

Self-Guided Tour

Women in Art

The Minneapolis Institute of Art continues to grow its collections of works of art made by women. Women artists have added their voices to art making throughout time and across cultures. With a great diversity of styles and subjects, they have expressed their feelings, examined how women are viewed, created beauty and controversy, and celebrated and critiqued the times and places in which they live.

By looking at examples from various cultures, ranging from historical to contemporary periods, you will experience the many contributions women have made and how they have influenced art making around the world.

(Gallery maps with artwork locations are on the last page.)



Gallery 255
Myrlande Constant, *Bal Kontredans (Country Dance)*, 2021

How do the materials used add to the vibrancy and meaning of this work?

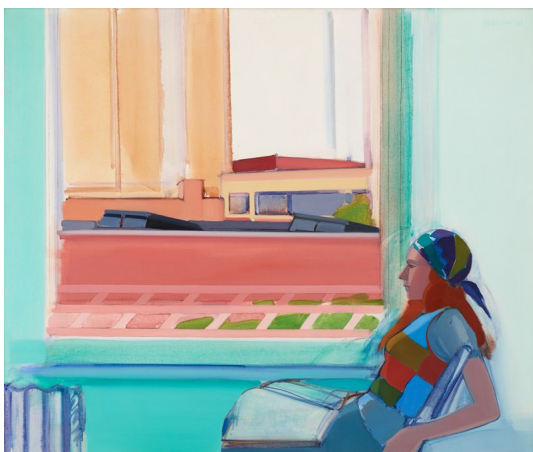
Myrlande Constant made this *drapo Vodou* (Vodou flag) depicting a lavish scene layered with meaning and symbolism from her Haitian culture. Working within a male-dominated flag-making tradition, Constant is the first female textile artist to gain international acclaim for her innovations in this practice. The flag is unfurled at the beginning of a Vodou ceremony to signal congregants to come together. The sparkle of the sequins and mirrors attracts the attention of the spirits. The individuals gather to create music with a drum, maracas, guitar, concertina, and harmonica. Smoke, color, and patterns swirl as a man extends an arm to a woman who steps forward. In this vibrant landscape, the people join in a *bal kontredans* (country dance).



Gallery 259
Avis Charley, *Think Long, Think Wrong*, 2021

What words would you use to describe this woman?

Dakota/Diné artist Avis Charley portrays resilient, independent Indigenous women in modern settings. While growing up, she yearned to encounter paintings made by and for Indigenous people in museums, instead of the romanticized and often inaccurate portraits she found painted by non-Native artists. This led Charley to paint authentic representations of Native people living in the contemporary American landscape. She has said she wants her work to inspire present and future generations and to broaden perspectives for general audiences. Charley says, "I create images that I wish I would have seen growing up—beautifully adorned Indigenous women carrying themselves with pride and grace, their dynamic figures coming alive and engaging us with their humanity."

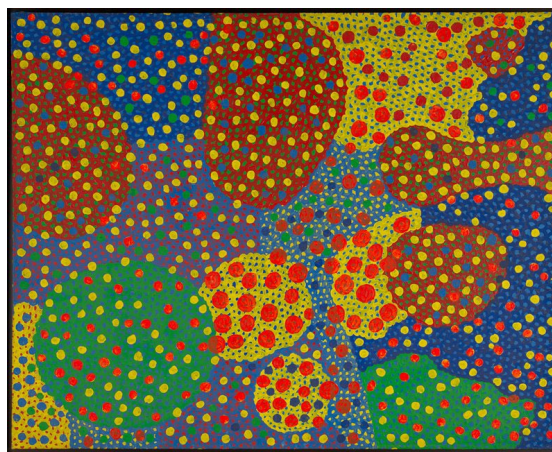


Gallery 375

Elizabeth Osborne, *Woman in Belgravia Hotel*, 1969

How does this woman relate to her surroundings?

American painter Elizabeth Osborne posed a model before an open window against an urban landscape of varied architectural elements. The woman's clothing is composed of flat color blocks that pick up the rectangular rhythms of the adjacent window and radiator grill, as well as distant rooftops, windows, and sky. Her serene, contemplative state matches the balance of the forms depicted. In works of the 1960s and beyond, Osborne has often placed figures in architectural space to highlight states of being and relationships between them. She emulates modernist styles, such as Minimalism and Color Field painting, while incorporating her study of light and the landscape. In writing about her work, Osborne acknowledges that the rationality of [modernist] architecture helped her as a painter. She merges abstraction and realism, thereby challenging the viewer to rethink differences between these ways of seeing and depicting the world.



Gallery 375

Yayoi Kusama, *Untitled*, 1967

What type of emotion(s) do you think this artist was feeling? What do you see that makes you say that?

Yayoi Kusama struggles with controlling her thoughts and emotions. Since childhood, she has experienced hallucinations and obsessive thinking. She often feels surrounded by dots that make up an "infinity net" around her. To help manage her feelings, Kusama creates paintings, sculptures, installations, and more using bright colors and repeating shapes, especially polka dots. In 1977 she admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital and continues to live there, walking to her nearby studio to work on her art every day. She has harnessed her trauma through her work. Now in her 90s, Kusama is internationally known and considered Japan's greatest living artist. Her Mirror Infinity Rooms, lined with mirrored glass and containing scores of neon-colored LED lights, are featured at many museums. These rooms of infinite lights create an illusion of never-ending space. In this way, Kusama creates an environment that may help viewers experience what a world of "infinity nets" is like.



Gallery 376

Dorothea Tanning, *Tempest in Yellow*, 1956

What figures can you find "trapped" within the painting?

