

La Muse

DOCENT DATES

July 1

Preference Sheets DUE

August 1

Proof of vaccine to Margot Dement, Director of Human Resources. (See message)

August 15

Grand Reopening; Practice Tours with Shirley Waxman and Paul Guido.

September 2021

Public tours resume



Vincent van Gogh, *Almond Blossoms*, 1890, oil on canvas. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. *Vincent loved to paint the flowering almond trees on the grounds of Saint-Rémy hospital. He sent this painting as a gift upon the birth of Theo and Jo Van Gogh's son, whom they named Vincent. Jo prized it above all of his works in their home. After Theo died that year, she hung it in her room.*

Dear Docents,

Greetings from your editor. We're in countdown mode marking our return to the Museum. While we are enjoying renewed freedom from isolation, our return to docent activity requires proof of vaccination. Be sure to email a jpg of your card by August 1 to Margot Dement, Director of HR: mdement@sbma.net.

In early June several of us got a jump start on re-entry—four sessions of Verbal Description Training with Hannah Goodwin, an access specialist from the MFA, Boston. Her focus centered on the skilled use of language in offering objective information to visitors who have visual limitations. The key is to do this without bludgeoning them with our interpretations, robbing visitors of their own connection with the art. “On a tour I need your eyes. There’s nothing wrong with my mind.” It had not occurred to me that words such as “humorous” (a Hockney piece), or “ominous” (Bierstadt) could be interpretive. The group workshop along with individualized homework made a useful practicum in what we do every day as docents—model visual literacy by really looking, the core tenet of VTS. And from there, let the experience flow.

Thank you to Patsy and Rachel for organizing the training, and to Hannah for her expert guidance and feedback in a relaxed forum. For those who are interested, you can watch the session videos on this link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1ONV9iC3Mm0amSMXOYzpNfKfijh2M7G5c>

In this issue we have another installment from Ricki on Vincent van Gogh—this time examining the influence of his family. Thank you, Ricki, for your outstanding research. *Lori Mohr*



From our Membership Chair
2020 & 2021 Service Recognition Awards



Pattie Firestone

Dear Docents,

Last month's list of Service Award recipients omitted Niki Bruckner's name. She will receive her 25 years pin. Congratulations, Niki. I apologize for the error. *Pattie.*

25 YEARS

NIKI BRUCKNER

2020 RECIPIENTS

10 YEARS

SUSAN BILLIG
VIKKI DUNCAN
ANDREA GALLO
ROSEMARIE GEBHART
MOLORA NICHOLS
GAIL STICHLER

15 YEARS

CHRISTINE HOLLAND

20 YEARS

LAURA DEPAOLI
LOREE GOLD

2021 RECIPIENTS

5 YEARS

ERIKA BUDIG
DAVID REICHERT
PATRICIA SANTIAGO
JOANNE SINGER

10 YEARS

MARY ELLEN HOFFMAN
RALPH WILSON

15 YEARS

JULIE ALLEN
PAUL GUIDO
SUSAN NORTHROP
GRETCHEN SIMPSON

20 YEARS

KAREN BRILL
SCARLETT EL-KHAZEN
JEAN SMITH

Pattie.Firestone@gmail.com

301-520-5775 (mobile)

805-770-7499 (home)

Dancing Ganesha, Remover of Obstacle

By Susan Tai, Elizabeth Atkins Curator of Asian Art

Written for *SBMA Friends of Asian Art*, reproduced in *La Muse* courtesy of Susan Tai



Susan Tai

Dancing Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles

India, Uttar Pradesh, 11th century

Sandstone 23 × 12 1/2 × 5 in.

Gift of Deanne Violich in memory of her mother

Anne Witter Gillette



Holly Chen

This pot-bellied, elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesha, is one of the most beloved deities in India. He is known by many popular names such as the Remover of Obstacles, Bringer of Good Fortune and Success, and the Lord of Beginnings. Offerings are made to Ganesha before any important task is begun. He usually occupies a place near the doors in temples and homes.

