

Oklahoma Art

MY FEET hurt. It is the middle of another endless day of wandering through museums, and I have long since stopped caring whether I see the masterpieces. The other patrons are gazing at the sculpture with awe. What am I missing? Would it not be simpler to look at examples of this art in a book?

The curator steps behind me and says, "What do you see when you look at this sculpture?" I respond, "I see exactly what's written in the brochure. A she-wolf, with Romulus and Remus." "Yes, but what do you see?" he repeats. "You know the story of Romulus and Remus. Is this what you expected? Look at the expression on the she-wolf's face. Can you tell what she feels? Is that a look of love, ferocity, or protection? Walk with me. Sculpture is meant to be appreciated from all angles. Otherwise, the artist would use a different medium."

We circle the sculpture slowly and, after every few steps, the curator stops to comment. "From this angle the faces of the she-wolf and the infants are not visible. What does the sculptor expect us to notice?" A few more steps and then, "You know, some people believe that a different artist is responsible for Romulus and Remus, that the original sculpture was of the wolf alone."

The circling process is working its magic and my feet ache a little less. I round the sculpture a few more times, wishing I could touch the wolf to understand her better. The curator approaches me again. "Don't spend all of your time on this sculpture. There are many works of art in the museum and each one deserves your attention. Leave this piece now; you can return another day. The sun will be at a higher angle,

casting a different shadow, or you may be the only patron in the room, viewing the sculpture against an entirely different background. You'll be able to appreciate the art better if you are allowed to admire it on many occasions."

Again, I stand in a museum unfamiliar to me, and a different curator is giving me instruction. "What do you see when you look at this sculpture?" "I see just what the chart says. A 76-year-old white woman who needs a checkup and a review of her medications." "Yes, but what else do you see? This is a very complicated masterpiece, which needs to be viewed from many angles. Come, walk with me." The circling process begins anew, but this time I am allowed to touch each work of art for better understanding.

"Examine her right eye closely. Do you imagine that her lens is a bit cloudy? What does that mean to us?" We walk on. "Now we can see the medications she holds in her hands: quinapril, lorazepam, iron tablets. What clues do these medications offer us in our quest to understand her better?" Two more steps and the curator speaks again. "Look closely from this angle. Can you see that this is a woman who worries about her safety at night?" As we circle, the woman speaks and her words offer keys to her past and future. She says her two sons live with her. Are they watching over her or does she still take care of them?

Finally, I am beginning to appreciate the living art. Now the curator issues a word of caution. "Tonight the museum will stay open late for you. But you must learn to circle the masterpieces more quickly, for the museum must close each evening and no work of art should be left unseen."

My face must surely reveal the ques-

tion I dare not ask. Why must the museum close? If there are works of art to be appreciated, why does the museum not remain open throughout the night?

I wander alone through the museum for several more hours. When I have seen enough, I seek out the curator. He sits at his desk with his eyes closed, his head tilted away from me. He looks weary; if he were given an inscription, he might fit into the museum. Have I enough experience to give him a title? My choice for him is *teacher*.

From this angle, I see long legs, capable of circling the masterpieces by day, drawing hesitant patrons along behind. The curator makes a quick detour on his way to lunch so he can catch a glimpse of his wife. An exchange of looks allows him to continue smiling throughout the day. Does this explain why the museum must close at night? The curator may need time to rest, to appreciate his family, and to be a part of the community. He is best able to explain the mysteries of the art when he is refreshed.

Will I disturb him if I attempt to examine his heart? I get out my tape measure to estimate its size. Just as I had imagined—a large heart indeed.

From another angle I see that his eyes are still closed. What would I see if they were open? Would I find a wisp of humor or a focused stare that indicates he is counting to 10 before speaking? Perhaps I would catch that hint of vulnerability that connects him with others of the human race.

I step back, and from this viewpoint I can see that someone else has already given the curator a title: *family doc*.

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