

Autumn in Milan by Hermann Schmidtman: painted in 1936

Welcome to this guide in which we'll be spending a short time looking at this painting together.

First of all, let's think about the whole scene- obviously we're in a busy city area but there's plenty more to observe here. Despite the loose style of painting, you may already find that you can read all sorts of information in it, such as time of year, the probable time of day, the weather, and the era depicted. Are you aware how you're doing that? Let's look more closely.

So to start with, it's interesting to be aware of the style of painting we're looking at. Perhaps this is a style of painting you like, or maybe not. It's quite an impressionistic painting and you could try zooming in for a moment to see the brushstrokes on the canvas. These are quite vigorous and rough, reminding us that this *is* paint applied to a canvas, but magically when we zoom back out, it transports us into an impression of a scene that's in another time and place. It's not straightforward to make out all the details with this style of painting. Do you like the challenge of that, or is it frustrating to you?

You may think there's little detail to see, but despite the rough brush strokes, we can read a considerable amount of information.

We know from the title that we're in Milan. Could you have identified that we're in a European city without the title? By considering the buildings and the people, it looks likely we're somewhere in Europe doesn't it? And that building in the background, even though it's sketchy, has enough detail to suggest to us that it's quite Italianate and old.

The buildings to the front left of the canvas are more vaguely drawn. There seems to be a sign hanging above the closer of the buildings. What do you think the buildings are? The sign suggests maybe cafés, or shops perhaps?

Moving our eyes across to the centre of the canvas, there's a horizontal splash of white. Could that be a hint of a café table covered with a white table cloth? It's next

to two figures to the right who might be nuns, strolling towards us. So we could be in a pedestrian square or street, with a café or shops.

Probably one of the first things you noticed about the picture is all the people, a real hustle and bustle of people in fact. And we can maybe get a sense of the feel of this crowded street. Would you say there's a rushed air to the people, or maybe a leisurely feel? Are we seeing rush hour or perhaps later in the morning, or maybe there's a lunchtime feel to the scene?

There aren't many clues as to the time of day. But - what about the light? Viewing the top left of the painting, there's a hint of a watery sun behind the clouds, and it's moderately high, so this could suggest a time towards the middle of the day.

What about the weather? Look at the pavement. It's full of richly painted reflections; these are dabs and daubs of paint and yet we're left in no doubt that this *is* a wet pavement. So, it's clearly been raining very recently, but there are no umbrellas up, and the sun's starting to break through. That pearly, washy sort of light in the sky often follows rain. Next time there's a rain shower, and then the sky starts to brighten, take a note of the quality of light and see how well this painter has captured this sort of light.

Then there's the clothes the people are wearing – they're a really good clue as to temperature. People aren't bundled up but they're not in summer wear either. So it's temperate, pleasant enough to stroll around and sit at café tables on the street.

What can you tell about the time of year? Of course, we have the title to guide us, but we don't need this to tell us it's Autumn. The orange leaves on the trees are obvious, and also, notice all the fallen leaves on the wet pavement. Then there's the tree on the right that's shed its upper leaves already– look how the bare branches shoot up into the sky.

Do you think it's windy or calm? How can you tell?

Thinking about the era of the painting, do you think it's depicting a scene contemporary with the date it's been painted, or is it set back in time? It's interesting to look at clothes and artifacts for any available clues. What do the clothes tell you in this painting?

And then it's intriguing to imagine what would change in this image if it were painted yesterday rather than years ago. The clothes would change of course. What else? Looking at the man on the left, for instance, he's reading a paper. But nowadays he's more likely to be reading the news on his tablet. And the woman in the centre of the painting might, these days, be chatting on her mobile, perhaps letting a friend know she's on her way. Where do you think she's going? She's quite smartly dressed, with a little hat and matching shoes. Perhaps she's going for a lunch date with a friend, perhaps on her way to work.

If *you* were in this painting, where would you like to be? Maybe sitting at a café, watching the world go by? Or strolling through the warm streets absorbing the sounds and sights? Perhaps you'd even be painting this picture.

We've come to the end of this audio guide now, although you're welcome to spend more time looking at the painting on your own.

Next, you might like reflecting on what you most enjoyed about this brief activity so scroll down to **Wrap up your painting** to have a go at this.