

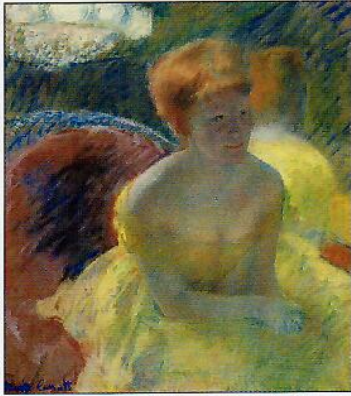
An impressionist painting of a woman with short, vibrant red hair. She is looking slightly to her right with a soft expression. The background is composed of bold, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, and yellow, creating a sense of light and movement. The overall style is characteristic of the Impressionist movement.

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## AMERICAN IMPRESSIONISTS

featuring  
Mary Cassatt



COVER: Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). *At the Theatre* c. 1879. Pastel. 21 1/8" x 17 3/4"  
Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO.

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Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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# A NEW KIND OF ART

Toward the end of the 19th century, a series of shocking art exhibitions was held in Paris. Many people were outraged, and art critics wrote comments like the one below. In 1886, 300 of these paintings — done by a group of French artists called *Impressionists* — came to New York City. Curious Americans flocked to see these "shocking" works. Most of those who came to this Impressionist exhibit were pleasantly surprised. They liked what they saw: **outdoor scenes from everyday life filled with light and color.**

Why had the French art critics originally objected so strongly to this new style of painting?



**The 18th-century Italian work above is an example of a city scene done before the Impressionists developed an entirely new way of painting.**

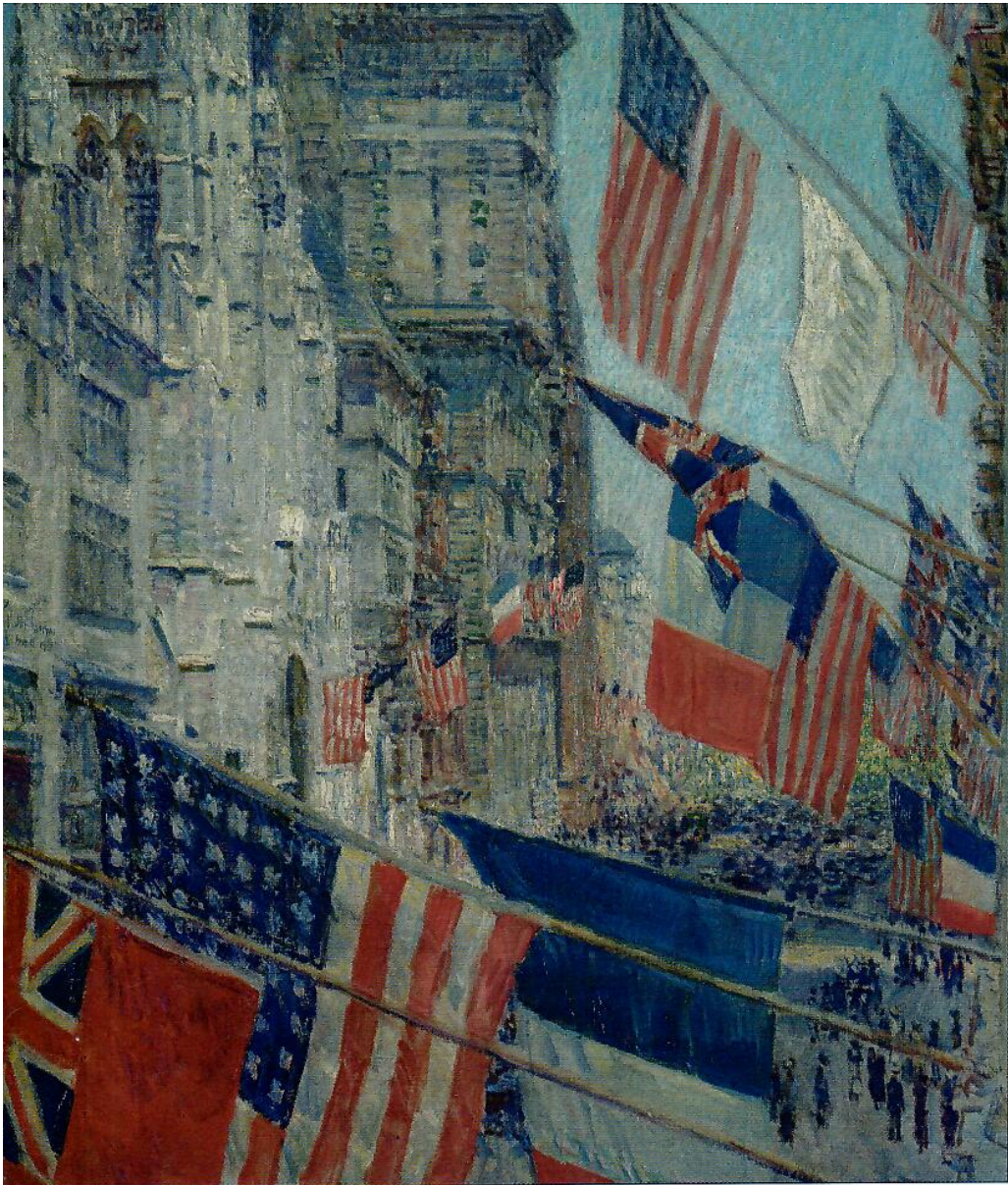
Follower of Canaletto (1697-1768). *A Fete Day, Venice*, c.1750. Oil, 63 1/4" x 87 1/4"  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

