



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Americans "R" Us Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia)

Self-guided Tour: All art works available at Minneapolis Institute of Art, which is free and open to the public. Free "tickets" are required and need to be reserved to keep the number of visitors within safety guidelines during COVID. For tickets and Mia hours, [visit the Mia website](#). In addition, most of these artworks are available for viewing online through the [Mia website](#).

Why This Mini-Pilgrimage?

No single group defined by gender, language, religion, place of origin, race, age, or any other category has a monopoly on the truth. It takes all of us together, hearing one another's experience to draw close to a vision of God and of one another. In his poetic art, the visionary writer of Revelation describes the great vision of God's beloved gathered around God.

I looked again. I saw a huge crowd, too huge to count. Everyone was there—all nations and tribes, all races and languages. And they were standing, dressed in white robes and waving palm branches, standing before the Throne and the Lamb and heartily singing: Salvation to our God on his Throne! Salvation to the Lamb!

All who were standing around the Throne—Angels, Elders, Animals—fell on their faces before the Throne and worshiped God, singing: Oh, Yes!

The blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, The honor and power and strength,

To our God forever and ever and ever! Oh, Yes!

Revelation 7:9-12 (The Message)

Vision calls us to see. Visual artists have offered their experience, their lives and values to us to see, that we might know more richly some of those who gather round the throne in addition to ourselves.

In this tour we focus on North American artists, people who call this land between Canada and Mexico home. And what a varied bunch we are! Enjoy getting to meet your

American compatriots. Take your time to see their visions, imagine their words, perhaps hear them singing.

Tips for being a Mia pilgrim: When “meeting” a work of art, give yourself time (at least a full minute, preferably two) before you **read** the label copy, to take it in. These works are listed in the order they would appear if you enter Mia and go up the stairs at the far end of the lobby, directly up to the second floor. Ask any guard for directions to the Arts of the Americas Gallery and/or pick up a handy map. Choose as many or as few as you like.

Let’s get started

On the Second Floor

Jaune Quick-to-see Smith | *What is an American?*, 2003 | Room 261

Smith’s lithograph with hand painting and collage answers the question “what” is an American by showing us “who” is an American. Smith is a member of several native American tribes (see <https://collections.artsmia.org/people/2761/jaune-quick-to-see-smith>) and works as artist, curator, and activist. In this picture, she uses collage, the technique of cutting and pasting paper art works from other sources) in pieces that provide some answers to what goes into making an American. You will find a lot of symbolism in her choices.

The first thing to do at this painting is to look long and hard at what Smith has chosen to include as definitive, perhaps ironically, perhaps not, of an American. The whole painting centers on a single figure unidentifiable beyond being a Native American male. This figure fills the paper and the only part of his world that we see is what the artist positions around him as “background” to his existence.

Some Questions: Artists use color and composition—where everything goes in the picture—to lead the viewer’s gaze to what is important. What colors do you see in this work? How are they symbolic? Where does the artist use color? Can you think of any other figures who might be shown as “bleeding” from their hand (Hint: Jesus of Nazareth, St. Francis of Assisi)? What does this imply about the African American here?

Artists also use the direction of lines to set up their work for us, even if we are not conscious of the directions of the lines. Take a look at Smith’s work. What kinds of lines does she use (horizontal, vertical, diagonal)? What kind of impact do they make? Diagonal lines are lines that show energy. A diagonal position defies gravity and requires energy to maintain or move away from. Do you see how the artist uses

diagonal lines to draw our eyes to the hand at the center of the painting (at the hub of a big X)? Diagonal lines also show us this figure striding along. He is not still. Is that part of being an American?

Look carefully at the small additions to the painting around the figure. What do you learn about what is American? Do the images from the background have anything to do with Native American life? How do you think it feels to be originally at home in north America, only to find yourself an alien to the cultural symbols that prevail?

If you were going to draw yourself as a central figure with symbols around you, what would it be important for you to include? This would make a great collage project for you to do at home and it sure gives us a lot to think about!

Allan Hauser | *Rendezvous*, 1981 | Room 261

Hauser, a Native American of the Apache nation, was raised on a farm in the American south. Though his family expected him to take over the farm, Hauser discovered that he was an artist who wanted to share the songs, stories, customs, and life of his people visually. He worked and taught throughout the American West during a long career. After he retired from teaching, he spent years sculpting in stone and with bronze. This sculpture is made of Indiana limestone that Hauser chose himself.

Some Questions: As you look at this statue and walk around it to get a feel for it, how would you describe the woman? What do you wonder about this woman? Do you think the stone used to sculpt her adds something to the way we see her? How does the quality of the stone contribute to your sense of the woman? A “rendezvous” is a meeting. This woman is on her way to meet someone. How can you tell?

