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Breezing Up- A Fair Wind by Winslow Homer

Illuminating Values



audience: My audience is young amateur American artists who are learning about art and its importance not only in the contemporary world but also the historical world.

Homer's paintings are mostly attractive, they possess a power to attract the viewers from a far distance. Homer's style reflects realism, he accurately illustrates the events that are going on around him.

“As early as 1847, when he was eleven years of age, he was fond of drawing sketches. In school hours

he stealthily illustrated his textbooks” (“Winslow Homer”). Homer started illustrating at a very young age and by the time he was twenty two, he was making a living out of his passion for paintings. He illustrated for the *Harper's weekly*, a newspaper in New York. For job purposes, Homer had to go to places like Washington DC and Virginia to create illustrations of political events and matters like Lincoln's inauguration. After a few years of working for the *Harpers'*, he got interested in painting war subjects. He painted events from the civil war which later became very famous in the history of art. Homer's painting subjects slowly changed over time after the civil war. He made his first voyage to Europe in 1867. And then he traveled back and forth to Massachusetts where he started painting landscape and farm life scenes. Homer's latter paintings were considered as the most authentic expressions of American country life.

Homer spent the summer of 1873 on the Gloucester island in Massachusetts where he made tons of watercolor series in which he, “depicts children at their pastimes-in boats or posed against the town's wharves” (Ruth). After the civil war, the nation coveted for simplicity and innocence, and Homer's painting fitted and fulfilled this desire with their energetic and optimistic pictorials. *Breezing Up* is the final version of Homer's many watercolor sketches which now exists with Homer's other works in the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Homer had made quite a lot of changes by the time he had created *Breezing Up*. Since the first sketches, the changes have altered the meaning of the painting overtime. These changes were made according to the time and events happening around Homer in the Postwar America. “A Fair Wind” was the title given to this painting by Homer, however in 1879 they changed the title to *Breezing Up* as they thought the latter title was more apt for the painting. The ultimate form of these sketches is very unique and eloquent. *Breezing Up* is an essential addition in the American art as it helps understand new beliefs and values of post-war America.

Homer's paintings not only illustrate but they tell stories. His love for adventures and the sea can be seen in his realistic paintings of the marine subjects. "Breezing Up" is similar to some of Homer's other marine projects. This painting of Homers' is described as "a buoyant scene" because of its ability to stay afloat in the roughest situation. When we look at the painting, we can tell that it is done by an American artist. The painting has an American feel to it; like the way the sailors are dressed and also the scene looks like it is on an American sea-coast. This painting has many different symbols the buoyant boat which signifies the cheerful as well as the optimistic belief of the sailors themselves. The light clouds displays the good point in their life that is coming ahead. In *Breezing Up*, Homer portrays a fisherman and three young boys sailing on the ocean coast after a successful day of fishing in a boat registered in Gloucester, Massachusetts. As they sail on the coast, their catch is peacefully lying inside the ship. The Sailors are dressed well and neat, they are all wearing hats, leather boots and jackets. It is a sunny summer day and the sailors are sailing under the blue sky with the puffy white clouds. He had used warm colors in order to give the painting the sunny and refreshing tone. The boat consists of one sail which is being steered by the oldest of the boys. The breezy wind is giving the sailors a hard time by tilting the sail and monstrously shifting the waves to fill the boat with water. While the sailors are trying to survive the choppy waves, another boat is sailing peacefully in the background. The fisherman and the three boys are weighing the boat down and trying to balance it. The oldest of the kids looks like the savior or the leader as he is sitting on the very top of the boat steering the sail. His facial expressions suggest calmness and fearlessness. On the other hand, contrary to our assumption that the old fisherman would steer the sail, he is rather reclining and sitting inside the boat. The two younger boys are trying their best in helping to weigh down the boat. Even the expressions on the younger boys' faces are exceptional because instead of being scared or even bothered about the windy atmosphere around

them, they are rather calm, patient, and hopeful. They are all busy doing their part and do not seem to care much about what others around them are doing.

Breezing Up is one of the amazing works of Winslow Homer. Since most Americans' beliefs and perspectives changed in the postwar America, Homer's interests also changed a ton when he switched from illustrating war subjects to illustrating marine subjects. Some of his other marine illustrations include "The Gulf Stream", "Sunlight on the Coast" and "Hound and Hunter" ("Winslow Homer in the National Gallery of Art"). Overtime his paintings became more mature and more realistic. Homer had adapted the realism style, in which he illustrated matters and objects precisely. *Breezing Up* is the outcome of Homer's many sketches during the three year period (1873-1876). Homer made a whole lot of changes in the consecutive sketches while on the island. After the war, there were many new American beliefs and values dissipated around the nation. Homer has captured some of these morals and values in his exquisite painting, *Breezing Up*. The portrayal depicts an optimistic future for Americans.

Some of these notable features of the painting include change, faith, future, trust, and unification. "The boat and the young man steering it are metaphors for a change in national leadership, with a new, young generation guiding the country after the Civil War" (Ruth). The boy steering the boat instead of the old fisherman demonstrates this belief of change in leadership for a better America. The young boy is steering the wheel very confidently all by himself and he is also the one looking far into the horizon. This illustration might be able to help keep trust and faith in the younger generation that the nation is in safe hands and also that the younger generation would lead us to great things in the future. *Breezing Up* shows all of the sailors doing their part of trying to balance the boat. Each one of their effort is significant in tackling the heavy winds (Carney). This depicts a sense of teamwork with that the belief that we can

achieve anything by working together as a united nation. Homer has done a great job in illustrating these beliefs in a realistic painting. The fact that he created this painting over the period of three years shows his use of realism style; he had made changes in the painting simultaneously as things changed around him.

Homer's paintings attract the viewers by their energetic portrayal. When we look closely at his meanings it tells us a story as well as teaches us lesson. The aforementioned audience, amateur artists should look at Homer's paintings as they can get inspiration from his paintings. Homer's realism style can teach the young artists how they could portray events or matters around them in the form of a realistic illustration. *Breezing Up* is especially one of the paintings that represents the post war beliefs in the history and culture of America. It was also able to fit-in perfectly in the hopeful mood of the postwar era. It explicitly teaches and helps us understand American morals and values of hope, change, etc. Young learning artists strive for aspirant influences in their artwork. As Paglia had described in the *Glittering Images* that, "The only road to freedom is self-education in art" (Paglia 18). It would be good for young artists to have influence of a renowned artist in their work. Homer could provide as an apt role model for these aspiring artists because of his creativity and originality.

Works Cited:

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