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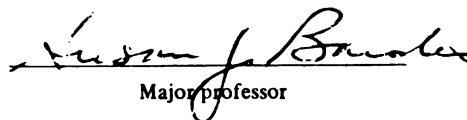
How Fourth and Fifth Grades View Abstracted
Versus Realistic Paintings and the Implications
In a Museum Setting

presented by

Carolyn S. Wolfe

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HOW FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADES VIEW ABSTRACTED VERSUS
REALISTIC PAINTINGS AND THE IMPLICATIONS IN A
MUSEUM SETTING

by

Carolyn S. Wolfe

A Thesis

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

HOW FOURTH AND FIFTH GRADES VIEW ABSTRACTED VERSUS REALISTIC PAINTINGS AND THE IMPLICATIONS IN A MUSEUM SETTING

By

Carolyn S. Wolfe

Students in fourth and fifth grades (about 8 to 11 years of age) move through a transitional stage developmentally. The majority of their thoughts are based on concrete ideas while the remaining cognitive process moves toward abstract concepts. In reference to this age group's view on abstracted versus realistic paintings, fourth and fifth graders progress much the same way; preferring realistic over abstracted works but a gradual separation between the two grades is apparent as the older children begin to move into the next developmental stage. As a result of these implications, staff within an art museum should focus on cognitive and aesthetic development in order to facilitate age-appropriate teaching and learning.

DEDICATION

To my family who have always been unfailing in their patience and love, especially to my parents whose unconditional love and support has enabled me to complete a dream.

Finally and most importantly to my daughter Cassie, whose compassion, understanding and sense of humor has made me realize daily that I am the luckiest mom in the world.

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"Art is a mirror that reflects who we are. Art is one of the means by which we document our existence in this world." ¹

Introduction

Experts in developmental psychology and aesthetic appreciation believe that children proceed through developmental stages that influence how they respond to the world around them, whether that response includes concrete or abstract reasoning.² What then are the implications when a child who is in a transitional developmental stage, which relies on concrete, thought patterns and also begins to recognize theoretical concepts, views abstracted art? Is there a theoretical format that children follow when looking at art? What are the implications within a museum setting when using developmental stages as guidelines for aesthetic appreciation and art education?

To begin, it must be noted that child development and aesthetic researchers have found that the visual arts are imperative for growing children.³ Unfortunately numerous art programs in schools have been cut to make way for other curriculum. "Among museums, art museums are visited least often by schools. As is generally known visual arts are not

¹ Katherina Danko-McGhee. *Aesthetic Preferences of Young Children* (E. Mellen Press, 2000), 2.

² Michael Parsons. *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

considered "basic" by most school districts. With the exception of art specialists, most teachers have little or no training in art, and they feel unable to use it in their teaching."⁴ But researchers such as Katherina Danko-McGhee believe that "...art's importance to our cognitive development should not be underestimated."⁵ Dennis Wolf (1983) noted that "... art activities can provide children with aesthetic experiences in several ways: by exercising their imagination, teaching them to be original thinkers, and helping them to be more aware of their environment."⁶

Art can promote a sense of self-empowerment because the child can be part of the creative process of the artwork as well as when looking at art, the child can learn about contemplation and reflection, which expands the perceptual and critical thinking skills of the child.

Art also contributes to cultural awareness by revealing a society's values and aesthetic preferences. Children become aware of how other cultures and societies are similar to and different from their own.

When considering and utilizing the theoretical ideas on children's developmental growth, teachers and more importantly for this research, museum docents can provide a developmentally appropriate learning environment. Understanding the child's stage of cognitive development

³ Katherina Danko-McGhee. *Aesthetic Preferences of Young Children* (E. Mellen Press, 2000), 4.

⁴ Alison L. Grinder and E. Sue McCoy. *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* (Ironwood Press, 1985), 93.

⁵Danko-McGhee, 1

⁶ Ibid.,2

will help the docent to view the artwork from the student's perspective and therefore facilitate an aesthetic and age-appropriate approach to teaching children about art.

Chapter 1

Overview

The fifth grader stares intently at Joan Miro's *The Tilled Field* with its imaginary landscape equipped with an earlobe that protrudes from the trunk of a tree and a ship with a large mast sunk into the ground. I can almost hear the wheels of imagination turning in her head. Within seconds she yells out "it's a how!" "A how?" I ask. "Yes, a cow and a horse put together, you know, a how!" Curiously I look at the animal she points to and indeed it is a hybrid of a cow and a horse: a how. How could I have overlooked it?

Fourth and fifth graders (about eight to eleven years of age) view the world around them with open eyes: eager to please, ready to respond and intuitive to their feelings if given a chance to express themselves. They are actively engaged in making sense of the world they live in and this group of children has generally moved through developmental stages in stride with their peers. Aesthetic research indicates that children in fourth and fifth grades are in a transitional phase in their cognitive development. They have one foot, so to speak, planted in tangible thought and the other foot progressing toward conceptual

ideas.⁷ For the most part they are in the stage of "concrete operations" according to Swiss Psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Piaget found that children begin to deal with abstract concepts such as numbers and relationships from the ages of about seven to eleven. At this stage children can solve problems but they must be presented in concrete ways.⁸ "Piaget describes cognitive behavior during this time as concrete because, although ability to deal with simple logical relationships is emerging, reasoning is still dominated by direct personal experience."⁹

Children of this age group also begin to think about relationships and apply reasoning to them. "This enables children to "hold" in their minds the basic identity of objects or situations despite external changes in them."¹⁰ For example, grandfather can be dressed in a bunny suit and at this age the child can distinguish that it is still their grandfather. "Children can thereby maintain a stable perspective toward important aspects of a situation, even though they are considering it from various perspectives."¹¹

When this age range looks at visual art, the stage they are in helps them to build upon factual ideas and eventually integrate more conceptual concepts. Aesthetic development researcher Michael

⁷ Michael Parsons. *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 6.

⁸ Jean Piaget. *The Psychology of the Child* (New York, Basic Books, 1969), 33.

⁹ Alison A. Grinder. *The Good Guide: A Sourcebook for Interpreters, Docents and Tour Guides* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Ironwood Press, 1985), p 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

Parsons says that in order for a child to understand a painting they must follow a "...common sequence of development built on a series of insights...."¹² Comparable to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Parsons believes that each stage or level of understanding is built on the previous one. The development of stages makes it possible for children to gain an understanding of art.

Parsons categorized aesthetic development into five stages, which span from early childhood to adulthood. Stage one or Favoritism, involves children as young as three (depending on their cognitive development and language skills) up to around age seven. At this stage children seem to have a strong attraction to color in a painting: the brighter and bolder the better. Many children will be drawn to highly saturated colors, geometric shapes and imaginary themes. For a child in this stage looking at a painting is considered a pleasant experience and most all paintings are looked upon as good paintings regardless of subject matter or if the painting is abstracted or realistic.

In stage two or Beauty and Realism, subject matter is as important as the idea of representation. For a child ages eight or nine to about age twelve, the basic purpose of a painting is to represent something. "A painting is better if the subject is attractive and if the representation is

¹¹ Ibid., 30.

