seen art objects. It’s definitely challenging and delightful when it all comes together ...” – Antra Pakalns

“What I enjoy so much about the book club tours is that people come prepared to interact. ...I have also enjoyed the way that certain art jumps off the wall, showing me how it works into the theme of the books. I also enjoy working with the other docents, in seeing how we all look at exactly the same subject and come out with so many different ideas. Book tours have been a great addition to the MIA!” – Elizabeth Mayotte

“The groups that I have toured just loved the experience of connecting the book with our collection... we are really building an audience [who] plan to read ahead or have their book groups add it to their schedule.” – Susan Burnett

What our tour participants have to say:

“... You turned a potentially ho-hum, wandering, first visit to the Museum into a day filled with learning and great discussion... [thanks to you] we have decided to read *Outcasts United* together as part of [our road] trip.”

“I love the selections you have made.”

“I’ve read every book, but haven’t made every tour.”

“I’ve made every tour, but haven’t always read the book.”

“What could be better than art and books?”

“The tours help me look at things I would usually walk by.”

“I feel as if I have just been on a one-hour vacation!”

As docents, we are all committed to life-long learning and igniting the curiosity of those who come on our tours. *Inspired by Books* is a powerful way to keep the work we do fresh and fun. If you are interested in becoming an “Inspired” docent, contact [Debbi or Jackie] and ask to be put on the email list.

From its scrappy beginnings in 2007 this program has been able to grow due to the prodigious efforts and creativity of so many of you to whom much thanks, but not nearly enough credit, is given.

Reflections on Becoming... and Being a Docent

Emily Shapiro

As the touring year comes to a close each June, my thoughts begin to turn away from the mechanics of planning tour routes, selecting art objects, and imagining new ways to engage high school students. Instead, I find myself musing on what it means to me to be an MIA docent and how performing this role year after year has changed how I think, how I interact with others, and how I see myself and wish others to see me.

This year, these musings have led me back ten years, to 2003 – the year I left my research job at the University of Minnesota Law School and began teaching part-time at William Mitchell College of Law. Being a teacher had been a life-long dream of mine and, in the process of teaching lawyering skills to law students, I began to rediscover my own love for learning new ideas, new ways of understanding, and new ways of communicating.

At the same time, I began to see how many gaps there were in my so-called “liberal arts” education. I became conscious – uncomfortably – that whole fields of knowledge were outside my academic, professional, and personal areas of expertise. My science knowledge was scant. My math skills were elementary. And, my understanding and appreciation of art, music, and dance – there was little to none.

More importantly, I began to realize that my approach to understanding the world had narrowed over the course of my life. Mainly due to my career as a lawyer and, perhaps, due to my own learning preferences, I had gotten used to perceiving the world solely in terms of rules, structures, and cause-and-effect relationships. Linear. Rational. Predictable. Nothing more.

Dissatisfied with this, I decided to venture beyond the familiar contours of law school academia and take “lifelong learning” classes through the U of M to fill in some of these gaps. I took classes in high school-level chemistry and statistics (scary!) and one on film and film-making (amazing!). I braved the cold of the early Minnesota spring and acquainted myself with its spring wildflowers (now all forgotten!). And then, one brave semester, I took a class on art consisting of tours led by two of our docent colleagues at the MIA (you know who you are!). And then, I took another and then another.

These art classes changed my life: they gave me the courage to apply to be a member of the docent class of 2005. As a result, a whole new world has opened up for me – one dominated by visual perception and aesthetic expression instead of order and rules. In this world, I have learned to understand history and culture anew through artistic impressions. I have learned to see the physical world differently through color, light, shape, and emotion. I have learned to communicate more openly with my law students, focusing on their “learning” instead of my “teaching.” I have learned to be comfortable with a little less control and a lot more freedom. Most of all, in this world, I have been blessed with a new community of friends and colleagues – a rare gift in the latter half of one’s life – from whom I learn something new every day.

So, as this touring year comes to a close and I reflect upon it and the ten years preceding it, I feel the need to say a public “thank you” to the MIA and its staff, to all of my docent friends and, most of all, to my two docent “muses” who first opened my eyes to the beauty and power of art. Thank you for this gift.

Art Adventure at a Glance

Annie Dressen

For many children in the Twin Cities area and beyond, their first MIA experience actually takes place in their own classroom through the Art Adventure Program. This school year over 87,000 elementary school students learned about works of art in the MIA’s collection using poster-size reproductions and hands-on props presented to them through parent volunteers.

The works are organized by an overarching theme, such as *People and Their Environments*, *Sources of Strength*, or *Amazing Animals in Art*. There are 10 themes in all and each theme is comprised of 8-9 works in the MIA’s permanent collection that vary as to medium, artist, culture, and time period. Not only does Art Adventure introduce students to original art, but it also teaches them about global cultures, inspires creativity, encourages thoughtful discussion and critical thinking skills.

