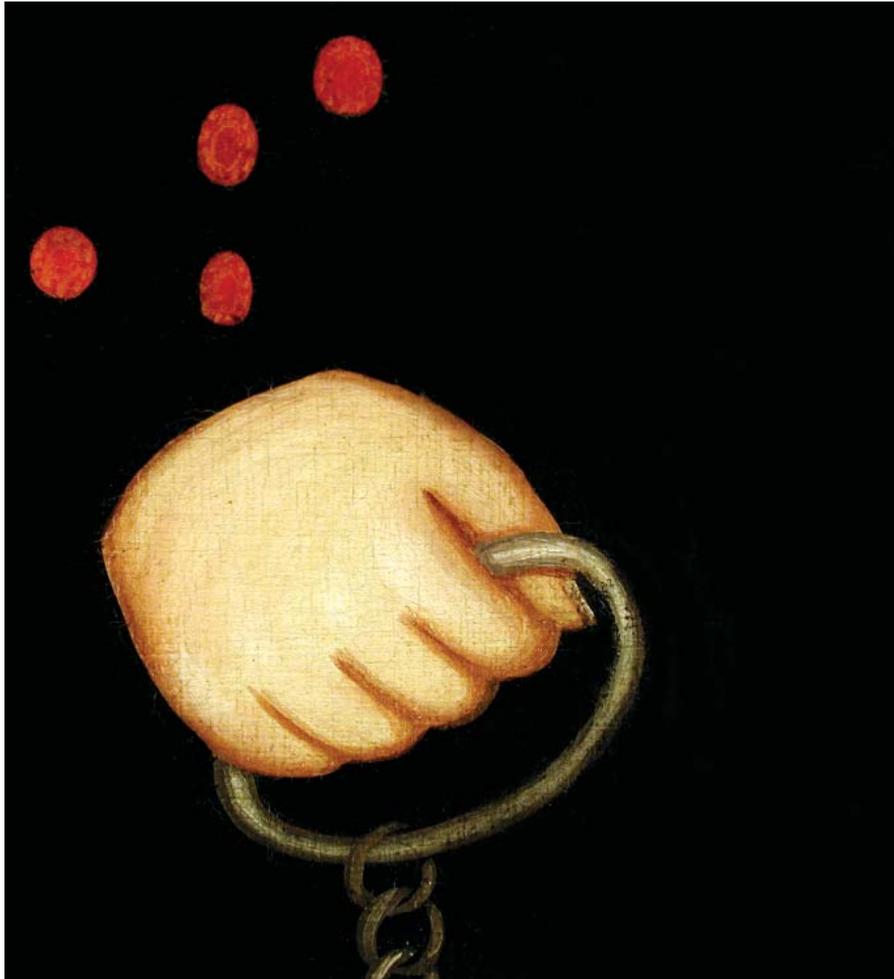


ART SPEAKS

Reading, Re-interpreting and Re-creating Works of Art



Student and Teacher Guide to

BETTER THINGS

[WORKS OF ART] ARE TIME CAPSULES, NOT HIDDEN AWAY IN SOME MASONRY WALL TO BE UNEARTHED IN THE DISTANT FUTURE, BUT ARE INSTEAD RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW—AND THEY CALL OUT THEIR RESPECTIVE MESSAGES, MANY FROM CENTURIES IF NOT MILLENNIA AGO, DIRECTLY TO THE VIEWER IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THEY DID WHEN FIRST CALLED INTO BEING. HOW WE READ THEM IS UP TO US. BUT READ THEM WE MUST.

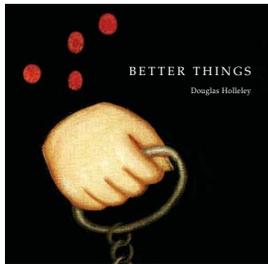
—Douglas Holleley, Introduction to *Better Things*

FACT: THERE ARE OVER 12,000 WORKS OF ART

in the collection of the
Memorial Art Gallery.



BETTER THINGS: A SINGLE PERSON'S OPINION



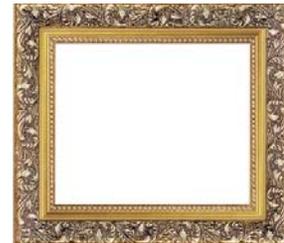
*An Annotated Visual Essay of Color Photographs
Interpreting the Collection of the Memorial Art
Gallery of the University of Rochester, Douglas
Holleley, 2004*

A trip to the Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) inspired photographer Douglas Holleley to create his book *Better Things*, giving the MAG works of art new interpretations by translating them into a new medium.

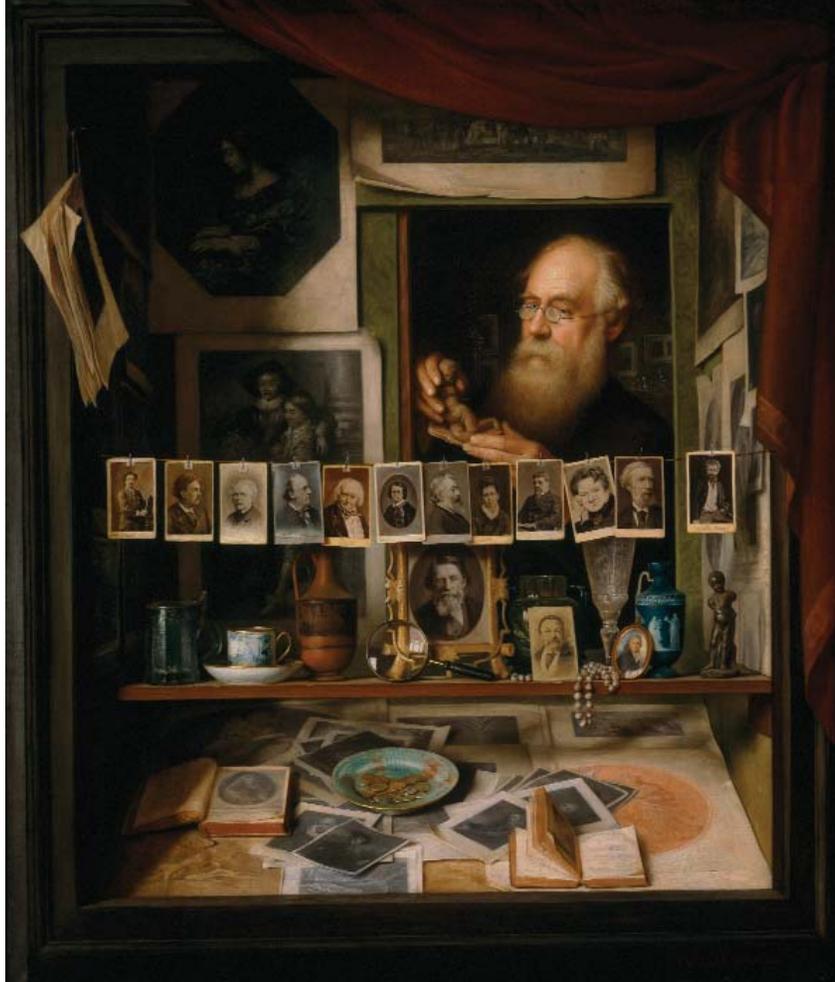
Milton W. Hopkins,
1789–1844
*Pierrepont Edward
Lacey
and His Dog, Gun,*
1835–36
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs.
Robert H. Dunn in
memory of Ruth
Hanford Munn and
James Buell Munn,
78.189

YOUR PERSONAL INTERPRETATION

You too can read the images, interpret and re-interpret them, and create new works of art that speak for you. Look closely at the images, read their messages, choose your medium and create a new work of art. Demonstrate your dialog with the images and with us.



A WORK OF ART



LOOKING AT ART:

Sometimes great works of art can seem overpowering. However, it is important to remember that they are just pictures. Simply look at the picture and describe, in your own words, what you see.

Are you reminded of anything?

Are you puzzled by anything?

Trust your response. It is as valid as that of any art critic.

Things to look for might include:

Gestures

Facial expressions

Interpersonal drama and context

Composition

Colors

Lines

Shapes and patterns

Size and materials

INTERPRETATION:

After describing the painting or art work, note what you have observed. Now try to put this together so you can create an interpretation of the artwork.

Things you might consider are:

Does the image tell a story?

What seems to be going on?... How can you tell?

Is it "real" or imaginary? If imaginary, why and for what purpose?

If the latter, why and for what purpose?

Where was the artist positioned to paint this scene?

FINAL TASK:

Respond creatively in your own work of art. You may choose to make an image, either by drawing or collage.

Alternatively, you may choose to write a short story or poem.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF DOUGLAS HOLLELEY



DOUGLAS HOLLELEY CREATES NEW WORKS OF ART

in a new medium and with a new message
by pairing details from MAG works of art.

Holleley calls this act, “*interactive reading*.” In the introduction to *Better Things* he explains

In much the same way I engaged in a dialog with each of the individual works when photographing, so too the photographs subsequently engaged in a dialog with each other. This process quickly broke down barriers of time, space and category. Freed even further from their original context, characters and events could now speak directly to each other across geographical borders and even time itself.

Douglas Holleley uses the word “*reading*” to describe how he relates to the works of art. How does this differ from “*looking at*” works of art?

PLAYING WITH WORDS:

We usually think of “things” as physical objects with real weight and substance in the material world. However, “things” can also be abstract ideas.

