

Assignment.

Subject of the assigned tour for a University of Minnesota Sociology class:

The topic is Urban Poverty with an eye on how museums historically have reflected in their art--and served--a more dominant culture and what museums like MIA have been doing to address this more recently. It's part of a larger conversation about urban planning and marginalization.

From the Professor:

My students have been interested in ways in which institutions have become more inclusive of their representations of art as well as outreach efforts to a wider range of audiences.

Theme:

Seeing Yourself at Mia*: Cultural Inclusion and Community Outreach.

*Mia translates to "Mine" in many languages.

Community Outreach:

Transition: Mia works with community organizations across the Twin Cities to develop programs that create greater accessibility, relevant dealings, and foster greater awareness.

First Floor Commons Hallway area.

This exhibit shows works done in studio classes at Mia through the Community Outreach Program with city grade and high school students. This current exhibit subject was: How we see the future of our community.

*I listed some of the many Community Outreach Mia Programs, including that Mia has free entrance .

(We can work together and make a full list.)

Transition: Museums can send messages with what they display and how it's displayed.

The next object demonstrates the importance of communication between a museum and community.

Mary Griggs Burke *Dollhouse. Commons Area.*

I told the story from <https://new.artsmia.org/stories/the-doll-returns-from-difficult-conversations-a-fresh-start>

Mia didn't realize we were avoiding conversations about race and representation in Art and museums.

The group discussed and agreed on the decision. This group also began a short discussion on banned books.

Transition: Before we figure out a museum's goals we need to see where we've been. We're going back to Minneapolis 100 years ago.

*Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue. Robert Koehler. 1902. *Short Stop.*

Q: Describe what you see? How might you describe city life from what you see? Describe the people you see walking?

In 1893, Koehler became the director of the Minneapolis School of Fine Arts now MCAD And a central figure in the founding of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

* They liked the fact that my Dad graduated from MCAD in the 40s on the GI Bill.

Model of Original Scheme for the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts. McKim, Mead, and White. 1912.

The architects were well know. It was meant to get potential donors excited about building a museum. It included a library, orchestra hall, sculpture hall along with galleries.

*They walked around and looked carefully. They commented on which parts were completed and talked about the Greek architecture.

Q: What do you think was the "Steam Engine" *that propelled this endeavor? They surmised it was the wealthy and that wealth was necessary to complete goal.

* The above discussion was from their reading of sociologist Saskia Sassen. "High finance is the steam engine of our time. It provokes change".

Q: Who do you think might have been the dominant visitors in 1915? They referenced the Rainy Day painting.

*Mia's first purchased painting in 1915 was *Vacationers on the Beach at Trouville* by Eugene Boudin.

Q: From your Urban Studies, how do you see the demographics of Minneapolis today compared with 1915?

The museum added space in 1974 and again in 2006. The latter added 40% more space.

* I told them that my Dad did the advertising brochure for the 1974 addition.

Q: How might the extra gallery space enable Mia to reflect the changing demographics? How might you have suggested using it?

*They discussed that the space could be used to reflect more cultures and reach a larger community audience.

Let's continue to explore ways Mia is reaching out to a wider audience and being more culturally inclusive.

Transition: The next object tells a story of a not so well known woman.

Drive by:

House Top Quilt. Addie Pearl Nicholson, 1974

Mia wants to expand and give space to underrepresented artists, living and dead, and of color.

<http://collections.artsmia.org/art/131460/housetop-quilt-nine-block-half-log-cabin-variation-addie-pearl-nicholson>

Transition: Museums reflect history and is a source of learning. Our next stop shows Mia's initiative to show our period rooms in new realistic ways.

Providence Parlor 1760-1770 United States.

After a brief description, they explored on their own and came out and discussed what they saw.

Q: Who writes history? After seeing the room, how might you describe life in Providence then?

Life was booming, but for whom?

Drive by: Looking over the Rotunda from the third floor:

The space has been reimaged to display new acquisitions that are more culturally inclusive. Greek and Roman antiquities are now in the adjacent gallery where you will find the sculpture Doryphoros, its artist used a mathematical system of proportions to create an ideal human form and speaks volumes on classical history.

* I wanted to add in a subtle way that seeing yourself at Mia includes multiple interests.

Entrance to Target Wing.

Looking out the window we see the park, a green space for all to enjoy.

The "Steam Engine" that propelled this new wing was Target: a reflection of their interest in community. At first it displayed mostly modern and contemporary works. Now, there are also galleries of extensive cultural inclusion; giving voices to many. If you have time, go back and look through all of the galleries.

Transition: Children are frequent visitors. This next painting allows them to see themselves at Mia.

Polaris. Martin Wong. 1987

We see children of various ethnicities sitting in a circle playing marbles. In the center is the North Star, its gravitational pull binding the children together. It's an optimistic and fantastical vision of the future.

* I did a drive by with my group. But this would be a great discussion on many tours.

Transition: When addressing inclusion we need artists who use their voices to inspire activism and museums to recognize these artists and get their work into our galleries. One such artist is Kehinde Wiley.

Santos Dumont - The Father of Aviation II. Kehinde Wiley. 2009.

Look carefully at this painting.

Q: Can you share adjectives on how this painting makes you feel. Size? Describe what the young men are wearing. Do you think they from today?

The artist, Kehinde Wiley, is best known for his large scale portraits of black people posed as kings, prophets, saints and heroes. He draws inspiration from great portraits of European art history, replacing the subject with black protagonists.

