



Peter Blume (1906–1992)

The Rock, 1944-48

Oil on canvas (57 5/8 x 74 3/8 in.)

The Art Institute of Chicago, 1956.338

(Art Institute of Chicago American Art Manual)

Image 26

**Peter Blume**

(American, born Russia, present-day Belarus,
1906–1992)

The Rock, 1944–48

Oil on canvas

146.4 x 188.9 cm (58 x 74 in.)

Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.

1956.338

Peter Blume finished *The Rock* in 1948, three years after the end of World War II (1939–1945), a time of worldwide destruction and disbelief. The war, including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, illustrated both the capability of humanity to inflict pain and devastation on itself and the catastrophic effects of new technology. Although Blume's work often eludes clear interpretation, images of decay and rebirth recur throughout his paintings. *The Rock* is a powerful evocation of this theme.

In the painting, a group of men and women rebuild civilization out of its own destruction. Looming in the center of the painting is a monumental rock, scarred and blasted, yet enduring. Though precariously perched on a pedestal of sand and stone, the rock gives balance and symmetry to the **composition**. Surrounding the rock are scenes of destruction and reconstruction. An animal skeleton, signifying death, lies near the rock opposite a vivid red flower-like growth, a reference to life. Below, men and women work to bring order to this chaotic landscape. On the left, a group of workers construct a building using simple tools and means of

construction. On the right, a man strains to bring order to a smoldering ruin; an oval portrait on a shattered wall and the empty rocking chair are all that remain of those who once lived in the destroyed home. The smoke from the ruined house flows across the top of the painting towards scaffolding, linking contrasting symbols of destruction and renewal. With its cantilevered limestone terraces, the building surrounded by scaffolding alludes to Falling Water, a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, for Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar Kauffman (who commissioned this painting from Blume.) The house appears in the painting as a symbol of modern innovation and the hopeful rebuilding of a destroyed landscape, and it serves as a contrast to the ruins on the right side of the painting. Blume painted these dreamlike images with clear, bold colors, influenced by both the political currents of the time as well as the art of the **Surrealists**.

At the age of five, Blume emigrated from Russia to Brooklyn, New York, where he studied fine art. He eventually traveled to Europe. It was through this time abroad and Blume's friendships with artists in New York who had fled to the United States during the rise of **fascism** in the 1930s that he developed his individual artistic style. Blume was particularly influenced by Surrealism, an art movement that developed in France in the early 1920s. Surrealism is typified by dreamlike images, and it explored the psychological theories of the unconscious. Blume was one of the first American artists to embrace the movement, focusing on the dreamlike juxtaposition of disjunctive and unrelated objects and figures. He often used the themes of death and rebirth as metaphoric references to fascism, the ills of modern society, and other aspects of the contemporary world to which he objected.

As the center of the composition and the inspiration for the painting's title, the rock is a powerful symbol of humanity's tenacity and capacity to survive in the face of destruction. The figures, with their expressive faces, struggle to go on living and working in a nightmare created by humanity. In a deliberate balancing of images of devastation and rebirth, the painting serves as a metaphor for the damage and reconstruction of the world following World War II.

THEMES:

Narrative

Nature and Environment

**RELATED
WORK**

**Ivan Le Lorraine Albright,
*That Which I Would Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door)***

Ivan Albright, a Chicago artist who achieved international fame in the 1930s and 1940s, worked in an independent style quite unlike any of his contemporaries in American painting, such as Grant Wood (see p. 57) or Edward Hopper (see p. 62). Although Albright's paintings were essentially realistic in style, as seen in the minute detail of *That Which I Should Have Done I Did Not Do (The Door)*, his works often occupied a realm somewhere between reality and imagination, not unlike the paintings of Peter Blume. Albright's meticulous style has often been described as "magic realism" or "hyperrealism" for its intense detail and vivid color.

