

SCHOLASTIC

# ART

## GEORGES SEURAT

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FORMERLY ART & MAN

WORKING

WITH

COLOR





Painter Georges Seurat when he was 24.

**SCHOLASTIC**

**ART**

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# A YOUNG

On May 15, 1884, an art exhibition opened in an unused post office hidden behind the largest art museum in Paris. The members of the show's hanging committee considered one painting too large, or possibly too strange, to put in the exhibition rooms.

So the work on the right, done by 24-year-old Georges Seurat (George Sur-RAH), ended up in a dark corner where it was overlooked by most people. Today, over a century later, this painting—Seurat's *The Bathers*—is considered to be one of the most important works in modern art.

At the end of the 19th century, Paris was the center of the art world. At that time art was controlled by a powerful organization, the French Academy, and artists had to follow strict rules to get their work shown. A group of artists known as *Impressionists* were inventing fresh new ways of painting the world around them, emphasizing color and light in their work. These young painters, like Seurat, were defying the Academy and were setting up their own art exhibitions.

Georges Seurat was born in Paris in 1859. His father, a local official, was so secretive and solitary that he lived by himself in his own house, only visiting his family once in a while. Seurat, his mother, brother, and sister stayed in the family apartment a few miles away. Much of Seurat's free time during his childhood was spent in the many large, suburban parks in his neighborhood. Seurat graduated from the local high school, then went on to art school. After serving in the army, he returned to Paris, where he set up a studio and began painting the scenes he saw around him.

There were several places on the banks of the river, just outside the city, where Seurat and other Parisians went on weekends. But while most people brought picnic baskets or bathing suits, Seurat brought his sketchbook. He made many drawings, then took them back to his studio and used them to compose a large canvas. Seurat wanted to capture the feeling of a long, lazy Sunday afternoon in a way that would seem more real than the actual scene. He noticed that when the Impressionists wanted a color to appear brighter, they would use small strokes of the color's **opposite** (*green's* opposite is *red*; *blue's* is *orange*; *purple's* is *yellow*).

If you look closely at the cover, the grass in *The Bathers* is actually made up of small yellow and blue brushstrokes. Seen from a distance, it looks green. When Seurat added strokes of green's **complementary** (opposite)—red—the resulting "after-image" makes the grass appear to shimmer and wave in the breeze. In this work, Seurat used brightly colored marks to develop *Pointillism*—the style of painting for which he became famous.



# GENIUS



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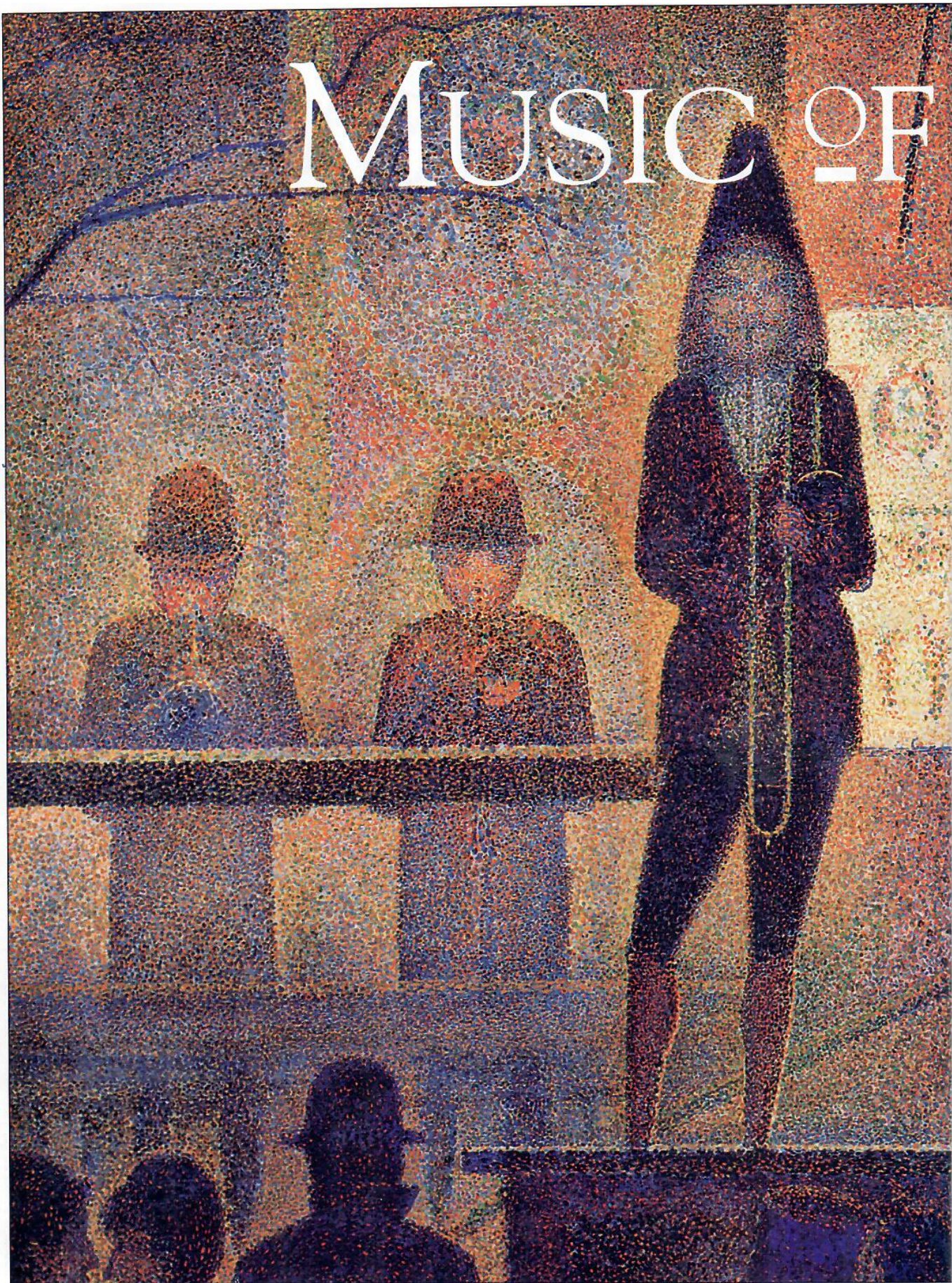
*Six years after graduating from high school, Georges Seurat created this painting—one of the most famous images in modern art.*

