

There Is a Woman in Every Color Black Women in Art

Text and Literature in Art

Subjects: Art History; English

Activity

1. **In the exhibition gallery:** Students will view the art in *There Is a Woman in Every Color: Black Women in Art*. The class will discuss works that utilize text and/or reference literature.
2. **Outside of class:** Students will select one of the works highlighted during the gallery discussion. Drawing from the work's interpretive text, content they have learned in class, and additional research, they will write a short paper analyzing the interaction between visual and textual/literary information in the work.

Ways to Adapt

-This assignment could be expanded to include a hands-on activity in which students create their own artwork that uses text and/or references literature. The Mulvane can help supply space, materials, and instruction for this project if desired.

Note: There are about 10-12 works in the exhibition that utilize text and/or reference literature (see examples on back).

For assistance with facilitating or adapting this activity, contact:

Sara Stepp
Academic Curator, Mulvane Art Museum
sara.stepp@washburn.edu
385-670-2422

Selected examples of works *with excerpts from interpretive texts*

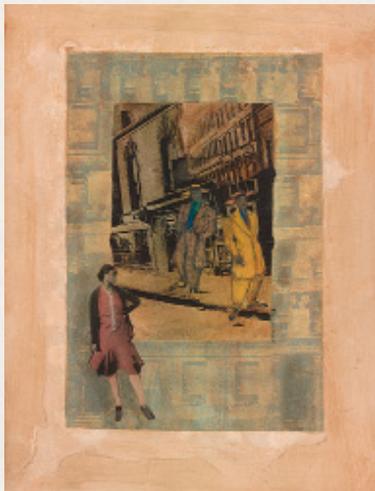
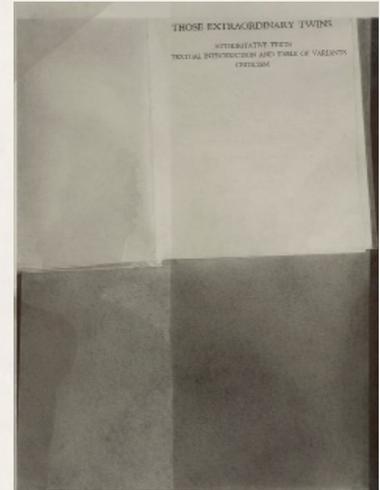
Nyeema Morgan

Like It Is: Those Extraordinary Twins, 2016

graphite pencil on Coventry paper

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

Pudd'nhead Wilson and *Those Extraordinary Twins* were both published by Mark Twain in 1894. The conjoined twins in *Those Extraordinary Twins* inspired the dual protagonists in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: a mixed-race African American child and a white child who are switched at birth and go on to play opposing social roles due to their perceived racial identities in the antebellum South. In this drawing, the text that shows faintly through the title page suggests a substructure that remains unseen, perhaps alluding to frameworks of thinking that govern perceptions of difference.



Betye Saar

Now You Cookin' with Gas, 1999

mixed media collage

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

This work comes from Betye Saar's series of silk-screened collages that correspond with short stories by author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. In *Now You Cookin' With Gas*, Saar illustrates the last story in the book and depicts the encounter on the streets of Harlem. Two slick-talking, zoot-suited men are attempting to attract the attention of a young woman. Saar's choice to position the woman just outside the frame of the collage asserts the woman's self-possession and independence as she boldly rejects the men's advances.

Lorraine O'Grady

Cutting Out CONYT 26, 1977/2017

letterpress printing on Japanese paper, cut-out, collage on laid paper

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

In 1977, O'Grady scanned the *Sunday Times* for material for her shaped poems featuring headlines from the newspaper. The poems she would assemble became reflections of the culture in New York, crafted in such a way to speak to social and racial issues of the time. The works underscore O'Grady's intention to create "counter-confessional" poetry that would express personal thoughts and ideas through the public language found in the *New York Times*.

