Institute's Art Library is Bountiful

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART'S RESEARCH AND REFERENCE ART LIBRARY

By John Parker

Is art a reflection of life, an indicator of what we are, what we are becoming, what we have been? Is it possible to think of the past, to read of it, and not postulate a collection of images of the physical aspects of the past? No portrait of Columbus from life survives, nor does a picture of his ships. Yet portraits and pictures abound, presumably because we need them. The idea of Christopher Columbus and a ship is not enough.

So we reach back through the visual and decorative arts to find images and realities to go with the words of history, literature, philosophy, and science. In this search we in Minnesota have near at hand the Research and Reference Art Library at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The close relationship between books and the visual arts was recognized at the founding of the Institute in 1883, when a library was incorporated in the initial concept. Indeed, when the Minneapolis Public Library was opened in 1889 it was home to both the Institute and its library, as well as to the Institute's Art School.

From these beginnings the Institute's Art Library has grown into a collection of more than 45,000 volumes, serving a broad clientele of artists, scholars, collectors, dealers, and museum visitors. In general, the library reflects the museum's holdings: books about the wide range of a world history of art. Decorative arts are a strong field, including pottery, silver, furniture, tapestry and other household items, as well as architecture. Prints, drawings, and photography are well represented, as well as paintings, particularly those of nineteenth-century France.

The types of research resources available in the library include monographs about artists and genres of art. Exhibit catalogues are a major resource for what has been shown at the Institute and elsewhere. There are also catalogues covering permanent collections at both the Institute and other museums. In the permanent Object Collection of some 80,000 pieces, the catalogue of object files focuses on some 200 items. For the researcher seeking to follow the movement of art objects in recent years, the library holds a strong collection of catalogues from the leading auction houses going back to the 1960s. The periodical collection is equally rich in titles. The reference collection provides sources for biographies of artists, as well as information on when and where their works have been exhibited.

The Research and Reference Art Library, like others, is moving toward electronic formats and retrieval systems. The catalogue is on line; the card catalogue is still available, but probably not for long. Dial access is coming. Works like the Art Index, the Bibliography of the History of Art abstracts, biographical dictionaries, and auction records are, or soon will be, available by computer.

The library hours are 12:00 to 5:00 on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and from 12:00 to 8:00 on Thursday, Labor Day to Memorial Day. Otherwise, the library is open from 12:00 to 5:00 Tuesday through Friday.

Peterson is the Librarian, Michael Boe the Assistant Librarian. The library, served by a number of volunteers and a supportive Library Council, is frequently host to exhibits, openings, and book sales. Here is a good base for the independent scholar: a quiet, congenial atmosphere, conducive to serious work.

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NEW IDEAS AND PARTNERSHIPS, OLD RESPONSIBILITIES

By Dave Juncker

As David Wiggins began the annual meeting lecture at the Minnesota History Center offices in St. Anthony Main, new interested listeners arrived, one after another, until the enthusiastic crowd threatened to push Dave right out the front door. Those of us anticipating a fairly standard historical/park board “Us vs. Them” type of presentation were immediately surprised. Dave began with a brief overview of the historical significance of the St. Anthony Falls region from two perspectives: as an important focal point for early industrial development for nineteenth century settlers; and the native sensibility, including the region’s spiritual significance. Next came a description of the area’s decay, as industry left the riverbanks, and the struggle to preserve, renew, and revitalize this magnificent falls and riverfront area.

My attention was captured by the processes and evolving goals that have emerged due, in no small part, to Dave’s interest and focus on preserving the earlier “natural” grandeur within a newly vibrant, urban setting.

The St. Anthony Heritage Board has been formed, with a broad mix of historical, community and business representatives. Progress has included: the recently heralded St. Anthony Falls Heritage Trail; the reopening of the Stone Arch Bridge to foot, bike, and in-line skate traffic; the guided and self-guided walking tours; and River City Trolleys (tying the river front with inland historical sites and buildings). Dave noted on-going plans for a Central Riverfront Park, St. Anthony Main, Riverplace, Nicollet Island, Whitney Crown, and the Godfrey House. He drew attention to the projects initiated in 1996, including the watershed partnership, the Mill Ruins Park “Dig,” Washburn-Crosby building stabilization, Milwaukee Railroad property/soil reclamation, and the Hennepin Island flora and fauna inventory.