Ganesha means "lord (isha) of the Ganas," who are Shiva's mountain-dwelling, mischievous attendants. He is popularly known as the son of Shiva, the Destroyer and Renewer, one of the three major cosmic gods of Hinduism, and his consort, Parvati. Though his elephant head may have derived from regional worship, the most popular account is that Ganesha was crafted by Parvati while Shiva was away and when Shiva returned to find a strange boy guarding the door to his wife's bath he became enraged cutting off the boy's head. Once Parvati revealed the truth, Shiva rescued Ganesha with the head of the first creature he encountered, an elephant.

Here, Ganesha mimics Shiva's dance, swaying his chubby body on one leg while holding in each of his four hands: an axe, a radish, a lotus, and a bowl of sweets. He wears two intertwined snakes, his sacred thread, above the waistline of his transparent skirt. While the axe signals Ganesha's warrior strength, the lotus signifies divinity and purity. His weakness for sweets is apparent in the bowl of sweets he holds, and one such sweet cake, modaka, even dangles off the end of his trunk. Below the axe is a radish, his favorite food. His human-like follies, fondness for sweets and food, adorable physique, and the power to bring goodness, make him one of the most popular deities worshipped by all faiths in India. ■



The Grounding and Visionary Role of Vincent van Gogh's Family

By Ricki Morse

Part of an ongoing series for the Van Gogh exhibit, Fall 2022



Ricki Morse

To gain a sense of Vincent Van Gogh's early years, recall the sunless moors of the Hague School painters, the subject of last March's article in *La Muse*. Vincent remembers his

childhood as austere and cold, a reflection perhaps of his parents' staunch respectability and devotion to duty. And while his father's ministry to a small

Dutch Reformed congregation in the largely Roman Catholic Brabant region afforded the family a house, carriage and other amenities, the rector's stipend was small. Vincent, born in 1853, was the oldest of six, with three sisters and two brothers. He was named for his grandfather (1789-1874), a widely respected intellectual and minister from The Hague.

Vincent was a sometimes indifferent student, preferring to wander alone in the fields near his home, fascinated with animals, plants, flowers and insects. A sensitive child, he dressed differently, adopted his own eating habits and was viewed as odd. When he was sent away at 11 to a boarding



Barn and Farm, 1864. Earliest known painting by 11-year-old Vincent VG



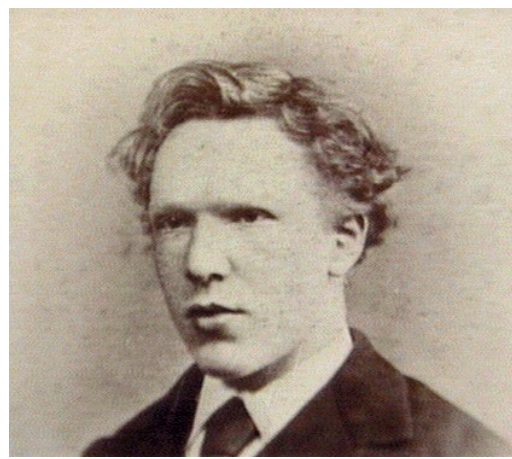
Pollard Willow, 1883. Watercolor, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

school in a nearby town, he felt further alienated and begged to come home. He entered the village middle school, was drawn to the study of languages and excelled in English, German and French and became a dedicated reader in a wide range of subjects. However, due to the cost of schooling for a ministerial family, he dropped out at 15 and spent much of his time with his Uncle Cent who was an art dealer with Goupil & Co. His father encour-

aged the relationship with his wealthier brother, and Uncle Cent trained Vincent in his agency which led the next year to Vincent's placement as a clerk with Goupil & Co in The Hague.



Top. L-R: Theodorus van Gogh (1822-1885), nicknamed Dorus, the artist's father, "the handsome reverend." Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (1819-1907), 1888, oil on canvas, VGM Amsterdam. Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Vincent van Gogh*, 1881 (the artist's grandfather), pencil, wash, ink on paper. VGM, Amsterdam. **Below, L-R:** Uncle Cent van Gogh (1820-1888), elder brother to Vincent's father, intro-



duced Dorus to his wife's sister, whom Dorus married, thus the families were very close knit. (Middle) Theo van Gogh, (1855–1891). Parisian art dealer; brother, confidant and financial supporter of his older brother, Vincent. R: Vincent at age 19.

