

25 Schools,  
25 Big(g) Works of Art  
Study Objects from the  
Collection



*Tea Table*

"Big" Tom Burton

Long Neck, Sussex County, DE, 1860s-1900

Walnut, Swamp Root

According to family tradition, "Big Tom" Burton was an African American sharecropper who worked on the Burton Plantation in southern Sussex County, Delaware. Until the Emancipation Proclamation, the plantation's owner, Benjamin Burton (dates unknown), was the largest slaveholder in the state. This table, very likely a marriage between an eighteenth-century walnut tabletop and a swamp-root base, is an extremely rare example of a documented piece of furniture created by an African American in Delaware.



*Wainscot Chair*

Maker unknown

Chester County, PA, 1720-60

Walnut

People in Delaware likely made chairs like this, as well as other types of furniture, in the early 1700s. However, Delaware-made furniture dating before 1740 has yet to be found. Made in nearby Chester County, Pennsylvania, this turned chair has mortise-and-tenon construction. These techniques were first practiced in the colonies in the 1600s.



*Captain Harding Williams*  
Abraham Delanoy (1742-1795)  
ca. 1785  
oil on canvas  
Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, no. 217

Abraham Delanoy studied painting in London under the tutelage of renowned artist Benjamin West. Following the completion of his studies abroad, Delanoy returned to the United States, where he established himself as a portrait painter in New York City, South Carolina, and the West Indies. His portrait of Captain Harding Williams, with its emphasis on linearity and soft tones, is typical of Delanoy's style. Williams' trade as a captain of trips to Lisbon, Dublin, Bordeaux and Glasgow, is referenced in this portrait through the inclusion of a map and compass. Captain Williams lived in the Delaware Valley area and is buried in the cemetery of Immanuel Episcopal Church in New Castle, Delaware.

For Further Thinking:

Delanoy included references to Captain Williams' trade as a sea captain.

What would you included in a portrait of yourself to reference your job and personality?



*Old Church at Wilmington (Delaware)*

R. A. Matlack (dates unknown)

Wilmington, Delaware, 1842

Watercolor and ink wash on paper

This is among the earliest known depictions of Old Swedes Church, a sanctuary built by Swedish colonists in northern Delaware in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. R. A. Matlack recorded the church in a dilapidated state. The artist associates herself with the Wilmington Female Collegiate Institute, an early women's college that operated from 1837 to 1885.



*Drop-lid Chest*

Maker unknown

Probably Kent County, Delaware, ca. 1800

Painted poplar and pine

Gift of Alice Biggs in Memory of Franklin Biggs; 2005.6

When setting up a household, an early Delaware family likely included a storage chest among the first furniture forms it purchased. These chests stored personal objects and expensive textiles. Delaware chests are often decorated with polychrome designs, both objective and abstract, in bright, primary colors. The distinctive Prussian blue color of much Delaware painted furniture was available in regional dry goods stores in the 1700s.



*Condiment Spoon*

Hannah Robinson (1803-1878)

Ca. 1850

Biggs Silver Catalogue, page 246-253

This condiment spoon was created by Hannah Robinson, who was one of the only female silversmiths in Delaware during the 19th century. Not only did Robinson create her products, but she also managed her own business on Market Street in Wilmington. Many of her pieces bare the stamp "H. Robinson," on the reverse and feature delicate floral designs and engravings of the owners' initials.

For Further Thinking:

Why might people from the 19th century have considered silversmith work to be more appropriate for men than for women?

Who are some women today who are taking on careers in fields typically held by men?



*Commodore Jacob Jones, USN*  
Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860)  
ca. 1813-14  
Oil on canvas

Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, no. 229

Commodore Jacob Jones, a native of Smyrna, Delaware, was a widely heralded hero of the War of 1812. The work follows closely in line with Rembrandt Peale's other representations of American war heroes, which often featured evocative clouds in the background and dashing windswept hair styles. The work provides an example of the ways in which American citizens and American painters integrated Napoleonic fashions and European Romantic artistic styles into their lives, in keeping with their French sympathies during this era.

For Further Thinking:

What aspects of the painting do you think suggest Commodore Jones' heroism?

How is this portrayal similar or different to how we portray war heroes and heroic people today?





*Spectacles*

Either Jacob F. (1819-1867) or John F. (1812- 1867) Robinson

**Biggs Silver Catalogue, pages 254-272**

The existence of sunglasses is often thought to date back as far as the Roman Empire, during which time Pliny the Elder gave an account of Emperor Nero watching sporting events through tinted glasses. References continue in sources throughout history and there were several made for Civil War soldiers. Although there may have been some large production of sunglasses during the period in which this pair was made, these spectacles were probably more specifically crafted.

