

Different strokes for different folks

By Elaina Edman
Special to the Globe

For thousands of years, painting has been one of the most enduring methods of artistic expression. Throughout history, paintings have told us stories about people, places and events, but the truly amazing thing about painting is the many different ways artists use it to express themselves.

A great example of this can be found in the exhibit "Works from Perception: Paintings by the Midwest Paint Group." Including more than 40 works from 10 central United States artists, this show at Spiva Center for the Arts features a smorgasbord of paintings created in varying styles and capturing a variety of subjects. On display through February 26, "Works from Perception" is an excellent exhibit that will acquaint viewers with the age-old pastime of painting.

Tools, subject and style

Before an artist can begin painting, he or she must have the appropriate tools at hand. Painters can paint on canvas, boards, paper, or basically any surface that will hold color. Brushes in different shapes and sizes are used to apply the paint. Artists also have different types of paint to choose from, such as watercolor, acrylic or oil, to name a few.

One tool used by some painters is a palette knife. This is a thin knife that is used to dab the paint on a surface rather than brushing it on. Palette knives can be used to create smooth lines or even rough textures that add dimension and interest to a painting.

Another painting technique is called paint pouring. It was popularized in the 1940s by artist Jackson Pollock, who literally dripped different colors of paint onto a canvas to create a unique collage of colors. Clearly, there are lots of differ-

ent ways to get color on a canvas!

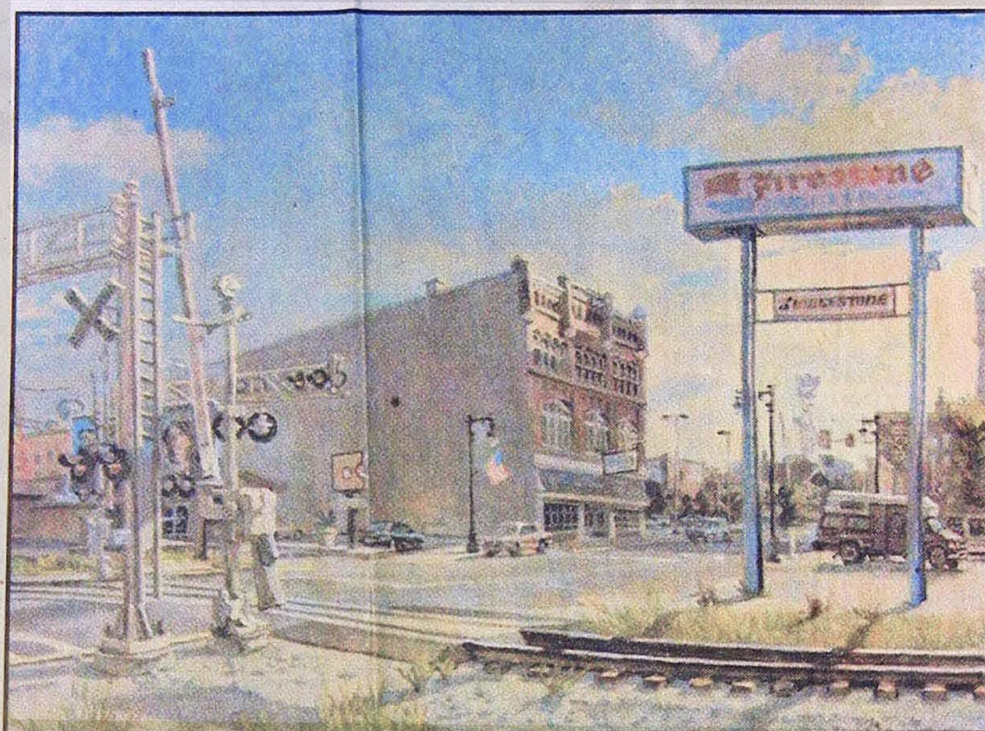
Probably the biggest influence on how an artist paints is his or her perception of the world. This perception can be expressed through the artist's palette, which refers to the particular scheme of colors used in a painting. These colors may be described as a light palette, dark palette, realistic palette, or a moody palette, for example. Some artists have a style that includes a favorite family of colors. Once you know an artist's palette well, you can often recognize the creator of a painting without even looking at the name.

Additionally, different artists work with different subject matter. In the Spiva show, for example, viewers will see everything from figurative paintings and still life paintings to cityscapes and landscapes.

Continuum of expression

Paintings can be described in many ways, but they usually fall somewhere between realistic or abstract.

When it is obvious what the artist has painted and the finished product looks like an actual reproduction of something, such as a house or person, it is a realistic painting.



"Wabash at Railroad Crossing, Afternoon" by Michael Neary

If the viewer can't easily tell what the artist painted, or the painting can be interpreted in different ways, it is considered abstract.

Often, paintings from a particular time in history or part of the world share similar characteristics. Artists may work together or they may have learned from the same teachers, or from one another.

A good example of this is the Impressionist painters of the 1870s and 1880s. This Paris-based group of painters, the most famous of which was Claude Monet, created art that might be described as falling somewhere between realistic and abstract. The

Impressionist painters emphasized the changing quality of light in outdoor scenery and used bold brush strokes that were visible to the eye. The result was that the finished paintings were realistic enough that a viewer could understand a particular scene that the artist was recreating; however, they were also abstract enough that they required the viewer to really study the painting before drawing any conclusions about the subject matter.

Although we tend to think of the beauty of Impressionist paintings today, the term "impressionist" was actually coined by a critic of Monet's who did not like one of his paintings. At the

Artist Spotlight

Artists usually have their own methods of creating, and Michael Neary of the Midwest Paint Group thrives on using the outdoors in his work. Neary, of

Terre Haute, Ind., sets up his easel, canvasses and paints on the sidewalk to capture the rhythm of life in a downtown setting.

His painting "Wabash at Railroad Crossing, Afternoon" (left) was created using just this method.

This fresh air approach to painting is much like the way Impressionist artist Claude Monet painted. One of Monet's most famous series of paintings featured the same haystacks painted at different times of the day, in different light.

Like Monet's, Neary's paintings include amazing colors unlikely places. This kind of use of color can add mystery and depth to a painting while also stretching the imagination!

time, the Impressionist style of painting was so far removed from traditional realism that it was not initially well received.

In modern times, however, it's a widely accepted fact that art can and does look like many different things. If you get a chance, stop by the Spiva show to check out the wonderful variety of paintings on display there, or just study a few of them featured on today's page.

Using the information from this lesson, try your hand at identifying the tools the artist used to create the paintings, his or her palette, the subject matter, and whether the work is realistic, abstract, or somewhere in between!

In the Gallery

View at Spiva Center for the Arts through Feb. 26



"American Linden" by Bob Brock



"Tabletop View of Lake Michigan" by Timothy King



"Figure Group" by Glen Cebulash