



1. Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828)

George Washington, begun 1795

Description

This portrait of President Washington, called the Gibbs-Channing-Avery portrait, is one of eighteen similar works known as the Vaughan group. The first of this type, presumably painted from life and then copied in all the others, originally belonged to Samuel Vaughan, a London merchant living in Philadelphia and a close friend of Washington. This original portrait by Stuart, painted in 1795 according to Rembrandt Peale, was subsequently acquired by Joseph Harrison of Philadelphia. While in Harrison's collection, Rembrandt Peale copied it many times. The version now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, considered to be one of the earliest and best replicas, was sold to Stuart's close friend, Colonel George Gibbs, and subsequently descended in the Gibbs family.



2. Peaceable Kingdom, ca. 1830–32

Edward Hicks (American, 1780–1849)

Oil on canvas; 17 7/8 x 23 7/8 in. (45.4 x 60.6 cm)

Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch, 1970 (1970.283.1)

Edward Hicks, a Quaker preacher and sign painter, painted approximately sixty versions of the *Peaceable Kingdom*. The painting represents the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:6: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." The presence of additional animals and children on the left is due to Hicks' inclusion of the seventh and eighth verses. Hicks derived the composition, a popular nineteenth-century Bible illustration, from an engraving after a drawing by the English artist Richard Westall. The theme of a peaceable community of animals was one often used as a political metaphor, and was adapted by Hicks himself. The artist sometimes included scenes of Penn's treaty with the Indians, intending Penn's flock to stand as a sort of partial fulfillment of the biblical prophecy.

3.



Thomas Cole (1801–1848)

View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm—The Oxbow, 1836

Oil on canvas; 51 1/2 x 76 in. (130.8 x 193 cm)

Description

Long known as "The Oxbow," this work is a masterpiece of American landscape painting, laden with possible interpretations. In the midst of painting "The Course of Empire" (New-York Historical Society), Cole mentioned in a letter dated March 2, 1836, to his patron Luman Reed that he was executing a large version of this subject expressly for exhibition and sale. The picture was shown at the National Academy of Design in 1836 as "View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm." Cole's interest in the subject probably dates from his 1829–32 trip to Europe, during which he made an exact tracing of the view published in Basil Hall's "Forty Etchings Made with the Camera Lucida in North America in 1827 and 1828." Hall criticized Americans' inattentiveness to their scenery, and Cole responded with a landscape that lauds the uniqueness of America by encompassing "a union of the picturesque, the sublime, and the magnificent." Although often ambiguous about the subjugation of the land, here the artist juxtaposes untamed wilderness and pastoral settlement to emphasize the possibilities of the national landscape, pointing to the future prospect of the American nation. Cole's unequivocal construction and composition of the scene, charged with moral significance, is reinforced by his depiction of himself in the middle distance, perched on a promontory painting the Oxbow. He is an American producing American art, in communion with American scenery. There are both sketchbook drawings with annotations and related oil sketches of this subject. Many other artists copied or imitated the painting



George Caleb Bingham (1811–1879)

Fur Traders Descending the Missouri, 1845

Oil on canvas; 29 x 36 1/2 in. (73.7 x 92.7 cm)

Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1933 (33.61)



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4. Description

On June 4, 1845, Bingham returned from a winter stay in central Missouri to St. Louis, bringing with him several paintings and many sketches. This apparently was one of the pictures that he brought with him, and he sent it later that year for sale to the American Art-Union. It was first called "French-Trader—Half breed Son," but the Art-Union gave it the title by which it is now known. Bingham, whose earliest efforts were portraits, produced a masterpiece of genre painting with little precedent in his oeuvre. The strikingly spare, geometric composition and luminist light recall the paintings of William Sidney Mount, particularly his "Eel Spearing at Setauket" (New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown). The solemn, motionless scene immortalizes the vanished world of the American frontier, constructed for a northeastern audience. The tranquil work was submitted to the Art-Union as a possible companion to the more implicitly violent "The Concealed Enemy" (Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas), in which an armed Osage warrior lies in wait behind a boulder. The polar opposition of quietude, savagery, and frontier danger embodied in the paintings held enormous appeal for urban viewers. Bingham painted a similar, though less extraordinary, picture called "The Trapper's Return" (Detroit Institute of Arts) in New York in 1851.



Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937)

Flight Into Egypt, 1923

Oil on canvas; 29 x 26 in. (73.7 x 66 cm)

Marguerite and Frank A. Cosgrove Jr. Fund, 2001
(2001.402a)

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5.

