

Selections from the Permanent Collection

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Resource Unit

A Note to Teachers

The collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum include thousands of works of art. Although this resource unit focuses only on a few of these works, those included have been selected because they are:

- critical to the development of the museum's collection;
- important exponents of a specific art movement;
- examples of outstanding work by a recognized artist;
- frequently on display at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

This resource unit is designed to provide educators conducting self-guided tours with the background, questions, and extensions they need to fully engage students in exploring these paintings. Many of the questions included in the *View + Discuss* sections can also be applied to other works. If you plan to use the selections in this resource unit as the basis for a museum visit, it is strongly suggested that you visit the museum prior to bringing your students to confirm that the works are on view and to orient yourself to the galleries. A partial list of permanent collection works on view is available at www.guggenheimcollection.org.

A Brief History

Solomon R. Guggenheim (1861–1949) was born into a large, affluent family of Swiss origin, which amassed its fortune in American mining during the 19th century. Guggenheim and his wife Irene Rothchild became enthusiastic patrons of the arts, accumulating a collection of works by Old Masters.

In 1927 Irene commissioned a newly arrived German painter, Hilla Rebay, to paint her husband Solomon's portrait. Solomon visited Rebay's studio in Carnegie Hall, where the walls were hung with non-objective paintings. While Rebay painted Guggenheim's portrait, she taught him about non-objective art, a style that uses line, shape, and color to create non-representational imagery. She later wrote, "Guggenheim, who had been

collecting paintings by old masters for many years... saw a non-objective painting and declared 'By Jove, this is beautiful.'" Impressed by Rebay's impassioned commitment and lured, perhaps, by the thought of pioneering a relatively untouched area of collecting, Guggenheim began purchasing works of non-objective art.

During the spring of 1929, Hilla Rebay and Mr. and Mrs. Guggenheim traveled to Europe, where they visited the studios of many artists. During that trip, Guggenheim purchased his first piece of non-objective art, Vasily Kandinsky's *Composition 8* (1923), the first of more than 150 works by the artist to enter the collection. By 1930, Guggenheim owned art by Kandinsky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Marc Chagall, Fernand Leger, Robert Delaunay, Amedeo Modigliani, and Georges Seurat, among others, and had decided to start his own museum. Hilla Rebay eventually became Solomon Guggenheim's chief art adviser, and later the first director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting and its successor, the Guggenheim Museum.

Although founded to exhibit non-objective art, through the years the museum has enlarged its collection to include major gifts from several donors in various areas of modern and contemporary art. The current collection includes six very different private collections:

- Solomon R. Guggenheim's collection of non-objective painting premised on a belief in the spiritual dimensions of pure abstraction;
- Peggy Guggenheim's collection of Surrealist and abstract painting and sculpture; housed in her former residence in Venice, Italy;
- Justin K. Thannhauser's array of Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and early Modern masterpieces, selections from which are on permanent view in the museum's Thannhauser wing;
- Karl Nierendorf's holdings in German Expressionism;
- Katherine S. Dreier's paintings and sculptures of the historic avant-garde;
- Dr. Giuseppe Panza di Biumo's vast holdings of European and American Minimalist, Post-Minimalist, Environmental, and Conceptual art.

Over the years the museum's directors and curators have acquired additional works to form a richly layered collection dating from the late 19th century to the present.

Today, the Guggenheim is a museum in multiple locations with access to shared collections, common constituencies, and joint programming. Nevertheless, it is the permanent collection that constitutes the very core of the institution.

“In my opinion, the art that is the most corrupt is sentimental art” – Camille Pissarro¹



< CAMILLE PISSARRO >

1830–1903

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jacob Camille Pissarro was born on July 10, 1830, on the West Indies island of St. Thomas where his father was a prosperous merchant. He received his early education at a boarding school near Paris. Returning to St. Thomas, the young man had little interest in the family business and spent his time sketching the picturesque port. At age 25, Pissarro abandoned this comfortable bourgeois existence to live in Paris.

Working closely with Claude Monet, Pierre Auguste Renoir, and Alfred Sisley, Pissarro began to revise his method of landscape painting, emphasizing color in his expression of natural phenomena and employing smaller patches of paint. Pissarro produced many rural landscapes and river scenes that emphasized the play of light.

During the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) Pissarro lived in England. When he returned to France he settled in Pontoise. He took part in the first Impressionist exhibition in 1874 and was the only artist to show at all eight Impressionist exhibitions.

Always searching for fresh influences, in 1885 Pissarro met with Paul Signac and Georges Seurat, representatives of a younger generation of artists who were experimenting with Pointillism.

During the 1890s Pissarro gradually returned to a more supple style that better enabled him to capture his sensations of nature. While continuing to depict the landscape and peasants, he also embarked on a new adventure: cityscape painting. In his portrayals of Paris, Rouen, and Le Havre, he explored changing effects of light and weather, while expressing the dynamism of the modern city.

Pissarro lived long enough to witness the start of the Impressionists' fame and influence. He was revered by the Post-Impressionists, including Cézanne and Gauguin, who both referred to him toward the end of their own careers as their “master.” He continued to work in his studio until the end of his life.

ABOUT THIS WORK

The Hermitage at Pontoise, ca. 1867

The view represented here is a winding village path at the base of a cluster of houses in Pontoise, France, known as the Hermitage. The town of Pontoise lies approximately 25 miles northwest of Paris. Camille Pissarro lived here between 1866 and 1883, choosing the rural environs for a series of large-scale landscapes that have been called his early masterpieces.

Pissarro's setting, replete with villagers and neatly tended gardens, is more than just the naturalist painter's attention to observed reality. This painting challenged established conventions through its use of color and expressive brushwork.² Pissarro stripped his painting of the historical or sentimental overtones that characterized the landscapes of his immediate predecessors. He made dramatic use of light and dark, capturing the effects of sun and shade.

