
ART SMART

3rd Grade / January

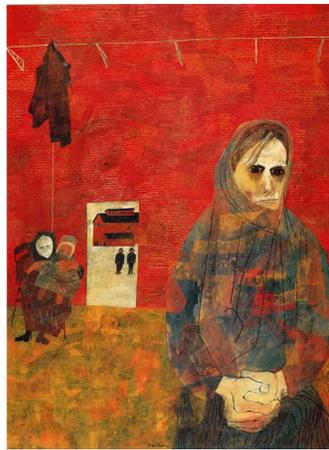
THEME:
People at Work

WORKS:

1. Edgar Degas, *Ballet Scene*
2. Ben Shahn, *Miners' Wives*
3. Andrew Wyeth, *Alvaro and Christina*
4. Jean-Francois Millet, *Man with a Hoe*
5. Benjamin West, *The Battle of La Hogue*



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2.



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5.

Edgar Degas - Ballet Scene - French 1907

3rd Grade
January

- What do you think this picture is called?
- What kind of work are they doing here?

It is called Ballet Scene and was painted by Edgar Degas - Has anyone ever seen this painting or others by him of dancers before?

Degas grew up very wealthy and privileged, unlike many famous artists - so he had many freedoms to paint how he wanted because he didn't need to do it for money.

He painted with many other famous impressionist artists (Manet, Cassatt) and studied them- but was not a follower and used his own style.

- **What is an Impressionist?** (a movement in the late 19th century in French painting, characterized by the goal of reproducing an impression of a subject by use of reflected light and color, small brush strokes and the blurring of outlines)

He liked to work alone and inside while many painted outdoors with friends.

He used lines and the color black when many impressionists did not. (used primary colors and blurred outlines.)

And painted people other than landscapes and liked to show them in their lives, like at the ballet or at the racetrack or at work.

- **What colors did he use?** Does the painting show texture? Floor, skirts - **How were they done?** Blended base overlaid with strokes.
- **What do you think it is drawn or painted with?** Pastels - known for developing the use of pastels beyond sketching but making it as bold as paint. Strokes are visible.
- **Is the painting very detailed?** - This painting is very large in real life for a pastel because it was done late in Degas career when he was almost blind.
- **Are the subjects in the painting posed?** No - not looking at artist, continuing with dance.
- **Does it look like they are moving or standing still?** Shows movement
- **When you look at this picture what does it look like?** Resembles a Photograph. Photography was one of Degas' interests and he liked to compose his pictures like a candid photo.
- **Where is your eye drawn when look at the print? Is the main subject in the center of the print?**

No Degas very influenced by two events occurring in Europe: photography and the importance of Japanese prints - which used a different composition than their traditional mode, main subject is not in the center of pic.

Ballet Scene shows these two influences - Dancers are caught in movement and the ones on the right are more detailed balanced by the stage and smaller figures on the left.

Ben Shahn, Miners' Wives -

American artist born in Russia. Moved to Brooklyn when he was 8.

He wanted to record the realities around him. He painted during the Depression and worked to portray the many people who lost their jobs and were very poor.

How does this picture make you feel? What is the mood of the picture?

How do you think the subject feels? Sad, dazed, angry.

How can you tell something bad has happened? Attitude of the miners' wives. Huge clenched hands.

What is the subject of this painting?

What story is the picture telling? Families are waiting to see if their loved ones are safe.

This painting is one of a series following a mine disaster in Illinois where many men lost their lives.

What colors are used?

Are the colors muted or sharp? Mostly muted with some light and dark shapes for contrast (the face and hands of the woman. The figures in the background. The clothes of the miners.) Colors are muted to create an illusionary effect. Almost ghostlike in places.

Who are the people in the painting? Families and men in suits who work for mine to deliver bad news.

Why does the artist choose to paint these subjects? Show the realities of working conditions. Employers need to provide safe working environments for their employees.

Andrew Wyeth, Alvaro and Christina 1917

Introduce artist but not name of painting.

Artist was born the youngest of 5 children who's father was a famous book illustrator and studied in his studio. He died recently in 2009.

His paintings are of buildings and people Wyeth encountered in his daily life.

This painting is Called Alvaro and Christina - **Does it show those people? Is it a portrait?** No does not include people.

What kind of painting is it? A still life. **Why?** Arrangement of objects that do not move. **Was the Degas picture a still life?**

Do you see people at work in this painting? No shows things people use to work.

Why do you think the artist called it Alvaro and Christina?

Alvaro and Christina depicts a house he has painted many times owned by a brother and sister in Maine. Christina posed for the artist many times, but Alvaro posed once for the artist, but refused to pose again so Wyeth portrayed him in the things that belonged to him: his grain bags, his barn, his boats. These are symbols of Man at work.

This painting was painted shortly after the brother and sister died.

What colors are used? Are they bright or subdued?

What items do you see in the painting? Doors, mop, pail. By painting their possessions their presence and their work lingers on.

Do the items in the painting look old or new?

How did the artist show that the building and things were old? - dull, faded colors. Texture of dirt and scratches, dented pail, wrinkled rags.