In the mid-1800s, Paris was the art capital of the world, and French art was controlled by a powerful organization called the Academy. The Academy held important annual art exhibitions and had set up very strict rules for acceptance. Paintings were to depict historic or heroic scenes. The canvases took months to complete, had to be highly

realistic, and were done in dark colors.

The city scene above left, done in 1750, is the type of painting that would have been acceptable to the Paris critics in the 1870s. The huge, elaborate canvas is of a festival on a canal in Venice. The artist has created a feeling of deep space, and every detail has

*"These young people — who call themselves Impressionists — are not artists. The only impression they achieve is that of a cat walking on the keyboard of a piano."* — ALBERT WOLFF, critic, 1877



**An Impressionist city scene would look like the painting on the left.**

Childe Hassam (1859-1935). *Allies Day, May 1917*, 1917. 36¾" x 30¼" National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

been carefully painted, heightening the sense of almost photographic realism.

By the mid-1800s, some young French artists wanted to break away from the rules of the Academy. They began to paint nature outdoors, using bright, light colors and working quickly to capture the "first impression" of what they saw. Year after year their paintings were rejected by the Academy for being too radical. Finally, the artists organized their own exhibition. Their show opened in Paris in 1874, and most of the critics objected to what they saw.

However, not everyone hated the French Impressionist style. Some of the paintings began to sell and the style gradually won acceptance. Soon, American artists were using the Impressionist style. By the early 20th century, American art schools had begun teaching Impressionist techniques to a new generation of artists.

The painting above was done by the American Impressionist artist Childe Hassam [Child HASS-um] in 1918. Compare this scene of New York City with the painting of Venice (left). What differences do you see? Both show celebrations, but which scene seems more "real"? Which painting conveys the color and excitement of a parade? In the Hassam painting, we view the scene from **above**, as if we are looking down from a window. The image is **tightly cropped** and painted with **quick brushstrokes of bright color**. The **diagonals** of the flags add to the **dynamic composition**.

In this issue, you'll learn about American artist Mary Cassatt [Cass-AT] who was part of the original French Impressionist group. You will see how artists of today use Impressionist concepts in their work. Finally, you'll work from an ordinary subject to create your own dynamic composition.

# Mary Cassatt

## IMPRESSIONIST FROM AMERICA

Mary Cassatt, who did the Impressionist portrait on the cover, was born in 1844 to a wealthy Pennsylvania family. The Cassatts settled in Philadelphia in 1858 after living in



During her long career, Mary Cassatt produced more than 1,200 paintings, pastels, prints, and watercolors and is considered to be one of the most important American artists of the 19th century.

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). Self-portrait, 1880. Watercolor. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Europe for several years. As a child, Mary Cassatt was exposed to the art and culture of Germany and France, which may have inspired her to become a painter. In 1860, she enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

Cassatt studied at the Academy for four years, but found her classes disappointing. Instead of using live models, students were required to draw from plaster casts. In addition, there were very few European master paintings for students to study. During the first half of the 19th century, American cities had not yet developed public art collections that contained many works by the "old masters." Cassatt knew that she needed to do what all serious American artists of her day did: study art in Europe.

"I'd rather see you dead!" was the reaction of Robert Cassatt when his daughter told him of her plan to study abroad. It was customary for a young woman of the Cassatts' social standing to "dabble" in art and music until she found a suitable husband. To consider a serious career in art was out of the question. Mary Cassatt, however, was headstrong and determined. She convinced her father to change his mind. In 1865, properly chaperoned, she sailed for France. Cassatt traveled through France, Italy, and Spain studying paintings in museums and galleries. In 1873, she settled in Paris.

Dissatisfied with the conventional style

*"I left conventional art.  
Then, I began to live."*

*Mary Cassatt*



of painting, Cassatt became interested in the new ideas of the *Impressionists*. A turning point in her career came in 1877, when she met an important member of the Impressionist group: Edgar Degas [duh-GAH].

