



“Folk Art Fun”

May 2009

Miles Early Childhood
Development Center

Beginnings

- With the formal academic year over, for the “Maymester” session, our teachers often identify a theme that reflects interests expressed by children over the year across class groups.
- We had a great experience two years ago with a month long festival of performing arts, and teachers remembered there was high interest in a few activities that were “folk art” inspired. With some of those children still here at ECDC, they decided to pursue that idea.
- Our documentation from the 2007 festival was revisited, several books were read, examples shared, and class discussions held that confirmed the promise of a study of folk arts.

Key Concepts & Activity Plans

- Planning needed to be inclusive for 2-5 year olds and several children with special needs.
- Activity choices needed to permit direct teaching of techniques specific to the genres, but be open-ended to allow for creative expression and individuality.
- We wanted at least one activity to be a joint effort that could be added to our permanent collection and display of child work.
- During the summer sessions, meeting the South Carolina Early Learning Standards is not the highest priority, but we anticipated there would be many positive outcomes from this work that could be correlated or documented to the standards.

Selected project work

Individual Work

Silhouettes

Tin Ware

Painted glassware

Stenciling

Decoupage

Paper Toys

Landscape paintings

Checkerboards

Group Products

Reverse glass-painting

Painted furniture

Combination

Wooden Village

“The Caves at ECDC”

Key Concepts & Questions

- “When the first art was made, there were no museums, no art schools, and no art supply stores.” (from American Folk Arts for Kids by Richard Panchyk)
- What is art?
- Why do people make art?
- Why are there so many different kinds of ‘folk art’?
- What makes folk arts different from other kinds of art?

Involving parents - Email sent out to families as project began:

"This Maymester the Seashell and Butterfly classes are working together on a project we are calling Folk Art Fun. We will be concentrating on American folk art, introducing various types of works and artists, discussing what it means to be an artist, and asking the questions what is art and why do people make art (adapted to the developmental level of each class). We will be creating a variety of folk art-inspired pieces which we hope to display at a folk art festival at the end of May. Yesterday we began our study by learning a little about the earliest roots of folk art - cave drawings. We found out that early people had no written language and used art to communicate what they were thinking. They also made art on the cave walls to make their surroundings nicer. We took a virtual tour of the ancient Caves of Lascaux where we saw pictures of animals like bison, horses, rhinos, deer and ibexes as well as hunters and ancient symbols. We have started experimenting with earth-toned pastel and crayons to create our own representations of these cave drawings.

For our Folk Art project [study] we are in need of the following:

- Bottle Caps
- Buttons
- Glass Jars (pickle or mayo-sized)
- toilet paper tubes
- 12" x 12" or 14" x 14" squares of cardboard
- embroidery cloth

If you have any of these items, please leave them with Deanna. We look forward to seeing how this project progresses!

The Caves at ECDC

The origins of American folk art can be traced back to the people of the Ice Age. Fifteen thousand years ago caves were decorated with natural pigments found in rocks and berries. Cave art was also used to express thoughts and ideas and to record events as the people of the time had no written language.

Wonderful examples of this art were discovered in the Caves of Lascaux in France. The Butterflies and Seashells were inspired to create their own cave art representations after taking a virtual tour of the famous French caves.

This activity was a topic of such high interest that creating an actual cave emerged as a separate, parallel project.



Making Art with what you have

Folk artists had a knack for turning discarded items into beautiful works of art. This was borne out of necessity as traditional art supplies were costly and out of the reach of most common folk. Anything could be turned into art – scraps of metal, an old shutter, tin cans and even newspaper. Much of this type of work is disappearing. Tin piercing for example, was a wonderfully cheap and effective form of decoration, but with the Industrial Revolution it became possible to mass produce decorated tin ware at a very low cost.



The Butterflies and Seashells recreated these traditions, making tin sun catchers by hammering nails into canning jar lids, displayed in our glass-block windows

They also made still-life art painted on newspaper. These paintings of simple elegance and charming pierced metal ornaments embody the thrifty principles of Folk Art.

Inspired by Grandma Moses

Though interested in art as a child, Anna Mary Moses, better known as Grandma Moses, did not have a real opportunity to pursue painting until after her husband died. In her late sixties she began painting scenes of happy memories and landscapes of places familiar to her.

