MEDIEVAL TO METAL: THE ART AND EVOLUTION OF THE GUITAR

September 29th, 2018-January 6th, 2019

How to use this resource: This packet is designed to be flexible. Use it to help prepare for a docent-led tour of the museum, to inform a self-guided tour, or to discuss selected artworks in your classroom, whether you’re able to physically visit the museum or not. The suggested activities (page 7) should be used in conjunction with in-depth discussion of at least one related artwork.

The guitar has been a signature element of world culture for more than 500 years. As the guitar’s ancestors evolved over centuries from the earliest ouds and lutes to the signature hourglass shape we all know today, guitar makers experimented with shapes, materials, and accessories, seeking the perfect blend of beauty and sound. Spanning centuries of design and craftsmanship, this exhibition takes visitors through the history of an object that is one of the most recognizable items on the planet. Art and music transcend cultural boundaries while the most recognized musical instrument—the guitar—has influenced culture beyond music. Through the years the guitar and its shape have been integral elements for artists such as Vermeer and Picasso and today they are incorporated into the advertisements of everything from clothes to car.

What guitars are in the show?

The following 40 guitars are included in the exhibition:

- Oud (North Africa)  Maccaferri Plastic
- Lute (Europe)  Silvertone 1487 Speaker Guitar
- Theorbo  Teisco Kimberly Apollo Greenburst
- Vihuela (16th Century Spain)  USSR Soviet Tonika
- Charango (Bolivia/Chile)  Ibanez Giger Iceman
- Martin Parlor  Ovation Roundback Acoustic
- Goldklang Romantic Parlor Guitar  Superstrat
- Martin D-28  Giannini Craviola
- Guitarron  National Valco Lapsteel
- Greco Spanish guitar (20th Century)  Bond Elecraglide
- National Resophonic Dobro  BC Rich Red Warlock
- Rickenbacker Lapsteel  Vong Co Teisco
- Fender Telecaster  Ibanez Jem 7V
- Gibson Les Paul Recording  Air Guitar
- Fender Stratocaster  Gitano Silent Guitar
- Benedetto Archtop  Goya Hagstrom 80
- Rickenbacker 360/12  Guitar Hero/Rock Band Controller
- Gibson Flying V  DiDonato
- Vox Teardrop  Crossroads Guitar
- EKO 700
**HISTORY**

Belonging to a group of instruments known as chordophones, guitars make sound using a string—or multiple strings—stretched between two points. The plucking or strumming of the string(s) causes a vibration that generates sound waves. Acoustic guitars rely on a resonator, or sound box, to amplify sound. Electric guitars use amplifiers to increase the sound.

The Renaissance introduced the lute, evolving from the Oud, and many musicians customized their lute by adding more strings or lengthening the neck to allow for a wider range and combination of notes to be played. Made by craftsmen, called luthiers, these modifications led to multiple precursor guitars though the modern day guitar cannot be traced to any one specific model. Guitars are distinguished by their place of origin as each community designed the instrument to maximize the desired sound.

A guitar consists of a head with the tuning keys; body with the pick guard, bridge, sound hole and saddle (acoustic only), pickups and volume/tone controls (electric only); and the neck, which includes the fingerboard, frets, and position markers.

**DESIGNERS**

**Antonio de Torres Jurado** (mid-1800s): A Spanish luthier, Torres determined that the soundboard, or top, of the guitar was the most integral part for producing volume. He found that spruce was the perfect wood to create the top and developed a system of braces to place underneath the top, hidden inside the guitar, to ensure the soundboard was rigid enough to keep from breaking but flexible enough to produce the best sound. His design remains the standard blueprint for building the classical guitar.

**C.F Martin** (1796-1873): A German cabinet and guitar maker, C.F. developed an “X” bracing that could support steel strings which gave his guitars a wider range of tones than Torres’. Today, C.F. Martin & Company is one of the longest running family-owned businesses in the US.

**Orville H. Gibson** (1856-1918): Gibson developed the archtop, or slightly curved top, a defining characteristic of guitars in the mid-20th century and today. Gibson remains one of the most famous makers of guitars in the world.

