

La Muse

Council meetings start at 10 am, with coffee at 9:15.

November 2
Meeting

November 16
Bus trip; No Meeting

December 5
Holiday Party

December 21
No meeting in lieu of the Holiday Party.

January 18
Meeting



John Tunnard, *Last Day*, 1944, (detail) pastel wash, gouache, crayon, pen and ink on paper INTERNAL USE ONLY

Dear Docents,

At the Director's Dialogue on October 21, Larry Feinberg deepened our knowledge of the past as he told us stories about the extraordinary history of our 75 years as a museum. In keeping with that theme, I thought about what keeps our Docent Council chugging along. As an organization, we, too, have an extraordinary history—decades of docent participation bound by the common goal of giving visitors the best tours possible, our shared love of art and learning, and the friendships that have grown out of those shared experiences. These are the basics of why we keep doing what we do, finding joy and connection through art.

So how do we celebrate the Docent Council? Stories. Stories are our infrastructure, how we engage with each other, how we continue to grow and learn. Think about all the stories that surround us. We tell stories to students and adults as we guide them through the Museum. We share stories about our touring experiences with each other as well as our art discoveries when we travel. We learn together with each new exhibition, both from excellent lectures the Education Department organizes for us, and from our own research beyond that. Our current exhibitions are deeply enriched by the stories we offer visitors.

This year I am hoping to share special moments we've had, stories that can include the following: a tour you've given, a docent trip you've taken, a favorite team you've been on, a student or adult who made you feel the tour you gave made a difference for them, an extraordinary effort made by another docent, how another docent helped you succeed in becoming a better docent, some exciting research that you've done, a favorite work of art that you love that is in our permanent collection. And don't overlook the moments that have made you laugh, the ones you share right after a tour with your teammates.



Gail Stichler, President
Docent of the Year

This project is the brainchild of Mei Chih Ho, our Membership Chair. She and I will

work on it together. Our request is that you—Active Docents and Sustainers—send me or Mei Chih anything you would like to share. We are excited to hear from you, and will share some of these stories at future council meetings. This is a small way we can thank you for all that you do and have done, and a way to honor our history as a dynamic organization.

I'm looking forward to seeing you at our next meeting on November 2 when Eik Kahng will be discussing the Artworks in the British Modernism exhibition. *Gail*

From our Vice President



Ralph Wilson

We have a large group signed up for our trip November 16 to The Broad Museum. The bus will leave at **8:30 am** with a stop in Carpinteria. We should be back in town between 5:30 and 6:00 pm. The cost is \$55.00 per person. Please bring your checks made out to SBMA Docent Council to the meeting November 2, or put them in the Vice President's box in the docent office.

Detailed instructions will be emailed to those on the list, along with a map of other points of interest and places to eat in the area. You can still sign up to join us at the meeting this Wednesday, or email me at (mr.beagle@verizon.net).

SAVE THE DATE for the Holiday Party on December 5 at the beautiful home of Ron and Andrea Gallo. Invitations will follow. Below is my report on the docent visit to the Westmont.

Ralph



On Saturday, October 29, a small group of us visited the Westmont Ridley-Tree Museum to view the mid-career exhibition of work by Dug Uyesaka, who gave us an instructive and enjoyable tour of his assemblage and works on paper. (Image 1)

Dug likes to combine natural and man-made objects in his pieces. "Smoke", a 2005 work consists of a wooden sake cup, filled with sand, on

which stands a column of small rocks varying in shade from white at the base to deep black at the top, thus making the impalpable concrete. (Image 2). Throughout the exhibition we see the humor of the artist and the excitement of marrying unlikely objects into a smile-producing or thought-provoking organism. Who can not feel for the dog staring at the ball lying just outside the glass jar in which he is trapped? (Image 3)



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There are 99 works on display, and those who are unfamiliar with Dug Uyesaka's work (image 4) should make an effort to see the exhibition (which runs at the Westmont until January 14, 2017).

He is a remarkably creative artist and teacher.



2



3

From our Student Teams Chair



Student tours are under way, with three schools receiving Power Point presentations, and three tours given to a total of 78 students. Some groups enjoyed the *Dia de los Muertos* installation at the FRC as part of their Museum experience. Thanks to our wonderful Education Department for their creative enhancements of our tours!

