

## Lesson Fourteen:

# From the Sugar Cane Fields To the Easel—

## THE MYSTERY OF GEORGE RODRIGUE'S BLUE DOG

*My teachers influenced me the most. I suppose if I had to pick an artist, it would be Salvador Dali. I studied art, but you have to throw all that away and the art has to be truly yours. That is why I returned to Louisiana and painted what I knew.*

~George Rodrigue

(W. F. Foy. Personal Interview. April 27, 2004)



### Setting The Stage

Many artists have been inspired or influenced by the natural scenic beauty of wetlands of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary, and this is readily seen in their endeavors. Two such artists are Rhea Gary and C.C. Lockwood, who collaborated on "Marsh Mission," a yearlong project to bring national attention to Louisiana's disappearing wetlands.

(<http://www.marshmission.com>) The May, 2005 issue of *American Artist* features an eight-page article on Rhea Gary's work. C.C.

Lockwood is a nature photographer who has documented estuarine ecosystems and wildlife in a series of photographic works. His books have been invaluable in helping people discover the natural beauty of the estuary, as well as educating them about its issues. C.C. Lockwood is spotlighted in a newspaper article "Missionary of the Marsh," (May 30, 2004, p. E1) written by Chris Bynum, staff writer for *The Times-Picayune*. In the article, Lockwood describes the project's mission statement, "This is land that harbors value; land that supports the Cajun culture, history, and music associated with it..."

This lesson features a Cajun artist whose body of work has also been influenced by the beauty of our wetlands. The painter, George Rodrigue, born in New Iberia, Louisiana, finds his inspiration in Louisiana bayous and swamps and in Cajun culture. (For a brief biography, visit <http://www.georgerodrigue.com/index2.htm>.) He catapulted an image of his little blue dog representing *Loup-Garou*, a werewolf of Cajun legend, into a national pop phenomenon (Read his interview, pp.17-23). Students will explore the elements and principles of art as they apply their knowledge to the creation of a Rodrigue-inspired estuary pop image using Photo Shop Deluxe software, digital cameras, and Microsoft Word.



**Loup Garou**

George Rodrigue

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George Rodrigue

# Objectives

## STUDENTS WILL

- **define pop, abstract, and expressionistic art as it relates to Cajun artist George Rodrigue.**
- **define the elements and principles of art.**
- **view and analyze artistic elements and principles of the work of celebrated artists Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Edvard Munch, and George Rodrigue.**
- **research the life of the artists George Rodrigue, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, and Edvard Munch to develop an understanding of abstract, pop, and abstract expressionist art.**
- **study pop, abstract, and abstract expressionist art genres and come to understand the type of art that inspires George Rodrigue.**
- **study in-depth the art of Cajun artist George Rodrigue and create a pop image using Photo Shop to recreate a Rodrigue-inspired pop image.**
- **depict elements (animal and landscape) of the BTE in their pop-inspired art.**
- **research and discuss the influence of the estuary on the artistic development styles of New Iberia artist George Rodrigue.**
- **develop their critical thinking skills as well as appreciation of art through the use of teacher-generated art critique questions.**

# MATERIALS

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## HANDOUTS:

- *An Interview with George Rodrigue: Not Just a Cajun Guy Who Paints Dogs the Color Blue* (pp. 17-23)
  - *George Rodrigue's Artistic Styles* (p.9)
  - *How to Talk about the Elements & Principles of Art* (pp.12-13)
  - *History of Pop Art* (pp.10-11)
  - *Estuary Pop Art Procedures* (pp.14-15)
  - *Estuary Pop Art Rubric* (p.16)
- Copy of the following books by George Rodrigue: *Blue Dog Man*, *Why Is The Blue Dog Blue*, *Blue Dog*, and *Blue Dog Love*
- Copy of documentary about George Rodrigue (It provides video documentary as well as access to Rodrigue's galleries.) at <http://www.io.com/~gibbonsb/rodrigue.html>
- Copy of Doug MacCash's article (2004, May 23). "Top Dog." *The Times Picayune*, pp. E3-E6.
- Computers with Internet access as well as software programs—Photo Shop Deluxe and Microsoft Word
- Digital camera with extra batteries and discs (depending on type of camera)
- Photo-quality paper
- 8 x 11 inch black matting (from local frame shop or hobby store)
- CDs of assorted Cajun music
- Drawing and watercolor paper
- Markers
- Paints
- Colored pencils
- Paint brushes

## GETTING READY

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1. Collect materials.
2. Practice creating pop images. You may want to arrange for an art teacher or talented art student(s) to facilitate the art activity.

