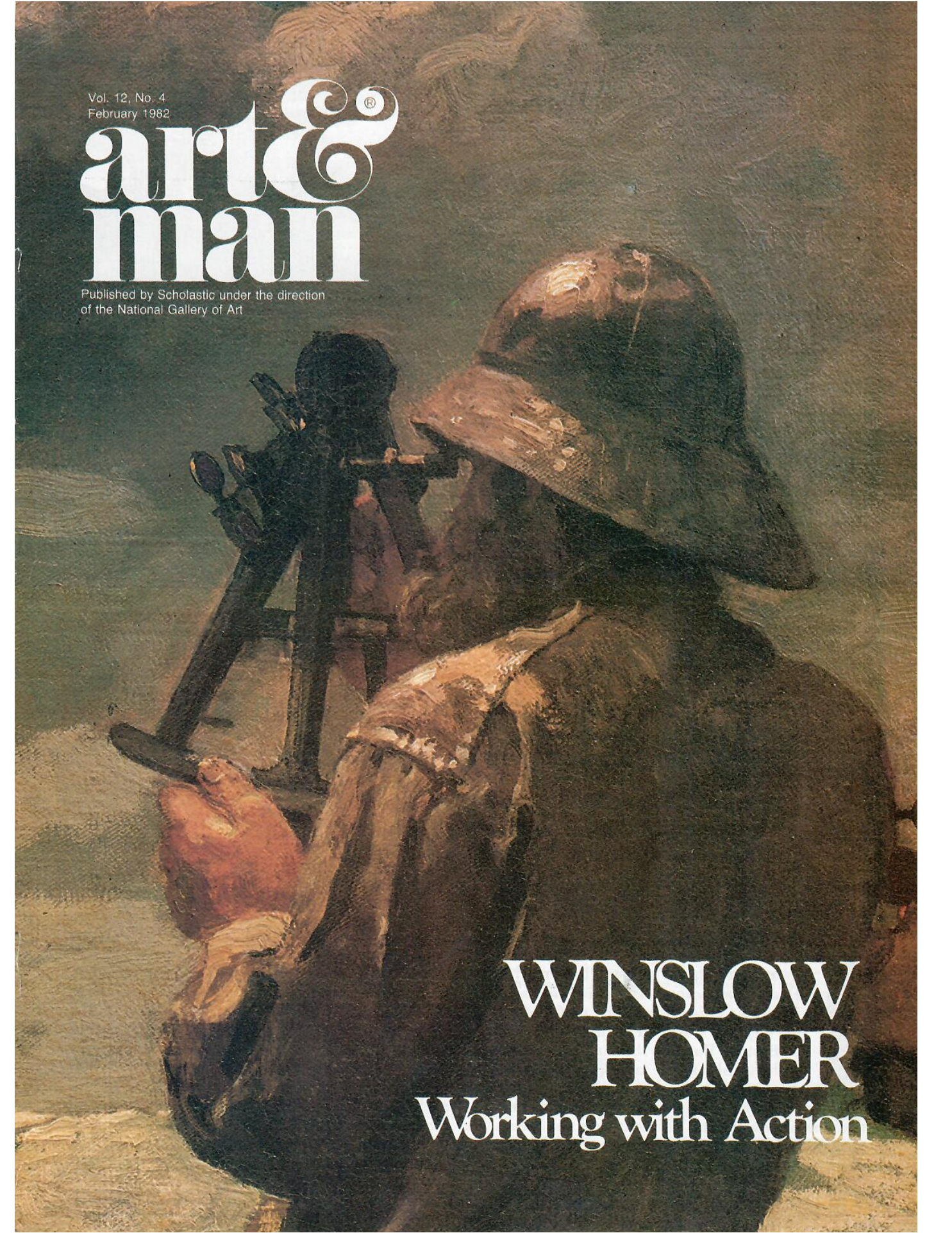


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WINSLOW
HOMER
Working with Action



Winslow Homer was one of the first American artists to paint people as they really were.

Winslow Homer's America

How can you get the excitement of wind, sun, and fresh air into a painting? Winslow Homer did—as no American painter had before.

In 1842, when he was six, a big change took place in Winslow Homer's life. Homer, who would later become one of America's greatest painters, moved out of the city. He was used to the cramped life of Boston. But now he could rise early, grab his fishing pole, and spend the whole day outdoors in the country. He was never happier—looking, exploring, discovering something new in everything he saw: ponds and creeks, meadows and woods. Later this love of the outdoors would go into his art.

In the painting (above) of two mountain guides, you can almost imagine that the man in the bright red shirt is Homer himself. (Compare him with his photo, right.) Standing in a field of wildflowers, he looks completely at home. More than likely Homer actually stood in a meadow like this on one of his fishing trips to Canada or the Adirondack Mountains in New York. He probably made his sketches for the painting on a bright, sunny day like this.

This scene looks quiet and peaceful, but is that the feeling you get? The air is crisp and the wind blows the clouds across the sun. The figures are not moving right now, but they were a minute ago, and they will be going into action again at any second. Homer knew how to create a restless, active feeling even in a calm-looking scene like this one.

Winslow Homer had always been interested in telling dramatic stories. He began his art career as an illustrator and was soon free-lancing for *Harper's Weekly*, the greatest news magazine of the time. Unlike news magazines today, it was illustrated with woodcut prints, not photos. When the Civil War came, Homer went to sketch the soldiers and scenes of camp life for *Harper's*. Then, in the middle of his career as an illustrator, he suddenly took up painting. This decision like his others would be a private one. Neat, quiet, and



Winslow Homer
around 1880.

polite on the outside, Homer had a tough, independent nature. He had no use for school and learned painting on his own. Like many other American painters of the mid-19th century, Homer turned his back on the subjects favored by European artists—scenes from the Bible and mythology. He was one of the first to capture the “real” America—the people and the landscape. And he brought to his paintings a sense of drama and action that was totally new. He trusted only his own eyes—not those of other artists.

In order to work in this new, direct way, Homer felt he had to be completely alone. So he moved from the city to a lonely spot on the coast of Maine. In a damp, bare studio he built above the cliffs overlooking the ocean, Homer painted for the last 25 years of his life. It was the drama of the sea—alive with waves and wind—that he most loved to paint. Or the actions of people as they struggled against it during storms. Or, as shown in the painting on the cover, the life of sailors working on board a ship. The title *Eight Bells* refers to the way time is marked at sea. Perhaps a storm has finally ended, and now the sailor can measure the ship's location. Homer knew how to pick just the right moment—one that could suggest what has happened before, and what is just about to happen.