From Degas, Cassatt learned to use brighter colors, to compose subjects dramatically, placing them at an unusual angle. The mirror reflection, as seen in the pastel portrait of her sister Lydia on the cover, was an artistic device often used by Cassatt in order to view the subject from an unexpected angle and to extend the feeling of space. In this portrait, the artist has used bright colors and short, crosshatched strokes. The composition, the diagonal lines of the strokes, and the light that shimmers on the various surfaces give this drawing a sense of the excitement of the theater.

*The Boating Party* (above) is one of Mary Cassatt's finest works. The subjects are viewed from slightly above. As in most of her paintings, Cassatt has carefully planned the composition so the viewer's eye moves

directly to the subject's face. The light, bright colors of the mother and baby contrast with the dark figure of the man. The subjects are framed by the bright blue background. And the three figures are emotionally connected by their glances. The artist has cropped the boat, making it appear to come toward the viewer. We feel almost as if we are sitting in the boat with the figures.

Though Mary Cassatt's work was not very popular in America during her lifetime, European artists and critics regarded her as one of the most talented painters of the time. She also persuaded many American collectors to buy Impressionist paintings. Many of the private collections she helped form in the United States were later donated to American museums and galleries.

Like her lifelong friend Degas, Cassatt began to lose her sight and eventually she had to stop painting. Her last years were somewhat lonely, though she was still visited by family and friends. Mary Cassatt died in France in June 1926 at the age of 82.

**In Cassatt's *The Boating Party* (above), the curve of the sail, silhouette of the boat's side, the line of the oar, and the man's arm lead the eye to the focal point of the composition: the mother and child.**

*The Boating Party*, 1893-4. Oil, 35½" x 46⅞" National Gallery of Art Washington, DC.

**MASTERPIECE  
OF THE MONTH**

*Preview*

**Mary Cassatt's sister Lydia  
drives the carriage with French  
Impressionist artist Edgar  
Degas' niece beside her.**

*Woman and Child Driving*, 1879. Oil. 35¼"  
x 51½" Philadelphia Museum of Art. W. P.  
Wilstach Collection.



# Family PORTRAITS



**If you squint your eyes and  
look at the painting on the left,  
how many figures do you see?**

*Breakfast in Bed*, 1897. Oil. 25½" x 29"  
Virginia Steele Scott Collection, Huntington  
Library & Art Gallery, San Marino, CA.

**T**hroughout the years

that Mary Cassatt lived in France, she was visited often by her family and friends. Even though Cassatt's work had been praised by Degas and other well-known artists, her family probably did not realize how important she was. To them, she was simply "Alexander's unmarried sister" or "Aunt Mary who paints." Cassatt was very fond of her nieces and nephews and often included them in her compositions. Many of her most important works are based on the theme of mother and child. In each of the paintings shown on these two pages, and on pages 8 and 9, the artist has used an **asymmetrical** (different shapes on each side) composition. In order to show the figures' emotional closeness to one another, Cassatt arranges them so that they are **intertwined** or **overlapping**.

In the portrait of Cassatt's brother and nephew (right), the artist shows their close relationship by placing their heads side by side. The father and son form two **flat, simple, dark shapes**. The facial expressions of both are serious and calm, reflecting the restrained father-son relationship that was considered proper in Mary Cassatt's time.

In *Breakfast in Bed* (below left), the figures of the mother and child are **intertwined**. They form the center of the composition, which is divided into two unequal parts by the **diagonal line** of the woman's arms and the baby's legs. The **soft shapes** of the pillows and clothing **frame** those of the heads, arms, and legs. The scene is **tightly cropped** like a photograph, so the mother and child — so intertwined that they are seen as one figure — fill the canvas.

Notice how the **three figures** in the painting *Woman and Child Driving* (above left) seem to be crowded into one corner of the **asymmetrical** composition. The **positive shapes** of the figures on one side **equal and balance** the **negative space** on the other. What do you think about the faces of the woman and child? Do these two seem happy with one another? The man seated with his back to them wears an indifferent expression. Is he the child's father, a rela-



*“I have had a joy from which no one can rob me — I have been able to touch some people with my art.” — MARY CASSATT*

tive, a friend, or a family servant?

*The Bath* on pages 8 and 9 is one of Mary Cassatt's most complex compositions. The mother and child are seen from **slightly above**. Their figures touch in several places: heads, hands, and feet. The oval shape formed by their overlapping hands **repeats** the shape of the basin at their feet. The large pitcher serves as a **focal point**. Cassatt has **flattened the space** so the background appears to come forward. The artist **crosses** the composition and uses color to separate the painting into two parts. The red and green patterns of the carpet and background surround and frame the pink and white shapes of the two figures, making them stand out as one unit.