## PROCESS

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### WHOLE GROUP/SMALL GROUPS

1. Ask the students the essential question, “What is art?” and list responses on chart paper.
2. Provide students with several images that represent pop, expressionistic, and abstract art. (Use projector and laptop computer or downloaded images, art books or postcards.) Ask the students if they recognize any of the images? Can they identify the artist and genre?
3. Define pop, abstract, and expressionist art. Refer to handout: *George Rodrigue’s Artistic Styles*.
4. Show the images again and ask students to identify the genre. If needed, provide the names of the artists: Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, Edvard Munch, and George Rodrigue.
5. Discuss elements and principles of art. Refer to handout: *How to Talk about the Elements & Principles of Art*.
6. Look carefully at the image of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*. For an image as well as in-depth information about the painting, refer to the URL <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/>
7. In small groups have students use their handout to analyze and describe the elements and principles Edvard Munch used in his painting.
8. Ask the question, “What do you think was the artist’s purpose for creating this image?” Discuss Expressionism.
9. Assign Journal questions: “Why is the person in Edvard Munch’s painting screaming?” “How does Munch’s artistic style reflect the era (time period)?”
10. Break class into four groups. Assign one group Jackson Pollock’s *The Composition*, another group Picasso’s *Abstract Portrait 1*, a third group Andy Warhols’ *Soup Can*, and the fourth group George Rodrigue’s, *Loup Garou*. Each group will discuss the artistic style (i.e. abstract,

expressionism, pop, etc.), analyze the artistic elements and principles, and answer the question, “What is the artist’s message?”

11. Images can be downloaded from the following sites:

- Paintings and related links for Jackson Pollock: <http://www.beatmuseum.org/pollock/jacksonpollock.html>
- Official Picasso Web site: <http://www.picasso.fr/anglais/>
- Biography of pop artist Andy Warhol: <http://www.warholfoundation.org/biograph.htm>
- Rodrigue site providing video clip of artist at work, information about children and art as well as images of past and current work: <http://www.georgerodrigue.com/index2.htm>

12. Ask each group to share analyses with the whole class.

13. Read aloud passages from a George Rodrigue book such as *Blue Dog Man*. Show students Rodrigue’s artwork, emphasize his Cajun ancestry, and pay close attention to artistic elements and principles.

14. Pass out copies of the handout *An Interview with George Rodrigue: Not Just a Cajun Guy Who Paints Dogs the Color Blue*. Have students read and write notes in margins. Allow time for student discussion and questions. Or ask for three student volunteers to read the interview parts for the interviewer, George, and Wendy aloud.

15. Distribute handout *History of Pop Art*. Explore Internet sites such as the Index of Pop artists [http://wwar.com/masters/movements/pop\\_art.html](http://wwar.com/masters/movements/pop_art.html) as well as the search engine focusing on art genres, such as Pop and Abstract Expressionism. [http://www.artchive.com/artchive/pop\\_art.html](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/pop_art.html). Look at art books.

16. Have students bring from home one “pop-”ular item (e.g., McDonald’s French fry container) or image of an item. Ask them to draw sketches transforming the object into Pop Art.

17. Ask students to research animals that live in the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary. Ask them to draw sketches transforming the selected estuary animal into Pop Art. They can use a Microsoft drawing tool to draw their selected estuary animal or scan their sketches and save to a computer file.

18. Students will take a field trip to a habitat in the estuary to photograph the landscape of the estuary using a digital camera or locate an estuary photograph online.

19. All groups will use Photo Shop Deluxe to paste drawn animals (previously saved into a folder) into their digital estuary landscapes to create a Rodrigue-inspired image. Refer to handout *Estuary Pop Art Procedures*.



## EXTENSIONS

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- Using the drawn estuary animal image you created earlier, create a 3D image using household or found objects.
- Write a legend about your animal (inspired by the Cajun legend of the *Loup Garou*, told to George Rodrigue as a little boy).
- Use printmaking techniques (think Andy Warhol) and a popular image from contemporary society to create a series of post cards or note cards to raise money for a grade-level “Pop” festival celebrating the popular image (Why not write a letter to George Rodrigue and invite him to the festivities?).
- Plan a class culinary celebration honoring George Rodrigue’s Cajun heritage. Students will research and cook a Cajun dish to share with classmates and add recipes to a class cookbook.

## RESOURCES

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### BOOKS

MacCash, D. (2004, May 23). Top Dog. *The Times Picayune*, pp. E3-E6.

McAinch, D., Rodrigue, G., & Rodrigue, W. (2001). *Blue dog love*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.

Baumbusch, B., & Rodrigue, G. (1999). *Many faces of the face*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.

Freundlich, L. S., & Rodrigue, G. (2002). *Blue dog*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.

Goldstone, B., & Rodrigue, G. (2002). *Why is blue dog blue?*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.

Danto, G., & Lewis, M. (2003) *Art of George Rodrigue: A Cajun artist*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.

McAinch, D., & Rodrigue, G. (2002). *A blue dog Christmas*. New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc.



## WEB SITES

This is an excellent search engine focusing on art genres, such as Pop and Abstract Expressionism, links to books and other sites.

