



American Regionalism: Selections from the Art Museum Collection

January 29, 2011 – December 23, 2012

University of Wyoming Art Museum 2011
Educational Packet for K-12 Teachers

Purpose of this Packet: To provide K-12 teachers with background information on the exhibition and age appropriate suggestions for exploring the concepts, meanings and artistic intent of artwork before, during and after the museum visit.

Curricular Unit Topic: Exploring the artists and time period represented in *American Regionalism: Selections from the Art Museum Collection*.

The focus of this educational packet and curricular unit is to **observe, question, explore, create and reflect**.

Observe: Students will observe the work of artists who used a realist pictorial language to represent American scenes or places during the years between World War I and II, particularly during the Great Depression. They will look closely at paintings, prints, and drawings, exploring the ideas and themes and the artistic qualities: colors used, marks made, subject matter, style, and techniques.

Question: Students will read, write, sketch, and listen to museum educators, and then come up with questions about the work and the artists who created it. Students will question the materials and techniques used and their responses to the artwork in the exhibition.

Explore: They may explore the cultural, political, and historical periods during which the work was created, considering advancements in science, math, and technology. They will learn about the art movements of the work represented and will be encouraged to research vocabulary words related to the exhibit.

Create: Students will be given time to practice sketching and drawing and may create their own paintings, prints, or drawings that reflect the style of the artwork on exhibit. Work on art projects may occur either in Shelton Studio or in their school art room.

Reflect: Students will evaluate their final artwork with other students from their classes and with teachers and museum educators. They will receive feedback on the artwork and the concepts behind the making of the artwork. After this process, students may write an essay about their art, the artist, or their museum experience.



Minetta Good (American, 1895-1946), *Columbia Heights, Brooklyn*, not dated, lithograph, 9-1/4 x 14 inches, Gift of the Works Progress Administration, University of Wyoming Art Museum Collection, 1968.73

American Regionalism: Selections from the Art Museum Collection

Introduction: The works displayed in this exhibit are primarily lithographs and etchings of Regionalist works from the Art Museum's permanent collection. Regionalism is defined broadly, encompassing the Museum's best American Scene works from various regions of the U.S. The works selected use a realist pictorial language to represent scenes or places, and, with a few exceptions, were created during the years between the World War I and II and at the height of the Great Depression. The exhibition is organized into four sections: the Midwest, the South, the East, and the West, which demonstrates the variety and similarities of Regionalism occurring across the United States. The resulting geographical divisions cause the works to act as portraits of each region, and yet considered all together, evoke the whole of America. The subject matter ranges from farm work, family, and community, to scenes of transportation. All of these are characteristics that typify the American experience during the Depression.

Central to this exhibition is Thomas Hart Benton, who was a prolific spokesperson for the Regionalist movement during the 1930's. His celebrity as a great American artist meant that he traveled the country painting local experiences. His dedication to this style was such that, even after the movement had peaked, he refused to submit to the new fad of Abstract Expressionism or other subsequent art forms, and so some of his works featured in the exhibit were actually created in late 1960 and the early 1970's. These later works represent his stubborn defiance of new forms of art. Benton is represented in all regions of this exhibition except the East. His exodus from the East was due to his belief in the corrupting influences of urban modernization and its inherent leanings toward European modernism. He voiced support for a new American art that expressed local community values imperiled by the corrosive influences of modernism. Other artists, who worked during this period, including a number of women such as Minetta Good, are represented in the exhibit because their work reflects similar local values. Their subjects range from farm work and family to transportation scenes. All of these characteristics typify America during the Depression and thus provide iconic imagery of the period that is quintessential "Americana".

Two other artists most typically associated with Regionalism, John Steuart Curry from Kansas, and Grant Wood from Iowa, are included in the exhibit. While they are nearly as synonymous with the Regionalist movement

as Benton, these three men's styles are diverse. Wood is renowned for his sardonic humor conveyed in a precise realist style. He is also known for his curvaceous hills rolling over dream-like fantasy farmscapes. Curry is less known for his artistic skill, but has been praised for his regard for social justice expressed through allegory. Benton, Curry, and Wood are generally considered by art historians to be the leaders in the Regionalist movement. Art critics such as Thomas Craven, who proclaimed their arrival as the beginning of an American Renaissance, solidified their notoriety as Regionalists, as well as great American artists. Their works were viewed initially as the start of a national art movement.

