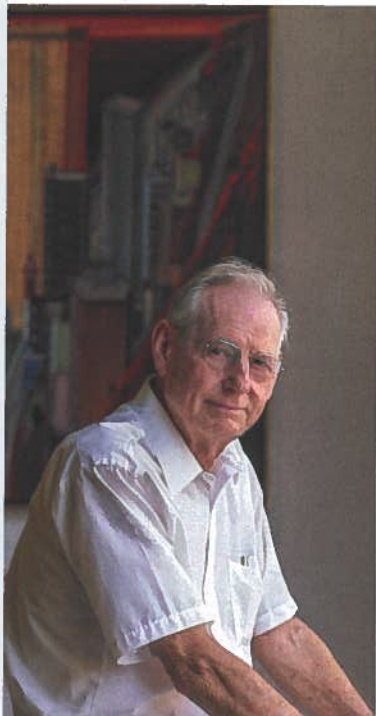


American as Apple Pie

How does Wayne Thiebaud capture contemporary life?

Cakes and pies stand in neat rows behind the glass counter at the bakery. Creamy frosting and thick filling make viewers' mouths water. In paintings like his 1995 *Cakes and Pies*, cover, Wayne Thiebaud (TEE-boh) excels at delighting the senses and making stomachs growl. Still working at age 98, the artist has spent his career exploring the American way of life.

Wayne Thiebaud



Evolving Interests

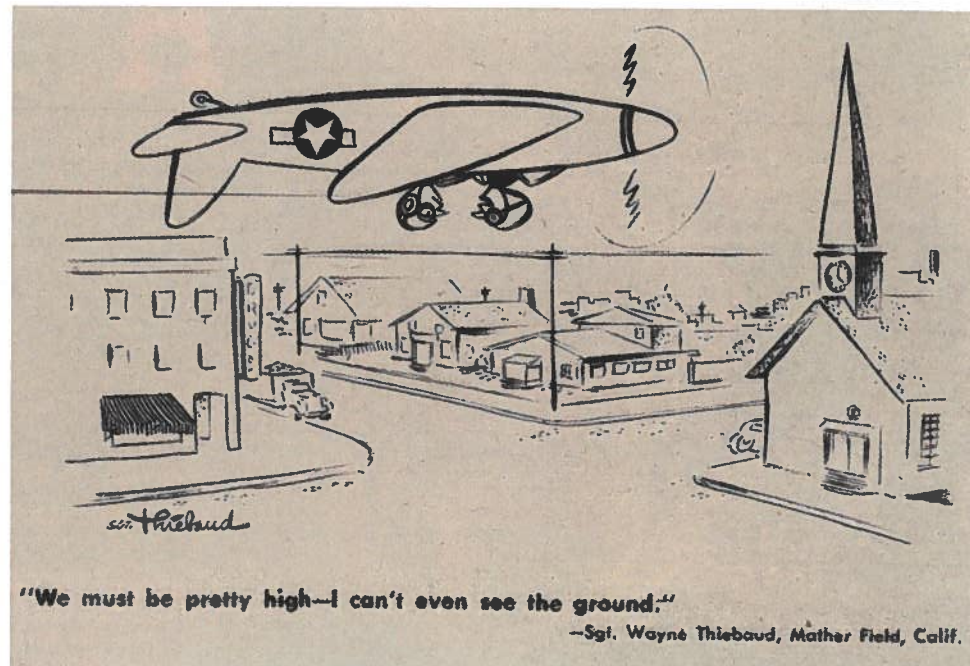
Born in 1920, Thiebaud grew up in California. As a young man, he held a variety of jobs that allowed him to express his creativity. He started out as an apprentice at the Walt Disney Studios, where he learned the art of cartooning by drawing characters such as Goofy and Pinocchio.

Then Thiebaud served in the United States Army from 1942 until 1945. During his service, he produced **comics** like the one below for the base newspaper. After his time in the Army, Thiebaud became a **commercial artist**, designing movie posters and working in advertising.

In the late 1940s, Thiebaud shifted his focus to **fine art**, making paintings to be hung on walls rather than reproduced in ads. "The more I got interested in layout and design, the more I was led to those examples in fine art from which they were derived," he explains. Thiebaud went back to school and in 1960 became a professor of art at the University of California, Davis. He taught there for more than 30 years. Thiebaud believes that learning from his students helped him develop his own style.

