

SCHOLASTIC

ART

SEPT. • OCT. 1992

VOL. 23, No. 1, ISSN 1050-892X.
PUBLISHED IN COOPERATION WITH
THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART,
FORMERLY ART & MAN

Henri Rousseau

WORKING WITH FANTASY

 SCHOLASTIC



COVER: Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) *Myself*. 1890. National Gallery, Prague.

SCHOLASTIC
ART

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POSTAL INFORMATION

Scholastic Art (ISSN 1060-832X; in Canada, 2-c no. 9360) is
published six times during the school year, Sept./Oct., Nov.,
Dec./Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr./May, by Scholastic Inc., 2931 East
McCarty St., P.O. Box 3710, Jefferson City, MO, 65102-3710.
Second-class postage paid at Jefferson City, MO 65101 and at
additional mailing offices. POSTMASTERS: Send notice of
address changes to SCHOLASTIC ART, 2931 East McCarty St.,
P.O. Box 3710 Jefferson City, MO, 65102-3710.

PUBLISHING INFORMATION

U.S. prices: \$6.95 each per school year, for 10 or more subscrip-
tions to the same address. 1-9 subscriptions, each: \$13.50 stu-
dent, \$22.00 Teachers' Edition, per school year. Single copy:
\$1.75 student, \$3.50 Teachers'. (For Canadian pricing, write our
Canadian office, address below.) Second-class postage paid at
Jefferson City, MO 65101 and at additional mailing offices.
Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to
SCHOLASTIC ART, Scholastic Inc., 2931 East McCarty Street,
P.O. Box 3710, Jefferson City, MO 65102-9957. Canadian address:
Scholastic-TAB Publications, Ltd., 123 Newkirk Rd., Richmond
Hill, Ontario L4C 3G5. Available on microfilm through Xerox
University Microfilms, Inc. 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI
48106. Also available on microfiche through Bell & Howell Micro
Photo Division, Old Mansfield Rd., Wooster, OH 44691. Printed in
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THE
MAGICAL
WORLD
OF

Henri Rousseau

When a group of French painters exhibited their work in Paris over 100 years ago in 1890, there was one painting on which nearly every critic seemed to agree. One of them commented,

*"I made my
beginnings in
art by myself.
Nature was my
only teacher."*

—HENRI ROUSSEAU



"The artist—moved no doubt by an excess of modesty—has painted himself as a giant with an outsize head, bursting perhaps with profound thoughts..." Another said, "Monsieur Henri Rousseau is bent on setting the art of painting back several thousand years." However the artist Paul Gauguin [Go-GAN] disagreed, stating that "Rousseau's portrait is the very essence of painting!"

What do you think of the self portrait on this month's cover? Do either the person or the background look real? Do the figure and the setting seem to go together? Why does the man look so big? And why is this painting—as well as all the others in this issue done by 19th century French artist Henri Rousseau [Roo-SO]—considered to be a great work of art?

Rousseau was born in a small French town in 1844. When he was nine, his father, a shopkeeper, lost all his money and property. Henri was interested in art, but since his family couldn't afford to send him to art school, after graduating from high school, Rousseau went into the army. In 1871 he took a job as a toll collector at one of the city gates of Paris. In 1893 after an uneventful career, Rousseau retired and began painting full-time. Later the artist said, "I was 42 years old when I picked up a brush for the first time," but he had prob-



ably begun painting earlier than that.

In 1886, when Henri Rousseau first began exhibiting his work, Paris was the center of the art world. A few years earlier, a group of painters known as the Impressionists had invented fresh ways of using color and light. Younger artists like Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne [Say-ZAN], and later, Pablo Picasso, were developing new and controversial painting styles. Rousseau exhibited his paintings with those of Cezanne, Gauguin, Picasso, and Henri Matisse [Ma-TEECE], but his work was unlike that of any other artist.

Rousseau's work was unsophisticated, as he had little artistic training. Although many critics made fun of his paintings, Rousseau never became discouraged, perhaps because he mistook their attention for praise. In his self-portrait (cover) Rousseau presents himself as a

great French artist. With his back toward the ships he used to inspect, holding his palette and brush and wearing a Rembrandt-like hat, he towers over the Eiffel Tower and the river Seine [Sen]. He has decorated himself with an award for painting and has pinned it to his lapel (another painter named Rousseau had received the award but Henri always liked to assume it had been given to him).

Because of his innocence and child-like trust, Rousseau became a favorite of many well-known artists of the time. They enjoyed playing tricks on him and also attending the elaborate parties he gave. A few years before his death in 1910, Rousseau painted a series of "jungle" pictures like *The Snake Charmer* (above). Henri Rousseau is best known for these magical fantasy worlds, most of which he created during the last years of his life.

Rousseau did the painting above for a friend to remind her of her trip to India.

The Snake Charmer, 1907. 65" x 73"
Louvre Museum, Paris.



