

# **Living with Art**

## ***Art in the Home***



**An Outreach Program**  
**Los Angeles County Museum of Art**



# **Living with Art: *Art in the Home***

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**An Outreach Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

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Cover photo: *House Group*, Unknown, Mexico, Nayarit, c. 200 B.C.—A.D. 500, partially burnished red slip with white and yellow painted slip decoration on ceramic, 12 x 10 x 8 inches  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Proctor Stafford Collection purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch M.86.296.30 © 2009 Museum Associates/LACMA

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# Living with Art: *Art in the Home*

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THE DESIRE TO POSSESS OBJECTS AND IMAGES OF SPECIAL VALUE MAY BE UNIVERSAL. For most of us, our homes are where these objects are saved and displayed. How do we select the objects we live with? What makes them important? This packet includes reproductions of artworks that relate to the subjects of family and home and are intended for viewing as well as a variety of other functions.

The material includes suggested questions and activities to assist students in making discoveries about the artworks, and historical, biographical, and technical information for the classroom teacher.

- Do you have a group of favorite objects at home? How are they alike? Do you keep them together? What things do other people collect?
- Do you have any objects that have been passed down from one family member to another? Do you have any items that were made by a family member or friend? What are they? Who made them and why?
- Is a museum a collection? What things may be collected and displayed in a museum? What kinds of objects would you see in an art museum? (LACMA's collections include drawings, paintings, sculpture, photographs, prints, furniture, decorative objects, and costumes.)

Museums are places in which special objects are saved, cared for, and shared. Looking at and thinking about objects in museums may help us learn about the people who made them, the people who used them, and the people who saved them.

## House Group

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**T**HE MUSEUM'S HOUSE SCENE FEATURES A STEEP-ROOFED STRUCTURE OF CLAY whose depicted inhabitants are engaged in various activities: Adults are preparing and perhaps eating food, and children are playing. The style of this sculpture is characterized by relatively rough solid figures embellished with colored slip, or liquid clay. This *House Group* comprises three structures and multiple figures and is decorated with white and yellow over red slip. Note an unusual aspect of this example: the addition of parrots and ravens on the rooftop.

- How is this house like the place where you live? How is it different?
- What can you learn about these people and where they lived by looking at the *House Group*?
- Describe the designs on the roof. Does the place where you live have decorations on its outside? How might you decorate your home if you could?
- When you are at home, look carefully at the building you live in. Note the shape and see if its sides are similar or different. Pay attention to details and any decoration. Make a sculpture of your home.

In Nayarit, as in other remote regions of western Mexico, within the village culture artists produced direct and personal representations of their lives. The Nayarit people left no written history or monumental architecture; knowledge of the culture derives from the art found buried in tombs. The high point of this anecdotal art is found in lively and elaborate clay depictions of houses, ball games, and celebrations.

Because of a belief in an afterlife, people of many cultures buried objects with a person when he or she died. These objects would be useful in the next life. Today we can learn about how early people lived by studying the items found in their tombs.

- What objects of yours would you most like to have with you in the next life? What might be most useful? What items would tell future viewers the most about our culture?
- How does this depiction of a house compare to those of other pre-Columbian settlements?



HOUSE GROUP

Unknown, Mexico, Nayarit, c. 200 B.C.—A.D. 500

Partially burnished red slip with white and yellow painted slip decoration on ceramic, 12 x 10 x 8 inches, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Proctor Stafford Collection purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch M.86.296.30

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## ***Fall-Front Cabinet***

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**C**OVERED IN A DESIGN OF FLOWERING PLANTS, THIS CABINET DERIVES ITS descriptive name, *Fall-Front Cabinet*, from the front panel that opens to reveal seven drawers. The largest drawer, in a square shape in the center, is surrounded by five rectangular drawers with floral motifs and one small drawer with a checkered pattern. Made of rosewood and decorated with an inlay of ivory, the cabinet also contains a keyhole, brass handles, and a base. Cabinets such as this example had many uses. They were portable and were designed to hold jewelry, important documents, and other valuable objects. They also functioned as writing desks. The front panel, when open, provides a flat surface on which to write.

- What words would you use to describe the cabinet? How is this like furniture you have seen before? How is it different?
- Where do you keep small, important objects such as jewelry or letters? What would you store if you had a special box like this?

The entire cabinet is decorated with a design of flowering plants, including lilies, poppies, tulips, and even some imaginary plants. Notice how the plants are arranged: some of the flowers are in profile while others are shown frontally. The artist has made sure that all the flowers, leaves, and vines are shown clearly and has arranged the plants in rows bordered by geometric patterns. The floral motif was popular for this time and place; it is also found in paintings, architecture, textiles, and metalwork from this period.

- If you were to decorate a box, what type of design would you choose? Would you create a design from nature, such as the floral pattern seen here? Geometric patterns? Something else? How would you arrange your design?

This cabinet was made during the middle of the seventeenth century, in the area that is present-day India. The Mughal Empire, which ruled this area from the early sixteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, had a long-standing appreciation for floral decoration. It is believed that the genesis of the "floral style," exemplified by this cabinet, comes from portraits of flowers that painters for the imperial court made while traveling. One imperial painter made nearly one hundred paintings of flowers for the Mughal emperor Jahangir (reigned 1605–27).

A cabinet such as this one is a mixture of multiple influences. The fall-front cabinet is a form from sixteenth-century Europe and was often reproduced in Asia. This cabinet contains Mughal decorative motifs and was made with Indian materials and techniques.





FALL-FRONT CABINET

India, Gujarat, or Pakistan, Sindh, 1650–70

Rosewood inlaid with ivory; brass fittings, 15 1/8 x 21 3/4 x 16 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Jane and Marc Nathanson,  
Bill and Dee Grinnell, Greg and Mechas Grinnell, and Marilyn B. and Calvin B. Gross  
through the 2007 Collectors Committee M.2007.56

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## ***Water Heater with Internal Brazier***

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**T**HIS SILVER WATER HEATER CONSISTS OF A RECTANGULAR BOX RESTING ON four legs, a handle, and spout. Elaborately decorated, the exterior of the water heater features animals, angels, and many detailed designs. The water heater was made in the eighteenth century in the viceroyalty of Peru (the Spanish colonial administrative area of South America), in what is present-day Bolivia.

- Look closely at this artwork. How many different animals do you notice? What other details are included?
- How is this work of art like something you own or have seen? How is it different?

The drinking of yerba maté tea was widespread throughout the viceroyalty of Peru. Many people drank from simple dried gourds; *maté* is the Quechua word for the squash plant that produced the gourds. Others used highly decorated silver objects such as this one; lions were popular animals for the decoration of these water heaters.

This object was used to keep water hot so that guests could drink hot tea in a living room or another place that was away from a stove in the kitchen. The rectangular body has two internal compartments, one to hold water and another to hold hot coals. One of the round lids on the top allows for ventilation, while the other covers the opening to pour water in, which would then be poured into cups through the spout.

- Imagine drinking tea using this water heater. What other objects would you use? What would they look like?
- What object or objects in your home are used for special occasions? What makes them special? Who attends those events? Are there special or important roles for those objects on special occasions?



WATER HEATER WITH INTERNAL BRAZIER

Bolivia, 18th century

Cast, molded, and chased silver

10 5/8 x 12 5/8 x 5 7/8 in.

Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas

Photo © 2009 Museum Associates/LACMA

## ***Furisode with Imagery Alluding to the Noh Play Kikujido***

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**A** *FURISODE* (FUR-EE-SO-DAY) IS ONE OF THE VARIATIONS IN SHAPE OF THE kimono (literally "the thing worn"), the traditional dress of both men and women in Japan. A kimono is a long, loose robe with no fastenings, instead held in place with a wide sash. It is simple in shape, however, great emphasis is placed on its decoration. The *furisode* ("swinging sleeve") has sleeves that hang down along the length of the garment. Today the *furisode* is worn by children and young unmarried women on special holidays.

This *furisode*, which is shown from the back, dates from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and is made of a silk crepe that has a puckered surface. Its decorations are accomplished by several different techniques, including stencil and embroidery.

- Have you ever considered a piece of clothing a work of art?
- Are all clothes art? How so or why not?

A number of decorative patterns cover the kimono: Stylized clouds are embroidered in purple silk and gold metallic threads. The four seasons are represented by snow-covered mountains, spring cherry blossoms, summer rain, and autumn chrysanthemums. Banana leaves, depicted on the sleeve, was a popular kimono motif during the Edo period (1615–1868); they often symbolized the fragility and impermanence of life on Earth.

- What similar decorations might you find on clothing today?

The images embroidered near the center of the back—the Chinese-style couch, pillow, and fan—refer to a specific Chinese tale adopted by the Japanese and adapted into a traditional Japanese play. In the play, a favored Chinese attendant accidentally touched the Emperor's pillow with his foot while passing the couch and had to be banished from the palace. Before sending him off, the Emperor taught him a sacred line from Buddha's teachings that would ensure him safety and longevity. The exiled attendant wrote the sacred words on chrysanthemum petals so he would not forget them. The attendant was called "Chrysanthemum Boy," which is the translation of the title of the play *Kikujido*. The dew that washed the ink off the petals became the elixir of everlasting youth.

- What contemporary stories or scenes decorate our clothing today?
- If you selected a story to illustrate on a piece of clothing, what specific images, characters, or scene would you depict?



FURISODE WITH IMAGERY ALLUDING TO THE NOH PLAY KIKUJIDO  
Unknown, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868), late 18th–early 19th century  
Paste-resist dyeing (*shiroage*), stenciled imitation tie-dyeing (*kata kanoko*), and  
silk and metallic thread embroidery on light blue silk crepe (*chirimen*) 67 3/8 x 51 in.  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Miss Bella Mabury M.39.2.7  
© 2009 Museum Associates/LACMA

## ***Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child***

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**I**N THE PAINTING A MOTHER HOLDS A CHILD SITTING SOMEWHAT AWKWARDLY but relaxed on her lap. What do you notice about the pair? She cradles the child with one hand and with the other grasps a cloth in a basin of water. She bends her head to tenderly meet the child's gaze.

In this work Mary Cassatt explores a moment in time, as well as composition, texture and surface pattern, and color. The shapes of the mother and child form a long oval that stretches from the top of the mother's head to the child's foot. The image is closely cropped, especially at the left, with the mother's right elbow pushing past the edge of the picture. The light color, the white garments and pink-flesh skin in particular, contrast with the slightly darker tones of the background. The irregular and lively application of the paint emphasizes the momentary quality of the painting.

- Describe the colors Cassatt used in the painting. What mood does the painting evoke? Does her choice of colors support that mood? How so or why not? How might your feeling be different if Cassatt had chosen other colors—for example, bright, bold colors?

The painting is an example of Cassatt's Impressionist work. Working in Paris and inspired by French Impressionists, Cassatt began depicting domestic scenes, often figures in interiors. She used a palette of light and bright colors and energetic brushwork. *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child* is considered one of the earliest, if not the first, of Cassatt's depictions of a mother and child; nearly one-third of her artistic production is devoted to that theme.

Born near Philadelphia, Cassatt received her early training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. After travel and study in a number of countries in Europe she settled in Paris. The artist Edgar Degas became her friend and mentor, and at his invitation she exhibited in five of the Impressionist exhibitions held from 1879–1886. Best known for her mother-and-child images, Cassatt also depicted other aspects of life, including bedroom and theater scenes.

