

Reimagining Native/ American Art

Teachers Guide, Grades K-12



Mia

Reimagining Native/American Art

November 11, 2023–May 27, 2024

This guide is designed to facilitate conversations about “Reimagining Native/American Art,” a new kind of exhibition at Mia that looks at Native American and American art through four Dakota worldviews or philosophies. It can also be used to help prepare students for a museum tour or self-guided experience. It presents information about selected artworks that illustrate each of the four main themes, and it contains images and discussion prompts. Discussions begin with close looking and description, and then follow up with more complex questions. We recommend you review the content and plan your lessons, discussions, or tours in alignment with the interests and needs of your students.

Looking to visit the exhibition with your students? To register your group of 10 or more students for a self-guided experience, [please use this form](#).

We look forward to seeing you at Mia soon!

A celebration of “Relationality,” the idea that everything in the world—nature, ideas, objects, and people, past, present, and future—exists in relationship with everything else, is at the heart of this experimental installation. Every aspect of this collaboration was shaped by being together, listening, honoring lived knowledge, and respecting points of view. Mia curators Jill Ahlberg Yohe and Robert Cozzolino worked with Andrea Carlson (Ojibwe; artist), Jordan Poorman Cocker (Gáuigú [Kiowa] Nation; curator), Bridget R. Cooks (curator and professor, University of California, Irvine), Dakota Hoska (Oglála Lakḥóta, Pine Ridge, Wounded Knee; curator, Denver Art Museum), and Darlene St. Clair (Mdewakanṭuwanṭ Dakota, Lower Sioux; professor, St. Cloud State University) as advisers. We also thank Gwen Westerman (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate; poet, artist, professor, Mankato State University), Šišóka Dúta (Bdé Hdakinṭan Oyánke; Dakota-language educator, and translator), and Nicole Martin Rogers (White Earth Ojibwe Nation descendant; independent consultant, Indigenous evaluator).

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Cover: Jeffrey Gibson (Choctaw-Cherokee, born 1972), *WHAT WE WANT IS FREE*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, glass beads and artificial sinew inset into wood frame, 59¾ × 69¾ × 2⅞ in. (177.8 × 48.26 × 48.26 cm). Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky and the Jane and James Emison Endowment for Native American Art, 2021.28

Introduction

This teachers guide is designed to introduce you and your students to a suite of experimental galleries at the Minneapolis Institute of Art that invite visitors to think about American art through the lens of Dakota worldviews or philosophies. To do this, Mia curators and a group of Native advisers selected artwork from Mia's collections of Native American and American art, which are usually studied separately, and organized them in a brand-new way. The new arrangement (installation) prompts us to think of these works as having a broad, shared history.

This guide presents a selection of artworks from each gallery and invites you and your students to look closely, think critically, make connections to yourselves, and connect the artworks to a main theme that represents a Dakota worldview. These themes are Place/Living Land, Place/Histories, Relations, and Making the Future Together. If it is relevant to your students and curriculum, you can also talk about how and why the histories of Native American and American art have been kept separate for so long.

The artworks in this installation are by American artists of many backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Installed side by side, they encourage viewers to seek areas of commonality and respect any points of difference. We encourage you to think about how relationships between places, people, and ideas—including your own—can expand what we think of as American art and Native American art.

Mnisota Makoce (Gallery 301)

The Minneapolis Institute of Art resides on Dakota land, an area called Mnisota Makoce, or “where the clear waters reflect the sky.” Extending beyond government-defined borders, Mnisota Makoce includes land in what we now call Canada, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Mnisota Makoce has long inspired artists of many different backgrounds, and the artworks in this gallery are grounded in this place, tied to the people, the land, and their relations. Relations are not limited to human relations—they include the relationships among animals, humans, and nature. Before reading about these five artworks, look closely at each and think about how the artist might have been connected to the ideas of people, land, place, and relations.

Wókiksuye (Remembrance), 2018

Sisters Kateri and Eileen O'Keefe created this horse mask, titled *Wókiksuye (Remembrance)*, as part of a community project to create horse regalia at Dakota Wicoh'ą, a Minnesota nonprofit dedicated to revitalizing the Minnesota Dakota language. The mask honors and affirms the Dakota people's deep relationship with horses.

The artists also addressed their community history in the design of the beadwork. The work honors the 38 Dakota men who were hanged in Mankato, Minnesota, after the U.S.-Dakota war of 1862 and two more who were later hanged at Fort Snelling because they all took action against the U.S. government after years of unjust land seizures and broken promises. The beadwork marks the deaths of these Dakota men with 38 + 2 beaded crosses.

The body of the mask is constructed of tanned deer hide and eagle feathers. Deer, or *taḥca*, are relatives who have long instructed and sustained the Dakota people. Eagles are important because they fly closest to the Creator. Their feathers are presented to individuals to recognize and honor their deeds.

Discussion Questions

What draws your attention first when you look at this horse mask? Why?

What materials are used to make this horse mask? How do these materials relate to the idea of respecting animals and nature?

The artwork honors horses, eagles, and deer, all important relations of the Dakota. What relations are most important to you? How might you honor them in an artwork?

What elements of the mask honor the 38 + 2 men hanged by the United States? Why do you think it was important for the artists to acknowledge the murder of these men?



