

family guide

Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue

from the Collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and Camille O. and William H. Cosby Jr.

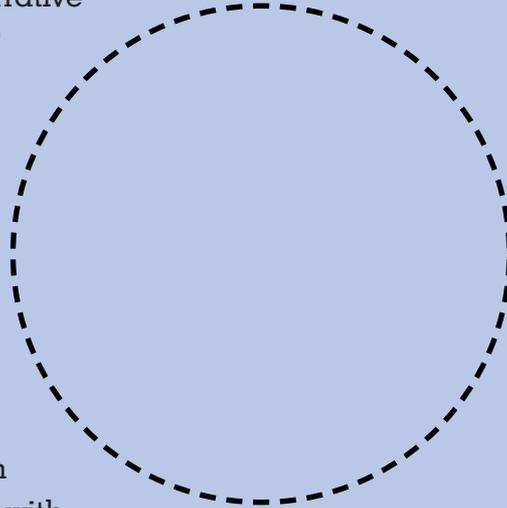


Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

Artists everywhere have stories to tell that speak to audiences across time, places, and cultures. Just like authors who tell tales with words, artists use visual language to invite us into a world of images, ideas, and imagination. Lend your imagination to an exploration of forms, styles, techniques, and materials in *Conversations: African and African American Artworks in Dialogue from the Collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and Camille O. and William H. Cosby Jr.*

Encounter some of the common threads that weave our stories together as part of the narrative of the human family. **Look closely** at works of art—what materials and techniques are used by artists to express their ideas? **Imagine** what story each artist might be telling. **Share** your ideas with those around you.

We respond to works of art for many different reasons. Build your visual vocabulary with the words you find in **purple** to help you exchange ideas with others in your group.



Written by Deborah Stokes
Edited by Colleen Foran
Designed by Lisa Buck Vann
Photographs by Franko Khoury unless otherwise noted

LOOK CLOSELY



IMAGINE



SHARE



Use this guide to help you “read” the artworks on display through thoughtful looking. Learn the ABCs of visual vocabulary—**form, style, material, and technique**—and reflect on the special role that art plays in all our lives.



things

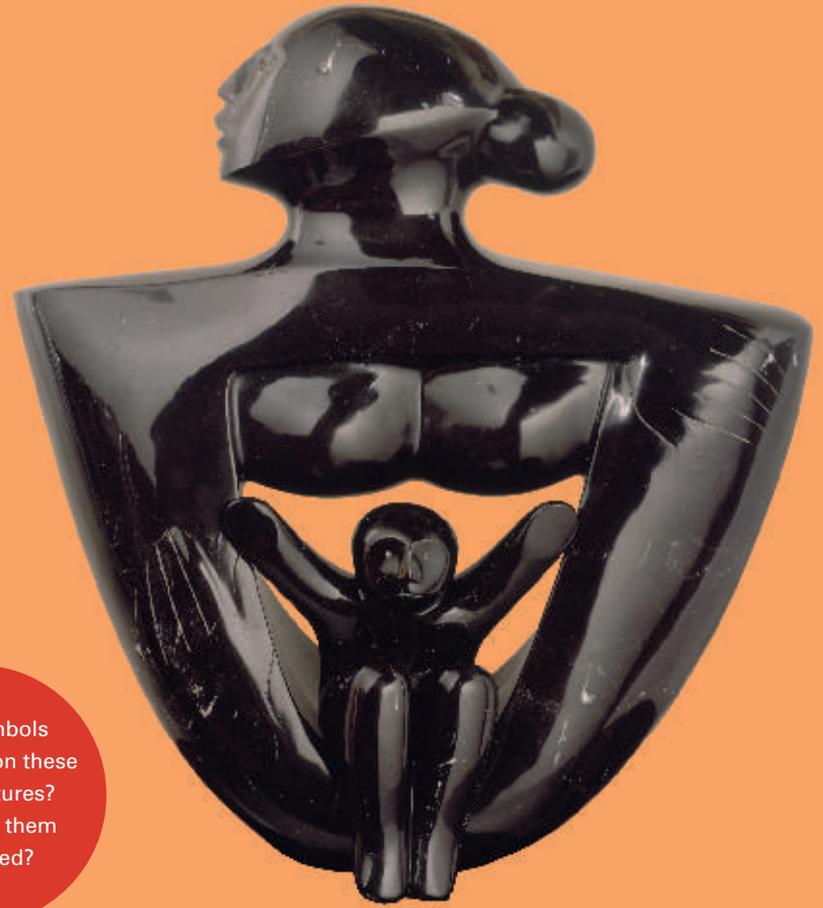


people



places





What symbols do you see on these two sculptures? Are any of them abstracted?

