

Francis Bacon

Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X, 1953

JIM DEMETRION: I'm Jim Demetron. I was formerly Director at the Art Center here from about 1969 to 1984.

This is a painting by the British artist, painter Francis Bacon. The picture is called *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. It was painted in 1953 and the image of the pope, especially in this pose, comes up very, very often in Bacon's work. He was obsessed with a painting done 300 years earlier, a painting by Diego Velázquez which he claims never to have seen. But he did see many, many reproductions the work was reproduced over and over again and he had them pinned all over his studio walls.

What you see here is a figure of great authority, a pope, who in his own realm could do just about anything he might wish. But the pope here is seems to be not in full control. I mean, the image is of a man who is screaming and one wonders what he is screaming at. And you look at him and he's kind of hemmed in. And then that hemming in feeling is even more greatly enhanced by the fact that you've got these odd yellow-gold colored tubular elements that hem him in. It's almost like he's in, the pope's almost in an electric chair. And then on top of all that you've got these striations, these vertical stripes almost very thinly painted. You can't see the pope completely, you're looking through something, maybe it's a curtain or a drape or whatever it is that's transparent. And there's that element that's separating you from the pope as well.

Sometimes you always can't rely on what artists say about their own work, but he always denied that he was interested in anything at all except the formal qualities of the painting. That we shouldn't read too much into the scream. Keep in mind that 1953 was not that far after the end of World War II. We learned more about the Holocaust then and you look at the picture and you see these little red spatters of paint on the white part of the pope's garment. You know, they can be interpreted as blood. Is the pope screaming at something that he has seen? Is he screaming at something he has perpetrated advertently or inadvertently? The pope during World War II was thought to have not done enough to help. You can get many interpretations of it.

Joseph Beuys

Energie Plan for the Westman, 1974

JEFF FLEMING: Hi, I'm Jeff Fleming. I'm Director of the Des Moines Art Center.

This is Joseph Beuys' *Energie Plan for the Westman* from 1974. This was produced during a performance at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in Minneapolis, during his first visit to the United States. He was a flyer for Germany in World War II and he was, following the war, investigating, questioning, examining what it means to be human and how we as humans define culture, create culture, change culture, destroy culture. And this piece speaks to that.

Performance was an integral part of his work, just as painting or sculpture or drawing. His drawings are magnificent, and this is because they're very spontaneous and they're very intimate. They have a symbolism that is truly his own, that we can only catch glimpses of.

If you look at the arc in the upper right, you can just make out words, such as sculpture, painting, poetry, music. All of these things that constitute or define culture as we know it, at least for the western world. And also on the left, you can see words that define who we are as humans, such as freedom, culture. You see life, with perhaps a plant, you see the sun, which obviously is a source of energy for plants. And you see a reindeer, which is in the center, which again is a recurring motif and icon in his work.

This is a chalkboard and it was produced with chalk drawn on a chalkboard. With that in mind, it's extremely fragile. And as you can see, it is covered. There is no fixative or any process that has made this a permanent object or the drawing a permanent drawing. So here we have to treat it for what it is, and that is a very fragile object that can be destroyed at any moment with just the wipe of a hand.

Cecily Brown

Half-Bind, 2005

JEFF FLEMING: This is Cecily Brown's *Half-Bind* from 2005. It's a very lush and painterly canvas. Cecily Brown's work always includes the figure, often in a sexual connotation. Here we have a female figure sitting on a rock, perhaps a figure looking at her from the side. She's in the forest, where the leaves and the environment are all merging together into very complex and beautiful and lush patterns. You can also assume, just barely, that this female figure is swinging on a swing. You can see the chains of which is holding the seat of the swing within this forest. And you can barely make out the head at the lower left of a gentleman that might be, I assume it's a gentleman, that might be pushing the swing and/or perhaps spying upon her from the side.

This is a particularly active painting. We see pink and oranges and flesh tones, which of course alludes to the figure. But we also see the purples and greens and reds and lush colors, and all of these combine into a moving, energetic, vibrant presentation, a really a living canvas.

She works in a variety of sizes, from the very intimate to very, very large-scale canvases such as this one. The size obviously makes it a grand presentation and an overwhelming presentation. It's larger than the viewer, which has an impact, even a psychological impact upon the viewer, when you engage a work this large and this active and this vibrant.

Joseph Cornell

Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery, 1943

JIM DEMETRION: This is a box construction by the artist Joseph Cornell. The work itself is called *Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery* and it was done in 1943. Now, he's one of the very, very few artists of that time certainly, whose art consisted primarily of these constructions that were enclosed in these little boxes with windows over them. So you kind of looked into this other world. And one of his favorite themes was that of birds. He referred to them as aviaries.

