

Minneapolis Institute of Art

# Art Adventure

Dressed for the Occasion



Mia

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

**This booklet belongs to:** \_\_\_\_\_

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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.



# Dressed for the Occasion

From early times, people have dressed in an endless variety of styles. Clothing is a vehicle for creativity and an expression of identity. What people wear can reveal a great deal about their personalities, social and economic status, occupations, and environments. Clothing can also provide insights into the customs, values, religious beliefs, materials, and technical achievements of a culture.

The six works of art in this set include objects of adornment and ceremonial dress, as well as images of people dressed for specific occasions. By examining people's attire in works of art from various periods of time and diverse cultures, we can begin to understand the important role of clothing throughout history. In *Dressed for the Occasion*, students are invited to explore the many ways clothing is central to our lives. Because the set features a broad range of media in both two and three dimensions, it also provides an opportunity to study techniques used in photography, oil painting, woodcarving, and sewing techniques such as embroidery and appliqué.

# Prop Kit Contents

<b>Work of Art</b>	<b>Prop</b>	<b>Replacement Cost</b>
Hmong, Ceremonial skirt	Sample of Hmong embroidery (2)	\$30 each
	Photograph of Hmong girls in traditional clothing and of woman sewing	\$10
Yoruba, King's crown	African beaded bracelet	\$25
	Photograph of Yoruba king	\$10
Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, <i>Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi</i>	Sample of taffeta fabric	\$30
	Reproduction of Vigée Le Brun self-portrait	\$10
James VanDerZee, <i>Wedding Day, Harlem</i>	Photograph of VanDerZee	\$10
Richard Hunt, Transformation mask	Sample of carved cedar	\$20
Germany, Armor	Photographs of:	
	Jousting	\$10
	Football gear	\$10
	Armor (back)	\$10
	Sample of chainmail	\$20
	Metal hinge	\$15
Artwork Reproductions (7)		\$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 missing items. Thank you!

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**Hmong, Laos, Asia**

**Ceremonial skirt, 1950–82, cotton, polyester, silk; indigo batik, cross stitch embroidery and appliqué**

**Gift of funds from Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hartwell, 82.138**

**30 ½ x 24 ¾ in. (77.47 x 62.87 cm) (length at waistband, without ties)**



**This skirt was made by a member of the Hmong group to be worn for the New Year festival, an important celebration for the Hmong people. With its bright colors and elaborate decoration, the skirt was a sign of a woman’s beauty, skill, and prosperity, as well as her value as a prospective wife.**

## **Background**

The Hmong, whose name means “free people,” have always valued their independence and self-sufficiency. Once inhabitants of central China, the Hmong were driven into southern China more than 2,000 years ago by the ethnic Chinese, who were politically dominant. During the 1800s, many Hmong families continued their migration into the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia. There they lived in relative isolation, scattered in small village groups in northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. In these regions, the Hmong had a semi-nomadic lifestyle, practicing a type of farming that forced periodic resettlement in search of fertile land. In the 1960s, war in Southeast Asia had a devastating impact on the Hmong, destroying their economy and food supply. By 1970, large numbers of Hmong people living in Laos had become actively involved in the war, allied with the U.S. military. When the United States withdrew its troops from the area, the Hmong were forced to flee to Thailand’s refugee camps to escape political persecution. By the late 1970s, many Hmong people had left the camps to settle in the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and elsewhere. Since that time, large numbers of Hmong people have settled in Minnesota. In fact, outside of Southeast Asia, the Twin Cities has one of the largest urban concentrations of Hmong people.

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**Reflecting a semi-nomadic lifestyle, the material culture of the Hmong consists of easily transportable objects.**

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Reflecting a semi-nomadic lifestyle, the material culture of the Hmong consists of easily transportable objects. Traditional clothing is especially important to the Hmong, who create distinctive textiles for both everyday and festival wear. They refer to their brightly

colored garments as *paj ntaub* [pahn-dou], meaning “flower cloth.” These textiles reflect the artistic skill and industry that Hmong women have developed and passed on from generation to generation.

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To them, clothing is a symbol of their ethnic identity and a means of asserting their common kinship.

Although the basic elements of traditional garb are similar among all Hmong people, some variety exists between subgroups in design, color, and decoration. Two divisions are generally acknowledged: Hmoob Dawb (sometimes referred to as White Hmong) and Hmoob Leeg (Blue Hmong). These names refer to different linguistic communities, each of which has developed its own unique styles and motifs for textiles.

Over recent decades, traditional Hmong clothing has undergone changes, with an exchange of elements between various subgroups. As the conflict in Southeast Asia forced people to leave their mountain villages for refugee camps, many Hmong people came in direct contact with one another and began to exchange items of clothing. A new type of regalia evolved, combining the colorful skirts of the Hmoob Leeg with the elaborately adorned belts and purses of the Hmoob Dawb.

## **Ceremonial Skirt**

This vividly colored knee-length skirt was made by a Hmong woman living in a Thailand refugee camp and was purchased through a relative living in the Twin Cities. It was made to be worn for the most

important Hmong celebration—the New Year festival. Traditionally, textiles have been a focal point of Hmong rituals held in celebration of the New Year.

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In Southeast Asia, craft-making intensifies at the end of the harvest season, as costumes and jewelry are produced for the upcoming festivities. To the Hmong people, new clothing celebrates the good fortune of the past year and is a sign of future prosperity. Conversely, wearing old clothing on the New Year is an omen of misfortune and poverty.

The New Year is a time of courtship and celebration. At the festival, men and women of marriageable age gather to find potential mates. They perform a ritual game of ball, called *pov pob* [poh poh], during which young people, dressed in their New Year finery, play catch with black cloth balls made by the young women. They also sing songs to get acquainted with one another. By wearing elaborate clothing, young women show off their personal beauty as well as their textile skills. Finely sewn attire is considered a sign of a woman's diligence and, therefore, increases her value as a wife. Indeed, wearing one's finest dress to a New Year's celebration is believed to help attract a prospective partner.

This skirt displays the high standards that the Hmong apply to their needlework, seen in elements such as tiny stitching, complex designs, precise patterns, and straight borders. The fine needlework creates a rich layered effect, with striking color combinations and intricate design motifs. Typical of Hmong needlework, it features lively rectangular patterns with triangles, diamonds, and zigzags. The exuberant effect is enhanced by brilliant contrasting color—bright pinks, oranges, yellows, and greens that dazzle the eyes. Contrasting colors of hot pink and lime green appear especially vibrant when placed next to one another.

The skirt is composed of brightly colored cross-stitch embroidery placed next to appliquéd strips of synthetic fabric. These various layers create depth, enhanced by the dimension of the pleats. The Hmong use a variety of fabrics, ranging from silk to synthetics, and relish the shiny, glittering quality of certain materials. Combining various textures and surfaces, this artist juxtaposed shiny strips of fabric with matte surfaces of embroidered yarn. The entire skirt is accordion-pleated and contains as much as nine yards of fabric. While in storage, the small pleats are basted together to keep their shape.

In Laos, skirts made for the annual New Year festival are worn for daily wear during the following year, while new and more elaborate items are created for the next year's celebration. In the United States, Hmong girls have adopted Western-style clothing for everyday wear and dress in Hmong clothing only for ceremonial events. Other changes in traditional apparel reflect the Hmong's ability to adapt to modern industrial society. Today, many skirts incorporate synthetic materials and dyes, resulting in the fluorescent colors that we see here rather than the all-natural fabrics and primary colors of earlier traditional dress.

This Hmong skirt would be the most complex and striking part of a woman's traditional garb. It is common to also wear black jackets with various types of decoration. Yards of black fabric are wrapped several times around the waist and midriff. An apron—plain black for everyday wear and elaborately decorated for festive wear—is worn over the front of the skirt. This apron is tied on with a red, orange, or pink sash that has tassels hanging down the back. Silver belts are often worn over everything, and silver coins and elaborate silver jewelry also adorn festive attire. The look is completed with black or white leggings as well as a hat or turban. Just imagine the dramatic and alluring effect of these garments, with the graceful sway of pleated skirts and colorful sashes, the shimmer of silver necklaces and belts, and the jingle of dangling coins.

## Technique

Characteristic of the Hmong style, this skirt includes three horizontal design sections. On top is a band of white cotton material. The central horizontal panel is covered with a batik pattern, created by a fabric-dyeing technique that uses wax. Here's how the batik technique works: The pattern is first drawn with beeswax onto the cloth with a metal tool, and then the cloth is immersed in an indigo or black dye. The areas covered by the wax are not affected by the dye, creating a pattern that is revealed only when the wax is removed by boiling the cloth. After the batik pattern is made, pieces of cloth are sewn on the batiked material in a technique called appliqué (applying a cutout decoration to a larger piece of material). Finally, on the bottom of the skirt is another horizontal band with a design of cross-stitch embroidery and appliqué. The variety of design motifs are executed without stencils, drawn patterns, or rulers; rather, they are done simply by eye and memory, with a steady hand guided by the grain of the fabric's woven threads.

## About the Artist

Traditionally, Hmong women have decorated the clothing of their family members. Placing great value on their craft, Hmong mothers taught their daughters at a young age the necessary skills of fine needlework. In Laos, girls as young as 5 began to learn the skills necessary to create their distinctive attire using the techniques of appliqué, embroidery, and batik. Girls would also become proficient at making hemp cloth, from cultivating the hemp plant to spinning, bleaching, weaving, and dyeing the hemp fiber. In recent times, however, most of the cotton or hemp cloth used to make these skirts has been purchased in the marketplace. Traditional textiles continue to be important to Hmong people living in the United States, yet few young women are able to develop the skills necessary for this art form. The demands of school and work leave them with little time to devote to needlework. Classes, workshops, apprenticeship programs, and pattern books are available for those who wish to learn.

Many pieces, such as this skirt, are also imported from Thailand and Laos.

In recent years, many Hmong women have adapted the patterns and techniques of their clothing to create a variety of textiles, such as decorative hangings, bedspreads, pillowcases, tablecloths, and coin purses, which are intended for sale to non-Hmong people. Another important development is the production of "story cloths," embroidered fabrics with scenes depicting Hmong folklore, traditional village life, and celebrations, as well as events such as the war in Southeast Asia and their journey to a new life in America. These cloths often use writing along with images, illustrating the makers' adaptation to literacy in English and to their market audience.

## Key Ideas

1. A Hmong woman made this skirt while living in a refugee camp in Thailand. A relative, living in the Twin Cities, purchased it.
2. Hmong culture was semi-nomadic (moving frequently); as a result, their art needed to be easily transportable.
3. This skirt was made for a New Year festival. Wearing new clothes for the New Year celebrates the good fortune of the past year and is a sign of future prosperity.

## Suggested Questions

1. This skirt was worn to a special celebration. Think about when you celebrate something special. What do you wear? How does it make you feel? Why?
2. This skirt was embroidered (sewn with thread and ribbon) to make bright, beautiful patterns. Look closely. Describe the colors and patterns. How do they make you feel? Why? They were worn for a happy celebration. What colors would you use for a sad celebration? Why?
3. Older women taught young girls how to make skirts like this. Think about something special you have learned from an elder in your family, school, or community. What did they teach you? How does it make you feel to know this?

**Yoruba, Nigeria, Africa**  
**King's crown, 1920, glass beads, leather,**  
**canvas, wicker**  
**The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 76.29**  
**L.15 (crown), L.15 (fringe) in.**





**This beaded crown was worn for ceremonial occasions as a sign of a Yoruba [YORE-u-bah] ruler's divinity, authority, and power. Aspects of the crown showed the king's relationship to the spirit world and the powerful women in his community. Today, African rulers often dress in ways that project their power and importance.**

## **Background**

Since the 1000s, the Yoruba of West Africa have lived in the southwestern area of present-day Nigeria, Togo, and the Republic of Benin [beh-NEEN]. Historically, the Yoruba territory consisted of numerous kingdoms ruled by kings, councils of chiefs, and elders. Many of these kingdoms continue to flourish today. The Yoruba have a system of divine kingship that extends back to the beginning of the great Ife [E-fay] kingdom in the 1000s or earlier. The capital city of Ife, regarded by Yoruba as the place where life originated, continued through the centuries to be the primary religious center for all of Yorubaland.

Stories play an important role in the Yoruba culture. According to one version of the Yoruba creation story, the chief god Olorun [oh-lo-ROON] lowered a great chain from the heavens to the ancient waters. His son Oduduwa [Oh-DUE-due-a] climbed down this chain, bringing with him a handful of earth, a five-toed chicken, and a palm nut. He threw the dirt upon the waters and set the chicken on the dirt. The chicken busily scratched and scattered the dirt until it formed the first dry land. In the center of this new world, Oduduwa created the magnificent Ife kingdom. He planted the palm nut, which grew into a proud tree with 16 branches, symbolizing the 16 sons and grandsons of Oduduwa.

Oduduwa was the first ruler of the kingdom of Ife and the father of all Yoruba. Over time, he crowned his 16 sons and grandsons and sent them off to establish their own great Yoruba kingdoms. Each of these kings was divine because he descended from Olorun. Only the descendants of these original 16 could be considered divine kings in the future. Only they could wear special veiled crowns that symbolized their sacred power and were part of their royal clothing.

These veiled, beaded crowns were probably first made in the early 1800s. Before this time, Yoruba kings wore some kind of crown, perhaps made of a natural material, but little is known about them. In the early 1800s, tiny glass beads, known as "seed beads," were imported into Africa from Europe. These trade beads, which came in many colors, were enormously popular in parts of Africa, inspiring creative new art forms among the Yoruba. Among the Yoruba, the use of beaded accessories was restricted to kings, priests, priestesses, and herbalist-priests.

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Traditionally, only kings could enjoy the full range of beaded clothing, which included shoes, fans, footrests, canes, staffs, thrones, and crowns.

Yoruba kingdoms still exist today within present-day Nigeria, and kings continue to carry out their religious roles as well as some political duties, though they lost much of their political power in the 1900s. While regalia is still made by Yoruba specialists, its use is probably less frequent than in the past.

## **Beaded Crown**

Known as an *adenla* (great crown), the crown was a sign of the king's divinity and authority and was only worn for ceremonial occasions. This crown is made of thousands of tiny, brightly colored glass seed beads.

