

SEE FOR YOURSELF

This is no ordinary guide.

Create your own museum experience using these fun, interactive art cards.

NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

Welcome to the National Museum of Women in the Arts!

SEE FOR YOURSELF cards correspond to selected works from NMWA's collection and special exhibitions. Use them to engage with the artwork, discover fascinating facts, and reflect on your experience.

What next?



Begin to **SEE FOR YOURSELF** by searching for near object labels in the galleries. When you find one, take out the related card.

Interested in a work with no card? You can still **SEE FOR YOURSELF**. These suggestions can get you started:

- What's going on in this artwork? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find?
- Move around the work. Look closely but please do not touch. Then step further away. How does the work change from different viewpoints?
- What materials, tools, and techniques do you think the artist used to make this work?
- What personal associations or memories does this artwork evoke?
- Before reading the label, give the artwork a title. Compare yours to the one on the label. Does knowing the published title change your understanding of the work?

Are you visiting with children?

Younger visitors can also learn to see for themselves. Share information from the cards that you think will interest them. Or try some of these ideas:

- **Go on a colors quest.**
What colors did the artist choose?
How do they make you feel?
- **Hunt for shapes**—geometric, organic, and fantastic!
- **Try a senses walk.**
Imagine you could take a step into the work of art.
What would you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste?
- **Tell a story.**
What happened just before this scene?
What happened just after?
- **Look at the figures.**
Imagine you are one of the people represented in the artwork.
What's on your mind? How do you feel?

About the Museum

The National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) is the only major museum in the world solely dedicated to championing women through the arts. With its collections, exhibitions, programs, and online content, the museum seeks to inspire dynamic exchanges about art and ideas and to advocate for better representation of women artists. NMWA addresses the gender imbalance in the presentation of art by bringing to light important artists of the past while promoting great women artists working today.

SEE FOR YOURSELF cards are supported in part by the members of the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Get more!

Get guided

Book a docent-led group tour of the collection or a special exhibition.

nmwa.org/visit/book-tour

Get active

Attend a workshop, gallery talk, film, or performance. Check our calendar for upcoming programs.

nmwa.org/visit/calendar

Get social

Follow NMWA on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.

[@WomenInTheArts](https://www.instagram.com/WomenInTheArts)

Get schooled

Read our blog Broad Strokes to learn more about art, artists, and upcoming exhibitions and programs.

nmwa.org/blog

Get involved

Become a member, a volunteer, or an intern.

nmwa.org/support

Portrait of Princess Belozersky



Portrait of a Young Boy



Portrait of Princess Belozersky, 1798

Portrait of a Young Boy, 1817

The Eyes Have It

Known for her flattering portraits, **Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun (1755–1842)** earned commissions throughout Europe and Russia. Royalty, aristocrats, writers, and actors alike coveted her idealized renderings.

Take a closer look

The subjects' large, expressive eyes—a Vigée-LeBrun signature—invite our approach. Flawless skin and rosy complexions imply youth and health. Her illusionistic handling of texture distinguished glossy locks, a glinting gun barrel, diaphanous fabrics, and lustrous amber.

Something to talk about

Vigée-LeBrun satisfied her patrons' vanity by rendering them more attractive and approachable than they might truly have been. Today, what techniques do artists use to achieve similar results?

Who knew?

The artist experienced perks and peril as court painter to Marie Antoinette. With the onset of the French Revolution in 1789, this connection to the vilified queen forced Vigée-LeBrun to flee her homeland. In exile for 15 years, her fame ensured her welcome in cities and courts across the continent.

Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Portrait of Princess Belozersky*, 1798; Oil on canvas, 31 x 26¾ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Rita M. Cushman in memory of George A. Rentschler; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

Élisabeth Louise Vigée-LeBrun, *Portrait of a Young Boy*, 1817; Oil on canvas, 21¾ x 18¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth



Sarah Miriam Peale

Susan Avery



Isaac Avery



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Susan Avery, 1821

Isaac Avery, 1821

A Family Affair

Sarah Miriam Peale (1800–1885) belonged to a talented family. Her father and uncle were prominent American artists, as were two sisters and seven cousins. Peale painters are known for their meticulous attention to detail.

Take a closer look

The Avery portraits provide clues to their socioeconomic status. Susan's jewelry, tortoise-shell combs, and cashmere shawl, together with Isaac's jeweled tie pin, speak to their prosperity. But their open postures and facial expressions make them seem approachable rather than aloof.