Description

Tanner's eloquent "Flight into Egypt" is a canonical mature work by the increasingly esteemed American artist, who studied in Paris and resided in France. In the mid-1890s Tanner decided to concentrate on biblical themes familiar from his childhood in a household headed by a leader of the African Methodist Church. Tanner developed an increasingly painterly, highly personal style based on empirical observation and inner vision. "Tanner blues," complex layers of glazes, and flat decorative surfaces are keynotes of many of his late canvases.

"Flight into Egypt" depicts the Holy Family's clandestine evasion of King Herod's assassins (Matthew 2:12–14), Tanner's favorite biblical story. It expresses his sensitivity to issues of personal freedom, escape from persecution, and migrations of African-Americans from the South to the North. The painting, which reveals a concern for human emotions and an awareness of the mystical meanings of biblical narratives, also manifests Tanner's affiliation with contemporary Symbolism and the religious revival that occurred in response to challenges of the modern era.

On the back of this canvas is a study for the prizewinning work Tanner entitled "Christ at the Home of Lazarus," painted about 1912 and now known only from photographs.



6. The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull), 1871

Thomas Eakins (American, 1844–1916)

Oil on canvas; 32 1/4 x 46 1/4 in. (81.9 x 117.5 cm)

Purchase, The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift, 1934 (34.92)

Shortly after his return from studies in Europe in July 1870, Eakins began to paint rowing pictures. This work is among the most celebrated of those painted between 1870 and 1874. It depicts Eakins' boyhood friend Max Schmitt (1843–1900), a champion oarsman, in a scull on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. Eakins depicted himself in the distant boat, rowing away from Schmitt. The bridges behind the rowers can be identified as the Girard Avenue Bridge and the Connecting Railroad Bridge, respectively. It is believed that this work commemorates Max Schmitt's victory in a single-scull competition on October 5, 1870. A number of drawings for various parts of this composition exist



John Singer Sargent (1856–1925)

Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau), 1883–84

Oil on canvas; 82 1/8 x 43 1/4 in. (208.6 x 109.9 cm)

Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1916 (16.53)



Enlarge

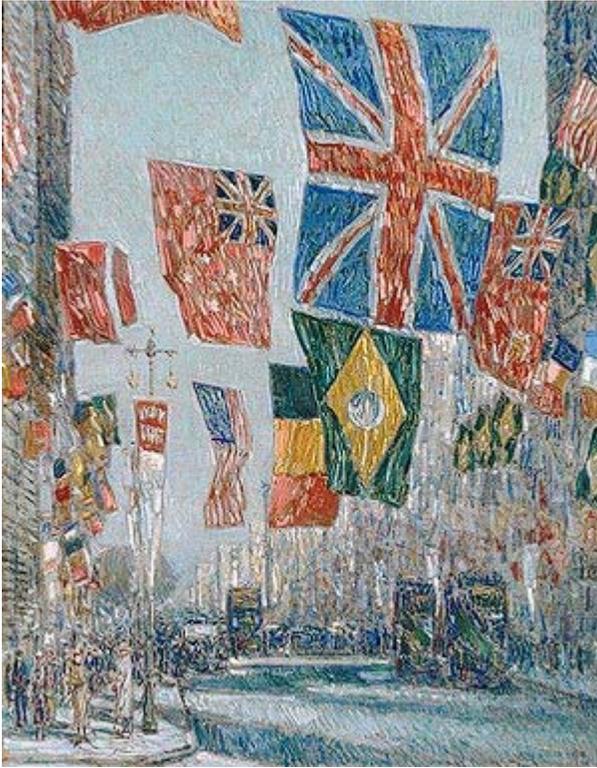


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7. Description

Virginie Avegno (1859–1915) was born in Louisiana, the daughter of Major Anatole Avegno of New Orleans, a gentleman whose family had emigrated from Camogli, Italy, and Marie Virginie de Ternant of Parlange Plantation, Louisiana. After Major Avegno died of wounds suffered at the Battle of Shiloh, Mrs. Avegno took her daughters to Paris. There Virginie became a celebrated beauty and married Pierre Gautreau, a Parisian banker. Sargent probably met her in 1881. In 1882, he wrote of wanting to paint her portrait. He worked on the portrait at the Gautreau's summer home in Brittany in 1883, but he had difficulty finding a suitable pose and perspective. Numerous studies show his different attempts at the composition. The portrait as finally executed was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1884 as "Portrait de Mme ****" and created a scandal. Sargent considered it one of his best works; an unfinished second version of the same pose is in the Tate Gallery in London.



