



Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil
Claude Monet



1874

Oil on canvas

21 x 28 inches (54.3 x 73.3 inches)

Claude Monet

(French, 1840–1926)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: John G. Johnson Collection,
1917, cat. 1050

Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil

A small sailboat drifts along the water in this tranquil scene. Warm, golden light brightens the bridge's white pillars and the boat's sail. Their reflections in the water add pink, yellow, and orange hues to the blue of the river. Along the top of the bridge, a train chugs along, letting out puffs of smoke that drift across the sky. A gentle wind pushes the boat across the calm river below.

Claude Monet (Clah'd MOE-nay), the French artist who created this work of art, enjoyed painting the outdoors directly from observation. He appreciated the variety of colors in the sky, water, plants, and trees, especially those seen at sunrise and sunset. Notice the deep greens, blues, and purples in the grassy riverbank, and the blues and yellows in the train's smoke. Monet had to work quickly to capture the color and light as he saw it, since both frequently change as time passes. Look closely and you'll see the many short, quick brushstrokes that make up the grass, trees, water, and clouds. This style of painting is known as Impressionism.

This painting shows the Seine River in the town of Argenteuil (Ar-jen-TOY), located just outside Paris. Monet lived there when he painted this picture, so he didn't have to travel far to observe this scenic spot. At that time, the railroad service was expanding, and it became easier for city dwellers to take weekend trips to the nearby countryside. Perhaps the tiny figures in the boat are enjoying time away from the faster pace of urban life.

Looking Questions

What time of day do you think it is?

What do you see that makes you think so?

Describe the weather. What might it feel like if you were there?

What colors are the shadows? What about the reflections in the water?

Compare the two modes of transportation depicted. How are they different?

If you could enter this picture, where would you go and what would you do?



Yabu Lane below Atago
Utagawa Hiroshige I



No. 112 from the series
One Hundred Views of Edo
(*Meisho Edo Hya kkei*)

1857 (Edo Period, 1615–1868)

Color woodcut

Sheet: 14 x 10 inches (37.1 x 25.7 cm)

Utagawa Hiroshige I
(Japanese, 1797–1858)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of
Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1946-51-34

Yabu Lane below Atago

In this winter scene, people walk along a snow-covered street beside a bright blue stream. Three sparrows flutter about, looking for food. People shelter themselves from the falling snow with hats and umbrellas and leave trails of gray footprints as they hurry on their way. The snow dots the sky and water and weighs down the green bamboo on the right side of the picture, bending its branches.

This print is part of a series of images called *One Hundred Views of Edo* by the Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige I (Ooh-tah-gah-wah He-row-SHE-gay). Edo (Eh-doh), now called Tokyo, was a large and prosperous city in Japan that is the country's capital today. This scene depicts the area at the foot of Mount Atago. This place would have been easily recognizable to Edo residents because of the bamboo thicket on the right, which was at the edge of a well-known mansion. The bamboo was thought to protect the mansion's inhabitants from danger.

Hiroshige, who was born and raised in Edo, was known for capturing the mood and feeling of each place and season. His prints celebrated the beauty of the city and people's enjoyment of it. Many people collected these works of art because they were beautiful, colorful, and inexpensive—about the cost of a bowl of noodles. You can see the artist's signature in the red vertical box on the left side of the picture. The two red boxes in the upper right contain the name of the print series (right) and the title of the print (left).

Looking Questions

Describe the plants, trees, animals, and people you see in this picture.

Where might this scene take place? What clues tell you so?

Describe the mood or feeling of this place. How does the artist get that feeling across?

How would it feel to walk along this street?

What stories do you think are taking place?



The Life Line
Winslow Homer



1884

Oil on canvas

28 x 44 inches (72.7 x 113.7 cm)

Winslow Homer

(American, 1836–1910)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: The George W. Elkins Collection, E1924-4-15

The Life Line

This painting depicts a suspenseful moment during a heroic rescue. Crashing waves, dark threatening skies, and fierce winds surround the two figures in the center. Remnants of a sinking ship are barely visible in the upper left. Only a thin rope supports the weight of the man and woman, who are suspended above the turbulent sea. The woman's clothing and hair are soaking wet, her head hangs back, and her right arm dangles above the water. She holds onto the rope with her left hand, indicating that she is conscious. Perhaps the figures on the distant cliff on the right wait to help the man and woman as soon as they reach the shore.

One year before he painted *The Life Line*, American artist Winslow Homer witnessed a demonstration of a lifesaving device like the one shown in this picture. He included details that show how it worked. For example, the slack of rope in the water on the left indicates that the people are being pulled to safety by the lower rope on the right. In addition, notice how only the right half of the upper rope has water droplets along its bottom edge. The left half was wrung dry as the pulley moved from left to right.

Homer left some details of this story a mystery. A red scarf flaps in the wind and hides the man's face. Why could this be? Homer also left the conclusion of the story unclear. It is up to us to imagine how this adventure ends.

Looking Questions

What do you think is happening in this painting?

What is the weather like? How can you tell?

What do you think the ropes connect to on either end?

If you could step into this painting, what would you hear, smell, see, touch, and taste?

Why do you think the artist chose this moment of the story to depict?

How do you think the story will end?



