



## FOLK ART AND YOUR CLASSROOM - A PERFECT FIT?

By Tanja Jones  
Curator of Education

What do a six-foot giraffe covered in bottle caps, a very *untraditional* Navajo weaving of a pig, and a whirly-gig with an American flag theme have in common? They are all examples of folk art. In *Contemporary American Folk Art: A Collector's Guide*, experts Chuck and Jan Rosenak define folk art as "self-taught (work) that comes from the soul of the artist and is not inspired by some other source." This definition encompasses an amazingly diverse group of works created by artists with little or no formal training. Most works are created to express strongly held beliefs, values, or feelings; Howard Finster, described as "folk art's first superstar," likened his works to "sermons in paint."

Folk art is not necessarily created with traditional art-making tools or methods, and is judged on a more subjective basis than many traditional works of art –

taking into account the artist's emotions and strong creative impulse. It is the diverse nature of folk art, in both form and content, that makes it an ideal tool for introducing the visual arts into other curriculum areas.

- *Folk art often serves a "story-telling" function as artists use images to pass along information to future generations, making it a unique enhancement to language arts curricula. For example, encourage students to create fictional stories to explain the creation of works whose origin or intent is not readily obvious.*
- *Folk art is a valuable tool for the social studies and history instructor since many folk art pieces have a regional character or concentrate on topical concerns, including the depiction of political figures.*
- *The unique construction of many works, using found objects available to the artists (such as bottle caps), promotes the innovative use of pattern, repetition, symmetry or asymmetry. Enough variety of shapes and forms can be found in folk art to make the most reticent geometry student sit up and take notice!*



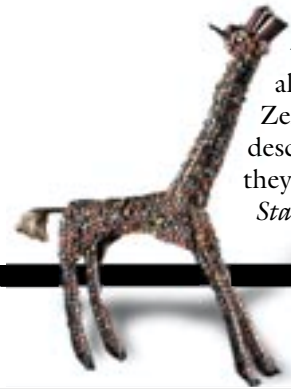
*"It is the diverse nature of folk art, in both form and content, that makes it an ideal tool for introducing the visual arts..."*

Introducing folk art into the curriculum can be as easy as downloading images from the Internet or visiting a local museum. These approachable works of art can be an exciting visual arts infusion into your curriculum.

## ENHANCING A SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM WITH FOLK ART IMAGES

Cultural icons or symbols such as the American flag or the *Statue of Liberty* often serve as creative inspiration for folk artists. Use this information to enhance the study of national identity and current events.

1. Remind students that folk art is created by individuals without formal artistic training. It often reflects strongly held feelings or beliefs that the artist expresses in visual form.
2. Introduce students to Malcah Zeldis' *Miss Liberty Celebration*. The painting features the artist's interpretation of the celebration surrounding the restoration of the *Statue of Liberty*, and also reflects the personal celebration of Zeldis' recovery from cancer. Ask students to describe what they see in the image and why they think the artist chose to include the *Statue of Liberty* in her work.
3. Explain to students that many folk artists choose to incorporate national or regional symbols into their works of art. Discuss the reasons why artists would make such a choice.
4. Discuss the importance of national and regional symbols throughout history and have students list national symbols that are in use today. What purposes do they serve? How do they relate to current events and reflect tides of nationalism? Ask students how recent world events have impacted national pride. Do students feel this will be reflected in works of art?



## RESOURCES

The following resources can extend the learning in the lesson above:

Books and Publications:

- *Bird, the Banner and Uncle Sam: Images of America in Folk and Popular Art*, Elinor Lander Horwitz
- *Five Star Folk Art: One Hundred American Masterpieces*, Jean Lipman
- *ABC America from the National Gallery of Art*, Cynthia Elyce Rubin
- *Contemporary American Folk Art: A Collector's Guide*, Chuck and Jan Rosenak

Show and discuss the following art works and artists whose works feature or have become American icons or symbols from popular culture:

- *Statue of Liberty*, American flag, the *Washington Monument*
- Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware*
- Jasper Johns, (1930- )
- Grant Wood, (1892-1942)



**Credits:** Page 1, Bottom: (detail) Jack Savitsky, *Train in Cool Town*, 1968, Oil on fiberboard, 31 1/4 x 47 3/4 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson. Page 2, Center: Unidentified Artist, *Bottlecap Giraffe*, after 1966, Bottlecaps on painted wood with marbles and animal fur and hair, 72 1/2 x 54 x 17 1/2 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. and museum purchase made possible by Ralph Cross Johnson. Page 2, Bottom-Right: (detail) Malcah Zeldis, *Miss Liberty Celebration*, 1987, Oil on corrugated cardboard, 54 1/2 x 36 1/2 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr., ©1987, Malcah Zeldis. Page 3, Bottom-Left: Hawkins Bolden, Untitled, 1987, Wood, cloth, galvanized iron, and straw, 38 x 17 1/2 x 44 in., Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of William Arnett. Page 3, Center: Photograph courtesy of Chris Van Houten. Page 4: Willie Mae Brown, *Still Life*, 2001, Acrylic on paper.

