

WALTZING THE MUSE:
THE PAINTINGS OF JAMES MICHALOPOULOS

MARCH 1 THROUGH JULY 16
PRESENTING SPONSORS: HENRY AND PAT SHANE

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About the Guide

This guide is intended for use in conjunction with a Museum visit and as a tool to extend the experience after the tour. *The tour experience in this guide aligns with Common Core Standards and National Core Standards for the Arts.*

Before You Visit

A gift of art from Louisiana businessman Roger Ogden to his mother nearly 40 years ago marked the beginning of a collection that today forms the heart of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art. Captivated by the beauty of *Blue Lagoon*, a painting by Alexander Drysdale, Ogden was inspired to assemble a body of work that recounted the history and changing aesthetics of painting in Louisiana. Gradually, he began to expand to collect works by artists from other Southern states and in other media, including sculpture, photography, works on paper, and self-taught art. Since then, the collection has grown to become the largest and most comprehensive assemblage of Southern Art in the world, with works from artists born in, working from, or creating work about southern American states, including Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

Today the Ogden Museum exists to protect and preserve these artworks so that all may enjoy. We ask that you observe the following rules while visiting:

- **Keep the artwork safe - no touching paintings, sculptures, cases, pedestals, or museum labels**
- **No food, drink, or chewing gum**
- **No flash photography**
- **Backpacks and large bags must be checked with security**
- **Students must stay with docent-led tour groups at all times**

Please note that restrooms are located on the 2nd (accessible only by elevator) and 5th floors. A teacher or chaperone must accompany all students to the restroom.

On the Tour

Students visiting the museum will enjoy group discussions where they will be asked to carefully observe artworks and then explain “what is going on” in a particular piece of art. As museum docents prompt them to support their interpretations with evidence, students will engage their reasoning and logic skills through a method called Visual Thinking Strategies, which is proven to build capacity for critical thinking. More information is available at www.vtshome.org.

After the Tour

Participating in post-tour activities helps students retain information and insight gained during the museum experience. Post-tour writing and art lesson plans are included here for use in the classroom.

Museum educators are also available to lead post-tour art activities at the museum (\$3.00 per student supply fee).

About the Artist



**Figure 1: The artist James Michalopoulos
(Romero & Romero Photography)**

Born in 1951 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, James Michalopoulos is an artist who works in both painting and sculpture. He is best known for his colorful and dynamic depictions of New Orleans architecture, musicians, and people, including five posters created for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

After Michalopoulos attended Bowdoin College in Maine, he traveled around the country living the life of a 'modern-day itinerant artist'ⁱ, eventually settling in New Orleans. At the time, permits for Jackson Square, a popular tourist destination and outdoor art market, were sold out, so he had

to get creative. Instead of selling finished works to visitors in the square, Michalopoulos would draw sketches of people waiting in line for taxis to make money and hone his technical skill.

Continuing his art education at the University of New Orleans and the New Orleans Academy of Fine Art, Michalopoulos began to develop the distinctive style that has won him wide recognition. Working at night to avoid the heat, he would load painting supplies and a portable radio onto his Vespa and ride around the French Quarter and Fauborg Marigny until he found a scene that intrigued him.

Tuned into the radio station WWOZ, Michalopoulos listened to jazz, blues, R&B, brass, gospel, Cajun, and zydeco music while he worked, lending the rhythmic, musical feel to his paintings that makes them instantly recognizable. The distinctive architecture of New Orleans, along with its cast of musicians, performers and ever-present soundtrack of music, cars, and movement combine to provide Michalopoulos a source of inspiration for his work.

The artist describes his work as occupying the intersection of **Expressionism** and **Impressionism**, with an emphasis on **color, shape**, and graphic **lines**, as well as a sense of place and spirit of the subject. Instead of a **paintbrush**, Michalopoulos uses a **palette knife** not just to mix colors on a **palette**, but also to sculpt the copious amounts of **oil paint** on his canvas into three-dimensional renderings of houses, **landscapes**, cars, and people.

