

OLLI – Kay Miller’s Lens tour – Theme: *What is revealed, what is concealed?*

- 1) Storytelling/Gender/Historical – “Men and Women Fighting” - George Tooker
- 2) Empathy/Viewer Response/Storytelling – Kunin Portrait Gallery (G360)
- 3) Race/IDEA (race)/Global/Historical – “False Start” – Frank Bowling
- 4) Sensory/Spiritual/Personal experience (DNA)/Global - “Radiations of the Midnight Walker” – Leonardo Benzant – Enduring Soul exhibition with “Egungun Mask” or maybe “Crucifix” - Serge Jolimeau -with its birds. [African knowledge system theme: spiritual expression-in-physical form]
- 5) Viewer Response/Spiritual - “Musical Still Life” - Theodore Roszak
- 6) Socio-Economic/Historical/Viewer Response – “Strike Breakers (Company Violence),” Morris Topchevsky G377
- 7) Race/Gender/Historic/Viewer Response - “White Savior Complex,” Julie Buffalohead exhibition.

THE PROCESS:

What is the lens approach? How does it differ from superficial the way most of us look at art? Emily Shapiro and I started out talking about the usual lens with which we and most museum-goers approach works of art: Look at the label, scan the picture, move to the next work. If we use a lens at all, it’s often the same one, based on our personal bent and predilections. As a former reporter, storytelling tends to be my go-to lens: I make sense of most art by telling myself a story about it.

My goal in these tours is to enable visitors to engage more deeply with each artwork, to create a deeper grasp and visual memory of that piece. A secondary goal is for participants to think about how art reflects its era, to compare it with our times, and help us see our roles in our own societies. Finally, the lens approach gives visitors a toolbox from which they can approach a gallery of art, choose a few pieces to really look at and absorb.

We handed out half-page summary sheets of eight possible lens through which to view art. Emily summarized these from Debbi Hegstrom’s more detailed description of these lenses. [below: Points of View – Summary Sheet; Points of View: Critical lenses for Viewing Works of Art]

Emily and I both found discussions at our first pieces were the longest and most involved. So, for our first objects we chose more complex pieces that invited long discussions. I began with *Men and Women Fighting*, by George Tooker, because it is a piece that has long puzzled me. The mystery of this object was perfect to begin with the STORYTELLING LENS. Visitors immediately spotted stories: Custody battles, spousal violence, death of a child. Participants built beautifully on each others’ stories. They had lots of questions: Why is the woman in orange ripping her bodice? Why is everyone barefoot? Where and when is this taking place? Why are the men angry and the women distraught? Why are the men carrying sticks? What happened to the child on the ground?

Their questions led us quite naturally into using additional lenses: GENDER (what is this male-female struggle about and where might we see it today?); HISTORICAL (where did Tooker get the idea for this painting and why wasn’t he explicit about its meaning?) VIEWER RESPONSE (what conflicts might this reflect in today’s world?)

Emily and I came to think of the LENS process as **VTS on steroids**. It involves the same deep questions, the second, third and fourth looks it invites.

Good questions are essential. So is having excellent background, to add – as it becomes relevant. Perhaps the **biggest caveat** is to be spare in adding your own narrative. The goal is to share just enough to spur additional observations by the group. Restraint can be difficult. Guard against telling too much of the story because you know it. If you add too much, you will preempt the discussion that visitors find incredibly satisfying. I did that on one tour and learned a lot from it.

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At the end of each tour, we asked visitors how they felt about the LENS process. Without exception they said they loved it – because it opened their eyes to the art, the maker, and to themselves as viewers.

I used a single lens – the EMPATHY LENS - for the entire time we were in the Kunin portrait gallery (G360) because the two exercises we use there ended up being really time-consuming as we shift from picking the person in a portrait that you'd like most to know, to the person you'd avoid at all costs. These tend to draw everyone in the group to talk about their choices. Surprisingly, some visitors had quickly developed entire stories about the person portrayed. Occasionally, the person in the painting reminded them of a real person they knew and loved – or didn't. They were gravitating to a STORYTELLING LENS without a cue from me.

On leaving the portrait gallery, one participant mused, “Actually, we are all looking at these works personally – through the VIEWER RESPONSE lens. It says more about us than it does about the art.” Often, Morris Kantor's *Untitled (Posthumous Portrait of the Artist's Mother)* was chosen as the least-liked person in the gallery. After the tour, a new OLLI member said he felt he knew her. He had just retired as a pediatrician in Rochester. The portrait reminded him of an especially unpleasant mother and her glower as she sat in his waiting room, suspicious of any diagnosis he offered!

