FRIENDS OF THE FRANCES LEHMAN LOEB ART CENTER

ART AT VASSAR

FALL 2004

Evidence Revisited

October 2 - December 19, 2004
Prints and Drawings Galleries

Anonymous photographer, Photograph from Evidence

Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1974. Fast friends who had in common an upbringing in the San Fernando Valley and a wry sense of humor, the two began collaborating on conceptual art inspired by the work of such southern Californian post-Pop masters as Ed Ruscha and John Baldessari. For a billboard piece titled *Oranges on Fire* and a book, *How to Read Music in One Evening* (both 1974), Sultan and Mandel drew upon the wealth of anonymous imagery available in low-budget advertisements and instruction manuals. Their witty, offbeat projects questioned the principles of originality and authorship while moving art out of the museum and into more public arenas.

The Evidence project was a logical next step. Having secured an official-looking letter of support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the artists approached assorted industries, police departments, municipal agencies, and testing facilities, requesting permission to rummage through their photographic files and carry off specimens. Examining some two million photographs in seventy archives over a two-year period, they edited their findings down to 89 prints, which were exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in March 1977. The associated book, *Evidence*, became an instant and enduring classic among photographers. Like the artists' earlier ventures, **Evidence** was, in the artists' words, "a poetic exploration upon the restructuring of imagery." Stripped of explanatory captions and divorced from their institutional contexts, the banal photographs seemed to testify to cryptic and dubious rituals, carried out in pursuit of lost questions.

When the show closed, The Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona acquired the entire set of Evidence prints and sent them on an international tour that included stops at the Centre Pompidou in Paris and Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. In its travels, **Evidence** sowed no small amount of confusion, admiration, and controversy over the artistic appropriation of "found" imagery. In the preceding decade, the snapshot, the news photograph, postcards, advertising images, and other functional genres of imagery had begun appearing in museum contexts; the anonymous photograph had emerged as a central focus of curatorial attention. By adopting the role of artist-curators, Sultan and Mandel assumed a complicated position within contemporary debates about the aesthetics of documentary photography and the role of Photographer Unknown in the medium's evolution.

Accompanied by a new edition of the 1977 book, **Evidence Revisited** pairs the original **Evidence** prints with correspondence and other historical documents that contextualize the project. It thereby lends a human dimension to an unassuming yet influential episode in photography's postwar history and provides perspective on the now-ubiquitous role of found photographs in art.

Mike Mandel spoke at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, October 12 in Vassar's Taylor Hall 203. A reception for the exhibition followed in the Art Center. **Evidence Revisited** is presented at Vassar through the generous support of The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation.

Second Sight: Originality, Duplicity, and the Object

January 14 - April 10, 2005
Prints and Drawings Galleries

Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987), Jackie II, *1966. Color screenprint in black and lavender inks on paper board. Gift of Drs. Alvin and Lenore Weseley (Lenore S. Levine, class of 1954), 1992.32*

Museum exhibitions normally lay emphasis upon "master" pieces: objects which, through singular quality and renown, stand for epochal transitions and definitive chapters in the evolution of art. In **Second Sight** the story is instead about continuity and constant, subtle amendment in art over time, told by objects from the Art Center's collection that refer, in a variety of ways, to other objects. The curators and the director have plumbed the vaults for rarely-exhibited works that have transmitted motifs, methods, styles, genres, ideas, and traditions from one context to another. Ranging across all media and through geography and history, from the Middle Ages to the present, **Second Sight** brings together variant renditions and copy sketches, satires and homages, authorized facsimiles and suspected forgeries, works of problematic attribution, renderings in alternative media, modern versions of classic themes, and postmodern reinventions of modernist icons.

A tale of enduring national rivalries lies behind Washington Allston's *Cupid Playing with the Helmet of Mars* (1804), a copy of a figure found in the foreground of Rubens' *Henry IV Receiving the Portrait of Marie de' Medici* (1621-25). Two decades after completing his work in front of the original in the Luxembourg Palace, Allston recalled that French painters passing by, ignorant of color technique, had condescendingly regarded his pre-glaze colors as a sign of American incompetence. In contrast, a visiting Italian cardinal who witnessed the vernissage in process had praised the painter for knowing his business.

Two self-portraits, painted and drawn, by a later American artist, Milton Bellin (1913-1997), are remarkable for a degree of finish – and of inch-for-inch agreement with each other – at which manual skill borders on mechanical precision. Bellin's technique, in egg tempera on panel and ink and gouache on paper respectively, was characterized by meticulous attention to detail and perfection of surface.

Photographers, working in a medium widely regarded as inherently mechanical, have employed diverse methods to avoid the taint of "art reproduction" and to signal the status of their work as art in itself. In **Second Sight** an Orientalist platinum print of the Thames by Ernest Lamb is seen alongside one of its aesthetic forebears, James McNeill Whistler's lithograph *Early Morning, Battersea* (1878).

Among satires in the exhibition is a seventeenth-century Flemish bronze sculpture of the Laocoon; its lead figure, Bacchus, has been set upon not by serpents but by putti who are after his bowl of wine. In James Gillray's *Weird Sisters: Ministers of Darkness, Minions of the Moon* (1791), an etching dedicated to Henry Fuseli, the latter's image of the witches in *Macbeth* morphs into a trio of Tory ministers. The moon they worship is a two-faced monarchy, a smiling Queen on its sunny side and the King in the shadows.

Even viewers who consider themselves familiar with the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center's collection will find much to be worth a look, and a second look, in **Second Sight**. The exhibition is made possible by the generous support of The Smart Family Foundation.