Kateri O'Keefe (Dakota, Lower Sioux) and Eileen O'Keefe (Dakota, Lower Sioux), *Wókiksuye (Remembrance)*, 2018, brain-tanned deer hide, Czech seed beads, eagle feathers, brass sequins, abalone shells, canvas, 16½ × 23 in. (41.91 × 58.42 cm). Collection of Dakota Wicoh'ą (dakotawicohan.org)

The Falls of St. Anthony, 1848

Seth Eastman's painting depicts Owámniyomni (whirlpool), a place sacred to the Mdewakanton Dakota. The painting, however, is titled *The Falls of St. Anthony*, based on the name given to the falls by Father Louis Hennepin in 1680. It was not unusual for European American colonizers to rename Native places.

Today, there is a movement to challenge and reverse these European names. In recent years, for instance, a dedicated group of Dakota people and their allies led the successful effort to restore Bde Maka Ska, a lake in Minneapolis, to its first name.

Seth Eastman is one of the best known of the many 19th-century artists eager to document the largely unsettled land west of the Mississippi River. In *The Falls of St. Anthony* he showed the falls and adjacent riverbanks nearly untouched by the commercial development that would come soon with increased Euro-American settlement. He alluded to this coming change by including in the middle distance the first dam built above the falls in 1848, between the east bank of the Mississippi and Nicollet Island.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at *The Falls of St. Anthony*. What do you see? Imagine what you might hear if you were in the place and time when this was painted. Think about how the "clear water reflects the sky." This is Mnisota Makoce.



Seth Eastman (American, 1808–1875), *The Falls of St. Anthony*, 1848, oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 23 in. (34.45 × 43.97 cm). Gift of Dr. John and Colles Larkin and the John R. Van Derlip Fund, 2009.16.1

How do you think this painting relates to the idea of relations? How do you think the artist felt about the place he was painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

Paintings like this one by Seth Eastman can be considered to represent the point of view/perspective of the colonizer or Euro-American. Why do you think it is important to consider the painting in this way? How does this change how you see or think about the painting?

Bird stone, 26th–25th century BCE

A Native artist carved this simple, abstracted bird-shaped stone thousands of years ago as a ceremonial weight for a hunter's atlatl (spear-throwing device). The delicate beauty of its carving suggests another, less utilitarian purpose as well—perhaps as an emblem of prestige or a clan symbol.

The bird stone is a beautiful reminder that Native people were creating useful and artistic items long before settlers arrived in the Americas. It helps people today to understand just how long these have been Native lands.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at the bird stone. What are some of the details you notice? What do you wonder about it?

Now, imagine holding the bird stone. What do you think it might feel like? Why do you suppose the tactile aspect of the stone mattered to the artist who carved it?

Why do you think it might be important for a museum to exhibit a 4,000-year-old bird stone next to a beaded mask made only five years ago?



Archaic Woodlands artist, *Bird stone*, 26th–25th century BCE, slate, $1\frac{1}{16} \times 5\frac{1}{8} \times \frac{1}{16}$ in. ($4 \times 13 \times 2.1$ cm). Gift of Beverly N. Grossman, 2001.63

Lake Superior Landscape, 1981



George Morrison (American [Grand Portage Anishinaabe], 1919–2000), *Lake Superior Landscape*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, $38\frac{7}{8} \times 62\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{16}$ in. (91.12 × 152.08 × 2.54 cm). The Jane and James Emison Endowment for Native American Art, 2015.¹

George Morrison, who was given the Ojibwe names Wah-wah-ta-ga-nah-gah-boo (“Standing in the Northern Lights”) and Gwe-ki-ge-nah-gah-boo (“Turning the Feather Around”) by elder Walter Caribou, painted the Lake Superior landscape throughout his life. His ancestors were the first humans in this area around what the Ojibwe call Gichi-Gami, or “Great Sea” (Lake Superior). It comes as little surprise then that this largest freshwater lake in the world by area and third by volume, is so central to his work. The rocks on its northern shore—nearly as old as Earth itself—are as endlessly fascinating as the powerful water.

“Every moment, the horizon is present,” Morrison said of the lake. “The horizon has been an obsession with me for most of my life. . . . I think of the horizon line as the edge of the world, the dividing line between water and sky, color and texture. It brings up the literal idea of space in a painting. From the horizon, you go beyond the edge of the world to the sky and, beyond that, to the unknown.”

Discussion Questions

Spend some time looking at George Morrison's painting of Lake Superior. Describe what you see. How do you feel as you look at this painting? What about it makes you feel this way?

The theme of this gallery focuses on Mnisota Makoce, Dakota lands in what we now call Canada, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. How does this painting embody Mnisota Makoce, which translates as “where the clear waters meet the sky”?

Based on this painting, how do you think George Morrison felt about the landscape around Lake Superior? What do you see that makes you say that? Think about a landscape that is meaningful to you. How might you show your relationship to that land in a work of art?

Compare and contrast George Morrison's painting with Seth Eastman's painting of the sacred Dakota site renamed St. Anthony Falls.

