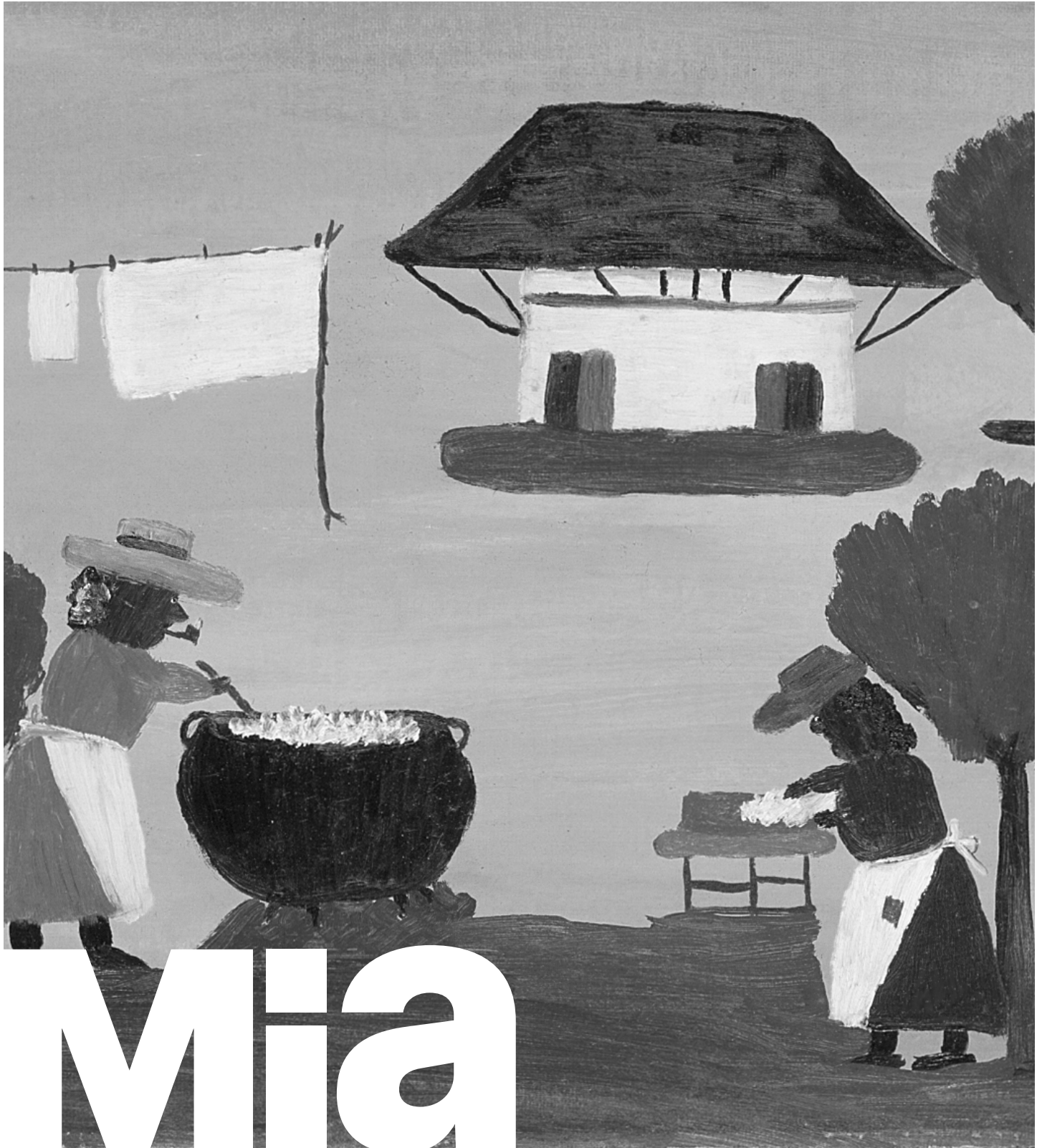


Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Adventure

Cultural Reflections in Art



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.

Cultural Reflections in Art

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

Cultural Reflections in Art

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Jean Clouet the Younger, <i>Princess Charlotte of France</i>	•Samples of velvet and silk	\$30
Chuck Close, <i>Frank</i>	•Photograph of Frank with grid and proportionate enlargement	\$10
Kongo, <i>Nail Figure (nkisi nkonde)</i>	No prop	
Chimu, <i>Ear Spools</i> <i>Winged Genius</i>	•Scale model of ear spool	\$30
Clementine Hunter, <i>The Wash</i>	•Sample oil painting on masonite •Photograph of the African House on the Melrose Plantation	\$30 \$10
Italy, <i>Writing Desk</i>	•Sample of gilded wood	\$35
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

When we encounter works of art in a museum, we experience them in various ways. Since works of art are often created for a context other than the museum, we can better understand their meaning if we are aware of the context for which they were made. Each of the six works of art in this set is a product of a specific place and time and in some way reflects the culture that produced it.

A culture can be defined as *the way of life of a group of humans living in a particular geographical area of the world at a particular moment in time*. Culture includes the art, beliefs, social and family customs, inventions, language, technology, and traditions of a people. The science that studies and interprets human culture is anthropology, while the branch of anthropology that concentrates on past civilizations is archaeology. Anthropologists and archaeologists work like detectives, gathering evidence from the artwork, houses, tools, and artifacts of a culture. They carefully piece together the evidence and then suggest theories to explain their discoveries. While they use various scientific methods to collect information, they also rely on careful observation as a tool of discovery.

