



Richard Norris Brooke, *A Pastoral Visit*, 1881

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Richard Norris Brooke (born Warrenton, VA, 1847–died Warrenton, VA, 1920)

A Pastoral Visit, 1881

Oil on canvas, 47 x 65 13/16 in. (119.5 x 167.1 cm)

Signed, dated, and inscribed lower right: Richd. N. Brooke. 1881./ (ELÈVE DE BONNAT—PARIS)

Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 1881

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Warrenton, Virginia in 1847, Richard Norris Brooke trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia and taught painting at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. After serving as United States consul in La Rochelle, France, he studied in Paris for three years with the artist **Léon Bonnat**. Brooke returned to Warrenton in 1879 where he built a studio. Acquiring status as a landscape painter and portraitist, he immersed himself in the Washington, D.C. arts scene. Brooke held a position of authority at almost every arts organization in town including the Washington Arts Club, the Society of Washington Artists, and the Art Students League of Washington. The Corcoran named Brooke Vice President of its art school in 1902.

ABOUT THE ART

Motivated by the curiosity and interest in Southern African American culture that characterized the Reconstruction Era, Brooke and other white artists produced numerous **genre paintings** focusing on this topic. It was Brooke's goal to elevate his subjects "to that plane of sober and truthful treatment which, in French Art, has dignified the Peasant subjects of **Jules Breton**." Like Breton's rustic subjects, the figures in Brooke's painting exude simplicity and humility. *A Pastoral Visit* depicts an African American family in their modest, yet comfortable home. The wooden cabinet's open door reveals shelves lined with pottery and china. A circus poster and a string of drying chilies enliven the back wall and the mantel holds a coffee grinder, tea jar, and an apple. The kitchen table's empty front corner allows the viewer

to observe the pastor's visit and the meal that is being served for the occasion. The elderly pastor's dignified bearing contrasts with the more casual posture and dress of his younger host. The two older children, both seated at the table, seem impressed with their important guest, while the younger girl, no doubt dressed in her best frock, clings to her father's leg. The family matriarch concentrates on serving a meal to the distinguished visitor. Brooke's Warrenton neighbors acted as models for this painting and others.

Although Brooke claimed he only depicted African Americans in a novel, positive light, a few stereotypes remain intact: the old, yet sociable African American pastor; the hard-working, nurturing mother; the shoeless children; the scraps of food on the floor; the chair's worn paint; and the banjo, brought to this country by the African slaves, which symbolizes African American musicality. While the painting typecasts through certain images, the family bonds over a meal, a daily occurrence of families of all races.

Just as Breton's peasants lived an antiquated life, following centuries-old religious and agricultural tradition, Brooke's family represents a traditional southern way of life that the artist believed was fast disappearing. By 1880, the type of large single room with a hearth depicted here was replaced by separate dining and cooking areas. Pastoral visits were also a thing of the past, as congregations were now able to financially support parsonages. The fact that Brooke places the family in a pre-**Reconstruction era** context suggests a preference for, and nostalgia towards the "more humble" African Americans of a previous time.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

- What visual clues distinguish the pastor from the family?
- Who is speaking at the moment captured in the painting? What do you think might be discussed during this visit?
- While Brooke said he tried to only represent his subjects in a positive manner, some African American stereotypes remain intact. What is a stereotype? Are they always negative? Is the artist inevitably stereotyping if he or she is representing a social class or race different than their own? How can artists avoid this practice?

EXTENDED DIALOGUE

- Rather than referring to contemporary African American culture, Brooke consciously chose to depict a genre scene from a previous era in African American culture. Therefore, does this painting tell us more about contemporary African American daily life, the usual purpose of such genre scenes, or does it tell us more about white culture and how whites viewed African Americans at this time?

VOCABULARY

Léon Bonnat (1833–1922): A French painter, collector and teacher who studied and worked in Paris. He was internationally renowned for his portraits of both Europeans and Americans.

Genre painting: A work of art depicting a scene of everyday life with people carrying out their daily activities.

Jules Breton (1827–1906): A French artist known for his rural peasant scenes. Breton's realistic themes were modified by an idealized treatment of his subjects and settings.

Reconstruction Era: During this period (1865–77), the federal government controlled the states of the former Southern Confederacy before they were readmitted to the Union.

