Learning to Look: Navigating the Mysteries of the Art World

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“If truth is that which lasts, then art has proved truer than any other human endeavor. What is certain is that pictures and poetry and music are not only marks in time but marks through time, of their own time and ours, not antique or historical, but living as they ever did, exuberantly, untired.”

Jeanette Winterson in *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*, 1995
Weekly Themes

Week 1: Who am I? A Closer Look at the Art of Portraiture

Week 2: The Changing Nature of Landscape Art

Week 3: Whose History is it Anyway?

Week 4: Hidden Meanings in Still Life

Week 5: Photographs – Capturing the Moment

Week 6: “My kid could do that!” The Perils of Abstraction
Some mysteries we will/have solved(?):

• Week 1: Why is the Mona Lisa so famous?
• Week 2: How many members did the Group of Seven have? (Hint: not 7, and Tom Thomson wasn’t one of them)
• Week 3: How can you make a portrait of someone you have never seen?
• **Week 4: When is an apple not an apple...?**
• Week 5: When was the first “selfie” photograph taken, and who took it?
• Week 6: Could my kid do that...?
Definition of Still Life:

- A **still life** (plural: **still lifes**) is a work of art depicting mostly inanimate subject matter, typically commonplace objects which are either natural (food, flowers, dead animals, plants, rocks, shells, etc.) or man-made (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewelry, coins, pipes, etc.)

- In art, still life developed as a separate genre/category of painting in the Low Countries (coastal region in northwestern Europe including the Netherlands, Belgium and low lying deltas of the Rhine and other rivers – in current European Union referred to as Benelux) in latter 16\textsuperscript{th} century.

- Derives from Dutch word *stilleven* (Romance languages use term *dead nature* – *nature morte* in French, for example.)
Definition of Symbolism (Merriam Webster)

1. the art or practice of using symbols especially by investing things with a symbolic meaning or by expressing the invisible or intangible by means of visible or sensuous representations: such as
   • artistic imitation or invention that is a method of revealing or suggesting immaterial, ideal, or otherwise intangible truth or states
   • the use of conventional or traditional signs in the representation of divine beings and spirits
2. a system of symbols or representations
Week Four: Hidden Meanings.....
Medieval symbols of martyrdom in Simone Martini’s *St. Catherine* (1320-25, NGC)
Two ‘Saint Catharines’ (Medieval and Baroque)

Simone Martini’s *St. Catharine*, c. 1320-25
(egg tempera and gold leaf on wood) NGC

Artemesia Gentileschi’s *Self-portrait as Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1615-17
(oil on canvas) National Gallery, UK
Two depictions of Vulcan (Roman god of fire) at NGC

Vulcan and Aeolus, Piero de Cosimo, c. 1490  
Vulcan at his Forge, Pompeo Batoni, 1750
Virgin and Child with Saints, B. Gozzoli, c. 1476 (NGC)
Two versions of a Saint: St. Anthony Abbot

The Virgin and Child with St. Anthony Abbot and a Donor, Hans Memling, 1472 (NGC)  
The Temptation of Saint Anthony, Follower of Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1450-1516 (NGC)
The Garden of Earthly Delights, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1490-1510 (Prado Museum, Madrid)
Exterior of the Bosch triptych (when closed)
A not-Bosch vs. a Bosch: Right panel of Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights

“Follower of Bosch” in NGC
More Temptation....

Detail of the Temptation of St. Anthony

Eve, the Serpent and Death, Hans Baldung, called Grien, c. 1510-15 (NGC)
Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks*, 1483-86 (Louvre)
Madonna of the Rose Garden, Sandro Botticelli, 1469-70 (Uffizi Gallery Florence)
Botticelli’s evolving Madonnas: Madonna della Loggia, 1467; and Madonna of the Pomegranate, 1487 (both in Uffizi Gallery, Florence)
The Doni Tondo, Michelangelo, c. 1507 (Uffizi Gallery)
Laocoon and His Sons, Vatican Museums, Rome (excavated 1506)
Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling paintings, 1508-12 (Rome)
Raphael’s School of Athens, 1509-11
Madonna of the Goldfinch, Raphael, 1505-06 (Uffizi Gallery)
Christ Child and the Infant John the Baptist, Sandro Botticelli’s Workshop, c. 1490 (NGC)
Detail of Botticelli Workshop painting
The Christ Child and the Infant John the Baptist with a Lamb, Bernardino Luini, c. 1507-32 (NGC)
Protection from the Plague: *The Virgin and Child with Saints Roch and Sebastian*, Lorenzo Lotto, c. 1521-24 (NGC)
Early Renaissance vs. Baroque style St. Sebastians

St. Sebastian, Andrea Mantegna, 1480 (Louvre)

