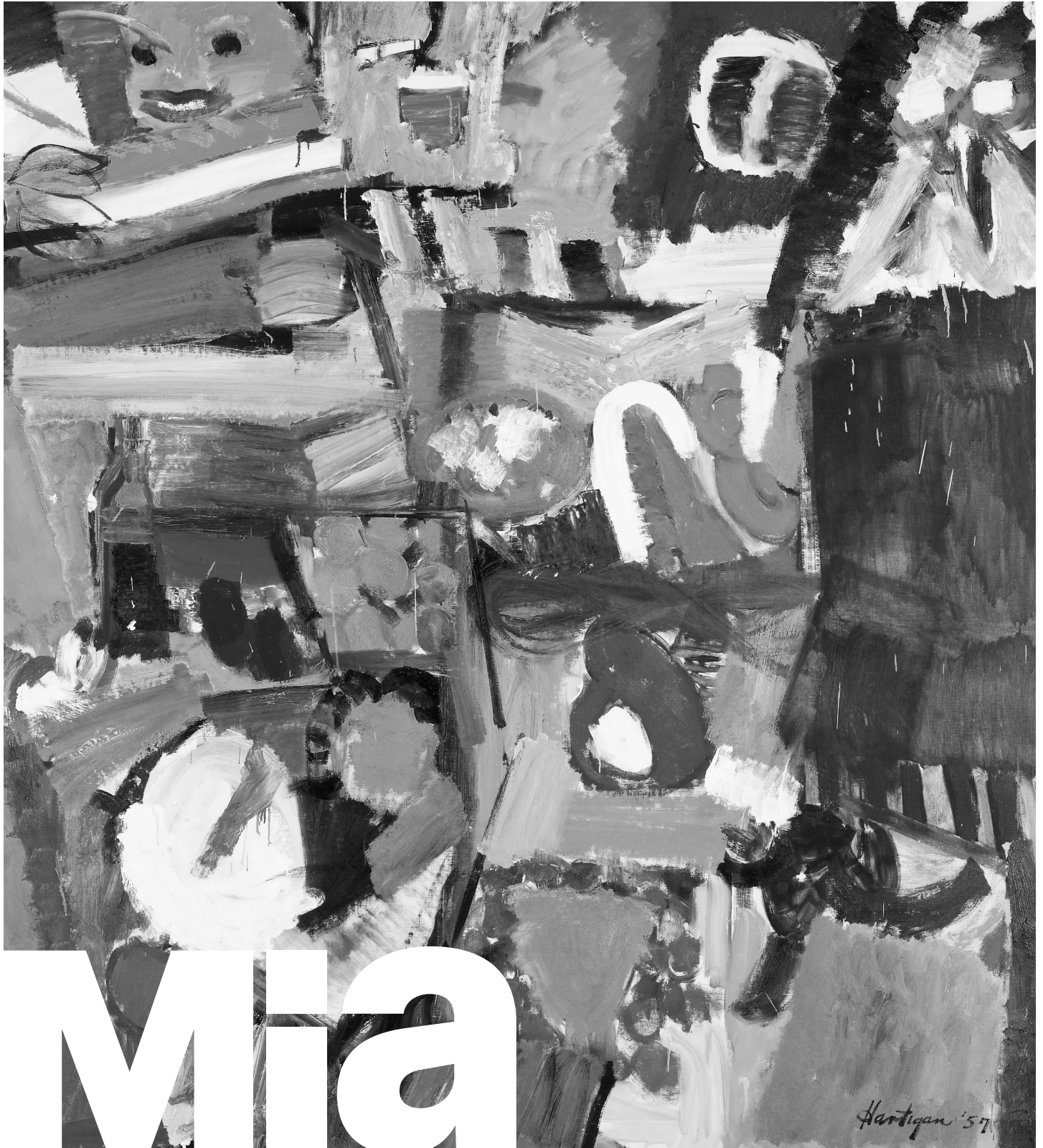


Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Adventure

American Art Sampler



Mia

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. Membership at the Minneapolis Institute of Art now has a Pay What You Can option. Make a contribution or join for free, and become part of the member community! You'll enjoy access to special exhibitions, discounts, incentives, and insider news and information. If you choose to contribute, you'll be supporting the museum's free general admission every day. Donations also provide valuable resources that go to the museum's exhibitions, lectures, events, and classes offered for young and old alike.

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 Art 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.

The Art Adventure Program

What's the Art Adventure Program?

Art Adventure is a program that engages students with artworks from the Minneapolis Institute of Art's collection. Through the support of thousands of trained volunteers, Art Adventure brings visual arts into K-6 classrooms across Minnesota and beyond. The program encourages creativity, critical thinking and global awareness through in-depth explorations of art across various cultures and time periods. Art Adventure is an opportunity for students to experience art up close and personal through reproductions, technology, and touch-and-feel props.

What's a Picture Person?

Picture People are the volunteers from the community who facilitate discussions of artworks using 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 theme and artworks their school will be using that year. At training they receive printed background material, learn engagement techniques, and—most importantly—experience interacting with the original objects they will soon be introducing to students.

What does the Art Adventure Program do for students?

A recent evaluation of Art Adventure showed that, besides encouraging an interest in art, the program fosters five major critical thinking skills: describe what they see, notice details, understand how the parts form a whole idea or artwork, support interpretations with sufficient reasons, and support opinions or preferences with sound reasons. The skills and experiences students gain through Art Adventure will impact them for the rest of their lives.

Once You're in the Classroom

Relax!

The information provided in this booklet is intended as background material to help you feel confident when sharing the images with children. You are not expected to cover everything. 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 can see you and the reproduction.

Talk with the classroom teacher to find out what routines the class follows when gathering for a visitor. Aim 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 with everyone in the group.

Set up the students for successful exploration.

Have the children wear nametags so you can call them by name.
Set your own preferences aside to allow students to form their own opinions.
Encourage the students to take turns speaking.
Paraphrase what the students have said to let them know that you have been listening and help clarify each student's statement.

Begin each discussion with a moment of silent looking.

Begin by introducing the lesson, yourself, and the reproductions. Review with the class what a museum is and what you'll be doing with them. Start by having the students observe the artwork in total silence. 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. Model your expectations by spending the time quietly looking too.

Give students time to talk about what they have observed.

Start with questions like “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! “What else can you find?” or introducing and linking historical content can help generate further comments.

Connect your key ideas to the students’ observations.

When the students’ observations begin to slow down, use what you have learned about their interests to steer the discussion towards key ideas which you have chosen to focus. 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 ways you might find out together.

Keep the age of your class in mind.

Don’t expect young children to be able to focus for more than twenty minutes. Plan your presentations accordingly. 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”? Keep in mind that younger children are more likely to accept the abstract than older students, who may want concrete content.

Talk to other Picture People.

Experienced Picture People have great ideas about how to capture the imagination of a class. Don’t hesitate to borrow and adapt their suggestions, but remember to bring your own creativity along too!

Talking about Art

These questions encourage close-looking and meaning-making to help students find their own relevance in works of art. Through this process they learn to value art as having something to do with their own lives.

What do you see in this artwork? What else can you find?

This is the best line of questioning to begin conversations with K-2 students. For students that seem ready to dive deeper, ask "What do you see that makes you say that?"

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

You'll notice this question is different than, "What do you see?" "What's going on?" invites a consideration of relationships and interactions and taps into children's natural interest to find stories. "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?

What does this artwork remind you of?

What would you use this for? What do you see that makes you say that?

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

What are people in the picture looking at? Where are there bright colors? What is biggest?

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

What would happen if you changed a color? Moved an object or person? Left something out?

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

"Compare and contrast" encourages close looking and reinforces the theme. 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?

What do you like most about this artwork? Why?
What do you like least about this artwork?

If you could keep one artwork from this set, what artwork would you pick? Why?

Using Touch-and-Feel Props

Why props? Students normally first encounter the Art Adventure artworks in their classrooms as reproductions. 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 experience. The use of props also helps engage learners who prefer hands-on learning styles, and reinforces the understanding of all learners.

How should you use props? Without careful planning, props will do little but distract your group. Use these helpful tips to lead successful exploration:

- Present the prop alongside information about a work of art or to help answer a question about the work of art.
- There are a number of ways to use the prop:
 1. Pass the prop around to each student. Give the students a question to consider while they are waiting for the prop and one to consider after they have held the prop.
 2. Ask a single student to come forward and describe how it feels to the whole group.
 3. Hold the prop yourself and walk it around the group for the students to touch or look at closely.
 4. Hold the prop yourself to illustrate relevant parts of the discussion.
 5. Then give everyone a chance to examine it more closely at the end of your presentation.
- Clear communication of your expectations is essential to getting the students to stay focused on the activity. Let the students know that they will need to take turns, what they should do if it's not their turn, and how they should treat the props.
- After the students have explored the prop, refer to the experience as you continue the discussion.
- Don't forget to plan how you'll get the props back! Schools are charged significant fees for missing or badly damaged props and reproductions.

