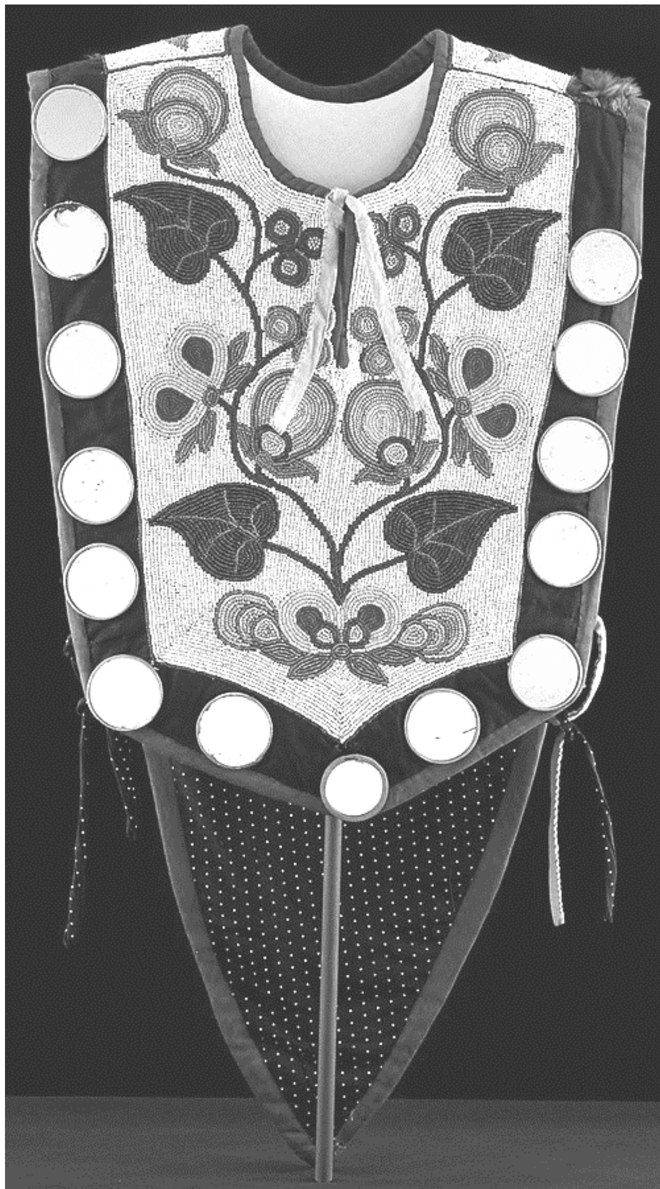
Art Adventure

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Dressed for the Occasion



Anishinabe, *Cape*,
19th–20th 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.

By becoming a member of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, you can reach even further, bringing the experience of world-class art to thousands of museum visitors a year – some visiting for the first time ever, and many of them schoolchildren. Members help support the museum's free general admission every day. Members also help support the exhibitions, lectures, events, and classes offered for children, families, students, and adults.

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For more information or to join, please call the Members' Hotline at (612) 870-6323 (toll-free (888) 642-2787), or visit our website at **www.artsmia.org.**

• 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

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Portrait of a Burgomaster*	●Samples of velvet	$30
Blue Hmong, Ceremonial skirt	●Sample of Hmong embroidery ●Photograph of Hmong girls in traditional costume	$30 $10
Yoruba, King’s crown	●African beaded bracelet ●Photograph of Yoruba king	$25 $10
Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi*	●Sample of taffeta fabric ●Reproduction of Vigée-LeBrun self-portrait	$30 $10
Anishinabe, Cape	No prop	
James Van DerZee, *Wedding Day, Harlem*	●Photograph of Van DerZee	$10
Roman, *Standing Deity*	●Sample of fresco painting	$50
Richard Hunt, *Transformation Mask*	●Sample of carved cedar	$20

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!

Contents

Introduction

1. Bartholomeus van der Helst, ***Portrait of a Burgomaster***, c. 1660 1
2. Thailand (Blue Hmong), **Ceremonial skirt**, 20th century 7
3. Nigeria (Yoruba), **King's Crown**, 19th century 13
4. Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, ***Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi***,1793 19
5. Anishinabe (Ojibwe), **Cape**, 19th–early 20th century 25
6. James Van DerZee, ***Wedding Day, Harlem***, 1926 31
7. Roman, ***Standing Deity***, 1st century A.D. 37
8. Richard Hunt, ***Transformation Mask***, 1993 45

Introduction

From earliest times, people have dressed and adorned themselves in an endless variety of styles and manners. While clothing has served as protection from the elements, it also has been a vehicle for creativity and an expression of identity. What people wear can reveal a great deal about their personalities, social and economic status, occupations, and environments. Clothing can also provide insights into the customs, values, religious beliefs, materials, and technical achievements of the cultures in which people live.

The eight works of art in this set include objects of adornment and ceremonial dress as well as images of people dressed for specific occasions. By examining people's attire in works of art from various periods of time and from diverse cultures, we can gain insight into the important role of clothing throughout history. We can also see shared human qualities expressed in the desire to wear items that display beauty, status, power, and cultural and religious meaning. We can find differences, as well, in attitudes, values, styles and available resources. Through the works of art in this set, students are invited to explore the many ways in which clothing is central to our lives. Because the set features a broad range of media in both two and three dimensions, it also provides an opportunity to study techniques used in photography, oil painting, fresco wall painting, and woodcarving, and sewing techniques such as embroidery and appliqué.

Bartholomeus van der Helst, Dutch, 1613–1670
Portrait of a Burgomaster, c. 1665-1670
Oil on canvas
H.48⅜ x W.39⅜ inches (canvas)
Bequest of John R. Van Derlip in Memory of Ethel Morrison Van Derlip, 35.7.106

Theme

This civic leader of 17th-century Holland is dressed in all his finery to have his portrait painted. Unlike the simple attire of Countess Bucquoi in the portrait by Vigée LeBrun, his clothing is formal and richly decorated to display his important position and material success.

Background

The 17th century was a golden age in Holland, a period during which its towns became vigorous centers of trade and industry. After winning independence from Catholic Spain in 1648 and securing religious, political, and economic freedom, Holland became a democratic and predominantly Calvinist Protestant country. Holding a position of great economic strength, it rose to become the outstanding sea power in the world. Extensive colonial possessions in the East and West Indies brought Holland great prosperity. During this period, Amsterdam became an international port and the chief banking center of Europe.

Holland's prosperity resulted in the rise of a ruling class of wealthy merchants as well as a large middle class, all of whose members were extremely proud of their newly won freedom and accomplishments. Dutch citizens delighted in their homes and families, and adorned their walls with paintings that reflected their lifestyle, values, and material prosperity. Responding to the great demand, large numbers of artists provided paintings of extraordinary quality and variety. For the first time, painters began to specialize in specific subjects such as landscapes, seascapes, genre paintings, and still-lifes.

To feed the mania for art collecting among the Dutch middle class, artists also began to produce works of art to sell on the open market rather than on commission. This represented a great change, since historically the church and court were the primary patrons of European artists, commissioning art for their own use. In 17th-century Holland, however, there was no royal court, since the country was an independent republic that had been freed from the rule of Spain's absolute monarchy. And Calvinism was the dominant religion of Holland, which meant that images of saints, or any other pictorial or sculptural representations, were not allowed in churches. This Protestant religion held that art and ornamentation had no place in the church.

Although religious and court art was not commissioned in 17th-century Holland, there were commissions in the field of portraiture. During this period, Dutch painters produced unprecedented numbers of portraits for members of the affluent middle class who wanted to show off their new social and economic status. There was a demand for portraits not only of individuals, but also of couples, of whole families, and of groups of people in civic and military organizations. Indeed, commissioned portraits provided a thriving livelihood for many artists, who relied on them as a dependable source of income when facing the economic uncertainty of

an open market.

Portrait of a Burgomaster

Although we do not know the identity of the man in this portrait, it is believed he was the *burgomaster* of Amsterdam, an important position in town government equivalent to mayor. Since he clearly wanted his portrait to display his important social position and material success, it is not surprising that he chose for the commission Bartholomeus van der Helst, Amsterdam's most prominent portraitist. Van der Helst used pose, costume, and setting to make a statement about his subject's status and importance. Here, the *burgomaster* is portrayed as a gentleman of leisure, standing on the veranda of his estate. He appears self-assured and proud in his body language and frontal pose, directly confronting the viewer with his left hand placed on his hip and his right hand resting on a marble column. Such architectural elements as this balustrade and column became a convention in Dutch portraiture around 1650. Associated with the dignity and grandeur of ancient Greece and Rome, they evoked the importance of the sitter.

The *burgomaster* has chosen to wear his finest clothing for this portrait, making a bold fashion statement. Taking up most of the canvas, his sumptuous and costly costume informs us of his wealth, power, and prestige. He wears an official-looking coat of black velvet. Black clothing was the popular choice for portraits in the Netherlands during this period, indicating the sitter's high social class. This particular kind of coat, called a *justaucorps*, was a newly fashionable style. The black color also serves as a striking contrast to the costume's lavish decoration. His glittering braided vest is particularly flamboyant, with gold and silver lace patterns and liberal use of metal buttons. A luminous band of gold and silver looped threads is draped across his ample stomach. Attached to his side is a *baldric*, a sword carrier, which was another sign of a very fashion-conscious gentleman. Because the sitter is represented in three-quarter view, we do not see his attire below his long coat. He likely would be wearing a pair of petticoat breeches, also known as *culottes*. These loose shorts were often decorated with ribbons at the waist and knees.

The *burgomaster*'s fancy sleeve ruffles, an important accessory for both men and women's costume in the 17th century, are embellished with tiers of gold and silver lace, multicolored looping ribbons, which also appear on his shoulder's *epaulet* (fringed strap), and delicate linen lace cuffs. Complementing his cuffs, around his neck is a lace cravat. The Dutch were passionate about lace during the 17th century, eager to display its intricate patterns, rich textures, and dramatic contrasts. His cravat, tied with a striking red bow, is a key feature of his costume, with its central placement, clearly defined triangular shape, elaborate patterns, and soft textures. A gentleman of his status would have owned numerous sets of matching cuffs and cravats. During the 18th century, sleeve ruffles became more simplified, as can be seen in Vigée LeBrun's rendering of Countess Bucquoi's attire. It is interesting to note, however, that modern male neckwear evolved, over time, from the cravat. Indeed, the groom's bow tie in Van DerZee's photograph is an updated version of this ornate cravat. Likewise, the *burgomaster*'s layered fashion of the coat, vest, and breeches, were precursors of the modern-day three-piece suit. The fussy frills of 17th-century men's clothing contrast dramatically with the sleek, simple lines of the groom's 20th-century attire.

While the pose, setting, and magnificent garments in the portrait clearly glorify this gentleman, the artist did little to idealize him. Adhering to Dutch naturalism, van der Helst shows the details

of his subject's soft, robust skin, long, flowing hair, and full face with its rounded chin and rosy complexion. His slight smile, twinkling eyes, and direct gaze suggest a friendly, contented man who enjoys the comforts of life and his position in society. He faces the world with warmth and vitality.

Identity

According to documentation, when this painting was purchased in 1935, its title was *Portrait of a Burgomaster*, and the museum did not know the name of the man in the painting. He was later identified as Jacobus Trip, a member of the prominent Dutch family that made their fortune in iron and armaments. The Trip family loved to have their portraits made, and commissioned artists often. In addition to van der Helst, Rembrandt, and several other artists, also painted portraits of Trip family members.

Recent scholarship on the Trip family[1] has led the museum to question the portrait's identity. This research revealed that although Jacobus Trip was a wealthy businessman, he never held the position of *burgomaster*. The museum has since decided to remove his name from the portrait's title. It is hoped that continued research will someday uncover his true identity.

Technique

Known for his polished, highly finished style, Bartholomeus van der Helst used oil paint on canvas to create this naturalistic portrait. Oil paint lent itself to van der Helst's precise technique because of its brilliant colors, translucent effects, and the layers in which it was applied. Characteristic of many Dutch artists in the 17th century, van der Helst's brushwork is barely perceptible. Capturing the play of light on various surfaces of his sitter's clothing, he shows the sheen of the velvet coat, the shimmering quality of the ornate vest, and the crisp linen of the lace. He used very fine brush strokes for minute details of the lace, skin, and gold and silver threads.

Artist

Bartholomeus van der Helst was born in Haarlem, Holland, in 1613, and little is known of his early life. He arrived in Amsterdam in 1636 and soon received important commissions from civic leaders. From the mid-1640s on, he replaced Rembrandt as the most popular portrait painter in Amsterdam. Van der Helst rose to prominence during a period when a taste for elegance and luxury dominated many aspects of Dutch life, including clothing, interior decoration, and portraiture. His paintings reflect the general change of style that occurred around the mid-1600s when the courtly, elegant manner of Flemish portrait painting replaced the more restrained, somber manner of earlier Dutch portraits. Van der Helst is also known for his large group portraits of the Amsterdam civic guards. He died in Amsterdam in 1673.

Suggested Questions

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[1] Research conducted by Dr. Alison Kettering, an art history professor at Carleton College and an expert on 17th century Dutch art.

1. What is a portrait? Do you have a portrait of yourself? How was it made? How was this portrait made? Look closely. Can you see any brushstrokes?

