



MARCH 2015

An Eye for Pattern

Normandy Landscape | Hale Woodruff



VISIT THE BMA
and see *Normandy Landscape* in the
American Wing.

Hale Woodruff (American, 1900–1980).
Detail, *Normandy Landscape*. 1928. Oil on
canvas. 21¼ x 25⅝ inches. The Baltimore
Museum of Art: Edward Joseph Gallagher III
Memorial Fund, BMA 2002.279. Art © Estate
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Somewhere along a riverbank in northern France, a group of trees caught the eye of artist Hale Woodruff. Perhaps it was the striking pattern of willow branches that inspired him to take out his paintbrushes, palette knife, oil paint, and canvas. Woodruff painted slender branches forming a screen of green and yellow-brown stripes against an overcast sky. Clusters of tiny leaves cling to the branches like beads along a string, while smears of dark green stick to tree trunks on either side. Broken branches lean this way and that, eventually falling to the ground in a loose network of crisscrossing lines. Rows of tall poplar trees, made tiny by distance, create another lively pattern across the river.

The trees of Normandy probably looked different from trees that Hale Woodruff had sketched and painted back home in Indiana. As a young African American artist, he had come to France to study art and absorb the rich atmosphere of Paris where painters, musicians, writers, and dancers were experimenting with new and unconventional ways of representing a changing world. Impatient with classes in traditional art schools, Woodruff studied paintings hanging in the great museums of Paris and traveled outside the city to paint bold views of French towns and countryside. Always dangerously short of money and food, Woodruff returned to the United States after four years and took a job as an art teacher in Atlanta, Georgia, where the surrounding clay hills and piney woods provided a new kind of landscape. For years, Woodruff took his college students outdoors on sketching and painting expeditions, offering them the same kind of challenge that had helped him to grow as an artist in France.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Go to a place that you usually walk right by without paying attention. Stop, look for interesting patterns, and make some sketches. Repeat the activity at several more places that you have overlooked. Then compose a design based on one of your sketches.

Hale Woodruff built a distinguished career as a painter, printmaker, and muralist. Much of his work involved telling stories of African American life, culture, and history in a modernist style. At the end of his career, his style became more abstract. To see his work, Google “Hale Woodruff” and click on Images. To read more about Hale Woodruff’s career, see <http://bit.ly/1HVYELq> and <http://bit.ly/1bcwEby>.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



Hale Woodruff. *Normandy Landscape*.

1928. Oil on canvas. 21¼ x 25⅝ inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Edward Joseph Gallagher III Memorial Fund, BMA 2002.279. Art © Estate of Hale Woodruff/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY