

A *Ghostly* Newsletter

Hello: I hope this finds you well and reading a good book. In the spirit of Halloween, I'm re-reading a classic by Robert Louis Stevenson, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." I'd forgotten that this is one of his short stories. Next up from his collection of short stories: "The Body-Snatcher," "A Lodging For the Night," "Markheim," "Thrawn Janet," and "The Misadventures of John Nicholson." Spoiler alert to all you Star Wars fans: "Thrawn" doesn't refer to the Grand Admiral, but to the more traditional meaning of Stevenson's time: twisted, crooked, perverse, and ill-tempered.

In honor of Halloween: "**Ghost Paintings:**"



What's Behind That Masterpiece Painting?

Most artists reuse canvases, and this theme is a plot point and clue in "[Stealing Renoir](#)." Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Mártir Patricio Clito Ruíz y Picasso, (yes, he was christened with 25 names) burned some of his early work to stay warm during one winter in Paris, and reused what was left. A few of Picasso's paintings that were supposedly destroyed by fire, is a plot point in "[Stealing Picasso](#)."

While working on my upcoming book, "Saving Van Gogh," I have learned that Vincent Van Gogh reused many of his canvases, which is causing a problem for museums showcasing his early work. As the paint and varnish on the finished work fades and cracks, the earlier paintings bleed through and muddle the appearance. Modern technology reveals more of the earlier works hidden below the surface. Since this is October and nearly Halloween, let's explore these "Ghost Paintings."



The perimeter of Renoir's "A Couple," (pictured above) had been covered by the frame, which protected the paint from exposure to light and prevented fading. Renoir used carmine lake pigments to achieve the bright red stripes in the dress, unfortunately, these pigments fade when exposed to light. The bright red pigment is made from crushed and ground cochineal insects that live on cactuses in Mexico and South America!

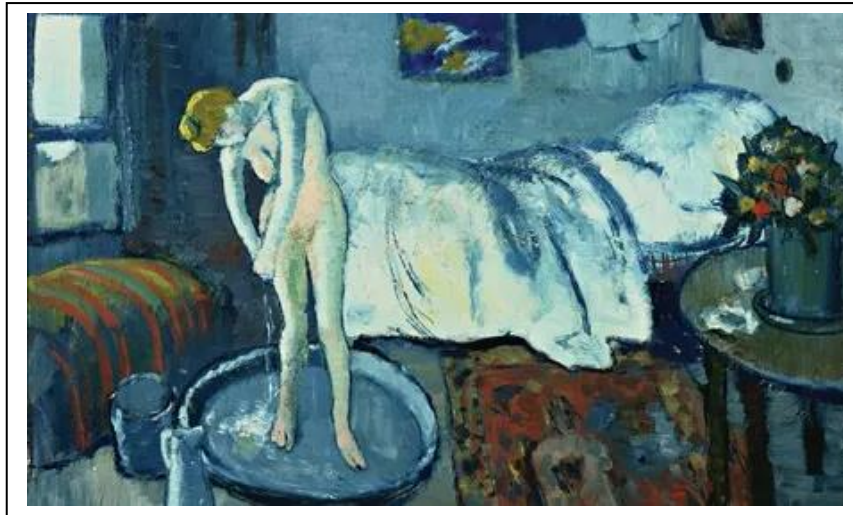
Further examination revealed an entirely different painting hidden beneath the surface, a "ghost painting."



The Blues

Pablo Picasso's Blue Period reflects a difficult time in his early career. He was mired in poverty and surrounded by the beggars and prostitutes who had congregated in one of the poorer sections of Paris. It was shortly after his close friend, the Spanish poet Carles Casagemas, shot himself in the head at a dinner party, that Picasso began using blue hues to express his own suffering.

The two paintings pictured above are what lie beneath one of his landmark paintings from this period: "The Blue Room."



Pablo Picasso, The Blue Room, 1901

The paintings on the wall behind the bather are Picasso's own work, which at the time, he was unable to sell.



Because Vincent Van Gogh was such a prolific letter writer, we can glean additional information about one of his “ghost paintings.” In a letter to his brother, Theo, on or about Sunday, October 7, 1883, Vincent included a sketch (or scratch, in Vincent’s own words) of one of the paintings he was working on, and had this to say about it: “Here’s a little scratch from the peat fields. There are often curious oppositions of Black and White here. For example, a canal with white sandy banks through a sooty black plain. You can see it above, too, small black figures against a white sky, and again gradations of black and white in the sand in the foreground.”

This sketch led to a “ghost painting” pictured below.



Which is buried beneath the finished work, pictured below: “Women on the Peat Moor” 1883.



I hope you've enjoyed this "spooky" edition of my newsletter. If you haven't already, please take a moment to leave a review on Amazon. It is really helpful with sales. Here is the link to my latest book, "[Stealing Picasso](#)." Thank you.

If you know of anyone who is looking for a speaker, the Kentucky Humanities Speakers Bureau is great about helping to subsidize appearances. I'm available as a speaker to talk about "[Stealing Renoir](#)," and how World War II was the largest art theft in history.

Or, if Kentucky history is appropriate for audiences, the Speakers Bureau will subsidize my appearance to discuss the findings from my research grant into the Underground Railroad in Kentucky. I'm also available to talk about gardening with native plants and "[Let The Earth Breathe](#)." If you or anyone you know would like to schedule a talk, here's the [link](#).

Meanwhile, I have been gathering seeds in preparation for the upcoming native plant and seed swaps. The swaps are free, as are the plants and seeds. If you aren't already a member and are interested in gardening with native plants, here is the link: [Kentucky Native Plants Swap](#)

[Here is a link to my previous newsletters.](#)

Happy reading.

Stephen Allten Brown

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