



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Mini-Pilgrimage
Fall 2020

Artists Show Us Our Fears
Minneapolis Institute of Art

Self-guided Tour: All art works available to view 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 General Admission Tickets: ticket.artsmia.org/products/general-admission

Virtual Tour: Most of these artworks are also available for viewing online through Mia's website (<https://collections.artsmia.org>).

Why This Mini-Pilgrimage?

We are humans and fear is part of our heritage. We live in fragile bodies on a small, struggling planet AND we love each other. The world is beautiful. Life has so much that is good. How do we live in that tension?

Theological Connection:

Long ago, the apostle Paul wrote famous words about fear that encourage us to live confidently no matter what. Paul knew our human fears are very real, but insists that there is no danger that can ultimately un-do us.

Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture.... None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

Romans 8: 35-38 (The Message)

Engaging Art:

Artists portray human fears in so many different ways. Sometimes seeing something helps us name it in ourselves and realize that we are not alone! As you look at each work, try to imagine what fears the artist suggests. How does the artist show fear in the work you are looking at? Does the work offer a counter to the fear?

You'll notice that these works come from a variety of times and places though most of them are drawn from a western European tradition. Often the conventions of that tradition are used to challenge the prevailing culture.

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. (For more tips on looking at art, please read the "Looking at Art" section on this page or keep an eye out for my YouTube offering, "Looking at Art.")

These works are listed in the order they would appear if you enter the 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 Africa Gallery and/or pick up a handy map. Choose as many or as few as you like.

Let's get started**In the Africa Gallery, 2nd floor (236, 250, 254, 255)**

Yinke Shonibare | "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters," 2008 | Room 250

This striking work is like a lot of art, an imitation with a twist that sharpens the point the artist wants to make. In this piece, you can compare Shonibare's work with a much older print by Francisco Goya (see it here: <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-sleep-of-reason-produces-monsters-no-43-from-los-caprichos/FAF4YL0zP9cjHg?hl=en>). Goya made his print to describe how he saw his society besieged by forces of darkness. Shonibare uses the same construction, but dresses his figure in batik print. Now the fearful forces of oppression see to converge on a figure representing African and Asian peoples.

Some questions: What do you see? What else do you see? Are these frightening animals? What are some animals that are frightening to people? Why do you think they are? What does sleep have to do with this story? Are we less frightened when we are awake? Can you think of some things it might mean to say that reason is asleep? Is that like being "tuned out" or "not woke"?

Goncalo Mabunda | Untitled Mask, 2017 | Room 254

By 2020 in the United States we have learned to fear the results of violence that is all around us. Mabunda has taken parts of a gun, a symbol of violence no longer able to be used violently, and assemble a mask of a human head. Masks are used throughout African cultures to lead viewers to a variety of experiences and new perceptions. Just glance around the gallery to take note of the many and varied masks on display.

This mask is made from military weapons that have been transformed. Or have they? Perhaps when a whole head is made of weapons, the artist is suggesting that the weapons transform us. What do you think?

Some questions: What do you see? How do you feel as you look at Mabunda's sculpture? What do you see that leads to that feeling? Is Mabunda telling a story with this work? Is he offering insight on the basis of a story?

How does this help us—or doesn't it—to think about gun violence in our own time and place? How does it reveal our fears?

In the MAEP Gallery, 2nd floor

Rachel Breen | "The Labor We Wear" (Until November 1) | Room 257

Breen's multi-room work summons you to enter a world of more subtle and yet very real fears. As in the Shonibare piece, clothing is very significant. In fact, the art work is made of clothing, clothing that is tossed aside for the sake of "fashion." The clothing symbolizes bodies in many ways: those that eke out a living creating these easily discarded consumer goods; the processes often toxic to water and land used to make these goods; the disappearance of human community (do you know who made the shirt you're wearing?) in the appearance of community/collection.

Some questions: What do you see? How do you feel in these rooms? What might the artist be telling us? What do you see that makes you say that? How is this art different from what we usually think of as art? What might this artist be trying to tell us about the fears of others, fears we don't even notice in our everyday lives?