In this issue, you'll discover more about Winslow Homer's search to capture the actions of nature and people. You'll learn other ways to show action, and then you'll find out how to use the human figure in a dramatic way.

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ACTION INTO PAINT

Homer watched and waited for just the right moment. And he painted it in bold new ways.

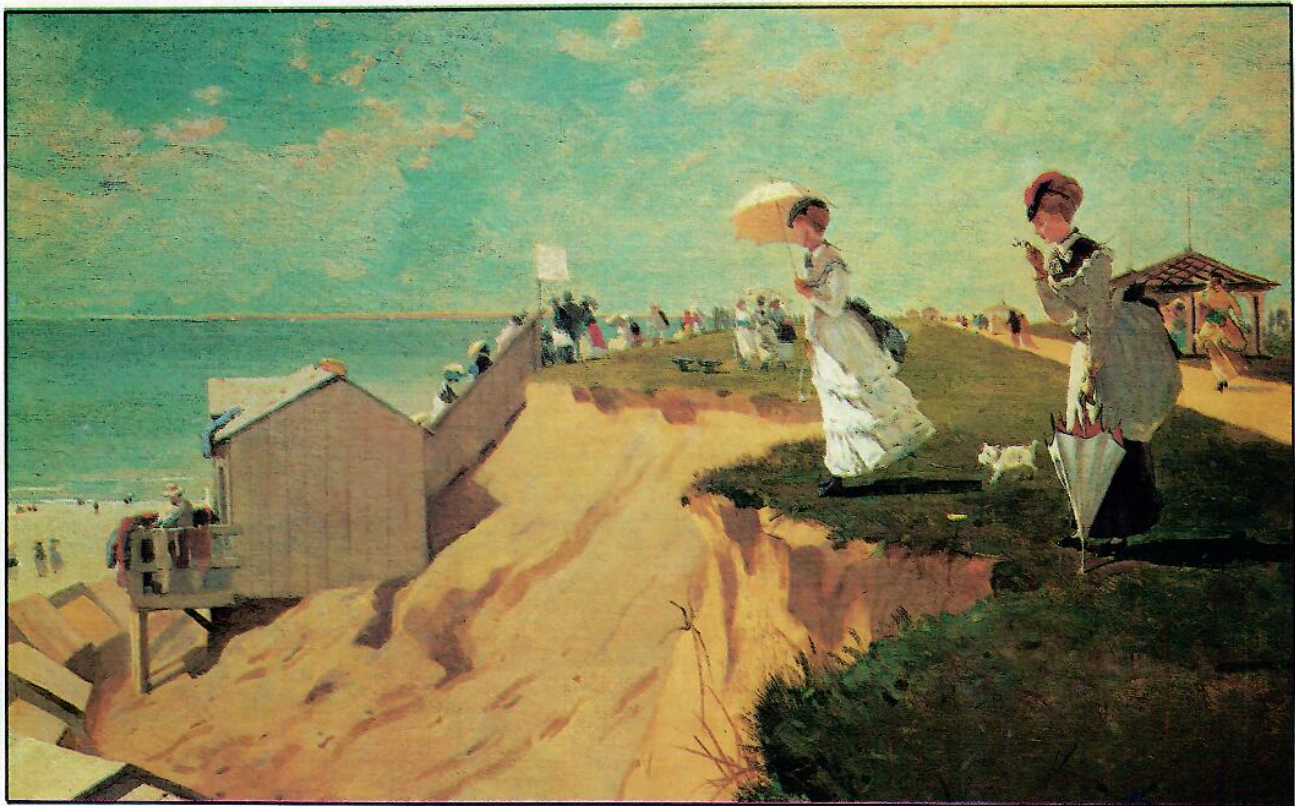
When Homer was young, he painted a calm, peaceful, sunny world. On a warm, breezy day he would often go to the beach, where he watched the fashionable women parading up and down the boardwalk. In the beach scene, right, he has focused on two people, just as he

did in *Two Guides*, but it is hard to imagine two more different pairs. The womens' white skirts flow in the gentle breeze, while the sun shines down in a bright noonday sky. The colors are all light and cheerful. But even in this peaceful scene, there is a hint of tension. Balanced by the beach house on the left, the women stand at the very edge of the cliff, leaning forward. Even



Right and Left, 1909, oil. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of the Avalon Foundation, 1951.

This is also a seascape. It has many of the same elements as the other painting above, right—ocean, sky, people—but how has the whole mood changed?



Long Branch, New Jersey, 1869, oil. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Charles Henry Hayden Fund.

Winslow Homer always loved the sea. When he was young, he painted ocean scenes like this one.

Homer's most tranquil compositions hold the promise of action.

Suddenly, when he was about 45, Homer found he couldn't paint bright, pleasant landscapes anymore. He left the country looking for inspiration. He ended up at a tiny fishing village in England, and for several months, he hardly ever came out of his cottage. Something had changed in him, and when he came back to this country, his new subjects were tough, hardy sea people and the drama of ship wrecks and rescues. A peaceful sea bored him now. He called it that "pond" out there.

In Homer's new paintings, a wild, violent nature took over and people became less important. Look at the painting of two goldeneye ducks done the year before Homer died. How is it different from the beach scene? It's more dramatic, but why? What is happening to these ducks? Can you find the hunters? They're far in the back-

ground—a tiny patch of smoke and fire on the waves below. Homer had often used the theme of hunter and hunted but rarely from this point-of-view. We seem to be up in the air with the ducks themselves.

Have the ducks been shot? Do their positions look natural? What else creates the feeling of a struggle with death? Notice the dramatic light and dark colors. And look at the tense, jagged lines and brushstrokes—especially the sharp waves, leaping up as if to grab at the birds.

Even Homer was surprised by this painting. It portrayed a real scene of action, but something else was happening too. It was becoming less realistic, and it suggests brand-new ways of painting for the future.

What makes it modern? Compare it with the beach scene and you'll see that it's much less detailed. It's also *flatter*, or the space of the painting seems much more squeezed together.

One way Homer did this was by hiding the horizon line. Can you find it? (It's two-thirds of the way up, near the birds' wings.)

