

La Muse

Docent Dates

Docent Meetings

April 1

No meeting

April 15

No meeting

May 6

Bruce Robertson, *Small Format American Painting show*

May 20

Eik Kahng, *Van Gogh*

May 29

Graduation and Service Recognition Ceremony



Pierre Soulages, (b. 1919), French, *10 Mai 1961*, oil on canvas. SBMA Gift of Robert B. and Mercedes H. Eichholz. Soulages named each painting by the date on which it was executed. On May 10, 1961 Air France Flight 406 from Algiers to Marseilles crashed in the Sahara, killing all aboard. Perhaps this painting records Soulages emotional response to the crash, serving as a memorial to all who lost their lives in that disaster. *Submitted by Ricki Morse.*

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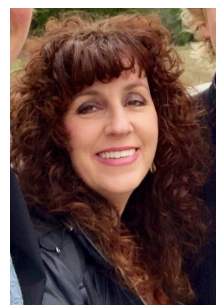
Dear Friends,

Although docent board business seems about as important right now as doing the dishes during a house fire, I feel compelled to attempt to continue with the normal as much as possible. So here goes nothing.

At our last meeting, the Board approved proposed revisions to the by-laws. According to the by-laws, amendments must be emailed "to each member of the Docent Council at least one week prior to the Council meeting at which the action is proposed for approval." In accordance with the by-laws, I will be sending you an emailed copy of the proposed changes in the next couple of days. However, because it may be some time before we meet again, we will send the proposed changes out a second time just prior to our meeting.

The substantive revisions that were approved by the Board and that will be voted on by the Council include:

Leave of Absence status is defined as an absence for any reason of up to two years per request. Upon return, LOA docents are generally not required to undergo additional training or review. Leave of Absence status must be approved by the Board.



Molora Vadnais,
Docent Council
President

Sustainer status is intended to be either permanent or longer than two years. Sustainer docents who wish to return to Active Docent status may be required to undergo additional training or evaluation. Sustainer Status does not need Board approval.

As part of the by-laws review, the committee determined that it was necessary to change the wording of the **Resignation** Section to remove the statement "Active Docents may not resign in good standing." The committee believed that this statement is ambiguous and unenforceable.

The committee also discussed the **Suspension or Termination** section and determined that the phrase "Consistently failing to arrive 15 minutes early for either a student or adult tour" was overbroad for adult tours and was unenforceable because docents touring adults are generally unmonitored when they arrive for a tour.

The committee noted that other parts of the by-laws were in need of revision but because these were outside the scope of the present committee's mandate, the committee recommended that these issues be studied next year. Also at our last board meeting, the Board approved a Covid-19 Contingency Plan that was overtaken by events before it could be sent to you and for the most part is now irrelevant. However, one aspect of the plan that is still relevant— and hopeful—is that provisional instruction is continuing by electronic means. We fully expect this fine class of new docents to graduate as soon as the museum re-opens and they are able to present their 45-minute talks.

As of now, the graduation ceremony is scheduled for May 29, but as it is unlikely that society will be reopened by then, graduation will likely be postponed until the fall. But the provisional class will start touring this summer as usual if the museum is open even if the graduation ceremony comes later.

Please do not worry about missing touring credit this year. Everyone will get credit. The Board is working on a proposal that would curtail touring requirements for docents who were unable to complete the 8-tour per year requirement due to museum construction or natural disasters. Although this resolution was postponed until our next meeting to give time for slight editing, I feel confident that it will pass. The Covid-19 Contingency Plan, which was passed, also curtailed the 8-tour requirement for this year.

I would like to thank Patsy and Michelle for their work during this crisis. Their professionalism is outstanding and their love for the Docent Council is evident. Thanks especially to Michelle for working tirelessly and creatively to send us Checklists and other information of upcoming exhibits and reopening galleries. And thanks to Lori Mohr for agreeing to publish *La Muse* weekly until we are able to meet again in person. Please send in your submissions! We want to hear from each of you. Finally, please stay in contact with each other via emails, texts, and phone calls. It is tempting to turn off and shut down right now. But when you aren't heard from, your friends worry. None of us need more worry.

