

Everyday People, Extraordinary Acts

Everyday heroes—people who struggled with difficult circumstances and often became stronger through their hardships—have inspired artists in various times and places. Explore works of art that embody the character, spirit, and commitment of people, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose actions have had a profound impact on history and society. (This tour often ties in with MLK day or Black History Month.)

Here is a sample of works you could view and discuss. (Not all of these works are currently on view; be sure to check ahead of time.)

Elizabeth Catlett, *Singing Their Songs* and other prints

Clementine Hunter, *Picking Cotton* and *The Wash* – paintings that recall Hunter’s days at Melrose Plantation. It’s hard work picking cotton, but what other side of the story do the bright, joyful colors tell you about Hunter’s memory of the experience?

Henry Moore, *Warrior with Shield* – A British artist who experienced the Nazi bombings of England depicts a wounded soldier no longer able to hold a weapon, but who valiantly defends himself with his shield. The warrior is believed to be the embodiment of England’s courageous opposition to Germany in World War II.

Ernst Barlach, *The Fighter of the Spirit* – Barlach’s works were banned from public view by the Nazis because they were considered “degenerate.” The original sculpture, which represents the triumph of the human spirit over injustice, was confiscated by the German SS. They planned to melt it down, but it was somehow saved. The Institute’s full-size cast was taken from the reconstructed original. You can see the seams where it had been cut apart.

St. Catherine – a young woman refuses to deny her faith and is tortured, but her will is not broken and she ultimately triumphs.

Esther and Ahasuerus tapestry and *Embroidered Box* – Queen Esther saves her people from a plot to murder all the Jews in the kingdom of Persia.

Lewis Hine photographs – Hine worked to expose the cruel exploitation of children as a cheap labor force. He helped abolish unfair labor practices and secure passage of the Child Labor Laws.

Walker Evans – stark, detailed photos that confront the spiritual and economic crisis of the Depression.

Dorothea Lange, *White Angel Bread Line* or *Migrant Mother* – images of people determined to survive during the Depression.

Luis González Palma, *Viviendo en Silencio (Live in Silence)* – Palma expresses the plight of the Guatemalan Maya people by evoking images of saints and martyrs from the Catholic religious tradition. He tells a story of violence and racism against the native people by the ruling class (of European Spanish descent).

Buddha images – When a young man born to wealth and privilege discovers suffering and death, he decides to abandon his sheltered life and seek the path to enlightenment and release from suffering caused by human desire (*nirvana*).

Bodhisattvas give up a chance for *nirvana* and stay on earth to help people with their struggle for truth and salvation.