Perhaps the most insightful thing any of my tour participants said came at our final stop: *White Saviour Complex*. After discovering how different his initial perceptions are from what Julie Buffalohead has said about the symbols she uses and how her art reflects her biracial heritage and the long, difficult history of her Pomo people, he said, he mused, “Looking at this, I realize how utterly unprepared I was to see this from a Native point of view.”

I did six of these Lens tours. I had a long list of objects I was prepared to use. I varied what I used, but found discussions were so intense that each time I only got to **four works**. My list (above) includes only those pieces that I used. Emily and I will talk about those that proved most successful for us.

QUESTIONS:

False Start, 1970, Frank Bowling (Guyanese, b. 1934), Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, Van Derlip 2018.56



Label: In *False Start*, Frank Bowling maps an expansive yet intimate geography that charts his path from Bartica, Guyana, to London and New York. Rejecting the graphic formalism of pure abstraction, his *Map Paintings* (1967-71) contain references to post-colonialism – the social and political power relationships that sustained colonialism – his own Afro-Caribbean roots, and the broader African diaspora. The composition of *False Start* features prominent outlines of the continents of the Southern Hemisphere – Africa, Australia, and South America – rendered in tones of white and pink. Through its omission of Europe, the image challenges Eurocentric historical narratives while drawing attention to the expansive footprint of colonialism and imperialism.

Quote: *“What distinguishes or creates the uniqueness of the Black artist is not only the color of his skin, but the experiences he brings to his art that forge, inform, and feed it and link him essentially to the rest of the Black people.”* ~Frank Bowling, 1969

Questions:

1. IDEA LENS

- Let this large, colorful piece fill your eyes. After a minute, what element of it most captures your attention?
- What shapes do you see? What do they remind you of?
- Let's read this painting from left to right. Bowling called this painting, “False Start.” Why might he have named it that? What do you see on the far left? How much of the African continent do we see on the left?
- What other continents do you see? What part of the hemisphere are all these continents on?
- Where is the second stencil of Africa located? Why might Frank Bowling have included Africa twice? Where does Bowling place it in relation to South America?
- With your eyes, trace a journey from the shape of Africa to the shape of South America. Why might Bowling have placed them in this order? What might that reflect about his own life?
- Where are North America, Europe and Asia?
- What colors do you see? What can you tell about how Bowling applied them? [Pooling of paint. Story about following the light]

10. HISTORICAL LENS [era and Bowling bio]

- Think about the year 1970, when this work was painted? What movements were going on in the U.S. at the time? The country was virtually on fire at the time. [Civil Rights, Black Power, women's movement, Chicano movement, environmental movement].
- This painting was done at a very emotional time nationally – during the white-hot moments of the Civil Rights, feminist and anti-war movements. How does it reflect those times?

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13. This painting is part of the monumental “Map” series that Guyanese painter Frank Bowling created from 1967-71 that are semi-autobiographical. The name of this two-gallery exhibition “Mapping Black Identities” is drawn from this work and that series. Bowling painted this seminal, **autobiographical** work in 1970 - about half-way through that series. His “Map Paintings” are about the African diaspora, colonialism and its lingering effects. He’s showing us an expansive, yet intimate geography. What does Bowling suggest about how he and others in the African diaspora were affected?
14. In *False Start*, Bowling sets an abrupt beginning in Africa [far left], where the diaspora begins. Where do you see Africa reappearing? What might that reappearance midway in the painting represent? [The “middle Passage” by which captured or purchased African men, women and children were transported to slavery in the New World]
15. [Brief bio of Bowling.] What layering do you see here? How might that layering reflect his life?
16. Bowling is also showing the passage of personal time for himself. How does he accomplish that? [His trajectory begins in British Guiana. He goes to London. Is back and forth. Layers with “middle passage” references, empire building and colonial practices. All wrapped together.]
17. How are those **phenomena still present in our world today**?
18. What do you make of the elongated **purple figures** at the far right? How might that relate to his story? To Trevor’s?
19. Bowling talks about his “journeys” – between physical locations, between art movements to find his own individual voice. What journeys did Trevor Noah take? And how did that contribute to who he has become?
20. **This painting also alludes to the intensely personal experience for Bowling of finding his place in an art world in which color field work and pop art were dogmas. Black artists still had to find their place in a world in which Black artists were still largely excluded.**
21. Look for signs of Bowling’s process - pooling and staining the canvas and the use of stencils.
22. **Also LOOK FOR: Bowling’s footprints where he walked across the painting.** Bowling didn’t treat this canvas as fragile. He really engaged with his materials.
23. Almost all of Bowling’s map paintings were included in a seminal show at the Whitney in 1971. *False Start* was painted in 1971 and didn’t make it into the show. **This is its FIRST exhibition!**

Men and Women Fighting, 1958, George Tooker, American, 1920-2011, Tempera on board, Kunin. [right] Giotto’s Massacre of the Innocents.



Study for Confrontation (Men and Women Fighting), 1958, Tooker, Graphite on paper, Hood Museum, Dartmouth and Allegories of Vices and Virtues: Temperance and Wrath



Label: No additional information

Questions:

1. **STORYTELLING LENS:** What is going on here? What impresses you first?
2. How many figures do you see? How close are they to us?
3. What are they wearing? What colors are their clothes? What might that tell us?
4. What are the men carrying?
5. What emotions do you see on the faces of the women? Of the men?
6. What environment are they in? Which are the most prominent? Look high and low.
7. What story does this suggest to you? Why might the men and women might be fighting?
8. **GENDER/CHILDHOOD LENS**
9. Who is most powerful in this painting – the women or the men? What tells you that?
10. Why is the woman in red baring her breasts?
11. What gives power to the men? To the women?
12. How is the similar to or different from the roles that men and women play today?

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13. What is happening to the children? Why might the man and woman be grabbing a child? Is it a boy or a girl? Are any of the adults protecting the children? How do the children feel?
14. How might this scene apply to our world today?
15. **HISTORICAL LENS** – Brief Tucker bio
16. George Tooker told curator Bob Cozzolino that Men and Women Fighting has a lot to do with Bill Christopher's and his **commitment to civil rights**. Through his artistic career, Tooker displayed a consistent commitment toward social justice, equality and spiritual harmony. How might Tooker be demonstrating that here? What does Tooker suggest is at stake when civil rights are violated? How are civil rights like the lives of children?
17. **ART HISTORICAL/RELIGIOUS LENS**
18. Does this remind you of any stories you may have read, heard or seen depicted from the Christian Bible? What are those stories? How are they similar?
19. Some of the figures in this painting were clearly inspired by frescoes painted by the great artist Giotto in Scrovegni Chapel. Others may have been. This work was probably meant to be read from left to right.
20. Compare the woman in red to the “vice” image of “Wrath” in the Scrovegni Chapel. How are they similar?
21. The composition of this painting appears to have been inspired by Giotto's *Massacre of the Innocents*: What is similar? Why might Giotto have put men and women at odds with each other? How differently are the environments presented?
22. Why do you think that artist George Tooker eliminated so many details? How is the power of this painting affected by Tooker reducing it to what he called the essentials of a work?
23. **PERSONAL LENS**
24. How might it apply to events of our day?
25. What feelings does this picture create in you?

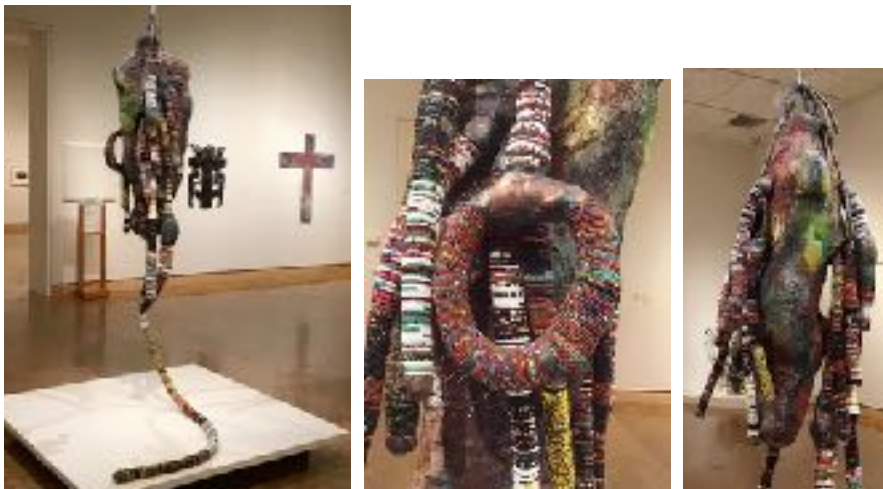
1. **Kunin Portrait Gallery – Suggestions from Debbi and Ann**

- **Empathy lens**

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- Have people circulate in gallery. Notice a face/figure you resonate/connect with on surface level.
- Look for what it is about that person. Spend some time with.
- Ask the question: "Who are you attracted to? What do you see in that person that is attractive to you, that helps you connect?"
- Who did you avoid when you looked around the gallery?
 - Spend some time with that person – as much as five minutes.
 - Focus just on the face. Open yourself up to that person & what they're doing. Put preconceived notions aside.
 - Figure out: What do you need to know – or what would you need to know – in order to connect.
 - Did you feel a shift by spending more & more time?
 - What did you need to know: ~"I want to know WHY she's angry. And what she's like when she's not angry."
 - Are there times you have felt like that?
- What would help you to understand?
 - "Is there something wrong?" "Did something happen to you that you look poor – your clothes?" "Is there something wrong in your life that we could talk about"
 - "Is there anything I could do to help you?"
 - What was your day like today?
 - What was your childhood like?

