

Minneapolis Institute of Art

Art Adventure

Dressed for the Occasion



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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.

Dressed for the Occasion

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

Dressed for the Occasion

Prop Kit Contents

Work of Art	Prop	Replacement Cost
Bartholomeus van der Helst, <i>Portrait of a Burgomaster</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Samples of velvet 	\$30
Blue Hmong, <i>Ceremonial Skirt</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sample of Hmong embroidery •Photograph of Hmong girls in traditional costume 	\$30 \$10
Yoruba, <i>King's Crown</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •African beaded bracelet •Photograph of Yoruba king 	\$25 \$10
Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-LeBrun, <i>Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sample of taffeta fabric •Reproduction of Vigée-LeBrun self-portrait 	\$30 \$10
James Van DerZee, <i>Wedding Day, Harlem</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Photograph of Van DerZee 	\$10
Richard Hunt, <i>Transformation Mask</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sample of carved cedar 	\$20
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

From earliest times, people have dressed in an endless variety of styles. Clothing is a vehicle for creativity and an expression of identity. What people wear can reveal a great deal about their personalities, social and economic status, occupations, and environments. Clothing can also provide insights into the customs, values, religious beliefs, materials, and technical achievements of a culture.

The six works of art in this set include objects of adornment and ceremonial dress as well as images of people dressed for specific occasions. By examining people's attire in works of art from various periods of time and diverse cultures, we can begin to understand the important role of clothing throughout history. Through the works of art in this set, students are invited to explore the many ways clothing is central to our lives. Because the set features a broad range of media in both two and three dimensions, it also provides an opportunity to study techniques used in photography, oil painting, fresco wall painting, woodcarving, and sewing techniques such as embroidery and appliqué.



Bartholomeus van der Helst, Dutch, 1613–1670

Portrait of a Burgomaster, c. 1665-1670

Oil on canvas

H.48³/₈ x W.39³/₈ inches

Bequest of John R. Van Derlip in Memory of Ethel Morrison Van Derlip, 35.7.106

Theme

This civic leader of 1600s Holland is dressed in all his finery to have his portrait painted. Unlike the simple attire of Countess Bucquoi in the portrait by Vigée LeBrun, his clothing is formal and richly decorated to display his important position and material success.

Background

The 1600s was a golden age in Holland, a period during which its towns became vigorous centers of trade and industry. During this period, Amsterdam became an international port and the chief banking center of Europe.

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

To feed the mania for art collecting among the Dutch middle class, artists also began to produce works of art to sell on the open market rather than on commission from church or king. Although religious and court art was not commissioned in 1600s Holland, there were commissions in the field of portraiture. During this period, Dutch painters produced unprecedented numbers of portraits for members of the affluent middle class who wanted to show off their new social and economic status. There was a demand for portraits not only of individuals, but also of couples, whole families, and groups of people in civic and military organizations. Indeed, commissioned portraits provided a thriving livelihood for many artists, who relied on them as a dependable source of income.

Portrait of a Burgomaster

Although we do not know the identity of the man in this portrait, it is believed he was the *burgomaster* of Amsterdam, an important position in town government equivalent to mayor. Since he clearly wanted his portrait to display his important social position and material success, it is not surprising that he chose for the commission Bartholomeus van der Helst, Amsterdam's most prominent portraitist. Van der Helst used pose, costume, and setting to make a statement about his subject's status and importance. Here, the *burgomaster* is portrayed as a gentleman of leisure, standing on the balcony of his estate. He appears powerful and proud in his pose, confronting the viewer with his left hand placed on his hip and his right hand resting on a marble column. Such architectural elements as this balustrade (railing supported by closely spaced pillars) and column became a convention in Dutch portraiture

around 1650. Associated with the dignity and grandeur of ancient Greece and Rome, they showed the sitter's importance.

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

The *burgomaster's* fancy sleeve ruffles, an important accessory for both men and women's costume in the 1600s, are embellished with tiers of gold and silver lace, multicolored looping ribbons, which also appear on his shoulder's *epaulet* (fringed strap), and delicate linen lace cuffs. Complementing his cuffs, around his neck is a lace tie. The Dutch were passionate about lace during the 1600s, eager to show intricate patterns and rich textures. His cravat, tied with a striking red bow, is a key feature of his costume, with its central placement, clearly defined triangular shape, elaborate patterns, and soft textures.

