

Self-Guide

Museum Minors

Let's face it: the winter holidays are never more fun than when you are a kid—no school, no responsibilities, just sweets, surprises, and swag. In honor of your favorite lads and lasses, enjoying the holiday season, we offer this tour of some of the museum's memorable minors.



GALLERY 227

J. Ellis Bonham (1825) by William Bonnell

Perhaps it's those big brown eyes, or the proportionally tiny body, or maybe it's the stark background and lonely shaft of light, but there's something very vulnerable about J. Ellis Bonham in this portrayal. Depicted at age nine, J. Ellis had lost his mother, likely due to complications of his birth. He eventually became a lawyer, who, a contemporary remarked, gave "effective speeches," which "at times bore traces of laborious preparation." Yet the New Jersey native was also of fragile health and died at the age of 39. The self-taught and itinerant portraitist William Bonnell was not much more than a child himself when he painted J. Ellis, along with the portraits of the child's father and stepmother hanging nearby. The artist was a mere 21 years old!



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GALLERY 1

Untitled page from *Paget Album* (1868/80)

by Edith Mary Paget

The fanciful world of fairy tales and fables, the playful practice of Victorian photocollage, and the charm of children—what could make a more delightful combination? Along with the stories of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, classic nursery rhymes provided aristocratic women with a perfectly whimsical canvas to unite their favorite little ones and fantastical photocollage scenes. In this page from the *Paget Album*, a humorous illustration of "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe," the maker's daughter Ada is among the bevy of babes packed into the crone's bootie. Look for more tots in tall tales by browsing through the virtual Gough and Bouverie albums in the *Playing with Pictures* exhibition.



GALLERY 134

Prunus Vase (12th century), China

Along with sugar and spice and everything nice, flowers are still in this day and age conventionally paired with little girls, but during China's Song dynasty which spanned from 960 through 1127, it was actually little boys who often frolicked amid the floral scroll motifs popularly incised into the period's elegant ceramics. Originally derived from Indian Buddhist art, the motif symbolized a wish for male heirs as well as general good fortune. On this vessel, boys clamber among winding tendrils of lotus flowers and lily-like blossoms. Though termed a prunus vase, or *meiping*—a vessel designed to hold plum blossoms—this piece with its fitted lid was most likely used for wine.



GALLERY 155

***Krishna the Butter Thief* (15th century), India**

While most kids might direct their petty pilfering at the cookie jar or the candy drawer, Lord Krishna, the avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, had a penchant for pinching butter. Raised in a family of cowherders in Vrindavan, Krishna simply could not get his fill of milk products as a child. The lactose lover regularly raided his family's larder and snuck about the village, pricking holes in milk and butter pots to consume the contents. As depicted in this small bronze figure, probably made for domestic worship, Krishna dances jubilantly with his prize, a ball of butter, in his right hand. The pose, one not likely to be performed by a child, is taken from Bharatanatyam, a rigorous classical dance form.



GALLERY 161

***Dorothea and Francesca* (1898) by Cecilia Beaux**

If you ever had to sit still for a studio photograph, then you can only imagine how tortuous it must have been as a kid to sit, or in this case stand, for the hours and days required for a painted portrait. Francesca Gilder Palmer, the younger sister in this striking portrait by Cecilia Beaux, recalled, "It was a rather fatiguing pose and I longed to be out in the fields, riding the farm horses." Of course, the resultant work is anything but fatiguing; Beaux's lively brushwork captures the natural grace and intimacy of the sisters as then 16-year-old Dorothea patiently teaches Francesca a dance. Connected through their mirrored body position, concentrated gaze, and tightly clasped hands, the girls evoke true sorority without sentimentality.



GALLERY 297

***Vincent and Tony* (1969) by Alex Katz**

During the 1950s and 1960s when most artists were exploring abstraction, New York native Alex Katz rather unfashionably devoted himself to figuration in both landscapes and portraits, developing his signature Pop Art–influenced style. Katz's flat, bright works, which grew larger and larger over time, often featured his wife Ada and the couple's only son, Vincent. In this monumental canvas, a nine-year-old Vincent (on the left) appears with his friend Tony. Being painted so many times, Vincent must have gotten the art bug; now a poet and art critic, he has also collaborated with his dad on a project entitled *Autographs*, featuring poems by the younger Katz and drawings by the elder.



RYAN EDUCATION CENTER

Illustration from the book *The Secret Olivia Told Me* (2007) by Nancy Devard

Ah, the playground—where kids' endless energy is unleashed upon swings, slides, games, and, of course, secrets. In N. Joy's 2007 children's book, rhyming verse details a secret's passage from friend to friend, from the schoolyard to the backyard, as the children's confidential tale morphs and becomes something quite different along the way. Nancy Devard illustrates the elaborate game of telephone with wonderfully expressive silhouettes and uses the image of an ever-expanding red balloon to represent the secret that eventually explodes into confetti.

Now how about art from kids?

Stop by the Ryan Education Center in the Modern Wing for a host of activities for kids of all ages. Admission is always FREE! This month, special events include the Treasure Hunt and Tea Party on December 6 and Holly Days, December 27–30. Pick up a Family Calendar for more programs and information.