[http://www.artchive.com/artchive/pop\\_art.html](http://www.artchive.com/artchive/pop_art.html)

Wonderful site, provides video documentary as well as access to Rodrigue's galleries

<http://www.io.com/~gibbonsb/rodrigue.html>

Rodrigue site providing video clip of artist at work, information about children and art as well as images of past and current work

<http://www.georgerodrigue.com/index2.htm>

An online exhibit as well as related background information about the artist

<http://www.sec.state.la.us/ARCHIVES/rodrigue/rodrigue-index.htm>

An encyclopedia of Cajun culture

<http://www.cajunculture.com/People/rodrigue.htm>

Excellent site featuring Acadian artist, including George Rodrigue

<http://www.acadian-cajun.com/acadart.htm>

USA Today article focusing on George Rodrigue

<http://www.usatoday.com/gallery/bluedog/frame.htm>

The image of the dog in art, painting, photography, literature, theater, history, television & on the Web

<http://personal.uncc.edu/jvanoate/k9/artdogs.htm>

Index of Pop artists

[http://wwar.com/masters/movements/pop\\_art.html](http://wwar.com/masters/movements/pop_art.html)

Biography of pop artist Andy Warhol

<http://www.warholfoundation.org/biograph.htm>

Online art encyclopedia

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/history/expressionism.html>

Abstract expressionist

<http://www.chrissnider.com/component/option.com-wrapper/Itemid,59>

The Art Institute of Chicago

[http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_glossary1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_glossary1.shtml)

Edvard Munch Biography and Paintings

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/>



Munch Museum

<http://www.gallen-kallela.fi/artnoir/Mmuseo.html>

Official Picasso website

<http://www.picasso.fr/anglais/>

Cool Picasso site for kids

<http://www.surfnetkids.com/picasso.htm>

Picasso Biography

<http://www.picasso.com/>

Jackson Pollock Biography

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/pollock/>

Guggenheim Museum featuring paintings of Jackson Pollock

[http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist\\_bio\\_129.html](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist_bio_129.html)

Paintings and related links for Jackson Pollock

<http://www.beatmuseum.org/pollock/jacksonpollock.html>

Elements of art and related information

[http://www.sanford-artadventures.com/study/g\\_art\\_elements.html](http://www.sanford-artadventures.com/study/g_art_elements.html)

## FIELD TRIP SUGGESTION

Jean Lafitte National Park - The Park seeks to illustrate the influence of environment and history on the development of a unique regional culture. The Barataria Preserve (in Marrero) interprets the natural and cultural history of the uplands, swamps, and marshlands of the region. Located on the West Bank of the Mississippi River in Marrero, Louisiana. Barataria Preserve Visitor Center, open daily 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed December 25 and Mardi Gras.

Visit [www.nps.gov/jela](http://www.nps.gov/jela)



<http://www.btnep.org>



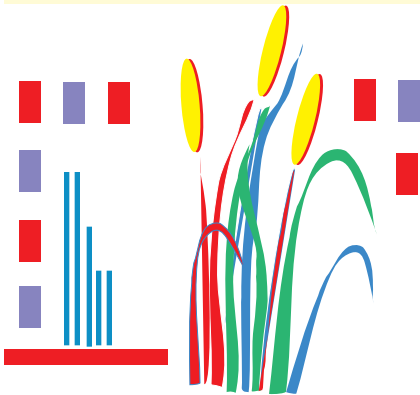
## HANDOUT:

## GEORGE RODRIGUE'S ARTISTIC STYLES

### EXPRESSIONISM

Expressionism is a style of art in which the intention is not to reproduce a subject accurately, but instead to portray it in such a way as to express the inner state of the artist. The movement is associated with Germany in particular and was influenced by such emotionally-charged styles as Symbolism, Fauvism and Cubism.

There are several different and somewhat overlapping groups of Expressionist artists, including *Die Brücke*, *Der Blaue Reiter*, *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* and the Bauhaus School. Leading Expressionists included Wassily Kandinsky, George Grosz, Franz Marc and Amadeo Modigliani.



### POP ART

Pop Art is a style of art that explores the everyday imagery that is part of contemporary consumer culture. Common sources of pop art include advertisements, consumer product packaging, celebrities and comic strips.

Leading Pop artists include Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein.

### ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

Abstract expressionism, in which there is no subject at all, but instead pure form, developed into an extremely influential style in the mid-20th century. Abstract Expressionism is a form of art in which the artist expresses himself purely through the use of form and color. It is a form of non-representational, or non-objective art, which means that there are no concrete objects represented.

Now considered to be the first American artistic movement of worldwide importance, the term was originally used to describe the work of artists Arshile Gorky, Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock.

The movement can be broadly divided into two groups: *Action Painting*, typified by artists such as Pollock, de Kooning, Franz Kline and Philip Guston, put the focus on the physical action involved in painting; *Color Field Painting*, practiced by Mark Rothko and Kenneth Noland, among others, was primarily concerned with exploring the effect of pure color on a canvas.



Pop Art was a movement that departed from the clichés of boldness so often portrayed in modern art. The Pop artists disconnected themselves from the idea that art must contain meaning in the abstract.

The artists most recognized and closely associated with Pop art include:

- **Andy Warhol** (1928-1987 ) *Mickey Mouse, Marilyn Monroe, Soup Can, Mick Jagger,* and *Cow* are among his more famous paintings. One of his famous quotes is, "In the future everybody will have 15 minutes of fame."
- **Roy Lichtenstein** (1923-1997) *Sunrise, Spray,* and *Girl With Hair Ribbon* are among his most famous paintings.
- **Claes Oldenburg** (1929-1989) *Scissors and Monument* is one of his more famous works.
- **Richard Hamilton** (1922-1982) One of his most famous works was *Man, Machine, and Motion.*

These artists found success in both Europe and the United States. As it existed then, and as it exists now, Pop Art was a regeneration and renewal from the nearly two-decade reign of *Abstract Art*.

