

Robert Delaunay

3417.1



A full-color poster depicting this painting, *Rainbow*, by Robert Delaunay is yours free when you join or renew your membership in the Honolulu Academy of Arts this year. You will also be eligible to win an exciting trip to Australia and other prizes as well! See details in *Announcements*. (3417.1) CN, 4/86

"The Rainbow," #3417.1
Academy Purchase (1966)
oil on canvas

Robert Delaunay (France)
(1885-1941)
1913
Gallery 1

Artist: Robert Delaunay (1885-1941) gave up his studies early on and began his art career in 1904. Almost immediately his work broke away from traditional techniques for, also in 1904, he began to paint in large touches of pure color. In 1906, Delaunay was influenced by Seurat and while he was not using the Pointillist technique, he did study Seurat's color theories and those of Chevreul. In 1908, he became interested in Cezanne's conception of space. Delaunay also scrutinized the Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque and African, Egyptian and Mesopotamian sculpture in the Louvre. In 1910, Delaunay married Sonia Trek whom he had known for three years and who worked side by side with him.

Delaunay began to paint in a Cubist style but had reservations about Analytical Cubism's monochromatic scheme and static quality. He formulated what is known as Orphic Cubism or Orphism in which free and imaginative color took precedence over objects themselves. Between 1914 and 1918 Delaunay spent a great deal of time in Spain and Portugal. About 1930 he began working at his first plaster reliefs. In 1940, fleeing from the German invasion he took refuge in Auvergne, then in Mougins. He died in Montpellier on October 25, 1941. His most famous works include his Saint Severin series, three large compositions titled "Eiffel Tower," the "City of Paris," "Windows," and "Rhythms."

Subject: Landscape depicting the archtypal view of Paris with the Eiffel Tower visible behind the curving rainbow, the hill of Montmarte in the distance and above a large balloon floating in the sky. Colors are prismatic and lively and are applied in patches.

Style: Delaunay's style is derived from Cubism but is unique and innovative in its use of color. Delaunay used bright patches of color to create a feeling of movement in his paintings. Divergent planes are superimposed and perspectives multiply and shift. Delaunay eventually gave up working in a representational mode for a more abstract one in which free, expressive color was used.

Instructional Aids

- Have group determine what the subject of this painting is. Notice the Eiffel Tower, hill of Montmarte, the balloon, woods and road.
- Discuss color. What effect do the use of non-naturalistic, bright colors have on a landscape? Is the rainbow painted true-to-life?
- Discuss space. Is the landscape seen from a single perspective? Notice the rainbow.
- Do we have a feeling for a particular season in this painting?
- Compare and contrast with Braque's still life in terms of color, shifting perspectives and degree of abstraction.

Robert Delaunay (French, 1885–1941)

The Rainbow, 1913

Oil on canvas

Purchase, 1966 (3417.1)

Inspired by Eugène Chevreul's highly influential 1855 treatise on the law of simultaneous contrasts, Robert Delaunay reinterpreted Cubism in terms of color. Delaunay drew impetus from Chevreul's theory that colors in the spectrum resonate according to their juxtaposition to liberate color and empower it with the articulation of depth, sensation, and movement in a painting. "These colored planes are the structure of the picture, and nature is no longer a subject for description but a pretext," he wrote, seeking to abandon altogether the "images or reality that come to corrupt the order of color."

One of several Paris scenes Delaunay did between 1910 and 1913, *The Rainbow* represents a step along the way to this pure abstraction. The Eiffel Tower's distinctive shape emerges ghost-like through the arc of the rainbow at right, while the dome of the Sacré Coeur is just visible on the horizon. But the painting's real subject is its vivid, riotous color, which transcends its descriptive role to operate as an energizing and even spiritualizing force. Christened "Orphism" by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, Delaunay's style is one of several adaptations of Cubism developed in France in the second decade of the 20th century.

ROBERT DELAUNAY
France, 1885–1941

***The Rainbow*, 1913**
Oil on canvas

Purchase, 1966 (3417.1)

Although he exhibited with the cubists, Robert Delaunay had reservations about the almost monochromatic palette used by Picasso in the early phase of his work in cubism. Believing that color should take precedence over form, Delaunay used the spectrum to create what he termed the law of simultaneous contrasts. His paintings are bright and imaginative, composed of broad planes of pure color. Between 1910 and 1913 he painted a series depicting the city of Paris, especially the area around the Eiffel Tower. In this work, a prismatic rainbow appears between the viewer and a cityscape alive with colorful trees; a hot air balloon rises above the hill of Montmartre, crowned by the Cathedral of Sacré Coeur. To the right, the Eiffel Tower is partially lost behind the rainbow; next to it, a loosely scrawled arc represents a ferris wheel.