



BIRD OF PARADISE QUILT TOP

Artist unidentified

Vicinity of Albany, New York; 1858–1863

Cotton, wool, silk, and ink with silk embroidery; 84 ½ × 69 ⅝"

Gift of the Trustees of the American Folk Art Museum, 1979.7.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE OBJECT

The *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top*, made during the Civil War period, is thought to be an unfinished marriage or wedding quilt. This idea is supported by the vertical rows of appliquéd blocks that feature pairs of birds and other animals. In addition to these animal pairs, other symbols of union and fertility can be found on the quilt top; they include birds tending nests of eggs, flowers, and fruits. The only aberration appears in the two top blocks of the quilt. A single female figure is appliquéd onto one block, but the square next to her is nearly empty, save for the decorative leaves and flowers. Newspaper templates, including a template of a male figure, were found with this quilt top, suggesting that perhaps the quilt was never finished, and the marriage it was intended to celebrate never took place.

The quilt top also features depictions of famous nineteenth-century racehorses and of an elephant named Hanible, who had traveled throughout New York State during this period with his trainer.

RELATED LESSONS

- “Counting Quilts” (pre-K–1)
- “Exploring Folk Art Through Poetry” (2–3)



BUTTON TREE

Gregory "Mr. Imagination" Warmack (b. 1948)

Chicago; 1990–1992

Wood and cement with buttons, bottle caps, and nails; 56 × 34 × 60"

Gift of the artist, 2000.13.1

Photo by John Parnell, New York

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE OBJECT

Gregory Warmack, also known as Mr. Imagination, lives in Pennsylvania. After having been shot in an attempted robbery in 1978, he made a conscious choice to become an artist. Warmack uses any materials he can find, such as bottle caps, buttons, and coins, to construct human and animal figures, masks, and canes. *Button Tree* was created from bottle caps, buttons, and the salvaged limb of a tree that had been a victim of urban development. The buttons were nailed one by one directly into the wood in a laborious process that took years to complete.

RELATED LESSONS

- "What Is Folk Art?" (pre-K–5)
- "Exploring Folk Art Through Poetry" (2–3)

WHAT IS FOLK ART?

PRE-K-1

GRADE LEVEL: PRE-K-5

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS: THE ARTS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

ESTIMATED TIME: ONE 45-MINUTE PERIOD

2-3

4-5

OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the significance and history of folk art.
- Students will hone analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Students will understand varied reasons for which folk artists create.

MATERIALS

- Images of *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top* and *Button Tree*

LESSON ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES

Introduction and Discussion

The students will think about and expand their preconceived notions of folk art.

- Ask the students what comes to mind when they think about folk art.
- *Hi folks!* What does *folks* mean? If *folks* stands for people, then folk art is art made by people—ordinary people who make extraordinary things.
- People have always had art in their lives, decorating their homes and workspaces with extraordinary works of art and beautifully crafted objects. The artists whose creations are on view at the American Folk Art Museum never went to art school. They learned their skills from someone in their family or community or from other professionals, or they used their own imagination to teach themselves how to create art.
- Folk art can be traditional or contemporary; it was made long ago, and it is being made today.

Activity

Discuss two works of art from the museum's collection individually, then compare and contrast them.

- Allow for the students' interests and observations to guide the discussion. Ask open-ended questions to provoke responses and sharing.
- Encourage the students to use their own words to describe what it is they see in the artworks and where they see it, rather than just have them use their fingers to point.
- Share the background information on these objects as it pertains to the discussion and at a level appropriate for your students.

BIRD OF PARADISE QUILT TOP

- What is happening in this picture?
- How many people can you find in this quilt top? What are they doing?

- Do you think all the animals you see in this quilt top live together in real life? Why or why not?
- The title of this artwork is *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top*. What other title could you give it?

BUTTON TREE

- What do you see?
- What is this object made of, and how do you think it was put together?
- This is a sculpture made by Gregory Warmack, also known as Mr. Imagination. He often creates works of art he thinks of as acts of goodwill. How does he do good by reusing materials?

COMPARISON

- How are these two works different? How are they the same? Think about the artists' backgrounds, the materials used, and the subjects depicted.
- Which object surprises you most as a work of folk art?

PRE- AND POST-LESSON ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- This lesson is an ideal introduction to any of the lessons in this curriculum or a visit to the American Folk Art Museum.
- Tell the students that the various works of folk art have much in common. They all relate to one or more of the themes explored in this curriculum: utility, community, individuality, and symbolism. Ask the students to look at *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top* and *Button Tree* and think about how the two works connect with these four themes.

ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION METHODS

- In discussion, students were able to identify types of folk art in their daily lives.
- In discussion, students responded to the works of art with descriptive words and analysis.
- Students understood and found connections between the two discussed works of art.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Recommended Books for Students

Coleman, Janet Wyman, with Elizabeth V. Warren. *Baseball for Everyone: Stories from the Great Game*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with American Folk Art Museum, 2003.

A history of the sport illustrated with baseball statues, sculptures, balls and bats, paintings, and baseball-themed quilts.

Critters A to Z in American Folk Art. New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2003.

An alphabet of animals portrayed in folk art carvings, quilts, paintings, and many other media.

Esterman, M.M. *A Fish That's a Box: Folk Art from the National Museum of American Art*. Arlington, Va.: Great Ocean Publishers, 1990.

A children's introduction to folk art, featuring objects from the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., including works made from found materials. Encourages students to create their own works of art.

Lyons, Mary E. *Painting Dreams: Minnie Evans, Visionary Artist*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

———. *Starting Home: The Story of Horace Pippin, Painter*. New York: Scribner, 1993.

———. *Stitching Stars: The Story Quilts of Harriet Powers*. New York: Scribner, 1993.

