Audio Guide Transcript

Art Along The Rivers
A BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

October 3, 2021–January 9, 2022
Main Exhibition Galleries

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM
STOP 1
Introduction Gallery: Welcome

Speaker: Melissa Wolfe  
Curator of American Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I’m Melissa Wolfe, curator of American art at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the audio guide for Art Along the Rivers: A Bicentennial Celebration, an exhibition we’ve organized in conjunction with the 200th anniversary of Missouri’s statehood. It presents extraordinary objects produced or collected within the area defined by the confluence of the powerful Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers, an area we have aptly defined as the confluence region. The paintings, sculptures, drawings, furniture, ceramics, metals, textiles, and many other artistic forms span over 1,000 years of creative production. They tell us rich and wide-ranging stories about their makers, their communities, and their subjects. Some of these stories we know quite well, while others might be new to the majority of us. Some stories highlight the strength of their communities. Others bring us to acknowledge the very real disparities under which their communities worked.

Many of these objects have never been considered in the context of the objects installed right next to them. However, the exhibition gathers them together to ask us to be curious and enter into the fresh and often surprising dialogues that prove their continued relevance to our experiences today.

This exhibition audio guide offers 14 commentaries by speakers who come from a wide range of backgrounds and interests, all highlighting the extraordinary collaboration this exhibition received from so many regional communities and institutions. You will hear perspectives that range from the scholarly to the very personal. But all, we hope, will amplify the deeply resonant meanings held within these objects.

We encourage you to experience this guide in any order you like; you may follow it in numeric order or pick and choose. Each featured object can be located by following the floorplan on this webpage or by identifying the audio icon on the object’s label in the exhibition. Whether you’re listening from home or in the Museum galleries, I hope you enjoy this audio guide and your visit to Art Along the Rivers.
STOP 2
Art at the Confluence Gallery: Robe

Speaker: Alex Marr
Assistant Curator for Native American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

This is Alex Marr, assistant curator for Native American art at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

The artist of this Robe was a high-ranking leader of the Mandan, a Native American group from the upper Missouri River. Across the plains in the 19th century, men created autobiographical records of their military achievements in multiple forms, including figural paintings such as this. These visual representations counted as personal property, and they were used to certify a man's claim to elevated status within Indigenous political organizations.

Narrative action on this painting represents eight distinct events that took place through a span of years, though the composition relays Mató-Tópe's bravery with an arresting sense of simultaneity and power. Looking closely at one story at the top of the painting, Mató-Tópe stands in profile while holding a spear and shield. This depicts an experience when he single-handedly faced down an attack from several 100 enemies. Tracks, circles, and lines behind the figure convey his allies’ retreat in the midst of flying bullets. In the top left corner, four rows of tracks represent the attackers. The enemies later claimed that he charged with the strength of four bears. This is the episode where the artist received his adult name; in the Mandan language, Four Bears translates to Mató-Tópe.
Hi, I’m Amy Clark, senior research assistant in the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

Although this Mississippian figurine is only 3 1/2 inches tall, its rediscovery was monumental. Archaeologists excavated it from the East St. Louis Mound Center in June 2009. The multiyear salvage archaeology project was prompted by the construction of the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge that spans the Mississippi River. During the second half of the 19th century, the development of East St. Louis heavily impacted the ancient Mississippian site. Nearly all the mounds were destroyed, and areas were filled to raise the city above flood levels. This capping of the area, however, remarkably preserved prehistoric features under the city’s now vacant industrial district.

The figurine was found on the floor of a burned structure, likely a temple, that had been framed in red cedar. Tucked into a shallow depression in one corner of the building, the figurine survived the intense fire that ravaged the site during the 12th century. The construction of the St. Louis National Stockyards in the late 1800s introduced underground water and sewer lines, one of which was placed less than an inch from the figurine. Ancient Mississippian flint clay objects are rare, and the recovery of this figurine in a controlled scientific context is even more important.
STOP 4
Art at the Confluence Gallery: Communion Chalice

Speakers: Delbert and Dolores Schmidt
Members of the Trinity Lutheran Church
Altenburg, Missouri

DOLORES: I'm Dolores Schmidt.

