

FRYE

ART MUSEUM

Guided Artwork Discussion: Charles Burchfield

<https://youtu.be/55HUoybCMCY>

Thank you for joining us for a virtual Artwork Discussion with the Frye Art Museum. My name is Caroline, and I am the Education Coordinator here at the Frye. I will be facilitating today's digital discussion. While we cannot be together in the galleries, we hope you will still enjoy the opportunity to slow down, look closely, and spend some time with a work from the Frye Collection.

It's always fun to look at art by yourself or invite a friend or family member to join you in this discussion. You might also choose to write down your observations or make a drawing in response. If this is the case, please gather your materials now.

We will begin each artwork discussion by taking a quiet moment to simply look at the work of art and observe. Remember there are no right or wrong answers—it's about what you notice or experience when looking. After you have taken a moment to observe on your own, I will ask some questions to guide your looking and provide information about the artwork before we end.

You can expand or minimize the video on your screen for the discussion. You can also access closed captioning through the settings tool. Take a moment to see what works best for your viewing.

Today's theme is **Step into Spring**. A time when the ground begins to thaw and the sun begins to shine, spring can also represent transition and new experience, evident in the blossoming of flowers and bright nod of nature. As we look at today's artwork, I encourage you to consider how, especially in these uncertain times, the promise of spring can present fresh ways of looking and feeling.

I am particularly excited that this format allows us to share works from the Frye's collection that we have not previously featured in an artwork discussion.

This is the artwork we will be looking at today. We will take pauses in between each set of questions to give you time to look closely at the artwork and think about your responses. Remember: you may pause this video at any time to spend more time on one of the slides.

To start our discussion, please take 30 seconds to look quietly at this piece. You might start at the top corner of the canvas, moving across and down. You may move close to the screen to see details or step back for a new perspective. Your cursor is a great tool to trace and track details within the artwork.

Thank you for your quiet observation.

We will now move into our guided questions. If you are looking with a friend or family member, we hope you will share your observations, or consider writing down or sketching your answers.

1. How would you describe the colors in this painting? Light? Dark? Rich? Washed out?
2. Do you see movement in this work of art or does it seem still? How do the colors, lines, and shapes contribute to a sense of movement?
3. What time of the year do you think it is? What elements in the painting guide you to that conclusion?
4. How does the artist convey light in this work of art? In your opinion, does the artist's emphasis on light bring about any emotions or ideas?
5. The word "mysticism" is often associated with this artist's work, bringing forward ideas of spirituality or contemplation. Do you see anything in this work of art that you might associate with mysticism?

Thank you for taking the time to share and reflect on your observations. I would now like to share some information on this piece.

Charles Burchfield (American, 1893-1967)
Clouds and Windblown Hay, ca. 1954-64
Watercolor on paper

40 x 30 in.

Museum Purchase, 1964.017

Photo credit: Jueqian Fang

Charles Burchfield's style defies categorization, bridging the gap between representational painting and symbolic expressionism. His appreciation of nature and modernist style resulted in some of the most unusual nature paintings in American art.

Born and raised in rural Ohio, Charles Burchfield's midwestern upbringing resulted in an intense interest in art and nature that shaped his artistic career. He studied watercolor at Cleveland School of Art, where he was introduced to the modernist art movement. After serving briefly in World War I, Burchfield settled in Buffalo, New York, where he started a family, taught art, and continued to pursue his own artistic practice.

Burchfield's style shifted throughout his career. *Clouds and Windblown Hay*, the image we are looking at today, was created in the last 20 years of Burchfield's practice when he was focused on creating large-scale expressive, abstracted work. At over three feet high and two feet wide, Burchfield added onto *Clouds and Windblown Hay* ten years after starting it in an effort to increase the painting's size and impact.

This watercolor landscape scene includes simple forms, curving lines, and contrasting colors. The verticality of the image heightens the drama of the scene as shafts of sunlight light across rolling fields of hay and flowers. His works give a sense of otherworldliness, "almost mystical in his expressions of nature including seasonal changes, and forest sounds, which he depicted with quivering brushstrokes."

Burchfield continued to make art until his death in the 1960s, and the largest collection of his work can be found at the Burchfield-Penney Art Center at Buffalo State College. Also an avid writer, Burchfield journaled regularly since high school. At the time he died, his journal filled 72 volumes.

Burchfield also worked for a wallpaper design company in Buffalo. To end today's discussion, I'd like to share an example of one of Burchfield's designs. This wallpaper sample is titled *Hazy July Noon*. Do you see similarities in Burchfield's wallpaper design and *Clouds and Windblown Hay*? What differences do you notice?

Thank you for joining us for a virtual artwork discussion. We can't wait to welcome you back to the Museum again soon.