How did the artist highlight certain items? Light from window.

Do you see his use of shapes to highlight items? Rect. Doors and post. Triangle, circles.

Why do you think the artists composes the picture using shapes.? Creates balance and contrast with light and shape.

What feeling does it give you? Somber, subdued.

What do you think the artist may have been feeling when looking at the house after his friends passed away?

Jean - Francis Millet (Mee - lay), *Man with a Hoe*

What do you think the painting is called?

Man with a Hoe

Year? 1860-1862

- Millet grew up as the son of peasants in Normandy, France.
- He studied Latin and loved to read. He read all his life.
- He worked in the fields with his family and painted on the side.
- His parents recognized his talents and had him study with a local painter.
- He began to paint portraits for a living and moved to Paris to continue his work.
- As his work matured he became very interested in doing paintings and drawings of workers and peasant life.
- He was seen as POLITICAL for doing this and made the rich uncomfortable.
- Other artist friends told him not to paint pictures of laborers.
- Many said he was a Socialist (Activist) who only focused on the hardships of life on the farm, not the beauty of the countryside.
- But Millet disagreed and said his intentions were to paint simple pictures of HONEST events and people doing HONEST work.

Questions:

Does this look like easy work? (short hoe)

How does the ground look? (hard and rocky)

What is the man's expression? (exhaustion)

* This painting was painted by Millet from MEMORY!!!

Benjamin West, *The Battle of La Hogue, 1778*

- Benjamin West was the youngest of 10 children of an innkeeper in Pennsylvania.
- According to legend he learned how to mix paint from the Indians and made his first paint brush from hairs from a cats tail.
- By age 20 he was regarded as the worldwide leader of the “grand style” of painting.
- The Battle of La Hogue shows sailors acting out the parts of men who fought each other in a real battle between the English and Dutch against the French in May 1692.
- He could only paint what he could see, so King George III commanded his admiral to stage a battle scene.

Can you imagine a King or President today staging a battle so an artist could paint it?

Who seems to be winning the fight?

(notice the figure in red is calm and confident, this is the British Admiral. The frightened, wigless man in blue symbolizes France.)

What research would West have had to do to make sure his painting looked authentic (a battle scene 90 years in the past?)

Clothing, flags, ships, boats, weapons, etc.

People at Work

Edgar Degas, *Ballet Scene*



Edgar Degas (ed-gahr duh-gah), French, 1834-1917, *Ballet Scene*, c. 1907, pastel on cardboard, 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 43 $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Chester Dale Collection.

The Artist

Helaire Germaine Edgar Degas does not fit the model of the impoverished, misunderstood artist. He was born to wealthy Parisian parents, finished an expensive education in law, and traveled frequently to Italy to study the works of Renaissance art. He never lacked for commissions for portraits of rich and influential people and could afford to use his time as he wished, painting and drawing the way he liked.

As a young man, Degas chanced to meet the revered artist, Ingres, who advised him to "draw lines, young man, many lines, from memory or from nature. It is in this way that you will become a good artist." Perhaps that is why Degas never worked in the style of the true Impressionists whose paintings seldom included firmly drawn lines. Yet Degas knew all of them well, especially Manet and Cassatt, was interested in their ideas, and often exhibited with them.

Degas was, however, not a follower. He preferred solitude, usually working indoors from his sketches rather than painting with friends in the open air. He chose to paint people rather than landscapes and did not avoid using black in his paintings as most of the Impressionists did. His early and mature work shows his skill as a draftsman. He made thousands of preparatory sketches everywhere he went. It was not until he was an old man, almost blind, that he abandoned his use of line and delicate colors and laid his pastels on in heavy layers of bold color.

His favorite subject was humanity. Although he had few close friends, he chose to portray people in all his drawings and paintings. He showed them at the racetrack, the ballet school and theater, the cafes, and in their workplaces. Photography was one of his interests, and he liked to compose his paintings as though they were candid snapshots. He was a sensitive, inward, witty man with exquisite taste and the money to live the way he wanted. His works prove him one of the most original artists of a great century.

The Art

Although Edgar Degas also worked in oils, it is his inventive use of pastels that has given him much of his great reputation. He developed the pastel medium beyond a mere tool for sketching and devised unique ways of making it as expressive as paint. *Ballet Scene*, a pastel study, done late in his life when he was almost blind, is an example of his most bold and forceful work in this medium. It is large for a pastel, about 30 x 44-in., because Degas could no longer see well enough to do the small, detailed, delicate work that first won him recognition.

On this large sheet of cardboard, Degas has returned to the subject, the ballet theater, that interested him greatly in the years when he associated with the newly formed group of Impressionists. Here, he has reworked the theme of ballerinas on stage in the typical gestures of the dance.

Two events that occurred in Europe during his lifetime influenced the art of Degas. One was the introduction of photography as a practical way to record people and places. The other was the importation of Japanese prints, informing European artists of an oriental kind of composition that was quite different from their traditional western mode. Degas embraced both new ideas. He carefully organized his compositions to appear as though they were casual snapshots or glimpses through a camera's lens. And he studied and utilized the Japanese technique of placing the center of interest not in the physical center of the picture. This *Ballet Scene* exemplifies these two influences. The dancers are caught in the midst of movement. The ones at the right, larger and more detailed, are balanced asymmetrically by the smaller figures and the large area representing the floor of the stage.