DELBERT: And I'm Delbert Schmidt—been a member here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Altenburg for 93 years.

DOLORES: And, yes, I've been here since I was six years old. I was the only one that used the chalice. When I was little, going to Communion, they had the different chalice. The men would go first, and they had a silver chalice that they used, and then the ladies would go.

DELBERT: Then they finally quit using it.

DOLORES: Well, they said it was a shame not to preserve it.

DOLORES: In 1839 a group from Germany led by the Reverend Martin Stephan had immigrated from Germany. They had five ships, and one ship was lost at sea. That was the one which had fewer people but carried the most memorabilia, and pirates had gotten to it, and you know, it sank.

DELBERT: The chalice and the crucifix up there—that's from Germany, too. The baptismal tray there inside [the font].

DOLORES: Yeah, the tray inside is also from [Germany]. So that must have been on a different ship.

DOLORES: And Reverend Martin Stephan wanted these people settled in this small area. Though they came up on a steamboat then to St. Louis, and some stayed in St. Louis. But others, he wanted them to come down in an area like this.

DELBERT: Yeah, and they started five little towns. Frona's still here and Altenburg and Uniontown. Uniontown was called Paitzdorf. And during the Civil War, the Union soldiers camped there, and they couldn't pronounce that. Paitzdorf.

DOLORES: When I was small, we only had one English service, then gradually I remember it was two a month. Now we never have German services anymore. And I don't know, well, we can't find a pastor to speak German.

DELBERT: We used to have, like, Easter and Christmas had one German service. But I had to learn English. It was all German at home. So, in the first couple of years, but then
all the way through school, we had like our memory verses: half English and half German. We had to learn them both, you know, and we always had that certain song. Remember, Dolores? “Breit aus die Flügel beide”? 

DOLORES: Yeah.

DELBERT: (murmurs) . . . nimm dein Küchlein ein. I'm not a singer. (laughs)

DOLORES: Let's see. (sings) Breit aus die Flügel beide o Jesu, meine Freude, und nimm dein Küchlein ein, Will Satan mich verschlingen, so lass die Englein singen: „Dies Kind soll unverletzet sein”. And, yeah.

DELBERT: Yeah, that's it. Yeah. It's “angel spread your wings.” You know, “keep the children [unharmed]” and all that.

DOLORES: I know I had to learn that in German. I didn't have a clue what I was saying. I didn't.

DELBERT and DOLORES: (laugh)
STOP 5
Art on Display Gallery: North Salon Installation

Speaker: Amy Torbert
Assistant Curator of American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Amy Torbert, assistant curator of American art and cocurator of *Art Along the Rivers*.

Nineteenth-century St. Louisans could have stood in your shoes and also enjoyed every single one of the works in this gallery. Maybe it shouldn’t be, but it is a bit surprising that a visitor to St. Louis in the 1830s could have seen the Italian 17th-century painting included in this gallery and then traveled across town to view the painted Plains Indian shirt that you also see here. Or, if you were passing through in the 1870s, you might have come across the marble statues here, made in Rome by two of the most accomplished American female sculptors. To learn the individual stories of every object on the wall in front of you, be sure to scroll through this audio guide stop on your device.
STOP 6
Art on Display Gallery: South Salon Installation

Speaker:  Melissa Wolfe
Curator of American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I’m Melissa Wolfe, curator of American art and cocurator of Art Along the Rivers.

While this room might seem crowded, it gives you a taste of how it would feel to visit a museum or one of your art collector friend’s homes in the 19th century. To someone from that era, the single-line installations that we now use would have felt very empty and maybe a little boring.