This sculpture is not meant to be realistic and show us every detail, as *Stampede* will do when you come to that one. What about this sculpture makes this figure appear real? Which aspects seems less real? Why do you suppose the artist omitted extra details in this sculpture? How would it change if he had included all kinds of details? After you look at the next piece, a sculpture on the 3rd floor called *Stampede*, decide if you have a style you like more. What do you favor?

On the Third Floor

Harry Jackson | *Stampede*, 1958-59 | Room 301

This sculpture from the mid-20th century re-creates the chaos of a cattle drive gone wrong – into a stampede. The cause of the stampede is not known, but the process

of stampeding is shown in the beautifully detailed work by Harry Jackson. We get a feeling of the fear and confusion of the cattle and horses themselves. The desperate measures being taken by the cowboys to calm things down don't seem to be working. As the animals charge across the terrain, the ground itself plays a part in the danger of the stampede. Cowboys have long been heroes of a growing United States of America. They and their work have often been sentimentalized for consumers who underestimate what it took to bring beef to market. The artist, Harry Jackson, worked as a ranch hand in Wyoming as a young man and went to war as a Marine in World War II. He has both the artistic skill and the experience to bring home to us this dynamic and dangerous event.

Some Questions: How does the sculpture use the metal to show different textures? What textures can you find in the sculpture? One cowboy is raising his pistol into the air? What might he want to do with that pistol? Keep in mind that this is a very fast-moving event. What could a pistol do?

A cowboy was almost always a young man who made a living herding cattle around the pasture lands of the American west. His job was to get them safely to trainyards after they had fattened up all summer on the far-flung hills and meadows of our country before it was so densely settled. What kinds of things would he have to know to do his job? Does it sound like work you would like to do? Why or why not? What do you think about the cattle in this sculpture? They are originated in England and are named for their long horns. Now we think of a Texas Longhorns as a name for University of Texas sports teams, but the teams were named after the cattle that helped Texas become an important state. Do these longhorns look like they will provide a lot of meat?

Glance around the room for other sculptures concerning the American west and cowboys.

Dale Nichols | *The Twins*, 1946 | Room 302

Nichols was born at the turn of the 20th century in small town Nebraska and spent most of his young adult life in Chicago, first as a student and a commercial artist, then as teacher at the University of Illinois. He later became art editor for the Encyclopedia Britannica for many years. It is clear from his work that his memories of the countryside remained vivid over the years. Nichols is famous for painting frequently a scene with a red barn, snow, and a farmer doing some task in various seasons. Nichols was a Regionalist artist in his earlier years, painting the Midwestern scenes he knew well in a way that is both modern and realistic.

Some questions: Why do you think the painting is called *The Twins*? Is that the name you would choose for it? Notice that Nichols does not use a lot of colors in this painting. What colors do you see?

Artists often repeat the use of color in a painting in order to keep the viewer's eyes moving and to make connections among parts of the painting. What colors do you see repeated and where? What is the overall effect of this painting on you? Can you describe how you feel looking at it in a few words? What is it in the painting that makes you feel this way?

If you could visit the farm in this painting, would you want to? Why or why not? How would you dress for your visit? What season of the year do you think it is in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? The man and the horse are both tiny and seen without any features. They also seem to have the same posture. Can you imitate that posture? What do you think the artist is trying to show us about these two figures?

Junius Brutus Stearns | *A Fishing Party Off Long Island*, 1860 | Room 305

Stearns was born in Vermont and spent much of his adult life in New York city as an artist. He had five children of whom his younger two sons were named Raphael and Michelangelo, after the famous painters of the Renaissance. Stearns obviously highly valued art even though his own choice of subject was quite different from those earlier painters. After a famous series of paintings of the life of George Washington, he turned to scenes of everyday life and portraits of less famous people. He produced a number of paintings about fishing, like the one at the MIA. This is a rather subdued painting of a pretty wild event – shark-fishing in Long Island sound!

Some questions: First look carefully at the painting. What do you see? What is going on? How do the men look? Are they really into what is going on? What kind of weather do you think it is in this picture? What do you see that suggests that?

In addition to the shark, there is additional wildlife in the picture. Do you see it? Can you make the sound of this wildlife? Artists often set a scene that involves several of our senses. If you've ever been to the ocean, can you close your eyes and bring to mind how it sounded, how it felt, how it smelled? Do you think this is a dangerous sport? Why or why not? Would you like to try it?

Long Island is a long strip of land that juts out east of New York city into the Atlantic Ocean. Yet the scene gives no hint of being near a big city. How do we know there are other people living near the sea? This picture is painted right before the Civil War begins in the United States. What does it tell us about life for these men in their time?