We can still use extra help. As it is, if one person can't make a tour, we're spread thin. If you have time to do one tour, a few, split tours with a friend....we're flexible and will take whatever you can offer.

Karen Brill

From our Adult Teams Chair



Happy Autumn! I've got very little to report because everything is going just wonderfully—you are organized and tours are going like clockwork. Thank you to all!

In September, we toured 266 visitors on 50 tours. Those numbers are lower than usual, but we hope for an increase with the new exhibit and the holiday season.

Christine Holland

From our Community Speakers Program



Team Leaders Kathryn Padgett and Shirley Waxman

CSP welcomes Wendi Hunter to the Team! She will be preparing a talk on the *David Wiesner: The Art of Wordless Storytelling* exhibition. Read issues of *La Muse* to find out where to attend her fun, lively and entertaining talk at a public venue in 2017! There are two public talk scheduled for November.

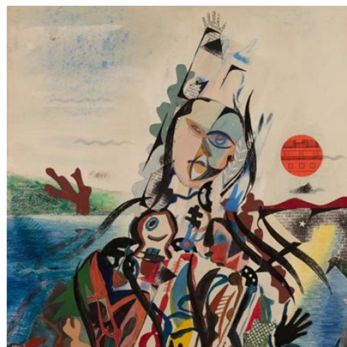
We would love you to join us!

SB Central Library: Saturday, November 12, 3 pm. Mary Joyce Winder: *British Art From Whistler to World War II.*

Montecito Library: Wednesday, November 16, 6 pm. Mary Eckhart: *Artists of the Golden West: Higher than High, Wider than Wide, Deeper than Deep.*



Drew Brophy, *The Great Wave of Kanagawa*, 2012



(Right) *Madonna of the Setting Sun*, 1942. Eileen Agar; *St. Paul's through a shop window*, 1940., Cecil Beaton; Thomas Moran, *Mist in the Kanab, Canyon, Utah*, 1892

Entre Chiens et Chat at the Bonnard Museum The Docent from Hell

By Josie Martin



We do a museum-a-day during our ten days on the Cote D'Azur, and that's not including the Matisse Chapel, the Chagall, the Renoir, nor the Cocteau Museums. But this is a story about a Curious Incident in the Middle of the Bonnard Musee.

So we're going from gallery to gallery, looking at these mirthful, endearing, and often melancholy drawings of creatures that Pierre Bonnard and his beloved Marthe adored.

Remember Marthe coming out of her bath in our own collection (*Nude*, below, right), looking almost erotic, conscious neither of the painter nor the viewer? Years ago, there was a Bonnard show at LACMA. It was almost entirely of Marthe in, out, or entering her bath. My friend, a former LACMA docent, noted that Marthe spent more time in the "salle de bain" than anywhere else with so many paintings of her "a la toilette". At the time, I didn't notice there were oodles of cats or dogs present because of the dreamy, mysterious loveliness of those wistful images.

The Bonnard exhibition catalog says, "Animals seem to be like accessories in the paintings, bathed in somber eroticism: We are reminded of *L'Homme et la*



The Bathroom, 1932, oil on canvas, 48" x 47"

numerous Basset hounds, not to forget his dear sister's dogs, Bella and Ravageau, the portrait he did of Ravageau, whose name he spells out on the canvas, evokes infinite tenderness for animals."

Martine Tujague, my friend, and I walk past wonderful portraits of animals, some as wistful as they are humorous. I smile with delight through the entire show. How I wish we could bring it to SBMA, I tell a guard, my French rusty after nine years of non use, but it gets me through the exhibit and all of Antibes where we are staying for ten days.

And then comes the docent from hell.

A thinner version of Nurse Ratched, dressed in a blue serge "complet." She looks like a prison warden, lecturing a group of students from the Lycee Carnot,



Nude Against the Light, 1909

Femme (below, right) where three little cats come to greet Marthe after the act of love.... Little by little the image of Marthe evolves, the young woman becomes no longer an object of desire but the eternal subject of his painting, a classic figure.... Marthe preferred the company of animals more than that of men. Her legendary misanthropy fascinated the painter as much as he was saddened by it."

Another essay states, "There are many accounts of Bonnard's legendary generosity toward his friends, the animals. Dogs had always been part of his familiar world.