**Does the work above look as if it was created by using a scientific formula?**

---

Georges Seurat (1859-1891) *Bathers at Asnières*, 1883-84. National Gallery, London. Detail shown on cover.

# MUSIC OF



# THE NIGHT

“Imagine a tall young man, extremely shy but with great energy . . . working with incredible intensity, shut up in his tiny studio, using what little money he has to buy expensive books instead of food.”\*

This was the way a contemporary of Georges Seurat’s described the artist and his lifestyle.

Everyone who knew Seurat described the artist as being very secretive. He never talked about his private life or gave opinions on any subject. And he worked all the time. In fact, the only way friends could get him down from the ladder where he painted day after day was to criticize his theories on color. Then Seurat would passionately argue about the importance of color in art and why artists should always paint scientifically.

But once in a while Seurat’s friends did get the artist out of his studio. On summer evenings, Seurat and his companions would join the crowds watching outdoor shows put on by carnival people—clowns, dancers, musicians—as they performed under dim, smoky gaslights. In *The Bathers* (pages 2-3), Seurat used his new technique—*Pointillism*—to paint sunlight. Now he wanted to use it to paint artificial lights at night.

Because of the importance of technology at the end of the 19th century, Seurat thought art should be created using scientific methods. To paint *The Side Show* (right), he developed an exact “optical formula”—using so many dots of color to the square inch and adding an exact **number of dots of the color’s opposite**.

This painting may have been done scientifically, but as another French artist—Henri Matisse—said, “If Seurat’s pictures were only about scientific theories, they would be of no interest.” How do you feel when you look at this work?

**Can you figure out the “color formula” Seurat used to create *The Side Show* (right) by looking at a detail shown on the left?**

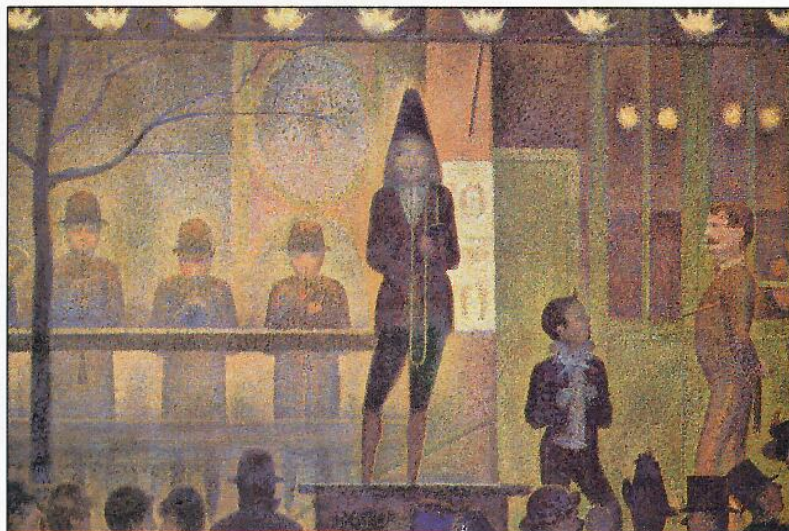
*The Side Show*, 1888. © 1994  
The Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, NY, NY.

Do the people in it seem to be having a good time? Do they look friendly or happy?

Seurat found that certain color combinations produced certain feelings—**bright, warm colors** make the viewer happy, while **dark, cool colors** can cause feelings of depression. In *The Side Show*, Seurat used color to create a melancholy, detached mood. The painting is a brownish **monochrome** made up of green, yellow, orange, and blue dots and **simplified, stylized shapes**. Those shapes that can be read as figures are **flat, vertical, two-dimensional silhouettes**. Seurat’s **simplified, minimal forms** can be seen as setting the stage for much 20th-century abstract art.