Holleley writes that *Better Things* was a response to “Meliora,” the motto of the University of Rochester (and thus of the Memorial Art Gallery), which in turn might have been inspired by the classical writer Ovid. In *Metamorphoses* Ovid writes, “video meliora proboque” or “I see and appreciate better things.”

What does “Better Things” mean to you?

Choose one of Holleley's paired photographs.

Give the pair a single title that captures the meaning of the two images together. *Explain your choice.*

Holleley writes that the characters speak to each other.

Select a pair:

What do you imagine they might be saying to each other?

What do they say to you?

LOOKING AND LEARNING:

Carefully observe one of Holleley's paired images.

Describe everything you see in each image.

What similarities and differences do you see as you compare the two?

How does comparing two images change your view of each image individually?

Why has Holleley chosen to pair these two images?

What is the connection between the two images?

How has Holleley linked the two images?

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION:

The images in *Better Things* are details from larger paintings and sculptures. They have been removed from their original context and so have acquired new meaning.

Compare the detail in one of Holleley's photographs with the original work of art (these may be found in the index of *Better Things* or on the Memorial Art Gallery website <http://mag.rochester.edu>).

How does the detail relate to the whole artwork?

How has the message of the original work changed?

FINDING THE CONTEXT:

Holleley has grouped his photographs into four chapters or themes: "On Reading," "On Men and Women," "On the Land," and "Meliora."

How do the images he has chosen support the specific themes?

How does knowing the category affect your interpretation of the visual images?

How would looking at the images without a title or a theme affect how you "read" the images?

FIND YOUR VOICE AND LET ART SPEAK FOR YOU

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

Create your own version of *Better Things*.

Choose two works of art from the MAG collection. Print images from the MAG website or buy a poster or postcard.

Cut these into pieces so that each has an important element.

Choose two pieces that have some connection to each other.

What is your theme or dialog?

What title would you give your work of art?

Choose one of the individual images from *Better Things*.

Using it as your starting point, create a new work of art.

Print an image from the MAG website or use a postcard.

Create a grid over the painting.

With other students, copy the painting square by square.

Reassemble the pictures and compare the copy to the original. *What has changed?*

Create new categories or themes and re-sort the images in *Better Things*.

Make your own book with the images arranged according to your themes.

Write poetry.

Brainstorm words inspired by the colors, the lines, the shapes, and the patterns of one of the images.

Brainstorm words inspired by the interpersonal drama, gestures and facial expressions.

Brainstorm words inspired by the general atmosphere. Arrange the words into poems.

Translate the photographs or original works of art into a dramatic presentation.

Each student can pose, perform a dance, or otherwise through gesture alone, respond to the image.

See if your classmates can identify the image you have selected to interpret through body movement or gesture.

What does Douglas Holleley mean when he writes that “...characters and events could now speak directly to each other...”?

Choose two of the images in *Better Things*.

What are the two images saying to each other?

Write a dialog for them.

Write a story inspired by one of Holleley's photographs.

Is Douglas Holleley creating art when he uses the works of other artists to make his photographs?

How is the photograph of a work of art different from the original?

Can a photograph of a work of art be considered art itself? If so, under what conditions?

Is a photograph of a detail different than a photograph of the whole painting? How? Why?

Download an image of a work of art from the MAG website.

Using Photoshop, change the colors of the painting to express a new mood and message.

Adjust the size and scale of the painting; how does that change the message?

Choose a detail and explore ways to emphasize its significance in the painting.

Take photographs of yourself and of things important to you.

Select from these photographs two details that, when put together, make a statement about who you are or what you think about yourself.

FRONT COVER:

(detail) Milton W. Hopkins,
1789–1844

*Pierrepont Edward Lacey
and His Dog, Gun*, 1835–36

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert

H. Dunn in memory of Ruth Hanford

Munn and James Buell Munn, 78.189

PAGE 4:

Walter Goodman,

1838-1912

The Printseller, 1882-1884

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 98.75

PAGE 6:

Douglas Holleley, images paired

in *Better Things*, pages 42 and 43:

(above) (detail) Lilly Martin Spencer,
1822-1902

Peeling Onions, ca. 1852

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Women's Council in

celebration of the 75th anniversary

of the Memorial Art Gallery, 88.6

(below) (detail) Walter Goodman,
1838-1912

The Printseller, 1882-1884

Oil on canvas

Marion Stratton Gould Fund, 98.75

Art Speaks: Reading, Re-interpreting and Re-creating Works of Art: A Student and Teacher Guide by Carol Yost,
Estelle B. Goldman Assistant Curator of Education, Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester.

Publication and distribution of *Art Speaks* thanks to support from John and Jayne Summers Foundation and Lynne Lovejoy.



UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Memorial Art Gallery

500 University Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607 585.276.8900 mag.rochester.edu

©2007 Memorial Art Gallery