Director's Message—College Collections and New Directions

The feature article by Professor Andrew Watsky in this edition of *Art at Vassar* deals with an exciting group of Japanese paintings and prints acquired over the past year by the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center. While there have always been some Japanese works of art in the collection at Vassar, their presence and use have had a somewhat checkered distant past and an uneven recent one. Among the large collection of Asian objects given to the College by Charles M. Pratt in 1936, were a number of objects from the Japanese tea ceremony, mostly bowls and tea jars. This material, together with the better- known Chinese jades given by Mr. Pratt, had remarkable breadth and depth as a collection. A number of the jades were perennially on view in Taylor Hall in the eponymous "Jade Room," a place that today retains the name but where no jades have resided for fifteen years, a fact certainly puzzling to many students. The collection also contained a number of Japanese prints of widely varying quality and condition that were not much utilized.

The problem with this Asian material was that it existed largely outside of curricular support and use. While Asian art was taught at Vassar intermittently during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, it was largely done by part-time or visiting faculty whose responsibilities did not include the building or advocacy of the collection. In fact, much to our present chagrin, a large number of the Chinese jades and Japanese ceramics were deaccessioned and sold in the early 1980s, when it appeared that these works would never be relevant to the mission of the college and its museum. Fortunately, we did retain almost two hundred objects from this collection.

Many things changed, however, in the late twentieth century. The great economic rise and influence of Japan and, later, China on the international stage resulted in a greater interest among universities in offering courses, then programs, and ultimately, departments centered on Asian studies, often with the financial support of Japanese sponsors. This growth was not an intellectual fad but a clear evolutionary trend. When the Vassar art department made a half-time position in Asian art full-time in 1994, it signaled an important moment for the curriculum. In the hiring of Andrew Watsky, the College also gained a scholar with a deep-seated love of works of art and much specialized knowledge in the field of Japanese paintings, prints, and objects. This interest led to bringing to Vassar loans of original works from a number of American museums and exhibitions focused on Japanese lacquer and prints. Such loans, over time, become expensive and it was increasingly clear that support of the program needed to be made tangible by beginning an initiative to broaden and strengthen the holdings of Japanese art. The past fifteen months have brought some remarkable works of Japanese art into the permanent collection, as Professor Watsky recounts in his article. The highlight, the early Buddhist Nachi shrine mandala painting, arrived in October of this year, much to the enthusiastic surprise of scholars in this field. Coincidentally, it has been a very good time to make Japanese acquisitions and one senses that there is greater value for money spent in this field over many areas of Western art.

The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center will remain committed, where possible, to focusing acquisition support on the important areas of growth and use within the curriculum, both within the art department and, potentially, in other areas of study. The building of the Japanese collection will continue to be a priority and, I think, a model of the symbiotic and synergistic relationship between proactive faculty and the professional staff of the Art Center.

James Mundy
The Anne Hendricks Bass Director
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center

From the Art Department

The members of the art department at Vassar College have a special commitment to work with original objects. For this reason, we are especially blessed to have the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center available as a place to gather with students in the presence of art. When participants in Art 105 attend their first discussion section, they find themselves with their conference instructor before the Egyptian head of Merymose in the Loeb Art Center, and they will continue to make many class trips to the museum throughout the year. Our proximity to art institutions in New York is also a boon, and as the year progresses, 105 students find themselves journeying to the Metropolitan Museum to do their paper assignments. In upper division classes, the majority of the faculty members continue to require students to write papers based on first-hand observations of art works. Often instructors personally accompany students to museums or historic buildings for on-site discussions. Andy Watsky has so taken this principle to heart that he has organized a spring-term field trip to Japan for his course, Asian Studies 105, and his students will have the opportunity to visit such places as Nara, Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Tokyo under his expert guidance.

This preference for "real" objects over reproductions extends into our scholarly life as well, and many in our department have organized or have been involved with exhibitions recently. Last year, Molly Nesbit was the co-curator of the **Utopia Station** at the Venice Biennale, and Lisa Collins was the co-author of an exhibition catalogue, *African American Artists, 1929-1945: Prints, Drawings, and Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art.* Nicholas Adams facilitated an exhibition based on the buildings of the Baroque architect Fischer von Erlach, held in the College Center, in February. Jacki Musacchio was co-curator of a stunningly beautiful display, **Marvels of Maiolica**, that was installed in the Art Center from April 9 to June 13. This exhibition of Italian Renaissance ceramics from the Corcoran Gallery of Art collection included an array of compelling objects that Jacki used to enhance the teaching of her seminar as well as her lecture course in the spring term. She also wrote a catalogue to accompany the exhibition. Brian Lukacher curated a show and wrote the catalogue for *Joseph Gandy: Visionary Views of England,* held at the Richard Feigen Gallery in New York this past summer. This exhibition included 98 watercolor renderings of the English countryside that had been bound in a sketchbook for almost two centuries. These sketches retain a freshness and vitality that reveal much about the Romantic response to nature in the early 19th century. Isolde Brielmaier is currently co-curating a show, **Engaging the Camera: African Women, Portraits and the Photographs of Hector Acebes**, at the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, which will be held from October 28, 2004 to February 21, 2005. And finally, Susan Kuretsky is organizing a major loan exhibition for the Lehman Loeb Art Center, **Time and Transformation in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art**, which will bring together over ninety Dutch paintings and works on paper. Along with Susan, an international team of scholars will contribute to its catalogue, which is supported in part by the Agnes Rindge Claflin fund. The exhibition will run from April 8 to June 19, 2005.