Colin Campbell Cooper proposed starting our museum in 1937 while the Great Depression raged and Fascism descended. Our museum opened in 1941, while war ravaged the world. Cooper and our other founders believed that art could be a beacon of hope in dark times. It is in some way fitting that our museum will once again reopen and give hope in our own dark times.

Molara Vadnais

Colin Campbell Cooper, Segovia, Spain 1924.
SBMA, Gift of the family of the artist.



From our Vice President



Patty Santiago

What a disappointment having to cancel our New York City trip, but given what the city has been coping with during this pandemic, it breaks your heart. In addition to illness and death, so many businesses and employees have been affected by the shutdown, my son being one of them. He says the scene is eerie during early morning runs through the streets of his Brooklyn neighborhood. Many streets have been closed to discourage movement. But he is safe, for which I am extremely grateful when so many others are not. Please take care, stay safe. I look forward to reuniting with everyone again in the near future. *Patty*

From our Student Teams Co-chairs



Irene Stone

Not too long ago we were considering how to conduct student tours with only the New Media exhibition and the Wiley painting available for tours from February 18 to March 6. Our teams rose to the challenge with enriching half-hour tours trading with a wonderful art project organized by Itoko. The children were intrigued with this new art expression (*Is this art?*) and fully engaged in the day's activities. For the month of February we toured a total of 223 students, and for the March 6 tours added 42 students. We thank all the docents who took on this challenge and did so with



Teda Pilcher

careful planning, good teamwork, and a positive collegial attitude. We now look forward to the museum's reopening and our sharing with the students the wide selection of art work on display.

These last weeks have allowed us to slow down and thus appreciate more fully the beauty of the natural world around us and understand how grateful we are for healthy and safe family and friends.

Teda and Irene

From our Adult Teams Co-chairs



Vikki Duncan

Here are the stats for February: Docents gave a total of 28 tours to 211 visitors, with an average 7.5 visitors/tour. Our Community Speakers Program gave 6 talks to 121 attendees. A total of 8 tours were cancelled in February due to gallery closures necessitated by renovation work

As you shelter in place, find a way to bring art into your life every day (online for now) and stay safe.



Christine Holland

Christine and Vikki

From our Provisional Co-Chairs



Ralph Wilson

Dear Colleagues,
The Provisional Class managed to have two meetings in March before the museum closing and self-isolation announcements. Both times our emphasis was the 8-minute presentation and practicing in the gallery. Once again Gail Stichler and Pattie Firestone assisted by coaching during one practice session, and they have our sincere gratitude for their time and expertise.



Patty Santiago

We especially enjoyed an informative, comprehensive, and engaging presentation on modern and contemporary art by our own Michelle West. Her wide-ranging discussion introduced and clarified many of the often challenging and changing “-isms” of 20th century art. We extend thanks to her for a much appreciated lecture.

With the closure of the museum, the 8-minute presentations became impossible. However, the class continues through emails, and they are now putting together their highlights tours. Each has submitted the theme and list of objects that will be used.

Every week they are sending a bullet list for one or two new objects. We anticipate that when the museum re-opens, the provisionals will be prepared to give their highlight tours for evaluation, and we will welcome the Class of 2020 as Active Docents.

Happily we have the time to enjoy and share guilt-free internet surfing:

Ralph and Patty



From our Nominations Chair



Mary Ellen Hoffman

Dear Docents,

Because it is important during these unprecedented times to carry on traditions, even though they be somewhat modified, the members of the Nominating Committee—me, VP Patty Santiago, and acting President Molora Vadnais, in consultation with the Education Department—are pleased to announce the

Docent Council slate for the 2020-2021 service year:

Once again we have to improvise, this time on how we will vote to approve the slate. So I am requesting that you consider the slate hereby presented. No other names were submitted on or before March 18 (the deadline set forth in the March *La Muse*) so I am asking you to vote electronically by e-mail to me: mehoffman54@gmail.com as soon as you review the slate up until April 15.