During the Great Depression, the government, already rapidly expanding in 1933, began several programs of art patronage for artists. The most well known of these is the Works Progress Administration. One of the goals of this multi-faceted New Deal agency was the development of iconic American imagery through the employment of artists to create grand murals in newly constructed government building projects. The three Midwesterners, Benton, Curry, and Wood, were regularly handpicked for these highly publicized works. The Treasury Section of Fine Art, headed by Edward Bruce, was another government agency that employed artists. His disdain for abstraction made representational realism the preferred style of the Section. Because commissions for post office murals were widely available through Treasury Section competitions, Regionalism became the dominant American style.



Joe Leborg (American), *Paving*, not dated, lithograph, 15 x 10-3/4 inches, gift of the Works Progress Administration, University of Wyoming Art Museum Collection, 1968.106



American Regionalism: Selections from the Art Museum Collection

History: The collapse of Wall Street in 1929 initiated an economic crisis with worldwide repercussions. During the 1930's the United States increased its isolation, turning its attention inward to deal with the domestic situation. American art followed this trend toward nationalism and national artistic autonomy. The desire for art with American themes led to the affirmation of the artistic movement known as the American Scene, a larger movement that includes both American Regionalism and Social Realism. Scene artists, though having different processes, had in common the use of an intense and effective realist language to describe the many and varied aspects of America during the years of the Great Depression. This movement sharply rejected modern art. The leaders of American Regionalism argued that art serves a vital function in society, and the Federal Government supported this view and protected the fledgling movement. As a result, Regionalism managed to convey an American experience that was both nationalistic and honest about society in a troubled time.

The regional painters of the period looked with nostalgia on the past, seeking the roots of their culture and the most genuine American values. The urban localists of the East were contemporaries of the regionalists. They concentrated on the contemporary world, examining how life in big cities, with its heavy demands, can alienate people, presenting the modern world with an attitude that oscillated between bitter disdain and an optimistic celebration of daily life. Because America is understood to be a pluralist society, the American Scene is viewed with a diverse set of themes. Mythic American history was a common element in Regionalist works, such as Benton's *Lewis and Clark on Eagle Creek*. Benton drew from American literary imagery in works such as *Huck Finn and Slow Train Through Arkansas*. American work life was another common theme, coupling hard work with small town folk life. Agrarian depictions were emblematic of the movement. Benton was also known for realistic representations of cowboys, possibly symbolizing two thematic modalities: work, and the mobility of rapid movements across the landscape. Edward Hopper's *Locomotive* is a variation on these themes.

Artists' Biographies:

Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975)

Thomas Hart Benton was born on April 15, 1889 in Neosho, Missouri. He spent most of his childhood in boarding schools and in Washington, D.C. and landed his first job as a cartoonist for the Joplin American in Missouri. Benton studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, resided briefly in Paris and New York City, and then settled in Kansas City, working as an instructor of drawing/painting at the Kansas City Art Institute. His most famous pupil was the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock. Benton was part of the Regionalist movement and is well known for his mural paintings depicting everyday scenes of Midwestern life. The figures in his works often appear cartoon-like because of the way he distorts the bone and muscular structure of faces. His most famous murals are located in the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City and in the Truman Library in Independence. Benton died January 19, 1975 in his studio.

Virginia Dudley (1913–1976)

Virginia Dudley lived and worked in Rising Fawn, Georgia for most of her artistic career. She belonged to the New Orleans Association of Artists and worked in a wide range of media. Dudley had exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Smithsonian Institution. She was an art educator and lecturer until her death in 1981. Her lithograph, *Sharecroppers* is arguably not a work of Regionalism, so much as Social Realism.

Jim Turnbull (1909–1976)

Jim Turnbull studied art at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and St. Louis School of Fine Arts. His work was grounded in American Scene subjects. Turnbull's style during the thirties splits the difference between the Social Realists and Regionalists. Like many other artists during the Depression, Turnbull was an itinerant painter of the American Scene, roaming across the country in search of sharecroppers, chain gangs, and miners who are featured in his work. This type of work was concerned with depicting the reality of the hardships in the South.

