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art & man

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*Auguste
Renoir*
Working with Color

A NEW WORLD OF LIGHT

“We want to create poetry through the harmony of true colors”—*Camille Pissarro, Impressionist*

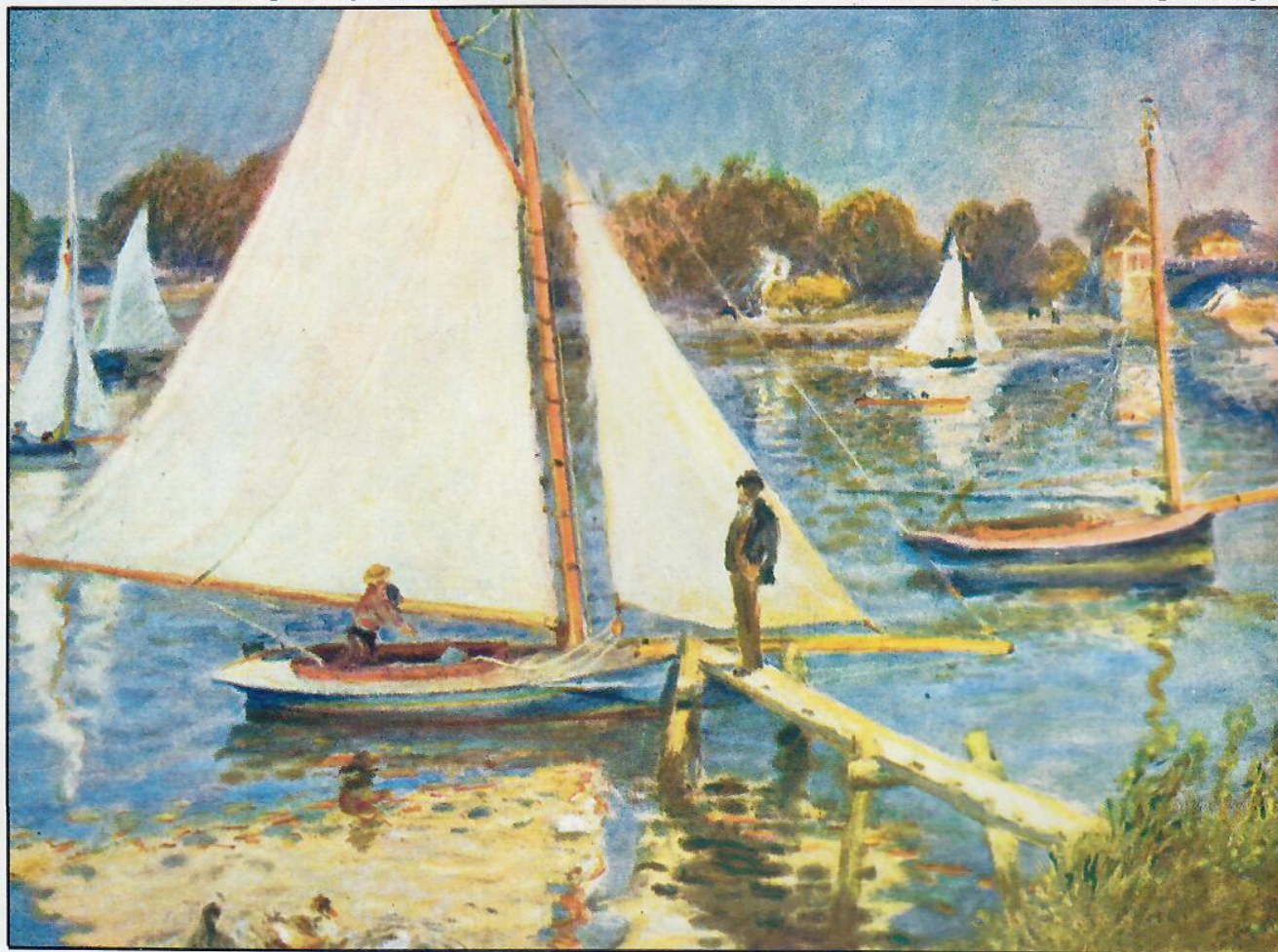
The two paintings shown below are both of the same subject—sailboats in a river on a late summer afternoon. Which one looks like a photograph? But which one looks more “real”?

During the Renaissance, art-

ists like Raphael discovered new ways of painting reality. They were able to paint a scene so realistically, it was almost like looking through a window. In the Dutch painting (*below, right*), you can see every detail—each face, every ripple on the water, even the birds overhead.

Artists continued to paint this way for nearly four centuries, and over the years they began to follow very strict painting rules. The horizon should be low and there should be a certain amount of sky. Only browns and blacks were considered “natural” colors. Any other colors had to be very dark and dull. If people were included, they had to be doing something very important, be in historical costume and be painted only in certain poses. And it took months of work in

In 1874, this painting of sailboats by Renoir was called “wallpaper,” a “mud splash,” and a “paint rag.”



Renoir, *The Seine at Argenteuil, 1874*. Portland (OR) Art Museum.

the studio, painting every detail, to do a "real" work of art.

A group of young French painters looked at the accepted paintings, and then looked at the world around them filled with light, color, and people. It was hard to see a connection, so gradually they began to try and paint what they saw. These young artists, called "Impressionists," had a very hard time, for French art was controlled by a powerful organization called the Academy. You either followed the rules the Academy set up, or your work was not chosen to be exhibited. If no one saw it, no one bought it.

Auguste Renoir, one of the most famous of the Impressionists, had always wanted to paint. Born in 1841 into a large and poor family, Renoir went to work at the age of 10 to help support them. He worked in a factory, painting china, and saved every penny he could. At last, when he was 21, he had enough to enter the Paris Art School. Although he was soon discouraged by the rigid rules and boring classes, he did like being with the other students. Finally Renoir and some of his new friends left school and began painting together.