Pissarro depicts ordinary, working-class people that many critics of the time considered a vulgar choice for the subject of a painting. Pissarro adopted a simple, unsentimental approach to the rugged existence of the peasants he painted in their natural surroundings. His work avoided the confines of traditional academic painting, which centered on scenes far removed from the real world Pissarro hoped to describe. Although *The Hermitage* may today appear to us to be an idealistic depiction of country life, for Pissarro it was a quest for a truthful manner of depiction.

Adapted from essay by Cornelia Lauf.

1. Janine Bailly-Herzberg, ed., *Correspondence de Camille Pissarro*, vol. 1. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; Pontoise: Valhermeil, 1980–91, p. 267.

2. *Thannhauser: The Thannhauser Collection of the Guggenheim Museum*. Guggenheim Museum Foundation, New York, 2001, p. 201.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lloyd, Christopher, ed. *Studies on Camille Pissarro*. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

Pissarro, Joachim, *Camille Pissarro*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993.

Rewald, John, *Camille Pissarro*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989.



The Hermitage at Pontoise, ca. 1867
Oil on canvas, 59 5/8 x 79 inches
Thannhauser Collection,
Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser, 78.2514.67

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *The Hermitage at Pontoise*, ca. 1867

- ▶ Describe the scene shown here. Be as specific as you can. Where are we? Describe the weather. What time of the day is it? How can you tell? What are the people in this scene doing?
- ▶ This work was completed in 1867. Make a list of all the “clues” that tell us that this painting was completed more than a century ago. How might this scene change if it were painted today?
- ▶ Is this a place you would like to visit? Why? Why not?
- ▶ For many years, Pissarro both lived and painted in Pontoise, the town depicted in this painting. In the final year of his life, Pissarro wrote to his son, “If I listened to myself, I’d stay in the same town or village for years, contrary to many other painters; I’d end up finding in the same place effects that I didn’t know, and that I hadn’t attempted or achieved.” Discuss this quote and its meaning in relation to this painting and to your experience of familiar places.
- ▶ Describe how Pissarro is able to create the illusion of depth in this painting. Which objects seem closest to us? Which are furthest away?

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- As a class, generate a list of words—nouns, verbs, adjectives—you associate with this painting. Choose several words from this list and compose a poem that is compatible with this work.
- In the school auditorium, project the slide onto the stage so that the image is large enough to form a stage set. Invite students to “step into” the painting and create a one-act play dramatizing the events depicted. Ask students to choose an appropriate musical overture as a prelude to their performance.
- Describe a day in the life of one of the people in this painting. Your response can be based on research or on a careful examination of this work.
- Create a drawing or painting that shows a landscape or cityscape of the place where you live. When finished compare your work with Pissarro’s depiction of his hometown.
- Imagine that you could step inside this painting and find yourself in a specific place within it. You may find yourself inside one of the houses, perched on a tree branch or relaxing in the tall grasses. Write an essay about your experience from this unique vantage point.
- This painting, at approximately five by six-and-a-half feet in size, is Pissarro’s largest. Using a tape measure mark off these dimensions in order to understand the scale. Paintings from this time were usually based on a strict size hierarchy, and paintings this large were usually reserved for what was considered to be important themes, such as historical events. To challenge this convention, some artists would maintain this large scale but instead paint scenes of everyday life. How might the impact of the painting change if it were very small? Twice as large? Do you think there are more or less important themes for art works? What would your “top five” important themes be?

VOCABULARY

ACADEMIC PAINTING An accepted style of painting taught by an academy of art. France during the 18th century had a very strong academic tradition that prescribed subject matter, artistic representation, and training techniques.

POINTILLISM A method of painting which systematically applies points of pure color to a canvas that blend together when viewed from a distance.

IMPRESSIONISTS Artists in the later part of the 19th century whose work dealt with the effects of light and color. They used these effects to capture the immediacy or “impression” of a moment.

POST-IMPRESSIONISTS Artists including Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Vincent van Gogh who were grouped into an artistic movement thought to embrace the idea of art as a process of formal design with purely expressive aims.

"I'm returning the photographs of the two paintings along with this letter. The Woman with Parrot must have been done...in 1871 at the latest, because after this time I lost sight of the woman who posed for this picture. In any event, they are of no value, especially the Woman with Bird [sic]. Pray do not get too excited over such daubs." — Pierre Auguste Renoir, March 1912³



< PIERRE AUGUSTE RENOIR >

1841–1919

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pierre Auguste Renoir was noted for his radiant, intimate paintings and recognized by critics as one of the most individual painters of his period. Unlike the many Impressionists who focused primarily on landscape, Renoir was as much interested in painting the single human figure or family group portraits as he was in landscapes. To him composition and form were as important as rendering the effects of light.

Renoir was born in Limoges, France, on February 25, 1841. At age 14, he became an apprentice porcelain painter and grew adept at painting designs on china. Renoir's early work was influenced by two French artists, Claude Monet, in his treatment of light, and the romantic painter Eugène Delacroix, in his treatment of color. Renoir first exhibited his paintings in Paris in 1864, but

he did not gain recognition until 1874, at the first exhibition of painters of the new Impressionist school. He became a leading member of the Impressionists, sharing with them an interest in catching the fleeting effect of light and atmosphere on color and form. Renoir exhibited with the group at the independent shows they organized in the 1870s as an alternative to the official annual Salon in Paris. Renoir fully established his reputation with a solo exhibition held at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in Paris in 1883. During the last 20 years of his life Renoir was crippled by arthritis; unable to move his hands freely, he continued to paint using a brush strapped to his arm. Renoir died at Cagnes, a village in the south of France, on December 3, 1919.

ABOUT THIS WORK

Woman with Parrot, 1871

The woman holding the parrot is Renoir's friend and companion of six years, Lise Tréhot, whose youthful features are recognizable in no fewer than 16 other canvases the artist painted between 1867 and 1872. He probably painted this picture soon after his return from service in the Franco Prussian War in 1871, before Lise married an architect from a well-to-do family in April 1872, evidently never to see Renoir again. The woman holds a parrot, a popular and exotic pet at the time. The black taffeta dress with white cuffs and red sash accentuate Lise's dark hair and white skin; the dark green walls and plants suggest a rather heavy and formal interior.

