

Discussion Guide for the Online Virtual Tour
of

Arvie Smith: Scarecrow

Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University

ARTIST STATEMENT

For the entirety of my career, I have sought to transform the African American experience into provocative paintings that depict deep sympathy for the dispossessed and marginalized in search for beauty, meaning, and equality. I draw from my personal experiences, and present day and historical omissions, violations, and contributions of African Americans. My time growing up in the Jim Crow South laid the blueprint for my life as an artist.

The colors of my grandmother's quilts and African rhythms embedded in African music form the palette for my paintings. From my travels in West Africa, I am impressed by the parallels of the sounds, smells, and images of the Black South and Africa. I draw inspiration from artists like Romare Bearden, Michael Rae Charles, Robert Colescott, Grace Hartigan, Thomas Hart Benton, Palmer Hayden, Jacob Lawrence, Kerry James Marshall, Horace Pippin, Diego Rivera, and Charles White.

Through art there is a freedom and my intent is to address ideas and concerns that affect our humanity. I speak unfettered of my perception of the Black experience. By critiquing atrocities and oppression, by creating images that foment dialogue, I hope my work makes the repeat of those atrocities and injustices less likely. These are the reasons I paint.

LOOKING AT THE WORK OF ARVIE SMITH

Focus on a few works in the exhibition – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.

Describe what you see here.

How has the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principals of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?

Where does your eye go first? Why?

How does your eye move around the painting – is it led by color?

By shape? By pattern? By size?

Describe the color – has the artist used it realistically or more expressively (for example: a red face for anger or passion, a green face for envy). Does it create a certain mood?

Are the forms and figures flat or modeled? Do they appear realistic? How does the artist's use of line, shape and color contribute to this effect?

Where do the forms and figures exist in space (foreground, background, on different planes, etc.)?

What do you think is happening in the work?

Is the work realistic or dreamlike? Or both? Explain.

Is there one figure (or figures) that is the focus of the work? What makes it stand out? Size? Color? Facial expression (or lack of facial expression)? Gesture?

What is the mood of the work? How has the artist created it?

Does there appear to be a relationship between the figures in the work? Explain.

Do they seem to be interacting? Share the same space?

Why do you think he put these figures together? Do they seem to inhabit the same "story?"

Does there seem to be more than one story or scene? If so, are they related? Explain.

What objects, figures, and/or symbols has the artist included?

What do you think they mean to the artist? Have you seen them in other works in the exhibition? Does the way he has

interpretation of them? Of the meaning of the work as a whole? Explain.

Has the way the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principals of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis) contributed to your interpretation of the work? Explain.

Does the title influence your interpretation of the work? Explain.

Further Discussion:

- What images, figures, and symbols do you see repeated in Arvie Smith's work? How does he address cultural stereotypes, including demeaning representations of Black people?
- What themes do you see repeated?
- Discuss the following artist's quote as it relates to a work, or works, in the exhibition:

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LEARN MORE ABOUT ARVIE SMITH

- [Artist's website](#)