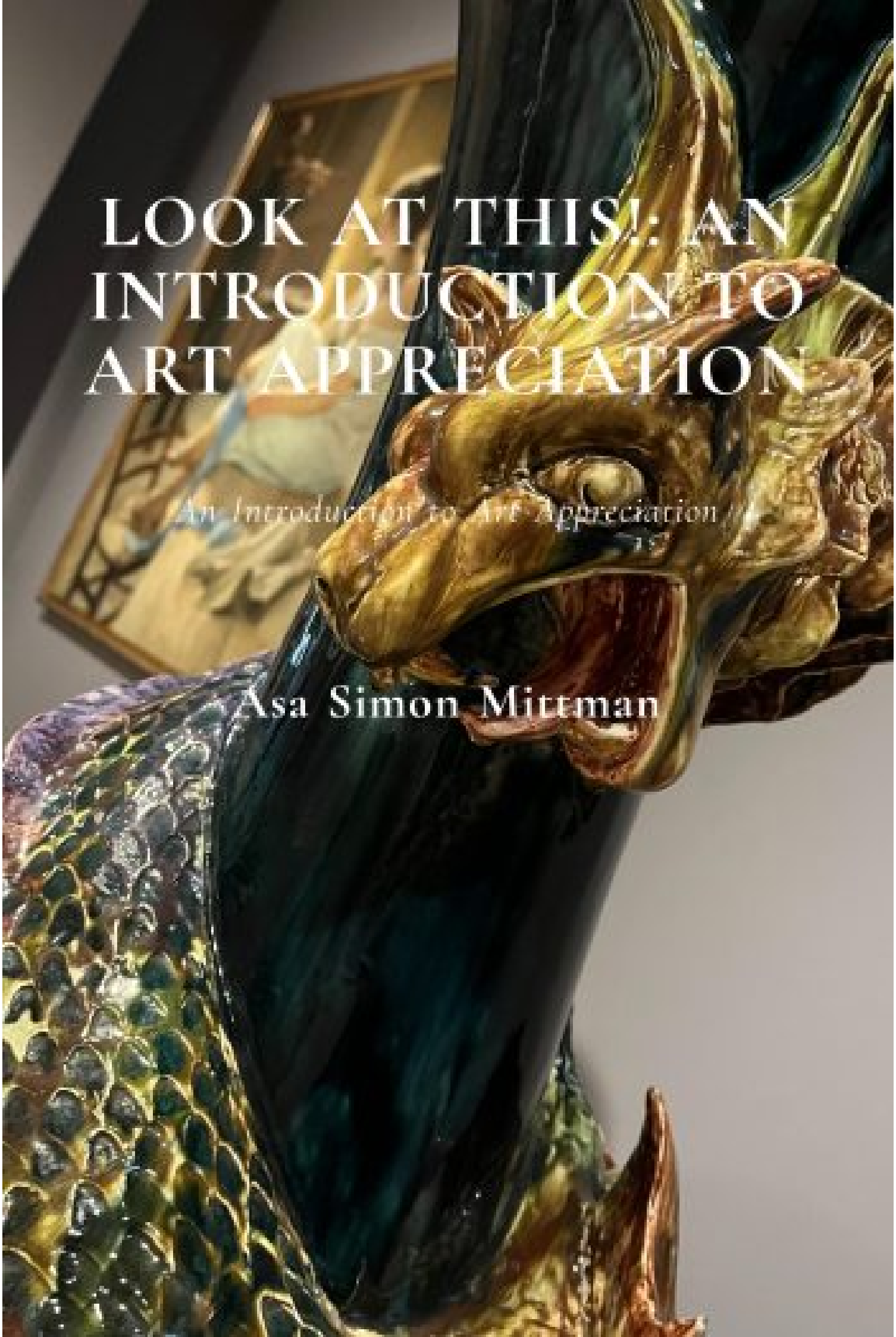

LOOK AT THIS!: AN INTRODUCTION TO ART APPRECIATION

An Introduction to Art Appreciation

Asa Simon Mittman

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ASA SIMON MITTMAN

EVELYN NORRIS



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NOTE: NEW CHAPTER ADDED! SEND ME COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS!

Look At This! has a new chapter! It addresses the pervasive artistic theme of Death. This chapter was written by my students, who did a great job of it!

If you see anything that seems wrong or missing, or if you have other suggestions, please let me know at: asmittman@csuchico.edu.

Now, go out and look at some art!

Preface: Why should *you* care about art?

This is a book about *you*, and about *your* interaction with art. It is not a dry, dusty list of names, dates, and places for you to memorize. Instead, it focuses on skills that will help you understand how art works, how it inspires feelings and thoughts through its styles and subjects. Looking at art is not an easy, straightforward process, even though it often feels natural.

The power of art can be immediate, striking, even arresting. We are now living in what is likely the most media-saturated era of world history, as we are bombarded with visual images constantly, but we have very little training in how to critically interpret these images. The fundamental tools are not taught to children in school. Looking – real, deep, careful looking – is not as simple as it seems. The aim of this book to teach the *skills* needed to decode art, to provide you with *tools* you can apply to all of the visual data around you.

Over the course of the book, you will explore a wonderfully diverse array of works. They will likely strike you as beautiful or ugly, stunning or strange, funny or compelling, or any combination of these at once. Art does not have to be beautiful or uplifting. Likewise, though, it does not have to be weighty and serious. There are no limits to the moods and ideas art can or should convey. There are, though, tools and tricks through which artists convey these moods and ideas. These visual techniques, above all, will be the subject of this book.

But why should *you* care about art? There are a great many potential answers to this question. It can enrich your life, open your eyes to new experiences, "expand your horizons," and so on. But the main answer to be offered here is that art is a powerful means to see through the eyes of others – people distant in time or place from you, or living within your own country, your own city, on your block or in your house. Through other people's eyes, we see the world as we had never seen it before. We might be shown a glimpse of staggering beauty or of breathtaking horror, of joy or passion or pain. By learning how to understand the visual elements used to create these images, you will become more able to understand the messages they contain, and more receptive to the perspectives of those who made them.

Just as importantly, whenever we look seriously and carefully at another person or culture, we gain a deeper understanding of ourselves. You may not yet care about the life of a Buddhist monk living two hundred years ago in Japan, or about a Roman soldier worshiping a long-forgotten god, but like everyone else, you are surely interested in yourself and your world. Just as leaving home is the only way to truly see the home you leave, so too, looking outward is a powerful path to looking inward, to seeing yourself more clearly.

While the specifics of the names and dates of the works in this book will fade with time – unless, of course, you continue to study the history of art! – the skills needed to interpret works of art and other elements of visual culture will last your lifetime. Close visual analysis, along with an understanding of some of the more common and compelling themes throughout the art of the world, can be used to unlock possible meanings of just about any work of art you might encounter on your campus, in museums, in religious or historical sites, but also in your friend's living room. These skills will also help you find points of entry and access into any works of art, celebrated and world-famous or as-yet unknown. The purpose of art appreciation is simply that – to help you learn to appreciate art. You do not need a great amount of historical information about every period of art history to appreciate works (though it never hurts, of course). Instead, you need the skills involved in careful looking.

It is my hope that once you have the skills you need to understand any works of art, wherever you might find them, you will also have the *desire* to look carefully and deeply at them. The visual arts produce in many viewers two great anxieties: the uncertainty about how long we should spend looking at any individual work and the sense that there is supposed to be a "deeper meaning" that eludes us. We listen to a song or watch a movie from start to end. But, of course, a painting or sculpture goes on indefinitely. How do we know when we should move on? And how do we know if we have found that deeper meaning, or even if there is one, at all?

The first two chapters of this book will provide you with the basic tools of visual analysis. Then, we will look at a series of exciting themes commonly found in art. These include among others religion and power, sex and violence, community and personal expression. The goal of these chapters is not to familiarize you with particular periods or movements in the history of art – the Italian Renaissance, Meiji Japan, the Impressionists, and so on. Instead, by using examples chosen

from throughout the globe, and from prehistory to the present day, the book should help you learn how to apply the basic tools of visual analysis to any object.

At the heart of each chapter will be three Spotlight Images. The first two will serve as touchstones for the chapter, and will each be treated to careful and extended analysis. The third will be the final image in the chapter, and here you are invited to actively analyze the work of art on your own. Between the Spotlight Images, you will find groups of images discussed briefly. This book contains fewer works than is common in large survey textbooks, but treats some of them in greater depth in order to help you to learn to do the same. In short, by the end of the book, you will be equipped with the tools to make you more comfortable in the often bristly art world, and confident in your personal experience of it.

I recently put the question to my own freshman art students: "Why should *you* care about art?" They offered some of the ideas I have used, here. At the end of the discussion, one student summed it all up well: "Why *shouldn't* you care about art?" Indeed, why not? Each and every work of art is worth your time and merits your close attention. I would stand before each and every work of art – in this book or not – and shout to all those passing by, "*Look at this*!"

–Asa Simon Mittman, Chico, CA (2023)



Me standing in total awe in front of the medieval Borgund Stave Church, ca. 1180, Norway, 2023. Photo: Selfie by Asa Mittman

Media Attributions

- Me standing in total awe in front of the Borgund Stave Church, Norway, 2023. Photo: Selfie © Asa Mittman

1. Visual Analysis 1: The Elements of Art

Visual Analysis 1: The Elements of Art

Visual Analysis is the backbone of art appreciation. It takes a bit of practice, but once you have mastered the skills, it can help you to analyze any works of art you come across. It will even help you to understand why things you see every day – ads in magazines, billboards, television shows, movies, really *all things visual* – are (or are not) effective.

In order to perform a visual analysis, you need to realize that in every visual image there are multiple things at work that affect our response to it: the **visual elements** (also called **formal elements**) that compose the image; the way these elements relate to one another, called **composition**; and the cultural context in which the image is made and viewed. Visual analysis only deals with the first two. This introduction will first provide a definition of each visual element, accompanied by examples, and then will define the **principles of composition**, also with examples. There will be a number of terms introduced here, but the point is not to overwhelm you with jargon. Once you know the terms for things, you see them more clearly. These terms are helpful not only to describe works of art but also to see them. It is important to note that these categories all blend into one another – textured forms existing in space can be made of colored shapes defined by lines!

The Elements of Art

Line: A path either represented or implied
Shape: The property of a two-dimensional form, usually defined by a line around it
Color: The light reflecting off objects, divided into hue, value and intensity
Space: Depth, real or represented, as well as the general area within a work
Form: The property of a three-dimensional object
Texture: The feeling of a surface, real or represented[1]

Line



Albrecht Dürer, Four Hoursemen of the Apocalypse, woodcut print, ca. 1497/1498 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Line is the most basic visual element. Lines can be used to define shapes and figures, but also to indicate motion, emotion and other elements. In a **woodblock print** of the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by Albrecht Dürer (ca. 1497–98), **contour lines** – lines that define shapes – are used to mark the outside of all of the elements of the image. The outline of the hat on one of the horsemen, for example, is clearly made by a few black contour lines. This simple device is so effective that it is hard to remember that there is no hat here, only a few black marks on a creamy white page.



Detail of hat.

Note, though, that lines are also used to show **shading** – the representation of shadows caused when light hits one side of an object, leaving the other in shadow. On the hat, for example, the closely spaced lines, called **hatching**, show that the left side of his hat is in a shadow. This also helps the hat to look more three-dimensional, giving it a sense of **form**.

Contour lines outline all the figures and forms in the image, creating the illusion of shading and form. In addition, there are horizontal lines in the background. While these do create shading, they also help create the sense that the riders are moving rapidly from left to right.

1. The Elements of Art and Principles of Composition are here adapted from the J. Paul Getty Museum's "Understanding Formal Analysis," (accessed 4/29/2011) http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html (no date).

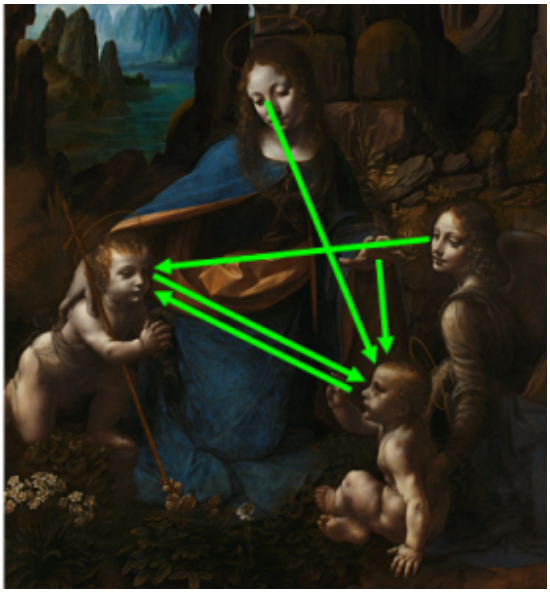
Motion lines may be familiar to you from comic strips, like in the *Krazy Kat* image below, but they appear in all sorts of work.



George Herriman, Krazy Kat – Out of My Way Woim, ink on paper, ca. 1920, Photo by Brecht Bug, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In the Dürer print, we can also divide the lines into **organic lines** and **inorganic or geometric lines** (See the section on shape below for more on organic and inorganic). **Organic lines** are loose, curving, irregular lines like those found in nature. In the Dürer woodcut, the lines of the horses' manes and tails, the figures' hair, and the ruffled clouds are all organic. Inorganic lines are generally straight or perfectly curving lines, like those found in geometry. In Dürer's image, most of the lines are organic, but the horizontal hatching lines in the background are inorganic.

We can also look for **implied lines**. These are not actually drawn, but we can connect the dots (literally or figuratively) to create the lines in our minds. Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* (1483-1486) contains wonderful examples. Here, the implied lines are **sight lines**, which guide us throughout the image. These help us know where to look, and show us what is important in the painting. Follow the gazes of the figures as they look at and gesture toward one another.



Sight Lines in Leonardo da Vinci, The Virgin and the Rocks, oil on poplar, thinned and cradled, ca. 1491.

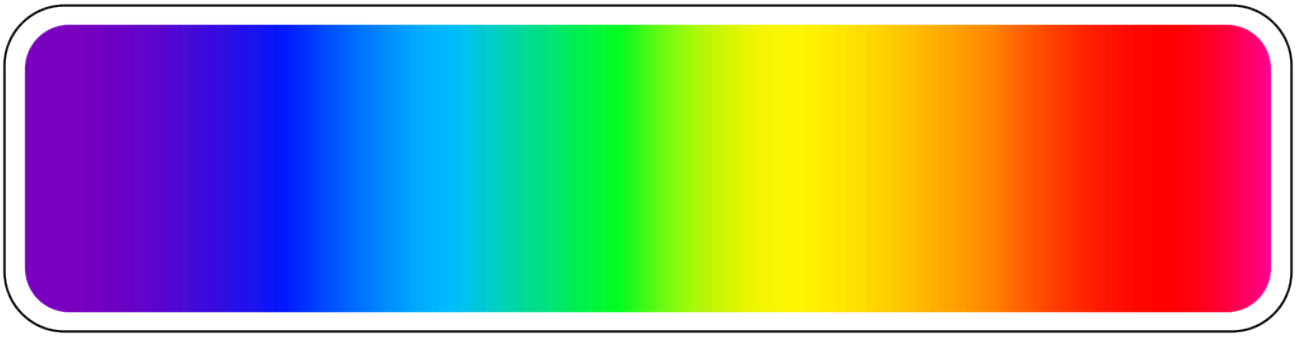
The angel at the right looks at the infant John the Baptist, at the left. He looks at the infant Jesus, who in turn looks back again at him. Above, Mary looks down at Jesus, and also gestures toward him with her hand. Basically, once we make it into the space of the painting, we become locked in a cycle of movement between the holy figures, guided by their sight lines.



Leonardo da Vinci, The Virgin and the Rocks, oil on poplar, thinned and cradled, ca. 1491 (National Gallery, London). Photo by The National Gallery, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Color

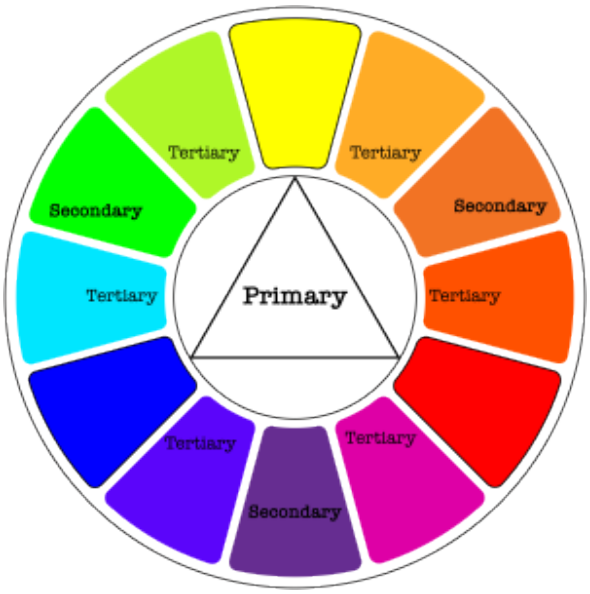
Artists can use colors for many reasons other than to simply duplicate reality (**naturalism**, discussed below) including setting moods and highlighting importance. The colors of the world can be divided on a few scales. When we use the term "color" casually, what we usually mean is hue. The hues appear on the visual spectrum:



Visible Light Spectrum. Image: Mari H.

On the spectrum, we see the pure hues. These can be divided into **primary colors**, **secondary colors** and **tertiary colors**, as on this color wheel. Primary colors are, for most art **media**, red, yellow, and blue (the exception is the additive color system, which is used in computer screens, theater lighting and the like, and has red, yellow, and green as its primary colors).

All the rest of the colors can be made from these. Secondary colors are made by mixing two primary colors: Red and yellow make orange, and so on. Tertiary colors are made by mixing a primary color with a secondary color. The colors opposite one another (like red and green or blue and orange) are **complementary colors**, which tend to stand out boldly next to one another. These are therefore often used for university colors and sports team logos. Colors next to one another (like red and orange or blue and green) are **analogous colors**, and these tend to blend together more smoothly.



Color Wheel. Image: Mari H.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Maternité, oil on canvas, 1885 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo by Frans Vandewalle, CC BY-NC 2.0.

The colors on the left of this wheel are called **cool colors** and those to the right are **warm colors**. Using cool or warm colors in an image can create moods. Pierre Auguste Renoir used warm colors for his *Mother and Child* (1886), creating a warm, cheerful, inviting scene. The oranges, pinks and yellows dominate the image. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot presents a similar subject in his *Mother and Child* (ca. 1860), but through the use of cool colors, instead creates a sad, cold scene dominated by blues and greens. Neither of these artists was worried about portraying the world as it really looked. Instead, they used color to inspire feelings in the viewer.

Color can also be considered in terms of **value**, which is the degree of lightness or darkness of a color. If we add white to a hue, we get a **tint**. If we add black, we get a **shade**.

There are many tints in the Renoir's *Mother and Child*, and many shades in Corot's *Mother and Child*. Tints tend to be more cheerful – pastel colors are all tints. Shades tend to be gloomier. Indeed, some terms for moods are based on these properties. Some speakers of English might say that a cheerful person is "lighthearted," or that an angry person is "in a dark temper." It is important to note that the associations that cultures make with colors are somewhat arbitrary, and are not universal. Some cultures see black as the color of death, perhaps inspired by thoughts of the darkness of a grave, while others see white as the color of death, perhaps inspired by the whiteness of bones. Associating white and black with qualities that have nothing to do with



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Mother and Child, oil on wood, ca. 1860 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

appearance is particularly dangerous. For example, we are used to thinking of white as the color of goodness and black as the color of evil, but this arbitrary association reinforces racist modes of thought – think, for example, of "a white knight," or of someone "going over to the dark side." These sorts of expressions are extremely common, and most people use them unthinkingly, but they should be reconsidered. The same is true of interpretations of colors in works of art. Such things are rarely – if ever – neutral.

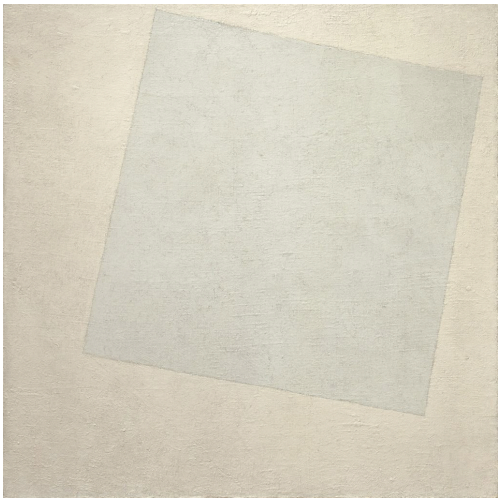


Henri Matisse, La Chambre Rouge, oil on canvas, 1908 (State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg). Photo by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



After Chen Chun, Garden Flowers, ink and color on paper, 1540 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

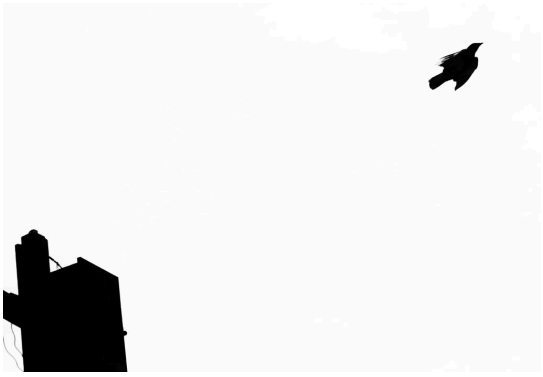
Finally, **intensity** or **saturation** is how bright or dull a color is. Henri Matisse tended to use very saturated colors, as in his *La Chambre Rouge* (1908), whereas in *Garden Flowers* (1540), painted by a follower of the artist Chen Chun, we see a much more muted palette with very little saturation of colors. The colors in *Garden Flowers* are mostly washed out. The grey-green of the trees and pinks of the blossoms are low in saturation, and do not stand out sharply from the beige paper on which they were painted. The Matisse painting, on the other hand, is a blaze of colors. The vibrant reds of the wall and tablecloth dominate the image, in sharp contrast with the green grass showing through the window and the blues curving throughout the image.



Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist Composition: White on White, oil on canvas, 1918 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Contrast is the amount of variation between the highest and lowest values in a work of art. This is perhaps most commonly used to talk about photography, but can be applied to any works. Kazimir Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) has very low contrast. There are no dark blacks, no stark whites; everything is in very similar shades of pale gray. The low contrast conveys the soft and gentle feeling of a heavy mist over quiet water.

On the other hand, Nagesh Jayaraman's *Freedom is to break free from all shackles…….* (2012) has extremely high contrast, meaning that the difference in the whites and blacks is much greater. Indeed, the images is almost entirely black and white. The effect is much sharper and crisper, making an



Nagesh Jayaraman, Freedom is to break free from all shackles……. 2012, (CC BY 2.0) https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/

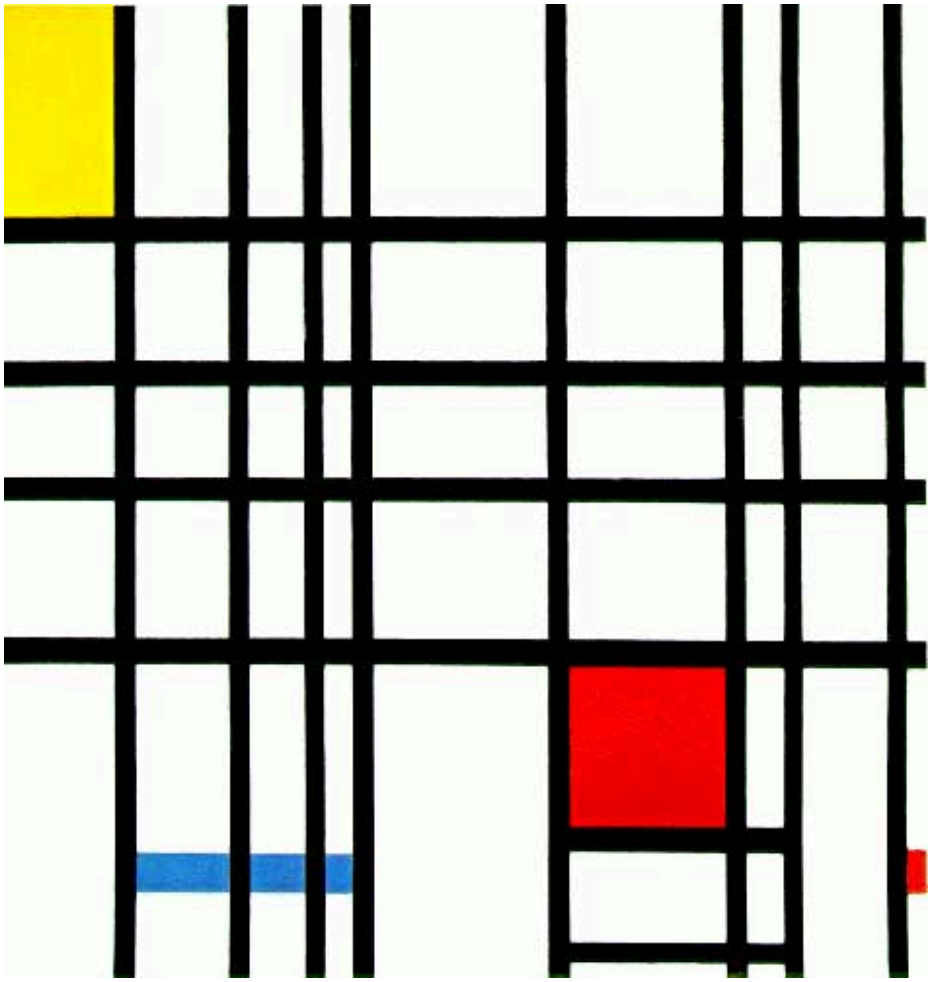
ordinary scene feel weightier. Similarly, Kara Walker's silhouette image *Before the Battle (Chickin' Dumplin')* (1995), the contrast is absolute.



Kara Walker, African't (detail), cut paper on wall, 1996 (The Broad, Los Angeles). Photo by Rob Corder, CC BY-NC 2.0.

We see only black and white. In this case, the artist is using the power of this contrast to draw the viewer's attention to some of the problems in US race relations, and their origins in the institution of chattel slavery, in which people and their children are bought and sold as property. This system of the dehumanization and abuse of human beings was justified by arguments that the world was, in a sense, black and white, that these two colors, when thought of as racial categories, were absolute and absolutely different. Seeing Walker's images in only black and white, and reduced to two-dimensional cut-outs, is a reminder of the falseness of the racist claims on which the system of enslavement was built. Therefore, while visual elements produce visual effects, it is important to remember that their implications can extend well beyond the purely visual.

Shape and Form



Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, oil on canvas, 1937-1942 (Tate Modern, London). Photo by uhuru1701, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Shape builds on line and color, as it has to be made of one or both of these. Shape is the property of a two-dimensional form, usually defined by a line around it or by a change in color. Like line, there are two main types of shapes, geometric and organic. While most works of art contain both geometric and organic shapes, looking at those that are more completely divided can serve to clarify the qualities. Piet Mondrian is an excellent example of an artist who used geometric shapes almost exclusively. In his *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red* (1937-42), Mondrian uses straight, vertical and horizontal black lines to divide his canvas into rectangles of primary colors. Nothing here gives the impression of the natural world. On the other hand, Maori facial tattooing, known as *moko*, uses primarily organic shapes.



Maori, Australasia, 2013 -35. Photo by Steve, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

They are still, like Mondrian's shapes, generally **abstract** – they do not depict any clear images – but the shapes are like those found in nature, curving, twisting and spiraling across their bearers' faces. The edges of the lines and shapes are crisp, but the forms are curving fluid.

Form is actual, three-dimensional shape, though it is often used to describe the illusion of three-dimensionality, as well. Like shape, form can be geometric or organic.



Korvar (Korwar), wood with glass beads, Indonesia, 19th century (?), Etnografiska Museet, Stockholm. Photo by Johan Vipper, CC BY 2.5.

A small *korvar* – a representation of an ancestor – from Indonesia mixes these form types well. While the figure is predominantly geometric, with the squared-off face and the nose shaped like an arrow pointing downward, the curving organic shapes on the panel below the face soften this effect.

Space

Space is used to refer both to depth, real or represented, and also to the general surface area within a work of art. Some periods of art history show a great deal of interest in creating convincing illusions of three-dimensional space in two-dimensional media. Perhaps the most iconic (though certainly not the only) example of this is the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1400-1600), when artists very deliberately worked to create convincing illusions of depth. Look at how Raphael creates an illusion of three-dimensional form in his *La Donna Velata* (ca. 1515). Through careful variations in value, particularly in **shading** – the use of darker colors to create the illusion of shadows – Raphael convinces us that the woman in the painting is really there in three dimensions. This is the same effect we saw in the Dürer woodcut print discussed above, but the medium – oil paint – allows for much smoother and finer variations in hue, value, shades and tints, creating a much more convincing illusion of three-dimensional forms.

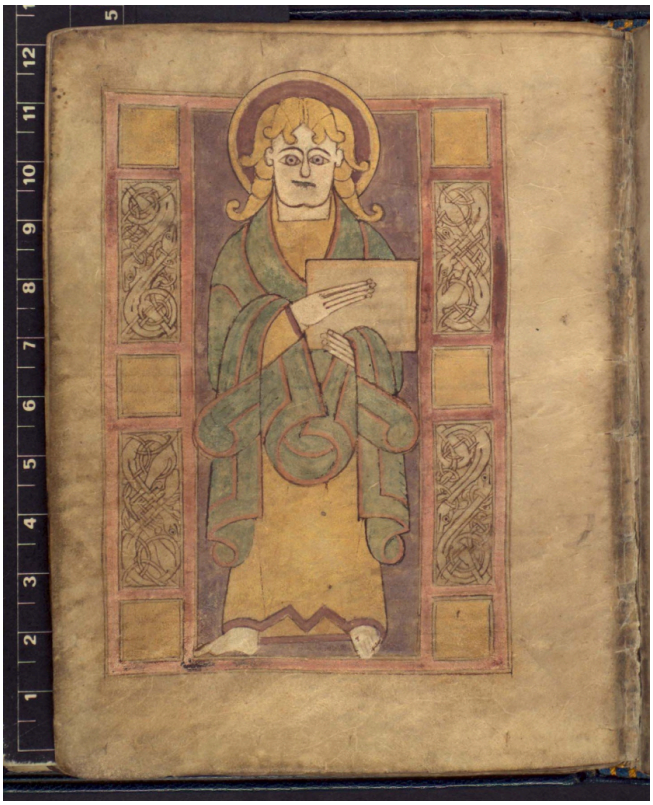


Raphael, La Donna Velata, oil on canvas, ca. 1512-1515 (Pitti Palace, Florence). Photo by Lluís Ribes Mateu, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Light seems to strike the woman from her left, casting her right side in shadow. The folds of her voluminous sleeve are a particularly splendid example of the illusion of space. Even examining a small detail of it, it is hard to believe that there is no depth, at all, just thin layers of paint sitting on flat canvas.



Raphael, La Donna Velata, sleeve.



Portrait of Luke, Gospel Book, London, British Library, MS Additional 40618, f. 21v, Ireland, 750-850. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.

For sharp contrast, we can examine a detail of a page of a medieval Irish Book of the Gospels, ca. 750. Both images show a person in voluminous robes, looking out at us, but this is where the similarities end. Raphael's figure is lit softly, creating **highlights** and shadows that create a sense of roundness and weight to her body and clothes. The figure of John the Evangelist from the Irish Gospels, on the other hand, is almost totally flat. There is virtually no shading to his body and the folds on his clothes are purely schematic patterns. If we isolate a small detail of John's clothing, as we did with *La Donna Velata*'s, it is difficult to even recall that this series of lines and colors is intended to be seen as a three-dimensional form, at all.

There are various methods used by artists to create the illusion that their figures exist in three-dimensional space. Among the more effective are **linear perspective** and **atmospheric perspective**. Another work from the Italian Renaissance will serve to demonstrate both. Pietro Perugino's *Christ Handing the Keys to St. Peter* (1481-82), uses both **linear** and **atmospheric perspective** to create the very convincing illusion of depth.



Detail of clothing, Portrait of Luke, Gospel Book.



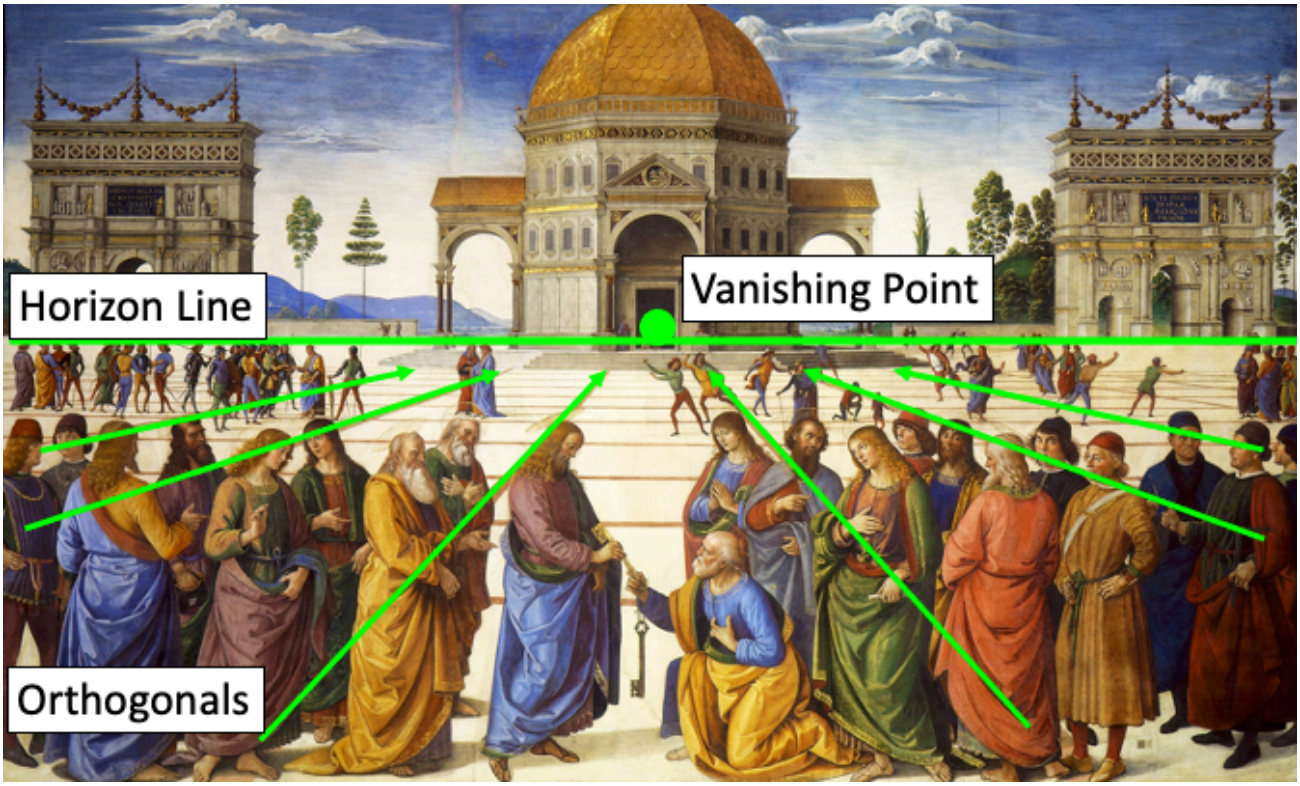
Pietro Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter, fresco, ca. 1481-1483 (Sistine Chapel, Vatican City). Photo: Public Domain.

Linear perspective is based on the optical illusion that parallel lines seem to converge as they recede into the distance. Railroad tracks are the classic example, as in Edouard Baldus's *Gare d'Enghein* (1855).



Edouard Baldus, Gare d'Enghein, salted paper print from printed negative, 1855 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

If we overlay the lines used on Perugino's painting, we can see how he used this effect.



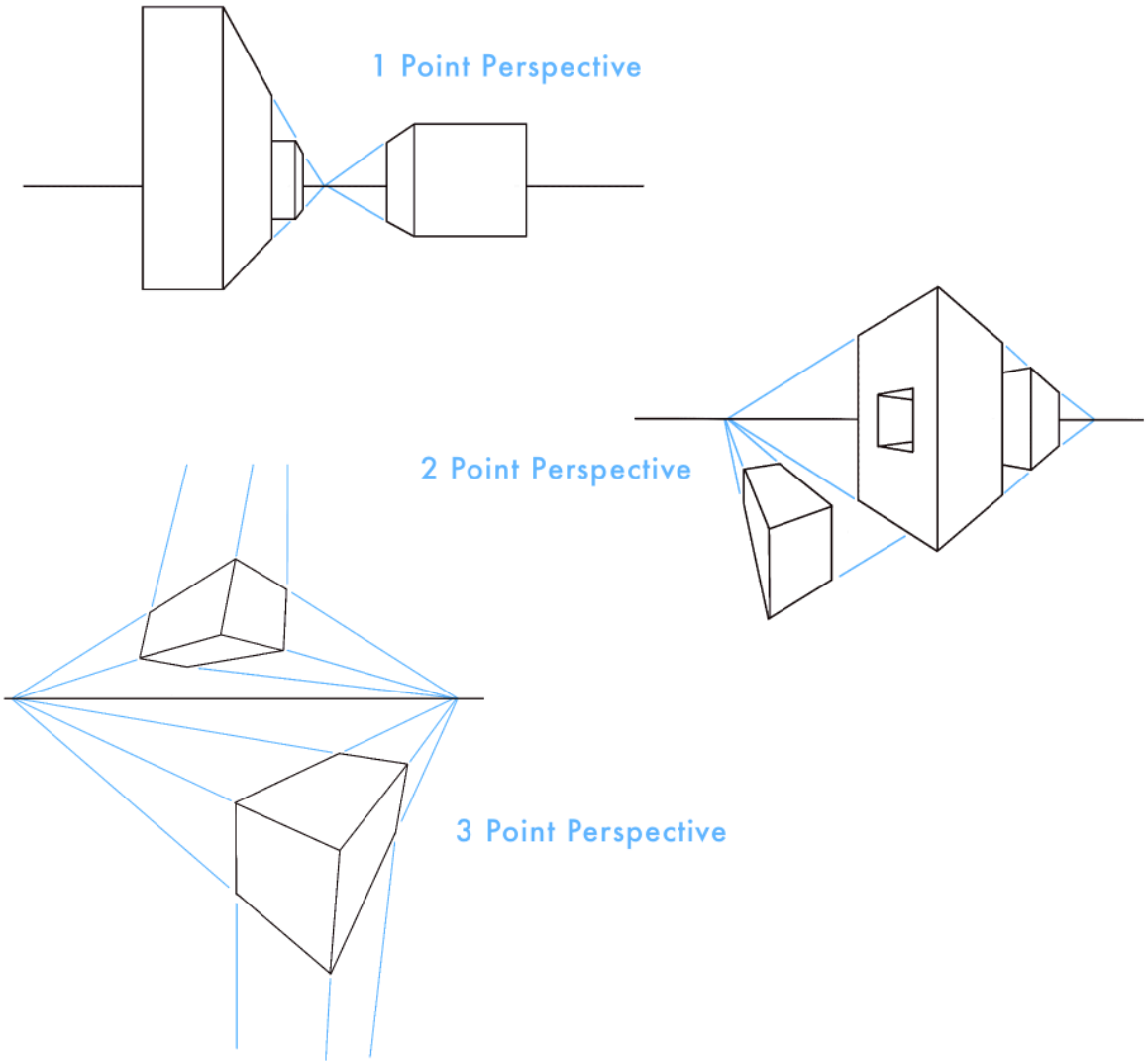
Linear Perspective Diagram, Pietro Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter.

The lines are called **orthogonal lines** or **orthogonals** and they meet on the **horizon line**, at the **vanishing point**. Note that as all the orthogonals converge, the forms also get smaller. The tool of **one-point linear perspective** is very simple, and artists can use it to create a convincing illusion of depth with only a few pencil strokes and without the careful measuring and use of a ruler, as in Rembrandt van Rijn's etching of *Cottages and Farm Buildings with a Man Sketching* (ca. 1645).



Rembrant van Rijn, Cottages and Farm Buildings with a Man Sketching, etching, ca. 1645 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Two- and three-point linear perspective are slightly more complicated, but operate on the same general principles and produce similar results.



1-, 2-, *and 3-Point Perspective Diagrams. Image: Mari H.*

Perugino also uses atmospheric perspective. This is based on the optical effect that makes objects in the distance appear paler, bluer, and less detailed than objects that are close to us. This effect is perhaps most striking when we look at images of mountains in the distance, as in Claude Lorrain's *Landscape with the Trip into Egypt* (ca. 1647). Note how the color of the figures in the **foreground** – the portion of the image that appears to be closest to the viewer – are more vibrant than the colors in the **background**.



