*Working
With Color*

Georges Seurat

This oil sketch is an early version of a figure featured in Seurat's best-known work, *Sunday on La Grande Jatte*. You can see the final version of this figure on the right side of the finished painting, shown on pages 8–9.

Reinventing

"I long to create something new, a kind of painting that is entirely my own." —Georges Seurat
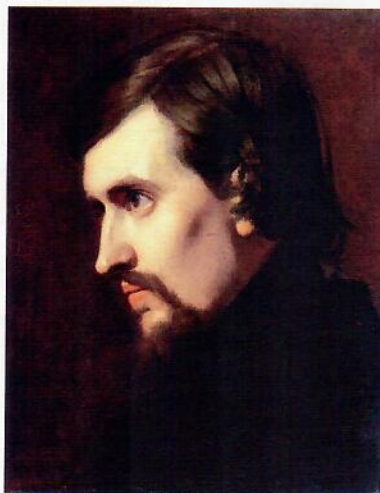
▲ **Seurat's teacher painted this portrait in the realistic, traditional style that had dominated European art for many years.**

Henri Lehmann (1814-1882), *Portrait of Charles-Francois Gounod*, 1841. Oil on canvas, Conservatoire National de Musique, Paris, France. Photo: The Bridgeman Art Library.

▶ **When he did this figure, Seurat was experimenting with the loose strokes and bright colors that had been introduced by the Impressionists.**

Georges Seurat, *Little Peasant Boy in Blue*, or *The Jockey*, c. 1882. Oil on canvas, .460m. x .38 m., Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France. Photo: Reunion des Musees Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

On March 19, 1878, 19-year-old Georges Seurat (George sah-RA) entered the oldest and most famous art school in Paris, the city then considered to be the center of the art world. The young student studied with Henri Lehmann—a master at the French Academy—the powerful organization that dominated the art of that time.

During the 19th century, the only way an artist's work could be seen at all was through the Academy's annual exhibitions. The rules were very strict. A work's subject, size, colors, style, theme, and medium were carefully controlled. Paintings had to be very traditional; there was no room for originality. Within a year, Seurat and some of his fellow artists had left Lehmann's class. Instead of drawing plaster casts, copying old master prints, and constructing complex historical compositions, they began to depict the life they saw around them. They took their paints outdoors to try and capture their first

the World in Color
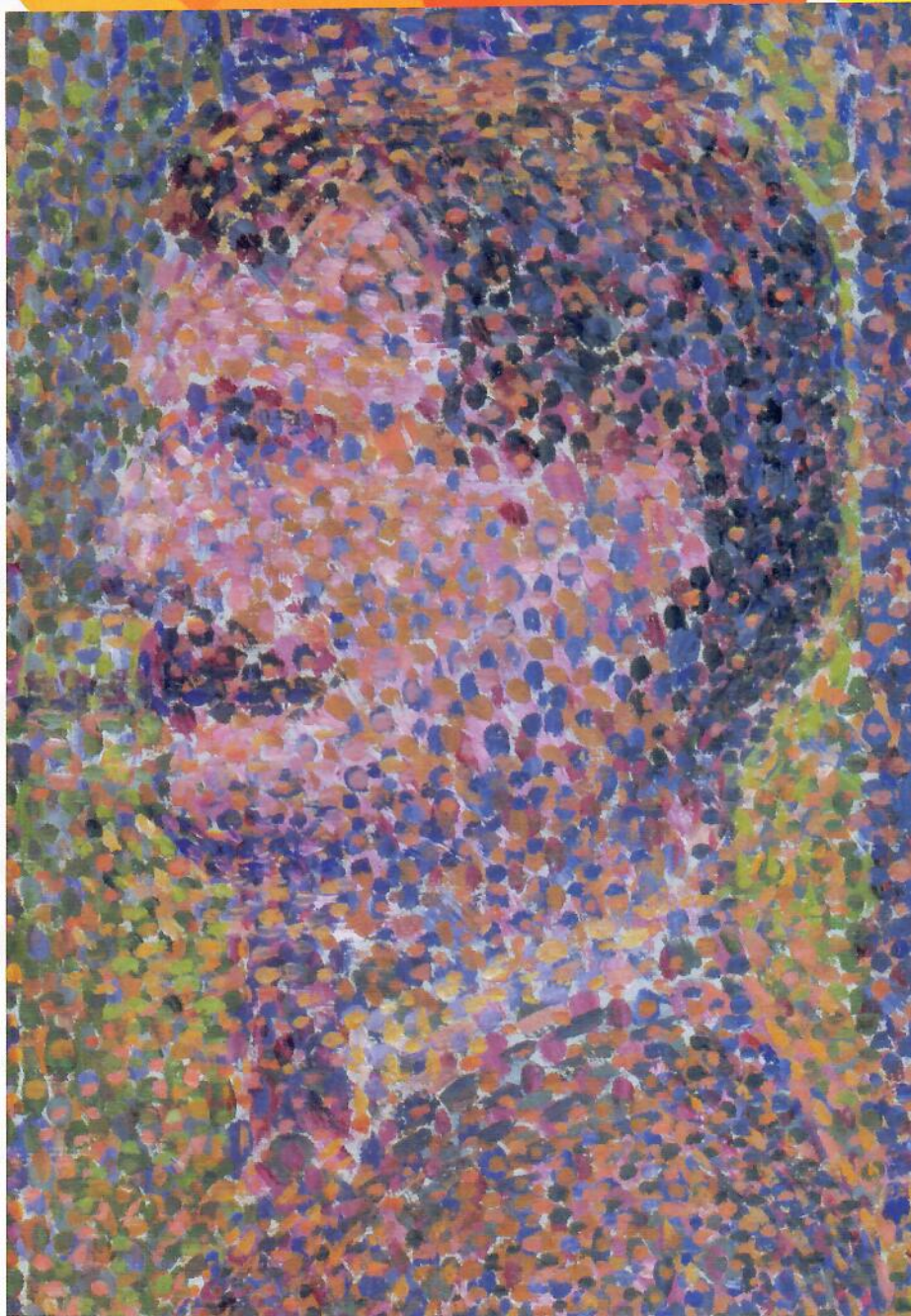
▲ **Finally, as you can see in this detail (left) of the work above, Seurat developed a painting style called Pointillism, his own system of representing color.**

studio portrait. The subject is artificially lit, and done in shades of brown; the painting style is one that a new technology—photography— would soon replace. Seurat's figure painting is a simplified sketch of an **ordinary subject,** set **outdoors** and seen in bright **sunlight. Loose sketchy strokes** blur the features of the boy, who is seen from an **unusual point of view**—slightly below. The background does not recede into the distance but appears to be as **flat** as the figure.