A veiled crown was the most important of all the beaded objects made by the Yoruba. It is a container of sacred power and represents kingship. Material inside the crown empowered the king to communicate with the spirits of his ancestors in order to benefit

his people. The king wore this beaded crown only on important state occasions, such as his own enthronement, the giving of titles on others, or major festivals he officiated. The crown was so powerful that even when it was not worn, it was treated as respectfully as the king himself.

Nearly all sacred Yoruba crowns display basic features similar to this one. The main part of the crown is dominated by a large yellow frontal face, a distinctive characteristic of Yoruba crowns. The face is not realistic, but rather is stylized with simplified geometric forms. Its striking features—black and white almond-shaped eyes, a triangular yellow nose, and an oval blue mouth—project from the surface. The three vertical lines on either side of the nose are scarification markings that identify the ruler's lineage. While the significance of such a face is incompletely understood by outsiders, it may represent a royal ancestor of the king. The Yoruba revere the spirits of their ancestors, who have the power to negotiate with other spiritual forces and to affect daily life. The face may serve to unite the spirit world of the ancestors with the earthly world of the king and his people.

The most distinctive characteristic of the crown is the veil of beads that hang over the king's face. It is a diamond-patterned net of black, white, maroon, and blue beads surrounded by vertical strands of beads in many colors. The veil covers the king's features and protects ordinary men and women from looking directly at his face when he is united with his powerful ancestors.

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**The veil covers the king's features and protects ordinary men and women from looking directly at his face when he is united with his powerful ancestors.**

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Concealment plays an important role in the spiritual meaning and power of the object.

Another significant feature of a veiled beaded crown is the projection of bright colors that rise above the face. Perhaps representing a hairstyle, this structure once

contained a pouch of herbal medicines placed there by herbalist-priests. The pouch gave the crown its power and was thought to be so powerful that the king himself could not look inside his own crown for fear he would be blinded. Therefore, the crown would have been put on and removed from behind by a palace official, which in some cases was a wife of the king.

The crown is surrounded by 16 colorful beaded birds. The birds have been carefully arranged on various levels, with one perched on top of the crown, looking down at the others. On the next level are four birds with outstretched wings whose beaks are pecking at the sides of the crown as they would the trunk of a tree. While the birds are depicted in a variety of colors, certain colors are used to articulate specific parts of the birds, such as red beads to define their beaks, white and black beads for their eyes, and bands of yellow beads to outline some of their wings.

The birds on the crown have many meanings and interpretations. Because birds fly, they may reference the king's connection with the spirit realm and his supernatural powers. They also signify a divine force called *ashe* [ah-SHAY]—the power to make things happen. The Yoruba conceive of all things as having *ashe*. Some people including kings and other high-ranking men and women, through experience and training, learn how to use this powerful life force to effect change. Gatherings of birds frequently appear in Yoruba art, often referring to the association between birds and the power of certain wise elderly women called “the mothers.” The mothers' special powers enable them to turn into night birds who punish or destroy those who are arrogant, selfish, or otherwise immoral. The birds on the crown refer to the *ashe*, or power, both of the king and of the mothers who support and protect the king.

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**The birds on the crown refer to the *ashe*, or power, both of the king and of the mothers who support and protect the king.**

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Many Yoruba kings continue to wear beaded headgear, but not necessarily the traditional conical crown.

## Technique

Creating a beaded crown like this one involved many people. Crown makers first built a wicker frame and covered it with a base of muslin or cotton cloth. Special priests helped select the colors and design for the thousands of tiny glass beads to be embroidered on the cloth. Requiring tremendous skill, bead embroidery involved stringing together beads to form a strand of a single color. The strands were then tacked to the surface of the crown with thread until the crown was completely covered.

The frontal face was probably made with shaped pieces of cloth dipped in wet starch and then affixed to the crown. The small representations of birds were also fashioned in cloth, embroidered with beads, and attached to the crown. The details of a crown's structure might vary somewhat, but the basic form was dictated by certain rules that were honored by the Yoruba people.

## About the Artist

Beaded crowns like this one were made by bead-working specialists, probably male, who were members of families known for these skills. It is likely that a very small number of families specialized in their production and transmitted the skills of the craft from generation to generation. These families often were wood carvers as well. While today we do not know the name of the person who made this beaded crown, the artist would not have been anonymous; indeed, his skills would have made him well known.

## Key Ideas

1. Yoruba beaded crowns were and are worn only by kings. Other beaded accessories are also used by priests.
2. The king of a Yoruba community would wear this crown only when communicating with his spiritual ancestors.

3. This crown has two important features. One is the veil that covered the wearer's face so that others could not see him while he communicated with spiritual ancestors. The other are the birds that represent the wearer's connection to spirits, his supernatural powers, or even ashe (a divine force).

## Suggested Questions

1. The Yoruba king's crown identified the wearer as a king and gave him special powers to interact with the spirit world for the benefit of his people. What kinds of hats do people wear today to identify their special role or status in the community?
2. Look carefully at the texture of the crown. If you could touch it, how do you think it would feel? What sounds would it make as the king moved? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Many hands made this artwork: a crown maker to build the metal frame, a priest to create the design and choose the colors, and a bead artist to assemble it all. Think of something you have done as a class. How does it feel to work as a team? Why? What is fun? What is challenging?

## Notes

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**Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, France, 1755–1842**  
***Portrait of Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi, née Parr, 1793, oil on canvas***  
**The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 78.7**  
**53 ½ x 39 in. (135.9 x 99.1 cm)**  
**61 ½ x 47 x 3 ½ in. (156.21 x 119.38 x 8.89 cm) (outer frame)**



**In her portrait, Countess Bucquoi [boo-KWAH] is dressed up in the fashion of the day, reflecting the late 1700s trend toward naturalness and simplicity. As natural and casual as the countess appears, however, the artist carefully arranged her pose, costume, and setting to glamorize her for posterity.**

## **Background**

The 1700s were a particularly complex and contradictory time in France, characterized by great advances in science and philosophy as well as political and social upheaval. A growing belief in liberty and equality conflicted with a society rooted in traditions of monarchical government and established authority. The struggle between these values culminated in the French Revolution of 1789.

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**With the revolution came a greater awareness of class differences and a desire for change and self-expression—all of which were reflected in the way people dressed.**

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With the gradual disintegration of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class, clothing became more alike for all classes of society.

Prior to the revolution, French aristocratic fashion was the model for women in all of Europe. The clothing was known for bodices heavily reinforced with bone, wide hooped skirts of sumptuous brocades and damasks (thick, shiny, patterned fabrics), and elaborate powdered headdresses. During the 1700s, this extravagant style, which emphasized the gap between the classes, gradually became outdated as a taste for informality emerged. Naturalness and simplicity became popular, and gowns were often made of muslin or indienne, a fine cotton that came in white or pastel colors, instead of brocade and damask. The artist, Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun [VEE-zhay luh-BRUN], encouraged her sitters to dress informally. In doing so, she actually helped launch this fashion style through her many portraits of Queen Marie Antoinette.

During the 1700s, the growth of trade and industry also contributed to changes in European costume. Inventions such as the spinning jenny, cotton spinning loom, and knitting machine increased the output of many types of textiles, particularly cotton. Cotton fabric was first imported from the East Indies and America and then produced in various centers in Europe. A lightweight white material in its natural state, cotton brought about a rapid revolution in European clothing. It also reflected the new taste for simplicity, in keeping with the new democratic ideals.

