

Bare Bones Paper on a Work of Art

Title: *In the Garden*

Artist: Mary Cassatt

Type of Art: Oil on Canvas – Impressionist

Prepared by: Peggy Baxter

Accession No. *on loan from DIA*

Brief Biography of Artist:

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) was the daughter of a wealthy Pittsburgh Banker. She spent several years of her childhood in Paris then moved to America. At age 16 she decided to become a serious artist entered art school. Her father was much opposed to this decision and was known to say he would rather see her dead than become an artist.

Mary was a strong willed girl. This was evident in her actions during this era of time. She studied right along with her male peers. However, for reasons of “decency”, she was not allowed to attend any of the classes that involved a male nude. At age 23 she moved back to Europe to study the works of the old masters.

Cassatt was first introduced to Impressionism when while walking in the marketplace – there in a shop window was a painting by Edgar Degas. It had an immediate and lasting effect on her. She later said, “I used to go and flatten my nose against the window, It changed my life” Degas also admired Cassatt’s talent and the two became good friends. Degas introduced Mary to the other Impressionists and they liked her paintings so much that she was invited to show her work at their exhibitions. She was the only American Artist to ever be included.

In her mid sixties Cassatt’s eyesight began to fail due to cataracts brought on by Diabetes. She began acting as an advisor for her wealthy American friends. Mary persuaded them to purchase art works by old and new masters – especially the Impressionist. This accounts for America’s large collection of the works greatest art pieces, which reside in galleries and museums across the nation.

Despite two surgeries, Mary lost her sight completely and dies at the age of 82 at her home in France in 1926.

Background Information and facts to bring out:

An apple-cheeked young girl waits patiently while her mother adjusts her pink sailor dress. Painted in 1904 this painting is a tender scene between mother and child. Mary Cassatt often used women and children from her family and neighboring villages as models in her paintings. Samone, a young girl in this painting was one of her favorites.

Formal Qualities (art elements & design principles) observed in the work

The balance between color and line are used with such harmony – that the viewer’s eye can enter the painting at any point of the picture and get swiped up and around until the focus rest upon the face of the girl – Samone

This is demonstrated in the color & line contrast between the golden path vs. in the background vs. the vibrant green grass area of the lower right corner. Also, in the use of the line of the chair vs. the Impressionistic color display of the flowered hedge behind the girls bonnet. All the bold black ribbon that surrounds the bonnet acts as a greater draw – emphasizing Samone’s dark eyes.

Expressive Qualities felt in the work:

The beautiful colors used in the painting as well as the warm and tender subject matter promotes a sense of love and warm feelings in the viewer. We can imagine the feel of warmth of the sun on this pleasant day.

Questions to ask:

How are the elements and principles of art used in this painting to make it a successful composition?

What emotions are evoked in the viewer while viewing it?

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Using the work in a tour:

Have students begin looking at the painting with their eyes focus on any area of the painting – then encourage them to relax and respond as their eyes sweep throughout the painting using line and color to guide them – unfolding the pathway of the composition.

This piece is a good example to begin a discussion on Women Artists and how society view of that era depicted the morality and restrictions as well as the benefits of that may have influenced the subject matter of the painter.