

Art Adventure

Amazing Animals in Art



Benin,
Leopard
17th century

● **Become a member of the museum today!**

Thank you for participating in the Minneapolis Institute of Art's popular Art Adventure Program! By volunteering as a Picture Person, you build an important link between the museum and our region's schoolchildren.

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● **What are you doing next Family Day?**

Family Days at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts are free monthly events that highlight the museum's collection and special exhibitions for art lovers of all ages. The second Sunday each month, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., the museum is filled with hands-on art activities, live music, dance performances, artist demonstrations, family tours, and more. All activities are free and appropriate for children of all ages. Visit our website, www.artsmia.org, for specific Family Day dates, themes, and descriptions.

About the Art Adventure Program

What's the Art Adventure Program?

The Art Adventure Program at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts is a way of bringing works of art that can't leave the museum into elementary school classrooms. Each of the ten Art Adventure reproduction sets features eight works of art chosen around a theme of particular interest to children. Students and teachers are encouraged to follow up classroom presentations with a class visit to the museum to see the actual artworks. They can take a tour with an Art Adventure Guide or with their teacher using a self-guide brochure available from the museum.

What's a Picture Person?

Picture People are the volunteers from the school community who present the reproductions in the classrooms. They are the vital link between the original work of art in the museum and children in the schools. Before they visit any classrooms, Picture People come to the museum for a training session on the reproduction set their school will be using that year. At training they receive printed background material, learn presentation techniques, and—most importantly—experience the enjoyment of interacting with the original objects they will soon be introducing to students.

What does a Picture Person Presentation consist of?

Each participating school structures its Picture Person presentations differently. A Picture Person may present pairs of images in a series of short visits; all the images at once in a single, longer visit; or some other schedule arranged by the school's Art Adventure Coordinator. The presentation may consist only of a discussion or it may involve hands-on activities. In addition, Picture People bring their own individual creativity to their presentations.

Whatever the format, however, one essential characteristic is constant: the Picture Person encourages the children first and foremost to **look** at the reproduction and **talk** about what they see. Although the Picture Person is knowledgeable about the works of art, she or he facilitates the discussion with thoughtful open-ended questions and related props rather than delivering "lecture"-style information.

What does the Art Adventure Program do for kids?

Picture Person presentations provide students with a rare opportunity to spend time looking at art and express what they see in words. Students gain confidence in their ability to find meaning in artifacts from a wide range of world cultures. They practice seeing things from another person's point of view, whether it's their classmate's or the artist's. They feel the thrill of meeting an old friend when they later come upon familiar objects at the museum. And, not least, they enjoy meaningful contact with a visiting member of the school community.

Preparing for a Picture Person Presentation

Relax!

The information provided in this manual is intended as background material to help you feel comfortable when you present the images to children. You are not expected to convey all the details. On the contrary; choose two or three key ideas you think will be compelling for the age group to which you are presenting. Kids love stories—what might you “spin” into a tale? What parallels can you draw with their lives?

Be sure everyone is able to see the reproduction.

Talk with the classroom teacher to find out what routines the class follows when gathering for a visitor. Young groups will often sit on the floor; older students may remain at their desks. Try 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 throughout the group.

Establish a climate where students can listen to what each child has to say.

It is very difficult to listen to more than one person at the same time. Let the kids know at the outset that you expect them to take turns speaking. (If you don’t know the children’s names already, arrange with the teacher to have them wear nametags so you can call on them by name.) Paraphrasing what is said emphasizes that you are really listening and encourages them to listen to one another. Your rephrasing may also help expand their vocabulary. Take care to remember, however, that aesthetic judgments are personal and inexact—set your own preferences aside to allow students to form their own opinions.

Begin your presentation of each image with a long moment of silent looking.

Introduce the lesson by explaining who you are and that you have brought reproductions of real works of art from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Review with the class what a museum is and what you’ll be doing with them. Then make a show out of getting the class to understand that their first job is to look quietly. You might build the suspense by keeping each image hidden while you explain that you do not want them even to raise their hands until you ask them to. Model your expectations by spending the time looking too.

Give children time to talk about what they have discovered by looking.

Good questions to use are "What's going on here?" and "What do you see that makes you say that?" 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, with a little prompting. "What else can you find?" can help generate further comments. See the "Tips for Talking about Art" following this section for more ideas.

Connect your key ideas to the students' observations.

When the student's observations begin to slow down, use what you have learned about their interests to steer the discussion towards the key ideas you have chosen to focus on. 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 together ways to find an explanation.

Keep the age of your audience in mind.

A child's interests and understandings evolve through generally predictable stages of development. Plan your presentations accordingly. Don't expect young children to be able to focus for more than twenty minutes. Consider your class'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"? At the same time, try not to talk down to older students.

You can expect developmental differences in children's aesthetic approaches to art, as well. Younger children will accept abstraction, while older children tend to demand a high degree of realism. Remember, too, that it's hard for young viewers to look "through" subject matter to notice compositional devices until preadolescence. And it's surprising to us as adults that children generally do not notice the emotional overtones of a work until the middle years of childhood. (Find out more about the stages of aesthetic development in *Invented Worlds*, by Ellen Winner, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.)

Talk to other Picture People and use your own imagination!

Veteran Picture People have great ideas about how to capture the imagination of a class. Don't hesitate to borrow and adapt their suggestions. In addition, several Art Adventure sets come with "prop kits," an assortment of supplementary materials for you to use in your presentation. Talk to your school's Art Adventure Coordinator to see if the set you are using comes with props.

Tips for Talking about Art

Remember, a key goal of the Art Adventure program is to help beginning viewers create personal meaning in a work of art. While your impulse may be immediately to begin "teaching," more is gained in the long run if you take the time to help the children establish an emotional connection with the art. The questions below help kids find their own relevance in works of art, and thereby learn to value art as having something to do with their own lives.

**What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?**

These simple questions work particularly well with artworks that have a narrative thread. You'll notice this question is different than, "What do you see?" Instead of eliciting a list of things in the picture, "What's going on?" invites a consideration of relationships and interactions and taps into children's natural interest in stories. The question, "What do you see that makes you say that?" focuses comments on the evidence at hand and helps kids explain their assumptions.

How would you feel if you were "in" this work of art?

What would you hear? How would something feel to touch? What path would you take through the picture? What do you see that makes you say that? Imagining the picture as an environment engages all the senses. The expressive qualities of a work become more concrete, easier to relate to.

How is this object like something you encounter in *your* life?

What would you use this for? What do you see that makes you say that? Do you have anything like it? Why do you like to have pictures of yourself? Why do you buy postcards on vacation? Drawing parallels with children's experiences gives them a hook on which to hang new information. Identifying similarities helps illuminate differences as well.

What person or object in this picture do you think was most important to the artist?

What are people in the picture looking at? What has a lot of details? Where are there bright colors? What is biggest? Talking about what makes things seem important in a work of art can allow even a novice to address basic compositional principles.

How would the artwork seem different if you could make a change?

What would happen if you changed a color? Made something bigger or smaller? Moved an object or person? Left something out? Added more details? Changed the quality of a line? Imagining changes helps identify visual elements and their contribution to the overall effect of the image.

How is this work of art like or different from another one you've seen in this set?

"Compare and contrast" is a staple of art historical thinking, but it can be done by anybody, at any level of thinking. 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?

Want to take it further?

Have a look at *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art*, by David N. Perkins (Santa Monica, Calif.: The J. Paul Getty Trust, 1994), a very readable guide on how and why to look carefully at art.

Another good book is *Take a Look: An Introduction to the Experience of Art*, by Rosemary Davidson (New York: Viking, 1994). Written for young readers, it provides a nice example of how to talk with children about art.

Tips for Using Props

Why props?

Students normally first encounter the Art Adventure works of art in their classrooms as 20 x 22-inch reproductions. In the reproductions, all 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 work of art, seeing the technique used to create it, or looking at a photograph in which the object is being used adds another dimension to the reproduction of the work of art. The use of props also helps engage learners who prefer hands-on learning styles, and reinforces the understandings of all learners.

What are the challenges of props?

Be aware that props will do little but distract your group without careful planning. Consideration of the following points can prevent group management challenges from undermining the benefits of props:

- What understanding about the work of art does the prop best illustrate? Present the prop in conjunction with information about a work of art or to help answer a question about the work of art.
- How will you structure the group's interaction with the prop?
There are a number of ways to use the prop. Among the variations:
 - Pass the prop around to each student. If you do it this way, give the students a question to consider while they are waiting for the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop. Encourage the students to be ready for discussion when the prop finishes circulating.
 - Ask a single student to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 - Hold the prop yourself and walk it around the group for the students to touch or look at closely. What should the students be doing while you're doing that?
 - Hold the prop yourself to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion. Then give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation.
- How will you explain to the group what you expect them to do with the prop? Clear communication of your expectations is essential to getting the students to stay focused on the activity. Will they all get to touch the prop? How should they take turns? What should they do when it's not their turn? How should they treat the prop?
- How will you link the experience with the prop to the rest of the discussion? After the students have explored the prop in some fashion, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.
- How will you get the prop back? Don't forget to plan how you'll get the props back! Schools are charged significant fees for missing or badly damaged props.

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**Art Adventure Program
An Educational Program of the
Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Revised 2014**

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Prop Kit Contents

<u>Work of Art</u>	<u>Prop</u>	<u>Replacement Cost</u>
Maria Sibylla Merian, <i>Moths, Caterpillar, and Foliage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of an engraved copper plate 	\$30
Nazca, <i>Vessel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hollow red clay sphere with slip glaze 	\$25
Philip R. Goodwin, <i>A "Bear" Chance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample painted canvas 	\$30
China, <i>Horse</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of white clay with glazes ● Photograph of tomb figures 	\$20 \$10
Spain, <i>Gold Lion Statuette</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of gold filigree ● Reproduction of actual lion size ● Images of Lion Fountain/Gold winged ram 	\$20 \$15 \$10
Benin, <i>Leopard</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Model of bronze ● Bronze casting process description ● Photograph of Benin court ceremony 	\$50 \$10 \$10
James Jacques-Tissot, <i>On the Thames, a Heron</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reproduction of another painting by Tissot ● Reproduction of a Japanese woodblock print 	\$10 \$10
France, <i>Teacups with scenes from "The Fox and the Stork"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photograph of full tea service 	\$10

Please make sure that you have enclosed all of the items on this list when you return the prop kit. You will be responsible for the cost of replacing any missing items. Thank you!

