

Welcome to Art Adventure

What is Art Adventure?

Art Adventure is a program that engages students with artworks from the Minneapolis Institute of Art's collection. Through the support of thousands of trained volunteers, Art Adventure brings visual arts into K–6 classrooms across Minnesota and beyond. The program encourages creativity, critical thinking, and global awareness through in-depth explorations of art across various cultures and time periods. Art Adventure is an opportunity for students to experience art up close and personal through reproductions, technology, and touch-and-feel props.

What does the Art Adventure Program do for students?

An evaluation of Art Adventure showed that, in addition to fostering an interest in art, the program fosters five major critical thinking skills. The skills and experiences students gain through Art Adventure will benefit them the rest of their lives.

5 Critical Thinking Skills

1. Describe what you see.
2. Notice details.
3. Understand how the parts form a whole idea or artwork.
4. Support interpretations with sufficient reasons.
5. Support opinions or preferences with sound reasons.

Who are Picture People?

You like being around and talking to children. You're happy to hear their ideas and are curious to know more about them. You think you might like art—or you know you love art! You might be a parent, a grandparent, or a community member with an enthusiasm for kids and the arts.

You're good at and enjoy

- Recognizing the value in others' unique perspectives.
- Learning about people and places new to you.
- Collaborating with other adults.
- Listening to students.
- Sharing information.

Things you don't have to be good at (but might worry are important)

You do not need to:

- Have classroom experience.
- Know about art, art history, or museums.
- Teach students about art historical periods and terminology.
- Know how to make art.

In this role, you will

- Introduce classroom students to a variety of preselected artworks from various cultures, places, and eras.
- Facilitate discussions using open-ended questions and reaffirm what you hear students say.
- Ask follow-up questions to enliven the conversation.
- Communicate with your school's coordinator.

Once You're in the Classroom

Relax!

The information provided in this booklet is intended as background material to help you feel confident when you share artworks with children. Don't feel you have to cover everything. Rather, choose two or three key ideas you think will be compelling. Kids love stories—what stories might you tell? What parallels can you draw to their lives?

Be sure everyone can see you and the reproduction.

Talk with the teacher to understand routines the class follows when gathering for a visitor. Aim for a setup that will get the students as close to the reproduction as possible. Keep the students' eyes on you, too, by making regular eye contact with everyone in the group.

Set up the students for successful exploration.

- Have the children wear nametags so you can call them by name.
- Set your own preferences aside to allow students to form their own opinions.
- Encourage the students to take turns speaking.
- Paraphrase what the students have said to let them know that you have been listening and help clarify each student's statement for the class.

Begin each discussion with a moment of silent looking.

Begin by introducing the lesson, yourself, and the reproductions. Review with the class what a museum is and what you'll be doing with them. You might build suspense by keeping each image hidden. Start by having the students observe the artwork in total silence. Model your expectations by spending time quietly looking, too.

Give students time to talk about what they have observed.

Introduce a key idea, then begin with a question. Each artwork has specific examples. Be sure to use your finger to point to the part of the picture the child is talking about. Paraphrase his or her words to clarify the observation for others. You'll be surprised how quickly students learn to justify their comments with evidence they can see in the picture! Asking "What else can you find?" or connecting historical content can help generate further comments.

Connect your key ideas to the students' observations.

When the students' observations begin to slow down, use what you've learned about their interests to steer the discussion toward your key ideas. Try to ask questions that will draw connections between what they have said and what you would like them to consider. If they pose questions you can't answer, admit it! Brainstorm ways you might find out together.

Keep the age of your class in mind.

Don't expect young children to be able to focus for longer than 20 minutes. Plan your presentations accordingly. Consider your grade level's ability to understand time—will students understand a date or phrase such as "colonial times" (fifth graders might) or should you stick with "a long time ago" or "about 100 years ago"? Keep in mind that younger children are more likely to accept the abstract than older students, who may want concrete content.

Talk to other Picture People.

Experienced Picture People have great ideas about how to capture the imagination of a class. Don't hesitate to borrow and adapt their suggestions, but remember to bring your own creativity along, too.

Talking about Art

Each artwork comes with key ideas and supporting questions. We encourage you to use them. If you want to develop your own, consider these non-specific questions, which encourage students to look closely and find their own meaning. This process helps develop the five Critical Thinking Skills (page 1). Please keep in mind that not every question will work for every artwork. Remember, if you ask a question, first share a key idea.

What do you see in this artwork?

What else can you find?

This is the best line of questioning to begin conversations with K-2 students. For students who seem ready to dive deeper ask, “What do you see that makes you say that?”

What’s going on in this picture?

What do you see that makes you say that?

You’ll notice this question is different than “What do you see?” “What’s going on?” invites a consideration of relationships and interactions and taps into children’s natural interest to find stories. “What do you see that makes you say that?” focuses comments on the evidence in the artwork and helps kids explain their assumptions.

How would you feel if you were “in” this work of art?

What would you hear? How might this feel if you could touch it? What path would you take through the picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What might it smell like?

What does this artwork remind you of?

What would you use this object for? What about this scene is familiar or unfamiliar to you? What do you see that makes you say that?

What person or object in this picture do you think was most important to the artist?

What are people in the picture looking at?
Where are there bright colors? What is biggest?

How would the artwork be different if you could make a change?

What would happen if you changed a color?
Moved an object or person? Left something out?

How is this work of art similar to or different from another one you’ve seen in this set?

“Compare and contrast” encourages close looking and reinforces the theme. Get together with your fellow volunteers to coordinate some provocative pairs.

How does this work of art relate to the theme of the set?

Let the students pull it all together! What connections do they see between the theme and what they’ve noticed and learned about the work of art?

What do you like most about this artwork? Why? What do you like least?

If you could keep one artwork from this set, what artwork would you pick? Why?

Using Touch-and-Feel Props

Why props?

Students normally first encounter the Art Adventure artworks in their classrooms as reproductions. The works of art appear to be two-dimensional and similar in size. Props accompany many of the reproductions to help overcome this limitation. Touching a material similar to the artwork, seeing the technique used to create it, or looking at a photograph in which the object is being used adds another dimension to the experience. The use of props reinforces the understanding of all learners through hands-on experiences.

How should you use props?

Without careful planning, props will do little but distract your group. Use these helpful tips to lead a successful exploration:

- Present the prop alongside information about an artwork or to help answer a question about the artwork.
- There are a number of ways to use the prop:
 1. Pass the prop around to each student. Give the students a question to consider while they are waiting for the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop.
 2. Ask a single student to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 3. Hold the prop yourself and walk it around the group for the students to touch or look at closely.
 4. Hold the prop yourself to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion.
 5. Give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation.
- Clear communication of your expectations is essential to keep the students focused on the activity. Let the students know that they will need to take turns, what they should do if it's not their turn, and how they should treat the props.
- After the students have explored the prop, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.
- Don't forget to plan how you'll get the props back from the students! Schools are charged significant fees for missing or damaged props and reproductions.

Family, Friends, and Communities

Relationships with others were as central to people in Mexico 2,000 years ago or in Mali 60 years ago as they are to us in Minnesota today. The universal need to interact with other people manifests itself in diverse ways. Though cultural and historical differences certainly exist, the relationships humans form bear remarkable similarities.

Throughout history and around the world, artists have represented a broad range of human interaction. The six works of art in this unit focus on diverse human relationships.

Whatever our own experiences are, we can find personal meaning in the human relationships and emotions depicted in this series. We may also discover how art can heighten our awareness of the bonds that connect human beings beyond time, gender, race, or nationality.

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
India, <i>Uma-Maheshvara</i> (Shiva's Family)	Sample of sandstone	\$5
Berthe Morisot, <i>The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with Her Nanny</i>	Sample of painted canvas demonstrating texture of impasto	\$30
Seydou Keïta, <i>Dressed in a loose boubou, a white smock (forokoni), and a black fez, this wonderful giant known to everyone in Bamako is proud of his lovely daughter</i>	Photograph of Kodak Brownie camera Map of Africa	\$10 \$10
Francisco Goya, <i>Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta</i>	Reproduction of portrait of Goya by Vicente López Portaña, 1826 (Museo del Prado, Madrid)	\$10
Mexico, Nayarit, House group	Diagram of shaft tomb	\$10
Martin Wong, <i>Polaris</i>	No prop	—
Artwork Reproductions (6)		\$50

Please make sure that you have enclosed all of the items on this list when you return the prop kit. You will be responsible for the cost of replacing any damaged or missing items. Thank you!

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India, Asia
Uma-Maheshvara, 10th–11th century, buff sandstone
The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 97.36
59 x 32 ¾ x 13 ½ in. (149.86 x 83.19 x 34.29 cm)



Made for religious purposes, this sculpture represents the divine powers of the Hindu god Shiva [SHEE-va] and his family. This work presents the timeless theme of harmony and shows the close bonds between a husband and wife surrounded by their children.

Background

Extending south of the Himalayan mountain ranges, India represents the oldest unbroken civilization in the world. The largest single nation within southern Asia, modern India is the birthplace of three major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Each of these ancient faiths has played a role in the development of Indian art and culture.

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The oldest faith, Hinduism, is not one integrated religion, but instead consists of many related sects. Lacking a single founder, Hinduism evolved as a polytheistic (belief in more than one god) religion, combining many different beliefs and customs that developed over centuries. The religion embraces an extremely complex collection of deities. The main Hindu gods include Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer and creator of the universe. The major gods all have numerous forms and appearances, each associated with different stories, animals, and poses. Hindu deities appear human, yet have idealized bodies and are shown with multiple arms, extra heads, or animal parts—showing the special powers that distinguish them as superhuman.

A long time ago, Hindu temples spread throughout India, and local kings rivaled one another in temple building. The temples often have mountain-like towers placed above the sanctuary, referring to the mythical mountain where the gods reside. They were elaborately embellished both inside and out with sculptural images and decorative carvings. Hindu deities were represented on panels in alcoves running around the outer walls of temples. Other parts, such as walls, ceilings, columns, and

doorways, were also ornamented with carvings of divine and semi-divine figures, as well as patrons of the temple, followers, and animals.

Shiva's Family

Typical of sculpture from central India dating from the 900s and 1000s, this elaborate relief would have originally decorated the exterior wall of a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Shiva. The sculpture portrays Shiva, whose dual identity as destroyer and creator reflects the Hindu belief that out of destruction comes creation. Shiva is accompanied by his wife, Parvati [PAR-va-tee]. The couple is surrounded by symbols that would be recognized by followers of the Hindu religion. They are seated on a throne made in the form of a lotus, the symbol of the universe, which in turn is supported by the bull, Nandi, Shiva's vehicle. The structure that surrounds the couple represents their dwelling on Mount Kailasa [Ky-lah-shah], in the Himalayas.

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Usually represented with multiple arms as a sign of his divinity, Shiva is seen with three arms in this sculpture (a fourth arm appears to have broken off). With one right hand he grasps a trident, a three-pronged spear that symbolizes his power. His left arm embraces his wife, while his other right arm rests on his leg (this arm's hand is missing). Shiva gently presses his right foot against a representation of Mount Kailasa in order to restrain warriors of the underworld, who appear in the lower section. Parvati holds a mirror in her left hand to reflect the glory of Shiva as well as her own beauty. Parvati's left foot rests on the figure of a lion, her vehicle.

The two figures are closely related in form and spirit, reflecting the Hindu concept that an important male deity's wife embodies his inherent energy or power. Shiva is considered powerless without Parvati. Clothing reflects this unity, with elaborate crowns and hairdos, sumptuous jewelry, and richly ornamented costumes. Their interwoven and dance-like pose represents the traditional manner of Indian sacred sculpture. The sculptor was not concerned with naturalistic anatomy, but rather with an idealized godly image expressing a sense of inner calm and spiritual serenity. This is seen in the figures' facial expressions as well as in their physical positions, which display the "lotus" posture of yoga with the sole of one foot turned upwards and joints bent sharply. When seated like this, Hindu deities develop a sacred aura that sets them apart from the everyday world.

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Distinct physical types evolved in Indian sculpture as models of divine beauty. In Indian art and mythology the gods are always youthful in appearance. Typical of Hindu male deities, Shiva is represented with broad shoulders and chest, a slender waist, and solid limbs. Like other female deities, Parvati is depicted with an elaborate headdress and jewelry, heavy round breasts, a narrow waist, ample hips, and a graceful posture. The exaggerated curves of her body reflect the Indian concept of ideal feminine beauty, which combines abstraction with naturalism. The rounded, organic forms of the figures blend with the curving lines of their garments and jewelry to create rich patterning and a rhythmic design. Through the sensuous portrayal of the figures, the artist shows their divine nature.

Technique

Stone carving is a "subtractive" process in which material is chipped away from a block of stone to create an image. First, a pointed metal instrument is used to cut the general outline of the sculpture. Then, a variety of chisels are used to cut away more stone, gradually revealing the finished form.

Sandstone is a relatively soft stone, which perhaps determined the artist's emphasis on sculptural form rather than minute detail.

Made of buff-colored sandstone found in central India, this sculpture has been carved in high relief with deep and rounded forms. Sandstone is a relatively soft stone, which perhaps determined the artist's emphasis on sculptural form rather than minute detail. Since the sculpture was made to adorn a temple wall, its form and composition were probably influenced by architectural considerations, such as its position on the wall, the depth of the niche in which it was placed, and the style of the temple. The figures of Shiva and Parvati are emphasized by their pronounced swelling forms. The deep carving provides areas of shadow that contrast dramatically with the protruding forms filled with light. The sculpture has also been carved in receding planes to create a sense of depth, with Shiva and Parvati carved in highest relief and the subsidiary figures that surround the key deities set back in lower relief. They are also smaller in scale and treated with less attention to detail.

About the Artist

A Hindu ruler commissioned the building of a temple not only as an expression of piety, but also in celebration of important political events, such as military victories or special ceremonies. Building in stone was an expensive undertaking; the stone needed to be cut and transported, and highly paid craftsmen of various skills were required.

While the name of the sculptor is unknown, we know that the artist’s role was to give visible form to religious ideas. Considering his work a means of connecting with the spiritual world, a sculptor went through various preparatory rituals before beginning a sculpture.

Important in the evolution of Indian sculpture was the close relationship between artists and priests. Priests set rules for translating theological ideas into sculpted images. In written texts, they gave detailed descriptions of appropriate costume, ornament, facial expression, posture, hand gestures, and emblems for various deities, their consorts, and animal vehicles. They also dictated the location of the figures on temple walls. Even the order of images and the proportions of figures were prescribed.

Key Ideas

1. This sculpture of Shiva and his wife, Parvati, was part of a temple used for worship and celebration.
2. Shiva, the god of destruction and creation, was considered powerless without his wife, Parvati.
3. The husband and wife are surrounded by symbols that represent their children, community, and Hinduism.