Radiations of the Midnight Walker, Victorious in Round Number 8, He Who Moves Inside of the Womb of Nagik and Timelessness, He Who Moves Here, There, and Everywhere Chanting: I AM THE GREATEST! And Chanting: WITCHCRAFT WILL NEVER TOUCH ME, Leonardo Benzant, American, b. 1972, Mannequin form, fabric, mpolos (Kikongo word for powders), string, coffee grounds, vija (ashiote), powdered Charcoal, efun (eggshell powder), cigar ash, glitter, acrylic, acrylic inks, gel medium, rope, leather, monofilament, glass beads, other materials. Private collection, Private collection, promised gift on long-term loan to Mia. L2019.104.1



Label Commentary:

Long tubular structures, like tentacles,

Larger than life,

Speak of what is required for the African

To emerge victorious

No matter how many rounds it takes.

It starts with long strands of multicolored Czech glass beads, wrapped around

Handstitched appendages crafted from bundled fabric, bits of soil, plant life,

Rum, bone, or even saliva.

The artist says, “There is a prayer inside each of these forms, a prayer, coins, or

Other things that are symbolic.”

Thus, the work delves into the collective unconscious, encodes and remembers

African cultural memory, and offers it as an invitation to healing.

Moving us outside of time

Connecting us through strands of DNA,

Quite literally, to the Ancestors – their knowledge – spirituality

Their stature, their power.

Questions:

1. Our approach to this next gallery is going to be slightly different. This exhibition of works by African artists and artists from the African diaspora is called **The Enduring Soul**. It is a collaboration by our own curators and the Cultural Wellness Center in Minneapolis. There is an invitation to experience how a very real presence of African ancestors is expressed and retained in both older and contemporary works. Members of the CWC talk about this space as a gateway to their African ancestors and to African systems of knowing and belief that stretch back thousands of years. Each of these works expresses the African spiritual memory of bringing heaven to earth.
2. In preparation for this exhibition, griots – storytellers and historians - came from the Cultural Wellness Center to speak with us about African Knowledge systems that go back thousands of years to the ancient Egyptians. They began by acknowledging the presence of their ancestors. Then, they invited us to **be at peace, be at rest and to be free**. They invited us to **bypass the censorship of the rational mind**, so that we could activate the knowledge that resides deep inside each of us.
3. So, let's begin in **silence**. Let's stand still. And open our hearts to the wisdom that is within us. Let's approach this piece by **Leonardo Benzant** it using two lenses – the **Spiritual Lens** and the **Sensorial** – sight, touch, smell, sound, imagined feel.
4. This piece **Radiations of the Midnight Walker** has a very long name, but also a very physical presence. First, let's experience what that physical presence is like. You have many objects in your home. How is this concrete object different?
5. If Benzant were here, he probably would welcome us to touch it. But he's not here to give permission. So let's imagine how it would feel. What is this made of? How would each bead feel in our hands? What colors would we choose? What would it feel to run a filament through the beads and then to shape them around a tube of bundled fabric – to create something new and old at the same time? Would you think of someone who had taught you how to do that?
6. Benzant says, **“I feel like I'm painting with the beads through color and rhythm.” Do you feel rhythm in his work?**
7. Does its shape remind you of anything? Beads are attached to a manikin form. What other materials can you identify? String, rope, glitter, and paint were all used in this sculpture.
8. It looks heavy. How would it feel in our arms? How would it feel to raise up this sculpture and hold it there long enough to hang it? Would we need someone to help us hang it?
9. Does it have a taste or a smell? It contains many ingredients that have both a smell and taste - coffee grounds, **ashiote** [*aa-chee-ow-tei* – which has a peppery aroma and subtle **flavor** described as nutty, sweet, and earthy], powdered Charcoal, eggshell powder, cigar ash, rope, leather, monofilament, glass beads, soil. Does the memory of those smells conjure other memories for you? Are any of your own ancestors, family members or special people associated with those smells?
10. What do you think it might sound like?