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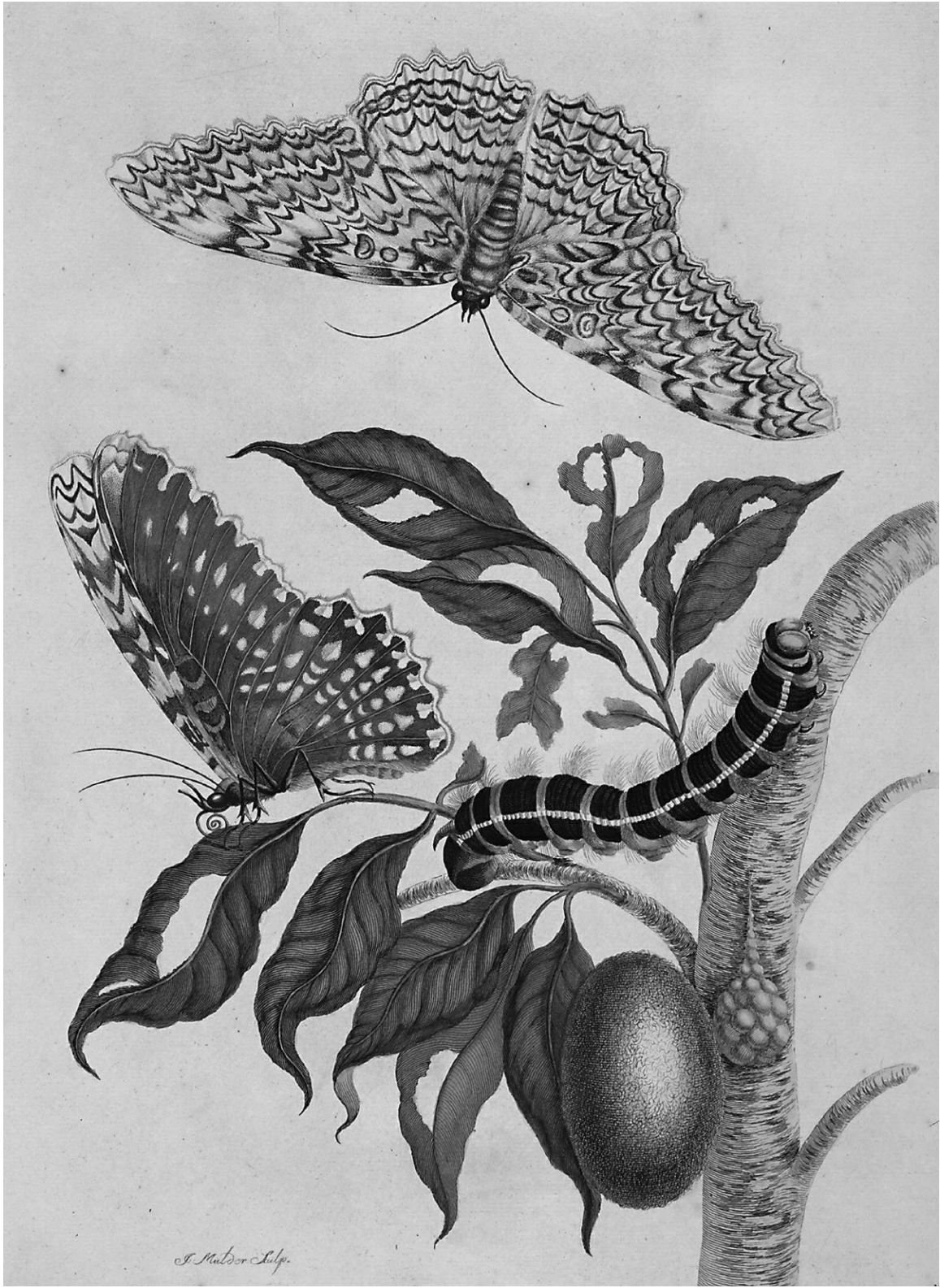
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Introduction

Throughout the ages, animals have been a source of fascination to humans. Whether loyal companions, fearsome foes, or means of sustenance, animals with their grace, vigor, beauty, and mystery have inspired people to create works of art. Indeed, in our earliest human records—cave paintings produced thousands of years ago—images of animals are depicted.

The eight works of art in this set include images of animals from diverse cultures of the world and periods of history. Illustrating the strong and enduring connection between humans and animals are works such as a horse made for a Chinese tomb, a leopard made to symbolize an African ruler, and a bear created to promote an American product.

The set explores the reasons why artists create images of animals, considering such motives as scientific investigation, religious beliefs, social customs, storytelling, advertising, and personal artistic expression. It also features a broad range of media, providing an opportunity to study techniques used in painting, printmaking, sculpture, and ceramics. A vessel made from the red clay of ancient Peru offers an interesting contrast to the fine white porcelain used to make tea cups in 19th-century France. Finally, through the works in this set, students are invited to examine the wondrous qualities of animals that have engaged the skills and imaginations of artists throughout history.



Maria Sibylla Merian, German, 1647–1717

Engraved by Joseph Mulder, Dutch, 1859/60--1735

Moths, Caterpillar, and Foliage

Plate 20 from ***Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium***, 1705--1771

Mixed intaglio, hand-colored

H.15¼ x W.11¼ inches (sheet)

The Minnich Collection The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 1966 P. 18,719

Theme

Combining scientific investigation with artistic concerns, Merian conveys with extraordinary delicacy the nature and beauty of a moth in various stages of development, as well as the plants upon which the insect thrived. Her published illustrations— of which this is an example— were based on careful studies of nature and provided new information to the sciences of botany and zoology.

Background

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the natural sciences underwent rapid growth in Europe, and the systematic classification of plants was developed. Important to this period of growth were the European voyages of exploration to distant lands such as the Americas, the Near and Far East, and Africa, which resulted in a tremendous increase in botanical and zoological knowledge. Travelers returned to Europe with drawings and written descriptions as well as new seeds and plants to be studied and classified. The microscope, which was invented in Holland in the late 16th century, was a boon to the study of plants and animals, transforming the sciences of botany and zoology.

In the early 17th century, the Dutch emerged as Europe's leading horticulturalists. Their passion for gardening and the cultivation of exotic flowers spurred the development of flower painting as an art form as well as botanical illustration of all kinds, including catalogues of flower species.

Although she was primarily an entomologist (one who studies insects), Merian is also recognized as one of the finest botanical artists of the period. Her work was influenced by the great Netherlandish flower painters of the 17th century. She carefully studied living examples of butterflies and moths, recording their appearance and activities at various stages in their life cycles. Her remarkable illustrations from these studies appeared in various publications. In these publications, Merian represented the results of her research on a single page, arranging the insects on or near the plants with which they were associated. While her methods seem logical to us today, they were at the time, as she declared on her title page, "a completely new discovery." The contemporary practice of studying insects relied only on preserved specimens in collectors' cabinets.

Working at a time when the natural sciences were in their early development, Merian contributed to the knowledge of her era. She helped to revolutionize the sciences of zoology and botany and to lay the foundations for the classification of plant and animal species.

Moths, Caterpillar, and Foliage

Embarking on her most adventurous project, in 1699 Maria Sibylla Merian set out for the exotic tropical country of Surinam, a Dutch colony located on the northern coast of South America. She wanted to study Surinam's insects in their natural setting, observing their metamorphosis and choice of food. Funded by the city of Amsterdam, Merian worked in the colony for two years, assisted by her daughters. During this time, she observed, recorded, drew, collected specimens, and interviewed the native people. While she originally intended to catalog only insects, she expanded her studies to include snakes, reptiles, birds, and monkeys. In 1701 Merian returned to Amsterdam, bringing with her extensive notes, drawings, and specimens. Four years later her ambitious volume *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (The Metamorphosis of Surinam Insects) was first published. Its 60 large plates, engraved by three Dutch artists working from Merian's watercolor studies, show bananas, pineapples, grapes, lemons, pomegranates, watermelons, papayas, and other plants, all supporting the life stages of beautiful moths and butterflies and some extremely large spiders and beetles.

The print *Moths, Caterpillar, and Foliage* is from her Surinam portfolio and reveals Merian's interest in the accurate portrayal of the various stages of a moth's development on one plant, in this case the *Agrippina* White Witch moth on a rubber tree. Moths develop by metamorphosis, a process that includes four different and distinct stages. The process begins when an organism known as a caterpillar (or larva) emerges from an egg; this creature is completely different from the adult it will become.¹ The first stage of development is represented here by the egg mass, the yellow form attached to the plant's trunk. The next stage, the larva or caterpillar, is shown crawling along the plant with sinuous movement; it has been feeding on the foliage, evident in the leaves that have been eaten away. Merian depicts the bright colors and bold patterns and stripes of the caterpillar, illustrating with remarkable clarity the details of its anatomy, such as its segmented skin covering, bristly hairs, yellow head, and clawed legs. The third stage of the moth's life cycle is the pupal stage, during which the caterpillar changes into an adult insect. In preparation for this stage, the caterpillar spins around itself a silken cocoon, the egg-shaped form shown attached to the tree trunk. Merian uses a technique called shading to gradually vary the lightness and darkness of the colors to suggest the swollen, expectant quality of life about to emerge. The final stage, the adult, is represented by two moths, one in graceful flight alighting on the plant, the other resting on a leaf with its wings folded back. Perhaps both are included to show the spectacular patterns and varying colors of the inner and outer wing surfaces. The lavender color of the closed wings contrasts with the neutral tones of the wide-spread open wings as viewed from above.

¹ Mauro Daccordi, Paolo Triberti, and Adriano Zanetti, *Simon and Schuster's Guide to Butterflies & Moths* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 10.

Technique

This print was made by a combination of engraving and etching, which are both types of intaglio printmaking. *Intaglio* refers to the process whereby the paper receives the ink from the incised lines of the printing plate rather than from the surface of the plate (as in relief printing).

Engraving is a method of cutting or incising a design into a surface (usually metal) with a sharp tool. The term also refers to the print made by inking such an incised surface. Though sometimes all intaglio prints are referred to as engravings, the word more specifically applies to those made with a tool called a graver or burin, which is a small metal rod with a sharpened point. This tool is pushed across the plate, cutting a V-shaped line in the metal surface.²

Etching is a process in which the lines in a metal plate are bitten (etched=eaten) by acid. The polished surface of the plate is first covered with a thin layer of acid-resistant coating called ground, which is composed of waxes, gums, and resins. The etcher draws through the ground with a metal point (the "etching needle"), which exposes the metal. The plate is then immersed in a bath of acid, which bites into the plate along the exposed lines. Since the etching ground offers almost no resistance to the needle, the artist has much the same freedom as in drawing.³

Although Merian was trained as an engraver (she was perhaps the first female engraver of copperplates), she did not undertake this task for the Surinam project as she had for her other works. The 60 plates were engraved by three Dutch artists working from the watercolor studies she had made. The prints made from these plates were then hand-colored with watercolor by either Merian or another artist. *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* was published in a folio volume in 1705. It was printed in Amsterdam in both Latin and Dutch. Other editions were published after Merian's death. *Moths, Caterpillar, and Foliage* was engraved by Joseph Mulder, whose signature appears on the print. He probably used etching to copy Merian's image, which he then reinforced with the engraving process. It is likely that Merian herself hand-colored the print, using transparent watercolor that allowed the engraved lines to remain visible.

Style

While scientific investigation was the impetus to Merian's work, artistic concerns were also important to her. Merian portrays her subject naturalistically, depicting what she observes with meticulous attention to detail. The fine lines produced by the engraving and etching processes render the exquisite detail of her subject, as seen in the delicate patterns of the moths' wings, the skin of the caterpillar, and the shimmering surface of the cocoon. Since Merian wants to convey specific information about the structure of nature, she arranges the insects and plants in various ways to display their forms, creating an elegant formal composition. The artist uses curving, repetitive lines in the leaves, the moths' wings, and the cocoon, achieving a surface rhythm and pattern and giving her forms a sense of life and vitality.