2. Describe what the *burgomaster* is wearing. What would his clothing feel like if you touched it? What fabrics are his clothes made from? How many different kinds of fabric can you see? Which fabrics appear to be thick and heavy? Thin and light? Which fabrics are transparent? Which are opaque? How many layers is he wearing? What decorations are used on his clothing? What colors of ribbon do you see? Where do you see a lot of buttons? What colors of lace do you see?

3. Do you think this portrait was painted: (a) before you were born; (b) before your parents were born; (c) before your grandparents were born? Why do you think so? Do you know any men who dress like this today? What is around the *burgomaster*'s neck? What do some men today wear around their necks when they get dressed up?

4. Does his clothing look comfortable? Would you like to wear this outfit? Why or why not? How long do you think it would take to get dressed in such an outfit?

5. What can you tell about this gentleman by the way he is dressed? Do you think he is an important person or an ordinary citizen? Is he wealthy or poor? What makes you say that? What kind of job might he have had? What clues did the artist give you about his job?

6. Try standing in the same position as the *burgomaster*. Are you standing straight? Do you feel comfortable? Confident? How do you think he feels? What does his facial expression tell you about him? Does he look happy? Content? Proud?

7. Does the *burgomaster* look like a nice person or an unpleasant one? What do you think he would be like if you could speak to him? Would he be friendly? Cruel? What makes you say that? Would you like to meet him? Why or why not?

8. How has van der Helst made the *burgomaster* stand out from the background? What colors did he use? What kinds of lines and shapes do you see? Where do you see patterns?

9. Describe the man's surroundings. What is he leaning against? What do you think the rest of his house looks like? What do you see in the background? How does the column seem to add to his sense of confidence? Why do you think the *burgomaster* wanted to be painted in this kind of setting?

10. Based on this portrait, what do you think the rest of his house looks like? Where do you think the portrait might hang in this house? Why do you say that? Imagine that you live in the place shown in the portrait. How would you feel? Relaxed? Uncomfortable? What makes you say that? Would you like to have your portrait painted in this place? Why or why not?

11. Both the *burgomaster* and Countess Bucquoi chose the costumes to wear for their portraits. Compare the way he is dressed to Countess Bucquoi's clothing in her portrait. Look at the ruffles on their sleeves. Which person's ruffles are fancier? Compare the

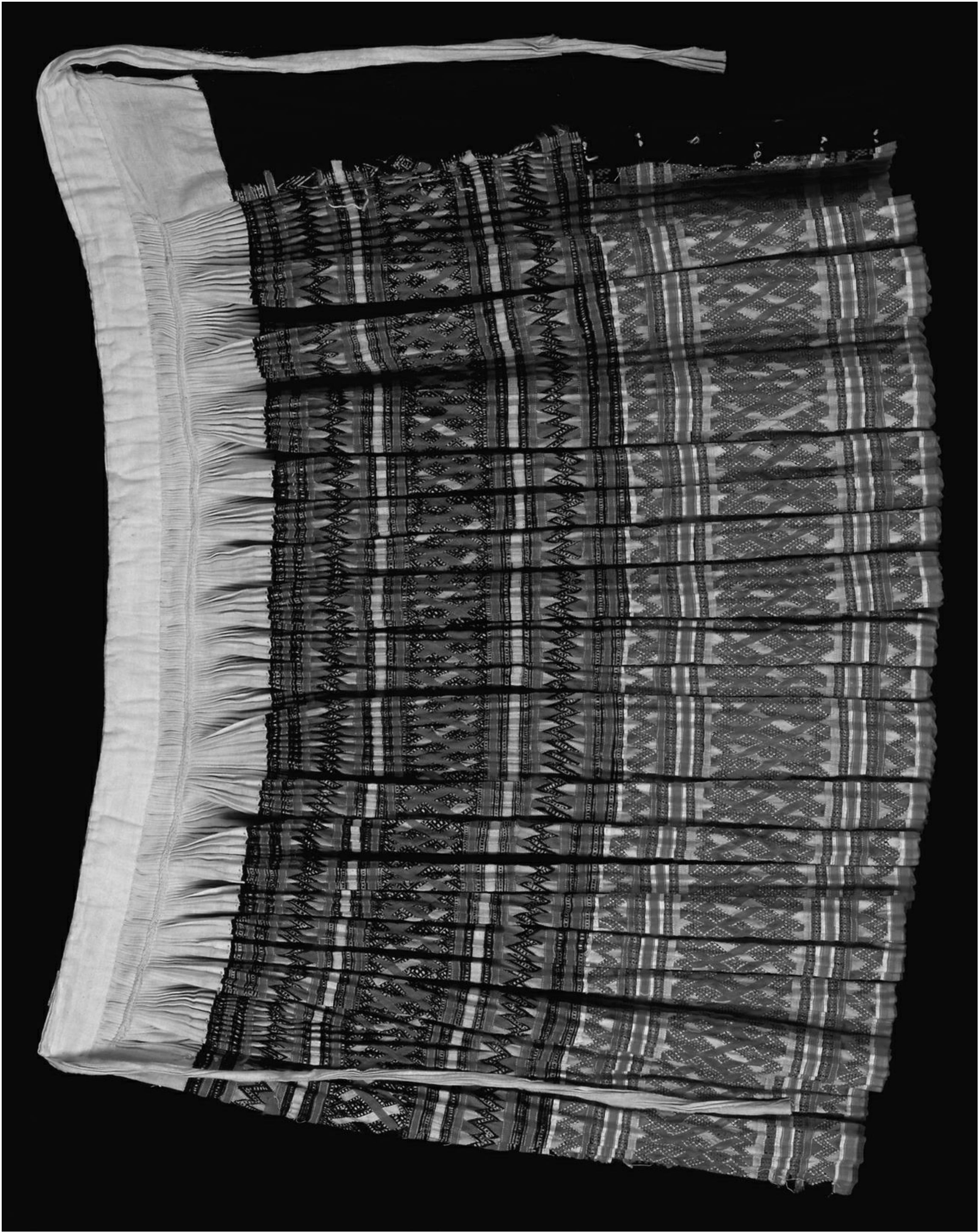
settings and poses of the two paintings. How are they similar? How are they different?

12. Compare the portrait of the *burgomaster* to *Wedding Day, Harlem* by James Van DerZee. In what ways are the men's clothing similar? In what ways are they different? How have men's clothing styles changed over the years?

13. What do you think a conversation between the *burgomaster* and Countess Bucquoi would be like? What would they talk about?

14. What are some of the reasons people would have their portraits painted? What does it mean to have a painting commissioned? Why do you think the *burgomaster* commissioned this portrait?

15. What would you like to wear for a portrait? What kind of setting would you pick? How would you pose? What would this say about you?



Blue Hmong (Asia, Laos)
Ceremonial Skirt, 1950-1982
Cotton, polyester, silk; indigo batik, cross stitch embroidery and appliqué
H.30½ x W.24¾ inches (length at waistband, without ties)
Gift of funds from Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hartwell, 82.138

Theme

This skirt was made by a member of the Blue Hmong group to be worn for the New Year festival, an important celebration for the Hmong people. With its bright colors and elaborate decoration, the skirt was a sign of a woman's beauty, skill, and prosperity, as well as her value as a prospective wife.

Background

> "A tiny needle, strands of bright thread, lengths of vari-coloured cloth, and the genius of a Hmong woman—these are the ingredients of some of the most exquisite needlework to be found anywhere." [2]

The Hmong, whose name means "free people," have always valued their independence and self-sufficiency. Once inhabitants of central China, the Hmong were driven into southern China more than 2,000 years ago by the ethnic Chinese, who were politically dominant. During the 19th century, many Hmong families continued their migration into the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia. There they lived in relative isolation, scattered in small village groups in northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. In these regions, the Hmong had a semi-nomadic lifestyle, practicing a type of farming that forced periodic resettlement in search of fertile land. In the 1960s, war in Southeast Asia had a devastating impact on the Hmong, destroying their economy and food supply. By 1970, large numbers of Hmong people living in Laos had become actively involved in the war, allied with the U.S. military. When the United States withdrew its troops from the area, the Hmong were forced to flee to Thailand's refugee camps to escape political persecution. By the late 1970s, many Hmong people had left the camps to settle in the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and elsewhere. Since that time, large numbers of Hmong people have settled in Minnesota. In fact, outside of Southeast Asia, the Twin Cities has the second largest urban concentration of Hmong.

Reflecting their semi-nomadic lifestyle, the material culture of the Hmong consists of easily transportable objects—clothing, jewelry, baskets, weapons, musical instruments and other domestic items. Traditional clothing is especially important to the Hmong, who create distinctive costumes for both everyday and festival wear. They refer to their brightly colored costumes as *paj ntaub* (pahn-dou), meaning "flower cloth." These textiles reflect the artistic skill and industry that Hmong women have developed and passed on from generation to generation. To them, costume is a symbol of their ethnic identity and a means of asserting their

[2] Paul and Elaine Lewis, *Peoples of the Golden Triangle* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 104.

common kinship.[3]

Although the basic elements of costume are similar among all Hmong people, there is some variance in design, color, and decoration between subgroups. While information regarding the definition of such groups is often conflicting, two divisions are generally acknowledged: White Hmong and Blue (also called Green) Hmong. These names are derived from the colors used in traditional women's clothing, but the two groups also have some differences in customs and language dialects.

Over recent decades, traditional Hmong costume has undergone changes, with an exchange of elements between various subgroups. As the conflict in Southeast Asia forced people to leave their mountain villages for refugee camps, many Hmong people came in direct contact with one another and began to exchange items of clothing. A new type of costume evolved combining the colorful skirts of the Blue Hmong with the elaborately adorned belts and purses of the White Hmong.

Ceremonial Skirt

This vividly colored knee-length skirt was made by a Blue Hmong woman living in a Thailand refugee camp and was purchased through a relative living in the Twin Cities. It was made to be worn for the most important Hmong celebration—the New Year festival. Traditionally, textiles have been a focal point of Hmong rituals held in celebration of the New Year. In Southeast Asia, craft making intensified at the end of the harvest season, as costumes and jewelry were produced for the coming festivities. To the Hmong people, new clothing celebrates the good fortune of the past year and is a sign of future prosperity. Conversely, wearing old clothing on the New Year is an omen of misfortune and poverty.[4]

The New Year is a time of courtship as well as a time of celebration. At the festival, men and women of marriageable age gather to find potential mates. They perform a ritual game of ball, called *pov pob* (poh poh), during which young people, dressed in their New Year finery, play catch with black cloth balls made by the young women. They also sing songs to get acquainted with one another. By wearing elaborate clothing, young women show off their personal beauty as well as their textile skills. Finely sewn attire is considered a sign of a woman's diligence and, therefore, increases her value as a wife. Indeed, wearing one's finest dress to a New Year's celebration helps attract a prospective partner.

This skirt displays the high standards that the Hmong apply to their needlework, seen in elements such as tiny stitching, complex designs, precise patterns, and straight borders. The fine needlework creates a rich layered effect, with striking color combinations and intricate design motifs. Typical of Blue Hmong needlework, it features lively rectilinear patterns with triangles, diamonds, and zigzags. These abstract geometric motifs contrast with the floral curvilinear designs of the Woodlands' *Cape*. The exuberant effect of the design is enhanced by brilliant contrasting color—-bright pinks, oranges, yellows and greens that sparkle and dazzle the eyes. Complementary colors of hot pink and lime green appear especially vibrant when

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[3] *Hmong Art: Tradition and Change* (Sheboygan, WI: John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 1986), 21.

[4] John Michael Kohler Arts Center, 21.

placed next to one another and create a dynamic optical sensation.

The skirt is composed of brightly colored cross-stitch embroidery placed next to appliquéd strips of synthetic fabric. These various layers create a visual sensation of depth, enhanced by the dimension of the pleats. The Blue Hmong use a variety of fabrics ranging from silk to synthetics and enjoy particularly the shiny, glittering quality of certain materials. Combining various textures and surfaces, this artist juxtaposed shiny strips of fabric with matte surfaces of embroidered yarn. The entire skirt is accordion-pleated and contains as much as nine yards of fabric. While in storage, the small pleats are basted together to keep their shape.

In Laos, skirts made for the annual New Year festival were worn for daily wear during the following year, while new and more elaborate costumes were created for the next year's celebration. In the United States, Hmong girls have adopted Western-style clothing for everyday wear and dress in Hmong clothing only for ceremonial events. Other changes in traditional costume reflect the availability of new materials and the Hmongs' ability to adapt to modern industrial society. Today, many skirts incorporate synthetic materials and dyes, resulting in the fluorescent colors that we see here rather than the all-natural fabrics and primary colors of earlier traditional dress.

This Blue Hmong skirt would be the most complex and striking part of a woman's traditional costume. Blue Hmong women also wear black jackets with various types of decoration. Yards of black fabric are wrapped several times around the waist and midriff. An apron—plain black for everyday wear and elaborately decorated for festive wear—is worn over the front of the skirt. This apron is tied on with a red, orange, or pink sash that has tassels hanging down the back. Silver belts are often worn over everything, and silver coins and elaborate silver jewelry also adorn festive attire. The costume is completed with black or white leggings as well as a hat or turban. Just imagine the dramatic and alluring effect of these costumes, with the graceful sway of pleated skirts and colorful sashes, the shimmer of silver necklaces and belts, and the jingle of dangling coins.