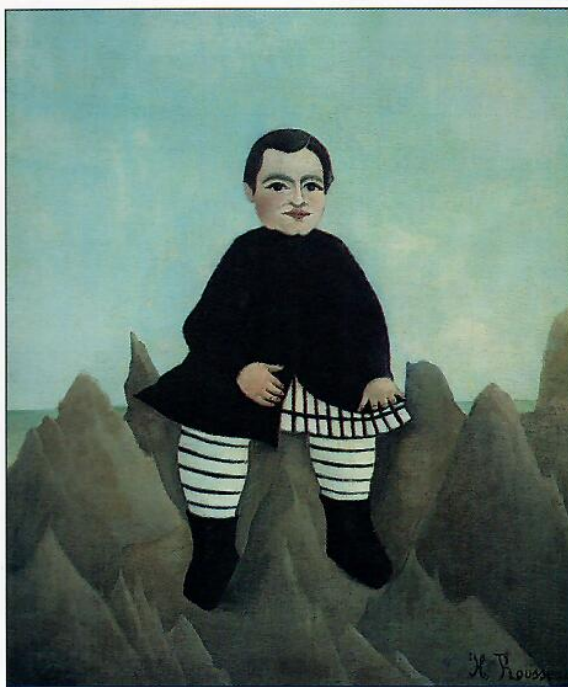
“Rousseau says he paints from life, but what powerful dreamlike images he creates!”—LOUIS ROY, MARCH 1895

Reality INTO Fantasy

Rousseau and his first wife (her name appears on the palette in the self-portrait on the cover along with that of his second wife, Josephine) had seven children (four of whom died), and money was always scarce. When Rousseau retired he needed to earn more so he painted signs, gave drawing and music lessons, and did portraits. The work on the right, *Boy on the Rocks*, was probably a portrait commission, but what do you think this boy's parents might have thought when they saw the finished painting?

Since people who get their picture painted usually want to see themselves or their children in a flattering light, Rousseau's portraits tended to disappoint them. Some were violently rejected and even Rousseau eventually became discouraged with portraiture. A well-known French writer (Alfred Jarry) so hated Rousseau's portrait of him that he used the picture for target practice, set fire to the canvas, and kept the tattered remains rolled up in a drawer in order to shock visitors.

Rousseau was painting his version of "reality" when he did portraits like *Boy on the Rocks*, for he let his imagination take over. Since he had no formal artistic training, he knew little about the **rules of proportion** (the comparable size, scale, placement and relationship between various parts of the human body) or **perspective** (a method of depicting the illusion of space). So the artist invented his own way of working. He would take the exact measurements of his model's face and body and transfer them directly to the canvas. This is why the little boy's waist and legs are twice as wide as they should be and his head, which appears to be pasted on his narrow shoulders, looks like that of an adult. The figure appears to hover mysteriously above a barren, rocky, moonlike landscape. Rousseau's portraits were usually done in black and white (perhaps because he felt these two extreme colors were easier to work with) and he was said to have held tubes of paint to his sitter's face in order to match "the precise tone of



the flesh." Henri Rousseau's portraits work not as photographic representations of reality, but as great imaginative works of art.

Even when he was painting ordinary subjects like *The Football Players* (left), Rousseau created extraordinary images. Four men are shown playing a game on a late summer evening. Does this painting look at all like a sports photo? The **simplified, stylized** figures of the men in their striped suits seem to **float** within the small enclosure. Despite an attempt at rendering perspective, the figures seem **flat**, trapped in a small **shallow space** as the trees on either side appear to be surrounding them. The scene looks calm but also mysterious, as though the figures were suspended in a dream. In the hands of many other painters, this picture would probably be accurate, "realistic" and ordinary. In *The Football Players*, Rousseau has captured the magic and fantasy he saw in his own everyday world.

Do you think the young boy shown in the painting above actually looked like this?

Boy on the Rocks, About 1894-5. 22" x 18" National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (Chester Dale Collection).

The work on the far left was painted in 1908, the year the first game of rugby (a version of football) was held in Paris.

The Football Players, 1908. 40" x 32" Guggenheim Museum, NY, NY.



Exotic Landscape is one of the last "jungle pictures" Henri Rousseau painted.

Exotic Landscape, 1910. 51" x 64" Norton Simon Foundation, Los Angeles.

"When I go into the greenhouses and see all the strange plants from exotic lands, it seems as though I am entering a dream." —HENRI ROUSSEAU

Landscapes OF THE Mind



As we've seen, Henri Rousseau could transform even ordinary scenes into imaginary worlds. But he was happiest when working on what he called his "creations," large paintings of fantastic scenes done mainly

at the end of his life. You've already seen one of his best known "jungle pictures," *The Snake Charmer* (page 3), in which a brooding figure playing a flute stares out from a lush green landscape. *Surprise!* (below) was Rousseau's first jungle painting. Nearly 20 years later in 1910, the year of his death, the artist did one of his last paintings, *Exotic Landscape* (left). If you compare the two works, you can see how Rousseau developed the unique style that made his paintings world-famous.

When Rousseau created plants and landscapes, the artist could invent and change proportion and perspective to suit himself rather than others, so his lack of formal training was no longer a handicap. His *instinct* and *natural talent* could take over. Rousseau may have borrowed the image of the tiger in *Surprise!* from an illustration he found in a children's book. He enlarged the tiger, changed it, then nearly obscured it with swirling jungle foliage.

No one knows precisely where Rousseau got his ideas for his highly inventive fantasy landscapes. He made frequent visits to the zoo and the Paris Conservatory whose greenhouses held exotic plants from all over the world. His children's animal books may also have served as further inspiration.

To create a work like *Exotic Landscape*, Rousseau would stylize his plant shapes, placing them on shallow planes parallel to the picture surface. All the elements were reduced to flat, over-all patterns varying in shape, color, and texture. The viewer's eye begins with the painting's focal point, the monkey eating a brightly colored orange, then travels up the line of monkeys and oranges on the left, across the solid area of blue sky above, to the white plant on the right and back down to the monkey. This circular composition is reinforced by the tree branches and the repetition of the leaf shapes which vary in size, scale, intensity (brightness/dullness and value (lightness/darkness)).