11. Benzant says that pieces like this are like **works in an initiation society**. if people seek his permission, he encourages them to touch, walk in and around the work. He says that activates it, like turning on a power switch. Do you think our presence does the same thing?
12. What do those tentacles remind you of? Think of ancestors. We often think of our ancestral heritage – expressed through our DNA – in Western terms, as the **double helix**. What **traits might each thick DNA strand express for Benzant?**
13. **What is YOUR personal experience with DNA?** Think about all the traits you received from your ancestors and that will live on after you. What favorite traits from your own DNA would you want to be encoded in a work of art?
14. We have just concluded the holidays – often a time for multiple generations of family to come together. Think about the feelings you have for grandchildren, children, nieces and nephews. **How do they think of you and your physical and spiritual connections to them?** A friend recently got Kelly's Christmas car and said she thought my beautiful granddaughter Maddie really looks like me. Although no one in the family has ever seen such a resemblance, I was thrilled at the comparison because of my love for Maddie. I am hoping that in the next couple of days or week, this object will linger in you and cause you think about your relationship to people who have come before you. And the people who will come after.
15. The artist says, **“There is a prayer inside each of these forms, a prayer, coins, or other things that are symbolic.”** Let your heart answer for you: If you could have one of those things, what would it be? And how might that change you?
16. One principle: Knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation. Our parents die. But we can live by holding these ancestors dearly in our hearts and studying the lessons they gave us.
17. As we leave, I'd love for you to consider what got awakened in you from being with this sculpture and your own thoughts? If you allow yourself to engage with that piece, with its spirits, where does it lead you? And what journey in your life is that a part of?

***Strike Breakers (Company Violence)*, 1937, Morris Topchevsky, Oil on canvas, Bigelow Fund
2018.69.2 G377**



Label: This eerie scene of Troops in gas masks looks straight out of World War I. Instead, it was based on a clash between police and workers in Waukegan, Illinois, in February 1937. Employees of **Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation**, just outside of Chicago, formed a union to push for better wages and safety at the plant. But the company refused to deal with the union. And when the workers went on strike, the company convinced local law enforcement to break it up, resulting in a week-long standoff that ended with the workers being gassed out of the plant and arrested. Topchevsky, a lifelong activist for equality, was moved by the workers' efforts and painted this image in honor of them.

Quote: “At the present time of class struggle, danger of war and mass starvation, the artist cannot isolate himself from the problems of the world and the most valuable contribution to society will come from the artists who are social revolutionists.” – Morris Topchevsky

Questions:

1. SOCIOLOGICAL-ECONOMIC LENS.

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2. Let's start by looking at this painting through a **sociological-economic lens**. What time period are we in? What demographic groups or conditions might be represented in this work? What social issues might artist Morris Topchevsky be addressing? How do the colors and composition contribute to the overall impact of the painting?
3. Who are the figures in the foreground? What are they holding? What caused the smoke?
4. Who are the figures in the left rear? How can you tell? Are the two groups on the ground working together?
5. Who is in the building behind the four lighted windows? Why are they there? Consider the relative size and scale of the two groups.
6. With the gas masks and khaki-colored uniforms, this painting looks like **WWI**. But one clue zeroes in on the real subject. What is the clue? ["DON'T SCAB" sign in a labor conflict].
7. Think of this as part of "**a people's history**." Let's add some details about the era and shift to an **historical lens**. This is the scene of a real event – a labor strike - that took place in 1937 in Illinois. It is a quintessential Depression-era theme of the tension between workers and factory owners. Artist, Morris Topchevsky heard about this strike (but didn't see it) and painted this just **MONTHS after the actual event**. With that information, what else do you see? What do you wonder about?
8. This was a strike by steelworkers who were picketing unfair labor practices – dangerous working conditions, low wages, long hours. It resulted first in a famous week-long, sit-down strike. When workers wouldn't leave the factory buildings, a mob gathered, followed by armed private security guards and over 100 sheriff's deputies. What does the picture suggest happened next?
9. **There was violence**. That is the scene Topchevsky has chosen to depict: Workers hold up in the factory, refusing to leave until their demands are met. Not only the local authorities from Waukegan, but also **vigilantes** armed with tear gas, clubs, scaffolding, and battering rams to get them out.
10. Now, let's shift lenses again a more **personal, experiential lens**:
11. **Put yourself in the building**. It is one of two key buildings that you and 95 long-time colleagues have taken over. What are the sight, sounds? What are you afraid of? What is exhilarating?
12. You're not a radical. What did it take for you to form a union and to take over this plant? You have worked for Fansteel – without a union - most of your adult life. Hours are long, the work is dangerous. You are skilled at your job. One day the company brought in efficiency experts, and the company cut your pay. Lay-offs might be next. Nationally, the new Wagner Act was passed in 1935, ensuring your right to organize and bargain as a group. But for months Fansteel has refused to negotiate. How does it feel to take over your workplace? To face armed police and vigilantes - maybe people you know? How do you feel about the other men who have gone out on strike with you? How do you feel about replacement workers who take your job when you are fired? If the company offered your job back but not your buddy's or the union – would you agree?
13. **Now, imagine you are part of that large cadre of private security guards, vigilantes, and over 120 sheriff's deputies on the outside**. You are armed with guns, tear gas, clubs, battering rams, even poison gas. Soon you will use scaffolding to break through the barricades with ram rods. How do you feel? It's 1937 – still the heart of the depression. The men inside are lucky to have jobs. They might be friends, neighbors, even relatives. They've held out a week. The company is furious, impatient. Your job may also be on the line. What are your feelings? How do you think you will feel when this is all over?

