



Francis Guy

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

Through close observation, Francis Guy was able to record what life was like in his community in a time before the first photographs.

- » Have your students create a representation of their communities without using photography as a medium
- » Have them write about what elements they will include in their depiction that show the identity of their community as well as how communities have changed in America from what was common in Francis Guy's time.

In his painting, *Winter Scene in Brooklyn*, Francis Guy has depicted the identity of Brooklyn, New York, where Guy lived and worked in 1820.

Guy indicates the vitality of this community, not only through the variety of its architecture and abundant natural resources such as wood and coal, but also by illustrating a diverse group of people going about their daily activities. In this way we are able to get a sense of what life was like in Brooklyn during this time.

Trained initially as a tailor and silk dyer, Guy began landscape painting in 1800, a time when "landscapes were uncommon and often depicted idealized subjects drawn from European artistic models rather than from nature."¹ In his pursuit of landscape painting, Guy was interested in topographical accuracy as well as aesthetic concerns and is known to have painted scenes of Brooklyn at least five times. Guy devised a method of tracing to assist in composing his views. He located the desired scene, suspended piece of black gauze in front of it, and traced the view in chalk. Then he pressed the gauze against a canvas prepared with a dark ground, rubbed until the chalk lines transferred to the canvas, and then painted over them in oil.



The people in his paintings are not anonymous figures in the landscape, but are depictions of actual citizens in Guy's neighborhood, which was a bustling seat of commerce due to its proximity to the Fulton Ferry Dock, the primary port to Manhattan for both people and goods from across Long Island². It is said that as he worked on this scene, Guy would call out from his window to neighbors to hold their positions while he painted them.



Crystal Bridges
Museum of American Art

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Francis Guy, *Winter Scene in Brooklyn*, 1820,
oil on canvas, 58 x 106 in.

¹ Picturing Place: Francis Guy's Brooklyn, 1820 Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn Museum, 2006. Web. 28 December 2015.

² BrooklynMuseum.org/opencollections/exhibitions/661/Picturing_Place/63A_Francis_Guys_Brooklyn_1820?referring-q=francis-guy