

Docent Dates

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

January 18
Meeting

February 1
Meeting

February 10
Valentine's Open House

February 15
Meeting

March 1
Meeting

March 15
Meeting

April 5
Meeting or bus trip

April 19
Meeting or bus trip

May 3
Meeting

May 17
Meeting

Speaker info will be included as it becomes available.



David Korty, 2000. *Untitled: (detail)*. Watercolor and gouache on paper. Drawing from the Schorr Collection INTERNAL USE ONLY

Dear Docents,

Happy New Year! Our first and only meeting in January will be on the 18th. It will be good to be together after our long break.

I was honored to be part of the first SBMA Docent Council Heroes Award Ceremony at the holiday party. To clarify how the award came about, we started the year with the idea of finding a way to honor more of our docents. Michi was our inspiration, but it was through discussion and much input that the Board came up with the concept of recognizing a group of docents who have provided invaluable support to our organization. We decided for this debut year, we would honor those docents who have created, developed and maintained our website. For over fifteen years this group, in all its various configurations, has brought us into and kept us in the twenty-first century. We owe a debt of gratitude to the following docents: Jerry Jensen, Steve Hiatt, Ricki Morse, Mike Ramey, Loree Gold, Irene Stone, Kathryrn Padgett, and Vikki Duncan

Our first website came online in 2001-2002 under the stewardship of webmasters Jerry, Steve and Ricki, who created the new website from scratch. Many docents gained their basic computer skills learning to use our new website. This was a major transition as we went from paper communication, snail-mailing all news, updates, and announcements, to electronic communication, and getting everyone on board.

Ricki maintained the site for ten years, doing all the input—posting papers, *La Muse*, and updating gallery changes. A deep and extensive



Gail Stichler, President and Docent of the Year

knowledge of the software's capabilities had to be coordinated with the needs of the Docent Council. She had it.

In 2011, the Board decided to switch to new software that offered increased capability and a more user-friendly format. Board President, Irene Stone, created a team to accomplish this—Mike, Loree, Irene, Kathryn, and Vikki. Ricki facilitated the transition by providing invaluable information on the structure of the original website using the Dream Weaver program. From there Mike offered his database management experience and took the lead in researching Word Press. Each member of the Word Press committee gave many hundreds of hours in development of the new site, which was introduced to the Docent Council in 2013-14.

It's hard to imagine performing our docents roles without a website, our go-to resource for exhibitions, access to our extensive permanent collection, research papers on artists and specific works, calendars, business, *La Muse*, Provisional materials, the list goes on. and more.

Our Docent of the Year tradition does not allow for recognition of group effort, so the Heroes Award has been a long time coming. It is with deep appreciation that we acknowledge the work of these eight people, who built and continue to strengthen this core resource.

Gail

From our **Vice President**



Ralph Wilson

Happy New Year to everyone, with wishes for a 2017 filled with artful opportunities, good vibes within our docent family, and both inner and outer peace throughout the world.

Be My Valentine!

Having successfully celebrated the end-of-year holidays, as accomplished party celebrants we should honor the first great holiday of the New Year. I refer, of course, to Valentine's Day. We're planning a party to which spouses/partners are invited.

Friday, February 10th, 4:00 to 7:00...SAVE THE DATE.

David Reichert and his wife, Diane Dodds, have generously agreed to host the open house party. As a bonus, we will get to enjoy their impressive collection of California scene paintings. Details to follow soon. *Ralph*

Spring Bus Trip

This trip, probably in early March, will be to LACMA, where there will be three exceptional exhibitions:

- *Renaissance and Reformation: German Art in the Age of Dürer and Cranach*;
- *John McLaughlin Paintings: Total Abstraction*;
- *Picasso and Rivera: Conversations Across Time*.

Any one of these would be worth the trip, and we will be challenged to explore all three in the same day. More information later.

Thank You, Andrea and Ron, for hosting our Holiday Party.



From our Student Teams Chair



In a very active December., with ever changing exhibitions, our docents continued to do what they do best: help students learn to look at art.

They gave 10 museum tours for 278 kids, and 4 Classroom presentations for 99 students.

Here's to a great 2017!

Karen

From our Adult Teams Chair



Happy New Year, my dear docent friends. I am out of town, but will be back with touring numbers for the next issue of La Muse.