How many different greens can you count in

this picture? Rousseau filled whole palettes with various shades of green paint. He once told a friend while painting a jungle picture that he was "already on his twenty-second shade of green."

During his lifetime, except to a few people, Henri Rousseau's work was considered unimportant. Later, when his work was recognized, many paintings were discovered in barns, basements, and attics. One of his greatest fantasy landscapes, *The Sleeping Gypsy* (pages 8-9), was found rolled up in a plumber's shop. Rousseau described the painting's surreal, dreamlike scene in this way: "A wandering gypsy with her water jar and mandolin beside her, sleeps deeply in the middle of the desert. A lion passes by but doesn't eat her. There is an effect of moonlight; it is all very poetic."

Rousseau may have adapted the tiger's image in the work below from an illustration he found in a children's book.

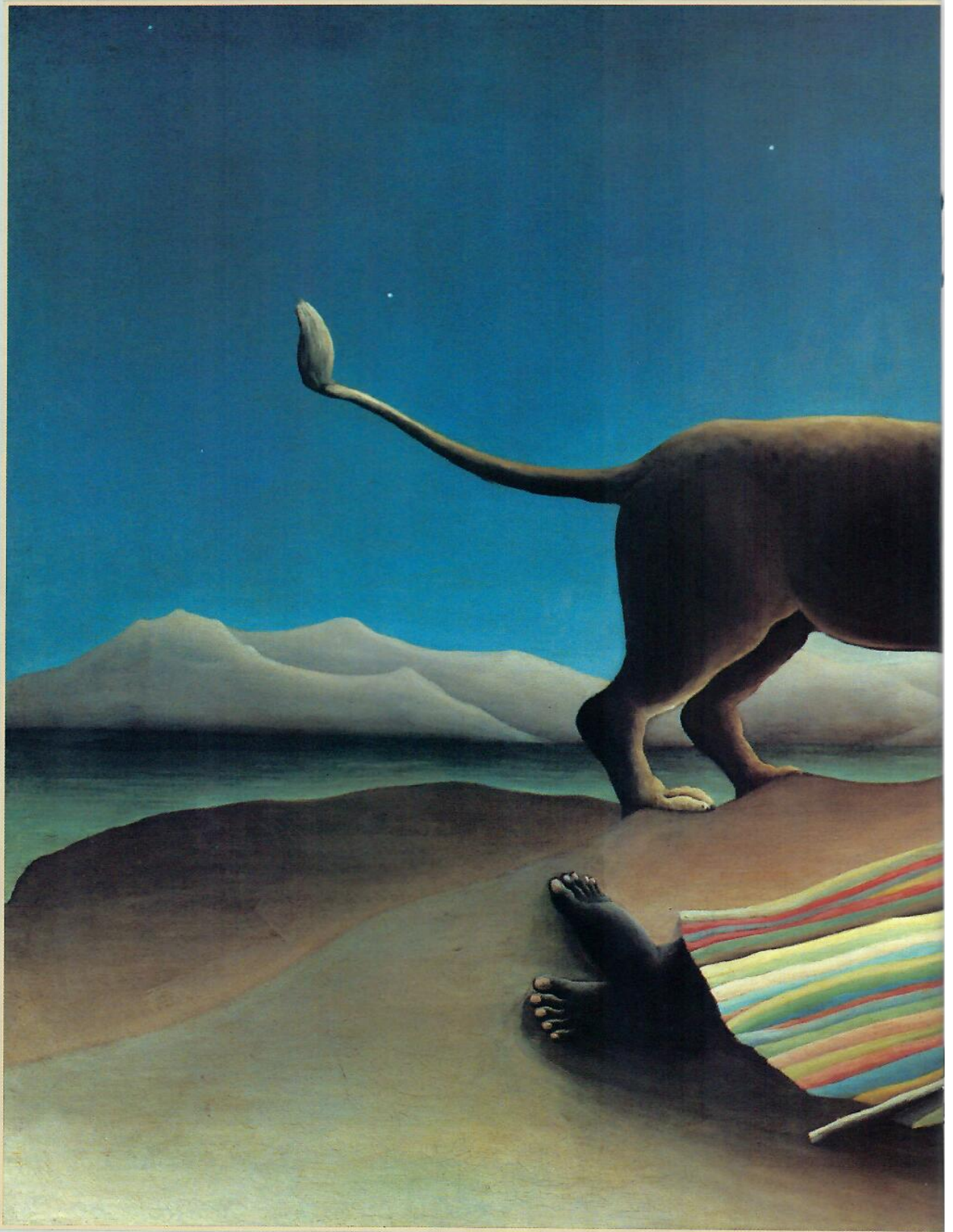
Surprise! 1891. 51" x 64" National Gallery, London. Photo, Superstock.



Henri Rousseau is best known for his "jungle pictures." Compare his first jungle painting (above) with the last one (left), done nearly 20 years later.

