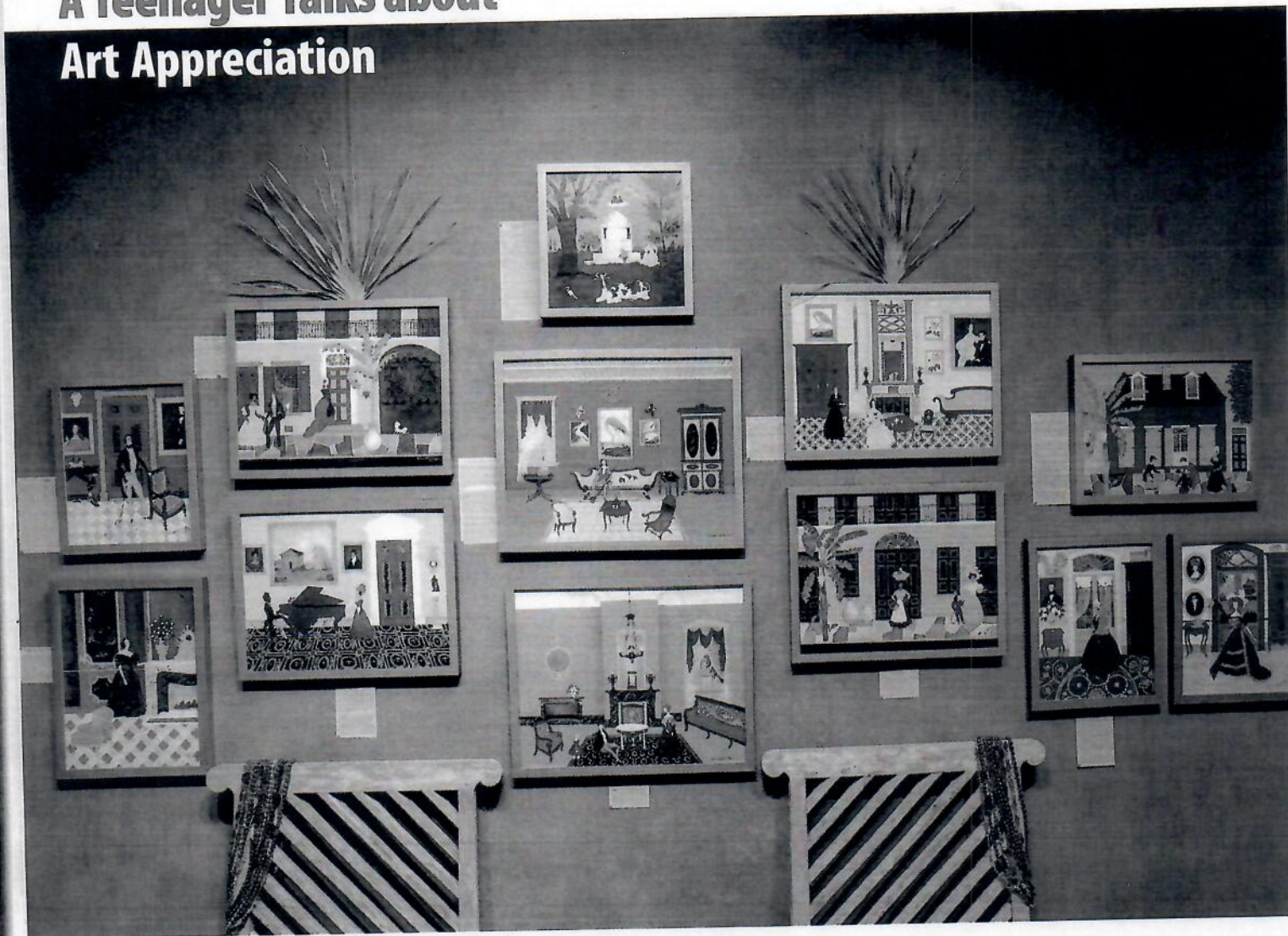


A Teenager Talks about Art Appreciation



Art dealer Elle Shushan's booth at the 2020 Winter Show—designed by Ralph Harvard and featuring paintings of Creole society in antebellum New Orleans by Andrew LaMar Hopkins—was cited by the author as an example of the color-and-pattern-filled art displays she admires. Photograph by Matthew Gilbertson, courtesy of the Winter Show.

