

Docent Dates

September 21

9:15 Coffee

10:00 Meeting &

Lecture: Eik Kahng,

Picasso and Braque

September 26

1:30 Docent Book

Club meets

(Details by email)

December 12

Holiday Party

(TBA)



Pablo Picasso, *Three Musicians*, 1921 Oil on canvas, 80 $\frac{1}{3}$ " x 74 $\frac{1}{3}$ "

Dear Docentrs,

Welcome to our new year of exciting activities! As you know, we did have a major change this summer when Erin Zetter left the museum to pursue other opportunities. It was sad because she has been such a can-do, cheerful good friend, first as docent, then as president and finally as Docent Coordinator.

We certainly wish her well. We have invited her to join us for our coffee and first council meeting on September 21 so that we all can show her our appreciation. At this time Rachael is providing us docent support while Patsy and the museum administration reassess the needs of the department and the Docent Council.

This summer has been especially busy at the museum. I want to thank the *Van Gogh to Munch* and the *Ori Gersht* teams for touring these larger numbers of visitors. Also, many thanks to our new docents and returnee Helene Strobel who have been giving Highlights tours as well as touring the ArtVenture Summer Camp students.

I am so pleased to be working with such a capable and dedicated board, all who have been working hard to prepare for the new service year. You should have already received information about your assignments from our very efficient adult and student team leaders. We have been collecting dues, updating directory information, reviewing the website to make it more user friendly, enjoying the summer *La Muses*, cleaning out the docent office for your use, and making other plans for a smooth transition.

With Erin's departure our immediate need has been to complete the recruiting, interviewing and planning for the new class. I am very pleased to report that our Vice-President Extraordinaire, Kathryn Padgett, has jumped into the breach and is very busy working with Gretchen, and with Paul's assistance, is preparing a new, streamlined syllabus. Our provisional class will be well served.

I look forward to greeting you all at our first docent meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 21. I thank you again for the opportunity to serve you as president and look forward to your comments, questions and constructive criticism.



Irene Stone

All images selected
by the editor

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Kathryn Padgett

Dear Docents,

It looks like the hallmark of this year is going to be change. Our wonderful Erin has left the museum to explore a new career, causing us to evaluate the various functions and activities of the Docent Council. Gretchen Simpson, Paul Guido and I are collaborating to bring changes to the Provisional Training Program so that we will have better concurrence with the exhibition schedules, while simultaneously giving more practical experience with public speaking and student touring.

Many fall exhibits are opening at roughly the same time, making it necessary for us to fill our upcoming meetings with preparatory lectures, and leaving no time for a fall bus trip. I am in the process of exploring local options to provide informative experiences outside of the Docent Council meetings. I will cheerfully accept any and all suggestions you may have for local art education experiences.

Come look at the Docent office! It has become a cheerful hub for small docent meetings, information dissemination, and informal gatherings. Irene Stone asked Vikki Duncan, Shirley Waxman and me to come in and do a deep cleaning and reorganization. We plan to put copies of *La Muse* up on the bulletin board each month and have organized binders containing past issues. [Our docent website also now has past issues of *La Muse*]. This office is for all of us; feel free to come in and use it.

The holidays will be here before we can blink an eye, so I am asking to hear from anyone who would be interested in hosting the Holiday Party on Monday, December 12th. I would also appreciate having someone volunteer to assist me in organizing the mailers, rentals, and other details of this very fun event. Please let me know if you would be willing to either host or assist with the party.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art's website describes our Docent Program as being known for "the quality of its training program as well as for the excellence, enthusiasm and dedication of its membership." This is an apt description of the heart and soul of this wonderful Program. We are indeed, a very enthusiastic group of volunteers who are deeply dedicated to serving the Museum and our community as art educators. We are all willing to give freely of our time to convey the love of art to all who will listen. I feel deeply honored to be affiliated with the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's Docent Council and look forward to working with you during this dynamic year.



The New Provisional Class



Gretchen Simpson

Good news! At this time we have 11 enthusiastic provisionals who are ready to embark on the "journey" of our docent training program. Many of our applicants have had previous experience as educators as well as backgrounds in art history.

It was a sad and frightening moment when I learned that Erin was leaving but the silver lining in that cloud was the entrance of Kathryn Padgett! She is truly dynamic, and together we are working on breathing new life into the program. Our emphasis will be in offering a more experiential approach to training — which includes more presentations in the galleries— without sacrificing the richness of the lectures, reading and research. We are excited about working together and are looking forward to the joy of working with this impressive class.