Claude Lorrain, Landscape with the Trip into Egypt, oil on canvas, ca. 1647 (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Returning to Perugino's painting, we can see that he has also relied on this effect, carefully making the figures in the foreground bolder in color and the smaller figures in the middle ground paler, while the hills in the background seem to fade away into pale blues.

It is important to note, though, that the use of various techniques to create a convincing illusion of depth does not make Raphael or Perugino "better" artists than the anonymous medieval monk who painted the page of the Book of the Gospels, nor does it make their works any "better" or more sophisticated. The illusion of depth is one of the many tools in the artist's toolbox, and it serves some purposes very well, but it not always the most powerful or effective way to convey an idea. Indeed, sometimes it can be in direct conflict with the intentions of an artist.

Texture



Jeff Koons, Balloon Dog, mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating, 2014 (Exhibition Center Pompidou, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

Texture is the feeling of a surface, real or represented. This might refer to the roughness or smoothness of actual objects and art media, or to the illusion of these properties. Jeff Koons' *Balloon Dog* (1994) has a perfectly smooth, mirrored surface it is difficult to resist touching it, though, of course, please don't touch the art! It is this surface texture that turns these replicas of commonplace, short-lived, disposable items into precious objects. In contrast, the coarse, bristly surface of an ancient Shang Dynasty Fang-Ding – a ritual vessel used in worshipping dead ancestors – grants the work a vibrant energy, but does not invite our touch.

The illusion of texture is no less important to our experience of works of art. Dutch **still lifes** are justly famous for their careful, illusionistic replication of objects. The smooth silver plates and glass goblet of Pieter Claesz's *Still Life* (ca. 1623) seem to tease us, as do the rougher nuts and breads, and the flaky pie. The lemon peel appears to dangle out of the image itself, just beyond our grasp, and therefore makes this magnificent spread all the more tantalizing.



Fang-ding, bronze, 12th-11th century B.C.E. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



Pieter Claesz, Still Life with Meat Pie, oil on panel, 1640 (Guildhall Art Gallery, London). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Media Attributions

- Albrecht Dürer, Four Hoursemen of the Apocalypse, woodcut print, ca. 1497/1498 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Detail of hat, Albrecht Dürer, Four Hoursemen of the Apocalypse, woodcut print, ca. 1497/1498 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- George Herriman, Krazy Kat – Out of My Way Woim, ink on paper, ca. 1920, Photo CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- Leonardo da Vinci, The Virgin and the Rocks, oil on poplar, thinned and cradled, ca. 1491 (National Gallery, London). Photo: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.
- Sight Lines in Leonardo da Vinci, The Virgin and the Rocks
- Visible Light Spectrum. Image: Mari H.
- Color Wheel. Image: Mari H.
- Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Maternité, oil on canvas, 1885 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Mother and Child, oil on wood, ca. 1860 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Henri Matisse, La Chambre Rouge, oil on canvas, 1908 (State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg). Photo: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

- After Chen Chun, Garden Flowers, ink and color on paper, 1540 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist Composition: White on White, oil on canvas, 1918 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Nagesh Jayaraman, Freedom is to break free from all shackles……. 2012, (CC BY 2.0) https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/
- Kara Walker, African't (detail), cut paper on wall, 1996 (The Broad, Los Angeles). Photo CC BY-NC 2.0
- Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, oil on canvas, 1937-1942 (Tate Modern, London). Photo: CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Maori, Australasia, 2013 -35
- Korvar
- Raphael, La Donna Velata, oil on canvas, ca. 1512-1515 (Pitti Palace, Florence). Photo: CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Raphael, La Donna Velata, sleeve
- Portrait of Luke, Gospel Book, London, British Library, MS Additional 40618, f. 21v, Ireland, 750-850. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication.
- Detail of clothing, Portrait of Luke, Gospel Book.
- Pietro Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter, fresco, ca. 1481-1483 (Sistine Chapel, Vatican City). Photo: Public Domain.
- Edouard Baldus, Gare d'Enghein, salted paper print from printed negative, 1855 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Perugino Diagrammed
- Rembrant van Rijn, Cottages and Farm Buildings with a Man Sketching, etching, ca. 1645 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Perspectives
- Claude Lorrain, Landscape with the Trip into Egypt, oil on cavnas, ca. 1647 (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden). Photo: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Jeff Koons, Balloon Dog, mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating, 2014 (Exhibition Center Pompidou, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.
- Fang-ding, bronze, 12th-11th century B.C.E. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Pieter Claesz, Still Life with Meat Pie, oil on panel, 1640 (Guildhall Art Gallery, London). Photo: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

2. Visual Analysis 2: The Principles of Composition

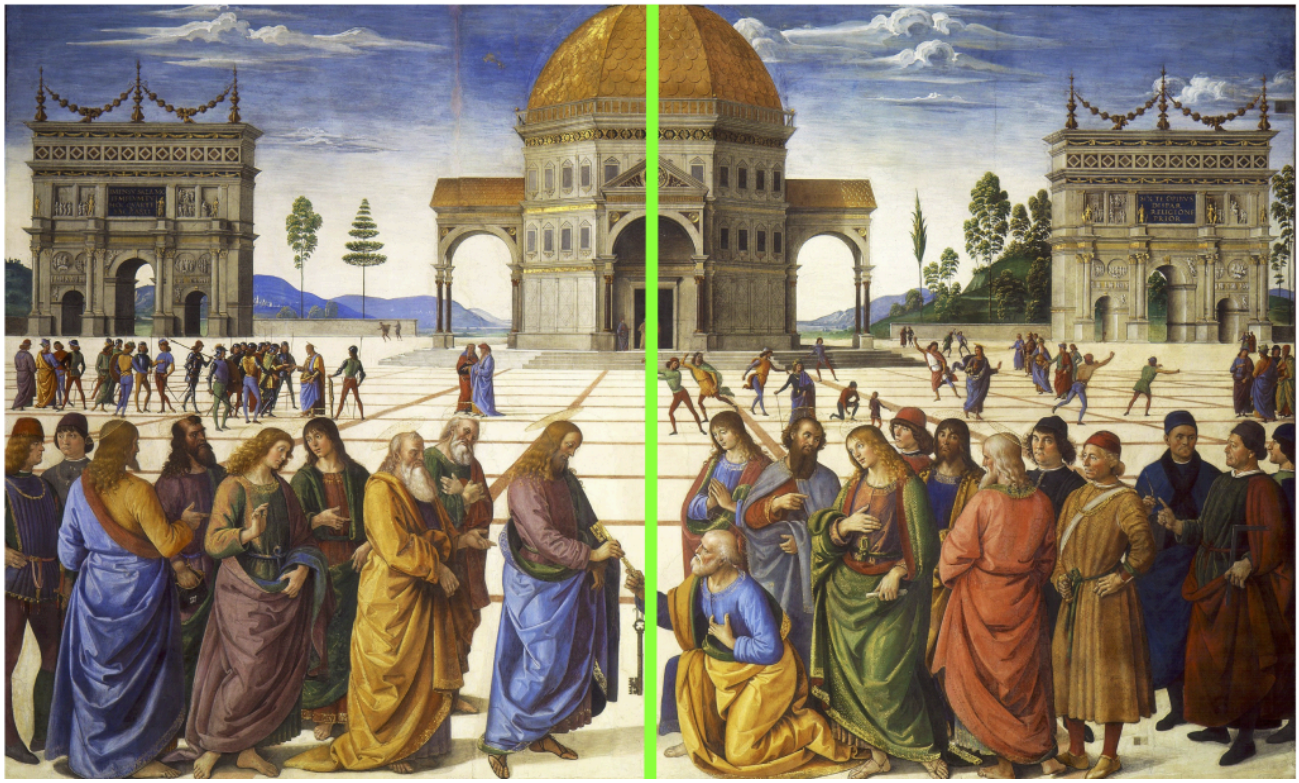
Visual Analysis 2: The Principles of Composition

Now that you know some of the basic visual elements, we can look at how they are put together in compositions. **Composition** is the way all of the visual elements are arranged to make the whole work of art.

Balance and Symmetry: An even use of elements throughout a work, and a mirroring of two halves
Emphasis: Drawing attention to one or more points in a work
Movement: A sense of motion as the eye is guided through a work
Pattern and Repetition: Repeating an object throughout a work or a part of a work
Rhythm: A visual tempo set by repeating elements in a work
Proportion and Scale: The relation in size of parts of a work to the whole
Variety and Unity: Use of different visual elements throughout a work, and the use of similar elements so that all the parts of a work fit together well

Balance and Symmetry

Balance is an even use of elements throughout a work. **Symmetry** is a very formal type of balance consisting of a mirroring of portions of an image. Bilateral symmetry, that is, two-sided symmetry, is the most common, in which two halves of a work of art mirror each other, as in Perugino's painting in the previous chapter. Drawing a line down the center of the image helps emphasize the symmetry of the background and the plaza in which the figures are placed.



Symmetry, Pietro Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter.

The symmetry gives the painting not only a sense of balance, but also a sense of calm, of stability and formality. Notice in particular the way that the buildings in the background are painted to make the work symmetrical. Not all elements of the painting, though, are perfectly symmetrical. The trees, clouds, and figures are not quite symmetrical, but they still are balanced in that they more or less equate to their counterparts on the other side of the image.

Just as the buildings themselves are symmetrical in Perugino's painting, symmetry is also common in major works of architecture, where it lends buildings a tone of stability and power. Classical Greek Temples like the **Temple of Artemis**, Corfu, Greece, ca. 600-580 BCE are rigidly symmetrical.



Reconstruction of the West Façade of the Temple of Artemis at Corfu, Greece, c. 580 BCE. Image: Lucas, CC BY 2.0.

In this **reconstruction** (the original is now a **ruin**), even the sculpture on the **façade** – the front of face of a building – is nearly perfectly symmetrical. At the outer corners (not visible in this drawing) are a mirrored pair of fallen warriors, then two pairs (one now fragmentary) of fighting figures, then two mirrored panthers, and then, in the center, Medusa (a monstrous gorgon with snakes for hair), with two of her children beside her (the winged horse Pegasus and the human-shaped Chrysaor). Even the fearsome gorgon in the center is presented facing directly outward at us, so that her face can be presented in hideous symmetry, with her great, bulging eyes, grimacing mouth, plaited hair, and even the snakes that emerge from the back of her head carved in perfect symmetry. This work should serve to counter the frequently made statement that symmetry makes works beautiful. While many cultures associate symmetry with beauty, and this temple as a whole might be described as such, a grotesque figure remains grotesque even when perfectly symmetrical.

Radial symmetry is created when an image is symmetrical around a central point or axis, like a sunflower viewed head-on. Radial symmetry creates a strong sense of **unity** in a work of art (to be discussed below), and is common in sacred images. In a 9th-century Buddhist Womb Realm **mandala,** all points seem to radiate outward from the central figure of the Buddha.



Buddhist Womb Realm mandala, hanging scroll with colors on silk,
Tō-ji, Kyōto, Japan, 9th century. Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Taizokai.jpg, public domain.

The numerous figures around the Buddha are **bodhisattvas,** individuals who have chosen out of compassion to delay their entry into **nirvana** in order to help others who are suffering. It is fitting that they are shown as if emanating out of

the Buddha, himself, as his enlightenment and compassion are the source and model for theirs. The image also gives a sense that the universe itself is highly ordered.



Polykleitos, Doryphoros, marble, ca. 450-440 B.C.E. (Museo Archaeologico Nazionale, Naples). Photo (cropped): Steve Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

However, *perfect* symmetry is not necessary to create a sense of balance in an image. **Asymmetrical balance** is created when two sides of an image do not mirror each other, but still have approximately the same visual weight, the same amount of detail or shapes or color, and so on. The Classical Greek sculpture ***Doryphoros* (The Spearbearer)** by Polykleitos (ca. 450-440 BCE) provides a clear example of asymmetrical balance. The figure does not stand in a symmetrical way, but overall seems even, calm, and balanced. In this case, the figure has his weight on his right leg, so this leg is tensed. The left leg is relaxed and bent. Balancing this out, the right arm hangs loosely, but the left arm is tensed. In this way, the body – which itself is symmetrical, or would be if he were posed with his feet side by side, looking straight ahead, with his arms hanging down – is balanced. This pose is called **contrapposto**, and is often used to give standing human figures a sense of life and animation.

Emphasis

Emphasis consists of drawing attention to one or more points in a work. This can be accomplished through any of the visual elements. In the Buddhist Womb Mandala above, the Buddha is emphasized through location (he is centered in the image), color (the vivid red petals around him draw the eye, and the contrast with the green circle around him further highlight him), line (all of the rows of figures essentially guide the eye inward to the center through implied lines, and the lines dividing the red petals direct us inward, as well), symmetry (the radial symmetry focuses us inward to the center), and so on. In essence, we cannot help but return, again and again, to the Buddha, the focus of the image and also the focus of Buddhist devotion.

Movement

Movement refers to a sense of motion as the eye is guided through a work. This can be accomplished by showing figures in motion, or simply through the visual elements. An Indian **illumination** – that is, a painting in a hand-made book – from the *Akbarnama* showing *Akbar Hunting in an Enclosure* (ca. 1590 CE) demonstrates both types.

As with the Dürer woodcut of the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* discussed in the previous chapter, the rider on his horse charges rapidly across the image. The smaller animals scatter, darting in all directions and also hunting one another. Their movements create a strong sense of movement throughout the image. However, there are formal elements that intensify this.



Movement, *Manohar*, *Hamid Bhakari Punished by Akbar.*



Manohar, *Hamid Bhakari Punished by Akbar*, *ink, watercolor, and gold on paper, ca. 1604 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.*

Just as the horizontal lines behind the riders in the Dürer suggested their movement forward, so here, lines and colors help convey the motion of the people and animals, here. Many of the people and animals in the image are in vigorous motion, racing this way and that. Emperor Akbar rides a horse leaping from right to left as he hunts a wolf, and he is accompanied by a hunting dog taking down a gazelle. Their motion is echoed by the group of attendants watching the hunt and gathering the slaughtered animals. Akbar and his dog are confronted by the counter-motion of two groups of animals that seem to be running in panic from left to right. A pair of these animals changes the angle of this left-to-right motion by moving upward rather than downward, and in so doing places Akbar, grandly dressed and powerfully posed on his horse, in the center of a whirlwind of movement.

Pattern and Repetition



Vairochana, bronze, sixteenth-seventeenth century (Stanford Art Museum, Stanford). Photo by A. Davey, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

When an image or object is repeated throughout a work of art, or a part of a work, this is called either **pattern** or **repetition**. Repetition can be less structured than pattern, which is more regular. Both can work to create a sense of **rhythm**, as discussed below. The large base of a bronze Chinese statue of Vairochana Buddha (sixteenth-seventeenth century) is composed of literally thousands of tiny bodhisattvas, which therefore seem to serve to support Buddha figuratively, as well as visually. Their repetition is very regular, establishing a clear pattern. This is also the case in the Buddhist Womb Realm mandala discussed above. The pattern in both cases emphasizes the unity of purpose shared by all these figures, each an embodiment of the ideal of compassion.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the visual tempo set by repeating elements in a work of art or architecture. The arches and **columns** of the Great Mosque of Cordoba provide a good example. They are spaced very evenly, setting up an even tone to the building. This is then enlivened by the rhythm created by the striped pattern on the **arches**.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Interior), begun 786, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

For contrast, we could look at Jackson Pollock's **Autumn Rhythm (# 30)** (1950). Pollock was a fan of jazz music, and

tried to capture something of its loose, syncopated rhythms. The resulting drip-paintings (they were made with the large canvases on the floor of his studio) have similarly loose, improvisational compositions. Despite its lack of formal structure, there is a clear rhythm running horizontally across the painting, and Pollock uses the title of the work to draw our attention to it.



Jackson Pollock, Autumn Rhythm, enamel on canvas, 1950 (*Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*). *Photo: Steve Harlow, CC BY 2.0.*

Proportion and Scale

Proportion refers to the relationship of parts of a body or form to one another and of the parts to the whole, for example, the size of the head of a figure in relation to the entire body. **Scale** is the relationship of parts of an image to the image as a whole, or to something in the world outside of the image, for example, the size of the figure of a king in an image as compared to the size of the figure of his servant in the same image, or the size of a statue of the king as compared to the size of an actual person. Beginning with proportion, we can look again at *Doryphoros*.



Altar Group, Oba Ewuake with enslaved men and decapitated bodies, bronze, nineteenth century (Bode Museum, Berlin). Photo: Sailko, CC BY 3.0.

Compare his proportions to those of an Altar Group from Benin with Oba (King) Ewuake flanked by two enslaved men (nineteenth century CE). *Doryphoros*'s proportions were laid out according to mathematical formulas in order to create an image that the sculptor believed presented the "ideal man." *Doryphoros* is about seven "heads" tall, so to speak, whereas Ewuake is approximately three "heads" tall. *Doryphoros*'s limbs fit within the range of average human proportion, whereas Ewuake's legs are considerably shorter than his torso. While their proportions are quite different, both works present figures considered ideal by their cultures. *Doryphoros* embodies quite literally the focus on external beauty – according to Greek tastes of the day – whereas the image of Ewuake shows, with the intentional enlargement of the head, the greater importance of the intellect in the culture.

Scale can refer to any relationship of parts to the whole, but one particular type is of great significance in many periods: **Hieratic scale** is scale based on relative importance. That is, the more important a figure, the larger they are in relation to the figures around them. This is quite different from the naturalistic scale found in works organized by linear perspective, like the Perugino painting in the previous chapter. Ewuake, for example, is considerably larger than the figures that flank him. These are not children, but adult men who were enslaved by Ewuake. We are not supposed to assume that Ewuake is a giant, but rather, that he is far more important than the other two men. Also note that the other two have rather different proportions: their heads are much smaller in relation to their bodies, and their arms and legs longer. This reminds us that Ewuake's proportions are absolutely deliberate, not the result of incompetence but of a conscious effort to convey a cultural meaning. Before leaving this work, though, two more details should be mentioned. Around the base of the work, there are the bodies of fallen men, bound with their hands behind them, decapitated. These defeated enemies are represented as far smaller than the enslaved men. The symbolism of decapitation as the ultimate, dehumanizing death highlights the importance of the scale of the head of the king who towers over them.

Variety and Unity



Detail of Buddha and bodhisattvas, Buddhist Womb Realm mandala

Variety is the use of different visual elements throughout a work, whereas **unity** is a feeling that all the parts of a work fit together well. These do not have to be opposites, as a work filled with variety might also have unity. The Womb Realm Mandala above is an excellent example. Unlike the bronze statue of Buddha discussed above, where all of the bodhisattvas are more or less identical, the many bodhisattvas on the World Womb Mandala are each individualized. At a distance, they all become one, expressing great unity, but taken one at a time, each as an object of devotional contemplation, they contain more variety than it would at first appear.

Naturalism

One more subject requires brief commentary. The issue of **naturalism** has been raised several times in this discussion of the visual elements of art and principles of composition, and will be mentioned many times in the chapters that follow. Naturalism is the resemblance of a work of art to the "real world," as we see it around us. The more naturalistic a work, the more it looks like our world, and the less naturalistic, the less so. For extremes, we will compare a work by the Italian Baroque painter Caravaggio with a work by Hakuin Ekaku, a Japanese Zen Buddhist monk.



Caravaggio, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, oil on canvas, ca. 1603 (Sanssouci Palace, Potsdam). Photo: Héliodore Baalbek, Public Domain.



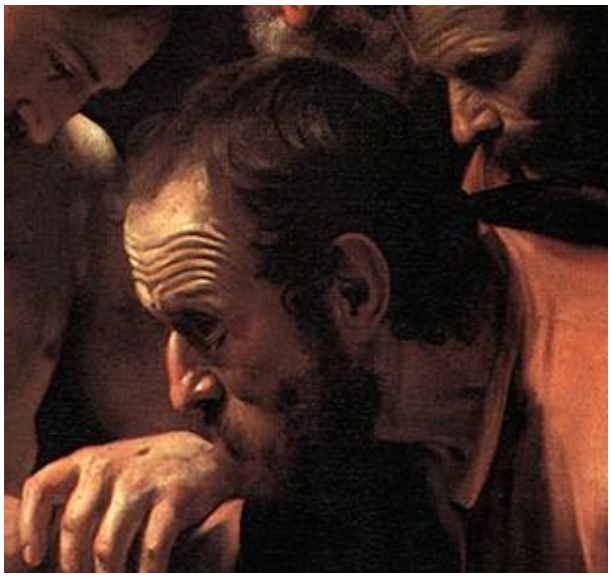
Hakuin Ekaku, Portrait of Bodhidharma, hanging scroll, ink on paper, mid-eighteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.Portrait of Daruma, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868) Hanging scroll; ink on paper; Image: 45 7/8 x 21 1/4 in. (116.5 x 54 cm) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving, 2015 (2015.500.9.3) http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/78145

Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* is highly naturalistic, whereas Hakuin's portrait of Bodhidharma (Daruma) rejects naturalism. Both paintings are **representational,** which means that they both depict something, as opposed to **non-representational** works like the Jackson Pollock discussed above, where there is no visual picture hidden in the lines.

In Caravaggio's image, the face of Thomas, who leans down to look directly at the wound in Jesus' side, is rendered in

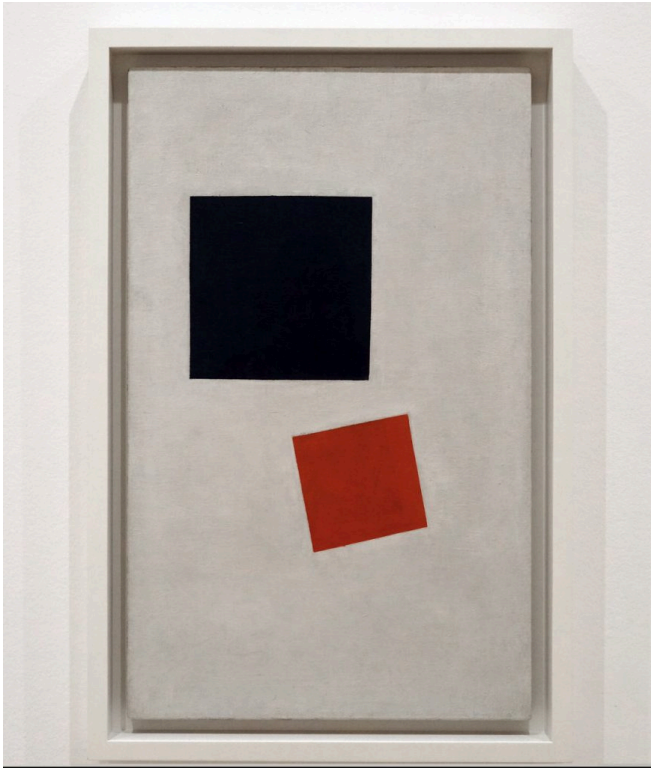
minute, realistic detail. His hairs are individually rendered, his features distinct and recognizable, his skin browned from the sun and with dirt.

Caravaggio found his models for holy figures in the streets, and their humble conditions are carefully depicted in his paintings. All this adds up to naturalism, and perhaps even to the highest degree of naturalism, referred to as **verism**.



Detail of Caravaggio, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas

Ekaku's portrait of Daruma, on the other hand, is recognizable as a human face, but all the elements have all been rendered somewhat **abstractly** – that is, in some way deviating or ignoring the appearance of the natural world, simplifying or altering it for effect. We might also say that Ekaku's image is **stylized** – designed according to the principles of a particular style rather than being beholden to the way things look in "the real world." This does not make it less "good" as a work of art, and also does not mean that the artist was less skilled. Rather, it is simply a different, less naturalistic style, designed to suit different goals. Here, the emphasis is not on the great Buddhist sage's literal appearance (he died over a millennium before this work was made), but on his wisdom, embodied in his giant, upturned eyes and vast forehead.

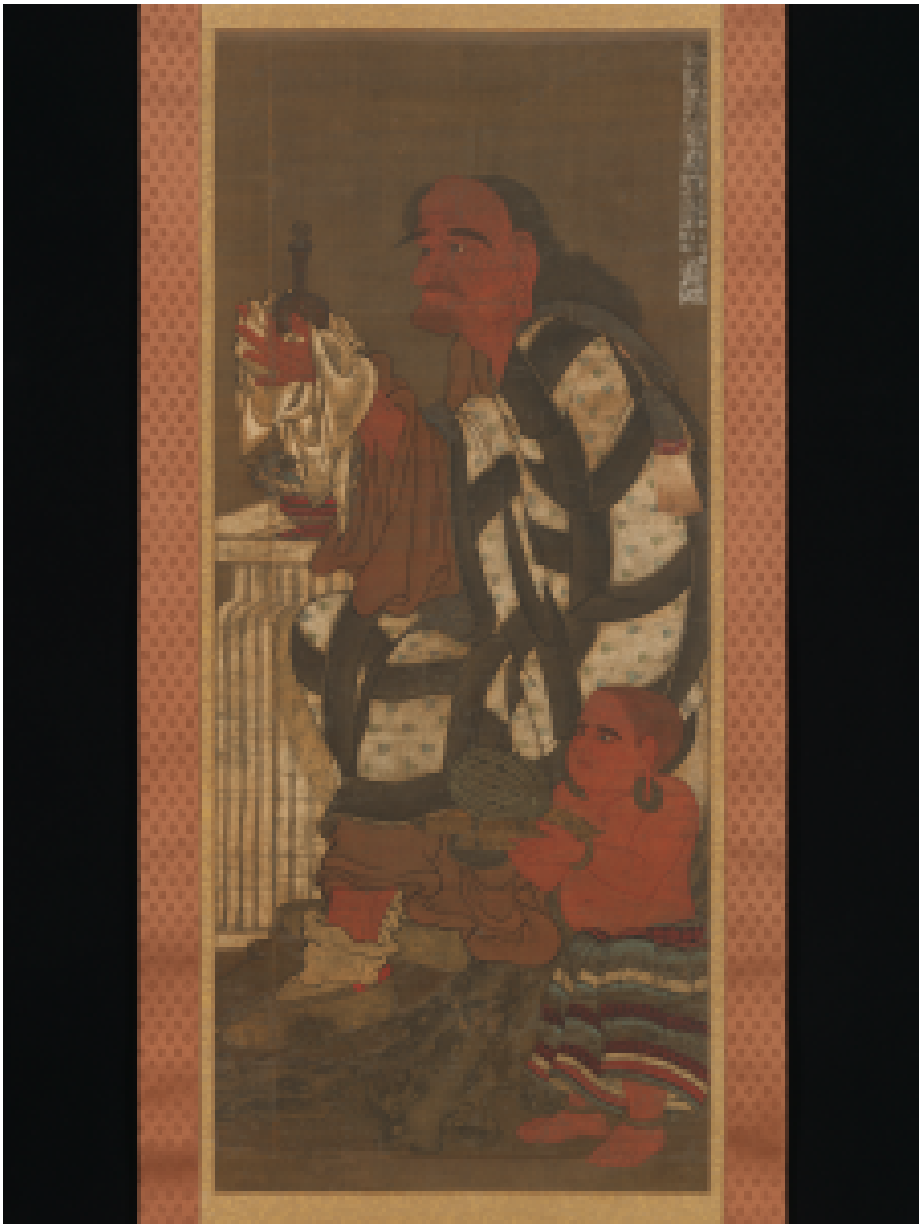


Kazimir Malevich, Painterly Realism, oil on canvas, 1915 (Museum of Modern Art, New York City). Photo: Photo (cropped): Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

The farthest extent of abstraction is **non-representational** or **non-objective art**, in which the subject is not merely abstract, but wholly absent. This type of art, which many viewers find highly challenging, makes little or no reference to the natural world, such as Kazimir Malevich's geometric paintings like his ironically titled *Painterly Realism* (1915), Mondrian's *Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red in* the previous chapter, or Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* (above). In such works, we are in a purely formal world, with no subject in the work but the work, itself, and where the tools of visual analysis are the prime method of entry into the work.

There is one other way, though, that we can speak of naturalism. Instead of contrasting it with abstraction, we can contrast it with **realism**. We would have to determine that *Doryphoros* discussed above is highly naturalistic, in that he looks very much like a living person. On the other hand, he presents an image of the Ancient Greek physical ideal of symmetry, youth, fitness, and, indeed, relaxation. If we are being honest, we would have to admit that while a person *could* look like this, rather few of us do. This is true in so far as few of us are as muscular and athletic as *Doryphoros*, but is also the case in that he is shown as a European man, reflecting Greek arguments about racial superiority. Ancient Greeks were in contact with many surrounding cultures, from India to Africa, and held the ethnocentric notion that Greeks were the most beautiful, balanced people in the world. When works like *Doryphoros* are uncritically described as having "ideal bodies," modern

art historians perpetuate this ancient racist outlook, so it is important to always note that these figures are not *actually* the only human ideals, but reflect their creators' ideologies.



Satsubari, the Second of the Sixteen Arhats, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, fourteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Doryphoros is indeed highly **idealized**, according to the Ancient Greek worldview. However, the work lacks **realism**, the property of images that represent the gritty or harsh realities of the world. For example, a fourteenth-century Japanese painting of *Satsubari, The Second of the Sixteen Rakan* – figures in Buddhism who protect Buddhist law and bless donors – is not painted with naturalism, in that the work is clearly a painting, with a loose style and exaggeration of features. On the other hand, the work is highly realistic, in that the artist has presented us with a figure that is ordinary or even slightly grotesque, rather than idealized. He is old, wrinkled and bent, his earlobe hanging low (stretched out by having

worn large gold earrings) as a marker of his past wealth. His clothes are rumpled, his socks slipping downward. While the image is not very naturalistic, it is still highly realistic.

Disentangling naturalism from realism is tricky, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, despite their important differences. Naturalism and realism might or might not appear in the same work. An image might be naturalistic and realistic, like *The Doubting of Thomas*, or naturalistic and idealized, as is *Doryphoros*. Alternately, a work might be abstracted and realistic, like the *Second Rakan*, or abstracted and idealized, like John in the Book of the Gospels in the previous chapter. This diagram presents the nexus of these terms, and we might plot just about every work of art in this book somewhere within it.

Some works, of course, like those by Duane Hanson, have both forms of naturalism. His life-size sculptures of people revel in their ordinary nature, and are also startlingly lifelike – **veristic** – so much so that they are frequently mistaken for real people when on display in museum exhibitions. I have been fooled by two of them, over the years. One was dressed as a museum guard and another as a workman. Even though I had seen *Slab Man* (1976) dozens of times, when his gallery was under construction and he was surrounded by carts of equipment and tools, I was fooled anew.

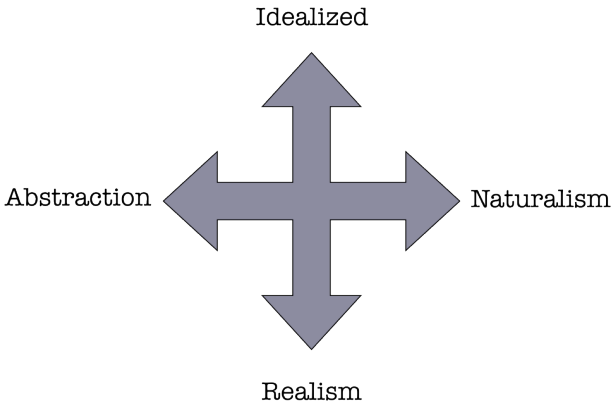


Diagram of Abstraction, Naturalism, Realism, and Idealized Images. Image: Mari H.

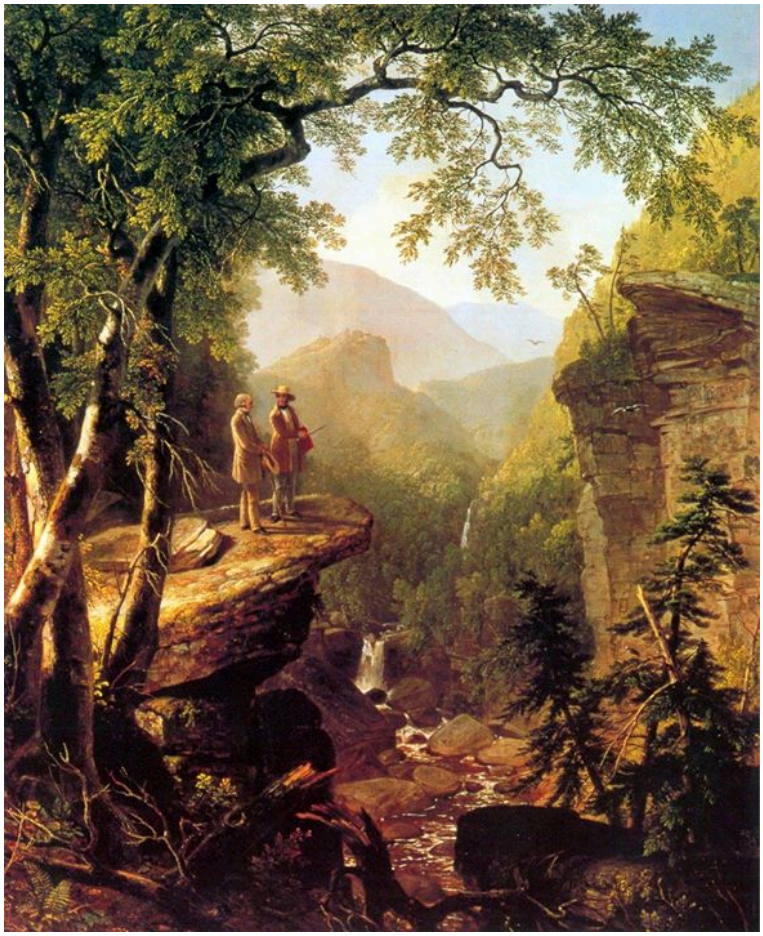


Duane Hanson, Slab Man, 1976 (Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford). Photo by Paul Lloyd, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

You can now identify all of the visual and compositional elements in any work of art! Take a look at the following pairs, and try to determine how the artists have used line, shape, color, space, form and texture, combined to create balance and symmetry, emphasis, movement, pattern and repetition, rhythm, proportion and scale, variety and unity, and convey degrees of naturalism and abstraction, realism and idealism, to create effective works of art. While this is quite a long list of individual and paired elements, once you have mastered them, you will be well-prepared to take on any works of art you encounter.

I have set up these three pairs of images, so that you can conduct the most classic of all art historical activities: the Compare and Contrast Exercise. The purpose of this, as already demonstrated in many of the sections above, is to allow the similarities and differences between works highlight their relative qualities.

Comparison 1



Asher Durand, Kindred Spirits, oil on canvas, 1849 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo by doigstar1, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

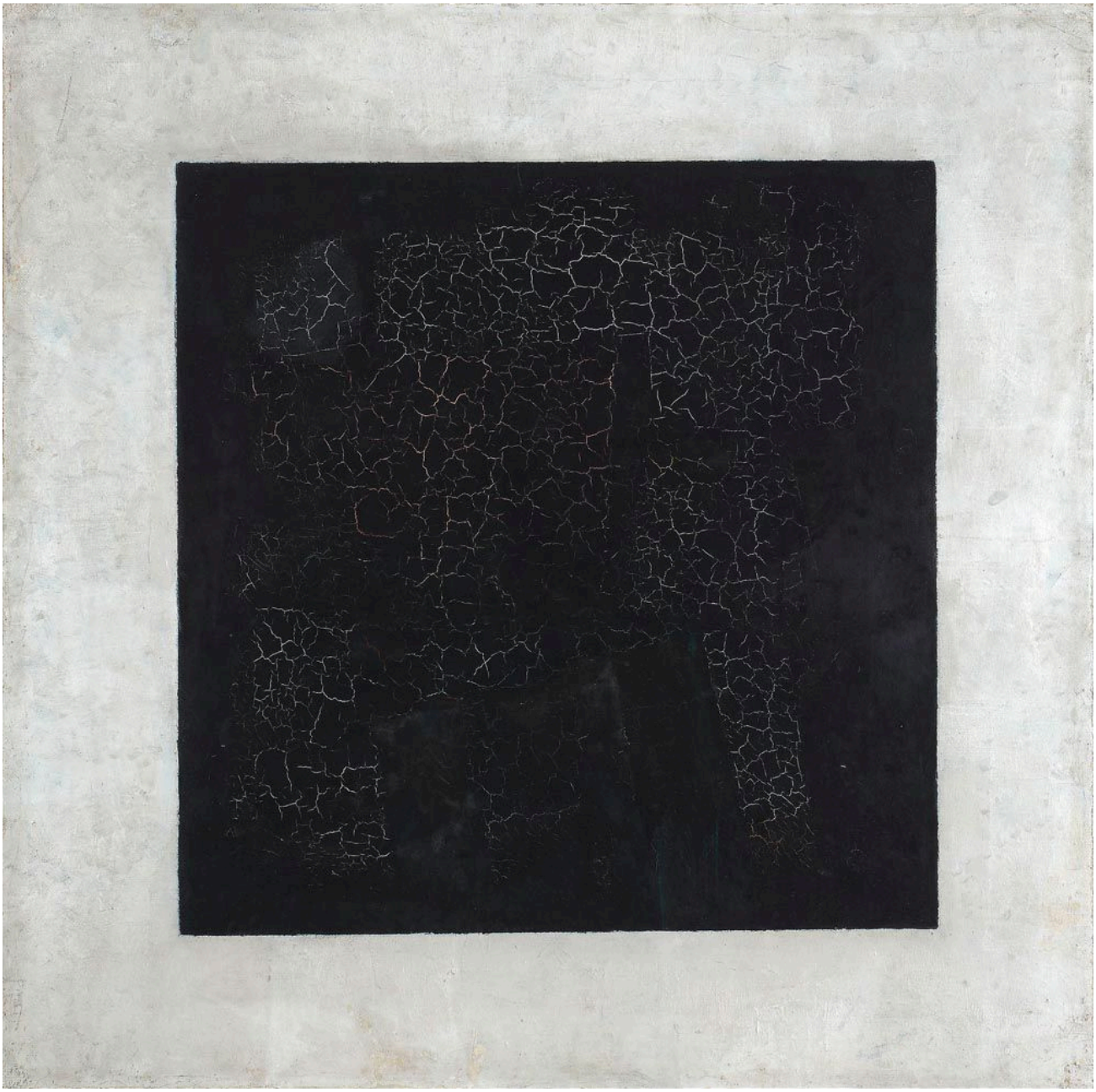


Dong Qichang, Landscapes After Old Masters, ink on paper, 1630 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Comparison 2



Wassily Kandinsky, Blue Painting, oil on canvas, 1924 (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



Kazimir Malevich, Black Square, oil on canvas, 1915 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). Photo: Public Domain.

Comparison 3



Tlatilco, Mask, ceramic, twelfth century–ninth century B.C.E. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba, ivory, iron, copper, sixteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Media Attributions

- Symmetry, Pietro Perugino, Christ Giving the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter.
- Reconstruction of the West Façade of the Temple of Artemis at Corfu, Greece, c. 580 BCE.
- Buddhist Womb Realm mandala
- Polykleitos, Doryphoros
- Manohar, Hamid Bhakari Punished by Akbar, ink, watercolor, and gold on paper, ca. 1604 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Manohar diagrammed
- Vairochana, bronze
- Cordoba – 39
- Jackson Pollock, Autumn Rhythm
- Nigeria Benin Group
- Buddha in lotus
- Caravaggio, The Incredulity of Saint Thomas
- Hakuin Ekaku, Portrait of Bodhidharma, hanging scroll, ink on paper, mid-eighteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.Portrait of Daruma, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868) Hanging scroll; ink on paper; Image: 45 7/8 x 21 1/4 in. (116.5 x 54 cm) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving, 2015 (2015.500.9.3) http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/78145
- Caravaggio, Saint Thomas
- Kazimir Malevich, Painterly Realism
- Satsubari, the Second of the Sixteen Arhats, hanging scroll, ink and color on silk, fourteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Diagram of Abstraction, Naturalism, Realism, and Idealized Images. Image: Mari H.
- Duane Hanson, Slab Man, 1976 (Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford). Photo: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Asher Durand, Kindred Spirits, oil on canvas, 1849 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Dong Qichang, Landscapes After Old Masters, ink on paper, 1630 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Wassily Kandinsky
- Kazimir Malevich
- Tlatilco, Mask, ceramic, twelfth century-ninth century B.C.E. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba, ivory, iron, copper, sixteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

3. Nature

How and Why Do Artists Present the World Around Us?

The natural world appears as a major theme in the visual arts from the very earliest images, such as the cave paintings discussed in the Religion chapter. The representation of the world around us is found, in various degrees and various forms, in all periods and regions. However, representations of the natural world are, themselves, never *natural*. That is, there is no way to merely present the natural world "as it really is," without this being influenced by the culture in which it was produced. Our cultures impact our perceptions of everything around us, and dictate the ways that we construct our images. Even a photograph of a landscape – perhaps the form that gives the greatest sense of accurate depiction of the world – is based on ideas the photographer brings to bear on that landscape, as well as the technologies used to generate the image.