American Art Sampler

Art Adventure Program
A program from the
Minneapolis Institute of Art
Revised 2015

GENEROUS SUPPORT FOR ART ADVENTURE PROVIDED BY:

UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION*

THE HEARST FOUNDATIONS

American Art Sampler

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Thomas Sully, <i>Portrait of George Washington</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reproduction of Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington 	\$10
Cadzi Cody, <i>Scenes of Plains Indian Life</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Samples of elk hide with and without fur ● Photograph of women tanning an elk hide, and (flip side) photograph of elk 	\$20 \$10
Alexis Jean Fournier, <i>Mill Pond at Minneapolis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Photograph of mill pond, and (flip side) photograph of Fournier 	\$10
John Frederick Peto, <i>Reminiscences of 1865</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No prop 	
Grace Hartigan, <i>Billboard</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of painted canvas 	\$30
Elizabeth Catlett, <i>Sharecropper</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sample of linocut ● Photograph of Catlett sharecroppers 	\$30 \$10
Artwork Reproductions (6)		\$50

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

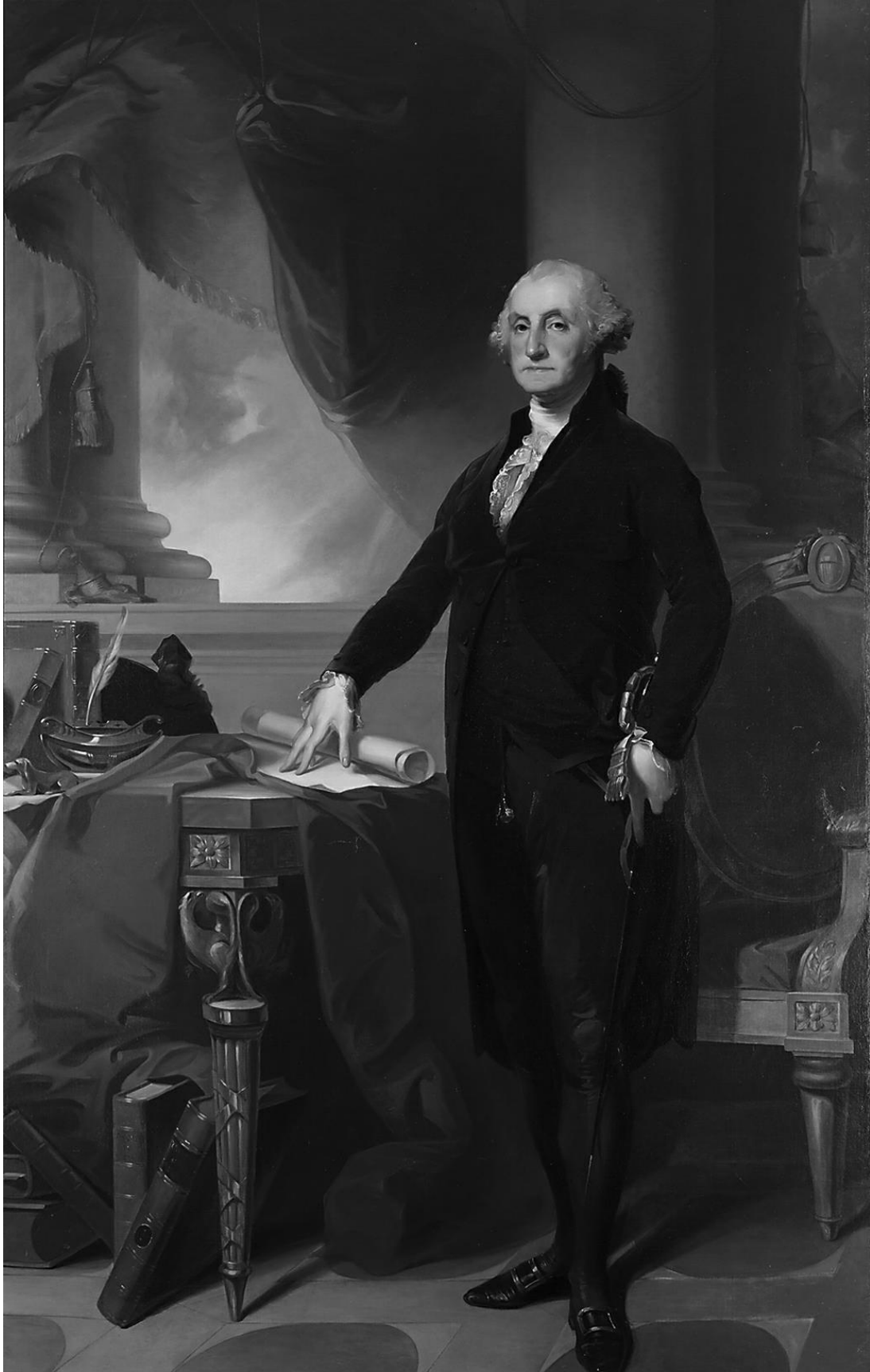
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Introduction

What is American art? Although this question has no single answer, we can examine many of the threads that contribute to the rich tapestry of American art. Diversity is certainly a characteristic of this tapestry. Throughout the land that now constitutes the United States, native peoples lived for millennia before the arrival of Europeans. Over the last three centuries, immigrants have come from many nations. Each of these groups has contributed its own unique artistic heritage to American Art.

The art objects chosen for this Art Adventure set, *American Art Sampler*, span three centuries. They extend from the colonial period to the 1900s. All of these works reveal the important role that artists have played in recording America's artistic and historical development. By studying this sampling of art made in America, we can learn something about the history, traditions, and experiences of this diverse nation.



Thomas Sully, American, 1783–1872

Portrait of George Washington (1732—1799), c. 1820

Oil on canvas

H.94 x W.60 inches

The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 32.12

Theme

This heroic image of George Washington shows the first president as a statesman and a military leader. Reflecting a period when America was seeking national heroes and national identity, the portrait offers an interesting contrast to John Peto's homage to another president, Abraham Lincoln, which was painted at the end of the 1800s.

Background

Following the American Revolution (1775-1783), America's radical ideas of federalism and individual statehood marked a startling separation from 1700s European political practices. Because there were no existing models of democracy in Europe at this time, the new nation was eager to associate itself with the virtues and values of ancient Greece and Rome.

This revival of ancient classical cultures, called neoclassicism, was expressed in 1800s painting, sculpture, and architecture. It was particularly evident in the new government buildings that were rising in cities across the country. These public buildings not only satisfied the practical need for government offices but also served as symbols recalling the classical past. By imitating classical cultures, the new republic hoped to associate itself with those great civilizations.

In the years following the Revolution, America was also in need of American heroes. George Washington, the most revered of revolutionary leaders and the first U. S. president, was an ideal role model. After his death in 1799, he became the symbol of the new republic. Washington's image proliferated across America, meeting the great demand for presidential portraits to decorate the many new government buildings. The painter Gilbert Stuart painted numerous portraits of Washington, three of which became models for countless reproductions, copies and imitations. While uniqueness and originality are highly valued in a work of art today, during the 1800s, the subject's identity and importance gave meaning and value to the work. The many 1800s artists who painted images of George Washington after his death were happy to copy works by artists like Stuart, who had painted the president from life.

Portrait of George Washington

This painting by Thomas Sully is a copy of one of Gilbert Stuart's best-known portraits of George Washington, the one often referred to as the Munro-Lenox Portrait. Finished in 1800 the Munro-Lenox Portrait, named for its two 1800s owners, was the first of four identical full-length paintings by Stuart. The Munro-Lenox Portrait used to hang in the New York Public Library. Sully made numerous copies of Stuart's portraits for various government buildings and historical societies because Stuart could not meet the overwhelming demand for pictures of the first American president.

Sully's picture is painted in the European tradition of aristocratic portraiture. A formal full-length portrait, it is a heroic image of George Washington, presented with symbols and theatrical effects. A noble figure, Washington appears stately and proud in his stiff three-quarters pose, which displays his fine clothing and accessories. He is depicted from a low point of view, adding to his air of importance. He wears a dark vest and jacket set off by a white ruffled jabot (lace or cloth attached to the front of a neckband) and cuffs, black knee-length pants, and black shoes with silver buckles—footwear commonly associated with Washington. The president stands in a dramatic pose, as if he is about to give a speech. His blank face reveals little of his true personality.

Washington's status is enhanced by the grand setting and the symbolic objects that surround him. His right hand rests on a copy of the Constitution, emphasizing his role as a statesman. He holds a sword in his left hand, a reference to his military achievements. Behind him, a wind-blown curtain lets in the light of dawn and reveals a rainbow. The rainbow is a common symbol of hope or beginning, and the dawn may symbolize the dawn of a new era under Washington's leadership. The inkwell and quill on the table refer to lawmaking, and the many books suggest Washington's authority based on the written law. The gilded (decorated with gold) furniture, rich red upholstery, and decorative red table covering reinforce the president's importance. The paperweight shaped like a dog may refer to his love of the outdoors.

The classical columns in the background and some of the motifs on the furniture suggest grandeur and the ideals of the ancient Roman republic, with which the new United States government hoped to associate itself. On top of the table leg are two eagles, birds that were victory symbols in ancient Rome. Eagles were associated with the god Jupiter, represented the standards of the Roman legions and stood for power and victory. The wrapped bundle of rods that form the leg itself once signified the authority of Roman leaders and the ideal of justice. The medallion design on the arm and crest of the chair symbolically refers to a Roman crown of victory.

Sully uses dramatic contrast in the painting to enhance Washington's heroism. The president's striking figure in black and white stands out against the surroundings of red and yellow tones. Various tones of red, seen on the tablecloth, curtain, chair, ribbon around the sword, sky, and even on Washington's cheeks, dominate and enliven the painting. The composition reinforces a sense of solidity and stability by incorporating vertical and horizontal lines and geometric shapes in the architecture and furnishings. For example, the oval back of the chair is repeated in the circles of the floor design. The stable vertical columns are echoed by the erect figure of Washington standing before them. Against these structural elements, the irregular shapes of the billowing drapery and tablecloth give drama and richness to the composition.

