

## Summer Intensive 2009

The goal for this year's Metropolitan Museum of Art's summer intensive class for high school students was to repeat and improve upon last year's printmaking project. The printing process is a multi media block print process using watercolor and oil mediums with linoleum block. It combines the technique of the white line print with the reductive block printing technique. In 2008 the students were shown examples of landscape compositions from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century European Gallery and then asked to go into Central Park and construct a landscape composition from direct observation from nature. They also viewed the work of Vincent Van Gogh and were asked to create a similar linear rhythm and plastic rhyme in translating their landscape into assigned print format.

A sample of the results is as follows:



The results were good often lacking in compositional substructure, repetition of shape, linear rhythm and subject/objects were too often stereotyped forms.

The 2009 class was asked to look beyond the recognizable objects for diagonal lines leading the viewer into the painting, directional lines leading to the subject of the painting, geometric shapes and repetitive shapes embedded within the objects of the painting. These comprise the composition's substructure that both directs the viewer and adds a sense of completion to the painting that objects alone can't provide. To illustrate the requested compositional concepts diagrams were drawn on photocopied images then presented next to the actual paintings in the gallery. Examples of the diagrams presented next to paintings in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Galleries:



What occurs consistently in the paintings observed is the diagonal lines across the outer corners of the painting, the diagonal lines that draw the viewer in from the outside edges and often forming triangles and establishing a relationship or dialog between objects in the painting. In this particular Corot painting you see a number of lines converging on the human figure making the figure a strong focal point of the painting. The figure is also semi circular and becomes part of the repetition of the circular forms in the trees, clouds, grasses and the water. In this composition all geometric forms are represented. The triangle, square and circle.



Like the painting above diagonal lines cut across the 4 corners of the painting with diagonals that lead the viewer into the painting from the edges. The diagonals form triangles and rectangular shapes in the composition. The diagonal lines also suggest roundness through their radial converging at the base of tree line suggesting or referring to the circular shapes defined in the trees. Again all three geometric shapes are represented in the composition.

After the composition demonstration students were shown the work of Vincent Van Gogh. The discussion centered on his use of rhythmic line to create form, unifying flow and repetition of shape. Also discussed was his use of the same compositional devices used to direct the viewer as used by the other artist's works that were observed and discussed. Color also was discussed in terms of the complex use of complements to create tension/conflict and harmony. Students were then instructed to walk through the 19<sup>th</sup> century galleries and select a painting to be the source for their block prints. They were to do a diagram of the painting's composition looking for directional lines, geometric forms and repetition of form (plastic rhyme). Next they were to utilize their compositional diagrams to do a second drawing defining the objects within the compositional structure.

In the printing process it was a conscious decision not to reverse the drawings on the linoleum block so that the final print images would appear in reverse of the original painting. The intent was to create a new work based on an existing painting by the use of reversal image and printing technique used.

The results are as follows:



Part of the compositional problems of this print may be because of the need to compress the composition into a horizontally shorter format. What is missing in the compositional drawing and the figurative drawing is the strong triangular shape that directs the viewer into the picture plane. The triangle is constructed by the bases of the three trees in the foreground that connects to another diagonal leading the viewer right and to the subject of the painting. Without those diagonals the painting/print becomes flat and the subject becomes the cluster of trees rather than the cross. Also I think more could be done with the foreground ground. It needs the contrast and directional lines caused by the shadows illustrated in the original painting.



Missing in the compositional drawing is the strong diagonal lines of both sets of trees. Flatness in the figurative and compositional drawings are due to the missing diagonal line across the lower left corner that connects to the diagonal line from the shrubs in the water leading the viewer back into the picture plane and back to the right side. Also missing is the strong diagonal along the edge of the water that goes over the curve of the human figures back. Unable to attend the final day the student finished the print in the white line technique with watercolor and ran the plate through the press to achieve a completed appearance of the print.



In the compositional diagram the student missed the strong diagonals that occur at the four outside corners. The bottom two diagonals come to a point at the center tree leading the viewer to the center foreground and also taking the viewer back into the picture plane. The diagonals clearly define and separate the foreground from the middle ground. One

can see in the figurative landscape drawing that without those strong diagonals the composition becomes flat or more two dimensional in appearance. The viewer is not pulled forward or allowed to recede back into the picture plane without the diagonals that take you to the adjoining diagonals that take you further back into the picture plane and back to the middle of the composition.

