

## *The Lost World: The Art of Minnie Evans*

### Teacher Resource

This resource is designed to facilitate conversations about *The Lost World: The Art of Minnie Evans* at the High Museum of Art. It highlights selected themes included throughout the exhibition. Use it in your classroom before visiting the museum or in the galleries during a self-guided visit. High-resolution images of art from the exhibition are in the Key Images PowerPoint. We recommend that you review the content and plan your lessons, discussions, or tours in alignment with the interests and needs of your students. Accompanying Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections are included at the end of this resource.

### About the Artist and Exhibition

Minnie Evans once said her drawings of harmoniously intertwined human, botanical, and animal forms came from visions of “the lost world,” or nations destroyed by the Great Flood as described in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. After her grandmother died in 1934 and the visions she experienced in childhood became stronger, Evans produced a large body of work ranging from abstract to representational styles. Though she found fame beyond her community in Wilmington, North Carolina—she was among the first Black artists to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1975—she has not been the subject of a major exhibition since the 1990s.

When Evans turned fifty-six, she shifted from decades of employment as a domestic worker to collecting admissions at Airlie Gardens, one of the most beautifully landscaped gardens in the Southeastern United States. She made art during idle moments and hung it on and near the Gardens’ exquisite wrought-iron gate. Selling or giving away her drawings to Airlie’s visitors led to a wider reputation and eventually a 1966 exhibition at a New York church titled *The Lost World*.

The High’s presentation reprises that 1966 title, honoring Evans’s interest in biblical and ancient civilizations while foregrounding the spiritual and historical circumstances of her extraordinary life. More than one hundred drawings, including her first line-driven compositions of the 1930s up to her masterful collages of the 1960s, are presented in a range of contexts, from the extrasensory experiences of her visions to the double-edged realities of her life in the Jim Crow South. Her drawings, beautiful and complex, thus become kaleidoscopic portals into her “lost world.”

### Selected Themes and Discussion Questions

*The Lost World: The Art of Minnie Evans* comprises many avenues of study for students. While the following selected themes are not exhaustive, they will guide you and your students in an introduction to Minnie Evans and her artistic practice.

## Selected Themes and Discussion Questions (cont.)

### Theme: Art and Spirituality

Minnie Evans had a rich spiritual life and attended St. Matthew AME in Wilmington, North Carolina. She kept a copy of the Bible and Seventh Day Adventist texts with her at the Airlie gatehouse and painted scenes of the life of Christ as well as apocalyptic imagery from the Book of Revelation in these texts. Like John the Apostle from the Bible, whose visions inspired revelation, Evans experienced episodes of dreamlike transcendence that motivated her art making.

She recalled opening her eyes one morning in the early 1940s as a “beautiful light appeared in my room [. . .] And there was a great wreath.” She also described passing out, regaining consciousness, and walking to her front porch, where “everything I looked at was rainbow.” Such visions became a source for her colorful, radiating, mandala-like designs. Her frequent inclusion of a light source, typically as a setting or rising sun, and the central faces that emerge from wreathlike or leafy canopies, are stylistic hallmarks that reflect the aesthetic experiences of her visions.

Evans also made art based on specific dreams, including a nightmare likely derived from her experience of the 1898 Wilmington Massacre. This trauma, and the pain from everyday indignities she endured in the Jim Crow South, found release in the alternative world of her drawings. That most of her mandalas are characterized by wide, staring eyes and silent mouths seemingly illustrates a remark recorded in one of the histories of Airlie: “The help knows a lot about the household.” When viewed within the context of Evans’s personal and ancestral history, the opposed forces of beauty and ugliness, good and evil, nourishment and violence in her art become even more apparent.

Many folk and self-taught artists are not formally trained; instead, their artistic practices are shaped by lessons learned from life and spiritual experiences, family and community traditions, and many other sources. This can be seen in Evans’s life and work. Evans created many works of art from visions and dreams that she believed came from God. Refer to the artworks in the Key Images PowerPoint or during your visit. Where do you see instances of Evans’s visions and dreams in her work? What symbols tell a spiritual narrative? How do you know?