A **sculpture** is a three-dimensional (height + width + depth) work of art made by carving, modeling, or welding **materials** like wood, stone, metal, and clay into works of art.

These two sculptures were created approximately 100 years apart. The Kongo artist and Elizabeth Catlett created them to provide a visual representation of motherhood in their own cultures. What elements are alike? different?

Look for **symbols** in works of art that express or represent a particular idea, quality, or characteristic.

An **abstraction** uses imaginative lines, shapes, textures, and colors to create new ways to represent the ideas associated with a person, place, or thing. An abstract style can be puzzling, with details and symbols that might require more thought.

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Look for other mother-and-child pairs as you tour the galleries. How many can you find?



If you designed a sculpture to depict a mother and child, what materials and techniques would you use? What poses would you portray?



What materials are used on these two artworks? Which sculpting techniques? How do these choices change the way the artworks look?





FUN FACT
This sculpture is over seven feet tall!
How tall are you?

Sculptors work in three dimensions, the way objects exist in the space around us. The Senegalese artist Ousmane Sow has chosen as his subject the 18th century Haitian leader Toussaint Louverture. By constructing an artwork **larger than life**, the artist recognizes the important role of this historical figure and asks the viewer to look up to see the commanding gaze of the figure towering above us. Do you need to know the history of Haiti to feel these powerful emotions?

An *nganga* is a ritual specialist who communicates with the spirit world and offers spiritual guidance through the use of a carved figure called an *nkisi*. After the sculpture was completed, the *nganga* often attached or hid additional substances inside the *nkisi*, increasing the figure's sacred and healing power. These accumulative materials reveal how the object's **form** changed over time.



What materials were used to make these objects? Do any of the materials look like they have been added to the sculptures later on?



How do the elements of these sculptures create powerful presences?



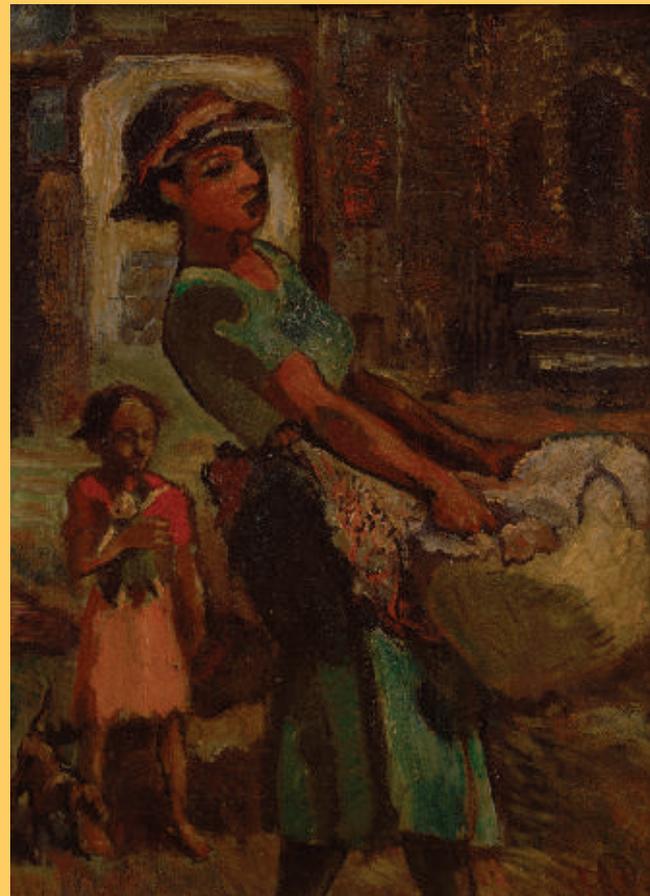
Stand tall like Toussaint Louverture. Now pose with your arm raised like the *nkisi*—describe how the different poses make you feel.





A **portrait** represents a particular person and displays his or her personality and character. The artist often frames the sitter from head to waist and includes clues about the person's social position or status. Joshua Johnston painted this portrait of Mrs. Thomas Donovan and her daughter Elinor more than 200 years ago!

