
Folk Art Module

Introduction

Folk Art, like all art, comes from life, from humans interacting with their world; from the natural environment and the built environment. The objects, events, experiences, and structures that we interact with both inspire us and have aesthetic qualities attributed to them. Whether it is the way the table is set for a "mug-up", the way a particular boat sits in the water, how a certain style of fence looks, how the powder horn was decorated or the special piece of furniture grandfather made for their anniversary, folk art is an expression of human aesthetics. It can be plain or extraordinary, functional and/or decorative. We see it in the workplace, the home, the architecture and the physical environment. Folk Art distinguishes itself from what is commonly known as "fine art" in that its creators are not formally trained, yet it still operates on the elements and principles of design which underlie fine art.

Virtually every community has folk art within its borders. To identify it, all you need is an open mind and an understanding of the role it plays. It is seen in locally made furniture, toys, games, garments, floor mats, picture frames, storage boxes, boots, paintings, drawings, samplers and numerous other objects. Influences can be observed from other cultures, particularly those of the early settlers. Folk Art has been and remains an important link in cultural transmission.

Categories - Groupings

Outside, Decorative Objects

This grouping of folk art contains things which are seen to be made outside the house for the purpose of enhancing the exterior environment. These works are usually distinct from things intended for used inside the house. The difference between the two was often influenced by the traditional roles of men and women in a society.

Matmaking

Matmaking is largely an inside the house activity. Hooked mats are produced by positioning narrow strips of fabric below a stretched piece of brin and then inserting a hook between two strands of the weave to hook the strip, pulling it just above the surface and then releasing it. This is repeated along the length of the brin. Hooking is a linear process.

The poked mat made use of short strips of fabric which were poked through on both sides of a strand so that both ends are left protruding.

Carving

This activity tends to focus on the decorative qualities of an object rather than its functional use. Sailors often carved images into powderhorns as a leisure activity while at sea. Furniture makers carved by hand, the designs and shapes seen in furniture made by machines. Home builders and home owners often carved details and designs on objects and into surfaces around the house; then there are those who carve objects, animals, or people.

Furniture

Furniture making techniques vary from area to area and over time. We can often determine where and when a particular piece of furniture was made just by finding out how it was made. Folk furniture will range from the simplest tool to incredibly ornate pieces, depending on the skills and influences of the maker.

Clothing

Clothing is as varied and interesting as there are people who wear it. It has specific conventions, is associated with rituals, offers protection, provides decoration and often stimulates ingenuity. Handmade items which reflect function and availability of materials can be quite fascinating to study.

Containers

A great deal of folk art focuses on the production and decoration of containers. These range from the first crude clay pots to elaborate dolls hidden within dolls. The needle case made by fishermen have something in common with the grass baskets made by women on the Labrador coast; they are both functional and decorative and stem from the environment in which the makers find themselves.

Notes:

FOLK ART SLIDES

FO1	Martin Barter/ <i>House and Yard</i>
FO2	Jack Mahaney/ <i>Whirligig</i>
FO3	Israel Young/ <i>Horses</i>
FO4	Louise Belbin/ <i>Moose</i>
FO5	Evelyn Chaffey/ <i>Untitled</i>
FO6	Grenfell Industries/ <i>Dog Team</i>
FO7	Gilbert Hay/ <i>Caribou</i>
FO8	Clyde Drew/ <i>Eagles in Flight</i>
FO9	John Sharpe/ <i>Woman Taking in Clothes</i>
FO10	Manasse Fox/ <i>Cabinet</i>
FO11	Anonymous/ <i>Games Table</i>
FO12	Christianne Morris/ <i>Quillwork Cradle</i>
FO13	Nascapi/ <i>Moccasin</i>
FO14	Angela Andrews/ <i>Tea Doll</i>
FO15	Yarn Point Crafts/ <i>Winterhouse Ltd./Mitts</i>
FO16	Unknown/ <i>Sun Bonnets</i>
FO17	Unknown/ <i>Sail Cloth Wall Hanging</i>
FO18	Nascapi/ <i>Cartridge Bag</i>
FO19	Suzie Pottle/ <i>Wastepaper Basket</i>
FO20	Anthony White/ <i>Spruce Root Basket</i>

Artist: Martin Barter
Title: *House and Yard*
Medium: Assemblage, Yard Art
Size: Variable
Date: 1983
Location: Mainland, Port au Port Peninsula

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A house and yard surrounded by a variety of assembled objects painted red and white. These vary from natural objects like beach rocks to such man made objects as an anchor and pieces of machinery.

Design: Formal geometric arrangements of objects and clusters of objects. Three-dimensional objects with surface decoration are installed at regular intervals throughout the yard.

Red on white dominates the colour scheme. Yellow cables form a link between the rock pillars.

Lines: Straight lines of objects direct our vision, giving the only sense of movement.

Techniques: The artist makes use of found materials and discarded equipment. Some of the machinery include pieces from the Newfoundland railway. The fence is made up of cable and fishing gear floats. The pillars are constructed of beach rocks cemented together. All objects are repainted annually by the artist.