## **Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi**

In this portrait, Countess Bucquoi sits in a relaxed pose, in front of a romantic backdrop of mountain scenery. With a hint of a smile on her face, she gazes confidently at the viewer, appearing as a woman of poise and intelligence. Her youthful skin and large eyes make her appear much younger than her 47 years. The artist may have omitted the countess' blemishes and facial lines, or made her eyes larger than life. She has also placed a great emphasis on naturalness, an attempt to capture a spontaneous quality in her pose. The countess appears relaxed and natural, with one arm leaning against the rock behind her, the upraised hand casually touching her lace bodice. The other hand gracefully rests on her lap.

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**Vigée Le Brun's ability to strike a delicate balance between naturalism and flattery contributed largely to her success as a portraitist.**

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Vigée Le Brun's ability to strike a delicate balance between naturalism and flattery contributed largely to her success as a portraitist. In this portrait, the artist has carefully orchestrated various components to glamorize the sitter. Vigée Le Brun had a flair for costume and drapery and introduced her own taste in simplicity to her subjects. She arranged their poses, attire, and hair, often embellishing them with sashes and scarves. Here the countess is wearing a style of dress called a *robe anglaise*, which is typical of the more relaxed fashion of the day, lacking fancy ruffles, braids, and trimmings of earlier styles. The skirt of shimmering silk satin falls in soft pleats and is held at the waist by an orange tasseled sash tied gracefully in a bow at her back. The countess probably wears a bustle pad (a pad worn at the back of a woman's dress to increase the fullness of her skirt) underneath the moderately full skirt. A *fichu* (scarf) made of cotton or linen and lace covers the low neck of her dress. A light woolen red shawl decorated with gold embroidery, a fashionable accessory of the time, drapes gracefully around her shoulders. The sash and shawl, supplied by Vigée Le Brun, appear in some of her other portraits, draping and adorning her subjects in a variety of ways.

In her portrait, Countess Bucquoi wears a knotted cap of silk or satin resembling the turban-like *bonnets à la Turque* [buh-nay-a-la-turk] of the day. Hats, an important part of a woman's attire, came in widely diverse and inventive styles. The artist probably arranged the countess's relaxed cap on her head as well as the hairstyle of soft curls falling on her shoulders, a mode far different from the formal poufs and piled up masses of powdered hair fashionable in earlier periods.

The countess is shown against a backdrop of natural grandeur, resting on a bluff overlooking wooded mountains, deep ravines, and cascading waterfalls. The setting recalls the scenery along the Danube River where the artist painted a number of landscapes. The countess would not have actually sat for her portrait in such a setting but, rather, in the artist's studio.

While the background may not be an accurate rendering of a specific place, it provides a picturesque setting for the countess, enhancing her charm and beauty.

## Technique

The use of oil paint offers great versatility in achieving brilliant and translucent colors, a wide range of tonal effects, and the representation of fine detail. Because oil paint is slow to dry and is applied in layers, an artist can rework the surface. With the use of oil paint, Vigée Le Brun was able to create finer details and more brilliant colors.

This portrait is painted on canvas stretched over a wooden frame. The surface of the canvas was prepared by priming it with a white ground. The advantages of canvas, especially over wood, is that it is lightweight, inexpensive, and takes less time to prepare. It also expands and contracts little with temperature changes, preventing cracks from developing in the paint surface.

## About the Artist

Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun was born in Paris in 1755, the daughter of a portrait painter who worked in pastels. As a student at a local convent school, she spent much of her time drawing in the margins of her books. By age 15 she was earning enough money from her art to support herself, her widowed mother, and her younger brother. She soon became a successful portraitist of the Parisian aristocracy.

As a woman portraitist, Vigée Le Brun had to overcome many obstacles to establish herself. Women did not have access to the same educational and professional opportunities as men did at this time. In most cases, they were denied membership in the academies of Paris and Rome, the major centers of art education during the 1700s. Further, they were barred from the study of the nude figure, which was the basis of an artist's training.

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**Vigée Le Brun was largely self-taught, and her early success was due to her own ambition and hard work.**

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Vigée Le Brun was largely self-taught, and her early success was due to her own ambition and hard work. As the daughter of an artist, she had opportunities and experiences during her formative years that most women did not have.

### **Key Ideas**

1. The woman in the painting is wearing casual clothes for the time period. This is not her fanciest outfit.
2. Unlike earlier portraits in France, when this portrait was painted subjects were encouraged to relax and be comfortable. The artist was known for her ability to make people look natural in her paintings.
3. For a long time, the wealthy dressed very fancy, and average people wore practical, casual clothes. Trends were changing in France at this time; everyone was dressing alike, making it difficult to know who was rich and who was not.

### **Suggested Questions**

1. Look closely at this painting. What is going on? What do you see that makes you say that? What does the weather feel like? What do you see that makes you say that? What sounds might you hear? What might it feel like on the rock? Why?
2. Take a moment to look closely at her clothes. Look at her facial expression. How do you think she is feeling? What do you see that makes you say that? Does she look comfortable? Why or why not? Have you ever worn fancy clothes? How did you feel? Do you feel more comfortable dressed fancy or casual? Why?
3. The artist painted this portrait in her studio and added the background from her imagination. What tells you this background might be pretend? What do you see that makes you say that? If you could have your portrait painted with any place as the background, what would you choose? Why?

### **Notes**

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**James VanDerZee, United States, 1886–1983**

***Wedding Day, Harlem, 1926* (printed 1974), gelatin silver print (printed 1974)**

**The Stanley Hawks Memorial Fund, 74.36.12**

**©Estate James VanDerZee**

**9 3/8 x 6 7/8 in. (23.81 x 17.46 cm) (image)**

**15 x 12 7/16 in. (38.1 x 31.59 cm) (mount)**





**Wearing their wedding attire, this Harlem couple poses for a portrait that captures for posterity the special occasion of their marriage. They chose photographer James VanDerZee for his skillful and imaginative approach to portraiture.**

## **Background**

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Harlem district of New York City became a hub for Black American celebrities and artists. This era, named the Harlem Renaissance, was a time when Black artists were officially recognized as a vital part of American culture. Publishers and art establishments in New York City encouraged and supported the development of Black music, art, and literature. Harlem's jazz musicians, musical-revue performers, actors, and literary celebrities brought international attention to this prosperous Black community. These diverse artists were united by a strong desire to celebrate their history and culture. In their works they explored subjects from their African heritage, traditions of Black folklore, and the details of their daily lives.

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, professions in the arts were not open to most Black Americans, the majority of whom lived in the South. There they were disenfranchised citizens separated from white people in almost every aspect of public life. Between World War I and World War II, more than two million people moved northward. Many were attracted to New York City because of the city's legal protection of Black people and strong presence of a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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**The mass migration to the North contributed to the idea of a “renaissance,” a rebirth of Black culture as a recognizable force in American life.**

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The mass migration to the North contributed to the idea of a “renaissance,” a rebirth of Black culture as a recognizable force in American life. This fundamental change generated a new sense of identity, of community, and of self-confidence and optimism

that many Black Americans had not previously known. The scope of the Harlem Renaissance gradually extended to the whole country as more Black Americans became involved in literary, artistic, and political pursuits.

