

## Docent Dates

Council meetings start at 10 am, coffee at 9:30.

### October 4

Julie Joyce and Mary Heebner on contemporary rotation; "Soares" walk-through

### October 18

Susan Tai, *Narrative Paintings in Asian Art*

### October 19

Tour of SB Historical Museum's "Sacred Art" w/ Diva Zumaya, 11 am

### November 1

Colin Gardner, Professor, UCSB, Contemporary Art

### November 15

Cancelled for bus trip

### November 20

LACMA trip

### December 6

Eik Kahng, *Portraits*

### December 11

Holiday Party

### December 20

Cancelled in lieu of Holiday Party

### January 17

Council meeting

### February 7

Council meeting  
Dates posted as space allows



*Story-telling: Narrative Painting in Asian Art*, opens October 1, 2017 SBMA INTERNAL USE ONLY

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing this after attending the first provisional meeting for the class of 2018. We have seven excellent participants who come from varied backgrounds in the arts, education, medicine, consulting, and social services. We are extremely pleased that they have chosen to undertake this life-enhancing program. If you see an unfamiliar face at our meetings, please introduce yourself and welcome the provisionals to our docent family. Watch for their biographies in the November issue of *La Muse*.

What a beginning we had two weeks ago at our first meeting of the Docent year! Andrew Winer's discussion of the literary influences on Valeska Soares underscored the deep thinking which generated the pieces on display in our galleries. The writings of Roland Barthes, Italo Calvino, and Jorge Luis Borges evoked in the artist considerations of time, literature, contradictions, memory, and so much



Ralph Wilson, President

more—all coalescing in the works which act as triggers for the viewer's emotional response. Based on the visitors I've seen and talked with during the past few weeks, there will be some very interesting discussions and questions in the galleries. The *Soares* exhibition allows us to expand our visitors' as well as our own understanding of this personal and challenging art.

Speakers for the next few months are familiar and welcome experts in their fields. In October we will hear from Julie Joyce and Mary Heebner, whose paper and cloth collage "Heron's View" is on display, and Susan Tai will talk about her *Narrative Paintings in Asian Art* exhibit being installed. In our one meeting in November Colin Gardner, Professor of Critical Theory and Integrative Studies in the UCSB Department of Art, will talk about text in contemporary art. In December we will hear from Eik Kahng discussing the *Portraits* exhibition opening early next year.

There will be no lack of art opportunities this coming year. As Professor Winer encouraged us, we must always "give the work what it demands".

Ralph

## From our Vice President



Mary Ellen Hoffman

Here we are, officially in fall! So, it must be time for trip updates!

Our LACMA trip to see "Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790" is scheduled for **Monday, Nov 20**. I will have the price and signup sheet at our Council meeting October 4. It should be a wonderful part of the LA/LA experience and I hope many of you can partake.

On **Thursday, October 19** at 11:00, I have arranged to have Diva Zumaya, SBMA curatorial assistant to Julie Joyce and Assistant Curator and Doctoral Candidate of History of Art and Architecture, UCSB, lead us on a tour she helped curate—the Santa Barbara Historical Museum's portion of the LA/LA exhibit: "Sacred Art in the Age of Contact, Chumash and Latin American Traditions in Santa Barbara." Note that the exhibit is in two parts, the other at UCSB's Art, Design and Architecture Museum. I highly encourage you to see both. The tour with Diva will include the Historical Museum segment. The focus at the two venues is essentially the same, with the Historical Museum's somewhat larger. Diva has accepted my offer to join us as our guest at an informal lunch after the tour at C'est Cheese or other locale.

There is no cost for the exhibit, although the museum does accept donations. I will put out a signup sheet at the October 4 Council meeting so I can give Diva a headcount. Again, I hope many of you will be able to avail yourselves of this LA/LA opportunity to increase your knowledge of history and art during the Mission Era in our own community!

We have another exciting trip that it's never too early to start thinking about—the Big Apple, New York City, April 22-27, 2018. Gail Stichler is reprising her role as organizer with details to follow, but mark your calendars now for what promises to be another fabulous adventure.

Our holiday party will at the lovely home of Josie and Ed Martin, **Monday, December 11** from 12:30- 3:00.