Technique

Characteristic of the Blue Hmong style, this skirt includes three horizontal design sections. On top is a band of white cotton material. The central horizontal panel is covered with a batik pattern, created by a fabric-dyeing technique that uses wax. The pattern is first drawn with beeswax onto the cloth with a metal tool, and then the cloth is immersed in an indigo or black dye. The areas covered by the wax are not affected by the dye, creating a pattern that can be seen when the wax is removed by boiling the cloth. After the batik pattern is made, pieces of cloth are sewn on the batiked material in a technique called appliqué (applying a cutout decoration to a larger piece of material). Finally, on the bottom of the skirt is another horizontal band with a design of cross-stitch embroidery and appliqué. The variety of design motifs are executed without stencils or drawn patterns or rulers; rather, they are done simply by eye and memory, with a steady hand guided by the grain of the fabric's woven threads.

Artist

Traditionally, Hmong women have decorated the clothing of all members of their families. Placing great value on their craft, Hmong mothers taught their daughters at a young age the necessary skills of fine needlework. In Laos, girls as young as five began to learn the skills necessary to create their distinctive attire. It took years of training to learn the required techniques of appliqué, embroidery, and batik. Girls would also become proficient at making hemp cloth, from cultivating the hemp plant to spinning, bleaching, weaving, and dyeing the hemp fiber. In recent times, however, most of the cotton or hemp cloth used to make these skirts has been purchased in the marketplace.

Traditional costume continues to be important to Hmong people living in the United States, yet few young women are able to develop the skills necessary for this art form. Because they must meet the demands of acquiring an education and earning an income, they lack the time that their mothers and grandmothers could devote to needlework. Other ways of transmitting these skills have developed, such as classes, workshops, apprenticeship programs, and pattern books. Many costume pieces, such as this skirt, are also imported from Thailand and Laos.

In recent years, many Hmong women have adapted the patterns and techniques of their clothing to create a variety of textiles such as decorative hangings, bedspreads, pillowcases, tablecloths, and coin purses, which are intended for sale to non-Hmong people. Another important development is the production of “story cloths,” embroidered fabrics with scenes depicting Hmong folklore, traditional village life, and celebrations, as well as recent events such as the war in Southeast Asia and their journey to a new life in America. These cloths often use writing along with images, illustrating the makers' adaptation to literacy in English and to their market audience.

Suggested Questions

1. What colors do you see in the skirt? Where do you see primary colors? Secondary colors? Complementary colors? Where do you see patterns?

2. What shapes do you see? Are they geometric or organic shapes? Point to the kinds of lines that you see in this skirt: horizontal, vertical, diagonal, angular, curved, thick, thin, broken, straight.

3. How do the lines, shapes, and colors make you feel? Happy? Bored? Excited? What makes you say that?

4. How long do you think this skirt is? How do you think it stays on when worn? How can you tell?

5. What would it feel like to wear this skirt? Would you feel comfortable? Happy? Attractive? Imagine a woman wearing this skirt. What would it look like if she were dancing? How would it move? What makes you say that?

6. For what kind of occasion do you think this skirt was worn? Celebrating? Playing? Working? What makes you say that?

7. This skirt was made to be worn for the Hmong New Year celebration, during which dances are often performed and games played. How do the lines, patterns, and colors help to make the skirt seem festive? What did the artist do to give the skirt movement?

8. What do you wear on special occasions? Are there any songs, dances, or games that are part of such occasions?

9. How long do you think it took to make this skirt? What makes you say that? How many different kinds of fabric were used to make this skirt? Point to each kind of fabric you can see.

10. How do you think this skirt was made? Was it sewn? Dyed? Embroidered? Point to areas of the skirt that are examples of each process. How can you tell what process was used?

11. Learning the necessary skills of fine needlework is something traditionally taught to young Hmong women by their mothers or grandmothers. Are there any skills that your parents or a relative are teaching you? Does it take practice? Will it take a long time to learn?

12. How can you tell that the Hmong women who made this skirt had high standards for its design? In what ways would this skirt advertise the skill and beauty of its wearer?

13. Many people in the United States who sew their own clothing buy patterns at a fabric store that give a plan for a skirt, dress, or pants. Do you think a pattern was used to make this skirt? What makes you say that?

14. Both the *Transformation Mask* and this Hmong skirt were made in the 20th century using traditional methods. How has each artist drawn upon traditions of their culture? How have they incorporated contemporary methods? (*Hmong skirt has contemporary fabrics; acrylic paint was used for the Transformation Mask instead of pigment paints.*)

15. Have you ever sewn any clothing for yourself? Did you have any help? Did you use a sewing machine, or did you sew it by hand? If you could make your own clothing for a special occasion, what would it look like? Would it be one color or many colors? Tight or loose? What techniques would you use to make it? How would the clothing reflect the occasion?

Yoruba (Africa, Nigeria, West Africa region)
Beaded Crown, c. 1920
Beads, leather, canvas, and wicker
H.15 (crown) x L.15 inches (fringe)
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 76.29

Theme

Worn for ceremonial occasions, this beaded crown was a sign of a Yoruba (YORE-u-bah) ruler's divinity, authority and power. Like European leaders such as the Dutch *burgomaster*, African rulers often dressed in ways that emphasized their power and importance.

Background

The Yoruba peoples of West Africa have inhabited the southwestern area of present-day Nigeria and the Republic of Benin (beh-NEEN) since the 11th century. In historic times, the Yoruba territory consisted of numerous city-states or kingdoms ruled by kings, who were thought to be divine, and by councils of chiefs and elders. Many of these kingdoms have flourished to the present time. The Yoruba system of divine kingship extends back to the beginning of the great Ife (E-fay) kingdom in the 11th century or earlier. The capital city of Ife, regarded by Yoruba people as the place where life originated, continued through the centuries to be the primary religious center for all of Yorubaland. It remains so today.

The rich mythology of the Yoruba culture is fundamental to its religious and social institutions. According to one version of the Yoruba myth about the creation of the world, the chief god *Olorun* (oh-lo-ROON) lowered a great chain from the heavens to the ancient waters. His son *Oduduwa* (Oh-DUE-due-a) climbed down this chain, bringing with him a handful of earth, a five-toed chicken, and a palm nut. He threw the dirt upon the waters and set the chicken on the dirt. The chicken busily scratched and scattered the dirt until it formed the first dry land. In the center of this new world, *Oduduwa* created the magnificent Ife kingdom. He planted the palm nut, which grew into a proud tree with 16 branches, symbolizing the 16 sons and grandsons of *Oduduwa*.

Oduduwa was the first ruler of the kingdom of Ife and the father of all Yoruba. Over time, he crowned his 16 sons and grandsons and sent them off to establish their own great Yoruba kingdoms. Only descendants of these original sixteen could be considered a divine king. Only they could wear special veiled crowns that symbolized their sacred power and were part of their royal regalia.

These veiled beaded crowns were probably first made in the early 19th century. Before this time, Yoruba kings wore some kind of crown, perhaps made of a natural material, but little is known about them.[5] In the early 19th century, tiny glass beads, known as “seed beads,” were imported into Africa from Europe. These trade beads, which came in a great variety of colors,

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[5] William Fagg, *Yoruba Beadwork, Art of Nigeria* (New York: Pace Editions, 1980), 9.

were enormously popular in Africa, inspiring creative new art forms among the Yoruba. They were equally popular in North America, and we also see them used in the Woodlands' *Cape*, included in this set. Among the Yoruba, the use of beaded accessories was restricted to kings, priests, priestesses, and herbalist-priests. Only kings could enjoy the full range of beaded regalia, which included shoes, fans, flywhisks, footrests, canes, staffs, thrones, and crowns.

Yoruba kingdoms still exist today within present-day Nigeria, and kings continue to carry out their religious roles as well as some political duties, though they have lost much of their political power in the 20th century. While regalia is still made by Yoruba specialists, its use is probably less frequent than in the past.

Beaded Crown

This crown, with its veil and clusters of birds, is made of thousands of tiny, brightly colored glass seed beads. Known as an *adenla* (great crown), it was a sign of the king's divinity and authority and was worn only for ceremonial occasions.

A veiled crown was the most important of all the beaded objects made by the Yoruba. It was symbolic of the essence of kingship as well as an actual container of sacred power. Material enclosed within the crown empowered the king to communicate with the spirits of his ancestors in order to benefit his people. The king wore a beaded crown only on important state occasions, such as his own enthronement, the conferring of titles on others, or major festivals at which he officiated. The crown was, in fact, so powerful that even when it was not worn, it was treated with the same reverence as would be given the king himself.

Nearly all sacred Yoruba crowns display basic features similar to this one. The main part of the crown is dominated by a large yellow frontal face, a distinctive characteristic of Yoruba crowns (some have more than one face). The face is not naturalistic, like the faces in the portraits in this set, but rather is stylized, with simplified geometric forms. Its striking features—black and white almond-shaped eyes, a triangular yellow nose, and an oval blue mouth—project from the surface. The three vertical lines on either side of the nose are scarification markings that identify the ruler's lineage. While the significance of such a face is incompletely understood by outsiders, it may represent a royal ancestor of the king. The Yoruba revere the spirits of their ancestors, who have the power to intercede with other spiritual forces and therefore to affect daily life. The face may serve to unite the spirit world of the ancestors with the earthly world of the king and his people.

The most distinctive characteristic of the crown is the veil of beads that hung over the king's face. It is made up of a diamond-patterned net of black, white, maroon, and blue beads surrounded by vertical strands of beads in many colors. The veil obscured the king's features, hiding his identity as an individual in order to protect ordinary men and women from looking directly at his face when he was united with his powerful ancestors. This offers an interesting comparison to the *Transformation Mask* of the Northwest Coast Indians, which also is worn on the head and embodies profound, sacred meaning. For both objects, concealment plays an important role in the spiritual meaning and power of the object. Unlike the Northwest Coast mask, however, which opens and closes to display images inside and out, this veiled crown is intended to obscure the king's face in order to protect the onlookers.

Another significant feature of a veiled beaded crown is the tall striped cylindrical projection in

bright colors that rises above the face. Perhaps representing a hairstyle, this structure once contained a pouch of herbal medicines placed there by herbalist-priests. The pouch gave the crown its power, and indeed, was thought to be so powerful that the king himself could not look inside his own crown for fear he would be blinded. Therefore, the crown would have been put on and removed from behind by a palace official, which in some cases was a wife of the king.

The crown is surrounded by 16 colorful beaded birds. The birds have been carefully arranged on various levels, with one perched on top of the crown, looking down at the others. On the next level are four birds with outstretched wings whose beaks are pecking at the sides of the crown as they would the trunk of a tree. While the birds are depicted in a variety of colors, certain colors are used to articulate specific parts of the birds, such as red beads to define their beaks, white and black beads for their eyes, and bands of yellow beads to outline some of their wings.

The birds on the crown have many meanings and interpretations. Because of their association with flight, they may be a reference to the king's connection with the spirit realm and to his supernatural powers. They also signify a divine force called *ashe* (ah-SHAY)—the power to make things happen—which only the highest-ranking Yoruba men and women possess. Gatherings of birds frequently appear in Yoruba art, often referring to the association between birds and the power of certain wise elderly women called “the mothers.” The mothers' special powers enable them to turn into night birds who punish or destroy those who are arrogant, selfish, or otherwise immoral. The birds on the crown refer to the *ashe*, or power, both of the king and of the mothers who support and protect the king. The birds may also be associated with fertility because of their abundance in the fields.

The back of the crown is covered with rich decorative patterns of diamond shapes and triangles in vivid colors. Unlike the Blue Hmong *Ceremonial Skirt*, which is composed of various materials, shapes, and textures, this object's surface is covered with beads of uniform shape, size, and texture. Yet the overall effect of the projecting forms of the birds, the bold geometric shapes, and the rich colors, patterns and texture of the lustrous beads combine to produce an image of great power, mystery, and dynamism.

Technique

Creating a beaded crown involved the work of many people. Crown makers first built a wicker frame and covered it with a base of muslin or cotton cloth. Special priests helped select the colors and design for the thousands of tiny glass beads to be embroidered on the cloth. Requiring tremendous skill, bead embroidery involved stringing together beads to form a strand of a single color. The strands were then tacked to the surface of the crown with thread until the crown was completely covered.

The frontal face was probably made with shaped pieces of cloth dipped in wet starch and then affixed to the crown. The small representations of birds were also fashioned in cloth, embroidered with beads, and attached to the crown. The details of a crown's structure might vary somewhat, but the basic form was dictated by certain rules that were honored by the Yoruba people.

Artist

Beaded crowns were made by bead-working specialists, probably male, who were members of families known for these skills. It is likely that a very small number of families specialized in their production and transmitted the skills of the craft from generation to generation. These families often were wood carvers as well. While today we do not know the name of the person who made this beaded crown, the artist would not have been anonymous in his own time.

Suggested Questions

1. What is this crown made of? Make a list of all the bead colors you would need to make this crown. Do you see primary colors? Secondary colors? Other colors? What patterns do you see? How are those patterns created?

2. Look carefully at the texture of the crown. If you could touch it, how do you think it would feel? Smooth? Rough? Soft? Bumpy? Sticky?

3. How do you think this crown was made? How do you think the beads are attached to the crown? Make a list of all the tools and materials you would need to make it.

4. What other object in this set is made of similar materials? (*Both the Woodlands cape and the Hmong skirt would require fabric or some kind of sewing base and sewing tools. The Woodlands Cape is beaded.*)

5. How long do you think it took to make this crown? Do you think one person or many people made this crown? What makes you say that?

6. Where do you see a face on this crown? Do you think the face represented is that of an important person or an ordinary citizen? Why do you say that? Why would the face of a royal ancestor be included as a part of the design of this crown? What does this tell you about the function or special powers of the crown?