**For Further Thinking:**

Sunglasses are one of myriad ways humans have adapted to challenges presented by nature. What are some other inventions we've created to protect us from the elements?



*Pendant*

Portrait by unknown artist

Mount by General James Wolf (1779-1858)

Probably Wilmington, first half of the 19th century

Silver

Partial gift from Col. Kenneth P. and Regina I. Brown; 2005.416

[Biggs Silver Catalogue, page 296-312](#)

This pendant of an unknown woman was set into a silver mount that is marked by Wilmington silversmith General James Wolf. A similar pendant marked by Wolf is known with a portrait of a young man also dressed in the clothing of first decades of the 19th century. This work was almost certainly made by two different artists: a silversmith and a painter. Pendants like this were created for a variety of reasons including marriage, engagement, and even death. In the latter case, they were often memorials to loved ones and sometimes even featured a spot to preserve a lock of their hair.



*Sideboard*

Dell Noblet (1777–?)

Wilmington, Delaware, ca. 1825

Mahogany, mahogany veneer, white pine, tulip poplar

Museum purchase; 2006.14

This is the only known piece of furniture bearing Dell Noblet's signature. He was one of a number of Noblet furniture makers of that name working in Wilmington, Delaware, in the 1800s. These makers spelled their names differently; "Nobeltt" and "Noblit" are two recorded variations. This maker's son, Hamilton Noblet, worked around 1836 to 1853 in the Gothic Revival style that was popular during that time.



*Miniature Chest of Drawers*

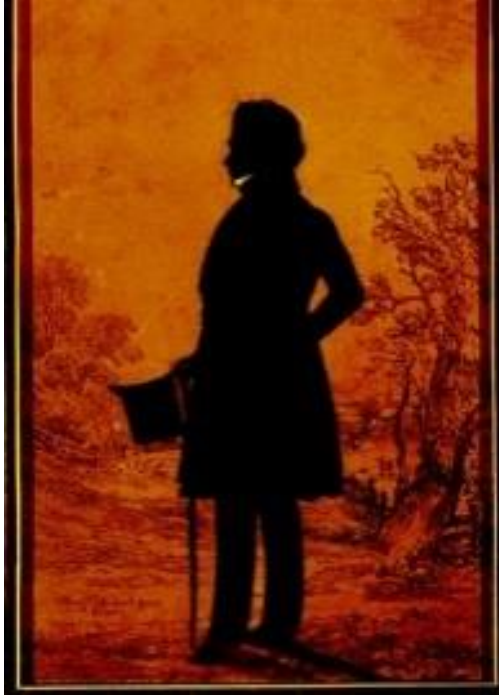
William Baker (dates unknown)

Frederica, Delaware, 1841

Walnut, tulip poplar, yellow pine

Museum purchase; 2011.10

A handwritten letter was found beneath the lid of this miniature chest. It describes, in the most poetic language of the nineteenth century, that William Baker, cabinetmaker of Frederica, made this object as a gift for his friend Robert Y. Townsend. To date we know little more about this Delaware furniture maker.



*Baltimore Gentleman*

Auguste Edouart (1789-1861)

1840

Positive cutout black paper silhouette applied over lithographed buff paper

Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, no. 253

The silhouette portrait was a wildly popular medium in the early 18th-19th centuries. In this work, the artist Auguste Edouart carefully cut the silhouette and pasted it into a customized background scene. Edouart was known for his skills with scissors and small details, like the small white piece of paper in this work, meant to depict the gentleman's collar.

For Further Thinking:

Although the identity of this figure is not absolutely known, many people during this era believed that a person's face, especially when shown in profile, expressed specific attributes of the figure's personality. Based on his profile in this work, what personality traits would you say this man has?



*Unfinished landscape (Sunset Study)*

Thomas Cole (1801-1848)

Ca. 1845-47

oil on panel

Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, no. 261

Thomas Cole was considered the leader of the alliance of artists known as the Hudson River School. These artists believed that the divine was most evident in nature and representations of it. This work by Cole was left unfinished and offers several insights into the way that he painted, including the revelation that he perfected his painting from the top to the bottom.

For Further Thinking:

Scholars have debated what Cole might have intended to paint in the large, dark area in the bottom left of this work.

What do you think it looks like? Why do you think he might have included that?



