

LESSONS

LESSON ONE: Rise of the Modern City



IMAGE ONE: André Derain. French, 1880–1954. *London Bridge (Pont de Londres)*. 1906. Oil on canvas, 26 x 39" (66 x 99.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Zadok. © 2005 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



IMAGE TWO: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. German, 1880–1938. *Street, Dresden*. 1908 (dated 1907 on painting). Oil on canvas, 59 1/4" x 6' 6 7/8" (150.5 x 200.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase



IMAGE THREE: Jacques-Henri Lartigue. French, 1894–1986. *Paris, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne*. 1911. Gelatin silver print, 11 7/8" x 15 3/4" (29.5 x 40 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the photographer

INTRODUCTION

The late nineteenth century saw the rise of the modern city shaped by industry, innovations in transportation, and shifting politics. During this period and throughout the early twentieth century, the urban experience became an important artistic subject.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn to broaden their descriptive and analytical vocabulary through comparisons and close analysis of works of art.
- Students will discuss changes taking place in the modern world and the psychological effects on the artists discussed in this guide.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

- Take a close look at André Derain's *London Bridge* (Image One) and describe what you see, using a variety of different words. How would you describe it to someone who has never seen it? Make a list of five to ten adjectives that apply to this painting.
- What kind of city do you think this painting is depicting? Think about *industry, population, and atmosphere* (the "feel" of a place). What do you see in the painting that supports your ideas?

In 1905, André Derain, a French Fauve painter, was **commissioned** by his art dealer Ambroise Vollard to paint views of London. Derain stayed in London for about two months, painting about thirty pictures. All of these paintings depict activity on or around the Thames, the wide river flowing directly through the heart of the city that was (and still is) both a tourist attraction and an essential part of London's industry. Derain set up his easel outdoors, and painted what was directly in front of him.

Nineteenth-century London underwent a huge growth in population following industrial developments, especially the building of the railways, beginning with the 1836 London and Greenwich line. London's population rose from about one million in 1800 to over six million a century later. Grand new architectural projects had been built in the city center, including several bridges over the River Thames, such as London Bridge, depicted in this painting. In 1905, the year before Derain painted this image, London Bridge had been widened to accommodate pedestrians.

Despite London's intense activity, Derain sought to create images of calm and tranquility. That same year, he wrote a letter to Matisse, which said:

I sincerely believe that we ought to aim for calm. . . . This calm is something of which we can be certain. Beauty, then, ought to be an aspiration towards this calm.²

- How do you think Derain evokes the "calm" he was aiming for?
- Now that you know more about London during this time, comment on the aspects of the city Derain chose to focus on. How do you think his choice of material, subject, and composition reflect his attitude to this modern city? Give examples from the work to support your ideas.

2. André Derain, January 1906, quoted in Judi Freeman, *The Fauve Landscape* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990), 85.

- ***Street, Dresden* (Image Two), painted by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in his studio, is based on the artist's memories of walking about the city. In contrast, Derain painted *London Bridge* in the open air, setting up his easel along the banks of the river. Analyze these differences in approach and how they might affect the making of a work of art.**
- **Imagine that you are part of the scene depicted in Kirchner's *Street, Dresden*. Describe what it might be like to walk along that street. Compare and contrast *Street, Dresden* with Derain's *London Bridge*. Use visual evidence to support your ideas.**
- **Make a list of ten sounds that you might associate with the scene in *Street, Dresden*. Look closely at all the areas of the painting. Compare the sounds you associate with Kirchner's painting with those you might associate with Derain's painting. What are the main differences?**

At the time this was painted, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was twenty-eight years old and living in Dresden, a large city in southeast Germany. His studio, a former butcher's shop, was the meeting point for the artist's group the Brücke, formed in 1905, of which he was a founding member. In a letter to fellow painter Erich Heckel, he wrote of the Dresden crowds:

Completely strange faces pop up as interesting points through the crowd. I am carried along with the current, lacking will. To move becomes an unacceptable effort.³

During the nineteenth century, Dresden's population quadrupled from 95,000 in 1849 to nearly 400,000 in 1900 as a result of a boom in industry, especially food processing and the production of medical equipment. By the time this picture was painted, Dresden had over 500,000 inhabitants. The scene depicted in *Street, Dresden* is the fashionable Königstrasse (King Street), where wealthy inhabitants went to shop and to socialize.

