

Minneapolis Institute of Art

# Let's Celebrate Life

Art Adventure

Nov 19 and 22 class

# Mia



## What's in a label?

Accession Number: year, group, item  
74.64.5

74 = year of accession: 1974

64 = where this object is within sequence  
of all donations that year: in the 64th  
donated group of objects

5 = where this object is in sequence within  
a group of donated objects: 5th item

Lakshota, United States, North  
America, *Dress*, 1880–1900,  
Leather, cotton, copper disks, bells,  
glass beads, Gift of James David and  
John David, 74.64.5

## Lak̄hóta = friends or allies

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Dakota-Lakota speakers lived in the upper Mississippi Region in territory now organized as the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas. Conflicts with Anishinaabe and Cree peoples pushed the Lakota west onto the Great Plains in the mid- to late-17th century.

**CF:** Use the names the people call themselves.



<https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2014/12/03/north-america-in-lakota/>



## Traditional Lakhóta lands



## Lakhóta reservation lands are located in South Dakota:

- Pine Ridge, home of the most numerous of the Lakota bands
- Rosebud
- Lower Brule
- Cheyenne River
- Standing Rock

Top: [lakotavoice.com](http://lakotavoice.com)

Bottom: [telegram.com](http://telegram.com)

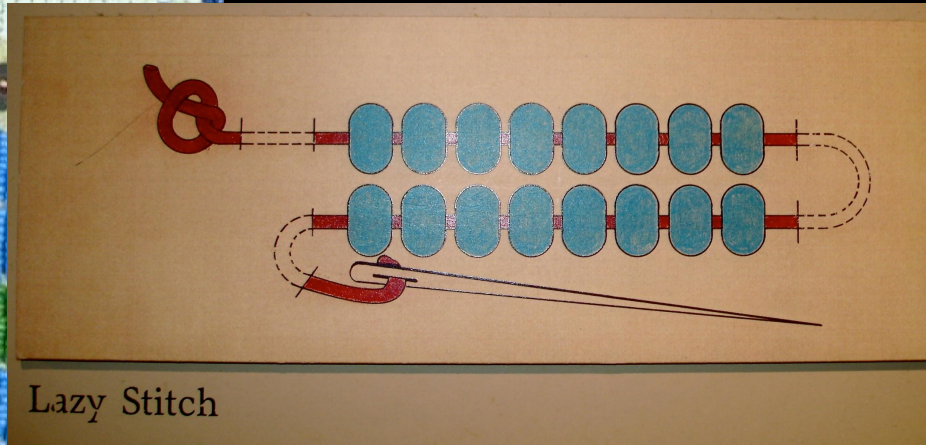
What designs or shapes do you see in the yoke of the dress? (D)



As the Lakḥóta world became more restricted, women focused time and energy on projects like this beaded yoke. The top of the dress is designed to look like stars and tipis reflected in the water, the shore line (land), and the sacred turtle.

CF: The artist was once known!





Lazy Stitch

Lane stitch

<http://crafting.idahohistory.org/beadwork/>

Prop idea: vial of seed beads

Turtle is a key player in the Lakḥóta creation story. When other animals failed, turtle succeeded in bringing mud up from the ocean to restore the land after a worldwide flood. The Creator spread the land on the turtle's back, which is why North America is called "Turtle Island." Turtle brings protection and good health, so it is common for women's clothing and accessories to be decorated with this symbol.





Lakḥóta women wore beaded dresses to ceremonies where they would dance and celebrate with their communities and families. The dress weighs about 20 pounds; women dance slowly and gracefully to the beat of the music. These strong and remarkable women were accustomed to putting up and taking down tipis, scraping and tanning buffalo hides, and moving the entire contents of their homes quickly and efficiently.

