Looking to Connect with European Paintings

Visual Approaches for Teaching in the Galleries

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On the cover, from left to right, details of: Claude Monet, *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench* (2002.62.1); Caspar David Friedrich, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (2000.51); Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Harvesters* (19.164); Hans Memling, *Maria Portinari* (14.40.627); as previously, *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench*, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, *The Harvesters*, *Maria Portinari*

Contents

4 **Introduction**
5 **Developments in European Painting, ca. 1250–1900**
10 **Visual Themes**

12 Introduction
15 Hans Memling, *Tommaso di Folco Portinari* and *Maria Portinari*
18 Willem Claesz Heda, *Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware*
21 Eduard Gaertner, *Parochialstrasse in Berlin*
24 Jacques Louis David, *Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier and His Wife*
27 Rembrandt, *Man in Oriental Costume*
30 Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *Allegory of the Planets and Continents*

34 Introduction
38 Giovanni di Paolo, *Madonna and Child with Saints*
41 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Esther before Ahasuerus*
44 Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils*
47 Georges Seurat, *Gray Weather, Grande Jatte*
50 Édouard Manet, *Boating*

54 Introduction
57 Nicolas Poussin, *The Abduction of the Sabine Women*
60 Pieter Bruegel, *The Harvesters*
63 Biagio d'Antonio, *The Story of Joseph*
66 El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*
69 Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Whalers*

73 Introduction
77 Jacopo Bassano, *The Baptism of Christ*
80 Georges de La Tour, *The Penitent Magdalen*
83 Johannes Vermeer, *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*
86 Claude Monet, *Camille Monet on a Garden Bench*
89 Caspar David Friedrich, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*

92 **The Metropolitan Museum of Art Gallery Teaching Goals**
93 **Notes to Terms Used in This Publication**

Introduction

Purpose

Intended as a tool for those who teach adults, focusing on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of European Paintings (ca. 1250–1900), this resource will help users to:

- focus on visual aspects of paintings;
- look at the collection from new perspectives;
- find connections between European paintings and other regions and periods of art;
- develop their own thematic pathways; and
- use pedagogical best practices, informed by the Museum's Gallery Teaching Goals (page 92).

This resource presents four themes—Illusion, Borders, Movement, and Illumination—that invite you to step away from a chronological narrative of painting's history and focus on visual aspects of painting that have engaged artists for centuries. The introduction to each section explores multiple facets of a particular theme and the various challenges they present. The diversity of the artists' approaches to these challenges is demonstrated in five to six paintings related to each theme. While the introductions are suggestive and broad, the individual painting entries offer concrete ideas about form, technique, and meaning.

By engaging the visual qualities of painting, you may find common threads among painters' methods or consider the differences between artists' approaches to their work. You might also find ways to relate the paintings to contemporary experience, to other objects in the Museum's collection, and to broader historical contexts. "Developments in European Painting, ca. 1250–1900" (page 5) presents an overview of some major changes and will help you frame these kinds of connections.

By starting with a painting's visual qualities, we are immediately engaged with the object before us. Weaving together meaning, function, or context with this primary act of looking allows us to trust our own observations, and see art history embodied in the object.

How to Use This Publication

The thematic sections and related painting entries are not sequential; you may read them in any order. You can navigate this resource according to your interests and needs:

- Use the links in the table of contents to advance to any section or work of art.
- Use the "Contents" and other links at the bottom of any page to go to those sections.
- Link from the title of a painting to its page in the Museum's online Collections section (which includes full catalogue entries and bibliographies).
- Use links within the text to access notes to specific terms (page 93), and additional related resources.
- To maximize navigation in this PDF, we recommend that you configure your toolbar in Adobe Acrobat or Preview (for Mac) to show page navigation tools. This will allow you to use "back" and "forward" buttons, for example.

Developments in European Painting ca. 1250–1900

Interdependent and concurrent, the major developments described below are aspects of European painting that changed significantly during the time period represented in the Metropolitan Museum's collection. This section provides a broad overview of some major art historical themes to help you consider how the formal elements of a painting are connected to its art historical context.

The Status of Painting

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the earliest period represented in the Met's European Paintings collection, painting was considered a craft: mechanical work that did not require intellect. Created mainly for Christian devotion, paintings primarily featured religious subjects, and their function was mostly didactic. During the Renaissance (broadly defined chronologically as 1400 to 1600), influential writers and artists argued that painting was a noble profession, and that it rivaled poetry in its ability to describe nature and beauty. This kind of comparison helped elevate the status of painting to a liberal art, a pursuit that *did* require intellect. With this change, people began to consider a painting's artistic merit as valuable as the physical materials used to create the work (gold, jewels, or expensive pigments, for instance). As artists began to seek new sources for their work from classical antiquity, subject matter broadened well beyond religion to encompass mythological and literary subjects as well as historical events (history painting). Painting's purposes also expanded as it began to express patrons' personal identity, power, wealth, and status.

The Identity of the Artist

With the elevation of painting to a fine art, the painter's identity and status also changed. It became possible for an artist to distinguish himself as an autonomous professional with the ability to attain fame and very high social position. Artists exercised more autonomy over the subject and execution of their work, and asserted their personal styles more emphatically. While signatures are rare in very early religious works, from the fifteenth century onward painters signed their work with more frequency, as a declaration of pride or a mark of approval (if a workshop was involved). Some painters used discreet locations to sign their work, and others found clever ways of inserting their names (for example, Petrus Christus, Carlo Crivelli, and Hans Holbein). Others (such as Rembrandt or Claude Monet) signed their work more prominently, without any illusionistic pretense.

The Role of the Patron

A painter who had gained prominence and status was more free to follow his or her imagination, which raised the bar for all painters; technical skill was always important, but patrons and critics also increasingly valued painters' creativity and inventiveness. Painters in the medieval and Renaissance periods were organized into guilds that controlled their production, but beginning in the late sixteenth century, academies supported and promoted artists' activities, provided training, and established artistic standards. Some of these academies were founded by artists, while others were established through the patronage of a monarch or ruler. In some ways, academies could be as restrictive as the guilds once were, and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many painters rebelled against their academies, further asserting their ever-growing independence.

Even in the thirteenth century, painting was inextricably linked to patronage. Churches commissioned religious subjects as didactic tools for worship, and private donors paid for altarpieces and other devotional works to help ensure the salvation of their eternal souls. As the status of painting changed, so did the nature of patronage and its influence. Patronage outside the church provided the impetus and venue for new and different subjects. Persuaded of the nobility of painting and its ability to confer honor, Renaissance patrons began to ask for works that held personal meaning, such as portraits, or painted domestic objects like birth trays. With the rise of a wealthy merchant class in Europe, the patrons and their demands became increasingly varied and influenced both styles and genres. At the same time, in the mid-sixteenth century, the Reformation (and subsequently, the Counter-Reformation) changed the nature and prevalence of religious art substantially. Wars and upheavals during this period affected patronage and, by extension, artists. Courts throughout Europe had cultivated painters for centuries; when revolutions swept the continent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, disrupting and overthrowing the monarchies, they changed the use and imagery of painting. Subject matter shifted from the glorification of monarchies and triumphant battles to depictions of the common man and the tragedies of war. A new kind of change—the Industrial Revolution—began to sweep Europe in the nineteenth century and fundamentally transformed the subjects, materials, centers, and markets for art.

The Emergence of New Genres

All of the changes described above helped foster the development of new kinds of painting, which are prominent in the European Paintings galleries at the Metropolitan Museum:

PORTRAITS during the medieval period were a means for displaying one's patronage and piety within the larger framework of altarpieces and frescoes. In northern Europe during the fifteenth century, portraits began to appear within devotional paintings, and sometimes as the wings of triptychs. With a growing interest in humanism, a desire to preserve one's likeness for posterity gave rise to secular, independent portraits. Early on they depicted little more than the sitter's head, but in the sixteenth century they expanded to larger, bust-length portraits, and eventually, grand full-length representations. England had a particularly strong portraiture tradition, beginning with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Artists also painted themselves: from the early fifteenth century, painters produced self-portraits, sometimes as studies but often as presentation paintings—proof of their skills for potential patrons. These self-portraits soon became prized by collectors, a fact that further attests to the rising status of the painter.

LANDSCAPE, like portraiture, also had its roots in religious paintings but eventually developed into a subject matter in its own right. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an increasingly large Protestant population in northern Europe sought landscapes without any religious pretext to adorn their homes. For the next century, however, many still thought of landscape as an inferior subject for painting, relative to history painting. In the seventeenth century, artists inspired by classical antiquity and travel to Italy began to paint idealized landscapes that captured the imagination as views of Arcadia, a legendary, utopian place of beauty. While nature was always a source of inspiration, in the late eighteenth century, artists and critics began to insist that painting studies outdoors, directly from nature, was critical for landscape painters. Large, finished landscapes were still made in the studio; however, by the late nineteenth century, artists painted full-scale landscapes entirely outside. In addition, plein-air paintings created as studies soon gained acceptance as finished works by both artists and the public (Claude Monet's *La Grenouillère*, for example). Eventually the landscape became a mode of expression for many artists (such as Vincent van Gogh), not just a source of visual inspiration.

STILL-LIFE AND GENRE PAINTING also emerged between 1250 and 1900. The production of religious images changed substantially with the Protestant Reformation, which marked the beginning of a general decline of Christian imagery in painting. The development of still life in northern Europe, especially in the Netherlands, reflects a growing societal emphasis on products of trade and commerce, which became part of everyday life. Collectors wanted images for their homes that reflected their lives and possessions. Still-life painting also gained popularity in southern Europe, where artists drew inspiration from statuary and motifs from classical antiquity as well. Genre paintings, depictions of everyday life, are closely connected to still life and its origins, and also became popular throughout Europe. These paintings offered subjects for amusement or entertaining scenes with moral undertones (such as in Frans Hals's *Young Man and Woman in an Inn*), and later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they even incorporated elements of social critique.

The Role of Painting Materials and Techniques

The appearance of the paintings we see in the galleries is inextricably linked to artists' materials and processes. The relationship between painting and process is a dialogue. Paint can be a vehicle for artists' imaginations; at the same time, its material properties can become a catalyst for new approaches. For this reason, it can be misleading to generalize about developments in painting technique over the centuries. Certain common practices changed with time and according to region—the use of preparatory drawings, methods for mixing colors, and some specialized ways of applying paint, for example. Yet each painter's working process varied, even from his or her contemporaries. "There are no rules in Painting," Goya insisted. We cannot take his words literally, yet the diversity of the Museum's European Paintings collection exemplifies the spirit of his statement.

Before even picking up a brush, the painter chooses what kind of support to use. The material qualities of the support (its texture, for example) can affect the appearance of the painting, but painters can also control this, and may choose a certain support for practical rather than aesthetic reasons. For example, Bronzino and Jacques Louis David both achieved very smooth surfaces, yet Bronzino painted on wood panel, while David created his "polished" surface on canvas. In contrast to David, some painters chose to incorporate the canvas's natural texture as part of the painting. Titian, for example, began to work "with" the visible weave of the canvas.

The painting medium, its consistency, and application are equally important to the painter in achieving a desired result. Painters in the fifteenth century were very aware of the practical and aesthetic uses of both egg and oil binders for painting; many early Renaissance artists actually incorporate both tempera and oil paint in their work (for example, Antonello da Messina and Fra Carnevale). The appearance of the paint relies greatly on how the artist applied it. Looking closely at the Christ child in works by Cosimo Roselli and Filippino Lippi, both painted with tempera, we see that each artist approached modeling, tone, and texture differently (note in particular the skin tones and hair of Christ). The use of oil as a binder and the development of oil techniques were certainly highly important; at the same time, artists used oil paint in many different ways. For example, Giovanni Bellini explored the possibilities of applying oil paint in glazes to achieve a greater tonal range than he previously did with tempera; Titian learned Bellini's technique but later chose to use a much thicker application with looser, visible brushstrokes. The intention and effect of similar techniques also can vary. Like Bellini, Hans Memling also painted with oil in glazes, yet created a more luminous surface, with sharper contours and details. Rembrandt's impasto technique evokes the weight and material substance of a metal chain (*Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*), while that of Van Gogh creates movement in the landscape (*Wheat Field with Cypresses*).

Until the nineteenth century it is difficult to isolate any single turning point or invention regarding painting materials and techniques, but the advent of manufacturing certainly had an impact on painting. With the Industrial Revolution, synthetic pigments were developed that offered new colors and cheaper alternatives for traditional organic and mineral pigments (ultramarine blue is a notable example). Perhaps most significant, the collapsible metal paint tube was invented in 1841. This made it much easier for painters to store and transport their paints, contributing to the popularity of painting outdoors in the nineteenth century.

Physical Changes in Paintings

The life of a painting continues long after the artist's final touch. Changes, either intentional or accidental, occur over time. Some works have been painted over (by the artist or a later hand), cut down to fit a different space, or divided into pieces that were subsequently separated from each other. Sometimes aging or environmental conditions change a painting's appearance. Colors and values can shift as pigments change over time; dark pigments, for example, sometimes become darker with age. Layers of paint that have become transparent with age may reveal how a painter altered something during the painting process (see Hans Memling's portraits of Tommaso di Folco Portinari and Maria Portinari, Illusion 1, page 15).

As viewers, we are not often aware of these kinds of changes, and, in most cases within the Museum's collection, they do not significantly alter our understanding of a painting. Conservators work to preserve the paintings and ensure we experience them as closely as possible to the original intent of the artist. In certain cases, information that conservators are able to bring to light (underdrawings, for example) provides important insight into an artist's intention or working method, and may even help identify the artist or workshop who made the painting. Sometimes changes that we are able to see, either with the naked eye or with the help of scientific examination, can add another dimension to how we approach the painting. In this sense, discussing alterations or techniques may add meaning to our experience of the work (Artemisia Gentileschi's *Esther before Ahasuerus*, Borders 2, page 41).

Visual Themes

What is constant is art's concern with itself, the interests painters have in questioning their operation.

—Leo Steinberg

ILLUSION, **BORDERS**, **MOVEMENT**, and **ILLUMINATION** address elements of painting that persistently engaged artists during the mid-thirteenth through nineteenth centuries. Each theme:

- is rooted in visual aspects of the paintings;
- is particularly important to the artistic traditions of European painting;
- is applicable across all the geographic areas and chronological span of the Metropolitan Museum's European Paintings collection;
- bridges form, meaning, and technique; and
- offers relevant connections to other collection areas.

You can look at virtually any painting in the collection from multiple perspectives. As you consider a particular theme you may find that different paintings come to mind, or you might examine a featured painting through the lens of another theme to see new visual solutions at work. The featured paintings in this publication are not illustrations to the themes; instead, the themes are intended to help you look more closely at the paintings. Neither exhaustive nor definitive, the themes can serve as entry points for looking, as the focus for entire discussions, or as points of departure and connection to other works. Most important, the themes and their examples are meant to engage you, stimulate conversation, and help generate your own connections and ideas about painting.