A few years later, Seurat had developed the style for which he is best known, a method of depicting the effects of color called *Pointillism*. The artist had noticed that when the Impressionists wanted a color to appear brighter, they would include a bit of the color's **opposite**

impression of a subject directly on the canvas. With their strokes of pure, bright color, these young artists wanted to re-create the effects of sunlight and movement.

Seurat painted *Young Peasant in Blue* (opposite page, near left) in the style of his friends from school, now known as *Impressionists*. Compare this painting with a portrait (opposite page, far left) by Seurat's teacher. The earlier work is a carefully posed, highly realistic, detailed

(see the color wheel on pages 14-15). In the detail (near left) from Seurat's *Circus Sideshow* (top right), you can see small dots of blue-green among the orange and pink strokes that make up the figure's face. Orange dots appear scattered among the green brushstrokes that make up the background. Later in the issue, you'll see why—when seen from a distance—the overall color of the face and background seem to be unusually bright.

Shimmering Surfaces

"My paintings reflect as exactly as possible the radiance of the open air." —**Georges Seurat**

▲ **A friend did this portrait of Seurat when the artist was in his late 20s.**

Four years after leaving art school, Seurat began the painting (below) that would make him famous. Today *The Bathers* is considered one of the most important works in modern art. But, if judges and critics of the time had had their way, this painting might never have been seen at all.

Georges Seurat was born in 1859 in Paris into a well-to-do family. His father was a local official, and his mother encouraged him to study art.

In spite of these advantages, young Georges had a somewhat unusual childhood. He saw little of his father, who lived in his own house and visited his wife and family once a week. Seurat and his mother spent much of their time in the large suburban parks near their apartment by the river. The artist went to high school, attended art school, then spent a year in the army. When he went back to Paris, he set up a studio, brought in a huge canvas, and began his first major painting.

To prepare for this work, Seurat returned to the parks of his childhood with his sketchbook. Back in his studio, he hired models, posed them and made more studies. Finally, he began putting his drawings together. At first he used uniform **hues** (colors) to model the larger figures. Gradually, he started to use new color techniques. In the Impressionist style, he **juxtaposed** long horizontal dashes

of blue and purple to create water. Seen from up close, much of the grass is made up of yellow and blue brush-strokes. If you stand back, however, these two **primary colors** combine in your eye, forming an **optical mix** that appears green. After the artist added crisscross dashes of green's **complementary color**, red, to the grass in the foreground, it made that area appear to shimmer and vibrate.

To understand how adding a color's **complement** (opposite on the color wheel) can make the color appear brighter, stare at a red object for a while. Then look at a white wall; a green **afterimage** will appear. Juxtaposing a color's complement creates an afterimage that makes the color seem more intense. Adding small dots of **complementary color pairs**

◄ **Seurat began The Bathers as an Impressionist, and finished it as a Pointillist.**

can make any color richer. Seurat added orange and blue dots to the hat worn by the boy on the right of the painting to increase the red's brilliance. The intensity of this small red area allows this figure to **visually balance** everything on the left side of the **asymmetrical** (differ-

ent on each side) composition.

When he finished *The Bathers* in 1884, Seurat tried to enter it into the Academy exhibition. The horrified judges refused it. As a result, Seurat and some other artists organized their own show. From then on, Seurat was considered the leader of the Pointillist movement. *The Bathers* reflects his growing interest in this new technique.

Because of the increasing importance of science at the end of the 19th century, Seurat felt that art too could be created using scientific methods. To paint the seascape above, he developed an optical formula. He placed a certain number of color dots in each square inch, then added an equal number of dots of the color's complement. The water was created by mixing **related** (next to each other on the color wheel) blue, green, and yellow strokes with dots of their complementary pairs, orange, red, and purple. This simplified seascape, broken into dots of color, resembles a modern nonrepresentational composition.

▲ **"I am currently pursuing an exact optical formula."** —**Georges Seurat**

Summer in the Park

"I want to make modern people file past like figures on a Greek frieze—to give them the eternal quality of the statues of antiquity." —Georges Seurat

Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, and details, 1884-1886. Oil on canvas, 81 3/4 x 121 1/4 in. The Art Institute of Chicago. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.
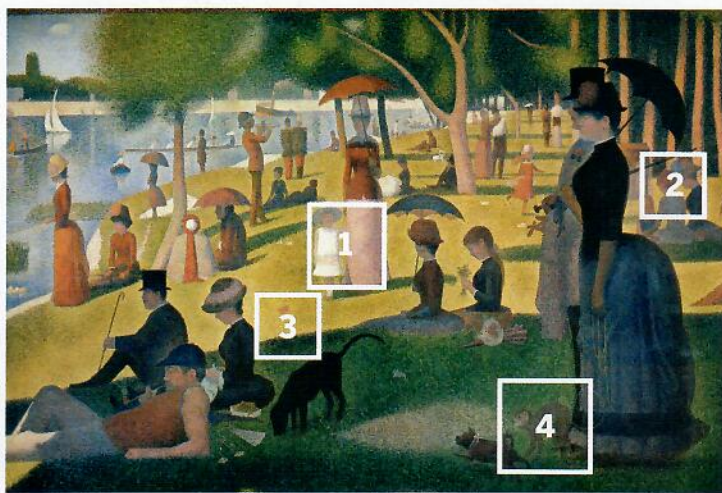
After exhibiting his first major work, *The Bathers,* Seurat began an even larger and more complex painting.