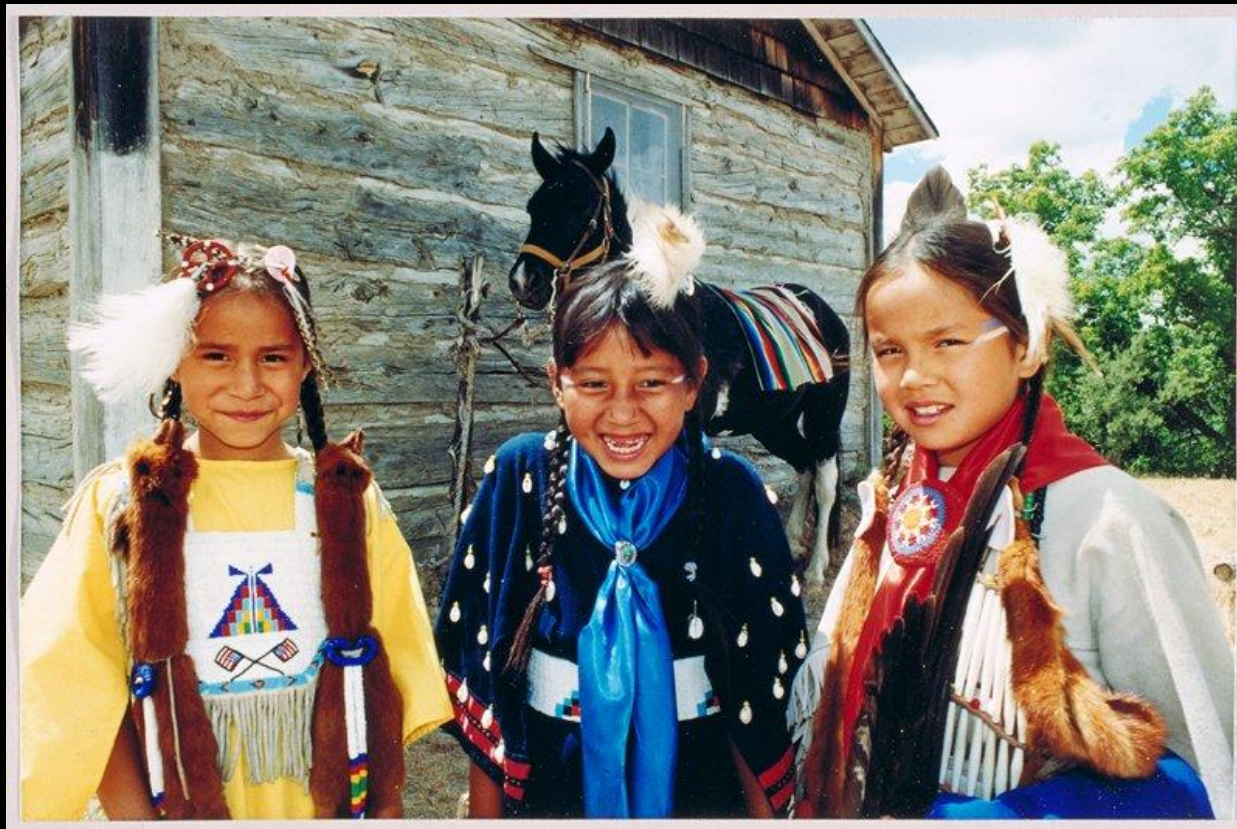


**CF:** Lakḥóta women still wear elaborate ceremonial outfits, dance, and celebrate with their communities and families at pow-wows. The jingle dress dance brings spiritual healing to the land.

**CF:** Avoid the word costume in describing traditional clothing.



Dresses like this are worn to special celebrations. What kind of clothes do you wear on special occasions? (A)



David P. Little, *Three Lakota Girls in Their Dancing Dress*, 1991, Color coupler print, The John R. Van Derlip Fund 92.9.2



Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community Wacipi (powwow)

<https://www.fujix-forum.com/media/jingle-dress-dancers-jpg.200967/>

Substitutes: think about your theme, consider your route, and find an example between stops. Textiles from other cultures are fine to include!



Miao, Skirt, 20th century, G210 (above)



Lakḥóta, Dress, c. 1880-1900, G261

This dress combines materials that came from Euro-Americans and other Native peoples. Stroud Cloth, wool made in the town of Stroud in Gloucestershire County, England, had been incorporated into Native American art for several decades.



**Nick Cave, United States, 1959, *Soundsuit*, 2010**, Metal, wood, plastic, pigments, cotton and acrylic fibers, Gift of funds from Alida Messinger, 2011.12a,b, © Nick Cave and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY

Soundsuits are often shown as freestanding sculptures, but Cave originally made them to be worn.