7. What animal decorates the crown? How many birds can you see? What are they doing?

8. A king of the Yoruba people wore this object. How do you think it was worn? How can you tell? Do you think this crown was worn as a part of everyday dress, or for a special occasion? How do you think the king's subjects would feel when they saw him wearing this crown? Excited? Frightened?

9. Do you think you could see the king's face when he wore this crown? Why not? Why would the king want to conceal his face from his subjects? On what occasions do people wear veils? How does a veil make its wearer seem mysterious?

10. The Yoruba king's crown identified the wearer as a king and gave him special powers to interact with the spirit world for the benefit of his people. Can you think of special headgear people wear today that identifies their special role or status in the community? (*Some examples: police hats, fire-fighter's helmets, graduation caps, bridal veils, chef's hats, bishop's miters, any other religious head wear.*)

11. The birds on the crown represent a group of wise elder women. They are symbols of the king's ability to deal with the forces of evil. A Yoruba king used the wisdom of these elder women to benefit his people. Why is the king's crown a good place for these symbols to be placed? (*The symbols of the wisdom of the elders appear to surround the king's head, an advantageous location for imparting wisdom. This location also honors the elders as powerful members of the community. Birds on the king's crown are easy for his subjects to see.*)

12. This crown gives its wearer special powers and at the same time conceals him. In what way is this similar to the *Transformation Mask*?

13. The birds on the crown help to protect the king and his subjects from the forces of evil. In what way is this similar to the ancient *Lar* figure? How does each object serve as protection?

Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Le Brun, French, 1755–1842
Portrait of Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi, née Par, 1793
Oil on canvas
H.53½ x W.39 inches
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 78.7

Theme

In her portrait, Countess Bucquoi (boo-KWAH) is dressed up in the fashion of the day, reflecting the late 18th-century trend toward naturalness and simplicity. As natural and casual as the countess appears, however, the artist has carefully arranged her pose, costume and setting to glamorize her for posterity.

Background

The 18th century was a particularly complex and contradictory time in France, characterized by great advances in science and philosophy as well as political and social upheaval. A growing belief in liberty and equality conflicted with a society rooted in traditions of monarchical government and established authority. The struggle between these values culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. With the revolution came a greater awareness of class differences and a desire for change and self-expression—all of which were reflected in the way people dressed. With the gradual disintegration of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class, clothing became more alike for all classes of society.

Prior to the revolution, French aristocratic fashion was the model for women in all of Europe. The clothing was known for bodices heavily reinforced with bone, wide hooped skirts of sumptuous brocades and damasks, and elaborate powdered headdresses. During the 18th century, this extravagant style, which emphasized the gap between the classes, gradually became outdated as a taste for informality emerged. Naturalness and simplicity gained favor, and gowns were often made of muslin or *indienne*, a fine cotton that came in white or pastel colors, instead of brocade and damask. The artist Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun (VEE-zhay luh-BRUN), who encouraged her sitters to dress informally, actually helped launch this fashion style through her many portraits of Queen Marie Antoinette. One particular painting of the queen wearing a straw hat and white muslin dress caused a sensation when it was shown at the exhibition of the 1783 Salon. Many thought it improper for the queen to dress in such an informal manner. Despite this resistance, simplicity became highly fashionable during the last years of Marie Antoinette's reign.

Another influence on this trend was a romantic interest in nature. The writings of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau helped popularize a love of the countryside and a respect for unspoiled nature. The classical French garden, known for its formal symmetry and geometry, lost favor at this time to the natural irregularity of English garden design. Many 18th century landscape artists were inspired by the accidents and surprises of wild nature.

During the 18th century, the growth of trade and industry also contributed to changes in European costume. Inventions such as the spinning jenny, cotton spinning loom, and knitting

machine increased the output of many types of textiles, particularly cotton. Cotton fabric was first imported from the East Indies and America and then produced in various centers in Europe. A lightweight white material in its natural state, cotton brought about a rapid revolution in European clothing. It also reflected the new taste for simplicity, in keeping with the new democratic ideals.[6]

Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi

In this portrait, Countess Bucquoi sits in a relaxed pose, in front of a romantic backdrop of mountain scenery. With a hint of a smile on her face, she gazes confidently and serenely at the viewer, appearing to be a woman of poise and intelligence. Her youthful skin and large eyes make her appear much younger than her 47 years. While the artist may have omitted the countess's blemishes and facial lines, or made her eyes larger than life, she has also placed a great emphasis on naturalness and attempted to capture a spontaneous quality in her pose. The countess appears relaxed and natural, with one arm leaning against the rock behind her, the upraised hand casually touching her lace bodice. The other hand gracefully rests on her lap.

Vigée-Le Brun's ability to strike a delicate balance between naturalism and flattery contributed largely to her success as a portraitist. In this portrait, the artist has in fact carefully orchestrated various components to glamorize the sitter. Vigée-Le Brun had a flair for costume and drapery and introduced her own taste in simplicity to her subjects. She arranged their poses, attire, and hair, often embellishing them with sashes and scarves. Here the countess is wearing a style of dress called a *robe anglaise*, which is typical of the more relaxed fashion of the day, lacking the fancy ruffles, braids, and trimmings of earlier styles. The skirt of shimmering silk satin falls in soft pleats and is held at the waist by an orange tasseled sash tied gracefully in a bow at her back. The countess probably wears a bustle pad underneath the moderately full skirt. A fichu (scarf) made of cotton or linen and lace covers the low neck of her dress. A light woolen red shawl decorated with gold embroidery, a fashionable accessory of the time, drapes gracefully around her shoulders. The sash and shawl, supplied by Vigée-Le Brun, appear in some of her other portraits, draping and adorning her subjects in a variety of ways.

In her portrait, Countess Bucquoi wears a knotted cap of silk or satin resembling the turban-like *bonnets à la Turque* of the day. An important part of a woman's attire during this period, hats came in widely diverse and inventive styles. The artist probably arranged the countess's relaxed cap on her head as well as the hairstyle of soft curls falling on her shoulders, a mode far different from the formal poufs and piled up masses of powdered hair fashionable in preceding periods.

The countess is shown against a backdrop of natural grandeur, resting on a bluff overlooking wooded mountains, deep ravines, and cascading waterfalls. The setting recalls the scenery along the Danube River where the artist painted a number of landscapes. The countess would not have actually sat for her portrait in such a setting but, rather, in the artist's studio. Just as the photographer Van DerZee used props and backdrops to associate his subjects with domestic comfort and harmony, Vigée-Le Brun suggests in this painting a woman communing

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[6] François Boucher. *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment*. expanded edition (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987) 291.

with nature. While the background may not be an accurate rendering of a specific place, it provides a picturesque setting for the countess, enhancing her charm and beauty.

The artist's approach to shape, color, and texture also emphasizes the sitter's appeal. The countess dominates the composition, forming a strong triangular shape against the scenery, a shape that suggests strength and stability. The colors of her garments—her mauve gown and ivory accessories, the rich red and gold of her shawl, and the brilliant orange sash—stand out against the muted greens and earth tones of the background and reinforce a sense of warmth and vibrancy. The artist skillfully depicts the rich textures of her subject and her clothing, such as the delicate lace on the fichu and cuffs, the lustrous silk fabric of the gown, and the countess's soft skin.

Vigée-Le Brun painted this portrait when she was staying in Vienna in the late 18th century. The painting was commissioned by the subject's brother, Prince Wenzel Paar, and it remained in the possession of his descendants for over a century. In her memoirs, the artist wrote about working on the painting and the hospitality she enjoyed during her stay in Vienna. When the portrait was completed, it was displayed in the salon of the prince's palace. The artist commented that the painting's exceptionally vibrant color scheme clashed with the white wall of the room. To soften the contrast, the prince hung green velvet on the walls, and he devised reflective candelabra to light the picture. One can imagine the striking display this would have made.

Technique

The use of oil paint offers great versatility in achieving brilliant and translucent colors, a wide range of tonal effects, and the representation of fine detail. Because oil paint is slow to dry and is applied in layers, an artist can rework the surface, unlike the Roman fresco (see page 41) artist, who needed to work quickly and without changes. With the use of oil paint, Vigée-Le Brun was able to create finer details and more brilliant colors than those in the Roman fresco.

This portrait is painted on canvas stretched over a wooden frame. The surface of the canvas was prepared by priming it with a white ground. The advantages of canvas, especially over wood, are that it is lightweight, inexpensive, and takes less time to prepare. It also expands and contracts little with temperature changes, preventing cracks from developing in the paint surface.

Artist

Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun was born in Paris in 1755, the daughter of a portrait painter who worked in pastels. As a young girl attending a local convent school, she spent much of her time drawing in the margins of her books. After studying painting with her father, who died when she was 12, and later with some of his colleagues, she established herself as a professional portraitist. By age 15 she was earning enough money from her art to support herself, her widowed mother, and her younger brother. She soon became a successful portraitist of the Parisian aristocracy. When she was 24, Vigée-Le Brun painted the first of a series of portraits of Queen Marie Antoinette, with whom she developed a close relationship. In 1776 she married the artist and art dealer Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Brun. Le Brun has frequently been portrayed as an irresponsible gambler who depleted her earnings, but he was

also a well-connected member of the art and business world whose contacts benefited his wife's career.

As a woman, Vigée-Le Brun had to overcome many obstacles to establish herself as a portraitist. Women did not have access to the same educational and professional opportunities as men did at this time. In most cases, they were denied membership in the academies of Paris and Rome, the major centers of art education during the 18th century. Further, they were barred from the study of the nude figure, which was the basis of an artist's training. Vigée-Le Brun was largely self-taught, and her early success was due to her own ambition and hard work, but as daughter of an artist, she had opportunities and experiences during her formative years that most women did not have. After she had earned the queen's respect and patronage, Vigée-Le Brun was accepted in the French Royal Academy. Her paintings of the queen and the royal retinue also contributed to the artist's international fame.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, it was dangerous for Vigée-Le Brun to remain in France because of her connection with the monarchy. Her royal patron Marie Antoinette was executed in 1793, the year Countess Bucquoi's portrait was painted. The artist fled France and spent the next 12 years in exile, traveling through Italy, Austria, Switzerland, England, and Russia, and painting portraits of the local nobility wherever she went. She later returned to Paris and bought a country retreat at Louveciennes. Her memoirs, titled *Souvenirs*, were published in 1835 and 1837. She died in Paris in 1842. Vigée-Le Brun was very prolific throughout her long career, producing over 800 paintings and contributing greatly to the art of portraiture and to the taste of her time.

Suggested Questions

1. Describe what Countess Bucquoi is wearing. What would her clothes feel like to touch? Her skirt? Her shawl? Her fichu (scarf)? Her sleeves? Her hat? Do they look comfortable? Would they be easy to walk in? Why do you think so? Would you like to wear this outfit?

2. What can you tell about her by the way she is dressed? What can you tell about her occupation or status in society? Do you think that this is how a countess usually dressed in her time? Do people treat you differently if you dress in fancy clothes rather than less formal clothing? Why do you think that the countess would want to dress less formally than expected for her portrait? Would people treat her differently? **[Volunteers could compare the way the countess is dressed to other portraits of aristocrats at the time.]**

3. What would her hair feel like if you were to touch it? Does her skin look soft and smooth or hard and rough? What has the artist done to give you that impression? How old do you think she is? Does she look this old? Why do you say that?

4. How do you think the countess feels? Does she look relaxed or uncomfortable? Why do you say that? Does the way in which she is sitting tell you anything about her personality? In what way? Does she look like a nice person or an unpleasant one? Would you like to meet her?

5. How has Vigée-Le Brun made the countess stand out from the background? What colors did she use?

6. Are there any similarities between her clothing and the background? What lines and shapes do you see repeated? (*The line of her sash is similar to that of the waterfall; the shape of her orange bow is repeated in the bushes; the triangular shape of her body is repeated in the mountains.*) What kinds of lines do you see? Angular? Curved?

7. Describe her surroundings. Does the ground look soft or hard? Would this be a comfortable place to sit? What do you see in the background? Do you think a place like this really exists or is it imaginary? Imagine that you are walking in this landscape. What is the weather like? How would you feel? Happy? Sad? Relaxed? Uncomfortable? What makes you say that? Would you like to have your portrait painted in this place? Why or why not?

8. What do the countess's surroundings tell you about her? Why has Vigée-Le Brun chosen to put Countess Bucquoi in this kind of landscape? Compare this landscape to the one depicted in the portrait by van der Helst. How are they different? How would the mood of the painting change if she were inside a building? In front of a building? In a cloudy landscape? What is she sitting on? How would the painting differ if she were sitting on a chair?

9. What kind of image is Vigée-Le Brun trying to convey about the countess? How do you think the countess wants us to view her? What has Vigée-Le Brun done to communicate that image? By looking at this portrait, what do you think the countess would be like if you spoke to her? Would she be friendly or cruel? What makes you say that? Why would someone in the aristocracy want to have themselves painted in this way?

10. Is this a realistic or a naturalistic portrait? Explain your answer by pointing to details in the painting.

11. If you could pick anything to wear for your portrait, what would you wear? What kind of setting would you pick? What would this say about you?

12. Have you ever had your portrait taken by a photographer? What did you choose to wear? Did you dress up? Why did you choose those clothes? Vigée-Le Brun often arranged her subjects' poses, attire, hair, and accessories such as scarves and sashes. Did the photographer fix your hair in any way? Did he or she give you hats or any accessories to wear? Have you ever been to a specialty portrait studio like Glamour Shots or had your picture taken in costume? How is this similar?

