



POMP UP THE JAM!

Splendor, Performance, & Pageantry in Art

FAMILY GALLERY GUIDE

June 12 – September 4, 2011 | 20/21 Gallery Conversation Wall
An exhibition organized by the 2010/2011 Spencer Museum of Art graduate interns.

FAMILY GALLERY GUIDE:

Form Follows Function



1977.0029

This guide explores six artworks whose form, or appearance, is based on their function—the task for which they were created. Most of these objects are functional and are meant to be used for special occasions. Sometimes, the sizes of the figures or the types of fabric used in an artwork provide clues to their intended purpose. While exploring the exhibition, think about how you decorate the special objects in your life. Look closely at the works of art and consider the questions below. Talk to your family and friends about what you see and think. Please remember not to touch the art.



Unknown Abelam maker
active Maprik Region, Papua New Guinea
yam mask, 1950
plant fiber, pigment, coiling
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Franklin D. Murphy, 1977.0029

- What is unusual about the size of this mask?
- What shapes do you see?
- This mask is meant to represent a face. Where do you see the eyes and nose?
- What are some reasons you might create a mask?

For the Abelam, a society from Papua New Guinea, yams are an important source of food. They can also be used as **currency**, or money, and add to the **prestige**, or importance, of the owner. Each year men spend months planting and tending to specially grown yams. At harvest time, villages hold yam festivals to celebrate the importance of this root vegetable in their society. A yam-grower's status in the community is directly related to the quality of his yam crop. Men decorate their biggest and best yams with masks like this one and the men themselves wear similarly-styled masks. The circles surrounded by large, oval shapes on each side of the mask are the eyes. The long ridge between the eyes represents the nose. When both the men and the yams are adorned with masks, a visual connection is created between the best yams and the "best" or most prestigious men. Decorating the yam is a way for the yam-grower to celebrate his hard work.

chalice veil, 1700s
France
silk, linen, brocade, embroidering
0000.2720

- Describe how this fabric is decorated. Are the patterns complex or simple?
- Do you think it would have taken a long or short time to decorate? Why do you think this?
- What type of event do you think this object would have been used for? Would you use it every day?

This decorated cloth was used to cover a **chalice**, or a cup, that formed part of the **communion rite**, a religious ceremony in the Catholic Church. Also called a veil, this cloth would have been placed over the chalice for both practical and symbolic purposes. It would have protected the chalice's contents and visually demonstrated the chalice's importance.

The fabric is silk and linen, two expensive and delicate fabrics. The veil is decorated with gold **brocade**, an ornate, raised design. Made in the 1700s, it was created with care in the hope that it could be used for many years. At this time, all fabric and clothing would have been handmade. The amount of detail on this veil, such as the brocade and the **embroidery**—a type of needlework—would have taken a long time to create and would have been expensive as well. The rich type of fabric and the time-consuming way it is decorated are clues that the object under the veil would not be an everyday cup.

- How do you show that an object is special to you?
- What types of objects do you have at home that you decorated or keep in special places because they are important to you?



Albrecht Dürer
 1471–1528
 born and died Nuremberg, Holy Roman Empire (present-day Germany)
The Triumphal Car of Emperor Maximilian I, 1523
 woodcut
 Museum purchase, 1959.0024.a–h

- Who do you think is the most important person in this print?
- What clues does the artist give you that hint at the most important figure?

From 1493–1510 Emperor Maximilian I ruled the **Holy Roman Empire**, which today includes parts of Austria, Switzerland, France, and Germany. In this print the artist, Albrecht Dürer, uses symbols and size to make Emperor Maximilian I look like the most important person in the picture. The size of the print itself—eight feet long and consisting of eight pieces of paper joined together—shows that the Emperor Maximilian I was a very important person.

Emperor Maximilian I sits in a large **chariot**—a fancy cart pulled by horses. He wears a crown and holds a **scepter**, a special rod or wand carried by royalty. The crown, the scepter, and the chariot tell us that Maximilian was a powerful ruler. We can see that he was the Holy Roman Emperor because the wheels of his chariot are decorated with double-headed eagles, a symbol that only the Holy Roman Emperor could use.

- Look closely at the other figures in the print. What do you think the words next to the figures might mean?
- How do you think these figures add to the importance of Emperor Maximilian I's position?

The artist included 12 horses and 22 women. Just as the double-headed eagle is a **symbol** for the Emperor Maximilian I, the women are symbols for his goodness. Next to each woman is a word that tells which part of his personality she represents. The artist uses these female figures and symbols to describe the abstract qualities associated with the Emperor; some of these are truth, faith, intelligence, and justice.