I wish each of you all the best for 2017. Christine

From our Community Speakers Program



Team Leaders Kathryn P. and Shirley Waxman

We close the year with very good news. Our Community Speakers Program is healthy and growing. **In 2015 we gave presentations to 695 members of the community. In 2016 that number rose to 1,254!** Our team reached almost twice as many people in its second year of operation, with an average of 22 attendees in 54 presentations. A huge thank you to Kathryn Padgett, Mary Winder, Mary Eckhart, Joan Dewhirst, and Shirley Waxman.

The Community Speakers Program is now posted on the Museum's website, with a brief description of the program, contact information, and a listing of upcoming public talks. Here's the link:

<https://www.sbma.net/learn/community/speakers>

Public Talks for January

Montecito Library: January 25 at 6 pm. Kathryn Padgett: *75th Anniversary Celebration: Highlights of the Permanent Collection*

Vista del Monte: January 25 at 7 pm. Joan Dewhirst: *Color: More Than Meets the Eye*

We give monthly talks at Vista del Monte. The social director has invited everyone to attend, docents and the public. If you need more information please contact Shirley or Kathryn.

As always, we appreciate your feedback, questions, comments, and venue suggestions. Shirley
communityspeakerssbma@gmail.com

Robert Rauschenberg at the Tate Modern

1 December to 2 April, 2017

Reviewed by Jonathan Jones, *The Guardian*

Submitted by Ann Hammond



Monogram 1955-59. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

From first to last, Tate Modern's Robert Rauschenberg show is almost impossibly rich and rewarding. Paintings made with dirt and paintings of nothing at all, images that encapsulate the achievements and disasters of 1960s America, a stuffed goat that looks like it has been feeding from a painter's palette, and a mud-bath gurgling liquid cement like a lava pool. The exhibition moves through a life and career at gathering pace, from the early 1950s to the artist's death in 2008. Room after room arrest us with yet another creative swerve, a shift in medium, scale, formal attack and presence.

In the 1950s, Rauschenberg dragged wreckage from the downtown streets of New York to his cold-water loft and made plangent, sour and lovely art that reflected his surroundings. He got Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning, whom he greatly revered, to give him a drawing so he could erase it. He used a car tyre to track a drawing across a scroll of paper, and made blank paintings of uninterrupted rolled-on whiteness that inspired his friend John Cage's never entirely silent 4'33', where ambient sounds fall before a silent piano. Rauschenberg's white painting reflects only light, gathers dust, stands as mute potential. You need only do this once. He made red paintings and black paintings and paintings that combined and complicated the medium in unexpected ways. Each new move was a foil to the last, and he kept on moving.

Rauschenberg's early work was inspired by his surroundings, by a trip to Italy with his then lover Cy Twombly, and by the artists and poets he met at Black Mountain College in the late 1940s, including Bauhaus expatriots Josef and Anni Albers. Albers taught the relativity of visual experience – how the experience of colour, for example, was entirely dependant on its surroundings – and this relational approach stayed with Rauschenberg throughout his career. In his art, one thing always leads to another in an endless chain of relations and reactions.

Just when you think you have the measure of him, he is off again. Weaving and feinting through the years, via artistic collaborations and relationships (with Jasper Johns and Merce Cunningham, with Cage and Warhol, with dancers and scientists), stepping aside from the mainstream and going his own way, Rauschenberg stayed ahead of the pack.



Pantomime 1961. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

Accounting for the dramatic shifts that accompanied his insatiable curiosity, the exhibition risks incoherence, or diminishing the variety of his art and preoccupations in favour of an abbreviated and smoothed-out pocket-book history. Yet the show maintains surprise, even though he was so prolific that much is missing.

His art used what was around him, repurposing and recontextualising the everyday. Rauschenberg could



Untitled (Spread), 1983. Photograph: Alastair Grant/AP

understanding than that of making. Sometimes it must have seemed as if his art almost made itself. He never tried to sew things up. That is the unenviable job of exhibitions.

Other Rauschenberg shows have afforded a tighter view; here we see the man in full, or as near as we can get. This retrospective considers the variety and development of Rauschenberg's art over almost six decades. While his relationships with other artists remain key, it is his own achievement that counts. Never has the phrase "losing yourself in the work", the ego suspended, felt so appropriate as with Rauschenberg, who said he never had the equivalent of writer's block. Even when he was caught for years in cycles of drinking and depression, the work went on: umbrellas and parachutes, full-body X-rays, dead radios and stopped clocks, tin cans, dead presidents, dances and pratfalls.