Directly across the river from the spot where the artist had set *The Bathers* was an island that held another large public park. This one attracted a more fashionable set of people. Each Sunday on summer afternoons, they came out into the park to see and be seen. Nearly every morning for the next two years, the artist took a boat over to La Grande Jatte (Gran Jaht) to sketch. He drew and made oil sketches until around noon, then went back to his studio to work out the arrangement of his giant canvas.

The artist divided his composition into three simple horizontal bands. The **foreground** is a dark green patch of shadow. A large light yellow-green area of sunlit grass forms the **middleground**. And a blue-green band of trees and sky at the top makes up the **background**. The more than 40 figures in this work have all been **simplified** and **stylized**. Those in the foreground—sitting or strolling in the shade—all face left and are seen from slightly **above**. The men in top hats carry canes; the women hold umbrellas and wear long dresses. One woman even walks a monkey on a leash. The people scattered in the middleground are seen from **eye-level.** Long, deep diagonal shadows seem to anchor them to the ground.

When he had completed his composition, and chosen his overall color scheme, Seurat began to paint. He was determined to create an entire painting using the optical formula he had developed while painting *The Bathers.* The small dots of color he planned to use throughout this huge work would sparkle, vibrate, and appear more alive than real life.

Seurat covered each area with a light underpainting so the white canvas would not show through and interrupt his carefully planned color patterns. He worked on one area at a time, using ladders to reach the top sections. He made notes on the colors he wanted to use so he would be able to paint throughout the night by gaslight (there was no electricity!). For two years the artist worked tirelessly, seeing no one, eating little, sometimes painting around the clock. He used both ends of the brush, sticks and other objects to create the more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million marks that make up this monumental work. He used only variations of the six colors in the color wheel, eliminating all earth colors and black.

Seurat finished the painting in 1886, just in time to show it in what was to be the final Impressionist exhibition. It was so unusual that most people and critics hated it and made fun of it. But a few immediately recognized the work's importance to the world of art. Today Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* is regarded as the greatest example of Pointillist art ever painted.

In March 1891, five years after creating his greatest masterpiece, Georges Seurat died suddenly of an unidentified illness. He was only 31 years old.
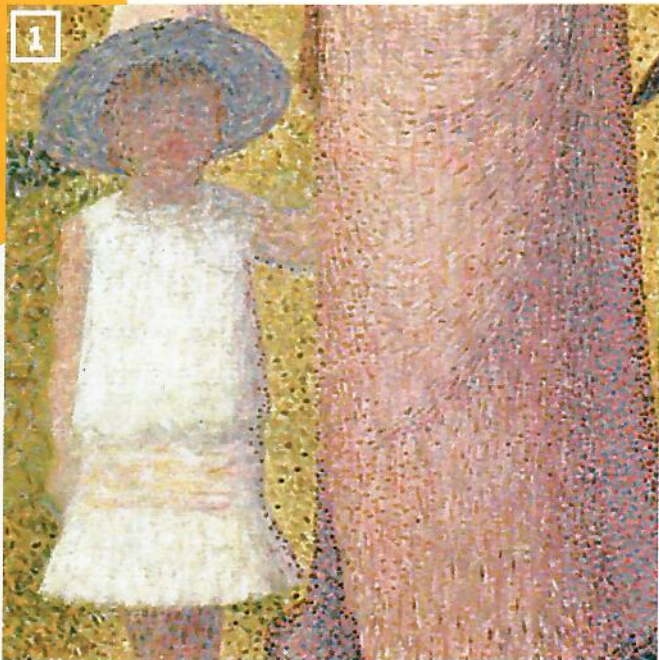
▲Seurat used primary colors to create the image of this little girl—the only figure in the composition who looks out at the viewer. The small marks he used are tints (the color plus white) of red, blue, and yellow. As you can see, many of the marks Seurat made were not dots. Here he uses dashes, tiny circles, and hatching. In many cases, these color marks follow the shape of the object; diagonals model the woman's dress; circular dashes define the girl's hat.

▲This detail—seen on the far right side of the painting—shows Seurat's use of complementary color pairs. The artist has used orange and blue to define the woman on the right. The orange of her face is heightened by the afterimages produced by adding blue dots. Blue dominates her hat, and is heightened by orange dashes. The addition of a few green dots (red's complement) causes the other woman's red hair to appear even brighter.
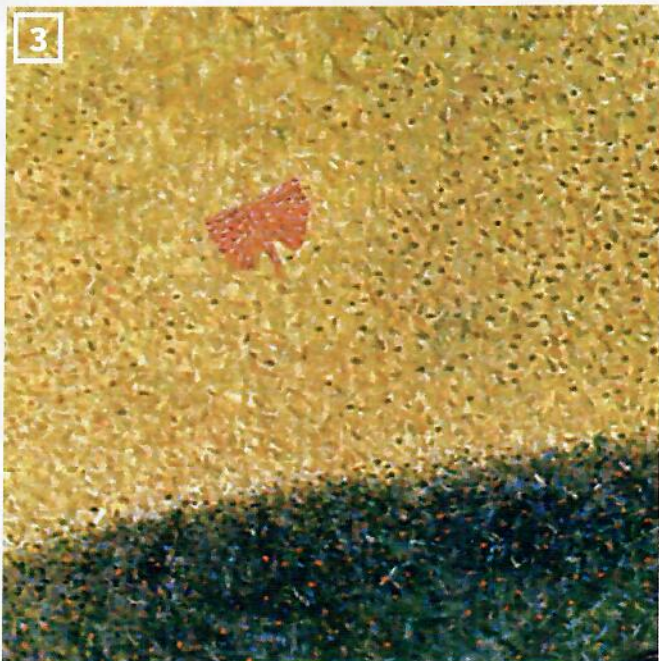
▲ The many color-temperature contrasts in *La Grande Jatte* intensify the feeling of a bright summer day. The sunlit grass is made up of related yellows, blues, and greens. A few complementary orange dots create afterimages, making the green appear even brighter. Cool related dark blues, greens, and purples form the shadowed areas. Seurat has added a few more red and orange dots at the edge of the shadow to increase the light/dark contrast.