Think about a person in your life or in pop culture, such as music or movies, who connects their life to something bigger than themselves. The connection could be spiritual, or it could be based on an idea or feeling such as curiosity, love, or suffering. How does that person express those connections? What is something you feel connected to? How would you express that connection in a work of art?

### Theme: Art and Math

Symmetry and repetition are features of Minnie Evans’s art. They give her compositions a sense of order, as well as a glimpse into how she processed the contradictions of beauty and ugliness that she experienced throughout her life. Evans often built her images around a central axis, creating balanced, mirror-like designs that evoke mandalas or sacred icons. She did not call them mandalas, but the connection to them was introduced in *The Lost World* (1966), the first presentation of her art in New York. Repeated motifs such as faces, eyes, flowers, and

## Selected Themes and Discussion Questions (cont.)

leaves suggest cycles of growth and renewal, reflecting her belief in the divine patterns underlying nature and existence. These nature motifs also pay homage to her time spent working at Airlie Gardens. Through rhythmic repetition and symmetrical structure, Evans conveys both visual unity and the idea that life is complex. The circular and symmetrical designs in Evans's mandala-like structures express spiritual balance and divine order. These radiating forms also serve as visual meditations, drawing viewers into the interconnected worlds Evans envisioned.

Find a work in which Evans uses radial symmetry. She often tried to “maintain an element of symmetry,” even when she cut, manipulated, or layered her mandalas. Using pencil and paper, sketch the basic geometric shapes you see in the work. Specifically, sketch the places where there is symmetry. How does symmetry impact the mood of the painting? Use a compass to design your own symmetrical mandala with at least three lines of symmetry.

### Theme: Art and Science

Minnie Evans's art is deeply rooted in both her spirituality and her love of nature. Her intricate, symmetrical compositions—filled with faces, plants, and fantastical creatures—reflect a sense of cosmic unity and the interconnectedness of all life. In addition to her faith, Evans's work draws from her natural surroundings in North Carolina, transforming her inner visions into vibrant, symbolic expressions of the world.

Look for one work of art that is a collage. Sketch or write down three elements Evans observed in nature (leaf shapes, floral patterns, animal forms, natural textures). How might observing ecosystems in Airlie Gardens have shaped her compositions? Where do you see examples of these observations?

Create a mini nature dataset by listing real organisms or patterns seen in Evans's work (spirals, branching systems, leaf venation, etc.). How do these organic forms compare to the fractals or more mathematical structures in her work?

## Key Terms, Ideas, and Historical Moments

- Collage: Artwork with layers of various textures or types of materials
- Folk and self-taught art: Art created by artists who did not receive a formal education but whose work is shaped primarily by lessons learned from family, community, work, and spiritual experiences
- Fractal: A pattern that is repeated infinitely within a defined space
- Mandala: A visual spiritual map of the universe, appearing primarily in Buddhism as well as Hinduism
- Radial symmetry: Arrangement of parts around a central axis
- Repetition: When a form or shape is repeated
- Symbolism: Use of visual forms to represent an idea, person, place, or animal

## Key Terms, Ideas, and Historical Moments (cont.)

- Symmetry: Balanced proportions or equal shapes or forms on both sides of an axis, even when the form is flipped or rotated
- \*Wilmington Massacre of 1898: White supremacist overthrow of the democratically elected government in Wilmington, North Carolina, and the subsequent lynching and campaign of racial terror against Black and African American individual residents

\* A 2024 PBS documentary called [American Coup: Wilmington 1898](#) sheds new light on this violent episode and the reparative possibilities that may exist between the descendants of its perpetrators and victims.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections

### Kindergarten

**VAK.RE.1** Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

**VAK.RE.1.c** Demonstrate an appreciation for art and art making processes by communicating thoughts and feelings.

**VAK.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

**VAK.CN.2.a** Explore universal concepts (e.g. self, family, community, world) inspired by other subject areas.

### First Grade

**VA1.RE.1** Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

**VA1.RE.1.b** Explain how selected elements of art are used in works of art to convey meaning.

**VA1.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

**VA1.CN.2.a** Explore universal concepts (e.g. self, family, community, world) inspired by other subject areas.

### Second Grade

**VA2.RE.1** Discuss personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

**VA2.RE.1.a** Use a variety of strategies for art criticism.

**VA2.RE.1.b** Demonstrate an appreciation for art and art making processes by communicating thoughts and feelings.

**VA2.RE.1.c** Use art terminology with emphasis on selected elements and principles of art.

**VA2.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections (cont.)

**VA2.CN.2.a** Explore universal concepts (e.g. self, family, community, world) inspired by other subject areas.

### Third Grade

**VA3.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

**VA3.CN.1.a** Recognize the unique contributions of contemporary and/or historical art forms, including Georgia artists.

**VA3.CN.1.b** Compare ideas and universal themes from diverse cultures of the past and present.

**VA3.CN.1.c** Recognize ways that artists are involved in communities and careers (e.g. architects, painters, photographers, interior designers, educators, museum educators).

**VA3.CN.2** Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

**VA3.CN.2.a** Apply art skills and knowledge to improve understanding in other disciplines.

**VA3.CN.3** Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

### Fourth Grade

**VA4.RE.1** Use a variety of approaches for art criticism and to critique personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy

**VA4.RE.1.a** Interpret and evaluate works of art through thoughtful discussion and speculation about the mood, theme, and intentions of those who created a work of art.

**VA4.RE.1.b** Use a variety of approaches to engage in verbal and/or written art criticism.

**VA4.RE.1.c** Explain how selected elements and principles of design are used in works of art to convey meaning.

**VA4.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

**VA4.CN.1.a** Recognize the unique contributions of contemporary and/or historical art forms, including Georgia artists.

**VA4.CN.1.b** Compare and contrast ideas and universal themes from diverse cultures of the past and present.

**VA4.CN.1.c** Discuss how social, political, and/or cultural events inspire art.

**VA4.CN.1.d** Investigate ways in which professional artists contribute to the development of their communities (e.g. architects, painters, photographers, interior and fashion designers, educators, museum educators).

**VA4.CN.2** Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections (cont.)

**VA4.CN.2.a** Apply art skills and knowledge to improve understanding in other disciplines.

**VA4.CN.3** Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

### Fifth Grade

**VA5.RE.1** Use a variety of approaches for art criticism and to critique personal works of art and the artwork of others to enhance visual literacy.

**VA5.RE.1.a** Interpret and evaluate works of art through thoughtful discussion and speculation about the mood, theme, and intentions of those who create works of art.

**VA5.RE.1.b** Explain how selected elements and principles of design are used in works of art to convey meaning.

**VA5.CN.1** Investigate and discover the personal relationships of artists to community, culture, and the world through making and studying art.

**VA5.CN.1.b** Explore and interpret ideas, themes, and events from diverse cultures of the past and present to inform one's own work.

**VA5.CN.1.c** Discuss how social, political, and/or cultural events inspire art.

**VA5.CN.2** Integrate information from other disciplines to enhance the understanding and production of works of art.

**VA5.CN.3** Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

### Sixth Grade

**VA6.RE.1** Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

**VA6.RE.1.a** Identify how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art.

**VA6.RE.1.b** Interpret works or art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions.

**VA6.RE.2.b** Use the language of art to identify how meaning is conveyed in works of art.

**VA6.RE.3** Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

**VA6.CN.1** Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

**VA6.CN.1.a** Identify universal themes in works of art from diverse cultures, both past and present.

**VA6.CN.1.b** Articulate reasons for making art throughout history, including the mutual influence of history, culture, and art.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections (cont.)

**VA6.CN.3** Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

**VA6.CN.3.a** Recognize the presence and meaning of visual art in the community.

### Seventh Grade

**VA7.RE.1** Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

**VA7.RE.1.a** Identify how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art.

**VA7.RE.1.b** Interpret works of art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions.

**VA7.CN.1.a** Identify universal themes in works of art from diverse cultures, both past and present.

**VA7.CN.1.b** Articulate reasons for making art throughout history, including the mutual influence of history, culture, and art.