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

Before Degas's use of this medium, pastel drawings had been considered as mere sketches to help an artist compose and paint the "real" work of art in the studio. Degas, however, invented new ways of working with pastels to make them as expressive as the traditional oil paints.

An aesthetic concern is who and what determine the value of a work of art? Another pastel study of ballet dancers by Edgar Degas recently sold for three million dollars.

Media and Technique:

Look closely and see if you can tell that this picture was made with the chalk-like pastels and not paint? *The strokes are visible, and they do not appear to be brushstrokes.* How did Degas achieve such rich effects of blended color? *He applied layers of pastel over one another. Sometimes the earlier layers were smoothed so that the strokes were invisible, then new layers of different colors laid on in different directions were applied.* Degas used pastels for both painting and drawing in color. Find some areas that are "painterly" and other parts that are "linear." *The background areas and the outline of figures.*

Elements of Design:

Find some areas that show different textures. *The floor, the dancers' skirts.* Describe how they appear to have been done. *A blended base overlaid with strokes—the floor; and with strokes and dots—the skirts on the closest figures.*

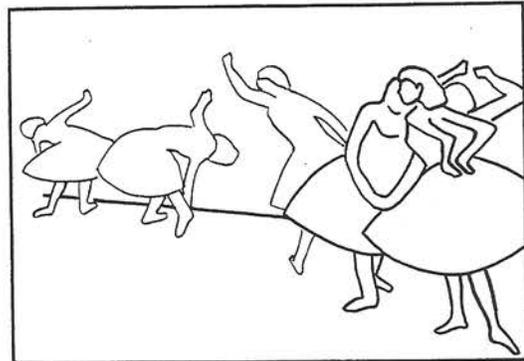
Principles of Design:

What colors did the artist use most in this pastel painting? How did he unify the figures with the setting they are in? *Repeated colors and values; nothing separates boldly.*

Degas was very interested in giving the impression of movement. What did he do to create that effect

here? *The figures are in the poses of dancers, bending and turning, leaning and twisting. Also, the viewer's eye is led from one side of the picture to the other by the placement of the figures and the line of the stage backdrop against the floor, a gentle diagonal movement.* The figures are in a variety of positions that contrast gently with one another and with their setting to add interest.

The illustration below diagrams the position of the figures and how they balance the composition.



The large figures at the right are the center of interest and are balanced by smaller figures to the left and the large space of the floor.

Point of View:

Sometimes Degas sketched his dancers from the orchestra pit, sometimes from a box seat, or loge, at the corner of the stage. Where did he sit when he made the sketches for this painting? This different point of view is another idea that came from Japanese art.

Expressive Properties:

How would you interpret the mood of this work? Choose several words that describe it referring specifically to what you see in the painting. Compare this pastel of ballerinas to pastels of dancers made by Degas earlier in his life. Compare it also with other pictures of people at work and at play to see how successfully Degas communicated his understanding of his subject.

People at Work

Jean-Francois Millet, *Man with a Hoe*



Jean-Francois Millet (zhahn fran-swah mee-lay), French, 1814-1875, *Man with a Hoe*, 1860-1862, oil on canvas, 31½ x 39-in.
J. Paul Getty Museum

The Artist

Jean-Francois Millet was born the son of peasants in a small village in Normandy, France, and he grew up with an intimate knowledge of rural life. Although he worked in the fields along with the other children, he was instructed in Latin and other studies by the village priest. He became a voracious reader and maintained this hobby all his life.

Millet drew constantly while he tended the family's sheep. Fortunately, his parents recognized his strong interest and unusual talents from the start, and they showed his work to a local painter. As soon as he was old enough, Millet followed the painter's advice and left the farm to study art. His earliest job was as a print copier, and it was through this occupation that he became familiar with the work of many great artists including Poussin and Michelangelo. Soon he began to paint portraits for a living. In 1837, in his early twenties, Millet moved to Paris to discover the wonders of the big city and the art treasures of the Louvre Museum.

As his work began to mature, Millet became increasingly interested in doing paintings and drawings of workers and peasant life. He was criticized as being too political; such humble subjects made the bourgeois city dwellers uncomfortable. But he declared that the worker was an indispensable part of his life. "Peasant subjects suit my temperament best," he stated. "I must confess, even if you think me a Socialist, that the human side of art is what touches me most."

By 1850, Millet had moved from Paris to the nearby town of Barbizon to escape an outbreak of cholera. There he found other artists who became his good friends, and he remained with them for the rest of his life. The colors of his palette became darker and drabber, in keeping with the more serious subject matter he would be best known for. Millet might have been recognized today as a landscape painter along with the other Barbizon artists had he not been so interested in the human figure. His last years produced a number of powerful, evocative countryside scenes, and some critics have compared the techniques of these landscapes to the work of the Impressionist painters.