## HISTORY

The Pop Art movement first began in England (British Pop). Pop artists' roots began with an interest in *Cubism and Dadaism*. They admired the singular artworks of Pablo Picasso's *Plate with Wafers* and Stuart Davis' *Lucky Strike*. They also appreciated the work of Marcel Duchamp whose ready-mades, as he called them, added a new sense of completion for the Pop artists.

Pop Art had an unusual kind of history for a modern art movement; it existed in the United States, England, California, and even in Canada. For the first few years of its existence, and especially in New York, Pop Art went relatively unnoticed.

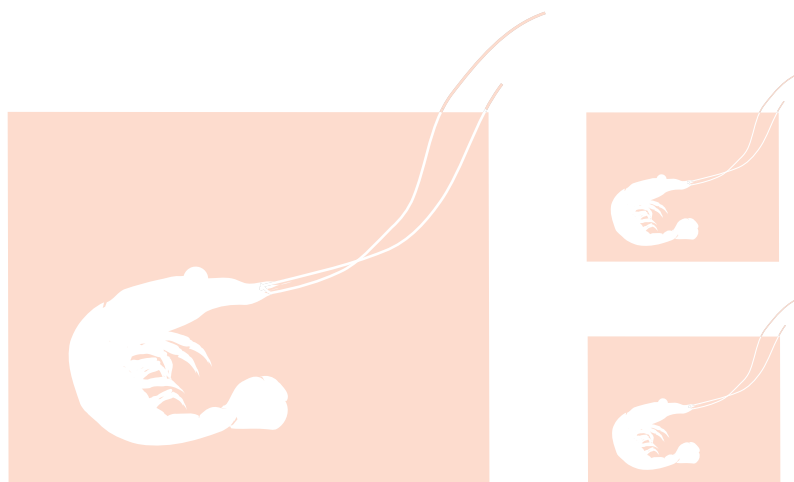
### 1950s

- Recognition of Pop Art began in the early 1950s and slowly developed over the next few years.
- Pop Art developed mostly because artists began to re-direct their attention to the possibilities of change.

- One of the first substantial artworks to come from these early years was Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is*—a work combining the efforts of art and today's culture. Other changes would soon follow, and many artists began completing similar renditions of how they saw Pop Art.
- For the most part, the reason Pop Art was so successful for its artists in the early years was because the world had grown tired of the repetitive forms of Abstract art.

## 1960s

- The artists began to associate more often with one another in the 1960s.
- In 1961, the Pop artists showed their work at the Young Contemporaries Exhibition. The list of artists included David Hockney, Peter Phillip and Derek Boshier. On the New York side of Pop Art, such artists as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselman began exploring their own aesthetic program.
- By 1965, when Pop artists showed their work at the Milwaukee art center, Pop Art had become well defined and regarded.





# HANDOUT:

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE ELEMENTS & PRINCIPLES OF ART

ELEMENTS OF ART	DESCRIPTION	ANALYSIS
COLOR	<p>The color of an object depends on how it absorbs and/or reflects light. If an object absorbs all of the light wavelengths, it will appear black. If it reflects all of them, it will appear white. If an object absorbs all wavelengths except red, for example, it will look red.</p>	
VALUE	<p>Value is the lightness or darkness of a color. You can get different values of a color by mixing its shades and tints.</p>	
SPACE	<p>Space is an empty place or surface in or around a work of art. Space can be two-dimensional, three-dimensional, negative and/or positive.</p>	
LINE	<p>There are many different kinds of lines (i.e. zig zag, straight, parallel, etc.). When connected together they make shapes, such as triangles, squares, etc.</p>	
SHAPE	<p>Shapes are flat. Some shapes are geometric, such as squares, circles, triangles, rectangles, and ovals. Other shapes are organic or irregular.</p>	
FORM	<p>Forms are three-dimensional; they have height, width and thickness. Shapes are flat; forms are not.</p>	
TEXTURE	<p>Texture is the way something feels when you touch it. Artists also create the illusion of texture.</p>	

# HANDOUT:

## HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE ELEMENTS & PRINCIPLES OF ART, CONTD.

PRINCIPLES OF ART	DESCRIPTION	ANALYSIS
BALANCE	Balance describes how artists create visual weight (symmetrical, asymmetrical, and radial balance). Artists think about how to make their works balanced by using elements such as line, shape and color.	
CONTRAST	Contrast creates excitement and interest in artworks. Two things that are very different have a lot of <b>contrast</b> . White and black have the greatest contrast. Complementary colors also have high contrast.	
PROPORTION	Proportion describes the size, location or amount of one thing compared to another.	
PATTERN	Artists create pattern by repeating a line, shape or color over and over again.	
RHYTHM	Visual rhythm makes you think of the rhythms you hear in music or dance. Artists create visual rhythm by repeating art elements and creating patterns.	
EMPHASIS	Artists use emphasis to make certain parts of their artwork stand out and grab your attention. The center of interest or focal point is the place the artist draws your eye to first.	
UNITY	Unity is the feeling that everything in the work of art works together and looks like it fits.	
VARIETY	Variety occurs when an artist creates something that looks different from the rest of the artwork. An artist may use variety to make you look at a certain part or make the artwork more interesting.	

What do you do when you want to create a pop image, and George Rodrigue has already claimed the Blue Dog? Create your own Rodrigue-inspired pop art ... here's how.

## PROCEDURES

1. Select an animal that lives in the estuary.
2. Open a new Word document using Microsoft Word.
3. Click the drawing tool bar; select different functions/art elements (i.e. shapes and lines) of drawing tools and create an estuary animal image.
4. After you draw your animal image, select the paint can.
5. Click on each individual shape and select a color from the paint pallet (If you would like your image to be one color simply click on your image and select one color).
6. Highlight each individual shape of your image by holding down the shift key and clicking on each shape, then select a color from the paint pallet to color your shapes.
7. Use the format object tool to select "group" to make one complete image that can be manipulated around the page as well as your selected digital Louisiana landscape photo.
8. Click and drag your animal image to ensure all shapes are unified and can be viewed as a whole image.
9. Place your cursor on the image and click "save as."
10. Make a folder with your first and last name (this folder can be used throughout the year to store other documents).
11. Save your drawing/image as Pop Art Animal.
12. Minimize your animal image document for later use.
13. Open Photo Shop.
14. Click: "file" and then open.
15. Select one of your previously saved digital Louisiana landscape photos to use as a background for your Rodrigue-inspired Pop picture.
16. Layers dialogue box should appear on screen (If not, choose window from toolbar and select "layers.>").
17. Double click background image in layers pallet.

## HANDOUT:

## ESTUARY POP ART PROCEDURES, CONTD.

18. New layers dialogue box should appear; click OK and your background should now read Layers 0 (zero).
19. Return to your minimized word document (animal image) and restore the image.
20. Click once on image from word document to select.
21. Go to Edit and select “copy.”
22. Return to Photo Shop (your landscape photo should appear).
23. Select “paste” from Edit on your toolbar.
24. Your animal image should now appear in your landscape photo.
25. Move your image to the area of the picture that suites you by clicking on “drawn image” and using the mouse to place into a specific photo location.
26. If you would like to resize your image, once you paste it into your digital landscape, return to the saved word document and resize your image from this location, repeating steps 21-23 as needed.
27. If you would like to delete a layer (in this case the original pasted image), click on “layer” and you will notice it highlighted.
28. Return to the top toolbar and go to layer and select “delete” and then “layer.”
29. Save your final image into your folder as Final Pop Art Animal Image.
30. Print a copy (obtain teacher’s permission) of your Rodrigue-inspired Pop image.
31. You or your teacher can laminate your final print.
32. Mat and frame your artwork and hang in school gallery or hallway bulletin board.



**Loup Garou**

George Rodrigue

Image reprinted with permission from  
George Rodrigue

**ALWAYS BE SURE TO SAVE YOUR WORK EVERY 5 minutes TO ENSURE THAT IT IS NOT LOST!!!**

# HANDOUT:



George Rodrigue  
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## ESTUARY POP ART RUBRIC GEORGE RODRIGUE - INSPIRED POP ART

POINTS	ELEMENTS OF ART	PRINCIPLES OF ART	CAPTURING STYLE / ARTIST
4	Very skillful in applying elements of art, e.g., color, shapes, lines, space, forms	Very skillful in applying principles of art, e.g., balance, proportion, emphasis, unity	Computer painting is very consistent with George Rodrigue's pop art style
3	Skillful in applying elements of art, e.g., color, shapes, lines, space, forms	Skillful in applying principles of art, e.g., balance, proportion, emphasis, unity	Computer painting is consistent with George Rodrigue's pop art style
2	Somewhat skillful in applying elements of art, e.g., color, shapes, lines, space, forms	Somewhat skillful in applying principles of art, e.g., balance, proportion, emphasis, unity	Computer painting is somewhat consistent with George Rodrigue's pop art style
1	Needs work in applying elements of art, e.g., color, shapes, lines, space, forms	Needs work in applying principles of art, e.g., balance, proportion, emphasis, unity	Needs work: Computer painting is not consistent with George Rodrigue's pop art style

TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS: 12 X 5 = 60 POINTS





## HANDOUT:

# AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE RODRIGUE: NOT JUST A CAJUN GUY WHO PAINTS DOGS THE COLOR BLUE

(W. F. Foy. Personal Interview. April 27, 2004)

George and Wendy Rodrigue were extremely gracious and forthcoming in the following interview. I, Wendy Foy, had the pleasure to not only learn about George's experience growing up in New Iberia, Louisiana, but also learned of his rise to fame with his image of a "Blue Dog." As a teacher, I feel the Rodrigues gave me a personal course in art education. I was inspired by George's art and Wendy's need to have George represented authentically—as an accomplished artist—and not just a Cajun guy who paints dogs the color blue. The following interview highlights George's remarkable career and personal accomplishments.

