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Living With Pictures  
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Gertrude Reis  
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# LIVING WITH PICTURES



*"In Holland Waters"—Clays*

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

EXTENSION DIVISION

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EAST LANSING

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# LIVING WITH PICTURES

GERTRUDE REIS

Pictures are used in the scheme of furnishings to give decoration to a room and to bring culture and inspiration into our lives. Thus the walls of a room furnish a background for creating a pleasant and cultural environment.

When the picture on the wall is no longer noticed and it no longer gives us ideas or makes us think, it is worn out. It is no longer filling the purpose of adding beauty and giving pleasure. This does not always mean, however, that it is necessary to throw the picture away. Perhaps it has hung too long in one place and hanging in a new place may make it interesting again. If the new surroundings do not call forth the old pleasure, try storing the picture for a while.

The Japanese, who have been trained to enjoy beautiful art, have an interesting method of using pictures in a room. Only one picture is used at a time and this one is given the place of honor. After a time, this picture is taken down and a different one used in its place.



*"Spring Dance"—Von Stuck*

## HOW TO ENJOY PICTURES

### CONNECT A PICTURE WITH SOMETHING IN YOURSELF

Training in art is not essential to gain a real pleasure in beautiful pictures. The first step in appreciation is to find a picture that means something to you, one that you can connect with something in yourself. Many a picture makes an appeal because it calls forth a memory of a person or of an



*"Mother"—Whistler*

incident. The portrait of Whistler's Mother may make this appeal because it calls forth the memory of one's own grandmother with her serene face. Many enjoy this picture because it typifies the beauty of age with all of its graciousness and dignity and because it touches a deep chord of respect for all mothers.

A picture may give pleasure because it matches

something in your experience. The person who grew up in a prairie country will love a picture with broad sweep of peaceful fields while the person whose home has always been on the shore of a great lake will respond to a picture of a ship at dawn on a quiet sea.

Another reason that we enjoy certain pictures is because they strengthen ambition. The mother who chose for her dining room, the picture of a pilgrim family seated around a table with heads bowed in grace, selected the picture because it strengthened the aspirations she had for her own small children. This picture strengthened her purpose to bring up her children to have reverent and grateful hearts.

Some pictures serve as travel to the persons whose imaginations make them wish for a glimpse of strange people and far lands, of great cathedrals and distant mountains. By living with pictures of these things, one may travel a long way from everyday tasks without leaving home.

### LOOK AT A PICTURE WITH IMAGINATION

Search the picture for the artist's meaning. It is not necessary to look this up in a reference book for the artist painted the picture to convey the meaning if you allow your imagination to interpret the picture. The picture of an old man and two small boys on a beach tells the story of a seaman who has sailed many seas, it tells about foreign lands, pirate ships, and glorious adventure. It tells of two little boys who plan to have splendid adventures

of their own. The picture tells you these things if you look at the boys' faces and the way they are sitting and if you study their clothes, their gestures, and their surroundings.

#### SEE THE BEAUTY AS THE ARTIST SEES IT

Another means of enjoying a picture is to see the beauty that the artist saw when he created it. Pictures are windows into the world of beauty that the artist knows. This beauty is often in color. When someone once said to the great artist Turner, that he had never seen such colors in nature, Turner replied, "Don't you wish you could?" A search for this same color in nature will be rewarded by the opening of a new world of beauty.



*"Boyhood of Sir Walter Raleigh"—Millais*

The artist paints the trees, hills, and streams as they appear in different seasons, at different times of the day, and in various atmospheric conditions. He attempts to give the feeling of being out-of-doors and close to nature. Very often, he paints the spirit of the out-of-doors, rather than a literal copy of it.

#### CONSIDER HOW THE PICTURE IS MADE

Increased appreciation of a picture comes through a discovery of how it is made. Apply the well-known principles of design. In the portrait of Whistler's Mother, discover how the artist secured balance by his use of light and dark. Balance and repose were secured in the Angelus by placing the two vertical, inactive figures against the long, quiet, horizontal lines. Find the center of interest in Madonna of the Chair. The curved lines in the picture lead the eye to the child's face. Rhythm, grace, and movement in Spring Dance are suggested by the wind-blown clouds and trees and in the dancing figures. Try to feel the rhythm and consciously enjoy the color harmony in every picture.