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***“I am haunted by the  
magnificence of  
the evening.”***  
**— Georges Seurat**



\*Arsène Alexandre, 1891

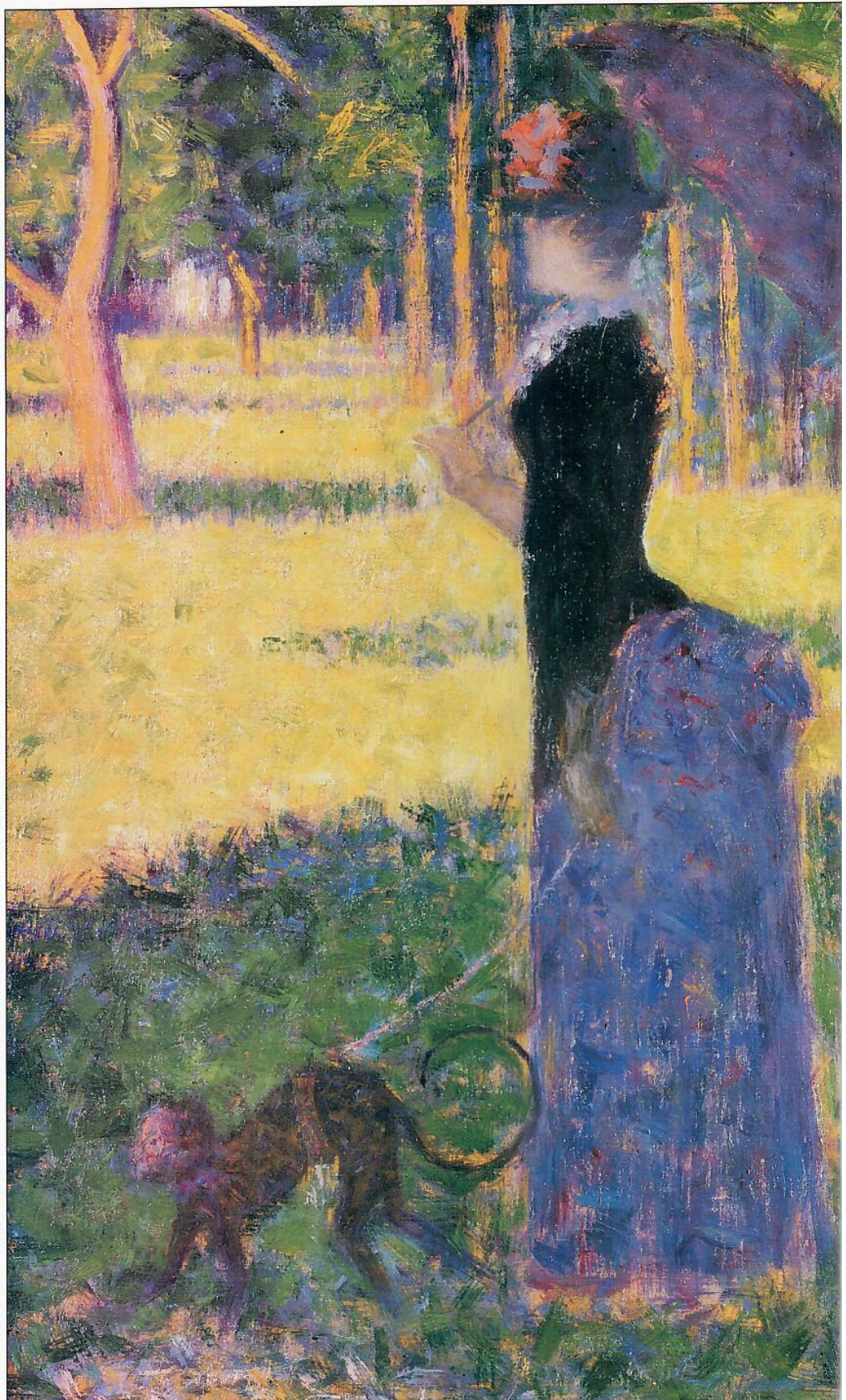
MASTERPIECE  
OF THE  
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Preview

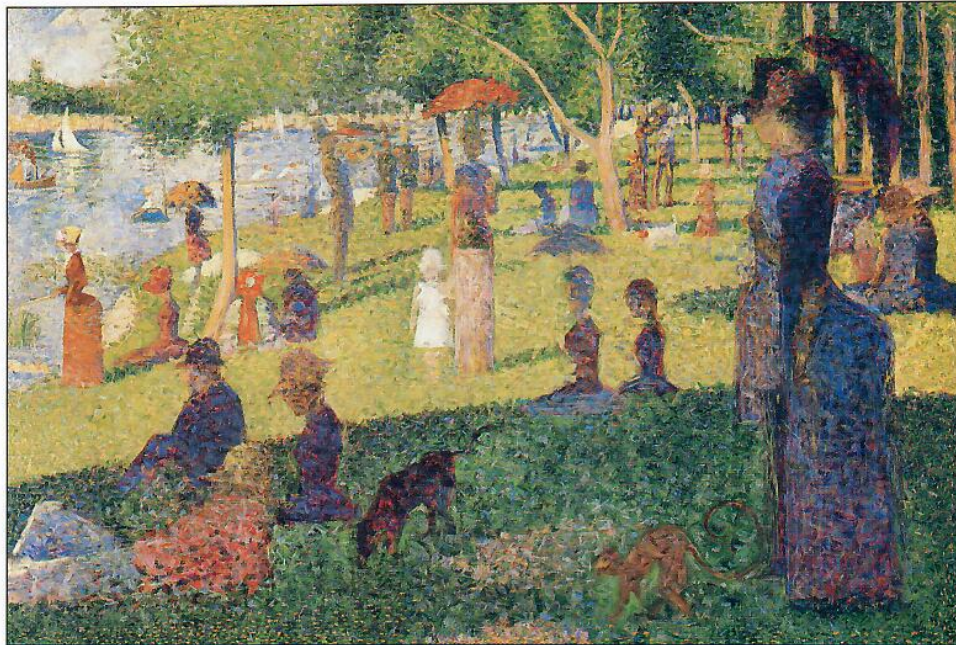
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*“Everything about this painting was so new — especially the color technique that nobody had ever seen or heard of before. So this was the famous Pointillism.”*