¹² Michael Parsons, *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

realistic."¹³ There is a lucid view of painting in this stage because for a painting to be beautiful it must be about something beautiful. According to Parsons, a subject that is considered to be 'weird' or 'ugly' by this age group generally translates into a subject that is more abstracted than realistic.

One advantage of stage two is that the child begins to acknowledge the views of other people. This slow movement away from an egocentric point of view, which is seen in stage one of Piaget's theory of cognitive development, enables the child to grasp more abstracted concepts. This move is of course at a different pace and at varying levels of the acceptance of other's views as recognized by each child. Abstracted concepts do not necessarily translate into an aesthetic choice toward non-representational paintings as noted in Parsons's work.

Expressiveness (stage three) pertains in many ways to the experience of viewing a work of art. During this stage, after age twelve or so, a painting that is acceptable to them is based on an interesting and powerful involvement when looking at art. Originality on the part of the artist slowly comes to be appreciated by the viewer. There is a new ability to see the skill of the artist and find empathy with subjects within the painting.

¹³ Ibid., 22.

Stage four or "Style and Form" begin when there is an acknowledgement that painting--its style, form and subject (non-representational or representational)-- are part of a social tradition rather than just individual achievement. The basic concepts of art history such as artistic movements and iconography become apparent. In this level a person can begin to find art criticism useful as a way of looking fully at the formal elements of a painting.

Autonomy (stage five) is the last of Michael Parsons's levels of aesthetic development. During this advanced stage art is valued as a way in which to raise questions about established views of art, culture and history. There is an acknowledgement that traditional expectations of looking at art may be ambiguous and misleading and therefore need to be rethought. A greater understanding of the creative process of art production for aesthetic appreciation and a creative outlet are brought to fruition.¹⁴

There have been several other studies done in regard to children's views on realistic art. In 1966 Pavel Machotka studied the comments made by several age groups when considering art, and found that "... realism was a concern in 35% of the comments made by seven year olds,

¹⁴ Ibid. , 24.

32% of the comments made by eleven year olds and 19% of the comments made by eighteen year olds."¹⁵

In 1968, Coffey found a preference for realistic art over non-representational art in her subjects, even as far back as kindergarten.¹⁶ Gardner and Winner in 1976 found that "...persons in this age group feel that art should be a precise rendering of reality."¹⁷ A developmental study by Rosentiel (1978) ascertained those children between eight and twelve years old react most decisively toward paintings that have realistic details, designs, and shapes.¹⁸

Purpose

When looking at Piaget's stages of cognitive development and Michael Parson's level of aesthetic development, parallels can be drawn. The age groups that I am most interested in are between eight and eleven years old, which places them in the fourth and fifth grade and in the developmental stage Parsons calls stage two. These children are going through a transitional phase from concrete concepts to the understanding of abstract ideas. How does this age range view abstract versus figurative art? If indeed, according to Piaget, children during this

¹⁵ Michael Parsons. *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 48.

¹⁶ Martha Taunton. (1980). The Influence of Age on Preferences for Subject Matter, Realism, and Spatial Depth in Painting Reproductions. *Studies in Art Education* 3: 40.

¹⁷ H. Gardner, E. Winner. (1976). How Children Learn: Three Stages of Understanding art. *Psychology Today* 9: 42-43.

age range have thoughts that remain rooted in the present and therefore they prefer real objects, does this in any way correlate to their attitudes and preferences for art? If there is a parallel between cognitive development and children's perspectives on certain types of paintings, then how can a museum utilize these findings to better engage their school tour groups? In a museum setting, what are the methods that docents can use to engage the child in looking at abstracted paintings? Can understanding the perspectives of children at this age help to facilitate more efficient programming for docent tours within a museum setting?

My research began when I observed museum visitors at the Kresge Art Museum at Michigan State University, the school groups ranged from kindergarten to junior high. When listening to their comments on the art in the museum I became most interested in fourth and fifth graders. They had particular opinions on abstract art. 'You call that art?' many would say to their friends. I realized the majority of these students didn't know what to do with an abstracted painting, which was a similar response to that of many adults who enter the museum. What we can't initially understand can make us feel uncomfortable. When that misunderstood work of art is housed within a museum, viewers can walk away with a negative experience. But what if a docent can introduce abstract art in

¹⁸ Danko-McGhee, 33.

a way that coincides with how a fourth or fifth grader develops cognitively?

I began to see a pattern in how children initially view different types of art. Depending on the age, as noted previously, young children, first to third grade, were far more attracted to paintings with bright color than paintings with muted or dark colors. I noticed this in more than half of the tours I observed. It didn't matter if the colors were reds, yellows, or oranges; whether part of a realistic landscape or blotches of paint haphazardly splashed on the canvas, they were fascinating to the young students because they used bright colors. Children in the fourth and fifth grade appeared to be more reserved in their initial reactions to works of abstraction. Many voiced the opinion of "I could do that." But when carefully and mindfully prodded by the docent to engage with the paintings, they warmed up by voicing their opinions in a more constructive manner. When given some sense of historical, cultural or artistic background, whether about the artist or subject, the majority of the children tended to move closer physically to the painting. They moved from the point of saying, "I can do that!" to "How did the artist do that?"

For the purpose of my thesis I limited my observations to fourth and fifth grader's interactions with paintings. Due to limited time, I chose to concentrate on the children's responses to paintings as opposed to other

types of artistic mediums. For a further study, observing children's responses to sculpture whether abstracted or realistic might prove to have interesting results when juxtaposed with their views on paintings.

I interviewed several experienced docents that have worked with fourth and fifth graders over five years at the Kresge Art Museum. And I observed two groups of fourth and fifth graders from Central School in Okemos, Michigan and St. Gerard School in Lansing, Michigan. I went to these schools, showed slides, talked about the works and distributed questionnaires. I wanted to listen first hand to the student's observations as well as read their views when they were given specific artworks to look at. The combination of these venues supported much of what the researchers had found concerning the interplay of child development theories and children's responses to art. And to my surprise there were many findings that were articulated not by scholars but out of mouths of bright fourth and fifth grade students.

Chapter 2

Data found in a school environment

Methodological analysis for fourth and fifth graders in a school setting

To investigate my question of whether fourth and fifth graders have a preference for realistic over abstract art, I exposed them to a range of realistic and abstract art and then posed questions to elicit their reactions. The questions in my instrument were designed so that the children would respond beyond a simple response of "I like it or I don't like it." I wanted to gain a clear sense of why they felt a certain way about the paintings. I showed slide reproductions of the works so that I was sure all the children interviewed would be able to see the same paintings and all the details.