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## ***Wedding Day, Harlem***

This black-and-white wedding portrait, taken in the studio of photographer James VanDerZee, marks an important rite of passage in the lives of this stylish young Harlem couple. Like so many of the residents in Harlem during the 1920s, the bride and groom selected VanDerZee, one of the neighborhood's most popular photographers, because of his unique and inventive style. The young people, representative of the Black middle and upper classes that emerged during the Harlem Renaissance, took great pride in their social status. This ordinary couple records through portraiture their personal identity, pride, and achievements. In this photograph, they preserve for future generations the joyous occasion of their marriage.

Wearing formal wedding attire, the bride and groom are seated together in the photographer's studio. They do not assume the straightforward pose of traditional portraiture, but rather are arranged in a more theatrical manner. The young man appears dignified in his tailcoat and bow tie, holding his top hat on his lap. He wears the standardized wedding clothes that grooms have worn in America since the 1800s. The bride wears a white wedding gown of satin under white net and lace. The above-the-ankles length of

her skirt reflects the revolution of shorter skirts that had taken place in the mid-1920s. Her veil mimics the shape of the fitted cloche hat that was popular during this period. The train from her dress cascades elegantly to the floor, echoed by flowers falling from her carefully arranged bridal bouquet.

The net and lace of the bride's veil are machine-made, a product of the industrial age. Though many brides in this period still had their gowns custom-made, the materials were mass-produced. A bride could also purchase a ready-made gown from a store or catalogue.

VanDerZee has “directed” the various elements of the portrait to create a romantic vision, capturing a sense of ceremony and solemnity. For VanDerZee, studio photography was somewhat like theater—an opportunity to “tell a story” with composed or fictionalized elements.

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**For VanDerZee, studio photography was somewhat like theater—an opportunity to “tell a story” with composed or fictionalized elements.**

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To create theatrical effects, he carefully arranged his subjects' poses and setting, using studio props and elaborate painted backdrops. He also introduced symbolic elements to evoke associations with his subjects and suggest some essential quality about them.

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**In this photograph, the photographer emphasizes the loving family, a theme he often explored and saw as essential to the life of the Black American community.**

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In this photograph, the photographer emphasizes the loving family, a theme he often explored and saw as essential to the life of the Black American community. VanDerZee includes elements that suggest domestic comfort, such as an ornately carved chair, a fluffy shag rug on the floor, and an oval mirror on the wall. These “real” three-dimensional furnishings are placed

before two-dimensional painted backdrops depicting a fire burning in a brick fireplace, a symbol of domestic warmth and security. The fireplace is flanked by stately architectural columns, which are associated with the dignity and grandeur of ancient Greek and Roman architecture.

While painted backdrops were commonly used by portrait photographers in the early 1900s, VanDerZee was inventive in his use of this convention. Another theatrical element is the superimposed image of a child holding a doll, who appears to be seated on the rug to the left of the fireplace. Is the child a memory of the bride's past or, more likely, a glimpse into the future? Drawing on the photographic negative itself, VanDerZee playfully added the flourish of hearts and arrows floating above the fire. Even his signature, printed in a vertical format, works as a linear design element within the composition.

## Technique

VanDerZee used various means both in the studio and the darkroom to produce a desired effect. He had a supply of furniture, architectural elements, and backdrops—many of which he hand-painted—as well as a selection of fashionable clothes for both men and women. In processing his film, he used the technique of photomontage, exposing several negatives to make a single photograph.

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**In processing his film, he used the technique of photomontage, exposing several negatives to make a single photograph.**

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This is the way he made the young girl holding a doll appear with the bridal couple. In addition to drawing directly on the negative, VanDerZee also retouched his negatives to flatter his subjects, removing unwanted facial lines and blemishes, or placing beauty marks on the cheeks of women. While this technique was controversial in the artistic community, it was highly popular among his clients.

During his career VanDerZee used a variety of cameras. For this portrait, he used a large format 8 x 10 camera, which was favored for studio work because of its clarity of detail.

### About the Artist

Born in Lenox, Massachusetts, in 1886, James VanDerZee grew up in a family interested in music and art. When he was 12 years old, he won a simple box camera as a prize for selling 20 packets of perfume. As a boy he photographed family and friends, but did not pursue photography professionally until later in life. In 1906 he moved to Harlem, where he took up a career in music, teaching violin and playing the piano at social gatherings. In 1915 VanDerZee was hired as a photographer's assistant in a New Jersey department store, and in 1917, he opened his own portrait studio in Harlem, where he enjoyed considerable success. He became the most sought-after photographer in Harlem and, in 1932, opened a larger studio with his second wife and business partner, Gaynella, who remained with him until her death in 1975.

VanDerZee's photos from the 1920s and 1930s show Harlem's socialites, politicians, religious leaders, families, and members of local organizations, as well as social events such as weddings, parades, and funerals. He photographed people not only in his studio but also on location, producing our most comprehensive document of community life in Harlem during its cultural renaissance. Essentially a self-taught photographer, VanDerZee remained outside and unaware of mainstream American photography.

### Key Ideas

1. Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City, was (and continues to be) a hub for Black culture in the United States.
2. The bride and groom in this photograph selected the photographer, James VanDerZee, because he was a local artist, working in the neighborhood and popular among the community.
3. The groom's clothing is typical for the time, and the bride's clothing has modern details: machine-made fabric, shorter hemline, and poofy veil.

### Suggested Questions

1. There is painting, photography, and drawing in this artwork. Where do you see painting? What do you see that makes you say that? How do you know this is a photograph? Why? Where did the artist add drawings? Why do you think he did that?
2. The couple is dressed fashionably for the time. If you could have your photograph taken in fun, fancy clothes, what type of clothes would you choose? Why? How do you imagine you would feel when wearing them? Why?
3. Look closely at the bottom left corner. The artist used technology to add a young girl playing with a doll. We do not know why he did it. What do you think are some reasons he might have added her? Why do you say that?

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**Richard Hunt, Canada, (Kwakiutl), Canadian, born 1951**  
**Transformation mask, 1993, cedar, pigment, cloth, string, wood**  
**The Anne and Hadlai Hull Fund, 93.42**  
**©Richard Hunt, C.M., O.B.C.**  
**13 x 12 ¼ x 20 ½ in. (33.0 x 31.1 x 52.1 cm)**



**Carved wooden transformation masks are worn for important religious ceremonies and dances of the Kwakwaka'wakw [kwak-wak-ya-wak] people. The images on this mask identify the artist's family clan and ancestors. When worn during a dance, the images also re-create ancient myths that are sacred to the Northwest Coast peoples.**

## **Background**

One of the world's richest natural environments, the Northwest Coast region of North America consists of a narrow strip of densely forested land less than 150 miles wide, surrounded by snow-capped mountains, islands, and ocean inlets. It stretches along the Pacific Ocean from the Alaskan Panhandle to northern California. In the past, the Native people who lived in this area obtained food, clothing, and shelter from their natural surroundings. The sea provided abundant fish, the basis of their economy, and the land offered bountiful forests teeming with deer, birds, bears, and other wildlife. From the massive cedar, fir, and spruce trees of the forests, the Native people built houses, canoes, storage chests, masks, implements, and other ceremonial and functional objects.