Sully closely copied Stuart's original, but his own style is still evident. The color is brighter, surfaces are more opaque (solid) and glossy, forms are cast in sharper shadows, and the head is more clearly formed and heroic than in the original portrait.

Technique

When he painted a subject from life, Sully proceeded to execute a series of drawings on paper and canvas before arriving at his completed portrait. In his book, *Hints to Young Painters*, written in 1851, he explained his technique, stating that he expected his subjects to have six sittings of two hours each. Although he used Stuart's painting as the basis for this portrait rather than painting from life, he most likely made some preliminary drawings as part of his working process. His deliberate approach and careful delineation of detail is very different from the

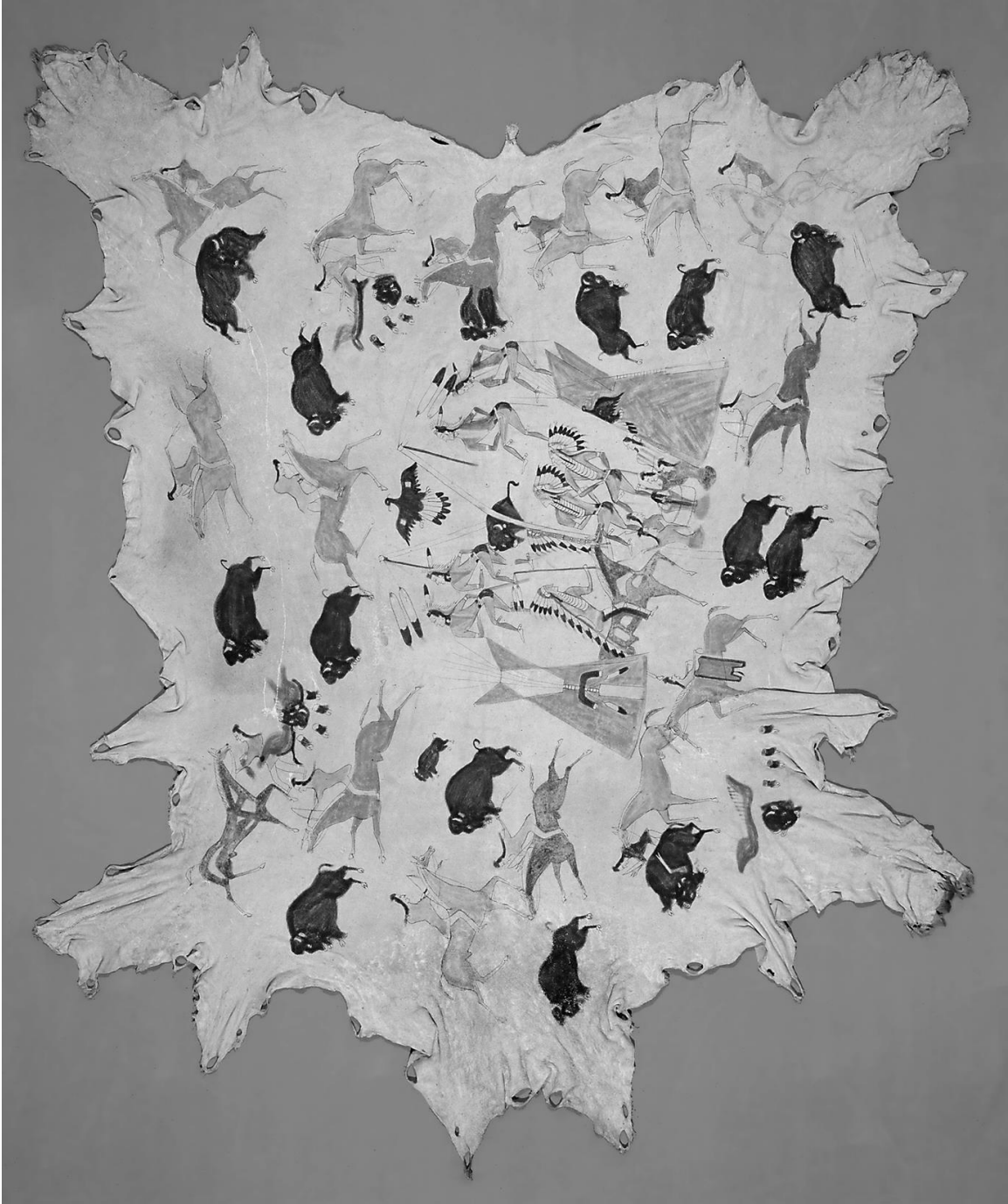
loose, gestural, and spontaneous brushstrokes in Grace Hartigan's *Billboard*. Sully is known for his fluid brushwork, which achieves a rich, lustrous effect. The use of oil paint offered the artist great versatility in painting brilliant colors and convincing textures since the medium of oil lends itself both to minute detail and to the subtle blending of tones. By applying layers of transparent paint over opaque ones, Sully created the illusion of actual skin and fabric and achieved a subtle play of light off the rich reds, yellows, and blacks.

Artist

Thomas Sully was born in England to parents who were actors. The family emigrated to the United States when Thomas was nine, and settled in Charleston, South Carolina. Sully began his career as a painter of miniatures but turned to easel painting in 1805, when he lived in New York City. Some of his earliest patrons were people in the theater. After serving as an apprentice to John Wesley Jarvis, he met Gilbert Stuart in Boston and studied briefly with him. The professional encouragement he received from the elder portrait painter confirmed Sully's ambition to become a leading American portraitist. He eventually settled in Philadelphia. In 1809, Sully traveled to England, where he, like many other American artists, went to see Benjamin West. Because Sully was only interested in portraiture, West sent him to Thomas Lawrence, who was at the time the leading English portraitist. Sully returned to America, where he became one of the nation's outstanding portrait painters during the 1830s and 1840s. In his 70-year professional career, he painted over 2,000 portraits. Sully was also a teacher, guiding the careers of many students including his own family. All six of his surviving children became professional or amateur painters.

Suggested Questions

1. This is President George Washington. How has the artist shown that this man is important? Parts of this painting were included to help identify Washington's abilities, talents, and personality. What objects tell you that George Washington was a military man? A smart man? Wealthy?
2. What time of day do you think it is? How can you tell? What is the weather like? Do you think it is warm or cool? What makes you say that? Where do you think the sun is coming from? What do you see in the sky?
3. Stand in Washington's pose. How does it make you feel to stand in this position? Do you feel important? Why? Try sitting down and slouching. How does this position make you feel? Would Washington look as important if he were sitting down and slouching? Why do you say that?



Cadzi Cody, Wind River Shoshone, 1866-1912

Scenes of Plains Indian Life, c. 1880

Elk hide, pigments

H.68 x W.79 inches

Gift of funds from Bruce Dayton, 85.92

Theme

Cadzi Cody (KAD-zee KO-dee) painted this elk hide at approximately the same time as Fournier's painting of Minneapolis but it represents a different attitude towards nature—one that reflects the ancient traditions of the Shoshone (sho-SHO-nee) people. The elk hide also speaks of the conflict between two cultures when Native Americans and Euro-Americans came into contact.

Background

When the first European explorers arrived on the shores of North America 500 years ago, the continent was populated by several million culturally diverse people speaking hundreds of languages. Archaeologists believe that Native Americans migrated approximately 20,000 years ago across the Bering Strait from Asia into present-day Alaska and Canada. When Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492, he mistakenly believed that he had landed in the East Indies, and he called the people he encountered "Indians." This misnomer has prevailed into the 1900s, although many native people of America today prefer to be called Native Americans or American Indians.

After their original migration, native people gradually populated the entire continent, evolving lifestyles with the climate of the areas in which they lived. The Shoshone people once inhabited the Great Basin region (Nevada, Utah, and portions of surrounding states) of North America. They were a migratory people who lived off the natural resources of the land. They fished, gathered wild plants and berries, and hunted with bow and arrows. Some Shoshone people moved into the Central Plains to hunt bison. In general, the Shoshone shared many of the cultural characteristics of the Plains tribes, such as great respect for the bison, the tradition of painting on hides, and the practice of the Sun Dance.

The bison was central to the existence of the Plains people. They hunted only as many animals as they required for food, respectfully offering prayers of thanks and using every part of the animal for multiple purposes. For example: bison hides were used to make moccasins, saddles, clothing, and containers; ribs were used to make sled runners; bison chips served as fuel; tails made good fly swatters; gallstones taken from a bison's gall bladder were used to create a yellow pigment that was used for painting; and hooves were boiled to make a glue-like substance.

The horse, introduced to America by the Spanish in the 1500s, probably changed the lives of the Plains bison hunters to a greater extent than the automobile changed the lives in the 1900s. The Plains tribes the Sacred Dog and believed it to have been a gift of the Great Spirit. Prior to having the horse, the Plains people hauled their belongings on travois pulled by dogs and hunted bison on foot. Horses greatly improved their ability to hunt and allowed them to become increasingly nomadic. Regarded with great esteem, the horse became the most valued

possession of the Plains people, and its image appears on many of their art objects, including this elk hide.