"Let's not paint anything but what we see ourselves," said one

of the young artists. And what they saw was light. Renoir and the Impressionists did painting after painting of water—flowing, sparkling, shimmering. Compare the water in Renoir's painting with the surface of the river in the work below. Which looks more like water? What are some of the other differences? Can you see any brushstrokes in the painting below? The Impressionists painted very quickly, directly on the canvas, using small strokes of bright color to capture the effect of sunlight and movement. They painted their "first impression" of scenes from everyday life, which gave the informal feeling that snapshots do today.

In the painting on the far left, Auguste Renoir has broken all the French Academy's "rules." He was called a "lunatic" and a "fraud," rarely sold anything, and sometimes couldn't even afford paint. Today Renoir's name and work are known everywhere and his paintings are worth millions.

In this issue, you'll learn more about Renoir and the Impressionists. You'll meet some modern artists who work with light and finally, you'll work with light and color yourself by creating your own "first impression" of a familiar scene.

This was the way sailboats should always look.



Albert Cuyp (1620-1691). *The Meas at Dordrecht*, c. 1660. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

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POET *of* COLOR

“Try to explain to Mr. Renoir that a woman’s head is not made of decomposing flesh, covered with green and purple patches which are the signs of decay in a corpse.”

—Albert Wolff, critic, April 3, 1877

This was the kind of criticism that Renoir’s paintings received when they were shown in exhibitions organized by the Impressionists. No one understood what the Impressionists were trying to do with color. While the other Impressionist artists were interested in capturing the effects of light on nature, Renoir was more interested in the way light looked on people. Renoir loved people and in this famous painting of an outdoor dance hall, most of the people he included were his friends and neighbors. Each Sunday they helped Renoir carry this giant canvas from his studio to the nearby *Moulin de la Galette*, so he could paint the colorful scene from life.

To capture these new subjects, Renoir and the Impressionists had to use color in a very new way. They wanted to reproduce the glow of sunlight right on the canvas, which had never been done before. So they had to look at objects, as if they were seeing them for the first time. Renoir noticed that the color of an object changes when the light on it changes. When you look at a person’s face, is it really one solid color? Does it sometimes have



Dancing at the Moulin de la Galette, 1876. Louvre, Paris. Galerie du Jeu de Paume. Editorial Photo Archives.

“Until Renoir came along, no one had ever thought of recording an event of everyday life, outdoors, on a large canvas. Renoir is a great poet.”

—Georges Rivière, art critic

little reflections of red, green, or blue in it? As you can see in the detail at the right, Renoir used small brushstrokes of “pure” color (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) to give the feeling of light. Up close, these strokes look like spots of color. But when you stand back, the eye mixes the colors and the canvas “glows” almost as if lit from behind. Dots of opposite (or *complementary*—see page 15) colors placed side by side add to this glow. Can you find examples of the main pair of complementary colors—blue and pinkish-orange—in this painting? Can you find any red/green combinations, or purple-yellow? Also, look at the edges of everything. Do you see any “hard” edges?

Most people, including art critics, had no idea that the Impressionists were discovering a new way to reproduce light. They said things like, “The Impressionists are makers of spots. The only impression they achieve is that of a cat walking on the keyboard of a piano.” Only the painters themselves knew. As Camille Pissarro, one of the most famous of the Impressionists said, “It is a new art. It is poetry created through the harmony of true colors.”





MEMORIES IN PAINT

Compare 20th-century American artist Milton Avery's work, above, to the detail of Renoir's painting on page 5. Could you tell right away what either subject was? Some American artists of the 1930s, like Milton Avery, expressed the world around them by using bold, simple areas of color. Look at the color wheel on page 15. Can you find the two

colors used in this painting—purple and blue-green? Are they *complementary* colors, or has the painter used another combination? *Value* is the lightness or darkness of a color. When white is added, a color has a *high* value. Adding black gives the color a *low* value. *Warm* colors are yellow, orange, and red, and they usually seem to come to-

ward the viewer. *Cool* colors, such as green, blue, and purple, seem to go away from the viewer. How do the *value* and *temperature* of this painting remind you of a summer's day on the beach? Does the sea look warm or cool? What about the sand? Can color combinations like those above, cause you to have certain feelings about a place?

**Find out how three modern American artists have brought
Impressionist ideas up-to-date.**

Landscapes of Light

BRUSHSTROKES OF LIGHT

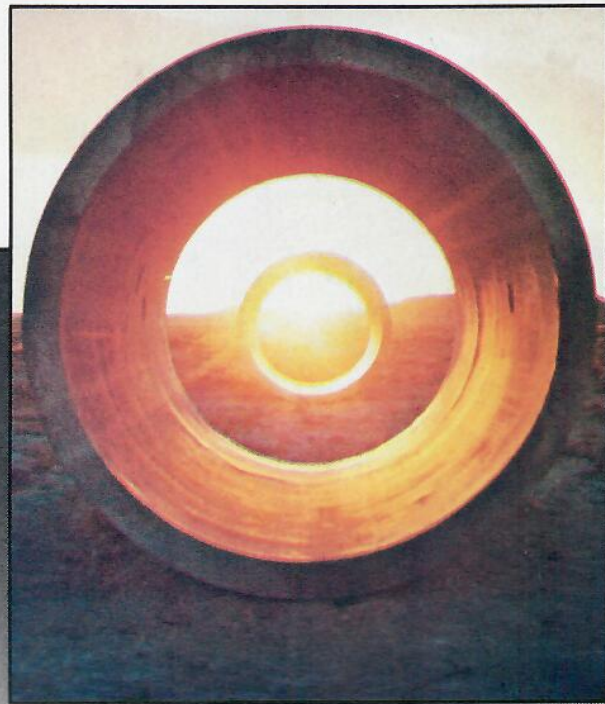
Like the Impressionists, contemporary American painter Joseph Raffael is fascinated by light on water. Many of his paintings are of just that—gigantic, close-up views of light sparkling on a small area of flowing water. Another of his well-known paintings is a wall-sized view of a lizard's head. With light hitting each scale, the whole face seems to glow. Every brushstroke in Raffael's works is carefully painted and each is slightly different from all the others. "I stand 16 inches from a painting when I'm working. Because I work on each stroke at a time, it's almost a molecular build-up of light and color. I nearly forget the subject and it's like letting the paint do the picture." Although nature—animals, flowers, fish, and water—is the subject of Joseph Raffael's paintings, they are really about light, color, and emotion.



