

# ART IN THE ENGLISH SPEAKING WORLD

## Work of art

Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997)

*Girl with Ball*, 1961



## Commentary

### *Introduction*

This document is a painting by Roy Lichtenstein, who is an American pop artist. He was a prominent figure in the Pop Art movement (with Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and others). Pop Art emerged in the 60s, which was a consumerist period in the US. *Girl with Ball* was painted in 1961 and can be seen at the MOMA Museum in New York City (USA).

### *Description*

This painting represents a woman who is putting up her arms because she is playing with a ball. Her hair is waving. She must be speaking because her mouth is opened. She seems to have fun. She is on the beach because she is wearing a swimsuit. Everything is typical of the sixties in the US.

Besides, the woman is in the foreground but there is no background. She is standing, alone and beautiful, in the middle of the painting. The colours are warm: the basis of the painting is yellow (it must be a sunny day) and the red of the ball reminds us with that of her lips. The colours render a peaceful impression, as if we were on holiday.

### *Analysis*

Lichtenstein took the image for *Girl with Ball* from an advert of a lodge for honeymooners, in the Pocono Mountains.



He transformed the image with the techniques of the comic-strip artist and printer. This strengthens the artifice of the picture. It shows

the stereotypical 50s American girl (the pin up), with wavy shiny long hair, open mouth with lipstick and a beautiful body. Lichtenstein creates a pop (=popular) idol of an American pin-up. The girl from the advert is transformed from a photorealistic pin up into a comic book effigy of 20<sup>th</sup> century American femininity.

### *Conclusion*

Roy Lichtenstein created this piece of art from an advert. This is commercial art. He wants to denounce the consumerist society we live in (but not so much as other pop artists such as Andy Warhol).

I like this painting: the colours are interesting and peaceful and because it was the beginning of the rights for women.

Edward Hopper (1882-1967)

*Nighthawks*, 1942



### *Introduction*

“Nighthawks” was painted by Edward Hopper, who is an American painter. He was born in 1882 and died in 1967. He was a realist painter. He is famous for his urban scenes, as “Nighthawks” suggests. The painting was made immediately after Pearl Harbour, a prominent event in American history, and this is important here. This painting can be seen at the Art Institute in Chicago, Illinois (USA).

### *Description and analysis*

What strikes at first sight is the composition of the painting because the left part is empty and the top right-hand corner too. Life is concentrated in the bottom right-hand corner. But is it really life? Indeed, if we have a closer look, the scene is lifeless and no energy comes out of it. Hopper began painting “Nighthawks” after the attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941. After this event, there was a huge feeling of gloominess across the USA and this feeling is portrayed in the painting. Moreover, the street is empty, and inside none of the three customers are apparently talking to the others. They seem lost in their thoughts. The painting seems motionless and silent. The dark and cold colours reinforce that idea: the city is gloomy, sad and lifeless. If there is light in the diner, it is artificial, as the relations between the people seem to be.

### *Conclusion*

As a conclusion, Hopper depicted an urban scene, devoid of life, warmth and energy. Everything is sad; that is the reason why I don't really like the painting because the colours and the emptiness don't make me feel at ease.

Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)

*The Runaway*, 1958



NORMAN ROCKWELL  
The Runaway

### *Introduction*

The document is a painting by Norman Rockwell, who is an American painter and illustrator. He was born in 1894 and died in 1978. He is famous because he started illustrating the *Saturday Evening Post*. This document is entitled “The Runaway” and dates back from 1958. It is an oil on canvas (35/33 inches). It corresponds to the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1958. It belongs to a very realistic, somewhat naïve genre. The original of “The Runaway” is in the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts (USA).

### *Description*

In the foreground, we can see two characters: on the right, there is a little boy. He must be around 10. He is wearing blue jeans and a yellow tee-shirt. On his left, a man is also seating at the bar. He is wearing a uniform so the man is a policeman. The two of them are speaking. They are looking at each other. Moreover, at the bottom of the painting, we can see a red bag, under the child’s seat so it must be his. The child is a runaway, as the title suggests.

In the background, we can see a third character who is the waiter. He is resting his elbows on the bar. He is listening and maybe talking to the two other people.