— ARSÈNE ALEXANDRE, 1891



# ENDLESS SUMMER



Georges Seurat had no sooner become well known for his first large painting *The Bathers* than he shut himself up again with an even bigger canvas. He left his studio only to do sketches for his next project,

a complex figure composition. He decided to place his figures on a grassy island outside Paris, where people gathered on weekends.

Seurat wanted to create a painting made up of tiny brushstrokes of bright color placed so close together the eye would mix them optically. Blue strokes next to yellow strokes would—from a distance—appear as a vivid green. The artist made many paintings before doing the final version of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* (pages 8-9).

Can you pick out the major **bands of light and dark** in the painting? The people in the foreground—all seen from the side—are in deep shadow. The figures in the bright middle-ground are seen from many **points of view**. The woman and girl in the center are seen from *eye level* while other figures appear from *above*, giving a **flat, two-dimensional** feeling.

Seurat hung this enormous canvas on his studio wall, standing on ladders in order to

cover it with thousands of dots of paint. He developed a whole **range of marks** — dots, commas, bars, slashes, and swirls. Most painters found it hard to work by artificial light, but since Seurat knew exactly what he was going to do, he could work all day, then on through the night. He worked like this for two years, “seeing and speaking to no one.”

Seurat finished his painting just in time for the Impressionist exhibit of 1886. To add to its optical effect, he added a frame using complementary color dots. *La Grande Jatte* was greeted with mixed reviews. It took some years for this haunting work with its mysterious figures and timeless atmosphere to be accepted as one of the great creations of modern art.

For the next five years Seurat painted constantly, becoming increasingly isolated. In March 1891, the artist was hanging an exhibition of his paintings. Nine days later, he was dead of an unidentified illness at the age of 31.

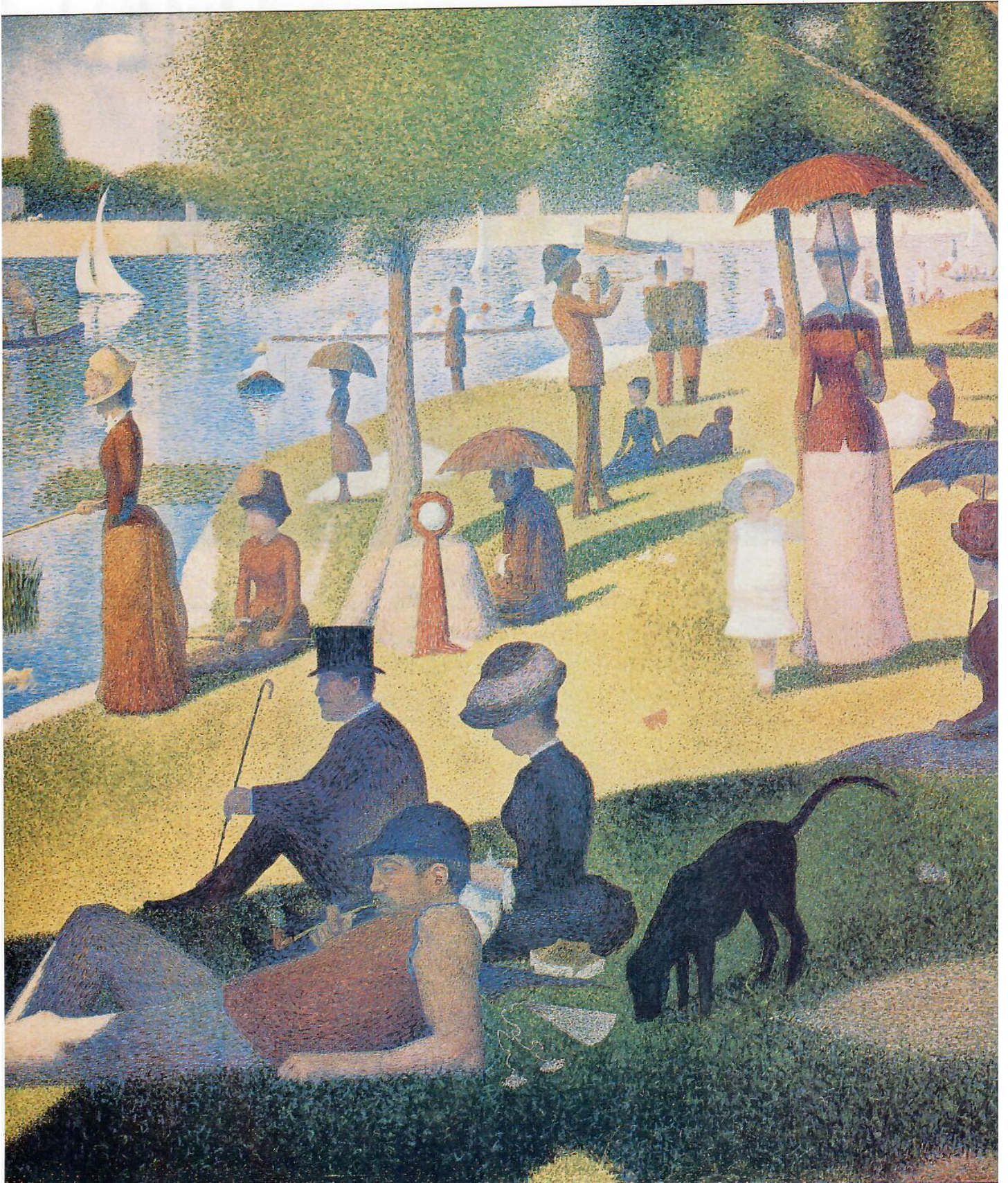
Compare these two early studies with the final painting shown on the next pages.