Study the kind of lines used in the composition and note what each kind expresses. Upward curves in the Spring Dance give an effect that is bouyant, gay, and cheerful. Downward curves in a picture lend a feeling of reluctance and sadness. Horizontal lines are found in all quiet, peaceful pictures.

Vertical lines such as cathedral spires are found in scenes that express purpose and aspiration.

#### CONNECT PICTURES WITH POETRY OR MUSIC

For the person who reads and memorizes poetry it seems natural to connect poetry and pictures. This adds to the enjoyment of each of them. Look at the painting of Whistler's *Mother* and think of these lines:

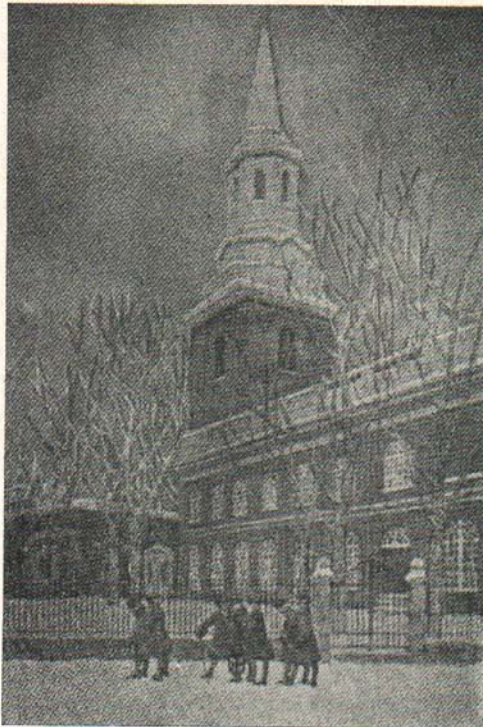
*"My crown is in my heart,  
not on my head  
Nor to be seen, my crown  
is called content."*

Look at the *Flower Girl in Holland* and think of:

*"Morning comes early and  
bright with dew,  
"Under your window I sing  
to you."*

In the same manner the person who loves music can almost hear the "Anvil Chorus" while looking at the picture, *Shoeing the Bay Mare*, or hear "The End of a Perfect Day" while looking at a picture of a beautiful sunset.

Try listening to music and thinking of pictures and discover the new joy you will take in both the pictures and the music.



*"Christmas Morning"—Guerin*

### THE SELECTION OF PICTURES

#### CLASSIFICATION

**Scenery.** Everyone likes a landscape picture for it is easy to understand and touches something in one's own experience. A landscape may give a feeling of rest or make one serene and thoughtful. A marine picture may suggest romance and adventure.

**Portraits.** Discovering a portrait that you enjoy is like finding a new friend. Pictures of people are often studies in character and they may give inspiration to worth while accomplishments. They may give courage and a desire for poise. Pleasure in portraits comes through a study of the lines in the face, the expression of the eyes, the turn of a hand, and the tilt of the head. These things reveal character.

**Pictures that Stir the Imagination.** Pictures of incidents from history, from literature, or from human experience are always interesting.

**Religious Pictures.** Very fine pictures of madonnas and stories from the Bible have an inspiring influence.

**Architecture.** Pictures of buildings and streets suggest travel and far off lands. Some buildings are interesting because of their historical significance, others because of their architectural beauty.

**Pictures of Animals.** These pictures appeal to the person whose hobbies or experiences lead to a special interest in animals.

**Pictures of Flowers or Still Life Objects.** Paintings of this type are usually chosen for the decorative quality of their color and design arrangement. Japanese prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige are excellent. Japanese prints usually show excellent movement or rhythm of line and they have fine arrangement of light and dark as well as subtle color. It adds to the enjoyment of Japanese prints when one knows that the artists conventionalized their forms and thought of their figure studies as designs rather than as photographic representations of individuals.



*"Erasmus"—Holbein*

In this classification, many pictures of the modern school of painting find their place. The growth and development of modern art has been upon the firm basis of simplicity and beautiful color. It is not photographic representation but is in the direction of the abstract and symbolical. The artists make skillful use of simplicity, strong color, lines, and many planes as well as expressive textures. Modernism is not driving out the old but is supplementing it where it is in harmony with the new interiors.

