

## A MIRROR TO HISTORY: REALISM, IMPRESSIONISM AND ABSTRACTION

A work of art serves two purposes: it is a personal expression of creativity by an individual artist and it is a reflection of the social, political and technological status of a society. Students who are given the opportunity to analyze works of art as part of a history or social studies curriculum can gain valuable insights into cultural change and historical context.

This object-based exploration is particularly effective in studying late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe - a period of political, scientific and social revolution, of ideological change - an end to an era. Scientific and technological advances (airplanes, automobiles, steamships, radio, movies, electricity, telephones, the assembly line) revolutionized travel, communication and industrial production. The study of psychology (Freud), the rise of feminism (suffrage) and urban expansions (mass transportation, social welfare, public sanitation and education, unionism) promoted changes in family life, fashion, and social status.

The work of major artists of the period reflected this change. Realist artists like Jean-François Millet and Julien Dupré, influenced by the French revolution of 1848, recorded the often-harsh realities of daily life in an unsentimental manner. Their paintings are solid and matter-of-fact, and contain a link to the classical style of the past.

Impressionism, flourishing in France from the 1860s to 1880s, questioned centuries-old artistic traditions and emerged as the most dominant and radical movement in nineteenth-century art. With the invention of the collapsible paint tube, artists like Camille Pissarro, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Eugène Boudin ventured out-of-doors to paint and depicted the pleasures of the triumphant middle class. Interested in capturing a specific moment in time, the Impressionists worked quickly and their resulting style combined vivid colors, visible, broken brush strokes, and strong surface patterns into an art concerned with capturing the fugitive effects of light, color and movement.

Abstraction ruled the art world during the twentieth century as Picasso and Braque shattered imagery, Matisse and the Fauves revolutionized the palette, Chagall explored dream and memory images, Dali and Magritte elevated psychology through Surrealism, and Kandinsky and Mondrian moved towards an abstraction that was so complete that it removed all reference to tangible subject matter.



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## A MATTER OF STYLE

This lesson will help students learn differences in style found in Realist, Impressionist and Abstract works of art and will provide students the opportunity to create their own still life painting through a comparison of styles.

1. Discuss with students the stylistic differences found in Realism, Impressionism, and Abstraction.
2. Arrange a simple still life on a table for all students to observe. Pass out oil pastels and a 6"x18" piece of drawing paper for each student, and have them fold their paper into thirds.
3. From direct observation of the still life, have students use the oil pastels to draw a distinctly different version of the still life, one realistic, one impressionistic and one abstract, in one of the three folded areas of their paper. Each still life should reflect the stylistic differences found in that period's artwork.
4. The following questions are useful for aesthetic or critical discussion:
  - Is it possible for an artist to destroy, change, or ignore the meaning of the subject of a painting?*
  - How did the abstract artists change and reinforce the flat qualities of the picture plane?*
  - How did the impressionists change ideas from earlier artists? What were their interests in looking at nature?*

## RESOURCES

The following resources can extend the learning in the lesson above:

### Books:

- Anholt, Laurence. *Picasso and the Girl With a Ponytail: A Story about Pablo Picasso*
- Garland, Richard. *Dinner at Magritte's*. 1995.
- Hopley, Brigitta. *Marc Chagall: Life is a Dream (Adventures in Art)*, 1998.
- Larroche, Caroline and Claudia Bedrick (Translator). *Corot from A to Z*, 1996..
- Powell, Julian. *Art in the Nineteenth Century (Art and Artists Series)*, 1994.
- Janson, H.W. and Anthony F. Janson. *History of Art for Young People*, 1997.

### Musical Selections:

- Johannes Brahms, *Symphony no. 1 in C Minor*.
- Claude Debussy, *La Mer*. 1903.
- Arnold Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*. 1912



Credits: Page 1, Top: (detail) Pablo Picasso, Spanish, 1881-1973, *Young Girl on a Sofa*, 1949, Oil on canvas, 16 3/8 x 10 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection. Page 1, Bottom: (detail) Adolphe Bouguereau, French, 1825-1905, *Innocence*, 1893, Oil on canvas, 39 1/2 x 20 3/4 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection. Page 2: (detail) Juan Gris, Spanish, 1887-1927, *Spoon and Bowl*, 1918, Oil on canvas, 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection. Page 3, Bottom-Left: (detail) René Magritte, Belgian, 1898-1967, *The Almayor's Madness*, 1951, Gouache over pencil on paper laid down on panel, 13 7/8 x 10 1/2 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection. Page 3, Bottom-center: (detail) Marc Chagall, French, 1887-1985, *Solitude*, c.1948, Gouache on paper, 19 1/2 x 22 1/4 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection. Page 4: Camille Pissarro, French, 1830-1903, *Landscape at Varengeville*, 1899, Oil on canvas, 25 1/2 x 21 1/4 in., Juntos Actuando por la Superación A.C. Collection

