

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Adventure

How People Lived



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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.

How People Lived

The earliest historical records made by human beings were not written, but painted or carved on the walls of caves tens of thousands of years ago. The six works discussed in this set give a vivid picture of how people lived at different times in various parts of the world.

Our survey begins with a vase from ancient Greece: what does this vase reveal of how the Greeks lived nearly 2,500 years ago? What did they value? Why did later cultures imitate them? The answers to these questions and many more may be found in the art objects themselves. These objects from the past reach to us across the centuries, using visual language to tell us of how people lived in other times and places. Our challenge is to learn to “read” these stories. Once we have learned to do that with the six objects in this set, we will be prepared to try our skills of discovery with other works of art.

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Antimenes Painter, Hydria	Photograph of top of hydria	\$10
Robert Koehler, <i>Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue</i>	Photograph of Koehler's wife and son View of contemporary Hennepin Avenue	\$10 \$10
Nicolas de Largillière, <i>Portrait of Catherine Coustard with Her Son Léonor</i>	Sample swatch of velvet and lamé Sheet with detail of painting	\$10 \$10
Japan, Helmet	Photo prop of a dragonfly	\$10
Elizabeth Catlett, <i>Sharecropper</i>	Sample of linocut Photograph of Catlett's <i>In the Fields</i> Photograph of Catlett	\$30 \$10 \$10
Dakota, United States Cradle board cover	Photographs of: Bison and Elk Porcupine	\$10 \$10
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 missing or damaged items. Thank you!

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Attributed to the Antimenes Painter, Greece
Black-figured hydria, 530 BCE, slip-glazed earthenware
The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 61.59
20 3/4 x 17 x 15 in. (52.71 x 43.18 x 38.1 cm)



The shape and decoration of this hydria, or vase, give us insight into the lives and thoughts of Greek people who lived over 2,000 years ago. Though its function was to carry water, its elaborate decoration and proportions speak of the qualities the Greeks most admired: harmony, order, balance, and beauty.

Background

The ancient Greeks developed one of the most remarkable civilizations in the history of the world. It reached its height in 400 BCE, known as the Classical period. The Greeks gave the world great works of art, literature, law, science, and philosophy, notable above all for the spirit they saw in human beings.

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Their sense of individual human worth was so great, they depicted their gods in human form, living high on Mount Olympus. Captured in the words of the ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles: “The world is full of wonders, but nothing is more wonderful than man.”

This hydria exemplifies that spirit. It was created just before the Classical period, in the Archaic period, which lasted roughly from 800 to 500 BCE. During this time, Hellas (as Greece was then called) evolved from a primitive agricultural society to one made up of many small city-states. The soil was poor for most crops, but olive trees and grapevines flourished. Olive oil and wine, along with fine pottery, became major trade items.

The common bond of the city-states was language, but they were also united by the legacy of Homer, the 700s poet who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These epic poems, and following works, recounted the legends of the Greeks’ gods, goddesses, and heroes—stories the Greeks loved and taught to their

youth. The legends dealt with questions of good and evil and served as models for human behavior. The Greeks envisioned their gods in all things.

In addition to the Olympian gods and goddesses, each city-state had its own patron god and goddess. Festivals were held to honor these divinities, and people attended from all over Greece. The festivals evolved into competitions, the most famous of which were the Olympic Games, founded in 776 BCE. The games were held every four years, as they are today.

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Athletics developed in accord with the Greeks’ aspiration to excellence in all things and their belief in the wonder of man. Athletes in the Olympic Games participated as individuals. A victorious athlete could expect to be immortalized as a hero in a public sculpture in his home city.

Hero worship was, in fact, closely related to worship of the gods. Thousands of heroes, believed to have descended from the gods, were revered throughout Greece. Greek poets celebrated their deeds in verse, and vase painters drew on the heroic legends as subjects of their decorations. Foremost of the Greek heroes was Herakles, who was considered to be the first athlete and, according to some versions, the founder of the Olympic games. Celebrated by poets, he was one of the most popular subjects of Archaic period vase painters, often accompanied by his patroness, Athena—as we see on this hydria.

Hydria

Several types of utilitarian vases (vessels used for eating, cooking, and storage) were made in ancient Greece. The hydria was used to carry water from a communal fountain. The side handles were used to lift it onto a woman's head for carrying, and the vertical handle at the back was used for pouring or for carrying the jar when empty. Even though this vase was made to be functional, great attention was given to its design and decoration. The balanced proportions are emphasized by the painted decoration. For example, the largest image appears on the main body of the vase, in keeping with its size and importance, and decorative patterns draw our attention to the handles and the foot. The elegant shape and elaborate decoration tell us that the Greeks placed a high value on beauty; even utilitarian vessels had to be beautiful.

The decoration of the hydria reflects the Greek preoccupation with heroes, athletics, and the interaction of human beings and gods. On the lip of the vase, the artist depicted a chariot race, one of the most exciting forms of competition to the ancient Greeks. It was, in fact, the nine-mile, four-horse chariot race, which opened the Olympic games. The image on the main body of the vessel is the harnessing of the four-horse chariot of Athena, who prepares to step into the chariot on the far left. Athena, venerated as a warrior-goddess, was also the goddess of wisdom and of the arts of peace, and the patroness of household crafts. She was especially revered in the city of Athens, named in her honor. Athena holds the reins of the two pole horses (horses already attached to the chariot). Two men (one's head is hidden behind the horses) stand at the heads of the pole horses, while two men lead the horses forward.

One of the two men (center) leading the horses is bareheaded with a red beard and a short, curly haircut befitting an athlete. These characteristics suggest that he is Herakles, though Herakles usually wears a lion skin (as in the image on the shoulder). The son of Zeus and a mortal mother, Herakles was considered

by the Greeks to be a mortal. An ideal athlete (credited with originating the Olympic games) and a hero, Herakles served as a model of human perseverance against seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

The subject of this vase could be the journey of Athena and Herakles to the battle between the gods and the giants. The gods needed a mortal to assist them, so Athena carried Herakles to battle in her chariot. This scene could also refer to another of the many tales about Herakles: upon his death, Athena transported him to Mount Olympus, where he became immortal.

