

8. Siestas and Snoozes

When one yawns until the hinges of the jaws can't open any wider and stretches to the point of tumbling over, drowsiness seeks satisfaction in sleep: The body is demanding attention. Twenty or thirty minutes of rest are called for, ideally during the fall in vigilance between three and five in the afternoon. Studies show that halfway through the day at least twenty minutes of sleep boosts one's intellectual and physical performance. In East Asia, many companies make time available for workers and staff to take a nap after lunch. Elsewhere, however, this break that promotes wellbeing is rarely respected. Like other practices that once seemed so difficult to establish, however, leadership and example, together with appropriate facilities, could make for an enduring change. If people are really a company's most precious resource, why can't a break that makes them more productive become established practice?

When one is sleepy, it shows: Edgar Degas' (1834-1917) *The Ironers* (fig. 134) is a justly famous work that captures this theme perhaps better than any other.



*Figure 134.- . Edgar Degas (France, 1834-1917). The Ironers, circa 1878/79.
Oil on canvas, 76 x 81.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris – France*

Two women in a laundry stand before an ironing bench. Degas places them along a diagonal. The one on the left, already in a state of lethargy, yawns as drowsiness overcomes her; beside her, her exhausted workmate leans heavily on her iron, pressing down with both hands. Confined in the close frame of the painting, the women evoke an emotion that the restricted space intensifies. Behind them, the coarse linen of the canvas is visible in places; these brown spots give the impression of steam and heat peeling the paint. The atmosphere is conducive to a weakening of the will as the weary bodies strain to continue their work: The artist succeeds in evoking, without any pathos or heroism, the physicality of effort. He captures the moment when courage and vigour are about to give way to the onset of sleep, that in-between moment when one succumbs to a force stronger than one's will.

A source of rest following labour, sleep—as in Jean-François Millet's (1814-1875) *The Siesta* (fig. 135)—can have the force of a heavy blow. It is midday (“*Meridienne*”, the French title of the painting), and the young harvesters—the peasant heroes of this Naturalist painting—are worn out by their work in the hot sun. In the shade of a huge rick, they sleep on sheaves of wheat, their scythes and a pair of shoes beside them in the foreground.



Figure 135.
Jean-Francois Millet
(France, 1814-1875).
Noonday Rest
(*La Méridienne*), 1866.
Pastel and pencil,
29.2 x 41.9 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston - USA.

In the winter of 1889-90, van Gogh, forced to stay indoors by both his nervous state and bad weather, made a copy from an engraving of Millet's *Siesta*. Reversing the image along its left-right axis, he made an exact copy of the composition, but painted it with his own sensibility (fig. 136): The rick of wheat in the sunlight is a flaming yellow, the sky a vibrant blue, and in the foreground the sleeping peasants evoke his vision of the dignity of work.



Figure 136.
Vincent Van Gogh
(Dutch, 1853-1890).
The Siesta
(after J. F. Millet),
or *La Méridienne*,
1889-1890.
Oil on canvas,
73 x 91 cm.
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris - France.



Jules Bastien-Lepage's (1848-1884) *Hay Making* (fig. 137) is, in the words of Emile Zola, "a masterpiece of naturalism in painting". Indeed, the affinity with Millet is evident, but what is striking about this work is the modernity of the composition.

Figure 137.

Jules Bastien - Lepage
(France, 1848-1884).

Hay Making, 1877.

Oil on canvas, 160 x 195 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris - France.

Indeed, the prominence of the vacantly self-absorbed woman in the foreground (note the photographic realism of her rendering), the protracted perspective of the sleeping man, the sweep of the silver-yellow hay into the distance and the distance of the hills beyond—all these elements make for a composition that resembles a close-cropped, wide-angle photograph, and bring a freshness to the genre of realist rural scenes.

Eugène Fromentin (1820-1876), a painter as well as a writer, was a Frenchman who accompanied an archeological mission to Algeria, got to know the land and its people (having already visited the country earlier), and became one of the first "painter-reporters" on North Africa (he also visited Egypt). Indeed, many of his paintings have a realism that gives them as much an ethnological as an artistic interest. In *A Street in El-Aghouat* (fig. 138), he evokes a scorching afternoon in this gateway town to the Sahara desert. The blazing sun bisects the street, fissuring the baked mud. On one side, a huddle of men in white jellabas lie resting on the ground; on the other, a figure is about to enter a building, while further up the street a stray dog roams. In the oppressive heat, sleep is welcome.



Figure 138.

Eugene Fromentin
(France, 1820-1876).

A street at El Aghouat (detail),
circa 1859.

Oil on canvas, 142 x 103 cm.

Musée de la Chartreuse,
Douai - France.



Figure 139.
Camille Pissarro
(France, 1830 - 1903).
Rest, Peasant Lying in the
Grass, 1882.
Oil on canvas 63 x 78 cm.
Kunsthalle
Bremen - Germany.