Study for *La Grande Jatte* 1884-85. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY.

George Seurat's artistic career lasted barely a dozen years, during which he created six major paintings (three are shown in this issue).

*Lady with a Monkey* (Study for *La Grande Jatte*) 1884-85. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA.

# A SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON THE ISLAND





# AND OF LA GRANDE JATTE



GEORGES  
SEURAT

MASTERPIECE

OF THE

MONTH # 1

*“The river, the women’s dresses, the sails of the boats, all the reflections came crowding into this square panel of beauty cut out of a marvellous afternoon — the motion of the hours at this luminous instant had been arrested for all time.”*

— MARCEL PROUST



Georges Seurat (1859-1891). A Sunday on La Grande Jatte, 1884-85. Oil on canvas. 207.5 x 308 cm. Helen Bartlett Memorial Collection. Photograph © 1994, The Art Institute of Chicago, All Rights Reserved.

SCHOLASTIC  
**ART**

SCHOLASTIC ART 8-9



## MAKING MARKS

Three artists who have used color patterns to express themselves

### *Shimmering Faces*

What do contemporary American Chuck Close's huge painted faces (above) have to do with Georges Seurat's landscapes created over a century ago? Compare the detail from Seurat's painting (page 4) with Close's *Eric*. Do you see any similarities?

Chuck Close's painting methods could be called a modern version of Seurat's *Pointillism* (see page 2). While Seurat built his images with color dots, Close uses a **grid** to enlarge his heads, dividing the features into small squares. For the past 20 years, Close has become known for the huge faces he slowly and carefully constructs square by square. Only recently has color become an important element

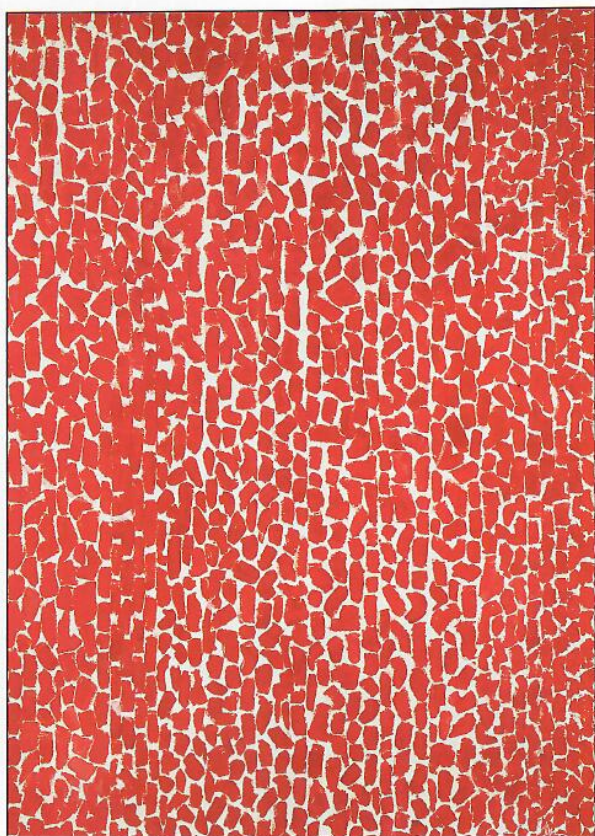
in his work. In 1989, the artist became partially paralyzed. Suddenly he was unable to use his hands. Sitting in a wheelchair, a brace on his arm and a brush strapped to it, he began learning to paint again. If you look at *Eric*, you can see that each square is a small abstract painting made up of three or four colors. Changes in the color's **value** (lightness and darkness) suggest highlights and shadows.

Like Seurat, Close's marks fit his subject—**calm patterns** made up of circles, curves, and **warm, restful colors** portray quiet, thoughtful personalities. **Angular shapes** and **bright, clashing colors** are used for nervous, excitable types.

**"I build a painting by putting little marks together — some look like hot dogs, some like doughnuts."**  
— Chuck Close

Chuck Close b 1940. *Eric*, 1990.  
100" x 84" Pace Wildenstein  
Gallery, NY, NY.





## Strokes of Color

Seurat's paintings were made up of small color dots, but his images were always recognizable. Does the work (left) by 20th-century African-American artist Alma Thomas remind you of anything? Maybe the title will give you some ideas.