The painting's long and philosophical title immediately conveys the primary theme of regret over choices made in life. The mood communicated by the work is dark and ominous. The large canvas depicts an old, dilapidated but elegantly carved turn-of-the-century door. An aged woman's hand rests inexplicably on the elaborately carved doorframe, a lace handkerchief clutched between two fingers. It is unclear what the hand is doing; this uncertainty underscores the sense of regret and mourning suggested by the title. Hanging on the door is a funeral wreath of wax flowers, now faded and damaged. The ghostly appearance of the hand, red paint smeared on the door (perhaps suggesting blood), the dark shadow lining the right side, and overall decrepitude imply death and decay. In fact, Albright used a tombstone as the model for the doorstep, and found the door in a local junkyard. At first, he painted the woman's hand using an actual model, but when she tired of posing after several years, he worked from a plaster cast, which perhaps contributes to the eerie effect conveyed by the painting.

Albright labored for ten years on *The Door*, as the work is popularly known. First he completed a charcoal **underdrawing** on the canvas before he began to paint; this alone took thirteen months of work. Then, working with a fine brush,

7. See, for example, Ingres's finished portraits, oil studies, and drawings of Madame Paul-Sigisbert Moitessier, richly detailed in Gary Tinterow and Philip Conisbee, eds., *Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch*, exh. cat. (Metropolitan Museum of Art/Abrams, 1999), pp. 426–53, cats. 133–44.
8. John D. Graham, "The Case of Mr. Picasso," unpublished ms., p. 1, John D. Graham Papers, 1799–1988, Archives of American Art.
9. Hayden Herrera, "Le Feu Ardent: John Graham's Journal," *Archives of American Art Journal* 14, 2 (1974), p. 10.
10. For "previous abstract Picassoid style," see "John Graham," *Art News* 45, 9 (Nov. 1946), p. 45; and for "Picasso to the Renaissance for his new inspiration," see "John Graham Turns," *Art Digest* 21, 3 (Nov. 1, 1946), p. 18.
11. Edward Alden Jewell, "Melange of Shows," *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1946, p. X8. Jewell likened Graham's older work to "canvases that looked like hot fudge" but nonetheless stated his preference even for those.
12. Fairfield Porter, "John Graham: Painter as Aristocrat," *Art News* 59, 6 (Oct. 1960), p. 40.

PETER BLUME (1906–1992)

155. *The Rock*, 1944–48

Oil on canvas; 146.4 x 188.9 cm (58 x 74 in.)

Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., 1956.338

156. *Buoy*, 1941

Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 45.7 cm (16 x 18½ in.)

Gift of Marcia W. Dunbar-Soule Dobson in memory of Helen Flanders Dunbar, M.D., 2003.432

Peter Blume, once called the "first real American Surrealist" by André Breton, the founder of the movement, refused Breton's invitation to join the group in the 1940s, saying it was "hopeless," for he "wasn't a Surrealist in that sense."¹ Blume believed that American artists ought to work inde-



CAT. 155



CAT. 156

pendently, without following the lead of a central figure, and in his own practice rejected the use of the unconscious as a theme. He thus evaded categorization throughout his long and successful artistic career.

Born in western Russia (now Belarus), Blume immigrated with his mother and sister to the United States in 1911 to join his father in New York, who had arrived two years earlier after having participated in the 1905–07 revolution.² Knowing at a young age that he wanted to be an artist, Blume began lessons at age twelve and continued through his teen years, despite opposition from his parents. After moving out on his own, he made ends meet by working odd jobs, often at lithographic and engraving houses, while continuing to paint. He first gained recognition in 1934, when his painting *South of Scranton* (1931; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) was awarded first prize at the Carnegie International. However, it wasn't until three years later that the artist publicly exhibited his next painting, *The Eternal City* (1934–37; Museum of Modern Art, New York), then called "a painted essay on Fascism."³ Blume continued working at the same slow pace, spending years at a time on a single work. This practice, along with the enigmatic subject matter of his works, tended to frustrate critics, but Blume's canvases were nonetheless held in high regard by many of his fellow artists and, eventually, the public.⁴

Although Blume's imagery can be described as Surrealist, his works never grew directly from his unconscious, as was customary with the artists who were officially part of

the movement. Rather, his images were often based on conscious experiences, influences, and observations. Because he combined diverse references within each work and was evasive when talking about his art, many of his paintings are open to a variety of interpretations, as is true of *The Rock*. It was commissioned in 1939 by department store magnate Edgar Kaufmann for his home, Fallingwater, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.⁵ The artist visited the structure in Bear Run, Pennsylvania, and it impressed him very much: "Seeing the house was a very, very dramatic experience. Wright probably did the most extraordinary architectural thing we've ever had."⁶ Blume first painted a small picture, *House at Falling Water* (fig. 143), which he described as:

a complete little picture, a very exacting miniature-like picture for the Kaufmanns showing the house *and* the people *and* the trees *and* the quarry and where the stones were carved out of the shelves of stone that Frank Lloyd Wright had found, a wonderful quarry. *Everything . . .* it had everything in it. And they said "Fine, this is lovely." But it had to be something about seven feet wide and five feet high to fit in the only place in Frank Lloyd Wright's house where a picture could be shown . . . I said, "here I've been working on this thing, and I'm through with this . . . To make a large picture out of a small one would just about kill me."⁷

While the artist struggled with the commission, his health began to deteriorate from the anxiety, and he traveled to Key



FIG. 143. Peter Blume. *House at Falling Water*, 1936–68. Oil on canvas; 25.4 x 35.6 cm (10 x 14 in.). Pensler Galleries, Washington, D.C.

West during the winter of 1940 to recuperate. *Buoy*, also in the Art Institute's collection, was one of three works relating to the trip that he completed upon his return home to Connecticut.⁸ Blume spoke of the buoys he had seen:

They'd put out these bright red balls, and inside of three or four weeks they'd be covered with . . . all sorts of odd growths . . . I watched them stripping this stuff off and getting to the red thing again . . . I saw these balls, great big buoys, as a form of the earth and the laceration down to the red thing as a sort of bleeding world going on.⁹

The background of the painting shows a tranquil beach scene, with golden sand and calm, turquoise waters under a clear blue sky. Yet the large scraped and chained buoy, covered in decay and pressed against the picture plane, is a commanding, unsettling presence. Blume's written description highlights the sense of aggression present in the painting. *Buoy* may thus express the spirit of its times; as the artist noted, right before World War II there was a "tremendous sense of violence in the air."¹⁰ Indeed, the picture conveys both this feeling of impending doom and the enormous amount of stress Blume was feeling at the time.

The Rock, which ultimately took four years to complete, does not in any way resemble *House at Falling Water*. The titular rock is a large, broken, jagged boulder atop a pedestal at the center of the composition. The artist described it as a "ball which is the earth all clapped and broken in the shape of a man's head."¹¹ As in *Buoy*, here too there is a sense of violence. On the left the construction of Fallingwater can be seen, with almost cartoonlike workers hauling the large flat stones needed to build the house. Conversely, the right side shows a destroyed, smoking building that may suggest either the demolition of a house next to Fallingwater or the

bombed London landscape after the Blitz.¹² At lower center, workers dig in the quarry and a woman with raised arms crouches at the base of the pedestal. Blume described her as "reach[ing] in for something," and commented that "I've always been fascinated by the business of reaching in with your fingers into the earth . . . She's looking for stones and of course I don't know how long this structure in the middle is going to last."¹³

In an unpublished article on *The Rock*, Mark White noted that the organization of Blume's painting is remarkably similar to that of *Haywain* (c. 1485–90; Museo del Prado, Madrid), an altarpiece by Hieronymous Bosch. Both comprise three sections, each with a strong vertical orientation. In *Haywain* the parts are literally separate, for the work is a triptych, but the division is also quite evident in *The Rock*, with the construction on the left, the central area showing the rock, and the scene of destruction on the right. Additionally, the compositions of the center panels of the two works are similar in that their figures are focused on, and in some cases reaching for, the large central object. Blume indeed admired Bosch, and as White remarked, "Altarpieces such as the *Haywain* . . . offered Blume both a useful compositional structure and an allegorical framework for examining the consequences of human folly."¹⁴ Yet despite the three distinct areas in *The Rock*, the viewer's eye is constantly swept through the entire picture. The central rock is the main area of focus but the many curves in the composition—the sweeping tree branch underneath the rock; the smoke drifting through the air; the straight lines of Fallingwater's scaffolding; and the curved and bent arms, legs, and backs of the workers—all serve to busy the eye.

Another similarity to the Bosch altarpiece, and fifteenth-century painting more generally, is Blume's method of execution. As the artist noted in painstaking detail on the verso of *The Rock*, he used the Maroger medium, named for painter and restorer Jacques Maroger, who allegedly rediscovered the Old Masters' techniques by experimenting with different paint formulas culled from their writings.¹⁵ For example, on the verso of *The Rock*, under *ingredients* Blume listed *white varnish* as *Damar resin melted in raw linseed oil*, and *black oil* as *lead white cooked in raw linseed oil until dark*. The resulting colors in *The Rock* are bright and clear, and bear an obvious resemblance to those in the central panel of *Haywain*, especially in the pinks and golds.

Blume's methodical approach is evident in the large number of studies of *The Rock*: over ninety are in the Art Institute's collection alone, all given by the artist. Most were done in charcoal or graphite and focus on the development of the rock, but some were executed in paint on paper (see figs. 144–45). All appear to have been made quickly,

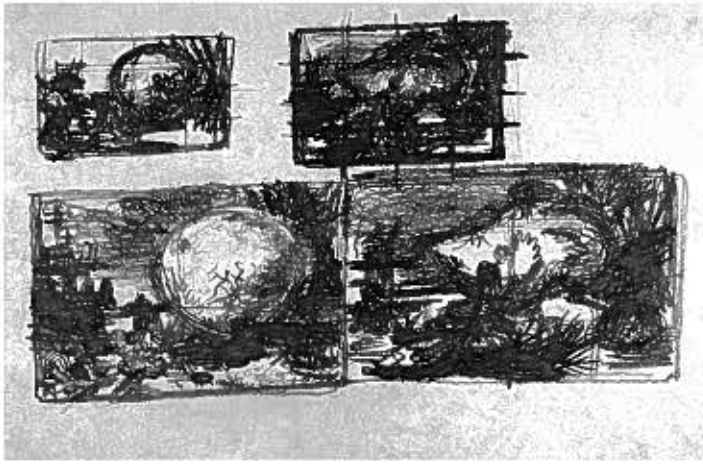


FIG. 144. Peter Blume. *Four Studies*, 1943/48. Graphite on ivory wove paper, tipped onto tannish green wove paper; 21.6 x 33.1 cm (8½ x 13¼ in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Peter Blume, 1963.919.



FIG. 145. Peter Blume. *Study*, 1943/48. Oil paint on white wove paper, tipped onto dark green wove paper; 10.8 x 14.5 cm (4½ x 5⅞ in.). The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Peter Blume, 1963.911.

with sweeping charcoal marks or broad strokes of oil paint, sometimes punctuated with bits of colored paper collaged onto the surface. These rapid studies contrast with the tightly controlled surfaces of Blume's paintings, *The Rock* in particular, about which he noted, "I would have done it all with the Number Two sable brush."¹⁶ Drawings were an important component of the artist's output; beyond numerous studies completed for paintings, he also produced many sketches on a daily basis, partly for what he called the exercise of his hand and eye.¹⁷

Ironically, when *The Rock* was finally completed, it was not hung at Fallingwater, just like its smaller predecessor. As Blume observed, only one area in the house could accommodate art, but it was, according to him, too dark and "no

place for a picture, really."¹⁸ Instead, Kaufmann hung the painting in his apartment in Pittsburgh, and his son gave it to the Art Institute in 1956, less than ten years after it had been completed.

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NOTES

1. Peter Blume, interview by Robert F. Brown, Aug. 16, 1983–May 23, 1984, transcript, p. 184, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
2. Frank Anderson Trapp, *Peter Blume* (Rizzoli, 1987), p. 13. For more on Blume, see esp. chap. 1, pp. 13–39.
3. Edward Alden Jewell, "Canvas on Fascism is Shown by Blume," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1937, p. 17.
4. For example, *The Rock* won the People's Choice Popular Prize at the 1950 Carnegie International.
5. For more on Fallingwater and the Kaufmanns, see Franklin Toker, *Fallingwater Rising: Frank Lloyd Wright, E. J. Kaufmann, and America's Most Extraordinary House* (Knopf, 2003).
6. Blume interview (note 1), p. 109.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
8. The other two works are *Key West Beach* (1940; Museum of Modern Art, New York) and *Weatherwane* (1941; private collection).
9. Blume interview (note 1), p. 111.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
12. In his writings on the painting, Blume mentioned both associations.
13. Blume interview (note 1), pp. 115–16.
14. Mark White, "Doomsday and Deliverance: Postwar Anxiety and the Dialectic of Human Creativity in Peter Blume's *The Rock*," unpub. ms., 2008, p. 5. My thanks to Mark White for sharing his research.
15. Conservation examination report, Apr. 2006, on file in the Department of American Art. I am grateful to Kelly Keegan, Kress Fellow in Paintings Conservation, for conducting the examination.
16. Blume interview (note 1), p. 130.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
18. *Ibid.* p. 116.