² Paul Goldman, *Looking at Prints, Drawings and Watercolours: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1988), 26.

³ Goldman, 26.

Biography

Born in 1647 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, to a Swiss father and a Dutch mother, Merian grew up in a home filled with artistic and literary activity. Her father, who died when she was three, was a noted engraver who published one of the first catalogs of different flower species. Her mother's second husband was a Dutch flower painter, Jacob Marell, with whom Merian studied. In 1665 she married one of her stepfather's pupils, the artist Johann Graff, and settled with him in Nuremberg. Their first daughter was born in 1668, and a second daughter in 1678.

In Nuremberg, Merian began methodically to explore and paint the world of nature, studying living examples of European butterflies and moths. She published her resulting illustrations, which were enthusiastically received by the scientific community.

Merian left her husband in 1685 and, with her two daughters, made a series of moves, living for a time in Friesland, Germany, and then in Amsterdam. In 1699 she set sail for Surinam, where she spent two years, until a bout with yellow fever forced her to return to Amsterdam. The results of her trip were more than a 100 watercolors painted on vellum, most of which are now in the British Museum. Many of these were engraved for the volume *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*. Merian next turned her attention to completing a final volume of her European insect book. She suffered a stroke in 1714 and died in 1717.

Suggested Questions

1. What insects do you see in this picture? What are they doing?
2. The artist wanted to show the various stages of the moth's growth. Each stage looks very different. Where is the egg stage? The caterpillar? The pupa in the cocoon? The moth?
3. What has the artist done to make the insects look so real? Is there anything unreal about this image? (*We would not be able to see all four stages of the same insect at the same time.*)
4. Where is the plant in this picture? Why are there holes in the leaves?
5. The two moths in the print appear to be the same insect. Why might Merian put the same moth in her print twice? (*To show its appearance with its wings open and closed.*)
6. Why would an artist choose to make a print rather than a drawing?
7. Why do you think Merian went to Surinam in South America to study insects?
8. Do we have moths here in Minnesota? Where might you find them? Have you ever collected butterflies or moths?



Nazca (South America, Peru, Andean region)

Vessel, 100 B.C.–600 A.D.

Ceramic, pigment

H.5³/₈ x W.8¹/₄ x D.4 inches

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 44.3.59

Theme

Since the Nazca (nahz-ka) people possessed no written language, they often used works of art as vehicles for visual communication. This clay vessel in the form of a fish was probably created for religious purposes and reflects the vital importance of fish and the natural environment in the Nazca world-view.

Background

The coastal river valleys of southern Peru were the settings for a succession of diverse cultures. The earliest clearly identifiable group was the Paracas civilization, whose tombs contain sophisticated examples of weaving and pottery. Following the Paracas, the Nazca civilization flourished from about 100 B.C. to 600 A.D. Since the Nazca people possessed no written language, much of their culture remains enigmatic. We know something about the Nazca, however, because they used art to communicate ideas visually, making textiles and ceramics of extraordinary technical and artistic quality. These objects offer clues to the everyday life, customs, and beliefs of this culture from long ago.

A country of geographic extremes, Peru is situated on the western edge of the continent of South America, bordered by the Pacific Ocean and dominated by the central Andean Mountain chain. Between the highlands and the ocean stretches a long, narrow coastal desert cut at intervals by river valleys. This is where the Nazca settled. Human habitation was possible in this arid and forbidding desert because of the natural features of the sea and a series of small rivers threading down from the Andes. Although these rivers often remained dry for months—even years—at a time, towns developed along their banks. The economy of the Nazca towns was based on agriculture, supplemented by the rich fisheries of coastal waters. The Nazca developed intricate irrigation systems with underground canals to transport and conserve water, attesting to their high level of engineering skills and their ingenuity in adapting to the desert environment.

Reflecting the natural environment, Nazca ceramics are adorned with subjects related to the people's primary means of subsistence—farming and fishing. Common motifs include fish, aquatic birds, and reptiles, as well as fruits and vegetables such as chili peppers, maize, and lima beans. Complex composite figures appearing in later works combine various human, animal, and bird attributes. The Nazca may have connected these figures to agricultural fertility and water. Because of scarce rainfall on the desert, and their dependence on the ecological balance of the natural environment, the Nazca were intensely concerned with their relationship to nature.

It is evident that burial of the dead was important to the culture since tombs have been found containing vast numbers of intricately woven textiles, colorful ceramics, and rich metal work.

Many of the numerous tombs discovered in the river valleys were looted over the centuries by people searching for marketable artifacts. Enough, however, have been excavated scientifically by archaeologists to show that the dead, often interred in chambers with adobe-brick walls, were supplied with an array of tomb offerings. Thanks to the arid desert climate, large numbers of these offerings have been well preserved.

In addition to tomb artifacts, the region is marked by one of the most unique and puzzling archaeological phenomena of South America—the Nazca Lines. Extending for miles, these networks of lines, spirals, geometric shapes, and animal figures, such as fish and birds, crisscross the desert in and around the Nazca area. They have been dated to the same period as the manufacture of Nazca ceramics. Because of their giant scale, the lines can only be seen without distortion from the air. They were made by removing the darkly weathered surface stones to expose the underlying lighter sand and gravel. While there has been much debate about their purpose and meaning, it is likely that they were made as markers for processional routes to places believed to be sacred. Many of these figures repeat the forms seen on painted ceramics and may be religious symbols connected with the sea, sky, and mountains. They are perhaps related to a set of rituals associated with the bringing of water to the Nazca Valley.⁴

Vessel

This vessel in the form of a fish was probably made for a tomb or for ceremonial purposes. It has a double bridge-spout handle—a distinctive feature of Nazca pottery. While the vessel's specific function is not known, its double spout would facilitate the pouring of liquids, while the bridge handle would be practical for tying onto packs carried by animals, or, if it were larger, for hand carrying. Because of the small size of this vessel, however, a utilitarian function seems unlikely.

Renowned for their polychrome (multi-colored) decoration, Nazca ceramics display the greatest chromatic range of all the ancient New World ceramics. This vessel features a variety of colors—orange and red-browns, mauve, white, black, and gray. Using warm earth colors and bold black lines, the artist achieves an effect of both tranquility and dynamism.

The artist has skillfully combined two- and three-dimensional means to represent a fish. Made with smooth contours and rounded forms, the figure has an inflated, swollen appearance suggesting fertility and abundance. The fins are represented by small-modeled protuberances that project from the back, sides, and lower surface of the fish. Painting on the vessel's surface delineates other features and creates a bold linear design. The viewer is engaged by the large round eyes, the smaller circles representing nostrils below them, and the strangely bared teeth, a menacing touch to this seemingly benign creature. The short, quick lines repeated on the upper part evoke the fish's scales and animate the surface with a lively pattern. The fan-shaped bands radiating from the sides of the mouth represent the gills, emphasized perhaps for their essential function in the breathing process. The bold horizontal stripes on the vessel's sides may refer to the distinct designs on certain types of fish, such as the striped bass. The stripes may even represent the lateral line, a sensory structure that runs along a fish's body and detects vibrations. The lines intersect with a V-shaped form on the fish's tail, suggesting the tail's dynamic force in helping the fish to swim and producing a striking decorative effect.

⁴ Craig Morris and Adriana Von Hagen, *The Inca Empire and its Andean Origins* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1993), 88.

Whatever the significance of these elements to the Nazca culture, it is clear that this artist observed the natural world and drew upon the rich colors, forms, and patterns found in nature. This sculpture expresses the vital spirit of the fish and its importance to the Nazca people—not only as a dietary staple and a source of nourishment, but also as a symbol that was integral to the mythology, religion, ceremonies, and rituals of a community.

This vessel is cracked around the head area and broken at the tail. Its condition is a reminder of its ancient history and also of the paradoxical nature of pottery. Despite its fragile quality, pottery is extremely enduring, offering tantalizing clues to archaeologists and attesting to the life of ancient cultures. Though we do not know the origins of this vessel, its generally well-preserved condition suggests that it came from a protected area such as a tomb.

Style

Nazca artists created a variety of vessels that includes spheres, domelike jars, open bowls, cylinders, and figural shapes like this one. The pottery of some ancient cultures of northern Peru emphasized modeling (shaping the clay), and used limited color. The Nazca relied less on modeling, but covered their smooth, delicately curved surfaces with colorful polychrome painting and designs that tended toward the abstract.

This Nazca artist has represented the fish with some degree of naturalism but has clearly abstracted the forms to create a bold stylized design. By distorting and simplifying certain features, such as the fins and the scales, and by combining two-dimensional and three-dimensional techniques, the artist has created a decorative, caricature-like effect. As in the African *Leopard*, reference is made to certain anatomical features, but the intention is to simplify and to use color, line, and form for expressive purposes.

Technique

This vessel was shaped by the coil method, an additive process in which long cylinders of clay, formed by rolling between the hands, were coiled in rows to build up the walls of the vessel. The coil marks are not visible because they were carefully smoothed off with damp cloths, scrapers, and stone polishers. Some modeling was used to shape the head, tail, and fin area. The double bridge-spout handle was made in a mold and then joined with the body. The holes in it would have allowed air to escape during the firing process. The vessel was probably covered with a slip, a thin overall clay wash, and then painted with mineral pigments before it was fired.

Artist

The expressive artist who created this fish is unknown. No records of Nazca traditions exist to provide clues to the artist's identity, training, or even gender. Nonetheless, the notable artistic achievements of the Nazca culture suggest the existence of craft specialists in the community.

Suggested Questions

1. What kind of animal is this? How can you tell? Does this look like a real fish? What makes you think so?
2. How would you describe this fish? (Is it scary? Funny? Lively? Quiet?) Why do you think so?
3. Is this fish abstract or naturalistic? What features of the fish did the artist emphasize? What features and details are missing? Which features are shown through the shaping of the clay? Which features are painted on the surface?
4. What do you think this object was used for? How can you tell?
5. What material is this made of? How can you tell? Where do you think the artist found the material? Have you ever made anything out of clay?
6. Why do you think that fish might be important to the Nazca people? How are fish important to us today?
7. The Nazca people lived in river valleys near the ocean, mountains, and desert. Why do you think rainfall was so important to them? Why were the Nazca people concerned with the environment? What concerns do we have regarding the environment today? Do we worry about a shortage of water today?
8. Pretend that you are an archaeologist who discovered this vessel. What clues does it give you about the Nazca people? (*They had the technology to fire clay; they lived near water; they were fishing people; they decorated their ceramic vessels.*) What other areas of their culture would you explore to help you understand its meaning? (*The natural environment; the burial sites; other vessels and their images.*)
9. This vessel may have been made to be included in a tomb. What other object in this unit was made for a tomb? In what ways are these objects similar? How are they different?



Philip R. Goodwin, American, 1882–1935

A "Bear" Chance, 1907

Oil on canvas

H.36 x W.26 inches

Gift of The National Biscuit Company, 70.64

Theme

Using an animal for purposes of advertising, Philip Goodwin depicts a large brown bear in the wilderness heartily devouring a crate full of Cream of Wheat cereal.

Background

The late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century was the golden age of illustration. During this period, books and periodicals were major sources of public entertainment. Periodicals were in every home, and illustrated novels were widely read. Since photography was not yet an alternative for publishers, illustrators served as reporters, providing a visual portrayal of the American scene.

During the early part of the 20th century, the Cream of Wheat Company advertised its cereal in many publications.⁵ In one of the most successful campaigns in American advertising, the company commissioned popular artists to produce paintings for advertisements, which were reproduced in magazines such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, and *McClure's*. Among these works was Philip Goodwin's *A "Bear" Chance*, commissioned by the Cream of Wheat Company in 1906 and completed in 1907. The painting graced the office walls of the Minneapolis company, which later became part of Nabisco. In 1970 the Nabisco Company donated the painting to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Throughout the history of advertising, animals have been used to promote products and concepts, attracting human interest with their popular appeal and fascinating, mysterious qualities. Many examples come to mind that are widely recognized today, for instance, Tony the Tiger, Charlie Tuna, and Smokey Bear.

⁵ First marketed in 1893 by a group of flour millers in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Cream of Wheat cereal was an instant popular success. The growing business moved to Minneapolis in 1897, where it remains today as the Special Products Division of the National Biscuit Company.

A "Bear" Chance

In this painting, a large brown bear sits in a clearing of a snowy pine-studded forest, devouring a wooden crate full of Cream of Wheat cereal. Its tracks mark the surrounding snow, reflecting the bear's deliberate movement in pursuit of its quarry. Exhibiting characteristic curiosity, independence, and voracious appetite, the bear appears to be perfectly comfortable in this winter wilderness, as it displays its deft survival skills. The painting conveys a clever marketing message by suggesting that the bear was lured from its winter den by the cereal. This is a testimony indeed to the alluring nature of Cream of Wheat since, normally, the bear would spend the winter in deep hibernation.

To promote a product, Goodwin has created a charming narrative scene as well as a compelling image. An innately strong and intelligent animal, the bear evokes a gamut of associations and connotations. American history is laced with tales of bears. Pioneer explorers such as Lewis and Clark and Davy Crocket encountered the grizzly bear in their push westward. Traditionally admired and respected by native Indian peoples for its extraordinary power, the bear is frequently represented on Native American art objects. Inspiring terror as well as amusement and affection, bears are especially intriguing to people, in part because we recognize human behavior in them. As powerful and dangerous as bears can be, they also evoke benign associations such as those related to the gentle and cuddly teddy bear, the responsible Smokey Bear, the delightful Winnie the Pooh, or the beguiling, hospitable animals in the fairytale *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

Despite the large and lumbering nature of this bear, Goodwin emphasizes its human characteristics. How human it appears as it sits and savors the cereal! Using its front paws like human hands, the bear firmly clutches the crate and nuzzles its mouth and nose greedily into the box. Its hearty appetite and obvious enjoyment could easily be translated to human experience. The image suggests that if you eat Cream of Wheat, you too will be strong, fortified, and able to survive the challenges at hand. In addition, the pristine and invigorating aura of the snow-covered wilderness reinforces the pleasure to be experienced when eating this hot cereal.

Although we see a tranquil, unspoiled setting, the Cream of Wheat crate and its commercial label is a reminder of human activity and the encroachment of civilization and industrial growth. While we cannot be sure if the trees here have been felled by natural disaster or by human exploit, Goodwin provocatively juxtaposes the wooden crate—a by-product of the lumber industry—with the adjacent tree stump. Perhaps it is a commentary on the possessive attitude people have toward natural resources and the human desire to domesticate not only the environment but animals as well. Today, from our late-20th-century vantage point, we lament the consequences of such activities as we struggle to preserve our vanishing wilderness areas and endangered wildlife.

Style

Goodwin was a sensitive observer of the natural world around him, portraying his subjects in a popular genre style, with a basic interest in naturalism. Like artists such as N.C. Wyeth and Charles Russell, who also worked as illustrators at the turn of the century and depicted the West, Goodwin was interested in capturing what he actually experienced.

Goodwin creates a tranquil setting using subdued, earthy colors and soft, undulating contours. The white, spare landscape is a striking contrast to the dark and imposing bear and provides an opportunity for the artist to show off the animal's thick coat of fur and its rich brown coloring. In this painting, Goodwin accurately depicts the details of the bear's form and anatomy—its massive, hunched body, soft brown fur, peering eyes, foraging nose, heavy legs, and large and formidable claws. His careful delineation draws our eye to the bear and the Cream of Wheat container, the centerpiece of the painting. The crate's prominent position in the foreground, its large scale, distinct geometric shapes, and bold letters reinforce it as the focus of our attention and the reason for this advertisement. Varying his paint application, Goodwin uses loose and sketchy brushstrokes in surrounding areas, as in the screen of trees in the background, the sky, and the blanket of snow. The soft dashes and thick dollops of paint create a sense of immediacy, enhancing the vibrant energy and activity of the bear.

Goodwin's use of vertical and horizontal lines and triangular shapes contributes to the stable and tranquil mood of the scene. The rhythmic vertical lines of the backdrop of trees meet the restful horizon line, which is repeated in the lines of the crate. The somewhat triangular shape of the bear is echoed in the pine trees as well as in the tree stump to the right, conveying a harmonious relationship between the bear and its habitat.

Artist

Born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1881, Philip Russell Goodwin began sketching and painting as a child, and made his first sale—an illustrated story—to *Collier's* when he was 11. He studied at both the Rhode Island School of Design and the Art Students League in New York City, as well as with Howard Pyle at Pyle's Brandywine School at Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Known as “the Father of American Illustration,” Pyle inspired an entire generation of illustrators through his work and his teaching. The Wyeth family continues this tradition to the present time.

By 1904, Goodwin had his own studio in New York City and was working on commercial assignments, producing illustrations for *McClure's Magazine*, *Collier's*, and *Everybody's Magazine*, as well as covers for *Saturday Evening Post*. His subjects always included wildlife, and he specialized in painting action-filled hunting scenes for sporting goods calendars. He also painted animals for circus posters and advertisements for various prominent companies, including the Cream of Wheat Company. Goodwin illustrated a number of books about animals and is best known for the illustrations he created for the early editions of Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and Theodore Roosevelt's *African Game Trails*. Working from subjects he observed both in the zoo and in the wild, he also made wax sculptures of animals, which were then cast in bronze.

A passionate outdoorsman and a skilled horseman, Goodwin enjoyed spending time in wilderness areas such as the Maine woods, the Colorado Rockies, remote areas of Canada, and the Montana mountainside lodge of his close friends, the artist Charles Russell and his wife Nancy.

Goodwin died at age 54, having earned little recognition by art circles. In recent decades, however, he has been rediscovered by collectors of wildlife, hunting, and fishing scenes.

Suggested Questions

1. What animal do you see? Was it painted to look naturalistic—as it appears in nature?
2. What is the bear doing? Describe how you think it is feeling.
3. Give a weather report. What is the temperature? What season of the year is it? What kind of day is this?
4. What did the artist do to make us notice the bear? What has the artist done to focus our attention on the Cream of Wheat cereal?
5. Describe the setting of this scene. Why do you think the artist chose to place the bear in the wilderness? Is there any evidence of human activity?
6. This painting was made as an advertisement for Cream of Wheat cereal. Advertisers use pictures to tell us about their products. What does this picture tell us about Cream of Wheat cereal? Why do you suppose the artist decided to use a bear to sell this product? Why did he choose this setting?
7. Do you think this is a successful advertisement? Does it make the product appealing to you so that you would want to try this cereal? This advertisement was created in the early 20th century; where would it have appeared? Where do you see advertising today? Do you think the nature of advertising has changed?
8. What ideas and feelings do you associate with bears? Are bears scary? Funny? Friendly? Gentle and cuddly?
9. Why do you think artists have often chosen to portray animals as subjects for advertising? Why do animals appeal to people? Do you know of any other animals that are used to advertise products?



China (Asia, T'ang dynasty, 7th-8th Century)

Horse, early 8th century

Earthenware with polychrome glaze

H.20½ x L.20¼ inches

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 49.1.6

Theme

Strong, noble, and splendid, this ceramic horse conveys the love and admiration that T'ang (tang) society felt toward its steeds. Not only were horses important in daily life, they were a part of death as well—replicated as ceramic tomb figurines to accompany and entertain the deceased in the afterlife.

Background

The very name T'ang dynasty conjures up a vision of wealth, sophistication, and splendor of a kind that no other Chinese dynastic name can evoke. There springs to the mind's eye a picture of richly caparisoned horses, gay clothes, dancers, musicians, merchants of all nations, vast teeming cities into which the wealth of Asia seems to pour in a steady stream. There comes to mind a sense of a robust forward-looking people of education, endowed with a keen appreciation of the arts.⁶

One of the most vigorous cultural periods in Chinese history, the T'ang dynasty, from 618 to 906 A.D., was an era of expansion, ferment, and prosperity. The major power between the Yellow Sea and Persia, China held widespread influence and traded extensively with countries far beyond its own frontiers. As the largest and strongest power on earth, her trade goods—particularly silks, ceramics, and metalwork—were highly regarded by the rest of the world. During the T'ang, the famous trans-Asian "Silk Road" was at its peak, remaining for centuries the world's greatest trade corridor. Covering over 7,000 miles, the silk routes stretched from India to China—skirting the scorching deserts of Central Asia and ending in the cosmopolitan cities of Chang-an (present-day Xian), the capital, and Lo-yang. Diverse people traveled along these routes, including merchants in caravans bearing exotic luxury items, as well as diplomatic emissaries, monks, pilgrims, and entertainers.

During this period, the influx of foreigners had an invigorating effect on the Chinese intellect and creative spirit. A number of influences entered into T'ang aristocratic life, for example, Indian religions and astronomy, Persian textile patterns and metal craft, Turkish costume, and horses from Central Asia. The impact of these influences on Chinese art was significant and pottery was one of the art forms clearly affected. T'ang ceramics display the robust vitality, cosmopolitanism, and technical advances that characterize the period.⁷

⁶ Margaret Medley, *T'ang Pottery and Porcelain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 11.

⁷ Much of this article is adapted from Robert Jacobsen, "Ceramic Tomb Sets of Early T'ang," *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, vol. 64 (1981).

Though it was an era of exotic taste, the Chinese continued their long-established practice of placing wood and clay figurines of humans and animals in the burial chambers of the deceased. These articles, which are referred to as *ming-ch'i* (ming-chee), meaning "spirit articles," were produced to accompany and protect the dead in the afterlife. Hundreds of figures, including soldiers, servants, musicians, tomb guardians, horses, camels, and models of articles used in everyday life, were placed in tombs.

These figures were produced in abundance during the T'ang period, when funeral processions and burials became quite extravagant. In fact, a special imperial government office was created for the production and supervision of *ming-ch'i*, regulating the number and type of grave objects. The office also regulated the arrangements of funeral processions not only of the aristocracy but of the common classes as well. T'ang funeral processions were relatively festive occasions, as well as somewhat ostentatious gestures of filial piety. Mourners would often carry the grave furnishings, including ceramics, to the tomb while crowds of people stood by to observe the procession. An ancient account relates that some families, in an effort to compete with their neighbors, incurred financial disaster.⁸ Eventually, an imperial decree issued in 742 set limits on the size and number of tomb pieces allowed, based on the rank of the deceased.