### *Analysis*

As regards the general composition, the three men make a pyramid. The colours are very soft (light blues, whites and yellows). They are not aggressive and it renders the situation softer (we have a policeman and the child, according to the title, is running away, but the picture is peaceful). Norman Rockwell wants to show the situation is not critical and the pyramid represents like a cycle. Dialogue is possible. The child should talk to his parents. When I look at the painting, I feel I want to help and talk to the child, like the policeman or the waiter. I feel sympathetic to him.

### *Conclusion*

As a conclusion, the document shows three people, among whom a child. The kid is running away. The policeman intends to speak to him, like the waiter. It is a very positive message. As far as I am concerned, I really like this document because it shows relations with police can be very peaceful and dialogue is possible.

William Hogarth (1697-1764)

*Gin Lane*, 1751

### *Introduction*

William Hogarth was a printmaker and social critic (1697-1764). He is famous for realistic portraits but also for comic strip-like series of



pictures. Our document is part of a series: Beer Street and Gin Lane. They both depict the city of London and its working class. "Gin Lane" was made in 1751 and can be seen at the British Museum in London (England).

### *Description*

In the foreground, people are sitting but are on alcohol effect. The woman in charge of a baby must be drunk because the baby is falling and the woman is laughing. In the bottom left-hand corner, it is not a man, it is death. At first sight, this print shows poverty and death are present. On the left of the print, a person seems to eat a bone. People are speaking. They are wearing rags.

In the background, we can see really many people. Some of them are putting a woman's body in a coffin. Others are talking, screaming, drinking.

### *Analysis*

This print is fully composed. The street is overcrowded. We have to concentrate to catch details. The street does not seem healthy and wealthy. It symbolizes poverty in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in London. Sometimes, alcohol was the only solution but it leads to death. Death is overwhelming in the print. Some people are dead and others are dying and a baby is about to die, all because of alcohol. On the top right-hand corner, a man is committing suicide. Moreover, a wall is collapsing and others are going to die. Alcohol is everywhere. Let's remind us the title of the print is "Gin Lane". Alcohol is destructive, this is Hogarth's message. He wants to denounce the destructive power of alcohol in London. He clearly represents chaos in the city.

### *Conclusion*

To conclude, Hogarth is depicting London in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Alcohol is much present and it is destructive. Alcohol symbolizes death. That is the message of William Hogarth.

We clearly do not feel at ease when we look at the document because it embodies poverty, sins, death. Nothing is positive. Yet, I find it interesting because it shows how life was and I think it is quite realistic.

J. M. W Turner (1775-1851)

*Rain, Steam and Speed, 1844*

### *Introduction*

Rain, Steam and Speed is an oil painting by the 19<sup>th</sup> century artist J. M. W Turner. This painting was first shown at the Royal Academy in 1844, the year it was painted. The historical context is important because this period is that of industrialisation and the development of transportation in England. Turner was a romantic landscape painter and a famous



watercolorist. He is known as “the painter of light”. This outstanding painting can be seen at the National Gallery in London (England).

### *Description and analysis*

First, let's begin with some of the painting's geographical facts. The location of the painting is Maidenhead Railway Bridge, across the River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead. The view is looking east towards London. The bridge was designed by Brunel and completed in 1838. The line from London Paddington to Taplow opened in 1838. Consequently, in a certain sense, this painting is realistic and wants to show England is developing itself. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, England was “the workshop of the world”.

However, there are scarcely any shapes in this painting. On the left, we can see a bridge and on the right, a train. Shapes are not clear but this is not what is important here. From the middle of the painting to the bottom left-hand corner are the rails and perspective reinforces the strength of the train. The first rail transport systems appeared in the 1820s in England. In this painting, Turner depicts the development and strength of trains. The fact the train is emerging from the vanishing point makes it all the more powerful. As regards colours, they are unquestionably warm. Besides, they are blurred. Oranges and yellows symbolise the heat of the machines and the fact they were more and more powerful in the 1840s.

### *Conclusion*

Turner painted a train, emerging from the middle of nowhere. Trains were developing themselves in the 1840s and steam was overwhelmingly present in everyday life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It symbolized power.

I really like this painting because it beautifully represents a historic period and because the colours reinforce the power of steam and the power of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. England was “the workshop of the world” and Turner painted it.