Europe and America Galleries, 3rd floor

Unknown artist | Funeral Torch, ca. 1720 | Room 310

This torch would have been carried and finally placed alongside the coffin of an important person as part of a funeral. It is made of wood, gilded and painted to help it gleam in the candlelight (no electricity in 1720!) and perhaps inspire a certain awe and horror. After all, prominent on the torch is the angel of death with a skull and wings, not how we usually picture angels. The fear of death or of non-being is part of all human life, even if some of us overcome it. It is a mystery to be approached with sadness for what is being lost and wonder about what is to come.

Some questions: What do you see? Look all around the torch – it was meant to be seen from all sides. Can you imagine this torch holding candles, lit only by candlelight? How does that change the look? How do you feel about this torch? Do you like it? Why or why not? Can we sometimes overcome our fears, or at least diminish them, by naming and picturing them?

Lucille Corcos | “Macy’s Parade,” 1942 | Room 359

Take a good look at this painting. A parade can be a lot of fun with music and floats and lots of people gathered to watch. But the floats in this parade often look a little strange, menacing even. And some people watch from the sidewalk, but the artist shows us the inside of a very crowded room with people that are a lot bigger than those on the sidewalk crowded at the window to see. They are on eye level with some of the floats.

Some questions: Do you find some of these characters in the parade scary? What about them is frightening? Do some of these floats or people look like they could be part of a bad dream? In 1942, there were military parades all over Europe. War had begun there that would last a long time. Might the artist be trying to show us something about war? What might she be saying? What do you think the artist is worried about?

Bernard Perlin | “Vacant Lots,” 1948 | Room 359

Take a good long look at this painting. The artist chooses colors that blend into one another so it takes a while to pick things out. Perlin grew up in the United States and painted during World War II and after. Immediately after the war he lived and painted in New York City where he was when he painted “Vacant Lots.”

Some questions: What is going on in this painting? Would you like to walk into this painting? What do you see that makes you say yes or no? Do you think the boy is

trying to climb into the fenced-off area or out of it? What do you see that makes you say that? Does anyone else live in this city area? What do you think the artist or the boy fears?

James Ensor | "The Intrigue," 1911 | Room 371

Ensor painted this painting to describe harshly the people of his home town when his sister became engaged to a Chinese man. The town folks didn't welcome the stranger to their little white, middle class Belgian town and Ensor's sister and her whole family were hurt.

Some questions: Can you find the two main characters in the painting? How do they seem different? Do these people have "natural" faces? How can you tell? What do you think the artist was trying to show? Would you like to meet any of these people? Who? Why or why not? Why do some folks fear those who look different? Why do we fear to look different from those around us?

Egon Schiele | "Portrait of Paris von Guttersloh," 1918 | Room 377.

Not long before he died in the influenza epidemic of 1918, Egon Schiele painted his good friend von Guttersloh. Schiele was only 28 when he died. His friend von Guttersloh was young too. Schiele survived WWI after a time of service, but both he and his wife died within three days of one another from the flu.

Some questions: Schiele captured his friend in a very unusual pose. He also used his paint in a special way to create the effect of small movements, nervousness, and fear or excitement. What do you think Schiele was trying to show about his friend? How can you tell. (Hint the big eyes may suggest skill at observation and intelligent focus!) There were a lot of frightening things in Schiele's world: how might painting a good friend provide a sense of hope? If you were an artist what would you paint to show what your world is like? What there be fear or joy or excitement or all of that? How could people tell from your work what your feelings are?

Georgia O' Keeffe | "City Night," 1926 | Room 378.

O'Keeffe painted many scenes of New York City over the course of five years. In this painting, it's almost as if the artist and we viewers are looking up, forced to look up, at these tall buildings with almost no lights. The scene is lit by the moon, even though it looks very tiny between the giant buildings. We see one other tiny light on the building.

Some questions: Surely O'Keeffe was impressed by the power of the buildings and the power of a culture that could create them. Are there other feelings here? Often as

people face change in what they have known, the unknown looks a little frightening. What might seem different here from what O'Keeffe had known? How had the city changed? Would you like to be in this city? Do you think it might look different by day? How do cities seem to you now?