iPod Tour: Painting Matters

INTRO: Ghislain d’Humieres

Welcome to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. This is Ghislain d’Humieres, the Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the museum. Since 1936, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art has served the campus and Norman communities as a center of multicultural art at the University of Oklahoma.

The museum’s permanent collection has grown to more than 12,300 objects, featuring French Impressionism, 20th-century American works, traditional and contemporary Native American and Southwest art, Asian art and graphics from the 16th century to the present, and much more.

Throughout each year, temporary exhibitions explore the art of various periods and cultures. Each semester, the museum offers special programming and education opportunities for all ages relating to these exciting exhibitions.

The museum currently is undergoing an expansion project that will add a new gallery for the Eugene B. Adkins Collection of Southwest art and a gallery for photography and works on paper. Slated for a fall, 2011 opening, the addition will be named in honor of Jon and Dee Dee Stuart, who made the lead gift for the expansion project.

During today’s tour, Susan Baley, the museum’s curator of education, and Michael Bendure, public relations officer, will lead you through the museum’s French Impressionist and contemporary galleries.

Thanks again for visiting the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Enjoy the tour!

STOP #1: Barbara Hepworth

England, 1903-1975
Two Figures, 1968
Bronze
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Max Weitzenhoffer, 1971

Paint is familiar to everyone. Kids dip their hands in it and smear it on paper to make finger paintings. Adults apply it with brushes and rollers on the walls of their homes. In this tour, we’ll look at how artists often use paint in innovative ways. For instance, the bronze sculpture, Two Figures, reminds us that artists don’t just use paint on paper or canvas—sculptors use it too! Here, Barbara Hepworth has pierced the bronze form with circular holes, and painted the walls of the holes cobalt
blue, perhaps to suggest the sky. Such a bright color in sculpture may come as a bit of a surprise to our modern eyes. However, many ancient sculptors considered their work unfinished until after the application of pigments to the surface.

As you continue the tour, begin in the Weitzenhoffer galleries of French Impressionism, where we’ll see how artists in the 19th and 20th centuries used oil paint in ways that were originally considered quite shocking. In the Hobson Family Gallery we’ll encounter examples of how more contemporary artists use oils and synthetic paints, such as acrylic, that first became available in the 1950s. Look for the numbered iPod symbols to guide you on your tour.

STOP #2: Pierre-Auguste Renoir
France, 1841-1919
Les Roses, 1878
Oil on canvas
The Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Collection, 2000

This painting by Pierre-Auguste Renoir is an example of Impressionism, a French movement that originated in the 1860s. As you look at the painting’s surface, notice the artist’s feathery brushwork. The quickly applied strokes of color merely suggest the impression of roses, like a quick glance at the subject. The Impressionists were trying to capture the fleeting effects of sunlight in their paintings, so it was appropriate to paint quickly. Renoir dabbed pure colors side-by-side on the canvas and let his viewers’ eyes optically mix the colors.

Renoir painted the flowers using a wet-on-wet technique, with oil paint thinned with turpentine. In this method, artists apply layers of wet paint to previous layers of wet paint—requiring them to work rapidly. After painting the roses, he used a soft sable brush to paint the tabletop that appears to be dappled by sunlight.

Painting shadows was another innovation of the Impressionist artists. Look carefully at the bluish shadows cast by the vase and flowers, and you won’t find the color black. The Impressionists, who carefully studied the effects of light, observed that shadows aren’t composed of neutral tones.
STOP #3: Claude Monet
France, 1840-1926
*Riverbank at Lavacourt*, 1879
Oil on canvas
The Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Collection, 2000

This landscape by Claude Monet shows the Impressionists’ preference for painting outdoor scenes directly in nature. Their approach is called *en plein-air*, a French expression meaning “in the open air.” This was an innovative technique when Impressionist artists first exhibited their paintings. Traditionally, painters ventured out into the landscape to make sketches, then brought the sketches back to the studio where they created the finished painting. However, the invention of metal paint tubes in 1841 freed artists from their studios. They no longer had to grind pigments by hand and mix the binding oil in just the right proportion. Paint tubes allowed artists to be more spontaneous, and made movements like Impressionism—with its emphasis on painting quickly to capture light and atmospheric conditions—possible.

The immediacy of Impressionism was influenced by simultaneous developments in photography. By 1858, photography was able to capture motion in a still picture, and the Impressionist artists also began to use blurred images in their paintings, such as the figures in Monet’s landscape, to convey movement.

At first, the public and art critics reacted negatively to these paintings, finding them “sloppy” and “unfinished-looking.” In fact, one of Monet’s earlier paintings, titled *Impression, Sunrise* ended up giving this art movement its name when the group of independent painters assembled their first exhibition in 1874. Art critic Louis Leroy called the entire show an “Exhibition of Impressionists,” in reference to Monet’s title.

STOP #4: Vincent van Gogh
Netherlands, 1853-1890
*Portrait of Alexander Reid*, c. 1887
Oil on panel
The Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Collection, 2000

The Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh used dark colors in his earliest paintings. However, when he arrived in France and met the Impressionists, his colors lightened. By 1887, when van Gogh painted this portrait of the Scottish art dealer Alexander Reid, vibrant hues had replaced the somber tones of his early paintings. Yellow—the dominant color in the painting—symbolized love to the artist, making it a significant choice in this painting of Reid, who was a good friend to both Vincent and his brother Theo.
Van Gogh’s paintings are examples of Post-Impressionism. Like the Impressionists, the Post-Impressionist artists used bright colors and visible, distinctive brushstrokes. However, the forms in their paintings seem more “solid,” and don’t appear to be “dissolved” by light as in some Impressionist paintings. For instance, take a look to your left at Young Woman in the Country, painted by Renoir just a year before van Gogh’s portrait. In Renoir’s Impressionist painting, the body of the woman seems ethereal, as if the dappled sunlight is dematerializing her. In contrast, the body of van Gogh’s subject seems to sit solidly in its chair. Although the colors of the man’s suit are similar to those found in the chair, Van Gogh defined the figure with a dark outline.

Van Gogh’s brushstrokes in this portrait are thick and elongated. Later, in paintings such as The Starry Night, his brushstrokes became more expressive of his turbulent emotions.

**STOP #5: Paul Signac**  
*Coast Scene, 1893*  
Oil on canvas  
Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Bequest, 2000

You’ll notice a big difference between van Gogh’s expressive, elongated brushstrokes and the precise dots of color found on the surface of Paul Signac’s Coast Scene. Signac named his meticulous painting method Divisionism, although it’s often called Neo-Impressionism or Pointillism. Signac and his friend Georges Seurat wanted to develop a new, scientific approach to painting based on the rules of color-contrasts. He observed that our perception of an object’s color is influenced by the color of the surrounding objects. By placing dots of complementary colors next to each other, the Neo-Impressionists hoped that their paintings would achieve the brilliance of natural light. Complementary colors are located opposite each other on the color wheel. When these types of colors, such as blue and orange, are placed next to each other, we perceive each color as intensified.

Unlike the Impressionists, who quickly painted landscapes directly out-of-doors, Signac made drawings and watercolors that he used as studies for works methodically painted in the studio. Ironically, the calculated quality of Neo-Impressionist paintings provoked even more negative reaction than the controversy caused by Impressionist paintings, which had criticized for being too spontaneous!
STOP #6: Edouard Vuillard
*Marie Holding a Bowl*, c. 1891
Oil on cardboard
Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Bequest, 2000

*Madame Hessel in the Dining Room*, c. 1935-38
Pastel and distemper on paper
Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Bequest, 2000

If you squint your eyes while looking at this small painting, you'll see three areas of pure, primary colors. As your eyes focus, you will notice the yellow square suggests a window, the red rectangle becomes a tabletop, while the blue shape is the woman’s dress. Vuillard was part of a group of painters who called themselves Nabis, a Hebrew word meaning “prophet.” These painters believed colors should be more expressive than representational. Their ideas can be summarized by the statement “a picture...is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.” The Nabis’ emphasis on flat areas of color with minimum realistic detail verged on abstraction.

After 1900, Vuillard’s works became larger and more luminous. If you move back into the living room, you’ll find an example of his later painting, titled *Madame Hessel in the Dining Room*. Unlike the flatness of his earlier painting, Vuillard has created a more conventional, three-dimensional perspective. In this work, Vuillard has used pastel and distemper. Distemper is an ancient type of paint made of water, chalk and pigment using a binder of either animal glue or casein—a resin made from solidified milk. The thin paint was inexpensive and used mostly for scene painting or mural decoration. Vuillard was most likely familiar with it from his commissions for apartment frescoes.

STOP #7: Raoul Dufy
*The Beach of Sainte-Adresse*, 1906
Oil on canvas
Aaron M. and Clara Weitzenhoffer Bequest, 2000

If you focus on the middle ground of this painting by Raoul Dufy, you’ll notice what seems to be an abstract painting composed of colorful, expressive brush strokes. It’s only when you discover the walkway with loosely painted pedestrians in the foreground and the buildings in the background that we read the painting as a seascape. Visiting an exhibition of wildly colorful paintings held in Paris during the fall of 1905 had an immediate impact on Dufy and influenced his color choices for this painting. The work he saw by artists such as Henri Matisse was inspired by the idea that color in painting should express the artist’s feelings about their subject.
rather than simply being descriptive of nature. This was really just taking van Gogh’s notion that color could have an expressive role one step further.