- **How does Kirchner express his opinion of the city in this painting? Give examples.**
- **Compare the choices that Kirchner and Derain made when painting the modern city. Using evidence from each painting, discuss the artists' use of color, composition, and setting, and analyze their attitude to the city.**
- **How do the different places in which Kirchner and Derain executed their paintings seem to have impacted their work?**
- **Now examine the photograph *Paris, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne* (Image Three), by Jacques-Henri Lartigue. What might be happening? Describe the scene.**
- **Compare this photograph to Derain's *London Bridge* and Kirchner's *Street, Dresden*. What are some of the similarities and differences between the three works? How does Lartigue's attitude to the city differ from that of Derain and Kirchner?**

This photograph, taken in 1911 by Jacques-Henri Lartigue, depicts a pair of fashionable ladies walking along the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, a tree-lined avenue in Paris. Lartigue began to photograph at the age of seven, and was only seventeen years old when he took this picture. Throughout his career, he photographed daily life in Paris, often focusing on the leisure activities of the upper-middle classes, of which he was a member. Although Lartigue's

3. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, quoted in Sherwin Simmons, "Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immorality in Berlin, 1913–16," in *Art Bulletin*, 82, no. 1 (March 2000), 123.

work seems lighthearted and informal, and was intended for his own and his family's amusement, it tells us a great deal about the changes taking place in Europe during the early twentieth century.

ACTIVITIES

1. Looking at London (Image One)

Have students research one of Derain's other London paintings, using a map of London to pinpoint the view and analyzing Derain's choice of setting and use of color. Why do you think he chose a particular scene? What impression of London does it give?

List of Web sites for this activity

1. For Derain's London paintings, see:

Houses of Parliament at Night

www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/viewone.asp?dep=15&viewmode=0&item=1975%2E1%2E168

London: St Paul's Cathedral Seen from the Thames

www.artsmia.org/mia/e_images/06/mia_6842e.jpg

The Pool of London

www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N06/N06030_9.jpg

2. For old photographs of London, see:

www.images-of-london.co.uk/OldPhotos.htm

3. For a map of London, see:

www.map-of-london.co.uk/map.html

The artist Claude Monet also visited London several times, between 1870 and 1904. Research Monet's scenes of London and compare and contrast them with Derain's. Do you see any differences between them? What do you think is the difference between the two artists' attitudes to the city? How do they convey their attitudes?

For Monet's London paintings, see:

Houses of Parliament, London, Sun Breaking Through the Fog

artchive.com/artchive/M/monet/sun_fog.jpg.html

The Thames at Westminster

artchive.com/artchive/M/monet/wminster.jpg.html

Think about which scenes of your hometown you would depict if you were trying to give a sense of it to someone who had never been there. Why would you use those particular scenes? What impression of the place are you trying to give?

2. A Letter from Dresden (Image Two)

Research the history, geography, and city plan of Dresden. Imagine you are living in Dresden during the time Kirchner painted *Street, Dresden*. Now write a letter to a friend or family member describing your experience of the city, based on the painting and your research.

3. Haussmann's Paris (Image Three)

Between 1850 and 1870, following periods of revolution, the streets of Paris were transformed by town planner Baron Georges Haussmann. Many of the densely crowded and

winding streets were destroyed to make way for broad avenues that eradicated overcrowding, created better traffic circulation, and improved the government's chances at quelling future uprisings.

Have your students research the changes in Paris between 1850 and 1870, making note of the city's layout before and after Haussmann's design. What effect might these changes have had on the citizens? Imagine that you are living in Paris during this period. Name five positive and five negative impacts that the new town planning might have had on daily life.