The Late Spring Arrival, 2022



Lamar Peterson (American, born 1974), *The Late Spring Arrival*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 × 60 in. (121.9 × 152.4 cm). Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky, 2023.^{15.1}

In his painting *The Late Spring Arrival*, Lamar Peterson explored the pleasurable hobby of gardening—one not always associated with or accessible to Black men. In this work, the artist depicted a man lying in repose in his garden, caught in a moment of solitude and joy. A swirling group of sticker-like bees further enliven the painting surface. While the man appears happy, confidently taking pride in his lush gardens, Peterson's rich palette and the angular framing of the figure between the plantings create a tension between the visible happiness and the implied challenges of the outside world. Peterson painted this in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. He wrote about this painting:

In *The Late Spring Arrival*, an African American man is enjoying the fruits of his labor in his garden as he attempts to process the despair, fury, and fear that entwined the public regarding the coronavirus and the murders of Black people at the hands of police. The young man in this painting is a proud and gleeful gardener taking advantage of moments of respite and self-care in nature.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at the details in Lamar Peterson's painting *The Late Spring Arrival*. What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

Describe some of the details in the painting that you like best. How does the painting make you feel? What about it makes you feel this way?

Why do you think it was important to include this painting by a contemporary Minneapolis artist in this gallery? How has the artist expressed his relationship with nature?

Why do you think it was important for Lamar Peterson to paint this at a time when many people were processing the despair, fury, and fear they felt because of the coronavirus and the murder of Black citizens at the hands of police here and across the country?

Before moving on . . .

Gallery Activity: After you have spent some time with these five artworks, select some others that capture your attention. Think about how each one embodies the themes of place and relations so important to the Dakota concept of Mnisota Makoce. What do you imagine was the artist's relation to place, nature, animals, and other humans? What do you see in the artwork that makes you think so?

Honoring the Living Land (Gallery 302)

What does it mean to honor the land—its plants, soil, minerals, and animals? How can we draw attention to the ways in which we are interconnected and find joy and life in our environment? How can we give back to the land that sustains us? The artwork gathered in this gallery responds in different ways to these questions, honoring what we find here, no matter where we are.

As you look at each artwork in this gallery, consider the art materials, subject matter, and colors and patterns the artists used. Why might these designs and subjects be significant? Why do you suppose these materials were selected? Think of the natural materials that surround you every day. What materials would you use to create an artwork? Why?

Waterfall, 1993



Truman Lowe (Ho-Chunk, 1944–2019), *Waterfall*, 1993, wood, 74 × 72 × 67 in. (187.96 × 182.88 × 170.18 cm). The Patricia and Peter Frechette Endowment for Art Acquisition, 2023.5.2a-c

In *Waterfall*, strands of ash wood pour down from a fixed position, creating a sense of movement. Water, the source of all life, was an endless stream of inspiration for Truman Lowe. Lowe grew up along the banks of the Black River in Wisconsin, where he was raised in an artistic Ho-Chunk family of splint-ash basket makers. Lowe was immersed in a Woodlands community living in relation to the land.

Discussion Questions

Take a moment to look at the waterfall. How would you describe the motion of the materials in this artwork? Now, think of the movement and sounds of a waterfall if you have heard one.

Water is a necessary part of life—for plants, animals, and us. How did Lowe honor water with this sculpture?

Why do you suppose the artist used strips of wood to create this waterfall? How does his choice fit in with the theme of honoring the living land?

Floral Legacy, 2019

Floral Legacy pays tribute to historic hide bags adorned with quill- and beadwork made by Dakota women. On one side of the purse, the hide is embellished by a beaded floral stem with delicate and symmetrical flowers and tendrils. The other side features 20 thin, horizontal bands of crimson-colored quillwork and a tightly quilled floral design, bursting with color. Every seam and the handle of the purse is decorated with quills. This technique requires extraordinary patience and persistence—qualities highly valued in Dakota societies.

Discussion Questions

What draws your attention first when you look at this bag? What about it draws your attention?

Now take a moment to look closely at the bag. What more can you find? Name some of the different materials the artist used to decorate the bag. Describe the different textures you see.

The artist, Holly Young, dyed and applied many porcupine quills to decorate this bag. This technique, called “quilling,” is very time-consuming. Think about the processes of removing, cleaning, and dyeing the quills before they were even applied to the bag. What do they suggest about the importance of honoring all relations, including animals?

How did Young honor the living land by making this bag? What about the living land, or environment, is important to you? How would you honor the land in an artwork?



Holly Young (Standing Rock Dakhóta, born 1977), *Floral Legacy*, 2019, quills, beads, tin cones, brass sequins, thimbles, satin, calico, fabric, brass bells, feathers, elk hide, 20 × 17 × 2¼ in. (50.8 × 43.18 × 5.72 cm). Gift of Funds from Maria Eggemeyer, Maria Wagner Reamer, and Therese M. Blaine in Recognition of the Friends of the Institute, 2019.65

Untitled, 1997



Kay Sekimachi (American, born 1926), *Untitled*, 1997, wasp paper, handmade paper, 3 × 6 × 6 in. (50.8 × 43.18 × 5.72 cm). Gift of Ruth and David Waterbury, 2013.80.3

Nature gives us many gifts—food, beauty, shelter—and artists respond to them in many unexpected ways. Kay Sekimachi, a groundbreaking fiber artist and weaver, made this bowl using paper from a wasp's nest. In transforming them into a bowl, she honored the beauty and natural source of her materials in surprising ways. By the early 1970s, Sekimachi was renowned for weaving sculptural forms that gracefully helped define new possibilities for three-dimensional fiber art. This bowl invites the viewer to behold the beauty of the wasp's nest, abandoned in nature and given another life in this new form.