South Philly (Mattress Flip Front)

Zoe Strauss



2001 (negative); 2003 (print)

Chromogenic print

Image: 6 x 10 inches (17.5 x 25.7 cm)

Sheet: 8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 26.4 cm)

Zoe Strauss

(American, born 1970)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with funds contributed by Theodore T. Newbold and Helen Cunningham, 2003-104-8

South Philly (Mattress Flip Front)

This young boy is in the middle of a daring flip over a pile of worn mattresses. His arms swing out to his sides, helping him to complete his rotation. The boy's perfectly vertical body and round face create the shape of an exclamation point that hovers over the blue horizontal line of the top mattress. How did he jump so high and where will he land? Will the mattresses cushion his landing, or will he soar right over them?

In the background, another boy in a white T-shirt looks on. He holds his hand up to his mouth, perhaps reacting to his friend's acrobatic moves. The pavement, sidewalk, and red brick building with graffiti tell us that this scene takes place outside on the street or perhaps in an empty lot. The mattresses are missing some of their stuffing and the pile has shifted to the right, suggesting this game may have been going on for a while.

Zoe Strauss, the artist who took this picture, believes that "an important role of art is to mirror what is happening in the world."¹ She often photographs what is most familiar to her: the people and places in her neighborhood in South Philadelphia. This particular photograph is part of her larger project to document life in the city. During the ten years that she worked on the project, Strauss held annual outdoor public exhibitions of over two hundred of the photographs. Each of these pictures tells a story, and together they present an intimate narrative of Philadelphia.

¹ "Interview with Zoe Strauss, photographer in the *Whitney Biennial 2006: Day for Night*," Clare Hurley, June 2, 2006, accessed March 19, 2010, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/jun2006/stra-j02.shtml>.

Looking Questions

What is going on in this picture?

Describe the setting of this photograph—time of day, season, and location.

How do you think each boy is feeling?

Where do you think the boy in the air will land? Then what will happen?



Portage (detail)
William Kentridge



2000

Book with chine collé figures cut from black Canson paper, affixed to pages from *Le Petit Larousse Illustré* (Paris, around 1906), mounted on Velin Arches Crème paper, folded as a leperello

Image and sheet (unfolded): 10 x 166 inches (27.5 x 422.9 cm)

Portfolio: 11 x 9 x inches (28.6 x 24.8 x 2.1 cm)

William Kentridge

(South African, born 1955)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with funds contributed by the Young Friends of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund, and the Print Revolving Fund, 2008-241-1 © 2011 William Kentridge

Portage (detail)

This image is a detail from a larger work of art—an accordion-fold book that is almost fourteen feet long. To create it, the artist William Kentridge arranged small pieces of torn black paper into figures. He then glued the figures onto pages that he removed from a French dictionary.

While the dictionary definitions in the background represent precise, factual information, the procession of shadowy figures presents a narrative that is more open to interpretation. Where are the people going, and why? Perhaps they are travelers on a road. Perhaps they are moving from one place to another. Maybe they are participating in a parade or celebration. The people carry various items such as chairs, tools, musical instruments, and other objects. What might these objects tell us about their stories?

The poses of the four figures pictured here give us clues about their feelings. The woman on the left seems to stride forward confidently, while the person in front of her looks down, perhaps tired or lost in thought. The next person holds something above her head. What could it be? The figure on the far right seems especially burdened with a heavy load. Whoever they may be, they move forward together.

Kentridge was born and raised in South Africa. His parents, who had Lithuanian and German-Jewish ancestry, were lawyers who worked against apartheid, a system of racial segregation. Kentridge's work, which includes films, drawings, sculptures, and theatrical productions, often addresses political and social issues.

Looking Questions

Where could these people be going?

Where might they be coming from?

What sorts of items do they carry?

Could this be a parade? A journey?

A migration? A celebration?

Look closely at the figures' poses.

What could each person's story be?

Why do you think the artist used torn paper and pages from an old book in this work of art?



Tomb Figures: Bactrian Camel and Central Asian Groom

Artist unknown



Bactrian Camel

618–907 (Tang Dynasty, 618–907)

Earthenware with *sancai* (tricolor) glaze

Height: 32 inches (81.3 cm)

Central Asian Groom

618–907 (Tang Dynasty, 618–907)

Earthenware with *sancai* (tricolor) glaze and traces of painted decoration on head

Height: 17 inches (43.2 cm)

China

Philadelphia Museum of Art: [Camel:] Gift of Mrs. John Wintersteen, 1964-9-1; [Groom:] Gift of Charles H. Ludington from the George Crofts Collection, 1923-21-12

Tomb Figures: Bactrian Camel and Central Asian Groom

These ceramic figures of a Bactrian camel and groom were made over one thousand years ago in China for the tombs of wealthy aristocrats or merchants. Objects such as these, along with figures of guardians, soldiers, and entertainers, were placed in tombs so that the spirit of the deceased person might have a rich and full afterlife similar to the life he or she had lived on earth.

China was the eastern end of the Silk Route (also called the Silk Road), some five thousand miles of roads linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, along which traders exchanged not only goods and services but also customs and languages. Two-humped Bactrian camels were ideal for carrying the trade goods. Standing seven feet tall at the hump, they can carry great weight, walk on varied terrain with their large feet, and store fat in their humps, converting it to energy or water on long journeys.

The unknown artists who made these sculptures filled them with a lively spirit. The camel twists its neck and opens its mouth to bray loudly. The groom raises his arm as if to control a stubborn camel with invisible reins. Attached to the camel's saddle you can see a water flask, a slab of smoked meat, and a saddlebag with a fanged guardian face.

