

Peace of Mind, c. 1930

Roy Nuse, 1885–1975

oil on canvas

H.30 inches x W 25 inches

Collection of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22



Biography

Roy Nuse was born on February 23, 1885, in Springfield, Ohio. He was the only son of a successful barber. He wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, so he was determined to become a barber himself. He trained to cut hair from an early age. When his father became ill, Nuse was forced to quit school and find work to help support his family. He decided to take a job in a factory painting lampshades. It was there where he discovered his talent in art, and in 1905 he went to the Art Academy of Cincinnati to begin his training as an artist. Nuse returned home on the weekends to work with his father in his barbershop. In 1925, after he had married, Nuse moved to Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He lived on a farm in Pipersville for seven years, and he began taking classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. It was there that he studied with Daniel Garber, the Pennsylvania impressionist painter. He also taught there for 21 years. Nuse worked in oil paints and created figurative and landscape paintings using subjects from his Bucks County surroundings. Themes in Nuse's paintings include chores on the farm. He also liked to paint family themes, using his own six children, everybody in his extended family, and the children of his friends. He was known as a portrait painter and received many commissions. Nuse even carved his own frames for his artwork. He died in Rushland, Pennsylvania, on January 25, 1975.

Who is this man?

When we look at a portrait, we can often use the visual clues given to help us imagine who the subject might be. What is he wearing? What is he doing? Where is he standing? How old is this man? We need to look at this painting closer to answer these questions. He is wearing a hat with a shirt and overalls. He is smoking a pipe and leaning against what seems to be a stone and wood building.

Nuse created many portraits in his lifetime, often of the same subject. Nuse liked to paint his family, friends, and neighbors. He often used his six children as models too. We know that Nuse created other portraits of this man, who was his neighbor, a Mr. Blevins. Blevins was a man of Scandinavian descent who worked on the James Work Farm, a dairy farm in Rushland, Pennsylvania. Roy Nuse's children called him "Old Man Blevins." He is smoking a corncob pipe and standing in front of a corncrib, a place on a farm for storing corn. What do you think Mr. Blevins is thinking? Would you want to get to know this Mr. Blevins? Why or why not?

Did the artist use a model for this painting?

Roy Nuse used his neighbor Blevins as a model for this painting. However, sometimes artists can create paintings from memory too. One of Nuse's favorite kinds of painting was portraiture. We can't see all of this man's face, because we are only given a profile



view. Portraits can be created in many different ways. Roy Nuse has included a side view of his subject, but portraits can include an image of the entire face or just part of a face. Sometimes the artist only includes the head of the person, sometimes the shoulders and the head, the upper body, or the entire body shown sitting or standing. Portraits can show people posing in a certain way, or in the middle of work or an activity. Here, the subject of Nuse's painting is quietly thinking about something. Have you ever created a portrait before? How about a self-portrait?

Why are portraits important in art?

Portraits have existed in art for centuries in many different forms and in many different cultures. Portraits can be done in any medium, including sculpture, oil paint, pastels, printmaking, or even metal. Before photography was invented, portraits were the only way to document images of people. Portraits have been created over history for many different reasons. Sometimes portraits were created to convey the power and wealth of certain people. Some of the earliest portraits of people who were not kings or emperors are the funeral portraits that survived in Egypt. During the Renaissance, portraits of people depicted donors in the paintings they commissioned. Objects and props would be included in a portrait to give information about the subject, or to show the subject's place in society. Portraits of people in opulent clothing were symbols of power, wealth, and authority. Sometimes portraits were even made for remembering the dead. For example, the Japanese created portrait sculptures to commemorate deceased monks. In African art, portraits emphasize social identity rather than individual identity. Portraits throughout Africa usually generalize and idealize their human images, because they are usually showing a ritual and commemorative function.

The invention of photography in the late nineteenth century changed the way in which portraiture was used. Before the camera, portraits had focused more on interpretive depictions of their subjects. In photography, portraits were based on a person's actual appearance. Some of these early photographs were formal, and required people to sit for a long period of time. As the camera improved, the speed with which photographs could be taken allowed photographers to experiment more creatively with their portraits.

Roy Nuse said, "I'd run a mile to get away from machines." Why did he say that?

Roy Nuse didn't like TVs and telephones. He also refused to own a car, even when he received one as a gift! He didn't trust any modern technologies. Life without technology was difficult. The farmhouse in which he lived was not large, and there were no indoor bathrooms. There were eleven people living in the house at one point. When Nuse would travel to Philadelphia, he would take a horse and buggy to another town to catch a trolley, and then later catch a train that would take him into the city. This would be a long commute from where he lived. When Nuse later moved to Bucks County, there was a train station within walking distance from his home, and he took the train into Philadelphia to teach at the academy. How do you feel about technology?