Discussion Questions

After looking at Kay Sekimachi's bowl, what do you notice? What do you wonder?

Now imagine you could hold it in your hand. How do you suppose it would feel? How light or heavy do you think it would be?

What do you think of when you think about wasps? If you have ever seen a wasp's nest, you may have seen hundreds of wasps flying in and out. The artist of this bowl saw beauty in the paper "woven" by the wasps and combined it with her own paper to make this bowl. What things in nature that you find beautiful could you use to make an artwork?

Why do you think this artwork was displayed in the gallery that focuses on honoring the living land and the connection between our natural world and us?

Sierra and her family, on the Mississippi shore, 2021



Leslie Barlow (American, born 1989), *Sierra and her family, on the Mississippi shore*, 2021, oil, pastel, and acrylic on canvas, 59½ × 47½ × 2½ in. (151.4 × 120.7 × 6.7 cm). Gift of funds from Elizabeth Short and R. Kirkland Cozine, 2022.18.2

Painter Leslie Barlow explores identity and belonging among people who identify as mixed race, multi-racial, or transracial adoptees. Sierra, featured in this portrait, describes herself as a mental health and wellness professional who works with BIPOC folks—and as a mixed-race parent with multiracial children of her own.

Barlow layered complex patterns and rich colors to express and amplify the family's joy and tell their story. Sierra is Navajo and Dutch American, and her partner identifies as Ghanaian American. The artist captured the family's love for each other in Sierra's smile and the warm glance between father and child.

Discussion Questions

Look at the painting. What do you see? What do you think is going on? What do you see that makes you say that?

Select one of the people in the painting. How do you think they feel? Why?

This painting shows a family enjoying each other's company during a special outing at the Mississippi shore. How does Barlow show joy in the figures? How does she represent the natural surroundings to reinforce how the people are feeling? Think about color and composition.

Think of a special memory of being outdoors. Where was it? What can you remember from that experience? Describe how you felt at the time. What colors would you include to capture that memory in an artwork?

Still Life with Fruit, Cakes, and Wine, 1821



Raphaelle Peale (American, 1774–1825), *Still Life with Fruit, Cakes, and Wine*, 1821, oil on panel, 10½ × 17½ in. (26.67 × 44.45 cm). Gift of Don and Diana Lee Lucker, 2008.49

Raphaelle Peale was one of several painters in his family. While his other artist relatives painted society portraits and large history scenes, Raphaelle preferred instead to craft small still-life paintings. His subjects were not considered serious at the time, but scholars have found them to be full of symbolic meaning, with references to his relationships and contemporary science. This one was likely made as a Christmas gift, an act of generosity and love appropriate to the offering depicted.

Discussion Questions

Look at the painting. What do you see? Describe the items on the plate and table. Would you eat anything on the plate? Why or why not?

Food has played an important part in the lives of people around the world today and in the past. This painting shows fruit and cake. These were special treats at the time this painting was created. Unlike today, people then couldn't go to a store and buy cake or fruit whenever they craved it. This *Still Life with Fruit, Cakes, and Wine* shows a unique and significant moment—a celebration or perhaps a holiday. How do you think the artist is celebrating and honoring the food in this painting?

Now, think of a food that is special to you. What makes it special?

Before moving on . . .

Gallery Activity: Let's think about overarching themes and topics in this gallery.

Think of the universal and elemental source of all life—water. Discuss the importance of water in your life and the lives of others. Look for other artworks featuring water.

How do you honor plants, animals, soil, water, etc.? What is the most challenging part of respecting the natural environment? How do you suppose we as a community could improve our actions to better the environment around us?

What do you appreciate the most about the living land around you? Share your responses with each other. How might you express your thankfulness in an artwork?

Mitakuye Oyasin: We Are All Related (Gallery 303)

Mitakuye Oyasin (We Are All Related) is a central principle guiding Dakota people through the world; it encompasses all living beings: people, animals, the earth, the sky, the universe. It requires humility, generosity, and grace, but to be guided by Mitakuye Oyasin is to experience deeper, more expansive relations with everything alive. In this gallery, Mitakuye Oyasin is expressed in Native American and non-Native works of art that speak to working together and always living in relation to others.



Dyani White Hawk (Sičǎŋǵu Lakota, born 1976), *Takes Care of Them: Wačháŋtognaka | Nurture; Wókaǵe | Create; Wówahokunǵiya | Lead; Nakíčiziŋ | Protect*, 2019, Color screenprint with metallic foil, 55½ × 32 in. (140.97 × 81.28 cm) each. Highpoint Editions Archive, The Friends of Bruce B. Dayton Acquisition Fund and the Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 2020.85.136.1-4

Takes Care of Them: Wačhántognaka | Nurture; Wókaže | Create; Wówahokun̄kiya | Lead; Nakíčičiŋ | Protect, 2019

In this set of four screenprints, Dyani White Hawk shows four different dresses decorated with dentalium shells, a kind of seashell from scaphopod mollusks. Each print features a uniquely decorated Plains-style dress. White Hawk incorporated metallic foil into each screenprint as well.