Once we have a majority vote of Active Docents who duly respond after this notice (it's like voting by mail!), I will announce this slate of dedicated, hardworking docents, including many of our newer docents and also some of our wise sages who have been here many years, always ready to serve.

Take good care of yourselves, family and others where you can,

Mary Ellen

President— Patty Santiago

Vice President—Karen Howsam

Secretary—Christine Holland

Treasurer— Jeff Vitucci

Membership—Pattie Firestone

Adult teams—Vikki Duncan and Sara Bangser

Student Teams—Teda Pilcher and Irene Stone

Provisional chairs—Kathryn Padgett, Paul Guido, Gretchen Simpson, Molora Vadnais and Erika Budig

Research—Sarajum Quazi

Evaluations—Shirley Waxman

Webmaster—Gail Stichler

Past President/Nominations—Intentionally left open



Butterfly Beach, Gaye Adams (Canadian), oil on canvas, 36" x 36". She painted this while visiting her cousin, Leslie Thompson in February 2020. Photo courtesy of the artist.

From our Membership Chair



Pattie Firestone

Below is the list of **2020 Docent Pin Recipients** to be honored during our Docent Council Service Recognition Awards and Graduation Ceremony. It is currently scheduled for May 29th at 3pm in the Auditorium, but that date may change.

If you are one of the recipients, please look over the list and make sure your name is on it. You can contact me at Pattie.Firestone@gmail.com

10 Year Pin

Susan Billig
Vikki Duncan
Rosemarie Gebhart
Gail Stichler
Molara Vadnais

15 Year Pin

Christine Holland

30 Year Pin

Ricki Morse

20 Year Pins

Laura DePaoli

From Our Secretary



David Reichert

Dear fellow docents,

As life under shelter-at-home rolls on, I am doing well. I'm happy to report that both my wife Diane and I have avoided the virus and hope it stays that way. We've both been a bit lethargic as we adjust. This is actually a perfect opportunity for all of us to catch up on "when we get around to it" projects around our home

I am using the Duolingo app to teach myself French. A large part of my family is French, and I like France, so it's about time that I learn the language! I have also begun reading "Undaunted Courage" by Stephen Ambrose. Although I have studied a lot of American history, I know little about the Lewis and Clark expedition, beyond the most basic facts. I am finding it to be a very well written book.

I am naturally a homebody and am largely doing well with quarantine. But I miss some aspects of public life. Diane and I belong to First Presbyterian Church at State and Constance, and look forward to when we can go to church again rather than watch online. I really miss the Museum and docent life, and really, really miss seeing all of you!

Warmest wishes,
David

From our Community Speakers Program Team Leaders



Kathryn Padgett

In March the CSP Team was able to give 3 talks to 36 enthusiastic listeners before we were all sequestered.

The amazing CSP Team has taken this time to create new interesting and exciting talks for our venues. Over the next few months we will be highlighting these talks in La Muse, so you can see how innovative and dedicated this team is to spreading art into our community. It is an important part of the docent program at SBMA.



Shirley Waxman

Molora Vadnais is working on *Small Format American Paintings from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's Permanent Collection*, to go along with the exhibition in Ridley-Tree. For many of our venues this will be a 'know before you go' type of talk, for others it will be 'bringing the museum to you' talk. Highlighting the museum's exhibitions and outstanding collection is a mission for the CSP Team.

The collection of small format paintings currently on view is a reminder of the breadth of the SBMA's American collection. Oil and brush conjure the illusion of near and far persuasively, from the close perspective of still life, to the life-size proportions of bust portraiture, to sublime expanses of land and sky. Whether within hand's reach or at an immeasurable distance, both types of visual experience are captured within the confines of a canvas no more than 15 inches in diameter. This talk will introduce and contextualize the paintings and artists represented in this exhibit.