However, it was one step too many for an art critic who viewed the exhibition and pronounced the artists fauves, the French word for “wild beasts.” So, the style became known as Fauvism. These paintings were described as “naïve and brutal” and as “either raving madness or a bad joke.” Of course, Impressionist artists had faced a similarly negative reaction to their work 30 years earlier.

STOP #8: Sam Francis
U.S., 1928-1994

Untitled, 1983
Acrylic on rice paper
Gift of Jerome M. and Wanda Otey Westheimer, 1999

Sam Francis’s untitled painting is totally abstract with no representational subject matter. Paintings like this one are usually categorized under the label of Abstract Expressionism, a style pioneered by Jackson Pollock in the mid-1940s. Pollock applied his paint by dripping and splattering it onto canvases placed on the floor of his studio. The end result was a kind of web made up of dark strands of pigment distributed evenly across the painting surface. Francis also used drips and splatters. However, in his painting, the strands of pigment are balanced by more thickly applied areas of bright color and white space.

Francis used acrylic, a type of paint containing pigment that’s suspended in a polymer emulsion. This modern material first became available in the 1950s. Unlike oil paint, acrylics are fast drying and can be diluted to a watery consistency. For instance, on the surface of Francis’s painting, you’ll see areas that resemble a watercolor where the thinned pigment has soaked into the paper.

Like Pollock, Francis was interested in the ideas of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, especially Jung’s concept of archetypes—primal, universal images that Jung believed reside in our unconscious mind. Many of Francis’s abstract paintings incorporate archetypal images, such as mandalas, spirals, and crosses, symbols he believed would enhance consciousness.
STOP #9: Don Eddy
U.S., b. 1944
*Wrecking Yard IV*, 1971
Acrylic on canvas
Gift, Jerome M. Westheimer, Sr., 2005

As a teenager, Don Eddy worked in his father’s auto repair shop, where he learned how to use an airbrush. With an airbrush, tiny droplets of pigment are sprayed onto the painting surface. The artist controls the amount of paint by using the tool’s trigger. It allows the painter to blend colors seamlessly, and makes it a good choice for those who want to achieve a very realistic effect in their paintings.

Eddy’s painting style is often classified as Photorealistic. This movement began in the late 1960s, and was characterized by subjects painted in a style resembling photographs. Eddy seems to represent reality in a straightforward way, but he actually alters the appearances of the objects he paints. For instance, in *Wrecking Yard* he made the surfaces of a wrecked Volkswagen “bug” more smooth and reflective than you would expect to find in a car sent to a junkyard.

In 1968, Eddy began taking his own photographs that convey his memories and personal relationships with images. After cropping the photographs into a square shape, he drew the basic outlines onto his canvas. The next step involved making tiny circles about 1/16 inch in diameter with his airbrush. His painting’s beginning stage sounds surprisingly similar to the approach of Signac and the Neo Impressionists—although the end result is quite different.

STOP #10: Hung Liu
U.S. born China 1948
*Tenderfoot*, 2001
Oil on canvas

When Hung Liu was growing up in China during the Cultural Revolution, the political atmosphere of the times caused her mother to burn all of their family photographs. This made photographic images from the past especially important to Liu, and she began to use them in her painting after immigrating to the United States. Two different photographic images served as subject matter for this painting. The much larger image of a duckling is painted with elongated brushstrokes, and looms over the image of two young boys holding up piglets. The unrealistic scale, combined with Liu’s painterly treatment, makes it very clear this work is NOT a photograph. After sketching the projected images, Liu applied thinned
down washes of oil paint and allowed them to drip down the surface. She has also painted circles in a variety of colors that seem to flatten the illusion of space in the painting by bringing our attention to its two-dimensional surface. The circles may also reflect Liu’s Chinese heritage. Chinese classical literature was traditionally published without punctuation, and students learned how to punctuate by adding small circles of ink beside the character that ended each passage.

STOP #11: Robert Rauschenberg
U.S. (1925-2008)
Haywire II (Borealis), 1990
Tarnishes on brass, copper, and bronze
Loan courtesy of Mrs. Sash Spencer

Robert Rauschenberg created this work by painting onto sheets of brass, copper, and bronze. However, rather than using paint, he brushed and poured chemicals that tarnished the metal. By using different types of chemicals, such as washes of less potent hydrochloric acid with splatters of the more intense nitric acid, Rauschenberg was able to create a subtle range of colors and intensities of oxidation. This technique produced iridescent colors that reminded him of the Northern Lights. He named the series Borealis since the natural light show is called Aurora borealis in the Northern hemisphere. In these metal paintings, Rauschenberg was experimenting with materials not commonly used in art making. He stopped using the highly toxic acids in 1992 because of health and environmental concerns.

Rauschenberg was no stranger to experimentation in his art. In the 1950s he began making works called “combines,” that were a hybrid made up of aspects of painting, collage, and assemblage of actual objects. For instance one of his first combines, titled Bed, included a pillow, sheet, and quilt that were framed like a painting. He scribbled on them and splattered the bedclothes with paint. The metal painting Haywire II from the Borealis series also has elements of collage because it combines painted silkscreened images of power lines and buildings with the more abstract splashes of acid washes.

STOP #12: Joe Andoe
U.S., b. 1955
Tulip without Petals, n.d.
Oil on linen
Gift of the artist, 1991

Joe Andoe grew up in Tulsa and graduated from the University of Oklahoma. His paintings of isolated natural elements like this tulip stem are made in reverse of traditional painting methods.
Rather than building up a painting surface by *adding* layers of pigments, he creates his images by *removing* paint from the canvas. First, he uses a flat-bladed knife to apply thick layers of paint in a single color onto the canvas. Then, he removes portions of the paint using rags, such as T-shirts, and paper towels to reveal an image. Andoe describes his process by saying: “The way I look at traditional painting, it’s a process that has the artist adding paint to the canvas in order to turn objects into flesh. With my style of painting, I’m taking away paint to reveal to the viewer an object’s soul…its spirit.”

The small cracks in the painting’s surface are the result of his method. Traditionally, artists built up the surface of oil paintings slowly—starting with thin washes, and then moving to progressively thicker layers. Each layer was allowed to dry completely before the application of another one. This technique minimized surface cracks in the painting. However, Andoe’s application of the oil paint in one thick layer produced a less durable surface.

**STOP #13: Jean Dubuffet**
France 1901-1985  
*Mi-Temps*, 1980  
Acrylic on canvas

Throughout his career, French artist Jean Dubuffet was influenced by children’s art, graffiti, and the art of the mentally insane. By looking to these “outsider” art forms, Dubuffet hoped to bring “a state of child-like innocence and amazement” to his own painting. He discarded traditional means of perspective and proportion as well as traditional concepts of beauty. His intentionally child-like paintings feature figures shown in simple frontal and profile views, with crudely rendered bodies and enlarged heads.

This painting is from a series of work Dubuffet began in October 1980. He called this group of works *Partitions*. In the *Partitions* series, Dubuffet surrounded his human figures with a closed, “cell-like” shape that emphasizes the figures and gives a sense of isolation. The composition of these paintings features a constantly shifting space that is broken up into different zones. Dubuffet compared the shifts in scale, from zone to zone, to the changing focus of a telescope.

Just as the Impressionists and Fauves were criticized for painting in child-like way, Dubuffet’s intentionally naïve paintings caused him to be one of the most controversial post-War French artists. Like all innovative artists, he was trying to get people to look at the world in a new way—something that can be threatening at first.
CONCLUSION: Luis Jiménez
U.S. (1940-2006)
Mustang (Mesteño), 1997
Fiberglass
Gift of Jerome M. and Wanda Otey Westheimer, 1998

We started our discussion of how artists use paint by looking at the bronze sculpture by Barbara Hepworth with its touches of bright blue. As you leave the museum today, look for the colorful sculpture of a mustang by Luis Jiménez. Jiménez didn’t use the more traditional material of bronze. Instead, he chose fiberglass—a modern material often associated with planes and cars. He painted the entire sculpture with an airbrush (like the tool Don Eddy used in his painting of the VW). His choice of blue for the horse may not seem like such a shock after considering the Fauve artists’ expressive use of color. Jiménez’s paint material may have also contributed to his vibrant color choices. He used the same acrylic urethane that jet airliners are painted with, and this paint is only available in a limited range of colors. He followed the airbrushed layers of paint with layers of clear urethane, so the painted surface is very durable. As preparation for his sculpture, Jiménez sketched the horses in the sculptures of the Greek Parthenon. Although we are familiar with the white marble surfaces of those sculptures, recent conservation work on the Parthenon has found they were originally painted with red, blue and green. So perhaps Jiménez’s vibrant blue mustang isn’t so surprising after all!

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