

NEWPORT
ART
MUSEUM



**VISUAL
STORYTELLING**

Featuring

**Joseph Norman,
*Target Practice:
Take This, Take
That*, 1999**

About the Artist

Joseph Norman
American, Born 1957
Target Practice:
Take This, Take That, 1999

Lithograph AP, Gift of Barry and Kathleen
Hittner, Newport Art Museum



Joseph Norman is widely considered the most important African American lithographer of his generation. Throughout his prolific career, he has sought to retell hidden, muted or silenced stories of the African American experience. Norman's own bloodline is poignantly marked with the unjust history of enslaved persons, as his parents were the grandchildren of slaves.

Norman was born and raised in the segregated south side of Chicago in 1957, one of six children, at the tail end of the **Chicago Black Renaissance**, led by brilliant black cultural figures, and in stark contrast with the harsh realities of racism and poverty. Norman credits his talent as an artist and an athlete with changing the trajectory of his young life because they earned him a spot at a high achieving high school, thus introducing him to life outside the south side.

Norman's motifs include depictions of tangled tree trunks and vegetation, seedy, industrial architecture, hardware, hand tools, and chains. His portraits of famous but underrepresented black figures, images of enslaved Africans, and titles like *Slum Garden* and *Middle Passage* indicate how geography, history, hope and dismay inform his expressive work.

Norman graduated from the University of Illinois and University of Cincinnati. He taught at RISD, the Newport Art Museum and Johnson & Wales University before becoming Chair of Painting and Drawing at Lamar Dodd School of Art, University of Georgia, Athens. His work is represented in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NY, the MFA Boston, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The National Gallery and Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington D.C, and the Newport Art Museum, RI.

"I suffer through the history of America".

—Joseph Norman

Description of Artwork

Target Practice: Take This Take That is a large **lithograph triptych** composed of 3 works on paper framed together in one large landscape piece. The black imagery on white paper depicts a dense and chaotic tangle of what appear to be sharp nails curved and threading through pieces of flat, possibly metal, material. There are 2 large hammers depicted with the flat heads facing each other. The imagery is larger than life, as if this is a zoomed-in view - the nails are the size of a child's forearm, and the hammer heads are roughly the size of a human head. In the background, a chain link fence can be seen, and various vines and plants poke and weave through. These things give the impression that this scene is outside, perhaps in the corner of an abandoned lot or junk yard. The imagery is drawn with expressive thick and thin black lines and cross hatching, giving it a threatening, rough and gritty appearance.

About the Artwork

Target Practice: Take This Take That is, for Norman, a work about conflict, tension, pain, and irreparable damage. At the time that he made this triptych, he was working through an emotionally devastating break up in his personal life. This work in many ways summarized the unproductive and pessimistic attitude he felt about the ending of the relationship. Complex and confounding, human relationships abide by their own rules and inhabit their own ecosystems. Norman chose to use the symbolic imagery of basic construction materials - hammers and nails - to create a portrait and landscape. But rather than building with these tools, Norman densely layered sharp, broken, unsalvageable nails tangled inextricably with wild vines and bits of metal, viscerally communicating destruction and confusion.

The imagery is metaphoric - hammers represent himself and his partner, who are surrounded by a gnarl of twisted metal that represents their anger and misunderstandings, hot-headedness and aggression. The work of building the relationship has ended, and now only destruction is evident. His strong black mark-making language and scale of the work suggest that his whole body was in motion and belies the degree of frustration, and hopelessness he felt. The title of the work: *Target Practice: Take This Take That* speaks to the devolution of the relationship, away from reconciliation and head first into a battle of hurtful words.

Though this artwork refers to a personal event, it is representative of the strong, graphic, black and white marks and motifs Norman utilizes to speak about broader issues including slavery, racism, and historical acts of violence. The devastation enslaved Africans suffered at the hands of white Americans remains an important theme in his work. How we treat each other as human beings is the heart of the question. Norman's work insists that we see and acknowledge the horror inflicted upon, and dehumanization of, his ancestors. In this way he implores the viewer to demonstrate the willingness to listen, empathize, and evolve.



Questions for Viewing

There is a lot going on in this work. Allow your eyes to move around the entirety of the image and then discuss. Where do your eyes rest? What seem to be the primary images?

Name three evocative adjectives you would use to describe the mood of this work.

Consider the title: *Target Practice: Take This, Take That*. What connections can you make between it and the work?

What might the objects in this work symbolize, or be metaphors for?

How does the black and white palette impact the work? If it were done in color, would it change how you experience the work?

In speaking about the themes in his artwork, Joseph Norman states, “I suffer through the history of America.” How do you see that statement reflected in this work of art?

In what ways does Norman’s work continue to be relevant today? What conversations does it allow us to have?

Activities

Close Looking

Look closely at this work of art. Identify one message that you think the artist is trying to communicate in that object and describe what you see in the object as evidence of that message.

Create a Manifesto

Joseph Norman used art as a way to express and represent his values. Working in a group, decide on some collective values you all agree on. For example: Family, freedom, and creativity. Create a manifesto document (in digital or paper format) that outlines those values and a visual representation of your manifesto.

Pictorial Journal Entry

Consider a memorable conversation or experience you had with someone, positive or negative. Create a drawing, collage or digital image using images as metaphors and symbols for the people involved and the way you felt in that moment.

The Great Migration Biography

Identify and research the story of an African American who migrated from the south to the north. Tell the story of their life in the south, their journey to and relocation in the north.

Art in Context

The Great Migration (1916-1970s)

The Great Migration was the relocation of more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, Midwest and West from about 1916 to 1970 in search of economic opportunities and to escape harsh segregationist laws, enforced poverty and abuse. The need for industrial workers due to WWI, and the promise of higher wages drew these citizen-refugees away from their rural Southern farms and to northern cities, where the percentages of blacks grew exponentially - New York by 66%, Chicago by 148%, Philadelphia by 500% and Detroit by 611%. The rapid influx was met in the North by more segregation, hostility and violence. A strain on available housing caused tensions that led many blacks to create their own cities within cities, fostering the growth of a new urban, African American culture. The most prominent example was Harlem, a formerly all-white neighborhood that by the 1920s housed roughly 200,000 African Americans. By 1970, the South was home to less than half of the country's African-Americans, with only 25 percent living in the region's rural areas. During the Great Migration, African Americans began to build a new place for themselves in public life, actively confronting racial prejudice as well as economic, political and social challenges, to create a black urban culture that would exert enormous influence in the decades to come.*

“It was the first mass act of independence by a people who were in bondage in this country for far longer than they have been free.”

— Isabel Wilkerson,

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration



Art in Context

Racial Segregation

The systemic separation of facilities, services, and opportunities such as housing, medical care, education, employment, and transportation in the United States along racial lines. The term mainly refers to the legally or socially enforced separation of African Americans from whites, but also refers to other minority ethnic groups. Racial segregation provides a means of maintaining the economic advantages and superior social status of the politically dominant group. During the period of racial segregation under Jim Crow laws, African Americans were prohibited from legally walking, talking, drinking, resting or eating except in specially designated areas. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of segregation in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, so long as “separate but equal” facilities were provided, a requirement rarely met in practice.

Not until 1954 was this doctrine overturned, by the Supreme Court unanimously in *Brown v. Board of Education*. But not until the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965 were the last of the segregationist Jim Crow laws overruled.



PHOTO: Segregated water fountains in North Carolina

Art in Context



ABOVE: McKinley Morganfield, better known as Muddy Waters, the Father of Chicago Blues



ABOVE: Charles White, Painter

Chicago Black Renaissance

Similar to the Harlem Renaissance, the Chicago Black Renaissance was influenced by The Great Migration, which brought tens of thousands of African Americans to Chicago between 1910 and 1930, and the Great Depression that began in 1929, which disproportionately affected the black community. From this catastrophe, a new black consciousness arose that embraced social activism, inspired black pride, addressed racial tensions, and encouraged black expression. Art, literature and music by black artists bloomed, and became vehicles to express social injustices. Jazz and Blues artists like Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Muddy Waters, and Fats Waller, the writings of Richard Wright (*Native Son*), and Lorraine Hansberry (*A Raisin in the Sun*) and art of Charles White contributed to a surge of artistic expression, community organizing, and social activity in Chicago's African-American community from the 1930s through the 1950s. The lasting legacy of the Chicago Black Renaissance was to center the focus of attention on the voices, lives and experiences of black people.

Vocabulary

CONTEMPORARY ART:

artwork produced in the late twentieth century to the modern day after the Modern Art movement

DRAUGHTSMAN:

a person who makes detailed technical plans or drawings

PRINTMAKING:

transferring images from one surface to another usually of paper or fabric

LITHOGRAPHY:

Printing from a flat surface which is treated so as to repel ink except for around the areas where printing is required

TRIPTYCH:

a picture or relief carving on three separate panels which are typically placed side by side as an altarpiece

LINE HATCHING:

an artistic technique used to create tonal or shading effects by drawing (or painting or scribing) closely spaced parallel lines; artists use the technique most commonly in drawing, linear painting and engraving

CHIAROSCURO:

the use of strong contrasts between light and dark, usually bold contrasts affecting a whole composition

Additional Resources

African American History in Rhode Island

http://www.gildedageincolor.com/?page_id=236

Credits

Artist Website: <https://art.uga.edu/sites/default/files/2019-03/NormanCurrentshortCV.pdf>

Article: https://www.redandblack.com/culture/uga-art-professor-explains-what-it-looks-like-to-be-an-african-american-artist/article_e75c4280-fb65-11e6-90e8-a3821d52ecab.html

<https://www.iesa.edu/paris/news-events/contemporary-art-definition>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/curatorial-departments/drawings-and-prints/materials-and-techniques/printmaking>

Website: The Great Migration: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>

Website: Isabel Wilkerson: The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration <https://www.isabelwilkerson.com/>

Photo of Segregation: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/shop/collections/fine-prints/19-north-carolina-1950-segregation-fountain/>

Photo of Charles White: <https://webuyblack.com/blog/daily-dose-history-charles-white-painter/>

Photo of McKinley Morganfield: <http://people.virginia.edu/~adc6r/MuddyWaters.html>