



*Introduction to*  
**ART**

Design, Context, and Meaning

**Editor-in-Chief | Pamela J. Sachant, Ph.D.**

Peggy Blood, Ph.D. | Jeffery LeMieux, M.F.A | Rita Tekippe, Ph.D.

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# 1

## What is Art?

*Jeffrey LeMieux and Pamela J. Sachant*

### 1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Recognize various historical arguments about the definition of art and who is an artist.
- Engage arguments that distinguish between art and craft.
- Critically evaluate claims about whether an object is or is not art from multiple points of view.
- Engage questions about who is considered an artist and the role of the viewer.
- Productively speculate about various reasons why people have made and continue to make art.
- **Recognize your intuitive understanding of art, and potentially build a broader, more comprehensive view of the nature and definition of visual art, one which incorporates historically and culturally diverse art objects and answers conceptual challenges.**

### 1.2 INTRODUCTION

We live in a rapidly changing world in which images play an important, even central, role. With widespread use of personal electronics, we instantaneously deliver and receive sound, video, and text messages. Corporations and governments worldwide recognize the power of advertising. Art museums worldwide are putting large parts of their collections online. Today we are seeing theater-quality movies made with inexpensive equipment that was unavailable ten years ago. Selfies, personal video, and memes are everywhere. In 1968, artist Andy Warhol (1928-1967, USA) said, “In the future everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.” (*Self Portrait, Andy Warhol*: [http://art.newcity.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Warhol\\_SelfPortrait.jpg](http://art.newcity.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Warhol_SelfPortrait.jpg)) We are seeing that prediction come true with the advent of personal electronics that rival the sophistication of the most advanced professional studios of only twenty years ago. We are surrounded by images, but, for all of our clever technical abilities, the fundamental dynamics of visual art remain the same.



**Figure 1.1 | *Blind Homer with Guide***

Artist: Bouguereau  
 Author: User "Thebrid"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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Take a few minutes to look over the accompanying image, *Blind Homer and His Guide*. (Figure 1.1) It was painted in 1875 by a leading member of the French *École des Beaux Arts*, or School of Fine Arts, William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1925, France), and serves as a good example of the kinds of paintings made in Europe during that time. We might wonder what a painting made more than 100 years ago in a foreign country could have to do with us today.

The French Academic artist Bouguereau's painting is more than a literal presentation of a forgotten moment in ancient history. The painting challenges viewers from every age to go deeper, to see the symbolism behind the history. Homer, who is thought to have lived around 1000 BCE, was the chief poet of the ancient Greeks. Ancient Greek ideas about social roles and the nature of virtue come to us in part from Homer's epic poems the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*. In Bouguereau's painting, Homer symbolizes civilization and culture. Homer wanders blindly through a savage wilderness with only a youth to shelter him. In this way, Bouguereau implies that a wilderness can be not only physical but also cultural, and in that sense, all of us wander through a wilderness that threatens the human

spirit found in culture. His painting asks the question, "How are cultural values carried forward?" In Bouguereau's work, the young man has taken responsibility for protecting Homer, who symbolizes the refined wisdom of the past and the foundation of western culture. This image is a call to the youth of Bouguereau's generation (and to ours) to bring precious culture forward safely through an ever-threatening wilderness.

Wherever we find human beings, we find visual art. Works of visual art raise questions not only about our ancestors, but also about the nature of visual art itself. What is art? Who is an artist? Why do artists make art? What is the role of the viewer? Does everything count as art? How have people defined art through time? How do we define art today?

In this chapter, we will examine these questions in more detail. The purpose of this examination is twofold: to increase your awareness of the mechanics of those images and, thus, more effectively understand the visual art that we encounter in our daily lives. Images are powerful. Images are used in our culture in many ways, not all of them benign. When we enhance our visual literacy, we raise our awareness of the powerful images that surround us.

## 1.3 WHAT IS VISUAL ART?

To explore a subject, we need first to define it. Defining art, however, proves elusive. You may have heard it said (or even said it yourself) that “it might be art, but it’s not Art,” which means, “I might not know how to define it, but I know it when I see it.”

Everywhere we look, we see images designed to command our attention, including images of desire, images of power, religious images, images meant to recall memories, and images intended to manipulate our appetites. But are they art?

Some languages do not have a separate word for art. In those cultures, objects tend to be utilitarian in purpose but often include in their design the intent to delight, portray a special status, or commemorate an important event or ritual. Thus, while the objects are not considered art, they do have artistic functions.

### 1.3.1 Historic Development of the Idea of Art

The idea of art has developmentally progressed from human prehistory to the present day. Changes to the definition of art over time can be seen as attempts to resolve problems with earlier definitions. The ancient Greeks saw the goal of visual art as copying, or mimesis. Nineteenth-century art theorists promoted the idea that art is communication: it produces feelings in the viewer. In the early twentieth century, the idea of significant form, the quality shared by aesthetically pleasing objects, was proposed as a definition of art. Today, many artists and thinkers agree with the institutional theory of art, which shifts focus from the work of art itself to who has the power to decide what is and is not art. While this progression of definitions of art is not exhaustive, it is instructive.

#### 1.3.1.1 Mimesis

The ancient Greek definition of art as **mimesis**, or imitation of the real world, appears in the myth of Zeuxis and Parhassios, rival painters from ancient Greece in the late fifth century BCE who competed for the title of greatest artist. (Figure 1.2) Zeuxis painted a bowl of grapes that was so lifelike that birds came down to peck at the image of fruit. Parhassios was unimpressed with this achievement. When viewing Parhassios’s work, Zeuxis, on his part, asked that the curtain over the painting be drawn back so he could see his rival’s work more



**Figure 1.2 | Zeuxis conceding defeat: “I have deceived the birds, but Parhassios has deceived Zeuxis.”**

Artist: Joachim von Sandrart; engraving by Johann Jakob von Sandrart

Author: User “Fae”

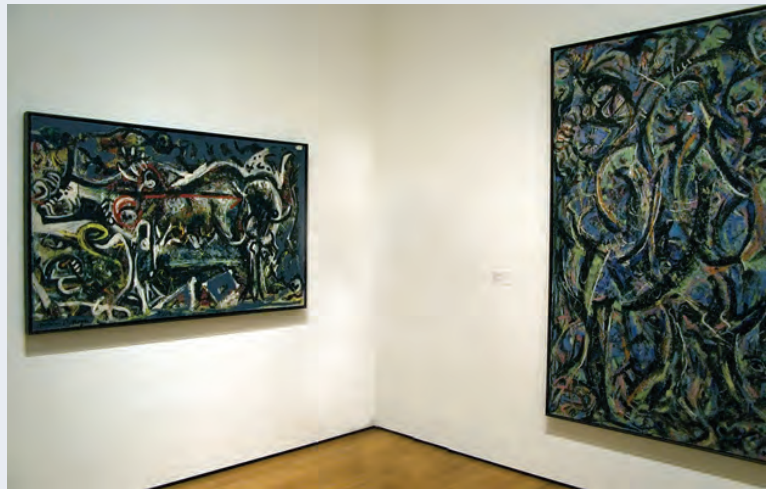
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clearly. Parhassios declared himself the victor because the curtain *was* the painting, and while Zeuxis fooled the birds with his work, Parhassios fooled a thinking human being—a much more difficult feat.

The ancient Greeks felt that the visual artist’s goal was to copy visual experience. This approach appears in the realism of ancient Greek sculpture and pottery. We must sadly note that, due to the action of time and weather, no paintings from ancient Greek artists exist today. We can only surmise their quality based on tales such as that of Zeuxis and Parhassios, the obvious skill in ancient Greek sculpture, and in drawings that survive on ancient Greek pottery.

This definition of art as copying reality has a problem, though. Jackson Pollock (1912-1956, USA), a leader in the New York School of the 1950’s, intentionally did not copy existing objects in his art. (Figure 1.3) While painting these works, Pollock and his fellow artists would consciously avoid making marks or passages that resembled recognizable objects. They succeeded at making artwork that did not copy anything, thus demonstrating that the ancient Greek view of art as mimesis—simple copying—does not sufficiently define art.



**Figure 1.3** | Left: *The She-Wolf*, Right: *Gothic*

Artist: Jackson Pollock

Author: Gorup de Besanez

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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### 1.3.1.2 Communication

A later attempt at defining art comes from the nineteenth-century Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy wrote on many subjects, and is the author of the great novel *War and Peace* (1869). He was also an art theorist. He proposed that art is the **communication of feeling**, stating, “Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them.”<sup>1</sup>

This definition does not succeed because it is impossible to confirm that the feelings of the artist have been successfully conveyed to another person. Further, suppose an artist created a work of art that no one else ever saw. Since no feeling had been communicated through it, would it still be a work of art? The work did not “hand on to others” anything at all because it was never seen. Therefore, it would fail as art according to Tolstoy’s definition.

1 Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art? And Essays on Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 123.

### 1.3.1.3 Significant Form

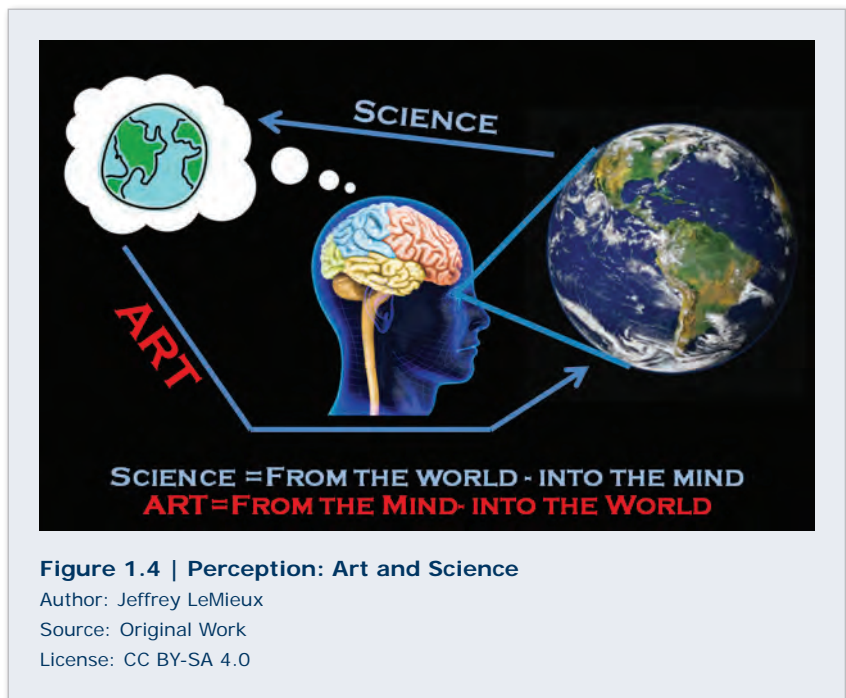
To address these limitations of existing definitions of art, in 1913 English art critic Clive Bell proposed that art is **significant form**, or the “quality that brings us aesthetic pleasure.” Bell stated, “to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour.”<sup>2</sup> In Bell’s view, the term “form” simply means line, shape, mass, as well as color. Significant form is the collection of those elements that rises to the level of your awareness and gives you noticeable pleasure in its beauty. Unfortunately, **aesthetics**, **pleasure in the beauty and appreciation of art**, are impossible to measure or reliably define. What brings aesthetic pleasure to one person may not affect another. Aesthetic pleasure exists only in the viewer, not in the object. Thus significant form is purely subjective. While Clive Bell did advance the debate about art by moving it away from requiring strict representation, his definition gets us no closer to understanding what does or does not qualify as an art object.

### 1.3.1.4 Artworld

One definition of art widely held today was first promoted in the 1960s by American philosophers George Dickie and Arthur Danto, and is called the **institutional theory** of art, or the “Artworld” theory. In the simplest version of this theory, art is an object or set of conditions that has been designated as art by a “person or persons acting on behalf of the artworld,” and the artworld is a “complex field of forces” that determine what is and is not art.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, this definition gets us no further along because it is not about art at all! Instead, it is about who has the power to define art, which is a political issue, not an aesthetic one.

## 1.3.2 Definition of Art

We each perceive the world from our own position or perspective and from that perception we make a mental image of the world. Science is the process of turning perceptions into a coherent mental picture of the universe through testing and observation. (Figure 1.4) Science moves concepts from the world into the mind. Science is vitally important because it allows us to understand how the world works and to use that understanding to make good predictions. Art is the other side of



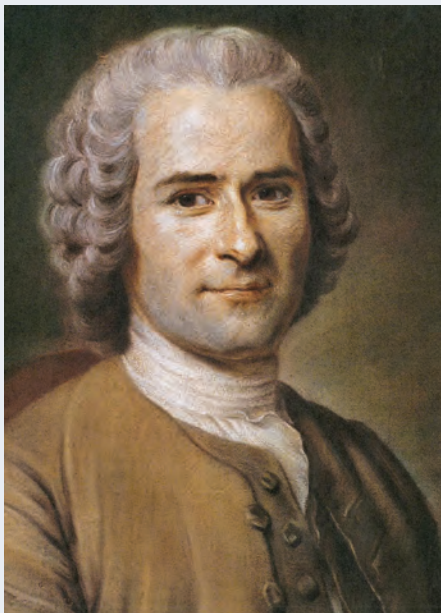
2 Clive Bell, “Art and Significant Form,” in *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913), 2

3 George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 464.



**Figure 1.5 | Portrait of Percy Bysshe Shelley**

Artist: Alfred Clint  
 Author: User "Dcoetzee"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 1.6 | Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau**

Artist: Maurice Quentin de La Tour  
 Author: User "Maarten van Vliet"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

our experience with the world. *Art moves ideas from the mind into the world.*

We need both art and science to exist in the world. From our earliest age, we both observe the world and do things to change it. We are all both scientists and artists. Every human activity has both a science (observation) and an art (expression) to it. Anyone who has participated in the discipline of Yoga, for example, can see that even something as simple as breathing has both an art and a science to it.

This definition of art covers the wide variety of objects that we see in museums, on social media, or even in our daily walk to work. But this definition of art is not enough. The bigger question is: what art is worthy of our attention, and how do we know when we have found it? Ultimately, each of us must answer that question for ourselves.

But we do have help if we want it. People who have made a disciplined study of art can offer ideas about what art is important and why. In the course of this text, we will examine some of those ideas about art. Due to the importance of respecting the individual, the decision about what art is best must belong to the individual. We ask only that the student understand the ideas as presented.

When challenged with a question or problem about what is best, we first ask, "What do I personally know about it?" When we realize our personal resources are limited, we might ask friends, neighbors, and relatives what they know. In addition to these important resources, the educated person can refer to a larger body of possible solutions drawn from a study of the history of literature, philosophy, and art: What did the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley say about truth in his essay *Defense of Poetry* (1840)? (Figure 1.5) What did the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau claim about human nature in his treatise *Emile or On Education* (1762)? (Figure 1.6) What did Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675, Netherlands) show us about the quiet dignity of the domestic space in his painting *Woman Holding a Balance*? (Figure 1.7) Through experiencing these works of art and literature, our ideas about such things can be tested and validated or found wanting.

We will examine works of visual art from a diverse range of cultures and periods. The challenge for you as the reader

is to increase your ability to interpret works of art through the use of context, visual dynamics, and introspection, and to integrate them into a coherent worldview. The best outcome of an encounter with art is an awakening of the mind and spirit to a new point of view. A mind stretched beyond itself never returns to its original dimension.

### 1.3.3 The Distinction of Fine Art

From our definition of art proposed above, it would seem that craft and fine art are indistinguishable as both come from the mind into the world. But the distinction between craft and art is real and important. This distinction is most commonly understood as one based on the use or end purpose of an object, or as an effect of the material used. Clay, textiles, glass, and jewelry were long considered the province of craft, not art. If an object's intended use was a part of daily living, then it was generally thought to be the product of craft, not fine art. But many objects originally intended to be functional, such as quilts, are now thought to qualify as fine art. (Figure 1.8)

So what could be the difference between art and craft? Anyone who has been exposed to training in a craft such as carpentry or plumbing recognizes that craft follows a formula, that is, a set of rules that govern not only how the work is to be conducted but also what the outcome of that work must be. The level of craft is judged by how closely the end product matches the pre-determined outcome. We want our houses to stand and water to flow when we turn on our faucets. Fine art, on the other hand, results from a free and open-ended exploration that does not depend on a pre-determined formula for its outcome or validity. Its outcome is surprising and original. Almost all fine art objects are a combination of some level both of craft and art. Art stands on craft, but goes beyond it.



**Figure 1.7 | *Woman Holding a Balance***

Artist: Johannes Vermeer

Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 1.8 | Quilt**

Artist: Lucy Mingo

Author: User "Billvolckening"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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### 1.3.4 Why Art Matters

American physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer is considered a “father of the atomic bomb” for the role he played in developing nuclear weapons as part of the Manhattan Project during World War II (1939-1945). (Figure 1.9) Upon completion of the project, quoting from the Hindu epic tale *Bhagavad Gita*, he stated, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Clearly, Oppenheimer had read more than physics texts in his education, which fit him well for his important role during World War II.

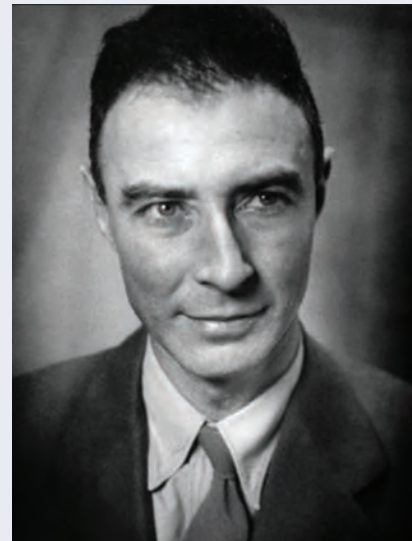
When we train in mathematics and the sciences, for example, we become very powerful. Power can be used well or badly. Where in our schools is the coursework on how to use power wisely? Today a liberal arts college education requires students to survey the arts and history of human cultures in order to examine a wide range of ideas about wisdom and to humanize the powerful. With that in mind, in every course taken in the university, it is hoped that you will recognize the need to couple your increasing intellectual power with a study of what is thought to be wisdom, and to view each educational experience in the humanities as part of the search for what is better in ourselves and our communities.

This text is not intended to determine what is or is not good art and why it matters. Rather, the point of this text is to equip you with intellectual tools that will enable you to analyze, decipher, and interpret works of art as bearers of meaning, to make *your own* decisions about the merit of those works, and then usefully to integrate those decisions into your daily lives.

## 1.4 WHO IS CONSIDERED AN ARTIST? WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ARTIST?

In much of the world today, an artist is considered to be a person with the talent and the skills to conceptualize and make creative works. Such persons are singled out and prized for their artistic and original ideas. Their art works can take many forms and fit into numerous categories, such as architecture, ceramics, digital art, drawings, mixed media, paintings, photographs, prints, sculpture, and textiles. Of greater importance, artists are the individuals who have the desire and ability to envision, design, and fabricate the images, objects, and structures we all encounter, use, occupy, and enjoy every day of our lives.

Today, as has been the case throughout history and across cultures, there are different titles for those who make and build. An artisan or craftsperson, for example, may produce decorative or utilitarian arts, such as quilts or baskets. Often, an artisan or craftsperson is a skilled worker, but not the inventor of the original idea or form. An artisan or craftsperson can also be someone



**Figure 1.9 | J. Robert Oppenheimer**  
Author: Los Alamos National Laboratory  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

who creates their own designs, but does not work in art forms or with materials traditionally associated with the so-called Fine Arts, such as painting and sculpture. A craftsperson might instead fashion jewelry, forge iron, or blow glass into patterns and objects of their own devising. Such inventive and skilled pieces are often categorized today as Fine Craft or Craft Art.

In many cultures throughout much of history, those who produced, embellished, painted, and built were not considered to be artists as we think of them now. They were artisans and craftspeople, and their role was to make the objects and build the structures for which they were hired, according to the design (their own or another's) agreed upon with those for whom they were working. That is not to say they were untrained. In Medieval Europe, or the Middle Ages (fifth-fifteenth centuries), for example, an artisan generally began around the age of twelve as an apprentice, that is, a student who learned all aspects of a profession from a master who had their own workshop. Apprenticeships lasted five to nine years or more, and included learning trades ranging from painting to baking, and masonry to candle making. At the end of that period, an apprentice became a journeyman and was allowed to become a member of the craft guild that supervised training and standards for those working in that trade. To achieve full status in the guild, a journeyman had to complete their "masterpiece," demonstrating sufficient skill and craftsmanship to be named a master.



**Figure 1.10 | Gudea**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

We have little information about how artists trained in numerous other time periods and cultures, but we can gain some understanding of what it meant to be an artist by looking at examples of art work that were produced. *Seated Statue of Gudea* depicts the ruler of the state of Lagash in Southern Mesopotamia, today Iraq, during his reign, c. 2144-2124 BCE. (Figure 1.10)

Gudea is known for building temples, many in the kingdom's main city of Girsu (today Telloh, Iraq), with statues portraying himself in them. In these works, he is seated or standing with wide, staring eyes but otherwise a calm expression on his face and his hands folded in a gesture of prayer and greeting. Many of the statues, including the one pictured here, are carved from diorite, a very hard stone favored by rulers in ancient Egypt and the Near East for its rarity and the fine lines that can be cut into it. The ability to cut such precise lines allowed the craftsman who carved this work to distinguish between and emphasize each finger in Gudea's

clasped hands as well as the circular patterns on his stylized shepherd's hat, both of which indicate the leader's dedication to the well-being and safety of his people.

Although the sculpture of Gudea was clearly carved by a skilled artisan, we have no record of that person, or of the vast majority of the artisans and builders who worked in the ancient world. Who they worked for and what they created are the records of their lives and artistry. Artisans were not valued for taking an original approach and setting themselves apart when creating a statue of a ruler such as Gudea: their success was based on their ability to work within standards of how the human form was depicted and specifically how a leader should look within that culture at that time. The large, almond-shaped eyes and compact, block-like shape of the figure, for example, are typical of sculpture from that period. This sculpture is not intended to be an individual likeness of Gudea; rather, it is a depiction of the characteristic features, pose, and proportions found in all art of that time and place.

Objects made out of clay were far more common in the ancient world than those made of metal or stone, such as the *Seated Statue of Gudea*, which were far more costly, time-consuming, and difficult to make. Human figures modeled in clay dating back as far as 29,000-25,000 BCE have been found in Europe, and the earliest known pottery, found in Jiangxi Province, China, dates to c. 18,000 BCE. Vessels made of clay and baked in ovens were first made in the Near East c. 8,000 BCE, nearly 6,000 years before the *Seated Statue of Gudea* was carved. **Ceramic** (clay hardened by heat) pots were used for storage and numerous everyday needs. They were utilitarian objects made by anonymous artisans.



**Figure 1.11 | Panathenaic Prize Amphora with Lid**

Artist: Nikodemos

Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum

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Among the ancient Greeks, however, pottery rose to the level of an art form. But, the status of the individuals who created and painted the pots did not. Although their work may have been sought after, these potters and painters were still considered artisans. The origins of pottery that can be described as distinctively Greek dates to c. 1,000 BCE, in what is known as the Proto-geometric period. Over the next several hundred years, the shapes of the vessels and the types of decorative motifs and subjects painted on them became associated with the city where they were produced, and then specifically with the individuals who made and decorated the pots. The types of pots signed by the potter and the painter were generally large, elaborately decorated or otherwise specialized vessels that were used for ritual or ceremonial purposes.

That is the case with the *Panathenaic Prize Amphora*, 363-362 BCE, signed by Nikodemos, the potter, and attributed to the Painter of the Wedding Procession, whose name is not known but is identified through similarities to other painted pots. (Figure 1.11) The Panathenaia was a festival held every four years in honor of Athena, the patron goddess of Athens, Greece, who is depicted on the **amphora**, a tall, two-handled



**Figure 1.12 | Pear Blossoms**

Artist: Qian Xuan

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

jar with a narrow neck. On the other side of the storage jar, Nike, the goddess of victory, crowns the winner of the boxing competition for which this pot—containing precious olive oil from Athena’s sacred trees—was awarded by the city of Athens. Only the best potters and painters were hired to make pots that were part of such an important ceremony and holding such a significant prize. While the vast majority of artisans never identified themselves on their work, these noteworthy individuals were set apart and acknowledged by name. The makers’ signatures demonstrated the city’s desire to give an award of the highest quality; they acted as promotion for the potter and painter at that time, and they have immortalized them since. It must not be forgotten, however, that the prize inside the pot was considered far more important than the vessel or the skilled artisans who created it.

China was united and ruled by Mongols from the north, first under Kublai Kahn, in the period known as the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The hand scroll painting *Pear Blossoms* was created with ink and colors on paper around 1280 by Qian Xuan (c. 1235-before 1307, China). (Figure 1.12) After the establishment of the Mongolian government, Qian Xuan abandoned his goal of obtaining a position as a scholar-official, as the highly educated bureaucrats who governed China were known, and turned to painting. He was part of a group of artists known as scholar-painters, or literati. The work of scholar-painters was desirable to many admirers of art because it was considered more personal, expressive, and spontaneous than the uniform and realistic paintings by professional, trained artists. The scholar-painters’ sophisticated and deep knowledge of philosophy, culture, and the arts—including calligraphy—made them welcome among fellow scholars and at court. They were part of the elite class of leaders, who followed the long and noble traditions within Confucian teachings of expressing oneself with wisdom and grace, especially in the art of poetry.

Qian Xuan was one of the first scholar-painters to unite painting and poetry, as he does in *Pear Blossoms*:

All alone by the veranda railing,  
teardrops drenching the branches,  
Although her face is unadorned,  
her old charms remain;  
Behind the locked gate, on a rainy night,  
how she is filled with sadness.  
How differently she looked bathed in golden waves  
of moonlight, before the darkness fell.

The poem is not meant to illustrate or describe his painting of the branch with its delicate, young foliage and flowers; rather, the swaying, irregular lines of the leaves and the gently unfurling curves of the blossoms are meant to suggest comparisons to how quickly time passes—delicate blooms will soon fade—and evoke memories of times past.

In thirteenth-century China, as has been the case throughout much of that country's history, the significance of a painting is closely associated with the identity of the artist, and with the scholars and collectors who owned the work over subsequent centuries. Their identities are known by the **seals**, or stamps in red acting as a signature, each added to the work of art. Specific subjects and how they were depicted were associated with the artist, and often referred back to in later works by other artists as a sign of respect and acknowledgment of the earlier master's skill and expertise. In *Pear Blossoms*, as was often the case, the poem, and the calligraphy in which the artist wrote it, were part of the original composition of the entire painted scroll. The seals appended and notes written by later scholars and collectors continued adding to the composition, and its beauty and meaning, over the next seven hundred years.

When James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903, USA, lived England) painted *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Black: Portrait of Theodore Duret* in 1883, he was making references back to the makers' marks Chinese and Japanese potters used as signatures on their ceramics in the monogram he adopted for his work: a stylized design of a butterfly based on his initials. (Figure 1.13) Whistler began



**Figure 1.13 | *Arrangement in Flesh Colour and Black: Portrait of Theodore Duret***

Artist: James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



**Figure 1.14 | *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket***

Artist: James Abbott McNeill Whistler

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

signing his work with the recognizable but altered figure of a butterfly, which often appeared to be dancing, in the 1860s. He had begun collecting Japanese porcelain and prints, and was tremendously influenced by their colors, patterns, and compositions, which reflected Japanese principles of beauty in art, including elegant simplicity, tranquility, subtlety, naturalness, understated beauty, and asymmetry or irregularity.

Whistler was among numerous American and European artists in the second half of the nineteenth century who felt compelled to break away from what they believed were the inhibiting constraints in how and what art students were taught and in the system of traditional art exhibitions. For Whistler and others, such restrictions were intolerable; as artists, they must be allowed to freely follow their own creative voices and pursuits. In adopting Japanese principles of beauty in art, Whistler could pursue what he called “Art for art’s sake.” That is, he could create art that served no other purpose than to express what he, as the artist, found to be elevating, harmonious, and pleasing to the eye, the mind, and the soul:

Art should be independent of all claptrap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism, and the like. All these have no kind of concern with it; and that is why I insist on calling my works “arrangements” and “harmonies.”<sup>4</sup>

Setting the artist apart in this way, as someone with special qualifications and sensibilities at odds with the prevailing cultural and intellectual standards, was far from the role played by a scholar-painter such as Qian Xuan in thirteenth-century China. The work Qian Xuan created was in accord with prevailing standards, while Whistler often thought of himself and his art as conflicting with the conventions of his day. Continuing one notion or categorization of the artist that had been present in Europe since the sixteenth century (and, later, the United States), Whistler was the singular, creative genius, whose art was often misunderstood and not necessarily accepted.

That was indeed the case. In 1878, Whistler won a lawsuit for libel against the art critic John Ruskin, who described Whistler’s 1875 painting, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, as “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face.” (Figure 1.14) By around 1880, in the aftermath of that rancorous proceeding, Whistler often added a long stinger to his butterfly monogram, symbolizing both the gentle beauty of his art as well as the forceful, at times stinging, nature of his personality.

4 James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: Frederick Stokes & Brother, 1908), [www.gutenberg.org/files/24650/24650-h/24650-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24650/24650-h/24650-h.htm)

## 1.5 THE ROLE OF THE VIEWER

An artist or craftsperson has an audience in mind when creating a work of art. Sometimes the audience *is* the artist. Most of the time, however, the audience—the viewer—is someone else. It may be an individual or a group of people the artist personally knows, or people the artist knows will be viewing the work in a specific context or with a certain purpose. The artist may also consider what meaning or impact the work of art will have for people who view it at an unknown time or place in the future, perhaps with little information about the artist or the work itself. Or, the artist may feel the need or desire to express an emotion and have no concern for how the viewer will react to the work, or even if the viewer will understand the work and why it was created.

As the viewer of a work of art, then, we are often aware that we do not have full knowledge of what the artist intended or, at times, even what the artist depicted. Not having that information, however, is not necessarily frustrating nor does it dampen our enjoyment of the piece. Instead, we may find the colors vibrant, or the subject intriguing, or the composition relaxing; in other words, we may simply enjoy looking at the work of art without feeling the need for particulars about it or the artist. But, there are other times when it is helpful to have some information about the artist or artwork for us to better understand and appreciate what we are looking at.

Sites exist around the world where images were painted or inscribed on cave walls during the Upper Paleolithic Period, c. 40,000-12,000 BCE. The majority of the images are of animals, but outlines of hands, human figures, instruments such as bows and arrows, and designs such as spoked wheels or parallel lines can also be found. They possess a number of notable features, including the fact that these images were painted over tens of thousands of years on every continent except Antarctica. Despite significant differences, the types of subjects depicted during all that time and in all those places are remarkably similar. But, as they were made during the pre-historic period, that is, before humans kept written records, all we know about them is what we can interpret by looking at the images themselves and by studying other objects we have found from the same places and time periods.

Scholars have put forth numerous ideas about why the images were made and what they could mean. The animals depicted include horses, bulls, bison, and deer, all of which were hunted during that span of approximately 30,000 years. For that reason,



**Figure 1.15 | Replica of the Pech-Merle de Cabrerets Cave painting**

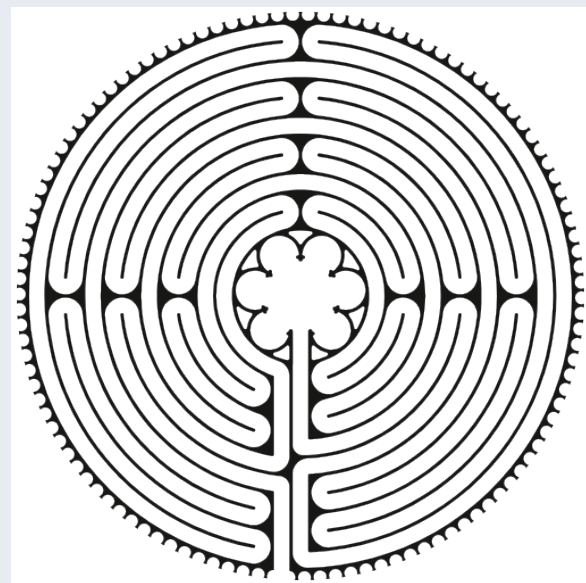
Author: User "HTO"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

some scholars hypothesize the paintings acted as a form of **sympathetic magic**, expressing the hope or giving thanks for a successful hunt by depicting the animals hunted. If the images were associated with such activities, crucial for the survival of those who created them, then their makers, as scholars further speculate, were **shamans**, or spiritual leaders of the group. A shaman is an individual with the power to interact with the physical world and the otherworld of spirits in order to maintain harmony between the two, predict the future, cast spells, and cure the sick.

Venturing into a cave, where all light from the outside world quickly disappears, is akin to a journey into another realm of existence. The images painted, seen only by fire, would have flickered and danced on the walls as if they depicted visitors from another world. We do not know who saw the paintings other than those who created them, but in the *Panel of Spotted Horses* within the Chapel of Bison in the Pech-Merle de Cabrerets Cave, France, the handprints also present are evidence that there were others who viewed them. (Figure 1.15) The prints were made by placing a hand on the wall and blowing paint around it, perhaps through a hollow, reed-like object. Are they meant to identify or document those who were present, to indicate their hoped-for powers as hunters or their inclusion as part of a shamanistic experience? We do not know, but even with the little information we have as viewers today, we can nevertheless enjoy the painting's beauty and mystery.



**Figure 1.17 | Diagram of the Labyrinth of Chartres Cathedral**

Author: User "Ssolbergj"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 1.16 | Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral**

Author: User "Maksim"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

A **labyrinth**, or maze, such as the one in the floor of the nave of Chartres Cathedral (1194-1250), France, is another example of an image or object found in a number of places, but about which we have little information. (Figure 1.16) A labyrinth is similar to a maze but generally has only one intricate and twisting path to the center. (Figure 1.17) There are labyrinths in the floors of numerous medieval Gothic cathedrals in Europe that were built in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. The labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral was built in the thirteenth century and, at 42.3 feet in diameter, it fills the width of the

**nave**, or central area of a church. While there is documentation that clergy performed dances during Easter celebrations upon labyrinths found in other cathedrals in France, no such records exist regarding Chartres. What it does seem to have in common with other labyrinths, however, is being used as a path to **circumambulate**, or walk, by visitors to the church who were on a **pilgrimage** or journey of faith. As was true of many Gothic churches, Chartres Cathedral held a **relic**, an object thought to have belonged to or been part of a holy person's body, in this case, a garment believed to be the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary when she gave birth. Pilgrims traveled to Chartres to venerate this relic as a demonstration of their religious devotion. While there, pilgrims and other visitors might follow the stones of the labyrinth while in prayer or a state of meditation; the inevitable outcome of the complex and turning path leading to the center mirrors the certainty that prayer will lead the believer to God. The repetitive and focused movement of walking while absorbed in prayer enhanced the devotional experience for the worshiper—who was also the viewer of the labyrinth—on both a physical and a spiritual level.

John Haberle (1856-1933, USA) was a painter who was born and spent most of his life in New Haven, Connecticut. He was well known for his *trompe l'oeil* works such as *A Bachelor's Drawer*: paintings that were so realistic they “fooled the eye.” (Figure 1.18) Precisely rendering objects on a two-dimensional surface as if they were in three-dimensional space, he was able to create an illusion of reality that was meant to draw in his viewers, who were briefly unaware of the trick he was playing upon them. Quickly recognizing the painting was in truth an uncannily accurate semblance of actual objects, the viewer then became a participant in the artist's game of deception.



**Figure 1.18 | *A Bachelor's Drawer***

Artist: John Haberle

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

The various objects in *A Bachelor's Drawer*, including photographs, paper currency, theater ticket stubs, newspaper clippings, a thermometer, and a hair comb, that appear to be haphazardly fixed to a wooden drawer front are visually interesting because they are so life-like. Once the viewer shifts focus to look at these everyday and commonplace items—the sorts of things you take out of your pocket at the end of the day, often intending to throw them away—and think about what they are, we also wonder what they might mean. And, that is exactly what Haberle intended his viewers to do.

The artist even rewards his viewers for their close attention to the many details in his painting by placing some important ones in the center: several fragments of newspaper articles, including one stating, “A New Haven artist has plunged himself into trouble by making too perfect greenbacks in oil.” Viewers who knew Haberle’s work would probably have been aware the statement was true. Haberle frequently depicted paper currency in his paintings, in spite of having been warned to stop doing so by the U.S. Secret Service, which was formed in 1865 to stop the distribution of counterfeit money. Those who appreciated his work knew Haberle took pleasure in making it clear he was ignoring that demand.

