

## Unit 3 The Gift of Art

### Colorful Stories of Art

Many artists are famous for their particular use of color. While some artists mix interesting and unique colors, other artists use primary colors to express strong emotions. As we walk through our newest exhibition, *Colorful Stories of Art*, we will explore the use of the three primary colors—yellow, blue, and red—and find out how they were a source of inspiration. Open your eyes, listen to the stories, and try to feel the emotions that the colors show.

### Vincent van Gogh

The first artist is Vincent van Gogh. According to research, the French city of Arles, where van Gogh spent his later years, had exceptionally bright and intense sunlight. Van Gogh expressed the sunlight, energy, and the joy of life he felt there through bright yellow colors. During his short life of 37 years, he created more than 900 paintings, around 300 of which feature mostly yellow. The series of paintings called *Sunflowers* includes some of his most recognizable works. Some have said that his preference for yellow in his artwork was due to a medical condition that forced him to see mainly yellow. While this may be true, we can also see his use of blue, orange, and other colors, and these combinations of colors serve to emphasize his joy being conveyed.

## Edward Hopper

Van Gogh used yellow to express joy, but Edward Hopper's use of yellow expresses loneliness. Hopper lived in New York City for nearly six decades, and he created paintings depicting urban scenes that showed how even familiar surroundings could cause the viewer to feel a sense of loneliness. Hopper's *Nighthawks* is a good example of this. There are four people in the same diner, but they're clearly not together. The bright yellow walls create a dramatic contrast to the darkness outside, emphasizing how people can be in the same space and feel apart. In Hopper's *Automat*, the feeling of loneliness is even more direct. The yellow lights lead the viewer's eye to the yellow hat of the woman, and the cool shades of the other colors contrast with the warm yellow, emphasizing that she's on her own.

## Kim Whanki & Henri Matisse

The color blue can produce a calming effect. Even during his days in Paris and New York, Kim Whanki never forgot his Korean identity. The blue sky and blue seas reminded him of Sinan, his home in Korea, which inspired him to create paintings filled with various shades of blue. His use of blue was an expression of how much he missed the place he grew up in. In *Tranquility 5-IV-73 #310*, the waves of deep blue and light blue dots bring up images of the sea or the sky. Kim Whanki said that he painted each dot as he thought of friends and loved ones from home.

On the other hand, Henri Matisse's blue speaks of freedom. *Polynesia, the Sky* and *Polynesia, the Sea* are two Matisse works that have an interesting similarity. In his later years, Matisse had cancer surgery, which left him unable to stand and paint in front of an easel. Instead of painting, he created artwork by gluing paper cut-outs and then painting details. Although his physical difficulties prevented him from doing many things, he still remembered the freedom he experienced while swimming in the Tahitian sea, looking through the salt water down to the sea floor and up towards the sky.

## **R.C. Gorman & Claude Monet**

Our last color is red, which is often associated with life and energy. R.C. Gorman, known as the Picasso of Native American art, may have felt the same way when he created Navajo Velvet. The painting depicts a woman sitting on the ground, deep in thought. Her figure in a red dress resembles a huge mountain against the background of the deep, starry blue night, suggesting the relationship between her and nature. Sometimes red is used to express the beauty of nature. Claude Monet's Autumn Effect at Argenteuil shows how the artist celebrated beautiful autumn moments. The bright reds in the painting symbolize the amazing and transformative power of nature. The painting captures the dramatic moment when the forest turns bright red and is reflected on the surface of the river.

Color is powerful because it stimulates such an emotional response in us. Artists use the same color to express various feelings, so the way we interpret the artwork can be various too. Open your eyes and let the emotions of the artwork come to you. You may love it or you may hate it, but art will always take you to a place beyond everyday life.