Illusion

Illusions offer us ways to escape from our everyday lives, whether for a moment or a sustained amount of time. We experience a certain kind of illusion when we watch a film or play. How do painters persuade us to participate in their illusions? Throughout the history of western art, viewers have delighted in the visual game that illusion provides; we perceive something as "real" while simultaneously, on some level, remaining aware that it is not. In painting, artists can play with illusion to engage our senses, to draw us into the world depicted. Painted illusions can be spatial, in which objects appear three-dimensional, either projecting forward from the painting or receding away from us by means of foreshortening and perspective. Illusions may involve paint "transforming" into another material, such as gold or a hard reflective surface. An illusion may also create a sense of verisimilitude, so that we perceive a painted representation almost as if it were a physical object (trompe l'oeil). Some illusions attempt to activate senses other than sight by evoking textures, temperatures, or weight, for example—nonvisual properties that are more strongly felt than seen.

Paintings featured in this section

1 **Tommaso di Folco Portinari (1428–1501)** and **Maria Portinari (Maria Maddalena Baroncelli, born 1456)**
Hans Memling

2 **Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware**
Willem Claesz Heda

3 **Parochialstrasse in Berlin**
Eduard Gaertner

4 **Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and His Wife (Marie-Anne-Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836)**
Jacques Louis David

5 **Man in Oriental Costume ("The Noble Slav")**
Rembrandt (Rembrandt van Rijn)

6 **Allegory of the Planets and Continents**
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

Illusion / Introduction

Illusion exists in many artistic traditions and time periods dating back to antiquity. For European artists, sources from the classical past (ancient Greek and Roman) inspired their use of illusion. The majority of paintings from these earlier civilizations have perished (and what remains has been discovered relatively recently), yet ancient texts recounting painted illusions continue to make these accessible to us. In fact, these texts were known and read since the early Renaissance. Authors like the Roman statesman and scholar Pliny the Elder (23–79 A.D.) wrote lively descriptions of paintings that were so lifelike that they fooled the most discerning eyes. He wrote of birds that alighted on painted grapes and attempted to eat them, a painting of a curtain that someone attempted to pull back, and portraits so perfectly accurate that physiognomists could use them to ascertain age or prophesy death.[1]

How are illusions dispelled?

Painted illusions were not entirely lost during the medieval period. Artists used foreshortening to indicate spatial recession even before they worked out the mathematical basis for linear perspective. In the mid-fifteenth century, the Renaissance architect and humanist Leon Battista Alberti wrote a treatise (*De Pictura*) intended to educate patrons about the practice of painting, and to elevate its status to a liberal art. In his text, Alberti describes how painters employ one-point perspective to create an illusion of recession and space. A painting's surface is not merely a flat plane, Alberti explains, but rather a "veil," or a window that the viewer sees *through*, to an illusionistic space beyond. This fundamental concept, which we take for granted today, is the basis for how people have viewed paintings for centuries. Until the modern era, painting *itself* was understood as an illusion. For this reason, the artists represented in the Met's European Paintings collection are all concerned with illusion to some extent, even those painters who manipulate our perception of space and volume or depart from traditional systems of perspective.

[1] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, 35: 36. Translated by John Bostock and H. T. Riley (1855).

Illusion / Introduction

Many artists represented in the collection found ways to conceal their brushstrokes in order to produce illusions so convincing that they appeared not to have been painted at all. They wanted to produce illusions so convincing that they appeared to not have been painted at all. The work of artists like Jan van Eyck and his followers, Raphael, Bronzino, Jacques Louis David, or Pierre-Auguste Cot, for example, appears very smooth, with hardly a brushstroke in sight. The image rather than the material qualities dominates. For other painters, this type of "perfect" illusion was not as important. Artists like Rembrandt, Goya, and Titian, for example, emphasize the very material qualities of their work with visible, directional brushwork, or a thick application of paint (impasto). Their illusions are of a very different sort: they activate our sense of the tactile. We can almost feel the weight of Artistotle's gold chain or the softness of Elizabeth Farren's fur muff.

Illusion was not always the primary concern of painters before the twentieth century. During the chronological span of the Met's collection, we see an ever-shifting balance between depictions of the world as it appears and representations of things that cannot be seen, as in the case of spiritual and emotional phenomena or symbolic imagery. A painting's purpose, the artist's subjectivity, and the social and artistic conditions of the time all impact what an artist considers to be the best way to represent nature or an idea. As a result, the kinds of illusions and the methods of creating those illusions vary with each period, geographic region, and individual artist.

What is the artist asking us to believe, and how is she or he trying to convince us?

LOOKING TO CONNECT

In what ways do senses other than sight help you navigate the world?

What illusions do you experience or create in your own life?

If you could step inside this painting and touch one of the objects, what would it feel like?

What are the figures in this painting seeing and feeling?

What does this painting sound like?

What kind of voices do the figures have?

If you stand in a different place, how does the illusion change?

FURTHER CONNECTIONS

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1 **Tommaso di Folco Portinari (1428–1501)** and **Maria Portinari (Maria Maddalena Baroncelli, born 1456)**, probably 1470

Hans Memling (Netherlandish, Seligenstadt, active by 1465–died 1494 Bruges)

Oil on wood

Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913 (14.40.626–27)

Spatial illusion

Memling plays with our sense of space by painting carefully shaded fictive frames around the figures. He actually places Tommaso and Maria *in front* of these frames, on "our side" of the painting—notice that the frames border only three sides of the panels, and do not continue along the bottom edges. Certain details reinforce this illusion; for example, Maria's conical headdress (or hennin) and its veil overlap the right side of the frame, as if projecting into our space. We know Memling was very careful with the placement of the hennin: X-ray analysis confirmed that he originally positioned it at a much steeper angle. In fact, we can see this if we examine the painting closely. Look for the visible pentimento: a darker area, on the top edge of the fictive frame. The original hennin is just barely visible beneath the upper paint layers, which have become more transparent with time. Memling later changed the position of the hennin, presumably so that it extends to the corner of the frame, where the translucent veil gently falls over the illusionistic edge of the painting. Memling also painted Tommaso's right sleeve extending over the fictive frame. Originally this effect would have been more pronounced, but the paint layers have darkened over time, greatly lessening the contrast between his dark purple sleeves and the black background. The couple's hands, particularly Tommaso's, are foreshortened so that they seem to project even farther outward, away from their bodies and into our space.

Illusionistic details

Memling used precise detail to create a sense of realness in the sitters: for example, he uses his brush to pick out the stubble on Tommaso's cheek, the individual hairs of his eyebrows, the glint of light in his eye, and the wrinkles in his neck that signal his aging skin. Maria's young face, by contrast, shows few wrinkles, but we see individual strokes for each eyebrow and carefully modeled highlights and shadows that make her nose seem three-dimensional. Elements of her clothing stand out as perhaps the most illusionistic details—the translucent folds of her veil and the tiny white hairs of her dress's fur trim. Her intricate necklace is so volumetric that it casts its own shadows on her neck (not to be confused with the shadowy dots above the necklace showing its original placement, another visible pentimento). Both figures' skin tones are built up from a white ground with layers of translucent oil glazes, which creates the illusion of flesh that seems to glow with life from within.

Illusion and meaning

The portraits once formed part of a devotional triptych, whose central panel—depicting the Virgin and Child—is now lost. Memling's illusion of space was highly innovative, and also connected his sitters more closely to the object of their devotion. If you imagine the missing panel placed between them, Tommaso and Maria would be directing their prayers (and gazes) toward the Virgin and Child. Memling's intricate detail created a record of the couple's features and wealth at an important moment in their lives, just after their marriage in 1470. We participate in Memling's illusions by suspending our disbelief for a moment, allowing the space between us and the portraits to dissolve, and observing these people just as they were (or as they wished to be presented) more than five hundred years ago.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/110001503

2 **Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware**, 1635
Willem Claesz Heda (Dutch, Haarlem? 1594–1680 Haarlem)
Oil on wood
From the Collection of Rita and Frits Markus, Bequest of Rita Markus, 2005 (2005.331.4)

Surface, volume, and light

A palpable sense of textured surfaces and three-dimensional objects dominates this painting. The lateral edge of the table is painted as if parallel to the picture plane, creating a transition area between our space and the objects on the table. Various items project off the table, helping us navigate this in-between area and move fully into the pictorial space—notice the knife handle, the rounded edge of the serving platter, a lemon rind, and an open, leather-covered knife case. Heda positions foreshortened round and cylindrical objects at varying angles to the picture plane, creating a sense of depth with a visual play that takes your eye in, out, and around the curving lines of the objects and the spaces they occupy. On the right, the silver tazza (chalice) is tipped on its side. This position allows Heda to depict the concavity of the underside of the base, as well as the convex curves of the handle and mouth.

Light is an integral part of Heda's illusions. He arranged his objects in a dark interior with dramatic light to create reflections and highlights that catch the viewer's eye. The delicate chasing of the tazza grabs tiny flecks of light. The volume of the upright glass's bowl is created by the reflective surfaces of the glass and the water inside it, where Heda painted the bright reflections of a window. Because this light source is outside the composition, it gives us a sense of place, a bright space beyond this darker interior.

Brushstrokes and textures

Heda's visible brushstrokes are few and careful. His choice of a wood support (rather than canvas), helps achieve this very smooth surface; however, Heda selectively used visible brushstrokes to evoke the textures of softer objects, such as the oysters, paper, and lemon. The painter applied yellow paint in a dappled pattern on the lemon, which then contrasts with the very smooth application of yellow in the reflection of the fruit in the silver tray. The brushy softness of the oysters contrasts with the smooth, hard metal of the serving dish; the platter's hard lines set off the jagged edges of the shells. The paper and lemon emphasize the perfect smoothness of the metallic surfaces.

Illusion and meaning

Heda's illusions connect us with the inner life of the painting; they seem like real objects that we can almost touch, feel, or smell. The carefully arranged composition and precise detail of the objects ask us to consider their meaning. In the seventeenth century, this still life would have associated its owner with the material value of the fine food and silver. At the same time, the illusionistic objects held additional meanings: the half-eaten oysters were associated with licentiousness, the lemon was an exotic (and hence expensive) fruit, and the paper made into a cone for spices would have been recognized as a page from an almanac.[2] The composition related an underlying message about worldly pleasures that quickly pass.

[2] Walter Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), vol. 1, 312.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/438376

3 **Parochialstrasse in Berlin**, 1831
Eduard Gaertner
(German, Berlin 1801–1877 Zechlin)
Oil on canvas
Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, and funds from various donors, by exchange, 2006 (2006.258)

Parochialstrasse in Berlin, Eduard Gaertner

Space through line

Gaertner takes us into an everyday scene with the illusion of deep space: we stand at one end of a street, on the left side, and look all the way down until our eye stops at a bend in the road and the spire of a tall church. The painter oriented his canvas vertically to accommodate the foreground buildings, which stretch to almost the entire height of the canvas. The sloping lines of the buildings and street extend the space backward, away from our eye. The artist began his illusion with a careful linear perspective grid to map out the composition and ensure the "correct" illusionistic recession of space. (We can see an underdrawn perspective grid in another of his paintings, *The Family of Mr. Westfal in the Conservatory*.) This is the same system that artists have used since the Renaissance, but Gaertner added a twist: his street is curved, so the rules have changed. The buildings are aligned with the curved street, forming a tight band; although their lines may seem to converge at a single point at the end of the street, in reality, the orthogonals of each building have their own vanishing point (unlike a true one-point perspective composition).

Scale and color

The size and placement of every detail of the painting is consistent with Gaertner's system of perspective. Objects in the foreground are larger and more detailed than those farther away. For instance, the white dog with brown ears is the same pictorial height as the woman in the red jacket beyond, and the height and detail of the red doorway at the left of the composition are greater than those of doors across the street and in the distance. The individual cobblestones in the foreground are delineated, while the distant street appears to have a uniform surface, for our eyes cannot distinguish cobblestones at that distance. Every object places our eye at a precise point in space. The figures themselves are almost incidental, part of the street life, yet they are also reference points that help us mark the distance.

Color and light complete the spatial illusion, suggesting distance and volume. As objects recede into the distance, they appear lighter, and Gaertner adjusted the saturation of his colors to achieve this effect. The street appears mostly in half-light, as the sun just barely creeps over the buildings to illuminate the very tops of a few facades on the right side of the street. Farther down, light breaks through above the small building on the left, where the street opens up slightly and we see the lateral side of a beige building. The brightness of this direct sun on the light pink building presents a striking contrast with the hazy, faded gray of the church beyond, reinforcing the sense of distance between them.

Illusion and meaning

The painter's illusion of space relies on our recognition that this is how we often perceive distances in everyday life. Looking down a modern city street, we witness avenues converging at pinpoints on the horizon, and see skyscrapers in miniature. Gaertner's city is early nineteenth-century Berlin, and he uses his illusionistic space to record it in painstaking detail. Gaertner's work is not the result of spontaneous plein-air painting—he calculated everything. During this period, the architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel was transforming Berlin at a rapid pace with imposing, neoclassical buildings.[3] The painting reflects a growing awareness of the city's architecture and views, and a desire to record them as accurately as possible.

[3] Geraldine Norman, *Biedermeier Painting, 1815–1848: Reality Observed in Genre, Portrait and Landscape* (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 63.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/438848

4 **Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and His Wife (Marie-Anne-Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836)**, 1788

Jacques Louis David

(French, Paris 1748–1825 Brussels)

Oil on canvas

Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman Gift, in honor of Everett Fahy, 1977 (1977.10)

Precise surfaces

David revels in illusions. The smooth "polished" surface of his canvas, a hallmark of his style, transforms flawlessly into glass, velvet, lace, feathers, and flesh before our eyes.

The artist painted Lavoisier's brightly lit apparatus (for measuring gases) with absolute precision. We see a green box refracted by the water in the bell jar to the far right, and the reflection of Lavoisier's paper and the table in the mercury in the glass container on the left. The bulbous glass in the lower right corner is almost completely transparent save for the reflections of Lavoisier's stocking on the upper left curve and the windows of the room. The indication of windows that are "behind" our vantage point creates an additional illusion of space. David's level of detail is consistent throughout, and this solidifies an allover sense of illusion—the scientific instruments, the figures, and their clothing are all rendered with equal care. David created his illusion by maintaining correct perspective and scale throughout, and also in his extreme care with the brush and application of paint. The only visible brushstrokes delineate individual strands of hair. David used opaque layers of paint in a calculated manner to perfectly capture the exact tonality of the shifting light effects on the various surfaces and volumes. The highlights on the red velvet, for example, are not created with translucent white paint that allows the red to show through, but rather with a perfectly mixed pink, applied in just the right way to give the effect of the velvet's texture. The ultimate illusion is one of atmosphere and the diffusion of light.

