

SYOSSET ADVANCE

“Blue” sheds new light on a familiar color

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By Sabrina Guo



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Photo courtesy of the Syosset School District

A cloudless sky; the ocean; a blue jay; a pair of jeans. Blue is everywhere, so when I first heard of Nassau County Museum of Art’s “Blue,” I was concerned that blue was too loose a connective tissue for an exhibit. Why would it be interesting to just see different blue artworks grouped together? But after seeing “Blue” for myself, I’m sold: watching blue morph in use and meaning throughout the artworks fills in the crevices of what “blue” can be. I left this exhibit with a greater appreciation for color, and a greater appreciation for the artists shaping their own visions out of the ancient hue of blue.

“Blue” presents many historically and geographically diverse takes on blue—from the dyed silk of French Kings to the lapis lazuli in Renaissance paintings to the blue-and-white vases of the Ming Dynasty. The uses of blue range from extreme to subtle: Yves Klein’s “Blue Venus” boldly splashes ultramarine onto a classic Aphrodite sculpture, while Antonio Santín’s painting series of fake woven rugs makes you look carefully for the blue in its threading.

I was most moved by a painting that rendered a woman in blue hues of nacre—Pablo Picasso’s “Buste de Femme.” The deep stillness of the painting’s blue layers captivated me; the woman looked pensive, melancholy, in pain... My heart ached with her. As a novelist, I wished I could communicate hurt as effortlessly as the downward tilt of her eyes did. From whom, from where, did this pain come? My heartache moved my fingertips to my phone’s keyboard, as I researched the conditions of the Saint-Lazare women’s prison where she lived.

Dr. Charles Riley, director of NCMA, tapped my shoulder. I jerked. “A COVID nurse from Queens stared at this painting for a good while a couple days ago. I asked her if she was okay.” He smiled fondly. “She just thanked me and said, ‘I really, really needed this moment.’ She wept right where you’re standing.”

The nurse and I were both drawn to “Buste de Femme,” but in “Blue,” there’s something for everyone. Blue is reincarnated as a new character in each work: healing, sadness, loneliness, freshness, wisdom, serenity, the list goes on. Walking through the exhibit, you can see blue’s endurance throughout history, each artwork branching off the tree of blue. Visit NCMA to form your own interpretation—and maybe find your new favorite shade.

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