The figures were coated with cream, amber, and green glazes, which still shine brightly after a thousand years. The groom's face and legs were not glazed, but instead were originally painted with watercolors, which have faded away over time.

Looking Questions

Describe the poses and expressions of the camel and the man.

What do they tell you about each?

How would you describe the camel's behavior?

What textures and colors do you see on each figure?

What material was used to make these sculptures?

How can you tell?

These figures were found in ancient tombs in China.

Why might tombs have been filled with such things?



White-Headed Eagle with Yellow Catfish

John James Audubon



Plate 31 from *Birds of America*, No. 7
1828

Plate: 25 x 38 inches (64.8 x 97.8 cm)

Original watercolor by
John James Audubon
(American, 1785–1851)

Hand-colored etching and aquatint
by **Robert Havell, Jr.** (British (active
United States), 1793–1878)

Printed and colored by
Robert Havell, Sr.
(British, 1769–1832)

Published by **John James Audubon**

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Caleb W. Hornor
and Peter T. Hornor, 1968-120-1

White-Headed Eagle with Yellow Catfish

With his sharp talons, piercing eye, pointed beak, and imposing size, this white-headed eagle appears strong and fierce. Also known as the bald eagle, this bird is easily recognizable because of its white head and tail, which stand out against its dark brown body. As the official emblem of the United States of America, it represents majesty and courage.

As a young man, John James Audubon, a budding scientist and artist, enjoyed studying birds on his father's farm near Philadelphia. In 1820, he took a three-month expedition down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, carefully observing a variety of birds and recording information about them through drawing, painting, and writing. His original watercolor paintings were later etched and printed in a seven-volume set of books called *Birds of America*, which included 435 large prints. This print is one page from volume 7. Audubon presented the birds in their natural habitats, engaging in typical activities such as hunting, feeding, courting, and caring for their young. Each image was accompanied by a written description.

In his text, Audubon described the bald eagle's "strength, daring, and cool courage," and noted its "ferocious, overbearing, and tyrannical temper."¹ He admired its majesty in flight, soaring high with its impressive wingspan of seven to eight feet. Audubon witnessed bald eagles catching their prey and stealing recent kill of other birds, a notorious tactic of the eagle. Perhaps such scenes inspired Audubon's image, in which the bald eagle grasps a catfish with his razor-sharp talons.

¹ John James Audubon, *Birds of America*, Volumes 1–7, First Octavo Edition, 1840, accessed July 12, 2010, http://web4.audubon.org/bird/BoA/BOA_index.html.

Looking Questions

The artist who created this image was a scientist and an artist. Which parts of the picture seem to focus on scientific accuracy?

What did the artist show us about what the eagle eats and where it lives?

What artistic choices were made to create a captivating image? Where do you see interesting lines, shapes, colors, and textures?

Where do you see areas of contrast—between light and dark, rough and smooth?

What adjectives best describe this eagle? Fierce or peaceful? Powerful or weak? How does the artist communicate those qualities?



Dog Barking at the Moon

Joan Miró



1926

Oil on canvas

28 x 36 inches (73 x 92.1 cm)

Joan Miró

(Spanish, 1893–1983)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952-61-82 © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Dog Barking at the Moon

In this sparse landscape, a ladder reaches up toward the black night sky. Nearby, a colorful dog stands on the brown earth, looking up to the half moon and bird above him. The bright colors and humorous subject matter create a fun, playful mood. The title of the painting, *Dog Barking at the Moon*, adds to this light-hearted feeling. However, the dark background and the vast empty spaces between the dog, ladder, and moon also produce a sense of loneliness and mystery.

Although he spent each winter in Paris, Joan Miró (J'wahn Mee-ROE) found inspiration for his art in his home in Catalonia (Cat-ah-LONEee-ah), Spain, where he made sketches on his family farm. He based many of his paintings on these drawings and his memories of the farm, including this one. In Paris, he was influenced by Surrealist artists and poets, who were inspired by dreams and the unconscious.

While his art was always based on actual places and objects, Miró thought of reality as “a point of departure, never as a stopping place.”¹ In *Dog Barking at the Moon*, he provided a recognizable landscape, but the exact setting remains unclear. The dog, moon, and bird are also identifiable, but they are distorted. The ladder reaches toward empty space, resting on nothing. The original sketch for the painting included words, with the moon telling the dog that he does not care about his barking. Miró omitted these words in the final painting, leaving it up to the viewer to imagine the story taking place.

¹ Margit Rowell and Ann Temkin, “Miró,” in *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, vol. 83, no. 356/357 (Autumn, 1987) (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987), 6.

Looking Questions

Describe what you think is happening in the picture.

When and where do you think this is taking place?
What do you see that tells you so?

What is the mood or feeling of the painting?
What do you see that creates that feeling?

What do you think the dog will do next?
What about the moon and bird?

If you could write a conversation between the dog, moon, bird, and ladder, what would they say?



The City
Fernand Léger



1919

Oil on canvas

91 x 117 inches (231.1 x 298.4 cm)

Fernand Léger
(French, 1881–1955)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: A. E. Gallatin Collection, 1952-61-58 © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

The City

The French artist Fernand Léger (Fer-nahn Le-zhey) was inspired by the modern city and celebrated its vitality in his art. In *The City*, he filled the painting with geometric shapes and patterns that remind us of lights, shop windows, signs, buildings, and other objects. Unlike a traditional landscape in which space recedes into the background, many shapes and colors push toward the foreground.