This painting is almost completely **nonrepresentational**. In it, Thomas has used color brushstrokes to communicate her inner emotions. For 35 years, Alma Thomas taught high school art while doing her own realistic paintings. At the age of 74, inspired by the holly tree outside her window, she took a canvas

**"Color is life; color reveals the living soul of the world."**

**— Alma Thomas**

Alma Thomas (1891-1978). *Red Rose Cantata*, 1973. 69" x 60" National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, © 1995 Board of Trustees. Gift of Vincent Melzac.

and began to make small strokes of bright color. Thomas had known this tree for years—her responses to it were deeply felt. She painted the **shapes** of the leaves and the **patterns of light and shade** they cast.

To create *Red Rose Cantata*, the artist used formal design qualities to suggest natural images. Her **monochromatic** (one color) **shapes—dots, commas, slashes, wedges**—stand for the shapes roses take turning from bud to blossom. The white **negative spaces** between the brushstrokes suggest sunlight flickering through red rose petals. The strokes are set in **vertical lines** like flowers in a formal garden.

Like Seurat, Alma Thomas used color to express what she **felt** rather than what she **saw**. Also like Seurat, Thomas's painting career lasted only a dozen years, until her death in 1978.



**"I want to capture the color and the darkness of street culture."** — Carlos Almaraz

Carlos Almaraz (1942-1989). *Crash in Pthalo Green*, 1984. 42" x 72" © 1995 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA.

## Colors of Life

Mexican-American artist Carlos Almaraz used strokes of **clashing color opposites** to express his conflict about growing up in two cultures.

Born in Mexico City, Almaraz came to the U.S. and lived in various sections of Los Angeles, never settling in one place for very long. His paintings reflect the way the artist felt about the landscape and culture of the Southwest. Do the **long, horizontal shapes** broken by **vertical slashes** and the **violent color contrasts** of the image on the left give you any clues as to what the work is about? Does looking at the title make the subject any clearer?

In the early 1980s, Almaraz did a number of paintings he called his "car crash series." The cars in *Crash in Pthalo Green*, speeding down a high-

way surrounded by **sharp, angular** mountain peaks and a **flaming sunset**, capture the angry violence of today's freeway culture. The exploding automobiles seem to resemble wild animals racing through the desert landscape. The **electric, day-glow color opposites—bloodred, and garish green, burnt orange and midnight blue**—and the **thick, expressive strokes** Almaraz has used add to the horror of this scene.

The artist once said, "Lately I paint with a new passion, trying to deny the fact that I too will someday pass on and the only thing remaining will be the images I leave behind." His paintings comment on the speed and excitement of contemporary urban life, as well as the constant threat of danger and violence.

# John Zeigler PATTERNS OF COLOR

John Zeigler was a 17-year-old senior at Lorain Catholic High School in Ohio when he made the colorful Scholastic Art Award-winning painting on the opposite page. Now just beginning his first year at the University of Toledo, John wants to major in civil engineering. He says, "I plan to pursue art as a hobby, and I might also use it in my engineering work. I enjoy art. I find it relaxing to sit back and draw."



**We select** our Artist of the Month from among Scholastic Award winners. To enter, ask your teacher to write to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, 555 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 for entry deadlines and rules books. *Scholastic Art* magazine does not have a separate competition.

#### ■ How did you get started in art?

I had a lot of art in grade school. I took a class in high school and, when I saw I actually had some drawing talent, I took another one.

#### ■ How did you come to create this Scholastic Art Award-winning work?

We hadn't done much with paint yet, so this was a class assignment to introduce us to color and acrylic paint. We were to take a piece of posterboard with a picture on it and paint it, using different colors, strokes, and brushwork. The only limitation was that we could use only three colors and white.

#### ■ What image did you use?

My picture looked like a man standing in a hallway at the top of a flight of stairs. There seemed to be a bunch of neon

lights around him. There were a lot of things going on in the picture with all of the colors and neon designs on the stairs. It was a very confusing image. The only thing you could make out was the man standing there.

#### ■ Where did you get your idea?

I began painting, and ideas started to come to me while I was working. I wanted to use as much color as I could, and I wanted to compose the image to make it clearer.

#### ■ How did you go about that?

The first thing I did was try to break the picture down into different components. There were ceilings and walls, but they were all covered with lights. I wanted the man to be the focal point of the picture, and I wanted the stairs and the railing to lead your eye up to him. I wanted the

neon designs to form patterns that would frame the man. To make the neon seem really bright, I tried to break the lights down into their respective colors. The green lights were yellow and blue; the orange lights were red and yellow; and the pinkish lights were red and white.

#### ■ Then what did you do?

After painting the lights, I started doing the stairs and the hallway. The painting was pretty dark so the stairs would stand out—in fact, your eye goes there first. I had used orange for most of the painting, so I did the stairs in yellow. I mixed white with the yellow so they looked even brighter. Finally I painted the man. In the original picture, he was just kind of back there. I wanted my composition to lead your attention up the stairs right to his figure. I made his face yel-

ARTIST OF  
THE MONTH

*I liked the intensity of the different color marks. I thought the painting looked psychedelic.*

low and his features a reddish color, so he looks bright orange.

■ **When did you know you were finished?**

I had a feeling I was done, so I stopped. Sometimes you try to do too much, and you mess up your painting. I liked what I saw, which was unusual. I usually don't like my art pieces. I liked the intensity of the different color marks. I thought the painting looked psychedelic.