Saint Sebastian in marble, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1617-18 (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid)
The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1647-52 (Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome)
The NGC’s Bernini (Pope Urban VIII, 1632)
Grien and Cranach in European Galleries, NGC
Venus, Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1518 (NGC)
Venus with fig leaf (pre-restoration)
From Venus to Vanitas (*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity—Ecclesiastes 1:2*) Still Life with a Skull and Writing Quill, Pieter Claesz, 1628 (MET Museum, NY)
As the Old Sing, so the Young Pipe, Jacob Jordaens, c.1640 (NGC)
Details of the Jordaens painting, including *Memento Mori*
More delicious (and not so delicious) details, including pentimento
Works by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Younger (Left: Still-life of Flowers in a Stoneware Vase, c. 1610; R: Bouquet of Flowers in a Faience Vase, 1620’s (NGC))
Still Life w. Fruit and Butterflies, Jan Davidsz de Heem, 1652 (NGC)
A 20th century bowl...(Mary Pratt)
De Heem’s Still Life with Fruit, Flowers, Glasses and Lobster, 1660’s (Royal Museums of Art, Belgium)
Mythological Allusions (Marie-Antoinette in 1778, Gen. Wolfe in 1760)
Pan and Syrinx, Jean-Francois de Troy, 1733 (NGC)
Two differing 19\textsuperscript{th} cent. *Mythologies* (Meynier’s *Wisdom Defending Youth from the Arrows of Love*, 1810; Turner’s *Mercury and Argus*, 1836) NGC
18th and 19th c. still-life paintings in NGC

Still Life with Peaches and Grapes, Anne Vallayer-Coster, 1770’s

Still-life, Gustave Courbet, 1871
Irish-American Artist William M. Harnett

The Old Violin, 1886 (Natl. Gall, Washington)

The Last Rose of Summer, 1886 (Cincinnati Art Museum)
Two Van Gogh still lives: Bowl with Zinnias and Other Flowers, 1886; and Iris, 1890 (both NGC)
Post-Impressionist Still Lifes: Gauguin’s *Vase with Nasturtiums and Quimper Faience*, 1886 (NGC); and Cézanne’s *The Basket of Apples*, 1890-94 (Art Institute of Chicago)
Picasso’s *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912 (Musée Picasso), and *The Small Table*, 1919 (NGC)
Gustave Klimt and Austrian Symbolism/Art Nouveau

Hope I, 1903 (NGC)  The Kiss, 1907-08 (Belvedere Gallery, Vienna)
Details of Hope I
NGC Portrait of Elisabeth Lederer, 1914-16 (w. detail of dragons)
Apache still life, Edward S. Curtis, c. 1907 (Library of Congress)
Still life photographs by Edward Weston

Nautilus, 1927

Pepper No. 30, 1930
Georgia O’Keefe’s *Jimson Weed, White Flower #1*, 1932 (Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Arkansas)
Pop Art: Contemporary Still Life?

Campbell’s Soup, Andy Warhol, 1968

Warhol’s Brillo Soap Pads Boxes, 1964 (NGC)
Twentieth-century: Surrealism and its influence

The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dali, 1931 (MOMA, NY)
Indigenous landscapes with hidden and not-so-hidden messages: Laurence Paul Yuxweluptun’s *Scorched Earth, Clear-cut Logging on Native Sovereign Land, Shaman Coming to Fix*, 1991 (NGC)
Kent Monkman’s *The Triumph of Mischief*, 2007 (NGC)
George Catlin’s *An Indian ball-play*, c. 1846-50
Monkman’s *The Academy*, 2008 (Art Gallery of Ontario)
Two of Monkman’s sources

Laocoon and His Sons, Vatican Museums, Rome (excavated 1506)

After the Bath, Paul Peel, 1890 (AGO)
Two more sources of imagery for Monkman:

Noval Morrisseau’s *Self Portrait Devoured by Demons*, 1964 (AGO)

Figure of Indigenous warrior from West’s *Death of Wolfe* (copies in ROM and NGC)
Mary Pratt’s domestic still lifes

Eggs in an Egg Crate, 1975 (M.U.N. Gallery)  
Red Currant Jelly, 1972 (NGC)
Jelly Shelf, 1999 (Equinox Gallery Collection)
“I think with my work, even things that are ordinary are not ordinary. Because I don’t really believe that anything is ordinary – I think everything is complex and worthy of conjecture and worthy of a close look. I really believe that you could imagine the secrets of the universe by looking at a pile of grapes.”

Mary Pratt, as quoted by Leah Sandals in Globe and Mail article, Aug. 16, 2018
Mary Pratt: “As you get older, you don’t see this long extension of your life, but you can see an extension of your art. So gradually I’m beginning to think that art is more important to me than life.” (from a CBC interview)

“Vita Brevis Ars Longa” Vanitas Still Life, Edwaert Colyer aka Edward Collier, 1684 (Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, NY)

Mary Pratt (1935-2018) with her work