Look for class bios in the next issue!
-Editor



Docents Off Duty: How I spent my summer vacation



Before Project

I am always amazed at the fascinating activities our fellow docents get involved with outside the museum, so I thought you would be interested in what Doug McElwain has been up to this summer.

-Editor

The Smithsonian American Art Museum collects images of paintings by American artists. Many of these images are available online to researchers, collectors or anyone else who is interested. Last December Doug McElwain committed to the niece of California artist Carl Sammons that he would compile for the Smithsonian an inventory checklist of all 165 of her

Sammons paintings as well as jpg files of the images. These images will soon be on the Smithsonian website soon as part of the Inventory of American Painting database.



After Project



Carl Sammons (1883-1968)

Relief Peak (left)

An Abandoned Mining Town in the desert

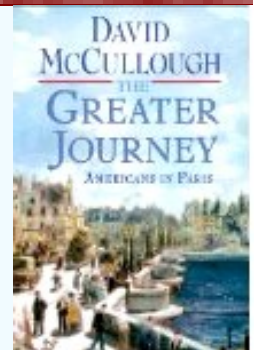


Docent Book Club

The SBMA summer Book Club choice

“The Greater Journey”
by David McCullough

Meeting September 26 at 1:30



New Email for Rosemarie Gebhart

artsyrosemarie@gmail.com

You can now find previous issues
of La Muse in the archives on our website

By Karen L. Kleinfelder, Ph.D.

Professor of Art History at California State University Long Beach

An excerpt from *Surviving Picasso*: Karen Kleinfelder Paints a Portrait of the Artist's Leg-

Q: Picasso is commonly thought of as the father of Cubism. Throughout his life, he continually invented new styles. Is this the reason he is thought of as the most influential modern artist?

A: Picasso's name has become synonymous with Modern Art; it is difficult, if not impossible, to think of one without the other. He may have been only 5'4" in height, but his influence has over towered most of the other artists considered Modern Masters. Is that because he is the best artist of them all?

Not necessarily, and one wants to avoid ranking artists anyway, as if it were a competition. The more curious issue is how Picasso became such a cultural institution in his own right. How, for instance, does he get dubbed "the father of Cubism" when the cubist project was something he undertook in collaboration with Georges Braque? Cubism's complexity was bigger and more groundbreaking than any one artist's vision could contain, and I think the much more interesting story is how these two artists gave birth to it together, and how it was then disseminated in many stylistic directions developed by many artists.

The tale of how Cubism grew and expanded is perhaps a bigger story than simply one of influence; it is more an example of a complex system that involved many dynamic elements and players, yet Picasso is the one whose name surfaces as the "originator." Why does this twisted tale ultimately reduce to him? Perhaps it has something to do with the way his body of work adds up to a complex, non-totalizing whole, like a map of the cubist project itself. For Picasso, style performs like Cubism by branching into many forking paths and acting out the principle of multiple perspectives. He once said:

"Basically I am a painter without style. Style is often something that locks the painter into the same vision, the same technique, the same formula during years and years, sometimes during one's whole lifetime. One recognizes it immediately, but it's always the same suit, or the same cut of cloth. There are, nevertheless, great painters with style. I myself thrash around too much, move too much. You see me here and yet I'm already changed. I'm already elsewhere. I'm never fixed and that's why I have no style."

Q: Picasso's paintings from the early 20th century seem to reflect different moods. For example, his blue period portrayed sad people, whereas his rose period depicted a more optimistic mood. What was, originally, the intended meaning behind Cubism?

A: One of the key shake-ups of Cubism is how it literally "broke the mood." As Georges Braque so perceptively put it, "In Cubism, the subject is *not* the object." Subject matter no longer matters; it is not subject matter that makes or breaks a cubist painting. It is more a question of form.

In Cubism, the ways in which painting speaks through its own formal language of line, shape, space, plane, and color starts to eclipse the subject, or rather, starts to become the subject. A cubist painting of a woman, even when Picasso used a model, is less a portrait of a particular woman than a portrait of painting itself. The psychological mood of the sitter or the subject is not the objective. The mood, thus, shifts from emotional expression to one of rigorous analysis.

Cubism is born out of a radical rethinking of the medium itself and a critique of the Eurocentric systems of representation based on mimesis, the accurate representation of outward appearances. Is painting to be conceived of as a window extension of our own space? How can we keep clinging to one-point perspective after Cézanne's shifting perspective, which begins to add a temporal dimension to space? How do we go on mimetically portraying a face once we encounter African masks that diagram rather than mirror the subject?

