

Educator Workshop | October 8, 2013

Louisiana: Where Water Meets Land

Louisiana and its people have been shaped by our relationship to water. From the southern coastal region with its interaction with the Gulf of Mexico to vast Lake Pontchartrain and the meandering Mississippi River, water influences our culture, towns and cities and ways of life. The rich and varied groups of people that contributed to the history of Louisiana and live here today have been inspired and confounded by the constant interplay of water with the land on which we live. This workshop features 10 works of art from NOMA's permanent collection that explore this relationship.

List of Works

- *Louisiana Indians Walking Along a Bayou*, 1847, Alfred Boisseau
- *Lidded Basket with Handles*, 1920, Choctaw Peoples
- *Battle of New Orleans*, 1815, Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte
- *Batture Shanty*, 1870, Richard Clague
- *Paradise Wood, Breaux Bridge, Louisiana*, 1910 Ellsworth Woodward
- *The Joseph Jefferson Presentation Cup*, 1895 – 1896, Gorham Manufacturing Company, modeled by W. Clark Noble
- *A View of New Orleans Taken from the Plantation of Marigny*, 1803 (reprinted 1967), J. L. Boqueta de Woiseri
- *Port of New Orleans*, 1935-1936, Paul Sample
- *Window with Ladder-Too Late for Help*, 2006, Leandro Ehrlich
- *Wave*, 1988, Lin Emery

Teaching Materials

- Wetland in a Pan: Model Lesson
- I Spy: Wetland in a Bottle
- Weaving and Dyeing Projects

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

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 1830s and 1840s. 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 American Indians walking in a wooded area presumably toward the market. The group wears clothing made of western material and carries 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 north shore 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. In 1800 the French Market in New Orleans was the essential place to buy goods for households as well as to see an assortment of people.

Discuss

- Who are these people?
- Where are they going?
- What just happened? What will happen next?
- What kinds of plants and animals would you find in this setting?

Water Fact

Lake Pontchartrain covers almost 630 square miles and was formed 5,000 years ago. It is approximately 40 miles wide from east to west, about 25 miles from north to south with a depth between 12 to 15 feet.

Lidded Basket with Handles, 1920, Choctaw Peoples, split cane and natural dyes, 26 x 17 x 17 in.

In 1700 six different groups of American Indians inhabited in what would become the state of Louisiana. The Caddo lived in the northwest section, the Tunica in the northeast corner, the Natchez were in the Mideast, the Atakapa in the southwest, the Chitimacha in the southern part and the Muskogee in the southeastern region. The Choctaw are part of the Muskogean family and lived primarily in Mississippi, but also inhabited areas north of Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana. These groups form part of the larger region of the Southern Woodlands which extends from the Atlantic Ocean west to Texas and from the Gulf of Mexico to North Arkansas. The Choctaw were the first native group to form an alliance with the French, and they actively traded goods with European settlements for cloth and weapons.

Both the Choctaw and the Chitimacha wove baskets from split river cane found along the bayous and river systems of south Louisiana. Cane was an important resource to these native groups and was used to make baskets for storage, darts for hunting, and matting and construction for homes. Weaving traditions have been maintained over at least three centuries, and contemporary Choctaw artists still produce basketry in traditional shapes and patterns. Dyes in brown/ black, yellow and red are obtained from roots and barks ground with mortar and pestle and boiled in water. While men and boys helped harvest the cane, basket weaving was done primarily by women.



Discuss

- Look for a similar basket in the painting *Louisiana Indians on the Bayou*. What do you think the basket in the painting might hold?
- What would you put in this basket?
- What do you think Choctaw women used to make dye?

Battle of New Orleans, 1815, Jean Hyacinthe de Laclotte (American born in France, 1766 – 1829), oil on canvas.

Laclotte, an architect and assistant engineer in the Louisiana Army, painted the *Battle of New Orleans* from sketches he made on the battlefield in January of 1815. While in New Orleans, he worked as an engraver and teacher of drawing, painting, and architecture. His view of the Battle of New Orleans fought in the War of 1812 is the only one believed to have been painted from authentic sketches made on the battlefield; the other known paintings of this subject are merely romanticized.



Laclotte's painting shows Jackson and his militia entrenched behind the Rodriguez Canal in Chalmette. Using a bird's eye perspective, Laclotte portrays the British general leading his troops in a direct frontal attack on the Americans. The battle occurred on the grounds of the Chalmette plantation east of the city on the 8th of January, 1815. Laclotte's considerable artistic ability enhances the work without diminishing our sense of the accuracy of the portrayal of the event seen through the eyes of a man who was an artist and soldier.

Discuss

- How did waterways assist the American forces in the Battle of New Orleans?
- Where would the artist stand in this painting?
- What would a worm's eye view of the battle look like?

