

WHEN THE CURTAIN NEVER COMES DOWN

A Teacher's Guide for Middle and High School



AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

2 LINCOLN SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY

(COLUMBUS AVE. BETWEEN 65TH AND 66TH STS.)

WWW.FOLKARTMUSEUM.ORG

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AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

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Cover image: Photographer unidentified, *Installation by Marie Lieb with Torn Strips of Linen Designed on the Floor of the Psychiatric Hospital Where She Lived*, c. 1894, color print, 4 1/2 x 6 5/16", Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg, Germany, 1771_1. © Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

WHEN THE CURTAIN NEVER COMES DOWN

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM, NEW YORK, MARCH 26-JULY 5, 2015

Most self-taught artists, including those who have shaped art environments and yard shows, can be perceived as performance artists. Their work is infused with daily rituals, public actions, gestures, and enactments, defining a lifelong artistic practice for which *the curtain never comes down*. Beyond paintings and sculpture, this exhibition includes ceremonial clothes, kinetic apparatuses, ephemeral installations, writings, fragments of ever-changing constructions, music, recordings, and other statements that have been captured by photographers and filmmakers. The inventive devices and countless strategies these artists configure are expressions of an alter ego, which they assume for its power to transform the world and, above all, to transform their own connections to reality.

Marie Lieb's poetic installation, made from torn strips of cloth arranged in floral and star patterns across the floor of a common room where she lived over a century ago, is among these expressions. Little is known about this piece or its author. Such creations were, and still are, usually destroyed or undocumented. Historically, collectors and museums have prioritized artworks that are readily collectible and more conventional in their materials and techniques, like painting, drawings, and sculpture—an attitude that elucidates a direct relationship between conservation and recognition. This exhibition delves into an underside of self-taught art and art brut, opening a door to the study of the field's neglected facets. Under a new light, it considers these creations as interdisciplinary and within a continuous body of work rather than one-dimensional or strictly object-oriented.

In 1930 the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule regretted that observers too often “admire the shape of a jar, but will forget to carefully study the position of the man who holds it and drinks from it,” urging people to “enter into the space” of an object. *When the Curtain Never Comes Down* navigates this fertile and intangible domain, attempting to engage with the ghost of each artist.

—Valérie Rousseau, PhD, Curator, *Self-Taught Art and Art Brut*

Major support for the exhibition is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts: Art Works. Additional support is provided by The Coby Foundation, Ltd., Joyce Berger Cowin, the David Davies and Jack Weeden Fund for Exhibitions, Fashion Institute of Technology, the Gerard C. Wertkin Exhibition Fund, the Leir Charitable Foundations, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Designed for educators to use as a resource in the classroom before, after, or in lieu of a visit to the American Folk Art Museum, this teacher's guide provides information about selected artists and artworks, topics for classroom discussion, writing activities, and art projects that introduce key ideas of the exhibition *When the Curtain Never Comes Down*. The guide is designed for those teaching at the middle and high school levels. While classroom teachers across the city, state, and nation often cover similar content, each educator has a distinct approach to engaging their learners in the material. In response, the museum's education team has created a guide to borrow from and build on to meet the needs of your specific classroom environment and teaching style.

There are multiple objectives for using this guide. One goal is to empower educators working with students of varying abilities to teach from the images presented here, and to promote teaching through an exploration of art by the self-taught. Another goal is to encourage students to ask critical questions when investigating visual art as a primary source. We hope this material will support dynamic learning in your classroom and help your students draw parallels with subjects they are already studying.

For each artist featured in this teacher guide, you will find accompanying artwork, background information on the creator, and a list of resources. In addition, each lesson plan contains questions to spark discussion as well as suggestions for related activities and projects for students meant to extend their learning even further. The questions section is separated into three categories: **Questions for Careful Looking** ask students to observe each object in great detail and then work together to decode what they see, **Questions for Further Discussion** tie in threads of background information on the objects to further the looking process, and **Questions for Context** help students identify and understand the cultural climate in which the object was created. Unlike the Questions for Careful Looking, Questions for Context encourage students to consider their responses independent of the artwork. Depending on the contextual information your students already have about the originating time and place of the object, you might want to ask these questions before or after students discuss what they see in the image.

Whether you are in the museum or your own classroom, we are certain that you will discover new and inspiring ways to integrate work by self-taught artists into your teaching to make history and culture come alive for your students!

TEACHING FROM IMAGES AND OBJECTS

Object-based learning, particularly from museum collections, activates students' powers of observation, interpretation, and analysis. At the American Folk Art Museum, our teaching methodology is inquiry-based and discussion-driven. Through facilitated conversation about objects, students construct their own interpretations of the works, thus establishing ownership of their ideas and cultivating confidence and pride in learning. As students link their observations and interpretations to those of their peers and bring their prior knowledge into the conversation, the class develops a collective body of knowledge, while individuals hone their critical thinking skills.

We recommend a few techniques that will help you guide students through the meaning-making process as you facilitate discussions about works of art:

Invite students to look carefully.

Start by asking students to take a minute to look silently at the work of art. At first, this process might be uncomfortable for students who are not accustomed to silent looking, but it will become easier with each new image. This invitation to look is essential; we are rarely encouraged to *slow down* to make observations. By spending a few moments together examining the image, students will start the lesson with a shared experience.

Use repetition in your Questions for Careful Looking.

Repeat questions you have posed to your students with different objects so they can anticipate the questions and feel comfortable responding. Repetition will help students better understand questions they might not have understood the first time, and it will provide them with a series of useful starting-point questions for when they approach an image on their own.

Engage students through open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions create space for multiple viewpoints and more than one “right” answer. In addition, these types of questions encourage discussion as opposed to single-word answers. When asked to respond to an open-ended question, students are invited to participate and share their ideas without fear of giving the “wrong” answer.

Paraphrase all students' comments.

As students offer their ideas and interpretations, paraphrase their comments to ensure that the whole group has heard each student's ideas. In addition, by voicing a student's comment in different words, you validate that comment and let the student know that you have heard the idea and understood it. Be sure to paraphrase all comments in a way that does not suggest that one comment is more valuable than another.

