ReadWorks®

ARTICLE-A-DAY™

Paintings

6 Articles

Check articles you have read:

- [ ] Third-Class Carriage by Honoré Daumier, 1856-1858
  607 words
- [ ] Circus by George Bellows, 1912
  364 words
- [ ] View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph by Paul Cézanne, 1887
  596 words
- [ ] Mountains at Saint-Rémy by Vincent van Gogh, 1889
  333 words
- [ ] Still Life, No. 1 by Marsden Hartley, 1912
  363 words
- [ ] Landscape with Figures by Maurice Prendergast, ca. 1910-1913
  301 words

Third-Class Carriage by Honore Daumier, 1856-1858

This text has been provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

Image Credit: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

Honoré Daumier (French, 1808–1879), Third-Class Carriage (Un Wagon de Troisième Classe), 1856–58. Oil on panel, 10¼ × 13⅜ in. (26 × 33.9 cm).

Honoré Daumier was an influential figure for the Ashcan artists because of his dedication to documenting the urban scene. His particular interest in the lives of the working class and the effects of industrialization on these poorest of Parisians resonated for these New York-based artists decades later.

There was no doubt as to Daumier's political outlook. It was apparent in his chronicling of modern urban life in mid-nineteenth century Paris as a caricaturist, lithographer, painter, and sculptor. He was even briefly imprisoned for his caricature depicting King Louis-Philippe as Rabelais's Gargantua sitting on a throne gorging himself on coins taken from the poor masses.

Daumier's subjects included street entertainers, laundresses, refugees, and, as shown here, travelers in a third-class carriage. *Third-Class Carriage*, one of the oldest works in the Armory Show

—along with works by Goya, Delacroix, and Ingres—is known to be the first of numerous oil paintings that Daumier did of the subject. It was done between 1856 and 1858. Daumier produced lithographs about the hardships of rail travel as early as 1843, often focusing on the comedic element of crowded trains. However, the various oil paintings with this particular motif—the interior of a third-class carriage, with a family in the foreground and individual travelers in the background—have a somber and sympathetic tone.

Reading the figures from right to left, Daumier presents the viewer with four stages of life, poignantly underscoring the predetermined life of the little boy. In Paris, third-class carriages were unclean, crowded, open compartments. The sharp contrast of the blue skies with the dark interior further emphasizes the cramped, almost prison-like confinement of the lower classes of Parisian society. However, similar to the peasant farmers depicted by Jean-François Millet, Daumier depicts the modest circumstance of the family with a simple nobility that honors them. Given the political leanings of the artist, the look of resignation and fatigue on the faces of the old woman and the man seated to her left may have been meant to evoke the sympathies of the viewer for the working classes.

Some have questioned the narrative. Are the people in the painting leaving the countryside and going into the city for work? Where are they going and why? What is the significance of using the train as a mode of transportation? Who are the people riding in the second- and first-class carriages? *Third-Class Carriage* was painted at a time when the steam engine brought people out of Paris and into the countryside for recreation. The areas around the city were affected by train travel; later, the Impressionists depicted trains going into the countryside—carrying people escaping those commercial centers whose industries grew as the result of the train.

This iconography was of great interest to Daumier. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a similar Daumier entitled *The Third Class Carriage*. The figures are slightly different, but the format and the groupings are comparable. There are sharper contrasts between light and dark areas, and the palette is comprised of more earth tones. Evidence of an underlying grid attests to its unfinished state. A lithographic work on newsprint in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum entitled *Voyageurs Appréciant de Moins en Moins les Wagons de Troisiéme Classe Pendant L'hiver* (*Travelers Appreciating Third-Class Carriages Less and Less in Winter*) shows people huddled together clutching their thin winter coats as snow drifts into the carriage.

Circus by George Bellows, 1912

This text is provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

George Bellows (American, 1882–1925), Circus, 1912. Oil on canvas, 33⅞ × 44 in. (86 × 111.8 cm).

Nightlife was a favorite subject of the Ashcan School, the group with whom Bellows was closely identified. He was attracted to entertainment spectacles, and *Circus* certainly offered that to the viewer. This was a time when the American circus was characterized by its spectacular size and grandiosity of staging. *Circus* was one of fourteen paintings that the artist exhibited at the Armory Show, and was reproduced in postcard form for sale at the exhibition.