Léger described modern urban life as “more fragmented and faster moving than life in previous eras.”¹ He captured this exciting, fast-paced movement with striking colors, eye-catching patterns, and overlapping shapes that crowd together and compete for our attention. Our eyes jump from one place to the next, creating a sensation similar to what it feels like to move through busy city streets. With so many interesting things to see, we seem to only catch glimpses of each.

Living in the vibrant city of Paris, Léger admired the bold text and graphics on billboards and posters, and was fascinated by the power of train engines and airplane propellers. He also enjoyed movies, a relatively new form of popular entertainment in the early twentieth century, and appreciated the way scenes quickly moved from one to the next. All of these sources of inspiration are reflected in *The City*, such as in the white letters (including Léger’s initials), flat colors, mechanical people, and its collage-like quality. The painting’s size—over seven feet tall and almost ten feet wide—is also similar to a billboard or movie screen, encouraging viewers to feel as though they can easily enter this lively and colorful city.

¹Jodi Hauptman. “Imagining Cities,” in by Carolyn Lanchner (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Department of Publications, 1998), 73.

Looking Questions

Describe the shapes, patterns, and colors you see in this painting. What do they remind you of?

What letters can you find? Why might they be here?

Look at the title of the painting. How does it relate to what you see?

What do you think the artist is saying about the experience of being in a city?



"Tar Beach 2" Quilt
 Faith Ringgold



1990

Silk

66 x 67 inches (167.6 x 170.2 cm)

Faith Ringgold

(American, born 1930)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased
with funds contributed by W. B. Dixon Stroud,
1992-100-1 © 1990 Faith Ringgold

“Tar Beach 2” Quilt

Faith Ringgold, who created this “story quilt,” is both an artist and author. This quilt tells the story of Cassie Louise Lightfoot, the protagonist in Ringgold’s children’s book, *Tar Beach*.

Several parts of the story are included in the picture. In the foreground, Cassie’s parents play cards with their friends on the tar roof (“tar beach”) of their apartment building in New York City. Cassie and her brother Bebe lie on a mattress nearby, looking up at the stars. A picnic dinner awaits them. Wet clothes and sheets hang to dry, flapping in the night wind. The George Washington Bridge stands tall behind the colorful buildings in the background.

In the book, Cassie dreams that she can fly and overcome any obstacle she faces. In the quilt, she appears twice in the sky, claiming the bridge for herself and giving her father the Union Building so that he won’t have to worry about employment. Ringgold included parts of the story in white writing in the purple sky.

To create Cassie’s story, Ringgold took inspiration from her own childhood in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City. Much of her art explores social and political themes and features powerful women, especially African American women. For example, Cassie’s ability to fly gives her freedom and power to achieve anything she sets her mind to. At the end of the book, Cassie proclaims that anyone can fly, stating, “All you need is somewhere to go you can’t get to any other way. The next thing you know, you’re flying among the stars.”

Looking Questions

What are the different people doing in this picture?

Which characters appear more than once? Where?

Where does this story take place? What do you see that tells you that?

Some characters are flying. What might flying symbolize?

How is this different from other quilts you’ve seen?

How is it similar?



Portrait of the Artist's Mother
Henry Ossawa Tanner



1897

Oil on canvas

29 x 39 inches (74.3 x 100.3 cm)

Henry Ossawa Tanner
(American, 1859–1937)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Partial gift of Dr. Rae Alexander-Minter and purchased with the W. P. Wilstach Fund, the George W. Elkins Fund, the Edward and Althea Budd Fund, and with funds contributed by The Dietrich Foundation, EW1993-61-1

Portrait of the Artist's Mother

A woman sits on a wooden rocking chair and gazes ahead, deep in thought. A golden light brightens her face and left hand as well as the shawl that drapes onto the floor. She wears a long navy dress, and her black leather shoes are just visible beneath it. She appears relaxed, holding a palm leaf fan in one hand and gently resting the other against her cheek. Her pose and facial expression suggest that she is a strong and thoughtful woman.

African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner painted this portrait of his mother, Sarah Elizabeth Miller Tanner, in 1897. When Sarah was a child, her mother put her and her siblings on an oxcart bound for Pennsylvania to escape slavery in Virginia via the Underground Railroad. Later, she married Benjamin Tucker Tanner, a highly educated minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and they had nine children. Their son Henry showed an early interest in art and studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. In 1891 he moved to Paris to pursue a successful artistic career and escape the racial discrimination he experienced in America.

Tanner created this portrait on a visit home after a long time abroad. He based the composition on James Abbott McNeill Whistler's famous 1871 painting known as "Whistler's Mother." However, while Whistler's portrait is cold and austere, Tanner's is warm and affectionate. In the bottom right corner, Tanner wrote, "To my dear mother, H. O. Tanner." This sensitive portrayal and endearing inscription capture the love and admiration the artist felt for his mother, the center of his large and distinguished family.

Looking Questions

Describe this woman's pose and facial expression. What might she be feeling?

What might her clothing and the setting tell us about her?

Where are the brightest parts of the picture? The darkest? Why might that be?

How would you describe the mood of the painting?

If you could read this woman's thoughts, what do you think they would be?



Woman of Tehuantepec

Tina Modotti



Around 1929

Gelatin silver print

Image and sheet: 8 x 7 inches (21.3 x 18.7 cm)

Tina Modotti

(Italian, 1896–1942)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Zigrosser, 1968-162-40

Woman of Tehuantepec

This black-and-white photograph shows a woman balancing a large painted gourd on her head. Tina Modotti (Moe-DOT-tee), the photographer, took the picture in 1929 when she traveled to the town of Tehuantepec (tay-WAHN-tay-peck) in southern Mexico. The women in the town, known as “Tehuana” (tay-WAHN-ahs), have long been admired for their strength, independence, and colorful clothing. Traditionally, they controlled the economic and political life in the region. Modotti took a series of photographs of Tehuana women engaged in everyday activities such as caring for their children and walking to market.

Modotti carefully composed this picture to draw attention to the woman’s strength and beauty. Her stable posture, powerful gesture, and calm facial expression show her self-confidence. Modotti cropped the photograph so that the woman dominates the composition. She also took the picture from a low vantage point so that we look up at the woman, emphasizing her importance. Striking shapes and patterns frame her face—from the repeating triangles, squares, and diamonds in her dress, to her shiny circular pendant and earring, and the delicate flowers, fruits, and leaves painted on the gourd she carries.

Modotti was born in Italy and immigrated to California when she was sixteen years old. She moved to Mexico in 1923 and learned photography from the renowned American photographer Edward Weston. She became best known for her pictures of Mexican women, children, workers, and artisans. Both art and politics were equally important to Modotti, and she abandoned photography in 1932 to dedicate herself to political activism.

Looking Questions

What shapes and patterns do you see in this photograph?

From what angle was this photograph taken?

How does that affect the picture?

What might this woman be thinking and feeling?

What makes you say that?

Imagine the rest of the scene around the woman.

What is her story?



Bicycle Race
Antonio Ruiz



1938

Oil on canvas

13 x 17 inches (33.3 x 43.2cm)

Antonio Ruiz

(Mexican, 1897–1964)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with the
Nebinger Fund, 1949-24-1

Bicycle Race

Four athletes speed toward the finish line in this colorful painting of a bicycle race. With determined looks on their faces, the two leaders hunch forward and tightly grasp the handlebars, pedaling as fast as they can. It is a bright, sunny day, and many spectators have come to watch the exciting event. On either side of the cyclists, children raise their arms and cheer. Other people sit and watch from atop a high wall on the right, their legs dangling off the edge. On the left, special guests and judges observe the race from a grandstand, decorated with colorful banners that blow in the breeze. Visible in the upper left, several people have even climbed up into tall tree branches to get a better view.

Mexican artist Antonio Ruiz (Roo-EEZ) painted this scene of a country fair in his hometown of Texcoco (Tes-KO-ko), located in central Mexico. He included many details to capture the look and feel of the town. For example, the red, white, and green striped banners are the colors of the Mexican flag. Jacaranda trees, which are found throughout Central America, loom over the street with their long branches. Ruiz also carefully depicted the different people's clothing, such as the judges' suits, the young boys' shorts and caps, and the sombreros, or wide-brimmed hats, worn by many of the spectators. Ruiz often added humorous details into his paintings, such as the goat bending down to eat something in the lower right, and the sleeping dog in the lower left corner.

Looking Questions

What is everyone doing in this picture?

How would you describe the setting—the place, season, and weather?

How does the artist show that the road goes far back into the distance?

What moment in the race is this? Why do you think so?

If you could enter this picture, what sounds would you hear?

If you could trade places with someone in the painting, who would it be and why?



Sunflowers
Vincent van Gogh



1888 or 1889

Oil on canvas

36 3/8 x 28 inches (92.4 x 71.1 cm)

Vincent van Gogh

(Dutch, 1853–1890)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Mr. and Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Jr., Collection, 1963-116-19

Sunflowers

Vincent van Gogh created this painting of twelve bright sunflowers in a simple clay jug soon after moving to Arles, a quiet, sun-drenched town in southern France, far from the noisy streets of Paris where he had been working. Excited about living in fresh, clean country air, surrounded by the vibrant colors of nature in Arles—especially the fields of sunflowers—he was also looking forward to the arrival of his friend, the artist Paul Gauguin (go-gan). Van Gogh planned to complete a series of sunflower paintings to celebrate his new beginnings and to decorate his new house and studio, “so the whole thing will be a symphony in blue and yellow.”¹ In this work, van Gogh painted the flowers in various stages of growth and decay, working quickly before they wilted. Some are only partially open, several are in full bloom with their lush, yellow petals spread wide, while another is already beginning to droop.

Although he grew up seeing the detailed, realistic style of Dutch painting, van Gogh painted in an Expressionist manner, using large brushstrokes and thick paint (called impasto). Each dab is visible on the canvas, and the entire surface seems to move and come to life. Bold colors—rusty brown, rich red, dark green, and gold—as well as an array of light yellows and oranges twist and turn against the pale turquoise background above the mustard tabletop. The orange outline of the jug and the artist’s signature, “Vincent,” help anchor the tossing, spiky petals.

¹ Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh, Arles, around 21 August 1888, from van Gogh’s Letters, Abridged & Annotated web exhibit. <http://webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/18/526.htm>

Looking Questions

Can you find twelve flowers in this painting?

Which ones are in full bloom? Wilting? Why would van Gogh choose to include wilting flowers?

Which flower has a red-orange center? Where else do you see this color (outlining the jug, the table edge, and “Vincent”)?

