



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
June 11, 2004

“Pure drawing is an abstraction. Line and modeling do not count; drawing and outline are not distinct, since everything in nature has color...By the very fact of painting, one draws. The accuracy of tone gives simultaneously the light and shape of the object, and the more harmonious the color, the more the drawing becomes precise...”

-Paul Cezanne, 1839 to 1906

Many years ago, when I was a jail librarian, I wrote a short piece about beauty. I think I was influenced by the unremitting ugliness of a county jail - it made me worry about people living without beauty. How would that affect people? I wondered. And what is beauty, anyway?

I was reminded of this recently when I was looking for an art book for someone. I pulled out a few of those huge heavy ones and glanced through, trying to find a particular sculpture. But while I was doing this, I was caught by the splendor of the paintings and the statues - and I realized how long it had been since I had gone to a museum just to satisfy my need to look at something beautiful. And as I looked through the library's art books, I also saw that a well done art book, with richly colored reproductions, could help to satisfy this need and to foster an interest in art.

So, today I went to the

art section in the Albany Library and picked out ten gigantic volumes to look at. These ten books represent hundreds of dollars of library funds - money our library spends so anyone with a library card can take one home and look at it. This is, to me, an amazing idea. And it makes me wonder how many people do just that. Of course, I don't really have to wonder - I can find out by checking to see how many times some of these books have been checked out.

Winslow Homer by Nicolai Cikovsky, Jr., has been checked out 46 times and renewed 10 times; *The Art of Richard Diebenkorn* by Jane Livingston has been checked out 32 times, and *Cezanne* by John Rewald has a circulation of 52 times. That means that fifty people have leafed through this book, possibly reading the text or maybe going right to the paintings, taking their time, thinking about each one.

When I was growing up,

continued on page 2

my parents and my grandparents always had art books on the coffee table. I used to kneel down and drag one over to me, then lift that heavy cover and carefully turn the pages. After a while I started to recognize the different styles: Gauguin, Picasso, Renoir, Van Gogh, Cassatt. And when we went to museums, I would look for familiar styles or even particular paintings. And I can remember how, by looking at this art work, I was filling some sort of visual need I must have – as if they were giving me information I couldn’t explain yet could understand.

As I was writing this, I asked the Albany Library branch manager, Ronnie Davis, if she ever took the time to look through the art books. Yes, she told me, I do. And, she added, she used to take the books home and put them on the coffee table, so her children would be exposed to art.

I think in our busy lives it is easy to forget the importance of art and beauty. Because it can only add subtly to our lives, it may be difficult to justify taking the time to browse through an art book. But the reward is great – art, like music and literature, gives us humanity and helps us to share a common love.