At the heart of the Art Adventure Program in the classroom are almost 1,900 volunteers from the community known as the Picture Person. Before presenting in the classroom, volunteers (most of whom are busy parents) come to the museum for a two-and-a-half-hour training session to see the original works of art lead by guides and docents.

In addition to providing information and ideas, these training sessions give volunteers the chance to have their own personal experiences with museum objects. Many comment that the Art Adventure Program is not only about engaging children with works of art, but also about setting aside a time for their own educational experience.

In addition to classroom presentations, the Art Adventure experience may include a visit to the museum on a specific tour lead by an Art Adventure



Guide. Over 27,000 students that participated in the program during the 2011-2012 school year enhanced their classroom learning experience with a museum visit. It is a wonderful way to reinforce what students learn and can lead to a lot of new discoveries. Students are amazed at the actual size of Chuck Close's *Frank*, the incredible details of the *Jade Mountain*, or the brilliant colors of Gauguin's *Tahitian Landscape*.

With over 20 years of existence, it is hard to find someone in the community who has been not been touched by the MIA's Art Adventure Program. Many MIA interns recall their favorite object from Art Adventure during their elementary years or that their parent was a Picture Person. Several guides and docents have stated that their appreciation of art began by being a volunteer Picture Person in their child's classroom. Even a few MIA staff members have fond memories of starting their relationship with art through Art Adventure.

A Visit to Cuba

Florence Walklet

Last fall in November, I was lucky to have a chance to go to Cuba with a group of people from the Walker Museum. It is a beautiful country, with wonderful people, and I would like to share my thoughts about the week long trip.

Our Cuban experience actually started in the Miami airport. When checking in for our flight to Havana there were Cuban people going home for a visit surrounded by a huge number of large boxes, electronics, sewing machines, plumbing parts, you name it! It was the first time I was asked for my body weight when getting my boarding pass ... every pound counted!

After we landed in Havana and were on our way from the airport, we couldn't help but notice all the billboards. There is virtually no advertising in Cuba, but there are a lot of billboards. They are all about political propaganda, and not consumer products. We very quickly became familiar with the silhouette of Castro and *El Che*. You see them just about everywhere.

Fidel Castro took over in Cuba in 1959. And from 1960 to 1991, Cuba had very close links with Russia. They relied heavily on trade with the Soviet Union. They exported 80% of their sugar cane to Russia, and in return imported Russian oil, machinery, etc.

In 1991 the Russian communist regime collapsed abruptly, which led to the end of subsidies from Moscow and of Russian imports. These events caused a drastic collapse of the Cuban economy. The Cuban people literally starved and it took the country many years to recover. I have to say it is pretty amazing to see a country where there is absolutely no manufacturing of any kind. They simplify, fix everything, and make do. In the streets, the tourist buses you see are made in China. There are a few small old Russian cars, and of course the spic and span old American cars from the 50s.

The average salary in Cuba is \$20 a month. As one person said, "They pretend to pay us so we pretend to work." Our tour guide told us that his electricity bill is over \$100 a month, so most Cubans scrimp and scrape to survive, unless they work within the tourism industry and multiply their salary a hundred times with tips. Or, the lucky ones get money from relatives in the United States.

Cuba has a population of 11 million people, and 1 million live abroad, mostly in America. Our tour guide admitted that out of his class of one hundred, only 20 have stayed in Cuba. He himself tried to leave but was denied the right to do so. In contrast, Cubans have excellent free health care and educational systems, but when you step into a pharmacy, or a store, you see almost bare shelves. And, doctors can make much more money being taxi drivers.

One of the things I enjoyed the most in Havana was looking at the architecture. In 1492 Christopher Columbus arrived in Cuba. As a result, the old colonial buildings have a very distinctive Spanish flair. The Cathedral, Basilica, and Palace of the Governor are stunning, and most of the old houses have lovely interior patios surrounded by archways. The Cathedral is the best example of Cuban Baroque.

Later on, in the 19th century, Neo-Classicism took over. Some of the large buildings downtown, like the Opera House for example, look as if they would not be out of place in some European capital. And then, you have the brutal modern style of the Soviet era. There is very little renovation that takes place on dated or old buildings, it is way too expensive. Buildings do crumble apart daily causing a number of casualties, and the dilapidated aspect of the buildings gives the city an eerie and strange atmosphere.

I will never forget the restaurant we went to one night. Because it was located on the third floor of the building, we had to go through grand rooms, with marble floors, statues and arches to reach it. The staircase was monumental. But at the same time, it looked completely abandoned. Barely lit with paint peeling off the walls and spider webs and electrical wires all over the place, it was still absolutely beautiful and a testimony to “grandeur and decadence.”

