

Studying art: frye art museum in seattle



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The Frye Art Museum in Seattle is presently host to two very different kinds of art exhibitions. Take Home and Make Real the Priceless in Your Heart by Liu Ding is a one of a kind exhibition. Rather than showcasing finished works of art, this novel exhibition shows works in progress as it were. Produced by artists from Beijing, the artifacts are factory commissioned reproductions stalled midway during their production. In this sense, it is a unique exhibition, offering the viewer a one-of-a-kind experience. The mastermind behind this exhibition is Liu Ding, who

“ employs the economic model of a shop as a platform for discussion on the creation of value in the art world...Through different approaches that include product pricing, promotion, marketing, and circulation, Lui seeks to investigate, understand and discuss value – particularly the complex characteristics of value in art – as well as the rules, mechanisms, and politics behind the creation of value.” (introduction to Liu Ding’s Store)

It is in light of this intellectual context that Liu Ding’s presentation will have to be viewed. And this politico-economic context adds richness and meaning to what would otherwise be dull, unimpressive works. For example, a prominent painting in this exhibition is that of a huge python whose body is not yet fully painted. By showing only the head and tail of the giant snake, the painter is prompting the viewer’s imagination to fill in the space. This feature opens up the scope for interpretation as well. Moreover, this artistic angle underscores the role of synthetic imagination in the discourse on aesthetics. Coming to the politico-economic angle, the exhibition shows how method, planning, schedule and intermediary stages supplement the production of works of art – a fact that is often shadowed by the beauty of

the finished product. Another painting under the theme of ‘ unfinished paintings’ is the Die Svende, which is an elaborately decorated frame enclosing nothing. Far from the conventional, Liu Ding’s exhibition can prove to be either thought provoking or disappointing, based on the taste, refinement and patience shown by the viewer.

Ties That Bind: American Artists in Europe is another exhibition in the Frye Art Museum. This exhibition, though, is quite conventional, in that, it showcases portraits and landscapes representing classical styles that evolved in 18th and 19th century Europe. When the dust settled after the end of the Civil War in 1865, many American artists ventured across the Atlantic to learn, assimilate and master the flourishing artistic culture in Continental Europe. Europe at the time was witnessing a peaking of artistic, cultural and intellectual expression, and American artists sought the excitement and stimulus of such an atmosphere. The result is a whole era of artistic production that adapted European techniques and traditions to American talents.

William Merritt Chase’ Portrait of a Lady against Pink Ground (ca. 1886) is one of the paintings on display. According to Chase’ experience “ each sitter presents some new phase of personality that one has never done before. There is constant variety; constant study in my work” (from accompanying note). Seen in this vein, the portrait in discussion captures the bohemian attitude in the pose and posture of the lady (Miss Virginia Gerson). John Singer Sargent’s Mrs. Frederick William Roller (dated 1895) is similar in theme adapting a mature style of portraiture that captures “ the interior life of the sitter against the backdrops of finely articulated spaces” (from the <https://assignbuster.com/studying-art-frye-art-museum-in-seattle/>

explanatory note accompanying the painting). The elderly lady Mrs. Roller, dressed in a black gown, standing in the backdrop of an architectural frame, makes quite an impression. The impact on the viewer is heightened by the skilful depiction of the curves of her dress and in the attention to detail given to the room setting. The fact that Mrs. Roller is shown with minimal jewelry and accessories is a testament to the effectiveness of Sargent's art. Another intimate portrait is the Maybelle (1898) by Thomas Eakins. Drawn at close range, it is evident that Eakins showers his sitter with abundant inner spirit while also bringing to light her emotional and cerebral intelligence. The focussed gaze of the sitter is also proof of her strength of character.

Other paintings in the exhibition embrace the genre of landscapes.

Prominent among them is Albert Bierstadt's rainbow in the Sierra Nevada (ca. 1871-73), which "depicts a romanticized western landscape as an American Eden" (from accompanying note). More than the natural setting, it is Bierstadt's inner light that shines through the lake, mountain and the woods. Beyond fulfilling the requisite of art imitating life, Bierstadt's masterpiece takes it to a higher perceptual level.

The Deserted Camp by Henry Raschen is another notable work on display. This painting reflects the somber reality of the systematic evacuation and extermination of the Native American population by white settlers. The eerie yet vivid colors of the American West are nevertheless beautifully portrayed. William Merritt Chase's Coast of Holland is similar in theme to The Deserted Camp, but differs in ecology and geology.

Frederick Childe Hassam's *Parc Monceau, Paris (1897)* captures the essence of leisure in Paris. The aristocratic lady and the child are absorbed in the beauty of the garden setting, serving as a metaphor for life in the city.

Willard Leroy Metcalf's *Bank of the Seine (1888)* is a painting that haunts one's memory. There is a melancholy and stagnancy that is attached to this work. There are some characteristic features of the impressionist style incorporated into this painting. Finally, John Henry Twachtman's *Windmills, Dardrecht (ca. 1881)* is an elegant landscape painting.