T'ang Horse

This blue-glazed ceramic horse belongs to a group of ten figurines excavated in 1948 from an imperial tomb near Lo-yang. Comprising five pairs of figures—court officials, warrior guardians, earth spirits, horses, and camels—the set is distinguished by its finely modeled forms, large-scale figures, abundant use of rare cobalt blue glaze, excellent surface condition, and the fact that it has survived intact. It is one of the few complete tomb sets in existence and one of only two in Western collections.

The horse was perhaps the most popular of all subjects to the T'ang potter. It is portrayed here with a lively, robust quality typical of T'ang ceramic art. One of only three such blue-glazed horses known to exist and the largest and best of those three, the horse is the highlight of the Minneapolis tomb set. It stands four-square on an unglazed rectangular base, with its neck arched, its head down and turned slightly to one side. The dynamic curve of the mane creates a striking profile and accentuates the tense energy of the powerful neck. Although standing at ease, the horse appears to be full of spirit, poised to move at any moment. Elegant and noble in appearance, this steed is glazed in a brilliant, deep cobalt with a contrasting white-and-brown streaked mane. The lavish use of cobalt blue, instead of the ordinary straw-colored glaze, indicates that the retinue was commissioned by a wealthy family who could afford this rare and costly material imported from Persia. The saddle has been left unglazed, and the paint that once decorated it is now gone. (Real saddles in the T'ang period were probably wooden and covered with leather.) The richly ornamented harness trappings are derived from Sassanian Persian metalwork design, and reflect the T'ang love of the exotic.

Eagerly sought for centuries, fine horses came to China from professional horse dealers of western Asia. The animals were of tremendous importance to T'ang China rulers, who used them for military purposes and diplomatic tribute. Vast horse herds were maintained by the

⁸ M. Prodan, *The Art of the T'ang Potter* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1960), 64.

Chinese government and horsemanship was regarded as an aristocratic privilege. Horses were important in providing an efficient mode of travel on the Silk Road and were vital to the military forces defending the borders of T'ang China. It is not surprising that the Chinese chose the horse—their favorite riding animal—to accompany them in the afterlife. Besides providing the deceased with a means to ride into battle, play polo, or hunt, the horse was a symbol of power, prestige, and wealth.

Style/Technique

This horse, made of white clay, was cast from molds. Typically, most T'ang pottery figures were mold-made in mass quantity, although on occasion they could be modeled entirely by hand. Larger figures, such as this horse, were often made by combining several molds with some hand-modeling to construct large, hollow pieces of sculpture. All works, whether mass-produced or otherwise, had to be finished by hand, a process that displayed the artist's skill, as is evident here in the horse's sense of proportion, spontaneity, and movement. The T'ang interest in naturalism is apparent in the careful attention given to the form of the horse, with its accurate proportions, distinct musculature, and lifelike posture. Its modeling conveys the artist's thorough understanding of a horse's anatomy.

This horse is made with the glazing technique of *san t'sai* (tsahn-tsigh), one of the unique ceramic developments of the T'ang period. *San t'sai* means "three-color" and usually refers to green, amber, and cream glazes found on T'ang burial ceramics. Many variations of the hues were used, however, so that the colors were not necessarily limited to three, and black and blue glazes were often included as well. The glazes produced a brilliant effect, well suited to the splendor of the age. The palette primarily used here includes blue, green, and caramel-colored glazes. The rare and costly blue glaze, usually reserved for the best and most striking figures, was associated with more important tombs.

In the *san t'sai* process, the figure was covered with a white slip before the glaze was applied. Slip is a fluid mixture of clay and water that works like a primer coat of paint or gesso, smoothing out the surface and giving it an even color. The use of slip helps to impart a clearer, brighter quality to the colored glazes than would be the case if the glazes were applied directly to the earthenware. (Because earthenware is composed of iron, it tends to discolor glazes.) After the application of slip, the body was covered with colored lead glazes. Because of their liquidity, lead glazes tend to run and streak. They flow and blend during the firing process, resulting in a luxurious interplay of colors, splashes, and drips. The fluidity of the colors was often exploited by the T'ang potter to obtain unexpected streaks and drips, contributing to the object's beauty. Despite the free and random nature of this process, it required extreme skill and sensitivity.

While the artist's interest in realistic detail is apparent in the horse's form, a quality of fantasy and generalization is also conveyed by the treatment of color. The glazes have been applied to produce a decorative and sumptuous effect rather than a realistic portrayal of the horse's color. The dynamic curve of the mane is heightened by its light colors and striped design, which contrast with the deep, brilliant blue of the body. The horse's bold colors and forms create a striking figure of remarkable splendor.

Artist

The manufacture of T'ang ceramics was a vital industry consisting of large workshops. While little is known about these workshops or the individual artists involved, this horse clearly was made by artists of the highest technical and artistic skill.

Suggested Questions

1. What kind of animal is this? Does this look like a real horse? Have you ever seen a horse that looks like this? What is naturalistic about this horse? What is not naturalistic?
2. What is this horse wearing? What does this tell us about how the horse was used?
3. How would you describe this horse? Is the horse showing any physical movement? Where? Would you want to ride this horse? Why or why not?
4. Can you tell what material was used to make this horse? Where did the artist find the material? Have you made anything out of clay? Do you think it was difficult to make? Why do you think so?
5. The technique used to glaze this horse is called *san t'sai*, which means "three-color." What colors are used here?
6. Why do you think the horse was important to Chinese people?
7. **Explain the significance of tomb figures and the belief in an afterlife.** Why would someone want to bring a horse into the afterlife?
8. What other object in this set may have been made to include in a tomb? Both used ceramics for works of art. Which culture do you think was more advanced in its ceramic techniques? Why?



Hispano-Muslim (Moorish)

Gold Lion Statuette, 11th-12th century

Gold

H. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 x 2 inches

The Katherine Kettridge McMillan Memorial Fund, 72.12

Theme

Throughout the centuries, many cultures have seen lions as symbols of courage, strength, and majesty. The specific function of this charming gold statuette, measuring less than five inches high, remains a mystery; however, its elaborate construction and elegant design suggest a purpose: a luxury item to delight the beholder. Undoubtedly, this figure served as a symbol of prestige and style for an aristocratic home in Muslim Spain around the 11th and 12th centuries.

Background

This lion comes from Spain, which was conquered from the Christian Visigoths (originally Germanic people) by the Muslim Umayyad [oo-my-ahd] empire in 711. The Umayyads ruled from Syria and established the southern region of the Iberian Peninsula as their empire's westernmost province, which they called *al-Andalus*. Parts of the region remained under the control of a Muslim empire or kingdom for the next 700 years, until Catholic armies brought Muslim rule to an end in 1492.

The Umayyad period in Spain was characterized by thriving trade, rich cultural exchange, and superlative artistic production. The Umayyads ruled from the city of Córdoba, which eventually grew to more than 500,000 inhabitants, comprising Muslims, Christians and Jews. By the end of the 10th century, Córdoba had become an international center of culture, science, philosophy, and learning. Arabic was the official language, and with a wealth of libraries and educational institutions, Islamic Iberia boasted a literacy rate that was higher and more widespread than in any other region in Western Europe. Many European Christian scholars studied in Muslim Spain and North Africa

At the beginning of the 11th century, the Umayyad dynasty was dissolved into a number of small, independent states, called the *taifa* [tah'-e-fah] kingdoms. The rulers, or *emirs*, of these aristocratic principalities fought among themselves for military supremacy and cultural prestige. They recruited the most famous poets to write sonnets and commissioned artisans to produce luxury goods for their personal pleasure. The lion statuette, produced at this time, is a testament to the sophisticated taste of the *taifa* rulers.

Lion Statuette

This lion statuette is Islamic in style and principle. Islamic art refers to works of art made by and for Muslims as expressions of the Islamic faith or its values, which also encompasses secular objects, made by cultures that flourished within the cultural environment of Islam. It is a

common belief that Islam forbids the representation of living beings, yet portrayals of human and animal forms in the secular sphere can be found in all eras of Islamic art. The Qur'an, the Islamic holy book, does not explicitly prohibit figural representation, though it condemns idolatry as a form of worship and so figural images are not found in mosques and other religious settings. Nevertheless, many Muslims—like people everywhere—enjoy pictures of people and animals in their everyday lives. Figural images in Islamic art, such as this small lion, are not intended to stimulate devotion, but serve instead as decorative reminders of the spiritual realm. Beautiful works of art are considered a reflection of the glory of heaven. Muslims—like any people who are associated by a common religion or political affiliation—hold a variety of beliefs, including their views on figural representation and approaches to art.

Although it is not known what exact purpose this small figure served, the receptacle at the top of the handle and the hollow body provide some clues as to how it might have been used. It is widely regarded that this lion is an aquamanile—a liquid-containing vessel, usually in the shape of an animal. The lion could have been a receptacle for water, oil or perfumes. The liquid would enter the cavity through the top of the handle and, when tipped, it is believed that the liquid would flow from the lion's tongue. It is also thought that the receptacle may have held a small candle or piece of aromatic incense, or served as a lamp.

Whatever its intended function, the statuette was certainly regarded as an object to be admired and treasured. Made of gold, it is extremely rare. Gold is a soft metal that is easily melted down and repurposed. For a delicate object such as this to have survived such a long and fractious period in history is remarkable. Only a few examples of small, gold filigree figures from this same period exist. The work closest in size, style, and workmanship is a winged ram found in northwestern Spain, now in the Provincial Museum of Lugo. Most gold work from Andalus was melted down by the Catholic conquerors of Muslim Spain (similar to the gold of the Aztecs and Incas) and the works that survived were generally ones that were buried inside walls of houses at the time of the expulsions of Muslims, who thought that the political situation might change and they could retrieve the works at some later time upon their return. Muslims and Jews were not permitted to take any valuables with them when they were exiled.

The symbolism of the lion is as enigmatic as the object itself. Early Muslim cultures inherited a large number of symbolic motifs drawn from a combination of Greco-Roman, Byzantine, Visigothic and Sassanian (ancient Persian) influences. When placed into Muslim context, many symbols lost their initial significance and became purely decorative. A symbolic association of the lion to royalty seems to have transformed from one of high significance to primarily ornamental. Representations of lions are found on luxury objects and commonplace everyday ware.

This statuette may have been modeled after the lion statues that support the basin of the fountain at the Palace of the Lions at the Alhambra, a fortress in Granada, Spain, regarded as one of the most famous examples of Islamic art and architecture. The fountain was built in the 14th century, but the twelve stone lions that make up the base of the fountain come from an earlier source, likely taken from an Umayyad palace in Córdoba from around the 10th century.

Style

The lion statuette is completely covered in intricate ornament from head to toe. The surface is infused with floral and tendril filigree (small, thin threads of metal) and fine granulation (tiny

metal beads), techniques that were widely used in Visigothic, Greco-Roman, Byzantine and Sassanian jewelry before adoption into the jewelry arts of the Muslim world. The closer you look at the lion, the more complexity of detail you discover. Islamic art draws on the creativity of many cultures and artistic traditions, but despite the diversity of its origins, Islamic art is often distinguished by an emphasis on ornamentation. Indeed, ornamentation is one of the most characteristic features of Islamic art and has been used from the 7th century to the present. The Arabic word for ornament is *zakhrafa*, which means “to gild.” It refers to the richness that permeates so many forms of Islamic art.