SCHOLASTIC

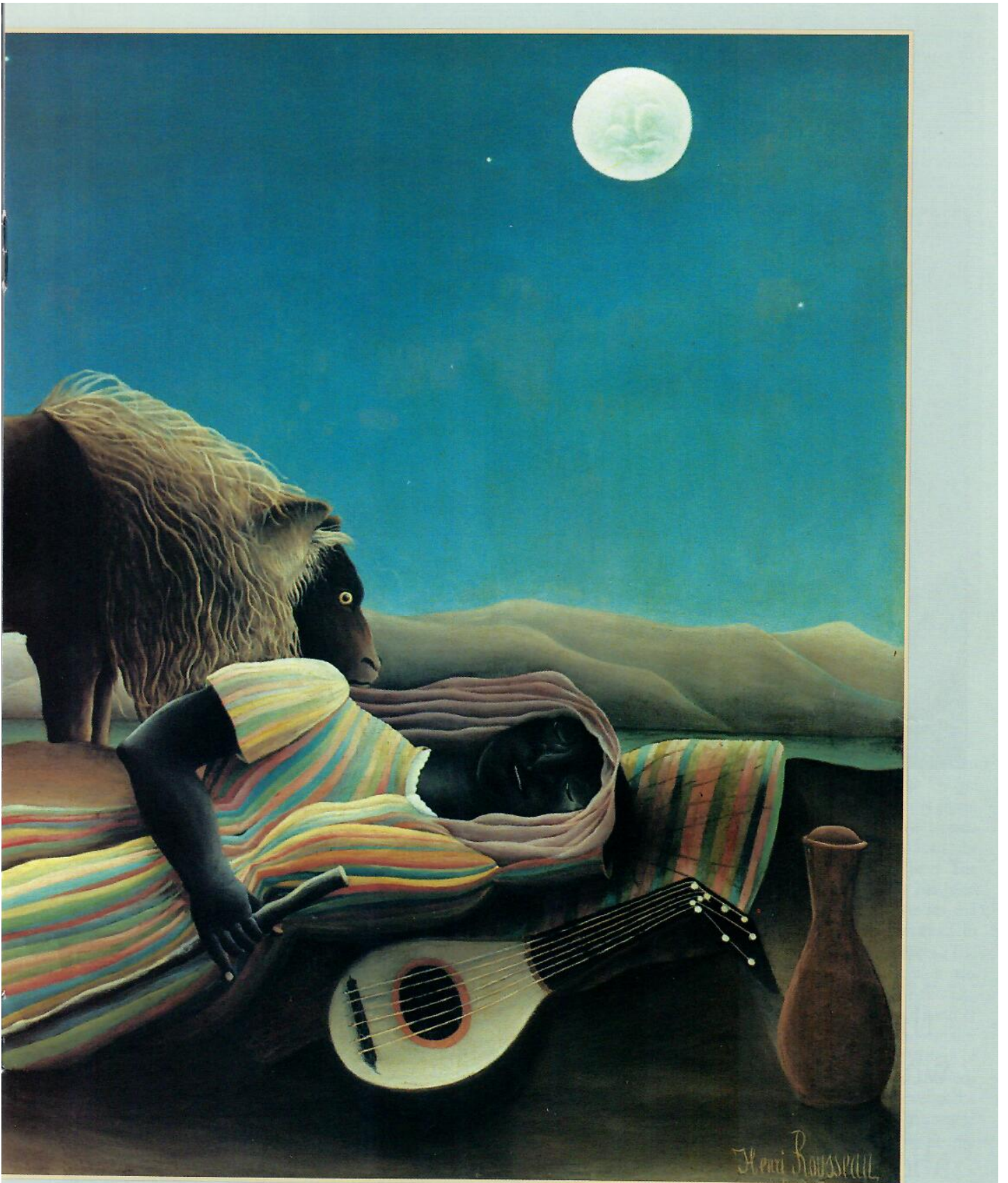
ART



MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH #1

THE SLEEPING GYPSY

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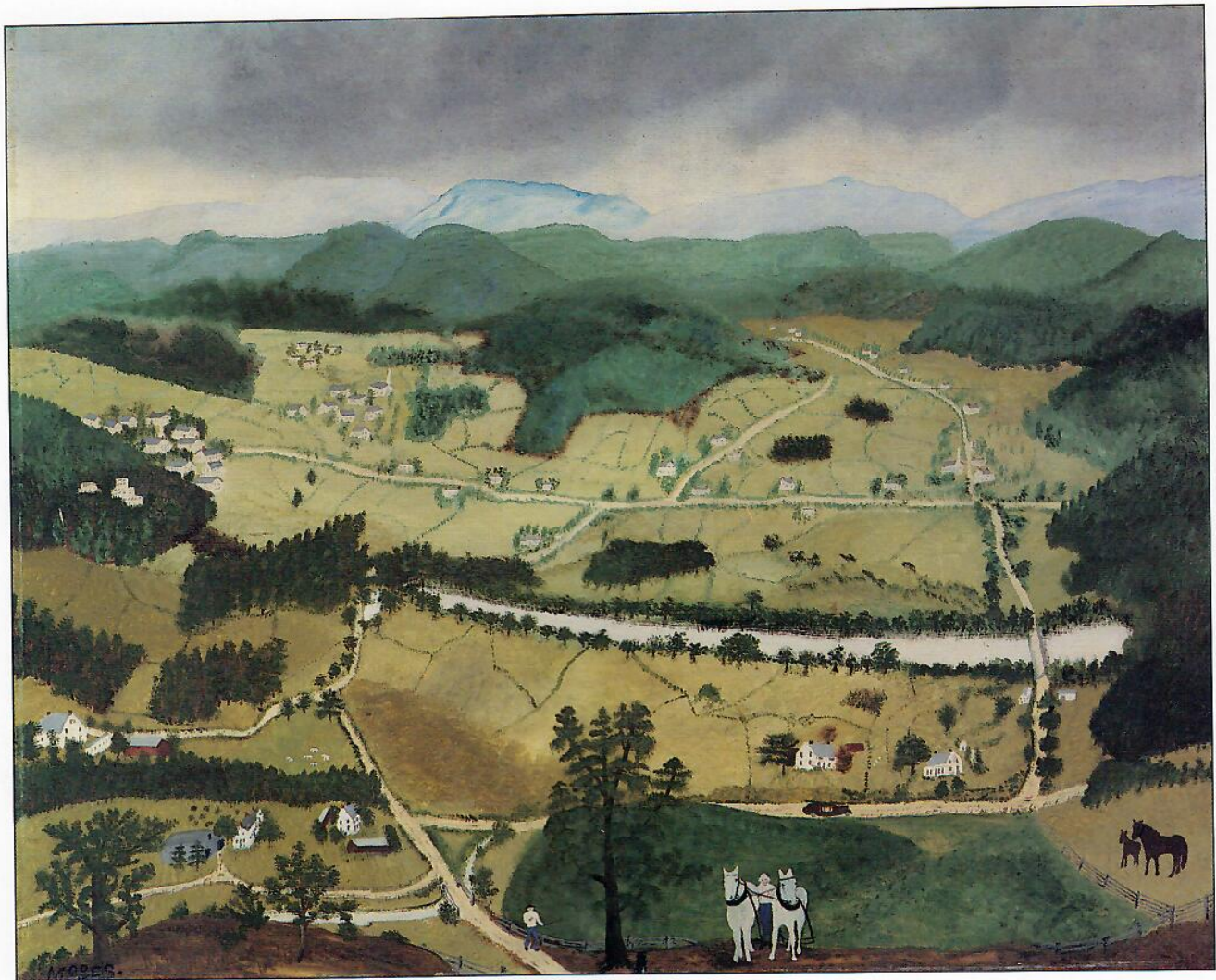


Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) *The Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897. 51" x 79" Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY.




BY HENRI ROUSSEAU

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ART SPOTLIGHT


**NATURE
 TRANSFORMED:**
 three American artists
 who have captured their
 own unique feelings
 about their surroundings

Personal Landscapes

Like Rousseau, Anna Mary Robertson Moses painted her own version of the “reality” she saw around her. “Grandma” Moses spent most of her life on a farm near the small New York town of Hoosick Falls and didn’t begin painting until she was in her 70s. She, like Rousseau, had no formal art training and knew little about *composition*, *anatomy*, or *perspective*. She did the painting above when she was 83 years old and she went on painting for 18 more years after that.

Many of Grandma Moses’ paintings are scenes because when painting landscapes she could *intuitively* duplicate what she saw. Although the space in her landscapes is recognizable, mainly because she changes the

scale—large objects in front, small in back—her scenes appear somewhat *flat*. She usually uses **asymmetrical compositions**: the elements on one side are different from but **visually equal** to those on the other. In *Cambridge Valley*, the *curve* of the river in the center leads your eye into the painting from right to left, down the road on the left to the **focal point** at the bottom, the man and horses plowing a field.

Grandma Moses painted real scenes very imaginatively.

Grandma Moses (1860-1961).
Cambridge Valley, 1943. Copyright ©
 1990, Grandma Moses Properties Co.,
 New York, NY

Tribal Stories

