Jackson Walston

CTZN 110

29 September 2018

VMFA First Impressions

On Saturday, September 29, our CTZN class went to the Virginia Museum of the Fine Arts. This is the second time I had been to the VMFA, the other time being in August, during the honors retreat. I was glad that I had been before because when I went this time I knew where I wanted to spend most of my time, in the American exhibit. The last time I was at the VMFA I was stunned by some of the beauty I saw in this exhibit. Each piece seemed to convey emotion of some sort. Some paintings showed happiness, some serenity, some elegance. No matter what the piece was, I saw and felt emotion.

The collection I was in was called The James W. and Frances Gibson McGlothlin Collection of American Art. I spent almost all of my free time in this exhibit and really came to appreciate the paintings. They all were different from one another, yet they fit together so well in this exhibit. I think what brought them together for me was that they made me feel something. When I walked the gallery, every piece that I looked at conveyed some meaning in me. When I first walked in, a painting with a ship sailing through ice and glaciers at sunset or sunrise. It was called *Scotch Whaler Working through Ice* and was painted by William Bradford. The piece made me feel extremely calm and happy. I have always enjoyed watching sunsets with my mom, so I think that is why this piece really spoke to me.

There were to paintings in exhibit that just looked so graceful and elegant that they made me respect the women in the paintings without even knowing who they were. These were *At the Opera*, by Seymour Joseph Guy, and *Mrs. Richard H. Derby*, by John Singer Sargent. The first painting, *At the Opera*, showed a woman’s face as she looks off to something not seen in the painting. She is dressed formally and looks elegant. The second, *Mrs. Richard H. Derby*, showed the full body of a woman dressed in black and pink. She looked calm, but also had a whisper of a smile on her face. These women looked beautiful and graceful, it made me think that they should be respected. I admired their beauty.

One of these paintings I saw was called *Madame Errazuriz*, by John Singer Sargent. This painting showed a woman dressed in all black against a dull background. She was definitely the focus of the piece, furthermore I believe her emotion was the focus of the piece. She looks as though she is grieving and sad. Typically, people dress in all black when mourning the loss of one they cared for. I felt sympathy for her; she looked sad and that made me feel sad for her. This was one of the few paintings in the exhibit that made me feel sad instead of happy or tranquil. It was very interesting and unique.

The last painting that really grabbed my focus was one called *Flowers in Her Hair*, by Julius Leblanc Stewart. The showed a woman who looked very serene and calm. What really caught my attention, however, was that the painting was not fully painted. I thought that perhaps the artist died before finishing the painting, but it was signed in the bottom right corner. So, this lead me to believe that it was intentionally painted to look unfinished. I think I actually like it more like this than I would if it was fully painted. The important features are painted, and you can see that the woman is happy and calm. It is very fascinating because it was the only painting in the exhibit that was “unfinished”. Perhaps someone else would see it and think it was stupid because it was not finished. It is up to the person to decide what the painting makes you feel. This made me reconsider some of the things that I thought about art; it doesn’t need to be fully painted to be an amazing piece.

There were many other paintings in the exhibit that I stopped to really look at and question, but the ones above are the ones that really caught my attention or made me feel something special. They made me experience a range of emotions, some that I didn’t expect a painting to make me feel. It is actually kind of interesting to think that these paintings made me feel one way but could make someone else feel another way. That, I believe, is part of the beauty of art, it is subjective and open to interpretation. Just because these paintings made me feel one way doesn’t mean that you would feel the same way.