

 SELF-GUIDED
TOUR

AMERICA ™



Highlights from the Hunter Collection



The museum is universally accessible

Portable gallery stools, wheelchairs, and strollers are available at Visitor Services.

250 Years of American History at the Hunter

Filled exclusively with American art dating from the colonial period to the present, the Hunter Museum is uniquely positioned to offer insight into the history of our nation. As America celebrates its semiquincentennial, the Hunter is honored to showcase artwork that reflects a variety of experiences lived during the United States' first 250 years. In the galleries you can find images that depict well-known American stories as well as images that offer insight into other, perhaps less well-known, American experiences, including those highlighted in this brochure. As you explore the galleries and reflect on the first 250 years of American history, we encourage you to take in the many images reflecting the circumstances, opportunities, and challenges facing the people and land of this country since its founding.

Childhood and Class in America

The concept of childhood being a protected life stage originated in Enlightenment-era Europe and eventually migrated to the United States; however, a family's class and status dictated the level of protection afforded to that child. The finances of a family, as well as race and ethnicity, heavily impacted the nature of one's childhood. The art works discussed here depict these differences:



Thomas Sully, *Juvenile Ambition* (also known as *Grandfather's Hobby*), 1825, Gallery 1

Created at a time when portraits were a symbol of status, this painting of an unnamed child shows the wealth and position of his family. He is seated in an adult-sized chair, wearing an adult's hat and reading glasses. He holds a toy horse, a sword, and a newspaper that he likely cannot yet read. Not only could these items be understood as symbols of his family's social status, but also of his own "ambition" as indicated by the title. A child of

affluence, he is wearing a play costume that also marks his potential destiny to become an educated military and/or business leader. In this way, he is cast both as a child at play and as a representation of his adult destiny.

Deborah Roberts, *Betty*, 2022, Gallery 18

In contrast to Sully's painting of a young boy from the 19th century, *Betty* by Deborah Roberts depicts a child of the 21st century, but centuries of American history are manifested in that depiction. Notably, *Betty* is not an image of a single girl but a collage of portraits of girls, representing a composite of Black girlhood. With her mismatched, brightly colored clothing, her playful pose, and direct gaze, Betty is shown as a child with free space to play, to be a child and to proudly determine how she will be seen. In *Betty*, Roberts reclaims childhood for Black children who historically would not have been given this authority over their own lives.



Women on Display

Like images of children, representations of women have taken many forms throughout U.S. history – often as a reflection of the times in which they lived. In the early years of the nation, most portraits of women depicted them as extensions of their husband's or father's property, an objectified display of his class and wealth. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women of differing classes were shown but still often as idealized reflections of virtue rather than as unique, complex individuals. As women gained more autonomy in society and more female artists and artists of color began to create portraits, more realistic, nuanced, diverse depictions of individual women appeared.

Abbott Handerson Thayer, *Young Woman (Bessie Price)*, 1897-98, Gallery 9



Thayer presented idealized visions of womanhood. Layered in a gauzy white gown, the woman depicted in this work (Bessie Price, a young Irish immigrant who worked for Thayer) is a reminder of the spiritual and muse-like quality of womanhood. The portrait offers no indication of Bessie Price's background, her heritage, her profession, or any part of her identity. Instead, she is cloaked in an ethereal notion of an angelic woman rather than as a representation of a specific person.



Ken Browar and Deborah Ory, *Misty Copeland (After Degas, "The Star")*, Principal, American Ballet Theatre, 2015, Gallery 12

Modeled after *The Star*, an impressionist painting by Edgar Degas, this modern take features Misty Copeland, a trailblazing star of contemporary ballet. Unlike the dancer depicted in the original impressionist artwork, Misty Copeland took an active role in the creation of this piece. And while she may be wearing fabric similar in color to that of Bessie

Price, she is not merely a representation of an ideal dancer, she is a representation of her full self. In 2015, Copeland broke barriers by becoming the first Black woman to be named a principal dancer in the American Ballet Theatre. In this photograph, she is performing confidently after years of working to be recognized as a professional dancer and is commanding center stage in this portrait of herself.

Picturing the Great Depression

After the Wall Street crash of 1929, the U.S. was sent into a decade

long economic depression which, coupled with environmental challenges, left many farmers and farm workers destitute and resulted in a period of extreme financial hardship for many in the country. The Great Depression was a well-documented period, thanks in large part to the work of artists hired by the U.S. Farm Security Administration to photograph the people and places impacted by the Depression, as well as other visual artists who documented their personal views of the period independent of government contracts, offering additional insights into personal experiences from that time:



Nicolai Cikovsky, *South Ferry, Manhattan, 1931, Gallery 15*

The docks were historically a place for laborers to find work in northeastern port cities. Nicolai Cikovsky, who came from a working-class background and understood the plight of day laborers, created this image at the beginning of the Great Depression. While the port in the background shows signs of vibrant commerce and there are newer automobiles and a

nice family standing by the dock, the man in the foreground and the circle of men to the left could indicate that a once-promising source of income was no longer guaranteed, a reminder that some families were struggling more than others.