Because the Plains tribes had a nomadic lifestyle, their art developed in a wholly different manner from that of Euro-Americans or of the more sedentary (not migratory) Native Americans living in other areas of the country (for example, the Pueblo). Whatever they made had to be relatively portable. The everyday objects of their lives were richly decorated with pigments, quills, beads, and other ornamentation. Every object was both useful and a work of art.

The use and decoration of bison, elk, and deer hides have a long history with Plains tribes. For a people who did not weave cloth, the hides provided a useful material for the construction of clothing, tipis, moccasins, and many types of containers. Painting on hides was one more way of honoring the animal for giving up its life. It was also a way of recording history for a people who mainly depended on oral tradition for record keeping. Hides were used in making “winter counts.” Each winter, designated members of a tribe painted a pictorial symbol documenting the most important event of that year on a hide. Additionally, the men displayed pictorial records of their personal achievements—their *coups* (acts of bravery), accounts of battle exploits, and numbers of horses they owned—on their hide robes and tipis.

Contact with Europeans brought changes in the tradition of hide painting, as it did to most other aspects of Native American culture. The conflict that developed between native people and Euro-Americans was largely due to two entirely different philosophies of life. Native Americans had lived in harmony with the land for thousands of years, believing that the Great Spirit had provided abundance for all. Europeans arrived in America with concepts of land ownership and usage that were unthinkable to native people. Prompted by a belief in “manifest destiny,” Euro-Americans felt it was their God-given right to tame and populate the “wilderness.” But Native Americans did not view the land they had lived on for millennia as wilderness. They feared, and rightly so, that they were being forced from their homeland.

More than a century of conflict ensued, and by the late 1800s most Native Americans had been forcibly confined by the U.S. government to reservations. The Shoshone people were placed on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming in 1868. Later, the Arapaho, their age-old enemies, were also confined there. During the reservation period, Shoshone men, deprived of their traditional way of life, continued to paint battle scenes and past glories upon their tipis and robes. They also painted on muslin sheeting issued by the government and on ledger paper obtained from army posts. Although, Native Americans were discouraged from practicing their own traditions. They carefully and accurately painted the details of their weapons, clothing and sacred objects, leaving a remarkable record of their way of life.

Before Native Americans were confined to reservations, hide painting was a way to recount personal exploits and record historical events. As Native American art became increasingly popular with non-Indian collectors, however, this tradition was transformed to produce paintings for sale as a means of economic survival. Along with others, Cadzi Cody was actively involved in supplying hides for this market. As a result of the trade with non-Indians, many hides such as this one have entered the collections of museums.

Scenes of Plains Indian Life

This elk hide painted by Cadzi Cody, who was a member of the Wind River Shoshone in Wyoming, depicts a bison hunt and aspects of the most sacred of Plains Indians ceremonies, the Sun Dance.

The Sun Dance is a ceremony in which the dancers offer thanksgiving and petition the Creator for their needs in the coming year. It is still practiced by modern Plains tribes. In traditional times, the first step in preparation for a Sun Dance was to kill the biggest bull bison of the herd. Cadzi Cody's elk hide painting shows this step. Around the periphery of the hide are hunters on horseback moving in a circular pattern as they pursue the bison. The artist also shows us the ritual butchering of the animal. The head of the bison was prepared for the Sun Dance by severing it behind the ears but leaving it attached to the tail by a strip of hide down the back. The head was then mounted on the sacred center pole, a cottonwood found growing by a stream and cut by the young men of the tribe. We can see this pole in the painting, and above it an eagle, which represented a channel between earth and the spirit world.

Cadzi Cody has now included the next step of preparation for the Sun Dance—the creation of a lodge with poles extended from the center pole, covered with brush. Within the lodge, men would dance facing toward the sacred pole, continuing for four days without food or water. The Shoshone called this type of dancing “dry-standing-dance.” The resulting dehydration and physical exertion often produced an altered state of consciousness, which invited visions. Around the pole, Cadzi Cody has depicted several dancers. The traditional adornments for participants in the Sun Dance are body paint, aprons, and eagle-bone whistles. Here, the artist has depicted the dancers in feather bustles, with bells attached to their legs. In Shoshone tradition, this type of dress would be appropriate for a nonreligious dance called the Wolf or Grass Dance. The reason for this variation is not known.

The drum was considered to be the heartbeat of the Plains people, as it still is today. Singing and drumming accompany the Sun Dance. In the painting, several men are shown drumming in the lower right area. Near them is a woman who has a baby in a cradleboard on her back. To the left, a man on horseback with a long feather bonnet is a respected war leader. Each feather was earned by an act of bravery. To each side of the center scene are tipis. Constructed of a framework of wood poles covered with hide, tipis provided portable shelter for Plains peoples during nomadic times. The designs painted on each tipi would have had symbolic meaning specific to its occupants.

The motif of the circle recurs several places on the elk hide: in the bison hunt, in the formation of the Sun Dance, and in the shape of the tipis. The circle has sacred significance to Native Americans. It is without beginning or end, symbolizing the cycle of life and the concept of the universe. Some native people believe that the Great Spirit made everything round—the sun, sky, earth, moon. For these and many other reasons, Native Americans made their tipis circular, arranged their camps in circular patterns, and sat in a circle in ceremonies.

Cadzi Cody painted this scene from memory and imagination. And has given us many specific details of the Sun Dance and the bison hunt. By the time Cadzi Cody painted this elk hide, the bison were nearly extinct. The Sun Dance itself had been outlawed by the U.S. government in 1881. Traditional religious practices were discouraged by the government in its attempt to assimilate the American Indian people into white culture. The Sun Dance was later made legal and now takes place in many parts of the Plains region during the summer months.

Technique

In traditional times, hide preparation was done by women. The hide was staked to the ground (see the holes around the edges), scraped to remove the hair, and bleached in the sun. At this stage, it was rawhide, stiff and ready to form into saddles or containers. To be suitable for painting or clothing, the hide had to be tanned or softened by rubbing and soaking with various substances. Then it was sun-dried, rolled for sizing, and stretched back to its original size and shape. We can see in the shape of this elk hide the four legs, the neck, and the tail of the elk.

In traditional hide painting, natural pigments were used. Natural pigments were derived from the following: red from hematite (iron ore), green from lake algae; blue from blue clay; yellow from bison gallstones. By the 1800s, commercial pigments were available through trade with Euro-Americans, and Cadzi Cody used them in this painting. Because some images in his paintings are so similar, scholars suspect that he may have also used stencils. For example, notice the striking similarities in the bison. The elegant and graceful horses are more individualized due to the range of colors and greater variety of stances. The rather realistic depiction of the horses indicates that the artist must have closely observed the animals.

By the time this painting was done, Native American artists had assimilated some of the conventions of Euro-American painting. They did not simply mimic them, but rather selectively used what was of advantage to them, often adapting new materials to their traditional style. Here, Cadzi Cody has used the new commercial pigments, but in the tradition and style of Plains painting. Some Euro-American influence may be indicated by the overlapping of forms to indicate depth and by the “humpbacks” of some of the hunters, perhaps an attempt to show foreshortening (perspective and depth in an image).

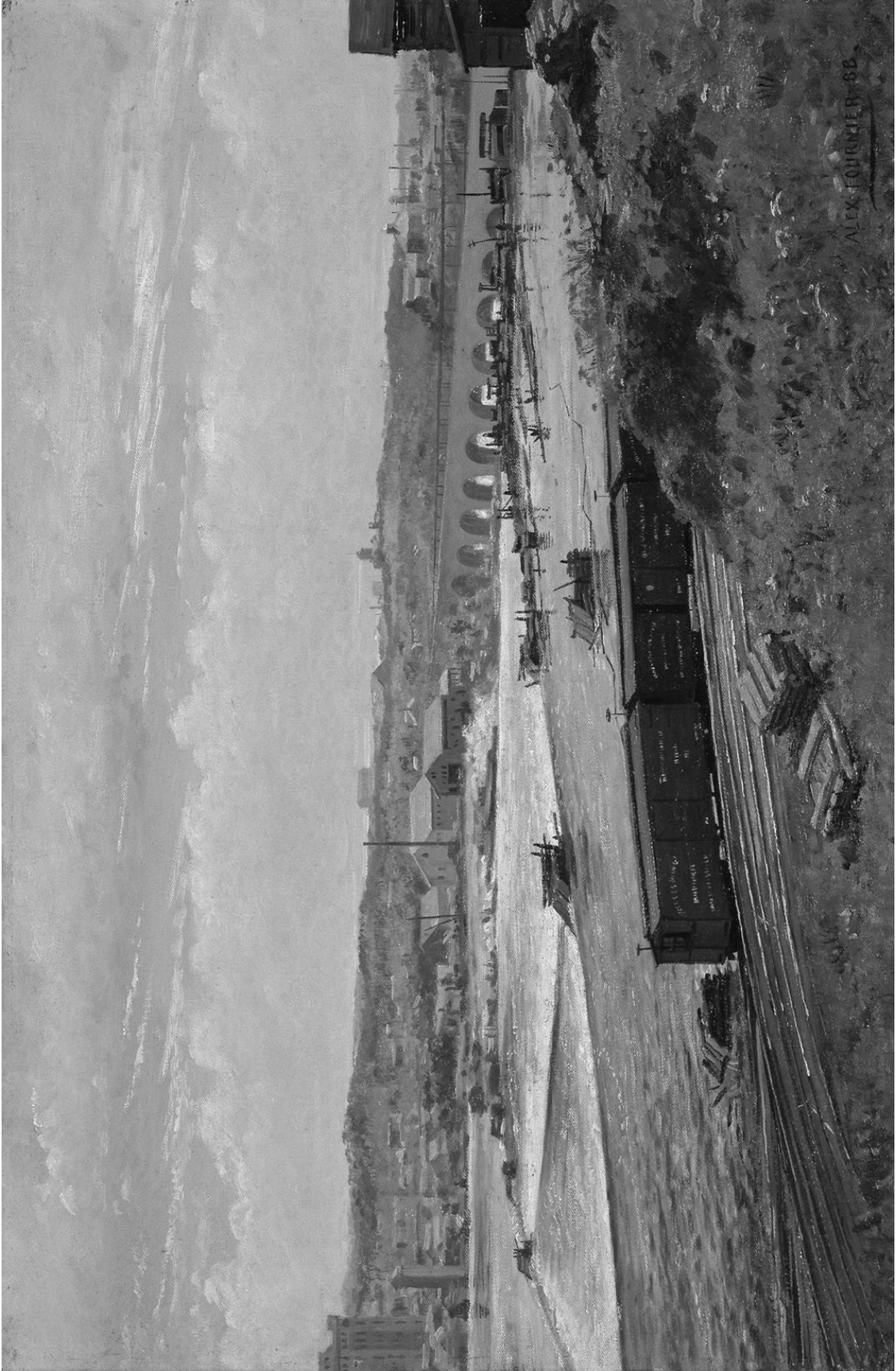
While Native American art was widely and avidly collected by Euro-Americans during this early period, it exerted little noticeable influence upon the style of Euro-American art. That changed in the 20th century. One of the most important figures in modern American art, Jackson Pollock, was inspired by Southwestern sand painting, and the Surrealists in the 1940s were influenced greatly by Native American art and cultural practices. Native American art is one of the many threads of artistic heritage that contribute to the rich tapestry of American art.