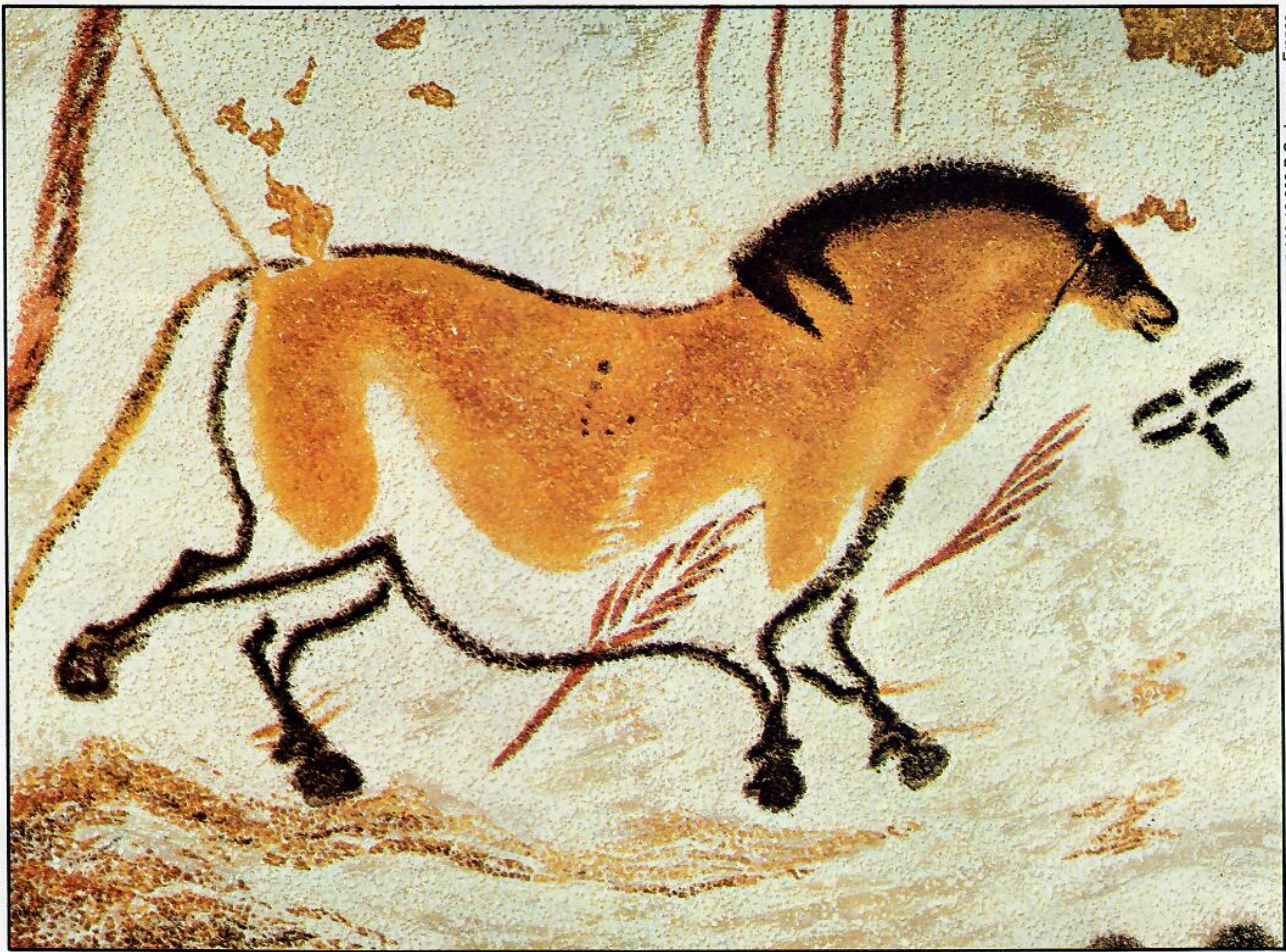
Another way Homer flattened the painting was by using the same colors in the foreground and the background. He used the same green in the sky, the water, and the birds. The clouds have become a stark band of yellow at the top. Where else can you find this color?

Another important change in Homer's style had to do with the way he used his brush. Notice the choppy, flowing brushstrokes in the waves, clouds, and birds. This is a new kind of action in art—the action of broad, quickly painted strokes of paint. These slashing brushstrokes could suggest the power of nature in a bolder way.

In this painting, two ducks are caught between life and death. It is nature at its most dramatic, and Homer found the means to capture it.

STOPPING TIME

Discover three ways artists have been able to show action.



Chinese Horse, c. 15,000-10,000 B.C., Lascaux, France.

The artist who painted this running horse lived more than ten centuries ago.

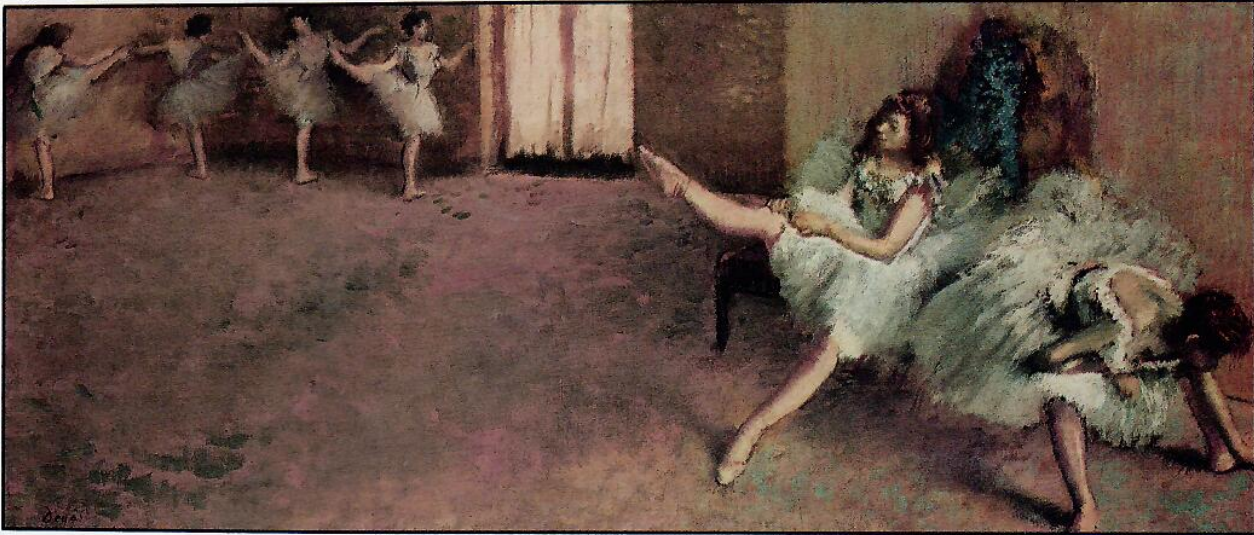
LIVING WALLS

Cave artists, working many thousands of years ago, were the first to try to represent action visually. But they didn't want just to create *pictures* of the animals they drew. They wanted to create the animal *itself*. The act