*A Bachelor's Drawer*, painted 1890-1894, would turn out to be the artist’s last *trompe l’oeil* painting of currency, though, as the exacting work had strained his eyes to the point that he could no longer paint such fine detail. Some of the other objects Haberle included, and the title of the work itself, seem to be referring to the end of an era. The pamphlet titled “How to Name the Baby,” prominently displayed in the upper right, partially covers the postcard showing a finely-dressed dandy with his dashing moustache that is placed directly above a discreetly covered photograph of a nude woman. They all lead down to a small photograph that appears to be stuck in the bottom (painted) frame, which is a portrait of the artist. Was he the bachelor who once had the freedom to attend the theatre, but is now taking up the life of a young father? This trail of clues is typical of the dry humor in Haberle’s work, here turned on himself, with an open invitation for his viewers to share the joke with him.

## 1.6 WHY DO WE MAKE ART?

Some of the earliest evidence of recognizable human activity includes not only practical things like stone tools and fire pits, but also decorative objects used for personal adornment. For example, these small beads made by piercing sea snail shells, found at the Blombos Cave on the southeastern coast of South Africa, are dated to the Middle Stone Age, 101,000-70,000 BCE. (Figure 1.19) We can only speculate about the intentions of our distant ancestors, but it is clear that their lives included the practice of conceiving and producing art objects. One thing we appear to share with those distant relatives is the urge to make art.



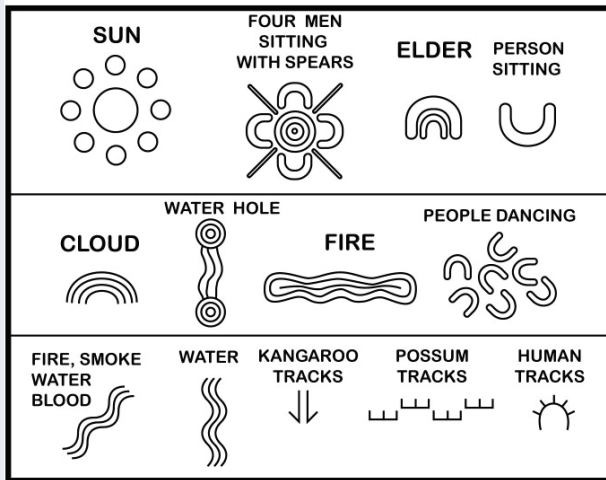
**Figure 1.19 | Blombos Cave *Nassarius kraussianus* marine shell beads and reconstruction of bead stringing**

Author: Marian Vanhaeren and Christopher S. Henshilwood

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

**AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL "MAP" SYMBOLS**

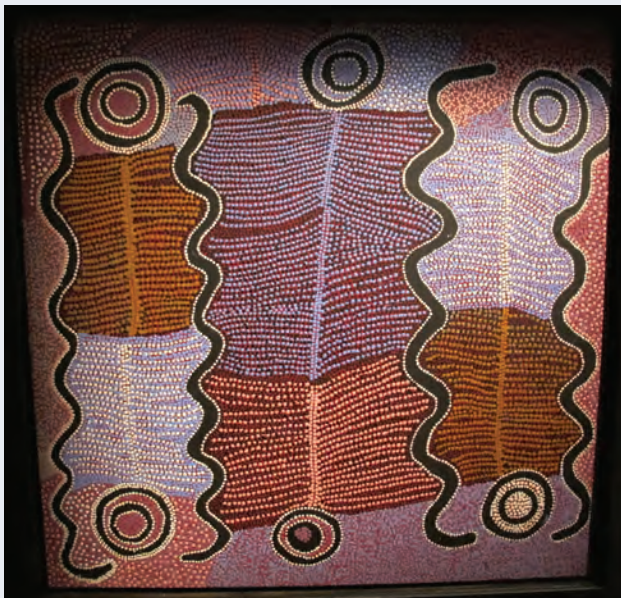


**Figure 1.20 | Australian Aboriginal "Map" Symbols**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux  
 Source: Original Work  
 License: CC BY-SA 4.0

A culture can be defined as a group of people who agree about what is important. Today many different human cultures and sub-cultures co-exist; we can find in them a broad range of ideas about art and its place in daily living. One main goal of Australian Aboriginal artists, for example, is to “map” the world around them. (Figure 1.20) In this painting on bark, pictorial symbols tell the story of the great hunter snake in colors such as red for desert sand and yellow for the sun. (Figure 1.21) In a similar way, though with different materials, Buddhist sand paintings known as **mandalas** present a map of the cosmos. These circular diagrams also represent the relationship of the individual to the whole and levels of human awareness. (Figure 1.22)

The need to make art can be divided into two broad categories: the *personal need* to express ideas and feelings, and the *community’s needs* to assert common values. In the following sections, we’ll look at some of these motivations to more clearly understand and identify artist intent in the works of art that we encounter.



**Figure 1.21 | Sand Painting**

Author: Saiko  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 1.22 | Wheel of Time Kalachakra Sand Mandala**

Artist: Losang Samten  
 Author: Steve Osborne  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

We should recognize that every person has lived a unique life, so every person knows something about the world that no one else has seen. It is the job of artists today to tell us about what they have come to know—individually or as part their community—using the art material or medium most suited to their abilities. While copying the works of others is good training, it is merely re-working what has already been revealed. Originality, however, is more highly valued in contemporary art. Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986, USA) explained her view on this matter when she wrote: (Figure 1.23)

It was in the fall of 1915 that I first had the idea that what I had been taught was of little value to me except for the use of my materials as a language—charcoal, pencil, pen and ink, watercolor, pastel, and oil. I had become fluent with them when I was so young that they were simply another language that I handled easily. But what to say with them? I had been taught to work like others, and after careful thinking I decided that I wasn’t going to spend my life doing what had already been done. . . . I decided I was a very stupid fool for not to at last paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1.23 | Series 1, No. 8**

Artist: Georgia O’Keeffe

Author: User “Profilaeas”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

### 1.6.1 The Personal Need to Create

Many works of art come out of a personal decision to put a feeling, idea, or concept into visual form. Since feelings vary widely, the resulting art takes a wide range of forms. This approach to art comes from the individual’s delight in the experience. Doodling comes to mind as one very basic example of such delight. Pollock’s Abstract Expressionist works, also known as action paintings, are much more than doodles, though they may resemble such on the surface. (Autumn Rhythm-Number 30, Jackson Pollock: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/488978?=&imgno=0&tabname=online-resources>; *Number 10*, Jackson Pollock: <http://www.wikiart.org/en/jackson-pollock/number-10-1949>) They were the result of many levels of artistic thought but on a basic level were a combination of delight in the act of painting and in the personal discovery that act enabled.

Some art is intended to provide personal commentary. Artworks that illustrate a personal viewpoint or experience can fulfill this purpose. *Persepolis*, a graphic novel by Marjane Satrapi (b. 1969, Iran) published in 2000, recounts her experiences and thoughts during the 1979 Iranian revolution, and

5 O’Keeffe 1976, unpaginated.

is an example of such personal commentary. (*Keys to Paradise: <https://imaginedlandscapes.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/pi-102.jpg>*) Satrapi is a leading proponent of the graphic novel, a new approach to art making. In an ironic critique of how different parts of Iranian society were affected by war, Satrapi compares the contorted figures of Iranian youth dying in a combat zone explosion with the dance movements at her high school celebration.

Artworks can be created thus as a means of exploring one's own experience, a way of bringing hidden emotions to the surface so that they may be recognized and understood more clearly. The term for this process is **catharsis**.

Cathartic works of art can arise from perceptions of grief, good, evil, or injustice, as in *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault (1791-1824, France), which was an indictment of the French government of his day following the sinking of a ship. (Figure 1.24) When Whistler, on the other hand, became a proponent of “Art for art’s sake,” he was rejecting outside influences such as contemporary artistic and social standards in order to “purify” art of external corruption. (see Figure 1.18) The idea of removing influence from the creation of art is a modern one. Much of the art made before the nineteenth century was produced with the support and under the direction of religious, political, and cultural authorities in the larger community.

### 1.6.2 Communal Needs and Purposes

Across history and geography, we see religious and political communities that remain stable despite constant pressure from both internal and external sources. One way in which communities maintain stability is in the production of works of art that identify common values and experiences within that community and thus bring people together.

Architecture, monuments, murals, and icons are visible guides to community participation in the arts and often use image-making conventions. A **convention** is an agreed upon way of thinking, speaking, or acting in a social context. There are many kinds of conventions, including visual conventions. A good example in visual art would be a conventional sense of direction. In Western cultures, text is generally read left to right. Therefore, when they look at artwork, Western viewers tend to “enter” a picture on the upper left and proceed to the right. Objects that appear on the left



**Figure 1.24 | *The Raft of the Medusa***

Artist: Jean Louis Théodore Géricault

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

side of an image are thought to be “first,” while ones that appear on the right are thought to be “later.” Since Asian texts follow a different convention, and tend to be read right to left, an Asian viewer would unconsciously assume the opposite.

Architecture, especially of public buildings, is an expression of a community’s values. Courthouses, libraries, town halls, schools, banks, factories, and jails are all designed for community purposes, and their shapes become strongly associated with their function: the architectural shapes be-

come conventions. The use of older styles of architecture can be as references to the values of previous cultures. In the United States, for example, many government buildings are designed with imposing stone facades using classical Greek and Roman columns that symbolize strength and stability. Federal government buildings such as the United States Capitol and the Supreme Court (Figure 1.25) were designed so that the community would associate ancient Greek and Roman ideals of virtue and integrity with the activities inside those more modern buildings.



**Figure 1.25 | U.S. Supreme Court Building**

Photographer: US Government Employee

Source: Architect of the Capital

License: Public Domain



**Figure 1.26 | The Bauhaus Building in Dessau, Germany**

Author: User “Mewes”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Many twentieth-century architects, however, have followed the guiding principle of American architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924, USA), that “form follows function.” In his design of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius (1883-1969, Germany) rejected superfluous decoration and focused instead on the efficient and functional use of space and material. (Figure 1.26) The leading school of art, craft, and architecture in Germany from 1919-1933, the teachings of the Bauhaus, or “construction house,” have strongly influenced domestic and industrial design internationally since that time.



**Figure 1.27 | Colleoni on Horseback**

Artist: Andrea del Verrocchio  
 Author: User "Waysider1925"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 1.28 | Burghers of Calais**

Artist: Auguste Rodin  
 Author: User "Razimantv"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY 3.0

Communities can remind citizens of public virtues by commemorating the individuals who displayed those qualities in **monuments**. Since ancient times, they have commonly been statues of such individuals placed on pedestals, columns, or inside architecture. The *Equestrian Statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni* by Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-1488, Italy) is a good example of this type of monument. (Figure 1.27) Created for the city of Venice, Italy, during the Italian Renaissance, the sculpture of Colleoni on horseback shows him as the bold and victorious warrior he was. But *The Burghers of Calais* by Auguste Rodin (1840-1917, France) and *Vietnam War Memorial* by Maya Lin (b. 1959, USA) are monuments that violate that long-standing norm. Rodin placed the burghers, or leading citizens, on ground level to humanize the six men who offered themselves as sacrifices to save their city; he did so in order to bring their internal struggles down to the viewer's eye level. (Figure 1.28) Lin's memorial is below ground level, and displays the names of the approximately 58,000 Americans who died in the Vietnam War. (Figure 1.29) These choices reflect the belief that the Vietnam War was initially conducted "beneath the surface," that is, unknown to most Americans, and to remind visitors that its cost was paid by real individuals, not anonymous soldiers. These two works of art are **unconventional** and **original** in their conception and execution.

Since ancient times, **murals**, paintings on walls, have been created in both public and private places. Ancient Egyptians combined images with writing in wall paintings to commemorate past leaders. Some of these murals were intentionally erased when the leader fell out of favor. Roman murals were more often found inside homes and temples. The Roman mural located in a bedroom of the Villa of P. Fannius

Synistor was unearthed in Pompeii, Italy. (Figure 1.30) It depicts landscape and architectural views between a row of (painted) columns, as if viewed from inside the **villa**, or country house.

*The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519, Italy, France) and the Sistine Chapel ceiling by Michelangelo (1475-1564, Italy) are murals from the Italian Renaissance. They were created for a wall in a refectory, or dining hall, of a monastery (Figure 1.31) and for the ceiling of the Pope's chapel. (Figure 1.32) Both depict crucial scenes in the teachings of the Catholic Church, the leading European religious and political organization of the time. Because many people at the time were illiterate, images played an important role in educating them about their religious history and doctrines.



**Figure 1.29 | Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall**

Artist: Maya Lin

Author: User "Mariordo"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 1.30 | Cubiculum (bedroom) from the Villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale**

Author: Rogers Fund

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

More modern examples of murals can be found around the world today. Diego Rivera (1886-1967, Mexico) was a world-renowned artist who executed large-scale murals in Mexico and the United States. His *Detroit Industry* murals consist of twenty-seven panels originally installed at the Detroit Institute of Arts. (Figure 1.33) The two largest panels depict workers manufacturing a V8 engine at the Ford Motor Company factory. Other smaller panels show advances in science, technology, and medicine involved in modern industrial culture, portraying Rivera's belief that conceptual thinking and physical labor are interdependent. These works are now considered a National Landmark. *The Great Wall of Los Angeles* designed by Judith Baca (b. 1946, USA) and executed



**Figure 1.31 | *The Last Supper***

Artist: Leonardo da Vinci  
 Author: User "Thebrid"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 1.32 | The Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel**

Artist: Michelangelo  
 Author: Patrick Landy  
 Source: Wikipedia  
 License: CC BY 3.0



**Figure 1.33 | *Detroit Industry, North Wall***

Artist: Diego Rivera  
 Author: User "Cactus.man"  
 Source: Wikipedia  
 License: Public Domain

by hundreds of community members is thirteen feet high and runs for more than one half mile through the city. (*The Great Wall of Los Angeles*, Judith Baca: [http://sparcinla.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/great-wall\\_m.jpg](http://sparcinla.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/great-wall_m.jpg)) Its subject is the history of Southern California “as seen through the eyes of women and minorities.”<sup>6</sup> The mural is part of a larger push in Los Angeles to adorn public spaces with murals that inform and educate the populace.

The term **icon** comes from the Greek word *eikon*, or “to be like,” and refers to an image or likeness that is used as a guide to religious worship. The holy figures depicted in icons are thought by believers to have special powers of healing or other positive influence. An icon can also be a person or thing that symbolically represents a quality or virtue. A good example is the image of St. Sebastian. St. Sebastian was a captain of the Roman guard who converted to Chris-

tianity and was sentenced to death before a squad of archers. (Figure 1.34) He survived his wounds, and early Christians attributed this miracle to the power of their religion. (He was later stoned to death.) In the late Middle Ages during widespread plague in Europe, images of St. Sebastian were regularly commissioned for hospitals because of the legend of his miraculous healing and the hope that the images would be curative.

An example of a non-religious or **secular** icon might be the bronze bust of the famous football coach Knute Rockne at Notre Dame University in Indiana. (Figure 1.35) The nose of the bronze sculpture is bright gold because many consider it good luck to rub it, so it receives constant polishing by students before exams.



**Figure 1.35 | Knute Rockne**

Artist: Nison Tregor  
 Author: Matthew D. Britt  
 Source: Flickr  
 License: CC BY-SA-NC 3.0



**Figure 1.34 | The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian**

Artist: Giacinto Diana  
 Source: Artstor.org  
 License: Public Domain

We have touched only briefly on the questions of what art is, who an artist is, and why people make art. History shows us people have defined art and artists differently in various times and places, but that people everywhere make art for many different reasons. And, these art objects share a common purpose: they are all intended to express a feeling or idea that is valued either by the individual artist or by the larger community.

## 1.7 CONCEPTS EXPLORED IN LATER CHAPTERS

### 1.7.1 The Structure of Art: Form and Design

In order to read this you have spent considerable time and effort learning individual letters, combinations that form a word, the structure of a sentence, and the organization of multiple sentences to move from one idea to the next. You use all of those skills to make sense of and understand the written word. And from there, you can introduce your own ideas, knowledge, and experiences to expand upon and bring additional meanings to what you have read.

We follow a similar process in learning how to look at and understand art. In Chapter Two: The Structure of Art—Form and Design, we will first define forms of art and the materials and processes used in creating them. We will then examine the elements of art, such as line, color, and form, as well as the principles of design, or how those elements are combined to create a composition. With this new vocabulary we can better understand and talk about what we are looking at, enriching our experiences interacting with art and architecture in the world around us.

### 1.7.2 Significance of Materials Used in Art

One of the basic choices in creating any work of art is the material from which it will be made. The materials might make it more or less important, more or less valuable, or might bring a variety of associations not inherent in the actual form of the work. In Chapter Three: Significance of Materials Used in Art, we will examine both the monetary value and the cultural value of works of art based upon the media—the materials—employed, and some of the many sources from which those values are determined.

### 1.7.3 Describing Art: Formal Analysis, Types, and Styles

Taking the building blocks of the vocabulary we built in reading Chapter Two: The Structure of Art—Form and Design, in Chapter Four: Describing Art: Formal Analysis, Types, and Styles we will discuss how to critically analyze, or systematically describe, a work of art. We will examine the elements and principles of its design, the category in which it falls based on the relative representation of the natural world, and how we might group that work with others, or the work of other artists based on its appearance, or style.

These tools not only help us learn more about the work of art, they enhance our appreciation of art by providing us with a greater understanding of the individual work's components and its relationship with art in the same or other cultures and time periods.

### 1.7.4 Meaning in Art: Socio-Cultural Contexts, Symbolism, and Iconography

Studying the historical, social, personal, political, or scientific reasons a work of art was made provides us with further, and key, information in understanding its meaning and symbolism. A work of art is part of the culture in which it was made; all artists, even those who wish to rebel against some aspect of the time in which they live, are influenced (and perhaps constrained) by

the world around them. In Chapter Five: Meaning in Art– Socio-Cultural Context, Symbolism, and Iconography, we will consider the many factors that influence the creation and our comprehension of works of art. And, we will explore meanings within a work, its symbolism, as a way of providing us with deeper understanding of what the work meant within the culture it was made.

### 1.7.5 Connecting Art to Our Lives

For art to have meaning, it must have some connection to us and our lives. Artists and those who hire them to create works of art have myriad reasons for doing so. In Chapter Six: Connecting Art to Our Lives, we will first look at aesthetics, the study of the principles and appreciation of beauty in art, from an historical perspective to gain an understanding of another way in which the value of art has traditionally been determined. We will also explore roles that art plays: it can be a means of expression, a symbol of inclusion or exclusion, a tool of communication, or a medium of education. When we find our connection to a work of art, we are engaged with and enriched by it.

### 1.7.6 Form in Architecture

Human beings have created a wide variety of architecture forms from pre-historic times to the present across the entire world. The continuous presence of architecture in human history indicates the vital and numerous roles structures play for both the individual and the society in which they are made. In Chapter Seven: Form in Architecture, we will examine purpose, function, and meaning in design and construction of sites and buildings within a variety of cultures. What can the history of constructed forms tell us about the needs, beliefs, and principles of our near and distant ancestors? Answering these questions sheds light on the role of architecture throughout history, as well as how it functions in our own time.

### 1.7.7 Art and Identity

Often today, when we think of art and identity, we are referring to the artist's identity, and what we mean is the artist's personal identity and what the artist is trying to communicate on a personal level. The notion of personal identity quickly expands, however, to include aspects that link the artist to others with similar characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, spiritual beliefs, and nationality. From there, we can begin to talk about identity within a clan, culture, nation, and other groups that share like traits and properties.

In Chapter Eight: Art and Identity, we will look at how notions of identity influence artists and the art they create. Whether artists are attempting to express individual, private feelings, or capture the personality of a nation, they must first define what the characteristics are and determine how those chosen will be represented in the work of art. We will look at these visualizations of identity in a variety of forms, from small hand-held objects to large-scale works of architecture, to discuss the impact of materials, size, and audience. And, we will examine the circumstances surrounding the creation of these objects to investigate the role social, religious, and political forces play in defining and assigning identity in art.

### 1.7.8 Art and Power

Throughout history, art has been used as a means of communication by those in power. When rulers commission depictions of themselves, for example, they may or may not want them to be recognizable portraits, but the sculpture or painting will certainly communicate what the ruler wants those who see the work to know about the ruler's position, wealth, and attributes, that is, indications of the ruler's power. These signs of power can be used to reassure the ruler's own people or to warn potential adversaries of the forces at the ruler's disposal. Rulers and others in authority have the ability to enlarge a show of power beyond a bodily display of physical strength and dominance to more potent and permanent monuments such as murals, sculpture, and buildings.

The power of art extends far beyond uses by those in control. Art can be used to build influence, increase leverage, and give hope to those who possess little authority. It can be used as a form of protest against those in command. And, it can be used to induce change. In Chapter Nine: Art and Power, we will look at art as a tool to comment upon and garner power, and as a means of communicating power and power relations. We will identify common visual strategies, and note similarities and differences over time and in different cultures.

### 1.7.9 Art and Ritual Life: Symbolism of Space and Ritual Objects

Human beings possess the ability to project our thoughts forward to speculate about what will happen in our future. We can contemplate our own mortality and reflect on existence beyond our own lives. Doing so can plunge us into despair or elevate us to heights of exultation. In times of desperation, art can serve as a talisman, an object believed to have power to bring luck or offer protection, against those things or events we fear in hope the occurrence can be warded off. In the case of the inevitable, such as sickness and death, art is used to give comfort to the suffering and solace to the survivors. We also employ art to pay tribute to what we cherish and honor; with works made of the finest materials, crafted with ingenuity and the utmost skill we give expression not only to our fears, but also to our hopes.

In Chapter Ten: Art and Ritual Life—Symbolism of Space and Ritual Objects, we will look at how art helps us to understand ourselves as mortal creatures, and the role it plays in our spiritual lives as we strive to locate meaning and purpose in existence as a finite or infinite concept.

### 1.7.10 Art and Ethics

Art can introduce us to new ideas, and it can influence what we think about ourselves and others. Art informs us and it can change us. Does this potential for tremendous impact place an obligation upon the artist, the photojournalist, or the museum curator to act under certain guidelines of originality or truthfulness, for example? If so, how do we define what original art is, and whose truth are we telling?

Chapter Eleven: Art and Ethics introduces us to some of the issues facing artists and others in the world of art in how they present themselves and their art.

## 1.8 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

### Key Concepts

When studying a subject, it is important to have a working definition of that subject. Our subject is art. The four historical attempts at defining art surveyed here each had limitations. Ancient Greek mimesis excluded art that does not re-present objects. Tolstoy's communication theory is unverifiable and is spectator-dependent, Bell's significant form is circular reasoning, and Dickie's Artworld theory is about who has the power to decide what art is, not about art itself. The operating definition of art used in this text is "from the mind into the world." The images used in this survey are considered works of art. It is the task of the student to be able to recognize, analyze, and interpret works of art, and to integrate this understanding into a coherent worldview. The purpose of this effort at understanding is to practice recognizing value in new and diverse forms of visual art. One end result is to then have a greater appreciation of and to simply enjoy looking at art.

Art is found wherever we find human beings. Art fulfills a basic human need for expression. This need can be sub-divided into personal needs and needs of the community. Personal needs include art created for delight, decoration, for political and religious devotion, and for personal catharsis. Communal needs can include architecture, monuments, murals, and religious and secular icons.

### Test Yourself

1. List and describe the four ways stated in the text in which people have defined art in the past.
2. Briefly re-state the operating definition of art for this text.
3. What is the significance of the ancient Greek myth of Zeuxis and Parhassios?
4. What do each of the four historical definitions of art reveal of how people thought about where truth is to be found?
5. Draw parallels between the sea snail shell necklace of c. 100,000 BCE and modern practices of personal decoration, for example, a pearl necklace.
6. Speculate about why images might be important in non-literate cultures? What might be one concern about images used in religious rituals? Can you identify an example of a non-religious icon other than the one noted in the text?
7. Speculate about why most early American federal buildings were built using classical Greek and Roman columns and imposing stone facades. Why were buildings in the twentieth century built with little reference to the architecture of classical antiquity? What ideas were lost and what ideas were gained with this shift in architecture?

8. Consider the change in the conventional presentation of public monuments by comparing how the monuments of Verrocchio and Rodin are presented, one on a high pedestal, the other at ground level. What does this change suggest about changing ideas about the heroic and monumental?

## 1.9 KEY TERMS

**Architecture:** the design and construction of buildings or other complex structures.

**Artworld theory of art:** an approach to defining art as whatever the artworld says it is.

**Catharsis:** the process of releasing pent up emotion resulting in personal change.

**Circumambulate:** to “walk around”—a ritual practice of circling a sacred site, following a set path either inside or outside of a structure.

**Communication theory of art:** an approach to defining art as a transfer of feeling from artist to spectator.

**Convention:** group consensus about the way something is usually done.

**Icon:** a person or thing regarded as representative of something, often religious.

**Institutional theory of art:** another name for the Artworld theory of art.

**Labyrinth:** similar to a maze, but generally has only one intricate and twisting path to the center.

**Mimesis:** an approach to defining art as a copy of perceived reality.

**Monument:** a statue or other structure meant to commemorate a famous person or event.

**Mural:** a work of art executed directly on a wall.

**Relic:** an object thought to have belonged to or been part of a holy person’s body.

**Secular:** lacking in religious or spiritual content, not bound by religious rule.

**Significant Form:** an approach to defining art as what we notice.

**Symbolism:** the use of images to represent ideas or qualities.

**Trompe l’oeil:** art so realistic that it “fools the eye.”

**Zeuxis and Parhassios:** an ancient Greek myth about two competing painters who vie for the title of greatest artist by copying reality most faithfully

# 2

## The Structure of Art

### Form and Design

*Jeffrey LeMieux, Pamela J. Sachant, and Rita Tekippe*

### 2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Distinguish between various materials, processes, and methods in the production of art objects.
- Identify the characteristics of different art forms and distinguish one from another.
- Explain the roles of elements and principles of design in creating forms and compositions.

### 2.2 INTRODUCTION

When we look at the art objects that people have made over the centuries and around the world, we find they share some basic elements. They exist; they have substance; they are either flat or “in the round”; they use (or do not use) perspective, line, shape, mass, value, color, texture, and so on. Over time, both artists and art critics have developed a set of terms to describe art objects and their design. In this chapter, we will develop an art-specific vocabulary to use in identifying different types of art forms, discerning the materials and processes used to create them, understanding how the elements and principles of design are used by artists, and recognizing how they convey meaning in visual art.

The possible combinations in visual art are infinite, but the visual arts have traditionally been practiced and categorized in only a few broadly termed ways. The primary distinction in the visual arts is dimension. Two-dimensional art consists of **drawing, painting, and printmaking**; three-dimensional art consists of **sculpture, including installation, and kinetic art**. In addition to these traditional types of art, new technologies and new ideas about art have given us four-dimensional **or** time-based art, such as **video and performance**. Such art depends on the use of technology and the passage of time for its effect. Most recently, time-based art has grown to encompass a category known as new media art, which includes digital art, computer animation, interactive art, video games, virtual reality, robotics, and 3D printing.

Today the separate categories of space and time are becoming blurred as artists seek ways to combine disparate approaches into a single, encompassing, and rich art experience. An important lesson from the modern approach to visual art for both artists and viewers is to recognize that each formal element and each approach to design has unique expressive power.

## 2.3 ART SPECIFIC VOCABULARY

Every discipline has its “jargon,” and the visual arts are no different. Visual artists use a variety of materials and processes to produce their work and art critics use specialized terms to describe that work. It is unavoidable that terms must be invented to serve the purposes of criticism and/or description. Many art terms are in common use and widely understood, some are less so. Some terms come from languages other than English. In the course of describing the different forms that visual art takes, this text will introduce terms by using a bold font, following them with explanations and definitions. As with any discipline, the goal in using specialized art terms here is to make things more clear and direct.

## 2.4 ART FORMS

Because of the limits of nature, art objects are limited to the dimensions of space—and time. For this reason, art objects fall into three categories: **two-dimensional art**, **three-dimensional art**, and **four-dimensional art**. Each category has divisions deriving primarily from differences between the materials and approaches used. Throughout history, art objects generally fit clearly into a discrete classification. In the nineteenth century, however, artists began exploring the limits of new materials as well as the boundaries of the categories into which they fell to see if they were real or arbitrary.

### 2.4.1 Two-Dimensional Art

**Two-dimensional art** occurs on flat surfaces, like paper, canvas, or even cave walls. This art can be further divided into three main categories: drawing, painting, and printmaking. All art that occurs on a flat surface is one or a combination of these three activities.

#### 2.4.1.1 Drawing

The term **drawing** describes both a visual object and an activity. At first glance, drawing appears to consist of making contrasting marks on a flat surface. The term



**Figure 2.1 | Replication of Chauvet Cave Lion Wall**

Author: User “HTO”  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

implies something more, however. One can “draw” water from a well or be “drawn” to a charismatic person. There is something in the word “draw” that is related to extracting or delineating, the “pulling out” of an essence. To draw an object is to observe its appearance and transfer that observation to a set of marks. Ancient cave painters truly “drew” the animals they saw around them based on their deep familiarity with their essential nature. (Figure 2.1) So in this context, drawing is a combination of observation and mark making.

Drawing is usually—but not always—done with **monochromatic** media, that is, with dry materials of a single color such as **charcoal**, **conté crayon**, **metalpoint**, or graphite. Color can be introduced using pastels. In addition to these dry materials, free-flowing ink can also be used to make drawings. These materials have been highly refined over centuries to serve specific artistic purposes.

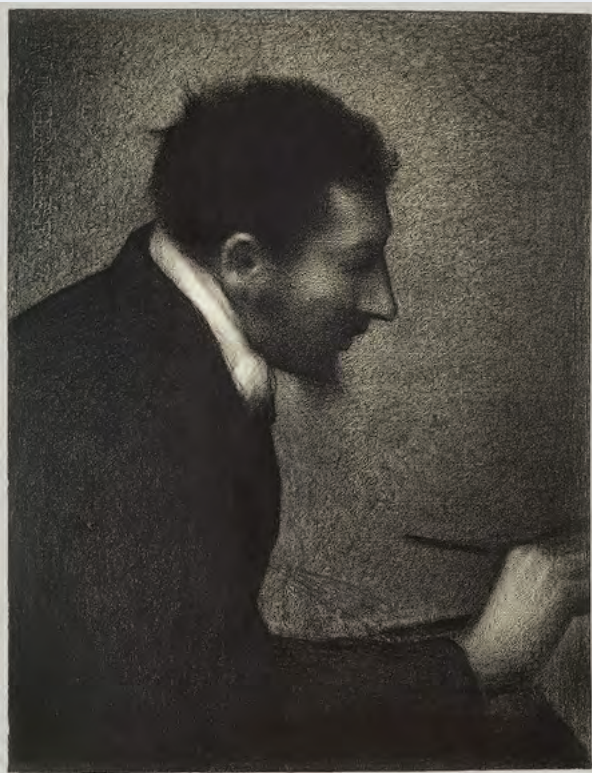
**Charcoal** is made from wood or other organic material that has been burned in the absence of oxygen. This process leaves a relatively pure black carbon powder. Artists compress this dry powder, or **pigment**, with a **binder**, a sticky substance like pine resin or glue made from the collagen of animal hides, to make hand-held charcoal blocks of various strengths and degrees of hardness. This compressed charcoal is used to make very dark marks, usually on paper. Com-

pressed charcoal is challenging to erase.

Charcoal also comes in a form called **willow** or **vine charcoal**. This form of drawing charcoal leaves a very light mark as it is simply burned twigs. It is generally used for impermanent sketches because it does not readily stick to paper or canvas and is easily erased. Both compressed and vine charcoal drawings are easily smudged and should be protected by a fixative that adheres the charcoal to the drawing surface and creates a barrier resistant to smudging.

**Conté crayon** is a hand-held drawing material similar to compressed charcoal. Conté crayons are sticks of graphite or charcoal combined with wax or clay that come in a variety of colors, from white to sanguine (deep red) to black, as well as a range of hardness. Harder conté is used for details and softer varieties for broad areas. This portrait by Georges-Pierre Seurat (1859-1891, France) was drawn in black conté crayon on textured paper in order to break the image into discrete marks. (Figure 2.2)

**Metalpoint** is the use of malleable metals like silver, pewter, and gold to make drawing



**Figure 2.2 | Edmond Aman-Jean**

Artist: Georges-Pierre Seurat

Author: User “Pimbrils”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.3 | Head of a Girl**

Artist: Leonardo da Vinci

Source: Wikiart

License: Public Domain

marks on prepared surfaces. (Figure 2.3) The surface must have a “tooth” or roughness to hold the marks. Any pure silver or gold object can be used for this, though artists today favor silver and gold wire held in mechanical pencils for the process.

**Graphite** is a crystalline form of carbon. In the sixteenth century, a large deposit of pure graphite was discovered in England, and it became the primary source for this drawing material. Because of its silvery color, it was originally thought to be a form of lead, though there is no actual lead in pencils. Today powdered graphite is mixed with clay to control hardness.

**Pastels** are similar to compressed charcoal but, instead of finely powdered carbon, finely ground colored pigment and a binder are used to create handheld colored blocks. (Figure 2.4) The powdery pigments smudge easily, so the image created must be displayed under glass or covered with a fixative. Edgar Degas (1834-1917, France) is famous for the subtle yet distinct layering of color he was able to achieve in his pastel drawings. (Figure 2.5)



**Figure 2.4 | Pastels**

Author: User “Tau1012”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.5 | *Nach dem Bade sich abtrocknende Frau (After the Bath, Woman drying herself)***

Artist: Edgar Degas

Author: User “Crisco”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Oil pastels are semi-solid sticks of high pigment oil paint that are used like crayons. They were originally invented to mark livestock, but artists quickly realized their aesthetic potential. Oil pastels are a convenient way to apply and blend heavily textured oil-based pigment onto any surface without using traditional brushes. The colors are vibrant, and the marks are gestural and immediate so oil pastel drawings can show the “hand” of the artist in a direct way, as can be seen here in *East Palatka Onions*, a 1983 oil pastel drawing by Mary Ann Currier (b. 1927, USA). (*East Palatka Onions*, Mary Ann Currier: <https://ketorg.cdn.ket.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/currier-ep-onions1100px.jpg>)

**Ink** is the combination of a colored pigment, usually black carbon or graphite, and a binder suspended in a liquid and applied with a pen or brush. A wide range of substances have been used over time to make ink, including lamp black or soot, burned animal bones, gallnuts, and iron oxide. The pigment must be finely ground and held together with a binder. There is a long tradition of fine art ink drawings.

Although the example given dates to the fourteenth century, the oldest ink drawings come from China in the third century BCE and are done on silk and paper. (Figure 2.6)



**Figure 2.7 | Mona Lisa**

Artist: Leonardo da Vinci  
 Author: User “Dcoetzee”  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.6 | Spring Dawn Over the Elixir Terrace**

Artist: Lu Guang  
 Source: Met Museum  
 License: OASC

#### 2.4.1.2 Painting

Painting is a specialized form of drawing that refers to using **brushes** to apply colored liquids to a **support**, usually canvas or paper, but sometimes wooden panels, metal plates, and walls. For example, Leonardo da Vinci painted *Mona Lisa* on a wood panel. (Figure 2.7) Paint is composed of three main ingredients: **pigments**, **binders**, and **solvents**. The colored pigments are suspended in a sticky binder in order to apply them and make them adhere to the support. **Solvents** dissolve the binder in order to remove it but can also be used in smaller quantities to make paint more fluid.

As with drawing, different kinds of painting have mostly to do with the material that is being used. Oil, acrylic,

watercolor, encaustic, fresco, and tempera are some of the different kinds of painting. For the most part, the pigments or coloring agents in paints remain the same. The thing that distinguishes one kind of painting from another is the binder.

**Oil** painting was discovered in the fifteenth century and uses vegetable oils, primarily linseed oil and walnut oil, as the binding agent. Linseed oil was chosen for its clear color and its ability to dry slowly and evenly. Turpentine is generally used as the solvent in oil painting. The medium has strict rules of application to avoid cracking or delamination (dividing into layers). Additionally, oil paint can oxidize and darken or yellow over time if not properly crafted. Some pigments have been found to be **fugitive**, meaning they lose their color over time, especially when exposed to direct sunlight. This can be seen in a detail of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* where the figure’s eyebrows and eye lashes are now “missing.” (Figure 2.8)

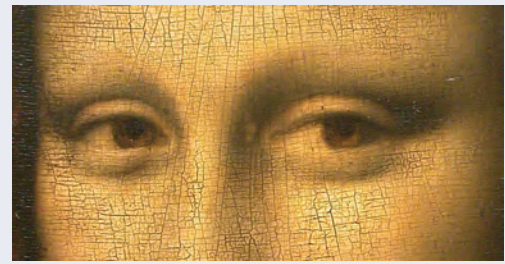
**Acrylic** painting is relatively modern and uses water-soluble acrylic polymer as the binding agent. Water is the solvent. Acrylic dries very quickly and can be used to build up thick layers of paint in a short time. One problem with acrylic is that the colors can subtly change as it dries, making this medium less suitable for portraiture or other projects where accurate color is vital. Nevertheless, acrylic paint is preferred over oil paint by many artists today, in part due to its greater ease of use and clean up, and because its rapid drying time allows the artist to work at a faster pace.