In this chapter, we look at a wide range of images depicting nature, with an emphasis on images of the land, and its flora and fauna. Some will celebrate the glories of nature, but others will present the natural world as a place of danger and strife. Still others will use the natural world as a metaphor for other concerns, embodying humanity or set in opposition to it.

These images are connected to those in many other chapters. Nature and the natural world are important elements of religious imagery, of images of human body, of gods and of nations. The image of Zeus in the Religion chapter, for example, might be discussed in regard to religion (he is a god), the natural world (an embodiment of thunder), power (he is in the process of using divine might to destroy someone), community (in Ancient Greece, religion was used to bind communities together around the worship of local versions of gods), violence (his action is one of violence), and so on. Most works of art contain many themes, and much of the most interesting work they do comes from the interplay between them.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I

Sesshū Tōyō, Winter Landscape, Kyushu, Japan, 1470s CE

VIEWING QUESTIONS

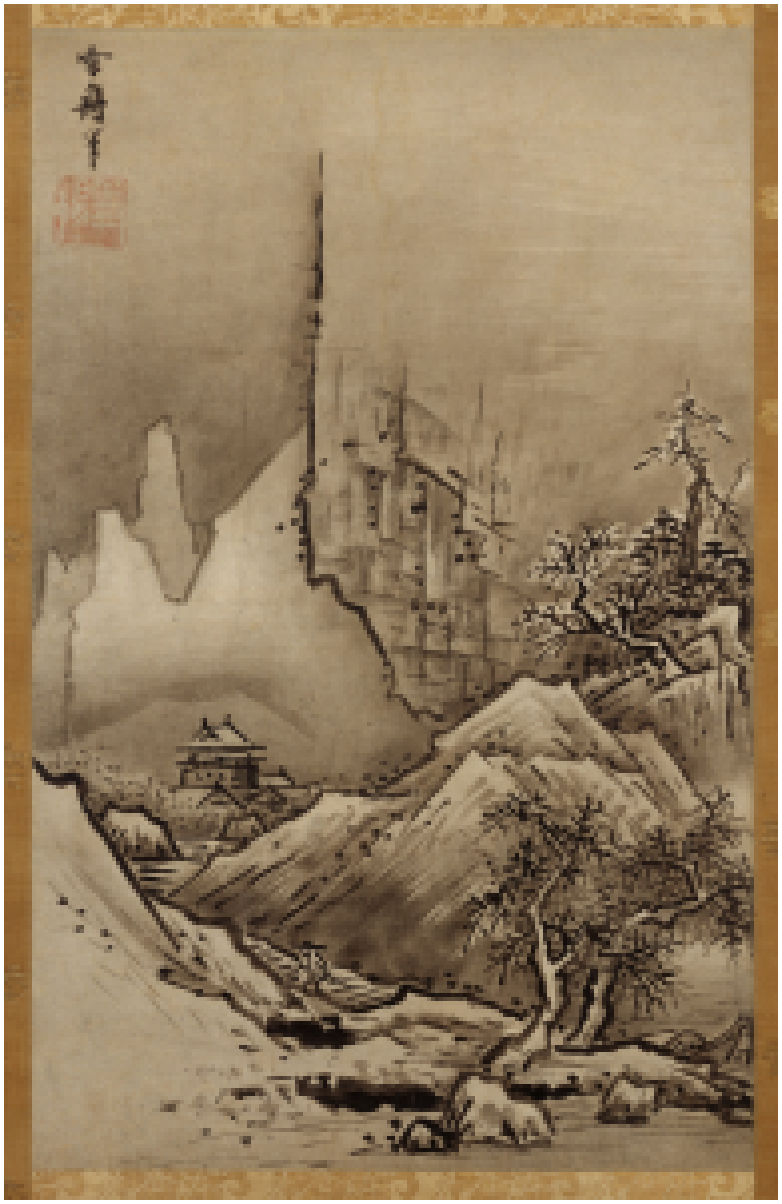
- How has the artist used **contrast** to create a mood?
- How has the artist used **line** to intensify the mood?
- What sort of **balance** does the image have and how does this affect the image?
- What is the role of the small figure on the steps, near the base of the image?

INTRODUCTION: Sumi-e Painting

Sesshū Tōyō, like most **Zen Buddhist** monks, practiced the art of **sumi-e** – black ink painting. The ink is made by burning pine twigs, collecting the soot, and mixing it with resin. This is made into a flat stick. The stick is then rubbed in a

small pool of water in an inkstone. The inkstone has a shallow slope to it, so that the ink can be built up on the slope. By mixing in more or less ink with the water, the artist creates the desired value. Sumi-e painting was popular among Zen monks because of its rapidity. The most famous works in the medium are not slowly and laboriously produced, but rather, rapidly sketched out with quick and fluid brushstrokes. Artists often aim for economy of strokes – they try to produce their image with as few strokes as possible, striking for the heart of the image rather than fussing about the details of its outward form. Since Zen Buddhists believe that Enlightenment can strike anyone at any time and with great suddenness, the form suits the belief.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: A Cold, Brittle Day



Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape, ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.

Sesshū Tōyō's *Winter Landscape* (1470s) is a powerful image. The painter manipulates the visual elements with great care and precision in order to create a mood. Since the artist restricted himself to the black sumi ink, the painting is necessarily only in shades of grey. Still, he uses it to with fairly high contrast, so that the darkest brushstrokes are very far in value from the smattering of white areas that result from Sesshū's decision to leave them unpainted. This high contrast emphasizes the hard feeling of the work, the cold, harsh, brittle sense of winter. Most of the contour lines used to define the outlines of the forms – the hills, temple, trees, and the human figure – are heavy and dark. An image of a snowy landscape might be shown as soft and picturesque, with all the edges blurred gently by the muting effect of the falling snow, but that is the perspective we have of the cold while sitting at the fireside. This image, on the other hand, conveys the sense that we are out in the cold. The landscape is a hard, icy mountain ridge, rather than a soft, snowy wood.



Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Detail of tree), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.

Still, this is hardly a black-and-white image. Instead, Sesshū has made use of a range of values, exploiting the middle grays to build up the weight of winter. The heavy, leaden sky hangs ponderously above. The snow-capped hills turn slushy and dim toward their bases. The only white sections are those around the tree branches, giving the sense that they are covered in snow.

The use of line works together with the contrast in *Winter Landscape*. The majority of the lines are choppy and jagged. In a depiction of the natural world, we might expect to see more use of organic, curvilinear lines. However, Sesshū constructs the trees, hills, and mountains almost exclusively out of short, straight lines of varying thickness and value. In addition, most of these lines are set at sharp diagonals, with those of the hills almost all at forty-five degrees. This gives the work a sense of energy, though since the lines are set in opposition to one another, with some slanting to the right and others to the left, this energy is pent up, unable to escape in any particular direction.

One line, though, dominates the entire composition: the curious heavy, thick, dark line that runs vertically down the image, just left of center. It slashes downward like a bolt of lightening, jogging briefly left and then slanting sharply off to the right. The space to the right of it is filled with a spiky grid composed of short lines that are mostly horizontal and vertical. These do not seem to be quite representational – what would they depict? Rather, they intensify the crystalline tone of icy winter. For that matter, what is that dominant line? Is it, perhaps, the edge of an overhanging cliff, threatening the little Buddhist monastery crouching beneath it? In that case, the upper portions must be shrouded in mist, since the form simply fades gently away as we move up the painting. Or perhaps it, too, is not really representational at all, not presenting any element of the natural world but, instead, creating a mood.

We identify with the small figure who trudges wearily up the long flight of steps, leaning forward into the climb and perhaps into a cold wind, his shoulders hunched up under his broad-brimmed hat. This figure is created through a series of short, quick, straight lines. Sesshū's economy is impressive. With only a few brushstrokes, he creates not only form but also feeling and mood.



Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Detail of person), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.

Sesshū's careful construction of balance is much in keeping with his crisp use of contrast and line. The image is not symmetrical – the two halves do not mirror one another even loosely. However, it has a dynamic, **asymmetrical balance**. Neither side of the image has greater visual weight to it. Sesshū uses a few techniques to achieve this, foremost among them **emphasis**.

In this case, emphasis is created through the visual elements discussed above, contrast and line, as well as through the use of concentrated detail. There is more detail on the right side of the painting, particularly in the knotty branches of the bare trees clinging to the rocks. This detail is the result of the sharp, prickly lines that catch our eye, picked out through high contrast with the white around them. On the left, though, the shapes are larger, more open, and brighter. These serve to isolate and thereby emphasize the small series of buildings in their midst. Our eyes therefore bounce back and forth across this image.



Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Zigzag Diagram), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.

The great vertical slash discussed above also works to establish this dynamic balance. It starts almost at the top edge of the image, slightly to the left of center. An artist seeking a more static, symmetrical image might have put it right down the center of the image. However, the line maintains the asymmetrical balance by cutting back to the right and passing through the center of the image. As we follow it downward, it moves to the right until it runs perpendicularly into the sloping hillside, which in turn carries our eyes down and to the left, and into another series of diagonal lines that move us further down and back to the right, to where the figure has moored his small boat. The line of the large boulders in turn pushes our eye back to toward the left, ending just about in the center of the image. This painting, despite its frigidness and balance, is a restless composition.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Zen Painting

Zen Buddhism – developed by **Bodhidharma** (known as Daruma in Japan), a Persian or Indian Buddhist who traveled to China – took root in Japan in the twelfth century. Buddhists seek **Enlightenment**, which leads to **Nirvana**, a peaceful escape from a cycle of reincarnation (rebirth) into the world of suffering. Bodhidharma believed that Enlightenment could be achieved through concentrated meditation, rather than the complex rituals practiced by some other Buddhist

sects. A crucial element of Zen Buddhism is the belief that Enlightenment can strike a person at any point, and this led to the establishment of practices considered more likely to bring it about, including some that relied on interaction with the natural world. Zen monks were encouraged to wander the countryside, taking solitary journeys to remote landscapes in order to contemplate them. In the words of Dong Qichang, a major painter of the seventeenth century whom many tried to imitate for centuries, "Read ten thousand books, and walk ten thousand miles." That is, study the works of great masters, and study the works of nature. Many Zen ink paintings were produced not in an artist's studio but in the wilderness. An **epitaph** for the early master Ni Zan (fourteenth century), tells us:

> in his late years, he became quieter and more withdrawn than ever. Having lost or given away everything he ever owned, he did his best to forget his worries … He roamed the lakes and mountains, leading a recluse's life.[1]

In a poem written at the top of his painting of *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu* (1372), Ni Zan writes:

> We watch the clouds and daub with our brushes
> We drink wine and write poems.
> The joyous feelings of this day
> Will linger long after we have parted.[2]



Ni Zan, Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, ink on paper, 1372 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Perhaps the most important concept for Zen artists was ***wabi*** – the appreciation of a simple, even austere lifestyle that was reflected in art. *Wabi* has had a strong impact on Japanese culture that continues today, and is perhaps most familiar in the form of the Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Zen monks were allowed to engage in more worldly activities than some other Buddhist monks, including art making. Their paintings were designed to encourage a deeper experience of nature, and to help convey that experience to the viewers. Their purpose is not to accurately and precisely record the appearance of the landscape, but to capture the feeling of a person gazing upon it. Sumi-e painting, practiced with rapid, intuitive brushwork, was perhaps the art form most well suited to this goal. Sesshū excelled at this, making works that are not mere representations of the landscape but rather, images that inspire feelings as much by the way the scene is painted as by the content of that scene.

Here again, the basic tenets of Buddhism help us understand the painting further. Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 566-480 BCE), an Indian prince who renounced his decadent lifestyle in favor of a life of meditation and simplicity. Gautama was sequestered in his royal palace, rarely venturing outside. On one excursion, though, he encountered the Four Sights: an old man, a sick man, a corpse and an **ascetic** – a person who intentionally lives a simple or even harsh life, usually to achieve spiritual goals. This led him to formulate the Four Noble Truths:

1. "Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, Ni Zan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*
2. "Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, Ni Zan," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

Life is suffering
Suffering is caused by desire of worldly things and goals
Desire can be eliminated
The Noble Eightfold Path is the route to ending desire and thereby ending suffering.

The Noble Eightfold Path, in turn, is:

> Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

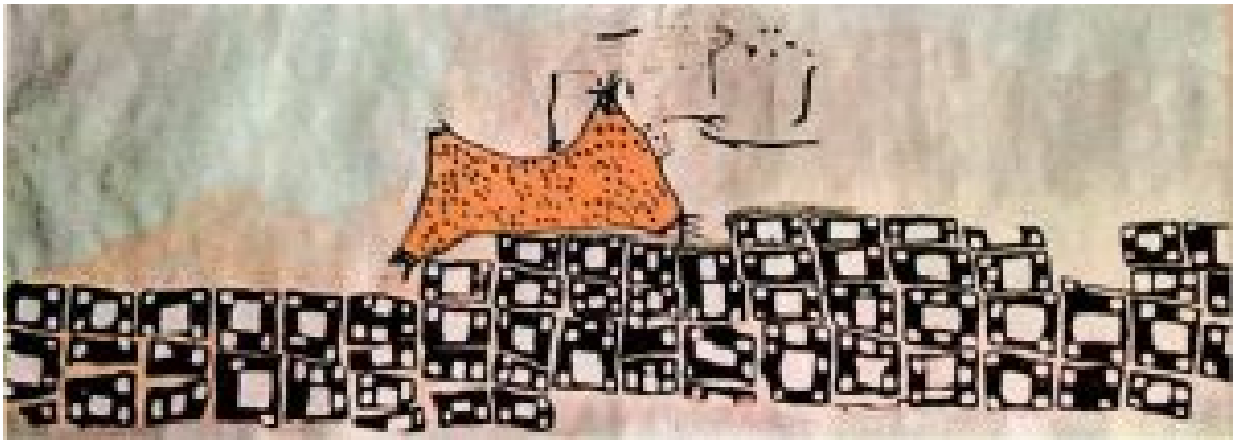
This path is designed to guide the Buddhist toward moral conduct, meditation, wisdom, and, ultimately, enlightenment.

In Sesshū's *Winter Landscape*, we can see these principles reflected. The landscape implies the suffering at the core of life, but the long staircase presents the noble path of right living, leading ultimately to the sanctuary of the Buddhist monastery, seeming to represent in this image not merely the immediate escape from the suffering of the traveler in the frigid world but also perhaps implying the greater escape from the entire cycle of worldly suffering: Nirvana. In this case, the entire image becomes a metaphor for the basic beliefs of Buddhism. All of Sesshū's careful control of the visual elements work to intensify the message that Buddhism is the path to release from the suffering represented by the world. Here, while the image seems at first glance to be about the natural world, in fact nature is being used as a metaphor for all elements of our world, natural and human.

Comparisons and Connections I: Nature as Harsh, Nature as Beautiful

Violent Nature

In emphasizing the difficult or even dangerous elements of the natural world, Sesshū Tōyō was participating in the one of the most ancient of artistic traditions. A wall painting at Çatalhöyük, Turkey (ca. 6150 BCE) is often cited as the earliest **landscape** – that is, an image where the main subject is the natural world, itself, rather than people or other figures doing something in that landscape. While the subject is not certain, it has been interpreted as presenting an image of an exploding volcano. Çatalhöyük is among the earliest surviving cities, and is the largest Neolithic city to have been found, originally housing as many as 10,000 people, actively engaged in trade for daily and luxury materials. Several of the buildings have wall paintings showing conflicts with the natural world. If this painting does show a volcano, then it depicts what is among the more spectacularly violent events in nature. An event of this nature would certainly capture the attention of ancient civilizations, as it captures ours, though they would likely have interpreted it through a different view of the world.



Çatalhöyük Volcano. Photo by Remixing Çatalhöyük, CC BY-NC 2.0.

A brief look at Çatalhöyük's overall design reveals much about this culture's view of nature. Whereas we tend to pay a premium for homes and offices with large windows looking out onto landscapes, few of homes and other structures found by archeologists at Çatalhöyük have windows that look outward from the city. This is a society more concerned with protection from the elements than with pretty views. This should not be surprising. The natural world was – and remains – a site of real danger. Here, the danger is of cataclysm rather than of grinding suffering, as in Sesshū's work.

In the wall painting, we see what appears to be the city spread out as if in a plan, with the wobbly, irregular rectangles representing structures. The lack of streets between them reflects the actual plan of the city. The buildings all adjoined one another, and some were only accessible through holes in the roofs. Towering over the city is a great volcano, depicted in bright orange, arguably based on Hasan Dag, a nearby mountain with two peaks.

Or is it? It has also been suggested that the image does not show a volcano and a city plan but rather, a leopard skin over geometric patterning. While this is a completely different – but also plausible – reading of an unclear, prehistoric image, it *also* points toward the dangers of the natural world, and the implicit competition between people and their environment. The leopard was a hunting competitor, as it killed the same wild goats hunted by the inhabitants of Çatalhöyük. In either case, then, this ancient image projects a relationship between the inhabitants and the natural world outside the perimeter of their city. Really, we do not have to choose; it could be one or the other, or even could be an amalgamation of both, representing these two natural forces in a single image. With prehistoric art – as with all art – we rarely have final and absolute answers.

In the next image, Joseph Mallord William Turner (English, died 1851) presents the natural world not merely as hard and challenging, as Sesshū does, and as in the image from Çatalhöyük. Nor does Turner make the violence something distant and without clear victims, as Sesshu does. Instead, he presents nature as a consummately terrifying, all-powerful entity, vastly overwhelming the small human figures lost within its rages. In his *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On* ("*The Slave Ship*") (1840), Turner uses energetic, visible brushstrokes, breaking up the forms and thereby intensifying the sense of chaos. There is nothing quite clear, here; everything seems to be in churning motion. Even the sun, burning through the clouds, does not seem a positive force. Rather, as the most brilliant white, the brightest value in the image, it seems a sharp, almost painful cut, just to the right of the center of the image. In this way, it recalls the vertical slash just off-center to the left in Sesshū's landscape.



Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The color palette here is generally warm, but this does not lend the image a cheerful tone. Instead, the reds, oranges and yellows are the shades of blood and bruises. This is all the more disturbing in a seascape, where we might justly expect a cool, gentle image of blue, greens, and whites. It is as if the violent death of the enslaved cargo has been inscribed across the whole of the sea and sky. In the lower right hand corner, great, nightmarish fish rises to the surface in a feeding frenzy.



Detail, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840

This painting was based on an account in Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1783), recounting an actual event in which, it seems, the captain of a ship caught in a typhoon had his "cargo" of enslaved people thrown overboard, still shackled together, in order to be able to get a reimbursement from his insurance company for their lost at sea. Just to the left of center, to a degree balancing out the blazing sun, are the hands of the drowning figures, outstretched dramatically in a last, failed, futile effort to cling to the surface, and to life. The oversized black chains, emphasized in a sort of **hieratic scale**, stand out in the foreground, implausibly but powerfully remaining afloat in the turbid sea. This, of course, would not happen in the real world, where iron manacles would plunge downward immediately, pulling those they bind down with this. Here, then, the artist is choosing symbolic meaning and emotional effect over strict **naturalism**.



Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slaves Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming on (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Albert Pinkham Ryder's seascapes are, if anything, even more intense images of the turbulent violence of the sea. For Ryder, though, the natural world is more clearly presented as a tool of divine retribution. His illustration of the story of *Jonah* (ca. 1885) is a tumultuous image, mixing biblical and literary imagery with a depiction of the natural world in order to create a terrifying scene. Largely forgotten today, when it was first displayed this painting was hailed as "the greatest art event of the year as far as our native workmen are concerned."[3]

The biblical Book of Jonah tells the story of a man chosen by the Jewish God to preach on distant shores. He is afraid, and so attempts to flee from this task, and from an omniscient and omnipotent – that is, all-knowing and all-powerful – god, by stealing away in the hold of a ship.

3. James Burr, "The Lure of the Sea," *Apollo* 133 (April 1991), 279.



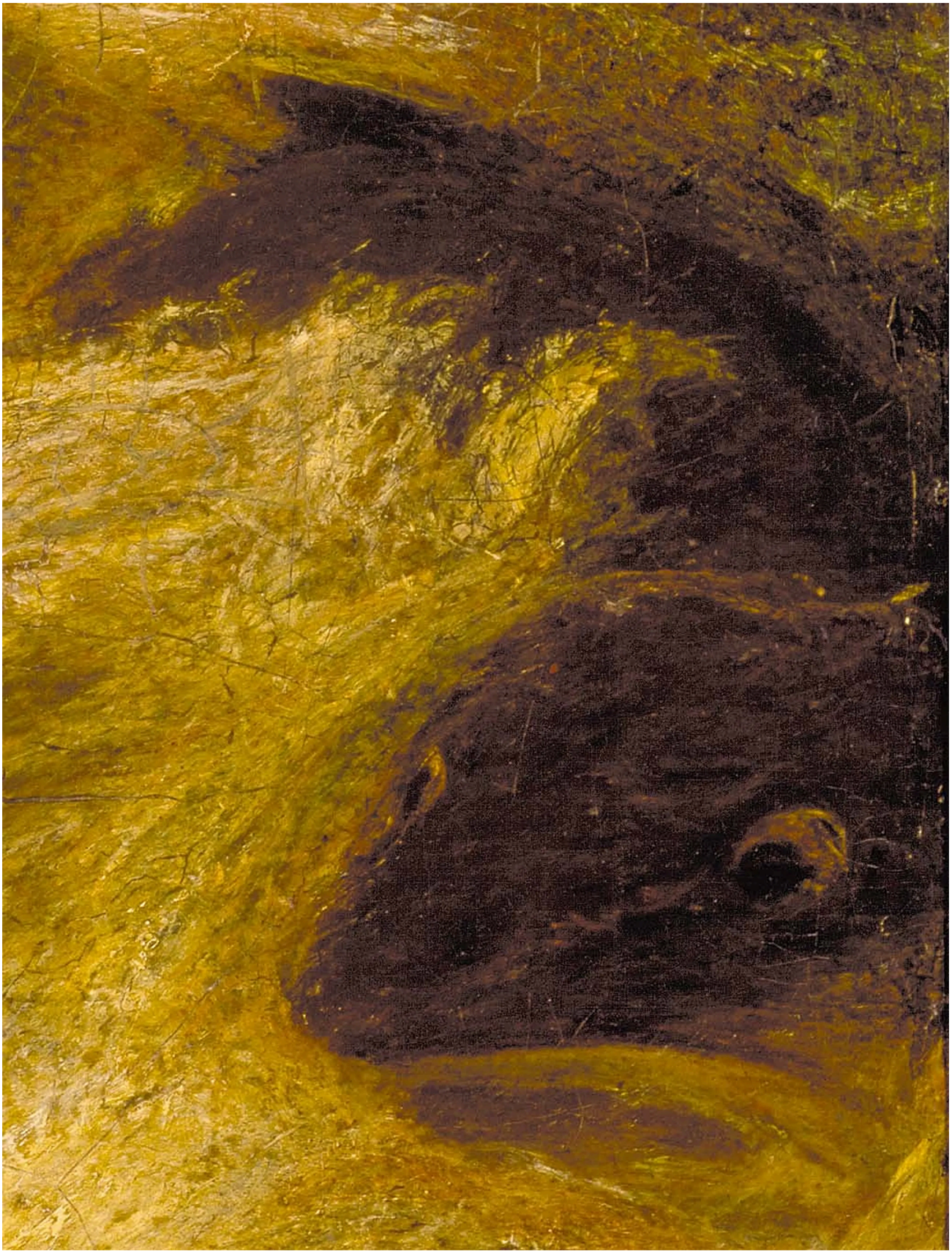
Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.). Photo: Public Domain.

As the biblical text reads:

> Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid … But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep … So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? … What have you done?" … The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." … Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard. … Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.[4]

Ryder might have given us the calm sea after the great fish has swallowed Jonah, but instead he presents the moment of highest drama and chaos. The image has no straight lines, nor any that are horizontal or vertical. Everything is churning and tossing at angles. The sea here is as animate a force as the fish, curving toward Jonah from the right edge of the painting.

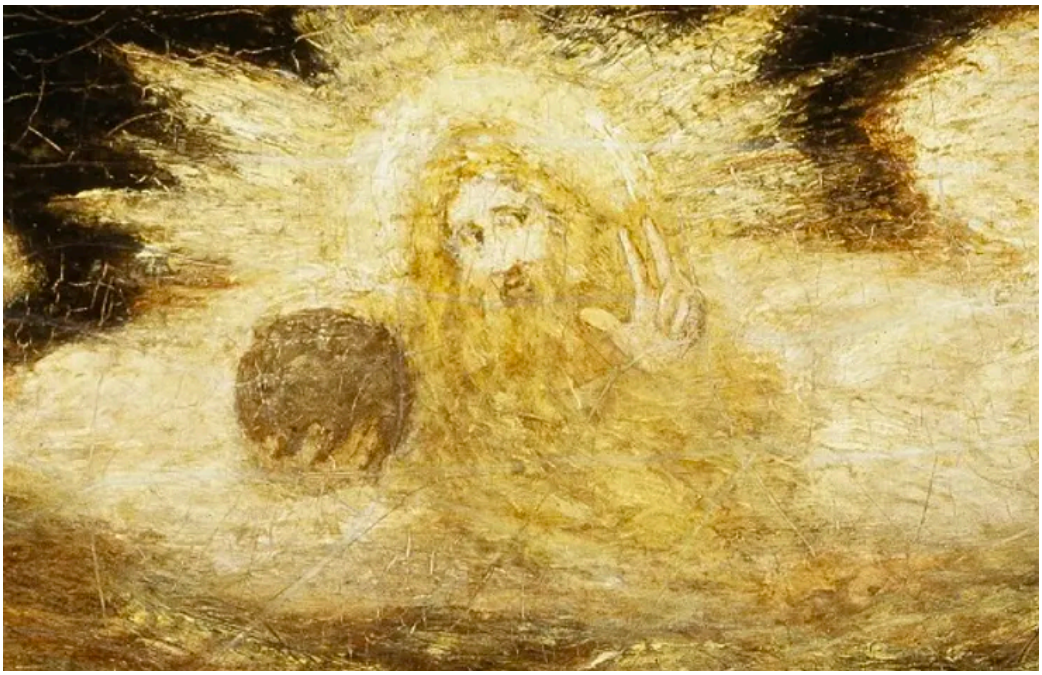
4. The Bible, New International Version, Jonah 1:4-1:17.



Detail, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895

The boat in the center is much smaller than that described in the Bible, since this one has no deck, and one could not retire below it. It is a little boat, not a substantial ship, and this makes the lives of those in it seem all the more imperiled. The form of the boat, apparently on the verge of capsizing or even of being folded in half by the powerful waves, recalls the form of the whale to the right, as they are the only solid, black shapes in the composition. By bending the hull so dramatically, Ryder has animated the boat, as well, transforming it into a gaping maw, ready to swallow those within it.

There is more, though: The figure in the background is often taken to be God, pursuing Jonah across the sea, but this does not quite fit.



Detail, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895

The bearded figure bears wings, which are not part of the **iconography** – the visual symbols – of the Jewish God. They do, though, suit a figure described in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (first published anonymously in 1798), a poem that directly inspired another of Ryder's paintings, *With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow* (ca. 1883).



Albert Pinkham Ryder, With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow, oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard, ca. 1880-1885 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.). Photo: Public Domain.

In Coleridge's poem, we read:

> And now the Storm-Blast came, and he
> Was tyrannous and strong:
> He struck with o'ertaking wings,
> And chased us south along.

The visual elements of *With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow* serve to highlight those of Jonah. This earlier painting, while also showing a small boat on a dark sea, has a strong horizontal line for the horizon. The waves do toss the light boat about, but the figures do not seem as desperately endangered. Returning to *Jonah*, we might view the massive, winged figure who seems to be driving the storm as "the Storm-Blast … with o'ertaking wings." If so, even the storm itself is an animate, personified element in this turbulent image. In Sesshū's painting, the cold winter seems impersonal, but for Ryder, the storm – sent by God – is quite personal, seeking out Jonah in the hold of the ship. He also presents the great fish, in line with the biblical text, as merely a tool of God, not a normal element of the natural world.

Personified Nature



Rafael Tufiño, Portfolio Las Plenas: Temporal, woodcut on paper (1953-1955). Photo: Éxodo Galeria, Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, by permission of Sucesión Rafael Tufiño.

The power of storms is a popular theme in art. We might also look, for example, to the work of one of the founding members of the influential Centre of Puerto Rican Art. His *Temporal (Storm)* (1953-1955) is a print based on a popular song about the San Felipe hurricane that inflicted great damage to his native Puerto Rico in 1927. Here, as in the Ryder, the power of the wind is again personified, now into a massive, dark giant glowering over the helpless people below him. Men, women and children, even a naked baby, are all swept up into the storm. The lines convey the great, swirling motion of the hurricane, and the bodies within it seem passive, as inert as rag-dolls.



Detail, Rafael Tufiño, Portfolio Las Plenas: Temporal, woodcut on paper (1953-1955).

A moment of high contrast in the print draws our attention to the figure with his arms raised, literally caught in the grip of the storm. The cluttered village to the lower right is also being swept away by the wind, seemingly under the direction of the giant's extended left hand.

In some cases, granting intention and will to the natural world is not merely a metaphor, as it is for Tufiño, who of course did not really think that the hurricane was a malevolent giant, or Sesshū, who used it to convey the idea of all worldly suffering. In the figure of Zeus in the Religions chapter, the power of the lightning is literally embodied in the powerful, muscular body of the god, and his intentions guide its direction. Still, the impersonal quality of natural violence is reflected in his impassive expression.



Temple of the Feathered Serpent, ca. second-third century (Teotihuacan, Mexico). Photo by jschmeling, CC BY 2.0.

Natural elements and forces need not be conceived of as harmful, though, to be associated with deities. In the civilization of Teotihuacan, a Mesoamerican group justly celebrated for its massive pyramids and other works of art and architecture built around the first century CE, we see the natural cycles of the seasons constructed as deities. The city still bears the name it was given by the Aztecs, meaning "The Gathering Place of the Gods," as they believed it to be (and some of their descendants still maintain it to be) where the gods gathered to create the universe. On the exterior of the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, according to some theories, the natural cycle of dry and rainy seasons were depicted as two deities, the Feathered Serpent, known to the later Aztecs as Quetzalcoatl, and the goggle-eyed Storm God. The images here are seen to alternate between the two, implying the cyclical alternation of the seasons. Still, this does not necessarily imply a peaceful, ecological understanding of natural cycles. The Feathered Serpent was associated with the belief that the natural cycles must be maintained with ritual executions.

Romantic Nature



Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Where Sesshū Tōyō, the muralist at Çatalhöyük, Turner, Ryder, and Tufiño all emphasized the harshness and danger of the natural world, Jean-Antoine Watteau instead painted romantic scene of joyous frolicking in the great outdoors. His *Le Pélerinage a l'Île de Cithère (The Pilgrimage to the Island of Cythera*, 1717) depicts a group passing through a lush landscape. The patrons for works like this were wealthy city-dwellers, largely removed from the dangers presented by the natural world.

Watteau was an innovative and experimental **Rococo** (eighteenth century) painter who began his career by rapidly churning out quick copies of religious paintings and then turned to comic scenes before finally inventing this sort of scene, known as a *fête galante* – an image of elegant outdoor entertainment. It conveys a frivolous atmosphere of aristocratic ease.

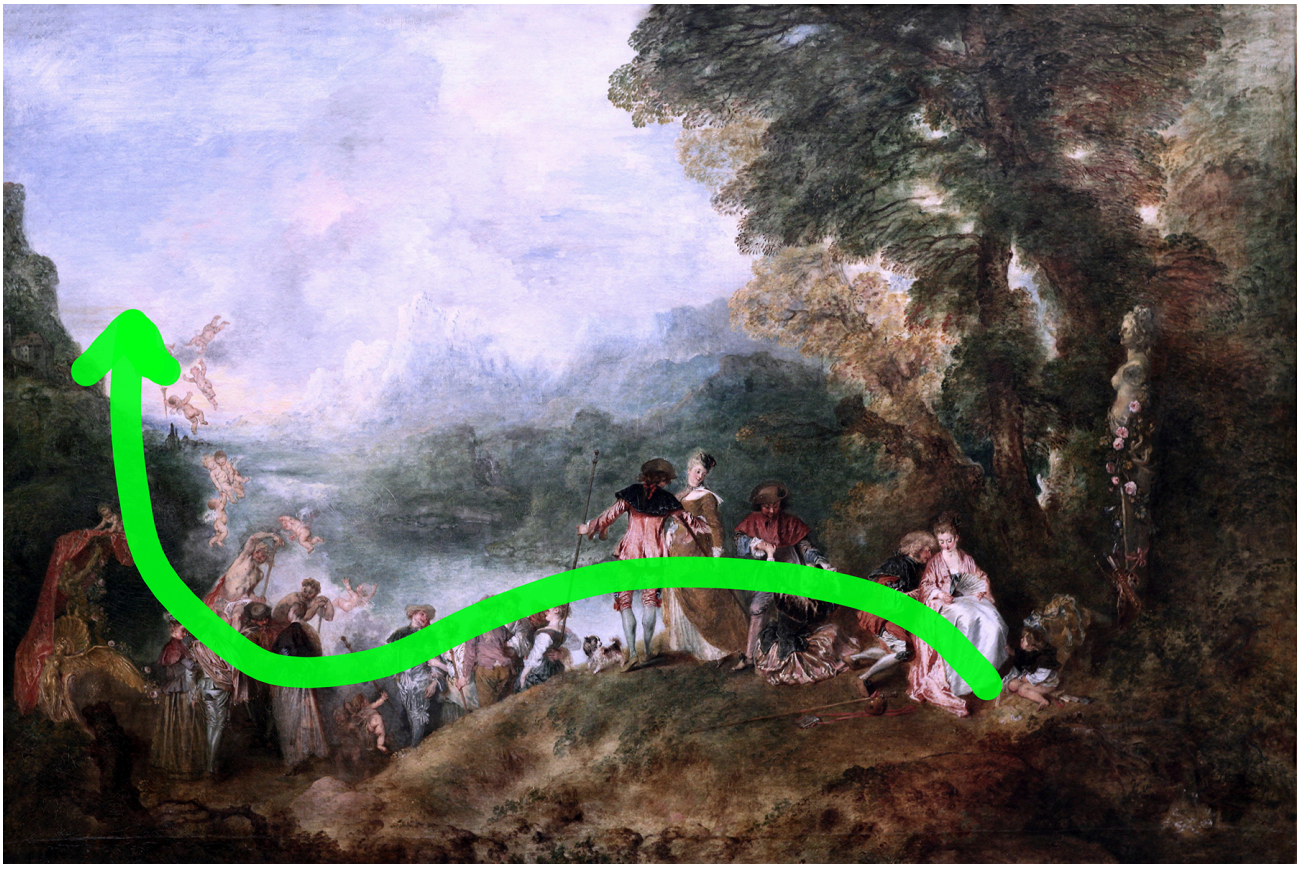
The soft, gossamer brushstrokes suggest that these figures – and the patrons of the work – were not often exposed to the rigors of the natural world, and did not wish to be reminded of them. Here, the beautifully dressed couples, accompanied by **putti** – the winged cupids floating about – are either heading to or from the mythical island of the goddess Venus, which was therefore the island of love. Their casual, communal stroll is in strong contrast to the uphill struggle of the lone figure of Sesshū's *Winter Landscape*. Indeed, everything here is quite at odds with Sesshū's harsh presentation of nature.



Detail, Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717.

If we follow the procession from left to right, we see that, accompanied by floating cupids symbolizing erotic love, the figures are already pairing off into romantic couples in increasingly compromising positions. At the end of the procession is a statue of Venus, wrapped in a garland of flowers. The rich abundance of nature here echoes the figures' sexuality. This springtime scene is bursting with life, unlike Sesshū's hard winter. Where his trees were bare, these erupt in rich greens. Where his lines were crisp and sharp, Watteau's are soft and blurred. Where his palette was paired down to shades of grey, Watteau's relies on the springtime pastel tones. The complete ease and safety of these figures is suggested by their spotless clothing. They are richly attired in pale silk, not marred by a speck of dirt or smear of grass stain. These cheerful figures pass through the landscape without being soiled by it.

It is, though, also possible to read this as a somewhat melancholy image of the departure from the island of love. The poses of the figures are ambiguous. For example, is the middle couple of the three in the foreground in the process of sitting down or standing up? The image presents a dream world, but a fleeting one that may already be passing.



Visual flow, Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717.

If we follow the flow of the figures, guided primarily by Watteau's use of value, we begin with the figures closest to us, drawn in by the woman's bright white gown and pink robes. We then follow the brighter tones down and away and then up, as the putti seem to drift off and away, perhaps carrying our prospects for love with them.

What we as viewers see in and get out of works of art, what our overall experience adds up to, is influence by what we bring to the works. The same is true of our experience of the natural world. Cultures will have differing interpretations of art and of the natural world, but so will individuals within these cultures. In fact, one Japanese artist's view of nature as a site of adversity (Sesshū's) is countered by a later Japanese artist who portrays the natural world as a source of pleasure rather than danger: Utagawa (Ando) Hiroshige's *The Snowy Garden* from the series *Prince Genji of the East* (created with Utagawa Kunisada in 1854) presents a winter day as a delight. Hiroshige was born into the samurai class, but gave away his title as head of his clan in order to pursue his artistic career. He achieved great acclaim in his own lifetime, and is particularly renowned for his ability to create atmospheric effects in the medium of **woodblock printing**. In this scene, the handsome and romantic Prince Genji – known from the *Tale of Genji*, written by Lady Murasaki Shikiby in the early eleventh century – looks on as three women create a large snow sculpture of a rabbit.



Utagawa Kunisada and Utagawa Hiroshige, The Snowy Garden, ink and color on paper, 1854 (Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland). Photo: Public Domain.

The two Japanese images differ starkly. Sesshū's painting is all in cold, dreary gray tones, whereas Hiroshige's print is mostly bright, unsullied white, dotted with the soft pastel colors of the figures' robes. Here, the leaden sky does not darken the tone of the image, but rather, highlights the brilliance of the snow, and of the equally white figures. The trees, while covered in snow, are mostly evergreens, and seem blanketed rather than shrouded. The lines are mostly softened and round, the edges of all the forms blunted by snow, rather than highlighted by ice. Finally, where Sesshū's figure was lonely and scantly clad against the cold, Hiroshige's figures are wrapped in rich, floor-length robes; where the frozen landscape was for Sesshū's figure a challenge to be overcome, for Genji and the women around him, it is a source of wonder and delight.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II

The Psalter Map, England, ca. 1275 CE

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What is **emphasized**, and how?
- How is **symmetry** used?
- How does **scale** influence the meaning of the work?
- Is the image **naturalistic**?

INTRODUCTION: A Medieval World View



Psalter Map (Detail of orb), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

Medieval Christians believed that the Christian God planned the layout of the world. They therefore saw the natural world not as many modern people do – as a product of natural forces like plate tectonics and volcanic activity – but as the perfect creation of a perfect god. Therefore, all elements of the natural world had great symbolic significance in the **Middle Ages** (ca. 400-1400 CE). Saint Augustine of Hippo, a highly influential author of the fifth century CE, writes, "The circle of the earth is our great book. In it I read the perfection which is promised in the book of God." This means that looking closely at the earth could be seen as similar to careful study of the Bible.

Maps like this were not designed for use by travelers – they would not have been very helpful for this – but rather, for contemplation. They present the natural world like a text for us to read. Studying this image should help us to see how great the impact of culture is on our interpretation of the natural world.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: An Ordered World



The Creator with Compass, illumination on parchment, ca. 1220-1230 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna). Photo: Public Domain.

The organization of the Psalter Map is based on several common compositional devices that help viewers know where to look first and identify what is important. Among the more powerful of these is symmetry. This image contains two forms of symmetry, **bilateral** and **radial**.

Starting at the top, we find the figure of Jesus in the center, indicating his importance. He seems to be emerging out of the great circle of the world below him. This emphasizes that the world, for this culture, is not a "natural" thing, at all, but a divine creation, intimately connected to its creator. Another thirteenth-century English work even shows us an image of Jesus creating the world by laying it out with a compass, just as the mapmaker of the Psalter Map laid out his small map.

The natural world in the Psalter Map does not look as it does in our modern maps. It is laid out with radial symmetry, emphatically centered on Jerusalem, the city Christians believed to be at the literal and spiritual center of the world.

While the rest of the image of the world is not presented as perfectly symmetrical, major elements balance one another out. In each "corner," there is a major feature. Moving clockwise from the top-right, we see the reddish-orange Red Sea, the alternating blue and orange cells containing the small white figures, the great complexity of mountains and rivers, and the curving wall and gate. Each of these regions, therefore, has similar visual weight, conveying a sense of radial balance to the world.

