

Highlights of Mia's Collection Key Ideas and Suggestions

Grades 6-12 and adults

Tour description for students:

What is a highlight? Look together at works of art and talk about how a "highlight" stands out for the way it looks, the skill it took to make it, its rarity, how much people enjoy it, or perhaps something completely different.

Tour description for adults:

View splendid works from around the world and throughout time. Delight in European and American favorites. Experience nature's beauty in tour-de-force landscapes and decorative arts from Asia. Discover how the living arts of Africa and the Americas honor traditions and inspire innovation.

Possible themes:

Pursuing Pleasure (food, sports, dance, fashion, cars, etc.)

Breaking the Rules (what artists love to do)

Grave Matters: Death and Dying in Art (afterlife art)

Body Image in Art (teens)

At the Table: Dishes and Other Decorative Arts (customs, manners)

Fables, Myths, and Stories (mixed-age groups)

Building Bridges: What Do We Have in Common?

ARTWORK 1:**Unknown artist, China****Celestial Horse, 25-220, Bronze with traces of polychrome****Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton, 2002.45****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. This sculpture of a powerful horse was made almost two thousand years ago by artists in China. Horses like this were made for large tombs of wealthy people to provide them with transportation in their next life.
2. The sculpture is made of bronze, a mixture of copper, tin, and other metals. It was cast from nine different molds because it was too difficult to make it in one piece.
3. The horse is mostly green, except where details that were once painted on the bronze still show, for example on its blue mane. Red and blue paint on its neck shows where the reins used to control the horse were once painted. On its back traces of a saddle still show.
4. This bronze sculpture shows an exceptional kind of horse known as Ferghana because it came from the Ferghana Valley in central Asia. China's Emperor sought out these powerful horses for his army. The Ferghana horses were larger and stronger than other horses, They had more energy and could ride longer and faster than the Chinese breeds. The emperor was bringing so many of these horses to China that the Ferghana ruler tried to stop him. The work is called "Celestial Horse" because these amazing animals were almost believed to be from another world.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. What are some things about this horse that may have led to calling it a celestial or heavenly horse?
2. Where do you see traces of paint on the horse? What do you suppose these painted areas once showed?
3. Where do you see evidence that the horse was made in several sections that were cast separately and then put together?
4. What kind of attitude do you think the horse has? What do you see that makes you say that?
5. What do you think makes this Chinese bronze horse a highlight?

ARTWORK 2:

Tsistsistas (Cheyenne) or Lakǎóta, United States, North America

Headdress, 19th–early 20th century, Bald eagle and other feathers, wool, buffalo hide, cowhide, horsehair, beads, pigments

Gift of Jack Garcia, Lakota, 2015.6

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This headdress is a belonging of the Tsistsistas or Lakǎóta, who are both Indigenous peoples of North America (here before the arrival of white European people). The headdress was donated to the museum by Jack Garcia and his family, who are Lakǎóta. Mr. Garcia received the headdress from a white art collector who felt it should be returned to its people. In the spirit of Lakǎóta generosity, the Garcia family gave the headdress to Mia for visitors to admire and appreciate. The bundle on the floor is from a Lakǎóta ceremony that took place when the headdress was installed in the gallery. It is filled with tobacco that was smoked at the ceremony.
2. We do not know the chief or warrior who would have worn this headdress. It was created by a Tsistsistas (Cheyene) or Lakǎóta artist, and represents power, leadership, and generosity.
3. The horsehair and notched feathers indicate the actions taken by the warrior on the battlefield. A red feather on the inside of the headdress may indicate the warrior was once injured. The headdress contains more than 70 eagle feathers. Each eagle feather was presented to the warrior for brave, compassionate, or generous actions.

Suggested Questions/Activities (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Have the group stand around the vitrine, and ask those on each side to share something they see on the headdress or in the case.
2. How do you think the warrior for whom this was made felt when he was wearing it? What might it have looked like if he was wearing it while riding a fast horse?
3. What is something generous (unselfish) you have done for your friends, family, or community? What are ways in which people have been generous to you?
4. How might your perspective of viewing this artwork change, if it was from your own culture? How do you think a person of Lakǎóta heritage might feel, seeing the headdress in a museum?
5. In what ways do we honor someone who is generous, compassionate, or brave today?

Research resources:

Mia Guide website, [Training notes from Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Dakota Hoska](#)

Khan Academy: [Feathered war bonnet](#)

Headdress video narrated by Dakota Hoska: [Headdress](#)