■ **Why did you use such small color brushstrokes?**

I wanted to capture the effect of neon lights, so I used a tiny brush to try to reproduce a pinpoint-sized laser effect.

■ **Why did you choose the colors you did?**

I chose them because of their brightness. The original picture

was dark and I felt bright colors would make the images stand out. So I worked with the primaries—red, yellow, and blue.

■ **Did you like working with paint and color?**

I really like the bold colors you can get in painting. Paint is more expressive than pastel or colored pencils. I found ideas came to me a little easier than they usually do. There were more possibilities with paint.

■ **Do you have any advice for other artists?**

There are kids I know who want to be artists. Sometimes I think they try too hard to make something really, really profound every time. I've found that art is a process that, if you let it happen, it will. I guess I'd say to relax when you do your art, and enjoy the process.





# CREATING COLOR FIGURES

SCHOLASTIC ART  
WORKSHOP

*Use classroom models  
and pastels to create a  
Post-Impressionist drawing.*

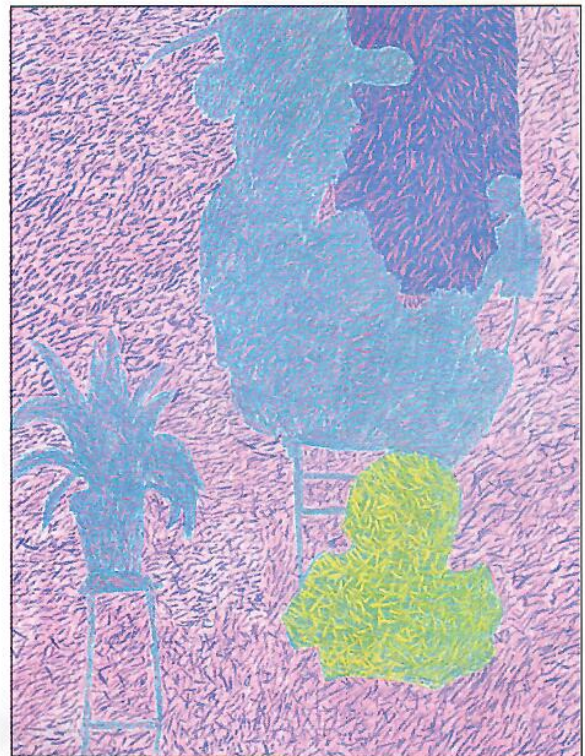
Earlier in this issue you saw a number of Georges Seurat's most famous figure compositions. You also learned how he used his new color technique—called *Pointillism*—to bring his figures to life. The artist also **flattened** and **stylized** his subjects to further emphasize the qualities of color and light.

In this workshop, you'll have a chance to use some of Seurat's ideas to create your own colorful figure drawing.

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## **Materials**

- No. 2 school pencil
- Vinyl eraser
- 18" x 24" 60-80 lb. white sulfite paper
- Drawing Board
- Pastels (12 color set)
- Paper Towels
- Hairspray or plastic art fixative (inexpensive hair spray works as well as expensive fixative and is less toxic)



## Starting Out

1. Pose two student models, emphasizing definite profiles that are easy to draw. Simple props can be added. Lighting from back or front can help emphasize silhouettes. Make several *very light* contour drawings, stressing **silhouettes** and **flat, two-dimensional shapes**. Change your location after each drawing so you can work from different angles. Remember to **simplify** and **rearrange** shapes.

## Step 2.

Select your best composition for the final pastel drawing. Limit the number of colors you use. *Red, orange, and yellow* are **warm colors**; *blue, green, and purple* are **cool**. *Red and green* are **color opposites**. So are *blue and orange* as well as *purple and yellow*. *Red, orange, and yellow* are **related colors**. *Blue, green, and purple* are also **related**. Adding *white* to a color makes it **lighter in value**; adding *black* makes it **darker in value**.



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti Jr., Art Instructor, Morrison (IL) High School.  
Photos by Larry Gregory.  
Pastels by (left to right) Benjamin Boyles; Katrina Klavenga; Melissa Carroll.

Credits for page 16.  
Chuck Close. b. 1940. *Kiki* (detail), 1993. 100" x 84" Pace Wildenstein Gallery, NY, NY. Photo by Bill Jacobson.  
Alma Thomas (1891-1978). *Untitled* (detail), 1973. Private Collection.  
Georges Seurat (1859-1891) *The Lighthouse at Honfleur* (detail), 1886. National Gallery of Art.



## Some Solutions

In which of these works (left) has the artist combined **small color marks** to make a new color? Who has used **dots**; who used **lines**? Can you find other kinds of color marks? Who used **horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines**? Do any marks suggest movement? In which drawings has the artist used **flat silhouettes**? Have any used **outlines**? Can you find a work that contains at least two **color opposites**; at least two **related colors**? How have some of the artists used the **white paper** to create new colors? Have any artists combined **warm colors**; **cool colors**? How has each artist used **color value**? In which work are all the colors the same value?

## Step 3.

Pastels can be blended, but for this project, you'll mix your colors *visually* as Seurat did, by placing small marks of color next to each other. Decide on the kind of **texture** or texture combinations you think will work best. Do you want to use *dots, slashes, swirls, scribbles, or lines*. Will your lines be *thick, thin, long, short, curved, straight, up and down, sideways, diagonal, close together or far apart*?