**Watercolor** painting suspends colored pigments in water-soluble **gum arabic** distilled from



**Figure 2.9 | *The Sponge Diver***

Artist: Winslow Homer  
 Author: User “Botaurus”  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.8 | Detail of the eyes of *Mona Lisa***

Artist: Leonardo da Vinci  
 Author: User “Cantus”  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

the Acacia tree **as the binder**. Watercolor paints are mixed with water and brushed onto an absorbent surface, usually paper. Before the industrial era, watercolor was used as an outdoor sketching medium because it was more portable than oil paint, which had to be prepared for use and could not be preserved for long periods or easily transported. (Figure 2.9) Today, however, many artists use watercolor as their primary medium.

**Encaustic** uses melted beeswax as the binder and must be applied to rigid supports like wood with heated brushes. The advantage of encaustic is that it remains fresh and vi-



**Figure 2.10 | *Portrait of the Boy Eutyches***

Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC



**Figure 2.11 | *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden***

Artist: Masaccio  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

brant over centuries. Encaustic paintings from ancient Egypt dating to the period of Roman occupation (late first century BCE-third century CE) are as brilliantly colored as when they were first painted. (Figure 2.10)

**Fresco** is the process of painting onto plaster; it is a long-lasting technique. There are two kinds of fresco: **buon fresco**, or “good” fresco, is painting on wet plaster, and **fresco secco**, or dry fresco, is done after the plaster has dried. Paintings made using the buon fresco technique become part of the wall because the wet plaster absorbs the pigment as it is applied. (Figure 2.11) The only way to correct a buon fresco painting is to chip it off the wall and start over. Buon fresco must be done in sections. Each section is called a **giornate**, which is Italian for “a day’s work.” Because it is done on dry plaster, fresco secco is more forgiving, but also less permanent as changes in moisture levels or damage to the wall can harm the painting. Due

to the dry air and stable weather, there are fresco secco murals created as early as 3,000 BCE in ancient Egyptian tombs that remain largely intact. (Figure 2.12)

**Tempera** painting has been around for centuries. The most popular version of painting during the Middle Ages was **egg tempera**, in which dry colored pigments were mixed with egg yolk and applied quickly to a stable surface in layers of short brushstrokes. Egg tempera is a difficult medium to master because the egg yolk mixture dries very quickly, and mistakes cannot be corrected



**Figure 2.12 | *Nebamun Tomb Fresco Dancers and Musicians***

Author: User “Fordmadoxfraud”  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

without damaging the surface of the painting. *The Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510, Italy) is an egg tempera painting. (Figure 2.13)

#### 2.4.1.3 Printmaking

A **print** is an image made by transferring pigment from a **matrix** to a final surface, often but not always paper. Printing allows multiple copies of an artwork to be made. Multiple copies of an individual artwork are called an **edition**.

There are four main types of printmaking: relief, intaglio, planographic, and stencil. **Relief** prints are made by removing material from the **matrix**, the surface the image has been carved into, which is often wood, linoleum, or metal. (Figure 2.14) The remaining surface is covered with ink or pigment, and then paper is pressed onto the surface, picking up the ink. **Letterpress** is a relief printing process that transfers ink to paper but also indents an impression into the surface of the paper, creating a texture to the print that is often considered a sign of high quality.

**Intaglio** prints are made when a design is scratched into a matrix, usually a metal plate. Ink is wiped across the surface, and collects in the scratches. Excess ink is wiped off and paper is pressed onto the plate, picking up the ink from the scratches. Intaglio prints may also include texture.

**Planographic** prints are made by chemically altering a matrix to selectively accept or reject water. Originally, limestone was used for this process since it naturally repels water but can



**Figure 2.13 | *The Birth of Venus***

Artist: Sandro Botticelli

Author: User "Dcoetzee"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.14 | Relief Wood Carving**

Author: User "Zephyris"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 2.15 | Stone used for lithography print**

Author: User "AndreasPraefcke"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

be chemically changed to absorb it. In stone matrix **lithography**, black grease pencil drawings are made on a flat block of limestone, which is then treated with nitric acid. (Figure 2.15) The nitric acid does not dissolve the stone, but changes it chemically so that it absorbs water. The grease pencil is removed, and the stone wetted. Where the grease pencil protected the stone from the acid, the limestone repels water and remains dry. Next, oil-based ink is rolled over the stone. Where the stone is dry, the ink will stick, but where the stone is wet, the ink will not. The image is “brought up” to the desired darkness by passing an ink covered roller on it, then it is printed by pressing paper onto the surface to pick up the ink. Most commercial printing today is **lithographic printing**, using aluminum plates instead of limestone blocks, or offset printing, where the inked image is transferred from a metal plate to a rubber cylinder and then to paper. (Figure 2.16)



**Figure 2.16 | Lithographic Press**

Photographer: Clemens Pfeiffer

Author: User "Panoramafotors"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Stencil** prints are made by passing inks through a porous fine mesh matrix. In **silkscreen printmaking**, for example, silk fabric is mounted tightly on a rigid frame. Areas of the fabric are blocked off to form an image. The fabric-lined frame is placed on top of paper, canvas, or cloth. Ink is then pulled across the frame with a rubber blade. Where the fabric is blocked off, the ink does not transfer. Where the fabric is clear, ink is pushed through onto the receiving surface.

It is important to be able to distinguish between original prints and reproductions. **Original prints** are handmade prints. Since each print is subtly different due to its handmade character, each print is considered an original work of art. (Figure 2.17) Editions of original prints can range from a few to dozens or hundreds of copies. **Reproductions** are mechanically produced. An original artwork is photographed; the photograph is then transferred to a print-



**Figure 2.17 | Artist Preparing Linoleum Prints**

Author: Kyle Van Horn

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY 2.0



**Figure 2.18 | Offset Press**

Author: User "RémiH"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

ing plate on a mechanical press. Each print is nearly identical, and editions can run into the thousands or tens of thousands. (Figure 2.18)

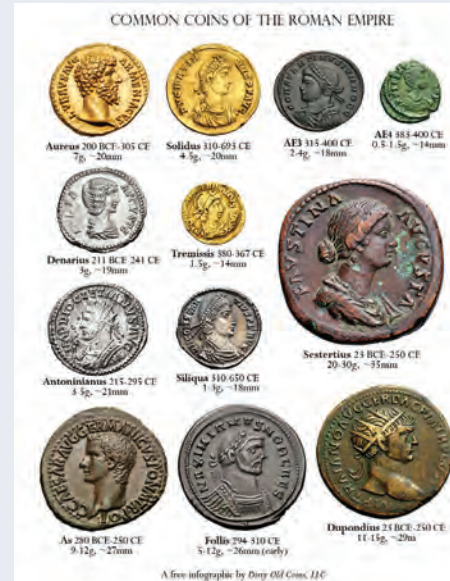
The value of an individual print depends on a number of factors, including whether it is an original print or a reproduction and the number of prints in an edition. Recently a new kind of print has become popular, the **gicleé**. This is essentially a digital inkjet print. Those who buy gicleé prints should be careful that only acid-free paper and archival inks are used in its production. The fibers that make paper can come from many different sources, some of which contain acid that will turn the paper yellow with age. Over time, ink

pigments can be fugitive, lose color intensity or even shift in hue. These effects will lower the value of the print. Acid-free paper and archival inks resist these defects and preserve the original appearance of the art object, thus maintaining its value.

### 2.4.2 Three-Dimensional Art

**Three-dimensional art** goes beyond the flat surface to encompass height, width, and depth. There are four main methods used in producing art in three dimensions. All three-dimensional art uses one or a combination of these four methods: carving, modeling, casting, or assembly. A form of three-dimensional art that emerged in the twentieth century is installation, a work in which the viewer is surrounded within a space or moves through a space that has been modified by the artist.

**Sculpture** can be either **freestanding**—"in the round"—or it can be **relief**—sculpture that projects from a background surface. There are two categories of relief sculpture: low relief and high relief. In **low relief**, the amount of projection from the background surface is limited. A good example of low relief sculpture would be coins, such as these ancient Roman types dating from c. 300 BCE to c. 400 CE. (Figure 2.19) Also, much Egyptian



**Figure 2.19 | Common Roman Coins**

Creator: Rasiel Suarez  
Author: User "FS11"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: GFDL

wall art is low relief. (Figure 2.20) **High relief sculpture** is when more than half of the sculpted form projects from the background surface. This method generally creates an effect called **undercut**, in which some of the projected surface is separate from the background surface. Mythological scenes depicted on the Parthenon, an ancient Greek temple, (Figure 2.21) and the *Corporate Wars* series (*Corporate Wars*, Robert Longo: [http://media.mutualart.com/Images/2009\\_07/24/0205/582184/49777ffa-d61f-42aa-a3f1-9c47ed564b05\\_g.Jpeg](http://media.mutualart.com/Images/2009_07/24/0205/582184/49777ffa-d61f-42aa-a3f1-9c47ed564b05_g.Jpeg)) by Robert Longo (b. 1953, USA) are both examples of high relief using undercut.

**Modeling** is an **additive** process in which easily shaped materials like clay or plaster are built up to create a final form. Some modeled



**Figure 2.21 | Lapith fighting a centaur**

Author: User "Jastrow"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.20 | Egyptian Relief Carving**

Author: User "GDK"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.22 | Bust of Maximilien Robespierre**

Artist: Claude-André Deseine

Author: User "Rama"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 2.0



**Figure 2.23 | A selection of woodcarving gouges, chisels, and a mallet**

Author: User "Aerolin55"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 2.24 | Sculptor Carving Stone**

Author: Bain News Service

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.25 | Marble statue of Eirene (the personification of peace)**

Artist: Kephisodotos

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

forms begin with an **armature**, or rigid inner support often made of wire. An armature allows a soft or fluid material like wet clay, which would collapse under its own weight, to be built up. This method of sculpting includes most classical portrait sculpture in **terra cotta**, or baked clay. (Figure 2.22) Clay lends itself to modeling and is thus a popular medium for work of this kind, although clay may also be carved and cast.

**Carving** is the removal of material to form an art object. Carving is a **subtractive** process that usually begins with a block of material, most commonly stone. Tools—usually metal or metal tipped—are used to chip away the stone until the final form emerges. (Figure 2.23) The



**Figure 2.26 | Naophorous Block Statue of a Governor of Sais, Psamtik**

Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC



**Figure 2.27 | Jade ornament of flowers with grape design**

Author: User "Mountain"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

from not only the artist's intention, but also the subtle shifts caused by unpredictable variations in the stone causing the artist to "change course" when too much stone came away. This possibility is not to suggest that trained sculptors do not know the limits of their medium: artists often encounter surprises and innovative ones can sometimes work solutions that incorporate them.

Different kinds of stone vary in hardness as well as color and appearance. Not all stone is suitable for sculpting. Marble, a form of limestone, was preferred by the ancient Greeks and Romans for its softness and even color. (Figure 2.25) Diorite, schist (a form of slate), and Greywacke (a form of granite) were preferred by Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures for their hardness and permanence. (Figure 2.26) The Chinese have traditionally used jade, a hard, brittle stone found in numerous shades, most commonly green, to indicate wisdom, power, and wealth. (Figure 2.27)

Wood is also often used as a carving material. Because of variations in grain size and texture, different species of wood have different sculptural qualities. In general, wood is prized for its flexibility and ease of forming, though it reacts to changes in humidity and lacks permanence. During the Heian era (794-1185 CE), the Japanese artist Jocho used joined wood to construct his sculpture of the *Seated Buddha*. (Figure 2.28)

**Casting** is a process that replaces, or **substitutes**, an initial sculptural material such as wax or clay with another, usually more permanent, material such as **bronze**, an **alloy**, or mixture of copper and tin. Casting is also a process that makes it possible to create multiple versions of the same object.

In the **lost wax process**, an original sculpture is modeled, often in clay, coated in wax, and then covered in plaster to create a **mold**. When the plaster dries, it is heated to melt the wax, which is poured out of the mold. Molten metal is then poured into the space within the mold between the (now lost) wax coating and the original sculpted form. When the metal has cooled and solidified, the plaster is broken away to reveal the cast metal object. (Figure 2.29) In order to create multiple versions of the object, the mold must be made in such a way that it can be removed without being destroyed. (Figure 2.30) This operation is generally achieved by separating a mold into several sections while the original is being cast. Sectional molds are also used to cast original objects that cannot be melted or otherwise removed from the mold. To cast the form, the original is removed, and the sections are then re-fastened together. In some cases, complex sculptures are cast in several pieces and the resulting metal sections are welded together.

**Assembly**, or assemblage, is a fairly recent type of sculpture. Before the modern period, carv-



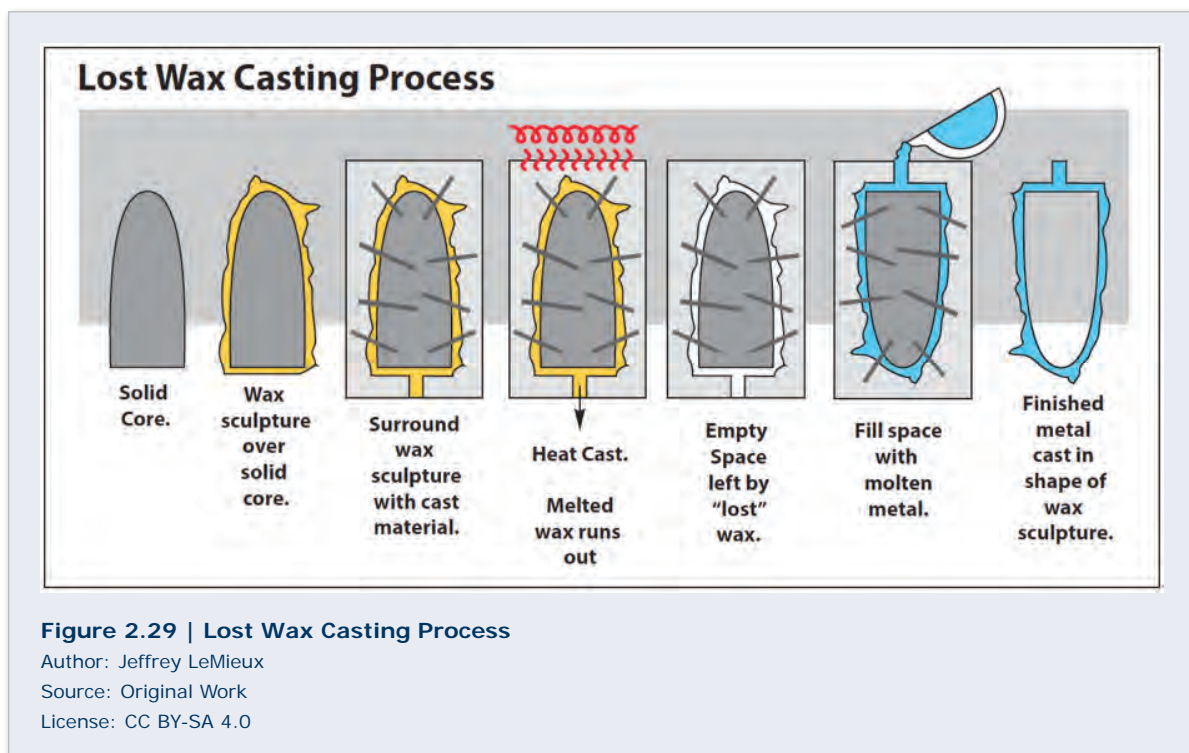
**Figure 2.28 | Seated Buddha**

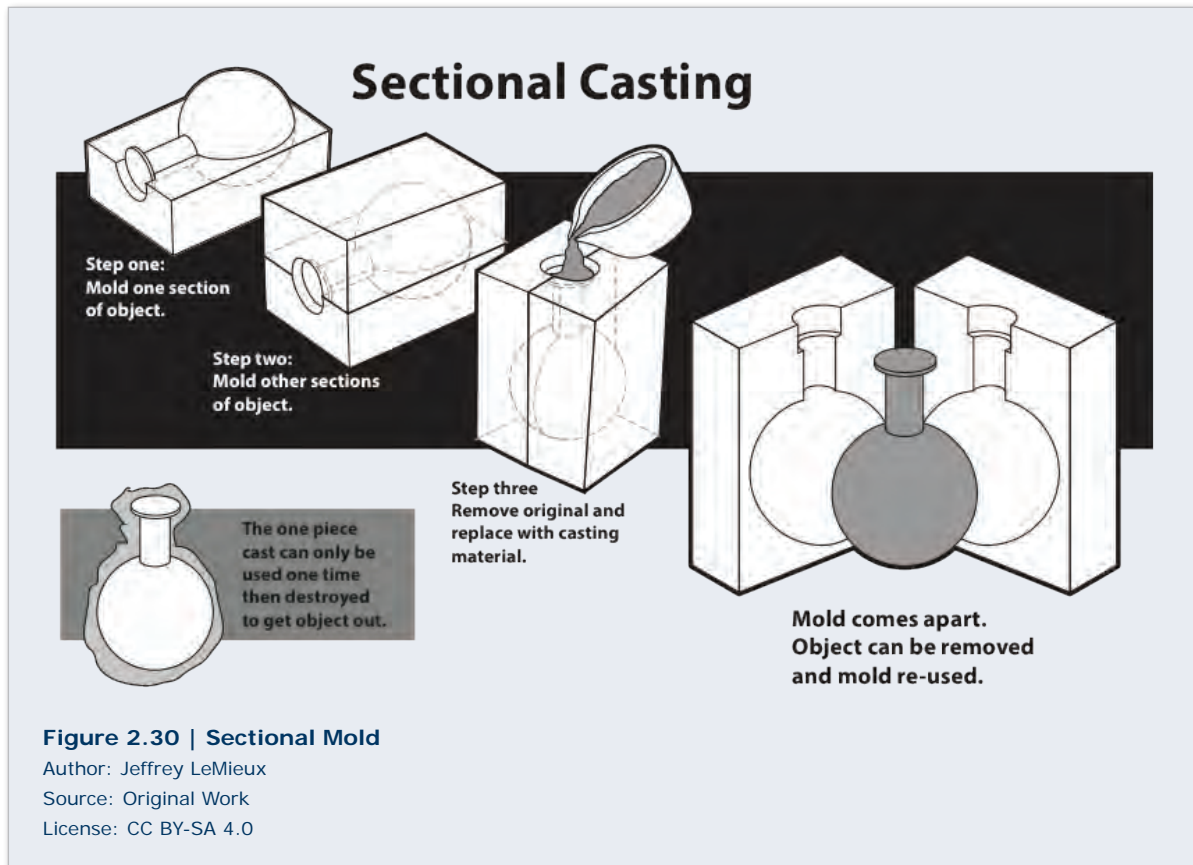
Artist: Jōchō

Author: User "Kosigrim"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

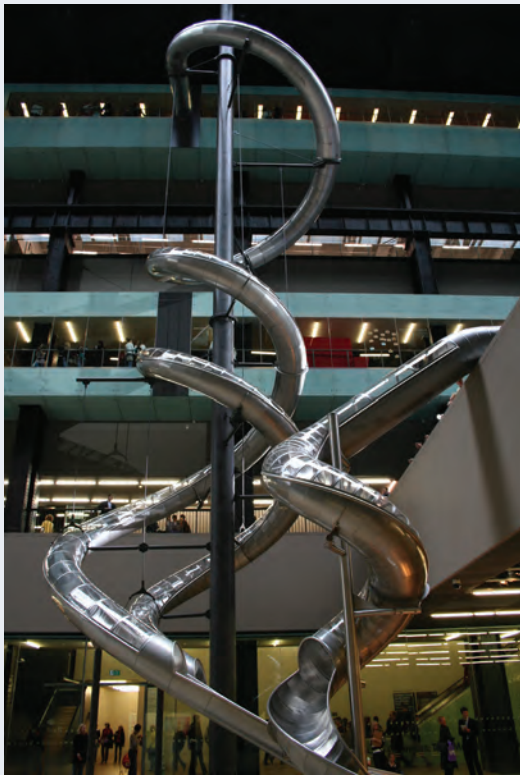




ing, casting, and modeling were the only accepted methods of making fine art sculpture. Recently, sculptors have enlarged their approach and turned to the process of **assembly**, manually attaching objects and materials together. Assemblies are often composed of **mixed media**, a process in which disparate objects and substances are used in order to achieve the desired effect.

Because she spent time near a cabinetry workshop, Louise Nevelson (1899-1988, Ukraine, lived USA) would retrieve wooden cut-offs and other discarded objects to use in her sculpture. Her art practice involved the use of **found objects**. Consider Nevelson's *Sky Cathedral*. (*Sky Cathedral*, Louise Nevelson: <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/81006>) She filled individual wooden boxes with found objects. She then arranged these boxes into large assemblies and painted them a single color, usually black or white. Each sub-unit box in the sculpture can be read as a separate point of view or separate world. The effect of the whole is to recognize that both unity and diversity are possible in a single artwork.

**Installation** is related to **assembly**, but the intent is to transform an interior or exterior space to create an experience that surrounds and involves the viewer in an unscripted interaction with the environment. The viewer is then immersed *in* the art, rather than experiencing the art from a distance. For example, Carsten Höller (b. 1961, Belgium, lives Sweden) installed *Test Site* in the Turbine Hall, a five-story open space, at the Tate Modern in London. (Figure 2.31) Part of a series of slides Höller created at museums worldwide, he wanted to encourage visitors



**Figure 2.31 | Test Site**

Artist: Carsten Höller  
 Author: User "The Lud"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

to use the practical, though unconventional, means of transport, and, while doing so, to experience the momentary loss of control and whatever emotional response each individual felt.

An installation that is intended for a particular location is called a **site-specific** installation. Good examples of site-specific installations would be *Tilted Arc* by Richard Serra (b. 1939, USA), (*Tilted Arc*, Richard Serra: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tilted\\_arc\\_en.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tilted_arc_en.jpg)); *Lightning Field* by Walter De Maria (1935-2013, USA), (*Lightning Field*, Walter de Maria: [http://sculpture1.wikispaces.com/file/view/Walter\\_de\\_Maria\\_Lightning\\_Field\\_1977.jpg/310921734/800x686/Walter\\_de\\_Maria\\_Lightning\\_Field\\_1977.jpg](http://sculpture1.wikispaces.com/file/view/Walter_de_Maria_Lightning_Field_1977.jpg/310921734/800x686/Walter_de_Maria_Lightning_Field_1977.jpg)); *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson (1938-1973, USA), (Figure 2.32); and *Cadillac Ranch* by the art group known as Ant Farm. (Figure 2.33) In part because of the large scale of many of these works, installation is an increasingly popular form of public artwork.

**Kinetic art** is art that moves or appears to move. Generally this art is sculptural. Good examples of kinetic artworks are the suspended, freely moving **mobiles** of Alexander Calder (1898-1976, USA) that are meant to change shape as part of their design. (*Nénuphars Rouges*, Alexander Calder: [http://www.wikiart.org/en/alexander-calder/red-lily-pads-n-nuphars-rouges-1956?utm\\_source=returned&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_campaign=referral](http://www.wikiart.org/en/alexander-calder/red-lily-pads-n-nuphars-rouges-1956?utm_source=returned&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=referral)) *Homage to New York* was a work of kinetic art Jean Tinguely (1925-1991, Switzerland) intended to self-destruct, although it never completed its purpose because a local



**Figure 2.32 | Spiral Jetty**

Artist: Robert Smithson  
 Author: User "Yonidebest"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 2.0

fire department stepped in and stopped the process. (*Homage to New York*, Jean Tinguely: <http://www.wikiart.org/en/jean-tinguely/homage-to-new-york-1960>) Reuben Margolin (USA) is a contemporary artist who uses intersecting waves to create beautifully undulating sculptures. Click the following link to view a video of Margolin's *Square Wave*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UQtDbybSWc>. Beginning with simple materials like paper towel tubes, fishing swivels, and fishing line, and then moving to larger, more complex

sculptures using more permanent materials like wood, metal, and wire, Margolin has made a career of creating meditatively flowing sculptures.



**Figure 2.33 | Cadillac Ranch, Amarillo**

Artist: Ant Farm

Author: Richie Diesterheft

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY 2.0

### 2.4.3 Four-Dimensional Art

**Four-dimensional art**, or **time-based art** is a relatively new mode of art practice that includes video, projection mapping, performance, and new media art.

**Video art** uses the relatively new technology of projected moving images. These images can be displayed on electronic monitors or projected onto walls or even buildings; they use light as a medium. The early video constructions of Nam June Paik (1932–2006, South Korea, lived USA) are a good example. In *TV Cello*, video monitors are assembled in the shape of a cello. (*TV Cello*, Nam June Paik: <http://a141.idata.over-blog.com/356x499/1/96/04/42/s-rie-F/Paik-N.-J.-TV-Cello.jpg>) When a bow was drawn across this object, images of a woman playing a cello appeared on the screens.

**Projection mapping** is another use of video projection. One or more two- or three-dimensional objects (often buildings) are spatially mapped into a virtual program that then allows the image to conform to the surface of the object upon which it is projected. (Figure 2.34) Evan Roth (b. 1978, USA, lives France) creates graffiti as a video projection and then photographs the results; thus, the work is temporary. This method of spatially augmented reality has been used by numerous artists (and advertisers) to “tag” everything from public spaces to the human face, without leaving permanent marks.

**Performance art** is art in which the artist’s medium is an action. Performance artworks are generally documented by photography, but the artwork is in the act itself. *Cut Piece* is a performance work Yoko Ono (b. 1933, Japan, lives USA) originally created in 1964 in which audience members were given scissors to cut off pieces of her clothing while the artist sat on a stage.

(*Cut Piece*, Yoko Ono: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:CutPieceOno.jpeg>) As the artist passively allowed her garments to fall away, the participants and viewers were in control of her transformation from whole to segmented.

**New media art** usually refers to interactive works such as digital art, computer animation, video games, robotics, and 3D printing, where artists explore the expressive potential of these new creative technologies. The international connectivity of the Internet has ushered in a globalization of information exchange which includes the arts. One example of the use of new media in art would be *10,000 Moving Cities* by Marc Lee (b. 1969, Switzerland). In this work, a viewer wears a video projection headset in which images from a chosen city are projected onto a digital urban architecture. The viewer can move within the new space through head motion. Real time social-media images and text from the chosen city are also captured and projected.

## 2.5 FORM AND COMPOSITION

When looking at art, many people today take a holistic or **gestalt** approach to understanding it. In this approach, the work of art is experienced as a single unified whole and an intuitive conclusion is drawn. This approach to art is a good place to start, but it can also be useful to examine the individual parts of an artwork and the relationships those parts have to the whole. When we examine an artwork by taking it apart, we are looking at its design. Design is divided into two broad categories: the elements of design and the principles of design. The **elements of design** are the physical parts of the artwork, or the **form**. The **principles of design** are the ways in which those parts are arranged or used, or the **composition**.

### 2.5.1 Elements of Design

A **design** is a governing plan or approach by which various parts of an artwork are created and assembled. It is rare to find a work of art that is entirely accidental or has come wholly out of the unconscious intuition of an artist. Further, looking at the way in which various parts of a work of art are arranged—even an intuitive or accidental work—can reveal clues to the goals and beliefs of the artist, the community in which the artist has worked, and the problems the work of art was meant to address.



**Figure 2.34 | Cathédrale St Jean illuminée**

Author: User "Gonedelyon"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: User "Gonedelyon"

There are six basic elements of design: line, shape, mass/volume, perspective, texture, and color. One way to think of these elements of design is to “walk up the ladder” of dimension. Our perceived world has three dimensions of space and one of time. Mathematically, a point has zero dimensions. A line has one dimension, length. A shape has two dimensions, length and height. A form with mass or volume has three dimensions, length, height, and width. In moving from points to volumes, we have “walked up the ladder” of dimension from zero to three. In addition to the three dimensions of physical space, there are two more things artists can incorporate into a given work. They can introduce texture, and they can introduce color.

Here is a brief explanation of the definition and dynamics of each element of design.

### 2.5.1.1 Line

Line is the first order element of design. A **line** is an infinite series of points that are arranged in a direction. The direction of a line may be straight (unchanging) or curved (changing). All kinds of objects are **linear**, or predominantly formed by using lines. **Calligraphy**, or “beautiful writing,” is one popular use of line. The character of line in writing has two main functions. First, the linear figure or shape of a written symbol denotes its meaning. Second, the manner in which the figure is created can be seen as expressive in itself. A **tughra**, or the calligraphic signature of a sultan, and the refined text of Arabic calligraphy are renowned for their expressive beauty, as are many works of Asian script. In many writing cultures, the beauty of the script is as important as the message the script contains. (Figure 2.35)



**Figure 2.35 | Tughra (Official Signature) of Sultan Süleiman the Magnificent**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

One quality of line is gesture. **Gesture** is the line produced by the movement of the artist’s hand, arm, or body, of a kind of dance with the material, as can be seen in this photograph of Jackson Pollock in the midst of painting. (Jackson Pollock: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/b7/Jackson-Pollock.jpg>) For example, short, uneven staccato lines may be read as impatient, or lacking in confidence or grace. Evenly drawn horizontal lines express calm. Straight lines can represent rigidity, which is neither good nor bad, but depends on context. A rigid bridge is a good



**Figure 2.36 | Nude Male Figure with a Sword**

Artist: Alexandre Cabanel  
Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC

or light and dark. These crosshatching lines generally follow the shape of an object. (Figures 2.4 and 2.36)

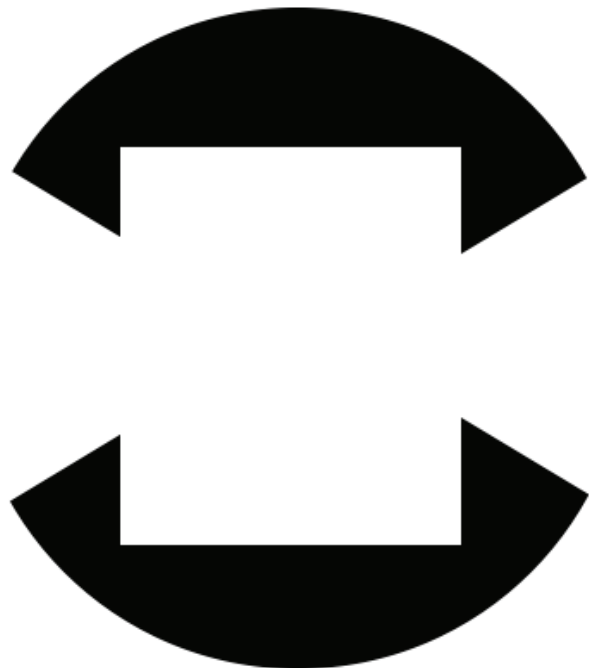
Some lines are not drawn at all. Instead, they are **implied** or suggested by an intentional alignment of shapes. The image of the square inside the circle is an example of implied line. (Figure 2.37) Lines that converge beyond the edge of an artwork are another because they imply a distant intersection. A third example of a line that is not actually there is **psychic** line. Two people looking at one another in an artwork create a psychic line between them.

Line has **expressive** content. By its nature, a line compels the viewer to follow

thing for those who depend on it not to give way. A rigid tree in a windstorm will sometimes be uprooted.

**Contour** is the line where differing areas meet and form edges. Human visual perception includes an enhanced ability to detect edges in nature. Contour lines follow the shapes of objects where they stand out from backgrounds. In mapmaking, contour lines indicate the shape of the landscape in regular increments of vertical height. On contour maps, lines that appear close together indicate a rapid change in height. Lines that are far apart indicate more gentle slopes. (GroundTruth Contours: [http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/w/images/thumb/b/b5/GroundTruthContours\\_Detail.png/300px-GroundTruthContours\\_Detail.png](http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/w/images/thumb/b/b5/GroundTruthContours_Detail.png/300px-GroundTruthContours_Detail.png))

**Crosshatching** is the use of uniformly spaced intersecting lines that create the perception of value



**Figure 2.37 | Square inside a circle, demonstration of implied lines**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux  
Source: Original Work  
License: CC BY-SA 4.0

along its path. The character of the line can control the direction, speed, and attention of the viewer. The movement of a line can be curved or angular. It can progress smoothly or with a staccato rhythm. A line can be thick or thin, pale or bold. These qualities are “read” rationally and emotionally; thus, line can have an expressive and emotional content that can often be found by viewer introspection.

Line is not just a two-dimensional design element. For example, wire is a linear medium that can be extended into three dimensions. Alexander Calder’s wire sculptures and portraits are fine examples of the expressive power of line in three dimensions. (*Acrobats*, Alexander Calder: [http://www.calder.org/system/post\\_images/images/000/001/082/medium/A00504.jpg?1352222725](http://www.calder.org/system/post_images/images/000/001/082/medium/A00504.jpg?1352222725)) Another example is Pablo Picasso drawing in space with light for photographer Gjon Mili (1904-1984, Albania, lived USA) for *Life* magazine in 1949. (Light Drawings, Pablo Picasso: <http://www.designboom.com/art/pablo-picassos-light-drawings-from-1949/>)

### 2.5.1.2 Shape

The design element of shape is the next element in the walk up the ladder of dimension. **Shape** has two dimensions, length and width. Shapes can be regular or irregular, simple or complex. Shapes can have hard or soft edges. **Hard-edged** shapes have clearly defined boundaries, while **soft-edged** shapes slowly fade into their backgrounds. There are two broad categories of shape: geometric and organic. **Geometric shapes** are regular and ordered shapes using straight lines and curves. **Organic shapes** are generally irregular and often chaotic. Hans Arp (1886-1966, France, lived Switzerland), in his work *Untitled*, used torn paper and cut shapes to create an abstract composition. While squares are geometric objects, Arp’s torn and irregular edges transform them into organic shapes. The orientation of those shapes roughly approximates a grid structure, but again, their deviation from a regular order implies a chaotic and accidental arrangement. In this work, Arp is dancing on the “edge of order.” (Figure 2.38)



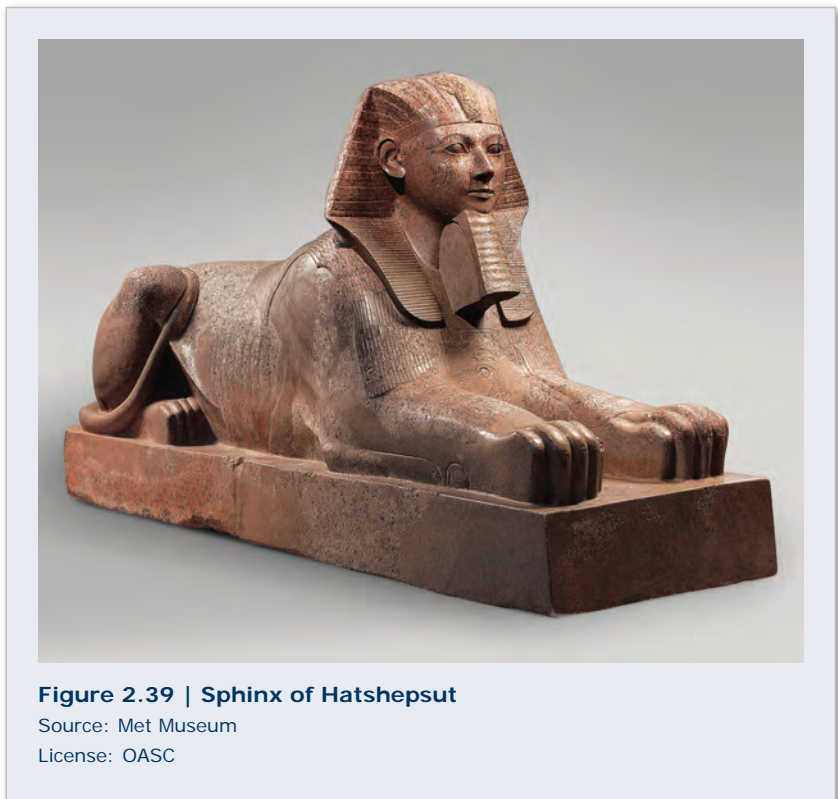
In two-dimensional artworks, shapes are figures placed on a two-dimensional surface that is known as a **ground**. This creates a relationship between foreground and background known as the **figure/ground relation**. The **figure** is the object that appears to be in front of the **ground**. In some artworks this relationship is intentionally unclear. In this case, an effect known as figure/ground reversal can occur. In **figure/ground reversal**, what was seen as the positive shape of the figure can also be seen as the negative space of the ground. This effect disrupts the sense of space in an artwork and disorients the viewer. (*Escher Woodcut II Strip 3*, Maurits Cornelis Escher: <http://www.tau.ac.il/~tsurxx/FigureGround/Escher2.GIF>)

### 2.5.1.3 Mass/Volume

The next and final step up the dimensional ladder is volume or mass. **Volume** has three dimensions: length, width, and height. Volumes may have interior or exterior contours, and they may be closed or open in form. **Mass** is the quantity of matter, often meaning its weight. A **closed form** is a volume that is not pierced or perforated. One goal of ancient Egyptian sculpture was to last for eternity. Therefore, they used closed sculptural forms, which are more structurally robust and more resistant to wear or breakage. (Figures 2.26 and 2.39) Empty space surrounds a closed form but does not move through it. Conversely,

empty space surrounds but also moves through an **open form**. Open form sculptures are closer in shape to the figures they represent and thus are more lifelike or “true” to the original reference.