How does van Gogh use yellow to lead your eye through the painting?

What is the mood of this painting? What do you see that communicates this?



Sugar Cane
Diego Rivera



1931

Fresco

57 1/8 x 94 1/8 inches (145.1 x 239.1 cm)

Diego Rivera

(Mexican, 1886–1957)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Cameron Morris, 1943-46-2 © 2014 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Sugar Cane

In this painting, Diego Rivera tells a story about life in Mexico during the Spanish colonial era before the revolution of 1910–20. Instead of focusing on a hero or several important characters, this story is about the millions of native Mexicans who worked for wealthy landowners for low wages. Even children raised and harvested crops instead of going to school. Beyond the two young girls and boy gathering papayas in the foreground, we see a light-skinned landowner lounging on his porch in a hammock, two overseers with guns and bandoliers (bullet belts) crisscrossing their chests, and workers cutting, tying, and carrying enormous stalks of sugar cane.

After attending art school in Mexico, Rivera traveled to Europe and visited churches in small Italian towns with murals illustrating stories from the Bible. Everyone, regardless of income or education, could understand the tales just by looking at the wall paintings, which impressed the young artist. When Álvaro Obregón, the newly elected Mexican president (1920–24), began commissioning public murals to give illiterate Mexicans a sense of their own history, Rivera quickly returned home.

With the help of skilled Mexican artisans, Rivera modified fresco techniques from Italian and pre-Columbian cultures. Powdered pigments are mixed with water and quickly applied to fresh plaster spread on a wall before the plaster dries. The artist used this technique to paint murals on the outer walls of public buildings throughout Mexico and in the United States, including this portable fresco, which was painted for an exhibition of Rivera's work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Looking Questions

How many people do you see? Which ones are children?

Which parts of the painting look warm and sunny? Cool and shady?

Where could this scene be taking place? Why? What is happening in the foreground? Middle ground? Background?

Can you find vertical, curving, and diagonal shapes? The color white?

What do you think Rivera wants us to know about Mexican history?



Mandarin in His Study
Artist unknown



1750–1850 (Qing Dynasty, 1644–1911)

Ink and color on silk;
mounted as a hanging scroll

5 feet, 1/16 inch x 2 feet, 7 1/2 inches
(152.6 x 80 cm)

China

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with Museum
funds from the Simkhovitch Collection, 1929-40-188

Mandarin in His Study

This portrait is of a Chinese scholar and civil servant, known as a mandarin, who lived over 150 years ago during the late Qing (ching) dynasty. Mandarins spent many years studying to pass difficult exams for their position. The term “mandarin” refers to the Chinese dialect they spoke and the post they held as government officials in the emperor’s court. In addition to writing about the history of the Chinese people and helping run the government, mandarins created poetry, music, painting, and calligraphy.

Seated on an armchair in his study, this mandarin wears a plain, black robe and hat. At work, he would have dressed in fancy, formal court robes with an embroidered crest showing his high rank, and sported a jewel knob on his hat. His feet rest on a wooden stand with rollers—a foot massager! Behind him are books and writing tools in a container, reflecting his favorite pastimes. Nearby on an antique table, there is a small, wild orchid, prized for its delicacy and a symbol of the scholar’s modesty. Look for an ancient pine tree in the painting above his head. Because a pine tree is always green, it symbolizes a long and productive life.

The large Chinese calligraphy above the mandarin means “pouring energy,” and refers to the old man’s vigor and good health. A poem, written in two parts on the back wall, describes a beautiful, chilly landscape with the purple clouds and blue skies of a clear, autumn morning. Like the orchid and the painting of the pine tree, the poem evokes thoughts of nature.

Looking Questions

How old do you think this person is? Why?

Where does he live? How can you tell?

Make a list of all the objects in this painting. Based on these objects, what are this person’s favorite pastimes?

Can you find two things that show his love of nature?

Imagine a vertical line through the center of this painting and compare the right and left sides. What is similar and different?

Does this painting feel balanced or off balance? Why?



Blind Singer
William Henry Johnson



Around 1939–40

Color silkscreen print on paper

17 1/2 x 11 9/16 inches (44.5 x 29.4 cm)

William Henry Johnson

(American, 1901–1970)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum (also known as the Philadelphia Civic Center Museum), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2004-111-719

Blind Singer

This lively image shows two musicians entertaining us with their voices, a guitar, and a tambourine. Facing us directly and standing close together, the man and woman catch our attention with their dynamic poses and their colorful clothing: a yellow hat with a blue band, a red tie, orange and blue jackets, and green shoes. Their bodies suggest movement: fingers strumming the strings of the guitar, hands shaking a tambourine, feet tapping, and hips swaying to the music.

William Henry Johnson would have seen musicians like these performing on busy street corners in New York City, where he worked and lived. He may have based these particular figures on gospel and blues singers from the 1930s and 1940s, such as Blind Boy Fuller, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, or the Reverend Gary Davis, who became popular first in the American South and then in northern cities such as Chicago and New York.

Johnson enjoyed the sights and sounds of New York's Harlem neighborhood and captured the fashion, music, and dance around him in his images. His artistic style was influenced by the geometric shapes of West African sculpture, which he could see in the city's museums. He was also inspired by colors and patterns used by other great modern artists like Pablo Picasso.

Looking Questions

What are these people holding? What are they doing?

Describe the lines, colors, and shapes that you see.