Native American artists worked mainly with natural materials to create the objects they used in their everyday life. Not only does this Lakota pipe bag (right) have a useful function, but the beadwork design decorating it **narrates** a story. The bag itself held a long, wooden flute-like musical instrument that was carved especially for a young man to play when he was courting a young woman. If she approved of his song, the next step was for the man to bring gifts to her father. In this beadwork design, the father is shown standing in front of his tipi, ready to receive a gift of five horses to be given to him by his future son-in-law. The **stylized, flat shapes** are done in black and white as well as in bold **primary colors**—red, yellow, and blue. Both sides of the design **balance** each other—the figure, the **geometric triangle** of the tipi, and the **negative background space** on the left visually equal the figure on the right and the five **organic, repeated shapes** of the horses.



This simplified, nearly abstract Lakota beadwork design is highly decorative, but it also tells a real story.

Lakota Pipe Bag, 1885. Leather, beads, horsehair, quills, rawhide. Denver Art Museum.

Visions of Nature

Henri Rousseau and twentieth-century American artist Horace Pippin both created fantastic worlds that existed only in their imaginations. Painted in 1945 while this country was involved in the Second World War, *The Holy Mountain* (left) is Pippin's vision of a paradise filled with peace and love. In the work, animals that are normally enemies—wolf and lamb; leopard and goat; cow and lion—stand next to each other. Children are seen

picking flowers in the foreground while a figure dressed in white stands in back. Behind the figure are a number of graves marked by small white crosses. Soldiers and tanks can be glimpsed through the trees. The space in the painting has been **flattened**, while the figures and animals have been reduced to **simplified, stylized shapes**. The **horizon line** in the center cuts the composition in half. The top half is filled with a band of trees while the bottom contains a **colorful alternating pattern** of people, animals and flowers. The figure in white serves as the **focal point**, and ties the whole painting together. Who do you think this figure might be?



What makes the painting on the left a work of fantasy?

Horace Pippin (1888-1946). *Holy Mountain II*, 1944. Private collection.