However, in Millet's final years, he began to fall from popular favor and earned very little money. He died in poverty leaving his widow to be supported by his old friends. Some years afterwards, his paintings achieved great popularity in America, and *Man with a Hoe* was one of the favorite paintings in the United States at the turn of the century.

The Art

Man with a Hoe was painted in 1862 at a time when Millet was facing much criticism from his fellow artists and the public. This particular painting drew scathing accusations, mostly having to do with his supposed political beliefs and personal views about a class of people, the farm laborers. Many people thought that Millet was a subversive Socialist who only focused on the hardships and grimness of life on the farm. Millet contested these accusations and said his intentions were to paint simple pictures of honest events and people doing honest work.

The viewer might see in *Man with a Hoe* a symbol of hard work, a man who is resting briefly after tedious yet necessary groundbreaking in the field. The hoe is short, making the work even more strenuous. The ground, although fertile enough to grow weeds and thistles, looks hard and rocky. The man's expression is one of exhaustion. His mouth is open as if he were gasping for air, and his eyes are shadowed and dull. He may have just glanced up to survey his progress and see how much remains to be done before the sun sets and his long day ends. Yet we feel the man is patient with his work and resigned to the unchangeable order of things.

Millet's critics felt that he did not portray the beauty of the countryside in this painting, only its harshness. Millet insisted, however, that he painted the

Jean-Francois Millet, *Man with a Hoe*

land as it truly was and that to someone who could see ahead to what the land would produce after being worked and planted, this countryside was indeed beautiful. By placing the sturdy peasant in the center of the foreground with the brown landscape and dusky sky stretching beyond into the far distance, Millet focuses our full attention on the character as well as the figure of this monumental man with a hoe.

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

Millet's work has been labeled both classic and romantic. His subjects are often intensely romantic, and his technique, especially in painting the human figure, is classical. Like Degas and Poussin, Millet returned again and again to the same subjects in his painting, hoping to create a timeless idea. Millet never painted directly from nature but always from memory. He placed his figures where he wished to create balance and harmony in his compositions. He understood line, shape, form, and color, but he never lost sight of his subjects as human beings, suspended in a moment of time, telling a timeless tale.

Although this painting was considered very radical and a political statement about the ills of society in France, it became very popular in the United States. It was immortalized by the socialist American poet, Edwin Markham, in a poem of the same name when he asked, "Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?" Whether Millet intended to or not, he made a painting that has become a symbol of the laboring class for more than a century.

Expressive Properties:

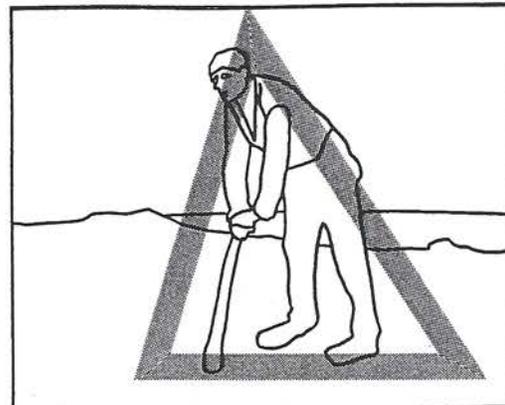
What is this painting about? *A tired peasant leaning on his hoe, and the dignity of hard, honest work.* What is the mood? What is the message? *Answers will vary.*

What time of day has the artist shown? *It seems to be late in the day when low, slanting sunlight*

creates soft, glowing colors. What clues tell you that it is a warm, still day? *Sunshine, vertical columns of smoke.* The peasant has been working the rocky, thistle-laden field with a short hoe, an implement that means he must work bent over. How must he feel after hours of this kind of drudgery? What do his dark face and the lines of his posture express?

Principles of Design:

Millet's painting was criticized because he seemed to make the peasant into a dull-witted, brutish creature. City people, especially those who went to art exhibitions, did not like to be reminded that farmers often had to work long hours under wretched conditions. Millet might have been suggesting that this peasant was somehow noble. Notice that the viewer seems to be looking up at him against the sky. He might even have been suggesting that he suffered like Christ. Notice the thorn-like thistles and the weariness expressed by the man's face. The figure, supported by the hoe, makes a bold triangle within the boundaries of the picture. What feelings does this pose suggest? *Sturdiness, stolidity, strength, resignation.* How does the picture balance? The triangular composition is shown in the diagram below.



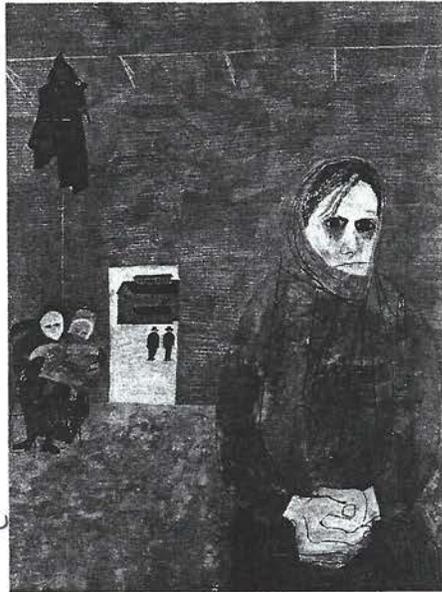
The figure supported by the hoe creates a strong triangular composition.