**The artist shows the emotional closeness of her brother and nephew by overlapping the two figures.**

*Alexander J. Cassatt and his Son, Robert Kelso Cassatt, 1884. Oil, 39" x 32"*  
Philadelphia Museum of Art. W. P. Wilstach Collection/Gift of Mrs. William Coxie Wright.

art&  
man.

MASTERPIECE  
OF THE  
MONTH #4



Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). *The Bath*,  
1891-2. Oil, 39 1/2" x 26". Art Institute of  
Chicago. Robert Walker Fund.

"In almost all  
my pictures of  
children, the  
mother is  
holding them.  
I wish you  
could hear  
them talk . . ."

— MARY CASSATT

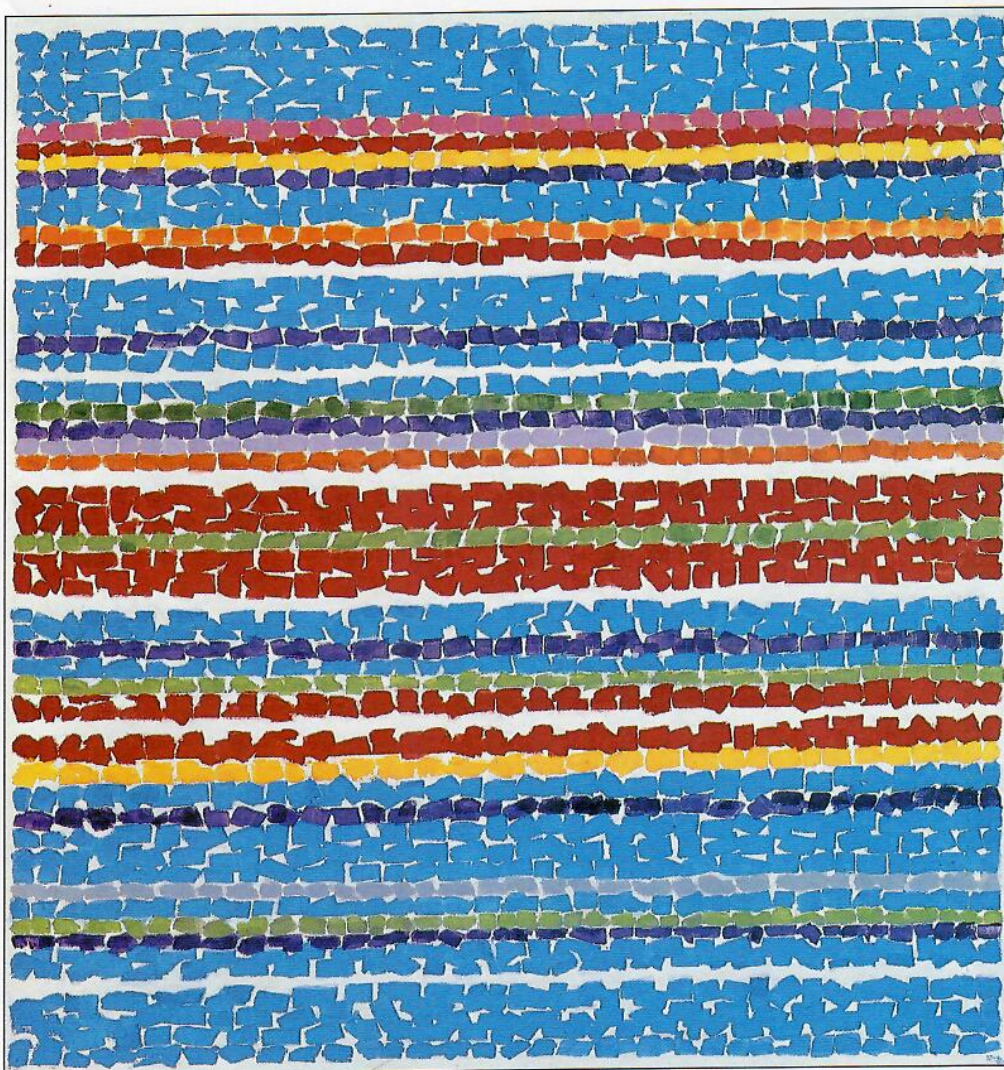
# THE BATH

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## by Mary Cassatt



# American “Impressionists” Today: Three modern American artists who look at nature in fresh new ways.



Artist Alma Thomas said, “My paintings reflect my communion with nature, the highest source of inspiration.”