Introduce new vocabulary in authentic ways.

As you paraphrase students' comments, attempt to balance the vocabulary that students already have with new words. Vocabulary is best acquired when presented in context, and a discussion about a work of art in which everyone is focused on a shared stationary image provides a perfect opportunity for this experience.

Ask students to support all observations and interpretations.

Ask students to back up their inferences and ideas with evidence from the work of art to legitimize their interpretations. Ask for visual evidence even when an interpretation seems obvious.

Point to elements of the image to which students refer.

If you have the opportunity to project an image of a work of art, point to areas of the picture that students address in their comments. This helps ground each comment and ensures that all students can see the element being discussed.

Weave background information into the discussion in appropriate and authentic ways.

As students develop their interpretations of the work of art, you may want to share threads of background information with the group. Information about the object should further the looking process, contextualize the artwork for students, or appropriately challenge the group to push the limits of their thinking.

At the beginning of each lesson, you will find Questions for Careful Looking. At times these questions relate specifically to details in the work of art, while in other instances they have a more general scope, and they may appear in multiple lessons in this Curriculum Guide. Both types of questions are equally important in the discussion, but the latter—the more general question—is critical in order for all possible observations to be heard. However, if a general discussion seems to have tapered off, simply asking for further detailed observations can revitalize conversation and allow students who haven't yet shared ideas to find new layers and meaning in the object and lead the group in new directions.

By beginning your discussion of an artwork with concrete observations, you ensure that all students have the same starting point. As the discussion progresses, students will naturally apply a historical context to the work; with markedly increasing ease, they will piece together what they see with what they know. At the same time, they will gain confidence in asking questions about what they see and seeking the information to answer them. As a result, students will use what they have taken from the conversation and apply it to the ensuing project. In the process, students will also gain experience scrutinizing primary sources and works of art in general, while at the same time cultivating their visual literacy and critical-thinking skills.

NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS

The lessons in this teacher’s guide address a variety of New York State Learning Standards and all strands of the New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts, and Common Core Standards (www.corestandards.org). Because lesson plans are designed to be adapted and tailored by educators, they are not accompanied by individual lists of standards addressed. The standards listed below reflect those inherent in many of the lessons and programs in the museum.

The Arts Learning Standards

- Standard 1: Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts and participate in various roles in the arts.
- Standard 2: Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in arts in various roles.
- Standard 3: Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- Standard 4: Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Social Studies Learning Standards

- Standard 2: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.
- Standard 3: Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.

English Language Arts Learning Standards

- Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
- Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for literary response and expression.
- Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
- Standard 4: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for social interaction.

New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts

- Strand 1: Artmaking
- Strand 2: Literacy in the Arts
- Strand 3: Making Social, Cultural, and Historical Connections
- Strand 4: Community and Cultural Resources

Lonnie Holley

(b. 1950, United States)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lonnie Holley's *Keeping a Record of It (Harmful Music)* (1986) is a juxtaposition of industrial and organic materials conjoined in a cycle of use and reuse, death and reanimation. It is also the cover image of the artist's latest album, *Keeping a Record of It* (2013), suggesting that the artist situates his found-object sculptures, the environments in which they emerge, and his musical performances in a shared constellation.

Holley's musical compositions are at once focused and expansive, rooted in the ethos and improvisatory, repetitive structure of spiritual and blues performative traditions. Wholly maverick in their construction and delivery, they are improvised, made of a reusable set of themes, lyrics, and refrains to emphatic and dramatic effect. Often starting from the kernel of an idea or a phrase, he extrapolates, delivering sermon-like discourses that address a cosmos that is at once philosophical and spiritual—galactic in its scope, yet local in its immediacy. Indeed, Holley limns and laces his performances with personal narratives of rescue and redemption that emerge from within both an African American Baptist tradition as well as from a post-pocalyptic Afrofuturist worldview. Holley has said, "Time, for me, works like a door. You have to go through time in order to be in it. It seems like one big cycle from within, like a spring."

Holley has been making music for almost three decades, taping and archiving himself. To date, he has released two albums; he only began professionally recording music in 2012, and has since toured and played with several well-known musicians and headlined at major museums. Much of Holley's recent success has been attributed to the power of his performance style, which imbues much of his personality and presentation—from the multiple rings and bracelets made of found materials he wears to his open demeanor, which generously avails itself to those who come into his orbit. In a 2014 profile on the artist, Mark Binelli distinguished Holley from the categories of folk or outsider artist and described him as "first and foremost . . . a performance artist."

Holley was first known for his raw sandstone sculptural carvings and for his installations made of rescued junkyard debris. These were part of a large-scale environment that became a destination for collectors, curators, and local followers.

—Thomas J. Lax

Full entry in Valérie Rousseau et al., *When the Curtain Never Comes Down: Performance Art and the Alter Ego* (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2015), 54–56.



Keeping a Record of it (Harmful Music)

1986

Salvaged phonograph top, phonograph record, and animal skull

13 3/4 x 15 3/4 x 9"

Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Atlanta



QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What are you looking at here?
- What sorts of materials do you see?
- How big do you think this work of art is? How can you tell? In what ways can you understand the scale?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- This assemblage, or three-dimensional collage, contains an animal skull, a phonograph record, and a piece of a phonograph record player. Visually, what do the various parts of the assemblage have in common? How are they different?
- What do you make of how the artist, Lonnie Holley, combined manufactured and natural elements in this artwork?
- What associations do you have with records and record players? What about with animal skulls? Can you find ways these associations intersect?
- If this phonograph record could still play music, what do you think it would sound like? Why?
- What do you think this artwork expresses about death? What do you think it expresses about life?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- In 1997 Holley's most famous artwork, an elaborate yard show, or an installation of sculptures made of found materials that sprawled across his two-acre property, was destroyed in order to make way for expansion of the airport in Birmingham, Alabama. Some of the recurring themes in Holley's artwork are about concerns with industry taking over—or taking the place of—nature. How can you see those concerns in this artwork?
- This artwork is also the cover for Holley's album *Keeping a Record of It* (Dust-to-Digital, 2013; available on Spotify). Listen to the first song from the album, "Six Space Shuttles and 144,000 Elephants." What do you notice about the song? It doesn't follow a recognizable or conventional structure; what is the effect of listening to a song without a chorus? What are some themes and ideas in the song? Holley sings "happy birthday" several times in the song; how does the idea of celebrating a birthday relate to the visual artwork? Can you identify other points of connection between the song and the artwork?
- Holley creates his visual art from found materials. When he performs music, he improvises the lyrics, the melodies, and while playing the keyboard. How are these processes related?
- In a piece by Mark Binelli for the *New York Times Magazine*, Holley said, "What I'm doing here, I think Malcolm said it best: by any means necessary. We can make art where we have to. Dr. King, if you remember, wrote a sermon on a piece of toilet paper." Who are the people—Malcolm and Dr. King—that Holley references? What does this quote convey about how he views his artistic process?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Provide students with large sheets of paper, pencils, and oil pastels or another similar drawing tool. Play the song "Six Space Shuttles and 144,000 Elephants" (or another song by Holley) and ask students to draw what comes to mind as they listen. Repeat the song a few times. Ask the students to study each other's work, either in pairs or as a class, and discuss why they made the choices they did. What do their drawings have in common? What did they interpret differently?



- Ask students to read Mark Binelli's *New York Times Magazine* article "Lonnie Holley, the Insider's Outsider." Have them consider the collector Bill Arnett's quote, "if Lonnie had been living in the East Village 30 years ago, and been white, he'd be famous by now." What did Arnett mean by that? Do the students agree? Why or why not?
- Educators, curators, historians, critics, and reviewers often debate how much of a role an artist's biography should play in interpretations of his or her work. Ask students to find and read three different reviews of Holley's latest album, *Keeping a Record of It*. To what degree do the reviewers discuss his life story? What themes, details, and points do the reviewers bring up most? Should Holley's hardships and eccentricities influence how we understand his work? Have a conversation in class about the issues the reviews raise, and then ask students to listen to the album and write their own review.

RESOURCES

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Marie Lieb

(dates unknown, Germany)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Barely anything is known about the Heidelberg patient Marie Lieb and the context of the floor pieces that are only documented in two photographs circa 1894, since written reports about her are missing. But there are reasons to doubt the first interpreter of the works, the psychiatrist Wilhelm Weygandt, who published one of the images in his *Atlas und Grundriss der Psychiatrie* (Atlas and Essentials of Psychiatry) (1902). His caption reads: "Pattern of figures, shreds of torn bed linen spread out by a manic woman across the floor of her room."

First of all, the two pieces are laid out on two different kinds of floor paneling, and at least one of them is too elaborate to belong to a patient's cell. Obviously, Lieb used larger, probably public spaces in the hospital—which could hardly have been done without consent of the doctors and nurses. Elements at the edges of the work seem to show that the patient planned her work, and worked on them carefully and without hurry. And secondly, the two works show not just ornaments as regular repetitions or symmetrical positioning of simple forms. They are much more complicated and include elements of an irregularity that recall letters of a foreign language.

This leads to the assumptions that Lieb wanted to make a statement not only for herself but also for others, and that this statement was not only about claiming space but also about sending a message, if unreadable to others. In this quality these floor pieces remind me of secret rituals, like witches' writings on the ground. It is imaginable that the patient was convinced what she did exerted magical power.

—Thomas Röske

Following page, top:

Photographer unidentified

Installation by Marie Lieb with Torn Strips of Linen Designed on the Floor of the Psychiatric Hospital Where She Lived

c. 1894

Color print

4 1/2 x 6 5/16"

Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg, Germany, 1771_1

Following page, bottom:

Photographer unidentified

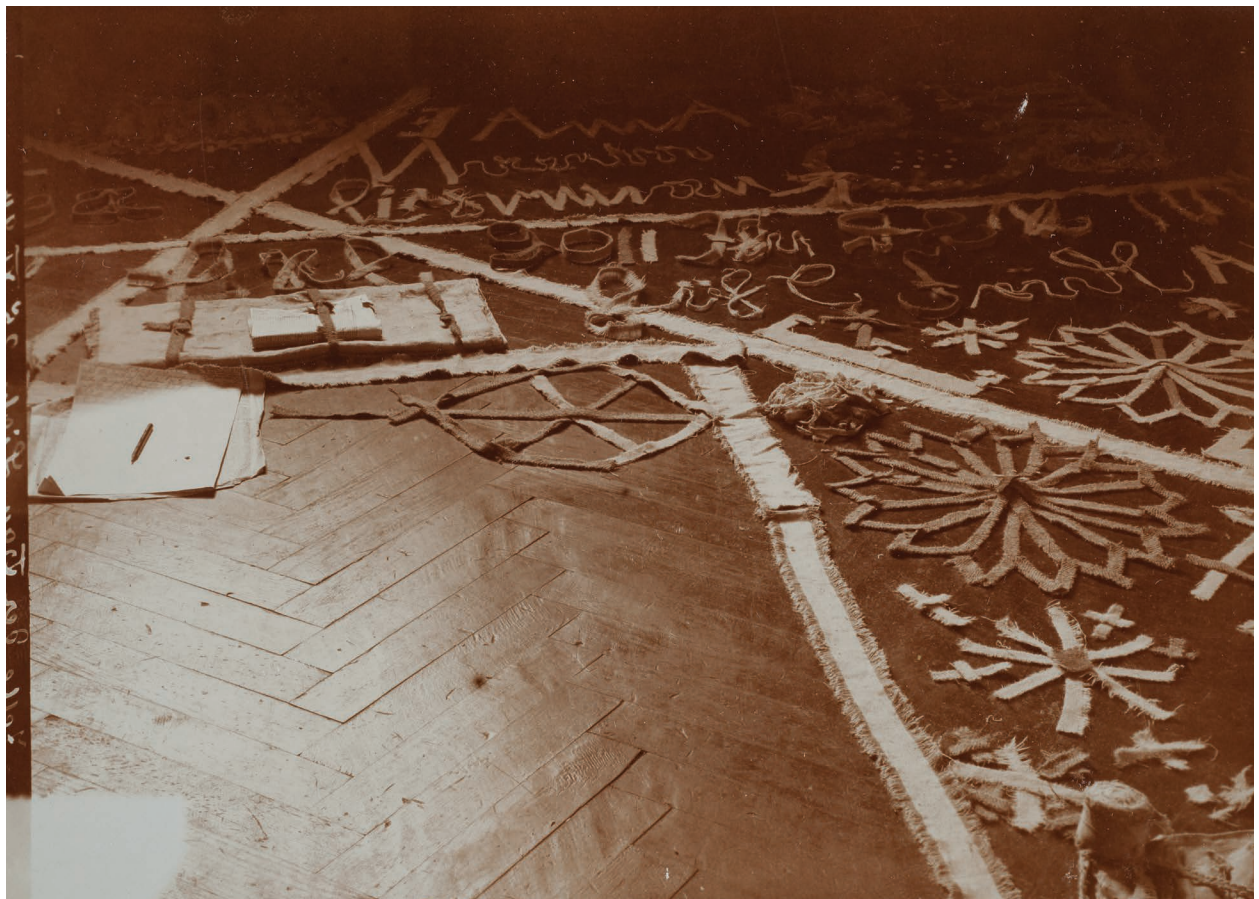
Installation by Marie Lieb with Torn Strips of Linen Designed on the Floor of the Psychiatric Hospital Where She Lived