He had several: Black, a beautiful spaniel, Ubu and Poucette, two of his



*L'Homme et la femme, 1900
45" x 28"*

just down the boulevard on the way to Cannes. They are taking notes so furiously that there must be a test right after. Not a smile, not a grin, only frowned concentration on their faces!

They aren't looking at the gorgeous tableau on the wall, *L' Apres-Midi Bourgeoise ou La Famille Terrasse au Grand-Lemps*, 1900 (right).

It is full of life and gamboling Bassets, a kitty staring out at the viewer, adorable little nieces in long dresses. Bonnard and Marthe were childless. Did she agree to this charming family event in Andree's garden? Alas, Marthe was anti-social, as per catalog: "misanthropic," both in the French and English translation.

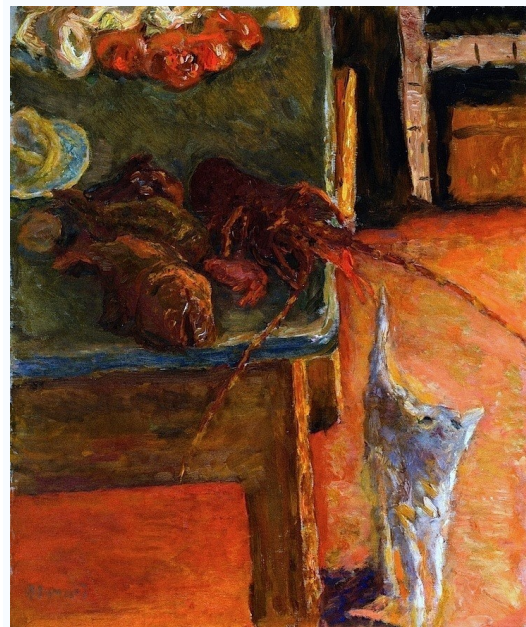
Misanthrope, those who dislike people.

And there: La Madame Misanthrope conducting the tour and LECTURING. There is no interaction with the students. When one of the kids timorously raises his hand to ask a question, the class professor, with one stink-eyed glare, shuts him down.

I am outraged! Fellow docents, you'll be proud that I didn't protest aloud and say "for God's sake, you're killing any potential love of art with this kind of didactic pedagogy." The boy won't enter another museum until his wife drags him there. And how many classmates will suffer the same fate?

There are amusing, delightful anecdotes in this painting that should make the students giggle, laugh, and cheer at what Bonnard is telling us. He's making fun of the central figure, an almost vaudevillian character, "the grandiloquent, grotesque Mme Pruhomme, godmother to nephew Charles, a future art historian and Bonnard's biographer." Mme P. is whispering in the boy's ear. The catalog states, "Bonnard's humour is evident as he laughs at this intoxicating provincial idleness while demonstrating a tender regard for his nephews and nieces, his elegant sister and the animals, right up to the detail of the cat nursing her kitten."

I catch the drift of Mme Misanthrope's lecture... all about technique and historical context and class struggle. I wonder, did she even look at the painting with its "joyous ferocity". Did she see the darling kitten creeping up the ankles of Andree, or the Basset posed regally on the top step of the house entrance? I drift away. I could interrupt, but my French isn't good enough and it would be rude.



I re-visit the animals. Which painting would I take home? Maybe *La Bouillabaisse*, a dark Nabis genre-painting in deep umber to red tones. A white cat, arched back, sniffs a fat fish on the table, a "nature morte." She's about to pounce! I can smell the fresh grouper and rock fish that will soon be placed in one of those huge black marmites hanging over the fire in the kitchen fireplace.

Reverie...while hiding on the LaGarde farm in France, 1943, before my parents sent me far away to be hidden by the brave nun, Soeur St Cybard. At the farm, my German-Jewish mother is helping Mme LaGarde, the kindly Catholic woman and her husband who took us in whenever the Nazis swept through our village. From the same mar-



L' Apres-Midi Bourgeoise ou La Famille Terrasse au Grand-Lemps, 1900, oil on canvas. 55" x 84"

La Bouillabaisse, circa 1910



The French Windows with Dog,

mite, my mother is scooping out scrumptious rabbit stew into big bowls. Mme LaGarde slices a dark crusty bread and there's a crock of boiled turnips. I hate turnips! It's practically all we eat at home. There's wine which Mons. LaGarde pours into my glass and then fills it with water from the indoor water pump. We all sit down together.