Finally, please join me in offering many thanks to Andrea and Ron Gallo for the last two delightful holiday gatherings at their spectacular home! Andrea has graciously promised to keep the door open for future engagements. It is fun for us all to see each others' homes and enjoy these special gatherings that we share with one another.

See you in the galleries!

### From our **Student Teams Chair**



**Karen Brill**

Dear Docents,

There is a "Soares and Students" walk-through on **Wednesday, October 4**, right after the Docent Council meeting. I've prepared a handout of questions to ask and ideas for working with kids. Bring your thoughts and insights. It will be a time to share with each other, as well as we get a better sense of touring this fabulous installation art.

Following a national trend, we are keeping up with the times with a Quick Time video for teachers to show students prior to their museum visit. The video is being created by our Education Department, and will be shown at a Council meeting when it is completed. It will also be on our website.

*Karen*

### From our **Adult Teams Chair**



**Irene Stone**

Dear Docents,

Adult touring has taken off with the opening of the *Valeska Soares* exhibition. It's been a source of intrigue and amusement for our visitors. Touring installation art calls for a different approach, and we are all flexing our touring muscles. The lecture by Alfred Winer from UC Riverside at our last meeting proved very helpful, and docents are enjoying touring the show.

Please send me your experiences with visitors so we can share with fellow docents. At its September meeting, the Docent Council Board did vote to adopt the Option C tour configuration. As of January 1, 2018 we will schedule one tour a day at 1:00 on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and two tours a day on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

In March the Board will review how it's working out. Your opinions will be important as we assess the new schedule and work together to find the best way to give our visitors an enjoyable experience.

Happy touring to all!

*Irene*

## From our Evaluations Chair



Greetings!

It's the start of a new docent year, and for most of us that means an evaluation is in our future. Our bylaws require an evaluation every time a docent joins a new touring team, and every two years thereafter. I thought it might be helpful to provide a brief review of what our evaluators look for in an adult gallery talk and hope you find this useful.

Laura De Paoli

1. Friendly docents – warm, welcoming and open to questions and comments.
2. An object-oriented talk – the discussion should focus on the artworks themselves. To encourage visitors to really look at the object, details should be pointed out and discussed. Historical and background information should be related to the visual elements.
3. Introduction, conclusion and transitions tied to a theme. These simple and formal elements help give structure to the talk.
4. Accurate information.
5. Professional presentation – the docent should stand next to the art object, facing the audience so that they can see the artwork and the docent simultaneously. Transitions should be delivered before walking to the next piece.
6. Enticing transitions that make the audience want to move to the next piece.

Please call or email me with any questions, comments or suggestions.

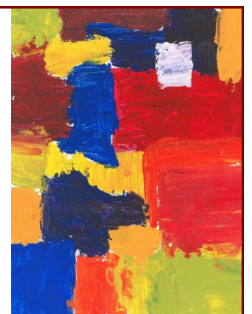
Laura DePaoli

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### *From our SBMA Blog*

In April, don't miss artwork in the Museum's elevator done by young artists as part of a newly launched Art After-School Program in partnership with Girls Inc. for 2nd – 5th graders, an expansion of the program that launched in January 2014. The students discussed the elements of art (line, shape, and color) and practiced color mixing as a warm-up for their sculpture and painting lessons. They painted their own versions of Hans Hofmann's *Simplex Munditis* (1962) in acrylic on canvas board (*right*).



From our **Community Speakers Program**



Team Leaders Kathryn and Shirley Waxman

The CSP welcomes Gretchen Simpson to the team! Her talk, *LOOK AGAIN!*, explores how we begin a conversation with the artist each time we stand in front of a painting.

It is insightful, interesting, and exciting!



Gretchen Simpson

Public talks for October:

*Valeska Soares- Any Moment Now*

Central Library: Tuesday, October 10, 2 pm

Docent Presenter: Joan Dewhirst

*East Meets West: Japanese Inspired from Monet to Van Gogh*

Ojai Library: Saturday, October 7 at 1 pm.

Presenter: Shirley Waxman

*Valeska Soares- Any Moment Now*

Vista del Monte: October 16 at 7 pm

Presenter: Joan Dewhirst.

We have added several new talks to the list of topics available for presentation. Contact Shirley or Kathryn for a complete listing.



