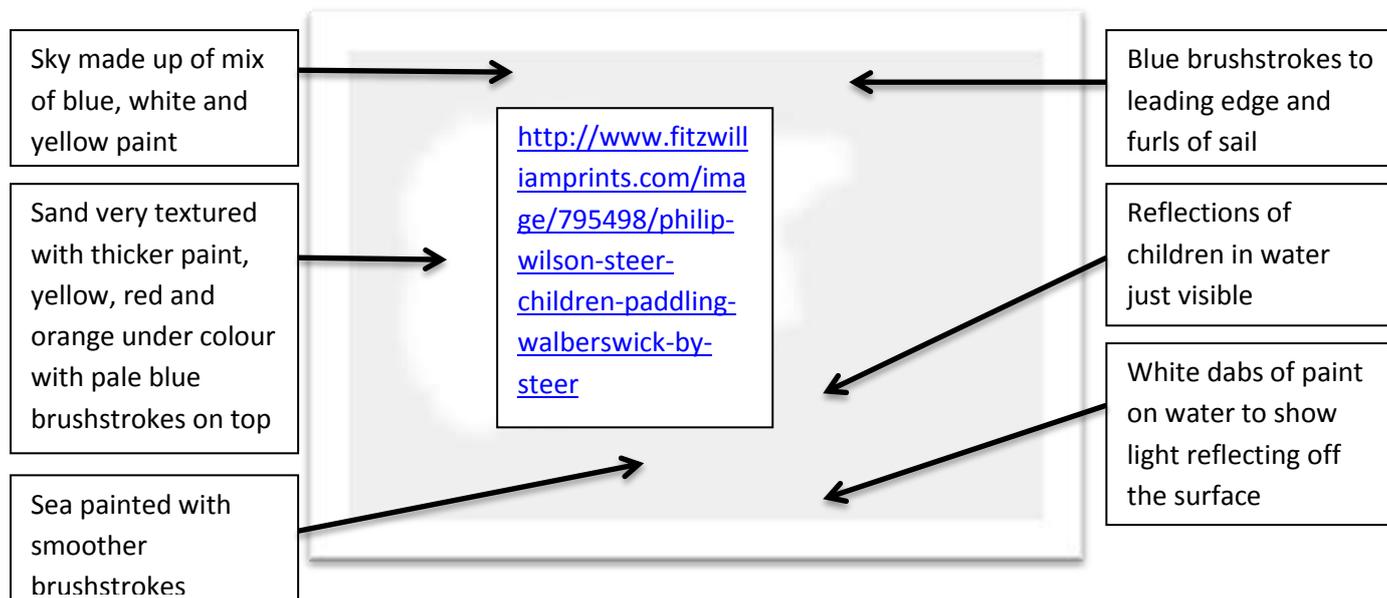


Walberswick, Children Paddling – Philip Wilson Steer



oil on canvas; 1894; 82 x 109.5 cm; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Description

This painting portrays a group of children playing in the sea and on the beach. It is painted in a very impressionistic style – there is no intricate detail in any of the children or objects portrayed.

To me this painting seems to be all about light and how it plays on different surfaces and the impression this has left on the painter. For example;

- There are many small brushstrokes of white on the water recording how the light reflects off it
- The children's hair has blue and red brushstrokes in it showing the effects of broad daylight
- The sand on the beach is over painted with blue brushstrokes to show the effect of light playing on a damp surface
- The sails of the boats have a blue brushstroke on the leading edge of the sail indicating the colour of the water reflected off them

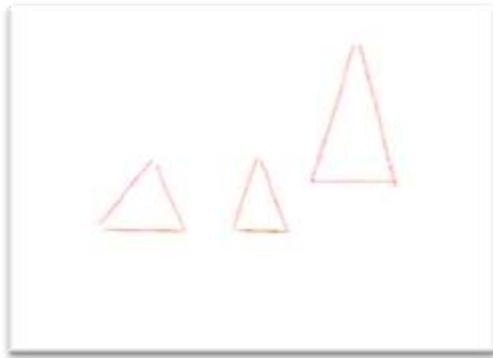
The beach itself is painted in short brushstrokes of yellow, red and orange, Thicker brushstrokes and volume of paint have been used to give an impression of texture, then the smoother blue brushstrokes applied over the top.

Interpretation

The composition is interesting, the two boats portrayed are barely contained within the scene – the far vessel has the top of its sails cut off by the frame while the prow and front sail is the only part of the boat on the right that is shown in the scene. This gives a sense of immediacy to the painting and a feeling of a world beyond.

I believe there are lines of movement within the painting connecting the children with the boats and also following the river out to sea.

This leads the eye through the painting as one examines it and eventually leads to the horizon. In this way attention is drawn from the horizon to the sky which has been painted with a mix of blue, white

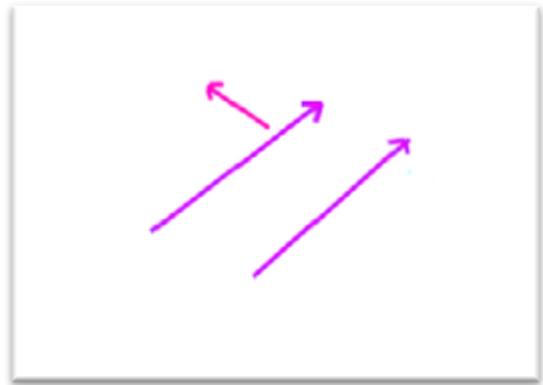


and

yellow –

another interesting study of the effect of light.

I think that there are also a number of triangular arrangements within the picture – from the children holding hands to the sails of the far boat; also the individually the two children on the left, one sitting, one bending down also form triangular shapes.



Evaluation

When considering a painting such as this the criteria used to evaluate it cannot be completely the same as those used to judge more obviously representational paintings.

Some criteria may be the same e.g. compositional skills and portrayal of scene. For me when judging this painting I found myself looking at the following points, which I probably wouldn't have used to judge, say a Constable;

- What do you see when judging the whole scene from a distance rather than examining detail of small parts of the painting
- Study the patterns of light portrayed in the painting
- What do you sense (feel) when looking at the painting
- Can you hear (or smell) anything

When using these criteria I think that Steer's painting is very successful in portraying a scene of children playing at the beach and the effect and transformations of light on the scene. It needs to be viewed from a distance and with imagination – it richly rewards such an approach.

528 words

References

<http://www.fitzwilliamprints.com/image/795498/philip-wilson-steer-children-paddling-walberswick-by-steer>