**Les Paul** (1915-2009): Lester Polfuss, or Les Paul, invented tape machines that could record different parts of a band one at a time. He collaborated with Gibson on a hybrid electrified guitar.

**Charles Kaman** (1919-2011): Kaman created the first “acoustic electric” guitar.

**Clarence Leonidas Fender** (1909-1991): Fender started out fixing electrical equipment like amplifiers for musicians. After listening to them complain about how unreliable the equipment was he started making his own electric guitars. His electrics had a solid body so they wouldn’t create feedback like acoustics, were portable, and easy to play. Today, Fender is one of the largest producers of guitars in the world. Despite being considered one of the most important developers of electronics technology in the history of music he never learned how to play, let alone tune, a guitar.
A selection of these works will be discussed during a docent-led school tour. A PowerPoint presentation featuring multipole viewpoints of the artworks for classroom use may be found at fwmoa.org/PreK-12

Presented by The National GUITAR Museum, this exhibition provides an overview of the design history of the guitar. Evolving from the European and Asian stringed instruments from the Middle Ages to the amplified versions we recognize today, guitars have changed in size, shape, and number of strings. The journey to the recognizable hourglass shaped six stringed version of today depends on where and when the guitar was created. Designers like Leo Fender, George Beauchamp, Guy Hart, and Les Paul designed guitars both to respond to and influence the changing sound of music. Easily transportable, the guitar allowed musicians to accompany themselves and this eventually led to electric guitars that could be heard over the louder accompaniment of drums, bass, and multiple vocalists. Today, there are more guitars made every year than all other instruments combined!

Themes: process, shape, design, functional art

Essential questions: (choose 2-3) How can a viewer “read” a work of art as text? How does knowing the contexts, histories, and traditions of art forms help us create works of art and design? Why do people value objects, artifacts, and artworks, and select them for presentation? How does art help us understand the lives of people of different times, places, and cultures? (VA: Re8.1.4a; VA: Cr1.2.8a; VA: Pr4.1.1a; VA: Cn11.1.3a)

Ideas to consider and look for throughout the exhibit

- **Functional Art**: As opposed to fine art, which is appreciated only for its aesthetic value, functional art is aesthetically pleasing but serves a utilitarian purpose (VA: CN11.1.Ka). Discuss what this means with students. For example, the dragon guitar is aesthetically pleasing but if it was made incorrectly how would that affect the functionality of it?

- **History**: We ask that you start your tour with the earliest guitar (the furthest one to the left of the title wall) so students can see how body shape, neck length, and string number changed. Throughout the exhibit, feel free to point out how different countries approached the shape of the guitar to elicit the sounds they wanted. What does this tell us about music in different places? (VA: CN10.1.4a)

- **Play**: Guitars are instruments that, unlike artworks, are meant to be handled and played! Feel free to pick up one of the guitars and strum it so students can hear. Ask them why in an exhibition like this they think it might be important to have playable guitars? Have they ever seen an art exhibit with hands-on art? Why is that?

- **Exhibition**: How are the guitars exhibited differently from the fine art in other galleries? How are they displayed differently from the quilts? They are in large black cases that “frame” the guitars. Each case is lit from above, meaning each guitar is in direct light. How is this different from usual artworks? What do you think it would be like if they were hung flush on the wall? Or if the cases didn’t have glass? (VA: Pr6.1.6a).
Oud (Ud), 3,000BC—Present
The Oud (rhymes with food) is one of the oldest stringed instruments in the world, probably originating in the Middle East.

What parts of a modern guitar does the Oud have? What is it missing? More like violins and cellos, the Oud does not have frets so musicians can slide their fingers to play “in between notes” that cannot be played on modern guitars.

What can we learn about Middle Eastern music from this instrument? The lack of fretboards is important in Middle Eastern music which has more tones than those found in traditional European music.

How does the shape differ from modern guitars? Do you think it would be easier or harder to play?

Look at and discuss the design!

Lute, 1400s—Present
Prominent during the Renaissance, it evolved directly from the Oud. Stand between both instruments and compare and contrast them. Note the addition of the fretboard!

Do the instruments have the same amount of strings? Do they have a similar neck length? What does that mean for the sound?