Ornamental designs based on floral and geometric patterns are among the most popular forms of decoration found on Islamic works of art. Flowers, leaves, and vines grow within geometric patterned surfaces and are contained by finely beaded registers that follow the form and structure of the lion’s body. Four little birds perch within the branches at the four corners of the lion’s back. Such a well-ordered garden may refer to the Garden of Paradise, promised in the afterlife to devout Muslims in the Qur’an. The delicacy of the applied décor and geometrically ordered patterning suggests a fine embroidered coat that softens the beast. The lion remains regal and refined, but the profusion of decoration makes it transcend the animal kingdom into a spiritual realm beyond this world.

Technique

Gold has long been valued for its beauty and coveted for its prestige. Gold is the most malleable of metals, capable of being pounded, stretched, or shaped without cracking or breaking. In its pure form, gold is too soft to be used alone and must be alloyed with another metal, such as copper or silver.

This small lion was likely made with the lost-wax process. First, a model of the lion is made of wax and coated in clay. When the clay is fired, the wax melts and is drained away, leaving an exact impression of the wax model in the cavity of the fired clay. The cavity is then filled with molten gold. When the gold is cool, the clay is carefully broken away, revealing the gold object. In this case, the statuette’s torso, head, mane, legs, feet, and handle may have been cast as separate pieces and soldered together. Decorative elements of granulation and filigree skillfully applied over the seams hide any trace of joinery and unify the form.

Granulation is the process by which minute gold spheres are fused to a gold surface. Fusing involves raising the temperature of the surface metal and the granules to the point at which they will adhere. The technique is extremely precise: if the correct temperature is not reached, the granules will not hold; if the temperature is too high, the granules will melt. The tiny spheres are first glued to the surface; the surface is then slowly heated to the precise temperature to fuse the spheres onto the base. The wires that comprise the filigree are attached with the same fusion process.

The minuscule granules are made by snipping small sections of wire onto a charcoal plate brought to just the right temperature so that the pieces liquefy and “bead up.” Sphere size varies according to the thickness of the wire and the uniformity of the spheres is dependent on the precise cutting of the wire. To make the hair-fine wire, a rod of gold is threaded and pulled through a succession of funnels, each smaller than the next. It is then twisted or plaited to create the braid-like quality found on the statuette’s filigree. The combination of lustrous gold, delicate décor, and intricate patterning on such an impossibly small scale make this a tour de

force of metalworking skill as accomplished by a jeweler. Mysteries around this object remain, but the rich cultural and artistic traditions of Muslim Spain around the 11th and 12th centuries are clearly revealed.

Artist

The artist responsible for this remarkable object cannot be identified. Many artists and artisans lived and worked on commission in large districts surrounding palatial courts. As members of guilds, they produced a variety of goods for rulers as well as for merchants, courtiers, and officials of the court. In some cases, workshops were formed and supported within the palace walls. After the establishment of the taifa kingdoms, however, only a few emirs had the resources to commission such works or support workshops that made objects of this quality.

The gold lion statuette at the MIA is a rare example of goldsmithing in Muslim Spain. There are a few examples of similar objects in Spain, Switzerland, and Canada. Gold jewelry using these same techniques is on view in many museums featuring Islamic art, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Suggested Questions

1. Look closely at this lion. What do you notice about its decorations? Do you notice any patterns? What shapes do you see in the patterns? Do you think this lion was created to be symmetrical (the same on both sides)?
2. Does this lion look like a real lion? How is this statue similar and/or different to a real lion? What physical characteristics of a lion are depicted to make it look naturalistic? What aspects of this lion are stylized? What characteristics do you associate with a lion?
3. Considering the intricate details of the filigree and granulation to the use of gold, a very precious metal, who do you think owned this lion? [Royalty or aristocrats of Muslim Spain] What attributes of a lion might the aristocrat want to associate with? What animal would you select to represent you?
4. The actual lion statuette is less than 5 inches tall. The classroom reproduction is almost four times the actual size! Why would you create something to scale? What other types of art use printing or drawing to scale? [Architecture] How does the impact of this object change when you know its actual size? Have your impressions of this object changed knowing it is quite small?
5. Compare this lion statuette to the Benin Leopard. Notice the actual size difference. How are they similar? How are they different? How is it that their uses could have been the same?
6. There is a lot of speculation on what this lion was used for (aquamanile, candle holder, lamp, incense burner); its actual purpose is unknown. What do *you* think this lion was used for and why? What would *you* do with this lion? Where would you put it?
7. Due to the fragility of this object, it would have been handled with exceptional care and may have even been purely decorative. Do you have any belongings that are used only for decoration? Dolls? Model cars? Autographed baseballs? How do you display these items? What makes them so important to you?

8. This lion is made of gold, a very precious metal. Why do you think the artist used gold instead of silver, clay, wax, or bronze? What do you think its being made of gold signifies?
9. Think of TV shows, movies, plays, or books that have lions in them. How have those lions been portrayed/depicted? (*The Lion King*, *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Wizard of Oz*, etc...)



Benin (Africa, Nigeria, West Africa region)

Leopard, 17th century

Bronze

H.17 x L.26 inches

Miscellaneous Works of Art Fund, 58.9

Theme

Created as a royal ceremonial object, this leopard was made to symbolize the Benin (beh-noon) ruler, called the *oba*. With its attributes of strength, ferocity, and intelligence, the leopard reinforces the *oba*'s power and status.

Background

Located in the tropical rain forest of southern Nigeria, the kingdom of Benin has long been one of the most highly developed cultural centers in West Africa. Its art tradition is famous for its sense of refinement and sophistication. Although little is known of Benin's early history, the kingdom was a great military and commercial power by the time the first Europeans arrived there in the late 15th century. The accounts of travelers during the 16th century describe the beautiful city of Benin, the kingdom's capital, as a highly organized religious and administrative center ruled by the *oba*. Vast and splendid, the royal palace complex was richly adorned with cast bronze decorations, carved wooden lintels, pillars, and beams, and ivory carvings.

The *oba* was believed to be the reincarnation of Benin's original ruler and, therefore, divine. He was the central figure in the kingdom—the supreme political, judicial, economic, and spiritual head of his people. Because the *oba* acted as intermediary between his divine ancestors and the Benin people, it was believed that he personally controlled the forces affecting the well-being of the entire kingdom. Regarded with a combination of awe, reverence, and fear, the *oba* had power over the life and death of his subjects.

Surrounded by elaborate ceremonies and rituals, the *oba* and his ancestors were commemorated with symbols of prestige in the form of bronze heads, figurines, and plaques. Most Benin art was made to glorify the *oba* and to pay homage to past *obas*, expressing the special power and privileges of this ruler and reinforcing the complex hierarchy of the court.

Benin's first direct contact with the European world came in the 15th century with the arrival of the Portuguese. The kingdom established diplomatic and trade relations with Portugal, and Portuguese traders supplied luxury items such as coral beads and cloth for ceremonial attire. In return, Benin provided the Portuguese with items such as pepper, cloth, and carved ivory. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Dutch, French, and English surpassed the Portuguese in trade with Benin. Dutch traders provided detailed descriptions of the royal palace and its artworks, which are particularly significant since this palace was destroyed by fire in 1897.

The kingdom of Benin flourished until the end of the 19th century. Then in 1897, it was overcome by a British military expedition. Despite the loss and destruction caused by this event, the kingdom still exists today within the modern state of Nigeria. The *oba* has been

restored and continues to serve as a religious leader, though his political authority is greatly diminished.

Benin Leopard

This bronze leopard is actually a water vessel, used by the *oba* when he washed his hands during ceremonies. The vessel was filled through a round, hinged opening at the top of the leopard's head; when tipped, water poured out through its pierced nostrils. This type of water vessel in animal form, called an aquamanile, derives from European types made from about 1100 to 1500 and used in both religious and secular contexts. Such vessels may have been known in Benin through trade with Europe.

When not being used, the leopard aquamanile stood on the *oba's* ancestral altar in the royal palace courtyard. Other bronze objects such as plaques and heads would have been displayed with it. Leopards were usually made in pairs; the mate to this leopard is in a museum in Munich, Germany.

Admired for its power, ferocity, agility, and intelligence, the leopard became a symbol of the *oba*. According to Benin thought, the leopard could strike fear into the heart of the enemy; it also was recognized as a leader in the animal kingdom. Images of leopards appeared on many objects of royal paraphernalia, reinforcing the *oba's* majesty and power. Live leopards, captured and tamed, were kept at the royal palace. Placed on leashes, they even accompanied royal processions. Leopard skins, which were emblems of rank in Benin, could be worn only by the *oba* and those who obtained his permission. When a hunter killed a leopard he was expected to report to the nearest chief that it was a "leopard of the bush," not one "of the house." Like the royal art of Benin, the leopard essentially belonged to the king, signifying his superior status.

This sculpture conveys the strength, cunning, and wary alertness characteristic of a leopard. Standing firmly on sturdy, muscular legs, the animal looks straight ahead with its ears perked and its fangs bared, a reminder of its awesome power. It displays many of the conventions used for leopards in Benin art, such as overlapping canines, distinct molars, slanted eyes, and leaf-shaped ears.

The richly textured bronze surface possesses a dull black patina and has been painstakingly incised with small circles to represent the leopard's spots. These are set against a stippled background.

Style

The artist has skillfully combined naturalism and stylization, depicting with some degree of accuracy the leopard's physical characteristics such as its sharp teeth, alert ears, lively eyes, and thick, heavy tail. Other features, while reflecting the actual appearance of a leopard, are simplified to create an abstract decorative effect. These include the regularly patterned circles incised on its coat and the elaborate linear designs on the perky ears.

Portrayed with ambiguity, the leopard can be perceived as either fierce or friendly. The sculpture's fully rounded forms and immobile stance evoke a sense of stillness, even a beguiling tameness. At the same time, the animal's sturdy legs are taut with strength and

tension, perhaps poised to spring, while the facial features bristle with the energy and ferocity of this stealthy, mysterious creature.

Technique

For centuries Benin artists have created exquisite animal figures and bronze heads by using a sophisticated casting technique known as the *lost-wax* method. In this process, the artists create a mold by making a clay core, which is covered with a layer of wax. They model and incise the wax as they want the sculpture to look, including all the details intended for the finished work. The wax is then covered with a thick coating of clay. Heating the mold causes the clay to harden and the wax to melt. When the melted wax is poured out, it leaves an empty space, which is filled by pouring in molten bronze. After the metal cools and hardens, the clay jacket is chipped away, revealing a bronze sculpture identical to the original wax model. As much as possible of the interior clay core is removed to produce a hollow sculpture.

Artist

Benin was a flourishing center for artistic activity where artists and craftpersons were organized into guilds of blacksmiths, brass and bronze casters, wood and ivory carvers, bead and costume makers, and leather workers. The *oba*, the most important patron of the arts in Benin, had a virtual monopoly on the work of many of the artists' guilds. These guilds were incorporated into the court organization, with workshops located in the palace. Membership in the guilds was hereditary, with skills passed on from generation to generation.