The male figure behind the pole horses wears the long white robes of a charioteer and a *petasos* (traveler's hat) and carries a staff. He may represent Hermes, the patron of athletes and the god of travelers. Immediately below the scene is a row of boars and lions, a motif commonly found on 500 BCE vases. In this case, the animals are associated with two of the 12 labors of Herakles. For the first labor, he strangled the Nemean lion with his bare hands, skinned it, and made a garment from the skin, which made him undefeatable. For the fourth labor, he captured a wild boar that had terrorized the inhabitants of the land.

Above the harnessing scene, on the vase's shoulder, is another episode from the life of Herakles, described in an epic poem from this era. This is Herakles's combat with Kyknos, son of the god of war, Ares. Kyknos was a bandit who robbed travelers on their way to visit the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. When he attempted to intercept Herakles on his visit and then refused to step aside, Athena urged Herakles to kill him. Ares attacked Herakles but was wounded in the thigh and had to retreat. Herakles is easily identified by his attribute, the lion skin, which symbolizes his strength. He is backed by Athena and Hermes on the left. To the right, behind the shield, is Kyknos, supported by Ares and two unidentified figures. Between Herakles and Kyknos is Zeus (Herakles's father), who stands with outstretched arms and appears to intercede.

To the Greeks, this image represented not just a story, but also the two sides of human nature. Herakles the hero and Athena as his patroness represent the forces of good. Ares and Kyknos display the darker side: those who wage war for the sake of destruction or greed. The story may remind us of heroes—real or imaginary—of our own time. For the ancient Greeks and for us today, stories of good and evil can be lessons in proper human behavior.

Technique

Pottery making was the first major industry to develop in Athens during the Archaic period. Workshops manufactured utilitarian and luxury wares in a variety of shapes and sizes for both the local market and export. Painted vases were not everyday pottery, but were reasonably affordable for a wide population. In most cases, the potter (who formed the pot) and the painter (who decorated it) were two different artists.

Generally, pots were formed (thrown) on the potter's wheel. A potter's wheel consists of a turntable, on which the clay is placed, and a disk or crank that the potter operates with his foot to keep the turntable moving. Both hands are free to form the pot from the clay as the turntable turns. Remarkably, this technique has changed little over some 2,500 years. Large pots such as the hydria were made in sections, joined together with slip (a mixture of clay and water). Sections were joined at the structural points between neck and body or body and foot. Thin coils of clay added on the outside conceal the joins. Handles were made by hand and attached with slip.

The images on the vases were created by means of a technique developed about 625 BCE. The figures were applied to the vase when the clay was leather-hard. The painter did not use the pigments that we associate with painting today, but rather a substance called *engobe* (a thickened mixture of clay and

water). Once the *engobe* was applied and dried, the pot was placed in a kiln, an oven-like structure that can be fired to high temperatures.

The firing (heating in the kiln) of the pots lasted for many hours. In the first stage, the entire vase turned red because the clay contained iron. In the second stage, the oxygen supply was cut off, causing the entire vase to turn black. In the third and final stage, oxygen was reintroduced, causing the vase to turn red again. The decorated portions, however, did not reabsorb the oxygen, because of the different consistency of the *engobe*; as a result, those areas remained black. The result was black figures silhouetted against the light-red background of the pot. The resulting pottery is known as black-figure ware.

Details were incised in the black areas by scraping through to the red clay with a sharp tool. Finally, accents of white and purple were applied after firing. Traces of white remain on Athena's face and Hermes's robe. Purple appears on the horses' manes. More colors were probably once present, but they have disappeared over time.

About the Artist

We know the artist only as the Antimenes Painter, the head of a large workshop who likely painted hundreds of vases. He had many colleagues who painted in a similar manner, but this vase is considered to be by his own hand. His workshop was known for images of harnessing scenes, such as the one on this vase. It was unusual in ancient Greece for the painter and potter to be the same artist, so it is likely that another member of the Antimenes workshop was responsible for forming the vase.

Robert Koehler, United States, 1850–1917
***Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue*, 1902, oil on canvas**
Gift by subscription in honor of the artist, 25.403
25 ¾ x 24 in. (65.41 x 60.96 cm) (canvas)
36 ½ x 38 ¼ in. (91.76 x 97.16 cm) (outer frame)



In *Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue*, Robert Koehler creates a picturesque view of everyday life around 1902 along a busy street in Minneapolis. Among the many people depicted are his wife and son, walking with the family dog. Also portrayed is his daily environment—the place where he worked and the community in which he lived.

Background

The city of Minneapolis was undergoing tremendous growth and change when Robert Koehler painted *Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue* in the first decade of the 1900s. Culminating an era of urbanization, Minneapolis, like other burgeoning cities throughout the nation, mirrored the vastly altered conditions of American life that resulted from increased population, advancing technology and industry, and the shift from a rural to an urban society.

Many of the buildings portrayed in this painting arose during the 1880s, when a building boom took place. This was a golden era for Minneapolis, reflecting the new prosperity brought by lumbering, flour milling, and trade.

This was a golden era for Minneapolis, reflecting the new prosperity brought by lumbering, flour milling, and trade.

The building on the left is the Minneapolis Public Library, built in 1889 of reddish-brown Lake Superior sandstone, an imposing presence on the southeast corner of Tenth Street and Hennepin Avenue. A newspaper account noted its “dreamy seclusion” away from the central business district.

The library housed the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts (forerunner of the Minneapolis Institute of Art), which included the Minneapolis School of Art (later called the Minneapolis College of Art and Design) and a gallery. Both the school and gallery were situated on the top floor.

What was it like to live in Minneapolis at the time of this painting? Passage into the 1900s brought an ever-quickening pace. Electric streetcars replaced horse drawn streetcars in the early 1890s; electricity competed with gas in the lighting of city streets and buildings; and automobiles made a rare appearance on the roads, driven by prosperous individuals with a taste for adventure. Nonetheless, horsedrawn carriages were the prevalent means of transportation. The bicycle was all the rage, with nearly 10 million Americans riding them in 1890.

Nicollet and Washington Avenues were bustling with retail activity, and shoppers could enjoy the new meccas of merchandising—fashionable department stores such as Donaldson’s Glass Block, Powers Dry Goods, and the recently opened Dayton’s. Those were the days when a man’s suit sold for \$10, a sirloin steak cost 12 cents, and a new stove was a bargain at \$22.50.

