

Horace Pippin: The Way I See It

At Brandywine River Museum Of Art

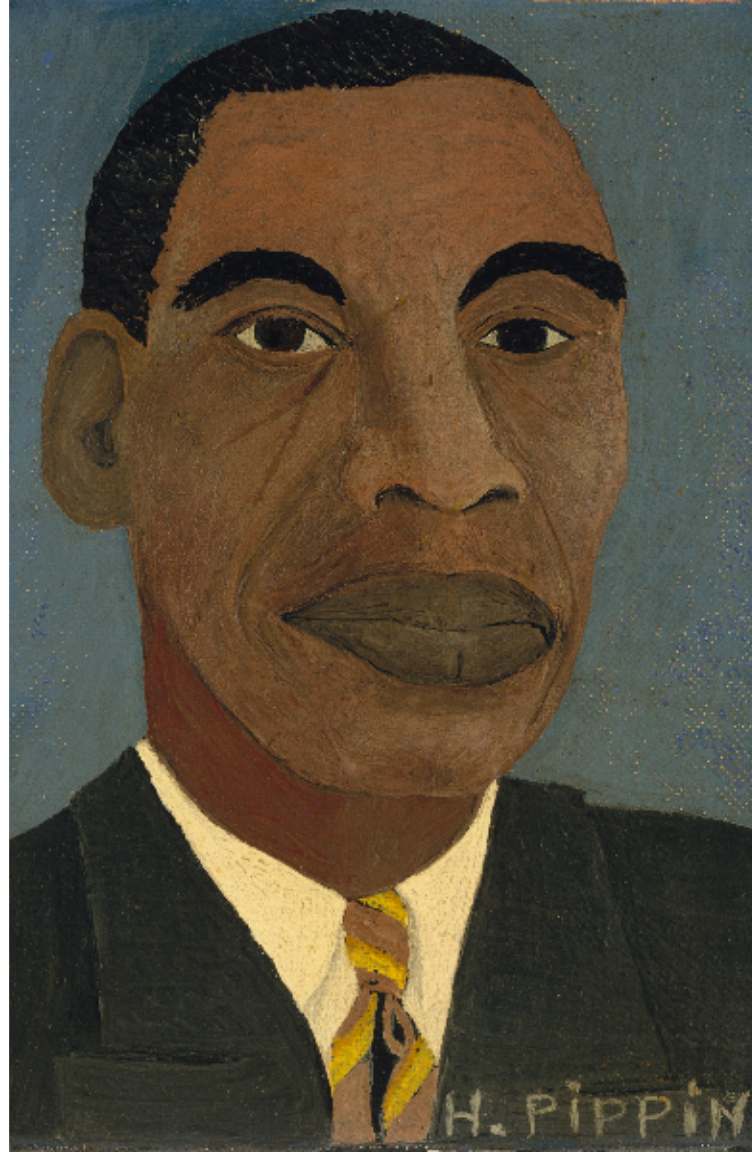


Previous Page: A combination of his mother's tales of black life in the South and the 1932 movie about sharecroppers, "Cabin in the Cotton," likely inspired Pippin's own versions, like "Old King Cotton," 1944. This oil on fabric measures a mere 16 by 27 1/8 inches and is in the collection of the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., gift of Mr and Mrs Sam Jaffe.

By Stephen May

CHADDS FORD, PENN — One of the great American self-taught painters, Horace Pippin (1886–1958) overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles to carve out a special niche in art history. He surmounted racial discrimination and survived a terrible

"Self-Portrait (II)," 1944, captures the force of the artist's appearance and personality. An oil on canvasboard, this work measures 8 by 6½ inches and is in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, bequest of Jane Kendall Gingrich. (Click image to see full size)



war wound to turn his observations in Pennsylvania, New York and France into combat scenes, genre vignettes, portraits and still lifes. “Pictures just come to my mind,” he said, “and then I tell my heart to go ahead.” Pippin’s idiosyncratic

Pippin said “Domino Players,” 1943, was autobiographical. He is the bored youngster seated at the kitchen table between the gray-haired, pipe-smoking player to the left and a younger woman opposite her. The third woman observes the game as she pieces a quilt in the background. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. (Click image to see full size)





style won him a legion of admirers and to this day attracts art lovers to his

Music was important to Pippin, who led the local drum corps in American Legion parades, sang in his church choir and played several instruments, in spite of his disabled right arm. In "Harmonizing," 1944, he recalled the "call and response" tradition of African American music. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio, gift of Joseph and Enid Bissett, 1964. (Click image to see full size)

canvases. His diverse output raises his contribution well beyond the status achieved by most untrained artists. His bold, colorful and expressive paintings are amply displayed in "Horace Pippin: The Way I See It," on

view at the Brandywine River Museum of Art through July 19. With nearly 70 works, it is the first major Pippin exhibition in 20 years. Audrey

Lewis, the Brandywine's associate curator, organized the display. As Brandywine's director Thomas Padon puts it, the exhibition offers a "rare

The American command in France was reluctant to assign Pippin's unit to combat duty. The 369th Regiment was at first kept busy unloading ships and building roads, but later spent more than six months on the front line without relief, the longest of any unit in action against the Germans. Pippin filled notebooks with sketches, such as this one showing the modern shells bursting on the battlefield. Pippin Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Click image to see full size)

(20)
were to go in no manland. of at our
right were a German machine gun. we
were at work swiping no manland.
we new that air machine guns were
were off to our left. we new the sound
of the German gun from our own
well in no manland where the sound
of the machine gun came from. there
were a piece of an old horse that had
been torn down by a shell. some time
in 1915 and we believed him to be there
that were one of our points. he kept it up
for some time. then he stoped at that time





◀ Pippin's last painting, "Man on a Bench," 1946, may be a self-portrait. Artist/writer Romare Bearden posited that the man "symbolizes Pippin himself, who, having completed his journey and his mission, sits wistfully, in the autumn of the year, all alone on a park bench." Collection of Daniel W. Dietrich II. (Click image to see full size)

Pippin's still lifes, mostly depicting colorful ► flowers in vases on neat lace doilies in modest or occasionally pretentious domestic settings, are especially appealing. "Floral Still Life," circa 1944, measures only 10 by 14 inches, but conveys a strong message of tranquility and beauty. Brandywine River Museum of Art, museum purchase 2003. (Click image to see full size)



When Pippin was commander of the local black American Legion Post, he often worked with Paul Dague, founder of a nearby white Legion Post. The artist's admiration for his fellow veteran was reflected in "Paul B. Dague, Deputy Sheriff of Chester County," 1947. Dague, later a Congressman, presented the portrait to the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Penn., in 1948.

opportunity to experience the full range of Pippin's creative brilliance.... In a relatively brief career that spanned only two decades, Horace Pippin developed a bold, singular vision in his painting, creating a body of work that continues to reverberate with remarkable



intensity.”

Pippin was born in into a family of common laborers and domestics in West Chester, Penn., and grew up in Goshen, N.Y. His father, who worked as a laborer, died when Horace was 10. His mother worked as a cleaning

woman. After attending segregated classes until he was 15, Pippin dropped out of school to support his widowed, ailing mother, toiling in an...
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