Suspended movement

The couple's pose heightens the illusion of the overall picture. Lavoisier holds a quill in his right hand, while his left elbow rests on the table, hand in the air, fingers lightly curved. It is a fleeting gesture, as if he has just raised his head from his hand to look up at his wife. Marie-Anne's pose is equally animated, her fingers lightly poised on the table as she rests for a moment on her husband's shoulder. Her hair seems to move as it curls and cascades down her back. David evokes a sense of momentary interruption and suspended movement. Marie-Anne gazes out at the viewer, creating an additional illusion: no matter where we stand in the gallery, her eyes seem to follow us, compelling us to return her gaze.

Illusion and meaning

David's illusion is an integral part of the work's meaning. This lifelike, life-size pair of figures is surrounded by equally "real" objects that reflect and reinforce their identities—both who they were and who they wanted to be. The couple's lives are on display and, therefore, every illusionistic detail is calculated to convince eighteenth-century Parisians of their status, from Marie-Anne's portfolio of drawings to Lavoisier's scientific equipment (which he designed himself). They wanted to declare themselves a "power couple." David more than delivered on his mission to represent the Lavoisiers' desired self-image; however, illusion relies on an audience, and in this sense, David's perfect illusion failed. Though intended for display in the Salon of 1789, the painting was never shown in public due to the volatile political climate in which Lavoisier found himself.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/436106

5 **Man in Oriental Costume ("The Noble Slav")**, 1632
Rembrandt (Rembrandt van Rijn)
(Dutch, Leiden 1606–1669 Amsterdam)
Oil on canvas

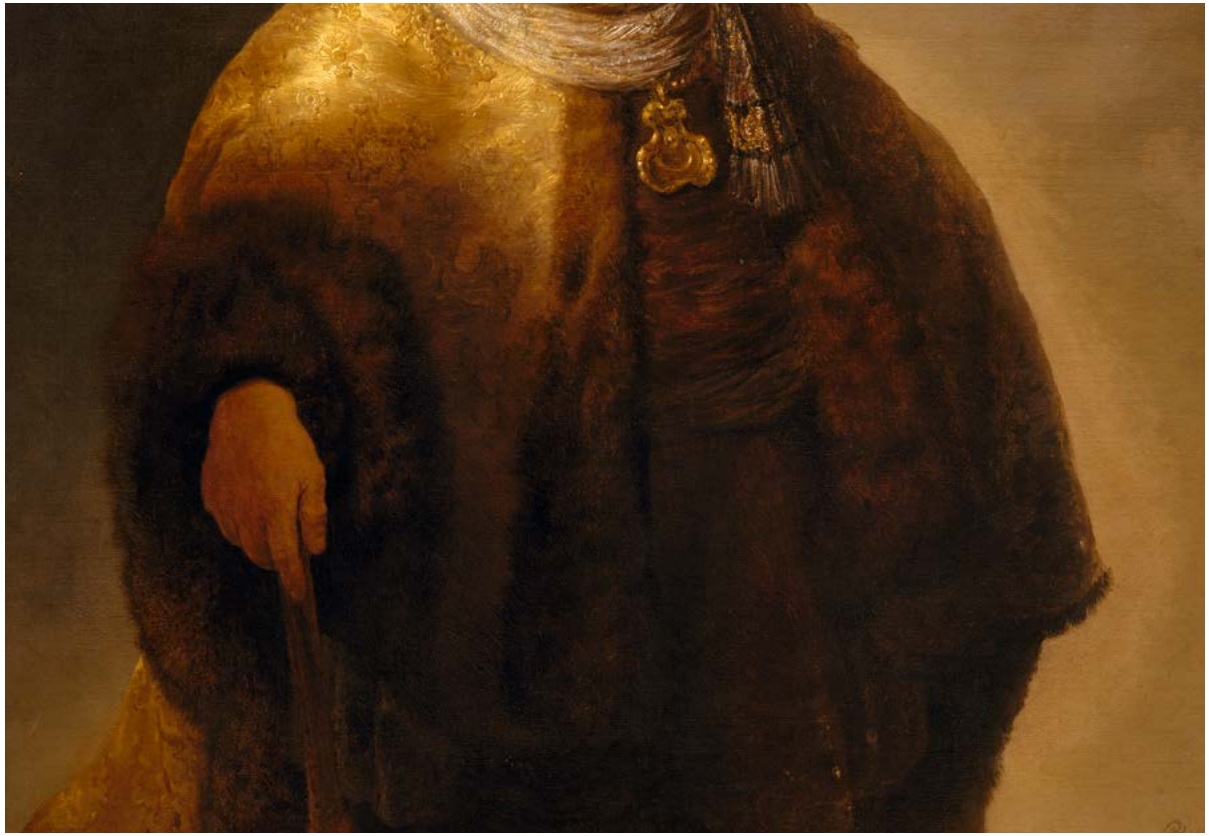
Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 1920 (20.155.2)

Tactile illusions

Rembrandt achieves his illusion with fluid, visible brushwork that changes with every varying texture and shape. He concentrates our vision on the upper half of the painting, where the light hits the figure. Directional strokes of semiopaque paint follow the folds of the turban; its shadows recede into darkness with thinner brushstrokes, while the highlights are created with thicker dabs of paint. Visible brushstrokes in the face and neck suggest wrinkles and hairs that seem to undulate with the sagging areas of flesh. Many colors together make up the flesh tone, applied in dabs and flecks that are not fully blended. Short, irregular strokes create the flowing curve of the light scarf, punctuated by dabs of blue and white that indicate the pattern. We notice its transparency as it curves around the figure's shoulder, and in the gold of the cloak that shows through. Moving into the cloak itself, the brushwork is more fluid and broad, with quick touches of yellow and white following the weave of the fabric. As the volume of the figure increases, so does the size of Rembrandt's brushstrokes. Broader expanses of dark paint transition our eyes into the darkness of the bottom half of the figure, where wisps of paint around the edges of his garment hint at its fur lining. Rembrandt highlights only just enough of the voluminous cloak to convince us of its grandeur and the expensive fur that lies beneath it.

Light and space

The levels of light in the painting are as varied as the textures. Rembrandt paints a series of half-lights along the face and body, as if light is both direct and reflected, hitting the figure from multiple angles. Rembrandt sets his figure in a space that is empty, yet he implies a setting. By illuminating the background on the darkest side of the figure, and conversely, setting the brightest edge of the figure against the dark background, he reinforces an illusion of volume in the figure, and of a space behind him. The man's hand projects forward, resting on a walking stick that extends off the canvas.



Illusion and meaning

Although the subject is a purely fictional character, not a portrait, Rembrandt evokes the lively presence of a real person through sheer technique and inventiveness. The painting was intended to entice a wealthy Dutch collector, who would have recognized the figure as an exotic Turkish "prince" or sultan; however, in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, just as today, the illusion of rich textures and the artist's expressive capacities also become the true subject of this painting.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/43785

6 **Allegory of the Planets and Continents**, 1752
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo
(Italian, Venice 1696–1770 Madrid)
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1977
(1977.1.3)

Upward space

Along the edges of the canvas, Tiepolo paints an illusionistic ledge, and then populates it with figures, both human and mythical. Although the canvas is rectangular, the composition is circular; Tiepolo orients the figures on the borders of the painting in four different directions, corresponding to the painted ledge. These bodies are foreshortened as if seen from below (*di sotto in sù*). Grounded on the four edges of the painting, their legs and clothing dangle over the painted ledge into our space. The rules are different for the non-mortals, who break away from the sides of the composition and fly up toward the god Apollo. Tiepolo plays with their poses, turning them in all directions so that their bodies appear to project into every possible degree of space. These torsions create an illusion of weightlessness, a palpable contrast to the space occupied by the mortals framing the composition. From the sides to the center, our eyes constantly move along with the rhythm of limbs as we, too, break from the borders of the canvas and spiral into the illusion of sky and clouds.

Atmosphere and light

Moving "upward" into the center of the painting, Tiepolo uses light and atmospheric perspective to create the illusion of receding space. Without any horizon line, the heavenly space seems boundless. Darker colors around the outer edges of the canvas gradually dissolve to light, in the sunbeams surrounding Apollo. The mortal figures that populate the painting's border are mostly shadowed; the light is above them, and we are positioned below. The innermost ring of clouds is considerably lighter, painted in hues of pink, cream, and gray, with blue sky peeking through. The figures along this ring of clouds are very light, desaturated by the addition of more white paint, and thus they appear farther away. At the center, Apollo and his closest companions are virtually the same light gold color as the sun.

Illusion and meaning

This painting pulls us in many directions as we attempt to orient ourselves. The fact that we cannot comfortably determine our placement or vantage point in relation to the composition provides a clue to the work's original purpose and context: it is a preparatory study for a ceiling Tiepolo later painted in the Würzburg Residenz in southern Germany. In the ceiling fresco, Tiepolo played with the eighteenth-century viewer's perception of what is real by combining painted and three-dimensional figures. The grisaille figures in the corners of the canvas are studies for the three-dimensional stucco figures that Tiepolo incorporated into the finished ceiling whose legs literally dangle into the room below. The carefully planned illusion of this painting ensured that Tiepolo's patron had a clear vision of how the finished ceiling would appear. Though the canvas now hangs vertically on a wall and not above us, we still experience some of the effects of the *di sotto in sù* spatial illusion. The swirling masses bring us into Tiepolo's illusionistic space, as we are pulled upward into a never-ending sky populated with gods.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/437790

Borders

Borders affect how we see the world and respond to it. Borders may be sites of tension, drama, or revelation, signaling the finality of an ending or the uncertainty of what lies beyond. Borders exist in our everyday environments as windows and doors, and also within the Museum: as we move from one space to another, we cross architectural borders that divide regions of the world and periods of time. Borders—whether social, cultural, political, or natural—also demarcate different spaces, groups, or forms, while establishing relationships among them. The borders of paintings likewise have purposes and meanings. A painting's borders are both physical and compositional, and can take the form of frames, edges, contour lines, horizon lines, or intersections of forms or colors within the painted surface. The powerful effect of borders such as these have prompted painters throughout the centuries to question, explore, reinforce, or destroy the borders inherent in two-dimensional surfaces, whether canvases, panels, or walls.

Paintings featured in this section

1 **Madonna and Child with Saints**
Giovanni di Paolo

2 **Esther before Ahasuerus**
Artemisia Gentileschi

3 **Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, Marie Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818) and Marie Marguerite Carreaux de Rosemond (died 1788)**
Adélaïde Labille-Guiard

4 **Gray Weather, Grande Jatte**
Georges Seurat

5 **Boating**
Édouard Manet

The picture plane and painted borders

By the medieval period, the four-sided or round, flat surface was a predetermined boundary for painters. The edges of the painting presented one kind of border, and the picture plane itself was another. Artists began to think of the picture plane as a transparent boundary, a window between our world and the painted space of the picture (see Illusion, page 12). Painted frames, parapets, or other framing devices make this boundary more explicit (for example, Goya's *Majas on a Balcony* and Petrus Christus's *Portrait of a Carthusian*). When a figure or an object appears to cross one of these borders, it signals a connection between worlds—the secular and the divine, or the pictorial and the real. Depicted borders *within* a painting invite the viewer to see the image through the artist's eyes.[1] The varied devices artists use include door frames (for example, Johannes Vermeer and Charles Marie Bouton), window frames (Charlotte du Val d'Ognes), niches (Jacques de Gheyn II), or framed mirrors (Juan de Flandes). Yet even without a painted framing device, artists can play with the boundary of the picture plane. Paolo Veronese and Moretto da Brescia, for example, bring their figures as far forward as possible, so that they almost seem to reach out of the picture.

Compositional borders

When figures are cut off at the edge of a painting, an image may seem "cropped," as if the world in the painting extends beyond its physical boundary. The compositional borders of a painting position us at a specific vantage point and control what we see. Objects near a painting's edge can direct our eyes into the composition, or they may even carry specific meaning. Painters often place their signatures near the edge, and Tiepolo even added his own self-portrait in *The Triumph of Marius*.

Borders are not only edges, but exist within a composition as well. Internal borders can lead us into zones of symbolic or visual contrast (Henry Lerolle's *The Organ Rehearsal*, for example, or the regions of heaven and hell in Jan van Eyck's *The Last Judgment*). Depending on how a painter treats them, internal edges between forms and spaces can create or obscure intersections, or suggest transitions. Contour lines, which visually define a body or object, are a kind of representational border that artists continually investigate. Some painters emphasize contour lines as a conscious, stylistic choice (for example, Ingres and Degas), while others dissolve them, or lessen the visual boundary between a figure and its surrounding space (such as Odilon Redon).

When do borders act as boundaries, and when are they penetrable?

[1] Victor Stoichita, "Margins," in *The Self-Aware Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

Frames and physical borders

The earliest frames in the collection are integral or engaged frames, attached to the painting surface (Memling's *Virgin and Child*, for example, is an integral frame). These frames provide protection for the paintings, and also served as places for painters to rest their hands or wrists while working. In a religious context, frames can be didactic, directing our eyes in sequenced readings of separate panels. In a Netherlandish triptych, for instance, a hinged frame serves both practical and symbolic purposes. It unifies three separate panels while enabling the outer panels to open and close, covering or revealing the inner panels. The frame of Patinir's *The Penitence of Saint Jerome*, which is original (though stripped of its gilding), is one example of this type. Though now missing its other panels, the *Virgin and Child* by the Master of the Saint Ursula Legend was also part of a triptych, and its frame is original. On each side we can see holes that have been plugged up where the hinges were once attached.

A frame can function as an extension of simulated space in a painting, or it can help focus our eyes on the work. Even in the earliest works in the collection, frames served to mediate between paintings and their changing environments. Though artists would not have made frames themselves, as early as the seventeenth century painters were concerned with how frames affected viewing experience. In 1639, Poussin wrote:

> *… embellish [my painting] with a bit of frame, for it needs it, so that when it is viewed as a whole the eyes' rays will be absorbed and not scattered around by receiving elements from the other neighbouring objects … it would be most appropriate for the … cornice to be simply gilded with a matt gold which blends gently with colours without offending them.*[2]

In later centuries, some painters experimented with designing their own frames: Monet, for example, created frames for his series of Rouen Cathedral. Louisine Havemeyer recalled that, "Degas once told me he thought it an artist's duty to see his pictures properly framed."[3] Degas's notebooks contain studies for frames, and he designed the frame for his painting *Collector of Prints* (though it originally was not painted gold).