8. Avenue of the Allies, Great Britain, 1918

Childe Hassam (American, 1859–1935)

Oil on canvas; 36 x 28 3/8 in. (91.4 x 72.1 cm)

Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot (1876–1967), 1967 (67.187.127)

During World War I, Hassam painted views of New York's Fifth Avenue decorated as "the Avenue of the Allies." This painting depicts part of the most ambitious flag display, held between September 28 and October 19, 1918, in support of the Fourth Liberty Loan Drive. This spectacle was planned by a committee of artists and architects and involved the decoration of Fifth Avenue between 26th and 58th Streets. Here, Hassam looked north from Fifty-third Street and compressed into a vibrant pattern three blocks dedicated to flags of Great Britain, Brazil, and Belgium. The artist painted at least thirty flag pictures and these were exhibited often in groups of twenty-two, as a reminder of the number of allied nations.



Winslow Homer (1836–1910)

The Gulf Stream, 1899

Oil on canvas; 28 1/8 x 49 1/8 in. (71.4 x 124.8 cm)

Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1906 (06.1234)

 Enlarge

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9. Description

"The Gulf Stream" was based upon studies made during Homer's two winter trips to the Bahamas in 1884–85 and 1898–99. First exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia in 1900, the picture was subsequently reworked and "improved" by the artist. Early photographs show changes to the sea and to the back of the ship, making the composition more dramatic and vivid. The painting was shown in this state at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in 1900–01, and then at M. Knoedler and Co. in New York, where the artist placed on the picture the record-asking price of \$4,000. There were problems selling the work because of either its high price or its unpleasant subject matter. Homer may have reworked the painting again in the face of this criticism in order to add the rigger on the horizon that signals hope and rescue from the perils of the sea.



Grant Wood (American, 1892–1942)

The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, 1931

Oil on Masonite; H. 30, W. 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm)

Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1950 (50.117)

© Estate of Grant Wood/Licensed VAGA,
New York, NY

10. Description

Born and raised in Iowa, Grant Wood became one of America's best-known Regionalists, along with Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry. He trained in various crafts — woodworking, metalworking, and jewelry making — before attending painting and drawing classes at the Art Institute of Chicago (1913–16). During the 1920s Wood traveled to Europe four times, visiting Paris, Italy, and Germany. The most important lessons he brought back were from Munich, where he was impressed by the contemporary art movement known as the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), which rejected abstraction in favor of an orderly, realistic art. He also admired the primitive Flemish and German painters, particularly the way in which they depicted mythological or biblical stories in contemporary costumes and settings, making them more relevant to the viewer than strict history paintings. Back in Iowa, Wood applied these ideas to his depictions of ordinary life. His work, like that of the other Regionalist painters, rejected the abstract modernist currents of European art in an effort to forge a realistic style that could depict typically American subjects.

Wood first came to public attention in 1930, when his painting "American Gothic" won a medal at the Art Institute of Chicago. A year later he painted "The Ride of Paul Revere," which makes no attempt at historical accuracy — for example, eighteenth-century houses surely would not have been so brightly lit. The picture has a dreamlike sense of unreality. The bird's-eye view makes the setting look like a New England town in miniature. Note the geometric shapes of the buildings and the landscape (even the treetops are perfectly round); the precisely delineated, virtually unmodulated light emanating from the buildings and raking across the foreground; the distinct, regularized shadows; and the way in which the forms in the darker background are almost as clear and visible as those in the brightly lit foreground. With his clean line and his even, unerring hand, Wood has thrown the scene into high relief, heightening reality so as to make it almost otherworldly, a quality that differentiates him from his fellow Regionalists. His precision evokes the work of eighteenth-century American limners. Unlike his modernist contemporaries, Wood remained committed to depicting regional life in America and, he hoped, the creation of a national style.



Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975)

July Hay, 1943

Egg tempera, methyl cellulose, and oil on Masonite; 38 x 26 3/4 in. (96.5 x 67.9 cm)

George A. Hearn Fund, 1943 (43.159.1)