Invited speakers were among the departmental highlights of the spring 2004 term, including: a lecture by the groundbreaking feminist scholar, Mary Garrard, on "Leonardo da Vinci's Enigmatic Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci: a Problem of Genre"; a lecture by Johan Martelius, of the Royal Technological Institute, Sweden, on two mid-20th c. Swedish architects, Peter Celsing and Sigurd Lewerentz; a lecture by architectural historian Eve Blau, Harvard University, on "Under the Sign of Transparency"; a digital presentation by Pierre Huyghe and Francois Roche on their *Streamside Day Follies*, an event organized in conjunction with Dia:Beacon; and a provocative lecture by Jeremy Blake, a contemporary video artist.

On all fronts—departmental activities, teaching and scholarly endeavors—our common purpose combines to form a vibrant intersection of intellectual inquiry and direct perception of art.

Karen Lucic
Professor and Chair

Group Visits

Educators, students and community groups are invited to experience the collection of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center with the help of Vassar College student docents. Let them be your guides in the exploration of original paintings, sculpture, works on paper, photographs and other art forms. Several tours are available, specifically designed for adults or school groups, levels K-12.

Highlights of the Permanent Collection offers a comprehensive overview of art in the collection from antiquity to the present.

Special Exhibition Tours provide a focus on current temporary exhibitions.

Curriculum-Based Tours are available to educators of all disciplines to complement work done in the classroom.

Self-Guided Tours for groups are always welcome; advance notice of your group's visit is appreciated whenever possible.

Educators may also participate in the *Every Artwork Tells a Story* program for students in grades 1 - 5. Docents visit your classroom and present slides of works from the permanent collection. Student-centered discussion to encourage exploration of art is followed by an appropriate art activity.

Educators and tour group arrangers should call Kelly Thompson, Coordinator of Public Education and Programs, at (845) 437-7745 or email: kethompson@vassar.edu. Please allow at least three weeks advance notice to reserve a tour date and time.

Walk-in tours for children and their families are offered on Saturdays at 11:00 A.M. Adult-oriented tours are offered on Saturdays and Sundays at 3:00 P.M. No reservations are required for walk-in tours.

Friends' Report

The Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center are pleased to announce the resounding success of the past year's efforts to give a significant work of art to the FLLAC as a 10th anniversary gift. Thanks to the support of our generous members, we accomplished all we set out to do and more. It was a terrific year and we owe our gratitude to all of you – our members – whose enthusiasm and love of art continues to sustain and enrich our programs.

What could be more fun than the opportunity to not only support the growth of the Art Center's outstanding collection, but to be actually part of the acquisition process? To this end, the Friends organized two elegant evenings where participants learned about art and building a collection, socialized with colleagues and friends, and viewed and voted on which of three artworks would be purchased as the 10th anniversary gift.

We express profound gratitude to Frances Beatty Adler, class of 1970, and a director of the Friends, and Richard Feigen, who opened the R. L. Feigen gallery in New York City in March for an evening cocktail party. James Mundy, director of FLLAC, presented his recent research on Federico Zuccaro to guests, and all had the opportunity to view in person the three artworks chosen by Mr. Mundy and FLLAC curators Joel Smith and Patricia Phagan:

1. Richard Serra, *Spiral Cord*, 2001, paintstick on handmade paper
2. Alfred Leslie, *Self-Portrait*, 1982, Oil on canvas
3. Robert Colescott, *Knowledge of the Past is Key to the Future: The Other Washingtons,* 1987, Acrylic on canvas

Each guest was entitled to vote on which of the three they thought should be the anniversary gift. On the occasion of the Friends annual meeting, a gala dinner was held in the magnificent newly renovated Students Building on campus. The three artworks were displayed in the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center's galleries, and the curators presented the merits of each work to dinner guests. Mr. Mundy delivered a fascinating lecture on building a museum collection to the crowd. Following much lively discussion, dinner, wine and dessert were served and the final ballots counted.

A very close count left Alfred Leslie's *Self-Portrait* as the choice for acquisition. It now hangs prominently in the FLLAC 20th century galleries. Mr. Leslie was born in the Bronx in 1927 and studied at the Art Students League and New York University. Although hailed as one of the most talented of the second generation of Abstract Expressionists, he turned to a realist style in the early 1960s, portraying everyday people in a heroic manner. Among his best-known images are standing self-portraits, such as this painting of the artist in formal black tie. Like his other self-portraits, it is large, frontal, and the figure is pressed against the picture plane. Along with Philip Pearlstein and Chuck Close, Alfred Leslie emerged from the Pop movement of the 1960s as a key figure of figural realism. In spite of the revival of realist painting in the late twentieth century, their style of painting was never rivaled or duplicated.

