

Large-Print Visual Descriptions of Select Objects for

State Fairs: Growing American Craft

Second Floor

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Photo by Amy Hutchins

Label Text

Justin Favela

born 1986; resides Las Vegas, NV

Capilla de Maíz (Maize Chapel)

2025

polyester sheets, cement, steel, staples, and tape

Welcome to the *Capilla de Maíz*. Look around, look up, and reflect on the nation's most vital crop. This installation honors the profound cultural significance of maize, frequently called "yellow gold," in the Americas. Maize sustained Indigenous peoples and later European settlers, helping to grow the American agricultural economy.

Justin Favela draws together many sources and symbols of maize from North American visual culture. The shimmering gold-fringed walls combine two Mexican art practices: *cartonería* (commonly known as piñata making) and the lavish, Churrigueresque baroque ornamentation of eighteenth-century Mexican Catholic churches.

Favela's piñata corncobs highlight maize's role in the formation of American identity. The iconic corncob column capitals in the United States Capitol, designed by Benjamin Latrobe around 1808, were part of an effort to create a distinctly American style of architecture. James Renwick later incorporated corncob capitals into his design for this building. Maize also took the spotlight in horticultural installations at state fairs, which boosted the nation's image as the "land of plenty."

Justin Favela is a multidisciplinary artist based in Las Vegas, Nevada. Favela's installation is a window into his fantastical world, where American pop art shines through the Latin American experience.

Capilla de Maíz (Maize Chapel) is organized by the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Major support is provided by Bannus and Cecily Hudson.

Visual Description

The scale of the room is immense. At about 4,200 square feet with a forty-foot ceiling, the space feels like a house could fit inside of it. On the far wall where visitors enter, there are four giant yellow corncobs with large green leaves hanging over the space. Each cob is so big, they each look like the size of a car with even bigger leaves arching over the room. On the wall closest to the visitor, there are four more corncobs. The ceiling is illuminated with different colors, which change slowly and fade into each other. The room and corncobs sparkle in the light.

The corncobs are made of a shiny material which reflects light and bounces it around the room. The material is cut in a fringe-like pattern creating texture on the corncobs and leaves, like you'd see on a piñata. Layers of fringed material create a highly textured surface. Each corncob is made of a shiny gold material with long, thin, golden strings hanging from the end of the cob to mimic the silk-like fibers found on corn. The husk is made from a bright, rainforest green. The leaves of each husk branch out and arch over the room.

The lighting in this gallery is lower than most rooms in the exhibit which creates a calming atmosphere as if to encourage quiet introspection. The carpet on the floor has a gold, brown, and yellow abstract pattern that evokes a field of grain.

Label Text

Margarita Cabrera

born 1973; resides El Paso, TX

Arbol de la Vida—John Deere Tractor Model #790

2007

clay, slip paint, acrylic latex paint, and metal hardware

Artist and activist Margarita Cabrera uses one of the most iconic symbols of American agriculture, the John Deere tractor, to draw attention to the immigrant workers American agriculture depends on.

The clay fabrication of this tractor references *árbol de la vida* (tree of life) sculptures, a Mexican ceramic tradition that blends pre-Columbian and Catholic cosmologies and conveys the story of creation. Cabrera applied the flowers, birds, and butterflies that traditionally decorate these sculptures, but replaced the usual tree form with a life-size clay replica of a John Deere tractor. By merging the American tractor with an Indigenous Mexican craft practice, Cabrera highlights issues of exclusion within the

agricultural system, especially given the reliance of American food production on immigrant labor.

Courtesy of Margarita Cabrera

Visual Description

At one end this gallery is a recognizable object that looks impressively large indoors. This is a life-size John Deere tractor. However, it does not have the signature branding with its green and yellow colors. This tractor is either made of or is covered with an earthy, dull reddish-brown clay. The tractor has large wheels in the back and smaller wheels in the front. From the tire treads to the nuts and bolts that hold the wheels to the vehicle, every detail from a real John Deere tractor was replicated. The seat and pedals are also covered in clay.

Decorative objects, including clay butterflies, birds, moths, and flowers, are attached to the surface of the tractor. Each item is small and could fit in the palm of your hand. There are so many of these motifs covering the surface of the vehicle that it seems like they are

taking over the tractor. They cover the tops of the wheels, line the engine hood at the front, and spread throughout all the surfaces. Birds perch on the railing above the seat of the tractor.

Label Text

Syd Carpenter

born 1953; resides Philadelphia, PA

Our Home Places

variable materials

This grouping of three sculptures, titled *Our Home Places*, is part of Syd Carpenter's series *Places of Our Own*. Each sculpture is a portrait of an African American farmer.

Many state fairs historically excluded African Americans or segregated attendance and participation. The South Carolina State Fair, for example, awarded different premiums to white and Black farmers. The latter responded by establishing their own fair in 1878 “to develop and promote the agricultural, mechanical, and educational interest of the negro race of South Carolina.” The fairs remained separate until 1970.

Carpenter’s portraits make visible the personal stories of Black farmers throughout the American South. Carpenter,

also an avid gardener, memorializes homes cultivated through resourcefulness and resilience.

Courtesy of Syd Carpenter

Syd Carpenter

born 1953; resides Philadelphia, PA

Pearl Fryar

2014

clay, steel, and graphite

Pearl Fryar cultivated a whimsical topiary garden comprising more than four hundred plants, most of which were discarded by other gardeners at the local compost pile. At the center of the sculpture is the pyramidal roof of Fryar's home. The surrounding shapes evoke the graceful, abstract forms of his topiary wonders—including his original house number, 165.

Courtesy of Syd Carpenter

Visual Description

This art installation is comprised of three artworks that are lined up in a row in front of a white pine wall in the shape of a large barn. Each sculpture is set on a large, square, burnt orange platform. There are two light wood-colored sculptures on each end and a dark brown one in the middle.

Let us focus on the sculpture in the middle. This sculpture stands about five feet tall. It is dark brown and has a triangular brown base that is outlined with what looks like a rusted metal picket fence. A pole in the middle of the triangle base is irregular and zigzags at several angles before reaching the top of the sculpture, which has a squarish shape with rounded corners and edges like a cloud. It is black and has large numbers on the outside edges reading “165”. At the center of the shape, there is a pyramidal roof of a house tucked into the undulating cloudlike shape, which lacks sharp edges

and makes this piece feel cozy and whimsical.

There are round protrusions on the outside edges that look like bushes.

A video projection goes across all three sculptures and onto the white pine wall behind them. Projected images include photographs of farmers, people working in gardens, and close-up images of plants and farm animals. Shadows of the sculptures and visitors walking by are cast on the wall.



Photo by Albert Ting

Label Text

Sarah Pratt

born 1977; resides West Des Moines, IA

Hannah Pratt

born 2003; resides Cedar Falls, IA

Grace Pratt

born 2003; resides Cedar Falls, IA

Curious Regard

2025

butter over armature of wood and metal

Every year, visitors at the Iowa State Fair line up to see the life-size butter cow in the Agriculture Building, sculpted by Sarah Pratt and her twin daughters, Hannah and Grace.

Butter art, a tradition among nineteenth-century farm women, became a popular feature at state and world's fairs. At the 1911 Iowa State Fair, John K. Daniels exhibited a butter sculpture showing a young boy tending

a dairy cow and her nursing calf. Though the butter industry was mechanizing and reducing its reliance on small, family-owned dairy farms, the butter cow communicated agrarian family values.

Sarah Pratt apprenticed with the famed butter sculptor Norma “Duffy” Lyon. In 2006, Lyon passed her butter knife to Pratt, who brings a present-day vantage point to her work while building on the state-fair tradition of entertaining and educating fairgoers. Pratt also creates the official butter cows for the Missouri State Fair and the Illinois State Fair.

Visual Description

A life-size cow stands on a platform inside a very large octagon-shaped glass case. There is a gentle hum as the case acts as a refrigerator to preserve the butter sculpture. If you are very close to the case, you can feel the chill from the glass. The room in which the case has been built is also shaped like an octagon which gives a dramatic effect to the cow inside. The cow is made of butter and is a uniform pale yellow color.

