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Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
1934 U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

Extension Circular 1162

PICTURE STUDY
Furnished by
The American Federation of Arts

PURPOSE: The American Federation of Arts desire to ascertain the type of pictures in which rural people are interested and the methods of presentation which might be practical to use in the future. They also wish to stimulate an interest in art thru the use of inexpensive prints.

This set of pictures were sent to four states to be tried out. The states chosen were in the different sections of the United States.

It has been stated that the purpose was to stimulate interest in art. These pictures were selected with that in view. It may be that some of them would not seem suitable for a home but they are examples of different art and are interesting from that standpoint. Many pictures can be enjoyed for their method of making rather than because they add color or design to a room or have a pleasing idea which we can enjoy.

Some of these pictures have been selected for these reasons rather than because they are suitable for a home.

CONTENT OF THE PICTURES:

1. "The Pantry", by de Hooch.

The original of this painting is a perfect rendering of an interior. Many opportunities are afforded the eye to travel from the front of the picture back into the distance. On the left, beginning in the near foreground with the end of a wall, the eye strikes the door, and through the open cellar entry looks out upon a courtyard, through the window admitting light into the semi-dark pantry. On the right, through another open door, we look into a second chamber, with a window looking out. Light, color, texture and design play important parts in this picture. Each represents a path which, if pursued, lead us to an appreciation of the richness of the picture.

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The light, which comes from several sources, is varied as it penetrates into the interior of the house. Study any portion of the picture and note the "values" (the degrees of light and dark, regardless of color) of adjacent planes. Take for example, the portion around the upper center of the picture, where we see the stairs leading from the second floor penetrating into the room. Note how the underside of the treads are graded in "value". Follow through the reflected light on the wall beneath the open window, and note how transparent the shadows are.

The blue-green and reddish tiles are repeated in the colors of the mother's dress. On the whole, an arrangement of warm colors is brought into contrast with cool colors.

By texture in a painting, we mean the surface of things, whether rough, smooth, hard, soft; whether made of glass, wood, tile or any other material. For

example, there is no question that the windows are made of glass, because of the way the light is reflected. We would recognize it as glass even if the panes had no frames. Likewise, the textiles and the dresses suggest cloth, in contrast to the smoothness of the walls and floor tiles.

Finally, the figures are so placed within the space as to make for a fairly even distribution of interest. As the dominant note in the picture, the largest figure is placed somewhat to the left of the center, and is "balanced" by the view through the open door on the right. Of all the pictures in this set, this one gives us the strongest feeling of space and distance. We can really see into this picture, and are made to feel how one thing is placed behind the other, leading the eye back. The perspective lines of the tiles, the differences in the value of the walls--becoming lighter as they go back--contribute to this effect of depth.

De Hooch belongs to the school of the XVII Century Dutch painters, and specialized in interiors. He is a contemporary of Vermeer, who is represented in the following picture.

2. "View of Delft", by Vermeer.

Much of what has been said about the de Hooch picture applies with equal emphasis to Vermeer's "View of Delft". There is here the same careful study of illumination, the same sense of depth, leading the eye from the foreground through the middleground into the distance. The silhouette of the city is contrasted against the light sky. As one follows the skyline, one notes a great deal of charming detail, particularly in the places where the orange colored roofs contrast against the deep greens of the trees and the blue-green slate roofs in the middleground, representing some fine passages of color contrasts. Likewise, how convincingly the water is painted in the quietly flowing river! In spite of the detailed rendering, the total impression is very much like the one which a person would receive if actually viewing a scene under similar conditions of light and illumination. In the whole history of painting, this is perhaps the finest interpretation of its kind.

3. "A Bit of Castine, Maine", by E. M. Bicknell.

Here we have a reproduction of an oil painting of a New England fishing village by a native American painter. In this case, the reproduction suggests the "texture" of the surface, as each stroke of the brush is plainly visible. It may prove interesting to compare this picture with Pissarro's "Village Tower". In the Pissarro we feel that the arrangement of the shapes within the rectangle is very purposeful. For example, the corners are clearly emphasized, more or less forcing the eye to remain within the confines of the picture. In contrast, Bicknell's composition reproduces a section along the shore. Though the shapes are also arranged, the "pattern" appears more accidental and less premeditated.

Particularly attractive are the purple shadows on the white houses, and the houses in the distance looking out from underneath the trees, all enveloped in light and atmosphere. Perhaps the least successful portion of the picture is the painting of the water. In order to make the brush strokes fuse and give a convincing impression of glittering reflections in lightly rippled water, the picture must be held some distance from the eye, and looked at by half closing the lids. In that way, it will go together better, and give a more convincing impression of reality. Another

way to accomplish the same aim is to look at the picture through the hollow of your hand, closing out the surroundings, so that only the surface of the "canvas" (in this case reproduction), will be visible.

