

Beauty of The Brinton gone virtual

Who knew that 2020 would offer so many challenges with a global pandemic hitting the world hard in the first quarter of the year? Getting accustomed to the new normal of wearing masks, social-distancing and staying at home has without doubt tasked our emotional well-being as social creatures.

Let's be honest, we like going to the movies, eating at restaurants and hanging out together with family and friends. It's who we are as communal beings. As with the rest of the world, museums and cultural institutions are not immune in having to adapt to the times.

The Brinton Museum in Big Horn made the decision early on in March to move forward in presenting its planned schedule of exhibits. It would be different knowing there would be no visitors in the galleries. The question became, "We have the art; how do we reach our audience?"

Had COVID-19 not hit the planet, the museum would have seen hundreds of school children in the S. K. Johnston, Jr. Family Gallery in April for tours of the spring Illustrator Show. Nationally-known artist Theodore Waddell's charming storybook illustrations of a beloved Bernese Mountain Dog, Tucker, were delightful, perfect for teaching young children about art.

In the same month, The Brinton's inaugural juried print invitational, Printmaking in the Rockies and on the Great Plains, opened in the Jacomien Mars Reception Gallery. In normal times, a reception for participating artists would have taken place to announce these shows. Given the COVID-19 restrictions in place, such events were not an option. We needed to reach out to our patrons virtually.

If there is a positive side to COVID-19, it's that it has been instrumental in museums using online material to build intuitively diverse educational programs. The Brinton is creating an archive of video material on art and artists that is invaluable in documenting its exhibits and knowledge about artists of the area.

There was an enthusiastic response to the online scavenger hunt to find Waddell's creative images of Tucker and his friends. An educational video with detailed information about printmaking processes and interviews with the artists in the print competition is now part of the institution's archives and is available on its website.

Like thousands of other museums throughout the world, the benefits of going virtual and also the increased use of social media have without doubt made for stronger educational outreach to a local as well as national community.

By June 1, The Brinton was able to open to the public with COVID-19 guidelines in place. However, the practice of documenting the exhib-

its through video had by this time become status quo.

It was a no-brainer for the museum to create a series of informative videos, narrated by museum director Ken Schuster, to bring to life the work of the 19th century American painter Henry Farny (1847-1916). An exhibit of 13 of Farny's paintings and an oil by Frederic Remington (1861-1909) were on display at The Brinton Museum during the summer loaned by the American Heritage Center's George A. Rentschler Collection at the University of Wyoming.

Running concurrent with the Farny show was the exhibit *Takuwe*, a show on the tragic Wounded Knee Massacre that took place on December 29, 1890. Originated by the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies, *Takuwe* is the second in a series of exhibits organized by CAIRNS that has been presented at The Brinton.

Takuwe was yet another opportunity for the museum to add video material to its online archives. Native American historian Craig Howe, Ph.D., made two visits to The Brinton for a virtual gallery talk on the art and artists and presented a scholarly perspective on the facts of the massacre itself.

Artists featured in The Brinton's Northern Trust Gallery shows since May have each participated in virtual receptions to introduce themselves and their art to the public. Like aging fine wine, our technical capabilities are getting better with each interview.

Maybe the COVID-19 pandemic has a silver lining. In spite of social-distancing, quarantines and staying home, we are finding our audience in their living rooms and at the breakfast table, coffee cup in hand, learning about art, history and culture at The Brinton in Big Horn.

Don't get too comfy in your pj's and cozy slippers, when this pandemic crisis is over — hopefully, sooner than later — we want to see our patrons and docents back in full force in the exhibit galleries looking at great art. The bonus is that you can visit the museum in person and watch the virtual programs at home.

And if you're feeling the bug to get outside and enjoy nature, put on your walking shoes and take advantage of cool mornings and the upcoming warm autumn afternoons to hike The Brinton's newly opened trails. The scenery, the land and its wildlife are good for the soul. And, yes, the magnificent view of the Bighorns never gets old. It was, in some measure, the beauty of the land that brought Bradford Brinton to Wyoming.

I wonder what he would think about all this online virtual stuff. I'd like to believe he would have liked it.

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