Like I say, he was reclusive, tended to work in this little house where I visited him in Queens, in New York, on Utopia Parkway, which is kind of a wonderful name for a place to live. But this particular work is no utopia, for sure. Because what Cornell has done here is to depict an aviary—these four colorful, exotic birds and he has shattered their world almost literally. And if you look closely at the work there's a bullet hole, we'll call it, right in the middle of the glass. And there are cracks that radiate out from that bullet hole. In other words, this wonderful, civilized world—and we know it's civilized because there are references in the background to contemporary life, to French life in particular—this world was shattered by World War II.

You know, a bird is kind of a symbol of freedom, but here these birds are encased, they're being shot at. The white bird with the red splatter above its head there could very well represent France. It seemed to me that 1943, you've got the US, you've got France, you've got Great Britain and you've got Russia—all four countries in this war against Nazism. And France had fallen by then. I have suggested that this is, this might be the case that this represents, the practically the killing of France, something a bit more specific than just a general attack on a civilized world.

The following recording is by artist Tony Cragg about his sculpture, *Untitled (Conch Shell)*

Tony Cragg

Untitled (Conch Shell), that's a little bit perverse isn't it—it's actually, *shell*, and then it's not even a shell, because it's actually a fossil of a shell. And it's a fossil which I think it's called Gryphaea. It's a bivalve, and in English folk lore, it's actually called "The Devil's Toenail." And they are very dark stone fossils of a creature that lived many millions of years ago. And the interest in the idea of a kind of harmonic in form. That materials arrange themselves in certain very specific patterns. And especially the more complicated arrangements of material that are associated with living forms. I mean, it's still only atoms piled up on top of each other and doing things, but the structures have certain laws and rules to it, which we see, and we feel. Also when you're listening to music, there's a lot of noise going on. A lot of sounds, if you like, going on. But there are certain notes, certain things, that actually hit something in our brains. They actually have a physical and even psychological mental effect on us. So pleasing, or not pleasing, and they can be very complicated, they can be mixed up, or given as half tones, or whatever. You arrive at harmonies and play with disharmonies, and so that's the basis of music. So the way that the music world, our sound world, is ordered for us, which is related to these tones that we see, have a sudden orderliness about them. They find a correspondence in our nature that we react to. Sometimes it seems more difficult when you're looking at a visual world. The visual world is apparently, ultimately, more complicated. Or there are a lot more tone variations and harmonies of pitch and color and everything, and dark and textures, and whatever else. One could look out a window and assume it's very chaotic. It looks kind of chaotic, but somehow if you look at the world enough, you then also see, little things, little rhythms in the world. You see the verticality of the trees and the grass, and even if one's a big verticality or little verticalities, and you see the way that the things grow and spread out in space and whatever. So there is a kind of, as well, I won't say there's a sort of harmonic or musical effect, to make the whole thing sound much too lyrical. But there are a lot of basic formal structures to the visual world as well. Just simply put, it's the harmonies of a naturally made object. And then coming to the harmony, the shapes and forms, of not the music instruments themselves, but the cases, that were made for musical instruments.

John Currin

Three Friends, 1998

JEFF FLEMING: This is John Currin's work *Three Friends* from 1998. This is a very large canvas for the artist, but it's a very, very typical work in that he updates, but draws from, art history to produce his work. This one in particular draws very specifically from the Three Graces from Lucas Cranach, who was a Northern Renaissance painter. The figures come directly from that painting, the foreground and the background come directly from that painting that is at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City.

Here we have a very mannered look at human figure. The female form in particular. The art term, or the art movement in term Mannerism, which is an Italian art movement certainly exaggerated the female form or the human form often in ways that were not quite physically correct—extended necks, extended arms, extended fingers and hands. For example, the lady on the left, whose elbow and shoulder—physically this can't take place—as well as the leg of the reclining female figure, this leg cannot be housed in this position. So it's very mannered it's very gestured, it's very cartoon-like in many ways—and that's very appropriate too, because his work is a mixture of looking at art history as well as looking at contemporary sources, from record album covers to magazines to advertisements.

Very much a degree of humor involved, which is one of his trademarks as well, where he's using humor to present his own point of view, which is specifically male, and specifically referring to male sexual desire. And in fact one of these images, the center image is a portrait of his wife, Rachel.

Jean Dubuffet

Villager with Close-Cropped Hair, 1947

JEFF FLEMING: This is Jean Dubuffet's *Villager with Close-Cropped Hair* from 1947. Jean Dubuffet was a particularly interesting artist. He didn't fit the period in which he lived. He didn't follow what was happening with the larger art world. He had an interest in art by the self-taught, or the naïve, even the mentally challenged. And this work I think presents some of that primitive and naïve quality that he was so enamored with. This also has a village in the background and a figure, obviously, with spiked hair. There is conversation that this might be a self-portrait. So this is a very special painting in that it might be one of the only self-portraits that he produced.

The process of producing the work is also very interesting and exciting. It's very energetic, it's very roughly done. You can see thick applications of paint with a brush and with a palette knife, and then he has etched into the paint, perhaps with the end of his brush to delineate the figure and the clothes of the figure and the hair and the grimacing face, and the very, very large head that almost equals the size of the body.