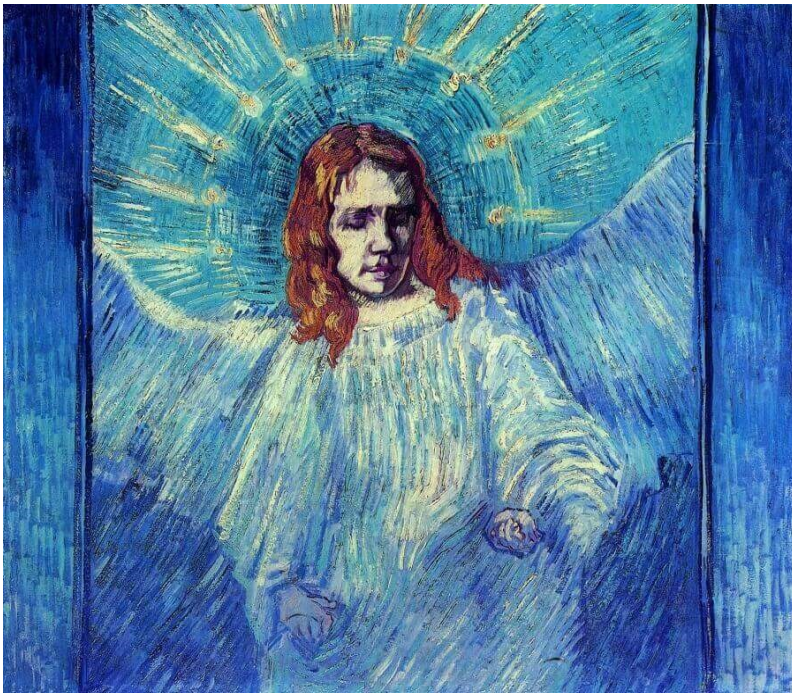
The Goupil & Co. Years, 1868–1876, The Hague, London, Paris

Thus Vincent was seen by his parents as now launched on a respectable and worthwhile career, confirmed when he was 19 by his placement in Goupil's London office. His younger brother Theo, also under Uncle Cent's tutelage, had become a clerk with Goupil in Paris, and the lifelong correspondence between the brothers began. Vincent was successful at the firm, fascinated with London



and English culture, especially their museums and literary tradition—Shakespeare, Keats and Dickens. But he wrote to Theo of his loneliness and homesick sadness, which soon took on another passion, his love for his landlord's daughter. She was already secretly committed to another man and rejected his advances as well as his

Vincent van Gogh, *Vicarage and church at Etten*, 1876, pencil on paper. VGM, Amsterdam

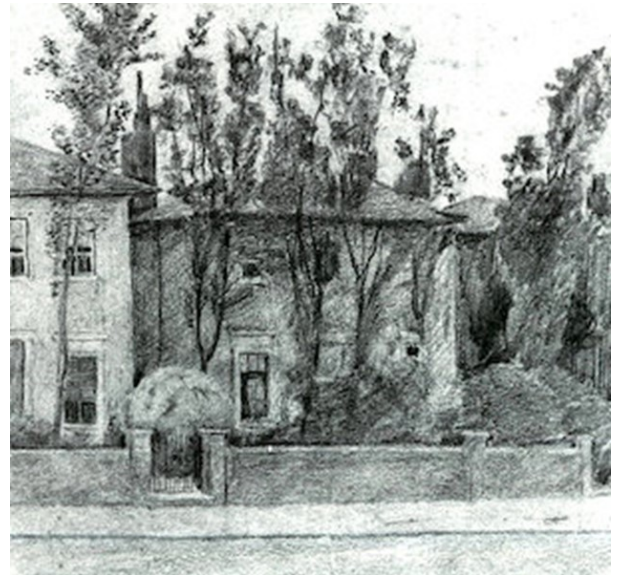


Vincent van Gogh, *Head of an Angel, After Rembrandt*, 1889, based on a Rembrandt lithograph