Modern sculptors such as Henry Moore (1898-1986, England) have explored the abstract use of closed and open forms, as well as negative and positive space. (*Reclining Figure 1969-70*, Henry Moore: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/o/o8/PikiWiki\\_Israel\\_12097\\_reclining\\_figure\\_by\\_henry\\_moore\\_in\\_tel\\_aviv.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/o/o8/PikiWiki_Israel_12097_reclining_figure_by_henry_moore_in_tel_aviv.jpg)) In three-dimensional art, **positive space** is the space occupied by a given volume, while **negative space** is the empty space within that volume. Notice how the figure twists around an imaginary boundary. The “saddle” in the middle suggests an invisible weight pressing down on the form there. This sculpture depends as much on the empty space around it as it does on the volume occupied by the bronze. In addition, its mass is lessened by the openness of its form, especially when compared to ancient Egyptian sculpture, an entirely closed form.



**Figure 2.39 | Sphinx of Hatshepsut**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

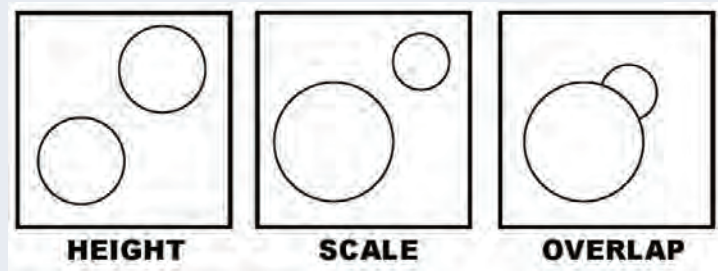
To convey the three dimensionality, mass and volume, of forms on a flat surface, artists use **chiaroscuro** (Italian: “clear-dark”) or varying shades of light and dark. As a form turns toward a light source it appears brighter, and as it turns away from the light source it appears darker; the shift in light and shadow creates the illusion of volume in space. The face and hands of Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* are considered masterpieces of chiaroscuro. (Figure 2.7)

#### 2.5.1.4 Perspective

**Perspective** in art is the illusion of space on a flat surface. Before the discovery of the geometric system of linear perspective in fifteenth-century Italy, the illusion of space was created by using three main visual cues to the recession of space. These three cues are height, scale, and overlap. Objects that are higher on the drawing surface, objects that are smaller in scale, and objects that are partially obscured by other objects all appear further away in space. (Figure 2.40)

**Linear perspective** is based on the regular geometric recession of space. Linear perspective uses a vanishing point and horizon line. The **vanishing point** is the spot where all receding lines seem to converge on the horizon line. The **horizon line** is the set of all possible eye-level vanishing points. (Figure 2.41) **Orthogonal lines** are the lines that appear to meet at the vanishing point and imply the regular recession of space. Horizon lines and vanishing points can provide clues to the artist’s intent. In Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, for example, the artist has located the vanishing point directly behind the head of Jesus. (see Figure 1.25) Because the vanishing point is the viewer’s vision extended infinitely in one direction, Leonardo’s placement of the vanishing point behind the head of Jesus associates Him with the infinity of the Christian God.

Before linear perspective was formulated as a coherent geometric system, painters used intuitive perspective to portray receding space. **Intuitive perspective** acknowledges that receding lines converge, but does not recognize that they converge at a single horizon line and vanishing point. Nonetheless, even

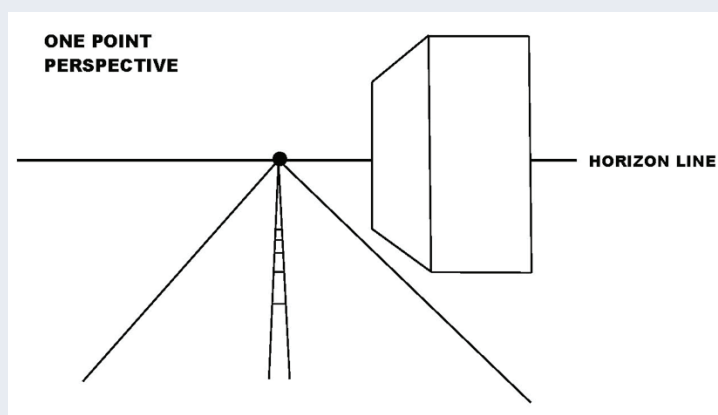


**Figure 2.40 | Height, Scale, and Overlap**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux

Source: Original Work

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**Figure 2.41 | Height, Scale, and Overlap**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux

Source: Original Work

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when paintings lack a rigorously coherent geometric system of linear perspective, determining where the horizon would be can inform us about how the artist views the subject. Compare two paintings of the same name, *Madonna Enthroned*, one by Cimabue (1240-1302, Italy) and the other by Giotto (1266/7-1337, Italy). (Figures 2.42 and 2.43) Both paintings use intuitive perspective. In Cimabue's painting of 1285, the implied horizon is low and the viewer sits at the foot of the throne, while Giotto's image, painted in 1310, has the horizon higher, and thus the viewer is on the same level as the Madonna. This difference of viewpoint signifies changing ideas about the Madonna's relation to the individual. Cimabue's painting places the viewer in subservient homage, while Giotto's painting may be seen as more approachable, indicative of a tiny but significant shift in European thought that eventually blossomed into the Italian Renaissance.

There are different types of linear perspective. The main types are one-, two-, and three-point perspective. The distinction is in the number of vanishing points used. **One-point perspective** uses a horizon line and one main vanishing point and is normally used when simple views are



**Figure 2.42 | Santa Trinita Madonna**

Artist: Cimabue

Author: User "Eugene"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



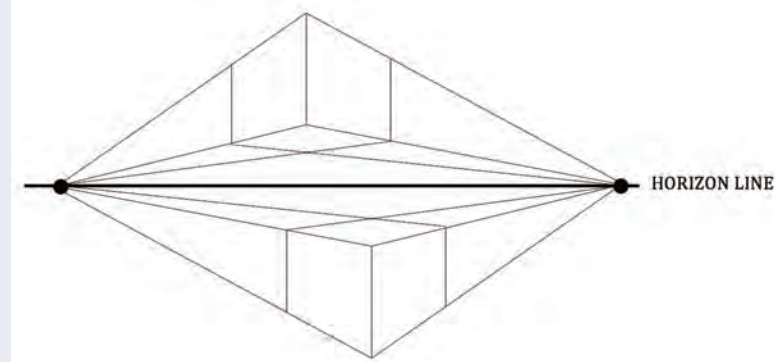
**Figure 2.43 | The Ognissanti Madonna**

Artist: Giotto

Author: User "Shizhao"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.44 | Two-Point Perspective**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux

Source: Original Work

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depicted, such as a railway track disappearing into the distance directly in front of the spectator. **Two-point perspective** uses a horizon line and two separated vanishing points to present the illusion of a space that recedes in two directions. (Figure 2.44)

**Three-point perspective** incorporates the recession of space in a third, vertical direction above or below the horizon line as well as the two horizontal directions in two-point perspective. As tall buildings recede upward from street level, they also diminish in apparent size in the same way railroad tracks appear to converge in the distance toward the horizon. (Figure 2.45)

Many people make the mistake of thinking that linear perspective gives a completely accurate picture of the world. It does not. Linear perspective is a limited tool for representing how the world looks. It is considered sufficiently “accurate” only within a limited “cone of perception” of about 60 degrees. So while linear perspective is an excellent tool to represent our experience of space, it has limitations that should be recognized.

**Atmospheric perspective** is the way in which the illusion of distance is created on a flat surface through the use of color and focus. In a landscape that extends into the distance, the haze of the intervening air alters the colors and clarity of objects. The further away an object is from the viewer, the more it approaches the color of air, which is a light blue-gray tone. Dark objects become lighter and more blue as they recede from the viewer. Additionally, the contrast between light and dark colored objects and the perception of detail decrease with increasing distance. Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902, Germany, lived USA) used this effect in his painting *The Rocky*



**Figure 2.45 | New York Daily News Building**

Artist: Hugh Ferriss

Author: Dover Publications

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: OASC

*Mountains, Lander's Peak* to give a sense of monumental space. (Figure 2.46)

### 2.5.1.5 Texture

The term **texture** describes the surface quality of an artwork. Texture is an important element of design because it engages the sense of touch as well as vision. Objects can be rough or smooth, wet or dry, sticky or slick, hard or soft, brittle or flexible. The two main approaches to texture are *actual* texture and *implied* or *simulated* texture. **Actual texture** is primarily—though not exclusively—sculptural, while **implied texture** is primarily used in two-dimensional works of art.

The painters of the Northern Renaissance and the Dutch Golden Age, the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, were very interested in the simulation of a wide variety of textures. One main goal of artists from those periods was to excel at telling the truth about the material world. They worked to capture the full visual range of the sense of touch. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669, Netherlands) is well known for his use of **impasto**, or very thick application of paint, in order to heighten the sense



**Figure 2.46** | *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*

Artist: Albert Bierstadt

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



**Figure 2.47** | *Belshazzar's Feast*

Artist: Rembrandt van Rijn

Source: Wikiart

License: Public Domain

of reality in many of his paintings by adding actual texture. This can be seen in his handling of flesh on some of his self-portraits, as well as his rendering of metal and jewelry in his painting of *Belshazzar's Feast*. (Figure 2.47)

### 2.5.1.6 Color

**Color** is the most prominent element of design and is one of the most powerful and yet subjective elements in art. The nineteenth-century American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson noted this subjective quality of color when he wrote, "nature always wears the colors of the spirit."<sup>1</sup> Ideas about color

1 C. A. Bartol, *Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Discourse in West Church* (Boston, Mass: A. Williams & Co., 1882), 14.

can be grouped into three broad categories: the history of color, physics of color, and perception of color.

The earliest use of color was limited to what kinds of pigments or coloring agents could be found in the local environment: ochres (yellow-browns) from various colors of earth, blacks and grays from ashes and burned wood or charcoal, reds and yellows from minerals, plants, and insects. Paleolithic cave painters used these materials for their murals. In addition to natural pigments, ancient Egyptians formulated synthetic pigments such as powdered glass to create Egyptian blue, a distinctive hue used on statues, walls, and monuments. In the Roman Empire, a rare form of purple was extracted from a particular kind of snail and, because of its rarity, was used primarily for royal garments. During the Renaissance, a deep blue was made from a finely ground gemstone, lapis lazuli.

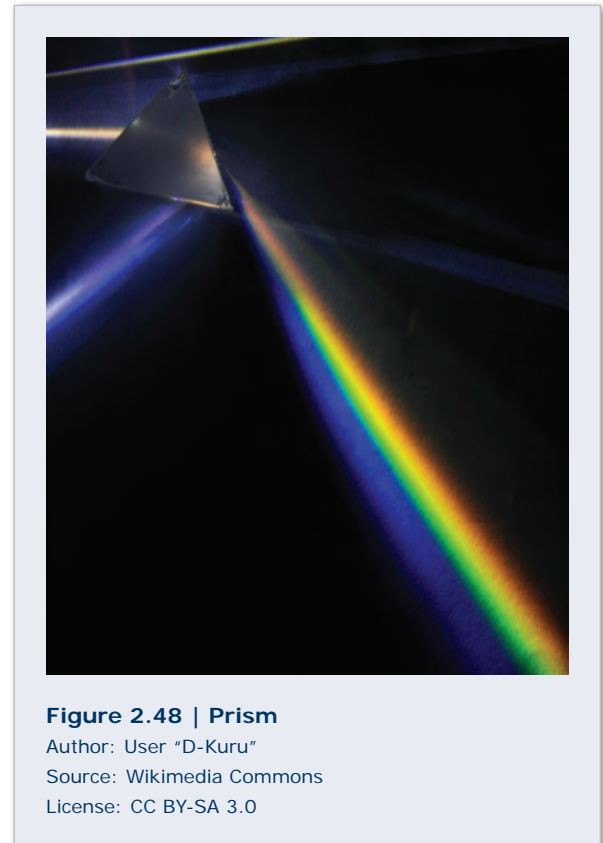
Egyptians associated colors with the gods; the god Amon had blue skin, and Osiris had green. The ancient Greeks took a more scientific approach to color. The ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles thought that color fell into four categories: white/light, dark/black, yellow, and red. The ancient Chinese associated color with the five elements taught in traditional physics: water (black), metal (white), wood (green), earth (yellow), and fire (red). In a number of Asian traditions, black is the color of heaven and white is the color of death or mourning. In western culture the opposite is the case.

Modern ideas about color were greatly refined beginning in the fifteenth century by architect and art theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472, Italy). In his treatise *Della pittura (On Painting)*, published in 1435, Alberti stated:

Through the mixing of colors infinite other hues are born, but there are only four true colors from which more and more other kinds of colors may be thus created. Red is the color of fire, blue of the air, green of the water, and grey of the earth . . . white and black are not true colors but are alterations of other colors.<sup>2</sup>

From this early framework, others made further discoveries.

The term “color” describes the sensation caused by variations in the wavelength and intensity of light as it interacts with the human eye. **Visible light** is the small portion of the **electromagnetic spectrum** that can be seen by humans. When the white light of the sun is passed through a prism, it is **refracted** into the colors of the rainbow from red through orange, yellow, green, and blue to violet. (Figure 2.48)



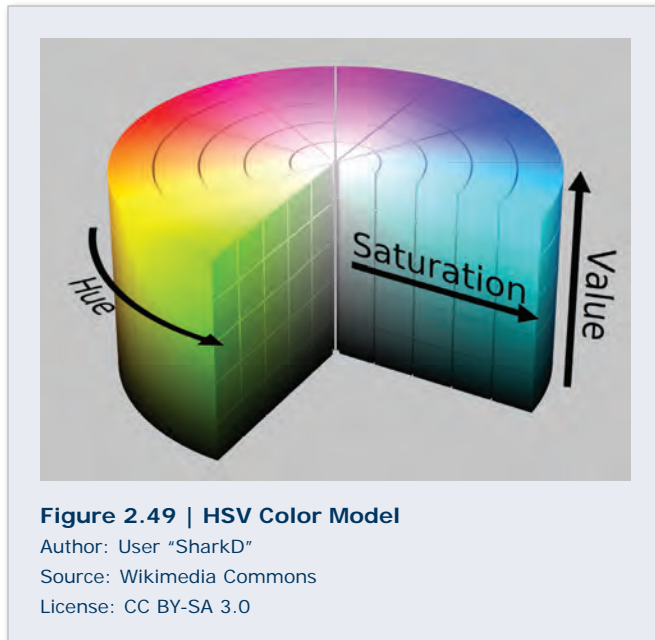
**Figure 2.48 | Prism**

Author: User “D-Kuru”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

<sup>2</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1956), 49-50.

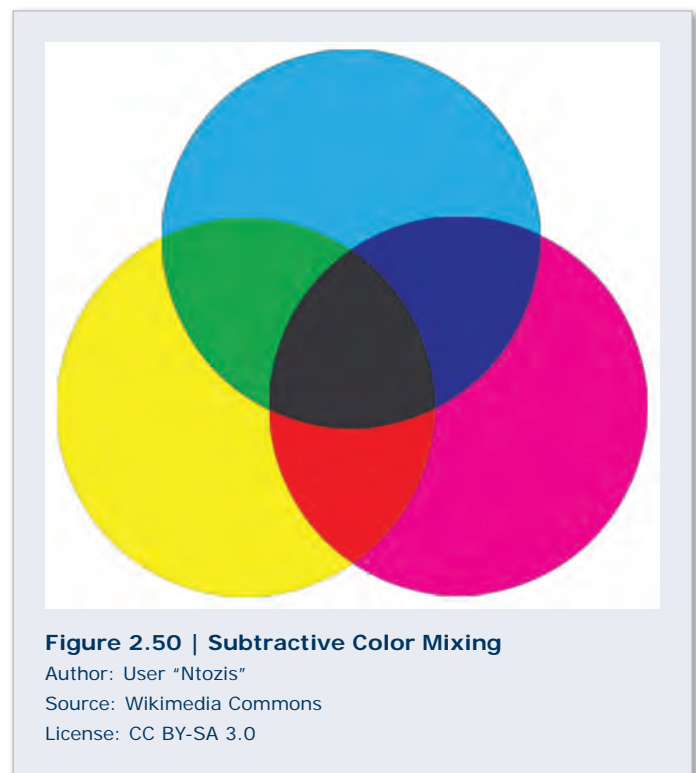


Color as perceived by humans can be broken into three discrete parts: hue, saturation, and brightness. (Figure 2.49) **Hue** is the wavelength of a given color. Longer wavelength colors appear on the red end of the spectrum, while shorter wavelength colors are on the violet end. Hue is the color “name,” e.g., red, yellow, blue, green, etc. Color can be either subtractive or additive. **Saturation** is the purity of a color and ranges from a neutral gray to the pure color while holding brightness as a constant. **Brightness** is the lightness or darkness of a color and ranges from fully illuminated (the pure hue) to fully darkened (black). Each pure hue also has a relative brightness, for example, pure yellow has a greater brightness than pure blue.

**Subtractive color**, or reflective color, occurs when white light is reflected off a surface, and all the colors of the spectrum are absorbed by that surface except for the color that is reflected back to the viewer. Subtractive color mixing starts with the **primary colors** of red, yellow, and blue. When these colors are mixed, the **secondary colors** of green, orange, and purple, are created. Mixing yellow and blue makes green, mixing red and yellow makes orange, and mixing red and blue makes purple.

The English mathematician and physicist Sir Isaac Newton demonstrated in the seventeenth century that white light, when refracted through a prism, could be separated into the visible spectrum. In the nineteenth century, writer and statesmen Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and chemist Michel Eugène Chevreul separately published research that concluded that red, yellow, and blue were primary colors and that all other colors could be mixed from them. At the beginning of the twentieth century, industrial chemists further refined the understanding of printing inks and derived the CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) subtractive color model: beginning with white, as one adds color, the mixture moves toward black. (Figure 2.50)

With the advent of television, computers and digital imaging, the additive model of RGB (red, green, blue) in which colors are added together and the HSB (hue, saturation,

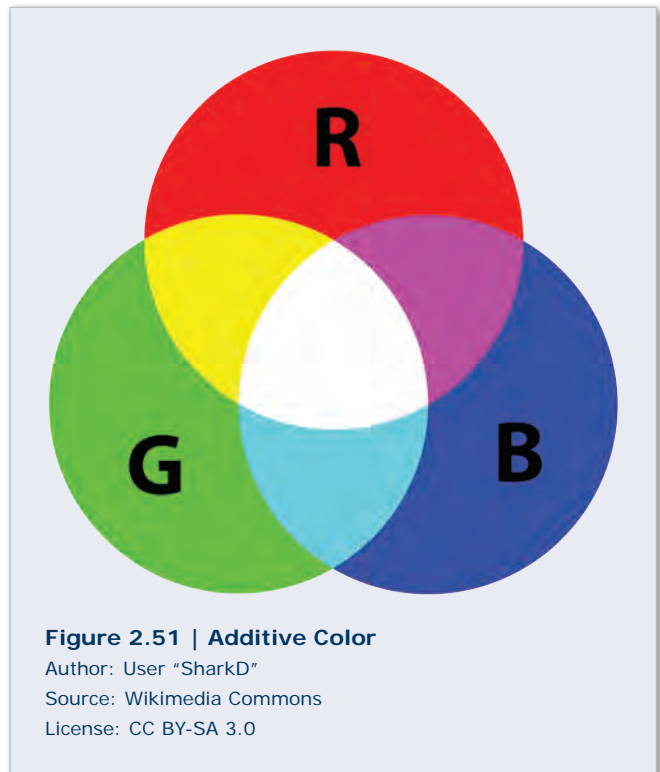


and brightness) color system, based on human perception, have become industry standards. **Additive color**, or transmission color, occurs when light of different colors is projected. The primary hues of additive color are red, green, and blue. This is the RGB color model. (Figure 2.51) When red and green lights overlap, yellow is seen. When red and blue lights overlap, magenta is seen, and when green and blue lights overlap, cyan appears. These are the secondary hues of additive color. When red, green, and blue lights all overlap, white light is seen. Television screens are actually tiny dots, or pixels, of red, green, and blue glowing lights. The colors we see coming off those screens are additive.

Our RGB model of additive color is directly dependent on how human eyes function. The human retina is a sheet of neurons that coats the inside of the eye. Within this sheet of neurons, there are specialized neurons called rods and cones. Rods are neurons that are sensitive to changes in light intensity, and cones are sensitive to red, green, or blue light. The reason we have RGB computer monitors is because we have RGB eyes.

Artists sometimes intentionally exploit the physiology of human vision. Because human vision is limited by unique biology, certain effects become possible. Neurons store chemical neurotransmitters to send signals. If a neuron must continually “fire” because it is being continuously stimulated, it can deplete its supply of neurotransmitter. There is a slight delay between the depletion and restoration

of this chemical supply within the neuron. In the interim, an **after-image** occurs. Look at the green, orange, and black flag for 10 seconds, then look at a blank wall or empty white space. (Figure 2.52) For a few moments, you will see the **complement**, or opposite, of green (red), the complement of orange (blue), and the complement of black (white) in their correct place on the American flag. The fading of this image indicates that the neurotransmitters in the retina have been replenished.



This effect was regularly used by artists during the Impressionist movement (c. 1870-1886). Consider *Impression Sunrise* by Claude Monet (1840-1926, France), one of the first Impressionist paintings. (Figure 2.53) Looking for more than a moment at the expanse of blue in the painting “exhausts” the sensation of blue and creates a complementary afterimage response, which is orange. Then when we look at the orange of the rising sun, we see not only the orange pigment on the painting itself, we also have the additional effect of “tired blue” in our retina. For this reason, the orange paint of the sun looks brighter than it would if we saw that color by itself. Many Impressionist artists intentionally used this effect, and this is one reason why Impressionist paintings tend to look so vibrantly colored.

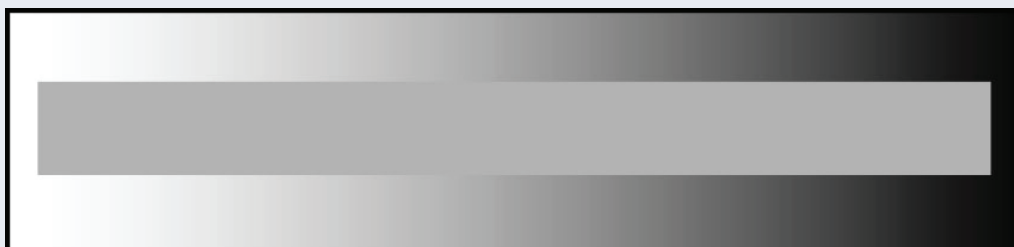


**Figure 2.53 | Impression Sunrise**

Artist: Claude Monet  
 Author: User “Paris 16”  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

In his *Homage to the Square* series of paintings that he began in 1949, the Bauhaus artist Josef Albers (1888-1967, Germany, lived USA) experimented with the relative perception of color. (*Homage to the Square*, Josef Albers: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/20/Josef\\_Albers's\\_painting\\_'Homage\\_to\\_the\\_Square'%2C\\_1965.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/20/Josef_Albers's_painting_'Homage_to_the_Square'%2C_1965.jpg)) His main interest was to demonstrate how a color can be affected by other colors that surround it. His book, *Interaction of Color* (1963), showed that perception of a single color can change depending on context. To demonstrate this, look at the accompanying image. (Figure 2.54) The band of gray in the center is one single color, but it appears to shift when placed on a contrasting background.

Contemporary artists employ specific terms for different uses of color. Natural, or **local color**, describes the body color of a given object. **Observed color**, on the other hand, is how the percep-



**Figure 2.54 | Gradient Illusion**

Author: Jeffrey LeMieux  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

tion of that local color changes as light shifts on an object. In Monet's series of paintings of the Rouen Cathedral, his depictions of different lighting conditions are a good example of the difference between local color and observed color. The color of the stone of the Cathedral is a medium gray. But at different times of day, such as the waning light of sunset, it will reflect the oranges and blues of the lingering sun and the growing shadows. (Figure 2.55)

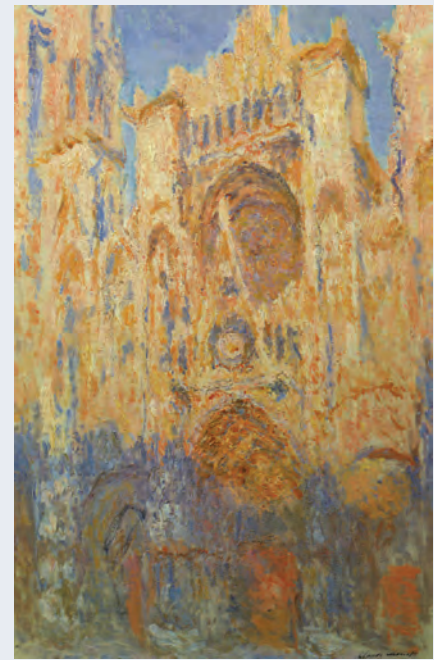
The Fauves were a group of artists in the early twentieth century who used **intuitive color** as the basis of their approach to making art. They were more interested in the expressive power of color than robotically reporting the local or observed color of their subjects. Consider this portrait by Henri Matisse (1869-1954, France) of his wife, Amélie Matisse. (Figure 2.56) Clearly she did not in reality have a green stripe running down the center of her face. The colors chosen by the artist were meant to express something other than simple visual observation.

Another aspect of color used by artists is **color temperature**. Colors can be either warm or cool. The **warm end** of the spectrum includes red, orange, and yellow. The **cool**

end of the visible spectrum contains green, blue, and purple. That said, even yellow can be cool, and even blue can be warm. Warm and cool colors interact in different ways and artists are trained to notice and use this difference; for example, warm colors seem to “advance” while cool colors “recede” in space and consequently shapes represented in those colors appear to be at different depths.

In organizing ideas about color, artists and art theorists have evolved a series of color schemes, or ordered relations between different colors. A **monochromatic** color scheme uses a single color. *The Old Guitarist* by Picasso is a good example of a monochromatic color scheme. (Figure 2.57) The pose of the figure, the texture of the ragged clothing and hair, and the dominating use of blue work together to create a unified emotional response of weariness and loneliness to the image.

A **complementary** color scheme uses colors opposite to each other on the color wheel. As mentioned ear-



**Figure 2.55 | *Rouen Cathedral, Facade (Sunset)***

Artist: Claude Monet

Author: User “Ribberlin”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.56 | *Portrait of Madame Matisse (The green line)***

Artist: Henri Matisse

Author: User “Sparkit”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.57 | *The Old Guitarist***

Artist: Pablo Picasso  
 Author: User "Chimino"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.58 | *Starry Night***

Artist: Vincent van Gogh  
 Author: User "Dcoetzee"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

lier, Impressionist painters exploited the effect of complementary color schemes to heighten the brilliance of their color palettes. While not an Impressionist, in his painting *The Starry Night*, Van Gogh (1853-1890, Netherlands, lived France) uses the blue of the night sky to charge the orange of his crescent moon. (Figure 2.58)

An **analogous** color scheme uses only one area of the color wheel. If the color green is chosen as the anchor color for the scheme, for example, the artist will use colors that occur between the yellow and blue points on the wheel. *Still Life with a Glass and Oysters* by Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1684, Netherlands, lived Belgium) is a good example of an orange/yellow/green analogous scheme. (Figure 2.59) There are many other color schemes that are used for various applications, but these three suffice to illustrate the idea.

## 2.5.2 Principles of Design

The elements of design are the visual components that artists use to make artworks. The principles of design are



**Figure 2.59 | *Still Life with a Glass and Oysters***

Artist: Jan Davidszoon de Heem  
 Source: Met Museum  
 License: OASC

the various ways in which those elements or components are arranged to produce a desired effect. There are as many ways to approach the arrangement of the elements of art as there are artists. Each work of art is unique in its conception, design, and execution. Recent developments in the visual arts have introduced accidental and irrational approaches to artmaking. In these approaches, the outcome of the work of art is not planned. While these works of art may be said to lack conscious design, sometimes they are successful. It is often possible to attribute the success of irrationally or accidentally produced works of art to one or more operating principles of organization. Becoming aware of the principles of design in a work of art allows the viewer to add depth to the analysis of those works. What follows are five principles of design. The list is not exhaustive but is a good place to start.

### 2.5.2.1 Unity/Variety

Unity is found in similarity, while variety is found in difference. A design that shows **unity** is one in which the elements of the work or relations between the elements are similar or identical. Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (see Figure 2.7) is considered a breakthrough in Italian Renaissance art because the soft edges of the figure are similar in approach to the soft tones of the muted background, thus unifying the image. A design that shows **variety** is one in which the elements of the work are varied in size, color, shape, or some other attribute. One concern with the overuse of unity in design is visual monotony. Visual unity may occur on a **conceptual** level as well as a physical one. Elements that are chosen based on a theme can display conceptual unity and yet display a variety of form. A work of art that lacks variety may be monotonous and lack interest. Many artists introduce variety into their compositions by making sure that no two intervals are the same. An **interval** is the space between elements, figures, or objects in a work of art.

### 2.5.2.2 Scale/Proportion

The design principle of **scale** and **proportion** is the issue of size of elements both individually and in relation to other elements. A famous example of the subtle use of scale is the relative size of the figures in Michelangelo's *Pietà*. (Figure 2.60) The sculpture is a depiction of Mary holding the body of her son Jesus after His crucifixion. If we measure the bodies of Jesus and Mary from heel to knee, knee to hip, and so on, and then compare them, we find that Mary is larger than Jesus. In addition, the fig-



**Figure 2.60 | Pietà**

Artist: Michelangelo  
 Author: User "Juan M Romero"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 4.0

ure of Mary is out of proportion, that is, the sizes of the parts of her body are not in alignment. This unusual use of scale and proportion serves to infantilize Jesus in order to subtly emphasize the mother/child relationship. Another use of scale and proportion is the use of forced perspective. (Figure 2.61) **Forced perspective** is the arrangement of figure and ground that distorts the scale of objects, making small objects appear large or large objects appear small by juxtaposing them with opposites. Forced perspective is most convincing when done photographically.

### 2.5.2.3 Balance

The design principle of **balance** is the issue of visual “weight.” Design elements like lines and shapes can attract our attention in a number of ways. For example, they can be brightly colored, they can be large in relation to other similar shapes, or they can be textured in unusual ways. Compositional balance is achieved when these competing visual weights are roughly equivalent. There are two kinds of compositional balance: symmetrical and asymmetrical.



**Figure 2.61 | The Leaning Tower of Pisa: Forced Perspective**

Author: User “Vin7474”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.62 | The Great Wave off Kanagawa**

Artist: Katsushika Hokusai

Author: User “Durova”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

The lines and shapes in a composition that uses the principle of **symmetrical balance** are usually equally arranged around an **axis**, or central line. In *The Sacrament of the Last Supper* by Salvador Dali (1904-1989, Spain), notice the balance of like forms to the left and right of the central figure of Jesus. (*The Sacrament of the Last Supper*, Salvador Dali: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/f/f1/Dali\\_-\\_The\\_Sacrament\\_of\\_the\\_Last\\_Supper\\_-\\_lowres.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/f/f1/Dali_-_The_Sacrament_of_the_Last_Supper_-_lowres.jpg)) Vertical and horizontal axes are generally reserved for very stable compositions, and this strategy is often used in a religious context to imply unchanging truth.

**Asymmetrical** balance is achieved when visual weights do not correspond to one another in shape, size, or placement; they are not distributed equally in a composition. The woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849, Japan) and *Still Life with Apples and a Pot of Primroses* by Paul Cézanne (1839-1906, France) are good examples of asymmetrical compositions. The large space to the right of the Hokusai's *Great Wave* "offsets" the approaching wave in the left half of the composition. (Figure 2.62) In a similar way, the large gray wall to the left in Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples* serves to offset the visually complex flowerpot on the right. (Figure 2.63) In each work, nearly one-third of the composition (the sky and the wall) is unoccupied, so to speak; there are no objects in those areas. Within the two-dimensional space of the work, however, we "read" each blank area as having a visual weight that counterbalances the forms in the remainder of the compositional space.

It is not always necessary for an artwork to be balanced. An obvious imbalance can produce the effect of unsteadiness, disorientation or distress, which can become a useful part of the larger idea within the work of art. The large empty spaces in the painting by Odd Nerdrum (b. 1944, Norway) carry substantial visual weight and imply both physical and psychological isolation. (*Man and Abandoned Landscape*, Odd Nerdrum: <https://s-media-cache-ako.pinimg.com/736x/27/a3/3b/27a33b6c5d3c9e087d20f7cb3c34296a.jpg>)

#### 2.5.2.4 Emphasis/Movement

The design principle of emphasis or movement is the intentional use of directional forces to move the viewer's attention through a work of art. When we see a color shift within a shape, this implies movement. And, when we see a line in a work of art, we are compelled to follow it. For example, arrows of any shape will signify direction and are widely used in advertising to attract and direct the attention of potential customers.

There are more subtle means of moving a viewer's attention through a work of art. *Descent from the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden (1404-1464, Belgium) uses the positions of the figures' arms, legs, and heads to trace the infinity symbol, which resembles the number 8 laying



**Figure 2.63 | *Still Life with Apples and a Pot of Primroses***

Artist: Paul Cézanne  
Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC

on its side. (Figure 2.64) This subtle reminder of Christ's everlasting life is meant to reassure and give hope to the faithful gazing upon this scene of death and grieving.

#### 2.5.2.5 Rhythm/Repetition

The design principle of **rhythm** is the repetition of visual elements to establish a pattern. This pattern can then be used to provide a stage for a special object, or the pattern can be interrupted to direct attention to the change. In his commentary of mass consumer culture, Andy Warhol's use of repetition compels us to notice the small differences between the apparently identical elements of his installation of paintings, *32 Campbell's Soup Cans*. (Figure 2.65)



**Figure 2.64 | *Descent from the Cross (Deposition)***

Artist: Rogier van der Weyden

Author: User "Argento"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 2.65 | *Campbell's Soup Cans***

Artist: Andy Warhol

Author: User "Gorup de Besanez"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 4.0

## 2.6 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

### Key Concepts

Visual art can be divided into dimensional categories: two-dimensional, three-dimensional, and four-dimensional art. Each category has unique and specific approaches and materials. Two-dimensional art consists of drawing, painting, and printmaking. Three-dimensional art consists of sculpture, including installation, and kinetic art. Four-dimensional or time-based art includes video and performance and depends on the use of technology and the passage of time for its effect. Time-based art has grown today to encompass digital art, computer animation, interactive art, video games, virtual reality, robotics, and 3D printing.

The elements and principles of design are the components and their organization within visual art. Line, shape, mass/volume, perspective, texture, and color are the primary elements of design. Time is a recently recognized additional element of design. Principles of design include unity and variety, scale and proportion, balance, emphasis and movement, and rhythm and repetition.

In this chapter we have also outlined many of the materials and processes used in creating art. In Chapter 3 Significance of Material Used in Art, we will examine the impact and meaning of substances employed to create works of art. In Chapter 4 Describing Art: Formal Analysis, Types and Styles of Art, we will utilize our understanding of materials and processes, and elements and principles of design to describe and explore meaning in art.

### Test Yourself

1. Historically, the term fine art was limited to mean painting, architecture, and sculpture. Today, other approaches to the production of art objects have been discovered and exploited. This process of evolution has had both drawbacks and advantages. Discuss.
2. “\_\_\_\_\_ -dimensional art occurs on flat surfaces, like paper, canvas, or even cave walls.”
3. Art can be broken down into Form and \_\_\_\_\_
4. “To \_\_\_\_\_ an object is to observe its appearance and transfer that observation to a set of marks.”
5. “For the most part, the pigments or coloring agents in paints remain the same. The thing that distinguishes one kind of painting from another is the \_\_\_\_\_.”
6. The difference between open and closed sculptural forms is that closed forms are surrounded by \_\_\_\_\_, while open forms are penetrated by it.
7. Calligraphy is defined as “\_\_\_\_\_ writing.”