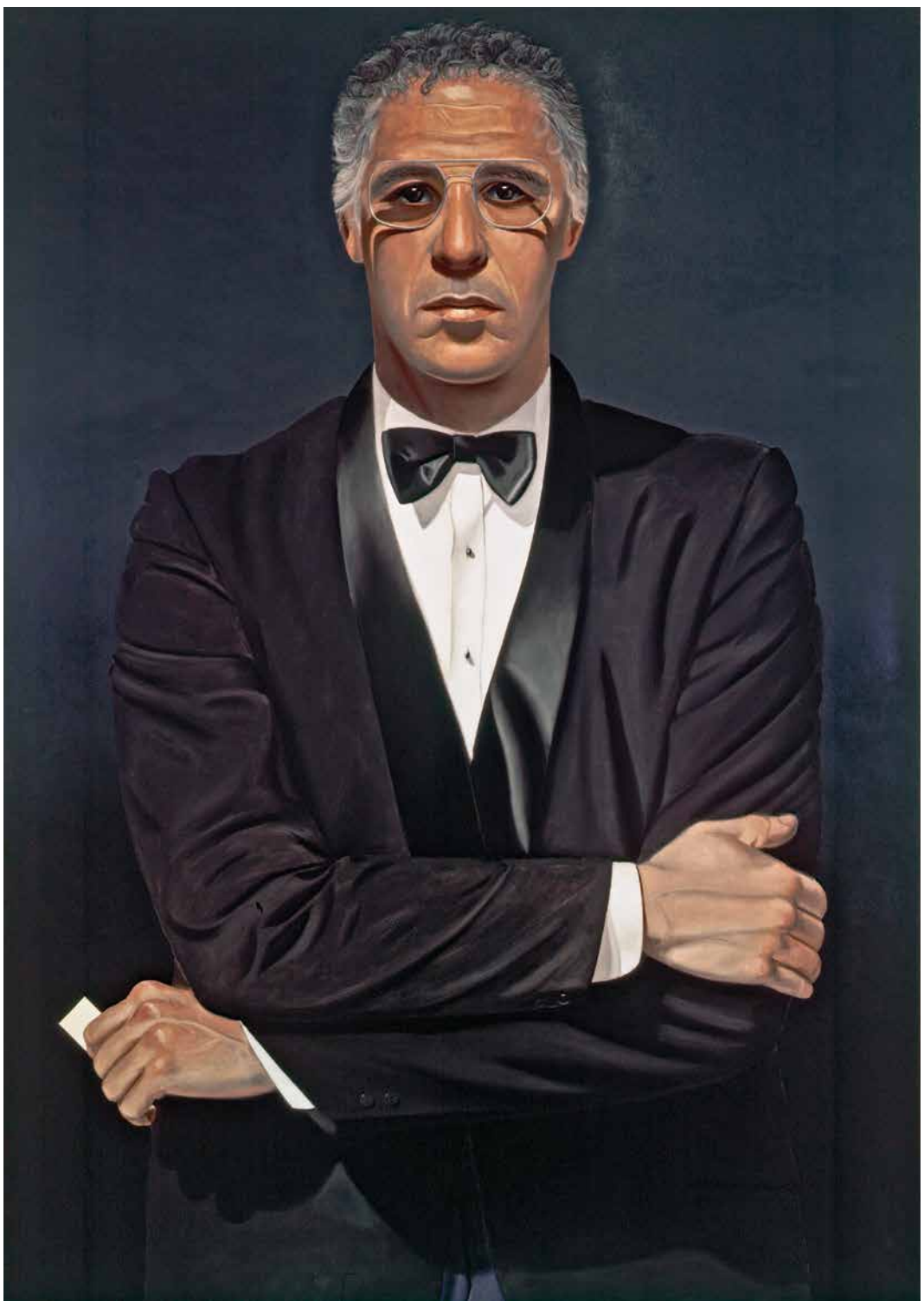
Additional recent Friends events across the country included an exclusive tour of the prominent 20th century art collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Meyerhoff of Baltimore. The Meyerhoffs graciously opened their home and garden to DC area Friends on June 17. Following the tour, Friends enjoyed a luncheon at Ladew Gardens nearby. We have Friends director Gay Patterson Lord, class of 1957, to thank for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

The Milwaukee Art Museum once again opened its doors to Friends and mid-west Vassar alumnae/i on June 12. The museum welcomed FLLAC director James Mundy back for his first visit since leaving his post as Chief Curator there in 1991. His lecture, "Report from the Seminar Room: What the Art Object Can Tell Us," enlightened Vassar and MAM's Fine Art Society patrons about the hidden meanings of art and served as the catalyst for the day's theme, The Educated Eye Looks at Art. Additional activities included master classes with Mr. Mundy and MAM curators, as well as a luncheon. We thank Friends director Anne Henoch Vogel, class of 1963, who was the driving force behind this exceptional day.

In this new year, we turn our attention to the promotion of FLLAC's education program. At our May Executive Committee meeting the Friends proposed an incentive gift toward the endowment being created to support the position of Coordinator of Public Education and Programs. The public education program trains Vassar students as docents to give museum tours to school groups and other visiting groups. In this newsletter you will read profiles of a few of these docents and I think you will agree they represent the best and brightest Vassar scholars. In addition to museum tours, they visit local schools to present works from the FLLAC collection with their "Every Artwork Tells a Story" program. Another popular program is the Artful Dodger series which features a non-art history Vassar professor presenting a favorite work of art in the galleries. FLLAC's education program reaches out to the Hudson Valley community in varied ways, and imparts a love of art and culture to youngsters and others. We support it wholeheartedly. The Friends' proposed gift is but a fraction of the money needed to create this endowment. We hope others, too, will step up to help complete the fundraising needed to endow this vital program for Vassar and the community.

Your membership in the Friends makes a significant difference in allowing us to support the Art Center in these and other ways. Thank you for your participation in all we do. If you are not a member of the Friends and are interested in joining our organization, there is an application form on the back of this newsletter. Do join now, and show Vassar and the Hudson Valley community that the arts continue to be an important aspect of modern life.

Joanne Cuttler
Executive Administrator
Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center



Alfred Leslie, American 1927-
Self-portrait, *1982*
Oil on canvas
Purchase, Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center Fund
2004.18

Japanese Art at Vassar

Ito Jakuchu, Japanese 1716-1800
Inscriber: Minagawa Kien, Japanese 1734-1807
Squirrel and Grapes
Scroll; Ink on paper
Purchase, Betsy Mudge Wilson, class of 1956, Fund
2004.6

Over the past year the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center has acquired a number of Japanese paintings and prints, opening an exciting new focus of collection that has enriched the galleries as well as Vassar classes in Japanese art. They range in date from the late sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, cover a wide range of approaches to image-making, from simplified abstraction to close observation, and depict a great variety of subjects, both secular and religious. Although these purchases represent only a first step in what, it is hoped, will be a long-term commitment to the area, the start is very auspicious.