Like anthropologists, students can use their eyes as tools of discovery, looking for clues about the various cultures. By asking certain questions, they can collect a surprising amount of information and can make many deductions about the works of art and the cultures that produced them.

Cultural Reflections Clue Sheet

- Clue 1: Materials. What materials is the object made of? Are these natural materials or ones made by humans? If natural, are they accessible from the surroundings or are they obtained through trade?
- Clue 2: Technique. How were these materials put together? What level of technical skill or education would this construction require? Is it a simple process or a complex one? Could it be done by hand or would it involve several tools or people to complete it?
- Clue 3: Size. What does the size of the object tell us? Is it small or large? What special tools would be required to make something very small? Very large? If the object is small, must special care be taken to protect it? If very large, does it need a special place for its use? Does its size tell us anything about the way it might have been used?
- Clue 4: Function. How might this object have been used? Do you think it was made for practical use or for decoration? Why? Was it used for everyday or special occasions? Why do you think so?
- Clue 5: Appearance. What does the overall appearance of this object tell us? Does it look new or does it show signs of use or age? Does it depict recognizable subject matter? If so, has this subject been shown realistically or has its appearance been stylized? What details do you see? Do the details tell us anything about the meaning or use of the object?
- Clue 6: Effect. How might the people of the culture have responded to the object? Would they find it appealing? Scary? Does it represent something pleasant? Threatening? Does it appear to be impressive and important or ordinary? Would the people have treated it with respect and care, or casually?



Jean Clouet the Younger, French, 1475-1541

Princess Charlotte of France, c. 1522

Oil on cradled panel

H.7 x W.5½ inches x D.³/₁₆ inches

Bequest of John R. Van Derlip in memory of Ethel Morrison Van Derlip, 35.7.98

Theme

This painting is filled with clues to what it was like to be a young princess living in France during the 1500s. It also offers evidence about the artist's occupation as a portraitist during that period.

Background

Francis I, king of France from 1515 to 1547, was a passionate collector of art. He was also the first French king to favor painting over the other arts. Sponsoring the Italian Renaissance masters at the height of their creativity, Francis I set the style for all the arts in France, placing a new emphasis on ceremony and luxury.

Except for pictures of royalty, few painted portraits were produced in France before the 1500s. As the court and nobility developed under Francis I, aristocratic families began to build their own collections of portraits, emulating the king and demonstrating their wealth and position. Another reason for the growing popularity of portraiture was the rise of interest in the individual. By the time Jean Clouet (Jhahn Klew–AY) began his career, the demand for portraits had increased greatly.

Princess Charlotte

In this portrait, Princess Charlotte, daughter of Francis I, is shown at about six or seven years old. This is the only likeness of Charlotte. She died not long after it was painted, at the age of only seven years, eight months.

Charlotte fills the frame, with her face shown in three-quarter view and her upper torso at a slight angle. She is presented in all her finery, holding a rosary of black and gold beads. Although only six years old, she is dressed like adult women in France during the 1500s. Over a linen chemise (or undergarment), Charlotte wears a golden silk tunic (outer garment), which is covered with a black velvet over-gown. On her head she wears a coral cap called a chaperon (shapp-err-OWN), made of velvet or quilted silk and decorated with tiny pearls. Underneath the cap is a thin linen or gauze layer that fastens around her chin. Clouet depicts the rich textures of her clothing and jewelry with meticulous attention to details such as the folds and pleats in her gold sleeves, the intricate lace of her linen cuffs and embroidered neckline, and the lustrous pearls in her headdress.

Clouet captures the delicate quality of Charlotte's youthful skin, but her facial features seem older than six years. She gazes intently into the distance, with an expression of gentle reserve. While her quiet, contemplative mood contributes to her mature appearance, it reveals little about her thoughts or feelings.

Despite the painting's small scale, Princess Charlotte has a strong presence, enhanced by Clouet's handling of composition, color, and texture. Charlotte projects forward from the dark background, creating an illusion of a solid three-dimensional figure. Clouet gives volume to the figure and costume, as seen in Charlotte's face and in the folds of the sleeves, where gradations of light and dark colors create the appearance of shadows and highlights. Clouet's use of shades of yellow, red, and brown gives Charlotte a warmth and vibrancy, which are reinforced by the enamel-like finish of his jewel tones. Charlotte's face and hands stand out against the dark background and broad areas of color. The exquisite details of her jewelry and costume are emphasized by their contrast with these masses of color.

As the eldest of Francis's six children, Charlotte would have been an important person in the French court despite her young age. In this period, French children, once they reached the age of six, were considered miniature adults, and they were expected to dress and act like adults. Because of Charlotte's high position in the court, expectations of appropriate behavior and manners would have been even greater. One can't imagine her telling jokes to her siblings, playing hide-and-seek, or sneaking a midnight snack from the kitchen.

Technique

Using oil paints on a wooden panel, Clouet applied his colors with great precision, making the individual brushstrokes almost impossible to distinguish. The medium of oil paint lends itself both to minute detail and to the subtle blending of tones. Clouet probably began by sketching Charlotte's features on the white surface of a gessoed panel (gesso is a mixture made of fine ground plaster and glue). He then applied the flesh tones to the face and hands and added darker tones to build up the modeling. He probably painted the costume and background before adding the final details of jewelry and accessories.