▲ In this shadowed area, Seurat's colors are mainly related secondary shades (the color plus black). The woman's dress is made up of deep-purple vertical dashes with a few orange dots. Crosshatched strokes of related greens, blues, and purples fill the grassy areas. Short brushstrokes of red and green, blue and orange overlap to form the curves of the monkey's body and tail. From a distance, these colors mix optically to create glistening brown fur.

Georges Seurat

"Under a blazing mid-afternoon summer sky, we see the Seine flooded with sunshine . . . some people are strolling, others are sitting or stretched out lazily on the bluish grass."
—*Georges Seurat*
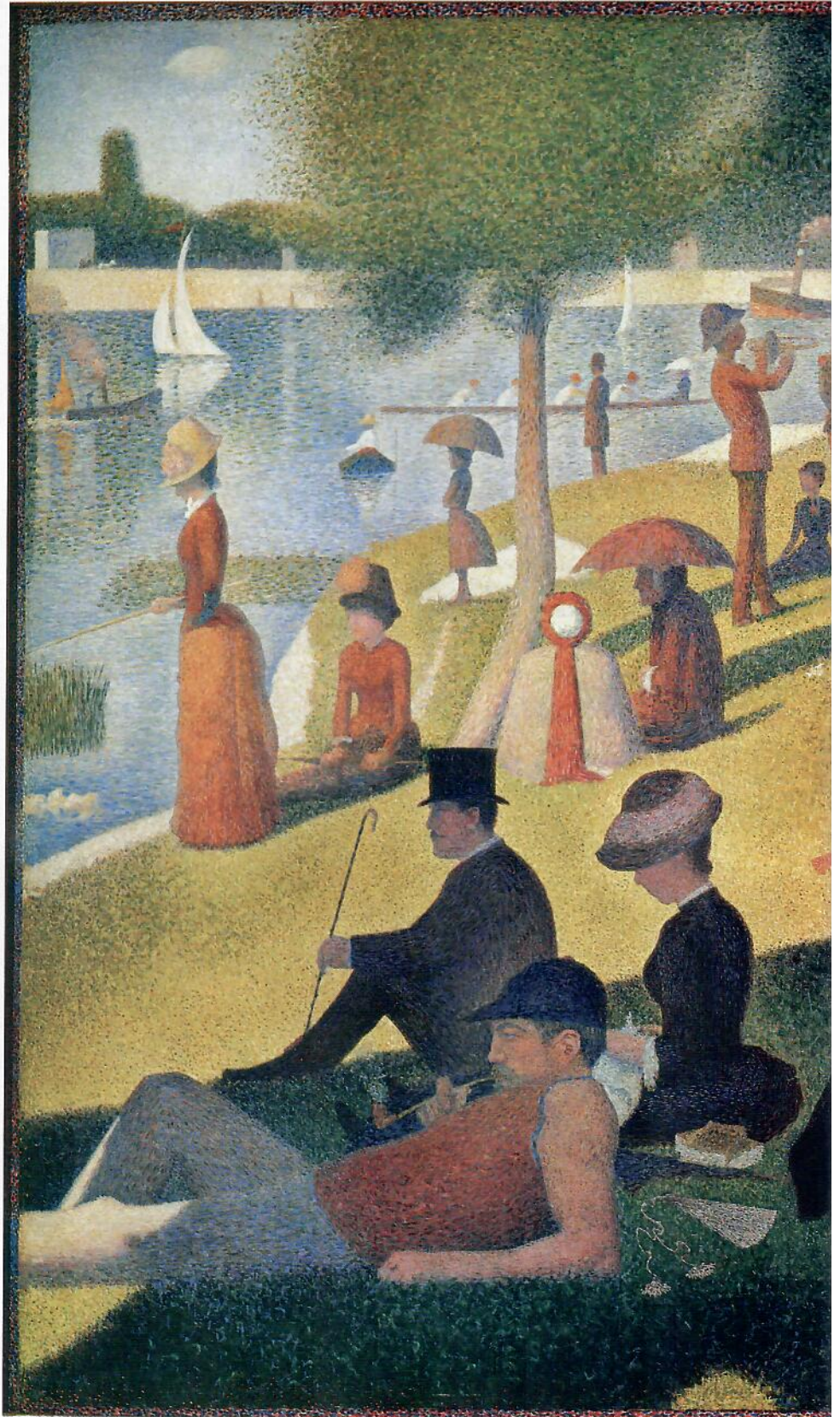
Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, 1884-1886.
Oil on canvas, 81 3/4 x 121 1/4 in. The Art Institute of Chicago.
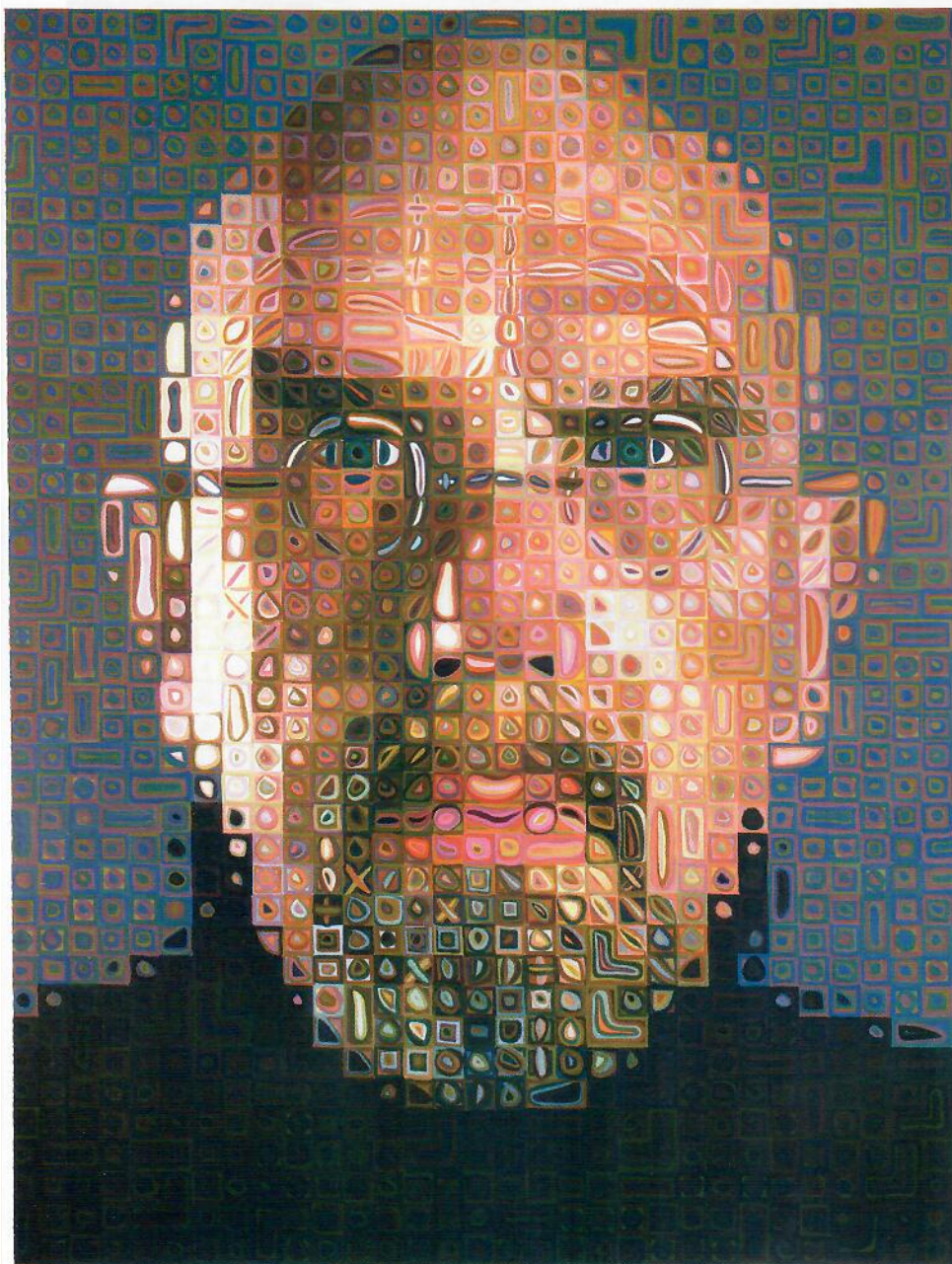Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

Sunday on La Grande Jatte

Portraits of the Artists

Three artists who have used strokes of color to paint their own images

"AT THE SAME TIME I'M FINDING THE COLOR WORLD I WANT, I'M ALSO USING EACH STROKE TO BUILD THE IMAGE."— CHUCK CLOSE

COMPLEMENTARY MARKS

Like Seurat, contemporary American artist Chuck Close uses small units of color to build his huge portraits. The large expressionless, closely cropped faces the artist has been painting for the past 40 years make a visual comment on today's celebrity culture. We see faces all around us every day—in the media, ads, photos, on billboards. We feel we know these faces, but they are really only images, not actual people.

To make this point, the artist paints only people he knows. But he depicts them in a very impersonal way. He works from small ID-type photos. And while Seurat built his images with color dots, Close uses a grid to divide his canvas into small squares. In this self-portrait (left), each square is a tiny abstract painting, and each contains a different color combination. Some of the squares are made up of **complementary pairs**, and in some, the colors are **related**. The highlights are **tints**; the shadows are **shades**. When we stand back from the painting, the colors blend to create an overall **complementary color scheme**—orange face, green background. And like the media images on which the artist models his work, the closer we get to this painting, the less human the image seems to become.

◀ Chuck Close (b. 1940), *Self Portrait*, 2004-2005. Oil on canvas, 8' 6" x 7' ½" Photo by: Kerry Ryan McFate/Courtesy PaceWildenstein. ©Chuck Close, courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York.

"I ENTERED THE WORLD WITH A PASSION FOR LINE AND COLOR."—MARY CASSATT

RELATED STROKES

At the same time that Georges Seurat was painting his most famous works, on the other side of the city of Paris, another artist was creating masterpieces of her own. And shockingly—at least during the mid-19th century—this Impressionist artist was not only American but a woman.

Born into a wealthy family in Philadelphia in 1844, Mary Cassatt began traveling while she was in her early 20s. She soon settled in Paris to paint. Cassatt's talent was so great that even though she was a woman and was not French, she was allowed to exhibit her work with that of the Impressionists. In this realistic self-portrait (right), the artist uses the **loose, sketchy brushstrokes** and **informal, asymmetrical composition** she learned from the Impressionists. The dark shape of the figure on the left of the composition is **balanced** by the **negative space** of the canvas on the right. Transparent watercolor washes done in **related** blue-greens, yellows, and oranges communicate the subject's strength, serenity, and determination.