Subjects

The list of ten questions was given to a total of 153 students from the fourth and fifth grades.¹⁹ Seventy students were from St. Gerard School in Lansing, Michigan and eighty-three were from Central School in Okemos Michigan. The fourth graders ranged in age from eight to ten years and the fifth grade from nine to eleven years. Students from St. Gerard School were observed on December 10, 2001 while the students from Central School in Okemos were observed on January 14 and 18, 2002. The

¹⁹ UCHRIS IRB #01-727

questionnaires were completed anonymously. The children were told that I was coming into their school by their art teacher but didn't know the entire nature of my visit. When I arrived I explained that I was interested in their opinion on art and asked that they be as honest as possible when answering the questions. I also asked them to avoid words such as "cool" and "stupid" because it is impossible to infer an overall meaning from these words; these words seem to be very subjective in their definition. I made it clear that there were no right or wrong answers and this was not a test so they would not be graded on their responses.

Instrumentation

The children were asked a series of ten questions about nine paintings, which were intended to provoke responses to the chosen paintings and comparisons between them. A slide of each image was projected onto the front board of the room. Children were asked to sit as close to the board as possible to ensure that they could see the details of each slide. I read each question out loud to ensure that the students were aware of the image that correlated with the question being asked.

The specific questions were:

1. Look at the slide and write down everything
you see.
2. Look at the slide on the left, what do you think

- the person is feeling?
3. Look at the slide on the right, what do you think the person is feeling?
 4. Which of these people would you want to be friends with? Why?
 5. How does the painting on the left make you feel? Why?
 6. How does the painting on the right make you feel? Why?
 7. If you were an artist which painting would you paint?
 8. Why?
 9. If you could go into one of these paintings and visit, which painting would it be?
 10. Why?

Question one was designed to be an icebreaker for the students. The image shown was Pieter Breughel's *Children's Games* (Figure 1). They were shown the full image on the right side and then a detail of the middle of the painting on the left side of the board. I wanted the children to begin with an image that they more than likely had never seen before. I did not want personal experience with an image to influence their

thoughts and answers. For example, showing Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* or Van Gogh's *Starry Night* might have them reiterating what a teacher or parent had told them about that particular work of art rather than relying on their own thoughts and words.

There is an extreme amount of movement within Pieter Brueghel's *Children's Games*. Many children equated this image with the Where's Waldo? books that have been so popular in recent years. My goal was to see if the students could actively look beyond the physicality of what was presented in the image and perhaps even say something about why the artist might have painted it. If a child could go beyond the fact that there was a house and people on the streets, I considered them to be looking beyond what the artist had painted as subject matter.

For question two I selected an abstract portrait of a woman, Chaim Soutine's *Lady in Red* (Figure 2). Question three's image, Ingres's *Madame Moitessier* (figure 3) was a contrast to image two with its very realistic painting of a woman. I then juxtaposed these two images and asked the students the same question for each portrait: what do you think this person is feeling? Leaving the slide images projected up on the board, I then asked them question four: which of these people would you want to be friends with? Why?

For question five and six the images (Figures 5 and 6) were done by the same artist but in different styles; one being geometric shapes in light

colors and the other, a more impressionistic style done in dark colors. Images for question five and six were juxtaposed next to each other on the board. Question five and six were worded the same: How does the painting on the right (or left) make you feel? Why?

For question seven and eight, images (figure 6 and 7) were projected simultaneously. The student's chose one image in which to answer question seven: if you were an artist which painting would you paint? In answer to question eight, "why?" they gave their reason why they chose that particular image.

Question nine asked: if you could go into one of these paintings (Figure 8 and 9) and visit, which painting would it be? Why? (Question ten). As in question seven, two images were projected on the board. The students were once again asked to choose between them for their answers.

The questions were administered individually in handouts to the students, and the questions were posed in numerical order for each of the artworks. The students were advised not to discuss their answers until all the instruments had been collected.

I made certain that when I picked out the initial images that any of the questions could have applied to the majority of the images. For example, I could have asked any of these questions in relation to any of the images. I wanted to prevent the children from generalizing their

responses after looking at just a few images. I wanted them to really look and think about the question in reference to the image shown. Each class session took approximately thirty-five minutes; twenty-five of those minutes were strictly for the questionnaire and slides and approximately ten minutes for discussion after the questionnaire was completed.

As Michael Parsons's noted in his work, children generally refer to works that are not representational as weird and ugly. Could these fourth and fifth graders go beyond the weirdness of some of the abstracted images? I was looking for specific answers in response to the questions, which were stimulated by the nine images that I presented. I wanted to be able to quantify their answers so that I had some idea of how they were thinking in regard to the images selected. I wanted to see if these students could go beyond the physicality of the painting. Could they begin to think conceptually or were they still in a very concrete stage? For example, when looking at Chaim Soutine's image of the *Woman in Red*, could they look beyond her abstracted face and body and tell what she was feeling?

Artworks

Among the nine reproduced images chosen for the research were three realistic paintings; a cityscape, a portrait of a woman, and a landscape. The six remaining images ranged from an abstracted portrait

of a woman, two images of trees, one colorfield painting, one abstract expressionistic image and finally an imaginary landscape.

Figure one by Pieter Breughel's coincides with question one.

Breughel's image is a realistic portrayal of a busy town filled with people in the 1560s called *Children's Games*. Figure two corresponding with question two, was Chaim Soutine's, *Woman in Red* (1923). Soutine's painting is an abstracted portrait of a woman done in very loose brushstrokes and no delineation between the bright colors. Jean Auguste Ingres's highly realistic portrayal of *Madame Moitessier* (1851)(Figure 3) depicts a woman with a very sober expression dressed entirely in black. Figure two and three were used in reference to question four in which the students were asked to make a choice between the images.

Joan Miro's *Trees*, (Figure 4) and *Red Tree* (Figure 5) were used for questions five and six. The fragmented and geometric *Trees* contains muted greens and browns outlined in black. *Red Tree* displays a leafless black tree against a blue background. The brushstrokes are thick, painterly and impressionistic. *Earth and Green* (1955) (Figure 6) by Mark Rothko contains two colors, a wash of one color on the top of the canvas and a wash of a second color underneath that. Jackson Pollock's *Convergence* (Figure 7) displays a white canvas splattered with different colors. Figure 8 by Joan Miro, *The Tilled Field* (1923) represents an imaginary landscape and farm filled with hybrid creatures. The flat image

exhibits colorful shapes and organic forms. Figure 9 is a painting by John Constable, *The Hay Wain* (1821) of a realistic landscape with horses and figures.

