Evidence Revisited

October 2 - December 19, 2004
Prints and Drawings Galleries

Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1974. East friends who had in common an up-bringing in the San Fernando Valley and a witty 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, oft-beat projects questioned the principles of originality and authorship while moving art out of the museum and into more public arenas.

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Second Sight: Originality, Duplicity, and the Object

January 14 - April 10, 2005
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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 depart-
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 been Japanese works of art in the collection at Vassar, their presence and use have had a somewhat checkered history 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 Japan (specifically designed for adults or school groups, levels K-12). 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 objects have been formally presented on view in Taylor Hall in the various ‘Jade Room’ areas over the years.

The problem with this Asian material was that it existed largely outside any 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 of a quickly expandable collection. In fact, much of the objects originally given to us, especially the Chinese jades and Japanese ceramics were accessioned and sold in the early 1980s, when it appeared that these works would not 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 Buddha 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
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 its 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:

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 figurative 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 alumni/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 Hall-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 Annual 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 Cutler
Executive Administrator
Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center
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 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 unshakeable 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 lustrous 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 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.

A recent acquisition, 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, watery ink for the mature crop; soft, delicate fine lines for the squirrel’s fur. An inscribed poem at the top of the painting, blanked by a prominent scholar-calligrapher of the day, characteristically comments on the painting’s subject, lyrically linking the depicted motifs to the painting’s subject, lyrically linking the depicted motifs to the season. The subject was familiar in Japanese and Chinese art—squirrels, and remains, the staple of the East Asian diet—and Ito’s painting expertly renders it in his disciplined and fluid brushwork, with touches of color to highlight certain details. The scene 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 China’s great neighbor, which was long an inspirational source for the Kano workshop in terms of subject matter and painting techniques.

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is very different, too, from Ukiyo-e 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 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-diffused watercolors that emphasized the subtle, elegant contours and non-basified 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, paddles 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
Meet the Docents

Name: Daniel Biller
Class Year: 2006
Major: Art History
Years as a Docent: 3
Hometown: Nokesville, MD
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 enthralled with art before, and it felt good that I had them so engrossed.

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 are your other hobbies/interests? I really enjoy mountain climbing, driving embarrassingly large trucks (farm girl at heart), traveling.

Favorite artwork at FLLAC: 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 such an interactive sculpture what with its challenging works.

What is your favorite period/style in art? Modern art and Postmodern are really free for me up. The works coming out in the 1950s and 60s — Pollock et al — is art nirvana for me.

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 can only be a good thing.

The most rewarding experience in my career as a docent was: It’s 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 Elsa, 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? Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, and Andre Breton. Surrealism 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:** Zach Wagner  
**Class Year:** 2007  
**Major:** Film  
**Years as a Docent:** 1  
**Hometown:** Philadelphia  
**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  
**Remain of the Day**

**Career goal:** High school art teacher  
**Other hobbies/interests:** I love music, talking about books, traveling – especially road trips

Favorite artwork at FLLAC: The Leslie  
*Why?* 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? 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 with too and 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?  
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 would 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.

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

Describe an interesting tour/art presentation from your docent experience:  
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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 you would purchase first the work of 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 am sure those three would make for good conversation.

What would you serve? Thai

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 would 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. 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.

How has the FLLAC contributed to your experience as a Vassar student?  
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To help continue activities in support of the Art Center, we invite you to become a member of the Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center.

**Friends of the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center receive:**
- invitations to Art Center openings and special events
- the Friends newsletter published twice a year
- an invitation to the Friends annual meeting
- invitations to participate in special trips

Yes, I wish to be a **Friend.**
- Junior Friend (Graduates within 5 years) $25
- Individual $50-99
- Contributing Member $100-249
- Sustaining Member $250-499
- Donor $500-999
- Patron $1000-4999
- Director's Circle $5000

Make checks payable to Vassar College,
Friends of the Art Center, Box 102, Vassar College,
Poughkeepsie, New York 12604

Matching gift form
I am (my spouse is) employed by

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January 14 - April 10, 2005