**VA7.CN.2.a** Identify and build art skills and habits of mind that support a variety of careers (e.g. higher order thinking skills, tolerance for ambiguity, judgment in the absence of rule, finding structure in apparent disorder, problem-solving skills, perseverance, creativity).

**VA7.CN.3** Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

**VA7.CN.3.a** Examine the presence and meaning of visual art in the community.

**VA7.CN.3.b** Describe the connection between personal artistic creation and one's relationship to local and global learning communities.

**VA7.CN.3.c** Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.

### Eighth Grade

**VA8.RE.1** Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

**VA8.RE.1.a** Interpret how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art.

**VA8.RE.1.b** Interpret and critique works of art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions.

**VA8.RE.1.c** Analyze where and how we encounter images in our daily lives and how images influence our view of the world.

**VA8.RE.2.c** Evaluate and express a position regarding the aesthetic value of specific works of art.

**VA8.RE.3** Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

**VA8.CN.1** Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections (cont.)

**VA8.CN.1.a** Identify universal themes in works of art from diverse cultures, both past and present.

**VA8.CN.1.b** Articulate reasons for making art throughout history, including the mutual influence of history, culture, and art.

**VA8.CN.2** Develop life skills through the study and production of art.

**VA8.CN.3** Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

**VA8.CN.3.a** Examine and evaluate the presence and meaning of visual art in the community.

**VA8.CN.3.b** Analyze the connection between personal artistic creation and one's relationship to local and global learning communities.

**VA8.CN.3.c** Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.

### Ninth–Twelfth Grades

**VAHSVA.RE.1** Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

**VAHSVA.RE.2** Critique personal works of art and the artwork of others, individually and collaboratively, using a variety of approaches.

**VAHSVA.RE.2.b** Develop skills and provide respectful and constructive criticism to peers as part of a community of learners.

**VAHSVA.RE.2.c** Develop a repertoire of contemporary and historical art exemplars through art criticism.

**VAHSVA.RE.3** Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

**VAHSVA.CN.1** Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

**VAHSVA.CN.1.a** Discuss the intent of works of art in context to historical events.

**VAHSVA.CN.1.b** Examine universal themes that appear in works of art throughout various times and cultures.

**VAHSVA.CN.1.c** Analyze the ways in which personal experience affects the understanding and appreciation of works of art.

**VAHSVA.CN.1.d** Investigate the role of works of art as visual record keeper.

**VAHSVA.CN.2** Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

**VAHSVA.CN.3** Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence Connections (cont.)

**VAHSVA.CN.3.a** Access resources to research art (e.g. museums, internet, visiting artists, galleries, community arts organizations, visual culture).

**VAHSDR.RE.1** Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world.

**VAHSDR.RE.1.a** Consider the influences on works of art from a wide range of contemporary and traditional art through discussion and/or written response.

**VAHSDR.RE.1.b** Investigate and discuss how the issues of time, place, and/or culture are reflected in works of art.

**VAHSDR.RE.2** Critique personal works of art and the artwork of others, individually and collaboratively, using a variety of approaches.

**VAHSDR.RE.3** Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy.

**VAHSDR.CN.1** Develop personal artistic voice through connecting uses of art within a variety of cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts.

**VAHSDR.CN.1.a** Discuss the intent of works of art in context to historical events.

**VAHSDR.CN.1.b** Examine universal themes that appear in works of art throughout various times and cultures.

**VAHSDR.CN.1.c** Analyze the ways in which personal experiences affect one's understanding and appreciation of works of art.

**VAHSDR.CN.2** Develop life skills through the study and production of art (e.g. collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication).

**VAHSDR.CN.3** Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom.

**VAHSDR.CN.3.a** Access resources to research art (e.g. museums, internet, visiting artists, galleries, community arts organizations, visual culture).