PAUL CADMUS (1904–1999)

157. *Study for "Bar Italia,"* c. 1954

Pen and black ink, over graphite, on ivory wove tracing paper;
31.8 x 38.1 cm (12½ x 15 in.)

Signed: *Cadmus* (lower right)

Jalane and Richard Davidson Collection, 1984.1514

Paul Cadmus first achieved national celebrity in 1934 when his painting, *The Fleet's In!* (Navy Museum, Washington, D.C.), depicting a group of rowdy sailors on shore leave, caused a minor scandal and was removed by order of the United States Navy from a Public Works of Art Project



The Rock

1944–1948

by Peter Blume

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
Department of Museum Education
Division of Student and Teacher Programs
The Elizabeth Stone Robson Teacher Resource Center

ART
INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

Peter Blume (American, born Russia, present-day Belarus, 1906–1992)

The Rock, 1944–1948

Oil on canvas

57 5/8 x 74 3/8 in. (146.4 x 188.9 cm)

Gift of Edgar Kaufman, Jr., 1956.338

At the center of this painting looms a monumental rock—scarred, blasted, yet enduring. Precariously perched on a natural pedestal of soil and stone, the rock serves as the **fulcrum** of the composition, giving it balance and symmetry. A scene fraught with destruction and bustling human activity encircles the rock. Men and women of different ages and races work together to bring order to the chaotic landscape. On the left, a group of workers constructs a modern building using simple tools and methods. On the right, two men—one old, the other young—strain to bring order to a smoldering ruin. This bizarre combination of devastation and reconstruction provokes the viewer to question both the causes for such destruction as well as the goal of these men and women's efforts. According to the artist, Peter Blume, *The Rock* symbolizes “the continual process of man's rebuilding out of a devastated world.” The complexity and dense imagery of this work, however, are open to several interpretations. Peter Blume's *The Rock* is indebted to the political, social, and artistic currents of the time as well as the artist's own personal vision.

At the age of five, Blume and his family emigrated from Russia to Brooklyn, New York. While still in grammar school, he enrolled in evening art classes and later began attending fine arts classes at the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design. Like many other young artists in New York of the 1920s, Blume was forced to take odd jobs in order to support himself as a painter. After working as a jewelry manufacturer, newsstand attendant, and elevator operator, he finally received recognition as an artist from a prestigious New York gallery. Shortly thereafter, his painting *South of Scranton* won the highest prize at the 1934 Carnegie International Exhibition of Paintings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. At 28, Blume was the youngest artist to win this prize. During the **Great Depression** (1929–1940), Blume was one of the 10,000 artists employed under the **Federal Art Project** (FAP; 1935–1943), an agency of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's **New Deal**. This agency marked the first time in American history that the arts were funded on a large scale by the federal government. Blume was one of the artists chosen to paint murals for post offices and other federal buildings. It was during his tenure as an FAP artist that he began developing his individual artistic style.

Blume became familiar with many modern art styles during his travels through Europe and through his affiliations with **émigré** artists who

fled to the United States during the rise of **fascism** in the 1930s. He was particularly influenced by the style and philosophy of **Surrealism**, an artistic movement that developed in France in the early 1920s, typified by dream-like images and seemingly nonsensical subjects. These themes were greatly indebted to psychological theories of the unconscious and revolutionary politics of the early 20th century. Inspired by Surrealism, Blume developed a repertoire of fantastical subjects and caricatured human forms in his paintings. He used his painting to criticize the rise of fascism in Europe and to comment on the ills of capitalism in modern society. He repeatedly used themes of death and rebirth, in particular, as the foundation for this type of social commentary. In addition, Blume continually painted and sketched scenes from nature including rock formations, marine life, and plant life; these laborious sketching techniques contributed to the density and complexity of his works. *The Rock* brings Blume's interests in social commentary and nature together as a dynamic whole and highlights his vast array of rich visual symbols.