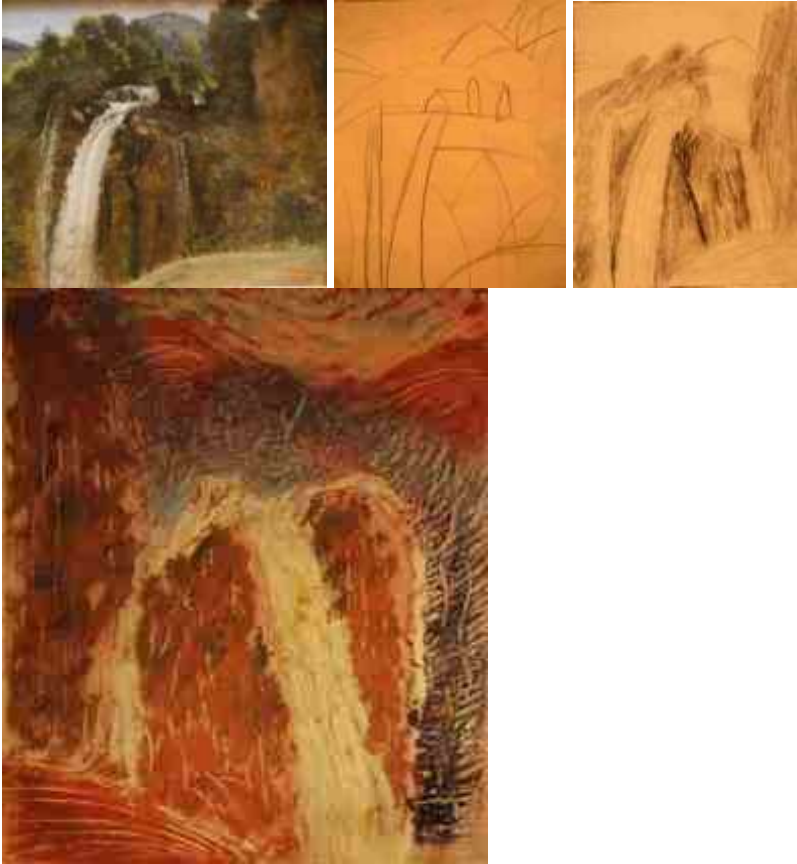
Not having a sky posed difficult problems for the student to solve but was in route to solving them when time ran out. It was a slow meticulous process of cutting shapes and overlaying of color. Most of the background is finished and the base colors of the foreground are laid in with watercolor.



Part of the assignment was to create a consistent flow or rhythm and that each print had to use different colors so it would be an exploration in color adding to their knowledge of color and avoiding the temptation of using safe expected colors. This series accomplishes both tasks and the student did a good job moving color around the composition and not isolating any one color. The trunks of the trees are a little stiff and heavy lacking the flow necessary for the rest of the composition. The most successful use of color to create space occurs in the 4<sup>th</sup> image where the background becomes muted and advances the darkness of the middle ground trees.



In this print the student missed the strong diagonals of the trees and cloud formations as well as the diagonal across the right corner. The student very quickly deviated from the instructed printing procedures but showed thoughtfulness in the exploration and was encouraged to continue. The approach was mostly direct paint on the linoleum plate with additional cutting brushing and rolling of oil and watercolor. Some effects are quite interesting but in the final week the student gave more time to conversation than thought to the printing project and so the foreground is not as complex, thought out and executed as competently as the background. It is important to note here that visual learning or making a work of art is an active process of being fully engaged and completely focused on the task/project at hand. Visual thinking falls within the domain of the right hemisphere of the brain and talking/language falls within the domain of the left hemisphere of the brain. Both cannot be active or in control at once so the left hemisphere associated with consciousness dominates and represses the hemisphere needed to see or find visual solutions that would be generated by the right hemisphere. When the mind is tied up in conversations what usually occurs is stereotypical solutions, which are simply incorrect non-thinking solutions to visual problems. It is essentially the same principle used in making cell phone usage while driving illegal. Talking is left hemisphere and driving is right, spatial and left always takes precedence over right hemisphere function except in dream when consciousness (left yields to the subconscious (right).



This student has very weak drawing skills with little understanding of composition. The drawing skills are reflected in the print. It was only through constant promptings, suggestions as to the next step and the many layers that made sense out of the chaos yielding interesting results. However the student made few choices and was unable to capitalize on any of the accidental spontaneous effects that occurred. The student was more fully engaged in conversation than in producing visual art.



The student had an excellent start with the sky and background utilizing accidents and color bleeding caused by the printing process. The result was a very rich integration of color as evident in the sky, background hills, trees, edge of the foreground tree and in the buildings. In the second week the student became engaged in conversation and stopped visually thinking resorting to stereotype imagery of the green triangular spiked trees in the middle ground and the V shape cuts on the small tree on the left. Stereotype imagery as explained are non thinking solutions caused by too much left hemisphere activity and not enough focus on making a work of art This is evident in the middle and foreground where the solutions are the same in all prints and it lacks the complexity and richness in color of the background area of the print. The artist and artwork did not reach their full potential.

The following are prints and resource material from the 2009 Studio intensive course



The compositional drawing is close to being correct. From front center there is a diagonal of light directing the viewer left and forming a semicircle leading back to the center volcano mountain in the background center. The building on the right becomes part of a semicircle that connects into the circular lake and again directs the viewer to the mountain. It is echoed within the same structure with two additional semi circle forms painting to the mountain. The edges of the mountain, right, left and center are semicircles also and are moving in the opposite direction as the foreground semicircles. The print does not have the described flow but in the 6<sup>th</sup> image succeeds in creating space through flat layering of foreground, middle ground and background but lacks the flowing transition of the original.





What was noticeably consistent in almost all the students' work was good drawing skills demonstrated by their figurative rendering of recognizable objects. Compositions are improved this year though their knowledge and recognition of composition still remains weak. It seems that instruction is at fault. Possibly too many concepts were attempted to be covered in one course with a limited amount of time. Composition, color and print technique is a lot if not too much to introduce to students at once. It is hoped that the idea of compositional substructure is planted in their mind so that the students will begin to think beyond the physical, recognizable objects and symbols of idea and identify the importance and completion that the geometric and well-dialoged substructure contributes to the work of art.

If the project was successful it is because students achieved a certain level of success in their exploration. Information of color, composition and plastic rhyme may become more apart of their visual vocabulary. The process posed many challenges for the students to solve visually and those who were actively engaged in learning, (visual learning) can build off their visual explorations that they experienced during their 8 day Studio Intensive Course at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.