Q1: I have read you were born in New Iberia, Louisiana. How has your upbringing in South Louisiana influenced you as a creative spirit?

*I think one is born with a creative spirit. Being from southern Louisiana (New Iberia), it wasn't until I traveled outside of the state that I truly knew how different I was. My Cajun culture disappeared; and when you get away from your culture for a while you reflect on how you were brought up and realize your cultural identity is slipping away. I didn't want this to happen, I had to preserve my heritage ... so I returned home to Louisiana.*

Q2: So, you were an outsider?

*Yes, it's not until you leave that you have time to reflect on where it is that you are from. It took me some years before I was able to embrace my Cajun culture, appreciate and want to return and preserve my culture ... I owed it to my roots, my people, to represent my birth place through my art.*

Q3: What is your definition of art?

*Art is a personal expression. It reflects society; it always has. Art expresses or mirrors society. Whatever is going on at the time is usually what influences artist. It can't be avoided.*

Q4: How would you define your artistic style (genre)? Is it Pop Art?

*My earlier style was primitive, more folk art. I captured a Cajun style and wanted to preserve the images I grew up with. I was a little naïve; my early style was primitive, naïve. As I grew as an artist my style has changed; it has become more Pop Art. My style changes, you get bored, you try something else for a while. You have to be open-minded and flexible.*

Q5: Who or what has inspired/influenced/empowered you?

*My family, friends in New Iberia, as well as formal education, my art education in Los Angeles*



*has allowed me to really understand what “art” is, and through education comes empowerment.*

Q6: How much of your own life is reflected in your work?

*Everything. My art wouldn't be what it is without my individual experiences, my life in south Louisiana. I started painting when I was in about the fourth grade and continued my art education at USL.*

Q7: Do you create with the intent to send a message? If so, how important is it that your audience understands your message?

*I am a serious artist, some people think otherwise. But no, I don't always create with the intent to send a message. Sometimes there's an intentional message, sometimes my art is conscience and other times I paint what comes to mind without ever having a premeditated thought. It's the benefit of being successful. I can do what I want for as long as I want. As long as I enjoy what I do, if people still want to purchase my art, then I will have the opportunity to continue to create.*

Q8: Have you ever compromised your style as an artist?

*Intentionally, no, because Cajun artists are rare due to the limited exposure, and years ago there weren't many well-known Cajun artists, so being one of the first successful Cajun artists has given me the freedom to create what I want without much compromise unless I agree.*

Q9: Why after attending school in California did you return to south Louisiana? What is it about southern Louisiana that is so mystifying?

*Family life, friendships ... the scenery and culture. Knowing, and finally realizing who you are, where you're from. That was what was missing from my life in Los Angeles. The comfort of the small, Cajun community—there is no other place like southern Louisiana. It is beautiful and serene.*

Q10: I have noticed the southern Louisiana landscape in your paintings, especially the Oak tree. How has the estuary influenced your art?

*I started with landscapes, driving back from California—I noticed how remarkable the landscape changed. First, I painted wheat. Then, I painted the magical sky behind the beautiful oak trees. I wanted to capture how unique Louisiana was. Early Louisiana painters studied in Europe and their styles were very European in design, and I wanted to capture what was different about the Louisiana landscape. The tree represents people's “roots,” their families.*

Q11: Most people recognize you from your famous terrier, Tiffany, the “Blue Dog” paintings. What genre is your “Blue Dog?” Is it Pop Art?

*It developed into Pop Art. Kind of took on the same image as Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Can or Uncle Sam (We want you!). The Blue Dog image is as recognizable as some of America's most well known images, like Warhol's.*

Q12: Let me clarify your reference to the Blue Dog as “it” instead of “she” before I continue with my questions. You corrected me when referring to the Blue Dog as a “she,” and this is something the average person (like myself) would assume—that the Blue Dog is your beloved pet dog. However, in actuality “it” is a mere model, a nonliving being. Is this correct?

*Tiffany was a girl; the blue dog is not. It's a shape, an entity, able to take on male, female, or most often neutral qualities. It's not Tiffany, my beloved pet. The Blue Dog – it's quite difficult for people to accept or understand that I paint an image and not a pet dog.*

(Wendy, George’s wife, clarified a few misconceptions I had about the history of the Blue dog as well as George’s artistic intent. Wendy had the following to say:

*I guess it's not a big deal, but I'll bring it up for what it's worth. The emphasis on Tiffany in questions such as the one above is just such a strange one. The reason George chose Tiffany as the model for the loup-garou has nothing to do with the fact that she was his pet dog. He had taken lots of photographs of her and many other dogs over the years, just like he takes pictures of many things. George has always painted from photographs—not as a photo-realist, but rather to get ideas about shape. And that's exactly what happened with the loup-garou. He flipped through his photographs looking for a suitable image. Obviously, even though he was painting the loup-garou, he was not looking to capture Tiffany as a werewolf. It's a coincidence, in a way, that her photo is the model. He liked her shape and stance in the photo, and from that he decided to use it as the loup-garou; it had nothing to do with immortalizing her. Tiffany had been dead for 4 years already, in fact. It's no different than when he paints me as Jolie Blonde, for example. He sticks me in all kinds of poses and costumes and takes photographs. Whatever he ends up using depends on the composition and look he's going for in the painting).*

Q13: Now that we have had some significant clarification, isn’t it mind baffling, the popularity of the Blue Dog? How did this cute terrier mix become so popular?

