

MINGEI

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM

CURRICULUM GUIDE

INFORMATION AND IDEAS FOR EDUCATORS

Bill Traylor

Drawings from the Collections of the High Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

February 9–May 12, 2013

www.mingei.org/exhibitions/bill-traylor



This exhibition includes approximately 63 drawings and paintings by self-taught Alabama artist Bill Traylor. Traylor began drawing near the end of his life and his works are notable for their flat, simply defined shapes and vibrant compositions in which memories and observations relating to African American life are merged. Traylor is recognized as one of the finest American artists of the 20th century.




WHO WAS BILL TRAYLOR?



Bill Traylor (1854?–1949) was born into slavery on a plantation near Benton, Alabama. After emancipation, he continued to live and work on the plantation until sometime before 1928, when he moved to Montgomery. There he worked as a laborer until he was physically unable to continue, then began receiving modest government assistance. Under the challenging conditions of Depression-era Alabama, Traylor survived on the streets in the then primarily black enclave of Monroe Avenue. He slept on the floor of local businesses and spent his days sitting on the sidewalks, creating more than 1,200 drawings.

Using modest materials, Traylor recorded events from his past as well as his observations of life in the Monroe Avenue area. Traylor sold or gave most of his work to Charles Shannon, a local artist who befriended him, for modest sums or in exchange for art supplies. Shannon preserved Traylor’s artworks for approximately forty years before reintroducing them to the public in the 1970s, and they now rank among the most important examples of self-taught art ever created.

EXHIBITION THEMES

<p>People</p>		<p>The human figures that appear in many of Traylor’s drawings represent particular people that he observed or remembered from his past. Traylor observed the heart of Montgomery’s African American community, boasting numerous black-owned and -operated businesses and an African American middle class eager for the latest music, fashion and style. This was the bustling, chaotic, thriving black community that Traylor experienced and chronicled.</p>
<p>Animals</p>		<p>Animals feature prominently in Bill Traylor’s art. In many of his works are pictures of farm animals he remembered from the plantation on which he worked for much of his life. He repeatedly drew solitary images of chickens, pigs, goats, cows, horses and mules, conveying a sense of individuality in each one. In addition, exotic animals were featured in the annual parade that came through Montgomery, quite possibly the inspiration for some of his exotic animal drawings.</p>
<p>Constructions and Exciting Events</p>		<p>Traylor was once asked what was going on in a particular drawing, and he simply replied, “That’s an exciting event.” From this, his animated, multi-figure compositions have come to be known as “Exciting Events.” Many include constructions with organic or architectural elements, or combinations of both. Some of these puzzling objects probably have their origins in memories from the plantation, while others may have been inspired by Montgomery’s urban landscape near the streets where Traylor sat to draw.</p>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Emancipation Proclamation was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, freeing all African Americans (at least in writing) from slavery. However, for former slaves, jobs, housing and currency were in short supply, so many continued to live and work on the lands of their former owners, now as sharecroppers with meager wages.

When slavery ended, Bill Traylor would have been an adolescent, somewhere around the age of 8 years old. With no other options, his family stayed and worked on the land of their former masters, Marion Hartwell and Ella Annie Boyd Traylor. Bill Traylor stayed on the Traylor Plantation until the last plantation owner passed away in the early 1920s, moving then to Montgomery, Alabama where he began to create his drawings.



EXHIBITION VOCABULARY

Emancipation Proclamation: The presidential order signed by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, freeing all African Americans from slavery.

Folk Art: Art produced using the traditional practices of a particular nation or region, often created by artists with no formal training, reflecting traditional culture, everyday customs, history and/or religion of that region.

Self-Taught Artist: An artist with no formal artistic training or schooling.

Outsider Art: Art created outside the framework of the recognized art scene.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do the memories and life experiences of an artist influence their artwork?
- Does a person need to be a professionally trained artist in order to produce art?
- Why might an artist use recycled materials rather than materials bought at a store? Do the materials that Bill Traylor used to make his work make them more or less meaningful?
- Why is it important to preserve art? What do you think might have happened to Bill Traylor's work if Charles Shannon had not collected and preserved them?

