



June 2008

An Artist's Personal Style



VISIT THE BMA

Look for Tom Miller's *Jungle Chest* in the Contemporary Wing. It's brightly painted with elephants, prancing antelopes, and lots of lively dots, curves, and squiggles.

Maryland Crab Feast Tom Miller

Seven friends, a dog, and a tableful of crabs. It's a familiar scene on a hot summer afternoon in Maryland. A man in striped shorts arrives with an overflowing pot of bright red crabs, steamed and ready for eating. Losing no time, the man in pink lifts a mallet to crack open a claw while the woman in the flowered sundress carefully picks out the meat with her fingers. Across the table, the man in the tank top and striped kufi cap gets ready to wash down the spicy crab with a cool drink.

Would a real crab feast in Baltimore look like this? Yes and no. Surely the activity of pounding, picking, eating, drinking, and chattering back and forth would be the same. Music would blare from a radio, and a cat might view the scene from her perch on a windowsill. But would the neighbors look as if they've been pressed flat? And would they have pointed shoulders? Would the crabs be so enormous?

In his own very personal style, artist Tom Miller takes us to his Baltimore neighborhood. He transforms each person's body and every piece of clothing (as well as the green bush and paper-covered table) into clear-cut flat shapes, free of shadows and extraneous details. He broadens one man's shoulders and narrows another man's legs. He heightens the woman's hairdo, and uses bright pink fingernails to call attention to the gesture of each hand. With eye-popping color, playful exaggeration, and sophisticated manipulation and layering of shapes and patterns, Tom Miller invites us to a Maryland crab feast where even the crabs appear to be full of life and enjoying the party.

Challenge for Students

Choose a familiar scene, and transform it into a picture using colored paper cut-outs. Feel free to exaggerate shapes, sizes, and colors.

Print the image on page 2 for your students.

Tom Miller. *Maryland Crab Feast*. 1994. 10-color screenprint. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Steven Scott Gallery, Baltimore, in Honor of the Artist, BMA 1995.1. ©Estate of Tom Miller

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