



A Usable Past: American Folk Art at the Colby College Museum of Art

Seth Thayer Jr., Elizabeth Finch, Tanya Sheehan

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A Usable Past brings together paintings, sculptures and works on paper by self-trained artists working in the eastern part of the US during the 19th century. Produced and originally circulated outside the sphere of fine art, these objects emerged from vernacular traditions that favored decorative aesthetics over mimesis. In the 20th century, artists, scholars and collectors came to believe that artworks like these expressed such supposedly quintessential American values as industriousness and ingenuity, and that they also served as native precursors to modernism. Featuring new scholarship, *A Usable Past* features highlights of Colby College's extensive holdings of American folk art.

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