

Thanks for Art: Part II

By Kathleen McShane

In November 2020 (remember COVID?), I wrote a piece called Give Thanks for Art in time for Thanksgiving (See *The Art Connection* at Dataw.art/blog). It's Thanksgiving time again. I thought, let's see if I can do this again.... but no repeats. Well, maybe a couple of repeat artists, but no repeat works of art.

What do we think about when we think about Thanksgiving? Remembering our forebears (think Plymouth 1620), the bounty of the harvest, eating more than we probably should, spending time with family and friends, turkeys, football, and the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade.

The first piece of art I chose is not only because it features food but also because it is an imaginative composition of fruits and vegetables. Entitled *Vertumnus* (1591), the painting by the Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526-1593) combines fruits and vegetables to make a portrait of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II. Vertumnus is the Roman god of seasonal change and plant growth. Arcimboldo is best known for imaginative portrait heads made entirely of objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, and books.



The painting below, which also features food, is aptly entitled *Still Life with Turkey* (1627). The still life, part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, was created by Dutch Golden Age artist Pieter Claesz (1597-1661). Claesz is considered among the best still-life painters of the 1620s. According to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Claesz “painted with tangible detail and carefully observed light effects and sought to enhance the illusion of reality by arranging objects on the table so that they appear to recede in space.”



The turkey painting below is by the Spanish artist Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Goya is the most important Spanish artist of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, often called the last Old Master and the father of Modern Art. Of the Romantic School of artists, Goya frequently portrayed current events; he is an exemplary war artist. *Still Life, Plucked Turkey and Pan with Fish* (1812) is part of the collection of Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany.



A better-dressed turkey appears in the painting below. Entitled *Wild Turkey Cock, Hen and Young* (1826), the painting is by John James Audubon (1785-1851), the French -American self-taught artist, naturalist and ornithologist. Born Jean-Jacques Rabin, Audubon undertook to make a complete pictorial record of all the bird species in North America. His major work, *The Birds of America* (1827-1839), is still considered to be one of the best ornithological works ever completed. *Wild Turkey Cock, Hen, and Young* is part of the collection of Crystal Bridges, Bentonville, AR.



The watercolor below is by American Charles Culver (1908-1967); commercial artist, cartoonist, art teacher, art critic, jazz musician, and author of children's books. The watercolor, called *Turkey* (Undated), is part of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art collection. Culver's art philosophy, in his own words, was this: "A real artist, except in his youth, doesn't follow trends at all, nor does he feel any sense of competition with other artists because his desire is not to be best but to be individual. A real artist never desires to be the foremost artist of his time, but merely one of the good artists of all time."



Moving to the origins of our Thanksgiving, the painting below depicts the Pilgrims' landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620. The painting title is *The Landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, 1620* (1854) by American painter Peter Rothermel (1812-1895). Rothermel was best known for his historical paintings. This painting depicts Myles Standish, military leader of the Plymouth Colony, standing on a rocky shore, helping his wife, Rose, out of an open boat. This painting belongs to the Kirby Collection of Historical Paintings in the Lafayette College Art Collection.



Below is a more somber view of Thanksgiving. The painting is titled *The Thankful Poor* (1894). Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937) was an African American artist known for depicting African American life. He was one of the first African American artists to achieve international renown. This is the last known work of his. The painting was purchased by the Cosbys in 1981 and later sold to Art Bridges, an organization dedicated to the collection and exhibition of American art.



The painting below is entitled *The First Thanksgiving* (1914). The artist Jennie Augusta Brownscombe (1850-1936) mainly painted what are referred to as genre paintings, many of which depict revolutionary and colonial American history. Brownscombe sold the rights to over 100 works; reproductions have appeared on calendars and greeting cards. She was a founding member of and a student and teacher at the Arts Students League of New York.

Although realistic, *The First Thanksgiving* contains at least two historical inaccuracies: the log cabin and the Plains Indian headdresses.



Brownscombe created a second version of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving, *Thanksgiving at Plymouth* (1925), which is part of the National Museum of Women in the Arts collection in Washington, DC. In both paintings, a central figure is the praying Miles Standish.



Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) gives us a whimsical take on Thanksgiving with his *Cousin Reginald Catches the Thanksgiving Turkey* (1917). The picture is one of a series that Rockwell created between 1917 and 1922 depicting the misadventures of city slicker Reginald Fitzhugh at the hands of his country cousins. *Cousin Reginald Catches the Thanksgiving Turkey* appeared on *The Country Gentleman's* December 17, 1917 cover.



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The Thanksgiving painting below is by Doris Lee (1904-1983). Painter, illustrator, and designer Lee is known for her folksy depictions of everyday life and depression-era murals. She first gained national attention when she won the Logan Purchase Prize at the Art Institute of Chicago for *Thanksgiving* (1935). The prize donor, Josephine Logan, condemned the choice, calling the painting too modern and founding the Sanity in Art movement in response. Logan's reaction only brought Lee more fame; the painting is now considered one of the most famous views of our Thanksgiving tradition. The painting remains in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.



The work below is easily recognizable as Norman Rockwell's. Painted just before the end of World War II, *Home for Thanksgiving* (1945) is considered one of Rockwell's more sentimental works. It depicts an active-duty soldier home for the holiday. It was the artist's 234th painting for the *Saturday Evening Post*.



The scene below, entitled *Turkeys* (1958), is the work of Grandma (Anne Marie Robertson) Moses (1860-1961). She painted this particular theme numerous times. Grandma Moses is an icon of American folk art, often depicting scenes of everyday life in America. She started painting in earnest at age 78; she lived to be 101. Grandma Moses' art became very popular in 1939 when the Museum of Modern Art in New York City acclaimed her as a "modern primitive." *Turkeys* is part of the collection of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art.



Thanksgiving morning.... Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Yes, there's art for that. Joseph Delaney (1904-1991), African American artist and younger brother of Beauford Delaney, gave us his interpretation of the event many of us now watch on TV. Delaney was part of the Harlem Renaissance scene, a student of Thomas Hart Benton, an artist in residence at the University of Tennessee, and an activist in opposition to racial discrimination. Below is his depiction of the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade (*Macy's Parade*, c. 1974-1984) in the collection of the Knoxville Museum of Art, where Delaney was born and died.



Last, Thanksgiving in many households means watching football. There are not many well-known artists who have painted football scenes. This may be a bit of a stretch. Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) is a prominent French Post Impressionist artist whose *Sleeping Gypsy* may be his most recognizable work. He also painted *Football Players* (1908) ...not soccer; they use their hands. OK, it's rugby. That was the best I could find. *Football Players* is part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