c. 1894

Color print

4 9/16 x 6 5/16"

Prinzhorn Collection, University Hospital Heidelberg, Germany, 1772



QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What is going on here? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What shapes do you see? Can you identify any patterns?
- What materials do you see?
- How might this artwork have been created?
- How big do you think this work of art is? How can you tell?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Marie Lieb created this artwork on the floor of the psychiatric facility where she was institutionalized, using fabric—possibly torn bed sheets. Does her work remind you of anything you’ve seen before? If so, what?
- Considering the circumstances of this artwork’s creation, why might Lieb have made it? Do you think you would do something similar in her situation? Why or why not?
- Installations are works of art that are often site-specific, or designed specifically for the place they are shown, and transform that space in some way. Lieb’s installation was not affixed to the floor; it was impermanent and temporary. What are some pros and cons of creating temporary artwork?
- Lieb’s installation was presented in a heavily trafficked area of the psychiatric hospital where she was a patient. How might other patients have reacted to it? What about hospital staff? What do you make of the fact that these two photographs were taken of the work and saved for so many years?
- Very little information exists about Lieb and her artwork. If you could ask her about her installation, what questions would you ask?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- In her essay “When the Curtain Never Comes Down: Performance Art and the Alter Ego,” American Folk Art Museum curator Valerie Rousseau includes Lieb as an artist who “constructed art environments” and places her installation in the context of performance art, a genre in which art is enacted live. Rousseau notes that when Lieb made her work, around 1894, “performance art” was not yet a recognized genre. Do you think we can look at Lieb’s work, around one hundred and twenty years later, and see something different than what her contemporaries saw? Can we appreciate it in different ways? Why or why not? What if Lieb’s intention wasn’t to create art? Would that change the way you look at her installation?
- In 1894, Lieb’s work might have been dismissed or not taken seriously as “art” because she was confined to a psychiatric hospital. Does knowing that she was likely living with mental illness change the way that you look at her artwork? Do you think it is important to know about her life circumstances? Why or why not?
- Performance art is sometimes said to challenge more conventional art forms, like painting or sculpture. Do you think that is true of Lieb’s installation? Why or why not?
- These images of Lieb’s work are part of the Prinzhorn Collection at the University Hospital Heidelberg, Germany. The collection was started by the art historian Hans Prinzhorn, who expanded an art program for psychiatric patients and, in the 1920s, published a book on the patients’ art. When the Nazis came into power before World War II, they attempted to cleanse Germany of all artwork that went against their Aryan ideals, including the work that Prinzhorn collected. Fortunately, the work was stored away and saved. Why might this collection have seemed to go against the Nazis’ ideals?



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Using Popsicle sticks, strips of paper, or fabric, ask students to re-create a portion of Lieb's installation on their desks. Then ask them to try out their own configurations. Have a conversation about how this compares to drawing: What is similar? What is different? What do they like best about each? How do they feel about making something temporary?
- If you can, identify a well-trafficked public area of your school where you might be able to re-create Marie Lieb's installation. Using torn strips of fabric, have your students work together to set it up as best they can, based on the photograph. How does the broader school community react to the installation? What happens to it over time?
- Visit the Kerlin Gallery website (link below) to view images of Isabel Nolan's project "Unmade," which was based on Marie Lieb's installation. What connections are there between the two artists' work?

RESOURCES

Atlas Obscura website. "The Prinzhorn Collection."
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TheArtStory.org (2015). <http://www.theartstory.org/movement-performance-art.htm>.

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<http://www.kerlingallery.com/news/isabel-nolan/selected-works>.



Melina Riccio

(b. 1951, Italy)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In her earlier life, Carmela Riccio, known as Melina, worked as a pattern maker for major labels of Italian haute couture and took care of her three children. In 1983 she presented her own collection of home furnishings at the MACEF international trade fair in Milan. That experience was a terrible disappointment, triggering a nervous breakdown for which she spent time in a psychiatric hospital. A long and difficult period ensued: an alternation of leaving home, being repeatedly hospitalized, and wandering from city to city in Italy.

While in the hospital, she asked God for help and saw a sign from heaven in the form of a discarded rotten apple. She identified with this apple, rejected just as she was by society; it bore the label of the Melinda fruit consortium, which she associated with her own nickname, Melina. On one of her visits home she burned her money, gave away her jewelry to the poor, and, believing herself to be called by God, left her home and family to go in search of the truth.

In 2005 she began in the course of her wanderings to leave messages minutely handwritten in marker on newspaper boxes and trash bins. These were brief entreaties for peace that summed up the ideas she had been formulating. Her need for self-expression grew in the years that followed, along with the size of her marker strokes and the range of techniques she employed (collage, embroidery, graffiti). Wearing colorful hand-sewn outfits that incorporated word collages, she began to appear in the public squares of various Italian cities, as a form of performance aimed at spreading her pacifist message.