Clementine Hunter | *The Wash*, 1950 | Room 324
Clementine Hunter | *Picking Cotton*, 1905s | 324

These two paintings, displayed side by side, give a wonderful glimpse into the world of Clementine Hunter. She was born a slave and spent the first sixty years of her life picking cotton and then cooking for the plantation household. Ms. Hunter did not start to paint until she was 60 years old, when she found some discarded paints and began to paint scenes from her own real-life experience. Both of these paintings highlight the hard, physical work that slaves did, including women and very young people. It is interesting that in both paintings, Ms. Hunter uses bright, almost cheerful colors to produce her painting.

Some questions: “Folk art” describes art works that are made by people with little or no training in using art materials and who portray scenes familiar from their lives. Clementine Hunter is often called a folk artist. As you look at her paintings, how can you tell that Clementine Hunter did not have art lessons? Do you think she was able to look at art anywhere in her life?

In *Picking Cotton*, what do you see? Even though it’s in the corner, the artist did not forget to include the water spigot. Why do you think an ordinary spigot is important enough to put in a painting? Who in the painting looks different from the others? In what way? What do you think about that?

In *The Wash*, what do you see going on? How is this way of doing the wash different from what you’re used to? Do you think it was hard work? Look at the colors the artist uses in this painting. Do they seem realistic to you? What might they represent? What do you think the weather was like on this wash day? Did the weather make the work harder or easier? If you could, would you like to walk into the painting and visit with the washerwomen? Why or why not? From the few items on the clothes line, how do you think people dressed?

Dawoud Bey | *Untitled [Young Girls in Overalls]*, 1988 | Room 365

Daywould Bey was born in 1953 in New York city and now lives in Chicago. He is well known for his photographs of ordinary Black people. He became interested in photography when he was a teenager, long before the age of digital photography. Bey felt the absence of Black artists in the United States. His idea was to focus, quote literally, on the people that others don’t even see or notice. His art work then brings them into our world to get to know.

Some questions: Describe the girl in the photo. How does she look to you? If she could talk to us, what might she be saying? Do you think the artist captured some of

her personality? How did he do that? What did he include or leave out? Can you take the same pose as the girl? How does it make you feel to stand like that? Do you enjoy that pose?

Photographers have to figure out just where their subjects should stand, what the light could do for the picture, how to pay attention to shadows, how to set up a background. Describe the light and background and things you notice in this photo. How has Bey made the photo such a good picture of this girl? If you could have your own photo taken by someone very skillful, how would you want it set up to show who you truly are?

Morris Topchevsky | *Strike Breakers: Company Violence*, 1937 | Room 377.

This painting is not recommended for young children, but it will interest adult because it shows the same combination of violence, poverty, desperation, and official power that we see in our streets around the world today. It is also similar to Goya's paintings from the time of war in Spain a century earlier. Topchevsky was born in Russia (now a part of Poland) and emigrated to Chicago when he was 11 in order to escape anti-Jewish terrors. He experienced ethnic violence as a boy and again during the race-riots in Chicago in 1919. He became a member of the American Communist party to work for social equality and an end to violence. In this 1937 painting, it is the struggle of the working class that is at the heart of the matter.

Reginald Marsh | *Holy Name Mission*, 1921 | Room G377.

Marsh was born in Paris and moved to and lived in New Jersey when he was two years old. He had a privileged upbringing, but did not turn to the subjects of privileged life styles for his art. Fifty years after the early impressionist painter Degas made poor ballerinas and ordinary Parisians the subjects of his painting, Marsh also turned to flamboyant dancers and club scenes that were far from posh. He also painted many scenes from the time of the Great Depression, this painting among them. This painting captures a scene in New York City that would have been familiar in the very early 1930s. From 1929-31 (and afterwards) there were many homeless and men on the streets of New York. There was a Holy Name Center for Homeless Men near the Bowery in New York. It was closed in 2011.

Some questions: It has been said that Marsh paints crowds and finds them fascinating instead of focusing on individuals. Describe the crowd in this painting in your own words. What does the name *Holy Name Mission* suggest to you? What kind of "mission" would attract such a line-up of men? What colors does the artist use in this painting? What does his color choice suggest to you? How do you imagine the men sound as they wait and what do you think they are waiting for? Do you think

having a place for people to get a meal, a bed, a shower is something important in our day and age, nearly 100 years later? How can those of us lucky enough to have a home help with that? Do you think Marsh was offering his artistry to dramatize the plight of the homeless and forgotten crowds? Who helps us see the homeless and needy now? What wisdom does our faith bring to these questions?