There is a painting made with a real sheet, quilt and pillow, like a gloriously squalid and filthy painter's lie-in. He made paintings incorporating handkerchiefs, parasols; one has a plaster dog tethered to it. There are two almost identical paintings – even the paint smears and drips are the same. The same, but different. I spent ages staring from one to the other. I found myself stuttering between one moment and the next.

Another incorporates a One Way street sign, pointing out of the picture, redirecting our attention away from art and back to real life, a place where illusions end and life begins. Go on doing this sort of thing too long and the gags become boringly rhetorical. So he stopped making them.

Rauschenberg's restlessness and curiosity are invigorating. One minute he is in the studio, the next painting on stage with Merce Cunningham, or careening about in his own dance piece on roller skates, or making an artwork on a microchip to be sent into space. The filmed performances in the show are tantalising glimpses of an art that was lived.

Then he starts recomplicating things again, revving up after letting go, travelling, taking photographs, rescuing bits of mangled metal and letting them stand for themselves. The inkjet paintings in the last room, with their juddering montages of photographic imagery, both hark back to the density of his combines and silk-screen paintings, and predict the visual and mental cacophonies of the internet age, which was only just beginning in the artist's last years. In one late work a skeleton X-ray is surrounded and besieged by a welter of signs and snapshots: a zebra drinking, a wall calendar's flurry of expired dates. Rauschenberg's art is still timely. It's time.

be downbeat and beat-up, he could be slick and sharp and glossy, or move from the glutinous red paintings to the sheer, glamorous surfaces of the silkscreen paintings, with their blown up images of Jack Kennedy, old masters and astronauts. He adumbrated the flavour of his times.

"What was great about the 50s," remarked American composer Morton Feldman, "is that for one brief moment – maybe say six weeks – nobody understood art." But somehow Rauschenberg kept definitions at bay throughout his career, allowing himself less the task of

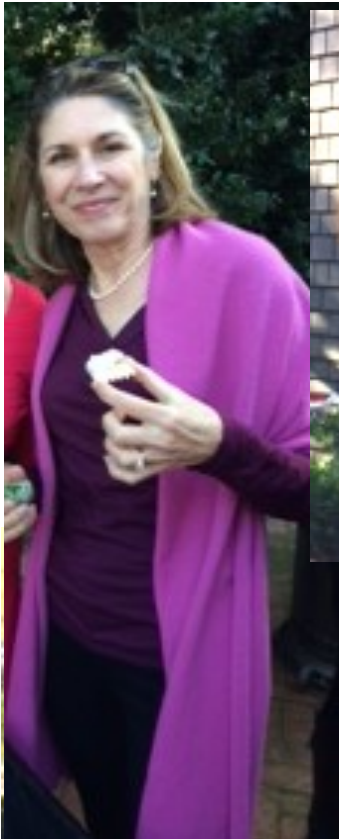


Pelican, from 1963, in which Rauschenberg rollerskated Photograph: Courtesy of the artist/Tate

Docent Holiday Party 2016







Goodbye
2016



Mid-life Venus, By Judith Shea An Iconic Image Re-configured Captures the Dynamic of Aging



Judith Shea, *Mid-Life Venus*, 1991, Bronze with fabric INTERNAL USE ONLY

Judith Shea, *Mid-Life Venus*, 1991, Bronze with fabric INTERNAL USE ONLY
which it sprang.

At first glance, the sculpture is shocking in its pairing of bronze and cloth. But duality is the essence and richness of *Mid-Life Venus*, inviting us to think about the title and experience this sculpture and the range of emotions it evokes. While the body of *Venus* is maternal, broken, and static with a carved fabric draping her body that is reminiscent of classical statuary, the cloth dress is pristine, youthful. The strong vertical line of her body is in direct contrast with the fabric cascading across the floor, a horizontal dimension adding tension to the larger-than-life tableau. The greenish glaze of the bronze suggests the ravages of time as the aging goddess holds on to a dress, the bodice reminiscent of a girl's gown, white with youthful promise and a life yet to be lived. Light reflecting off the soft white material heightens the distinction between it and the subdued cast of her time-worn patina.

Mid-Life Venus is quintessential Judith Shea, complete with signature image—the hollow dress, a vessel into which the viewer may project personal feelings. What is this dress and why is *Venus* crying as she beholds the garment? It is the nature of the dress and the sadness it evokes in her that invites us to search for meaning and significance. According to the artist, "*Venus de Milo* is (was) a feminine ideal, the goddess of love and beauty—here ravaged by time. It's a metaphor for age, both the artwork and the person. Regarding aging: it's the unknown that does damage."