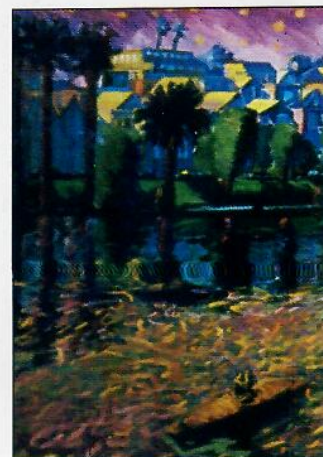
Alma Thomas (1892-1978). *Light Blue Nursery*, 1968. Acrylic. 50" x 48" National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian.

## Nature Abstracted

Like the Impressionists, 20th-century American artist Alma Thomas also got her inspiration from nature. She began to paint seriously during the 1950s, after teaching junior high school art for 35 years. The artist chose to focus on nature, rather than base her work on Afro-American themes, as many other black artists of the time were doing.

Despite their abstract (simplified to capture their essence) quality, her images came directly from the natural scenes she saw every day — the tree outside her window and the flowers in her backyard. The gardens planted throughout the city of Washington, DC, were also one of Alma Thomas’s favorite subjects. The painting (top), *Light*

*Blue Nursery*, shows one of these gardens as seen from above. The rows of flowering plants form a **symmetrical composition** (both sides are the same) made up of tight rows of **warm and cool brushstrokes**. The artist uses brilliant colors in an almost **geometric** way to show how **controlled** nature can be in a formal garden.





How do you think the “sculpture” above can be called “art”?

→ Christo Javacheff (b. 1935). *Surrounded Islands*, Miami, FL. 1980-83. © Christo 1983. Photo: Wolfgang Volz.

## Unnatural Nature

For two weeks in the spring of 1983, 11 islands in Miami were encircled by 200-foot-wide rings of flamingo-pink fabric. This environmental sculpture (shown in the photograph on the left) was titled *Surrounded Islands* by its creator, the American (born in Bulgaria) artist Christo. Christo has become famous for wrapping enormous objects — he has covered monuments, buildings, bridges, and even entire coastlines. He feels wrapped objects take on a certain mystery which causes us to see nature in a new, fresh way.

In addition to the actual construction of his projects, Christo involves himself in every other

aspect of the process: applications, public hearings, legal procedures, and environmental testing to make sure the work won't damage the environment. He has called *Surrounded Islands* “my version of Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*.” [Mo-NAY, a French Impressionist painter, created many famous paintings based on images of water lilies.] The **bright, complementary pinks and greens** in *Surrounded Islands* resemble the brilliant colors in many Impressionist paintings. Christo's art is in many ways, as temporary as nature itself. It begins, grows, blossoms for a brief time; then it dies and becomes only a memory.

## Hollywood Nature

Like the American Impressionists of the last century, many artists today use nature as the source of the images they create. Some — like California painter Carlos Almaraz — use traditional materials and techniques to express their ideas about nature. Compare the painting below, called *The Mystery of the Park*, to Childe Hassam's work *Allies Day* on page 3. The subjects are different, but each artist has **flattened** (made the objects in back seem as close as the

objects in the foreground) the space in his painting. Both works are **simplified, tightly cropped, brightly colored** and both have been painted with very **loose brushstrokes**. Can you see any differences between Hassam's Impressionist painting and the one below? If you look closely, you can see that *The Mystery of the Park* was done in four separate panels. Seen together, the panels make up one panoramic scene. But each panel can also be viewed separately.

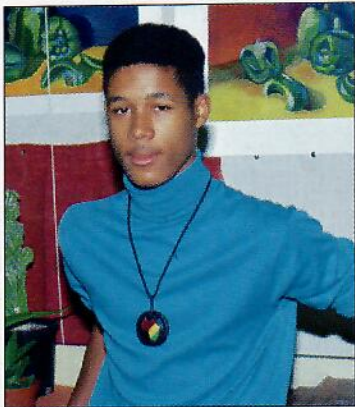
Each **composition** is based on a different **color scheme** — dark blues and greens dominate in the section on the left; the next is made up of reds; the next, oranges; in the right panel, yellows and pinks are the most important colors. Each section shows a different view of Echo Park in Los Angeles, seen from a slightly **different angle**. The organization of the work resembles a film in which the camera “pans” across the scene, frame by frame.

Carlos Almaraz calls his painting (below) “a Latin version of Impressionism.”

Carlos Almaraz (b. 1955). *The Mystery of the Park*, 1982. Oil. 6' x 24' Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles.



# Dartanian Franklin: FIGURE PAINTER



When 16-year-old Dartanian Franklin started the self-portrait on the right, he remembers feeling happy. But look at the expression he has painted. Did his good mood continue, or does it appear to have changed as he did this portrait? Notice all the cool, somber blues. Only a few bright

strokes of color in his face seem to lighten the painting.

