

Educator Workshop

The Stories of Art: Learning to Look, Looking to Write

SELECTIONS FROM NOMA'S PERMANENT COLLECTION

The Lawyer's Office, 1545, Marinus van Reymerswaele (Claeszoon), Flemish, 1495 – 1566, oil on wood, 40 3/8 x 48 5/8 in.

Paintings by masters of Northern Renaissance realism often recorded official contracts or acts, and *The Lawyer's Office* is a remarkable example of this practice. The papers pinned to the wall in the background of the painting tell us about a 1526 lawsuit begun in Reymerswaele on the North Sea by the heirs of a man who had purchased a salt refinery from another man. The buyer refused to make the initial payment, and a lawsuit was established by the heirs of the seller. By the time that the legal transactions ended in 1538, the property had been destroyed by storms, leaving only the lawyer to profit from the venture through his legal fees.



Marinus van Reymerswaele was known in his day as a painter of genre scenes and satire. This painting exemplifies both of these subjects, depicting a record of every day life in a detailed and satirical style. The conniving lawyer appears well fed and is dressed luxuriously in his red velvet shirt and brown outer garment with a fur-lined collar. Next to him is his clerk who furiously jots down every word that is spoken. The man in the foreground on the far right empties his bag of its contents, probably all of his money in the world. His thin face tells us that he is poor and has had a difficult life and his clothes are simple and made of wool. The two figures in the background appear hopeful (on the left) and stunned (on the right). The artist tells the story of the legal transaction through costume, facial expression and body language.

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Homo Bulla: A Boy Blowing Bubbles in a Landscape, 1665
Bartholomeus van der Helst, Dutch, 1613 – 1670, oil on canvas, 32 x 28 ¾ in.

Museum purchase, the Edith Rosenwald Stern Fund by exchange, 95.189

Van der Helst practiced in Amsterdam and became one of the more fashionable portrait artists of his time. He became well-known for his painting of opulent fabrics and flattery of his sitters of which this painting is an excellent example. The portrait of the boy is playful and informal as he stands in a landscape holding a shell and straw for blowing bubbles. But, an underlying symbolism is present. Following a long tradition, “homo bulla” was a reference to the frailty of life, and more specifically, that human life is as transient as a soap bubble. Following the morals of the Protestant religion which discourages material gain, it is ironic that a child dressed in fine clothing is presenting the lesson of cherishing life.



Romeo and Juliet, 1778, Benjamin West, American, 1738 – 1820, oil on canvas, 50 x 44 ¼ in.

Museum purchase, Women’s Volunteer Committee Fund, 73.33

Benjamin West began his career as a portrait painter in colonial Philadelphia and went on to become a court painter to King George III in England as well as a president of the Royal Academy of Art. At the height of his career in the 1770s, West painted three categories of subjects: English history, Biblical scenes and scenes from Shakespeare as exemplified by *Romeo and Juliet*. His style forecasts the Neoclassical movement with its interest in reviving classical forms, while his interest in nationalism and dramatic literary subjects are indicative of the Romantic movement. West depicts the scene from Act III, Scene 5 of the play when the nurse runs to warn the young lovers of the awakening household: “Your lady mother is coming to your chamber. The day is broke; be wary, look about.” Juliet then laments, “Then, window, let day in and let life out.” Romeo hastily leaves saying, “Farewell, farewell! One kiss, and I’ll descend.”



Portrait of Marie Antoinette, 1788, Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun, French, 1755 – 1842, oil on canvas, 109 1/2 x 75 1/2 in.

Museum purchase, Women's Volunteer Committee and Carrie Heiderich Funds, 85.90

As wife of King Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette reigned as Queen of France from 1774 until her death on the guillotine in 1793. Their marriage united the French Bourbon and Austrian Hapsburg royal families. Marie Antoinette was one of Europe's most admired aristocrats for her fashion and courtly manners. She was the great purveyor of French taste, and all the women of the royal court looked to the Queen to set the fashion trends.

Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun was one of the most celebrated court portrait artists of the late 18th century. In 1783, she was admitted to the French Royal Academy, a rare honor for a woman at that time. During the course of her long career as a portraitist of the aristocracy, Vigée-Lebrun completed at least twenty-five portraits of Marie Antoinette, whom she counted as one of her life-long friends. In this portrait, Vigée-Lebrun strikes a balance between ornate elements of Rococo and traditional ideals of Neoclassicism. The portrait is rife with symbolism. The color blue is traditionally associated with royalty and the velvet pillow under the feet of the queen and her crown are additional reminders of her elevated status. The leather book that she holds not only indicates that the queen is literate, but it is also embossed with both the Bourbon and Hapsburg coats of arms, indicating her own lineage as well as that of her husband. Her crown sits on a pillow embossed with the gold fleur-de-lis, another symbol of the Bourbon dynasty. Vigée-Lebrun portrays Marie Antoinette as the ideal of regal power commanding our attention from her elegant armchair.



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Louisiana Indians Walking Along a Bayou, 1847
Alfred Boisseau, American, born in France, 1823 – 1901,
oil on canvas, 24 x 40 in.

