

A First-Time NDS Experience

By Kramer/NDSC Education Grant Recipient Roger Haight

As a Kramer/NDSC Education Grant recipient and first-time attendee to the Montreal 2017 National Docent Symposium, I was energized! I was looking forward to learning a lot during the breakout sessions, museum tours and the keynote breakfast talk. As a 20-year docent at Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton, New Jersey, I was also looking forward to the opportunity to share my own docent experiences. And what a great four days of sharing it was!

First, I should start out by saying that 2017 was a great year to experience both Canada and Montreal. Canada celebrated 150 years of confederation, and Montreal celebrated its 375th birthday.

The opening night NDS cocktail party, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art (MMFA) was a celebration of food, music and art. Located less than a 10-minutes' walk from the hotel, the walk to MMFA allowed me to enjoy a variety of terrific public artwork. As a docent at a sculpture garden my eyes were drawn to an installation of six headless figures, cast iron shells, walking in step with each other, called Walking Figures, by an artist I recognized as Magdalena Abakanowicz. We are fortunate to have several of her pieces at Grounds for Sculpture. Next up was an iconic blue LOVE sculpture by Robert Indiana.



Then I spotted a large beautiful, luminous yellow Dale Chihuly Chandelier with its characteristic twirls and curlicues in front of the museum's colonnaded façade. What a treat, and my symposium adventure had just begun!

After a few tempting appetizer portions of delicious food accompanied by a live jazz trio, I spent the rest of the evening visiting the museum's collections escorted by MMFA docents who "showed us their stuff"! I chose to concentrate on a special exhibit of First Nations art that was simply unforgettable. We explored a stunning piece entitled My Mother Talks About Caribou by Iyaituk Mattiusi.



The stone's natural white veins, on the face, represent the stories of the caribou emanating from the opening of his mother's mouth. The arms were many-fingered caribou horns, forming a loving, encircling embrace. The docent's story brought the sculpture alive and reminded me of the importance of what we do, for our visitors, as museum docents.

From the keynote address, through the breakout sessions, given by various museum docents and staff, to the day trips including fabulous meals, right to the closing lecture, it was a learning experience par excellence (I even learned a little French). But, perhaps one of the best parts of NDS was meeting and getting to know other docents. After the ice was broken by sharing meals, we began to talk about our varied docent experiences and about our own museum collections. With that sharing, I now feel like I have a friend and a museum to visit in every city including a few off the beaten path that I would never have found on my own.

I can't wait to hear what's in store for NDS Washington, D.C. in 2019!

To find out more please visit our website at <https://www.nationaldocents.org/symposia/education-grants/ndsc-education-grants-for-2019-nds-washington-dc>