of painting bulls, deer, and horses (such as this Old Stone Age drawing of a horse found in a cave in France) is thought to have been like a magic ritual. If there was to be a hunt, painting the animals in very active, life-

like poses would ensure success. If horses were needed, drawing their pictures was the first step to capturing them. For artists of the Stone Age, the action of drawing was as important as the resulting work of art.

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Before the Ballet*, 1888, oil. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Widener Collection, 1942.



The famous artist Edgar Degas is best known for his paintings of dancers ready to go into action.

CAPTURING THE DANCE

As we have seen in the paintings of Winslow Homer, action can be shown by the way in which a work of art is *composed*. The French Impressionist Edgar Degas painted a number of very active subjects such as horse racing and ballet dancing. Although Degas' style was very realistic, he was able to show the excitement and movement of the ballet by the way he arranged the people and objects in his paintings. Look first at the shape of this

work. A long, thin canvas is much more active than a square one. Follow the diagonal "action line" that begins with the figure at the lower right. The pointed toe to the left then pulls your eye up to the four dancers at the top. Half the painting is made up of "empty" floor space which seems to squeeze the dancers into the corners. The figures are closely "cropped" at the top and sides, so they seem to be bursting out of the picture.

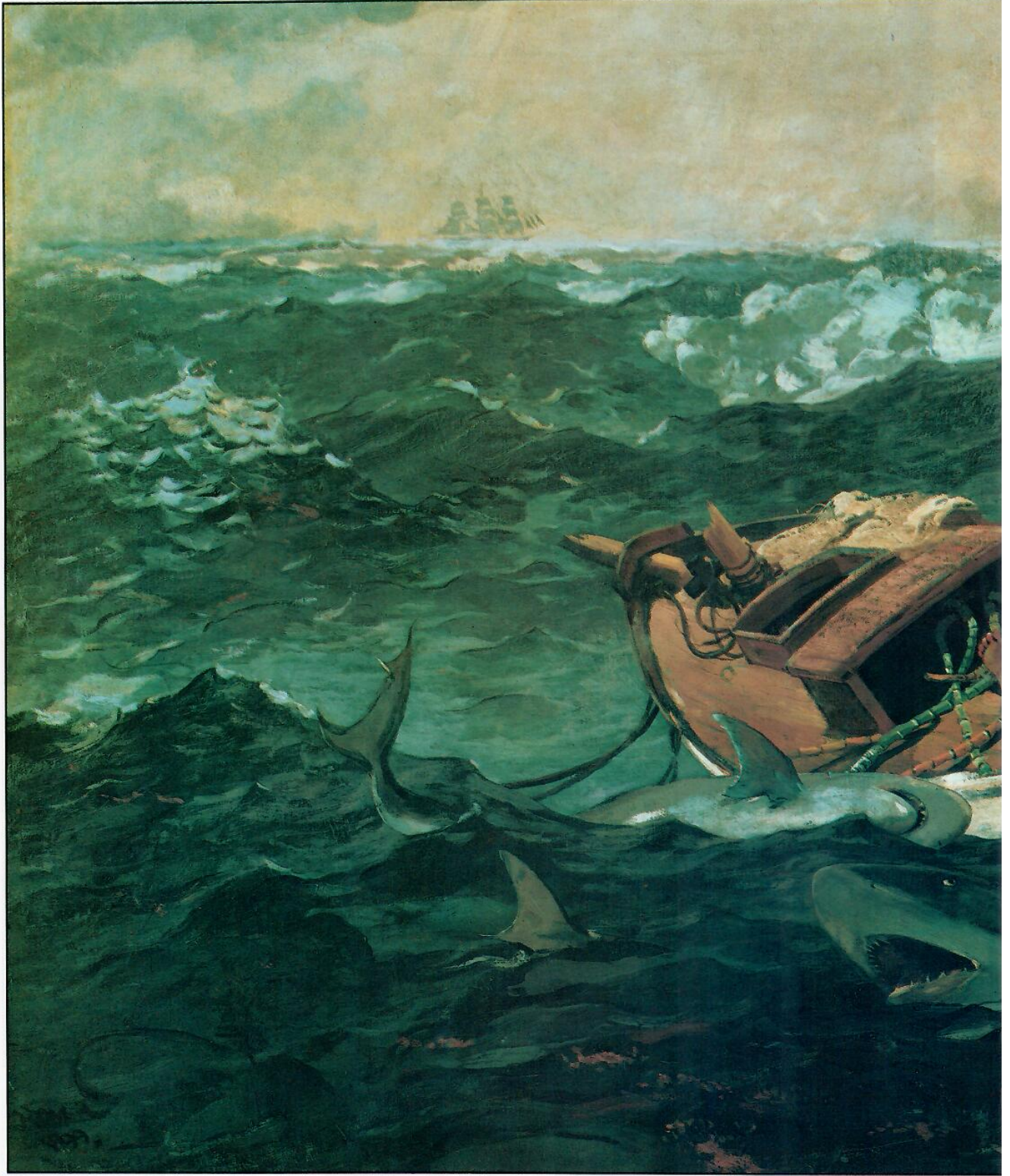
Elaine de Kooning (b. 1920), *Basketball—Pink and Blue*, 1981. Spectrum Fine Art Ltd.



How was this artist able to capture the feeling of movement in paint?