The feathery, richly textured brushwork suggests that the artist has captured a lovely young bourgeois woman passing some free time. However, the picture's emphasis on somber hues, the woman's ambivalent expression, and the claustrophobic space

she occupies indicate that this is not merely a glimpse at a frivolous pastime. The spiky fronds of the plants beneath the model close in on her, restricting her space, like that of the bird. That the woman can be read as a caged bird is further suggested by her elaborate, ruffled dress with its red ribbons and her pensive expression. In genre paintings of the 1860s and 70s, such richly dressed young women were generally assumed to be *lorette*, or high-class courtesans. The parrot and the gilded birdcage are sometimes interpreted as erotic symbols. The subject of a woman holding a parrot appears in works from the 1860s by Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, and Edgar Degas. This painting has also been described as a celebration of the color black, which Renoir called "the Queen of the colors."

3. *Thannhauser*, p. 206

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Pach, Walter. *Pierre Auguste Renoir*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1950.

Renoir, Jean. *Renoir, My Father*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960.

Rewald, John. *The History of Impressionism*, 4th ed. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973.



Woman with Parrot, 1871
Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 25 1/8 inches
Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser 78.2514.68

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *Woman with Parrot*, 1871

- ▶ Describe this painting to a classmate as completely as possible. What new things did you discover as you described this painting that you had not seen at first glance?
- ▶ Describe the environment that the painting suggests. Where are we? What time period is it? What do you see that supports your conclusions? If this painting were to suddenly come to life, what sounds would you hear? What would happen next?
- ▶ Take the pose of the woman in this painting. Describe how it feels.
- ▶ Describe a day in her life. What time does she get up? What does she eat for breakfast? What kind of things might she do in a typical day? Which details in the painting support your ideas? Do you believe her life to be similar to or different from yours? How so? Would you like to trade places with her for a day? Why or why not?
- ▶ This is a painting of a woman who the artist actually knew named Lise Tréhot (1848–1922). She was 23 years old when she posed for this painting. If you could, what questions would you like to ask her?

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- If you were to have your portrait painted by an artist, what would you want portrayed about you? In what environment would you place yourself? What would you be wearing? What pose would you take? Do a preliminary drawing for such a portrait.
- This painting, *Woman with Parrot*, has been described as a celebration of the color black, which Renoir called “the Queen of the colors.” Why might Renoir have said that? Do you agree or disagree? Create a painting where a primary color is black. After completing the painting revisit and discuss Renoir’s statement.
- In this painting we see how an upper-middle-class woman would have been dressed in 1871. At the library or on the Internet research how a man might have dressed, a child, a person from a lower socio-economic class. How do the fashions of the times reflect lifestyles and cultural values? How do our current fashions reflect contemporary lifestyle and culture?
- Reread the quote at the top of this lesson. It is clear that when confronted with this painting 40 years later, Renoir did not think of it, referring to it as “of no value.” Do you think artists are always the best judges of the value of their own work? Have you ever been praised for work you did not value? Have you ever presented work that you valued that was criticized by others? How do artists evaluate their work?
- French author Emile Zola (1840–1902) was a contemporary of Renoir. Zola’s literary work can provide a glimpse into Parisian life in the late 1800s. Between 1871 and 1893 Zola wrote a series of 20 novels under the generic title *Les Rougon-Marquart* that follows two branches of a family—the Rougons, bourgeois shopkeepers, and the Marquarts, a group of smugglers. Through painstaking research Zola produced an arresting and complete picture of French life, particularly of Paris, in the late 19th century. Ask students to read selections from Zola’s works online or from the library.

VOCABULARY

ROMANTIC PAINTING A style of 19th century art that rebelled against the rules of the prevailing academy and looked for alternative sources for inspiration.

SALON In France in the 19th century the Salons were major exhibitions that introduced the public to new and established artists.

“There are two occupations in me: the study of exterior perception, filled with painful experiences, dangerous for my humor and my nerves. And the study of pictorial decoration. . . which ought to give me the tranquility of a worker.” — Edouard Vuillard, 1894



< EDOUARD VUILLARD >

1868–1940

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Edouard Vuillard was born in 1868 in Cuiseaux, a tiny French town near the Swiss border. At age nine, he moved with his family to Paris. His father, a retired army officer, died several years later, leaving his mother, Marie, with three children and only a small income. She came from a family of textile designers, and to make a living she first operated a lingerie shop and then a dressmaking business from the succession of Paris apartments that the family occupied. Edouard lived with his mother, his greatest supporter for her entire life, surrounded by the women and fabrics that filled her workroom. In his paintings, he confined himself primarily to scenes of cozy, cluttered interiors, often using his mother and sister as models. His interior scenes are characterized by a lavish use of pattern—wallpaper, upholstery, and dress fabrics, closely juxtaposed to create an effect almost like collage.

In 1888 Vuillard studied briefly at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts under Jean-Léon Gérôme, but disliked the conservative approach. Later that year he moved to the Académie Julian, where he met other young artists who rejected both academic art and Impressionism. Vuillard associated with this group, known as the Nabis. By the turn of the century he was making striking, large-scale decorative wall paintings and folding screens, and later, portraits of prosperous French families. While Vuillard’s art remained figurative, his intense focus on the picture surface itself—the flattened, sometimes unpainted support patterned with figures that blended with their surroundings—would foreshadow elements of abstraction in the 20th century.

ABOUT THIS WORK

Place Vintimille, 1908–10

In 1908 Vuillard and his mother moved into an apartment in the corner building at 16 rue de Calais, overlooking the Place Vintimille (known today as Place Adolphe Max). The small park, with its tall trees and statue of 19th-century composer Hector Berlioz, offered then as now an oasis of calm to strollers, tourists, playing children, and nannies. For the next 20 years Vuillard would draw, paint, and photograph this park from every angle and perspective.