USE THE WORK OF BILL TRAYLOR TO REVIEW

The Elements of Art and Principles of Design

ELEMENTS OF ART

Line – A mark with greater length than width; lines can vary in width, length, curvature, color or direction

Shape – A two-dimensional area or plane that may be opened or closed, free form or geometric, found in nature or made by humans

Form – Three-dimensional shapes expressing length, width and depth

Space – The area between or around an object, or the feeling of depth

Color – Light reflected off of an object. The three characteristics of color are:

Hue – The gradation or variety of color

Value – How light or dark the color is

Intensity – How bright or dull the color is

Texture – The surface quality that can be seen and felt

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Balance – The distribution of the visual weight of objects, colors, texture and space. The three types of balance are:

Symmetry – The arrangement of parts to create a balanced or mirror image

Asymmetry – Unbalanced parts

Radial – Elements arranged around a central point

Emphasis – Special attention given to an element to make it prominent

Movement – An element that causes the eye of the viewer to travel across the work of art

Pattern – The repeating of lines, shapes or colors

Repetition – The recurrence of elements throughout a work of art

Proportion – The relationship in size of one part to another

Rhythm – Regular repetition to achieve a specific effect or pattern

Variety – Combining different elements of art to create interest

Unity – The feeling of harmony between all parts of the work of art

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES AND LESSONS

Modifiable to grade level

INTERPRETING DRAWINGS OF PEOPLE

Students view drawings made by Bill Traylor and interpret the scene.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will examine Bill Traylor's drawings and interpret what they see

Students will develop opinions based on visual evidence

Students will develop dialogue using descriptive language

MATERIALS:

Bill Traylor images (Available on Mingei's website)

Worksheet (included at the end of this guide)

Pencil or pen



DIRECTIONS:

Show students examples of Bill Traylor drawings by either projecting the images on a screen or handing out photocopies of the worksheet.

By examining drawings that depict at least two people interacting, have students create a dialogue between the people in the drawing.

Ask students to consider the following questions:

- What is going on in this picture?
- How do you think these people might know one another? What is their relationship?
- What do you think happened right before this moment? What do you think will happen next?

Next, have students examine one of Bill Traylor's drawings of an individual person and construct an identity for the figure in the picture.

Ask students to consider the following questions and then write a journal entry about that person based on the visual evidence they find in Bill Traylor's drawing

- Is the person a man or a woman?
- Where do you think they are going?
- How old do you think this person is?
- What do you think they do for a living?
- How do you think they are feeling right now?

Alternative/Extension: Make it personal and have students bring in photographs from home. In groups of two, have students exchange photographs and interpret the scene, considering the same questions.

DRAWING WITH GEOMETRIC SHAPES

To construct his images Bill Traylor used geometric shapes such as squares, rectangles and triangles to construct the body of his figure. In fact, in some of Traylor's images you can still see the outlines of each shape.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will use geometric shapes to create a 2-dimensional work of art

Students will demonstrate beginning skills in life drawing

Students will draw both stationary and moving objects

MATERIALS:

Sketch pad or several pieces of paper

Ruler

Pencil

DIRECTIONS:

Review geometric shapes with students and demonstrate how to draw those shapes using a ruler.

Ask students to choose a spot outdoors where they can sit and observe, just like Bill Traylor did, for a certain length of time, preferably a location where lots of people are coming and going. This can be done either at school or at home.

After their observation, ask students to draw human or animal figures that they observed, using the geometric shapes that they are familiar with as a starting point for their figures. Encourage students to fill in as many details as they can remember.

Try not to erase. Encourage students to continue working without erasing or judging their work, Bill Traylor rarely altered his work once he created it. Bill Taylor's drawings are not realistic, but he believed in his lines and drew without hesitation. Who knows your drawing could be world famous. Don't erase or throw your work away.

Once the students have completed their drawings invite students to share their work with the class and ask the other students to see if they can guess what's going on in the picture.



WHAT WILL I FIND AT MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM?

Mingei International Museum reveals the beauty of use in *folk art, craft and design* from all eras and cultures of the world.