Dave then listed twelve current projects, many extending the work of already mentioned prior efforts: Mill Ruins Park ideas, Washburn-Crosby and Mill District exhibits, an oral history project, extended trolley routes, and several others. It’s a pretty full plate!

Particularly interesting to me, as Dave began to close his presentation, was his obvious attention to illuminating the processes of public history. These include building consensus within the varied communities, recovering lost (yet indicated) meanings associated with the area, and attempting to obtain oral histories. This broadly based group of Minnesotans seems dedicated to recovering the best aspects of former times for inclusion in our waterfront’s future: showing the good, the bad, and the questionable, and transforming a potentially striking small region into a new kind of complex “Park.”

The exciting part of the process and projects underway is the realization that we can have a regional park that maintains the traditional aspects of historical preservation, display, education, etc., and yet co-exists with dynamic and changing business and residential communities within its boundaries.

A final note: There is an indication that the earliest natives of this region used the rapidly receding falls (from the pre-Fort Snelling area to the present St. Anthony area) as a historical time line, dating tribal and regional events. We have the opportunity, as a community, to uncover this possible truth and to extend the concept to use human-made, as well as geological, points of reference to memorialize our experience as we move into the next century.
Coen Studies Impressionism in Minnesota
A SEASONED SCHOLAR'S VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF REGIONAL ART

By Helen Twombly Watkins

Lunch with Rena Neumann Coen, author of a new book, Minnesota Impressionists (Afton Historical Society Press, Afton, Minnesota, 1996), led to an interesting discussion on the history of regional art in our state. When Dr. Coen began research for her book, defining who constituted a Minnesota artist was more problematic than defining Impressionism. Although disdained during the '40s, '50s, and '60s in this country, as a purely French import, Impressionism has now been widely accepted as an important period in the history of American art. Once she defined the subjects of her study as artists who had spent a “significant portion” of their lives in Minnesota, Dr. Coen was able to focus on personal characteristics that most attracted her interest.

Although Claude Monet was the primary source of inspiration for the Minnesota Impressionists, James Abbott McNeill Whistler also exerted a strong influence on many of the individual painters, particularly in the romanticizing of the urban scene during the second decade of the twentieth century. A prime example is Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue [ca. 1910, by Robert Koehler (1850-1917)] pictured at right. It hangs in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Other examples re-printed and discussed in the book are St. Paul by Night, undated, by Arthur R. Allie (1872-1953) at the Minnesota Historical Society, The Channel to the Mills, 1913, by Edwin M. Dawes (1872-1945) at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and Frozen Mississippi, 1909-1912, by Philip Littke (1857-1942) and Downtown, ca. 1915, by Nathaniel Foutse-Dart (1886-1965) at the Minnesota Historical Society.

As Dr. Coen says in her Introduction, “Since the Impressionists were chiefly concerned with the appearance of things without... idealization... , they defined their casual, seemingly accidental subjects in temporary and instantaneous terms. This rapid approach to Impressionist pictorialization had the further effect of suggesting the heightened tempo of late-nineteenth-century life, like the fragmentary and fleeting view of the world that one gets from a bus, a train, or any other rapidly moving conveyance.” The observation is interesting in light of the fact that the American Impressionists were an integral part of the larger nineteenth-century landscape tradition which saw America as “the location of a new Eden where man could live a truly virtuous life in simple harmony with nature.”

Another result of Dr. Coen’s research which fascinates her is the “challenging number of women artists” in the group, as well as their sometimes socially shock-

ing spirit of innovation. She gives as one example Elisabeth Augusta Chant (1865-
1947), who may be “the most mysterious and enigmatic personality in the history of Minnesota art.” Joining up with Margarethe Heisser to share a studio which they sublet from Alexis Jean Fournier (born in St. Paul, but referred to as “the last American Barbizon”), they transferred their quarters into a central meeting place for the Minneapolis Arts and Crafts Society. “Based on William Morris’ example in England,... The American Arts and Crafts movement, although it quickly gained momentum and an influential following, was still regarded with some suspicion by outsiders who thought it harbored eccentrics rowing against the tide of industrialization.”

