

FAMOUS ARTIST SERIES: WAYNE THIEBAUD (1920-2021)
Pop Art

Supplies Needed:

ART BIN:

- Project examples of textured “dessert art” on foam plates
- Textured paint ingredients: shaving cream, acrylic paints, craft sticks for mixing, bulk gallons of glue (backup glue on shelves in CFA supply room)
- Containers for mixing and/or transporting paint
- Paper plates for paint sharing (do not use foam plates for this, please)
- Paint brushes, assorted

CFA CLOSET:

- Glue from the gallon container
- Paper dinner plates (either in art bin or in CFA closet)

OTHER Links for BenQ Board can be pulled up in advance:

- [“Three Machines”](#)
- [soup can paintings](#)
- [Claus Oldenburg \(soft sculpture sandwiches](#)
- [“Wedding Cake” \(1962\)](#)
- [“Watermelon Slices” \(1961\).](#)
- [“Four Cupcakes” \(1971\)](#)
- [“Four Sundaes” \(1963\)](#)
- [“Party Tray” \(1994\)](#)
- [“California Cakes” \(1979\)](#)
- [“Eight Lipsticks” \(1988\)](#)
- [“Beach Dogs” \(2004-07\)](#)
- [“Two Kneeling Figures” \(1966\)](#)
- [“Self Portrait with Suspenders” \(1997\)](#)
- [“Brown River” \(2002\)](#)
- [“Urban Freeways” \(1979-80\)](#)

AHEAD OF TIME NOTES:

- ☐ Contact the teacher about sharing a 10-minute YouTube feature about Wayne Thiebaud. It can be found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vl_QJ5D9Qm8 If possible, watch the YouTube piece ahead of time.
- ☐ Mix textured “frosting paint” for the art project before doing the presentation. You will need to prepare the following paint colors: brown, pink, yellow, and white to be shared by the students.
- ☐ **Frosting Paint Directions:**

In four bowls, pour equal parts glue and shaving cream (1 cup of each per bowl) and mix until smooth and even. Then add a squirt or two of one color of acrylic paint to each bowl to create brown, yellow, and pink “frosting.” Leave one bowl white. Mix each color with a craft stick. Cover the paint if you’ve prepared it ahead of time, or it will dry out. See recipe and helpful hints on the art project page.

PRESENTATION

Show “[Three Machines](#)” (1963) to students

- This painting is called “Three Machines.” It was painted by modern American artist Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced TEE-bo) in 1963. Thiebaud was born in Mesa, Arizona in 1920 and is still living (and painting) today.
- Do you remember studying any artists who have used food or candy as their subject matter? *Remind students they have probably already learned about Andy Warhol ([soup can paintings](#)) and [Claus Oldenburg \(soft sculpture sandwiches and other foods\)](#). We’ll find out today where Wayne Thiebaud fits in as an artist.*
- When Thiebaud was very young, he moved to Long Beach, California. His mother, Alice, was a great cook, and Wayne spent many happy afternoons picnicking and enjoying delicious food and the company of his family. Thiebaud once said, *“I was a spoiled child. I had a great life, so the only thing I can do is to paint happy pictures.”* We have many of his happy pictures to share with you today!

OPTIONAL: Play the YouTube feature about Thiebaud from CBS Sunday program. (It is very interesting and approximately 8 minutes long.) Invite students’ comments and reactions. Use these discussion points after the YouTube feature.

(NOTE: If you DO NOT show the YouTube program, skip these two questions.)

- Some of the artists we’ve studied, such as VanGogh (who dealt with depression and cut off his own ear) and Warhol (who was considered to be very eccentric) were more “unusual” than Thiebaud. What are your impressions of Thiebaud after seeing him interviewed on TV? Is Thiebaud how you expected him to be? (He is laid-back, unpretentious, and grandfatherly. He seems ordinary.)
- As we saw in the video clip, Thiebaud took his paintings to many art galleries before he found a place that would display his paintings. But now, he is very successful. How much did his most expensive painting so far, called “Bakery Counter” sell for? (1.7 million dollars in 1997) How does Thiebaud seem to feel about that? (Embarrassed by fame and fortune. Modest and humble.)

