

Peter Blume: A Closer Look

Reflect on Peter Blume's *The Rock* to practice slow looking and get new ideas for your own art making. You can view this painting in the museum, [online](#), or on a classroom poster.

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Peter Blume (American, born Smorgon, Russian Empire, now Belarus, 1906–92)
The Rock, 1944–48
Oil on canvas
Gift of Edgar Kaufmann Jr.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Take a minute to look at the artwork. Where is your attention pulled first? What do you notice about that area? Where does your eye go next? What more do you see?
- Describe the setting. Are there clues that suggest when and where this takes place?
- What do you think happened before the scene we see here? What might happen next?
- Choose one person in the scene. Pose like them. What do you think they are doing? How does their pose relate to or differ from other people in the painting?
- Think about the word contrast. Can you find things that contrast in this artwork?
- What moods or feelings do you see? Which parts of the painting bring them up?
- What do you think the artist might have been trying to express or communicate? Why?
- Read the information about the artist and his work on the back of this resource. Look at the artwork again. How have your observations and thoughts about the work changed?

CREATIVE RESPONSES

Writing Prompt: Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream...

With its bright colors, mysterious setting, and contrasting objects, *The Rock* is dreamlike. Imagine and describe a dream that includes the scene represented in the painting. What happened prior to this scene to cause such destruction? Concentrate on the sensory experiences of the painting. What do you see? Feel? Taste? Smell? Hear? What do you think happened next?

Responding to Events of Your Time

Peter Blume used his art as a means to process and respond to the events of his time, including fascism, the horrors of war, American consumerism, and glimmers of hope for the future. What are the issues that impact you and your communities? Work individually or as a group to name a few issues and your feelings about them. Plan a creative response. What would you like to say? How might you express it? Work in the form of your choice, such as a poem, group collage, dance, or painting. Or, you could stage a group photo in the style of *The Rock*.

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Peter Blume at work on *The Rock*, date unknown

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Peter Blume and his family emigrated from Russia to New York when he was a child. They were among the many people fleeing Europe to escape the rise of fascism in the early 20th century. Blume showed talent as an artist from a young age and took art classes at several different schools. As a young man, he worked odd jobs until he was able to support himself as an artist. During the Great Depression (1929–40), Blume was one of about 10,000 artists employed under the Federal Art Project (FAP; 1935–43), an agency run by the federal government to fund the arts. Blume was one of the artists chosen to paint murals for post offices and other federal buildings. It was during this time that he began developing his unique artistic style.

Blume was influenced by styles including folk art, Cubism, and Surrealism. The Surrealist movement developed at the end of World War I in response to what many felt was senseless death and destruction. It aimed to examine the subconscious with imaginative and dream-like images. Blume's painting style was often based in fantasy, including the almost cartoon-like people we see in *The Rock*. He continually painted and sketched elements of nature, such as rock formations, marine life, and plant life, and reflected on themes of death and rebirth. It took Blume four years (1944–48) to complete *The Rock*, and he made over 500 studies in pencil and oil to help him achieve his vision.

By the time Blume completed *The Rock*, World War II had devastated many parts of the world—from German Nazis bombing London to the United States vastly destroying Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan with atomic bombs. Blume reflected on these events and the idea of rebuilding when creating the painting, but ultimately, the complex scene he created is open to several different interpretations.

EXPLORE MORE ARTWORKS

Learn more about the work of Peter Blume and thousands of other artists by searching the museum's collections page by name, title, or keyword at www.artic.edu/collection. Below are suggestions of artists and artistic movements that relate to the work of Blume. What connections and differences do you find?

[Explore](#) more of Peter Blume's work, including some of his many sketches for *The Rock*. Read more about [Surrealism](#). Other Surrealist artists include: [Alice Rahon](#), [Matta](#), [René Magritte](#), [Claude Cahun](#), [Salvador Dalí](#), and [Joan Miró](#). Cubism is a style that breaks images into sharp angles and shows different views of an object at the same time. Artists who worked in the style of Cubism include: [María Blanchard](#), [Pablo Picasso](#), [Juan Gris](#), and [Rufino Tamayo](#). Folk art (also called vernacular art) is a form of art created by skilled makers who may not have had formal training. From everyday objects to showpieces reflecting the aesthetics of particular regions, [explore](#) select vernacular artworks.

Blume, alongside artists like [Charles Sheeler](#) and [Charles Demuth](#), was also considered to be part of Precisionism, an American movement from the 1920s–30s that featured images of modern industrial and urban life in sleek geometric forms. He also took inspiration from [Frank Lloyd Wright](#), an architect and designer who sought to create harmony between architecture and nature and urban landscapes. *The Rock* was commissioned by the Kauffman family to hang in their home Fallingwater, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, the construction of which is shown on the left side of the painting.