Interpretation:

What do you think? Is it appropriate for an artist to make a political or social statement with a painting?

People at Work

Ben Shahn, *Miners' Wives*



Ben Shahn, American, 1898-1969, *Miners' Wives*, 1948, egg tempera on board, 48 x 36-in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Given by Wright S. Ludington.

post depression
by +

The Artist

Ben Shahn was born in Russia but came to Brooklyn, New York, when he was eight. Because he was already so good at drawing, the toughs of his neighborhood forced him to make sidewalk chalk sketches of various heroes of the sports world. At fifteen, he worked as a lithographer's apprentice and attended high school at night. He worked his way through art classes at two universities in New York and the National Academy of Design and made two trips to Europe and North Africa. At 32, he rejected the popular French style of art and determined to record the realities of the life around him.

In 1931, Shahn found precisely what he needed. Over a period of seven months, he worked on a series of 23 small paintings and two large panels dealing with the highly political trial and execution for murder of two Italian-American anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti. The haunting images of the two condemned men recalled the obvious injustice of their trial. The following year, Shahn completed a series about a persecuted labor leader. These caught the attention of the celebrated Mexican muralist, Diego Rivera, and Rivera invited him to assist on a large Rockefeller Center mural project.

Throughout the deepening Great Depression of the 1930's, Ben Shahn worked to portray the misery of

the hundreds of thousands of unemployed American workers. The lightless sweatshops, inadequate housing, tedious and backbreaking work with outmoded tools were conditions they had to face if they were lucky enough to find a job, and Shahn showed those aspects of America, too. In the later '30's, he and his wife painted a number of fine murals about labor. Then in 1940, his work was shown in an exhibition that won the attention of a large number of museum curators.

Satirical pieces on war themes done in luminous color replaced his social realism paintings, and in the years after the war, he turned toward a personal realism, yet still people-centered. *Miners' Wives* is from this period. In the 1950's, his interest in symbolism and allegory predominated, and he produced a series with classical allusions in which he warned of the danger that badly-managed technology holds for man.

Today, Ben Shahn's art in all its media and forms is in great demand, and yet his rise to fame left him stubbornly unchanged. In his biography by Selden Rodman, he states, "I'm sadly dulled to fame, too, now that it has come at last, because all during those years of obscurity, I protected myself with the philosophy that a headful of thoughts and a roomful of paintings were the important things in life even if the public never found out about either. I still think so."¹

The Art

Ben Shahn was, by the late 1940's when he painted *Miners' Wives*, one of the best of the school of Social Realism artists. Through drawings, prints, photographs, and paintings, he had described the poverty-stricken or unemployed thousands who were victims of the political and economic fluctuations of the first half of the 20th century. This painting is one of a series he did following a mine disaster in Centralia, Illinois, where many men lost their lives from underground explosions and fire due to recognized hazardous conditions that had remained uncorrected.

Shahn has told of the tragedy through the brooding, melancholy expressions of two women and a child inside a brick building near the scene of the accident. Dazed, angry, unbelieving, they stare uncomprehendingly into space, their emotions contained and their thoughts inward. Through the small door and beneath another company building, two men in business suits walk dejectedly across the yard. The

mood of anguish is heightened by details such as the women's huge, clenched hands and the miners' change of clothing hung high in one corner, perhaps never again to be worn.

With a technique of translucent layers of color over a tempera underpainting, Shahn has created an illusionary surface. Against the brick wall, shapes reminiscent of letters of the Hebrew alphabet hover as though they were ghostly presences. Through the blue, hooded cloak of the large, grieving woman show patches of the red of the wall and the ochre yellow of the floor, making her too seem like a ghost. Her face is grim; her eyes are dead. The other woman, a blanketed child on her lap, huddles hopelessly. The mood is one of bitterness, loss, and despair.

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

By 1948, when *Miners' Wives* was painted, Ben Shahn had already been recognized for his artistic interpretation of the plight of the lower classes. He championed their cause and through his art he fought to better their situation. Publicizing in his paintings their lives of quiet desperation and the deplorable conditions of their existence, he was a leader in bringing about a change for the better. Nevertheless, incidents such as the mine disaster at Centralia in 1947 showed that there was much still to do. Famous already, he continued to portray the effects of irresponsibility and greed on the lives of poor people.