Artist

Little is known of Clouet's early years. It is thought that he was born in the southern Netherlands and by 1509 had settled in Paris. From 1516 on, he worked at the French court, and in 1530 he became chief painter to King Francis I, serving in this position for most of the king's reign. Clouet painted many portraits of royalty and nobility, including Francis I and other members of the royal family. Because Clouet's works are unsigned, attribution is often difficult. Yet he is considered to be an important artist who continued the French portrait tradition while borrowing elements from both Italian and Flemish art.

An innovator in many areas, Clouet originated the widespread use of portrait drawings in colored chalk, a means of supplying copies of portraits in demand. He also created the format of the miniature portrait and helped introduce the concepts of Italian Renaissance art to France. His work had considerable influence on his contemporaries.

Cultural Clues

- The portrait allows us to imagine what royal life was like in 1500s France. Charlotte's rich and sumptuous attire shows us how a princess would dress and also suggests that young children were expected to behave like adults.
- Because Charlotte holds a rosary, we might conclude that religion was an important aspect of her life.
- From its small size, we can deduce that the portrait probably was not hung in the ballroom or dining room of the royal palace but, rather, was painted for another family member to hang in a bedroom or sitting room, perhaps with portraits of Charlotte's brothers and sisters or other family members. It was probably for personal rather than state use.
- The materials Clouet chose to use, panel and oil, were what was available at the time. Canvas had not yet replaced wood as the favored support for paint.
- Clouet's naturalistic style using modeling to create an illusion of three-dimensionality suggests the technique of perspective.
- Clouet's role as a painter of portraits suggests that he could support himself by specializing in this art form.

Suggested Questions

1. Describe what Charlotte is wearing. How would it feel if you could touch her hat, sleeves...? (*Pass around the fabric samples.*) How does the fabric feel?
2. Not many children during Charlotte's lifetime got to wear fancy clothing like hers. What can you tell about Charlotte's life by looking at her clothes? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. How do you think Charlotte looks older than six or seven years old? What makes her look older than six years old?



Chuck Close, American, born 1940
Frank, 1969
Acrylic on canvas
H.108 x W.84 inches x D.3
The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 69.137

Theme

This large portrait contains clues to American culture in the 1960s, offering evidence of the technology, the environment, and the social and artistic values of the period.

Background

Ever since the camera was invented in 1839, artists have often used photographs in producing works of art. 1800s European painters such as Eugène Delacroix and Gustave Courbet studied photographs to reach an accurate view of nature, and the French Impressionists were inspired by the cropped compositions and unusual viewpoints found in photographs. Photography is an independent art form as well as inspiration for painters.

Chuck Close's early portraits, based on photographic images, are associated with a group of artists called Photo-realists, who used photographs as subject matter for their paintings. This movement appeared in America in the late 1960s. It was both an outgrowth of the Pop movement, which used elements of popular culture as the basis for its art, and a reaction against Abstract Expressionism, a movement of the 1950s that emphasized emotional expression. Like other art of this era, Close's paintings are in large part about the process of creating art.

Frank

In contrast to the small-scale portrait of Princess Charlotte, this portrait is monumental—9 feet by 7 feet. Based on a professional black-and-white photograph, it is more a portrait of a photograph than of the artist's friend Frank. Close believed that a photograph taken in a fraction of a second could reveal some truth about a person that could be lost in the lengthy sittings required by a traditional portrait painter. While he was interested in the unique qualities of his subjects, he did not emphasize their personalities. Close hoped that by choosing relatively anonymous subjects, he could create works that viewers would experience more as paintings than as portraits.

This appears to be a realistic portrait of a young man pictured close up and directly from the front. Frank stares out at the viewer from behind his horn-rimmed glasses, which reflect the warped image of a cityscape in their lenses. Close painstakingly copied every contour and shadow of the photograph of Frank, giving the same attention to each detail, from his tousled hair, bushy eyebrows, and tightly closed lips to his facial pores. Close wanted to explore the relationship of the various parts of Frank's face. Depending on how one reads the surface of the painting, a viewer can perceive the details either as parts of a face or as abstract shapes and patterns of black, gray, and white.

Close's paintings challenge visual perception through his precise representation of the camera's image. Like the human eye, the camera focuses on one area at a time, leaving other areas blurred. Close shows us the blurry areas, areas our vision does not normally recognize because the lens in the human eye automatically focuses the images we see. Here the tip of Frank's nose and the edges of his hair, ears, beard, and collar are slightly out of focus, just as they appeared in the photograph. Only that area between his nose and ears, which includes his glasses, eyes and parts of his cheeks, is in sharp focus. Confronting *Frank* is an exciting and a perplexing experience. His vast scale, realistic detail, and fixed, hypnotic stare can be unsettling to the viewer.

Technique

Shortly after beginning his career as an abstract painter, Close changed his approach to painting because he did not want to be concerned with decisions about composition (the way shapes and colors are arranged in a picture). He limited his subjects to portraits based on photographs, painting only familiar faces—his friends and family. He presented a frontal, close-up, symmetrical view of his subject's head and shoulders against a uniform white background. Also, he worked in very large scale because he wanted to create powerful images that would attract attention.

Close began by having a photograph made of his subject, working with a professional photographer in setting up the shots. He attempted a passport-style effect, with a certain blandness of expression and banal quality. The photos were not intended to flatter the subject but to present interesting painting problems to the artist.