Blume finished *The Rock* in 1948, three years after the end of World War II (1939–1945). The war, including the atomic bombing of **Hiroshima** and **Nagasaki**, illustrated the catastrophic effects of technology on the earth and its inhabitants. The devastation of the recent war was likely foremost on visitors' minds when the painting was first shown in Pittsburgh in 1950. As the center of the composition and the inspiration for the painting's title, the rock may be Blume's powerful symbol of humankind's tenacity and survival in the face of such destruction or, perhaps, the endurance of the earth itself, despite the catastrophic wars humans cause. The men and woman, with cartoon-like faces, struggle as if in a stupor to go on living and working in a nightmare created by the irrational use of technology.

The deliberate balance of imagery in the composition alludes to both decay and rebirth, making the painting a metaphor for the destruction of the war and the reconstruction of the world that followed. A skeleton, for instance, lies near green **lichen** and a scarlet fungus, perhaps referring to the persistence of life amidst death. Smoke drifts toward a building under construction, linking symbols of destruction and renewal. The destroyed buildings allude to the bombed ruins of London left after the World War II **Blitzkrieg** in 1940. All that remains of those who once lived there are an empty rocking chair and the oval portrait on the shattered wall.

In the lower right-hand corner of the painting, a red Coca-Cola sign, torn from its original location, lies purposelessly amidst the broken bottles and burning remains of this ravaged, old-fashioned home. In contrast, a new building surrounded by scaffolding is on the rise as humans work together to create it. With its **cantilevered** terraces of limestone, the structure alludes to **Falling Water**, a house designed by **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1867–1959) and completed in 1935 in Bear Run, Pennsylvania. Falling Water is one of the most spectacular architectural achievements of this century, designed for the Pittsburgh department store magnate Edgar Kaufman, who also commissioned *The Rock* from Peter Blume. During a visit to Falling Water in 1938, Blume completed many sketches intended as preliminary drawings for the background of a family portrait commissioned by Kaufman. Blume never completed the Kaufman family portrait, yet Falling Water makes an appearance in *The Rock* as a symbol of modern innovation and the hopeful rebuilding of a destroyed landscape. Interestingly, the construction workers use only simple tools such as hammers, chisels, wheelbarrows, and a basic pulley system to erect this modern design. On one hand, Blume's imagery indicates a distrust of modern technology, yet the collaborative effort of the workers, the blooming plants, and the fast-rising architectural monument seem to suggest that there is hope for the future.

Glossary

Blitzkrieg: German term (meaning “lightning war”) used to signify any swift, concentrated military offensive; it is most often applied to the massive bombing of London by German planes in September 1940.

cantilevered: describes a beam or terrace that projects an the architectural structure, seemingly hovering in the air

émigré: person who leaves his or her native country to reside in another country; especially one who leaves the country during a period of political unrest

Falling Water: home designed in 1935 by architect Frank Lloyd Wright for the Kaufman family in Bear Run, Pennsylvania

fascism: system of government that advocates a dictatorship of the extreme right. This system of government often includes the merging of business and state leadership with a narrow-minded nationalism.

Federal Art Project (FAP): New Deal project to provide employment initiated in 1935 by the United States government and lasting until 1943. This agency commissioned unemployed artists, writers, and musicians to produce public works of art during the Great Depression

fulcrum: the point around which a lever rotates; something that serves as a hinge or support

Great Depression: period of drastic economic decline following the stock market crash of October 1929 and continuing until 1940. It was characterized by decreasing business activity and high rates of unemployment.

Hiroshima: city in Japan destroyed on August 6, 1945 by the first atomic bomb employed in warfare by the United States

lichen: type of plant made up of algae and fungus usually found growing on a rock or another solid surface

Nagasaki: seaport city in Japan and the target of the U.S. atomic bomb dropped on August 9, 1945; the bombs resulted in the surrender of the Japanese and the end of World War II

New Deal: programs and policies for economic relief, reform, and recovery introduced by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his administration between 1933 and 1940

Surrealism: modern literary and artistic movement that began in France in 1924 and flourished in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. The movement stressed the radical transformation of existing social conditions and values through the liberation of the unconscious mind. Surrealist art is characterized by its bizarre, dream-like, and sometimes non-representational imagery.

