

DOCENT DATES

November 4

Rachel Skokowski,
Curatorial Exhibition
Research Assistant.
"From Copper to Col-
or: Printmaking in
19th c. France."

November 18

Holly Chen, SBMA
Curatorial Assistant,
Asian Art on Japanese
Woodblock Prints

December 2

Fabian Leyva-Barragan,
Curatorial Assistant,
Photography and New
Media "Highlights
from SBMA's New
Media Art Collection".

December 16

Charlie Wylie, Curator
of Photography and
New Media "Facing
Forward: Photographs
from the Collection".

January 6, 2021

TBD

January 2021

TBD

Grand Reopening

April, tentatively

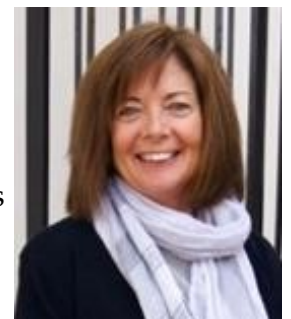


Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892)
*Midnight Moon in the Yashino
Mountains*, 1886, a woodblock
print from his masterwork, *One
Hundred Aspects of the Moon*.
In our current *Major Works on Pa-
per* exhibition in Davidson Gallery,
we have not only eleven wood
block prints but also a display of
print making tools—a perfect set
up for a great tour. *Midnight
Moon* flourishes with all the drama
we associate with Yoshitoshi, but
also his exquisitely balanced de-
sign, tilting momentarily off cen-
ter. Not only is the moon in eclipse
but the grieving widow faces a
winged ghost of the chief who
committed suicide after leading
men into an ill-conceived battle.
Her billowing scarlet robes echo
the curve of the ghost's wings,
overseen by an ominous moon.
Submitted by Ricki Morse

Dear Docents,

We have been enjoying lectures by Alina Kozlovski, Assistant Curator, these last two Zoom meetings. Her manner is so engaging that I really got excited about being back in front of the art, as I'm sure many of you feel, too. As touring docents, her lecture wasn't just information. She gave us useful strategies on how to tour antiquities in a global world (ex: using nuanced language for words like "culture" vs. "civilization") and relate ancient ideas to our world today. If you missed these lectures, be sure to watch the videos on our docent website under the *Art* tab.

I thank you for letting me delete the nagging reminder about Docent Council dues from my message each month. All active and sustaining docents are paid up. Dues help us in developing the budget for this year. Although everything has changed and we cannot tour or assemble in person this fall or winter, we are hopeful that in April when the Museum reopens, we can regroup and move



Patty Santiago, Docent
Council President

forward as a council in what may be a mask-wearing, social-distancing world for some time. Whatever the changes, we Docents are known for our flexibility and patience. Together we will make our council the satisfying experience of education and camaraderie we have all enjoyed for years. Both Karen and I strongly support the idea of a “Spring Fling” which would replace the annual holiday party when we get the green light to resume activities.

The Interest Sheets sent out this summer got nearly unanimous participation from Active Docents. In addition to exploring new and innovative ways to stay involved with the Museum, this response was a good gauge of the strong enthusiasm docents continue to feel, even in the midst of “COVID fatigue.” No one is wandering away, discouraged. Most of us are involved one way or another.

If there is any silver lining to COVID, it’s that we have all been forced to slow down, stay put, turn inward. That means the big chunks of time we normally spend researching material for our tours while managing everything else in our lives can now be done at a more leisurely pace. This is the perfect window of opportunity to deep dive into what areas interest you, or review research papers on our website to learn more about the permanent collection, or especially, to get ready for the upcoming exhibitions.

If you’re looking for a place to start, especially for those of us less familiar with the full SBMA collection, Rachel sent out the checklist for “Works on Paper” and we received checklists for Thayer Gallery and Ludington Court for the spring. You can begin with that.

Thanks for your continued support and participation as we navigate the choppy waters during this moment in time. Hang in there.

Patty



2020 DOCENT of the YEAR



CONGRATULATIONS, Molora!

We thank you for getting us through the transition from full Docent activity to total lockdown last winter and spring. There were so many unknowns, so much stress—all quite sudden just as you stepped into the role of Acting President. Your personal cards and phone calls to Docents, the suggestion of a weekly *La Muse* along with your heartfelt message in each issue are but a few examples of the leadership and encouragement you gave the council for months. And we did hang in there. Mary Joyce chose well.

La Muse Editorial Staff

From our Membership Chair



Pattie Firestone

Dear Docents,

We may not be touring, but I know that like me, you are reading about art, watching art podcasts, researching papers, participating in our ZOOM Docent Council meetings (or watching the recordings), doing Interest Sheet activities—anything that prepares you for touring our visitors—ALL of that counts as Research Hours. As you know, these service hours are used not only for our council purposes but also goes toward SBMA funding as part of our mission statement in serving the community. So keep working toward your service pins and send those hours! Thanks, Pattie Firestone

<Pattie.Firestone@gmail.com>

Your Art-related Activities Count!

Let's Take A Trip!

by Ricki Morse



Our Museum is open! We can now stand before our 1938 Andrew Wyeth, *Evening Star*, and truly feel at home. This early watercolor reflects the world Wyeth painted-- silent, perhaps abandoned, a place where people lived, worked, moved on from. Cherished as an American icon, Andrew Wyeth is probably our single most famous American painter. He echoes a Puritan rural work ethic in remote farm buildings rendered



with a kind of blunt realism, but incorporating a subtle yearning or melancholy which makes them unforgettable. Critics assailed him as sentimental, conflated his work with that of his famous father, N. C. Wyeth, the illustrator who designed covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* and illustrated legendary tales of the American west. But Wyeth's uncanny and subtle sense of place invests his landscapes with his own presence so fully that we always know a Wyeth when we see one.

Andrew Wyeth (1917-2009)

Born in 1917 in Chad's Ford, Pennsylvania, into a family brimming with artists and inventors, he was the youngest of five children, was frail throughout his childhood and home schooled under the tutelage of his father, who taught him to draft before he learned to read. The family had a summer home in Cush-



ing, Maine, which along with the Chad's Ford countryside provided the settings for his work. In 1937 the MacArthur Gallery in New York City mounted his first one man show of oil paintings, which sold out before the opening. Our watercolor, *Evening Star*, is dated the following year.

So we are in at the beginning of his remarkable journey, observing the farmhouse and barn through an evening mist, enhanced by darkening sky, a lonely homestead rendered with quiet thought, leaving us with a compelling sense of inherent significance highlighted by the single evening star.

Andrew Wyeth, *Evening Star* 1938, watercolor on paper.

To his father's disdain, Andrew Wyeth added

the egg tempera medium to his repertoire, learned from his sister Henrietta's husband, the New Mexican painter, Peter Hurd, and egg tempera along with watercolor remained his major mediums. In 1940 he married Betsy James who through the years became his business manager and frequent model. The second of their two sons, Jaime, also became a well-known artist, and Andrew painted portraits of both boys and many of Betsy herself. Wyeth's most famous painting, now in the MOMA collection, is *Christina's World*, 1948, which grew out of his friendship with Christina Olson and her family in Maine; however

rather than Christina herself, the model was his wife Betsy. Christina's legs were paralyzed from a childhood illness, and she chose to crawl using her arms rather than use a wheelchair, moving about the farm under her own power. Though he deeply admired Christina's strength and courage, he considered the painting imperfect and often voiced the wish he had concentrated more on the grasses and left out the figure.

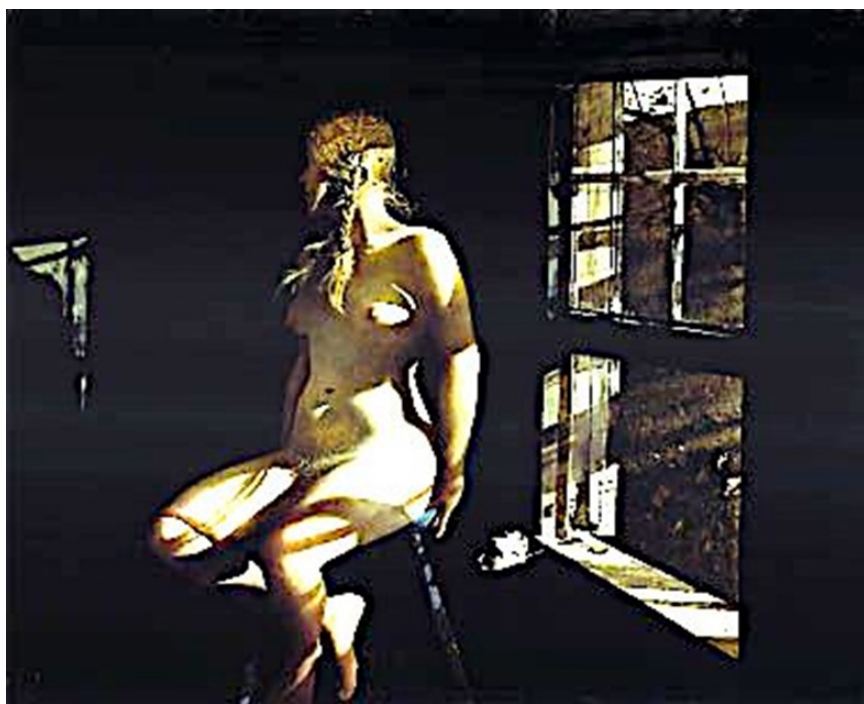


Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World*, 1948, tempera on wood.