The stew is delicious, my father dips his bread into it hungrily. My mother glares at him, I don't know why. Later in America, I learn that to keep kosher, you cannot eat from any animal with a cloven hoof — pigs, deer, rabbits.

The LaGardes would like to adopt me; like the Bonnards, *The White Cat* they have no children. I adore their little dog, Mussolini, born on the day his namesake was defeated by the British. But that's another story.

I am struck by the power of art... how it can kindle memories, passions, moments long forgotten, love for an artist who captures our humanity.

And what will the Lycee students remember? Probably the Docent from Hell, misanthropic, cheerless, their forbidding professor. They could have spent the

entire tour smiling, questioning, enjoying, and admiring the brilliant Bonnard show, *Entre Chats et Chien*.

Alas, alas indeed.

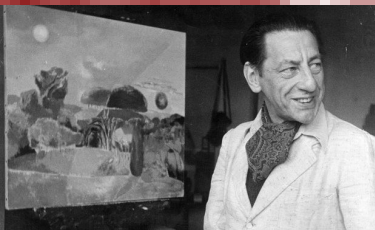


The White Cat

Paul Nash Review – pain, wonder and inescapable menace

Tate Britain, London

Adrian Searle, October 27, 2016 from Artintern.net



Paul Nash at work circa 1944.

I included this article on Paul Nash not only because his work is represented in our British exhibition, but because it contributes to our study of modernism. LM

With worlds under huge moons, Oxfordshire hilltops and Berkshire downs, autumn woods and mackerel skies, Paul Nash was almost a neoromantic painter of a small, domesticated island. Willows thrashing in a gale over a secluded pond; the empty coast at Dymchurch, with its groynes and coastal defences; marshes at Rye subjected to a severe geometry, where even the clouds are rhomboids. What odd, contrary paintings they are.

But geometry really worked for Nash in *Winter Sea*, (right) with its fractured and folding planes, flattened un-



Nash is as much concerned with shattered concrete, or a helmet in a crater, as he is with the soldiers. *The Menin Road*, 1918. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

der a night sky. Illuminated by an unseen moon, *Winter Sea*, to which Nash returned several times between 1925 and 37, is a deceptively simple painting of inescapable menace. For me, it has a kind of absolute gravitas, like a hollowed-out future disappearing into the distance. It stops me dead.

Not everything Nash did was equally good. He was never what you could call a great painter. Yet we keep returning to him, because his art is full of mystery and strangeness, suffering and wonder. He saw fallen elms in a field as prowling monsters, bits of white flint as bleached human encounters. He could paint a withered plant in a pot, reflections of spherical lamps in a restaurant mirror, a meeting between a tree stump and a tennis ball on a cliff-top and lend them all a peculiar significance.



Winter Sea, 1925-37, oil on canvas, 28" x 37.5"

Sometimes the strain shows, as though surrealism wasn't really what he was aiming for, even though, at the time of the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London in 1936 he was dubbed England's surrealist-in-chief. But something uncanny and unhomey persists.



Nash in surrealist mode ... Equivalents for the Megaliths, 1935. Photograph

This is the second Nash Tate retrospective since 2003 (the first was in Liverpool), but it covers much more ground. As well as tracing the development of Nash's painting from the 1910s until his early death in 1947, it includes his previously undervalued photography, his assemblages (some made in conjunction with his sometime lover Eileen Agar), and an entire room devoted to *Unit One*, a loose affiliation of British artists, designers and architects who, in the 1930s, saw themselves as connected to a wider European modernism.

In this room we also find a small, recently rediscovered and reassembled sculpture by Nash (found in pieces in a cardboard box), which was undoubtedly influenced by the surrealist work of Alberto Giacometti.

Nash may have encountered Giacometti in dissident French surrealist Georges Bataille's subversive magazine *Documents*. Unlikely though it seems, *Documents* appears to have been the model for Nash's *Shell Guide to Dorset* (part of a series, sponsored by the petroleum company and aimed at the car-driving tourist, under the editorial control of poet John Betje-man). Nash has the Isle of Purbeck in Dorset alive with prehistoric lizards. What was really singular about him was a sense of the visionary and of things impending, as if an unseen world were about to reveal itself.