Students gaze at Hans Hoffman's *Simplex Munditis*, 1962, with Docent Loree Gold. *From the SBMA Blog* IMAGES INTERNAL USE ONLY

## As the Muse Improves

By Josie Martin



Calendar says: *Portraits Tour* Tues. Sept. 5th.

The preceding week had been hectic so I failed to note Rachel's messages about the front entrance being closed for the new *Valeska Soares* installation. I reviewed my notes, arrived half an hour early, and took the Park entrance elevator to ML so I could leave my purse in a lockers near the reception area.

Surprise!

There's no access to Ludington Court. No new installation. The walls are stripped, except for this amazing field of footstools behind yellow tape. A worker is on the ladder spackling, I expect. I can only see his checkered flannel shirt and tousled hair. What's happening?

I head for Ridley Tree, the one and only gallery that is open. I ask the guard who looks just as nonplussed as I do when I ask perhaps a bit too brusquely, "But where are we supposed to meet the visitors?" He shrugs and tells me the *Highlights Tour* docent just walked around and—Never mind, I march up to Patsy's office, grumble. The whole crew is sympathetic. I leave my purse on a chair and rush back down.

IMPROVISE, some little voice tells me. A woman steps off the elevator. I practically stalk her... "Hello, my name is...Welcome to" —it is not quite the S.B. Museum of Art. That voice again: "Welcome to the Ridley Tree Gallery where I would be happy to...". She smiles indulgently with that mien that strongly suggests she'd like to go on her own. "If you have any questions, I'll be here for a while."

A few minutes go by. The lady from the elevator approaches me after all, "If you have the time..." She's from Detroit, has never been here before. We walk toward the "Demon Queller" who is on my *Portraits* list. I launch into the mythology of Zhon Qui, who traveled all over the world to expel evil spirits. Despite his semi-loopy appearance here, he was considered a man of integrity. She's been to China. We have a nice exchange about the fragility of silk scrolls. A family with a baby stroller and a little boy stop by us just then. I interrupt my narrative and ask the little guy, perhaps 5 yrs old.



"Do you like demons?" He's smiling. His father tells him to take his hands out of his pockets, he obeys. "Well, this fellow could go around and stomp out all the bad people and..." The mom looks approvingly, the baby sleeps. Now it's a whole different tour. I ask him if he knows any demons, his father says something to him in Spanish.

"Godzilla!" says the boy in perfect English. Big trouble. I know nothing about Godzilla, so I tell him, "He would quell Godzilla too," and I slyly move them to the Monets.

The woman from Detroit chuckles as I begin to sing, "*London Bridge is falling down, falling...* Do you know that song?" Several hefty nods ensue. "So there is a bridge in London and maybe this is the one in that song. Can you see the boat?" He runs forward to point it out.

"Not too close," says Mom.

I ask him if he can tell if it's early morning or early evening. "It's sunrise!" The parents glow, as if sun-struck by their smart little son. Father nudges Mom in Spanish, "De donde?"

"Pre-school" she announces proudly. It really is a golden moment. There is soft crying from the stroller.

They say thank you, and move on.

I resume my Monet presentation with Elevator Lady. There's lots of back and forth dialogue, the Monets at the Met.

It's now 2:30. I'm perfectly satisfied with my 'mini tours' and about to go. Two teen-agers wearing short shorts exit from the elevator looking a bit lost at the emptiness. One spots me with my badge.

"What are all those chairs, I mean, stools? Are they for prayer?"

I'm on again! Welcome and where are you from, etc. They are from Chile, they are doing the English program out of the private

language school on De la Vina. The

short girl speaks so well that I ask why she's studying here? Giggles, she has a friend, etc. The larger girl

wearing braces is quiet. I ask her, "Do students get homesick being away for 6 months?" She says softly, "a little."

The talker says, "A lot! But my sister lives in New York, so I go to see her. I love New York, MOMA, the Statue of Liberty and the subway." Turns out she's 17 and loves to paint.

I take them right away to the "Woman in Grey" by Duez. The quiet one says, "Maybe she is sad?" A whole conversation ensues. I cannot keep from telling them about my mother leaning over the ship's side, weeping when we left France some 70 years ago. "Just like my grandma when she had to leave Chile..." says the chatty one.