Suggested Questions

1. What kind of animal do you think this is? How can you tell? Does this look like a real leopard? What physical characteristics of a leopard are depicted to make it look naturalistic? What aspects of the leopard are abstract?
2. What kinds of pattern do you see on the leopard? Where do you see the pattern?
3. What parts of the leopard's body do you notice first?
4. Do the eyes look sleepy or alert? Why do you think so? What makes it look as if the leopard is listening to something?
5. What kinds of textures does this leopard have? Smooth? Furry? Rough? Shiny?
6. Does this leopard seem friendly or fierce? Why?
7. How large do you think this leopard is?
8. In Benin, the leopard was associated with the ruler, the *oba*. What attributes of a leopard might a ruler share? (*The leopard is powerful, swift, beautiful, cunning, frightening, agile, alert, etc.*) If you were a ruler, what animal would you want to be associated with? Why?
9. Discuss purpose of an aquamanile. This leopard was made to hold water. Where would the water pour out?
10. Why do you think the *oba* would have this aquamanile made for him? (*Answers include: to enhance his image or prestige, to keep the court sculptors in business, to add majesty and glamour to court ceremonies, etc.*)
11. What is this sculpture made of? How can you tell? What does the material tell you about the kinds of technology the people of Benin had available to them? What else does the sculpture tell you about the people who made it?



James Jacques-Joseph Tissot, French, 1836–1902

On the Thames, A Heron, c. 1871–72

Oil on canvas

H.36 ½ x W.23 ¾ inches

Gift of Mrs. Patrick Butler by exchange, 75.7

Theme

James Tissot's (Tee-ssō's), painting *On the Thames, A Heron* combines a quaint English Victorian narrative—two fashionable young women at leisure, boating on the River Thames (temz) —with new compositional techniques borrowed from Japanese woodblock prints and photography popular with avant-garde artists in France. By merging concurrent English and French styles of painting, Tissot pays equal attention to the Grey Heron that dominates the lower half of the painting. To add a touch of tension and mystery to this otherwise quiet scene, Tissot captures the moment when this large, majestic water bird takes flight.

Background

The French painter James Tissot left France for England in 1871, a political refugee of the Franco-Prussian war. Years earlier, while Tissot was a young man studying art in Paris, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Prussia was pursuing the unification of German states to create a powerful German Empire. Bismarck's political maneuvering threatened France's political standing as well as its borders, and on July 19, 1870, Napoleon III declared war. The shortlived Franco-Prussian war ended with a crushing French defeat.⁹ In the turmoil that followed, a local socialist government, the Paris Commune, was instated to rule Paris, but it soon dissolved when the conservative French government returned to power and retook the city. Because of his association with the Commune, Tissot was forced to flee to London to avoid arrest.

England had remained neutral during the French-Prussian conflict, but was experiencing a revolution of its own—the industrial revolution under the reign of Queen Victoria. By the end of the 19th century, Victoria's England had acquired territory and developed trade routes throughout the world, expanding the British Empire to encompass nearly one-fourth of the earth's land surface. Exotic goods from around the world flowed into England's ports. Its political prowess grew simultaneously with its technological progress. London's Great Exhibition of 1851, held in Hyde Park, was a platform for advances in science and new machines powered by steam and electricity, which spurred drastic changes in the way people lived. Goods were manufactured more quickly and cheaply, workers became more productive, and wages increased. People now had more free time and disposable income. Tissot wasted no time finding patrons among this growing middle class, which indulged in pastimes previously enjoyed only by the wealthy, such as leisurely outings on the Thames.

⁹ Ironically, only 64 years earlier, the French Sèvres tea set painted by Caron, was given as a gift to Prince William of Prussia in 1807, the year following Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat of Prussia in his imperial campaigns.

On the Thames, A Heron

On the Thames, A Heron is one of Tissot's first English works. Arriving with little money and few resources, he quickly built his career creating scenes of London life imbued with Victorian charm. Here, Tissot has painted two smartly dressed young women on an autumnal pleasure outing on the calm backwaters of the River Thames. For his setting, he chose the Thames, England's major river at the country's heart, in a conscious appeal to his English audience. As a major transportation artery for both trade and travel, the Thames was a symbol of England's vitality and a subject of admiration.

On the Thames, A Heron depicts a quintessential English scene. As in an English poem or novel, the image tells the story of two women—one blonde, one brunette—in a Thames skiff, a wooden rowboat developed specifically for Victorians to enjoy the recreational value of the river. Tissot painted the scene with glossy precision. His attention to detail is particularly expressed in his subjects' clothes, which were carefully chosen for the models. The black-and-white checked skirt, bobble-fringe shawl, and little white hat with flowers and black ribbon all appear in later paintings.

What takes this painting beyond a sentimental English narrative is the magnificent Grey Heron that glides diagonally across the lower half of the composition. The heron subtly appears to the viewer as it materializes from the natural surroundings of marsh grasses and water. Once discovered, it inspires awe and wonder through its size and beauty. As if captured with a camera, Tissot constructs that instant when this great bird takes flight, roused from its fishing post along the river's edge.

Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) are one of the most familiar of England's birds. They can be found in fresh, salt, clear, or muddy waters. Regents Park in central London has up to 20 nesting pairs. Known to live for up to 25 years, herons are excellent fishers and silently stalk in shallow waters to strike their prey with alarming speed. As Tissot has so skillfully depicted, the Grey Heron has a white head with a crest of long black feathers. With a wingspan of 72 inches and a length of 37 inches, they arch their wings and tuck in their necks while in flight. It is no wonder that Tissot chose to place this familiar bird of England so prominently in this painting.

Tissot's placement of the heron directly into the foreground is a daring move that stems from his interest in Japanese design, so popular with his fellow artists back in France. The strong diagonal composition, shallow depth of field, and the viewer's high vantage point come directly from Japanese woodblock prints. The juxtaposition of two separate pictorial elements—the girls and the heron—in a compressed space also reflects an influence from Japan. Tissot's application of pattern in the fabrics, trees, grasses, and water is another reflection of Japanese style. In this way, Tissot takes a traditional English scene and transforms it into a thoroughly contemporary form.

Tissot lends greater depth to the scene through his use of weather and season. The still, mystical mood is evoked through the rich colors of an overcast fall day. The soft gray backdrop of the Thames heightens lush variations of sienna, umber, red, and green. In contrast, the stark black and white of the women's garments establishes a psychological division between their carefully contrived world and their natural surroundings.

The tension is intensified by the close proximity between the women, the heron, and the viewer. Subtle gestures indicate that their activity has been interrupted, as one stops still while tying her shawl, the other in the act of rowing. Tissot draws the viewer into the picture through these

gestures—the turn and lift of a head or the gaze of the eyes. The subjects’ attention is not directed toward the heron, but rather the viewer. Perhaps it is we, the viewers, who have just entered on the distant shore to disrupt this hushed scene.

Style and Technique

Tissot’s ability to synthesize popular English subjects with French painting techniques appears perfectly logical and acceptable to our contemporary eye. However, in his day, his French contemporaries considered his conventional style as pandering to the London market, while the English critics thought his painting too “French” through his emphasis on design and flirtatious innuendo.

Tissot was technically a conservative academic painter, trained at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris; nevertheless, it was his social acquaintances that had the greater effect on his style. His influential friends included artists Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and perhaps most importantly, James Whistler. It was shortly after meeting Whistler that Tissot anglicized his name from Jacques to James. While in Paris, Tissot absorbed the trends for Japanese design, called *Japonisme*; aestheticism, a decorative style that emphasized sensual rather than moral meanings; and Impressionism, a modern way of painting thoroughly contemporary subjects. Japanese woodblock prints, readily available through trade, brought to the West a new understanding of Japanese design principles. Western artists owed a clear debt to Japan in their daring compositions, shallow field, and high vantage point. Photography as a new medium also influenced the way contemporary artists painted and composed. The camera’s ability to record instantaneously with descriptive accuracy may have influenced Tissot’s sense of immediacy and attention to detail.

Disillusioned by the political and social events of the late 19th century, many artists turned away from a romantic view of the world in favor of an objective view of the ordinary, observable world. Avant-garde artists rejected traditional themes of history, mythology, and religion in favor of scenes from everyday life, emphasizing contemporary fashions and social practices central to the whole idea of Modern. Tissot’s interest in fashion, etiquette, and elegant accessories is a distinctive feature of his work. Tissot’s paintings often feature two or three figures amid a profusion of fabrics, ribbons, and flowers. Dresses and hats from his cache of props are repeated in his other works, even within a single painting. Tissot’s interest in fashion may stem from his upbringing in the textile center of Nantes (nahnt), where his father was a linen draper and his mother a milliner. Despite his interest in new subject matter, Tissot continued to paint in the highly finished, detailed style of the academy to meld traditional techniques with modern life.

Through his predominant depiction of the stylish leisured class, Tissot’s London paintings demonstrate a keen insight into Victorian life. He capitalized on this socially aspiring culture, whose wealth was the product of British industry, and quickly gained celebrity. Despite Tissot’s success, his pictures were often described as vulgar. To many, the newly rich were considered coarse society, flaunting their affluence in poor imitation of the established social and economic order of old England, and Tissot captured it with clarity and minute detail.

Tissot’s paintings also look to the popular culture of English illustrated magazines for their subject and treatment. Upon his arrival in London, he stayed with his friend, Thomas Gibson Bowles, who ran the newly published magazine, *Vanity Fair*. While in England, Tissot taught himself to etch in order to reproduce his own paintings rather than sell the rights to other engravers. Tissot’s flair for narrative may stem from his sketches and etchings of people in

familiar settings, such as the Thames, the streets of London, and seaside resort towns, which he made for such publications as *Vanity Fair*, *Graphic*, and *Illustrated London News*.

Biography

Tissot was born in 1836 in Nantes, a thriving seaport where he grew up among ships, boats, and water. His father was a prosperous merchant who had a drapery business, and his mother was a milliner, which likely influenced Tissot's passion for painting fabrics of all types and textures. Over his father's objections, Tissot went to Paris at the age of 20 to study at the *École des Beaux-Arts*. In Paris he made friends with fellow artists Edouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and James Whistler. Although he studied at the academy, he made his reputation in France as a society painter and exhibited his work at the fashionable Paris Salon, becoming the most profitable of the four friends.

Despite coming from wealth, Tissot joined the revolutionary Paris Commune when the Franco-Prussian War ended in 1870. When the government returned to power, Tissot fled to London, where he remained for 11 years. After Tissot was officially cleared of any association with the Commune in 1874, he returned to Paris for short trips, but kept his home in north London's fashionable St. John's Wood, where he built a successful career painting London society. The collectors adored his work, his friends envied his success, and his critics dismissed him as frivolous and insincere.

Never married, Tissot lived openly with the love of his life, Kathleen Newton, an Irish divorcée and model. Between 1877 and 1882, Newton was the subject of numerous paintings and engravings, and Tissot's work became extremely personal as he painted their life and surroundings. Newton died of tuberculosis in 1882 at age 28. After her death, the grief-stricken Tissot returned to Paris and concentrated on religious themes, creating a series of paintings from the Bible. He made three trips to the Near East between 1886 and 1896 to sketch and photograph the people, costumes, and landscape of the region.¹⁰ Tissot died in Buillon, France, in 1902.

