

## Docent Dates

### Docent Meetings

**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



Nathalie Provosty, *Council, Untitled (16-38) (detail)*, 2016. Watercolor on paper, diptych. SBMA purchase with funds provided by The Basil Alkazzi Acquisition Fund, 2018. From *In the Mean-while...Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Art*. This exhibition is curated by Julie Joyce, Senior Curator, ArtCenter College of Design and former Curator of Contemporary Art, SBMA with assistance from Rachel Heidenry, Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Art, SBMA.

Dear Friends,,

Thank you all for your cards and emails this past week. Reading your thoughts was like getting lots of hugs from lots of friends! As we move into week four of our new, temporary reality, I have begun to reflect on my childhood growing up in Louisiana in the middle of the woods. The nearest neighbors--none within shouting distance--were all relatives and the closest grocery store was a 45-minute drive away. Mom went shopping once every two weeks, and in the interim, we ate what was in the freezer. Cravings were rarely satisfied and "running to the store" was not an option. I don't remember ever being bored. I do remember hiding from my mother so she wouldn't put me to work! Like many rural kids, I learned to drive when my legs were long enough to touch the pedals. I think I was 12. Then I roamed the woods on dirt logging roads on a tractor or a truck, or with my cousin on her dirt bike. I remember one time having to walk five miles home after running the truck out of gas only to have to get on the tractor with my father and go back to retrieve the truck. Dad, of course, being a farm boy himself, always had gas on hand and time to spare.

Now that my life is an echo of my childhood, I am



Molora Vadnais, Docent Council President

finding I don't really miss the busyness that the virus forced me to forego. And I now realize how much all of that busyness detracted from my freedom to spend my time the way I wanted without deadlines and commitments always looming in the back of my mind. Maybe, if this lasts long enough, I will long for a nice dinner out, an appointment at the nail salon, or a night at the symphony. But now, I am content to stay home and garden, sew, read, and roam the woods alone once again. I wonder how quickly, if at all, the gyms and restaurants will refill when this is all over? Latent fear will keep some of us at home but how many of us will choose to permanently disengage from the busyness or at least re-engage in a more thoughtful manner. What are your thoughts on the future of normal?

Sincerely,  
Molora

### From our Nominations Chair



Mary Ellen Hoffman

Dear Docents, PLEASE BE SURE TO VOTE by April 15 on our slate of officers for 2020-2021 by e-mail to me: [mehoffman54@gmail.com](mailto:mehoffman54@gmail.com). Once we have a majority vote of Active Docents who duly respond after this notice, 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. *Mary Ellen*

**President**— Patty Santiago

**Research**— Sarajum Quazi

**Vice President**— Karen Howsam

**Evaluations**— Shirley Waxman

**Secretary**— Christine Holland

**Webmaster**— Gail Stichler

**Treasurer**— Jeff Vitucci

**Past President/Nominations**—

**Membership**— Pattie Firestone

Intentionally left open

**Adult teams**— Vikki Duncan

Sara Bangser

**Student Teams**— Teda Pilcher

Irene Stone

**Provisional chairs**

Kathryn Padgett,  
Paul Guido,  
Gretchen Simpson,  
Molora Vadnais  
Erika Budig

**VOTE by April 15!**

Interview with Julie Joyce  
Curator of Contemporary Art  
By Lori Mohr in November 2008  
Post script by Patsy, April 7, 2020



Julie Joyce, our former Curator of Contemporary Art, was scheduled to speak to us March 15 at our council meeting on “In the Meanwhile,” which she curated. This is one of fifteen interviews I did in 2008 for La Muse, then edited by Mary Eckhart, before taking over as editor the next year. Julie had become our new Contemporary Art Curator just two months earlier, in September 2008.

From 2008:

In her own quiet, unassuming manner, Julie Joyce has spent the last few months since her arrival laying the groundwork for a re-defined and thoroughly distinct contemporary art program. With an undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University, a master’s in Art History and Museum Studies from USC and more than 20 years experience in the field, Julie comes across on first meeting as thoughtful and deliberate, a little shy and a lot modest, friendly, fearless, and I have no doubt, utter-

ly capable of lifting us up—like a Shonibare *Flying Machine* – to the next level for a whole new view of the contemporary art landscape.

**Lori:** Julie, how did you find your way to this field of art?

**Julie:** As an undergrad, I became fascinated with the contemporary gallery scene. At the time – this was the early 80s—a lot of galleries were opening and showing major works not only by L.A. artists but also by New York artists. When I graduated, I did whatever I could to find a job in a gallery, which was a little bit unconventional. I got a job working in the Dorothy Goldeen Gallery; she was one of the top five galleries at the time. I really got to know some amazing people – artists, critics, collectors. But eventually I became aware that I wanted to move forward, wanted to be a curator.

