

ART OF THE AMERICAS

A RESOURCE GUIDE



ABOUT THE MUSEUM

LACMA is the largest encyclopedic museum in the western United States with more than 100,000 works of art. Through its far-reaching collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California. The collection includes artworks from various cultures from the prehistoric to the present.



GOALS OF THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

One goal of this guide is to help teachers prepare students to visit the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where they will participate in a docent-guided tour entitled Art of America.

A second goal of the guide is to help teachers relate aspects of the tour to their school's curriculum.

ABOUT THE TOUR

Docents offer this 90 minute tour for students in grades 4–12. The tour surveys the development of art in the Americas from ancient times to the present day. Students compare and contrast the unique characteristics of art from different historical periods of the Americas, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the people. The tour also focuses on works from North, Central and South America, including the works of 19th century California, as well as modern and contemporary artists of the Americas. This tour meets the state content standards for history/social science for grades 4, 5, 8, and 11.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT

Distribute copies of the glossary.

For younger students: name the elements of art listed in the glossary and discuss their meanings. For older students: distribute copies of glossary for review.

Have the students identify the elements of art in the reproductions. Explain that the museum tour will provide a similar opportunity to look for these elements. A docent at the museum will discuss how such elements can help the viewer to explore the meanings of artworks.

Ask your students to illustrate a particular city within America. Have each student write down descriptive terms which relate to the image at the bottom of the illustration. Display the works and note similarities; also discuss the different ways in which artists depict similar places.

GLOSSARY

Color

The visual sensation dependent on the reflection or absorption of light from a given surface. Color is made up of *hue*, *intensity*, and *value*.

Hue refers to the name of the color (red, blue, yellow, orange)

Intensity refers to the brightness or dullness of a color

Value—the lightness or darkness of a hue or neutral color

Line

One of the elements of art. Lines vary in length and direction. Lines can be horizontal, vertical or diagonal. They can describe structure or gesture, the outline of a shape or create patterns.

Materials

Artists use a variety of materials and tools to create art. Some materials are common and inexpensive (clay, for example), while others are costly (gold and jewels). Artists select their materials to support the intention of the artwork.

Shape

Geometric shapes such as circles, triangles, and rectangles, or freeform shapes, appear in many different kinds of art. They may form the underlying structure of the composition, or define certain parts. Shapes that are repeated establish patterns.

Symbol

Something that stands for or represents something else.

Texture

The way a surface feels or appears to feel. Texture can range from smooth and soft to rough and hard.

FLOWER DAY

1925

Diego Rivera



ABOUT THE IMAGE:

Throughout his career, Diego Rivera created numerous easel paintings and watercolors representing the indigenous peoples of Mexico. *Flower Day (Día de flores)* is his earliest and most accomplished depiction of a seller of calla lilies. The unusual perspective of the flowers, which are seen from above, and the blocklike forms of the figures are stylistic devices derived from Rivera's earlier cubist paintings. *Flower Day (Día de flores)* is Rivera's first major painting to enter a public collection in the United States.

BURN, BABY, BURN (L'ESCALADE)

1965–1966

Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren)



ABOUT THE IMAGE:

Burn, Baby, Burn is an iconic painting by one of Latin America's greatest masters. The work was initially inspired by the horrific attacks of the Vietnam War. In 1965 the Watts riots erupted in Los Angeles when a California Highway Patrol motorcycle officer pulled over a black man on charges of drunk driving. Soon after, thousands of people began protesting the deepest discriminatory practices of the LAPD, reflecting the profound racial divisiveness of the city. Matta saw the Vietnam War and the Watts riots as connected. The cry "Burn, Baby! Burn!" was coined by the charismatic local radio giant Magnificent Montague, who would shout the phrase every time a piece of soul music got him excited. Listeners in Los Angeles appropriated the cry for the arson that marked the riots. In *Burn, Baby, Burn* the viewer's eye moves incessantly from one point to another, echoing the bold dynamic and rhythmic sense of this quasi-galactic, futuristic composition. There is an electric, almost cinematic quality to the picture. Through a powerful turbo-like shorthand, Matta conveys a sense of speed and dislocation. Signs are scattered throughout the surface: imploding satellites to the left, suggesting the velocity with which news travel, a bolting vehicle at the top speeding across a freeway, and a group of black heads in a vertiginous vortex to the right. The phosphorescent, pungent green at the bottom right of the composition suggests hope, a verdant future. Like Picasso's *Guernica* (1937)—a work that Matta greatly admired and which he helped install in the Paris 1937 Universal Exposition—*Burn, Baby, Burn* is a bold indictment of the destructiveness of mankind and a manifesto for peace.

ANGEL'S FLIGHT

1931

Millard Sheets



ABOUT THE IMAGE:

Millard Sheets painted *Angel's Flight* in 1931, at a time when many American artists—known as “regionalists”—favored local subjects for their art. In this painting Sheets presents the commercial and residential buildings that once hugged the side of Bunker Hill in downtown Los Angeles. The stairs allowed residents and visitors access to Hill Street below and to such businesses as Grand Central Market, shown at street level with the red-striped awning. The title of the painting refers to a little railway—not shown—that paralleled the stairs and terminated near the platform where the two women stand. Although Sheets remained faithful to the specifics of this neighborhood, he adjusted some of the details to emphasize the almost dizzying experience of looking directly down. The dramatic change in scale between the two women on the platform and the shoppers below demonstrates the steepness of the descent. The twisting steps (which in truth followed a straight path) along with the shifting planes of the buildings (notice how each has a different perspective or vanishing point) lend visual excitement to the experience of looking at the painting.