Nick Cave biography:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nick-Cave-American-artist>

Fallen twigs collected, cut, drilled, and pieced together (made as a reaction to beating of Rodney King by LA police officers in 1991)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@beleves2be/video/6837986164171885829>

Soundsuits can express, hide, protect, and/or celebrate the wearer's identity. Cave wanted to mask identity and scramble notions of race, class, and gender. You can be whatever you want to be in a soundsuit.



Soundsuits are made of cast-off goods and clothing found in thrift stores, flea markets, auctions, and art fairs.





This one is made of noisemakers, sweater fragments, doilies, tambourines, and more.

What do you see that looks like a toy? (D) What might this suit sound like as it moves? (I)

What would you include on your own soundsuit? (A)

What props could you use?



Cage stages events in which the Soundsuits make noise and move, with performers who take on the characters.



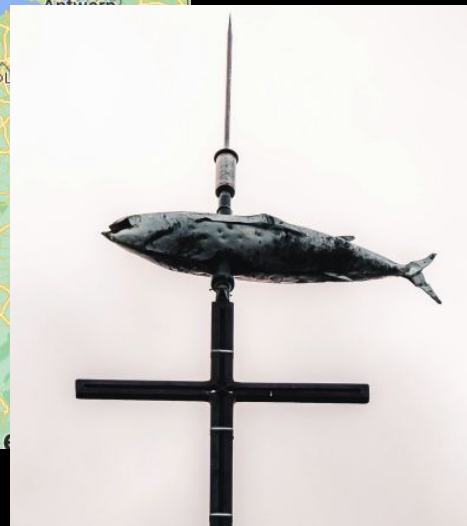
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpNcmh3rxko>



**Paul Signac, France,**  
***Blessing of the Tuna Fleet***  
**at Groix, 1923, Oil on**  
canvas, The William Hood  
Dunwoody Fund, the John R.  
Van Derlip Fund and Gift of  
funds from Bernice  
Dalrymple, 62.36