It is a great painting. It's one of our masterpieces—to me.

Tom Friedman

Untitled, 2000

JEFF FLEMING: This is Tom Friedman's work. It's *Untitled*, from 2000. It is a piece of paper. And the process is that he drew on the paper and then he cut out the white, leaving only the lines of the drawing. This is very, very typical of Tom Friedman's work. His work is very, very obsessive, it's very, very laborious. And in fact he said that this piece is probably the most laborious piece that he's ever created. So this piece of paper is suspended from the ceiling and it gives a feeling that this is a three-dimensional object. And if you stand back from it, it has the impression that it's three or four inches thick. And you don't even know what the material is and these images of figures and faces pop out of the drawing. You can see tiny faces and if you look back you can see larger faces. You can see an ear in the upper left, you can see a face in the center toward the right. There are numbers, there are stars, there are other things that pop out.

In his other works he uses a wide variety of materials, most of them commonplace, most of them very ordinary—from making a painting on the wall with toothpaste, or making a sculpture out of toothpicks, or making a sculpture out of Lifesavers®. He's even used toilet paper in his work, where he's rerolled—perfectly—a roll of toilet paper. So it becomes this amazing object. He's used bubble gum. What's so wonderful about his work is the fact that it is so laborious, it is so obsessively ridiculous. There's a great deal of humor in his work. But in this particular piece there's a great deal of magic.

Alberto Giacometti

Man Pointing, 1947

JIM DEMETRION: This is a sculpture from 1947 by the Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti. Most of his sculptures of standing figures have the arms and hands down to the side. They're almost like sticks, you might say, or stick-like figures, because of this sort of emaciated look.

This device that he uses of these elongated figures, this emaciated look, this kind of craggy surface which catches the light in various ways is very, very characteristic of Giacometti's work, especially after World War II. People said, "Well, you know obviously this relates somehow to World War II and the emaciation and people being miserable shape." But Giacometti disclaimed all of that. He said, "No, no that's not the reason for this. This is the way I look at people. This is what I see when I see human form."

And he's talked about being somewhere and looking out on a plaza with figures in the distance coming toward you and you look at the figure and it takes on slightly different forms. I think he would argue that the human form is really fragile that is the nature of life. That we are fragile in one way or another, either physically or psychically that there is an element of fragility in all of us.

He worked in plaster and then he would ship off the plaster to a local foundry and they would cast it into bronze. And this piece, which he did in about nine hours and during that nine hours he destroyed what he had started with and changed the thing entirely. But what he had in mind, initially, was to include a second figure, and that this upraised arm it would almost be like an embrace or a sheltering or protecting kind of gesture and the other figure would be there. About five or six years after he did *Man Pointing*, he finally did this second figure and was dissatisfied with the way it looked and he destroyed the other piece.

Francisco Goya

Don Manuel Garcia de la Prada, c. 1811

My name is Juliet Wilson-Bareau. I am an independent researcher. I've been working on the life and times and works of Francisco Goya for very many years now and I'm particularly interested in his paintings, of all periods. We are looking at Francisco Goya's portrait of Manuel Garcia de la Prada. We think that it was painted some where between 1805 and 1808.

Garcia de la Prada was in his 30s when the portrait was painted. Garcia de la Prada was a very lively, active fellow. He was a banker. He was given very high appointments in Madrid at around this time. In 1800, he was given a court appointment and looked after all kinds of commercial interests for the court. And in 1811, under the French government of Spain, Garcia de la Prada became, effectively, the mayor of Madrid and he was very active in running the country. And this went on until General Wellington came in and finally drove the French armies out of Spain. And then he, as a sympathizer with the French, of course, had to leave in a hurry.

The painting is really one of his most ambitious male portraits. And it's very striking that one can compare it with some of Goya's portraits of some of the highest, highest-ranking aristocrats in Spain. And yet Garcia de la Prada is a bourgeoisie man, a working man, extremely intelligent, and forceful, but not a man with pretensions to aristocracy. And I think one of the things that must have endeared him to Goya, was his obvious passion for this little dog—a little bitch in fact—very clearly painted, showing that she is a female dog. And Goya was a great lover of animals. He was passionately addicted to hunting himself, and always had hunting dogs attached to him. [He] Made many drawings and even some paintings of dogs. And I think that he had very special relationship with this lovely little pug dog.

We presume that he is pictured, although he was probably painted in Goya's studio—that he is pictured as if he were in his own home, with his dog, which is placed on a very handsome piece of furniture. And beside him is this very plain, rush-seated chair, ladderback, which was actually an item of furniture that is found in many, many of Goya's portraits, not this particular one, that was probably Garcia de la Prada's own chair—maybe he brought it with him to the studio. But in many of Goya's portraits from the 1790s and 1800s, we see often quite wealthy-looking, extremely well-dressed gentlemen either sitting on or standing against this kind of very simple, almost poor you could say, sort of chair. But it is a chair that was much in use in Spain at the time.

The painting must have been absolutely magnificent at the time that Goya painted it. There are quite a number of portraits, where you see very elegant gentlemen in yellow breeches of this kind, which might be of perhaps a velvet or of satin. In the case of this portrait, it has at sometime in its life been rather harshly cleaned. And it is difficult to

read the quality of the kind of material from which the clothes are actually made. But nevertheless, they are striking. They still describe the shape and the shapely legs of the sitter very well. And it is hoped, in fact, that this picture can go through some sort of conservation process, and be enhanced. Because one of the things that one notices is that the top hat on the chair doesn't actually sit down on the chair. It seems to be sort of levitating, almost floating, above the rush-seated area of the chair. And this is probably because some glazing and shadows—transparent shadows—were removed in a cleaning process, probably many, many years ago.

Edward Hopper

Automat, 1927

JEFF FLEMING: This is Edward Hopper's *Automat* from 1927. Edward Hopper is a quintessential American artist and this is a quintessential American painting. Here we see what we assume to be a lonely female in the city. And she's gone to an automat. And at this time, automats sprung up all across New York City and provided a quick and cheap meal for the recent newcomers into the city. The automat was like a vending machine, where you can have hot soup, you can have a sandwich, but you would never have interaction with a human being. The kitchen was behind the machines. And you would simply put your money in the machine, open the door and receive your dinner or your lunch or your soup. So here you have a representation of a social phenomenon at that time. But it is a quintessentially American social phenomenon.

I think the artist has given us tidbits of details and tidbits that could add to a narrative that we may not know the answer to. There's an empty chair at her table. Is she waiting for someone? Is she alone? Has someone left her? She has one glove off and one glove on. She has her coat on. There's a radiator by the door, but it's very small. Will it heat the room? Is it cold outside? Those tidbits of questions that add to the narrative, that add to the questions we might have with this work and who this figure is and what is her story?

Edward Hopper

Automat, 1927

I'm Patricia Junker, and I am the Anne M. Barwick curator of American Art at the Seattle Art Museum. This painting is *Automat* 1927 by Edward Hopper.

He was really referring to a very particular kind of restaurant, that was a, a vending-machine restaurant. So the interesting thing is in this picture we don't see vending machines. We only know the kind of restaurant it is because of the title that he gave it.

Now, what's interesting is: who is this woman, sitting alone, in this, what would have been a very large, and at lunchtime, very bustling, automat restaurant. And look at what time of day it is. She's sitting there in the, in the middle of the night. She's sitting there—it's dark outside. She's sitting in this brightly illuminated restaurant where anyone could come in at any hour of the day and have a 5-cent cup of coffee. And she's sitting there by herself at a table for two. And she's sitting in the window. She's sitting right near the door. And she's sitting near the stairway that leads down to a lower level. So anybody walking into the restaurant, walking down the stairs, or walking by on the street outside, would see her. She's really on display.

One of the things I've come to appreciate about Edward Hopper's art is that nothing in his pictures is arbitrary. And every detail is something that he remembered from an experience and that, that stayed in his memory, that really impressed him and that became more fascinating as time went on as he thought about these things. So the details in this picture, and in any Edward Hopper painting, are always just full of meaning.

So, we have in the automat window the bowl of fruit. Now, the automat used bowls of fruit in its windows as a display for to entice the public in. It was a way of saying: "Look, everything that you find in the Automat will be sumptuous and fresh," even though it was coming out of vending machines. So this was a display that one would see in the automat window. But interestingly, because he's, kind of, put it there on display with the young woman, we have to wonder: Is she also a sort of a young thing ripe for the taking, you might say in a common way. So maybe he's making that reference to her by putting her there with that bowl of fruit. Because she does certainly look like she's enticing someone into the automat perhaps by sitting so close to the window.

Because he's cropped this scene so close that we don't really even see much of the restaurant. We're staring at her and we're watching, we're seeing every little thing about her. The fact that she has one glove on and one glove off. It's obviously cold outside. She's sitting near the radiator, but she's left her coat on and she's left her gloves on. She's kind of nervously, or maybe absent-mindedly, playing with her coffee cup. And she's staring down. She has no real sense, I think, of anybody else in the room or

anything going on outside or any passersby in any part of the restaurant. And so she's either completely lost in herself, or she's so self-conscious that she's kind of looking down in hopes that no one is looking at her. I always feel that way when I'm dining alone in a restaurant myself, so I can understand, I think, what she might, what a woman like her would be feeling.