Mood: Light-hearted, pleasant.

Thought Provoker: What objects have you seen in other people's back yards?

Notes:

Artist: Jack Mahaney, Carbonear
Title: *Whirligig*
Medium: Wood, Paint
Size: Approximately 70 cm long
Date: 1982
Location: Collection of the Rice Family

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A duck with movable wing-like attachments which rotate with the wind. Yard art can encompass virtually anything one chooses to install outside the house, shed, etc. in a decorative manner. Some yard art can have a functional role as well. Yard art is a public display, a community style installation. Many items are handmade. Others are older objects transformed from their original use such as the rubber tire as planters. Wind driven objects are the most common. These are sometimes called whirligigs. The movement of these pieces create sound.

Design: Symmetrical; in-the-round consideration is given to construction of this stylized bird shape with smooth rounded corners.

We see spotted blue colour on a white background. The wingtips, beak, tail section and top of head are painted solid orange. A narrow red band encircles the neck.

Techniques: Wood was sawn, handcarved, painted, and assembled to respond to air movements. The piece is mounted on top of a 2 m high pole.

Mood: Whimsical

Thought Provoker: What other objects, events, animals, etc., lend themselves to becoming whirligigs? Can you think of a function for them or other ways to drive whirligigs?

Notes:

Artist: Israel Young
Title: *Horses*
Medium: Paint on Wood, Mural
Size: Approximately 5 cm x 5 cm
Date: c. 1985
Location: Marsh's Point, Port au Port Peninsula

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: An exterior wall mural showing four horses of which the white one is centrally located and larger than all of the others. The mural is on the back side of a barn-like structure.

Design: The large white horse dominates the work by its size, location and the shape of the building wall. The narrowing of the roof creates a frame which emphasizes the central image.

Variations of blue provide a contrasting background to the white. Several smaller brown horses are given less emphasis.

Movement is evident in the position of the horse.

Space is somewhat ambiguous.

Technique: The artist probably used housepaint on the available surface. The image may be influenced by an actual horse known to the artist or by an image he has seen elsewhere.

Mood: There is delight and joy in the movement of horses in their environment. Carefree, fantasy, dreamlike.

Thought Provoker: What other subject matter could have been used? What would the effect be if the scale was different? What objects would you paint on? Why do people paint images on the exterior of buildings or the interior of caves?

Notes:

Artist: Louise Belbin, Grand Bank
Title: *Moose*
Medium: Fabric Scraps, Brin
Size: 55 cm x 103 cm
Date: c. 1977
Location: MUN Art Gallery Collection

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A single stylized moose standing in profile. The animal seems to be walking across a small body of water. Each side is flanked by a stylized floral shape.

Design: Bright foreground colours contrast with a neutral grey/white background. The black moose dominates the whole composition. The colour of the antlers is repeated in the earth shape of the foreground. A black/blue border surrounds the image. All colours are bold, without any subtle change. This was probably due to the availability of particular fabrics as opposed to the dyeing process used to obtain colours for Grenfell mats. (See FO6)

Simple organic forms appear throughout the composition. There is a symmetrical balance. Implied movement in the moose figure goes from right to left.

Technique: Hooked mat technique. Materials were likely bought or found locally. Some may have been recycled. A lack of frayed edges indicates the use of nylon type fabric, probably a synthetic knit.

Mood: Colourful, playful

Thought Provoker: What other animals would make good subjects? How would a change in the colour or the medium change the mood of the piece? Are there particular images in your area that are popular in such mats?

Notes:

Artist: Evelyn Chaffey, St. David's
Title: Untitled
Medium: Fabric, Brin
Size: 35 cm x 65 cm
Date: 1968
Location: Collection of the Artist

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A floral-like pattern.

Design: Two large circular shapes of colour set within two triangular shapes are separated by a strong diagonal line of colour. The whole area is surrounded by a thin border.

This is an unusual choice of pattern for this medium.

The red area dominates one half while the blue/white combination dominates the other. The use of a blue border unifies the piece.

The piece is symmetrically balanced.

Techniques: Poked mat technique. Material used seems to be a crimp knit which was favoured by mat makers around the time this was made. Mats are often influenced by the popularity of materials available at a particular time.

Mood: Adventurous.

Thought Provoker: How is the mat different from the Belbin mat? How would the mat be changed if this were a realistic image of a moose?

Notes:

Artist: Grenfell Industries Production Worker
Title: *Dog Team*
Medium: Dyed Nylon Stockings, Brin
Size: 85 cm x 115 cm
Date: c. 1940
Location: Collection of Steve Hamilton

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: Dog sled, northern Newfoundland or Labrador. A dog team is being readied to tow the sled. The figures are standing on an ice flow with open water in the distance. The time of day appears to be early morning or late evening - shadows are pronounced. Mats having representational images were usually intended as wall hangings whereas those with patterns and designs were intended for use on the floor.