To translate the photograph into a monumental painting, Close used the techniques of Renaissance artists and contemporary billboard painters. He prepared a grid over the 8-by-10-inch photograph in order to transfer the image, unit by unit, to a proportionate grid drawn on the 9-by-7-foot canvas, which he covered with a white mixture of plaster and glue called gesso. He then created the image with a commercial airbrush, which uses a compressor to distribute paint. Close's airbrush was filled with a thin mixture of black acrylic paint and water. He worked from top to bottom and, over the course of several months, applied many layers of paint to build up the dark tones. While he used some white paint, many of the white highlights and some small details, such as the hairs of Frank's beard, were made by scratching through the layers of black and gray with a razor blade to reveal the white gesso underneath. Close used no more than two tablespoons of black paint to create *Frank*. (Note: The reproduction used in this set appears more brown than black in tone than the actual painting.)

Artist

Chuck Close was born in 1940 in Monroe, Washington. From the age of four, he knew he was going to be an artist. School was difficult for him because of learning disabilities, but he discovered that he excelled in drawing. After graduating from high school, Close earned his B.A. degree from the University of Washington and his B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees from Yale University. He also received a Fulbright Grant to study in Vienna, Austria, in 1964 and 1965. In 1967, Close moved to New York City and taught at the School of Visual Arts.

Though skillful at painting abstract works, Close was frustrated by the open-ended nature of abstraction. In 1967 he began to use the photograph as a point of departure for large-scale portrait heads. Later he explored each of his subjects in a wide variety of media and techniques, including water colors, pastels, and ink "mosaics," made with impressions of the artist's

thumbprints. While he is best known for his monumental portraits done with an airbrush, his works since the late 1970s have often been painted with brushstrokes, producing a looser, more spontaneous effect.

In the late 1960s Close began receiving critical recognition and by the mid-1970s was established as a major artist of the 1900s, represented in museums and galleries throughout the United States and Europe. In 1988, at the age of 48, Close suffered a spinal artery collapse that left him a quadriplegic. With months of therapy, extraordinary perseverance, and the use of special equipment, he was able to return to work in his New York City studio. Since then, he has continued to explore monumental portraiture, retaining some elements of his earlier format but incorporating brilliant pulsating colors and rich light and shadows.

Cultural Clues

- We see the advanced technology of the period in the tall buildings that are reflected in Frank's glasses.
- Close's airbrush technique creates a smooth visual quality on his canvas. Because the painting imitates the look of a photograph, we can assume knowledge of and interest in photography.
- The portrait's monumental scale suggests that it was intended to hang in a very large space, perhaps an office-building lobby or a museum. It certainly seems too large for an average home!
- The artist was not commissioned, like Jean Clouet was by Charlotte's royal family. Rather, Close chose to paint Frank's image because he wanted to express himself as an artist. We can deduce that the artist's role is different in 1900s America than in 1500s France.

Suggested Questions

1. What makes it look like a photograph?
2. If you were to meet Frank, what do you think he would be like? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Would you like Chuck Close to paint your portrait? Why or why not?



Kongo (Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa region)

Nkisi Nkondi (Nail Figure), 1800s

Wood, natural fibers, and metal

H.15¾ x W.9¾ x D.7¼ inches

The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund, 71.3

Theme

Created to maintain the well-being of a Kongo village, this sculpture offers clues to the ways in which it was used and perceived by the inhabitants of that community.

Background

This sculpture, called an *nkisi nkondi*, (en-KEE-see en-KAHN-dee) was carved by the Kongo people who lived in the region of Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo) in central Africa during the late 1800s. Popularly known as nail figures, these sculptures were used for various purposes, such as protecting the village, curing illnesses, settling disputes, sealing agreements, and destroying enemies. The term *nkisi* refers to the spiritual charm of the figure. *Nkondi* refers to the figure itself and is derived from the verb *konda*, "to hunt." (The plural form is *minkondi*.) Like seasoned hunters, *minkondi* could capture liars, thieves, and others who undermine society.

Generally carved in the shape of human beings or, on occasion, dogs, *minkondi* were sacred objects. A nail figure's power came from spirits that were attracted to ritual substances placed in a container cut into the figure's head or stomach. A religious specialist, who was also a healer and a legal expert, determined the appropriate herbs, animal bones, fur, and seeds. With the help of this powerful carved figure, the religious specialist took care of the spiritual and physical needs of the Kongo villagers. Kept in a hidden part of the specialist's home, on special occasions the *nkisi nkondi* was brought outside in a public setting where judicial procedures took place. The parties involved came before the figure with the specialist, and together they investigated the problem at hand.

Each of the blades, nails, screws, and other sharply pointed objects driven into a nail figure represents the taking of an oath, the witnessing of an agreement, or some other occasion when the power of the figure was invoked. When an agreement was to be made between two individuals or two villages, representatives from both parties took an oath in front of the *nkisi nkondi* and then sealed the oath by driving a nail or other sharp metal object into the figure to activate its power. This was similar to the Western tradition of signing a contract. If two warring parties came before the figure to make peace, the conditions agreed upon were hammered into it with a nail. If a person accused another of stealing property, both would go before the *nkisi nkondi* and, while driving in a nail, would ask to be destroyed by the image if telling a lie.

Evoking both gentle and fearsome powers, *minkondi* were considered to be enforcer of a system of justice as well as guardians and friends: they healed or protected the innocent, punished or killed the guilty, and wrought revenge on those who broke their oaths. Some *nkisi* have been so heavily used that the wooden figure is barely visible beneath the applied objects.

Nkisi Nkondi (Nail Figure)

Despite its small size, this figure seems very intimidating with nails and blades studding its surface. The head is finely carved with large, almond-shaped eyes, a broad nose with flaring nostrils, and a tense, open mouth. This mouth is ready to speak on behalf of justice, signifying that the figure is alert and has power. The eyes are made of glass mirrors—one can see through the glass while simultaneously watching their reflection in the mirror.