ARTWORK 2 (alternate):**Anita Fields, Wedding hat, 2018, Top hat and feathers****Wedding coat, 2019, Wool, satin, silk, embroidery, beads, clay buttons****The Jane and James Emison Endowment for Native American Art, 2019.42.1 and 2019.42.2****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. When delegations of Osage men traveled to Washington, DC for negotiations with the United States government in the early 1800s, they were often given gifts of top hats and military regalia. The clothing usually didn't fit, however; so they gave the garments to Osage women. The women repurposed them as wedding attire, modified to reflect an Osage aesthetic. They added silk ribbon work, finger woven yarn belts, and trade buttons to the coats, and brightly colored feather plumes and French ribbons to the hats.
2. Artist Anita Fields created this contemporary, artistic version of an Osage wedding coat and hat to reference issues that affect modern Osage people. Look carefully at the interior and exterior to find images that represent oil economics (oil wells), colonization and imposed policies and treaties (Treaty of 1808 document), alongside images of an Osage belief system of respect for nature and a worldview reflecting their creation story (birds, flowers, sun symbols, DNA patterns).
3. Fields has said the interior images remind us of history and experiences that are carried internally. The exterior images serve to make our world aesthetically pleasing; as we remember our past, we must work to make our future beautiful. Diligent hands are needed to make beautiful things.
4. No longer used as wedding attire, the coats have become a central part of a ceremony for transferring a sacred drum from one drum keeper to another. The garments symbolize the transfer of leadership in the dance and celebrate the virtues of hospitality and generosity.

Suggested Questions/Activities (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. What is the first thing you notice about this outfit? (Before you reveal it's a wedding hat and coat.)
2. Osage women created their wedding attire using top hats and military regalia that had been given to men. How do you think the bride for whom this was made felt when she was wearing it?
3. Images of family photos, historical documents, oil wells, and Osage worldviews (plants, flowers) are included on the garment's lining. Why do you think the artist added them?
4. How might your perspective of viewing this artwork change if it was from your own culture? How do you think a person of Osage heritage might feel, seeing this outfit in a museum?

"When we can look through another lens, one different from mainstream society, we can begin to acknowledge and hopefully appreciate what other cultures continually contribute to the place we call home." —Anita Fields

ARTWORK 3:

Suit by Unknown Japanese; Artist: Helmet by Saotome Ichika, Japan, Asia
Red-and-blue-laced Suit of Armor from the Kii Tokugawa Family, 17th century, Iron, leather, lacquer, silk, wood, gold leaf and powder, bear fur
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 2009.60a-s

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This elaborate suit of Japanese armor is a lightweight, form-fitting type designed to protect the body in close combat. With a face mask, forearm sleeves, thigh and shin guards, and bear-fur boots, every inch of the wearer's body is protected. That said, the suit could have been worn in battle but probably was only used for parades.
2. Makers laced together hundreds of lacquered (lacquer is a material made from the sap of trees) metal and leather plates with red and blue silk cords to create the distinctive appearance of the armor and give it flexibility.
3. The suit may have belonged to a feudal lord named Tokugawa Yorinobu (1602–1671). He was the founder of the branch of the Tokugawa family that ruled Japan until 1867.
4. The helmet bowl consists of 124 plates, an unusually high number, designed in an upside-down acorn shape. A praying mantis, gilded with gold, is poised as if to strike its prey. The helmet is signed by Saotome Ichika, a famous armorer during the late 1500s and early 1600s.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely at the Japanese armor. There is a lot to see here! What do you notice first? Next? What else do you see? What words (adjectives) would you use to describe it?
2. Look at all the different materials that the suit of armor is made of. Where do you see metal? Fur? Cloth? Silk cord? Leather? Lacquer (a special shiny material made from tree sap)? Many different specialists worked on different parts of the armor. Why do you suppose it was important to make the armor so elaborate? Why might it have required so many different materials?
3. Imagine the man who wore this armor as he put it on piece by piece. How do you think he felt when he had the whole suit of armor on, including his bear-fur boots? How do you think he felt when he moved? Think about the sounds he might have heard when the lacquered metal and leather plates hit each other. (Look for videos showing the elaborate process of putting on the armor.)
4. Look at the praying mantis on top of the helmet made by the artist Saotome Ichika. What qualities do you see that make it a good symbol for a feudal lord? The armor also includes images of phoenixes, tortoises, and lions, all symbols of the family's power. (You could show some of these; a flashlight is helpful for this.) What animal would you want on an outfit to signify your power?

ARTWORK 4:**Bwa, Burkina Faso, West Africa region, Africa****Plank mask, c. 1960, wood, pigment****The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 98.2****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. This mask was used in graduation celebrations, when boys and girls have learned their roles as adults in their culture.
2. The mask is danced and represents spirits that are important to the Bwa community.
3. Boys and girls learn about their community and ancestors as they prepare for graduation.
4. The different shapes on the mask have special meanings. The double zig-zag represents the path of the ancestors. The crescent shape on the top represents the moon, and the important time of year when masks are danced. The checkerboard pattern on the back represents learning. The elder teachers are symbolized by the dark areas, and the young students by the light areas.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. What do you see that tells you this is a mask? How is it similar to other masks you have seen? What makes it different?
2. This mask is decorated with shapes that make a face. Look closely. How did the artist use the shapes to make a face? How does this face make you feel?
3. This mask connected the community to their ancestors. How do you connect to your ancestors or elders in your community?
4. What ceremonies in your community mark the passage from childhood to adulthood?
5. What do you think is expected of young people when they become adults?
6. What would you like to tell someone younger than you about growing up?