Like a walking placard, Melina has become a lively presence in the streets of Genoa and Rome, indiscriminately joining protests against planned parking lots, anti-racist demonstrations, or pride parades. She marches alongside demonstrators, boldly exhibiting the banners and flags she has sewn out of found materials. The technique of collage allows her to remold images and words that she sees as containing “evil,” canceling out or weakening their brutality and giving the isolated element a new life of meaning. During demonstrations, she will tie her banners to railings and greet participants, handing out fruit, flowers, and poems. She sometimes sews small felt hearts or stars (recurring symbols in her work) onto people’s lapels. Her handiwork sanctifies the castoff scraps of consumer luxury; might a “word” of hers serve to make us whole?

—Gustavo Giacosa

Full entry in Valérie Rousseau et al., *When the Curtain Never Comes Down: Performance Art and the Alter Ego* (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2015), 96–97.

Right:
 Melina Riccio (b. 1951, Italy)
 Dress
 2010
 Embroideries, sequins, and synthetic flowers on
 ornamented fabric
 46 1/2 x 30"
 Collection ContemporArt, Genoa, Italy

Below:
 Photo by Mario del Curto (b. 1955, Switzerland)
 Work by Melina Riccio
 2009
 Digital image
 Private collection

Translation:
 PEACE
 Melina Riccio
 I FREE
 THE SPACE
 FROM TORMENT
 TO DUTY
 THOSE WHO COLLABORATE
 TO DO GOOD FOR FREE
 I THANK YOU







Previous page, top:
 Photo by Mario del Curto (b. 1955, Switzerland)
 Work by Melina Riccio
 2009
 Digital image
 Private collection

Above:
 Photo by Mario del Curto (b. 1955, Switzerland)
 Artwork by Melina Riccio
 2009
 Digital image
 Private collection

Previous page, bottom:
 Photo by Mario del Curto (b. 1955, Switzerland)
 Melina Riccio
 2009
 Digital image
 Private collection

QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What are you looking at here? How can you tell?
- What specific images do you see on the dress? How do you think the artist, Melina Riccio, applied them?
- The text on the dress is written in Italian. Do you recognize any words? What might the text be about?
- What are some words you would use to describe this artwork? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Riccio wears her creations walking Italian city streets, joining protests, and marching in parades. What would you think if you saw Riccio wearing this dress? Why?
- The words on this dress comprise a text collage that incorporates, at least in part, the Italian lyrics to one of the oldest Christian hymns, “Salve Maria.” (Please see the English translation of the hymn on page 24 and share with the class.) How does this add to your understanding of the artwork? “Salve Maria” can be sung or recited at the end of the holy Rosary, a series of meditative Christian prayers. Do you think writing it on a dress changes its meaning or interpretation? Why or why not?
- The artist embroidered her name on the front of this dress. How would you describe the style of the letters? How did she embellish them? What message does her signature convey about her?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- After a difficult period in her life, which included stays in psychiatric facilities and a sense of disillusionment with society’s focus on capitalism, Riccio burned her money, gave away her jewelry, and, believing that she was called upon by God, left her family and home to travel from city to city spreading a positive, pacifist message. How do Riccio’s life circumstances add to your understanding of her artwork?
- Beyond wearing uplifting messages on her clothing, Riccio creates banners and graffiti, writing on garbage cans, newspaper boxes, and walls. (Show the students the image of her graffiti painted in a stairwell as well as the included translation on page 19.) What do you notice about her message? What is she saying? How would it make you feel to come across this small poem scrawled in a stairway?
- Riccio also hands out fruit, flowers, and poems, and sews small felt hearts or stars onto people’s clothing. How would you describe her methods? Why might she use these tactics to get her point across? Do you think it is effective? Why or why not?
- Through her work, Riccio attempts to take the power away from words that she believes contain “evil” and to give them new meaning. Can you think of other instances in which people have tried to give new meaning to a hurtful word? How do people try to do this? What are some instances in which you feel like it was successful? Unsuccessful?



SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Riccio inscribes messages that she believes in on her clothing. What messages do your students believe in? What do they want to spread through the community? Using fabric markers and blank t-shirts, or fabric markers and strips of sheets to make banners, ask students to create their own Riccio-inspired wearable message.
- Riccio is not alone in her desire to spread a social message through graffiti. Ask students to use their cell phone cameras to record all the graffiti they see over a period of time of your choosing—a day or a week—either individually or in a neighborhood walk you take together. Then ask students to e-mail you the images they feel convey a social message. Put together a gallery of what they discover and discuss as a group. Do their findings put forth messages they believe in? That represent their community?
- Like many performance artists, Melina Riccio makes herself vulnerable to conflict when she engages with the public. Ask students to cut small symbols out of paper or felt—either their own design, or a heart or star like Riccio uses—and attempt to distribute them to the wider school community. What is their experience like? How do people respond? Watch a selection of clips on YouTube of Melina Riccio (see link below) and make note of incidents of harassment involving community members and interventions by police officers. What personal qualities and characteristics does one need as a performance artist?

RESOURCES

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SALVE MARIA

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!
Our life, our sweetness, and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,
To thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this valley, or tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy toward us;
And after this our exile show unto us the
Blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus;
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.



Raimundo Borges Falcão

(b. unknown, c. late 1940s, Brazil)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Brazilian state of Bahia, a principal location in the country's early slave trade, is famous for its African-based rituals. During Carnival a million tourists pour into its capital, Salvador, "the fountain-head of the transplanted African cultures." Carnival is a highly choreographed event involving many different actors, coordinated costumes, and months of rehearsals. In the midst of this buoyant pageant an unusual solo show takes place, staged for an audience of one.

Raimundo Borges Falcão, an illiterate man of an uncertain age, lives alone in a windowless wooden shack on the rural outskirts of the seaside capital. The interior of his tiny home is filled floor to ceiling with materials that he scavenged from scrap heaps and which he gradually transforms into wearable fantasies he reveals at Carnival. Once a year, this seemingly unremarkable man shines brightly. Traversing the historic city center on homemade roller skates, he proudly shows off the costume he has prepared for this purpose, to be worn only once. In one example, plastic dolls become glittering mermaids on a striking headdress; tinfoil-wrapped fish sculptures share space with a gilded seahorse and a sparkling octopus; sequin-studded crabs extend their claws; shoulder cape, wrap skirt, and bracelets look like they were caught in a magician's fishnet; and scepters resemble those of the *Orixás*, the African ancestor gods of Salvador, whose avatars in glittering costumes hold staffs and mirrors that symbolize their powers.

