

## June Public Tour: The Search for Belonging

*Examine the challenges and rewards of belonging in a changing world.*

Here are some ideas to use in creating this tour. Pick and choose as you like!

Introduction: What defines you as an individual? You might begin with your interests and accomplishments, but when digging deeper you might think about your connections: the people, places and ideas which give you a sense of belonging. After our physical needs and the need for safety are met, the most important human need is for love and belonging. This tour looks at works of art to inspire conversations about the challenges and rewards of the search for belonging. A prop to help discuss what we need/desire for a good life is **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** (see last page).

**“Home is where the heart is.”** (attributed to Pliny the Elder, CE 23-79, Roman author, naturalist, and philosopher)

For many, home and family are the first and most long-lasting experience of belonging. Today families can be defined in many ways; a child can find belonging with a single parent or a blended family, a kind teacher or supportive coach. What do families consider as important to provide? What do children want and treasure most? How might those perspectives be similar? How might they be different? Let visitors imagine what each individual feels by looking at an image of a family:

**Peace Concluded (69.48)**

**At the Spring (2009.17)**

**Berthe Morisot, The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with her Nanny (96.40)**

Caregivers are tested by the needs of aging parents or loved ones with challenges. Their strength reveals the deep bonds of belonging to another. **Tim Lowly's At 25 (recto and verso; 2016.95)** explores his relationship with his daughter: as a caregiver, father, and artist. How can caregiving be isolating? How can it strengthen bonds with others?

A search for belonging may include a spiritual journey. Consider **Gerrit Dou's Hermit Praying (87.11)**. How can religious practice be rewarding? **Khaled Ben Slimane's White Vase (2018.7)** reflects his Sufi beliefs and the influences of Japanese calligraphy. His spiritual journey is a search for universal beauty:

[https://www.artforum.com/uploads/guide.004/id04129/press\\_release.pdf](https://www.artforum.com/uploads/guide.004/id04129/press_release.pdf)

Some people find a connection with pets. How do people and animals communicate and bond? Begin a conversation about pets with the **Portrait of Olive Craster (2015.81)** with her squirrel. Here's some background on Olive and her husband:

<https://www.robilantvoena.com/artists/50-pompeo-batoni/works/889/>

How have changes in modern life affected what pets mean to us?

## **Community and Belonging**

Part of our identity is firmly tied to the place we were born. More fluid are groups we join and the people with whom we find connection because of common interests. Today community can also mean joining social media and sharing information, ideas, and personal messages, etc.

### Community: The Land

The exhibition **In Dialogue with the Forest: Barkcloth Paintings from Congo** is a visual interpretation of the sights and sounds where the Mbuti people live. Their identity is based on belonging to the rainforest as “their god, parent and sanctuary.”

Good background: <http://www.fao.org/3/y9882e/y9882e09.htm>

Select a barkcloth and ask visitors to look at lines and shapes. Imagine the sounds you can hear in a rainforest: insects, rain, dripping water, birds, animals, etc. Invite visitors to share the sights or sounds that they associate with “home.”

**Teo Nguyen’s Untitled 14 (2018.39.1)** is about the land of Minnesota and his story as an immigrant. What is he saying about MN? Why do you think he made the horizon line so low? Nguyen says, “As an immigrant and an artist...I have learned to embrace the American spirit of freedom that says if you see a road that interests you, go ahead: venture down it.” What does it mean to you to be a Minnesotan? Can people belong to two places and cherish both? Explain. What are the challenges of belonging when you find yourself “in between” or parts of two distinct cultures?

### Community: Belonging to a Social Group

Communities can provide social get-togethers or a response to a particular need in a changing world.

**Mori Sosen’s Monkeys Playing on a Stone Lantern (78.22.2)** can inspire a lively conversation about the way people interact in a group. What is each monkey doing? What are the rewards of belonging to a troop of monkeys ... or group of people? Do you notice any problems? What do you think will happen next? How do you think a monkey would react to being isolated? How does modern life push people towards a life without social interaction? What do you think are the results?