Not surprising, these dense installations were status symbols that showed off the owners’ wealth and taste. The side-by-side displays also let a visitor make easy comparisons between the works. I hope you, like your 19th-century counterpart, might find interesting matches here as well. To learn the individual stories of every object on the wall in front of you, be sure to scroll through this audio guide stop on your device.
Hello, my name is Diane Wright, and I am the curator of glass and contemporary craft at the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo, Ohio—home to Libbey Glass, the company that made this extraordinary Punch Bowl and the oldest glass company in existence in the United States today.

In 1888 Edward Libbey inherited this glass company from his father and relocated the factory from New England to the Midwest, where there was ample supply of sand and natural gas—two critical requirements for a glass factory. By 1904, when the World’s Fair opened in St. Louis, Libbey was growing his brand by producing elaborately cut glass for both the table and for decoration throughout the home. This very stylish glass was, as Libbey called it, “an endless source of keen enjoyment.” And they marketed it as appropriate for gift giving at any time of the year.

In the 19th century and into the early 20th century, world’s fairs had an enormous impact, as they provided a place where companies could show off to the world, and especially their consumers, what they were making, and they often created showstopper examples of their craft, especially for the fairs. The Libbey Punch Bowl is just such an object. It is a tour de force of glassblowing that shows off the best craftsmanship in glass cutting, and it would have been a highlight of Libbey’s display at the fair in St. Louis that included about 1,800 examples of cut glass. This style of covering the entire surface with deep, intricate cuts created quite the prismatic effect, and it was called brilliant cut, after the term used by diamond cutters.

Although the Punch Bowl was for sale, the bowl is nearly two feet wide, and its oversize scale made it really more impressive than practical. It eventually returned to Toledo after the fair closed. The ladle, on the other hand, did not make it back to Toledo for quite some time. It was not until 2015 that it was reunited with the Punch Bowl and the 24 cups that go with it—111 years after it was made.
STOP 8
World’s Fair Gallery: Block Out the Sun

Speaker: Stephanie Syjuco
Contemporary Artist

The following audio recording provides information on the mistreatment of Filipinos at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.

My name is Stephanie Syjuco, and I’m a visual artist speaking to you from Oakland, California. And the work that I have in the exhibition is called Block Out the Sun from 2019.

I was invited by the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis to do a solo exhibition in 2019. In the lead-up to it, they invited me to come out and do some research, specifically on the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. It turns out that in 1904 over 1,200 Filipinos were imported into St. Louis to be put on display as part of the fair. And as a Filipino American artist, I was very interested in this as a historical legacy of both St. Louis and also how photography came into play.

My project Block Out the Sun consists of 30 images, all taken in different archives within St. Louis. And going through files and files of these images, I was really challenged with how to respond as a contemporary artist. These photographs are over 100 years old. They also tell a very different story about how we now view other cultures. And I wanted to create a kind of thoughtful but also a very sort of personal and even emotional response to it. I use my hands to literally block out the ability to view the images. And this was actually strategic. It was a way for me to kind of talk back to the archive.

In my recent works in photography, I’ve been really focused on both the history of photography as well as how it developed in conjunction with anthropology. And so, it turns out that a lot of these early kind of anthropological or ethnographic photographs were also taken during the time of American colonial expansion. And so, thinking about myself as both an American as well as a Filipino, you know, those places intersect through photography in the early ethnographic photos that American anthropologists were taking. And so, interestingly, what appear to be these kind of photographs taken in a foreign land were actually taken in St. Louis. And so, what you’re looking at behind my hands covering the individuals are actually re-created, fake Filipino villages set up in St. Louis. And so, I think that’s an interesting kind of commentary, too, on how the discipline of anthropology actually also constructs what it wants to see instead of just documenting what’s actually there.
Portraiture Gallery: Robert J. Wilkinson, Barber of the Southern Hotel

Speaker: Lois Conley
Founder and Executive Director
The Griot Museum of Black History

The following audio recording acknowledges physical and sexual violence against Black people.

Hello, I am Lois Conley, founder and executive director of the Griot Museum of Black History, thanking you for stopping by to learn a little about the state of Black life in the antebellum St. Louis where Robert J. Wilkinson lived.