The most important acquisition is a monumental painting of the sacred precincts of Nachi, a major site of syncretic Shinto and Buddhist worship since ancient times. Executed in ink, colors, and gold leaf on paper, the *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* is an exceptional example of a type of narrative painting that was produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of the Nachi religious establishment's proselytizing and fundraising efforts: it was used by monks to help narrate the countless factual and apocryphal tales associated with this sacred place. The painting is full of lively vignettes of the devotional activities that took place at Nachi over the centuries. Dominating the right side of the painting is Nachi's magnificent waterfall (the tallest in all Japan), which was believed to be the manifestation of a deity. The renowned twelfth-century monk Mongaku is shown at the base of the waterfall being rescued by two child-deities—Mongaku was so devoted to worshipping under the sacred torrent, the legend goes, he almost drowned. In the lower right of the painting a small sailboat departs on a one-way trip to the mythical paradise Fudarakusen, its sail inscribed with an invocation of faith ("Hail to Amida Buddha"). This practice involved worshippers of unshakable belief who willingly left behind this mundane world to seek the promise of the next, and until the eighteenth century had many advocates. Among the other recognizable sites and buildings of Nachi, numerous people of different social strata—warriors, aristocrats, monks, and commoners—engage in similar devotional activities.

The clarity of pictorial expression makes the stories easy to follow. Carefully rendered buildings anchor the composition; bright colors and lucent gold leaf further emphasize the important places within the profusion of detail. Typical of such paintings, the site is shown from a bird's-eye perspective, affording a privileged view of the site. The clarity of the narrative style will make the painting an entertaining and instructive focus for gallery talks at the Art Center; indeed, such talks would emulate the original purpose of the painting—as a visual device to illustrate a monk's storytelling.

Nachi is still today a major tourist and pilgrimage destination in Japan, renowned not only for its religious history but also its natural beauty, and it was recently designated a World Heritage Site. This past summer, I led a group of Vassar faculty on a trip to many of Japan's important cultural sites, and we spent one day at Nachi hiking around the mountain and its monuments, retracing part of the ancient pilgrimage route, and comparing the Art Center's painting to the actual place. We stayed overnight at the temple there, enjoying temple food and the quiet of the precincts after the tour groups were gone. It was, all agreed, one of the highlights of our trip, and I will repeat the visit next spring with a group of Vassar students in a course I will teach on the relationship between contemporary Japan and its artistic past.

The Lehman Loeb Art Center also recently purchased a large pair of six-fold screens by the seventeenth-century painter Kano Eino. Eino is famous not only as a member of the Kano workshop—the most influential and enduring painting workshop in Japan, known for adapting orthodox Chinese modes of painting into its own style—but also for writing the first comprehensive history of Japanese painting. Across the broad horizontal format of the screens, Eino depicts the annual cycle of rice cultivation, from the initial planting of the seeds, the transplanting of the young seedlings into the flooded rice paddies, the harvesting of the mature crop, and the celebrations that follow. The subject was common in Japanese and Chinese art—rice was, and remains, the staple of the East Asian diet—and Eino's painting expertly renders it in his disciplined and fluid ink brushwork, with touches of color to highlight certain details. The scene Eino renders here takes place not in Japan, in fact, but in China, as indicated by such things as clothing and features of the landscape itself. It is an imaginary vision of Japan's great neighbor, which was long an inspirational source for the Kano workshop in terms of subject matter and painting techniques.

Another recent addition, on a much smaller scale, is an intimate hanging scroll by the eighteenth-century Individualist painter, Ito Jakuchu. The subject is a squirrel frolicking on a grape vine, and Jakuchu uses it to display his consummate control of ink on paper to express the different textures and characters of the various elements: crisp, dry brushwork for the brittle grape vine; loose, wet ink for the mature bulbous grapes; soft, delicate line work for the squirrel's fur. An inscribed poem at the top of the painting, brushed by a prominent scholar-calligrapher of the day, characteristically comments on the painting's subject, lyrically linking the depicted motifs to autumn.

Also small in scale are two nineteenth-century surimono, privately commissioned prints made in limited quantities for exclusive groups of well-to-do clients. As is the case with these examples, surimono were created with the most lavish yet delicate printing methods and often include printed inscriptions of poetry. Their pictorial effects are much more understated than the more familiar and commercial Ukiyoe prints: the light tone of the ink produces a remarkably delicate appearance; small amounts of gold leaf introduce rich touches of luminosity; blind printing (printing without ink) creates soft shadows. The subject matter

Continues

Japanese 16th-early 17th century
Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala
Ink, colors, and gold leaf on paper, mounted as a hanging scroll
Purchase, Pratt Fund and Betsy Mudge Wilson, class of 1956, Memorial Fund
2004.10

Japanese Art at Vassar *Continued*

Totoya Hokkei, Japanese 1780-1850
Warbler perched on a mortar and pestle, *from the series* Sanjûroku tori zukushi (A Collection of Thirty-six Birds), *mid 1820s*
Shikishiban surimono
Purchase, Pratt Fund
2003.39.2

Kano Eino, Japanese 1631-1697
Farming Scenes of the Four Seasons
Pair of six-fold screens;
ink and color on paper
Purchase, Betsy Mudge Wilson, class of 1956, Fund
2004.4

is very different, too, from Ukiyoe prints—not the Kabuki theatre, courtesans, or the landscapes, but usually seasonal, lyrical imagery. Both of these prints are New Year's images, and they are inscribed with poems that convey appropriate auspicious meanings for the depicted images. In the print entitled *Warbler Perched on a Mortar and Pestle*, for example, each of the two poems makes reference to pounded rice and mortars, the main ingredient and tool used to make a special treat eaten at New Year's; the poems also refer to warblers and young greens, typical spring-time imagery (the lunar New Year coincided with early spring in Japan). These prints are meant to be enjoyed quietly and over time, looking at the subtle pictures and linking them to the elegant accompanying poetry.

