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Visual Arts
Professor Romaine

Henry Ossawa Tanner

Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first African American painter to gain national recognition. He was an artist of the 1800's to the 1900's. In Tanners works, he most known for his use of light in His works. From the annunciation, the flight into Egypt (1899), to the Holy Family, this use of light is used most to emphasize certain aspects of the art. For example: In the Holy Family, the light shines upon the ordinary not being so ordinary. The space is universal, yet sacred because of it being Jesus as a child and His human family. "The infant at her side is both her son and her Savior". Most of his work was all centered around Christ/Biblical Themes as He was a Christian. His art themes were solemn, ordinary, yet set apart. Some of his famous paintings are "Flight to Egypt, the Good Shepard", etc.

I really liked Mr.Tanners use of light in his art to capture the viewers attention in a certain detail. My favorites are The Good Shepard & The Holy Family. I liked the Good Shepard because the painting is very dark yet the light of the moon shines in the darkness. It reminds me a lot of Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." The light of the moon can be seen as the Lord, being the hope in the darkness. I also enjoy The Holy Family because is makes the ordinary, extraordinary. Anyone not knowing who was in the picture would've thought it was a regular family but in context & the light shining upon Mary and Jesus, you see there is an ethereal sense to the picture. I can again relate this to how God uses the ordinary for extraordinary means; saves and changes the lives of the regular Joe. Especially through Jesus, becoming incarnate (ordinary) and dying on the cross for the extraordinary. I also enjoyed his painting style. Everything blended together and nothing was really linear - it made the paintings more "soft".