When Robert J. Wilkinson moved from Cincinnati to St. Louis in the 1840s, he was among some 1,400 free people of color living in antebellum St. Louis. But life was a complicated dichotomy for Black people. They were forbidden to gather for meetings, including church meetings, unless in the presence of a white person. It was illegal to teach Black people—enslaved or free—to read and write. Despite their status, all Black people were required to have a pass or be arrested. They had the right to seek legal advice but could not testify against a white person. Enslaved Black people in antebellum St. Louis could not legally marry. None could vote. Blacks were allowed a trial by jury, but a jury only of all white men. Physical abuse, of torture, of an enslaved person was a crime, but the rape of an enslaved woman or girl was not.

Just a few years before Wilkinson’s arrival, Francis Mackintosh, a free Black man, had been lynched by a violent St. Louis mob. Some enslaved Blacks were allowed to work outside of the owner's household, often earning enough money to purchase their own freedom and that of family and other enslaved persons. However, any free Black person, born free or manumitted, who had migrated to St. Louis after 1847 had to be gone by 1860 or risk being enslaved. Like his father and brother, Robert J. Wilkinson, the subject of this Thomas Easterly daguerreotype, was a skilled barber. He owned and operated a thriving barbershop in a popular downtown hotel that was frequented by statesmen, businessmen, and other white movers and shakers. Yet, because of discriminatory public accommodation laws that prevailed, he could work there, he could even own a business there, but he could not rent a room and spend the night there.
My name is Cayce Zavaglia, and I am a St. Louis–based artist, and this embroidery is called *Emmylou*.

So, I was trained as a painter, and I always loved craft as a kid. And I think I was always on this road or this, like, quest to find a way to incorporate craft into art. I think in the art world, there's this separation—there's always this dialogue of art versus craft. And I came to St. Louis to study at Wash U [Washington University in St. Louis] and received a painting degree. And I kept thinking about this particular embroidery that I'd made as a kid that was just a kit of a sheep station. And it was something about the making of that piece, where I made French knots to actually make the sheep, I really wanted to pay tribute to this piece I had made as a kid. So, I started with basic embroidery materials. I didn't have a hoop. I just kind of was taking my basic knowledge of embroidery and adding that to my training at Wash U and my undergrad training in painting and using that as the starting point for this series of work.

So, this particular piece, *Emmylou*, is an embroidery of one of my friends in Australia's daughter. It's all hand sewn using crewel wool, and the background is painted and sanded acrylic. And on the back of this image is another portrait that is more abstracted, that is filled with knots and loose ends. The history of needlework tells you that the back image should be as neat as the front. I have never had the patience for kind of abiding by that rule that's held dear by a lot of needleworkers. And there was one particular piece that I had in an exhibition that I had overworked the mouth area, and so it kind of looked like buck teeth. I, you know, pulled it out of circulation—it didn't sell—and I couldn't even stand to look at it in my studio. So, I turned it around. I was only looking at this back image for a whole year. Through that whole year, I started to really appreciate this other side, the beauty in the knots and the mess of this other side, and really started to think a lot about the parallels to this other side that we all have, especially in this social media age. We only want to show the front side, and this other side that we all possess, that is knotted and it's messy, and it has so much potential for beauty, and it is something that everyone can relate to.
I’m David Conradsen, curator of decorative arts and design at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

The Scarab Vase, carved from glowing white porcelain and highlighted with translucent blue glaze, is one of the great masterpieces of American art pottery, made by one of its trailblazing pioneers. Adelaide Alsop Robineau began her artistic career as a china painter, decorating dishes and tablewares; later she offered instruction to women in her New York studio and even published a monthly magazine to spread the word about the ceramic arts. In 1901 Robineau began to work in clay, first modeling a small pinch pot decorated with beetles and holes punched around the rim. The Scarab Vase is a remarkable demonstration of her skill and her complete mastery of the porcelain medium just a few years later.

