

Art of the South Tour

Tour Audience

Adults, visitors 16 years of age and older

Time Length

50 to 60 minutes

Tour Goals

The intent of the general adult tour is:

- to introduce the visitor to the Morris, its collection, programs, and resources;
- to provide an experience that encourages the visitor to return to the Morris and to visit other museums.

Tour Objectives

Through their participation in a general tour, visitors will:

- learn about the history and mission of the Morris;
- be oriented to the museum's physical spaces;
- learn general characteristics about the museum's permanent collection;
- become familiar with the themes around which the permanent collection galleries are organized;
- broadly understand the development of Southern art;
- feel comfortable and encouraged to make return visits to the museum.

Introduction

- Introduce yourself.
- Welcome our visitors to the museum;
- Ask the group questions about their knowledge of the museum and their interests or objectives.
- Review museum etiquette and expectations.
- State this tour's objective: to provide a sampling of the permanent collection galleries.
- State the tour time length.

When the Morris Museum of Art opened in 1992, it was the only museum in the country that was dedicated to the collection, exhibition, and interpretation of the art of the American South. It has since been joined by other public institutions, and they—along with scholars, collectors, and dealers—have established a place for the visual arts within the field of Southern studies.

The museum's permanent collection was established in 1989 with the purchase of 230 paintings from Dr. Robert Powell Coggins, an enthusiastic, pioneering collector. In 1993, a trust created by Dr. Coggins donated 958 additional works of art to the museum. Although the museum's founders, Sissie and Billy Morris were avid collectors themselves, it was the Coggins Collection, with its concentration on the art of the South from 1840 to 1940, that identified the areas of emphasis that are reflected in the museum's galleries. The museum's permanent collection has grown dramatically over the years since, and other areas of special interest—notably folk art and photography—

have been developed through purchase and donation. The permanent collection of the Morris Museum of Art now includes nearly five thousand objects in all media, dating from the earliest days of the United States to the present.

Tour Stops

Your tour should acknowledge all major permanent collection galleries that are open at the time of your tour. (On occasion, permanent collection galleries may be used for large temporary exhibitions.) In each gallery, provide a general orientation to the theme of the gallery and discuss at least one work of art that is representative of the works on display in that space.

Nineteenth-Century Portraits

The dominant form of painting in the South of the 1800s is the subject of Nineteenth-Century Portraits. The sophistication and skill of the painters vary considerably, from that of the unknown painter who captured the likeness of Rebecca Bowen, a seventeen-year-old bride, most likely lost to disease or the rigors of childbirth, to that of the academically trained Samuel F. B. Morse, a wintertime resident of Charleston in the early 1820s. In addition to showing the wide range of portrait styles in the days before the rise of photography, this gallery illustrates the geographic range of the museum's interests and the ways in which culture traveled from the great port cities of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans to such inland marketplaces as Nashville, Natchez, and Louisville.

Suggested focus works:

Samuel F. B. Morse, *Untitled*

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James Hamilton Shegogue, *Untitled*

Images of the Civil War

The central event in American history, the War between the States (1861-1865), is recalled in Images of the Civil War. John Mooney's *Surprise Attack Near Harper's Ferry* captures the chaos and terror of battle. A version of Henry Mosler's *The Lost Cause*, one of the most widely reproduced images in late-nineteenth-century America, and Constantino Brumidi's *Columbia Welcoming the South Back into the Union* address themes of loss and reconciliation. Only a few of the paintings in this gallery depict actual events. Mooney's *Surprise Attack* records from memory an ambush in which the artist was a participant, and paintings by an unknown artist illustrate the naval battle between the ironclads CSS *Virginia* and USS *Monitor*. Most of the paintings in this gallery were produced after the war had ended, and all of them reflect Southern attitudes toward the causes of division.

Suggested focus works:

John A. Mooney, *Surprise Attack Near Harper's Ferry*

Constantino Brumidi, *Columbia Welcoming the South Back into the Union*

Southern Stories

Great storytelling, not artistic styles, is the real subject of Southern Stories. Kentuckian Thomas Satterwhite Noble's *The Price of Blood* reflects both his sound academic training and his hatred of slavery. William Aiken Walker's *Plantation Portrait*, a complex painting, is about both the African American farming family that it depicts and the South's

transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy. William Tylee Ranney's *Crossing the Ferry—Scene on the Peedee* represents the challenges of everyday travel as well as the widespread nineteenth-century belief that America was destined to expand westward, and the importance of religion to a community is the subject of Russell Smith's *Baptism in Virginia*.