This is the beginning of the Edward Hopper that we know and love, though in 1927 nobody recognized that. Nobody saw this for the major new direction that it was in his art. When he showed this painting in 1927, he was still known as a landscape painter and primarily as a watercolorist and so his fame had come in 1924 with a lot of his watercolor paintings of Gloucester, of old houses in Gloucester. In 1927, when he had his next show in New York, he included four oil paintings, including this one, which was the largest of the four in the show. So he was obviously intending this to be a major statement. Critics really loved the watercolors. They loved the etchings from years earlier, that he'd also included in the show, but they thought that the paintings really lacked something. And they said particularly of this one that it lacked any sort of sense of control over the composition. And I think maybe they're talking about all the emptiness and the fact that the fruit bowl is kind of off-center and behind her. They really were kinda missing the point. And no one really appreciated, I think, where Hopper was going in his art. So in 1927, though this painting was bought in 1927 by a famous collector, it took several years for Hopper to gain his reputation on paintings like this. And then two years later he paints "Chop Suey" another restaurant picture, which is almost its pair. And so the rest is history. He quickly then became famous for pictures like this. And these are the pictures that we know and love today.

Jasper Johns

Tennyson, 1958

JIM DEMETRION: This is a painting called *Tennyson* by Jasper Johns. It was painted in 1958 and it's a painting that I'd known for a while before coming to Des Moines.

When someone confronts a picture like this, and when I myself first saw the painting, I found it really challenging, difficult certainly. And I wondered about what was causing that difficulty and I think there are a number of factors. One, the color itself, which is not a jazzy, sexy kind of color. Gray being an intermediate kind of color. Not black. Not white. Two, the word Tennyson written across the bottom, what was that all about? There's a certain indefinite quality to it.

The picture itself is a rather complicated picture in the way it's constructed. You'll note that at the top of the picture you can see a division there. What's happened is that the artist has painted two long vertical canvases. He's bolted them together and you can see there at the top this kind of a division. The rest of that division has been covered over by another canvas, which starts at the bottom and then goes up about four-fifths of the way and then is folded back on itself. Someone suggested that this is like two beds, perhaps, side by side. Whatever's under there is hidden. And maybe what Johns is saying is that people's true selves are being hidden by this folding of the canvas back over itself and by the use of gray to cover it all over. You can't see it. And I think concealment and hiding and not being able to see what's underneath this canvas or blanket or whatever, is a factor here in this painting.

The way *Tennyson* is presented here with these large, Roman capital letters, someone has said, "It's like a monument of some sort." Johns himself is very reticent about talking about his paintings and what they mean. You know someone once referred to this as a tombstone, and it may not have been too far off the mark.

Donald Judd

Untitled, 1976

JEFF FLEMING: This is Donald Judd's *Untitled* work from 1976. There are 21 aluminum panels. Each are unique panels. Each one is a little bit different. They are panels, perhaps four inches high, and they each have a different layer or plane which reflects and refracts light. They can either form as a container or as a platform in which something else may rest. There is a prescribed order in how this work is laid out. There are three rows of seven each and each order within that seven is prescribed by the artist.

Donald Judd was a prominent figure in the Minimalist movement. The Minimalist movement did not respond to subjectivity, it presented work that denied the evidence of the human hand, denied any relationship to the outside world, such as a still-life or portraiture or landscape. Donald Judd would have designed this and given it to a fabricator. It was fabricated by machine. So it is a very cool and calculated approach to art making.

There's no barrier per se between this work and the viewer, such as a pedestal, which traditional art or a sculpture may have been placed on a pedestal, so that close relationship to the viewer really is in contrast to the very machine made, the very calculated, the very lack of human contact or lack of human touch. So that dichotomy is an interesting force in the work.

Anselm Kiefer

Untitled, 1987-88

JEFF FLEMING: This is the German artist Anselm Kiefer's *Untitled* work from 1987. It's a large, two-paneled work, covered in lead and mixed media. Obviously, materiality is of paramount importance in this work. Lead, for one thing, is a very, very heavy material. It's also somewhat poisonous. The other materials apparent here, such as the tar and the hay, and the dirt references again decay, destruction, war. At the bottom panel we see two train tracks that converge and then move off to each side. This seems to be an obvious reference to trains that carried prisoners or Jews and other individuals to concentration camps in Europe. The landscape looks very, very bleak and damaged by war, which again, which exists on the bottom panel. The top panel is cleaner. We have the ladder going up, that might reference a release or an escape from that dense and heavy landscape that perhaps is destroyed by humanity.

Anselm Kiefer was hugely important as a German artist and as a proponent of the German contribution to postmodern art. That contribution really was a questioning of who we are as humans, in terms of our culture. How do we establish culture? How do we maintain culture? How has culture changed humanity and/or enhanced or destroyed humanity?

You also see bits and pieces of words and language—EU, is obvious and this has perhaps a relationship to Europe, which certainly has a relationship to the Western civilization. You also see Land, which is both land in English and in German. Again a relationship to who we are and where we come from and where we have created the culture in which we exist.

Jeff Koons

New Shelton Wet/Dry Triple Decker, 1981

JEFF FLEMING: This is Jeff Koons' *New Shelton Wet/Dry Triple Decker* from 1981. Jeff Koons selected three vacuum cleaners from the Shelton company, placed them in Plexiglas containers and stacked them one on the other. This presentation took something from popular culture, something from the consumer world that any individual could have purchased, and presented them in a very pristine and specific format that elevated them into the realm of art.

