

Artist Handout

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DEAN MITCHELL



About the Artist:

Artist Dean Mitchell was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and grew up in Quincy, Florida. Mitchell was raised by his **maternal** grandmother, Marie Mitchell. Mitchell's upbringing inspires much of his work; Mitchell claims his grandmother was the one who encouraged him to join the field.

As a child, Mitchell often used art as an escape from his everyday life. By the time he was accepted into the Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio, he had become an accomplished painter.



Figure 1 Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio

After he graduated, Mitchell did paintings for a well-known greeting card company and participated in numerous art shows.

Over the years, Mitchell's work has become recognized through numerous awards. He was eventually able to work commercially as a **freelance artist**.

Mitchell has won the following awards:

- The American Watercolor Society Gold Medal
- Allied Artist of American Gold Medal in Watercolor and Oil
- Thomas Moran Award from the Salmagundi Club in New York
- Remington Professional League
- Three years in a row he won the Best in Show Award from the Mississippi Watercolor Society Grand National Competition.
- In 2004 and 2007, he received the Autry National Center Award for Watercolor at the Masters of the American West Fine Art **Exhibition** and sale.

Sources:

Mitchell, Dean. "Dean Mitchell Artist." *Dean Mitchell Artist | Watercolor Artist*, 12 Feb. 2021, deanmitchellstudio.com/.

"Dean Mitchell Artwork." *Cutter & Cutter Fine Art*, www.cutterandcutter.com/artist/dean-mitchell/.

"Dean Mitchell Artist Bio." *Dean Mitchell's Marie Brooks Gallery*, mariebrooksgallery.com/dean-mitchell-artist-bio/.

Enwonwu, Oliver. "Dean Mitchell's Affirmation and Projection of Black Identity: Dean Mitchell Artist." *Dean Mitchell Artist | Watercolor Artist*, 4 June 2020, deanmitchellstudio.com/dean-mitchells-affirmation-and-projection-of-black-identity/.

Kimmelman, Michael. "A Black World Of Ins and Outs." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 26 Apr. 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/04/26/arts/art-review-a-black-world-of-ins-and-outs.html.

Quotes:

"Art doesn't begin with a brush and a palette, but with the artist's ability to perceive life. You have to learn how to live before you can learn how to paint."-Dean Mitchell

"The visual arts must communicate to the human spirit, forcing individuals to reflect on themselves and their existence beyond their own self-interest."-Dean Mitchell

Map of Quincy Florida FL



Figure 2 PHOTO COURTESY OF CUTTER & CUTTER FINE ART

“Mr. Mitchell is a virtual modern-day Vermeer of ordinary black people given dignity through the eloquence of his concentration and touch.” —Michael Kimmelman, *New York Times*

“His reputation hinges largely on his superb craftsmanship, the emotional depth of his work, his avoidance of facile sentimentality, and an accomplished sense of formal design.”- Oliver Enwonwu

Artwork:

Dean Mitchell is most well-known for his watercolor paintings. He crafts landscapes, still-lives, and figurative works all within this medium. However, he is known for more than just the creation of watercolor paintings; he is renowned in other mediums such as egg temperas, oils and pastels.

Dean Mitchell does not make commission portraits or paintings. He also does not make paintings for galleries, specifically. Rather, Mitchell paints people, places, or things that are important and meaningful to him. He has often explained that "it's the most simple things that have the most power."



Figure 3 "Vote" Oil Painting

Dean Mitchell grew up in **poverty** in the American South. His grandmother encouraged him to enter the field of art, but his mother indicated that there were very few places in the world for Black painters to make a career within the **racist** United States. Still, Mitchell pursued his goals and became a successful painter. His works often feature people of color, the elderly, places of poverty, or places of desolation. Mitchell's works often act as socio-political commentary on the injustices he witnesses in the US.

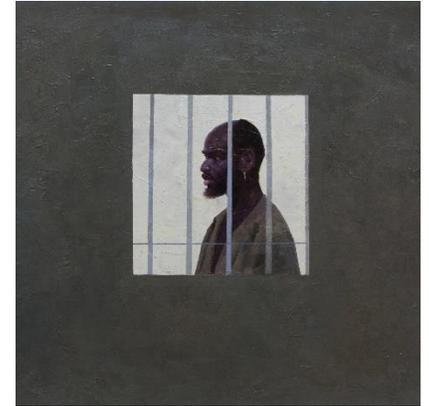


Figure 4 "No Way Out" Oil Painting

Audience and The World:

Dean Mitchell is active within the world of art. Under the “**Accolades**” section of his website, viewers can see the hundred of awards, nominations, and recognitions received by Mitchell. Many of his works depict Black people, Black culture, and Black life within the Southern United States. To the **world**, Dean Mitchell communicates a poignant view on what it means to be an African American in the Southern US.

Audiences of Mitchell's often view the elderly, the poor, or worn-down buildings occupied by people of color. For this reason, Mitchell's works usually attest to the ongoing state of inequality within the United States. His works also, however, communicate to the **world** a sense of beautiful, dignified humanity within the brokenness of his subjects. The **juxtaposition** of humanity and brokenness are clear in the works of Dean Mitchell.

Structural Frame:

- How does Mitchell's use of muted color affect his works' meaning?
- How does the artist use space to create meaning within their work?
- How does the artist use realism to convey a message within the work?

Subjective Frame:

- What things and ideas do you associate with **portraits** and **landscapes**?