8. Perspective in art is the \_\_\_\_\_ of space on a flat surface.

9. The three main cues to the illusion of space on a flat surface are:

10. The five elements of design mentioned in the text are:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

11. The text mentions several principles of design. List and Describe three of them.

Principle of Design:	Description:
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____

12. The unique property of Kinetic sculpture is: \_\_\_\_\_

13. “The Fauves were a group of artists in the early twentieth century who used \_\_\_\_\_ **color.**”

14. Suggest one potential reason for the use of a monochromatic color scheme, a complementary color scheme, and an analogous color scheme.

- a. Monochromatic \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Complementary \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Analogous \_\_\_\_\_

## 2.7 KEY TERMS

**2-Dimensional Art:** art that is executed on a two dimensional surface that has length and width; a flat (or nearly flat) surface. These include, but are not limited to, paintings, drawings, and prints.

**3-Dimensional Art:** art that is executed in the three dimensions of length, width, and height. These include, but are not limited to, sculpture, architecture, ceramics, glass, textiles, assembly, and installation.

**4-Dimensional Art:** art that is executed in, and depends upon, both space and time, which is considered the “fourth dimension.” Examples include but are not limited to performance art and video art.

**Abstract Expressionism:** or ABEX; this art historical term is specific to a group of painters working in New York after the Second World War. This group includes Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and Helen Frankenthaler. Their primary approach to painting was gestural, and “all over,” a condition in which no single part of the work is visually predominant.

**Acrylic:** a fast drying water-soluble petroleum based painting medium.

**Actual Texture:** the condition in which texture is created, not represented. Actual texture is the opposite of simulated texture or the illusion of texture. Examples include brushstrokes, impasto, collage, and inclusion.

**Additive Color:** color based on projected light.

**Additive:** a sculptural process in which material is added.

**Afterimage:** the optical sensation that occurs after a visual stimulus is removed. The afterimage is a quickly fading complement of the original stimulus.

**Analogous Color:** a color scheme that uses colors adjacent to an initial point on the color wheel. For example, if an artist chose red for the initial color, then an analogous color scheme would employ the color range that occurs between orange, red, and purple.

**Armature:** a wire or wood substructure used to support a clay sculpture while it is being worked.

**Assembly:** a sculptural process in which disparate materials are combined to form the final artwork.

**Asymmetric:** lacking symmetry.

**Atmospheric Perspective:** the use of color to simulate the illusion of space.

**Axis:** an imaginary line around which objects are arranged.

**Balance:** the property of equality in visual weight.

**Binder:** a transparent fluid used to suspend colored pigment and attach it to a support.

**Brush:** tools used to apply paint to a support, usually hair or fiber attached to a wooden or plastic handle.

**Buon Fresco:** literally, “good fresco.” A mural process in which pigment is painted on and absorbed into wet plaster.

**Calligraphy:** beautiful writing.

**Carving:** a sculptural process in which material is removed to reveal the final artwork.

**Casting:** a sculptural process in which material is substituted to form the final artwork.

**Charcoal:** an art medium made from burned wood used to make dark black marks usually on paper.

**Closed Form:** sculptural forms that are not penetrated by exterior space.

**Color Scheme:** an organized or formulaic approach to the selection of color. For example, Monochromatic (one color), Complementary (opposite colors), and Analogous (adjacent colors) color schemes.

**Color Temperature:** in visual art, the sensation of “warm” or “cool” relative to a given color. Warm colors tend toward red/orange, while cool colors tend toward blue/white. Every color, when compared to another can be seen to be either more warm or more cool.

**Color:** the sensation caused by differing qualities of light.

**Complementary Color:** colors that when blended together create a neutral gray. On a color wheel, complementary colors appear opposite to one another. Examples of a complementary color pair would be blue and orange or red and green.

**Composition:** the arrangement of visual elements.

**Conte Crayons:** in drawing, square sticks of compressed charcoal or pigment and wax or clay.

**Conte:** a mixture of pigment and clay used to make colored marks, usually on paper. Traditionally manufactured in black, white, and sanguine (red) colors.

**Contour:** the exterior boundary of a form.

**Contrast:** areas with a high difference in value, color, texture, or other scale.

**Cool Color:** a color that tends toward blue/white in hue. A cool color can be any color that tends toward blue/white when compared to another color. For example, alizarin crimson is a cool red when compared to cadmium red medium.

**Crosshatching:** intersecting marks that create value on a form.

**Description:** the process of enumerating the various elements of an artwork.

**Design:** a plan for the arrangement of visual elements.

**Drawing:** the process of making marks on a support, often but not always representative of an idea or object.

**Edge:** exterior boundary of a shape.

**Edition:** a series of prints made from a single matrix.

**Electromagnetic Spectrum:** continuous range of radioactive energy by wavelength.

**Elements of Design:** the physical components of visual art.

**Emphasis:** the strategy of directing attention with the use of high contrast.

**Encaustic:** a painting process which uses wax as the binder.

**Figure/Ground Relation:** the figure in front of the ground. Used to specify which objects qualify as figures.

**Figure/Ground Reversal:** ambiguous figure ground relation in which figures can be alternately seen as grounds and vice versa.

**Figure:** a shape that appears in front of a background.

**Forced Perspective:** use of perspective to create a distorted or unnatural scale relation.

**Form:** the physical components of visual art.

**Found Objects:** material incorporated into artwork that is not normally considered an artistic medium. Found objects serve the same purpose in sculpture that magazine cutouts serve in collage.

**Freestanding:** sculpture that can be viewed from all angles.

**Fresco Secco:** the process of painting on dry plaster.

**Fresco:** the process of painting on wet or dry plaster.

**Fugitive:** pigments that change color or become transparent with time or weathering.

**Geometric:** a shape with mathematically regular contours.

**Gestalt:** intuitive perception of an artwork as a single whole experience.

**Gesture:** direction interpreted as movement.

**Gicleé:** an Ink-Jet print, usually on acid free paper with archival inks.

**Graphite:** a carbon-based mineral mixed with clay to make pencil leads of varying hardness.

**Ground:** the stage on which a figure resides.

**Gum Arabic:** a water-soluble resin from the Gum tree used as a binder in watercolor.

**Hard-Edged:** a shape with clearly defined boundaries.

**Height:** vertical distance or measurement.

**High Relief:** sculpture that remains attached to a base, but uses undercut. Opposite of low relief.

**Horizon Line:** the visual limit of space where sky and land or water meet. In linear perspective, the vanishing point rotated 360 degrees.

**Hue:** the quality of wavelength in color; the color name.

**Impasto:** thick application of paint.

**Implied Line:** invisible line perceived by alignment of unrelated shapes.

**Impressionism:** a nineteenth century art movement, originating in Paris, in which changing variations of light become a principal subject. Examples include the work of Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt.

**Ink:** a liquid pigment traditionally used with pens of various manufacture.

**Installation:** an art practice that surrounds the viewer in an environment.

**Intaglio:** a printing process in which a metal plate is scratched with a steel point to produce printed images.

**Interactive:** artwork in which the viewer is expected to participate.

**Interval:** the space between elements of an artwork.

**Intuitive Color:** an approach to the selection of color that relies on intuition or other internal state rather than observation of an external condition.

**Kinetic Art:** art that incorporates motion into its design.

**Line:** an infinite series of points with limited length.

**Linear Perspective:** geometrically constructed illusion of the recession of space.

**Linear:** of or pertaining to the quality of line.

**Lithograph:** a printing process that relies on the repulsion between oil-based ink and water. A stone (or aluminum plate) is drawn on and etched. Where the stone is etched will absorb water. Where the stone is not etched (protected by the drawing or image) the stone will remain dry. Water is applied to the stone. Ink is then rolled over the stone. Where the stone is wet, ink is repelled. Where the stone is dry, ink adheres. Paper is then pressed onto the inked stone resulting in a print.

**Local Color:** the color of an object under even illumination.

**Lost Wax:** a casting process in which a wax original is molded, then wax is melted out and replaced with metal.

**Low Relief:** sculpture that remains attached to a base and does not use undercut. Opposite of high relief.

**Mass:** the quality of possessing three dimensions.

**Matrix:** in printmaking, any material used to produce an image. For example, in relief printing, the matrix is usually a carved linoleum or wood block.

**Metalpoint:** drawing using ductile metal such as silver, gold, or pewter as the pigment. Usually on paper or gessoed panel.

**Mixed Media:** the use of unconventional or unusual combinations of materials in a single artwork.

**Mobile:** in sculpture, a kinetic artwork moved by wind or gravity.

**Modeling:** a sculptural process in which material is added to form the final artwork.

**Mold:** a hollow form used to shape a fluid or plastic substance.

**Monochromatic:** of or using a single color.

**Motion:** movement or change in position over time.

**Negative Space:** the absence of mass in space.

**Non-Objective Art:** art that does not have direct pictorial reference to objects seen.

**Observed Color:** the perception of color on an object illuminated by a directional light source. The perceived color of such an object varies as it tends toward highlight or shadow.

**Oil Pastels:** paper covered sticks of solid pigment and oil-based binder originally used to mark livestock.

**Oil:** in painting, a solvent soluble binder that dries slowly, usually linseed oil.

**One-point perspective:** a mathematical drawing system with the intention of making three dimensional objects and space look realistic in appearance as they converge on a single vanishing point.

**Open Form:** sculptural forms that are penetrated by exterior space.

**Organic:** shapes or forms that are loose or undefined.

**Original Print:** a handmade print.

**Orthogonal:** in perspective, lines that recede to the vanishing point.

**Overlap:** a shape or object which obscures or lies over something else.

**Painting:** the process of applying liquid pigment to a surface, or an art object resulting from this process.

**Pastel:** solid sticks of pigment.

- Performance Art:** an approach to art in which the object is an action by participants.
- Performance:** artworks consisting of actions, usually documented photographically.
- Perspective:** in art a system that portrays three dimensions on a flat surface.
- Pigment:** in art, the substance with gives color to a medium.
- Pigment:** the coloring agent in paints, pastels, inks, and other art media.
- Planographic:** a printing process which occurs on a flat surface, originally limestone.
- Point:** in perspective, an object with zero dimension.
- Positive Space:** the area occupied by a solid or filled object.
- Primary Colors:** in art the three basic colors by which all other colors are mixed, i.e., red, yellow, and blue.
- Principles of Design:** the strategies by which the elements of art are arranged to create a desired visual effect.
- Print:** an artwork produced by transferring pigment from a matrix to a support, usually paper. Most often done in a series of identical impressions. See “edition.”
- Printmaking:** the process of producing multiple identical or nearly identical images from a single print matrix or set of matrices.
- Psychic Line:** in art, line that is understood without being seen by the eye.
- Refracted Light:** light that has been separated into distinct colors after having been passed through a prism.
- Relief:** the physical projection of an artwork beyond the support or base.
- Reproduction:** a mechanically produced print.
- Rhythm:** in art, a pattern formed by repeated objects.
- Scale:** the size of an object.
- Sculpture:** the production of artwork that exists in three dimensions. Examples are carving, casting, modelling, or assembly.
- Secondary Colors:** in art, the three colors formed by mixing two primary colors, i.e., green, orange, and purple.
- Shape:** an area of two dimensional space.
- Simulated Texture:** a visual representation of a tactile experience.

**Site Specific:** installations which use their location as part of the intended effect.

**Soft-Edged:** lacking a definite boundary.

**Solvents:** substances usually liquid, which dissolve a given paint binder.

**Stencil:** a printing process in which pigment passes through a mask onto a support.

**Substitutes:** in sculpture, replacing one substance with another. In casting, hot liquid metal is substituted for melted wax.

**Subtractive Color:** sensation of color created by reflection of light off of a surface.

**Subtractive:** a sculptural process in which material is removed.

**Support:** the surface on which an artwork is created.

**Symmetric:** shapes reflected equally about an axis.

**Technological Change:** notable shifts in available technology and science that play a part in the shift of culture and determine the availability of new artistic media.

**Texture:** the tactile quality of a surface.

**Three-Point Perspective:** a system of perspective that uses a third point above or below the horizon line to indicate the recession of space above the viewer.

**Time Arts:** the use of change as an element in art, usually performance art, kinetic art, or video.

**Tughra:** Islamic calligraphic device designating a high status individual.

**Two-Point Perspective:** a system of perspective that uses two points on the horizon to indicate the recession of space on either side of the viewer.

**Undercut:** in sculpture, an overhang created by removing material from underneath an object without detaching it from the base or support.

**Value:** in visual art, the characteristic of lightness or darkness of a color, ranging from near-white to black.

**Vanishing Point:** the point on the horizon where orthogonals meet, representing the viewer's vision extended infinitely in one direction.

**Vector:** the characteristic of having direction.

**Video:** moving images recorded and projected or displayed on a monitor.

**Visible Light:** the portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that can be seen by the human eye.

**Volume:** a bounded three dimensional area.

**Warm Color:** a color that tends toward red/orange in hue. A warm color can be any color that tends toward red/orange when compared to another color. For example, ultramarine is a warm blue when compared to cobalt blue.

**Watercolor:** a water soluble painting medium that uses gum arabic as binder.

**Willow/Vine Charcoal:** a drawing medium made from burned willow twigs, and used primarily for initial layout of paintings as it does not adhere well to drawing surfaces.

# 3

## Significance of Materials Used in Art

*Rita Tekippe and Pamela J. Sachant*

### 3.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the differences among valuation of art materials, especially with regard to intrinsic qualities of raw material versus produced objects
- Discuss the differences between monetary and cultural values for works of art
- Discuss the idea of “borrowed” significance that comes with the re-use of components from previous artworks
- Describe the significance of value added to objects by complex artistic processes or by changing tastes in different eras

### 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Among the aspects of an artwork that evoke response, aid understanding, and contribute meaning will be the material(s) used in its creation. These materials might make it more or less important, more or less valuable, or might bring a variety of associations that are not inherent in the essential form. For example, you might recognize a vase not merely as a vase, but as a Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933, USA) Favrite glass vase. (Figure 3.1) Knowing the creator, material, and special processes involved in the artwork’s creation would add to and might change your perception and appreciation in several important respects. For example, you could



**Figure 3.1 | Bowl**

Artist: Louis Comfort Tiffany  
Source: Met Museum  
License: Public Domain

link it to an important artist, an innovative artistic technique, a significant period in American décor and manufacturing and marketing, a valuation based on its collectability, and numerous other interesting details about its creation and use.

The most apparent choices in this regard are for three-dimensional forms such as sculpture and architecture, where it is more likely that costly and precious materials such as gold, silver, gems, marble, or bronze are used in its creation. The distinction among material choices for drawing and paintings will also have certain effects for their meanings. For example, if a painter applied **gold leaf**, 22K gold pounded into extremely thin sheets, to a painting's surface, the monetary and cultural value of the work increases. (Figure 3.2) The **monetary value** refers to the amount a buyer is willing to pay, which in this case includes the cost of the materials the artist factors into the price of the artwork. The **cultural value** is the perceived quality or merit of the work: what it is worth according to that culture's standards of artistic importance or excellence. If a work of art has high monetary or cultural value, the owner's reputation and status are, in turn, elevated.

Without considering each and every possibility in this regard, we should look at a few pointed examples that will help us know what to consider when we examine artworks with a view to the choices of materials that the artist (or patron) must have made. The techniques for many of these is discussed in greater detail in other parts of the text, so our primary focus here will be on the intrinsic materials, although the ways they are worked, used, and combined are inextricably significant in some of these cases.

### 3.3 UTILITY AND VALUE OF MATERIALS

The earliest drawings, paintings, vessels, and sculptures were made with whatever the artists could find and turn to their use for creating images and objects; such readily-available material includes mud, clay, twigs, straw, minerals, and plants that they could use directly or with slight alteration, such as grinding and mixing minerals with water to apply to cave walls. (Figure 3.3) Experimentation was surely part of the process and, just as surely, much of it is lost to us now, although we have some examples of works, materials, and tools to give us insight into the artistic processes and material choices.



**Figure 3.2 | Annunciation to the Shepherds, illumination from the *Book of Pericopes (Lectionary)* of Henry II, fol. 8v, 1002-1012 CE.**

Source: Artstor.org

License: Public Domain



**Figure 3.3 | Reproduction of a bison of the cave of Altamira**

Author: User "Rameessos"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 3.4 | Korean neolithic pot, found in Busan**

Author: User "Good friend100"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

For example, in works such as this **earthenware**, or baked clay, vessel, the artist had explored sufficiently to discover that mixing a certain type of earth in certain proportions with water would yield a flexible substance. The resulting clay could be **handbuilt**, generally by wrapping and smoothing coils, into a vessel shaped with a conical bottom that would sit nicely in a coal fire for heating its contents. (Figure 3.4) A twig or string might be used to incise marks in the surface, not only to decorate it, but also to make it easier to hold onto than if it were completely smooth. Dating to c. 3,500 BCE, pots such as this from the late Neolithic era in Korea are known as Jeulmun pottery, meaning “comb-patterned.” The clay could be found in different colors, textures, density, potential for adherence, etc. It could be manipulated by hand to make containers to store, transport, cook, or serve all sorts of goods.

The invention of the potter’s wheel allowed artists to “throw” the clay on a rotating platform the artist operated by hand or powered with a kicking motion. When and where the potter’s wheel first appeared is much debated, but it was widely used in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Southeast Asia before 3,000 BCE. Using a potter’s wheel allowed the artist to turn vessels with thinner walls, a greater variety of and more uniform shapes and sizes, and a larger array of painted and incised decorative elements for additional aesthetic appeal. They could, as well, make molds for serial production of commonly used types of pots.

By the time of the Ming Dynasty in China (1368-1644), vases such as this from the Xuande period (1426-1435) painted in imperial (cobalt) blue and white display both the technical innovations and the remarkable degree of refinement achieved. (Figure 3.5) The development of such



**Figure 3.5 | A Ming dynasty Xuande mark and period (1426-1435) imperial blue and white vase**

Author: User "Meliere"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 4.0

mineral resources as kaolin and petuntse allowed ceramicists to create porcelain, one of the most refined and hardest types of pottery, which became known as “china” because of the origins of the materials and processes; chinaware was soon emulated the world over for its beauty and utility as tableware and décor.

Traders from Portugal returned from China with chinaware (porcelain vessels) in the sixteenth century. The semi-translucent material, elegant shapes, and glass-like, intricately decorated surfaces of the pots were unlike anything produced in Europe at that time. The demand for such wares quickly spread throughout Europe, and ceramicists on that continent spent the next two centuries trying to unlock the secret of how to create such smooth, white, and hard pottery. Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus and Johann Friedrich Böttger, both employed for that purpose by Augustus II the Strong, Elector of Saxony (today Germany) and King of Poland (r. 1694-1733), are credited with producing the first European porcelain in 1708. It would become known as Meissen ware because it was produced at the factory set up in the town by Augustus II for that purpose to safeguard the formula and maintain his exclusive control over the creation and sale of European porcelain. (Figure 3.6)

The monopoly held by Augustus II was short-lived, however, as the secret was sold and a competing factory opened in



**Figure 3.6 | Teapot**

Artist: Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur  
Author: Walters Art Museum  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.7 | Pitcher**

Artist: American Porcelain Manufacturing Company  
Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC



**Figure 3.8 | Egyptian tomb wall painting**

Author: British Library

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC0 1.0

Vienna, Austria, by 1717. From there, variations of the formula and the production of porcelain spread throughout Europe as demand increased from the privilege of royalty, to the rich and titled, and eventually to all who could afford the status-giving ware. For example, this nineteenth-century commemorative pitcher made by the American Porcelain Manufacturing Company would have been presented to specially mark an occasion. (Figure 3.7) Although it is a distant relative of Chinese imperial porcelain ware and the royal courts of Europe, the techniques and materials used in its creation were still associated with tradition, wealth, and high social standing, elevating the cultural value of this mass-produced vessel to the level of a keepsake or even a family heirloom. Objects such as this are valued beyond their monetary worth or utilitarian purposes, both due to the tactile and aesthetic qualities that come from the physical substance and techniques used and to historical and social associations they hold.

Similarly, drawing and painting, apparently first confined to the rock walls of nature, were areas of exploration for artists who later applied color to the built walls of architecture, and then to portable objects of various types. Ceramic ware was decorated with images from nature, pictorial and narrative motifs, and messages of myth, power, and even everyday life. The same is true of tomb walls of Egypt (Figure 3.8), palace walls in ancient Iraq, (Ashurnasirpal II with Attendants and Soldier: <http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=36470>) and Greek vessels used for practical or ritual purposes (Figure 3.9).



**Figure 3.9 | Terracotta krater**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

Eventually such vessels, as well as books and other objects, bore written information and pictorial explications of textual content: illustrations. Early textual works were often inscribed on stone tablets to ensure their durability or on relatively fragile materials like papyrus that required laborious preparation to make it suitable for conveying information. In either case, the materials used added to the work's significance. By the time of the development of the **codex** (probably in the Roman era), or manuscript with bound pages, the most common form of modern physical books, the choice material was animal skin, as seen in manuscripts throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, roughly the beginning of the fourth to the fifteenth centuries, in the Western and the Middle Eastern regions of the world. (Figures 3.10 and 3.11) Sheepskin, or parchment, the most commonly used support for written works, was obtained by laborious preparation of the pelts, through scraping and buffing the surface to make it suitable for use



**Figure 3.10 | Historiated Letter L, with illustration of the Tree of Jesse, Capuchin's Bible, f. 7v, c. 1180. BNF**  
 Author: User "Soefirm"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

by scribes and illustrators who added the words and pictures. The most refined book arts

were often presented on **vellum**, or calfskin, prized for its smoother and finer surface. When used for especially important works or those made for royal purposes, it was often dyed purple or dark blue, with script applied in gold or silver ink and illustrations that included areas of gold or silver. (see Figure 3.2) These lustrous images were known as **illuminations**, that is, given light. The viewer would at once recognize the special and distinctive treatment implied by the use of such precious materials and know that the patron had paid well for an elegant and important book.



**Figure 3.11 | Kitab al-Bulhan: Middle Eastern House and Lifting Machine, Arab scientific manuscript leaf. 1. 14th century**  
 Author: User "Peacay"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

### 3.4 PRECIOUS MATERIALS, SPOLIA, AND BORROWED GLORY

Objects made for sacred or royal use were often wrought of such lavish and treasured components as vellum, silk, linen, wool, ivory, gold, silver, gems, and rare stones and minerals. Frequently crafted for further refinement, such works

show their precious properties to advantage. In ancient Rome/Byzantium, there were quarries for **porphyry**, a rich purple marble stone (the basis for the association of the color purple with royalty). Because it was restricted to royal purposes, its very appearance carried connotations of the imperial significance of any work made from it. It was often used for columns and other architectural components that thereby accentuated important structures or parts of them. Once the imperially controlled mines were abandoned in the fifth century CE, new items could not be made of porphyry, so older monuments were sometimes pillaged and re-used, with the royal significance transferred to the plunderers, implying not only the replacement of the old order by the new, but also the superiority of the conquerors.

Porphyry burial containers were especially prized in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Constantina was the eldest daughter of Emperor Constantine the Great (r. 306-337 CE), the Roman ruler who in 313 CE decreed early Christians could practice their faith without persecution and confiscated land should be returned to the Church. Although Constantine considered himself a Christian, he did not abandon the Roman gods and religious rituals. For example, in 321 CE he stated that Christians and pagans alike should observe the day of the sun (later named Sunday); the cult of the sun god had been popularly observed in Roman culture for centuries, and associations of the sun as the source of light, warmth, and life had been adopted by those of the Christian faith. Constantine, according to legend, was baptized a Christian on his deathbed in 337 CE.

When his daughter Constantina died in 354 CE, she was entombed in a porphyry **sarcophagus**, or stone coffin, that was richly carved with motifs from both the pagan Roman and Christian faiths. (Figure 3.12) There are small, winged cupids gathering grapes among garlands of grape vines with peacocks and a ram below on the front and back of the coffin, and cupids treading on grapes on both ends. In Roman mythology, such scenes were associated with Bac-



**Figure 3.12 | Sarcophagus of Constantina**

Author: User "Jean-Pol GRANDMONT"

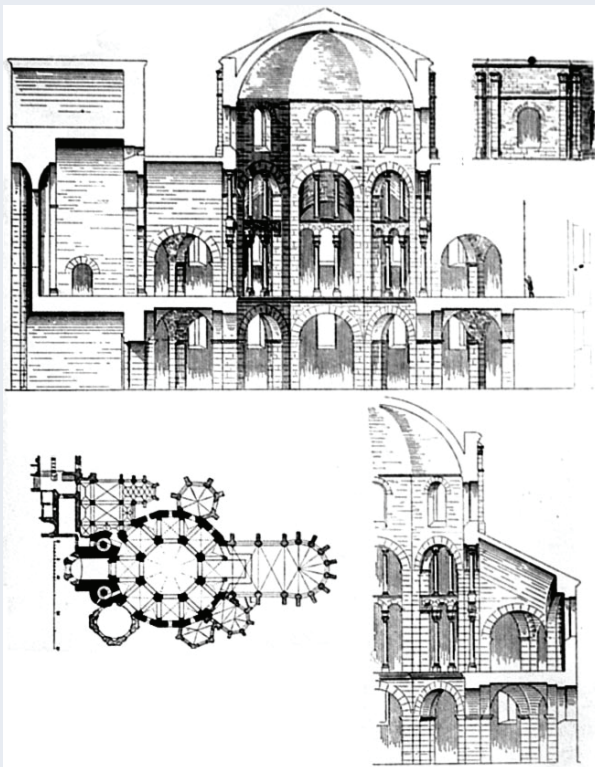
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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chus (known to the Greeks as Dionysus), the god of the wine harvest and wine making who as a baby was reborn after having been slaughtered by the Titans. Interpreted as Christian motifs, the cupids, who became known as **putti** or small, winged angels, are seen as preparing the grapes for the **Eucharist**, the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper by consecration of the bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Such re-imagining and re-purposing of motifs and their meanings were frequently seen at this time of transition from paganism to Christianity; further,

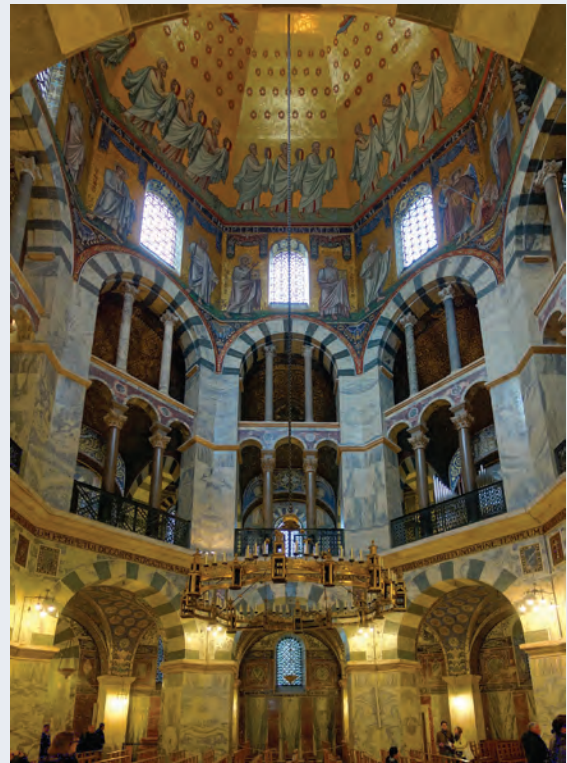
having been adopted by Constantine and his family, they were associated with imperial power and carried connotations of the Christian conquest of paganism.

Later, in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, Charlemagne (r. 768-814 CE) used pillaged porphyry columns inside arches on the upper level of his imperial chapel, a building intended for his own entombment. (Figure 3.13) The Palatine Chapel (c. 796-798 CE, consecrated 805 CE) was part of the palace complex Charlemagne had built at Aachen, in what is now Germany. The interior of the chapel is an octagon topped by a dome supported by heavy piers with arches on the second level, where the imperial throne is located, with a view to the high **altar** (the ta-



**Figure 3.14 | Cross-sections of the Palace Chapel of Aachen**

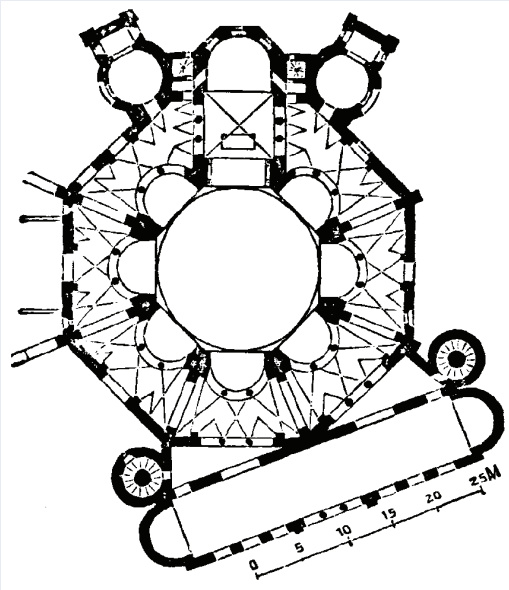
Author: User "Sir Gawain"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



**Figure 3.13 | Aachen, Palace Chapel of Charlemagne. c. 800**

Author: User "Velvet"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

ble or other surface where religious rituals are carried out) located across the church on the first floor below. (Figure 3.14) The design of the building is modeled on **mausolea**, or buildings containing tombs, and churches from the late Roman, early Christian, and early Byzantine periods (fourth-seventh centuries), such as San Vitale (526-647 CE) in Ravenna, Italy. (Figure 3.15) Charlemagne, who was not only King of the Franks and King of the Lombards but was also crowned as the first Holy Roman Emperor in 800 CE, used that design and the plundered columns to signify the revival and replacement of the old Roman Empire with his own reign as a Christian world ruler.



**Figure 3.15 | San Vitale, Ravenna**

Author: User "Väsk"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Among others, Holy Roman Emperor Henry (or Heinrich) II (r. 973-1024) similarly borrowed and supplanted Charlemagne's glory by adopting his palace complex at Aachen and adding to its structure and furnishings with his own statements of imperial power. Henry II commissioned a lavish pulpit for the chapel that was completed in 1014. (Figure 3.16) The semi-circular pulpit has a smaller semi-circle to either side, a shape known as a **trefoil**. The center is made up of nine rectangular panels covered with **chased** gilt copper that has been formed by hammering into low relief images of the Four Evangelists. The panels are adorned with gemstones and embellished with **enamel**, powdered glass fused to the surface by heat, and **filigree**, beads or threads of gold or silver arranged in designs on a metal surface. The three ivory panels on each of the smaller semi-circles depict pagan mythological figures; the panels were made in Egypt in the sixth century CE. Re-used parts such as the porphyry columns, gemstones, and ivory panels are known as **spolia**, remnants that had

been taken from older art and architecture and incorporated into new art objects and places with the implications of conquest, superiority, and heritage for the new patrons.



**Figure 3.16 | Ambon (11th-century) of Henry II, Holy Roman Emperor. Aachen Cathedral, Germany.**

Author: User "HOWI"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.17 | The Barbarossa chandelier**

Author: User "Lokilech"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.18 | Shrine of Charlemagne, Interior of palatine chapel in Aachen Cathedral, Germany.**

Author: User "ACBahn"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.19 | Shrine of Charlemagne**

Author: User "HOWI"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.20 | Cross of Lothair**

Author: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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Another, later Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I (r. 1155-1190), and his wife, Beatrice, commissioned a chandelier to hang below the octagonal dome in the chapel. (Figure 3.17) This was called the Barbarossa chandelier, reflecting the emperor's nickname after his red beard; it was installed between 1165 and 1170 in honor of the Virgin Mary and as a tribute to Charlemagne. The chandelier's forty-eight candles cast a tremendous spread of light in an age when artificial illumination was costly, emphasizing its association with earthly wealth and heavenly light.

As a continuation of the work undertaken by his grandfather Frederick I, which also included exhuming Charlemagne's bones, Frederick II (r. 1220-1250), following the plans Barbarossa had made, completed the creation of a lavish, new jeweled and gilded shrine for the remains of Charlemagne, seeking to elevate him to the rank of sainthood. These statements in rich material forms, imply the surpassing glory of their imperial predecessor, shared by those who followed in his lineage. Moreover, the associations of royalty and honor for earthly rulers was often intertwined in very pointed ways to artwork associated with the Christian God and saints. Notable in this regard



**Figure 3.21 | Augustus cameo**

Author: User "Absalypson2"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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is the shrine for Charlemagne—clearly a statement of imperial power—made of rich materials that reflect popular Christian notions of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where these saintly rulers were thought to act as intercessors for the believer. (Figures 3.18 and 3.19) Often such imperial works actually featured objects or significant decorative details from imperial Roman works, such as the antique cameo of the Roman Emperor Augustus that was applied to the *Cross of the Emperor Lothair II*. (Figures 3.20 and 3.21) The gilded cross, dated to c. 1000, is covered with 102 gemstones and thirty-two pearls and has a rock crystal seal near its base bearing a portrait of Lothair II (r. 835-869). Including the portraits of earlier emperors further emphasized the wealth

and power of the ruler who had it made, believed to be Otto III (r. 983-1002). In addition, gemstones on such devotional works were selected for their qualities associated with healing, good fortune, the ability to ward off evil, and their mystical translucence, that fostered spiritual illumination.

### 3.5 LIQUIDATION OF TREASURES



**Figure 3.23 | The mid-12th-century silver altar piece surrounding the shrine of Saint Remaclus**

Author: User "Kleon3"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

Works such as these often implied the storing of riches as heavenly treasure and also represented a means of storing material wealth that could be used for mundane purposes in

time of need. We have records of a number of extravagant shrines and **liturgical** (relating to worship) furnishings that have not survived because they were taken apart and sold to feed a famine-stricken community or to provide for a new building project or an updated expression of devotion. Such works as the sumptuous Screen of Charlemagne (Figure 3.22) and the enormous Stavelot Altarpiece (Figure 3.23) are known to us only from drawings and small fragments that remain from the original objects. The disappearances of such works



**Figure 3.22 | Screen of Charlemagne**

Artist: Piersac  
Source: www.medart.pitt.edu  
License: Public Domain

indicate that their rich material components, while once intrinsic to their great spiritual implications, at some point came to be seen as an important source of wealth that could be put to other use.

### 3.6 WOOD, INLAY, AND LACQUER

Sculptures, objects, and architectural components of wood were also fashioned with a view to their monetary and cultural value. Some varieties of wood are more rare, others have qualities that make them easier to work in certain types of process, and there have been waves of “fashion” in wood choices at many eras. For example, lindenwood and limewood are associated with the Middle Ages, mahogany with eighteenth-century England and Scotland, oak with the Arts and Crafts work of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, and delicately lacquered wooden goods with Yuan Dynasty China.

Wooden sculpture was a far more predominant art form than painting in northern Europe during the Romanesque (c. 1000-1200) and Gothic periods (c. 1200-1500) in that region. The material favored was lindenwood or limewood due to the fineness of the wood’s grain, which allowed the sculptor to carve intricate detail. Generally, the sculpture was then **polychromed**, or painted, to increase the lifelike quality of the figure. Suggesting that spark of life was important in works such as *The Throne of Wisdom* because Mary, the compassionate and merciful Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, was believed to have the power to intercede with her Son, the infant Christ, on behalf of the faithful. (Figure 3.24)



**Figure 3.24 | Throne of Wisdom**

Author: User “Okapi07”  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Mahogany was discovered as a marketable wood by European explorers and traders in the Caribbean islands, Central America, and South America by the seventeenth century. The naturally reddish-brown wood was prized for its beauty and strength and, throughout the 1700s, was frequently used in England and Scotland to create fine furniture for the market there and in the American colonies. A table such as this was a status symbol indicating the owner’s wealth and taste, which was further enhanced by its use: this was not a utilitarian piece but a display table for chinaware. (Figure 3.25)

The Arts and Crafts movement began in England in the middle of the nineteenth century, but quickly spread throughout Europe and to the United States. In a time of growing industrialization, with an ever greater number of people moving to urban areas, working in factories, and consuming machine-made goods, some felt the need to reclaim the handmade. With romantic associations of simpler times, greater authenticity, and individ-

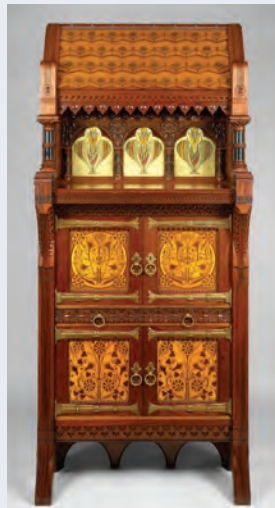
ual labor, furniture and decorative objects made as part of the Arts and Crafts movement were prized for their workmanship, design based on forms from nature, and respect for the natural materials used. For example, this cabinet is thought to have been made by Daniel Pabst (1826-1910, Germany, lived United States), one of the leading furniture makers of his day. It features elaborately carved surfaces and **inlay**, where one material is cut and fit into another in complex patterns. (Figures 3.26 and 3.27) Although the types of wood used—walnut, maple, and white pine—are not exotic or rare, the mastery with which they have been painstakingly cut and applied conveys a sense of preciousness. Inlay techniques were often used to provide visual contrast and to emphasize both the distinctive and diverse qualities among the materials brought together and the refined craftsmanship involved. A piece of furniture made with such skill was prized for its singularity and for the intricacy of the craft involved in its creation.



