

# VMFA ON THE ROAD Exhibition

## *Revealing and Obscuring Identity: Portraits from the Permanent Collection*

### FAMILY VISIT GUIDE

This guide offers families some helpful tips for visiting the On the Road Artmobile

#### WHAT TO EXPECT FOR YOUR VISIT

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This exhibition examines the complex role of portraiture across cultures and time periods. Beginning with the Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro, and concluding with American artist Gordon Stettinius, we consider how artists have used portraiture as a means to both reveal and obscure their sitter's identity. Traditionally, portraiture has been used to highlight the sitter's wealth, power, beauty, virtue, and intelligence and has been reserved for the elite of society. Several of the works in this exhibition maintain this tradition while others employ it as means to explore truths about the nature of art, the way we perceive beauty, and the way culture influences and reflects personal identity.

By examining these works chronologically, it explores how portraiture in the European context has shifted from traditional portraiture, which reinforces the sitter's identity through an array of objects and careful composition that glorify the subject- to expressionist portraiture, which distorts reality to evoke varying moods and emotions. It also considers how photography portrays the sitter's identity through their race, occupation, and status and how self-portraiture can reveal the artist's core identity or reflect a carefully constructed persona.

Consider the role of portraiture in your life. Do you use your phone to capture images of your family, friends, and pets? What are ways we reveal and obscure identity with the portraits we take?

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## ARTISTS REPRESENTED

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\*Edward Le Bas                      \*Félix Bracquemond                      \*S. Ross Browne  
\*Jen Davis                      \*Charles Bird King                      \*André L'Hôte                      \*Gordon Stettinius  
\*Chuck Stewart                      \*Jerry Torn                      \*Kitagawa Utamaro                      \*Edward Weston

## REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

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It considers how photography portrays the sitter's identity through their race, occupation, and status and how self-portraiture can reveal the artist's core identity or reflect a carefully constructed persona. This diverse collection of portraits provide insight into the function of portraiture across various mediums, artistic movements, and cultures.

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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- Beginning in the 1780s **Kitagawa Utamaro** was one of the most important Japanese artists in the Edo period, he is believed to have produced over 2,000 ukiyo-e woodblock prints.
- When **Charles Bird King** was hired to paint prominent Native American leaders in 1821, he was already a principle artist (portraitist) in Washington D.C.
- In the 1900s **André L'Hôte** was one of the creators of the art style *Cubism*, he is known for his bright colors and angular shapes.
- At the *1900 Paris World's Fair* **Félix Bracquemond** received the grand prize for graphics, in his lifetime he created 900 etchings.
- While traveling around Mexico City in the 1920s, **Edward Weston** connected with Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.
- In 1949, **Edward Le Bas** was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Arts of London; almost a decade later he was awarded Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE).
- With over 2,000 record covers spanning 70 years, **Chuck Stewart's** photography visually captured jazz from the 1950s onward.
- **Jerry Torn** was well-known for his graphite portraits, and taught art at Loyola University of Chicago.
- Since 1990, professional studio artist **S. Ross Browne** takes art therapy seriously, and at one time he was an art specialist for the VCU Health System.
- **Gordon Stettinius** started a publishing company named *Candela Books* in 2010, and founded *Candela Gallery* in 2011.
- **Jen Davis** debuted an eleven year self-portrait series in 2014, and she has exhibited around the world.

## MATERIALS & TERMS

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**Painting:** an art discipline that requires applying wet or oily pigment to a surface with a brush.



Acrylic- a water-based fast-drying pigment suspended in acrylic polymer emulsion and plasticizers, silicon oils, defoamers, stabilizers or metal soaps.

Oil-the pigment is mixed with drying oils like linseed oil.

André Lhote, "Portrait d'Anne a la robe rouge," oil on canvas, ca. 1930

**Photography:** an art discipline that captures images with a process of chemical action of light and other radiation.



Gelatin Silver Print-a black and white photographic process that coats silver salts and gelatin onto glass (light sensitive) and is exposed after capturing an image.

Chromogenic print-a photographic process that uses dyes, layers of emulsion, and exposure to develop a color negative, transparency or digital image.

Chuck Stewart, "James Brown," gelatin silver print, 1966

Digital-using a camera to capture an image focused by the lens, so that it can be digitized and stored as a computer file.

**Printmaking:** an art discipline that uses physical or chemical reactions to create an image on a surface for the purpose of printing multiples (editions of that image) using a press or hand pressure.

Etching- a technique in intaglio where the exposed metal plate is incised using acid, so it can hold ink. Plates are made of iron, copper, or zinc.

Lithograph- a form of printmaking: that originated with drawing (greasy material) on a stone, and is etched (fixed) into the stone using acid.



After Charles Bird King, "Kish-Kallo-Wa, Shawnee Chief", hand-colored lithograph, 1836

Woodcut- a form of relief, a block of wood is carved into and then hand printed.

Ukiyo-e: in Japanese it means "pictures of the floating world," also a type of Japanese woodcut during Edo period (17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) that depicted the Samurai and Geishas lifestyle.

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## LAYOUT OF EXHIBITION

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As a gallery on wheels, the artmobile represents a portion of the VMFA's permanent collection. It has three sections that includes touch screen computers, touch screen tablets, 11 two-dimensional works of art, and an area for distance learning.



## TIPS FOR VISITING

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**Explore the art.** When you visit the exhibition, take time to look carefully at a few works of art rather than walking quickly through the space.

**Look together.** Explore artworks in the galleries as a family and discuss what you see, think, and wonder.

**Try an activity.** Try some of the activities that follow to enjoy a more meaningful experience of the works of art. Additional activities are also available on the VMFA Learn website [www.vmfa.museum/learn](http://www.vmfa.museum/learn).

## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

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Kitagawa Utamaro, "Ariwara no Narihira, from the series Fashionable Six Poetic Immortals," woodblock print; ink and color, ca. 1795-96

## **I See, I Think, I Wonder**

Walk up to any piece and record your; I See, I Think, I Wonder responses to objects and then compare your answers (use a pencil to write on paper) with the artwork's label. What surprised you? Were some of your ideas the same as what you read? Have some of your "I wonder" statements been addressed?

## **Strike a Pose**

Artists often have specific reasons for the poses of the people in their artwork. Sometimes just by mimicking the poses, you can understand more about the art even before getting any additional information. Do the following with a chosen work of figural art (a work of art that has a person in it).

Without looking at the label, study the gestures and body language of a figure you see. Carefully move your body and adjust your facial expression to match that of the figure. What does doing this tell you about what the figure may be thinking or feeling?

## **Before and After**

Sometimes artists create multiple works of art to tell a whole story. Sometimes they only show us part of a story, leaving the rest up to us and our imaginations.

Chose an artwork that seems to have a story. Examine the scene and then sketch what you imagine might have occurred before or after the moment the artist chose to represent.

## **WHEN YOU ARE DONE VISITING VMFA *On the Road***

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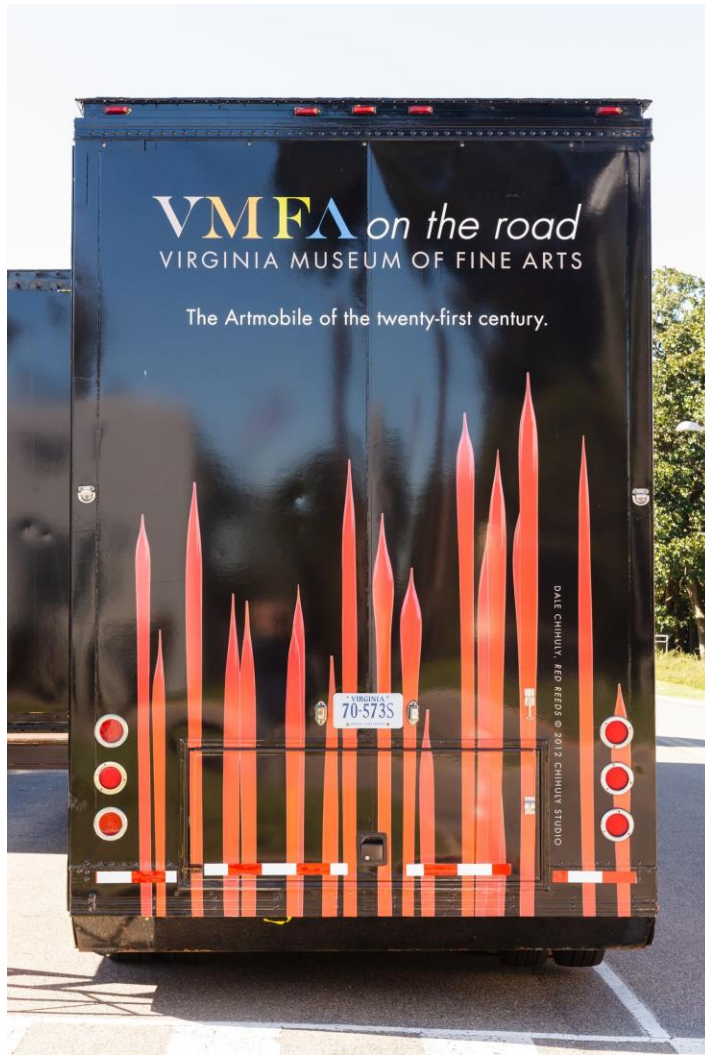
**We value your feedback.** Please take time to answer a few survey questions. It will take a couple minutes. Your answers will help us know how effective we are in sharing the VMFA collection with you.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/F3CPVM9>

**Reflect** on what creativity is to you. Where has it taken you, or where can it take you? Was it a physical or mental journey? What did you produce or make from it?

**Share** what you experienced with others. Let others know about the various artworks that were created by artists from Virginia. What was your favorite? What did you already know? What did you learn? What will you never forget?

**See traveling schedule** at <https://vmfa.museum/exhibitions/exhibitions/vmfa-on-the-road/>



**VMFA**  
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS