

Use this handout to help
you explore the artworks
featured in our galleries.

Exploring Black Artists at the IMA

EMBODIED: HUMAN FIGURES IN ART

FLOOR 2

① Hair and Identity

The *helmet mask for Sande association* and Allison Saar's *Nappy Head Blues* show how hair can represent strength, beauty, and identity. One celebrates coming of age traditions in West Africa, while the other reclaims pride in Black hair.

→ Look closely at the hairstyles in each artwork. What textures, shapes, or details do you notice?



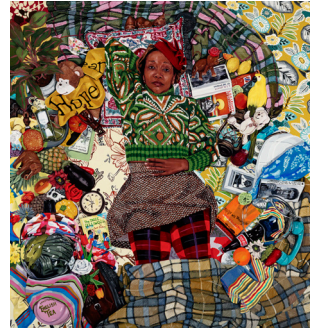
BOLD: NEW VOICES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

FLOOR 2

② Memory and Identity

Kenyan-born artist Wangari Mathenge made this painting as part of series called *Re-Membering*. The group of works explores identity, memory, and culture. To inspire her series, Mathenge studied books, objects, and traditions and included details from what she learned in her compositions.

→ This painting is full of things to notice. Take a slow look. What stands out to you? What objects, symbols, and patterns would you use to show your own history and culture?



WORK IN PROGRESS: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT AMERICAN ART

FLOOR 2

③ The Mundane

Indiana-born artist, John W. Hardrick, was one of the first Black students to attend Herron School of Art and Design. Hardrick liked to highlight the “beauty in the extraordinary and mundane.” We have two works of his on display in *Work In Progress*, but check out *Dolly & Rach*.

→ What stands out as “beautiful”?



④ Foreground, Middle Ground, and Background

Robert S. Duncanson was a Black American painter working in the 1800s. He is known for depicting places he visited, like this one painted while in Scotland.

→ Artists often build paintings in three parts: the front (foreground), middle (middle ground), and back (background). Look closely at the painting. List one detail in the front, middle, and back:

FOREGROUND _____

MIDDLE GROUND _____

BACKGROUND _____



5 What Do You Hear?

Elizabeth Catlett moved to Mexico in 1946 and lived there for many years. She made art about everyday people and worked with other artists to fight for equality and justice. This sculpture is called *El Canto*, which means “the song” in Spanish.

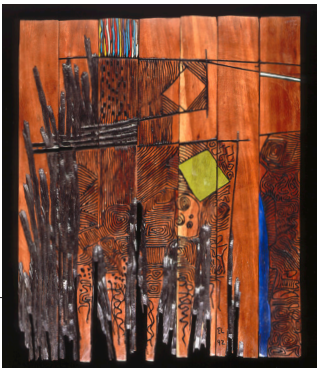
→ Try imitating the shape of the mouth. Can you sing a note?



6 Symbols and Colors

El Anatsui used bright colors and geometric shapes in the decoration of this artwork, titled *Sacred Comb*. The repetitive curved lines are similar to designs found in textiles, body art, and sculpture from southeast Nigeria.

→ If you could make a “sacred” object from something in your everyday life, what would you choose?



7 A Bird Staff of Power

Used by high-ranking figures in the Kingdom of Benin, located in present day Nigeria, this brass staff played a role in royal ceremonies and festivals. When struck with a metal rod, the bird’s beak creates a sharp sound. The staff refers to a historical military victory and symbolizes the king’s authority over both natural and spiritual forces.

→ As you look at this staff, consider how objects can communicate messages without words. What ideas or values do you think this staff was meant to convey during a public ceremony?



8 Beauty in Design

Norman Teague and Yohance Joseph Lacour designed the *Africana Rocking Chair* with patterns inspired by West African traditions that express identity, beauty, and connection to community. Many artworks in the Design Gallery are also objects people use, and artists include details that carry meaning or tell a story.

→ Think about the objects in your life. If you could design something that shows beauty or strength, what choices would you make to tell that story?



Draw a sketch. →

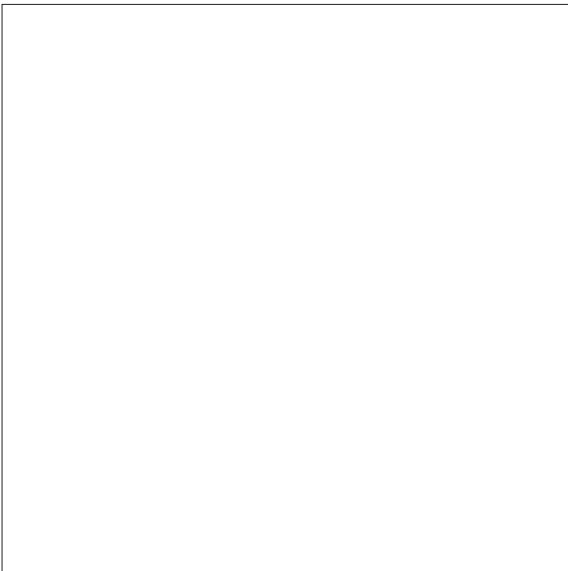


Image credits: Gola people, *helmet mask* for Sondo association, 20th century, wood, pigment, mastic, fiber, metals, cowrie shells, claws, 16-1/8 x 8-1/2 x 9 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eitelborg, 1989.387. Alison Saar (American, b. 1956), *Nappy Head Blues*, 1997, wood, paint, found objects, 19-1/2 x 13-1/4 x 12-1/4 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Indianapolis Chapter, 1999.41. © Alison Saar, Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA. Wangari Mathenge (Kenyan, b. 1973), *Re-Membering V (Something Torn and New)*, 2025, oil on canvas, 76 x 72 x 2 in. (canvas). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Delavan Smith Fund, Lucille Stewart Endowed Art Fund, 2025.7. © Wangari Mathenge. John W. Hardrick (American, 1891–1968), *Dolly & Rach*, about 1930, oil on board, 43 x 38-1/8 x 2 in. (framed). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, On loan from the Estate of Constance Stubbs. © John Wesley Hardrick, Robert S. Duncanson (American, 1821–1872), *Loch Long*, 1867, oil on canvas, 19-1/2 x 33-11/16 in. (canvas); 25-7/8 x 39-3/4 x 3-3/4 in. (framed). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift of the Alliance of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1997.142. Elizabeth Catlett (American, 1915–2012), *El Canto*, 1968, cast bronze with brown patina on mahogany base, 12 x 8 x 8-1/4 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Deaccessioned American Sculpture Fund, Gift of the University of Louisville by exchange, 2018.73. © 2025 Catlett Mora Family Trust / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. El Anatsui (Ghanaian, b. 1944), *Sacred Comb*, 1992, wood, paint, varnish, 30 x 25 x 1-1/2 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift of the Alliance of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1999.77. © El Anatsui. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, NY. Edo people, *staff with bird figure*, mid-1700s to mid-1800s, brass, Ht. 10-1/2 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Emma Harter Sweetser Fund, 1922.62. Norman Teague (American, b. 1968) and Yohance J. Lacour (American, b. 1973), *Africana Rocking Chair*, 2022, basswood, leather, 28 x 21-1/2 x 24 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Purchased with funds provided by Christopher West, Robertine Daniels Art Fund in Memory of Her Late Husband, Richard Monroe Fairbanks Sr., and Her Late Son, Michael Fairbanks, 2022.20. © Yohance Joseph Lacour, © Norman Teague.