The influences of European modernism and abstraction were sweeping American

galleries. However, his paintings continued to be highly valued in the art market which freed him to pursue his own vision. In the 1980s his Helga series, nude and clothed portraits of his sister's housekeeper, were drawing seven figure prices, and though the gossip about his relationship with Helga was upsetting to him and his wife, no one who knew him believed the stories, though some saw the gossip as fuel to ignite the market. This nude of Helga from the early 1980s gives us a new insight into Wyeth's artistic evolution. The harsh light and geometric shadows offset the nude body. Helga's averted face seems to gaze at the mirrored reflection of the window on the far wall, turning our focus to the spatial impact of the light and dark diagonals magnifying the contrast between geometric abstraction and portraiture.

Wyeth's continued success in the market allowed him to pursue his art as he pleased until his death at 91. In a 1987 interview he said, "I put a lot of things into my work which are very personal to me. So how can the public feel these things? I think most people get to my work through the back door.



Andrew Wyeth, *Helga*, 1982, tempera on canvas.

They're attracted by the realism and they sense the emotion and the abstraction — and eventually, I hope, they get their own powerful emotion." This understanding of expressionism belies his reputation as a "realist" and reveals his projection of the abstract. And it is that emotional involvement, not sentimental but very personal, which has given him a lasting place in our imaginations. ■

Seph Rodney: The Personalization of the Museum Visit
(Patsy read an excerpt from this at our 10/21 Zoom meeting)



Seph Rodney

A Post-pandemic Manifesto on Looking

“If the general shutdown of galleries and museums, studios and parks has taught me anything about my relationship to art, it’s that being in its actual presence is wholly different from experiencing it through the mediation of a screen.”

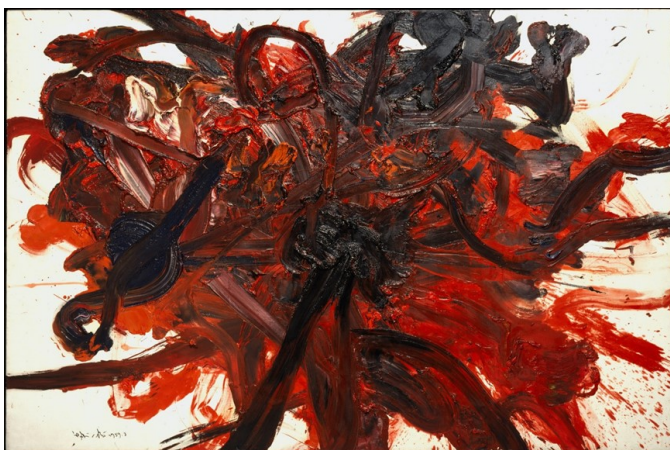
Preparing for that moment, critic Seph Rodney considers four “convictions” to ensure he never takes art for granted again.

In the post-pandemic future, I trust I will again have the opportunity to be in the physical presence of art, will be able to look at it

searchingly, circle it or be encircled by it, in some cases even touch it. If the general shutdown of galleries and museums, studios and parks has taught me anything about my relationship to art, it’s that being in its actual presence is wholly different from experiencing it through the mediation of a screen (setting aside those mediums that are intentionally engineered to be experienced by electronic channels). I profoundly feel a longing for something personal, something in front of me that is for *me*, that is similar to what happens when I lock the gaze of someone else who recognizes me and indicates this recognition with language or a nod or just a relaxation in their bodily demeanor. I don’t get these corporeal responses from an artwork, but I do get my focus reciprocated; I get to measure my own body against a work and thereby come into some kind of intimate relation. We occupy the same space and time,



Robert Gober, *Untitled*, 1999. Walker Art Center.



Kazuo Shiraga *Untitled*, 1959. Walker Art Center

and that means we become kindred in some meaningful way. No wonder I feel adrift these days, wandering through nimbus clouds of mental haze. I can’t tell where I am because I have few anchor points by which to take my own measure. Seeing art in person allowed me that. So I imagined what will change, or what should change, when I no longer have to see art by way of electronic media, and I developed a set of convictions, perhaps responsibilities, to set myself as a viewer, because too often I’ve walked into a gallery, swept my gaze over the work

for few seconds, and walked out believing that there was nothing else there for me. Something about this moment tells me that in doing so I have been taking art for granted. So, here's my four-point plan to ensure that once this is all over, this doesn't keep happening.