Anishinabe (Ojibwe) (North America, United States, Great Lakes/Woodlands Region)
Cape, 19th–early 20th century
Cotton, glass beads, fur, metal, mirrors
H.29 x W.15¾ inches
The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 91.85.7

Theme

This elaborately decorated cape was made by an Anishinabe (ah-nish-ih-NAH-bay), (Ojibwe [oh-JIB-weh]) woman for a man of her tribe to wear on special occasions such as family and social events or religious ceremonies. Like the Hmong *Ceremonial Skirt*, this garment reflects the traditions of the people who made it and their adaptability to a changing environment.

Background

In ancient times, Native Americans known to anthropologists as the Woodlands peoples were widely dispersed throughout the Northeast region of the United States and Canada, living in territory that stretched from the Atlantic seaboard to the area around the Great Lakes. The arrival of European settlers dramatically affected the eastern Woodlands groups, pushing them westward and northward into Canada as Europeans took over their lands. At the same time, these groups benefited economically from the tremendous demand for fur by European traders. Native American men hunted and trapped small game, and sold or traded the animal pelts to French and English merchants. The fur trade became important for the sustenance of the Woodlands people and a key component in their interaction with the Europeans.

Among the Woodlands people were the Ojibwe, who migrated into the Great Lakes region from the east coast in the 17th and 18th centuries. Today the Ojibwe, or Chippewa (CHIP-ah-wah) as they are sometimes called, are among the largest groups of American Indians. They live in parts of Canada, North Dakota, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. (There are seven Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota.) In their own language, the Ojibwe refer to themselves as Anishinabe, meaning "original people."

Traditionally, the Ojibwe way of life was shaped by the abundance of water, game, and forests in their environment and was guided by the cycle of the seasons. In the winter, Ojibwe men were involved in hunting and trapping game, while women furnished their homes and prepared food and clothing for their families. In the spring, men and women gathered in the maple groves to collect sap for the preparation of maple sugar and planted crops like corn, squash, and pumpkins. Summer was a busy season of fishing, gardening, and berry gathering, and autumn was the time for the harvesting of wild rice growing in the shallow lake waters. Throughout the year, Ojibwe life was pervaded by a deep sense of spirituality and respect for the natural world.

Known for their craft and textile skills, Anishinabe women tanned hides, wove domestic items such as mats and baskets out of reeds, and made a variety of birch bark objects such as

containers, storage vessels, canoes, and even the coverings of their dome-shaped wigwams (dwelling). They also made their family's clothing. The men made a great variety of wood sculpture, such as bowls, spoons and pipes.

Until commercially woven materials such as broadcloth, cotton, and velveteen were introduced in the 19th century, Ojibwe people wore clothing made of tanned leather. Women used various materials to embellish clothing, including moose hair, which they embroidered on skins, and even pieces of birch bark in the early days. They also adorned their clothing and personal articles with porcupine quills, that is, until European traders brought glass beads to the Great Lakes region. Since the 17th century, these tiny bits of glass tubing, known as "seed beads," were manufactured in Europe (primarily in Venice, Bohemia, and Holland) and brought by explorers and missionaries to far-flung regions of the world. Enormously popular, they became highly valued trade items, admired for their lustrous beauty and great versatility. As can be seen in the Yoruba *Beaded Crown*, these trade beads made an enormous impact on the embellishment of African ceremonial dress, and they had a similar effect on the costumes of North American Indians. Over time, the Ojibwe gradually replaced quillwork with beadwork, often using the same patterns and designs. The Anishinabe word for beads is *manidoominensag*, which means "berries of the Great Spirit." The term goes back to the early use of seeds that were dyed, pierced, and strung for necklaces.[7]

Like other Native American peoples, the Anishinabe came into conflict with Euro-Americans, largely because of land differences. Native people had lived in harmony with the land for millennia, and believed in sharing its abundance with one another. Contrary to this attitude, Europeans arrived with concepts of farming, which required large amounts of land for each family unit, and land ownership for private use. As the American continent was opened to European settlers in the 1700s and 1800s, the federal government took increasingly aggressive action against the Indian people, confining them to small areas of land, called reservations, and attempting to assimilate them into Euro-American culture.

For the Anishinabe in Minnesota, the reduction of tribal land resulted in the curtailment of their traditional way of life, with such seasonal activities as hunting, fishing, trapping, and the gathering of wild rice and maple sugar dramatically reduced. The government as well as missionaries attempted to assimilate Native Americans into Euro-American culture by establishing schools such as St. Benedict's at White Earth and St. Mary's at Red Lake. Indian children were also sent to boarding schools, away from the influence of their own families.[8] Despite the struggles and adversity they endured, many Native Americans clung to their beliefs and traditions while still adapting to a changing way of life.

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[7] Edna Garte, *Circle of Life: Cultural Continuity in Ojibwe Crafts* (St. Louis County Historical Society, Chisholm Museum and Duluth Art Institute, 1984), 16.

[8] Louise Lincoln and Paulette Fairbanks Molin, "Unanswered Questions: Native Americans and Euro-Americans in Minnesota," *Minnesota 1900: Art and Life on the Upper Mississippi, 1890–1915*, ed. Michael Conforti (Newark: Associated University Presses, 1994), 305.

Woodlands *Cape*

This richly decorated beaded cape was once worn by a Minnesota Anishinabe man as part of his festive attire. Anishinabe women made such beaded articles of clothing for their families. Like the Hmong *Ceremonial Skirt*, the cape was worn on special occasions as an object of pride and display. Traditionally, there were frequent occasions for Ojibwe men to wear such fancy clothing. During the early reservation period, however, new social and ceremonial events developed, for example, expanded powwows and social dances, Fourth of July festivities, and school and mission ceremonies. To all these occasions, Native Americans brought their own traditions and practices.[9] Beaded articles were also valued as gifts and were often exchanged between friends.

Like many of the Anishinabes' traditional objects, this cape incorporates materials obtained through trade, such as manufactured cotton cloth, mirrors, and beads. It is richly decorated on both the front and back with thousands of brightly colored glass beads, which represented luxury and prestige to the Anishinabe. In the 19th century, Anishinabe decorative work became known for its distinctive floral motifs using bright colors and curving, flowing lines. As can be seen on this cape, the style was naturalistic to a certain degree, in that the flowers reflect with some accuracy the appearance of flowers in nature; for example, there are clearly delineated petals, leaves, and stems. Yet the images are stylized in the elimination of details and simplification of forms, which creates a pleasing two-dimensional design.

The rather naturalistic treatment of flowers and foliage, which is characteristic of Ojibwe beadwork, appeared after contact with Europeans. In earlier times, most Ojibwe quillwork was done in geometric patterns. It is thought that these new motifs were influenced by a variety of textile arts, such as embroidery, lacework, and needlepoint, which the colonists had brought with them to the New World. These textiles may have provided new designs that could be translated into beadwork. But the Ojibwe were also inspired by their surroundings, and the designs found in the abundant plants and flowers of their natural environment certainly served as models for their naturalistic leaf and floral motifs. Many of the colors used also coincide with those found in nature, with bright warm hues of reds, pinks, and yellows for the flowers, and green tones for the leaves and stems. Yet, despite this naturalistic treatment, the plant forms have a sense of fantasy, with their exuberant multicolored flowers, stylized shapes, and contrived symmetrical arrangement. The bright colors and clearly delineated design stand out dramatically against the white beaded background.

The cape also combines an interesting variety of textures, such as the smooth glass mirrors, the uneven bumpy surface of the glass beadwork, and the soft cotton and fur. The mirrors that border the beaded design are used here as striking embellishments. The placement and regularity of these circular shapes contrast with the beaded area with its playful arrangement of stems, leaves, and flowers that curve and meander around the surface. The organic shapes of the curvilinear plant forms complement the geometric shapes of the mirrors. Many circles also appear within the beaded design (for example, in the shapes of the flowers). The entire cape is governed by a careful symmetrical arrangement of forms.

This cape was worn over a shirt, something like a vest, and tied at the neck and on each side. It would have been part of a man's ensemble of beaded clothing, perhaps including leggings, a

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[9]Lincoln and Molin, 312.

breechcloth or “apron,” one or two bandolier (shoulder) bags, and a hat or headdress. All these articles of clothing would have been covered with curving floral designs in bright colors applied on black velveteen. With his beaded costume, the man would have worn soft-soled moccasins, probably of hide. While Anishinabe people had, for the most part, adopted Euro-American clothing for daily wear by the reservation period, they continued to make and wear distinctively decorated clothing for special and festive events, a practice that continues today. Like the *Transformation Mask* for the Kwakiutl Indians and the *Ceremonial Skirt* for the Hmong, this distinctive attire has helped the Anishinabe people retain their cultural identity.

Technique

An Anishinabe woman made this cape out of cotton material. To create the beadwork design, she may have used birch-bark stencils for tracing the leaves and flowers. The beads were first strung on cotton thread and then stitched onto the fabric with “spot stitching” at regular intervals. The lines of the beads follow the contours of the design, set within a background of solid white beading. This bead embroidery technique, similar to that used on the Yoruba *Beaded Crown*, allows large areas to be filled with flat color. It also facilitates the creation of curvilinear, free-form shapes. Most of the fabric of the cape was covered with beads except for the border around the entire form. Fur lines the border in the back, while glass mirrors are affixed in the front.

Artist

While the name of the individual who made this cape is unknown, it was most likely made by a Minnesota or Wisconsin Ojibwe woman for a male relative in the late 19th or early 20th century. Except for objects made of wood, stone, and silver, Ojibwe arts and crafts were primarily made by women. Their knowledge and skills were passed on from generation to generation, as they were for the Northwest Coast Indians and the Hmong people. Creating elaborate beaded attire like the cape not only fulfilled a practical need, but also enabled Ojibwe women to demonstrate their needlework skills. As in the Hmong culture, such skills were highly valued by the Ojibwe people. Making these items also had emotional meaning, serving as an expression of a woman's devotion to her family.

Suggested Questions

1. What materials were used to make this cape? Make a list of all the tools and materials you would need to make it. How are the beads attached?

2. How long do you think it took to make this cape? A few hours? Weeks? Years? Why do you say that?

3. What colors do you see on the cape? Are they bright or dull? Do they seem natural or unnatural? Why do you say that? How many shades of red and blue do you see? Where do you see them?

4. Use your finger to point out the kinds of lines that have been used for the flowers and plants on the cape. Are they angular? Are they curved? Do you see mostly organic or geometric shapes? What shapes do you see repeated on the cape? Where do you see them? Where do you see patterns?

5. Is the design on the cape symmetrical or asymmetrical? How does this add to the effect of the cape? Imagine the cape with angular lines and asymmetry. How would this change the effect? How is the mood of the cape similar to or different from that of the Hmong skirt?

6. Do you think the artist looked at real flowers and plants to bead this cape, or do you think she used her imagination? What gives you that impression?

7. How do you think this cape would be worn? What are the ties on the sides for?

8. How would you feel if you were wearing this cape? Excited? Bored? Peaceful? Calm? Why do you say that? How do the kinds of lines, colors, and shapes used help create that mood?

9. Does the cape look comfortable? Would you like to wear it? Why or why not? Do you think a man or a woman wore this cape? Why do you say that?

10. Look at this cape, and think about what kind of environment the artist lived in. Do you think she lived by mountains? Lakes? A forest? Why do you say that? What evidence on the cape led you to think that?

11. For what kind of occasion do you think this was worn? Playing, hunting, working, everyday activities, special occasions such as festivals, ceremonies, holidays? Why do you say that?

12. In what way would this cape display pride at a special celebration? How is this similar to the Hmong skirt?

13. How do you think the artist acquired the materials for this cape? Do you think all the materials used to make this cape are native to the Woodlands regions? Why do you think Ojibwe women began using beads for decoration instead of porcupine quills?

14. How does the cape reflect the natural environment of the Woodlands Indians? How is this similar to the *Transformation Mask*?

15. In what ways do you think contact with Europeans influenced the design of this cape? What can you tell about the trade practices of the Woodlands Indians by looking at this cape? How does this reflect the traditions of the Ojibwe people?

16. This Woodlands *Cape*, the Hmong *Ceremonial Skirt*, and the Yoruba *Beaded Crown* have all been influenced by trade with Europeans or exposure to European materials and motifs. What kinds of things do you think influenced the development of modern Euro-American clothing?

VANDERZEE
NYC

James Van DerZee, American, 1886–1983
Wedding Day, Harlem, 1926; 1974 (reprint)
Gelatin silver print (printed 1974)
H.9⅜ x W.6⅞ inches (image)
The Stanley Hawks Memorial Fund, 74.36.12

Theme

Wearing their wedding attire, this Harlem couple poses for a portrait that captures for posterity the special occasion of their marriage. They have chosen photographer James Van DerZee for his skillful and imaginative approach to portraiture.

Background

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Harlem district of New York City became a mecca for African American celebrities and artists. This era, named the Harlem Renaissance, was a time when black artists were officially recognized as a vital part of American culture. Publishers and art establishments in New York City encouraged and supported the development of black music, art, and literature. Harlem's jazz musicians, musical-revue performers, actors, and literary celebrities brought international attention to this prosperous black community. These diverse artists were united by a strong desire to express their African American experience and celebrate black history and culture. In their works they explored subjects from their African heritage, traditions of black folklore, and the details of their daily lives.