Results

When computing my research on the fourth and fifth grade I began to see a separation on many levels in the responses between the two grade levels (Figure 10). Many of the fifth graders appear to be in a transitional stage in regard to Parsons's stage two where realism and clarity of image is necessary and Piaget's concrete operational stage where concrete thought is foremost. They appear to prefer abstract art to realistic representations. Of children in this age level, Howard Gardner says that they are "...in the process of breaking away from primitive conceptions and moving towards those of an older group. Thus their responses are often a mixture of mature and immature views."²⁰

Collectively for question one, 128 out of 153 of the children made lists of the things that they saw in Pieter Breughel's image (Figure 1). Only sixteen percent of 153 students looked beyond the physical (Figure 10) and questioned what was going on within the painting. The significance of asking this question was to see if the children had the cognitive capability to write down ideas and concepts that were happening in

Breughel's *Children's Games*. One child who questioned the theme said "it is either a festival like Notre Dame or some sort of invasion...." This child equated the intense movement within the painting with an invasion. One astute fifth grader even pointed out "I think it is sort of interesting that all these people seem to have their own personality." This child is perhaps beginning to see beyond himself leaving the egocentric thoughts behind and looking into the picture to draw conclusions about the subject matter addressed. When broken down, sixty-five percent of the fifth graders were actively looking beyond the physical in the image as opposed to only thirty-five percent of the fourth graders. For example, fourth graders generally made lists of what they saw in the image such as "trees, buildings, people and animals." As can be surmised by the large number of fifth graders actively looking, they are in the midst of a transitional stage where they begin to think hypothetically about concrete ideas and express them on paper. But as seen in Figure 11, twenty-six out of the total students, both fourth and fifth grades critically thought beyond the question. This low number could be raised during a tour if children were engaged with the docent to look closer at the narrative of the painting

Question two and three seemed to initiate a strong emotional response from the students. Of 151 students, sixty-eight percent viewed Soutine's image of the *Woman in Red* (Figure 2) as portraying a positive

²⁰ Howard Gardner, Ellen Winner, and Mary Kircher. "Children's Conceptions of the Arts,"

feeling (Figure 12). For example, most students felt that the *Lady in Red* was happy. "I think she looks happy because she is expressing herself. She has a very unique style of clothes." One child said, "I think she feels happy and she feels pretty but I don't think she is pretty." Michael Parsons suggests that in stage two of his aesthetic development, children do not debate whether the person in the painting is ugly or weird; they see this as a fact.²¹

As for Ingres's portrait of *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3), out of 146 total students from both the fourth and fifth grades, ninety-seven said the woman in the image was feeling unhappy or used terms that suggest negation such as loneliness or sadness. The majority of those ninety-seven responded by saying she was sad or unhappy. "She's sad and solemn, she probably doesn't have any friends." "I think she is feeling sad because she is wearing black, black is a bad mood color." The color of Madame Moitessier's dress became a focal point for how the children read into her feelings as asked in question three. Many students asked if she was going to a funeral or perhaps she was mean. They did question whether the image was a photograph or a painting, which could express the beginning of abstract thought, but they were more interested in whether her outfit was somehow related to a sad event or death.

Journal of Aesthetic Education 9 (July 1975): 65

²¹ Michael Parsons, *How we understand art: A cognitive developmental account of the aesthetic experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 42.

When it came time to answer question four (which of these two would you want to be friends with and why?), there was a shift in the responses between the two grades but overall (Figure 13) the students chose the realistic portrait (Figure 3). The fourth graders in general were more interested in the realistic, the tangible. The fifth grade, in general, tested the waters of abstract thoughts. This can be seen in the results of this question, (Figure 13) forty-three percent of the fourth grade chose the *Lady in Red* (figure 2) and fifty-seven percent chose the realistic *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3). Fifty-seven percent of the fifth graders (Figure 14) would prefer to be friends with the woman in Chaim Soutine's work as opposed to the forty-three percent who want to be friends with Madame Moitessier. These results play into this age group as being in a transitional stage; the fifth grade is moving toward abstracted thought and aesthetic preference.

Sixty-two percent of the fifth graders had both positive and negative reactions to Ingres' *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3), compared to thirty-eight percent of the fourth graders. Negative reactions from both fourth and fifth grades included comments such as " she looks mean" or "she's evil!" This seems to indicate a shift in fifth graders viewing preferences and as Howard Gardner has pointed out in his work, they are able to hold ambiguous feelings toward a painting.²²

²² Howard Gardner, Ellen Winner, and Mary Kircher. "Children's Conceptions of the Arts,"

For questions five and six, I chose images (Figure 4 and Figure 5) by the same artist but done in different styles. In question five, I asked them how the painting made them feel. I wanted to see if they could pull any emotion out of a non-representational image. For a child in this age range there is difficulty in interpreting abstracted forms to represent something such as a face or a familiar inanimate object. "Geometric forms require purely intellectual and original organization to recommend themselves to the eye..."²³ How many of these students would be able to consciously organize what they saw in the image and then write down a feeling to parallel the cognitive process?

Piet Mondrian's *Trees* (Figure 4) presented many students with a dilemma. For the students who raised their hands during the interview, they said they were confused as to how they should feel about the image. I told them that they could feel any way they wanted and to write down their initial thoughts about the image when the slide first came into view. Identifying their feelings to an abstracted work appeared to cause difficulties because nothing in the image could be related to anything realistic.

When I analyzed the answers to this question, I chose the most common answers that the children had given. The most popular answers

Journal of Aesthetic Education 9 (July 1975): 69.

²³ Susanne K. Langer. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1960), 43.

for the fourth grade were different than the most popular answers for the fifth grade. Eleven out of sixty-nine fourth graders said Mondrian's *Trees* (Figure 4) made them feel happy; twelve said the painting made them feel dizzy and confused; and ten said the painting reminded them of stained glass. As for the fifth graders, their top three answers were as follows: seventeen out of seventy-five felt confusion, ten felt sadness and four felt dull or bored.

For most of the fourth graders it was the colors and what the painting reminded them of that brought about the answer of happiness. "It makes me feel warm because of the green and green is mostly in summer and spring and they are warm." "It makes me feel like I am in a church or a pile of leaves" and "It makes me feel happy because it looks like fish being caught and I like to fish." The fifth graders appeared to be more puzzled by the painting than the fourth graders but they also appeared to begin to think critically about the image. For example, "I feel lost and the picture looks like I am in the jungle and can't get out." And "I feel confused because it is not just one painting, it is tons of paintings put together with lines separating the paintings" or "I feel covered because it looks like a blanket of leaves or a quilt with one main design. It looks like it is on your head so that's what you see." Many of the fifth graders also commented on the colors in relation to their feelings. "It makes me feel

sad because the colors are so depressing", and "makes me feel gloomy because when it is a gloomy day I am sad."

Mondrian's *Trees* composed of black lines and brown, gold and light green colors, seemed to affect how the students read the image. The fourth graders equated the sadness of the colors to images in their own life. For example a fourth grader wrote " It makes me feel sad because it looks like smoke and pieces of the twin towers." Another student wrote, "It makes me feel sad because it reminds me of my baby sister who died right when she was born, dark and lonely colors." Although they didn't have trouble finding an emotion it was still grounded in some reality of their lives. As Michael Parsons' notes, "If we cannot recognize what a painting is about, we read our own subject into it, guessing or inventing"²⁴

In Pavel Machotka's research of how children evaluate paintings, he found that children do have a preference for a realistic representation of an image until around age eleven but he also notes an interesting increase in empathy and emotional development. "Although younger children would establish an emotional relationship to a painting, it was usually in terms of a personal relationship, such as liking a picture of a person because it reminds him of his father; it was not until the age of twelve that an emotional relationship was established with a picture that

was outside the youngster himself, that is, with the atmosphere or character of the picture as a whole."²⁵ This can be seen in some of the answers of the students who equated their responses to their own reality, such as saying that the colors remind them of a person in the family or a memory.