This was the neighborhood where Vuillard had spent his youth and where many friends and fellow artists lived. The two panels in the Thannhauser collection form the outer views as seen from his fifth-floor apartment window, with each panel carefully depicting a different time of day, weather conditions, and specific details noted from the artist's extensive observation. These two views of Place Vintimille are part of a larger group of four panels Vuillard worked on from 1908 to 1910, commissioned by the well-known playwright Henry Bernstein. They do not form a continuous whole, but rather capture different segments of the elliptical park. Although the statue of Berlioz now rests on a lower pedestal, the little park and the surrounding houses remain essentially intact.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

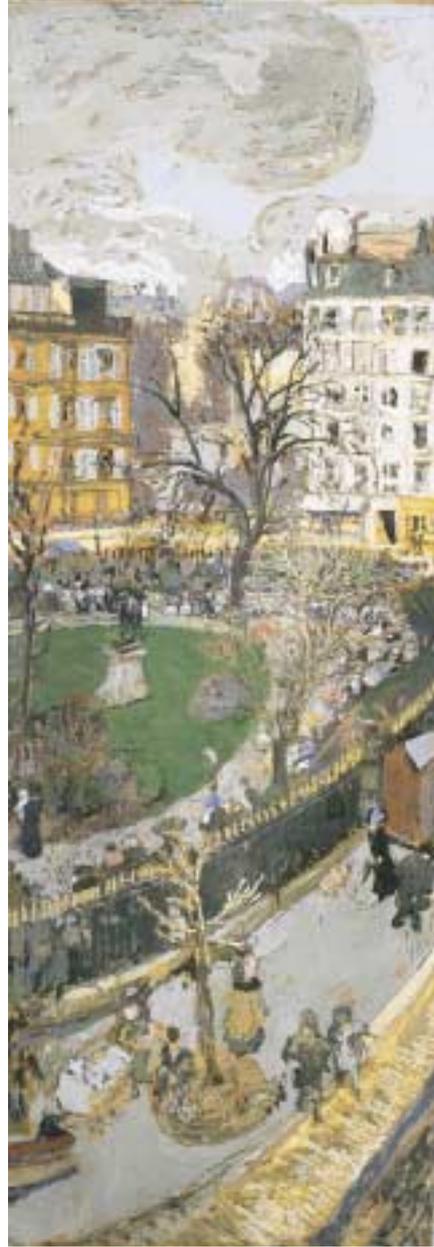
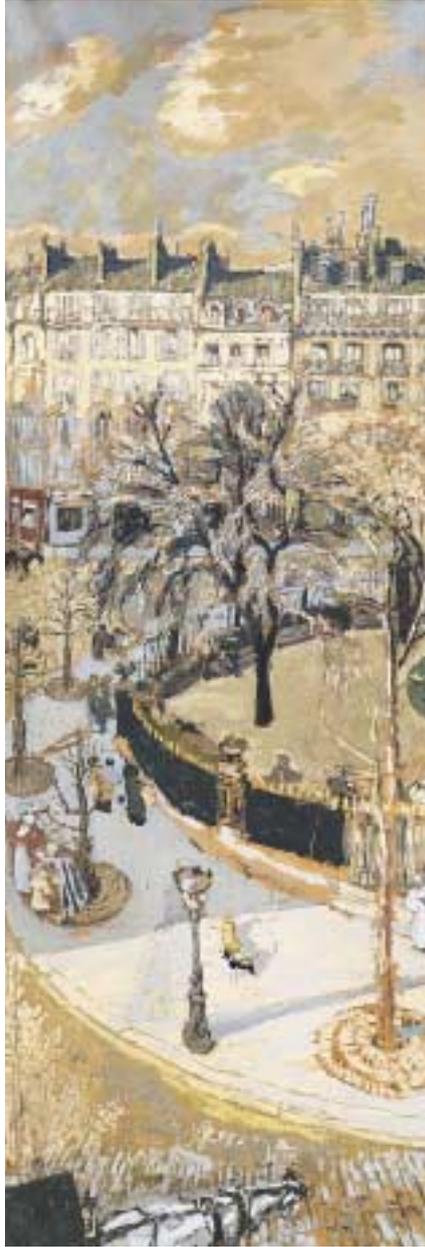
Cogeval, Guy, *Edouard Vuillard*, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and National Gallery of Art, Washington, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.

Rewald, Sabine, "Vuillard's Unlikely Obsession: Revisiting Place Vintimille," *Art in America*, July 2001, p. 70–79.

WEB SITE

National Gallery of Art

<http://www.nga.gov/feature/artnation/vuillard>



Place Vintimille, 1908–10
Distemper on cardboard, mounted on canvas
Two panels: 78 3/4 x 27 3/8 inches and 78 3/4 x 27 1/2 inches
Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser 78.2514.74

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *Place Vintimille*, 1908–10

- ▶ Describe what you see in these paintings. Where are we? When? How can you tell? What activities can you observe?
- ▶ What season of the year appears to be depicted in these paintings? What day of the week and time of day might be pictured? Support your answers with specific observations from the paintings.
- ▶ Provide a “weather report” that describes the atmospheric conditions that the people on the street are encountering. What clothing would you select to wear on a day such as this?
- ▶ From what vantage point was the artist working while painting? How can you tell?
- ▶ How might Place Vintimille look today? Name the things that might have changed.
- ▶ Why do you think Vuillard chose to paint so many panels of the same park?
- ▶ How is this park similar to or different from your neighborhood park?

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Choose a place in your neighborhood that is special to you. Make a list of words that you associate with this place. What characteristics of it are important to you? Write a poem that captures the way you feel about this place.
- In addition to his paintings and drawings, Vuillard took dozens of photographs of the park and used them as visual references. Choose a familiar place and photograph it over time, as the seasons change, at various times of the day, in changing weather conditions. Assemble all the pictures. Discuss how the changes in environment affect the mood of the photographs. Which do you prefer? Which seem most characteristic of the way you view this place?
- With an audio recorder, develop a sound track to accompany these paintings that include all the sounds that are implied within the panels. Make a second recording that includes sounds from your local park. How do they differ? How are they similar?
- Vuillard chose to work in the medium of distemper for several reasons. Although time-consuming to prepare, it provided a matte, opaque surface more pleasing to him than other types of paint. Can you name other instances when using a labor-intensive process is worth the time and effort because of the result? Set up a simple still life and draw or paint it in three different media. For instance, depict the same still life in watercolor, tempera, and pastel. How does this influence the impact of the work? Which medium do you prefer for this work? Why?
- What is your favorite view looking out a window? What about this view appeals to you? Here is one way to capture that scene. Tape a piece of clear acetate (transparency film) over a window. With a black Sharpie marker trace the edges of the view you see out the window. Be sure to close one eye and do not move your head while you are drawing. When you are finished remove your drawing from the window and place it on top of a sheet of white paper. Continue to embellish the drawing you have made by adding details and color.

VOCABULARY

ABSTRACTION The essential form of an object; a process in which the artist focuses on and exaggerates the forms of objects for aesthetic and expressive purposes.

LES NABIS (ca. 1888) A group of painters who took their name from the Hebrew word for prophet. The Nabis believed that what mattered most was not to depict things but to evoke impressions and feeling. In addition to painting, they made illustrations, posters, and political caricatures focusing on Parisian life.

“Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings.
The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposely, to cause vibrations in the soul.”
— Vasily Kandinsky, *The Effect of Color*, 1911⁴



< VASILY KANDINSKY >

1866–1944

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Moscow in 1866, Kandinsky spent his early childhood in Odessa. His parents instilled in him an early love of music that would influence his work, down to the names of his paintings: *Improvisations*, *Impressions*, and *Compositions*.

In 1895 Kandinsky attended an Impressionist exhibition where he saw Monet’s *Haystacks at Giverny*. He stated, “It was from the catalogue I learned this was a haystack. I was upset I had not recognized it. I also thought the painter had no right to paint in such an imprecise fashion. Dimly I was aware too that the object did not appear in the picture.” Soon after, Kandinsky, who had trained to be a lawyer, left Moscow for Munich to begin his study of art.

Kandinsky participated in several of the most influential and controversial art movements of the 20th century, among them the Blue Rider group, which he founded in 1911 with fellow artist Franz Marc. “We thought up the name while sitting at a café table.... Both of us were fond of blue things, Marc of blue horses and I of blue riders. So the title suggested itself.”⁵

In his memoirs Kandinsky recalls the day in 1910 when he accidentally discovered non-representational art. As he returned home at sunset he was struck as he entered his studio by an “indescribably beautiful painting, all irradiated by an interior light.” He could distinguish only “forms and colors and no meaning.” He soon realized that it was one of his own paintings turned on its side. Soon after he began working on paintings that came to be considered the first totally abstract works in Modern art; they made no reference to objects of the physical world and derived their inspiration and titles from music.

In 1912 he published *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, the first theoretical treatise on abstraction, which examined the capacity of color to communicate the artist’s innermost psychological and spiritual concerns. His reputation became firmly established in the U.S. through numerous exhibitions and his introduction to Solomon Guggenheim, who became one of his most enthusiastic supporters.

ABOUT THIS WORK

Composition 8, 1923

During the spring of 1929, Solomon and Irene Guggenheim accompanied Hilla Rebay, an artist who would later become the first director of the Guggenheim Museum, on a European tour. Introduced to Kandinsky in the artist's studio in Dessau, Germany, Guggenheim purchased *Composition 8*, the first of more than 150 works by the artist to enter the collection.

Kandinsky regarded *Composition 8* as the high point of his postwar achievement.⁶ In this work circles, triangles, and linear elements create a surface of interacting geometric forms. The importance of circles in this painting foreshadows the dominant role they would play in many subsequent works.

Kandinsky evolved an abstract style that reflected the utopian artistic experiments of the Russian avant-garde. The emphasis on geometric forms, promoted by artists such as Kazimir Malevich, sought to establish a universal aesthetic language. Although Kandinsky adopted some of the geometric aspects of Suprematism and Constructivism, his belief in the expressive content of abstract forms alienated him from his Russian colleagues. Kandinsky's work synthesized Russian avant-garde art with a lyrical

abstraction that includes dynamic compositional elements, resembling mountains, sun, and atmosphere that still refer to the landscape. This conflict led him to return to Germany. In 1922 Kandinsky joined the faculty of the Bauhaus where he discovered a more sympathetic environment. He taught there until 1933, when the Nazi government closed the Bauhaus and confiscated 57 of Kandinsky's works in its purge of "degenerate art."

Adapted from an essay by Nancy Spector. (Nancy Spector. *Guggenheim Museum Collection A to Z*. New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2001, p. 387.)

4. Vasily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Munich, 1912, p. 42.

5. Will Grohmann. *Wassily Kandinsky: Life and Work*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1958, p. 78.

6. Grohmann, p. 188.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Barnett, Vivian Endicott. *Kandinsky at the Guggenheim*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1983.

Barnett, Vivian Endicott, Christian Derouet, et al. *Kandinsky in Paris: 1934-1944* (exh. cat.). New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1985.

Long, Rose-Carol Washton. *Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.



Composition 8, 1923
Oil on canvas, 55 1/8 x 79 1/8 inches
Gift, Solomon R. Guggenheim, 37.262

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *Composition 8*, 1923

- ▶ The title of this painting, *Composition 8*, suggests an association with music. Imagine that you could hear sounds coming out of this image. What kinds of things might you hear? What type of music does *Composition 8* suggest to you? Describe some of the qualities that this musical work would have. Why?
- ▶ As students view this work, play several selections of different types of pre-recorded music. Ask students to decide which musical work relates most closely to the painting.
- ▶ Are there aspects of this work that seem to refer to things in the observable world? Are there parts that seem to be completely invented by the artist, or does it seem to be a combination of these two realms? Explain your perceptions.
- ▶ Describe the way that Kandinsky has used color in this work. Does it convey a particular mood, feeling, sensation, or sense of place? Do you have any personal associations with this palette (combination of colors)?
- ▶ Kandinsky uses a variety of shapes, lines, and colors to create this painting. List the steps and tools the artist might have used to create this work.
- ▶ Although Kandinsky named this work *Composition 8*, generate a list of alternative titles that would be appropriate for this painting.