As the city grew, so did an appetite for entertainment and culture. The theater enriched urban life with a variety of plays, opera, and vaudeville, a favorite form of family entertainment. In professional sports, baseball was the most popular game. Twin Citians trooped to Nicollet Park, home of the Minneapolis Millers, and to Lexington Park, home of the St. Paul Saints.

Home and family, central institutions in American society, were symbols of calm and stability amid a changing world.

Home and family, central institutions in American society, were symbols of calm and stability amid a changing world. Traditional family roles were clearly defined: men took charge of the business world and cast the votes in the political realm, while

women were responsible for taking care of the home and children. Urban families tended to have fewer children than those in rural areas. The growth of publishing produced a profusion of books and magazines that advised women on home management and reinforced their traditional roles.

At the same time, urban growth was creating changes that eroded tradition. Technological advances and labor-saving services allowed women more free time; many became involved in charity work and women's clubs and organizations. New career opportunities caused a growing number of women to enter the workforce.

There were adverse effects to the extraordinary changes taking place in society. Problems relating to labor strife, child labor, swelling immigration, the rights of women, and corruption in city government were major concerns at this time, and movement for reform was under way.

Nonetheless, it was the Age of Confidence, and the country entered the 1900s with a sense of optimism. On New Year's Day, 1900, the *Tribune* assured the city's 200,000 residents that their future was "onward and upward." The new century would bring untold "expansion of all desirable blessings, of prosperity, of educational and moral growth, of beneficent political policies."

Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue

This picturesque cityscape offers a glimpse of life in Minneapolis at the turn of the century. Looking south from Ninth Street, we see the buildings located around Tenth Street and Hennepin Avenue. The prominent building in the left middle distance with the lighted first-floor window is the Minneapolis Public Library. Across the street to the right is the Hennepin Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, which stood on that site from 1881 to 1911. Known as the Red Brick Church, its steeple was a prominent landmark in downtown Minneapolis. When Koehler painted this scene around 1902, the southern area of Hennepin Avenue he portrayed was more residential than the commercial end to the north. Many private homes were in the area, as well as numerous rooming houses and hotels.

Koehler depicts the bustling activity of the city as it looked on a rainy evening, perhaps in early spring or late fall, suggested by the leafless trees and the warmly dressed figures. It is twilight and the rain has stopped, as evidenced by the glistening puddles in the street, the cloud-filled sky, the furled umbrellas, and the sense of moisture in the air. While the streetcar's headlights are on and light glows from the library and church windows, sunlight penetrates through the clouds in the western sky.

Among the people portrayed strolling and scurrying down the avenue is the artist's family. The woman and child in the foreground are Koehler's wife, Marie, and their son, Edwin, who are walking with the family dog. A photograph discovered in the 1970s was clearly the basis for the figures in the painting. Fashionably dressed, Mrs. Koehler lifts her long skirt, preventing her hem from sweeping the wet ground. Typical of the early 1900s, her dress emphasizes her silhouette, enhanced by a waist-pinching corset commonly worn underneath. Her hairstyle is the pompadour, drawn up high with a large hat perched on top. Her son wears a jacket with knee pants and cap typical of the time.

Walking hand in hand, they appear to be enjoying a leisurely stroll together. Koehler portrays a happy family relationship reflecting similar family values of the time. They seem to be in harmony with their surroundings, comfortable in the city despite the dampness and onslaught of evening.

Technique

The French Impressionists of the later 1800s paved the way for artists like Koehler by addressing the subject of modern urban life and by their sense of technical experimentation and innovation.

In *Rainy Evening on Hennepin Avenue*, Koehler creates a setting filled with soft mist and atmosphere using subtle color harmonies in a variety of violet, brown, black, and gray tones. Contrasting with this rather dark, murky palette are small patches of warm yellows and oranges, which represent various sources of light glowing from the library and church windows, shining from the streetcars, and illuminating the face of a man who stops to light his pipe. Highlighted areas break up the grays of the sky and create a shimmering quality on the wet ground. With loose, sketchy brushstrokes, Koehler evokes the soft, luminous quality of the rain-soaked street and sidewalk.

While Koehler's interest in light and atmosphere has much in common with the Impressionists, his forms maintain a solid, three-dimensional quality, which differs from the sketchy, unfinished appearance of many Impressionist paintings. Koehler's well-defined forms are particularly seen in the figures in the foreground of the painting, whose contours are distinctly delineated. They are depicted naturalistically, with considerable attention to details of gesture and clothing. These details, however, are softened by the hazy atmosphere of twilight. Koehler indicates depth by the use of linear perspective, through which objects become progressively smaller and closer together as they become more distant, as can be seen in the figures and the buildings. He also uses aerial perspective, where the buildings depicted in the distance fade to a bluish gray color. Details blur, suggesting the effects of light, air, and distance.

About the Artist

Born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1850, Robert Koehler emigrated with his family to Milwaukee when he was 4 years old. His father was a skilled mechanic; his mother taught needlework and dabbled in painting. Koehler excelled in drawing at a young age, and aspired to be a lithographer (printmaking with stone). He attended a few arts schools at home and abroad before settling in Minnesota.

In 1893 Koehler was appointed Director of the Minneapolis School of Art, a position he held until 1914. Though mainly occupied with teaching and administrative duties, he found time to paint, lecture, and write articles. Koehler was actively involved in many local art associations. Soon after he arrived in Minneapolis, he founded and was president of the Minneapolis Art League, located at 719 Hennepin Avenue, which held annual exhibitions.

A strong advocate of American art, Koehler also organized annual exhibitions of American art at the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts. During his tenure at the school, Koehler was involved in planning for a new art school and museum, which were outgrowing their space in the library. His dreams for these facilities were realized in 1915 with the opening of the spacious building of the Minneapolis Institute of Art (then known as the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts).

Nicolas de Largillière, France, 1656–1746

***Portrait of Catherine Coustard, Marquise of Castelnau,
Wife of Charles-Léonor Aubry, with Her Son Léonor***

1699, oil on canvas

The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 77.26

53 ¼ x 40 ¾ in. (135.26 x 103.51 cm) (sight); 70 ½ x 58 x 5 in. (179.07 x 147.32 x 12.7 cm) (outer frame)



This portrait of a French mother and her son was made to celebrate the family's newly attained nobility and the birth of an heir to their estate. From studying it, we can learn about the family relationships and lifestyle of upper-class society in a time of transition at the start of the 1700s.