*All Down the Squalid Street the Little Procession Passed, 1906*

Frank E. Schoonover (1877-1972)

Oil on canvas

Gift of Edward R. Burka

Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, page 397-398 essay on Schoonover

This painting by Frank E. Schoonover, depicts a scene from James W. Steele's story "The American Way." In the story, a couple is being expelled from an old western town at gunpoint. Although this work is from fairly early in the artist's career, it is notable for its interesting composition and play of light and shadows. The Biggs has built and continues to build the largest and most diverse collection of works of art by Schoonover and donations like this one help the Biggs to preserve and grow the artist's legacy.

For Further Thinking: When illustrating stories, Schoonover had to think carefully about which moments to depict. Think about your favorite story. What moments would you depict in your illustrations of that story?



*Craftsman's Chair*

Don Stephens (1887–1971)

Arden, Delaware, ca. 1910

Oak

Gift of the estate of Caroline Stephens Holt

The design of this so-called “Craftsman’s” chair is inspired by British Arts and Crafts Movement examples. Don Stephens joined this chair with wooden pins and carved its decoration by hand to express his preference against machine-made furniture of the Industrial Revolution. The chair is very similar to examples designed by William Lightfoot Price (1861–1916) in the nearby artist community of Rose Valley, Pennsylvania. Price and Don Stephens’s father founded Delaware’s northern artist colony of Arden in 1900.





*Portrait of Alison Kendall*

Henryette Stadelman Whiteside (1891–1973)

1925

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase; 2005.447

Henryette Whiteside studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with Thomas Anshutz (1851–1912), William Merritt Chase (1849–1916), and Cecelia Beaux (1855–1942). She also studied with Charles W. Hawthorne (1872–1930) in Rhode Island. The sitter of this portrait is the daughter of another of Whiteside's instructors, William Sergeant Kendall (1869-1938). Whiteside exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy, the National Academy of Design, and the Art Institute of Chicago. An important advocate for art education in Delaware, she founded the Wilmington Academy of Art in 1928, which merged with the newly founded Delaware Art Center (now the Delaware Art Museum) in 1938.



*Portrait of Mae Mafco*

Edward Loper (1916–2011)

ca. 1940

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase; 2007.4

Biggs Catalogue, Vol. II, page 481-482 essay on Loper

Born in Wilmington, Delaware, Edward Loper learned to paint in the Delaware Division of the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression. In 1937, he was the first African-American artist to exhibit in the Wilmington Society of Fine Arts. The artist found initial commercial success with his own modernist perspective that displayed the influences of realism, post-impressionism, and cubism. Loper later studied aesthetics at the Barnes Foundation, and his work began to display the influence of Henri Matisse's (1869–1954) fauvist use of color. He exhibited internationally, and several regional collectors purchased his work. All the while Loper taught private painting classes that featured his signature rhythmic use of dissonant patterns of color.



*Watt Stax Record Shack*

John Iowa Lewis (1913–2012)

1973

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Baker Family; 2008.5.18

Jack Lewis was originally from Baltimore but moved to Delaware during the Depression to document the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps. He developed a signature abstract style, which distinguished the architectural studies, cityscapes, portraits, and landscapes that he painted throughout the Delmarva Peninsula for the next sixty years. Having continued his studies at Rutgers University, Lewis taught painting classes at the Rehoboth Art League, in Bridgeville, and at the Dover Air Force Base, all in Delaware. He also published seven books on his regional watercolor studies, including *Pacific Odyssey*, *The Hudson River*, and *The Chesapeake Bay Scene*.



*Lewes*

Howard Schroeder (1910–1995)

1968

Oil on canvas

Gift of Gerald A. and Marion H. Lynch; 2001.3

Born in New York, Howard Schroeder trained as a commercial artist at the National Academy of Design. He was stationed at Lewes, Delaware, during his World War II service. After the war, he and his wife opened the iconic art-supply store, The Art Age, which fueled the growing artist colony surrounding the Rehoboth Art League. Schroeder spent most of the rest of his life teaching art within small classes and private schools across the state.



*The Seine, c. 1923*

Clarence Montfort Gihon (1871-1929)

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase

Clarence Montfort Gihon worked in the Post-Impressionist style. He was born in Philadelphia and trained in New York. Gihon later moved to Paris to study and stayed for 35 years. He regularly showed works at the Pennsylvania Academy, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Panama Pacific Exhibition and the Salon of the Societe Nationale des beaux Arts in Paris. Most notably, Gihon studied under William Merritt Chase and Kenyon C. Cox in New York. This work reflects the time Gihon spent in France and is one of a series of paintings in which Gihon depicted the famous Seine river in Paris.