Artist

Because the hide painting is unsigned, it is difficult to make a positive identification of the artist. The style of this painting is similar to other existing hide paintings thought to have been painted by a Shoshone traditionally known as Katsikodi. That name, however, cannot be found in any official records. It is believed that Katsikodi was actually a Wind River Shoshone man named Codsioigo (co-SEE-ko), who was given the “white” name *Cadzi Cody* in 1900. The name *Codsioigo* means “mountain flower” in Shoshone. Codsioigo died on October 22, 1912, at the age of 46.

Suggested Questions

1. What animals do you see in the painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Do you think Cadzi Cody was more interested in showing how things looked or in telling a story? What is your evidence?
3. When Cadzi Cody painted this hide, his traditional way of life had all but vanished. The U.S. government had outlawed the Sun Dance and Shoshone Indians were forced onto reservations. Why do you think he continued to paint traditional aspects of Indian life?



ALEX. FOURGIER, B. 60.

Alexis Jean Fournier, American, 1865–1948

Mill Pond at Minneapolis, 1888

Oil on canvas

H.17 x W.26 inches (outer frame)

The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 46.8

Theme

In this painting, Fournier (FORN-yay) depicts the city of Minneapolis in the late 1800, showing how industrial development dominates the urban landscape. The painting also reflects the late 1800s belief in “progress” and humankind’s ability to control nature.

Background

St. Anthony Falls and the Mississippi River played an essential role in the exploration and settlement of the Minnesota territory and in the development of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The falls and surrounding area, including both sides of the river, were part of a large expanse of land that were purchased by the U.S. government from the Dakota Indians at the beginning of the 1800s. The Dakota people had called the falls “Minirara,” meaning “curling water.” In 1680, Father Louis Hennepin, the first white person to see the falls, named them for his patron saint.

The federal government was the first to recognize the falls’ potential to supply power, and constructed Fort Snelling in the 1820s. Later, enterprising settlers harnessed the water’s power to run sawmills, flour mills, foundries, factories, and a host of other industries. Minnesota secured statehood in 1858, and by 1888 (the time of this painting) it was one of several young states experiencing the first flush of economic growth and industrial expansion. The city of Minneapolis, already known as the world’s leading lumber market, was now becoming the foremost flour-milling center in America.

Much of this technological development took place along the river, the city’s primary source of power and transportation. Such development brought drastic change to the environment, and, gradually, the natural beauty of St. Anthony Falls was diminished. Today we are more aware of the impact of industrialization on nature and its adverse effects on humanity. In the 1800, however, many people considered the earth and its resources limitless and available for any enterprising person to use and exploit.

Mill Pond at Minneapolis

This painting is an accurate record of Minneapolis in 1888, showing many landmarks of the time. The urban landscape documents the rows of mills and industrial buildings that had developed along the banks of the Mississippi, some of which can be identified. Directly to the left of the arched bridge is Farnham’s Mill, one of the last active sawmills at the falls; on the far left edge of the painting is the Pillsbury “A” mill, which was built by the artist’s father. When completed in 1883, it was the largest flour mill in the world. Both mills derived their power from the mill pond, a reservoir constructed to channel the flow of the river. The mill pond is seen in the painting’s middle distance, a band of water that appears calm next to the rushing water behind it from the falls. To the right of Farnham’s Mill is the Stone Arch Bridge of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railroad, completed in 1883. The bridge was a national symbol of

the city's prosperity and progress. It was the first and only curved masonry bridge in the world and also the first masonry bridge to span the Mississippi. The Stone Arch Bridge provided railroad access to the heart of the city's business district for the first time, connecting Minneapolis to both the eastern and western parts of the nation.

Beyond the arched bridge is the steel truss that formerly carried Tenth Avenue traffic across the river. Above the bridge to the left, just breaking the horizon line, are the first buildings of the fledgling University of Minnesota. They are dominated by the tower of the University's landmark, Old Main. On the hill to the right are the polygonal storage tanks of the Minneapolis Gas Company. In the foreground railroad tracks and cars can be seen.

Fournier painted the scene from the west bank of the river. The same view can be seen today from the Third Avenue bridge. The artist included in his panoramic view all of the signs of human progress that would have appealed to his business patrons. He presented them in such a manner that industrialization seems surprisingly compatible with nature. Blending with the marks of human development, the rolling wooded hills rise in the background to meet a partly cloudy blue sky. In the foreground the tracks of the railroad are juxtaposed with the soft grasses and foliage of the land around them. To Fournier and his patrons, these elements were apparently not in conflict.

Fournier's use of line, shape and color contributes to the harmonious effect. The composition is organized into distinct areas of foreground, middle ground (or middle distance), and background. The horizontal lines of the horizon, the band of clouds, the riverbank, and the water's current, gently sweep across the painting and contribute to a restful, tranquil mood. This is reinforced by the use of soft, cool colors—blues and greens and whites. At the same time, the diagonal lines of the bridges, the rushing waters by the pond, and the train create movement and give the scene a dynamic quality that suggests notions of progress and moving ahead.

Technique

Fournier worked directly from nature, painting out of doors and perhaps putting on the finishing touches in his studio. His use of oil paint enabled him to render his subject naturalistically, with attention to accurate details and local setting. While he shows us the actual shapes and colors of objects, his technique is not as meticulously detailed as that of John Frederick Peto or Thomas Sully. Fournier has a looser, more spontaneous style that captures the effects of light and movement, as seen in the flowing water, the floating clouds, and the windblown hillside. His fluid brushstrokes are visible, unlike those of Peto whose finely detailed painting shows no evidence of brushwork.

Artist

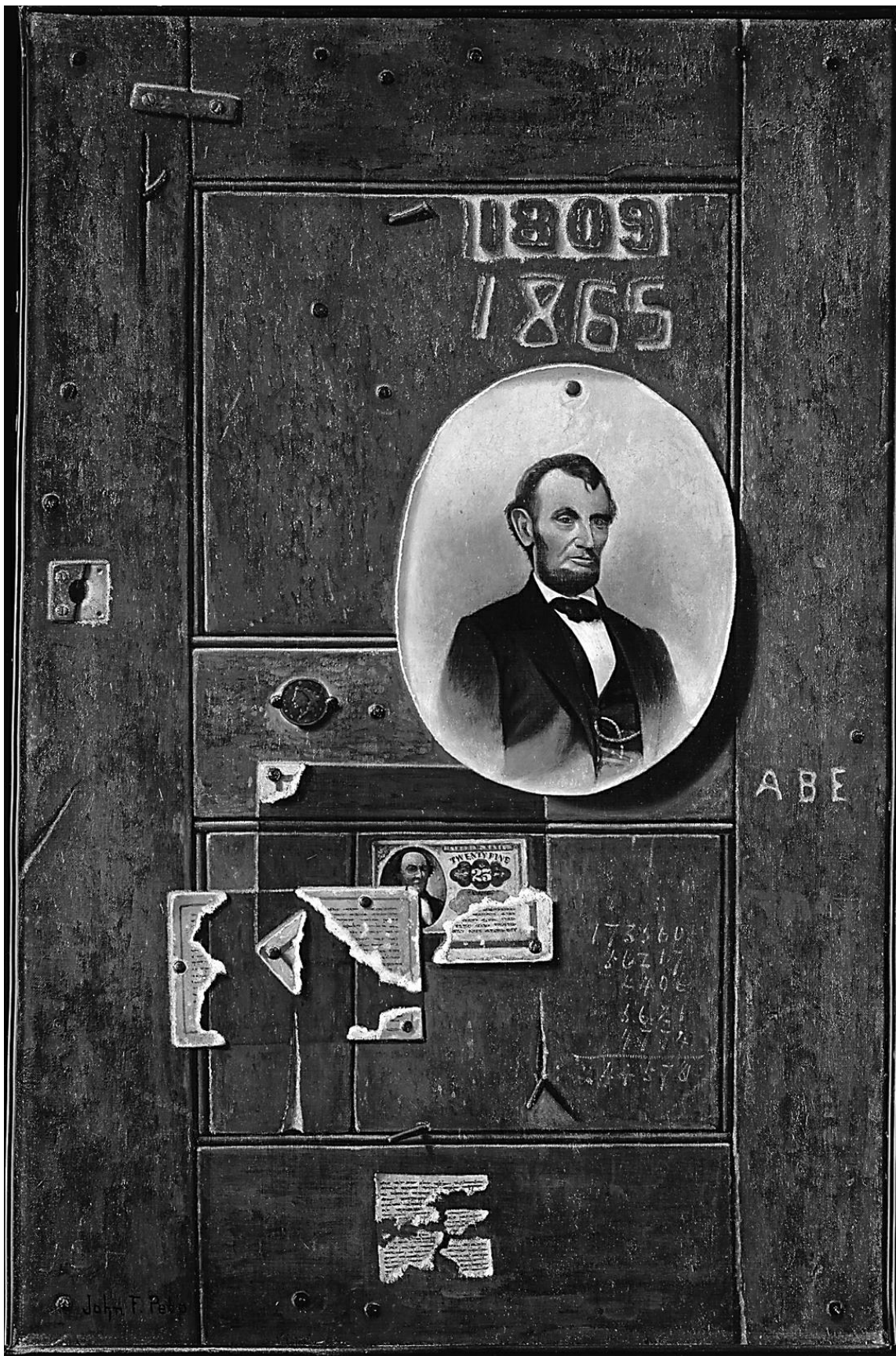
Alexis Jean Fournier, the son of a millwright, was born in St. Paul in 1865. He spent his early youth in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but returned to Minnesota in 1883, where he supported himself as a sign and scenery painter. While living in Minneapolis, he acquired patrons who sponsored his enrollment in the newly established Minneapolis School of Art (now the Minneapolis College of Art and Design). In 1887 Fournier established his own studio above a tailor shop at 412 Nicollet Avenue. He specialized in landscape paintings working in oil and watercolor, and attracted many local patrons.

In 1893 several patrons, including Hill, paid for the artist to study in France. He attended the Académie Julian in Paris and was greatly influenced by the landscapes of the Barbizon School

of painters. This group of artists was interested in landscape painting and advocated painting directly from nature. Fournier returned to Minneapolis, where he continued to live for many years while traveling widely. In 1908 he went to the village of Barbizon in France where he completed a major project consisting of 20 canvases entitled *Haunts and Homes of the Barbizon Masters*. These works were critically acclaimed when exhibited in New York, Boston, and Minneapolis in 1915 and 16. He spent his later years in East Aurora, New York, and continued to produce carefully executed, realistic landscapes until his death in 1948.

Suggested Questions

1. What kind of sounds would you hear if you were at this place? What kind of sound would the water make?
2. How would you feel if you could walk in this landscape? What about the painting makes you say that? What would you do there?
3. What do you think the artist is paying attention to in this scene—nature, industry, or both? What signs of industry or technology do you see in this painting? How is human activity changing the landscape? What do you see that makes you say that?



John Frederick Peto, American, 1854–1907

Reminiscences of 1865, after 1900

Oil on canvas

H.30 x W.20 inches

The Julia B. Bigelow Fund by John Bigelow, 44.25

Theme

John Frederick Peto reminisces in this painting about the events of 1865, paying tribute to President Abraham Lincoln while reflecting the somber mood of the country at the beginning of the 1900s.

Background

John Frederick Peto came to maturity in the years following the Civil War, when America was engaged in the painful and turbulent period of Reconstruction. Despite the divisions brought on by the war, the 1870s and 1880s were decades of optimism in America. In 1868, only four years after the war ended, the first intercontinental railroad connected the east and west coasts. During the years that followed, fortunes were amassed by people such as John D. Rockefeller, who began the Standard Oil Company in 1870. The telephone and the electric light bulb were invented. The Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883. The architect Louis Sullivan built the first skyscraper in Chicago in 1890. During this period, the west held the promise of great fortune for prosperous entrepreneurs as well as those who only dreamed of success. Optimism ran high because it seemed that progress was limitless and that the problems of poverty and disease would be solved.

There was, however, a good deal of tension beneath the surface. By the 1890s, it was obvious that progress had a darker side as well. Various events and disturbances contributed to the nation's mood of increasing disillusionment. Major labor strikes occurred in 1877 and again in 1892. In 1890, the final armed conflict between the U.S. Army and the American Indians took place when over 300 Native Americans were killed at Wounded Knee in South Dakota. Huge numbers of immigrants were coming into the country, and Ellis Island was opened in 1892 to cope with them. The Panic of 1893 and the resulting collapse of banks were followed by a prolonged economic depression. In 1898, America declared war on Spain. The 1865 assassination of Lincoln was followed by the assassinations of President Garfield, in 1881 and President McKinley, in 1901. By the turn of the century, these events brought skepticism into the American consciousness, countering the former assumptions about progress.

Reminiscences of 1865

Peto was looking back several decades when he painted this picture reflecting on the events of 1865. That year was marked forever by the end of the Civil War and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. It was the death of Peto's own father in 1895, however, that prompted him to begin a series of paintings, including this one, which alluded to Lincoln, to death, and to the war. Considering that Peto was only a child in 1865, it is possible that the painting may be as much an expression of his personal feelings about the death of his father as it is a recollection of the historic events of that year.

The painting is called a still life because it depicts a group of lifeless objects that were arranged by the artist. What we actually see is paint on a flat canvas. Through his skillful painting of details, however, Peto creates the illusion of actual objects attached to a worn wooden door. The focal point of the painting is the black and white image of Lincoln, reproduced from an engraving of a photograph. It gives the appearance of an actual photograph stuck to the door with a brass tack, but it is in fact a painted image. In making the painting, Peto repeatedly pressed into the outlines of the engraving with his pencil in order to trace the image accurately onto the canvas. Adjacent to the photograph, Peto painted Lincoln's nickname "ABE" so that it appears to be carved into the door, as does the year of his death. He painted Lincoln's birth date, 1809, to simulate relief carving, making the numbers look as if they are standing out from the door.

Currency was a favorite subject of still-life painters in this age obsessed with money. Peto included the image of a 25-cent shinplaster, a worthless piece of paper money, which is just below a tarnished "Liberty Head" gold coin. The image of the man on the shinplaster is Robert J. Walker, who was Secretary of the Treasury under James Polk.

Everything in the painting subtly shows the passage of time. The photograph curls around the edges. The painted door is weathered, the lock is rusted, and the nails are bent. Fragments of tattered pieces of paper are attached to the door, the rest being torn away or worn off. In the lower right corner, faded columns of numbers apparently written in chalk are barely visible.

Each of these elements has been carefully arranged within the rectangular design of the door to create a sense of order. Peto used a subdued color scheme, with shades of muted green, gray, and tan that reinforce the worn, weathered appearance of the door and the objects on it. The meticulous details are displayed on the surface of the canvas, inviting the viewer to consider the subject matter and to study the various objects and their carefully painted textures.

The painting conveys an inescapable sense of nostalgia and sadness. Only the image of Lincoln remains relatively intact compared with everything around it. Perhaps a message of the painting is that Lincoln's impact on America lingered after his death. In the turbulent turn-of-the-century years, Peto shared the country's nostalgia for Lincoln's heroic leadership. The artist suffered from a kidney disease in his later years, as well as mourning the loss of his father, and he was preoccupied with themes of death.

Technique

John Peto specialized in still life painting, working in a style popularized by the Dutch in the 1600s called *trompe l'oeil* [tromp-LOY], or "fool-the-eye" painting. In this style, artists painted lifelike images in order to trick viewers into believing they were looking at arrangements of real objects. *Trompe l'oeil* pictures became popular among an American public that admired the skill required to create them.

The medium used in Peto's painting is oil paint. As we saw in Thomas Sully's *Portrait of George Washington*, oils enabled an artist to paint very fine details and achieve convincing textures. Peto's technique is so convincing that the objects look real and three-dimensional. We can almost feel the slickness of the photograph, the roughness of the faded door, the softness of the frayed paper and the hardness of the bent nails. Unlike Grace Hartigan in *Billboard*, Peto does not show evidence of his brushwork in his attempt to paint realistic subjects.

Artist

Peto was born in Philadelphia in 1854, the son of a gilder and dealer in picture frames. His first introduction to fine art was in his father's shop, and he was soon sketching and drawing. It was not until 1877, two years after he first advertised his skills as a painter that he received formal training at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he studied periodically over the next six years. It was through the Academy that Peto met William Harnett, a still life painter whose style and choice of subject matter strongly influenced the younger artist.

Peto married in 1887, and in 1889 moved to Island Heights, New Jersey, a resort community. He continued to paint still lifes, though he was not very successful at selling his work. His somber, melancholy paintings did not particularly appeal to a public interested in pretty decorative works. He lived his final years in obscurity, suffering from Bright's Disease, a kidney ailment from which he died in 1907 at the age of 53. Though not appreciated during his lifetime, Peto is today considered an important American still-life painter. He was rediscovered in the late 1940s by a scholar researching the work of William Harnett. The researcher found that many of Peto's paintings were unsigned or that they bore Harnett's signatures, which were forged at a later time after the death of both artists. Consequently, *Reminiscences of 1865*, which is actually signed by Peto, has proved to be crucial to art historians in understanding his work.

Suggested Questions

1. What are some of the objects you see in this painting? What are the objects attached to? Where do you see numbers?
2. What are some of the things we can learn about Abraham Lincoln from looking at the painting?
3. Pretend you are touching this painting. Which areas are smoothest? Which are roughest? What areas of this painting look like they might give you a splinter if you touched them?
4. The French called this type of painting *trompe l'oeil* (tromp-LOY), which means "fool the eye." How are our eyes fooled?
5. How is this painting similar to Sully's portrait of George Washington? In what ways do the two portrayals of American presidents differ?



Grace Hartigan, American, 1922--2008

Billboard, 1957

Oil on canvas

H.78½ x W.87 inches

The Julia B. Bigelow Fund by John Bigelow, 57.35

Theme

Drawing on her experiences in New York during the 1950s, Grace Hartigan incorporated familiar elements of urban America into her work. In this celebration of personal expression, fragments of figures and abstract forms recall billboard images seen fleetingly from a highway.

Background

After World War II, America emerged as a great world leader. The arts flourished, and New York City replaced Paris as the art center of the Western world. One group of New York artists called Abstract Expressionists captured the speed, energy, and power of American life with a new way of painting. They were inspired by European artists who had immigrated to New York during the war and who encouraged the exploration of new styles and ideas. Drawing on the power of European styles, American artists developed the revolutionary art style of abstract expressionism.

The artists of this movement placed a high value on personal expression, rejected realistic subject matter, and infused human emotion into abstract form. Their spontaneous gestural style, known as action painting, often revealed the physical act of painting. The artists relied heavily on improvisation and chance effects and placed great emphasis on the *process* of painting. Accidental shapes, dribbles, splashes and strokes of paint revealed the creative process.

Abstract Expressionism became an international phenomenon during the late 1940s and continued into the 1950s. Soon younger artists flocked to New York to become part of the group known as the New York School. They adopted the energetic gestural style of the older Abstract Expressionists, but turned from purely abstract art to recognizable subjects—landscapes, still lifes, and figures. Grace Hartigan belongs to this “second generation” of Abstract Expressionists.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Pop Art movement also flourished in New York City. It was inspired by the consumer culture and commercialism that had become an important part of American life. Several factors had led to a boom in product advertising and consumerism in the United States following World War II. After years of scarcity during the war, the American public was eager to buy new products, particularly cars. With increased production and ownership of automobiles, America became a car culture during the post-war years. Commerce spread out from the inner city to the highway, and billboard advertisements reached the newly mobilized audience.

The Pop Artists of the 1950s and 1960s represented and often satirized images from American popular culture, drawing from sources such as television, comic strips, billboards, advertising, and the commerce of contemporary life. Some artists also used the techniques as well as the

imagery of commercial art. Though Hartigan does not consider herself a Pop Artist, her early paintings can be seen as a bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

Billboard

In *Billboard* Grace Hartigan uses images from everyday life, drawing upon her experiences in New York City during the 1950s. The fragments of figures and forms in the painting recall billboard images seen fleetingly from the highway. Combining abstract and representational forms, Hartigan considers her art as “real” but not “realistic.”

Hartigan is fascinated by the accessible and boldly simplified style of American advertising. In this painting, she draws upon advertisements she saw in *Life* magazine. The artist shows us a variety of fragmentary images such as a smiling face above a tube of Ipana toothpaste, the neck of a wine bottle over a glass, molded lime Jell-O surrounded by fruit, and the keys of a piano. These seemingly chaotic images are unified by Hartigan’s bold, expressive brushwork and balanced by her placement of colors on the canvas.

The bold, gestural brushstrokes in *Billboard* clearly demonstrate Hartigan’s relationship to the Abstract Expressionist style. The spectator is invited to feel the “presence” of the artist and to experience the very process of painting through her large gestures and thickly applied paint. Hartigan has said that *Billboard* took her about one month to complete, but that she wanted it to look as if it had taken about an hour, because above all she wanted its spontaneity to shine through.

Color is the primary visual element in *Billboard*. In fact, Hartigan thought of the work as a formal exercise in color manipulation. Using vivid colors and bold, dynamic brushstrokes, she infused the forms with energy and life, arranging them by size and intensity of color to balance the composition. No part of this painting seems to hold the viewer’s attention longer than another. Our eye wanders from one bright color and interesting shape to the next. Hartigan achieved this effect mainly through the careful use of complementary colors—red and green, blue and orange, yellow and purple. For example, the large rectangle of purple on the right is balanced by a smaller square of yellow (purple’s complement) on the left. The red of the circular apple is intensified by the surrounding green (red’s complement). The same green is repeated in the lower right corner, where it takes on a different appearance next to the analogous colors of blue and darker green. The careful balance of color in this work demonstrates Hartigan’s belief that “you should be able to enter a painting like a promenade—that you should be able to walk in anywhere and walk out anywhere.”

Following as it did the total abstraction of the Abstract Expressionists, Hartigan’s painting signaled a reintroduction of recognizable subjects into art. This work predated the Pop movement of the 1960s and its satirical use of commercial, mechanical, and urban imagery. The artist has said, however, that she intended no social commentary with her painting. Instead, *Billboard* celebrates the exuberance of her bustling New York environment. She considers this a joyous painting filled with light and energy. She says that the viewer should observe all her paintings with the innocence of a child, without being too analytical. Using bright, vivid colors and the slapdash brushstrokes of action painting, she presents a jazzy, dynamic image of American life.

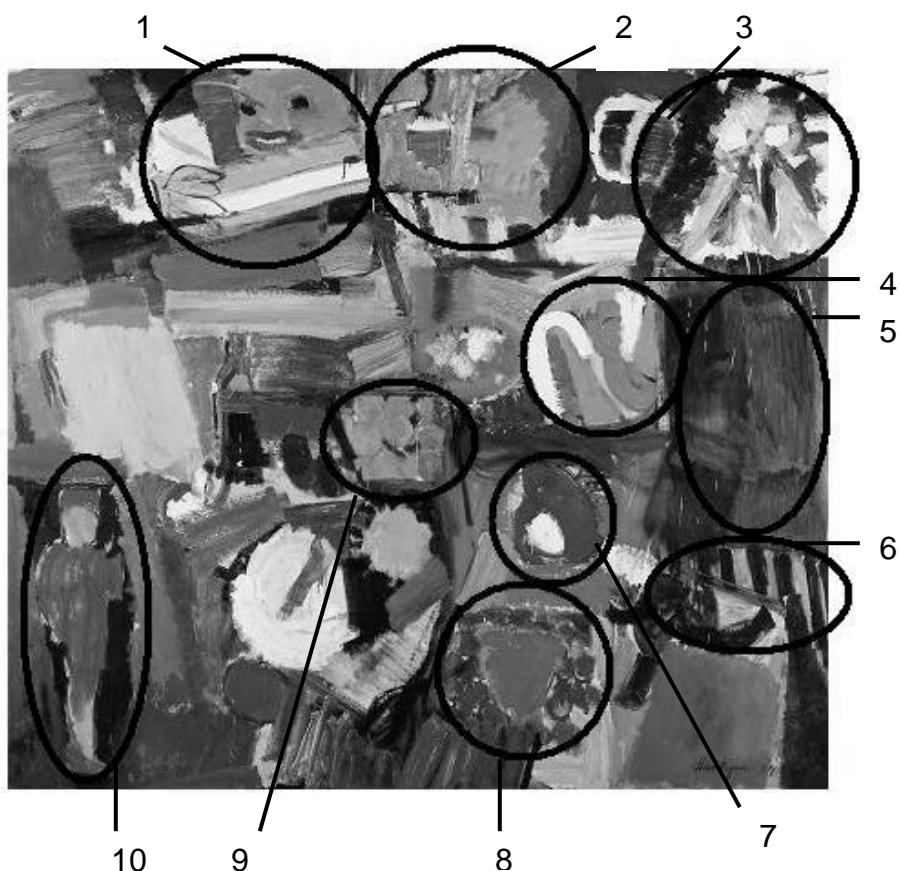
Technique

During a 1983 lecture at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Hartigan described the process by which *Billboard* was created. Inspired by American advertising, she began this work by selecting images from *Life* magazine that appealed to her because of their colors. (See diagram on page 42.) She preferred to use objects that she felt had “no energy or life of their own” so that she could infuse them with her own energy and joy of living. Next she cut the images out and pinned them up on a wall in the form of a collage on a background of purple paper. Using this collage as a model, she began to paint on the canvas, rearranging elements and adjusting the color as the work progressed.

As Hartigan painted these images, she continued to invent, improvise, and expand upon her initial idea, not knowing what the final product would be. This approach is the opposite of that used by Thomas Sully, who made careful drawings in his studio for his precisely composed painting.