This female cow has attentive ears, gentle eyes, a large udder, and a smooth nose. She is standing straight and looks out at the visitor. The detail in the butter is impressive: the udder is round and veiny and adds a lifelike quality to the sculpture. The tuft of hair at the end of the tail is made of curled butter shavings. The body of the cow is smooth and has hip bones protruding like they do on a real cow. The legs are straight as the cow stands relaxed.

The hooves are attached to a rectangular butter platform that is lined with butter balls the size of clementine oranges.

Label Text

Susie Brandt

born 1959; resides Rockland, ME

4-H clubs

Alaska, New Jersey, West Virginia, and Utah

4-H Interaction of Color String Quilt

2025

cotton

As a child in Warren County, New York, Susie Brandt won numerous purple ribbons (indicating “excellent”) in 4-H competitions for her home-sewn clothing. Brandt became a textile artist and educator celebrated for her energetic use of color and her community-centered projects. As a professor in the fiber art department at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, she coordinated collaborative quilt projects to support student scholarships.

Brandt guided 4-H clubs from Alaska, New Jersey, Utah, and West Virginia in creating the two quilts on view here. She sent each group a selection of fabric and instructions

for making log cabin and diagonal “string” designs, giving the makers leeway to improvise and experiment with color.

Courtesy of Susie Brandt

Visual Description

A large and colorful quilt hangs on a wall. At about nine-by-nine feet, this quilt is about the same size as a king-sized bed spread. There are ten square quilt blocks along each side of the quilt. Each square is about ten-by-ten inches, similar in size to a trivet used under a hot pot on a kitchen table.

The colors of the quilt are bold and bright. Each square is constructed with different colored strips of fabric that are arranged in diagonal stripes. Some of the stripes have straight, regular edges while others are irregular and organic but follow the same diagonally arranged stripes. Each square has an individual color palette. Some use light pastel pinks and blues, others use bright, bold colors, and some use earthy tones like dark greens and

browns. No two quilt squares are the same. Each square has a large shamrock quilted into its surface.

The squares are arranged in a way that creates a larger pattern that can be noticed when the visitor stands further away from the quilt. Using the diagonal stripes of each square, the artist created large “x” and diamond shapes each using four squares. This larger pattern is also in the center of the quilt. The border of the quilt contains quilt squares that do not follow the diagonal stripe pattern. Each square at each corner of the quilt has a unique pattern. The square in the upper left corner is in the shape of a plus sign. The square in the bottom left corner is a quilt block with a pastel sunrise over the ocean. The top right corner features a quilt block with an abstract pattern of horizontal rows of fabric. The bottom right corner has a quilt block repeating vertical rows of yellow and green fabric that is bordered by multiple horizontal stripes.

Lastly, lining the very edge of the quilt is a black and white striped cord. The pattern of this border is like a black and white version of a candy cane with the two colors creating a twisted pattern.

Label Text

Macariah Pine

Báakkuukaak Chiwaakiiuúsh (Prays in the Morning)

Apsáalooke (Crow)

born 2003; resides Billings, MT

Miss Crow Fair Regalia

2012–23

beaded crown; beaded earrings; necklace; hair
adornment; rings; sash; scarf; scarf holder with abalone
shell; elk tooth and cotton dress; beaded leggings and
matching belt with belt purse; feather fan; leather gloves;
moccasins; bracelet with ring attached; floral bracelet;
choker; and shawl

Macariah Pine won the title of Miss Crow Fair in 2023. Often called the “teepee capital of the world,” the Crow Fair has been hosted along the Little Bighorn River in Montana for more than a century.

For the competition, Pine had to demonstrate her knowledge of Apsáalooke (Crow) language and culture.

She wore this regalia with components made entirely by her and her family, all known for their skilled beadwork.

Pine tries to be a role model to the younger Apsáalooke students she visits as part of her role as Miss Crow Fair.

Courtesy of Macariah Pine, Rosanna Pine, Janice E. Little Light, Shari Doney, and Cornelius Little Light Sr.