The figure stands in a pose of challenge and authority, with its left hand resting on its hip, and its right arm raised to hold a weapon (which is missing). The form is nearly symmetrical with its feet firmly grounded on two rectangular wooden bases. It is in a stance of readiness, poised for action—another reminder of the *nkisi nkondi*'s power to punish clients who break their vows or tell lies before the image. A mirror seals the rectangular container that holds substances believed to have strong religious powers. This mirror once reflected the faces of those that stood before the figure, showing that the spirit was keeping watch on their every move.

The figure is covered with a variety of sharp objects, mostly iron nails, which have particular significance since the Kongo people considered metal powerful. Also attached to the figure are shells, string, and pieces of bone as well as bundles filled with extra substances, such as the cotton-covered yoke around the neck. The tied bundles, held together by raffia cords, may symbolize the tying up or stopping of an evil spirit causing some affliction. Nails wrapped with string or wicker, such as those found on both the left and the right sides of the face, were probably used during a rite of reconciliation, binding the participants to their promises.

The animated and encrusted surface of sharp objects has a prickly texture that attracts and repels the viewer with its bristling energy. The variety and density of materials and textures hold our attention. Yet the aggressive nature of the attached nails and blades tends to distance the viewer from the figure. We know it would be uncomfortable to touch. At 15¾ inches tall, this nail figure could be easily transported from place to place, but some *minkondi* are as tall as 5 feet.

Technique

This *nkisi nkondi* was carved out of wood. Woodcarving is a subtractive technique in which the form is created by chipping away the material, rather than by adding and modeling as with clay. Woodcarving tools include an assortment of chisels, gouges, and knives, which are struck with a mallet to form the sculpture. The face of this figure is finely carved with attention to naturalistic details in the features, while the body is roughly shaped. After the sculptor carved the figure, a ritual specialist completed it by placing substances in the stomach cavity and in other receptacles. The nails, blades, and screws were driven into the figure during its use. The sculpture is thus an assemblage of various materials, put together by several people.

Artist

Although we do not know the names of the individuals who created this sculpture, we do know that *minkondi* were made by a sculptor and a ritual specialist working together. These artists were qualified to meet the spiritual and social needs of the community.

Cultural Clues

- ➦ Because of its powerful appearance, we can guess that this figure was treated with respect by the village that owned it. The aggressive quality of the figure and materials probably intimidated those who confronted it. We can deduce that it had an important presence in a community.
- ➦ Its appearance suggests signs of use on many occasions, since many objects were driven into the surface.
- ➦ This figure was constructed of natural materials such as wood and raffia, and also human-made materials such as glass mirrors and metal nails and blades. These people either had metal forging skills or acquired metal objects through trade with other people.

Suggested Questions

1. What do you think makes this sculpture look human? Super-human? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Take the stance of this figure. How does this pose make you feel? Even though this object is small, how do you think it shows power?
3. What is your first reaction to this figure? Its function was to serve the well-being of a community as part of a system of justice. Does knowing the purpose of the object change your feelings about it in any way? Why or why not?



Chimú (South America, Peru, Andean region)

Ear Spools, 1150-1450

Gold

L.5 x W.5³/₈ inches

The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 43.4.1

Theme

Worn nearly a thousand years ago in Peru, these dazzling ornaments suggest the importance of the wearer and provide clues to the Chimú society's system of government and religious beliefs.

Background

The Chimú people lived in the river valleys and coastal areas of the Central Andes region in western Peru from about 1000 A.D. until conquered by the Incas in 1430. Gold was plentiful in the Peruvian Andes; much of it gathered as pure flakes or nuggets from streams or rivers. To remove gold from ore, the Chimú used fire and water to break up ore-bearing rocks. In later times, gold was mined by digging shafts in the mountains.

Although the Chimú were skilled potters, Chimú craftsmen excelled above all in metalworking, particularly gold. The Chimú made greater use of precious metals than any other people in ancient Peruvian history, creating a tremendous diversity of forms including ceremonial weapons, tools, jewelry, and vessels.

Chimú society was structured in a rigid caste system led by the nobility. Most of the population were commoners, many of whom helped build the large cities for which the Chimú are known. Chan Chan, their capital, was one of the most splendid cities in ancient Peru. Archaeological excavations reveal that many of the commoners in Chan Chan were artisans, whose quarters contained tools for woodworking, spinning, weaving, and metalworking. The state supported these artisans, who crafted many ceremonial vessels and personal ornaments for the nobility.

The custom of wearing ear ornaments has been practiced by people throughout the world. In many ancient South American cultures, ear piercing and the wearing of ear ornaments were thought to protect from evil spirits. The Chimú people may have believed that spirits were responsible for health or illness and that evil spirits could enter a person's body through its orifices. Thus ear ornaments, inserted into pierced earlobes, were worn as protection. Over time, ornaments became larger and more ornate, and simple ear piercing did not suffice. It became necessary to wear ear spools of increasing size and weight from childhood on, in order to gradually stretch the pierced lobes to accommodate the large tubes of the ornaments.

Ear Spools

These ear spools were worn as a mark of distinction and status by a high-ranking man of the Chimú society. The large disks of the ear spools also protected the wearer from evil spirits by covering the ears. In Chimú society, such ornaments were probably worn only on special occasions and by men of high rank.