Circus has the feel of quick sketch, with the artist rapidly recording the scene to the beat of the crowd's excitement, but in fact Bellows created the painting from memory back in his studio. He had visited a circus performance with his wife in Montclair, New Jersey. His wife noted the circus was a financial flop, but her husband was inspired enough by the event to create two paintings based on it.

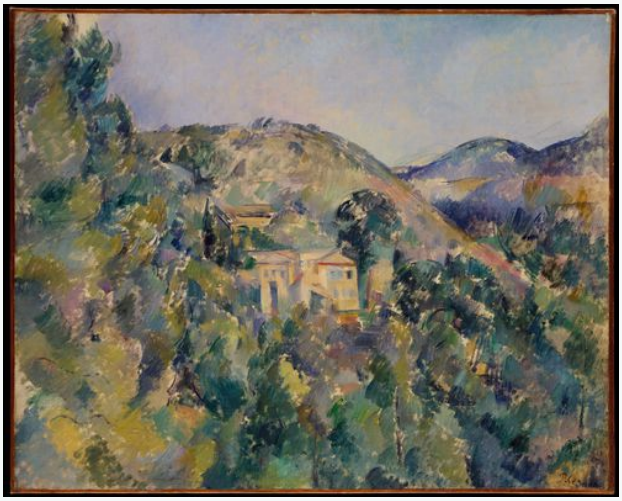
The energy of the scene is captured in Bellows's dynamic brushstrokes. For all its feel of spontaneity, *Circus* is actually an extremely structured work. Pinholes in the canvas suggest careful geometric planning, and, indeed, the work is all about balance. The focus is a woman balancing herself atop a circus horse. To her left are acrobats relying on their strength and balance to perform their daring feats. As subjects, they in turn are balanced by the acrobats to the right in poses of rest, probably having just completed their act. And the composition that Bellows has

painted is balanced by his positioning of the crowds and the pure white horizontal area across the center of the picture.

George Bellows was yet another artist who came to New York to study with Robert Henri and begin his career as an artist. Bellows, as other Ashcan School artists, relished in depicting the daily lives of ordinary people. He is particularly known for his depiction of sporting events, notably boxing matches, where noisy crowds are always featured. (In his famous *Dempsey and Firpo*, in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, he actually places himself in the crowd at the Polo Grounds.)

View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph by Paul Cezanne, 1887

This text is provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.



Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906), View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph, late 1880s. Oil on canvas, 25⅝ × 32 in. (65.1 × 81.3 cm).

Cézanne's *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph* is important for a few reasons. First is the artist's influence on Cubism decades after he painted this landscape. A challenge to the Western artist has been to represent the three-dimensional world on a two-dimensional surface, the picture frame acting as a window into the illusion of reality. In *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph*, Cézanne recognized the canvas for what it was—a flat surface on which he could create a composition by looking at nature analytically as spheres, cylinders, and cones, and building forms using rich planes of color. Cubists appreciated Cézanne's new way of seeing and his technique for representing what he saw.

In addition, this painting has a place of note in Cézanne's history. It became the first work by the artist to enter an American museum when the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired it directly from the Armory Show in 1913. Finally, the work is important within the history of American collecting; the details of its purchase offer insights into the Manhattan art world at the time of the Armory Show.

The Met first opened to the public in 1870 in the Dodworth Building at 681 Fifth Avenue, briefly

relocating to the Douglas Mansion at 128 West 14th Street before it opened at its present site in 1880. In 1913, its trustees were still debating whether or not to buy modern art, when Bryson Burroughs, painting curator, made his pitch to trustee John G. Johnson to purchase *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph*. He thought the $8,000 asking price could be shaved and added, "It would be a popular purchase with a large number of our public and would make valuable friends for the museum." Johnson replied that although the work did not appeal to him, it was a matter of individual taste, adding, "I think it well, also, for any Museum to have represented on its walls examples, as far as possible, of everyone who stands for something in art. Cézanne does thus stand."