Design: Colours are harmonious, painterly with subtle gradations. There is use of contrast of the dark figures, the landforms and the central dog against the light background.

Our eyes follow the line of the dog team to the middle ground then off into the distance. The overall design indicates a knowledge of formal design theory. The use of a border is common to many folk art forms both in Newfoundland and elsewhere.

Techniques: Hooked mat technique. With such Grenfell mats, old nylon stockings were shipped from England, dyed locally, and hooked into decorative mats using specified designs. The materials were assembled as kits and sent out to their production people. The mats were sold to raise funds for the Grenfell Foundation.

Thought Provoker: Compare this style with the previous two mats. How does this mat show there was a knowledge of formal design theory at work?

Notes:

Artist: Gilbert Hay, Innuit Carver, Nain
Title: *Caribou*
Medium: Stone, Caribou Antler
Size: Approximately 25 cm x 30 cm
Date: c. 1985
Location: Collection of the Artist

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A stone carved caribou, standing with its neck slightly lowered. Bone antlers crown its head. In the slide we see the artist, the work and an uncut stone.

Design: This is a sculpture in the round where all sides must be considered as contributing to the whole. Positive/negative space is important here.

Natural colours of the materials remain. Light and shadow interplay on the roughly textured surface of the animal.

The stone is rough yet seemingly smooth in places. The finished sculpture can be contrasted with an untouched stone in the right hand side of the slide; shiny vs. dull, polished vs. cut. Texture remains in the control of the artist. The type of surface intended is significant to how one views the completed piece.

The animal seems massive. The piece is more interpretative than realistic/literal.

Techniques: Handcarving, using chisels, mallets, and polishing instruments.

Thought Provoker: How would the piece look with a polished surface? in a different medium?

Notes:

Artist/Maker: Clyde Drew
Title: *Eagles in Flight*
Medium: Scrimshaw on Moose Antler
Size: 17 cmh x 19 cml x 4 cmw
Date: 1989
Location: Collection of Alex Hickey

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: The heads of two eagles fashioned from a piece of antler. The top one points skyward while the other faces in a horizontal direction.

Design: A strong sense of movement is present in the shape of the piece. Lines present in the surface texture also contribute to this. The natural colours of the antler resemble the colours of the eagle. The artist has made use of this by retaining the natural appearance of the antler behind the polished head shapes. There is great contrast between the smooth-polished heads and the rough-unfinished surface.

Techniques: Once the artist selects a certain piece of bone, he lets it suggest what it will become. Its shape will often inspire him. Imagination and suggestion play a big part in creating a piece. A grinding tool, similar to those used by dentists is employed to outline the major shapes and details. After sanding with various grades of sandpaper the piece is polished on a motorized buffing wheel.

Thought Provoker: Could you do something similar with other types of bone? What might you do?

Notes:

Artist: John Sharpe
Title: *Woman Taking in Clothes*
Medium: Wood Carving
Size: 30 cmw x 20 cmh x 12 cmd
Date: 1983
Location: Jeanette Laaning Collection

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A woman dressed for winter weather removing clothes from a line. Beside her is a container with other clothing like articles. The line is suspended between two vertical poles. All objects are mounted on a wooden base.

Design: Muted, subdued use of colour in the figure contrasts with the brilliance of the white used on the clothing shapes.

Careful consideration is given to all sides and the arrangement of objects in terms of how they contribute to the whole.

Balance is asymmetrical.

Techniques: Hand carved, hand painted wood, assembled using glue and wire. A found container cover serves as a clothes basket.

Mood: Whimsical, a sense of humour. The clothes, frozen rigid and stiff, is typical of a winter day.

Thought Provoker: How would this subject look in a different season? medium? colours? stuffed?

Notes:

Artist: Manasse Fox, Nain
Title: *Cabinet*
Medium: Pieced, Incised and Painted Wood with Ivory
Size: 28 cmw x 9 cmd x 36 cmh
Date: c. 1906
Location: NF Museum, St. John's

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A wall cabinet with four doors. Each door is decorated with a different pattern.

Design: A compass/star design is repeated on each door. This compass/star in a circle, the incised lines and colours reflect German influence. The dot within a circle and some of the patterns are Inuit. They can be identified with the sealskin piercing tradition. The ivory turn knobs, made from walrus tusk, reflect traditional Inuit carving. Geometric shapes of circles, squares, rectangles, and triangles are repeated in various combinations. The geometric decoration is similar to designs seen on Inuit skin boots.

Technique: The patterns were created by deep incising and application of at least six contrasting colours of paint. The carved circles on the upper door were fitted into holes which were cut right through the thin door panels. Most of the wood used appears to have been taken from packing crates. The overall construction, unlike the decoration, is generally crude. The mitred door frames are fixed to the door panels by round nails. The original hinges were fashioned from interlocking wire staples. All of the original knobs are now missing. (Peddle, Traditional Furniture)

Thought Provoker: How does this piece compare with contemporary furniture?

