



# WHAT IF?

## FAMILY GUIDES

Scientists, architects, and artists often ask *What If?*

- What if man could fly like a bird?
- What if we could communicate with someone on the other side of the world—in seconds?
- **What if a post office could become an Art Museum?**

75 years ago a group of prominent and passionate Santa Barbara citizens asked that question and created the Santa Barbara Museum of Art from what was once a post office.

This year marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that founding and celebrates the beginning of a new era and new look for our Museum. In both 1941 and 2016, the answer to *What If?* became *Why Not?* and that simple question made things happen!

Use these *What If?* Cards to explore the Museum with friends and family. We hope they will spark ideas and inspire conversation about the possibilities and power of art, where the only limit is what we dare to imagine.

Using the map to the right, find the works of art on the front of each postcard and read the family guide cards while looking at the work of art.

# WHAT IF?





# WHAT IF YOU COULD PAINT SUNLIGHT?

1



The French artist, Claude Monet, painted this scene while looking out of his hotel window at the nearby Waterloo Bridge on the River Thames in London.

**Can you see any boats, people, or buildings?**

Rather than paint every detail, Monet was trying to give us a quick idea of what the day was like—an impression. For this reason he is associated with a group of like-minded painters called Impressionists. The Impressionists liked to paint outdoors to capture the way that sunlight changes the colors we see.

**What colors did Monet use in this painting?**

**When you stand back from the painting, does it get clearer or fuzzier as you move away?**



## WHAT IF TIGERS WERE CAPTURED IN STONE?



This brick, with its dynamic depiction of tigers, was made around 2,000 years ago during the Han dynasty in China as decoration for a tomb. In China, the tiger is associated with the western direction and is believed to be good luck. The fierce tiger is believed to have the power to drive away demons and provide protection for people.

**Look closely at this brick. How many tigers do you see?**

Notice the curves of their tails and the swirling design carved in the brick.

**Does the design make the tiger seem still or in motion?**

王



Some experts say the line of the carving echoes the fluid line of Chinese brush painting. What do you think? Ancient Chinese believed that the markings on the tiger's forehead resembled the Chinese character for “wang” or king.



## WHAT IF BRUSHSTROKES WERE SNOW?

3



This painting by the American artist George Bellows is filled with motion. Even his brush strokes seem to swirl and dip across the canvas. Bellows puts us in the middle of the New York City streets 100 years ago.

**What is missing from this scene that you might see on city streets today?**

**How does Bellows show us that the action takes place in winter?**

Take a closer look at the people in the scene. How would you feel if you were the little girl watching from the sidewalk? The man holding the horse?

**If you had to give this painting a new title, what would you call it?**





# WHAT IF A FOOTPRINT HELD THE STORY OF A LIFETIME?



This carved limestone fragment tells the story of the birth of the Buddha, or enlightened one. It is filled with symbols that reveal different episodes from his lifetime, and is thought to have been part of a larger stupa, or dome shaped burial mound. The mound originally contained physical remains of the Buddha that later became symbolic.

**Can you find Buddha's footprint?** In the upper section of this piece, the soles of Buddha's feet are shown in the midst of the legs of his followers.

**Do you see a wheel pattern on his feet?** This is the wheel of law, or dharma, set into motion by the Buddha when he gave his first sermon or lesson. It represents his teachings that are the path that will lead us to enlightenment.

**Do you see a goose carrying a flower?** The goose is carrying a lotus, the flower believed to represent purity, spirituality, and the sky. **Can you find a hand and a tree limb?** This is believed to be the branch-like arm of Buddha's mother under the tree where legend has it that she gave birth to him from her side.

**Why do you think this story is set in stone?** Early followers of the Buddha recorded events from his life on stone so they could be read by many people and would last for centuries.



# WHAT IF A PAINTING WAS LIKE A PUZZLE?



Frederick Hammersley painted these tangram-like combinations of colored shapes without a plan, just a feeling. He would lay down one shape, and then that shape dictated what and where the next would go, and so on.

**What kinds of shapes do you see in the painting? What colors? What do they remind you of?**

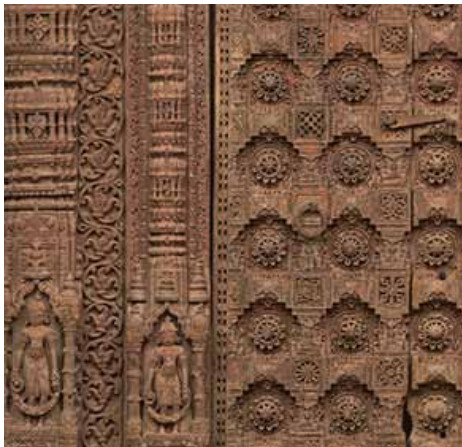
**If you were asked to give it a title what would it be?**

Hammersley called this painting *Growing game*. **Why do you think that might be? What do you notice that looks like it is growing?**

This painting is part of Hammersley's "Hunch" series, which he began in 1950. He said about it, "A hunch is the beginning of an impulse. When I paint these I don't have to worry about what the teacher says or what you would say. It feels right."



# WHAT IF A DOORWAY WAS MADE OF DREAMS?



**Can you find the four guardian figures at the base of the door?**

These four male and female figures are nature spirits, called Yaksha and Yakshi.

The Jain religion respects all living things and believes all beings, great and small, have a divine spark and are worthy of the same consideration.

**Who might you choose to guard your house?**

Notice the series of carved images above the door. These represent the 14 auspicious, or lucky, dreams of a Jina's mother. Each image was a promise of good things to come for her child.

**What images of good luck might you wish for in your dreams?**



# WHAT IF YOUR NICKNAME WAS "BUTTER THIEF"?



How can we tell that Krishna is dancing?

Is anyone else in motion?

The dancing *gopis*, or female milkmaids, surround Krishna and are shown moving to the music as he plays.

Can you find any other musicians? (Hint: look above his head.)

This painting, called a *pichhvai*, was created to hang in a temple as a backdrop for the figure of Krishna. It illustrates the legends associated with this “butter thief” deity and makes us feel as if we were part of the scene.





# WHAT IF ART COULD BREATHE?



Lewis deSoto's 26 foot long inflatable sculpture *Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)* is inspired by a 12th-century stone carving of Buddha at Gal Vihara (Rock Temple) in Sri Lanka. **Does the fact that he is made of vinyl, not stone, change the way you feel about this sculpture? Does it seem less serious or less permanent? Why?**

Each day in the gallery, the Buddha figure is activated, as if being brought to life, with an industrial fan, which inflates (inhales) when switched on at the beginning of the day, and deflates (exhales) when switched off at closing. The artist was re-creating or representing the idea of spiritual breath or *prana* in Hindu philosophy, which is common in the practice of yoga and now popular all over the world regardless of religious beliefs.

Look at the face of deSoto's Buddha and compare it to the detail of the Buddha's face reproduced here. **What is different?** The artist has given this Buddha his own face, not to be disrespectful, but to remind himself and us that life and death are connected just as are breathing in and breathing out. One follows the other and each one of us contains Buddha nature.