Several paintings are by nineteenth-century literati painters, Japanese artists who sought inspiration from Chinese models different from those admired by the Kano workshop and who thereby positioned themselves outside the established orthodoxy of official art. These self-proclaimed amateurs—who were in fact expertly practiced—created a new approach to painting in Japan that was enormously popular and influential. In *Autumn Landscape*, by Nakabayashi Chikuto, for example, the soft brushwork, light-toned ink, and off-center composition create an overall looseness that was an anathema to Kano workshop artists. It is just such paintings, however, that invigorated Japanese art—as, I hope, all these new works will do for the Art Center galleries.

Andrew M. Watsky
Associate Professor, Art Department

Curator's Choice

John William Hill, *Bacharach on the Rhine*

Around 1855, the American artist John William Hill seemed convinced of painting nature in a more careful, acute manner, after having read and absorbed the first volume of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Hill, associated with the American Pre-Raphaelite movement at mid-century, would come to paint landscapes and still lifes in highly detailed, light-filled watercolors that emphasized the subtle, elegant contours and sun-basted surfaces of nature. Ruskin, the English artist and critic, promoted a more exact recording of nature than was current in American art, and he championed watercolor, especially the works of England's greatest watercolorist, J. M. W. Turner, who, according to Ruskin, masterfully combined the literal with the romantic.

Born in London and reared in Philadelphia and New York, Hill was the son of the engraver John Hill, a specialist in scenic landscape and city views. Hill, who apprenticed to his father and lived near him in West Nyack, at first served as a topographical artist for the New York State Geological Survey and as a painter of watercolor views of cities and sites that were intended to be engraved. Inspired by Ruskin, he gradually changed course and began in the 1850s making sketching trips to the Hackensack River Valley and the Catskill Mountains, painting oils and watercolors in the open air. In 1857 he showed some of these studies at the spring exhibition at the National Academy of Design. The next summer, he continued making nature studies, increasing the translucency of his tones and brightness of his colors and traveling to more sites. Working steadily in this new way, he began producing watercolors of far greater clarity and detail, and by 1863 he was elected president of the American Pre-Raphaelite group, the Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art.

During the mid-1850s, when Hill began his venture into this new manner of working, the Reverend Elias Lyman Magoon was forming his collection of over three thousand British watercolors, drawings, prints, and Hudson River School paintings, eventually bought by Matthew Vassar as the core collection of the Vassar College Art Gallery. In 1856, Magoon, future trustee of the college and a correspondent with Ruskin, purchased from Ruskin *Bacharach on the Rhine*, an example of Turner's small "vignette" watercolors which were so highly praised in *Modern Painters*.

The circumstances leading to Hill's copy are unclear, but both Hill and Magoon were ardent admirers of Ruskin and his ideas. Sometime after the arrival of *Bacharach on the Rhine* on America's shores, perhaps in the later 1850s, Hill copied Turner's watercolor, shown at left, below. In this small, flickering color sketch, puddles of blue are prominent and nuances of light and reflection dominate. Light dominates Hill's slightly larger copy, too, at right, though the contours are less defined and the highlights are diffused. In fact, a network of hatching strokes in Hill's work renders a softer light and replaces Turner's washes of blue. By the 1860s, this system of fine hatch marks, with stippling, defined Hill's watercolor technique, and a glowing light distinguished his works. Both watercolors will be on view during the winter exhibition, **Second Sight: Originality, Duplicity, and the Object**.

Patricia Phagan
The Philip and Lynn Straus Curator of Prints and Drawings

(at left)
J. M. W. Turner (English, 1775-1851)
Bacharach on the Rhine
Watercolor, gouache, and graphite
Gift of Matthew Vassar
1864.1.217

(at right)
John William Hill (American, born England 1812-1879)
Bacharach on the Rhine *(copy after J.M.W. Turner)*
Watercolor and graphite
Gift of Ellen Gordon Milberg, class of 1960
1983.44

Meet the Docents

Name: Daniel Biller
Class Year: 2006
Major: Art History
Years as a Docent: 1
Hometown: Westwood, MA
Favorite author: John Steinbeck
Career goal: unknown
Other hobbies/interests: reading, swimming, film

Favorite artwork at FLLAC: *The Defense of Paris* by Gustave Doré
Why? It's a huge and impressive allegorical history painting, but it was painted by someone who is usually considered an illustrator: most of Doré's works are tiny illustrations for books. It's really out of character for the artist...

What is your favorite period/style in art? I really like process art; people like Richard Serra, Chuck Close, or even Ad Reinhardt, who focus on the act of creation of their art.

Describe an interesting tour/art presentation from your docent experience: I enjoy relating the history of the portrait of Matthew Vassar once hung in Rockefeller Hall. At one point in time, however, some rowdy students decided to throw mashed potatoes at the portrait of our founder. Ever since, the painting has been kept in a safer location. However, if you look closely, you can still see where the mashed potato hit.

What is your favorite education program? Why?
Noteworthy is a great program – docents pick a work of art and give a public talk about it, and the presentation is followed by some music related to the artwork. I presented a Jackson Pollock alongside a jazz quartet. Not only is it a great way to reach out to the public, but it was a good learning experience for me as well.

The most rewarding experience in my career as a docent was:
I was once giving a tour to an elementary school, and I included a painting of *St. Jerome in his Study*, which is a Northern Renaissance work, and therefore includes lots of overt symbolism. I explained to the children what a symbol was, and they spent the next 30 minutes analyzing the painting. I've never seen kids so young enthralled with art before, and it felt good that I had them so engaged.