Before the time of European settlement, the Northwest Coast Indians developed complex social and religious systems. Many of their sacred practices and ceremonies expressed gratitude for the plentiful gifts of nature and a desire to maintain prosperity and well-being. They also manifested a close relationship with animals. Central to these ceremonies were distinctive art objects adorned with images of animal symbols, sometimes referred to as animal "crests." These crests represented families or clans, groups of people who shared the same ancestors. An animal crest was considered the property of a family or clan. The crest identified the members' ancestors and, in return for proper respect and ceremony, protected them.

Much of the art produced by the Northwest Coast people, as well as their ceremonial activities, were intended to proclaim the wealth and status of important families, particularly the wealthy hereditary nobility. These people were obligated to give away their material goods in elaborate ceremonies

called potlatches, which were held in the winter to celebrate a special event, such as a wedding or a birth. Many decorated objects were made for these potlatches, including doorposts and totems for the house, ceremonial regalia such as masks and costumes, and numerous implements and eating utensils. All called attention to the ancestry, greatness, and wealth of the family and the man who was its head. By giving away his possessions, a family leader shared his riches with the community, strengthened his leadership, and gained the respect of others.

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**By giving away his possessions, a family leader shared his riches with the community, strengthened his leadership, and gained the respect of others.**

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In addition to displaying wealth and status, the potlatch was a way to pass titles and privileges on to family heirs and to redistribute goods within a stratified society. It was important to participate in these feasts, and attendees often traveled great distances.

## **Transformation Mask**

Among the southern groups of the Northwest Coast Indians, the Kwakwaka'wakw people are known for their elaborate ceremonies using a range of complex objects. While this particular mask was made for sale, Richard Hunt made a similar mask for family dances at a winter potlatch. Transformation masks are worn to illustrate myths of animal ancestry, to show animal crests owned by an individual, and to reveal the interaction of human and animal spirits. According to Kwakwaka'wakw creation stories, there was once a time when birds, fish, animals, and humans differed only in skin covering and had the ability to transform themselves at will. These ideas still guide Kwakwaka'wakw religious traditions today.

A transformation mask is a spectacular sculptural form constructed with moveable parts that open and close. As part of the dance, the wearer dramatically reveals the images of different animal and human spirits both inside and outside the mask. At the beginning of the dance, this mask would be closed, showing the image of the raven represented on the outside. During key moments of the dance, however, the dancer pulls hidden strings to open the mask and reveal the carved images inside of a human face flanked by a two-headed serpent. According to Kwakwaka'wakw belief, when dancers are wearing these masks, they themselves are transformed into the spirits represented on the mask.

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**Raven is a central character in Northwest Coast Indian mythology.**

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In many stories, he is the creator of the physical world and the bringer of light. Raven has supernatural powers, and is also a “trickster” who can transform himself into anything at any time, often playing mischievous tricks on others.



An ovoid

A U-form

The mask opens to display an image of Sisuitl [SEE-shoe], a two-headed serpent often associated with the protection of warriors. The serpent is believed to occasionally eat those who see him, which may explain why Sisuitl is often represented with a human head between two profile serpent heads, as it is here. Other human features are the upraised hands painted on the interior wings of the mask next to the serpent

heads. Together the images on the mask refer to the transformations of human to Raven, Raven to human, human to Sisuitl, and Sisuitl to human.

Although Raven and Sisuitl are traditional Kwakwaka'wakw images, they also are personally significant to the artist. Raven is the special animal and main crest of Hunt's father's clan. Sisuitl is the special animal and main crest of his mother's clan. Worn at family dances, a mask like this one represents Hunt's ancestry.

This mask combines two- and three-dimensional techniques, using both relief carving and painted design. The distinctive Northwest Coast style of decoration is displayed here in the bold linear designs and forms. The painted images are stylized, using simplified geometric and organic forms and abstract designs to represent animal and human images. The artist animates the surface with an intricate design using two basic shapes: the ovoid and the U-form. These shapes, integral to Northwest Coast artistic tradition, are found throughout the mask in a variety of configurations. Examples of the ovoid are seen in the serpent's eyes and nose, the palms of the human hands, the man's forehead, and the designs above and below the raven's beak. The U-form is repeated in many segments of the serpent's body, as well as on the chin of the human face. While many of these forms seem to represent certain animal or human features, others simply create a pleasing design. In painting the designs, Hunt used traditional Kwakwaka'wakw colors of black, red-brown, and green to emphasize important features, such as eyes, nostrils, hands, and teeth.

The mask's sense of dynamism and movement are further enhanced by the carving of the complex surface, both inside and out, with various curving contours and deep recessions. Raven has an extremely long, straight beak with a bluntly curving, turned-down tip. The eyes, nose, and mouth of the central human face are deeply cut, and they have openings through which the dancer can see and breathe as he dances. The dancer's body would be draped with sheets of red or black cloth to which

feathers are sometimes attached. He would be accompanied by the sounds of drums and singing.

## Technique

Richard Hunt uses traditional Kwakwaka'wakw techniques when carving and painting masks. He made this mask from red cedar, a soft wood favored by Kwakwaka'wakw artists for its clear and even grain. Woodcarving is a form of subtractive sculpture, in which the form is created by carving away wood from the log. Hunt used traditional hand tools, such as an adze, chisel, and curved knife. When the carving was completed, holes were drilled along the sides of the hollow shell to insert pegs and strings used to maneuver the mask when worn. Hunt then painted the mask with quick-drying acrylic (plastic-based) paints, a contemporary update to traditional natural earth pigments, such as red ochre, charcoal, and blue-green clay.

## About the Artist

Richard Hunt is a contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw artist who comes from a family of internationally respected artists. Born in 1951 in Alert Bay, British Columbia, he has lived most of his life in Victoria. Hunt began carving at age 13, receiving lessons from his father, who was taught by Richard's grandfather. Kwakwaka'wakw art forms have been transmitted from generation to generation. This has occurred despite attempts by the Canadian government to assimilate the Northwest Coast peoples into the predominant white culture. The government banned the potlatch ceremony from 1884 to 1951; nevertheless, many Kwakiutl artists, like Hunt's grandfather, continued to make traditional ceremonial items, keeping these art forms alive for future generations. Today, Kwakwaka'wakw art is undergoing a great revival, and Richard Hunt is a part of it. His work has been widely exhibited and is represented in collections around the world.

## Key Ideas

1. Masks like this are danced at special ceremonies and celebrations.
2. The artist Richard Hunt made the mask to sell, but it is in the same style as transformation masks he made for his family to use in potlatches.
3. This mask represents Hunt's ancestry. Raven is a special animal and main crest of his father's clan. Sisuitl (two-headed serpent) is the special animal and main crest of his mother's clan.

## Suggested Questions

1. Look closely at the mask. How did the artist use shapes to create animals? What do you see that reminds you of a face? What do you see that makes you say that? How did the artist make the animal face different from the human face? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. The artist included two animals (Raven and Sisuitl) because they represent his family and his ancestors. Think about your family and those who came before you. What animals represent your family? Why? What about them reminds you of your family? Why?
3. The artist learned how to carve wood from his father, who learned from his father. Think about lessons or skills you have learned from someone in your family or community. How does it feel to learn something new? What are the challenges? What is exciting? Do you have a special skill that you want future generations to learn? Why?