The orb of the world is also presented as having a certain bilateral symmetry, matching that of the heavens, depicted above. On either side of Jesus, mirrored angels swing incense burners toward him. While the three figures are not perfectly symmetrical, they are largely so, and this creates a sense of importance and also makes the image appear somewhat still and timeless. Even the incense burners, which are at the top of their arc, seem permanently suspended there.



East Wind and Eden, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

Below Jesus, at the top of the map itself, is a small black circle, representing the Garden of Eden. This is divided in half by the Tree of Knowledge of the Good and Evil, with Adam and Eve on either side. Radiating out from Eden are five rivers that are also arranged with rough symmetry. Following the central **axis** downward, we pass through a mountain range with four roughly symmetrical peaks, through a large lake to Jerusalem, and then onward down through the vertical

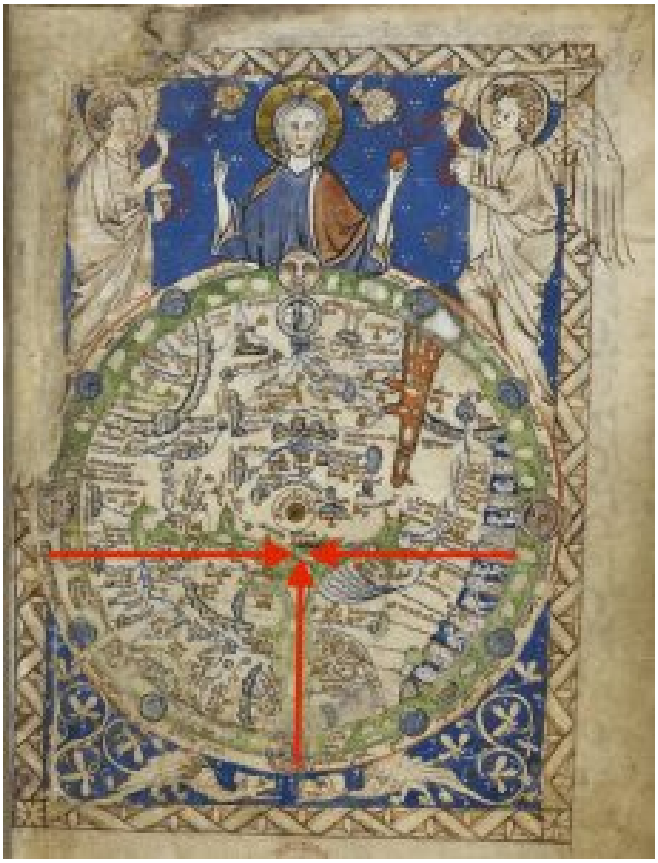
green body of water that is the Mediterranean Sea. Through the use of all of these formal elements, this vision of the natural world as seen from above – the perspective of God – shows the world as far more ordered and less haphazard than we know it to be.

Scale is also vital in conveying importance in this image. The figure of Jesus is somewhat larger in scale than the angels to his sides. More dramatically, though, he is massively oversized in relation to the entire world, displayed below him. It is clear that Jesus is being presented as holding absolute power over the natural world. Indeed, in his left hand is a small red orb with two lines drawn on it.



Psalter Map (Detail of orb), ca. 1275 (British Library, London).
Photo: Public Domain.

This is a "T-O" map, the most common type in the Middle Ages, when this image was painted. There is a perhaps subtle **repetition**, here, as the entire map is, in essence, a more complex version of the T-O map. The green Mediterranean makes the vertical line, and the River Don and the Nile form the horizontal arms. In this way, the small red orb parallels the large, detailed image of the world. This repetition is used to further reinforce Jesus's control of the world he holds so casually in his hand.



Psalter Map (T-O Lines Diagrammed), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Mapping Religion

Medieval European culture was dominated by a Christian worldview in which the Bible was the highest authority. Many medieval scholars believed that the best of times were in the past, and so they were more inclined to trust ancient texts than they were to believe the evidence of their own experience of the world. The Psalter Map is a good example of an image of the natural world based not on contemporary travels and scientific studies, but on the Bible and other texts.



Isidore, T-O Map, ca. 600-625, Photo: Public Domain.

We therefore see on the Psalter Map, and on a simpler T-O Map, the three continents accounted for in the Bible: Asia, Africa and Europe. Many maps from the period do little but show these continents. We might be surprised to see that Europeans placed Asia at the top of the map, rather than Europe, but medieval Europeans did not think that their own continent was the most important place, since it did not feature significantly in the Bible. Really, the Bible hardly mentions any European locations. Rather, "Asia" – which in ancient and medieval Europe, referred only to the portions of Asia closest to Europe, since the rest was unknown – was the setting for many of the most important Biblical events and sites.

Just below the figure of Jesus, for example, is the Garden of Eden. The Garden was believed to be a real place, the most perfect section of the natural world, located at the eastern edge. In comparison, Britain, where this map was made, is at the bottom corner, tightly pressed in on from all sides. Medieval maps like this are therefore **oriented** toward the "Orient" (Greek for East), which is therefore placed at the top in order to convey its relative importance.



Psalter Map (Eden and England highlighted), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

The map looks like a flat disc, but this is not because people in the Middle Ages thought the world was flat. This is simply not true. While maps like the Psalter Map present the world as a disc, our maps generally show the world as a similarly flat rectangle, which we understand represents the spherical world. They did not, though, know about the other contents. Instead, they assumed that there was nothing but water around the "back" of the world. There were a few early explorations, such as the voyage of the Viking Leif Ericson to "Vinland" – present-day Newfoundland, Canada – around 1000 CE, but their discoveries were not widely known.

This map would be of no use to someone trying to travel from England, where it was made, to Jerusalem at the center, or beyond to the more distant lands of Africa and Asia. What was it for, then? Certain elements suggest that we should read this image of the world symbolically. The puffy-cheeked winds and the reddish Red Sea are just two of many such elements. Jesus' gesture is also symbolic. He raises his right hand in a traditional symbol of blessing. He might be seen as blessing the world, but since he is looking out at the viewer, he might also be seen as blessing the reader of this **Psalter**. The Psalter is a volume containing the Book of the Psalms, from the Hebrew Bible, as well as other texts. It was one of the most important books for Christian devotion in the Middle Ages. This map comes at the very beginning of the Psalter, suggesting that the viewer was supposed to approach it with a similar devotion, and to focus careful contemplation on it, just as they were supposed to approach the psalms that follow it.



Dragons, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

At the base of the image is a pair of dragon-like monsters. They are, because of their location, contrasted with the images of Jesus and the angels at the top. Just as the images at the top of the map suggest Heaven, these monsters are probably intended to suggest Hell. Their tails turn into vine-like plants that sprout leaves. Since these natural elements are growing out of frightful monsters, they imply the rather negative view that medieval people had of the natural world. While they believed that all the world was created by God, they also thought that it was filled with the traps and snares of the devil. The natural world, with all of its real dangers and its seductions, was to be viewed with great caution, even fear.



Winds, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.

The small faces around the edge of the world are representations of another natural force: the winds. With beige faces at the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West), and pairs of dusky blue-gray faces in between, they create a consistent pattern pointing inward to the center of the image. They also, though, convey ideas about race commonly held by Christians in medieval Europe. The blue-grey color is one often used in medieval depictions of African and Muslim figures (and especially African Muslims), and is further emphasized by the figures' hair, which is shown as closely cropped and tightly curling.

These images are often dehumanizing, reinforcing ideas about the fundamental differences between European Christians and other peoples they encountered throughout the world. The use of white faces for the cardinal – that is, the most important – winds and these blue-gray faces for the lesser winds conveys its creator and **patron's** belief that groups were not only different from one another, but that these differences made groups better or worse than one another, and unsurprisingly, these European Christians placed themselves as the top of this hierarchy. Such views are the backstory to much modern racism.

In a sense, then, the Psalter Map has some common ground with Sesshū Tōyō's *Winter Landscape*, as both of these works see the landscape not, in essence, for its "own sake," but as an object of human contemplation; and both saw this contemplation as a potential route to avoid suffering (reincarnation for the Buddhist, hell for the Christian), and to approach joy (Nirvana for the Buddhist, Heaven for the Christian). The concerns and ideologies of the artists and viewers, then, are written across the landscapes of the natural world.

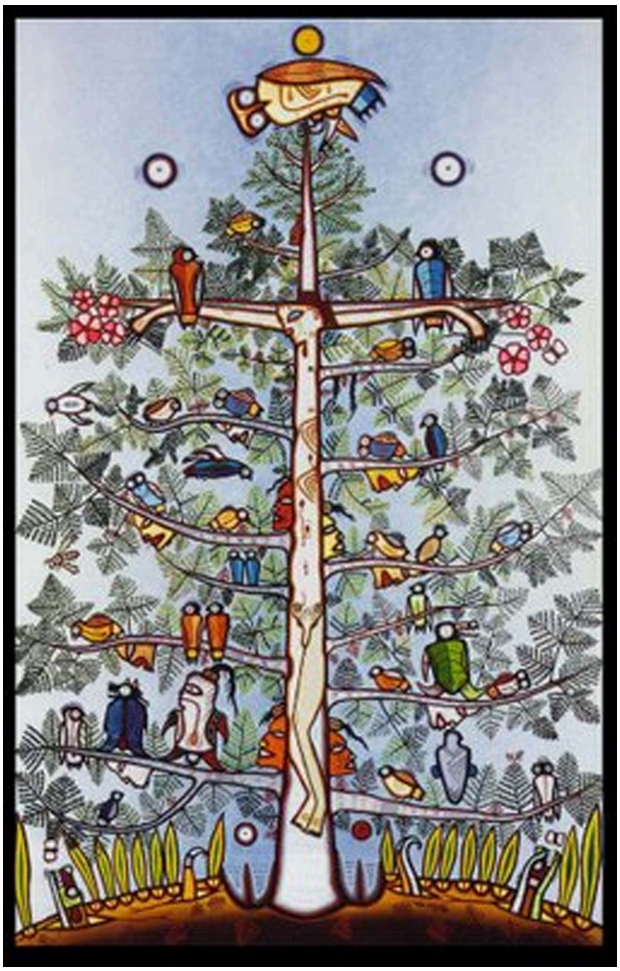
Comparisons and Connections II: Humans, Animals, and their Place in Nature

A Continuum of Life

While the Psalter Map looks and functions rather differently than current Western maps, it is nonetheless a recognizable part of this tradition. Other images of the land and its contents provide good points for comparison. Aboriginal Australian paintings, for example, might also be considered maps of their landscape, and are similarly symbolic in focus. Indeed, they are more fully symbolic than medieval European maps in that they do not embed the symbolic contents in an oriented diagram of the whole world.

Kumantajayi Long Tjakamarra's *Emu Dreaming* (1972) presents a diagrammed landscape with a sinuously curving river at the left, paralleled by the similar form of the snake just to it's right. Here, as on the Psalter Map, repetition of a form is used to form a conceptual connection between the two elements. This snake is the ancestral snake that created a lake, and so it takes on the watery form of the river.

Near the center of the image is a form that is quite similar to the depiction of Jerusalem at the center of the Psalter Map. Each is a series of concentric circles, giving a sense of power radiating outward from the midpoint. This general form is repeated throughout the image, in a loosely formed pattern. In *Emu Dreaming*, the form represents a waterhole that is seen as the source of the ancestral emu. The bird footprints that spiral around the waterhole and throughout the image imply the presence of the ancestral emu's numerous avian descendants. Animals are presented as the most important elements of the land in Tjakamarra's painting, while they are almost totally absent in the Psalter Map. On the map, the only "animals" present are the dragons that highlight the dangers of nature and, if we look very closely, a gazelle of sorts being ridden by a small figure in the row of monsters at the left edge of the map.



Blake Debassige, Tree of Life, 1982. Photo: Anishinabe Spiritual Centre.

While the Psalter Map ignores or actively avoids images of animals in the landscape, focusing instead on human cities and territories, and Tjakamarra's painting emphasizes the presence and value of animals, Blake Debassige's *Tree of Life* (1982) works to integrate the human and animal into a continuum, symbolized by the tree. This work is also a sort of map, combining traditional Ojibwa (Chippewa) Native American and Christian **cosmology**, in which the great tree at the center is also the cross of Jesus' **crucifixion**. The tree is a vertical axis in the image, representing the connection of the zones of earth, water, and sky. Traditional Ojibwa religion teaches that this axis carries prayers between realms of power, while in Christianity the Cross is a site for devotion and prayer, and so in this work, the gray form at the center serves to embody both ideas. This tree is bursting with life, with foliage, birds, animals, humans, and mythical beings all sprouting from or clinging to its form. The line styles and colors are so consistent throughout the image that all of the elements seem integrated into a single, cohesive system. In the world view presented by this image, Ojibwa and Christian, human and animal, natural and spiritual are all compatible and united, a view quite different from that embodied in the Psalter Map, where walls, mountain ranges, and boundaries, and difference between groups of people, are emphasized.



Sunaura Taylor, Chicken Truck (2007). Photo: By permission of the artist.

Such harmony is not always the focus of images of human and animal interactions. Artists also work to show the problems that result from sharing the world with other species. Sunaura Taylor has explored the breakdown of the cycles of the natural world in her work on factory farming. Her *Chicken Truck* (2007) is a large-scale painting that, at over 10 feet wide, presents the viewer with nearly life-sized images of chickens crammed into small crates for transport. Taylor chose to align the crates with the picture plane, so that their fronts seem to be at the surface of the painting. This allowed her to emphasize the grid-like quality of the crates, thereby establishing a regular pattern that highlights the unnatural, mechanized quality of this system of production and consumption. This decision also presses the chickens toward the viewer. They are right in front of us, not deep within illusionistic space, which encourages us to feel closer to them emotionally as well as physically.

This image contrasts sharply with the common images on packages of packed poultry, which show healthy birds roaming through sunlit farmyards, with the ever-present red barn in the background. In Taylor's painting, the stress is on the conflict between uniformity and regularity, embodied in the crates, and the messy reality of the animals they contain. The crates are composed of rectangular, inorganic shapes, though they do show some bending and breaking, whereas the birds are organic lumps. Taylor uses high contrast between the bright white of the feathers and the inky depths of the truck. There is also strong contrast between the white feathers and the flecks of red throughout. Are these the chickens' combs and wattles, or are they splashes of blood? Zoom in on the image in the newsletter link above. A close look shows that, due to the painter's loose, brushy style, we cannot always tell.

Taylor's *Chicken Truck* is a work with a clear political agenda that would have been utterly foreign to the creator of

the Psalter Map, made in a culture that believed animals were created in order to be used by humanity. Others artists suggest a greater degree of ambiguity in their presentation of animals and in the implied interaction between "us" and "them." Few artists could be said to more forcefully display the presence of animals in the landscape than French Enlightenment artist Jean-Baptiste Oudry. His popular paintings depict animals at full scale – that is, the images are life size – but unlike Taylor's chickens, Oudry specialized in larger animals like elephants and rhinoceroses. Among the more prominent of these is an image of Clara, an Indian rhino paraded throughout Europe in a traveling menagerie starting in 1741. This painting is nearly fifteen feet wide, and standing before it is a startling experience, so tangible is the massive animal that takes up most of the image.



Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Rhinoceros, oil on canvas, 1749 (Staatliches Museum, Schwerin). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Oudry used contrast and lighting effects to draw the viewer's attention. For example, he pulls our eyes to the horn – the rhino's trademark feature – by having it shine with the appearance of reflected light. The physical impact of the image is given an extra jolt, though, when we catch Clara's eye. In the manner of many human figures in art – though few animal figures – she stares out at us. Our attention is drawn to her eye through the paler gray encircling it, and the splash of white to indicate the sclera – the "white of the eye."



Detail, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Rhinoceros, oil on canvas, 1749.

This is a very carefully observed painting. Unlike other artists, Oudry clearly spent considerable time examining his animal subjects. Still, the pose, mood, and – such as we might imagine it – the expression of the animal was determined by the artist. Rhinos, unlike many animals, do have whites at times visible around their irises, but this feature seems to be deliberately emphasized, here, with the result that the eye appears more human than the eye of a real rhinoceros. This makes it easier for us to identify with the large-scale figure dominating the canvas.

Clara herself must have been quite intriguing, as she became so famous that she inspired a bit of what has been called "Rhino-Mania" in eighteenth-century Europe. She was the subject of numerous paintings, and featured prominently in a human anatomy textbook published by Bernhard Siegfried Albinus in 1747 (and, indeed, her image was used as a sales poster for it).



Jan Wandelaar, Engraving of Clara and Human Skeleton in Bernhard Siegried Albinus, Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani, 1749. Image: uploaded by Jan Arkesteijn, Public Domain.

Clara also appeared in as all sorts of promotional material from cheap souvenirs to elaborate bronzes, lamps, beadwork, and clocks. A remarkable musical clock survives – and still works! – to bear witness to "Rhino-Mania."



James Cox (ca. 1723–1800), Musical Rhinoceros Clock, ca. 1765–72. Gilt bronze, silver, enamel, pearls, and colored glass, pedestal: white marble and agate. Photo: Bridget Coila, CC BY-SA 2.0.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=82#oembed-1

Clara brought the wilds of Asia, as they were imagined, to the cities of Europe. But ultimately, it is unclear from Oudry's massive image what we are to make of her. Do we pity her captivity (highlighted by the white patches worn into her tough hide, the result of rubbing against her cage for years)? Do we callously gawk, and buy a cheap souvenir? Or do we simply gaze in wonder – a term often used in the period of the Psalter Map to describe the emotion evoked by encounters with large creatures – overcome by the sublime experience of being in the presence of this massive, mighty, strange being?

Medieval European images of animals contemporary with the Psalter Map were sometimes much more clear in their meaning. **Bestiaries** were books of beasts that usually augment the natural history of animals with symbolic and spiritual meaning. These were often made as luxurious illustrated **manuscripts** – handmade books. A thirteenth-century example in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University has an image of a "*rinocerous*" – also called a *unicorn*, both of which mean "one-horn" – being captured and killed.



Unicorn, Bestiary, parchment, ca. mid-thirteenth century (Bodleian Library, Oxford). Photo by Bodleian Libraries, CC BY-NC 4.0.

The first word of the text underneath the image reads, "Unicornis," Latin for "unicorn." According to medieval legend,

the unicorn could only be captured by a virgin, who would lure it to her lap in order for hunters to kill it. In this case, unlike for Oudry, the animal is not merely a physical fact (as Oudry emphasizes with the massive scale of his paintings), but rather, a symbol. The text of the Bestiary reads, "Jesus Christ is spiritually the unicorn," and the single horn on its head "signifies that which [Jesus] said, *I and the Father are one*."[5] According to medieval Christian belief, then, the single horn of the unicorn was not an accident or the result of natural evolution, but a sign from God to show a religious truth.

In the image, the unicorn seems to be reaching out to the virgin maiden, who instead looks to the hunters who stab the beast with spears. The straight lines of the spears, and the V shape they form, direct our eyes to the wounded creature. Blood wells out from its side, while it looks up to the maiden as if to ask for help. While the text gives us the "meaning" of the unicorn, the image still does not give as clear a message. With whom might we sympathize? With the rough, ill-shaven hunters? With the deceitful maiden, whose gesture nonetheless seems tender and protective? Or with the unicorn? Why give directions for catching and killing a creature, and then present an image that seems to guide our sympathies toward it?

5. Willene B. Clark, A *Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary, Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 126.



Unicorn, "Ashmole Bestiary," parchment, England, 1201–1225 (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1511, f. 14v). Image: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-NC 4.0

There is a further wrinkle in some medieval Christian images of unicorns. In another bestiary in the Bodleian Library, we see a similar scene. Again the virgin sits at the left edge of the image, cradling the seemingly gentle unicorn in her lap. Again, the hunters attack from the right, stabbing the unicorn from behind. The hunters, though, are represented differently. Now, one of the hunters is painted blue and has tightly curling hair; the other wears a curious, curving cap. The blue figure might remind you of the blue-grey wind faces on the Psalter map. This figure is, like those winds, intended as a representation of a Muslim figure. The hunter in the curved cap is presented in the same tones as the virgin, but the hat tells us what the illuminator wanted us to think about him: European Christians associated this sort

of hat, called a Phrygian cap, with Jews. Therefore, when we put together the text's claim that the unicorn stands in for Christ, this image attempts to present Muslims and Jews as the persecutors and murders of Christ. Such Islamophobic and antisemitic imagery is extremely common in medieval Christian art. Here, then, the artist uses a book about the creatures of the natural world not only to make claims about Christ, but also to reinforce its audience's prejudices.

The Human Landscape

It is not only animals, but also the landscape itself can be inscribed, even overwritten with human concerns. The iconic Westerns of director John Ford construct the American West as a landscape upon which men can enact their heroism. Ford directed a remarkable 146 films, television shows, and shorts, many of which were Westerns, and of these many were filmed in Monument Valley, an easily recognizable stretch of desert, dotted with massive buttes — straight-sided rock formations with flat tops (which is, of course, what Chico State's own Butte County is named for, even though what we have are really mesas).

https://archive.org/embed/stagecoach-1939-john-ford

The opening sequence of *Stagecoach* (1939), one of many films he directed starring John Wayne, gives a sense of what will follow. The very first moments of the film show us the vast, open landscape of the West, into which a stagecoach rides, moving away from the viewer and into the landscape. To a score of triumphant brasses, we see figures that appear to be US soldiers silhouetted against the buttes and then, accompanied by a shift to menacing tones, Native Americans traveling toward us. Indeed, the music played here will be familiar to anyone who has watched old westerns, or even old cartoons, like this shockingly racist clip from an episode of Loony Tunes, featuring the popular Bugs Bunny:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: *https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=82#oembed-2*

The two bits of music are similar because this was Hollywood's shorthand way of signaling the presence of Native Americans, almost always presented in negative, dehumanizing ways. When the white soldiers ride by, the score is romantic, filled with soft, uplifting strings. When a group of Native Americans enter the film, the score switches to emphasize heavy, deep drumbeats and lower, deeper tones. This music returns wherever Native Americans are shown on screen, and even some of the times when they are merely mentioned. This conditions the viewer to see them as a menacing force.

Within the first minute of the film, owing in part to the musical score, we know all we need to about the conflict that will be played out across the dusty, dry, barren landscape. Its emptiness, emphasized in shot after shot, is a vital part of the narrative, suggesting that settlers are moving into an unoccupied wasteland, rather than a traditional Native American homeland. This allows the "aggression" of the Apaches (led by the legendary Geronimo) to seem baseless. The director's choices in how to depict the natural world in the opening sequence, therefore, are central to the morality play that follows.

Like so many other westerns, *Stagecoach* is in essence an argument justifying the colonization of the continent, and the presentation of its landscape is key to this argument. When we are in a white settler town, we see tidy buildings filled with people dressed in fancy clothes. The Apaches, in contrast, appear in barren stretches. Indeed, one character compares the Apaches to the dangerous animals of the desert, saying that they "strike like rattlesnakes" (1:05). While in some genres, we are encouraged to see nature as a beautiful, restful place, westerns generally paint it as a dangerous, inhospitable place, filled with deadly animals and hostile people.

The Passage of Time

Of course, the natural world is not an inert entity we merely ride over, nor is it constant, as it might perhaps seem in the Psalter Map, not statically frozen in time. Contemporary Scottish artist Andy Goldsworthy often uses his art to highlight the passage of time, perhaps most dramatically – and humorously – in his Midsummer Snowballs (see images here, here, and here). On June 21, 2000, Midsummer Day, he had thirteen giant snowballs, each bearing curious, concealed objects, placed on London streets. The snowballs were so huge – weighing about a ton each – that they took six days to melt. As they did so, they slowly revealed and released their contents.

While the snowballs melted, though, they also drew viewers' attention to the natural environment, highlighting the cold of the snow, and the warmth of summer. They also invited viewers to think about the natural world as they walked through one of the world's largest cities. The snowballs were created the previous winter near Goldsworthy's home in Scotland, and they were packed with natural objects from this rural setting – berries, barley, wool, feathers, and so on. The public was able to interact with them, touch them, break off pieces, and make their own little snowballs. Some attracted birds as they released their contents. Made in the last year of the twentieth century and displayed and destroyed in the first year of the twenty-first, the snowballs place the passage of time before us.

Time is, of course, an important element of the natural world. Time can be a basic element of works of art, a central subject matter, or it can enter it in a more figurative sense, as with these midsummer snowballs that are affected by time and sooner or later are gone, the works themselves vanishing, eaten up by heat and time.



Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), copper alloy, ca. eleventh century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Shiva Nataraja (*Lord of the Dance*, eleventh century CE) is not perhaps as obviously focused on the natural world as other images in this chapter, but it bears important implications for notions of time and their impact on our understanding of the world, and the universe. This image would have originally been draped with silks, covered with jewels and wrapped in flower garlands, creating an impression very different from that which we see today. Shiva is often described as if one of three main deities of Hinduism (Braham the Creator, Vishu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer). However, Hindus – who generally define their religion by their devotion to an individual god, such as Shiavites or Vaishavites – actually see these roles, and these beings, as more fluidly connected, with beliefs overlapping, contrasting and conflicting.

In this image, Shiva dances with grace in the *ānanda tāṇḍava* ("dance of bliss"), poised atop a demonic dwarf, whom he easily subdues. The figure is composed of soft, sensuous forms, with a somewhat androgynous body. While a male god, Shiva is here depicted in a rather different style than the muscular gods of ancient Greece and elsewhere. In his rightmost hand, he holds a small drum, which beats out the cycles of creation, whereas the fire in his leftmost hand implies destruction, also suggested by the fire encircling him. Still, he raises another of his hands to us to offer us a sense of calm, which is also reflected in his blithe expression. His raised left foot suggests our eventual liberation from cycles of reincarnation through escape from ignorance, embodied in the dwarf crushed beneath the god's right foot. In this way, the *Shiva Nataraja* links back to the Buddhist image by Sesshū that began this chapter. Both present the natural world, for good or bad, bounteous or harsh, as something, ultimately, to be escaped.

There is, though, again a point of trouble to be dealt with: in symbolizing ignorance, the "dwarf" figure relies on an

assumption that the outward shape of a human being indicates their inner qualities. This is a foundational assumption underpinning most forms of racism, but it is also a central pillar of ableist thought. That is, able-bodied people often view physical differences (whether or not they impair or disable a person) as markers of intellectual or moral failings, and artists and authors frequently use an external, visible impairment as a marker of internal corruption or evil. Think, for example, of Captain Hook, the Phantom of the Opera, Voldemort, or Darth Vader (and see here for a brief discussion of these issues). While the "dwarf" here is not based on a particular individual, the figure still functions, in tandem with highly idealized image of Shiva, to describe a natural world where interior properties are legible on a being's exterior.

The World in a Snake

In this chapter, we have seen images of the world, the landscape, and the animals and people that inhabit it. One image, though, might be seen as containing all of these concerns. The Great Serpent Mound in Adams County, Ohio (ca. 1070) is a product of the Mississippian Culture, a Native American civilization that flourished from ca. 900-1500. They followed a tradition of mound building that began as early as 1700 BCE and continued for 3000 years. These mounds were usually used to bury leaders or even entire groups with grave goods. The Great Serpent Mound is among the most impressive, 20 feet wide and running 1254 feet from end to end, following its twists and turns. The site was carefully chosen, on a ridge overlooking a stream, thereby granting the mound greater visibility.



Serpent Mound (Aerial), ca. 1070 (Adams County, Ohio). Photo by Timothy A. Price and Nichole I., CC BY-SA 3.0.

The form shows a serpent eating an egg. It is possible that the mound was inspired by a celestial event: it was constructed shortly after the appearance of Halley's Comet in 1066 CE. Cultures throughout the world recorded its appearance in art and text. The comet was closer to the earth than it has been since, and shined so brightly for a week that it could have been seen even during the day. In the Great Serpent Mound, the large oval at the front and the long tail are loosely analogous to the form of a comet.

Seen from the air, the organic form of the mound undulates gently, ultimately terminating in a spiraling tail that roughly balances the mouth, held wide to hold the egg. From the ground, the mound appears as more of a wall or maze, slithering off into the distance. Based on the gigantic scale of the mound, the animal in the landscape is also, in essence, the landscape itself. Turner and Ryder animated the landscape as a malevolent force. Here, though, the serpent seems to be an embodiment of the people who created it. Such mounds frequently contain both human remains and specialty items characteristic of their culture.



Serpent Mound (Ground), ca. 1070 (Adams County, Ohio). Photo by Eric Ewing, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The mound is echoed in several works by Andy Goldsworthy, who has constructed a number of undulating walls, perhaps most famously that at the Storm King Art Center in Upstate New York (see here for an image). The wall, 5 feet high and running a remarkable 2,278 feet, took a team of wall builders two years to construct out of stones from the landscape of the Center. These stones are not carved into rectangular blocks, but left in their rough state, emphasizing the natural material rather than the stonemasons' work. The work is reminiscent of the Great Serpent Mound in its snaking form, of ancient architecture, and of modern and contemporary works of art. It spans a vast amount of space – winding between trees and, for a stretch, disappearing beneath a river – and in so doing, invites us to consider the flow of time. Unlike the large wall on the Psalter Map, Goldsworthy's wall appears to be part of the natural world out of which it was constructed.

CONCLUSION

Images of nature vary tremendously, from the most terrifying (like Turner's storm at sea) to the most domestic (like the *Snowy Garden*). They show catastrophe (*Jonah*) and struggle (*Winter Landscape*), but also lighthearted enjoyment (*Le Pélerinage a l'Île de Cithère*). They show animals as cosmic (The Great Serpent Mound), divine (Temple of the Feathered Serpent), connected to a spiritual web (*Tree of Life*), and as awesome sites of wonder (*Rhinoceros*). Nature is among the earliest themes to appear in art, and has remained a vital source of inspiration in the millennia following.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE III

Albrecht Altdorfer, Danube Landscape, Germany, 1520-1532 CE



Albrecht Altdorfer, Landscape of the Danube Near Regensburg, oil on canvas, ca. 1522-25 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich). Photo by Rainer Zenz, Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What are the main **compositional principles** used to design the painting?
- What is the **focal point** of the image, and what guides our eyes to it?
- How is **contrast** used?
- How does the image invite us into the landscape?
- Is the work **naturalistic**?
- Is the work **idealized**?
- This is often considered the earliest pure landscape painting in Western Art. How does the painting relate to other landscape images you have seen? Is it effective?

Media Attributions

- Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape, ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.
- Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Detail of tree), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.
- Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Detail of person), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.
- Sesshū Tōyō, Autumn and Winter Landscape (Zigzag Diagram), ink on paper, fifteenth-sixteenth century (Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo). Photo: Public Domain.
- Ni Zan, Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu, ink on paper, 1372 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Çatalhöyük Volcano. Photo by Remixing Çatalhöyük, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slaves Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming on (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Detail, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840
- Detail, Joseph Mallord William Turner, Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On (Slave Ship), oil on canvas, 1840
- Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.). Photo: Public Domain.
- Detail, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895
- JonahDetailDetail, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Jonah, oil on canvas, ca. 1885-1895
- Albert Pinkham Ryder, With Sloping Mast and Dipping Prow, oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard, ca. 1880-1885 (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C.). Photo: Public Domain.
- Rafael Tufiño, Portfolio Las Plenas: Temporal, woodcut on paper (1953-1955). Photo: Éxodo Galeria, Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, by permission of Sucesión Rafael Tufiño.
- Detail, Rafael Tufiño, Portfolio Las Plenas: Temporal, woodcut on paper (1953-1955).
- Temple of the Feathered Serpent, ca. second-third century (Teotihuacan, Mexico). Photo by jschmeling, CC BY 2.0.
- Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Jean

Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Detail, Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717.
- Visual flow, Jean Antoine Watteau, Pélerinage à l'Île de Cythère, oil on canvas, 1717.
- Utagawa Kunisada and Utagawa Hiroshige, The Snowy Garden, ink and color on paper, 1854 (Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland). Photo: Public Domain.
- Psalter Map (Detail of orb), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- The Creator with Compass, illumination on parchment, ca. 1220-1230 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna). Photo: Public Domain.
- East Wind and Eden, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Psalter Map (Detail of orb), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Psalter Map (T-O Lines Diagrammed), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Isidore, T-O Map, ca. 600-625, Photo: Public Domain.
- Psalter Map (Eden and England highlighted), ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Dragons, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Winds, Psalter Map, ca. 1275 (British Library, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Blake Debassige, Tree of Life, 1982. Photo: Anishinabe Spiritual Centre.
- Sunaura Taylor, Chicken Truck (2007). Photo: By permission of the artist.
- Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Rhinoceros, oil on canvas, 1749 (Staatliches Museum, Schwerin). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Detail, Jean-Baptiste Oudry, Rhinoceros, oil on canvas, 1749.
- Jan Wandelaar, Engraving of Clara and Human Skeleton in Bernhard Siegried Albinus, Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani, 1749. Image: uploaded by Jan Arkesteijn, Public Domain.
- James Cox (ca. 1723–1800), Musical Rhinoceros Clock, ca. 1765–72. Gilt bronze, silver, enamel, pearls, and colored glass, pedestal: white marble and agate. Photo: Bridget Coila, CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Unicorn, Bestiary, parchment, ca. mid-thirteenth century (Bodleian Library, Oxford). Photo by Bodleian Libraries, CC BY-NC 4.0.
- Unicorn, "Ashmole Bestiary," parchment, England, 1201–1225 (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 1511, f. 14v). Image: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-NC 4.0
- Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja), copper alloy, ca. eleventh century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Serpent Mound (Aerial), ca. 1070 (Adams County, Ohio). Photo by Timothy A. Price and Nichole I., CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Serpent Mound (Ground), ca. 1070 (Adams County, Ohio). Photo by Eric Ewing, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Altdorfer-Donau

4. Communities

How does art help create communities?

We are born into our families, our towns and cities, and our nations. We are also born into communities defined by religion or politics, race or ethnicity. Throughout our lives, we make choices about these communities: Do we agree with our parents' politics? Do we wish to stay in the towns where we were born? And do we want to shape these communities, however they might be defined? Works of art often engage themes of community, with some designed to create cohesion among communities of various sorts – tribes, religions, races, political movements, nationalities – and others designed to encourage us to question the validity of such communities, and the ways that they have been manipulated to subjugate and suppress groups and the individuals that comprise them. This chapter will consider works of art from across the globe, produced by artists grappling with their communities, and the communities around them, works that should push us to reflect our own communities.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

MUNGO MARTIN, MASK OF HUXHUKW OF ATLAKIM, BEFORE 1952



Mungo Martin, Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe' (Mask of the Raven Man-Eater), red cedar, red cedar bark, paint, ca. 1940 (Seattle Art Museum, Seattle). Photo: Difference engine, CC BY-SA 4.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What effect do the color choices have on the work?
- What is the impact of the use of line?
- Is the work naturalistic or abstracted, and what is the effect?
- How would it feel to see this bird snapping its beak in your direction?

INTRODUCTION: A Festival of Giving

Among the Kwakwaka'wakw, a group of Canadian First Nation tribes of the Pacific Northwest joined by a common language, the potlatch is a central social event that allows families and villages to solidify internal bonds, tell their stories, display their wealth and generosity, and form bonds with other villages. These are among the most important elements that define their communities. "Potlatch" means "to give" in the common language used along the Pacific Northwest coast, and the ceremony features extensive gift exchanges. Art is integrated with all elements of the potlatch, including elaborate masks and costumes used for dances, as well as items created for the gift exchanges. Masks depicting *Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe'* – human-eating supernatural birds who are a servants of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé, the powerful human-eating spirit living at the north end of the world – are an important part of the potlatch "Dance of Hamsamala." The potlatch was such a strong element of the effort to maintain and bolster the Kwakwaka'wakw community that in the early twentieth century Canadian authorities bent on breaking up this community sought (ultimately unsuccessfully) to eliminate the practice, which they saw as a barrier to forced conversion to Christianity and forced assimilation of Kwakwaka'wakw groups.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: A Monstrous Mask

This remarkable mask of *Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe'*, carved by Mungo Martin, is almost three feet long. It is made of red cedar wood, with trim of red cedar bark, and painted in white, black and red. The visual emphasis is on the length and power of the beak, which accounts for about three-quarters of the mask's length. The red lines running along the length of the upper and lower beak emphasize its linearity. Indeed, the "**formline**" is the dominant element of Pacific Northwest Indigenous arts. The formline, generally painted in black, is a flowing contour line of varying thickness that defines figures and their features. As is common, the formline in this mask varies in thickness and shifts direction frequently, but not so much as to become loose or busy. Instead, the linework remains calm and stable, conveying a sense of strength and permanence.

While the painted forms clearly indicate the features of the monstrous bird, they are not naturalistic. Instead, they are highly abstracted, allowing line, pattern, and repetition to dominate the image. Below the white panel containing the figure's eye, for example, is a series of c-shaped curves alternating in black and while that steadily diminish in size as they approach the red nostril, which in turn dramatically expands as it moved toward the front of the beak. These forms create a sense of energy pressing forward toward the tip of the beak.

Some elements of the mask, like the nostrils, are rounded-off rectangles, referred to as **ovoids** in discussions of Pacific Northwest Indigenous arts. These shapes are used to define animal forms, to represent features like eyes and nostrils, and to fill what would otherwise be negative space. The repetition of the form within works and across a range of works lends a feeling of unity to the art. They also, through their slightly irregular shape, create a subtle sense of movement, as if the lines that flow around them are gently in motion.

The color palate of this mask is typical of Kwakwaka'wakw art, relying on black, white, and red, in addition to the natural colors of the cedar bark and wood. These create very strong contrasts and emphasize the formlines. The red surrounding the opening of the beak reminds the viewer of the violent nature of the *Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe'*, servant of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé. In performance, the beak would be snapped open and shut while the dancer chants "hap, hap, hap!" ["eat, eat, eat!"], indicating that he is looking forward to cracking heads open with his long beak. The beak is moved by means of a string hidden under the cedar bark trim that hung down from the back of the mask.

To appreciate the role that such a mask would play in establishing a community, we need to view it in use rather than in the isolation of a museum display case. Films made in the early 1950s, around the time that Martin carved this mask, give a sense of the performances in which it would have been used. Other works of Kwakwaka'wakw art shown in this film display similar formlines and ovoids.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=209#oembed-1

The mask was not only part of a complete costume; it was one image among many used in the dance, performed in front of a large painted screen, accompanied by musicians and singers, and surrounded by members of the community who were (and are) not only audience members but also participants. Seeing similar masks as part of complete costumes give a greater sense of their scale, which required that they be held on the dancer by means of an elaborate chest harness.



Hamat'sa displays in the Field Museum around 1910, from Franz Boas's 1897 book, based on photographs taken at the Chicago World's fair and in Ft. Rupert. Image: John Curran, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The figure in the bottom-center squats low enough that the cedar bark trim covers most of his body, transforming him from an ordinary member of the community into the dangerous, man-eating spirit bird. Around him, additional dancers appear in the guises of other powerful creatures of the north.

Another useful photograph was staged by Edward S. Curtis, a photographer and filmmaker, and it features the Kwakwaka'wakw cast he hired for a romantic (and highly problematic) silent film, *In the Land of the Head Hunters* (1914).



Edward S. Curtis, Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, British Columbia, ca. 1900, from Curtis's The North American Indian (1907-1930). Image: Public Domain.

This photograph was one of over 2000 in Curtis's 20-volume publication. While the photograph was not shot from an authentic performance, it depicts many elements of Kwakwaka'wakw art, including the masks, costumes, totem poles and, to the far left, a painted screen. Seeing all these elements together in a great house, we can get a better sense of the otherworldly atmosphere of dance, for which the masks are a central element. We can also, though, see how very close the audience – seated at the right – is to the performance, how integrated the larger community is in this communal dance.

The frightening mask of *Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe'*, with its huge beak, brought to life by the dancer snapping it shut, displays the fearsome nature of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé and his servants. It also therefore demonstrates the bravery and power of the Kwakwaka'wakw community that, in their legends, defeated this frightening foe in the distant past and in so doing took some of his power for themselves.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: The Kwakwaka'wakw Potlatch

The potlatch ceremonies were performed in the winter, when the spirits of the cold north are considered to be at their most powerful. During this time of year, it is believed that the man-eating beings roam among the villages, and the dances are part of the process of taming them by taming the initiates held in their grip. The masks worn for the dances symbolize supernatural beings from stories and legends and are often remarkable works, not only intricately carved and colorfully painted but also animated with moving mouths and eyes, sometimes splitting down the middle to reveal second and even third masks within them.

The Hamaťsa dance celebrates the victory over Baxwbakwalanuksiwé, the man-eating spirit of the north, and is used to induct new members into the Hamaťsa society, the most prestigious of a number of secret societies of the Kwakwaka'wakw. With the community gathered in a great house – a large wooden house divided by painted screens – young men first appear as wild, following the model of the man-eating Hamaťsa. In some enactments, the initiates – possessed by the man-eating spirit – would appear to bite members of the audience, who would then break pouches of

animal blood to simulate bleeding. Such acts, and other related elements of the performance, led to false accusations by the Canadian government of literal cannibalism.