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, professions in the arts were not open to most African Americans. The majority of blacks lived in the South where they were disenfranchised citizens separated from white people in almost every aspect of public life. Then events surrounding World War I helped nurture the development of a new cultural identity. Many black Americans proudly served in the war and felt a new sense of participation in their country. While stationed overseas, they became aware of the international interest in African American culture, as well as the extraordinary appeal of jazz—the new black American music. The war also spurred the continued growth of an industrial economy and created work opportunities in Northern factories. In search of employment, education, liberation from political constraints, and opportunities for a better life, thousands of blacks began a mass migration from the South to the cities of the North. Between World War I and World War II, more than two million people joined the exodus to the North. Many were attracted to New York City because of the city's legal protection of blacks and the strong presence there of a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The mass migration to the North contributed to the idea of a “renaissance,” a rebirth of black culture as a recognizable force in American life. This fundamental change generated a new sense of black identity, of community, and of self-confidence and optimism that many black Americans had not previously known. Gradually the scope of the Harlem Renaissance extended to the whole country as more black Americans became involved in literary, artistic, and political pursuits.

Wedding Day, Harlem

This black-and-white wedding portrait, taken in the studio of photographer James Van DerZee, marks an important rite of passage in the lives of this stylish young Harlem couple. Like so many of the residents in Harlem during the 1920s, the bride and groom selected Van DerZee, one of the neighborhood's most popular photographers, because of his unique and inventive style. The young people are representative of the black middle and upper classes that emerged during the Harlem Renaissance and took great pride in their social status. Though not aristocrats like Countess Bucquoi, this ordinary couple shares with her the common human desire to record through portraiture their personal identity, pride, and achievements. In this photograph, they preserve for future generations the joyous occasion of their marriage.

Wearing formal wedding attire, the bride and groom are seated together in the photographer's studio. They do not assume the straightforward pose of traditional portraiture but rather are arranged in a more theatrical manner. The groom gazes lovingly at his bride, holding her tenderly with his arm around her shoulder. The bride looks proudly into the camera lens, inviting the viewer to share in this joyous event. The young man appears dignified in his tailcoat and bow tie, holding his top hat on his lap. He wears the standardized wedding clothes that grooms have worn in America since the 19th century. The bride, a vision of beauty and delicacy, wears a white wedding gown of satin under white net and lace. The above-the-ankles length of her skirt reflects the revolution of shorter skirts that had taken place in the mid-1920s. Her veil mimics the shape of the fitted cloche hat that was popular during this period. The train from her dress cascades elegantly to the floor, echoed by flowers falling from her carefully arranged bridal bouquet.[10]

Compared with the painting by Vigée Le Brun, this 20th-century photograph shows the effects of technology and mass production. The invention of photography made portraiture accessible to more people. Although not many owned their own cameras at this time, a visit to a photographer's studio was common for middle-class people, especially for formal occasions. The bride's clothing also reflects the influence of technology. The elegant lace and satin of her gown, once materials associated with the wealthy, were now easily attainable because of mass production. The net and lace of the bride's veil are machine-made, a product of the industrial age, in contrast to the handwork of *burgomaster*'s and Countess Bucquoi's clothing. Although many brides in this period still had their gowns custom-made, the materials were mass-produced. A bride could also purchase a ready-made gown from a store or catalog.

Like Vigée Le Brun, Van DerZee has “directed” the various elements of the portrait to create a romantic vision, capturing a sense of ceremony and solemnity. For Van DerZee, studio photography was somewhat like theater—an opportunity to “tell a story” with composed or fictionalized elements. He carefully arranged his subjects' poses and setting, using studio props and elaborate painted backdrops to create theatrical effects. He also introduced symbolic elements to evoke associations with his subjects and suggest some essential quality about them.

In this photograph, the photographer emphasizes the loving family, a theme he often explored and saw as essential to the life of the African American community. Van DerZee includes

[10] It is interesting to note that during this period brides often wore their wedding dresses for evening wear and special events after their wedding day.

elements that suggest domestic comfort, such as an ornately carved chair, a fluffy shag rug on the floor, and an oval mirror on the wall. These "real" three-dimensional furnishings are placed before two-dimensional painted backdrops depicting a fire burning in a brick fireplace, a symbol of domestic warmth and security. The fireplace is flanked by stately architectural columns, which, as in the portrait by van der Helst, are associated with the dignity and grandeur of ancient Greek and Roman architecture. To the right of the fireplace, a vestige of a misty romantic landscape evokes a mood of pastoral tranquility. While painted backdrops were commonly employed by portrait photographers in the early 1900s, Van DerZee was inventive in his use of this convention. Another theatrical element is the superimposed image of a child holding a doll, who appears to be seated on the rug to the left of the fireplace. Is the child a memory of the bride's past or, more likely, a glimpse into the future? Drawing on the photographic negative itself, Van DerZee playfully added the flourish of hearts and arrows floating above the fire. Even his signature, printed in a vertical format, works as a linear design element within the composition.

Meticulously crafting his compositions, as was his custom, Van DerZee creates strong contrasts of dark and light to highlight the bride and groom, focusing attention on them. The whites of the bride's attire play against the black top hat and tailcoat of the groom, as well as the dark wood of the chair. The couple appears in sharp focus against the soft, hazy backdrops. The rich textures of the real objects—the fine lace of her gown, the lustrous wood of the chair, the soft, fluffy shag rug—stand out clearly against the haziness of the setting. Celebrating the stuff of middle-class family life, Van DerZee has combined a wealth of details, textures and images to create an imaginative and beautiful wedding portrait.

Technique

Van DerZee used various means both in the studio and the darkroom to produce a desired effect. He had a supply of furniture, architectural elements, and backdrops—many of which he hand-painted—as well as a selection of fashionable clothes for both men and women. In processing his film, he used the technique of photomontage, exposing several negatives to make a single photograph. This is the way he made the young girl holding a doll appear with the bridal couple. In addition to drawing directly on the negative, Van DerZee also retouched his negatives to flatter his subjects, removing unwanted facial lines and blemishes, or placing beauty marks on the cheeks of women. While this technique was controversial in the artistic community, it was highly popular among his clients.

During his career Van DerZee used a variety of cameras. For this portrait, he used a large format 8 x 10 camera, which was favored for studio work because of its clarity of detail.

Artist

Born in Lenox, Massachusetts, in 1886, James Van DerZee grew up in a family interested in music and art. When he was 12 years old, he won a simple box camera as a prize for selling 20 packets of perfume. As a boy he photographed family and friends, but did not pursue photography professionally until later in life. In 1906 he moved to Harlem where he took up a career in music, teaching violin and playing the piano at social gatherings. In 1915 Van DerZee was hired as a photographer's assistant in a New Jersey department store, and in 1917, he opened his own portrait studio in Harlem, where he enjoyed considerable success. He became

the most sought after photographer in Harlem and, in 1932, opened a larger studio with his second wife and business partner, Gaynella, who remained with him until her death in 1975.

Van DerZee's photos from the 1920s and 1930s show Harlem's socialites, politicians, religious leaders, families, and members of local organizations, as well as social events such as weddings, parades and funerals. He photographed people not only in his studio but also on location, producing our most comprehensive document of community life in Harlem during its cultural renaissance. Essentially a self-taught photographer, Van DerZee remained outside and unaware of mainstream American photography. With the advent of inexpensive cameras in the 1940s and 1950s, his business began to decline. Limited to occasional commissions, he supplemented his income by offering a mail-order retouching service.

In 1968, Van DerZee's photographs were discovered by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and featured in a major exhibition, “Harlem on My Mind,” receiving great acclaim. After living a life of relative obscurity, Van DerZee, in his 80s, became something of a celebrity, enjoying a host of honors and awards including the International Black Photographers Award, the Living Legacy Award, and the American Society of Magazine Photographer's Award. James Van DerZee died in 1983 at the age of 96, leaving an archive of several thousand negatives and prints and a rich legacy to American photography.

Suggested Questions

1. What is a portrait? Why is this photograph a portrait? For what purpose do you think this portrait was taken? What makes you say that?

2. How do you think the people in the photograph feel? Do they look comfortable or uncomfortable? Happy? Content? Nervous? What makes you say that?

3. Describe the way this couple is dressed. For what occasion are they dressed? How can you tell? What is the man holding in his hands? What is the woman wearing on her head? Do people dress like this for weddings today? For any other occasions?

4. Which fabrics are transparent? Which are opaque? How many different textures can you see in this photograph? Try to name all those you see. Compare the texture of the woman's veil to the texture of the rug. Which do you think is softer? How can you tell?

5. Van DerZee used many kinds of contrast in this photograph. Where do you see contrast between light and dark? Soft and hard? Horizontal and vertical? Shiny and dull? Rough and smooth?

6. Describe the setting. Where do you think these people are? What do you see surrounding them? What is reflected in the mirror? Van DerZee used painted backdrops in his photographs, along with real objects. Which objects are part of a backdrop and which are real? How can you tell? Why do you think he used backdrops? How would the portrait differ if the background were plain?

7. What else do you see? Who do you think the child with the doll is? What do you think her relationship is to the couple? Do you think she was in the original photograph?

Why do you think Van DerZee chose to put this little girl in the photograph? What could her presence mean?

8. Van DerZee often included symbols in his photographs. What is a symbol? Find a symbol for love in this photograph. (*Two hearts with an arrow through them are on the brick wall of the fireplace*). What other things in this photograph might be symbols? What do you think they symbolize? (*The child with the doll might be a symbol of the past or of things to come; the columns might represent dignity and grandeur; the misty landscape might represent romance*).

9. In what city do you think this photo was taken? (*New York City*.) How do you know that? (*The letters NYC are written on the photograph*.) Can you see where the artist signed the photograph? (*Lower left corner*.)

10. Do you think this was photographed before or after the portrait of Countess Bucquoi was painted? Why do you say that?

11. Both the *burgomaster* in the portrait by van der Helst and the groom in this photograph are dressed in their finest clothes. How is their clothing similar? In what ways does their clothing differ?

12. What props did Van DerZee use in this portrait. What other artist in this set used props for his or her portrait? (*Vigée LeBrun*.)

13. What is the difference between a photograph and a painting? Which do you think takes a longer time to make? Would you rather have your portrait painted or photographed?

14. People often have their photographs taken for special occasions like weddings. On what other occasions do people take photographs? For what special occasions have you had your picture taken? Did a photographer take the picture, or was it a family member or friend? What kind of environment were you in? Was it in a photography studio, in your home, or outside? How did the environment reflect the occasion? What did you wear for the photograph? Did you dress up? How did your clothing reflect the occasion?

15. Vigée LeBrun painted Countess Bucquoi wearing the current fashions of the day. What does the couple's clothing in this photograph tell you about the fashions at the time the photograph was taken? What does this photograph tell you about the couple's social and/or economic status? What makes you say that? What else can you tell about them by the way they are dressed?

16. What clues can you find in the photograph that help you identify the time period in which this photograph was taken? Do you think the couple's clothes were made by hand or machine? How can you tell? Do you think Countess Bucquoi's clothes were made by hand or machine? Why do you say that? What does the setting of the portrait tell you about the time period? Are there any other clues you can find?

17. For Van DerZee, studio photography was like theater—an opportunity to tell a story. How has Van DerZee made this photograph theatrical? What story do you think he is telling in this photograph?

Roman (Europe, Italy, Pompeii)
Standing Deity Holding Horn and Bucket, 1st century A.D.
Fresco
H.33¾ x W.18½ inches
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Rubin, 79.21

Theme

The clothing and accessories of this standing figure identify him as a *Lar*, a household deity that protected the home and well-being of an ancient Roman family.

Background

In the 1st century A.D., Pompeii was a prosperous harbor town along the Sarno River in southwestern Italy. It was a market for the produce of the rich Campanian countryside, a port with wide Mediterranean connections, and a bustling industrial center providing specialty products such as woolen goods, wines, millstones, fish sauce and perfumes. Nearby, along the Bay of Naples, many wealthy Romans had built villas overlooking the sea, some located on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, the cone-shaped mountain that dominated the bay. On August 24, A.D. 79, Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried Pompeii and a number of other towns in volcanic mud, pumice, and ash, destroying the lives of thousands of people and sealing up their possessions. The survivors drifted away and settled elsewhere and, over time, these cities were forgotten or lingered on in folklore. Then in the mid-18th century, they were rediscovered and excavation was begun that has continued to the present day. Well-preserved beneath the thick volcanic debris, the rich remains of a culture have gradually been revealed.

Excavations of Pompeii reveal that the town was divided into regular blocks containing houses, shops, restaurants, and factories. Each building intersected with the next like a jigsaw puzzle. A typical Pompeian house was essentially an inward-facing building enclosed by walls without windows and lit almost exclusively from within. One passed through a door into a passageway that led into the atrium. This was the central room or court of a Roman house where guests were received and family gatherings might take place. The atrium had an opening in the roof for light and a pool in the middle of the floor for collection of rainwater, which helped keep the house cool. At the back of the house was another enclosed courtyard which usually contained fountains and a garden. The interiors of Pompeian houses were decorated with paintings, the Roman equivalent of our wallpaper, and with mosaics that covered the floors. Almost all the Roman murals and many of the floor mosaics known today come from Pompeii and the other cities destroyed by the volcanic eruption. They reveal an extensive record of life and art in the ancient Roman world.

Religion was an important aspect of Roman family life. The Romans were practical people who developed a religion that corresponded to their needs. They placed less emphasis on mystical experience and more on religion's connection with practical experience, that is, the welfare of the family and material success. Roman people believed in a pantheon of gods with protective powers and performed special rites to obtain their favor. Publicly, religion was a matter of state

policy, and temples were built to honor the many gods worshipped throughout the Empire. Privately, religion was a matter of choice, but most Romans observed religious rituals to gain protection from the many perils that threatened their lives.