**Lori:** Curatorial positions must not have been easy to find.

**Julie:** [Chuckling self-consciously]. No, they certainly weren’t. There was a joke around school that the curatorial professions were for the wealthy, and a lot of the students were certainly from that situation. But they weren’t really as driven as someone

like me. I was able to live with my parents a few years longer, but it isn’t like I didn’t have a day job as well.

**Lori:** And you’re from L.A. Tell me you’re not commuting!

**Julie:** [Leaning forward slightly] Well, my husband and I have property in Altadena where he just built a studio. So, when I got THE CALL [big grin], we had to make a decision. I took a small apartment four blocks from the museum and I’m here during the week.

**Lori:** Julie, within your field of contemporary art, do you have a subject specialty?

**Julie:** I do. In terms of time, I’m interested in post-war, particularly anything from the 1960s forward. In terms of genre, I’m interested in painting...I’m maybe traditional in that sense. I share that interest with my husband as well.



Installation view of Yinka Shonibare, *Man on Flying Machine*, 1999, mannequin, Dutch wax printed cotton, steel, rubber and aluminum. From Yinka Shonibare, MBE: *A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child and Other Astonishing Works*, SBMA March 14 - June 21, 2009.

**Lori:** Basic question: What is contemporary art and how does it differ from modern art?

**Julie:** Well, I think of it in terms of an idea. Modern art, of course, has to do with these very utopian ideas about society, about the way things work – very definitive, very didactic, very optimistic. Contemporary is, of course, post-modern, tends to be post-dystopian [laughing], tends to be post-deconstructivist.

**Lori:** You're talking to a new docent. Explain.

**Julie:** [Pausing] In the beginning there was art that was largely about deconstruction -

breaking down these ideals and these standards we had in mind. Warhol, of course, is one of the earlier post-modern artists in terms of the popular images that questioned our beliefs - our wholehearted buying into images from advertising - and going against that 50s idealism. In the 60s, of course, it was all about going against and reevaluating those ideals.

**Lori:** So, contemporary art is defined in terms of time and content?

**Julie:** But at the same time it's art made by living artists.

**Lori:** Ah! That sounds like the major criteria!

**Julie:** I think it's *one* of the criteria. Sure. And the content can be different from modernism, but in some cases it can be similar. It can critique modernism as well as other areas of art, like the way Yinka Shonibare re-enacts certain major paintings, like the Goya and the Gericault, where it's conceptual – he's promoting certain ideas. He knows he's copying those paintings. But that's not new to art. Looking back through art history, active artists have always been critical thinkers – like Gericault, like Goya – who were considering the political aspects of society, the dynamics of power. So yeah, in a way, I think contemporary art can just be art by living artists.

**Lori:** How do you go about curating up-and-coming artists? I mean, how do you know which art will stand the test of time? Does knowledge and experience tell you what makes a work iconic, significant?

**Julie:** [Laughs, then pauses, sitting back]. That's a really good question. It's something we curators deal with every day. I think all curators are puzzle-solvers in that you have to find what fits a particular institution, what fits a particular time, what fits in terms of the larger collection, the physical space, the mental space, the audience, and – I know this may sound mechanical and crude – but when you can hit a number of those bases, you have a good feeling. And there's another component – the artist.

One of the things I didn't mention in my history was that I was director of the Luckman Gallery at Cal State L.A. for ten years and one of the things I realized doing exhibitions is that when you're working with any artist – living, dead, under-recognized, over-recognized – you have to be responsible that you're contributing positively to the artist, to the field, and doing something that hasn't been done before. That's very important. Part of



Yinka Shonibare, *Nuclear Family*, 1999, mixed media installation,



Yinka Shonibare, *La Méduse*, 2008, chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, and *La Méduse*, 2008, wood,

the interest must be scholarship and a sense of discovery. Even if it's re-discovering an under-represented artist.

**Lori:** Where is this art, the leading edge so to speak? Who's making it?

**Julie:** It's everywhere! And that makes finding that leading edge really difficult, but that also makes it thrilling. And I think 'leading edge' can mean different things—just because they're young and hot doesn't mean it's sexy. Sexy can be anything - it *can* mean an emerging artist, or it can mean you're re-contextualizing, or re-evaluating a mid-career artist.

That's exciting for everybody! That's how you add to the knowledge base for the audience—by providing a certain look, a different view.

**Lori:** So, curating is a combination of intuition and intellectual experience.

**Julie:** Absolutely. And there's always a basic formula I keep in mind and, simple as it seems, it works. The work that's most appealing to me is interesting on a level that's purely aesthetic—something beautiful and compelling—but also interesting conceptually in terms of how it speaks to our present-day society. That's definitely one of the reasons I like Shonibare's work so much. But there's so much [art] out there! And that's why you have to have parameters. And that's also why I go to shows and art fairs and travel and talk with my colleagues. That's the thing about curating – it's a social activity. Granted, a lot of it happens in your own head, but once it's out there, it's public. So, I'm definitely mindful of how a show will be received.

