

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Adventure

Amazing Animals in Art



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Art Adventure Program
A program of the Minneapolis Institute of Art—Revised 2024

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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 pre-selected 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?

Developing Cultural Fluency

Cultural fluency, the ability to communicate and interact with people from backgrounds that are different from our own, is more important than ever in our diverse, multicultural world. But how can we achieve cultural fluency? Art Adventure Picture People have a unique opportunity to facilitate discussions about different cultures and human experiences with a diverse group of students. But if these cultures are unfamiliar to us, we may not understand the meanings their art objects hold. As educators, we must understand how our teaching can impact students in their development as scholars, artists, and citizens. For that reason, we've compiled some tips and tools to help you practice cultural fluency in the classroom.

The information shared here is only the first part of a larger conversation. We will refine this information annually at the end of the academic year. Please refer to it as needed and let us know how to improve this work in progress.

Mia's collection belongs to everyone

Mia's collection of more than 100,000 art objects is held in the public trust, which means it is preserved, documented, and displayed for the benefit of the public. As stewards of these artworks, we are committed to making sure they remain accessible to the public for generations to come. We continuously assess the collection and are committed to expanding it responsibly so that it reflects our values of inclusivity and equity. We also realize that museum collecting practices of the past do not always measure up to today's legal and ethical standards. Museums often have histories connected to slavery and the displacement of Indigenous peoples, for example. For these reasons, Mia is committed to addressing diversity and inclusion more directly than in the past.

Tips and tools for practicing cultural fluency

Embrace "I don't know"

If you're asked about an aspect of a culture and you don't know the answer, it's best to say, "I don't know." Do not try to make an educated guess based on what you may know of that culture—or other cultures.

Own your mistakes

Uh oh, you've made a mistake! What to do? First, don't panic. Acknowledge your error. Don't make excuses for yourself—set a personal goal to work on not repeating the same mistake in the future.

Avoid cultural appropriation

Cultural appropriation is the act of adopting or modifying elements of a nondominant culture in a way that reinforces stereotypes or contributes to oppression. It also includes using parts of that culture (dress, music, dance, art, etc.) without permission.

Cultural appropriation can be so nuanced and complex that many people have a difficult time understanding it—and perhaps not realize they are doing it themselves. Below is a brief rundown of cultural appropriation versus cultural appreciation.

Appropriation

Dehumanizes oppressed groups

Takes without permission

Perpetuates stereotypes

Ignores the meaning and stories behind the cultural elements

Appreciation

Celebrates cultures in respectful ways

Asks permission, provides credit, and offers compensation

Elevates the voices and experiences of members of a cultural group

Focuses on learning the stories and meanings behind cultural elements

Here are two tips for avoiding cultural appropriation in Art Adventure classroom art projects:

- Don't use cultural attire as costumes. This can reinforce offensive stereotypes of those in our community.
- When leading art activities in the classroom, don't ask students to replicate the type of artwork they are studying. For example, do not ask students to make an Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) beadwork, a Yoruba crown, or an latmul hand drum. Instead, develop activities inspired by these artworks and students' personal experiences.

Points to remember when discussing cultures not your own

- Cultures are diverse and dynamic, not monolithic. Monolithic thinking is the tendency to view cultures and peoples from a single perspective and set of values. Reducing monolithic thinking requires us to examine our own biases and assumptions and create an environment that celebrates diverse perspectives in all forms.

- When presenting work from Africa, remember it is a continent not a country. Be specific about naming the culture and country of origin for the artwork.
- Be specific when talking about Native American nations and Native American artists' cultural or tribal affiliations. Use the information in your booklets.
- Native Americans are still here. Acknowledge contemporary cultures when talking about Native American tribes or nations.
- If you are uncertain about an unfamiliar word, check your booklet for the phonetic pronunciation.
- Acknowledge multiple worldviews and voices in your classroom discussions. For example, when presenting an artwork from the United States in the 1800s, talk about the diverse perspectives in that historical context (e.g., immigrants, African Americans, Native Americans, women, industrialists, etc.).
- Encourage students to do research and ask questions. Showing genuine curiosity and a desire to grow, learn, and connect is the best way to avoid perpetuating cultural stereotypes.

In the end, don't make assumptions about a culture based on what you know or don't know. Take time to learn about the culture before delving into a classroom discussion. Do what you can when you can as you learn to do better.

Learning is a process!

Now, take what you've learned and practice. There will be mistakes, and that is OK. Making mistakes is a natural and necessary part of the learning process, from childhood to adulthood. If you can notice and correct your mistakes and practice repeatedly, you will gain confidence and proficiency. Add these tools to your toolbox as you continue your lifelong learning about cultural fluency.

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.

Amazing Animals in Art

Animals have always been a source of fascination for humans. Whether loyal companions or threatening predators, animals have long inspired artists through their grace, beauty, and mystery. The six works of art in this set include images of animals from diverse cultures of the world and several periods in history. They illustrate the strong and lasting connection between humans and animals.

Amazing Animals in Art explores the reasons why artists create images of animals, among them religious beliefs, social customs, storytelling, advertising, and personal expression. It also features a broad range of media, providing an opportunity to study techniques used in painting, sculpture, and ceramics. Finally, through the works in this set, students are invited to examine the qualities of animals that have engaged artists' imaginations and techniques throughout history.

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Nazca, Vessel	Hollow red clay sphere with slip glaze	\$25
Philip R. Goodwin, <i>A "Bear" Chance</i>	Sample painted canvas	\$30
China, Horse	Sample of white clay with glazes	\$20
	Photograph of tomb figures	\$10
Spain, Lion statuette	Sample of gold filigree	\$20
	Reproduction of actual lion size	\$15
	Images of Lion Fountain (2)	\$10
Benin, Leopard water pitcher	Model of bronze	\$50
	Bronze casting process description	\$10
	Photograph of Benin court ceremony	\$10
Ishida Yūtei, <i>Flock of Cranes</i>	Photograph of crane	\$10
	Container of gold leaf	\$20
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!

Contents

Peru, Nazca, Vessel in the form of a fish, 100 BCE–600 CE.	11
Philip R. Goodwin, <i>A “Bear” Chance</i> , 1907	15
China, Horse, 700s.	19
Spain, Hispano-Moorish, Lion statuette, 1000s–1100s	23
Nigeria, Edo, Leopard water pitcher, 1600s	27
Ishida Yūtei, <i>Flock of Cranes</i> , second half of the 1700s	31
Amazing Animals in Art: Self-Guided Tour	35

Nazca, Peru, South America
Vessel in the form of a fish, 100 BCE–600 CE, clay, pigments
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 44.3.59
5 3/8 x 8 1/4 x 4 in. (13.7 x 21.0 x 10.2 cm)



Because the Nazca (nahz-ka) people did not have a written language, they often used works of art as visual communication. This clay vessel was probably created for ceremonial purposes, like for a tomb, and reflects the vital importance of fish and nature in the Nazca worldview.