"My charge is to present the subject in a way that shows its true character," Michalopoulos explains of his approach to the portraits. "So I really have to look at them and follow their energy and follow their spirit and try to present it in a way that is faithful, and places them in the environment of the city and their musical milieu."ⁱⁱⁱ

Glossary of Terms

- **Color** – the visual sensation dependent on the reflection or absorption of light from a given surface. The three characteristics of colors are hue, intensity, and value.
- **Line** – in visual art, the delineation or fracturing of space in color or black and white. Line qualities can vary in width, length, gesture, color, direction, etc.
- **Shape** – a two-dimensional area or plane that may be open or closed, free form or geometric. It can be found in nature or created by humans
- **Form** – (1) the particular characteristics of an artwork’s visual elements (as distinguished from its subject matter or content). (2) a three-dimensional volume or the illusion of three dimensions; related to shape, which is 2D.
- **Elements of art** – sensory components used to create and talk about works of art (line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space)
- **Linear perspective** – a graphic system used to create the illusion of depth and volume on a flat surface. In images of buildings and objects, the lines defining their edges and features are slanted, making them appear to extend back into space.
- **Texture** – the surface quality of materials, either actual or implied
- **Distortion** – the condition of being twisted or altered from a usual or regular shape. In visual art, distortion is often used as an expressive technique.
- **Mood** – the state of mind or emotion communicated in a work of art, through color, composition, media, size, scale, etc.
- **Oil paint** – oil-based pigment used with paint thinner, turpentine, or other non-water-based suspension
- **Palette knife** – an artist’s tool used for mixing or applying paint, with a flexible steel blade
- **Palette** – a flat surface where the artist arranges and mixes paints; usually made of wood or plastic.



Figure 2: A palette knife mixing oil paint

- **Painting knife** – an artist’s tool with a flexible steel blade used to apply paint on the canvas. It has a pointed tip, lowered or “cranked” like a trowel, suited for painting on canvas.
- **Landscape** – an image of the land, outside, or natural environment
- **Portrait** – an image of a person or a group of people
- **Urban** – an environment with high population density and large amount of human construction
- **Rural** – an environment with low population density and a small amount of human construction
- **Expressionism** – artwork in which is subject is presented solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effect or in order to evoke moods or ideas
- **Impressionism** – artwork that seeks to re-create the artist’s or viewer’s general impression of a scene

Post-Tour Writing Activity

Poetic Response: Creating a Haiku (Grades 2+), 50 minutes

James Michalopoulos often speaks of his paintings as “poetic interpretations” of scenes from real life. In this activity, students will use observation skills, personal reflection, and creativity to make their own poetic interpretation of a piece by Michalopoulos.

Prep:

- Project an image of **We Groovin’** by James Michalopoulos (available for download from http://ogdenmuseum.org/teacher_resources/)
- Each student needs a *Haiku* Worksheet (attached), a pencil, and eraser.
- Introduce project – We are going to observe a painting and then create a response in the form of a *haiku*, a special kind of poem that has strict rules about syllables.

Step 1: Ask students to observe the image like they did in the Museum, looking closely at tiny details and making sure their eyes travel over the whole painting. Observation should take about 2 minutes.



Figure 3: James Michalopoulos, *We Groovin’*. Oil on canvas, 2014. Courtesy the artist

Step 2: After observing, have students write down adjectives, or describing words, about what they see, what is going on, or even using their imagination about what *could* be happening, in the box that says “Word Bank”. It is okay to write down similar words and phrases. Creating the Word Bank should take about 10 minutes.

Example:

- Night
- Cloudy sky
- Streetlights on
- Man walks home
- Quiet street
- Tilting houses
- French Quarter
- Buildings dancing
- Moonlight

Step 3: After the Word Bank has been created, have students write down the number of syllables next to each word. For students struggling with syllables,

clapping each time they hear a different vowel sound in each word can be helpful. Counting syllables should take about 10 minutes.

Step 4: Explain *haiku* – a Japanese poem of 17 syllables, in three lines of 5, 7, and 5, that communicates to the reader or audience images of the natural world.

Step 5: Have students arrange their words from the Word Bank into haiku form by writing on the lines below, remembering that there are only 5 syllables allowed on the first line, 7 on the second, and 5 on the third. Adding in extra words, especially **verbs**, to create an action is also a good idea. Also remember that a haiku does **not** have to rhyme. Arranging the words to create the haiku can take up to 30 minutes.