What first caught your eye in **Revolutionary (Angela Davis) (2018.41)**? Walk closer...are there any surprises? **Wadsworth Jarrell’s** 1972 print was part of an art-making and music project to create a greater sense of community belonging among African Americans. In the 1960s, Angela Davis was a leader in the fight for racial, gender, and economic justice, as well as a counterculture activist. Growing up in Alabama in the 1950s, her family lived in the "Dynamite Hill" neighborhood, which was targeted by bombings of homes to drive out middle-class blacks. How does the arrangement of the words help you to hear her anger and her message? If all the words were printed neatly at the bottom of the page how would you react? How would the image be different in black and white?

**Delita Martin's Between Sisters (2019.35.2)** is inspired by the past with the circles and the moon as ancient symbols of feminine strength. However, Martin tells a story of the future: African-American women coming together to talk, forming communities, and becoming icons of strength.

Good 5 min video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRtGoY3ZLk4>

Look at the posture of the two women and their eyes. What do they say to you? Martin is a printmaker, but also uses sewing and mixed media with patterns. What does that add to her work?

#### Community: Social Media

The fantastical quality of **Tokumaru Kyoko's Cosmic Plants (2011.82.1)** conveys a sense of growth, life, and the rewards that plants can offer. For millennials a connection to plants and participating in plant owner communities through social media is "the newest thing:" <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-leafy-love-affair-between-millennials-and-our-houseplants>

How can belonging to an online community be more inviting and inclusive than a physical community? Are there downsides to a community that only meets online?

#### Community: Ritual and Tradition

**Jeffrey Gibson's Nothing Is Eternal** (promised gift L2018.228.3) has been related to the body of a dancer, while the beadwork, jingles, and nylon ribbons celebrate powwow regalia. As a child, Gibson thought of powwows as a tradition, but now, he recognizes them as modern. "I define modernism as innovation or an invention responding to drastic changes in circumstances and environment, and powwow is one of those things; it evolved as a way to bring people back together." Powwows developed as a response to native communities under stress and threat. (**Wikipedia: Pow wow history**) As our times change, our traditions change, but the importance of belonging to a group remains. One example is the 21st century tradition "Friendsgiving." Can you think of ways holiday celebrations have changed? What is enjoyable about new traditions?

The **Somali Wedding Basket (2010.73)** is a tradition about maintaining community ties. **Signac's Blessing of the Tuna Fleet at Groix (62.36)** is a very old tradition to ensure a safe and bountiful fishing season. It's also a US tradition that strengthens community. (**Wikipedia: Blessing of the Fleet**)

#### Community: Who Belongs?

Masks were profitable town souvenirs where **Ensor** lived. **The Intrigue (70.38)** speaks to our times with its "us-them" hostility. Ensor used masks to hide identities, but expose the deep prejudice and animosity of the people in his community. What do these people fear from this couple? How does belonging to a group "give permission" for words and actions that usually are held in check?

A new acquisition in G315 is **Patrick Lee's Loyalty and Trust**. His photorealistic drawing of a Los Angeles gang member feels threatening but at the same time reveals vulnerability.

**Background: <http://www.milesmcenery.com/news/patrick-lee-at-the-huntington-museum-of-art-huntington-wv>**

What do his choice of tattoos say about who he is? Do his hands and eyes tell another story? Why do you think he chose “Loyalty and Trust” as tattoos?

**Maggie Thompson’s Family Portrait (2015.61A-C)** looks at the issue of “[blood quantum](#),” a method the federal government uses to determine “how Indian” a person is and what benefits they are allowed. Thompson says, “My dad is mostly Native American and my mom is Irish and German.... Even though I am mostly ‘white’ I still identify myself as being Native American.” Who gets to decide if someone belongs to a family or community? Is family a matter of birth, genetics, or a mutual recognition among people? Within the warp threads can be found glistening strands of gold—and Thompson’s own answer.

**<https://blogs.mprnews.org/state-of-the-arts/2014/03/maggie-thompson-weaves-together-her-indian-identity-in-where-i-fit/>**

