



GREATER PHILADELPHIA AREA DOCENT CONSORTIUM

GPADC Fall Meeting
Glencairn Museum
April 17, 2024

Welcome

GPADC Chair, Monica Gondek, welcomed everyone. She introduced and thanked the current GPADC Steering Committee members. She asked if anyone is interested in volunteering to be on the n Steering Committee to email her. She explained that GPADC have spring and fall in-person meetings. Winter meetings will be virtual. At this time, there are no meetings scheduled; Monica requested that members go back to their institution and ask if they would like to host a meeting.

Monica introduced Brian Henderson, Director of Glencairn Museum. He spoke about the infrastructure restoration project at Glencairn which included heating and installing central air-conditioning, redoing the domestic water pipes and extensive electrical work. Brian informed us that Glencairn is the family home (built between 1928 and 1939) of Mildred and Raymond Pitcairn who lived there until 1979. Raymond Pitcairn was inspired to create a space for a collection of Medieval architectural art. He also was overseeing the construction of Bryn Athyn Cathedral. He wanted to build a cathedral for his community that reflected the old traditional style of medieval architecture. He wished to create a new aesthetic, giving new meaning to old objects, in a new space that invoked the original. Glencairn is the realization of his wish. Works of art are embedded in the fabric of the home/museum. After Mildred passed away in 1979, the family gifted the home and art collection to the Academy of the New Church. The Academy of the New Church had their own museum ,and that collection was integrated with the art at Glencairn and the museum was opened to the public in January of 1982. Brian shared that the mission of Glencairn is to welcome a dialogue about the architecture, the art created for the home, and the objects in the collections. He asked us to think about the higher meaning that art plays in our lives. By recognizing what we all have in common with the hope that we can better understand others and look to the goodness that exist in all humans.

Monica introduced Lisa Parker-Adams, Cairnwood Estate's Director of History and Education. She was Cairnwood's first Education Coordinator and later became the Director of History and

education in 2010. Her projects at Cairnwood Estates includes turning the Garden House into a visitor center, rearranging the 3rd playroom into a gallery space, and creating exhibitions of period fashions for the museum. Lisa showed us a slide show about Cairnwood Estates. John and Gertrude Pitcairn purchased land that became the community of Bryn Athyn. John Pitcairn was a Scottish immigrant who came to America with his family at 5 years old. He left home at 14 and began working for the Pennsylvania Railroad as a telegraph operator. and rapidly works his way into a management position in his 20's. He made his fortune by investing in oil production as well as newly developing pipelines. Later he became involved in manufacturing and was cofounder of Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company. He met Gertrude and after a six year courtship, were married in 1884. They lived in Philadelphia on Spring Garden Street for a time and 5 of their children were born there. They were advocates of the Academy of the New Church. They purchased 550 acres with the intention of funding space for the church and school campuses and to make it possible other members of the congregations could move with them. There was a stream running through the property, ponds for fishing, swimming, skating, and plenty of farmland around. The grounds had a Beau Arts country house, a garden house, greenhouses, and a carriage house. They entertained many of their church members socially. In 1903 the school buildings were built. John and Gertrude decorated with pieces that they collected from around the world. These pieces were considered educational. The Cathedral was built in 1913. The chapel is in the tower, John and Gertrude felt it was important to practice their faith with the family. Prayer and meditation happened in the chapel daily. In closing, Lisa mentioned the various programs and exhibitions at Cairnwood, Glencairn, and the Cathedral.

Monica welcomed Leah Smith, Visitor Experience and Rental Event Manager. Leah was hired as a part-time educator at Glencairn and she never left. Leah has been working at Glencairn for 20 years and along with her duties she manages tours, volunteers, and assists with visitor services. Leah thanked Monica and Anna for helping to organize the event and for making a sight visit. She also thanked all the docents in attendance for coming. She spoke about the Bryn Athyn Historic District which includes Glencairn Museum, Cairnwood Estates, and the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Glencairn has layers of collections: Medieval Art, which covers stained glass, art by craftsmen, and art in stone, wood, metal, and glass; Religious Art from Syria, Mesopotamia, Babylon; Islamic art; Collections from Greece, Rome, Egyptian and Indigenous peoples. Leah is excited about the upcoming Sacred arts even April 28th which will feature contemporary art mixed in with the antiquities at Glencairn. The 18 family bedrooms at Glencairn have been turned into galleries for the art collections. There are objects that have been recently installed that are on loan from Penn Museum. Leah discussed reasons why people come to museums: To learn something, someone brought them, or just interested in discovering something new. People are intrigued by the fact that Glencairn is a castle. But it's also a museum of religious art and when people are looking at an object, the docent finds a way to focus on the object to tell a story that's behind the object. Telling a story about the object brings people along by engaging interest. How does the object connect with the person in the practice of their worship? What does the object say about their religious belief? How is the object used as an expression of their

faith? Where is our connection to the piece as humans? What is the question that a docent can ask that will unite everyone and not divide them. Finding a way to speak about religion in a way to not be at conflict but look for similarities. Leah gave us a lot of food for thought.