*In the 1980s, I had a show in California. The people attending my shows in Los Angeles coined the name, “Blue Dog,” and it has just kind of stuck.*

Q14: So, there was no intentional attention given to the Blue Dog?

*No, no more than anything else I had done at the time. The Blue Dog comments on life today.*

Q15: What do you mean, it comments on life today?

*It is what popular culture wants; it represents the lost Cajun influence in my life after I moved to California.*

Q16: Your “Blue Dog” is recognized internationally. How did Tiffany become your muse?

*Tiffany had died a long time before I ever painted her. She was used loosely as a model. The public has placed the emphasis on Tiffany, not me.*

Q17: Okay, I am starting to understand, it is more of an image, a model than a “dog” per se?



*Yes, the dog element was dropped and it has become more a graphic interpretation, a shape.*

Q18: I am certainly not an art expert, but as I learn more about the elements and principles of art, I have noticed you play a great deal with pattern and shape?

*Yes, the Blue Dog is all about shape and how it relates to the background. I paint it and each shape relates to another. I do paint with a purpose in mind. It's not just a blue dog; it's much more.*

Q19: After some research I learned that you had been painting for some time before the “Blue Dog.” Did you consider yourself successful prior to the Tiffany craze?

*Yes, I painted for 20 years before the “Blue Dog” and have been painting for 20 years since that first “Blue Dog.” If you can support your family – you’re successful!*

Q20: Most artists are also storytellers. I read on your website that the *Loup Garou* was a story your mother told you as a boy. Exactly what is this, *Loup Garou*?

*As a boy I was told the story of the Loup Garou—a French werewolf/dog that lived in the sugarcane fields. My mother would tell me, “If you’re bad or if you don’t do as you are told, the Loup Garou will get you.” I used my dog Tiffany as a model for the Loup Garou.*

Q21: Is this why Tiffany (Blue Dog) has yellow eyes in your painting, to kind of illuminate a hypnotic stare? Perhaps, a haunting image from your childhood?

*In my first Blue Dog painting, it has red eyes, not the bright yellow eyes you see in the majority of the Blue Dog paintings. After the dog no longer represented my pet dog, only a spirit, its eyes became stark yellow and the shape was round, saucer-like. The eyes were red because this was a scary, haunting image—the loup-garou.*

*(Wendy Rodrigue elaborated: George changed the eyes to yellow to make the image friendlier once it started to take on a life of its own and lose much of the loup-garou scariness {and leave the bayou scenes}. It wasn't until the eyes became yellow that George even started to paint the image at times as Tiffany. And in fact he did paint the dog as Tiffany for a short period—maybe 2 years or so, around 1991-1992, before the image moved on again and became something else, leaving the ideas of the loup-garou and of his pet dog, Tiffany, as mere roots of a series.)*

Q22: I know all the dog questions are redundant at this point in your career, but I have to ask, when did you first paint Tiffany?

*I first painted Tiffany as the Loup Garou in my 1984 book, Bayou. It was not yet the “Blue Dog;” it was the Loup Garou—just an image, not a dog.*

Q23: Were you prepared for the fame the Blue Dog has brought you?



*No, I don't believe anyone is ever prepared. The phenomena that most thought was such a simple "dog." The general population immediately took hold of the Blue Dog. It was like Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Can painting. Something as simple as a dog—phenomenal.*

Q24: How would you describe the techniques used in creating your famous Blue Dog paintings?

*It NEVER changes shape; it is painted at eye-level; the image could be a person, but it's a dog. Painting the Blue Dog is challenging. When I paint the Blue Dog some of the images are a series of repetitions; it is done by hand, and each image has to be exact.*

Q25: How many Blue Dogs do you paint annually?

*About 35 to 40.*

Q26: Some people might assume you might not enjoy painting the Blue Dog; does this ever get monotonous?

*I enjoy painting the Blue Dog. The thing is, at this point in my career I don't "have" to paint anything. I enjoy my work and my painting. The Blue Dog does not determine my success.*

Q27: What's the strangest thing that you have experienced as the artist of the Blue Dog?

*Well, I was on a book tour and there were some animal rights people at one of my signings. They were naturally there to support the artist who loves dogs. This was a bit odd, not that I didn't appreciate seeing people who are supporters of animal rights, but usually people show up to support the artist. It's difficult to explain to the average person that my work isn't all about the dog.*

Q28: However, this love of the dog as man's best friend is a misconception, is it not?

*People think my art is "all about the dog." The love I shared with my dog has nothing to do with my art. I am not a "dog" artist. My art is based on my love of art. I am a good artist because I love art, not dogs. Granted I do love dogs (as to not offend anyone or seem ungrateful).*

Q29: Before I move on and away from your beloved Blue Dog. I have to ask, how do you feel about the mad rush of "animal" art that have popped-up around town?