A gentleman of his status would have owned numerous sets of matching cuffs and cravats. During the 1700s, sleeve ruffles became more simplified, as can be seen in Vigée LeBrun's rendering of Countess Bucquoi's attire. It is interesting to note, however, that modern male neckwear evolved, over time, from the tie. Indeed, the groom's bow tie in Van DerZee's photograph is an updated version of this ornate tie. Likewise, the *burgomaster's* layered fashion of the coat, vest, and breeches were precursors of the modern-day three-piece suit.

While the pose, setting, and magnificent garments in the portrait clearly glorify this gentleman, the artist did little to idealize him. Adhering to Dutch naturalism, van der Helst shows the details of his subject's soft, robust skin, long, flowing hair, and full face with its rounded chin and rosy complexion. His slight smile, twinkling eyes, and direct gaze suggest a friendly, contented man who enjoys the comforts of life and his position in society. He faces the world with warmth and vitality.

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

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

Technique

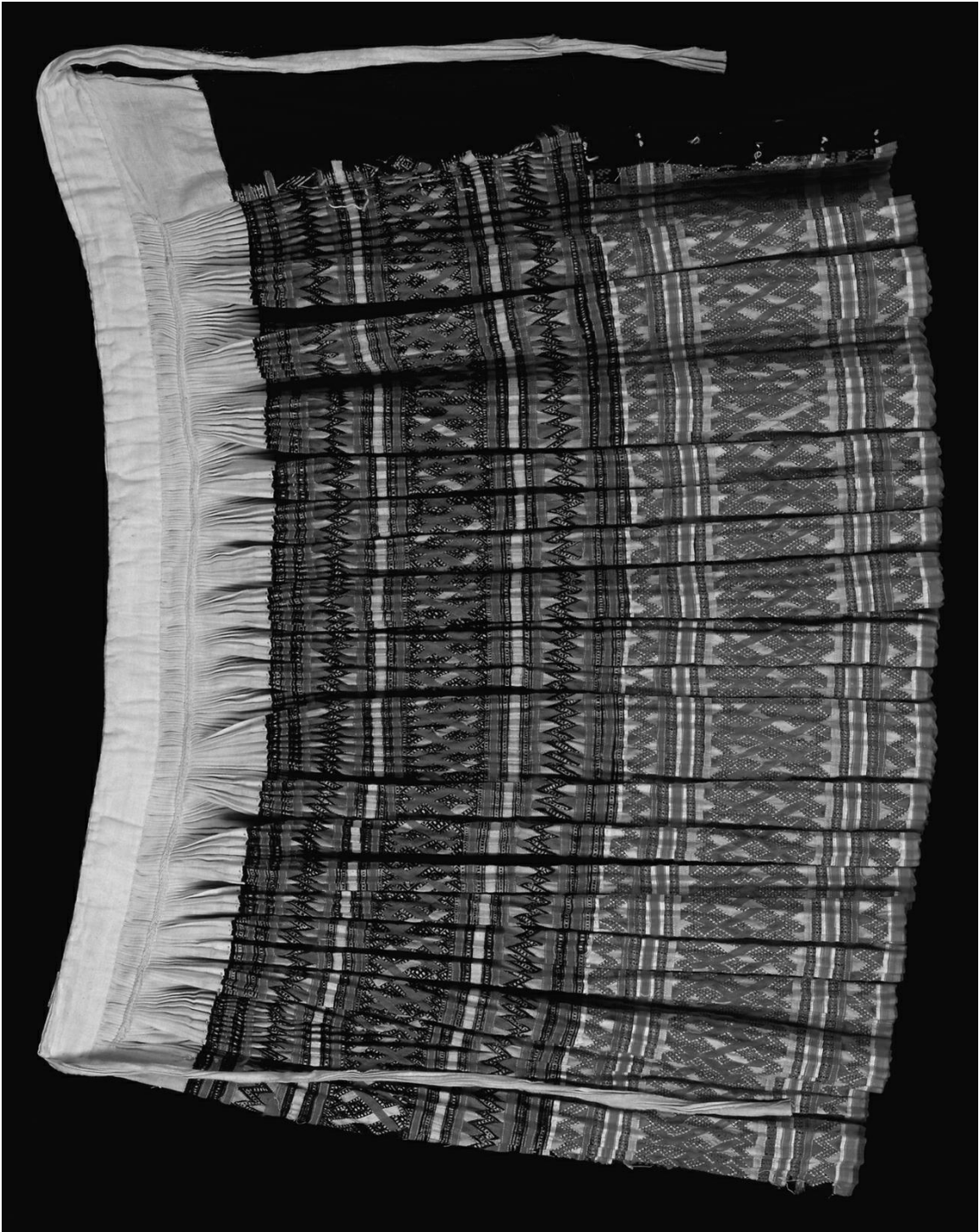
Known for his polished, highly finished style, Bartholomeus van der Helst used oil paint on canvas to create this naturalistic portrait. Oil paint lent itself to van der Helst's precise technique because of its brilliant colors, translucent effects, and the layers in which it was applied. Characteristic of many Dutch artists in the 1600s, van der Helst's brushwork is barely perceptible. Capturing the play of light on various surfaces of his sitter's clothing, he shows the sheen of the velvet coat, the shimmering quality of the ornate vest, and the crisp linen of the lace. He used very fine brush strokes for minute details of the lace, skin, and gold and silver threads.