Something to talk about

Paired paintings of spouses are called “pendant portraits.” Often such images become separated over time. Art historians must then rely on details within the paintings to reunite them. Which details in these works indicate that they belong together?

Who knew?

Widely considered the first professional female painter in the United States, Peale portrayed a number of influential political figures, including the Marquis de Lafayette and Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton.

Sarah Miriam Peale, *Susan Avery*, 1821; Oil on canvas, 35¼ x 27½ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museum purchase: The Lois Pollard Price Acquisition Fund; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

Sarah Miriam Peale, *Isaac Avery*, 1821; Oil on canvas, 35¼ x 27½ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museum purchase: The Lois Pollard Price Acquisition Fund; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth





Bedazzling!

Mickalene Thomas often works with rhinestones, glitter, and enamel. Inspired by art history, popular culture, and Pop art, her depictions of African American women examine concepts of female identity and beauty.



A-E-I-O-U and Sometimes Y, 2009

Take a closer look

Working from a projection of a photo-booth image, **Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971)** defines her subject's contours with black rhinestones. At first glance, the glossy pink panel appears uniform, as if machine-made. Yet subtle color shifts and paint layers confirm Thomas's creative presence.

In her own words

"I feel like the rhinestones in my paintings are like that really glossy lipstick that women wear. It's another level of masking, of dressing up."

Who knew?

Thomas titles many of her works after songs. "AEIOU Sometimes Y" was a dance club and MTV hit in 1983 for the two-man group Ebn-Ozn. Catch the video on YouTube.

Mickalene Thomas, *A-E-I-O-U and Sometimes Y*, 2009; Plastic rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on panel, 24 x 20 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Deborah Carstens; © 2009 Mickalene Thomas, Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth



Portrait of a Noblewoman



Dear Dowry

The sumptuous garments and jewels adorning this woman in her wedding portrait are part of her dowry—the wealth she brings to her marriage. Unlike this sitter and other women of the day, Lavinia Fontana did not have to meet this requirement because of her earning potential as an artist.



Portrait of a Noblewoman, ca. 1580

Take a closer look

The nobility of Bologna sought **Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614)** for portrait commissions. Her ability to portray fabric textures and intricate jewelry—seen clearly in this work—appealed to her status-conscious patrons.

Something to talk about

During the Renaissance, portraits were never simply created to represent the likeness of the sitter. Consider Fontana's handling of costume, expression, and pose. What do such details communicate about this young woman's character, mood, and social standing?

Who knew?

Incorporated symbols suggest this sitter embodied qualities of an ideal 16th-century bride. The marten pelt suspended from her waist signifies fertility—this animal reproduces prolifically. The cross pendant, high collar, and affectionate dog represent piety, modesty, and loyalty.

Lavinia Fontana, *Portrait of a Noblewoman*, ca. 1580; Oil on canvas, 45¼ x 35¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth



They call me Redbone but I'd
rather be Strawberry Shortcake



It Made Sense...Mostly In Her Mind



They call me Redbone but I'd rather be Strawberry Shortcake, 2009

It Made Sense...Mostly In Her Mind, 2011

Grays Anatomy

Amy Sherald (b. 1973) perceives racial identity as something we construct and perform. She presents her subjects with unusual costumes and props. The resulting characters seem to float, spot-lit against vivid backgrounds—fantastic and playful, yet uncanny.

Take a closer look

Sherald works from color photographs of her models, but renders their skin tones in a range of gray shades. By removing the “color” of her subjects, Sherald challenges our cultural tendency to view color as race.

In her own words

“While attending private schools and being one of two or three black children, I was raised to be conscious of how I acted, spoke, and dressed. This performing aspect of my identity...was the key to my social acceptance and assimilation.”

Who knew?

Former First Lady Michelle Obama selected Sherald to paint her official portrait in 2018, making the artist the first African American woman honored with such a commission.