Another example is Ada Augusta Wolfe (1878-1945), whose Old Mill at Champlin, Minnesota, November 1933, hangs in the Minnesota Historical Society. “Throughout her life she was an independent spirit, who... hated what she saw as a form of intellectual dishonesty in art - sentimentalism... Her goal was to make her work, at all times, broad and simple,... Art, she maintained, ‘above everything else, needs absolute freedom for its growth. If you want to be a painter, then first be a rebel against anything which has a tendency to enslave you’.”

Dr. Coen sees the Minnesota Impressionists as representing an “optimistic time” in our history. Part of this “optimism” is the direct effect of the painter’s technique which used color primarily to reflect the changing nuances created by...

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Impressionism

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light. Light was their subject, determining the ways in which they saw and portrayed the physical world around them. We still have "impressionists" painting today, but Dr. Coen finds their work to be "more derivative/lacking the same sense of revelation," which the earlier generation exhibited.

The author of Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota 1820-1914 (the first real study of regional art in Minnesota); In the Mainstream: The Art of Alexis Jean Fournier (1865-1948); The Paynes, Edgar and Elsie: American Artists; and a 1996 book on Mary Henderson Eastman, as well as numerous articles on the "iconography of the West," Dr. Coen is continuing to pursue her interest in "regional issues." One example she wishes to explore further is the analogy, particularly in the humor contained in their imagery, between the writings of Mark Twain and the river paintings of George Caleb Bingham. Dr. Coen hopes her book, although ostensibly about Minnesota Impressionists, will stimulate more interest in regional art, particularly as an antidote to the prejudice against regionalism prevalent in the 1960s. She is clearly a crusader against academic "snobism" in art criticism, and endorses placing greater value on craft work, especially that of women, as having more than a purely "utilitarian" function in our culture.

Rena Neumann Coen received her A.B. from Barnard College, her M.A. from Yale University, and her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. She has taught since 1969 at St. Cloud State University, where she is now Professor Emerita of art history. Dr. Coen's foremost message to the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum is: reach out to more retired researchers like herself. Retirement does not mean the end of research, and "works-in-progress" programs would be very valuable to those with actively engaged minds, like herself, who consider themselves to be a long way from the end of writing and publishing.
MISF Board Notes

The board spent the first months of the year talking about organizational needs. Noting that the needs of MISF stay fairly stable, even if the arrangement of people who fill them changes, President David Juncker opened the January meeting with a list of responsibilities which he asked board members to fill. Helen Watkins, Vice President, will edit the newsletter. John Bessler will coordinate public programs. Curt Hillstrom will continue to manage the membership data base and the study groups. David Juncker and Lucy Brusie, Secretary-Treasurer, will supervise the fiscal agency account. Brian Mulhern continues as Archivist. The board is still looking for members to take responsibility for publicity, mailing, and public functions (social events).

Fiscal agency is a new venture for MISF this past year. We are currently providing 501(c)(3) administration for two grant recipients: Gloria Morris-Grothe and Jon Holtzman. Board members have established administrative policies as follows:

1. Applications in which MISF will be the fiscal agent should be reviewed by a MISF committee before the application is submitted.
2. A person for whom we agree to administer a grant must be an MISF member in good standing.
3. MISF will submit IRS 1099 forms for anyone to whom we pay more than $600 in one year.
4. MISF will retain 10% of grant funds for administrative fees.
5. Grant recipients who use our fiscal agency will be expected to produce a public program for MISF.
6. Until we reach a stage where we can employ a fiscal administrator, MISF can administer no more than two such accounts a year.

On a grammatical note, the board voted at the January meeting to keep the apostrophe in Scholars' in the name of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum.

Who's New on the MISF Board?

Helen Watkins moved to Minnesota in 1963, intent on completing her dissertation for a Ph.D. in English from Yale while her husband pursued his Ph.D. in American Studies at the U. of M. Although she never quite completed her Ph.D., Helen is currently transforming her dissertation into a book (on Jonathan Swift, John Locke, and the historical permutations of "free speech"). She has taught English literature at Augsburg College, and Women's Studies, both credit and non-credit, at the U. of M. For ten years she worked with children and parents (particularly low-income families) in Community Ed. Programs, community organizing, proposal review/proposal writing, and advocacy/lobbying for child care at the municipal, county and state levels. Helen was the Director of the Women's Resource Center at Normandale Community College for three years. In 1994 she received her J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law.