(NOTE: If you DO NOT show the YouTube program, please present the next three bullet points to students. Skip them if you saw the YouTube program, as the information will be redundant.)

- *During high school, Thiebaud worked at restaurants and played on his school basketball and football teams. He began taking drawing classes, and earned money by drawing movie posters for a local theater and painting signs. When he was a junior in high school, Thiebaud broke his back playing football. He spent a lot of time drawing cartoons while his back healed.*
- *As a teenager, Thiebaud got a job in the animation department at Walt Disney Studios. He helped draw cartoons for Goofy and Pinocchio, and supported his family with the money he earned.*
- *In the 1940s, Thiebaud attended a junior college and joined the U.S. air force as the U.S. entered World War II. He wanted to be a pilot, but instead he worked as an artist and cartoonist for army*

newspapers and posters. When the war ended, Thiebaud went back to college to study art, education, and art history. That's when he decided to start teaching art classes to college students and become a painter.

- Thiebaud took his paintings to many art galleries before he found a place that would display his paintings. But things have changed for Thiebaud. His most expensive painting so far, called "Bakery Counter" sold for 1.7 million dollars in 1997!

Show "[Wedding Cake](#)" (1962) and "[Watermelon Slices](#)" (1961). Thiebaud's earliest artwork was inspired by foods he liked to eat and had seen when he worked in restaurants. He liked the cheerful colors and simple shapes of foods. **Talk about the subject matter, composition, color, and shapes seen in the artwork.**

- When Thiebaud became a professor of art at the University of California, Davis in 1960, he also began to assemble a collection of his artwork inspired by some of his favorite foods. He painted pictures of hot dogs, pies, cakes, candy, cups of coffee, bacon and eggs, sandwiches, and gumball machines.

Show "[Four Cupcakes](#)" (1971) and "[Four Sundaes](#)" (1963)

- Thiebaud was quickly classified as a "Pop artist" because he painted **popular** things people bought (like Andy Warhol and the famous soup can paintings). But Thiebaud had a different feeling about this. He said he painted pictures of pies, cakes, and gumballs because they reminded him of his childhood and what he loved about America.
- As he became a better and better painter, Thiebaud worked on his brush strokes to make his pictures clearer and simpler, and he did sketches before he painted each piece. Thiebaud is known for using "delicious" thick paint and thick brush strokes to look like lemon, vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate frosting as in "Four Cupcakes" and "Four Sundaes" and in many of his other food paintings including "Wedding Cake." We will be using thick paint and thick brush strokes today when we make our art project in Thiebaud's style.

Show "[Party Tray](#)" (1994) and "[California Cakes](#)" (1979). **Ask children to identify the simple shapes in these works of art.**

- Shapes were very important to Thiebaud. He always thought of the foods he painted as geometric shapes. What kinds of shapes do you see in these works of art? (circles, ovals, triangles, squares, rectangles) It was easy for Thiebaud to think about a slice of pie as simply a triangle, and a cake as simply a circle.
- Patterns were also important to Thiebaud. Do you see any patterns in his artwork? Notice the straight rows of cakes and cupcakes. We'll see more evidence of Thiebaud's love of patterns when we look at his landscapes.

Show "[Eight Lipsticks](#)" (1988) and "[Beach Dogs](#)" (2004-07)

- Thiebaud didn't only paint food. He painted other common objects, such as lipsticks, eyeglasses, and neckties, and animals such as dogs and cows. He liked to see the patterns in "regular things," and use bright colors and plain backgrounds when he painted them.