**Lori:** In speaking about you a couple of weeks ago, Larry [Feinberg] said you would be offering exhibitions of international stature and interest. What does it mean to be international today?

**Julie:** We're in a post-globalization world, so it means you have to speak on an international level. It's about an exhibition's appeal, and all those bases it hits. You can be internationally recognized for shows of local people, or of California artists or artists across the U.S. as well as you can for international figures. The idea is to have exhibitions of the highest quality, those that add to the field, and those that can do that—hit all those bases—will be of interest on an international level.

**Lori:** Julie, Shonibare is your big debut exhibition. Most people are used to art being shown in white space gallery cubicles. I mean, this is installation art with life-sized pieces that you have to walk around! Is the format of this exhibition going to challenge the ways in which visitors traditionally view art?

**Julie:** It's funny, Shonibare works with such diverse media—sculpture, installation, photography, film—and I almost look at them more as sculptural installations. But I do see your point. I'm just hoping people will come with open minds. To me, because the fabric alone is so beautiful, I find it compelling, so I'm a little blinded. I just hope people will explore what they think it's about. If they don't like it, fine. But sometimes that's when the most interesting issues come up.

**Lori:** A Freudian 'analyze-the-resistance' response, huh?

**Julie:** [Nodding] It can bring up some interesting issues. Some of the most interesting art that I've found is through that initial negative reaction.

**Lori:** It seems to me that with contemporary art, viewers need a bit more help with interpretation. As touring docents we are the interface between art and the visitor. What guidance can you give us for enhancing the experience, making sure our visitors get the most out of this exhibition?



Yinka Shonibare, *Hound*, 2000, Dutch wax printed cotton textile, three mannequins, four fiberglass dogs, fiberglass fox



Yinka Shonibare, *La Méduse*, 2008, chromogenic print mounted on aluminum, and *La Méduse*, 2008, wood, foam, Plexiglas, Dutch wax-printed fabric, and acrylic paint. .

**Julie:** Of course, you never want to tell anyone what to think, so answering questions is good, being a resource. But even though it's contemporary art, I think it can be approached in a traditional way. You can always look at the iconography... you can look at, for example, *The Hound*... what's going on, what country does it seem to represent, what era... I just think there are so many avenues through which you can approach the work. Say, for instance, you're interested in issues of colonialism—the history of the fabric alone, the trade and commerce and structures of power—it's all there.

The routes used for commerce by colonial merchants were probably those routes established by the slave trade in the 1700s. In the United States, we're constantly dealing with African-American issues—slavery, issues regarding establishing the colonies—it's all part of our history. However, we don't focus so much on Europe's role. England would not be England without its rush to expand the Empire by establishing the colonies, and with them trade routes. Think of the Portuguese, who first developed the global trade routes and were also the first to import slaves from Africa. It's all pertinent.

**Lori:** Huh...all that from fabric. I'm not sure I would get that at first. For the visitor, it's about which dots you connect from your own knowledge.

**Julie:** Yes. And I'm also hoping that people who are more attuned to works from other periods—Goya, Geri-cault—may be able to enter the work that way. That's one of the reasons we felt this was a particularly good show to re-establish the contemporary program, because it does speak to many of the works in the art historical canon. It's possible for the audience to connect on a number of levels.

**Lori:** In meeting with the docents a few weeks ago, Larry [Feinberg] responded to a question about the status of our Latin American art by saying it would always be a part of what we do, but not as big a part as it has been.

**Julie:** I'd say that's accurate. Because it *is* such a strong component of our collection, I feel that when we do focus on Latin American, it will most likely be with something that's happened since the post-modernist era; we have that pretty well covered. It will be contemporary. And that's an area we're completely lacking in. There are so many amazing contemporary Latin American artists, many even from Mexico City, like Gabriel Orozco, artists who are getting major shows at MoMA, at MOCA. We don't even have a photograph of his.



Yinka Shonibare, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (Asia)*, 2008, chromogenic print mounted on aluminum.

So if and when we do something, it will be different from what we've done and again, the intent will be that we're adding to the field.

**Lori:** Will you be doing something with California as well as local artists?

**Julie:** You'll see some of what we've collected in the New Acquisitions show coming up, and in moving forward, we will start focusing on works post-1960's California. For instance, we don't have a major Ed Ruscha painting. We don't have a John Baldessari. We have works by some great Bay Area artists but we don't have some others, like Manuel Neri. We have a major early painting but not a later Diebenkorn, and he's so important because he bridges northern and southern California like few artists do. So he's an exceptional and quintessential California artist.