Roger Hammer's professional career has included public relations, editing and publishing, professional tennis instruction, umpiring, and dog breeding. Other "jobs" include those of "mail carrier, musician, photographer, bank teller, florist, garbage collector, soldier, and father/husband," as well as "poet." Truly a Renaissance man! Trained in Theater Arts in California and at the Performing Arts Studio in Minneapolis, Roger has been a Director in TV production, a reporter for both TV and radio, and an actor: performing at The Laughing Cup, the Hennepin Center for the Arts, and the Southern Theater in Minneapolis. Currently he is embarking on an even newer career: publishing a series of children's books called Different Books. These were originally targeted at children with disabilities, but now include "differences" of all kinds. Welcome to Roger, whose openness to new ideas will surely inspire the actions of the MISF Board.

Membership Application

to join the
Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum

Membership benefits include borrowing privileges at the University of Minnesota libraries, if so desired.

Regular
- $10.00 - $39.00 sliding scale (under/ unemployed)
- $40.00 (regularly employed)

Household
- $15.00 - $49.00 sliding scale (under/ unemployed)
- $50.00 (regularly employed)

Sustaining
- $75.00 or more

Donor
- $100.00 or more

Benefactor
- $150.00 or more

All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by law.

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City ____________________________
State _______ Zip
TelephoneNumber (home) ____________________________
(Work) ____________________________

Clip this and mail it to:
Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum
P.O. Box 80235
Minneapolis, MN 55408-8235
(612) 870-1859

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Immortality

By Lucy Smith

Very early in life we learn about our limits, first by celebrating every year our beginning (the day of our birth), then by learning about our end through observing the deaths of those preceding us (our grandparents for example). When our parents introduce us into their religion, we learn about the universal longing for immortality, for lasting beyond our limits. This longing antedates contemporary religions. When archeologists dig out of the earth statues of long-forgotten rulers inscribed in extinct languages, the main message that they pass to us is: “I existed and I was special.”

Ancient statues and inscriptions survive as witnesses to their times because they were made of stone or were written on stone or on fired clay. Those everlasting materials assured some form of survival to the ancients. But since it is not easy to write in stone (one can’t write a book in stone), we can learn only a few facts of the lives thus memorialized. Later, other materials were used, like papyrus, parchment, and paper, which were more suitable for a longer work but could not survive as long as stone. Only recopying by hand saved some of them.

The discovery of print gave us another powerful illusion of immortality. All that was needed to keep special people in the memory of posterity was the reprinting of books containing their thoughts, their poems, their political speeches or the dramas representing conflicts of their times.

Today, many centuries later, we are once more changing our materials and therefore affecting our prospects for immortality. I am writing this on my Macintosh Classic that is only five years old. But already the relentless pressure of marching progress is “stepping on me” in the form of disapproving catalogues sneering every month at my ignorance of the latest software. The “Big Brother” who sends me these catalogues, which I never ordered, counts on his customers being people who can stand only thirty-second messages. Such people were raised on ever-changing toys imposed on them by obliging TV sets. They learned to play with these toys only as long as their TV and their friends deemed them fashionable. Now, they have become pliable in the hands of manufacturers, like the clay of the ancients, obediently acquiring perpetually changing software. (Try to imagine future archeologists digging for discs and chips to learn from them about the past.)

In the past it took a long time for a new idea to be conceived, disseminated and accepted. Even then, the new idea was usually incorporated into the existing pattern of civilization or culture without disturbing its regular flow. Change occurred very slowly, when the quantity and quality of new ideas started to impede the old ones and to change the old pattern of thinking.

In the Middle Ages, immortality could be acquired in only one way: after death as an eternal life in Heaven, provided people were good during their life on earth. But the Renaissance brought another form of immortality: a person could become immortal on earth, in spite of the death of his body, if his art was admired. From then on, artistic creations were no longer dedicated to the honor of God but designed to honor the artist. In the eighteenth century, artists and writers began to be honored for the power of their ideas, although they were also persecuted for those ideas by those who held a different kind of power. New ideas could be dangerous not only to the dogmas of the church but also to the religious and political status of individuals. In spite of the persecution of the thinkers, their ideas were stronger than the persecutors and caused changes in the world.