Changes in architectural and interior design styles over the centuries led to new styles of frames. As a result, most paintings' original frames were replaced; even if not original, however, many in the European Paintings collection are period frames, contemporary to the paintings (like the frame of Botticelli's *Last Communion of Saint Jerome*), or careful reproductions (like those of Rubens's *Venus and Adonis* and Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Man*). When a frame is original, a period frame, or a good reproduction, the design gives us a sense of the painting's geographic and chronological context. In certain cases, the style of the

[2] Nicolas Poussin, letter to Paul Fréart de Chantelou, April 28, 1639, in *The Self-Aware Image*, by Victor Stoichita (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 56.

[3] Louisine W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector* (New York: Ursus Press, 1993), 250.

? What do we mean when we talk about "coloring outside the lines"?

frame will even echo decorative elements in the painting (for example, Jean-Baptiste Greuze and François Gérard). Sometimes, however, the very presence of a frame may entirely contradict the painting's original context—a frame can help "transform" a fragment removed from a larger work, like an altarpiece, into an independent painting (*A Donor Presented by a Saint*, Circle of Dieric Bouts). The edges of a panel or canvas can provide clues about whether a painting has been cut. In the galleries, we do not see many paintings' edges because they are covered by frames, but when we do, there is good reason. For *The Resurrection*, Perugino painted a fictive molding that extends to the very edge of the panel. The curators chose not to frame this work, so that we can see both the painted frame and the edge of the panel. These visible borders remind us that the painting was originally part of a larger series of panels.

LOOKING TO CONNECT

What kind of borders do you encounter every day?

Have you ever cropped a photo? Why did you crop it, and how did that change the image?

How does clothing and presentation form borders?

How does the painting's frame focus your eyes?

What is our vantage point, and how does the painter indicate this?

What lies beyond the edges of this painting?

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1 **Madonna and Child with Saints**, 1454
Giovanni di Paolo (Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia)
(Italian, Siena 1398–1482 Siena)
Tempera and gold on wood
The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.76)

The borders of the panels and the structure of the work contain the figures in this altarpiece. Each holy figure is given a space, which is predetermined by the size and shape of the panel. The artist did not construct the panel or the frame, nor is it likely that he dictated the shape. Its form is traditional, common to the time period and region of Italy. The overall shape—a larger central panel flanked by two thinner, shorter panels on each side—intentionally echoes the elevation of a Gothic church, with pointed arches and a central nave with aisles on each side. In this way, there is a sense of place encoded in the borders of the altarpiece. At the same time, the panels' size also relates physically to the viewer: each panel is only slightly taller than the average person's height. In keeping with common practice, a curtain would have covered the altarpiece, providing another border that protects the painting and conceals it from everyday viewing.

Visual borders

A continuous, horizontal band visually joins the panels and forms a ground upon which the holy figures stand. Its front edge is shaded and aligned with the picture plane. On its lateral surface, a progression from light to dark gives the appearance of recession, creating a shallow space for the holy figures to occupy. At the far edge of this space, the gold background begins. Gold was evocative of divinity and endowed a painting with an otherworldly glow when illuminated by candlelight. The use of gold leaf was popular in the medieval period and continued into the early Renaissance. Here the painter combines the older tradition of the gold background with a newer sense of volume and space in the platform and figures. The saints are placed in a middle ground between two borders: the picture plane, which connects to the human world, and the background, a link to the divine realm beyond the painting.

Crossing the borders

While visual and physical borders demarcate the separate spaces of the painting, the painter endows the figures with movement and gestures that traverse the altarpiece's static borders. Each figure looks in a different direction; the diagonal lines created by their gazes lead in many directions and are not bounded by physical any border. The Virgin's gaze leads us to Saint John; he in turn exchanges a look with Saint Nicholas while gesturing back toward Christ. Christ looks outward at us; his gaze crosses the picture plane to draw the viewer into the painting.

Borders and meaning

The frame and borders of the altarpiece provide a kind of template. The painter works with this sacred space to create a visual message of hope and redemption by connecting the holy figures and the viewer. The figures' placement within the structure, their gestures, and their gazes connect them to the earthly church. Once part of our world and now belonging to the divine realm beyond, the saints themselves are border figures—they are intercessors between mortals and God. The believers pray to them to act on their behalf, to help them in this world, and to ensure that they end up in a good place after death. Giovanni di Paolo's visual message explains this fundamental aspect of Catholicism, while the missing predella panels below would have provided a narrative lesson about the life of Saint John the Baptist.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436508

2

Esther before Ahasuerus, ca. 1630
Artemisia Gentileschi
(Italian, Rome 1593–1651/53 Naples)
Oil on canvas
Gift of Elinor Dorrance Ingersoll, 1969 (69.281)

Compositional borders

Artemisia Gentileschi uses the edges of the painting and a series of compositional borders to dramatize the moment Esther collapses before King Ahasuerus. The artist pushes her figures to the edges of the composition; Esther's dress and one of her maids are cut off by the left edge of the painting, while the king's throne backs up to the right edge. We see the end of the room on the right side, yet on the left, it extends beyond our view. At the lower edge of the painting, the cut-off step implies that the space also extends toward us, as if we are standing in the room. Each figure occupies her or his own bounded space within the composition. Ahasuerus is positioned within a semi-circular, raised platform. Its height and shape present a clear, physical border. Above, the scallop-edged red curtain presents another border demarcating his space. Esther and her maids, forming a single figural group, fill the left side of the painting, their space bounded by a line of floor tiles that continues into the door frame beyond. This border is visual, but explicit. The hem of Esther's dress just barely crosses this line in the floor, as her pinky finger and the elbow of the maid graze the line of the doorjamb.

The void as a border

Artemisia creates a void between the figures that is emphasized by their movement toward it. Esther's knee points toward the shadowed, empty space as her body arches back and her arm extends. Ahasuerus's toe reaches off the top step, still relaxed, while his other foot has shifted back as he motions to lift himself up from the throne. The void between them is pregnant with drama: it separates the two figures, but only for a moment. Will Esther fall forward into the space? Will the king get up in time to break her fall? Esther's cast shadow falls between them, the only point of connection across the space. Artemisia considered this void carefully. She originally included a boy with a dog on the bottom step, extending into the darker space above. The outline is partly visible in the gallery, and confirmed by X-ray analysis of the underlying paint layer.

Borders and meaning

Eliminating the boy and the dog, and creating the possibility for visual movement across the void, underlines the narrative meaning of the Old Testament story. It is a moment of uncertainty, when Esther is at risk of angering a man who had his previous wife executed. Esther, literally and figuratively, has crossed a line. The dramatic tension is characteristic of Artemisia Gentileschi's work; many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century depictions of the story represent the moment of forgiveness that occurs just after this one.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436453

3

Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, Marie Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818) and Marie Marguerite Carreaux de Rosemond (died 1788), 1785

Adélaïde Labille-Guiard

(French, Paris 1749–1803 Paris)

Oil on canvas

Gift of Julia A. Berwind, 1953 (53.225.5)

Within her own borders

We are in the artist's studio. Labille-Guiard plays with our perception by setting up a double border, a painting-within-a-painting. She depicts herself seated, working on another canvas within the composition. Part of the depicted canvas is visible; we see the back and the tacking edge, but not the front. The artist looks away from her work, directly at the viewer. By setting up the composition in this way, she prompts us to wonder: Are we spectators interrupting the artist as she paints another subject? Do we occupy the place of her sitter? Or, is she painting her reflection in a mirror beyond the picture plane, putting us in the position of the mirror?

The physical painting is huge—almost seven feet high. Proportionally, the real painting is larger than the canvas depicted within the painting; if *this* canvas were in the composition, it would have to extend much higher, beyond the painting's top edge. The figure of the artist does not occupy the entirety of the painting; rather, Labille-Guiard frames herself with attributes that identify her as an accomplished artist and a teacher. At the right, the she included a stool with a roll of paper and a holder for chalk (porte-crayon).

Along the bottom edge, the wood floor catches the reflection of the artist's dress and shoes. At the lower left side stands the easel, where the artist inserts her signature ("Labille fme Guiard / 1785"). Just beyond the canvas are two classical sculptures, and behind the artist stand two of her students.

Borders and meaning

The artist painted herself both as an artist in the act of painting, and as the subject of a formal portrait, in a silk gown and hat. By drawing our attention to the borders of both the real painting and the depicted canvas, the artist implicates us in the act of viewing, seeking (or perhaps demanding) our attention and approval. These pictorial devices were not new inventions: Diego Velazquez most famously included a full-length self-portrait in *Las Meninas* (1656, Madrid, Prado). Labille-Guiard consciously aligned herself with this important artistic tradition. The maximum number of female artists allowed to join the French Royal Academy at that time was four, and Labille-Guiard was one of them. The carefully structured and executed self-portrait was exhibited at the Salon of 1785, perhaps with the intention of promoting the acceptance of more women to the Academy.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436840

4 **Gray Weather, Grande Jatte**, ca. 1886–88

Georges Seurat

(French, Paris 1859–1891 Paris)

Oil on canvas

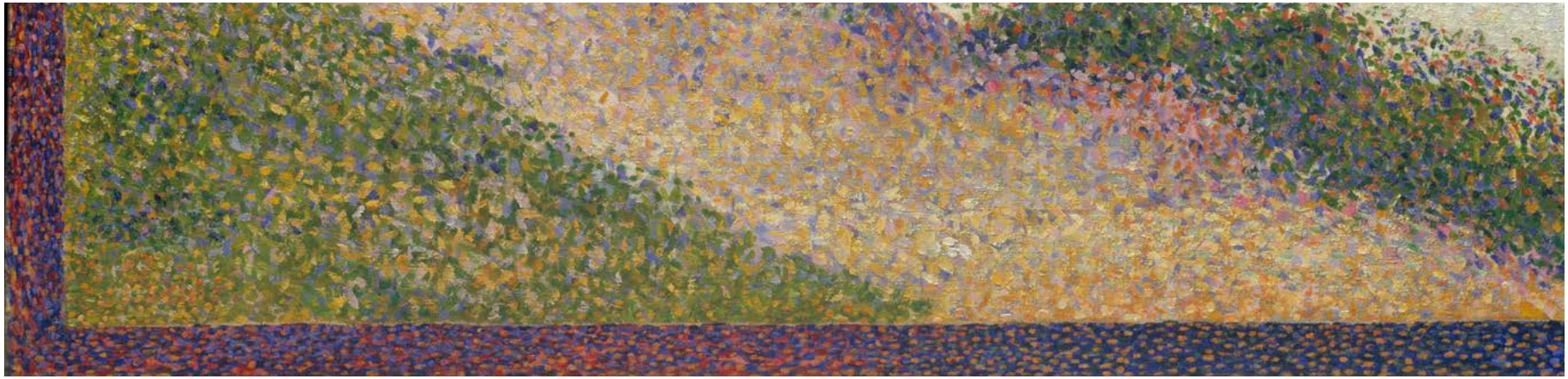
The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 2002, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (2002.62.3)

Painted borders

A painted border frames Seurat's composition on all sides. This is not the illusionistic fictive frame device of earlier artists like Memling (Illusion 1, page 15); it belongs entirely to the world of the painting, not to ours. The border is mostly painted with ultramarine blue flecked with dots of orange, pink, and red. Moving downward from the top right corner, the red becomes more frequent and intense, then wanes again toward the lower right corner. All the way around the canvas, the border changes with varying hues and concentrations of blue, red, pink, and orange. These shifts of color and intensity are not arbitrary; rather, they change in relation to the adjacent complementary colors and values of the landscape. This is most noticeable when we stand back from the painting, where we can see the entire border at once. The most concentrated areas of blue, for instance, border the lightest areas of the composition: the sky at the upper right, the reflected orange-toned light on the edge of the tree at the right, and again at the left side of the composition, near the lightest part of the ground and water. Seurat used more dots of bright red to complement the green grass in the lower left corner. At the same time, the changes in the border are more intuitive than formulaic. Rather than "cropping" the composition, Seurat provided a kind of visual buffer zone, a transition between the painting and its actual frame that focuses our eyes on the central composition. In this way, he created a painting independent of any physical boundary other than the canvas itself.

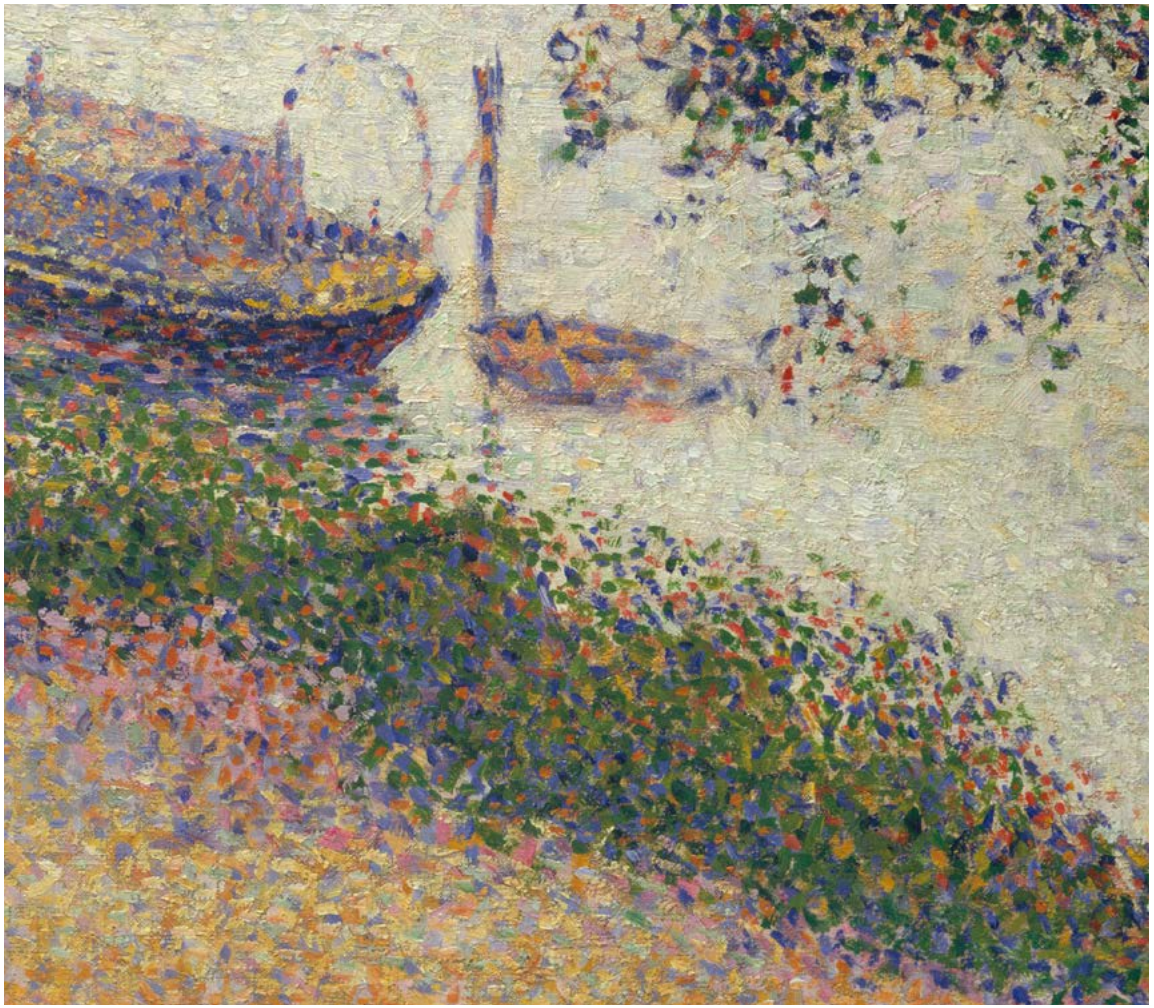
Missing borders: contour lines

The border around the painting contrasts with the overall lack of clear borders within the painting. Seurat's pointillist technique effectively dissolves any contour lines of the landscape. Shapes and forms are defined entirely by changes in color, rather than by brushstrokes or lines. Borders are only formed by our eyes, which, at a distance, join the dots and perceive definition and contrast between different areas of the landscape. In this sense, the creation of form, color, volume, and depth is dependent upon the act of viewing.