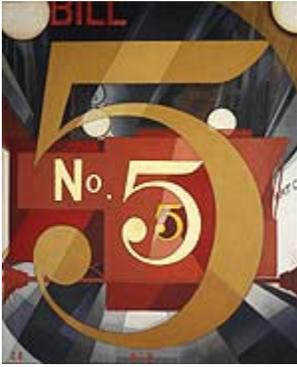
11. Description

Thomas Hart Benton has traditionally been identified as a Regionalist, a term applied to artists from the 1920s and 1930s, like Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry, who worked outside the mainstream of modernism and used a traditional figurative style to glorify the daily lives of rural Americans. Benton was born in Neosho, Missouri, a small town in the Ozarks in 1889. Although his father was a member of the House of Representatives and his great-uncle a U.S. Senator, Benton was always a rebel. When he dropped out of school at the age of fifteen to work as a cartoonist for a newspaper, his parents sent him to a military academy from which he promptly ran away and enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1908, Benton went to Paris, where for five years he was involved in the avant-garde movements of Cubism and Synchronism. Upon his return to the United States, however, he vehemently rejected abstraction and "internationalism" and concentrated instead on creating a native American art. To that end he found his subject matter in the small towns and agricultural heartland of this country. In retrospect, Benton's artistic isolationism, and that of many other American artists, can be correlated to a worldwide return to realism in the 1920s following World War I.

Although he lived in New York City from 1912 until 1935, Benton identified more closely with the rural America of his birth. His paintings celebrated the rural farmer at work and play, and he depicted his subjects more as symbolic types than individuals. He began to make large paintings and murals dealing with themes of Americana including those at the New School for Social Research in New York and at the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City. Benton traveled throughout the country, returning to the small towns of the South and the Midwest and spending each summer at Martha's Vineyard. He continued to work in much the same style and spirit until his death in 1975, maintaining his reputation as an artist of the people. Benton's legacy was furthered by his influence as an instructor at the Art Students League from 1926 to 1935. There he taught the young Jackson Pollock, to whom he remained a mentor and friend.

Benton's tendency to cast the ordinary American in a heroic mold is evident in "July Hay." As the viewer's eye moves from the rich curvilinear forms of the foreground foliage up the undulating landscape to the curving contours of the figures, the transition is seamless and the composition unified. Benton uses a strong contrast of light and dark tones to achieve a sculptural modeling of the forms. The style is a heightened yet geometrical naturalism: the flowers, weeds, and insects in the foreground are rendered in compulsive detail, while the workers, whose backs are turned to us, are generalized. All the elements in the composition are given equal emphasis in color, intensity, and detail of rendering, which points to the lessons that he learned from fifteenth-century Flemish painting. This is also reflected in the traditional technique, as Benton worked primarily in egg tempera, finished in delicate glazes that enhanced the brilliance of the colors. One can also find correlations in the depictions of nineteenth-century French peasants by François Millet and Jules Breton, who glorified the honesty and integrity of agrarian living in the face of an encroaching urbanism. Benton's tone, however, is unmistakably American. He had long ago discarded all vestiges of modernist formalism.



Charles Demuth (American, 1883–1935)

The Figure 5 in Gold, 1928

Oil on cardboard; H. 35-1/2, W. 30 in. (90.2 x 76.2 cm)

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.59.1)

12. Description

Born and raised in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Charles Demuth studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia intermittently between 1905 and 1908. It was in Philadelphia that the artist first met the American poet and physician William Carlos Williams, the subject of this painting. Demuth continued his art training during trips to Europe between 1907 and 1921. In 1925 he was included in a group exhibition organized by Alfred Stieglitz, who later gave him a few one-man shows at his galleries. When Demuth died at age fifty-one, after suffering from diabetes for much of his life, an important and prolific career was cut short after only twenty years.

Demuth, a versatile artist, tailored his style to his subject matter. His delicate, loosely handled watercolors of fruits and flowers pulsate with subtle, exquisitely balanced color. His paintings of the modern urban and industrial landscape, on the other hand, are tightly controlled, hard, and exact — in a style aptly called Precisionism. Although these works show the influence of Cubism and Futurism, their sense of scale and directness of expression seem entirely American.

"The Figure 5 in Gold" is one of a series of eight abstract portraits of friends, inspired by Gertrude Stein's word-portraits, that Demuth made between 1924 and 1929. This painting pays homage to a poem by William Carlos Williams. Like Marsden Hartley's "Portrait of a German Officer" and Arthur Dove's "Ralph Dusenberry," this portrait consists not of a physical likeness of the artist's friend but of an accumulation of images associated with him — the poet's initials and the names "Bill" and "Carlos" that together form a portrait.