Dyani White Hawk explains that the images hold deep personal meaning:

The idea for this suite of four dresses, inspired by Plains-style women's dentalium dresses, came from the practice of requesting four veterans to stand in each cardinal direction for protection during certain ceremonies. My mother is a veteran. In thinking through the ways in which the women in our lives stand guard, protect, and nurture our well-being, the idea for this set was born. Each print is named with a quality that embodies the ways they care for us, yet this list of qualities could go on and on, and each person carries multiple roles. This list is simply a starting point, an acknowledgement and gesture of gratitude for the many women in my life who have helped Create, Nurture, Protect, and Lead in ways that have taught me what it means to be a good relative.

Discussion Questions

Look at each print. Describe one or two details about each. Now compare them with each other. What is similar and different among them?

Discuss the meaning of the words “create,” “nurture,” “protect,” and “lead.” Does anyone in your life come to mind when you consider the meaning of one or more of these words? How do they model those qualities?

Think of someone who is important to you. Why are you grateful for them? How would you show your gratitude for them in an artwork?

Baltimore signature album quilt top, 1844–45



United States, *Baltimore signature album quilt top*, 1844–45, cotton; pieced, appliquéd, embroidered, and inscribed, 107 × 105½ in. (271.78 × 267.97 cm). Gift of Stanley H. Brackett in memory of Lois Martin Brackett, 75.9.1

Thirty-six women made this quilt top, each contributing and signing a unique square. Signature album quilts were a collective form of remembrance—a record of the names, kind sentiments, and sewing skills of a group of friends. Such quilts became popular in the 1840s, a period of national expansion when many people, moving westward, desired a material reminder of the communities they left behind.

Album quilts were especially popular in Baltimore, where the Methodist Church had a strong presence. Methodist ministers had to move to a different congregation every year, and on their arrival or departure they often received an album quilt from the congregation. This quilt top was not completed with a backing, so it likely was never presented to the intended recipient.

Discussion Questions

To begin, focus your eyes on the whole quilt. What do you notice first? What more can you find? Describe the colors, shapes, and designs.

Thirty-six women made this quilt top. This is an example of teamwork! Let's think about how much collaboration (working together) went into making it. What skills were needed to make this? (Planning, measuring, cutting, sewing, etc.)

This artwork is a product of good collaboration. When have you worked on a team or with others? What are some talents you brought to the team?

In what ways does this non-Native quilt illustrate the theme of Mitakuye Oyasin (We Are All Related), a central principle guiding Dakota people?

This quilt tells a story of travels and memories from different communities. If you were to design a square to add to this quilt, what would it look like? Why would you choose those colors, shapes, and design?

Our Homes, Ourselves, 1999



Nora Naranjo Morse (Kha'p'oo Owinge [Santa Clara Pueblo], born 1953), *Our Homes Ourselves*, 1999, clay, paint, dimensions variable. Gift of Sara and David Lieberman, 2000.76a-i

Nora Naranjo Morse created seven tall forms to make this ceramic sculpture. The artist shared this about how the sculpture relates to her culture and life experiences:

Our Homes, Ourselves is a biographical articulation of the profound influence that mud and the act of creating a home had on me. *Our Homes, Ourselves* is the architecture of my people, the Santa Clara and Tewa Indians of northern New Mexico. For centuries we have built our own homes out of mud and clay indigenous to this area. I learned a great deal about building with adobe— sunbaked mud brick—when my husband and I built our house. While building a house was challenging, working with mud reconnected me to the Pueblo building tradition that I come from. Building a home opened a world realization about cultural knowledge and my internal sense of direction. There is something unusual and rich about creating a home that you will grow old in.

Discussion Questions

Focus on the colors, size, texture, and lines of the sculpture. Describe what you see. What does the sculpture remind you of?

The artist says that she learned a lot about building with adobe (sunbaked mud brick) when she was building her house. How do you see this reflected in the artwork?

Think of the design, materials used, and artist's inspiration. How do they connect this artwork to the land and its people?

Wise Elders Portraiture Class at Centro Tyrone Guzman with En Familia hay Fuerza, mural on the history of immigrant farm labor to the United States, 2017



Aliza Nisenbaum (Mexican [active U.S.], born 1977), *Wise Elders Portraiture Class at Centro Tyrone Guzman with En Familia hay Fuerza, mural on the history of immigrant farm labor to the United States*, 2017, oil on linen, 95 × 75 in. (241.3 × 190.5 cm). The Mary Ingebrand-Pohlad Endowment for Twentieth Century Paintings, 2018.13.2

Centro Tyrone Guzman's Wise Elders program provides services to support the holistic health and independent living of Latino elders. Aliza Nisenbaum taught a portrait-drawing class to the Wise Elders, asking them to draw each other and their loved ones. Here, they pose with their artistic creations against a mural depicting the history of migrant laborers in the Midwest. The painting is a testament to the unique character and life experience of each Wise Elder and the collective wisdom they impart to their community.

Depicted from left to right: Melissa Benitez, Jesus Cazares, Sol, Juana Gonzales Moreno, Nicanor Torres Marcos, Minerva Cazares, Elena Valencia de los Santos, Roberto Arista.

Discussion Questions

Look at the painting. What do you see? Look more closely. What else can you find? What do you wonder?

This is a community of Latino elders who create art together. When they participate and gather for these drawing classes, how do you suppose they feel? What in the painting makes you say that? Why do you think community is so important for people?

Think of a time you worked on a drawing. How did that make you feel? If you were to draw a loved one, whom would you draw? Why? What details would you include to show that your loved one is special to you?

Cleota Collins, 1932



Henry W. Bannarn
(American, 1910–1965),
1932, plaster, pigment,
17⁵/₁₆ × 8³/₄ × 7¹/₄ in.
(43.97 x 22.23 x 18.42 cm).
Gift of funds from the
Decorative Arts, Textiles,
and Sculpture Affinity
Group, 2011.64

Sculptor Henry Bannarn was studying at the Minneapolis School of Art (now the Minneapolis College of Art and Design) when he made this portrait of the singer Cleota Collins, in June 1932. It is his earliest known work. Bannarn, who moved to Minnesota from Oklahoma as a child, enjoyed being involved in his community and used his art as a way to pay respect to fellow African Americans, many of whom he admired for their work in gaining racial equality. Cleota Collins was not only a singer but also a civil rights activist, making her Bannarn's ideal subject.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this artwork. How do you think Cleota Collins is feeling? What do you see that makes you say that?

If you could touch the sculpture, how do you think it would feel? What do you see that makes you say that? Bannarn sculpted this likeness of Cleota Collins by applying wet plaster by hand to model the contours of her face. How does this sculpture illustrate the idea of Mitakuye Oyasmin (We Are All Related)?

Cleota Collins was an ideal subject for Bannarn because he admired her work as a singer and activist. Think of a person you respect or admire. What about them makes you feel that way? If you could create an artwork in their honor, what would you make? Why?

Bannarn's sculpture serves as a means for people to know something about Cleota Collins. How do you represent or capture memories, times, people? Why is doing this important to you?

Before moving on . . .

Gallery Activity: Select a few other works that appeal to you or pique your curiosity. How does each relate to the theme of We Are All Related?

Think about how you interact with others. Now think about your family, friends, animals, and community. How do you connect with those closest to you?

Making the Future Together (Gallery 304)

“What we want is free,” according to the text in Jeffrey Gibson’s artwork. If so, do we already have it? What do we want, exactly? Love, peace, health, equality, kindness? To create the future we want, we must work together to cultivate and sustain it. The artwork in this room suggests what that future might look like and how to achieve it.

Consider this question as you look at the individual artworks and around the gallery as a whole:

In what ways can our vision for the future be enhanced by including multiple perspectives and highlighting Dakota and Indigenous worldviews?

October 18, 2020: *THE FUTURE REMAINS UNWRITTEN* (For A.), 10/18/2020

The artist Piotr Szyhalski wrote about this work:

This work is part of a series of 225 ink drawings—a new one made each day for eight months—called the COVID-19: Labor Camp Report. Whether in the form of a work on paper, a poster, or a book, the project serves as a record of time, both labored and lost. At the start of the pandemic, I posted these images on Instagram (@laborcamp), along with a short text. The drawing from October 18, 2020, included the following message:

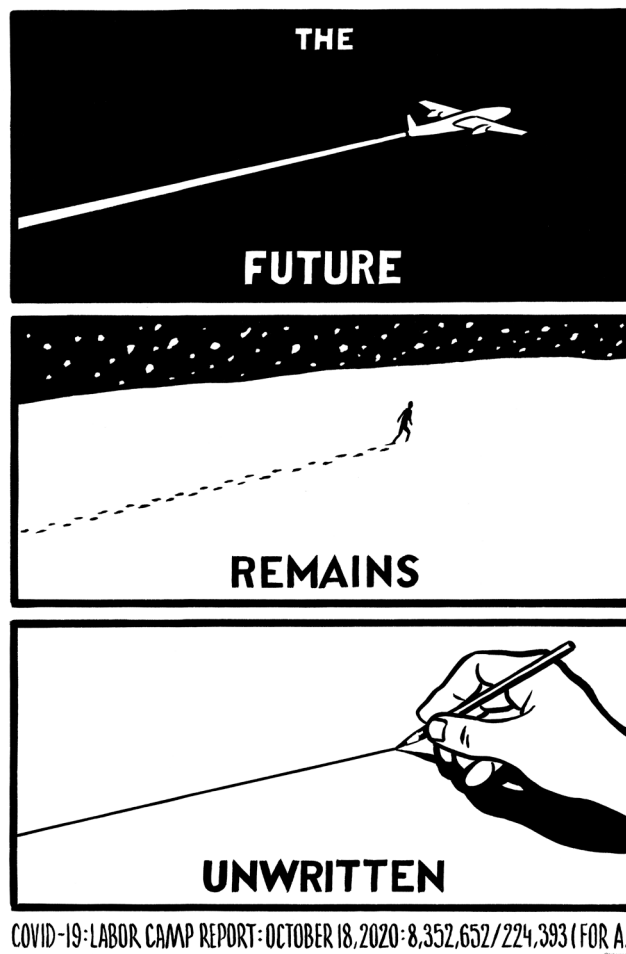
“To all those whose lives got put on hold. Who feel stuck, immobilized and rudderless. Whose plans were thwarted by travel bans, lockdowns or quarantines. This drawing is for you. Stay strong: the future will come!”

Discussion Questions

Take some time to look at this drawing made during the Covid pandemic in 2020. What do you see? Read the words and think about how each picture relates to the words.

What do the words “the future remains unwritten” mean to you? Although they meant something specific to the artist at the moment he drew this, they can be interpreted or read differently by each of us.

If the future remains unwritten, how will you contribute to writing your part in making that future? In what ways will you work with others to make sure the future is better for everyone?



COVID-19: LABOR CAMP REPORT: OCTOBER 18, 2020-8,352,652/224,393 (FOR A.)

Piotr Szyhalski / Labor Camp (American [born Poland], born 1967), *October 18, 2020: THE FUTURE REMAINS UNWRITTEN (For A.)*, 10/18/2020, from the series COVID-19: Labor Camp Report, ink on paper, 29 × 20 in. (50.8 × 73.7 cm). Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky, 2021.1.209

#48: While there are negative effects there are also positive ones. The young are grasping and learning American ideas fast. Many are using their skills and knowledge to help and speak for our community., 1993–2001



Cy Thao (American [born Laos], born 1972), #48: While there are negative effects there are also positive ones. The young are grasping and learning American ideas fast. Many are using their skills and knowledge to help and speak for our community., 1993–2001, oil on canvas, 30 × 36 in. (76.2 × 91.44 cm). Gift of funds from anonymous donors, 2010.55.48

While a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, Cy Thao started what would become a series of 50 paintings tracing a 5,000-year history of the Hmong people. The series is as much Thao's personal story as it is a cultural history. He and his family fled Laos in 1975, staying in a refugee camp in Thailand until 1980, when they moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. In the camp, Thao saw other Hmong refugees making "story-cloth" tapestries, and he realized the power that pictures have to tell stories without words. "I want the series to educate the younger generation," he said, "to have some closure with the generation that went through the war and hopefully become a historical document for generations to come." This is panel 48 from that series.

The scene depicts a group of Hmong people, including the artist, protesting stereotypical and hateful comments made by a shock jock on KQRS, a Twin Cities radio station, in 1998. Thao remembers the disc jockey saying, "Either assimilate or hit the . . . road." That incident, and racism against the Hmong and others in general, eventually led Thao to a victorious run as a Minnesota state representative in St. Paul (2002–10), where he dedicated himself to making change.

Discussion Questions

This painting and the artist's story express how something positive can come out of negativity, when people come together to make change and, ultimately, a better future.

Look closely at this painting by artist Cy Thao. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?

How does Cy Thao show that this is a peaceful protest? Why might that have been important for him to communicate?

About this painting, the artist wrote, "While there are negative effects there are also positive ones. The young are grasping and learning American ideas fast. Many are using their skills and knowledge to help and speak for our community." How will you use your knowledge and skills now and in the future to speak out for your own and others' communities?

Soul Catcher/Regenerator, 2015



Renée Stout (American, born 1958), *Soul Catcher/Regenerator*, 2015, found wire, wood, metal, acrylic paint, found table, wood construction, acrylic paint, found technology, and vintage rattan fish trap, 96 × 50 × 18 in. (243.8 × 127 × 45.7 cm). Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky and the Richard and Beverly Fink Endowment for Art Acquisition, 2022.47a-d

The artist Renée Stout asked herself the following questions: If you could make a device that would harness the power of the spirit realm to transform the hearts of human beings so they emanate pure love, what might it look like? How would it work? This sculpture is a response to her big questions. In Stout's imagining, it is a machine that works with otherworldly forces to dispel bad thoughts and intentions. Her fantastical creation is designed to create a wavelength that allows the artist to communicate with spirits, or even extraterrestrial beings.

Renée Stout says of this artwork: "Between 2010 and 2015, I started making 'devices' that evoked the idea that I could connect with higher beings (aliens? spirits?) beyond this plane for guidance in navigating these troubled times and help in aiming to shift the energy in a more positive direction. . . . I imagined the *Soul Catcher/Regenerator* as a piece of technology that could be used to tune the meanness out of people when they come within its vicinity."

Discussion Questions

Spend some time looking at this artwork. There is a lot to see! How would you describe it to someone else?

This artwork by Renée Stout is a type of sculpture called an "assemblage." What kinds of things did she assemble to make it? Which things do you wonder about?

The artist calls it *Soul Catcher/Regenerator*. She thinks about it as a device that talks to other beings, including aliens and spirits, to shift energy in a more positive direction. She imagines it as a machine that could be used to "tune the meanness out of people." How do you think she has communicated these ideas in the artwork itself? What kind of machine would you like to imagine or make in order to help build a kinder, better future?

How does Stout's assemblage or machine support the idea of building a better future together?