Support for Arts 101 materials is made possible in part by the Women's Committee of the Corcoran and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

ENDNOTES

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Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Corcoran*, c. 1876–77

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Albert Bierstadt (born Solingen, Germany, 1830–died New York, NY, 1902)

Mount Corcoran, c. 1876–77

Oil on canvas, 60 11/16 x 95 7/8 in. (154.2 x 243.4 cm)
Signed lower right: ABierstadt. (A and B in monogram)
Museum Purchase, Gallery Fund, 1878

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Albert Bierstadt was a preeminent 19th-century landscape artist of the American West. Born in Germany in 1830, his family relocated to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1832, and Bierstadt later returned to Germany to pursue artistic training in Düsseldorf. The detailed **naturalism** and smooth surfaces Bierstadt learned to paint in Düsseldorf propelled him to fame shortly after his return to America in late 1857. He made the first of three trips to the uncharted Western territories in 1859, and quickly realized that his ability to paint with great precision was ideally suited for creating **sublime** landscapes of the awe-inspiring, untamed West. Bierstadt made drawings and oil sketches at various sites which he would later use as the basis for paintings he completed in his studio.

Such landscapes belonged to the “Great Pictures” tradition—single painting exhibitions that could stimulate an anticipatory excitement similar to today’s midnight movie releases. In the 1860s, Bierstadt found fame with his large-scale, highly-detailed landscape scenes that were dramatically unveiled before a paying crowd. However, as public and critical taste in the 1870s and 1880s moved away from these tightly painted, dramatic American vistas towards a looser, expressive style, Bierstadt clung to the Düsseldorf teachings. This led many to criticize his late work as old-fashioned.

ABOUT THE ART

The dramatic cloud forms, rugged mountain peaks, lush forest, and sparkling water in *Mount Corcoran* are typical of Bierstadt’s landscapes. The miniscule bear approaching the lake emphasizes the natural expansiveness even more, magnifying the surrounding panorama by comparison. The first explorer of Mount Corcoran (an actual peak in the **Sierra Nevada** now known as Mount Langley) would certainly have felt a sublime reaction to the overwhelming vista. With the painting *Mount Corcoran*, Bierstadt attempts to reproduce

this original awe; even the canvas’ huge dimensions contribute to this mission. *Mount Corcoran*’s precisely defined details, large size, and dappled light are like many of the **Hudson River School** canvases created around the same time.

By the mid-1870s, Bierstadt was determined to gain representation in an American art museum, and set his sights on the recently established Corcoran Gallery of Art—which housed pieces by Bierstadt’s contemporaries and rivals such as **Frederic Edwin Church**. The Corcoran had acquired Church’s painting *Niagara* in 1876 to great notice and reception, which surely inspired Bierstadt to pursue the gallery. In April 1877, Bierstadt exhibited a painting called *Mountain Lake* at the National Academy of Design in New York City, where it received a lukewarm response. Undaunted, Bierstadt sought a meeting with Corcoran trustee William T. Walters, who showed no interest in the piece. Bierstadt continued his pursuit and appealed directly to the museum’s founder, William Wilson Corcoran. Bierstadt renamed the work *Mount Corcoran*, and delivered it directly to Corcoran’s home. Ironically, no one seemed to notice that Bierstadt had previously exhibited this exact work as *Mountain Lake*. There were concerns, though, that it did not reflect a real place. William MacLeod, the Corcoran’s first curator, was initially appeased when Bierstadt presented him with a map from the War Department, in which a peak of the Sierra Nevada was clearly labeled “Mount Corcoran.” But MacLeod’s relief dissipated the following day when he discovered that the name was not engraved on the map, but had been written by a War Department employee at Bierstadt’s request! Nonetheless, Bierstadt persuaded Corcoran to buy the painting for \$7,000 in January 1878. Without Bierstadt’s shrewd marketing and tireless self-promotion, *Mount Corcoran* would not have made it into the Corcoran’s collection.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

- How does the artist use various elements of nature to establish the mood of the painting? Are the gray clouds in the upper left or the golden light on the lake’s shore more dominant?
- Where do you look first? Which colors stand out to you? How would the effect of the painting be different if there was a figure of a person rather than a bear?
- Have you visited a place like this? Where? Were you alone or with a group? As you looked at the majestic landscape, did you experience any of the feelings described in the definition of “sublime?” What do you remember about the sounds and smells of the environment?
- Besides indicating that a change in weather may be coming soon, how does the presence of the clouds contribute to the overall composition of the painting? What other elements has the artist used to guide one’s eye around the picture?

