



Don Cooper, *Extreme Southeast Georgia*, 1990. Oil on canvas. Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Extreme Southeast Georgia is part of a larger series in which Don Cooper incorporates mystic, eastern elements into the Southern landscape. Anyone who has visited the old Carnegie estate on Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia, can see the similarities between the site and the painting. According to the former curator at the Morris, Estill Curtis Pennington, the work “celebrates the natural supernaturalism of a landscape in decay, a traditional Southern theme.” On Cumberland Island, writer Padgett Powell has said, “A barrier island is a barrier; it is beauty, but is a rough beauty.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Don Cooper was born in Texas in 1944. As a child his interests were archaeology and geography, and he spent much of his time reading a large set of encyclopedias in his home. Living on a farm and in small towns, he was always surrounded by nature and spent a lot of his time outdoors. Cooper’s parents were “crafty,” and he describes his mother as a “self-taught” artist who always encouraged his interest in art. Unfortunately, Cooper had no art classes at school, nor were private lessons available to him as a child. He was often called on to do drawings and illustrations for various classes in high school.

Cooper attended the University of Georgia with the intention of studying medicine. His roommate was an art student, whose works he found to be comparable to his. Cooper decided to change his major, switching to commercial art. He then found his niche while studying under Jim Herbert in the 1960s, and received training as an abstract painter.



After receiving his M.F.A. in painting and drawing from the University of Georgia in 1968, Cooper was immediately drafted into the army. He spent a year in Vietnam, serving as a scout dog handler. This inspired a series of paintings of dogs done while he lived on a farm in Woodstock, GA, after his return to the U.S. Following this, he painted scenes with wild animals native to Georgia. While these works were more abstractly related to his experience in Vietnam, Cooper's next series included human forms and a more direct Asian influence. His interest in Asian culture, religion, and travel has remained strong since this time.

Cooper has received numerous grants and awards, including the MOCAGA Working Artist Grant and Fulbright Artist Fellowship. He taught art at West Georgia College in Carrollton, and then moved to Atlanta where he lived and worked as a painter, sculptor, and part-time drawing and painting teacher at the Atlanta College of Art.

Cooper continues to travel extensively to Vietnam, India, China, Kashmir, Thailand, and other places that interested him as a child. He is an avid gardener, traveler, and student of Asian culture and religion. He exhibits every two years in Atlanta, and describes his work as "process painting." Cooper's works are comprised of lush mythic scenes with latent or evocative narrative content, which results in works of psychological depth and ambiguity.

QUESTIONS

1. What about this painting gives it supernatural elements? What is the mood of the work? How do the colors and lighting contribute to the mood of the work? Cooper's works are heavily influenced by mystical, Asian elements. What about the painting shows this influence?
2. Cooper has said that he used to think of his images as movie frames; now, he sees them as a fraction of the frame. He claims, "I don't know what the story is," but creates a narrative for the viewer to complete. What kind of story can you make from this painting?
3. If you look closely you can see another person in the background. The two people in this painting do not interact. What does that add to the painting? How does that add to the mood of the work?



Teaching with the Morris!

Information and Questions to use in the Classroom

SOURCES

Artspace, Don Cooper. http://www.artspace.com/don_cooper

Morris Museum of Art, Permanent Collection. <http://www.themorris.org/ourcollection/cooper-georgia.html>

Pennington, Estill Curtis. *A Southern Collection*. Augusta, GA: Morris Communications Corporation, 1992.