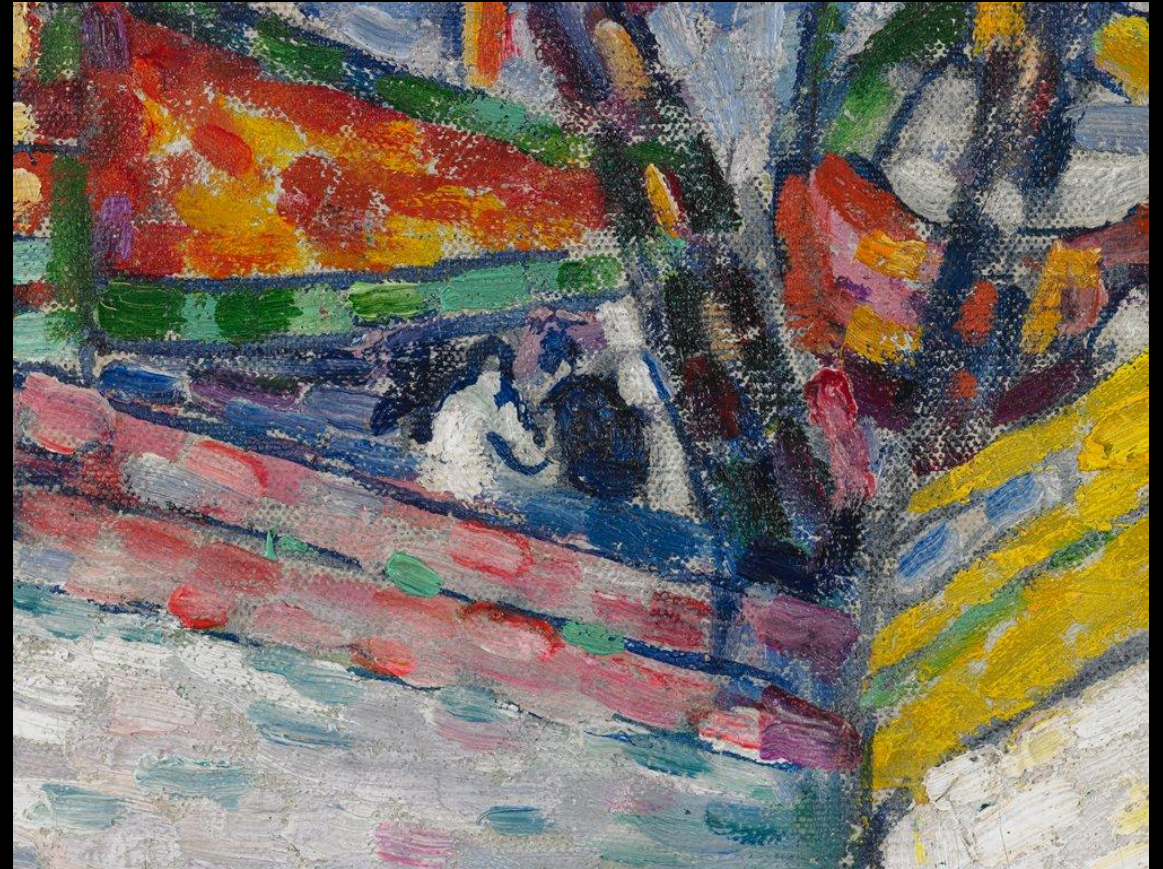


The island of Groix was the first tuna port in France at the beginning of the 20th century. Their products traveled as far as Switzerland, England, Germany, Algeria... The people of Groix were so proud that they replaced the traditional rooster on the village church tower with a tuna and it's still there!



The whole society revolved around tuna: fishermen, ship owners, cannery workers, blacksmiths, carpenters, sailors, even the local pharmacist who created a tuna-based ointment. (I wonder how it smelled!)

The whole town gathers to celebrate the blessing. The communities relied on the fisherman's catch to support and feed them. Look for the fishermen!





Boats are cleaned and decorated with flags, then blessed with Holy Water by a priest who stands on another vessel as the boats pass by.

The ceremony typically takes place in spring or early summer. Prayers are said for a successful year of fishing. It's also a time to remember men and women who have died at sea.

(Wikipedia)



Associative questions:

Let's step into the picture.

Where would you like to be?

How would you feel if you were here?



Visual elements:

What kind of **lines** do you see?

Signac believed that vertical lines—the masts—produce a feeling of joy.

Horizontal lines—the horizon and the ripples of the sea—produce a feeling of calm.





The diagonal lines of the fishing poles and the triangles of the boats provide movement and action—along with the flags waving in the breeze!

What **colors** do you see?

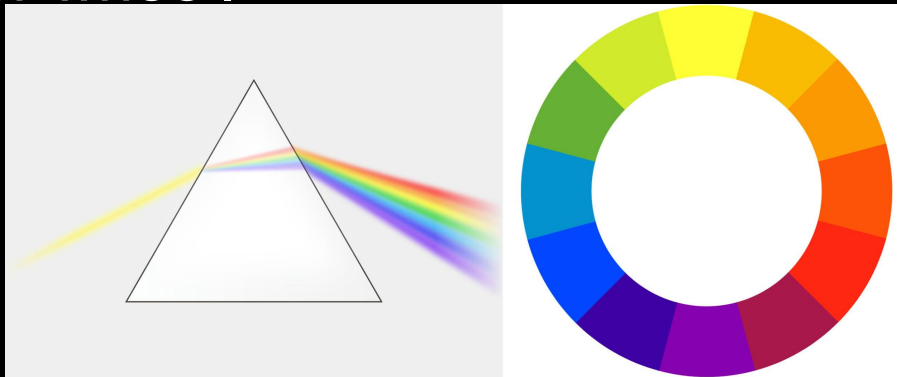
Bright colors and thick, short brushstrokes also add emotions.

Pick a color you see in the painting.  
How does that color make you feel?

Pick up a pretend paintbrush. How  
would you make the brushstrokes in  
this painting?