EXTENDED DIALOGUE

- What is your view on the manner in which Bierstadt promoted his painting to individuals at the Corcoran? Was this ethical? Does the fact that so many people now enjoy viewing *Mount Corcoran* justify Bierstadt’s questionable methods? How can artists today achieve recognition by important people or institutions who might help their careers?

VOCABULARY

Naturalism: An artistic style that strives to reproduce the world as honestly as possible, with careful attention to naturally-occurring details.

Sublime: The philosophical idea that confronting an overwhelmingly powerful scene in nature elevates the human soul.

Sierra Nevada: A mountain range in California and Nevada; it spans 400 miles north-to-south, and is approximately 70 miles across east-to-west.

Hudson River School: The United States’ native school of landscape painting (c. 1825-1875), which glorified the country’s unique terrain in an effort to broadcast the country’s might and majesty to its citizens and to the rest of the world.

Frederic Edwin Church: A prominent member of the Hudson River School.

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Edward Hopper, *Ground Swell*, 1939

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Edward Hopper (born Nyack, NY, 1882–died New York, NY, 1967)

Ground Swell, 1939

Oil on canvas, 36 3/16 x 50 1/16 in. (91.9 x 127.2 cm)

Signed lower right: EDWARD HOPPER

Museum Purchase, William A. Clark Fund, 1943

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in the shipping town of Nyack, New York, Edward Hopper spent his formative years sketching the maritime industry of this bustling port on the Hudson River. He attended art school in New York City, studied in Europe three times, and in 1913 moved into the Greenwich Village apartment that he retained for the rest of his life. Hopper worked for many years as a commercial illustrator, until his paintings of a rapidly changing New York City caught the public's eye. His most iconic images capture the haunting loneliness of city life. Hopper depicted backstage theater scenes, deserted streets, modern apartments, and cafes by night or transitional moments such as twilight or dawn. His paintings often feature fashionable urbanites who appear to be disconnected from one another. Although many distinct American art movements surfaced during his career, he never aligned himself with any one school. His luminous, motionless, and powerfully emotional style is often called **romantic realism**.

ABOUT THE ART

Ground Swell, numbering among a group of similar seafaring subjects Hopper executed during the late 1930s and early 1940s, was painted in the summer of 1939 at his seaside home in South Truro, Massachusetts. With brilliant blue water and a near cloudless sky, the scene appears to be an idyllic summer afternoon. Three shirtless young men and a young woman in a red bathing suit top and scarf, all focused on the

clanging green **bell buoy**, sail the **gaff-rigged cat boat** into the rolling ocean. Their body language indicates that the sailing party is much more captivated by the navigational marker than by each other's company; this detachment emphasizes Hopper's recurrent themes of the isolation of modern life and the need for escape.

The painting's title offers the first hint that this dazzling nautical scene might conceal an ominous undercurrent. A "**ground swell**," an actual ocean phenomenon, refers to a heavily rolling surface churned up by a distant storm. The waves have activated the green bell buoy's sound mechanism to warn the sailors of this unseen trouble coming from afar. While Hopper painted *Ground Swell* in his Cape Cod studio during the summer of 1939, war was brewing across the Atlantic. Although World War II did not officially break out in Europe until September 3, the preceding months were marked by instability and rapidly escalating national tensions across the continent. Hopper's sea and sky seem to reflect the impending disturbance; **cirrus clouds**—harbingers of change—signal that stormy weather is in the near future, while the ocean swells can be interpreted as a visual realization of the radio waves which brought news of distant conflict to American shores. The bell buoy in *Ground Swell* sonically registers the reverberations of some unspecified distant turmoil, perhaps alluding to the approaching geopolitical threat of world war.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

- How does Hopper's use of blue affect the painting's mood? Would using other colors have changed the painting's effect on the viewer?
- Who could these sailors be? Are they related? What do you think happened to them?
- At what are the sailors looking? What could they be thinking as they stare?
- How far out to sea is the sailing party? Do you think they might be headed into dangerous waters? Imagine if there were several other boats visible in this seascape, how would that change the mood of the painting?
- Is there more sky or water in the painting? If this ratio were switched, how would it affect the work?
- What is the **focal point** of the painting? How does the artist convey that to the viewer?
- Note the dark round shape just above the woman's back. Some interpret this as the head of another sailor. What do you think?

VOCABULARY

Romantic Realism: The term usually describes a form of realism modified to express a romantic attitude or meaning.

Bell buoy: A navigational marker with a bell inside, which rings when jostled by turbulent waves. It alerts sailors of rough water conditions and approaching storms.

Gaff rig: A sailing rig in which the sail is four-cornered, fore-and-aft rigged, and controlled at its peak by a spar (pole).

Cat boat: a sailing vessel characterized by a single mast near the front of the boat.

Ground swell: A broad, deep swell or undulation of the ocean, caused by a long continued gale, and felt even at a remote distance after the gale has ceased.

Cirrus cloud: A wispy, white, high-altitude cloud made of fine ice crystals.

Focal point: The place in a work of art on which attention becomes centered because of an element emphasized in some way.

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Jane Hammond, *Hand Held*, 1996

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Jane Hammond (born Bridgeport, CT, 1950; lives and works in New York, NY)

Hand Held, 1996

Oil and mixed media on canvas, 72 x 110 in. (182.88 x 279.4 cm)

Gift of the Mary M. and Sash A. Spencer Collection, 2008

© Jane Hammond, courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1950 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Jane Hammond gained an early appreciation of art through her grandmother, who took her to Europe to study the great masterpieces. As a student at Mount Holyoke College, she focused on biology, poetry, and art history. Hammond continued her art education by taking classes in ceramics and sculpture. From 1980 to 1990 she was a teacher at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

As a child, Hammond liked to collect and catalog a variety of objects. She divided her backyard into a grid and imitated the field work of an archaeologist by recording and categorizing everything she found in each section of soil. Hammond's **studio** is filled with lists of words and many illustrations, as well as stacks of her own drawings—all of which serve as artistic inspiration for her paintings, **collages**, artist books, and photographs. Hammond, who currently lives and works in New York City, says that her work is “as complicated, inconsistent, varied, multifaceted as you are, as I am, as life is.”

ABOUT THE ART

For many years, Hammond collected pictures that refer to a variety of subjects including science, magic, dance, puppetry, and popular culture, not knowing what role they might eventually play in her art. From this group of images, she chose 276 to serve as a kind of visual vocabulary from which she created her work. She chose that number because it provided enough variety that the images would not be frequently repeated, and yet the viewer would recognize some of the images woven together in different paintings.

Hand Held is part of a series on which Hammond collaborated with the American poet, John Ashbery. He reverses the usual artistic procedure by first choosing a title and then writing the body of the poem. Hammond asked Ashbery if he would write titles for which she would create paintings. Hammond was surprised when a week later, Ashbery faxed to her a list of 44 titles, which according to the poet, only took a few minutes to complete. Conversely, Hammond spent almost a decade creating over 60 works which used her selected images in different combinations to create meaningful artistic responses to Ashbery's titles.

Hammond's large and brightly painted canvases, which she envisions before she creates them, are often reflections of her memories and dreams. She likens herself to a **cartographer** in the way she organizes and presents information. It seems fitting that in order to create *Hand Held*, Hammond used the map of the United States to organize, systematize, and categorize her many pictures of hands. While the images of hands in the painting have very smooth surfaces, they are placed on a background that is textured and thickly painted. Hammond used a mixture of oil paint and wax which was applied over a layer of ground up fired ceramic. As Hammond says of her work, “I thought art should be open and **investigatory**, capable of surprise while allowing the artist to grow and expand and change and go deeper.” Hammond has also created digital images by combining elements from several photographs to create an imaginative and surreal **narrative** just as she does in her paintings.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

- Look carefully at the many different hands included in this painting. What are they doing or touching?
- If you look at the sets of hands in states that are next to each other, do you see any relationship between them?
- Can you find our area on the map? Are the hands doing something that seems fitting for our region?
- The title of this work, *Hand Held*, was created by poet John Ashbery. Do you think Hammond chose images from her visual vocabulary of 276 images that successfully depict the title? If you were given the same title, how would you choose to represent it?

EXTENDED DIALOGUE

- Think about objects in your bedroom or school desk. Are there items that you collect or objects that you place into categories? Do most of your possessions fit into a couple of different categories? Imagine creating a work of art based on your favorite objects. Would there be a common theme to all of the objects?

VOCABULARY

Studio: The place where an artist works, its nature determined by the practical needs of production: adequate light by which to see and space in which to create the work of art.