Grandma Moses enjoyed painting pleasant scenes and children. She also enjoyed using a bit of glittering paint to make her pictures sparkle. Her folksy style was not immediately appreciated but gained in popularity in 1940 when the Museum of Modern Art showed three of her pictures at an exhibit of unknown artists.



The Butterfly class read a biography about Grandma Moses and discussed what they noticed in her work. They used a print entitled “Hoosick River Summer” as reference to create a landscape in the style of Grandma Moses.

Decoupage

Decoupage has been practiced for centuries but became very popular during Victorian times. The word comes from the French word *decouper* meaning “to cut out.” Scraps of wrapping paper, newspaper, wallpaper or magazines were used to decorate objects such as bowls and boxes.

The Butterfly class spent time paging through old magazines and cutting out pictures to use for their art. They used Mod-podge to apply the pictures to their “treasure boxes.” The results reflected a charming *mélange* of personality.



Painted Glassware



In traditional folk interiors, everything was worthy of decoration – walls, floors, chests, etc. Painted glassware was particularly popular. Common motifs included tulips, birds, ribbons, stylized human figures, and sometimes portraits.

The Butterflies and Seashells painted jars with acrylics and ‘spouncers’ to create these beautiful vases.

Paper Toys



In the 18th and 19th century there were very few manufactured toys. Children entertained themselves with homemade playthings.

Because they were inexpensive and easy to make, paper doll or toy cutting was a very popular hobby. Children embellished their creations by drawing or painting them.

Though they were very delicate, many of these toys have survived from the 19th century tucked in a book or envelope. Horses were an especially popular subject.

The Butterfly and Seashell classes traced patterns and cut out (with some help) the designs. They added liquid watercolor or watercolor pencil to decorate their creations.

Silhouettes

During the 18th to mid-19th century, silhouette cutting was very popular. Named after a penny-pinching French minister of finance, having a silhouette made was an affordable way for people to have a likeness of themselves or a loved one. The cut likeness was often referred to as a “portrait a la Silhouette,” a reference to their bargain price. The most talented cutters took only a few minutes to create their work.



The Butterflies and Seashells visited a virtual silhouette parlor and watched a silhouette being cut before sitting for their own portraits a la Silhouette.

Children were challenged to identify each other from their finished portraits.

Stenciling

Stencil painting has a long and rich history. The earliest known example in America was 1778. Stencil artists were professional itinerants who carried with them a supply cut from thick paper.

Colors were bright and often inspired by popular themes. The children made whimsical creations with stencils, acrylic paint and found items such as buttons, bottle caps, and twigs for embellishment.



They also made checkerboards, which proved immensely popular!

Collaborative Efforts



We think it valuable for children to engage in collaborative work by

- negotiating how their individual efforts can be combined for a group presentation to represent an idea or theme
- contributing their individual effort to a single final product

Products representative of this concept included a wooden toy village, a painted chair, and a reversed-glass painting.

Our painted chair



They were very happy to return to school in the fall and find it located in a spot where they could all admire (and sit on) it.

Painted and decorated chairs became popular in the early 1800's. They became known as "Hitchcock chairs" because Lambert Hitchcock produced so many of them in his factory.

To make our painted chair, the children discussed design options and then chose one plan. Each child painted some part of the rocking chair.

Reverse paint on glass

This style of folk art was imported from Europe into the United States and was very popular during the 19th century.

Typically oil paints were used, however the Butterfly and Seashell classes used a combination of acrylics and bio-colors to create this work.

Normally when painting one would paint the background first and then add details. In a reverse painting it is the opposite. The painter begins with the details, layering them closest to farthest. The last thing added is the background. **VERY CHALLENGING!!!**

Common subjects included horses, landscapes, people and flowers. Often times a piece of aluminum foil was cut and put behind the glass before framing. This was done to add extra sparkle.



Exhibit Celebration & Follow-up

As with our *Celebration of the Performing Arts* study in May 2007, we found we had much to share at the end of this study.

The teachers and children planned an opening celebration, with refreshments, invitations, music, and a special brochure for “The Caves at ECDC”

Children acted as docents and hosts. Most of the text for this documentation was taken directly from the narratives created by the teachers that accompanied the various parts of the exhibit.

The Butterflies group will also revisit this study once more in Fall 2009 with a visit to an African-American Folk Art exhibit.

Fun with Folk Art