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959): American architect as well as an important designer and theorist. Wright is best known for his Prairie School designs at the turn of the century.

Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions

• Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream...

With its vivid, eerie colors and juxtaposition of unrelated objects, *The Rock* is somewhat like a dream. Assign a creative writing exercise in which students imagine and describe a dream that includes the scene represented in the painting. What happened prior to this scene to cause such destruction? Ask students to concentrate on their sensory experiences of the painting. What do they see? feel? taste? smell? hear?

• A Rock Study Guide

Use this painting as the starting point for a unit on rocks. Ask students to develop a chart containing the following information: What are the three main rock families? What are their physical properties? Where are they found? What are their uses? Have students include a small illustration of each rock type. You may want to conduct a short walking trip around the school neighborhood to collect rock samples.

After finishing their rock study guide, have students look at the representations of rocks in Peter Blume’s painting. Would this rock fit into a particular category? How many different types of stones or rocks can you identify in this image? Do you think Peter Blume attempted to realistically represent particular types of rocks? Why or why not?

Name (Scientific Name)	Formation Cycle	Physical Properties	Location	Uses	Illustration
<i>Igneous</i>					
<i>Sedimentary</i>					
<i>Metamorphic</i>					

- **Home Sweet Home**

This painting includes two representations of architectural styles. On the left-hand side, we see Falling Water, Frank Lloyd Wright's revolutionary design for Edgar Kaufman, under construction. On the right-hand side is a more traditional brick-style family home of the early 20th century that has been partially destroyed. Use these two types of living spaces as starting points for a brief unit on architecture. Have students collect pictures of different types of residences from around the world and throughout history. These can be images from books, magazines, photos, or drawings. A walk around the school's neighborhood also might provide examples of various styles. After students have collected a large and diverse archive of images, create a visual timeline of residential architecture. Finally, ask students to design a home for the future. How will the structure accommodate the residents' wants, needs, and the home's geographic location? To further expand this exercise, have students draw floor plans and models to scale of their homes.

- **Tools of the Trade**

Have students identify the tools that are being used by the people in this picture. Were these the typical tools used in the mid-1940s? Are these the same tools that we might employ in a present-day construction site? Compare them to construction tools and procedures used for the ancient Egyptian pyramids (David MacCauley's 1975 *Pyramid* is a good resource book for students). Why do you think Peter Blume avoided using modern technology in this work?

- **Test your Knowledge**

After studying the image and the information about the painting, have students develop a quiz to test their peers' knowledge of the picture. Ask students to exchange papers and grade each other's work. You may want to repeat this activity several times. First, use this as a looking exercise. Then return to the activity after students have learned additional information about the painting, the artist, or the time period.

Examples:

What color dress is the young woman wearing?

What modern corporation is referenced in the painting?

Who painted this picture?

What historical event(s) does this painting reference?

- **Help Wanted**

Have students write a "Help Wanted" ad for this construction site. What qualifications would prospective employees have to possess? What personal traits would be useful in this working environment? Have students read employment ads from your local newspaper to familiarize themselves with the current style and terms. As a follow-up activity, have students write a letter of application for this job.

- **My Life as a Rock**

Write a story from the point of view of the rock.

How does it feel?

What does it see from where it is situated?

How did it become so fragmented and scarred?

What are its future goals?

- **Advanced Activity**

For older students, use this painting as a starting point for a discussion about the effects of war, particularly World War II. Peter Blume's *The Rock* alludes to the massive destruction of cities and towns during World War II, particularly the atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Blitzkrieg in London. You may want to compare this painting to other images and films from the same year and/or literary or documentary texts from this period. Some suggestions: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, Rumer Godden's *Episode of Sparrows*, or Edward Hopper's painting *Nighthawks*?

Related Resources for Teachers

Trapp, Frank Anderson. *Peter Blume*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

Peter Blume, *The Rock*, 1944–1948.

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Peter Blume
American, 1906–1992
The Rock, 1944–1948