Suggested focus work:

Thomas Satterwhite Noble, *The Price of Blood*

Still-Life Paintings

Beautiful nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century images of flowers, fruit, and inanimate, everyday objects are featured in Still-Life Paintings. Some of the works of art are by native-born Southerners, while others are by artists who spent time in the South producing work that is identifiably Southern. Martin Johnson Heade's *Two Magnolia Blossoms in a Glass Vase*, painted late in his career when he lived in Saint Augustine, Florida, is such a picture. While it is clear that these paintings are related to themes of abundance and fruitfulness, the interest of regional painters in still life grew out of the work of the naturalists who roamed the South, recording in detail the plants and animals of the South. Other artists showed more interest in demonstrating painterly technique, suggesting how objects might feel to the touch. Paintings by Elliott Daingerfield and Willie Betty Newman, with their vigorous brushwork and dazzling light effects, have little in common with the tradition of natural science or the exacting realism of Heade.

Suggested focus works:

Martin Johnson Heade, *Two Magnolia Blossoms in a Glass Vase*

Andrew John Henry Way, *An Abundance of Fruit*

Impressionism in the South

Impressionism in the South presents works of art that are painted with vivid color, obvious brushstrokes, and an emphasis on the fleeting effects of light. After its beginnings in France in the 1870s and 1880s and its introduction to America through exhibitions in New York and Boston in the late 1880s, impressionism flourished here. Even after artists began to paint in more modern styles, impressionism continued to thrive in certain regions and for an especially long time in the South. *The Yellow Parasol*, by Louis Betts, from Arkansas, is an example of a successful impressionist painting. Its bright colors, the suggestion of a subject rather than a careful drawing, and attention to the effects of light identify it as impressionist by definition. Other artists took a similar approach to dissimilar subjects, everything from a rainbow to a doorway in Charleston.

Suggested focus works:

Wayman Adams, *New Orleans Mammy*

Gari Melchers, *Rainbow*

Southerners at Play

The paintings in Southerners at Play illustrate some of the ways in which Southerners have traditionally spent their leisure time. Augusta Oelschig's *Play Ball*, Frank Lloyd's *Playing Marbles*, and John Martin Tracy's *A Field Trial-On the Point* show them as active participants in a variety of enjoyable pastimes. Other paintings—most notably, Robert Grafton and Louis Griffith's depiction of a 1917 horse race in New Orleans—emphasize the spectators as much as the participants. These paintings are about more than recreation, however. They also illustrate economic status and the emergence of the

middle class, the nature of American culture and the way it travels, and the role that the land plays. While it is clear that quail hunting, for example, is not available to everyone in the same way that shooting marbles is, it also is clear that there are equalizing pastimes, such as a pleasant day spent at the beach.

Suggested focus works.

Louis Oscar Griffith and Robert Wadsworth Grafton, *The Start*
Edgar Nye, *The Bathers*

Rotating Gallery

This gallery changes every few months. Review the wall text to learn more about the current exhibition.

Abstraction in the South

This gallery examines abstraction, the dominant mode of artistic expression in post–World War II America, as seen through a Southern lens. It features the work of several masters of the idiom. Ida Kohlmeyer, Herb Jackson, and William Halsey were all born in the South. Radcliffe Bailey, though born in New Jersey, moved with his family to Atlanta, where he has resided since he was four years old. Brian Rutenberg, a South Carolinian, now lives in New York City, where he has captured the visual equivalent of the heat, humidity, and burning sunlight of the Carolina coast in his paintings. Betsy Eby, a daughter of the Pacific Northwest, has brought an identifiably Asian sensibility to her work in the South. All are clearly influenced by abstract expressionism, the influence of which was felt in the South, though it came later and never quite achieved the dominance that it did elsewhere.

Suggested focus works:

Ida Kohlmeyer- *Composition 95-22*
Betsy Eby- *As Above So Below*

Glass Collection

The history of the studio glass movement in America is relatively brief. The prosperity in the United States during the late 1940s led to the rise of mass-produced goods including factory-produced glassware. In what seemed an almost direct reaction to mass-produced synthetic materials, some Americans embraced traditional, hand-wrought, functional crafts. It was in this atmosphere that the studio glass movement was born. Its forebear was Harvey K. Littleton, a well-established ceramist and teacher at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Littleton, whose interest in glass dated from his childhood, traveled and studied in Europe in 1957 and 1958, visiting many small glassworks in Naples and Murano, Italy, which strengthened his determination to develop glassblowing in the United States. He experimented with hot glass in his studio in 1958 and enjoyed some success. He came to believe that individual artists engaged in studio glassblowing—as opposed to glass manufacture on an industrial scale—could succeed in the United States.