WHAT WE WANT IS FREE, 2020



Jeffrey Gibson (Choctaw-Cherokee, born 1972), *WHAT WE WANT IS FREE*, 2020, acrylic on canvas, glass beads and artificial sinew inset into wood frame, 59¾ × 69¾ × 2⅞ in. (177.8 × 48.26 × 48.26 cm). Gift of funds from Mary and Bob Mersky and the Jane and James Emison Endowment for Native American Art, 2021.28

Jeffrey Gibson created *WHAT WE WANT IS FREE* amid a global pandemic, civil unrest, and calls for racial justice. Gibson says the work expresses the necessity of “dignity, respect, joy, freedom, and liberation” for marginalized communities. It also acknowledges the extraordinary, ongoing work of past struggles for equality and the universal need for all people to be free.

Gibson's paintings resemble modernist patchwork quilts with the added dimension of his community's aesthetics, including color palettes found in historical Choctaw clothing and cultural belongings. The beaded frame offers additional texture and is an homage to beadwork found in nearly every Indigenous community throughout North America.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at Jeffrey Gibson's artwork. What about the artwork draws your attention first? What else draws your attention? What do you wonder about it?

What do the words “What we want is free” mean to you? To the artist Jeffrey Gibson, it means the necessity of “dignity, respect, joy, freedom, and liberation” for marginalized communities. Does this information change how you see or think about the painting? How?

How do the materials and colors contribute to the strength of the artist's message? How might the message read differently if Gibson chose instead to use muted colors?

The theme of this gallery is about everyone making a future together. What are some actions you can take right now to be even more respectful of others? Or to spread more joy?

Otokaheya / At the Beginning, Owamniyomni / Whirlpool, Anpetu Sapa Win / Dark Day Woman, all 2010

Each of these quilts by Gwen Westerman, textile artist, historian, and poet, evokes aspects of Mnisota Makoce. Each one alludes to the past and present and encourages us to think about the future.



Otokaheya / At the Beginning (left)

This quilt, one of three commissioned for the Mill City Museum's "Original Green" exhibition, represents how St. Anthony Falls may have looked 10,000 years ago, when it was closer to the St. Paul area, and the power of the Mississippi River was unrestricted. The fabric was dyed using a process called snow-resist, and recycled materials are included.

Gwen Westerman (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, born 1950s), *Otokaheya / At the Beginning, Owamniyomni / Whirlpool, Anpetu Sapa Win / Dark Day Woman*, all 2010, 100% hand-dyed cotton with bead, shell, and paper embellishments; mounted on stretcher bars, each 40 × 36 in. (101.6 × 91.44 cm). Courtesy Gwen Westerman, EL.2023.25.1-3

Discussion Questions

Look closely at *Otokaheya / At the Beginning*. What do you see? What else? What colors do you see?

Now imagine you could stand next to the magnificent Owamniyomni, or St. Anthony Falls. What sounds do you hear? How do you feel being so close to this powerful waterfall?

Gwen Westerman used her imagination to represent what Owamniyomni might have looked like way back in time. She also used recycled materials in the work. Why do you think she did that? What materials would you use to make a portrait of Owamniyomni?

Owamniyomni / Whirlpool (middle)

The Dakota name for St. Anthony Falls is Owamniyomni. Spirit Island is in the foreground, and a Dakota village is on the opposite bank. The real shells along the lower right side are from Pike Island, where the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers converge. This piece served as the cover art for the book *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (MNHS Press, 2012).

Discussion Questions

Take a close look at this quilt, which also represents Owamniyomni. How is this image different from the one in the quilt to the left? What does it have in common?

The sky, land, and water represented in this quilt, and even the shells from Pike Island, where the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers converge, all celebrate the birthplace and homelands of the Dakota. What role could Gwen Westerman's quilt play in ensuring that Dakota history is never forgotten?

Anpetu Sapa Win / Dark Day Woman (right)

Various legends recount the story of Dark Day Woman, who went over the falls with her son in a canoe because she was distraught that her husband had taken another wife. The dyeing process produces surprising effects, including the appearance of a figure of a woman in the sky. The effects of industrialization have diminished the falls and river, and the mills are in ruins, yet the shell of a freshwater mussel has reappeared.

Discussion Questions

Look closely at this quilt. What do you see? Look closely in the sky to find a figure of a woman. The quilt keeps the story of Dark Day Woman alive for those who know it. How does storytelling connect the past, present, and future?

Despite depicting the effects of industrialization on the falls and river, and the crumbling mills, Westerman also includes freshwater mussel shells in the water. Why do you suppose she did that? How might the shells relate to the theme of making a future together?

Before you go . . .

Gallery Activity: Let's return to the question posed as you entered the gallery: In what ways can our vision for the future be enhanced by including multiple perspectives and by highlighting Dakota and Indigenous worldviews?

What will you take away from your exploration of American art through the lens of Dakota principles? What artworks or ideas will you talk about with your friends and others when you leave the museum?

Wrap up

Here are some big questions to think about and discuss if relevant to your group:

What ideas and values do you think tell an American story?

What happens when we prioritize relationships among people, the natural world, and history?

The idea of connectedness is a consistent theme in these galleries. How do we and the world benefit when we work, tell stories, live, discuss hard histories, listen, and learn together?

How does my thinking about American art change if we elevate Native American art and worldviews?