William Merritt Chase, Children on the Beach, 1894
oil on board. Bequest of Margaret Mallory. SBMA



Gustave Caillebotte, Paris Street, Rainy Day, 1877 Oil on canvas. Chicago Institute of Art

Lori Mohr has created a sure-fire popular topic, *Sex in the City: The New Woman in 19th c Paris*

In the 1870s, an emperor and a baron undertook the remaking of Paris: Napoleon III and Baron Georges Haussmann's urban renewal project converted a medieval town into the Paris we know today, with its grand boulevards, parks and squares. At the same time, women began to push against the limits of home and motherhood to become active participants in public life and in the workforce. Join Lori Windsor Mohr as she explores works by artists such as Gustave Caillebotte, Eduard Manet and Edgar Degas to see how they captured the pulse of an era when city planning and changing roles offered women the freedom to engage in a new modern world.

The Enduring Energy of Pierre Soulages

By Ricki Morse



Welcome to James Glisson, our new contemporary curator! What a thrill it was to hear him praise our Latin American collection, which we haven't seen in years. And how exciting to anticipate his debut mid-20th-century Abstract Expressionism show, to see images of our Helen Frankenthaler and Pierre Soulages.

It seems appropriate to highlight Soulages, since Paris celebrated his 100th birthday last December with a rare exhibition for a living artist at the Louvre, an honor previously granted only to Marc Chagall and Pablo Picasso.

Born in Rodez, a small city in southern France, Soulages was fascinated with the ancient cave paintings, the menhirs (Neolithic standing stones), and medieval churches throughout the area, particularly with the artifacts and Romanesque architecture of Sainte Foy de Conques, the 10thc abbey/church in a nearby village. As a boy he collected arrowheads and pottery fragments and felt drawn to the ancient Celtic images created in the dark caves. He remembers being questioned by a friend of his older sister as he made black lines on white paper. Asked what he was drawing, he replied "snow." The black revealed the white of the paper.

Before World War II, Soulages visited the museums of Paris, viewing the works of Picasso and Cezanne. In 1938 he returned there to enroll in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. But he was disappointed by the school's traditional methods, its rigid ideas, and soon returned to Rodez, painting black leafless trees against a bright sky. After military service he enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montpellier, France, where he studied Russian abstract painting. Moving back to the outskirts of Paris in 1946, he opened a studio and began his exploration of bold black gestural painted swaths on a white background. Exhibitions quickly followed—his first one-man show opened in 1949. During these years he also designed sets as well as costumes for plays and ballets. By 1954 he had gained representation by the prominent New York dealer, Samuel Kootz. Museums had begun to acquire his work including in 1952, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.



Painting 193 (1948) oil on canvas. MOMA, NYC

The career of Pierre Soulages is the stuff of legends, touted as France's greatest living painter, selling canvases internationally in the millions of dollars, he continued to follow his personal vision. In 1979 Soulages had a revelation that transformed his work.

Up to this time he had used black "for its power of expression in contrast with other colors." Waking one morning to view yesterday's canvas, which he had not felt good about, he saw it differently. What he saw now was the reflection of light on dark surfaces. "Where it was layered, the light danced, and where it was flat it lay still. A new space had come into being." He named this black "outré-noir," ultra-black, beyond black or the other black. The sculptural qualities of outré-noir produce a unique visceral experience, as if the black gains facets. To exploring the reflective power of black, Soulages used brushes, spoons, small rakes,



At his Dec 2019 opening at the Louvre.

