



Nat Leeb, *Arizona*, (No date)

ARTIST BIO

Born the son of an antiques dealer in Germany, Nat Leeb displayed a natural talent for art. At age fourteen he was accepted into the School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg, France, and while there, won both first and second place at an international competition. This was the start of a successful career and Leeb quickly became part of Europe’s cultural elite. He relocated to Paris at just nineteen years old, where a mutual friend introduced him to his future mentor, the painter Claude Monet. Monet invited Leeb to study at his countryside home and studio in Giverny, France, and encouraged him to keep luminous colors as the focus of his art. Leeb took these words to heart, and a bold use of vibrant color remained a signature aspect of his work.

Nat Leeb returned to Germany a few years later, but in 1933 (after Adolf Hitler gained power), Leeb’s abstract art was declared unacceptable, and sadly, many of his works were destroyed. Leeb eventually fled the country, eventually going back to France. He continued to exhibit in galleries, but as World War II intensified, Leeb concentrated his efforts on secretly aiding allied soldiers. He was caught and tortured and although he survived, Leeb remained crippled for the rest of his life. After the war, Leeb returned to Paris and continued his career as an artist, working in Europe and the United States for fifty years.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Nat Leeb’s interest in color was in line with modern art movements developing across Europe during the early 20th century. After studying under Monet in the Impressionist style, Leeb used pure color to portray emotion, distorting representations of the real world to evoke moods and feelings. Works by the artist’s German Expressionist friends were often dark, harsh, and critical of the world around them. Leeb’s choice of bright colors, on the other hand, resulted in more peaceful and harmonious compositions. He was most often referred to as a “colorist.” Instead of painting shapes or people, Leeb used color as a symbol for memories and emotions. Despite his association and training with different artists and groups, Leeb never formally joined any group of artists.

ARTWORK

Arizona demonstrates Nat Leeb’s ability to use color to evoke emotions and preserve memories. How do these colors make you feel? Consider the temperatures these colors convey. How might they relate to a place like Arizona? Or might the colors and shapes evoke the landscape, as reflected in the title? What do you see that might recall the desert-like environment of Arizona?

INTRODUCTION

Mentored early in his career by the aging Impressionist Claude Monet, Nat Leeb was drawn to colorful abstractions of the natural world. In this painting, real-life depiction takes a back seat to a simplified, emotionally charged representation of the American Southwest.

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- 1 Sharpen observational skills
- 2 Interpret an abstract work of art
- 3 Understand the science of color and pinpoint where different colors are found in nature
- 4 Identify, replicate, and measure polygons

LOOK AND DISCUSS

Take some time to look closely at this painting. Then respond verbally or in writing to the following prompts: I See..., I Think..., I Wonder...

How would you describe this work to someone who could not see it for themselves?

What connections do you make with the real world when looking at this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

CONTINUE THE STORY

Nat Leeb used color to visualize his memories of places, like Arizona. Why do you think the artist would choose to depict Arizona in this abstracted style? Often our memories of a place reflect how we feel about that location. The colors that shape our memory can carry and intensify these emotions. Based on this painting, how do you think Nat Leeb felt about Arizona?

ACTIVITY #1: COLORS IN NATURE

Materials: Online resource, drawing materials (optional)

Subject Areas: Visual Arts, Science

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Where does the world get its color? Discuss how color is seen through light reflection and photoreceptors in the eyes. Where in nature do you see the colors of the rainbow? As a class, create a “brainstorm bank” of ideas for each color, then each of you will choose one item such as a rock, gem, plant, flower, insect, animal, or the sky. Research that item specifically and present what you have learned about its properties that give it a unique color. Include a detailed drawing of the item in the presentation, paying special attention to its true color.

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Strand: Respond (V.R)

Students will understand, evaluate and articulate how works of art convey meaning for the observer as well as the creator. Refer to contextual information and analyze relevant subject matter, characteristics of form, and use of media.

ACTIVITY #2: SHAPES IN ART

Materials: Colored paper (yellow, orange, red, purple, blue), scissors, glue, pencil or pen, protractor, online resource (optional)

Subject Areas: Visual Arts, Math

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Make an approximate recreation of *Arizona* by cutting 5-7 polygon shapes from colored paper and gluing them onto a sheet of light blue paper. Be sure to cut straight lines and precise angles—your recreation should be geometrically measurable. Switch with one of your classmates, then identify and label each shape. If able, use a protractor to measure the angles, and write the measurements in their respective angles. What do each of the polygon angles add up to?

UTAH STATE VISUAL ARTS LEARNING STANDARDS

Strand: Create (V.CR)

Students will generate artistic work by conceptualizing, organizing, and completing their artistic ideas. They will refine original work through persistence, reflection, and evaluation. Elaborate on an imaginative idea and apply knowledge of available resources, tools, and technologies to investigate personal ideas through the art-making process.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment for this lesson may include student participation in group work or discussion of interpretive answers. The activity “Colors in Nature” can be used to assess students’ research and observation skills. The activity “Shapes in Art” can be used to apply and assess student understanding of geometry.