

Janice Mason Art Museum
LESSON PLANS FOR WIER EXHIBIT
Background Information

ARTIST NAME : Richard Estes

ART PIECE ON DISPLAY: “Untitled (Chinese Lady)”

About the Artist

Richard Estes was born on May 14, 1936, in Kewanee, Illinois, but his family actually lived in Sheffield, a very small town 20 miles from his birthplace. He always liked to draw and still has a drawing he did when he was about four years old and signed it “Dick Estes”. When he was eight years old, he received an oil painting set for Christmas. His family moved to Chicago when Estes was a teenager, and he studied at the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1950’s, where his training centered on [figure drawing](#) and traditional academic painting. Estes said, “ I never really thought I’d wind up as a painter, rather, I thought I would probably do [commercial art](#) or design or something like that. I didn’t think I’d be successful as a painter although I always wanted to do it.” After graduation from the Art Institute, Estes moved to New York, working in the [graphic design](#) field as a freelance [illustrator](#) and for various magazine publishers and advertising agencies. He continued to paint at night, and his first one-person show opened in New York in 1968.

Most of Estes’s paintings from the early 1960’s are scenes of New Yorkers engaged in urban activities. Around 1967 his paintings of city street scenes changed to images of glass storefronts, reflecting distorted images of buildings and cars. The artist works from photographs to create his free-hand paintings. Estes takes pictures primarily on the streets of New York City, where he lives, although he has also worked in Venice, Chicago and Paris. He likes to take his pictures on Sunday when the streets are quiet and empty. Estes said, “I just wander around and look at things and take a lot of pictures, then if something strikes me and I think it’s interesting...” He also said that he would not be able to paint a photograph of a place that he had not visited himself. He believes that his memory of a place is as important as the photo record.

About the Art

Estes is one of the foremost proponents of the [Photo-Realist movement](#). This movement began in America in the mid-1960’s with such artists as Malcolm Morely and Chuck Close. The crisp clarity of Estes’s paintings looks like a photograph, yet upon closer inspection his work reveals elements and [perspectives](#) that do not exist in reality. There are some common misconceptions that Estes paints from a projected photograph; however, he uses many photographs of a particular scene, taken from a variety of angles and light conditions. He then chooses the images from different photographs that will be incorporated into the final painting. He said, “The reason I take a lot of photographs is to make up for the fact that one photograph really doesn’t give me all the information I need. And painting is trickery because you can make people respond by guiding their eyes around the picture. The photograph doesn’t do that because a camera doesn’t have ideas. It can only reproduce.” His usual medium is [acrylic paint](#), painted in layers, and he then overpaints the entire canvas in oil to give rich saturation of color and to create the glossy finish of a photograph. He also uses [silk screening](#) to produce some of his works, using many

layers of screens to complete the scene. He hides his name somewhere in each of his works, and it has become popular to find his name in the work.

The Estes art piece in this exhibit was completed in 1977 and is titled “Untitled (Chinese Lady). This work is typical of Estes’ paintings. The subject is a [cityscape](#), looking into two storefronts with reflections in the glass, showing the scene from the other side of the street. This piece is an extremely complex silkscreen, requiring 200 separate screens for the run to complete the picture. In order to insure perfect registration of each screen during each printing step, he used a computer controlled Domberger press in Germany. This piece measures h 36” X w 49 ½” framed.

Related Terms

- acrylic
- cityscape
- commercial art
- figure drawing
- graphic design
- illustrator
- painter
- perspective
- photo realist
- Photo Realist movement
- photograph
- silk screening

Age Specific Lesson Plans

Grades K-5

Kentucky Core Content

AH-E4.1.34 Describe a variety of media and processes used to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

AH-E-4.1.35 Media-crayon, pencil, paint, fabric, yarn, clay, paper, paper-mâché (Used to produce artworks).

AH-E-4.2.35 Recognize that artists choose to express themselves in different styles and subject matters.

AH-E-4.2.37 Subject Matters: landscape, portrait, and still life.

AH-E-4.1.42 Use a variety of media and art processes to produce two-dimensional (2-D) and three-dimensional (3-D) artwork.

Objectives

- To learn that [photographs](#) are used as the basis of many of Estes' paintings.
- To understand that Estes often painted [cityscapes](#) based on photos he took on Sunday afternoons, usually in New York City.
- Estes does not include people in his paintings.
- Estes sometimes uses a [silk screen method](#) of producing his pictures, such as the one in our museum.
- Estes hides his name in all of his pictures.
- Estes takes many photos to create one picture.
- Estes did not like to paint any place he had not visited.

Suggested Questions

1. What subjects does Estes like to paint?
2. How did Estes go about painting his pictures? What role did photographs play in this process?
3. What is a [cityscape](#)?
4. Estes used a [silk screen method](#) of making the picture we have in the museum. Tell about this method.
5. When Estes was a young child did he think he would become a [painter](#)? What did he like to do?

Related Activities

1. Have the students draw/paint a picture by looking at a photograph.
2. Have students draw/paint a cityscape. Have the students hide their name in the picture.
3. Have students bring their own cameras to school and go outside and take pictures. Have them bring back the developed pictures and share them with the other students.
4. Have students use a screen of some type to paint a picture.

Grades 6-8

Kentucky Core Content

AH-M-4.1.31 Principles of Design: repetition, pattern, balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal point), contrast (light and dark), rhythm, proportion, and movement.

AH-M-4.1.34 Identify and describe a variety of art media, art processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, experiences, and stories.

AH-M-4.1.35 Media: two dimensional-crayon, pencil, fabric, yarn, paint (tempera, watercolor), ink and pastels.

AH-M-4.1.39 Subject Matter: landscape, portrait, still life, abstract, and non-objective.

AH-M-4.1.42 Effectively use a variety of art media, processes, and subject matter to communicate ideas, feelings, and experiences.

AH-M-4.1.37 Art Processes: two-dimensional-painting, fabric design, printmaking, and mosaics.

Objectives

- To understand that Richard Estes is a leading [photorealist](#) painter.
- To learn that Estes uses a unique method of producing his paintings.
- To realize that Estes changed his career plans as he matured.
- To grasp information about Estes favorite subjects for his paintings and generally where they were.
- To find that Estes has a unique habit of hiding his signature in his pictures.
- To learn what a [silkscreen](#) method of producing a picture involves.
- To understand that Estes paintings often look like photographs.

Suggested Questions

1. Explain what it means that Richard Estes is a [photorealist](#) painter. How does he use his photography in his paintings?
2. Tell how Estes career plans changed at different stages of his life?
3. What relationship is there between the words Richard Estes, [cityscapes](#), New York City, and Sundays?
4. If you were to look at one of Estes' paintings what might you be looking for besides the art?
5. How are original art works produced by the [silkscreen](#) method such as Estes used in the "Untitled (Chinese Lady)" picture?
6. Who are some other [photorealists](#) that are contemporaries of Estes?

Related Activities

1. Have students paint a picture by utilizing two or more photographs. Be sure to have students hide their names in the picture.
2. Have students make photos of Cadiz or their hometown. These then could be the basis of a cityscape of their very own.
3. Have students do a written critique of one of Estes' paintings they find on the internet or library. Use the [Four Step Method of Art Criticism](#).

Grades 9-12

Kentucky Core Content

AH-H-4.1.31 Describe works of art using appropriate terminology.

AH-H-4.1.32 Art Elements: color and color theory: primary and secondary hues, values (tints and shades), intensity (brightness and dullness); color relationship: triadic, complementary, and analogous.

AH-H-4.1.33 Principles of Design: Balance (symmetry/asymmetry), emphasis (focal pattern), pattern, repetition, contrast, variety, movement, rhythm, proportion, transition/gradation, and unity.

AH-H-4.1.34 Defend personal interpretations of works of art and architecture by using arguments.

AH-H-4.2.36 Subject Matter: portrait, landscape, still-life, abstract, non-objective.

Objectives

- To understand that Richard Estes is a [photorealist](#) and how his work is unique.
- To learn that Richard Estes has favorite scenes and places he prefers to paint.
- To learn that Estes produces complicated paintings as the result of basing his paintings on numerous photographs.
- To refute the idea that Estes' pictures are no more than reproductions of photos he has taken.
- To find out how the [silkscreen](#) method is used to produce pictures.
- To note that Estes' "Untitled (Chinese Lady)" is a very complex silkscreen.

Suggested Questions

1. Explain what a photorealist is and why Richard Estes is in that category?
2. Who are some of Richard Estes contemporaries who are photorealists?
3. What type of subject matter did Estes prefer to paint? What place in particular?
4. What makes Estes' paintings so complicated?
5. How can you prove that Estes' paintings are more than reproductions of photos he has made?
6. Explain how you know that Estes' "Untitled (Chinese Lady)" is a very complex silk screen.
7. What do we mean by [silkscreen](#) printing method?
8. Secure from the internet or library a copy of a painting done by Estes. Have students describe this work using the [Four Step Method of Art Criticism](#).

Related Activities

1. Have students make photos of Cadiz or their hometown and bring them to class. The students are to paint a cityscape utilizing these photos. Be sure to have them hide their name in the painting.
2. Provide a large photo for the class to paint. Instructions are to paint the picture as much like the photo as possible. How much do the paintings look like the photos?
3. Have students look up information about Estes and his painting from the internet/library. Have them write a paragraph telling about the person and a paragraph discussing his art.
4. Look up information about what a silkscreen is and have students try their hand at making a silk screen picture.