"Yes, go ahead." I say.

Silence. After a few respectful moments, I venture, "That was when Allende was removed and killed by the Pinochet dictatorship, wasn't it?"

"You know what happened?"

"Yes, I remember very well."

The girl blurts out, "But Americans don't know this, nobody knows."

She is on the edge of tears.

I pat her hand. "Some of us do." We then talk about the painting, the colors, the composition. They admire the woman's gown.

We spend another half hour together, whatever catches their attention—Delacroix, Morisot, Wilfredo Lam, and the abstract work right in front of her that the younger girl has been dying to see—Frankenthaler's "Green Sway."

"This is what I want to paint," she murmurs. We wander a bit longer in the photo gallery. I look at my watch. It's 3:15; I'm late for an appointment.

"You're free to enjoy the gallery. I have to leave," I explain. They look disappointed. The short girl gives me a hug.

It's all I can do not to take them home with me.



Wilfredo Lam, "The Casting of the Spell", 1947, oil on burlap



Ernest-Ange Duez, oil on canvas 1873



Helen Frankenthaler, "Green Sway", 1975, acrylic on canvas.

# The Stubborn Genius of Auguste Rodin

By Peter Schjeldahl, *The New Yorker*, October 2, 2017

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The hundredth anniversary of the death of Auguste Rodin prompts “Rodin at the Met,” a show of the Metropolitan Museum’s considerable holdings in works by the artist. But no occasion is really needed. Rodin is always with us, the greatest sculptor of the nearly four centuries since Gian Lorenzo Bernini perfected and exalted the Baroque. Matter made flesh and returned to matter, with clay cast in bronze: Rodin. (There are carvings in the show, too, but made by assistants whom he directed. He couldn’t feel stone.) You know he’s great even when you’re not in a mood for him. Are “The Thinker” and “The Kiss” kind of corny? I’ve felt that. Does the grandiosity of “Monument to Balzac” (for which there is a small study in the show) overbear? Sure. There’s a stubborn tinge of vulgarity about Rodin, inseparable from his strength. But roll your eyes as you may, your gaze is going to stop, again, and widen at the sight of one or another work of his. What does it is a touch that thinks. He—or his hand, as his mind’s executive—wrenched figurative sculpture from millennia of tradition and sent it tumbling into modernity.

A team of Met curators led by Denise Allen has installed about fifty bronzes, plasters, terra-cottas, and carvings by Rodin, along with works by related artists, in the grand foyer of the museum’s galleries of nineteenth-century painting and filled one room with a chronological survey of his drawings. The ensemble tells a number of stories, depending on how you proceed and where you focus. I took it randomly, as a picaresque culminating in a visit to the museum’s ground-floor sculpture court. There, permanently on view, is a full-sized cast of Rodin’s “The Burghers of Calais” (1889), to my mind the most stunning of modern monuments. It depicts six wealthy men who, in 1347, volunteered to be executed by a besieging English force as a price for mercy to their fellow-citizens.

Milling at odd angles to one another on uneven ground, naked beneath robes or draped sheets, the burghers are heroes whose shared moment of heroism—stepping forth for sacrifice—is over. Each man is now terribly alone. One appears resigned, one writhes in despair, and another,



“The Burghers of Calais,” modeled 1884-95, cast in 1985. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



tasked with surrendering the key to the city, attempts defiance while palpably trembling on the verge of tears. The youngest pleads with an older one who turns angrily away; but another, forgetting himself, offers comfort. Enlarged hands and feet emphasize the bodies to counterbalance the faces. Light pools and, as you move, flows on the black patina. Rodin wanted the monument placed at ground level in Calais, but the city's officials weren't ready for so radical an overture to common humanity. They hoisted the humble and humbling burghers onto a ceremonious pedestal. (It's too bad, but understandable, that the Met must protect the work by installing it on a low plinth.)