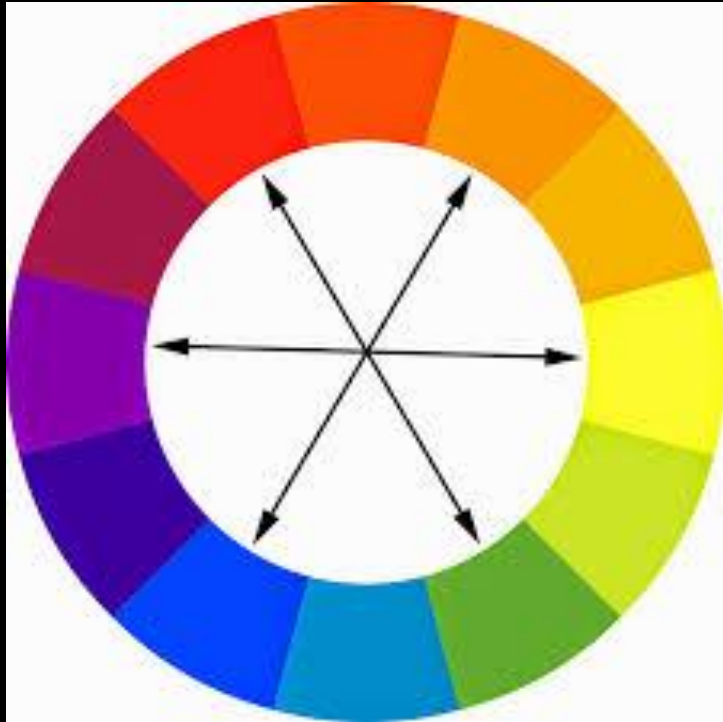
Signac emphasizes the intensity (saturation) of the colors. Colors are most intense when they are straight from the tube and not mixed with another color. Mixing a color with gray, black, or white will make it duller, as will mixing it with its complement, the opposite color on the color wheel.



Color wheel prop



When you place complementary colors next to one another, they look more intense and also add movement.



Color wheel prop

What other props could you use?



Today, picturesque seaside communities attract many tourists to places that look much the same as before. Open air markets still sell the island's produce from the land and sea.

<https://www.visit-orient-brittany.com/unmissable/island-of-groix/>





**latmul, Papua New Guinea, Oceania, *Hand drum (kundu)*, 20th century, Wood, rope, pigment, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 98.37.3**



right: Wikipedia

left: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Papua-New-Guinea>



**A world of water:** The Iatmul live in villages along the Sepik, a great river. It winds in serpentine fashion down from the mountains, through cloud forests, tropical rainforests, and mangroves. It is the largest unpolluted freshwater system in Papua New Guinea and one of the largest freshwater basins in the Asia Pacific region. Waterbird and crocodile populations are supported by the 1,500 lakes and other wetlands. The many habitats of the basin are globally known for their biodiversity.

<https://savetheseplik.org/campaign/life-on-the-seplik/>

*Kundu* means drum. This drum is made of wood, hourglass-shaped, with one end covered with snake or lizard skin for the membrane.

One end is closed, the other open. These are the two major realms, the earth and the sky.

A crocodile links the two worlds. Look for three crocodiles on the drum. (The handle and each of the drum openings.)





The crocodile connects the latmul to their ancestors. In their creation story, a giant crocodile named Wagen created the land by diving into the primordial ocean and bringing up mud on its back. The mud formed an island, and more land grew from there. The latmul believe that the world still rests on Wagen's back. The movements of its body and tail cause earthquakes and create rivers.

Spikes represent the crocodile's spiked skin and sharp teeth.



The Iatmul people use songs and musical instruments to tell their creation story. They recite long lists of mythological ancestor names and other details in singing contests.

The music they make connects the community to the spirit world. They believe the ancestors will help the community when they are pleased or harm them when they are not.



The drum is also used in initiation (graduation) celebrations when boys transition from boyhood to manhood. \*Through scarification rituals the boys are said to become crocodiles. The cuts allow the crocodile spirits to enter the body.

This initiation ceremony is for boys only.

(\*This information is provided in case the topic comes up. You do not need to introduce it.)

Skin cutting ritual to resemble crocodiles:  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-45297699>



The ceremony takes place at the men's house. The drum provides rhythms for the dances and songs performed. After the initiation the young men are considered ready to marry and have children.

**CF:** Initiation ceremonies and rituals are still important today.

Drums like this are played for special celebrations. Think of something you celebrate. What kind of music would you play? (A)

Drums and flutes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI42I4sXHOs>



Men congregate in intricately carved “spirit houses,” a meeting place to talk, eat, relax, and discuss problems confronting the village. Ceremonial objects, such as hand drums, are stored inside the house.