▶ Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), *Self Portrait*, c. 1880. Watercolor on paper, 13 x 9 5/8 in. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Photo: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, NY.
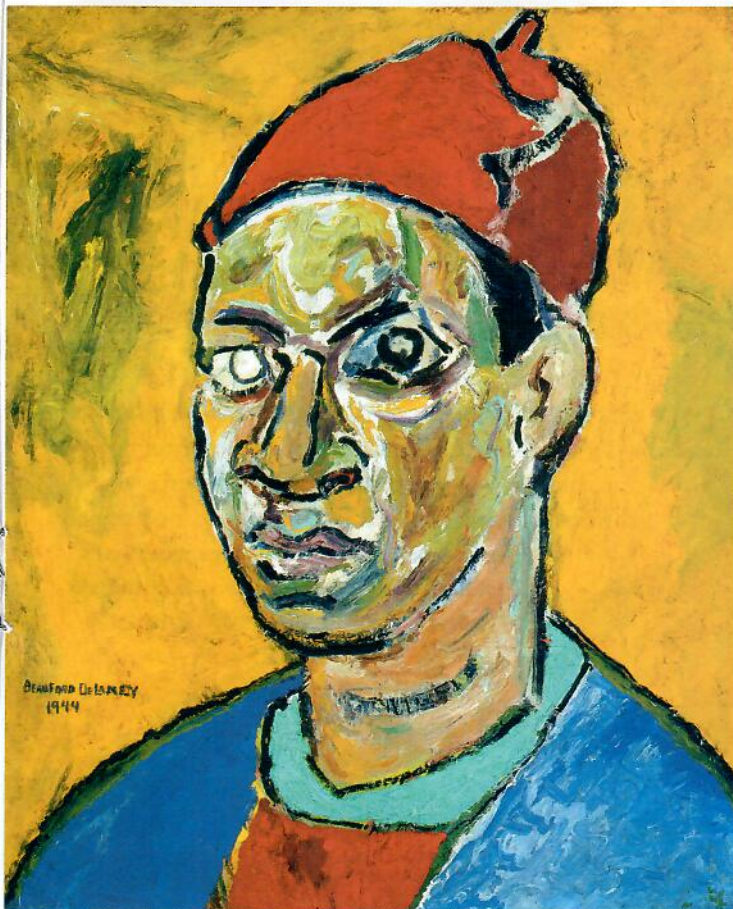
"I'M TRYING TO MERGE COLOR AND FORM INTO THE ESSENCE OF THINGS FELT AND REMEMBERED." —BEAUFORD DELANEY

PRIMARY FEELINGS

The difficulties faced by 20th-century African-American painter Beauford (BO-ferd) Delaney can be seen in this powerful self-portrait (left). Jobs were hard to find during America's Great Depression (1929 through the late 1930s), and Delaney had to earn his living working as a bellhop, telephone operator, doorman, caretaker, and janitor. His frustrations are expressed by his use of **flat, simplified shapes outlined** with thick black brushstrokes. The **bright, intense primary colors** Delaney has chosen—red, yellow, and blue—visually represent the strength of his feelings. By contrast, the artist has distorted the features of his face and painted them with thick, choppy brushstrokes of browns and greens. His painting style serves to draw the viewer into the work's **focal point**, the artist's eyes. Each eye is very different. The one on the right stares wildly outward. The other has been painted in white, perhaps to suggest the depth of the artist's inner struggles.

◀ Beauford Delaney (1901-1979), *Self Portrait*, 1944. Oil on canvas, 27 x 22 ½ in. Restricted gift of Alexander C. and Tillie S. Speyer Foundation; Samuel A. Marx Endowment, 1991.27. The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography ©The Art Institute of Chicago.

Balanced Colors

When 17-year-old Jessica Staubach first started to experiment with color, she had no idea what the painting she was working on would look like. " 'What is it,' people kept asking. From up close," the artist says, "it just looked like a bunch of colorful squiggles. It wasn't until I had finished the whole painting that people saw what I was doing."

Like Seurat's paintings, *Views of Landscape* (opposite page) takes advantage of the way our eyes see color. Jessica created this award-winning work as a ninth-grader at Mother of Mercy High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. Now a senior, Jessica hopes to pursue a career as a graphic designer.

How did you first get involved in art?

I always enjoyed art class, starting when I was in grade school. I like being creative. I'm not very good with words, and it's sometimes easier to express myself visually.

How did you come to create this award-winning piece?

It was an assignment for art class. We had to paint a scene from nature, and we had to use unnatural colors. So, if you were painting grass, it shouldn't be green!

How did you get your idea?

My painting is based on a snapshot from our family photo album—it's somewhere that our family visited, and I liked the feeling. In the photo you can see a strip of grass and a river, a row of trees off in the distance, and then the sky. I liked how the image was divided into different bands of color.

How did you go about creating your composition?

I started by drawing the outlines of the different forms on a sheet of white paper. The first thing I drew was the horizon line, which separated the composition into different sections. I didn't try to draw trees or anything but just made a bunch of abstract shapes. I did a rough overall pencil drawing, just to figure out the arrangement of the shapes.

Then I picked the colors I wanted to use. None of the colors came directly from the tube; I mixed them on the palette. When I did the sky, I started with one shade of blue and kept adding variations so that it wouldn't look flat. I made lighter blues by adding white— darker blues by adding just a little bit of black. For the row of trees in back, I used warm oranges and yellows. I wanted to use almost the opposite of green, which is the color you usually expect trees to be. Then I added some dabs of green to heighten that contrast.

I continued adding layers of color until the page was full. I kept stepping back to see what colors needed to be where so that everything would look balanced. If there was white on one side, I made sure there was also a dab of white on the other side. Your eyes keep moving around the image, but they are drawn to the area with the complementary colors orange and blue.

How did you decide on your colors?