14. **What are Topchevsky's views of this conflict?** Several additional things to consider: In his native Poland, Topchevsky's Jewish family faced pogroms in which **four of his siblings perished**. His father was an iron worker and a labor activist in Poland before they immigrated to Chicago. In addition to the ethnic violence his family had experienced in Poland, Topchevsky witnessed the 1919 race riots in Chicago – resulting in his lifelong commitment to racial equality. The CIO, which organized this strike is known for organizing workers across egalitarian racial, ethnic and gender lines. How might that square with Topchevsky's portrayal in this painting?
15. **A little more labor history:** By 1937, when this occupation took place, a huge national wave of sit-down strikes had rolled into Chicago. Sit-down strikes won gains for workers that had eluded them in the many years of corporate welfare and company unionism and spread across the country. The sit-down occupation of plants strikes was considered an effective “pioneering” labor technique because it minimized violence, prevented the company from introducing strikebreakers, and imposed a choke hold at the key location: the point of product.
16. This strike at the Fansteel Metallurgical Corporation in North Chicago was a landmark - considered among the most brazen. There, workers battled police in the streets. Policemen then constructed a scaffold to assault the sit-down strikers. Using tear gas, they routed the workers lodged on the second and third floors of the factory. Class warfare had come to Main Street U.S.A.
17. **The strike at Fansteel has part of intensifying class conflict.** Occupation at Fansteel happened during the New Deal era of industrial unionization and was suppressed by massive police intervention, bringing to the fore the revolutionary implications of sit-down wave of strikes. It was a landmark case at the Supreme Court, decided two years after the sit-in. Historically, the Fansteel company won its case at the Supreme Court against the strikers, citing owners' property rights. Across the country, employers used the decision to fire thousands of workers.
18. As violent as the Fansteel strike was, it was not deadly. But other sit-down strikes in the Chicago area were, most notably the Little Steel Memorial Day Massacre four months later in which **thousands of strikers were arrested, 300 injured and 18 were killed**.
19. Fansteel was a harbinger of worse class violence to come. How does this painting put us back in those times? Does it have anything to say to us in present day?
20. **Topchevsky is really interested in how art can sway social consciousness.** Does his portrayal of this event make you more – or less – sympathetic toward workers?

White Saviour Complex, 2019, Julie Buffalohead, Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma, b. 1972, Acrylic, graphite, and collage on Lokta paper, Courtesy of artist and Bockley Gallery.



Label: A woman in a burgundy dress lies on her back, with an attentive coyote standing on top of her. This paper cut-out woman is placed upon jet black paper with a ribbonwork design adorning the bottom. Ribbonwork, created with imported silk ribbons from Europe and stitched onto wool, is a unique art form created by women in Osage, Ponca, and other communities across the North American prairie. To the left, a string connects the woman to **two fat raccoons**. One is comfortably lounging on his back; he wears a **bear-claw necklace** and holds ribbonwork in his paw. The other raccoon stands upright, grasping **stick figures of the Lone Ranger**, a hero of TV and movie westerns, and a **well-groomed white woman holding a cell phone** and clasping a fancy purse.

Wall label: Storytelling: Julie Buffalohead. Julie Buffalohead creates visual narratives told by animal characters who have personhood, agency, and individuality. Like all great storytellers Buffalohead connects the mythical with the ordinary, the imaginary and the real, and offers a space into which viewers can bring their own experiences. As we enter her worlds, she coaxes us to discover additional layers of meaning – social, historical, political, personal – using metaphor, wisdom and wit. The **rabbits and coyotes** that feature prominently in Buffalohead's work often **play the part of trickster** in Native storytelling. The artist uses the trickster in a variety of ways, representing all the different forms humanity can take. She says, "[The trickster] introduces chaos into the world...but at the same time, he is a **creator** and creates worlds. **He represents what it means to actually be a human being** and to have all these feelings and emotions and contradictions within yourself." This new body of work incorporates the coyote and **crows**, familiar subjects in Buffalohead's work, as well as self-portraiture, to tackle weighty subjects – such a forced incarceration, citizenship, historical trauma, and policies of cultural genocide.