**CF:** Artisans who carve house posts, orators’ stools, ceremonial hooks and other features found within are honored by their community. Today collectors seek out beautifully carved historic and contemporary works.

<https://sacredland.org/sepik-river-basin-papua-new-guinea/>





**John Singer Sargent, *The Birthday Party*, 1885, Oil on canvas, The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund and the John R. Van Derlip Fund, 62.84**



What's going on in this picture?  
(D)

What's the first thing you see in  
this picture? (D)

The party is for Robert Besnard's birthday. He is featured in this painting by John Singer Sargent, a friend of the family.

How do you think Robert feels about his birthday cake? (I)

How would you like to celebrate your birthday? (A)

<https://new.artsmia.org/stories/boyhood-john-singer-sargents-birthday-boy/>





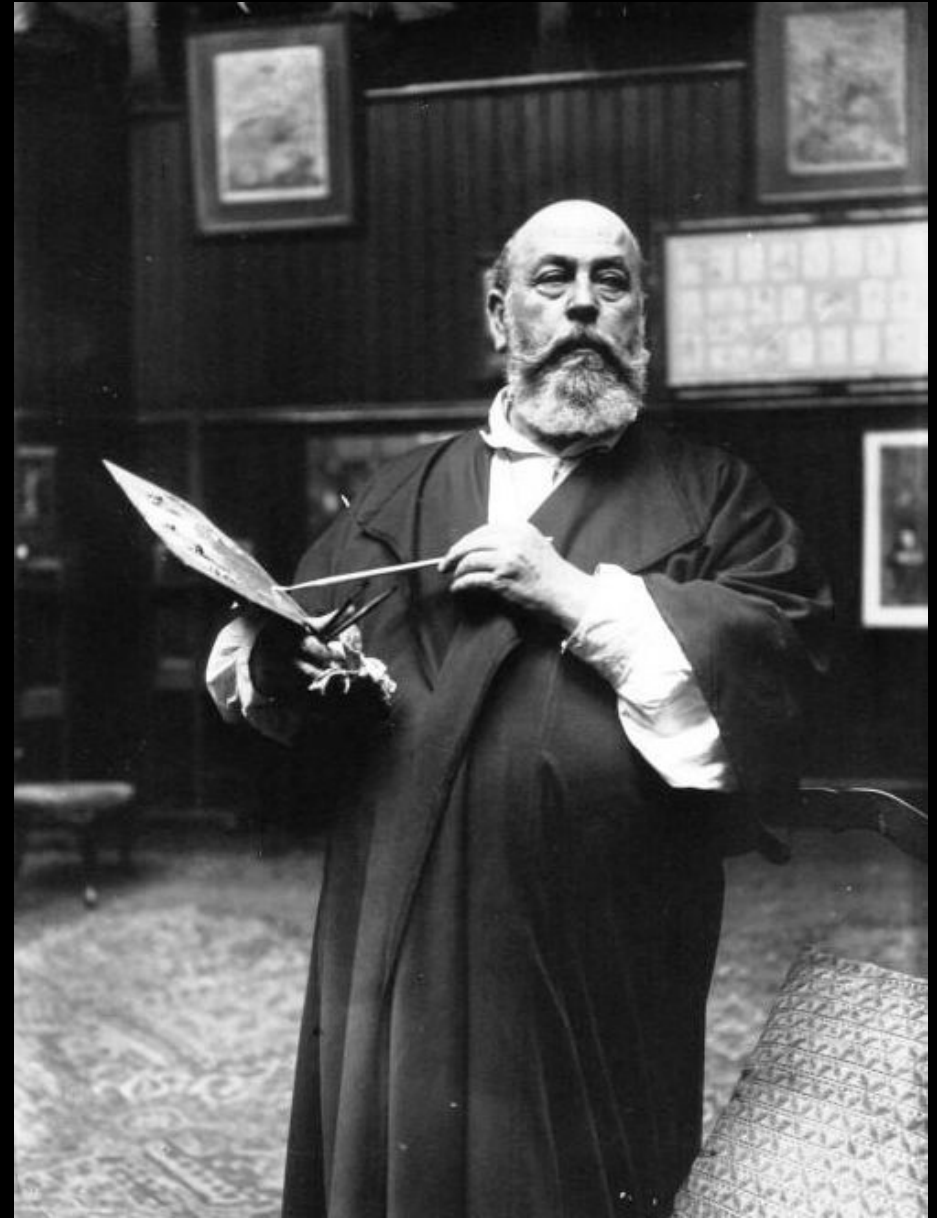
Robert's mother, Charlotte, is cutting the cake. She called him "Le Bi," which means "Little B." This view of her face is called a profile. (Everybody turn to the side so we can see your profile.)