Williams' poem "The Great Figure" describes the experience of seeing a red fire engine with the number 5 painted on it racing through the city streets. While Demuth's painting is not an illustration of Williams's poem, we can certainly sense its "rain/and lights" and the "gong clangs/siren howls/and wheels rumbling." The bold 5 both rapidly recedes and races forward in space, and the round forms of the number, the lights, the street lamp, and the arcs at the lower left and upper right are played against the straight lines of the fire engine, the buildings, and the rays of light, infusing the picture with a rushing energy that perfectly expresses the spirit of the poem



13. Autumn Rhythm (Number 30), 1950

Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956)

Enamel on canvas; 105 x 207 in. (266.7 x 525.8 cm)

George A. Hearn Fund, 1957 (57.92)

© 1999 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Pollock had created his first "drip" painting in 1947, the product of a radical new approach to paint handling. With *Autumn Rhythm*, made in October of 1950, the artist is at the height of his powers. In this nonrepresentational picture, thinned paint was applied to unprimed, unstretched canvas that lay flat on the floor rather than propped on an easel. Poured, dripped, dribbled, scumbled, flicked, and splattered, the pigment was applied in the most unorthodox means. The artist also used sticks, trowels, knives—in short, anything but the traditional painter's implements—to build up dense, lyrical compositions comprised of intricate skeins of line. There's no central point of focus, no hierarchy of elements in this all-over composition in which every bit of the surface is equally significant. The artist worked with the canvas flat on the floor, constantly moving all around it while applying the paint and working from all four sides.

Size is significant: *Autumn Rhythm* is 207 inches wide. It assumes the scale of an environment, enveloping both for the artist as he created it and for viewers who confront it. The work is a record of its process of coming-into-being. Its dynamic visual rhythms and sensations—buoyant, heavy, graceful, arcing, swirling, pooling lines of color—are direct evidence of the very physical choreography of applying the paint with the artist's new methods. Spontaneity was a critical element. But lack of premeditation should not be confused with ceding control; as Pollock stated, "I can control the flow of paint: there is no accident."

For Pollock, as for the Abstract Expressionists in general, art had to convey significant or revelatory content. He had arrived at abstraction having studied with Thomas Hart Benton, worked briefly with the Mexican muralists, confronted the methods and philosophy of the Surrealists, and immersed himself in a study of myth, archetype, and ancient and "primitive" art. And the divide between abstraction and figuration was more nuanced—there was a back-and-forth at various moments in his career. Toward the end of his life (he died in a car accident in 1956), he said, "I'm very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you're working out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge. ... Painting is a state of being. ... Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."



Jasper Johns (American, born 1930)

White Flag, 1955

Encaustic, oil, newsprint, and charcoal on canvas; 78 5/16 x 120 3/4in. (198.9 x 306.7cm)

©Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

14. Description

Born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1930 and raised in South Carolina, Jasper Johns moved in 1949 to New York City, where he enrolled in a commercial art school for two semesters. Back in New York, following his service in the army (ca. 1950–51), Johns became acquainted with artist Robert Rauschenberg, composer John Cage, and dancer Merce Cunningham. By the mid- to late 1950s Johns had already achieved fame with his paintings of targets, numerals, and American flags, and his work was exhibited in prominent museums and galleries in New York. "White Flag" of 1955, recently acquired by the Metropolitan from the artist's own collection, exemplifies Johns's early style, which engendered a wide range of subsequent art movements, among them Pop Art, Minimal Art, and Conceptual Art. During the 1950s and 1960s Johns frequently appropriated well-known images (such as targets, flags, and beer cans), elevating them to cultural icons. Throughout his oeuvre — which includes painting, prints, drawings, and sculpture — images are constantly recycled and combined in extensive series. In his later compositions of the 1970s, Johns filled the surface of his pictures with colorful cross-hatchings (suggested by the passing cars on an expressway); and since the 1980s he has incorporated images that have more autobiographical significance.

"White Flag" is the largest of his flag paintings and the first in which the flag is presented in monochrome. By draining most of the color from the flag but leaving subtle gradations in tone, the artist shifts our attention from the familiarity of the image to the way in which it is made. "White Flag" is painted on three separate panels: the stars, the seven upper stripes to the right of the stars, and the longer stripes below. Johns worked on each panel separately. After applying a ground of unbleached beeswax, he built up the stars, the negative areas around them, and the stripes with applications of collage — cut or torn pieces of newsprint, other papers, and bits of fabric. He dipped these into molten beeswax and adhered them to the surface. He then joined the three panels and overpainted them with more beeswax mixed with pigments, adding touches of white oil.

The fast-setting medium of encaustic enabled Johns to make each brushstroke distinct, while the forty-eight-star flag design — contiguous with the perimeters of the canvas — provided a structure for the richly varied surface, which ranges from translucent to opaque.