"Quincy Tobacco Barn" 15" x 10" Watercolor

- What things and ideas do you associate with the images of homes that are falling apart? What about the **architecture** in the American South?
- How do paintings work as communicative pieces?
- How does the artist's overall composition effect his works' meaning?
- What are the common **subjects** of Mitchell's paintings?
- What sorts of ideas are associated with the **mediums** Mitchell uses? (Watercolors, oil paint, egg tempura)

Cultural Frame:

- Mitchell's mother told him "He can't make a living as no Black man selling no pictures". Why did his mother have this belief? Is this still true today?
- How are people of color often depicted in the world of fine art?
- How many Black painters can you name? How many White painters? What does that say to us about the society we live in?

Postmodern Frame:

- How is the artist, Dean Mitchell, a traditional artist? How is he not?
- Would many people consider the works of Dean Mitchell as 'traditional' art?
- How does Dean Mitchell disrupt the traditional world's opinion of an artist or painter?
- How do the works of Dean Mitchell disrupt the status quo of art? What does his art attempt to do?
- Whose voices are privileged in the works of 'traditional' art? How does Dean Mitchell Challenge that?
- Do you think we need more artists of color like Dean Mitchell in the world of art? Explain.

Compare and Contrast:

Examine the art of Winslow Homer, an American watercolor painter from the 19th century.



6 "Dressing For The Carnival" By Winslow



5 Salt Kettle, Bermuda, 1899, watercolor over graphite Homer

Winslow Homer was a 19th century, American landscape painter and printmaker, best known for his marine subjects. He is considered one of the foremost painters in 19th century America and a preeminent figure in American art.

"Painted at the end of Reconstruction— *Dressing For The Carnival* marked by the final withdrawal of federal troops from the South—Homer's challenging subject evokes both the dislocation and endurance of African American culture that was a



"Swamp Box" 30" x 20" Watercolor

legacy of slavery...The theme of independence was particularly relevant in the Reconstruction era, when newly emancipated African Americans briefly enjoyed full civil rights.” (The Met on ‘Dressing For The Carnival’, 2021).

“In Salt Kettle, Bermuda, Homer depicted a seascape with a view of a resort called Salt Kettle, which is open to this day.” (1st-Art-Gallery.com, 2021).

Sources:

“Salt Kettle, Bermuda Painting by Winslow Homer Reproduction: 1st Art Gallery.” *Oil Painting Reproductions from 1st Art Gallery*, www.1st-art-gallery.com/Winslow-Homer/Salt-Kettle-Bermuda.html.

Metmuseum.org, On The Painting ‘Dressing For The Carnival’ by Winslow Homer. March, 2021.
www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11116.

Compare and Contrast Questions:

- In what ways are the works of Winslow Homer and Dean Mitchell alike? In what ways are they different?
- What part does color play in both works? Is one more colorful than the other?
- Dean Mitchell’s works consistently focus on Black subject while Winslow’s do not. Why might that be?
- Both Mitchell’s and Winslow’s artistic style are realistic in nature. However, which one might be more optimistic? Which one might be more pessimistic?
- Compare the artists’ use of people of color in their paintings. Do both artists offer their subjects an equal amount of humanity and dignity? Explain why or why not. (Remember to keep in mind that Winslow was a White man alive during the American Civil War and Mitchell is a Black man alive in 2021).
- Compare and contrast how each artist uses space in their works to create meaning.
- Compare and contrast how each artist utilizes shape in their works to indicate realism.

Suggestions For Artmaking and Research:

- Dean Mitchell crafts his works based on subjects that are important to him and have meaning. Go home and list some local people, places or things that have meaning to you, why they are important to, and then photograph those artifacts to use later for references for paintings.
- Dean Mitchell uses watercolors to make most of his famous works. Go and research some effective watercolor techniques on how to convey different textures so that you can apply those skills in your meaningful landscapes.
- Dean Mitchell sometimes makes work through the medium, ‘Egg Tempura’. Go research what that means and create a pamphlet on how to paint with Egg Tempura as a first-time learner.
- Dean Mitchell’s works focus on issues of social justice. Research the term social justice and see if there is a topic that interests you. Then, brainstorm how to turn one of those topics into a meaningful painting.
- Dean Mitchell is coming to visit our class (how exciting!). I want you to do some research on who he is, where he came from, and how he makes art. Then, I want you to ask him questions about what it’s like to be a professional artist, how he got there, and I want you to ask questions you might have regarding how he might advise a young, passionate artist on improving their skill and becoming successful in their field.

Vocabulary (Definitions Adopted From Dictionary.com)

Maternal: “Of or, relating to, belonging to, or characteristic of a mother”

Freelance Artist: “A person who pursues a the art profession without a long-term commitment to any one employer”

Exhibition: “A public showing (as of works of art, objects of manufacture, or athletic skill)”

Poverty: “The state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions”

Racist: “Behavior or attitudes that reflect and foster this belief : racial discrimination or prejudice

Accolades: “A mark of acknowledgment: Award”

Juxtaposition: “The act or an instance of placing two or more things side by side often to compare or contrast or to create an interesting effect.”

Portraits: “A pictorial representation of a person usually showing the face.”

Landscapes: “A picture representing a view of natural inland scenery”

Architecture: “A method or style of building”

Subjects: “Something represented or indicated in a work of art.”

Mediums: “A substance regarded as the means of transmission.”