Reginald Marsh, *Subway - 14th Street, 1930, Gallery 15*

This work, created just months after the Wall Street crash of 1929, offers another nuanced view of society at the start of the Depression. By depicting a new subway station in New York City, Reginald Marsh captured a moment of change for

the nation. The women are nicely dressed and their clothing doesn't show signs of wear – we don't know if they'll face hardship in the decade to come. The man in the foreground holding a paper could be reading about the economy, but based on the visible headline, he could just as easily be reading about Prohibition rum raids. The African American woman on the left represents the growing New York City population during the Great Migration, and the bearded man on the right is dressed in a manner that may indicate Eastern European heritage and Jewish faith, reflective of the many immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island. This view at the start of the Great Depression allows for a more complex understanding of a society in transition rather than one focused on the economic challenges of the time.

Reclaiming Ancestral Narratives

Many Americans connect to their personal history and heritage through the foods they eat, the styles they wear and the traditions they celebrate with their families. Likewise, contemporary American artists often reflect their heritage through their work, reclaiming stories or using the past to offer their view of the present.



***Rose B. Simpson, Vital Organ:
Heart, 2022, Gallery 18***

Inspired by the artistic heritage passed down through her matrilineal line and taught to her by her mother, Rose B. Simpson continues the tradition of Pueblo Tewa pottery vessel making. She intentionally includes visible fingerprints, which she calls the “touch of the maker,” as an important connection to her ancestral home in New Mexico. In this piece, Simpson combines a traditional vessel with a life-size figure. She covers the piece with markings, purposefully avoiding specific spiritual meanings and opting for a more universal language to convey Indigenous experiences.

Simpson suggests that the “plus” sign refers to the cardinal directions, and the “X” represents protection. In this way, her pieces empower and heal while serving as important links to carry stories to the next generation.



Jiha Moon, *Yellow Wave*, 2013, Gallery 18

Through her work, artist Jiha Moon navigates the intertwined layers of her identity as a Korean-born woman who has spent her adult life in the U.S. Moon integrates generalized Asian symbols, such as fortune

cookies (which are actually Chinese American inventions and have no correlation to Korean heritage) and the ubiquitous smiley faced sticker exemplifying the happy disposition often expected of Asian women in the U.S., with materials specific to her Korean heritage, such as the Hanji mulberry paper that is the foundation for this piece. She incorporates the peach, which serves both as a reference to the Korean symbol of fortune and to the official fruit of Atlanta, Georgia, where she lived when she created this work. Blond locks, the proverbial yellow wave of the title, flow through the piece, representing the Euro-American notions of beauty that Moon first encountered when coming to the U.S.



  **Share photos of your visit to the Hunter!**
@huntermuseum



Founded in 1952
Celebrating our 75th anniversary next year!

The Hunter Museum of American Art collects, preserves and presents American art, connecting the community through inspiring, educational and visitor-focused experiences for all. A national model exemplifying how art museums can transform the communities they serve, the Hunter is an essential space where all people are welcomed to experience creativity, connect and share ideas.

Image credits, in order of appearance:

Thomas Sully, **Juvenile Ambition (also known as Grandfather's Hobby)**, 1825, oil on canvas, 36 1/2 x 28 3/4 inches. Gift of Mrs. Henry Hayes in memory of Mr. Hayes, 1968.10

Deborah Roberts, **Betty**, 2022, mixed media collage on paper, 60 x 82 inches. Museum purchase with funds contributed from Spectrum 2024, 2024.12. Image courtesy of the artist and Vielmetter Los Angeles. Photo credit: Brica Cox.

Abbott Handerson Thayer, **Young Woman (Bessie Price)**, circa 1897-98, oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 19 5/8 inches. Museum purchase, 1999.11

Ken Browar and Deborah Ory, **Misty Copeland (After Degas, "The Star")**, **Principal, American Ballet Theatre**, 2015, dye sublimation print on aluminum, 50 x 42 inches. Gift of Ken Browar and Deborah Ory, 2021.18

Reginald Marsh, **Subway - 14th Street**, 1930, egg tempera on canvas, mounted on masonite, 36 x 48 inches. Gift of the Benwood Foundation, 1976.3.22

Nicolai Cikovsky, **South Ferry, Manhattan**, 1931, oil on canvas, 28 x 30 1/4 inches. Museum purchase, 1999.2

Rose B. Simpson, **Vital Organ: Heart**, 2022, clay, twine, grout, glaze, Overall: 90 3/4 x 18 x 13 1/2 inches. Museum purchase, 2023.6

Jiha Moon, **Yellow Wave**, 2013, ink, acrylic, embroidery patches, glitter, stickers, collage prints on hanji paper, Surface: 50 x 90 inches. Museum purchase with funds contributed from Spectrum 2014, 2014.10