Background

Louis XIV of France was an absolute monarch whose brilliant reign of 54 years earned him the title of Sun King. Under his leadership, France achieved political dominance in Europe, and Paris replaced Rome as the artistic center of the time.

The king's insatiable need for absolute control was the source of his triumph and also of his demise.

The king's insatiable need for absolute control was the source of his triumph and also of his demise. He surrounded himself with advisors from the middle class, who had little power except what he granted them. The courtiers, who eventually numbered 10,000, were maintained in the king's opulent palace at Versailles. Even nature gave way to the king's will as he transformed a forest into a park. Art as well as architecture was at the service of Louis XIV. He established a powerful academy, which for over 40 years dictated standards of art in accord with his own taste and ambition.

During the last 30 years of his rule, Louis XIV's power gradually declined. By the turn of the century, disastrous military campaigns and the king's extravagance at Versailles had brought the French economy to the verge of collapse. By 1700, the courtiers-in-residence could no longer be maintained, and the nobility began moving to Paris, where their lifestyle became less luxurious and more informal.

The Aubry family, two of whom are depicted in the portrait, lived in this world of excess and transition at the turn of the century. Léonor Aubry, the head of a wealthy middle-class family, was awarded noble status in return for 20 years of government service under Louis XIV. Shortly afterward, his eldest son, Charles, also a bureaucrat, purchased an estate in

central France that afforded him the title of Marquis de Castelnau. Their rise to social prominence prompted the Aubrys to commission Nicolas de Largillière (lar zhil YAIR) to paint a series of family portraits, including this one of Catherine Aubry, Charles's wife, and her young son, Léonor, named for his grandfather.

Portrait of Catherine Coustard, Marquise de Castelnau, Wife of Charles-Léonor Aubry, with Her Son Léonor

What appears to be a charming portrait of a mother and son posing with the family pet might seem (except for the clothing) like any number of modern-day pictures showing the virtues of family and motherhood. But looks can be deceiving. Closer examination reveals how stiffly the subjects are posed and how little they actually relate to each other. The concept of motherhood as we understand it today did not exist in France at the beginning of the 1700s. Family traditionally meant lineage, the inheritance wealth, and marriages were often loveless legal contracts. The birth of a child gave status to the mother for having produced an heir to the fortune, but the child's care was the servant's job. Parents and children remained almost strangers to one another. Respect and obedience were expected from children, not love and affection.

It is unusual for a young child the age of Léonor to be included in a portrait of this time. The reason for his presence is to show him as heir to the family fortune and to honor his mother for having produced an heir. Léonor is the new nobility's hope for the future.

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Madame Aubry, who was the daughter of a prosperous cloth merchant, wears an elegant contemporary dress. Her fashionable blue velvet gown is lined with embroidered silk and embellished with a silver bodice. Her costume is a little unusual because it shows the less rigid dress code of the new Parisian society. The stylish fashion she wears, called a *robe de chambre*, is a softer, more comfortable gown than those worn at Versailles. Madame Aubry would have worn it to receive guests at home. Her hair is fashioned in a *fontange*, with two curls framing her forehead. This look was popular in French hairstyle for 30 years, appearing in many portraits of the period. Léonor's clothing may look odd to us now, but at that time it was normal to dress boys and girls alike until they were 5 or 6 years old. In France, this practice continued into the 1900s. Late 1800s American photographs also show young boys wearing dresses. Léonor's garment is called a *jacquette*. The plumes in his matching velvet head-dress indicate that he is a boy.

Largillière's portraits were not intended to reveal the personalities of his sitters. The Aubrys, like most of Largillière's patrons, wanted their status emphasized, not their inner selves.

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Therefore, rich clothes, richly painted, became the essence of his new style of aristocratic portraiture.



Nicolas de Largillière, *Portrait of Charles-Léonor Aubry, Marquis de Castelnaud*, 1701, oil on canvas, Bequest of Margaret Weyerhaeuser Harmon, bequest of Professor Alfred Moir, and gift of the Henfield Foundation, by exchange 2018.25

In the portrait of Charles, what first seem to be expressions of wealth and power are actually meant to convey a more casual portrait. His dress and location are our clues. Charles sits outside in the family's garden, showing his expansive household. He wears attire that was casual for the time, including a larger-than-life wig and red robe. Charles looks up from a book, demonstrating he is literate and educated, and also that he has leisure time.

Though together these portraits show a picture of family relationships and the lifestyle of the Aubrys, they weren't always displayed together. Sometime after Largillière painted them, the portraits became separated. In 2018, Mia acquired the portrait of Charles, allowing the family to once again be reunited.

Technique

The use of oil paint offered artists great versatility in representing brilliant color and convincing textures. Largillière used those advantages to the utmost in this painting. By applying layers of transparent paints over opaque ones, he created the illusion of actual skin and cloth and achieved a subtle play of light off the rich blues and reds.

This portrait is on canvas, stretched over a wooden frame. The surface of the canvas was prepared by priming it with a white ground. Canvas has several advantages over other supports: it is lightweight, inexpensive, and expands and contracts little with temperature changes, so the paint surface does not crack.

About the Artist

Largillière was born in Paris. He received his early training in the workshop of a Flemish painter in Antwerp who specialized in landscape and genre painting (scenes from everyday life). In 1674, at the age of 18, he became a studio assistant to the leading court portraitist in England, Sir Peter Lely. In 1680, Largillière returned to France, where he established his reputation as a portrait painter. He was admitted to the Royal Academy in 1686. In 1705, he became a member of its teaching faculty and in 1720 was appointed director.

Most of Largillière's patrons were successful members of the bourgeoisie who, like the Aubry family, had gained status and wealth through government service. They appreciated Largillière's ability to flatter them in portraits; he preferred them to the impoverished court nobility because they were more apt to pay their bills. Blending elements from traditional Baroque portraiture and the new Parisian taste, he forged a portrait style that helped free French painting from the restraints of the academic style.

Blending expressive naturalism from traditional Baroque portraiture with the new Parisian taste, he forged a portrait style that helped free French painting from the restraints of the rigid academic style.

Key Ideas

1. This portrait of a French mother and her son celebrates the family's newly attained noble status.
2. Coustard's dress reflects a casual lifestyle adopted by the wealthy nobility at this time.
3. The painting of mother and son emphasizes the importance of the son as heir to the family fortune.