## Notes

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**Germany**

**Armor, 1520, steel, leather, copper alloy (composite; early 20th century restoration)**

**The Washburn Fund, 23.54**

**77 x 31 ½ in. (195.6 x 80 cm)**





**Arms and armor have been around for thousands of years, used in conquest, defense, court pageantry, and ceremonial events. Armor is primarily a tool to protect oneself in combat and military engagements. But by late 1400s and 1500s armor was also worn in jousting tournaments, one-on-one combat fought with long wooden lances while galloping full speed on horseback. This suit is a type of heavy plate armor worn in tournaments, called tilting armor, after the central barrier, called a tilt, on the jousting field.**

## Background

Armor is often associated with medieval knights and the joust. The real account of the knight in shining armor is a bit more complicated than that depicted in legends. Knighthood was granted by a king, queen, or political leader for service to country in a military capacity, but it could also be granted for positions of nobility, such as landholders. Though it is true that knights wore armor, so did foot soldiers, citizens, wealthy burghers, and nobility in varying quality and amounts. A person in armor should be referred to as a man-at-arms or man in armor. (There are accounts of women wearing armor, but they are rare.)

The quality of armor would have been reflected in its price: ready-made or second-hand items affordable to citizens, mercenaries, and lower nobility, and the best quality and highest fashion—and price—made for the court.

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**Armor, like clothing, reflected fashion trends, but above all it also had to be functional.**

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Armor, like clothing, reflected fashion trends, but above all it also had to be functional. Makers of armor, called armorers, were constantly improving designs to keep step with advancements in warfare. On this example, the rope-like edges on the breastplate and hand-defenses (gauntlets) and the belted form of the breastplate follow men's fashions of the day, establishing the owner as a man of taste and means.

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**A full suit of the best plate armor was expensive: equivalent to about five to eight years of rent for a merchant's house, or over three years' worth of wages for a skilled laborer.**

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## Plate Armor

This suit is a composite of parts from various armor dating from the 1500s, with some restorations from the early 1900s.

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**Plate armor is personal body protection made from articulated iron or steel plates that encase the wearer from head to toe.**

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A full suit of plate armor, called a harness, is composed of individual elements constructed of lames (strips of metal) and plates, linked by movable rivets and leather straps. The weight of a well-fitted armor is distributed over the entire body, allowing the wearer to jump, run, and move relatively freely. It is a misconception that the movement of a man in full armor was so restricted, were he to fall down he would be unable to get up again. Indeed, modern experiments with genuine armor from this time demonstrate a free range of movement. For comfort, armor was worn over a padded garment. The procedure for putting on a suit of armor usually began with the legs, followed by the upper body and arms, and, finally, the helmet and gauntlets.

As firearms improved and were more commonly used in combat in the 1500s, the use of full battle armor declined; meanwhile, armor made for jousting competitions continued to develop. Such armor, though still flexible, could be twice as heavy as that made for the battlefield: 110 pounds vs. 33–55 pounds. After 1650, most combat armor was reduced to the simple breastplate due to the

development of the flintlock musket, which could penetrate metal at a considerable distance; however, armor made for use as parade or ceremonial wear remained popular among the nobility. Today, protective armor made from modern-day materials is used by military personnel, police, and firefighters and in sports equipment.

**Lance Rest or Lance**

**Arrest:** supports the weight of the lance and allows the wearer to hold the lance firmly under his right arm to “arrest” or stop it from sliding backward.

**Tassets:** protect the upper legs and hips.

**Mail Shirt:** “mail” means chain, a shirt made of interlocking rings worn under the armor.

**Gauntlet:** protects the hand and forearm. The gauntlets in this set are of the mitten-type.

**Cuisses:** protect the thigh.

**Poleyns or Knee Cops:** protect the knees.

**Visored Helmet:** protects the head, neck, and throat. A mechanical visor can be worn up or down.

**Gorget:** protects the throat and upper chest.

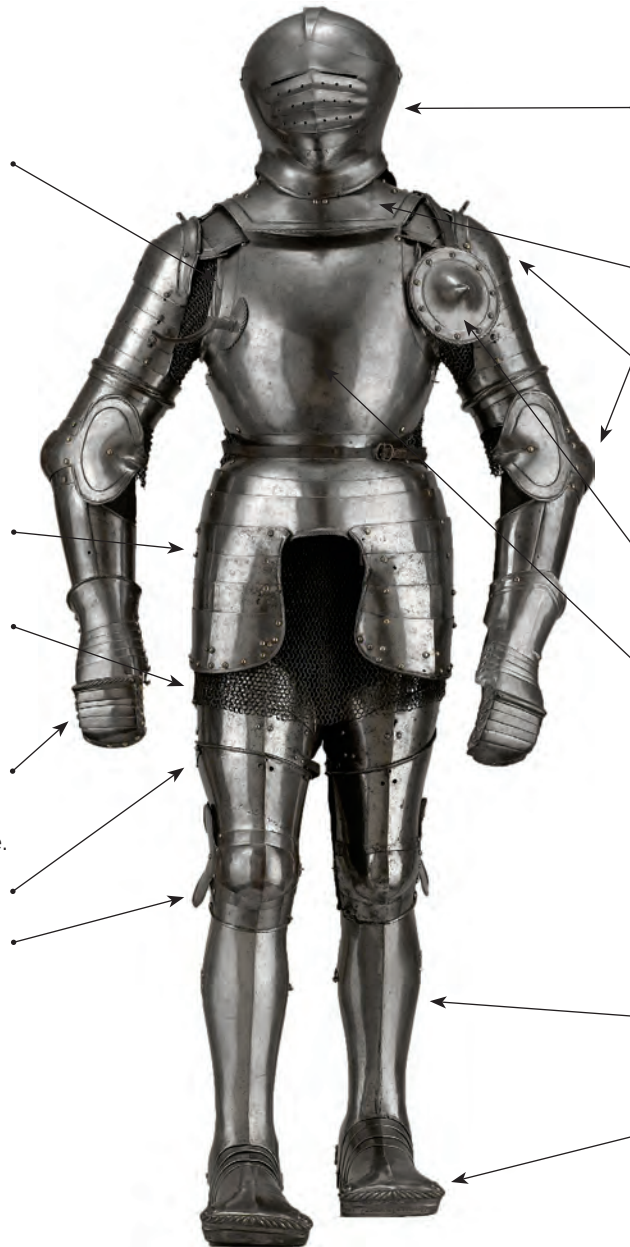
**Pauldron, Couter, and Vambrace:** pauldrons cover the shoulder and upper arm, couters cover the elbow, and vambraces cover the forearm.

**Besagew:** circular shield to protect the armpits and exposure to vital arteries.

**Breastplate and Backplate:** protect the upper torso. The pronounced bowed front deflects the blow of the lance away from the body.