Example:

*Man walks home with horn
Buildings dance in the moonlight
French Quarter streets sleep*

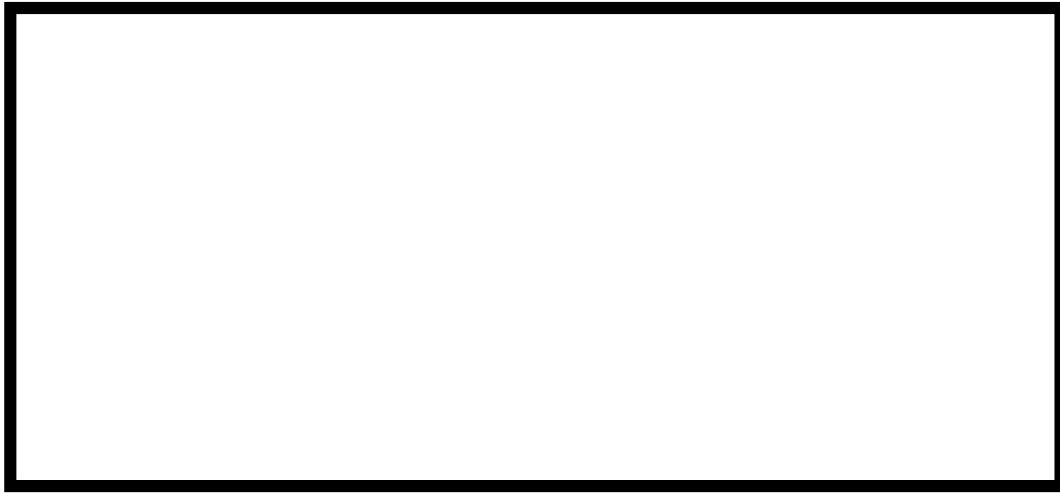
Wrap up: Pair sharing or sharing with the whole class is a great way to conclude the lesson, and reiterates that different people can have different interpretations, stories, or ideas about a work of art, and that’s what makes it interesting.

Display Work: Printing an image of the Michalopoulos painting discussed and displaying alongside the students’ poems in a classroom or hallway is a great way to showcase the work (cut *Haiku Worksheet* in half for display) and extend the experience.

Michalopoulos Haiku Worksheet

Name: _____

WORD BANK



(5)

(7)

(5)

Art Activity: Colorful Architecture Paintings

Suggested for: Early Childhood (PK - 1)

Approximate Time: 30 - 45 min

Materials:

- Architectural coloring page (printed on white card stock works best).
- Washable markers
- Soft-bristle (watercolor) brushes
- Water in small cups
- Paper towels

Introduction:

The artist James Michalopoulos creates unique paintings based on the historic buildings found in the New Orleans neighborhoods of the French Quarter and the Fauborg Marigny. His use of strong colors and mostly nighttime skies results in works that are beautiful but also express a mood or a feeling.

Step 1: LOOK

Project Image of **Dark Horse** by Michalopoulos (available at http://ogdenmuseum.org/teacher_resources/).

Take a minute to look closely at an image of Michalopoulos' artwork and consider these questions:

- What **colors** do you notice? Where are they?
- What time of day do you think it is? Why?
- What mood or feeling do you get from this painting (happy, excited, sad, scary, lonely)? Why?

Step 2: ADD COLOR

Using washable markers, add color to the coloring page. It's not necessary to color in ALL the white space - in fact, the end result is better when you leave some white space on the page. Remember that Michalopoulos uses bright colors in his work. What bright or strong colors can you use?

Step 3: PAINT

Turn marker into paint by using a soft-bristle brush, brushing first over the marker on the page and then spreading the color to white space. You will see the colors move and even mix to make new ones. Use paper towels to blot excess water at the end.



Figure 5: Adding color with markers but leaving some white space



Figure 4: After the wet paintbrush has been used

Option: Have students draw their own houses, first with pencil then trace over with permanent marker or Sharpie. Then, add color using markers and go over with a wet paintbrush.

Art Activity: Nature Up Close

Suggested for: Elementary (2 +)

Approximate Time: 30 - 45 min

Materials:

- Watercolor paper or white card stock
- Crayon (or oil pastel if available)
- Soft-bristle (watercolor) brushes
- Water in small cups (up to 4 students can share)
- Watercolors or tempera paint
- Paper towels

Introduction:

*The artist James Michalopoulos creates unique paintings of nature that surrounds his studio and home in France, using layers upon layers of paint. Looking at nature up close can give us a different view of the living things that surround us. We can use color and layering to create a “**resist**” painting of nature.*

Step 1: LOOK

Project image of **Water Lilies** by Michalopoulos and other **nature images** (available at http://ogdenmuseum.org/teacher_resources/).