Suggested Questions

1. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? (For K-2 begin with: What do you see in this picture?) What more can we find?
2. This is a portrait of a mother and son. What do you think of when you hear the word portrait? Portrait usually refers to a picture of a person or group of people. This portrait was made using oil paints on canvas. How do many people today make portraits? Who here has had a photo portrait taken? Who has made selfies? How do you pose differently for a school photo vs. a selfie?
3. How do you think Coustard feels in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? How do you think her son feels? What do you see that makes you say that? What about the dog? How do you think it feels? Take Coustard's pose. How do you feel sitting like this? Why do you suppose she sits this way? Look closely at all of the details for clues.
4. The artist included a lot of details of clothing, setting, and attributes (things that help communicate information about people). What would you want to include in a portrait to tell others about you today —and hundreds of years from now? How would you want to look in your portrait?

Japan, Asia

Helmet in dragonfly shape, 17th century

Iron, lacquer, wood, leather, gilt, pigments, silk, papier-mâché

**The James Ford Bell Foundation Endowment for Art Acquisition and gift of funds
from Siri and Bob Marshall, 2012.31.1a-c**

28 x 24 x 13 ¾ in. (71.12 x 60.96 x 34.93 cm) (approx.)



In Japan, dragonflies symbolize focus, determination, and vigilance. Able to change directions nimbly, dragonflies reflect the ideal virtues of a capable warrior. This helmet is called an “exotic helmet” (*kawari kabuto*, [kah-war-ee kah-boo-toe]) because of its imaginative design. It likely belonged to a high-ranking warrior who wanted to stand out from his peers. Exotic helmets were a sort of military haute couture in 1500s and 1600s Japan, and they were important expressions of personality, status, and wealth.

Background

In Japan, samurai [sam-ur-eye] were a class of elite warriors renowned for their loyalty and military skill. Land-owning aristocratic families employed samurai as early as the 900s. Frequently at war over land and vying for political influence, these families relied on samurai to protect their lives and interests. The samurai formed close bonds with the families they served, gaining a reputation for their devotion (the term samurai comes from a Japanese word meaning “to serve”). The ideal samurai was expected to be selfless, brave, and fiercely loyal. Because of their elevated connections, social status, and military skills, samurai developed influence in politics, eventually becoming Japan’s ruling class.

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By the 1100s, powerful military families established a feudal government (social system where those who own land have power). At its head was a military leader, the shogun [show-gun], who replaced the emperor as Japan’s ruler. But the government was very unstable. Ruling families faced competition from other families, and sometimes even from within their own. Samurai and their lords were caught amid complicated relationships. Between the 1400s and 1500s, feuds between aristocratic families spread over most of Japan. This period is known as the Sengoku Jidai [sehn-go-coo gee-die] or Warring States Period. Low-ranking foot soldiers, peasants, and even some Buddhist clergy joined samurai armies in battles.

Helmet

For better or for worse, it was important for samurai to be recognizable in battle—especially to distinguish friend from foe. Leaders in particular needed to be easily visible by their armies in the chaos of battle. During the 1300s, armies began marking their armor with symbols that represented their allegiance, while others shared color schemes for the same purpose. Soldiers showed their support by decorating their armor with their feudal lord’s crest, or *mon* [moan]. Still others showed their intent to fight by attaching fans or small branches from fruit trees to their helmets.

By the late 1500s, flamboyant helmets were all the rage among top samurai.

While this ornate helmet is a far cry from a plum branch, it shows the continued importance of individual expression, identity, and the evolving artistry of armor making. By the late 1500s, flamboyant helmets were all the rage among top samurai.

They distinguished officers from the ranks, and exhibited their personality, wealth, and status. Officers often chose symbols that held special meanings, or reflected an aspect of their personality. Sometimes, the design on a leader’s helmet even reflected the collective spirit of his army.

In 1603, a new shogun named Tokugawa Ieyasu [Toe-coo-gah-wah ee-yay-yah-sue] took control of Japan. He established a strong central government, controlled by his family until 1868. This period, called the Edo [Eh-doh] or Tokugawa period, was a relatively peaceful time in Japan. During the Edo period, Japan’s population grew, and cities became

important cultural centers. Urban residents enjoyed plenty of outlets for entertainment at restaurants, shops, and spectacular street shows. Arts like painting, calligraphy, woodblock printing, kabuki theater, and the tea ceremony flourished, all with major support from the samurai class.

Lacking wars to fight, samurai invested their time—and justified their status—by patronizing the arts. Still, they maintained a connection to their military heritage. They continued practicing martial arts and remained ready for battle. As a result, even during peacetime, artisans continued making samurai armor and helmets with flair. Armor and helmets were worn during ceremonies or in public processions that showed off the ruling class's grandeur. Ultimately, samurai applied their military discipline to their intellectual and artistic interests. Prominent samurai thinkers declared samurai to be Japan's cultural role models, setting the standard for good taste and class. The dragonfly helmet at Mia shows the continuing interest among the samurai of combining both visual and military arts. This helmet illustrates their taste for beauty and humor, even when the subject was war.

Despite its high social status, the samurai class faced many uncertainties in the late Tokugawa period. Between their expensive lifestyle and few outlets for gainful employment (samurai were not typically allowed to farm or own shops), samurai families increasingly fell into poverty. Some even grew skeptical about the feudal system. In 1867, a civil war broke out between those wishing to destroy the feudal government (and restore the emperor's power) and those who supported it. A year later, in 1868, forces backing the emperor won, and the feudal system collapsed. In 1873, the new government created a national army, thereby eliminating the need for the samurai class. Three years later, the government dissolved it altogether. Many former samurai were given money to open their own businesses, while others joined the army or engaged in politics. Though their status dissolved, former samurai played important roles in shaping Japanese history and society in the early 1900s.

Technique

Frequent wars and large armies created high demand for effective yet inexpensive armor. To keep up with demand, armor makers developed practical, simply designed helmets that appealed to lower-ranking warriors. In contrast, leaders and officers wanted elaborate helmets.