Now a senior at Sumner Academy, Kansas City, Kansas, the artist told us about the process he went through while he was creating this portrait. Next year, Dartanian is planning to go to art school and hopes eventually to become a graphic artist. Art is his favorite activity, but he also enjoys wrestling and working on his car.



Dartanian likes to work on figure paintings in his spare time.

**How long have you been doing art?**

As long as I can remember. I used to draw little sketches of my family and people I knew. I especially liked drawing my sister in ridiculous poses because we didn't get along too well. In the fourth grade, I started drawing comic-book characters. I'd put my father's face or my face on Superman or Batman. Then I began doing composites of all of them and making up my own stories.

In junior high, I discovered the art section in the library. I would look at books on how to draw the human body. I got interested in drawing the body correctly, as opposed to the way it's drawn in comics.

**When did you get serious about art?**

When I got to Sumner. I was overwhelmed by how much there was to art. It became an obsession with me. Wherever I was, I would be drawing.

**How did you happen to do this piece?**

We were studying figures. And then the Scholastic Art Awards came up and I decided to do a self-portrait.

**Why a self-portrait?**

I'm my best model. I don't have to take a break. And I don't feel as much pressure about making the work perfect or hurting someone's feelings. I can do it the way I want to. I

wanted to make this portrait more eye-catching than the ones I had done before.

#### How did you begin?

I started out with a couple of thumbnail sketches to get the position. At first I was going to leave out the hat, but then I thought it would give color to another place in the picture besides the shirt. I remember being in a happy mood, joking around with friends. I had just bought the hat. I put it on backwards, and then I decided to leave it that way.

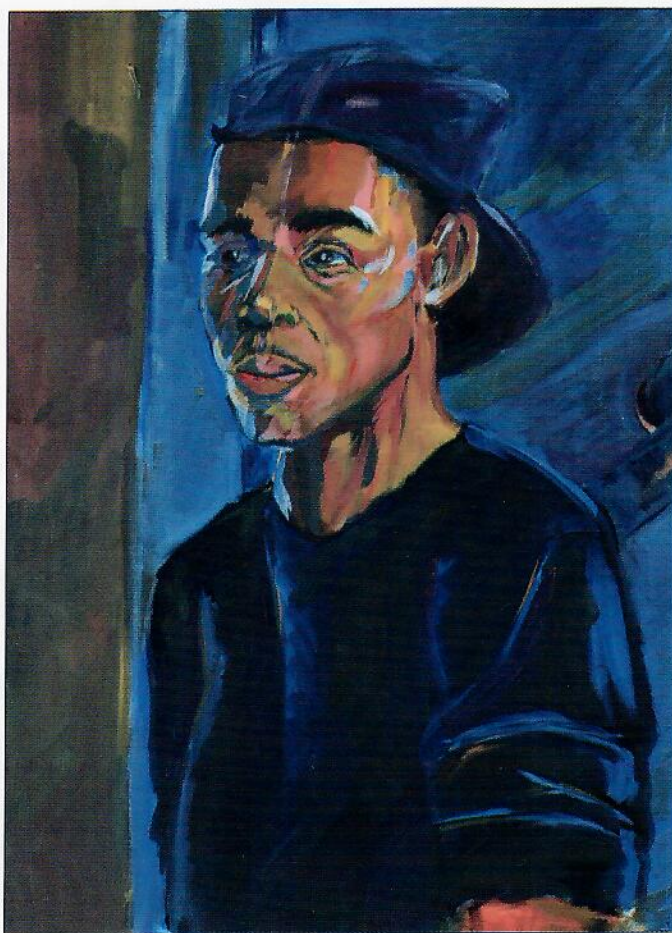
#### How did you do it, step by step?

First I did a sketch in paint. Then I went in with blue to get rid of the white. White doesn't give you as much of a feeling for space as a color does. Then I started working on the major color changes, the wrinkles in the shirt, the structure of the face. I started doing details like the eyes. They were the hardest. I wanted them to look real, but they weren't turning out. I checked a couple of books and realized I had left out the eyelids.

All this time I was looking in a big mirror, and somehow, the happy, joyful feeling had disappeared. After a while, during the time I was doing all the details, I got into one of my bad moods and that's how the picture came out. I was thinking, "I know it's not going to make it, it's not going to look good."

#### Why did you add the bright highlights?

I thought when I finished the last detail, the painting would be done. But I realized I needed more color. So I added straight, raw colors like yellows, blues, and reds to bring out the



shapes. I made the brights either cool or warm. If they were cool, I had to make sure they were the right brightness or dullness. When they were warm, I usually touched in a little red. I used color on the nose to bring out the shape and suggest highlights.