From his early years in Paris to his late religious phase, Tissot's unique synthesis of styles made him one of the most remarkable artists of his time. Today, Tissot is regarded as one of the most original painters of 19th century.

¹⁰ *Journey of the Magi* (70.21), in the museum's collection, dated 1894, comes from this period in Tissot's career.

Suggested Questions

1. How would you describe these young women? How would you describe their dress? What are they doing? What do you see that makes you say that? What, if anything, surprises you about this scene?
2. How would you describe the setting? What season do you think it is? What do you see that makes you that? If you were a weather reporter, how would you describe the weather?
3. What words would you use to describe the Gray Heron? How would you describe the women's reaction to the heron? How would the painting be different without the heron?
4. Tissot's work has often been described as an English narrative, a painting that tells a story. What story does this painting tell? What happened in the story before the heron appeared? What part does the bird play? What will happen next? Imagine that you have just entered into the painting. What part do you play in this narrative?
5. This story takes place on the River Thames in London, England, in 1871. What would it feel like to be on the river in this small boat, called a Thames skiff? What types of sounds might you hear? What types of smells might you find? What do you see that makes you say that?
6. Tissot was known for painting in a clear, polished style, with great attention to detail. What details do you notice in this painting? Where has the artist paid the most attention to detail?
7. England of the late 1800s was a very fashionable place, and Tissot was interested in the fashions of the day. What types of textures did Tissot paint in the clothes? Where else did Tissot paint textures? What kinds of patterns did Tissot paint in this scene?



Painted by Christophe-Ferdinand Caron, French, 1774–1831
Manufactured by Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, Sèvres, France, est. 1738
Teacups with scenes from "The Fox and the Stork", 1807–1808
Porcelain with enamel and gilded decoration
H.4⁵/₁₆ x W.4 ½ x D.3³/₈ inches
The Groves Foundation Fund, 81.101.13 and 81.101.16

Theme

Caron has portrayed the fox and stork with picturesque charm, providing rich adornment to this luxury tea service. Illustrating a popular fable, he imbues the animals with personality and amuses us with their human behavior.

Background

Porcelain is the finest and most highly prized form of ceramic, valued for its hard, white, translucent qualities, its shiny surface, and its mysterious resonance, which causes it to ring when struck. Porcelain had been made in China since the 7th century, and was occasionally imported to the West where it was considered a rarity and luxury. For centuries Europeans sought the formula for making porcelain, but it was not until the early 18th century that the secrets of its production were discovered in Germany.

During the second half of the 18th century, France became the leading porcelain manufacturer in Europe. The center of the French porcelain industry was located at the national porcelain manufactory at Sèvres (sev-vr), a suburb of Paris. Setting the fashion in ceramics from around 1760 to 1815, the Sèvres factory was recognized for its rich colors, the quality of its individual painters, and the opulence of its GILT decoration.

Though it began in private hands, Sèvres soon came under the royal patronage of King Louis XV. It became a government enterprise and is still operating as one today. It was extensively patronized by Napoleon Bonaparte, for whom some very ambitious items were produced. These pieces included enormous vases decorated with allegories of his victories, tables set with painted porcelain plaques, and elaborate dinner and tea services. Contributing to the glory of his reign, these porcelain objects were frequently presented by Napoleon as diplomatic gifts.

Teacups

These cups belong to a tea service that was a gift from the emperor Napoleon to Prince William of Prussia. The service was ordered in 1807, the year following Napoleon's defeat of Prussia in his imperial campaigns. Each of the 12 cups and saucers and 4 serving pieces is richly adorned with scenes derived from the famous fables of the French writer Jean de la Fontaine.

La Fontaine, who lived from 1621 to 1695, was a popular French poet and writer whose fables have enchanted generations of children and adults. His poetic interpretations were based on fables that had proven their vitality in popular tradition. La Fontaine frequently drew upon the Greek author Aesop, whose legendary fables about clever, foolish, greedy, and generous

animals have been a source of inspiration to artists and writers for centuries. The subjects portrayed on this tea service reflect not only the popularity of La Fontaine's fables, but also the interest in motifs from nature that occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries.

The images depicted on these cups are based on episodes from "The Fox and the Stork." In this fable, Mr. Fox invites Miss Stork to dinner and serves clear soup in dishes so shallow that the stork, with her long beak, is unable to sip even a drop. Alas, after watching her host lap up his dinner, she goes home still hungry. In the next scene, Miss Stork invites Mr. Fox to dinner and serves a thick soup in tall vessels with a long narrow neck. The stork can now eat with ease, inserting her beak in the jar, while the fox, unable to reach his food and feeling weak with hunger, can only stand and watch. Reminding the fox that she simply followed his example, the fable ends with a moral lesson: treat others as you would like to be treated yourself.

The artist Christophe-Ferdinand Caron illustrates the fable's two main sequences on separate cups. Though his images do not have the text to support them, Caron clearly portrays the essence of the story, using naturalistic detail and dramatic gestures and imbuing his animals with a sense of mischief and personality. In the first scene, the fox eagerly laps up his soup from the gold dish on the ground, while the stork stands by intently observing him. She stands erect with wide-open wings and prancing, fluttering movement. Her body language suggests her outrage at the fox's rude indulgence as well as her own feelings of hunger and frustration. The tables are turned, however, on the second cup, where the stork savors the meal with her long beak nestled deep into the tall blue vessel. Contrasting with her animated posture in the first scene, her contentment and pleasure are now apparent. But the fox appears distressed and forlorn, cowering toward the ground, his tail tucked beneath him.

Though Caron is concerned with a realistic portrayal of the animals' physical features, he reveals their behavior to be more like humans than like animals. Caron portrays the fox and the stork with careful attention to anatomical detail, showing the heavy build of the stork, its bright red bill and legs, its broad wings and long neck, and its boldly patterned plumage of black and white. He also renders the fox's long, sharp snout, its pointed ears, and its bushy tail. Nonetheless, there is a fairytale quality to the scene, partially due to its scale, reminding one of toy-like miniatures. Moreover, the animals are engaged in the human activity of dining together, indeed with utensils produced and used by humans.

By their very nature, fables use stereotypes to convey certain human characteristics; in this case the fox, which we associate with craft and cunning, is an appropriate deceitful and greedy character. The stork, which has the legendary reputation in Europe as the bringer of babies and symbol of good luck, fits the role of the innocent victim of the fox's wiles who behaves with intelligence to teach the fox a lesson. Suggesting both the foibles and the wisdom of the fox and the stork, Caron gives us a caricature of human beings and human behavior. Like the writers La Fontaine and Aesop, Caron portrays animals to delight, amuse, and teach a moral lesson, as well as to decorate this luxury tea service with picturesque charm.

Style

Reflecting the French fascination for classical antiquity during Napoleon's empire, the shape of these cups is patterned on ancient Greek pottery forms. This style, which emulates the classical world of Greece and Rome, is called neoclassical. Contrasting with the curving forms and elaborate flourishes of earlier porcelains, the flatter, straighter surfaces and simple lines of the neoclassical style were inviting to painters. In fact, painting assumed a new importance as

it often now covered the entire surface, hiding the white porcelain, which traditionally had been displayed.

The painted scenes unfold around the outside of each cup, edged by gilt on the border and foot that continues inside and completely covers the interior of each cup. Glowing brilliantly, the tea service gives an impression of preciousness and resembles metalwork.

The landscape scenes are painted in a naturalistic style, reflecting Caron's emphasis on direct observation, which can be seen in the animals' physical characteristics, stances, and gestures. He focuses our attention on the animals and their actions, setting them front and center against a neutral backdrop of soft fluffy trees in one scene and a rocky embankment in the other. Behind the stage-like settings are soft blue skies and idyllic landscapes. The muted browns, greens, and blues of the backgrounds allow the vivid white, black, and red hues of the stork to stand out, as well as the rich rust and white fur of the fox and the shiny gold and blue vessels from which the animals eat. Despite the miniature scale of the paintings, the subjects are clearly and exquisitely defined, attesting to the meticulous skill of the artist.

Technique

The cups from this tea service are made of *hard-paste* or "true" porcelain, which requires two special ingredients. The first is *kaolin*, a type of clay that retains its shape, even in very high temperatures, and turns a white color after firing. The second important ingredient is *petuntse*, a stone that gives porcelain its translucent quality. In the manufacture of porcelain, all the materials are first finely ground up, or pulverized, and washed and filtered. The proper mixture of kaolin and petuntse, referred to as the *paste* or *body*, is combined with water to make a plastic substance that can be shaped either on a potter's wheel, by hand, or in baked clay molds. These teacups were shaped in molds.

Usually the shaped ware is covered with a thin coating of minerals called a glaze and then put into a kiln and fired at a very high temperature. When fired, the body becomes vitreous, or glasslike, and impermeable. Enamel colors and a thin gold leaf are painted over the glaze, and the ware is fired again at a lower temperature.

Artist

As the manufacture of French porcelain developed during the 18th century, production tasks became specialized. Various artists/craftspersons, such as a painter, a modeler, and a gilder, often collaborated to make an object. With the help of factory records and marks on porcelain, it is sometimes possible to identify these individuals. We know that the service was painted by Christophe-Ferdinand Caron.

Caron was born in St. Cloud, outside of Paris, and was associated with the Sèvres manufactory from 1792 to 1815 as a specialist in animal painting. This tea service, which took him over six months to execute, is one of his greatest achievements. He also decorated many of the plates of the service used personally by the emperor Napoleon.

Fascinated by animals, Caron made drawings on his frequent visits to the botanical gardens and zoo in Paris. He also used engravings and documents as sources for animal and landscape images. In 1815, due to failing eyesight, Caron retired from the Sèvres manufactory.

Suggested Questions

1. What kinds of animals do you see painted on these cups? What are they doing?
2. What do you see in the background behind the animals? What does the background on these cups tell us about the animals' homes?
3. How does the stork feel about the fox eating from the flat bowl? How can you tell? How does the fox feel about the stork eating from the tall vase? How can you tell?
4. **Tell the fable of "The Fox and the Stork."** What parts of the story do you see on the cups?
5. Fables are stories that teach us a lesson. What do you think the lesson of this story is?
6. What looks real about these pictures? (*Consider: setting, animals and their movements.*) What do you see on the cups that is not real? In what other ways do the fox and the stork behave like humans?
7. These cups are part of an entire tea set. What else is included in a tea set? (*Teapot, creamer, sugar.*)
8. Where do you see gold on these cups? The insides of the cups are covered with gold too. Why do you suppose designers and artists put gold on teacups? Consider the purpose of these cups: they were part of a tea service given to a Prussian prince by the emperor of France. Does their purpose as a royal gift give you any clues? What are they?
9. Although they are made of different types of clay and by different methods, these teacups, the vessel in the form of a fish from Peru, and the horse from China are all ceramic, made of clay. What do these different pieces tell us about ceramics? (*Universality, importance to various cultures at different times in history, variety of uses and functions.*) Have you ever made something out of clay? What did you make?