Andy Warhol (American, 1928–1987)

Self-Portrait, 1986

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas; H. 80, W. 80 in. (203.2 x 203.2 cm)

Purchase, Mrs. Vera G. List Gift, 1987 (1987.88)

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15. Description

Of all the Pop artists who emerged in New York and on the international scene in the early 1960s, none is more famous or more typifies the movement than Andy Warhol. Although he had a traditional art education at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, as a young man in the 1950s he supported himself doing commercial art in New York. About 1959 he decided to concentrate his energies on painting, calling upon both his formal training and commercial experience in his new work.

Warhol purposely sought an alternative to the emotionally charged paintings of the Abstract Expressionists by adopting a commercial, hands-off approach to art. His aim was to demystify art by making it look as if anyone could have done it. To this end, he borrowed images from American popular culture and celebrated ordinary consumer goods, such as Brillo pads, Campbell's soup cans, and Coca-Cola bottles, as well as media and political personalities, including Marilyn Monroe and Mao Zedong. He featured them in individually colored serial paintings and prints that relied on commercial silkscreening techniques for reproduction.

After the early 1960s his most frequent subjects were the famous people he knew, and occasionally he was his own subject. In this eerie, premonitory self-portrait, produced just a few months before his death in February 1987, Warhol appears as a haunting, disembodied mask. His head floats in a dark black void and his face and hair are ghostly pale, covered in a militaristic camouflage pattern of green, gray, and black.



Roy Lichtenstein (American, 1923–1997)

Stepping Out, 1978

Oil and magna on canvas; 86 x 70 in. (218.4 x 177.8 cm)

Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, Arthur Lejwa Fund in honor of Jean Arp; and The Bernhill Fund, Joseph H. Hazen Foundation Inc., Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation Inc., Walter Bareiss, Marie Bannon McHenry, Louise Smith, and Stephen C. Swid Gifts, 1980 (1980.420)

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16. Description

To many people, Roy Lichtenstein's paintings based on comic strips are synonymous with Pop Art. These depictions of characters in tense, dramatic situations are intended as ironic commentaries on modern man's plight, in which mass media — magazines, advertisements, and television — shapes everything, even our emotions. Lichtenstein also based paintings on well-known masterpieces of art, perhaps commenting, as did Andy Warhol in his "Mona Lisa," on the conversion of art into commodity. Like Warhol, Lichtenstein, who had an art-school background, also worked as a commercial artist and graphic designer (1951–57), an experience that influenced the subject matter of his later paintings. Lichtenstein's fame as a Pop artist began with his first one-man exhibition, at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York in 1962, and continued to characterize his career throughout his life.

"Stepping Out" is marked by Lichtenstein's customary restriction to the primary colors and to black and white; by his thick black outlines; and by the absence of any shading except that provided by the dots imitating those used to print comic strips. Yet beneath the simplicity of means and commonplace subject matter lies a sophisticated art founded on a great deal of knowledge and skill. Lichtenstein here depicts a man and woman, side by side, both quite dapperly dressed. The male is based on a figure in Fernand Léger's painting "Three Musicians" of 1944 (Museum of Modern Art, New York), but seen in mirror image. He wears a straw hat, high-collared shirt, and striped tie; the flower in his lapel is borrowed from another Léger painting. The female figure, with her dramatically reduced and displaced features, resembles the Surrealistic women depicted by Picasso during the 1930s. Her face has been reduced to a single eye set on its side, a mouth, and a long lock of cascading blond hair.

The composition of "Stepping Out" is complex and rather elaborate. The figures, while quite different in appearance and style of dress, are united through shape and color: the sweeping curve of the woman's hair is answered by the curve of her companion's lapel; the diagonal yellow of the end of her scarf is echoed in the yellow rectangle that covers the top of his face; the red Benday dots cover half of both faces; and the black that serves as background for the man invades the area behind the woman



17. Based on the town center of Rockport, Massachusetts, the elements in this painting take their cue from period advertising. Using gas pumps, trees, and storefronts combined with words, letters, and random lines, Davis conveys the vitality and speed of American life in the mid-twentieth century.