Machotka linked this cognitive change to a decrease in egocentrism, which begins to occur near age eleven when cognitive development ushers in abstracted thoughts and concepts.

The other image by Piet Mondrian, *Red Tree* (Figure 5), appeared to make many of the students experience sadness. Fifty of the 129 students said they felt sadness when looking at this image and twenty-three out of the 129 students said they felt scared.²⁶ Many of the fourth graders equated their sadness with sadness of the tree itself, as if it held some human emotions within its trunk. "It makes me feel sad because the tree is dying and no one can do anything to save it but cut it down." "I feel scared and uncomfortable because the tree is sad and the tree is bending over and looks like it is crying." This pattern is well known in child development and has been called the "transparency view." "Children

²⁴ Michael Parsons, *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 31.

²⁵ Viktor Lowenfeld, *Creative and Mental Growth* (New York, Macmillan Press, 1987), p113.

²⁶ The difference in total number of students is due to the fact that fewer children answered question 5 than question 4.

tend to look through the painting as if it were transparent and at the objects represented as if they were actual."²⁷

The fifth graders appear to use the word sadness in reference to the colors and the isolated tree. The idea of being alone and in isolation seemed to play an important role in how the students read this image. "I feel sad because there are no more leaves", "I feel lonely because the color is dark and there are no people, its empty" and "I feel lonely because the tree is the only thing in the picture." Many of the fifth graders felt a sense of empathy with the theme in Mondrian's *Red Tree* (figure 5), but unlike the fourth graders they did not feel a sense of animism about the tree and its setting.

Question seven dealt with Mark Rothko's, *Earth and Green* (Figure 6) and question eight considered Jackson Pollock's, *Convergence* (Figure 7). An overwhelming 115 out of a total of 152 students picked Jackson Pollock's image as the painting they would have produced if they were an artist (Figure 15). It appears from their answers that the main reasons they chose the image by Pollock stems from the colors and that it looked easy and fun to paint. Michael Parsons acknowledges that many children give three reasons for why abstract art looks the way that it does. "One is that we paint them because they are easier. An abstract painting may

²⁷ Ronald Moore ed. *Aesthetics for Young People*. Michael J. Parsons, "Can Children do Aesthetics?", p.40

be a good painting, and it may be hard to do but it is easier than a realistic one. The reason is that the details don't matter much, because they won't be noticed.²⁸ Secondly, Parsons notes, children think that perhaps no model was available for the artist and that he/she had to work from memory and this accounts for the lack of detail and non-representation. And the third reason that abstracted works are painted stems from the desire to be different and attract attention on the part of the artist.²⁹ In my research I only found evidence that the students felt the painting would be easy and fun to produce. They did not give the other reasons that Parsons's stated.

It appears that Figure six (Mark Rothko's *Earth and Green*) proved to be more difficult for the students to engage with and evoke a feeling. Figure seven (Jackson Pollock's *Convergence*) seems to have induced strong feelings because of the single image and the dark colors. When the students had some representation in front of them within an image they didn't need to incorporate a realistic image from their life. This can be seen in their interpretations of Mondrian's *Trees* (Figure4), which depicts an abstraction so the students had to equate the colors or shapes with a dead relative, something they enjoy doing or a real image from their life. Also in *Red Trees* (Figure 5), the students had a representation, a

²⁸ Michael Parsons, *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 91.

²⁹ Ibid.,91

lifeless tree against a blue background, but they were able to bring forth feelings without relying on realistic explanations.

As for the Rothko (figure 6), which was chosen by only thirty-seven out of 152 students, it appears that the students liked the soft colors and the fact that it wasn't "all messed up." Another point made by these students was the calming nature of the Rothko as opposed to the wild energetic Pollock (Figure 7). "It relaxes and makes me happy" one student said about the Rothko.

The fact that more children chose the Pollock over the Rothko challenged my hypothesis that the children would pick the less abstracted of the two and also challenged some of what researchers have written in the past. So what could be the conclusions for the majority of students picking the Pollock? Perhaps there is some correlation between personality types and how students choose paintings of this nature. Pollock's painting, full of extreme movement, might be favored more by extroverted children than Rothko's calm image.

Joan Miro's *The Tilled Field* (Figure 9) and John Constable's realistic *The Hay Wain* (Figure 10) were the images used for questions nine and ten. Fifty-four percent of 151 total students picked the Miro and forty-six percent of the total students chose the Constable (Figure 16). When I broke down the numbers and separated the calculations by fourth and fifth grades, once again I could see a difference between the age levels.

Forty-eight percent of seventy-three fourth graders chose the Miro and the remaining fifty-two percent chose the Constable. For the fifth grade (Figure 17), sixty percent of the fifth graders chose the Miro and the remaining forty percent chose the Constable.

Fourth graders generally gave reasons such as "it looks fun," "there is crazy fun stuff to play with" and "would be fun to visit" as reasons for choosing the Miro as a place to visit. Fifth graders became more critical in their reasoning when choosing the Miro. "It defies the laws of gravity, science and nature," and "it's magical and a fantasy world that I might never experience."

Sixty-nine out of a total of 151 students' chose John Constable's *The Hay Wain* realistic landscape. Fourth graders seemed to give explanations that dealt with security or comfort within Constable's image. There was a need for security on the part of this group and they could find it in Constable's image but not in that of the Miro (Figure 8). For example, "the creatures won't eat me, there is a nice warm house," "it's a calm country setting" and "looks less dangerous."

The fifth graders expressed the importance of the calmness of the Constable as opposed to Miro's fantasy landscape. As noted in previous answers and relating to the fifth graders cognitive development, the fifth grades were able to express their feelings concretely on paper. "It's like going back in time, peaceful country, calm," "looks calm and relaxing,

you can put your feet in the water and be yourself" and "I love the country, I don't want to go to a Dr. Seuss place like on the left."³⁰

Discussion with the students after their questionnaire was completed

Once the students had completed their questionnaire and handed them in, I went over some of the questions with them. When asked which paintings they wanted to talk about, the majority of the students chose Chaim Soutine's *Lady in Red* (Figure 2) and Jean Auguste Ingres's *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3). I was not surprised because when both of these images were positioned next to each other, most of the children laughed or said they both looked "freaky." When I asked the fourth graders if they felt that the artist who did *Lady in Red* (Figure 2) was a good painter, most said he was a good painter but maybe the woman in red just looked that way in real life. In particular, the girl's felt that the woman with the red dress was feeling hurt because people made fun of her. Boys generally were more interested in why she looked like she was "melting" or a "mutant." I asked if she was happy or sad and many felt that she was happy because her eyes looked happy. When I asked them if it was because she was smiling, the majority had not realized that she was smiling just that she reminded many of their grandmothers.

³⁰ This student's remark is in reference to Miro's *The Tilled Field*, which was projected on the left side of the screen next to the Constable.