Show "[Two Kneeling Figures](#)" (1966) and "[Self Portrait with Suspenders](#)" (1997)

- After years of painting food and objects, Thiebaud began to experiment with painting portraits. Every artist that we've studied in the art awareness program has used their own approach and technique to create portraits. It's a part of every artist's progression.
- Thiebaud's wife Betty Jean was the subject of many of his portraits, but Thiebaud himself was his most frequent subject. "Almost every morning, when I get up, I've done a linear drawing of myself, for just five or ten minutes," he says. "I have this big stack of them, mostly just my head looking in the mirror."
- Look at the background of Thiebaud's portraits and other paintings. What do you notice? (Almost all of Thiebaud's paintings are done using thick, brightly colored paint against plain white backgrounds.)
- Take a look at "Self Portrait with Suspenders." How does Thiebaud seem to be feeling in this portrait? (He looks cheerful and amused. Some critics say he looks like he is tilting his head to analyze his work and critique it.)

Show "[Brown River](#)" (2002) and "[Urban Freeways](#)" (1979-80)

- Thiebaud is also well known for his landscape and cityscape paintings. He often paints scenes from his home state of California where he still lives. He is fascinated by steep streets, hills, and patterns in nature. Ask: Which one is the cityscape? Which is the landscape?
- Let's look at "Brown River" first. Take a look at the patterns in this painting. Where do you see them? What are they? (Wavy lines and diagonal lines in some fields; diamond pattern in others. Dots. Arches. Stripes.) This painting is called "Brown River." Where's the river? Does it have a pattern? (No. It's one of the only spaces on this painting that are solid.)
- Next, let's examine "Urban Freeways." Paintings like this one were inspired by toy cars and trucks Thiebaud played with as a child. Some critics feel this painting is cartoonish. What might appear cartoonish about this painting? (cheery colors, hectic mazes of roads, speedy toy-like cars)
- In 1990, Thiebaud retired from full-time teaching, but he didn't stop painting. Today, he still teaches a few art classes, paints, and plays tennis. All of Thiebaud's children are artists too.

Suggested Project

Wayne Thiebaud once said: *"Cakes, they are glorious; they are like toys!"*

Today we are going to make a delicious piece of artwork. We will follow the style of Thiebaud by creating a painting of a cake or pie using thick frosting-like paint.

- Give each student a foam plate and invite them **FIRST** to write their name on the bottom of the plate, and **SECOND** to sketch their work of art onto the plate before painting it. Encourage them to sketch a whole pie or cake or piece of pie or cake, or other dessert. Remind them to use simple shapes like circles, squares, and triangles. **Show students the examples.**
- Once students are done sketching, distribute palettes of **PREMIXED** textured paint to groups of students. Pour globs of different colored paints onto paper plate "palettes" (please don't use the foam plates for this) so that the paint can be shared. Provide each student with 1-2 paint brushes of varied sizes (one wide and one thin is best).
- Invite students to take turns using the various colored paints to create their artistic confection. One strategy is to use a thin brush to outline their shapes and use a wide brush to fill in. Students can layer the paint on their plate to make raised textures, or flatten the paint to make glossy, flat surfaces.
- Find a flat drying surface for the artwork and allow it to dry for 24-48 hours.

- Clean and dry the brushes and bowls thoroughly so they can be reused! Allow extra time for cleanup for this project.

PREMIXING THE PAINT IS VITAL!

Textured Paint Recipe

(repeat for each frosting color)

- 1 cup white glue (like Elmer's)
- 1 cup white shaving cream
- 1 or 2 squirts of acrylic paint (pink, yellow, or brown) for color

Mix these ingredients in a bowl using a craft stick. Repeat for each color. Allow paint to rest for at least 2 minutes prior to using, and cover securely if you are making it in advance of the project. We are aiming for "confectionary colors," so tint the frosting to look like chocolate, vanilla, lemon, and strawberry. For vanilla, just leave the frosting white.

PLEASE LEAVE AT LEAST FIVE MINUTES THE END OF THE SESSION TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO DISCUSS THEIR WORK.