What kind of mood do they create?

What do you think you would see and hear if this work of art came to life?



Mr. Prejudice
Horace Pippin



1943

Oil on canvas

18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches (46 x 35.9 cm)

Horace Pippin

(American, 1888–1946)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Matthew T. Moore, 1984-108-1

Mr. Prejudice

Mr. Prejudice is a small painting with a powerful message. At the bottom, a group of figures, half white and half black, stand on either side of a large V. The men wear uniforms: a doctor in white, two sailors in blue, two aviators in tan, two men operating machinery, and two Army soldiers in brown, including a self-portrait of Horace Pippin himself, with his right arm that was injured in battle hanging at his side. Above them are larger figures: a white-robed member of the Ku Klux Klan (a white supremacy group), a white man in a red shirt holding a noose, and a brown Statue of Liberty. At the top, a grim-faced white man hammers a wedge down into the V.

Pippin was deeply affected by his experiences as a soldier in a segregated troop during World War I in France. Despite helping the United States achieve victory abroad—symbolized by the V—he and his fellow African American soldiers were treated poorly when they returned home. Pippin painted *Mr. Prejudice* over twenty-five years later, toward the end of World War II, when he saw more discrimination against the next generation of African American soldiers. This painting is one of his strongest artistic statements about segregation, racial prejudice, and social injustice.

Looking Questions

What do you notice first in this painting?

Look closely. What can you tell about the figures?

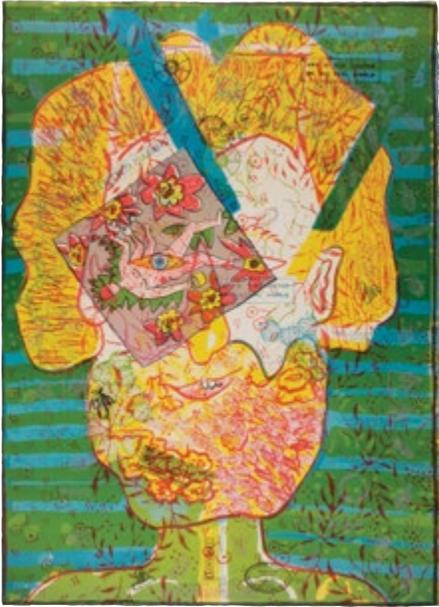
How are they interacting?

What do you think Horace Pippin is saying in this painting?

What makes you say that?



Isiah
Isiah Zagar



1986

Color offset lithograph

Image/sheet: 29 x 213/4 inches (76 x 55.2 cm)

Isaiah Zagar

(American, born 1939)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of the Brandywine Workshop, Philadelphia, in memory of Anne d'Harnoncourt, 2009-61-90

Isaiah

Isaiah Zagar created this self-portrait in 1986. He decorated this energetic print with vibrant colors and lively patterns. Turquoise and green horizontal stripes, layered with red flowers and leaves, create a playful background. Bold, red lines follow the contours of his bright yellow hair, eyes, nose, mouth, and beard. Look closely to find people, leaves, branches, flowers, hands, and even a coffee cup embedded within the picture. Zagar also included stamp-like texts, such as "Art is the center of the real world" and "Philadelphia is the center of the art world," convictions that he has stated in his work for decades. These colors, patterns, images, and ideas become a part of Zagar's face, hinting about the artist's thoughts on identity and how he sees himself.

Isaiah Zagar is best known for his colorful, public mosaics on buildings in Philadelphia and around the world. The mosaics are made with pieces of mirror, tile, glass, and a variety of other materials. His largest artwork is Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, a massive, mosaic-decorated art environment outdoors at 1020 South Street that covers half a city block.