Expressive Properties:

What is the subject of this painting? How can you tell that something dreadful has happened? *Attitude and expression of the miners' wives.*

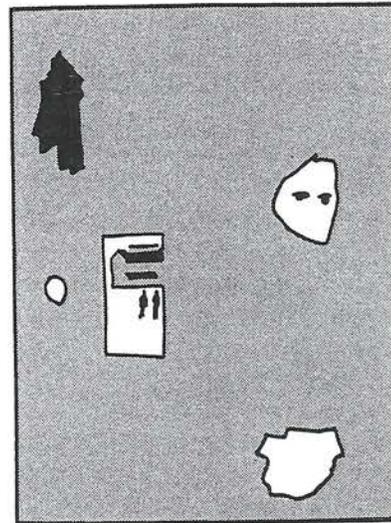
Do the colors seem to contradict or reinforce the feeling that a tragedy has occurred? *Primary colors are usually considered "happy," but these primaries have been much modified and subdued suggesting change and sadness.*

Elements of Design:

How has each color been muted? *The red of the wall shows an underpainting of darker shapes suggesting symbols or the Hebrew alphabet; the yellow floor has been painted over strokes of blue and red to cre-*

ate a blend of green, orange, and yellow; the blue robe likewise shows patches of dull red, green, and purple with an effect of translucency. Where are the lightest areas of the painting? The pasty-white faces, the large gnarled hands, and the snowy landscape. How did Shahn use lines? Thin, pen-like lines are drawn over the paint to indicate folds of fabric and the details of faces and hands. Fine white lines describe high brackets and the brick texture of the wall.

The diagram outlines the muted primary colors suggesting change and the light and dark shapes which contrast with the overall subdued middle values.



A few light and dark shapes contrast with the overall subdued middle values.

Interpretation:

* What story is the artist telling with this art work? *Wives of miners are waiting to learn if their men are safe, injured, or dead. What larger message is Shahn communicating? The owners of industries must provide their employees with safe workplaces and decent living conditions.*

Judgment:

Is such "propaganda" as this Social Realism style of painting a proper concern of artists and a genuine purpose for art?

¹ Rodman, Selden, *Portrait of the Artist as an American*; New York; Harper, 1951.

People at Work

Benjamin West, *The Battle of La Hogue*



Benjamin West, American, 1738-1820, *The Battle of La Hogue*, 1778, oil on canvas, 84 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 60 $\frac{1}{8}$ -in. National Gallery of Art, Washington; Andrew W. Mellon Fund.

The Artist

Benjamin West was the youngest of ten children of a Pennsylvania innkeeper. He learned from the Indians how to mix paint and made his first brush from a goose quill and hairs from a cat's tail, according to popular legend. At any rate, West was a professional painter by the age of twelve, and at twenty was famous throughout the colonies of New York and Pennsylvania. He was soon to be regarded as the worldwide leader of the "grand style" of painting that dominated the second half of the 18th century.

Realizing that he needed to learn more about his craft by studying the work of the great masters of the past, he went to Italy in 1760. The wealthiest and most educated people of Rome welcomed him as a curiosity thinking him some kind of noble savage from the wilderness, and they took him to see the greatest statue of antiquity in the Vatican museum, the *Apollo Belvedere*. He was much impressed, and representations of that famous torso can be found in several of the master paintings he did later in his career.

Wherever he went, West's courtesy and helpfulness made him many friends. Although he was commissioned to paint many portraits of important people in England, where he went next, he became better known for his large paintings of classical and historical subjects. He was called "The American Raphael." His fame soon led to an audience with King George III, and they became close friends. With ever-growing confidence, he painted large can-

vases that were immediate successes including *The Death of Wolfe* and *William Penn's Treaty with the Indians* both of which contain figures inspired by the *Apollo Belvedere*.

His position at court made it possible for West to be very helpful to other artists arriving in England from the Colonies, and he never hesitated to further the training and career of other American and English painters. He even removed some of his own canvases so that some new young artists could have room to exhibit in the prestigious Royal Academy of English Art which he helped to found. He was the Academy's president for 27 years.

West continued to paint historical and religious canvases until his death at 82. He was buried with great ceremony in St. Paul's Cathedral, London.

The Art

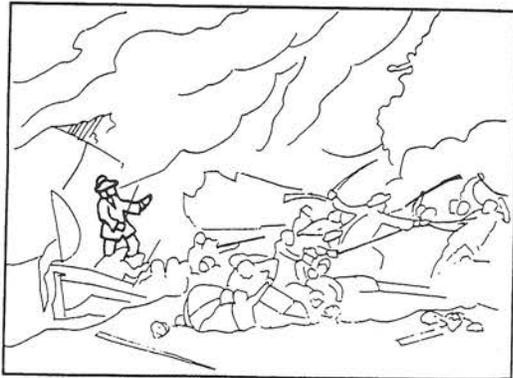
Benjamin West's *The Battle of La Hogue* is generally considered to be his most significant battle picture. For some years, he had been painting subjects relating to American history. He was determined to do a series about the American Revolution because, in spite of his close friendship with King George III, he was jubilant about America's try for independence from England. However, the King did not welcome the idea of looking at all of those battles England had lost and insisted that West show a British victory. Since West could best paint only what he had seen with his own eyes, the King commanded an admiral to stage a battle all over again. In the English Channel, as the frigates moved into battle array and fired blank charges, West sketched furiously. He thus was able to paint what was beyond his power to imagine about a sea victory.