Artist

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

Suggested Questions

1. This picture is a portrait. A portrait is a painting, photograph, or drawing of a person. Do you have a portrait of yourself? How was it made? How was this portrait made? Look closely.
2. Describe what the *burgomaster* is wearing. How would it feel to touch his coat, vest, buttons...?
3. What can you tell about this gentleman by the way he is dressed? What makes you say that?
4. Try standing in the same position as the *burgomaster*. Are you standing straight? Do you feel comfortable? Confident? How do you think he feels? What does his facial expression tell you about him? What do you think he would be like if you could speak to him? What do you see that makes you say that?



Blue Hmong (Asia, Laos)

Ceremonial Skirt, 1950-1982

Cotton, polyester, silk; indigo batik, cross stitch embroidery and appliqué

H.30½ x W.24¾ inches (length at waistband, without ties)

Gift of funds from Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hartwell, 82.138

Theme

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

Background

The Hmong, whose name means “free people,” have always valued their independence and self-sufficiency. Once inhabitants of central China, the Hmong were driven into southern China more than 2,000 years ago by the ethnic Chinese, who were politically dominant. During the 1800s, many Hmong families continued their migration into the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia. There they lived in relative isolation, scattered in small village groups in northern Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand. In these regions, the Hmong had a semi-nomadic lifestyle, practicing a type of farming that forced periodic resettlement in search of fertile land. In the 1960s, war in Southeast Asia had a devastating impact on the Hmong, destroying their economy and food supply. By 1970, large numbers of Hmong people living in Laos had become actively involved in the war, allied with the U.S. military. When the United States withdrew its troops from the area, the Hmong were forced to flee to Thailand's refugee camps to escape political persecution. By the late 1970s, many Hmong people had left the camps to settle in the United States, Canada, Australia, France, and elsewhere. Since that time, large numbers of Hmong people have settled in Minnesota. In fact, outside of Southeast Asia, the Twin Cities has the second largest urban concentration of Hmong.

Reflecting their semi-nomadic lifestyle, the material culture of the Hmong consists of easily transportable objects. Traditional clothing is especially important to the Hmong, who create distinctive costumes for both everyday and festival wear. They refer to their brightly colored costumes as *paj ntaub* [pahn-dou], meaning “flower cloth.” These textiles reflect the artistic skill and industry that Hmong women have developed and passed on from generation to generation. To them, costume is a symbol of their ethnic identity and a means of asserting their common kinship.

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

Over recent decades, traditional Hmong costume has undergone changes, with an exchange of

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

Ceremonial Skirt

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technique

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

Artist

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

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

In recent years, many Hmong women have adapted the patterns and techniques of their clothing to create a variety of textiles such as decorative hangings, bedspreads, pillowcases, tablecloths, and coin purses, which are intended for sale to non-Hmong people. Another important development is the production of “story cloths,” embroidered fabrics with scenes depicting Hmong folklore, traditional village life, and celebrations, as well as recent events such

as the war in Southeast Asia and their journey to a new life in America. These cloths often use writing along with images, illustrating the makers' adaptation to literacy in English and to their market audience.

Suggested Questions

1. What colors do you see in the skirt? Where do you see primary colors? Secondary colors? Complementary colors? Where do you see patterns?
2. How would you describe the patterns in this skirt?
3. This skirt was made to be worn for the Hmong New Year celebration, during which dances are often performed and games played. How do the lines, patterns, and colors help to make the skirt seem festive?
4. Both the *Transformation Mask* and this Hmong skirt were made in the last 20-30 years using traditional methods. How has each artist drawn upon traditions of their culture?