FUN FACT
Fruit was often used by artists as a symbol of kindness, abundance, humility, and modesty.



A **genre** painting is a scene from everyday life.

Notice how the artist, James Amos Porter, uses the light glowing from the doorway to direct our eye to the mother's face. Where does your eye go next? Porter chose to place the forms in his painting in a triangular **composition**. Can you see it? Follow the mother's arms down to the laundry basket and then to her daughter in the background.

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Realistic details can tell us a lot about the subjects of portrait and genre paintings. Notice what each person is holding in these two artworks.



What would you be holding in your portrait? What would it say about your personality?



Both of these artworks represent a mother and child, but their clothes and poses are very different. Describe how they represent different versions of life.





Naturalism is an artistic style that aims to depict someone or something as observed in the real world.

In this painting, Henry Ossawa Tanner wanted to paint a scene viewers would recognize from their everyday lives. Does this scene remind you of anything from your own daily life?

Notice the man and the boy are not looking at each other or the viewer. What are they doing? What is the artist telling us?



How does the artist use light in this painting? What might it symbolize?



What words describe how you feel when looking at this scene?





There's a hidden symbol in this painting—can you spot it?

Realism is an artistic technique where an artist paints accurate details of the world around us in order to make the viewer feel a certain way. Realist paintings often make the viewer feel as if they are inside the painting.

Hughie Lee-Smith uses realism to create the illusion of three dimensions. At the center of the painting, a woman has her back to the viewer—what do you suppose she is thinking?

6

Do you think this painting represents a real or an imagined landscape? Which details make you think so?



Pose like the girl in the painting. Imagine what you might see or hear in the distance.



Describe some of the details in the landscape. Do they make you feel haunted, sad, or happy?





Add yourself in!
What would you
be doing?

Archibald J. Motley, Jr.'s **paintings** depict many scenes of African American city life. In *Stomp*, Motley uses details to express the sophistication of jazz music and the excitement of crowded dance floors at a late night Chicago dance club.

Malick Sidibé used his camera to capture every detail of an African dance club through **photographs**. Photographers like Sidibé frame real scenes to express ideas about their subjects. How is this different from how painters create artworks? This photograph shows a couple dancing together in Mali.

How do these works look similar? How do they look different? How do the techniques used to make the artworks change the way they look?



Imagine the mood of the painted scene. Now imagine the mood of the photographed one. How are they similar? different?



Describe the details you see in the painting and the photograph. Can you spot any that are the same in both?





A **still life** is an arrangement of everyday objects, such as fruit or flowers, used as subjects in drawings, paintings, and photographs.

While in France, Lois Mailou Jones captured light, color, and atmosphere in this dazzling still life painting that includes a landscape in the background.

FUN FACT

July 29th has been declared Lois Mailou Jones Day in Washington, D.C.!

8

What is the first thing you see? Look closely at the composition and use of light in the painting.



What do you see out of the window? Imagine yourself in the landscape beyond.



Describe where the composition takes your eye . . . and your imagination.





A **landscape** is a scenic view depicting natural features like the sky, mountains, trees, deserts, and rivers. A **cityscape** is a view depicting features made by humans such as skyscrapers, roads, and houses. Which of these paintings is a landscape? Which is a cityscape?

Look for the place in the painting of the waterfall where the earth meets the sky. This is called the **horizon line**. Can you find it? Is there a horizon line in the cityscape?



David Koloane's cityscape and Robert S. Duncanson's landscape both have a figure in the **foreground**. Can you find them? Think about the size of the figures. Which is bigger and which is smaller? Why do you think the artists chose to paint their subjects different sizes compared to the **background**?

What words come to mind when you look at these two artworks? peaceful? busy? noisy? calm?



Which would you rather visit, the landscape or the cityscape?



Describe what you would hear, smell, and feel in each painting.





A **collage** (*ko-LAAHj*), from the French "to glue," is a technique combining paint with various materials such as magazine and newspaper clippings, colored paper, cloth, or other found objects that are then glued to the paper or canvas.

Romare Bearden was a master of collage and improvised ways of combining different materials and inventing new surfaces and forms. In this collage depicting a jazz musician, the artist creates a composition of lively angles, colors, and patterns to convey an illusion of sound and movement.

How many shapes and colors can you find?