The word *mingei*, meaning 'art of the people,' was coined by the revered Japanese scholar Dr. Sōetsu Yanagi by combining the Japanese words for all people (*min*) and art (*gei*). Yanagi's teachings awakened people to the essential need to make and use objects that are unfragmented expressions of head, heart and hands.

Established in 1978, Mingei International Museum collects, conserves and exhibits these arts of daily use - by anonymous craftsmen of ancient times, from traditional cultures of past and present and by historical and contemporary designers.

Mingei International Museum in Balboa Park, San Diego opens a window on the great world, revealing similarities and distinctions of individuals and cultures in art of the people, and inspiring people to express their own innate creativity.



IN PREPARATION FOR YOUR VISIT

- Schedule a Museum visit and Docent-led tour through the Education Department. Mingei International offers **free** admission for all K-12th grade groups and transportation reimbursements for Title 1 schools.
 - Email: ec-asst@mingei.org
 - Call: 619-704-7492
 - Complete an online tour request form:
www.mingei.org/education/museum-tour-request
- Review the information in this guide with your students; build their knowledge, excitement and confidence before they arrive.
- Discuss Museum etiquette:
 - Touching can harm the art; refrain from touching objects in the Museum. A Museum Docent will point out any objects that may be touched.
 - Running and roughhousing in the Museum is both dangerous and distracting to others – instead, walk quietly, talk softly and listen carefully to the interesting information your Docent will share with you.
 - All food and drinks must be left at the front desk prior to entering the galleries.
- Explain to students that a Museum Docent will guide them through the exhibition. Explain that a Docent is a knowledgeable Museum-trained volunteer who will share lots of valuable information with them.
- Explain that Mingei International is a Museum of folk art, craft and design that shows work from all over the world, and that “Mingei” is a Japanese word that means “art of the people.”



WEB RESOURCES

Mingei International Museum

www.mingei.org

Bill Traylor

<http://www.mingei.org/exhibitions/bill-traylor>

<http://www.high.org/Art/Exhibitions/Bill-Traylor-Exhibition.aspx>

http://www.petulloartcollection.org/the_collection/about_the_artists/artist.cfm?a_id=56

<http://fristcenter.org/calendar-exhibitions/detail/bill-traylor>

Bill Traylor: Chasing Ghosts video

<http://www.billtraylorchasingghosts.com/>

Foundation for Self-Taught Artists

<http://foundationstart.org/>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

All publications are available in Mingei International Museum's library

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Lyons, Mary E. and Bill Traylor. *Deep Blues: Bill Traylor, Self-taught Artist*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1995.

Neeley, Mary Ann. *Montgomery: Capital City Corners*. South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 1997.

Russell, Charles. *Groundwaters: A Century of Art by Self-Taught Artists*. London: Presetl Verlag, 2011.

Tate, Don. *It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2012.

IMAGE GUIDE

High resolution images are available on the museum's website

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Dog and Cat Fight, c. 1940–1942

Watercolor and graphite on cardboard

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon

Untitled [Exciting Event: House with Figures], c. 1939–1942

Poster paint and pencil on cardboard

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, T. Marshall Hahn Collection

Woman with Bird, c. 1940–1942

Watercolor and graphite on cardboard

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon

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Untitled [Man in Blue Pants], c. 1939–1942

Poster paint, pencil, colored pencil and charcoal on cardboard

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, T. Marshall Hahn Collection

Untitled [Turkey with Bug], c. 1939–1942

Poster paint and pencil on cardboard

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, purchase with funds from Mrs. Lindsey Hopkins, Jr., Edith G. and Philip A. Rhodes and the Members Guild

Untitled [Blue Man on Red Object], c. 1939–1942

Poster paint and pencil on cardboard

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, purchase with funds from Mrs. Lindsey Hopkins, Jr., Edith G. and Philip A. Rhodes and the Members Guild

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Man, Woman, c. 1940–1942

Watercolor and graphite on cardboard

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon

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Woman, c. 1939

Graphite, crayon, and charcoal on cardboard

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Alabama, Gift of Charles and Eugenia Shannon

Bill loved to draw people. He saw all kinds of people doing different things as he sat along the sidewalks of Montgomery. **What do you think these people are saying to each other?**



Bill Traylor

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