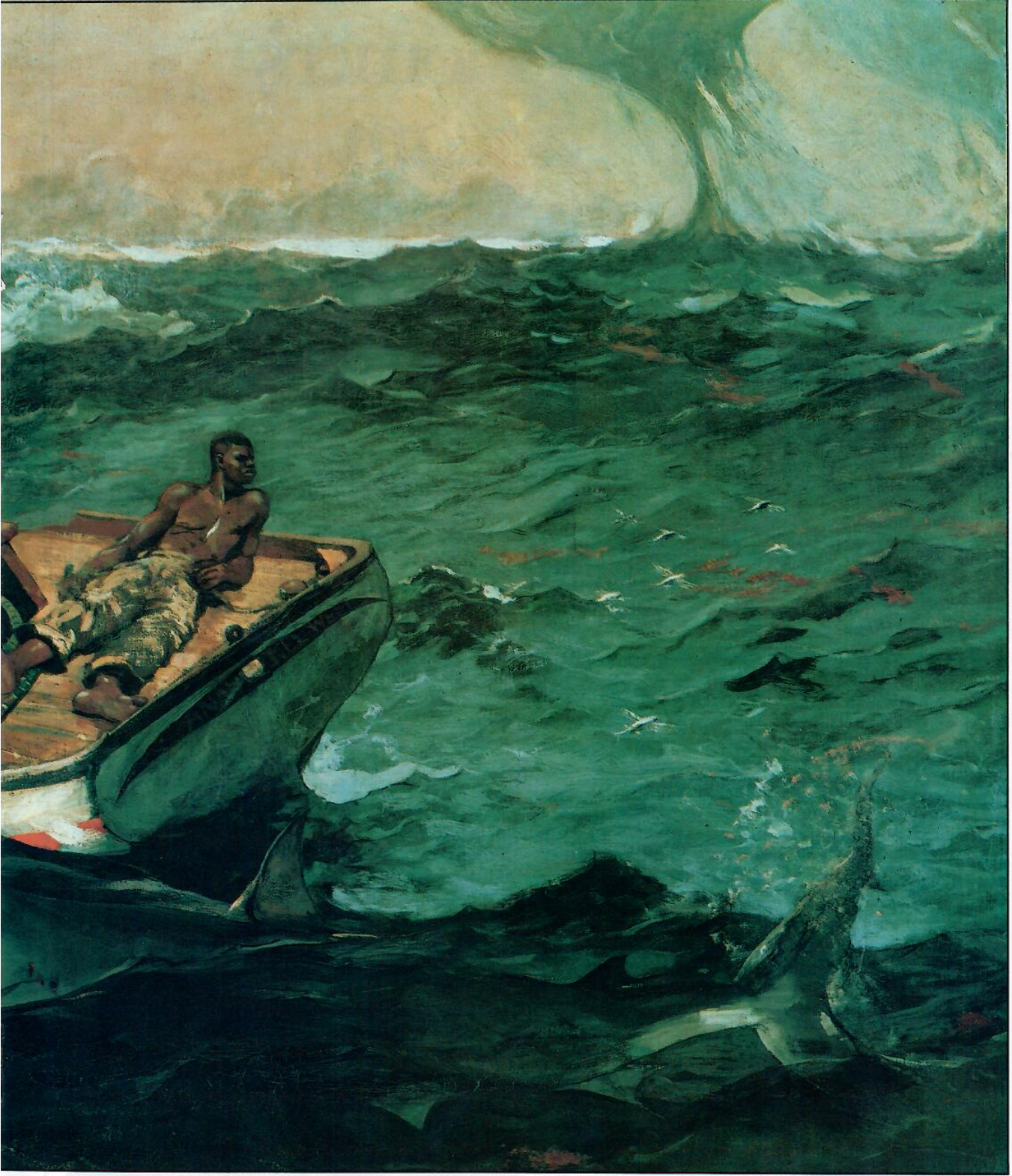
ACTION PAINTINGS

Sometimes action is shown in the way an artist uses his or her materials. Contemporary American painter Elaine de Kooning uses paint, color, and the strokes of her brush to create what appear at first glance to be very unrealistic abstractions. Does this painting *Pink and Blue* look like anything to you? Notice how all the brushstrokes which begin at the bottom seem to overlap and join together at one spot, the *focal point*, at the top. De Kooning went to a number of sports events, especially basketball games, before doing this painting. Can you find the players, the ball, the basket? Perhaps you've seen sports photos taken in such a way that all the figures are just moving blurs of color. The streaks and swirling brushstrokes of *Pink and Blue* show action in the same way.



art&man *Masterpiece of the Month 4* Winslow Homer's

Winslow Homer (1836-1910), *Gulf Stream*, 1899, oil. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Gulf Stream

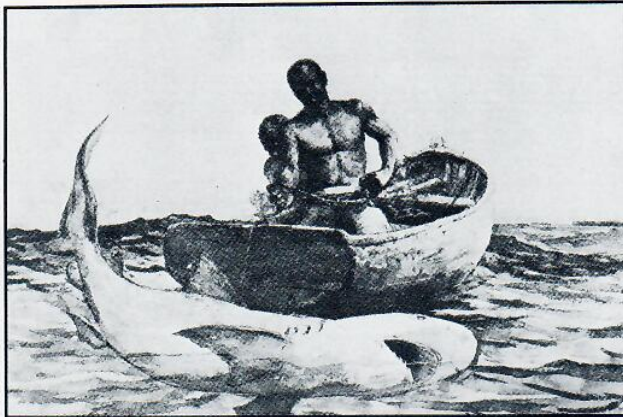
Winslow Homer's Gulf Stream

Gulf Stream is one of the most action-packed works of art ever created by an American artist. How and why did Winslow Homer paint it?

A sailor, alone in the vast and stormy ocean, is balanced on the deck of a small sailboat. The ship is badly battered. It is leaning dangerously and may be leaking. Its mast and rudder have broken off. The black water below it is churning with the bloodthirsty jaws of man-eating sharks. The dark, surrounding waves threaten to cover the boat at any minute, while a tall waterspout looms in the distance. The whole painting is so real and alive that when it was first shown, people were shocked that the artist could have been present during such a horrible event.

Actually, Winslow Homer painted *Gulf Stream* in his studio in Maine during the middle of the winter in 1899. Living alone, "my nearest neighbor is half a mile away," in this small, cold building perched above the ocean gave Homer a special relationship with the sea. However, sometimes he would tire of the grays, browns, and whites of Maine. Then he would turn to his other world.