Remember to work carefully with pastels. Do not blow, as colors will smear. Your finished figures should not look "real." Emphasis should be on *arrangement of simplified color shapes*.

When complete, fix your drawing in a well-ventilated area.

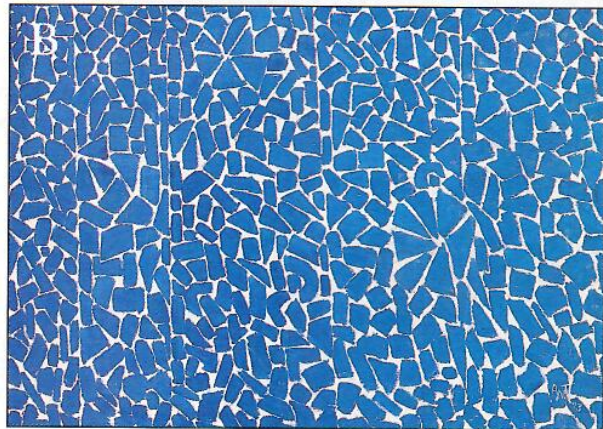
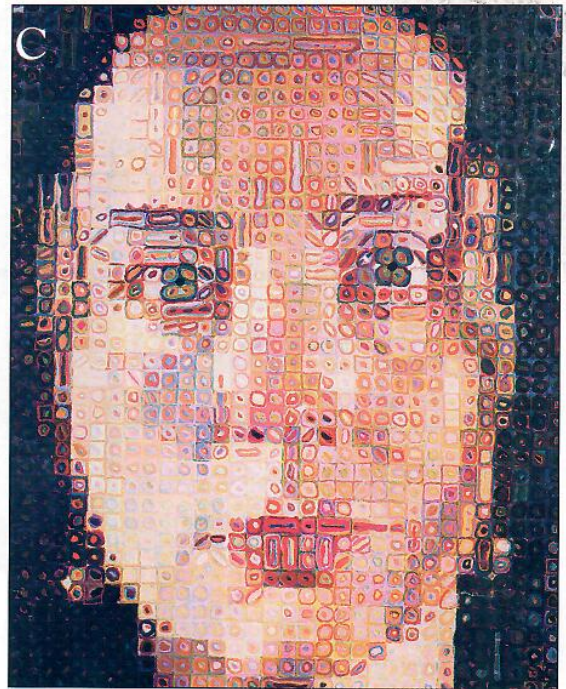
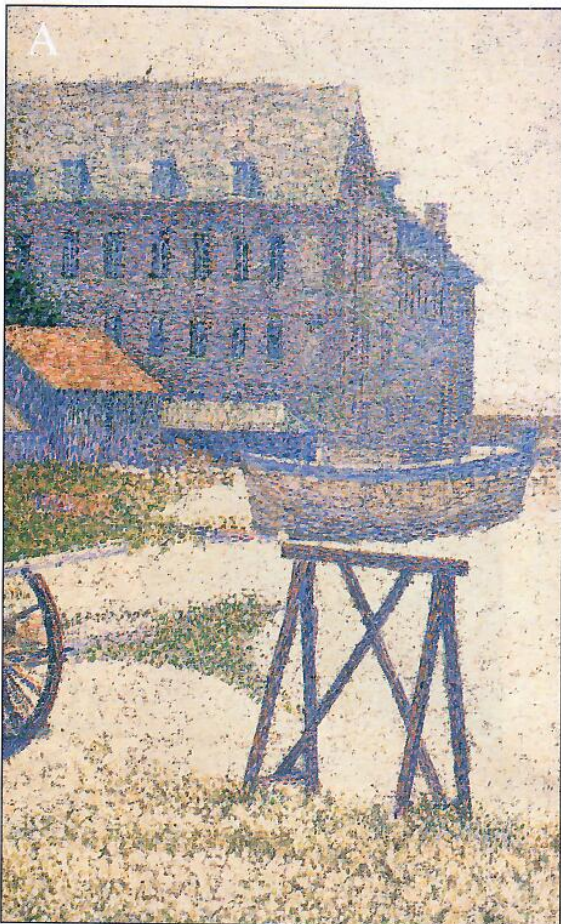


You've probably never seen these three paintings before. Can you identify each artist?

Museum curators and critics have to identify and judge art every day. They do this based on what they know about art and on other works by the same artist.

Here are three examples of works by painters whose art appears in this issue. Can you name the artist? Which characteristics (subject, style, technique, brushstroke, use of color) made you recognize each?

- A. Artist \_\_\_\_\_ Explain \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Artist \_\_\_\_\_ Explain \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Artist \_\_\_\_\_ Explain \_\_\_\_\_



Fill in the letter and the art term that applies.

In \_\_\_\_\_, the color scheme made up of a single color is called \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is an example of the 19th-century color technique known as \_\_\_\_\_.

In \_\_\_\_\_, changes in the color's \_\_\_\_\_ suggest highlights and shadows.

There are two **complementary** (opposite) colors in \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_ has at least one **warm** color in it.

At least one **cool** color can be found in \_\_\_\_\_.

The colors in \_\_\_\_\_ are based on a **grid**.

The colors and shapes in \_\_\_\_\_ are **nonrepresentational**.