Background

The Nazca civilization flourished in a coastal valley region of Peru from about 100 BCE to 600 CE. The Nazca did not have a written language, leaving much of their culture a mystery today. However, we do know something about the Nazca because they communicated visually through highly technical and creative textiles and ceramics. These artworks offer clues to the life, customs, and beliefs of this culture from long ago.

Peru is situated on the western edge of the continent of South America, bordered by the Pacific Ocean and dominated by the central Andean Mountain chain. The Nazca settled and prospered in the Peruvian coastal river valleys. Though rivers remained dry for months—even years—at a time, towns developed along their banks. The economy of the Nazca towns relied on agriculture, supplemented by the rich fisheries of the coastal waters. The Nazca developed intricate irrigation systems with underground canals to transport and conserve water.

Nazca ceramics often reflect their natural environment and way of life: farming and fishing.

Nazca ceramics often reflect their natural environment and way of life: farming and fishing. Common motifs include fish, aquatic birds, and reptiles, as well as fruits and vegetables such as chili peppers, maize (corn), and lima beans. Complex figures

appearing in later works combine various characteristics of humans, animals, and birds. The Nazca may have connected these figures to agricultural fertility and water. Because of scarce rainfall in the desert, and their dependence on the ecological balance of the natural environment, the Nazca were intensely concerned with their relationship to nature.

We can see that burial of the dead was important to the Nazca; tombs have been found containing vast numbers of intricately woven textiles, colorful ceramics, and rich metal work. Many of the numerous tombs discovered in the river valleys were looted over the centuries by people searching for marketable artworks and other artifacts. Evidence, however, has been excavated by archaeologists to show that the dead, often buried in chambers with adobe-brick walls, were supplied with an array of tomb offerings. Thanks to the arid desert climate, large numbers of these offerings have been well preserved.

Fish-shaped Vessel

A Nazca artist probably made this fish-shaped vessel for a tomb. It has a double bridge-spout handle—a distinctive feature of Nazca pottery. While the vessel's specific function is not known, its double spout would ease the pouring of liquids, while the bridge handle would be practical for tying onto packs carried by animals, or, if it were larger, for hand carrying. Because of the small size of this vessel, however, a practical function seems unlikely.

Renowned for their polychrome (multi-colored) decoration, Nazca ceramics display the greatest color range of all the ancient New World ceramics.

This vessel features a variety of colors: orange and red-browns, mauve, white, black, and gray. Using warm earth colors and bold black lines, the artist achieves an effect of both calm and dynamism.

The artist has skillfully combined two- and three-dimensional means to represent a fish. Made with smooth contours and rounded forms, the fish has an inflated, swollen appearance suggesting fertility and abundance. The fins are represented by projections from the back, sides, and lower surface of the fish. Painting on the vessel's surface marks other features and creates a bold linear design. The viewer is engaged by the large round eyes, the smaller circles representing nostrils below them, and the strangely bared teeth, a frightening touch to this seemingly harmless creature.

The short, quick lines repeated on the upper part represent the fish's scales and animate the surface with a lively pattern. The fan-shaped bands radiating from the sides of the mouth represent the gills, emphasizing their essential function. The bold horizontal stripes on the vessel's sides may refer to the distinct designs on certain types of fish, such as the striped bass. The stripes may even represent the lateral line, an organ that runs along a fish's body and detects vibrations. The lines intersect with a V-shaped form on the fish's tail, suggesting the tail's dynamic force in helping the fish to swim and producing a striking decorative effect.

This sculpture expresses the vital spirit of the fish and its importance to the Nazca people.

Whatever the significance of these elements to the Nazca culture, it is clear that this artist observed the natural world and drew upon the rich colors, forms, and patterns found in nature. This sculpture

expresses the vital spirit of the fish and its importance to the Nazca people—not only as a dietary staple and a source of nourishment, but also as a symbol integral to the mythology, religion, ceremonies, and rituals of a community. Though fragile, pottery is a long-lasting material and one that proves the existence of ancient cultures.

Technique

Nazca artists created a variety of vessels, including spheres, domelike jars, open bowls, cylinders, and figural shapes like this one. The pottery of some ancient cultures of northern Peru emphasized modeling (shaping the clay) and used limited color. The Nazca relied less on modeling, but covered their smooth, delicately curved surfaces with colorful polychrome painting and abstract designs.

In the vessel's details, the artist has abstracted the fins and scales to create a bold design.

This Nazca artist has represented the fish with some degree of naturalism. In the vessel's details, the artist has abstracted, for example, the fins and scales to create a bold design. Despite references to physical features, the artist uses color, line, and form mostly for expressive purposes, not for anatomical accuracy.

This vessel was shaped using the coil method, an additive process in which long cylinders of clay, formed by rolling between the hands, were coiled in rows to build up the walls of the vessel. The coil marks are not visible because they were smoothed off with damp cloths, scrapers, and stone polishers. Some modeling was used to shape the head, tail, and fin area. The double bridge-spout handle was made in a mold and then joined with the body. The holes would have allowed air to escape during the firing process. The vessel was probably covered with a slip, a thin overall clay wash (thin mixture of clay and water), and then painted with mineral pigments before it was fired.

About the Artist

The artist who created this expressive fish is unknown. No records of Nazca traditions exist to provide clues to the artist's identity, training, or gender. Nonetheless, the notable artistic achievements of the Nazca culture suggest the existence of craft specialists in the community.

Key Ideas

- 1. The Nazca had a great respect for nature because their climate was unpredictable and often inclement.
- 2. We do not know much about Nazca people, who had no written language. Archaeologists have been able to gather what little information we do know from tombs and art.
- 3. The artist who made this vessel used realistic and abstract designs to make it look like an actual fish, and also an exciting work of art.

Suggested Questions

- 1. Look closely. What about this vessel (color, shape, pattern, design, etc.) looks like a real fish? What do you see that makes you say that? Where do you see the artist being creative? How so?
- 2. Fish were very important to the Nazca people. Think about an animal that is important to you or your community. What is it? Why is it important to you?
- 3. Close your eyes if you want. Imagine you are holding this vessel. How does the clay feel in your hands (smooth, rough, warm, cold)? Pretend you are holding it by the handle and carrying it full of water. How does it feel to pour it out? What objects from today does it remind you of? How so?

Notes

Philip R. Goodwin, United States, 1882-1935
A "Bear" Chance, 1907, oil on canvas
Gift of the National Biscuit Company, 70.64
36 x 26 in. (91.4 x 66.0 cm)



To sell cereal, Philip Goodwin depicts a large brown bear in the wilderness chowing down on a crate full of Cream of Wheat cereal.