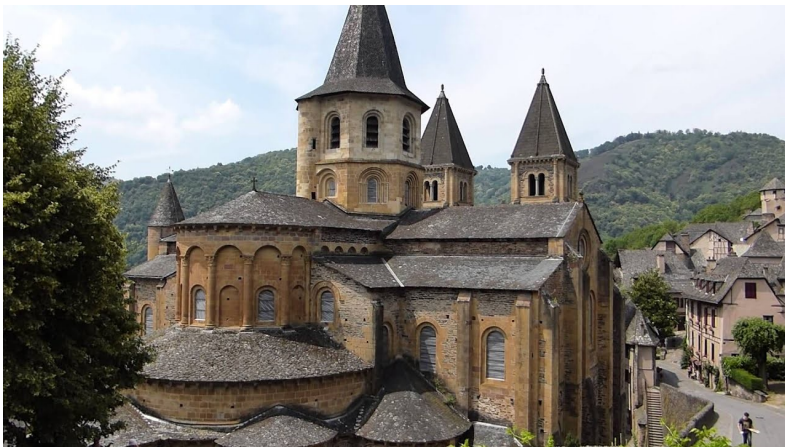


Walnut Stain, 2004, oil on canvas.

sometimes gouging and chipping away the paint to achieve unique reflective experiences—truly abstract *expressionism*.

In 1987, Soulages was commissioned to return to his beloved Sainte Foy de Conques to design 100 abstract stained glass windows for the 10th c church. He developed a new kind of glass with variable translucency. The installation was completed in 1994, providing an overwhelming experience within the Romanesque vaulted dome.

In 2014 the city of Rodez honored its most famous son, opening a Soulages Museum, housing over 500 of his paintings. You may want to add this ancient city to your next European itinerary and experience *outré-noir* for yourselves!



Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy, France



Pierre Soulages Museum, Rodez, France

Looking Ahead



Perhaps you would like to begin your preparation for our Van Gogh exhibition next October with a tour of the Amsterdam Van Gogh Museum. A comprehensive site, it provides a walk through the galleries, room by room. www.vangoghmuseum.nl

Submitted by Ricki

What Mona Lisa with her feet up says about art after coronavirus

From The Washington Post By Philip Kennicott, Art and Architecture Critic, March 25, 2020

Submitted By Molora Vadnais



As art memes circulating in the age of coronavirus go, it is more whimsical than ominous. It shows the Mona Lisa, perhaps the most famous painting in the world, edited to present its subject at ease, reclining with her feet up. Her smile is unmistakably happy rather than enigmatic, and her feet are thrust out of the picture plane and right into our faces.

Although the image was created well before the current pandemic, as it bounces around on Twitter, it seems as if she is having her “first vacation in 500 years,” as one user said in a tweet. The Louvre, like museums all around the world, is closed. The humor of the meme is its suggestion that the great, iconic works

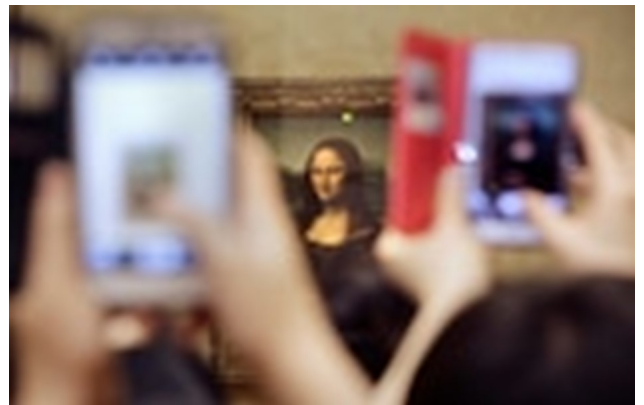
shuttered therein are letting us know how exhausted they were with our usual attention. It is related to other memes and now debunked or discounted stories that suggest the natural world is also happy to have us less out and about in it, including the claim that dolphins and swans have returned to the suddenly pristine waters of Venice. A YouTube video of penguins wandering the empty public spaces of the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago — thus reversing the usual dynamic of observer and observed — is authentic, but supports the same deep craving embedded in the spurious memes.