***Batture Shanty*, 1870, Richard Clague
(American, 1821 – 1873), oil on canvas.**

Though born in Paris, Richard Clague's early life and artistic training were divided between France and New Orleans. The artist's father came to New Orleans around the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and became a prominent member of the community. Clague's father financially backed the Americans during the Battle of New Orleans and was a close friend of Andrew Jackson. In 1832 when his parents separated, Clague moved to Paris with his mother, a free woman of color. He studied art in Switzerland and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris returning to New Orleans. In the United States Clague's style of naturalistic landscape painting was accepted and praised whereas at the Paris Salon landscapes were considered secondary to history painting.



Though Clague had many European influences, he is very much part of the American naturalistic landscape tradition. He was the first artist in Louisiana to understand in aesthetic terms the distinct character of the swamps, forests, and rivers of Louisiana. In *Batture Shanty* we see Clague's ability to characterize the atmosphere and geography he was painting. He depicts a way of life on the batture of which many in the U.S. and Europe were unaware. Clague's adaptation of the Barbizon artists' composition, style and technique to the representation of Louisiana resulted in a native landscape tradition.

Discuss

- What time of day do you think it is in this painting?
- What would life be like on the batture?

Paradise Wood, Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, 1910, Ellsworth Woodward (American, 1861 – 1939), oil on canvas.

At the height of his career Ellsworth Woodward was considered the South's leading art figure. Woodward was born in Massachusetts and studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Munich Academy. Together with his brother, William Woodward, the two became important figures in New Orleans, establishing artistic traditions with long-lasting effects. Though an accomplished artist, Ellsworth choose to dedicate himself as an art activist. He became a founding dean of Newcomb College Art School and Pottery, a school of art for women that became the most significant in the south. Ellsworth was also a founding trustee of the Delgado Museum later known as the New Orleans Museum of Art and was the Director of the Museum from 1925 to 1939. William Woodward, meanwhile, also championed art education and taught at Newcomb College. Additionally, he helped spur a restoration movement that saved a group of priceless New Orleans buildings.



Ellsworth Woodward dedicated himself to making art a primary element in daily life. His works focus on flora and fauna as well as the architecture of the South. *Paradise Wood* is an excellent example of Woodward's nostalgic approach to Southern life with an Impressionistic style. The painting has a liquid feel that accurately conveys the lushness of the natural environment of Louisiana. Contrast between shadow and light filters through the moss cloaked trees creating a tonalist effect suggestive of Woodward's German influences. For over thirty years Ellsworth Woodward devoted himself to art education and the preservation of Southern art. Woodward is recognized as one who forged a Southern art tradition by recognizing and interpreting the nature that surrounded him.

Discuss

- How does the artist create a “wet” feeling in the painting?
- Without revealing the title, discuss where this scene might take place.

***The Joseph Jefferson Presentation Cup, 1895 – 1896,
Gorham Manufacturing Company, modeled by W. Clark
Noble, sterling silver, cast, applied and chased, 24 ¼ x 18 in.***

Joseph Jefferson purchased Orange Island in 1869 and built a winter home where he could enjoy hunting and fishing and the relatively mild climate of south Louisiana during respites from the stage. His home, now on the historical registry, sits atop a coastal salt dome on Lake Peigneur on what is now called Jefferson Island.

This Presentation Cup was commissioned by his thespian peers as a gift and presented to Jefferson. It was designed and manufactured by the Gorham Manufacturing Company. The rounded cup, which is just over two feet in height, was cast and adorned with three cast figures representing Jefferson in his most well-regarded roles, including Rip Van Winkle, a role he played more than 4500 times. The frieze along the lip of the cup depicts winged angles holding swags from which hang dramatic masks. The entire vessel is further decorated with trees, ferns and other flora. An engraved panel praises the actor and wishes him good health, revealing his esteem among his peers.



Here's your Good Health and to your Family's and
may they all live long and prosper.

To the Dean of the Dramatic Profession with the
Loving Greeting and Affection of his brother and
sister players.

November 8, 1895

He touched nothing he did not adorn.

Discuss

- What can you learn about Joseph Jefferson from this gift?
- How might the decorations on the silver vessel look different if he lived in another part of the country?

A View of New Orleans Taken from the Plantation of Marigny, 1803 (reprinted 1967), J. L. Boqueta de Woiseri, Aquatint in colors on cream wove paper, photo offset lithography.

The settlement of Natchitoches was the first permanent settlement in Louisiana in 1714. Soon after, the Scot, John Law, backed by the French government, led a group of French citizens to a new settlement in Louisiana in present day New Orleans. Although the living conditions were extremely poor in the marshy land, the French government persuaded citizens to travel to the New World.



The new French colony proved to be unprofitable and in 1762 France signed a secret treaty with Spain to give Spain control of the Louisiana territory, which consisted of an unspecified area of land encompassing the Mississippi River and its tributaries. By 1800, Spain had returned Louisiana to France. In 1803 Thomas Jefferson sought to buy the port of New Orleans from France. Surprisingly, Napoleon agreed to sell all of the land encompassing Louisiana and the watershed of the Mississippi River. He sold the Louisiana territory to the United States for 15 million dollars, equaling approximately three cents an acre. With the Louisiana Purchase, the United States doubled its land mass. It gained the area which today consists of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma and most of the land in Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana and Minnesota.