Can anyone be immortal in our time for thinking or writing? Our attitude toward artists, writers and thinkers has changed, and degenerated into placing them on silly talk shows. Instead of dwelling in a Pantheon forever, our artists are displayed for a few minutes to engage in banal conversation. What is our attitude toward immortality? How long can “immortality” last under present circumstances? It seems that the immortality of time, which included past and future, has been replaced by the immortality of space: talking to large audiences of a million viewers at one moment in the present. Goodbye to past and future.

Can a writer today still influence the way people think, when there are so many magazines representing points of view similar to those of their readers? Writers are useful to magazines for expressing ideas that readers already have, not for having the power to change those ideas. Writers and readers have become mirrors reflecting each other.

Mirrors were always important as a bridge between mortal and immortal existence. The mirrors were covered in the house of a deceased person to prevent him from a possible confusion between the two worlds. But seeing one’s reflection in a mirror is for the living only a communication with oneself. At the U. of M. Film Society I always know the film by its audience; each kind of film has its own individual constituency, determined by nationality, sexual orientation, etc. Can we communicate with others when we mostly look at ourselves?

Immortality was once payment for the attainment of a specific value. A conquest of another group gave one the right to a stone statue. Following religious ethics gave one a place in Heaven. A villain could gain a place in memory through particularly heinous acts. Artists could be remembered for their art. But to affect the thinking of a great number of people one had to know how to communicate a long-lasting truth. Can we still communicate immortal truth to people including those who are not our mirror image? And what is immortal truth for our time?
MISF Study Groups

SCIENCE & HUMANITIES

The Science & Humanities study group meets approximately every three weeks (date chosen in advance by consensus) at 7:30 pm at the home of coordinator Ginny Hansen (W: 377-5960; H: 374-5505), 2408 Girard Avenue South, Minneapolis.

The general theme is the nature of creativity in both science and the arts: what psychological, mental, and physical processes are involved. The group is currently reading and discussing Arthur Miller's The Insights of Genius (1996). Newcomers are welcome, even if they have not done the reading. Call Ginny for the next meeting date.

PHILOSOPHY

The Philosophy group meets every third (sometimes fourth) Monday at 7:00 pm at the Chicago Deli, 48th and Chicago in Minneapolis.

Currently the group is in the middle of Peter Singer’s edited compendium Ethics (available in paperback), but will take a detour at its March 24 meeting to experiment with a topic-centered, rather than a book-centered approach. The topic on March 24th is What is Ultimate Good? (using participants’ own knowledge and experience as well as books they’ve read, including Singer, section II, part A). New members are most welcome to join in the discussion.

For more information call coordinator Curt Hillstrom at 823-5132.

RELIGION AND CULTURE

This group is also starting a new experiment by merging, at least temporarily, with the newly created Family Values group. The purpose is to look at family values from many perspectives: how they are interpreted differently by different people, how those differences affect us all, and where they might lead us.

Meetings will be (probably) on the second Tuesday of the month, at the home of coordinator Lucy Smith: 1747 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul (698-9671). Call for more information; meetings will be scheduled from March 11th on, and will initially take the form of open discussion.

Member News & Notes

Justine Smith has accepted a new position in Michigan. Jill Waterhouse just completed a gala event at the Landmark Center, raising funds for the arts.

Contributions to this column are welcome at any time, particularly letters to the editor in response to articles previously published.

Feel free to send us press releases about your work, or to write up a paragraph or two on your own.
MISF CALENDAR FOR 1997

APRIL
25th  Deadline for the spring edition of the newsletter

MAY
17th  Forum: Work-in-progress by Jon Holtzman: *Nuer Journeys* (see p. 4 for details)

JUNE
14th  Forum: Presentation by Bill Everts, author of *Stockwell of Minneapolis* (see p. 4 for details)

SEPTEMBER
TBA  Forum: panel presentation on public education

OCTOBER
1st   Deadline for the autumn edition of the newsletter

DECEMBER
TBA  Forum/Annual Meeting

MINNESOTA INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS' FORUM
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Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408-8235

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