For Further Thinking: On the Biggs Timeline, we feature a work by William Merritt Chase, who was an instructor of Gihon. Find this work on the Timeline and look closely at it in relation to this work by Gihon. What do you see that is similar? What do you see that is different? Do you prefer one artist over another?





*Entrance*

Ruth Egri Holden (1911-1996)

Probably 1960s

Oil on canvas

Gift of Charles and Frances Allmond

Ruth Egri Holden studied and worked as a painter, muralist and art instructor throughout the country, but eventually settled in Wilmington, Delaware. She worked within the modernists modes of Cubism and Dynamic Symmetry and having her work in the collection offers the Biggs the opportunity to emphasize the historical significance of modernist styles to Delaware's artistic heritage.

For Further Thinking: Although modernists like Holden focused primarily on colors, form, and shape, many visitors have very emotional reactions to this work. What personal response does this work stir up for you? Does it feel hopeful, dismayed, comforting, or unsettling?



*Hair*

Joseph Konopka (1932–)

1970

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of Casimera Konopka: 2004.505

Joseph Konopka demonstrates Pop Artists' veneration of advertising art and other ordinary objects to the level of fine art. In this portrait of the artist's wife, the artist emphasizes wallpaper patterns and the arrangement of beauty products on the vanity. Born in Philadelphia and a student of the Cooper union and Columbia university, Konopka paints his large compositions from studying a series of photographs he takes of his subject. The artist is represented in dozens of art museum's in America and Europe including the National Museum of Art, Museum of the City of New York, the Newark Museum and the National Museum in Warsaw to name a few.



*A Map of the World*

Mary Tobias Putman (b 1943)

2006

Oil on panel

Museum purchase, 2010.7

A 2010 recipient of the Hassam, Speicher, Betts & Symons Purchase Fund Award for the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Mary Putman began her career studying art at the Carnegie Mellon University. Having lived in Philadelphia for many years, the artist gravitated to the open landscape of Delaware that reminded her of her childhood home in rural southern Michigan. The work of this acclaimed artist illustrates the forms and patterns of human encroachment upon the land. *A Map of the World* is an aerial view into the artist's representation of the small, traditional fishing village of Leipsic, Delaware, near the state's capital of Dover and the Delaware River.





*Ballet the Black Crook*

Robert Henri

1894

Oil on canvas

Robert Henri was one of the most influential American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His pioneering efforts to document urban life through art launched a style known as The Ashcan School, and he was a pivotal member of the groundbreaking artist group known as The Eight. This group's denunciation of official art institutions and styles in favor of representations of everyday city scenes dramatically changed the course of American art. The group's social awareness and style rejected the tenets of the much-lauded Impressionists and Henri's works from this period forward reflect the stylistic influence of the radicals Edouard Manet and Gustav Courbet. The Eight and their ideals later merged with the larger Ashcan School that Henri championed at the peak of his career.

Although Henri was an intransigent champion of these ideals in his mid and later career, his early works, like *Ballet – the Black Crook*, stands in stark contrast to these principles. After starting his artistic education at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Henri went abroad to Paris to study at the Académie Julian. The works he created during this time in France and shortly after demonstrate a clear Impressionist influence in their light subject matter, brighter palettes, and layered brushstrokes.

The indistinct edges, brilliant whites, and traditional subject matter in *Ballet – the Black Crook* place this work squarely within this timeframe in the artist's life. The paintings' inclusion in the Biggs' collection allows the museum to display and explore the complex development that can occur over the course of an artist's lifetime.



*Tench and Elizabeth Francis, ca. 1740*

Robert Feke (c. 1707- c. 1751)

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase with funds from the Choptank Foundation

These portraits by American artist Robert Feke depict Tench and Elizabeth Francis. The couple was prominent in colonial Maryland and Philadelphia through Tench's work in law and politics. The paintings were most likely done during the time when Feke was living and working in Philadelphia as a portrait painter. His work is best known for the particular emphasis he placed on the decorative aspects of his sitter's clothing. The acquisition of these portraits, which needed conservation and re-framing, offers the Biggs the chance to use the paintings as didactic tools for educating on the nuances and importance of conservation.

For Further Thinking: Conservation efforts, like those used to preserve these paintings, offer an example of the crucial overlap that occurs between science and art. What are some other ways that science and art overlap? What is similar in the two processes of scientific discovery and the creation of art?