Suggested Questions

1. Look closely at this sculpture of Shiva and Parvati. What is going on? What do you see that makes you say that? What shapes do you see? Where? What animals are in the sculpture? What else can you find?
2. Shiva is a very powerful and important god in the Hindu religion with both human and superhuman elements. What about these figures looks human? What do you see that makes you say that? What looks superhuman? Why? How else does the sculpture show this?
3. Shiva and Parvati loved each other and relied on one another for support. How did the artist show you this? What do you see that makes you say that? How do you show someone you care? How does it make you feel?

Notes

Berthe Morisot, France, 1841–95

The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with her Nanny, 1884, oil on canvas

The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 96.40

22 ½ x 28 in. (57.15 x 71.12 cm) (sight)

34 ¾ x 40 ¼ x 4 in. (88.27 x 102.24 x 10.16 cm) (outer frame)



Berthe Morisot has captured a poignant moment in her own daughter's life, as the young girl observes her nanny doing needlework. The painting offers a glimpse into French domestic life during the 1800s, as well as insight into the artist's dual roles as mother and painter.

Background

The French Impressionists were a revolutionary group of artists who began painting modern life in the 1860s, challenging traditional French academic ideas with a new way of seeing and portraying the world. They wanted to capture the liveliness of modern life in their art and to represent their subjects as the human eye actually perceived them. To this end, they explored ways to capture impressions of passing moments and of the constantly changing effects of light and atmosphere. By studying the new scientific theories on light and optics, they learned that the actual color of an object is modified by the intensity of the light surrounding it, as well as by reflections from objects and colors next to it. Hence, reality, as the eye perceives it, is always changing. In their quest for spontaneity, these artists often used broken brushstrokes and quick gestures. They rejected traditional techniques, such as the modeling of forms in dark and light, sharp focus, precise detail and outline, the use of black for shadows, and continuous brushstrokes.

The Impressionists also explored contemporary themes in their art. During the 1850s and 1860s, Paris was rebuilt under Napoleon III and his architect, Baron Haussman, who transformed the city's narrow winding streets into broad boulevards lined with cafes, restaurants, and theaters. People were drawn out into public places for leisure activity, providing new subject matter for the Impressionists. In order to paint directly from life, they moved their easels outside, painting in the open air (*en plein air*) rather than in their studios. Impressionist artists also painted quiet scenes of middle-class family life, perhaps as a defense against the rapid growth of urbanization and industrialization occurring at the time.

Female artists in this period, however, were restricted in their subject matter; the public aspects of modern Paris were not considered appropriate for respectable women to paint. During the 1800s, male and female roles and activities were clearly defined. The realms of art, culture, commerce, and public life were considered men's, while the private world of home and family was the realm of women. Boys were given public education that prepared them for leadership and public service, while girls were prepared for a life of domestic responsibility, motherhood, and artistic accomplishments suitable for enhancing the home, such as needlework and watercolor painting. Because of these differences, female artists associated with the Impressionists often chose their subjects from the private world of their home and family. Focusing on the relationships in their lives, these artists often used family members as models.

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The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with Her Nanny

This painting is one of several in which Berthe Morisot [Bairt Mor-ee-Zo] featured her daughter, Julie, with her Irish nanny, Pasie. Here they are seen at Morisot's spacious Paris home on the rue Villejust, which the family occupied beginning in 1883. The two are shown in an interior room, with a window view behind them. Both are intently focused on Pasie's sewing. The artist captured this ordinary activity with little concern for detail; instead, she

depicts the scene as it would be perceived in a single glance, giving the picture a spontaneous appearance. Morisot freely applies the paint using sketchy brushstrokes and rapid movements. At close range, the brushstrokes appear disjointed and the images somewhat abstract, but observed from a few feet away, they become recognizable forms. In the background, the figure of a man with his back turned is barely discernible through the window. This is Morisot's husband, Eugène Manet, who was the brother of a famous painter, Edouard Manet.

In this painting, Morisot reveals her daughter's sense of wonder by focusing on the act of looking. Pasié's focused and skilled needlework captures Julie's attention, just as their interaction captures the artist's attention. While the mood is tranquil, it is also charged by Julie and her nanny's active curiosity. By seating Julie and her nanny so close together, Morisot shows a comfortable and peaceful relationship between the two. The nanny seems nurturing as she patiently teaches Julie to sew. Furthermore, by situating the pair so close to the foreground, Morisot brings the audience into this intimate moment.

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Though the strokes and colors may appear haphazard, Morisot carefully selects and applies colors to create depth, movement, and countless other effects. The space extends from interior to exterior — from the nanny's needlework, to Morisot's husband in the garden, and finally the buildings past their house. Morisot uses complementary colors, such as red and green, to create the illusion of deep space. For example, pinks in the background building and both figures' facial features stand out against the greens of the garden. By painting colors so that they bounce and disappear into one another, the artist creates a sense of activity and spirit.

Morisot's ability to combine her roles as parent and professional artist is suggested in this painting. Julie, her only child, was her workday companion and favorite model. Like many mothers in the intimate act of producing a family album, Morisot observed and sensitively depicted her daughter during a precious moment of Julie's development. It is also significant that Julie's nanny is part of the scene, indicating Morisot's financial resources, which allowed her to hire support for Julie's upbringing and thus free herself to pursue painting as a profession.

Technique

Morisot used a shorthand technique of spontaneous brushwork to capture visual experience of a given moment. This daring technique resulted in loose, rapid brushwork and a variety of sketchy markings.

Although she worked in oil paint on canvas, Morisot wanted her paintings to achieve the fresh, informal appearance of watercolors and pastels. Her extreme freedom of brushwork, which was more common in preparatory studies, done in pastel or watercolor, was considered exceptionally daring at this time. During her career, Morisot continued to investigate the possibilities of the rapid oil sketch.

About the Artist

Born in 1841, Berthe Morisot grew up in a rich family with a strong artistic tradition. Morisot studied art from childhood, always confident that she would become a painter. She quickly evolved into a daring and influential artist, despite the many obstacles she faced in the art world. As a woman, she was barred from the state-sponsored schools that produced the most successful artists of the time. Instead, Morisot studied art with her sister Edma and several other painters of her time. She also studied with her brother-in-law, Edouard Manet.

Morisot was able to combine her devotion to parenting and to art, engaging her daughter as her workday companion, model, and fellow artist.

The subject of mothers and daughters always fascinated Morisot, and with the birth of her own daughter in 1878, Julie became a focus of her art. Morisot was able to combine her devotion to parenting and to art, engaging her daughter as her workday companion, model, and fellow artist. Morisot recorded Julie's physical and intellectual development from infancy through adolescence. Morisot and her husband took an active role in their daughter's education, teaching her drawing, painting, reading, writing, and history at home, a practice that was not unusual at the time.

Like many female artists throughout history, Berthe Morisot was not recognized in her day for her achievements as a painter. While she was often ignored or negatively reviewed by critics, she was respected by her colleagues and had a strong influence on them. It was not until after her death that Morisot's work received wide acclaim.

Notes

Key Ideas

1. At the time this female artist was working, women were restricted to painting scenes of family and home life.
2. The artist Berthe Morisot loved to paint portraits of her daughter, Julie; in a way she painted a "photo album" of her childhood.
3. She used loose, fast brushstrokes that look blurry up close, but they form a clearer picture when viewed from a few steps back.