As for the discussion of Ingres painting of Madame Moitessier, the fourth graders seemed most interested if she was going to a funeral because of her black dress or if she was rich. I asked them why her skin was so pale and many sensed that she was sick or depressed especially with the lack of emotional expression on her face. "She's a vampire and she's dead!" one particularly loud fourth grader said. When I explained that this woman was wealthy and when she did go outside she wore gloves and large hats, the children seemed to take note again of her physical appearance.

When talking to the fifth graders about which woman they would want to be friends with (either the *Lady in Red* (Figure 2) or *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3)) many felt that the woman in the black dress looked mean and snobby. The lady in red appeared to be "soggy " and "maybe she had taken an acid bath" but nonetheless she still needed friends.

When talking about Jackson Pollock's image many students wanted to know how the artist painted *Convergence* (Figure 7) When I told them that he had laid the large canvas down on the floor and splattered paint on it, they thought that would be fun. When asking the fourth graders if Pollock randomly threw the paint on the canvas, the majority said yes. When fifth graders were asked the same question, it appeared that half felt Pollock randomly splattered the paint and the

other half thought he carefully splattered it and had a method to his work. Michael Parsons's remarks that children who are in stage two (fourth and fifth graders) can begin to "acknowledge the viewpoint of other people."³¹ Parsons also comments that the majority of children still haven't learned to tell the difference between two important basics in their cognitive as well as aesthetic development; ideas that are based on what can be seen and those ideas that cannot be seen.³² This move can be noted in many of the fifth grader responses that began to empathize with the artist and his creative ability.

In conclusion to my discussion with the students, they thrived on being asked questions about their opinions. The majority took my interview and instrument very seriously and I tried to give my undivided attention to their ideas and comments. Learning about the historical and artistic implications of the images appeared to stimulate both grades to ask more questions and discuss far more than they could have on paper given their time constraints.

³¹ Michael Parsons, *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of the Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 23.

³² Ibid, 32

"They have opened our eyes as much as I
hope we have opened theirs..."
(Kresge Art Museum docent)

Chapter 3

Docents

Methodological Analysis for docents in Kresge Art Museum

As part of my research I interviewed eleven docents at the Kresge Art Museum on the campus of Michigan State University. Since these tour leaders work with school groups when they come into the museum, I wanted to gain insight into how they have experienced fourth and fifth graders and their views on art. Through the years I have observed the docents first hand as they guide the students through prehistoric to contemporary works of art in the Kresge Art Museum. I have seen confusion and delight on the faces of the students as they look at non-representational paintings. How does the docent capture the child's attention when they are explaining a work of abstract form? If a child's cognitive development during the fourth and fifth grade still fluctuates between the concrete and realistic concepts and the gradual movement towards conceptual images, is there a method to enhance their understanding of abstracted concepts in art while they are still in a transitional stage?

Subjects

I randomly chose eleven docents out of forty active docents who volunteer their time at Kresge Art Museum. The docents I spoke with were museum veterans who have volunteered at the museum for at least three years.

Instrumentation and Responses

One-month prior to my meeting with the docents, I gave each of the docents a copy of the questions that I would be asking. I wanted to give them time to reflect on the questions and think of examples of their exposure to abstracted art via fourth and fifth graders as well as methods they used on this age range to facilitate learning.

My instrument consisted of four open-ended questions designed to create an objective dialogue among all participants.³³ The meeting with the Kresge Art Museum docents took place on January 7, 2002.

The specific questions were:

1. Have you seen a preference for realistic as opposed to abstract paintings when working with fourth and fifth grades?
2. In your experience as a docent at Kresge Art Museum,

³³ UCHRIS IRB #01-727

have you noticed any trends in regard to how fourth and fifth graders view abstracted paintings as opposed to how first through third graders view abstracted paintings?

3. Have you been taught through your docent training any specific ways in which to introduce abstract paintings to fourth and fifth grades?
4. Have you developed techniques on your own for explaining abstract paintings to fourth and fifth graders?

In response to question one, the docents said they haven't noticed an overwhelming difference in how the students in fourth and fifth grades receive and interact with an abstract image. "Perhaps" one docent said, "I never noticed a differentiation because we have certain topics we use in tours for different age ranges." Another docent added, "many students are told by their teachers before hand to be polite and not talk out of turn, especially the younger children, and this could influence the amount of dialogue which would in the end give us an idea for any preferences." Theme tours are provided for kindergarten through junior high at the Kresge Art Museum. The themes are as follows:

Kindergarten-Color

First grade-shape

Second grade-Line

Third grade-Texture

Fourth grade- Painting

Fifth Grade-Sculpture and Art for a new nation

Sixth grade- Art of many cultures

Junior High- Art and Humanities

These theme tours provide focus for the docents as well as the students. When students come year after year they will have built a basis on which to continue learning about the arts, cultures and history in the museum and in the classroom.

Question two dealt with trends regarding how fourth and fifth grade view abstracted paintings in comparison to how first through third grade view abstracted paintings. Many docents said that grade first through third seemed more spontaneous in conversation with the docents. The children at this age did not seem to be influenced by conventions and were eager to talk about art whether what they said was right or wrong.

The fourth and fifth graders on the other hand were more reserved in their explanations and questions. Because of these reservations, whether due to self-consciousness, peer pressure or not knowing an answer, the fourth and fifth graders were not as able to freely express their ideas as the first through third grade. This is where many docents felt that they can act as a catalyst in children's perceptual skills by asking open-

ended questions and letting the children guide themselves in many ways to self-discovery of the arts.

When I asked if they had been taught through their docent training any specific ways in which to introduce abstracted paintings to fourth and fifth graders, many docents noted that it was essential for the tour guide to talk about the artist in relation to an abstract work. " We need to point out 'tricks' that the artist utilized and pull in the human story of an artist." When children are presented with a work that is non-representational, they need to find some reality or concrete basis to begin to look at and understand the painting; telling the artist's story and his methods is a good way to help the students understand the abstracted work. "Children love to hear stories about people who have lived in the past. When you are able to bring a part of the artists life into focus and equate it to the child's world, perhaps the abstraction can become more focused over time." But as one docent pointed out, "children and adults also need to realize that the art doesn't have to mean anything. We can look at it for the colors and lines and still be moved."

One important factor that the docents see playing a role in how children view art is the influx of technology. "Kids have the advantage of the computer, video games and high tech movies. There is a rise in disjointed images in computer imagery. Perhaps kids are going to become more open to abstraction because of all the visual technology

they view daily." Will this overload of three-dimensional moving images and its sense of hyper-reality desensitize children when they look at an abstract painting? Or will technology serve as a positive conduit between art and the museum setting?

The docents were very adamant about allowing the children to find their own way through the art. "Docents need to let the children find their way with a helping hand." If too much personal opinion begins to cloud the tour, the docents will be doing a disservice to the group. "We need to remember as docents that we need to try hard not to push our views." Children, on the other hand, should be encouraged to expand their ideas and opinions so that they are thinking and interacting with the art and the other students."

