

# ANIMALS IN ART

**ARTIST:** Mark W. Robison (1957-- ) Orem, Utah

**TITLE:** *House Cat* 1997

**MEDIA:** oil on board

**SIZE:** 7-1/2" x 5-1/2"

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

By Mark Robison

I was born in 1957 in Topeka, Kansas. My family moved to Chicago in 1971, where I graduated from high school. I was going to attend the Art Academy in downtown Chicago, but I decided against it at the last minute. I converted to the LDS Church in 1977, and the missionaries convinced me to come to Brigham Young University (BYU).

At BYU, I majored in Illustration and Design, and I count myself extremely lucky to have studied under James Christensen, who was very patient with me as I tried and tried and tried to paint like him.

Although I am not a prodigious artist, I love to paint. My struggle with color blindness (red--green) has been a constant source of frustration, but I feel I've become a better artist because of that struggle.

I have worked full-time for the *Friend* Magazine (a publication of the LDS Church) for six years. To be able to produce artwork by traditional means as well as electronic media (Macintosh) has been a wonderfully rewarding experience. It can be a bit disconcerting however, when I'm painting at my easel and make a mistake, and instinctively, my left hand tries to "Command-Z" (or undo) my mistake.

My philosophy of painting is simple: I paint what I like.

My wife Dana and I have four kids. We live in Orem.

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## SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

(History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

What style of artwork is this painting? (Realism, Impressionism, Fantasy, etc.) What other artists paint in a similar style? (The students may know James Christensen. If not, show his two paintings from this packet: *Rhinoceros* and *Fantasies of the Sea*.) How is House Cat unique; how is it similar?

What kind of aesthetic approach could you use to talk about this work? Is it beautiful? What else can an artwork be besides beautiful? Where should this painting be hung? Why?

This is a very small painting, 7-1/2" x 5-1/2" (If you have young students, get them to figure out how big that is.) What effect would the size have on how the painting makes you feel? What if the painting were 36" x 48" ? What kinds of colors and lines has the artist used? How do they contribute to the feeling the painting inspires? Do you like this painting? Why?

### ACTIVITIES

#### Art

**Standard Three--**Selecting and evaluating subjects, symbols, and ideas

**Objective:** Students will discover that it takes time to see a work of art and to think about it by participating in an activity of observation.

The THIRTY SECOND LOOK:

## PROCEDURE:

Ask students to estimate the average amount of time they spend when looking at a work of art. Record their responses and discuss why there may be differences. Explain that the average time that adults spend looking at one object in a museum is less than half a minute, or thirty seconds. Are thirty seconds ample time to spend with a work of art? Why or why not? Try the following experiment to test their answers.

Show the slide of *House Cat* from this packet to the students for thirty seconds. Then turn off the slide projector.

Ask students to answer questions based on what they recall from memory alone.

Below are some sample questions.

1. List all the colors you remember.
2. How many windows were in the picture?
3. What time of day was the scene?
4. Describe the door of the house.
5. List living objects in the painting.
6. List inanimate objects in the painting.
7. What was the most prominent part of the painting?
8. Where was light coming from in the painting?
9. Describe the animal in the painting.
10. How was the animal propped up on the roof so that it did not fall off?
11. What is the theme or subject of the painting?
12. What kind of mood or feeling is depicted?
13. How many people are in the painting?
14. Describe one aspect of the work you remember most vividly.

Encourage all students to share and debate their answers. Does everyone have the same recollections? Comment on the variety of responses. Ask the students if they all looked at the artwork for the same amount of time.

Have students look at the artwork again. Guide them through a careful reexamination. Ask them how they might change their answers to the questions asked earlier. Encourage students to speculate on the story being communicated. Ask them to explain how the detailed observations allowed them to determine what the work depicts.

Ask students to consider how much longer they spent looking at the image the second time. Was their first glance sufficient? Ask students if discussing and comparing observations with other people helped them understand the work of art.

Have students explain their answers.

## Art

**Standard Two**--Identifying and using structures

**Standard Three**--Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, ideas

**Standard Four**--Understanding visual arts in relation to history and cultures

## **Standard Six--**Connecting visual arts to other disciplines

**Objectives:** Identify narrative art--art that communicates a story.

Interpret setting and mood in a work of art in order to develop a story line appropriate for it. Interpret a work of art through a one-minute skit or presentation.

### PROCEDURE:

1. Students divide into groups of four. Each group examines a work of art about an animal(s) in this packet. Students should consider setting, mood, body language, expressions, and gestures. Complete the worksheets on the following pages entitled THE STORY LINE.

Once the worksheets are completed, ask each group to create and present a one-minute skit, which demonstrates their own groups' interpretation of the story presented in their work of art.

2. Students present their skits. See if the class can identify the appropriate animal and the work of art. Be sure that students can back up their interpretations with physical evidence from the work of art.