proposal of marriage. In 1875 Uncle Cent came to his rescue and arranged Vincent's transfer to the Paris branch of Goupil. But something had shifted in Vincent. He was disillusioned with the art world, the merchandizing of works of art, the commercialization of the artist. Above all he had lost his sense of meaningful work, of having a worthwhile place in the world, and his thoughts turned increasingly to spirituality, which had always had an important place in his life. In 1876 he was released from Goupil having often left work to visit his family in the Netherlands, neglecting his appearance and his duties. Vincent returned to his family's new home in Etten in search of a calling in the ministry.

A Religious Calling 1876-1880, London, Belgium

Vincent's long held spirituality was coming to the fore, his identification with simple people, his desire to be of use to others. Against his father's advice he, took an unpaid position as an instructor at a church school in Kent, England, and then a paid position in another school in Islesworth, which also afforded him an opportunity to preach. His letters to Theo included sketches of the countryside, his earliest known works, and from this time forward we see



Vincent van Gogh, *Houses at Islesworth*, 1876, pencil on paper.



Vincent van Gogh, *Coal Mine In the Borinage*, 1879, watercolor and pencil on paper, VGM Amsterdam

the increasing prominence of sketches in the correspondence. Though he devoted the next four years to an intense devotion to ministry, the sketches became a prominent part of his communication with Theo. We can see his visual acuity and skill emerging, as he became more deeply involved in the



Vincent van Gogh, *Bearers of the Burden*, 1881, pencil, ink, paper, from an earlier drawing, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands

lives of his flock.

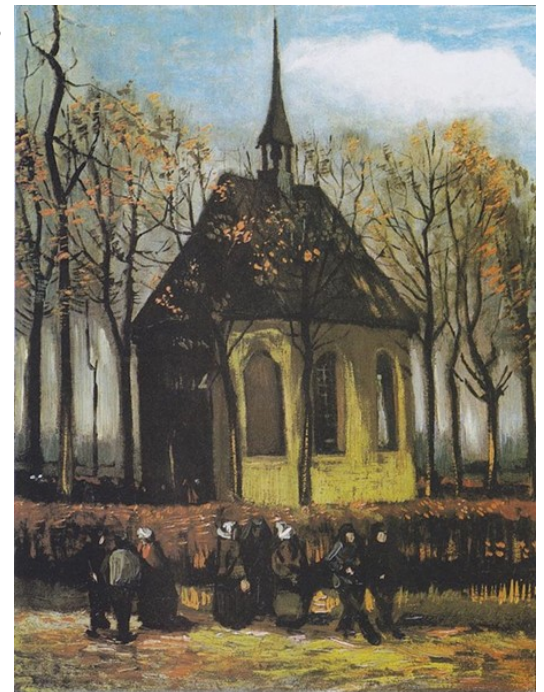
His family, increasingly concerned about the intensity of Vincent's religious fervor, persuaded him to return home during a Christmas visit. He longed to pursue ministerial studies and in 1876 went to live with an uncle in Amsterdam who was a theologian. His father hired a tutor to assist in the Greek, Latin and mathematics courses, but Vincent saw no relevance in ancient languages and chose a shorter course which would allow him to become an evangelical preacher.

However, Vincent was motivated by a deep, long-held value system, a concern for the downtrodden, a deep respect for hard working

laborers, and soon abandoned his studies and volunteered as a lay preacher in the impoverished Borinage district in southern Belgium.

Within a few months of living among the coal miners, Vincent had given away his lodging to a homeless man and was sleeping on a straw pallet, ministering to the overwhelming needs of the miners. His employers found his lifestyle insufficiently dignified, and he lost his contract, living on Theo's generosity. After an explosion at the mine he tore up his clothes to make bandages for the injured. Beginning to doubt his capacity to minister effectively, he more often turned to drawing as a respite. Theo, concerned for his health, came to visit in 1879, was appalled by his brother's living conditions, his hygiene, and angered Vincent in a confrontation, which precipitated a searing self-assessment during which Vincent terminated his correspondence with his brother, the only time this occurred in the rest of their lives. For ten months Vincent found himself turning completely toward art as his life's direction, and when he did write to Theo it was with a firm resolve which remained fixed for the rest of his life.