**Lori:** You'll be doing a mix of local and international-interest shows.

**Julie:** Yes. We're going to be doing a variety of shows and I think with everything together, we will definitely have a stronger presence in the international arena. I'm absolutely confident that will happen.

**Lori:** Rumor has it that you are planning to bring other artists in to speak.

**Julie:** Patsy and I are discussing ways to do this beginning with the California-focused Permanent Collection show. We're both huge advocates for this type of interaction. We fully intended to have Yinka Shonibare come here, but he's somewhat disabled with a neurological disorder – from a virus he got when he was 19 – that has compromised his physical endurance and makes it difficult to travel.

**Lori:** What's in your five-year plan, Julie?

**Julie:** [Laughing] You mean other than finishing this brochure for Shonibare in March? I'm so focused on the show – it's hard to see beyond it right now. But I want us to be introducing people to things they've never seen before and things that will make them think in a different way. I know the community is proud of our museum, and it's such an exciting time here under Larry's leadership—I'm hoping there will be a renewed sense of pride in what we're doing. If we can accomplish that, we'll do well. ■

### Postscript from Patsy:

The Yinka Shonibare show was a remarkable debut and unlike anything we had seen before—dramatic, beautiful, thought-provoking, intelligent and it introduced us to an artist whose reputation was on the rise. These became hallmarks of Julie's shows. The title, "A Flying Machine for Every Man Woman and Child and Other Astonishing Works" seems remarkably poignant now as we shelter at home. The global connecting points and history behind that show, its commentary on colonialism, trade, the power of the one who tells the story had deep resonance with audiences of all ages. How wonderful that thanks to Julie we have in our collection Shonibare's "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters," another title that takes on layers of meaning in this time.

-----

We also did a Thinking Routine for student touring called "Posturing Possibilities: Taking Flight: *Imagine you are riding on one of these flying machines. Rather than being propelled by pedals or wind or any kind of engine, these machines are powered by your dreams. Write a word for each blade of the propeller that represents a dream or emotion or experience that "lifts" your spirits.*

## The Artist: Yinka Shonibare



Born in London in 1962 to Nigerian parents, Yinka Shonibare, MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) is recognized internationally for his provocative sculptural installations, photographs and films that contrast African and European imagery and convention. The SBMA exhibition featured the installation *A Flying Machine for Every Man, Woman and Child* (2008) that shows an idyllic family riding human-powered flying machines modeled after 19th century

drawings – alluding to the continual freedom sought by emigrants and tourists alike. Best known was the artist’s sculptural work, which presents headless mannequins clothed in Victorian era dress made from atypical fabrics—brightly colored, wax-printed cloths commonly identified as African batiks. Essential to the work’s meaning is the use of textiles strongly associated with Africa yet originally produced in Europe and sold to Africans by Dutch traders in the 19th century.

The exhibition was punctuated by the presentation of Shonibare’s first film, *Un Ballo in Maschera* (*A Masked Ball*), 2004, in which the artist continues his quest to question power in relation to race, gender, and history. The film presents the assassination of King Gustav III of Sweden in 1792 through the medium of dance. The characters don Shonibare’s trademark African batiks but remain ambiguous in identity and sometimes gender.

This exhibition was organized for the SBMA by Julie Joyce, Curator of Contemporary Art. This exhibition was made possible through the generosity of the SBMA Women's Board, The Cheeryble Foundation, Alice Willfong, Anne and Houston Harte, and Elisabeth and Gregory Fowler.





## From Tracey Miller



*This poem is timeless, really shows how history repeats itself. It was written in 1869, during the cholera pandemic that swept Bengal, the Middle East, Mecca, Europe, and North America. It was reprinted during the Spanish flu Pandemic of 1919.*

### AND PEOPLE STAYED HOME

By Kathleen O'Meara

'And people stayed home  
and read books and listened  
and rested and exercised  
and made art and played  
and learned new ways of being  
and stopped  
and listened deeper  
someone meditated  
someone prayed  
someone danced  
someone met their shadow  
and people began to think differently  
and people healed  
and in the absence of people who lived in ignorant ways,  
dangerous, meaningless and heartless,  
even the earth began to heal  
and when the danger ended  
and people found each other  
grieved for the dead people  
and they made new choices  
and dreamed of new visions  
and created new ways of life  
and healed the earth completely  
just as they were healed themselves'



*Photo taken during Spanish flu.*

# THE LAST PAGE



Teda Pilcher as gardener and photographer, capturing the pandemic pace of life.



From Ann Hammond:

Wine barrel staves tripod support the red barrel hoop....the hoop can be any colour you choose. I have red, white and blue ones positioned around the garden.



I can't get over how resourceful and creative everyone is. *Heather Brodhead, former SBMA Librarian*



Your next issue of *La Muse* will be Wednesday, April 15

Editor [Loriwindsormohr@gmail.com](mailto:Loriwindsormohr@gmail.com)