First to appear is the Hamaťsa initiate, overcome by the spirit of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé. The Huxwhukw dancers, and those portraying the other monstrous birds of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé, follow the frenzied Hamaťsa initiate, terrorizing the crowd while the initiate retreats through a painted screen. The bird dancers step aside as the initiate reemerges, partially tamed. This process is repeated, as he is gradually tamed, such that the man-eating spirit in him is contained so that he can rejoin the general Kwakwaka'wakw community, but also now belong to the select group of Hamaťsa initiates. The Huxwhukw mask is an important part of the Hamaťsa dance, and therefore helps bind the community together. This dance, in turn, is an important part of the potlatch, the first dance performed because it relies on the power of Baxwbakwalanuksiwé, the most powerful of the winter spirits.

Mungo Martin, who was a chief as well as a sculptor, carved this mask. Martin's dual roles indicate the status of carving in the community. Martin in particular worked to use carving as a means to transmit Kwakwaka'wakw culture, which was rapidly being lost in the early twentieth century. With his wife Abayah, also an artist, he preserved the teachings, stories, mythology and traditions of his community, keeping them alive through a period of persecution by the Canadian government. Remarkably, footage survives of Martin at work, carving a mask (available on an old site here, if your browser supports Flash). This short silent film, shot by Clifford Carl for the "Victoria Amateur Movie Club" in 1953, shows the artist carving with a variety of implements, and even includes a display of the array of tools used. In the film, we can see the rapid, confident process of the master carver, who not only produces the mask but also, rapidly and with ease, creates a paintbrush and paints from natural materials in order to color the mask once the carving is finished.

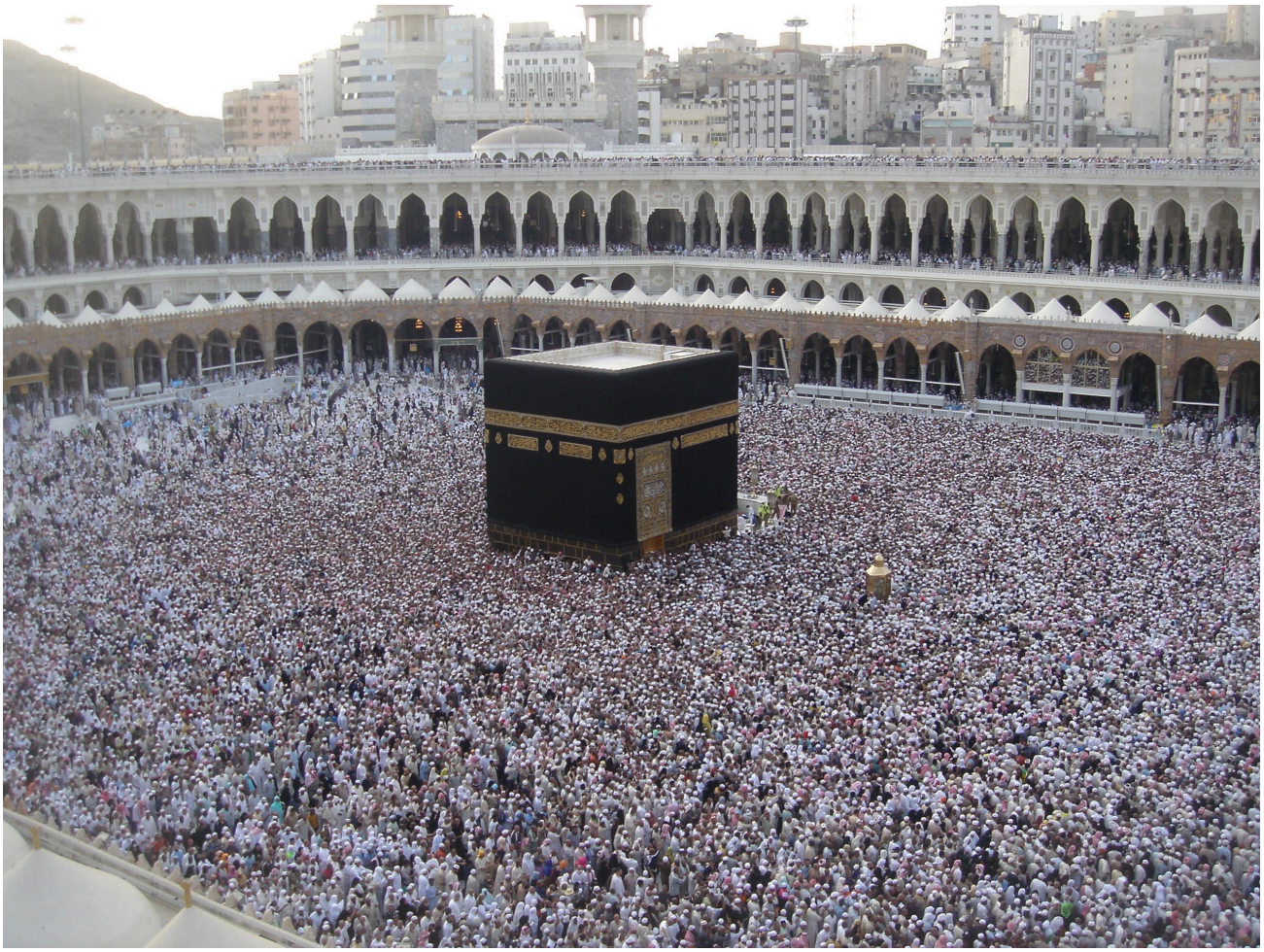
The late nineteenth century was the heyday of the potlatch. This was a period of wealth for the Kwakwaka'wakw, resulting from new trade with colonial settlers and decreased warfare between villages, but also from a drastically decreased population that was shrunken by the introduction of new diseases. This newfound and newly concentrated wealth led to gift exchanges that were both more lavish and more frequent. The potlatch ceremony was such a strong element of the Kwakwaka'wakw community, binding groups together, that it came to be the subject of condemnation by Canadian authorities. In 1884, the potlatch was outlawed. It was seen as a symbol of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples' refusal to accept forced conversion to Christianity and forced assimilation into the Christian community. This was a process that involved large-scale anti-Indigenous violence and the abduction of Indigenous children who were then raised in Christian communities, among other acts. Once the potlatch was outlawed, participation in it was punishable by imprisonment. Accusations against the participants included not only the baseless charges of child endangerment and prostitution, but also charges of cannibalism, based on the mythology of the staged performances, indicating that the government took too literally the stories of Hamaťsa and the monstrous birds that help him. At times, sentences against participants were suspended if those caught gave up their masks and goods. These were eventually sold off to museums, with little or none of the profit being returned to the communities. The Canadian authorities recognized the importance of these masks in the rituals that bound the community together, and so they removed them in an attempt to weaken the community. However, the winter dances and potlatch ceremonies were so important to the Kwakwaka'wakw that they continued in secret and at great risk until they were again legalized in 1951. At this point, Martin was hired by the Royal British Columbia Museum to restore totem poles displayed at Thunderbird Park in Victoria, Canada. His work went from outlawed to celebrated, and remains so today. However, many masks and other goods – including some carved by Martin – that were surrendered in the 1920s remain in museums today, despite efforts by tribes to reclaim them.

Comparisons and Connections I: Constructed Communities

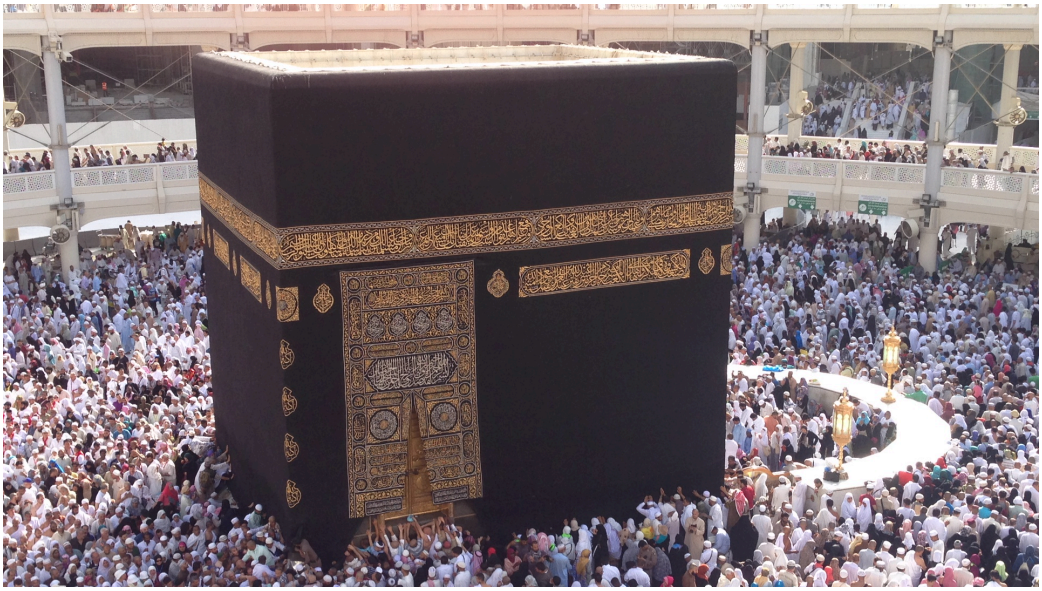
The Hamaťsa ceremony is designed to construct and display relationships between members of the community, and to reaffirm their common heritage and values. This series of comparisons will focus on images and structures designed and used to enhance the bonds within other communities.

Among the world's more impressive communal ceremonies is the Hajj, the Muslim **pilgrimage** to Mecca during the first days of the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar, Dhu'l-Hijja. This pilgrimage – a journey for a significant religious purpose – is one of the **Five Pillars of Islam** (see here), the religion's most fundamental tenets. While it began during the life of Mohammad with a few hundred pilgrims, the annual Hajj now consists of well over two million people.

Some of the main ceremonies of the Hajj are centered on the **Ka'bah** (Arabic for "cube"), a structure in Mecca believed by Muslims to be the house Abraham, the Jewish **patriarch**, erected for God.



Ka'bah (Distant View), al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 608 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Fraz Ismat, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Ka'bah, al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 608 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Amalia Fonk Utomo, CC BY 2.0.

The Ka'bah is now surrounded by the Haram Mosque, which was built around it. This plain, cubical stone structure was, at the time of the Muslim conquest, an Arabic polytheistic shrine cared for by the Quraysh tribe. Mohammed declared that it should be the focal point of all Muslim prayer, and it remains so – when Muslims pray five times a day, facing Mecca, they are praying more precisely toward the Ka'bah. It is covered in a vast cloth called the *kiswa*, which is ornamented with Arabic calligraphy containing inscriptions from the **Qur'an** and designs in gold against the otherwise austere black cloth. The cloth plays interestingly with scale. While the building itself is, for a work of architecture, fairly small, the *kiswa*, for a piece of cloth, is immense. This transforms the unimposing structure, rendering it striking and impressive. Records are uncertain, but it may have been covered in a cloth since pre-Islamic times, and these cloths have been in other colors, including white, green and red. Each of these would create quite different effects.

The Ka'bah not only forms the central focus of Muslim prayer throughout the world, but also a focus for the Hajj. At the height of the pilgrimage, thousands of pilgrims slowly circle the structure seven times in a ritual called *Tawaaf*.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
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In order to further stress the communal nature of the Hajj, all pilgrims are to wear the same simple garment made of two uncut pieces of cloth, usually white, called the *Ihram*. Ideally, the pilgrim then kisses the *Hajr-e-Aswad*, a black stone embedded in the side of the Ka'bah.



Hajr-e-Aswad, Ka'bah, al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 605 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Genius M.Nasim, CC BY-SA 4.0.

This stone, now broken into three pieces and held together by a large silver frame, was probably part of the pre-Islamic religion of the region, but according to Islamic belief was given to **Adam** by God when he was thrown out of the **Garden**

of Eden. According to this legend, the *Hajr-e-Aswad* was white when it was given to Adam, but has become black as it has drawn in the sins of the pilgrims. The Ka'bah is a simple structure visually, which means that all pilgrims circling it have a similar view. The Quranic inscriptions are very large, so that they can be read even by those at a fair distance from the structure. At the height of the Hajj, the Ka'bah sits at the center of millions of pilgrims who, wearing similar clothes, circle it as one massive community. The individuality of the pilgrims becomes, in this process, less important than their shared membership in the Muslim community.

While the Ka'bah and the Hamaťsa ceremony use art as the center of activities that help strengthen communal bonds, other works are designed to construct a sense of community by depicting the members of the community, themselves. This can be done literally or through symbolism, as the following two examples demonstrate. These are both **medieval** Christian works, but present two different strategies used to establish related communities.



Eadwig Basan, Image of Saint Benedict, Eadui Psalter, London, British Library MS Arundel 155, f. 133, England, between 1012 and 1023 CE. Image: CC0 1.0.

The Eadui Psalter, created in Canterbury, England (1012-1023 CE) is an **illuminated manuscript** – a handmade, hand

illustrated book. It is written on **vellum** – animal skin, usually sheep or calf – painted with inks, and decorated with actual gold.

The manuscript is a **psalter**, which is a volume containing the biblical Book of the Psalms. This copy was made for a **monastery**, where **monks** live a life centered on devotion to the Christian god. This image relies on a number of visual elements to define the community and express their unity. The largest figure is the seated man to the left. His halo contains an inscription that tells us this is "Saint Benedict, father of the monks," the person who founded the monastic group, or order, the others belong to. He is shown in **hieratic scale**, so that while he is seated, he is still taller than the other figures. He is also one of only two men depicted in full color, while the rest of the figures are only lightly colored.

This image is not unfinished. Instead, the **illuminator** – the artist who made the image – has used color, as well as shimmering gold, to give emphasis to this most important figure. Benedict is gesturing toward a large book held by the monk to the right. The book contains the opening of Benedict's Rule, a guide to teach monks how to live. He is therefore providing for the audience of this manuscript – who would be monks in his Benedictine Order – a figure of authority, a leader who created their community.

Benedict is shown as if he lived at the same time as the monks beside him, but he died in 547 CE, almost 500 years before this image was made, and before the monks within it lived. The figure kissing Benedict's feet is probably Eadwig Basan, the **scribe** (copyist) and illuminator for this copy of the Psalter. Benedict looks directly outward at the viewer, who would be one of this monastic community. He therefore seems to be giving his Rule not only to the mass of figures to the right, but to the reader, as well.

The crowd of monks on the right stand in for the entire monastic community. They are drawn in ink outlines, and some have light touches of color on their robes. They cluster closely together, showing their solidarity, and gaze at Benedict with clear adoration. They are packed together so tightly that they seem to be a single, united form. Above, the hand of God reaches out of the clouds holding a scroll. The left side reads, "He that hears you, hears me," suggesting that Benedict's words are God's words. The right side reads, "Be obedient to your superior," suggesting that God himself supports the hierarchy of this community.



The Good Shepherd, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The so-called Mausoleum of Galla Placida, in Ravenna, Italy (ca. 430-450 CE), on the other hand, depicts the Christian community through symbolism. While the structure is still known by its conventional name, it is not believed to have been the Mausoleum (burial structure) of Galla Placida, half-sister of the Roman Emperor Honorius and herself a ruler of a fourth of the Roman Empire. It was actually built as part of the Church of Holy Cross (Santa Croce) to house a **relic** of the True Cross, that is, a piece of wood believed at the time to have been a piece of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. The small chapel is shaped like a cross, which would reinforce the association with the relic. This work is a **mosaic** – an image composed of thousands of small pieces of glass, tile, or stone embedded in plaster. A detail from this image shows the individual tiles.



Detail of mosaic, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

At the mosaic's center, Jesus sits on a rock, clothed in gold robes and leaning on a cross-staff. He is surrounded by a flock of sheep. In such images, Jesus is referred to as "the Good Shepherd," a title that is associated with a few biblical passages, including the Gospel of John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Psalm 23 (which would be contained in the Eadui Psalter discussed above) was also frequently used to establish the role of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. While this is a Jewish text with a number of Jewish meanings, it was appropriated by Christians, who believed that it was about Jesus:

> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
> He makes me lie down in green pastures,
> he leads me beside quiet waters,
> he restores my soul.
> He guides me in paths of righteousness
> for his name's sake.
> Even though I walk
> through the valley of the shadow of death,
> I will fear no evil,
> for you are with me;
> your rod and your staff,
> they comfort me.

This passage was often cited in the **Early Christian period**, when Christianity was a new religion seeking converts, and in

the **Byzantine period**, when the building was constructed. The psalm suggests that God is kind and generous, a source of comfort and protection, and so is like a shepherd to his flock. The sheep, then, are standing in for his Christian followers. As the masks, costumes and screens of the Hamaťsa ceremony were the visual focal point for the community during their central communal rituals, so too, this image would serve as the backdrop for the **mass**, the central communal activity of medieval Christianity.

Rather than being directly depicted, as the monks are in the Eadui Psalter, instead the Christian community is represented symbolically. Like the monks in the Psalter, though, these sheep all gaze adoringly at Jesus, and the viewer – following their implied sight lines – cannot help but keep returning to him, as well.



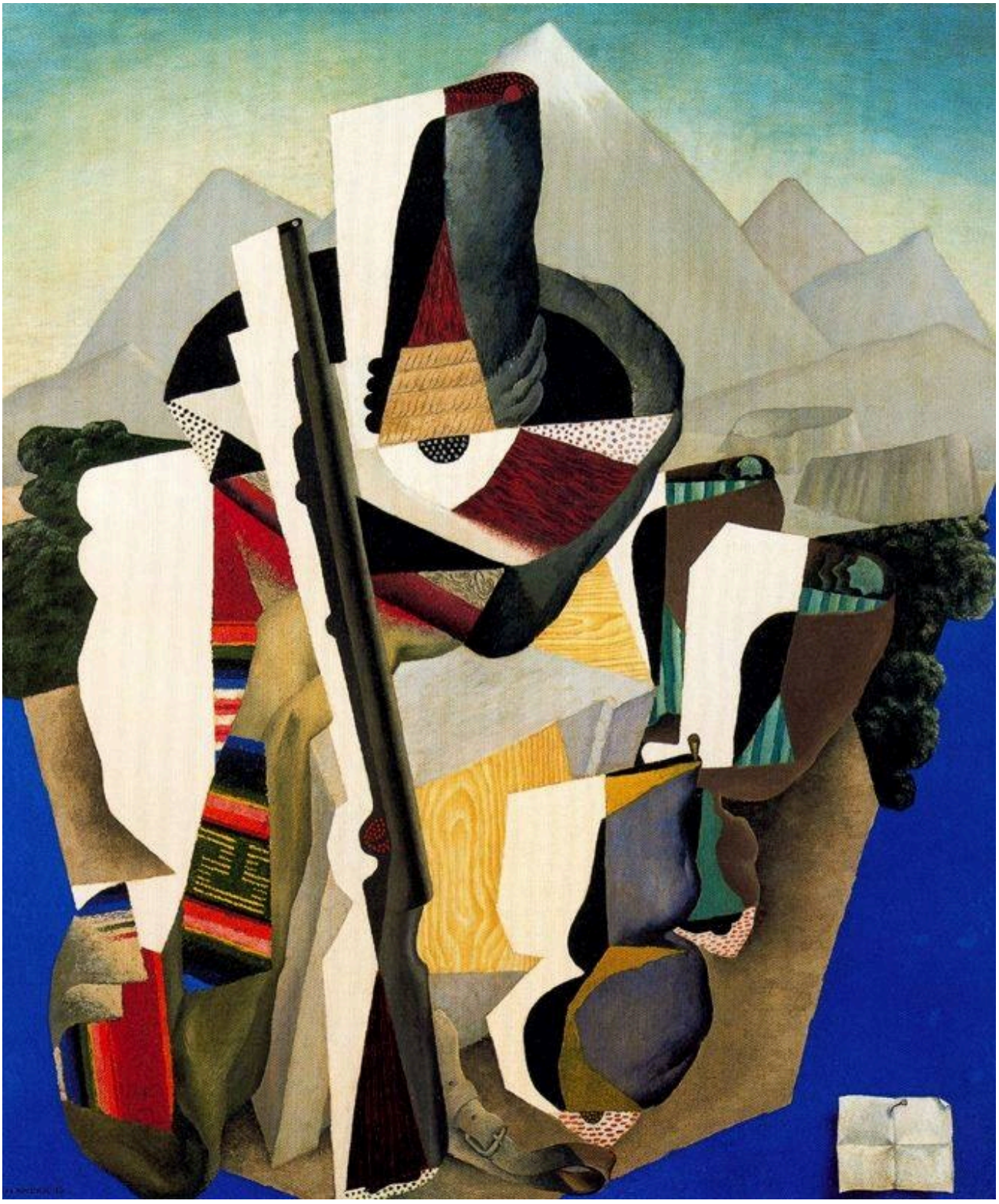
Sheep, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The choice of symbol is important: while it does draw on the texts mentioned and others, it also teaches its intended audience how they are to behave. Sheep are passive and patient, two values highly praised by Christians in the period. If the followers of Jesus were shown as a pride of lions, or as a varied menagerie of animals, the effect would be quite different. These gentle, affectionate, obedient sheep, nearly identical to one another, provide a model for the worshippers in the church to follow.

The Ka'bah, Eadui Psalter, and Mausoleum of Galla Placida have all been used to reinforce religious communities, and the Hamaťsa ceremony functions to construct a tribal identity that is deeply interwoven with religious beliefs and mythologies.

A Community by Ideology

Art can also engage entirely secular groups. Diego Rivera, the central member of the Mexican Muralists, wanted the poorly educated general public to be able to understand his art, but struggled to find a style that would be clear enough. He slowly shifted from the newly popular Modernist styles he learned about while living in Paris to a more direct style dominated by figures in action. We will consider two of Rivera's paintings, an early work in a Modernist style and a later work designed to be clearer for a mass audience.



Diego Rivera, Paisaje Zapatista, oil on canvas, 1915 (Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City). Photo: Candy Mar, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

His early work, *Zapatista Landscape* (1915) is in the **Cubist** style pioneered by Pablo Picasso and others. It presents a

series of symbols associated with Mexico, and with the recent populist peasant revolution against what its members saw as unjust land use policies. In the center of the image are a sombrero (a broad-brimmed hat), serape (a blanket worn like a cape), rifle, and ammunition belt. The Cubist style presents these items as if from multiple perspectives at once. The images are fragmented and disjointed, and it is up to the viewer to assemble them mentally into a cohesive image.

The sombrero, the focal point of the image, is a good example of this technique. It is at the center, horizontally, and above center, vertically, which is often considered a prime focal point for images. It is predominately dark, and set against the lighter colors around it so that the contrast also draws our attention. It is a curious image, though, since the hat seems to be made of several materials. At the right and left, it seems to be made of black felt, but in the center, it is red, with what appear to be straw or rope bands around it. In this way, the image appears to be not a particular sombrero, but a stand-in for all sombreros, the characteristic hat of the peasant followers of the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata.

The serape is also a symbol of these rural farmers who took up arms, represented by the rifle and ammunition belt, to fight for land reforms. The Cubist image, then, when assembled in the viewer's mind, is of a Zapatista, a follower of Zapata, and is presented as an iconic image of the Mexican people. The abstraction of the image is important – were this a portrait, however typical in the choice of its subject, it would have to show a particular person. Instead, it stands in for all the revolutionaries, and by association, for the downtrodden populace of Mexico, standing up to their oppressors. All of this is set in front of the white peaks the mountains around the Valley of Mexico, tying the revolutionaries to the land they were fighting to control. Rivera himself considered the painting to be "the most faithful expression of the Mexican mood that I have ever achieved."[1]

Still, this painting was aimed at an educated audience familiar with Cubism and familiar with its challenging approach. It was therefore not ultimately satisfying to Rivera, who was trying to make art that would not only help outsiders to understand the people behind the Revolution, but also to speak to the revolutionaries, themselves, and to the general public of Mexico. Rivera writes (with a **utopianism** undercut by his strong condescension):

> The society of the future would be a mass society. And this fact presented wholly new problems. The **proletariat** had no taste; or, rather, its taste had been nurtured on the worst esthetic food, the very scraps and crumbs which had fallen from the tables of the **bourgeoisie**.[2]

Here, Rivera uses the vocabulary of **Communism**, speaking of the proletariat (the working class, seen as the most virtuous members of society) and the bourgeoisie (those in control of wealth and the systems of production). His answer to the problem he perceived was mural painting, large-scale images based on clear depictions of human figures in action. He studied Italian Renaissance murals, but also Pre-Conquest Mexican art, in order to create a new style that he believed would speak directly to the Mexican populous. The murals he created are often very large and highly complex, so only a small portion of one mural can be discussed, here.

1. Diego Rivera (with Gladys March), *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (Mineola: Dover, 1991), 65.

2. Rivera, My Art, My Life, 66.



Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, fresco, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.

His *History of Mexico* mural, painted from 1929-1935, is a massive work running 21.5 m (70.5 ft) along a single wall. It is housed in a building originally used by Spanish colonial lords, and then by the president of independent Mexico, so the setting was an important element of the work. Its location along a stairway means that the viewer must get very close to it. Since the scale of the figures is approximately life size, and they are painted with a strong sense of their volume and pressed very close to the surface of the image, rather than receding within a perspectival illusion of depth, the viewer is made to feel as if part of the action in the image.

From right to left, as we are meant to see it, the mural covers the whole history of Mexico, from before the Spanish Conquest through "Mexico of Today and of the Future." At the center of the mural is an image celebrating Mexican independence, won from the Spanish colonists in 1810-1821. There are essentially two **registers** – horizontal bands of imagery or decoration – under the central arch, divided by an image of an eagle standing on a cactus, which is a reference to the Aztecs.



Eagle, Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Based on an Aztec stone carving, it refers to the myth of the founding of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, now Mexico City, and acts as a reference to a mighty Mexican past. Above the eagle is a balding priest in black clothes with white "preaching bands" – like a pair of neckties – holding broken chains. This is Hidalgo, a priest who was one of the main leaders of the revolution, and the chains are the chains of servitude to the Spanish.



Hidalgo, *Diego Rivera*, *The History of Mexico*, *mural*, 1929-30 (*Palacio Nacional*, *Mexico City*). *Photo: Milan Tvrdy*, *CC BY-NC 2.0.*

To the right stands a group of men in sombreros, carrying rifles and wearing ammunition belts. Unlike the dizzying array of recognizable figures facing out at us, these men have their backs to us. In this way, since they are faceless, they become – like the Cubist figure of Diego's *Zapatista Landscape* – anonymous and therefore universal representatives of the community.



Zapatistas, *Diego Rivera*, *The History of Mexico*, *mural*, 1929-30 (*Palacio Nacional*, *Mexico City*). *Photo: Milan Tvrdy*, *CC BY-NC 2.0.*

Instead of the cluster of symbols from his earlier painting, here Rivera presents full figures who act as stand-ins for all the peasants who rose up to overthrow the Spanish lords. At the top-right, another group of men in sombreros, with rifles and bandoliers, stand behind revolutionary leaders including Zapata (at the left, in the sombrero and with the long mustaches) holding a banner reading "TIERRA Y LIBERDAD" ["Land and Liberty"], the rallying cry of the revolution.



Zapata, Diego Rivera, *The History of Mexico*, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.

This banner seems at first to be addressed to the man to the left, presented as a proletariat worker in his blue collar and overalls, who points the way to the future. It is also, though, addressed directly to the spectator, who is encouraged to celebrate the liberties won in the fight for independence, and to continue to fight for the cause of the worker – the modern-day peasant now striving to gain control of the means of production rather than merely working at low wages for factory owners. The massive image creates a virtual community, and the viewer is encouraged to imagine stepping directly into the image, joining in the communal struggle.

A Community by Exclusion

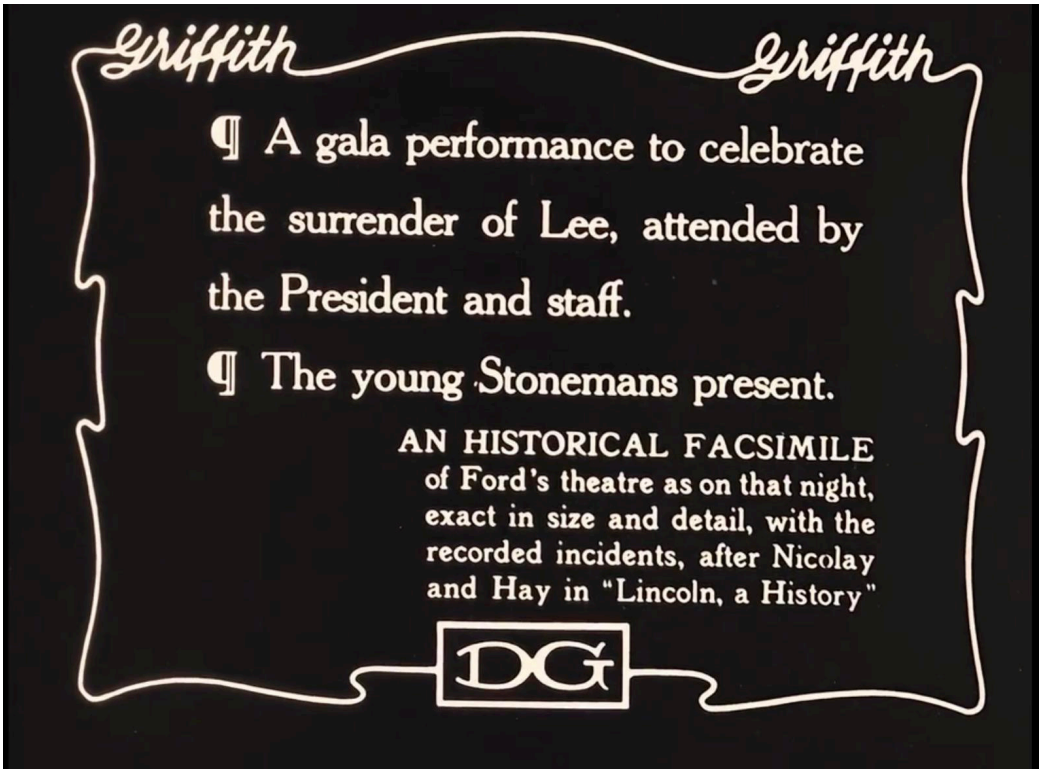
It is important to note, though, that not all works of art designed to construct communities are positive images of the oppressed, fighting back against oppressors, or of groups binding themselves together though images designed to evoke collective joy. Other works were designed to help cultures build strong senses of identity by demonizing and excluding groups, such as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). This is a film that is widely celebrated for its technical and artistic innovations, but broadly condemned for the ideology it endorses. The title suggests a film celebrating the great glories of the national community, as if the film is a straightforward celebration of the founding of the United States. Instead of the Founding Fathers, though, Griffith's heroes are the Ku Klux Klan.

The full film is hosted on the Internet Archive, and you can view it there, or can view it right here, but bear in mind that the context is *profoundly* offensive. It should, though, be studied as it has much to teach us about the history of anti-Black racism in the United States.

https://archive.org/embed/dw_griffith_birth_of_a_nation

The Birth of a Nation was based on *The Clansman*, a novel written by Thomas Dixon. Griffith used major film stars of the day, including the famous Lilian Gish, and the film was an enormous commercial success. Part of its appeal was rooted in its innovative use of new techniques including **flashbacks** and **montage**, two techniques so common today that we hardly notice their use. Barely more than a minute into the film, and **intertitle** – a card containing text, used in silent films to convey dialogue and information – of this three hour epic reads "The bringing of the African to America planted the first seed of disunion," as if to lay the blame on enslaved Africans for the graphically depicted scenes of Civil War violence that follow, rather than on the enslavers. Griffith's work is in essence pro-slavery and in support of the South's secession from the United States. His film depicts the South's secessionists as noble and heroic, and the Northerns as arrogant and corrupt, devastating the supposed simply harmony of Southern plantation life. The film covers President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, and then the period of **Reconstruction**, which is the term used to describe Congress's efforts to restructure the Southern states after the Civil War, in order to reintegrate them into the country. Many in the South saw Reconstruction as humiliating, especially in its (limited) requirement for integration of formerly enslaved people into the larger fabric of US life, including education and government.

The intertitles frame the film's scenes in very careful ways. Some claim that the scenes of the film — all highly fictionalized and deeply skewed by Griffith's pro-Klan views, are "historical facsimiles," showing the events exactly as they occurred.



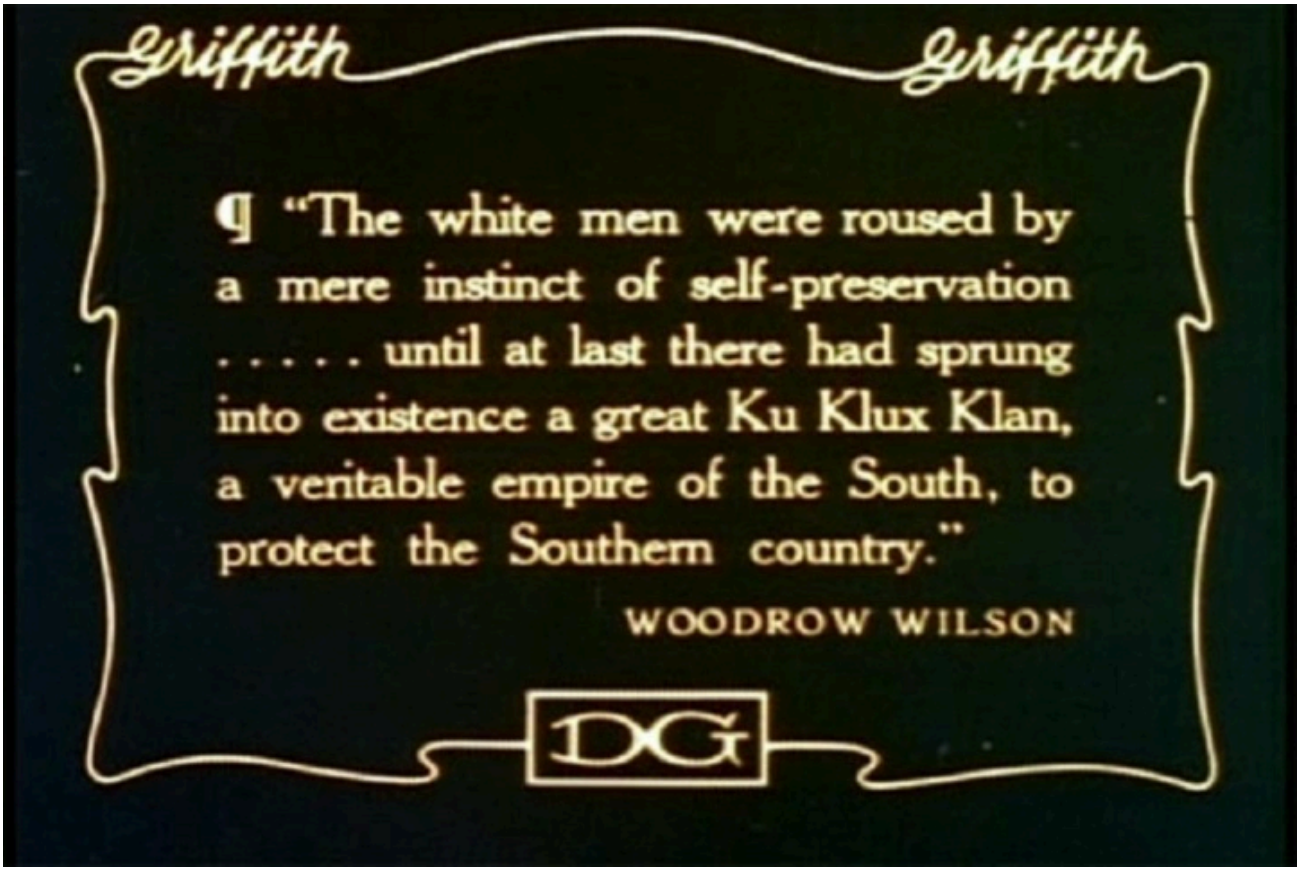
Intertitle, D.W. Griffith, Birth of a Nation (1915). Image: Public Domain.

Other intertitles cite their sources, as if to provide footnotes. These strategies provide a sense of neutrality and objectivity. One important intertitle reads (at 1:28:02): "This is a historical presentation … not meant to reflect on any race or people of today." The very next intertitles (at 1:28:16, 1:28:39, and 1:28:53), though, clearly praise white Southerners and demonize Black people, as well as Northern whites:

> Adventurers swarmed out of the North, as much the enemies of the one race as of the other, to cozen, beguile, and use the negroes … In the villages the negroes were the office holders, men who knew none of the uses of authority, except its insolences … The policy of the congressional leaders wrought … a veritable overthrow of

> civilizations in the South … in their determination to "put the white South under the heel of the black South … until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan … to protect the Southern country."

The texts on these intertitles are from President Woodrow Wilson's *History of the American People*, which was published 1902, a decade before he was elected president of the United States (1913-1921), but he was the current president when *The Birth of a Nation* was released, giving these problematic texts the authority of the highest office in the country.



Intertitle, D.W. Griffith, Birth of a Nation (1915). *Image: Public Domain.*

In one of the most problematic scenes in the film, we see the State Assembly of South Carolina, which we read is composed of "101 blacks against 23 whites" (at 1:53:40). In the scene that follows, we see the recently freed men (some played by white men in blackface makeup) as a collection of racist stereotypes: they are depicted as loud and slovenly. For example, one swigs whiskey from a bottle, another takes off his shoes to prop up his bare feet on his desk, and yet another, while making a speech, chews on and gestures with a large hunk of chicken, which he repeatedly points toward the camera, and therefore at us, and so on. The moment that seems to have sparked the greatest degree of fear in the film's original viewers comes when a group of white visitors enters at the balcony above the assembly. These include two women in frilly dresses and hats. At their entrance, there is a cut to a group of Black assembly members who turn as one to stare up at these women. We see the assembly from above, which urges the viewers to identify with the whites on the balcony, who are filmed at much closer to eye-level. This is immediately followed by an intertitle reading "Passage of a bill, providing for the intermarriage of blacks and whites." The film then cuts back to the assembly members who, still staring up at the women, begin to leer openly, with a mixture of lust and aggression. The film cuts again to the women

on the balcony. Their male chaperone ushers them out, as more Black men gaze after them with undisguised lust, most notably a man wearing his hat askew who looks them up and down a few times and smiles.

At the time that *The Birth of a Nation* was showing throughout the United States, there was an active movement to pass a constitutional amendment banning "miscegenation" – a term of condemnation for sex between members of difference races – though none were passed. There were, though, many state laws prohibiting interracial marriage, the last of which were not struck down by the Supreme Court until 1967. In this politically charged atmosphere, the scenes of the State Assembly in *The Birth of a Nation* were powerful. Mere minutes later, the film presents a Ku Klux Klan rally, and then white-hooded Klansmen riding to the rescue of innocent women and children. While there are many images of white Southerners, who are presented alternately as honorable and upstanding, and victimized and helpless, the most potent images of the film are its most problematic – those depicting Black Americans. This film is deeply connected to the effort to construct a community: a white – and white supremacist – Southern community, galvanized by the demonization of Black Americans.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

CARRIE MAE WEEMS, *FROM HERE I SAW WHAT HAPPENED AND I CRIED*, 1995-1996, 33 TONED PRINTS

For all toned prints from this series, see the artist's own site here.

For larger copies of particular images, hosted by MoMA, see these links:

- FROM HERE I SAW WHAT HAPPENED
- YOU BECOME/A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE
- AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL/DEBATE
- BLACK AND TANNED/YOUR WHIPPED WIND/OF CHANGE HOWLED LOW/BLOWING ITSELF – HA – SMACK/ INTO THE MIDDLE OF/ELLINGTON'S ORCHESTRA/BILLIE HEARD IT TOO &/CRIED STRANGE FRUIT TEARS
- ANYTHING/BUT WHAT YOU WERE/HA
- AND I CRIED

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What impact does the use of color have on you as a viewer?
- What is the effect of pattern and repetition in the series?
- How does the medium of photography affect your assumptions about the images?
- How does the text alter your responses to the images?

INTRODUCTION: Weems, Identity, and Appropriation

Carrie Mae Weems is an American photographer who studied photography and folklore in the 1980s, and her art – which frequently juxtaposes images with texts – engages both of these fields. Her work draws on her family background and personal identity. As the descendent of Mississippi Delta sharecroppers – farmers who work on rented land paid for with a share of their crops – she has used modern images but also has re-photographed older images. In *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995-1996), the viewer sees a series of 33 **appropriated** photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, reprinted, toned, and **juxtaposed** with text. Because of the mechanical aspects of photography,

the art form is often viewed as if it produces "accurate" images of reality, as if it reflects a truth outside of itself. Weems's work, though, demonstrates that photography is never neutral, never simply a reflection of reality. Instead, the ways in which photographs are created, composed, and displayed all construct the reality the photographs seem to capture.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Photographing Oppression

From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried is a series of 33 photographs, none of which were taken by Weems, but which are reproduced and altered by her to grant them new significance. All the photographs in the series are displayed at the same size (approximately 2′ × 20″; 60 × 50 cm), in matching black frames, creating a very regular repetition. The first and last of the 33, though, stand out: they are different in color, blue when the rest are red. The first and last are also not **matted** at all, so that the photograph takes up the full space within the frame, whereas the 31 photographs in between them are cropped by circular mats that suggest historical photographical techniques, but that also bring our focus in tighter, closer to the figures.