Gift of William E. Groves, 56.34

Alfred L. Boisseau arrived in New Orleans in 1845, one of a number of well known European artists who were lured to the city in the 1830's and 1840's. Before his arrival, he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and was a student of Paul Delaroche. Boisseau was greatly attracted to what he saw in Louisiana, what he perceived as exotic and was able to depict the native scene with freshness and perceptive vision. He worked as both a portrait and genre painter.



Louisiana Indians Walking Along the Bayou was exhibited at the 1847 Paris Salon. In this painting we see a group of Indians walking in a wooded area presumably toward the market. The Indians wear clothing made of western material and carry a rifle, indicating their interaction with non-natives. Details of the Indians hair and the baskets they are carrying indicate that they are of the Choctaw tribe. The setting for this painting is thought to be on the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain somewhere along the Tchefuncte River. The Choctaws were frequently seen in the French Market where they sold baskets, goods from palmetto leaves and filé, a common ingredient in Creole food.

Dogs in the French Market, 1889, Paul Poincy, American,
1838-1909, oil on canvas, 44 x 50 in.

Museum purchase, 25.0

Paul Poincy was a native New Orleanian of French descent. Because he showed talent in art, his parents sent him to Paris to study painting. After training at the École des Beaux Arts and the Academie Julien, he returned to his hometown in 1859 to begin work as an artist. He became a successful portraitist in the city, but also painted the city life and religious paintings. Poincy appeared at almost every art exhibition in New Orleans at the time. He worked closely and shared studio space with Richard Clague, the noted New Orleans landscape artist.



In the painting *Dogs in the French Market*, he has depicted a market scene that was probably common in the 1880s in the French Market or in any of the thirty neighborhood markets that existed in New Orleans at the time. The French Market opened at the riverfront of New Orleans at the end of the 18th century when the city was under Spanish rule. Originally, it was the site of Native American trading but the Spanish regulated the buying and selling of goods. By the 1880s, the French Market was at its high point in popularity but in its lowest in cleanliness and general condition of the buildings with cobwebs and broken plaster walls. It was a common site to see gutters full of waste, and food scraps everywhere. Dogs ran through the market scrounging for morsels to eat. In this depiction, Poincy has painted a dog snatching food off the butcher's table

and the bulldog underneath about to attack.

Study for "Several Circles," c. 1926, Wassily Kandinsky, Russian 1866 – 1944, oil on canvas, 27 5/8 x 27 5/8 in.

Gift of Mrs. Edgar B. Stern, 64.31

Born in Russia in 1866, Kandinsky was among the first artists to eliminate recognizable objects from his paintings, creating non-figurative works of art with mystical overtones. In 1896 Kandinsky abandoned his law studies in Russia and went to Munich to learn painting. In Munich he became a founding member of the German Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* (the Blue Rider). This group of artists hoped to explore all things new in art. Like the ancient Greeks and the Europeans of the Renaissance, Kandinsky believed the arts were important for the development of the soul.



To Kandinsky, art was a matter of using rhythmic lines, colors and shapes, rather than narrative. He likened these elements of painting to the combination of notes and melodies that make up a symphony. *Sketch for "Several Circles"* demonstrates a late period in which the artist began to experiment with geometric forms. The combination of the opaque background with the well-lit circular forms and the transparency of the intersecting circles seem to imply the movement of the forms.

Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis, 1936, Joan Miró, Spanish 1893 – 1983, egg tempera on masonite, 19 3/4 x 22 5/8 in.

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.295

Miró was a Spanish painter, whose Surrealist works look like dream-inspired, hallucinatory renditions. In 1920 he moved to Paris where, under the influence of Surrealist poets and writers, his art evolved into the globular biomorphic forms for which he is most known. Miró drew on memory, fantasy, and the irrational to create works of art that are visual versions of Surrealist poetry. His forms are painted in a limited range of bright colors, especially blue, red, yellow, green, and black. Although generally apolitical, he expressed his feelings after the atrocities in his homeland during the Spanish Civil War with a series of tableaux sauvage or wild paintings such as *Persons in the Presence of a Metamorphosis* in which amoebic figures watch another figure disintegrate into biomorphic parts. In this series, the artist's whimsical bestiaries of the 1930s are transformed into tortured monsters.



Everyone Here Speaks Latin, 1943, Max Ernst, German, 1891 – 1976, oil on canvas, 18 x 21 1/2 in.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac S. Heller, 52.31

Max Ernst was associated with both the Dada and Surrealist art movements. After establishing the Cologne branch of Dada in 1919, he moved to Paris in 1922 and joined the Surrealist movement two years later. During World War II, Ernst escaped to the United States where he lived from 1941 - 1951. While living in New York from 1941 - 1943, Ernst created paintings to reflect the decaying situation in Europe. *Europe After the Storm* (1940 - 1942) and *Everyone Here Speaks Latin* (1943) reflect war in Europe. The title of the latter may also refer to the artist's situation in a new country, unable to speak the language. In this work, figures in red and blue are scattered throughout a fantastic and somewhat foreboding forest. Embracing the Surrealist's fascination with chance, Ernst worked in a technique called *decalcomania* which involved pressing a sticky painted surface between two layers of canvas or board and then pulling them apart thereby creating a strange spongy surface. Ernst also worked in a method that he created called *frottage*, or texture rubbings. Ernst lived from 1946 - 1951 in Sedona, Arizona with his fourth wife, Dorothea Tanning.