Borders and meaning

Seurat wanted to achieve a harmonious composition of pure color, and this included the frame. He was disturbed by the shadows cast on the painting by frames, and was concerned with controlling the area of vision around this painting. He believed that complementary colors and values could harmonize a frame and a painting, and he applied this theory to both painted and physical frames. Seurat insisted on this to the point of repainting many of his canvases with borders long after they were completed; he added this painting's border at least a year after it was finished, just before the work was exhibited in 1889. While most of Seurat's contemporaries were concerned with physical frames (most notably, Edgar Degas, who designed the frame for his *The Collector of Prints*), none of them took up Seurat's painted-border technique. Yet Seurat's borders and the dissolution of contour lines signal a wider interest in scientific theories of vision and color, and how they relate to the experience of paintings.



See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/438015

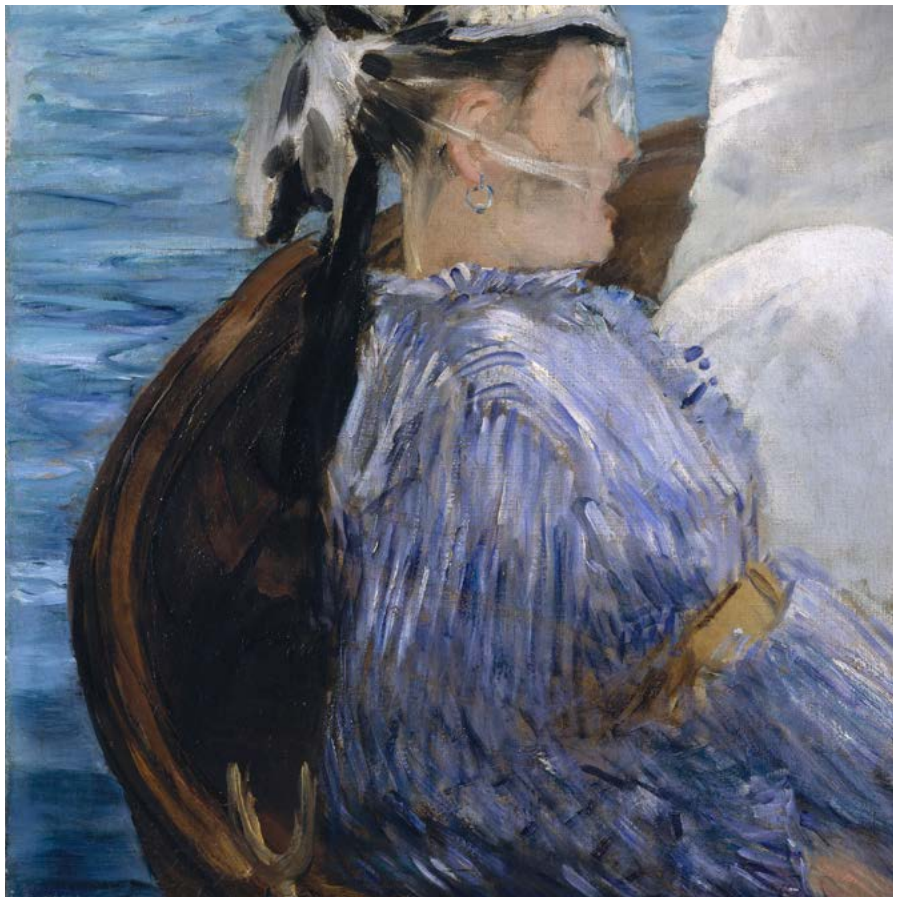
5 **Boating**, 1874
Édouard Manet
(French, Paris 1832–1883 Paris)
Oil on canvas
H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.115)

Borders and space

A very conspicuous border is missing from Manet's painting: there is no horizon line. The blue water reaches to the top edge of the painting, blocking any sense of spatial recession. As a result, our eyes do not extend very far beyond the figures, who seem pushed to the very surface of the picture plane. The other edges of the painting reinforce the spatial ambiguity. Rather than composing his figures and their boat within the space of the canvas, Manet abruptly cut off the boat at the bottom and right edges of the painting at oblique angles. The gunwale, the top border of the boat, curves around the figures at an angle that is perspectivally incorrect. The edge of the boat seems to just graze the woman's elbow rather than support it. At this point the gunwale meets the painting's bottom edge, in an indistinct passage of brown paint that extends along the edge, gradually becoming lighter and thicker, and leading into what could either be a strangely angled oar (resting outside of its lock), or, more improbably, the starboard side of the gunwale. The right edge of the composition is fraught with conflicting angles. We see the interior port side of the boat, curving toward the corner of the painting, while above, the boom and sail fill the upper corner at an angle inconsistent with that of the boat. Originally Manet painted the man holding the sail's line (visible in the position of the hand and an area of lighter paint above it); when he moved the line to its present position, he increased the awkwardness of the sail's position relative to the boat. Manet intentionally confuses the space through the incessant play of edges and borders between shapes.

Form and figure

Manet painted the woman almost entirely without clear contour lines. He established the form of her dress with a series of clear, linear brushstrokes. At the lower edge of the painting the strokes appear to dissolve the boundary between her dress, her hand, and the boat itself. The contours of the man are much more pronounced. The artist distinguished his figure with broad planes of color, mostly white, that rarely intrude into the surrounding fields of color. Manet did not reinforce the edges of the figure with any additional contour lines. The result is a distinct set of shapes and forms that appear solid and flat, juxtaposed interestingly with the form of the woman, composed almost entirely of lines, who seems to dissolve in the light.



Borders and meaning

Manet took nineteenth-century viewers out of their comfort zones and confronted them with an arrangement of form and space that seemed jarring to some critics. He was not concerned with traditional Western illusions of perspective. Instead, Manet's "impossible" spaces and his refusal to create any type of real volume in the figures draws attention to the inherent flatness of the painting. The painter discarded the centuries-old conception of the picture plane as a window to an illusionistic space—this is a modern way of looking at painting.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436947

Movement

Movement can be a form of action, interaction, or expression. Witnessing movement forces us to react in the most profound sense. Neuroscientists have discovered that our brains respond empathetically to the gestures and movements we see in images, generating a sensation of motion in our own bodies. We feel it in our bones, as art historian David Freedberg describes it. In this way, movement often provokes emotion—we feel compassion when we see a body collapsed with anguish. Artists understood the power of movement intuitively long before art historians or scientists began to search for an explanation. Painters have explored and visualized movement in many ways throughout the centuries as they have sought to convey meaning and tell their stories.

Paintings featured in this section

1 **The Abduction of the Sabine Women**
Nicolas Poussin

2 **The Harvesters**
Pieter Bruegel the Elder

3 **The Story of Joseph**
Biagio d'Antonio

4 **The Vision of Saint John**
El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)

5 **Whalers**
Joseph Mallord William Turner

Gesture and figural movement

The gestures and poses of bodies can depict a range of movement, from the dramatic struggle of a body in torsion to the smallest tremor of a facial muscle. A moving body can convey any number of emotions associated with a particular action, like fear, anxiety, excitement, or joy. A body with muscles tensed to spring into action may demonstrate potential movement or energy. A pose that is impossible to maintain suggests action in the next instant. Even a very still figure, completely at rest, may suggest internal movement of the soul or mind. Beginning in the Renaissance, artists and critics commented on the "motions of the mind" that are conveyed by features of the face and the implied movement of gazes, lips, eyebrows, or hands. Movement of the face or body also may be overt and symbolic to impart a specific meaning, like the raised hand of Christ's blessing. Some gestures are almost universal in meaning: in Jacques Louis David's *The Death of Socrates*, we immediately understand the gesture of Socrates's pupil covering his eyes. However, Socrates's upward-pointing hand needs further context to understand its significance.

What makes a scene appear momentary?

The artist's movements

Sometimes we sense movement even when no body is present, simply in the gestural mark of the artist on the panel or canvas. For centuries, painters have used the apparent movement created in the traces of brushes, palette knives, and other tools for expressive purposes. Directional strokes of paint can describe the movement of any number of elements or materials, whether natural (like Monet's rippling water) or man-made (like Elizabeth Farren's fur-trimmed cape). Painters can create a sense of agitated motion through vigorous brushwork (El Greco, Movement 4, page 66; Turner, Movement 5, page 69), or of stillness through the methodical and nearly invisible handling of paint (Vermeer, Illumination 3, page 83). Regardless of technique, the surface of a painting acts as a record of the painter's gesture. All of the works in the Museum's European Paintings collection manifest the movement of the artists' bodies as they applied paint. Looking ahead chronologically and crossing over to the Met's collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, to Jackson Pollock's "action paintings," we see how artists' movement and gestures become the actual subject of painting.

Movement / Introduction

Narrative and compositional movement

Beyond representing action and emotion, movement in paintings is also related to time and the progression of narrative. Painters can achieve the impossible by capturing a fleeting moment or glance with the "quickness" of a brushstroke, or visualize a longer arc of time by depicting repeated, episodic figures in a continuous sequence of events (such as in the *Scene from the Story of the Argonauts*). Compositional devices create movement as well—directional lines, repeated colors, gazes, and gestures lead our eyes around the painting. Our process of viewing can be quick or slow, methodical or darting; as we move our eyes along with the composition, we read and react to the painting, thus deriving meaning through participation and the act of looking.

How does movement in a painting suggest either sound or silence?

LOOKING TO CONNECT

Consider how you express emotion with your face or body.

Think about a time when you felt inspired to move or dance—what triggered your action?

Try to capture a gesture or pose with one line in the painting, either by drawing it or tracing it with your finger.

Mirror one of the gestures or expressions you see in this painting. Observe how your body moves and how you feel.

If you could "un-pause" the painting, what action would happen next?

Choose a color and follow it through the painting, noticing where your eyes move.

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1 **The Abduction of the Sabine Women**, probably 1633–34
Nicolas Poussin
(French, Les Andelys 1594–1665 Rome)
Oil on canvas
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1946 (46.160)

Romulus has raised his cloak as a signal, and with this single, quiet gesture, he has initiated the action below him. Everything but the architecture seems to be moving—figures and drapery, flailing limbs, tensed muscles, and anguished faces. Movement activates and organizes Poussin's painting.

Figures and gesture

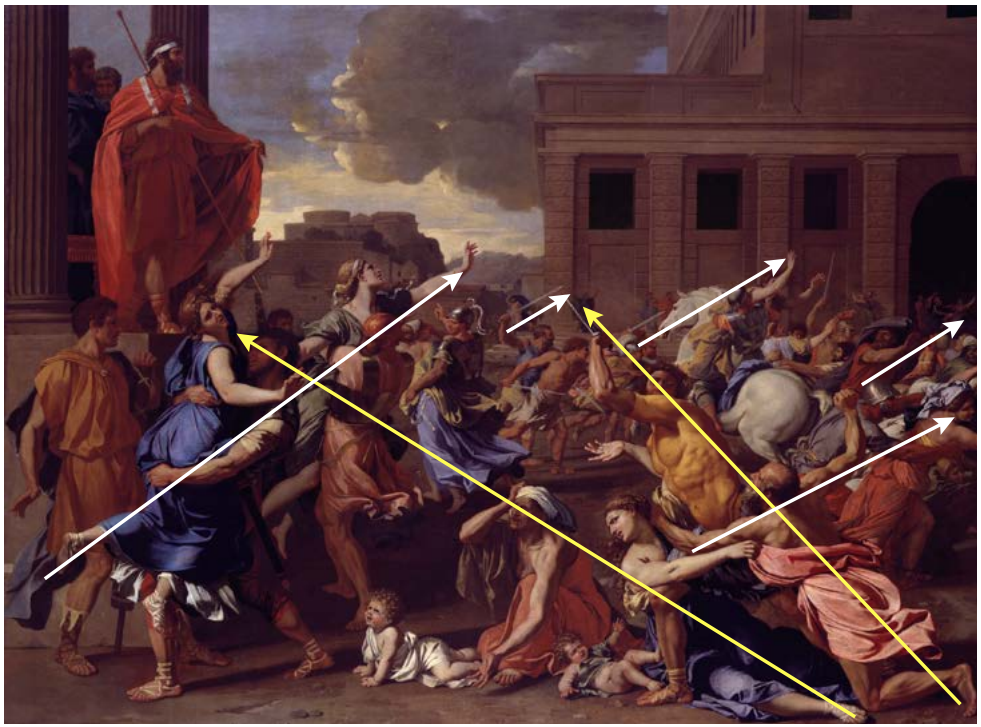
Bodies in motion dominate the composition, from the foreground to the middle ground. Spanning the width of the canvas, they create a sense of suspended motion. In particular, the pair of figures to the left and in the foreground visualize a struggle in two directions: the upward movement of the woman in blue, who throws back her head and raises her arms, is countered by the leftward stride of the man grasping her torso and carrying her in the opposite direction. Behind them, to the right, is a similar pair of figures. The grounded, solid poses of both men present a strong contrast to the graceful gestures of the women's left arms. Visually, the upward movement created by these arms is so powerful that the women's bodies almost seem to defy gravity. The figures' movement activates our senses. We feel the strain of the Romans in the foreground as they twist and heave, flexing their muscles, just as we sense the flight of the Sabines, who almost jump off the canvas. We register the alarmed expressions of their faces and recognize their emotions.