His father, Albert, stands in the dim light of the background, so we can't see his face very well.



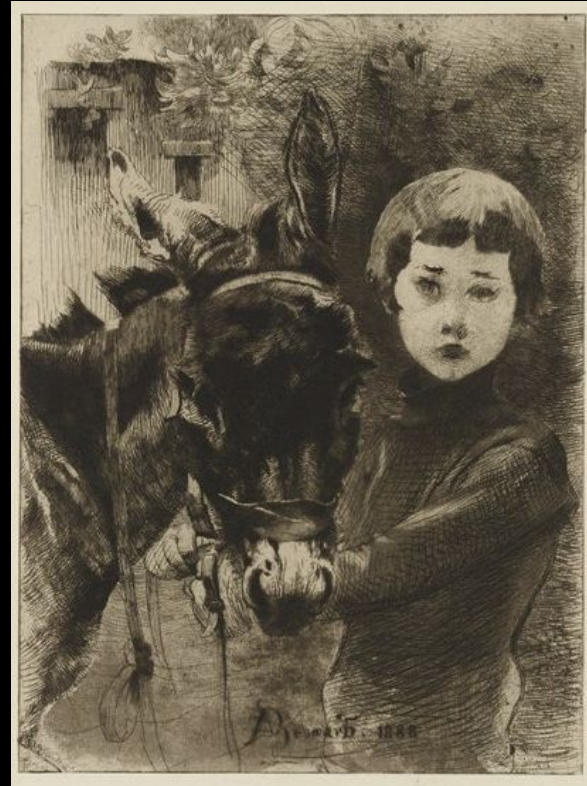


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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul-Albert\\_Besnard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul-Albert_Besnard)

Robert is the oldest son. The family will have three more children. Albert made prints and paintings of his family.



Germaine, age six, Robert, age nine, and Philippe, age four. Baby Jean is not included.

Here are the Besnard children five years later: Robert, Germaine, Philippe, and Baby Jean. They all became artists when they grew up.

Looks like Dad is in the background again!



Albert Besnard, *The Artist's Family*, 1890, oil on canvas, © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay, Paris)

Charlotte and Albert were artists in Paris at the time of the Impressionists. Impressionist art captured a moment in time, as if it were just happening. They used quick brushstrokes and liked to show how light reflects off surfaces.

Where do you see reflected light in this picture? (D, I)

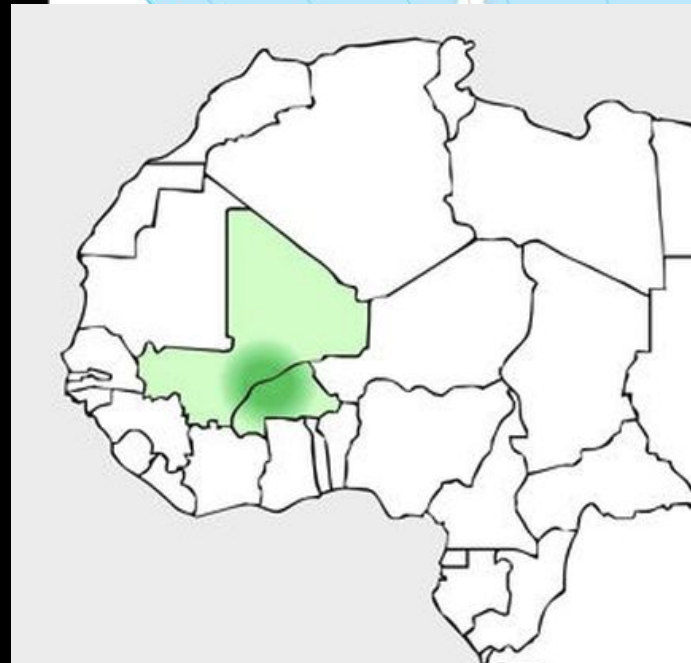
How would you make the brushstrokes? (A)