It was in 1884 that Homer had first traveled to the tropics. This trip opened up a whole new world of light and color for the New England artist. In Bermuda, Florida, and the Bahamas he painted a sunny, free life of fishing and diving for sponges into clear, blue water beneath waving palm trees. But even in this tropical paradise things weren't perfect. People still had to struggle against natural forces. Fish got away, sharks attacked, and there were hurricanes and tornados. As the waves crashed on the rocks below and the wind blew the snowdrifts still higher outside, Homer again decided to paint the conflict between human beings and the sea. This time he set it in



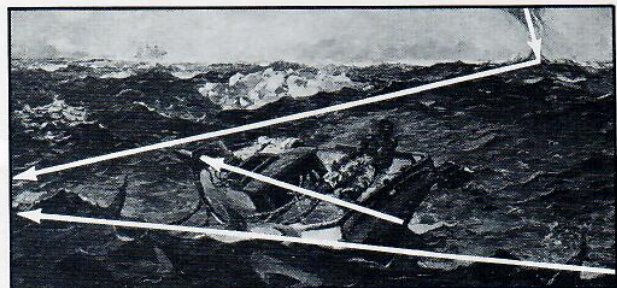
On his trips south, Homer did many watercolors. He later used these sketches to create *Gulf Stream*.

the tropics of his travels.

Using his sketches and watercolors, Homer carefully composed *Gulf Stream*. With its flat horizon line and the boat placed right in the middle of the work, this could have been a very calm painting. But the subject is far from peaceful, and Homer uses some very dynamic techniques to show this action. Look at the angle of the boat as well as the angle of the wave in front

and the one in back. The movement set up by these diagonal *action lines* (see diagram) creates a feeling of tension. The light-colored boat seems to be trapped between the two black waves. Homer's use of color—the red stripe on the boat and the strokes of red paint in the waves—remind us of the sharp jaws of the sharks waiting below. The rough, thick brushstrokes in the water and sky heighten the feeling of powerful and sinister natural forces about to destroy the helpless human being.

When this painting was exhibited in New York City, it was so effective that it shocked and upset many people. Homer grew so tired of the complaints he wrote, "You may inform these people that the man did not starve to death. He was not eaten by the sharks. The waterspout did not hit him. And he was rescued by a passing ship, returned to his home and lived happily ever after."



WINSLOW HOMER'S FIRST JOB

"Boy wanted. Apply to Bufford, lithographer. Must be good at drawing. No other wanted."

When Homer was 19, his father drew his attention to this ad. It was time, Mr. Homer felt, that his son get a job. That was the last thing Winslow wanted — even a job that had to do with drawing. He felt drawing should be fun, not work. He'd much rather go out sketching with his friends.

However, Winslow got the job. He was hired as a lithographer's helper for a period of two years. The time seemed endless. From 8 until 6 every day Homer would copy drawings so they could be printed. He hated the work. The drawings came from the companies' files, not from what he had seen himself. His only escape was getting up early and going fishing for an hour before work. Then he would hide his pole in the bushes and be on his way to the shop. No one ever guessed. He'd come in looking so scrubbed and well-dressed



Homer Archives, Bowdoin College Art Museum, Brunswick, Maine.



Winslow Homer did magazine illustrations like this one for 20 years before he was able to paint full-time.

that the other workers thought he came from a wealthy family.

Finally the two years were over, and Homer decided to become a free-lance illustrator. Woodblock engraving, a new method of illustration, was sweeping the country, and artists were in great demand. Homer quickly taught himself this new technique, and began selling his work. Just four months after he left Bufford's, one of his drawings was featured on the front page of a Boston newspaper.

Homer also began selling to *Harper's Weekly*, the most exciting newspaper of the time. He moved to New York, and rented a studio on the top floor of a musty old building. The studio was very small, but the light poured in through one window, the view was magnificent, and Homer was happy.

Before long, Homer was of-

fered a high-paying job at *Harper's* as a staff artist. But he didn't take it. His independence was too important to him. Who knows where it might lead him? Homer later explained: "I had a taste of freedom. The slavery at Bufford's was too fresh in my memory.... From the minute I took my nose off that lithographic stone, I have had no master. And never shall have any."

Compare this month's masterpiece, *Gulf Stream*, to the woodcut above, *Homebound*. In both, Homer shows us a storm at sea. He composed both using a series of active diagonals. And the curved, sweeping lines in both give a vivid feeling of action.

Winslow Homer went on to become one of America's most famous painters. But he learned everything he had to know about art from these early jobs.

Artist of the Month

Mike De Jong:

CAPTURING NATURE

Nineteen-year-old Mike De Jong is always looking at the little things—the things you pass everyday and hardly notice. Like the tree turning yellow in the frontyard. Or the late afternoon sun sparkling through the top of a cookie jar at the window. These are the kind of things he looks for when doing a painting.

Mike is currently attending a college near his home in Lansing, Illinois. He's sold several watercolors and is represented by two galleries. He talked to us last fall about his Scholastic award-winning watercolor, *A Windy Day*.