If you were building an art collection of your own, what artist/style would you purchase first? I would really like to own one of Ad Reinhardt's "Black" paintings. It's just a canvas painted black, but in a meticulous and modulating fashion. Ad Reinhardt would spend incredible amounts of time on a canvas that was just the color black. It would be great to own.

What three artists would you invite to dinner and why? What would you serve?
Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and Andre Breton. Surrealists as dinner company would be an interesting experience, I'm sure.

If Matthew Vassar were alive today, whose work would he purchase for the collection?
I'm guessing he would still be big on the Hudson River School, especially since it has become a lot more famous in the last 150 years. So he'd probably be purchasing paintings by Cole and Church.

How has the FLLAC contributed to your experience as a Vassar student?
The FLLAC is a wonderful resource for me, especially since I'm an art history major. Not only does it allow me to view artists' works personally, but it also provides a calm, contemplative setting for looking at and thinking about art.

Name: Jeannette Vaught
Class Year: 2005
Major: English and History
Years as a Docent: 3
Hometown: Nokesville, Virginia
Favorite author: James Joyce
Career goal: to be a student for as long as humanly possible!
Other hobbies/interests: horses, mountain climbing, driving embarrassingly large trucks (farm girl at heart), traveling.

Favorite artwork at FLLAC: varies periodically, but right now it's Donald Judd.
Why? I saw the Judd retrospective exhibit last spring at the Tate Modern in London, and it was brilliant. The fact that we have this work from his peak creative years in our gallery is mind-blowing. It's a great work to compare with Agnes Martin's *Harvest* and explain the concepts of minimalism relative to the two—even people who are turned off by 'modern art' can connect to it on a basic aesthetic level, and thus open the door to even more challenging works. It's such an interactive sculpture what with its reflective surfaces and wide negative spaces, it's easy to convert the skeptics to his genius.

What is your favorite period/style in art? Modern art and modernist literature really fire me up. The works coming out in the 1950s and '60s —Pollock et al — is art nirvana for me. This period combines my academic interests of simultaneous literary, historical, and geo-political revolutions into brilliant artistic expression.

Describe an interesting tour/art presentation from your docent experience: One of the best tours I had was a high school class of AP (Advanced Placement) art students preparing for their spring exam. We spent all morning parked in front of art, and the back-and-forth discussion we had was as much a learning experience for me as it was for them.

What is your favorite education program? Why? Every Artwork Tells a Story: giving kids an open door to all kinds of art early can only be a good thing.

The most rewarding experience in my career as a docent was: It is a continual process, but the most rewarding experience is helping people really 'get' a work that challenges them, whether it be a young kid looking at art for the first time, or a little old lady who rejected everything post-Renaissance and can now (without necessarily having to LIKE it) see the point of a Pollock.

If you were building an art collection of your own, what artist/style would you purchase first? First I would have to get a velvet painting of Elvis, but then I'd splurge on this gorgeous long horizontal Pollock I saw at the Tate.

What three artists would you invite to dinner and why? What would you serve? Caravaggio for the wine, Walker Evans for the conversation, Dalí for the pure weirdness. It wouldn't be an art party without Dalí. I would definitely cater.

If Matthew Vassar were alive today, whose work would he purchase for the collection? He would probably lament the closing of the frontier and purchase Ansel Adams.

How has the FLLAC contributed to your experience as a Vassar student? The FLLAC has enabled me to spend time surrounded by art without the pressure of art classes—the experience has allowed me to not have to choose between other academic pursuits and a continuing education in art.

Name: Liza Dolmetsch
Class Year: 2005
Major: Studio Art
Years as a Docent: I am in my 4th semester
Hometown: Arden, DE
Favorite author: I can't pick but some of my favorite books would be *The Sound and The Fury*, *Jesus' Son*, *Catch 22* and *The Remains of the Day*
Career goal: High school art teacher
Other hobbies/interests: I love music, talking about books, traveling – especially road trips

Favorite art work at FLLAC: Mark Rothko's painting (*No. 18*)

Why? There is something really familiar about that painting that resonates for me. I never used to like Rothko and then one day it sort of hit me like a ton of bricks. His paintings are for me like pure sensation the moment before your brain gives them meaning-ie perceives them. He gives a name to emotions that are just on the tip of my tongue.

What is your favorite period/style in art? I really can't narrow it down. It's like the author question, I'm going to avoid it! Sorry! Some of the greats for me at the moment are Michelangelo, Vermeer, Degas, Diebenkorn, Serra.

Describe an interesting tour/art presentation from your docent experience:
Actually some of my favorite tours are ones that I just listened in on. All the docents have their own special spin on the collection and their own knowledge to bring to it. I remember a tour that Nathan gave concluding with *Harvest* by Agnes Martin. He was so fantastic he almost had me sold. Almost!

What is your favorite education program? Why?
I really enjoyed a program we did with the Poughkeepsie Day School. It focused on the Hudson River and we looked at all sorts of representations of the river, its environment, its people. One week was an old etching of a steamboat map, another Hudson River School paintings, then works by American Indians of the region. For selfish reasons I really loved the "Every Artwork Tells a Story." So many schools don't have the time or money to come visit the museum so they were so grateful for our visits. The program was also very successful at letting the students do more of the talking which is usually my favorite part anyway.

The most rewarding experience in my career as a docent was:
One wonderful moment that stands out occurred after giving a tour to a group of 8th graders. As they started to break up a student derided the Ellswoth Kelly and others joined in. Now, I must admit that I do not like that work personally, but I was trying to formulate a response when another boy spoke up. Witnessing an incredibly articulate 8th grader explain to his classmates the worth and potential of abstract art, and watching them listen was fantastic.