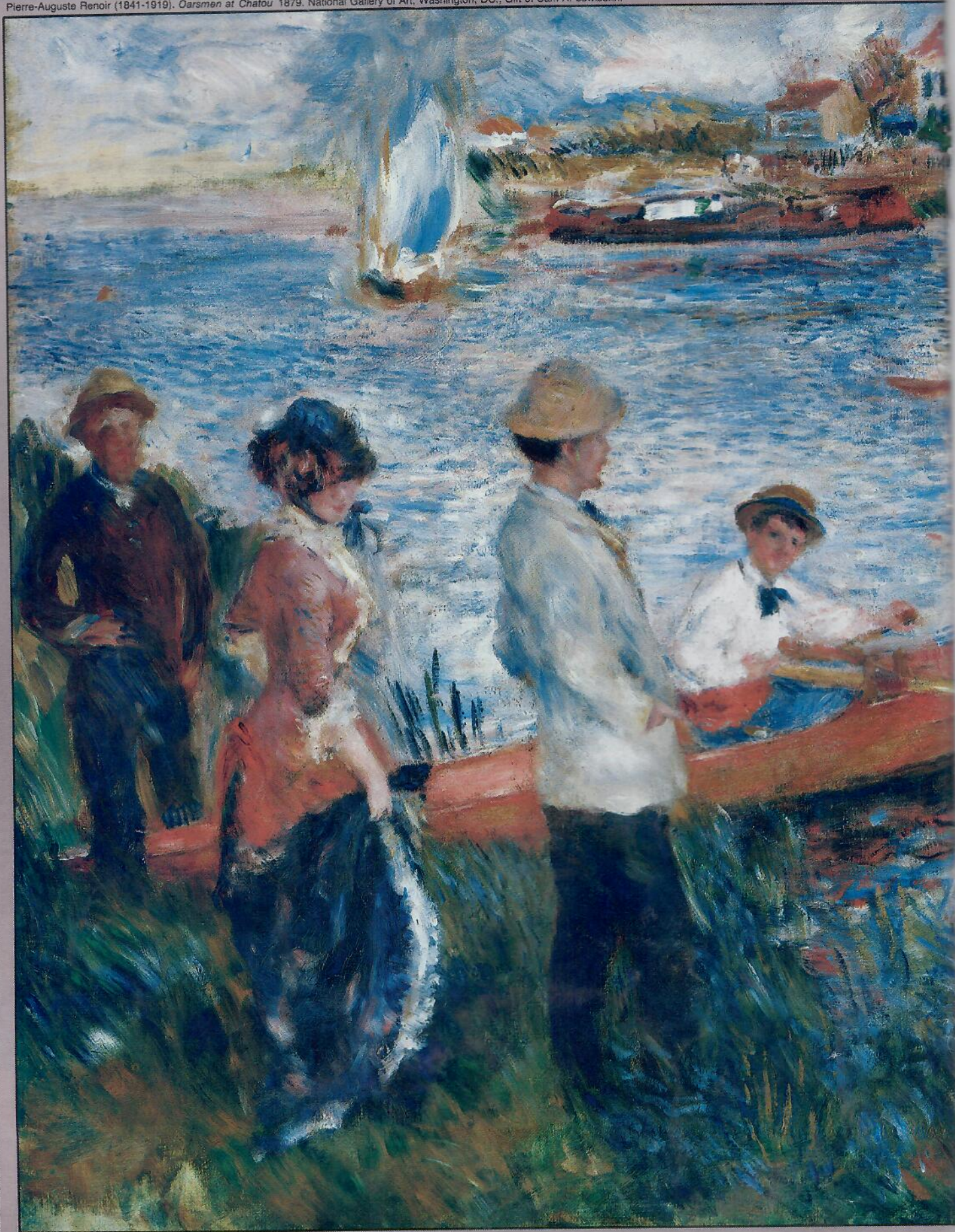
Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, 1973-76. Each tunnel is 18' long and weighs 22 tons. Great Basin Desert, UT.

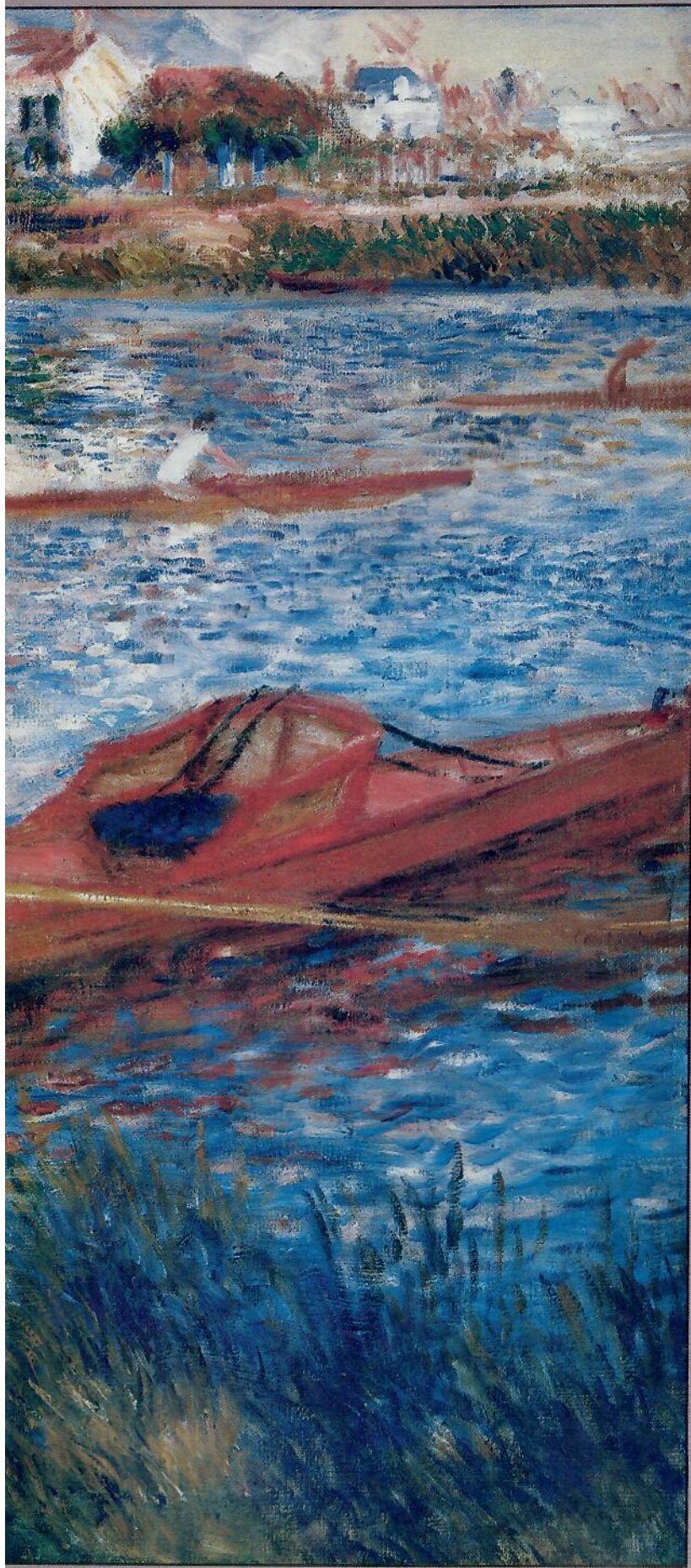
CAPTURING THE SUN

Some artists today use paint and canvas, while others work directly with light itself. Nancy Holt is an environmental artist who does large, outdoor constructions. *Sun Tunnels* is a huge sculpture set in the middle of the desert in western Utah. Four large, concrete tubes serve as "locators," or as a way to focus attention on a special place and event. By crawling inside the tunnels, the viewer can experience nature in a new way. Wind, sounds, texture, and smells are all emphasized. Small holes cut in the pipes frame certain stars at night, and create changing patterns of sunlight during the day. And at dawn and dusk, the sun rises and sets, focused within the frame of the *Sun Tunnels*.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). *Oarsmen at Chatou* 1879. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC., Gift of Sam A. Lewisohn.





Oarsmen at Chatou by Renoir

*“It is the most delightful spot
in the world—shaded by giant
trees, laughing groups of
canoers at the water’s edge,
gaily dressed girls on the shore
and dancing gleams of sunlight
flashing through the leaves.”*

— Guy de Maupassant

**art&
man**

Masterpiece of the Month 2

Magic Summers

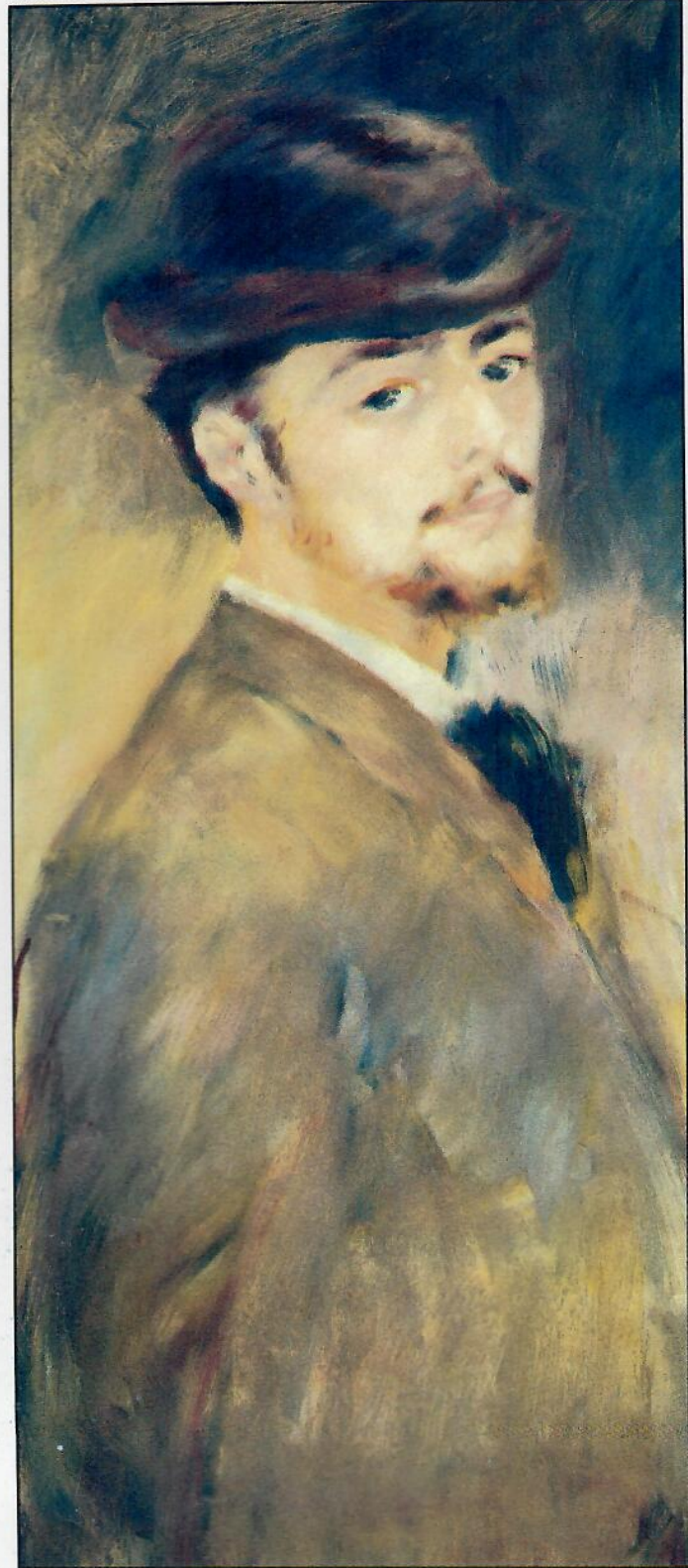
Spend a day with the two artists who developed the art of Impressionism.