The Mona Lisa meme, however, gets at deeper psychological beliefs about art. We tend to anthropomorphize artworks, investing them with a sense of agency and action. We refer to the Mona Lisa as *her*, not it, and not just because it is an image of a woman. At some level, we can't quite believe she is an inanimate object, mere oil and pigment on a warped panel of poplar wood.

So the meme implies a question worth thinking about:

What is all this art doing now that we are no longer looking at it? The rational mind will say, nothing. It is just sitting there, like it does every night when the museum is empty. The halls are dark, the space is quiet, and the art hangs mute upon the walls. Perhaps a security guard passes by from time to time, but that's it.

That answer would shock someone from an earlier age, when art had ritual and religious power. And it probably still offends many of us, if we are honest about the complex ways we conceive of art's power. In 1936, the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin published a classic essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” which introduced a term that has become inseparable from the way many people think about these ideas. He wrote about “aura,” the unique presence of the work itself, which carried vestiges of sacred resonance from an earlier age. The constant reproduction of paintings and sculpture — in books, cheap prints, postcards and posters — allowed modern audiences to get closer to art, but it also threatened “aura,” the particular power of the work when contemplated in real life, at the right distance, under the right



Tourists take pics of da Vinci's Mona Lisa at the Louvre in November 2015. (Amr Nabil/AP)

conditions.

Strictly speaking, the Mona Lisa is a painting, and everything significant about the power of that painting happens inside us, in our minds and through the circulation of cultural ideas about the painting. But speak less strictly and we find ourselves thinking about art as if it is intelligent and active in the world. We still believe in something like “aura,” and can’t quite conceive that the art is simply turned off at night when we aren’t there to see it. Art speaks to us. We have a conversation with it. Curators often speak of putting works “in dialogue” with each other, as if they are capable of having a conversation among themselves. So when a museum closes at night, we may be more inclined to think that the art is sleeping, rather as we do, and not merely inert, like the waffle maker or microwave in our kitchen.

***The arts will recover,
but they will never be
the same.***

So what is the art doing now, during this long hiatus that may keep the Mona Lisa with her feet up for months? The reclining Mona Lisa meme suggests that we think (or hope) that the art is resting up, getting ready for us again, preparing to reengage us when we can get back to public life and the museums are open once more. Another way to ask this is, what is happening with aura now that almost the whole world is shut off from the art itself, able to access only reproductions, and mainly digital ones? Is the aura regathering? Is it re-accumulating in the art, like the fictional dolphins and swans returning to Venice? Is it getting ready for our return to a shriven world, sadder, smaller but somehow more pure than before?

Those are fantasies, and powerful ones. But the reality is this: We won’t return to the same Mona Lisa, or any other work that existed before the coronavirus pandemic. We can’t even begin to understand all the ways it will be different. Travel and tourism may return, but they may no longer be accessible at the same scale, and to as wide an audience. There will probably be new inequalities and hierarchies in the access to art. The exchange of private tours for promised donations, deeply embedded in the economy of many museums before the coronavirus, may be explicitly monetized: Pay us up front to see art without the public and its pathogens.

If thousands die and millions are unemployed, art will be for many people more local, no longer about a trip to Paris and a day at the Louvre, and more a matter of finding something sustaining near to hand, as cheaply as possible. If social distancing becomes embedded in our behavior, the psychology of our great, big-city museums will be different, too. It may be a long time until museums feel comfortable packing their galleries like they once did. And even then, a quick jostle past an iconic work, thronged with a few hundred fellow art pilgrims, will feel very different than it once did.

The greatest difference will be at the personal level. Art almost always feels different to us after a great shock, after a health scare or major illness, or the death of a loved one. Sometimes things that seemed important feel suddenly insipid, and vice versa. We tend to attribute these changes as much to the work itself as to our own changed condition. We think the painting was only pretending to be good, or hiding its true value, and the change in our perception has something to do with the modesty or wiles of the art work itself.