*Over the last 7-8 years the French Quarter is full of animal paintings. I feel that completely reproducing something simply because someone else has gained success merely enables aspiring artists, and, as a result, they will never fully develop as artists if they spend all their time painting animals because they think someone became famous for painting a dog. I am grateful for the opportunities and the success the Blue Dog has afforded me, but I was already well known prior to the dog.*



Q30: What has been the highlight of your career as an artist?

*My book, Cajuns, published in 1975, was selected as one of the official gifts for the Jimmy Carter White House; this was before people knew what “Cajuns” were.*

Q31: Speaking of Cajuns, the world has certainly managed to latch on to the term and now the world has gone Cajun Crazy. You walk into restaurants as far away as California and there’s going to be a Cajun dish on the menu. I was in Florida and there was Cajun, blackened chicken. Hollywood for a while made anyone who lived in Louisiana a Cajun. I am not so sure the vast majority of the population knows what a “Cajun” really is.

*You’re right. The credit should be given to Paul Prudhomme. He brought Cajuns into the lives of everyone. Every menu in the country has at one time or another had something Cajun. Cajuns have come to define what south Louisiana is. Read the article written in USA Today sometime in the 1980s about Cajuns; this article defines Cajun culture quite well.*

Q32: Are you a Cajun artist?

*I am a Cajun artist, but when I first referred to myself as such my mother was quite embarrassed. My culture has shaped my career; I am proud of my heritage.*

Q33: Why was your mother embarrassed by the Cajun reference?  
Wendy Rodrigue provided me with a bit of George’s cultural history. She said:

*Cajuns were poor; they lived off the land. They were hunters and trappers. George's mother was very proud that her father came to Louisiana straight from France. Ironically, her mother's ancestry came from Canada—the original Cajuns, so actually she was more Cajun than French! But to this day, she doesn't admit it (she's 99) and is quite proud of her maiden name, Courrage. In her day, the word Cajun was an insult.*

Q34. How do you feel when others are critical of your work?

*Personally, I wish they would speak to me before writing. I can clear up a lot rather than let someone make assumptions without getting the facts or my input.*

Q35: Is an artist successful if he never sells his art?

*As an artist, you have to put yourself out there. Unless you are a graphic artist or illustrator (Rodrigue also did this) and you have your work in magazines or some other form of media. If you paint or are a photographer, you must take risks. If you don’t attempt to sell your work, I don’t think you can be successful in the eyes of society. Personally, sure, as artists we create and feel a sense of success. There’s the artist and the piece he is creating. Once it is complete, the piece takes on a life of its own—it leaves my hands and it is out of my control as far as fate is concerned. Like the Blue Dog. If people buy my work, do I feel success? Yes, I can support my*



*family, and that makes me successful. The fact that I created something that someone else found inspirational or aesthetically pleasing—that makes me feel successful.*

Q36: 50 years from now, which of your accomplishments would you like to be remembered for?

*This changes. The “Blue Dog” made Cajun paintings more significant in the art world, thus supporting more southern Louisiana artists. I think this is an okay legacy, don’t you?*

Q37: I know you have done some work with children, and on your website teachers are encouraged to send in the work their students have created based on the Blue Dog to be displayed on an online gallery. You obviously support the arts in education. What advice would you give to administrators or writers of curriculum about the value of art in the classroom?

*I support art in education. I have been to Washington D.C. on the Mall, have spoken at colleges, and on occasion have taught graduate students. My art affects young people, as young as kindergarten on up. Kids connect with what I do because it is simple. The older they are, the more they begin to understand the meaning of art. Teachers should teach art history and allow children to develop a background, some vocabulary to discuss and appreciate the arts. One needs art history as well as application. Understanding the artist, early artists were scientists, like Michaelangelo; these artists advanced society to a higher level.*

Q38: Is art essential if one is to have a well-rounded education?

*Yes, teaching art in a historical context is vital to one reaching his or her full potential. The question that should be asked is, “What is art?” Children should be allowed to explore this with guidance and practice. Art can be traced back to the Egyptians and is a reflection of all societies.*

Q39: Are you working on anything right now and if so, can you share it with those reading this interview? Maybe a Jazz Festival poster?

*No more Jazz festival posters, I have painted three, and it is time to let someone else have a turn. I am working on a 3-D metal sculpture of the Blue Dog. It is 4 ft. x 12 ft. It will be three dogs back-to-back painted on each panel. They are made of bronze, metal, and chrome. Each of a series of 10 takes approximately 6 months to complete. The 3-D sculptures will each stand alone and be of various colors (blue, red, etc.). This is what I am working on in Lafayette right now.*

Q40: Last question, what, in your opinion, is the “spirit” of the estuary, you call home?

*The spirit of the estuary is a combination of its colorful people, living and working in the wetlands. Living off of the land, the land their ancestors lived on years ago, the spirit is one of beauty and grace, rich in culture. Everyone takes something precious from the estuary; you sometimes have to distance yourself in order to translate the spirit of the estuary.*