"Wait, perhaps someday you will see that I too am an artist," he wrote to Theo in his last letter from the Borinage, on September 24, 1880. "I don't know what I can do, but I hope I shall be able to make some drawings with something human in them ... The path is narrow, the door is narrow, and there are few who find it."



Vincent van Gogh, *Congregation Leaving the Dutch Reformed Church in Neunen*, 1884-85, His father's church revised to commemorate his father's funeral ceremony

Jo van Gogh-Bonger: The Phoenix Who Rose

Vincent van Gogh may have seemed cursed by the fates, but he was certainly blessed by angels in Theo's choice of a wife. Johanna Bonger was a 22-year-old English teacher in Amsterdam when Theo first met her in 1885. Smitten, he proposed on their second meeting, and she declined as she was seeing someone else. But Theo persisted and wrote to Vincent of their engagement in 1888. Though reared in a conservative, very proper family, Jo, as she preferred to be called, longed for a larger life to satisfy her intellectual curiosity and her love of the arts, as well as her growing political liberalism.

As Theo's wife, she was plunged into the heart of belle époque Paris, her husband a champion of the new artists providing shows and gallery space not afforded them by the Académie des Beaux-Arts. She was deeply in love—with Theo, with Paris, with the changes she was witnessing in *avant garde* art. Their apartment was full of Vincent's canvases—hanging, still packaged, stacked in closets—and Theo shared Vincent's letters, his quest for a new personal expression on the canvas.

Nine months later the new Vincent was born, actualizing their dream. Vincent came to meet the heir and namesake in May 1890 on his way from Saint-Remy to Auvers sur Oise, north of Paris, where he was to settle under the care of Dr. Paul Gachet. Jo recorded in her journal, "Before me was a sturdy, broad-shouldered



Jo and little Vincent in 1891, the year of her husband's death.

man with a healthy color, a cheerful look in his eyes and something very resolute in his appearance. He looks much stronger than Theo, was my first thought." She watched the brothers standing over the baby's cradle as tears came to their eyes.

Just two months later Theo rushed to his brother's bedside, hospitalized with a gunshot wound and was with him when he died. Their sisters gave Theo rights to all Vincent's art work—400 paintings and several hundred drawings—in recognition of his support of Vincent through the years. And just six months later, in early 1891, Theo died of a brain disease after months of illness. "It's all nothing but a dream!" Jo wrote in her journal. "What lies behind me—my short, blissful marital happiness—that, too, has been a dream! For a year and a half I was the happiest woman on Earth." And she adds, "As well as the child, he has left me another task—Vincent's work—getting it seen and appreciated as much as possible."

An old friend suggested she move back to the Netherlands and open a boarding house in order to support her son and to enjoy the comfort of her homeland. She chose a leafy Dutch village, Bussum, with a cultural scene, at a nice distance from her parent, to insure her independence.

As she was leaving Paris, Émile Bernard, an artist and friend of Vincent, advised her to leave Vincent's paintings in Paris with him to sell, close to the art market. Vincent had never been well enough known to warrant a one-man show. She made at this point the first of several acute judgements. She declined his offer and had already launched a study of art history and the art market. She began reading the trove of letters



Johanna van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1825) Editor of the letters of the Van Gogh brothers, published in 1914, collector and curator of the family Vincent van Gogh collection.

from Vincent to Theo, learning what Vincent intended in the paintings, and finding comfort and kinship in her loneliness.

Dressed in her mourning clothes she began settling into her new house, renting rooms, sorting her silver and china and hanging Vincent's paintings. *The Potato Eaters* went over the fireplace in the living room, *Almond Blossoms* and two other paintings of flowering tree branches adorned her bedroom. Every wall was covered with paintings. Continuing her study of Vincent's letters, she found a comradely identification with his love for simple, hard-working people and an understanding of his sense of isolation among his peers—an experience she faced constantly as a woman approaching dealers. She came to see the letters as a necessary part of the paintings, the personality of the artist—integral to the work, which we now see as the basis of expressionism. She approached two art historians in Amsterdam, persuading them to read selected letters related to paintings she showed them. She was persistent, passionate, charming. She convinced them both.

