



Fourth Grade Print

Copper (1936)

By Philip Latimer Dike

Technique: oil on canvas

Collection: Phoenix Art Museum

Art Genre: Western-American Landscape

OBJECTIVES:

- The students will examine Philip Latimer Dike's use of color and perspective in his painting, *Copper*, and the students will consider the historical context of the painting's subject matter.
- The students will create an Arizona landscape scene on copper foil.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Phil Dike was born in California in 1906. He received a scholarship to Los Angeles's Chouinard Art Institute upon his graduation from high school. After four years there, he went on to the Art Students League in New York, where he studied with renowned artist George Luks (1866-1933). Dike traveled to Europe and North Africa, returning to California in 1931 to teach at Chouinard and work in the fine-art department at Walt Disney Studios. Of his diverse and ever-evolving artistic style, the artist said: "The creative process is like the flight of birds, unpredictable... Change is influenced by life patterns, the written word, people, places, and things, and by the unpredictable nature of the growing person."

ABOUT THE WORK:

Copper is the oldest metal used by man, who learned to use it for agriculture and weapons more than 10,000 years ago. Today, copper and its alloys (for example, brass and bronze) are used in electrical systems and electronics, computers, home appliances and fixtures, plumbing, keys, coins, and many other products. The early formation of Planet Earth left copper deposits deep below what is now Arizona. In the 1800s, mining companies were established in areas where copper-rich ore (metal-bearing rock) occurred on or close to the ground's surface. Copper-mining soon became one of Arizona's most important industries.

In the early 1930s, Dike traveled to Arizona, which, like the rest of the country, was feeling the socio-economic effects of the Great Depression. As the demand for consumer goods decreased, so did the need for copper. The devastating consequences of the Depression felt by the local mining industry inspired Dike to create *Copper*, an oil-on-canvas painting.

The artist combined elements of two towns – Jerome, north of Phoenix, and Miami, east of the city – to make reference to the two types of mining in Arizona. Underground mines are found in rocky, mountainous areas like Jerome, where the desired material lies deep under the surface. Open-pit mines, like the one in Miami, are more common if the material is closer to the surface. In *Copper*, lines formed by roads, buildings and natural formations lead our eyes to the copper plant; the light-colored pit and plant, under an ominous sky and surrounded by darkened houses and dramatically lit rocky cliffs, further indicate the importance of this central area of the painting. Of *Copper* and its sister painting, *Inspiration Copper*, Dike said: "These pictures represent a culmination of feelings and experiences in the copper mining towns of Arizona prior [to] and during

the Depression, of that period which influenced me greatly.” In 1936, the artist was invited to show *Copper* at the Carnegie International, the oldest North-American exhibition of contemporary art from around the world.

QUESTIONS AND POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Subject Matter

- Describe what you see in this painting. (Discuss this painting’s historical context and the two types of copper mining that are depicted in this painting.)
- Describe the weather conditions in *Copper*. What kind of feeling does this weather give to the painting?
- The vantage point that the artist chose is slightly above the town. Where might the artist have been located in order to capture this “top-down” view?

Elements of Art

- Think of the colors of some objects that contain copper: pennies, the Statue of Liberty, the dome of the old Arizona state capitol, or brass instruments. Which of these colors did Dike use in *Copper*?
- This painting includes many geometrical elements. What are some of the different shapes in this painting?

Evaluation

- What do you find interesting about this painting? (Remind the students that they can view the original painting at the Phoenix Art Museum.)
- What do you like about the way the artist painted this scene?

PROJECT: The students will create an Arizona landscape scene on copper foil. Brainstorm different types of Arizona landscape scenes with the students (i.e. mountains, desert, towns, citrus groves, ranches, etc.). The students should first plan their scenes with white paper and pencils. The scenes should include a background with some detailed images in the foreground. Each student will receive a 5-inch square of copper foil and a stylus stick. The stylus stick will be used to impress the planned scene onto the copper foil sheet. Have each student put a sheet of construction paper under the copper foil because this will increase the depth of the impressions. Remind the students to put their names in the bottom corner of the copper square. Please save this artwork in the students’ art portfolios.

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ Copper foil squares (5-inch squares)
- ✓ Stylus sticks
- ✓ Practice papers (5-inch squares)
- ✓ Construction paper - to be used as a soft surface under the copper foil, which allows for deeper impressions on the foil (Please save these construction paper sheets so they can be reused by the next class.)