

How To Read A Museum Label

To get the most information out of each Web page with an image, the viewer should not forget to read the label under the image. This label contains information often included on labels on art work on museum walls. Although a label has minimum information, it contains some important facts about the art work.



Jenkins, P.O.
Portrait of Isaac V.W. Dutcher, Quincy, Illinois,
1842
oil paint on ivory, 2 1/2 by 3 1/2 inches

Illinois State museum collection
Illinois State Museum Society purchase

1. **Name of artist** (life dates if available)
2. **Title of work, date**
3. **medium, size**
4. **current owner or copyright holder of the image**
5. **how the museum got the object** (if applicable)

Sometimes some of this information is unknown or unavailable.

Folk artists did not always sign their work or become well known enough for their style to be recognizable.

In the nineteenth century, some birth and death records were not always kept or were lost.

Many works are not dated; look at other dated works of the artist, if they exist.

The Illinois State Museum Collection is the home of all of the artworks in the Museumlink Art Modules except when otherwise stated, such as all the Lerner photographs.

Educational Opportunities with Museum Labels

Questions for Discussion and Research: using reference sources; some questions may not have verifiable answers yet.

Where did the artist learn to paint?
Where did the artist live (in Illinois)?
Who was Mr. Dutcher?
How old was he?

How did painters paint on ivory?
How does one paint such tiny brushstrokes?
Who used this object and why?

What profession might he have had?
Why did he have a portrait made?
How does one paint such tiny brushstrokes?

The viewer may also think about artistic or aesthetic questions:

Was this artist a very good painter?
Is this art if it is a useful object?
Is this style typical of the period around 1842?
Has the meaning of this object changed through time?

Making Labels for Your Work of Art or Art Exhibit

Use the above guidelines when creating the text for an exhibit label or a school art show. Only the fourth line (owner) may not apply, (unless the exhibit contains historical objects).

Preparation for a Field Trip to a Museum

Use the objects on the Web site as a treasure hunt for label facts (paintings and photographs for a trip to an art gallery; folk art, furniture or quilts for a trip to a historical site).

Examples:

- Where was Helen Gilchrist's piano made?
- What year did Helen make her appliqué bedcover?
- Who painted *Dream Trip to a Star*?
- What kind of art did Adrian Troy make?
- What is the title of the funniest painting you saw?
- How big is the smallest painting you saw?
- Find a quilt made by a man.
- Who owns the sculpture *Vanity* by Laura Slobe?

These few questions cover all categories of label information; artist, title, date, medium, size, owner, location.

What other questions can you think of?