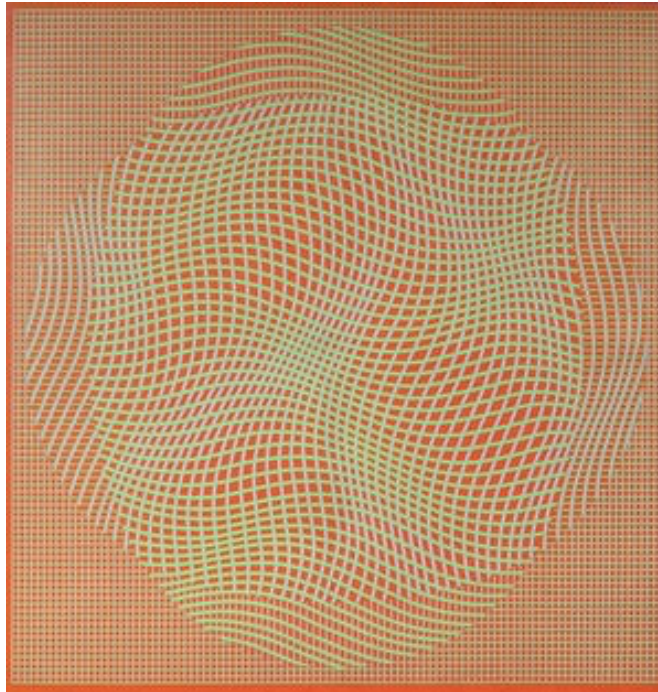


## THE REPOSITORY

### What's the difference between paintings in museums and those hanging on restaurant walls?

Mark Spaner | Published 5:20 a.m. ET Oct. 16, 2022



Julian Stanczak, *Crosscurrents*

I've admired Thomas Kinkade paintings while dining at favorite restaurants and drank whiskey while gazing at the monocled Saint Bernard with the full house in "Dogs Playing Poker."

However, paintings by Kinkade and "Dogs Playing Poker" never hang in any art museum I've visited.

Art museums do not collect beautiful things.

Perhaps I should rephrase that sentence. Art museums do not collect art for its beauty alone.

It takes something extra for a painting to find its way onto the walls of any museum, whether it be the Canton Museum of Art or the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. And, that something extra ... art's vigorish ... is what makes art museums one of the greatest ways to spend a leisurely afternoon.

Museums make you think.

Thankfully, a little thinking has proven popular in today's "entertain-me-now-now — now!" culture. According to the American Alliance of Museums, more people visit museums every year than all major league sporting events ... combined. It appears art museums are, indeed, part of America's favorite national pastime.

A museum's vig may be tied to history, innovation, medium or mission. It depends on what it decides to collect.

The Canton Museum of Art focuses on American works on paper and ceramics. Its outstanding collection of such art is worth over \$35 million. The Toledo Museum, with a far larger endowment, collects the very best works from

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a select group of A-list artists. The Cleveland Museum of Art, with an even bigger endowment, has assembled one of the world's widest ranging collections "for the benefit of all the people forever." They put their money where their mouth is with free attendance for everyone.

A few years ago, one of my favorite clients stopped by my office after her first museum experience during a Leadership Canton outing at the Canton Museum of Art. This was a smart, mature woman who grew up in small town Ashtabula and always felt somewhat intimidated by art museums.

She didn't understand the rules or why the art was even there. But, after hearing M.J. Albacete, the former museum director, explain the significance of different paintings, she realized there's more to museum-quality art than a pretty picture. She was hooked.

Many of us visited a local art museum on school outings. If you're like me, you probably stared at a piece of modern art and thought, "Heck, I could do something this good."

The drip paintings of Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists were a real boon to amateur dreamers worldwide. They were proof you didn't have to draw well to be an artist. But, the reason so many museums collect abstract expressionist art has more to do with world history.

Abstract expressionism, the first great American art movement, was the natural heir to modern art movements starting in the 1860s as photographers began pushing artists aside as the chroniclers of history.

Follow the path through time.

Freed from the need to accurately depict contemporary society, the impressionists began studying how light and color influenced what we saw. Their loose brushstrokes soon became more abstract in the hands of artists like Cezanne. Picasso became fascinated with African masks and how things looked from different perspectives at the same time.

It's no accident these artists were working at the moment in history when agrarian societies became industrialized. Art of the time mirrored how the simple life had become confusing.

Soon Marcel Duchamp saw the beauty in factory-made things and his "Readymades" turned mass produced products into art. At the same time, Edward Hopper and other urban realists created stunning paintings depicting the alienation and loneliness of a new factory age.

Alienation and inner turmoil continued as subjects for expressionists like Edvard Munch. Unconscious dreams fueled surrealist art at the same time as Sigmund Freud appeared. From there, it was a short hop, skip and jump to the inner angst of an immigrant housewife named Janet Sobel whose own drip paintings influenced Pollock.

Pollock then turned art into an emotional free-for-all throwing paint in surprisingly controlled patterns of color. The abstract expressionists were society's raw nerve endings just as rock 'n' roll was taking over American culture. It was no accident of timing.

Local art museums contain the history of the world in picture form. Its not always pretty, but always meaningful. You just have to look for the story behind the art.

This entire cycle of art history started with impressionism, including an early exhibition inside Maison Dorée ... a common Paris restaurant.