De Woiseri's aquatint celebrates this exchange. The banner flying from the beak of the eagle reads "Under My Wings Every Thing Prospers." The Mississippi River flows through the left side of the print and the developing lands of the Marigny Plantation make up the foreground. In the distance are the buildings of the French Quarter.

Discuss

- Imagine standing in this location today. What would you see?
- What can you recognize in this print?

Water Fact

The Mississippi River flows 2,552 miles from Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana.

Port of New Orleans, 1935-1936, Paul Sample (American, 1896-1974), oil on canvas, 25 x 36 in.

Paul Sample was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1896. At the age of 25, Sample developed tuberculosis and to alleviate his boredom while convalescing in upstate New York, he began to draw and paint. This led to a fairly successful career as a painter. He eventually became Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Southern California. Sample painted in the Regionalist style popular during the Great Depression and with the Works Progress Administration. Regionalism was inspired by the farmlands or cityscapes of America. These artists painted realistic scenes with a subdued palette. Although Regionalists depicted harsh realities of life, they usually portrayed figures with a sense of pride and dignity.



In 1935 *Fortune* magazine commissioned Sample to paint eight port cities in the United States to accompany an article on maritime commerce. In addition to the New Orleans example, Sample painted Baltimore, Boston, Houston, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Seattle and Stockton. Sample chose an aerial perspective to portray a detailed scene of the busy river. *The Port of New Orleans* is bustling with activity on land and on the Mississippi River. Since its earliest development, New Orleans has been a crucial port city in the United States. Even today, the Mississippi River traffic is a vital source of transporting domestic and international goods.

Discuss

- Look for different modes of transportation in this painting. What would be similar if you looked at the river today? What would be different?

Water Fact

The Mississippi River is the longest river in North America and the fourth longest in the world. Annually, more than 6,000 ocean vessels move through New Orleans on the Mississippi River, making it the world's busiest waterway.

Window with Ladder-Too Late for Help, 2006, Leandro Ehrlich (Argentinean, born 1973), metal ladder, steel underground structure, fiberglass, aluminum frames.

Sculptor Leandro Ehrlich grew up in Buenos Aires, Argentina in a family of architects, where he became interested in the emotional quality of architectural spaces rather than its functional role. Ehrlich wasted no time in becoming one of the most well recognized young artists of Argentina and he was offered scholarships to study at the Taller de Barracas, an advanced sculpture and installation workshop. Ehrlich's first solo exhibition took place in New York in 1999. In 2000, he participated in the Whitney Biennale and in 2001 he represented Argentina in the Venice Biennale. Since then he has participated in many solo and group exhibitions internationally. Ehrlich is known as an installation artist who often juxtaposes emotionally charged architectural spaces with everyday objects in ways that both confound and inspire the audience.

Window with Ladder-Too Late for Help was originally placed in an empty lot in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward, an area particularly devastated by Hurricane Katrina, as part of the U.S. Biennial Prospect 1. This piece stands over fourteen feet tall and creates the illusion of a ladder leading up to an open window. In its original setting, it evoked the strong feelings of loss and hope associated with disaster. As is often the case with Ehrlich's sculptures, *Window with Ladder-Too Late for Help* appears to defy laws of gravity and physics as the brick-encased window hangs in midair. The much beloved sculpture was moved to the sculpture garden so that it could remain permanently in New Orleans. Its new location offers the potential for new interpretations.



Discuss

- What is holding up this window?
- What do you think might happen here?

***Wave*, 1988, Lin Emery (American, b. 1928), polished aluminum.**

Born in New York, Lin Emery made her home in New Orleans. She was greatly influenced by the artist Ossip Zadkine, whose sculpture *La Poetesse* is also represented in NOMA's Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden. She met Zadkine in Paris where she became his apprentice. Emery was particularly influenced by his philosophy that art should create a nervous tension. Emery found abstraction to be the best means of expressing herself. Additionally, her desire to examine objects from multiple perspectives led Emery to the addition of a kinetic element to her work. She experimented with water and magnets as moveable forces, and eventually adopted the use of wind. Unlike water or magnets, the wind is not supplied by the artist, but rather by the environment.

In Emery's aluminum abstract sculpture, *Wave*, the sculpture blends with its environment. Emery seeks to represent the spiritual harmony of nature and energy in her sculptures. *Wave* harnesses the power of the wind creating a graceful and ever-changing interpretation of natural force. The crescent motif evokes the physical configuration of the wave, while the gentle motion refers to a wave's trajectory. Emery's sculptures consider energies moving through nature. The arcs that sweep through the wind, the graceful movement of the shadows, the reflections in the highly polished surface and on the water beneath it depict pure nature.



Discuss

- What are some methods that an artist might employ to cause a work of art to move?
- Of what does this sculpture remind you?

Water Fact

Water covers approximately 70% of the Earth's surface, but only 2.5% is fresh water.