Compositional movement

Poussin's gestural movements also create compositional movement. The repetition of limbs and draperies (particularly the women's arms, with their softly flexed wrists) creates a kind of rhythmic order. Together the figures form compositional lines that draw our eyes across the painting in two directions. The strongest sense of movement is laterally, with the current of bodies fleeing to the right side of the painting and leading our eyes off the canvas. The figural group in the right foreground counters this movement. The collective force of the two men's bodies thrusts upward from the lower right corner, while the two female figures form another diagonal that is extended by the older woman's gaze toward the female figure in blue on the left. These opposing compositional diagonals create an additional kind of movement, enhancing the effect of the overall struggle.

Movement and meaning

Poussin interpreted a story from antiquity, and to do so he took figures and poses from the classical and contemporary art that he studied in Rome. The kidnapping of the Sabines was a brutal episode, when the Romans forcibly carried away the women of a neighboring tribe to be their wives. Poussin conveyed all the drama of this event, and yet transformed its violence with classical gestures and carefully organized movement. In this way, he captured contradictory sensations of elegant violence and organized chaos.



See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/437329

2 **The Harvesters**, 1565
Pieter Bruegel the Elder
(Netherlandish, Breda (?) ca. 1525–1569 Brussels)
Oil on wood
Rogers Fund, 1919 (19.164)

Compositional movement

Bruegel compels us to read every inch of his painting by guiding our eyes around the composition with a careful arrangement of lines and details. He anchors the painting with a tall tree in the foreground; a group of people gathers at its base. Our eyes circle the tree and then move outward into the land, finding a path that takes us down the sloping field into the middle landscape, accompanied by three figures and two low-flying birds. This arc sweeps from bright yellow wheat into green trees and a road that carries our eyes into the distant fields. Here we connect to another path that leads into the hazy, distant background and the line of the horizon.

Following the water's edge, we begin to journey back toward the foreground, to the trees and the church beyond it. Moving along this border of trees to the right side of the painting, we encounter a figure dangling from a tree and apples falling to the ground. The journey returns us to the central group of resting figures. There is a sense of constancy to the circular movement around the painting, yet at any point we can choose to veer off the sweeping arcs of the natural landscape. We might, for instance, follow the road traveled by the wagon in the middle ground to encounter new details in the center of the canvas. The painting's composition structures our tour through a broad expanse of land that otherwise might be difficult to navigate visually.

Figures and gesture

While the larger compositional lines keep our eyes moving, each area of the painting is populated by precise details that ask us to consider life within this painted world. All of the figures are in various poses of labor and rest. The man in the foreground, separate from the group, sprawls with his arm bent behind his head. Another man twists his body to reach behind him and cut a slice of bread. A kneeling man in a brown cap holds a spoon in his fist and opens his mouth widely, mid-bite. Some figures in the foreground are still working. One man walks toward us, slightly slumped by the weight of the jugs he carries. Other figures mirror the land in their poses and movement: the shape of the scythes and the implied action of the men working with them echo the sweeping lines of the landscape; a woman bent over with a bundle of wheat mirrors the pyramidal shape of the wheat stacks.

Movement and meaning

These gestures of labor connect the people to the landscape, just as other figures' poses of rest connect them to us on a human level. Bruegel uses movement to visually unite people and land. The sense of circular motion that Bruegel created also reflects the cycle of the seasons, which relates the painting to its larger context: it was originally part of a series of six paintings, each depicting a different time of the year. Movement underlies the entire series. Imagine these dynamic landscapes in one room, as originally intended. As a whole, the series would have presented a sense of "arm-chair travel"—a visual and mental journey.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/435809

3 **The Story of Joseph**, ca. 1482
Biagio d'Antonio
(Italian, Florentine, active by 1472–died 1516)
Tempera on wood
The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931 (32.100.69)

Time and narrative

In this painting, movement is not merely compositional; it also signifies the passage of time. The artist portrays not one event, but eight separate Old Testament episodes from the life of Joseph. This is a continuous narrative, a technique that collapses time to show us everything on one panel.

The story begins in the middle ground at the left, where a group of figures stands just outside the city gate. A merchant in red, labeled "MERCATANI," holds a bag of money; to the right is "PULTIFR" (Potiphar), who moves away with one arm on "GUSEPPO" (Joseph), the boy he has just bought as a slave.

We enter the city gate and move right, where we encounter the next chronological episode depicting Joseph tempted by Potiphar's wife. Notice that Joseph looks older, but still wears the same clothing in order to maintain his pictorial identity throughout the composition.

On the other side of the loggia, Potiphar has locked Joseph in prison.

The painter then brings our attention forward, to the building in the foreground, where through a window we can see a man in bed with the label "SONGO DI FARAGONE." This is the dream of Pharaoh, which Joseph then translates for him in the next scene, at the table just to the left of the bed.

For the next episode we look to the center of the painting; Joseph is seated on his chariot, now a free man promoted by Pharaoh. We then move forward in time by moving backward in the composition, to the loggia in the middle ground where Joseph is shown forgiving his brothers.

The final episode takes our gaze back to the left and outside the gates where we began. We find Joseph reaching up to greet his father, Jacob, who is seated on a horse.

Space and movement

The painter would not have had enough lateral space to depict these eight episodes on one panel if he had arranged the scenes sequentially from left to right. Instead, he arranged the narrative in several directions, moving back and forth from the middle ground to the foreground in a kind of unfinished figure eight. In order to do this, the painter created an illusion of three-dimensional space using linear perspective, an innovation of the early Renaissance. The receding lines of the buildings' exteriors, as well as their interior spaces, make room for the many episodes depicted here.

Movement and meaning

By depicting the entire life of Joseph rather than a single episode, the artist created a work that held multiple meanings for his patron. Each episode of Joseph's life was related to a different virtue, such as forgiveness, purity, and devotion. The painting was simultaneously decorative, dynamic, and entertaining, and it served as a reminder that God rewards virtue with greatness. This painting, along with a companion panel relating Joseph's earlier life, would have been part of the decoration of a Florentine bedroom. As he moves us through time with a continuous narrative, Biagio d'Antonio sets the entire story in the fifteenth century by painting Florentine-style buildings and clothing, making the Biblical events seem contemporary to his viewers.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/435666

4 **The Vision of Saint John**, 1608–14
El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos)
(Greek, Iráklion (Candia) 1540/41–1614 Toledo)
Oil on canvas
Rogers Fund, 1956 (56.48)

The Vision of Saint John, El Greco

El Greco combines gesture, line, light, and brushstroke to create a series of rippling and fluctuating movements that evoke the otherworldly.

Gesture and line

With arms extended, Saint John fills the left side of the canvas. His elongated body, covered by rippling blue cloth, sweeps our eyes upward, taking in the height of the canvas and connecting the earth and sky. His arms form a wide V and his fingers and hands seem to stir the cloudy sky, pushing it toward the tumbling putti and the male figure on the right side of the painting. The impossibly curving arm of this nude male stretches upward with his gaze, while the undulating form of his body takes our eyes downward. We continue this up-and-down movement with each successive figure, through the center of the painting. Both the contour lines of these figures and their modeling contribute to a sense of rhythmic movement. The light and shadows of the flesh are painted with visible strokes that blend and overlap, so that the bodies seem to shimmer with an inner motion.

Line is not entirely freed from the task of describing form, but the brushstrokes have a life of their own. Wide, feathery strokes of paint change direction and tone with every fold of Saint John's blue robe. The brushstrokes are looser in the sky, as El Greco began to build up a cloudy heaven. The sky is unfinished and the earthy tone of the canvas's ground shows through, allowing us to see how the artist applied paint in thin, sweeping layers that softly blend on the canvas. We can imagine that the finished sky would have been equally dynamic. The yellow and green draperies are also unfinished, but still perform their pictorial function of isolating the nude figures from the sky as they, too, ripple with motion.

Space and movement

The effect of all this movement is heightened by El Greco's treatment of space. All of the figures, including the kneeling ones, appear to hover on an indefinite ground plane. El Greco does not anchor his figures with the traditional device of cast shadows, but instead surrounds the nudes with dark lines. Far from grounded, they seem buoyed by the visible brushstrokes, particularly the three standing figures in the center. There is no sense of spatial recession: while Saint John seems closer to us because of his size, the red cloth appears as close to the nude figures as to him. This collapsing of space into one plane of figures, ground, and drapery, is key to the expressive movement. Not bounded by space or earthly forces, the drama of the lines and gesture becomes the painting's primary focus.

Movement and meaning

El Greco's movement is in the service of spiritual expression. Intended for a hospital chapel, this painting depicts a vision, not a narrative. The motion that takes us in all directions is creating an unreal, spiritual place for contemplation and consolation. While the painting is unfinished, the effect of El Greco's innovative brushwork—and the lines and motion he created with it—would have been equally, if not more, powerful in a finished composition.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436576

5 **Whalers**, ca. 1845
Joseph Mallord William Turner
(British, London 1775–1851 London)
Oil on canvas
Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1896 (96.29)

Nature in motion

The immediate, overall effect of Turner's brush is a ceaseless, crushing motion of sky and water. Brushwork is visible all over the canvas, yet we cannot always make out its direction; the many layers of paint create a hazy, opaque mass that evokes violently churning water.

We can see clear, directional brushstrokes in the large, central ship. In the area between the light brown rowboats and the ship, vertical strokes of white and gray convey the violence of the wave and spray behind the nearly capsized boats. These strokes optically blend the middle ground and background, eliminating the perception of distance between the ship, the boats, and the horizon. Around the small boats, flicks and scrapings of the brush express choppy water and swells. Looking closely, we can see small bodies, almost the same tone as the boats and water, falling out of the powerless, upturned boat.

Just below these boats, in the lower center of the canvas, Turner created the effect of moving swells with broader strokes of white that crest over a darker passage of yellowish-brown and then spray back upward. These touches of white repeat in other areas of the water, often blending with other colors to vanish into the hazy water, as white caps disappear when a wave falls. In the left foreground, where the darkest colors are concentrated, small, tight brushstrokes radiate outward in many directions, as if the water is erupting from the impact of the whale's tail. The whale's head rises up out of the water in a rush of dark reddish brown paint. Touches of light pink—water tinged by blood—spray upward around the whale. Light, translucent brushstrokes move the water up and outward around the whale's right side. Below, the water is completely dark, and it seems more of a solid mass than water.

Over the entire canvas, Turner's handling of paint suggests vision coming in and out of focus. Our eyes do not comfortably settle in one place for too long. The sky is a series of white and gray brushstrokes and palette knife scrapings, layered over blue. The effect is of a moving mass of clouds that never quite breaks, confusing and overpowering in concert with the water below.

Movement and meaning

From our distant vantage point we can take in the full effect of nature's movement and action, yet we cannot make out any human emotion. The concentration of masses in the center of the composition allows our eyes to circumnavigate the action rather than penetrate it. Turner's style was unique and considered quite radical by some, yet the theme of nature overpowering man was not new. In the late eighteenth century, artists started to explore the Sublime—the notion that strong emotion could arise from the contemplation of a terrifying situation. Turner's innovative, layered brushwork boldly evokes a violent scene of nature in motion.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/437854

Illumination

Light is a constant presence in our lives: we see the world because everything in it reflects, absorbs, or refracts light waves in varying quantities. Illumination is the purposeful use of light to achieve an aesthetic or practical effect. Both in painting and in the world around us, light makes forms visible and directs our eyes. llumination often provokes physical or emotional responses that add meaning to what we see.

Paintings featured in this section

1 **The Baptism of Christ**
Jacopo Bassano (Jacopo da Ponte)

2 **The Penitent Magdalen**
Georges de La Tour

3 **Young Woman with a Water Pitcher**
Johannes Vermeer

4 **Camille Monet on a Garden Bench**
Claude Monet

5 **Two Men Contemplating the Moon**
Caspar David Friedrich

Form and space

For the painter, whose visual medium depends on material, color, and value, light is critical. The principal person in a picture is light, Édouard Manet reportedly said. For centuries, artists have studied the properties of light in order to determine how they can reproduce its effects in painting. Artists represented in the Met's European Paintings collection share an interest in using light and shadow to create form or volume in their paintings. Their approaches vary: some painters use pure color for shadows and then add white to lighten colors (for example, Lorenzo Monaco's *David*, or El Greco's *Portrait of a Cardinal)*. Others vary the density of translucent paint layers to create areas of highlight and shadow (Gerard David). Many painters began their canvases with a darker-toned ground (such as brown or gray), and then adjusted the value in both directions, building up darker and lighter tones to model form (Bassano, Illumination 1, page 77; Rembrandt, Illusion 5, page 27).

Artists also use light to create a sense of space and atmosphere. Painters who went outside to study landscape observed how objects across great distances appear lighter or less saturated, and they began to mimic this effect in their compositions to convey distance and space (atmospheric perspective). Different colors and qualities of light in a landscape can also suggest different times of day and weather conditions, and painters often use light to create the sense of a storm or rapidly changing weather (Jacob van Ruisdael, El Greco). The numerous oil sketches of landscapes in the collection (for example, Pierre Henri de Valenciennes) attest to the tradition of painters going outside to study the interactions of light, atmosphere, and nature. Artists in the later nineteenth century, like Claude Monet, made light the actual subject of the painting. To capture the momentary, changing effects of light, Monet painted canvases entirely outside, from start to finish, in one sitting.

Light draws us into paintings, connecting us to the place and moment that is depicted. Painters may use a consistent light source within a composition to create unity and a sense of space. Sometimes the light source in the painting is even consistent with the actual external light source; some artists used this technique in paintings destined for church chapels. For example, the direction of light and shadow in Raphael's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* reflects the placement of windows in the chapel it occupied. Within the painting, cast shadows follow the direction of the real light, while also creating a sense of the figures' weight and placement on the ground. Light draws us further into the illusion of the painting by connecting it to the real world.

How is moonlight different from sunlight?

Expression and symbolism

Illumination can be highly expressive. Low light might seem cozy while bright, cold light can be alarming. If the light in a painting seems out of the ordinary, it alerts us to look for meaning or narrative. Light that creates strong contrast or shadows in unusual places may alert us to significant objects, gestures, or people (see Caravaggio's *The Denial of Saint Peter*). Diffuse light, with gentle highlights and shadows, may seem equally unreal in its otherworldly, calming effect (such as in François Boucher's *The Interrupted Sleep*). Depending on the color and quality of the light, shadow may seem harsh and ominous (in Bartolomé Murillo's *Crucifixion* and Goya's *Don Manuel*), or studied and contemplative (in Rembrandt's *Aristotle*). A backlit subject, with a window behind it, places us "inside" the scene and gives us the sense that we have a privileged, interior view (see Edgar Degas's *A Woman Ironing* or Marie-Denise Villers's *Charlotte du Val d'Ognes*).