Ever since I can remember, I have been dragged to museums, art shows, private art collections, and historic houses with my family. Now, as a junior in high school, I can look back and appreciate the significance of what I have seen and how, subconsciously, my eye has been honed to respond to art and to recognize good art and design. My mother, a curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, brought me on work trips with her beginning when I was an infant—to New York City, Williamsburg, Washington, DC. One of my godmothers was Mary Donnell Tilghman, the late proprietor at Wye House in Maryland, where my brother, Henry, and I have spent many hours exploring the house, outbuildings, historic graveyard, and enormous landscape. Every building I have visited—from Chartres Cathedral and Hampton Court Palace to the Sydney Opera House and the Madisons'

Montpelier—has been judged against my early familiarity with Wye House's design, proportions, details, and the stories of all of the people who lived there.

For my family, the tempo of each year is governed by art and antiques fairs—Americana Week and the Winter Show in New York in January; Philadelphia in April; Delaware in November. At those fairs, at receptions like those held annually by the Met's Friends of the American Wing, at symposiums like the Antiques Forum at Colonial Williamsburg, I have met dynamic people that make the events far from average: Anne Hamilton, Elle Shushan, Linda Kaufman (I have never seen a lawn like hers before or since), Joan Johnson, Robert Trent, Joseph Rishel, Leslie Miller (who loves to talk horses with me), Wendy Cooper, Matt Thurlow, Stiles Colwill, Margaret Pritchard (who makes amazing steak and has a fun garden). I even just found a



picture of our friend Ralph Harvard's cool Adidas shoe on my iPhone camera roll from the Winter Show in 2020—a shot I took to inspire my brother.

Sometimes my mom asks me to be her one-person focus group. She wants me to know what I would like to see in a museum like hers. When we go to art shows, she encourages me to wander on my own and find what I think is interesting, or would buy if I were a collector. She asks what type of exhibition or installation or display is engaging to the teenage eye. My answer: I like a display to draw me in with color and patterns—color and patterns that create a good design. Sometimes a single work of art is grand enough to do that. But other times, a massing of artworks creates a display that I want to see better, closer. For example, a wall of paintings or a case of blue-and-white ceramics of various shapes and sizes, where the display itself creates a work of art.

I personally seek the variations, the contrasts that color and pattern make. I feel like the number of images my generation cycles through daily on our phones accustoms our eyes to so much sensory experience that we are hyperaware of arrays of color and pattern. Maybe it's good or maybe it's bad, but our eyes are constantly barraged and overwhelmed with images. A display in an art museum or a booth

in an art fair has to be designed well—so the art pops out and grabs us—inviting us in (as click bait) to explore and learn more.

In my first-grade art class, we made renditions of the Philadelphia Museum's *Sunflowers* by Vincent van Gogh. For my birthday that December, I asked my mother to take my friends and me to the PMA. We ran up the steps and then she took us inside. I led my friends through the cavernous galleries and showed them my favorite artwork—*Spring* by John La Farge. Then, when we came to the rotunda where van Gogh's *Sunflowers* hangs, my friends and I ran over to it. There it was. Big. Bright. Alive with the brushstrokes that you could see almost coming off the canvas. We were mesmerized.

In other words, even though our eyes are bombarded with images all day long, the true work of art—not a digital reproduction—is what we really ought to see. The challenge for museums and art and antiques shows is, I think, how to use design and display and color to engage us and make us want to look again.

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Another display that appealed to the author was the Aronson Antiquairs booth at the Winter Show, 2020. Photograph courtesy of Aronson Antiquairs, Amsterdam.

Spring, designed by John La Farge (1835–1910), assembled by Thomas Wright (1858–1918), painted by Juliette Hanson (active 1881–c. 1920), 1901–1902. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Charles S. Payson.