I picked colors that I liked, such as related blues, greens, and purples. I used a lot of cool colors in this work because I think they make people feel calm and peaceful. Instead of trying to paint a realistic outdoor scene, I wanted to focus on how all the colors looked next to each other. If you stand up close to this painting, all you can see is a bunch of colors and scribbles that don't really seem to make sense. But when you step back even a little bit, the image starts to look like a landscape.
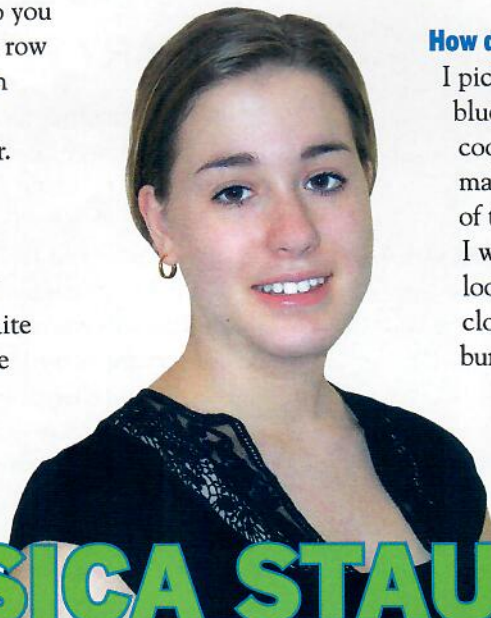
JESSICA STAUBACH

"If you stand up close to this painting, all you can see is a bunch of colors and scribbles. . . .But when you step back, the image starts to look like a landscape."

What was your biggest challenge in creating this work?

Mixing new colors to match ones that I had already used was a challenge. I wanted some colors to blend in and others to contrast, so that areas seem to pop and lead the viewer's eye around the composition.

Were you satisfied when you were done?

I felt happy about my painting, and I thought it looked good. Some of my classmates made their paintings very realistic, with lots of details. But I wanted mine to be different. Many people used recognizable shapes, but my shapes are more abstract. I wanted to start with a bunch of colorful squiggles and choppy lines that the viewer can gradually recognize as a sunny summer landscape.

Do you have any advice for aspiring artists like yourself?

Don't give up. Even though you might not think your piece looks good, keep going and follow through on your idea. At first I didn't know if my painting was going to look like anything. I was kind of concerned that people might not realize what it was because I used such strange colors and didn't paint any details. From up close, it looks so different. Some people could tell what it is without the title, but I'm not sure everyone could.

Elliot Riggen
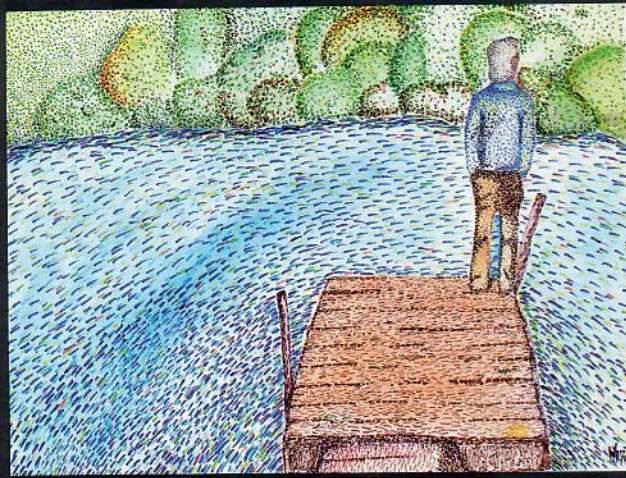
Michael DuBois

Madison K. Johnson

▲ **Elliot has divided his landscape into three horizontal bands. Reddish tree trunks in back intensify the surrounding complementary green washes. In front, dashes of green grass are heightened by complementary red dots set in between.**

▲ **A variety of short thick marks as well as a high, tightly cropped point of view add to the visual power of Michael's work. The blue dashes, intensified by a few complementary orange dots, seem to follow the flow of the water and emphasize the dock and the figure.**

▲ **Here, Madison has used tiny, uniform dots of color throughout. The color is controlled by the spaces between the dots—so few in some areas that you**

SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

Working with Color

Use Seurat's color theory to turn a familiar scene into a pointillist image

MATERIALS

- 18 x24 in. 80lb. White sulfite paper
- 3H pencil
- Drawing board or painting board
- Hand-held pencil sharpener
- Vinyl or kneaded eraser
- Viewfinder
- Variety of water-based markers with different tips (chiseled, pointed, broad, and fine)
- Paper toweling, tissue (non-lotion type) or toilet paper
- 3/4 in. Masking tape or blue painters tape
- Containers for water
- Large watercolor brush, No. 10 or 12
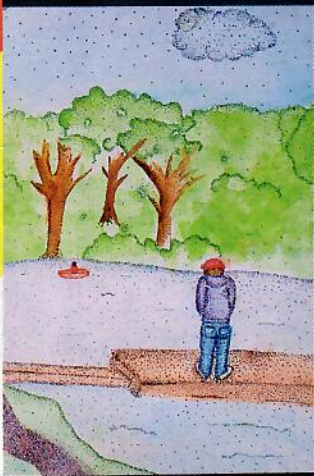- Digital camera
- Gallon Zip Lock bag

Y ou've seen how Georges Seurat used tiny marks —dots, dashes, circles—of pure color to create landscapes that almost seem to glow when viewed from a distance. In this workshop, you'll use Seurat's color techniques to create your own pointillist landscape.
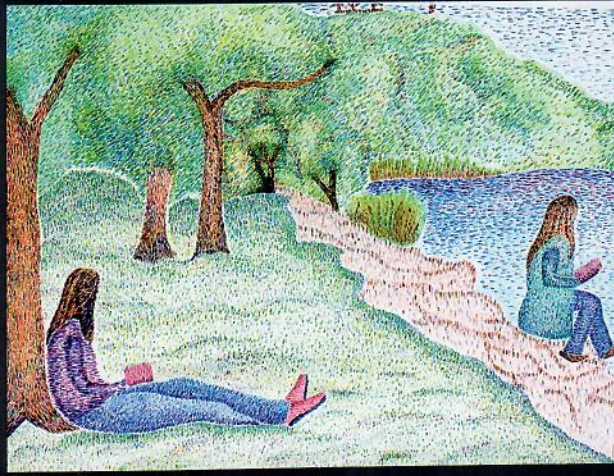
STEP 1 PLANNING YOUR COMPOSITION

Select two outdoor scenes you would like to represent. As you do, think about how Seurat worked with people and objects to make his landscapes visually interesting. If your composition is set up in three bands, what will go in the foreground, middle ground, and background? If it is asymmetrical (different on each side), how will you use people and objects to visually balance your piece?

