

The Principia School of Nations Museum

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Fall term review 2008

"The time demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and willing hands..."
-- J.G. Holland (from a poem, quoted by Mary Kimball Morgan in her 1934 Commencement address.)

WHAT IS ART?

Principia College visiting art instructor **Marrin Robinson** brought her fall term 20th century "topics in art history" class to the museum gallery to view **African sculptures and Japanese prints**. Similar works from the early 20th century influenced the work of such modern abstract artists as Picasso and Matisse. "Direct contact with these other cultures is transforming," Robinson commented. "I thought [the students] should have direct contact with the objects, as the artists had."



Under the guidance of art instructor Marrin Robinson, standing, art students sketch African artifacts in the museum gallery, as a way to understand the impact traditional African sculpture had on such pioneers of modern art as Picasso and Matisse.

IMAGINING OTHER TIMES, OTHER WORLDS:



Environmental Imagination FYE study clothing and cultural objects made by Sioux artisans.

Art instructor **Danne Pike Rhaesa** fall term brought students from the **"Environmental Imagination"** First Year Experience program (co-taught with biology instructor Mary Ann Hoff and Writing Instructor Liz Paul) to sketch **Native American artifacts**, in preparation for a creative assignment based on research into the traditional lifestyles of four tribal groups who lived in distinctive ecological regions of North America. These **storyboard illustrations** are currently **on exhibit in Radford gallery**. Student groups wrote and illustrated original stories, which reflect what

they learned about both the cultures and ecology of the regions they studied. Engaging with authentic cultural objects from the collection brought a unique dimension to their cultural and historical research.

“We had been researching the Native American cultures on the web and through library sources,” Rhaesa reported, “but when the students saw the collections from our own museum, could observe the artifacts’ intricacies and draw from them, their level of dedication really went up...They were in awe at the rich resources in the museum.” Evidence of this dedication and heightened sensitivity to the cultures studied showed up in the students selection of appropriate color palettes for their illustrations. Retired anthropology professor Dr. Roger Batz, who attended the exhibition opening, had this praise for the students’ work:

“They got it!” he said. “They really captured the spirit of the culture they were writing about.”

CELEBRATING REGIONAL ARTISTS: Early fall term, the museum contributed to a special program on regional artists, by loaning pieces by artists **Frederick Oakes Sylvester** and **Kathryn E. Cherry** for exhibit. The program, co-sponsored by Historic Elsie Foundation and



Frederick Sylvester painting near the bluffs on the Principia College campus. (Archive photo)

Principia College, featured a talk in Wannamaker Hall by Julie Dunn-Morton, curator fine art collections at the St. Louis Mercantile Library, followed by docent-led tours to view related artwork displayed at several campus locations. Sylvester and Cherry each served as art directors at Principia and were respected artists. The College retains significant collections of their work.

According to the Mercantile program description, “In the early 1900s, painters celebrated St. Louis’s natural beauty, as well as the energy of its industrial urban area. We have come to call them regional artists.” Sylvester, who taught at Principia from 1901 until 1915, was noted for his poetry, as well as his Mississippi landscape paintings, for which he used a muted palette. Cherry, a

nationally recognized ceramicist, was art director from 1915 until 1931. Contact Jane Pfeifer, chair of the College cultural properties committee, for a complete listing of the school’s Sylvester and Cherry holdings. The museum and archives also contributed to last summer’s **exhibit** in Radford Gallery on the work of noted west coast **architect Bernard Maybeck**, who designed the chapel and 10 other campus buildings.