Guardian Angels, 1946, Dorothea Tanning American b. 1913

Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in.

Museum purchase, Kate P. Jourdan Memorial Fund, 49.15

Dorothea Tanning was born in Illinois and began her artistic training at the Chicago Academy of Arts. She was influenced by the Museum of Modern Art's 1936 exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* as well as by her fortuitous meeting with Max Ernst in 1942. Tanning developed two consecutive styles. The first was Surrealist and lasted until about 1954, and the second style is more abstract. *Guardian Angels* is from her Surrealist phase and indicates an interest in childhood and dreams. Tanning specialized in erotic imagery involving adolescent girls. In NOMA's painting, monstrous angels hover over crumpled beds carrying in their arms the once sleeping children.



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Landscape, L'Estaque, 1906, Georges Braque, French, 1882 – 1963, oil on canvas, 20 x 23 3/4 in.

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.284

Georges Braque is most remembered as one of the most important figures in the development of 20th century art because his work with Pablo Picasso in 1908 led to the development of the Cubist movement. Before this significant contribution, however, Braque was aligned with the Fauve movement and its exploration of the expressive qualities of color. The word “fauve” is French for “wild beasts” and was used derogatively by art critics who accused the artists of using intense color in a violent and uncontrolled way. These early experiments with color led Braque to Cézanne and an interest in form that became fully realized when he began his association with Picasso in 1907. *Landscape, L'Estaque* depicts the town near Marseilles in the south of France. The painting shines with warm sunlight and the pale greens, roses, blues and orange-yellow combinations produce an effect close to iridescence. The high horizon line insures that the land remains the main subject of the painting, while the bold dashes of color throughout the landscape confers a sense of movement throughout the composition.



Woman on Porch, 1958

Richard Diebenkorn

American 1922 – 1993

Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 in.

Museum Purchase through the National Endowment of the Arts Matching Grant, 77.64

Throughout his career, California artist Richard Diebenkorn moved from Abstract Expressionism to figurative work and back again to abstraction. As a student at Stanford University he was introduced to the work of Edward Hopper, who became a stylistic influence. Other early influences include Henri Matisse and Paul Bonnard both of whom worked in an abstracted, flat style which explored identifiable subject matter. Diebenkorn's early and late work was concerned with abstraction that combined landscape influence and aerial perspective. During the 1950s he worked in San Francisco during a distinctively figural period. In these paintings, the artist constructed new worlds through the use of balanced geometric elements, unequal bands of bright color and implied space. Often the figures appear in a bright landscape in a mood of reverie, as in *Woman on Porch* of 1958. In this work a solitary and featureless woman sits in an armchair surrounded by a vast and colorful architectural space. Diebenkorn did not work from a live model; instead he worked from a series of drawings which he then linked back to the intended spatial environment.



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***Woman in an Armchair*, 1960, Pablo Picasso, Spanish, 1881 – 1973, oil on canvas, 45 1/2 x 34 3/4 in.**

Bequest of Victor K. Kiam, 77.299

Pablo Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain and his artistic talents were noticed at an early age. In 1900, he moved to Paris where he was very productive sometimes completing two and three paintings a day. He developed a personal style that changed throughout different periods of his life. After discovering African art, Picasso began incorporating tribal imagery into his paintings freeing himself from European artistic traditions and leading him toward Cubism, which explored multiple perspectives and faceted forms. Picasso's masterpiece of 1907, *Demaiselles d'Avignon*, displayed African influence and the cubist perspective for the first time. Picasso would return to these stylistic elements in later years.

Woman in an Armchair depicts his second wife, Jacqueline Roque, who appears frequently in the artist's works from 1953-1973. Roque is seated in an armchair and her large, dark eyes, and black hair play a dominant role in the composition. Cubist stylistic elements reemerge in this painting. The face is seen both in profile and in frontal views, and the palette is reduced to black, white, grays, and browns.



***Two Sitting Figures*, 1979-80, Lynn Chadwick, British, 1914-2003, bronze 66" x 33" x 56".**

Gift of the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Foundation, 98.131

Lynn Chadwick was born in London in 1914 and was educated at Merchant Taylor's School of Architecture. After serving as a pilot in World War II, he continued his architectural work until 1946. Chadwick then started his own firm designing textiles, furniture and architecture. This company was successful and allowed him the freedom to experiment with sculpture. In 1956, Chadwick was awarded the First Prize at the prestigious Venice Biennial, beating the great Italian sculptor Alberto Giacometti. Chadwick began his career by designing mobiles based on insect and bird forms. Eventually, his work progressed from light and airy to massive and heavy. His sculptures became monumental, abstracted, human forms that sat or reclined on the ground. The figures were usually created in pairs and represented powerful, regal couples. *Two Sitting Figures* exemplifies this style. The couple is massive in form with abstracted geometric heads and bodies. The limbs are delicate, however, contrasting with the large bodies.



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