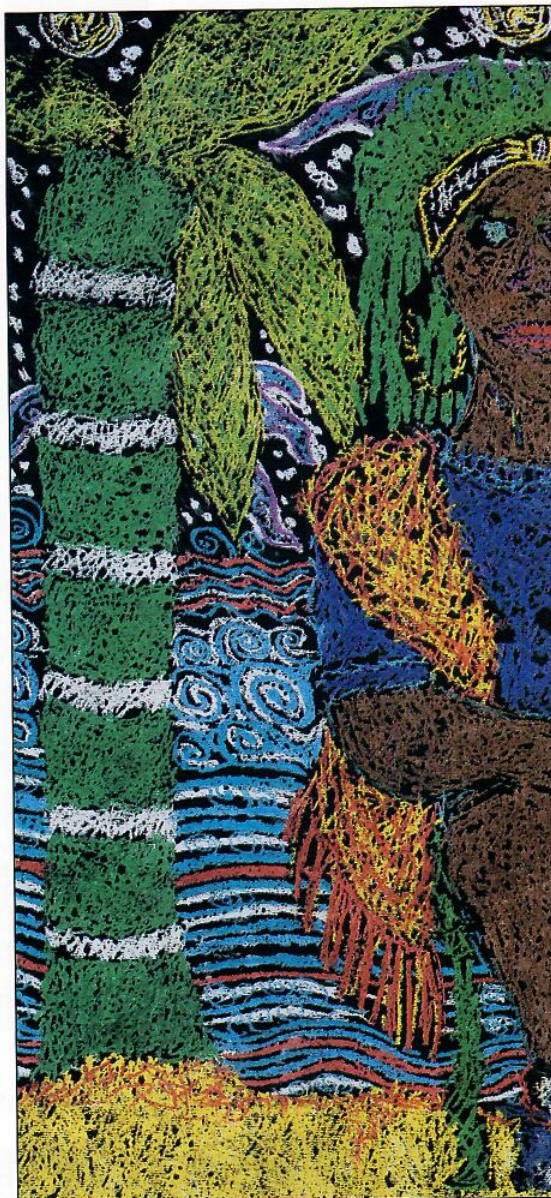
Mike Lindenthal: PORTRAITS FROM NATURE



“Jamaican Night” is the name of the colorful Scholastic Art Award-winning work (right) by 15-year-old Mike Lindenthal of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Winning the award when he was a freshman at R.J. Reynolds High School encouraged Mike to pursue an art

career. Now a sophomore, he’s planning to go to art school. “I’d like to paint pictures for a living,” he says.

When he’s not creating art, Mike plays drums and wants to form a reggae band. Mike is interested in Jamaican culture and he loves reggae because of the music’s trademark African and Carribean beat.



■ **When did you start doing art?**

I’ve been drawing ever since I was four or five years old. I liked drawing because I found that it was a good way for me to express myself.

■ **How did you happen to do this particular work?**

It was a class assignment. My art teacher asked us to do a crayon portrait of a live model. One of the students volunteered to sit on a stool and model.

■ **How did you come up with your idea for the portrait?**

At first I thought I was going to

do a straightforward portrait. My teacher wanted it to be realistic and include the classroom.

But as I worked on it, I knew I didn’t want my portrait to look like everyone else’s. I wanted it different—more in line with my personality and interests.

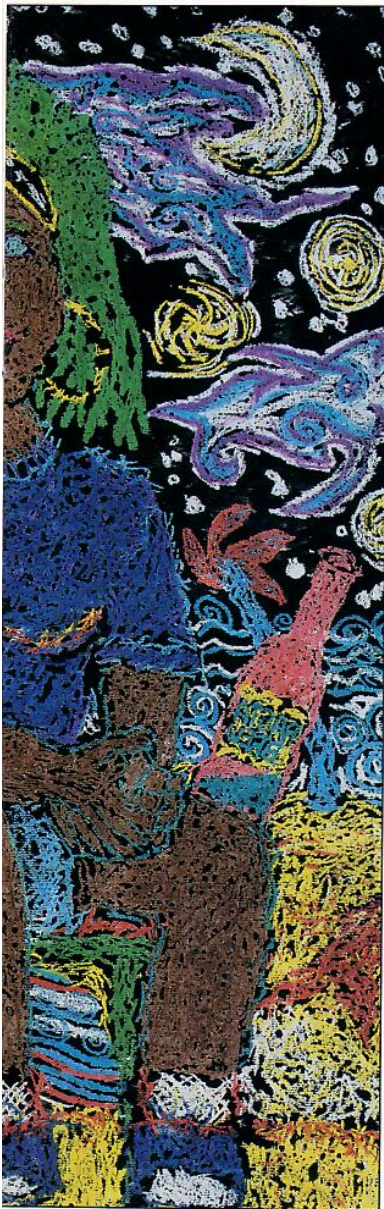
I knew I wanted to use more than just crayon. I decided to combine crayon and black tempera paint, a technique my teacher had showed us recently. I thought it would look neat since the paper was white and the crayons would look really, really bright. When you paint black over crayon, the colors

stay bright and the background turns black. I like that effect.

I also used a technique called “stippling.” Instead of coloring in solidly, I used the crayons to scribble shapes out of lines and dots, so there was more of an impressionistic effect. Actually, I think the look turned out halfway between realism and impressionism.

■ **How did you start?**

First I made a pencil sketch on another sheet of paper. I drew the model’s face, and her body so I could get a feel for the scale of the picture and balance the

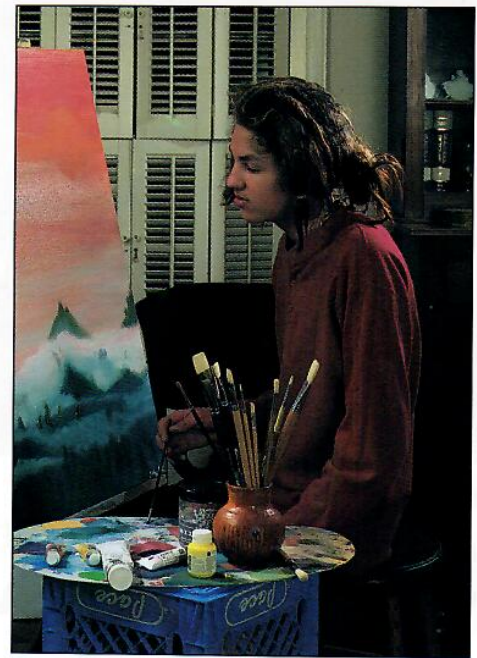


composition. Then I started drawing her with crayon on a large sheet of paper.

■ Then how did you proceed?
I began by drawing her face. Then I worked down to the rest of her body and the chair.

The portrait looked like the model except for her hair and her shirt. I changed those a bit. Her shirt was really white, but I liked blue a lot better. Also, the model's hair was short and stood straight up. I didn't like that, so instead I gave her "dreadlocks". It's part of my belief system. If you let your hair

"I'm passionate about art. It's a way for me to express how I'm feeling at the time. I'm usually thinking about something that's happened when I'm creating art."



grow naturally, it forms dreadlocks. I have them too; I've had them for two years. So I made her hair green because I thought it would show up, plus I like green a lot.

I outlined her in aqua to give her more emphasis since she's the focal point of the picture. The last thing I drew was the background.

■ Why did you choose the background that you did?

I knew I didn't want the classroom in my portrait, so I sketched out several ideas—a desert, a jungle and an ocean. I settled on the ocean. I wanted to create an island effect and I thought the clouds and ocean worked well in the background.

I put in a bottle. I could picture someone sitting on the beach drinking a bottle of soda. And I drew in a moon, since the background was already black.

■ Were you pleased with the finished results?

Yes, I like the way it turned out. I wanted to do a portrait, and sort of change it but not completely. The basic idea was still there, but the background was more fantastic. I wanted the colors to be vibrant, almost

fluorescent-looking.

I was happy with it also because it turned out to be very different from a lot of the other people's stuff. The other people followed the teacher's ideas, but I came up with my own idea. I added myself to this painting. Otherwise the portrait wouldn't have much meaning.

■ How did your classmates respond to this work?

Most of the people who see this picture like it. My class liked the way it turned out. A lot of people don't understand my work. But they do understand not everyone is the same.

■ What does art mean to you?

I'm passionate about art. It's a way for me to express how I'm feeling at the time. I'm usually thinking about something that's happened when I'm creating art. Lately I've been thinking about things that happen in life.

■ Do you have any other comments about art?

Find your own style. Find what is in you and follow that. Don't just do what everyone else is doing or else all art will look the same. Pursue your talents and take chances. Be creative.

"I came up with my own idea. I added myself to this painting. Otherwise the portrait wouldn't have much meaning."

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 books.



SCHOLASTIC
ART
WORKSHOP

FROM STILL-LIFE TO JUNGLE

Turn a group of ordinary house plants into an exotic, dream-like landscape.



When you sketch from the plants set up in the classroom, compare their various types of leaves, flowers, stems, buds, branches, and roots. Try to think of ways to combine them into a landscape.

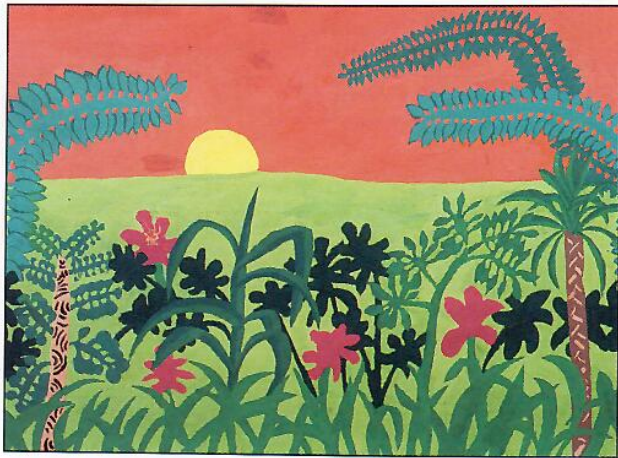
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Henri Rousseau is most famous for his fantastic, jungle-like scenes. He sometimes called them his “Mexican pictures,” encouraging the legend that he had been in Mexico while in the army. However, it is doubtful that the artist ever left France. He did frequently visit the Paris zoo and botanical gardens, which is where he probably got his ideas for these works.

In this workshop you—like Rousseau—will use natural forms as a starting point for creating a fantasy landscape of your own.

Materials

- 18" x 24" 80 lb. white sulfite paper
- Ebony or school pencils
- Vinyl eraser
- Drawing board
- Masking tape
- Acrylic/tempera (powder/liquid) paint (primary, secondary, black, brown, white)
- Variety of flat/round brushes
- Palette to mix paint (dinner plate)
- Covered containers for paint
- Container for clean water
- Plastic wrap to cover palette
- Toweling/newspapers



Starting Out

Step 1. Set up a still life made up of a variety of interesting plants. Do several contour drawings of each, then try **stylizing** and **simplifying** their shapes in various ways. You can

select and enlarge certain *parts*, or put portions of different plants together.

shapes (try to avoid lines that stand alone). Your landscape should be dense and varied but not confusing.