THE KENTUCKIAN

1954

Thomas Hart Benton



ABOUT THE IMAGE:

In 1953 the motion-picture company Norma Productions hired Thomas Hart Benton to execute a painting to be used for publicity purposes for the movie *The Kentuckian*, starring Burt Lancaster. The movie features a backwoodsman and his son who confront civilization in the form of a frontier village. The American West and the progress of civilization were of special interest to Benton, who had portrayed these themes in his early murals. In this painting the Kentuckian becomes the archetypal frontiersman leading his family to the golden land in the West. The Kentuckian heads toward the unseen village, located somewhere ahead in a sunny valley. He strides forward, high on a hill against a cloud filled sky. This baroque compositional device, echoed by the diagonal positions of the boy and the dog, emphasizes the Kentuckian's dynamic vitality. Although the painting's large size may have been determined by the commission, the heroic presentation was surely Benton's idea, for many of his late easel paintings are more tightly focused around a single large figure than were his early mural scenes.

MULHOLLAND DRIVE: THE ROAD TO THE STUDIO

1980

David Hockney



ABOUT THE IMAGE:

British-born artist David Hockney's great affection for the city of Los Angeles, his home since the 1960s, is evident in the many works that draw upon its cultural iconography: luxurious swimming pools, sun-drenched landscapes, and handsome young men at play. Painted from memory in just a few weeks, *Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, the largest of Hockney's canvases, vividly captures the quintessential Los Angeles activity: driving. It is a personalized panoramic map of Los Angeles based on the artist's daily trip from his home in the Hollywood Hills to his studio on Santa Monica Boulevard. Hockney establishes a sense of distance by alternating between detailed renderings of objects (trees, houses, tennis courts, and power lines) that represent sections of the landscape and more abstract planes of color or simple grids that define the outlying Studio City and Burbank. Mulholland Drive swirls across the top of the work, moving the viewer's eye from left to right and conveying the sense of motion and altitude that the artist experienced on the ridge road.

FOLLOW-UP WRITING EXERCISES

After the museum visit

POSTCARDS

Have younger students create postcards featuring their favorite work or art from the tour. On one side have them draw a picture of their chosen piece and on the reverse they can write a letter to a friend or family member describing the colors, shape, lines, textures and symbols of the object. Have students explain why they liked the work.

WRITING A PROPOSAL FOR A MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Have older students collaborate to write a proposal for a museum exhibition that deals with some aspect of the Art of Many Cultures tour. In the proposal, the students should consider the following:

- The theme of the exhibition. What will it be about?
- The name of the exhibition
- The reason the group thinks the exhibition will be enjoyable, educational and important to the public. (They are trying to persuade a museum director to support and fund the project.)
- A list of objects to be included in the exhibition. Students can let their imaginations guide them. This could include photographs, posters, sculptures, paintings, clothing, movies and more.
- Will there be a label for each of the objects or didactic (instructive) wall panels?
- Will there be an exhibition brochure or related events?
- Will there be an opening reception with invitations?

ADDITIONAL IMAGES AND INFORMATION ABOUT OBJECTS
ON YOUR TOUR CAN BE FOUND BY VISITING COLLECTIONS
ONLINE AT WWW.LACMA.ORG

- **THE MANTLE OF SPRING**

William Wendt

- **MOTHER ABOUT TO WASH HER SLEEPY CHILD**

Mary Cassatt

- **MUSIC ROOM MIRROR FROM THE MILTON LATHAM
RESIDENCE**

Herter Brothers

- **CLEOPATRA**

William Wetmore Story

LACMA GENERAL INFORMATION

Please review these regulations with students before arriving at the museum.

MUSEUM RULES

- No touching works of art including outdoor sculpture. Viewers must not come closer than 24 inches to any work of art.
- No touching walls or any parts of installations. No sitting on platforms in the galleries or gardens.
- No eating, drinking, smoking, gum-chewing, excess noise, or running in the galleries.
- All groups must comply with instructions or requests from docents, gallery attendants or security staff.
- Teachers and chaperones must stay with the students at all times and are responsible for student behavior.
- Student assignments that require note taking are not permitted during a docent tour.

ARRIVING AT THE MUSEUM

- Plan to arrive at the museum at least 15 minutes before the tour is scheduled to begin.
- The museum is located at 5905 Wilshire Boulevard where buses should arrive for students to disembark.
- Enter the museum at the BP Grand Entrance on Wilshire Boulevard in front of *Urban Light*. A docent will meet your bus when it arrives.
- Buses should park on 6th Street, which is one block north of Wilshire Boulevard.
- Cars may park on surrounding streets or in the pay parking lot at 6th Street.

LUNCH

- Picnicking is permitted at the tables outside the Ahmanson Building, the BP Grand Entrance or in the park, and students are welcome to bring sack lunches. Seating is not permitted in the Café or the surrounding patio. Box lunches may be purchased from the Café. Orders must be placed one week before your arrival. Please contact the Plaza Café (323) 857-6197.

MUSEUM REENTRY

- If you are planning to visit the galleries after your guided tour please present a copy of your confirmation letter at the Welcome Center on the BP Grand Entrance, or the Los Angeles Times Central Court, to receive free admission tickets. Your group may not enter the galleries until 12 noon when the museum opens to the public.



ENJOY YOUR VISIT

