

Teacher Resource Packet
Joseph Meierhans (1890-1981), *The Jazz Trio*, 1942



Joseph Meierhans (1890-1981), *The Jazz Trio*, 1942,
oil on canvas, H. 40 x W. 50 inches, James A. Michener Art Museum.
Gift of Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest.

Looking Questions

- Describe what you see in this painting. Create a list of all the details you can find.
- Is there a **focal point** in this artwork? If so, what draws your eye to this location?
- How does Meierhans use the elements of line and shape in his work? What type of lines and shapes do you see?
- How would you describe Meierhans' use of color? What colors do you see?
- Where do you see **pattern** or **repetition**?
- Would you consider this painting **realistic** or **abstract**? Explain.
- Do you see any evidence of Meierhans' **textile** design background? Explain.
- What kind of music do you think this painting is inspired by? What would it sound like?
- Why do you think this painting is called *The Jazz Trio*?
- If you were going to give this painting a different title, what would you call it? Why?

About the Artwork

Joseph Meierhans' *The Jazz Trio* is an **abstract Modernist** painting, inspired by the **improvisation** and liveliness of jazz music. Meierhans often compared composing music to painting saying that a painting must "sing for the eye as much as music does for the ear." In this work, he uses the **repetition** of colors, shapes and dynamic lines to lead the viewer's eye around the painting and create a visual melody. The shapes and lines **intersect** and overlap to create movement and **rhythm** in the **composition**.

Meierhans may have been inspired by Pablo Picasso's 1921 Cubist painting *Three Musicians* featuring three musicians playing their instruments. Although we don't see any realistic people in this painting, we can interpret certain shapes as bodies, arms, legs and heads. Meierhans used shaded forms and contrasting bright colors against a dull, brown background to help the viewer distinguish three distinct **figures**.

About the Artist



Joseph Meierhans in his Gallery, 1966 / unidentified photographer. Joseph Meierhans papers, 1924-1969. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/joseph-meierhans-his-gallery-4650

Joseph Meierhans was born in Oberlunkhofen, Switzerland. In 1917, he came to the United States to work temporarily as a designer in a Swiss **textile** mill in New York City, and he never returned. During this time, he worked by day at the mill and then began to study painting by night and on weekends. Meierhans studied with A. N. Lindenmuth of Allentown, Pennsylvania, with Karl Knaths of Provincetown, Massachusetts and then with John Sloan at the Art Students League in New York City from 1919-1921.

After living and maintaining a studio in New York City for 15 years, Meierhans used the money he made through designing textiles and moved to Bucks County in 1932. Meierhans settled into an old Victorian home in Hagersville, Bedminster Township on 52 acres of farmland and lived there for 45 years with his wife Virginia. While in Bucks County, he continued to work as a pioneer of synthetic fabrics as chief fabric designer for the J.P. Stevens Company in New York commuting back and forth from his home until the mid-1950s. During World War II, he designed fabrics for the U.S. Army that was used for specific purposes, one of which was a waterproof cloth called "Joe cloth" used in the Arctic region.

Meierhans joined the avant-garde American **Abstract** Artists group in New York in 1946. This group began in 1936 and grew out of frustration by artists that abstract art was not being recognized by most galleries, museums and art organizations in the U.S. In 1956, he converted a 200-foot chicken coop into his own art gallery featuring premiere Delaware Valley artists which operated for over 20 years. During his time in Bucks County, he became involved with the Penridge School District and the Bucks County Superintendent's office to help with acquisitions of work for both the school district's art collection and The Traveling Art Gallery, a collection of works that rotated in all of the Bucks County schools from the early 1940s through the late 1980s.

Meierhans' style constantly evolved throughout his career. His early work was in watercolor and oil and contained recognizable subjects. Meierhans painted the mountainous landscapes of his native Switzerland as well as American east coast scenery. His professional career as a **textile** designer led to a concern for **texture** and color. His later work moved to complete **abstraction**, which became his preferred style. He derived his inspiration as a painter from nature and scenes from everyday life. His work was strongly concerned with **composition**, form and color. Meierhans was always experimenting and felt his approach was closest to the artist Wassily Kandinsky. He stated in 1961, "Every painting I do is different. It can never be duplicated."

Meierhans was a prolific painter, and when interviewed at age 85, stated he was painting every day, trying to get as much in as possible because "there is simply not enough time to explore all the things I would like to do." Shortly afterward, in 1977, he stated that he had completed 1,067 paintings. That same year, Meierhans moved to Murphy, North Carolina and passed away four years later shortly before his 91st birthday.