Cubism begins with a set of questions more than any firm, fixed position, and that is the way it should be since

"In Cubism, the ways in which painting speaks through its own formal language of line, shape, space, plane, and color starts to eclipse the subject, or rather, starts to become the subject."

Cubism develops into a new way of thinking categorically opposed to the privileging of any single, fixed position. Picasso famously said, “*In the old days pictures went forward toward completion by stages. Every day brought something new. A picture used to be a sum of additions. In my case a picture is a sum of destructions. I do a picture, then I destroy it.*”

Cubism advanced as a sum of destructions: a shattering of one-point perspective, a rupture of the unities of space and time, a breakup of the body into bits and pieces, and a disallowing of the separation of figure and ground. Gone is the pathos of the Blue Period that followed his young friend’s suicide; gone is the more romantic, yet still lingering elegiac tone of the Rose Period.

Cubism breaks the mood like it breaks everything else. Picasso and Braque could not have known where all Cubism would lead in the beginning stages of its development, but they did know they were on to something big. They jokingly called each other Orville and Wilbur after the Wright Brothers because they sensed they were taking painting to new heights.

Q: In 1907, Picasso and George Braque pioneered Cubism. How did the art world of that era react to this style?

A: 1907 is the year of the groundbreaking painting, *Les Femmes d’Alger (O.J.)* (left), so shocking that Picasso did not even attempt to exhibit it publicly for many years. The avant-garde saw it, nonetheless, in



Picasso’s studio, and it managed to shock even these cutting-edge artists. Braque exclaimed that it looked like the artist wanted us to eat rope and drink gasoline. Whether the *Demoiselles* is the first Cubist painting or not is highly debated, but it is clear that it was the birth of something radically new and confrontational. These five women—prostitutes from the red light district of Barcelona—have been described as five of the least seductive nudes in the history of art. They have been called a species of bitch goddess, and when they fix their fierce gazes outward, they assault the viewer and turn us into their “johns.”

This is not a painting that stays tucked neatly and securely within its frame. Picasso breaks the frame here, literally as well as figuratively, since he wanted the painting to show just the way it looked in the studio, without a frame and threateningly in your face. He has been accused here of committing pictorial rape on tradition, the nude, and one-point perspective. These women are naked, sexual, and

fragmented like the spatial field itself. As the poet Yeats would say in another context, “*The center no longer holds; mere chaos is loosed upon the world.*”

Most disturbing of all is the squatting figure looking at you head-on and rear-on simultaneously. Picasso is mooning the Academy here, and he tops it off with that face! Her lopsided eyes stare out from a mask that shows how boldly Picasso was making use of his new encounter with African art at the Trocadero Museum. What attracted him to the so-called “primitive” arts of Africa was their “sophistication” of form. Eurocentric art would never be the same again.

If the public was not ready for what would follow in the wake of the *Demoiselles*, the avant-garde was. Georges Braque, still in shock from his encounter with the canvas, went home and painted his version, called the *Large Nude*. Others started to follow in the years leading up to the First World War, and it would not be long before Cubism was the hip new style. Much imitated and with talk of the fourth dimension filling the cafes, Cubism was nevertheless not well understood. Many of these imitators were still thinking in conventional terms and just adding a cubist gloss like a veneer to the surface to make the paintings look more modern.



Picasso and Braque kept working in tandem, often not able to tell their own works apart, pushing Cubism through its analytical stage to a point of hermeneutics so cryptic that to most the subject was virtually unreadable, only to bring the subject back with a vengeance through collage and the synthetic Cubism that followed. Cubism was truly a revolutionary turning point, changing the way space was rendered on a flat canvas plane in a radical way beyond anything else that had been seen since the Italian Renaissance first invented one-point perspective hundreds of years earlier.

Though there is no direct influence, the fact that Einstein published his theory of relativity two years before Picasso painted the *Demosielles* seems no coincidence. Space and time had fragmented, with faith in an absolute, fixed Truth giving way to multiple perspectives and shifting frames of reference. Gertrude Stein once said that artists do not live ahead of their time; they just see the composition of the age, while the rest of us still live in the past, trapped by outmoded frames of thinking based on the composition of a previous age rather than the continuous, changing present. Cubism was the composition of the age, for better or worse.

Q: What is the difference between analytical and synthetic Cubism?