Yoruba (Africa, Nigeria, West Africa region)

Beaded Crown, c. 1920

Beads, leather, canvas, and wicker

H.15 (crown) x L.15 inches (fringe)

The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund, 76.29

Theme

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

Background

Since the 1000s, the Yoruba peoples of West Africa have lived in the southwestern area of present-day Nigeria and the Republic of Benin [beh-NEEN]. Historically, the Yoruba territory consisted of numerous kingdoms ruled by kings, councils of chiefs, and elders. Many of these kingdoms continue to flourish today. The Yoruba have a system of divine kingship that extends back to the beginning of the great Ife [E-fay] kingdom in the 1000s or earlier. The capital city Ife, regarded by Yoruba people as the place where life originated, continued through the centuries to be the primary religious center for all of Yorubaland. It remains so today.

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

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

These veiled beaded crowns were probably first made in the early 1800s. Before this time, Yoruba kings wore some kind of crown, perhaps made of a natural material, but little is known about them. In the early 1800s, tiny glass beads, known as "seed beads," were imported into Africa from Europe. These trade beads, which came in many colors, were enormously popular in Africa, inspiring creative new art forms among the Yoruba. Among the Yoruba, the use of beaded accessories was restricted to kings, priests, priestesses, and herbalist-priests. Only kings could enjoy the full range of beaded clothing, which included shoes, fans, flywhisks, footrests, canes, staffs, thrones, and crowns.

Yoruba kingdoms still exist today within present-day Nigeria, and kings continue to carry out

their religious roles as well as some political duties, though they lost much of their political power in the 1900s. While regalia is still made by Yoruba specialists, its use is probably less frequent than in the past.

Beaded Crown

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

A veiled crown was the most important of all the beaded objects made by the Yoruba. It represents kingship as well as a container of sacred power. Material inside the crown empowered the king to communicate with the spirits of his ancestors in order to benefit his people. The king wore a beaded crown only on important state occasions, such as his own enthronement, the giving of titles on others, or major festivals he officiated. The crown was so powerful that even when it was not worn, it was treated as respectfully as the king himself.

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

The most distinctive characteristic of the crown is the veil of beads that hang over the king's face. It is a diamond-patterned net of black, white, maroon, and blue beads surrounded by vertical strands of beads in many colors. The veil covers the king's features and protects ordinary men and women from looking directly at his face when he was united with his powerful ancestors. Concealment plays an important role in the spiritual meaning and power of the object.

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

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

The birds on the crown have many meanings and interpretations. Because birds fly, they may

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

Technique

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

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

Artist

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

Suggested Questions

1. Make a list of all the bead colors you would need to make this crown. Which are primary colors? Secondary colors? Other colors? What patterns do you see? How are those patterns created?
2. Look carefully at the texture of the crown. If you could touch it, how do you think it would feel?
3. A king of the Yoruba people wore this object. How do you think it was worn? How can you tell? Do you think this crown was worn as a part of everyday dress, or for a special occasion? What do you see that makes you say that?
4. The Yoruba king's crown identified the wearer as a king and gave him special powers to interact with the spirit world for the benefit of his people. What kinds of hats do people wear today that identify their special role or status in the community?



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

Theme

In her portrait, Countess Bucquoi [boo-KWAH] is dressed up in the fashion of the day, reflecting the late 1700s trend toward naturalness and simplicity. As natural and casual as the countess appears, however, the artist has carefully arranged her pose, costume and setting to glamorize her for posterity.

Background

The 1700s were a particularly complex and contradictory time in France, characterized by great advances in science and philosophy as well as political and social upheaval. A growing belief in liberty and equality conflicted with a society rooted in traditions of monarchical government and established authority. The struggle between these values culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. With the revolution came a greater awareness of class differences and a desire for change and self-expression—all of which were reflected in the way people dressed. With the gradual disintegration of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class, clothing became more alike for all classes of society.

