

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE



Israel Leibo, *Landscape with Plough*, 1935

Although pictures are flat, artists have developed all sorts of ways to create a sense of space and distance in their paintings. They can create the impression that you can see for miles and miles around. They can make you believe you are standing on a high hill looking down or invite you to walk into a picture onto a path, a road or a bridge. The part of a picture that seems nearest the front is called the foreground. The most distant part is the background. The part in the middle is the middle ground.

Use Israel Leibo's *Landscape with Plough* to explore some of the techniques artists use.

Linear perspective

If you stand in the middle of a straight road, the sides appear to meet at a point (called the vanishing point) on the horizon. Artists depict the same effect to create a sense of distance in their pictures.

Where can you see lines that meet?

- The ploughed furrows of the field and the road

Where do they meet?

- At the foot of the hills



Scale

Artists paint things in the foreground larger than the same sort of things in the background.

Which trees seem the nearest?

- The trees on either edge of the picture

Which trees seem the furthest away?

- The trees at the foot of the hills



Overlapping

Overlapping shapes, such as trees and hills, create an illusion of distance, because you perceive one behind another and thus further away.

Find some trees and bushes that overlap parts of the picture.

Say what they block out.



Texture

Artists paint things in the foreground bolder, in more detail and more recognisable than things in the background, which are less clear and fuzzy.

What is painted in most detail?

- The trees in the foreground.

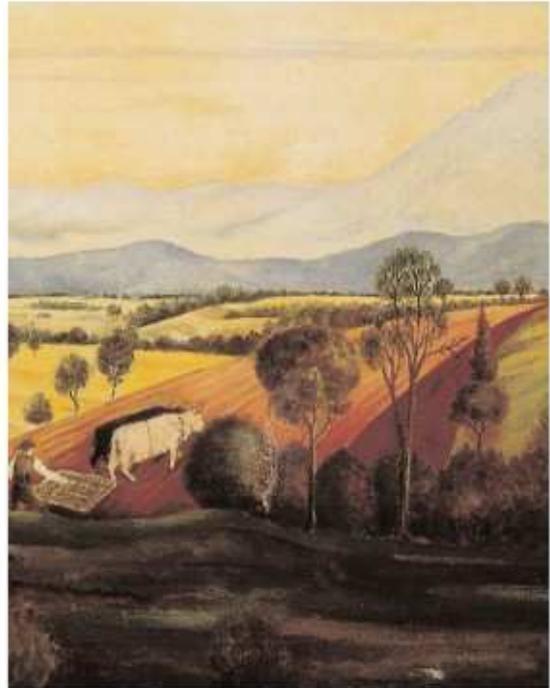


Aerial perspective

When you look at any view, distant objects look much bluer and contrasts in texture seem weaker. This is an optical illusion. Water vapour and dust in the air partly obscure colours and forms faraway. Artists increase the feeling of distance in pictures by painting strong foreground colours and paler colours with bluer tones for things in the far distance.

What are the palest things in the picture?

- The hills. The high, furthest line of hills are the palest of all.



Viewpoint

Artists paint things that seem far away higher up on their paintings than things that seem nearer.

Which seems nearer to you, the ploughman or the hills? What makes you say that?

- The ploughman. The hills are higher up on the painting than the ploughman.

Take a look at these same techniques in these famous paintings:

Georges Seurat, A Sunday Afternoon on the Grande Jatte 1884–1886

(The Art Institute of Chicago)

Notice how the people in the background appear smaller and smaller as they recede in space. See where the lines of the riverbank meet.

Claude Lorrain, Landscape with Hagar and the Angel 1646 (National Gallery, London)

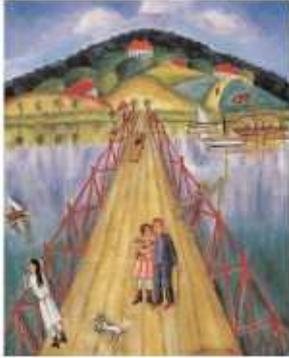
In this good example of aerial perspective, the dark browns of the foreground land and trees give way to a greenish yellow hill further away and pale hills in the far distance. The tall trees overlapping the distant view on either side enhance a feeling of depth.

John Constable, The Cornfield 1826 (National Gallery, London)

See how Constable leads your eye through the tall trees to a distant view beyond. His positioning of the dog, the drinking boy, the gateposts, the farm-hand in the golden cornfield and the squat church tower takes your eye on a zig-zag walk through the picture.

Peter Paul Rubens, Autumn Landscape with a View of Het Steen in the Early Morning probably 1636 (National Gallery, London)

Notice the diminishing scale of the trees; the changing colours of the landscape from warm oranges and browns to greens and finally to blue; the detailed painting of the foreground compared with the fuzziness of the background.



Chana Kowalksa
The Bridge 1937



Chana Kowalksa
Shtetl 1934

Artists don't always use all the rules of perspective. Sometimes they use only one or two or break the rules to create a particular effect. Chana Kowalksa used linear perspective to pull us into her pictures. In *The Bridge*, she makes us feel we are on the middle of the bridge about to meet the hugging couple. In *Shtetl*, she makes us feel we are at the centre of a village looking down on the water pump.

What do you notice about the lines of the planks and the rails of the bridge?

- The lines gradually narrow and almost meet at the far end of the bridge.

What do you notice about the sizes of the people on the bridge and in the street?

- The people reduce in size, the further away they seem to be.

What similarities are there between these two pictures?

- Both show a long central pathway that tapers to a point and towards a building in the distance.
- Both show a two-horse empty cart and driver with a whip.
- Both include people, trees and buildings.
- Both show people concentrating on everyday activities – fishing, watching boats, taking a walk, fetching water.

How do the colours of the hills and houses in *The Bridge* compare with the hills in Leibo's *Landscape with a Plough*?

- Even though the hills and houses in *The Bridge* are in the distance, the colours are as strong and bright as the colours of the couple's clothes.
- The hills in *The Bridge* vary in colour and get darker towards the top.
- The bright red roofs of the houses stand out strongly in contrast with the green of the hills.
- In Leibo's picture the hills are all bluish. The furthest ones are palest.

What effect does using strong colours for the hill in *The Bridge* have?

- The strong colours make the hill feel near, even though the perspective of the bridge suggests that the hill is quite faraway.
- The strong colours make your eyes focus on the hill as a destination, and make the hill feel as an equally important part of the picture as the bridge.

What do you notice about the houses in *The Shtetl*?

- Many of them seem flat, like scenery for a stage set.
- They meet at the vanishing point, blocking out the golden temple behind.

How would you describe the atmosphere of the two pictures?

- Both pictures seem calm and quiet.

What is odd about The Shtetl?

- There is no view behind or beyond the houses on the street, only sky.
- The side streets do not lead anywhere.
- The telephone post is out of scale with the rest of the picture. It also has no wires attached.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Israel Leibo

Leibo was born in 1912 in Tallin, Estonia. He went to Berlin in 1929, where he studied with Max Lieberman. After travelling extensively throughout Europe, he finally settled in England in 1939.

Chana Kowalska

Kowalska was born in 1904 in Wlockawek, Poland and was the daughter of a rabbi. She started drawing at the age of 16 and became a school teacher at age of 18. In 1922, she moved to Berlin and later to Paris. She worked as a journalist and wrote articles about painting for Jewish newspapers. In the Second World War, during the German Occupation of France, she worked in for the French Resistance. Arrested by the Gestapo, she was first imprisoned with her husband, then deported and shot by the Nazis in 1941.