

# FERDINAND HODLER

## CONCEPT

Ferdinand Hodler's *The Sacred Hour* is an ideal example of the symbolist works he painted between 1890 and his death in 1918. Several versions of this work were completed, each with two, four, or six female figures. The use of repetitive figures in this painting depicts Hodler's grand ideal of parallelism, a principle of repetition essential in the order of nature, and in the symmetry of the body.



detail: Ferdinand Hodler, *The Sacred Hour* ca. 1907–11, The Edwin and Virginia Irwin Memorial, Fanny Bryce Lehner Endowment, Mr. and Mrs. Harry S. Leyman Endowment; and Museum purchase: Gift of Mary Hannah, Mrs. Louis J. Ransohoff, and Mary E. Johnston, by exchange, 1990. 1294

## BACKGROUND

Ferdinand Hodler was born in Switzerland on March 14, 1853. When he was five his father died; his mother remarried but also died at young age of tuberculosis. During his adolescence, Hodler found himself alone. The fear of death haunted him throughout his life. At the age of fourteen he apprenticed with landscape artist Ferdinand Sommer in Thun. At eighteen he studied painting with Barthelemy Menn, a pupil of Ingres, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Geneva. This thorough training made him familiar with artists like Hans Holbein the Younger, Rembrandt, Albrecht Dürer, and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.

In 1878 Hodler traveled to Spain, this trip would prove beneficial in broadening his artistic style. It was during this time that he became familiar with the works of the Impressionists. His early works, predominately ornamental in style, did not reflect his true interests of myths and the past. In 1881 on a visit to Paris, he came in contact with the works of Paul Gauguin and his followers and those of Impressionist Georges Seurat, which greatly influenced his work. Hodler became a symbolist and his own "parallelist" principles were made apparent through the repetitive use of line, shape, and color with an emphasis on decorative and

## CRITICAL THINKING

What type of lines can you make with your body? Describe them.

How do the lines you make with your body change when you add movement?

What body parts do dancers use when they create line?

Select a landscape or still life in the permanent collection of the Cincinnati Art Museum. Create this painting using a small group to portray the lines and shapes you see. Add movement to the small group portraying the painting. What type of music would be appropriate to accompany the movement?

mystical elements.

There were many enthusiasts for Hodler's symbolist works in Germany and Austria where he was admitted to the Berlin Sezession, an invitational art exhibition, in 1899 and to the Vienna Sezession of 1904, in which a large show was held in Hodler's honor. This growing interest for his work resulted in commissions from both the University of Jena and the city of Hanover. Apart from these large decorative commissions, his later works consisted mainly of mountain landscapes painted with subjective and expressive color. He died in Geneva, Switzerland, on May 20, 1918.

The *Sacred Hour*, painted in many versions using two, four, or six female figures, is an example of a cartoon, or preparatory painting, for a wall mural. The two seated figures, painted from the same model, are arranged symmetrically as mirror images of each other. Each figure varies in detail yet is deliberately likened to the other in overall appearance. The figures are personifications or allegories, not

realistic depictions. Hodler uses color to express mood and line to symbolize the circle life. In this painting, the vertical line is used as a symbol for life and the horizontal line as a symbol for death. The strong vertical lines of the women suggest life, and the springlike flowers in the background suggest new life.

The message of this painting seems to be the harmonious association between woman and nature. Unreal and dreamlike, the painting depicts an environment that is not so much substantial as it is emotional. The relationship of the women to their natural surroundings is expressed by their dancelike gestures, implying that their own eurythmic movements are the source of their joy in life and nature.



# CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

## LANGUAGE ARTS

Play nonobjective renditions of music (classical, new age, jazz, pop-rock, or movie soundtracks) and allow students to compile an adjective list describing their feelings about the music. Play the piece again and allow the students to write a descriptive paragraph or poem about the way the music made them feel.

## SOCIAL STUDIES

Study the development of dance styles and the use of dance in ritual from the beginning of civilization to modern times. Make a time line of costume that goes along with the development of dance.

## MATH

Study and make examples of symmetry in nature. Allow students to bring in examples of symmetry in nature or go on a scavenger hunt. Look at designs in art that are balanced symmetrically. Assign students to make symmetrically balanced designs using both geometric and natural shapes. Discuss the process and differences.

## MUSIC

Study the art of eurythmic music and dance. Learn about the famous Swiss composer and music educator Emile Jacques-Dalcroze. Explore the meaning of his statement "All elements of music can be experienced through movement."

## ART HISTORY

Still life, portraits, and landscapes can all be portrayed with students creating shapes, lines, and movement in body language. Assign small groups to portray specific masterworks in art class and try to perform them to music.

## VOCABULARY

symbolism	parallelism	expressionism	gesture
eurythemics	modern dance	contour	improvisation
Impressionist	art nouveau	composition	ritual
symmetric balance	background	repetition	harmony
mystic			

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[www.wetcanvas.com/Museum/Artists/h/Ferdinand\\_Hodler/](http://www.wetcanvas.com/Museum/Artists/h/Ferdinand_Hodler/)







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