In Camille Pissarro's (1830-1903) *Rest: Peasant Girl Lying in Grass* (fig. 139), the fine mesh of brushstrokes gives a soft, luminous effect, unifying the painting and creating a oneness between girl and earth. There is an air of pantheism in the work, and a suggestion that one day the nourishing earth will in its turn be nourished by the girl who now draws comfort from it.



Figure 140.- Pablo Picasso (Spain, 188-France, 1973). Peasants asleep. 1919.
Tempera, watercolor and pencil on paper, 31.1 x 48.9 cm. The Museum of Modern Art,
New York - USA. ©Succession Pablo Picasso

There is something imperturbable and timeless in Picasso's *Sleeping Peasants* (fig. 140). With their monumental bodies and opposing gestures—his in-gathered, hers expansive—the figures make a harmonious composition that radiates grace, as if in sleep anything can be pardoned. There is an insolent innocence in the pose, and a boldness of colour that makes one wonder how long these lovers will stay down on the farm.

In Bulgarian artist Vladimir Dimitrov–Maïstora's (1882-1960) *Rest* (fig. 141), all is blocks of matter linked by a play of light and shadow. Between figures, ground and sky nothing is particularly distinct, everything coheres into a general impression: Nature is all. An atmosphere saturated with coagulated reddish-browns envelopes everything, reinforcing the pantheistic vision.



Figure 141.
Vladimir Dimitrov -
Maïstora
(Bulgaria, 1882-1960).
Rest.
Oil on canvas.
Art Gallery "Vladimir
Dimitrov-Maïstora"
Kustindil - Bulgaria.
© V.Dimitrov-
Maïstora Gallery

Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) can be seen as the urban counterpart of Millet. One of a three-part series depicting socioeconomic distinctions, *The Second-Class Carriage* (fig. 142), a work of 1864, shows four individuals—two dozing, two awake—sitting next to each other in a train, each absorbed in their own world. Snow falls out the window; inside it is cold, and Daumier's technique (watercolor, ink wash and charcoal) captures that frigidity. The artist's vision of early industrialization and urbanization is a bleak one.



Figure 142. - Honoré Daumier (1808-1879). *2nd class car*, 1864.
Watercolor, ink wash and charcoal, 20.5 x 30.1 cm. Walters Art Gallery,
Baltimore, USA

One hundred and eighteen years later, on the eastern edge of Europe, the Bulgarian artist Vihroni Popandreev (b. 1953) painted *The Company Bus* (fig. 143), a bus taking workers to the factory. As the sun emerges from under the horizon, the passengers—head sunk in turned-up collar or head thrown back—steal a few more moments of sleep. The horizontal and vertical bars, together with the harsh delineation of shadow and light, emphasize their isolation.

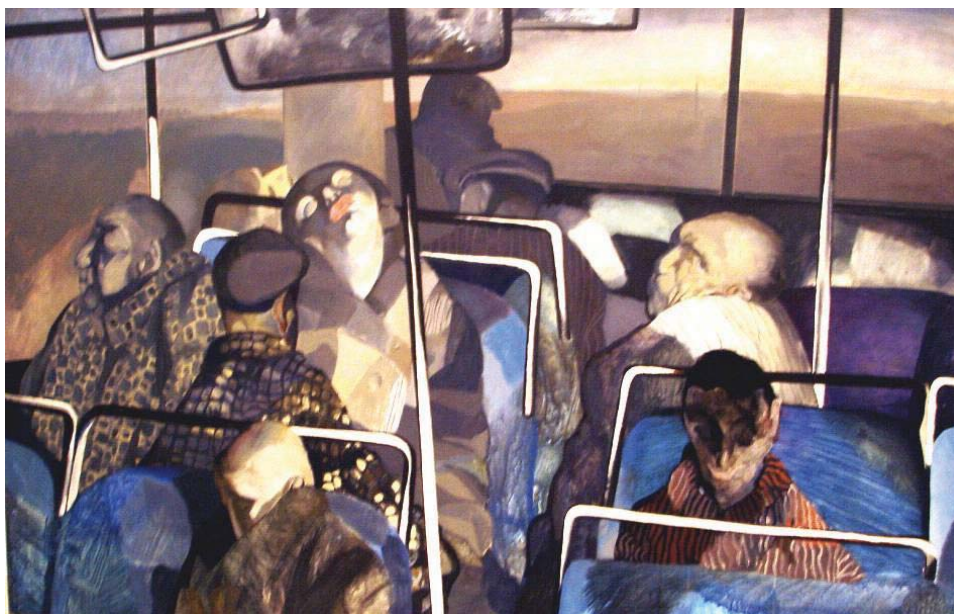


Figure 143. Vihroni Popandreev (Bulgaria, b. 1953). The Company Bus, 1982. City Gallery, Sofia - Bulgaria. © Vihroni Popandreev

In French artist Fabrice Béghin's (b. 1959) *The Green Negress* (fig. 144), there is a certain serenity in the woman dozing on the bus. The solidity of the geometrical lines, the bold colours and blue sky, and the glimpse of nature outside combine to give this scene an air of dignified repose.



