

Horace Pippin



Domino Players, 1943
Oil on composition board, 12 3/4 x 22 in.
The Phillips Collection

The Artist

Horace Pippin

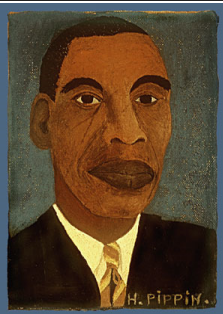
Born West Chester, Pennsylvania 1888; died West Chester 1946
Horace Pippin was an African American painter. He was born around 1888—just twenty-three years after the Civil War and the end of slavery. His grandparents were slaves, and his parents were domestic workers. Pippin enjoyed drawing and illustrated his spelling words in school. His family could not afford art materials. At age ten, he won a box of crayons in a magazine-drawing contest and started coloring. He left school at age fourteen to help his family. He worked on a farm, as a porter at a hotel, and as an iron molder in a factory.



Photograph of Horace Pippin
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution

Pippin was called a folk artist because he had no formal art training. He used bright colors, flat shapes, and straight lines. He did not use shading or complicated perspective. His art is called primitive, naive, or innocent. In 1938, at the age of 50, the Museum of Modern Art in New York included four of Pippin's paintings in a traveling show. He took art classes for the first time. Pippin became more and more well-known. Galleries showed his paintings, and museums began to buy his work. He made 75 paintings during the last years of his life. Just as he became famous, Pippin died. (source: National Gallery of Art)

Art Movement



Horace Pippin
Self-Portrait, 1944
oil on canvas on cardboard
8 1/2 x 6 1/2 in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Folk Art

Folk Art does not come out of the fine art tradition. Folk artists are typically from rural or pre-industrial societies, and are more closely related to craftsmen than they are to fine artists. Generally, artists of this style have little to no formal training in art. Folk art is characterized by a naive style, in which traditional rules of proportion and perspective are not employed. Closely related terms are Outsider Art, Self-Taught Art, and Naive Art.

The Artwork

Domino Players

The intimate interior setting of *Domino Players* is characteristic of Pippin. He drew on memories of his own childhood, of family members and friends at their everyday activities—caring for children, praying, quilting, smoking, playing games—and created a portrait of African American family life in the pre-World War II era.

Pippin placed two members of his family in the center of activity. The one at the right may represent his mother, Christine, wearing a polka-dotted blouse, while a woman who may be Pippin's grandmother smokes her pipe and observes the dominoes game. The dominoes spill toward the family matriarch, a former slave who claimed to have witnessed the hanging of John Brown in 1859. The dominoes build a wall—woman-to-woman, generation-to-generation. The boy, perhaps Pippin himself or his younger brother, John, appears lost in contemplation. He is the only male member of this group, placed protectively between two strong women. The cold whites, grays, and blacks of the barren room are complemented by the colors of the quilt and the vibrant reds placed strategically throughout the painting. The solid horizontals of the floor and table slant upward, and the doorway, window frames, and walls provide a firm vertical support for the figures.

The serenity of the scene and the Sunday evening demeanor are disturbed by the exaggerated size of the sharp open scissors on the blood-red scrap of cloth, the ferocious teeth-like flames of the coal fire, and even the tongues of red flame in the oil lamps. All are presented as disproportionate signs of danger, as only a child would perceive them. (Source: The Phillips Collection)

Discussion Suggestions

Discussion:

- *Artists tell stories with color, line, and shape. They paint people, places, and things. They even paint numbers and counting, if you look closely enough. You'll find all these things in the *Domino Players*, a painting by African-American artist Horace Pippin.*
- *Count the number of people; count the number of objects; look for a clock; what time of day would it be; What colors are used? Is there an accent color?*

Activity Idea

Recreate the Scene of the *Domino Players* (see detailed instruction sheets in folder).

- Gather props and costumes to recreate the scene portrayed in the painting.
- Paint a large backdrop to represent the back of the room seen in the painting (with students).
- Recreate the scene.
- Photograph the scene.
- Have students paint the scene just as they see it.

Materials Needed:

- Tempera paints
- Large piece of craft paper (from roll)
- Costumes and props
- Colored pencils, crayons, watercolors, or pastels
- One piece of good paper per student (could be drawing, construction, or even good typing paper)

Easy Drawing Activity

- Draw a picture of a room with things and people in it.
- Or - Cut out of magazines and paste on construction paper to create a room that tells what is happening.