The first exhibition was held in Amsterdam in 1892. The art historian, Hans Luijten wrote of Jo, "She identifies an important gallery in Amsterdam and she goes there: a 30-year-old woman with a little boy at her side and a painting under her arm. She writes to people across Europe." When Jo was 33 the Parisian dealer Ambrose Vuillard included 30 of Vincent's paintings in his gallery show. Jo was gaining the confidence and the craftiness of a pro. When she sent works to a gallery she included works



Vincent van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas, MoMA,

from what she considered "the family pictures," works that were never to be sold, adding quality to the show and adding to Van Gogh's reputation. Remembering Theo's concern about *A Starry Night* as perhaps delusional, she sold it, but upon further reflection, she bought it back to join the family pictures, which were years later, through the generosity of her son and grandsons, to become the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. We now recognize Jo as the original collector and curator of the ultimate Van Gogh exhibition.

Nellie Hermann, "Idle Bird," *The Paris Review*, June 2015.

Russell Shorto, "The Woman Who Made van Gogh," *New York Times Magazine*, April 14, 2021

Richard Kendall, *Van Gogh's Van Goghs, The Masterpieces from the Van Gogh Museum. Amsterdam*, 1998. Harry N. Abrams, Inc.

H. Anna Suh, editor, *Van Gogh's Letters, The Mind of the Artist in Paintings, Drawings and Words, 1875-1890*, 2006, Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers

Frank Gehry on LUMA Arles:
'I kept thinking about what the light was like for Van Gogh'
From The Art Newsletter, Submitted by Ricki Morse



The Art Newspaper: The Tower at LUMA Arles alludes to both the built and natural environments around Arles. Can you explain this synthesis in the building?

Frank Gehry: I responded sculpturally to the city. There are two important Roman structures that are

close to LUMA Arles. It made sense to reinforce that aesthetic to create the entrance and foyer for the building as a drum. It was intuitive, responding sculpturally to what I saw in Arles, and then relating to it in some way. Arles is surrounded by the Alpilles [mountain range] and that creates a strong image. When we talked with Maja Hoffmann [the founder and president of the LUMA Foundation] about capturing the light, it led to a naturalistic building up of the façade. It required something more related to the environment and the city of Arles. Van Gogh famously said: "Those who don't believe in the sun down here are truly blasphemous." Not just the light; specifically, the sun was a talisman for him.

Was this a factor in your designs?

I think that my own art history and sense of Van Gogh's presence in Arles was always in the back of my mind. I always kept thinking about what the light was like for him when he painted there. With the more naturalistic façade, we were able to make something that was not a single image but, rather, something that captured multiple images at different times of the day. I was excited by that, and I think we were successful. It changes all day and captures the light, and shows these different instances very proudly.

You've also said Van Gogh's *Starry Night* was another influence. In what way?

Starry Night (1889) was painted in Arles and is an incredible painting we all love. I was curious what the light was like when he was painting and think that it must still be there today. The building in the evening does come close to capturing the colours of that painting.

To read more, click on the link.

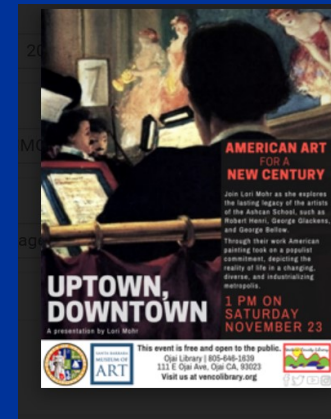
SBMA DOCENT COUNCIL COMMUNITY SPEAKERS PROGRAM

Once upon a time....the Docent Council had a Senior Outreach Program, which “aged out” due to antiquated slide technology. The twenty-first century iteration is CSP. In 2014 –2015 Kathryn Padgett and Shirley Waxman revived and expanded the program to include all populations. If you like the idea of outreach, this Docent team is for you. We go beyond the Museum walls to a variety of interested organizations that have chosen from our brochure of docent-created talks. We speak at libraries, senior centers, private organizations such as the Yacht Club, VISTAS, and service clubs. Create your 45-minute PowerPoint talk and you’re ready to go!

