

From the Kansas City Business Journal

:<http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/print-edition/2012/10/26/daydream-at-the-nelson-atkins-museum.html>

PUBLIC AFFAIRS JOURNAL

Daydream at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Premium content from Kansas City Business Journal by Fred Logan, Contributing Writer

Date: Friday, October 26, 2012, 5:00am CDT

The **Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art** inspires daydreams.

That's not true all the time, of course. The museum frequently is bustling with activity. Sometimes it's downright noisy.

But during quiet times, there's no better place to go and just contemplate the world.

Try this: Go to the European baroque paintings in Gallery P15. Plop yourself on the bench in front of one of the museum's great masterpieces, Caravaggio's "Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness." Let your imagination go.

Caravaggio gives us a youthful prophet, with dirty toenails and a mop of hair that would work on any college student today. The gospel of Matthew tells us that John the Baptist wore "raiment of camel's hair," but there's just a hint of that in the painting.

The Baptist's face transfixes us. He's gazing down, possibly in deep thought. His eyes are shaded. No matter how hard we try, we can't see them.

Is the itinerant preacher contemplating his baptism of Jesus? Is he worried about his fate, knowing that Roman authorities view him with suspicion? Or is he just a moody teenager?

Ian Kennedy, the museum's Louis L. and Adelaide C. Ward Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, told me that before Caravaggio did it in this painting, John the Baptist had never been portrayed in this manner.

It's not for nothing that Caravaggio's been described as "the first modern painter." His John the Baptist is a brooding, enigmatic saint and provocative, even in the 21st century.

Caravaggio, in fact, painted "St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness" in the period of 1604 to 1605.

Daydream a bit and now think of William Shakespeare, who at that same time was writing "King Lear." The play's exploration of filial betrayal and madness speaks to us today as forcefully as it did to Elizabethan audiences.

Then let that daydream transport you to 1604 Spain, where Miguel de Cervantes was writing the tale of a delusional "knight" in "Don Quixote," one of the masterworks of Western literature.

So in the earliest years of the 17th century, Caravaggio, Shakespeare and Cervantes explored, in ways unique to their time, psychological complexity, madness and delusion.

Was there ever such an explosion of artistic genius at the same time? What if they met? ...

Then the reverie ends. Not to worry. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will always inspire new daydreams.

Fred Logan | flogan@loganlaw.com. Logan is a partner in Prairie Village law firm Logan Logan & Watson LC and a regular columnist for the Kansas City Business Journal.