Perhaps we will return to the world in which great works, like the Mona Lisa, have aura. But it would be better if we didn’t. If we could transfer that fantasy about art — that there is something magical in its presence, that it is somehow human, like us, with emotions and agency — to actual people, we would live in a far better world. We might then put these great works in a new category, no longer relics of a sacred past, but harbingers of a new, humanist future. We would thank them for having taught us to invest other humans with the same value we vested in them, and then, perhaps, the Mona Lisa could really put her feet up and indulge a satisfied smile.

Sheltering in Place: Thoughts from Gretchen Simpson



What comes to me so clearly as these quiet days roll by is that there are always two sides to a situation. The pain and loss that is prevalent from this virus is overpowering and our lives will never be the same after we emerge again. However, there is also the sudden awareness of a “slower” pace as we step outside; the air is fresh, birds are singing, roads are less traveled and things in general have a less frantic energy. There is a kind of relief that also comes with social distancing, even though we feel the deprivation of those hugs and embraces. I guess I’m trying to find a way of coping that I can build on, that will lead to a grateful outcome.

Personally, my house is absurdly clean and now that jig saw puzzles have reappeared, I find my self talking to the pieces. (Go figure that out!). I really appreciate the virtual diversions offered by the museum and even without my dearest walking buddy, Kathryn, long walks are still restorative. BUT the greatest blessing in my life is the arrival of my new grandson, Jacob Steven Jaffe. Breaks my heart that I have to keep distance for awhile, but that will pass. Life renews itself.

Hugs to all,
~gretchen

Baby Jacob has a very auspicious
birth date: 02/22/2020.



“Art Installation” from Shirley Waxman



MARATHON, Texas - There were no lines, but the shelves were just as empty as any store across the country, unless you were in the market for a snake or two.

Along Highway 90 near Big Bend National Park, in one of the most desolate parts of West Texas, Target Marathon, as it is known locally, was open for business, though not the kind one might expect.

About four years ago, an unidentified artist transformed an old cinder block railroad building into a tiny fake Target store, complete with the retail chain's familiar red bull's eye logo. Some interpreted it as the equalizing cousin to Prada Marfa, an art installation located in an equally remote roadside spot about an hour down the road.

THE LAST PAGE

Editor's note: On the news these days we are seeing reporters televising from their homes — private lives revealed in a background of family photos and cluttered bookshelves. This weekly *La Muse* gives us the opportunity to glimpse snippets of our own lives that others don't see under normal circumstances. Last week in *La Muse*, Molora got the ball rolling with her "queens", and this week we meet Gretchen's new grandson, Jacob, and Patty's, still-like-new grandson, Maxwell. Isn't that fun? So c'mon...scroll through your phone and send us a favorite pic. Thank you to everyone for this week's submissions. Lori



Left: Here we have new garden art by an SBCC student. He had to explain why it was called "Heartbeat," but I bet you can see it! Its in the arms.....I have been moving it around as it falls over easily. I first saw it with a dozen others by artists from different studios who pushed the pieces into the grass for support.

Submitted by Ann Hammond



Patty Santiago with grandson, Maxwell, at the beach while mom works from home.



From Gail Stichler

I recently joined the FB page for: [National Docent Symposium Council to National Docents Forum](#) \ It's not an open site, but was very easy to join. I had to put in my name, museum affiliation, etc., and was approved almost immediately. Someone is posting an artwork of the day and asking people to identify it. Yesterday they had 2 postings, including one by Robert Delaunay. Of course, I then did a search on google to see more of his work. I've basically been avoiding FB, but this is so enticing that I want to see more of these posts. You might want to try it. Maybe you'll have as much fun as I have.



Image from a greeting card



Your next issue of *La Muse* will be Wednesday, April 8

Editor Loriwindsormohr@gmail.com