The fashionable Renoir liked to paint people. He also liked to dress well himself.

The two men sat side by side on the river bank in the warm, summer sun. The tall, heavily bearded one was talking enthusiastically. "Just look closely at the water. It changes from hour to hour. Right now it's green with a little orange in it, but in an hour it will be yellow and violet, and if you mix the right values. . . ." The short, thin painter interrupted. "Monet, why do you and all the others have to turn everything you paint into a theory? Why can't a painting just make the artist and the viewer feel good?"

As his companion went on painting, the exchange reminded Renoir of the way the two friends had met 12 years ago. It was in a class at the famous Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. For months the students had been copying a few outline drawings over and over and drawing the same plaster statue. Finally, a few of the students were allowed to paint. Renoir was hardly the teacher's favorite. He could still remember one of his more embarrassing moments. The teacher had been correcting each student's painting. When he came to Renoir's, he said loudly, "Young man, the rest of us are trying to be serious artists. No doubt you dabble in paint to amuse yourself." Renoir replied, "If I didn't enjoy painting, I certainly wouldn't do it." Soon after that, Renoir heard the teacher shouting again, but not at him for a change. "Why, you have painted the model just as he actually looks. That is very ugly! Awful! When you paint a figure, Mr. Monet, you must make him look like a Greek god. Nature offers no interest at all. Beauty is everything." The new student, Claude Monet, and Renoir soon decided to leave the school in order to paint what they saw around them.

They painted in the streets of Paris, and in the forests outside the city, but they especially loved



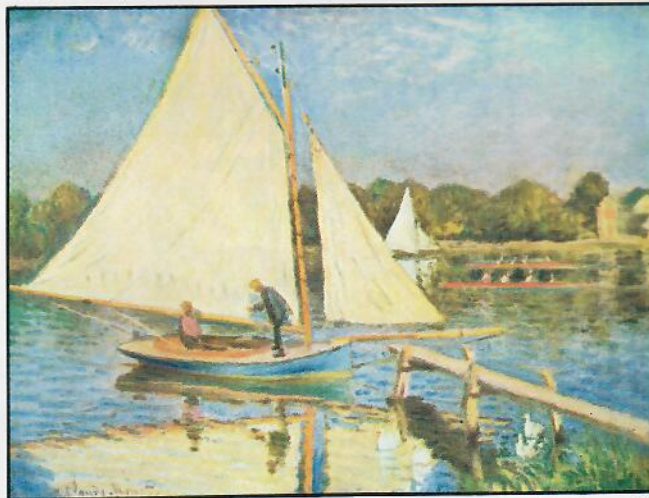
Renoir, *Self-Portrait (detail)*, 1876. The Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA. Bequest, Maurice Wertheim.

His friend Monet didn't care how he looked, as long as he could paint his landscapes.



Renoir, *Portrait of Monet*, (detail), 1875. Louvre, Paris.

Claude Monet (1840-1926). *Sailboats at Argenteuil*, 1874. Durand-Ruel Collection, Paris.



Compare this painting by Claude Monet with that of his friend Renoir, on page 2.

the banks of the Seine in the summertime. In fact, everyone in Paris in the 1870s was discovering this area. The newly built railways took people out of the city in minutes to the cool river banks where they could swim, sail, and dance at the new amusement parks. For several summers, Renoir, Monet, and the others painted outdoors together in a new way that only they understood.

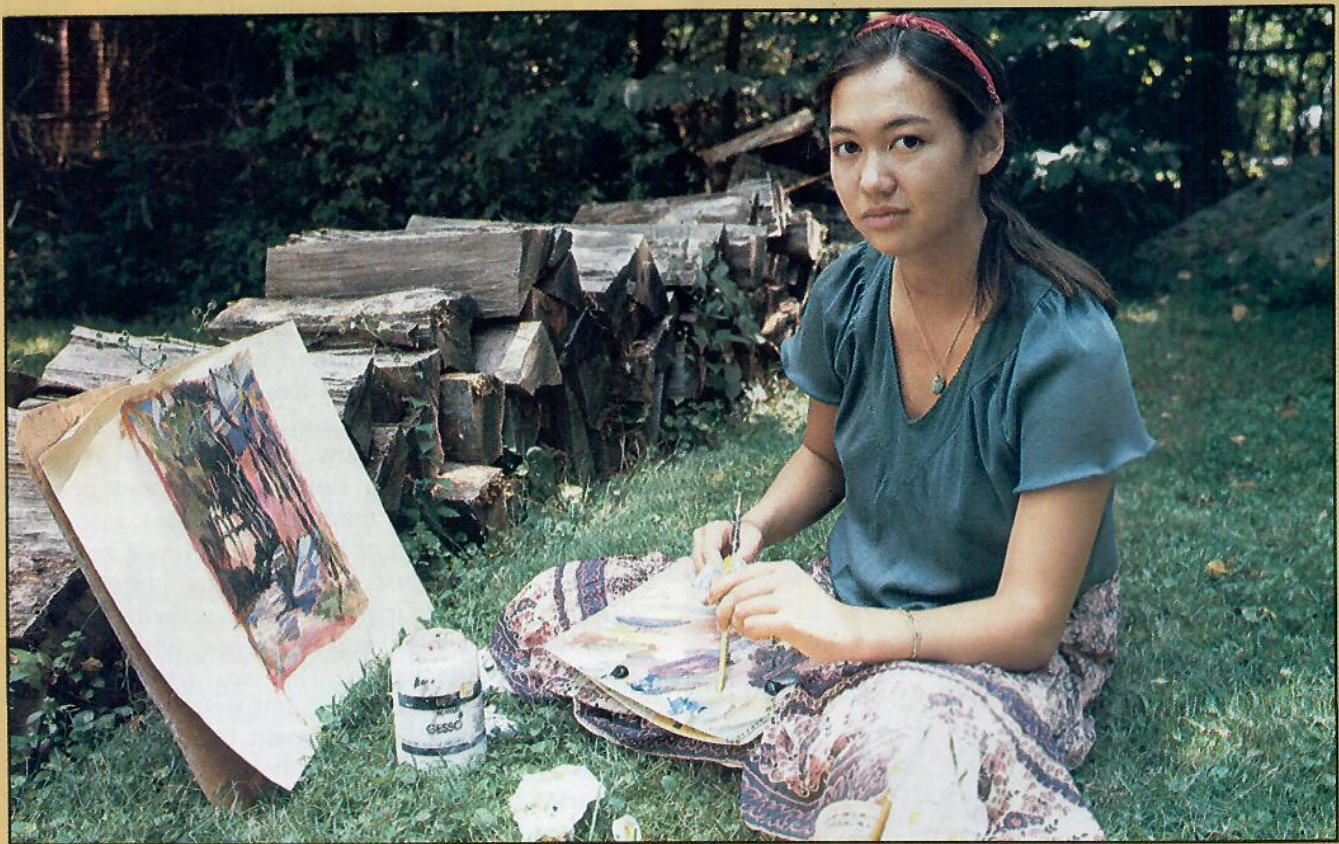
During the summer of 1874, Monet and his family rented a little house by the river. Monet described it as "A charming retreat surrounded by trees and rose bushes. A few steps away are all the delights of summer; the lapping waters, the riverside houses, the gliding sailboats." Renoir visited often and the two painted everything in sight (see Renoir's painting of Monet painting in his garden, on the cover). Both painters were desperately poor, the beautiful setting and their friendship being their only luxuries. Monet wrote, "No bread, no kitchen fire, no light. Worst of all, no colors left. If only I could work, everything would go all right. Renoir is bringing us bread from his house, so we don't starve."

