

## Two-Dimensional Media

Paint is a medium created by combining a pigment with a binder. The different types of binders and pigments allow for paint to be a diverse medium that transcends the limit of time. Although the first paintings were created over 45,000 years ago, paint is still used as an artistic medium. The diversity of paint is what makes it so widespread, a painter can choose to use an acrylic paint to create a quick work of art, a fresco to make a brilliant piece of art, or choose to use an oil paint to create a blended and precise work of art. With these different mediums and different supports artists can create a wide range of art to express themselves.

The artwork discussed in this paper is *American Progress* by John Gast. This work is often used to communicate the idea of “Manifest Destiny” and show how politics and art are intertwined. In *American Progress*, Gast uses the principles of Focal Point, Motion and Time, Color, and Proportion to convey the sense of growth and American idealism.

The Focal Point of this piece is an angelic lady in a wispy white dress. This figure helps the viewer to understand the ideology behind the people traveling west, they believe that a god is commanding them to travel west and “civilize” the lands. The fact that this figure is the focal point of the painting shows how important religion was in this expansion to the west. The highlights on the lady and the scale of her are the main factors that make her the focal point.

In *American Progress*, Gast uses implied motion to help the viewer understand the journey that these pioneers have embarked on. The different groups of people at different stages of the westward expansion show how the people of the Americas changed over time. On the right side of the painting, or the eastern seaboard, there are ships, trains, and cities. From right to

left the technological level of the painting decreases. This implies that over time the technology is being brought to the west, but slowly.

Gast uses color in his piece to show how good it is that the pioneers are traveling westward. The right side of the painting with the cities and boats are light and airy, the use of oil paint helped Gast to create a blended piece that establishes unity and comfort. The soft pastels also evoke a sense of divinity, that this landscape is what god wants. On the left side of the painting the use of darker colors shows that this side of the painting is less favorable. The colors aren't as blended out and everything looks sharper and more dangerous. This further enforces the idea that the groups in the painting needed to move west to make those areas better.

The scale of the idyllic lady compared to the rest of the figures shows how important she is to the settlers who are moving west. This helps the viewer understand that she represents God and the power of Him. The size of her compared to the size of the land shows how far her reach is. American Progress depicts the Americas from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans, and the amount of land that the figure covers shows that she, and her divine counterpart, are guiding the whole country.

The artist who created American Progress was John Gast. Gast was born in Berlin, Prussia in 1842 and emigrated to the Americas with his family in the 1850s. His work *American Progress* is his most famous piece of art, but he also practiced lithography. His Father was considered a master lithographer, and he launched a lithography paper. His other works include *Bluffs on the Mississippi Below the Arsenal*, *Angel Sitting on Mountain Top*, and *Untitled*. Many of his works depict the natural beauty of the American West and promote a sense of patriotism in the viewer.