I need to ask questions of the work.

These are not the "why" questions that flummox and bedevil most interlocutors, but instead I will begin with the simple: What is happening here? If I can ask that question of the work and stay with it until it is answered, I will have begun to take the work seriously. I will have begun to see that something has happened and is happening right now in the moment of this encounter. By posing this question I can begin to make myself present to the art even as it is present with me the moment I make visual contact. From here I can venture onto more precarious ground and ask myself, How did this come about? And there are subsidiary, related queries: What kind of care had to be taken to make this thing? How long did this take and what else besides physical labor did it require of the maker? If it were unmade how might the world be poorer?



Lorna Simpson, *Wigs (portfolio) (detail)*, 1994. Walker Art Center

I need to imagine the worldview that brought the work about.

There are many artists—perhaps it's fairer to say most of them—who make work that I could not have predicted would exist, and there is something there in that particular vision. I should wonder about the author's perspective as evidenced by the work. Is it jaundiced? Is it celebratory? Is it aspirational? Is it nihilist? Is it suffused with generosity, and, if so, is that generosity limited to a select clique? A crucial question will be whether or not I can live in the world the artist imagines or whether I would be welcome there at all. I should also ask: Who can live here and thrive?



Kerry James Marshall, *Gulf Stream*, 2003. Walker Art Center

I need to look at myself and ask what the work is calling up in me.

It seems essential to understand that this encounter with art is always dialogic. As much as the work speaks to me, I speak to it, if I have made myself fully present to it. We are in a conversation and it may be that what the work evokes in me is a deeply rooted hurt or fear (or another emotional response). When I was an undergraduate, I had to read James Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain* for a college class. The book infuriated me so much that I

ripped it in half when I finally forced myself to finish it. Its story reminded me of my own relationship with my father, who was contemptuous of me in a way that paralleled the treatment of John Grimes, the main character of Baldwin's novel. That experience reminds me that I should recognize in the interchange with a work of art I may show resistance, and, if I do, it's useful to ask where the resistance comes from and what aspect of the work calls this resistance into play. More, I should ask myself what specific emotional response is being called up. It has happened that I've experienced a moment of pure hilarity when I encountered a Christopher Wool painting and deciphered that it spelled out, "If you can't take a joke you can get the fuck out of my house." It delighted me, I think, because it gave me permission to vicariously live through a moment of rudeness that I would very rarely allow myself to express in my social life.

I need to recognize the work's agency.

This is the ultimate gesture of respect to the artwork—to recognize that it is not only *not* coextensive with the author, it is its own entity with something to say or be. There are several ways this may be understood. I get there by regarding the work as constituting the investment of time, skill, and attention by the artist, which also ultimately exceeds the artist's hand and mind precisely because it comes into being in a different way for each viewer. Each work of art is like a clock that a watchmaker has given a ticking heart to and then let it go out to beat and beat and take breath and say with its own voice why it needs to be here with us now. The heuristic I use to get myself there when it is difficult is to ask myself: What does the work make possible now that wasn't possible before? What does it give me that I did not have?

With these convictions in place when the world has somewhat righted itself and the doors to galleries and museums are open again I hope to walk into an art space and take all these charges seriously. Like the poet Theodore Roethke found in his poem "The Waking" (next page)—I want to use each encounter with art to "learn by going where I have to go."

Seph Rodney, PhD, was born in Jamaica and came of age in the Bronx, New York. He became a staff writer at *Hyperallergic* in 2016 and is now a senior editor and writer there, focusing on contemporary art and related issues. He has also written for CNN Op-ed, NBC Universal, and *American Craft Magazine*, and penned catalogue essays for Joyce J. Scott, Teresita Fernandez, and Meleko Mokgosi. Rodney was recently awarded the 2020 Rabkin Art Journalism Award.



THE WAKING

Theodore Roethke

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

DIA de los MUERTOS

Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), is celebrated throughout Latin America and everywhere with a Latino population every year with a two-day festival on November 1 and 2 (coinciding with All Saints Day and All Souls Day, minor Catholic holidays.) Assured that the dead would be insulted by mourning or sadness, Dia de los Muertos celebrates the lives of the deceased with food, drink, parties, and activities the dead enjoyed in life. It is believed that their souls return to visit the living families in homes, businesses and cemeteries. Several elements are placed on Day of the Dead altars: candles, decorative or perforated paper, flowers, photos of the loved one, food, pan de muerto, incense, sugar skulls, a cross, water, salt and objects of the deceased. The levels represent heaven, the world between the living and dead, and the Earth. (Source: Nationalgeographicsociety.org.) At SBMA traditionally we have the altars assembled by our students displayed in the Park Wing lobby.