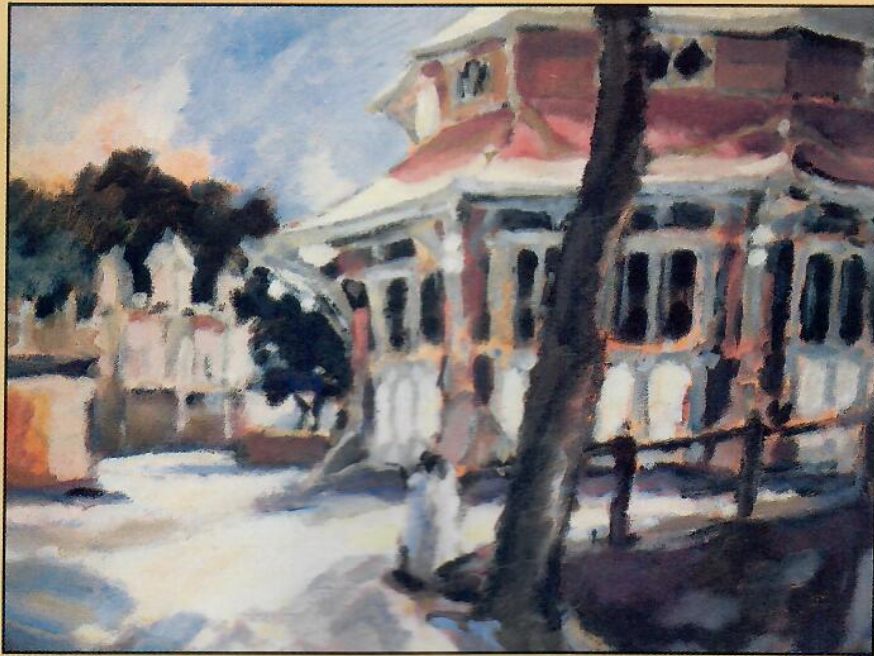
But they kept painting, and the colorful happy world they created, flooded with bright sunlight, gave no sign of the hard lives they lived. After a while, Renoir, Monet, and all the other Impressionists parted to follow their separate careers. Over the years, both Renoir and Monet became successful and both continued painting into their old age. At the end of his life, as Monet gradually went blind, he just kept working larger, using brighter colors. Crippled with arthritis, Renoir painted scores of masterpieces with brushes strapped to his hands. The two artists' painting styles grew very different, but neither ever forgot the magic summers they spent together, developing a new way of seeing that would change the history of art. As Renoir said many years later, "Without Monet, I would have given up."

Ann Lofquist: ***PAINTER***

Ann Lofquist's painting of a carousel seems almost alive. Light and shadow splash through the moving branches of the trees. It feels hot. The sun is high in the sky, and it's almost noon. Just how did Ann capture this moment?

Ann, who is 18, has been painting since the 11th grade and drawing for as long as she can remember. She loves painting outdoors, and her favorite places are the parks she can bike to from her home in Bethesda, Maryland (a suburb of Washington, DC). This year she's studying art in Washington University in St. Louis on a scholarship. (She also received a scholarship in the Scholastic Art Awards.) Here's what she has to say about her painting.





How did you happen to paint this carousel?

I woke up and I just felt, today I want to do the carousel. So I called up my friend and she said she'd meet me at the park and keep me company. Maybe she was a good influence. She hurried me along. She only let me paint for two hours!

But why this carousel?

I've ridden it many times, but that's not the reason I painted it. It struck me as very odd. The park was empty and deserted, and then there was this bright carousel. It always appealed to me—maybe it was the color, the way it was built. I walked around it a couple of times looking for views I might paint, months before I did the painting. I still want to keep painting it—at other times of the day and at night, when it's crowded. I guess I could plan to do a carousel series.

How did you actually begin the painting?

I did a little thumbnail sketch on paper for the composition, but I drew as little as possible. I just put a few guidelines on the

canvas with a dark brush. I put in the shadows and then went back and did the lights. The first thing I looked for was the direction of the light. A feeling of light is important in a hot day painting.

But how do you paint sunlight?

It's hard to describe. It's not like I have specific steps. I just try to get the feeling of the moment. I'm not really painting the carousel, I'm painting the day. It's not something you can predict. I have no idea when I start a painting what it will look like when it's finished.