Background

The late 1800s and the early decades of the 1900s were the golden age of illustration. During this period, books and newspapers were major sources of public entertainment. Illustrated novels were widely read, and newspapers were in every home. Because photography was not yet a practical option for publishers, hand-drawn illustrations provided scenes of American life.

During the early part of the 1900s, the Cream of Wheat Company advertised its cereal in many publications. In one of the most successful campaigns in American advertising, the company asked popular artists to produce paintings for advertisements, which were reproduced in magazines. Among these works was Philip Goodwin's *A "Bear" Chance*, commissioned by the Cream of Wheat Company in 1906 and completed in 1907. The painting graced the office walls of a local company, which donated the painting to the Minneapolis Institute of Art in 1970.

Throughout the history of advertising, animals have been used to promote products with their popular appeal. Many examples come to mind: Tony the Tiger, Trix Rabbit, and Smokey Bear.

Throughout the history of advertising, animals have been used to promote products with their popular appeal.

A "Bear" Chance

In this painting, a large brown bear sits in a clearing of a snowy pine-studded forest, devouring a wooden crate full of Cream of Wheat cereal. Tracks in the snow mark the bear's footsteps to the cereal box. The painting sends a clever marketing message by suggesting that the bear was lured from slumber by the cereal.

The painting sends a clever marketing message by suggesting that the bear was lured from slumber by the cereal.

To promote a product, Goodwin has created a charming narrative scene as well as a compelling image. American history is filled with tales of bears. Pioneers like Lewis and Clark encountered the grizzly bear in their push westward. The bear is often represented in Native American artworks as an admired and respected animal. Bears are especially intriguing to people, in part because we recognize human behavior in them. As powerful and dangerous as bears can be, they are also accepted as the cuddly teddy bear, the responsible Smokey Bear, or the sweet Winnie the Pooh.

Goodwin manipulates the bear's appearance to make it humanlike; look at how almost childlike the bear appears as it sits and enjoys the cereal! Using its front paws like human hands, the bear firmly clutches the crate and nuzzles its mouth and nose greedily into the box. The image suggests that if you eat Cream of Wheat, you, too, will be able to survive the frosty, harsh winter.

Furthermore, Goodwin contrasts the wooden Cream of Wheat crate—a product of the lumber industry—with the surrounding tree stumps, visually questioning the impact of human activity on nature.

Technique

Goodwin was a sensitive observer of the natural world around him, interested in capturing what he actually experienced.

Goodwin creates a tranquil setting using earthy colors and soft contours. The white, spare landscape is a striking contrast to the dark, imposing bear and provides an opportunity for the artist to show off the animal's thick coat of fur and its rich brown coloring.

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In this painting, Goodwin accurately depicts the details of the bear's form and anatomy—its massive, hunched body, soft brown fur, peering eyes, foraging nose, heavy legs, and large claws.

He draws our eye to the bear and the Cream of Wheat container, the centerpiece of the painting. The crate's prominent position in the foreground, its large scale, distinct geometric shapes, and bold letters reinforce it as the focus of our attention and the reason for this advertisement. Goodwin uses loose, sketchy brushstrokes in surrounding areas, as in the screen of trees in the background, the sky, and the blanket of snow. The soft dashes and thick dollops of paint enhance the bear's vibrant energy.

The soft dashes and thick dollops of paint enhance the bear's vibrant energy.

Goodwin uses triangular shapes to communicate a stable and tranquil mood. The somewhat triangular shape of the bear is echoed in the pine trees as well as in the tree stump to the right, conveying a harmonious relationship between the bear and its habitat.

About the Artist

Born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1881, Philip Russell Goodwin began sketching and painting as a child, and made his first sale—an illustrated story—to *Collier's* magazine when he was 11. He studied at both the Rhode Island School of Design and the Art Students League in New York City, as well as with Howard Pyle at Pyle's Brandywine School at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Known as "the Father of American Illustration," Pyle inspired an entire generation of illustrators, like Goodwin, through his work and his teaching.

By 1904, Goodwin had his own studio in New York City and was working on commercial assignments, producing illustrations for *McClure's Magazine*, *Collier's*, and *Everybody's Magazine*, as well as covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Working from subjects he observed both in the zoo and in the wild, he also made wax sculptures of animals, which were then cast in bronze.

A passionate outdoorsman and a skilled horseman, Goodwin enjoyed spending time in wilderness areas such as the Maine woods, the Colorado Rockies, remote areas of Canada, and the Montana mountainside lodge of his close friends, the artist Charles Russell and his wife, Nancy.

Key Ideas

1. When this painting was made, animals were popular images for advertisements.
2. At this time, photography for marketing was not yet a practical option; instead, companies hired artists to paint or illustrate advertisements. The artworks were then reproduced in magazines and newspapers.
3. The artist liked the outdoors and spent a lot of time in nature, which helped him realistically portray the bear and background of this painting.

Suggested Questions

1. Even though there aren't real people in this painting, the artist has created an image of both the wild and humans. Look closely. What about this painting looks like the wilderness? What do you see that makes you say that? Where in this painting do you see humans? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Imagine you had to describe this painting to a person who is unable to see it. What do you tell them? How is the weather? What season is it? How do you know? What is going on? Who is there? What do you see that makes you describe it that way?
3. Companies use pictures to tell us about their products. This painting was made to sell Cream of Wheat, a cereal. How is *A Bear Chance* like pictures used to sell items on television, magazines, and online today?

Notes

China, Asia

Horse, 8th century, earthenware with polychrome glaze

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 49.1.6

20 ½ x 20 ¼ in. (52.07 x 51.44 cm)



Tomb objects, like this ceramic horse, provide clues to a vibrant period in Chinese history that balanced tradition with new ideas. The sculpture venerates a prosperous imperial official and is a virtuosic example of craftsmanship in clay.

Background

One of the most lively cultural periods in Chinese history, the Tang dynasty, from 618 to 906, was an era of expansion, upheaval, and prosperity. The major power between the Yellow Sea and Persia, China held widespread influence and traded extensively with countries far beyond its own frontiers. As the largest and strongest power on earth, its trade goods—particularly silks, ceramics, and metalwork—were highly regarded by the rest of the world.

During the Tang dynasty, the famous trans-Asian “Silk Road” was at its peak, remaining for centuries the world’s greatest trade corridor.

During the Tang dynasty, the famous trans-Asian “Silk Road” was at its peak, remaining for centuries the world’s greatest trade corridor. Covering over 7,000 miles, the silk routes stretched from India to China—skirting the scorching deserts of Central Asia and ending in the cosmopolitan cities of Chang’an (present-day Xian), the capital, and Luoyang. Diverse people traveled along these routes, including merchants, ambassadors, monks, pilgrims, and entertainers.