*Figure 144.
Fabrice Béghin
(France, b.1959).
The green Negress, 1995
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm.
Collection of the artist,
Paris – France
© Fabrice Béghin*

Robert Guinan (b. 1934), chronicler of urban life in his adopted city of Chicago, has painted a number of subway scenes. In *On the Subway* (1984) (fig. 145), he depicts in rapidly sketched lines a woman on a subway train with three children beside her. The scene has an air of silence, the woman staring straight ahead and the children sitting still, perhaps dozing, while a man reads a newspaper behind them.

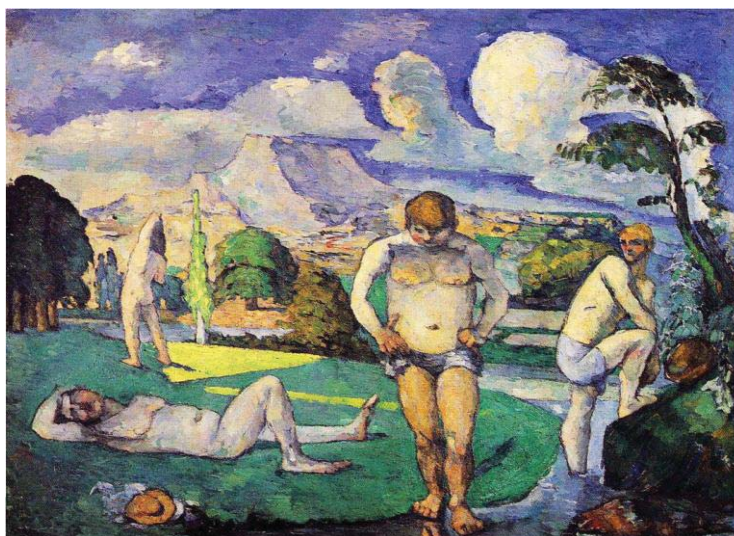


*Figure 145. Robert Guinan
(USA, 1934).*

*On the subway, 1984.
Oil on canvas, 91 x 100 cm.
Private Collection
© Robert Guinan*

What has caught the artist's attention, what has made him want to capture this moment on a moving train? Perhaps he was touched by a vision of innocence. Perhaps in a reverie, before picking up his brush, he felt himself a child again.

*Figure 146.
Paul Cézanne
(France, 1839-1906).
Bathers at Rest, 1875-1876.
Oil on canvas,
82 x 101.2 cm.
Barnes Foundation, Merion
(Pennsylvania) – USA*



Paul Cézanne's (1839-1906) *Bathers at Rest* (fig. 146) is an early example (1875-76) of his reinterpretation of the tradition of nude figures in a landscape. Indeed, he would go on to produce over seventy such works, evolving from a bright, high-key palette such as this one, wherein figure and landscape are clearly distinct, to greater abstraction with toned-down colours in a lower key, more complex compositions, and a treatment of the figure not as flesh but as surface and volume. Aiming for a fusion of figure and landscape, focusing on composition and structure, his series of bathers was always in a state of becoming. From this early evocation of bathers at rest, he would move on to produce paintings that exerted a decisive influence on the giants of early- to mid-twentieth century art, Matisse and Picasso.

Half Hours with the Best Authors (The Siesta) (fig. 147), Philip Hermogenes Calderon's (1833-1898) evanescent watercolour, shows three young ladies in billowing, milky-white dresses, sitting as if exhausted by their reading. The humour of this English painter of Spanish and French descent is as light as the misty lilac and pale russet of the décor; with a bit of imagination, one can even breathe in the perfume of these young things with tired heads.



Figure 147.
Philip Hermogenes
Calderon
(Great Britain,
1833-1898).
*Half an hour with the
best authors (The
Siesta), 1866.*
Watercolor on paper,
17.8 x 27.9 cm.
Tate Gallery,
London - G.B.

What strikes one immediately in James McNeill Whistler's (1834-1903) *Note in Red* (The Siesta) (fig. 148) is the harmony of the brilliant red and the raw, semi-transparent sienna, and the rapidity and nervousness of the brushstrokes. One senses an unposed moment, seized on the run while the model sleeps; indeed, the painting conveys a feeling of privacy, even intimacy, that is confirmed when one learns that the model was also the artist's mistress. Her face turned away from the viewer, the woman sleeps, her sprawling pose belying the voluptuousness of her dress, while everywhere in the painting the presence of the artist is manifest.