The Battle of La Hogue therefore shows sailors acting out the parts of men who fought each other in a real battle between the English and Dutch against the French in May, 1692, almost 90 years earlier. The frightened, wigless man in blue symbolizes France, while the calm, red-coated man is the British admiral. Although they actually were only staged effects, the billows of smoke appear to be from foundering French vessels. West used his sketches of the frigates and small boats and his many previous drawings of people in action to compose this document of furious and dramatic activity. Imagine an admiral today staging such a battle so that an artist could please a king!

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

What is it about this masterful painting that catches your attention? Probably it is the story the painting tells of a smoke-shrouded battle being fought hand-to-hand across boats that are capsizing in turbulent green water. This is a narrative painting, one whose purpose is to tell a story. Look closely. Who seems to be winning the fight? In which direction is the action moving? Find several diagonal lines and shapes that lead your eye from left to right across the canvas. The billowing smoke from the leaning ship, the arm of the red-kerchiefed man being hauled into the tilted boat, the curves of the swords and muskets. Notice in all the confusion the upright, calm, and confident stance of the man in red. Clearly this brave Englishman, Rear Admiral George Rooke, is in control and is about to complete the destruction of the remaining French forces. This is illustrated in the diagram below.



The single upright calm figure contrasts with the diagonal lines and shapes to become the center of interest. The diagonal lines lead the eye from the lower left to the upper right and provide a feeling of movement and action.

Interpretation:

An art historian is a kind of art detective. What evidence is there in the painting that this is a sea battle that took place near the end of the 17th century? What research would West have had to do to make certain his painting looked authentic? Clothing, flags, ships, boats, weapons. He also needed to

know the appearance of smoke blowing from burning wood and gunpowder and how the ships were maneuvered in the battle. The artist had to know not only how to paint, but also he had to find out many things about the past in order to make his picture believable. An art historian, though, would also be able to recognize the difference in style between a painting done at the actual date of the battle and one like this, made almost 100 years later.

Elements and Principles of Design:

This is a rather large oil painting, about 5 x 7-ft. In it, Benjamin West painted dozens of figures. Some are more visible than others. How did he manage this? Overlapping shapes, selective use of light and shadow. Is the "spotlight" only on the two highest ranking officers? Why not?

- X How has West made the scene exciting to look at? Much of the action is framed by dark clouds and murky water. The three lightest areas guide our eyes to the most significant parts of the picture. Can you find them? Near the British admiral, the retreating Frenchman, and the group of survivors in the foreground. Would the painting convey the same dramatic feeling if the lighting had been all bright and clear?

Comparison:

Compare this painting of *The Battle of La Hogue* with other narrative paintings in the set to see how artists of different styles tell their stories.

Notice the contrast in mood between *The Battle of La Hogue* and Millet's painting of *Man with a Hoe*. One is all action and drama, telling a story about an exciting historical event. The other is a quiet but powerful comment about the uneventful life of an ordinary man. What did West do to create a mood of thrilling activity? How did Millet control the feeling of stolid, plodding routine in his painting?

Arrange the pictures in the set in the order of most active to the most calm. Think about how each artist managed to achieve the particular effect of movement or stillness through line, color, balance, rhythm, and composition.

People At Work

Andrew Wyeth, *Alvaro and Christina*



Andrew Wyeth, American, b. 1917, *Alvaro and Christina*, undated, watercolor, 22 x 29-in.
Collection of William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum, Rockland, Maine.

The Artist

Andrew Wyeth is the youngest of five children born to the famous book illustrator, N. C. Wyeth. He grew up surrounded by people who enjoyed creating art, and his father allowed him to work in his studio, not influencing his style but insisting that he learn his craft thoroughly. The young student was so gifted that at twenty, he held his first show in New York City. It was a complete sellout, and people have been eager to purchase his paintings ever since.

Wyeth, probably the most popular American painter alive, is a shy, quiet man. He avoids public appearances and prefers to ramble the countryside around his home in Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania, or the family's summer place in Maine, sketching and painting familiar sights, old buildings, and comfortable old friends.

The Art

Driving through Wyeth country which is near Chadd's Ford along the Brandywine River in Pennsylvania is like walking into a novel-in-progress and meeting the characters. There is the house of the *Tenant Farmer* and there is *Kuerner's Barn*. Andrew Wyeth grew up in this neighborhood and still paints its buildings and residents every winter. But in the summer, he moves to another tiny village, the scene of another novel-in-progress, *Cushing, Maine*. The house there that Wyeth has painted many times over the years belongs to the Olsons, Alvaro and Christina Olson.

The Olson house once was an inn used by the crews of clipper ships sailing down the Maine coast. For many years, it was lived in by the crippled woman memorialized by Wyeth in *Christina's World* and her younger brother, Alvaro, the last of the Olsons. Al was once painted by Andrew Wyeth, but he refused to pose again. So Wyeth continued to portray him in those things that belonged to him: the seed corn drying in an upstairs room, his grain bags, his blueberry baskets in the shed, his barn, and his boat. These were symbols of the man and his work.