During this period, an influx of foreigners introduced new ideas that invigorated the Chinese intellectual and creative spirit. A number of influences entered into Tang aristocratic life; for example, Indian religions and astronomy, Persian textile patterns and metal craft, Turkish costume, and horses from Central Asia. The impact of these influences on Chinese art was significant, and pottery was one art form clearly affected. Tang ceramics display the sophistication of the period.

Though they adopted many new ideas, the Chinese continued their traditional practice of placing wood and clay figurines of humans and animals in the burial chambers of the deceased. These articles, referred to as *ming qi* [ming-chee], meaning “spirit articles,” were produced to accompany and protect the dead in the afterlife. Hundreds of figures were placed in tombs, including soldiers, servants, musicians, tomb guardians, horses, camels, and models of articles used in everyday life.

Many of the figures were created during the Tang period, when funeral processions and burials became extravagant. In fact, a special imperial government office was established for the production and supervision of *ming qi*, regulating the number and type of grave objects. The office also regulated the arrangements of funeral processions not only for the aristocracy but for the common classes as well.

Tang funeral processions were relatively festive occasions.

Tang funeral processions were relatively festive occasions. Mourners would often carry the grave furnishings, including ceramics, to the tomb while crowds of people stood by to observe the procession. An ancient account relates that some families’ extravagance, in an effort to compete with their neighbors, brought about financial disaster. Eventually, an imperial decree issued in 742 set limits on the size and number of tomb pieces allowed, based on the rank of the deceased.

Horse

This blue-glazed ceramic horse belongs to a group of 10 figurines excavated in 1948 from an imperial tomb near Lo-yang. Comprising five pairs of figures—court officials, warrior guardians, earth spirits, horses, and camels—the set is distinguished by its finely modeled forms, large-scale figures, abundant use of rare cobalt blue glaze, excellent surface condition, and also the fact that it has survived intact. It is one of the few complete tomb sets in existence and one of only two in Western collections.

The horse was perhaps the most popular of all subjects to the Tang potter. It is portrayed here with a lively, bold quality typical of Tang ceramic art. As one of only three known blue-glazed horses, and the largest and best of those three, this horse is the highlight of Mia's tomb set.

As one of only three known blue-glazed horses, and the largest and best of those three, this horse is the highlight of Mia's tomb set.

It stands four-square on an unglazed rectangular base, with its neck arched and its head down and turned slightly to one side. Though standing at ease, the horse appears to be full of spirit, poised to move at any moment. Elegant and noble in appearance, this steed is glazed in a brilliant, deep cobalt with a contrasting white-and-brown streaked mane. The lavish use of cobalt blue, instead of the ordinary straw-colored glaze, indicates that a wealthy family or its retinue (advisors or assistants) imported this rare and costly material from Persia. The saddle has been left unglazed, and the paint that once decorated it is now gone. (Real saddles in the Tang period were probably wooden and covered with leather.) The richly decorated harness trappings (ornamental harness covering) are derived from Sassanian Persian metalwork design.

Eagerly sought for centuries, fine horses came to China from professional horse dealers of western Asia. The animals were of tremendous importance

to Tang China rulers, who used them for military purposes and diplomatic tribute. Vast herds were maintained by the Chinese government and horsemanship was regarded as an aristocratic privilege. Horses were important in providing an efficient mode of travel along the Silk Road and were vital to the military forces defending the borders of Tang China.

Horses were important in providing an efficient mode of travel along the Silk Road and were vital to the military forces defending the borders of Tang China.

It is not surprising that the Chinese chose the horse—their favorite riding animal—to accompany them in the afterlife. Besides providing the deceased with a means with which to ride into battle, play polo, or hunt, the horse was a symbol of power, prestige, and wealth.

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Technique

Made of white clay, this horse was cast from molds. Typically, most Tang pottery figures were mold-made in mass quantity, though on occasion they could be modeled entirely by hand. Larger figures, such as this horse, were often made by combining several molds with some hand-modeling to construct large, hollow pieces of sculpture. All works, whether mass-produced or otherwise, had to be finished by hand, a process that displayed the artist's skill, as is evident here in the horse's sense of proportion, spontaneity, and movement. The Tang interest in naturalism is apparent in the careful attention given to the form of the horse, with its accurate proportions, distinct musculature, and lifelike posture. Its modeling conveys the artist's thorough understanding of horse anatomy.

This horse is made with the glazing technique of *san cai* (tsahn-tsigh), one of the unique ceramic developments of the Tang period. *San cai* means “three-color” and usually refers to green, amber, and cream glazes found on Tang burial ceramics. Many variations of the hues were used, however, so that the colors were not necessarily limited to three, and black and blue glazes were often included as well. The palette primarily used here includes blue, green, and caramel-colored glazes. The rare and costly blue glaze, usually reserved for the best and most striking figures, was associated with more important tombs.

In the *san cai* process, the figure was covered with a white slip before the glaze was applied. Slip is a fluid mixture of clay and water that works like a primer coat, smoothing out the surface and giving it an even color. The use of slip helps to bring out a clearer, brighter quality to the colored glazes than would be the case if the glazes were applied directly to the earthenware. After the application of slip, the body was covered with colored lead glazes. Lead flows and blends during the firing process, resulting in a vivid interplay of colors, splashes, and drips. Tang potters use this fluidity to obtain what were considered beautiful streaks and drips. Despite the free and random nature of this process, it required extreme skill and sensitivity.

While the artist’s interest in realistic detail is apparent in the horse’s form, a quality of fantasy and generalization is also conveyed by the treatment of color. The glazes have been applied to produce a decorative and sumptuous effect rather than a realistic portrayal of the horse’s color. The dynamic curve of the mane is heightened by its light colors and striped design, which contrast with the deep, brilliant blue of the body. The horse’s bold colors and forms create a striking figure of remarkable splendor.

About the Artist

The manufacture of Tang ceramics was a vital industry consisting of large workshops. Little is known about these workshops or the individual artists

involved; nevertheless, artists of the highest technical and artistic skill clearly made this horse.

Key Ideas

1. Ceramics from the Tang dynasty were admired by the rest of the world for their technique, beauty, and design.
2. Artworks like this were put in tombs to protect the dead in the afterlife and to keep them company.
3. Horses were one of the most popular images for Tang ceramics. This specific horse is one of only three blue-glazed horse sculptures known to exist.

Suggested Questions

1. The artist included a lot of details on this horse. Look closely. Describe what you see.
2. Some clay figures are all one texture. This clay horse has different layers. Look closely and pick a spot on the horse. How do you think it would feel to touch it? What do you see that makes you say that? Pick another spot to describe and share again.
3. Artists sometimes have fun with animals and get creative with how they depict them. Take a moment to look closely at this horse. Where did the artist have fun? What do you see that makes you say that? Where did the artist make the horse look real? What do you see that makes you say that?

