

Student Name

Art 300 Intro to painting

Spring 2020

Wheat fields Art Review



The Met, 5th avenue, New York, New York currently houses a beautiful painting by artist Jacob van Ruisdael (Dutch, Haarlem 1629–1682 Amsterdam). *Wheat Fields* is an oil on canvas painting that depicts a Dutch landscape in the 17th century. Ruisdael's depiction of this landscape focus on subject matter, painting style and the human experience, and he cleverly makes all these elements build each other up.

The first thing one notices is the vast landscape. The artist emphasizes this subject matter with his depiction of land, sky, and even sea. The land and sky being the most prominent feature visible, while an ocean appears as mist like in the background. Humans and human infrastructure

are secondary characters in this work, a house hides behind some trees, and miniscule people walk along a dirt road. These subjects appear faint and clearly in the background.

Upon further inspection Ruisdael uses a painterly manner to represent this landscape on a more detailed level. The sky dominates the scenery, it appears focal and grand. The clouds are painted softly, and soft lines are used to highlight the curves and creases of the clouds. This technique creates an apparent grand and layered look to the dominant clouds. On land finer contouring is visible in some shrubs and logs in the foreground, the higher detail creates the effect that this scenery is nearest to the viewer. A dirt road runs down the middle of the foreground shrub area. To the left and right of the road live two fields of wheat. Here Ruisdael only lightly details the outer edge of the wheat fields, going horizontally into the fields the brush work is completely soft and loose, resulting in the wheat appearing soft. Following the path past the wheat fields towards the background, trees dominate the spatial plane and the brush works continues the same trend. The artist uses atmospheric perspective, and different brush stroke styles to demonstrate the beauty of the scenery.

While the landscape is the center of the stage, human presence is a secondary character in this painting. Looking closely into the central space where the trees reside a villa peaks out through the trunks. The houses are softly brushed giving them a faded ghostly appearance. Furthermore, looking at the road that extends towards the foreground, a lady with a child walks towards the upper most foreground and a man towards the background. The people are rendered with enough lines and contouring to be able to distinguish their clothing and simple nature, but the softness of the lines and lack of defining features merely make these figures secondary characters. Moving towards the ocean area the boats also appear ghostly and faded, on the surrounding landscape a lighthouse or tower of some sort is present but also looks like an

apparition. This use of atmospheric perspective further shows that the main residents of this scene is the grand sky, the soft wheat fields, and the spatial woods.

As noted, the artist is good at using his painting style to emphasize subject matter, but he also uses lighting and color to appeal to mood which serves as this works relation to the human experience. The artist uses a somber toned color pallet with areas of exposed sky painted a faded blue and clouds are various shades of grey with a hint red orange to represent a hidden sun somewhere in the dense clouds. These uses of color in the sky evoke a sense of moodiness and drama in the lighting present. As we descend from the skies, the grass and shrubs appear like a dark shaded green, some leaves are colored dark brown orange and give a fall look to the environment. Areas directly under the grey clouds are shaded darker than the surrounding areas. The Wheat fields are a pale yellow and are under the shadows of the clouds, giving them a grey appearance. With the use of somber lighting and mellow colors the artist really captivates a sense of coldness and melancholy, which inspires the viewer to feel emotion and react to the painting.

Ruisdael clearly uses a softer style in combination with an emphasis on lighting, and dull color to really cultivate such strong sensory responses to this grand Dutch landscape. There is no doubt as to why Ruisdael is considered one of the main headliners of his time, a period known as the Baroque or more locally the Dutch golden age. That said Ruisdael's greatest feat is that his work is still highly praised and recognized, almost 400 years after his time.

Sources

Metmuseum.org, www.metmuseum.org/en/art/collection/search/437549.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Jacob Van Ruisdael." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 31 Jan. 2019, www.britannica.com/biography/Jacob-van-Ruisdael.