By the late 1500s, they began commissioning extravagant helmets that reflected their wealth, rank, and personality. The base was the same plain helmet made for common warriors, whereas the top was constructed out of wood, then covered with papier-mâché and lacquer for a seamless design. On this helmet, the dragonfly also features removable golden wings, golden eyes, and a silk cord to tie at the chin. Whether this helmet was worn in battle is unknown. One thing is clear: In spite of its exotic appearance, this helmet was designed to offer good head protection during combat.

One thing is clear: In spite of its exotic appearance, this helmet was designed to offer good head protection during combat.

And like most others, this dragonfly helmet features an apron at the rear to protect the back of the neck.

Elizabeth Catlett, United States, 1915–2012

Publisher: Published by the artist and Taller de Grafica Popular, Mexico City;

**Printer: Printed by the artist and Jose Sanchez, *Sharecropper*, 1952 (printed c. 1952–57), color linocut
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, P.97.1**

Art ©Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

17 5/8 x 16 5/8 in. (44.77 x 42.23 cm) (image); 22 x 19 5/8 in. (55.88 x 49.85 cm) (sheet, irregular)



Elizabeth Catlett's creative approach and vision about the role of the Black American artist have earned her a unique place in the history of American art. In this linocut, Catlett portrays a Black American sharecropper whose inner fortitude and life of hard work are boldly conveyed.

Background

By the 1950s, when Elizabeth Catlett created *Sharecropper* and many other prints and sculptures, Black American artists had made great strides in terms of breaking through barriers that had existed in the art world for centuries, but still largely worked outside the mainstream. After World War II, art in the United States was dominated by the Abstract Expressionist movement, which placed great emphasis on large-scale, physical gesture and nonrepresentational subjects. Artists interested in representation and social messages, including many Black American artists, sought opportunities to work outside this mainstream movement, dominated by white men.

Diverse Black American artists were united by a strong desire to express their experiences and to celebrate Black American history and culture.

During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, the Harlem district of New York City became a hub for Black American celebrities and artists. At this time, Black visual artists, writers, and musicians were officially recognized as a vital part of American culture. Diverse Black American artists were united by a strong desire to express their experiences and to celebrate Black American history and culture. Gradually the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance extended through the country.

Another important period for Black American artists was the Depression of the 1930s, during which President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.). This project employed more than 5,000 artists, whose work was commissioned to adorn public buildings across the nation. For the first time, significant numbers of Black American artists were able to work full-time in their profession. Such patronage

supported their participation in cultural life, ending the isolation that many had previously experienced.

The post-World War II period of the 1940s and 1950s was one of heightened activity for Black American artists, who were increasingly awarded fellowships and opportunities for exhibitions and travel abroad. From the 1960s on, the civil rights movement was another force that contributed to a growing interest in Black American art and to the burgeoning of such institutions as Black American museums, galleries, and cultural centers. Black Studies programs were established on college and university campuses across the United States. Black educational institutions, such as Howard University, Fisk University, and Hampton University, also built art collections and trained artists. Among the many Black teacher-artists who influenced a generation of students was Elizabeth Catlett. Her social activism and vision of the role of the Black artist have earned her a unique place in the history of American art.

Sharecropper

Committed to creating socially conscious art, Elizabeth Catlett addresses issues of race and gender, especially the struggles of Black American and Native American women. Her primary subjects in her prints and sculptures are mothers, social activists, and working-class women, such as the sharecropper portrayed in this color linocut. Catlett believed that art can help achieve social change by provoking thought and by planting the seeds of inspiration. She believed that art "should be a voice for the people, especially for those whose voices are quelled by social and political injustices."

In *Sharecropper*, Catlett portrays an elderly Black woman whose face reflects a life of struggle and survival within a brutal social system.

In *Sharecropper*, Catlett portrays an elderly Black woman whose face reflects a life of struggle and survival within a brutal social system. Sharecropping, a system of tenant farming, flourished in the southern United States after the Civil War and the end of slavery. A sharecropper was one who agreed to farm the land of a landowner for a share of the crop. The landlord supplied seeds, tools, food, and clothing on credit, which the sharecropper was obligated to pay back after the crop was sold and the profits were split. Costs were usually so high that most sharecroppers could never repay their mounting debts. Though living conditions for sharecroppers were somewhat better than those of enslaved people, they were still tied to the land with no other options for their livelihood.

While we do not know the name of the woman portrayed in this print or the details of her life, Catlett conveys a sense of her subject's strength and dignity in the face of hardship and racial injustice. With her large straw hat and strong angular features, the woman has a compelling physical presence. Her age is suggested by her white hair and deeply lined skin, but her face, with its bold features, reveals an inner strength and vitality.

Catlett creates a heroic image with her unique style, which combines abstraction with naturalism. She is known for her treatment of the face as an image of racial identity and a record of human experience. Here she clearly articulates the subject's features with some degree of naturalism, as seen in the woman's brown skin, long neck, sad gazing eyes, full lips, and white curly hair. The artist also delineates carefully chosen details, such as the weave of the straw hat, the creases of the woman's clothing, and the lines of her skin. At the same time, she uses distortion with her stylized treatment of line and form. Catlett, who was also a sculptor, seems to have chiseled the sharp angles of the subject's face, creating a mask-like effect. The woman appears to be three-dimensional. She has a sense of mass and volume that seems related to the artist's sculptural work and gives the woman a weighty presence that reinforces her strength. The repetition

of heavy, forceful lines in the work forms patterns that cover the entire surface, producing an intense feeling of rhythm and energy. The movement of the lines in various directions contributes to the power and dynamism of the image and charges it with emotional and psychological tension.

She portrays not so much a specific individual as a symbol of every sharecropper, or perhaps of any person who has endured adversity.

Catlett's expressive approach adds to the symbolic, universal quality of the image. She portrays not so much a specific individual as a symbol of every sharecropper, or perhaps of any person who has endured adversity. The viewer's low vantage point causes the subject to loom above us, with her upper torso, head, and hat filling the frame. The importance of her hat is emphasized by its large size, emphatic detail, and careful placement in the composition. It is slightly cropped at the edges, enhancing its presence and reminding us of the woman's difficult work in the hot sun.

The artist's limited use of color—brown, yellow-green, black, and white—creates dramatic contrast and impact, focusing our attention on specific areas. Catlett emphasizes the sharecropper's brown skin, which contrasts with the print's overall black-and-white surface. Defining the woman's posture and demeanor, the bright yellow-green of her garment also shows off the black-and-white safety pin that clasps her jacket. Yet her pose, facial expression, and prominent placement within the composition evoke a spirit of determination, inner strength, and dignity.