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- *Composition 8* is the first painting by Kandinsky that Solomon R. Guggenheim purchased to begin his new collection of non-objective art. Imagine that you are Mr. Guggenheim visiting Kandinsky's studio in 1929. At the time this approach to painting was considered revolutionary. Act out a dialogue between Solomon Guggenheim and Vasily Kandinsky that might have occurred during this historic meeting.
- Many people have a favorite color, but few have a favorite palette. Experiment with assembling a palette of five or six colors that you feel work harmoniously together. You can mix these colors from paints or use "color chips" from your local paint store. Do you have any associations with the palette you have chosen? Does it suggest to you a particular environment or emotion? Now try this exercise again choosing a palette of colors that you dislike. Discuss which palette was easier to formulate and why.
- Kandinsky believed that art should express the inner character of things, not their surface appearance. His work seeks to reveal this essence through shape, line, and color. Provide each student with four small sheets of drawing paper and drawing materials that include color (color pencils, Craypas, or crayons are fine). Ask students to create *non-objective* compositions to express the following words through the use of line, shape, and color only:

Anger	Precision
Loneliness	Exhaustion

Display the completed works and discuss. What are the similarities and differences between how different students interpreted same word? What are they? As you view the student work, are there conclusions that can be drawn about how people respond to certain colors, shapes, and lines?

- Create a non-objective painting that expresses the essence of a familiar place.

VOCABULARY

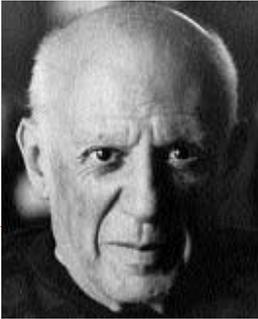
BAUHAUS The Bauhaus School of Design was a highly influential state-sponsored school of art, architecture, and design founded in Weimar in 1919. Its aims included raising the quality of everyday life through an aesthetic of modern and universal design.

NON-OBJECTIVE ART Art that uses forms, shapes, and colors that are invented rather than observed

CONSTRUCTIVISM A Russian art movement of the early 20th century based on the use of non-objective, often technological, shapes and new materials. Its name derives from the "construction" of abstract sculptures from industrial materials.

SUPREMATISM A highly geometric style of 20th-century abstract painting developed around 1913 by the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich. Its guiding principle was, "the supremacy of pure sensation in creative art," best represented by the square which Malevich considered the most essential element.

“We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand.” – Pablo Picasso



< PABLO PICASSO >

1881–1973

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pablo Picasso is considered the most influential artist of the 20th century, and his lifelong creative invention repeatedly changed the course of visual thinking. He was born in 1881 into a middle-class family in Malaga, Spain. His father was a painter, teacher, and museum curator, and a major influence in Picasso’s formative years as an artist. Moving to Barcelona in 1895, Picasso enrolled in the fine art academy. In 1900, he visited Paris for the first time, soaking up the café culture and nightlife of the bohemian arts capital. Soon after, Picasso settled in Paris, where intriguing tales about friendships, collaborations, and rivalries with other famous creators, such as writer Gertrude Stein, composer Igor Stravinsky, and artist Henri Matisse, began to surface. To this day, the public still devours stories about Picasso’s relationships with his wives and long-term companions, who served as models and muses for his art.

During his 80-year career, Picasso produced roughly 50,000 works of art, ranging from

paintings and sculpture to ceramics and drawings. His style developed from the Blue Period (1901–04), characterized by its predominantly blue tones, melancholy themes, and forlorn characters, to the Rose Period (1905), with a brighter, more naturalistic palette and subjects of circus and carnival performers in intimate settings, to the pivotal work, *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1906–07). *Les Femmes d’Alger* redefined the genre of the classical nude by incorporating indigenous art influences, such as African and Oceanic sculpture. Through this painting, Picasso set the stage for Cubism. A revolutionary system of painting, Cubism shows multiple views of the same object simultaneously on the two-dimensional picture plane and was a bold, new language. More than any other painter of his time, Picasso made viewers and critics alike question the idea of traditional genres. Picasso continued to work prolifically until his death in 1973 at the age of 92.

ABOUT THIS WORK

Woman with Yellow Hair, 1931

Picasso met Marie-Thérèse Walter, the subject of this portrait, in 1927 when she was 17 years old. They began an intense love affair, but concealed it from the public for many years as she was a teenager and the artist was married. However, Picasso documented their early years together, albeit cryptically, by including the monograms “MT” and “MTP” in his still lifes and portraits of the time. By 1931, Marie-Thérèse’s voluptuous body and blond hair were explicitly referenced in works such as *Woman with Yellow Hair*. Marie-Thérèse became a muse and constant subject for Picasso. He portrayed her reading, gazing into a mirror, and sleeping, the most intimate of depictions. A single, curved line delineating Marie-Thérèse’s profile became an emblem and appears in numerous sculptures, prints, and paintings. Less a portrait than an homage to his young mistress, *Woman with Yellow Hair* is rendered in a sweeping, graceful, curvilinear style that is a radical departure from his earlier portrayals of women. The photographer Brassai visited Picasso’s studio in 1933 and commented on the classical and undulating character of the majority of works he found there: “He opened the door to one of those immense naves, and we could see, radiant in white, a city of sculptures...I was astonished by the roundness of all these forms. A new woman had entered Picasso’s life: Marie-Thérèse Walter.”⁷

Although painted nearly 20 years after the artist’s initial experimentation with Cubism,

Picasso’s simplification of Marie-Thérèse’s voluptuous figure into primary shapes can be traced back to that painterly technique. The undulating lines, rounded organic shapes, and saturated hues attest to the artist’s appreciation of contemporary developments in painting such as Surrealism. As an honorary member of the Surrealists, Picasso was influenced by their investigation into dreams as a portal to the subconscious, and the bright, playful colors he has chosen for this portrait may represent dream imagery.