Luthiers, or lute makers (now includes anyone who makes stringed instruments), were craftsmen that designed the instruments. What do you think luthiers had to know to create these instruments?

What materials are used? Wood, catgut strings and fretboard

The lute features in many famous paintings, including ones by Vermeer! Why do you think artists would include instruments in their works?

Guitarron, 1600s—Present
A Spanish guitar, the guitarron is a staple of Mariachi music. Have you seen a guitar like this in Coco or in our Day of the Dead exhibition?

How does this guitar compare with the European Lute? It’s much bigger! It’s the largest bodied of the guitars. In fact, it’s used in the rhythm section of Mariachi bands and is categorized more as a bass guitar, which is a percussion instrument like the drums.

Does this guitar have a fretboard? Why do you think it doesn’t? As the rhythm section, it needs to be able to play a wider range of notes.

How is the decoration of this guitar similar or different to the others? All have designs around the soundboard.
Martin Dreadnought D-28, 1931—Present

Inspired by British battleships in WWI, this large guitar eliminated the need for other instruments to accompany musicians as they moved from parlors into small song and dance bands. What impact does the size of the guitar have on the sound? How is this similar to the Mariachi guitar?

This guitar proved that guitars could stand on their own, and spurred the growth of singer/songwriters like Johnny Cash, Taylor Swift, and Ed Sheeran. How do you think this impacted music?

The most popular style of acoustic guitar in the US, this is probably the guitar you imagine when someone says acoustic guitar.

Compared to the other guitars, what do you think of the design of this guitar? Not as flashy, a little boring.

EKO 700, 1965—Present

Why do you think this design is called a “triple cutaway”?

This is an electric guitar. How is the shape different from the acoustic guitars we’ve looked at? What pieces are the same and which pieces are different? How can you tell this is an electric guitar? Be sure to note that it doesn’t have to be hollow to produce sound like an acoustic since it uses an electric amplifier.

An Italian guitar, this design includes a lot of sparkle! Why do you think musicians would want a sparkly guitar?

Do you think musicians would buy a guitar if it looked pretty but didn’t play properly?

Ibanez Jem7V, 1985—Present

Sometimes musicians designed their own guitars, and these designs became associated with the individual musicians. Why do you think musicians would want to design their own guitars? What would you include on your guitar design?

How does this compare to the “triple cutaway”?

The cut-out on the body of this guitar is called a “monkey grip”. What do you think it was used for? It was a built-in handle to carry the guitar, no case needed!

The inlay on the fretboard is a “Tree of Life” design. What design would you want on your guitar?

How does this electric guitar compare to the other? What is similar? Different?
This guitar makes us think of jello! What do you think of when you see it?
Why do you think a musician would want to play a guitar like this?
How does this angular design compare to the more standard designs? How far do you think designers can stray from the “standard model” before the sound of the guitar changes?
This is red acrylic instead of wood (wood is resonant which is why it is the preferred medium) and is extremely heavy. Imagine what it would be like to be a musician and play a two hour set. How would your arms feel? Would you want a guitar like this?
What can we learn about the mechanics of the guitar by looking at this one?

Air guitar, 1970s—Present
The air guitar is an imaginary guitar that is played as if it was an actual instrument. There is an international competition held every year in Finland.
Started in the 1970s and 1980s in response to the exaggerated movements and facial expressions of rock guitarists, the air guitar has moved from mimic to an institutionalized form of performance.
Do you think this should be included in the exhibit?
What does an air guitar sound like? Sounds like whatever guitar music is being played.
Play your best air guitar!