The first and last images are based on the same photograph, depicting a regal African woman with an elaborate headdress. Her name was Nobosodrou, and she was a Mangbetu woman photographed in 1925 in what was then the Belgian Congo. She is shown in full profile (perhaps recalling Barbara Kruger's *Untitled [Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face]*, 1981, discussed in the Power chapter). The use of a full-profile images means that we can stare at the subject without her looking back at us. This places the Western viewer – particularly the Western male viewer – in a position of power common to art from the colonial era (and long after). Here, though, as with Kruger's image, the text here shifts the power relations. The photographs are displayed behind glass, on which has been etched, "FROM HERE I SAW WHAT HAPPENED," and "AND I CRIED." These inscriptions transform the figure from the object of the viewer's gaze into an active witness, gazing on all the images in between these bookends. They are set off from the rest of the series by color, so that their cool blue tint implies not the fury of the bright red images but a softer sorrow. The lines of the figure's elegant profile direct our eyes inward toward the more confrontational images that comprise the rest of the series.

The second image is visually quite similar, which renders the differences more meaningful. It again presents a bare-chested woman in full-profile, facing to the right. However, where the first figure appears powerful, even regal – she was an aristocrat, as indicated by her hairstyle – the second seems subjugated, defeated. Her eyes are downcast and her expression sullen. The text, like Kruger's, speaks directly to the viewer: "YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE." This text asks the viewer to imagine stepping into the place of the photographic subject, to feel the stigma or humiliation of being subjected to scientific analysis, as if an animal or object rather than a human being.

The next nine images contrast strongly with the first two. The figures are now turned toward us, and they stare out directly, confronting our gaze. While some seem fairly placid, others glower from within their red circles. The man in the image that reads "AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE," for example, looks straight out at us. His expression is somewhat ambiguous, neither hostile nor welcoming. The text presents a second context for the western conversation about Africans and African culture, suggesting that the figures were not in control of academic discussion about themselves. Scientists analyze, anthropologists debate, and the photographers – the original photographers of these archival images – aid them in their dehumanization of their subjects. As we move from image to image, though, we have to continually meet the gazes of these figures as we read the text literally inscribed over their bodies.

The most extensive text covers almost half of one of the most powerful and disturbing of the images. Over the back of a man who bears a web of scars from whippings, we read:

BLACK AND TANNED
YOUR WHIPPED WIND
OF CHANGE HOWLED LOW
BLOWING ITSELF – HA – SMACK
INTO THE MIDDLE OF
ELLINGTON'S ORCHESTRA

BILLIE HEARD IT TOO &
CRIED STRANGE FRUIT TEARS

This inscription, which reads like a poem, contrasts with the image beneath it in much the same way that earlier texts had contrasted with their images. While the figures staring out at us seemed to defy the controlling analysis of science or anthropology, in this case we see the figure from the back, his face in profile and in shadow. The text is almost optimistic in tone, but in the image, the conceptual, emotional, and economic violence implied throughout the series is replaced with literal, physical violence. This image is a vital component of the series, since it shows the viewer the eventual consequences of the racism conveyed in the earlier images.

The color choice used to tint all but the first and last images – they are "feverishly toned," according to Weems – suggests multiple meanings.[3] The red might imply violence and blood (particularly in "BLACK AND TANNED"), or anger against the injustice of the images and the systems that produced the original photographs. Bringing these two concepts together, the deep, rich red tone, repeated in image after image, might press the viewer to realize that the original images that Weems has appropriated are, themselves, a form of violence.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Race and Art

This work raises the complex issue of race, itself. While race is often taken to be a natural category that seems self-evident, it is not. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) – dedicated to the study of human beings – has issued a clear statement of the subject, worth quoting at some length:

> [H]uman populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups … [so] any attempt to establish lines of division among biological populations [is] both arbitrary and subjective … "Race" … evolved as a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior … [P]resent-day inequalities between so-called "racial" groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances.

In essence, what this means is that race is not a biological fact; it is a cultural interpretation – a group of "myths," according to the AAA – that associate external, observable physical characteristics with the behaviors and capacities of individuals, and argue that these internal traits are permanent and passed down to each generation. This earlier approach to human difference is directly critiqued in the beginning of Weems's series, with images addressing "scientific" and "anthropological" approaches to the people in the photographs, and to "YOU," the viewer she directly addresses in her text.

Like many Americans (and others), Weems's heritage is more complex than any simple racial label might imply. Her great-grandfather was Jewish and her great-grandmother was of African and Native American descent. This is a reminder of the problematic nature of race as a category. Weems notes that most critics discussing her work immediately focus in on issues of race, and then gender, but she argues – rightly – that she is more than the reductive label "black woman photographer"[4] suggests, and her work is similarly more complex and engages subjects in addition to the core issues of race and gender.

Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* used racial stereotypes to create hostility toward Black Americans. Weems directly explores these stereotypes, confronting them head-on and challenging her viewers to resist the racist and sexist

3. Eddie Chambers, "Carrie Mae Weems: Cafe Gallery Projects, London," *Art Monthly* (July/August 2005, Issue 288), 31.

4. Carrie Mae Weems, "Carrie Mae Weems," in *Art:21, Art in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 5, ed. Marybeth Sollins (New York: Art21, Inc., 2009), 44.

ideology they represent. She also works to reveal how earlier images conveying such stereotypes have functioned. One of her main tools here is **appropriation** – the reuse of imagery created by other artists. In this case, she uses photographs spanning most of the history of photography, from the mid-nineteenth century to the contemporary period. They include, for example, photographs of enslaved people taken before the Civil War, as well as photographs of Africans living under colonial rule. The images of Nobosodrou was originally taken by Leon Poirier and George Specht as part of a publicity stunt to demonstrate the off-road capability of new automobiles called *The Black Journey across Central Africa with the Citroën Expedition*, in 1925. The text accompanying this image in *The Black Journey* describes Mangbetu women in dehumanizing but also sexualizing terms, and concludes by declaring them "fair nudities."

Weems's work is less about establishing a community than it is about exploring and critiquing how a community has been defined from the outside, by others. The texts and images do not tell us much about people of African descent, but instead, about how various European and American groups – scientists, anthropologists, enslavers, and even modern artists – created artificial, deceptive, or otherwise confining and constraining images of Black people. This series not only suggests that qualities associated with Black Americans, in particular, are not accurate, but that all images of groups – created from within the community or from outside it – are not "natural" but cultural. All the images discussed throughout this chapter point outward to "communities" which are, ultimately, cultural groupings rather than biological facts, and the works of art covered are often important elements used to construct these communities.

In speaking of early influences on her work, Weems singles out Walker Evans as a photographer she respects for having worked "with a great deal of compassion."[5] So, too, Weems' own work is suffused with compassion for the figures whose images she reuses. Here, this is perhaps most evident in "BLACK AND TANNED," the image depicting the whipped man.

However, instead of focusing on the abuse, the text directs us to think of more positive imagery, so that the violent whipping becomes "YOUR WHIPPED WIND OF CHANGE," moving toward Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday, two early Black American musical icons. In particular, Weems refers to Holiday's powerful "Strange Fruit," (1939), a song about the **lynching** of African-Americans. While not written by Holiday – the author was Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher and activist in the Bronx – her version of it remains the most well known.

The lyrics are mournful and moving – the "strange fruit" of the title are "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze," victims of lynchings left to rot where they are hung by violent mobs – and footage of Holiday singing the song shows her nearly overcome with emotion. The song, which she recorded on her own special label when her usual record label rejected it based on the lyrics, was a powerful element of the movement to stop lynching. It was emblematic of the shifts society was, and is, undergoing, those "winds of change" Weems inscribes across a beaten body. It is, in a sense, a precursor to the Black Lives Matter movement, and the many songs written in support of it.

The inclusion of the more recent photographs is an important element to the work, especially the use of *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980) by the prominent American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. This is the basis for Weems's ANYTHING BUT WHAT YOU WERE HA. The appropriation of Mapplethorpe's photograph serves to demonstrate that the problems being addressed in this series are not something from the distant past, not a nineteenth-century issue that we as a culture have moved beyond. Rather, this work suggests that Black Americans continue to be objectified through the medium of photography. In Mapplethorpe's image, we see an African-American man cropped from the mid-chest to the mid-thighs, clothed in a three-piece suit, but with his fly down and his penis hanging out and apparently partly erect. The cropping of the photograph draws our attention to the man's penis and emphasizes its size. This is the first image in Mapplethorpe's book *Black Males* (1982), the title of which points toward the same scientific and anthropological discourse emphasized earlier in Weems's series. Without a face, in a cheap suit, this man is reduced to a racially charged sexual stereotype, indeed perhaps intentionally and ironically used to emphasize such stereotypes. By including this work, Weems makes the whole series more relevant for contemporary audiences.

5. Eddie Chambers, "Carrie Mae Weems: Cafe Gallery Projects, London," *Art Monthly* (July/August 2005, Issue 288), 54.

The works in the following section of Comparisons and Connections – like Weems's series and the photographs on which it was based – construct communities from within and without, some with bigotry, some with compassion.

Comparisons and Connections II: Defining and Redefining Communities

Celebrating and Mocking Nations

This section considers works that define and redefine communities, both from within and from without. It will cover works by French, Chinese, Ndebele South African, and US artists, and includes works depicting or referring to large groups and small communities, communities defined by their homogeneity and by their diversity. We begin with Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830 CE, a work commemorating the July Revolution, a second French Revolution.



Eugène Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People, oil on canvas, 1830 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo: Dennis Jarvis, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Delacroix witnessed the fighting in the streets during this public uprising to overthrow the French **monarchy** – the kings and queens – in July of 1880. He writes:

> Three days amid gunfire and bullets, as there was fighting all around. A simple stroller like myself ran the same risk of stopping a bullet as the impromptu heroes who advanced on the enemy with pieces of iron fixed to broom handles.

Wishing to contribute to the Revolution, Delacroix took up his brush. He created an image designed to inspire anger at the monarchy and sympathy for the revolutionaries. In so doing, he created a new image of the French people, constructing a community that consists of the lower and middle classes, shown working together to fight the aristocracy.

The composition is triangular, with the bare-breasted personification of Liberty at its apex. Around her are a young boy, a well-dressed member of the **bourgeoisie** in a top hat, and workers in rough clothes, all participating in the armed struggle. The figure of Liberty rises above them, at once clearly **allegorical** and also seeming to be flesh-and-blood, her cheeks flushed, her foot firmly planted on the rubble beneath her as she raises the Tricolor, the French flag designed during the Revolution. In contrast with Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres's *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* (1806, discussed in the Power chapter), this image places the *people* of France, and the ideal toward which they strive, in the foreground, rather than a single ruler.

Delacroix's idealized image of the classes working together to fight oppression, guided by the principle of freedom, has come to be a symbol of the French Republic, and also has come, like the images of Che Guavere discussed in the Power chapter), to be a globally recognized image of the ideal of liberty and the promise of revolution. Yongbo Zhao, a Chinese expatriate painter who lives in Germany, chose it as the source for his parody, *We are the People* (2004, see here for an image on the artist's site, and here for a slightly larger image).

Yongbo spent several years studying "**Old Master**" paintings in Europe. Like Weems – who appropriates earlier photographs – Yongbo borrows images from well-known paintings. His painting style is rough and loose, with clearly visible brushstrokes and willful distortions. The basic composition of *We are the People* is similar to Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, with a bare-breasted figure at the apex of a compositional triangle. Indeed, they are so similar that a Google Lens search based on Yongbo's painting results in images of Delacroix's.

However, there are a number of crucial points of difference. Most obviously, the crowd around the female figure has been replaced with a flock of sheep. The French Tricolor – the three-colored flag – has been replaced with a red flag that recalls the flag of China, so we are able to read the flock of sheep here, and in other works by the artist, as the Yongbo's cynical representation of the Chinese people. His title is a direct evocation of community, referring to the opening of the US Constitution ("We the people …") – a document related to the French Revolution celebrated by Delacroix. However, when taken together with the sheep, Yongbo's title seems rather ironic. While the sheep surrounding Jesus in the mosaic of the Mausoleum of Galla Placida (discussed above) were to be taken as positive symbols of a unified Christian community under the care of Jesus, the notably male rams in *We are the People* are a chaotic mass of drooling, lascivious beasts.

There is a great deal of movement in the image, conveyed through the active brushstrokes as well as the apparent movement of the crowd. They stare up at the figure of Liberty with undisguised *human* lust, with their eyes fixed on her, their tongues lolling, and their hands reaching out as if to tear her scant clothes from her. Indeed, this is a much more sexualized image of the woman than in Delacroix's image; her right hip is revealed as her skirt seems in danger of coming completely undone. Instead of holding a rifle in her left hand, she holds her breast, which pours milk into a dish held by the ram standing in the place of the Delacroix's young boy. Throughout his paintings, Yongbo reveals the undercurrent of sexuality beneath the surface of European art, but here the emphasis seems to be less on lust than on the failure of ideals and the failure of revolutions, and the artist seems to place the blame not with the ideal, not with Liberty – who is ready and able to nourish the populace – but with the community, itself.

Yongbo lived through the Cultural Revolution in China (see the Power chapter), and attended art school in Maoist China, where he felt coerced to create art in support of the **Communist** government. When he emigrated to Europe,

though, he soon became disillusioned with the politics and society he found there. This is perhaps suggested by the use of the Brandenburg Gate in the background, a massive structure built as a monument to peace under the patronage King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, who supported the French monarchy during the Revolution celebrated by Delacroix. Yongbo's painting therefore can be seen as criticizing both Chinese and European communities in equal measure.

Preserving Communal Identities

From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was an official **apartheid** state, in which the Afrikaner minority – descendants of Dutch, French, and German colonists – enforced racial segregation and denied basic rights to the native South African majority. Aware of the forced resettlement in 1979 of the Ndebele – a South African tribe whose members were among the millions of Blacks South Africans removed from their homelands – photographers, including Photojournalist Margaret Courtney-Clarke, sought to document the tribe's tradition of painting that was in danger of disappearing. Indeed, in the years since, though apartheid has ended, there are fewer and fewer of the wonderful painted houses that have traditionally indicated Ndebele communities.



Ndebele Village, South Africa, 2000. Photo: Luca Bruno, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Ndebele women paint their houses as part of the custom of *wela*, during which young men gather for initiation rituals that mark their entrance into manhood. While the young men are away for three months, their mothers paint their own houses, and entertain visiting friends and family. The bold designs and rich colors are striking, and while there are some representational motifs that appear, they are generally minor elements within an overall pattern, rather than the focal point. Indeed, while some painters argue for the representational nature of the symbols, others maintain that they are merely patterns without meaning.

This image shows the outer wall of the *umuzi*, or compound. At the time it was photographed, the *umuzi* was shared by its painter, Franzina Ndimande, her husband, and their thirteen children. The image reveals the integration of traditional

styles and modern materials – the bold colors are commercial paints that provide a much wider spectrum than was available with natural materials.

Here, we see the outer wall, with its geometric, rectilinear designs that at times seem to suggest images – on the lower left and right of the entrance gate, for example, the forms seem to suggest schematic renderings of an *umuzi* and the houses it would contain. The dominant compositional element is symmetry, though this symmetry is somewhat loose, and enlivened by the color choices: while a form might be the same on either side of the entrance gate, for example, the colors filling the black outlines differ.



South African Tourism, Ndebele village, Mpumalanga, South Africa, 2015. Image: CC BY 2.0.

Ndebele women wear elaborately decorated garments and adornments that recall the designs on the houses. In this photo, for example, we see a woman standing in front of a painted house, wearing beaded neck hoops (called *isigholwani*) and a headdress in colors and patterns that are very similar to those on her home. According to one Ndebele painter, Ndimande, "Painting is in my heart. As long as I am able to paint, then I will carry on this tradition."[6]

Still, these painted houses and elaborate adornments were highly controversial and contested. Under apartheid, they were used by the South African government as evidence of the essential nature of racial difference, and therefore as a reason for enforced segregation. Instead, though, they might be seen as a wonderful and lively art form to be celebrated as one of the many traditions of South Africa. The Ndebele tradition of painted houses has now outlasted the apartheid system that attempted to pervert it by using it against the very people who practiced it. Instead, Ndebele painting now

6. Margaret Courtney-Clarke, *Ndebele: The Art of an African Tribe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, 2002), 32.

celebrates a community that survived almost a half-century of systematic oppression, and is now celebrated as part of a larger social fabric of South Africa.



Oil Lamp with Menorah, Roman Jerusalem, ca. 100 CE. Private collection. Image: Fonds Françoise Foliot, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Judaic Oil Lamp, 5th-6th Century CE, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Sometimes a community can be unified by an object, as is the case with these early medieval Judaic oil lamps. Because the Ten Commandments expressly forbids imagery, especially in a religious context, Jewish art does not usually contain figural images or literal representations. Instead, as we see in these lamps, decoration often features a series of images central to the Jewish community of the period.

One has lost its lid, but on the other, where the lid survives, we can see a small structure serving as a handle for the lid to be lifted to fill the lamp with oil. This little building represents the shrine for the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, which are the main source for ancient Jewish laws, customs, and stories. Behind the shrine is an image of the ***menorah***, a seven-branched candelabrum that is among the oldest of Jewish symbols. It is particularly appropriate on this oil lamp, since the seven-branched *menorah* – as opposed to the more commonly known nine-branched *menorah* used for the holiday of *Chanukah* – was used to light the Great Temple in Jerusalem. It stood for the light of God, and as a symbol of the Jewish community, which followed a biblical verse in seeking to be "a light unto the nations."[7] The form of the lamp therefore refers to its function.

Once the Great Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, and Jews were, in the years that followed, evicted from Jerusalem, the *menorah* came to be the main symbol of the lost Temple, which in turn was the main symbol of the Jewish community that, by the fifth century, was living in exile. Without a land or a nation, the Jewish community's identity become more fully associated with religion, and so this oil lamp is a conglomeration of images with specifically religious associations. To the right of the *menorah* is a *shofar* (ram's horn, trumpeted to announce *Rosh Hashanah*, the New Year celebration and a time of repentance), and to the left are the *lulav* (palm, myrtle and willow branches bundled together) and the *ethrog* (a citrus fruit), which together are waved in celebration on *Sukkot*, once a harvest festival and now more generally a festival of thanksgiving. As the *lulav* and *ethrog* are waved, prayers are chanted, such as the following:

> Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us concerning the waving of the lulav. Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustenance, and permitted us to reach this season.[8]

These small, humble lamps, ordinary elements of any temple's treasury, therefore bring together symbols not only of the Jewish god, and of **scripture**, but also of festivals and celebrations that bound the community together. These symbolic elements would be largely unclear to those from outside the community, and therefore all the more pointedly speak to those within it.

Stitching a Community Back Together

Faith Ringgold's art more directly contains images that create a sense of community out of disparate groups. Her *Crown Heights Children's Story Quilt* (1994, see here and here for images), for example, contains twelve panels depicting folktales taken from numerous traditions. Anansi the Spider, a wily trickster character from Jamaica, appears at the top-left. West African stories follow, and then the Dutch legend of Peg Leg Peter. Haitian, Native American, Italian,

7. Isaiah 42:6.

8. See https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/258827?lang=bi

Puerto Rican, Vietnamese, Korean, and Jewish folktales follow in sequence. These are the disparate and distinct ethnic communities pooled together in Crown Heights, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.

Crown Heights was the site of a famous riot in 1991, sparked when the son of Guyanese immigrants was accidentally hit and killed by a car that was part of the motorcade of a prominent **Hasidic** Jewish rabbi. This large quilt – 12 feet wide – was commissioned by a local public school in the wake of the heightened tensions between the ethnic communities living in close proximity in the neighborhood, and presents an encouraging model of diversity within unity.

Rather than the "melting pot" metaphor, in which all people are fused into a single "American" culture, it presents a "mosaic" culture, in which each culture retains its identity, while also serving as one part of a larger picture. The tension in the work – and in the neighborhood it depicts – is essentially one of variety and unity. The painted quilt contains a busy network of colors, patterns, and cultures, unified through a consistent visual style of simplified figures depicted with very active lines. The narratives are not necessarily clear to those unfamiliar with the stories, but their diverse origins are underscored by the five portrait-style images that appear at the four corners and the center. The center is given to a stand-in for the region's first occupants, in the form of a Native American figure in a feathered headdress, positioned between the Algonquin story of the Winged Head and the Mohawk story of Bright Morning Runs East, thought admittedly the figure in a war bonnet is more reminiscent of the Plains tribes than those of the North-East. The squares are divided by decorative panels that meet at right angles like the rectangular blocks of Crown Heights, so the whole quilt becomes something of a conceptual map of the neighborhood, celebrating both the individuality of its numerous ethnic communities and the beautiful patchwork they create together. As Ringgold says:

> Each culture has its own stories that help you learn about the people. And when you get all these people together, you benefit from their positive side. You benefit from the greatness of their cultures.[9]

Outsiders

Ringgold presents a model of patriotism rooted in celebration of diversity. Diane Arbus, on the other hand, celebrates diversity while calling into question the role of patriotism, by examining the processes by which we construct artificial communities. She manages a curious reversal in her photography: through her lens, "ordinary" American citizens, members of the larger community or communities, are presented as troubling, suspect, and even freakish, while circus freaks and other outsiders are presented as functional members of tight-knit communities. Two photographs by Arbus can serve to demonstrate this effect, *Patriotic Young Man with a Flag, N.Y.C.* (1967, see here for an image) and *A Jewish Giant at Home with his Family in the Bronx, N.Y.C.* (1970, see here for an image).

Patriotic Young Man with a Flag, N.Y.C. shows a young man photographed from slightly below his eye-level, so that we look up at him. He, though, looks further upward. The photograph is fairly dark, throughout, and his dark coat and hair, and the shadow behind him on the wall all contrast with the few bright points in the image. Through contrast, Arbus places emphasis on his button, the stars and stripes on his flag, his uneven teeth, and, above all else, his large, pale eyes. He looks up with an expression of great excitement, even a sort of ecstatic joy – reminiscent of the expressions on the rams in *We are the People* – but as Arbus captures the moment, he seems somewhat unstable, overly fervent.

Through the contrast of the few bright elements of the image with its overall darkness, Arbus implies a connection between his national pride, signaled by the button and flag, and his luminous eyes that, taken with his tight grin, make the man seem slightly unbalanced. Perhaps he is watching a political speech, or perhaps he is not really looking at anything at all. Arbus does not give us any context for him, beyond what he wears and holds, and the neutral and

9. The City of New York, "Faith Ringgold," *Percent for Art* (2012), cite now archived: https://web.archive.org/web/20151104102520/http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcla/html/panyc/ringgold.shtml

anonymous wall behind him. While this figure is likely part of a large community – patriotic Americans, or a particular political party, maybe attendees of a rally – he is presented as isolated. He might seem less troubled and troubling if Arbus had chosen to photograph him as part of a large, flag waving crowd.

In contrast, even the title of *A Jewish Giant at Home with his Family in the Bronx, N.Y.C.* stresses the communities to which the main subject belongs. He is Eddie Carmel, billed as "The World's Tallest Man, over 9 feet tall," by the Ringling Brothers Circus belongs (see here for an image of a circus poster).

The title tells us his religion, and also emphasizes that he is a member of a family. His "normal" parents stand beside him. Arbus might have sought, like many photographers of circus "giants," to stress Carmel's height by having him reach an arm out, clear over the heads of his parents (as in this circus advertisement. She might have requested that he stand straight, pulling himself up to his full and considerable height. She might have chosen to place him in a room with a lower ceiling, to put Carmel in the foreground and his parents in the background, or to place her camera closer to the floor. All of these decisions would have exaggerated his great height, but they are unnecessary.

Carmel is, though, clearly gigantic, without any emphasis needed. Instead, then, Arbus emphasizes the very ordinary nature of his home, which is no storybook room with massive iron furniture. Neither his Bronx home, with its upholstered furniture and striped curtains, nor his parents could be any more ordinary. Carmel was only able to find work that exploited his height, working in the circus and in B-movies like *The Brain that Wouldn't Die* (1962). Still, Arbus presents him in conversation with his parents, a hint of a smile on his lips, as his mother seems to look at him not only with amazement but also with concern.

There is a tension in Arbus' work between compassion and exploitation. Is it possible to present cultural outsiders like circus freaks and nudists to the general public without exploiting their images? It is what sets these communities apart – not isolated individuals, but members of communities, though outside of the mainstreams of culture – that Arbus most vigorously celebrates, writing that "nothing is ever alike. The best thing is the difference."[10] Still, when viewed together, her photographs of outsiders create a sense of continuity, even community.

CONCLUSION

The works in this chapter have celebrated, constructed, and condemned communities. They have used imagery to elevate and to demonize, to define themselves and bind their communities together, and to exclude and reject those outside these communities. They have sought to create or reinforce communities through ceremony (like the Kwakwaka'wakw masks), politics (like the paintings by Rivera, Delacroix, and Yongbo), religion (like the Eadui Psalter and the Judaic oil lamp), and race (like *Birth of a Nation*). Some of the artists have actively tackled issues of condemnation and rejection, as Weems does in her photographic appropriations, and Ndebele artists did in the face of apartheid and resettlement. Some of these communities are ancient, like that of the Jews, others modern or even fleeting, like those captured by Arbus. All of them, though, work to encourage viewers to locate *themselves*. When it comes to community, *you* are either *in* or *out*.

Spotlight Image III:

YOSHIKAZO, PICTURE OF FOREIGNERS' REVELRY AT THE GANKIRŌ IN THE MIYOZAKI QUARTER OF YOKOHAMA, PUBLISHED BY MARUYA JINPACHI, WOODBLOCK PRINT, EDO PERIOD, 1861

10. Diane Arbus, *Revelations* (New York: Random House, 2003), 57.



Utagawa Yoshikazu, Foreigners Enjoying Themselves in the Gankirō, ink and color on paper, ca. 1861 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How do actual and implied lines guide you through the work?
- How does the use of perspective affect the image?
- What techniques are used to differentiate between the western figures and the Japanese figures?
- How are various communities – professional, national, racial, gendered, and so on – suggested by the image?

Media Attributions

- Mungo Martin, Gwaxwiwe' Hamsiwe' (Mask of the Raven Man-Eater), red cedar, red cedar bark, paint, ca. 1940 (Seattle Art Museum, Seattle). Photo: Difference engine, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Hamat'sa displays in the Field Museum around 1910, from Franz Boas's 1897 book, based on photographs taken at the Chicago World's fair and in Ft. Rupert. Image: John Curran, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Edward S. Curtis, Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch, British Columbia, ca. 1900, from Curtis's The North American Indian (1907-1930). Image: Public Domain.
- Ka'bah (Distant View), al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 608 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Fraz Ismat, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Ka'bah, al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 608 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Amalia Fonk Utomo, CC BY 2.0.
- Hajr-e-Aswad, Ka'bah, al-Masjid al-Harām, ca. 605 (Mecca, Saudi Arabia). Photo: Genius M.Nasim, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Eadui Basan, Image of Saint Benedict, Eadui Psalter, London, British Library MS Arundel 155, f. 133, England, between 1012 and 1023 CE. Image: CC0 1.0.
- The Good Shepherd, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-

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- Detail of mosaic, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Sheep, Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, ca. fifth century (Ravenna, Italy). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Diego Rivera, Paisaje Zapatista, oil on canvas, 1915 (Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City). Photo: Candy Mar, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, fresco, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Eagle, Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Hidalgo, Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Zapatistas, Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Zapata, Diego Rivera, The History of Mexico, mural, 1929-30 (Palacio Nacional, Mexico City). Photo: Milan Tvrdy, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Eugène Delacroix, Liberty Leading the People, oil on canvas, 1830 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo: Dennis Jarvis, CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Ndebele Village, South Africa, 2000. Photo: Luca Bruno, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- South African Tourism, Ndebele village, Mpumalanga, South Africa, 2015. Image: CC BY 2.0.
- Oil Lamp with Menorah, Roman Jerusalem, ca. 100 CE. Private collection. Image: Fonds Françoise Foliot, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Judaic Oil Lamp, 5th-6th Century CE, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Utagawa Yoshikazu, Foreigners Enjoying Themselves in the Gankirō, ink and color on paper, ca. 1861 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

5. Power

How do artists work for and against power?

We all know that a painting of a flower is an artistic representation of nature, and that a depiction of the deity Shiva is a representation of religion. How, though, is *power* depicted in art, and, conversely, can an image represent a challenge to power? The focus of this chapter is the interpretation of images involving power and will feature works of art used by kings and emperors to establish, declare and maintain their power, as well as works created to protest such power – works used to fight against oppression and injustice. Because works of art that endure over time are necessarily made of expensive materials and require specialized skill, and because most works of art in the pre-modern world were created on **commission** (requiring wealthy **patrons**), most of the surviving art is that of the powerful, often flaunting their power in marble or gold. It is rare to find works of art that make strong protests against the powerful until relatively recent periods since the materials that are used would be of a less-enduring nature.

The first half of the chapter will examine art produced for the powerful. The second half of the chapter will look at art protesting power structures and hierarchies. While some of the works declaring the power of their patrons will be in the materials we might expect, like stone and bronze, others will be produced cheaply, in order to be more widely distributed. Some of the same visual elements used to convey power will be subverted to struggle against it. Many of these works were, at the time of their creation, controversial, and some remain so. The chapter considers works from the earliest historical period to the present, and from modern day Iran, Egypt, France, China, Korea, Nigeria, Cuba, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and the United States. These works of art all evoke strong emotional responses – positive and negative – and this demonstrates their own power, as well as those they represent and challenge.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

The Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, Lintong, China, 246–208 BCE



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Pit 1 Overview), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by Dan Lundberg, CC BY-SA 2.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How does scale work in the terracotta army?
- What are the dominant principles of composition?
- How does the use of naturalism affect the work?
- Look at the details of hairstyles, shoes, belt buckles and faces. How does the individualization of the soldiers affect your response to the work?

INTRODUCTION: The First Emperor China

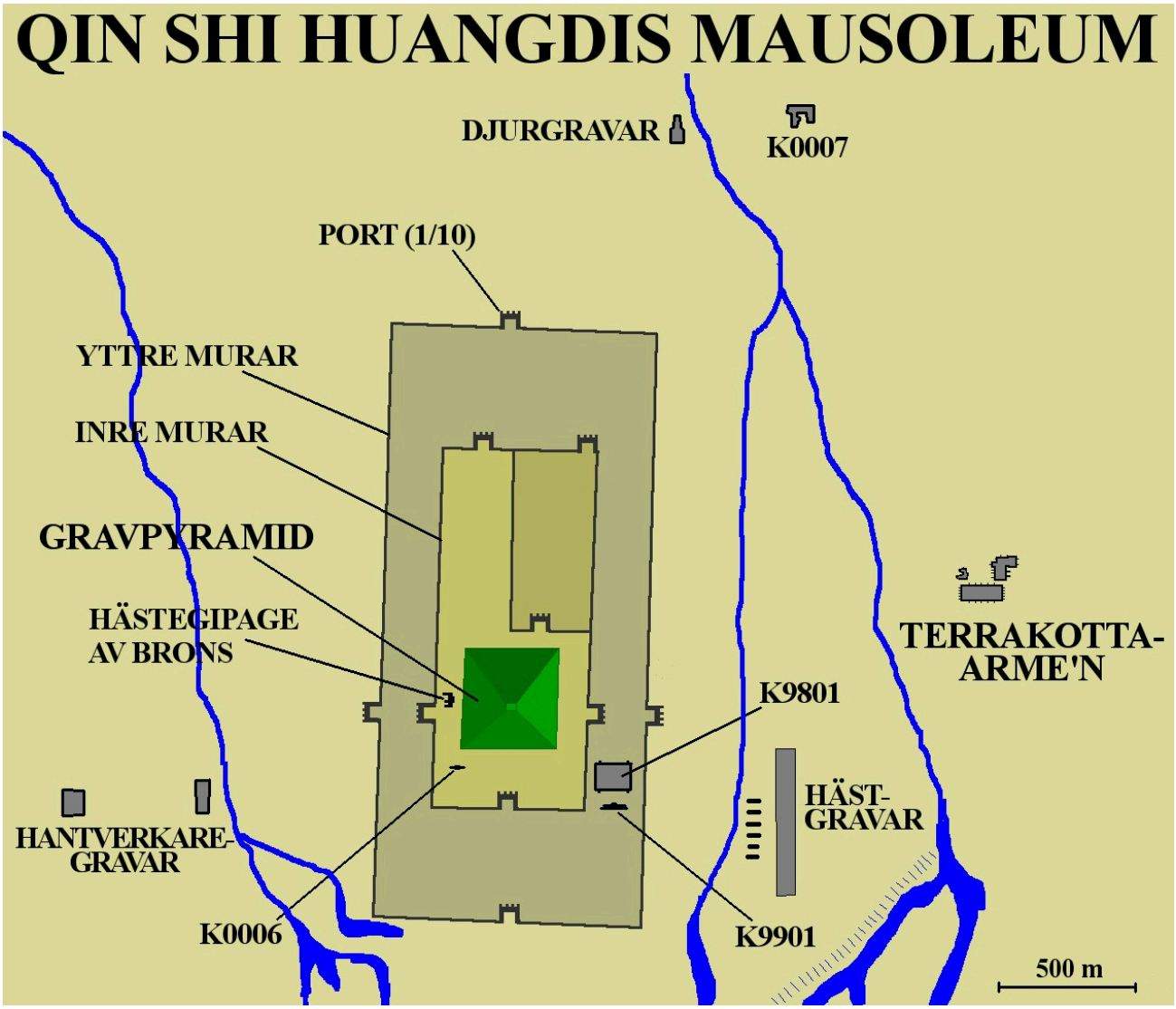
Qin Shi Huangdi was the first emperor of China. In 247 BCE, he became king of the Qin (pronounced "Chin") state at the age of thirteen, during a period of great conflict. Eventually he defeated the rulers of all the competing Chinese states, unifying China in 221 BCE and declaring himself Qin Shi Huangdi ("First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty"). As emperor, he was repressive, banning and burning **Confucian** books and executing the scholars who wrote and studied them. Not surprisingly, he was not universally adored – there were at least two attempts to assassinate him. He began the construction of his vast tomb as soon as he took the throne as king, and it took 38 years to finish, even with a reported 700,000 convicts laboring for the last 13 years of the construction. These great numbers are, themselves, displays of the tremendous power of the emperor, and the work clearly bears the imprint of their astounding labors.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: An Army Under the Ground



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Exterior), 246–208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by 申威隆, CC BY-SA 3.0.

From the outside, Qin Shi Huangdi's burial mound looks like a hill. When the tomb was complete, it was covered in grass and trees, so that it would appear like a natural part of the landscape. This explains how the huge tomb remained hidden until rural villagers digging a well in 1974 accidentally discovered it. It blended into its surroundings, looking like a foothill of the Li Mountains.



Plan of the Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huangdis. Image: Kigsz, CC BY-SA 3.0.

As the plan of the tomb complex shows, the tomb was part of a large burial site. The tomb itself was surrounded by a large number of other burials, including the three pits containing the terracotta warriors, but also a pit filled with the remains of exotic animals, and the graves of followers executed at the time of the burial.

So far, approximately 7,000 terracotta figures and 100 wooden chariots have been discovered in Pits 1, 2 and 3. When we look at the vast rows of the 6,000 soldiers of the army in Pit 1, the largest yet found, we get a view that was not available from the time that the tombs were sealed until the excavations of the 1970s. The figures were set into paved channels of earth, reinforced with wooden planks and then buried. They represent a very carefully planned program that would have been on view during the decades of construction of the burial, though afterward they were lost to view. This raises questions about audience: While reports of the soldiers were published once the tomb was sealed, they were likely not solely designed to impress the living.

As a whole, the layout and design of the army emphasizes pattern and repetition. The soldiers are all of very similar size – slightly larger than life-size – and are standing in repeated poses. They are arranged in consistent rows, which establishes a very regular pattern. It also creates a sense of unity, which is an ideal generally sought by real armies.

These soldiers are clearly, through their unified appearances, collectively working to express, enforce, and protect the power of the emperor, even as he lies in his grave. There is, though, variety throughout the army, enlivening the whole with small, humanizing differences in features and costume.



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Kneeling Archer), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by Slices of Light, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The soldiers are arranged in battle formation, with a vanguard of archers surrounding the bulk of the army. The hands of the archers are now empty, but they originally held wooden bows, of which some traces survive. These wooden bows, along with bronze weapons held by other soldiers, would have given the soldiers a more naturalistic appearance.

The scale of the project is hard to comprehend. This is not a token set of guards around the imperial tomb, but a complete army, from foot soldiers and cavalrymen to generals. To get a sense of these figures, we will look first at an archer from Pit 2. The archer, wearing a long robe and armor over his torso and shoulders, kneels on his right knee. He originally held a bronze crossbow, a weapon that shot heavier arrows faster and farther than bows. His armor is quite detailed. The immensity of the labor required to produce the thousands of figures is stressed by viewing the figure from the back, revealing the attention paid even to the soul of his shoe. It bears three different patterns in the tread, differentiating the heal, center and toe. The care taken over such a minor detail emphasizes the power of the patron, and the vastness of his wealth.

Still, while there is great attention to detail, which suggests the individuality of the figures, there are also techniques used to grant the whole composition its consistent and impressive unity. The most obvious method used to create a sense of unity is the depiction of the soldiers' armor: since they are an army, they are dressed in very consistent uniforms.



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Kneeling Archer's Shoe), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by Julian Mason, CC BY 2.0.

There are subtle techniques used to suggest that the figures are not actually individual portraits but slightly differentiated versions of a generalized, idealized soldier. The folds of the archer's clothing, for example, are stylized: we know that the heavy cuts into the surface of the terracotta represent folds in heavy cloth, but they do so in a generalized way, rather than seeming like each was carefully copied from reality.

The figure's face is also at once individualized and slightly abstracted. Its sense of individuality does not come from intense **verism**, from the rendering of every wrinkle and imperfection, but from the lively and alert expression. All of the features are smoothed out, made angular. Some of the figures bear bushy moustaches and beards or thick eyebrows, but this figure's features are all more minimally presented. The halves of his moustache are flat planes, and his eyebrows are smooth ridges. All of the artist's efforts here seem to be focused on his watchful state. The figure, like all of the thousands at the site, is idealized. The archer appears to be youthful and strong. His face is highly symmetrical, though this is

humanized by his off-center top-knot of hair. He, like all those around him, is an ideal soldier to serve in the emperor's imposing army.



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (War Chariot), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by tefl Search, CC BY 2.0.

Equally impressive are the great chariots, including the war chariot. These were found just outside the actual burial of Qin Shi Huangdi, which remains unexcavated at this time. Two bronze chariots were found, one considered a war chariot and the other a peace chariot. Both chariots were found in fragments but have been restored. They are about half life-size, and intricately designed. The war chariot contains gold and silver embellishments on the canopy pole and the horses' bridles, as well as other parts of their tack.



Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (War Chariot), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by Mary Harrsch, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The horses are depicted in much the same style as the terracotta figures, with a delicate balance between naturalism and stylization. Their heads and bodies are somewhat generalized, so that we do not see veins or tendons standing out beneath the hide, for example, and yet they are still quite lively. Their ears are perked up as if with attention, their heads tossing as they bite their bits. They were originally painted white, with red tongues, which would have granted them an even more lively appearance. The horses, like the soldiers, are each individualized, and yet clearly all part of a cohesive team. They are all of the same size, and wear similar gear, but they differ in subtleties of the nostrils and eyes, for example.

A crossbow hangs within easy reach of the driver, elaborately decorated with patterns. A quiver containing 54 bronze arrows of two different types – diamond-shaped and flat tipped – was found hanging from the inside of the chariot's rail. This intense level of detail and precision suggests that these arrows were not merely for decoration, but rather, were seen as being of potential use.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Warring in the Afterlife

The burial of Qin Shi Huangdi straddles the divide between the previous and present chapters, reflecting through

religious burial practices the worldly power of the emperor. In order to understand what the use might have been for all of these figures and their carefully produced armor and weapons, it is necessary to describe the context for their production. In ancient China, very elaborate burials were standard features of imperial court practice, and were copied by lesser members of the aristocracy, as well.