Images in *Billboard*

1. Ipana toothpaste smile and tube of toothpaste
2. Wine bottle and glass (only the neck of the bottle is visible)
3. Dole pineapple
4. Peaches and whipped cream from a food ad
5. Area of violet color: Windsor violet was the color of the background on which Hartigan arranged her collage. It seemed to fit into the plan, so she kept it.
6. Piano keys
7. Apple with a bite taken out
8. Lime Jell-O and fruit
9. Oranges
10. Figure from a Campbell soup ad



Artist

Grace Hartigan was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1922. She attended night school at the Newark College of Engineering, where she studied mechanical drafting. During World War II, she worked in an airplane factory, painting watercolor still lifes in her spare time. During this period she was also raising a son while her husband was in the army, as well as taking painting classes at night.

In 1945 Hartigan moved to New York to be in the center of the art world. Greatly influenced by the Abstract Expressionists, she quickly absorbed their spontaneous, abstract style, but she also became interested in the works of old European masters such as Raphael, Rubens, and Caravaggio. She became active in the milieu of the New York School, and lived in New York's colorful Lower East Side, which provided subject matter for many of her paintings.

Hartigan's first break occurred in 1950 when her work was exhibited in a New Talent exhibition juried by the critic Clement Greenberg and the art historian Meyer Shapiro. In 1951 she had her first one-woman show. In 1959 the Museum of Modern Art in New York sent an exhibition called "The New American Painting" to eight European countries. Grace Hartigan was the only woman included in this famous exhibition.

Suggested Questions

1. What objects do you see in this painting? Try to find the following things:

Ipana toothpaste smile	Apple with a bite taken out
A wine bottle and glass	Lime Jell-O mold with fruit
Oranges	Figure from a soup ad
Dole pineapples	Peaches and whipped cream
Piano keys	

2. Grace Hartigan uses many kinds of lines in this painting. Find at least one of each of the following kinds of lines: straight, curved, vertical, horizontal, diagonal, thick, thin, jagged. Where do you see lines formed by the edges of two colors meeting?

3. Imagine that you could hear this painting. What sounds would it make? What about the painting makes you say that?

4. Compare and contrast Hartigan's modern image of New York City with *Mill Pond at Minneapolis*. How the paintings look the same? How do they look different?



Elizabeth Catlett, American, 1915--2012
Sharecropper, 1957–1968
Color linocut
H.22 x W.19 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, P.97.1

Theme

Elizabeth Catlett has portrayed a Black American sharecropper whose inner struggle, fortitude, and life of hard work are conveyed in this linocut.

Background

Throughout American history, Black American artists have struggled for artistic independence and recognition in a dominant white society. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and early 1930s was an important period in Black American culture. During these years the Harlem district of New York City became a hub for Black American celebrities and artists. This 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. Diverse Black artists were united by a strong desire to express their experience as Black Americans and to celebrate Black history and culture.

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, professions in the arts were not open to most Black Americans. The majority of Black people 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. 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 Black people began a mass migration from the South to the cities of the North. This fundamental change generated a sense of Black identity, of community, and of self-confidence and optimism that many Black Americans had not previously known. Gradually the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance extended to the whole country as more Black Americans became involved in literary, artistic, and political pursuits.

Another important period for Black American artists was the Depression of the 1930s, during which President Franklin Roosevelt initiated the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.). This project employed more than 5,000 artists whose work was commissioned to adorn public buildings across the nation. For the first time, significant numbers of Black American artists were able to work full-time in their profession. Such patronage supported their participation in cultural life, ending the isolation that many had previously experienced.

The post-World War II period of the 1940s and 1950s was one of heightened activity for Black American artists, who were increasingly awarded fellowships and opportunities for exhibitions and travel abroad. From the 1960s on, the civil rights movement was another force that contributed to a growing interest in Black American art and to the burgeoning of such institutions as Black American museums, galleries and cultural centers. During this period,

Black Studies programs were established on college and university campuses across the United States. Black educational institutions such as Howard University, Fisk University, and Hampton University also built art collections and trained artists. Among the many Black teacher-artists who influenced a generation of students was Elizabeth Catlett. Her ideas and vision of the role of the Black artist have earned her a unique place in the history of American art.

Sharecropper

Committed to creating art that is socially conscious, Elizabeth Catlett addresses issues of race and gender, especially the struggles of Black American and Native American women. Her primary subjects in her prints and sculptures are mothers, social activists and working-class women, such as the sharecropper portrayed in this color linocut. Catlett believed that art can help achieve social change by provoking thought and by planting the seeds of change. She believes that art “should be a voice for the people, especially for those whose voices are quelled by social and political injustices.”

In *Sharecropper*, Catlett portrays an elderly Black woman whose face reflects a life of struggle and survival within a brutal social system. Sharecropping was a system of tenant farming that flourished in the southern United States after the Civil War and the end of slavery. A sharecropper was one who agreed to farm the land of a landowner for a share of the crop. The landlord supplied seeds, tools, food, and clothing on credit, which the sharecropper was obligated to pay back after the crop was sold and the profits were split. Costs were usually so high that most sharecroppers could never repay their mounting debts. Although living conditions for sharecroppers were somewhat better than those of slaves, Black people were still tied to the land with no other options for their livelihood.

While we do not know the name of the woman portrayed in this print or the details of her life, Catlett conveys a sense of her subject’s strength and dignity in the face of hardship and racial injustice. With her large straw hat and strong angular features, the woman has a compelling physical presence. Her age is suggested by her white hair and deeply lined skin, but her face, with its bold features, reveals an inner strength and vitality.

Catlett creates a heroic image with her unique style, which combines abstraction with naturalism. She is known for her treatment of the face as an image of racial identity and a record of human experience. Here she clearly articulates the subject’s features with some degree of naturalism, as seen in the woman’s brown skin, long neck, sad gazing eyes, full lips, and white curly hair. The artist also delineates carefully chosen details such as the weave of the straw hat, the creases of the woman’s clothing, and the lines of her skin. At the same time, she uses distortion with her stylized treatment of line and form. Catlett, who is also a sculptor, seems to have chiseled the sharp angles of the subject’s face, creating a mask-like effect. The woman appears to be three-dimensional. She has a sense of mass and volume that seems related to the artist’s sculptural work and gives the woman a weighty presence that reinforces her strength. The repetition of heavy, forceful lines in the work forms patterns that cover the entire surface, producing an intense feeling of rhythm and energy. The movement of the lines in various directions contributes to the power and dynamism of the image and charges it with emotional and psychological tension.

Catlett’s expressive approach adds to the symbolic, universal quality of the image. She portrays not so much a specific individual as a symbol of every sharecropper, or perhaps of any person who has endured adversity. The viewer’s low vantage point causes the subject to loom above us, with her upper torso, head, and hat filling the frame. The importance of her hat is

emphasized by its large size, emphatic detail, and careful placement in the composition. It is slightly cropped at the edges, enhancing its presence and reminding us of the woman's difficult work in the hot sun.

The artist's limited use of color—brown, yellow-green, black, and white—creates dramatic contrast and impact, focusing our attention on specific areas. Catlett emphasizes the sharecropper's brown skin, which contrasts with the print's overall black-and-white surface. Defining the woman's posture and demeanor, the bright yellow-green of her garment also shows off the black-and-white safety pin that clasps her jacket, a poignant sign of her poverty. Yet her pose, facial expression, and prominent placement within the composition evoke a spirit of determination, inner strength, and dignity.

Technique

Sharecropper is a linocut, or linoleum cut, a popular type of relief print made by a process similar to making a woodcut. The tactile quality of its heavily worked surface was achieved by a technique of cutting away linoleum with a carving tool. A linocut employs a block constructed of a layer of thick linoleum glued to a piece of wood. The soft linoleum surface is easily carved with tools similar to those used in woodcarving—chisels, gouges, and special knives. The parts that are to print white are cut away, leaving the black lines in relief. Separate blocks are made to create each color area. The block is inked with a brayer (hand roller) and printed either by hand or in a press.

In an interview, Catlett said:

I learned technique from traditional, establishment schools, and it took me a long time to realize that technique was the main thing to learn from them. But technique is so important! It's the difference between art and ineptitude... You can't make a statement if you can't speak the language; here it's the language of the people, the language of art.

Artist

Born in Washington, D.C., in 1915, Elizabeth Catlett was the daughter of parents who were both trained as teachers. Catlett was a precocious child, showing early signs of drawing skills in elementary school. In high school she decided to become an artist.

Catlett attended Howard University, where she studied painting. After graduating from Howard in 1937, Catlett became an art teacher at a high school in Durham, North Carolina, but she earned wages lower than those of the white teachers and soon decided to leave the position. During this period, she became increasingly concerned about the plight of the poor and the oppressed, a theme that inspired most of her works.

Catlett ultimately settled in Mexico, where she headed the Sculpture Department of the National University of Mexico and continued producing her own works. Though she was warmly accepted in her adopted country, her identity as an Black American continued to inspire her work. Receiving wide recognition, her art has been exhibited throughout the world.

Suggested Questions

1. What kinds of lines do you see in this print? Use your finger and trace each type of line you see in this painting.
2. What do you think she is feeling? What is your evidence? What can you tell about her by looking at her clothes? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Do you think she looks strong? Why? Do you think this woman is physically strong or mentally strong? Which do you think is stronger—her muscles or her will? Why? How has the artist shown she is strong?
4. What viewpoint does the artist use to show the sharecropper? Why do you think she chose this viewpoint? Why do you think Catlett showed us such a close view of the woman?