Suggested Questions

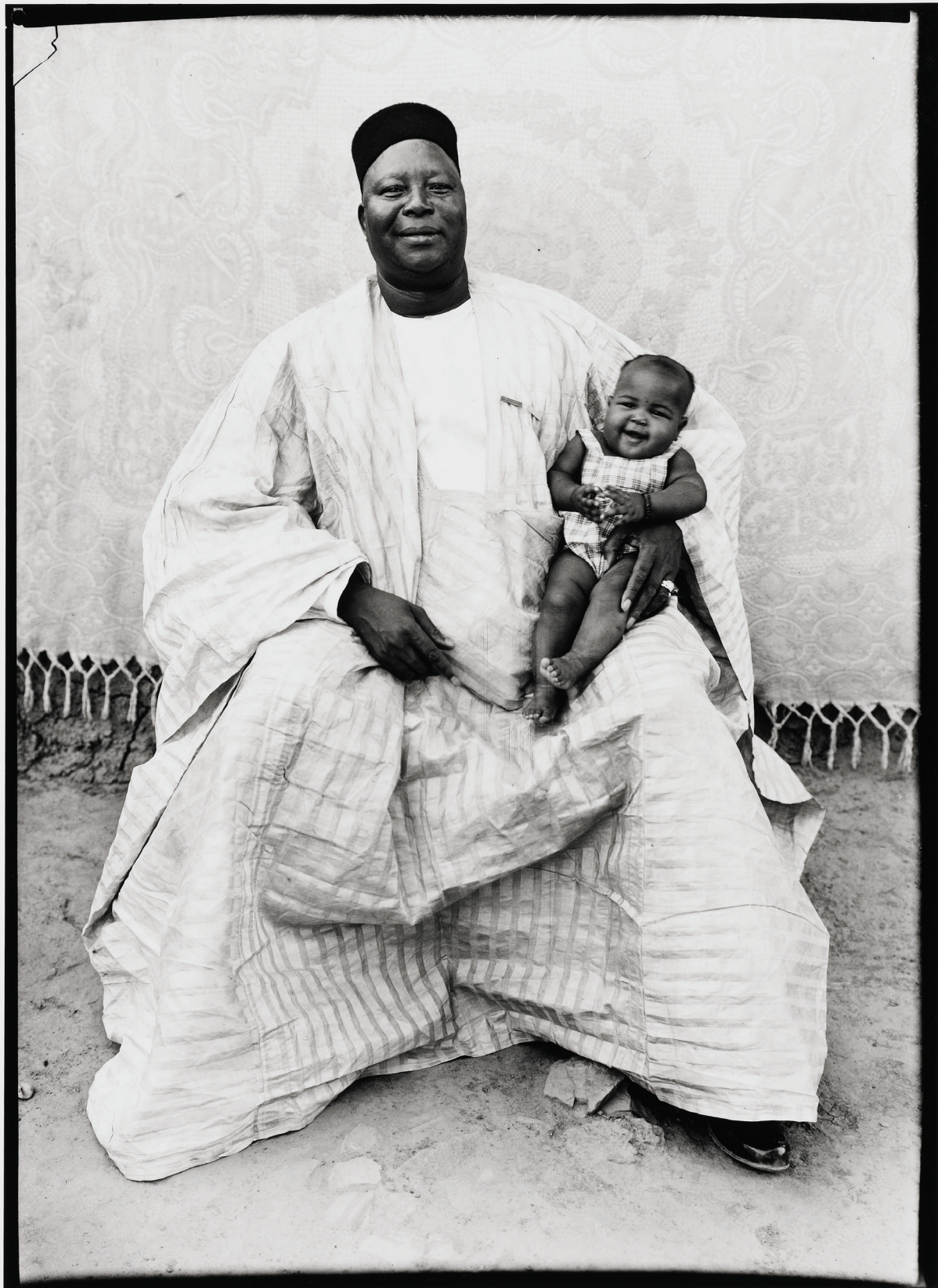
1. The daughter is watching her nanny sew. Look closely. What else do you see in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Soft colors and fast brushstrokes fill this painting. Imagine you are holding a paintbrush. What would it feel like to paint the daughter's face? Why do you say that? How would it feel to paint the nanny's dress? Why?
3. The nanny and child are unrelated, but they are in their own way a family. While Julie's parents worked, the nanny helped care for and loved her. Who are some people outside of your family you care about? How do you show them you care?

Seydou Keïta, Mali, Africa, 1921-2001

Dressed in a loose boubou, a white smock (forokoni), and a black fez, this wonderful giant known to everyone in Bamako is proud of his lovely daughter.

1949-52 (printed 1998), gelatin silver print

**The Alfred and Ingrid Lenz Harrison Fund, 98.39.4 ©IPM International Photo Marketing
22 1/8 x 16 in. (56.2 x 40.64 cm) (image); 23 3/4 x 20 in. (60.33 x 50.8 cm) (sheet)**



Seydou Keïta was a portrait photographer from Bamako, Mali. He was self-taught, worked hard, and enjoyed a successful career. Keïta took photos of everyone from Mali's first president, Modibo Keita, to his own family and neighbors. The photograph documents the special relationship between a man, named Billaly, and his daughter.

Bamako, Mali

Bamako is the capital of Mali, a West African country, now home to nearly 2 million people. Mali is approximately the same size as Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska combined. In the late 1880s, the French conquered the area and made it a part of what came to be called French West Africa. French became the primary language. Mali gained its independence in 1960. At the time Keïta lived in Bamako, it had a population of only 100,000 people, comparable to Rochester, Minnesota, today. There was a cathedral, railway station, post office, and zoo. The railway station made Bamako a stopping point for many travelers. People coming from countries to the east of Mali, such as Burkina Faso, would stay in Bamako on their way westward. They were usually making their way to Dakar, Senegal, a major port city. Working in such a populated area benefitted Keïta's business by bringing in clients from other countries.

About the Artist

Seydou Keïta was a self-taught portraitist working in Mali in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. Although he never knew his actual birthday, he was the oldest of five children and had a large extended family. Growing up, Keïta admired his father and uncle for each having an education and a trade. He envied the respect and appreciation they received from their community. When he was a teenager, his uncle came back from a trip to Senegal with a camera for Keïta. It was a Kodak Brownie, a German-made camera, known for being simple and inexpensive to use. As he gained more experience, he purchased more cameras, all Kodaks. Keïta had originally learned how to make furniture, but once he had a camera he was determined to be a photographer.

Keïta began by taking pictures of his family, but people around town would see him with the camera around his neck and ask him to take their photograph.

Keïta worked as both a furniture maker and photographer until he opened his home studio in Bamako in 1948. He began by taking pictures of his family, but people around town would see him with the camera around his neck and ask him to take their photograph. He found that taking photos in the street was difficult and that he preferred working from his studio or going to the clients' homes. Because he lacked formal training, the photos weren't always clear or flattering. Keïta was unable to reimburse unhappy clients, though, because their advance payment allowed Keïta to have the photographs printed. Eventually, a local photographer, Pierre Garnier, taught him how to develop and print his own photos. Garnier, who opened the first photography studio in Bamako, was a source of knowledge for Keïta.