Large numbers of household shrines uncovered in Pompeii have shed light on religion at the private level, revealing that simple rituals were an important part of life. The father of a Roman family offered daily prayers and gifts at the *larium*, or household shrine (see Figure 1), usually located in the front of the house by the atrium. The *lararium* consisted of a mural painting and/or small bronze sculptures representing traditional household gods as well as others that the family might hold in special honor. The family worshipped here daily as well as on special occasions, such as a boy's coming of age.

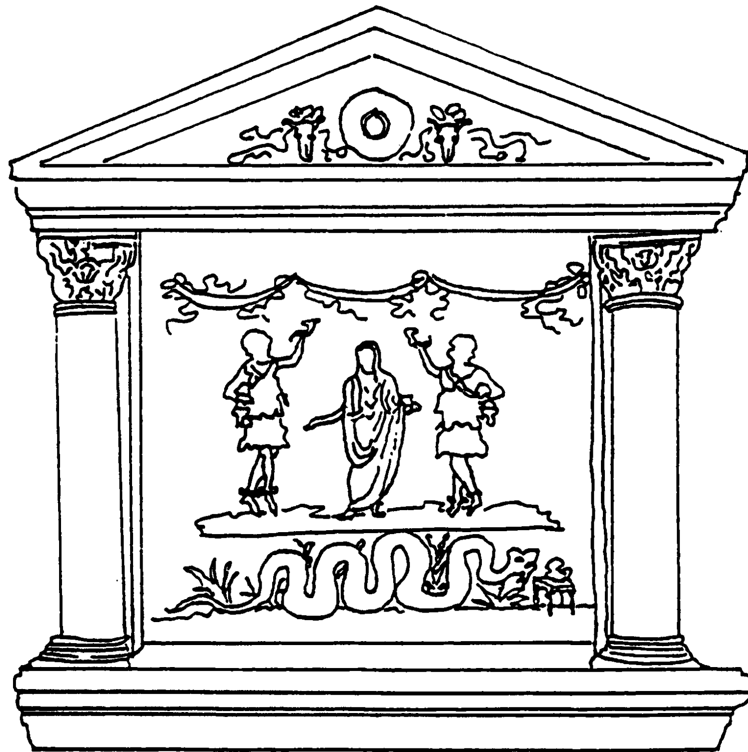
Standing Deity

This fresco fragment was uncovered in Pompeii in the late 19th century. It was once part of a larger wall mural, evident by the fragmentary nature of the leafy green bough at the top of the fresco, which ends abruptly at the edge of the panel. The standing deity depicted on this fresco fragment is a *Lar*, an ancient Roman household deity. Because *Lares* were always shown in paired images, another *Lar* would have appeared on the missing part of this wall painting. In fact, a similar *Lar* figure remains in a house in Pompeii, and scholars believe it may have been part of the same mural.

The cult of the *Lares* was widespread throughout the Roman Empire, and these deities would have been worshipped in nearly every household. The ancient Romans revered the *Lares* as guardians of the house and of the family's prosperity and well-being. They were also considered preservers of food and drink. There are various theories about the origin of these deities. One suggests that they are related to the ghosts of the dead, while another holds that *Lares* began as gods of agriculture and later evolved into household deities.

This figure has been identified as a *Lar* based on the evidence of the setting as well as the subject's appearance, pose, dress, and accessories. *Lares* are represented as youthful male figures, though some of them display female characteristics as well, such as the suggestion of breasts in this figure. The deity in this fresco has a serene facial expression and fine features—a small mouth, straight nose, and large eyes. Tight, wavy curls frame his face. He holds a drinking horn, called a *rhyton*, in his upraised hand and pours a stream of liquid into a small wine bucket, called a *situla*, which is in his lowered hand.

Figure 1



This is a simplified drawing of a typical lararium, a wall painting with an elaborate architectural frame. A large household might have several shrines, some with more figures though not all this elaborate; there are numerous variations. Common to most, however, is the division into two registers seen here. In the upper register, below three garlands, is a scene of sacrifice. The genius, or presiding divinity of the household, stands with head veiled and hands outstretched holding symbols of offerings. On either side stand the two Lares of the household (they always appear in pairs), pouring wine from a drinking horn, or rhyton, into a small wine bucket, or situla. In the lower register, a serpent approaches the offerings (of fruit?) upon an altar. Together with the setting of rich vegetation, the two registers symbolize prosperity, the fertility of nature, and the bounty of the earth beneath.

(Both of these vessels are special attributes of the *Lares*.) As is typical, the *Lar* is dressed in rustic attire, wearing a red knee-length tunic with blue trim, a swirling green cloak called a pallium, tall fringed leather boots with open toes, and a crown of leaves on his head. The tunic is made of a thin, lightweight material, probably linen or a fine wool, which clings to the figure's body and flutters in the breeze. The artist has depicted the folds and undulations of the flowing fabric with rhythmic curving lines, along with careful shading and highlights. The billowing effect also suggests the dancing movement that *Lares* often display.

The tunic was introduced into Italy by Greek colonists, and in Rome it was worn chiefly by men. When worn without an over-garment, it was considered the costume of common people. Made of two pieces of linen or wool sewn together on the sides, a tunic was fastened at the shoulders with clasps or buttons and tied with a belt at the waist, reaching the knees in the front.[11] Unlike the highly detailed and elaborate clothing worn by the Dutch *burgomaster*, this style of clothing, which was characteristic of ancient Greek and Roman costume, is essentially draped rather than form-fitted to an individual. Classical costume consisted of a simple rectangular piece of cloth woven in varying sizes according to its intended use and the height of the person who would wear it. There were no differences between the cloth worn by men and by women. The rectangles of cloth were always draped, never shaped or cut, and worn around the body according to definite rules.[12] There were few types of costume in ancient Greece and Rome, but a great variety of draped arrangements could be achieved with the same piece of cloth by using pins, belts, and other fasteners.

The *Lar*'s tunic appears to be fastened at the shoulders, though it is difficult to know since the artist has depicted the costume in a sketchy manner, unlike van der Helst, who reveals minute details of his subject's clothing. The belt around the waist is covered by the overhanging material pulled up through it, creating a bloused effect. The artist used vivid colors of brownish red and blue for the tunic, which, next to the green cloak, create a vibrant effect.

A green cloak, or *pallium*, swirls behind the deity, looping around his left arm. The awkward circular form is not convincing as the draping of a cloak and appears to be more decorative than naturalistic. The cloak seems rather flat and stiff in its halo effect, floating in mid-air and lacking the sense of solidity and volume of the figure underneath the flowing tunic. The artist has attempted to create a sense of three-dimensionality in the figure, also apparent in the treatment of the feet, which seem to be weighted flat on the ground rather than floating in limbo.

The *Lar*'s tall, fringed boots of natural hide reach the calf and are laced up to the top. Such boots are described as rustic since they would have been typical of those worn by people in the Roman countryside. In Rome, various types of footwear were a distinctive mark of identity and social class. Another example is the kind of sturdy boots with thick soles and leather thongs worn by soldiers.[13]

In addition to the clothing and accessories, references to a pastoral setting also help identify

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[11] François Boucher, *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment*, expanded edition (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 119.

[12] Boucher, 103.

[13] Boucher, 125.

this figure as a *Lar*. The garland at the top of the fresco is a common motif associated with *Lares*, as is the horizontal brown ground line on which the deity stands. The reference to rich vegetation symbolizes prosperity, the fertility of nature, and the bounty of the earth.

Technique

The image of the *Lar* is part of a fresco. Fresco painting is a method of wall painting in which pigments mixed in water are applied directly onto freshly laid plaster so that the painting becomes part of the wall. Fresco, the Italian word for “fresh,” is one of the most permanent painting techniques. A fresco has a matte (flat) surface, far different from the glossy quality of oil paints, and is valued for its brilliant color effects. The fresco wall must be constructed according to an exact procedure, using several layers of lime plaster. The main tools used by ancient Roman plasterers were similar to those used by masons today, for example, a trowel for applying the material and a float for smoothing and polishing it. After the plasterers had finished their work, the painter used brushes to paint the pigments onto the plaster surface while it was still damp. The pigments used in Roman wall painting were obtained from mineral, vegetable, and animal sources. Minerals such as cinnabar or hematite may have been used for red, ultramarine or azurite for blue, and glanconite and celadonite for green.

Fresco is a demanding technique requiring fast execution, since it is virtually impossible to correct work without removing the plaster and starting again. Although background color was always applied to wet plaster, details could be added to the wall when it was either wet or dry. In this fresco of a *Lar*, the painting is on white ground (surface) and the background has not been painted, except for the green garland above and the brown earth below the standing figure. The artist has used broad brush strokes in areas such as the garland and ground, and more subtle, finer brushwork for the face and figure.

Artist

Roman wall painters did not sign their paintings, nor were their names recorded in literary or archaeological sources. Despite their anonymity, these painters constituted a vital profession in Pompeii, since wall painting was essential to a home's interior decoration. There was a particularly great demand for wall painting in Pompeii in A.D. 62 when the city suffered an earthquake that damaged many buildings and prompted a need for the decoration of new walls and the restoration of old ones.

The wall painters of Pompeii belonged to local workshops probably divided into two groups of workers: those who constructed the walls in the houses of the clients, and those who decorated them. The latter were dependent on the work of the former since a fresco would not survive on a poorly constructed wall.

It is believed that artists worked from pattern books because the same motifs and subjects have been replicated in wall paintings found in different parts of the Roman Empire, even though themes were freely adapted and widely varied.[14] It is likely that the painter offered such patterns to the patron, who would make the final decision as to how a room was decorated.

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[14] Roger Ling, *Roman Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 218.

Suggested Questions

1. Describe what the figure is wearing. Does the fabric appear heavy or light? How can you tell? How many pieces of fabric do you think were used to make his tunic? How would you put clothing like this on? (*Two pieces of fabric were sewn together, slipped over the head, and tied with a belt at the waist.*) Do you think it would be easy to put on? Why do you say that?

2 Do you think the *Lar*'s clothes look formal or casual? What makes you say that? Do you think that this clothing is functional or decorative? Explain your answer.

2. What do you think his boots are made of? Do they look comfortable? Why do you think his boots have open toes? Would you like to wear them? Why or why not?

3. What would it feel like to wear the *Lar*'s clothes? Do you think they would feel soft or rough on your skin? Would they keep you warm? Would it be easy to walk in them? Dance? Run? Why do you say that?

4. Describe his surroundings. Where do you think he is? Is he inside or outside? How can you tell? What is the weather is like? What makes you say that?

5. What kind of environment do you think the ancient Romans lived in? Wet and cold? Hot and dry? How does the *Lar* figure's clothing reflect that environment? Why would the ancient Romans choose to wear light simple clothing?

6. What is the *Lar* doing? What is he holding in his hands? What is the thin line above him meant to represent? What is the green object behind him? Does it look like a cloak? Why would the artist choose to depict it in this way?

7. Is the deity standing still or moving? How can you tell? What has the artist done to depict movement? What kinds of lines did he use?

8. Where do you think this fresco was intended to be placed—in a museum, in a church, or in someone's house? Why do you say that?

9. *Lar* figures were regarded as guardians of the house and of the well-being and success of the family. How do you think the *Lar* protected the home and family? Does this figure have any attributes that would make him a good guardian of the home and family? (*He is young, strong, robust, and agile; we know that Lares were associated with food, drink, and nourishment.*) Do you think he would be a good guardian of your home? Why or why not? If you could choose a guardian for your home and family, what would he or she be like? What kinds of attributes would he or she have?

10. How can you tell that this is only a portion of the fresco? What do you think that the other portion looked like? How do you know?

11. Compare the *Lar*'s clothing to that of the *burgomaster*. Which is more elaborate? How is each subject "dressed for the occasion"?

12. The clothing that the deity is wearing is typical of what an ordinary citizen in Pompeii would wear. Why do you think a deity would be portrayed in the same kind of clothing as the common people?

13. What do the figure's pose and gesture tell you about him? Is the deity standing still or moving? How can you tell? What has the artist done to depict movement? What kinds of lines did he use?

14. How has the artist conveyed volume? Is there any place where he does not create a sense of volume? In what part of the painting?

15. The ancient Romans worshiped many deities, each of which served different purposes. Can you name any of them? What are their special properties? What do you think the special properties of this deity are? Use clues in the fresco to support your answer. (*This is a deity that protects the home and well-being of the family*.)

16. How do you think archaeologists are able to identify *Lares*? (*Archaeologists use several different sources, such as writings of the time, repeated excavations of similar images, the location of the images, what they found in close proximity to the object, and visual characteristics*.) Which of this figure's characteristics do you think help identify him as a *Lar*? Which do you think help identify him as a Roman deity?

17. In what ways is the business arrangement between the wall painter and the patron in Pompeii similar to that between an interior designer and customer today? Why do you say that?

Richard Hunt, Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) (British Columbia, Canada) born 1951
Transformation Mask**,** 1993
Cedar, pigment, cloth, string, and wood
H.13 x W12¼ (closed), D.20½ inches
The Anne and Hadlai Hull Fund, 93.42

Theme

Carved wooden transformation masks are worn for important religious ceremonies and dances of the Kwakwaka'wakw (kwak-wak-ya-wak) people. The images on this mask identify the artist's family clan and ancestors. When worn during a dance, the images also re-create ancient myths that are sacred to the Northwest Coast peoples.