Technique

Sharecropper is a linocut, or linoleum cut, a popular type of relief print made by a process similar to making a woodcut. Catlett achieved the tactile quality by cutting away linoleum with a carving tool. A linocut employs a block constructed of a layer of thick linoleum glued to a piece of wood. The soft linoleum surface is easily carved with tools similar to those used in woodcarving—chisels, gouges, and

special knives. The parts that are to print white are cut away, leaving the black lines in relief. Separate blocks are made to create each color area. The block is inked with a brayer (hand roller) and printed either by hand or in a press.

In an interview, Catlett said:

I learned technique from traditional, establishment schools, and it took me a long time to realize that technique was the main thing to learn from them. But technique is so important! It's the difference between art and ineptitude... You can't make a statement if you can't speak the language; here it's the language of the people, the language of art.

About the Artist

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1915, Elizabeth Catlett was the daughter of parents who were both trained as teachers. Catlett was a precocious child, showing early signs of drawing skills in elementary school. In high school she decided to become an artist.

Catlett attended Howard University, where she studied painting. After graduating in 1937, she became an art teacher at a high school in Durham, North Carolina, but she earned wages lower than those of the white teachers and soon decided to leave the position. During this period, she became increasingly concerned about the plight of the poor and the oppressed, a theme that inspired most of her works.

In 1946, Catlett went to Mexico City on a fellowship. There, she worked at Taller Grafica de Popular (TGP), a print collective established in 1937 by artists committed to addressing Mexican identity and leftist political themes. At TGP, she created *Sharecropper* and many other prints. Catlett ultimately settled in Mexico, where she headed the Sculpture Department of the National University of Mexico and continued producing her own works. Though she was warmly accepted in her adopted country, her identity as a Black American continued to inspire her work. Receiving wide recognition, her art has been exhibited throughout the world.

Key Ideas

1. *Sharecropper* illustrates artist Elizabeth Catlett's commitment to showing the strength and resilience of women, especially women of color, while also bringing attention to their struggles.
2. Catlett's bold, expressive style and her social activism, at a time when the mainstream art world was dominated by white men, have earned her a unique place in the history of American art.
3. This linocut draws attention to the plight of sharecroppers, who had few opportunities to work outside of this often brutal system of tenant farming.

Suggested Questions

1. Elizabeth Catlett was committed to showing the strength of black women in her art. How does she show the strength of this woman? Consider both physical and mental strength. What other details does she include to tell us about this woman's life? How do you think this woman is feeling? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. This is a linocut, a type of print on paper made by cutting away linoleum to create the lines of the picture. What kinds of lines do you see in this print? Use your finger and trace each type of line you see. Look closely to see how Catlett uses lines to make the woman appear three-dimensional.
3. How do you feel when you look at this picture? What about it makes you feel this way? What makes it expressive? How does the artist's limited use of color—brown, yellow-green, black, and white—influence how you feel? How does the point of view affect how you feel?
4. In what ways is this picture a symbol of the condition of women forced to sharecrop for a living, rather than a portrait of an individual?

Dakota, United States, North America
Cradle board cover, 1880, hide, quills, beads, ribbon, sequins, cloth
The Driscoll Art Accessions Endowment Fund, 2003.162.2
9 3/8 x 24 3/4 x 8 3/4 in. (23.81 x 62.87 x 22.23 cm)



Caring for a child is one of a parent’s greatest responsibilities. In a car, babies are strapped into car seats. At mealtime, they sit in a high chair. To protect their children, some Dakota women use a cradle board. What elevates a cradle board cover is its beauty as an artwork rich in spiritual significance. They are made by respected female artists in the community and given to the expectant family.

The Dakota

The Dakota people consider what is now modern-day Minneapolis as their place of emergence. Often incorrectly referred to as the Sioux, the Dakota people emerged from the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, known as Bdote [buh-DOH-tay] in the Dakota language. Eventually, the Dakota expanded their homelands into present-day Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota. “Dakota,” which stands for “friend” or “ally,” moved around the Upper Midwest according to the season and availability of food. They were remarkably resourceful, with an excellent knowledge of harvest and medicine. The Dakota were the largest group among the Plains Indians around the 1500s and 1600s. Through the adoption of horses, the Dakota expanded their hunting capabilities, particularly the hunting of bison. After many years of conflict, the U.S. government forced the Dakota to live on federal reservations that shrank over time as treaties were broken and land was reapportioned to settlers. Despite their reduced circumstances, the Dakota continued to maintain their traditions and practices, working with what they had to survive.

Despite their reduced circumstances, the Dakota continued to maintain their traditions and practices, working with what they had to survive.

Practical, but Highly Valuable

Consider the role of a car seat, high chair, or crib today: they are places for young children to sit, sleep, and eat. In them, children are protected from danger, but they remain able to interact with those around them, and there is easy access for feeding and changing. Those practical qualities are comparable to the functions of a cradle board. The distinction, however, is that cradle board covers are highly respected works of art with strong spiritual meaning. Cradle boards and their covers are made by only the most talented female artists, and they are costly and time-consuming to complete. Female relatives—a mother, grandmother, or an aunt—of an expectant mother make a cradle board for the family. Not everyone is lucky enough to receive such a gift. If a family is not given a cradle board, one can be borrowed. Cradle boards are such an important part of society that young girls have toy-sized versions to teach them how to care for a baby.

Babies and toddlers spend most of their first two years tucked safely in a cradle board. The cradle board and cover, typically made of hide or cloth, are often strapped to an adult’s back, attached to the side of a saddle, or propped against something sturdy. A cradle board has many pieces: a wooden backboard to support the baby, a footrest to prop it up, a hood offering protection from the elements, and a highly decorated cradle board cover.

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Before being placed inside the cradle board, children are swaddled in a cloth and laid down on the wooden backing. They are then tied inside the cradle board cover. Facing outward, the baby is able to remain part of the action. To entertain the baby, toys are suspended from the hood or awning, much like stroller awnings and car-seat handles. Still, what separates these examples from cradle boards is the latter's artistry.

