BUT IS THIS ART?

This self-guided exploration through the Culture Galleries asks you to explore history through art and artists that may differ from the first thing that comes to mind.

3rd Grade and Up
What do you consider art?

What do you think of when you think of art? This self-guided exploration through the Culture Galleries asks you to think about history through the lens of lesser known art forms and their artists. Exploring history from different angles can help us to have a deeper understanding of the larger story.

There are seven stops. Each stop asks you to consider a question(s) or an activity. You (or your group) can do as few or as many stops as you like. You can go in any order you like. You can also participate by taking photos at specific stops. Below is a map of where you can find the locations.

Meanings in the Abstract: Spencer Lewis’ Untitled

Spencer Lewis is an artist best known for his abstract and colorful paintings executed on cardboard or jute (a plant fiber used to make burlap). His work explores the process of gestural painting expressed through heavily worked pigmented strokes and tactile canvases.

- What was Spencer Lewis’ understanding of this painting? How does it connect to himself and history?
- What three words come to mind when you look at Spencer Lewis’ abstract painting titled Untitled?
Blacksmiths and Metalwork

Philip Simmons mastered the craft of functional and decorative ironwork. Examples of his work, including iron gates, can be seen throughout South Carolina's Lowcountry and contribute significantly to the region's sense of place.

- What does this section of the exhibition tell about the history of enslaved and free Black blacksmiths? How does Philip Simmons fit into this story?
- Did you know that the filigree, the bronze-colored latticework that wraps the outside of the museum, pays homage to the intricate ironwork of African American metalworkers in South Carolina and Louisiana?

Baskets of History and Culture

Mary Jackson is one of the world’s most highly-regarded Gullah basket-makers and an exceptionally skilled basket artist. She creates baskets that derive from traditional forms in highly sculptural and expressive ways.

- What are the baskets made out of? How does this material connect to the geography of South Carolina?
- What is something that you have made by hand that connected to your past, culture, or hometown?

Setting the Standard

The Florida A&M University Marching 100 has long set the standard for collegiate marching band. FAMU’s Marching 100 rose to prominence under the guidance of its longtime bandleader, Dr. William P. Foster.

- How did the local community help Dr. Foster and the FAMU Marching 100 build their program in the beginning?
- It is time for you (or your group) to step onto the field. Pose as if you (or your group) are marching with your instrument(s) across a field during a halftime performance. Have someone take a picture to capture the moment.

The Art of the Performance: Sissieretta Jones

Madame Sissieretta Jones became the most famous African American singer of her time in the United States and around the world. She performed for general audiences, as well as the rich, royal, powerful and influential.

- How do you think that Jim Crow impacted the life and career of Sissieretta Jones?
- It is time for you (or your group) to step on stage. Pose as if you (or your group) have just finished a sensational concert and the audience is applauding. Have someone take a picture to capture the moment.
It’s Funny, Right?: Puppet Oscar Land

Born in Detroit, Stu Gilliam launched his career as a ventriloquist in the late 1940s on the Black entertainment circuit. Stu Gilliam performed with his puppet alter ego, Oscar Land, until the early 1960s, when he switched to stand-up comedy.

- Look Oscar Land, the puppet alter ego of Stu Gilliam. What are three words you would use to describe the puppet?  
  
  What is the funniest joke or stand-up performance that you have ever heard or seen?

Culinary Arts, Enslavement, Freedom and the Presidency

Hercules was George Washington’s chief cook at Mount Vernon and in his presidential homes. Dolly Johnson was invited to cook in the White House under two administrations - President Benjamin Harrison and President Grover Cleveland - and served a year with each of them. In her later years, she opened several restaurants and ran a busy catering business in Lexington, Kentucky.

- What types of dishes did Dolly Johnson serve on one of her Christmas menus?
- These questions require quick research on your personal device or once you return home.
  - What happened to Hercules by the end of Washington’s term?
  - Besides George Washington, what other presidents had enslaved chefs? What impact did these enslaved chefs have on American cuisine? (Tip: Try starting by looking up “James Hemings.”)