
Color and Light

Are the colors warm (reds, yellows, oranges) giving us a feeling of happiness and brightness?

Are they cool colors (blues, purples, greens) making us feel serious, quiet, and moody?

Are the colors vivid (true) with the absence of black or white?

Do they reflect light or not (matte)?

Are they opaque (such as oil paints) where none of the canvas is seen?

Have they been blended and applied thickly?

Or has the artist used translucent paints (such as watercolors or washes) to allow some of the canvas to show?

Do the colors tend to make objects appear to recede into the distance (cool)?

Do they make images appear to advance toward the viewer (warm)?

How does the artist use light?

Has some area been highlighted or spotlighted as if on stage?

Are there distinct shadows used for the effect of modeling (creating an almost photographic reality)?

Is light used in a realistic manner (as in nature) or is it abstract?

Does the effect of light help give us a sense of perspective?

Color is everywhere. It is dynamic with respect to light and we respond to it strongly. It sets a mood and therefore is a direct link to our emotions. In our example, the warm peach colors of the child's smock, the yellow of the boat interior and the woman's hat, all make us respond in a pleasant and positive manner.

Color can have different qualities such as intensity, hue, and tone. It can also give a painting texture and make it come alive. Cassatt's painting was done in vivid color in oils contributing to a feeling of excitement. The *contrast* of the oarsman with the other figures heightens this feeling.

Color is a device used by the artist to establish a sense of perspective. Notice how the bright, light colors of the boat and sail give us the feeling that the boat is coming directly at us.

Artists use light for different effects. The use of contrasting light and shadow gives the painting its sense of three-dimensionality. In Cassatt's painting there is very little modeling or shadowing. This tends to make the painting seem flat (a common technique used by the Impressionists). Notice how the intense white of the bow of the boat helps to lead our eyes in the direction of the subjects' faces. The bright and vivid colors give the viewer the sense that this was a very sunny day.