- How is this like a scene you might see today? How is it different?
- We often take family photographs at such events as holiday gatherings, weddings, and birthday parties. Do you have family photographs of other events or casual gatherings? Remember a formal or casual gathering of your family. Draw or paint all the family members and show clearly what each is doing.



MARY CASSATT

United States, 1844–1926

MOTHER ABOUT TO WASH HER SLEEPY CHILD

1880, Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 25 3/4 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Mrs. Fred Hathaway Bixby Bequest M.62.8.14

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## Red-Blue Chair

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**N**OTICE THE GEOMETRIC FORMS THAT MAKE UP THE CHAIR AND HOW THEY relate to one another. Though they seem to be separate, the elements of seat, back, arms, and legs are harmoniously composed and joined in a way that is visible to the viewer.

- What is the predominant shape that is repeated many times in this chair? How many rectangles are there? How many squares? Notice that certain colors are placed in specific places. Where is each color used?
- How is this chair similar to or different from portable chairs you might use? Do you think it would be a comfortable place to sit?
- Design a chair, table, or other piece of furniture that would be functional as well as beautiful. Who would use your chair and why?

This chair was designed one hundred years ago in Holland by Dutch architect and cabinetmaker Gerrit Rietveld. About forty years after he designed the chair, it was actually built by another person, Gerard van de Groenekan. The chair is an embodiment of the principles of a Dutch art movement called de Stijl, meaning "the style." The artists of de Stijl, which included Dutch architects, artists, designers, and writers, were dedicated to designs that emphasized straight lines, solid planes, right angles, and primary colors. They were especially interested in designs that clearly revealed the construction of the actual object.

- Can a piece of furniture be a work of art? How so or why not?

One of the best-known artists of the de Stijl group is the abstract painter Piet Mondrian. Visit LACMA's collections online, [www.collectionsonline.lacma.org](http://www.collectionsonline.lacma.org), to find an image of Mondrian's painting *Composition in Red, White, and Yellow* (1936). What similarities and differences do you notice between the chair and the painting?

Like many other architects, Gerrit Rietveld believed that there should be a unity between the architecture of a house and the furnishings within it. In 1924 Rietveld designed the Schroder House in Utrecht, the only example of a de Stijl building. The outside consists of lines and planes that create a geometrical arrangement. Inside, there are sliding walls that can be moved in and out to change the configuration of the space.

- Imagine a house that would match the look of this chair. What would such a house look like? Would you like living in such a house? Why or why not?





RED-BLUE CHAIR

Designed 1918, made c. 1950

Designed by Gerrit Rietveld, The Netherlands, 1888–1964

Made by Gerard van de Groenekan, Utrecht, 1904–94

Painted wood, 23 5/8 x 33 1/16 x 33 1/16 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art purchased with funds provided by Merle Oberon M.86.258

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## Follow-up Questions

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In addition to viewing and discussing the transparencies individually, students should consider the common qualities among the works of art and how they fit the program's theme of art in the home. Group the images in order to consider thematic similarities.

### **What are the materials of art?**

Consider *Fall-Front Cabinet* and the *Red-Blue Chair*. Both are made of wood. Why do you think the artists chose wood for these works? Can you imagine them made from other materials? What would they look like?

### **What subjects do artists choose?**

Consider *House Group* and *Mother About to Wash Her Sleepy Child*. How are these works alike? What do they tell us about the people shown? How are they like or unlike your own family or home? How might you depict your family or home in a work of art?

### **How are objects used?**

View the water heater, *jurisode*, chair, and cabinet. What kinds of objects are they? Are they like objects you have at home or have seen? If they are for use, can they also be considered art? How so or why not?

### **What makes an object a work of art?**

Art historians, collectors, and viewers all make individual judgments about what art they like and what art is good, each considering different qualities. Aside from what you like, what qualities do you think are important in determining whether a water heater, a chair, or a cabinet is a good work of art? Consider qualities such as usefulness, decoration, craftsmanship, and originality.