A: Analytic Cubism comes before Synthetic. You can think of one as a deconstructive turn, which dismantles the conventional codes of representation and shatters the unities of space and time, while the other is a reconstructive move that picks up the fragmented elements and pieces them back together according to the logic of multiple perspectives and hybrid, often conflicting realities. In the earlier analytical stage, color drops out so Picasso and Braque can concentrate on rethinking how space can be mapped on a flat surface by fragmenting one-point perspective into multiple perspectives. What began as a form of "volumetric flatness" around 1908-09 progressively evolves (or devolves) into a complex grid network by 1911 where the illusion of mass is increasingly flattened and fragmented, suggesting what Einstein had already discovered: that you cannot think space without thinking time, and you cannot think time without thinking space.

When the paintings of 1911 became almost impossible to decipher (remember, Braque said that "in Cubism, the subject is not the object"), Picasso reached the point of no return. What he does next is critical. If he goes any further in terms of analysis and abstraction there will be no subject left. There will only be lines, shapes, and faceted planes on a flattened spatial plane. Does he take that step into complete abstraction? He never does. Instead, when the paintings are no longer readable, he adds words, or rather, word fragments, and starts bringing back symbols and other cues to keep the image hovering between representation and abstraction rather than resolving the conflict one way or the other.

The turning point between analytic and synthetic Cubism is the invention of collage, which happened in a little painting by Picasso as 1911 slipped into 1912. *Still Life with Chair Caning (right)* brings several disparate elements together: a cubist-fragmented glass



seen from shifting perspectives along with the letters—JOU—that form only a word fragment, coupled with a piece of contact paper depicting a commercially printed trompe-l'oeil illusion of chair caning, all topped off by a mock frame formed by a piece of hemp rope surrounding the canvas' circumference. The representational and the abstract collide here along with the real and the fake, the truth and the fictional. The little canvas is both an analysis and a new synthesis of different, even contradictory modes of representation that show how no single style has more “truth” value than any other.

Cubism, thus, is not simply the breakthrough of abstraction or the privileging of abstraction over realism. It is at once more complex and subversive than that. Cubism points to the fact that all styles—whether realistic or abstract—are just different modes of representing and therefore equally valid. The cubist project does not culminate in the climax or apotheosis of abstraction as some have argued, claiming Picasso was too scared to go “all the way” into complete abstraction. On the contrary, Cubism leads to a conclusion more in keeping with Einstein's theory of relativity and postmodern's embrace of diversity and pluralism. Abstraction and realism exist along more of a continuum than in a hierarchical relationship where one trumps the other. Cubism's multiple perspectives speak of multiple truths rather than any fixed, absolute axiom.

Q: It is said that there is scarcely a 20th century art movement that Picasso didn't inspire or contribute to. What are some of those movements, besides Cubism?

A: Much of the first half of the 20th century art is an unfolding of the cube. The German Expressionists add an emotional edge due to their anxiety-filled experience of fragmented space and time during the years building up to WWI, while Mondrian in Holland pushes Cubism all the way to the non-objective grid. Marcel Duchamp's ingenious take on the appropriation of the real object—the readymade—was initiated by cubist collage, which opened the way for mixed media through its inclusiveness of materials. A penniless Russian artist, Vladimir Tatlin, crashed in Picasso's studio for a month while visiting Paris during the time Picasso was busily at work on collage and cubist sculptures. He returned to Russia and after the Communist Revolution developed Russian Constructivism, whose motto, inspired by collage, was “real materials in real space.”

The idea was to apply the lessons of Cubism to real world design by making a functional art that utilized the abstract principles of Cubism's multiple perspectives and flattened planes in space. Constructivist sculpture stopped being conceived simply in terms of shape and mass. By following the example of Cubism's dematerialization of matter, the Constructivists turned sculpture from solid mass into a construction of space. Germany Bauhaus picked up on the same principle of applied Cubism to solve the social needs of a machine age through design and architecture modeled on the dematerialization of mass into lines and planes in space.

Even Surrealism's biomorphic dreamscapes and psychic automatist drawings—so different from Cubism's hard-edge geometric abstraction—still owe a debt precisely because the Surrealists were reacting, in part, against the rational logic of Cubism. Virtually every avant-garde style developed in the first half of the 20th century in one form or another developed from or reacted against Cubism in some way. Even Jackson Pollock's webs at mid-century can be looked at in terms of pushing past cubist gridlock by finding a way to make a painting hold itself together as tightly as a grid, but without resorting to hard-edge geometry. Both Picasso's Cubism and Pollock's webs are examples of structured chaos.

Clearly, Cubism was not an easy act to follow. No wonder Pollock reportedly muttered of Picasso, “God damn it, that guy missed nothing!”

July 2008

<http://disqus.com/forum/picasso/interview>





The Cubist Pug

Charcoal drawing by Ojai artist Jim Christiansen

Comments? Suggestions?

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Lori Mohr, Editor