Monica introduced the Keynote Speaker Lauren Stichter. She has been the Director and Associate Professor of Art Education, Moore College of Art and Design since 2015. Lauren is an artist, educator, curriculum consultant, professional development Administrator, and workshop facilitator who is passionate about equitable and accessible practices in Art Education. Lauren is a practicing ceramic artist. She was the lead pre K-12 Art teacher at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (2001-2015). Recently, Lauren received the 2024 Art Educator of the Year Award from The Council for Exceptional Children, Division of the Arts Education.

Lauren stated that she has always been impressed with the work that docents do. She shared with us the many meanings of the word docent. Educator, mentor, guide, teacher, lecturer, expert, and specialist are a few. She remarked that she wanted to focus on the educational part. According to Lauren, people who identify in the disabled community have meaningful experiences when viewing artwork. Fifteen to twenty percent of the population exhibit with some form of neuro divergence. Lauren explained that neurodiversity is the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways: there's no "right way" of thinking, learning, and behaving.

The neurodiversity movement emerged in the 1900s, aiming to increase acceptance and inclusion of all people while embracing neurological differences. Possible traits of a neurodivergent person can include hyper fixation, need for movement or breaks, stimming, social differences, sensory sensitivity, giftedness or struggles in academic areas. She stated the differences in supporting neurodiverse individuals versus accommodation and accessibility. Accommodation is reactive and accessibility is pro- active. Accommodation requires a person to disclose their disability or health problem when they shouldn't have to. Accessibility is making information, activities, and environments meaningful and useable to as many people as possible. She spoke about the curb-cut effect, the greatest desire and the universal design for learning. She asked audience members what they want their guests to take away after visiting their institutions. There were many great responses.

Lauren provided tips on preparing a tour and introducing museum culture for neurodivergents:

- Use the first five minutes before the tour begins to Identify barriers,
- Consider any sensory or processing needs that may arise,
- Encourage breaks (if needed), and
- include information that normalize accessibility options.

She answered questions from the worksheet that she passed out:

- If an area is too loud, move to a quieter space if possible or just address it beforehand.
- When engaging with small children get down to eye level.

- Have a Plan B when planning a tour, be flexible.
- Above all, show empathy, a sense of belonging and wellbeing, is a priority in a space.

In conclusion, Lauren informed the group of various resources available:

- a book, Culturally Responsive Teaching in The Brain
- TechOwl, which is an organization located on Temple University's campus, is a state-funded adaptive technology lending library.
- The Bartol Foundation supports trauma informed education for artists and educators, offering free workshops.
- Art Reach, at Friends Select, does accessibility consultations in museum spaces.
- Disability Pride PA, has disability workshops with offices located in center city.

Lastly, Lauren informed us about a Conference being held at Moore college of Art called Reimagining the Field, November 8-10.

Discussion Questions

A representative from each table gave a brief summary about the topic they discussed. Some of the topics were from Lauren's worksheet.

Has your docent training changed since covid?

Many institutions are doing Zoom trainings, some have programs on websites for guides to view. Fundraising is being done at some museums to pay for programming. A few institutions are doing virtual tours. Younger docents are doing tours now.

Have your organization provided training for any special populations during a tour to staff, guides, or volunteers?

A few museums do offer training for neurodivergent groups.

At your most basic level, what do you want your guests to walk away with?

To want to come back, empathy for other cultures, that this is a place where they belong, were some of the answers.

What spaces, tools, and supports can you incorporate into your tours and/or educational setting?

Help neurodivergent groups by recognizing sensory issues, identifying language issues, give members from neurodivergent communities a choice in how they want to participate.

Our meeting concluded with Glencairn Guides conducting tours of Glencairn Museum and Cairnwood Estates.

Respectfully Submitted by
Velma (Vee Jay) Jackson