

## Art for Autumn

By Kathleen McShane

Fall has arrived! What better way to greet fall than with fall colors, brought to you by some outstanding art?

### **Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Autumn (from the Four Seasons)*, 1573**

This painting is part of a series of four artworks by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-1593). He represented the seasons as portraits of four men, composed of fruit, vegetables, and plants related to that time of the year. For autumn, the neck is comprised of two pears and some vegetables. The face is made of apples and pears; the chin is a pomegranate; the ear is a mushroom, adorned with a fig-shaped earring. The lips and mouth are made of chestnuts, and the hair is made up of bunches of grapes. His hat is shaped like a pumpkin.



**John Constable, *Cenotaph to the Memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1833-6***

John Constable (1776-1837) was a British landscape artist of the Romantic School, particularly known for his paintings of the English countryside. One of Constable's later works, the landscape below represents a scene on a Leicestershire country estate, featuring a monument to Sir Joshua Reynolds, the first President of the Royal Academy of Arts and the leading portrait painter of his day. The painting was the last that Constable exhibited at the Royal Academy, and unfortunately, it did not sell. It is now part of the collection of the National Gallery, London, bequeathed to the museum by Constable's eldest child, Isabel.



**Thomas Cole, *Catskill Mountain House*, 1845-1847**

Thomas Cole (1801-1848) was an American artist in the Romantic tradition and a pioneer of American landscape painting. Cole was the founder of the Hudson River School movement, a group of landscape artists with a similar Romantic aesthetic, whose works were primarily focused on the Hudson Valley and the Adirondack, Catskill, and White Mountains.

The Catskill Mountain House featured in Cole's painting below was a grand hotel built in 1823 at the top of the Catskill Escarpment, a fashionable destination for artists of the Hudson River School, authors, and presidents drawn by the magnificent views of the Hudson Valley. The State of New York acquired the property in 1962 and opted to burn it down, in keeping with state forest management policies signed that forbade structures on land decreed as forever wild.



**Gustave Courbet, *Autumn*, 1866**

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was a French Realist painter who was committed to painting only what he could see. He rejected the Romantic aesthetic, causing scandal with the realism of his images. Courbet cultivated a rebellious persona, even proclaiming himself the “proudest and most arrogant man in France.” His depiction of ordinary people was met with derision; the figures in one of his paintings (modeled by his sisters) were called ugly. Courbet’s painting, shown below, is in the collection of the Portland Art Museum in Portland, OR.



**Claude Monet, *Autumn Effect at Argenteuil*, 1873, and *The Studio Boat*, 1875-76.**

The French artist Claude Monet (1840-1926) is considered the founder of Impressionism. He and his family lived in Argenteuil, a suburb in the northwestern part of Paris, from 1871 to 1878. Monet was quite prolific during his time in Argenteuil; it has been estimated that he completed between 200 and 250 canvases there, with more than 75% focusing on the town and its surroundings. While living there, he purchased and outfitted an old boat (see the second painting below), which he used as a floating studio, sometimes painting while it was anchored and sometimes while floating down the Seine. The first painting below was created on the studio boat.



**Vincent van Gogh, *Avenue of Poplars in Autumn*, 1884**

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) was a Dutch post-Impressionist painter and one of the great luminaries of Western art. His career as an artist lasted fewer than 10 years, from 1881, when he decided he could simultaneously be an artist and serve God, to his untimely death by suicide in 1890 at age 37. Although his artistic career was short, he left behind a legacy of approximately 850 paintings and 1,300 works on paper.

The painting below was created in the Netherlands, before Van Gogh moved to France. In reference to the painting, Van Gogh said, in one of his letters to his brother Theo, "The last thing I made is a rather large study of an avenue of poplars, with yellow autumn leaves, the sun casting, here and there, sparkling spots on the fallen leaves on the ground, alternating with the long shadows of the stems."



**Vincent van Gogh, *Les Alyscamps*, 1888, and Paul Gauguin, *Les Alyscamps*, 1888**

In early 1888, Van Gogh, tired of the cold and city life in Paris, set out for Provence, hoping to establish an artists' colony, and settled in Arles. The only artist to join Van Gogh in Arles was Paul Gauguin, and only after much cajoling (and money from Vincent's brother, Theo). Gauguin (1848-1903), a French Post-Impressionist, Symbolist, and Primitivist, is probably best known for his bright colors and figures.

In October 1888, Gauguin and Van Gogh embarked on a two-month, tense and tumultuous collaboration. Their approaches to painting were quite different; Gauguin (according to the National Gallery of Art) was outspoken and egotistical; Van Gogh's mental health was declining. Nevertheless, both created masterful works of art during their brief time together, often of the same subject. The two works of art below, from the Roman necropolis in Arles, were painted by Van Gogh and Gauguin during their time together in Arles.



**Childe Hassam, *Autumn Boulevard, Paris, 1889***

**Childe Hassam** (1859-1935) was a pioneer of American Impressionism and one of its most prolific and successful practitioners. His personal credo was that “the man who will go down to posterity is the man who paints his own time and the scenes of everyday life around him.” Many of his paintings depict three urban centers that he loved: Boston, New York, and Paris.



**Camille Pissarro, *The Large Walnut Tree, Autumn Morning, Éragny, 1897***

Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) was a Danish-French artist, born in what is now the US Virgin Islands, who has been referred to as the first Impressionist and the “dean of Impressionist painters”. He was forced to leave France during the Franco-Prussian War; upon his return to France after the war, he found that of the 1,500 works of art he had left behind, only about 40 remained, as soldiers had destroyed the others.

Pissarro lived in the rural French village of Éragny (northwest of Paris) from 1884 until he died in 1903, where he converted a barn into his studio and found inspiration in the local landscape.



**Wassily Kandinsky, *Autumn in Bavaria*, 1908**

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) was one of the pioneers of Abstraction in Western art. Born in Moscow, he became a French citizen five years before his death. Perhaps an apocryphal story, Kandinsky is said to have recognized the power of abstraction upon seeing one of his paintings hung upside down. His work was exhibited as “Degenerative Art” by the Nazis.



**Henri Rousseau, *Eiffel Tower at Sunset*, 1910**

Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) was a French artist who painted in the Naïve or Primitive style. With no formal art education, he was ridiculed by critics during his lifetime but eventually became hailed as a self-taught genius. In his own opinion, he was a great realist artist. In fact, he considered Picasso and himself to be the only two great living artists.



**Pierre Bonnard, *Autumn View*, 1912**

Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947) was a founding member of the post-impressionist group, Les Nabis. Les Nabis comes from the Hebrew word for prophet. These artists saw themselves as prophets of modern art, favoring bold, simplified forms. Bonnard is generally viewed as one of the great colorists of contemporary art.



**Egon Schiele, *Four Trees*, 1917**

Egon Schiele (1890-1918) was an Austrian artist of the Expressionist school, and a protégé of Gustav Klimt. His body of work is known for its sexuality (he was found guilty of exhibiting erotic drawings in a place accessible to children, for the number of self-portraits he created, and for the twisted body shapes that characterize many of his paintings of people). His career was cut short when he died of the Spanish flu at 28; his wife had died from the same disease only three days earlier.



**Georgia O'Keeffe, *Autumn Leaves*, 1924**

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) is one of the most significant artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As early as the 1920s, O'Keeffe was recognized as one of the most important and successful American artists, known for her paintings of skyscrapers and enlarged flowers. After her death, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum was established in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The museum's collection features nearly 150 of O'Keeffe's paintings, as well as hundreds of works on paper.

The painting below is of fall leaves from the Lake George, NY area, fall being O'Keeffe's favorite season in the Adirondack Mountains. O'Keeffe created twenty-nine leaf pictures between 1922 and 1931, all based on the leaves she collected at Lake George.



**Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950**

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) was a major player in the abstract impressionist movement. Pollock is best known for flinging and dripping thinned enamel paint onto an unstretched canvas laid on the floor of his studio. These works became known as “drip paintings” or action paintings.” One author of his obituary would call him “Jack the Dripper”. Pollock used sticks, trowels, basting syringes, or knives to drip, fling, flick, and splatter paint. Pollock’s drip paintings initially met with skepticism. One year after their debut, a *Life* magazine article queried, “Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?”

The painting below is one of Pollock’s drip paintings, a monumental canvas measuring 9’ by 17’.



**Cy Twombly, *Quattro Stagioni, Autunno*, 1993-5**

Cy Twombly (1928-2011), according to *Artland Magazine*, was one of the great artists of the 20th century. He is remembered for his signature energetic scribbles, his simultaneously wild and spare canvases, and his bold digression from the general tendencies of American postwar abstraction." Some critics and many viewers have dismissed Twombly's work as something a five-year-old could have done. When the Metropolitan Museum of Art held a retrospective of his work in 1994, the exhibition's curator felt compelled to pen an essay entitled *Your Kid Could Not Do This, and Other Reflections on Cy Twombly*. Twombly himself addressed the criticism, saying, "My line is childlike but not childish. It is tough to fake...To achieve that quality, you need to project yourself into the child's perspective. It has to be felt."

*Quattro Stagioni, Autunno* is one of four paintings, each celebrating one of the seasons.