Report from Rockport, 1940
Stuart Davis (American, 1892–1964)



18. Portrait of a German Officer, 1914

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)

Oil on canvas; 68 1/4 x 41 3/8 in. (173.4 x 105.1 cm)

Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949 (49.70.42)

Hartley painted his most startlingly advanced abstractions during the first years of World War I while living in Berlin (March 1914–December 1915). The War Motifs, his German military series, are intensely powerful canvases in an Expressionist vein; they reflect not only his revulsion at the wartime destruction, but also his fascination with the energy and pageantry that accompanied the carnage. *Portrait of a German Officer*, painted in November 1914, shows Hartley's assimilation of both Cubism (the collage-like juxtaposition of visual fragments and the hieratic structuring of geometric shapes) and German Expressionism (the coarse brushwork and the dramatic color). The condensed mass of images (badges, flags, medals) evokes a collective psychological and physical portrait of the officer. There are also specific references to Hartley's close friend Karl von Freyburg, a young cavalry officer who had recently been killed in action: K.v.F. are his initials, 4 was his regiment number, and 24 his age



Chuck Close (American, born 1940)

Lucas, 1986–87

Oil and pencil on canvas; 100 x 84 in. (254 x 213.4 cm)

Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift and Gift of Arnold and Milly Glimcher, 1987 (1987.282)

© 2003 Chuck Close

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19. Description

Associated with the Photo- or Super-Realist movement of the late-1960s and 1970s, the American artist Chuck Close initially became known for the minutely detailed portrait heads he painted on a monumental scale in black, white, and gray. These works, which were based on photographs, were factually rendered but magnified every pore and imperfection to unexpected and unnatural proportions. The subjects for all of Close's portraits are drawn from his wide circle of relatives and friends, many of whom are connected to the art world as artists, dealers, and collectors. Their identification in the titles by their first names only lends a casual informality to otherwise imposing images.

Paintings such as "Lucas," which depicts fellow artist Lucas Samaras, are representative of Close's later, more colorful and painterly style. They go beyond the hyper-reality of his earlier portraits and elaborate on his pictorial investigation of the act of perception, breaking down the visual information into component parts that describe the actual process of seeing, not just the end result. To create these portraits, Close begins by taking photographs of the sitter, then draws a grid over the photo, from which he methodically reproduces the contents of each tiny square on a magnified scale with small dashes, dots of pigment, thumbprints, or applied pieces of colored paper. Viewed close-up, the elements of the picture are seen as separate abstract markings; from a distance, they coalesce into an illusionistic portrait. In order to assimilate all of the multi-hued daubs of color on an eight-foot-plus canvas, the viewer is forced to stand quite a distance from the work. From this perspective, the subject stares coolly, anonymously, and unwaveringly at the viewer



Ellsworth Kelly (American, born 1923)

Blue Green Red, 1962–63

Oil on canvas; 91 x 82 in. (231.1 x 208.3 cm)

Arthur Hoppock Hearn Fund, 1963 (63.73)

© Ellsworth Kelly

20. Description

Ellsworth Kelly began his studies as an artist at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1941, and the same year enlisted in the U.S. Army. In 1944 he participated in the operations in Normandy and Brittany. During the time his division was stationed in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Kelly made his first trip to Paris. When he returned to the United States, he entered the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where he began training as a realist painter. In 1948, Kelly took advantage of the G.I. Bill to return to Paris, where he stayed for six years. While the years between 1948 and 1954 were crucial ones for the Abstract Expressionists in New York, Kelly's work, away from this influence, developed a greater affinity with that of Matisse and Arp.

Hard-edged, flat, and without a trace of the artist's hand, Kelly's signature imagery is nonetheless based on architectural and natural forms. In Kelly's hands, abstraction becomes a conceptual method by which he reconfigures and recontextualizes the forms and structures of the real world. His paintings and sculptures represent a subjective interpretation of reality, rather than a descriptive copy of it. In "Blue Green Red," he has juxtaposed three bold colors in a highly skillful and effective manner to create a complex picture in which color and shape are one. The edges of one shape—the rectangle—are identified with the edges of the canvas, while the blue ellipse expands beyond the canvas, forcing us to finish it in our minds. Despite the clean, precise rendering of the ellipse, its form is irregular and seems to float and swell, activating the entire composition.

Kelly's arrangement of the complementary colors, which work to intensify one another at their intersections, is also an essential component of the work. The opposite colors of red and green both add to the boldness of the work and divide the overall rectangle into distinct units. The artist has also exploited the tendency of warm colors to appear to come forward on the picture plane, and cool ones to recede. While the bright, unmodulated colors are unequivocally two-dimensional, we can nevertheless read the red strip at the bottom as foreground and the cool green and blue as receding background. When viewed as foreground and background in this way, the sources in nature for Kelly's forms are suggested. Blue and green are the colors of water and earth—perhaps lake and field, as indicated not only by hue but by the swelling, fluid shape of the ellipse and the flatness of the green surrounding it. While the painting itself is continuous with the European biomorphic tradition, its scale is that of the huge close-ups of billboards and movie screens—a very American form.