4. "Spring in Wicklow, Ireland", by Paul Henry.

This picture is attractive because of the colors--with the brilliant yellow-green contrasting against the dark reddish purple in the foreground. The low horizon, with the mountains in the background, makes the trees appear all the taller, giving an impression of height. This gives a feeling of spaciousness, which is increased by placing the strongest accents of the picture--the contrasts of the yellow-green, red-purple and blue in the hills of the background--near the bottom of the picture. Another interest comes from the branches of the trees, which are traced against the light sky. Apparently through the action of the wind, the branches have assumed a certain parallelism of direction, a feature which adds considerably to the "pattern" of the picture. This picture, because it is strong and dominant, and simple in its masses, is particularly well-suited for purposes of framing and hanging.

These last two pictures have been included from the covers of "The Literary Digest", which, up to recently, reproduced a different oil painting each week on its cover. Though the large majority were taken from rather inferior originals, occasionally covers appeared which had merit, even though we do not recall that really outstanding works were ever reproduced. In choosing these covers, we had in mind to thereby call attention to the possibilities of individuals following the cover designs with a view of choosing a good cover whenever it appeared. It is doubtful, though, that much can be gained from this source, as the popular magazine covers are not worth framing, while the better types of magazines, which do have attractive covers, are not on display in many places.

5. "The Sower", by Millet.

Millet's lithograph of "The Sower" is removed by four centuries from the engraving of the Florentine lady. While the latter is a fine piece of decoration and craftsmanship, "The Sower" emphasizes the dignity of labor. In its strong lines and simple and bold forms, it is equally emphatic, and hence preserves some of the decorative simplicity which eliminates details and emphasizes masses.

Millet was an artist of the mid-XIX Century; as such he profited from the artists of his period, who brought into painting a sense of the outdoor illumination. Though without color, we have a distinct feeling of light and atmosphere. Note how the head stands out against the light sky, throwing into relief the left contour. Also note how the forward thrust of the walk, and the backward swing of the arm, suggest the action of walking while scattering seed. Though the artist was at liberty to represent almost any part of this movement, he selected that particular instant when the action seemed most expressive. In doing so, you will note a relationship of lines following each other in parallels, which we have already pointed out in the Greek relief. The simplifications of form here brought about through the action of the light making a shadowy silhouette of "The Sower", and the arrangement of the lines within a definite pattern, all of which are carefully fitted to the space, are fundamental aspects of good art.

But there is one new element in this example of modern art which is not apparent in the previous examples of Classic and Renaissance art. The figure is actually and convincingly placed within space; "The Sower" is not standing out in front,

like "Lucretia", but is enveloped in light and is part of the landscape. To make a figure stand in space was not an invention of the XIX Century, but had already been achieved in the XVII Century, where it found its greatest exponent in Rembrandt, not to mention earlier masters, like Van Eyck, who had already achieved similar results of giving us a realistic sense of figure and space intimately united.

6. "Feeding Her Birds", by Millet.

This reproduction is well-known through innumerable reproductions. As we have here a greater sense of the realistic, through the use of color, a more natural illumination and a subject more close to our own day, most of us will find little difficulty in appreciating this picture. To increase our understanding how the artists have varied in their interpretation of nature throughout the ages, we should realize that even this picture is far from being photographic. Aside from the human interest of the picture, dealing with a mother and children, it also charms us because of its simple contrasts of light and dark. Detail has been eliminated, as we will note by observing how the foreground has been treated. Like "The Sower", details have been subordinated to bring out a few broad contrasts of light and dark. Millet was a painter of peasants, and represents them to us as vigorous human beings, who go about their daily chores as they are still familiar to every person who has been brought up on the farm. By avoiding everything which is superficially pretty and attractive, he gives to his subject, dignity and significance.

7. "The Gleaners", by Millet.