Keïta wasn't the only photographer in the region, but people thought he was the best and preferred his backdrops to other studios. He used patterned textiles for his backdrops to cover the earthen walls of his courtyard; sometimes they were as simple as a bedspread. Keïta could recall the approximate dates of his photographs by the background, which he changed every few years. Between 1949 and 1952 he used his own fringed bedspread, seen in this photograph. He also used a floral backdrop, then one with leaves, later an arabesque pattern, and finally a plain, grey sheet. Keïta labeled all of his photographs with their date and type (ex. couple, portrait, full length). On the chance a client returned for more prints, he always kept his negatives in a trunk in his home. Keïta had a rubber stamp that read "Photo

SEYDOU KEITA" that clients wanted printed on their photograph.

Thanks to the railway, Keïta's name spread to other West African countries. His friends would also help recruit clients by going to the station with portrait samples. As payment for their time, he would give them a percentage of the revenue they brought in. His studio's proximity to the railway station was a large contributor to his popularity. People would come to the studio without appointments, point to a photograph hanging on his wall, and say, "I want that." And Keïta would take their portrait right away. Sometimes that method worked, but sometimes it didn't. Given the experience he gained over the many portraits he made, Keïta knew how to position his clients to look their very best. He took great care to pose people in various positions, a quality that, to him, rendered it art. He wanted everything to be as close to perfect as possible. Clients weren't used to standing in front of a camera; that often made them look too serious, so Keïta would tell them to relax and smile. He claimed appointments only took about 10 minutes to get a good photograph.

He took great care to pose people in various positions, a quality that, to him, rendered it art.

Keïta photographed using both natural and artificial light, but clients who wanted artificial light had to pay more to cover the cost of electricity. Each night he would print the photos from the day and then retouch them the following morning. It was common for Keïta to go into the country to take identification card photos, but in the more rural areas they did not have electricity. He invented a simple machine to allow him to develop photos. By making a hole in the side of a metal barrel and using a piece of red painted glass as a filter, Keïta used the light from a kerosene lamp to develop these images. Many people in the rural villages, and even some older people in the city of Bamako, thought that if you had your portrait taken, you would lose your soul and die. To reassure his clients, Keïta would have them look through the lens themselves.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the people in Bamako began wearing European clothes and wanted it documented in photographs. For women, the most important accessory was their jewelry. These items were signs of wealth and social status. It was normal for people to bring personal items with them and have them documented alongside them. Keïta recalled people owning things such as sewing machines, brand new bicycles, and eyeglasses. He also kept items in his studio for people who wanted to use them, but didn't have their own. Keïta lent his clients European clothes and props like watches, fake flowers, and a telephone.

When the people in Bamako gained their independence from the French and the country officially became Mali, Keïta was asked to work for the government as their official photographer. He didn't want to close his studio, but the government didn't want him running a personal business outside of his official duties. He was the government photographer until 1977, when he finally retired. At that time, Keïta turned his studio into a mechanics shop where he could tinker in his free time. He also enjoyed going to the mosque and taking care of his home. It wasn't long before a French curator saw Keïta's work in a 1991 New York exhibition, "Africa Explores." The works were not attributed to Keïta, and it took time for the curator to identify Keïta as the artist. Now Keïta was known around the world, and his work exhibited in Europe, Asia, and North America, including at Mia. He spent the final years of his life shooting fashion photography in Paris, where he died while his first solo exhibition was in development.

Portraiture

The type of photographs Keïta took is called a portrait. Much like a school picture today, portraits allow us to remember important events, achievements, and relationships. Portraits can be taken for professional reasons. For instance, Keïta traveled to take photographs for the government and local businesses. He also took portraits for identification cards, similar to a passport or

driver's license. Other times portraits are personal. Photographers often take pictures of people to document and preserve their culture. They allow us to show ourselves however we wish to be portrayed, and that makes the photograph specific to us. Portraits allow us to show others something special about ourselves, which results in them being both incredibly personal, but also very public.

Photographers often take pictures of people to document and preserve their culture.

Billaly and His Daughter

Taken from a low angle, the portrait puts the viewer at eye level with Billaly, a local man known by many. Keïta framed the photograph close around Billaly so we are able to see him in his entirety, but not much beyond his large frame. Seated on his left knee and tucked into his arm is his child. Her face lights up with a smile that outshines her father's. She wears a plaid romper and what appears to be a bracelet on her left wrist. Billaly wears a *boubou*, a wide-sleeved, open-faced robe commonly worn by men in West Africa; a *forokoni* underneath, which is the traditional Bamana shirt worn by men; and a fez, a short, cylindrical shaped hat. Billaly's left toe peeks out from under the robe where a broken black dress shoe is visible. Behind the father and daughter is a floral backdrop with a fringed border. The earthen walls and floor of Keïta's courtyard are easily identified, but Billaly's *boubou* completely envelops whatever they are seated on.

Seydou Keïta's studio had a revolving door of visitors. People came from rural areas in the country, but also from just down the road. It was common for Keïta to not know a client before they arrived to see him. Oftentimes he never learned their name, which is what makes this photograph so special. Keïta remembers the man in this photograph, Billaly, and the day that he came to visit. Keïta posed Billaly multiple times, but then he added Billaly's young daughter for this photograph. Keïta's clients wanted objects with them in their

portraits that would tell a viewer something special about them. Many women wore fancy jewels to show wealth, but Billaly displayed his relationship with his daughter to highlight his status as parent. His pride is evident in his smile and the way he tightly cradles her in the crook of his arm.

Key Ideas

1. The artist, a self-taught photographer, wanted his portraits to reflect the personality of the sitter.
2. Seydou Keïta began by taking photos of his family, but word spread about his talents and his audience grew to the entire community—including the first president of Mali!
3. He found it challenging to take photographs on the street, so he set up a studio in his backyard using household items as backdrops and props.
4. This photograph is of a father who came in for a portrait, but he wanted it to include his daughter because he considered her to be one of his best parts.

Questions

1. Look closely at Billaly and his daughter. How do you think they feel at the moment this photograph was taken? What do you see that makes you say that? What are four different words to describe their emotions? What does this photograph tell us about their relationship? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Think about when you have a school picture taken. Do you do anything special to get ready? Why? Do you think about what you are going to wear? Why? How do you sit? Show me. What does your school picture tell viewers about you?
3. If you were to have Seydou Keïta take your photo, what family or friend would you want to have with you? Why did you choose that person? How would you want to sit? What would each of you wear? Why?
4. This photograph is in black and white. We do not know the actual colors. Look closely. Imagine what it might look like in color. What colors do you think are there? Why?

Francisco Jose de Goya y Lucientes, Spain, 1746–1828
Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta, 1820, oil on canvas
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 52.14
45 1/8 x 30 1/8 in. (114.62 x 76.52 cm) (canvas)
54 x 39 1/8 x 3 3/4 in. (137.16 x 99.38 x 9.53 cm) (outer frame)



Goya agradecido, a su amigo Arrieta: por el acierto y esmero con q. le salvó la vida en su aguda y peligrosa enfermedad, padecida a fines del año 1819. a los setenta y tres de su edad. Lo pintó en 1820.

Goya's self-portrait is a deeply moving image of friendship and compassion. Painted at a time when the artist was disturbed by the human capacity for cruelty, it affirms that kind relationships can exist between people.

Background

The second half of the 1700s are often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. It was a period in which many European philosophers and intellectuals, particularly in England and France, believed that the world operated according to natural laws. They thought that the human mind had the power to discover these laws and solve problems through reason and scientific inquiry. These ideas led to the American and French revolutions, which were based upon a belief in liberty and equality that would shape the modern era.