Oblivious to the movements of the carnival dancers surrounding him, Falcão becomes a one-man art show moving to its own rhythm. His flamboyant outfit is meaningful only to him; he is an eccentric at odds with the mainstream, yet his work is firmly grounded in his culture. *Yemanjá*, the ever-present Yoruba goddess of oceans and the "Mother of the Waters," is venerated throughout coastal Brazil. All of Falcão's costume sculptures seem like an altar to the deity, where the discarded objects become offerings. His works, like those of so many other creators in the Afro-Atlantic diaspora, hints at a collective memory of scrap heaps, which in much of Africa stands for graves or portals to the realm of ancestors.

—Beate Echols



Photograph by Dimitri Ganzelevitch
Raimundo Borges Falcão with the Carnival Disguise "Blue Shark"
 2000
 Digital image
 Collection of Beate Echols and Michael Shub

Following page:
 Raimundo Borges Falcão (dates unknown, Brazil)
Untitled (Ceremonial Costume in Eleven Parts including Cape, Bracelets, Belt, and Scepters)
 c. 1999
 Leather, plastic, string, rope, tinsel, paper, carpeting, bubble wrap, cardboard, buttons, beads, purses, seashells, felt, mirrors, dolls, metal, wood, candy wrappers, Christmas ornaments, costume jewelry, plastic bottles, and paint
 Approx. 92 x 39 x 25"
 Collection of Beate Echols and Michael Shub



QUESTIONS FOR CAREFUL LOOKING

- What are you looking at here? How can you tell?
- Describe what you see as if you were speaking to someone who isn't able to see it.
- What colors do you see? What materials?
- Does the costume remind you of anything you've seen before? If so, what?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- The artist Raimundo Borges Falcão created this costume by hand. How might he have gone about making it? Noticing the kinds of materials he used—fabric, mirrors, seashells, candy wrappers, etc.—what do you think he had to do first?
- Falcão not only created this artwork, but he wore it as well. What do you think it would feel like to wear this costume, both physically and emotionally? Would you feel weak or powerful? Shy or bold? Why? How would you move? What kinds of sounds might the costume make?
- Exhibition contributor Beate Echols writes that the artist, who is “illiterate,” lives “alone in a windowless wooden shack on the rural outskirts of the seaside capital” of the state of Bahia, Brazil. What would that be like? How would you feel if you lived that way?
- Once a year for Carnival, an important annual festival in Brazil that marks the period of celebration leading up to the forty days of Lent before Easter, Falcão straps on homemade roller skates, dresses in his handmade costume, and sets out into the crowded city center. He doesn't participate in the organized parades or join in with the Carnival dancers, but moves independently. How do you think he feels as he shows off his costume? How would you feel seeing him?
- Falcão only wears each costume once; he makes a new one each year. Why might he do that? If you created a work of art like Falcão's costumes, do you think you'd reuse it or make a new one each year? Why?

QUESTIONS FOR CONTEXT

- Although Raimundo Borges Falcão is an individual and has created his own specific art practice, there are many cultural connections one can make between the costumes he makes and other traditions, like those of the Yoruba people in West Africa or the African American Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans. Why might similar art forms and practices take place in locations like West Africa, Brazil, and New Orleans (see images below)?



- Study a map of Slave Trade Routes from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (see page 30). How does looking at this map add to your understanding of how and why traditions and cultures can be similar across three continents?
- *Yemanjá* is the Yoruba goddess of oceans, the “Mother of the Waters,” and is an important figure along coastal Brazil as well as West Africa. What evidence do you see in Falcão’s work that he, too, is influenced by *Yemanjá*?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Falcão does not read or write. Imagine that you have the opportunity to visit him and hear him tell his life story. What might he say about an ordinary day in his life? What might he say about the first day of Carnival? Write a paragraph in his voice about each occasion.
- Without buying anything new, spend several days gathering recycled and found materials, as well as reusable clothing, jewelry, and art materials. Use what you’ve gathered to create a headdress in the tradition of Falcão. How might your creation have been different if you’d been allowed to buy new materials? What do you lose and what do you gain in using only what you can scavenge?
- Assign half the class to research Carnival in Brazil and the other half to research Mardi Gras in New Orleans. When does each event take place? Who celebrates? How is each celebrated? What do people wear, what music do they listen to, what do they eat? Either as a class or in pairs, have students look for the similarities and differences. What do you think accounts for each?