We Are Making a New World, 1918 Photograph



Wood on the Downs, 1930, Photograph

Nash's experience during the first world war marked him physically and psychologically. A gas attack at Passchendaele in 1917 wrecked his lungs, and his experiences in the trenches left him with post-traumatic stress disorder. A sense of the immanent was already there in Nash's sensibility, but the war gave it focus. The blasted trees of his 1918 *We Are Making a New World* (above, right) have a terrible, almost mystical authority.

The exhibition labels keep reminding us of the influence of Italian metaphysical painter Giorgio de Chirico on Nash's art. Nash's still lives, set at the window of a flat overlooking London's St Pancras station, show the



The ever-present moon ... Nash's *Battle of Germany*, 1944. Photograph.

influence, but not the spirit. But what some of the best of Nash's work shares with De Chirico, prefiguring any influence, was a profound sense of emptiness. This was already there in Nash's early watercolours of trees and gardens, and a distant vista, where a vision of the artist's mother looms in the evening sky.

Here, the influence is more likely Samuel Palmer, and though it might be attractive to see some of his early watercolours and ink drawings as connected in some way to European symbolism, to Odilon Redon, their most likely progenitors were writers of supernatural fiction, such as Algernon Blackwood and MR James. But then

we would have to ask what attracted Nash to those authors in the first place.

Although one early painting shows two young women walking in an Edwardian shrubbery, people are largely absent from Nash's work, apart from the frightening images he painted during the first world war, with soldiers silhouetted in the light of flares and explosions in the sky, and corpses strewn in the mud of no man's land. Even here, Nash is as much concerned with blasted trees, shattered concrete, an upturned helmet floating in a flooded crater, or bits of twisted metal, as he is with the soldiers.

Later, in the second world war, Nash painted a scrapyard of downed German fighters and bombers at the edge of Oxford. *Totes Meer* is a dead sea of metal under a cold moon. A short clip of film in the exhibition shows Nash, elegant in suit and hat, sketching among the mangled wreckage, which he also photographed. I suspect that Nash, like JMW Turner, just wasn't that great at painting people, but this provided an opportunity to find other ways to invoke their presence. The diving stage, with its levels and platforms, and other skeletal architectural structures that occur in Nash's art in the 1920s and 30s, are mysterious signs of human activity. Just because you can't see anyone doesn't mean there's no one there.

The moon, as it was in his earliest work, is always present. It hangs huge in a break in the clouds and smoke of his 1944 *Battle of Germany* (above) – a painting that is not so much a panorama as a kind of abstracted Europe under bombardment (it is not a wholly successful painting, but that doesn't really matter). It rides over his strange, late painting in which a sunflower careens over the hills like circular-saw blade, and rises over landscapes that have a strange, day-for-night light. Full of vanishing points and visual fissures and occlusions, Nash's late, equinoctial landscapes are unsettling. It is hard to tear myself away from them. I keep expecting something to happen, someone to appear.



Solstice of the Sunflower, 1945 and *Eclipse of the Sunflower*

THE LAST PAGE



Image from *Black Dog*: Dave McKean delves into the dreams of war artist Paul Nash – in pictures

“There is so much film, poetry, art, firsthand testimony and documentary about the first world war. But to see something pushed through the lens of the imagination is to see it afresh. Painters can do that, as they can put all their sadness and anger in their work. I felt all of that while working on this and I hope it comes across in the book.

When I look at Paul Nash’s work, I always feel like I am watching a dream. They feel like looking at the real world through the filter of his imagination. So many people lock their experiences of war away, don’t want to talk about it – but artists and writers can put that experience somewhere. You can really see that in Paul Nash’s work: his impressions of the people, the landscape and how that reflects the psychology of the experience. I think he absolutely nailed it.” Dave McKean

As part of the first world war centenary art project 14-18 Now, comic book artist and filmmaker Dave McKean has produced a graphic-novel biography of painter Paul Nash, whose dreamlike – or nightmarish – depictions of war explored the psychological scarring that still haunts soldiers today.

Lori Mohr, Editor
Mohrojai@aol.com

