

Got an Hour? See the Met These 4 Ways

The collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art holds a number of remarkable depictions of powerful women. Here's our 50-minute critic's guide.

By **HOLLAND COTTER** DEC. 8, 2016



"Fragment of a Queen's Face" (circa 1353–1336 B.C.), from Egypt, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Damon Winter/The New York Times

New Yorkers live booked-up lives, and tourists are the busiest people in town. Who else dashes in beat-the-clock time from the World Trade Center to Rockefeller Center, to Trump Tower to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, pausing for selfies at each stop?

And when you hit the Met with your meter running, what can you do? The place is huge; ridiculous. Macy's, but more. So you have a decision to make. If you restrict yourself to a special show, or a gallery or two, you'll be able to see some art in a focused way, though you'll miss the breadth that makes the Met so awesome. If you opt to cover a lot of ground fast, you'll get the lay of the land, but as a drive-by blur.

Let me propose a compromise: a thematic tour, or set of tours, that would take in the multicultural mix of a great global museum, but selectively, in a purposefully hopscotching way, with an eye on the clock; tours that would last somewhere under an hour, the span of a workday lunch break.



Alma Thomas's "Red Roses Sonata" (1972), in the Metropolitan's Modern and Contemporary Wing.
Damon Winter/The New York Times

It's an image — you get the sense that Stein's personality forced it out of Picasso — of a woman thinking critically. In a different way, Florine Stettheimer's "Cathedrals of Wall Street" (1939) a few rooms away, with its insouciant image of the financial district, the capitalist heart of the nation, packed with preening politicians and soldiers, is the product of an artist painting critically. So is Alma Thomas's "Red Roses Sonata" from 1972, an abstract view of nature as a gorgeous but tattered curtain of red and blue.

Thomas's painting is in Gallery 923, near the museum's southwest corner, all those acres away from Hatshepsut's room. And if during your tour you've tracked down and stayed with even a fraction of the images of and by women en route, lunchtime is long over; it's probably too late to go back to the office, and your travel group has moved on and left you behind. So you might as well stay and look further: for an ancient Greek oil jug with paintings of women spinning yarn; a Zandra Rhodes wedding dress, pure '70s punk; for an exquisite willow basket by the Native American artist Datsolalee, patterned with dancing flames. The more you look, the more there is. So keep touring till closing time.