“I take the good parts that I love and put in the things I know to be beautiful, people who happen to look like me.” Wiley.

*I showed them photos of David’s Napoleon Crossing the Alps and Kehinde Wiley’s Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps.

This brought on a discussion comparing the 2 portraits, but mostly of ours and wondering why the men are arranged as they are compared to the arrangement of Wiley’s Napoleon painting.

* Kehinde flew to Brazil and met 2 men in a poor neighborhood who agreed to pose.

* They selected a well know sculpture outside the airport dedicated to one of Brazil’s pioneer aviators, Santos Dumont.

* They chose to portray themselves as the two fallen heroes at the bottom of the statue.

I showed them the photo of the statue.

Q: Why do you think the men may have chosen to be portrayed as the fallen heroes? How does that fit in to our discussions of marginalization? (Particular to this group)

We had a discussion on those whose success is built on the backs of others. They included slavery.

Q: This painting used to be in the Baroque gallery because of its style: capturing the climax of a moment, dramatic lighting and the viewer becomes involved and part of the picture plane. If you were to choose, which gallery would you put it in?

Hands down they all agreed the message was far more important than the style. And liked it amongst the other works in the gallery.

*(I showed the his portrait of Barack Obama).

Transition: In this same gallery the next artist wants us to feel the perspective of slave fugitives using the Underground Railroad.

Night Comes Tenderly. Dawoud Bey. 1953.

Information came from the video Dawoud Bey: Art begins with an idea. From our guide site.

* This is a drive by. I spoke in a hushed tone.

This is the last stop of the Underground Railroad in Cleveland. The fugitive quietly approaches the ivy laced brick edifice. What are they listening for? Is someone behind the wall? Are we being seen? Night is both a comfort and a promise yet filled with anxiety. Dawoud Bey draws on ancestral echoes in each state and empathize.

Transition: I did not specifically give a transition. We walked into the next gallery and they all came to a stop before *God's Gift* Tawny Chatmon 2019.

My first thought it was a Klimt.

Q: What did you notice first about this painting?

Q: What adjectives might you use to describe the girl wearing the robe?

Tawny Chatmon's work celebrates Black beauty, identity and culture of a young, black child. She is in a glittering dress, inspired by Gustav Klimt's lavish portraits of white Viennese women that she saw as a child in Germany. Tawny Chatmon saw a negative historical representation as well as an absence of black figures in European and American art. She looks at this as a counter narrative and redemptive measure to uplift Black tradition.

They saw a similar as Wiley.

Transition: The next artist arrived in New York City in 1929, the high point of the Harlem Renaissance having a hand in bringing black music, art, literature and culture into the public limelight.

Jazz Quartet. Beaufort Delaney. 1929

What adjectives come to mind when looking at the scene? Energy?

Where do you see movement?

What might it sound like to be here?

Members of the Black disenfranchised community became subjects of his works. Delany's art studio was in nearby Greenwich Village. This is a scene at a jazz club in Greenwich. He was a lover of jazz and music.

*The students loved this painting. They questioned the Star of David in the upper left hand corner. I wasn't sure, I asked them what they thought. One student had just read a book, in another class, by James Baldwin. He wrote that many of the Jewish community, also disenfranchised, lived in Harlem.

*We cited their reading of Louis Wirth who said that with growing urbanization, people live in heterogeneous groups. Crossing between cultural groups becomes more difficult.

Because Delaney was gay and Black, he felt double disenfranchised. He moved to Paris in the 1950s where he continued painting.

Transition: The Minneapolis Institute of Art is located on Dakota land. The state name Minnesota comes from the Dakhóta word Mnísota, “land where the water reflects the sky.”

Americas Galleries

Walking through 1st gallery 259. This gallery is vibrant and alive with contemporary Native American artists. They animate the stories and strengths of indigenous people.

Transition: *James J. Hill* Tray, 1884, of St Anthony Falls surrounded by several islands. Only a few remain. One is Spirit Island sacred to the Dakota.

Q: Look carefully at the objects displayed in the same case as the tray. What do you notice about the time they were made?

How might this choice of installation and overlay shift your perspective?

We took the time to read the wall.

All of the placards now identify the First Nation name rather than the European given name.

Transition: 2020 was a monumental year that included a global pandemic, civil unrest and a call for racial injustice. The next artist invites us to think and interact with his work.

*To me, this is the perfect end piece. Inviting reflection on marginalized groups.

What We Want is Free. Jeffrey Gibson. 2020.

Q: Take a moment to look, noticing the colors, shapes and materials.

What do you see?

Do the shapes and colors overlap? What materials do you notice?

What if I told you that this work represents marginalized communities across North America? What dialogue do you think Jeffrey Gibson wants to open up? We discussed the title.

Gibson said this work expresses the necessity of “dignity, respect, joy, freedom and liberty of marginalized communities”. It resembles a modern patchwork quilt found in historic Choctaw clothing. The beaded framework is found in Indigenous communities across North America.

Here at Mia, we are all learners and want growth. Always questioning another perspective, different from the traditional museum.

- * As we walked we saw an Art Adventure Group. A perfect time to discuss this program.
- * I also pointed out accessibility efforts.
- * We stopped at Jade Mountain. I told them of my tour where a university student stood with his back to it and recited the inscribed poem by heart.
- * Going past the African galleries I told them of former director Evan Mauer's work to secure more Somalian objects to better represent Minnesota's population.
- * They asked about repatriation. I told them of the Leger and the Greek vase. When something is claimed it should be returned, Mia absolutely looks into that claim and if justified returns it.