10

What materials did Bearden use to collage this artwork?



Bearden was inspired by music, especially the blues and jazz. What sounds do you hear?



Describe how a collage looks different from the other art techniques shown in the exhibition.





Clap your hands to create some musical rhythms and patterns.

Solomon Irein Wangboje made this image of an African drummer using a special technique known as **linocut**—he cut into a piece of linoleum, rubbed ink onto it, then pressed the carving onto a sheet of paper to make a **print**. (Linocuts can also be inked

and printed again to repeat the same image many times, like a stamp.) Carving the image first allows the artist to emphasize angles, patterns, and bold forms, like a drummer would emphasize rhythms.

How would this image look different if it were a painting? a photograph?



With this technique, the artist could make the same image in a different color—what color would you choose?



Think about the choice of color in this artwork. What mood does it convey to you?





Textile artists use **cloth** and **fibers** as materials to construct both useful and artistic works. Faith Ringgold is an artist known for her painted story quilts, which combine **painting** techniques with **quilted fabric** materials.

Notice how the artist conveys the theme of family by repeated use of painted portraits and sewn quilt squares. What story do you think Ringgold was telling? The carefully constructed composition displays many artistic choices—division of forms, space, size, shape, color, and pattern—combined to express both a feeling of improvisation and unity.

African artists have a long history of producing textiles. Some techniques include loom woven, factory printed, photo-transfer, appliqué, and embroidery. Can you find examples of some of these techniques in the exhibition? Do you think making a cloth using such methods would be easy or challenging?

12

On the quilt, how many portraits can you count? how many squares?



What type of fabrics are you wearing? What techniques do you think were used to make your clothing?



Ringgold used painting and traditional quilting to make her artwork—can you point out where she combined the two techniques?



FRONT COVER

Alma Woodsey Thomas
1891–1978, United States
A Fantastic Sunset (detail)
1970
Acrylic on canvas
120.8 x 120 cm (47 1/2 x 47 1/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart, permission
courtesy Charles Thomas Lewis

BACK COVER

Sara-Nar artists, Chad;
Bachama, Bura, Ga'anda, Hona,
and Tera artists, Nigeria
Bowls
Late 20th century
Gourd
Dimensions vary
National Museum of African Art,
gifts of Ellen Patterson Brown
and Mildred A. Morton
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
2000-29-4, 2000-29-11, 2000-29-26,
2000-29-31, 2000-29-48, 94-2-6

PAGE 1, LOWER LEFT

Gerard Sekoto
1913–1993, South Africa
Boy and the Candle (detail)
1943
Oil on canvas
46.2 x 36 cm (18 3/16 x 13 1/4 in.)
National Museum of African Art,
museum purchase, 2000-3-1

PAGE 2, LEFT

Kongo artist, Angola, Democratic
Republic of the Congo,
Republic of the Congo
Female figure with child (*niongi*)
Late 19th to early 20th century
Wood, pigment, mirror glass
54 x 27.9 x 26.4 cm
(21 1/4 x 11 x 10 3/8 in.)
National Museum of African Art, gift
of the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer
Foundation, 72-41-4

PAGE 2, RIGHT

Elizabeth Catlett
1915–2012, United States
Maternity
1980
Marble
66 x 61 x 21.6 cm (26 x 24 x 8 1/2 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart,
© Catlett Mora Family Trust/Licensed
by VAGA, New York, NY

PAGE 3, LEFT

Ousmane Sow
born 1935, Senegal
Toussaint Louverture et la vieille esclave
(*Toussaint Louverture and the Elderly
Slave*)
1989
Mixed media (iron, earth, jute, straw)
220 x 100 x 110 cm
(86 5/8 x 39 3/8 x 43 5/16 in.)
National Museum of African Art, museum
purchase, through exchange from Emil
Eisenberg, and Mr. and Mrs. Norman
Robbins, and with funds from Stuart Bohart
and Barbara Portman, 2009-8-1

PAGE 3, RIGHT

Kongo artist, Democratic Republic
of the Congo
Male figure
Late 19th to mid-20th century
Wood, glass, iron, pigment, cloth,
plant fiber, horn, nails
42.7 x 26.6 x 19.3 cm
(13/16 x 10 1/2 x 7 5/8 in.)
National Museum of African Art, gift of
Dr. and Mrs. Robert Kuhn, 91-22-1

