

# HORACE PIPPIN

## INTRODUCTION

Interested in art forms free of academic tradition, European avant-garde artists at the turn of the twentieth century looked to art of non-Western cultures, the traditional folk arts and crafts of Europe, the art of children, and the work of self-taught artists.

In France, Pablo Picasso discovered Henri Rousseau, who became the first self-taught painter to be included in his circle. Modernism's appreciation of nonacademic art spread to the United States in the 1920s. The work of unschooled artists was celebrated for its honesty and elegant simplicity and was seen as a reflection of the true character of America. In this context, self-taught artist Horace Pippin gained acclaim. Pippin's natural genius for what philosopher Alain Locke called "modernistically abstract talent" captured the interest of the 1930s art world.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Horace Pippin was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1888. As a young child Pippin was very interested in drawing. He often drew pictures instead of writing out his spelling words and at the age of ten won a contest sponsored by an art supply company. At fourteen, he left school to go to work. In 1912, Pippin was working in New Jersey for a furniture packer when he was given the job of packing oil paintings. This was his first introduction to fine art.

At age twenty-nine, Horace Pippin enlisted in the United States Army, serving as a corporal in the 369<sup>th</sup> Colored Infantry Regiment of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Division (the *Hell Fighters*) in World War I. On the front lines in the Argonne Forest in France he recorded his experiences in the trenches with colored-pencil drawings. In



# VOCABULARY

folk art  
Modernism  
nostalgic  
narrative  
genre

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Freeman, Linda. *Horace Pippin: There Will Be Peace*. Video/28 min. Level: All grades.  
Chappaqua, NY: L & S Video, Inc., 1996.
- Lyons, Mary. *Starting Home: The Story of Horace Pippin, Painter*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993.
- Stein, Judith, ed. *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in association with Universe Publishing, 1993.

# INTERNET RESOURCES

Galerie St. Etienne  
<http://www.gseart.com/>

This was the gallery who first showed Grandma Moses' work in 1940. This website has several articles on self-taught artists.

Roucher, Nancy. Accompanying study guide to *Horace Pippin: There Will Be Peace*.  
[http://www.landsvideo.com/education\\_01.htm](http://www.landsvideo.com/education_01.htm)

October 1918, Pippin was shot through the right shoulder by a sniper. He was honorably discharged from the Army the following year, with a steel plate in his shoulder and almost no use of his right arm. Pippin recalled that the war "brought out all the art in me." He began decorating cigar boxes with charcoal as therapy for his right arm, using his left arm for support. He soon discovered that he could create more satisfactory results by using a hot poker to burn images onto wooden panels.

At the age of forty, Pippin began working in oils. It took three years to complete his first piece *The End of the War: Starting Home*. He eventually turned to other subjects besides his war experiences. Among these were the lives of Abraham Lincoln and antislavery activist John Brown, stories from the Bible, childhood memories, outdoor scenes, portraits, and still-lives. Pippin said, "Pictures just come to my mind and then I tell my heart to go ahead."

Pippin's work first caught the attention of Christian Brinton, president of the Chester County Art Association. Brinton and illustrator N.C. Wyeth invited Pippin to exhibit his work in the *Sixth Annual Exhibition* of the art association. This opportunity led to other exhibitions and news of his work spread to New York City. Holger Cahill, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, included four of his works in an exhibition entitled *Masters of Popular Painting* in 1938.

Philadelphia art dealer Robert Carlen gave Pippin an exhibition in 1940. At that time he introduced Pippin to collector and self-made millionaire Dr. Albert C. Barnes. Both Barnes and Carlen were instrumental in exposing Pippin's work to major museums throughout the country.

In addition to attracting dealers and collectors, Pippin's work also earned him commissions. Among these was a painting for the Capehart Collection, a portfolio of contemporary art used in advertisements. *It's Comin'*, based on the Stephen Foster song *Old Black Joe*, appeared in *Life* magazine in 1943.

Horace Pippin worked steadily on his paintings for nine years from the time he was "discovered" until a stroke ended his life in 1946. He left behind a remarkable body of work described by Barnes as "... distinctively American; [in] its ruggedness, vivid drama, stark simplicity, picturesqueness, and accentuated rhythms." *Christmas Morning, Breakfast* is one of at least eight home interiors Pippin painted. They all include various family members going about their daily activities in a large room, usually featuring a wood-burning stove and descriptive details such as patches of fallen plaster and torn window shades. In his nostalgic scenes, Pippin shows the grandeur in the ordinary lives of common people.

## ABOUT THE ART

*Christmas Morning, Breakfast* was painted in 1945. It is an image of a sparsely furnished room decorated with a Christmas tree and greenery, one stocking hanging from a shelf by the window. A woman is serving a stack of pancakes to a small boy. The poverty of the room is witnessed

in the exposed wallboards and the mother's life of hard labor is evident in her bowed back. Yet the painting glows with familial warmth between the two figures, and the neatness of the room suggests domestic order. *Christmas Morning, Breakfast* is a warm, nostalgic image based on Pippin's own childhood. Although the painting was created only a year before his death, the details in the work illustrate his fond memories of his youth.

## CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

### SOCIAL STUDIES

Horace Pippin painted many historical narratives about the lives of nineteenth-century political figures Abraham Lincoln, the sixteenth president of the United States, and John Brown, an antislavery activist. Study the lives of these two individuals and the relationship each had to the events of the pre-Civil War era.

A number of Pippin's genre paintings, including *Christmas Morning, Breakfast*, depict his childhood memories of everyday life at home in Goshen, New York, in the 1890s. In what kinds of activities are the figures in these works engaged? How do they compare with everyday activities in the contemporary world?

### MUSIC

Horace Pippin painted several portraits of internationally renowned opera singer Marian Anderson. Listen to recordings of her work. There are lessons on Marian Anderson available through the Kennedy Center website at: [http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teaching\\_materials/curricula/curric/mariananderson/marian.html](http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teaching_materials/curricula/curric/mariananderson/marian.html)

### PRACTICAL LIVING

Horace Pippin produced a large body of work despite his weakened right arm. Contemporary artist Chuck Close also overcame physical difficulties in order to make art. Explore the determination of artists who found ways to work even though they were physically challenged.

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Most of Pippin's paintings are *narrative*. What is the story being told in *Christmas Morning, Breakfast*? Write a description of the piece and interpret its meaning.

## CRITICAL THINKING

Horace Pippin included an image of a woodstove, such as the one in *Christmas Morning, Breakfast*, in many of his domestic interiors. What role does this image play in the meaning of the piece? What other details in the painting give clues about the family's life?

Pippin is considered a folk artist. Some of the trained artists of his time resented his critical acclaim. Examine the differences between folk art and fine art. Do you think folk artists deserve as much recognition as trained artists? Why or why not?



Horace Pippin, *Christmas Morning, Breakfast*, 1945, The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, 1959.47

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Cover detail:  
Horace Pippin, *Christmas Morning, Breakfast*,  
1945, The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial,  
1959.47

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