Suggested focus works:

Harvey Littleton- *Sectioned Arc with Double Helix*
Brent Kee Young- *Snake River Shelter (Matrix Series)*

The Southern Landscape

The Southern Landscape represents the geography of the South, from the Gulf of Mexico to the Potomac and Ohio Rivers and from the Atlantic Coast to eastern Texas. The gallery also includes a very broad range of painting styles that span more than one hundred years. Most importantly, however, this gallery captures the extraordinary range of *cultural landscapes* in the South. Britain provided the basic cultural stamp, but the influences of native peoples, of the French, Spanish, Irish, and German settlers, and of African Americans are clear. The cultural landscapes of the South continue to evolve, and the paintings displayed here reflect the times in which they were created.

Suggested focus works:

William C. A. Frerichs, *Gorge, North Carolina, Toulou Falls, Waterfall, North Carolina*
Meyer Straus, *Bayou Teche*
Henry Ossawa Tanner, *Georgia Landscape*
Stephen Alke, *Tobacco Settlers on a Hilltop*
John Kelly Fitzpatrick, *Autumn in the Hills, Wetumpka, Alabama*

Regionalism in the South

Regionalism in the South reflects the important influence of painter Thomas Hart Benton, who traveled widely through the rural South in 1928 and 1929 gathering visual material for mural projects in New York City. The paintings that Benton produced during that trip predicted the kind of work that many Southerners turned to in the 1930s. Lamar Dodd, Rachel Hartley, and Pamela Vinton Ravenel celebrated the real values of everyday life and the beauty of simple things. Charles Shannon and Marie Hull sought to identify and address problems that were distinctive to Southerners, black and white. Finally, in this gallery hangs a masterpiece by one of the most important of all regionalist painters, John Steuart Curry, whose *Hoover and the Flood*, commissioned by *Life* magazine, depicts the catastrophic Mississippi River floods of 1927.

Suggested focus works:

John Steuart Curry, *Hoover and the Flood*
Lamar Dodd, *Bargain Basement*

Modernism in the South

To most people, *modern* simply means "up to the moment." But *modernism* in art was a specific movement that began, perhaps, as early as 1870 and lasted until after World War II. The South was as open to its influence as any other part of the country, and Modernism in the South reflects those influences. Most of the major artistic movements that emerged in Europe early in the twentieth century can be seen here: cubism in Paul Ninas's *Abstraction*, surrealism in John McCrady's *I Can't Sleep*, and expressionism in Lamar Dodd's *From This Earth*. It is also clearly demonstrated here that the influence of these European movements was both indirect and late, usually filtered through the experiences of other American artists who had spent time in Europe, where they had direct contact with European modernists between the world wars.

Suggested focus works:

Paul Ninas, *Abstraction*
Lamar Dodd, *From This Earth*
John McCrady, *I Can't Sleep*

Contemporary Art in the South

Contemporary Art in the South features works of art that illustrate the richness and vitality of the contemporary South's art scene. The contemporary South is marked by an active and extensive network of museums and art centers, art schools and departments, galleries, and private and corporate collections. The art of today's South exists in a wide variety of expressive forms, everything from the realism of John Baeder and Edward Rice to the abstraction of William Christenberry and Ida Kohlmeyer. There is a middle ground occupied by artists as different as Jonathan Green and Wolf Kahn, who use the visual language of abstraction to capture recognizable subjects. A representative collection of contemporary art must also include the work of self-taught and visionary artists. While such artists have worked in the South throughout its history, their work has garnered increased attention only over the past forty years, owing, in part, to an ever-widening understanding that these works of art are as valid a mode of visual expression as that of academically trained artists.

Suggested focus works:

James William "Bo" Bartlett, *The Art of Drawing*

Jonathan Green, *Daughters of the South*

Edward Rice, *923 Telfair*

Folk Art in the South

Folk art—often characterized as outsider, visionary, or self-taught—varies widely in medium and subject matter. The range of descriptive terms applied to it does little to capture the imaginative ways in which folk artists express deeply personal ideas in visual language. Generally, they employ readily accessible materials—crayons, markers, house paint, and the like—as well as found objects (here including at least one gas tank), to produce their paintings, drawings, and sculpture, putting mundane materials to fresh and ingenious uses. Their works are shaped by experience and filled with a passion that sometimes steps over into spirituality—and in some cases into eccentricity. Many folk artists spent much of their lives doing something other than making art. Their life stories are often as fascinating as their creative output.

Suggested focus works:

David Drake- *Stoneware Storage Jar*

Howard Finster- *Mona Lisa*

Cadalac Message

Conclusion

- Restate the tour objectives.
- Ask for any questions.
- Express our appreciation for the group's visit.
- Provide information concerning the Center for the Study of Southern Art, public programs, and temporary exhibitions.
- Invite our guests to gather brochures and visit the Museum Store.