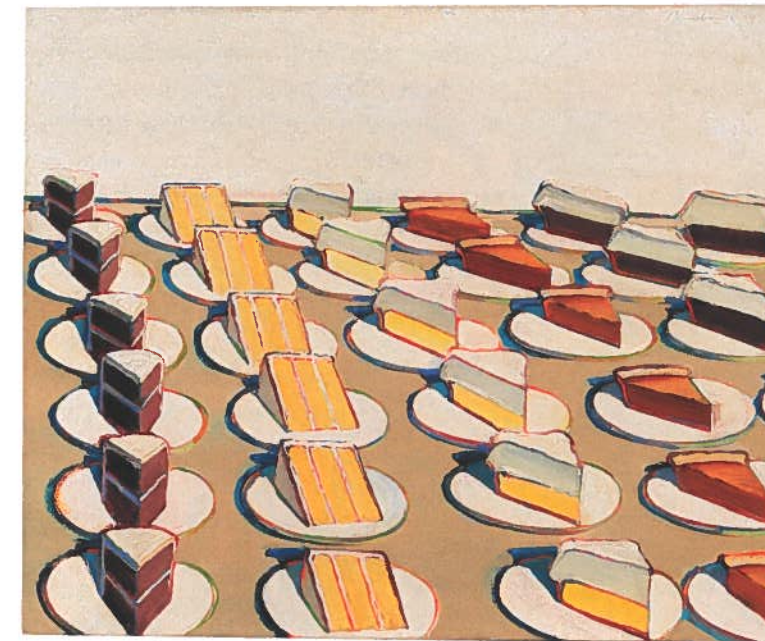
How does Thiebaud use a simple line drawing to convey a big idea?

Wayne Thiebaud, *Cartoon from Yank: The Army Weekly*, October 15, 1945. ©Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



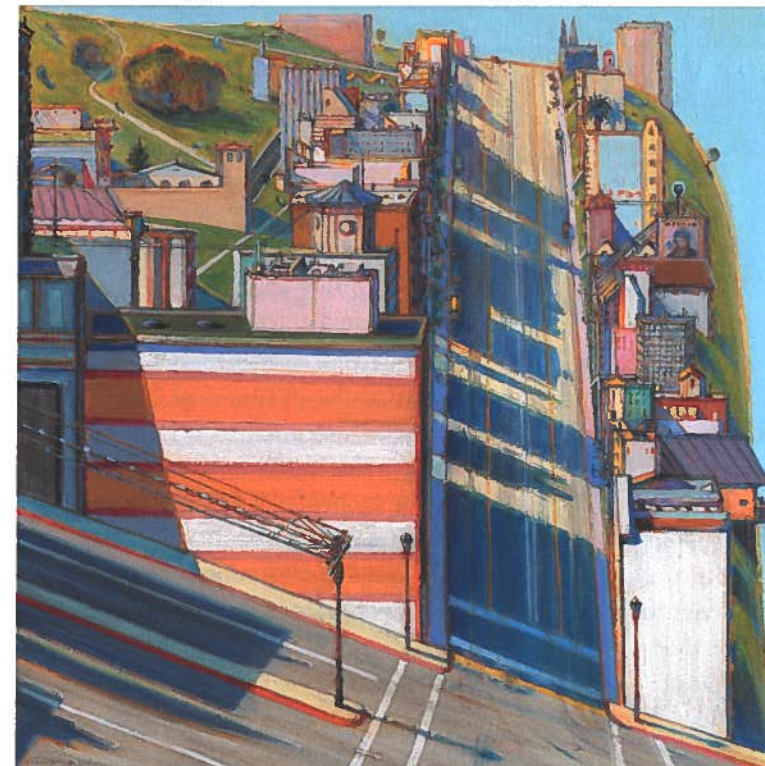
In what ways does Thiebaud explore the fundamentals of art in this composition?

Wayne Thiebaud, *Pie Counter*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 29 13/16x35 15/16in. (75.7x91.3cm). Purchase, with funds from the Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund, New York, NY. Accession #84.11. Whitney Museum of American Art. ©Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



“My own sense is being American is a very important part of what I feel and do.”

—Wayne Thiebaud



Learning the Rules

Thiebaud began painting to learn about the fundamentals of **composition** and **form**. Composition is the arrangement of objects within a work plus the choices the artist makes about how to render them. Thiebaud chose food as a subject because many foods are simple **three-dimensional** forms. He used still lifes to study composition, experimenting with **color**, **light**, **space**, **perspective**, and **texture**. In his 1963 *Pie Counter*, left, the artist paints the triangular slices with **cool** shadows. The lush brushstrokes mimic the texture of frosting and whipped cream.

Thiebaud didn't expect anyone to take these paintings seriously as fine art, and he was surprised when they did. "When I painted the first row of pies, I can remember sitting and laughing . . . 'Now I have flipped out!'" the artist recalls.

Pushing Boundaries

By mastering the basics of form and perspective in works like *Pie Counter*, Thiebaud developed the skills he needed to challenge the rules of composition. Late in his career, the artist created many paintings of San Francisco, including his 2001 *San Francisco West Side Ridge*, left. The artist disrupts traditional perspective to capture the city's perilously steep streets and **geometric** buildings. Thiebaud's background in cartooning helped him learn how to render scenes simply and effectively. His dedication to the fundamentals of art gives him the skills necessary to bend the rules while still creating plausible compositions like this one.

To many people, Thiebaud is a quintessential 20th-century artist. From the delicious foods that appear in bakeries across the country to dramatic cityscapes, Thiebaud's bright, colorful paintings capture aspects of everyday American life.

How does Thiebaud bend the rules in this painting?

Wayne Thiebaud, *San Francisco West Side Ridge*, 2001. Oil on canvas, 36x36in. (91.4x91.4cm). Gift of Sam Rose and Julie Walters, Washington, D.C. Accession #2004.30.5. Smithsonian American Art Museum. ©Wayne Thiebaud/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.