Rodin was a child of the working class. (His father was a police clerk.) I think that this explains a lot about him—and about his reception, to this day—as it does about his close friend Pierre-Auguste Renoir (the son of a tailor). Both men came to art by way of tradecraft: architectural ornament in Rodin's case, decoration of ceramics in Renoir's. Their training in commercial aesthetics, aimed to please, distinguished them from their more privileged and urbane Impressionist and Post-Impressionist contemporaries. They loved flesh, which Rodin sensualized and Renoir prettified, both shamelessly. Rodin had no avant-gardist desire to reject academic convention, which, nonetheless, rejected him. He was refused, three times, admittance to the *École des Beaux-Arts*, probably because of his early fondness for eighteenth-century rococo—too old-fashioned for the academy's reigning neoclassicists. He was doomed to independence. He worked as a craftsman, in Belgium, while living with Rose Beuret, a seamstress. (They had a son in 1866 and, despite Rodin's many infidelities, married in 1917, the last year of both their lives.) On a trip to Italy, in 1875, works by Michelangelo and Donatello set Rodin's imagination afire. He was ready for Paris.

Rodin's breakthrough work, "The Age of Bronze" (modeled in 1876, *right*), made when he was thirty-six, is beautiful: a nude youth, life-sized, rests his weight on one leg, lifts his face with eyes closed, clutches the top of his head with one hand, and half raises the other, clenched as if grasping something. (The model had held a staff to keep his arm up.) When the enigmatic work was first shown, in 1877, Rodin titled it "The Conquered Man," to eulogize his nation's recent defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. But no one was eager to be reminded of that. In addition, the figure's extreme naturalism, which caused an immediate public sensation, gave rise to rumors that Rodin hadn't sculpted it but had cast it from an actual body. Stung on both counts, he subsequently steered clear of contemporary political references and made his figures either larger or smaller than life. Meanwhile, his initial notoriety morphed, by quick stages, into international fame, crowned by the triumph of a show of his work at the 1900 Paris world's fair, the Universal Exposition.

In 1880, Rodin was commissioned to design the portal for a museum of decorative art in Paris. The museum was never built, and Rodin's Dante-inspired, megalomaniacal melee of a hundred and eighty figures, "The Gates of Hell," (*next page*) was still unfinished when finally cast after his death. It spawned many of his touchstone sculptures: constituent figures, cast in varying sizes. "The Thinker,"





a presiding presence in “The Gates,” ponders damned souls, apparently, while displaying a set of muscles that might as easily juggle them. But Rodin wasn’t much for musculature generally. The physical organ that most galvanized him was the skin, not just as the outside limit of the body but as the inner limit of the outer world. It is what excites—and stops—his hand. The effect is timelessly startling. Abandoning the refinement of “The Age of Bronze,” it shrugs off beauty, which requires a degree of detachment. Rodin didn’t behold his subjects or present them for admiration. He had at them, and they have at us.

The kinetic appeal of Rodin’s most original works is complicated by something like wit, if wit can be said to impart power. A primary case in point is “The Walking Man” (modelled before 1900), for which he plunked the rough torso of one uncompleted sculpture onto the fully articulated legs of another. The legs appear to stride, with momentum conveyed by a twist at the hips. But they can’t do it. Both feet are flat on the ground. Try assuming the posture yourself, as I did at the Met. (People will stare. So what?) Your rear foot feels stuck in something. Walking becomes lurching. The effect is simple, but it electrifies as the sign of an intelligence that comprehends, and can gainfully subvert, the fictive language of figuration in sculpture. You get, in a flash, that Rodin could have played no end of Picasso-like games with givens of the medium, had he been more of a sophisticate.

As it is, Rodin’s reputation was long qualified, in the twentieth century, by an imputation of laggard taste, like that of the painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, several of whose suavely executed Arcadian scenes complement the show. Did Rodin drag Romantic and Symbolist longueurs and boilerplate mythology into the stern light of modernity? Yes. He could title even an inventive, violently erotic figure—headless, with spread legs—“Iris, Messenger of the Gods” (modelled in 1890).



But I would be for forgiving him that, if it needed forgiveness. His retention of old tropes is no more inherently sentimental than the myth of progress that led some modernists to snoot him. Indeed, his ready access to the past in art, combined with the absolute audacity of his stylings, recommends him to a moment—our own—that is disillusioned with formal development while hungering for authenticity. If you give Rodin the chance, he will show you possibilities of transcendence that aren’t only close at hand but identical with it. ♦

The Last Page:  
Endings and Beginnings



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