Prior to the revolution, French aristocratic fashion was the model for women in all of Europe. The clothing was known for bodices heavily reinforced with bone, wide hooped skirts of sumptuous brocades and damasks (thick, shiny, patterned fabrics), and elaborate powdered headdresses. During the 1700s, this extravagant style, which emphasized the gap between the classes, gradually became outdated as a taste for informality emerged. Naturalness and simplicity became popular, and gowns were often made of muslin or *indienne*, a fine cotton that came in white or pastel colors, instead of brocade and damask. The artist Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun [VEE-zhay luh-BRUN], who encouraged her sitters to dress informally, actually helped launch this fashion style through her many portraits of Queen Marie Antoinette. One particular painting of the queen wearing a straw hat and white muslin dress caused a sensation when it was shown at the exhibition of the 1783 Salon. Many thought it improper for the queen to dress in such an informal manner. Despite this resistance, simplicity became highly fashionable during the last years of Marie Antoinette's reign.

During the 1700s, the growth of trade and industry also contributed to changes in European costume. Inventions such as the spinning jenny, cotton spinning loom, and knitting machine increased the output of many types of textiles, particularly cotton. Cotton fabric was first imported from the East Indies and America and then produced in various centers in Europe. A lightweight white material in its natural state, cotton brought about a rapid revolution in European clothing. It also reflected the new taste for simplicity, in keeping with the new democratic ideals.

Countess Maria Theresia Bucquoi

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

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

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

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

Technique

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

This portrait is painted on canvas stretched over a wooden frame. The surface of the canvas

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

Artist

Marie Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun was born in Paris in 1755, the daughter of a portrait painter who worked in pastels. As a young girl attending a local convent school, she spent much of her time drawing in the margins of her books. By age 15 she was earning enough money from her art to support herself, her widowed mother, and her younger brother. She soon became a successful portraitist of the Parisian aristocracy.

As a woman, Vigée-Le Brun had to overcome many obstacles to establish herself as a portraitist. Women did not have access to the same educational and professional opportunities as men did at this time. In most cases, they were denied membership in the academies of Paris and Rome, the major centers of art education during the 1700s. Further, they were barred from the study of the nude figure, which was the basis of an artist's training. Vigée-Le Brun was largely self-taught, and her early success was due to her own ambition and hard work, but as daughter of an artist, she had opportunities and experiences during her formative years that most women did not have.

Suggested Questions

1. Describe what Countess Bucquoi is wearing. What might her clothes feel like to touch? Do they look comfortable? Would they be easy to walk in? Why do you think so? Would you like to wear this outfit?
2. This kind of clothing was considered informal. What can you tell about her by the way she is dressed? Do people treat you differently if you dress in fancy clothes rather than less formal clothing?
3. How do you think the countess feels? Why do you say that? Does the way in which she is sitting tell you anything about her personality? Would you like to meet her? Why or why not? What would you like to ask her?
4. Describe her surroundings. Does the ground look soft or hard? Would this be a comfortable place to sit? What do you see in the background? Do you think a place like this really exists or is it imaginary? Imagine that you are walking in this landscape. What is the weather like?



James Van DerZee, American, 1886–1983
Wedding Day, Harlem, 1926; 1974 (reprint)
Gelatin silver print (printed 1974)
H.9³/₈ x W.6⁷/₈ inches (image)
The Stanley Hawks Memorial Fund, 74.36.12

Theme

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

Background

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

Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, professions in the arts were not open to most African Americans. The majority of blacks lived in the South where they were disenfranchised citizens separated from white people in almost every aspect of public life. Between World War I and World War II, more than two million people moved Northward. Many were attracted to New York City because of the city's legal protection of blacks and the strong presence there of a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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

Wedding Day, Harlem

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

photograph, they preserve for future generations the joyous occasion of their marriage.

Wearing formal wedding attire, the bride and groom are seated together in the photographer's studio. They do not assume the straightforward pose of traditional portraiture but rather are arranged in a more theatrical manner. The young man appears dignified in his tailcoat and bow tie, holding his top hat on his lap. He wears the standardized wedding clothes that grooms have worn in America since the 1800s. The bride, a vision of beauty and delicacy, wears a white wedding gown of satin under white net and lace. The above-the-ankles length of her skirt reflects the revolution of shorter skirts that had taken place in the mid-1920s. Her veil mimics the shape of the fitted cloche hat that was popular during this period. The train from her dress cascades elegantly to the floor, echoed by flowers falling from her carefully arranged bridal bouquet.

The net and lace of the bride's veil are machine-made, a product of the industrial age, in contrast to the handwork of *burgomaster's* and Countess Bucquoi's clothing. Although many brides in this period still had their gowns custom-made, the materials were mass-produced. A bride could also purchase a ready-made gown from a store or catalog.