One of Spain's greatest and most complex artists, Francisco Goya was a product of the Age of Enlightenment. The period's values of liberal thought and reason were of underlying importance to his art.

One of Spain's greatest and most complex artists, Francisco Goya was a product of the Age of Enlightenment. The period's values of liberal thought and reason were of underlying importance to his art. Goya has been seen both as a universal visionary who speaks to the modern world through his powerful exploration of fantasy and imagination, and as an artist reflecting his own time and country. In his prolific output, he explores the conflict between reason and the irrational, enlightenment and ignorance, hope and despair, light and darkness.

Goya was deeply affected by the turbulent political events taking place in Spain, particularly during the last 30 years of his life, when he saw the ideals of the Enlightenment overshadowed by chaos and suppression. He witnessed the corruption of the reign of Charles IV, which led to the French occupation of Spain in 1808. The French ruler,

Napoleon Bonaparte, established a military dictatorship in Madrid under his brother, Joseph. When Napoleon's armies first occupied Spain, Goya and many other Spaniards hoped they would bring the liberal reforms so direly needed in the country, but they were sorely disappointed by the savage behavior of the French troops. On May 2, 1808, the citizens of Madrid rose up against Napoleon's forces; the uprising, however, was crushed the following day with a brutal mass execution of the Spanish patriots. With Napoleon's abdication as emperor of France in 1814, Ferdinand VII, the heir of Charles IV, was restored to the throne of Spain, ruling as an absolute monarch and instigating a new wave of repression and tyranny.

Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta

This double portrait was painted in 1820, just after Goya had recovered from a serious illness. A token of gratitude, it includes this inscription in Spanish at the bottom, translated here in English: "Goya thanks his friend Arrieta for the sureness and care with which he saved his life from the serious and dangerous illness at the end of the year 1819 at the age of seventy-three. Painted in 1820."

In this poignant self-portrait, Goya portrays himself as an aged, dying man being nursed by Dr. Arrieta. Wearing a gray dressing robe, and appearing pale and feverish, Goya clutches the bedsheet with his left hand while his right hand rests limply on it. Dr. Arrieta tenderly supports him in an upright position and firmly offers his patient a glassful of medicine.

The juxtaposition of the two men creates a striking contrast.

The juxtaposition of the two men, positioned to highlight their differences, creates a striking contrast. Pale and sickly, Goya has a gray complexion, which contrasts with his white nightshirt and the healthy appearance of his doctor. Painted in colors suggestive of life, Dr. Arrieta wears a forest green jacket and has a rosy complexion. His demeanor is firm and in control with an expression of resolute calm on his face, while his ashen, pained patient—slumped with his head falling back and his eyes barely opened—seems to struggle for his life. The hands of the two protagonists are particularly expressive; the doctor’s are strong and protective while those of his exhausted patient are groping and uncertain, though his left hand grasps the sheet—perhaps a sign of energy and willfulness.

At either side of the doctor and his patient there appear three vague figures that witness the scene, yet seem to vanish into the blackness of the sickroom. Their significance has been the subject of much scholarship. They have been interpreted as friends or servants, or perhaps as a reference to Goya’s devoted companion—the woman with whom he lived at the time the work was painted. They are suggestive of the artist’s mental state during his illness and have been compared to the nightmarish and menacing figures that populate many of Goya’s late paintings.

The doctor can be seen as the embodiment of science and reason, triumphing over the darkness of impending death.

Whatever their significance, these figures are shadowed by those in the foreground, who ultimately offer a message of hope and triumph. The doctor has saved Goya’s life, and can be seen as the embodiment of science and reason, triumphing over the darkness of impending death. We have here not only a thankful tribute to a friend’s steadfastness, loyalty, and devotion, but also a profound statement about Goya’s confrontation with death.

Technique

Goya creates strong contrasts of light and dark to focus our attention on the protagonists in the painting. Set against a dark, murky background, the faces of Dr. Arrieta and his patient are dramatically presented. Because the dim figures in the background are painted in dark tones, the figures of Goya and Dr. Arrieta, depicted in lighter flesh tones, come forth in relief. These two main characters are solidly defined, while the figures in the background are difficult to read. Their dim presence adds a mysterious quality to the painting.

The complementary colors—red and green—appear more vibrant when placed next to one another. The red blanket reinforces the doctor’s healthy glow and enlivens the painting.

In contrast with the rosy complexion of the doctor, the artist uses drab, muted grays to suggest the dire illness of the feverish patient. While Goya’s ashen face is offset by his white nightshirt, his gray robe reinforces the gray pallor of his face. The doctor, on the other hand, wears a green jacket, which enhances the rosy tone of his skin. The complementary colors—red and green—appear more vibrant when placed next to one another. The red blanket occupying the foreground reinforces the doctor’s healthy glow and enlivens the painting.

Goya’s use of oil paint on canvas achieves a variety of effects, including translucent colors, a range of tonal qualities, and the representation of naturalistic details. Notice how the paint is applied with great variety. Some areas, such as Goya’s robe and the red blanket, are painted with a filmy smoothness, while other areas reveal the artist’s brushstroke and his vigorous, free handling of paint. This can be seen on the hair of the doctor, the white collar and cuffs of Goya’s nightshirt, and the shadowy figures in the background.

About the Artist

A painter, engraver, and draftsman whose large output defies classification, Francisco Goya was a highly individual artist. Goya was the son of a gilder born in Fuentetodos, Aragon, in the northeastern region of Spain. Though little is known of his early training, he began his career as a designer for the Royal Spanish Tapestry Works, where he spent six years producing cartoons (drawings) of scenes of popular Spanish life that were used in creating tapestries. His work was so well received in Madrid that in 1789 he became court painter to the Spanish king, Charles IV. Widely renowned by this time, Goya was celebrated by members of the Spanish upper class, whose portraits he painted throughout his career.

Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta was executed at La Quinta del Sordo following his recovery from a serious illness, which occurred in 1819. After painting this self-portrait, Goya created 14 large black murals, known as the “Black Paintings,” which covered the walls of his villa with fantastic, grotesque imagery.

Goya made a path for future modern artists by being creative in his interpretation and passionate in his painting.

In his imaginative and expressive approach to painting, Goya prefigured the later developments of the Romantic Movement in France during the 1800s, as well as modern art beginning with Édouard Manet and the Impressionists. He made a path for future modern artists by being creative in his interpretation and passionate in his painting.

Notes

Key Ideas

1. The artist Goya painted this as a thank-you note for his friend, Dr. Arrieta, who nursed him back to health when he was sick.
2. The artist was upset at the bad in the world and wanted to paint a picture that reminded people of the good.
3. The focus of this painting is the two men in front, but three more figures are hiding in the background. We are not certain who they are. They might be real or they could be from the artist’s illness-induced dreams.

Suggested Questions

1. This is a painting of Goya and his doctor, Dr. Arrieta, who is giving him a cup of medicine. Look closely. How does the artist make himself look sick? What do you see that makes you say that? How does he make the doctor look healthy? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. The doctor and Goya are friends. Look closely. How does the artist show their relationship? What do you see that makes you say that? Look for the people standing in the background. Why do you think these people are there? How do they make you feel? What is your reasoning?
3. Goya painted this picture for Dr. Arrieta as a thank-you. What are some ways we thank people for taking care of us? How does it make you feel when someone thanks you for your help? Why?
4. There are many ways to show our friends we care about them. What are some ways you show care in your classroom? In your community? With your family?

