

ARTS & LEISURE

Noble works speak for themselves, thanks to new audioguide

Livingston museum becomes the first on the Island to employ system, which currently has entries for 71 pieces of art

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Seventy-one objects in the Noble Maritime Collection — paintings, lithographs, a soup tureen, a model ship, a drawing by a kindergartner — are speaking for themselves this spring.

They are “talking” by means of the museum’s new, free audioguide system. Wireless and compact, it consists of a hand-held “wand,” an “Orpheo mini.” It looks a lot like a remote.

As is the standard practice, selected items are labeled and numbered. By keying the number, the museum-goer accesses a story or anecdote about the object.

The Livingston museum’s namesake, marine artist John A. Noble (1913-

1983), is heard on one of the stops inside his preserved workplace, a meticulously organized houseboat.

Restored and outfitted, it is permanently docked on the first floor.

In the library, a colorful tureen is on the audio menu. Made by the highly desirable Quimper Pottery, the piece belonged to the artist’s mother, Gloria, who loved anything Quimper.

On the first floor, visitors can listen to an account of the handsome 19th century ceiling mural in the Writing Room. The rich green neo-classical painting actually has a storm in formation in its northeastern corner — highly appropriate since “nor’easters” are often the most dangerous storms.

The Noble mural is smaller and less grand than the mural in the Main Hall,

but much better. The Main Hall painting is gaudy by comparison, with cross-eyed Neptunes, many little parrots and a thicket of palm fronds.

The entry for a tiny drawing of a tall, gabled house reveals that it is the work of John Noble, drawn in 1918 when he was just 5 years old. His mother found the sheet years later and kept it.

Noble’s talent and interest in art seems clear even in this early, prodigious effort. The perspective’s practically perfect.

Noble’s chief work was a 79-sheet series of lithographs of contemporary marine scenes. Many are already in the system. “We’ll have all of them online by 2010,” said Erin Urban, founding executive director of the museum.

Determining the first 71 entries took some time, she added. “We had two considerations. We wanted to choose objects that are on exhibit permanently, and tell the core story of the museum.”

The Noble Collection, the newest museum on the Island, is the first to have audioguide. Historic Richmond Town expects to launch an audioguide for selected areas of its 100-acre complex later this year.

A \$10,000 grant from the Staten Island Foundation helped underwrite the new system. It was produced by Orpheo, an international company that has a Manhattan office.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NOBLE MARITIME COLLECTION

The Noble Maritime Collection’s new audioguide — the first system of its kind on Staten Island — includes entries for 71 objects found in the Livingston museum.