**Figure 3.25 | China table**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



**Figure 3.26 | Cabinet**

Artist: Daniel Pabst

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



**Figure 3.27 | Detail of Cabinet**

Artist: Daniel Pabst

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

Lacquer has been used in art throughout Asia since Neolithic times, but carved lacquer is created in China only. **Lacquer** is resin from trees found in continental Asia that hardens to a natural plastic when exposed to the air; it is resistant to water and durable. The base of a lacquered object is wood, to which the liquid resin is applied in up to 200 layers. This tray was made in the fourteenth century, during the Yuan Dynasty,

when lacquer was most often tinted red by adding cinnabar, powdered mercury sulfide. (Figure 3.28) Once hardened, the lacquer was carved away to create detailed scenes of court life, such as we see here, floral motifs, nature scenes, dragons or abstracted patterns. While the resin itself is of little monetary value, the laborious process and high level of skill required for such delicate carving meant the completed objects had, and still have, significant cultural value.

### 3.7 INTRINSIC VALUES AND ENHANCED WORTH OF METALS

Some of the materials prized by artists and patrons become more valuable because of these artistic uses; others are valuable for their intrinsic worth as raw substance. From the earliest times, metals such as gold, silver, iron, and copper

were used and traded in their natural states, as they came from the earth. They were mixed with other materials to create alloys, used for minting coins and forming sculptural objects. Among the most prominent metal materials first used for art were iron and bronze; forging and casting them were among the earliest complex artistic processes devised. Brass (copper alloyed with tin, lead, and/or other metals) and the harder, more durable bronze have been widely used for grand public monuments that have fine detail, weather well, and can be hollow cast to reduce the amount of metal used. (Figures 3.29 and 3.30). Because forging and casting are complex and highly skilled processes, a viewer should know that an object made of this material was a significant statement for the artist or patron to make, one involving considerable planning and staging to accomplish the work.



**Figure 3.29 | Bronze statue of Buddha**

Author: User "Dirk Beyer"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0



**Figure 3.28 | Tray with women and boys on a garden terrace**

Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC

### 3.8 RARE MATERIALS AND PROHIBITED USES

The economic and ecological factors involved in some materials have sometimes moved consideration of their use far beyond the discussion of artistic

production. An example is work in ivory, especially that obtained from elephants, although it was also taken to use for sculpture from their kin, the extinct mammoth, as well as from walruses and other mammals. Its rarity and workability led to its valuation for finely carved works, often for aristocratic patrons and very special purposes, such as the devotional objects (*The Virgin and Child*, Unknown: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O166591/the-virgin-and-child-polyptych-unknown/>) and personal toilet articles (*Attack on the Castle of Love*, Unknown: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O88416/attack-on-the-castle-of-mirror-back-unknown/>) that were popular among the court ladies of the late Middle Ages. Its exploitation has led to scarcity and, ultimately, now threatens the very existence of elephants, since they have been savagely hunted and their herds decimated in the interest of profit. Consequently, both the sale and purchase of ivory objects, even those considered antiques and historical treasures, are now widely boycotted in the interest of preservation of the species.



**Figure 3.30 | The Minute Man**

Artist: Daniel Chester French

Author: User "Flying Jazz"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

### 3.9 MATERIAL CONNOTATIONS OF CLASS OR STATION

Other more mundane materials and appropriated components might also have strong political connotations that intensify the meaning of the artwork. Korean artist Do Ho Su chose and assembled military dog tags to create a larger-than-life figural impression of an imperialistic robe with a hollow core. It carries connotations of the political strength of his native land being built upon such things as the dehumanizing mandatory military service he had performed, and the relationships between individuals and the collectives they form. (*Some/One*, Do Ho Suh: <https://2yhr3j6imaw4e4zzg38k38ar-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/suh-inst-002.jpg>; *Some/One* detail, Do Ho Suh: <https://2yhr3j6imaw4e4zzg38k38ar-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/suh-inst-001.540.jpg>)

### 3.10 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

#### Key Concepts

One of the basic artistic choices for any creation is the material from which it will be made and so should be an area for careful attention in our analysis of any artwork. Deliberate choices can also involve the pointed spurning of rich resources in favor of humbler stuff, as in the robe created

by Do Ho Su, and less refined surfaces, such as cardboard or burlap for paintings; things that are only more recently available than those traditionally used, like plastics for sculpture, titanium for architecture; and the technologically evolved media that move into the realms of the physically immaterial. Choices and implications have expanded exponentially, and our examination of them should be broad, deep, and careful.

### Test Yourself

1. Discuss the differences between materials that are intrinsically precious, and those that are made more valuable by the processes or creative ideas in works of art, by considering specific examples.
2. Consider the use of *spolia* in at least three specific examples and discuss how they changed the significance of the art work to which they were applied.
3. Review and describe a specific process for creating artwork that involved procedures for combining diverse materials into the product.
4. Considering such common materials as clay or wood, discuss the ways in which an artist might use it for making an object of much greater value than the inherent worth, and what factors, other than the creation process, might lead people to value it highly.

## 3.11 KEY TERMS

**Codex:** the book form in which pages (or leaves) of material such as parchment, vellum, or paper, are gathered into bundles and bound together—initially by sewing, now usually by glueing—and then provided with a cover to protect the sheets. Its ancestor was the scroll, in which the sheets were joined into a long continuous roll that was opened out from one side, rolled up at the other, for viewing the contents.

**Cultural value:** the perceived quality or merit of the work: what it is worth according to that culture's standards of artistic importance or excellence.

**Earthenware,** or objects made from clay: such as vessels that are formed for specific uses and hardened either by drying in the air or by baking in high heat. Often, earthenware goods are distinguished from more refined clay-based objects that are creating with additional processing of the material or different/more complex firing methods. See **porcelain**

**Gold leaf:** 22K gold pounded into extremely thin sheets, to be applied selectively to areas of 2-d or 3-d objects.

**Handbuilt:** clay objects that are shaped by hand, often by wrapping and smoothing coils of clay into the desired form. These are distinguished from **wheel-thrown** or mold-made goods.

**Illumination:** literally, given light, specifically through the use of gold or silver for letting of illustrative touches in a manuscript. The term is also sometime used to describe manuscripts that have images added to them, as opposed to simply including lettered text

**Manuscript:** literally, hand-written presentation of script and/or images. The form was supplanted by books produced with a printing press, although the term is still used for a singular copy of a written work.

**Mausolea**, plural of **mausoleum:** a building designed to house one or more tombs, usually for an important person. These were most often centrally-planned, with a design that pivoted around the burial site. In Christian usage, these were sometimes attached to a larger, congregational structure, but sometimes stood alone. They might house more than one tomb.

**Monetary value:** the worth of materials or objects, in terms of “market value.” This might be determined by the value of the materials use or of the finished art object, considered differently from the cost of the materials.

**Parchment:** sheepskin, prepared for use in manuscripts—less refined than **vellum**, used for finer and more expensive works.

**Polychrome:** painted in several colors.

**Porcelain:** highly refined ceramic ware, initially produced in China, with select materials like petuntse and kaolin, to create semi-translucent material, with elegant shapes, and glass-like, intricately decorated surfaces, and high-temp fired for hardened finishes.

**Potter’s wheel, wheel-thrown:** pottery made with the use of a potter’s wheel, a device for turning the clay body on a rotating platform for a more uniform shape. These were first turned by hand, knee, or pedal motion, later electrified.

**Putti** plural of *putto*: a small winged baby angel, a cherub.

**Spolia:** bounty taken from and original context, as in the “spoils of war.” Often, items of spolia were re-used in later works to imply the conquest (and superiority) of the new owner over the original.

**Vellum:** calfskin, prepared for use in luxury manuscripts, more highly prized than the rougher, less expensive **parchment**.

# 4

## Describing Art

### Formal Analysis, Types, and Styles of Art

*Jeffrey LeMieux, Rita Tekippe, and Pamela J. Sachant*

#### 4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Employ a vocabulary of art specific terms and critical approaches to conduct a formal analysis of works of art.
- Identify different types of art based on the degree of representation or non-representation a work displays.
- Distinguish between variations of representational qualities within a work of art.
- Identify characteristics that relate an individual or group of works to a cultural style, stylistic movement or period, or an individual artist's style.

#### 4.2 INTRODUCTION

Developing the ability to examine and understand works of art makes sense for many good reasons. For one, art is powerful. In subtle but real ways, we are influenced by the visual culture that surrounds us.

In Chapter Two: The Structure of Art—Form and Design, we identified, defined, and discussed the elements and principles of design. Now, we will focus on the analysis of art. **Formal or critical analysis** is an examination of the elements and principles of design present in an artwork and the process of deriving meaning from how those elements and principles are used by visual artists to communicate a concept, idea, or emotion.

How and what is communicated in a work of art is linked to the type or category in which it falls: representational or non-representational. Within the broad category of **representation**, that is, a visual reference to the experiential world, we can further characterize the work of art using terms such as naturalistic, idealized, or abstract. Art that does not attempt to present an aspect of the recognizable world is **non-objective** or **non-representational**. In such work meaning is communicated through shapes, colors, and textures.

**Style** can refer to the general appearance of a work or a group of works that were created in accordance with a specific set of principles about form or appearance. Style can refer to the art as a whole that was made during a particular era and within a certain culture. More specifically, we can consider whether the artwork belongs to a stylistic movement such as the Italian Renaissance, Realism, or Abstract Expressionism. Style can also refer to how elements and principles of design are employed by an individual artist: the visual characteristics of that artist's work.

## 4.3 FORMAL OR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While restricting our attention only to a description of the formal elements of an artwork may at first seem limited or even tedious, a careful and methodical examination of the physical components of an artwork is an important first step in “decoding” its meaning. It is useful, therefore, to begin at the beginning. There are four aspects of a formal analysis: **description**, **analysis**, **interpretation**, and **evaluation**. In addition to defining these terms, we will look at examples.

### 4.3.1 Description

What can we notice at first glance about a work of art? Is it two-dimensional or three-dimensional? What is the medium? What kinds of actions were required in its production? How big is the work? What are the elements of design used within it?

Starting with line: is it soft or hard, jagged or straight, expressive or mechanical? How is line being used to describe space?

Considering shape: are the shapes large or small, hard-edged or soft? What is the relationship between shapes? Do they compete with one another for prominence? What shapes are in front? Which ones fade into the background?

Indicating mass and volume: if two-dimensional, what means if any are used to give the illusion that the presented forms have weight and occupy space? If three-dimensional, what space is occupied or filled by the work? What is the mass of the work?

Organizing space: does the artist use perspective? If so, what kind? If the work uses linear perspective, where are the horizon line and vanishing point(s) located?

On texture: how is texture being used? Is it actual or implied texture?

In terms of color: what kinds of colors are used? Is there a color scheme? Is the image overall light, medium, or dark?

### 4.3.2 Analysis

Once the elements of the artwork have been identified, next come questions of how these elements are related. How are the elements arranged? In other words, how have principles of design been employed?

What elements in the work were used to create unity and provide variety? How have the elements been used to do so?

What is the scale of the work? Is it larger or smaller than what it represents (if it does depict someone or something)? Are the elements within the work in proportion to one another?

Is the work symmetrically or asymmetrically balanced?

What is used within the artwork to create emphasis? Where are the areas of emphasis? How has movement been conveyed in the work, for example, through line or placement of figures?

Are there any elements within the work that create rhythm? Are any shapes or colors repeated?

### 4.3.3 Interpretation

Interpretation comes as much from the individual viewer as it does from the artwork. It derives from the intersection of what an object symbolizes to the artist and what it means to the viewer. It also often records how the meaning of objects has been changed by time and culture. Interpretation, then, is a process of unfolding. A work that may seem to mean one thing on first inspection may come to mean something more when studied further. Just as when re-reading a favorite book or re-watching a favorite movie, we often notice things not seen on the first viewing; interpretations of art objects can also reveal themselves slowly. Claims about meaning can be made but are better when they are backed up with supporting evidence. Interpretations can also change and some interpretations are better than others.

### 4.3.4 Evaluation

All this work of description, analysis, and interpretation, is done with one goal in mind: to make an evaluation about a work of art. Just as interpretations vary, so do evaluations. Your evaluation includes what you have discovered about the work during your examination as well as what you have learned, about the work, yourself, and others in the process. Your reaction to the artwork is an important component of your evaluation: what do you feel when you look at it? And, do you like the work? How and why do you find it visually pleasing, in some way disturbing, emotionally engaging?

Evaluating and judging contemporary works of art is more difficult than works that are hundreds or thousands of years old because the verdict of history has not yet been passed on them. Museums are full of paintings by contemporary artists who were considered the next Michelangelo but who have since faded from the cultural forefront.

The best art of a culture and period is that work which exemplifies the thought of the age from which it derives. What we think about our own culture is probably not what will be thought of it a century from now. The art that we believe best embodies our time may or may not last. As time moves on, our evaluations and judgments of our own time may not prove to be the most accurate ones. We live in a world full of art, and it is almost impossible to avoid making evaluations—possibly mistaken—about its value. Nonetheless, informed evaluations are still possible and useful even in the short term.

### 4.3.5 Examples of Formal Analysis

#### *Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* by J. M. W. Turner



**Figure 4.1** / *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*

Artist: J. M. W. Turner

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

*Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* by Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851, England) is a chaotic, atmospheric oil on canvas painting. (Figure 4.1) First, on the level of description, the dark structure of the foundering steamboat is hinted at in the center of the work, while heavy smoke from the vessel, pitching waves, and swirling snow surround it. The brown and gray curving lines are created with long strokes of heavily applied paint that expand to the edges of the composition. Second, on the level of analysis, we note that the paint application, heavy, with long strokes, adds dramatic movement to the image. We see that the design principle of scale and proportion is being used in the small size of the steamboat in relation to the overall canvas. Now

let us interpret these elements and their relation: The artist has emphasized the maelstrom of sea, snow, and wind. A glimpse of blue sky through the smoke and snow above the vessel is the only indication of space beyond this gripping scene of danger, and provides the only place for the viewer's eyes to rest from the tumult. This scene is of humanity's struggle for survival against powerful forces of nature. And finally, we are ready to evaluate this work. Is it powerfully effective in reminding us of the transitory nature of our own limited existence, a memento morii, perhaps? Or is it a wise caution of the limits of our human power to control our destiny? Does the work have sufficient power and value to be accepted by us as significant? The verdict of history tells us it is. J.M.W. Turner is considered a significant artist of his time, and this work is one that is thought to support that verdict. In the end, however, each of us can accept or reject this historical verdict for our own reasons. We may fear the sea. We may reject the use of technology as valiantly heroic. We may see the British colonial period as one of oppression and tyranny and this work as an illustration of the hubris of that time. Whatever we conclude, this work of art stands as a catalyst for this important dialogue.

Another example of formal analysis. Consider *Lady at the Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt

### *Lady at the Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt



**Figure 4.2** / *Lady at the Tea Table*

Artist: Mary Cassatt

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

Mary Cassatt (1844-1925, USA, lived France) is best known for her paintings, drawings, and prints of mothers and children. In those works, she focused on the bond between them as well as the strength and dignity of women within the predominantly domestic and maternal roles they played in the nineteenth century.

*Lady at the Tea Table* is a depiction of a woman in a later period of her life, and captures the sense of calm power a matriarch held within the home. (Figure 4.2) First, a description of the elements being used in this work: The white of the wall behind the woman and the tablecloth before her provide a strong contrast to the black of her clothing and the blue of the tea set. The gold frame of the artwork on the wall, the gold rings on her fingers, and the gold bands on the china link those three main elements of the painting. Analysis shows the organizing principle of variety is employed in the rectangles behind the woman's head and the multiple circles and arcs of the individual pieces of the tea set. The composition is a stable triangle formed by the woman's head and body, and extending to the pieces of china that span the foreground from one edge of the composition to the other. Let us interpret these observations. There is little evidence of movement in the work other than the suggestion that the woman's hand, resting on the handle of the teapot, may soon move. Her gaze, directed away from the viewer and out of the picture frame, implies she is in the midst of pouring tea, but her stillness suggests she is lost in thought. How to evaluate this work? The artist expresses a restrained but powerful strength of character in her treatment of this subject. Is the lack of obvious movement in the work a comment on the emergence of women's roles in society, a hope or a demand for change? Or is it a monument to the quiet dignity of the domestic life of Victorian era Paris? The gold of the frame, the rings, and the china dishes appear to unify three disparate objects into one statement of value. Do they symbolize art, fidelity, and service? Is this a comment on the restrictions of French domestic society, or a claim to its strength? One indication of the quality of a work of art is its power to evoke multiple interpretations. This open and poetic richness is one reason why the work of Mary Cassatt is considered to be important. The above examples are only one of many ways in which we can interpret and evaluate works of art. We will examine a few more approaches to analysis and critique. The point of this exercise is to equip the interested student with tools to become more fully aware of the dynamics and content of works of art, not only in museums and textbooks, but in the world of images that continually surrounds us today.

## 4.4 TYPES OF ART

### 4.4.1 Representation and Abstraction

The most basic point of style, perhaps, is type or category, whether a work is **representational** or **abstract**. In the broadest terms, if the work has visual reference to the phenomenal world, we consider it to be representational. That definition suffers from over generality, though, since any physical or visual expression that has some reference to the physical world includes some aspect that we see as reflecting the physical world. And, to some extent, all works are also

**abstract**, in that they might remind us of what we see in the phenomenal world by only reflecting some physical feature(s) rather than detailing the object, place, or person itself. Having said that, we can proceed to see art in terms of its relative representation or relative abstraction of the original form.

It may help to start here by examining a number of works; each is based on the artist's observations of cows but is distinctive in what the artist elected to convey in their artwork about cows on the continuum from representation to abstraction. The first of these works is by Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899, France), who depicted a variety of animals in great detail with regard to their anatomy and physiognomy, and took great care to render her illustrations with fidelity to the appearance to the actual animals she had observed. (Figure 4.3) Artistically gifted and thoroughly trained, she went on to deepen her own knowledge and to hone her skills by visiting farms, veterinarian dissections, and slaughterhouses in order to develop extensive knowledge of her preferred subject matter, with which she created imagery of animals and other features of rural farm life. Her cows would be correctly described as very **naturalistic** in appearance—their forms are quite similar in appearance to actual cows.



**Figure 4.3** / *Ploughing the Nevers*

Artist: Rosa Bonheur

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

In comparison, if we examine the renditions by folk artist Edward Hicks (1780-1849, USA), we see cows that are much less rigorous in their resemblance, most likely the result of his not having had exacting training and practice in precise replication. (Figure 4.4) A Quaker minister,

Hicks treated his painting at first as a supplemental avocation, then as his primary means of supporting his family. He used it to express themes of spiritual and historical community events that interested him, generally in simplified landscape settings that emphasized narrative and symbolic messages rather than exact proportions and details.

In some works, though, the difference in correspondence to natural appearance can be due to the artist's very different purpose for the work. *The Yellow Cow* by Franz Marc (1880-1916, Germany) clearly does not slavishly reproduce natural appearances but instead seeks to convey through abstraction a sense of light-hearted lyrical expres-



**Figure 4.4 | *The Residence of David Twining***

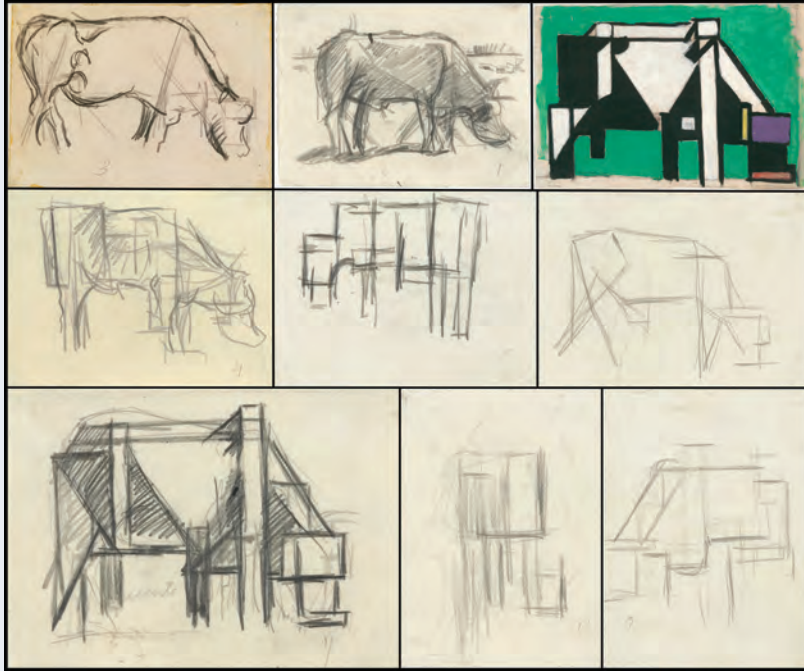
Artist: Edward Hicks  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.5 | *The Yellow Cow***

Artist: Franz Marc  
Source: Wikiart  
License: Public Domain

sion for the animal. (Figure 4.5) To achieve this end, Marc took great liberty in creating an image that went far beyond what he saw, to make an expression that carries messages of what he thought and felt about his subject. Marc created a great many images of animals in nature that were metaphorical reflections of his views of mankind and the human spirit. Such a movement towards abstraction often derives from the artist's wish to express an emotional or intellectual commentary on the subject, or to use the subject as a starting place to diverge from visual appearances of the purely



**Figure 4.6 | *Composition (The Cow)***

Artist: Theo van Doesburg

Source: MoMA

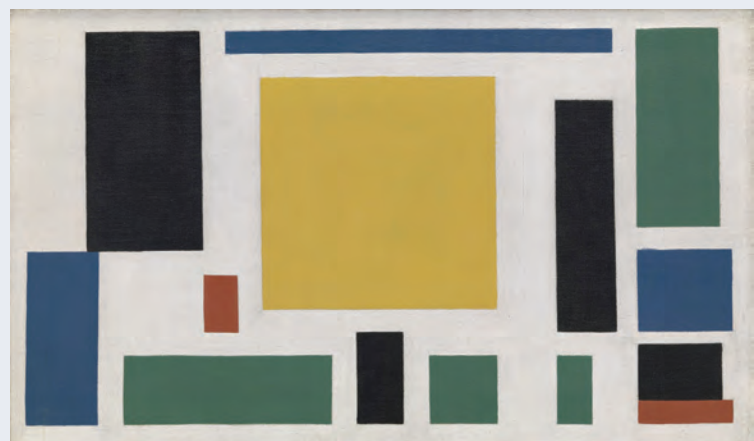
License: Public Domain

physical phenomenal world in order to create a statement of some other ideas.

Another artist bearing investigation in this regard is Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931, Netherlands), who used his own philosophical probing to frame a systematic path from naturalism in his renditions of the cow to an abstraction that is visually quite far removed from what most of us see in the phenomenal world. (Figure 4.6) Beginning with a series of exploratory sketches, he sought to reduce the linear forces of a cow's form to the three he thought were essential components of the physical and metaphysical world, that is,

vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, while reducing the three dimensions of the cow's form to the painting's two-dimensional surface. At the same time, he tried to simplify the forms and volumes, progressively creating a strongly abstracted picture that few of us would likely recognize as of a cow if we were not led through the process by which he developed the image. Indeed, we have evidence of the process and its result in *Composition VIII (The Cow)*, a fully developed instruction that provides us with great insight into Van Doesburg's train of thought and work, as well as his process of abstraction. (Figure 4.7)

Representation, then, shows us some broad vision of what we see in the original, be it a person, landscape, interior, event, or such, with some level of detail. To one degree or another, all art is ab-



**Figure 4.7 | *Composition VIII (The Cow)***

Artist: Theo van Doesburg

Source: MoMA

License: Public Domain

stract in that it is not the original form but instead the artist's response to the original form rendered in artistic terms—although, clearly, not all of it is so strongly abstracted that we lose the plainer references to the physical world.

#### 4.4.2 Idealization

Sometimes artists create an **idealized** version of a natural form rather than truly reflecting its actual appearance. This was the norm, for example, in depictions of royal figures in ancient Egypt. There was a **canon**, or set of principles and norms, for the representation of royals that was very specific about just how they must look, including norms for the proportions of the different parts of the body to one another, their stance, and other details. The canon also set standards for their garments, headgear, the false beard, the arm and fist positions, and other details. The canon was remarkably conservative and unchanging, altering very little over the many centuries that ancient Egypt existed.

The figures of the Pharaoh Menkaure (r. c. 2530–c. 2510 BCE) and his Queen Khamerernebtj are shown as being well proportioned, physically fit, and in young adulthood. (Figure 4.8) Because the king was regularly assessed with regard to his favor with the gods and fitness to rule, he was required to be in top physical condition—or so he must appear in any official imagery. This necessity resulted in the **idealization** of the natural physical form. So, while it is a representational image of the royal body, the need to depict him as a fit and worthy ruler meant that he was generally shown as being in the prime of life, with a trim and perfectly proportioned physique, and with no apparent hint of weakness or vulnerability. By contrast, the image of an Egyptian state official, Ka-Aper, who was not of royal rank, was created with a different idea. (Statue of Ka'aper: <http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=27334>) As a commoner, he is shown with a very different physique—rather pudgy and more relaxed, certainly not governed by the rules for the royal imagery. It is more naturalistic, not idealized like the royal works.

To study idealization further, we will explore the evolution of nude male sculptural forms in ancient Greece. We know Greek sculptors began with ideas they gleaned from the Egyptian forms



**Figure 4.8 / Statue of Menkaura and Queen Khamerernebtj II**

Author: Keith Schengilli-Roberts

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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A

B

C

D

**Figure 4.9 / Sculptures of the human form demonstrating anatomical accuracy**

**Photo A | Marble statue of a kouros**

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

**Photo B | The Kroisos Kouros**

Author: User "Mountain"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

**Photo C | Kritios Boy**

Author: User "Tetraktys"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

**Photo D | Doryphoros from Pompeii**

Artist: Polykleitos

Author: User "Tetraktys"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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they knew but then altered them in some very significant ways that reflected their own distinctive culture. They presented the forms in the nude (only sculptures of males were nude at first, female sculpture remained clothed until the fourth century BCE) and, over time, they increasingly sought to capture more accurate physical details and the principles of movement in the body, rather than the static sense of permanence the Egyptians had favored.

From early on, Greek artists had the opportunity to observe the Olympic contests, athletic competitions that were held every four years in honor of Zeus, the ruler of their gods. The Olympics featured nude male athletes in a great many physical activities and diverse exercises, games, and sports. Over time, Greek artists developed a keen understanding of human physiology, how various movements and feats were achieved, and how bones, muscles, and tendons coordinated and functioned. They increasingly rendered the human form with great anatomical accuracy. When we look at the sculptures in Figure 4.9, we can see the evolution of depiction from the two figures dating to the Archaic period (800-480 BCE), when kinship with Egyptian work is apparent, to the Early Classical (c. 480-450 BCE), and then the High Classical period (c. 450-400 BCE), considered to be the epitome of naturalism in artistic depiction of the male physique.

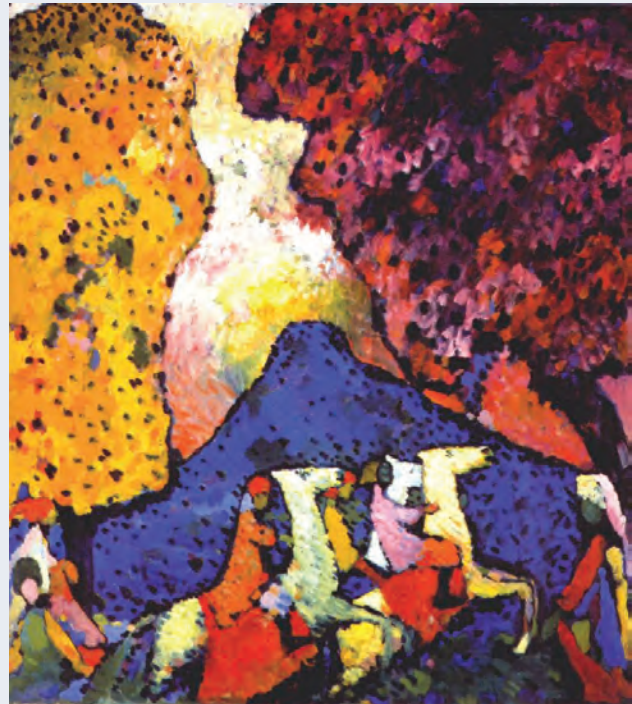
The turning point in this evolution—the moment when the achievement of naturalism was pronounced—was with the creation of the *Kritios Boy*, c. 480 BCE. (Figure 4.9c) At that point, the beginning of the Classical period in Greece, sculptors captured the potential for naturalistic movement and the *contrapposto* or weight shift of the knees and hips that occurs when standing with one leg at ease or walking. This soon gave way, however, to a canon of art for the refined form. So, again, true naturalism gave way to a notion of the “perfect” or idealized form.

### 4.4.3 Non-Representational or Non-Objective

One further note is needed in consideration of the relationship of type to response to the phenomenal world. Recurrent strains of abstraction appear throughout the history of art, when artists elected to streamline, suppress, or de-emphasize reference to the phenomenal world. In the twentieth century, though, this approach took on different character in some instances, with a stated rejection of the art as related to the natural world and concerned instead with the art itself, to the processes by which it was made, and with the product as referring to these processes and artistic qualities rather than to some outside phenomenon: the observed world.

Still, the art is never completely independent of some reference: the viewer might respond to the color, painterly effect, line quality, or some other aspect that is not necessarily associated with recognition of a particular physical object or “thing” but that relates to the qualities of the art in some way, that is, to some recognition of reference—although this recognition may be ephemeral and may be nameless. The response might be quite visceral or intellectual, nonetheless. The development of this idea was perhaps an inevitable phase of the abstraction and explorations of the formal means that had been conducted by various movements that evolved in nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Stories abound about the era in art and the push from abstraction to non-representation, with several artists claiming to have led the breakthrough. The first artist to use the term **non-objective art, however**, seems to have been Aleksandr Rodchenko (1890-1956, Russia), (*Spatial Construction no. 12*, Aleksandr Rodchenko: [http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/spatial\\_construct\\_jpg.html](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/spatial_construct_jpg.html); *Assembling for a Demonstration*,



**Figure 4.10 | Blue Mountain**

Artist: Wassily Kandinsky

Source: Wikiart

License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.11 | *Angel of the Last Judgment***

Artist: Wassily Kandinsky  
Source: Wikiart  
License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.12 | *Red Spot II***

Artist: Wassily Kandinsky  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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Aleksandr Rodchenko: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/45090?locale=en>) and its most active early theorist and writer was probably Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944, Russia, lived Germany and France). (Figures 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12)

The artistic climate fostered widespread experimentation, and the synergistic atmosphere was a seedbed for new ideas and modes of working. Rodchenko sought to affirm the independence of artistic process and the “constructive” approach to creating artworks that were self-referential, and he explored the possibilities in painting, drawing, photography, sculpture and graphic arts. Kandinsky, also Russian but working in Germany, wrote an important treatise entitled *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) that was widely popular and soon translated from the original German into many languages. He explored color theory in relationship to music, logic, human emotion, and the spiritual underpinnings of the abstractions that for centuries had been viewed and absorbed through religious icons and popular folk prints in his native Russia.

## 4.5 STYLES OF ART

In addition to looking at where along the spectrum from representation to non-representation a work of art may fall, we can examine the style of the work. Style can encompass the principles about form and appearance shared within a certain culture or era. Style can refer to a movement or group of artists and their work, where the commonalities can range from employing like elements and principles of design, to using certain materials or processes, to following a set of religious, political, or ideological beliefs. Style also indicates the visual characteristics of an individual artist’s work. We conduct a stylistic analysis by examining the artistic elements and considering how they have used, and how they relate to other works by that artist, group of artists, or in a certain time frame, culture, or region.

In general, artistic styles tend to fall into three broad categories: Period, Regional, and Formal styles. Period styles are groups of art in which the works derive their characteristic structure from the culture prevalent during a particular time period. A good example of a period style would be Gothic Art or Ming dynasty Art. Regional styles are groups of art in which the works derive their structure from the culture prevalent in a particular place. A good example of a regional style would be Dutch Art or Latin American Art. Formal styles are groups of art in which the works derive their structure from principles that are not characteristic of either one place or one time. A good example of a Formal style would be Surrealism, Impressionism, or Modernism. Formal styles tend to be the “isms.”

From the earliest times, we can see that some artists sought to make their depictions conform closely to what they saw in the world around them, but that for various reasons they often chose to emphasize certain aspects at the expense of great naturalism. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the degree of naturalism that you see in the artwork is necessarily and primarily related to the skill level of the artist.

Artistic and stylistic change is generally a matter of evolution, and often rather reactionary. The artistic choices about style (and other matters) made at any particular point are influenced by what other works of art look like at that moment. So the artist will likely try to create an expression that goes further in one direction, or changes directions in some way. Thus, art might become more naturalistic, as we have seen, or it might become less so, because the artist thinks the art might express the idea better by using a slightly different style or a radically different idea. The divergence is related to current “thinking” within the culture and other more specific circumstances.

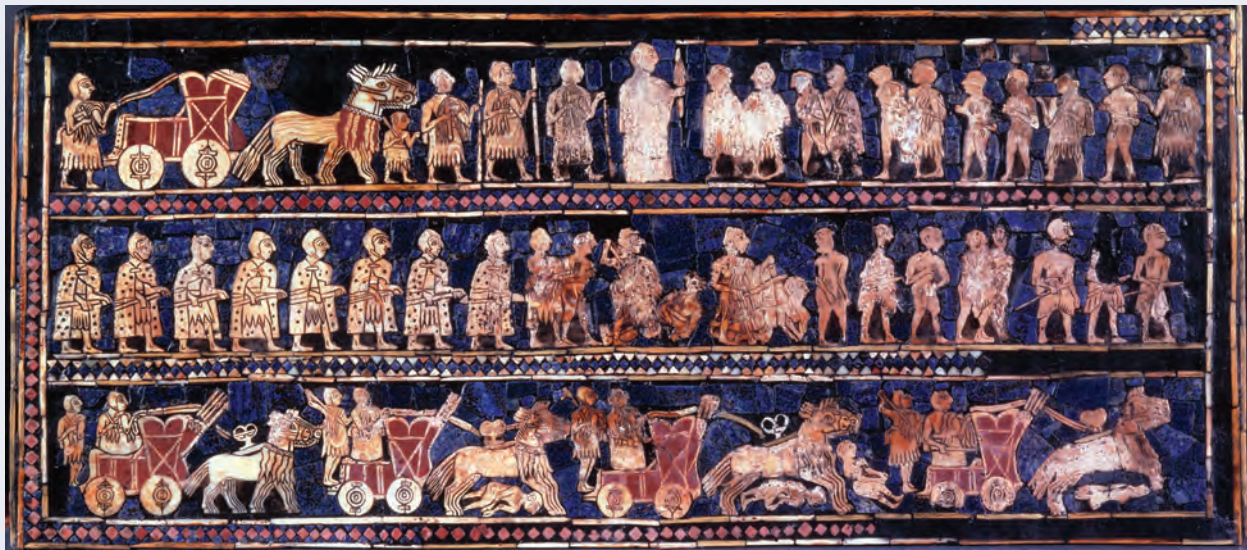
### 4.5.1 Cultural Style

There are artistic choices with regard to style in every work. While these choices are generally made at the discretion of the individual artist today, for much of history style has been a reflection of the broader cultural currents that influence so much of life in any time and place. These cultural factors have often led to the general approaches to representation that art historians call “conventions of representation.” To acquaint ourselves with these conventions and how they pertain to a cultural style, we will look at a few examples.

#### 4.5.1.1 Ancient Near East

These conventions are evident to us when we examine a broad selection of works from those created in the ancient Near Eastern cultures during several centuries. Look at the way figures are depicted in a detail from the Standard of Ur (c. 2600-2400 BCE) from ancient Mesopotamia, today Iraq, a wooden box with scenes of war and peace made from inlaid pieces of iridescent shell, red limestone, and blue lapis lazuli. (Figure 4.13) We see the figures have sufficient naturalism to allow us to easily recognize the human body. But we also see that they include a range of naturalistic detail.

The figures appear static, even when they are shown to be moving through space. They are shown in a **composite view**, that is, with portions of the body shown in profile and others in frontal view



**Figure 4.13 / Standard of Ur, 26th century BCE, "War" panel**

Author: User "Dbachmann"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.14 | Music Stele**

Author: User "Jastrow"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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so the artist can provide details that would not be visible in a strict profile. They turn the body in space so that the viewer sees the hips and shoulders, along with a twisted torso, turned slightly towards the viewer. For warriors and leaders, this is a heroic stance, showing power and command. The composite view is completed by giving a frontal view of the eye on the profile of the face and head shown.