Notes

Hispano-Moorish, Europe
Statuette of a lion, 11th–12th century, gold
The Katherine Kettridge McMillan Memorial Fund, 72.12
4 ¾ x 4 x 2in. (12.1 x 10.2 x 5.1cm)



Throughout the centuries, many cultures have seen lions as symbols of courage, strength, and majesty. The specific function of this elaborate gold statuette, measuring less than five inches high, remains a mystery. Yet its painstaking construction and elegant design suggest a purpose: a luxury item to delight the beholder. Undoubtedly, this figure served as a symbol of prestige and style for an aristocratic home in Muslim Spain around the 1000s and 1100s.

Background

This lion comes from Spain, which was conquered by the Muslim Umayyad [oo-my-ahd] empire in 711. The Umayyads ruled from Syria and established the southern region of the Iberian Peninsula as their empire's westernmost province, which they called *al-Andalus*. Parts of the region remained under the control of a Muslim empire or kingdom for the next 700 years, until Catholic armies brought Muslim rule to an end in 1492.

The Umayyad period in Spain was characterized by thriving trade, rich cultural exchange, and unparalleled artistic production.

The Umayyad period in Spain was characterized by thriving trade, rich cultural exchange, and unparalleled artistic production. The Umayyads ruled from the city of Córdoba, which eventually grew to more than 500,000 inhabitants, comprising Muslims, Christians, and Jews. By the end of the 900s, Córdoba had become an international center of culture, science, philosophy, and learning. Arabic was the official language, and with a wealth of libraries and educational institutions, Islamic Iberia boasted a literacy rate that was higher and more widespread than in any other region in Western Europe. Many European Christian scholars studied in Muslim Spain and North Africa.

At the beginning of the 1000, the Umayyad dynasty was broken into a number of small, independent states, called the *taifa* [tah'-e-fah] kingdoms. The rulers, or emirs, of these aristocratic states fought among themselves for military supremacy and cultural prestige. They recruited the most famous poets to write sonnets and commissioned artisans to produce

luxury goods for their personal pleasure. The lion statuette, produced at this time, is a testament to the sophisticated taste of the *taifa* rulers.

Lion Statuette

This lion statuette is Islamic in style and principle. Islamic art refers to works of art made by and for Muslims as expressions of the Islamic faith or its values, which also encompasses secular (non-religious) objects, made by cultures that flourished within the cultural environment of Islam. It is a common belief that Islam forbids the representation of living beings, yet portrayals of human and animal forms in the secular sphere can be found in all eras of Islamic art.

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The Qur'an, the Islamic holy book, does not explicitly prohibit figural representation, though it condemns idolatry as a form of worship; as a result, figural images are not found in mosques and other religious settings. Nevertheless, many Muslims—like people everywhere—enjoy pictures of people and animals in their everyday lives. Figural images in Islamic art, such as this small lion, are not intended to stimulate devotion, but instead serve as decorative reminders of the spiritual realm. Beautiful works of art are considered a reflection of the glory of heaven. Muslims—like any people who are associated by a common religion or political affiliation—hold a variety of beliefs, including their views on figural representation and approaches to art.

Though it is not known what exact purpose this small figure served, the vessel at the top of the handle and the hollow body provide some clues as to how it might have been used. It is believed that this lion was a receptacle for water, oil, or perfumes. The liquid would enter the cavity through the top of the handle and, when tipped, flow from the lion's tongue. It is also thought that the receptacle may have held a small candle or piece of aromatic incense, or served as a lamp.

Whatever its intended function, the statuette was certainly regarded as an object to be admired and treasured. Made of gold, it is extremely rare. Gold is a soft metal that is easily melted down and repurposed. For a delicate object such as this to have survived such a long and fractious period in history is remarkable. Only a few examples of small, gold filigree figures from this same period exist.

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Most gold work from Andalus was melted down by the Catholic conquerors of Muslim Spain (similar to the gold of the Aztecs and Incas), and the works that survived were generally ones buried inside walls of houses at the time of the expulsions of Muslims, who thought that the political situation might change and they could retrieve the works at some later time upon their return. Muslims and Jews were not permitted to take any valuables with them in exile.

Technique

The lion statuette is completely covered from head to toe in intricate ornament. The surface is infused with floral and tendril filigree (small, thin threads of metal) and fine granulation (tiny metal beads). The closer you look at the lion, the more complex detail you discover. Islamic art draws on the creativity of many cultures and artistic traditions. Despite the diversity of its origins, it is often distinguished by an emphasis on ornamentation. Indeed, ornamentation is one of the most characteristic features of Islamic art and has been used from the 600s to the present. The

Arabic word for ornament is *zakhrafa*, which means "to gild." It refers to the richness represented in so many forms of Islamic art.

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Ornamental designs based on floral and geometric patterns are among the most popular forms of decoration found on Islamic works of art. Flowers, leaves, and vines grow within geometric patterned surfaces and are contained by finely beaded registers that follow the form and structure of the lion's body. Four little birds perch within the branches at the four corners of the lion's back. Such a well-ordered garden may refer to the Garden of Paradise, promised in the afterlife to devout Muslims in the Qur'an. The delicacy of the applied décor and geometric patterning suggests a fine embroidered coat that softens the beast. The lion remains regal and refined, but the profusion of decoration makes it transcend the animal kingdom into a spiritual realm beyond this world.

Gold has long been valued for its beauty and coveted for its prestige. Gold is the most malleable of metals, capable of being pounded, stretched, or shaped without cracking or breaking. In its pure form, gold is too soft to be used alone and must be alloyed with another metal, such as copper or silver.

This small lion was likely made with the lost-wax process. The process is as follows:

1. First, a model of the lion is made of wax and coated in clay. When the clay is fired, the wax melts and is drained away, leaving an exact impression of the wax model in the cavity of the fired clay.
2. The cavity is then filled with molten gold.
3. When the gold is cool, the clay is carefully broken away, revealing the gold object.

In this case, the statuette's torso, head, mane, legs, feet, and handle may have been cast as separate pieces and soldered together. Decorative elements of granulation and filigree skillfully applied over the seams hide any trace of joinery and unify the form.

Granulation is the process by which minute gold spheres are fused to a gold surface. Fusing involves raising the temperature of the surface metal and the granules to the point at which they will adhere. The technique is extremely precise: if the correct temperature is not reached, the granules will not hold; if the temperature is too high, the granules will melt. The tiny spheres are first glued to the surface; the surface is then slowly heated to the precise temperature to fuse the spheres onto the base. The wires that comprise the filigree are attached with the same fusion process.