The choice of a pure white gown was also deliberate. The bodice suggests the form of a girl or young woman, a small, slender, youthful figure. According to Shea, the dress represents the opposite of aging *Venus*. "It represents a pubescent female. The bust darts are very shallow; it is the dress of a young girl, a girl on the verge of becoming a woman. It's about purity, innocence. I chose the material very carefully. The bolt of cloth is cotton satin: pure but with a little bit of shine—the purity of childhood, but with the promise of womanhood, the undamaged

Mid-life Venus, she's back! I wrote the following paper (edited for La Muse) in 2007 as a provisional. My research notes include an interview of the artist by Jill Finsten. Ten years later, Shea's aging Venus still packs a punch.



Judith Shea

Mid-Life Venus, created in 1991, refers to the Hellenistic sculpture *Venus de Milo*, half-draped from hips to ankles in the manner of classical Greek sculpture and elevated on a bronze base to a height of 84 inches.

In contrast to her famous predecessor, *Mid-Life Venus* is older, her breasts heavier, expression more pensive. Her face is also cracked and slightly caved in, with a tear rolling down her cheek. Missing her right arm and most of her neck, *Venus* holds in her left hand (extending from an arm Shea added) the collar of a pristine, white, sleeveless girl's dress made of real

female, right out of the chute. Further, the dress is still attached to the bolt of fabric; she hasn't even cut the cord yet (referring to the left hand of *Venus* holding clutching the dress)."

Clearly, Shea's youthful dress, as held by the tearful, aging ambassador of sexual love in all her matronly physicality, represents a tangible memory of all that the dress itself stands for, including the body of she who wore it. The sense of loss expressed by aging *Venus* is clear and powerful.

The tear on *Venus'* cheek as she gazes at the dress slipping from her hand evokes a certain sadness and poignancy. The tear is also what adds an element of dejection to our *Venus*; the gown belonged to a moment when she was young, innocent, poised on the precipice of life. The viewer can imagine the classical *Venus*, lithe with beauty, proportion, allure. There is a palpable melancholy in our aging *Venus*—the melancholy that comes not only with bodily aging, but also the loss of purity, innocence.

CONTEXT

Against the backdrop of the Women's Movement, the 1970s was a time when painting, as a medium, was under attack: certain feminists had raised political questions about painting based on the lingering machismo with which the medium was associated since Abstract Expressionist times. It was a time when it was of some importance for women artists to find ways of making an art that spoke to women as women. And Shea did, by exploring clothing as sculpture, choosing a hollow dress as her trademark. Almost nothing speaks to differences in gender the way articles of clothing do; in choosing the dress, Shea clearly reflects political issues central to feminist concerns. But while art critics believe Shea's portrayals of women—saintly, godly or otherwise—in many ways suggest self-portraits, she is also very much a woman of her time, grappling with personal issues that resonate with all women.

When she created *Mid-Life Venus* in 1991, the artist was 43 years old, a woman at the crossroads. And Shea indeed confirms what art critics have suggested—that the piece is autobiographical. "It's about me at a certain age, as an artist and a woman. Do you "revamp" and try to stay young? There are issues of youth and beauty. Do you try to change, or allow the character to grow?" Shea adds that her particular choice of materials is referencing her life course as well, stating, "I was doing bronzes in the mid-1980s. But my earlier work was out of cloth. So it is about viewing ourselves, my own history, my genesis: from cloth to bronze."

THE ARTIST

Born in Philadelphia in 1948, Judith Shea spent her early childhood in middle-class suburbia where her parochial school education and constant exposure to religious statuary—especially the sumptuous draping of painted wood fabric over saintly bodies—would prove to be a powerful influence on her later work.

"The first sculptures I ever saw were not in museums but figures in churches. I was fascinated by those statues and tried to figure out what they were saying and doing. All that is in my work."

Her childhood interest in clothing led her to the Parson's School of Design in New York where she earned an Associate of Arts degree in 1969. While working professionally as a designer, she became frustrated with the restrictions and lack of hands-on involvement. Returning to Parson's, she received her B.F.A. in 1975 and turned her attention to making art.