Notes:

Artist/Maker: Anonymous
Title: *Games Table*
Medium: Wood, Chip Carving
Size: 75 cm x 60 cm x 45 cm
Date: late 19th century
Location: Collection of the Newfoundland Museum

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A freestanding table. The top has been carved, to create a gamesboard. The piece probably functioned as a table for other purposes when not in use for games.

Design: The table itself is symmetrical. The carved area seems to be symmetrical at first, however there are variations in the design due to the chipcarving technique used. The heart and shell shapes which have been carved into the surface reflect an Irish folk furniture decoration technique. It bears similarity to washstands both in size and with the inclusion of a shelf-like platform between the legs. The colour may not be the original.

Techniques: Parts for the table were handcarved. The surface decoration is created with a chipcarving method where a knife or chisel is used to chip the surface, then the piece is cut away. It was used most often to create geometric motifs.

Thought Provoker: Compare this games table to the more modern entertainment things like Nintendo, Trivia games; single person games, or group games.

Notes:

Artist: Christianne Morris and Alexander Strum
Title: *Quillwork Cradle*
Medium: Porcupine Quills on Birch Panels
Size: 73 x 98 x 52 cm
Date: c. 1868
Location: DesBrisay Museum Collection. Photo by Edith Walter

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A child's cradle, lined with fabric. The exterior has its wood edges showing. It is supposed to be an exact copy of one she made for the infant, Edward VII, c. 1841.

Design: The exterior edges show the wooden structure which underlies the quillwork. A variety of traditional design motifs including star patterns, circles, moose, flora, fauna, and waves cover the surface. The overall design is symmetrical. Colours are generally cool except for a few areas of earth tones.

Techniques: Porcupine quills are worked on birchbark panels which are then mounted on a pine frame. Porcupine quills are smooth and shiny. They become flexible when soaked in water. This makes them easy to dye. After they are dyed and dried, they are sewn or poked into skin, cloth, or bark. This type of embroidery was used to decorate moccasins, leggings, shirts, and containers.

Thought Provoker: Compare this to modern day children's furniture.

Notes:

Artist: Nascapi Indian Labrador
Title: *Moccasin*
Medium: Sewing, beading, surface distortion
Size: Small Adult
Date: Unknown
Location: Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A moccasin of tan coloured animal hide with multicoloured decorative beading on its surface. Its upper edge is lined with white fur. These are outdoor boots designed to be worn in the type of cold dry snow found in Labrador.

Design: Balance is symmetrical. Attention is given to all sides in its construction.

Tan coloured animal hide makes up the article. Multicoloured beads are used to create what may be symbolic designs on the surface.

The toe section has a series of repeated lines in the leather which are the result of a smocking technique which gathers the material.

Soft, pliable leather with even softer fur. The beads have a hard, shiny surface.

Careful attention has been given to the colour structure and placement of the symbols. The toe section has a repeating line pattern.

Techniques: Stitchery, beading, and surface distortion.

Thought Provoker: What found materials in your environment could be used to make footwear that would be suitable to your climatic environment?

Notes:

Artist: Angela Andrews
Title: *Montagnais Tea Doll*
Medium: Sewn, Stuffed Fabric and Caribou
Size: Approximately 18"
Date: 1980
Location: Collection of Katie Parnham, Portugal Cove

DISCUSSION STARTERS

- Subject Matter** A fully clothed doll constructed from pieces of plain and floral printed fabric. The feet are sewn from animal hide. In the dolls lap is a smaller doll encased in a carrying harness. Tea dolls were made to literally carry tea on their extended trips into the interior of Labrador. They were made by women, carried by children and used as playtoys until the materials were consumed. The whole doll was consumable. Fabric and leather was used as patches to repair clothing. The fabric used was probably bought locally or recycled. Though this one is female, they could be male or child.
- Design:** Its form is rounded and chunky, the result of stuffing the interior.
- In this piece colours vary from fabric to fabric. The yellowish-brownish tint of the face and feet comes from exposing the caribou hide to a smoking process.
- The doll is soft, pliable, and lightweight.
- Balance is symmetrical.
- Techniques:** Fabric and leather is sewn together to form the body of the doll, then dressed with suitable clothing. There is some surface embellishment on the face. A quilting/stuffing technique is used in its assembly. Some dolls may have beading when attired in traditional dress.
- Mood:** Gentle, quiet, passive.
- Thought Provoker:** How does the function of this doll compare to the function of contemporary dolls? How does this practices fit with the concept of environmental conservation?

Notes:

Artist/Maker: Production Workers
Title: *Trigger Mitt and Thrummed Mitt*
Medium: Wood - spun and unspun
Size: Adult
Date: 1990
Location: Yarn Point Crafts/Winterhouse Ltd.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: We see two pairs of knitted mitts. The pair on the left with the thumb and forefinger separated from the rest of the mitt is known as a trigger mitt. The thrummed mitt is designed exclusively for warmth. The pair on the right with only the thumb separate, has unspun wool incorporated into its construction and makes use of a thrummed knitting technique. The trigger mitt was designed for use in hunting on the land or sea to free the trigger finger.