You seem to see colors that most people don't—purple shadows, pink highlights.

As soon as I began painting, I started seeing things I'd never noticed before. When I rode my bike down the street I would notice all the purple and blue in the shadows on the road. I noticed that in the early morning the sky was bluer, and there was more pink in the light. I really like the warm colors of the morning, but most of my paintings are done around noon because I have trouble getting out that early.

How did you get started in painting?

It was probably my teacher. He really opened my eyes. On my own I started reading books on art history. I found it helped me appreciate paintings more. I used to find museums dull—now I can spend hours and hours in them. I know every painting in the National Gallery in Washington, DC, and when they take one out and put in a new one, I always know.

How did you decide you wanted to be an artist?

It's hard to say exactly. It's something I can imagine myself spending my life doing and not getting tired of. And I think it's the only thing.

Do you ever worry about "making it" as an artist?

Yes—because I have to support myself. I'm pretty realistic. I don't want to starve. I'll probably have to do something else to support myself as a painter.

And I don't want that to be commercial art. But I have other interests—history, fossils.

That's one reason I'm not going to an art school.

But I don't know if any school is the place to learn about art. I'm signed up for all these core classes on drawing and composition. I know I ought to learn about them, but I'm not looking forward to it. We'll see.

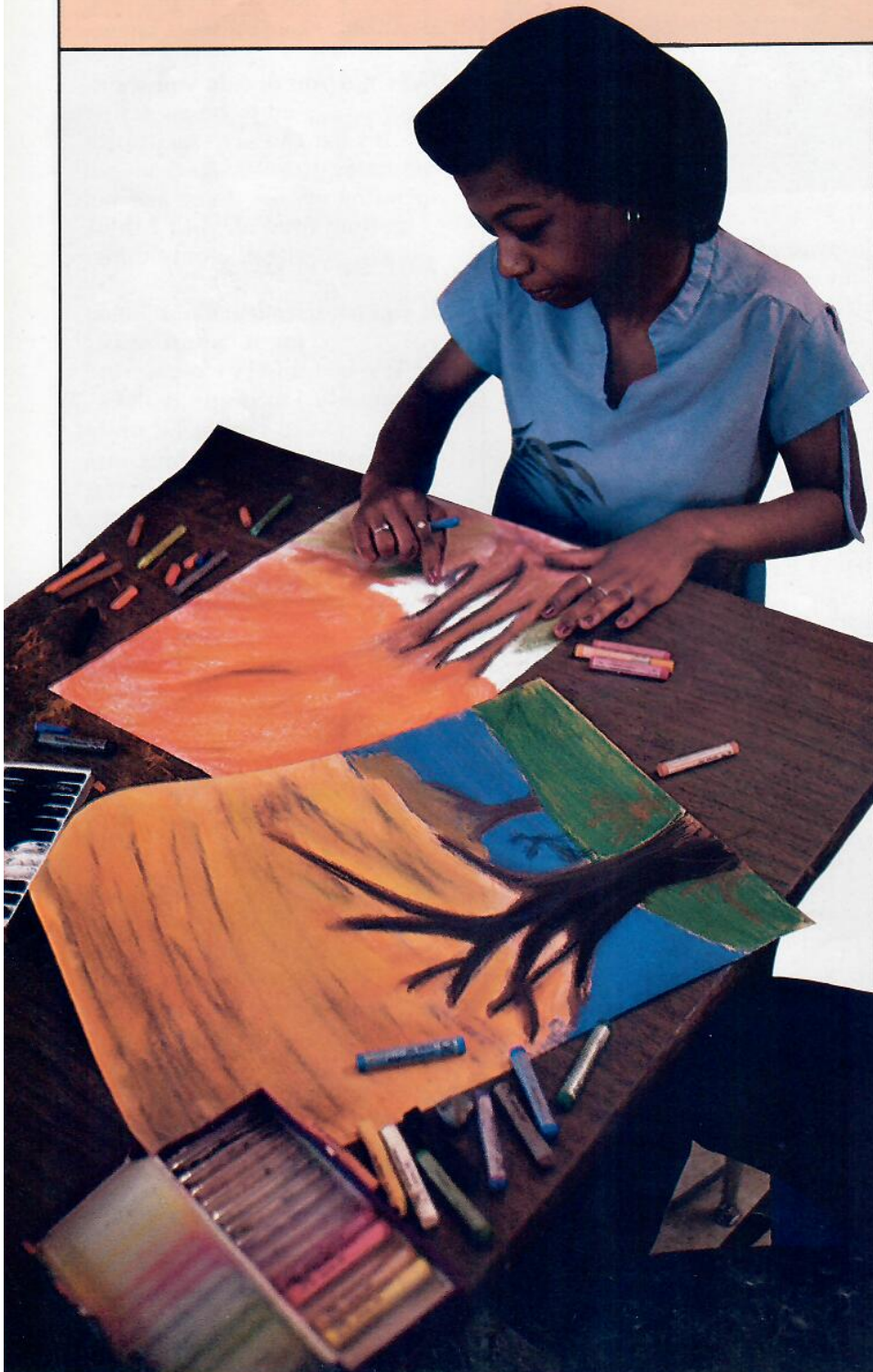
What advice could you give our readers about painting?

I'd just say get out there and paint. Enjoy yourself, and it will come. I don't think technique is that important. It's more important to respond to color. Wherever you are, if you're just sitting at a bus stop, look at the colors around you. Most people think shadows are gray, but that's so untrue to a painter.

Try to see what colors are really there.

Working with *LIGHT*

Create an "Impressionist" drawing, using today's technology.



“**L**ook for something in nature that you feel strongly about. Look at it, close your eyes a minute, then begin to paint your ‘first impression.’ Do not outline shapes, but put down the large color areas you remember. Work quickly, on everything at the same time.”

