

BAM-AT-HOME

WOMEN IN AMERICAN IMPRESSIONISM: THREE MASTERWORKS FROM THE SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

MARY CASSATT (1844-1926)

Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla, 1873

(see larger image, pg. 4)



A portrait can be defined as a representation of a particular person, animal, or other being or creature. Current technology and social media have introduced the selfie as a new, 21st-century self-portrait.

- When you take a selfie, what compositional choices do you make?
(such as lighting, pose, cropping, background, etc.)

Look closely at Mary Cassatt's painting.

- What compositional elements stand out to you?
- What mood is conveyed by the artist's compositional choices of pose, color, light, etc., in the painting?

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Google world events for the period just before and when this painting was made [1865-1873].

- What other events or discoveries can you add to the timeline that tell you more about this time period?

1873

- San Francisco cable car makes debut
- First known color photographs are developed
- First train robbery by Jesse James
- Based on your search, what might it have been like for an American woman to travel and live in France and Spain in 1873?
- What might it have been like for an American man?
- How might it be different/the same today?

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION–Mary Cassatt

- grew up in Philadelphia
- spent most of her adult life in Paris
- left Paris in the early 1870s and traveled to Spain
- set up a studio in Seville and painted *Spanish Dancer*
- As a female artist during a period dominated by male artists, Mary Cassatt devoted her life to her artistic practice – she did not conform to the social norms of marrying and raising children.
- She is considered to be America’s leading Impressionist.
- She was the only woman to exhibit with the French Impressionists in Paris.
- She helped to increase the popularity of the Impressionist style in the United States.
- Her paintings met a need in society to romanticize women’s domestic roles at a time when women were seeking and making changes – pursuing legal voting rights, dress reform, higher education, and social equity.
- Can you imagine the kind of life the woman in this painting might have lived?

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Write a caption for this painting as though it were an Instagram post.



The image shows a simulated Instagram post. At the top is a white navigation bar with a camera icon on the left, the word "Instagram" in the center, and icons for a calendar and a share arrow on the right. Below this bar is a circular profile picture of the Boise Art Museum (BAM) and a three-dot menu icon. The main content is a painting of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white lace veil and a white lace dress, holding a colorful folding fan. Below the painting is a row of four icons: a heart, a speech bubble, a share arrow, and a bookmark. At the bottom is a large, empty rectangular box for writing a caption.

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Mary Cassatt, *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla*, 1873, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Victoria Dreyfus, 1967.40

part 3, pg. 4

MARY CASSATT (1844-1926)

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Her paintings met a need in society to romanticize women’s domestic roles at a time when women were seeking and making changes – pursuing legal voting rights, dress reform, higher education, and social equity.

Many of these changes were discussed in salons – parlors, or living rooms. People came together to talk about social and political changes, literature, music, and performance. They played games and expressed their creativity in these gatherings.

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPT

Studying a painting can be like reading a book. It can allow you to forget where you actually are while you imaginatively enter another time and place.

Study Cassatt’s painting until you feel yourself in the midst of it, facing the Spanish Dancer in Cassatt’s studio.

Answer the prompts below. By doing so, you will have a prose-poem when you are finished.

In Cassatt’s studio...

I see _____

I touch _____

I smell _____

I think _____

I wish _____

I wonder _____

I am _____

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Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla, 1873

- Did writing change the way you observed the painting? If so, how?
- What don't we know about the woman in this painting?
Does she enjoy dancing? How long has she been dancing? Does she do it for work or pleasure? Is it part of her heritage? How did she meet/know Mary Cassatt? What was the relationship between Cassatt and this woman?, etc.
- What would you like to ask the woman in the painting?
- What would you like to ask Mary Cassatt?

Share your prose-poem with BAM!

Email: Emily Nadel, Curator of Education
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Include: Name, Grade, School