Christina, confined to her house and yard since a childhood attack of polio, was painted many times by her friend and neighbor, Andrew Wyeth. His colors were her colors, too. Her eyes were deeply brown, her hair reddish gray, her flowered print dress a faded blue. The light inside the old, cluttered house was dim, the air was pungent, and the furnishings were dull. There was an old black stove, charred wood, ancient ochre walls. Wyeth did many studies of Christina in her environment making her the most famous model in modern American art. But two years after *Christina's World* was finished, both Christina and Alvaro died, and the Olson paintings soon came to an end.

Walking through the empty house shortly after Christina was buried, Wyeth could still sense the lingering presence of his two old friends. Still remembering, he painted the gray and blue doors of the shed in *Alvaro and Christina*. The title refers to the two doors which were used by Alvaro and Christina Olson as they passed from the shed to the kitchen. The left door was most often used by Alvaro, and it was close to the wood box. The story of Alvaro and Christina seems to linger in their remaining possessions of mop, pail, and bushel basket. This somber, moody watercolor has the feel of a still life.

Guided Analysis

Cultural Context:

What is a portrait? A picture of one or several persons. What portraits have you seen before? Include those in the *Take 5* sets. Does this watercolor painting by Andrew Wyeth look like any portrait you know? Why do you suppose the artist called it *Alvaro and Christina*?

What does it look like, if not a portrait? A still life? Why? A still life is an arrangement of objects that do

Andrew Wyeth, *Alvaro and Christina*

not move about. List the objects you see. Two doors, a basket, a pail resting in a tub, the handle of a mop or broom, several pans, two old rags. What else is there just outside the picture? A high window through which comes the light to illuminate the interior of the shed.

Elements of Design:

How would you describe the colors the artist used? Are they what one might expect to find inside an old shed near the seacoast? How did Wyeth indicate that the building and its contents were old and weathered? Dull, faded colors; textures of dirt and scratches on the worn, old wood surfaces; a dented pail; some wrinkled rags. Who do you think owned and used the objects in the painting? The elderly brother and sister, Alvaro and Christina Olson, who had spent all their lives in that house.

Expressive Properties:

As you study this painting, what mood do you feel? Choose a word or two, then tell what in the picture suggested them. Andrew Wyeth did not paint this picture from his imagination. He was able to sketch, then paint, right inside the shed looking closely at every object. And yet, because he is an artist not a photographer, he was able to change things to achieve a better balance, or he might have decided not to show everything he saw. He might have simplified the colors or changed the textures. In your opinion (because we never know for sure), what message was Wyeth trying to give us? What has he been able to say about Alvaro and Christina?

Principles of Design:

Are there many colors or few? Are they bright or subdued? Can you see how Wyeth used light coming from a window outside the picture to spotlight certain parts? The two rectangular shapes, the post and the blue door, receive most of the light. Can you find some triangular shapes and some ovals that add variety? How many textures has Wyeth shown us? Wood-splint basket, metal pail, etc.

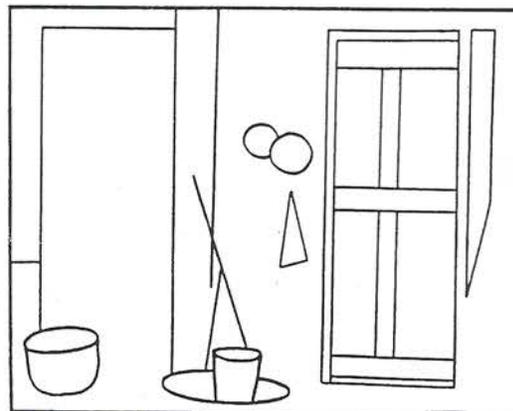
If you squint your eyes, you will more easily see that the main lines and shapes are vertical. Does this give a feeling of stability rather than movement to the composition? Where are the areas of greatest contrast? Can you see how Wyeth has used the principle of contrast in various ways to lead our eyes to

things he believed to be important? Bright against dull, curves against straight lines, textures against plain surfaces, blue against neutral tones.

Does the painting seem balanced? Most of the brightness and the "busiest" shapes are in the center. The blue door is balanced by the large, dark, shadowy section. This dark part is kept from being too plain and boring by the carefully-painted basket and a few details on the shadowy door. Find the large triangular shape that encloses most of the objects. Is it the same area that the light from the unseen window illuminates?

Interpretation:

Alvaro and Christina is a realistic portrayal of everyday objects. At the same time, it is also a modern, abstract composition. If you were to represent each object as its basic geometric shape, this composition would appear as a very contemporary, asymmetrically balanced design. Because of its simplicity—the vertical lines that suggest quiet dignity, the stable, triangular composition, and the somber colors and ordinary textures—this painting tells the viewer much of how Andrew Wyeth felt about his old neighbors. The diagram below relates to the shapes in the painting.



There is a dominance of rectangular and triangular shapes which contrast with the curved oval shapes for variety. Wyeth has used a rich, visual texture in the basket, pail, cloth, and wood.

What do you think? Does this painting tell the same amount, or more, or less about Wyeth's feelings about his friends than an ordinary portrait would? How might you make a similar portrait of someone you know?