Figure 148.- James Abbott McNeill Whistler (United States, 1834-1903).
Note in Red (The Siesta), 1883 - 1884. Oil on wood 21.6 x 30.5 cm.
Museum of American Art, Giverny - France.

Intimacy is again the keyword in Rest: Portrait of Vera Repina (fig. 149), Ilya Repin's (1844-1930) portrait of his wife dozing in an armchair.



One respects the silence, even in painting, when observing someone sleep; here, one also admires the beautifully rendered hands and head, the gracefully crossed feet, of this youthful wife absenting herself from the world. The close framing and unitary colour scheme reinforce the impression of privacy. There is emotion in the technical mastery, and when one knows the work is late nineteenth-century Russian, one is all the more justified in saying the tenderness it gives off is Tolstoyan. (As it turns out, the painter and the novelist were good friends.)

Figure 149.

Ilya Iefimovitch Repin (Russian, 1844-1930).

Break

(Portrait of Vera Alexeyevna Repin), 1882.

Tretyakov State Gallery, Moscow - Russia.

The eye is at first confused when it encounters Edouard Vuillard's (1868-1940) Interior with Three Lamps, rue Saint- Florentin (fig. 150). Indeed, it finds nowhere to rest in the proliferating flicker of the patterned wallpaper, the many-planed mosaic of textured surfaces, the indistinct masses of black. The clutter is cloying. The man dozing in the rocking chair takes no precedence over the bright shawl covering the piano;



Figure 150. Edouard Vuillard (France, 1868-1940). The living room with three lamps, Saint-Florentin street, 1899. Oil and distemper on canvas, 60 x 96 cm.

Musée d'Orsay, Paris - France.

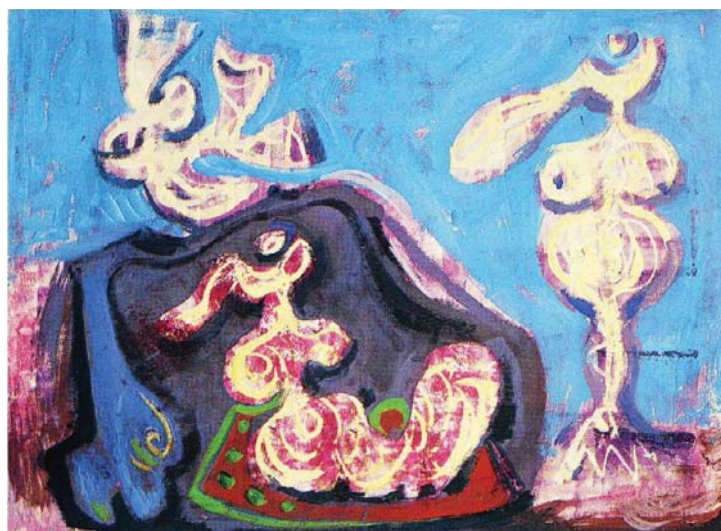
the potted palm is as important as the person sitting under it. But then one steps back, and perceives that the painting's limited tonal range and diffused lighting make all its elements cohere; suddenly the noise becomes silent, the atmosphere intimate. And then one gets it: This is a turn-of-the-century bourgeois interior, a faithful vision of a highly-decorated living room; this is an evocation of relaxed intimacy between old friends, at a point in the evening when one can be comfortably alone, yet still together. And in that, there is enchantment.



In the simplified forms and planes of colour in Pavel Kuznetsov's (1878-1968) *Woman Sleeping* (fig. 151), one can detect the influence of Gauguin and Cézanne. Indeed, in 1905 the Russian painter spent a year in France, but it is from his trip to Central Asia that he brought back this scene of nomadic life on the Steppes.

*Figure 151.- Pavel Kuznetsov
(Russian, 1878-1968)
Sleeping Woman, 1911.
Oil on canvas, 66 x 71 cm.
Tretyakov Gallery,
Moscow - Russia.
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012*

The oval face and slant of the eyes register the Asian origin, but otherwise the painting asserts its artistic transformation of reality. It evokes the feeling of observing a woman sleeping, it gives an idea of the tent, but it dispenses with any documentary depiction. Indeed, it is the symbolic dimension of the scene that takes precedence, giving the painting a timeless air.



*Figure 152.
Karl-Otto Götz
(Germany, b. 1914).
Siesta I, 1947.
Tempera on paper,
40.5 x 54.5 cm.
Suzanne Besson Collection,
Le Mans - France.
©ADAGP, Paris, 2012*

A figure seated on a carpet, resting in a kind of couch: With its recognizable human forms, Karl-Otto Götz's (b. 1914) *Siesta* (fig. 152; painted in 1947, two years before he gave up figurative painting), retains an elementary representationalism. The forms appear infinitely malleable, freed from all contingency; one has the impression they could reconfigure