Each of these ear spools weighs about five ounces. The posts, which are five inches long and about one inch in diameter, were inserted through holes in the earlobes. They were tied together at the back of the neck to stabilize the ornaments. Although the ear spools are relatively light in weight, their size and shape must have made them difficult to wear.

Each disk is decorated with a complex figural scene. The central figure in each scene represents a deity or king who wears an elaborate crescent-shaped headdress decorated with four bangles, which are smaller disks attached to the main disk with wire. In his right hand, the figure holds a glass, called a *keru*, a symbol of power and identity used in many Andean religious and state ceremonies. The object in his left hand looks like a cylindrical cup. He stands on a litter (a platform or stretcher on which a person can be carried). Supporting the litter are three anthropomorphic figures with human bodies and monkeylike ears and tails. They appear to be lower in status than the central figure since they are placed below him in a supporting role and are smaller in scale. Two of these figures wear smaller, simpler versions of the central figure's headdress, indicating their status, and also carry some type of cup.

The significance of the cups is not known; perhaps they were intended to receive the contents of the chief figure's beaker. The third and smallest figure, located in the lower center, is adorned with just a bangle. Monkeys holding staffs appear often in Chimú art as symbols of authority. Like the *Winged Genius*, these mythical human-animal figures may indicate a belief in the supernatural. Other mythical figures on the ear spools are serpent heads on the ends of the litter shafts and two-headed felines represented in stylized designs that wind around the posts (these are difficult to see on the reproduction).

Each disk has decorative, small-scale surface detailing, such as the tiny gold beads on the rim and the rich patterning on the headdresses. The circular shape of the disk and post is echoed by the crescent-shaped headdresses, the figures' faces, the monkeylike ears and spiraling tails, the rim beading, and the small bangles attached to the disk.

We can imagine how impressive a Chimú nobleman must have looked wearing these ear spools as part of his ceremonial attire. The dazzle of gold, the light glancing off the bangles, the very size of the ear spools would have contributed to his splendid and imposing appearance.

Technique

A number of goldsmithing techniques were used in making the disks of the ear spools. First the gold was melted and cast into flat sheets by pressing it between two flat slabs of stone or clay. Gold disks were cut from the flat sheet with sharp chisels and then hammered on a wooden surface into a shallow concave shape. During the hammering process, the gold had to be annealed, or heated, to keep it malleable.

Flat sheet gold was also used to make the figures that decorate the disks. The shapes were cut and then embossed by hammering the backs over a wooden mold to form the relief. The details were incised on the front later with sharp chisels. The fully formed figures were then soldered to the shallow disk. The gold bangles were probably cut from sheets of gold by means of a hollow tubular tool called a punch. The hollow gold beads on the rim of the disk were molded in halves and then forced together in a press. The beads were strung on wire and soldered to the edge.

While these ear spools were constructed primarily by cutting and manipulating two-dimensional sheets, the goldsmiths of the ancient Americas had mastered nearly all of the goldworking techniques known today. Despite the sophistication of the techniques, the tools used were of

the simplest kind. Materials at hand such as stone, pieces of wood, and even bone were often used. Archaeological excavations have also uncovered instruments such as punches, chisels, blowpipes, wooden models, and welding tools.

Artist

The Chimú had learned goldsmithing techniques from their predecessors in the area, the Moche people, but they achieved new heights in the art of working gold, and Chimú goldsmiths were accorded high prestige.

Cultural Clues

- The ornateness of these ear spools suggests that they were worn for special occasions by a person of high status. The gold material and intricate workmanship suggest that the ornaments are precious.
- The ear spools provide information about the level of Chimú technology in science of metal and the tools available to the Chimú for obtaining, refining, and working gold.
- The placement, scale, and attire of the figures suggest a hierarchical society. The central figure appears to be the most important since he is the largest and placed above the other three figures, which support him on a litter. Because two of the supporting figures wear headdresses and are larger than the one in the lower center, they seem to be of middle status. The smallest figure appears to be of lowest status.
- The mythical figures of hybrid human and animal forms suggest a religious belief in the supernatural.

Suggested Questions

1. What human features do you see? Animal features? How many figures do you see on the ear ornaments?
2. Of the four figures, which looks the most important? The least important? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Not everyone in the Chimú culture wore ear spools like this, how can you tell? What is your evidence?
4. These ear ornaments are made out of gold. The Chimú culture prized gold and developed ways to harvest and work this soft metal. What more does this tell us about the ear spools?



Clementine Hunter, American, 1885–1988

The Wash, 1950s

Oil on board

H.18 x W.24 inches

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 91.88.2

Theme

This colorful scene of women doing the wash in an outdoor setting provides evidence of what life was like for Clementine Hunter and other Black Americans living on a Louisiana plantation in the 1950s.

Background

The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed slavery in 1865. Nonetheless, many Black Americans in the South had no choice but to remain on the lands of their former masters, working for low wages and under conditions only slightly better than those of slavery. By the turn of the century, many Black Americans were leaving the South in search of a better life. However, limited work opportunities in both the North and the South, as well as racial intolerance, kept many others on the plantations. Some landowners persuaded generations of black workers to remain on plantations and farms with promises of higher wages and good treatment.

Clementine Hunter lived and worked at Melrose Plantation in the Cane River region in northern Louisiana. Although life was limited and difficult for many Black Americans, Hunter was able to find joy, beauty, and intense pride in her experiences at Melrose, where she lived most of her long life.