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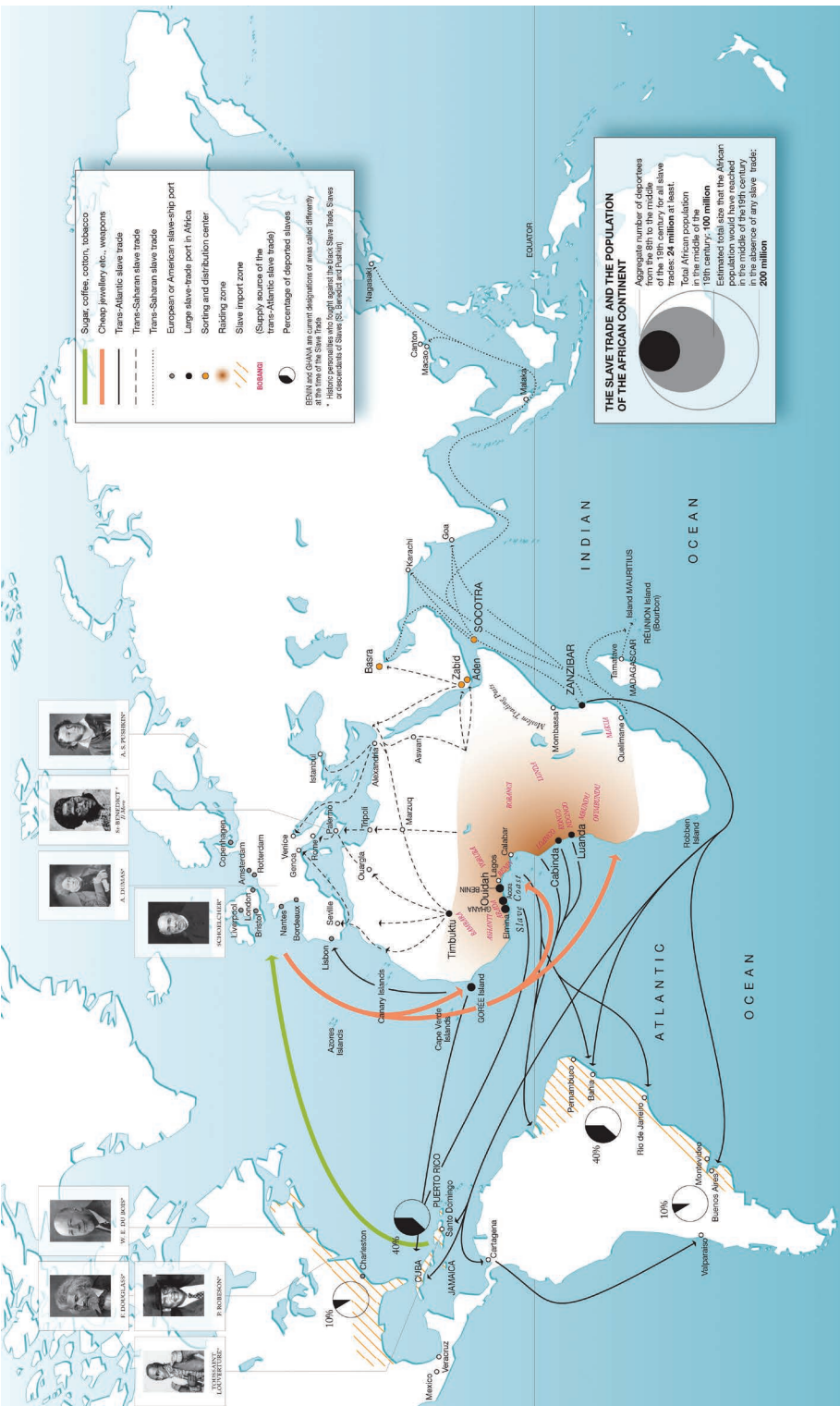
THE SLAVE ROUTE

The slave trade represents a dramatic encounter of history and geography. This four century long tragedy has been one of the greatest dehumanizing enterprises in human history. It constitutes one of the first forms of globalization. The transatlantic slave trade was a commercial system of forced labor that linked different regions and continents: Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and the Americas. It was based on an ideology: a conceptual structure founded on contempt for the African people and on the idea of the sale of human beings (black Africans in this case) as a mobile asset. For this is how they were regarded in the "black codes", which constituted the legal framework of slavery in the Americas.

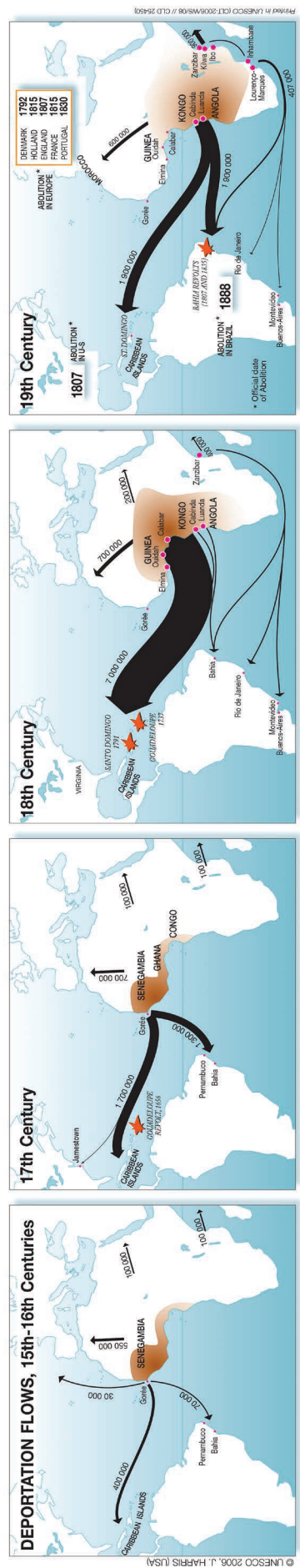
The history of this dissimulated tragedy, its deeper causes, its modalities and consequences have yet to be better understood. This is the basic objective of the project. The project is part of the "Slave Route" Project. The issues at stake are: historical truth, human rights, development, identity and citizenship in the modern multicultural societies. The idea of "route" signifies, first and foremost, a geographical dimension, a spatial dimension, a human dimension. It is circuits followed by the slave trade. In this sense, geography sheds light on history. In fact, the slave trade map not only lends substance to the early form of international trade, but also by its very nature, it illustrates the impact of the system.

These slave trade maps are only a "first step". They are based on the data gathered by Joseph Harris (USA) about the slave trade and slavery, they should be completed to the extent that the theme networks of researchers, set up by UNESCO, continue to bring to light the deeper layers of the coding by exploiting archives and documents. It will be possible to understand that the black slave trade forms the invisible stuff of relations between Africa, the Arab World, Europe, the Indian Ocean, Asia, the Americas and the Caribbean.

The Coordination of the Slave Route Project



THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE POPULATION OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT



© UNESCO 2008, J. HARRIS (USA)

GLOSSARY

Assemblage

A sculptural composition that is assembled or constructed from an arrangement of objects and materials. The term may refer to either the process of creating the work or the finished construction.

Capitalism

An economic system in which people, rather than the government, own goods, wealth, and property.

Carnival

A festive season that occurs immediately before the Christian season of Lent. The main events typically occur during February. Carnival is a period of public revelry in Roman Catholic countries, involving processions, music, dancing, and masquerades.

Installation

A three-dimensional work of art that usually consists of multiple components, often in mixed media, that is generally exhibited in a large space in an arrangement specified by the artist.