Robineau formed this vase on a potter’s wheel, and once it was sufficiently dry, she began to carve the surface with the repeated motif of an Egyptian scarab, or dung beetle. An observer who watched her working on the vase reported that the carving progressed by half an inch per day, leaving just a scattering of porcelain dust on the floor.

Throughout her career, Robineau was known for intensively laborious works like this and a constant drive for innovation and perfection.
STOP 12
Art Communities Gallery: Gorilla

Speaker: Amy Torbert
Assistant Curator of American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I’m Amy Torbert, assistant curator of American art and cocurator of Art Along the Rivers.

In 1960 the artist Houston Chandler gave a lecture at the Saint Louis Art Museum about sculpting animals. He recommended visiting the St. Louis Zoo to get to know them up close. He wasn’t interested, however, in exactly replicating them but rather used abstraction to find “the simplicity that brings out the most powerful line of expression.”

Chandler conveyed such lessons to his students at the People’s Art Center, where he taught for many years. The center was created by a group of Black and white St. Louis philanthropists who solicited support from their communities and the Federal Art Project. In establishing the city’s first interracial art center, they envisioned that it would “bring together people of all racial origins, religious faiths, economic levels, and age for creative self-expression through a common interest in arts and crafts.”

For more than 20 years, the center offered free art classes for children and adults as well as exhibitions of student, local, and national artists. It taught painting and drawing as well as metalwork, pottery, dress design, weaving, woodwork, art appreciation, and more. At its peak in 1952, the center served 1,385 children and 700 adults. Local artists and Saint Louis Art Museum staff members taught at the center, including Oscar Thalinger, the Museum’s registrar.

The People’s Art Center deserves to be better known today for the success it achieved in placing art into the lives of everyday St. Louisans. For example, Manuel Hughes, whose large painting is also in this gallery, walked into the People’s Art Center on his own at age 7 or 8 and told them that he wanted to take an art class. His years of study at the center laid the foundation for his career as a professional artist, which continues today.
STOP 13
Art as Advocate Gallery: Newsies at Skeeter Branch, St. Louis, Missouri, 11:00am

Speaker: Melissa Wolfe
Curator of American Art
Saint Louis Art Museum

The following audio recording references inhumane child labor conditions.

Hello, I’m Melissa Wolfe, curator of American art and cocurator of Art Along the Rivers.

In 1910 Lewis Hine spent nine days in St. Louis making over 130 photographs of child laborers such as these three newsboys—or newsies, as they were called—but also of children as young as 4 years old working in shoe, glass, printing, and medicine factories in the city. Hine traveled across the country making similar photographs in order to gather evidence of unsafe child labor conditions for the National Child Labor Committee. In 1912 the committee was able to establish the Children’s Bureau, which is now part of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The Labor Committee struggled to elicit empathy in well-off communities for a newsboy. The seeming independence of “working the street” as he did fit too well into the country’s romanticized notions that a young, down-and-out boy could make his fortune through just such an entrepreneurial endeavor. However, as with most of our romanticized notions, newsboys rarely if ever found their way out of poverty. The Labor Committee had determined that newsies worked under the least supervision of any urban child laborer. They were not working for themselves and were often beat by their employers if they didn’t sell enough newspapers. They were frequent targets of robberies, and they often took on adult vices such as smoking, drinking, and gambling at an early age.

While Hine rarely identified the children in his photographs, the niece of the boy in the middle identified him from a photo published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 2007. His name is Ray Klose, and he was likely working on this Monday at 11 am—which was his 13th birthday—rather than being in school because his father was often ill and had a tough time finding steady work. Ray didn’t graduate from elementary school, but he became a streetcar conductor. He and his wife, Stella, lived their entire lives in north St. Louis, where they also raised and showed Airedale terriers.
Hi, my name is Abdul-Kaba Abdullah. I’m from St. Louis, Missouri, executive director of Park Central Development, which is a community development corporation in St. Louis that builds urban, vibrant, equitable neighborhoods for all people to live, work, and play. We actually have done probably 75 percent of the murals in the neighborhood called the Grove. And when this mural was curated in 1968, it was done at a time where we were really trying to, as Black people—or at the time, Negroes—were trying to have a dignity of respect. This place was set right outside of Pruitt-Igoe, this mural. Automatically, the first thing I think about is the picture of my great-grandmother that we have, who lived in the Pruitt-Igoe, and I think about just the stories that they would tell about really the conditions. But through it all, I think it shows the greatness and the resiliency of the African American people but really Black people and people of the diaspora of Africa.

