

CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN ART REPRESENT



NEW YORK
State Museum

The New York State Museum's exhibit **REPRESENT: Contemporary Native American Art** offers a unique opportunity for educators to explore the culture of the First Nations people through their modern art and craftsmanship. The exhibit highlights examples from the New York State Museum's Contemporary Native American Art Collection. The selected works of art reflect ideas, concepts, and topics that are appropriate for a diversity of ages, correlate to both the educational programs, *People of the Longhouse* and *Native People of New York*, and will work well using the *Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)*. Please feel free to use any of the art works you see on display, but not all are understandable for all age levels.

To view the online exhibit, please visit:

<http://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/represent/>

For more information about the New York State Museum's permanent exhibit **A Mohawk Iroquois Village at the New York State Museum**, please [click here](#).

The New York State Museum is a program of
The University of the State of New York | The State Education Department
Office of Cultural Education

TEACHER'S GUIDE

REPRESENT:

TEACHER'S GUIDE

WTS QUESTIONS:

1. "What's going on in this piece?"
2. "What do you see that makes you say that?"
3. "What more can we find?"

If you have time: Bring the students back to the Three Sisters Diorama, in the Native Peoples of New York exhibit, to review the importance of corn, beans, and squash in Iroquois and Algonquin cultures.

CLASSROOM IDEAS:

Web links are underlined

1. Read the [*story of the Cornhusk Doll*](#) by Antoinette Scott, and her quote about the "message of vanity". Ask how the artist incorporates this message in her piece.
2. Read and discuss [*the story of The Three Sisters*](#) and the importance of corn in Iroquois society, (pages 11 and 16) and [*the Mohawk version of the story*](#) from the by Mohawk Story Teller Kay Olan.
3. Research toys and games that Iroquois children played with in the past. Have students design and develop some simple play items using naturally-occurring materials. Describe and share with the class.
4. Create a cornhusk doll and write a paragraph explaining what the doll represents.
Instructions for creating a cornhusk doll can be found [here](#) (page 19).



**Three Sisters:
Corn, Beans,
and Squash, 2013**

Cornhusk, glass beads, cotton fabric

NYSM Collection E2013.67

ANTOINETTE SCOTT

SENECA, DEER CLAN

“I am truly glad that I took the time to learn from my grandmother the importance of the Iroquois Seneca Cornhusk Doll. It has a great message of vanity and being humble that I like to live and share with others who want to learn.

“The dolls I create are made entirely of cornhusk and are a finished product after a long intricate process of twisting, tying, and sculpting. They are then finished with fabric and beads which tell a story of a particular era.

Representing the fifth generation to uphold this artistic practice, Scott speaks to the central importance of corn in her culture—a precisely crafted message unchanged by time.

REPRESENT:

TEACHER'S GUIDE

WTS QUESTIONS:

1. "What's going on in this sculpture?"
2. "What do you see that makes you say that?"
3. "What more can we find?"

CLASSROOM IDEAS:

1. *Discuss the importance and significance of ancestry in one's life.*
2. *Create dialogue by asking and discussing the following questions with students:*
 - Why do we want to remember our ancestors?*
 - How does this help us in our own lives?*
 - Why might Native Americans want to honor their ancestors?*
 - Why do the artists want to preserve their traditions?*
 - Why do they make changes to some of the traditional styles and ways in which their ancestors worked?*
3. *Research contributions that Native Americans have made to New York State. Let students use different mediums to share their answers, e.g.: drawing, computer printouts, artifacts, essays.*
4. *Have the students make their own creations while thinking of the artist's quote, "**stone is alive and worthy of communication**". Discuss what the artist meant by this quote*



**Ancestors/
Tree of Life**

Brazilian soapstone with walnut base

NYSM Collection E2013.71

TOM HUFF

CAYUGA-SENECA, DEER CLAN

"Stone is ancient—one of the original elements of creation. We believe that a living spirit exists in all natural things. Therefore, stone is alive and worthy of communication.

Despite holding degrees from both the Rhode Island School of Design and the Institute of American Indian Arts (Santa Fe, NM) Huff maintains that "artists are self-taught. Even after mastering process and technique, *they will have to deal with questions of idea and aesthetics, and ultimately, confront themselves.*

Poet, curator, educator, and visual artist, Huff maintains a respect for tradition, a wry and spot-on position on contemporary issues, while championing the fresh voices of a new generation.

REPRESENT:

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WTS QUESTIONS:

1. "What's going on in this painting?"
2. "What do you see that makes you say that?"
3. "What more can we find?"