Perhaps few pictures are better known than this one, which, together with its companion piece, "The Angelus", is familiar to most of us through having been reproduced in many places. What has been said about Millet in "The Sower" and "Feeding Her Birds" also applies to "The Gleaners". We have here farm women at work against the wide horizon of distant fields. This picture cannot but help to bring to our minds the laborious processes of a more primitive method of harvesting. With the efficient methods of modern farm machinery, the labor of these women has fortunately been made unnecessary; but such thoughts remove our minds from the immediate presence of the picture. Note, for example, the harmony of color. By virtue of the red bonnet and the reflected light in the features of the central figure, our eye is carried to this point. Above, and in the distance, the sunlight illuminates a patch of field between the stalks. The figure toward the left is so painted that it actually seems further removed from the eye, as the surface is rendered with less detail. By skillfully arranging one figure slightly behind the other, our eye is gradually led into the distance, giving us a sense of deep space.

8. "Clocher du Village" (Village Church Tower), by Pissarro.

Like Millet, Pissarro is a French painter who is closely linked up with the so-called "Impressionists". With the advent of "Impressionism" in the second half of the XIX Century, painting lost interest in subject matter, and emphasized the importance of light and color as factors which profoundly change the "ordinary", or "everyday" appearances of objects. With the interest of painting concentrated on light and shade, human beings, as such, were no more important than houses, fields, skies or other inanimate objects. It is significant, therefore, that Pissarro gives us a bit of landscape devoid of the human element. There is no longer any "story" or "content" left. Another point which distinguishes the painters of impressionism from the "naturalists", with whom Millet is related, is the fact that the pictures become bright-

er. We say they are paintings "in a higher key". The feeling of sunlight is stronger, for instance, in the brilliant tile roof in the left foreground, and the strong greens and reds throughout the picture. Owing to this influence of sunlight and atmosphere, sharp outlines are obscured.

While in Millet's "Gleaners" the eye can easily trace each figure, Pissarro's "Village Tower" merges into sky and foliage. While Millet preserves outlines, and hence drawing, Pissarro's picture is done directly with a brush. Millet paints thin surfaces; Pissarro paints thick spots which blend into each other without rigid contours. This picture, therefore, establishes the most direct link with contemporary painting. One of the virtues of this canvas is the fact that even though contours and drawing are not emphasized, we still have a distinct "pattern" or "design".

9. Portrait of a Lady. Engraving by an unknown Florentine of the XV Century.

Whoever has had little experience in looking at the art of earlier periods than our own may not immediately appreciate the beauty of this engraving. A common obstacle in the road of art appreciation is the fact that we too often confuse beauty of nature with beauty in art. This confusion may apply in this example.

Perhaps if we met the lady in life, she might not appeal to our idea of beauty. But we are here only concerned with an engraving of her, in which we enjoy the contrast formed by the rich head-dress and necklace; and the elaboration of the sleeve against the simple line of the profile. We further note the firm line of the profile, which is so continuous, strong, and incisive that it is able to maintain itself against the heavy masses of rich decoration. This engraving is a beautiful piece of decoration, like a piece of rich jewelry, in which the lines give a sense of power and strength because they have been drawn by the hand of an expert draftsman.

An engraving is done with the so-called graver, which is a tool that is applied directly to the metal plate, and which requires great skill and force to handle skillfully. It is a medium pre-eminently suited to strong, firm lines, giving an engraving a distinctly linear character.

10. "Lucretia", by Raimondi. After Raphael.

Like the "Portrait of a Lady", by an unknown Florentine, this is another reproduction of an engraving. These two prints, the one by the unknown Florentine and this one by Raimondi, may well be compared to illustrate the styles of the early and late Renaissance. For example, in the early Renaissance the figure is placed in profile, emphasizing one plane only. There is no attempt to show depth. In place of a "realistic portrait", we have a flat piece of decoration. In contrast, the Raimondi engraving gives some sense of depth-- the background opens up, showing us a view into the landscape. The figure is placed against an architectural background, showing a Corinthian column on the left adjoining a round arch. In place of the flat, linear portrait, we have here light and shade, making for roundness. To further emphasize depth, Lucretia's right arm is fore-shortened, reaching, so to speak, out of the picture. Still, the rendering of light and shade is not pronounced. The light is represented as coming from above, allowing the figure to cast a shadow on the floor.

As yet, there is no attempt to show a great deal of variation in the degrees of light and dark between the different planes. The conception of light and

dark is still here in its infancy. The composition is essentially one of three distinct planes, which, like drops in a stage, are placed one behind another; first, the plane of the figure; second, the plane of the architectural back ground; third, the plane of the landscape. With the exception of the joints of the tile floor, there are no lines which connect these planes. On the other hand, the composition is tied together laterally, the outstretched arms of Lucretia uniting the right and left side.