Step 2

Choose the best of your drawings and *combine* them together to give the feeling of a landscape. Decide which shapes work best as trees, as bushes, and as ground cover. Your jungle will consist of an **overall pattern**, but you can use **accents** (dark or light, large or small shapes, or bright colors) to set up a **visual rhythm** which will move your eye through the composition. You should be working mainly with

Step 3.

Choose a color scheme. Will you use many colors or just a few? Think about the time of day it will be in the landscape you are creating (morning, mid-day, evening, night). This will determine the mood of your painting, the way the light falls, and the color scheme you use. Prepare your palette and mix your colors.

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

Reading clockwise from above, left: Clayton Riley, Andrea M. Johnson, Julia C. Velazquez, Kendra K. Kophamer.



Some Solutions

You will be working basically with three areas—*foreground*, *middleground*, and *background*, emphasizing **two-dimensional shapes/patterns**. Try overlapping and weaving together

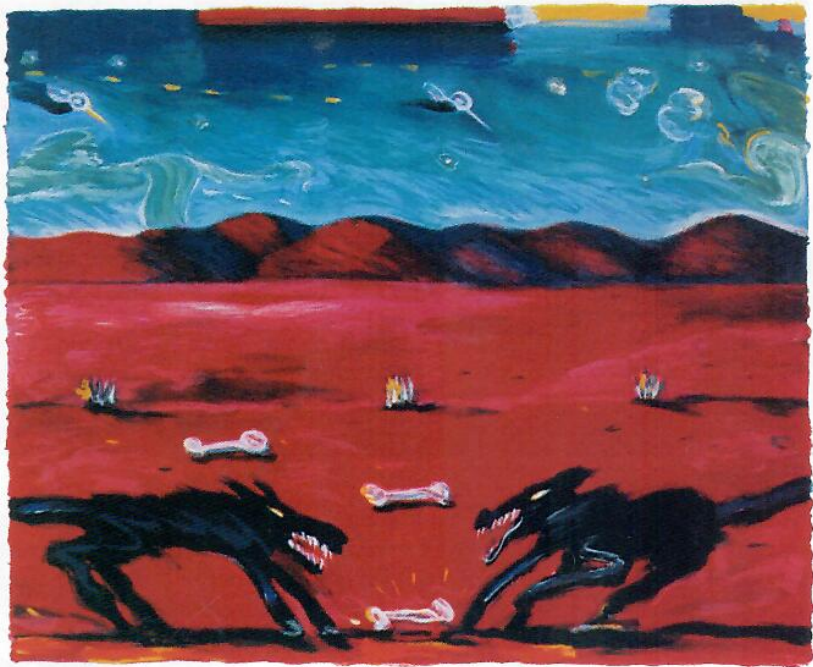
your **stylized plant shapes**. You can create patterns by **repeating shapes**. (Vary by changing **scale, color**; using **large, solid** or **small, detailed shapes** with/without outlines.) You can use

contrast (light/dark; plain/*texture*; warm/cool, bright/dull colors) or different colors with the same **value** (lightness or darkness). You can use **negative spaces** (areas between shapes).

ARTS ALIVE



Like Henri Rousseau, these two contemporary American artists have also created fantastic landscapes.



Savage Fantasies

Compare Henri Rousseau's calm, poetic visions of nature to the landscape (above) done by Hispanic artist Carlos Almaraz. Two wild, wolf-like dogs with glaring eyes and gnashing teeth fight over a bone in the middle of a red-hot desert. To create their landscapes, both Rousseau and Almaraz used **simplified, stylized, and distorted** shapes.

Both flattened the space by avoiding **modeling** and **cast shadows**. Almaraz' style is more emotional than Rousseau's. The slashing, thickly painted strokes and bright, violent colors in *Greed* present a savage, nightmarish vision of nature. Carlos Almaraz was born in Mexico. He grew up in east Los Angeles and many of his paintings con-

How do you think the artist Carlos Almaraz felt about nature when he did the work above?

Carlos Almaraz (1941-1989). *Greed*, 1989. Serigraph, edition of 120. 41" x 47" © Almaraz estate.

tain political messages connected with his background. The animals in *Greed* may symbolize struggling forces in Mexican-American culture.



Nature as Cartoon

One critic recently called artist Rodney Alan Greenblat's landscapes and animal sculptures, "folk art from another planet." A second critic wrote that the artist's cartoons, gadgets, and constructions seem "more appropriate to an amusement park than to an art museum." What do you think of Greenblat's nature fantasy (left)

called *Bird Bath at Beek Pointe*? In it, **stylized, cartoon-like** birds encircle a comic fountain whose ears spout water. The artist says he grew up with TV—cartoons and situation comedies became a very real part of his life. He says, "I was inspired by amusement parks—Disneyland was my favorite. I was impressed by what Disney tried to do—create a magical kingdom. That's what I want to do." Do you think this painting is a **satire** (an overexaggeration to the point of ridicule) of American commercialism, or a celebration?

Compare the painting (above left) with Henri Rousseau's jungles on pages 6-7.

Rodney Alan Greenblat b. 1960. *Bird Bath at Beek Pointe*, 1988. Gouache and colored pencil. 42" x 52" Gracie Mansion Gallery.