

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF WESTERN ART

THE ANSCHUTZ COLLECTION

American Art Style Resource Sheet

Expansion of the American West began in 1803 with the purchase of 828,000 square miles of land from France in what is known as the Louisiana Purchase. Nearly doubling the size of the U.S., Americans became interested in what was west of the Mississippi River and many would head out to explore and settle the land.

Among those heading west were explorers and artists alike, interested in documenting the new land, animals, plants, and people they encountered. As more Americans headed west, the Western frontier changed with the population, technology, and economic growth. As the United States changed, so did the art that was being created by American artists, who were adapting and reacting to the societal, political, and emotional changes in the world around them. American artists began putting their own spin on styles of art coming out of Europe, as well as creating their own schools and styles of art completely unique to the United States.

Over about a 100-year period, American artists went from being interested in depicting the Western frontier to focusing their efforts on their own personal interpretations of the West. Materials and the way they were used shifted over time to meet the interests of the artists and the artistic styles they were aiming to create.

Documentary— These artists were similar to European Realists, interested in depicting realistic scenes of the world around them. Documentary artists wanted to record the land, plants, animals, and people they encountered, as accurately as possible. They were creating visual records of the new world that was being explored for those unable to head west. Although they were often striving for accuracy in their representations, their portrayals of these new scenes and people typically had an air of exoticism to them. Most often, these artists would make quick, charcoal or graphite sketches onsite and use those sketches to help create large oil paintings upon returning to their studios.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: new people, places, and animals (unseen by the artist or urban dwellers before)
- Very realistic
- Lots of detail
- Colors used are meant to be realistic

Artist Examples: George Catlin, Alfred Jacob Miller, William Jacob Hays Sr., and John Mix Stanley.



Detail of: William Jacob Hays, Sr., *The Gathering of the Herds*, 1866

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Hudson River School— Starting in New York, these landscape painters would eventually expand their subject matter to views beyond the Hudson River Valley as many of them made their way out west. The Hudson River School is considered to be America's first real artistic group and would thrive for about a 50-year period. These artists were interested in creating a style of art unique from the work coming out of Europe to define America as its own artistic powerhouse. Hudson River School artworks are romanticized landscape paintings of real or imagined places—often produced on large-scale canvases. The landscapes have a sense of luminism, meaning the light and how it hits the landscape is emphasized. Hudson River School paintings that do include people or animals usually place them as small figures in the foreground of the piece to show the greatness of the landscape.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: grand depictions of places
 - Could be a real or imagined scene
- The way the light hits the land is emphasized
- Colors used are meant to be realistic
- Dramatic
- Little-to-no visible brushstrokes
- Small people or animals in foreground (front)
- Large in size

Artist Examples: Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Asher B. Duran, and Thomas Cole.



Detail of: Albert Bierstadt, *Valley in King's Canyon*, after 1871

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Modernism—Modernism is an all-encompassing term for a wide variety of styles that mainly came from Europe in the late 1800s to early 1900s. European Modernism came to America with the immigration of artists and the Armory Show of 1913. This large exhibition held in New York City was organized by American artists and collectors alike to show the work being produced in Europe to United States audiences for the first time. Soon after, American artists would begin to try out different styles, blending them to create their own versions. Styles in Modernism range from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism. American Modernists rejected Realism, instead experimenting with form, line, and color. Modernists also created work that focused more on the actual materials used to create the work, like large brushstrokes and unblended pigments. Some major Modernist movements are:

Impressionism—Characterized by its highly visible brushstrokes. This style of painting appears to catch a fleeting moment, as if the moment is in motion. Rather than strong form, broad brushstrokes are used to create loose shapes. Often painted en plein air (outside).

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: people, places, and things (often in combination)
- Does not look real
- Very visible brushstrokes
- Colors used are light, soft, pastel palette

Cubism—Characterized by realistic objects being portrayed through multiple viewpoints, resulting in angular shapes making up the image. Objects are broken down into different planes, meant to create a 2D image that suggests a 3D form. Early cubist work used a muted color palette of blacks, greys, and natural tones. Cubist color palettes would become brighter and more varied with the second wave of Cubism, “Synthetic Cubism”.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: people, places, and things
- The painting is broken up with sharp, angular shapes and lines
- Colors used range from dull colors like blacks, greys and browns to bright, primary and secondary colors.
- Recognizable objects or shapes put together in unrecognizable ways

Fauvism—Characterized by bright colors and intense brushstrokes that are similar to Impressionism but stronger. The colors used are unnatural, instead artists chose complimentary colors on their palette to create scenes. Artists explored form, line, and color in Fauvism, straying from the natural or expected.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: people, places, and things (combination of these as well)
- Very visible brushstrokes
- Colors used are bright and intense primary and complimentary

Artist Examples: Victor Higgins, Emil Bisttram, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Gina Knee.

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Detail of: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Another Church, Hernandez, New Mexico*, 1931



Detail of: Jan Matulka, *Indian Festival in Arizona*, c. 1917-18

Regionalism—Regionalism emerged out of the 1920s in America shortly after the end of WWI. American artists began to reject aspects of European Modernism as it moved toward full abstract—or non-objective—visuals, instead blending Modernist elements with Realism. The first World War and the Great Depression of the 1930s turned America inward, focusing on internal issues and rebuilding. During this time a group of painters emerged who continued to champion Realism but still held an interest in the Modernism exhibited by the European artists at the Armory Show. Before visual depictions of American scenes became popular, a literature group interested in writing stories about the American Midwest emerged first. Authors like Upton Sinclair and Willa Cather wrote about the plight and hardships of small-town life and farmers. The artists who painted similar scenes would become known as Regionalists and were more often than not trained outside of art world centers, which were New York or Europe.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: people and places
 - People working and farming
 - Places such as farms and towns in states like Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri
- Not as realistic looking—clear that it is a painting and not a photograph
- Bright colors
- Visible application of paint

Artist Examples: Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood.

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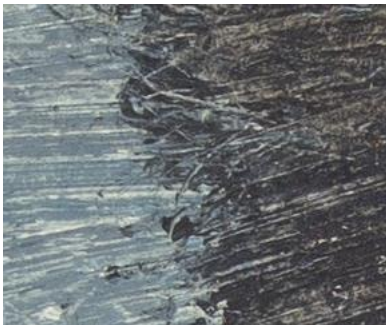
Detail of: John Steuart Curry, *Tourist Cabins*, c. 1934

Abstract Expressionism—Abstract Expressionists were interested in exploring new forms of art that expressed thought, emotion, and the production of art itself. These artists were against representations of form, instead artists' emotions or the overall aesthetic of the painting were the subject matter. The term Abstract Expressionism was used because the imagery is abstract or nonobjective and the artist's motions and hands are the most expressive part of the work. The work of art is thought to be simply that, a work of art, focused on pigment, canvas, and brushwork rather than the likeness of an object or landscape.

Visual Characteristics:

- Subject matter: materials used to create the artwork and emotion
- Can see how the artist applied the paint
 - Resulting in shapes, smudges, sprays, flicks, and brushstrokes of paint
- All colors used, dull to bright
 - Colors are used to express a feeling
 - Commonly colors that do not mix well or are not paired together often are explored

Artist Examples: Helen Frankenthaler, Emil Bisttram, and Franz Kline.



Detail of: Emil Bisttram, *Storm*, 1940