At $6,700 (approximately $155,000 today), *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph* was the most expensive painting purchased at the Armory Show.

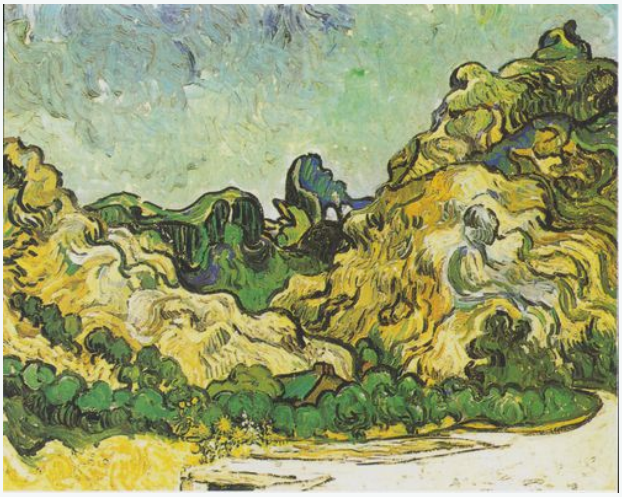
Many areas of the canvas were left bare, but because this is one of the few paintings Cézanne signed, it is considered to be a finished work. Painted in 1887, the picture is a view of a hill, the Colline des Pauvres, on the road between Aix-en-Provence and the village of Le Tholonet. The Domaine Saint-Joseph was a group of buildings originally owned by the Jesuit order.

For The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin of May 1913, Burroughs wrote a two-page article on the purchase of *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph* that includes a detailed description and contextual information about Cézanne. Given the cost of the work, and that it is the museum's first such work, the article could be read as a defense of the purchase. The final words of the article bear repeating here. With these words, Burroughs recognized Cézanne as an artist with deep convictions who was not afraid to break with tradition and share his vision with others:

> No artist was more sincere. His unwavering fealty to his own convictions results in a production widely unequal in merit. At times when the tradition is languid this is true of all those who follow the devices of their own hearts rather than the orthodox laws . . . .

Mountains at Saint-Remy by Vincent van Gogh, 1889

This text is provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.



Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890), Mountains at Saint-Rémy (Montagnes à Saint-Rémy), 1889. Oil on canvas, 28¼ × 35¾ in. (71.8 × 90.8 cm).

To put it in some context, Vincent van Gogh painted this countryside scene, *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, the same year the Eiffel Tower was built in Paris. Impressionists were fond of painting urban scenes, assuming the role of *flaneur* (a stroller) recording the passing scene. However, van Gogh saw the city, especially Paris, as an unhealthy environment, and he preferred to paint rural scenes, and paint them out of doors. He felt this was beneficial to his health.

The healthful benefits he believed were afforded by painting *en plein air* must have been on his mind as he painted *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*. Van Gogh painted this scene on the grounds of the hospital of Saint-Paul de Mausole in the southern French town of Saint-Rémy, to which he had voluntarily admitted himself in 1889. He suffered from periodic bouts of mental distress, which ultimately led to his suicide a year later.

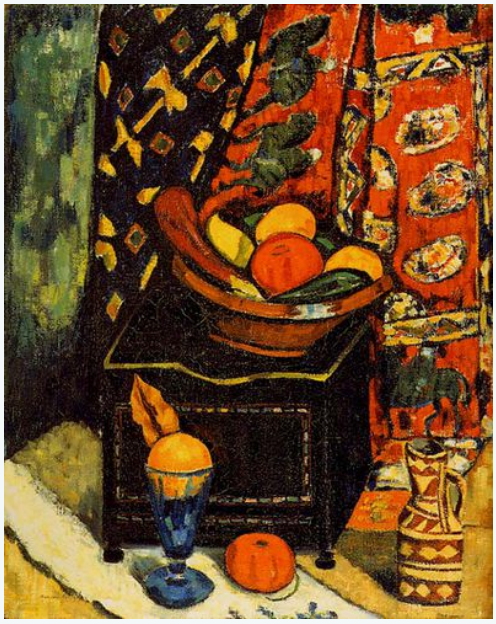
This low range of mountains—the Alpilles—was visible from the hospital grounds that van Gogh was free to wander. Expressionistic and executed in the artist's highly individual style, with bold lines and strong colors applied with thick paint, the work came not from his imagination, but directly from nature, as he saw it and as he *felt* it.