In the Words of the Artist

"A painting must sing for the eye as music does for the ears." -*James A. Michener Art Museum Archives, n.d.*

"Some say that artists carry things too far, but we know that the world would stand still if no one ventured beyond the limits of the familiar." -*Princeton Gallery of Fine Art, 1985*

"When great art is deeply felt and understood, it ceases to be a collection of beautiful objects and becomes instead a succession of gateways. When this happens, art reveals the path of beauty." -*Princeton Gallery of Fine Art, 1985*

"To me, art is a continual search...I am convinced that there is at the core of life...of all of us...a pattern, a **rhythm** that is basic and fundamental. This is what I am seeking with my paintings...to discover...to explain." -*Bucks County Traveler, 1958*

"Modern Art touches on many fields in life; it is not just painting a pretty little picture to hang on the wall. Art goes much deeper than that. It is a pulse of the world driving for newer forms and conceptions." -*Princeton Gallery of Fine Art, 1985*

"Why should not an artist reach out into unknown territories to discover new ways of painting, different ways of construction, and unfamiliar ways of using composition, form and color?" -*Princeton Gallery of Fine Art, 1985*

"Music acts directly on the soul. So does form and color. The more I see, the more I can see new combinations and intriguing form and color. I'm always thinking of the next painting before I finish the last." -*Intelligencer, 1977*

Interdisciplinary Connections

Interdisciplinary connections can be made between *The Jazz Trio* and a variety of subjects. The lesson ideas, listed below for elementary through high school students, are provided as a way to enrich curricula and make meaningful connections with the work by Joseph Meierhans. To make connections students can:

Visual Arts

- Identify the various **tints** and **shades** of colors in the *The Jazz Trio* painting. Experiment with creating **tints** and **shades** of different colors by mixing in white or black paint.
- Paint an **abstract** painting that contains every **primary**, **secondary** and **neutral** color. Mix your own colors using only red, yellow and blue paint. *Optional:* Use white to help create neutral colors.
- Practice different types of **figure drawing**. Draw an **abstract** figure using only line and shape. Take turns posing as the model.
- Create an artwork inspired by your favorite song. Share it with your classmates and see if they can guess the song.
- Make a movement painting by putting a piece of paper, a marble and some paint in a closed box. Then dance and shake the box around to the music of different styles.
- Design and build an **abstract** musical instrument sculpture out of recycled materials inspired by *The Jazz Trio*. Bonus if the instrument actually plays music!

Performing Arts

- Discover the sounds of various jazz instruments by playing real instruments, listening to recordings, or playing on [PBSKids Jazz](#).
- Perform an **improvisational** spoken word poem about the painting. Include what you see and how the painting makes you feel.
- In a small group, choreograph and perform an interpretive dance inspired by this painting. What types of movement would you use? Will you move fast or slow? How will you interact with the other members of your group?

Art History

- Meierhans was influenced by artists like Joan Miró and Wassily Kandinsky who used music to inspire their artwork. Look at examples of artwork by these artists and discuss their similarities and differences with the work of Meierhans.
- Look at both *The Jazz Trio* and Pablo Picasso's *Three Musicians* and discuss the similarities and differences. Which one do you prefer? Explain why.
- Find a work of art from the Michener's permanent collection during a visit or by visiting the Michener's page on the [Google Cultural Institute](#). Compare and contrast your chosen artwork to *The Jazz Trio* using a Venn diagram.

- Meierhans studied early in his career with John Sloan and Karl Knaths and was influenced by their work. Look at examples of work by these artists and discuss their similarities and differences with the work of Meierhans.

Language Arts

- Write a poem about the colors in the *The Jazz Trio* painting. Use rich adjectives and metaphors to describe the colors.
- If you could hear this painting, what kinds of sounds would you hear? Are they loud? Soft? Do you hear a single sound? Many sounds? Where are they coming from? After you have identified all these sounds, write a short story inspired by these sounds.
- Read and interpret the lyrics to some famous jazz songs by artists like Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington that might have inspired this painting. *Optional:* Create an artwork to go along with one of these jazz songs.
- Read the picture book *The Jazz Fly* by Matthew Gollub or *This Jazz Man* by Karen Ehrhardt as an introduction to jazz music.

Social Studies/History

- Browse the Michener's [Bucks County Artists' Database](#) to find other artists who were connected to the group of modernist artists in the Bucks County region including Lloyd Ney, Charles Evans or Louis Stone. Select one artist to research in further detail and create a short presentation to share your information. Make an oral presentation or a slideshow using a presentation tool like [Haiku Deck](#).
- Research the Jazz Era and create a timeline of important events. Make your timeline on poster board or use an interactive timeline creator like [Tiki-Toki](#).
- Interview a great-grand parent or someone else that was alive in the 1920s or 1930s. Ask them a few questions about what it was like growing up in that decade. Present your interview in a creative way (ie. magazine article, news report).

Mathematics and Science

- Meierhans and many other **abstract** artists used shapes in their paintings. What **geometric** and **organic shapes** do you see in *The Jazz Trio* or his other **abstract** artworks?
- Use a compass to measure the various **obtuse** and **acute angles** created by the lines in the painting.
- Find **intersecting** lines, **parallel** lines, vertical lines, and horizontal lines in the painting. *Optional:* Create your own line drawing.
- Explore the science of color mixing and color theory to mix your own **primary**, **secondary** and **neutral** colors.
- Meierhan's worked with the U.S. Army during WWII to design a synthetic fabric to be worn in the Arctic. Learn more about the science behind **camouflage** design and how artists contributed to the invention and creation of **camouflage**.