Jeff Koons is also responding to market demand and the need and the desire for new items. And for example, when you purchase something new it's a precious object at that time, and through use it loses its preciousness.

Also, there's a bit of humanity involved here, and he very purposefully says that there's a relationship between the three. They're all of different sizes and he speaks of one being a papa, one being a mama and one being a baby. So, even within that very ironic look at consumerism and how we elevate and make something perhaps more important in one situation than another there's a humanity between that relationship and a connection to who we are as human beings.

Brice Marden

***Range*, 1970**

JEFF FLEMING: This is Brice Marden's *Range* from 1970. The work is composed of three panels. Each of the panels is monochromatic and then he joined the three panels into a more horizontal piece. It's a very simple and straightforward Minimalist approach, but unlike the Minimalist movement, in which there was no evidence of the artist's hand and no relationship to the outside world, this work has both. The oil paint he mixed with a wax. Mixing wax with the oil paint creates a beautiful, beautiful texture, a velvety texture to the canvas. It's something that you want to touch. It's something that you want to feel. It has a sensuality to it and you can see at the bottom of each of the three panels he left a bit of the canvas exposed. So it's very obvious that this was produced by hand.

The work is a very sensual work, not only in its surface, but also in his choice of color, which is very subtle and very muted and has reference to the world around, and particularly a Western landscape, of which he was very familiar and had an affinity for.

Agnes Martin

Untitled #3, 1974

JEFF FLEMING: This is Agnes Martin's *Untitled* painting from 1974. It's a very minimal work in terms of the amount of material in the work, but it's not necessarily a Minimalist work.

It was very apparent in Agnes Martin's work as well as her discussions about her work that there's a relationship to landscape, quite often. Not a direct relationship to landscape, but a relationship to a feel of a place, the spirituality of a place, the allusion to a place. She was born in Canada and she speaks of the wheat fields on her father's farm. And she spent a great deal of her working career in the Southwest of the United States.

This is a very quiet and contemplative work. The viewer needs to spend an intimate time with the work. I think we can see a sensitivity to the materials within a very structured format. You have the three rectangular forms, but within those rectangular forms but within that order, within that structure, there's a looseness and there's a sensitivity to the application of paint. If you look very closely at the brush marks, they're very, very apparent within a hand-drawn pencil line. Each of those are not pristine, or not complete, or not polished. So, the evidence of the artist's hand is vital in terms of responding to the work.

Henri Matisse

Woman in White, 1946

JEFF FLEMING: This is Henri Matisse's *Woman in White* from 1946. This is a painting he produced later in his life. He died in 1954. He was in the south of France and it is believed this was his caregiver, a portrait of his caregiver, of which he produced a series of portraits.

This is a very typical Matisse painting, where there's a merger of abstraction and figuration. You see the lady's skin is a very flat surface. You see the linear marks on her dress. You see the pattern in the chair as well as the pattern in the wallpaper or the cloth covering of the background. We have this lively Mediterranean atmosphere and the lively Mediterranean light, so the colors are pure and crisp and bright, which is a reflection of his environment.

Line was always a part of his work. It can be produced with brush, it can be produced with marker, or you can see where he's literally made the paint marks, and then used perhaps the end of his brush to draw into the wet paint and/or come with chalk or pastel and draw over the paint, which may be evident in the spots on the couch and the chair covering.

His work was about the joy of living, joy of life, the joy of making art, and I think it's clearly apparent in this very beautiful and bright and lively painting.

Georgia O'Keeffe,

From the Lake No. 1, 1924

JEFF FLEMING: This is Georgia O'Keeffe's *From the Lake* from 1924. It's an oil on canvas. It's an abstraction of a natural scene in Lake George. Lake George is in upstate New York.

This is an abstract work. It's an abstract work in a sense that it is drawn from the natural world—it's drawn from a specific landscape. It's images of a lake, of mountains, of billowing cloud-filled sky that's pushing out the sun. So we have a relationship to something tangible to something in the natural world. But the artist implants an abstraction and a pattern and a rhythm to it that is all her own.

This is somewhat of an atypical work in 1924. This was a totally abstracted work, although it was based on a landscape and a natural format. But its degree of abstraction at this time was somewhat unusual for her. But it did point to the future in which her works were very much abstracted. So this is an early example of something that she would go back to time and time again throughout her career.

Claes Oldenburg

Three-Way Plug, Scale A (Soft), Prototype in Blue, 1971

JIM DEMETRION: The object in front of us is by Claes Oldenburg, an American sculptor who was born in Sweden. The title of this work is *Three-Way Plug, Scale A (Soft), Prototype in Blue*. Done in 1971. And it was done actually from an idea that Oldenburg had when he visited the Art Center. He came by on New Year's Day of 1971. Oldenburg was going into the Pei Wing and his eye went up into the Pei Wing you know because there are clerestory windows up there and you're in this wonderful space and you tend to look up. And Oldenburg felt that the architect was maybe calling too much attention to himself. And what Oldenburg wanted to do was to bring the viewers' eyes down a bit and to look at the art.

I had wanted to get something by the artist. I really wanted it to be a soft sculpture. I thought one of his great innovations was using material that lent itself to changing form by using soft materials, so that a work could look different in different situations. So, you can do all kinds of things with it. You can make it lie down, you can splay those legs, those prongs, and it takes on different forms depending on what you do with the piece.

He came up with this proposal and I really liked it immensely. I liked it because this sculpture, with these eyes and nose as I'll call them part of the holes of a three-way plug and the prongs that descend from the plug. They all take on a kind of anthropomorphic element to them. They look like a person and that's not just the case with this work, Oldenburg has done this in a very, very large number of his works. I've always liked the work not when it's necessarily suspended from the ceiling, but when those prongs hit the floor. It's like a big oaf, a very pleasant, jovial kind of oaf. It's not threatening at all. I think it's not threatening because of the blue color. Certainly, Oldenburg's works bring a certain joy, I think.

Robert Rauschenberg

Talisman, 1958

JEFF FLEMING: This is Robert Rauschenberg's *Talisman* from 1958. It's an early example of his "combines". And he coined the term "combine", or the term "combine" was coined in relationship to his work, which is a combination of found and manipulated materials. But in addition to that, it's a combination of media as well—sculpture, painting, text, photography, all combined to create something essentially new and unique, particularly in the '50s and '60s.

We see a combination of loose and gestural brushwork, you see it overlaid on text, you see text bleeding through or a ghost image of text coming through brushwork. You see clear imagery. You see clear text. So it's a combination of this going back and forth between a painterly surface as well as a found and/or photographic or text-based surface. Here you see sports imagery, you see found objects, things that might have been discarded, but are part of human experience that he has now resurrected and placed in the context of fine art. Really combines this notion of what art is and what living is and merges them into something that could be considered one.

Talisman of course has a relationship to charm and magic, and incorporated into this work is a jar. We're not quite sure, the viewer's not quite sure, what might be in that jar. But it could hold that charm, that magical element, indeed that magical element that combines art and living into one.

John Singer Sargent

Portraits of Edouard and Marie-Louise Pailleron, 1881

JEFF FLEMING: This is John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Edouard and Marie-Louise Pailleron*. It's a painting from 1881. The two children, the Pailleron children, sat through eighty-some sittings to have their portrait taken. Edouard was 13 or 14 when this portrait was painted, and Marie-Louise was nine. Obviously there seems to be a tension between the two siblings in this work, and perhaps a tension between the siblings or the sitters and the artist. They appear to be less than happy with the seating arrangement and their relationship with one another, with their very stern and discontent faces. The painting has a predominant red theme or hue. And certainly that adds to a psychological tension about the work.

John Singer Sargent was an American artist. He was born in America but spent most of his career in Europe, in England and France. And he had subjects of high society that kept him busy all over the continent. We believe that John Singer Sargent picked out the dress, the white dress, for Marie-Louise, in an attempt to show his technical skills.

I think when you look closely, I mean obviously it's a very beautiful and realistically presented painting, but if you look very closely, if you look at the faces, which are glowing white, you look at the dress which is beautifully, beautifully painted, but close-up is quite abstract. In fact, the entire painting, if you look very closely, is a grouping of very, very loose and fluid brush strokes. Certainly, John Singer Sargent was a painter's painter.

Henry Ossawa Tanner

The Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water, c. 1907

This is Henry Ossawa Tanner's *The Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water* from 1907. We see a ghostlike figure of Christ walking on the water and the disciples in a boat watching him walk away. This is a marvelously mysterious painting. The painting, or the image in the painting, is illuminated by moonlight, so there is a darkness to the painting, but at the same time it has this wonderful spirituality.

The moon itself is reflected in the water. In fact, most of the image of the painting is of water, with a very high horizon line, and the Christ figure moving out into that horizon line. So it's a marvelous composition, a very unusual composition, where we see the reflection of the water is the primary element of the painting.

Henry Ossawa Tanner was an African American artist who lived within the United States, but was forced to go to Europe early in his career. As an African American artist, he could not find a way to make a living in the United States.

This painting is one of my favorite works in the collection of the Art Center. It's one of my favorites because of the potency of the artist's experience, his passion for the Biblical subject matter, but also the manner in which it was done is very, very loosely and impressionistically painted.