# INSPIRATION, CREATIVITY AND PERSONAL VISION

By Hope McMath

Director of Education at The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens

*"The emotions are sometimes so strong that I work without knowing it. The strokes come like speech."* -Vincent van Gogh

Visual images are a large part of our waking and our sleeping lives. At any given moment, children and adults are bombarded by a wide array of imagery ranging from advertising to art. Many of these images serve a specific purpose, such as selling product or idea, and were created with that purpose in mind.

But what of the images that are a result of inner visions and dreams? From paintings on the walls of caves to the work of artists like Marc Chagall and Vincent van Gogh, the external depiction of internal reality has presented some of the most arresting and interesting images ever created through the use of imagination, the subconscious, and dreams.

Children of all abilities possess the capacity to use art at deeply expressive levels, and art can serve as a primary means of communicating ideas that are difficult to share verbally. Because art is highly symbolic, it is also a medium

of communication for sharing unconscious fantasy and personal idiosyncrasy, resulting in images that are highly expressive, personally satisfying to the creator, and evocative for the viewer.

In encouraging students to tap into their dreams and imagination as an impetus for artistic production, teachers can create lessons that lend themselves to the exploration of memories and dreams. Asking students to write about their memories or dreams, or introducing music during the art making experience, allows students to transition from concentrating on external realities to something that is very personal.

Much of art education deals with the depiction of the natural world, which is important for building technical skills and eye to hand coordination. Equally important is the freedom to create images that allow for distortions, exaggerations, and the exploration of uncommon relationships between objects and the spaces they occupy. By allowing students to explore their memories and dreams in a visual journal, the teacher is not becoming an art therapist, but rather is facilitating the making of art that can function on a metaphorical level.





## EXHIBITIONS

### Modern Masters: Looking Without Limits

*The Juntos Actuando por la Superación, A.C. Collection*  
January 29 to March 16, 2003

### Expressive Impressions: Three Decades of American Abstract Prints

May 15 to August 17, 2003

### African American Masters: Highlights from the Smithsonian American Art Museum

October 2 to November 30, 2003

## ART CONNECTIONS EXHIBITS:

### Future Artists of the Beaches Exhibition

Sponsored by FOCUS Cummer and the PGA Tour  
January 29 – March 27, 2003

### The Photographs of Ingrid Damiani

March 30 – April 27, 2003

### Art by Students at St. Pius and Holy Rosary Schools

Sponsored by the Weaver Family Foundation  
April 29 – May 31, 2003

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Visit these websites to find good art ideas and teacher lesson plans:

- [www.tam.itesm.mx/art/imenu.html](http://www.tam.itesm.mx/art/imenu.html)  
A general art history site containing basic information on many periods and styles.
- [www.picasso.com](http://www.picasso.com)  
An exploration of the art legend and his work.
- [www-personal.umich.edu/~macduffe/](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~macduffe/)  
A Camille Pissarro home page.
- [www.loggia.com/art/artists/bouguereau.html](http://www.loggia.com/art/artists/bouguereau.html)  
An exploration of the Academic master and his work.
- [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)  
The Met's timeline of art history places artists in historical context.

### Teacher In-Services:

Friday, March 14, 2003  
12:30 PM - 3:30 PM  
*VSA Arts Teacher Training - Enhancing the ESE Classroom with Art*

ESE educators will learn how to bring the arts into their classrooms to enhance student participation and active learning. This workshop will feature practical lessons, suggestions, tools, and techniques for bringing the power of the arts to students of all abilities. The in-service will also provide curriculum relating to the VSA Arts Festival, scheduled for April.

Open to ESE Educators.

### *Integrating the Arts into the Curriculum*

The museum also offers individual schools or educational groups a half day or full day in-service entitled Integrating the Arts into the Curriculum. This workshop can be tailored to your needs. Call for more details.

April 2-4, 2003  
*Volunteers needed for the annual VSA arts Festival on April 2-4, 2003. Please call 355-0630 for more information.*

Learn more about exciting events at the Cummer by visiting our website at [www.cummer.org](http://www.cummer.org). To book a tour, please call *Art Connections* at 355-0630.