The minuscule granules are made by snipping small sections of wire onto a charcoal plate brought to just the right temperature so that the pieces liquefy and "bead up." Sphere size varies according to the thickness of the wire, and the uniformity of the spheres is dependent on the precise cutting of the wire. To make the hair-fine wire, a rod of gold is threaded and pulled through a succession of funnels, each smaller than the next. It is then twisted or plaited to create the braid-like quality found on the statuette's filigree.

The combination of lustrous gold, delicate décor, and intricate patterning on such an impossibly small scale make this a tour de force of metalworking skill.

The combination of lustrous gold, delicate décor, and intricate patterning on such an impossibly small scale make this a tour de force of metalworking skill as accomplished by a jeweler. Mysteries around this object remain, but the rich cultural and artistic traditions of Muslim Spain around the 11th and 12th centuries are clearly revealed.

About the Artist

The artist responsible for this remarkable object cannot be identified. Many artists and artisans lived and worked on commission in large districts surrounding palatial courts. As members of guilds, they produced a variety of goods for rulers as well as for merchants, courtiers, and officials of the court. In some cases, workshops were formed and supported within the palace walls. After the establishment of the taifa kingdoms, however, only a few emirs had the resources to commission such works or support workshops that made objects of this quality.

Key Ideas

1. Lions represent strength, power, and courage in many different cultures around the world.
2. From what is known about Islamic art and the use of human or animal imagery, this object was not intended for worship. More likely it was made to be admired. It possibly held perfumes or oils, but we do not know its intended purpose.
3. Gold is extremely rare and difficult to work with. The details on this lion would have required an artist with immense technical skill and knowledge of the material.

Suggested Questions

1. This lion statuette is only 5 inches tall. An average male lion is over 4 feet tall! Look closely. How did the artist make this little lion look strong? Powerful? Courageous? What do you see that makes you say that? How does looking at this lion make you feel? Why?
2. Imagine you could hold this lion. Close your eyes if you want. Put out your hand. How would the weight of it feel in your hand? Imagine you are running your fingers around it. How would it feel to touch? What do you see on the lion that makes you say that?
3. Lions are important to many cultures and represent qualities—strength, power, courage—they hope to share. If you had to choose one animal to represent you, what would it be? Why? How would you turn it into an artwork? Why did you decide to do it that way?

Edo, Nigeria, Africa
Leopard water pitcher, 18th century, bronze
The Miscellaneous Works of Art Purchase Fund, 58.9
17 x 26 in. (43.18 x 66.04 cm)



Created as a royal ceremonial object, this leopard was made to symbolize the Benin (beh-noon) ruler, called the *oba*. The leopard's strength, ferocity, and intelligence, by extension, reinforce the *oba*'s power and status.

Background

Located in the tropical rainforest of southern Nigeria, the kingdom of Benin is one of the most highly developed cultural centers in West Africa. Its art tradition is famous for its refinement and sophistication. Though little is known of Benin's early history, the kingdom was a great military and commercial power by the time the first Europeans arrived there in the late 1400s. Benin's first direct contact with the European world came in the 1400s with the arrival of the Portuguese. The kingdom established diplomatic and trade relations with Portugal, and Portuguese traders supplied luxury items such as coral beads and cloth for ceremonial attire. In return, Benin provided the Portuguese with items such as pepper, cloth, and carved ivory.

Accounts of travelers during the 1500s describe the beautiful city of Benin, the kingdom's capital, as a highly organized religious and administrative center ruled by the *oba*.

Accounts of travelers during the 1500s describe the beautiful city of Benin, the kingdom's capital, as a highly organized religious and administrative center ruled by the *oba*. Vast and splendid, the royal palace complex was richly adorned with cast bronze decorations, carved wooden pillars and beams as well as ivory carvings.

The *oba* was considered the reincarnation of Benin's original ruler and, therefore, divine.

The *oba* was considered the reincarnation of Benin's original ruler and, therefore, divine. He was the central figure in the kingdom—the supreme political, judicial, economic, and spiritual head of his people. Because

the *oba* acted as intermediary between his divine ancestors and the Benin people, it was believed that he personally controlled the forces affecting the well-being of the entire kingdom. Regarded with a combination of awe, reverence, and fear, the *oba* had power over the life and death of his subjects.

Regarded with a combination of awe, reverence, and fear, the *oba* had power over the life and death of his subjects.

Surrounded by elaborate ceremonies and rituals, the *oba* and his ancestors were commemorated with symbols of prestige in the form of bronze heads, figurines, and plaques. Most Benin art was made to glorify the *oba* and to pay homage to past *obas*, expressing the special power and privileges of this ruler and reinforcing the complex hierarchy of the court.

The kingdom of Benin flourished until the end of the 1800s. Then, in 1897, it was overcome by a British military expedition. Despite the loss and destruction caused by this event, the kingdom exists today in Benin City, within the country of Nigeria. The *oba* has been restored and continues to serve as a religious leader, though his political authority is greatly diminished.

Benin Leopard

This bronze leopard is actually a water vessel, used by the *oba* when he washed his hands during ceremonies. The vessel was filled through a round, hinged opening at the top of the leopard's head; when tipped, water poured out through its pierced nostrils. This type of water vessel in animal form, called an aquamanile, might derive from European types made from about 1100 to 1500 and used in both religious and secular contexts.

When not being used, the leopard aquamanile stood on the *oba*'s ancestral altar in the royal palace courtyard. Other bronze objects, such as plaques and heads, would have been displayed with it. Leopards were usually made in pairs; the mate to this leopard is in a museum in Munich, Germany. Pairing the leopards evoked spiritual balance.

Admired for its power, ferocity, speed, and intelligence, the leopard became a symbol of the *oba*.

Admired for its power, ferocity, speed, and intelligence, the leopard became a symbol of the *oba*. According to Benin thought, the leopard could strike fear into the heart of the enemy; it also was recognized as a leader in the animal kingdom.

Images of leopards appeared on many royal objects, reinforcing the *oba*'s majesty and power.

Images of leopards appeared on many royal objects, reinforcing the *oba*'s majesty and power. Live leopards, captured and tamed, were kept at the royal palace. Placed on leashes, they even accompanied royal processions. Leopard skins, which were emblems of rank in Benin, could be worn only by the *oba* and those who obtained his permission. When a hunter killed a leopard, he was expected to report to the nearest chief that it was a "leopard of the bush," not one "of the house." Like the royal art of Benin, the leopard essentially belonged to the king, signifying his superior status.

This sculpture conveys the leopard's strength, cunning, and alertness. Standing firmly on sturdy, muscular legs, the animal looks straight ahead with its ears perked and its fangs bared, a reminder of its awesome power. It displays many of the conventions used for leopards in Benin art, such as overlapping canines, distinct molars, slanted eyes, and leaf-shaped ears.