Martin Wong, United States, 1946–99
***Polaris*, 1987, Acrylic on canvas**
The P.D. McMillan Memorial Fund 2017.35 © Estate of Martin Wong
73 ½ × 92 ¼ × 1 ¼ in. (186.69 × 234.32 × 3.18 cm)



With so much political unrest in the art world and the broader United States during the 1980s, the artist wanted to create an idyllic scene of equality and diversity in hopes that this is what the future would bring.

About the Artist

Martin Wong was a Chinese-American artist born in Portland, Oregon, in 1946. His family moved to San Francisco to raise him near Chinatown, and many members of his extended family lived along the coast. In San Francisco, Wong worked as a set and prop designer for theater companies, the most well-known of which was the Angels of Light Performance Troupe. A self-taught painter, he eventually decided to move to New York City to explore painting in greater detail.

Wong often used the local cityscape as a backdrop, painting people from of his new, diverse community.

Wong lived in the Lower East Side of New York City, a neighborhood where many recent immigrants also lived and worked. Although he lived near Chinese Americans and many other minority populations, Wong was considered an outsider because he was openly gay. He became a well-known artist for his loving depictions of life on the Lower East Side, where he was known for wearing cowboy outfits and a Fu Manchu mustache. He often used the local cityscape as a backdrop, painting people from his new, diverse community. He also explored his own identity through his artwork by experimenting with poetry or phrases in different languages, including sign language.

Wong was interested in astrology, the supposed influences of the stars and planets on humans, and groups of stars (constellations), which is why a map of the stars serves as a backdrop to Polaris. The constellation forming Wong's astrological sign, Leo, appears in the lower third of the painting between two children playing marbles.

Background

In 1978, Martin Wong moved to New York City to live among diverse groups of people with whom he could identify, like artist collectives and the LGBTQAI+ community. One artist collective that formed before Wong's move, the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), advocated for greater representation of women and artists of color in museum galleries and collections. The AWC inspired further groups to assemble. One community of artists and writers founded a newspaper, *The East Village Other*, that published provocative articles and printed artworks about the art world and social issues in New York City. Another was the Guerrilla Girls, arguably the most famous group to fight for gender equality in the arts, which became active in the mid-1980s. During the 1980s, many of these artist collectives opened small galleries and creative spaces for artists to complete and display their work. Numerous artists still wrestling with the aftereffects of the Vietnam war processed its impact through their work. The new galleries and creative spaces offered an accepting, politically supportive environment for artists and audiences.

2SLGBTQAI+

Once known as members of the “gay community,” this string of initials (or acronym) describes identities across the gender and sexuality spectrums. It stands for 2-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), Asexual (or Ally), Intersex, and a plus sign for greater inclusivity. The terms in parentheses show how the acronym contains multiple meanings depending on audiences.

Throughout Martin Wong's career, he found inspiration in artist collectives, the gay community

(today known as 2SLGBTQAI+), and the people of the Lower East Side. In 1999, Wong died at age 53 from complications related to AIDS, a virus that targeted gay and trans men, among other populations. Starting in the 1980s, artist-led groups like Act Up! brought attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis, demanding political support and response, and ultimately paving the way for greater gender equality and 2SLGBTQAI+ community acceptance. But until a vaccine “cocktail” proved effective at curbing HIV transmission, HIV/AIDS gutted communities in New York City, San Francisco, and places inhabited by 2SLGBTQAI+ populations.

Polaris

In Polaris, Wong turns an ordinary playdate into a fantastical game of marbles, set against a backdrop of constellations. The children in the painting are ethnically diverse, representing the various identities found in Wong’s Lower East Side community. At center is the North Star, otherwise known as Polaris, an important global symbol for its use in navigation; it is only seen in the northernmost part of the sky. The children sit within the Northern Hemisphere, specifically right outside the Arctic Circle. They are all equally close to Polaris, which symbolically links all ethnic backgrounds and identities of the globe.

The children are all equally close to Polaris, which symbolically links all ethnic backgrounds and identities of the globe.

The children, each sitting one ring away from Polaris, are shown on a level playing field. They are also all outlined in gold, signifying their participation in the game. The only figure not outlined in gold is seen in the upper left-hand corner; it looms over the game, observing the children.

A Closer Look at Polaris

Eight children sit in the circle. The boys are dressed in black while the girls wear colorful shirts. If we begin with the girl in the yellow and work clockwise,

we can see she is touching her chin in contemplation while looking toward the center of the composition. She sits atop the Gemini constellation and places her left hand over the Cancer constellation (both are astrological signs). To her left are twin boys, one making a throwing motion with his right hand, almost touching the constellation Draco. The other twin focuses on something unseen happening outside of the painting.

It is significant that the Gemini constellation is nearest the twins because this collection of stars represents the Greek myth of Castor and Pollux.

It is significant that the Gemini constellation is nearest the twins because this collection of stars represents the Greek myth of Castor and Pollux. The mythological boys were brothers who were so close, they are often called twins. When Castor is killed in battle, Pollux asks Zeus, his father and ruler of the gods on Mount Olympus, to join his brother in the underworld for all eternity. Their story, although it ends tragically, shows how powerful the sibling bond, and specifically brotherly love, can be.

The next figure is another girl, in pink. With her back is to the viewer, she also appears to be actively playing the game. To her left is a boy, looking at the ground. Under his right hand is the Hercules constellation, perhaps indicating he is more interested in the stars than in the game. The next figure is a girl wearing a striped shirt. Directly behind her is a figure not outlined in gold; the viewer can only see the individual’s legs and feet. Next is a boy looking toward Polaris while his friends continue their game of marbles. Though the face of the final child cannot be seen, the figure is outlined in gold and wears black. Both details indicate that the figure is a boy who is also interested in the game.

Key Ideas

1. The artist moved from Chinatown in San Francisco to the Lower East Side of New York City, an area that was ethnically diverse and had a well-established art community.
2. Martin Wong painted this artwork to symbolize the diversity in his neighborhood and how any differences among members of a community should be embraced and explored.
3. Each constellation in the background represents a mythological figure, all telling stories such as that of the brothers Castor and Pollux.

Suggested Questions

1. This painting shows a group of children playing a game of marbles. Describe what you see. How does this painting make you feel? Why?
2. All of the figures in the painting are outlined in gold, except for one. We only see that person's feet. Who might they be? What do you see that makes you think that?
3. There are lots of different things you can do in your community. What are some things you like to do? Why? What games do you like to play with your friends and family?

Notes

Nayarit, Mexico, Central America
House group, 100–400 CE, clay, pigments
The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 47.2.37
18 x 9 ¾ x 7 in. (45.7 x 24.8 x 17.8 cm)



This sculpture shows that families enjoyed gathering together for meals in ancient Mexico just as they do around the world today. Family life, marked by a strong sense of unity and warmth, was so important to the Nayarit [Nye-a-REET] culture, they sought to ensure its continuation even after death.

Background

The states of Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima make up a cultural area located in western Mexico along the Pacific Ocean. The region's terrain is divided into two geographical zones: a highland area averaging 5,000 feet above sea level, and a relatively narrow tropical coastal plain. Today the region is home to Huichol and Cora Indians. Two thousand years ago, earlier Indian people lived there in small farming villages scattered among the foothills of the Sierra Madre. Isolated from the rest of the country by mountains, they led simple communal lives. No archaeological remains of their buildings, likely made of perishable materials—wood, straw, adobe bricks—and no historical records survive them.

The numerous graves discovered in western Mexico are our only source of knowledge about the ancient cultures of the region.