Both natural and unnatural illumination may hold more specific meanings as well. In Christian theology and Western philosophy, light is considered a fundamental component of the universe and a symbol of divinity. Light is equated with goodness, and darkness with evil; painters sometimes use this duality to convey specific religious messages. Gold leaf was used throughout the early Renaissance to both reflect ambient light and signify divinity. Later, painted gold light held the same meaning, and it was also used to delineate a dramatic, visionary experience (for example, Philippe de Champaigne's *Annunciation* and Guido Reni's *Immaculate Conception*). Often, painters made distinctions in color and quality between divine and natural light, sometimes combining both to actively break boundaries between the physical and the supernatural. With scientific explorations in the late eighteenth century, mystical theories of light gave way to more

How do we manipulate lighting for special effects?

"rational" hypotheses, and in painting, light frequently took on more secular meanings. Illumination often alluded to thought, understanding, or wisdom. With further advances of science and discoveries about the nature of vision, painters began to experiment with color and even take a more "scientific" approach to painting light. In his 1876 essay *La Nouvelle Peinture* (The New Painting), Edmond Duranty commented that the Impressionists' analysis of light was so accurate that even the best physicists would not be able to find fault with it.

Surfaces and light

The pictorial effect of light depends also on the ambient light that hits the painting (incident light) and its interaction with the material properties of the painting (its ground, its medium, and the application of paint). Painters were aware of how their finished paintings would interact with external illumination, including the effects of varnishes. Though some paintings were never meant to be varnished (like the sixteenth-century painting of the *Virgin Suckling the Child*), varnishes were usually applied to finished paintings to both protect the surfaces and to saturate colors, bringing out the full range of shadows and light. Whether a work is painted with tempera or oil, a varnish applied on top will reflect incident light and create a shiny surface. In the nineteenth century, the application of varnish just before the opening of an exhibition had become a tradition, so that all of the paintings on view had a consistent, glossy appearance. Toward the end of the century, painters like Camille Pissarro and Berthe Morisot refused to varnish their canvases because they preferred the surfaces to appear matte.

Museum curators, conservators, and gallery lighting designers all think about how paintings would originally have been lit and how ambient light affects our perception. They work to adjust gallery conditions so we see colors and values that are as close as possible to what the artists originally intended. The low light of Gallery 602, for example, approaches the warm, dim glow of the candlelight that would have illuminated early religious paintings.

LOOKING TO CONNECT

When do you use candles, and what is the effect of their light?

How do the qualities and effects of sunlight change during the day?

Think of one of your favorite places. How is it illuminated?

In the painting, where is the light source? What is creating light, and what reflects it?

Imagine you can step into the painting. What is the temperature like?

What are the darkest areas of the painting? Where are the transitions from dark to light?

FURTHER CONNECTIONS

A great deal has been written about light by a variety of experts. For an in-depth bibliography organized by type of study and time period, see: Bell, Janis Callen. "Light." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T051002.

Christiansen, Keith. "Connections: Clouds." The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–2013. www.metmuseum.org/Connections/clouds.

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McGlinchey, Christopher. "Color and Light in the Museum Environment." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 51 no. 3 (1993–94): 44–52.

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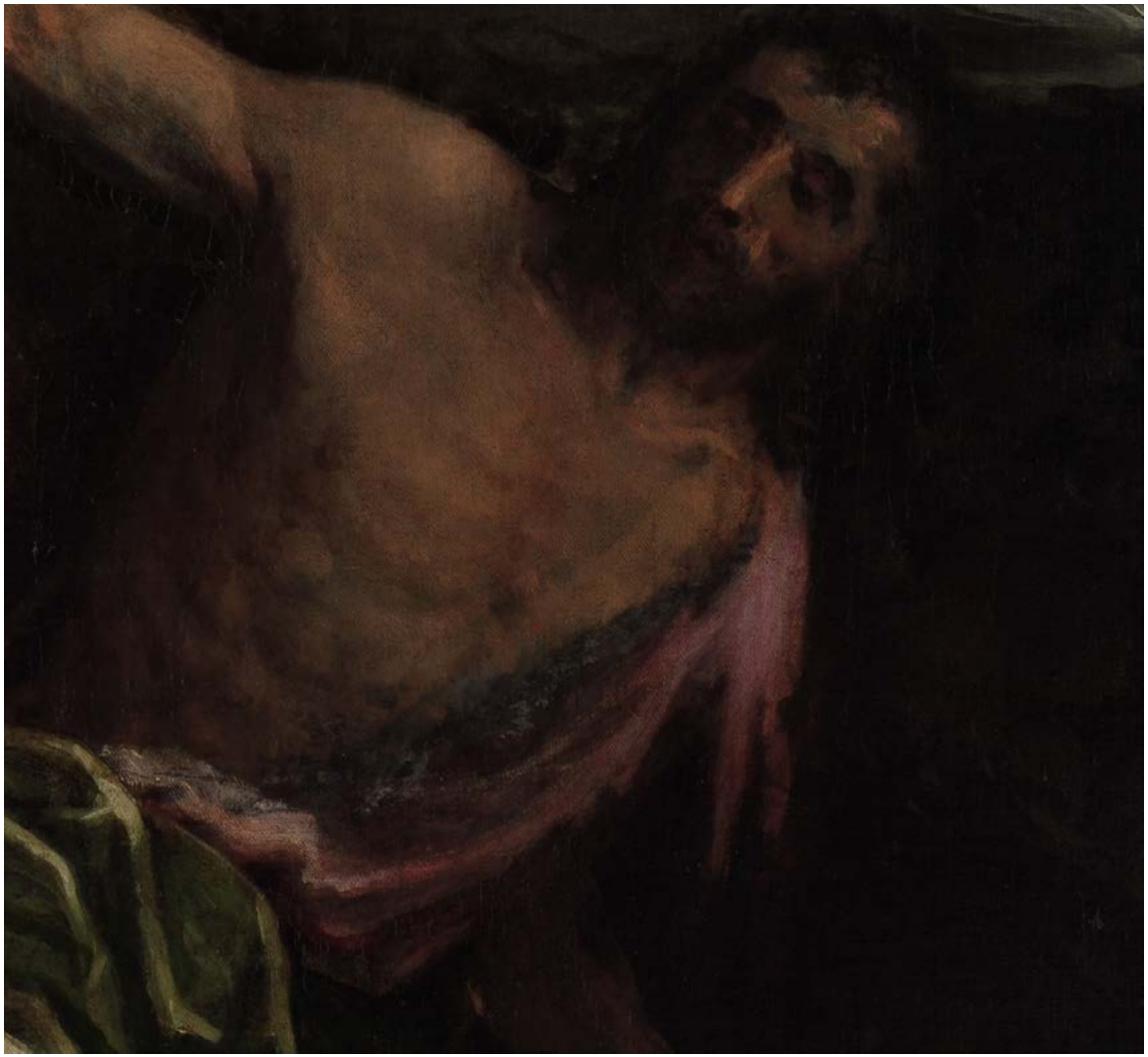
1 **The Baptism of Christ**, ca. 1590
Jacopo Bassano (Jacopo da Ponte) (Italian, Bassano del Grappa ca. 1510–1592 Bassano del Grappa)
Oil on canvas
Partial and Promised Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Mark Fisch, 2012 (2012.99)

Almost complete darkness surrounds the figures. On the right side of the painting, light begins to emerge along the horizon. A touch of white in the sky is the only other bright, pure light; we can barely make out a bird's head and part of a wing (the dove of the Holy Spirit). Below, Saint John's forearm is painted with warm pink and orange tones with flecks of red. His other arm almost disappears into shadow. Bassano picks out highlights in John's drapery with opaque tones of red and green lightened with lead white, giving form to the space between Saint John and Christ. Even the places on the canvas where light is absent seem heavy and thick with atmosphere.

Bassano's figures literally emerge from the surrounding darkness. Unlike the earlier Venetian artist Giovanni Bellini, who began with a white ground and built up color with layers of translucent glazes so that light is reflected through translucent layers of paint, Bassano began with a dark brown tone on the canvas and then applied lighter colors of paint in semiopaque layers. The preparation layer is still visible in areas (the lower right corner, for example) because the painting remains unfinished. By working in this manner, Bassano's colors quickly create light areas, so the forms seem to materialize from the depths of the canvas (rather than appearing to glow from within, like Bellini's *Madonna and Child*). Where the form of Christ's foot enters the water, it seems to dissolve back into the darkness. Bassano's process is particularly subtle in the modeling of the torsos of Saint John and Christ; the application of paint in patches draws out the ribs and muscles of the figures' abdomens. The flesh shimmers as shadows play beneath the lighter passages. Christ's upper body is broadly lit with wider areas of light paint, while his abdominal muscles are selectively highlighted. Light hits the concavity of his lower belly, and a dab of red paint suggests his navel. The effect, which would have been similar if the painting had been finished, is almost of an apparition: Christ seems to be stepping out of the darkness into light, and yet the light comes from a source that we cannot see.

Illumination and meaning

By setting the scene at night and eliminating natural daylight, Bassano emphasized divine light. Christ himself embodies the light, as he emerges from the darkness. The artist's approach to painting light was careful and entirely consistent with a fundamental precept of Christian theology. According to scripture, Christ comes into the world to bring light; he is God made flesh. The painter, similarly, emphasized the flesh of Christ coming into being through light. The painting technique and Bassano's attention to light are inseparable from the message of the painting.



See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/440393

2 **The Penitent Magdalen**, ca. 1640
Georges de La Tour
(French, Vic-sur-Seille 1593–1653 Lunéville)
Oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 1978 (1978.517)

Georges de La Tour restricts his light source to a single candle, which draws both our gaze and that of the seated woman. He painted the long, wavering flame with carefully varied tones, darker at the wick and then lighter before it tapers and blends with the surrounding colors. A careful brushstroke whisks around from the smooth right side of the flame's base and curves upward, just barely crossing into the dark of the mirror. De La Tour adjusted the flame's color and intensity only minimally in the reflection, where the tapered end becomes slightly orange as it disappears in the dark glass. The candle itself appears lighter in the reflection because the far side of the candle catches its own reflected light. It also appears shorter because the mirror is tipped backward at an angle.

The mirror, the source of this double illumination, is set in a frame with a less reflective, angled surface (possibly gilded wood) that gives off a more diffuse light. To achieve this effect, the areas of highlight are less sharply defined. The painter incorporated more red pigment in the left side of the frame, suggesting a reflection of the Magdalen's skirt. Moving out from the candle and the mirror, we find that everything is painted in warm colors—yellow, red, and orange—in order to convince us of the tonal effect of the candle's illumination. The light touches everything the artist wants us to notice: the discarded pearls, the skull she holds in her lap, her simple clothing, her folded hands, and the barest glimpse of her turned face.

Everything in the light's path creates shadow; even the raised edge of the woman's blouse casts a shadow on her skin. In fact, large areas of the canvas are in almost complete darkness. De La Tour created sharp lines of contrast between his light and dark areas—in the skirt, for example, and in the eye sockets of the skull. The bright line of the Magdalen's profile is just barely visible, and crosses the sharp line of the dark shadow on the wall beyond her. These contrasts create a play of form and void; the absence of light on either side of Mary creates a series of unknown spaces that isolates her figure. We have little sense of the rest of the room or what it might contain.

Illumination and meaning

Even before knowing anything about the woman in this painting, the light evokes a specific mood. She is alone with a single candle and objects that serve as reminders of the world and human mortality. Though the contrast of light and dark is visually dramatic, the clarity of line, alternating planes of light and dark, smooth brushwork, and broad areas of darkness create a distinct sense of stillness. The painter used the ordinary light of an everyday object—a candle—and transformed it into the setting for a quiet moment that seems both believable and extraordinary.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/436839

3 **Young Woman with a Water Pitcher**, ca. 1662
Johannes Vermeer
(Dutch, Delft 1632–1675 Delft)
Oil on canvas
Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889 (89.15.21)

Temperature and color

Light streams in through an upper window, out of view, and begins to peek through the hazy lower window: this is a moment just before direct illumination. Vermeer's light has a narrative power; he uses the effects of light to create textures, colors, and forms that seem to reach beyond the visible to hint at the inner world of the female figure.

Vermeer's palette consists of mostly cool tones, created by mixing blue pigment with his colors. Looking closely at the shadows on the white wall, and in the woman's head and shoulder coverings, we see how varying shades of blue create the shadows, and how the artist contrasted them with touches of yellow-white highlight. The light closest to the window, in the upper left corner and along the window sash, is warm, painted with more yellow and pink. As the light moves across the room, Vermeer added more blue so that the light below the map is decidedly cooler. This variation of tone and color in the light is part of what creates the atmosphere and gives us a sense of the room's cool temperature.

The brightness of the red in the carpet on the table is heightened through contrast with blue tones. Where the light hits the carpet, Vermeer blends orange with the red to achieve a warmer tone. Along the edge of the table, where the carpet falls into shadow, we see the subtle transition of color from a warm orange-red to a cool blue-red. Vermeer painted more of the blue design on this lateral side of the carpet than on the top, further emphasizing the difference in temperature between light and shade. Where the carpet is reflected in the metal basin, the tone and temperature shifts again. The slightly greenish color of the metal mutes the reflected reds and blues. Vermeer formed the gray metal pitcher of deceptively simple strokes of mixed complementary colors, blue and orange in some areas, and red and green in others. Warm white highlights create the luster of the metal, and a strip of brighter blue and soft red-orange reflect the brightest areas of the cloth and the jewelry box.

Texture and form

Light both creates form and dissolves its edges. Vermeer built up his tones in patches of semitransparent paint in such a way that it creates a sense of solid form in soft focus. Looking at the high-resolution digital image, we can see that Vermeer's layered areas of color do not entirely line up to form a sharp edge anywhere in the painting. For example, along the contours of the woman's extended arm and sleeve, the different tones blend ever so slightly with the color of the wall. The most stunning use of this effect is in the carpet, in the borders of the different colors, where Vermeer's technique captures the texture and pattern of the woven surface. We sense that the artist chose his objects for the varying ways that their shapes and textures absorb and reflect light.

Illumination and meaning

During this period Vermeer was increasingly preoccupied with the appearance of natural light.[1] The lack of narrative pretext in this painting allows light to become the protagonist. Vermeer's illumination is that of our everyday world, and light is so carefully rendered that we may forget it is painted. To our modern eyes, the crisp colors with bright, hazy edges confer an almost photographic quality. Vermeer may have used a camera obscura to study the effects of light, but in the painting, its elusive quality can only be explained by the artist's attention to color and the handling of paint.

[1] Walter Liedtke, *Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), vol. 2, 880.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/437881

4 **Camille Monet (1847–1879) on a Garden Bench**, 1873

Claude Monet

(French, Paris 1940–1926 Giverny)

Oil on canvas

The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 2002, Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (2002.62.1)

Sunlight and color

Monet is outdoors, painting the immediate effects of the sun's illumination. Though the shadowed figure of Camille occupies the center of the canvas, the inclination of her body and the lines of the bench take us quickly out of the shadow and into the sun.