Key Vocabulary

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract • Acute angle • Camouflage • Composition • Contrast • Figure drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal point • Geometric shape • Improvisation • Intersecting • Modernism • Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtuse angle • Organic shape • Parallel • Pattern • Primary color • Rhythm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition • Secondary color • Shade • Textile • Texture • Tint
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Themes

The Jazz Trio addresses a variety of themes for discussion and lesson planning. These include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstraction • Modernism • Pattern/ repetition • Rhythm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color theory • Painting • Geometric/org anic shapes • Textile arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jazz Era • Tints/shades • Music • Primary/ secondary colors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lines/ angles • Artistic experiment ation • Bucks County Artists • World War II
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More Michener Connections

Discover these additional works and/or artists at your next visit to the Michener, on the Museum's [Bucks County Artists' Database](#), or at the Michener's page on the Google Cultural Institute website to compare and contrast them with the work of Joseph Meierhans.

Kaloidis, Lee. *02-24-09*, 2009, oil on canvas. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/1612)

Keene Jr., Paul F. *Street Quartet*, 1990, acrylic on canvas.

(www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/434)

Meierhans, Joseph. *Untitled*, n.d. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/383)

Meierhans, Joseph. *Untitled*, n.d. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/384)

Ney, Lloyd (Bill). *Study for New London Facets, Panel 1*, 1940, charcoal, graphite and tempera on gessoed laminated wood panel. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/465)

Ramsey, Charles F. *The Modern Woman*, 1934, oil on canvas.

(www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/1819)

Rosen, Jack. *Paul Whiteman at Lambertville Music Circus*, n.d., photograph.

(www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/940)

Stone, Louis. *On Parade*, n.d., oil on canvas. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/1821)

Stone, Louis. *Untitled*, c. 1940, oil on canvas. (www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/image/1197)

Zenk, Joseph. *Swinging (Tension)*, 1938, oil on canvas.

(www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/swinging-tension/ogFJGTCbou_fig)

*all works above accessed 1 August 2017



Joseph Zenk (1904-2000), *Swinging (Tension)*, 1938, oil on canvas. W.36 x H.48 inches. James A. Michener Art Museum. Gift of Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest.



Charles F. Ramsey (1875-1951), *The Modern Woman*, 1934, oil on canvas. W.30 x H.40 inches. James A. Michener Art Museum. Gift of Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest.



Paul F. Keene, Jr. (1920-2009), *Street Quartet*, 1990, acrylic on canvas, H.54 1/2" x W.52 1/2 inches. James A. Michener Art Museum. Purchased with funds provided by Anne and Joseph Gardocki.



Lloyd Raymond Ney, *Study for New London Facets, Panel I*, 1940, charcoal, graphite and tempera on gessoed laminated wood panel, H. 69 1/4 x W. 41 3/4 inches. James A. Michener Art Museum. Museum purchase and partial gift in honor of Dr. Marvin and Muriel Sultz, Elkins Park, PA.

Selected Resources

Web Tools

PBSKids: www.pbskids.org/chuck/jazz_sounds.html

Haiku Deck: www.haikudeck.com

Tiki-Toki: www.tiki-toki.com

Google Cultural Institute: www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/partner/james-a-michener-art-museum

Bucks County Artists' Database: www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists

Websites

"Joseph Meierhans." *Bucks County Artists' Database*, James A. Michener Art Museum, 2017, www.michenerartmuseum.org/bucksartists/artist/149/

"Joseph Meierhans in his Gallery," *Smithsonian Institution*, 1966, Archives of American Art, 2017, www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/joseph-meierhans-his-gallery-4650

"Joseph Meierhans." *Permanent Collection Mobile App*, James A. Michener Art Museum, 2017, www.michenerartmuseum.oncell.com/en/joseph-meierhans-155167.html

Neszmelyi-Romano, Adrienne. "School Stories: Artist Joseph Meierhans and The Pennridge School District," *Learn with the Michener Art Museum*, 18, Aug. 2017.

<https://learnmichener.org/uncategorized/school-stories-artist-joseph-meierhans-pennridge-school-district/>

"Permanent Collection Youth Audio Tour." *James A. Michener Art Museum*, 1 August, 2017.

<https://spts.us/mam/youth-audio-tour>

"The Jazz Trio." *Google Arts and Culture*, 2017, www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset/the-jazz-trio/7gG1GuLIUDcuhw

“Three Musicians.” *Museum of Modern Art*, Audio Courtesy of Audioguide, 2017,
www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/372/5987

Books and Education Resources for Teachers and Students

Ehrhardt, Karen. *This Jazz Man*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2010.

Gollub, Matthew W. *The Jazz Fly*. Santa Rosa, CA: Tortuga Press, 2000.

“Michener Goes Modern, Traveling Trunk.” *James A. Michener Art Museum*. Web. 1 August 2017.

www.michenerartmuseum.org/education/schools-teachers/traveling-trunk-program/michener-goes-modern

Common Core Standards: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.G.A.1; CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.G.A.2;
CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.4.MD.C.5.A; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2.A/B/C/D/E; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1.A/B/C/D; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.5

Pennsylvania State Standards: Arts and Humanities: 9.1, 9.2, 9.3, 9.4; Social Studies: H.8.2;
Science: 3.2

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