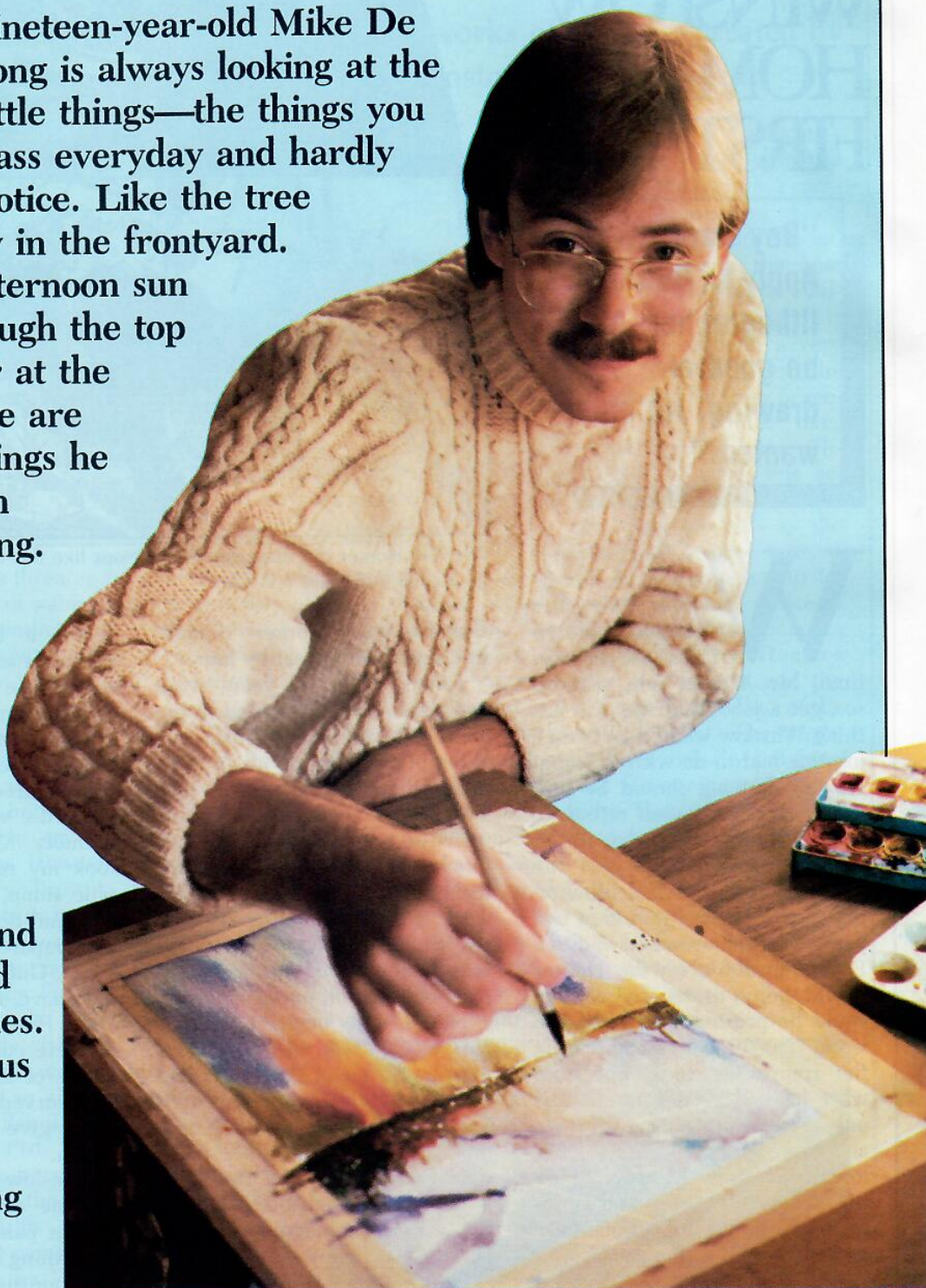


Photo by Janet Soderberg

How did this painting come about?

One summer it was hot. I was bored and I wanted something to do. So I looked through these photos I had. I picked out this awful one I'd taken on vacation of a house in the Smoky Mountains. It was an old-time house open to the public, all raw natural wood and I really liked it.

What did you do next?

I filled a big bucket full of water and put my feet in it because it was so hot. Then I started drawing on the picnic table in the yard. I drew the house exactly the way it was in the photo, but the rest of the scene I made up.

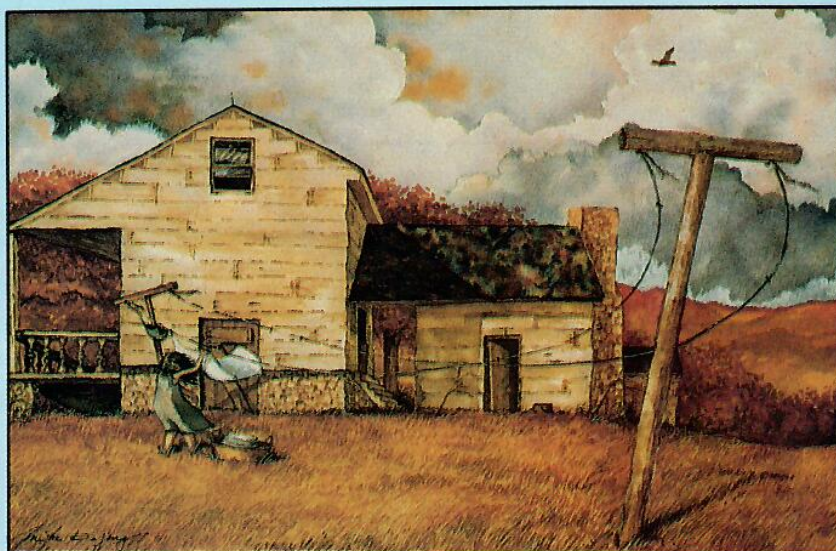
The house and clouds were painted first. I hadn't quite planned out the woman, but I had left a space for her. And the clothesline was a last minute thing. Before I put them in, I thought something's wrong. I'm not getting the wind. If you cover the clothesline and the woman with your hand, what's left is very empty and still. There's nothing to give you that whoosh.

Why did you want it to be windy?

The scene needed it. And I thought how would it look if there was an old lady standing out there, up to her ankles in grass? She probably has a sink full of dirty dishes inside, and the kids are still in bed. I really like that lady. I can relate to her. She's doing the best that she can.

How did you use the woman and the other parts of the painting to make it look windy?

The grass is all on a diagonal. The clothespoles seem blown over a little bit. And I like the way the woman is pushing away from the wind. It really blows around here. When we were



little, we would actually lean against the wind and it would hold us up.

There's also a clear, fresh color to the clouds and the trees that makes you think of a crisp, windy fall day. It could have just stormed and now the sun's out. That's the way the clouds look.

You said the clothesline was a last minute thing?

Yes. The upper-right corner of the painting bothered me. The chimney on the house just sort of left me out there and there was no way to bring me back in. So I put in a clothespole and used the clothesline to bring your eye back into the middle of the painting. My favorite spot is right there—that passageway between the two buildings where you can look through. It seems like such a quiet, happy place. I'd like to sit there.

Did you make many changes as you went along?

I was very picky about what I was going to put in. I didn't want clutter. I'd rather just let the simple shapes play up their own area.

Simplicity is very important. I could have put curtains at the

windows, a tricycle and furniture in the yard. Originally, when I sketched out the clothesline, it was full of clothes—socks, underwear, dresses—the whole deal. But I erased it all. It was too funny, too cute—with the long johns flapping in the breeze.

How did you choose the colors?

The color orange just does something for me. It's a total rush. And blue and orange work so well together. The real warm against the real cool. The whole painting is done with just orange and blue. It was kind of an experiment to see how far I could go with just two colors.

Why did you use watercolor?

I never considered anything else. It's the easiest way for me to put my thoughts and ideas down on paper. I'm starting oils now and I enjoy it, but it's not the same. I don't get lost in it like I do in watercolor.