Visual Description

Two female mannequins are dressed in vibrant garb. The mannequin on the right wears a dusty rose-colored dress that has long sleeves and falls to the mid-calf. On her head, the mannequin wears a crown made of small beads. The crown has dark blue text that says “Miss Crow Fair Macariah Pine.” This text is set against a rectangular background of turquoise beads. Above this text are three sky blue triangles. Flanking the turquoise text box are dark orange and green triangles that intersect each other and form a zigzag style vertical pattern. The figure wears dangling beaded earrings with a large central floral motif. These earrings are set

against dark braided pigtails that are adorned with trapezoid-shaped beaded decorations. Inside each trapezoid is a green and white striped triangle that rests on a blue base with a yellow and orange center. This motif is repeated on the figure's lapel. Three strands of large blue, white, and red beads hang below the trapezoid decorations on her pigtails. She wears a silky, shiny scarf around her neck that is draped into a "V" shaped on the front of the outfit. A large pink and yellow stylized flower is placed at the bottom of the scarf near where the two ends of the scarf meet. The flower has one green leaf on either side. Below the flower is a large button. The figure wears a pink sash that says "2023 M....". The rest of the text is hidden but we can assume the text is the same as her crown which reads "Miss Crow Fair". The back of the sash reads "Macariah Pine". A red beaded belt with a geometric pattern secures the waist of the dress. The edge of the belt has different stripes of colored beads.

Throughout the dress, large cream-colored, rounded seashells are affixed to its surface. A red textile is draped over the figure's left arm. The red textile features an embroidered brown horse and white fringe along the edge. The middle finger on the right hand wears a ring that is made of many small beads. The ring has two green almond-shaped leaves that surround a section of peach, dark red, and blue. The figure wears a beaded bracelet on their right wrist. The right hand is holding a fan made of large white feathers with light brown along the edge. The base of the feathers is wrapped in stripes of dark blue, light blue, yellow, and red.

The hem of the dress has a wide black edge bordered by white stripes on either side. The figure wears soft-sided boots that tie in the front in four or five separate places. The cream-colored boots feature red, black, and light blue stripes on the toe portion of the shoes.



Label Text

Tommy Lowe

Diné (Navajo)

born 1959; resides Lukachukai, AZ

Miss Navajo Nation Crown (2016–21)

2016

sterling silver and turquoise

Every year a Diné (Navajo) woman is crowned Miss Navajo Nation at the pageant of the Navajo Nation Fair in Window Rock, Arizona. Beulah Melvin Allen was crowned the first Miss Navajo Nation in 1952. The pageant requires contestants to demonstrate their knowledge of Diné skills and traditions such as ritual sheep butchering, fluency in the Diné language, food preparation, and wool spinning. They also give presentations on history and dress. The winner is seen as a representative of the Navajo Nation and as a role model for young women.

From 2016 to 2021, the reigning Miss Navajo Nation wore this crown made of sterling silver, embellished with

turquoise—a sacred stone in Diné culture, with powers of health and protection.

Courtesy of Navajo Nation Museum

Visual Description

The words “Miss Navajo” stand out on the front of this magnificent crown. The letters are wide, bold, and capitalized and are crafted out of a silver metal material and set on a black background. The silver crown has a high peak at the front that is rounded at the top. It slopes down into two more rounded peaks on either side similar in shape to a regal crown that one could picture on a king or queen.

On each peak is a group of turquoise stones set in an oval pattern with a larger single stone at the center. Around each central oval stone are tear drop-shaped turquoise stones. Beneath the tallest peak at the front, there are four smaller round stones of different colors. From left to right, the stones are black, orange, turquoise, and white.

At the center of the front of the crown, there is a large circle of turquoise stones. Inside the circle, there are bands of red, yellow, and blue. Inside this rainbow band border, there is text reading “GREAT SEAL OF THE NAVAJO NATION”. Beneath the text, there is a motif made of different colored stones. From top to bottom, the motifs include a yellow sun above a white mountain. Beneath the mountain are three animals in brown, red, and white stacked in a vertical line. It is difficult to determine what types of animals are represented. Beneath the animals, there is a yellow mountain. At the bottom of this central portion of the crown, there are two leafy green plants that look like corn stalks lining each side. The stalks are topped with yellow stones.

On the sides of the crown, there are shiny blue, red, and white jewels. Metal details add decoration to the silver parts of the crown and mirror each other on both sides. Some of the details look like fern leaves, flowers, or clam shells. Turquoise details line the top of the black band that says “MISS NAVAJO” near the base of the crown.

Bordering the black band on either side are small, pearl-like beads. On the right side of the crown, there is an American flag with the word “VET” inscribed below. Next to these motifs is a black silhouette of a kneeling soldier. A silver square with the words “1868 Treaty” is inscribed next to the soldier. “1868 Treaty” is above abbreviations of the “four corner” states: Utah (UT), Colorado (CO), Arizona (AZ), and New Mexico (NM). On the other side of the crown from left to right are the following images: “ABC” and “123” are in large black font, followed by the black silhouette of a graduation cap and diploma, a silver oval with scalloped edges, and a black silhouette of a person in profile wearing a crown.



Photo by Albert Ting

Label Text

Rod Zeitler

born 1952; resides Iowa City, IA

Home Canning Display

2025

glass mason jars and preserved foods

Rod Zeitler has preserved his status as an Iowa State Fair legend. For the last several years he has had an entry in each of the roughly 180 canning classes, and he typically wins a ribbon per class. (A small sample of his collection of ribbons is on view on the first floor.)

Zeitler grew up on a farm in rural Iowa, where he was a 4-H member and exhibited livestock at fairs. Years later, seeking to emulate his wife's success in winning fair ribbons for her weaving (Deborah Zeitler's winning artworks are on view on the first floor), he began entering canning competitions.

This display features more than seven hundred jars of Zeitler's home-canned pickles, relishes, sauces,

vegetables, fruits, jellies, jams, preserves, and butters. The stepped arrangement recalls historical canning and horticultural exhibitions at state fairs.

Courtesy of Rod Zeitler

Visual Description

This pyramid is enormous and occupies almost this entire gallery. The lighting inside the pyramid adds to the grandeur of this piece and makes the whole pyramid glow. The white pyramid displays canned jars. The light behind the jars illuminates them allowing the visitor to identify various familiar canned goods. There are twelve rows of canned jars with each row getting smaller as it goes up towards the top of the pyramid. At the top, there is a large, shiny, yellow pear. There are so many jars displayed; it would take a long time to count them.

Walking around the pyramid, visitors might be able to identify a variety of canned goods inside the mason jars including salsa, jelly, and vegetables, like carrots, potatoes, and corn. Everything inside each jar looks delectable as if each jar was carefully crafted to display

what is inside. The number of jars and the illumination elevate these seemingly commonplace canned goods to something beautiful that must be appreciated.

Some rows have alternating large and small jars. The base of the pyramid has faux greenery and American flag bunting.

Label Text

Shae Bishop

born 1990; resides Richmond, VA

Rhinestone Rattlesnakeboy

2024

suit: printed denim fabric, ceramic, leather, and rhinestones; hat: ceramic and underglaze; sunglasses: plastic, glass, and rhinestones; custom mannequin: foam and steel

To create his *Rhinestone Rattlesnakeboy* outfit, Shae Bishop merged the themes of cowboy culture, masculinity, and relationships between humans and animals. Motivated by a commitment to wildlife conservation and the idea that “nature is the original source of all human design,” Bishop embellished this suit with ceramic and rhinestone detailing and paired it with a porcelain cowboy hat bearing a rattlesnake motif. The suit was inspired by the work of the artist Loy Bowlin of Mississippi, known as the Original Rhinestone Cowboy, who often appeared at local fairs. Bishop himself dreams

of traveling to fairs as Rattlesnakeboy to promote native snake conservation.

Courtesy of Shae Bishop

Visual Description

Standing before you is a mannequin wearing a cowboy outfit. The mannequin is about six feet tall and has a slim build. From head to toe, this ensemble is bright and colorful. The clothes are made in a western cowboy style complete with a cowboy hat.

Starting at the top is a light tan cowboy hat. Unlike typical cowboy hats, this one is made of ceramic. Under the brim, there is a painted rattlesnake on each side winding around the head. The snake on the left is dark brown with tan stripes while the snake on the right is a very pale brown with even lighter stripes. Pink flowers fill the empty spaces in between the snakes. The top part of the hat features a darker snake winding around the right side of the hat and the lighter snake winding around the left side.

The cowboy wears a jacket made of a shiny material that starts at the shoulders and comes down to meet at the

center of the chest on the front and halfway down the back. It is light blue that gradually shifts to a dark blue towards the outside and is outlined with a bold black stripe. It is lined with pink leather tassels that fade into white at the ends. On each side of the jacket's lapel, a rattlesnake curls around towards the chest. The snakes' bodies extend down the front and the tails end with their rattles which hang in front of the tassels of the jacket.

The bright blue of the jacket has a detailed pattern of hexagons, like a honeycomb. Each hexagon is a slightly different shade of light blue. Lining the arms and bottom hem of the jacket are colorful rhinestones in light blue, pink, and gray. On each sleeve near the wrists, there is a tan leather detail with a painted pink flower with green leaves. It is a similar pink to the tassels.

Just under the bottom hem of the jacket, a large oval belt buckle, seemingly made of ceramic, is covered with three pink flowers with yellow centers and green leaves. The belt loops are decorated with rhinestones.

The pants are made with the same bright blue fabric with the honeycomb pattern. The top of the front pockets is lined with a black material with a decorative arrow on each end. Just below each pocket are two decorative, ceramic panels. They are organically shaped almost like wings. There are three pink flowers with green leaves painted on each panel. The panels are outlined with clear rhinestones. At the bottom of each pant leg are two more ceramic panels. Two rattlesnakes are intertwined on each panel and go up almost to the knees. Below the curved black arrows near the waistband are more pink flowers with green leaves which were painted on a tan background. These panels are also outlined with clear rhinestones. Scattered throughout the pant legs are colorful rhinestones. The bottom of each pant leg is lined with bright blue rhinestones.

Finally, to complete the ensemble, the cowboy wears square shaped glasses. They are normal plastic frames but are bedazzled with clear, light blue, and pink rhinestones.

Label Text

Talabartería la Querencia

Colotlán, Mexico

Charro Saddle

ca. 1998

hand-embroidered leather with maguey cactus fibers and silver inlay

Jerry Diaz is a fourth-generation charro cowboy. In seventeenth-century Mexico, charros were country horsemen. The term now refers to participants in Mexican-style rodeos and equestrian activities, called *charrería*. Every year at the State Fair of Texas, Diaz and his family produce a show to highlight rodeo traditions. As Diaz notes, “To be a cowboy or a charro, it has to come from inside your soul first.”

This traditional charro saddle, produced by the Mexican saddlery Talabartería la Querencia and used by Diaz in his performances, is adorned with *piteado*, an

embroidery technique using fiber from the maguey cactus. The saddle horn is inlaid with silver.

Courtesy of Jerry, Staci, and Nicolas Diaz

Visual Description

This is a large western style saddle. This saddle has a prominent horn, the part of the saddle used to fasten rope, that is bright silver with a detailed decorative pattern etched into the surface. There are horseshoe motifs on either side of the horn's silver base.

Overall, the saddle is light tan and has a beautiful pattern reminiscent of a baroque style design covering every part of the leather. The pattern looks like intricate curling leaves and branches. The light tan leather is layered on top of a dark brown leather to create a stark contrast highlighting the design. The underside of the leather straps holding the stirrups are dark brown. Etched silver plates are on the outside of each stirrup, which have a similar design to the saddle with curling leaves

and branches with a geometric pattern bordering the outside.

Beneath the leather part of the saddle, there is a plush wool layer that would add padding to where the saddle sits on the horse's back. This wool is a cream color and contrasts to the darker saddle. At the back of the saddle is a small, rolled blanket that is red, black, and white.

Finally, the seat of the saddle, where the rider would sit, is dark tan, smooth, and slopes up at the back to hold the rider in place. The material looks soft like velvet.