Lucretia's position is carefully studied. With the dart in her hand, she is about to stab herself. The realistic subject is in no way allowed to interfere with a carefully contrasted contour. For example, the comparatively straight line of her right contour is brought into forcible contrast with the curved contour of her left. By thus contrasting, in outline, the opposite contours of a figure, Raimondi follows a well-established "device" of the Italian Renaissance, which is called "contra-posto", and which means "counter position". We find this manner of posing a figure throughout the works of the great masters Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo--not to mention many others of their period. If we compare the arrangement of the folds on Lucretia, we shall discover certain fundamental resemblances to the manner in which those are handled in the seated figure in the Greek relief. In both, the drapery is used to reveal the form underneath, and make for a play of light and shade, bringing light surfaces into opposition with adjacent portions, which are heavily "testured" through carefully arranged folds. This similarity of style brings out strongly the fact that the artists of the Italian Renaissance went back to the art of the ancients. They knew this art through Roman sculpture, which had been strongly influenced by the Greek, and in many cases executed by Greek artists. This similarity of style, therefore, further illustrates the phrase we find in our history books: "that the Renaissance was a rebirth of classical culture".

11. <u>"Madonna in the Courtyard", by Schongauer</u>.

This is another engraving, and as such may be compared with Raimondi's "Lucretia". While Raimondi gives us the classic interpretation of grace and harmony and easy flow of line of the Italian, we have, in Schongauer's "Madonna" the northern German spirit, which still carries on earlier Gothic traditions. In place of the smooth, graceful curves and the easy flowing contours, we have here a hard, crinkly line in the case of the drapery. Though light and shade is used, the illumination is used to define form. Like the linear ornamentation of the XV Century Florentine portrait (No. 2), the folds here also make a decoration, and are elaborated for the sake of surface ornamentation.

Each plane is carefully kept in its own place, with the perspective lines of the walls of the courtyard suggesting the third dimension. As this illustration shows, the ideal of feminine beauty was different in the northern countries (Germany and the Netherlands) than in Italy.

While in Lucretia we have the fully developed, heroic forms of Roman sculpture, we have here the more ethereal, not to say emaciated, lines of the Gothic Period, which, as an inheritance from the Middle Ages, discouraged bodily beauty. As we accustom ourselves to the apparently strange types used in both "Madonna" and "Lucretia", we shall also become more sympathetic to the purely artistic achievements in composition, line and light and dark.

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Appreciation of art is largely a process of growth. We begin by caring most for those things which are contemporary, and with which we are already familiar. As we enlarge our horizons, we may learn to appreciate the peculiar beauty in the art of other ages and former periods. By overcoming prejudices against peculiarities, which at first strike us as strange, we learn to accept these "conventions", and begin to appreciate the particular contributions of the artist.

12. Grave Relief of Hegoso. Greek, Fifth Century, B. C.

This is the only example of sculpture in the collection. Of the arts, sculpture is one with which we have little contact in our daily lives, and therefore less opportunity to learn to appreciate. Among the world's great sculpture, Greek sculpture is pre-eminent. Though great sculpture was also achieved in other periods, and by other people, it is still true that Greek sculpture is universally admired, regardless of other preferences.

This particular example shows us the mistress seated on a chair. She has removed a necklace from a box of jewelry which a slave girl has presented to her. If we recall that this is a grave monument, the subject may seem unusual from a modern point of view. Instead of grief and mourning, the Greek sculptor strikes a dignified and sedate note, presenting death as a taking leave.

In all art, we are interested, not merely in what a thing represents, but how it is represented. The choice of a worthy subject, or an expression of a lofty ideal alone does not guarantee good art. That depends on how much beauty the artist is able to express in the way he works out his theme. The particular beauty in this relief arises, for example, from the arrangement of the groups within the space. Note how the chair, the seated lady, and the standing slave girl are made to fill the rectangle. Major importance is given to the seated figure, to which the artist gave his greatest attention. The three hands are skillfully placed to bring the figures together, giving unity to the "composition."

To appreciate the importance of the lines, allow your eye to follow the main lines of the design. For example, the "s" shaped curve of the back of the chair is carried forward in the inclined head of the seated figure, and is again brought down through the right arm of the girl. In spite of apparent complexity, any good composition, if carefully analyzed, will reveal underlying repetitions of lines. Note the diagonal going from the lower left to the upper right -- it is clearly indicated in the lower leg of the two main figures, and is repeated in the upper portion in the back of the chair and the upper arm of the seated figure. Likewise, horizontals are repeated in the seat of the chair and the extended arm above.

Another source of appreciation of the refinements of the composition is discovered by following the lines of the drapery. Both figures are draped in such a way that the thin folds reveal the forms underneath, but the folds themselves are not confused and irregular, but are kept within well-defined spaces. For example, the folds which are caught at the end of the chair are dropped down to fill the space between the chair and leg. A vertical "motif" is repeated above, where the fold crosses the seat of the chair. A fine sense of contrast has been achieved through bringing together the broad plain surface of the revealed figure, side by side with portions which abound in masses of folds. Through the action of the light, these masses of folds form modulated surfaces, sharply defined ridges of light and dark.

A further source of pleasure arises when we become aware of the way the details, like the left foot of the lady, her hands and profile, are worked out. The latter is detached from the background so that the cast shadow forces it into relief. Likewise, the uplifted hands, through their shadows, make for accents, and give life to the relief. As improper illumination may well fail to bring out the beauty of a relief, these shadows are important.

Note how the artist allows the leg and back of the chair to come in front of the pilaster framing the central panel. To counter-balance this thrust to the right, the shoulder of the servant, and her foot, are set in front of the left pilaster, thereby maintaining perfect balance.

While we think of Greek sculpture usually as being white, we should not forget that originally it was touched up by the painter, and thereby gained in liveliness. This was done with good taste and reserve, picking out details here and there without creating too strong an impression of color. For example, lack of carving in the hair of the servant is probably due to the fact that originally these portions showed color.

This particular relief is one of several which stand outside the Dipylon Gate in Athens. It was carved in the V Century, B.C., which is the period of Phidias and the Parthenon, and represents the first part of the "Golden Age", or "Great Period", of Greek Sculpture.

13. Lithograph by H. Zuckerman. From Professor Cizek's Class, Vienna School of Arts and Crafts.

This lithograph represents children acting in a Christmas play, taking the roles of "The Three Magi". From their dress, we judge that they are children of a country school who have had a few robes, crowns and staffs added to their everyday clothes to represent the Biblical role in the annual Christmas play at their school.

The bright colors and the flat tones, showing no modeling, make of this lithograph a good piece of decoration for schools. Several years ago, Professor Cizek's methods were much talked about in this country. No doubt his influence contributed something toward our own art education. According to his theory, the art teacher should eliminate himself as much as possible, in order to bring out the individuality of the pupil. It has been discovered, though, that the uninfluenced unfolding of the pupil's originality is a thing which does not exist. Even in Professor Cizek's method of instruction, there are influences, even if they are less open than is usually the case in art teaching, under the so-called "directed method".

We have benefited in a very definite way from the Cizek influence, as it has made a large number of very attractive color lithographs available at prices ranging from ten cents to several dollars. They have been widely distributed in the United States, and are in use in many schools in all parts of the country.

14. "Portrait of an Unknown Lady", attributed to Pollaiuolo.

This painting, in general character, is very much like the engraving of a lady by an unknown Florentine, of the same century. The luminous fleshtones con-

trast vividly against the blue background. The modeling is "flat", showing hardly more than tints. In fact, we might think of this kind of painting as "tinted drawing". With much love and care, the artist has traced the elaborate coiffure, rendering, in considerable detail, the strand of beads and the delicate veil which covers the ear. Portraits in this so-called "Early Renaissance" were still treated externally--the artist deliberately shows the profile view, and made of the whole a piece of elaborate decoration. As yet, there is no attempt to interpret character or introduce movement or expression, or enhance the interpretation through strong contrasts of light and shade. The whole conception is one of rest, emphasizing the external aspects of the sitter, rather than those qualities which make for individual characterization. The profile portraits which have come down to us from that period, as paintings were never signed, resemble each other a good deal, causing the art historians much trouble in determining the name of the artist.

15. "Peace", by Margarete Slavetinsky, 1918.

This is a block print (linoleum cut) executed by one of the pupils of Professor Cizek. To obtain the best effect, it should be looked at from a distance of several feet, as the "scale" of the picture is fairly large. By that, we mean the lines are heavy and the detail has been simplified. This was necessary, as the design had to be cut in linoleum, which requires heavy lines to avoid the surface breaking down in printing. The brittle material--linoleum--and the simple tool--sloyd knife--therefore explain the vigor and boldness of the detail.

Note how arrangement of figures, animals and trees make for a tapestry-like, all-over pattern, in which the interest is distributed. Even the contrast between the white tree and the dark figure is still a part of the whole "texture", and is subordinated to the effect of the whole. As this print sells for ten cents only, it is perhaps the greatest "bargain" of the set.

Subject Matter furnished by The American Federation of Arts.
Arranged by Rizpah Douglass, State Agent, Home Beautification.

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