Richard Tuttle

Floor Drawing #19 (Sentence III), 1989

JEFF FLEMING: This is the American artist Richard Tuttle's *Floor Drawing #19*. He refers to it as a drawing in a very abstract way. The sense that you're drawing in space, you're drawing through sculpture, you're drawing with materials. You see it's made of commonplace materials, plywood, light bulbs, wire. Everything's exposed, the working process, the cuts, the marks, the glue. And the drawing could either be the sculpture itself: you're drawing in space, you're drawing on the sculpture, you're drawing with materials, you're drawing with wire that might be hanging on the wall, or the shadow of the wire on the wall. So the drawing and the line become one with the space and one with the materials.

It does seem to have a front and a back. But it's very obvious that Tuttle wanted the viewer to experience the work as a whole, and as a unit. So certainly the mechanisms that make it work, how it is, how the plane is held up in space, how the light receives it, electricity is obvious and the artist wants that to be a part of the work. Even the lines, the electric lines that go to the plug in the wall become a part of the work and in essence draw in space and draw on the floor.

The red lights do work, but the artist has made the decision not to turn them on, in essence. So if you screwed them in, they would glow red. But his decision was to focus on the white and the white light permeate the space and connect the work with the space around it.

Bill Viola

***Ascension*, 2000**

JEFF FLEMING: This is *Ascension*, from 2000. It is a video and sound installation, where the viewer is a part of the environment, is immersed in both the images and in the sound. We see a figure that falls into a pool of water. He rises up to the surface and then slowly falls to the darkness of the water. And you're left with a chandelier of air bubbles that slowly float to the surface, creating this beautiful, beautiful imagery.

Bill Viola's work is a perfect merger of contemporary technology, particularly the moving image—video and film—with this very human, emotional, subjective, intuitive realm. He often works with the elements of life, so to speak, water, fire. Water is a recurring theme in his work and has been a part of his work from the early '70s. You're either immersed in water, you travel through water, or water is a consuming mechanism that reflects fire or destroys fire or puts out fire.

This piece is obviously moving images, video. It's something that we're comfortable experiencing and engaging. And I think the fact that you have to experience this work over a duration of time—it is not a quick glimpse and then move on to the next. It's 10 or 11 minutes long and the full impact of the work cannot be felt without experiencing from beginning to end. So this is a piece that you have to slow down, you have to take your time. You have to allow yourself to be immersed into this experience.

The following recording is by artist Bill Viola about his sculpture, *Ascension*.

Bill Viola

Well, I think today that the most important questions are not being asked on a number of levels. And for me personally one of the most important questions that's been overlooked is the question of "*why?*" When Newton, one of the greatest minds that ever lived on this Earth, one of the most extraordinary scientists of all time; when he sat under the proverbial apple tree and the apple fell, he looked up and saw the apple he asked a very different question than what humanity up until that time in the 17th century was asking. And that was, he looked at that and said, "How did it fall? How did it happen?" So it's a very short jump from there, to the cosmos, to the stars, to the planets that understand the celestial mechanics as they call it. And how they actually work and how they happen and what's going on. In the Middle Ages and to the dim past, people had always wanted to know "how did the apple fall? Why did it fall?" And there were many theories about that—God made it fall or its proper place is on the Earth, which Aristotle told. So the question of why is so essential when you approach art as a person, as just a common person who has so specialization in art. So many people today, I had a young kid come up to me today, after I gave a little talk about my piece *Ascension*. And that little boy, he looked at me, he must have been about maybe eight or nine, he looked at me and he said, "Oh, when the man sunk to the bottom there, did you have an extra air tank down there so he could take a breath?" I said, "Yes" and I explained to him that there was a person another diver there and he walked away. And I thought, oh! I was saddened because I should have stopped him immediately and said, "That's not important. Of course I did. The importance is *why* did I make a piece that had that image of that man fall. What does that mean inside us—inside ourselves—to see a human being move up to the light and then sink down in the darkness?" And that's not what's being asked in our technical age when everyone wants to know how things are done. And I think that why question comes not from the mind but from the heart, is the question that we have to always have to have in front of ourselves—especially now.

Andy Warhol

The American Man—Watson Powell, 1964

JEFF FLEMING: This is Andy Warhol's *The American Man* from 1964. He worked in a serial format. In other words, he created images that he then reproduced and then combined to create multiple works within a series of works using the same image—altering the color, altering the format, altering the size, altering their combination.

He took his subject matter from popular culture, be it Marilyn Monroe, be it Elizabeth Taylor, or be it the *American Man* as you see here. This is actually a portrait of Watson Powell Sr., who was a Des Moines businessman. He led American Republic Insurance in the middle of the century. And it was commissioned by American Republic.

This is a silkscreen on canvas, so it's a photographic process that then goes through a printing process. So it's a combination of photography, printing, and painting on canvas.

Certainly his work and the repetition of images has a relationship to film, particularly the multiple images that combine in the human eye to create a moving image. But also I think it was in a direct relationship to what the process of creation could do. The printing process could print out as many images as you could have.

Andy Warhol was a quintessential American artist. He certainly established himself as one of the most influential artists of second half of the twentieth century. And many artists around the globe refer to Andy Warhol in one way or another in the creation of their work today.