## ART FOR AND BY THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

By Hope McMath

Director of Education at The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens

Hawkins Bolden creates scarecrows assembled from found materials including chairs, coffeepots, clothing, and other discarded household items. The resulting sculptures populate and protect his garden in Memphis, Tennessee, and Bolden's figures capture the attitude and expressiveness found in human gesture and physical attitude.

Hawkins Bolden is blind. Like most folk artists, his motivation to create visual statements is strong enough to overcome any limitations presented by lack of training, access to materials, geographic isolation, or disability. The need to conquer such obstacles often infuses folk art pieces with unbridled originality and ingenuity.

"People who cannot see are as likely to have a need to make and to appreciate visual art as anyone with sight; mental activity persists even after loss of sight, and self-esteem is attainable through engagement in the visual arts regardless of degree of visual acuity," states Scott Nelson, a curator, sculptor, and arts advisor who is blind. Among the many artists who have created art despite their visual impairment are Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Dale Chihuly, and Francisco de Goya.



Art appreciation and art-making programs for people who are blind are not new. There are a number of museums worldwide providing experiences for blind visitors through tactile drawings, touch tours, audio guides, and musical interpretations of artwork.

At the Cummer Museum, visually impaired visitors are given the opportunity to participate in a number of arts activities. *Women of Vision*, an arts and literacy program for the visually impaired, has just entered its fourth year and is being celebrated with an exhibition of student works. The lessons learned through *Women of Vision* are now being replicated with students at the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, (FSDB). Thanks to a generous grant from the MetLife Foundation, FSDB students and teachers are benefiting from monthly museum visits, classroom outreach, and curriculum development. In addition, the Cummer is working with museums around the country and Art Education for the Blind in New York City, to write, implement and evaluate a series of lessons that will be available for national dissemination.

## FALL EXHIBITIONS: *Treasures to go*

Delivered by the Smithsonian American Art Museum  
and the Principal Financial Group

### Contemporary Folk Art:

Treasures from the Smithsonian American Art Museum  
*October 11, 2001 – January 20, 2002*

### Works by Students at the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind

*October 26 – December 30, 2001*

### Women of Vision:

*October 26 – December 30, 2001*

Major funding provided by  
**MetLife Foundation**  
Museum Connections Initiative.

### Winter Teacher In-Service:

*Arts for All* given by Dwayne Szot  
*February 5th*

Adapting art-making activities and materials for  
students with disabilities.

### Museum Highlight Tours

Attend a fascinating docent-led journey through  
the treasures of the permanent collection.

*Tuesdays, 7:00 PM & Sundays, 3:00 PM*

## UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS:

### Vision 2002: The Cummer Contemporary

*February 13 – March 30, 2002*

### First Encounters: Chief Saturiba and Florida's Timucua People

*February 13 – May 26, 2002*

### Toulouse Lautrec: Artist of Montmatre

*May 3 – July 14, 2002*

## RESOURCES

Visit these websites to find good art ideas and teacher lesson plans:

- [www.cummer.org](http://www.cummer.org) – Information on booking a tour. Lesson plans and background information on Florida and the Timucua. Interactive kids' section.
- <http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/treasures/1fa/index.html> – The Smithsonian Institution site highlighting the Contemporary American Folk Art exhibition.
- [www.aboutourkids.com/articles/cr\\_publiced.html](http://www.aboutourkids.com/articles/cr_publiced.html) – Teacher and parent information related to the exhibition *Childhood Revealed: Art Expressing Pain, Discovery and Hope*.
- [www.folkart.org](http://www.folkart.org) – Folk Art Society of America site with *Folk Art Messenger* magazine.
- [www.folkartmuseum.org](http://www.folkartmuseum.org) – The American Museum of Folk Art in New York City.
- [www.avam.org](http://www.avam.org) – American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore.
- [www.mintmuseum.org](http://www.mintmuseum.org) – *Crafting North Carolina* – traditional American Folk Art.



Learn more about exciting events at the  
Cummer by visiting our website at  
[www.cummer.org](http://www.cummer.org). To book a tour, please  
call *Art Connections* at 355-0630.

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens • 829 Riverside Avenue • Jacksonville, Florida 32204 • (904) 356-6857



Contemporary Folk Art is one of eight exhibitions in Treasures to Go, from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, touring the nation through 2002. The Principal Financial Group is a proud partner in presenting these treasures to the American people.



Contemporary Folk Art is presented locally in part by Maxwell House, a division of Kraft Foods.