As I sit here and I look towards the future, and I look at the two older gentlemen in the picture, the first thing I see is not despair but a tiredness. But I see wisdom, and I see them looking, actually, I see them looking at me to say, “Hey, it's your time to take this baton and these paintbrushes and put this mural back in place.” Not only what's existing, but because as I look at it, they're all gone. They've all left this earth, but their mantles are here. So, either you pick those mantles up or you help to pass it to who that mantle is prepared for. I see, “Your turn, youngblood.” That's what I see. You know, that's how the old-timers say it. So that's what I see.

A lot of the murals we're working on now are important, but it's the people who are doing the murals and making sure that there is space for any Black and brown artist because, believe it or not, even in these spaces, they have not been traditionally allowed to exist or allowed the opportunity. And when they do, they're often underfunded or not funded to the same level. So even in access, you still see it in the arts. So, a big part of the murals that I'm working on is access for people and access for artists. And if I was asked to re-create this, what would it look like? I think this is actually the perfect mix of people for the period. This is what Black America has been able to rise up through, and through these figures and through the culture that we've been able to create. I think it's important to anchor this mural because this mural becomes the shoulders, as we say, we always stand on the shoulders of giants. The thing that I would want visitors to know and to realize is that Black is beautiful. Black is powerful. Black is love. Black is accepting. And Black is dignity.
My name is Marilyn Leistner, and I am the last mayor of a community in St. Louis County known as Times Beach, Missouri. I served as the mayor until 1985, when Governor John Ashcroft appointed me trustee to oversee the buyout of the community.

In 1982 the community learned on November the 11th that Times Beach was possibly sprayed with dioxin by a waste oil hauler. In 1974 the government knew that the dioxin was there. The government did nothing because they thought that the dioxin would go away in a year. Soon they would learn that it would take 100 years for the sun to degrade the dioxin. From then, the community proceeded to be overlooked.

In 1982 the community suffered the worst flood of its history. On my way home from work, when I heard them on the radio say that the people in the low-lying areas need to start to evacuate because the river was going to flood, and it was just that day I got a call at work from the city clerk saying that a reporter had called and said that our community was on a list of sites suspected to have been sprayed with dioxin. My first thought was, “Nah, there’s no dioxin in Times Beach.” After about two weeks of talking with people and listening to health problems, I called Russell Bliss, who was the company that sprayed the waste oil on our streets. And I asked him, “Did you spray our streets with an oil laced with dioxin, PCBs, and other chemicals?” And he said, “Marilyn, I will bet you two weeks’ pay that there’s no dioxin in Times Beach.” Unfortunately, I’ve never collected his two weeks’ pay, but the dioxin was there. On December 23rd of 1982 the EPA and the Missouri Department of Health and the CDC notified the people that the dioxin was there, to leave, and to not come back. At that time, the state of Missouri decided they were going to do a health study on the residents. And they kind of determined from that study that they didn’t see anything that was harmful. It’s difficult for me to say that the dioxin hasn’t caused any health problems in that community because I’ve seen too many friends and neighbors with health problems.

We were ostracized by people in our neighboring community. A front-page newspaper article said, “dioxin, the most potent chemical known to man,” and as a result of that article, the people from Times Beach were looked at as being contaminated and contagious. It was a type of community where, if I sent my kids out on the street, there were 100 mothers that would watch after them, and unfortunately, people saw that it
was a ragtag community, but it was not. It was a beautiful community, and there were some beautiful people that lived there. I would go back tomorrow if I could.