Bwa, Burkina Faso, Africa,  
Plank Mask, 1960, Wood,  
pigment, The William Hood  
Dunwoody Fund, 98.2

The Bwa live in central Burkina Faso and SE Mali. The population of over 300,000 lives in communities with no central government, ruled by male elders. They are known for their scarification and elaborate plank masks. Cotton farming is the primary source of income along with crops such as millet, rice, sorghum, yams, and peanuts. These crops along with other grains and various fruits are used for both nutritional and medicinal purposes.



Masks are used in performances to embody nature or ancestor spirits that interact with human beings and ensure the well-being of the Bwa community. They are danced at:

- important funerals to honor the person and escort their soul to the world beyond
- agricultural festivities to ensure the proper change of the seasons
- initiation (graduation) celebrations to help introduce young men and women to the secrets and responsibilities of adulthood (social behaviors)





This mask is decorated with shapes that make a face. Look closely. What shapes do you see? (D) How did the artist use the shapes to make a face? (I)

**Eyes of the owl:** a bird of power

**Projecting mouth:** sacred well (a place to acquire wisdom); person looks through this opening

What other shapes do you see?



**Double zig-zag:** path of proper social behavior established by the ancestors (has ups and downs).

**Crescent moon:** time of ceremonial year when masks are danced (quarter moon).

**Checkerboard:** value of learning with age.

Graduates are given a new white goat hide to sit on during ceremonies. As the young person becomes an elder, the hide ages and darkens. The checkerboard pattern shows the reliance between the elders (dark areas) and the young initiates (light areas).

**CF:** Shapes can have different meanings on different masks. We do not always know the meanings.



This mask connects the community to their ancestors, who taught the people proper behaviors.

Associative questions:

What do we learn from our grownups?

How do adults and young people rely upon one another?

The masks are worn with full body coverings made of plant fibers for protection from the powerful spirits.

*“I am not myself.”*

The wearer gives himself up to allow the spirit to enter the mask.

Musicians play flutes and drums and women sing songs while the dancer moves rapidly. With the fiber outfit twirling, he twists back and forth, dips low to the ground, and rotates to suggest a flying spirit.

Khan Academy:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/a/mask-nwantantay-bwa-peoples>



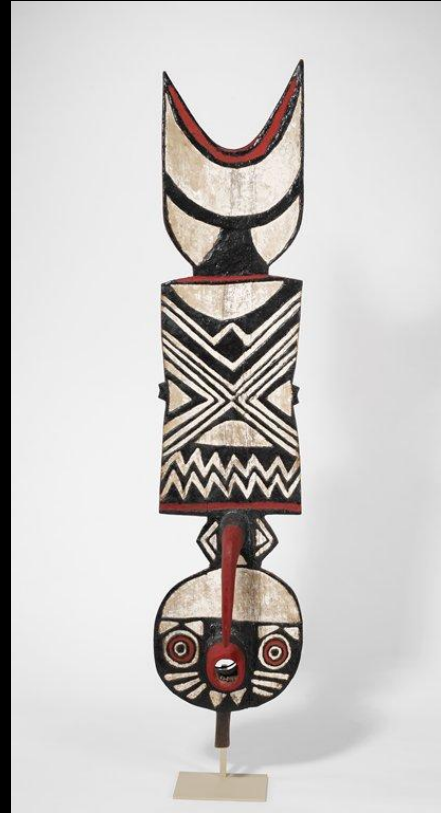
<https://library.the-possible.org/post/119251438497/bwa-plank-masks-burkina-faso-c-1960>



The large hook may represent the hornbill. Birds are associated with the world of the spirits (remember the Yoruba mask). They have the ability to live in both spheres; flying between the world of the living and the world of the dead.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-billed\\_hornbill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-billed_hornbill)



Choosing substitutes worksheet will be emailed and posted on the guide website. Due December 10/13.

[Google doc sign up for check-ins about your individual presentations](#)