Melrose Plantation had long been established on the northwest bank of the Cane River near Natchitoches (NAK-uh-tesh), Louisiana. It was first owned by the second son of Marie Thérèse Coincoin. Marie Thérèse Coincoin was a former slave and mistress of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer. In 1778, Metoyer freed Marie Thérèse Coincoin and their children and granted her 68 acres of land. With this land, she maintained a thriving agricultural empire, gaining thousands of acres of land through grants, which she used for cotton, corn, tobacco and cattle. Due to economic hardships, the descendants of Coincoin were forced to sell the property. In 1898, John Hampton Henry and his wife, Cammie, became owners of the plantation. Known for her boundless energy, Cammie set out to restore Melrose to its former glory with a sense of place and history, reviving local arts and crafts. Under her ownership, Melrose became a center for the arts, culture, and hospitality.

The Wash

This painting depicts three women doing the plantation laundry outdoors at a time when clothes were still boiled and scrubbed with lye soap. Their surroundings are sunny yellow fields, lush green trees, and a brilliant green and blue sky. Standing on a grassy ledge, a woman with graying hair smokes a pipe while she stirs the laundry boiling in a large black pot brimming with soapsuds. Flanking her are two women scrubbing clothes on boards. All three wear colorful straw hats, dresses with long skirts, and aprons, one with a bright red patch. Behind the women,

red and blue union suits and bright white towels hang on the line. Though the women are engaged in a mundane task, the scene evokes no sense of drudgery. Instead, Hunter's bright colors and flat, simple forms convey joy and vitality. Perhaps she is expressing her pleasure in the elements of her workaday world—the warmth of the sun, the beauty of the rural South, and the opportunity to socialize with other women on the plantation.

On the right stands a brick and cypress structure with wide eaves called the African House. It was built around 1800 under the direction of Marie Thérèse Coincoin. The architecture of the Africa House is thought to be a direct model of traditional African homes. She used part of the house as a store and another part as a prison for slaves. Hunter later painted murals inside the African House, under the sponsorship of the owner at that time, J.H. Henry. The house still stands at Melrose Plantation, now a historical site.

Hunter is referred to as a folk artist because she had no formal art training and worked outside the mainstream art world. Like other folk artists, she recorded and preserved the traditions of her heritage. She painted scenes familiar to her from her life at Melrose, often repeating subjects again and again. Events such as weddings, funerals, and Saturday-night parties are frequent themes, as are scenes of people picking cotton, threshing pecans, and boiling wash in the plantation yard. Her paintings of daily activity of Black Americans living on Melrose are based on her recollection of these events. They have a freshness and spontaneity that expresses her joyful, exuberant feelings about plantation life.

Hunter's penchant for pure primary colors of red, yellow, and blue gives the work vibrancy, as do the warm hues that vividly capture the warmth of this sunny southern setting. She did not paint a naturalistic scene according to the laws of perspective, but defined her figures and forms in broad patches of color, with virtually no modeling in lights and darks. Her approach differs greatly from that used in *Princess Charlotte*, where Clouet rendered his subject with attention to minute details and a sense of volume—the appearance of existing in space—by modeling with light and dark. In Hunter's painting, background and foreground are not clearly delineated; instead objects are stacked above one another to suggest distance. Thus, the clothesline, house, and tree seem to hover above the women's heads, while at the same time they appear to be behind the three women.

Technique

Hunter created several thousand paintings in her career. She painted on any material available to her including cardboard boxes, brown paper bags, scraps of plywood, and window shades. Among the more unusual materials she used were snuff bottles, wine jugs, gourds, and even black iron skillet.

In *The Wash* she applied oil paint to the surface of fiber board, working from memory without the preliminary use of sketches or models. Her direct approach to painting contrasts with the painstaking and laborious method used by Chuck Close in translating his image of Frank from a photograph.

Artist

Born in 1885 on Hidden Hill Plantation in Louisiana, Clementine Hunter moved to Melrose Plantation at the age of 16. Her father was a field hand and her mother a plantation cook. At Melrose, Hunter worked in the cotton fields and later in the main house as a cook. She gained

fame for her culinary skill at a time when Melrose hospitality was a legend in Louisiana. Throughout her long life she remained at Melrose, marrying twice and raising five children there.

Because Melrose's owner, Cammie Henry, encouraged visual artists, writers, and musicians to visit and work on the plantation, Hunter was exposed to a wide variety of art. She began to paint when she was nearly 60, inspired by some paints and brushes left behind by a visiting artist. From that moment on, she zealously pursued painting. Soon she received national recognition, winning the Julius Rosenwald Foundation Grant in 1945. In 1953 Hunter was hailed by *Look* magazine as among the most notable folk painters in the country. Two years later, she was the first Black artist to be featured in one-person shows at both the Delgado Museum (now the New Orleans Museum of Art) and Northwestern State University in Natchitoches. In 1955, she also undertook an important project, painting murals for the African House. These consisted of nine large panels that encircled the top floor of this unique structure, showing colorful scenes of the activities and pageantry of plantation life.

Though Hunter received no formal training, her career was influenced by François Mignon, a Frenchman who visited Melrose in 1938 and stayed on to become curator of the plantation library. He became Hunter's mentor and supporter, encouraging her until his death in 1980. Clementine Hunter became something of a legend in her own lifetime. She received unprecedented recognition for a Black folk artist, and in 1986 she was given an honorary doctoral degree by Northwestern State University. Her works can be seen in private and public collections throughout the United States and Europe.

