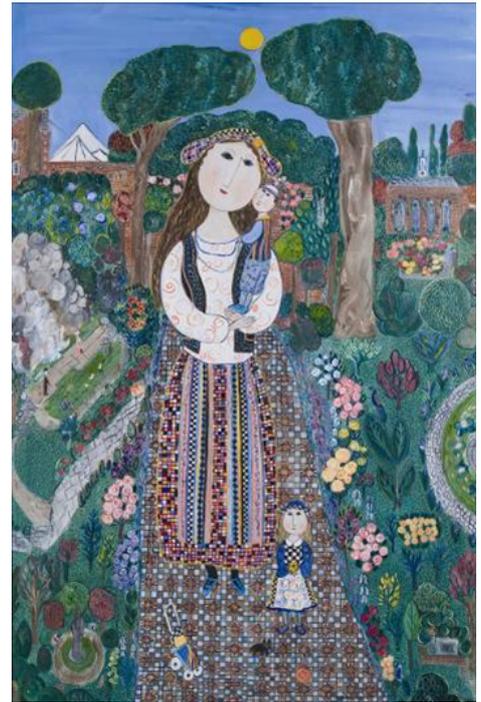


Teachers' Notes

Mother and Children in Holland Park, 1997

Dora Holzhandler (b. 1928)

Oil on canvas, 121.5 x 82 cm



Content and Ideas

Who is the woman in the portrait?

Self Portrait of artist, Dora Holzhandler. She is with her children. Dora has 3 daughters named Amalie, Hepzibah and Hermione. The woman has a calm expression on her face and her head is tilted towards her child which is a gesture of love and protection.

Where is she in the picture?

It is in Holland Park in London- it looks as though there are tents in the background - perhaps a summer fete or concert is taking place or is going to take place. It looks like summer time because the flowers are in bloom and the grass and trees are green.

The park is full of flowers and trees and is bursting with life. At this time of her life, Dora Holzhandler had just had children and was also learning about the Buddhist religion. She was learning new things as a new mother and also as a student of Buddhism. She painted lots of paintings of her family in the park, filled with plants, trees and flowers. These paintings represent how her own knowledge was growing and changing. Parks and gardens are also often said to represent paradise.

Form and Composition

What are the main shapes and colours that you can see in this painting?

The mother and children are centred in the middle of the painting. The trees in the park, frame the woman and children, and almost bend over her in a protective way. The sun shines directly above her, which also suggests a protective light.

Is it a 'realistic' painting?

The use of scale and perspective does not conform to 'accurate' representation. The size of the children is out of 'realistic' proportion which makes the mother look very large. The man walking his dog in the background is very tiny and seen almost from an aerial perspective. This adds to the 'magical' and surreal quality of the painting and ensures that the mother and children stand out against the backdrop of the park.

There is a 'naive' style to the way that Holzhandler has painted her figures and forms, in a supposedly simplistic way. She is painting from a 'mind's eye' perspective, from her own imagination, rather than from life.

Materials and Techniques

How is the image made?

The work has been made by using oil paints on canvas.

Nearly every part of the painting is filled with pattern and colour. There is pattern on the path, on Dora's and the children's clothes, as well as in the flowers and trees in the park. This use of pattern in painting is very similar to the traditional Indian and Persian miniature paintings that Dora Holzhandler enjoyed looking at.

Dora Holzhandler does not ever make any preparatory drawings for her work, not even for portraits. She paints from her mind straight on to the canvas.

About the Artist

Dora Holzhandler was born in Paris in 1928 of émigré Jewish/Polish parents. The collapse of her father's business forced her into care with a Catholic family in Normandy for six years, before her family re-grouped and moved to London in 1934. Her family survived the Second World War in England, but much of her extended family perished in Auschwitz concentration camp.

Holzhandler returned to Paris in 1946 to study at the Sorbonne. In 1948, she settled permanently in England and became a student at the Anglo-French Art Centre in St John's Wood, London, where she met and married George Swinford, a fellow student, and settled in Hampstead. She has exhibited in London, Bath, Paris and New York.

Dora's work focuses on particular themes such as self-portraits, mother and child, religious imagery, lovers and landscapes. It is influenced by her belief in both Jewish and Buddhist religions and incorporates mystical and religious symbolism in a recognisably naïve style.