7. Stephen A. Nash, ed. *Picasso and the War Years 1937-1945*, p. 74.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ashton, Dore, ed., *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1972.

Mailer, Norman, *Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man*. New York: Warner Books, 1995.

Nash, Stephen A., ed., *Picasso and the War Years 1937-1945*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998.

Richardson, John, *A Life of Picasso: Volume I*. New York: Random House, 1991.

FILM/VIDEO

New Ways of Seeing: Picasso, Braque, and the Cubist Revolution, 1989. New York: The Museum of Modern Art and Public Media Home Vision, 58 minutes, color. Videocassette.

Portrait of an Artist: Picasso, 1985. Chicago: Home Vision, 81 minutes, color. Videocassette.

Surviving Picasso, 1996. Los Angeles: Warner Bros, 126 minutes, color. Videocassette.

WEB SITES

Museo Picasso Virtual <http://www.tamu.edu/mocl/picasso>

National Portrait Gallery <http://www.npg.si.edu>

Picasso, the Early Years (Boston Museum of Fine Arts)

<http://www.boston.com/mfa/picasso/>

Guggenheim Museum <http://www.guggenheim.org>



Woman with Yellow Hair, 1931
Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 31 7/8 inches
Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser, 78.2514.59

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *Woman with Yellow Hair*, 1931

- ▶ How is this portrait a departure from traditional portraits that you have seen?
- ▶ Do you think the artist knew this woman? What do you see in this painting that supports your ideas?
- ▶ What message is Picasso sending about Marie-Thérèse Walter by painting her in this way?
- ▶ Describe the colors in this painting. How might the impact of the painting change if Picasso had used a darker palette for the figure?
- ▶ If you were to paint a portrait of someone very close to you, how would you use colors to express your feelings about this person?
- ▶ Some critics and art historians have suggested that Marie-Thérèse is asleep or dreaming in this portrait. If so, what might this woman be dreaming about? If Marie-Thérèse woke up and spoke directly to you, what might she say?
- ▶ How would you feel about someone painting you while you had your eyes closed? What might Marie-Thérèse have said to Picasso about her portrait? In your opinion, would she have approved of the finished portrait?

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Create a “visual timeline” reflecting Picasso’s life and career and his contributions to the history of art. Working in teams, ask students to research a specific decade from his 80-year career, and find images that reflect achievements in the visual arts, sciences and technology, and also socio-political events. Collage all of the images, interesting quotes, and reproductions of Picasso’s work throughout the decades into a collaborative timeline for the classroom.
- Find other images of Picasso’s portraits on the Guggenheim Museum Web site (www.guggenheim.org) or on the Internet and compare the different styles to *Woman with Yellow Hair*. Choose pairs of portraits and ask students to create interior monologues or dialogues between the two subjects. Have them incorporate body language and stage direction into their scripts to fully flesh out the two characters.
- Discuss how color affects our perception of Picasso’s portraits—for example, look at *Woman Ironing* (1904) from Picasso’s Blue Period as compared with *Saltimbanques* (1905) from his Rose Period. Ask students to create a self-portrait or to take a digital photograph of themselves and scan or upload it on the computer. Using Photoshop, ask students to change the mood or feeling of their self-portrait by applying filters to the image and changing the color, or experiment with paint or layering colored acetate paper over the self-portrait. Discuss how this changes the mood or feeling of the work of art. Students may want to research other artists, such as Andy Warhol, who have experimented with portraits and color.
- Ask one student to volunteer as a model. Have the other students create a quick gesture drawing of the volunteer’s profile. Encourage them not to pick up their pencil as they draw, capturing this profile in **one** continuous line. From the completed drawing students can then reduce this profile down to one quick line that best represents the student’s features. What is the simplest line you can create to describe the student’s profile that captures his or her essence? What would you focus on or exaggerate in your own profile?
- After exploring Picasso’s Cubist paintings and collages, choose one ordinary object, such as a guitar, and draw it from all the angles that you can see (turn the guitar or prop it on a stand). Cut up your drawings and then collage the fragments together making a new composition of forms. Try this same project using a digital camera.

VOCABULARY

CUBISM A style of painting, developed between 1907 and 1914 as a collaboration between Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, in which objects are represented as cubes and other geometric shapes.

MUSE Any of the nine sister goddesses in Greek and Roman mythology, presiding over branches of learning and the arts. A poet’s inspiring goddess, a poet’s genius.

SURREALISM A 20th-century art movement in art and literature that sought to express what is in the subconscious mind by depicting objects and events as seen in dreams.

“When I am in my painting, I’m not aware of what I’m doing. It’s only after a sort of ‘get acquainted’ period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own.” — Jackson Pollock



< JACKSON POLLOCK >

1912–1956

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jackson Pollock was born in Cody, Wyoming, in 1912. His family moved to Arizona and later to Los Angeles. While still in high school Pollock began to study painting. At the age of 18, Pollock came to New York to study at the Art Students League with Thomas Hart Benton, who would influence and encourage him throughout the next decade.

During the Great Depression Pollock worked for a government program known as the WPA (Works Progress Administration) that provided him with a source of income and enabled him to devote himself to artistic development. Some of Pollock’s WPA paintings are now lost, but what survives illustrates the gradual emergence of a deeply personal pictorial language that included references to Native American motifs, myths, rituals, and his own dreams.

Pollock’s early work was influenced by Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso. He embraced the Surrealists’ concept of the unconscious as the source of art. For a time Pollock worked with Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who

in 1936 established a short-lived experimental workshop in New York. There Pollock first encountered the use of enamel paint and was encouraged to try unorthodox techniques such as pouring and flinging paint to achieve spontaneous effects.

Pollock had his first solo show at Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century Gallery in New York in 1943. In addition to showing well-known European artists, Guggenheim set out to discover American-born artists as well, helping legitimize several artists who would soon form the nucleus of the New York School. By the time her gallery closed in 1947, New York had replaced Paris as the center for Modern art. Jackson Pollock’s imagery did not simply rework European precedents. His unique approach, using interlacing lines of dripped and poured paint, offered a new approach to making art that seemed both novel and completely American.

Adapted from an essay by Lucy Flint Gohlke

ABOUT THIS WORK

Enchanted Forest, 1947

During the winter of 1946-47, Pollock instituted a new way of creating paintings. Moving around the unprimed canvas, which was laid flat on the wooden floor of his Long Island studio, Pollock poured, splattered, and dripped paint and enamel using his entire body in the process. This approach reinvented the methods and tools of traditional easel painting and came to be known as Action Painting, a style that demanded the total physical involvement of the artist. Pollock's all-over style of painting avoided any points of emphasis producing intricate interlaced patterns that reflected Pollock's gestures and movements around the canvas. His paints were thinned so they would flow more readily. Using sticks, basting syringes, and dried-out brushes, he worked from all sides, creating an edge-to-edge network of looping lines. Pollock explained, "on the floor I am more at ease. I feel nearer, more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be in the painting."

Titles for Pollock's paintings were added once the work was complete, frequently at the suggestion of others. *Enchanted Forest* suggests a fable or myth while also referring to the tangled lines typical of the artist's drip paintings. In this work Pollock leaves large areas of white amidst the network of moving lines. The palette is limited to gold, black, red, and white.

Pollock provided an articulate summation of himself and his work:

Technic is the result of a need—
new needs demand new technics—
total control—denial of
the accident—
States of order—
organic intensity—
energy and motion
made visible—
memories arrested in space,
human needs and motives—
acceptance—⁸

Pollock's innovations helped to establish international prestige for American art while altering the traditional methods of painting and placing a new emphasis on process rather than product.

8. Francis V. O'Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds. *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works*, p. 253.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Clark, Timothy J. "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction." In *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*. Serge Guilbaut, ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 172-238.
- Landau, Ellen G., *Jackson Pollock*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989.
- O'Connor, Francis V., and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds., *Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works*, 4 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978.
- Varnedoe, Kirk, and Pepe Karmel, eds., *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* (exh. cat.). New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999.
- Greenberg, Jan, and Jordan, Sandra, *Action Jackson*, Roaring Brook Press, Brookfield, Connecticut, 2002.

WEB SITES

- The Pollock-Krasner Home and Study Center
<http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/pkhouse.nsf>
- National Gallery of Art
<http://www.nga.gov/feature/pollock/pollockhome/html>



Enchanted Forest, 1947
Oil on canvas, 87 1/8 x 45 1/8 inches
Peggy Guggenheim Collection, 76.2553 PG 151

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show *Enchanted Forest*, 1947

- ▶ What do you see? Describe this work as fully as possible.
- ▶ How do you think this painting was made? Describe the steps that the artist went through in the creation of this work.
- ▶ Focus in on a single line within this painting. Stand up and re-create the movement that the artist might have used to make this line. What part or parts of your body did you need to use?
- ▶ Which marks are in the background? Which are closest to the surface? How can you tell?
- ▶ Take a look at the entire work. What words would you use to describe the mood or feeling it communicates. Why?
- ▶ Pollock would usually title his works after they were completed. This work is titled *Enchanted Forest*. Does this seem like an appropriate title to you? Why? Why not? What title would you give to this painting?

EXPLORATIONS FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- To emulate Pollock's method of painting you will need the following supplies:
 - plastic sheeting to protect against spills;
 - unprimed canvas or cotton duck approximately 3 x 2 feet;
 - tempera or latex house paint in a few different colors, thinned with water to a consistency that will pour and flow;
 - wooden sticks, old stiff household brushes.

Pollock's painting studio was located in a barn where he could boldly fling paint around. If you don't have an empty barn or painting studio, experiment with Pollock's technique outside. Cover a wide area of asphalt or pavement with a plastic tarpaulin to protect it from splatters. On top, lay a smaller piece of unprimed canvas or cotton duck purchased from an art supply or fabric store. Either tempera or latex house paints can be used. Limit your palette to no more than four colors (Pollock limited his palette to a few colors too). In plastic containers, mix the paint with water until it reaches a thick, but flowing consistency. Using the wooden sticks and dried brushes as applicators, experiment with various ways of dripping, splattering, and pouring paint onto the surface. Try repeating a gesture several times as you move around the canvas trying to recreate Pollock's all-over approach. Repeat with various colors layering the lines and inventing new gestures, movements, and rhythms as you go. When your painting is complete discuss the process. How did making a painting in this way change your ideas about Pollock's work?

- Although Pollock received great acclaim as an innovative and inventive artist, he also was severely criticized. Many were skeptical of his unconventional working methods and labeled him "Jack the Dripper." Battle lines were drawn between Pollock's "highbrow" supporters and his "lowbrow" detractors, who couldn't understand why drips and splatters should be deemed art. In your classroom stage a debate, waging the most convincing arguments to support or assail Pollock's art.

VOCABULARY

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM Movement in mid-20th-century painting that was primarily concerned with the spontaneous assertion of the individual through the act of painting. Generally, abstract expressionist art is without recognizable images. The abstract expressionist movement centered in New York City and is also called the New York school.

ACTION PAINTING A term coined by the critic Harold Rosenberg to refer to a style within abstract expressionism that focused on the physical qualities of paint and the gestures of the artist. Artists associated with this approach include Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline.

SURREALISM A 20th-century art movement in art and literature that sought to express what is in the subconscious mind by depicting objects and events as seen in dreams.