Design: The trigger mitt shows its double strands in the finger and palm area but has a more intricate diamond shaped pattern on the back of the hand section. The thrummed mitt is of one basic colour with a white pattern occurring where the pieces of unspun wool are knitted into its construction.

Repetition of particular shapes and colours occurs throughout both. The inside of the thrummed is vastly different from the outside whereas the inside of the trigger mitt does not have a raised surface.

Technique: The trigger mitt is knitted using a double strand construction to provide greater insulation as part of its function. The thrummed mitt is of single strand construction and unspun wool twisted and knitted into every fourth stitch. This gives it greater insulation value. The wrist band areas of both employ a single strand technique.

Thought Provoker: How are the decorative and functional purposes of clothing accommodated in these mitts?

Notes:

Artist/Maker: Unknown
Title: *Sun Bonnets*
Medium: Linen, Cotton, Wire
Size: 40 cmh x 22 d x 20 cmw
Date: c. 1900
Location: Collection of Ms. Anna Templeton

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: The two white bonnets have enough fabric to fall over the back of the neck to protect it from the sun. A brim does the same for the face. Two straps are attached at the point where the brim and the main part of the bonnet intersect. These were worn by women to protect themselves from the sun while working in the gardens or on the fish flakes.

Design: The cording around the head section creates a textured pattern which helps dissipate heat. The light colour of the fabric would also contribute to doing this. The gathering and smocking, while functional, also become part of the aesthetic appeal of the garment. A wire inside the edge of the brim permits some shaping and would prevent it from flapping in the wind.

Techniques: Surface distortion (smocking, gathering, cording).

Thought Provoker: What modern hats fulfil similar purposes? How does their design differ?

Notes:

Artist: Unknown, attributed to Meyers family members, Oyster Pond, NS
Title: *Sail Cloth Wall Hanging*
Medium: Paint on Sailcloth, Knotted Twine
Size: 55.4 cm x 41 cm
Date: c. 1870 - 1890
Location: Collection of Dartmouth Heritage Museum, Dartmouth, NS

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A painting of a three-masted ship under full sail in profile. The canvas is fringed with knotted twine. There are two storage pouches at the bottom of the sail cloth.

Design: The painting is made up predominantly of blues and whites. These colours reflect the blues of sky and sea and the white of clouds and sea foam. Some warm tones are worked into the clouds.

A border of light-brown painted canvas borders the painting. Fringed knotted twine decorates the top and bottom sides of the piece.

The pouches were formed by folding the canvas upward and spot sewing them by hand. The ship was painted and then twine was knotted in an open lattice weave pattern. This was sewn to the edges of the pockets and along the top of the cloth, creating a scalloped shaped fringe.

This piece may have been used for storage purposes in the kitchen, workshop, or on board ship. It reflects the Maritime tradition of painted sail cloth used for floor and sea chest coverings.

Techniques: Sewing, lace techniques and painting.

Thought Provoker: What kind of image would you see if this object had a different function? What if it were something to be used in a car?

Notes:

Artist: Nascapi Indian, Labrador
Title: *Cartridge Bag*
Medium: Caribou Skin, Melton Cloth, Beads, Handsewn
Size: Approximately 7" x 9"
Date: Unknown
Location: Unknown

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A bag with a fold over flap to close it. The edges are decorated with three rows of coloured beads, and a variety of loops. The flap and front of the bag is decorated. Cartridge bags were used to carry and keep ammunition dry. They were usually worn over the shoulder.

Design: Bright red, white, blue and green coloured beads contrast with the dark background fabric. The carrying strap is of a natural colour.

Lines of coloured beads follow the edges of the bag - red on the outside, white in the middle and green on the inside. The flap has a symmetrical beadwork design on it. Its edge is decorated with evenly placed loops of white beads. The bottom edge has similar loops alternating between light and dark green. The front of the bag has a symmetrical arrangement of lines of red and blue beads.

Techniques: Sewing and beading techniques are used. Beads are strung on thread and sewn in runs.

Mood: Bright, colourful.

Thought Provoker: What other everyday use could you design a container for? Which found objects would you use to decorate the surface? How would this look in neon colours?

Notes:

Artist: Suzie Pottle
Title: *Wastepaper Basket*
Medium: Grass, Berryjuice
Size: Approximately 14" high
Date: c. 1935
Location: Rigolet

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A functional handmade basket which is basically round and tapered towards the base. A cover is sitting beside it.

Design: A zig-zag, red-brown pattern encircles the centre area of the basket. The same pattern is seen in the cover, only this time it is given a six-point star configuration which surrounds the centrally located handle.

Its shape is symmetrical; its design determined by function and materials.

The yellowish-brownish colours are the result of naturally dried grass. The red of the horizontal pattern comes from grass dyed with berryjuice.

Techniques: Wrapping/Coiling technique. Local grasses are carefully selected and harvested at particular times of the year. All dyeing is done before assembly.

Thought Provoker: If you used different materials, how would that affect the object?

Notes:

Artist: Anthony White
Title: *Spruce Root Basket*
Medium: Spruce Roots, Woven and Tied
Size: 35 cm x 33 cm x 33 cm
Date: c. 1900
Location: Collection of Ms. Meg MacDonald

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Subject Matter: A round, almost spherical, basket constructed from wood fibres. These were used primarily as garden baskets for gathering wood, vegetables, or even dry fish. Other uses included clothes hampers, sewing baskets, or storage baskets for cod liver aboard ships.

Design: This particular design has European origins. Though this one is round, others may be oval, square, or rectangular. A pattern, created by the interweaving roots, leaves an uneven implied rough-looking texture. Individual surfaces are smooth. A warm natural colour with subtle gradations is evident. The overall lines of the subject are graceful and elegant. It is symmetrically balanced.

Techniques: Spruce tree roots of varying thickness are pulled from the ground. They are peeled, split and coiled until woven into baskets. Pliable young shoots of birch or a similar tree are shaped to form the skeletal structure of the basket. The split roots are then passed over and under, alternatively until a continuous surface is achieved. The top edge is formed by interweaving the side pieces back down into the last few rows.

Thought Provoker: How would the object be changed if it were painted? What would happen if you were to change its function or the materials used to make it?

Notes:

Folk Art Project #1: Outside, Decorative Objects

Key Learning

1. We like to make our living spaces personal and lively by decorating. This includes outside spaces. When we look at outside space at home or school, we rearrange or ornament the features that we find ordinarily in these spaces. This is done with colour alone or with scenes of our small or wider community painted or carved on them. Graffiti is a form of this decoration.
2. Weather is also used as an outside feature, especially when utilizing wind in creating movement in this art. Whirligigs are a popular example.

Materials

- ! exterior latex paint
- ! marine boat paints of varying colours
- ! paintbrushes of sizes
- ! a variety of found objects

Motivation

Visuals

Slides FA7, FA9, FA20. After studying each slide individually, discuss how outside space has been decorated and who would respond to the decoration - the artist, people going past the space, or both.

Experimentation

1. Make a list from student knowledge of local yard art, whirligigs, murals, fancy house decoration (different colours for mouldings, patterns cut into mouldings or clapboard, patterns in roof shingles, etc.), painted old-time objects (sleds, spinning wheels, etc.) in yards that they know of in their own community. Students can describe these examples to the class.
2. Create a decorative border along the pathway or sidewalk to main entrance to the school.

Have students bring in various sizes of rocks. On large ones paint pictures of school activities or items used in the school. Paint small ones solid colours. Along one or both sides of path to school entrance place big rocks and surround them with smaller, solid-coloured rocks to create continuous border.

Suggested Theme

Discuss features that are found in our utilitarian outside spaces:

- Yards ! pathways
- ! gardens/lawns
- ! buildings - outhouses, sheds, barns
- ! clotheslines

Areas for different activities

- ! sawhorse and woodpile
- ! barbecue
- ! picnic table and chairs
- ! sandbox/play area

Wharves

- ! boats
- ! work areas
- ! slipway

Weather

- ! wind
 - ! rain
 - ! snow, etc.
- may bring changes over time.

Studio A

Create an animal shape that responds with movement to weather. Discuss which parts of animals move - wings, feet, fins, mouth, neck, tail, etc. Use cardboard cutouts with an exacto knife to create a body. Several layers glued together will give it strength. Cut out moving parts separately - you could do two or more on the one animal - and attach with dowelling through holes in the body. Paint and put outside on poles or a fence as a group. All of the animals could be of the same type to create a school, flock, etc., or all could be individual types (see slide SC14 - *Flying Fish*)

Summary

What happens visually when they are all moving? Discuss in terms of objectives and process (successes, problems, surprises).

Studio B

Discuss how flags are used to decorate - sports arenas, used-car lots, etc. Movement and colour are important.

On strong, plain cloth - for example: tarps, sailcloth, old towels, tablecloths, etc. - each student is to paint a portrait of themselves in their favourite outfit, as close to lifesize as possible. Cut out, leaving extra fabric at top to fold over and sew, staple or otherwise attach firmly to a clothesline. Tie the two ends of the line to trees in the schoolyard, or between parts of a building or buildings. Leave outside in the weather to see gradual changes.

Summary

Take photographs when first put up and every week thereafter. At the end of the term or year - put up photos and discuss changes brought about by weather; students take home own piece to pin on their wall.

Notes:

Folk Art Project #2: Matmaking

Key Learning

1. Two types of handmade mats are common in Newfoundland; the hooked and the poked. Both types have strong connections with similar styles of matmaking in Britain. They were usually placed in high traffic areas to absorb mud from the outside as people entered the house. This meant they had a short lifespan of one, sometimes two seasons.
2. Geometric designs were favoured. Some use was made of commercial designs, however, when a particular image was desired, it was either traced or hand drawn. The Grenfell Association employed workers to produce mats using their printed designs. These were a major departure from the traditional images. Grenfell mats were intended as visual works rather than functional objects.
3. Mats were made from whatever scraps of fabrics were available. This had a major influence on colour and overall appearance. Only in very few instances were dyeing employed.

Materials

- ! brin
- ! burlap
- ! fabric scraps
- ! hooking frame
- ! hooking tool
- ! screen

Motivation

Slides FO4, FO5, FO6. Discuss the design components and motifs used in the traditional mats and compare those with the detailed painterly images used in the Grenfell Industries mats. Some discussion might also be given to the question of whether outside influences should be brought to bear on local practices.

Experimentation

1. Find fabrics which have a fairly open weave. Try using the hooking technique to attach short pieces of fabric to the surface in a decorative fashion.
2. On small pieces of brin or one large piece have students explore both the hooking and poking techniques. Experiment with optical colour mixing, image making, achieving detail, random colour placement, different fabrics to determine their suitability to the techniques.

Themes

Some themes which lend themselves to these techniques include designed objects such as clothing, decorative or functional items; the built environment; elements from the natural environment or virtually any idea that can be reasonably carried out in this medium. Students should be cautioned that these techniques take quite a bit of time to execute, therefore, images should be chosen with that in mind.

Studio

Use the techniques to create something other than a mat. This might be a sculpture, wall hanging, box cover, an enclosure, or a wearable garment. Materials other than cloth might be used. A piece of clothing from the experimental activity could be further developed into a piece. Any utilitarian object can be hooked so that it becomes a sculptural piece - i.e., screendoors.

Summary

Display all pieces. Invite comparison for different applications or adaptations of the techniques. Discuss the objectives in terms of the experience. Explore whether there had been any surprises, disappointments, frustrations, innovations or problems.

Folk Art Project #3: Carving

Key Learning

1. Carving is a subtractive process where material is taken away from the original mass to transform the original shape to the desired form. For more information on sculptural techniques refer to the sculpture module.
2. The folk artist uses materials found in his/her environment. Scraps and objects that have outlived their usefulness are often recycled into sculptural pieces. Quite often the material suggests to the artist what to make from it. This phenomena of seeing the object in the material has been a part of human experience historically. Early humans created tools from materials that looked like the tool they needed. Many contemporary artists tell of similar experiences.

Materials

- ! wood
- ! soapstone
- ! bone
- ! any found materials
- ! clay
- ! styrofoam
- ! chisels
- ! gouges
- ! hammer
- ! files
- ! hacksaws
- ! hand drills and bits
- ! sandpaper
- ! kitchen utensils
- ! popsicle sticks
- ! plastic knives

Motivation

Visuals

FO7, FO8, FO9. Discuss how the materials might have suggested to the artist what to make.

Experimentation

1. Have a collection of found objects which the students can examine for suggestions of things to create from them. Such items as driftwood, stones, roots, or shale can be quite suggestive.
2. To experiment with carving techniques, choose a piece of relatively soft material such as soap, lather-hard clay, or styrofoam and, using a variety of cutting tools, produce a sculptural form.

Suggested Theme

Everyday experiences, people, animals, common inanimate objects, or designed structures could serve well as themes.

Studio

Make a sculpture related to the individuals environment using found or readily available materials. Some ideas include walking canes, ornaments, furniture, whistles, tools, musical instruments, weather vanes, or gate posts.

Summary

Display and discuss the work in terms of technique, the subject matter, inspiration and intention vs. outcome and the amount of influence the carving process has on the final product.

Notes:

Folk Project #4: Furniture

Key Learning

1. Folk furniture must not be compared to commercial products since so little of it follows the same guidelines and standards. Most of the form, design and decoration is influenced primarily by the skill, experiences, needs and imagination of the individual craftsman.
2. Since the furniture makers were largely untrained, their pieces were usually copies of relatively simple furniture remembered or seen in Britain or the Eastern Seaboard of North America. These fairly uncomplicated designs were repeated for generations with minor modifications. Most communities were too small to support the services of a trained furniture maker and were too far from such services to acquire commercially made furniture. In fact, the relatively cashless economy prevented people from having enough money to buy furniture.
3. Early wooden furniture was made from local wood such as pine, spruce, fir, and birch. Boards from demolished buildings or from old pieces of broken furniture were frequently used in the nineteenth century. Early in the twentieth century packing case material was incorporated as panels in pieces.
4. The later the date of construction, the more elaborate the pieces tend to be. There was more use of carving to adorn them as the nineteenth century wore on.
5. Furniture has a combination of form and function which is influenced mostly by cultural traditions and local skills.

Materials

- ! local lumber
- ! found pieces of old furniture
- ! scraps of wood and wood products
- ! contemporary building materials ends
- ! tools appropriate to construction

Motivation

Slides FO10, FO11, FO12. Folk furniture design is often the product of cultural influences from outside that are carried with people when they move or from contact with other people. Discuss these works in terms of this statement and then look to your own community for indications that this statement may also be true of architecture in general.

Theme

The obvious theme of the built environment could be used. Explore also the possibility of designed objects and objects related to activities such as work or leisure.

Experimentation

1. Use your home community as your resource to identify any distinctive home furnishings that may still be around in people's houses or in museums. Look for repeated home decoration motifs, particular styles of house painting, door styles and presentation, gates, gate posts, window design and trim, or any distinctive patterning. If there are people available locally who could be interviewed, talk to them.

Studio

Using only found materials that have been discarded or can be recycled from some other project or object, construct a unique piece of furniture that reflects something of the local environments. The definition of furniture should be as broad as collective imagination of the students allows. The piece can be functional or non-functional, lifesize or a scaled model, or a replica of something no longer available locally.

Summary

Assess the final projects in light of originality, appropriate use of materials, consideration of decorative and functional aspects, and whether the pieces reflect sincere efforts to create something from resources available in the local community.

Notes:

Folk Art Project #5: Clothing

Key Learning

1. Clothing has a dual role: it must be both functional and decorative. These roles are a reflection of one's environment, the season, ethnic origin, the availability of materials and fashion.
2. Folk costumes differ from everyday dress. Quite often particular garments have symbolic or ritual importance, such as headdresses, footwear, vests, etc.
3. Commercially produced fabric had to be imported to Newfoundland from Europe and the eastern United States which made it rather scarce and expensive for most people. Cotton, in the nineteenth century was widely available in flour sacks. This was commonly recycled into items of clothing.

Materials

- ! fabric scraps
- ! leather from old shoes or jackets
- ! old clothes
- ! fabric sacks, bags, containers
- ! pantyhose, stockings
- ! threads
- ! yarn
- ! string
- ! embroidery thread
- ! beads
- ! buttons
- ! staples
- ! crochet hooks
- ! glue/adhesives
- ! needles

Motivation

Visuals

FO13, FO14, FO15, FO16. Discuss the decorative vs. functional qualities of these pieces. Focus the discussion on how the functional qualities influence the decorative qualities. Explore how the artists has recycled materials.

Experimentation

1. Examine fabrics and materials used today to make clothing. Compare contemporary clothing items to those in the slides; hightops with moccasins, baseball hats with the bonnets and so on.
2. Select used articles of clothing and find other completely different functions for them.

Suggested Theme

People, leisure activities, costumes, rituals/ceremonies, work, seasons, at the beach, in the garden, or putting out garbage.

Studio

Create a work in which the following ideas have been considered:

- ! it must have functional/practical and decorative elements in it;
- ! it must be three-dimensional;
- ! its form should suit its function;
- ! you can wear it;
- ! it must have a hidden/surprise element incorporated into it;
- ! it should have more than one purpose;
- ! it could be humorous or serious.

Summary

In what ways does the final piece meet the criteria set down. Are there areas where it does not. If so, then how might it have been accomplished?

Notes:

Folk Art Project #6: Containers

Key Learning

1. Containers can be attractive in form and decoration and still be functional.
2. Form is largely determined by function. Surface decoration is influenced greatly by socio-cultural environments as well as intended use of the object. The function of a spruce root basket would prohibit decoration. The oilcloth wall hanging which would not take much abuse would readily allow surface decoration.
3. The availability and suitability of materials often affected the look of an object.

Materials

- ! roots
- ! grass
- ! paper
- ! wire
- ! sticks
- ! rope
- ! fabrics
- ! buttons
- ! bark
- ! string
- ! shavings
- ! seaweed
- ! plastics
- ! twigs
- ! old man's beard
- ! feathers
- ! newspapers
- ! paint
- ! dyes

Visuals

FO17, FO18, FO19, FO20. Discuss how the function of these objects influenced their design.

Experimentation

1. Try weaving techniques using some of the materials listed above. Experiment with applying

colours to them.

2. Choose an everyday container. Enhance the form through surface decoration so that it reflects its intended place of use. For example, what could you do to an oil can to reflect a garage.
3. Experiment with coiling techniques around a variety of objects - pencils, fingers, rulers, broom sticks, hockey sticks, chair and table legs - using a variety of materials such as: electrical tape, string, rope, fabric, wire, shredded garbage bags, reeds, old man's beard, seaweed, elastic bands, ribbons, threads, twist ties, or something else which lends itself to being twisted.

Suggested Themes

Designed objects, containers - both functional and non-functional, natural environmental containers such as caves, disposable/reusable containers would create numerous possibilities for exploration.

Studio

1. Design a container that is functional - reusable where the surface decoration is influenced by function. This might be a container for a car which serves as an activity centre for children; a container for grocery shopping with compartments for specific items; a wastepaper basket of paper or old newspapers to create a container for newspapers.

Summary

1. Display the finished pieces and discuss the relationship between form, function and decoration. Examine also how well the final products meet with the requirements of the project.