Nuse was also very frugal. He threw away very little and tried to improvise with what he had. Items like string, aluminum foil, and paper bags were carefully saved. With his artwork, he even tried to save materials. Sometimes he used old fabric glued to cereal-box cardboard for his surface to make a pastel drawing. Have you ever tried to reuse materials? Reusing things and recycling paper, plastic and glass is good for the



environment. Before you throw something out, ask yourself if you can reuse or recycle it!

Did you know that this painting travels to different schools?

This painting belongs to an art collection that was in the schools in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, for many years. A lot of the paintings in this collection hung in school hallways and were forgotten about. The schools and the Michener Art Museum knew that these paintings needed attention and care. So, they removed this painting, along with the other paintings, from the schools. The Michener Art Museum now has this painting and the other artworks in the collection in the museum's vault. They are kept safe and are cared for by museum curators and conservationists. During the school year, this painting travels to different schools and is part of a program called *Art on the Move*. This painting, along with five other paintings, is on display in a school for about eight to ten weeks! Museum staff installs the paintings in the schools in a safe place (most often in the library or art room), and students get a chance to use the paintings in their lessons. Do you have artwork in the hallways of your school?

Learn More

Learn to create a profile in the activity below entitled "Profile Portraits."

What is a limner, and what has this to do with portraits?

If Roy Nuse had lived one hundred or more years before, he might have been called a limner. In Colonial and Federal periods in the early United States, a person who painted portraits could be called a limner; the word means to draw or paint in sharp detail. Do you think that Nuse's portrait fits this description?

The pipe that Mr. Blevins is smoking looks unusual. What is it?

The pipe that Mr. Blevins is smoking is made out of a corncob. This is a very inexpensive way to make a pipe yourself. The cob, or center, of the ear of corn can be hollowed out, a stem attached, and you have a pipe. You can also buy a corncob pipe; the most famous come from Washington, Missouri.

Roy Nuse did not like to use machines. People who avoid using machines are often called Luddites. Who are they?

The Luddite movement, which began in England in 1811, was named for a person who we are not sure even existed named Ned Ludd. The members were usually weavers who did not like the idea of mechanical looms. It was not a general dislike of machines that cause them to resist the new loom; it was the belief that they would lose their jobs. Now when we use the term to describe someone, we usually mean someone who opposes new things like television and computers because the person often believes the "old way" is better.

Would you call Roy Nuse a Luddite? Didn't he have a car?

Roy Nuse was definitely a practical man. Nuse lived in an area of the county that was very far from transportation. Even though he didn't like machines, he did own a car. The first one he used was a "flivver" or a "Tin Lizzie". These were nicknames for the early Ford Model T car.



Related Images

Roy Nuse had a large family. He painted *Age of Speed* of five of his children at play. It is on the Bucks County Artists Database at the James A. Michener Art Museum, www.michenerartmuseum.org.

After Mr. Nuse retired from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, he taught at home. One of his students was Harriet Ermentrout. Look at her painting, *George School Farm*, on the Bucks County Artists Database at the James A. Michener Art Museum, www.michenerartmuseum.org. Do you think her work shows the effects of his teachings?

Roy Nuse was originally from Ohio, and studied in Cincinnati, Ohio with Frank Duveneck, who was a well-known painter of the time. Do you see any resemblance between Nuse's style and Duveneck's *The Cobbler's Apprentice* at the Traditional Fine Arts Organization, www.tfaoi.com.

Roy Nuse often made his own frames. Many artists, however, had their frames made by someone else. Two of the most well-known frame makers in Bucks County were Frederick Harer and Ben Badura. Badura was trained by Harer, and Harer thought that Badura was so skilled that when Harer died he left his tools to Badura. Look at their frames at the Bucks County Artists Database at the James A. Michener Art Museum, www.michenerartmuseum.org.

Related Links

Roy Nuse had a Ford Model T car, also called a "Tin Lizzie." Pictures of this car are available at transportationhistory.suite101.com. The car was not in good condition when he got it. He only drove it to the trolley stop in Plumsteadville to travel to Philadelphia or to Jenkintown. After traveling to Europe on a grant, Nuse had enough money left over to buy a newer car. It was a 1922 Ford Touring car. Touring didn't mean that he would go on tour with it; it was a way of saying that the car held more than two people and was not a convertible. Look at the Ford Touring Car at Concept Carz, www.conceptcarz.com.

Roy Nuse lived on a farm, but would you call him a farmer?

When you say farmer it generally means someone who makes his living from farming. He might raise crops to sell or animals, or perhaps both, but he usually does not have time for another job. In Bucks County, PA, farming is very important. There were also people who grew chickens for eggs, and vegetables for their families. These Bucks County residents usually had other jobs. Roy Nuse was a teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and also at the Beechwood School for Women (which became part of Beaver, then Ardadia University). When he retired from teaching, Roy Nuse made his living as a painter, enjoying the simple life of a farm-like atmosphere and his Bucks County surroundings. Other artists in the area who lived on farms included the painter Daniel Garber who raised sheep. Learn more about contemporary Bucks County farms from the Bucks County Moving Forward website, www.buckscounty.org.