Questions:

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1. Let's approach this next painting by Ponca artist Julie Buffalohead through the lenses of **Storytelling and History**. What distinctive elements do you see in this painting?
2. What is your first impression of this painting? Is it comic? Tragic? For kids? For adults?
3. What is the role of the animals? They are silent. But Buffalohead says we have a lot to learn from them. What stories are these animals telling? What have **you** learned from animals?
4. What is the woman doing? Why is she on her back? Why is she a paper cutout?
5. Why is a coyote on top of her? In Native lore, coyotes are tricksters that create chaos in the world and in doing so, help to create it. Buffalohead said that they are often the truest representative of what it is to be **human**. She often uses them to disguise herself in **self-portraits**.
6. How is the crow being treated? Why does Coyote dangle it? What is the relationship between the woman and the crow? Throughout U.S. history there have been efforts to erase Native people, their stories and their cultures. How does the Buffalohead – and the woman she paints in as her **proxy** - seeking to recapture those memories and truths?
7. How is the woman physically connected to other animals? What figures do they hold?
8. One raccoon holds ribbonwork with the slogan “good intentions” — a common phrase used to defend someone who's part of what writer **Teju Cole calls the White-Savior Industrial Complex**, the kind of self-congratulatory do-gooder who “supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.” Is the woman being baited by the coyote to “do good” without realizing her own motivations and white privilege?
9. The second raccoon – also a trickster - holds a figure of the **Lone Ranger**. What role does he play in our own memories and histories? How do those old stories jibe with the real history of how Native people were treated?
10. Although Buffalohead has many ideas in her mind as she creates, she welcomes observers to create their own stories about a work. In this way, we enlarge and complete its meaning.
11. Buffalohead loves paradoxes and contradictions. How are they at work here?
12. Why might she have called this painting **White Saviour Complex**? What does that title imply? What deeper layers of meaning – social, historical, political, personal – does it hold?

**SUMMARY – Half-page handout sheet for OLLI members:
Points of view: critical lenses for viewing works of art**

1. **Viewer response lens:** viewing a work for personal meaning
2. **Socio-economic lens:** viewing a work for its socio-economic issues
3. **Historical lens:** viewing a work for its contextual significance (information about the artist, the historical moment, or systems of meaning available at the time of creation)
4. **Gender lens:** viewing a work for its gender-related issues or attitudes towards gender
5. **IDEA lens** (inclusion, diversity, equity, accessibility): viewing a work for issues of race/heritage, inclusion, or equity)
6. **Empathy lens:** viewing a work for its emotional impact on you and your response to taking another person's perspective
7. **Storytelling lens:** viewing a work for its narrative forms and possibilities
8. **Spiritual lens:** viewing a work for its spiritual or faith-related issues
- 9.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION of Eight Lenses from Debbi Hegstrom:
Points of View: Critical Lenses for Viewing Works of Art**

Express yourself while viewing art from multiple perspectives.

This tour is based on lenses generally used to read and interpret literary works. Definitions, questions, and strategies for each literary lens are adapted for use in viewing works of art.

As we look at works of art today, we will try *shifting our perspective or viewpoint; that is, **changing our viewing lens***. Then we'll think about how doing that could offer us more *insight or a different entry point* into the work.

Viewer Response Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for personal meaning

Questions and Strategies:

1. In what ways is the work familiar to your life? Look for narrative events, types of characters, or setting. Can you relate to what's shown on a personal level?
2. In what ways is the work different from your life?
3. How does the work affect you?
4. How has the work increased your interest in the subject matter?
5. How has the work changed your personal view? Your world view? (Images of war, protest, suffering, celebration, labor, etc.)

Global Thinking Routine: The Three Whys

Why might the story/characters/setting matter to me?

Why might the story/characters/setting matter to people around me (family, friends, city, nation)?

Why might the story/characters/setting matter to the world (global perspective)?

Socio-Economic Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for its socio-economic issues

Questions and Strategies:

1. Explore the way different demographics are represented in works of art.
2. What world view does the work represent?
3. What does the work say about class structures?
4. What social issues might the work attempt to address?

