

A Scholarly Afternoon at the MFA

On a sunny spring Saturday, approximately 120 people gathered in the MFA's Remis Auditorium for the *Fourth Annual Undergraduate Art History Symposium*, sponsored by the Visual Culture Consortium/Boston (VCC), chaired by Prof. Stuart Steck of the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University. Scholars from fifteen local colleges and universities, including Emerson, Montserrat College of Art, Rhode Island College, and Salem State, founded VCC to promote multidisciplinary inquiry and dialogue in art history, architecture, and visual studies. Since its founding four years ago, the group has organized symposia, lectures, gallery talks, and panel discussions around Boston, and formed partnerships with local museums and galleries, including the ICA and the MFA. They're devoted to nurturing young scholars.

Selected from forty submissions from throughout New England, eight students were grouped equally under the headings, "Rethinking Authorship" and "Rethinking Practices"—heady stuff from serious students. There was much to applaud. The students' varied academic backgrounds and professional aspirations—not what you'd expect on first thought—signal the multifarious talents and interests this symposium attracts and celebrates. They delivered wide-ranging, highly professional, well researched and articulated, even provocative talks: Meghan Harley (Stonehill College) on censorship of Gustave Caillebotte's male nudes; Suzi Grossman (Tufts/Museum School) on appropriation in Sherrie Levine's photographs and Michael Mandiberg's digital archive; Stefan Idowu-Bello (Brown University) on the hip-hop-

meets-Baroque portraiture of Kehinde Wiley; Elizabeth Fitzgerald (Providence College) on the interactive art of sculptor François Morellet; Emily Mohr (Boston University) on the relationship between Greek texts and Greek painted pottery (using works in the MFA collection); Thomas Martel (Massachusetts College of Art and Design) on how post-WWII Japanese films reflect modern concerns; Jaean Ahn (Wellesley College) on the work of the contemporary American artist Walton Ford; and Holly Moye (UMass Boston) on Rem Koolhaas's unrealized Parc de la Villette.

Several schools have joined the collaborative since its founding. The number of submissions to the competition has increased. And the prestige of this symposium, scholarly and stimulating, surely also will continue to rise.

—Jack Curtis

"Rolling Out" the Moving Panorama

*This Book will make a Traveller of thee...
The blind also delightful things to see.*
—John Bunyan

"Delightful things to see" aptly describes the moving panorama, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Panoramas were popular entertainments in nineteenth-century America, Great Britain, and Europe. In the United States, painters produced long canvases of scenic wonders such as the Mississippi River and Niagara Falls. Touring panoramas functioned as dramatic travelogues. Artists began to produce moving panoramas on immense stretches of muslin affixed to large spools that enabled the movement of images under a framing proscenium arch. Presented in theatres, these moving scenes accompanied by music and narration, attracted enthusiastic audiences.

One of the most important moving panoramas was an 800-by-8-foot painted muslin scroll of illustrations of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Published in 1678 in England, the book is a Christian allegory, regarded as one of

the most important works of English religious literature. Artists Edward Harrison May and Joseph Kyle produced the panorama, which traveled throughout the country. Its last "performance" was in York County, Maine. In 1896 it was given as a gift to the York Institute, later known as the Saco Museum. The panorama was "rediscovered" in storage in 1996.

This special exhibition retrieves an artifact forgotten since the age of film that made it obsolete, utilizing post-film technology for replication and the renewed experience of a cultural marker. The fragile painting has undergone conservation at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center in Massachusetts, and the entire panorama photographed and printed on muslin in very high resolution. This full-scale replica will be 'performed' throughout the duration of the exhibition. The large section of the actual two-piece scroll (Christian's pilgrimage to the Celestial City) is exhibited at the Pepperell Mill in Biddeford with the smaller section (Christiana's journey) at the Saco Museum.

Narrative characters are presented as types set against backdrops that recall Hudson River School landscape painting. Major artists Frederic Church and Jasper Cropsey provided designs for the team of painters who produced the paintings. Stories of trial and consolation in vivid colors, somewhat muted by time and fragile chemistry, conjure the sublime. Art, landscape, and religion united in the country's journey toward the promise of Manifest Destiny. Americans received the story of the pilgrim as a symbol of desired identity and salvation, which fueled the dream of an Edenic westward expansion.

—David Raymond

THE MOVING PANORAMA OF PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Saco Museum
Saco, ME
www.dyerlibrarysacomuseum.org
Through November 10, 2012