This approach to figural forms continues in additional ancient Near Eastern works. The *Stele of Music* (c. 2120 BCE), depicting Gudea with attendants in one register and musicians below, shows the king ceremonially preparing to lay out a temple in the city of Girsu while accompanied by music and chanting. (Figure 4.14) In the relief of Sargon II, an Assyrian king who ruled 722-705 BCE, created approximately 1,400 years later, we see the use of these devices again, along with more variations of costume and headgear. (Figure 4.15)

These instances drawn from across many centuries but from the same geographical region that is today Iraq, show the persistence of a set of conventions of representation shared by the related cultural groups. We can also observe here that, when there is more emphasis on naturalism of the

human body, it is at the service of conveying a sense of power, usually to give more detail to musculature—especially in the chest and shoulders. This slight abstraction or deviation from absolute naturalism is also used to create a sense of greater physical stature and presence, a manipulation of actual sizes known as **hierarchical proportion**, meant to show the figures' relative importance. These conventions of representation serve to convey dignity and significance within the broad cultural style shared by these associated groups.

As noted, **abstraction** is not a modern method of art, but has been used purposefully in many eras. Abstraction, simplification of naturalistic forms, appears in the conventions of representation in the ancient Near East; unlike most later instances of abstraction, however, these conventions did not follow upon and show a reactionary counter-movement to a naturalistic approach, nor were they a stage that further amplified certain features for purposes of expression or emotional exaggeration.

#### 4.5.1.2 Ancient Greece and Rome

We earlier discussed the progression of cultural style in ancient Greece from the Archaic period to the High Classical period. The latter was also the era when the Parthenon temple and the other structures on the Acropolis in Athens were rebuilt or renovated as a statement of the power of that city-state. (Figure 4.16) The work of this era of artistic pinnacle is called **classical**.

By extension, the ancient Roman work that was created to emulate the Greek Classical style is sometimes defined, as well, as classical art. Careful distinctions, though, need to be made amongst the strictly classical, the imitative, and the revival of classical form in later eras. Examining these styles further, let us first look at what happened after the Greek High Classical era. Art in Greece,



**Figure 4.15 | Sargon II and dignitary**

Author: User "Jastrow"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Figure 4.16 | Acropolis of Athens**

Author: User "A.Savin"

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**Figure 4.17 | Apollo Sauroctonus**

Artist: Praxiteles  
 Author: User "Baldiri"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.18 | Hercules Farnese**

Artist: Glycon of Athens  
 Author: User "Marie-Lan Nguyen"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY 2.5

in what are called the Late Classical (400-323 BCE) and Hellenistic (323-31 BCE) periods, shows changes that move away from the High Classical norms in becoming variously more dynamic, more expressive, more emotional, more dramatic. (Figures 4.17 and 4.18) That is, they are exaggerated in some way from the calm composure of the Classical style that had expressed the cultural value of complete balance achieved by "a sound mind in a sound body," a rather sober and self-contained ideal.

In later Greek culture, we can see changes in an expansive political spirit, the influx of foreign cultural forces, the development of drama in theater, increasing materialism, and other factors that change the artistic and aesthetic spirit, consequently requiring different modes of artistic expression. The Romans, although deeply admiring the classical Greek art, held different cultural ideas and ideals, so Roman art, unless directly copying the Greek, would express their different views of life and the world. These included especially Roman worldliness, their boundless interest in expansion (which brought in a great variety of additional influences), their great ingenuity and inventiveness in such arenas as engineering and architecture, and their stress on individualism.

The Roman Republican period (509-27 BCE) overlaps the Greek late Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods. During the Republican period, Romans favored an anti-idealized approach to portrayal of people that went beyond simple naturalism to a very frank and unvarnished study of individuals, with a measure of veneration for the more mature citizens as models of an accomplished life. (Figure 4.19) The

Romans honored their ancestors and kept their venerable images as portrait heads, which they carried in funeral processions and kept in their homes; they valued the accomplishments of old age, so their views on aging and the aged were often expressed through **veristic** or truthful renditions of their likenesses.



**Figure 4.19 | Togatus Barberini**

Author: A. Hekler  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.20 | Augustus of Prima Porta**

Author: User "Till Niermann"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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However, the use of these unidealized depictions varied from one phase to another throughout ancient Roman history. It is especially noted that in the Early Imperial era (27 BCE-197 CE), with the rise of Augustus to Emperor, the practice of idealization in portraiture was again favored for the imperial likenesses, often seen clearly as part of the political propaganda used to promote the positive perception of the emperor and the promotion of his political goals and programs. The portrayal of the man Augustus, regardless of his age at the time of the creation of a portrait, was made to be the image of a powerful young man, heroic in stature, fit and fine. (Figure 4.20) Ensuing emperors varied their choices in this regard, some opting for a return to the age prior to the Imperial Age and notions of Republican virtue and the value of age and experience, others using the idealizing and propagandistic approach, to some degree.

In the late Roman Empire (284-476 CE), though, we see suppression and streamlining of natural detail in art that followed and was a reaction to that long period of naturalistic representations of

the human figure. Scholars interpret this abstraction as a means of stressing other-than-natural features that are ideological, spiritual, or philosophical in character. For example, in the *Portrait of the Four Tetrarchs* from c. 300 CE, we see that the *idea* of the **tetrarchs**, or four co-ruling emperors, working together to rule the four divisions of the vast Roman Empire is more important than the *representation of likeness* of any one of these co-rulers as an individual. (Figure 4.21)

Naturalism has given way to uniformity, with nearly identical figures of men in the same costume, crown, armor, and stance, as they embrace one another to show their joint office and efforts in the service of the Roman citizenry. Even though there is considerable detail in their clothing that links their joint rule to Roman traditions of military rulers and leaders, the suppression of distinctive, individual physical characteristics is used convey the concept of how they will function as one.

A few years later, when the Roman Empire briefly returned to a singular rule under Constantine the Great, the



**Figure 4.21 | The Tetrarchs**

Author: User "Nino Barbieri"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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new Emperor opted for an even more abstracted and simplified portrait representation. (Figure 4.22) He thus removed himself even further from the tradition of imperial portraits that had each varied in its extent of naturalism and idealization—even though the head emulates some in being clean-shaven, with a fringed cap of hair, and having an air of imperial hauteur. But it is far less personal and less intimate in its address to the viewer, both in large part to its marked suppression of detail, than depictions of earlier rulers. Further, Constantine appears to be focused on the heavens above, towards which his gaze is directed. The portrayal has been read as being more spiritual, linking him to the emerging Christian faith. Thus, the portrait is associated with a societal and cultural turn from worldly to spiritual matters, and that is likely reflected in this change in artistic interpretation.

#### 4.5.1.3 Indian Subcontinent

Strictly speaking, Greece and Rome were the classical civilizations of antiquity in the West, and some would even limit the use of the term “classical” in art to the High Classical period in Greece. The same principles and conventions of representation, however, include numerous works from other times and places. The revival of characteristics associated with the cultural styles associated with ancient Greece and Rome recur repeatedly throughout history in the West, and also appear sometimes in non-Western cultures. Becoming familiar with a few examples will make more apparent the variations of a naturalistic style, whether subtle or quite pronounced, that can be further investigated with regard for the cultural and individual values that are influential at the moment of the work’s creation and use.

In India, naturalism was not usually as restrained as those of the classical ideal we have been exploring. The Emperor Ashoka (r. 268-232 BCE), who reigned over most of the Indian subcontinent, oversaw the construction of 84,000 **stupas**, dome-shaped shrines, to house Buddhist relics. In this **Yakshi**, or female nature figure, guarding one of the four gates at the Great Stupa at Sanchi, the emphasis is on fleshy form, voluptuous and prosperous, indicating a robust healthy physique with connotations of earthly blessing and prosperity. (Figure 4.23)

During Ashoka’s reign and in the succeeding centuries, influenced by increasing contact with Western cultures and artistic styles that came with both friendly trade and aggressive military incursions by Greeks and Romans, many changes occurred in Indian art. A notable example is the Buddhist sculpture of Maitreya from Gandhara (today Pakistan), dating to the third or fourth



Figure 4.22 | Marble portrait head of the Emperor Constantine I

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

century CE. (Figure 4.24) Maitreya, derived from the Sanskrit word for “friend,” is a **bodhisattva**—a person who is able to reach nirvana but compassionately chooses to help others out of their human suffering. Maitreya, a successor to the current Buddha, will appear in the future.



**Figure 4.24 | Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya**

Source: Met Museum  
License: OASC



**Figure 4.23 | Elephants on North Torana, Sanchi, India**

Author: User “Bernard Gagnon”  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 3.0

The influence of Greek and Roman art can be seen in the treatment of drapery and the physical form. Although the figure is somewhat fleshier than Western counterparts, retaining the Indian penchant for more full-bodied physique, it is somewhat less substantial and certainly more concealed by the envelopment of abundant cloth than what had earlier been the norm for figural interpretation in India.

#### 4.5.1.4 Romanesque and Gothic Eras in Europe

Returning to Europe, Romanesque art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is noteworthy with regard to the idea of expressing a prevalent preoccupation among Christians about the ends of their lives and the end of time. For spiritual purposes, they often made a choice for greater abstraction and distortion, rather than the emphasis on a naturalistic depiction of the human form as seen in ancient Greek and Roman art. Their forms are not only simplified with suppression of naturalistic features in some ways, but are also twisted and turned in space, while their garments have a lot of linear detail that does not correspond well to the physical forms of the bodies they adorn. The effect is to remove their meaning from a focus on worldly phenomena, redirecting it to a sense of spiritual agitation.



**Figure 4.25 | Last Judgement**

Artist: Gislebertus  
 Author: User "Lametrie"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Many of the depicted scenes relate to the Christian expectations of the event of the Last Judgment, reflecting warnings to the devout that their lives and deeds now will be assessed at that point in the future. At Autun Cathedral (1120-1132) in France, we see a graphic array of elongated figures in the Last Judgment within the **tympanum**, the space above the **portals**, or doors. (Figure 4.25) The scene and surrounding decorative reliefs, created by the sculptor Gislebertus (active c. 1115-c. 1135, France) between 1130 and 1135, are centered on the flattened figure of the judging Christ. He presides over the resurrection of

the dead and the ensuing assignment to a heavenly welcome or a grotesque greeting by the denizens of Hell. Despite the lack of naturalism, the messages are clear in reference to human experience and prevalent beliefs of the era.

Following the Romanesque style in Europe was the Gothic era, which spanned the twelfth to fourteenth centuries in Italy and continued into the sixteenth century in northern Europe. The Gothic style included a return to greater naturalism, as focus shifted back to the natural world in many ways. (Figure 4.26) Figural forms began to reflect the observation of physical facts, and a phase of artistic evolution began that would eventually culminate in the intense naturalism of the Renaissance, especially in Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

Along the way, however, conventions of representation in Italy and in northern Europe diverged, producing increasing different cultural styles. For example, the "Court Style" was prevalent in the royal works of the Late Gothic era (late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), particularly in France, and lingered into the early Renaissance of the late fifteenth century in northern Europe. The approach reflected the prominence of aristocratic tastes and the



**Figure 4.26 | Saints Martin, Jerome, and Gregory**

Author: User "Jedhunsaker"  
 Source: Wikipedia  
 License: Public Domain

exaltation of earthly rulers and the conception of God and the saints (especially the Virgin Mary) as the court in Heaven. (*The Virgin of Paris*, Notre-Dame, Paris: [https://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/Images/arth212images/gothic/notre\\_dame\\_madonna\\_child.jpg](https://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/Images/arth212images/gothic/notre_dame_madonna_child.jpg))

While there is a clear change from the Romanesque style, the figures are not yet really naturalistic, with an emphasis on elegance and aristocratic attitude dominating the figural imaginings. As seen here, there is often abundant drapery falling in rich and graceful folds, so exaggerated that one cannot discern the space for a full figure beneath. The hips and knees, rather than showing the classical contrapposto positioning that the ancient Greeks developed, are gracefully swayed into an S-curve, connoting sophistication and refinement.

### 4.5.2 Stylistic Periods or Movements

In addition to examining style as a broad expression and embodiment of cultural beliefs and values, we can focus more finely upon stylistic groups and artistic movements as artists and works grouped together due to similarities in subject matter, formal approach, spiritual or political beliefs, or other commonalities. A stylistic movement can be based upon a pointed and conscientious revival of visual and philosophical traits of an earlier style. An artistic movement can also reflect the cyclical and recurrent evolution of style, with phases of moving gradually towards greater naturalism, and then rebounding towards some stylistic aberration that is less reflective of physical nature and instead expresses some other interest of human life and artistic attention.

#### 4.5.2.1 Italian Renaissance

The first artistic era in the modern West that we can speak of as possessing more specific traits and commonalities than a more broadly defined cultural style is the period known as the Renaissance, which is French for “rebirth.” Originating in Italy in the fourteenth century, the Renaissance was a period of conscious and purposeful revival of the ideas and ideals of the classical past. Within a shared cultural interest in **humanism**, the philosophical belief in the value of humans and their endeavors, artists of the Italian Renaissance sought ways to express themselves as individuals in their art. Through study of ancient art and close observation of the world around them, Renaissance artists as a group—but each characterized by singular traits—realized another pinnacle of naturalism in the human form. Italian artists of the fifteenth century would also invent linear perspective, so that all lines parallel to the viewer’s eye recede to a vanishing point on the horizon line.

A good example of linear perspective is the fresco *The Holy Trinity* by Masaccio (1401-1428, Italy), the first painting in which the technique was systematically employed. (Figure 4.27) The work depicts the crucifixion of Christ, with God the Father behind and above him supporting the cross, and Mary and St. John the Baptist standing to either side. When we extend the **orthogonal lines** from the ceiling vault above the holy figures, we find they converge at a point on the floor where the images of the patrons kneel, below and outside the vaulted area. This line divides the fresco into two zones: the zone above that, which for Christians symbolized eternal life, and the skeleton beneath the line which symbolizes the waiting grave. The **vanishing point**—and the attention of the viewer—is on the line between them where the patrons kneel in prayer. It

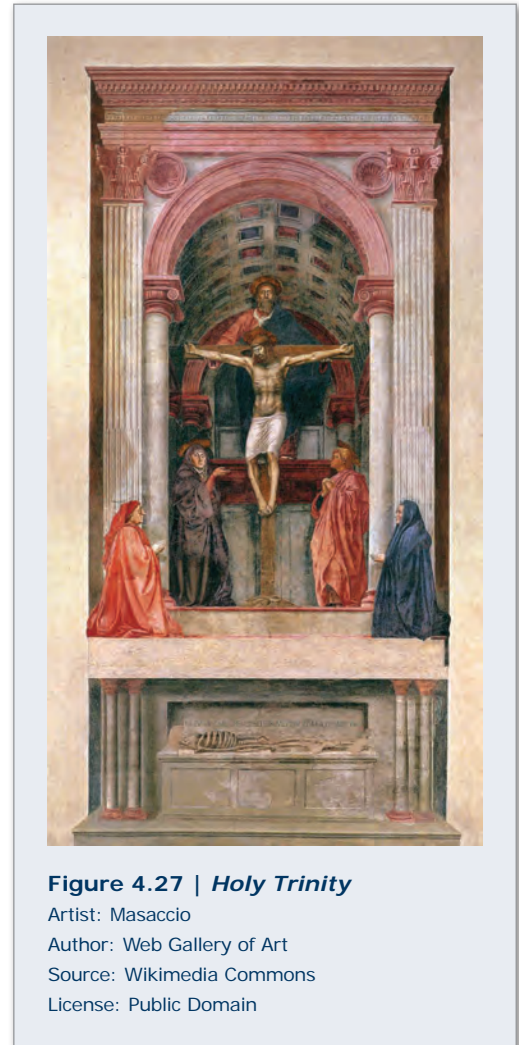
thus subtly but elegantly uses **linear perspective** to impart a message. The patrons and the viewer are “on the line between life and death” and have a religious decision to make.

During the preceding Romanesque and Gothic eras, philosophical thought was shifting from a focus on achieving everlasting life through devotion and considering humans and their feats to be weak and insignificant; however, the power of religion and religious beliefs had not diminished. Humanism of the Italian Renaissance both celebrated human intellectual and creative accomplishments—as can be seen in use of linear perspective in *The Holy Trinity*—and embraced the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that emphasized the humanity of Christ.

As a result, there was a shift away from distinct physical and emotional separation of holy figures within works of art to depictions that emphasized their spiritual presence among the faithful. For example, in the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* by Raphael (1498-1520, Italy), a hierarchy of Mary as the Queen of Heaven seated high on her throne with a ceremonial canopy and hanging cloth emphasizing her majesty is maintained. (Figure 4.28) The steps before her, however, are open for the viewer to symbolically ascend through devotion, and the serene landscape behind her is clearly on this earth and not a vision of a celestial heaven.

Subjects such as the Madonna and Child, which allowed the artist to accentuate human qualities such as the love, mercy, and tenderness which these holy figures had in common with the worshipper, were favored during the Italian Renaissance. Not only did the choice of subject matter reflect the new value placed on human empathy and agency, the myriad approaches to such subjects indicate the new freedom artists felt to abandon a broad cultural style as seen in earlier eras. Instead, they adopted stylistic traits that embodied a collective desire to “rebirth” the forms and philosophy of art as practiced in Classical Greece and Rome. This resulted in artists accentuating the individual in their art making within the agreed upon stylistic standards and ideals of the period.

As an example, compare Raphael’s *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints* to *Madonna and Child* painted approximately six years later by Titian (c. 1488-1576, Italy). (Figure 4.29) Both artists stress the tender connection between mother and child. Looking closely at the faces of all three women in Raphael’s work, however, we can see their features and the tilt of their heads are nearly identical, suggesting the artist chose to depict them in a similarly idealized manner. The Madonna in Titian’s work, on the other hand, has more individualized facial features. Titian places a greater emphasis on the naturalistic folds and flow of drapery than Raphael does, highlighting



**Figure 4.27 | Holy Trinity**

Artist: Masaccio

Author: Web Gallery of Art

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.28 | *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints***

Artist: Raphael

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



**Figure 4.29 | *Madonna and Child***

Artist: Titian

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

the transparency of cloth across Mary's lap, for example. Last, Titian brings the detailed landscape behind the figures closer to the picture plane, situating the figures in nature; Raphael focuses upon the grouping of figures in the foreground with a distant view of the land. In this way through their art, we have a front row seat to a changing cultural view about the proper relation of religious figures to the everyday physical world during the Italian Renaissance.

#### 4.5.2.2 Realism

We have already discussed naturalism as an approach to depicting objects that exist in the physical world in representational art. Now let us examine the terms naturalistic and realistic. These terms are often (incorrectly) used interchangeably, but their meanings and implications in art differ. Works that are **naturalistic** are those in which the appearance corresponds to nature, that is, to how the subject of the work looks in the natural, phenomenal world, such as the cows of Rosa Bonheur. In distinction, those that are correctly called **realistic** relay information or opinions about the underlying social or philosophical reality of the subject matter: they go beyond the natural appearance to express additional ideas.

Works created with a view to such realism may also be naturalistic in appearance, but they go beyond the naturalistic appearance to include social commentary in the pictorial message. Examples include works such as those by Gustave Courbet (1819-1877, France, Switzerland) that were created to express the realities of the rural poor in mid-nineteenth-century France and that were partly artistic statements of rebellion



**Figure 4.30 | A Burial at Ornans**

Artist: Gustave Courbet

Author: Google Art Project

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

against the prevailing norms of academically acceptable art. The *École des Beaux-Arts* was the nationally institutionalized body in control of training and exhibition of art in France, and its conservative tendencies went against such frank treatment of mundane subject matter. Rather, they promoted lofty subject matter, refined treatments, and their most highly prized works dealt with topics like history, religion, heroic narratives, and the like. Here, in the *Burial at Ornans*, Courbet presented not a grand ceremonial event, but an ordinary country funeral. (Figure 4.30) The scene includes a disparate group of common folk standing awkwardly in disarray—even though the grand size was associated with a more elevated subject and treatment.

The academic norms would have dictated that such a ritual event be presented with a greater sense of formality and pomp, emphasizing the coordination of activities in an uplifting and reverential manner. Since Courbet had trained and achieved mastery in the official French system, the painting was shown in the annual Salon, the official venue of the *École des Beaux-Arts*; nevertheless, it was widely criticized as lacking decorum and having too much **realism**.

Another of Courbet's works, *The Stone Breakers*, also shown at the Salon in 1851, garnered its share of the same sort of criticism, for it presented the hard labor of rural peasants as though it were a heroic activity. (Figure 4.31) Courbet again used realism to make a strong visual statement of the nobility of people and tasks that lay far outside the refined academic definitions of art. By doing so, he condemned not only the Academy but also the societal standards that supported such judgment and ranking of art and human activity. Thus, the art movement known as Realism was begun. Many works created in this vein were condemned and refused for exhibition in the official Salons, resulting in an anti-Academic movement among artists and the quest of many for independence from the state-con-



**Figure 4.31 | *The Stone Breakers***

Artist: Gustave Courbet  
 Author: The Yorck Project  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

trolled system for training and exhibition.

Such subject matter and approach to making art appeared in many different places throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such artwork invariably was associated with other signs of social change and upheaval, frequently reflecting the lives and interests of the peasantry—both rural and urban—and highlighting the oppressive conditions of their lives. In Russia, among other places, the movement included a spir-

it of probing and of artists expressing the distinctive cultural characteristics and specific social issues of their countrymen. Ilya Repin (1844-1930, Russia), in *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, pre-



**Figure 4.32 | *Barge Haulers on the Volga***

Artist: Ilya Repin  
 Author: User "Thebrid"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.33 | *Three Women in Church***

Artist: Wilhelm Leibl  
 Author: The Yorck Project  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

sented a realistic view of the arduous labor of men bringing the river barges to shore for unloading; the artist took great care to present each of them as an individual to be respected. (Figure 4.32) He also defined them in terms of age, physique, stature, and ethnicity, conveying the group as a sort of cross-section of Russian peasantry of the day.

In Germany, the influence of Courbet's Realism, coupled with study of portraits by Old Masters (European painters of renown c. 1200-1800), appears in a study by Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900, Germany) called *Three Women in the Church*. (Figure 4.33) In this painting, the detail of the individual women is remarkable, delineating as it does their rustic costumes, their strongly individual characters, their large work-worn hands, and their other physical features. Leibl had rendered these peasants with realistic attention to the effects of their hard life at their different ages, while conveying a great sense of respect for their traditions of family and faith. He sought to counter the legacy of glorified German history and myth with unflinching views of the ordinary people he knew.

Stylistic components of and ideas behind Realism were also used by American artists, notably in the early decades of the twentieth century,

when the crowded urban centers fostered harsh living conditions for the poor working class citizens. One important group within that stylistic movement, known as the Ashcan School, included painters such as George Bellows (1882-1925, USA), whose *Cliff Dwellers* shows the crowding and chaos in a Lower East Side New York City neighborhood on a hot summer day. (Figure 4.34)

These artists were often making commentary on the undesirable effects felt by newly arrived immigrants and the rural poor who had been lured into large metropolitan areas in hopes of better prosperity and lifestyle, especially as many remained on the lower rungs of the industrialized and commerce-oriented society. Again, the overall definition of form may be seen as naturalistic, but his efforts for realism led Bellows to a rather painterly, brushy approach that does not have definitively naturalistic detail throughout.

One further particular point needs to be made about the idea of realism in art. It is a mistaken notion to believe that photographic works are inherently or necessarily more realistic than any other work because they record some actuality. The artist who uses photography has as many opportunities for choice as one who works in any other medium and can make choices that

alter that actuality or its appearance. The photographer selects the subject matter and then can choose viewpoint, lighting, compositional field, a variety of photo processes and materials, and exposure time. The process of development and printing offers further options for manipulating the imagery, and sometimes changes are made after the printing process is complete. There is not necessarily any more “truth” or “realism” in a photo than in any other type of art.

For example, in the works of some photographers such as Edward Steichen (1879-1973, Luxembourg, lived USA) and Lucas Samaras (b. 1936, Greece, lives USA) we see that the artists have manipulated the photographs to alter their



**Figure 4.34 | Cliff Dwellers**

Artist: George Bellows  
 Author: User "Achim Raschka"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.35 | Moonlight: The Pond**

Artist: Edward Steichen  
 Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

appearances. Steichen used layers of **gum bichromate** to add color and to create a sense of hazy atmosphere for a mysterious nocturnal landscape. (Figure 4.35) Samaras, on the other hand, created a type of photography he called **Photo-Transformation** by using his fingers and a stylus to move and smear the dyes of a Polaroid print while still wet. (*Photo-Transformation*, Lucas Samaras: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/265049>) Leaving the protruding hand untouched, Samaras altered the spatial relationships in his photograph by blurring the surrounding imagery, including his own face, which became quite indistinct in the process. The stages of creating photographs

offer innumerable opportunities for altering the imagery from its “natural” appearances, while still often retaining the sense of “authenticity” of the photograph itself.

#### 4.5.2.3 Expression(ism)

As we have seen, choices made to move away from naturalism can reflect both the culture at large and the issues with which artists concern themselves as they seek to express ideas and/or feelings of the moment. **Expression** has been sought for many purposes related to thought, belief, emotional impetus, and any human concern that might prompt the creation of artistic articulation, in its various forms and media. Often, though, the idea of **expressionism** in art is more narrowly used to define the idea of foregoing a measure of naturalism in favor of the emotional content, emphasizing how the culture and the artist felt about the subject matter. This may be used in the West or East.

Examples are numerous in the illustrations of narratives, such as the Indian mythological story of the Hindu Goddess Durga, who dramatically slays the Buffalo Demon, using weapons borrowed from the male gods. (Figure 4.36) Such a story lends itself well to a dynamically expressive interpretation in art, as does the sort of devotional idea presented in the German works called **andachtsbilder**, devotional images used to aid prayer, as seen in Figure 4.37. These works were created on both small and large scale to provoke contemplation of the sufferings of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ as prompted by the stories of the Passion of Christ. Such works were further inspired by the relation of the holy figures’ sufferings to the physical effects of the Black Plague, rampant from Asia to Europe during the fourteenth century.

A more specific movement of Expressionism in Germany arose in the early twentieth century to give artistic form to the emotional and societal reactions to unrest caused by political and cultural upheavals. Reflecting the desire for social reform that was part of Realism as well as the long history of expressiveness in German art, the group was named the New Objectivity (*Neue*



**Figure 4.36 | The Great Goddess Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon**

Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 4.37 | Pieta Liebieghaus**

Author: User "FA2010"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

*Sachlichkeit*). In the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918), these artists presented harsh and piercing glimpses of the effects of the war's devastation on German society in the 1920s and of the ensuing societal unrest accompanying the emergence of the Nazis and the Third Reich in the 1930s. Artists such as Max Beckmann (1844-1950, Germany, Netherlands, USA) and George Grosz (1893-1959, Germany) used their craft to level harsh and cynical criticism against what they saw in the society around them, at home and across Europe.

In *Paris Society*, Beckmann showed a group of businessmen, aristocrats, and intellectuals (many of whom emigrated to Paris to flee conditions at home) gathered for what ought to be an evening of social pleasantries, but was instead one clearly pervaded by a sense of foreboding and gloom. (*Paris Society*, Max Breckmann: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/503>) The realism here shows the lack of connection among the partygoers, even to the extent that they apparently avoid or ignore one another, crowded as they are into an uncomfortable space. Beckmann himself, once a celebrated

artist in Germany, became an object of censure and ridicule by the time of the Nazi regime, and his artwork is often full of a sense of the malaise of the age.

Grosz, also despised by the Nazis, tended to make much more specific use of his critical realism, delineating especially harsh condemnations of the military and governmental establishments. For example, in *The Hero*, Grosz used graphic realism to convey his view of the anti-heroic treatment of individuals—especially World War I veterans—that he saw all around him. (*The Hero*, George Grosz: [http://www.moma.org/collection\\_ge/object.php?object\\_id=72585](http://www.moma.org/collection_ge/object.php?object_id=72585)) In the work of these two artists, we can note that the realistic approach sometimes moves away from strong naturalism. The artists seem to have deliberately chosen to make their renditions somewhat abstracted and unrefined—even crude—for the sake of expressive emphasis.

#### 4.5.2.4 Abstract Expressionism

We examined differences between representational and abstract art when we explored Van Doesburg's exploration of cows and the work of other artists who manipulated form by reducing its

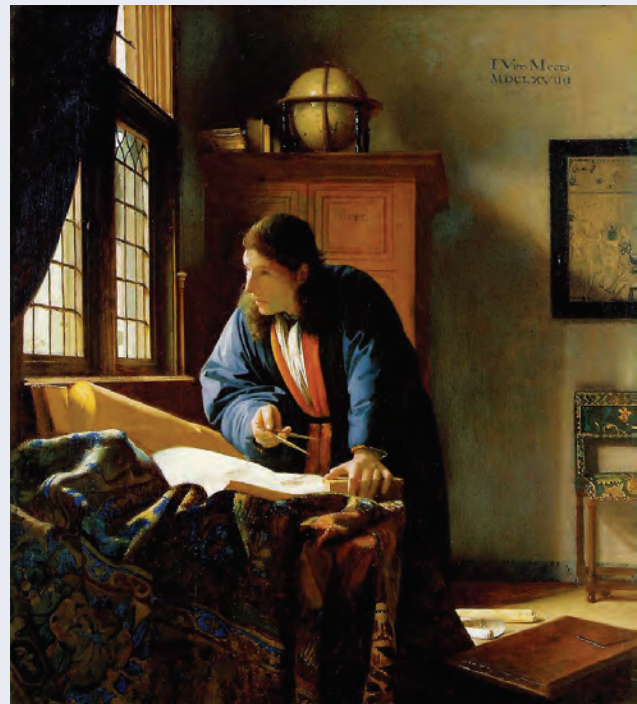
visual components or altering its appearance so that the form did not conform to the ways it might appear in nature. These artists chose to limit the degree to which they would carry the investigation of abstraction, opting to avoid losing references that were more or less clearly recognizable.

In the middle of the twentieth century, based in New York City, a movement called **Abstract Expressionism** included works of drawing, painting, print, and sculpture that were focused on the physical properties of the medium used as opposed to pictorial narrative, although not all of them were without reference to the figure or the phenomenal world altogether. In the work *Untitled* of 1957 by Clyfford Still (1901-1980, USA), we see how the imagery can remind us of a jagged crevice in a mountain landscape, but without definitive representation, and the artist himself denied that there was such a subject there. (PH-971, Clyfford Still: <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/75.35>)

Other artists associated with Abstract Expressionism used less sense of representation in their work. Included in the category were Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko (1903-1970, Latvia, lived USA). (*The Deep*, Jackson Pollock: <http://www.wikiart.org/en/jackson-pollock/the-deep-1953>; *No. 61 (Rust and Blue)*, Mark Rothko: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:No\\_61\\_Mark\\_Rothko.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:No_61_Mark_Rothko.jpg)) Abstract Expressionist artists were more concerned with artistic process and formal means than with the creation of narrative pictures. In examining a small cross section of work by the Abstract Expressionist artists, we can see that it may not be appropriate, after all, to call this a stylistic category, as there is not really a stream of visual similarities among them; rather, they are characterized as much by their freedom from the constraints of stylistic rules and their lack of unifying visual features.

### 4.5.3 Individual Style

Johannes (or Jan) Vermeer lived in the seventeenth century, a time of artistic flowering often referred to as the Golden Age of Dutch art. During his lifetime, Vermeer was a painter of some renown in his hometown of Delft whose work was purchased by a small number of collectors. After his death in 1675 at the age of forty-three, however, he and his work were largely forgotten, in part because the few works he painted were in private collections and rarely seen. For example, Vermeer's painting *The Geographer* was in the hands of more than two-dozen private owners before it was sold to the Städel Museum (Städelsches Kunstinstitut) in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1885. (Figure 4.38) And, Vermeer himself was not



**Figure 4.38 | *The Geographer***

Artist: Johannes Vermeer

Author: User "Hkgeogphr"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

“re-discovered” until 1860, when museum director Gustav Waagen recognized a work attributed to another artist as a painting by Vermeer. Working with Waagen, art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger published a **catalogue raisonné**, a detailed, comprehensive list of the artist’s work, in 1866, launching Vermeer toward the fame he and his thirty-four known paintings enjoy to this day.

After such a long period of obscurity, it is all the more interesting that Vermeer is considered today to have such a distinctive style. As in *The Geographer*, the great majority of his works are set in a



**Figure 4.39 | *Wheat Field with Cypresses***

Artist: Vincent van Gogh  
 Author: Met Museum  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

domestic interior, strongly lit by a multi-paned window to the left. Sunlight washes across the table at the window and the figure standing there, to the floor and the wall behind. The objects in the room are both those commonly found in a Dutch household of the day and specific to the occupation of a geographer, namely, the celestial globe, charts, and compass the man holds. Vermeer achieved the luminosity of the scene, with small details warmly highlighted to a fine glow, by applying multiple layers of translucent glazes of paint. The palette of earth tones interspersed with the vivid blue of ground lapis lazuli and brilliant vermilion of powdered cinnabar provide a richness, clarity, and stillness that are distinctively Vermeer’s, as well.

The life and work of Vincent van Gogh also provides us with a good example to talk about the individual style of an artist. In addition to what can be learned about the artist through his drawings and paintings, the more than 800 letters Van Gogh wrote to his brother, Theo, other family members, and friends, provide valuable information about his artistic intentions and thoughts about his art and life. After a childhood the artist described as troubled and lonely, he found happiness in 1869 at the age of sixteen when he took a position with the art dealer Goupil & Cie, first in the Dutch city of The Hague and then in London, England. After leaving the firm in 1876, however, he spent the next seven years in a series of vocational and romantic pursuits that left Van Gogh disillusioned and adrift. In 1883, he began to pursue drawing and painting, for which he had shown promise as a child. The two years he spent in Paris, 1886-1888, provided him with seemingly endless opportunities to study and grow as an artist. Overwhelmed by the pace of life there, however, in 1888 he settled in Arles, a small town in the south of France, where he spent the last two years of his life.

Largely based on the prolific artistic output during and biographical details about those last two years, Van Gogh is well known as an emotionally troubled artist who struggled artistically, financially, and socially. His work from that period does not look like that of any of his contemporaries, so we feel confident that his choice of subject and technique reveals something personal and intimate rather than polished, distant, and conventional. (Figure 4.39) His swirling brush strokes and vivid colors seem to indicate the chaotic and emotionally turbulent life he was experiencing. His choice of cypress trees as symbols of eternity reveal a concern with the spiritual that is well documented in his letters of the time. His passion, dedication to painting, and perhaps even a kind of desperation all seem to drive Van Gogh's individual stylistic approach.

## 4.6 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

### Key Concepts

Visual art can be usefully interpreted using a variety of approaches to discovering meaning in the elements, principles, and relationships present in works of art. A structured approach using description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation is presented and exemplified as one mode for understanding how works of art can carry meaning.

Other modes of interpretation recognize many approaches to art-making. Works of art may be idealized, representational, non-objective, or abstract. Issues of historical and personal style also become important in understanding what artists hoped to communicate with their artwork.

Types of art revolve primarily around representation, abstraction, idealization, and non-objective art, which is a rejection of representation.

The historical progression of artistic style simultaneously relies on and is limited by technology, socio-cultural, and religious constraints. Examples of cultural or Regional style are drawn from the ancient Near East, Ancient Greece and Rome, and the Indian sub-continent. Examples of period styles exemplified include the Romanesque and Gothic periods of Europe and the Italian Renaissance. Examples of formal styles, i.e., the "isms," include nineteenth century realism, expressionism of Weimar Germany, and the Abstract Expressionism of the New York School.

### Test Yourself

1. Discuss the difference between the categories of representational art, abstract art, and non-representational art.
2. Cite and briefly describe the four phases of critical analysis presented in this chapter.

Phase	Description
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____

- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Cite one example of an idealized work of art and discuss potential reasons for and goals of this idealization, especially as relates to the work's culture of origin.
4. Restate the three types of art historical **style** mentioned in this chapter, citing one example of each, and illustrate this example with a specific work of art

Style	Example	Artwork
a. _____	_____	_____
b. _____	_____	_____
c. _____	_____	_____

## 4.7 KEY TERMS

**Abstract:** in art, the property of representing selected essential features of a particular subject instead of relying on objective appearance alone.

**Andachtsbilder:** a German term to denote devotional images used to aid prayer.

**Bodhisattva:** in Buddhism, an enlightened person who remains in the world in order to help others attain enlightenment.

**Catalogue Raisonné:** a published collection of all the works of a given artist or art exhibition.

**Composite view:** the construction of a human figure from both profile and frontal views, for example, as in ancient Egyptian art.