**Greaves:** protect the lower leg. These are reproductions from 1900s

**Sabatons:** cover the feet. These are reproductions from the 1900s.



## The Joust

The French term “joust” aptly means “a meeting.” It originated in medieval military tournaments. By the late 1400s, the joust, fought between two individuals on horseback, developed into a popular spectator sport. Competitors rode toward each other from opposite ends of a small, defined ground, charging with a blunt lance. The object was to knock the opponent off his horse or break his lance. In the early 1400s, a tilt barrier was introduced to keep the horses from colliding as they charged, allowing only the upper body to be struck. The tilt barrier facilitated control of the horse, allowing the rider to concentrate on aiming the lance. Armor made for this type of joust is called tilting armor, with an emphasis on protecting the upper body.

## About the Artist

The makers of this armor are unknown, but the style and construction of this set place the majority of elements from Germany in the first half of the 1500s, during the Renaissance in Europe. The most important regions of armor production were in Italy and Germany; workshops from both regions exported their products throughout Europe. German armorer workshops were controlled under regulations of the guild, directed by a master armorer with a limited number of apprentices, who may have specialized in making certain parts. Armor may have been specifically commissioned or held in stock half-finished to be fitted to the specifications of the wearer.

Makers of arms and armor were among the first craftsmen to sign their works. Court armorers were as highly regarded as celebrated court painters.

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**The art of the armorer was to form the hardest steel to fit precisely, address both functionality and fashion, and reflect the taste and status of the owner.**

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Armor was often elaborately decorated with a variety of techniques, including painting, embossing, etching, engraving, gilding, and inlay. Etching, the most commonly applied technique, was soon adapted to the process of printmaking, using etched metal plates on the printing press. The armory can also claim another innovation: the slotted metal screw and turnscrew (screwdriver) to join the armor plates together.

## Key Ideas

1. This armor was considered fashionable (the belted waist of the breastplate was a popular design) and also functional.
2. While armor was sometimes used in battle, this armor was used for jousting. Jousting is one-on-one combat fought with long wooden lances while galloping full speed on horseback toward an opponent. The object was to knock the opponent off his horse or break his lance.
3. Armor was often elaborately decorated with a variety of techniques, including painting, embossing, etching, engraving, gilding, and inlay.

## Suggested Questions

1. Close your eyes if you want, and imagine putting the suit on. What might it feel like to move in this armor? What types of activities would be difficult to do while wearing it? What types of activities might be easier, or safer?
2. Look closely. Where does the armor move and bend with the body’s movement? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What part of the suit of armor would you put on first, or last? Why?
4. This suit of armor was designed to offer protection from being struck with a lance, a long wooden spear, during a joust, a competition between two people on horseback. What types of armor or protective gear do people wear today to protect themselves at home, at work, or at play? What types of natural “armor” do some animals have to protect themselves?



# Art Adventure

## Dressed for the Occasion

1



*Portrait of Maria Theresia Bucquoi*  
Élisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun

Gallery \_\_\_\_\_

4



Transformation mask  
Richard Hunt

Gallery \_\_\_\_\_

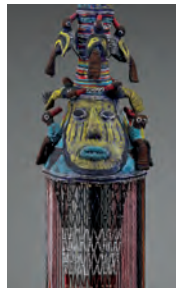
2



Armor  
Germany

Gallery \_\_\_\_\_

5



King's crown  
Yoruba, Nigeria

Gallery \_\_\_\_\_

3



*Wedding Day, Harlem*  
James VanDerZee

Gallery \_\_\_\_\_

6



Ceremonial skirt  
Hmong, Laos

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
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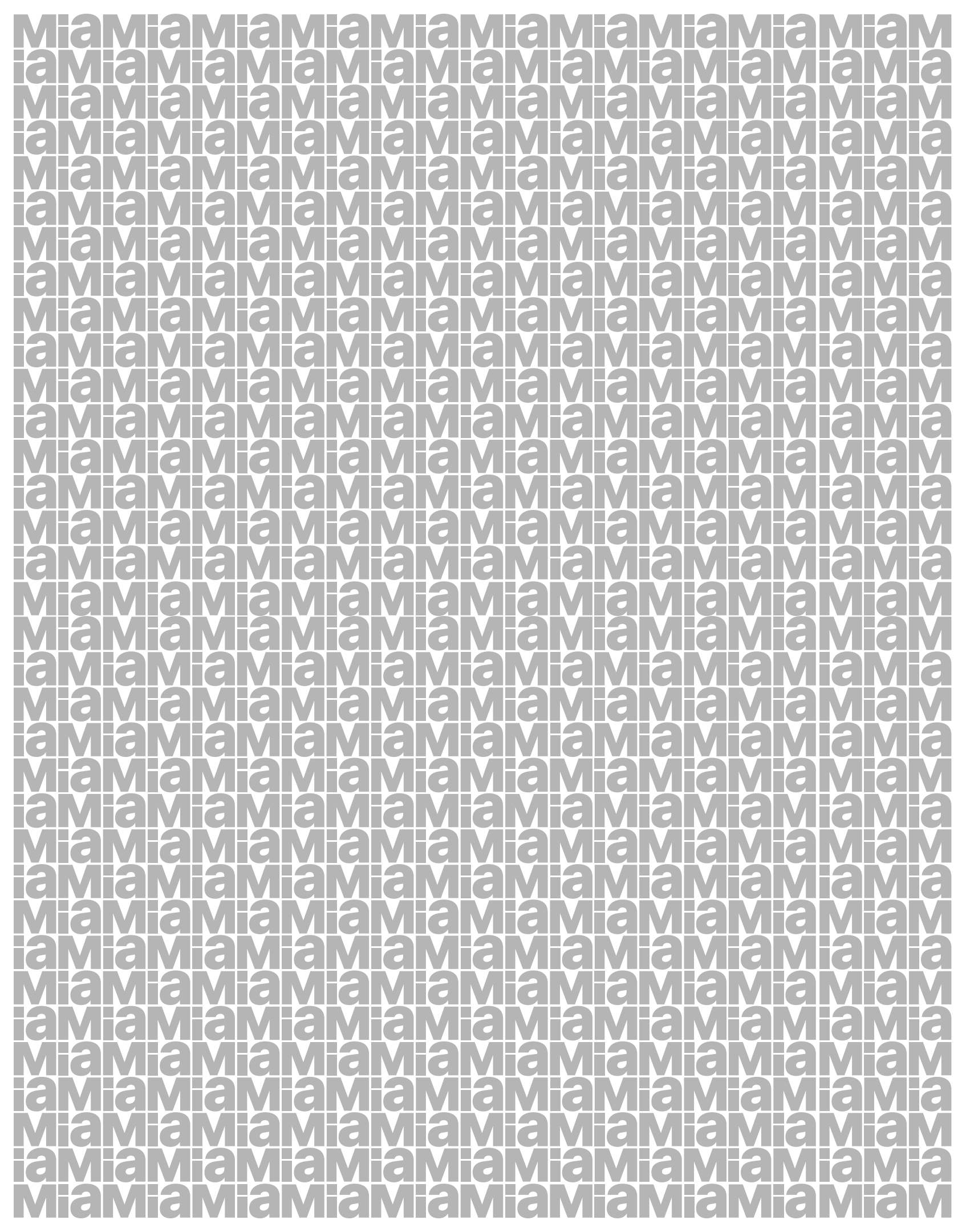
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