You seem very involved in art. What makes you want to continue?

There's something inside me that says, "This is so much fun." It's kind of like going back to being a child. I think it's fantastic.

Creating ACTION DRAWINGS

Find out how to create a work as exciting as those by Winslow Homer.

As we've seen on the cover and this month's Masterpiece, the paintings of Winslow Homer are filled with action. His basic subject, people against the elements, is very dramatic. It is the way in which Homer uses his figures that

creates the *tension* which brings his work to life. On these pages we are going to look at "dynamic tension" and try to make it work for us on the page.

This workshop will be in two parts. First, we will draw the figure from life. In drawing the human figure, the most important quality to try and capture is the way it *moves*.

MATERIALS

All you will need for this project is some chalk, or charcoal, and some large (18" x 24") sheets of paper.

Part I

1. Take turns modeling. Try and make your poses as different, exciting, and dramatic as possible.



2. Look at the whole figure and run an imaginary line down its center. We'll call this the *action line*. At two points on the figure, the shoulders and the hips, the action line may shift. At these points, run intersecting lines through the figure showing the directions of the shoulders and hips. We'll call these the *axis lines*.

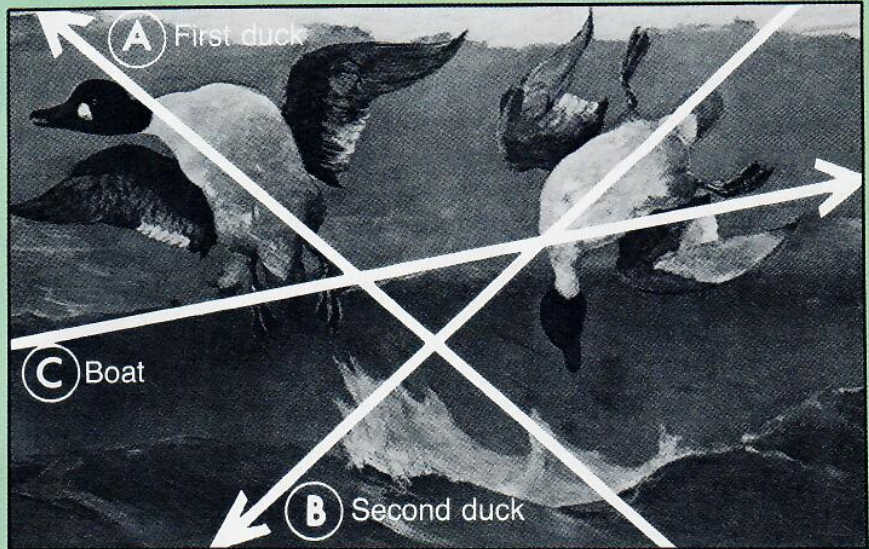


3. Using the side of the chalk, now begin to fill out the figure from the action line to give it weight. Don't worry about details, or making it look too much like the person you are drawing.



Part II

Look again at the work of Winslow Homer and try to see how he uses *dynamic tension*. For example, in *Right and Left* on page 4, follow the two “action lines” created by the two birds. The hunters’ boat, far behind the duck on the left, points in the direction of a third action line. The three lines *intersect*, or cross each other, creating a push-pull relationship between all three. This gives tension not only to the figures themselves, but to the entire space around them. Homer carefully places his figures to give as much dynamic tension as possible to the composition.



4. Pick out a couple of your most successful figure drawings and cut them out. Your figures should all be about the same size so you can concentrate on composition.



5. Working in small groups, put all of your cut-out figures together and move them around on a large sheet of paper. Try to create an axis line with the figures and play the general action line of one set of figures against the others.

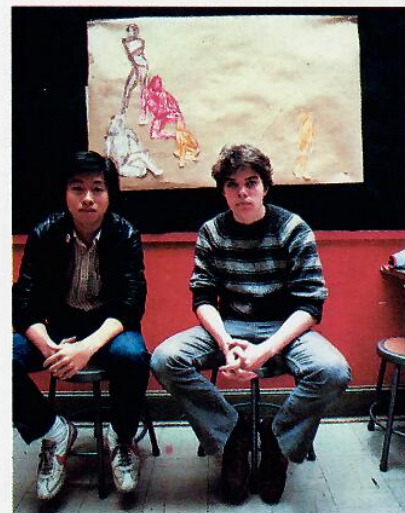


SOME SOLUTIONS

You can clump some figures together and spread others out. How can a single figure “balance” a group of many figures? What happens when the figures overlap? Can you find the “action” lines in this composition?



What happens to the space around these figures? How do dark and light, thick and thin figures affect the composition? What about the action lines? Where does your eye go?



When the group feels that the greatest dynamic tension has been achieved between the figures and the space, glue the cut-outs on the page.

Arts Alive

“Creativity”

Would you have guessed that this is a work of art? Who did it . . . why . . . how . . . what is it doing on the side of a truck? You'll find out the answers to these questions in a new television program called “Creativity.” On the 17-part series, a number of highly creative people—film-makers, painters, photographers, poets, TV producers—will tell you just how they get their ideas—what makes them create. “Creativity” is scheduled to begin this month on National Educational Television. Watch your local program listings for the date and time of this outstanding series.



Creativity with Bill Moyers is made possible by a grant from Chevron.

Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902). Yosemite Valley, 1866.



Homer's World

While Winslow Homer was creating pictures like *Gulf Stream*, what were other American artists doing? A new exhibition will give you a chance to see just how “different” Homer's work was from many other paintings done at that time. Over 100 examples of historical scenes, formal portraits, and huge landscapes (such as the one shown here) that were popular in 19th-century America can be seen in *An American Perspective: 19th Century Art from the Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz*. The show will be at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, until Jan. 31. It will then travel to the Amon Center Museum in Fort Worth, TX, March 19-May 23; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 6-Sept. 26.

Winslow Homer, *Easthampton, Long Island*, c. 1870, oil. Private Collection.



Winslow Homer Today

Next time you are in a shop that sells old, used items, have a closer look at some of the paintings. Maybe you'll be as lucky as a young actor, William Roerich, was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, one day in the 1950's. As he was going through a huge, dusty stack of paintings, he spotted a small beach scene. Since he couldn't afford the \$45 price, he bargained with the owner and finally got the painting, without its frame, for \$35. Last fall, this same painting, *East Hampton, Long Island* by Winslow Homer, was sold for more than half a million dollars.