Kehinde Wiley
 born 1977, Los Angeles, California
 Art Production Fund, producer
towel (Portrait of Andries Stille), 2008
 from *Works on Whatever 2008 Artist Towel Series*
 cotton, printing
 Illustration gift of the 2010–2011 Spencer Interns: Denise Giannino, Chassica Kirchoff, Meredith Moore, Ellen Cordero Raimond, Sarah C. Schroeder, Natalie Svacina & Amanda Wright, 2011.0014

The history of art is filled with **portraits**—pictures of people. Three hundred years ago only the most wealthy, powerful, or important people could afford a portrait of this size because of the high cost of artists' fees and materials. Since not everyone could afford such a portrait, these paintings became signs of wealth, **status**, and good taste.

- Have you ever had your portrait painted or your picture taken by a photographer?
- How is this portrait different from your own?
- Look closely at the artwork. What is unusual about the material Wiley used for this artwork?

Unlike expensive historical paintings, this image is printed on an oversized beach towel. It looks like an older painting because the artist is using the large scale, **ornate** gold framing, and depicts his subject in the kind of confident pose that we usually see in historical portraits. While many older portraits are very valuable and hang in museums, our towel artwork has a very different **function**, or purpose: they were originally given away at the swimming pool of a large hotel in Florida. This towel can be displayed on the wall, or laid out on the sand at the beach.

- What are some clues that let us know this is a more recent image?

Wiley's model wears a loose basketball jersey and silver jewelry, clothing we see everyday on the street, but that we would never see in a portrait painted 300 years ago. Most historical portraits depict well-known men, but we do not know this man's identity. Wiley chooses his models for their appearance and attitude, not their wealth or status. Because the cost of materials is much lower today, portraits can come in all different shapes, sizes, and styles.



Peking opera masks, before 1983
China
cut colored paper
Gift of Nancy Loo Bjorge, 2007.3.867.16; 09; 07

- Think about your favorite holiday, like Fourth of July or Thanksgiving. What types of decorations do you see for celebrating these holidays?
- Why do you think that we use decorations on holidays?
- Describe how you decorate your room. How can decorations tell us something about their owner?

In Chinese culture, all houses are cleaned to prepare for the New Year before the annual Spring Festival, which occurs at the end of January or beginning of February. People also decorate their homes with special **ornaments**, such as these cut-paper objects. This type of decoration began a long time ago when windows in China were made out of paper. People would decorate their homes by pasting beautiful paper cutouts, or “window flowers,” onto their windows. In preparation for the New Year’s celebration, each year people replaced the old “window flowers” with fresh ones. Each cut-out was different and was made to reflect each person’s interests.

- Compare the paper cuts of opera masks to the Abelan yam mask. How are they different? How are they the same? Think about the colors used in each mask.

The Spencer’s brightly colored paper cuts represent masks worn by characters of the Peking Opera. Together, they show that their former owner had enjoyed attending Chinese plays, which involved singing, dancing, acting, poetry, mime, acrobatics, and martial arts.



Eugene Omar Goldbeck
1892–1986
born and died San Antonio, Texas
Indoctrination Division, Air Training Command, Lackland Air Base, San Antonio, Texas,
1947
gelatin silver print
Museum purchase, 1981.0117

- Look closely at this photograph. What shapes and symbols do you see?
- What is unusual about the way the shapes and symbols are formed?
- What do you notice about the men’s clothing?

This photograph depicts an aerial view of a large group of soldiers arranged to form an image of a star and a pair of wings. The men in this photograph were United States Air Force pilots and chose the symbol of the star to represent their division, while the wings represent their profession as pilots. In total, 21,785 soldiers stood in a special pattern to form a large-scale image of their **symbol**. To make the picture, a photographer stood on top of a 200-foot tower and pointed his camera down to where the group of men was gathered. Altogether, this photograph required two months worth of planning and a huge number of people.

- How can a symbol represent a group of people, a school, or a sports team? Are you a part of a group? What symbol do they use?



The works of art in *Pomp up the Jam*

depict celebrations and events such as the Chinese New Year, historical figures like the Emperor Maximilian I, and objects that are both beautiful and functional like the chalice veil and the yam mask.

- *Do you see other objects in the Museum that give us clues to their function through their appearance?*
- *Do you have objects at home that serve a purpose yet are decorated (for example, a jewelry box)? How do their designs tell us that something special is inside?*

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