SUPPORTING SPECIAL EVENTS: Whenever possible, we link our changing displays in Howard Center and Holt galleries to current campus or world events. The first **Howard Center** display fall term featured lamps from several countries and periods, and was titled “**Let your Light Shine!**”, the theme of a Discovery Bound Leadership Conference held at the College over Labor Day weekend. The museum has an extensive collection of **early lamps, dating to Roman times,**



Roman style hand lamp from former Palestine. (Donor: Farid Salmond, xx3480a)

many of which were originally in the collection of Irving Tomlinson, an early worker in the Christian Science church. During the Pan African conference the display featured a beautiful **Massai beaded wedding necklace** from Kenya, and the Holt Gallery display featured sculpture, textiles and garments from

several African regions. The current Howard Center display of **Native American art** is part of a student project in conjunction with Assistant Professor Sally Steindorf's Native American Cultures sociology course. A display of Mexican cultural artifacts in the Holt Gallery case was timed to coincide with a campus visit by former Mexican President **Vicente Fox**. Following his lecture in Cox, President Fox signed copies of his autobiography in Holt Gallery. Visitors from Blackburn College browsed the museum galleries, which were open for the occasion. We welcome ideas on how our campus exhibits or gallery hours might tie in to your upcoming programs.

COLLEGE STUDENT-TEACHERS SHARE: Two



KC Gahlon explains how to complete an exercise using Native American artifacts.

Principia College education majors created engaging ways to share our museum collection this term with **elementary classes**

from The College School, where they

were student teachers. In late September, senior **KC Gahlon** brought the school's fourth grade to enjoy a gallery walk and to sketch and study **Native American artifacts**.

Senior **Brittany Pratt** planned varied, museum-based, activities for the school's first grade class, which is studying **China**. During their mid-October field trip, the first graders listened to *The Story of Ping*, learned about silk, completed an artifact "scavenger hunt," and made bookmarks with Chinese characters. The mentor teachers report that Principia education majors are exceptionally well prepared.



Brittany reads *The Story of Ping* to First Graders during a museum field trip .



COMING SOON IN HOLT GALLERY: Weaver and textile artist **Christina Bell** has been engaged by the museum to mount an exhibition winter term of Navajo rugs from the museum collection. It will be hung in Holt Gallery.

EXTENDED MUSEUM HOURS: In an effort to be more available to students, faculty and drop in visitors, the College museum gallery, located downstairs from Holt Gallery (School of Nations), is now **open 1-5 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons** during the academic term. Hours during academic breaks vary. Museum assistant Jayne Bennett is available during regularly scheduled hours, and by appointment at other times. In addition, museum director Nancy Boyer-Rechlin schedules one day each week for appointments on the College campus.

PROGRAM FLEXIBILITY: Our newly-opened class space allows students in visiting class groups to examine artifacts and artworks more closely. **We're happy to develop a special exhibit or program for your course.**

AT OUR SISTER CAMPUS: The museum program at the St. Louis campus was especially active fall term. Museum staff hosted **14 class visits**, mounted exhibits on American presidents and election memorabilia, and prepared artifact loans for art and social studies classrooms. The museum gallery and meeting area at that location was also in demand as an attractive setting for numerous **receptions and meetings**. Curriculum topics supported

by the collection included **ancient western and non-western civilizations, American colonial life and westward movement, Francophone Africa and the American electoral process.** The Upper School student council and museum staff partnered to organize a simulated Presidential election.

Off Campus Opportunities:

St. Louis Art Museum:

- **“Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art,” 1940-1976**, an exhibition that examines the work of these artists and of the critics who championed and influenced them, runs through January 11th. Visit www.slam.org for more art programming.

Missouri History Museum:

- Model Train buffs take note: beginning November 16, **model steam-driven trains** will run daily from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm throughout the holiday season and beyond. This display is FREE.
- A new exhibition about **Katherine Dunham**, a civil rights activist and dance pioneer who “introduced African and Caribbean influences to the European-dominated dance world,” opened November 2nd.
- A touring exhibition on the life and contributions of **George Washington Carver** opens November 28th. Performances of “Listening to the Still Small Voice: The Story of George Washington Carver” are scheduled **November 28-29**. See www.mohistory.org for numerous other programs. Also visit the website www.historyhappenedhere.org to explore historic buildings in two of St. Louis’ older communities.

CONTACT US: We welcome your requests and ideas. **Director:** Nancy Boyer-Rechlin, 314-514-3073, nancy.boyer-rechlin@principia.edu. **College museum assistant:** Jayne Bennett 618-374-5236