The Art of Quillwork

The use of quills in embroidery, unique to Native American art, takes many months to complete. Gathering the quills is the first hurdle. The most common quill comes from a porcupine, not native to the Great Lakes region. As a result, quills have to be procured via trade, travel, or birds. Quillwork is the domain of women artists, who form special societies to see that the knowledge and skills of community elders is passed down to younger generations. Not every artist is accepted into these societies, so being chosen is quite an honor. The Dakota consider the ability to embroider with quills to be a sacred gift.

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Even when glass beads became popular through trade, these specialized groups remained. The designs come to the makers in dreams, making it unacceptable to copy the design of another. An elaborate design elevates the artwork to a new level: the more detail, the more important the family.

There are many methods of quill embroidery, which far exceeds beadwork in difficulty. In this cradle board cover, the Dakota artist used a two- or three-thread straight stitch with one quill. The thread was sewn into a hide, typically buffalo thanks to its availability, and stitched into a straight line. Beneath it, the artist would stitch a second, or sometimes third, row of thread. Once she had neat, parallel lines, the artist folded a quill back and forth between them. This method of embroidery allowed for the most creativity. To make the quill pliable, the artist would

soak it in water or hold it in her mouth. She then had to flatten it either with her teeth or fingernails, or with a quill flattener made of wood or animal bone. To dye the quills, the barbed end of the quill had to be cut off to expose the hollow center. The quills were then soaked or boiled in vegetable or mineral dye till the desired color was reached. These techniques are all seen in this cradle board cover.

Cradle Board Cover

This elaborate cradle board cover, made of dyed porcupine quills, was clearly made by an experienced artist. Despite its difficulty to master, the quill embroidery appears effortless. What's more, the floral work is perfectly symmetrical and the animals are easily recognizable by their silhouettes: an elk head appears among small and large buffalo heads, dragonflies, a butterfly, and a soaring bird. A large, five-pointed star is embellished with the same sequins seen around the rest of the cover. Bundles of green, orange, and pink ribbon dot its opening, which is held together by three sets of ties, decorated with a repeating pattern of blue, black, and green seed beads. If you were to flip the cradle board cover over, the imagery and coloring would look the same. The cover's top has a large star with a sequin in the middle. Strips of color shoot out of the star's points, which are surrounded by flowers and what appears to be corn. The choice of animals, food, and flowers represents the artist's blessings for the child.

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The flap at the very top has a turquoise diamond design with a yellow and purple cross at its middle. It is surrounded by rows and rows of red quills, book-ended with two purple quills.

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How People Lived

1



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Cradle board cover
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6



Helmet in dragonfly shape
Japan

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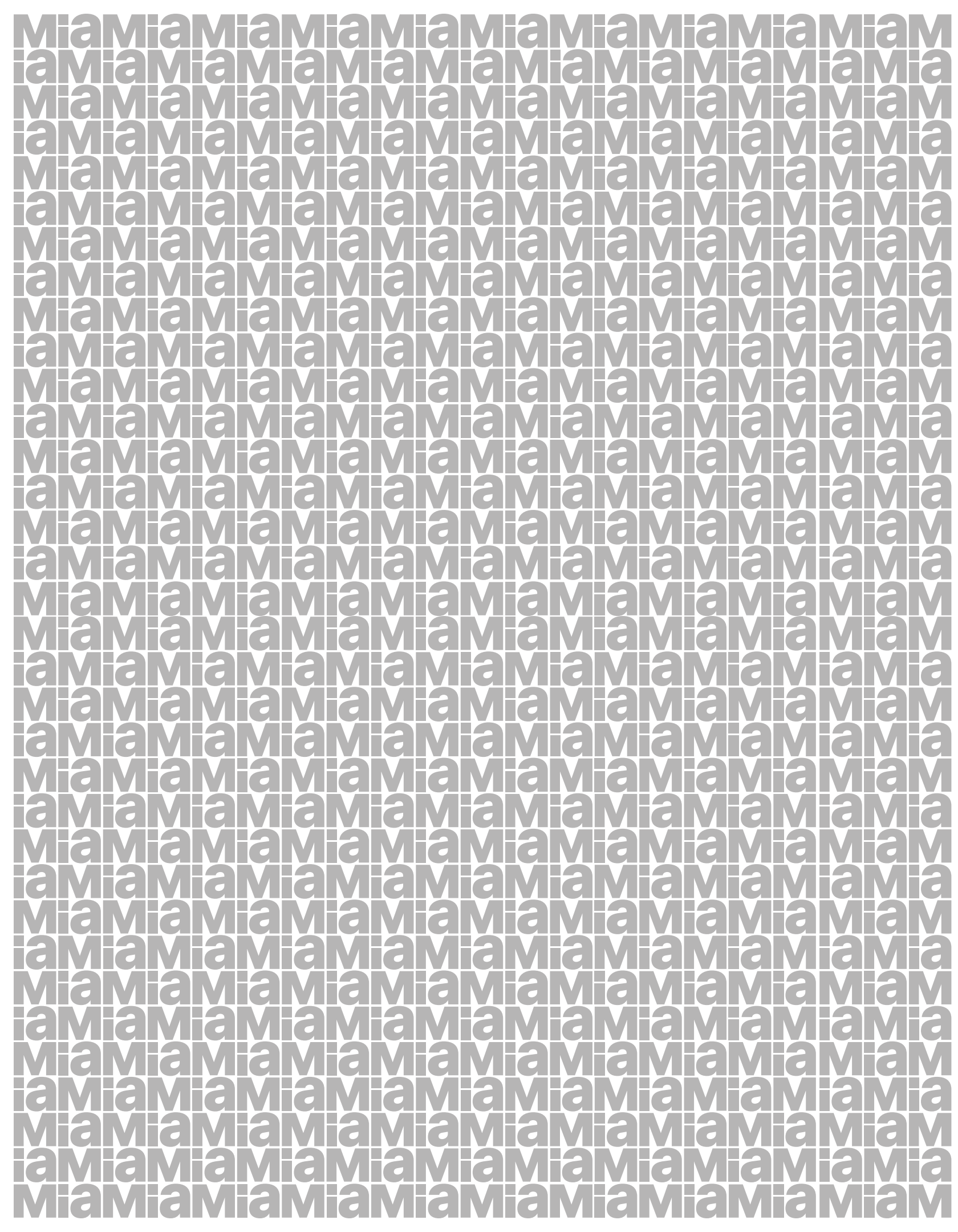
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