Reginald Marsh (1898–1954)

Reginald Marsh, renowned for his Depression-era portrayals of New York City life, was born in Paris to American parents and raised in Nutley, New Jersey. His artistic career began during his student days at Yale, when he served as the editor and cartoonist for the Yale Record. After graduating in 1920, he spent several years working as an illustrator for various New York based periodicals, including the Daily News, Vanity Fair and the New Yorker. Returning from Europe in 1926, Marsh enrolled in classes at the Art Students' League in New York. His instructors included two of the first generation Ashcan School painters, John Sloan and George Luks, whose urban iconography came to exert an important influence on his art. Following this, Marsh painted murals for the Post Office Building in Washington, D.C. and for the New York Customs House. However, he spent most of his time producing paintings, etchings, lithographs and drawings of such city themes as subways, burlesque halls, Bowery bums, amusement parks, and leggy girls on 14th Street. Many of his pictures, executed in watercolor and egg tempera or brush and ink, consist of views of crowds of people taking part in rowdy social rituals. His vigorous, baroque style, in which he emphasized physical action and strongly modeled forms, is rooted in the tradition of such masters as Peter Paul Rubens and Eugene Delacroix, and this influence connects his style to that of Thomas Hart Benton's. Although Marsh's subjects often relate to those of the Social Realists of the day, he chose to remain aloof from all political entanglement, making his ideas known only through his art.

John Steuart Curry (1897–1954)

Curry was born on a farm in Dunavant, Kansas, November 14, 1897. His technique as a painter was often criticized, but to quote Benton on Curry, "Art is something beyond painting." (Adams, Henry. "Space, Weather, Myth, and Abstraction in the Art of John Steuart Curry." John Steuart Curry, Inventing the West. Ed. Patricia A. Junker. New York: Hudson Hills Press, Inc., 1998. Pg. 116) Curry once told art critic Thomas Craven that his style was formed "on the King James version of the Bible." (Craven, Thomas. "John Steuart Curry". Scribner's Magazine. 103, no. 1, January 1938, pg. 37) Indeed, much of his work does appear apocalyptic, but this was because Curry was as much an activist in his work as a pure painter. Many of his paintings have biblical overtones—that is, they conflate Kansas happenings, such as a flood, with Bible stories. Because of his interest in subjects such as boundlessness, emptiness, displacement, and annihilation, Curry's paintings form a bridge between the moralizing sentimentality of the nineteenth century and the existential anxiety of the twentieth century. Helplessness is a pervasive theme in Curry's paintings. Substantial figures, whether animal or human, are overwhelmed by some all-powerful natural force—a bolt of lightning, a flood, a thunderstorm, or a tornado. Weather in Curry's work may be symbolic of the uncontrollable unnatural force of America's economic woes.

Gene Kloss (1903–1996)

Gene Kloss attended Berkeley, California where she took a seminar in etching. Her instructor, a perfectionist draftsman, was amazed at the first print she pulled from his hundred-year-old press. Enthusiastically, he predicted she would be an etcher. Kloss graduated with honors in art from the University of California at Berkeley in 1924 and that same year married Phillips Kloss, a writer and poet. Together they set out to explore the Southwest with a small etching press in their car. Eventually they established dual residence in Taos and Berkeley. They acquired forty acres of mesa land and built an adobe home and studio where they settled for life. The main objective to her work was always recording her impressions of things she considered beautiful and important.

Joseph Vorst (1897–1947)

Joseph Vorst was born in Essen, Germany in 1897. His early training in art came from teachers of French Impressionism in Berlin. Most believe that he immigrated to Missouri in the late twenties to escape the rise of Nazi fascism. This has been inferred from the fact that he joined the American Artists Congress, and in 1936 he signed this left-wing organization's famous "Call" to combat fascism. In a pervading climate of isolationism this was a bold stand to take. While in Missouri, Vorst became acquainted with Thomas Hart Benton, whom he referred to as a personal friend and associate.

Minetta Good (1895–1946)

Minetta Good received her formal art training from Cecilia Beaux and at the Art Students League under F. Luis Mora. Although a native New Yorker, Good lived in Califon and Freehold, New Jersey for most of the 1920s and 1930s. She was a versatile painter highly talented in landscape, still life and figurative works. In 1932, she was awarded the prestigious Eloise Egan Prize for best landscape painting by the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors for her canvas, *Idle Quarry*. Good exhibited frequently at such venues as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Philadelphia Art Alliance, the City Art Museum in St. Louis and the Salons of America, of which she was one of the founders. She also was the subject of many solo exhibitions, including a showing of her work at the Bamberger Galleries in the early 1930s. In 1940, Good was responsible for painting *Evangeline* in a St. Martinsville, Louisiana post office mural. A gifted muralist and printmaker working in New York City for the WPA Project, Good's painting career was cut short due to her untimely passing at the age of fifty-one years old.