If you were building an art collection of your own, what artist/style would you purchase first?
It surprises me but I suppose my tastes have become a little more modern. A trip to Dia:Beacon has me pretty in love with what some artists like Richard Serra are doing, as well as some Judd. I am terrible with names, though, but other artists along those lines. Of course, give me some Degas, Cezanne, Manet and I won't complain.

What three artists would you invite to dinner and why? What would you serve?
I just read *Girl With a Pearl Earring* so I sort of would like to sit down with Vermeer and compare. I would love to meet Degas. His work is so humane and I wonder if that is a reflection of the painter. There are a lot of contemporary artists that I would like to sit down to a meal with, ask them about their work. Luckily I am awful with names, so I'm going to skip out on listing them.

If Matthew Vassar were alive today, whose work would he purchase for the collection?
It's anyone's guess I suppose. Although it certainly isn't my favorite type of work, the fact that he purchased such a superb collection of Hudson River School works does say something. Maybe he would investigate local artists and representations of the area.

How has the FLLAC contributed to your experience as a Vassar student?
I can't say enough about this job really. The chance to work in a museum with no previous experience was pretty amazing. I've learned so much and had such a great time doing it. My knowledge base has expanded and deepened in the sense that the job pushed me to research areas and artists that I might not have otherwise. I think the best part, though, might be that I've had to focus a lot of energy on making the material accessible to different audiences. No matter who you are talking to, it's a matter of figuring out what is going to hook them, asking the right questions. Visual art is experienced and as an experience we are all on equal footing. It's quite the opposite of the elitist criticisms it sometimes acquires. Plus when it comes down to it, I get paid to talk about art and hang out with some awfully intelligent and interesting people. And I think we have the best boss around.

Name: Zach Wagner
Class Year: 2007
Major: Film
Years as a Docent: 1
Hometown: Philadelphia
Favorite author: John Steinbeck
Career goal: to be an independent filmmaker
Other hobbies/interests: listening to music, watching movies, drawing, writing

Favorite artwork at FLLAC: The Leslie

Why? Its minimalism allows the viewer to read the painting almost as an internal dialogue in a book. His stance and his glance suggest more about the character than any background could. And by placing the emphasis on only the subject, the artist almost eases us into this relaxed interpretation of the piece, forcing us to question what his position and facial expression reveal.

What is your favorite period/style in art? Abstract expressionism

Describe an interesting tour/art presentation from your docent experience:
I had one group of older women from Texas with personalities to kill. After the tour, they were telling me about how they were going around to all these different art museums and telling me about artists I had never even heard of. I admired their knowledge and envied their journey. I'm pretty sure I learned more from them that day than they did from me.

What is your favorite education program? Why?
I don't pick favorites. I like them all.

The most rewarding experience in my career as a docent was:
and continues to be the sincere gratitude and outward appreciation of any individual after I give a tour.

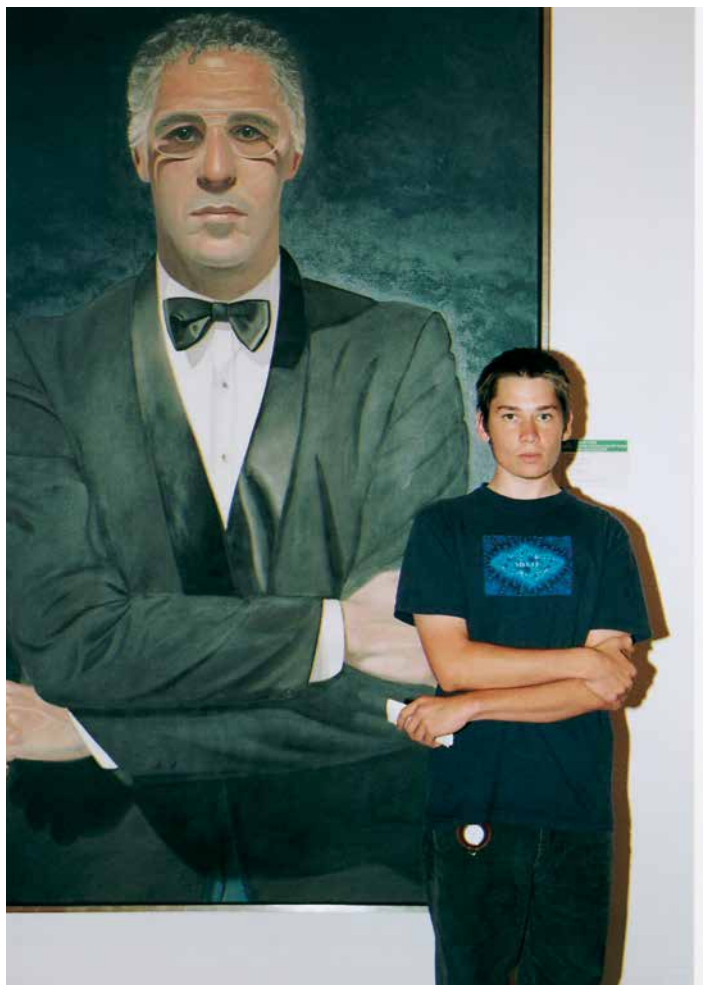
If you were building an art collection of your own, what artist/style would you purchase first? I think I would first purchase some of Pollock's works. However, given my knowledge and expectations of a grim future financial situation, I think a street vendor in New York will better serve my means.

What three artists would you invite to dinner and why?
Jackson Pollock, Leonardo Da Vinci, and Degas. I'm sure those three would make for good conversation.

What would you serve? Thai

If Matthew Vassar were alive today, whose work would he purchase for the collection? Norman Rockwell

How has the FLLAC contributed to your experience as a Vassar student? It continues to nurture, in me, a better understanding and appreciation for art.



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