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English 219

17 November 2017

Forsyth Favorites: Students Select

The artwork placement in this gallery was what initially struck me. The entire room was symmetrical and logically arranged; each wall complimented the other and flowed naturally. What fascinated me about this layout was how it made me feel as if I was within a pinball machine, without the chaos or clamor. The layout acted as my guide, sending me off effortlessly to the next piece just as it brought me to the last.

Two of the four display cases stood in the center of the room. The information place cards were positioned in such a way that I had to wrap around the entire case to read the poem associated with each work. This ingeniously required me to see all angles of the objects inside. The ekphrastic element of this gallery added an entirely new level to the experience. I, the observer, was not left to deduce my own interpretation of each piece. Instead, the poet's interpretation was itself an integral artistic element coupled with the work it was interpreting.

Upon the far left wall hung William R. Leigh's (1866-1955) "The Sentinel". This piece stood out among the rest due to its use of light and rich, deep coloring. The dark tones of blue and grey were beautiful, and the moonlight gave it an eeriness that felt almost magical. In this two-foot wide and three-foot tall oil painting on canvas, the brush strokes were short, thick, and textured. This technique

seemed to enhance its reflectiveness; causing you to feel as if the light in the gallery was the moon you unmistakably sensed shining above the scene.

This piece felt pensive and thoughtful. The steady gaze of the Native American Indian and the heavy countenance of the horse with its low hung head in the foreground gave gravity to the scene. The lines of poetry coupled with this work reinforce the sense of weightiness that was felt.

Tasia Braggs, class of 2019 from Houston, Texas, filled in the pensive blanks of this artwork with thoughts of family, celebration, culture, and heartache. She creates a character from the man depicted who embodies a tragically common facet of the Native American Indian experience. She explains how he feels stripped of his reality, ostracized from the light of day, and forced to start anew.

Beside it was an equally striking untitled work by Victor Casenelli (1876-1961) that was painted during the late 19th and early 20th century. The watercolor painting on paper was tall and narrow, about two ½ feet by one foot. The height made the depicted sky seem wide, gaping, open, and clear, like the world must go on forever behind the two subjects in the foreground. The watercolor technique utilized in this painting truly amazed me.

I got as close to the painting as I could, and a little grey tip of a feather upon the head of the mounted Indian caught my attention. These minute details are what add immensely to an interpretation of authenticity. It causes an observer to trust in the work as an accurate depiction of a scene.

Olivia Thorpe, class of 2018 from Austin, Texas, drew the observer's attention to the fixated focus of the mounted Indian. She created a narrative that

took you within his mind and provided insight behind his image. She weaves an intriguingly violent thread into a very placid depiction of the two men.

They are on a journey together, carrying weapons for protection. Gazing at the piece, I wanted to believe that they shared bond of brotherhood, loyalty, and sacrificial love. One could argue that the poem beside it highlights a latent desire to rise up against his fellow brother or sojourner, like the story of Cain and Able.

However, one could also argue that the poem echoes the shadow of violence that has been falsely cast upon these peoples heritage in American popular culture.

Thomas Moran's (1837-1926) "Venice," about 1 ½ feet by 1 ½ feet, made me stop in my tracks. I didn't even formulate thoughts for the first few moments that my eyes swam across its surface. I felt it paralyze me, as I stood there motionless, captured.

The use of light in this oil on canvas work painted in 1896 was nothing short of stunning. The textured clouds were lithely draped across the canvas like airy cotton candy. The reflection of Venice seemed to melt across the aquamarine waters in this nautical-city scene.

As I began to regain my bearings from the initial shock of the painting's aesthetic beauty, I noticed a party in the right lower corner of the painting. The small figures nestled in beneath the sails of a luxurious boat seemed to epitomize the words "elite" and "bounty". Their small size in relation to the rest of the scene seemed to embolden the greatness and majesty of Venice that Moran was attempting to display. "What a lovely party they must be having," I thought to myself.

Sean Sikorski, class of 2021 from Dallas, Texas, added an element of romantic mystery through his ekphrastic poem reflecting on Moran's "Venice." It brought me beyond the bay, and enabled me to imagine life among the streets. I found Sikorski's reference to wine significant. It was as if a consciousness of their humanity began to invade their lavish evening; the melancholy realities of life, aging, and dying slipped into the wine they were drinking. I found his use of wine ironic because what typically clouds the mind began to act as a sobriety potion, forcing them to consider the harsh realities of life.

Stanley M. Long's (1892-1972) "Deep in the Woods" encapsulated an American vision of the mythicized west. The cowboy in the center of the wooded scene was faceless, perhaps to symbolize that he is not an individual, but a representation of the western ideal. With chaps, a bandana, and a hat, he treks across the peaceful wood undisturbed, yet perhaps with awareness that he is being observed.

Painted with watercolor in the 20th century, the texture of the paper and simple linear placement of trees and branches gives the work a wholesome, clean, and straightforward aesthetic that made me want to trust the scene and the man within it. He is leading a horse on some sort of journey. Although I cannot tell where he is going, I do not question him. This scene felt warm and safe, just how American culture prefers to remember cowboys. His fondness seemed to remain incorruptible, even when elements of history may prove otherwise.

Jordan Smith, class of 2012, transported me from an observer in a gallery to a small bird within the scene, perched on a tree, eyeing the cowboy from a wood-

furnished viewpoint. His breath, the beat of his heart, the sounds, smells, and lighting of the woods came to life from Smith's words. The imagery utilized in this poem deepened my ability to immerse myself in the painting and feel it, not just see it with my eyes.

The last line, "He smiles and goes on his way," could neatly sum up a cowboy who tromps through the woods with no care in the world. Upon his horse he feels free as the sun warms the back of his neck, and the breeze helps to whisk the sweat off his brow. What fascinated me, however, was the fixation of his gaze toward the outside observer.

He may be enjoying the scenery, but he is alert and prepared to defend himself against any threat. The storytellers of the American west have built in a historically necessary adversary for their cowboy hero-figure, the Native American Indian. This cowboy could be on the look out for dangerous predators, but perhaps he, unbeknownst to himself, is the predator tromping through the woods that others should fear.