Collage: The word derives from the French “*coller*” meaning “to glue.” An artistic composition made of various materials glued on a surface. This term was coined by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in the beginning of the 20th century when collage became a distinctive part of modern art.

Cartographer: A person who studies and makes maps and charts using a variety of scientific tools.

Investigatory: To observe or study by close examination and systematic inquiry.

Narrative: The term is used to describe art that provides a visual representation of some kind of story or event, sometimes based on literary work.

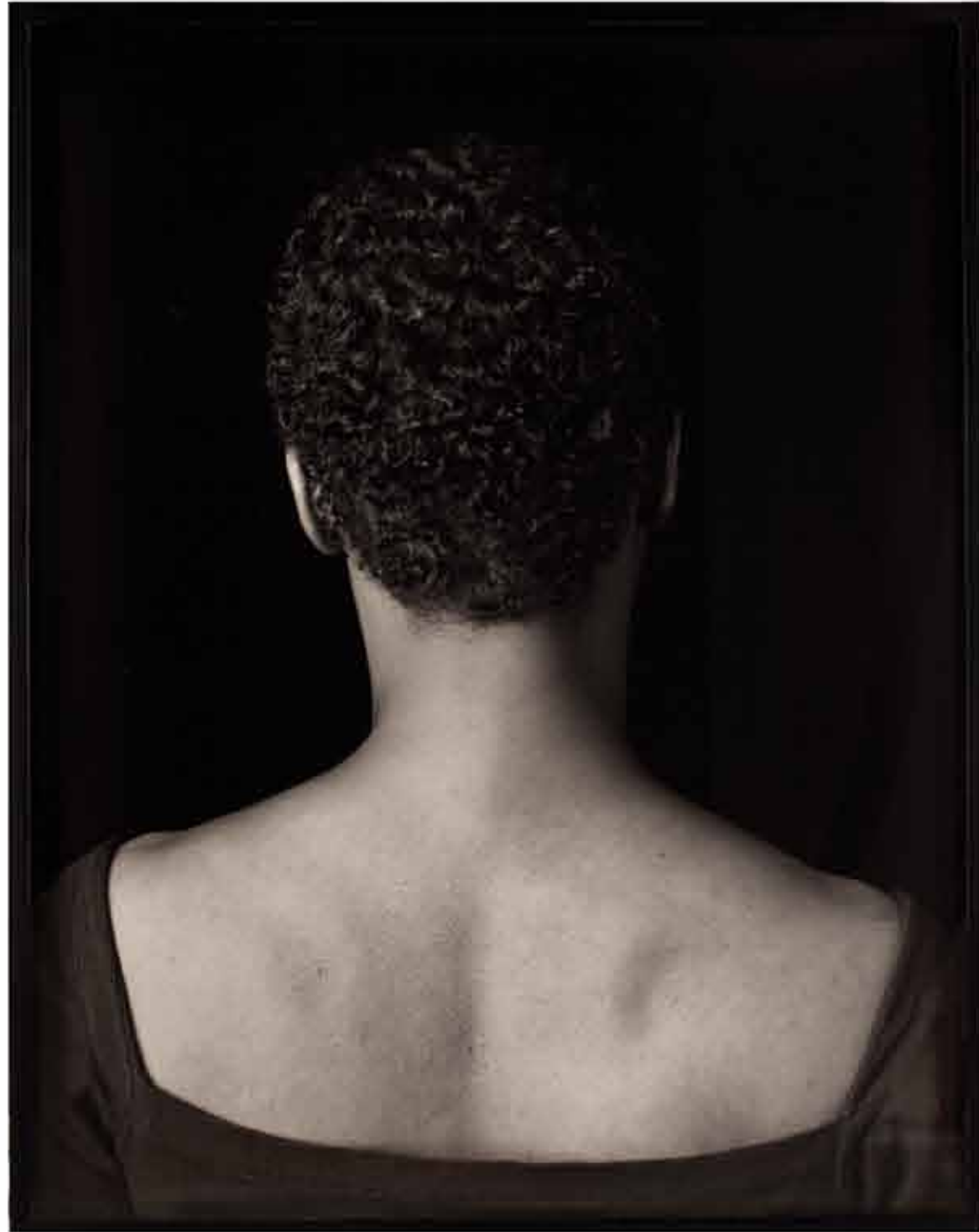
Support for Arts 101 materials is made possible in part by the Women's Committee of the Corcoran and the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

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- braid into four circles
- part into eight sections from the crown
- each section is twisted anti-clockwise
- braids meander over entire head
- starting just behind the ears
- tips of each strand are connected until they form a circle
- over-hand under-hand whichever you prefer
- a hair piece is attached to the crown.
- a section of hair is parted and held firmly between left thumb & forefinger
- the transverse braids from a series of zig-zags

Lorna Simpson, *Coiffure*, 1991

CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

Lorna Simpson (born Brooklyn, NY, 1960–lives and works in Brooklyn, NY)

Coiffure, 1991

Three gelatin silver prints with ten engraved plastic plaques, 72 x 106 in. (28.3 x 41.7 cm)

Gift of the Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1993

© Lorna Simpson, Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

ABOUT THE ARTIST

African American artist Lorna Simpson creates **conceptual photographs** and video art that explore issues related to identity, history, gender, and race. She frequently uses images of African American women to consider these ideas and to address stereotypes associated with African American culture. In her photographic work, Simpson often incorporates words as a way to question cultural assumptions that surround her imagery. She encourages viewers to consider the open-ended meanings that result when fragments of text are paired with images. Within the last ten years, Simpson has also turned to video as a medium for examining notions of race and gender.

Simpson was born in 1960 in Brooklyn, New York. In 1983 she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in photography from the School of Visual Arts in New York and in 1985, a Master of Fine Arts in visual arts from the University of California, San Diego. She rose to prominence in the 1980s with her large-scale photographs that combine image and text. In many of these images, the faces of female subjects are deliberately obscured. Simpson was the first African American woman to exhibit at the **Venice Biennale**. Her work is in major collections including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

ABOUT THE ART

Coiffure is a photographic triptych that examines the **identity** of an African American woman. This work exemplifies a **post-modern** approach to photography, creating meaning through

metaphors that result from the combination of images and text that do not necessarily go together. *Coiffure* is composed of three separate images that together depict images related to a black woman's identity in sequence. She is first seen with her back to the viewer, then a coil of braided hair appears, and the final image reveals the back of a carved African mask, as if she were wearing the mask. These are subjects that recur in Simpson's early work. The text is positioned below the photographs on 10 small plaques, revealing detailed instructions for braiding hair.

In *Coiffure*, Simpson considers the "symbolic significance attached to unstraightened black hair," which for many African American women represents a conflict between their heritage and the standards of beauty often dictated by modern media. Playing against the expected conventions of portraiture, the woman has turned her back to the camera, preventing the viewer from gazing at her face. In this way Simpson critiques traditional portrait and fashion photography, in which we learn about people by looking at their faces.

This triptych also explores how an innovative combination of images and language represent people in a new way. *Coiffure* reads as a simple **narrative** or story, encouraging viewers to consider their own identity by putting themselves into the work. In the middle panel, the head of braided hair connects the woman on the left with a symbol of her African heritage on the right. Simpson has provided literal, visual, and metaphorical links to bridge past and present in *Coiffure*. She creates an image that provides an insight into how cultural and geopolitical connections across time can be woven together like strands of hair.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE

- How do you feel about the fact that you cannot see the woman's face in the photograph on the left? Why do you believe Simpson did this?
- Why can't we see the front of the mask? Why are we behind the mask—similar to why we are behind the woman?
- By reading the text beneath the photographs, do you understand the process of braiding hair?
- Does the text seem like directions to you, or more like factual statements?
- If one of these three images was taken away, how would it affect the other two?
- How would the work change if the text below the imagery was removed?

EXTENDED DIALOGUE

- Simpson believes that one way African American women identify themselves is through their hair. Why is hair important as an identifying factor?
- How do you identify yourself?

VOCABULARY

Conceptual photography: As a part of Conceptual Art, photographers and artists create photographs primarily from or about a concept or an idea.

Venice Biennale: is a major contemporary art exhibition that takes place once every two years (in odd years) in Venice, Italy. The Biennale is based at a park, the Giardini, that houses 30 permanent national pavilions.

Coiffure: A coiffure is a style or manner of arranging the hair.

Identity: One's identity is a personal conception of oneself and expression of that self. It is an umbrella term used to describe individuality, personal identity, social identity, and cultural identity.

Postmodern: In contemporary culture, Postmodernism is the tendency to deny objective truth and global cultural narrative. It rejects the use of sharp classifications, including traditional stereotypes, and emphasizes the role of language, power relations, and motivations.

Narrative: A narrative is a story, created in a constructive format that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events.

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