Begin to lightly sketch each landscape on 18 x 24 in. paper taped to a drawing board. Sketch the scene, people, and objects using silhouettes and simple shapes. Use classmates and park visitors as models, but don't add details (faces, clothing, etc.). You'll use color marks later to suggest details and features. Include contours where you want to show highlights and shadows. You can use a viewfinder to help with proportion, scale, and in planning your overall composition. As you draw, don't forget to use diminishing

Chitra R. Patel

Tyler Horner

can barely see them, many more in other areas. The dots clumped at the edges of shapes add to the work's flat, stagelike quality.
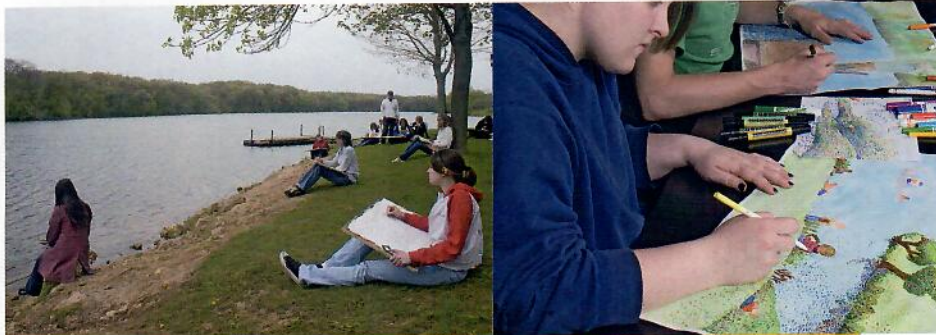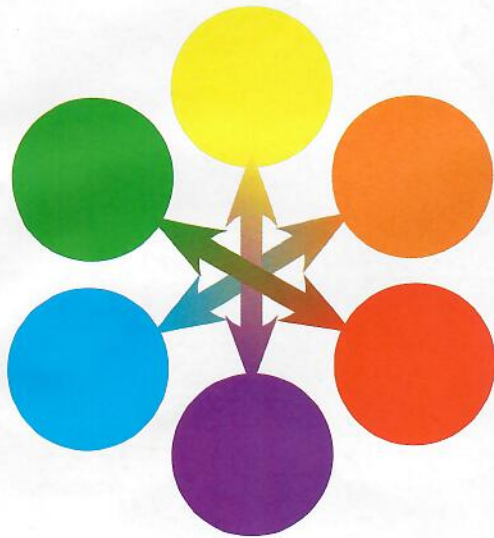
▲ Thin horizontal, vertical, and diagonal dashes done in cool, related blues, greens, and purples dominate this landscape. The figures on each side of the diagonal shape in the center serve to visually balance Chitra's calm, peaceful scene.

▲ Everything appears to be moving in Tyler's dynamic landscape. The closely placed blue dashes that make up the water seem to swirl in every direction. Added red and green dots increase the intensity of the blue. All the angular, pointed shapes in this work add to the wildness of the setting.

HELPFUL HINTS:
- To create an interesting composition you may wish to move or change landscape elements.
- Remember, once drawn, marker lines cannot be removed/covered.

- Try to avoid overlapping marks. Water-based markers do not mix well. Most colors applied on top of one another result in brown. Overlapping the same color will make the color darker.

scale (for people, trees, etc.) to increase the sense of depth. Then, take a digital photo of your two scenes to use as reference for color, light, and shadows as you continue to work.

STEP 2 CREATING YOUR LANDSCAPE

Choose your best composition and tape it to the board. Using a clean brush dipped in water, lightly wet an area or shape in your drawing. To create an underpainting, use a *light* watercolor wash to cover the wet white paper in that area/shape and let dry. Repeat this wet-on-wet technique for each area/shape continuing to use *very light* watercolor shades that will support your landscape's color schemes (light green for grass, light brown for trees, etc.). Blot excess water with paper towel or tissue.

When the watercolor wash is dry, carefully remove the painting from the board. Choose the watercolor markers

you want to use. The color wheel on this page will help you select your colors. Remember, Seurat used related warm colors (yellow, orange, red) in sunlit areas and related cool colors (blue/green/purple) in shadowed areas.

On the landscape you didn't choose, experiment with different marker tips. To create rippling water, use curvy marks and thick horizontal dashes. For grass and trees, use straight and vertical marks. Use larger dots to create foreground details, smaller ones for background forms. Experiment with complementary color pairs (opposites on the color wheel) to brighten an area and create drama.

Then, apply one color and pattern at a time in each area/shape of your selected landscape. Don't overlap colors; limit the number of colors in an area for unity. As you work, step back often to check if your colors are working together to create the desired optical effect.

Colorful Characters

In what ways have artists used color to depict the human face?

One of the most important of the elements of design is color. And, one of the most popular subjects in the history of art has always been the human face. In this puzzle, the two have been combined to show you just a few of the many ways artists use color.

Below are details of some of the paintings that are featured in this issue, along with a list of styles, descriptions, titles, and artists' names. Next to each word or phrase write the letter of the image (or images) that you feel is most appropriate.

____ **1.** Traditional studio portrait

____ **2.** Georges Seurat

____ **3.** Chuck Close

____ **4.** Watercolor washes

____ **5.** Complementary color pairs

____ **6.** Self portrait

____ **7.** Three primary colors

____ **8.** *The Bathers*

____ **9.** Pointillism

____ **10.** Mary Cassatt

____ **11.** Tiny abstract paintings

____ **12.** Color tints

____ **13.** Beauford Delaney

____ **14.** Impressionist portrait

____ **15.** Related colors

____ **16.** A richer red

____ **17.** Loose, sketchy strokes

____ **18.** Small color units

____ **19.** *La Grande Jatte*

____ **20.** Painted using French Academy rules