Dorothea Tanning participated in the 1943 "Exhibition by 31 Women," believed to be the first U.S. art show dedicated to female artists and a disruption of a male-dominated field. An early follower of Surrealism, Tanning later turned to painting she called "prismatic and lyrical." She described her vibrant canvases filled with faceted colors and shifting spaces: "My compositions began to shift and merge in an ever-intensifying complexity of planes. . . I wanted to lead the eye into spaces that hid, revealed, transformed all at once and where there would be some never-before-seen image, as if it had appeared with no help from me." Look closely to find a childlike figure seated at lower right. Other faces and bodies are submerged within glowing shapes throughout. Tanning stated her desire "to seduce by means of imperceptible passages from one reality to another. The viewer is caught in a net from which there is . . . no exit at all for you or for me."



Gallery 378

Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, *Frankfurt Kitchen*, 1926-30

What's your reaction to the layout of this kitchen?

Following World War I, a citywide housing project in Frankfurt, Germany, sought to provide low-income housing for some two million returning soldiers, as well as thousands of war widows. Grete Schütte-Lihotzky, one of Austria's first female architects, was hired to design a kitchen for 10,000 housing units that emphasized rational organization, standardization, and mechanized construction. The goal was to minimize unnecessary steps as well as provide labor-saving devices and increased physical comfort. Her innovative design included integrated units, continuous work surfaces, and a low worktable that allowed for food preparation while seated at the sink under a large window. Other design features provided storage bins with handles and spouts for pouring dry foods, an adjustable ceiling light, a movable stool, a concealed pass-through, a drop-down ironing board, and cabinetry painted deep blue, said to naturally repel flies.



Gallery 357

Philip Webb and Kate Faulkner, Morris & Co., *Settle*, c. 1800

What's the first thing you notice when you look at this bench, called a "settle"?

Kate Faulkner was an Arts and Crafts artist and designer. She worked in a variety of media, including wood engraving, embroidery, wallpaper and fabric design, and gesso (a kind of plaster), tile, and china painting. Faulkner both created her own designs and interpreted the designs of others. On the settle, a type of bench, she produced delicate floral and sun motifs using carved and gilded gesso. The dense intertwined vegetal forms are clusters of hawthorn and jasmine sprawling under bouquets of lilies, tulips, and carnations. The sides are adorned with cherry branches. Faulkner's detailed interpretations drew deeply from nature, matching the charm of the Morris & Co. design ethic. Living in a world that did not widely encourage female design practitioners, Faulkner compiled an impressive portfolio of creations. Many of them are still in print and remain popular to this day. This settle is unique to Mia, with no other object like it currently in the United States.



Gallery 322

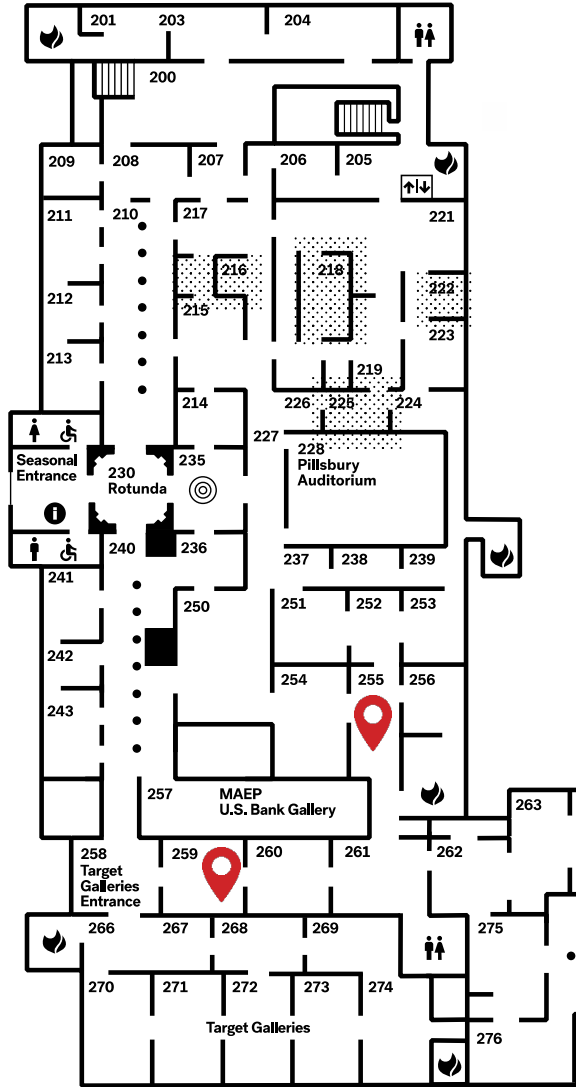
Bisa Butler, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 2019

What does the use of shiny, colorful quilted fabrics add to our perception of these women?

Textile artist Bisa Butler named this work after writer Maya Angelou's 1969 memoir. Angelou used the metaphor of a bird escaping its cage to refer to her own transformation into a self-possessed, dignified young woman despite the challenges of family trauma and racist oppression. Look closely to discover the fabric with the caged bird flying free! Butler alludes to Angelou's memoir to underscore remarkable, yet often overlooked, stories of individual persistence. Her quilt is inspired by a photograph from around 1900 of four women students at historically Black Atlanta University. She captured the confidence of these women, who earned college degrees during an era of racial discrimination. Many Black artists, including Butler, worked as teachers while pursuing artistic careers. Trained as a painter, Butler layered fabrics like glazes and used thread to draw, adding detail and texture. Textiles connect with her family history; she learned to sew at a young age from her mother and grandmother.

Self-Guided Tour

Second Floor



Third Floor

