

Pippin Tour for Students, Grades 3 - 6

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

As part of its collection, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts holds nine original paintings by the renowned self-taught African-American artist Horace Pippin (1888-1946.)

This venerable establishment has long admired Pippin's work. As the nation's oldest museum and art school, the Academy publicly recognized Pippin in 1943 by inviting him to show his work at their annual exhibition and then awarding him a purchase prize of six hundred dollars, an unprecedented honor for an unschooled artist.

The Collection:

Pink Cyclamen (1941)

Giant Daffodils (1940)

The Warped Table (1940)

West Chester Court House (1940)

Abe Lincoln, the Good Samaritan (1943)

Maple Sugaring (1941)

Fishing in the Brandywine, Early Fall (1932)

The Elk (1945)

John Brown Going to His Hanging (1942)

Several of the paintings in this collection are very tiny. What could have been a contributing reason for this?

Pippin had suffered a severe injury to his shoulder during the war and consequently always painted supporting his right arm with his left hand.

Pink Cyclamen (1941)

During the 1940's Horace Pippin painted over two dozen floral still lifes. He had an intense love of gardening and would often be seen in the West Chester neighborhood in which he lived, discussing garden design and exchanging tips with local people. He kept potted plants and freshly cut flowers in his home. These factors are thought to be the main inspiration behind his floral works.

How does Pippin make the pink color of the cyclamen "pop- out?"

Look at the tones of gray he has used, he gradually fades light into dark to create the greatest contrast right behind the pink of the flowers.

Do you think it is successful?

What other colors might he have used as a background.

Giant Daffodils (1940)



This powerful little composition is interesting because of its distortion of scale. The daffodils appear so large while the dog in the foreground seems small by comparison.

Is the fence scaled to the daffodils or to the dog?

Why do you think he painted them so large?

Do you think this painting looks more like a "still life" or a "landscape"?

What is the reason for your answer?

There is a foreground, a middle ground and a background to this painting.

Describe what is in each section.

The Warped Table (1940)

This painting is very simplistic in its rendition. It is a traditional "still life" with fruit set upon a table. The table appears very out of proportion and unsteady, hence the title "warped."

What does warped mean?

Name the fruit on the table. 2 apples, 2 pears, (not easy to distinguish from one another)

3 bananas, a lemon, and a melon.

The pears appear cracked. What is causing this? (layers of paint/ varnish cracking)

West Chester Court House (1940)



Known as the "Athens of Pennsylvania", West Chester boasts many beautiful structures built in the "Greek Revival" style, one of which was the Courthouse. Pippin was reportedly seen creating this painting by several local townspeople including a young newspaper boy named Sam Riccardo. Riccardo is convinced that the young boy throwing a newspaper in the bottom right corner of the composition is in fact himself, since he was the only black skinned newspaper boy employed by the newspaper at that time. West Chester Courthouse remains the same today and one can even recognize the trees, (obviously much larger sixty plus years later) and the statue "Old Glory" featured in the center of the painting is a memorial to

marines, soldiers and sailors who served in World War 1, a topic very close to Pippin's heart as we know from many of his paintings. He is remembered for stating, "Fighting in World War 1 brought out all the art in me."

It is thought that this painting was done to commemorate a national holiday of some sort since there are so many flags flying.

Maple Sugaring (1941)



This small but charming painting is a wonderful example of a technique called "pyrography," which was popular at the time. Pyrography involved using special wood burning tools to create wood panels, which would create a textured surface upon which to paint. Pippin however maintained that his use of a hot poker to do this was original and not influenced by others.

Biographers Selden Rodman and Carole Cleaver in their book, "Horace Pippin: The Artist as a Black American, (1972) describe the technique in more detail; "Holding the handle as firmly as he could in his stiff right hand, and balancing the rod on his knee, he took the extra leaf from the golden oak table and with his agile left hand maneuvered the panel against the smoking iron tip."

Look closely at this painting and you will see the lines left by the poker, in some places the marking although fine is quite deep.

Look at the fine detail of the lines of the tree bark and remembering how Pippin had to hold his brush. Consider how steadily he must have supported his hand! Try this technique next time you draw or paint!

Abe Lincoln, the Good Samaritan (1943)



Pippin painted several portraits, these were always of people he loved or admired. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, (1861-1865) was someone he admired enormously and considered a hero because of his democratic work for the emancipation of slaves, issues very close to Pippin's heart. The Emancipation Proclamation, (Sept. 24th, 1862), proclaimed the lawful enforcement of freedom for all African Americans.

In this snowy scene, Lincoln is seen offering a friendly hand to a young person chopping wood. Pippin created this painting in order to portray President Lincoln as a kind and caring humanitarian.

See how Pippin has used a limited palette of colors to create a scene, which feels, cold and windy. Yet, despite the weather the painting has a great feeling of warmth and compassion.

How does Pippin use gesture and body posture to show this?

If you were to paint a picture of someone you admire, who would it be and why?

Fishing in the Brandywine (1932)

Pippin loved the outdoors many of his paintings reflect this, as does this one, painted of a local scene, a creek in southeastern Pennsylvania.

How can we tell what time of year this is?

Pippin has included something we often see in other works, what is it? (the black and white dog.)

The Elk (1945)

Pippin has included the exact day as well as the date in this painting, Aug. 26 1945.

We know that Pippin had a great love and respect of the outdoors. His fascination with trees is apparent in his paintings. This one shows an enormous Elk (this painting is also known as "the Moose") standing resolutely in the center of the picture. In his self taught style Pippin tries to show distance by the placement of a leafless tree to the right of the painting. His treatment of clouds is somewhat simplistic with their ballooning, bulbous effect: they frame the elk's head and antlers giving them even more prominence.

What words could you use to describe the elk? (large, strong, proud etc.)

Look at the broken tree; do you think the Elk had something to do with this?

John Brown Going to His Hanging (1942)



As we know, Pippin painted people he loved and admired. Amongst these was John Brown, the militant abolitionist who inspired African American slaves to rebel against their masters and to fight for freedom.

The Battle of Harpers Ferry, Oct. 16th 1859, (an attempt by Brown to seize the federal arsenal) ensued but John Brown and others were imprisoned and he was put on trial, found guilty of treason, and sentenced to "death by hanging."

This well-known piece depicts the scene around Brown's journey to his death. Pippin's mother Harriet witnessing this somber event described the scene and atmosphere in detail to her son and it is upon this first hand information that Pippin based his painting. The woman in the lower right hand corner of the painting is believed to be Pippin's mother herself.

How has Pippin used color to portray the mood of this event?

Most people are painted looking towards the horse and carriage but a few are painting looking towards us. What expressions do you see on their faces?

How do you think they felt?

How do you think Horace Pippin and his mother felt?

If you were to portray a person from history who would it be and why?

References:

Judith E. Stein *I Tell My Heart, The Art of Horace Pippin*,
Universe Publishing, New York, NY (1993)

Selden Rodman and Carole Cleaver *Horace Pippin: The Artist as a Black
American* Doubleday Publishing (1972)

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