Background

One of the world's richest natural environments, the Northwest Coast region of North America consists of a narrow strip of densely forested land less than 150 miles wide, surrounded by snow-capped mountains, islands, and ocean inlets. It stretches along the Pacific Ocean from the Alaskan Panhandle to northern California. In the past, the native people who lived in this area obtained their food, clothing, and shelter from their natural surroundings. The sea provided abundant fish, the basis of their economy, and the land offered bountiful forests teeming with deer, birds, bears, and other wildlife. From the massive cedar, fir, and spruce trees of the forests, the native people built houses, canoes, storage chests, masks, implements and other ceremonial and functional objects.

Before the time of European settlement, the Northwest Coast Indians developed complex social and religious systems. Many of their sacred practices and ceremonies expressed gratitude for the plentiful gifts of nature and a desire to maintain prosperity and well-being. They also manifested a close relationship with animals. Central to these ceremonies were distinctive art objects adorned with images of animal symbols, sometimes referred to as animal "crests." These crests represented families or clans, groups of people who shared the same ancestors. An animal crest was considered the property of a family or clan. The crest identified the members' ancestors and, in return for proper respect and ceremony, protected them. Such protective qualities, similar to those of the *Lar* in ancient Roman times, were important for the group's sense of security and protection.

Much of the art produced by the Northwest Coast people, as well as their ceremonial activities, were intended to proclaim the wealth and status of important families, particularly the wealthy hereditary nobility. These people were obligated to give away their material goods in elaborate ceremonies called potlatches, which were held in the winter to celebrate a special event, such as a wedding or a birth. Many decorated objects were made for these potlatches, including doorposts and totems for the house, ceremonial regalia such as masks and costumes, and numerous implements and eating utensils. All called attention to the ancestry, greatness and wealth of the family and the man who was its head. By giving away his possessions, a family leader shared his wealth with the community, strengthened his leadership, and gained the respect of others. In addition to displaying wealth and status, the potlatch was a way to pass

titles and privileges on to family heirs and to redistribute goods within a stratified society. It was important to participate in these feasts, and people attending them often traveled great distances.

Transformation Mask

Among the southern groups of the Northwest Coast Indians, the Kwakwaka'wakw people are known for their elaborate ceremonies using a range of complex objects. This transformation mask was made by Richard Hunt, a 20th-century Kwakwaka'wakw artist. While this particular mask was made for sale, Hunt made a similar mask for family dances at a winter potlatch and wore it himself while participating in the ceremonies. Transformation masks are worn to illustrate myths of animal ancestry, to show animal crests owned by an individual, and to reveal the interaction of human and animal spirits. Their use is rooted in ancient Kwakwaka'wakw traditions. According to Kwakwaka'wakw creation stories, there was once a time when birds, fish, animals and humans differed only in skin covering and had the ability to transform themselves at will. All living beings were unified and animals could take on human form, just as humans could become animals, birds, fish, and mythical creatures. These ideas still guide Kwakwaka'wakw religious traditions.

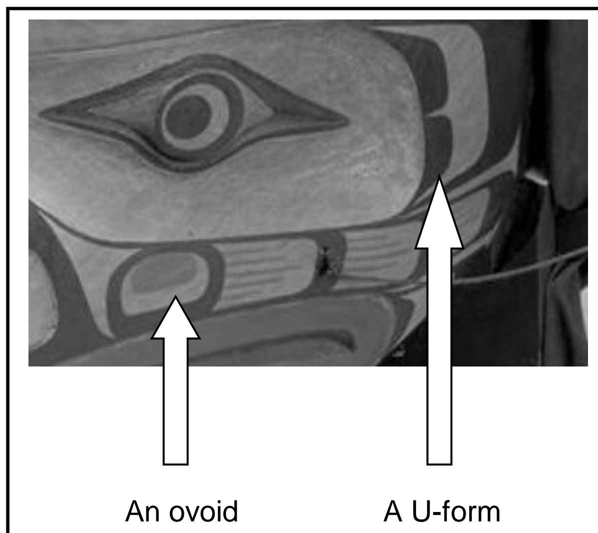
To enact such transformations in ceremonies, dancers wear transformation masks such as this. A transformation mask is a spectacular sculptural form constructed with moveable parts that open and close. As part of the dance, the wearer dramatically reveals the images of different animal and human spirits both inside and outside the mask. At the beginning of the dance, this mask would be closed, showing the image of the raven that is represented on the outside. During key moments of the dance, however, the dancer pulls hidden strings to open the mask and reveal the carved images inside of a human face flanked by a two-headed serpent. Through a combination of movement, dance, and sculpture, the interrelationship of different spirits is revealed with great theatricality. According to Kwakwaka'wakw belief, when dancers are wearing these masks, they themselves are transformed into the spirits represented on the mask.

Portrayed on this mask's exterior, Raven is a central character in Northwest Coast Indian mythology. In many stories, he is the creator of the physical world and the bringer of light. Raven has supernatural powers, and is also a "trickster" who can transform himself into anything at any time, often playing mischievous tricks on others.

The mask opens to display an image of *Sisuitl* (SEE-shoe), a two-headed serpent often associated with the protection of warriors. *Sisuitl* is a strong, invincible character whose glance alone can kill. The serpent is believed to occasionally eat those who see him, which may explain why *Sisuitl* is often represented with a human head between two profile serpent heads, as it is here. Other human features are the upraised hands painted on the interior wings of the mask next to the serpent heads. Together the images on the mask refer to the transformations of human to Raven, Raven to human, human to *Sisuitl*, and *Sisuitl* to human.

Although Raven and *Sisuitl* are traditional Kwakwaka'wakw images, they also are personally significant to the artist, Richard Hunt. Raven is the special animal and main crest of his father's clan. *Sisuitl* is the special animal and main crest of his mother's clan. Worn at family dances, a mask like this one represents Hunt's family history by showing his ancestry.

This mask combines two- and three-dimensional techniques, using both relief carving and painted design. The distinctive Northwest Coast style of decoration is displayed here in the bold linear designs and forms. The painted images are not naturalistic, like those of the portraits in this unit, since they do not attempt to represent subjects as they appear in nature. Rather, they are stylized, using simplified geometric and organic forms and abstract designs to represent animal and human images. The artist animates the surface with an intricate design using two basic shapes—the ovoid and the U-form. These shapes, integral to Northwest Coast artistic tradition, are found throughout the mask in a variety of configurations. Examples of the ovoid are seen in the serpent's eyes and nose, the palms of the human hands, the man's forehead, and the designs above and below the raven's beak. The U-form is repeated in many segments of the serpent's body, as well as on the chin of the human face. While many of these forms seem to represent certain animal or human features, others simply create a pleasing design. The lines used to define these forms are precisely delineated with flowing movement. The long curving body and segmented forms of the serpent suggest undulating scales and slithering movement. Combined with its sharp teeth and penetrating eyes, *Sisuitl* appears to be a fierce and powerful creature. In painting the designs, Hunt used traditional Kwakwaka'wakw colors of black, red-brown, and green, which are applied to emphasize important features such as eyes, nostrils, hands, and teeth.



In addition to the two-dimensional painted images, the artist also uses three-dimensional techniques. The mask's sense of dynamism and movement are enhanced by the carving of the complex surface, both inside and out, with various curving contours and deep recessions. Raven has an extremely long, straight beak with a bluntly curving, turned-down tip. The eyes, nose, and mouth of the central human face inside the mask are deeply cut, which, combined with their bright colors, makes these features appear even more striking. The facial features have openings through which the dancer can see and breathe as he dances. The dancer's body would be draped with sheets of red or black cloth to which feathers are sometimes attached. He would be accompanied by the sounds of drums and singing. Just imagine the visual impact of this mask being worn in a dance, as the forceful flow of lines in the painted and carved images are echoed by the dancer's flowing movement.

Technique

Richard Hunt uses traditional Kwakwaka'wakw techniques when carving and painting masks. This mask is made from red cedar, a soft wood favored by Kwakwaka'wakw artists for its clear and even grain. Woodcarving is a form of subtractive sculpture, in which the form is created by carving away wood from the log. The Yoruba *Beaded Crown*, on the other hand, was made by an additive process in which many different components were added or assembled. Hunt used traditional hand tools such as an adze, chisel, and curved knife. When the carving was completed, holes were drilled along the sides of the hollow shell to insert pegs and strings used to maneuver the mask when it was worn. Hunt then painted the mask with acrylic (plastic-

based) paints. Before these commercial paints were available, Kwakwaka'wakw artists used natural earth pigments, such as red ochre, charcoal, and blue-green clay. Hunt, however, like many contemporary artists, now prefers to use acrylic paints because they dry more quickly.

Artist

Richard Hunt is a contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw artist who comes from a family of internationally respected artists. He was born in 1951 in Alert Bay, British Columbia, but has lived most of his life in Victoria. Hunt began carving when he was 13 years old, receiving lessons from his father, who was taught by Richard's grandfather. Like the traditions of the Hmong and Yoruba cultures, Kwakwaka'wakw art forms have been transmitted from generation to generation. This has occurred despite attempts by the Canadian government to assimilate the Northwest Coast peoples into the predominant white culture. A government ban of the potlatch ceremony existed from 1884 to 1951, but many Kwakiutl artists, like Hunt's grandfather, continued to make traditional ceremonial items, keeping these art forms alive for future generations. Today Kwakwaka'wakw art is undergoing a great revival, and Richard Hunt is a part of it.

In 1973 Hunt began work at the Royal British Columbia Museum, first as an apprentice carver under his father and then as chief carver, a position he held for 12 years. In 1986 he began a career as a free-lance artist, working in diverse media in both two and three dimensions. He is highly acclaimed for his wood sculpture, particularly traditional ceremonial items such as masks, rattles, and bowls. His work has been widely exhibited and is represented in collections around the world.

In addition to his accomplishments as an artist, Hunt is an experienced ritualist and dancer, performing at many potlatches, feasts, and public displays. In 1991 he became the first native artist to be awarded the prestigious Order of British Columbia by the Canadian government. A pivotal figure in preserving the traditions of his people, Hunt lives up to his Indian name, Gwe-la-yo-gwe-la-gya-les, which means "a man that travels around the world giving." Living both in the traditional and modern worlds, he enjoys golf in his leisure time, as well as competitive sports such as football, soccer, and basketball.

Suggested Questions

1. This mask is worn by a Northwest Coast Indian dancer. It is called a "transformation mask." What does "transformation" mean? Why do you think it is called that? What does this tell you about the function of the mask? In what ways do you think the mask "transforms?" (*In a physical sense, it opens up; also the wearer is transformed spiritually into the animals shown on the mask.*)

2. How do you think the mask is worn? How do you think the wearer opens the mask? How can you tell? Look at the open mask. How do you think the wearer sees and breathes?

3. Look at the mask when it is closed. What animal do you see? What features does the raven have that help identify him? What kinds of lines and shapes did Richard Hunt use

to represent the features of the raven? How do the colors help emphasize the bird's features? Look at the open mask. What animals do you see? Where do you see a serpent? How can you tell which animal is the serpent? Where is the serpent's body? Where is its head? How has Richard Hunt represented the serpent's scales? What shapes did he use? (*A U-form.*) Where do you see a human? Besides the face of a human, what other human features do you see?

4. Raven is known as a “trickster.” What has Richard Hunt done to portray him in this way? What do you think the serpent's personality is like? Why do you say that?

5. What kinds of lines and shapes have been repeated on each animal? What features do the animals have in common? Why might common features be important to the function of the transformation mask? Why do you think all of these animals are represented on one mask? What could the purpose be?

6. Is the transformation mask symmetrical or asymmetrical? Why do you say that?

7. How do you think the mask was made? What materials were used to make it? What kinds of tools do you think were used? Do you think the process was subtractive or additive? Point to areas where you see evidence of carving.

8. How long do you think it would take to make this mask? Why do you say that?

9. How heavy do you think the mask is? What would it feel like to wear it?

10. In what ways does this mask reflect the natural environment of the Northwest Coast Indians? How does it reflect the mythology or religious beliefs of these people? Based on this mask, what kind of relationship do you think the Northwest Coast Indians have with animals? With the environment? Why do you say that?

11. What is the purpose of the black cloth? (*To help conceal the wearer.*) How is this similar to the Yoruba *Beaded Crown*?

12. This mask is worn for special ceremonies involving movement and dance. What kind of impact do you think this mask would have on onlookers? Would they be surprised? Delighted? Afraid? Bored?

13. Are there any celebrations or important events in your culture that involve masks or costumes?

14. Like needlework in Hmong cultures, Kwakwaka’wakw artforms are passed from generation to generation. Are there any traditions or skills that have been passed down in your family? What are they?

15. A group of Kwakwaka’wakw people who share the same ancestors are identified by their family “crest.” What animals do you think are Richard Hunt's family crests? Does your family have a special crest to identify them? If so, what does it look like?

16. The images of animal crests on the mask identify the wearer's ancestors. Do any other items of attire in this set identify the person wearing them? Which ones?

17. One of the functions of the potlatch ceremony is to display wealth and status. How is this similar to the Yoruba *Beaded Crown*?

18. From 1884 to 1951 the Canadian government banned the potlatch ceremony. What kind of effect do you think this had on Kwakwaka’wakw traditions? Why do you think the government imposed the ban? Do you think it was fair? Why or why not?

19. Although traditionally transformation masks are made for ceremony, this one was made for commercial sale. How does this reflect change in the culture? In what way is this similar to what has happened to the Hmong artistic tradition?