In the Shang Dynasty (ca. sixteenth-eleventh century BCE), rulers were buried with lavish possessions, as well as with their servants. Human sacrifices were common in the Shang Dynasty, and continued through successive periods. By the time that Qin Shi Huangdi commissioned his elaborate tomb, these practices were already ancient, and set the precedent for his ritual specialists to follow. Sima Qian's *Shiji* (*Historical Records*) provides an account of the tomb. Sima Qian is considered to be the first major historian of China, and his text was written in the second century BCE, during the Han Dynasty that succeeded the Qin. He tells us:

> The tomb vault was dug through three underground streams and the coffins were cast in copper. Palaces were built within the burial mound and the burial chamber itself was a rich repository full of precious and rare treasures. Artisans were commanded to contrive gadgets controlling hidden arrows so that if tomb robbers approached they would be bound to touch the gadgets and so trigger the arrows. On the floor of the vault mercury representing the rivers and seas was kept flowing by mechanical devices. The dome of the vault was decorated with the sun, moon and stars, and the ground depicted the nine regions and five mountains of China.... At the entombment the Second Emperor decreed that it was not fitting that the childless concubines of the First Emperor should be allowed to leave the imperial palace and should all be buried with the Emperor. Thus the number of those who died was very great.[1]

This account attests to the continued practice of human sacrifices, as well as the to great measures taken to secure the tomb against raiders seeking its riches. Indeed, like most imperial burials in China, Qin Shi Huangdi's burial chamber, itself, remains sealed, so this account of its vaults and surroundings has not yet been confirmed. However, there are heavy concentrations of mercury in the soil around it, which suggests at least some accuracy.

But why would an emperor wish to be buried with a terracotta army, with bronze chariots and teams of horses, and even with his concubines? In ancient China, death was seen not as the complete end to an individual but rather, a new stage in his life. Therefore, the army was intended not only to demonstrate the emperor's power in this life, but also to extend that same power into the world of the dead. Admittedly biased Confucian historians of later dynasties describe Qin Shi Huangdi as paranoid, though the two documented attempts on his life suggest that some fear would have been rational. Desiring to preserve his power eternally, he had the ideal army constructed, and placed to the east of his tomb – the direction of his enemies in life. This massive project should be seen in the context of Qin Shi Huangdi's other efforts, including the beginning of the Great Wall of China, built to keep out northern invaders in the world of the living. He gained unified control over China through military force, censorship of information and ideas, and defense against outside forces. Having accomplished this, he then worked to ensure that he would continue to hold such worldly power, even after his death.

Comparisons and Connections I: Rulers

The tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi uses repetition and unity to convey the sense that the emperor's power was nearly limitless. The rows and rows of larger-than-life soldiers were designed to protect him and to allow him to continue waging battles for dominance even in death. The use of slight variations within an otherwise repetitive composition gives the impression that he commanded vast numbers of men, all ideal warriors. Some scholars have noted among the

1. Zhang Wenli, *The Qin Terracotta Army: Treasures of Lintong* (London: Scala Books, 1996), 14-16.

divisions of soldiers facial types associated in the period with different regions of China, so the army even conveyed the geographical scope of the new empire. Still, for all of its impressive size, quality and richness of detail, it was hidden from view after his death, though accounts of it survived, like that quoted above.

God-Kings

From the earliest of history to the modern period, works of art and architecture have been designed to convey the power of rulers. While the following examples will often rely on a shared visual vocabulary to suggest power – including expensive materials, large size and **hieratic scale** – each example draws on its own culture for the most basic idea of what it means to be powerful, and each will express these ideas in its own fashion. In one culture, violence might be the hallmark of power, whereas in another support from the masses might be more important. The earliest written records to survive come from the **Ancient Near East**, a term used to refer to the region extending from Turkey in the east to Israel in the west, and centered on a series of civilizations that flourished in what are now Iran and Iraq from the fourth through the first millennium BCE.



Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, pink limestone, 2254-2218 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

One of the period's earliest empires was established by Naram-Sin, who inherited the throne of the **city-state** of Akkad in 2254 BCE and ruled until 2218 BCE. While the city of Akkad has not yet been found, archeologists believe it was in the area of Baghdad. Naram-Sin's grandfather Sargon I was purportedly the illegitimate son of a high priestess and sent down the Euphrates river in a basket (a common trope in ancient myth) before being rescued and raised by a gardener. He founded his own city and established dominance in the region through military success. Naram-Sin continued to seek power through force, extending Akkad's range of control and influence. In order to maintain this control, though, Naram-Sin had to frequently crush rebellions.

The Victory Stele of Naram-Sin commemorates his defeat of the Lullubi. The **stele** – an upright stone marker – makes a strong visual statement about the power of Naram-Sin. The composition is arranged in loose **registers**, angling up from the lower left to the upper right. The main figure is easy to spot, here: Naram-Sin is represented in **hieratic scale**, so that he towers over all the figures around him. He is also the highest figure on this large stele, which is over six and a half feet tall. He is also surrounded by more **negative space** than the other figures, who in contrast are crowded together in a jumble.

The space around the king is empty, so that he stands out clearly. This, though, merely draws our attention to him. His power is shown through his actions and the symbols on and around him. Just in front of him, a figure clutches a spear that Naram-Sin has thrust through his neck. The king carries other spears, a bow and arrows, and a battle-axe, as if a one-man army. Unlike Qin Shi Huangdi, who demonstrated his military power through images of his thousands of soldiers, Naram-Sin had himself presented as the most powerful member of his army, displaying a god-like ability to slaughter his enemies.

In addition to the dying figure bending backward before Naram-Sin, there are two more corpses splayed out in a heap beneath his left foot. Another falls vertically down the stele, breaking through the registers. Additional figures raise their hands to plead for their lives as they flee – note how the torso and face of figure in front of Naram-Sin is facing the conquering king, while his feet clearly point in the opposite direction. The massive and aggressive figure of Naram-Sin is capped with a horned helmet, an attribute that prior to this image was only depicted on gods and that therefore suggests that he has been **deified** – considered to be a god. Inscriptions tell us that he was known by the title "god of Akkad," and here the power of this mighty god-king seems infinite. As he ascends the mountain, he moves closer to the three suns (one now mostly lost) at the apex of the image. These are symbols of the gods of the Akkadians, guiding Naram-Sin to victory and suggesting his own divinity.



Great Pyramids of Giza, limestone, granite, basalt, brick, ca. 2575-2450 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo: by Darren, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Representations of power in the ancient world reached their peak with the art and architecture of the Egyptian kings, or pharaohs, particularly in the Great Pyramids of Giza (2575-2450 BCE). Built by the pharaohs Menkaure, Khafre, and Khufu, they remain the most **monumental** works of architecture in the world – no more massive buildings have ever been built. These are the only surviving works of the so-called Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, a group of marvels described in ancient Greece to acknowledge what were considered to be the most remarkable works of art and architecture know at the time, and their survival is due to their massive style of construction. As the focal points within a **necropolis**, or city of the dead, they dominate the landscape.

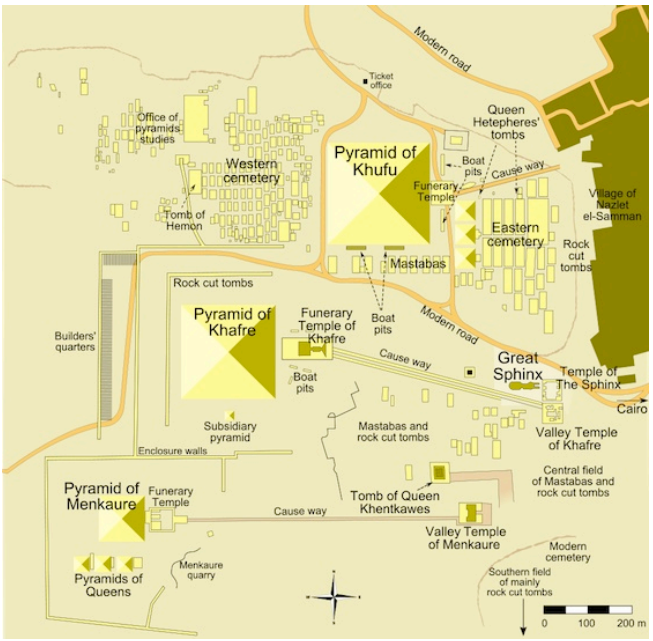


Great Pyramids of Giza (Detail of stones), limestone, granite, basalt, brick, ca. 2570–2450 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Jorge Láscar, CC BY 2.0.

The Pyramid of Khufu is the oldest and largest. It was originally nearly 500 feet tall at the apex, and the base is approximately 750 feet long on each side, covering thirteen acres. These numbers are so large that they are hard to grasp, but a detail photograph showing the size of the individual blocks helps convey the pyramid's remarkable size.

The size of the pyramids is not all that conveys the power of their patrons. The style also impacts this impression. They are not only large, and **radially symmetrical**, but also almost completely unadorned. Originally, the surfaces were covered with smooth blocks that would have given them perfectly straight sides, rather than the stepped sides they now have. They would therefore have presented the viewer with a structure so unified that each might even seem to be a single object on the grandest possible scale.

While Qin Shi Huangdi was also buried beneath a mound, his low hill was carefully concealed from view beneath grass and trees. In strong contrast, these works are literally human-made mountains rising over the flat planes of Giza, dominating the landscape and dwarfing all surrounding structures. As such, they were very clear statements of the power of the god-kings buried within them.



Plan of the Great Pyramids of Egypt. Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



The Great Sphinx of Giza, limestone, ca. 2500 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Barcex, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The pharaohs commissioned numerous images of themselves, many of which were created for the spaces inside and around the pyramids. Perhaps most well known of these is the Great Sphinx, guarding the entrance to the Pyramid of Khafre. It sits at the entrance to the long causeway that leads to a funerary temple and then to the pyramid. This figure, 65 feet tall and almost 190 feet in length, has the body of a lion but is capped by an image of the head of the pharaoh, wearing the royal cobra headdress. The Sphinx sits upright and alert, in formal symmetry. The figure was not assembled out of blocks, as the pyramids were, but rather, was carved out of "living rock" – stone still connected to the earth – though there are some additions to this.



The Great Sphinx (Detail of Face), limestone, ca. 2500 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Michael Lusk, CC BY-NC 2.0.

The image suggests the pharaoh's tremendous power, since it is not only colossal but also merges him with the most respected predator of Africa: the lion. The Sphinx has unusually large eyes, and this emphasis serves to suggest that this powerful creature is a most watchful guardian. Qin Shi Huangdi entrusted his protection in the afterlife to his vigilant soldiers. Khafre, on the other hand, seems to guard himself.

Markers of Authority

Large, watchful eyes can be found in thousands of images of gods and rulers, giving the viewer the sense that these absent individuals are nonetheless scrutinizing us. The portrait style common in the art of the Benin kingdom of the eighteenth century is highly abstract, with features of importance enlarged for emphasis. In this way, scale is manipulated to draw the viewer's attention to key elements, like the eyes. Here, we see a rattle staff, called an *ukhurhe*, made for a powerful *oba*, or king (see also Altar Group, Oba Ewuake in Visual Analysis 2: The Principles of Composition).

Oba Akenzua I ruled Benin in the early eighteenth century. The *oba*'s staff is capped with an image of himself, holding a simpler *ukhurhe*. This staff was probably used as a public political statement of power, unlike more traditional *ukhurhe*, which were carved in wood. Akenzua's great, wide-set eyes would have been directed both at his ancestors – the source of his power and authority – and at his subjects.



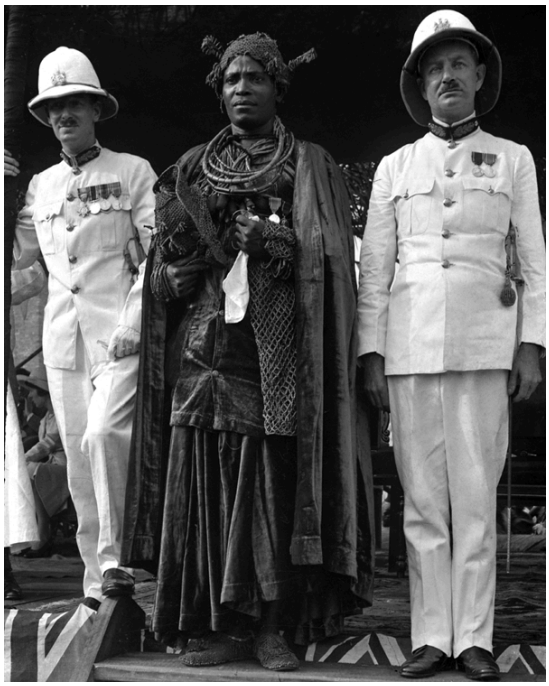
Rattle Staff: Oba Akenzua I Standing on an Elephant (Ukhurhe) [Detail of Top], bronze, copper, iron, ca. 1725-1750 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



Rattle Staff: Oba Akenzua I Standing on an Elephant (Ukhurhe), bronze, copper, iron, ca. 1725-1750 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

The staff, over five feet tall, has a hollow segment near the top, with narrow slits along its length, which rattles when shaken during prayers. This example is brass, which means it was a high-status item. As with Qin Shi Huangdi's burial, there is a balance in this work between worldly and spiritual power. The *oba* is shown dressed for a ceremony in elaborate royal garb, much of which would be made of valuable materials. As shown on the image on the *ukhurhe*, his headdress, the rings around his neck, and the panels on his chest would be made of coral and his armbands would be of ivory. This costly costume would declare to the viewer that the figure is no ordinary man. In a photograph of his descendant, Akenzua II (ruled 1933-1978), we can see an *oba* in a similar costume, giving a sense of how Akenzua II would have appeared in life.

The figure's importance is declared by his placement at the top of this luxury item, and his symmetry gives him a stable, solid, dignified appearance. His enlarged eyes declare his watchful nature. While the image of Akenzua I, itself, is small – only about six inches in height – hieratic scale is used to demonstrate his importance: he stands on the back of an elephant, an animal associated with rulership, and is more than twice its height. The elephant's trunk ends in a human hand. This may be a reference to Iyase n'Ode, believed to be able to transform into an elephant, who led a rebellion against Akenzua. Placing Akenzua atop the elephant makes a strong statement about Iyase n'Ode's defeat and the oba's triumph. The elephant is also hemmed in on both sides by leopards, symbols of the *oba*'s power. The elaborate nature of the depiction of the *oba* is the result of the centrality of the king to the art of Benin. The *oba* was both the main subject of the art, and also its most important patron. This forceful depiction of Akenzua's power is fitting, as he was the ruler of a kingdom that had ruled the region since the fifteenth century. In this case, therefore, the **iconography** – the series of signs and symbols in the art of a culture – works with the principles of compositional to create a strong statement of the *oba*'s authority.



Oba Akenzua II with Earl of Plymouth and Sir John Macpherson, Governor-General of Nigeria, 1935. Photo: Public Domain.



Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne, oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.

We again confront the direct gaze of the ruler when we stand before Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres's large oil painting of *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* (1806). This is a work that tries very hard to capture some of the majesty of earlier images of rulers through composition, technique and symbolism. The recently crowned emperor is shown centered in a highly symmetrical composition, seated on a **gilded** throne that frames his head like a halo, suggesting his divinity. The semi-circle of the white ermine fur cape draped over his shoulders visually completes the semi-circle of the back of the throne. The circles are carefully aligned to seem to be continuations of one another, thereby doubly framing Napoleon's head.



Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne (Detail of Staff), oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.

Napoleon's clothing and accessories could not be more sumptuous: fur, velvet in red – the color that has symbolized imperial power since Ancient Rome – and gold. The staff he holds in his right hand is topped with an image of Charlemagne, the revered medieval French king who was the first to be crowned emperor of the **Holy Roman Empire**. This great predecessor (Charlemagne is French for "Charles the Great") is posed quite similarly to Napoleon, suggesting a strong connection between these two French rulers, each of whom was the first in his era to be declared emperor.

Like the image of Akenzua on his *ukhurhe*, holding an *ukhurhe*, here the small image of Charlemagne atop Napoleon's staff also holds in his right hand a staff, this one capped with the *fleur-de-lis*, the symbol of the French monarchy. The staff in Napoleon's left hand was believed at the time to have belonged to Charlemagne, and the sword he bears is that of his precursor, as well.

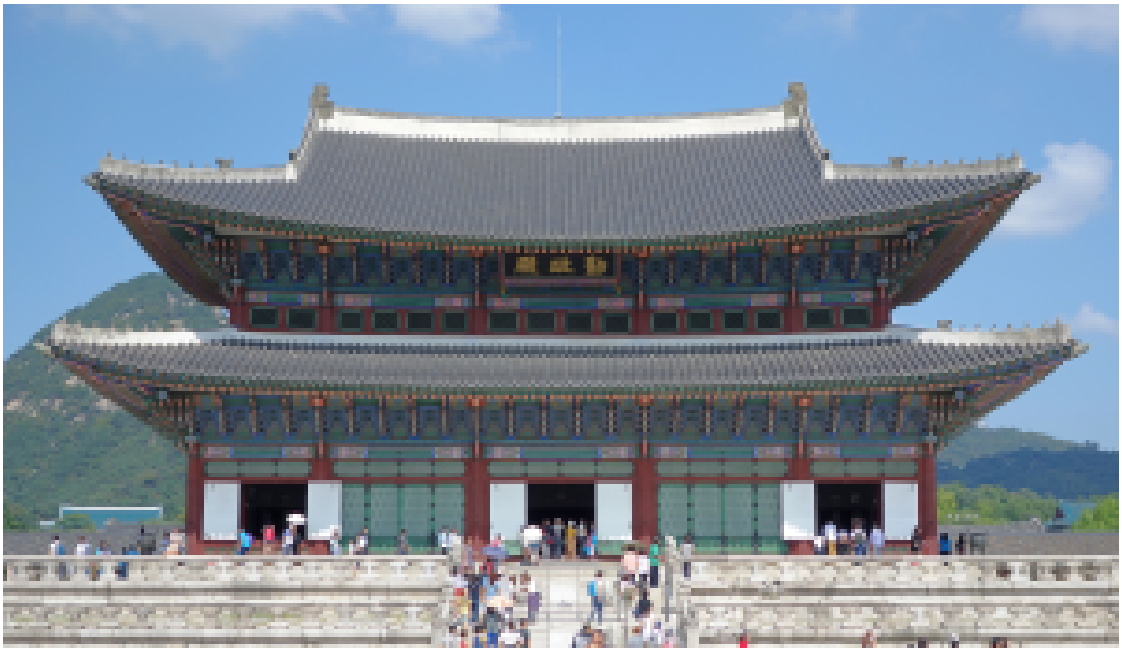
As Qin Shi Huangdi used ancient burial practices to connect himself to the tradition of his ancestors, Napoleon used these medieval treasures to connect himself with the past of France. He also bears the golden laurel wreath crown of the Roman emperors, and the arms of his golden throne contain the image of the Roman eagle. Ingres paints all of these elements with extreme precision, so that we can see each gem and jewel, and with such attention to the texture of the materials that is seems almost as if we can feel them beneath our fingers as we look at the image. This lavish portrait was an attempt by Napoleon to demonstrate his great power, and also to argue that, although he had created a new empire, he was continuing the tradition of Charlemagne, and of the great Roman emperors of **Antiquity**.



Gyeongbokgung Palace (Throne Room), 1395 (Seoul, South Korea). Photo by schizoform, CC BY 2.0.

In the portrait of Napoleon, we see a representation of a fairly lavish throne, but it pales in comparison to the actual Throne Room of Gyeongbokgung Palace in Seoul, South Korea. This was the primary palace of the Joseon Dynasty, originally completed in 1395 CE, but burned down in 1592 during the Japanese invasion of Korea, and largely rebuilt in the mid-nineteenth century.

Unlike roughly contemporary cities in China and Japan, Korean cities and palace compounds were not traditionally organized symmetrically organized. Instead, they followed natural features in an effort to achieve ***pungsu (feng shui)***. This makes the layout of the building and throne, itself, all the more striking. Geunjeongjeon Hall ("Hall of Diligent Rule") is a large, rigidly symmetrical structure, based on Chinese models, with two tiers of roofs that curve gently upward at the corners. It is set at the top of a platform with three tiers, requiring that the visitor climb more than a dozen steps before entering the hall.



Geunjeongjeon Hall, 1395 (Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul). Photo by Spike, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The building contains a single cavernous room, centered on the throne, which sits again atop a platform, elevating the king within this already-elevated palace. Behind the throne are wooden screens, and then a painted backdrop with five mountains, the sun, and the moon, all exclusive symbols of the king. A canopy with images of two dragons hangs over the throne, also symbols of the king. This image faces the inside of the throne chamber, and is therefore only visible to the king, himself, while he is seated on his throne. The king, seated on a throne on a platform, in a palace on a platform, would appear superior to all those beneath him.

Ironically, the Joseon Dynasty, following neo-Confucian ideas (based on the Confucian writings banned and burned by Qin Shi Huangdi), believed that the king's power and authority came from his fairness, and so, compared to other royal palaces of the region, Gyeongbokgung is relatively simple. Still, it is clear that despite rhetoric about equality, the king was no ordinary citizen. Like Napoleon on his throne, Khafre in his pyramid and as the giant sphinx, Naram-Sin atop his mountain, and Qin Shi Huangdi in his tomb, the Joseon king relied on art and architecture to convey his great power and to elevate him, quite literally, above his people.

It is important to note that the use of art to convey the power of rulers is not an ancient phenomenon. It continues in the modern world, though often on a more modest scale than in Ancient Egypt and China. For a more recent example, we turn to a statue of Saddam Hussein, former dictator of Iraq, which once stood in Firdos Square, Baghdad.



Photograph of Toppling of Statue of Saddam Hussein, 2003 (Firdos Square, Baghdad). Photo: Public Domain.

This statue was one of thousands of images of Hussein, and was produced as many of the images in this chapter were, at the orders of a powerful patron. It was a monumental bronze sculpture, set on a tall pedestal. Hussein appeared in a business suit, with a hand raised as if he were greeting a large crowd of supporters. This image became famous throughout the world just a month after the United States led invasion of Iraq began, and serves as a reminder that symbols of power can be used against those they are created to glorify. On April 9, 2003, a battalion of US marines secured central Baghdad and arrived in Firdos Square, in front of the Palestine Hotel, where over two hundred reporters were staying. The presence of so many reporters meant that, as the marines assisted a group of Iraqis in toppling the statue, the event was broadcast live throughout the world.



Photograph of Toppling of Statue of Saddam Hussein with U.S. Flag, 2003 (Firdos Square, Baghdad). Photo by Gerard Van der Leun, CC

BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The statue was created under Hussein, to celebrate and declare his power, but in the aftermath of the invasion, its toppling became a more complicated symbol of his fall from power. According to the most detailed account available, a US marine instigated the small crowd of Iraqis, and provided them a sledgehammer and rope. When it was clear this was not sufficient to pull down the statue, the marines sought and received authorization to use a large tow truck to topple it. While a corporal was hooking up a chain to the statue's head, he was handed a US flag, which the wind then whipped across the face of the image of Hussein. He spread it more fully across the face and, seconds later, took it down.

This brief moment was photographed, filmed, and broadcast, becoming a central image of the invasion. Had the Iraqis pulled down the statue without help of the truck, images would have appeared to show a spontaneous act by a joyously liberated populace, though this would have been false. Had the statue been toppled without the flag, the images would appear to show cooperation between the Iraqi people and the US military. The ultimate image, though it was not really staged as such, looked like a deliberate statement by a conquering occupier. In this way, a work of propaganda for a powerful, autocratic ruler became a symbol of his defeat at the hands of an invading military.

Propaganda



Long Live Chairman Mao, the Reddest Sun in Our Hearts, 1967 (*Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, Toronto*). *Photo by Thomas Fisher*, CC BY 2.0.

The final image in this section is a propaganda poster from China entitled *Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts*, produced by the Lu Xun Art College Artists in 1967. In 1966, the Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong began the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The movement was intended to address growing class inequality. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, one of its founders' goals was to decrease the economic divide between the rich and poor, but in the following decades, as Mao saw it, the government had moved away from this principle.

In this image, we see Chairman Mao rising out of the center of the red sun, smiling and radiant. Beneath him is an army of loyal supporters. These figures stand in for the 20 million youths who joined the Red Guard in order to route out "class enemies." They hold aloft copies of Mao's *Little Red Book*, which contains a list of sayings to encourage the masses to fight against class oppression. For example:

In class society, everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class.

It is up to us to organize the people. As for the reactionaries in China, it is up to us to organize the people to overthrow them. Everything reactionary is the same; if you do not hit it, it will not

> fall. This is also like sweeping the floor; as a rule, where the broom does not reach, the dust will not vanish of itself.[2]

The poster relies on broad use of a number of visual elements and principles of composition. Like most propaganda, it is not intended to be subtle; it is supposed to make a clear and dramatic point. The placement of Mao, centered at the top of the image, declares his importance, which is reinforced by the seemingly infinite crowd beneath him. Like the soldiers of Qin Shi Huangdi, they are nearly identical in dress, conveying their common purpose, but are slightly differentiated to give a sense of the individuality of the volunteers, united behind Mao.

The horizon line is located behind the figures, approximately at the eye-level of the young women in the front row. This effectively places the viewer *within* the crowd, as if we are marching along with them. It also has the effect, as the figures recede into the distance, of dissolving the crowd into a sea of hands, all holding up the *Little Red Book* toward the giant image of Mao. The red books and the red flags behind them seem as if they are being formed out of the rays that emanate from the red sun behind Mao. Like a sun god, Mao shines his message down onto his followers, who receive it with great joy. If any ambiguity were left, the large red characters at the base of the image read, "Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts."

The **woodcut** technique used here – in which a series of blocks is carved out to create the image, covered with ink, and then pressed to the page – has become since the 1960s a staple of political imagery. Is it an inexpensive way of producing a large number of images. Unlike the impressive and expensive works discussed above, this poster achieved its effect through large-scale distribution. The high contrast and large, flat panels of color common in woodcuts make this technique well suited to carrying clear messages to the masses. The following section will consider works that resist the sorts of power dynamics presented by the works discusses so far, many of which rely on similar visual techniques, but were created by artists working to achieve a greater measure of equality. Mao is an interesting figure with which to make the transition, since he was both a revolutionary leader of a populist movement and, later, an autocratic and repressive ruler. In this image, he is shown fighting against entrenched powers, but also as a clear source of power, himself. In the next spotlight image, we will see the works of an artist who relies on some of the same techniques to challenge not only particular rulers and policies, but also they very strategies through which they visually convey them.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

Barbara Kruger, Rage + Women = Power, cover for Ms. Magazine, January/February 1992
See here for an image.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What techniques does Kruger use to create emphasis?
- How do words and images interact in these works?
- How do the color choices affect the images?
- How does contrast affect the images?

2. Mao Zedong, *Little Red Book*, 1964, available at: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch02.htm

INTRODUCTION: From Graphic Design to Art

Barbara Kruger, who studied briefly in the fine arts program at Parsons School of Design, began her professional career in graphic design. She was the chief designer for the fashion magazine *Mademoiselle* in the 1960s, and cites this experience as central to her career as an artist. As she writes, "I learned to deal with an economy of image and text which beckoned and fixed the spectator."[3] Indeed, her work strikes out with a sharpness and clarity that is perhaps more often seen in advertising than in art. Kruger was also deeply influenced by the feminist movement that began in the 1970s, and much of her art responds to it and furthers its message. While issues of gender inequality are central to her work, though, she also uses the tools feminism developed to discuss other imbalances of power.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Powerful Words, Powerful Images

This Spotlight will consider four related works by Barbara Kruger, all of which rely on the same visual language to convey related messages about power. While not formally part of a series, they are all part of Kruger's overarching project of highlighting inequalities in society and the methods used by the powerful to maintain them. These images all contain grainy, high contrast black and white images with bold slogan-like texts placed across them. Her cover for Ms. magazine from 1992 recalls the poster of Chairman Mao in its use of pattern and repetition to create a sense that a mass of people are united behind a common cause, and in the use of bold text to tell the viewer what this cause is. Whereas Mao's poster informs the reader that "Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts," Kruger's image tells us that "**RAGE + WOMEN = POWER**." The text is highlighted through the use of bright red as a background, and through use of large, capitalized, italicized letters in the Futura Bold Oblique font, a very clear, clean, no-frills font appropriate to her pithy statements. There is nothing subtle about this equation, but that is the point. Like those to be discussed below, it speaks boldly and directly to the viewer.

Kruger's **juxtaposition** of text and image creates interesting contrasts. Kruger does not identify the source of her images, but the figures here seem to be girls dressed in gym uniforms and bearing hoops for hoop-rolling. They are therefore presented as obedient, wearing what they are told to, and gathered together in large numbers merely to engage in a trivial and lighthearted activity. Kruger's text, though, implies that such groups, animated by their frustration with subjugation, could bring about change. Stepping back, these figures might well be (or might grow up to become) feminists marching in support of women's rights. They are, like Qin Shi Huangdi's army, nearly identical figures, all dressed in matching white shirts and black shorts and carrying objects. However, unlike the emperor's soldiers, the text here suggests that these women should be fighting for *themselves*. Since this is a cover for a magazine directed at female readers, the work is not a threat, as it might seem to be in another context, but rather, a bold encouragement for women to rise up to achieve more power. The back cover, also designed by Kruger, shows a series of what appear to be doll's eyeballs on a wire rack, and reads in white on red, "WE WILL NOT LONGER BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD."

These issues are also central to Kruger's work that reads "*Your comfort is my silence*," though this work uses a very different approach to achieve a related message (see here for an image). Here, size is important. Unlike the small magazine cover, this is a large work, five feet tall, which makes it a much more confrontational image than it might otherwise be. The nearly faceless man is shadowed by his fedora, a hat associated with gangsters and cops in ***film noir***, and has his eyes blocked out with text, recalling the black bars used by tabloids in half-hearted attempts to conceal the identity of the subjects of photographs.

The figure, much larger than life, becomes ominous as he looms up before us, out of the darkness, his finger to his

3. Kate Linker, *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 14.

lips in a gesture directed at the viewer. Who is Kruger referring to with her pronouns, here? "*Your*" suggests both the shady figure in the photograph *and* the viewer, particularly the male viewer. It is perhaps then Kruger's silence, and by association, the silence of women in the face of oppression, that is the necessary condition for the comfort of those in power. These are confrontational works that, through their juxtaposition of text and image and use of pronouns, seek to elicit strong responses from viewers.

These themes appear in what is perhaps her most well known work, "*Your body is a battleground*," a poster designed to advertise a march on Washington on April 9, 1989 in support, as the poster reads, of "Legal Abortion/Birth Control/and Women's Rights" (see here for an image). This image presents a close-up photograph of a woman's face in frontal view, divided down the exact center, with half of the image printed as a **positive** and the other half as a **negative**. The grainy quality of the image and the use of high contrast creates the sense that this is not an original photograph, but rather, an image of an image of an image, as if reduced in quality by being photocopied multiple times. This makes for a more stark and striking image, and also suggests that the image is standard and pervasive, as if standing in for any number of media images of women like those that appear in advertisements in fashion magazines.

The text is again in bold white lettering, now alternating between back and red backgrounds. Again, the text seems to directly address the viewer: "*Your body*" is at issue, here. This, coupled with the woman's very direct gaze, implicates us, involves us in the issues of the march, reminding the viewer that it is *her* body that would be affected by the Supreme Court ruling on Roe vs. Wade, the landmark decision legalizing abortion in the United States (and overturned in June 2022 in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization).

The centered text and the image, precisely divided by the line separating the positive and negative sides of the image, aggressively seek the attention of the viewer. There is, though, a possible ambiguity in the image. "Your" might refer not to the viewer but to the woman in the image. The highly polarized issue of abortion rights divides the public into "Pro-Choice" and "Pro-Life" camps. The use of terms like "you" and "your," "me" and "mine," throughout Kruger's work constantly suggests power dynamics between the viewer and the image.

The sorts of dynamics emphasized in Kruger's works are at play throughout the history of art, as was the case with the terracotta army, sphinx, and staff discussed above, for example. However, Kruger brings these issues to the surface of her images, so that the power dynamics are not merely at work in her art, but the primary focus of it. The final work considered in this Spotlight features a woman's profile, with text that reads, "*Your gaze hits the side of my face*" (see here for an image). Again, Kruger relies on high contrast black and white imagery and text that generates a relationship with the viewer. The text alternates between black on white and white on black, working like the positive and negative halves of "*Your body is a battleground.*" On the present image, she might have written "*His gaze hits the side of her face*," or perhaps, "A *man*'s *gaze hits the side of a woman*'s *face*," but neither of these would have quite the power of her phrasing, since they do not speak directly to the spectator.

Still, as with the previous image, there are multiple ways to read the work. Which words do we emphasize in reading the image? "*Your* gaze hits the side of my face"? "Your gaze *hits*"? Or perhaps "*side*"? Does the image focus on the fact that a **gaze** – a term used in feminist literature underpinning Kruger's work to mean "a sexually charged, empowered stare of a man at a woman" – can be, in and of itself, an act of violence? Or on the fact that it is the viewer doing the gazing? Or, on the other hand, if we read the stress on "*side*," is her point perhaps that the so-called empowered male gaze merely glances ineffectually off the side of the figure's face?

Returning to the image of the woman, we can see that it is not actually a photograph of a woman. It is a photograph of a plaster sculpture of a woman's head, which emerges from a hard-edged square block. This is not a soft or fragile image of an imperiled woman, but a stony, impassive image, staring straight ahead of herself as if we, and our gaze, mean nothing to her.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: "Global Etiquettes of Power"

Feminism is a contentious subject, largely because it is often misconstrued in American media culture. Rebecca West

(the pen name of Cicely Isabel Fairfield), prominent author and critic, succinctly defined feminism as "the radical idea that women are people," a slogan that has remained at the center of the movement.[4] Kruger's art grew out of a group of feminist authors and artists who argue that **gender** – the way that people act out their physical sex, as opposed to their biological state – is not a natural condition. Instead, they maintain, gender was the result of cultural and political forces. One might well be born *female*, but it is society that dictates what is feminine.

Much of Kruger's art pushes back against our culture's received ideas about what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine. Her poster for the March on Washington, for example, highlights the ways that the female body is contested, fought over by political parties and social movements. While Roe v. Wade, which established the legality of abortion in the United Stated, was decided by the Supreme Court in 1973, it remained controversial from that point until 2022, when Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization overturned the previous ruling. This, though, did not end the controversy. Indeed, the debate about abortion rights is as active as ever, and remains a central point of political campaigns.

In her "*Your body is a battleground*" poster, Kruger tries to convince the (female) viewer that this is not a distant or abstract political or legal issue, but a personal, physical issue. "*Your*" body is the "battleground," a metaphor that implies violence as well as conflict. This poster was in response to Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, a Supreme Court case in 1989 that, following the course of a few previous decisions, decreased federal and state funding for abortion services. The poster is an attempt to make these legal cases, generally difficult for the general public to follow, relevant and important to the viewer.

Kruger's cover for *Ms. Magazine* is a strong feminist statement about the potential of women to enact change. She is resisting popular, media-supported images of women as docile and passive. Such images form the ironic backgrounds for many of her works, like the hoop rollers in her *Ms. Magazine* cover, but here she presents a more powerful image. While the left side of the image might be from an advertisement for lipstick, the right side of the image, with its blazing white eye, suggests perhaps the rage Kruger calls for in the cover, simmering beneath the placid surface of the model's face.

Kruger's work, though, is not strictly limited to feminism or to debates about gender. Instead, her work explores what one critic has called "the global etiquettes of power," that is, the subtle, seemingly polite and quiet ways that cultures enforce hierarchies.[5] Kruger might focus on images of tanks and bombs, of murders and rapes (and such imagery does appear, though infrequently, in her work), but instead she returns again and again to media images that are such common and normal parts of our world that we barely notice them when we see them on billboards, in magazine ads, on television.

"Your comfort is my silence," for example, might well be seen as referring to issues of gender, but it does not do so explicitly. We could therefore read into it any number of concerns about the powerful and about the silence of the powerless. We could interpret it as being about the rich and the poor, about corporations and exploited workers, about the military-industrial complex (the "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry," as coined and defined by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his farewell address in 1961[6]) and the general populace. On the other hand, the work could be about a power imbalance between any two individuals in a relationship. The work might address vast issues, national or global in scope, or personal, private issues between two people. The main target is the method, rather than the content, of the oppression.

The following section will contain a range of images that examine, explore, and challenge power dynamics. Some will speak with a visual vocabulary as direct and forceful as Kruger's, while others will raise these issues through subtler

4. Steven Schroeder, *Between Freedom and Necessity: An Essay on the Place of Value* (Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 2021), 67.

5. Kate Linker, *Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 18.

6. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The Farewell Address," *Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum website* (no date): https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/farewell-address.

means. Many will be linked in a lineage of protest imagery centered on the iconic image of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, often considered to be the most widely reproduced photograph in the world. The images will, like those of Kruger, challenge specific ideologies but will also work to reveal the ways that works of art produced for the powerful try to convince us to accept their messages.

Comparisons and Connections II: Art of Revolution

Che, a Global Icon



Alberto Korda, Guerillero Heroico (Detail of Ché Guevara), 1960. Photo by cheewai.lai, CC BY NC-ND 2.0.

Perhaps the most well-known image of resistance and revolution is the ubiquitous, stylized **silkscreened** portrait of Argentinian doctor-turned-revolutionary Che Guevara, but before turning to this image, we will look at the photograph on which it was based. This image, through several formal visual elements, turns the figure of Guevara from an individual into an icon.

The photograph was shot while Guevara was working in Cuba with Fidel Castro to establish a communist regime to

replace the government of the dictator they had overthrown. The photograph was taken from slightly below the level of Guevara's eyes, so that he seems to rise above us. The subject gazes off into the distance with a smoldering intensity, emphasized by our position beneath him, and his upturned eyes seem to suggest that he is steadfastly facing the challenges ahead.

The photograph is printed in high contrast, so that the background behind Guevara is almost pure white, and his revolutionary's beret, with its gold star at the center (indicating his position as Commandante, second in command only to Castro), and his hair, beard and collar combine to form a nearly black oval frame around his face. Because of the high contrast, most of his face is nearly white, but the whites of his eyes shine yet more brightly.

The photographer was Alberto "Korda" Díaz Gutiérrez, a Cuban photojournalist and friend of Castro who worked to document the revolution. This image, titled *Guerrillero Heroico [Heroic Guerrilla] (Version I)* (1960), is perhaps his most enduring. It was taken during a speech by Castro commemorating the victims of a sunken ship – believed by Castro to have been blown up by the American CIA – that had been attempting to transport French arms to the revolutionaries. Guevara appeared on the stage for a few seconds, just enough time for Korda to take two photographs.



Alberto Korda, Guerillero Heroico, 1960. Photo: Public Domain.

This highly popular photograph, circulated around the world, is actually a **cropped** version of a larger image. Looking at the uncropped version allows us to see how the cropping enhances the image. By removing the distracting profile of the man to the left and the busy fronds of the plant to the right, Korda isolates his subject against the blank backdrop of the sky. The image of Guevara also therefore takes up the majority of the image. This contributes to the tone of the image not as a photojournalistic record of a particular moment in time and space, but instead as an icon – a timeless image of an individual or, indeed, a movement, belief, or philosophy. The image does not seem merely to show us Guevara on that day in May of 1960, but rather, seems to embody his fury and the spirit of revolution.

The photograph itself, though, is not as widely known and reproduced as a silkscreened print based on it. Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick published the print and distributed it freely and widely, just after Guevara's death in 1968. This sort of mass distribution has also been central to Kruger's art, as well as images of Mao's Cultural Revolution. While the original photograph is in high contrast, the silkscreened image is in stark black-and-white or, as in the version reproduced here, black-and-white-and-red (using the same palette of colors as Kruger), with the exception of the bright yellow of the star on Guevara's beret. Unlike the photograph, the print contains no shades of grey. As a result, it appears yet more iconic, presenting Guevara as the very essence of Revolution, not only of the Cuban Revolution, but of all revolutions and revolutionary impulses. Now, the image – highly commodified in ways that would have disturbed the socialist Guevara – has come to stand in for any sort of rebellion against any authority. Its visual elements allowed it to become an icon, first detached from the single moment when the original photograph was shot and then from the entire context of the Cuban revolution, as it is rendered more abstract and therefore more universal through the silkscreened image.



Jim Fitzpatrick, Che Guevara, 1968 (The Little Museum of Dublin, Dublin). Photo by Donguijote, CC BY-SA 4.0.

A Giant Phenomenon

The American artist Shepard Fairey has more recently exaggerated this phenomenon. He gained prominence in the street art community through his *Obey Giant* sticker campaign (and then gained more wide acclaim after the publication of his popular "Hope" poster of then presidential candidate Barack Obama). In 1989, Fairey began to make stickers bearing images of World Wrestling Federation star André René Roussimoff, better known as André the Giant, juxtaposed with cryptic text.