Cultural Clues

- This painting offers clues to the environment of the three women depicted, suggesting a warm, sunny setting where people could enjoy being outdoors. The setting appears to be in the country or an open expansive area with a yard, flourishing trees, and a house.
- Washing and drying machines had been invented by the 1950s, but this painting portrays a time of simple technology when people boiled laundry with lye soap and hung it outside to dry.
- Unlike Princess Charlotte's portrait, which was painted because the subject was a member of a royal family, this painting reveals an interest in the ordinary life of common people, which we see the everyday activity of doing the wash and in the simplicity of their attire.

Suggested Questions

1. The women in this painting are washing clothes, how is this different from the way clothes are washed at your house?
2. How has the artist suggested that some things are farther away than others? Foreground in a work of art is the area closest to the viewer. Background is the area farthest away from the viewer. What is in the foreground? What is in the background?
3. Why do you think Clementine Hunter chose to paint a scene of women doing the wash? How would her painting be different if she made it today? What activities from your life would you like to show in a work of art?



Venice (Europe, Italy)

Writing Desk, c. 1760

Wood, paint, gilt, gilt bronze

H.53⁹/₁₆ x W.60⁵/₈ x D.28³/₈ inches

The Putnam Dana McMillian Fund, 76.74

Theme

By carefully examining this writing desk and its elaborate decoration, we can imagine what life was like in a Venetian palace during the 1700s.

Background

The city of Venice is built on a cluster of small islands in the Adriatic Sea. It has canals for streets, with picturesque stone bridges across the canals and splendid palaces along the banks. Once a great maritime and commercial power of Italy, Venice was declining as an economic force by the 1700s. Nevertheless, the nobility continued to spend their money on ritzy houses and furnishings, building many new palaces and renovating old ones.

A 1700s innovation in interior design was the attention paid to decorating the smaller rooms of a palace, which previously were used for everyday living but not necessarily for show, as the grand rooms and state apartments were. Many of these small rooms were decorated in the Rococo style, a style of art and interior decoration that was especially popular in France but spread throughout Europe during the 1700s. The Rococo style is characterized by delicate curving forms, gay pastel colors, and fanciful decoration.

Italian Rococo had a melodramatic quality that was particularly evident in the furniture of Venice—a city known for its opera, theater, masquerades, and carnivals. Venetian furniture of this time is remarkable for its bold design, lively carving, and brilliant decoration of flowers and figures. Venice was a center for the production of lacquered furniture in the 1700s.

Writing Desk

This elaborate and unusual Rococo writing desk was made for an 1700s Venetian palace. It has a graceful, flowing organic form. The winding curves, delicate gilt (gold leaf paint) carving, and pastel painted flowers are both sumptuous and playful—an effect accentuated by the combination of three-dimensional carved decoration with two-dimensional painted panels. Overall, the structure is symmetrical, but the decorative detailing is asymmetrical, as can be seen in the front corners and base supports. This desk seems to have been conceived more as sculpture than as furniture.

On close examination we can identify various motifs, many of which are derived from nature, such as flowers, foliage, and several kinds of seashells. On the center painted ornament, called a *cartouche*, the winged figure of Father Time appears with a scythe and an hourglass.

Although the desk may not look practical, it was made to be both decorative and functional. It was designed for a particular place in a newly constructed room. Somewhat obscured by the swirling decoration are six keyholes for six panels that open to reveal the desk's interior.

Looking at the photograph of the desk with the panels open, we can see a writing surface and drawers. The lower part of the desk opens at the front to reveal three drawers, and the two side panels hide storage spaces. The drawers are delicately painted with flowers like those on the outside of the panels. The insides of the panels are lacquered in green and gold with curvilinear designs. The upper panel lifts to disclose more decoration, carved and gilded to match the small drawers on top. We can only wonder about the precious items that might have been stored in the drawers and recesses of this desk!







Technique

The carved wood of the desk has been coated with a ground of gesso (a mixture of ground plaster and glue) to which gold leaf was applied. The process of covering a surface with thin sheets of gold is called gilding. This desk has both matte and shiny areas of gilding. In some areas, the gesso ground appears to have been engraved with small dots with a tool called a punch, making the gilding look rougher in texture. Gilt bronze hinges allow the six panels to open and close, and other pieces of gilt bronze also adorn the desk. The colorful floral decoration was done with oil paints.

Artist

Many different artists and craftsmen would have worked together to make this desk: a master carpenter to plan the overall design, a sculptor to do the carving, a painter to decorate the panels, and another specialist to apply the gold leaf and lacquer.

Cultural Clues

-  Like the Chimú ear spoons, this desk displays an abundant use of precious gold and fancy ornamentation, suggesting that it belonged to a wealthy person.
-  The complexity and richness of the desk's ornamentation reflect a high level of craftsmanship and aesthetic quality.
-  Although we know that it was meant for a palace, this desk seems to be about the right size for our own homes. (It is about 4½ feet high by 5 feet wide.) It was probably placed in a smaller room of the palace.
-  Its human scale and playful appearance suggest that the desk was used for personal purposes rather than for public or government matters. It does not have the formal, stately character we would expect of palace furniture. We cannot help but wonder what was kept in those hidden drawers. Could they have held secret letters, a diary, chapters from a novel, or household bills? The unfinished back is a clue to the way the desk was used: it was designed for one spot in a room and planned as part of a unified interior.

Suggested Questions

1. Look at photos of the desk closed. Look at photos of the desk opened.
2. How do you think this desk was used?
 1. Where are the drawers? What surface would you use to write a letter? Would you like to write a letter here? Why or why not?
 2. How is your desk at school or at home different?
 3. Based on what you see, what kind of person do you think owned this desk?