#### PICTURES THAT ARE SUITABLE FOR THE HOME

Suitable pictures for the home express cheer and happiness or give a feeling of rest. No picture that is silly, sentimental, or comic is worthy of a place in the home, neither should one choose pictures showing sorrow and grief for they are depressing. Avoid also, pictures that express fear, for they have a detrimental effect upon children.

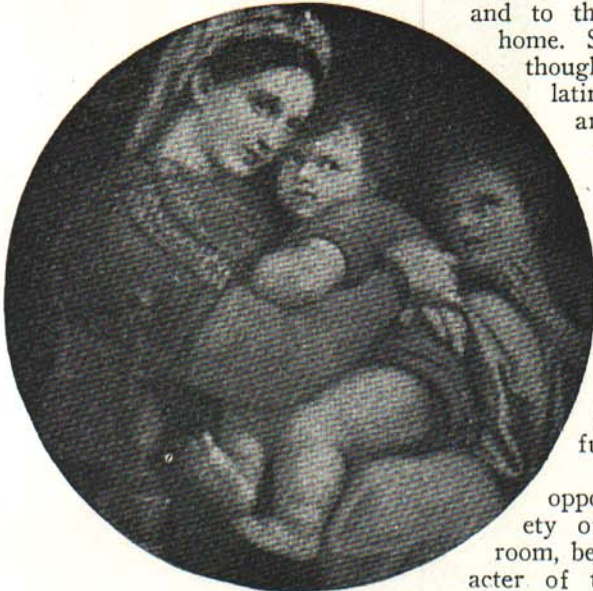
It is possible to buy very fine reproductions of most of the great masterpieces at very small cost. In buying an inexpensive copy of a famous



painting, note two things about the print. Choose one that does not have extremely bright color nor extremely dull color for the print with the medium colors is likely to be most like the original. The second thing to observe is the kind of lines in the picture; avoid the print that seems to have been blurred in the printing process.

#### CHOOSE PICTURES FOR THE ROOM WHERE THEY WILL HANG

Living room pictures should have a general appeal. They should be of interest to all the members of the family and to the guests coming into the home. Subjects that are restful or thoughtful, or inspiring or stimulating, are best. Landscapes are of the most general interest although marine pictures, architecture, portraits, and flower pictures are suitable.



"Madonna of the Chair"—Raphael

Dining room pictures should also be of general interest, but they may be gayer, with brighter color, than those in the living room. Flower pictures are particularly cheerful and suitable.

Bedroom pictures give an opportunity for a wider variety of subject than any other room, because of the intimate character of this room. Small framed

family photographs belong here where the one who loves them most may enjoy them. Religious pictures are suited to the bedroom because of the restful feeling they give.

Pictures for a child's room must never be the cast-offs of other rooms or chosen because an adult enjoys them. Consider the child's interests, let him help to select pictures for his room. Use only a few at a time and change them often, remembering a child's love of new things. Choose pictures that will develop imagination and suggest various interests. For the young child, pictures of nursery rhymes, animals, and flowers are excellent. The older child will enjoy pictures of famous people and national heroes, pictures of American Indian life and stories from history and literature. An effort should be made to surround the child with different pictures at different ages in order to keep up with his developing personality.

#### THE FRAMING OF PICTURES

After a beautiful picture has been selected, it requires a suitable frame to bring out all of its loveliness. The purpose of the frame is to make the picture attractive, to hold the interest within the picture, by not allowing the eye to be distracted.

A simple frame is correct, with very little ornament or decoration. It

should never call attention to itself. Wooden frames tinted with oil paints to repeat some of the colors of the picture are very satisfactory. The color of the frame may repeat the color of the middle value of the picture. The middle value is neither the lightest nor darkest color, but that color which is half way between the two. Never allow the color in the frame to be brighter than the brightest color in the picture. Some of the various stained woods with no added color make suitable frames. Metal may be used in a dull bronze or gilt finish. Sometimes a very narrow frame of black gives an accent that enlivens a picture.

The width of a frame depends upon the picture. A picture with intense color or large bold spots needs a fairly wide frame to enclose the composition while a picture with delicate color and small detail calls for a narrow frame.

Most pictures may be framed without mats. Only pictures with delicate color or a great deal of light such as etchings, need a mat to enhance the beauty of the picture, in which case the mat may be chosen to match one of the lightest colors in the picture.



*"Angelus"—Millet*

## THE HANGING OF PICTURES

### NUMBERS

Use only a few pictures in a room. A living room needs only one main picture and this should be placed in the most suitable and prominent place in the room. Two or three smaller pictures may be used with this main picture, if they do not detract from it as a center of interest. If there is a dark corner, a small picture in bright colors may hang there. Small scenes placed over a desk or table are interesting in the room with one large picture. In a room hung with pictures leave some plain wall to act as rest space. Too many pictures will give a spotted appearance to the walls.

### BACKGROUND

Pictures should be hung against a background that calls attention not to itself but rather to the picture. Plain walls in neutral colors, cream, buff, or gray are suitable. Figured wallpaper, bright painted walls, or dark dingy walls never make a proper background for pictures.

## HEIGHT

It is very important that pictures be hung at the right height if they are to be enjoyed. It has been found that a picture can be seen to its best

advantage if it is hung so that the center of interest in the picture is on the eye level of the person viewing it. This height is usually reckoned as being five feet three inches from the floor. The height for pictures in the child's room should be adjusted to the height of the child.



*"The Village Road"—Cezanne*

tops or bottoms of the frames may come. This is a question of personal tastes and judgment. Any of the three methods is correct.

The best decorative effects will be gained, if the pictures are chosen so

that their size and shape will be similar to the size and shape of the wall space where they are to be hung. A horizontal, rectangular picture of considerable size is best suited to the space above a davenport which is against a long wall, or over a fireplace. Vertical flower panels may be hung in the narrow wall space on either side of a group of windows.



*"Peace and Plenty"—Inness*

## GROUPING

Pictures are most pleasing when they are hung in relation to some group or piece of furniture. A large picture seems more stable, more a part of the

group, if it hangs above a table or large piece of furniture. The furniture appears to act as a base for the weight of the picture. If there seems to be too much space between a piece of furniture and the picture above it, something may be placed on top of desk or table which appears to bring the two together.

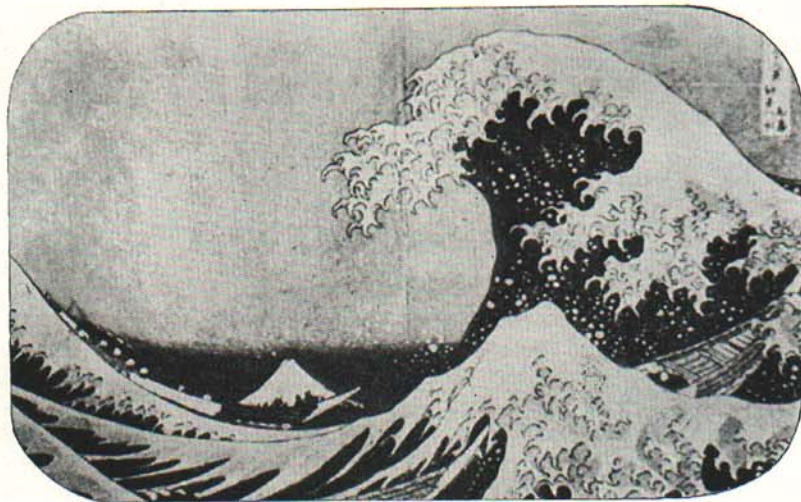
If there are no large pictures to be hung, then the small ones should be hung in groups, in order to avoid giving a spotty effect to the walls. Pictures of about the same size and of similar subjects look well when hung together.

Large pictures are usually hung by wires running from screw eyes on the back of the frame to the molding at the ceiling. These wires should not form a triangle above the picture, but should run parallel to each other up to separate hooks at the molding.

If a picture is of medium size or quite small, it should be hung so that the wire does not show, but attached to a small nail driven in the wall directly behind the picture. Pictures are hung flat to the wall for we cannot see them well if the top edge of the frame tilts forward.

#### SUMMARY

Do not think of pictures merely as beautiful wall decoration, but choose those that make your surroundings happier and your ideals higher. Choose pictures that are worthy of continued notice. Use only a few pictures in a room at a time.



*"The Great Wave"—Hokusai*

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