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

In this photograph, the photographer emphasizes the loving family, a theme he often explored and saw as essential to the life of the African American community. Van DerZee includes elements that suggest domestic comfort, such as an ornately carved chair, a fluffy shag rug on the floor, and an oval mirror on the wall. These “real” three-dimensional furnishings are placed before two-dimensional painted backdrops depicting a fire burning in a brick fireplace, a symbol of domestic warmth and security. The fireplace is flanked by stately architectural columns, which, as in the portrait by van der Helst, are associated with the dignity and grandeur of ancient Greek and Roman architecture.

While painted backdrops were commonly used by portrait photographers in the early 1900s, Van DerZee was inventive in his use of this convention. Another theatrical element is the superimposed image of a child holding a doll, who appears to be seated on the rug to the left of the fireplace. Is the child a memory of the bride's past or, more likely, a glimpse into the future? Drawing on the photographic negative itself, Van DerZee playfully added the flourish of hearts and arrows floating above the fire. Even his signature, printed in a vertical format, works as a linear design element within the composition.

Technique

Van DerZee used various means both in the studio and the darkroom to produce a desired effect. He had a supply of furniture, architectural elements, and backdrops—many of which he hand-painted—as well as a selection of fashionable clothes for both men and women. In processing his film, he used the technique of photomontage, exposing several negatives to make a single photograph. This is the way he made the young girl holding a doll appear with

the bridal couple. In addition to drawing directly on the negative, Van DerZee also retouched his negatives to flatter his subjects, removing unwanted facial lines and blemishes, or placing beauty marks on the cheeks of women. While this technique was controversial in the artistic community, it was highly popular among his clients.

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

Artist

Born in Lenox, Massachusetts, in 1886, James Van DerZee grew up in a family interested in music and art. When he was 12 years old, he won a simple box camera as a prize for selling 20 packets of perfume. As a boy he photographed family and friends, but did not pursue photography professionally until later in life. In 1906 he moved to Harlem where he took up a career in music, teaching violin and playing the piano at social gatherings. In 1915 Van DerZee was hired as a photographer's assistant in a New Jersey department store, and in 1917, he opened his own portrait studio in Harlem, where he enjoyed considerable success. He became the most sought after photographer in Harlem and, in 1932, opened a larger studio with his second wife and business partner, Gaynella, who remained with him until her death in 1975.

Van DerZee's photos from the 1920s and 1930s show Harlem's socialites, politicians, religious leaders, families, and members of local organizations, as well as social events such as weddings, parades and funerals. He photographed people not only in his studio but also on location, producing our most comprehensive document of community life in Harlem during its cultural renaissance. Essentially a self-taught photographer, Van DerZee remained outside and unaware of mainstream American photography.

Suggested Questions

1. A portrait is a painting, photograph, or drawing of a person. Why do you think this portrait was taken? What is your evidence?
2. How do you think the people in the photograph feel? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Describe the setting what you see. Van DerZee used painted backdrops in his photographs, along with real objects. Which objects are part of a backdrop and which are real? How can you tell? Why do you think he used backdrops? How would the portrait differ if the background were plain?
4. Both the *burgomaster* in the portrait by van der Helst and the groom in this photograph are dressed in their finest clothes. How is their clothing similar? In what ways does their clothing differ?



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

Theme

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

Background

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

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

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

Transformation Mask

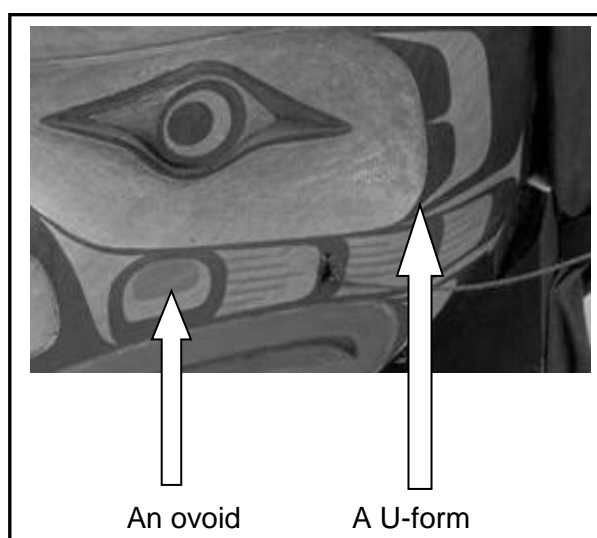
Among the southern groups of the Northwest Coast Indians, the Kwakwaka'wakw people are known for their elaborate ceremonies using a range of complex objects. This transformation mask was made by Richard Hunt, a 1900s Kwakwaka'wakw artist. While this particular mask was made for sale, Hunt made a similar mask for family dances at a winter potlatch and wore it himself while participating in the ceremonies. Transformation masks are worn to illustrate myths of animal ancestry, to show animal crests owned by an individual, and to reveal the interaction of human and animal spirits. Their use is rooted in ancient Kwakwaka'wakw traditions.