communityspeakerssbma@gmail.com



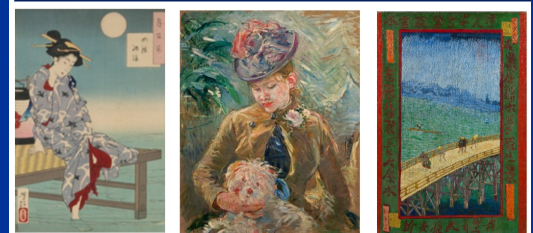
Speaker Lori Mohr
Ventura County
Museum of Art



CSP brochure listing

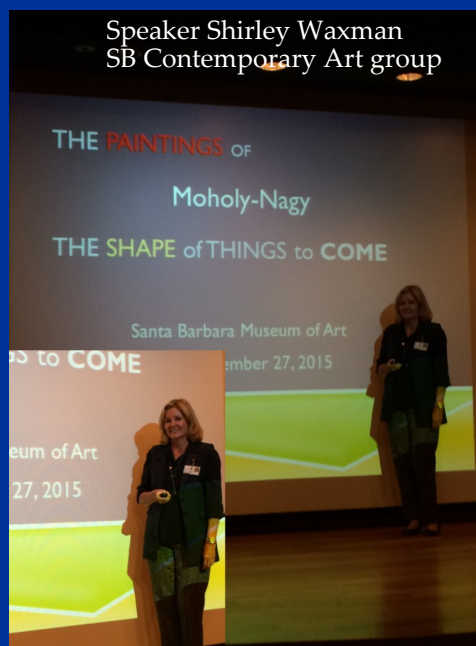


East Meets West:
Japanese Inspired Monet to Van Gogh



When Japanese woodblock prints arrived in Europe in the mid 1800’s they had a profound influence on avant-garde artists of the nineteenth century Impressionists and Post-Impressionist artists such as Monet, Mary Cassatt, Degas, Pierre Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Vincent Van Gogh created art that in composition, color, and imagery, borrowed directly from the Japanese. Japanese art had such a tremendous impact on French art that the French invented a word to describe the enthusiasm for the Japanese aesthetic and style, called *Japonisme*. Explore the development of Japanese woodblock prints and the artists who were inspired by the *craze* for all things Japanese

Docent Speaker: Shirley Waxman



Speaker Shirley Waxman
SB Contemporary Art group

CHASING DOWN A DREAM

It is with a heavy heart that I announce the departure of our beloved Tracy Miller from the Docent Council. After years of hard work growing their *RipTide* business and envisioning life on the northern California coast, she and Brad have achieved their goal. *RipTide* has outgrown its Santa Barbara warehouse, the home they've lived in for 37 years sold in a snap, and suddenly the dream has been made real. Tracey's good fortune is our loss. For years she amazed us all with her ability to build the company while nurturing her commitment to the Docent Council with ever-popular *Highlights* tours, as well those she did as part of special exhibition teams. Tracey's palpable enthusiasm and teamwork have made her a joy to work with. Next June she would have received her 15 Year pin along with me and Ann Hammond, the "Fab 5" Class of 2006 - 2007.

Tracey, we will miss your effervescent smile, and the way you light up every room with that vivacious laugh. Your big heart has warmed us, as it will those who inhabit your new world. Speaking for everyone who will miss you, we wish you all good things in this next chapter of your life.

LM



WHAT DO YOU WEAR TO A MUSEUM?

Submitted by Shirley Waxman

CAPTION: Photographer Stefan Draschan spent days waiting for museum visitors to match the artworks they observe, and it was worth it. While most of us visit art museums to see art (duh, right?), others, like France-based photographer Stefan Draschan, are there to create their own pieces. And Stefan does it by camping in galleries for days, waiting for visitors who perfectly match the artworks they observe. (samples from mymodernmet.com)