3. Write a short story based on an artwork. Ask students to look at an artwork and develop a story based on the visual evidence present in the work. What genre would it be? (drama, romance, mystery, comedy) Who are the main characters? What are they like? Who are the supporting characters? What is their role? Describe the setting. Identify who is telling the story. Describe the events taking place. Create some dialogue for each of the characters. Use the image as a jumping-off point. Add to the story by imagining what came before and what will happen next.

## **Art**

**Standard One--**Applying media, techniques, and processes

**Standard Four--**Understand history, culture, and personal experience

**Objectives:** Create a work of art which includes scale changes--an object is monumentalized or made larger than life size. Examine styles of pop art and surrealism that change scale.

### PROCEDURE:

1. Show *House Cat* by Mark Robison, surrealist work by Rene Magritte, and sculpture by Claes Oldenberg (i.e. *Spoonbridge and Cherry*). Examine how the scale has been changed in these works of art. (Scale is a standard reference.)

2. Have students draw an object and then monumentalize it by changing its surroundings. For example a q-tip would be monumentalized if it were found poking up out of the Eiffel tower. A baseball bat would be monumentalized if it were as tall as a telephone pole.

4. Assess if students have changed scale in their drawings.

## **Art/Literature**

**Standard Six--**Connecting visual arts to other disciplines

**Objectives:** To recognize a poet's comic exaggeration. To recognize the use of repetition, emphasis, and effect. To identify personification in a poem. To debate and write about animals.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Think of some unique or interesting personality traits you or your friends have. But what about cats? In "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats," T. S. Elliot catalogues many types of cats by occupation and character traits.

Some of them include the following:

- a. Growfinger--the roughest cat that ever roamed at large
- b. Rum Tum Tugger
- c. The Curious Cat
- d. Old Deuteronomy--the ancient village cat who sleeps in the sun year after year
- e. Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer
- f. The Cat Burglars

In each case, Elliot uses a common type of recognizable cat for his fanciful biography. Macavity is "The Mystery Cat." You find traces of his mischief everywhere, but you never catch him actually doing anything! Do you think Macavity committed all the crimes the poet says he is guilty of? What crimes could he really have committed and what crimes are probably impossible?

### **MACAVITY THE MYSTERY CAT by T. S. Elliot**

Macavity's a mystery cat: he's called the Hidden Paw--  
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.  
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, and the Flying Squad's despair:  
For when they reach the scene of crime--Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,  
He's broken every human law; he breaks the law of gravity.  
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare  
And when you reach the scene of crime, Macavity's not there!  
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air--  
But I tell you once and once again--Macavity's not there!

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;  
You would know him if you saw him for his eyes are sunken in.  
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is slightly domed;  
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.  
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;

And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,  
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.  
You may meet him in a bystreet, you may see him in the square--  
But when a crime's discovered, Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards).  
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.  
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel case is rifled,  
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled.  
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair--  
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! Macavity's not there!

And when the foreign office finds a treaty's gone astray,  
Or when the admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,  
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair--  
But it's useless to investigate--Macavity's not there!  
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:  
"It must have been Macavity!" But he's a mile away.  
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking on his thumbs,  
Or engaged in doing complicated long-division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity.  
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.  
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:  
At whatever time the deed took place--MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!  
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known  
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)  
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time  
Just controls their operations: The Napoleon of Crime!

### **Creative Writing Activity**

Write an imaginative or humorous poem that exaggerates the personality of your pet (or an imaginary pet).

### **Debate Activity**

Have the class debate the relative merits of cats and dogs (or some other animals) and encourage mock seriousness like T. S. Elliot's.

## **THE STORY LINE**

### **PART I**

Answer each question on this sheet by **LOOKING FOR EVIDENCE** in the work of art.  
You must be able to explain what evidence **IN THE WORK OF ART** led you to your

conclusions.

## **SETTING**

Where and when is this scene taking place?

Comment on the following:

Time period:  
(10 minutes ago)

Time of year:

Time of day:

Location:

## **MOOD**

What is the mood of this scene?

Comment on how each of the following influences mood:

Facial expression:

Body language:

Gestures:

Props & costume:

## **PLOT**

Comment on each of the following:

What just happened?

What is going to happen?

## **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

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What are the qualities of these characters (animals)?

List 4 adjectives to describe the character of one animal.

List 4 adjectives to describe the character of another animal or someone the animal might talk to.

## **DIALOGUE**

What would these characters say to one another?

Write 3 lines of dialogue for the first animal.

Write 3 lines of dialogue for the second animal.

## **MORAL**

What is the moral or the "lesson" of this scene?

## **PART II**

As a team, create a one-minute skit designed to present your ideas about the setting, mood, plot, characters, and moral of the story presented in this painting.