Grant Wood (1891–1942)

Grant Wood was born on a farm near the small town of Anamosa, Iowa in 1891, and is most closely associated with Regionalism, advancing figurative painting of rural American themes in an aggressive rejection of European abstraction. He was influenced in the latter part of the 1920s by the Gothic and Renaissance styles of northern Europe, especially the art of Jan Van Eyck. This period moved his compositional arrangement toward greater realism. From 1924 to 1935 Wood lived in the loft of a carriage house that he turned into his personal studio at "5 Turner Alley" (the studio had no address until Wood made one up himself). In 1932, Wood helped found the Stone City Art Colony near his hometown to help artists get through the Great Depression. He became a great proponent of regionalism in the arts, lecturing throughout the country on the topic. Wood taught painting at the University of Iowa's School of Art from 1934. During that time, he supervised mural painting projects, mentored students, produced a variety of his own works, and became a key part of the University's cultural community. Wood died in 1942, one day before his 51st birthday.

Edward Hopper (1882–1967)

Hopper lived through a period of the 20th century marked by profound historical, cultural, and artistic change; but through it all he stayed faithful to himself, making no changes to his way of painting and not even leaving New York except for brief trips. Hopper dedicated himself to painting from an early age, studying at the New York School of Art from 1900 to 1906, beginning with classes in advertising illustration and then studying art under Robert Henri. Between 1915 and 1923 he made about fifty etchings in which he examined the themes he would return to again and again throughout his career: figures alone within the urban setting and isolated buildings set down in landscape. Beginning in the 1930s, Hopper was looked upon as the leading member of the Regionalist movement in American art, although he denied any such association. With powerful eloquence, his evocative and deeply moving paintings present images of solitude, alienation, loneliness, the lack of communication between individuals.

Alexander Hogue (1898–1994)

Born in Memphis, Missouri, Alexander Hogue grew up in Denton, Texas, and studied art at the College of Art and Design in Minneapolis. He lived in New York for four years, returning to Texas every summer to paint until 1925, when he settled in Dallas. Beginning in 1926, Hogue made extended summer painting trips to Taos, becoming close friends with artists "Buck" Dunton, Victor Higgins, Emil Bisttram, and Ernest Blumenschein; many considered Hogue to be Blumenschein's protégé. It was here that he became especially interested in the Pueblo Indians' spiritual lives and relationship to the land. Along with artists John McCrady and Peter Hurd, Hogue is typically relegated to the margins of Regionalism, because his work does not depict Midwest local scenes, focusing instead on the landscape and people of New Mexico and Texas. A painter, printmaker, and muralist known for his Dust Bowl series and early 20th-century depictions of Indian life in Taos, Hogue worked in a style that was both abstract and realistic.

John McCrady (1911–1968)

In the mid-1930s, McCrady was painting almost exclusively the southern black scene. *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* was featured in Life magazine in 1941.

Lesson Overview: Students will learn about the work of some of the American Regionalists, exploring the work of key artists in this movement. Students will look to see what these works of art portray: the ideas, historical and cultural information, place and time. Students and teachers will consider this work in the context of how it defined an American art movement.

In the Shelton Studio students will be given the opportunity to complete a printing, an acrylic painting, or drawing modeled after any one of the American Regionalist prints, depicting their ideas about contemporary culture, time and place. Students might model stylistically the work of the artists on exhibit, but the ideas they convey will be their own and related to their own culture and events.

Students and teachers may research and engage in conversations about the American Regionalists' work before arriving at the art museum. While here they will spend time in the galleries closely observing the work, discussing it, writing about it, and even sketching it. They will begin conversations about the concepts behind the work, which will lay the groundwork for future opportunities to pursue these ideas in their home classrooms and schools.



Joseph P. Vorst (German/America, 1897-1947), *Mississippi River Bank*, 1940, lithograph, 9-1/8 x 11 inches, Gift of Mr. Richard Plotka, University of Wyoming Art Museum Collection, 1977.107

Essential Questions:

Grades K-6:

- What stories can artists tell?
- Choose an artwork and tell us what you think the story is.
- Where is the location of the story? How can you tell?
- How can we know what the artist is trying to tell us? What clues should we look for?

Grades 6-12:

- What does the word regional mean?
- What regions are represented in this exhibit?
- What do we mean by the term American Regionalism?
- Can art influence the way we think about a place and time? How?
- If you were to tell a story about your place and time through the use of pictorial images, what story would you tell?

Art Questions to Consider:

Grades K-6:

- What do you see?
- Can you describe how these prints all look the same or differently from each other?
- Describe the kinds and types of marks the artists have made.
- What shapes and forms do you see?
- How do the artists create texture?
- What colors do you see?
- How does the use of so much black ink make you feel?

Grades 6-12:

- How many different printmaking processes are represented in this exhibit?
- How would you use the same techniques to make your own print of a place that has meaning for you?
- Compare and contrast the elements of design in one of the urban scenes with one of the rural depictions. How are they alike? How are they different?
- Which image appeals to you the most? Why?
- Which is your least favorite? Why?



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Pre-visit activities: To prepare students for their museum visit and extend learning possibilities, we suggest that teachers consider the following activities:

- Students research art between World War I and II in art magazines, books, and on the web.
- Students research the Great Depression and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the impact this time period had on people in the U.S.
- Students explore the techniques used in this style.
- Students explore significant political, economic, and historical events of the early 20th century.
- Students create their own visual timeline of the period, identifying important events and individuals.
- Students research printmaking techniques such as monoprints, lithographs, serigraphs, and silkscreens.
- Students experiment with colors, brushstrokes, and surfaces to be used in painting.

Prerequisite knowledge: Museum educators work with teachers to ensure all projects are age and skills appropriate. Teachers may select words from this vocabulary list for students to look up and understand:

Printmaking: Intaglio
Etching
Monoprint
Wood block print
Lithograph

The Great Depression
The Works Progress Administration
Americana

Museum Activities

Part 1 – Time frame: 45 minutes

- Students will closely observe the works of the American Regionalists on exhibit in the art museum.
- They will identify lines, shapes, forms, patterns, repetition, light and shadow, technique and style in the existing work.
- Students will discuss what they see with museum educators.
- They will explore the styles of art practiced by the artists in the exhibit.
- They will explore the concepts behind the artwork in the exhibit.
- Using worksheets, students will respond in writing or drawing to the work they see by recording their observations and their own thoughts about the work.
- Students will answer questions on a museum worksheet that engages them in new thinking about the artwork, such as: if you were to write a new title for this piece, or what story would you write about this piece based upon what you see?
- Students will engage in discussions about their observations and their answers and sketches with one another and with the teachers.

Part 2 – Time frame: 45 minutes (minimum)

The following projects may be considered individually, or combined, or museum staff will work with teachers to develop specific projects that support ongoing classroom work.

- Students will explore the concepts and techniques demonstrated in the art of the American Regionalists by painting, drawing, or creating a print that relates in some way or responds to the art and ideas discussed.
- Students will create new artwork using a style exhibited by the artists in the American Regionalists.

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Post visit activities: We have found that students achieve maximum benefit from a museum visit when time is scheduled for post-visit activities. Here are some suggestions:

- Students discuss or write about their museum experiences, reviewing what they learned, what has special meaning for them, how they will use new information and skills.
- Students continue to research the works of artists and the concepts of Regionalism in America (an essay, art work, research paper).
- Students research other important events that were happening during this same time period in science, math, politics, popular culture and more.
- Students create their own drawings, prints and paintings to explore new ideas.
- Students create their own artwork focusing on an idea or event that has special significance for them.

Suggested uses in the curriculum: The study of the artists included in the exhibition, *American Regionalism: Selections from the Art Museum Collection*, and their artworks, plus the historical context of the early 20th century as it relates to multiple curricular areas including art, history, social studies, writing, reading, math, geography, and philosophy. Museum staff will work with teachers to address specific Wyoming Teaching Standards and to align museum projects and studies with ongoing classroom curricular units.

Recommended resources:

These are just a few of the many resources available. We welcome other suggestions that teachers and students find helpful that can be added to this list.

- UW Art Museum website: www.uwyo.edu/artmuseum
- Internet and library searches on the individual artists represented in the collection
- *Thomas Hart Benton and the American South* by J. Richard Gruber
- *Renegade Regionalists: the Modern Independence of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry* by James M. Dennis
- *American-Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work* by Nick Taylor
- *John Steuart Curry, Inventing the West* by Ed. Patricia A. Junker
- Library of Congress website: www.loc.gov

Materials for selected Shelton Studio projects are provided by the art museum.

Assessment and documentation of museum tour and studio experiences: In order to ensure that our museum tour program is meeting the needs of teachers and students, we may ask that participants help us assess the activities and learning that take place. Examples of evaluation tools include:

1. Students may self-assess using a quick survey that asks them to consider their response to the gallery discussions and explorations, and their studio experience,
2. Teachers will assess the overall visit by completing a quick-survey that asks for their observation and assessment of students' experiences, as well as assessment of the overall process of the museum visit.
3. Museum educators will record their observations and assessments.
4. When time permits, we will ask students to briefly discuss their art completed in the Shelton Studio.
5. Museum staff may take photographs of students and teachers to document the learning taking place and the work produced during a museum visit. These are available to teachers upon written request for use in teaching and student portfolios.