Amy Sherald, They call me Redbone but I'd rather be Strawberry Shortcake, 2009; Oil on canvas, 54 x 43 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the National Museum of Women in the Arts; © Amy Sherald; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth

Amy Sherald, It Made Sense...Mostly In Her Mind, 2011; Oil on canvas, 54 x 43 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Promised gift of Steven Scott, Baltimore, in honor of the artist and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the National Museum of Women in the Arts; © Amy Sherald; Photograph by Lee Stalsworth



SoHo Women Artists



SoHo Women Artists, 1978

History Lessons

This monumental group portrait by artist and activist **May Stevens (1924–2019)** portrays her with neighbors and art-world colleagues. Here, Stevens references the recent history of the feminist art movement and the women advocating for social change.

Take a closer look

The artist used individual photographs of her friends to compose this work. She wanted to show them as individuals as well as part of a professional community. Note shifts in light, shadow, and scale that indicate different source material for each figure.

Who knew?

Stevens honors inspirational predecessors. Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), also in the museum's collection, models one of her bulbous sculptures. Background text and skirt reference Steven's 1976 portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656), one of many historical women rediscovered by feminists.

May Stevens, *SoHo Women Artists*, 1978; Acrylic on canvas, 78 x 142 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Museum purchase: The Lois Pollard Price Acquisition Fund; © May Stevens and Ryan Lee Gallery, New York



The Ohio Project (8)



Part (12)



The Ohio Project (8), 1999

Part (12), 2003

Serial Artist

Nikki S. Lee (b. 1970) is often labeled a photographer, but she rarely takes her own pictures. She prefers to conceptualize works rather than remain behind the camera. Lee recruits amateur and professional photographers to capture the episodes she conceives.

Take a closer look

Lee created two series from 1997 to 2003. In "Projects," she infiltrated subcultures—such as energetic swing dancers, elderly New Yorkers, and rural Ohioans—and posed as a member. In "Parts," Lee staged scenes of herself and a male figure. She then cropped out all but a hint of her companion.

In her own words

"I'm more likely to be influenced by the little snapshots I see on a wall when I go to somebody's house. I'm inspired by real life, by the ordinariness of people taking pictures of people."

Nikki S. Lee, *The Ohio Project (8)*, 1999; Fujiflex print, 40 x 30 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Heather and Tony Podesta Collection; © Nikki S. Lee

Nikki S. Lee, *Part (12)*, 2003; Fujiflex print mounted on aluminum, 30 x 26¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Heather and Tony Podesta Collection; © 2003 Nikki S. Lee





Survival Mode

Describing herself as a “collector of souls,” Alice Neel willfully focused on the human figure when abstraction held sway. Unflinching portraits of her Spanish Harlem neighbors, like this one of Carlos Negrón, both dignify individuals and provide trenchant social critique.



T.B. Harlem, 1940

Take a closer look

Alice Neel (1900–1984) positioned the 24-year-old against a plain background, focusing attention on his face and physical condition. Heavy black outlines, oppressive space, physical distortions, and a mournful palette elicit shock, empathy, and anger at conditions that allowed such suffering.

Something to talk about

Neel intended paintings like *T.B. Harlem* to highlight the struggles of the urban poor and effect change. Abstract artists at the time typically ignored the everyday in favor of the timeless. What role do you think art can/should play in society?

In her own words

"I'll tell you what you can see [in their faces]. Their inheritance, their class, their profession. Their feelings, their intellect. All that's happened to them. You see everything in their faces."

Who knew?

In the 1940s, tuberculosis spread rapidly in overcrowded urban neighborhoods, and treatments were invasive. Negrón's bandage covers the wound from a procedure to collapse and "rest" the infected lung by removing ribs. Despite his dire appearance, Negrón lived into his late 60s.

Alice Neel, *T.B. Harlem*, 1940; Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; © The Estate of Alice Neel; courtesy of David Zwirner, New York



Two Generations



Two Generations, 1979

Artful Activism

The granddaughter of former slaves, **Elizabeth Catlett (1915–2012)** was born and raised in Washington, D.C. At Howard University, she studied design with Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998). Later, she turned to sculpture and printmaking through which she advocated for social change.

Take a closer look

Two Generations illustrates Catlett's skill as a printmaker. The dramatic play of light and shadow reveals her subjects' physical features and psychological complexity. Here, the artist invites us to consider the relationship and life experiences of these individuals.

In her own words

"I learned that art is not something that people learn to do individually, that who does it is not important, but its use and its effects on people are what is most important."

Elizabeth Catlett, *Two Generations*, 1979; Lithograph on paper, 17 x 20¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Dorothy Stauffer Lyddon; Art © Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