Monet creates flowers along a retaining wall on the left edge of the canvas using dabs of saturated red paint. The darker green in this section and the muted touches of mauve and mint green, which extend along the entire wall into the center of the canvas, evoke a partially shadowed surface in indirect sunlight. The female figure in the background is on the border of light and shadow. Direct sun hits her parasol's upper surface with a stroke of pure white. Light illuminates the left side of her body in summary strokes of light violet. In front of her, full sunlight bursts onto the flowers, foliage, and grass: Monet mixes varying amounts of white with pure color, describing the desaturating effect of full sunlight. The red flowers here are bright salmon-orange, created by mixing red with white and yellow to achieve a warmer, brighter tone. Interspersed with the flowers, the leaves are an electric yellow-green. Where the light is most intense, there is no trace of darker colors. Moving to the shadowed right-hand side of the bush, the bright colors are interrupted by darker greens and small touches of red.

Shadow and color

The effect of sunlight is as powerful, if not as bright, on the ground of the pathway. Monet brushed in a light, pink-toned white where the sun hits the path; where the shade begins, Monet's color becomes cooler, with added touches of blue that result in a lilac tone. This is not the consistent, sharp shadow of a fixed object, but the changing, dappled shade of a tree. Monet indicates this with both brushwork and color. Over the bright ground, the painter adds small strokes of light blue, yellow, mauve, and orange. The shadow retains the same tones as the sunlit areas, only much dimmer.

The hem of Camille's dress almost dissolves into the shadows, but for its much cooler tone of gray. Strokes of blue dance across the gray dress, indicating areas of light. Monet uses pure black paint very sparingly, only to pick out the darkest areas and the playful lines of the trim. In other places, he mixes black with blue to achieve a range of value even in these dark areas. Traces of an almost royal blue are visible in Camille's hat, for example, where a bit of indirect light hits it. On the left side of the bench, Monet uses light blue for the slats, while behind Camille's bustle, they are pure black. The male figure presents an interesting contrast—his dark hat and coat stand out sharply against the sunlit foliage behind him, while his lower half seems to dissolve behind the slatted bench. Here, lighter strokes of paint overlap the lines of the bench in many places, as if the light is pushing its way through the bench.

Illumination and meaning

Unlike the artists who went outside to sketch light and atmosphere in the early to mid-nineteenth century, Monet's work outside was not preparatory; eventually, he began and finished canvases out of doors. Rather than a dramatic landscape of Italy, or a Romantic vision of nature, it is an urban, everyday garden. Though this might be called a genre scene, it signals a preoccupation with a nonfigurative subject; the space that the two people occupy is about half of the composition, but light is beginning to win out over any other subject.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/438003

5 **Two Men Contemplating the Moon**, ca. 1825–30
Caspar David Friedrich
(German, Greifswald 1774–1840 Dresden)
Oil on canvas
Wrightsman Fund, 2000 (2000.51)

In this small canvas, light is an integral part of the subject matter and the focus of attention for the two men. Their backs are to us, as they stand at the top of a hill, one leaning on a walking stick and the other with his arm on his companion's shoulder. They are engaged in looking at the moon, and their turned backs indicate that we should do the same. The moon itself holds pride of place in the center of the canvas, framed by the tree and the figures. The crooked branches of the tree and its upturned roots contrast with the moon's perfect orb. To the right of the moon is a fleck of white paint: the planet Venus. Apart from the moon and Venus, there are no other touches of bright highlight anywhere in the painting, except a tiny spot on the left figure's white collar. The moon is not a real source of illumination for anything other than the sky itself.

Though the rising moon is the subject of the painting, its illumination is not dramatic; in fact, it appears rather dim. Its light is colored and muted by the effect of the atmosphere, whose interference scatters the blue, green, and purple range of visible light. It appears yellow, with a bright sliver on one side (either a waxing crescent, or perhaps a lunar eclipse). It casts a diffuse, glowing light through the sky, which becomes a light violet color toward the perimeter of the canvas. This soft purple of the evening sky mixes with the yellow moonlight above the horizon, resulting in a mid-tone of soft gray (particularly noticeable at the right edge of the canvas). Friedrich's palette is warm, and he uses yellow pigment throughout the sky and the earth to create a consistently warm tone.

The light of this moon is more subtle than a full moon in a dark night sky, or the throbbing red of a harvest moon. From our vantage point it throws everything else into shadow: the figures, as well as the craggy forms of the earth in the foreground. Had Friedrich chosen a different view, from the other side of the hill, the moonlight would have caught every changing angle of branch and bark, and the tree might have appeared incredibly dramatic. Instead the tree is mostly silhouetted. The large branches are only lightly brushed in and partially transparent, revealing some of the light behind them. Friedrich creates texture with his brush in these dark forms, setting up an additional contrast between the smooth, light sky and the nature around it.

Illumination and meaning

By placing the moon in the center of the painting and restricting its light to the sky alone, it becomes the subject matter entirely and explicitly. Friedrich took the moon as his subject in several other similar paintings inspired by the Romantic fascination with the moon in poetry and literature. Even if this painting depicts a lunar eclipse, the mood and colors, as well as the small size of the work, evoke a contemplative rather than dramatic mood. Whereas De La Tour's candlelight evokes religious meditation, here the figures' contemplation is purely secular.

See this painting on metmuseum.org
www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/438417

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Teaching Goals

The direct experience of original works of art lies at the heart of teaching in the Museum's galleries. While we recognize that the breadth of the Museum's holdings, the diversity of our visitors, and the different approaches of our teaching faculty invite a range of pedagogical methods, we propose that all gallery teaching be shaped by the following broad goals. These goals will also inform the distinct learning objectives that are developed for each audience-specific program within the Museum's offerings.

- Focus visitors' attention on original works of art and their capacity to evoke wonder, delight, and cultural understanding.
- Develop visitors' skills of visual analysis in order to facilitate their independent and meaningful encounters with works of art.
- Recognize and respond to visitors' diverse backgrounds, ages, interests, needs, and learning styles.
- Create opportunities for active participation and exchange with visitors to take full advantage of the interactive nature of gallery teaching.
- Encourage visitors to learn from works of art in multiple ways.
- Relate objects to art-historical and other intellectual contexts as appropriate to the objects and the audience so that visitors understand the objects from a variety of conceptual frameworks.
- Connect works of art to life today, as appropriate, so that art resonates as universal and relevant.
- Foster visitors' desire for further inquiry and a deeper engagement with art.

An interdepartmental committee comprised of Education, curatorial, and conservation staff, and members of the Volunteer Organization of The Metropolitan Museum of Art developed these teaching goals. Thomas P. Campbell, Director and CEO, approved these goals in spring 2010.

Notes to Terms Used in This Publication

Note to the Reader:
In many of the following entries, links to Oxford Art Online will connect you to more information on the given topic; however, Oxford Art Online is only accessible onsite at the Met (on a Museum computer or within the Museum's wireless network), or remotely via login with a Metropolitan Museum ID. If you have such an ID, you can access Oxford Art Online from home by logging in with your name and ID number through the Museum's Thomas J. Watson Library. If you are not affiliated with the Museum, your home university, institution, or local library may have its own subscription; please consult your librarian. In New York City, access is available onsite at New York Public Library's Research Libraries.

academy
an association of artists, organized to oversee training, provide opportunities for exhibitions, and offer a venue for debate and interaction between artists, and with the public. For more information, see Humphrey Wine, "Academy." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T000302.
➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting

atmospheric perspective
also called "aerial perspective," refers to the technique creating the effects of distance and atmosphere by adjusting color, saturation, and clarity.
➔ Back to: Illumination

binder
the liquid substance artists combine with dry pigment to create paint. Linseed or walnut oil, for example, are binders used in oil painting. Although sometimes medium is used as a synonym for binder, medium instead refers to the kind of paint (e.g. oil paint is a medium while linseed oil is a binder).
➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting

camera obscura
Latin, meaning "dark room." Basically, a box with a small hole on one side that lets in a small amount of light to produce an inverted image on the opposite side. The camera obscura has a long history and a number of variations; for more information, see Jacqueline Colliss Harvey, "Camera Obscura." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T013424.
➔ Back to: Illumination

chasing
the metalwork technique of hammering or denting metal to create low relief patterns or decorations. It is used in conjunction with the technique of repoussé (French, meaning "pushed up"), in which the metal is hammered out from the reverse side.
➔ Back to: Illusion

contour line
a line that defines an edge. See also the discussion of contour lines on page 34.
➔ Back to: Borders
➔ Back to: Movement

Notes to Terms Used in This Publication

di sotto in sù

Italian, meaning "from below upwards," refers to the kind of extreme perspective and foreshortening (common in ceiling paintings) in which the figures and objects appear to hover above the viewer. The technique was often intended to create the illusion that the ceiling was entirely transformed into a different space.

➜ Back to: Illusion (p. 31)

➜ Back to: Illusion (p. 32)

foreshortening

the depiction of an object or figure so that it is consistent with the perspective system of the painting and appears to either project or recede in relation to the viewer.

➜ Back to: Illusion

glaze

in painting, a transparent or semi-transparent layer of paint. See Jill Dunkerton, "Glaze." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T032835.

➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

➜ Back to: Illumination

grisaille

French, from *gris*, meaning gray. A method of painting in a monochrome, neutral color, often used to imitate the appearance of sculpture. For further information see Michaela Krieger, "Grisaille." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T034995.

➜ Back to: Illusion

guild

an organization that governed the training and trading activity of a particular profession; often associated with certain patron saints. For more information see Richard Mackenney, "Guild." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T035555.

➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

history painting

a genre in which the subject is a historical event (usually classical, mythological, or biblical). Many regarded it as the highest form of painting from approximately the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. For further information see "History painting." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T038306.

➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting (p. 5)

➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting (p. 7)

humanism

refers generally to the revival of interest in classical antiquity (mainly literature and languages) that began in the Renaissance. The word "humanist," as it emerged in the fifteenth century, designated someone who studied and taught classical subjects like rhetoric, grammar, poetry, history, and philosophy (*studia humanitatis*). See James O. Duke, "Humanism." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T039396.

➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

Notes to Terms Used in This Publication

impasto
a very thick application of paint, showing evidence of the painter's brush or palette knife.
➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting
➔ Back to: Illusion

liberal art
the origin of the term dates back to classical antiquity when it referred to areas of learning practiced by free men (*artes liberales*), as opposed to the manual labor of slaves (*artes vulgares*). This association persisted, and the liberal arts were long considered more worthy or noble than manual work. The areas of study defined as liberal arts varied across the centuries, but in general they included grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music. Timothy Hunter, "Liberal arts." The Oxford Companion to Western Art. *Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t118/e1468.
➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting

linear perspective
a specific technique that uses a system of lines to create the impression of spatial recession. There are different types of linear perspective, but the most commonly referred to is one-point perspective (the first to be codified in the Renaissance). One-point perspective demands that the artist designate a single **vanishing point** in the composition where all the foreshortened lines (known as **orthogonals**) converge. See Janis Callen Bell, "Perspective." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T066570.
➔ Back to: Illusion (p. 12)
➔ Back to: Illusion (p. 22)
➔ Back to: Movement

oil paint
for an in-depth discussion on the history and nature of oil paint, see Catherine Hassall, "Oil painting." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T063321.
➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting

pentimento (plural: pentimenti)
Italian, meaning repentance, or a change of mind. A visible change made by the artist painting over a previously rendered design, which is sometimes visible to the naked eye, due to the thinning of paint layers over time, or can also be discovered through technical examinations.
➔ Back to: Illusion (p. 16)
➔ Back to: Illusion (p. 17)

perspective
a technique used to create the appearance of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. This includes rendering objects in a way that gives the impression of their positions in space and physical relationships to each other (height, depth, distance, etc.). Linear and atmospheric (or aerial) perspective are two different kinds of perspective commonly employed by painters. See linear perspective and atmospheric perspective above.
➔ Back to: Illusion

Notes to Terms Used in This Publication

plein air
French, meaning "open air." In the context of painting, *en plein air* means painting outdoors. The term is commonly used as an adjective: for example, a plein-air painting.
➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting
➜ Back to: Illusion

poetry
Artists and theorists from the Renaissance period onward often discussed and debated the relative merits and powers of poetry and painting. The comparison between painting and poetry was known as the *paragone*. For further information see Claire Farago, "Paragone." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T065290.
➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

pigment
in painting, the coloring matter that is suspended in a binder to create paint. For an in-depth discussion see Karin Groen, "Pigment." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T067586.
➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

porte-crayon
an instrument for holding a piece of chalk or other drawing material. For more information see Jacob Simon, "The artist's porte-crayon." National Portrait Gallery, London, accessed August 15, 2013, www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/artists-their-materials-and-suppliers/the-artists-porte-crayon.php.
➜ Back to: Borders

predella
(Italian) the lower horizontal section of an altarpiece, separate from the larger main panel. It served to support the main panel and raise it higher. Often such panels were painted scenes that formed part of the altarpiece's overall narrative program. Today many predella panels are separated from their altarpieces.
➜ Back to: Borders

support
the material surface on which an artist paints. Wood, canvas, and paper, for example, are all types of supports. For more information see Jonathan Stephenson, "Support." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T082371.
➜ Back to: Developments in European Painting

Notes to Terms Used in This Publication

tempera
as it is used today, refers to paint composed of pigment mixed with egg yolk (and sometimes a bit of water). In the early Renaissance, it could also mean pigment mixed with water (as used in fresco painting). For this reason, "egg tempera" was used to designate egg yolk as the binder. See Jill Dunkerton's in-depth essay "Tempera." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T083694.

➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting

trompe l'oeil
French, meaning "fool the eye," is a term that was coined in the early nineteenth century to describe the illusion of three-dimensionality in a flat surface (not just painting). The "deception" requires that objects are painted full-scale, as they would appear in real life. Trompe l'oeil painting eventually became known as a sub-genre of still-life painting (like William Michael Harnett's *Still Life—Violin and Music*); however, today the term is commonly used to refer to both a technique and the genre. For further reading on trompe l'oeil, see Miriam Milman, "Does 'real' trompe l'oeil exist?" in *Art and Illusions: Masterpieces of Trompe l'oeil from Antiquity to the Present Day*. exh. cat. Florence: Mandragora/Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, 2009, pp. 21–32.

➔ Back to: Illusion

underdrawing
a preliminary drawing on the primed painting support, used to lay out the composition and guide the artist during the painting process. For further information see Maryan Wynn Ainsworth, "Underdrawing." *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T087055.

➔ Back to: Developments in European Painting