#### Did you actually see these colors?

Yes, I could see or maybe *feel* the colors as warm or cool. I sort of trained myself to see colors other than normal skin tones. I also began to notice that the face was not as simple as I had thought. There was more of a structure.

#### Did you make changes as you worked?

The background was originally red. I toned it down, but it was still too strong. So I made it blue and it seemed to pull everything together, especially

the shirt and the hat. The other part of the wall was white but I made it a beige and finally I dulled it to a brown.

#### When was it finished?

I still don't think it's finished, but there was no more time so I had to stop. I see details I'd like to change. I'd like the ear to blend in with the face. But basically, I was satisfied.

#### What do you like about creating art?

Art can do so many things. It can show how you feel; it can tell stories. Sometimes it seems like art can almost speak, but it's mostly how you interpret it.

I guess it's important to realize art is not always what you see. It's how you *feel* about what you see. To me, color is most important. When I have a feeling, I think about how colors could catch that feeling. I imagine it in my head.

*Art can do so many things. It can show how you feel; it can tell stories. Sometimes it seems like art can almost speak, but it's mostly how you interpret it.*

**We select** our Artist of the Month only from among students who have won medals in the current Scholastic Art Awards Program. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art Awards, 730 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 for entry deadlines and rules book.

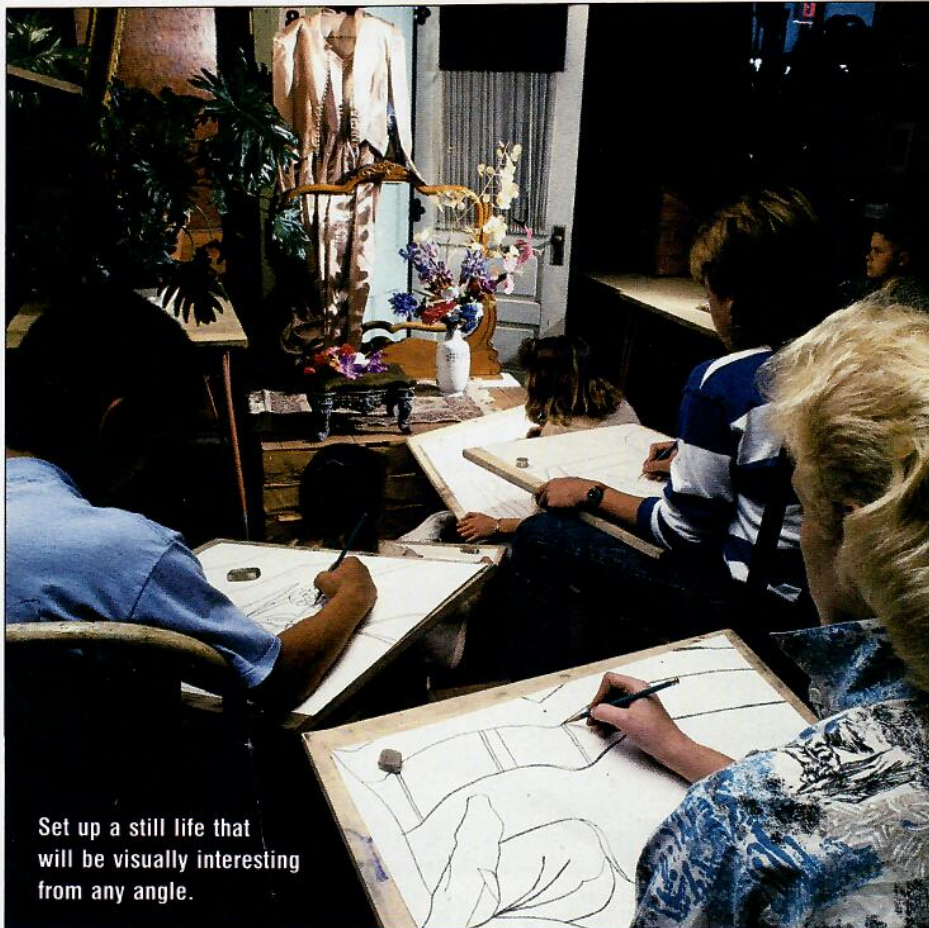
# CREATING DYNAMIC COMPOSITIONS

*Transform an ordinary still life into a colorful work of art.*



French and American Impressionists were among the first artists to create paintings based on everyday subjects. Ordinary trees, reflections in a pond, a vase of flowers — they found that almost anything could be turned into a work of art. As you've seen in this issue, Mary Cassatt, who painted many well-known Impressionist images, based most of her works on one theme — mothers and children. In this workshop, you'll set up a still-life arrangement. You'll select a certain portion of the still life, and using Impressionist principles of composition, turn it into a dynamic and unique pastel drawing.

Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr. Morrison (IL) High School. Photos by Larry Gregory.



Set up a still life that will be visually interesting from any angle.

## Materials

- 18" x 24" white Sulfite paper
- Drawing board
- Vinyl eraser
- Pastels
- Toweling or wax paper
- Hair spray (for fixative)

1



## Starting Out

**Step 1:** Set up a still life which includes at least three or four simple mechanical and organic objects. Select the most interesting angle and do a preliminary drawing. Your format may be horizontal or vertical. Crop your composition and emphasize a central focal point. Your proportions should be accurate.



Use wax paper or paper towels to prevent pastel from smearing.



2

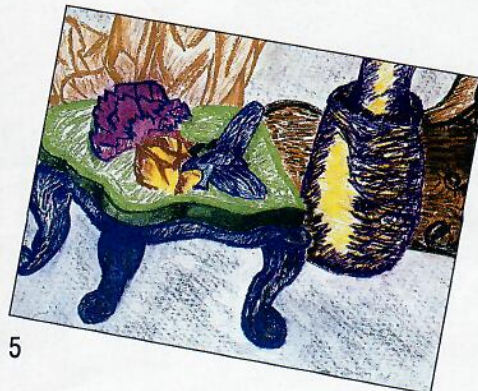


3

Drawings by (1) Scott Betts (2) Hector Salnz (3) Andrew Pitcher (4) Irene Feldes (5) Brandon Renkes (6) Don Seydel



4



5



6

## Step 2

Do several more drawings from different points of view — from above; below; from the side. Hang drawings and select the best composition.

## Step 3

Do a pastel drawing, working from the same angle. You can use short, medium, or long strokes. Limit blending; shade with darker strokes. Using hair spray, fix drawings in a well-ventilated area.

## Some Solutions

Which of the artists whose work is shown on the left and above have used the whole still life? Which artists have selected only one part? Which drawings were done looking from above? Which were done from the side? Were any done from below? Which artists used tight cropping? Which balanced the composition by placing positive shapes on top and negative space on the bottom? Which artists used diagonals to tilt the format? Which artists used abstract, simplified shapes and flattened space, and which artists worked with strokes of color? Which artists used a focal point to call the viewer's attention to one part of the drawing?

## ARTS ALIVE

# Two current shows give you a chance to see French and American Impressionist works.

### Test Your Knowledge

Imagine that you have walked into an art museum and have spotted the Impressionist painting on the right. Can you tell who painted it? Look carefully at the painting for clues: The artist has used a **tightly cropped, asymmetrical composition**; and the **positive shapes** of the figures are **balanced** by the **negative space** on the right. The floral pattern of the seated woman's dress **contrasts** with the background and with the light-colored dress of her companion. The two women are connected by their glances and gestures; they overlap slightly. Do you think they are sisters, cousins,

or close friends? Were you able to tell that this painting—*Young Women Picking Fruit*—is by this month's featured artist, Mary Cassatt?

You can see this painting in an exhibit called *Impressionism: Selections from Five American Museums*. This show features 85 paintings and 21 sculptures by Cassatt and her French contemporaries such as Degas and Gauguin. Museums in Minneapolis, MN, Kansas City, MO, St. Louis, MO, and Toledo, OH, will be showing this exhibit through the end of 1990. (Check local listings for the show's opening and closing dates.)



Does this painting resemble any you've seen in this issue?

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). *Young Women Picking Fruit*, 1891. Oil. 51½" x 35½" The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.



What Impressionist techniques can you find in this painting?

William Merritt Chase (1849-1916). *The Nursery*, 1890. Oil. 14¾" x 16" The Manoogian Collection.

### A Touch of Impressionism

William Merritt Chase was one of the most important American artist/teachers of the late 19th century. During the years that Mary Cassatt was painting in France, Chase became one of the first painters in the United States to use Impressionist techniques. In *The Nursery* (left), Chase combines Impressionism with a more traditional style. This painting is more **realistic** than most Impressionist works. The subject is seen at **eye-level** rather than from an unusual angle, and the artist does not use tight cropping. The building and the flower beds are **foreshortened**, giving the painting a feeling of depth. However, like Mary Cassatt and the Impres-

sionists, Chase has used an **asymmetrical composition**—the woman on the left is **balanced** by the flower beds on the right. True to the Impressionist style, the artist has used brushstrokes of **bright color**. He contrasts the **complementary** (opposite) colors red and green.

*The Nursery* is one of the paintings you will see in an exhibit called *American Paintings from the Manoogian Collection*. This exhibit includes over 60 works from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The show will be at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City through February 1990. It will then go to the Detroit Institute of Arts. —S.B.