The richly textured bronze surface has a dull black patina (a thin, colored layer that forms over time on bronze when it is exposed to air) and has been painstakingly incised with small circles to represent the leopard's spots. These are set against a stippled background.

Technique

The artist has skillfully combined accurate depictions of detail and non-realistic style, representing the leopard's physical characteristics—its sharp teeth, alert ears, lively eyes, and thick, heavy tail. Other features are simplified to create an abstract decorative effect. These include the regularly patterned circles incised on its coat and the elaborate linear designs on the perky ears.

Portrayed with ambiguity, this leopard can be perceived as either fierce or friendly.

Portrayed with ambiguity, this leopard can be perceived as either fierce or friendly. The sculpture's fully rounded forms and immobile stance evoke a sense of stillness, even a charming tameness. At the same time, the animal's sturdy legs are rigid with strength and tension, perhaps ready to spring, while the facial features are energetic and ferocious.

Lost-Wax Process

For centuries, Benin artists have created exquisite animal figures and bronze heads by using a sophisticated casting technique known as the lost-wax method. In this process, the artists create a mold by making a clay figure, which is covered with a layer of wax. They model and carve the wax as they want the sculpture to look, including all the details intended for the finished work. The wax is then covered with a thick coating of clay. Heating the mold causes the clay to harden and the wax to melt.

When the melted wax is poured out, it leaves an empty space, which is filled by pouring in molten bronze. After the metal cools and hardens, the clay jacket is chipped away, revealing a bronze sculpture identical to the original wax model. As much as possible of the interior clay core is removed to produce a hollow sculpture.

About the Artist

Benin was a flourishing center for artistic activity where artists and craftspeople were organized into guilds (an association of craftsmen or merchants) of blacksmiths, brass and bronze casters, wood and ivory carvers, bead and costume makers, and leather workers. The *oba*, the most important patron of the arts in Benin, had a virtual monopoly on the work of many of the artists' guilds. These guilds were incorporated into the court organization, with workshops located in the palace. Membership in the guilds was hereditary, with skills passed on from generation to generation.

Key Ideas

1. The leopard's characteristics were meant to support the strength, ferocity, and intelligence of the Benin leader, the *oba*.
2. Artists worked for the *oba* in the palace, and their skills were passed down from generation to generation.
3. This vessel served more than one purpose. It was used to wash the *oba*'s hands (water was poured in the top and came out the nostrils); it also stood at the *oba*'s altar to bring balance to the palace.

Suggested Questions

1. Take a moment to look closely at the leopard. Start at the tips of its ears and down its pointy nose. Go past the sharp teeth and down its spotted chest. Travel across its big claws. What did you notice? How did it make you feel? Why?
2. Look closely. What was the first thing you noticed about this leopard? Why? Take a moment to look slower. What details are you seeing on second or third look? How did the artist draw your attention to those details?
3. The *oba* saw himself as having the same qualities as a leopard: strength, ferocity, and intelligence. What qualities do you think are important for a person in charge? Think about your principal, your teacher, or an elder. Why do you think those qualities are important for them to have?

Notes

Ishida Yūtei, Japan, 1721–86

***Flock of Cranes*, 18th century, ink, color, and gold on gilded paper**

Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015.79.73.2

62 ¼ × 139 ½ in. (158.12 × 354.33 cm) (image)

67 ½ × 145 ½ × ¾ in. (171.45 × 369.57 × 1.91 cm) (outer frame)



This golden folding screen is decorated with images of Japanese cranes, important symbols of long life and good fortune. Cranes are highly respected, especially in Japan, China, and Korea. This screen is a *byōbu* [byoh-boo], or wind barrier. Screens are freestanding structures made from multiple panels hinged together; they are light enough to be easily picked up and rearranged. Because traditional Japanese rooms were open and had little furniture, screens acted as room dividers and could also be used outdoors. They are beautiful, utilitarian objects.

Ishida Yūtei and the Kano House of Painters

Ishida Yūtei was born in Harima, a small town outside of Kyoto, Japan. At the time, Kyoto was the capital of Japan. Yūtei worked for the court, which meant he painted for important rulers and other royalty. The practice of painting on moveable screens had arrived in Japan almost 1,000 years earlier, thanks to cultural exchange and trade with China, but Japanese artists transformed it into something much more complex. Yūtei was trained in the Kano House, a school of painters that began in the mid-1400s and continued well through the 1800s.

Their paintings were great sought after by Japan's ruling classes, members of the military elite, and by religious institutions.

Kano paintings were the most popular with the warrior class and aristocrats, who associated themselves with the boldness and energy of the style. During the late 1500s and 1600s, the Kano House reached its peak. Kano painters were masters of *Kanga* (Chinese-style painting) and *Yamato-e* (Japanese-style painting), but they had also developed unique styles that blended these two very different styles of painting. Their paintings were greatly sought after by Japan's ruling classes, members of the military elite, and by religious institutions like Buddhist temples.



Japanese Cranes

Often referred to as Japanese cranes, the birds seen in this screen are formally known as *tanchōzuru* [tan-cho-zoo-roo], which translates to “red-headed cranes.” They are easy to recognize thanks to their brightly colored heads, known as crests; the white feathers that cover their bodies, called plumage; and the black accents on their cheeks, throats, and tails. It was not unusual to spot these cranes in nature around China, Korea, and Japan, and therefore they were common subjects in art from these areas.

Because they are symbols of longevity (long life), Japanese cranes are sacred across all of eastern Asia.

Because they are symbols of longevity (long life), Japanese cranes are sacred across all of eastern Asia. According to lore, these cranes live for a thousand years. In fact, the typical Japanese crane lives between 30 and 40 years, which makes it one of the longest living birds in the world. They are also some of the largest: approximately 5 feet tall with a wingspan nearly 8 feet wide. Their size alone prevents them from being easy targets for predators; nevertheless, Japanese cranes are on the endangered species list.

Flock of Cranes

This screen is made up of six panels attached by hinges. Each panel has a light wooden frame supported by an overlapping lattice of wood strips, similar to a tic-tac-toe board. The frame is filled with layers and layers of paper, typically recycled. The paintings are made separately, usually in multiple panels, depending on the size of the screen. They are then attached to the screen themselves. Yūtei used gold foil—pressed pieces of real gold—as the background for much of this screen. Yūtei painted a single, continuous scene of Japanese cranes with great detail and in various positions. He accentuated the knotty texture of their legs and feet with dark, textured dots. Individual feathers, so fine they could be counted, are made from small strokes, which

create a featherlike texture. What is really remarkable, though, is the artist’s use of painting white on white, a technique that makes the feathers seem real.

