WELCOME!

Vida Americana explores how American artists were inspired and influenced by the work of the Mexican muralists. American artists learned that they could depict social and political subjects that were relevant to people’s lives. In this exhibition you can see how both Mexican and American artists used their art to fight for social justice and make the world a better place.

This guide focuses on works that our Museum educators feel are suitable for kids. Parents and guardians should note that a number of works in the exhibition are not appropriate for children. Please use discretion as you go through the galleries.

Visit the Museum on Saturdays and Sundays for Open Studio, our drop-in artmaking workshops for families with kids of all ages. Check out whitney.org/Families for a full list of our Family Programs.
Diego Rivera used bold shapes and vivid colors to depict Indigenous peoples and honor Mexican identity, culture, and customs. He painted this scene of a flower festival in Mexico that takes place every year. The flowers represent the cycles of nature and of life. Look at the different ways that the people in this painting are holding and wearing flowers. What do you think they are doing?

Draw a celebration that you enjoy with your family every year. It can be a birthday, a holiday, or a special family event. Include everything you need for this celebration, such as food, decorations, and objects.
Frida Kahlo often made self-portraits. She painted herself wearing traditional clothes from different places in Mexico. Sometimes Kahlo posed with her pets, including monkeys, birds, a dog, or a cat. Here, she's sitting with four of her pet parrots. Notice where the parrots are perching. How do they relate to the artist and to us? If you made a self-portrait, what would you wear? Who or what would you surround yourself with?
This painting shows a group of Zapatistas—farmers from southern Mexico who were led by Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919) in the Mexican Revolution during the early twentieth century. The men are marching to reclaim the land they worked on, which was taken from them by wealthy landowners. José Clemente Orozco used just a few colors to create the mood of this scene. Explore the composition of the figures. What rhythms and patterns can you see? Look closely at the men and what they are carrying. Can you spot any clues that tell us what might happen?

Think of something that you feel is important to communicate—it can be an issue from today or from the past. Use an image and words to communicate this issue.
This painting is the third in a series of sixty panels that Jacob Lawrence made about the migration of African Americans from the southern United States to the North in the early twentieth century. Using a limited palette and silhouetted shapes, Lawrence painted a group of people traveling with their hats, bags, and boxes. What do you think they are carrying with them? What kinds of events or conditions might make people decide to migrate?

What would you take with you if you moved from one part of the country to another? Write a list of things you would bring.

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These paintings are the two surviving mural panels of four that Aaron Douglas made to commemorate the history and achievements of African Americans. *Into Bondage* shows enslaved Africans bound for the Americas. *Aspiration* depicts the hopes that they might have for their future. Notice how Douglas used circles in both paintings to suggest sounds or songs. Compare the two panels. What other similarities and differences can you find?

What kind of world do you want to live in when you grow up? Make a sketch or write about your own hopes and dreams for the future.
In this mural, Charles White depicted five great African Americans who were central to the history of the United States. They are the largest figures in the mural. Look at their body language and the objects close to them for clues that suggest who they might be. Can you find civil and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth, educator Booker T. Washington, abolitionist Frederick Douglass who worked to end slavery, singer Marian Anderson, and scientist George Washington Carver?

When White chose the title for this mural in 1939–40, “negroes” was the term used to refer to African American people. Today, not only is this word not used, it is considered disrespectful.

Title: ____________________

Draw a portrait of someone you think is heroic. It could be someone you know or a famous person. Include objects that provide clues to who they are and why you think they are awesome. Give your work a title.
In 1936, Harold Lehman joined the Federal Art Project, a program created by the United States government to help artists earn a living during the Great Depression. He also worked with Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros in New York and Los Angeles. Lehman painted*The Driller* as a study for a mural in the prisoners’ dining hall at Rikers Island jail in New York City. In this painting, a man uses a powerful machine to drill into the red earth. What do you think this man is drilling for?

*Harold Lehman, The Driller (mural, Rikers Island, New York), 1937*
This film installation is of a market in Mexico City that includes murals by ten artists, created when the building was constructed in the 1930s. Four of them were made by American artists. The subject of the murals was supposed to be how food is produced and the importance of health and cleanliness. The artists also wanted to draw attention to social and economic injustices. Take a moment to look at this film installation and imagine being surrounded by art while you shop for groceries!

Pick one thing that you buy at a grocery store, such as bread, cheese, eggs, fruit, or vegetables. Draw where it came from and how you think it got to the grocery store.
This is a reproduction of a mural Diego Rivera first painted at Rockefeller Center in New York City. The artwork represents modern life and scientific achievements, and includes a portrait of Russian politician Vladimir Lenin. Businessman Nelson Rockefeller asked the artist to remove Lenin from the mural, but Rivera refused. Soon after, the mural was covered and eventually destroyed! Using black-and-white photographs taken before the destruction of the mural, Rivera repainted it in Mexico City. Which part of this mural catches your eye? Why?

Look for these objects in the mural:

- An old-fashioned microscope
- A pineapple
- An X-ray of a skull
- Cells
- War planes
- A star
- A tortoise
- A giant machine
In *Our Present Image*, David Alfaro Siqueiros replaced the face of a worker with a stone to represent not just one race or nationality, but all humans. Look closely at this work from different angles—left, right, center, close up, and further away. How does the painting change as you move around it? To the artist, the figure’s outstretched hands symbolized the worker’s power and strength.

Siqueiros used a stone for this figure’s head. Think of objects from nature that symbolize something meaningful to you: for example, a plant, fruit, tree branch, shell, star, or gemstone. Add them to this figure.
KEEP DRAWING

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