



Nellie Mae Rowe

Untitled
Marker on paper

About the Artist

Nellie Mae Rowe was one of ten children born to Samuel and Louella Williams. Her father was a former slave and her mother was born the year of emancipation. By the time she was 16, Rowe had spent much of her youth working the farmland of Georgia. During her childhood years, she began to draw and make her first dolls, activities which she would continue throughout her life. "I draw things you ain't never seen born into the world and they ain't been born yet. They will be seen someday, but I will be gone."¹

A gifted self-taught artist, one with deep ties to the soils and spirit of her native state of Georgia, she explored a diverse range of media and demonstrates a unique sense of color, design and composition. Her work has gained national and international recognition, in fact in 1982 she was included in the Corcoran Gallery of Art's exhibition, "Black Folk Art in America, 1930-1980," an exhibition that is regarded as the beginning of the national recognition of self-taught artists.

About the Artwork

Nellie Mae Rowe's work contains dreamlike imagery. Both real and imaginary animals, people, and flowers fill the space in a symmetrical arrangement. The artist created this piece with mixed-media including markers and ballpoint pens.

Sample Classroom Activity

Folk, Visionary, Primitive, Self-Taught – Which One is it?

Grades 6-8 (Language Arts, Aesthetics)

Works of art produced by self-taught artists have been categorized by many names. Over time terms include **folk**, **visionary**, **primitive**, and **self-taught**. Conduct research using the Internet to explore each of the terms. Write down definitions and discuss their similarities and differences.

Divide class into small groups. Using the placemat reproductions, ask students to categorize each work under the term they think best fits the work. Inquire with students:

- Is there one term that best fits all of the works of art?
- Do individual terms better fit individual works of art?

Ask students to write individual **persuasive essays** that select one term as the best broad term used to define the type of artworks discussed here. Remind students to support their decisions with evidence from the Internet research and the works of art.

¹ Nellie Mae Rowe, Morris Museum of Art