The numerous graves discovered in western Mexico are our only source of knowledge about the ancient cultures of the region. The Nayarit, Jalisco, and Colima people developed a distinctive form of burial. Rulers and other important members of society were buried in shaft chamber tombs found only in this region. These tombs consisted of vertical shafts extending approximately 10 to 50 feet deep; the deepest shafts opened into one or more chambers, each of which could contain multiple burials. Clay figures and sculptural groups have been found in these tomb chambers. They consist of lively depictions of people playing musical instruments, grinding corn, tending to children, and eating meals. Often whole families and villages are portrayed doing a variety of activities from daily life.

Tomb artifacts offer valuable clues to the everyday life, customs, and beliefs of this long-lost culture.

Between the 400s and 600s BCE, the Nayarit culture began to fade. Cultural influences from central Mexico had entered the region, and by the 800s CE, the distinctive local tradition of shaft chamber tombs containing clay figures had disappeared. Tomb artifacts offer valuable clues to the everyday life, customs, and beliefs of this long-lost culture, making it unfortunate that many Nayarit tombs were damaged by local farmers, or looted by people searching for these very desirable clay figures. Without texts, oral traditions, or controlled excavations, we cannot be sure of the meaning of these clay figures. They may have been placed in the tomb to honor or protect the deceased, or to serve as a link between this world and the next.

House Group

Like other ceramic pieces from western Mexico during the period, this Nayarit house group was made for a tomb. The sculpture consists of an elaborately multi-colored, two storied house inhabited by several men, women, and children, most likely a ruler and his family. They appear to be involved in activities of daily life—preparing and eating food, talking, and relaxing. The women can be identified by their short skirts, while the men wear loincloths (which are difficult to see) and sometimes hats.

In the upper story, which is open on two sides and covered by an ornate pagoda-like roof, are eight seated figures. At the rear, one figure faces outward, while four are positioned in the room's interior. They are gathered around a bowl filled with cylindrical objects, most likely corn or tortillas for their meal. Two figures appear to be eating, their hands raised to their mouths. Outside on the porch-like structure are three more figures perched on their knees. Two appear to be children; they are smaller in scale than the other figures. The child on the right sits in a relaxed pose. The one on the left is embraced by the woman seated nearby. The figures' poses, gestures, and actions, as well as the entire setting, suggest that the scene represents a time of feasting and relaxing for this family.

Two stairways along the sides of the piece lead to the area below, which consists of two rooms. A male figure wearing a conical hat leans against the doorway to the back room, while two women turn toward him and the container of food (similar to the one above) on the floor between them. The representation of two stories probably has symbolic significance, given that multistoried buildings were uncommon in western Mexico at the time this sculpture was made. Recent research by archaeologists suggests that the two-story house represents the Nayarit worldview, in which the living and the dead coexist, sharing one place with only a fragile barrier between them. Here, then, the dwelling of the dead below is a mirror image of the realm of the living above. Feasting links the living family members with those who have died.

Recent research by archaeologists suggests that the two-story house represents the Nayarit worldview, in which the living and the dead coexist, sharing one place with only a fragile barrier between them.

Characteristic of Nayarit sculpture, the figures are full of energy and have a sense of individual personalities.

Typical of Nayarit sculpture, the figures have been depicted with oval heads, distinctive hatchet-like noses, and flattened chests. They are adorned with painted body tattoos and other ornaments. Also characteristic of Nayarit sculpture, the figures are full of energy and have a sense of individual personalities. Though their appearance is rather general, their poses are quite naturalistic. The roof of the house and the wall below are covered with a geometric pattern of concentric diamond shapes, which gives the sculpture a highly decorative surface and a unifying design. This colorful display reflects the vital spirit of the Nayarit people and their faith in both this world and the next.

Technique

This sculpture was made by an “additive” process using various simple techniques. The piece was made with wet slabs of clay. The artist shaped the roof, walls, floors, and steps by hand, perhaps using a paddle-like tool to help flatten the surfaces and a cutting tool for precise edges. The bodies of the figures were also shaped from wet clay slabs. Thin clay strips were rolled to form the arms and legs, which were then added to the bodies. After forming the rounded heads, the artist made certain features, such as the noses and ears, by pinching the clay and attaching it to the figures.

A ceramic object like this would have been dried and then fired on or near an open flame. Firing makes clay harder and stronger, better able to survive the passage of time. Afterward, the artist painted the details—the patterned roof, face decoration, and clothing—in red, buff, and black pigments. Some of the colors have faded over time.

About the Artist

We do not know the name of the artist who created this expressive house group. Art in ancient Mesoamerica was not signed, and no written records of Nayarit traditions exist to provide clues to the artist's identity, training, or even gender.

Key Ideas

1. This sculpture shows two families gathering for a meal: one family on earth in their home and a second family of ancestors in the afterlife.
2. We know very little about the Nayarit and this artwork because they left no lasting oral tradition or text for us to learn from. We can only make assumptions based on other artwork from this time and region.
3. Nayarit culture valued family relationships so much, they created artworks about family to send into the afterlife with their deceased relatives.

Suggested Questions

1. Look closely. The people in this sculpture are doing everyday things. What do you see going on? What do you see that makes you say that? When you and your family, friends, or community are getting ready for a meal, how do you help? What are other people doing?
2. Look closely at this sculpture. Research tells us that the people on the top floor are living, and those on the bottom floor are their ancestors. Why do you think the artist put them in the same house? Why do you think the artist separated them by levels? What is your evidence?
3. This sculpture was like a gift from one family member to another. It was meant to show how much they cared for one another. How do you show your friends, family, and community that you care? What artwork could you make to represent that? Why?

Notes

Art Adventure

Family, Friends & Communities

Self-Guided Tour

1



The Artist's Daughter, Julie, with Her Nanny
Berthe Morisot

Gallery _____

4



Self-portrait with Dr. Arrieta
Francisco Goya

Gallery _____

2



Uma-Mahaeshvara (Shiva's Family)
Madya Pradesh, India

Gallery _____

5



Polaris
Martin Wong

Gallery _____

3



Dressed in a loose boubou, a white smock (forokoni), and a black fez, this wonderful giant known to everyone in Bamako is proud of his lovely daughter
Seydou Keita

Gallery _____

6



House group
Nayarit, Mexico

Gallery _____

Mia



2 Second Floor

- **Asia**
Galleries 200–227, 237–239, 243, 251–253
- **Americas**
Galleries 259–261
- **Modern & Contemporary**
Galleries 262–265, 275–277
- **Special Exhibition Galleries**
Target Galleries 258 & 266–274
- **Africa**
Galleries 236, 250, 254, 255
- **Restaurant (Mezzanine Level)**
Accessible via the Third Avenue elevator and stairs
- **Ancient Art**
Galleries 240–242
- **Pillsbury Auditorium**
- **MAEP, U.S. Bank**
Gallery 257
- **Non-Public Areas**

3 Third Floor

- **Europe & America 1600–1900**
Galleries 300–337, 350–357, 362
- **Prints & Drawings**
Galleries 315, 316, 344, 353
- **Europe 1200–1600**
Galleries 340–343
- **Period Rooms**
Galleries 318, 320, 325–328, 331, 335–337
- **Modern & Contemporary**
Galleries 359–361, 367, 369–380
- **Event Spaces**
Reception Hall
Villa Rosa Room
- **Photography**
Galleries 363–365, 368
- **Non-Public Areas**

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