(Works commissioned by people of wealth versus works created to show the “common” people: portraits of kings/nobles versus genre scenes; academic versus Impressionist art; grave goods)

Historical Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for its contextual significance. This includes information about the artist, the historical moment, or systems of meaning available at the time of creation.

Questions and Strategies:

1. Research the artist's life and relate the information to the work. Why do you think the artist created the work? What do you think is the artist's point of view?
2. If the artist is portraying an issue with more than one side, does the artist give proper consideration to all sides? Does the artist seem to have a bias?
3. Research the artist's historical time frame (political, intellectual, social, economic issues, etc.) and relate this information to the work.
4. Based on the context you received, has your point of view changed toward the artist? Has the information you received changed your view toward the work?

(Gauguin, Howard Writing Desk, Beckmann, Chuck Close, Emil Nolde)

Gender Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for its gender-related issues or attitudes towards gender. Talk about how people self-identify on a continuum. When gender is described as binary, the assumption is that men and women are different: they approach creating or viewing a work of art differently. How can we explore differences as relevant and valuable? misleading or surprising?

Questions and Strategies:

1. Consider the gender of the artist and the characters portrayed: what role (if any) does gender play in the work?
2. Observe how gender stereotypes might be reinforced or undermined. Try to see how the work reflects or distorts the place men or women have in society.
3. Imagine viewing the work from the point of view of someone from the opposite gender. (Picasso, Morisot, Caillebotte, Balthus, Rembrandt/*Lucretia*, Sara VanDerBeek exhibition)

IDEA Lens (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility)

Definition: Viewing a work for issues of race/heritage, inclusion, or equity.

Questions and Strategies:

1. Analyze how the work addresses race/heritage, inclusion, and/or equity. What images of “the other” are presented in the work? How are “others” portrayed? (Define: the condition and quality of “otherness” is the state of being different from and alien to the [social identity](#) of a person and to the [identity of the Self](#).) How can “othering” be harmful?
2. Are there unfair stereotypes in the work? Are there generalities that hold truth?
3. In what ways might this work express, promote, or expose bias? What do you bring to the work that affects how you see it?
4. Analyze the work for how it reflects cultural conflict, appropriation, exchange, or fluency particularly between majority and minority groups.

(Gerome, Delacroix, Robert Colescott, Kehinde Wiley, Mapping Black Identities exhibition, African objects)

Empathy Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for its emotional impact on you and your response to taking another person’s perspective.

Questions and Strategies:

1. How do you think this person feels? What do you see that makes you say that? (Examine both facial expression and body language.)
2. Consider a wide range of human emotions (happiness, anger, depression, indifference, awe, confusion, etc.) What other emotions do you see expressed in the work? What visual cues does the artist give you? Think about actions, setting, clothing, attributes, visual elements/principles, etc.
3. What do you think might make this person feel this way?
4. When (if at all) have you experienced this feeling or emotion? How does your personal experience help you understand this person’s emotions? How might it prevent you from understanding this person’s emotions?
5. What else would you like to know or learn to understand this person’s perspective better?
6. What would you do if you found yourself in this person’s situation?
7. What do you notice about what it requires to take another person’s perspective?

(Use with a portrait or group of figures where participants choose one of the figures.)

Storytelling Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for narrative forms and possibilities. The focus is on what is shown in the work itself.

Questions and Strategies:

1. What themes do you see in the work?
2. How has the artist used symbolism in the work?
3. Is the story portrayed believable or fantastic?
4. Where could the story go from here?
5. How would you end the story?
6. What is the greatest strength—or most noticeable weakness—of the work? What would you want the artist to have done differently?
7. Does the work fit into a category or type (historical event, romance/drama, psychological dilemma, satire, irony)? How does that show up in the work?

(Honthorst, Kandinsky, Benjamin West, Poussin, Mrs. T in Cream Silk, Robert Colescott)

Spiritual Lens

Definition: Viewing a work for its spiritual or faith-related issues

Questions and Strategies:

1. Analyze the work for aspects that relate to faith in a higher being or spiritual forces.
2. Compare aspects of the work as they relate to religious writings/scriptures or oral traditions.
3. For believers, how does the higher being/creator/spirit speak to the viewer through the work?
4. What does the work say about religion or spirituality?
5. What does the work say about faith? love? forgiveness? hope? compassion? suffering?

(Works related to spirituality/religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Native spirituality, animism, other belief systems)

Questions to ask at the end of the tour (to gather impressions from the group):

Of the lenses we used today, which ones helped you connect to the work of art? In what ways?

Did some of the lenses work better than others in creating a connection? In what ways?

How did a particular lens help you see the work or artist differently?

How did using more than one lens for the same work of art change your ideas about it?