ARTWORK 5:**Pierre Bonnard****Dining Room in the Country, 1913, Oil on canvas****The John R. Van Derlip Fund 54.15****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. Pierre Bonnard and his wife Marthe had a country house they called Ma Roulotte ("My Caravan") in a small town on the Seine River outside of Paris. This painting shows the dining room there, with cats perched on the chairs and Marthe leaning on the windowsill from outside the house.
2. Bonnard loved to express himself with bright colors and loose brushstrokes. He used colors that are complements of one another to make them stand out and appear brighter. (Show a color wheel to explain how blue and orange are opposite from one another, called complements.)
3. Bonnard wanted to unite the indoors with the outdoors by including an open window and door, and linked the interior and exterior of the house with the colors he selected.
4. Bonnard painted entirely from memory. It was more important to show how he felt about this space than to paint it exactly as it appeared.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. This is a painting of Bonnard's house in the country. Look closely. What's going on in this picture?
2. How did Bonnard link the feeling of the indoors with the feeling of the outdoors?
3. How do the colors Bonnard used unite the indoors and outdoors?
4. Pick an area of the painting and use gestures to depict how you would paint that area.
5. What part of your house is your favorite place to be? What type of artwork would you create to describe it? What colors would you use?

ARTWORK 6:

**Hans Ledwinka; Manufacturer: Ringhoffer-Tatra-Werke AG, Czech Republic, 1878–1967
Tatra T87 four-door sedan, 1948 (designed 1936), All-metal construction
Gift of funds from Regis Foundation, 2005.138**

Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)

1. This highlight of Mia's collection is a car called a Tatra. This is one of only a few cars in art museum collections.
2. The Tatra was named for a mountain range in eastern Europe where its power and reliability were first tested.
3. This car has a lot of unusual features. The three-part windshield made it easier for the driver to see (curved glass was not yet available). An extra tire was hidden under the rounded hood up front. It was also unique at the time for having its super 75-horsepower engine mounted in the back of the car. (Show images with hood and trunk open.) The blinkers flipped out from the sides when the driver signaled a turn. The cover over the rear wheels is called a skirt.
4. When Hans Ledwinka designed this car a long time ago, it was also special for how fast it could go! Yet, the Tatra is very rare: only 2000 of this type of Tatra were ever made.

For older students or adults:

5. This was the automobile of choice for Hitler's officers. They liked to drive fast (top speed of 100 mph) and recklessly on the Autobahn; many were injured and killed in car crashes. Eventually, Hitler forbade them to own one.
6. Ledwinka worked with Ferdinand Porsche, who appropriated/stole Tatra design elements for his 1936-39 VW Beetle design (the "people's car" was contracted by Hitler). Tatra sued VW after the war and won due to infringement of 11 Tatra patents.

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely at the Tatra to see what makes it special. There is a lot to look at. What about this car stands out for you? What words would you use to describe the car?
2. What do you think makes the Tatra car a highlight?
3. If you were going to design a car with special features, what would you include? Why?

For adults:

4. Are there any adrenaline junkies in the room? If you've ever been to Germany and driven on the Autobahn, what was that experience like?
5. Does anyone own/has owned a VW Beetle? What do you notice that is similar?

ARTWORK 7:**Delita Martin, *Between Sisters*, 2018****Acrylic, charcoal, colored pencil, decorative papers, and hand-stitching on paper
Gift of funds from Lucy Mitchell, Julie Steiner, and Kaywin Feldman, 2019.35.2****Key Ideas (provide 2-4 per artwork)**

1. Delita Martin combines printmaking, drawing, sewing, and painting in her work that celebrates the strength of African American women.
2. Martin finds inspiration in the stories of her community and in family photographs. She shows the important role that African American women play in their communities.
3. This work is from her series called "Between Spirits and Sisters." She is inspired by the Sande society of West Africa, a community of women that prepares girls to become women. During special ceremonies, they honor the spirits of their ancestors.
4. Martin incorporates materials and images from her personal memory. She compares this process to quilting, a skill she learned from her grandmother. Her grandmother told her stories about their family while they made quilts. (Show details of fabric circles that have been stitched onto the canvas.)
5. Martin creates layers in her portraits to show the space between the physical and spiritual worlds. (See photo of Martin with another of her works showing the layers.)

Suggested Questions (provide 2-3 per artwork)

1. Look closely at the two figures in this work. How are the figures shown different from one another? How are they similar? What might they be saying to each other?
2. Delita Martin calls her work "quilting," which implies sewing different layers together. Where do you see hand-stitching on the image? (Show a detail)
3. Martin uses circles in every work she creates. A circle represents the moon, which is a symbol of the female. If you chose a symbol to put in your artwork, what would it be? What would it represent?
4. How would you tell the stories of your family? What type of art materials would you use?
5. How does this picture remind you of your own family relationships?

Conclusion

Thank you for looking at and sharing your thoughts about these highlights in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. If you had to pick one highlight from today's tour as your favorite, which one would you pick? What made it a highlight for you? Be sure to look for other highlights--there are a lot of them--on Mia's website at www.artsmia.org.