Some cranes spread their wings open, about to take flight; some stand open-mouthed, likely making a loud noise; and others look down into the sand, possibly for food.

Some cranes spread their wings open, about to take flight; some stand open-mouthed, likely making a loud noise; and others look down into the sand, possibly for food. At their feet, sand rises and falls in small mounds and disappears into the gold-leaf background.

Gold leaf was not unique to Asia; indeed, artists in Europe also applied it to paintings and decorative arts. What makes the Japanese gold leaf notable is its extraordinary thinness.

What makes the Japanese gold leaf notable is its extraordinary thinness.

To achieve it, artists pressed together multiple sheets of gold between two pieces of paper. This stack was then wrapped in another piece of paper or animal hide and pounded by hand. The process was repeated some five times, and nothing about it was quick: the preparation alone could take as long as six months. Scholars contend that wealthy patrons preferred gold leaf to other materials for its ability to pick up and reflect what little light was available in the dimly lit rooms. Interestingly, gold and silver were readily available throughout most of Japanese history. In fact, it was paper and silk that cost the most, making these materials more highly prized than the gold applied to them.

Key Ideas

1. Cranes represent a long life and good fortune. They are incredibly important across many Asian cultures, especially in Japan, China, and Korea.
2. This screen is both an artwork and an object to be used. It is a highly decorated artwork that would be put in large, open spaces to create smaller temporary rooms.
3. The artist was very skilled and made all of the cranes' details look realistic. You can count the lifelike feathers, you can almost feel the roughness of the legs, and the faces are lively—almost as if the cranes were going to walk off the screen.

Suggested Questions

1. Imagine you are standing with the cranes. What sounds do you hear? What does it smell like? How does it feel? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Cranes represent wisdom and understanding. They are very important animals. How did the artist show you these cranes were special? What do you see that makes you say that? What animal is most important to you? If you were to paint a picture of it, what would you do to make it look important?
3. Pretend you are running your hand down the leg of a crane. What does it feel like? Imagine you are petting one on the back. How do the feathers feel between your fingers?
4. Put on your storytelling hat. What do you think happened before this moment in time? Why? What do you think will happen next? Why?

Notes

Art Adventure

Amazing Animals in Art

1



Vessel in the form of a fish
Nazca, Peru

Gallery _____

4



Gold lion statuette
Hispano-Moorish
Europe

Gallery _____

2



A "Bear" Chance
Philip R. Goodwin

Gallery _____

5



Water pitcher in the form of a leopard
Edo, Nigeria

Gallery _____

3



Flock of Cranes
Ishida Yūtei

Gallery _____

6



Horse
China

Gallery _____

Mia



2 Second Floor

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



3 Third Floor

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

Art Adventure Picture Person

Special Exhibition Voucher

Exchange for 1 adult entry.

No advance reservation needed.

Valid for any special ticketed
exhibition in Target Galleries.

Expires May 17, 2025.

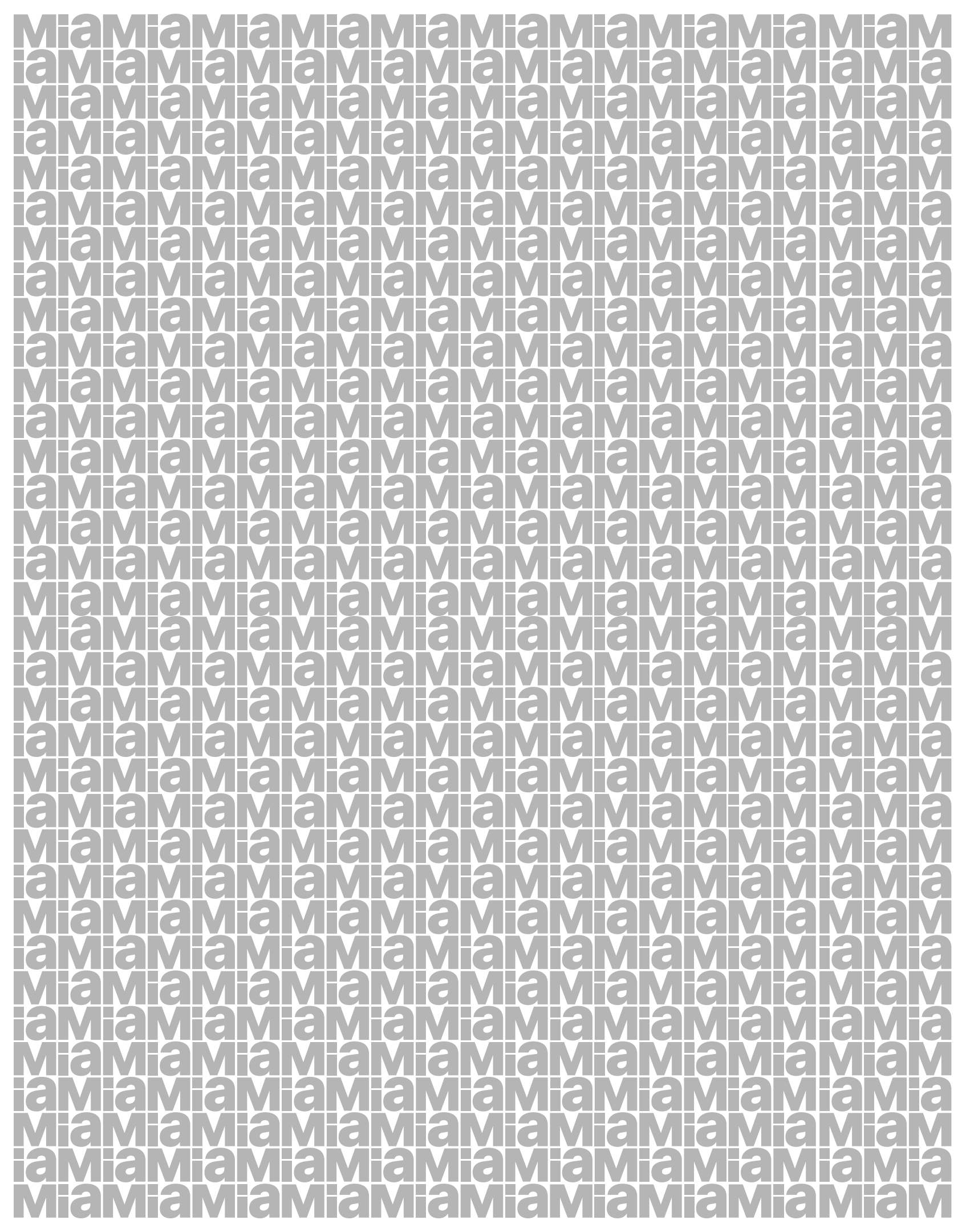
Minneapolis Institute of Art

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Tear out



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