CLASSROOM IDEAS:

1. Ask students to research the Shinnecock Nation and Mandush, including his role as Sachem in the settling of Southampton on Long Island. Write their findings in the first-person, in the voice of Mandush.
2. Discuss what is meant by "**European contact**" and what kind of changes it represented to Native people. Why does the artist say he and others are "**...reinvigorating aspects of the (Shinnecock) culture that have been set aside...**"
3. Discuss in small groups:
"How someone can share knowledge in a positive manner without 'dwelling on past tragedy'."
"Does the artist succeed with this painting?"

"Would you be able to let go of past injustices?"
"Is it important to do so? Why or why not?"
4. Have students paint or draw a picture of Mandush, carefully portraying his dignity and cultural identity.



**Mandush, Shinnecock
Sachem of the 17th century, 2007**
Acrylic on canvas

NYSM E2013.62

DAVID BUNN MARTINE

**CHIRICAHUA APACHE-
SHINNECOCK / MONTAUK**

“I do not believe, too much, in dwelling on past tragedy, but try to be positive in sharing knowledge. In the dual capacity of artist and Director/Curator of the Shinnecock Nation Museum, Martine graciously acknowledges his role as “cultural teacher. In a related capacity, as chairperson of AMERINDA (American Indian Artists, Inc.), he endeavors to deconstruct stereotypes and historical inaccuracies.

The interpretation of narrative historical scenes of Shinnecock culture has dictated Martine's creative path for more than 30 years. “Through the paintings, research, and teaching, I and other concerned people in the tribe have been especially interested in reinvigorating aspects of the culture that have been set aside over the past 300 years of European contact.

REPRESENT:

TEACHER'S GUIDE

KEY QUESTIONS:

1. "What's going on in this painting?"
2. "What do you see that makes you say that?"
3. "What more can we find?"

CLASSROOM IDEAS:

Web links are underlined

1. Ask, "Why does the artist want to change non-Native people's stereotypical ideas about Native Americans? How does he try to do this?"

2. Write in journals and answer these questions:

"What is a stereotype?"

"When you think of Native Americans, what are the first thoughts that you have?"

"Where do you think your thoughts about Native Americans come from?"

**"Did this painting and the artist's words change any of your preconceived ideas?"
Why or why not?"**

"What stereotypes about people would you like to change?"

[Click here for information on common stereotypes directed towards Native Americans and explanations of why they might be harmful or misleading.](#)

3. Have students show appreciation or thanks through a song, poem, work of art, or short video. Share these expressions of gratitude with the class.



At the Social, 2007

Acrylic on canvas

NYSM E2013.75

DAVID FADDEN/ KANIETAKERON

MOHAWK, WOLF CLAN

"Our ceremonies offer thanks and appreciation to all the things that give us life. This appreciation for life-giving entities is expressed through ancient prayer, songs, and dances. In my own way, I try to express this feeling through my art.

"Most Native imagery reflects a common stereotype of the fierce warrior or stoic Indian...I try to dispel this false portrayal by painting native people as people who like to laugh and show other emotions.

REPRESENT:

TEACHER'S GUIDE

VTS QUESTIONS:

1. "What's going on in this sculpture?"
2. "What do you see that makes you say that?"
3. "What more can we find?"

CLASSROOM IDEAS:

Web links are underlined

1. Plant corn, beans, or squash seeds in a paper cup and tend them as they grow. Discuss the importance of nurturing the plant by providing water, sunlight, and soil so that it grows strong.
2. Ask, "Why does this artist blend the corn and a pregnant woman together? What are the connections between human and plant life and nurturance?"
3. Read the story of the Three Sisters together. Have students research the history and significance of corn in Iroquois life, including its spiritual role. Let students write their own story about corn as a life-provider.
4. Draw a triptych (a work of art that is divided into three sections) after reading the Iroquois story of the Creation. Students may work in teams to complete their triptychs.
5. Research the role of women in Iroquois culture. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the role and view of non-Native women in history with that of women in early Iroquois culture.



Emerging Corn, 2012

Densite plaster, acrylic, and cornhusk

NYSM E2013.64

NATASHA SMOKE SANTIAGO

MOHAWK, TURTLE CLAN

Potter, painter, and sculptor, Smoke Santiago was brought up surrounded by family in the traditions of the Longhouse. As a teen she relocated from her Rochester birthplace to her grandfather's homeland of Akwesasne. There, her once youthful expressions exploded into artistic and spiritual maturity.

Working with near inexhaustible dedication, she looks to Haudenosaunee values, contemporary concerns, and the natural world for purpose. Cast from her own body and those of her friends, Natasha's belly sculptures honor the miraculous capacity of women to bear life and celebrate the nourishing continuity in the practice of cultural traditions.