According to Kwakwaka'wakw creation stories, there was once a time when birds, fish, animals and humans differed only in skin covering and had the ability to transform themselves at will. All living beings were unified and animals could take on human form, just as humans could become animals, birds, fish, and mythical creatures. These ideas still guide Kwakwaka'wakw religious traditions.

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

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

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



Although Raven and *Sisuitl* are traditional Kwakwaka'wakw images, they also are personally

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

This mask combines two- and three-dimensional techniques, using both relief carving and painted design. The distinctive Northwest Coast style of decoration is displayed here in the bold linear designs and forms. The painted images are stylized, using simplified geometric and organic forms and abstract designs to represent animal and human images. The artist animates the surface with an intricate design using two basic shapes—the ovoid and the U-form. These shapes, integral to Northwest Coast artistic tradition, are found throughout the mask in a variety of configurations. Examples of the ovoid are seen in the serpent's eyes and nose, the palms of the human hands, the man's forehead, and the designs above and below the raven's beak. The U-form is repeated in many segments of the serpent's body, as well as on the chin of the human face. While many of these forms seem to represent certain animal or human features, others simply create a pleasing design. The long curving body and segmented forms of the serpent suggest undulating scales and slithering movement. Combined with its sharp teeth and penetrating eyes, *Sisuitl* appears to be a fierce and powerful creature. In painting the designs, Hunt used traditional Kwakwaka'wakw colors of black, red-brown, and green, which are applied to emphasize important features such as eyes, nostrils, hands, and teeth.

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

Technique

Richard Hunt uses traditional Kwakwaka'wakw techniques when carving and painting masks. This mask is made from red cedar, a soft wood favored by Kwakwaka'wakw artists for its clear and even grain. Woodcarving is a form of subtractive sculpture, in which the form is created by carving away wood from the log. The Yoruba *Beaded Crown*, on the other hand, was made by an additive process in which many different components were added or assembled. Hunt used traditional hand tools such as an adze, chisel, and curved knife. When the carving was completed, holes were drilled along the sides of the hollow shell to insert pegs and strings used to maneuver the mask when it was worn. Hunt then painted the mask with acrylic (plastic-based) paints. Before these commercial paints were available, Kwakwaka'wakw artists used natural earth pigments, such as red ochre, charcoal, and blue-green clay. Hunt, however, like many contemporary artists, now prefers to use acrylic paints because they dry more quickly.

Artist

Richard Hunt is a contemporary Kwakwaka'wakw artist who comes from a family of internationally respected artists. He was born in 1951 in Alert Bay, British Columbia, but has lived most of his life in Victoria. Hunt began carving when he was 13 years old, receiving lessons from his father, who was taught by Richard's grandfather. Like the traditions of the

Hmong and Yoruba cultures, Kwakwaka'wakw art forms have been transmitted from generation to generation. This has occurred despite attempts by the Canadian government to assimilate the Northwest Coast peoples into the predominant white culture. A government ban of the potlatch ceremony existed from 1884 to 1951, but many Kwakiutl artists, like Hunt's grandfather, continued to make traditional ceremonial items, keeping these art forms alive for future generations. Today Kwakwaka'wakw art is undergoing a great revival, and Richard Hunt is a part of it. His work has been widely exhibited and is represented in collections around the world.

Suggested Questions

1. How do you think the mask is worn? How do you think the wearer opens the mask? How can you tell? Look at the open mask. How do you think the wearer sees and breathes?
2. Look at the mask when it is closed. What features does the raven have that help identify him?
3. What kinds of lines and shapes did Richard Hunt use to represent the features of the raven? How do the colors help emphasize the bird's features? Look at the open mask. Where do you see a human?