When asking the docents if they have come up with any techniques for explaining abstracted paintings to fourth and fifth graders, many docents said they did not use specific techniques with children of this age range. One docent said, "it's best to try to get the students to avoid pre-judging the works before they are told about the artist, theme or technique. If they do judge and use words like "it's stupid" or "ugly" then we need to find out what about the work is stupid and ugly to them." It is essential to be able to sense what becomes meaningful to the children throughout the tour. The docent then guides them to further investigation and channels their enthusiasm into learning. Another docent

said it was important as a docent not to argue or push your point too strongly at first but guide the student to go farther in their thinking. "We are essentially pushing our views, we must be careful!"

The most common suggestions for dealing with this transitional stage according to the docents were: displaying enthusiasm toward the tour and the art, letting the children find their way when looking at the art but also giving them a helping hand, and listening to each child's comment and opinions.

Chapter 4

Implications

My study reveals the existence of various viewpoints on the part of fourth and fifth graders in response to realistic and abstracted paintings. The students I studied appear to be engaged in a transitional stage of their cognitive and aesthetic development as consistent with the stages noted by theorists such as Jean Piaget and Michael Parsons. The majority of the students I interviewed seem to be in stage two, which Parsons refers to as Beauty and Realism. These students had a high preference for paintings that represented distinctive features of the real world. The rest of the children appear to have transitioned or are transitioning into what Parsons's calls Expressiveness (stage three). In stage three a good painting is based on the involvement with the object viewed. These students were critically thinking about the images that I had shown and began to inquire deeper into how the painting was made, what the artist might have been like, and they tried to understand what the abstracted work might mean.

My conclusions in reference to the data collected from the student's responses parallel much of the theories mentioned earlier but more subtleties were noticed in differences between the fourth and fifth grades. For example, when asked: which of these people would you

want to be friends with? Why? Fifty percent of the students chose Chaim Soutine's abstracted *Lady in Red* (Figure 2) and the other fifty- percent chose Ingres' *Madame Moitessier* (Figure 3). But when breaking the numbers down farther, Fifty-seven percent of the fourth graders picked *Madame Moitessier* where as fifty-eight percent of the fifth graders picked Chaim Soutine's abstracted *Lady in Red*. From these findings, there was a slightly higher rate of fifth graders who chose the image of the abstracted woman to be friends with over that of the Ingres image that is so realistic. This parallels Parsons's findings that this age group can begin to negotiate with conceptual thought and therefore abstracted images.³⁴

In reference to question nine and ten: If you could go into one of these paintings and visit, which painting would it be? Why? There is once again a slight separation cognitively between the fourth and fifth grades. Forty-eight percent of the seventy-three fourth graders chose Joan Miro's abstracted image, *The Tilled Field* (Figure 8) and fifty-two percent chose Constable's realistic landscape, *The Hay Wain* (Figure 9). A subtle transition from the preference of realistic thoughts and concepts can be seen in the fifth grader's answers to question nine and ten. Sixty percent of the seventy-eight fifth graders wanted to visit Miro's fantasy landscape while the remaining forty- percent chose Constable's realistic image (Figure 8) as their destination.

³⁴ Parsons. 31

Question seven and eight: If you were an artist which painting would you paint? Why? Elicited the highest response toward one image (Jackson Pollock's *Convergence* (Figure 7)) than any other image. Out of 152 total students, seventy-six percent chose the image by Jackson Pollock as the image they would want to paint if the student were an artist. The remaining twenty-four percent of the students chose the image by Mark Rothko (Figure 6).

The main reason provided by the students as to why they chose the Pollock image over that by Rothko has to do with the fact that the painting looked fun and more importantly it looked fun to paint. This answer corroborates Parsons's identification of the number one reason that children justify the production of abstracted painting is the fact that the abstracted work looks easy to paint.³⁵

Implications in an art museum

For further considerations on the part of any docent program, I have compiled several recommendations. These recommendations do not reflect exclusively the docent program at the Kresge Art Museum but are merely suggested to further any docent program dealing with school age children.

³⁵ Ibid.,91.

First, the tour must be focused and "...understanding the cognitive capabilities of young people...at different stages of reasoning provides the interpreter with bases for preparing presentations for given age levels."³⁶ By concentrating on the cognitive development of a child, by taking into consideration the stages or levels, the docent can stay focused on what is really important to certain age levels.

When discussing emotional content of subject matter within a tour, it is best discussed when the emotion has been experienced. Children at this age (fourth and fifth grade) are able to comprehend certain emotions such as anger, happiness or sadness in a painting because they have all experienced these emotions at one time or another. When discussing emotional content in an abstracted painting, it is best perhaps to discuss the child's feeling toward the painting or even introduce the notion of the artist's feelings during the creative process. Since abstract paintings may be difficult for children to understand, "...the only meaning that they can draw from such art is what they can associate to their own reality."³⁷ To delve into emotions they understand and parallel that with what they feel when looking at an abstracted work will perhaps bring them to a reality that they can cognitively identify, relate to, and move toward theoretical concepts.

³⁶ McCoy, 31.

³⁷ Ibid., 35.

There must be an elimination of barriers to learning where the questions asked on a tour are geared toward cognitive development rather than evaluation of a painting. Several barriers to learning for this age group (8-11 years) can be attributed to poor preparation on the part of the tour guide, or when the teacher and docent have different expectations with regard to the tour. Also when the tour is too long for the age level and the children are not asked open-ended questions, which can solicit critical thinking, the tour more than likely will not be successful.

When asking questions to fourth and fifth graders, it would be beneficial to ask divergent questions because this helps them to articulate their ideas and thoughts. Divergent questions encourage multiple answers rather than one specific answer. Divergent questioning is especially beneficial when children are looking at abstracted paintings; this can promote imaginative thinking and exploration of thoughts.

Most importantly, a relationship between the tour and classroom subjects is imperative. "Unless work in museum and school are closely integrated, much of the value of a visit is lost...This preparatory work should give the children some idea, not of what they are going to see, but of what they are going to look for...."ⁱ When teachers and docents communicate before a tour on what both sides expect and hope to accomplish, much learning can be found within a museum setting. "Interpreters, therefore, must make every effort to design tours to

complement the curriculum and to make the museum an important resource for the school. If this is not done, the educational potential of trips may be unrealized."³⁸

³⁸ McCoy, 93.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In conclusion, children in fourth and fifth grade progress developmentally through stages, which influences how they respond to abstracted and realistic paintings. Children in this age range are moving through a transitional stage between concrete thought and theoretical concepts. They do not move forward developmentally until they have mastered their current stage.

My research suggests a slight division between the artistic preferences of the fourth and fifth grades. The fourth grade in general preferred realistic images as Parsons and Piaget have noted in their research; the fifth grade on the other hand, moved modestly toward a preference for abstracted paintings.

As Michael Parsons notes in stage two of his theory, children in the fourth and fifth grades want a painting to have a subject matter, something tangibly based in their reality.¹ The transition of this age group through stage two brings forth the acknowledgement of the perspective of others; a moving away from egocentric thoughts and a shifting to abstracted concepts.