Take a minute to look closely at an image of nature up close.

- What **colors** do you notice?
- What **shapes** do you see?
- What details can you observe?
- What do you think the **texture** would be if you touched the objects in the picture? Smooth? Bumpy? Rough? Jagged?

Step 2: DRAW

Using crayon or oil pastel, draw what you see in the image, keeping in mind **line, shape, color, and texture**. **Remember to leave some white space – we will fill in all the background white space with paint in the next step.**

Step 3: PAINT

Using watercolor (or watered-down tempera if liquid) and a soft-bristle brush, gently mix water into the paint until it is “juicy”. Choose one color to use for background and brush color across the entire page, even over crayon or pastel. Because wax or oil and water do not mix, we create a *resist*, keeping drawn lines from mixing with paint. **Blot gently with paper towels to dry.**



Figure 6: Drawing with crayon or oil pastel, leaving some white space in background



Figure 7: Painting with watercolor on top of the crayon or oil pastel

Art Activity: Reimagining Jazzfest Posters
Suggested for: Middle School (6th grade +)
Approximate Time: 45 min - 1 hr

Materials:

- 8.5" x 11" paper (card stock or heavy drawing paper or watercolor paper works best)
- Hi-res images (available for educational use from the Ogden Museum's Education Department)
- Pencil + eraser
- Sharpie or pen
- Colors (markers, colored pencil, watercolor + brushes + small cups with water + paper towels)

Introduction:

The artist James Michalopoulos has been asked to create Jazzfest Posters for some of New Orleans' greatest performers and musicians, including Allen Toussaint, Dr. John, Fats Domino, Louis Armstrong, Mahalia Jackson, and Aaron Neville. The great success of the poster is that all the musicians or performers are recognizable, even without their names on the poster.

Step 1: LOOK

Project image of **Rockin' to New Orleans** by Michalopoulos (available at http://ogdenmuseum.org/teacher_resources/).

Take a minute to look closely at an image of Michalopoulos' artwork and consider these questions:

- How can we tell what kind of musician or performer is shown?
- Where are the musicians or performers located/What is the setting?
- What words do you notice? Where are they placed?
- What other details can you observe?

Step 2: DRAW

Using a pencil on paper turned vertically (hot dog or portrait orientation), draw a picture of a performer(s) or musician(s) you wish you could see at Jazzfest. Include details that give the viewer information about their instrument, style or music, or group. Don't forget the background - you can use it to provide additional details about your person (or people). You can also include the

words "New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival 2018" in a lettering style all your own.

Step 3: TRACE + ERASE

With pen or Sharpie, trace over the pencil lines you'd like to keep. When finished, use your eraser to remove all pencil marks from the page.

Step 4: COLOR

Use any medium to add color to your piece (markers, crayons, colored pencil, watercolors + brushes + small cups with water + paper towels). Be careful, go slowly, and take your time filling in the shapes with the medium you have chosen.

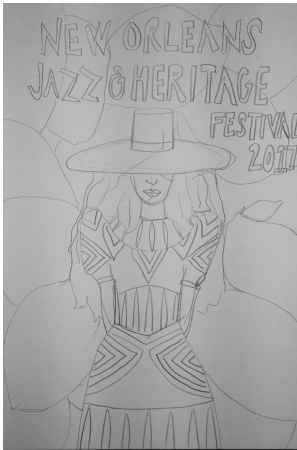


Figure 8: Drawing performer, background, lettering in pencil



Figure 10: Tracing over pencil lines and erasing all pencil marks



Figure 9: Adding color

Art Activity: Perspective Drawings
Suggested for: High School (9th - 12th)
Approximate Time: 45 min - 1 hour

Materials:

- Legal size copy paper or any size drawing paper
- Pencil and eraser
- Ruler or straightedge
- Colored pencils, markers, or watercolor
- **Images are available for use on download page.**

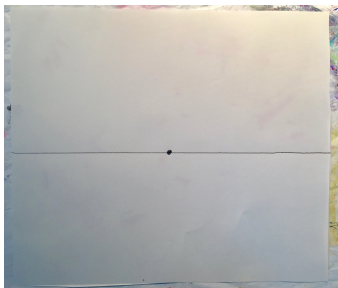
Introduction:

*In his paintings of historic neighborhoods of New Orleans such as the French Quarter and Marigny, James Michalopoulos uses a technique of creating an illusion of 3D objects (streets, houses, buildings, cars) on a flat, 2D surface (canvas), which is called **linear perspective**.*

Step 1: LOOK

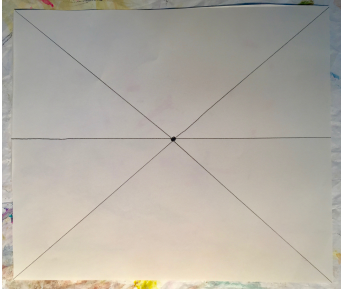
Project image of **We Groovin'** by Michalopoulos (available at http://ogdenmuseum.org/teacher_resources/)

Observe images of street scenes painted by Michalopoulos, and notice how things in the distance are smaller and lines recede into the distance. The receding lines are called **orthogonal lines** and they all converge, or come together, at the **vanishing point**. Try to identify orthogonal lines and vanishing point in the images.



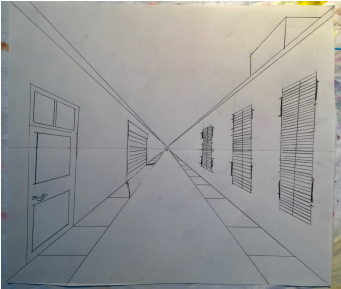
Step 2: SET UP PERSPECTIVE

Using a pencil and a straight edge, begin by drawing a **horizon line** (a line that separates the sky from the land) in the middle of the paper. Then, mark a small dot to serve as the **vanishing point**, in the middle of the horizon line.



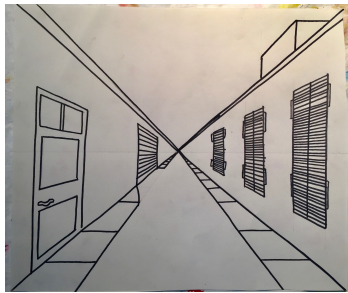
Step 3: DRAW LINES

Using a straightedge, draw **orthogonal lines** from corner to corner that intersect (cross) the vanishing point.



Step 4: ADD DETAIL

Using **orthogonal lines** that always begin with crossing the **vanishing point**, and lines that are **parallel** to the **horizon line**, draw buildings with historic details like you find in the French Quarter or Marigny, such as sidewalks, windows with shutters, elaborate doors, and balconies with a pencil and ruler.



Step 5: TRACE & ERASE

Using a Sharpie or other permanent marker or pen, trace over the lines that are true **orthogonals** and **parallels**. Use an eraser to remove all pencil lines and marks.



Step 6: ADD COLOR

Using colored pencils, markers, or even watercolor, add color to your piece, and don't forget the sky.

Standards

II. Common Core Standards for Museum Tour

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1b – Build on others’ talk in conversations by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.4 – Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1b – Build on others’ talk in conversations by linking their comments to the remarks of others.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1d – Explain own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1c – Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.1d – Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from discussions.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.4 – Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1c – Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others’ questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.7.1d – Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.3 – Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

II. National Core Standards for Museum Tour

- Process Component: Section 9

Anchor Standard: **Perceive and analyze artistic work**

Enduring Understanding: Individual aesthetic and empathetic awareness developed through engagement with art can lead to understanding and appreciation of self, others, the natural world, and constructed environments.

Essential Question: How do life experiences influence the way you relate to art? How does learning about art impact how we perceive the world? What can we learn from our responses to art?

- Process Component: Section 10

Anchor Standard: **Perceive and analyze artistic work**

Enduring Understanding: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.

Essential Question: What is an image? Where and how do we encounter images in our world? How do images influence our views of the world?

- Process Component: Section 12

Anchor Standard: **Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work**

Enduring Understanding: People evaluate art based on various criteria

Essential Question: How does one determine criteria to evaluate a work of art? How and why might criteria vary? How is a personal preference different from an evaluation?

ⁱ Sasser, Bill. "James Michalopoulos." In KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, edited by David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010--. Article published January 30, 2012. <http://www.knowla.org/entry/1314>. Accessed January 17, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Sasser, Bill. "James Michalopoulos." In KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, edited by David Johnson. Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2010--. Article published January 30, 2012. <http://www.knowla.org/entry/1314>. Accessed January 17, 2017.