Wayne Thiebaud Food Painting

Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced TEE-bo) is a contemporary American artist who creates some very delicious looking paintings! Thiebaud was born in Arizona in 1920, and grew up in southern California. His paintings are visual memories of the food served at the many family gatherings he went to as a kid. Some of the paintings are memories of diners that he worked in as an adult. (The above painting is called *Around the Cake.*)

- Think about family picnics, reunions and holidays you have attended. Was there a big table filled with food?
- Think about Deli’s and restaurants you have been to. What do the food or dessert cases look like with the items all lined up or arranged for display? (The painting on the right is called *Bakery Counter.*

There are many things that influence Thiebaud’s style as a painter. In addition to the memories that inspire his subject matter, some of his experiences encourage how he creates his compositions. (The painting on the left is called *Pies, Pies, Pies.*

Handout created by S. Wagner-Marx
When he was young Wayne drew cartoons in his free time and worked as an apprentice for Disney animation studios. In high school he spent time working on sets, lighting and posters for the theater events. When he was older he worked for a while as a commercial artist and created illustrations and advertising art. Eventually he decided to become a fine art painter.

The heavy outlines of the shapes and objects in his paintings remind us of the outlines that define cartoons. Wayne frequently used outlines, or halos, of complimentary colors to make his objects pop out for the viewer. He called this technique “halation.” The dramatic shadows that are cast by the objects in his paintings show the influence of theater and lighting in Thiebaud’s work. Finally, the stark blank backgrounds show his experience with illustration and advertising. (The above painting is called Cakes.)

Thiebaud’s paintings also make reference to a couple of different art movements. In the 1950’s Wayne saw an exhibit of Abstract Expressionist paintings in New York. The Abstract Expressionists painted quickly and used thick brushstrokes. The frosting-like textures in Wayne’s paintings resemble the artwork created by the Abstract Expressionists. The repetition and portrayal of everyday items in his paintings are also reminiscent of the Pop Art movement. Thiebaud, however, did not wish to criticize consumer culture. (The above painting is called Caged Pie.)

Project

For this project you will be creating an acrylic painting in the style of Wayne Thiebaud. As a class we will create a still life of sweets and desserts. From this still life we will create contour line drawings that we will transfer to a
canvas board. We’ll use paint to create **texture** and **color** in our paintings. When creating your composition, please keep the following in mind:

- Include only what is necessary in your design. Keep it simple and focus on the basic shape, rather than the detail, of the object you are portraying in your composition. Use **geometric shapes** like circles, ovals, and triangles to define your subjects.

- Formally organize your repeated shapes. Will your composition be **symmetrical**, **asymmetrical**, or **radial**? How will shadows connect to the objects? Will your shapes all be the same size?

- What colors will you use and how will they create **contrast**? Can you use “**halation**” to make objects pop out? Will the background, or **negative space**, color be a complement to the colors of your food? How will **value** (lightness or darkness of an object) contribute?