³⁹ Parsons, 13.

There is plainly a parallel between cognitive development and children's perspectives on certain types of paintings. In an art museum setting, it is to the benefit of the child that docent and educational programs recognize the developmental stage of each child.

It must be understood that each child moves at a different pace through stages of development and that each child's individuality should be taken into consideration. Failure to do so could result in generalizing about a student's cognitive and aesthetic development, which sets both docent and child up for failure.

Other considerations for further research in this area might include the following:

- *Can any preference between the fourth and fifth grades be noted for abstract sculpture as opposed to abstract paintings?

- *Do boys and girls in the fourth and fifth grades view abstract versus figurative art differently based on their gender?

- *When focusing on personality types is there any indication of differences in opinions about abstract and realistic painting?

- *Is there any connection between views by fourth and fifth graders and their socio-economic backgrounds when viewing art?

Finally, fourth and fifth graders look at art on a different level than most adults. The cognitive level may be pared down because of their age range but they know what they prefer and are not afraid to explain

why they feel a certain way if given a chance. By focusing on their cognitive and aesthetic development, docents, teachers and adults can facilitate effective learning that can last a lifetime.



Figure 1
Pieter Bruegel
Children's Games



Figure 2
Chaim Soutine
Lady in Red



Figure 3
Ingres
Madame Moitessier

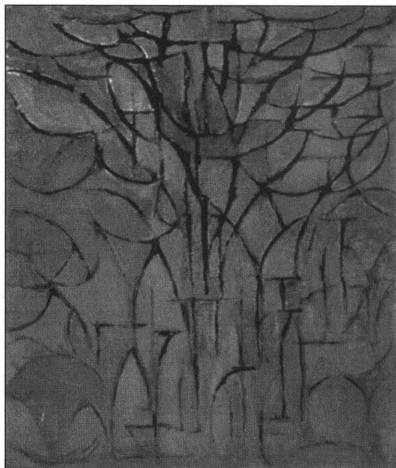


Figure 4
Piet Mondrian
Trees

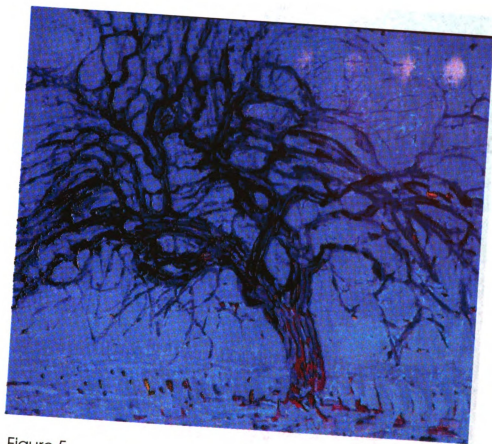


Figure 5
Piet Mondrian
Red Tree

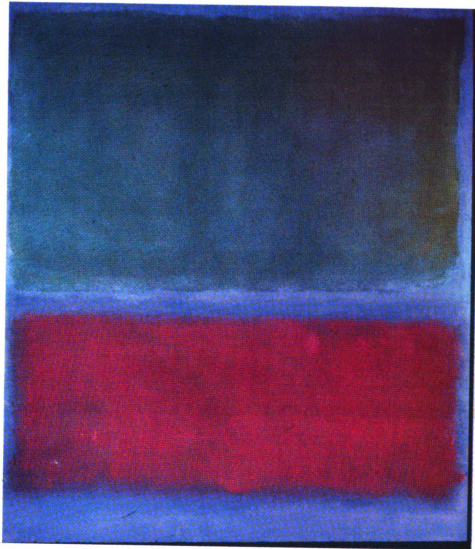


Figure 6
Mark Rothko
Earth and Green



Figure 7
Jackson Pollock
Convergence



Figure 8
Joan Miro
The Tilled Field



Figure 9
John Constable
The Hay Wain

FIGURE 10
Students Looking Beyond the Physical
When Responding to the Painting (Figure 1)
(Total 153 Students)

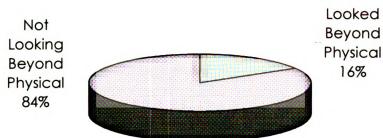


FIGURE 11
Comparison of Students Looking Beyond the
Physical When Responding to a Painting
(Figure 1)
Fourth Grade Vs. Fifth Grade
(Total 26 Students)

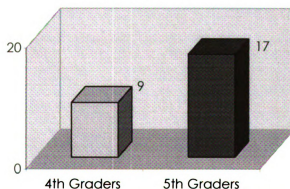


FIGURE 12
Students Who Viewed
Soutine's Work (Figure 2)
With a Positive Feeling
(Total 151 Students)

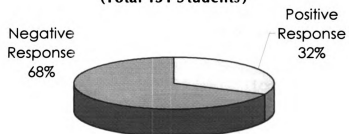


FIGURE 13
Who Fourth Graders Would Rather be Friends With in the Soutine
Vs. Ingres Paintings (Total 70 Students)

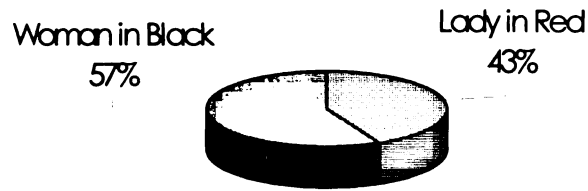


FIGURE 14
Who Fifth Graders Would Rather Be Friends With in the Soutine Vs.
Ingres Paintings (Total 74 Students)

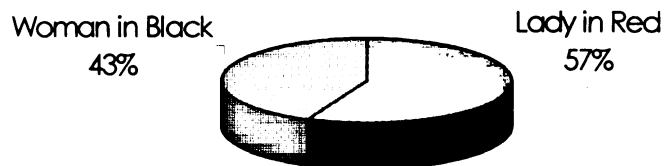


FIGURE 15
Comparison of Which Painting Students
Would Paint if They Were an Artist—
Rothko (Figure 6) vs. Pollock (Figure 7)
(Total 152 Students)



FIGURE 16
A Comparison of Which Painting Students Said They Would Rather
Go Into and Visit--
Miro (Abstract) Vs. Constable (Realistic)
(Total 151 Students)

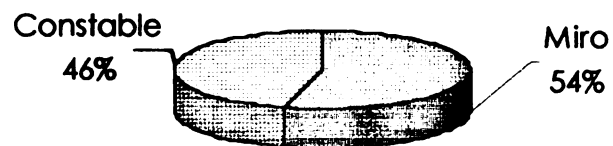
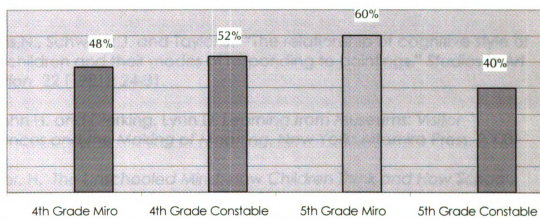


FIGURE 17
Comparison Between 4th and 5th Grades When Choosing A
Painting to Visit



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