PAGE 4, LEFT

Joshua Johnston
c. 1765–c. 1830, Baltimore area, Maryland
Mrs. Thomas Donovan and Elinor Donovan
c. 1799
Oil on canvas
76.8 x 64.8 cm (30 1/4 x 25 1/2 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart

PAGE 4, RIGHT

James Amos Porter
1905–1970, United States
Washenwoman
n.d.
Oil on canvas
45.8 x 33 cm (18 x 13 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart

PAGE 5

Henry Ossawa Tanner
1859–1937, United States
The Thankful Poor (detail)
1894
Oil on canvas
90.3 x 112.5 cm (35 1/2 x 44 1/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart

PAGE 6

Hughie Lee-Smith
1915–1999, United States
Festival's End #2
1987
Oil on canvas
97.8 x 98.5 cm (38 1/2 x 38 3/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and William H.
Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart,
© Estate of Hughie Lee-Smith/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

PAGE 7, LEFT

Archibald J. Motley Jr.
1891–1981, United States
Stomp (detail)
1927
Oil on canvas
76.3 x 91.5 cm (30 x 36 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart

PAGE 7, RIGHT

Malick Sidibé
born 1935, Mali
Nuit de Noël (Happy-Club)
1963, printed 2008
Gelatin silver print
Sheet: 61 x 50 cm (24 x 19 11/16 in.)
Image: 42.5 x 43 cm (16 3/4 x 16 15/16 in.)
National Museum of African Art,
museum purchase, 2009-12-3

PAGE 8

Loïs Mailou Jones
1905–1998, United States
Nature Morte aux Geraniums (detail)
1952
Oil on canvas
73.3 x 59.8 cm (28 7/8 x 23 1/2 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and William H.
Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart,
permission courtesy of the Loïs Mailou
Jones Pierre-Noel Trust

PAGE 9, LEFT

David Koloane
born 1938, South Africa
Moon and Dog
1995
Acrylic on canvas
109.3 x 104 cm (43 1/16 x 40 15/16 in.)
National Museum of African Art,
museum purchase, 96-31-1

PAGE 9, RIGHT

Robert S. Duncanson
1821–1872, United States
Falls of Minnehaha
1862
Oil on canvas
92 x 71.8 cm (36 1/4 x 28 1/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart

PAGE 10

Romare Bearden
1911–1988, United States
Sitting In at Barron's (detail)
1980
Collage on Masonite
100.8 x 75.5 cm (39 5/8 x 29 3/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart,
© Romare Bearden Foundation/
Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

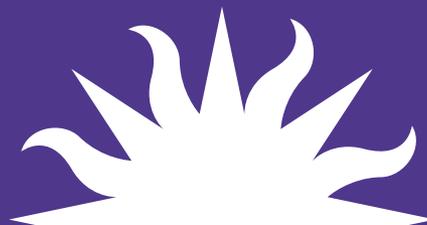
PAGE 11

Solomon Irein Wangboje
1930–1998, Nigeria
The Music Maker—Mood V (detail)
1965
Linocut on paper
36.2 x 29.8 cm (14 1/4 x 11 3/4 in.)
National Museum of African Art, gift of
Ambassador and Mrs. Benjamin Hill
Brown Jr., 76-3-18

PAGE 12

Faith Ringgold
born 1930, United States
Camille's Husband's Birthday Quilt (detail)
1988
Painted and pieced canvas and silk
269.3 x 207.8 cm (106 x 81 3/4 in.)
Collection of Camille O. and
William H. Cosby Jr.
Photograph by Frank Stewart,
Faith Ringgold © 1988

Now choose a work
of art that you liked best.
Explain your choice
to your group.



Smithsonian Institution
National Museum of African Art
950 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C.
africa.si.edu



Looking at these calabashes, count how many different shapes and patterns you can find.

A commonly found material in households across Africa is a dried calabash (gourd). They are often hollowed out and used as containers to carry water, food, and drink. Larger ones are made into percussion instruments. Artists use a technique called **pyroengraving**—carefully cutting into the hard surface with a heated knife or blade—to create finely detailed designs.

Create your own work of art at home or at school and write a story that draws on some of the ideas that you collected today!

Did you miss something in the exhibition? You don't have to see everything at one time. Visit the museum again and again!

Want to find out more? Visit the museum online at africa.si.edu.

**THE ARTS
CAN TAKE
US PLACES!**