**Contrapposto:** an asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure in which the line of the arms and shoulders contrasts with and balances the line of the hips and legs.

**École des Beaux-Arts:** an influential art school in France.

**Expressionism:** one of several art movements of the twentieth century that were concerned with conveying emotional and mental responses through art (German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Expressionism).

**Gum Bichromate:** a photographic print process which uses gum Arabic and bichromate.

**Hierarchical proportion:** the condition in which the size of figures is determined by social importance rather than observation.

**Humanism:** the belief that people are naturally good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion.

**Idealized:** an image that is represented as being ideal or perfected.

**Linear perspective:** a geometric system for representing the illusion of receding space.

**Naturalistic:** of or pertaining to the appearance of nature, without idealization.

**Non-objective:** unrelated to or exclusive of perceptions of objective external reality.

**Non-representational:** artwork which intentionally avoids the strategy of representation, instead selecting only novel and original experience as subject matter.

**Orthogonal lines:** in linear perspective, diagonal lines that recede into fictive space.

**Photo-transformation:** a type of photography created by Lucas Samaras which uses fingers and a stylus to move and smear the dyes of a Polaroid print while still wet.

**Portals:** in Gothic architecture, doorways, traditionally embellished with sculptural decoration.

**Representation:** in art, the use of signs or images which stand in for or take the place of something else.

**Stupas:** in Buddhist religious architecture, rounded mounds which contain religious relics, mark sacred places, or are used as sites of meditation.

**Tetrarch:** in Roman political history, the term for one of four co-emperors of the Roman Empire installed by Diocletian in 293 CE.

**Tympanum:** in Gothic Architecture, the semi-circular area above the Portal, traditionally embellished with sculptural decoration.

**Vanishing point:** in linear perspective, the point on the horizon to which orthogonal lines converge.

**Yakshi:** in Hindu and Buddhist mythologies, female counterparts to male Yaksha, who are both mythical beings that guard treasure hidden in the Earth.

# 5

## Meaning in Art

### Socio-Cultural Contexts, Symbolism, and Iconography

*Pamela J. Sachant and Rita Tekippe*

#### 5.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Place works of art in historical, social, personal, political, or scientific contexts.
- Define and distinguish between symbolism and iconography.
- Identify changes in symbols and iconographic motifs over time and in different cultures.
- Relate iconography to visual literacy.
- Describe connections between symbolism, iconography, and storytelling.
- Recognize metaphorical meanings in art.

#### 5.2 INTRODUCTION

The process we go through when we look at a work of art to determine if we recognize and can make sense of its content is not just a visual one. It is a mental process as well, largely based on the elements within and about the work we can identify and categorize. As we look and think, we may be given clues about what the work means by where it is, when it was made, what culture it came from, who created it, or why it was made. Any information we can gather helps us understand the work's context, that is, for what historical, social, personal, political, or scientific reasons the work of art was made. And then, using all the contextual information we have gathered, we interpret the work of art's content to discover what it means or symbolizes.

#### 5.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

##### 5.3.1 Historical Context

We can learn about the historical context to help us interpret the content and understand the meaning of two seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. Willem Claesz. Heda (1594-1680, Nether-



**Figure 5.1 | *Still Life with Gilt Goblet***

Artist: Willem Claeszoon Heda  
 Author: Web Gallery of Art  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain



**Figure 5.2 | *Vase of Flowers***

Artist: Jan Davidszoon de Heem  
 Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"  
 Source: Wikimedia Commons  
 License: Public Domain

lands) created *Still Life with a Gilt Cup* in 1635, and Jan Davidsz. de Heem painted *Still Life with Flowers* around 1660. (Figures 5.1 and 5.2) Heda lived in his native Haarlem his entire life; de Heem was born in Utrecht but traveled in the Netherlands and then lived in Antwerp for the majority of his career, c. 1635 to 1667. He briefly returned to Utrecht but settled back in Antwerp in the 1670s where he remained until his death.

Although depicting different types of things, each of these paintings is a **still life**, an arrangement of objects both made by humans and found in nature, such as flowers, fruit, insects, sea creatures, and animals from the hunt. A still life falls into a subject category known as **genre** subjects or scenes of everyday life. Both Heda and de Heem specialized in painting still lifes that were beautifully arranged and stunningly lifelike. Each was well known for his ability to depict a variety of textures and surfaces often displayed side-by-side, as we can see here, to create a dazzling and sumptuous visual array.

There are a number of things going on in the Netherlands in the 1600s—known as the Dutch Golden Age—that can help explain why Heda and de Heem included some of the objects in their paintings. What is today the Netherlands (or Holland) and Belgium were together ruled first by the Dukes of Burgundy, the Burgundians, beginning in 1433 and then by Charles V of the Habsburg family in 1506. Charles V left the Netherlands in 1515, however, to become King of Spain. Tension created by family members who remained in place to rule led to friction with the Dutch and eventually to revolt beginning in 1566. At the same time,

the Protestant Reformation that originated in Wittenberg, Germany, under Martin Luther in 1517 had spread through much of northern Europe, including parts of the Netherlands. Followers of the new Protestant faith were at first tolerated by the Catholic Spanish rulers, but they were soon treated as heretics, and their faith was seen as a rebellion to be crushed. William I, Prince of Orange, a Dutch nobleman, turned away from his position in the court of the Habsburg rulers to lead his country into the Dutch War for Independence from Spain, more commonly known as the Eighty Years War (1568-1648). In 1581, the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands were declared independent, forming what we still know as Holland today. The southern area that remained under Catholic Spanish rule was known as Flanders and is modern Belgium. Fighting continued on and off between the Dutch and Spanish until 1618 when they both became embroiled in a larger European War known as the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). With the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Spanish crown officially acknowledged the republic of Holland.

In the midst of this ongoing turmoil over politics and religion, as well as decades of disruption and destruction caused by war, the Netherlands also experienced a time of tremendous economic growth, revolutionary scientific exploration, dominance in worldwide trade, and flourishing of the arts. The rise of the merchant class (equivalent to today's middle class) led to the spread of education and wealth among new segments of society. Their knowledge of and appreciation for art, along with their discretionary income, in turn led to increased patronage. Patrons of art were not looking to purchase sculptures and paintings for churches, however, as Protestants do not embellish their houses of worship; they do not adorn the word of God as found in the Bible. This led to interest in new subjects in painting, such as genre and still life painting, as well as landscapes, city views, portraits, and religious subjects in works meant to hang in the home.

The subject of Heda's painting, *Still Life with a Gilt Cup*, is ostensibly the remains of a meal of oysters and bread, but it is even more about all the objects accompanying the food. (Figure 5.1) The tin plates and open-lidded pewter pitcher are relatively simply fashioned and could have been made by local craftsmen. But the remaining items, including a spiral ribbed clear glass cruet for oil or vinegar behind the tin bowl of oysters, the green glass wine römer, or goblet, decorated with **prunts** (applied blobs of molten glass, here drawn into points), and the tall, heavily ornamented, and gilded vessel topped by a lid with a figure of a warrior, are all luxury goods. They indicate wealth and good taste, and they allude to Holland's importance as a nation of traders who import beautiful objects from around the world.

We are not meant to look at this feast for the eyes and simply congratulate ourselves on our success and prosperity, though. The fact is the feast is over, and all we have here are the remains of what has too quickly passed. The richly decorated silver berkemeier, a wide-mouthed drinking vessel with a slender stem, is overturned. The oysters are a delicacy that retain their freshness and appeal only briefly, and the lemon, while beautiful, is actually bitter and will soon dry out. These are reminders that life is fleeting. No matter what material riches and comforts one accumulates on earth, it is more important to prepare one's soul for life everlasting.

In a similar fashion, in *Still Life with Flowers* de Heem sets before us, teeming with life and in abundant disarray, the beauty and bounty of nature. (Figure 5.2) But he also shows the swift passing of the seasons by depicting flowers, fruits, and vegetables that bloom and ripen throughout the

year. The tulips—from highly prized and costly bulbs imported by the Dutch from the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey)—honeysuckle, roses, carnations, peas, grapes, and corn—introduced to Europe from the Americas—are among the profusion of colors and forms that de Heem unrealistically depicts as all in season at the same time. The viewer would instead know that long before the orange carnation blossomed in the fall, the blood-red striped tulip would have withered in the spring. De Heem is reminding us in this **vanitas** (Latin: vanity) still life of our own mortality and the transience of life in the face of certain death.

Both paintings' messages reflect the importance in the Protestant faith, as practiced in Holland at the time, of the believer's direct connection to God without the need for intercessors. The faithful do not need the word of God to be interpreted for them, and the messages of God are everywhere. Both paintings are celebrations of riches and pleasures of life, but they are also reminders of its brevity and the unimportance of earthly possessions and human achievements in the face of eternity. So, while the works demonstrate the Dutch viewers' pride in themselves and their young nation's accomplishments in the face of tremendous obstacles, they also carry a word of caution and a reminder to be vigilant.

### 5.3.2 Social Context

Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1902, USA) painted *Conversation Piece* around 1851-1852. (Figure 5.3) A **genre painting**, it depicts an everyday scene of a mother holding her infant in her lap while the father stands beside them playfully dangling some cherries above the baby's eager grasp. It is a quiet scene of family life, a moment of contentment and peace, with the dining table not yet cleared after a meal adding an even greater sense of intimacy and informality. Spencer was the only prominent female painter at that time in the United States, and the majority of her works are narrative genre pieces such as this one. They are scenes of domestic life, often suggesting a story told through the setting, the arrangement and gesture of the figures, and their facial expressions.

Elements in Spencer's work often seem to reflect her personal life. The artist depicted herself and her husband



**Figure 5.3 / *Conversation Piece***

Artist: Lilly Martin Spencer

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

in *Conversation Piece*, as she did in many of her paintings. Not only was it unusual that she was a successful professional painter, when she married Benjamin Rush Spencer, he took on the household duties and aided his wife in pursuing her career. Over the course of their long (and what is believed to be happy) marriage, while also bearing thirteen children and raising seven to adulthood, Spencer remained the breadwinner of the family.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of changes had been introduced into American industry and commerce that had far-reaching effects on the roles women, men, and children played in the home and in the labor force. The advent of new machinery and production methods in the textile industry, for example, generated a need for mill workers that in turn fostered the growth and spread of urban centers. At the same time, both those who owned and managed the mill factories as well as those who worked in them became part of a wage-based economy, and the demand for goods and services to support them rose accordingly. In New England, the majority of the mill workers were young women who had been recruited from rural areas; the wages they earned were often saved in anticipation of marriage or to supplement their family's income. But critics feared the economic and social independence these young women gained would turn them against the often hard and isolated farm lives they left behind, and indeed many chose not to return. The greatest apprehension, however, was these women would turn away from their rightful place in the private sphere of home.

The growing industrialism of American society impacted men and their roles within and outside the home, as well. Men primarily worked in the public sphere, that is, outside the home in areas such as manufacturing, business, or commerce. Their roles were in sharp contrast to the domestic duties and roles of wife and mother played by women. This separation of obligations and expectations led to rigid gender roles in which both women and men were contained. The roles confined the woman to the protective environment of home, while the man sheltered her as he faced the harsh demands outside.

In Spencer's painting, the woman represents the feminine ideal of a nurturing and content mother. But rather than showing a father who holds himself apart from the womanly, domestic sphere—as was far more common at the time—Spencer depicts the man in an equally caring and warm role. An oval is formed by the mother's bent head and arm which extends from her hand supporting the baby's head through the baby's upraised arm to the father's bent arm, his bowed head, and his left arm resting on the back of the mother's chair. At odds with many at the time who believed men and women existed in separate spheres, Spencer draws the family into one circle.

American industrialism worked hand-in-hand with American ingenuity. Steamboat routes on the Mississippi River and its tributaries substantially contributing to the growth of settlements and cities from New Orleans to Pittsburgh began in 1811. The first steamboat to make that run was the *New Orleans* designed by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston, both key figures in the development of steamboat design and travel. As would be the case with the thousands of steamboats that would traverse the Mississippi over the next century, it was made of wood and propelled by a paddlewheel that was powered by a steam engine; the steam was made by heating water in boilers which had to be watched to avoid pressure building to the point of explosion, a very real and constant danger. In attempts to better travel time between landings or by engaging in races with



**Figure 5.4 | *The Champions of the Mississippi - "A Race for the Buckhorns"***

Artist: Frances Flora Bond Palmer

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

other steamboats, however, it was not uncommon for the engineer to stoke the fires while keeping the boilers' safety valves closed, allowing steam pressure to build past safe levels.

Although 230 boats were destroyed due to boiler explosions between 1816 and 1848 with the loss of nearly 1,800 lives, one of the great attractions of steamboat travel remained its speed.<sup>1</sup> The excitement and the danger of a steamboat race are captured in a print published by Currier & Ives in 1866, *The Champions of the Mississippi: A Race for the Buckhorns*. (Figure 5.4) Nathaniel Currier (1813-1888, USA) and his brother-in-law James Merritt Ives (1824-1895, USA) formed the company Currier & Ives in 1857. They published black-and-white and hand-colored lithographs on numerous subjects meant to appeal to a broad spectrum of the American public, including landscapes, genre scenes, portraits, depictions of politics and current events, and the latest innovations in science, industry, and the arts.

<sup>1</sup> "Steamboats." American Eras. 1997. [Encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2536600971.html). (June 22, 2015). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2536600971.html>

The firm of Currier & Ives hired well-known artists of the day to create the drawings from which their lithographic prints were made. The artist who drew the *Champions of the Mississippi* was Frances Flora Bond Palmer (1812-1876, USA). Palmer, like Lilly Martin Spencer, supported her family as a full-time artist. Palmer produced hundreds of original drawings in the seventeen years she worked for Currier & Ives, more than any other artist they employed. She printed and hand-colored many of her own works, as well, parts of the lithographic process generally reserved for artists in the firm with less training and expertise. For example, the prints were usually painted in an assembly line, with one artisan applying a single color and passing the work on to the next for another color. That Palmer took part in all phases of creating the prints was an indication of her great skill and versatility.

As was the case with the majority of scenes Palmer created, she did not witness the race between the steamboats *Queen of the West* and *Morning Star* or the cheering crowd on the shore. She depicted numerous such scenes, however, as competitions such as this were commonplace and prints commemorating them were popular and sold well. The races and the steamboats were a source of pride and a celebration of American ingenuity, competitiveness, and success. For those who owned a print such as *The Champions of the Mississippi*, the vast majority of whom had never seen the river or a steamboat competition, it represented the open possibilities of America's greatest waterway and indomitable spirit. As described by Mark Twain, who grew up in a town on the river's shore and spent four years as a riverboat pilot (1857-1861), there was a nearly magical quality to the allure and excitement of life on the river, especially when a steamboat race was coming. He related in his memoir *Life on the Mississippi* (1883):

In the "flush times" of steamboating, a race between two notoriously fleet steamers was an event of vast importance. The date was set for it several weeks in advance, and from that time forward, the whole Mississippi Valley was in a state of consuming excitement. Politics and the weather were dropped, and people talked only of the coming race.

The chosen date being come, and all things in readiness, the two great steamers back into the stream, and lie there jockeying a moment, and apparently watching each other's slightest movement, like sentient creatures; flags drooping, the pent steam shrieking through safety-valves, the black smoke rolling and tumbling from the chimneys and darkening all the air. People, people everywhere; the shores, the house-tops, the steamboats, the ships, are packed with them, and you know that the borders of the broad Mississippi are going to be fringed with humanity thence northward twelve hundred miles, to welcome these racers.<sup>2</sup>

### 5.3.3 Personal or Creative Narrative Context

Charles Demuth (1883-1935, USA) painted *The Figure 5 in Gold* in 1928. (Figure 5.5) Demuth met poet and physician William Carlos Williams at the boarding house where they both lived in Philadelphia while studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Demuth's painting is one in a series of portraits of friends, paying homage to Williams and his 1916 poem "The Great Figure":

<sup>2</sup> Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.), 1883. Accessed from: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/245/245-h/245-h.htm>

Among the rain  
and lights  
I saw the figure 5  
in gold  
on a red  
firetruck  
moving  
tense  
unheeded  
to gong clangs  
siren howls  
and wheels rumbling  
through the dark city.

Williams described the inspiration for his poem as an encounter with a fire truck as it noisily sped along the streets of New York, abruptly shaking him from his inner thoughts to a jarring awareness of what was going on around him. Demuth chose to paint his portrait of Williams not as a likeness but with references to his friend, the poet. The dark, shadowed diagonal lines radiating from the center of his painting, punctuated by bright white circles, capture the jolt of the

charging truck accompanied by the clamor of its bells. The accelerating beat of the figure 5 echoes the pounding of Williams's heart as he was startled. It was the sight of the number in gold that Williams was first aware of at the scene, and Demuth uses the pulsing 5 to symbolically portray his friend, surrounded by the rush of red as bright as blood with his name, Bill, above as if flashing in red neon.

For Demuth, that connection between his friend and his poetry told us far more about who Williams *was* than his physical appearance. A traditional portrait would show us what Williams looked like, but Demuth wanted to share with the viewer the experience of the poem the artist closely identified with his friend so that we would have an inner, deeper understanding of the poet. Demuth gave us his personal interpretation of Williams through the story, the narrative, that he tells us with the aid of "The Great Figure."

Georgia O'Keeffe gives us a portrait of the American landscape in a similar way in her painting *Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue* from 1931. (*Cow's Skull: Red, White, and Blue*, Georgia O'Keeffe: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/488694>) Throughout the



**Figure 5.5** | *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*

Artist: Charles Demuth

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century, the majority of artists depicted the American land through its mountains and forests, farmlands and prairies, rivers and waterfalls: the vast stretches, immense heights, bounty, variety, and majesty of the seemingly endless continent. In this painting, however, O’Keeffe chose to portray the beauty of the United States not through its fertile grasslands or rocky peaks but in the austerity and simplicity of the desert of the American Southwest that she had come to appreciate, as symbolized by the sharp lines of a bleached cow’s skull set against patriotic red and blue.

O’Keeffe was born in 1887 near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. After studying art and working as an art teacher in several areas of the United States, including Chicago, Illinois, Amarillo, Texas, and Columbia, South Carolina, O’Keeffe moved to New York City in 1918.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946, USA), a photographer, publisher, and art gallery owner who was instrumental in introducing audiences to and helping them appreciate European and American modernist art in this country in the first decades of the twentieth century, had exhibited O’Keeffe’s drawings in his gallery 291 in 1917. The following year she accepted his offer of support so that she could devote herself to painting full-time. After more than ten years in New York, depicting streets and buildings of the city and at the Stieglitz family home on Lake George in upstate New York, O’Keeffe decided to spend the summer of 1929 with friends in Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico.

Painted after that trip, *Cow’s Skull: Red, White, and Blue* shows the artist providing a contrast to traditional and popular landscape views. She is inviting the viewer to contemplate how nature can be daunting and uninviting and to remember the flinty strength of the pioneers who moved across and settled in the demanding climate and terrain of the Southwest. The harshness of that life can be seen in the jagged lines of splintered bone in the skull, a reminder of inevitable death—similar to a seventeenth-century Dutch *vanitas* piece such as de Heem’s *Vase of Flowers*. But, the skull was also an object representing life to O’Keeffe:

To me they are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around...The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho’ it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.<sup>3</sup>

### 5.3.4 Political Context

As was the case with the painting *Pear Blossoms* by Qian Xuan (Figure 1.10), *Bamboo and Rocks* by Li Kan (1245-1320, China) was painted during the Yuan Dynasty when the Mongols ruled China. (Figure 5.6) There are similarities but also important differences between the works. *Pear Blossoms* was painted in 1280, shortly after the Mongols took power, and *Bamboo and Rocks* was painted nearly forty years later in 1318. During that period, the Mongolian leaders made substantial changes in the government, thrusting out those in imperial power and scholar officials, including painters. Those who had been at the top of the social and political hierarchy were now turned away from government positions and looked upon with distrust and distaste.

3 Georgia O’Keeffe, “About myself” in *Georgia O’Keeffe: Exhibition of oils and pastels* (New York: An American Place: 1939).



**Figure 5.6 / *Bamboo and Rocks***

Artist: Li Kan

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

during the Yuan Dynasty, under the rule of the Mongol, the Chinese people would be like bamboo; they would bow but not break in the uncertain climate of the rocky landscape of occupation.

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828, Spain) was court painter to King Charles IV from the beginning of his reign in 1789 until Napoleon ousted Charles from his throne in 1808 during the French invasion of Spain. Goya was hired the same year to make a visual record of the bravery of the Spanish people against the onslaught of the French invaders. The impact of

Although the Mongols appreciated Chinese painting and artists were commissioned to make (or appointed to produce) works for those in power, many were unwilling to paint for the foreign leaders. Kan's painting is interpreted as a reflection on China, its people, and its traditions under Mongolian rule. *Bamboo and Rocks* is a pair of scrolls painted with ink and color on silk meant to be hung side-by-side. Unlike *Pear Blossoms*, which is a scroll meant to be unrolled in approximately twelve-inch segments on a table then rolled again to reveal the next segment and finally stored away between viewings, *Bamboo and Rocks* would remain in view hanging on a wall. Both are ink paintings capturing the simplicity of beauty in nature. But the objects depicted also have symbolic meaning going back to ancient Chinese culture. Bamboo symbolizes virtue, grace, and resilience, while rocks symbolize strength and power to endure. In Kan's painting, their contrasting forms, low and curvilinear against upright and angular, balance each other. The artist is indicating that



**Figure 5.7 / Plate 15 from "The Disasters of War" (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*): And there is nothing to be done (*Y no hai remedio*)**

Artist: Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

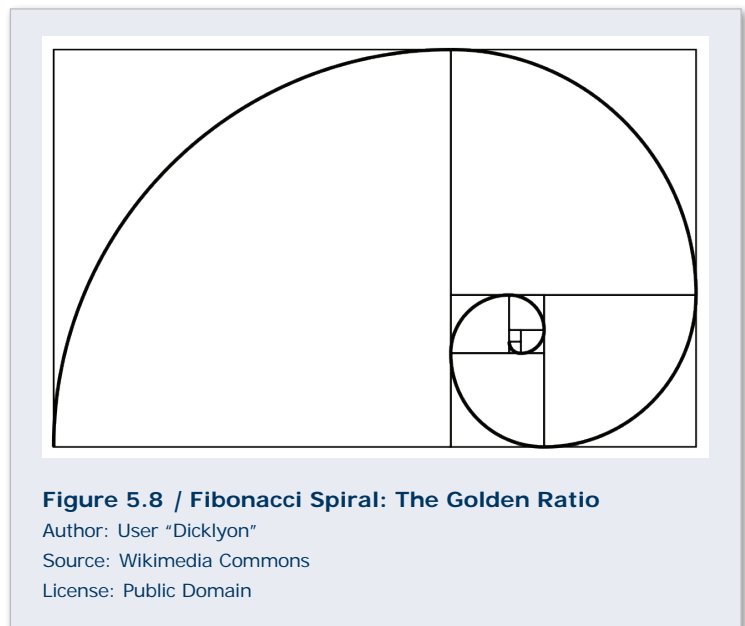
what Goya saw, however, changed the direction and tone of the series of prints he made from the unflinching courage of his fellow citizens to despair over the barbarous atrocities committed and merciless suffering endured by all who are trampled in the path of war. He created the series of eighty-two etchings, *The Disasters of War*, between 1810 and 1823. *Y no hai Remedio (And There's Nothing to Be Done)* is the nineteenth print in the series; it reflects the hopelessness of war. (Figure 5.7) There is no escape, nor is there justice. Both civilians and soldiers become dehumanized and numb in the endless slaughter, here in the form of a firing squad.

The print series was not published until 1863, thirty-five years after Goya's death. There are theories why: the artist was fearful of political repercussions, the scenes were too graphic, or the wounds were too painful for public release in the immediate decades after the war. The artist himself gave no explanation. By the time *The Disasters of War* series was printed, the French and Spanish governments that had participated in and ruled immediately after the Peninsular War (1808-1814), as it came to be known, had both been superseded. Goya's documentation of and cry against human self-destruction had no impact at the time of the disasters themselves, but they are still among the most powerful images of political protest ever made.

### 5.3.5 Scientific Context

Art and science are inextricably linked. The words “technique” and “technology” both originate from the ancient Greek word *tekhnē*, which means art. For the Greeks, both art and science were the study, analysis, and classification of objects and ideas. Through the study of math and art, they arrived at the **golden ratio**: when dividing a line in two parts, the longer part divided by the smaller part is also equal to the whole length divided by the longer part. Expressed algebraically, that can be written as  $a/b = ab/a$ . The visual representation of the golden ratio, the Greeks determined, results in the most visually pleasing proportions within and of an object or figure. (Figure 5.8)

Leonardo da Vinci was fascinated by how things work. The mechanics of nature, machinery, and the human body were all worlds to be explored deeply in order to be understood at their most essential, truthful levels. Although he was interested in human anatomy throughout his career, he spent the last twelve years of his life systematically studying and documenting his findings. He began in the winter of 1507-08 with a series of pen-and-ink drawings that he made of a dissection he carried out on an old man. In the winter of 1510-11, he completed additional dissections,



probably working with anatomy professor Marcantonio della Torre at the University of Pavia. (Figure 5.9)

Leonardo intended to include his more than 240 drawings in a treatise on anatomy, but following Marcantonio's death from the plague in 1512 and political upheaval in the city of Milan where Leonardo lived, his focus shifted and he never completed and published his book. When he died in 1519, his drawings and notes on human anatomy along with approximately 6,500 pages from his other notebooks were dispersed and effectively lost to the world for 400 years. Leonardo's insights into such areas as the functioning of the heart and growth of a fetus, all completely accurate, had to be laboriously re-discovered by other artists and scientists in the succeeding centuries.

Questions that had long intrigued artists and scientists but could not be answered by observation with the naked eye, such as details about a planetary body in space, a specimen under a microscope, or an animal in motion, were finally being answered in the nineteenth century with the invention of photography. Leland Stanford, head of the Union Pacific Railroad, former governor of California, and racehorse owner, in 1872 accepted the challenge to prove whether all four feet of a horse left the ground when galloping. He hired photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904, England, lived USA) to conduct a study of the sequence of movement that is too rapid to be captured by the human eye. Muybridge experimented with setting up cameras along a track to photograph the horse and rider at evenly spaced intervals. He was soon able to prove that indeed all four hooves are in the air when the horse's legs are under its body—not when the legs are fully extended to the front and rear as many had thought. (Figure 5.10)

While the first set of photographs Muybridge took for Stanford were lost, the industrialist (who with his wife Jane would found Stanford University in 1885) encouraged the photographer to continue his studies. Muybridge published his findings on the galloping horse in *Scientific American* in 1878. In the aftermath, Muybridge spoke frequently throughout the United States. He was invited to continue his studies at the University of Pennsylvania where his work was valued for the information it would provide in the areas of technology, science, and art. He conducted his photographic experiments there from 1884 to 1887, and the following year he published his



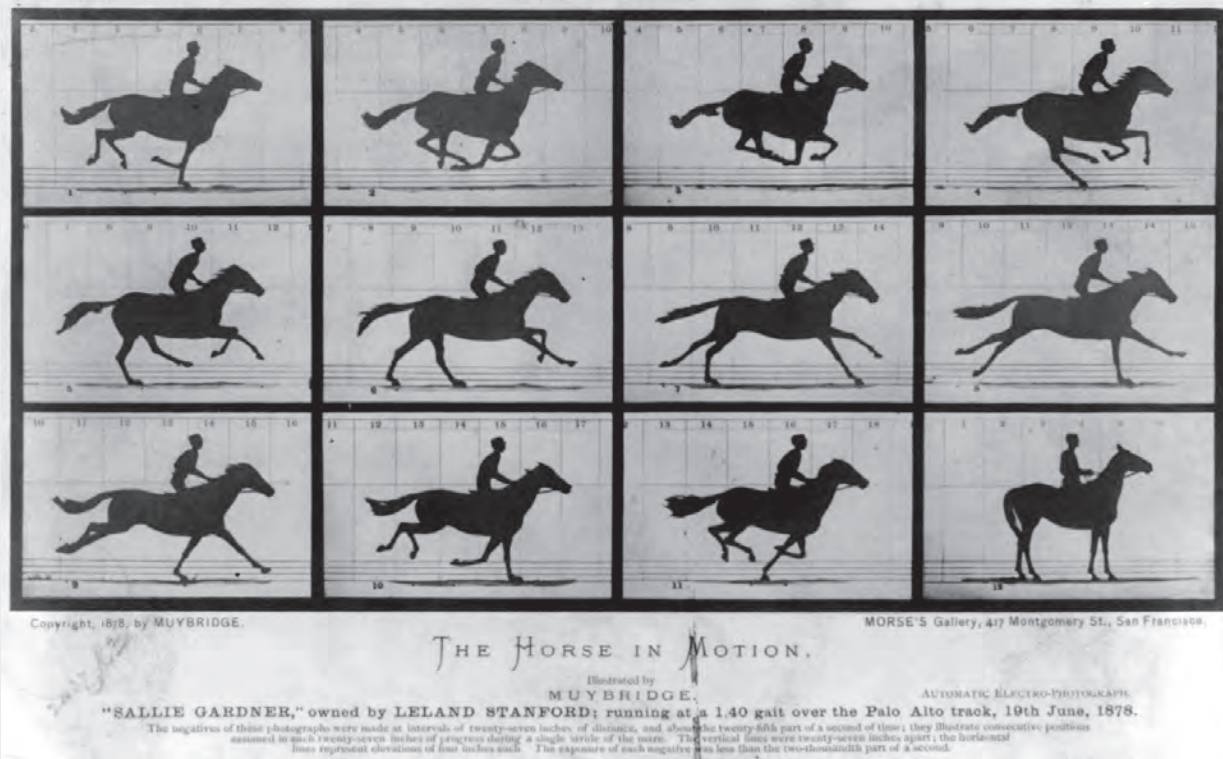
**Figure 5.9 / Anatomical studies of muscles of the arm and shoulder, bones of the foot**

Artist: Leonardo da Vinci

Author: User "Discovering da Vinci"

Source: Tumbler

License: Public Domain



**Figure 5.10 | *The Horse in Motion***

Artist: Eadweard Muybridge

Author: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

book *Animal Locomotion*, which contained 781 photographic plates of a wide variety of motion studies including men, women, children, horses, lions, bison, ostriches, cranes, and cats.

## 5.4 SYMBOLISM AND ICONOGRAPHY

**Symbolism** refers to the use of specific figural or naturalistic images, or abstracted graphic signs that hold shared meaning within a group. A **symbol** is an image or sign that is understood by a group to stand for something. The symbol, however, does not have to have a direct connection to its meaning. For example, the letters of the alphabet, which are abstract graphic signs, are understood by those who use them to have individual sounds and meanings. The users have assigned meaning to them, as letters have no meaning in and of themselves. An example of a naturalistic image is a rose, which in most Western civilizations symbolizes love. When one person gives a rose to another, it is a symbol of the love the person feels.

**Iconography** is the broader study and interpretation of subject matter and pictorial themes in a work of art. This includes implied meanings and symbolism that are used to convey the group's shared experience and history—its familiar myths and stories. Iconography refers to the symbols

used within a work of art and what they mean, or symbolize. For example, in different cultures a snake may stand for evil, temptation, wisdom, rebirth, or the circle of life. A depiction of a snake in a scene with Adam and Eve has specific meanings for those of the Christian faith or others who understand the snake stands for temptation within the context of that subject or story. In Chinese culture, however, a snake represents the power of nature and is said to bring good fortune to those who practice the snake's restraint and elegance of movement.

### 5.4.1 Changes in Meaning of Symbols and Iconography

While a symbol might have a common meaning for a certain group, it might be used with variations by or hold a different significance for other groups. Let us use the example of a cross. At its core, a cross is a simple intersection of vertical and horizontal lines that could refer to the meeting of celestial and terrestrial elements or forces or could lend itself to other variations of meaning. The cross most frequently associated with Christianity is the Latin Cross, with the long vertical bar intersected by a shorter horizontal one—believed by many to be the form of the cross upon which Jesus Christ, the central figure of the faith, was crucified. (Variants of the Cross: <http://wpmedia.vancouversun.com/2010/02/1346.crosses1.png>) But its simplicity of conception lends itself to various other readings, as well, and in pre-Christian use it was related to sacred and cosmic beliefs.

Within Christian usage, the cross has taken a great number of different of forms, including the equal-armed Greek Cross, favored by the Byzantine Christians; Celtic crosses, with a circular addition to the crossing; X's and upside-down crosses associated with specific Christian **martyrs**,

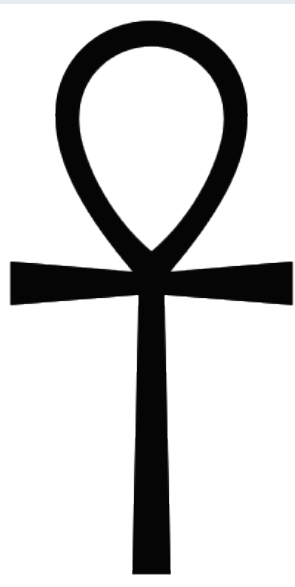
individuals who died for their faith, on such instruments of torture; and many others. In art, we might see them as simple flat graphic works, or decorated in two-dimensional renditions, or as fully developed three-dimensional interpretations, like the numerous grave markers in Irish cemeteries, where they are further embellished with intricate motifs and iconographic depictions of Bible stories. (Figure 5.11)

The Ankh, another cross form, with a looped handle, seems to have been devised by the ancient Egyptians as a symbol of the life-giving power of the Sun. (Figure 5.12) It was one of the numerous pictographic symbols they used both as a



**Figure 5.11 / Celtic Cross**

Author: User "Sitomon"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 2.0



**Figure 5.12 / Ankh**

Author: User "Alexi Helligar"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: CC BY-SA 2.0

separate sign and as part of the hieroglyphic system of writing they developed.

Clearly, many other symbols have various meanings, especially when they are represented as more abstract graphic signs. To read their implications in any particular application will require your considering where it was made and for what specific purposes, as well as how it might have been adopt-



**Figure 5.14 / Tian Tan Buddha**

Author: User "Henry\_Wang"  
Source: Pixabay.com  
License: CCO Public Domain



**Figure 5.15 / The Emblem of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP also known as the Nazi Party)**

Author: User "RsVe"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



**Figure 5.13 / Hindu Swastika**

Author: User "Masturbis"  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

ed and turned to different use at that time or later. Sometimes the shifts in meaning may be radical, as in the form of the swastika, an ancient sacred sign used in many different cultures, including India and others throughout Asia, as well as the Near East, and Europe. (Figures 5.13, 5.14, and 5.15) It has historically been a very auspicious sign with implications of good fortune and positive movement, and was therefore adopted for the ground plan for Buddhist stupa worship centers. Of course, in the twentieth century, its appropriation by the Nazi Party as a symbol of the superiority of the Aryan heritage led to very different and now generally negative connotations.

Iconography is often more specific and definitive, with concrete reference to world experiences and, beyond that, to some form of narrative for the group involved.

Again, analysis of the pictorial form requires examination of the context in which the artwork was created. We can and must look at the underlying narrative, but, as we shall discuss in the next several chapters, the pictorial expressions evolve both independently of the narrative sources and in response to narrative and artistic change.

For example, Christians (more specifically that branch now known as Roman Catholics) debated the “true nature” of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ.



**Figure 5.16 / West Portal of Notre-Dame Cathedral**

Author: User “Clicsouris”

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Among the points of debate was whether Mary was bodily in Heaven with her Son or whether she had to wait until the end of time when the whole of mankind would experience bodily resurrection, that is, at the time of the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, when everyone would have their lifetime of deeds assessed for purposes of learning whether they would spend eternity in Heaven or Hell. These Christian ideas are among those a great amount of art has been devoted to over time.

To illustrate, we can look at differences between two works about Mary and her place and role in Heaven that appeared in church relief sculpture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These differing ideas focused on the implied elevation of Mary to a divine status, or to her not being seen as divine herself, in which case, the faithful needed to keep a view of her as being in a more subordinate or secondary status. The questions included consideration of Mary as the “Queen of Heaven,” who might be ruling alongside her son. At Senlis Cathedral (1153-1181) in France, she was depicted as apparently a co-ruler with Christ, but ensuing theological discussion took issue with this possible over-elevation. (Figure 5.16) So, while the renditions of Mary as the celestial queen continued in popularity, they made it clear that she was only considered to be there at the bidding and will of Christ. This can be seen at Chartres Cathedral in France, where she bows her head to Jesus. (North Portal of Notre-Dame Cathedral: <https://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/chartresnorth/cportal.html>)

What we see here, again, is that our full analysis of the artworks we encounter needs a complex approach that includes a variety of visual clues and a wide range of research on the contextual details of its creation and use. In contrast to the longstanding assertion that “beauty is in the