We attended a performance by a group of Flamenco dancers, the Irene Rodriguez Dance Company. Those three women and three men strongly identify with the roots of their Spanish culture. I was mesmerized by the energy and quality of the show. It was a real high-light for me. They would love to perform and compete on the international scene, but are far from being able to afford a trip out of the country.

One day we went on a day trip to the Vinales valley. Located west of the capital, the valley landscape is stunning, very lush and encircled by mountains. There, traditional techniques are still in use for agricultural production, notably of tobacco. We visited one of the farms and had a lovely lunch there. I was surprised to see plows in the fields and no trace of old Russian machinery. I did spot some solar panels on a few roofs, but our guide did not have the time to make any comments about them. The roads were in good condition, but we hardly saw any private cars – just tourist buses.

Among all the artists we visited, my favorite was Jose Fuster. His very unpretentious work, “a la Gaudi,” is a crazy patchwork of colorful ceramic tiles. He decorates houses, courtyards, and his whole neighborhood. He wants to improve the quality of life in a city where life is hard. Still, he is loyal to the system even though he is barred from visiting the United States. The other contemporary artists we met exhibit their artwork both in Cuba and the States. The price of their art is pretty astronomical and I have to confess it made me feel uncomfortable considering the poverty that surrounds them.

Raoul Castro, who took over from his brother Fidel, seems to be more open. He has allowed Cubans to own real estate and open up small businesses like restaurants and repair shops.

Although recently, authorities, uncomfortable with too many aspects of capitalism, have stiffened regulations. Only 90 miles away from Key West, it is

amazing that the “Cuban Revolution” has lasted as long as it has. But, it is only a matter of time. Most people we came in contact with boasted about the new changes and the evolution of their country.

I left the country willing to go back. It is a beautiful place, and in spite of all the political and economic turmoil, I retain the memory of a proud, smiling and welcoming people.

Musings from MGP

Debbi Hegstrom

It has been a full and rewarding year in many ways. Our *Rembrandt* and *Terracotta Warriors* special exhibitions packed the museum with excited, inquisitive visitors of all ages. Many of you went above and beyond the call to ensure that they had stellar experiences.

Last year at this time, I outlined some of the Big Ideas developing and circulating in the museum world. There are many new ideas and initiatives in motion or on the horizon. Our strategic plan, *Dynamic New Approach*, outlines how we seek to enliven and deepen audience engagement:

The MIA will maximize new opportunities to attract and engage audiences in the art and history of world cultures past and present. Innovative programming, expanded school-based and community-based partnerships, compelling participatory on-site activities, and interactive online community development are new avenues to connect us locally and globally. This will maximize impact and long-term engagement.

Four Cs – communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking – are key to 21st-century skill building. Here is how the Learning & Innovation division is responding to and activating new levels of engagement with our audiences.

Twin Cities Museum School Collaborative: An upcoming pilot project will engage schools with the MIA, Science Museum, and Arboretum. Through visits to all three institutions, students will learn about weather, the water cycle and how water is essential to life. We will build on the connections among science, the natural world, and artistic interpretations.

Extended Collection Project: Docents and Art Adventure guides are learning about webinars and online facilitation and discussion, with an eye toward working with students and classrooms in a virtual

environment. Presently, we have had webinar sessions with Anoka Middle School, bringing parts of our collections to them over the Internet.

It's New / It's Now Contemporary Prints special exhibition: We are developing participatory spaces and activities in relation to the exhibition. We are soliciting entries and will display various unusual collections gathered by members of our local community. We will also offer a digital printmaking studio in the galleries where participants can make and manipulate collage images.

MIA Creativity Academy: This multi-visit museum/school pilot collaboration will engage Twin Cities fourth grade students and teachers at Title 1 schools that have no visual arts instruction. It will enhance the MIA's offerings to schools by focusing on literacy and art making. The program will culminate with an exhibition of student artwork in the MIA's Community Commons.

Free Arts Minnesota: Using our Art Adventure model, Free Arts volunteers will work with graphic artist Natasha Pestich and at-risk teens, exploring works in our collection related to identity. Pestich will guide them in producing screen-printed, wearable art.

New African galleries: As we "revision" our African art collection, we are developing new interactive displays, will hold an opening symposium, and will participate in a digital/filmmaking project involving Somali community youth and elders.

Continuing Legal Education: We are co-developing a pilot course on Ethics with Dorsey & Whitney law firm. Using art objects from our collections and the *More/Real?* exhibition as catalysts for dialogue, we will explore connections between artistic practice, interpretation, and legal issues.

Thank you for your participation and support in realizing new MIA initiatives. You are at the forefront of the visitor experience, interacting with diverse groups to meet their needs and requests. We are grateful for everything you do to make the MIA a friendlier and more accessible place as we explore new modes of involvement and engagement!