Looking Questions

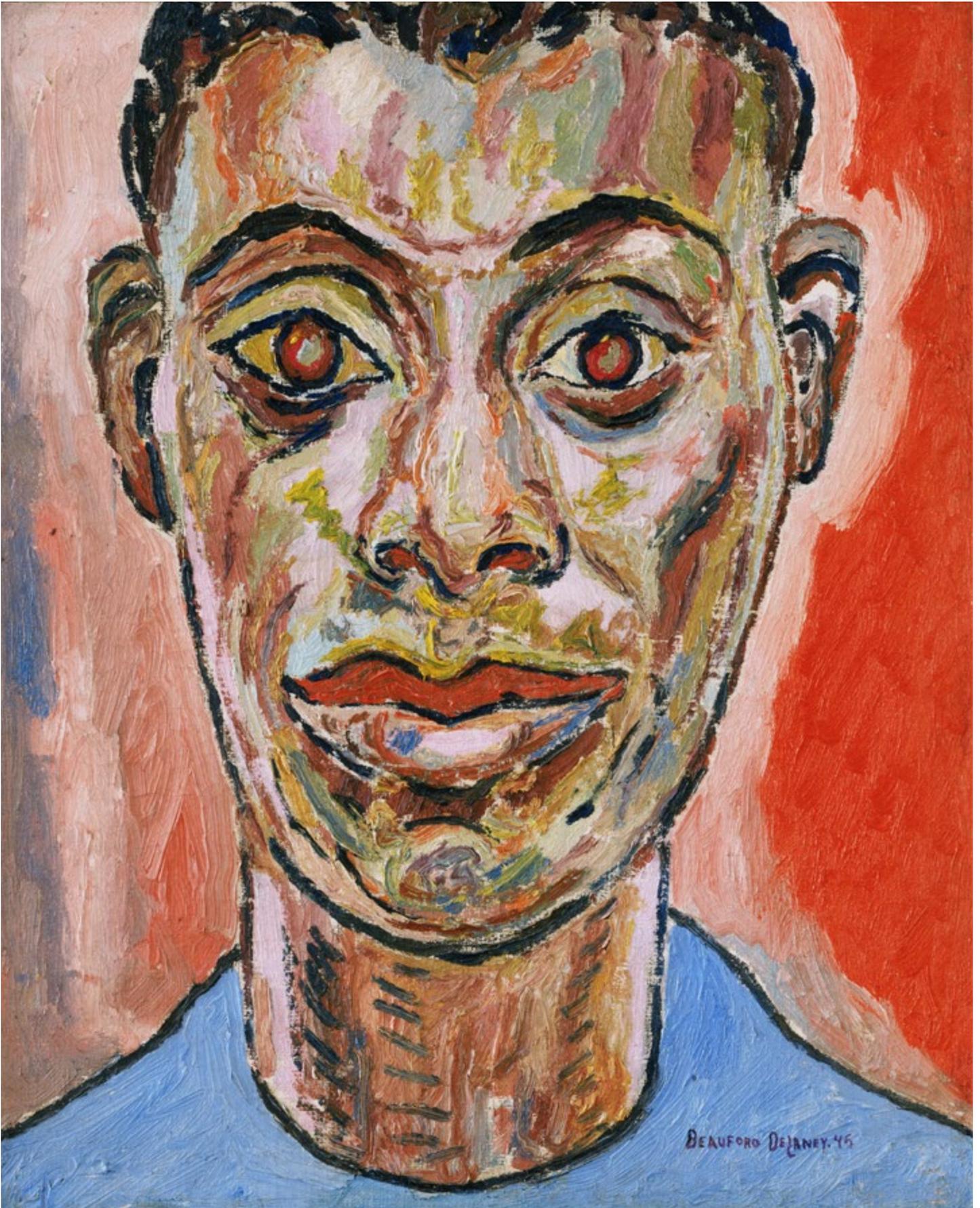
Describe the colors, lines, and patterns in this print.

What objects, figures, words, and phrases can you find?

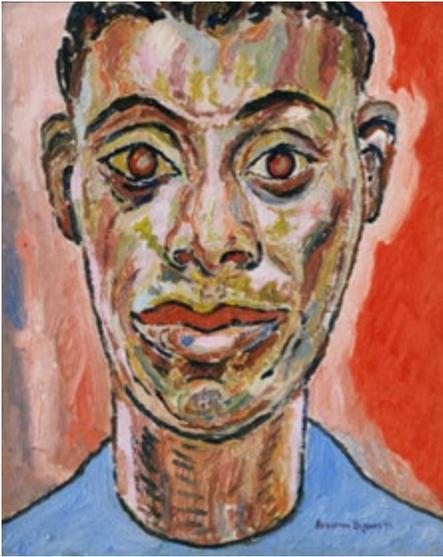
Isaiah Zagar is best known for his colorful public mosaics. How is this image like a mosaic?

What do you think he wanted to tell us about himself in this self-portrait? What does he say about the role of art in the world?

What words or phrases would you include in your self-portrait?



Portrait of James Baldwin
Beauford Delaney



1945

Oil on canvas

22 x 18 inches (55.9 x 45.7 cm)

Beauford Delaney

(American, 1901–1979)

Philadelphia Museum of Art: 125th Anniversary Acquisition. Purchased with funds contributed by The Daniel W. Dietrich Foundation in memory of Joseph C. Bailey and with a grant from The Judith Rothschild Foundation, 1998-3-1

Portrait of James Baldwin

In this striking portrait, the close-up image of a face with large features and eyes wide open stares back at us. This person's head almost fills the frame and is rendered with a rainbow of colors. Set against a bright red and pink background, it sits atop a strong, solid neck shaped like a cylinder and gently sloping, baby blue shoulders. This is a portrait of James Baldwin (1924–1987), who was twenty-one years old when he posed for this painting, and was soon to become a noted author and an impassioned, articulate spokesperson for the civil rights movement. Beauford Delaney called him "a prince."

The heavy black outlines around Baldwin's head, neck, and large, staring eyes barely contain the many colors that define his forehead, cheeks, chin, lips, and nose. The combination of bold and subtle colors, thick paint (called impasto), energetic brushstrokes, and frontal gaze creates an unforgettable intensity and presence. This portrait presents Baldwin as Delaney saw him: a vibrant young man full of energy and promise, lovingly surrounded by a soft pink aura.

Delaney and Baldwin had much in common. They were both sons of strict Southern preachers and grew up in families that struggled financially. They both did well in public school, attracting the attention and support of their teachers. After the death of Baldwin's father, Delaney became Baldwin's mentor and surrogate father, helping him find a job, teaching him an artist's way of life, and introducing him to all kinds of music—classical, blues, boogie-woogie, and jazz—as well as to artists, musicians, and wealthy supporters.

Looking Questions

Which parts of the painting look flat? Three-dimensional? Point to some shadows, highlights, outlines, and parallel lines.

What features of this person's face stand out? Why?

What adjectives would you use to describe his personality? Why?

Why might Delaney have chosen to paint a full-face, close-up view of Baldwin?

If you were having your portrait made, what would you want it to say about you?