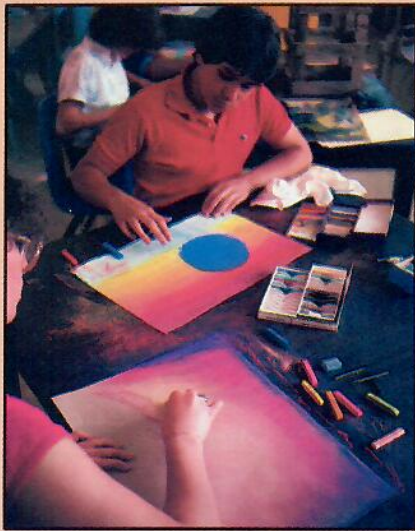
This was the way Renoir and the Impressionists painted their first impression of a place, a century ago. Today we can work with color and light, in much the same way the Impressionists did, aided by a modern invention, the camera.

MATERIALS

Slides, projector, large white sheets of paper (18" x 24"), colored pastels, *workable* fixative.

STARTING OUT

Bring in slides from a recent vacation or field trip. Pick those you feel strongly about that also contain large areas of bright color. Move the slide out of focus and compare the results with the Renoir paintings in this issue.



STEP 1. Using the side of your pastel, rough in the large masses of color. You can use different but related colors or *tints* of the same color. Use soft color areas; no lines or “hard” edges.



STEP 2. You can create a *visual color mix* as the Impressionists did by using *primary colors* (like red and blue) to mix a *secondary color* (like purple). You could put the two colors down in long strokes next to each other, or you might combine dots or swirls.

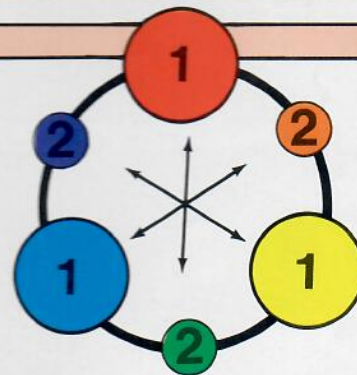


STEP 3. Your drawing could be made up only of light tints or dark ones. Or you might want to use a small amount of a different tint as a focal point.

Prepared by Jeanne and Francis Chauncy, Clayton High School, Clayton, NJ.

SOME SOLUTIONS

Which students have used *complementary colors*, *analogous colors*, *warm or cool colors*, *tints or shades*? Do shadows or silhouettes always have to be black? Remember, the slide should be used *only* as a color guide, not as an image to copy.



ABOUT COLOR

Primary colors (1) are red, blue, and yellow.

Secondary colors (2) are green, orange, and purple (they can be made by mixing primary colors).

Complementary colors

(1 + 2) are opposite each other on the color wheel. They are red/green, orange/blue, and purple/yellow.

Analogous colors (2 + 1) are *next* to each other, such as yellow/orange, blue/green, purple/red.

Arts Alive

Jules Breton (1827-1906). *The Weeders*, 1860. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.

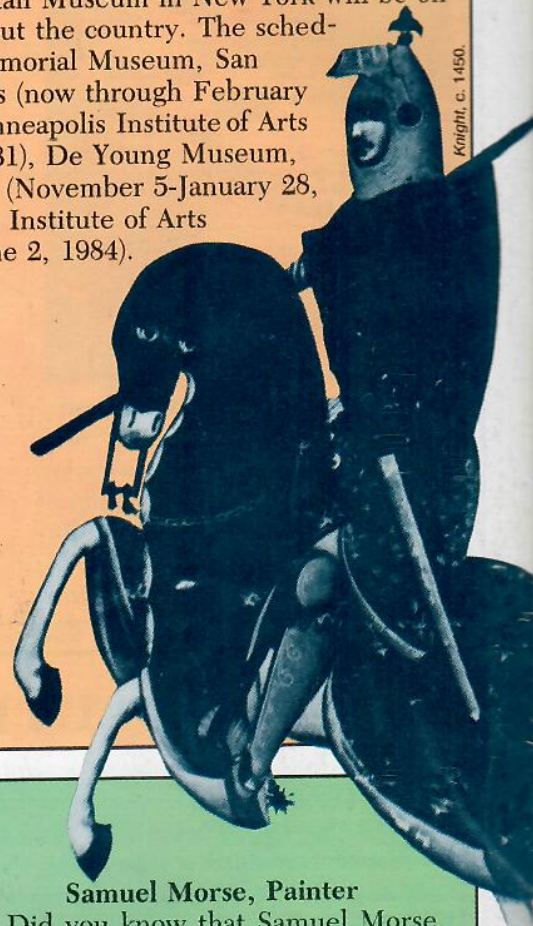


Renoir's Rival

The French Academy hated Renoir's paintings, but they loved the work of Jules Breton. Breton painted scenes from peasant life in a noble, dignified manner that followed all the academic rules. You can see 80 works by Breton and compare them to those of the Impressionists, at the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, through January 2, 1983. This exhibit, *Jules Breton and the French Rural Tradition*, will then travel to the Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, Tennessee (January 16-March 6) and to the Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (April 2-June 5).

The Age of Chivalry

Everyone loves tales of knights in shining armor, and now you can see what their armor actually looked like. Eight suits of armor, swords, daggers, firearms, and other weapons and costumes from the Metropolitan Museum in New York will be on view throughout the country. The schedule: Witte Memorial Museum, San Antonio, Texas (now through February 25, 1983), Minneapolis Institute of Arts (May 24-July 31), De Young Museum, San Francisco (November 5-January 28, 1984), Detroit Institute of Arts (March 10-June 2, 1984).



Samuel Morse, Painter

Did you know that Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was also a painter? Just recently his painting *The Gallery of the Louvre* was sold for \$3,250,000, and it can now be seen at the Terra Museum of American Art in Evanston, Illinois.

This painting gives a clear picture of the art world before the Impressionists. Almost like a photograph, it shows us just what a gallery in this famous French museum looked like, and which masterpieces were hanging on its walls. Artists from Europe and America got much of their training copying the Old Masters in the Louvre. In this painting, Samuel Morse, himself, is correcting the copy of a young American artist.

Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872). *Gallery of the Louvre*, 1831-33. Terra Museum of American Art, Evanston, IL.