Van Gogh referred to this painting in one of his many letters to his brother Theo, noting that he felt the "somber greens" went well with the "ocher tones." In the same letter, van Gogh wrote how somehow there was something sad in the scene, adding, "and that is why it does not bore me."

Van Gogh increasingly sought out scenes such as *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*. He found the countryside and its peasants comforting and reassuring. As the progressively industrialized, mechanized world was encroaching on this pastoral environment, Van Gogh treasured the countryside all the more.

Still Life, No. 1 by Marsden Hartley, 1912

This text is provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.



Marsden Hartley (American, 1877-1943), Still Life No. 1, 1912. Oil on canvas, 32½ × 25⅝ in. (82.3 × 65.1 cm).

Marsden Hartley is representative of the relatively small number of American exhibitors at the Armory Show for whom the show was not a revelation of modernist concepts, but instead a validation of their own work.

Hartley exhibited in Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery as early as 1909, when Stieglitz gave him a solo show. His story is an example of the type of support Stieglitz gave to modernist artists in an effort to promote avant-garde art in America.

During the run of the Armory Show, where *Still Life, No. 1* was shown, Hartley was in Europe on a trip partly paid for by Stieglitz, who understood how important it was for Hartley to be exposed to the latest trends in European art. He would remain there for three years. There he met Gertrude Stein, visited her weekly salon, and met American and European artists who were working in Paris. But it was in Germany where he felt the most affinity to the work being done by, among others, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, resulting in Hartley's later work executed in a more Expressionist style.

At the Armory Show, Hartley was represented by a number of drawings and two oil paintings, *Still Life, No. 1* and *Still Life, No. 2*, the current location of which is unknown. At the very time visitors to the exhibition were viewing *Still Life, No. 1*, Hartley, in Europe, was already in the process of rethinking his work. However, the traditional still-life subjects seen in this work are offset by the designs of the Navajo jug and the tapestries, heralding the symbols in Hartley's future work. The flattened perspective of the composition is also seen in Hartley's later work.

Still Life, No. 1 demonstrates that Hartley was primed to continue an exploration of Cubism and Expressionism during his time in France and Germany. This soon was proven out. By 1914, he created *The Aero* (on view in the National Gallery of Art), a work that demonstrates the great strides he made within a year (http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.52382.html).

Landscape with Figures by Maurice Prendergast, ca. 1910–1913

This text is provided courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

Maurice Brazil Prendergast (American, 1858–1924), Landscape with Figures, ca. 1910–12. Oil on canvas, 29⅝ × 42⅞ in. (75.2 × 108.9 cm).

Major art collector Edward Wales Root, speaking of *Landscape with Figures*, told his biographer that he was excited by the work by Matisse and Duchamp, "but I felt it was my business to buy the Prendergast." Placing Prendergast within the context of these two European modernists was significant and in fact Prendergast has been called America's first Post-Impressionist and is recognized as one of the first American artists to understand and appreciate the importance of European modernism.

Maurice Prendergast exhibited at the 1908 Macbeth Gallery show, thus becoming part of The Eight, a group associated with urban realism, but he never considered himself a realist. Prendergast's interests were not those of Robert Henri or the other Ashcan School artists who gathered around Henri.

Henri would later describe Prendergast's work as showing "the happy vibration of light" that suggested "a vitality of life." This is apparent in *Landscape with Figures*, a work that is representative of Prendergast's style and interests. Prendergast preferred happy scenes of middle-class life played out in public places such as city parks. However, although there are people and elements of a park setting, *Landscape with Figures* is a non-narrative work. It is highly decorative with all

components treated with an equal intensity of color. Prendergast's technique resulted in a flattening of space; depth is inferred through the layering of people, land, water, and sky.

The equal treatment of trees, people, water, sky, and paths, all pushed to the surface, gives the painting the quality of Islamic art that Henri Matisse so admired, and Matisse is cited as one of Prendergast's inspirations. Prendergast's work also shows a great affinity to Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat.