

learning library

ONLINE!

May 2022

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hello. My name is Janine and I am a museum guide at the Dayton Art Institute. In this video, we are going to look at several works of art and work to uncover what the artist is trying to tell us through their work. Basically, we will become codebreakers!

Have you ever looked at a work of art and wondered why it shows us certain things, and what these things might mean? Artists throughout time have used symbols to represent or suggest a certain meaning or emotion. A symbol is a thing that represents something else. Here are some examples from American culture: a red heart can mean love, a four-leaf clover suggests good luck or fortune, the green of a traffic light indicates “go” or proceed. Can you think of some everyday symbols you have seen?

Let's look at symbols in three types of art. The first is a still-life. Still-life is a painting or drawing of objects. These works often include fruits and flowers. Let's look at these two still-lives. Which painting is the brightest? Which picture looks like the flowers have been cut, need water, or are wilting?

A beautiful bouquet of blooming flowers can signify life & growth. On the other hand, wilting flowers serve as a reminder that life and beauty are fragile. Did you see any insects? Bugs can be another symbol for decay. Which painting represents life and growth most for you?

In our second type of art, sculptures, we will focus on animals and their meanings. Animals, both real and mythical, are used regularly as symbols. For example, a dog might represent loyalty; an owl represents wisdom and intelligence; a dragon can indicate power and strength. Look at this relief sculpture from the Dayton Art Institute collection. What mythical animal do you see? If you said “dragons”, you are correct. Would it surprise you to know that this is a very heavy, stone carving that was once found at the temple of a Chinese imperial family? Imperial means royal. Dragons, remember, symbolize power and strength. An imperial family would have wanted to convey such information to anyone entering the temple.



Top: Jan Fyt (Flemish, 1611–1661), *Garland of Flowers*, 1643, oil on oak panel. Gift of Pamela Price Houk, Harry Steele Price III, and Marlay Blackwood Price, in memory of their parents, Harry Steele Price, Jr. and Janet Smith Price, 2005.94

Middle: Artist unidentified (China, Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644), *Relief with Design of Dragons*, 15th century, marble. Gift of Mrs. Harrie G. Carnell, 1928.48.1-2

Bottom: John M. King (American, 1897–1977), *Kathryn*, 1937, oil on canvas. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. R. K. Finley, 1945.55

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The third type of art we will talk about is portraiture or an artistic representation of someone else. Portraits rely on symbols to reveal to us things about the person you are looking at. Consider this portrait and let's look closely for clues about this young person's life. Can you find a pet? Yes! A black cat. Do you think she has a favorite toy? If I were to guess, I would say her doll. Look closely at her lap. Not only do I see the doll, but a book. She may also have liked to read. In the background are some drawings and a globe. Could that be a sketch pad on the floor next to her foot? The artist's symbols have allowed a glimpse into this young girl's life and personality. What would you include in your portrait?

I hope you will visit the Dayton Art Institute soon to look for some of the symbols we talked about. Thank you for spending this time with me, and happy code-breaking! Be sure to check back next month for a new "Art Vids for Kids".

END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) for full multimedia presentation.

FEATURED ARTWORKS*

Artist unidentified (Persia, Abassid period, 750–1258 CE), *Bowl Decorated with Animals*, 10th century, earthenware with luster painting in yellow on white ground. Museum purchase with funds provided by the 1958 Associate Board Art Ball, 1968.74

Artist unidentified (Egypt, New Kingdom, 1550–1070 BCE), *Relief of a Nobel and His Wife Iny*, about 1335–1162 BCE, limestone and pigment. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Jefferson Patterson Endowment Fund, 1972.48

Artist unidentified (Mayan peoples, Late Classic Period), *Cylinder Vessel*, 650 – 800 CE), earthenware and slip paint. Museum purchase with funds provided by the 1967 Associate Board Art Ball, 1967.78

Jan Fyt (Flemish, 1611–1661), *Garland of Flowers*, 1643, oil on oak panel. Gift of Pamela Price Houk, Harry Steele Price III, and Marlay Blackwood Price, in memory of their parents, Harry Steele Price, Jr. and Janet Smith Price, 2005.94

Jan Davidsz de Heem (Dutch, 1606–1684), *Vase of Flowers*, about 1660, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, D.C. Andrew W. Mellon Fund, 1961.6.1

Artist unidentified (Costa Rica, Atlantic Watershed), *Jaguar Effigy Metate*, about 300–700 CE, basalt. The Harold W. and Mary Louise Shaw Foundation, L8.2001.99

Artist unidentified (Colima, West Mexico), *Dog Effigy*, 200 BCE–300 CE, earthenware and slip paint. Dayton Art Institute. Museum purchase, 1960.15

Artist unidentified (China, Tang Dynasty, 618–907 CE), *Dancing Horse*, 7th century, earthenware with pigments. Gift of Mrs. Howard C. Davidson in memory of her mother, Mrs. Harrie G. Carnell, 1943.39

Artist unidentified (Japanese), *Dog*, about 19th–20th century, ivory. Gift of Kettering Medical Center Foundation, 2016.50

Artist unidentified (Hopewell people, American, 900–1300), *Owl Effigy Pipe*, about 900–1300, stone. Museum purchase, 1962.34

Artist unidentified (Japanese), *Box in the Form of a Dragon*, 1968–1912, wood. Gift of Mrs. Virginia W. Kettering, 2019.4.5

Artist unidentified (China, Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644), *Relief with Design of Dragons*, 15th century, marble. Gift of Mrs. Harrie G. Carnell, 1928.48.1-2

Artist unidentified (Chinese, Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911), *Ancestor Portrait*, 19th century, ink and color on silk. Gift of the Honorable and Mrs. Jefferson Patterson, 1952.71

Michael Conrad Hirt (German, 1615–1694), *Portrait of a Daughter of Dietrich Bromsen*, about 1635, oil on canvas. Gift of Mr. Robert Badenhop, 1955.71

John M. King (American, 1897–1977), *Kathryn*, 1937, oil on canvas. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. R. K. Finley, 1945.55

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QUESTIONS OR IDEAS FOR FUTURE VIDS?

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