Mardi Gras Indians

African American revelers in New Orleans who dress up for Mardi Gras—the local name for Carnival—in elaborate, handmade suits influenced by Native American ceremonial apparel, and parade in the streets.

Performance Art

A nontraditional art form, often with political or topical themes, that typically features a live presentation to an audience or onlookers (as on a street) and draws from such arts as acting, poetry, music, dance, or painting.

Phonograph

An instrument for reproducing sounds by means of the vibration of a stylus or needle following a spiral groove on a revolving disc or cylinder.

Scepter

A symbolic staff historically carried by a king or queen; an emblem of authority dating back to ancient Greece.

Yard Show

The tradition, among African Americans and dating back centuries, of using visual and material objects to express belief systems around intersections in the worlds of matter and spirit. This tradition often manifests in the form of elaborately decorated yards and gardens, as well as environments of commemoration created in and around the home environment.

Yemanjá

A powerful sea goddess from the Brazilian religion known as Macumba or Candomblé. Many practitioners of this religion see Yemanjá as similar to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism. In some regions of the country and in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's capital city, people celebrate Yemaná on January 1.

Yoruba

A Niger-Congo language of southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo. Also, a member of any of the Yoruba-speaking peoples of this region.

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YouTube. “Melina Riccio” search results. https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=MELINA+RICCIO.

VISITING THE AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

STUDENT AND EDUCATOR PROGRAMS

The American Folk Art Museum offers a range of discussion-based gallery and artmaking programs for students, including single visits and multisession museum-school partnerships. For more information on current programs for students or additional educator programs, please call 212. 595. 9533, ext. 381, or e-mail grouptours@folkartmuseum.org. Information about all programs can also be found on the museum's website, www.folkartmuseum.org/resources/students-and-educators.

TOURS, PRE-K TO GRADE 12

Offered September–June, Monday–Friday, 10:30 AM–4:30 PM

All programs are discussion-based and interactive and are led by experienced educators. Students will further develop their critical-thinking skills through dynamic conversations and activities centered on works of art. Programs relate to the New York State Learning Standards and the New York City Curriculum Blueprint. The program you choose will be customized for your students' age group and abilities, and the museum welcomes inclusion classes and students with disabilities or special needs. The museum can accommodate up to thirty students at time.

The museum offers a series of themed tours—including Introduction to Folk Art, People and Places, and Artists' Materials & Process—that can be tailored for any age group. All groups have the option to sketch as part of the gallery experience and access the museum's Touch Collection. For the complete list of tour themes, descriptions, and fee structure, visit www.folkartmuseum.org/resources/prek-12-visits.

MUSEUM-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Multisession collaborations between the museum's education department and schools combine exhibition-based programs with specialized classroom visits by an experienced museum educator. These multiple-visit school partnerships provide students with a unique opportunity to hone their critical-thinking skills and powers of observation. Customized to meet each school's objectives, school partnerships can also include artmaking workshops, professional development for school staff, and programs for families. School partnerships are appropriate for all age levels. A listing of sample partnership programs can be found at www.folkartmuseum.org/resources/museum-school-partnerships.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

You are invited to create a workshop specifically for your staff at the grade, school, or regional level. Museum educators will work with you to develop a program that meets the needs of your specific group. The museum also offers additional free curriculum guides that integrate folk art into classroom learning: **Ralph Fasanella** (grades 9–12), developed in conjunction with the presentation of *Ralph Fasanella: Lest We Forget* at the American Folk Art Museum, offers topics for classroom discussion, writing activities, and art projects that introduce key ideas of the exhibition; **Self-Taught Genius** (grades K–12) presents information about selected artists and artworks from the traveling exhibition *Self-Taught Genius: Treasures from the American Folk Art Museum* and offers topics for classroom discussion, writing activities, and art projects that introduce the key ideas of the exhibition; **Folk Art Revealed** (pre-K–grade 5 and grades 6–12) is a guide to teaching American history and culture through folk art; and **In the Realms of Henry Darger** (grades 9–12) explores important themes in the work of the twentieth-century self-taught artist known for his vivid panoramic watercolors and includes selections from the artist’s writings. Each guide includes color images of works in the museum’s collection, lesson plans, a glossary, and bibliographic resources. Curriculum guides can be downloaded at www.folkartmuseum.org/resources/curricula-and-guides.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

- Programs are offered at the museum during the school year Monday through Friday, anytime between 10:30 AM and 4:30 PM.
- The museum does not allow self-guided groups. All groups must have a reservation with a museum guide.
- Groups must have one adult chaperone per every ten students; chaperones and teachers are responsible for supervising groups.
- Tours in select languages, including American Sign Language and visual descriptions, are available. Additional lead time may be necessary to schedule such a tour.
- Reservations must be made at least two weeks in advance. The museum accepts payment through purchase order; the museum’s vendor number is MUS005000.
- Buses may drop off school groups in front of the museum; there is no parking lot.
- There is no lunch area onsite, but there are several public outdoor seating areas steps away; please inquire when you book your visit.
- To make your reservation, please e-mail grouptours@folkartmuseum.org or call 212. 595. 9533, ext. 381.

ACCESSIBILITY

The museum is fully accessible and welcomes groups with special needs. Copies of labels and wall texts are available in large print. American Sign Language interpretation tours, verbal imaging tours, and tours of touch objects from the museum's Touch Collection are available by request with one-month advance notice. For more information, please contact the education department at 212. 595. 9533, ext. 381.

MUSEUM LOCATION

2 Lincoln Square (Columbus Avenue between 65th and 66th Streets), New York City

MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday–Thursday 11:30 AM–7 PM

Friday 12–7:30 pm

Saturday 11:30 AM–7 PM

Sunday 12–6 PM

Closed Monday

School programs are offered Monday–Friday, 10:30 AM–4:30 PM, September–June

ADMISSION

Free

Fees apply for school programs; please inquire when you book your visit.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Subway: 1 to 66 St/Lincoln Center

Bus: M5, M7, M11, M20, M66, M104

GENERAL INFORMATION

www.folkartmuseum.org

212. 595. 9533