Bendel Hydes & Realism

Gustave Courbet, *The Fishing Boat,* 1865

Bendel Hydes, *Nor'wester*, 1979

Jules Bastien-Lepage, *October*, 1878

Bendel Hydes, *Untitled*, 1981

"My references seem to be generated from the relationship of land and sea…my early work was very realistic and of the landscape" (Bendel Hydes)

The Artist

Bendel Hydes is known as Cayman's foremost contemporary artist. He was born in West Bay, Grand Cayman in 1952. Hydes studied art at Liverpool College of Art and Canterbury College in the UK and finished his studies at Clark University in the US, where he completed a degree in philosophy and political science.

Hydes has lived and worked in New York City since 1982 and participated in several important exhibitions there and in France, Brazil, London and Washington, D.C. His art is found in the collection of HRH Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh and several other public and private collections, including the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands and the Cayman Islands National Archive.

Hydes began his career working in a realist or representational style. At the time, realistic work was more popular and commercially successful than abstract art, as Hydes explains: 'if you didn't reproduce something that was a very strict photographic interpretation of reality, it wasn't considered valid. It was not art'. Gradually these attitudes would start to change, with Hydes today being recognised as the Islands' most successful artist.


Bendel Hydes, *Mr. Bibi's House*, 1969

Realism

Realism refers firstly to an artistic style in which the primary objective is to faithfully record a subject, such as a group of figures, a fishing boat, or the surrounding landscape, in a realistic manner. In this style, accuracy of proportions, perspective, naturalistic colour and detail are all highly prized and the scene or subject is usually clearly identifiable as a recognisable person, place or thing.

In the context of the history of art, Realism also refers more directly to an art movement which appeared in France in the mid-nineteenth century and is associated with the work of artists such as Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet. In many ways, Realism can be seen to represent the beginnings of modern art.
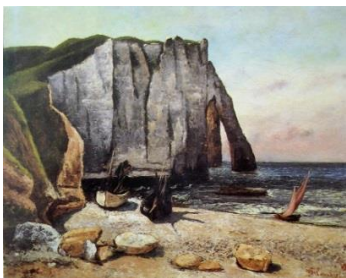

Gustave Courbet, *Cliffs at Etretat, After the Storm*, 1870

The Artwork

Bendel Hydes began exploring ideas and techniques associated with Realism in the late 1960s, under the guidance of his first art teacher, Ed Oliver. The emphasis of these classes was on painting outdoors and spontaneously capturing a scene, while also developing naturalistic drawing techniques. Hydes continued to work in a representational style into the 1980s, producing several prints of local landmarks, such as his *Island Images Series*, alongside numerous maritime-inspired watercolours depicting fisherman and Caymanian catboats.

Jules Breton, *The End of the Working Day*, 1886-87
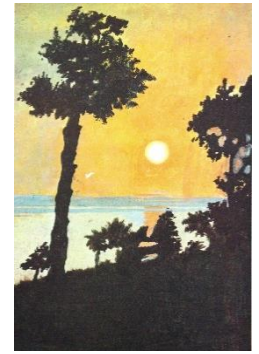
Bendel Hydes, *Island Images Series II*, 1979

Discussion

• Why do you think Bendel Hydes chose to initially work in a representational manner? What is the benefit of choosing a realistic style when depicting your local surroundings?

• Do you think realism requires more skill and technique than abstract art? What are the main differences between these two forms of artistic expression, and which do you most relate to?

Making Comparisons

• Look at the work of other Realist painters such as Gustave Courbet, Jean-Francois Millet, or the American James Abbott McNeill Whistler. How is their work similar to, and different from, the work of Bendel Hydes?

https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/realism

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustave_Courbet

Follow Up Activities

• Visit the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands and view the Bendel Hydes works in the Dart Auditorium that date from 1969-1983. How do they differ from his later paintings of the 1990s?

• Try and paint something in a Realist style, such as a landscape or still life. Use a photo for reference if you find that helpful or go outside and paint from nature.

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