Videogame Controller (Guitar Hero & Rock Band), 2005-Present
This guitar is used to play video games like Guitar Hero and Rock Band, replacing a joystick, mouse, or other input device. Has anyone played this game? Can anyone explain how to play it?
Does it look like the standard guitars we’ve seen in the exhibit? How is it similar or different?
Since this guitar isn’t played in the traditional way, meaning it doesn’t have to create sound, what changes for designers?
What parts of the standard guitar, either electric or acoustic, are kept on this guitar?
Do you think this would be lighter or heavier in comparison to “real” guitars?
Why do you think this was included in the exhibit?
“Crossroads” Guitar, 2013
There is a story in music about a musician who sells his soul to the Devil in return for fame and fortune. Legend has it that if the musician went to the intersection of two roads, called a crossroads, at midnight and called out the Devil’s name Satan would appear and grant him a wish in return for his soul. Can you tell what is on this guitar?
Do you think having these 3D skulls and designs would make the guitar hard to play? How do you think it would effect the sound?
This guitar represents the legend or myth mentioned above. Art tells a story. How does this guitar tell the story of the myth?
What would you want on your “crossroads” guitar?

Dragon 2000 Guitar, Paul Reed Smith, “Millennium Dragon”
One of only 50 made, this is a limited edition guitar. What is depicted on the body of the guitar?
What kind of guitar is this? How can you tell?
How long do you think it took the artist to design and create this guitar?
This a collectible guitar, because there are only 50 in the world. Do you think the owner of this guitar plays it or is it too valuable? Guitars are meant to be played, would you ever buy a guitar and then not play it? Would you buy a piece of art and not hang it?

Fender Stratocaster, 1954-Present
The Fender Stratocaster, or Fender Strat, is the model electric guitar.
Notice the “horned” body. They give a guitarist easier access to the fretboard. Why do you think a design element like that is important?
The contoured shape fits nicely against someone playing it, why is that important? It’s also lightweight, how does its size compare to the guitarron? It’s so lightweight, musicians could swing it around while they played!
This electric guitar has a “whammy bar” (the long bar on the body), what do you think that does to the sound of the guitar?
It’s extremely easy to make, why do you think a luthier would want an easily manufactural design? Do you think a cheap, easily made model made the guitar more accessible? [Relate it to Chuck Sperry poster art]

Fort Wayne Museum of Art
SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES: to be used in conjunction with a visit to the museum and/or an in-class discussion of selected artworks

Art Projects and Discussion Starters

- Though luthiers design their own guitars the process is collaborative in that they learn from and base their designs on others. Have students create an artwork and then create a second piece inspired by another students work. What part of their peers work did they keep: the media, the design, the theme?

- Have students design their own guitars on paper. What material will they use? What will the design be? How many strings will it have? Make sure they consider each part of the guitar in their design.

- Challenge students to take their paper guitar drawings/sketches 3D to create a model. Provide them with multiple materials and ask them to bring in objects from home. A Kleenex box with strings can be the starting point! What other musical instruments can they make with found objects?

- Synesthetes are people who have two senses connected, for example, they can hear music and see colors. Have your students listen to different kinds of music and draw what they hear. How would they show the sound of a guitar visually?

Extensions

- History or Social Studies: Map a timeline of guitar design. How does the changing of guitars match with the rise and fall of musical genres?

- Art History: Have students look at paintings that include lutes, guitars, and other musical instruments. Discuss why these pieces would be included in the artworks. What information do they provide?

- Science: Our exhibition focuses on the art of guitar design. But what about the art of sound? Design a lesson and experiment that lets students play with sounds. How does size and shape of the guitar and the placement of the strings affect the sound?

- Science: Have students research the neuroscience behind the phenomenon of synesthesia and then pick a synesthetic artist. Do they make art or do they make music? How does their synesthesia impact their creativity?

- Music: switch the art lesson on synesthesia—have students choose a work of art or create a new one, then compose music or choose a song to match it.

- English: Singer/Songwriters like Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift are musical poets. Have students write poems and then recite them (Spoken Word). Now have them put them to music. Should their poem be read softly and slowly, quickly like a rapper, or with a southern drawl? Does changing the style/ tempo of the music change the meaning of the poem?
FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- The National Guitar Museum: http://www.nationalguitarmuseum.com/

- Check out Fender’s website for guitar designs and lessons: https://www.fender.com/articles/how-to/40-of-the-easiest-songs-to-learn-on-guitar

- The Art Institute of Chicago has multiple lesson plans on art and music, including this one: http://archive.artic.edu/modern/resource/1023

- A short video from the Smithsonian exploring the history of the electric guitar through music: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/category/arts-culture/the-history-of-the-electric-guitar/