As a figurative artist, Shea carved out her unique niche in significant sculpture using clothing both as sculptural object and as surrogate for the human form. Her first widely exhibited works were simple, flat pieces of cloth used as abstract forms and later as surrogates for the human presence itself, using hollow dresses (or their vestiges) for women (and voluminous overcoats for men). Maintaining the elegant simplicity of the Minimalist style, Shea ventured beyond vestiges to garments and by the end of the decade, finally began to focus more directly on the human figure.

In 1981, while teaching a class in Medieval European Armor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Shea began casting fabric in iron and bronze. In 1982, she produced *Crusader*, one of her first cast pieces referencing the human form with clothing. Shea made a sensation in the world of sculpture with empty bronze or iron casts of articles of clothing swelled with the bodies of invisible wearers. They were haunting, ghostly, and true to the prevailing aesthetic of Minimalism.

A trip to Greece in 1983 proved a powerful influence, arousing the artist's interest in ancient cultures. But it was a trip to Rome in 1994 on a fellowship that gave her the opportunity to really immerse herself in the study of classical Roman sculpture. She was struck by the work of both Bernini and Michelangelo, specifically, the passion expressed in their art. Influenced by the masters of the High Renaissance, Shea's new pieces became more fully figurative and evocative of classical sculpture; her bronze and iron pieces were draped and shaped like Roman statuary. In the mid-80s, merging classicism with abstraction, Shea began juxtaposing figures with clothing forms and then pairing figures to give her work added psychological complexity. She also began imbuing her faces with emotional expression.

But western classical art was not the only major influence on Shea. From an early job at the United Nations folk-art shop to a sojourn to Oaxaca, she strove to integrate her love of classical sculpture with a focus on contemporary life. Mexican folk art, with its exaggerated human forms and strong craft sensibility, offered both abstraction and representation. Churches full of saint figures, all of them dressed in handmade clothes—some even with real hair—was a magical synthesis of the Catholic iconography of Shea's youth with her love of classical Greek form, and a lifelong obsession with clothing.

Now in her late 50s, [in 2007] Shea has moved away from classical sculpture and historical figures to highly descriptive portraiture (busts in wood, bronze) of well-known saints (Mary Magdalene, St. Francis, Joan of Arc) portrayed as anonymous, everyday people with painted faces and real hair. Yet her themes of empathy and abstraction remain. "For me, what I'm doing now is a continuation of what I've always tried to do—to make sculptures, whether they are extremely formal or obsessively descriptive, that will express human states."

Midlife Venus is a perfect expression of the major influences throughout Judith Shea's career. Her love of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture—the beauty and proportion as well as the passion she found in Bernini and Michelangelo—as well as the Catholic saints and martyred Christ's of her youth reborn in Mexican folk art, all converge to make her work human, relevant. Shea's career evolution from Abstract Minimalist to figurative sculptor and finally to descriptive portrait artist continues to reflect ongoing themes of empathy and abstraction, ancient and historical, intimate and universal.



Post-Balzac, Bronze

Prepared for the Docent Council by Lori Mohr, 2007

Full Bib on website:

1. Martin Friedman, "Judith Shea: Seven Characters on the Verge of a Revelation," *Sculpture Magazine* (March 2005, Vol 24 No.2).
2. Adams, Brooke. "Shea's Anti-Monuments," *Art in America* . April 1993.
3. Berggruen, J. Gallery. "Judith Shea: Statues." *Past and Future Exhibitions*, (October/November 2004).
4. Interview with Judith Shea by Dr. Jill Finsten, April 25, 2007.

THE LAST PAGE



Beatrice Wood (1893-1998) died nine days before her 105th birthday. In reference to our *Mid-life Venus*, I thought of her, a life long feminist who believed women were beautiful at every age, long before that was a cliché. When asked in interviews about her secret to long life, she famously responded, "I owe my longevity to young men and chocolate." You can sense by looking at her that she sees her own beauty and projects it.



As an artist she became a California Treasure and a local icon in Ojai where she lived for fifty years. In addition to her fame as a studio potter and sculptor, she was involved in the Avant Garde movement in the United States; she founded *The Blind Man* magazine in New York City with French artist Marcel Duchamp. and writer Henri-Pierre Roché in 1916. As an artist Wood was characterized as the "Mama of Dada." In an interesting note, Wood also inspired the character of old Rose in James Cameron's 1997 film, *Titanic* after the director read Wood's autobiography, *I Shock Myself*. The Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts in Ojai is open to the public.



Ricki at the SB Biltmore, wishing all a Happy New Year!

Lori Mohr, Editor
Mohrojai@aol.com