Lyons, Mary E., ed. *Talking with Tebé: Clementine Hunter, Memory Artist*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.

Picture-book biographies of folk artists, providing valuable historical perspective and context at a level appropriate for upper-elementary and middle-school students.

Nicholson, Nicholas B.A. *Little Girl in a Red Dress with Cat and Dog*. New York: Viking, 1998.

The imagined story behind this painting from the collection of the American Folk Art Museum from the perspective of the artist and the little girl that sat for the portrait.

Nikola-Lisa, W., and Grandma Moses. *The Year with Grandma Moses*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000.

Grandma Moses's paintings of landscapes through the seasons, accompanied by her own words, excerpted from her memoirs.

Panchyk, Richard. *American Folk Art for Kids: With 21 Activities*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004.

A survey of American folk art for kids, exploring a breadth of materials, styles, and artists as inspiration for children to create their own projects. Includes a foreword by Mr. Imagination.

Recommended Books for Teachers

Anderson, Brooke Davis. *Darger: The Henry Darger Collection at the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Full-color catalog of the American Folk Art Museum's Darger collection that offers an introduction to the controversial self-taught artist.

Arnett, Paul, and William Arnett, eds. *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South*. Atlanta, Ga.: Tinwood Books, 1999.

The definitive book on African American folk artists of the South. Volume 1 explores artists working in the years following World War II; Volume 2 focuses on artists working in the 1980s and '90s.

Bihalji-Merin, Oto, and Nebojša-Bato Tomašević. *World Encyclopedia of Naïve Art: A Hundred Years of Naïve Art*. Translated by Kordija Kveder et al. London: Frederick Muller, 1984.

A reference book on 19th- and 20th-century naïve art, including sections on specific geographic regions.

Fagaly, William A. *Tools of Her Ministry: The Art of Sister Gertrude Morgan*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Rizzoli International Publications, 2004.

The first monograph on this important self-taught artist, who considered her paintings and decorated objects tools for teaching the word of God.

Hollander, Stacy C. *American Radiance: The Ralph Esmerian Gift to the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

Catalog of this once private collection of American folk art, comprising hundreds of pieces of furniture, signs, ceramics, textiles, weathervanes, walking sticks, and other objects.

Hollander, Stacy C., and Brooke Davis Anderson. *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

An exploration of American folk art from the colonial period through the present as seen through highlights from the American Folk Art Museum's collection. *Bird of Paradise Quilt Top* is illustrated and discussed on pages 133 and 344–345. *Button Tree* is illustrated and discussed on pages 282 and 402.

Horwitz, Elinor Lander. *Contemporary American Folk Artists*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1975.

Offers profiles of the lives and work of 22 American painters, carvers, and environmental artists.

Lipman, Jean, and Tom Armstrong, eds. *American Folk Painters of Three Centuries*. New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980.

Catalog published in conjunction with a major retrospective of American folk art at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1980.

Lipman, Jean, Elizabeth V. Warren, and Robert Bishop. *Young America: A Folk-Art History*. New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1986.

A wide variety of folk art objects from the American Revolution to World War I presented chronologically, set within historical context.

Livingston, Jane, and John Beardsley. *Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980*. Jackson: Published for the Corcoran Gallery of Art by the University Press of Mississippi, 1982.

Catalog published in conjunction with the groundbreaking 1982 exhibition “Black Folk Art in America, 1930–1980” at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Maizels, John, ed. *Raw Vision Outsider Art Sourcebook*. Radlett, UK: Raw Vision, 2002.

A guide to art galleries, websites, organizations, publications, museums, and exhibitions of art of the self-taught, art brut, and contemporary folk art.

Rosenak, Chuck, and Jan Rosenak. *Contemporary American Folk Art: A Collector's Guide*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1996.

Includes biographical notes on 181 artists and lists of museums and galleries where one can see and buy their art.

———. *Museum of American Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Folk Art and Artists*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990.

A comprehensive look at 257 American folk artists, including biographical data and complete background information.

Sellen, Betty-Carol, with Cynthia J. Johanson. *Outsider, Self-Taught, and Folk Art Annotated Bibliography: Publications and Films of the 20th Century*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2002.

A guide containing entries for books, including reference books, biographies, exhibition publications of all kinds, picture books, and books geared to children, as well as periodicals, newspapers, and films about folk artists and their work.

———. *Self-Taught, Outsider, and Folk Art: A Guide to American Artists, Locations, and Resources*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2000.

A reference book listing individual artists, galleries, and museums organized by state, publications, exhibitions, festivals, art centers, organizations, and educational opportunities.

Ward, Gerald W.R., et al. *American Folk*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2001.

Highlights everyday life in 19th-century America through the folk art collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Warren, Elizabeth V., with Margaret S. Smeal. *The Perfect Game: America Looks at Baseball*. New York: American Folk Art Museum in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2003.

Captures portraits, watercolors, carvings, painted signage, lithographs, and a wide variety of everyday objects from the 1840s to the end of the 20th century that are reminders of baseball the way it used to be.

Wertkin, Gerard C., ed. *Encyclopedia of American Folk Art*. New York: Routledge in association with American Folk Art Museum, 2004.

A comprehensive reference book comprised of more than 600 entries, many of which refer to objects from the collection of the American Folk Art Museum.

Recommended Websites

American Folk Art Museum:

www.folkartmuseum.org

Contains information about the museum's exhibitions, collections, programs, and events, as well as an online catalog of the museum's noncirculating research library.

The de Young Museum, San Francisco:

“Teachers’ Guide to American Art”

www.thinker.org/fam/education/publications/guide-american/index.html

Online teachers’ guide produced by the de Young Museum, San Francisco.