Eye Spy



The Block, 1971

Romare Bearden (American, 1911–1988)

Cut and pasted printed, colored and metallic papers, photostats, pencil, ink marker, gouache, watercolor, and pen and ink on Masonite; Overall: 48 x 216 in. (121.9 x 548.6 cm); six panels, each: 48 x 36 in. (121.9 x 91.4 cm)

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Shore, 1978 (1978.61.1–6)

© Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

In 1969, Bearden published an article in which he wrote of "painting the life of my people as I know it—as passionately and dispassionately as Brueghel painted the life of the Flemish people of his day." Expansive in scale, narrative detail, and conception, *The Block* celebrates a Harlem neighborhood in a dynamic, affirmative spirit. The collage is organized in six panels that together measure eighteen feet. Dense incident drawn from an almost journalistic reporting of everyday activity is coupled with imagery from an inner world of fantasy and pure imagination. The reportorial and the fantastic are conjoined here in a scene emblematic of the African-American experience—at epic scale.

The composition is structured by a row of storefronts with residential apartments above. Among the neighborhood institutions, Bearden includes a liquor store, a funeral parlor (procession in progress), an Evangelical church, a barbershop, and a corner grocery. Sidewalk activity is richly depicted in vignettes: children play with pets, pedestrians hurry by, a street person is shown on the sidewalk, and myriad details of people alone and together make a comprehensive analysis of the daily routines of everyday life in one particular neighborhood. Bearden's magical vantage point lets us see indoor and outdoor scenes simultaneously, a unique view of public and private life. Among the private moments are people shown in conversation or watching television and a couple making love. Bearden moves beyond documenting everyday life into other realms, too: there's an Annunciation scene in one panel and an Angel ascending to heaven in another.

Whether we are seeing public, private, inner, or spiritual worlds, Bearden uses disjunctions of scale within the various vignettes to drive home emotional or narrative points. Other devices, too, carry the expression; color plays a huge role, as do sensitive transitions from black and white motifs to full spectrum. Sound was integral to the work as well: the original installation was accompanied by recordings of street noise, news broadcasts, and church music.

Bearden was inspired by music. *The Block's* dynamic visual rhythms have their counterparts in jazz principles, such as "call and response" (where each move determines the next) or "call and recall" (repetition of motifs with variations). The artist described his process: "I listened for hours to recordings of Earl Hines at the piano. Finally, I was able to block out the melody and concentrate on the silences between the notes. I found this was very helpful to me in the placement of objects in my paintings and collages. Jazz has shown me ways of achieving artistic structures that are personal to me."



Asher Brown Durand (1796–1886)

Landscape—Scene from "Thanatopsis", 1850

Oil on canvas; 39 1/2 x 61 in. (100.3 x 154.9 cm)

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1911 (11.156)

 Enlarge

 Zoom

 to My Met Gallery

Description

Inspired by William Cullen Bryant's poem "Thanatopsis," this landscape was first exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1850. The catalogue noted lines from Bryant's poem. After the exhibition, the picture was acquired by the American Art-Union and distributed in the same year to one of its subscribers. Durand's son noted that after this his father got the picture back, repainted parts of it, and sold it to Mr. B.F. Gardner. Durand briefly resumed painting large philosophical landscapes after the death of Thomas Cole, using his works as models. The presence of a funeral, of a farmer's daily work, and of the ruins of man in ancient nature reflects the poem's emphasis on the permanence of the earth and the creation and reversion of man from and to its soils

American Romanticism and Transcendentalism

* In 1819, a British observer noted the general perception of American literary and artistic culture:

"In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or looks at an American picture?"

"The Americans have no national literature, and no learned men. The talents of our transatlantic brethren show themselves chiefly in political pamphlets. ❖"

* Great ferment over the next three years:

-Persuasive writing gave way to entertainment, and a focus on the present world rather than afterworld

-New styles emerged: short story, detective story, humor,
(*The Sketch Book* by Washington Irving, *The Spy* James Fennimore Cooper)

Romanticism and Transcendentalism :

Early American writing was dominated by Age of Reason and its dominant philosophy, **Classicism**, characterized by reason, clarity, balance, and order)

Romanticism was a reaction to Classicism but retained the ideals of equality, freedom, and individualism set forth in the Declaration of Independence.

Key Romantic elements

- An emphasis on imagination as a key to revealing the innermost depths of human spirit;
- A great interest in picturesque and exotic aspects of the past
- Enthusiasm for portraying national life and character and common man
- Celebration of beauty and mystery of nature
- Fascination with supernatural and gothic
- Interest in exotic, especially Far Eastern, ideas
- Sense of idealism