Shepard Fairey, Obey Giant, 2009 (Boston, Massachusetts). Photo by Steve Garfield, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

While Guevara and Korda were fighting to violently overthrow specific capitalist governments, Fairey more playfully critiques capitalist consumerism and the desires of those who strive to achieve social acceptance through buying the "right" things. As he writes, "From the beginning, Obey Giant opened my eyes to many facets of capitalism and consumer-trend psychology." He is amused by those who would say, "I want a sticker because my rebellious friends have it," and who thereby – like those who would buy a t-shirt of Fitpatrick's image of Guevara without any understanding of the Cuban revolution – "reflect the complex irony of conforming to an image of rebellion to gain acceptance."[7]

Fairey's silkscreen print, like that produced by Fitzpatrick, is black and white, but the text style clearly borrows from Kruger, with its bold, italicized capital letters in white on red. In all of these cases, the artists are working to create images that will have strong, immediate impacts on the viewer, and they rely on very high contrast and bold, rich reds. The **stylized** close-up of André the Giant's face is aggressive and slightly threatening. The cropping works very well here: since the image is cropped very closely around the figure's face, the "giant" seems larger, as if he cannot be contained by the frame around him. This effect works well on large posters but also on the small stickers that can be found pasted on lampposts and buildings throughout the world by Fairey and his fans.

When taken with the large, glowering face of the Giant, the text reading "OBEY" becomes a command. But who or what, exactly, are we supposed to obey? Like Kruger's aggressive texts, this command engages us directly, demanding our interaction. However, Fairey does not tell us the point. His work is more ambiguous, and therefore able to attack a broader range of economic, social, and political ideologies. Indeed, the target of his *Obey Giant* campaign is more about

7. Shepard Fairey, "Introduction," in *Obey Supply & Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, Shepard Fairey, et al (Berkeley: Ginko Press, 2006), 1.

the method than the message. It is an advertising campaign without a product, a social campaign without a cause, a political campaign without a candidate. Through the intentionally absurd pairing of one face and one word, repeated again and again on images that range from 3 inch stickers to billboards, the images sum up the collective message of all advertising: "Obey!"



Shepard Fairey's Gigante sticker among other stickers on a lamp post. Photo: Caffeinatrix, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Fairey directly engages the Fitzpatrick's iconic image of Guevara with his *Gigante* print. As Fairey writes:

> The Che Guevara photo, taken by Alberto Korda in 1960, is probably the most clichéd image of rebellion worldwide. I stole it not so much to endorse what Che was about or what he did, but to demonstrate that symbols become easy to manipulate after they have a life beyond their real history. I see lots of kids with Che t-shirts who probably know nothing about him besides his rebel status.[8]

Fairey borrowed the red background, the pose, hair, beard and clothes, but altered the face – in place of Guevara's passionate features, he gives us the heavier face of André the Giant. The replacement is meaningless, in that while Guevara stood for a cause, the image of the wrestler stands for nothing. Fairey is instead using it to comment on the methods by which causes are advocated. The image is also full of insider references to Fairey's work, so that those familiar with his previous *Obey Giant* images can feel that they are insiders. "Gigante" is Spanish for "giant." The small text below André's face, "viva la posse," refers to Fairey's earliest Giant images, which read, "Andre the Giant has a posse," and the star on his hat – originally a reference to Guevara's high military rank – bears another image of the Giant, yet more stylized, which has become the logo of Fairey's business. The image self-consciously references itself and the willfully absurd image campaign, as a whole. Just as this image is not "about" anything, it argues that the too-often reproduced and commodified image of Guevara is also, at this point, emptied of its original meaning.

Art Against Power

While Fairey has been arrested over a dozen times for distributing his works – "street art" to Fairey and his fans, "vandalism" to law enforcement agencies – the risks he has taken pale in comparison to those of artists working within authoritarian countries or protesting violent regimes. There are many dramatic examples of artists protesting the powerful and thereby placing themselves in danger. John Heartfield used **photomontages** – collages made out of photographs, in this case usually from popular newspapers and magazines, like the images used by Kruger – to protest the Nazi party before and during World War II. His anti-Nazi images, often published in magazines, let to his persecution by the Gestapo – the German secret police – and in 1933, he escaped capture by climbing out of his window while the police were at his door. He fled to Czechoslovakia and then to England, and continued to publish his anti-Nazi photomontages. As Kruger once used *Ms. magazine* to distribute her work, Heartfield frequently used the journal *AIZ*. In addition to his official publications, Heartfield also created anti-Nazi postcards, which he then mailed to Nazi officials.

One troubling, prophetic image, published in *AIZ* before the German death camps began operation, shows a large hand using a knife to spread a man onto a piece of bread (see here of image). The headline at the top reads, "Goebbles Recipe Against the Food Shortage in Germany," and the caption at the bottom reads, "What? Your meals are lacking lard and butter? You can eat your Jews!" The satirical headline refers to Joseph Goebbels, one of Adolph Hitler's most zealous followers, head of the Nazi propaganda efforts, and one of the chief architects of the so-called "Final Solution," the systematic execution of Jews, Rroma (Gypsies), and others who fell outside of Hitler's vision of a "pure race."

Heartfield's captions turn what might be an amusing and absurd image into a disturbing one. Through the tools of photomontage, he combines two photographs to create one new, striking composite. The vast differences in scale create much of the interest in the image. The photograph of the man, looking disheveled and alarmed, is on a dramatically smaller scale than that of the hand holding the knife. This gives the impression that the conflict is highly asymmetrical, with one side vastly more powerful than the other. With this work, and a great many more, Heartfield tried to reveal the racism and violence behind the Nazi rhetoric of nationalism.

8. Shepard Fairey, "Introduction," in *Obey Supply & Demand: The Art of Shepard Fairey*, Shepard Fairey, et al (Berkeley: Ginko Press, 2006), 95.

More recently, several Chinese artists have gained prominence by challenging the authoritarian Communist Party, though the government frequently works to censor artists that officials consider too critical. Studios have been leveled and artists have been arrested and beaten, so the production of these works, even when they seem lighthearted or amusing, requires great courage. The Gao Brothers (Zhen and Qiang), for example, return over an over to images of Chairman Mao, generally off-limits for any form of criticism. As a result, they have had exhibitions closed by the police and have had to hold underground exhibitions. Their *Mao's Guilt* (2010, for images see here, here, and here) stands in sharp contrast to *Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts*.

The Gao Brothers' sculpture, cast in bronze and slightly over life size, has the feel of a monumental image celebrating the glory of a ruler. However, they present Mao as he never appeared in public, nor in official images: on his knees, his hand raised to his chest. The smiling, radiant face of Mao in the poster is replaced with a face drawn in on itself, wracked with sorrow and regret. The naturalism of the image is the standard for public monuments of leaders, but the usual sense of grandeur and triumph is replaced with a personal tone, as if we have caught the leader of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in a private moment of remorse. This sculpture is quite controversial, and the head is removable so that, officially, it is an anonymous and therefore safe work to exhibit. The head, kept in a secret location, is only placed atop the body on occasion. Still, there must be some sense of impish joy for the brothers, each time they decapitate the image of Mao, whose policies have been estimated to be responsible for the deaths of as many as 40,000,000 people.

The Gao Brothers' *Execution of Christ* (2010, for images see here and here), at times displayed with Mao's Guilt, is similar in style and subject, but achieves its impact through slightly different imagery and references. The brothers rely here on the figure of Jesus, stripped of all clothing but a swath of fabric around his waist, to stand in for the Chinese populace, for the millions persecuted and executed under Mao's rule. In the Gao Brothers' viewpoint, and as suggested by the poster of Mao as the sun, the Chairman worked to set himself up as a god, to replace other religions with himself. The surreal image of six identical Maos shooting Jesus presents Mao as hostile to religion, to the defenseless, and perhaps also to the West. In Gao Zhen's words:

> When Chairman Mao stood at Tiananmen and proclaimed the Founding of the People's Republic of China, when he proclaimed that China had stood up, it was really he who stood up while the people bowed down. It was him saying *Mao Zhudu Wan Sui* (long live Chairman Mao).[9]

In *Execution of Christ*, the seventh figure, standing behind the rest, depicts Mao as a sad old man, with the waist of his pants too high, stooped with a sense of defeat; he holds a massive rifle that looks too large for him. Like the figure in *Mao's Guilt*, this figure seems to be caught in a moment of introspection and regret, though this does nothing to halt to violence occurring beside him. While the figures are bronze, the bayonets of the rifles are shining steel, a reminder that the violence was (and is) quite real. The repetition of the figures of Mao recalls the terracotta warriors of Qin Shi Huangdi. This resonance is supported by the high level of detail in the figures, and the real weapons (the bayonets) in their hands. However, while the terracotta warriors supporting the emperor are each individualized, and in the propaganda poster of Mao the differentiated masses rise to support their leader, in *Execution of Christ*, each soldier is merely Mao, again and again. He, the image seems to suggest, is supporting himself, first and foremost. The image also seems to place the blame for the violence of the Cultural Revolution squarely on Mao's shoulders.

9. Interview with Frank Marx, "Tea with the Gao Brothers: The Gao Brothers reflect on the 60th Anniversary of the PRC and the gentrification of the Factory 798 Art District," *Modern Art Asia*, 2 (February 2010) <http://modernartasia.com/>.



Édouard Manet, The Execution of Emperor Maximilian (1868–1869). Oil on canvas, 252 × 305 cm. Kunsthalle Mannheim. Photo: The Yorck Project, Public Domain

Execution of Christ references other works of art created to protest acts of state-sponsored violence. It borrows the composition of Edouard Manet's *Execution of Maximilian* (1867), in turn based on the famous *Third of May, 1808 (The Shootings at Mount Principio Outside Madrid)* (1814) by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes.



Francisco Goya, The Third of May 1808 in Madrid or "The Executions," oil on canvas, 1814 (Museo del Prado, Madrid). Photo by KCC246F, CC BY-ND 2.0.

Goya's work has been deeply influential, providing the inspiration of many works of protesting the violence used by governments to establish and maintain their power, and so it will be the final work discussed here. This work is essentially a **history painting** documenting an atrocity. Goya lived under the Spanish monarchy in the nineteenth century. He was one of a group of liberal intellectuals who looked to France, with its growing Enlightenment philosophy, as a beacon of hope for their future. French Emperor Napoleon (discussed above) conquered Spain and placed his brother on the throne. Liberal intellectuals like Goya were delighted, believing that this would begin an era of liberal thought, of more openness and greater freedom, but the result was instead a repressive government.

On the third of May, 1808, a rumor spread among the populous that the French were going to execute the deposed Spanish royal family. Though these were the very same rulers that had oppressed them, the populace of Madrid rose up in the streets in their defense. In return, the French army herded hundreds of people into the church shown in the background of Goya's painting, and then in the predawn hours of the third of May, executed them one by one by firing squad. This was doubly tragic for Goya, who was horrified to see both sides of this equation – the Spanish rising up to defend their former oppressors, and the French turning out to be just as oppressive.

To the right, the soldiers are depicted all in a line, their backs to us, faceless and similarly posed, so that they seem to be a single unit, a group of automatons rather than individuals. This mechanical uniformity is enhanced by the Gao Brothers, who make the soldiers perfectly identical figures. In Goya's painting, the focal point is the man in white. He is emphasized primarily through line and contrast. The sharp, aggressive lines formed by the soldiers' rifles drive us toward him. He is also strikingly lit by the rectangular lantern on the ground in front of the soldiers, but he almost appears to be glowing from within. His arms are out-stretched, so that he is transformed from a victim into a martyr – a person killed for beliefs. Goya intends us to associate the figure with images of Christ, hung on the cross. Unlike the soldiers, he has a face; he is an individual. We see depicted in Goya's emotional brush strokes, in his very lose and **painterly** technique, the swelling emotion in the figure, the desperation in his eyes. The viewer cannot help but identify with him instead of

with the faceless automatons committing this atrocity. The Gao Brothers again are more literal: rather than a Christ-like figure, they depict Christ, himself.

What are we to make of this image of the execution of Christ by seven cloned Maos? It would at first seem like a straightforward critique of Mao and the violence he utilized to gain and maintain power, but the juxtaposition of the image of Christ, who seems (like the overall composition) to have been borrowed from a European painting, is incongruous. Finally, the transformation of Goya's composition from painting to sculpture allows the viewer to become part of the scene in a more complete way. We can walk around it, viewing the frozen scene from the perspective of any of the figures. Goya's work is very straightforward (if quite manipulative) in its imagery, while the Gao Brothers' work contains a greater degree of ambiguity.

CONCLUSION

The works of art presented here strive to empower rulers, but also to challenge rulers, groups, and corporations. Some work to challenge the very means by which they assert, advertise and enforce their power. Artists on both sides – those employed by the powerful and those who are their critics – rely on both high-status materials like cast metals, and on wide distribution through non-traditional, popular channels. Mao used woodblock print posters, but so too, Kruger used *Ms. Magazine*, Heartfield used *AIZ*, Fitzpatrick used screen-printed posters, and Fairey uses posters and stickers. These mass distributions are, as in an arms race, an effort to keep pace with the volume of advertising and propaganda distributed by and for the authorities these artists challenge. Others, like Goya and the Gao Brothers, borrow the durable materials and monumental scale typical of official imagery to parody and problematize it. Perhaps the most complex of these images are those that have been used to support both sides of conflicts. Mao was a popular hero before becoming a repressive autocrat. Guevara was a revolutionary outsider before working as a political insider. Their iconic images have outlived the individuals and their causes, but continue to be used in contests of power – substantial and minor – throughout the world.

Spotlight Image III:

Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of Louis* XIV, France, 1701 CE



Hyacinthe Rigaud, Portrait of Louis XIV, oil on canvas, 1701 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by FDRMRZUSA, Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What does the king's pose convey?
- How do the items around the king – his crown, scepters, sword, throne, and so on – contribute to the display of power?

- How does the horizon line impact our relation to the image of the king?
- What do the materials and the illusion of their textures add to the image?

Media Attributions

- Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Pit 1 Overview), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by Dan Lundberg, CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (Exterior), 246-208 B.C.E. (Xi'an, China). Photo by 申威隆, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Plan of the Mausoleum of Qin Shi Huangdis. Image: Kigsz, CC BY-SA 3.0.
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- Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, pink limestone, 2254-2218 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Great Pyramids of Giza, limestone, granite, basalt, brick, ca. 2575-2450 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo: by Darren, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Great Pyramids of Giza (Detail of stones), limestone, granite, basalt, brick, ca. 2570-2450 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Jorge Láscar, CC BY 2.0.
- Plan of the Great Pyramids of Egypt. Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- The Great Sphinx of Giza, limestone, ca. 2500 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Barcex, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- The Great Sphinx (Detail of Face), limestone, ca. 2500 B.C.E. (Giza, Egypt). Photo by Michael Lusk, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Rattle Staff: Oba Akenzua I Standing on an Elephant (Ukhurhe), bronze, copper, iron, ca. 1725-1750 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Rattle Staff: Oba Akenzua I Standing on an Elephant (Ukhurhe) [Detail of Top], bronze, copper, iron, ca. 1725-1750 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Oba Akenzua II with Earl of Plymouth and Sir John Macpherson, Governor-General of Nigeria, 1935. Photo: Public Domain.,_Governor-General_of_Nigeria
- Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne, oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.
- Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne (Detail of Staff), oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.
- Gyeongbokgung Palace (Throne Room), 1395 (Seoul, South Korea). Photo by schizoform, CC BY 2.0.
- Geunjeongjeon Hall, 1395 (Gyeongbokgung Palace, Seoul). Photo by Spike, CC BY-SA 4.0.
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- Photograph of Toppling of Statue of Saddam Hussein with U.S. Flag, 2003 (Firdos Square, Baghdad). Photo by Gerard Van der Leun, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Long Live Chairman Mao, the Reddest Sun in Our Hearts, 1967 (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, Toronto). Photo by Thomas Fisher, CC BY 2.0.
- Alberto Korda, Guerillero Heroico (Detail of Ché Guevara), 1960. Photo by cheewai.lai, CC BY NC-ND 2.0.
- Alberto Korda, Guerillero Heroico, 1960. Photo: Public Domain.
- Jim Fitzpatrick, Che Guevara, 1968 (The Little Museum of Dublin, Dublin). Photo by Donguijote, CC BY-SA 4.0.

- Shepard Fairey, Obey Giant, 2009 (Boston, Massachusetts). Photo by Steve Garfield, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Shepard Fairey's Gigante sticker among other stickers on a lamp post. Photo: Caffeinatrix, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Édouard Manet, The Execution of Emperor Maximilian (1868–1869). Oil on canvas, 252 × 305 cm. Kunsthalle Mannheim. Photo: The Yorck Project, Public Domain
- Francisco Goya, The Third of May 1808 in Madrid or "The Executions", oil on canvas, 1814 (Museo del Prado, Madrid). Photo by KCC246F, CC BY-ND 2.0.
- Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louis XIV, oil on canvas, 1701 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by FDRMRZUSA, Public Domain.(by_Hyacinthe_Rigaud)_-_Louvre_Museum

6. Religion

Introduction

For much of the history of the world, religion has been a dominant theme in the visual arts. This is the result of factors ranging from personal to societal to economic. Individuals wishing to earn the favors of a deity might commission a statue of the god, or even of themselves praying to that god. Others might carve or paint images of their gods themselves as acts of devotion. Whole villages, cities, and countries, or their rulers, might commission works to declare their allegiance to a god. Large-scale temples and churches often require **patronage** of this sort. Indeed, works that survive from ancient civilizations are usually made of the most durable materials like stone and precious metals, which are also the most costly. Over the course of centuries and millennia, the majority of more modest artifacts are lost, which influences our understanding of their periods.

This chapter examines a range of spectacular works created to express religious beliefs, please gods, and influence human affairs through supernatural forces. They convey but a small sample of the thousands of religions that have existed, starting with one of the oldest known paintings in the world and including works from Greece, Japan, England, China, Papua New Guinea, France, Afghanistan and on, ranging from 32,000 years ago up to the twentieth century.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

Cave Painting, Grotto Chauvet, France, ca. 30,000 BCE

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What **compositional devices** are used, and what effects do they create?
- What techniques are used to give the figures bulk and weight?
- How is **line** used?
- How is **scale** used?

VISUAL ELEMENTS



Chauvet Cave (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

The "Panel of the Horses," as this group of **prehistoric** wall paintings is called, is a massive group of animals, with woolly rhinoceroses, large felines, horses, bison, reindeer, aurochs (an extinct giant ox), and even possibly a mammoth. Most of the figures seem to charge from right to left across the wall for nearly 7m (21ft). They have a tumultuous energy that is most concentrated toward the left edge of the composition. This is achieved through **density** – the figures are much closer together, and there is much less blank space around them. They overlap and blend into one another.

From a distance, the composition looks like a massive herd stampeding across a landscape. On a closer look, though, the **unity** of the composition breaks down, largely through the use of **scale**. Figures that are drawn and painted right next to or on top of one another are at times drastically different in scale.



Chauvet Cave (Detail of horses). (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

In the detail of horses above, the set of four horses at the center are all roughly the same size. The way that they overlap has been interpreted by some as an effort to create **perspective**, so that the animals seem to recede into the distance in illusionistic space. The use of **shading** on the heads, which gives a sense that they are three-dimensional, does suggest that the artist(s) did want to create some illusion of **space**. However, the horse that appears closest to us is the smallest, which counters this illusion; the furthest away ought appear smallest.



Chauvet Cave (possible wooly mammoth). (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

In contrast to the four horses, which are close enough in size to seem like a cohesive unit, the leftmost edge has three aurochs with their heads pointing at a relatively tiny pair of woolly rhinoceroses. Similarly, below the lowest of the aurochs is a small figure, just roughed in, that may represent a woolly mammoth, facing to the left with its trunk hanging down. All throughout the composition, figures overlap in sharply contrasting scales, suggesting that there is no attempt to create a unified composition depicting a continuous illusion of space.

If the animals are not all in the same space, then it is unlikely that they are all moving together. Instead, it seems that there are a number of separate images and events, loosely connected. Each, though, might be taken in a number of ways. The horse heads, for example, might be in an overlapping sequence to show depth through perspective. They might just as well show a single horse in a range of poses, so that each represents the same horse at different times, as it tosses its head. Or maybe the front-most image presents a pony, in which case, this could be the same horse at four different times in its life. It is also possible that they are only connected conceptually, and that we are not to read any particular movement through time or space as we look from one head to the next. Indeed, they could be four independent images having nothing in particular to do with one another beyond location and subject matter. With prehistoric art, we can rarely be certain, since their creators did not have a written language to tell us what the artists intended or what the original audience thought.



Chauvet Cave (Detail of Rhinoceros), (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

Below the horse heads, we see a pair of woolly rhinos facing one another. Again, we might read this any number of ways. The **shapes** of the **contour lines** that define the forms suggest that they are charging toward one another. The rhino on the right has very small hindquarters. The form then swells dramatically as we move toward the forequarters, so that it seems to concentrate all of its bulk and energy into its lowered head. In a similar way, the rhino on the left is abbreviated to the rear – the hind legs are not even drawn in – and the form swells to a great hump over the lowered head, again conveying a sense of the figure driving forward. They therefore seem to meet with a powerful crash.

However, it has been observed that modern rhinos in the wild rub their horns together in gestures of friendly greeting, which might well be what is going on here. Finally, though, as with the rhinos positioned in front of the aurochs heads, it is possible that these two animals are not placed together to create a unified scene. Their overlapping may not indicate any direct spatial relationship, since seems likely that many of the overlaps throughout the wall do not.

In our visual analysis, we must bear in mind the setting for this wall of images. It is located some 150m (450ft) into the cave, *in total darkness*. It is next to a large block of stone that has the skull of a cave bear (an extinct species larger than the grizzly) atop it, and other cave bear skulls are on the floor around it. As prehistoric anthropologist and art historian Christine Desdemaines-Hugon writes:

> Lit by the wavering flames of tallow lamps, torches, or small fires, all the animals would spring to life, appearing to move, sway, expand to larger proportions, or momentarily disappear.[1]



Chauvet Cave (Bear Skull), (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Prehistoric art is, in a way, the ideal form of art for an art appreciation textbook. With works from the **historical era** – that is, works made by literate cultures – we have a wealth of **contextual** information: names, dates, key events, religious texts, poetry, royal genealogies, and so on. But for *prehistoric* art, the main evidence we have to consider is *visual*. Certainly, we can learn a lot based on the location of the works, archeological evidence about their makers, and other contextual evidence, but the main source for information about a prehistoric work remains the work itself.

Our species, *Homo sapiens* (Latin for "wise man"), evolved approximately 400,000 years ago, and our subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens* ("wise, wise man"!), evolved in Africa, possibly as early as 120,000 years ago, spreading from there to eventually occupy all the continents of the earth. The Chauvet Cave paintings are **Paleolithic** (from the Greek words for "old stone"). The period ran from approximately 2.6 million years ago (when the earliest stone tools were developed by

1. Christine Desdemaines-Hugon, *Stepping-Stones: A Journey through the Ice Age Caves of the Dordogne* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 17.

our evolutionary ancestors) until about 10,000 years ago, ending along with the last ice age and accompanied by the development of agriculture in the **Neolithic** ("new stone") period.

The paintings in Chauvet Cave are among the oldest known, from 32,000 years ago, and yet it is striking how readily modern viewers respond to them. The **naturalism** and close observation of animals is startling, especially as it is commonly assumed that art had to slowly progress from a "primitive" state toward naturalistic representations. Quite to the contrary, here at the *very beginning* of the artistic record, we find carefully observed animals, depicted with a sense of depth and movement.



Chauvet Cave (Detail of Rhinoceros), (Ardèdeche, France). Photo by Claude Valette, CC BY-ND 2.0.

We also, though, find striking **abstraction**, as in the simplified form of another rhino, seemingly drawn in a single contour line that defines the whole animal, and with just a few small additions of dots or lines to add the tail, eye, perhaps an ear, and some shading or nostrils below the large, elegant horn. In addition, there is the curious grey belt around the rhino's swaying belly, which does not seem to be quite representational. With great economy, the artist gives a sense of the creature and, contrary to common belief, this abstraction may present a greater conceptual challenge to artists than naturalism.

What does this cave have to do with religion? In assessing any work of art, we should always ask "What was this made *for*?" The people who created such works did not live in the caves they decorated, where were very humid, stifling places, absolutely dark and without ventilation for fires. The caves, then, must have served a function other than shelter. They could not really be seen as prehistoric art galleries, as the works are highly inaccessible and, because of the darkness, almost impossible to see.

If these paintings were not there to be seen, what *were* they for? Anthropologists suggest that they were probably used for any number of activities that we might now call "religion": **Shamanism**, **animistic** worship, **totemic** practices, or other forms of worship and ritual about which we know little. The images are mostly of animals that were not used for food, so they are probably not tied to hunting magic, but might instead be connected with fertility or power.

The great abundance of animals here and in other Paleolithic caves may suggest – or be intended to magically invoke – a fertile world that provides for the tribe so that these early humans can reproduce, as well. Some caves bear traces of ritual uses – evidence of music, suggestions of altars or offerings – that also points toward a belief in the supernatural. It is unlikely that these Paleolithic people had highly formalized religious traditions, but they almost certainly did have beliefs in supernatural powers or entities, and developed practices – including the creation of visual images – designed to access and influence them.

Because they did not write down their beliefs and intents, we cannot be certain. But the very existence of these works, produced by hunter-gatherer societies struggling for their basic survival, speaks volumes. These are not the decadent products of a leisured group. Producing them would have been very strenuous, with artists needing to crawl through narrow passages, pulling their fat-burning lamps, tools and even scaffolding with them. Viewing them would require similar efforts. Whatever the specifics of their function, these works were created with tremendous effort, skill and care, all of which suggests that they believed that creating these images – which were not designed to be viewed by many people, if any at all – would be *helpful* to them. We might speak of magic, and we might just as well call it religion.

Comparisons and Connections I

Chauvet Cave is a remarkable work that suggests that humans have imagined concepts of the supernatural from our

earliest moments as a species. We cannot know the specifics of the beliefs of this group of people and the rituals they developed around them since the cave's artists left no writings, but we can hypothesize about them. We can be fairly certain that, whatever they intended as they crawled through narrow openings, dragging their supplies with them into stifling, pitch-black caverns, the images these prehistoric people produced were not for mere decoration, not for entertainment or idle fun.

This section will discuss a series of works of art and architecture that were designed with religious intentions. Most will be from literate cultures, so their writings will help to answer many questions more precisely. The examples will vary greatly, including idols constructed to house gods, images reflecting devotion, scenes designed to inspire greater piety, and works to connect with supernatural beings and forces. Each should inspire reflection on Chauvet Cave and its potent imagery.



Shinto Shrine (Ise, Japan). Photo by N. Yotarou, CC BY-SA 3.0.

If the cave paintings might suggest some form of nature worship, this would recall many similar beliefs from throughout world history. The native religion of Japan, Shinto, is focused on *kami*, millions of nature deities that inhabit aspects of nature, like trees, rocks, waterfalls, and animals, which then become sites of worship. Originally, Shinto was not a codified, formal religion, though it later became more firmly based on rituals.

The Shinto Shrine at Ise, officially known as *Jingu*, is one of the most famous religious sites in Japan and Shinto's central one. It embodies many aspects of this nature religion in its design. It is built entirely of unfinished natural materials, with cypress walls and beams and a thatch roof. As a result, it cannot endure the Japanese climate for very long, and needs to be periodically rebuilt. Scholars believe that it was originally built in the first century CE, and then rebuilt in a time of cultural change in the seventh century. Since then, craftsmen who train for a lifetime rebuild it every twenty years. Their work building it is an act of devotion. The techniques and materials are consciously old-fashioned, but the resulting shrine appears fresh. It was last rebuilt in 2013, and will be rebuilt again in 2033. This might be seen as a reflection of the core Shinto practice of ritual purification as a form of renewal.

The shape of the shrine is based on raised granaries for food storage, designed to keep grain away from pests, but this became standard for Shinto shrines. The shrine at Ise is dedicated to *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami*, the sun goddess and mythical ancestor of Japan's imperial family. Therefore, the shrine is only used by the imperial family and its priests, and remains off-limits to the public. It originally housed several sacred objects, including a mirror associated with Amaterasu and seen as embodying notions of purity, honesty and sincerity. These same values are also emphasized by the simple, raw, unadorned materials of the shrine.

Still, *Jingu* is an impressive monument. Like most high-status religious structures, the shrine is **symmetrical**, which makes it seem stable and dignified. It is set at the end of a long path, behind a series of gates that serve to keep out most visitors but also provide a sense of entering into a sacred space for those priests and members of the imperial family permitted within. Like Chauvet Cave, the deeper within the space, the more sacred the atmosphere.

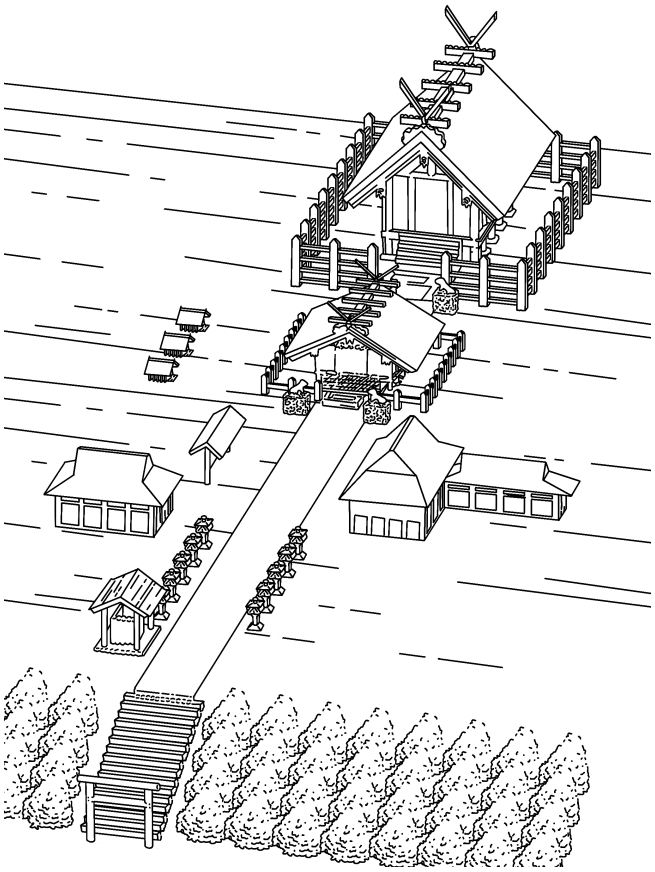


Diagram of Shinto Shrine (Ise, Japan). Image by Mari H.



Great Stupa, Madhya Pradesh (Sanchi, India). Photo by Raveesh Vyas, CC BY-SA 2.0.

A similar technique is used at the Great Stupa in Madhya Pradesh, Sanchi, India, constructed from the third century BCE through the first century CE. This major **Buddhist** pilgrimage site was built using donations by pious individuals to house the **relics** – the physical remains – of the **Buddha**. It is again removed from daily life; in this case, the whole complex is located only a short distance from the city, but through its design, the sacred center is set off from worldly activities.

Surrounding the mound of the main stupa is a large stone fence with four thirty-five foot tall stone gateways, or **toranas**, located at the four cardinal directions (North, South, East and West). These gateways are open, so they do not function like those guarding the entry to *Jingu*. Instead, they function to help **pilgrims** – people who travel to holy sites for religious reasons – transition from the ordinary world outside the gates to the sacred space within. Indeed, the Buddha is said to have requested to be interred at a crossroads, so that it would be easier for travelers to visit the site.



Great Stupa, Madhya Pradesh (Detail of East Gate), (Sanchi, India). Photo by Biswas Purba, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Unlike Chauvet Cave, the intent here was for the imagery to be as clearly visible to as many people as possible. The *toranas* are the only part of the Great Stupa to have

sculpture, which was again aimed at pilgrims. Pilgrims first walk around the exterior, looking at the images while meditating, and then enter through a *torana* and circle the stupa, itself, again looking at the imagery on the *toranas*. Buddhists believe in **reincarnation** – the notion that people are reborn into new bodies when they die – and many of the carvings show scenes from the Buddha's past lives, as well as real and mythical animals, and other beings.



Great Stupa, Madhya Pradesh (Detail of Yakshi), (Sanchi, India). Photo by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, CC BY 2.0.

Perhaps the most compelling of these are the **yakshis** and **yakshas**, female and male benevolent minor deities common in Indian belief and found in both Buddhist and **Hindu** art.

One such yakshi hangs lightly from a branch. Her sensuous body nimbly sways, her legs gracefully crossed at the shins. She has full breasts and her genitals are revealed through the diaphanous skirt she wears, only visible because of its hem that cuts across her anklets. These attributes forcefully convey a sense of fertility, perhaps further emphasized by the great phallic trunk of the elephant that approaches her from the left. She is a personification of water, and therefore of the source of life. At her touch, the tree seems to explode with its bounty of fruit.

While the *toranas* are covered in compelling images, there are no images of the Buddha, himself. He is, instead, shown through his absence, though images of his footprints, empty thrones, and the like.



Great Stupa, Madhya Pradesh (Detail of Footprints), (Sanchi, India). Photo by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, CC BY 2.0.

In strong contrast, in Ancient Greece, images of deities were seen as necessary for worship. The religion of the ancient Greeks was **polytheistic** – they worshiped many gods. Worship was conducted through sacrifice to the gods, but in order for the sacrifice to be meaningful, the god had to be present. Sculptors were therefore commissioned to create impressive images of the gods that served as **idols**, as images to be inhabited by the gods. Works like the impressive Bronze Zeus of Artemision (ca. 460-450 BCE) were not merely decorative or instructive, not designed just to give viewers an idea of what the god looked like or to teach worshippers about him. Instead, it was designed to entice the god, or at least some portion of his divinity, to enter the statue, which would then serve as an object of devotion and sacrifice, as may have been the case at Chauvet Cave.



Artemision Zeus, bronze, ca. 460 B.C.E. (National Archaeological Museum, Athens). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The figure is majestic. While the body is **naturalistic**, it is also highly **idealized**, with firm muscles that seem at odds with the age of the long-bearded figure. He once held a thunderbolt in his right hand, which is how we can tell that the figure is Zeus, the supreme deity of the Greeks and ruler of the sky. The figure does not have any inscriptions on it, and yet we can be sure it is a god because of the manner of his depiction. The figure's intent is clear: He is about to hurl his thunderbolt, probably to destroy a mortal person, and yet his face is utterly impassive. It is rigidly **symmetrical**, with even his hair falling in paired locks from the center, outward along his forehead. The god's expression is fixed, as he looks down on his victim without a trace of mercy.



Artemision Zeus (Detail of Face), bronze, ca. 460 B.C.E. (National Archaeological Museum, Athens). Photo by dynamosquito, CC BY-SA 2.0.

Early Christians, living in a **Greco-Roman** world where this sort of imagery was the standard, sought an image of their new god that would be greatly at odds with the often-merciless polytheistic **pantheon**.



The Good Shepherd, Asia Minor, 280–290. Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0 1.0.

An early sculpture of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd from the late third century CE is typical of this period. Here, instead of the older, powerful, domineering image of Zeus or Poseidon, Jesus is youthful, soft, and gentle in appearance. His body is still naturalistic and idealized, in that it seems young and healthy, but in place of the muscular nude of the Greek god, he is modestly clothed in the robes of a simple shepherd. Jesus carries a lamb on his shoulders, in reference

to a series of passages from the Bible, for example Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want…") and Jesus's Parable of the Lost Sheep:

> Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (Luke 15)

In essence, the message conveyed is that the viewer *is* the lost sheep, or at least might be, and that Jesus, unlike the Greek and Roman deities, cares about each person as the shepherd cares from his lost sheep. The Greek god stared down at his human victim coolly, without emotion; Jesus instead looks out at the viewer with a slight smile, and maybe even with expression of relief on his face. The message of such images was clear and persuasive to many: this was a god that cared about his followers.



Gislebertus, Last Judgment, Tympanun, Cathedral of St. Lazare, c.1130-46 (Atune, France). Photo by Jim Forest, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

About eight centuries later, when a depiction of the Last Judgment was carved over the west entrance to the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare in Autun, France, ca. 1130 CE, Christianity had become the most common religion in Europe. Christian art was therefore no longer primarily focused on winning new converts. With new goals come new styles. In this **tympanum** – the semicircular sculptural panel over the doorway – the image of Jesus is no longer naturalistic. Instead, it is highly **abstracted**, elongated dramatically and flattened out. Unlike the Greek god, he seems almost passive, elevated in the **mandorla** – the full-body halo that surrounds him – but also contained by it.

The composition relies on **hieratic scale**, with the importance of Jesus conveyed by his enormous size; angels and saints (Christian holy figures) are half his size, and ordinary people, below their feet in the **lintel** running across the bottom of the image, are shown as tiny, fragile figures, cringing and cowering as they approach the moment of their judgment.

In Christianity, the Last Judgment determines whether the souls of the dead will rise to the joys of heaven or descend to the torments of hell for all eternity. Emphasis is no longer on Jesus as the savior of lost sheep and protector of his flock. Instead, Jesus is now more impassive, showing no more visible compassion to those on his left being pulled and pushed into the mouths of hell than the Greek Zeus showed to his victim.

The whole composition is roughly **symmetrical**, with elements arranged on either side of the central figure of Jesus. Components on each side balance those on the other without exactly mirroring them. Architectural elements like arches and columns divide the image into sections. The effect is of an elaborate **cosmography** – an understanding of the organization of the universe – centered explicitly and absolutely on the massive figure of Jesus at the center.

In contrast with Chauvet Cave, where there was no clear principle of organization that dominated the full image and no clear relation between the animal figures throughout it, here everything is ordered and precise. All relationships between figures are clearly defined. This visual difference likely reflects substantial differences in the religions of their creators. On the other hand, the Last Judgment tympanum at Autun can be connected to Chauvet Cave in that it, like the *toranas* of Sanchi and the gates of *Jingu*, marks the entrance to a sacred space, and within that cavernous space, ritual and belief join to create the religious experience.



Gislebertus, The Temptation of Eve, ca. 1130 (Museé Rolin, Atune). Photo by Morio60, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The north portal of the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare has been damaged and rebuilt, but sculptures from the original design survive, including a sinuous image of The Temptation of Eve. At this point in the story, the **monotheistic** god **Yahweh**, shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, has created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, a place of ease and innocence with only one rule, recounted in Genesis 2:17:

> You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.



Detail of Gislebertus, The Temptation of Eve, ca. 1130 (Museé Rolin, Atune). Photo by Jacquym, CC BY-SA 4.0.

We find Eve as she picks the fruit in an oddly distracted manner. She has a dreamy expression on her face, and reaches casually behind her to pull the fruit from the tree. Only a close look reveals the clear danger of this act: at the right edge of the image, where the branch of the tree of knowledge bends sharply toward Eve, is the claw-like hand of the devil.



Detail of claw of the devil, Gislebertus, The Temptation of Eve, ca. 1130 (Museé Rolin, Atune). Photo by Mario60, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The rest of the figure is now lost, but this sharp-taloned remnant, grasping the branch and bending it toward the distracted figure of Eve, serves to suggest the significance of this otherwise peaceful scene.

Eve is completely without clothes, but unlike the artist of the Yakshi discussed above, the artist here relied on a strategically placed plant to cover her groin. This is an image about the dangers of sexual temptation, rather than about the wonders of fertility and bounty. The strong horizontality of the image emphasizes her lowliness. Her body snakes through the underbrush and she is surrounded by twisting, serpentine plants. Even a lock of her hair zigzags like a snake along her arm. Indeed, all of the lines in this image twist and turn, so that the viewer connects Eve with the serpent, the form of the devil in this part of the biblical **narrative**. The visual association of the serpent and the plants fosters a suspicion that the natural world itself is dangerous, not beneficial.

We can find strong contrast in the religious views of nature not only in the teeming images of Chauvet Cave, but also in lush the foothills of northern New Guinea, the second-largest island in the world, which bears both tropical rainforests and snow-capped, 16,000 foot mountain peaks. This is the home of the Abelam, among whom male status is based on participation in the Tambaran ("Men's House") cults, central institutions in their society. These cults have a strong influence on art and architecture. The giant, human-sized yams at the heart of the cult – not the usual variety grown for food, and sometimes themselves considered works of art – are associated with ancestors and with the potency of their growers.

During the annual harvest festival, the spirits of ancestors are believed to inhabit the yams. Their presence is reinforced by placing yam masks atop the yams, which are also dressed in full ceremonial **regalia**. These mask are only loosely **anthropomorphic** – that is, having human qualities – with highly **abstracted** features. On this mask, as is frequently the case, the eyes are highly emphasized, so that the ancestor seems to be present and watchful. They also wear elaborate headdresses, like those worn by Abelam men, to indicate their status. The images, then, like the images of Chauvet Cave, suggest fertility and abundance, as well as ancestry.



Abelam, Yam Mask, fiber, paint, twentieth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo by Shooting Brooklyn, CC BY-SA 2.5.

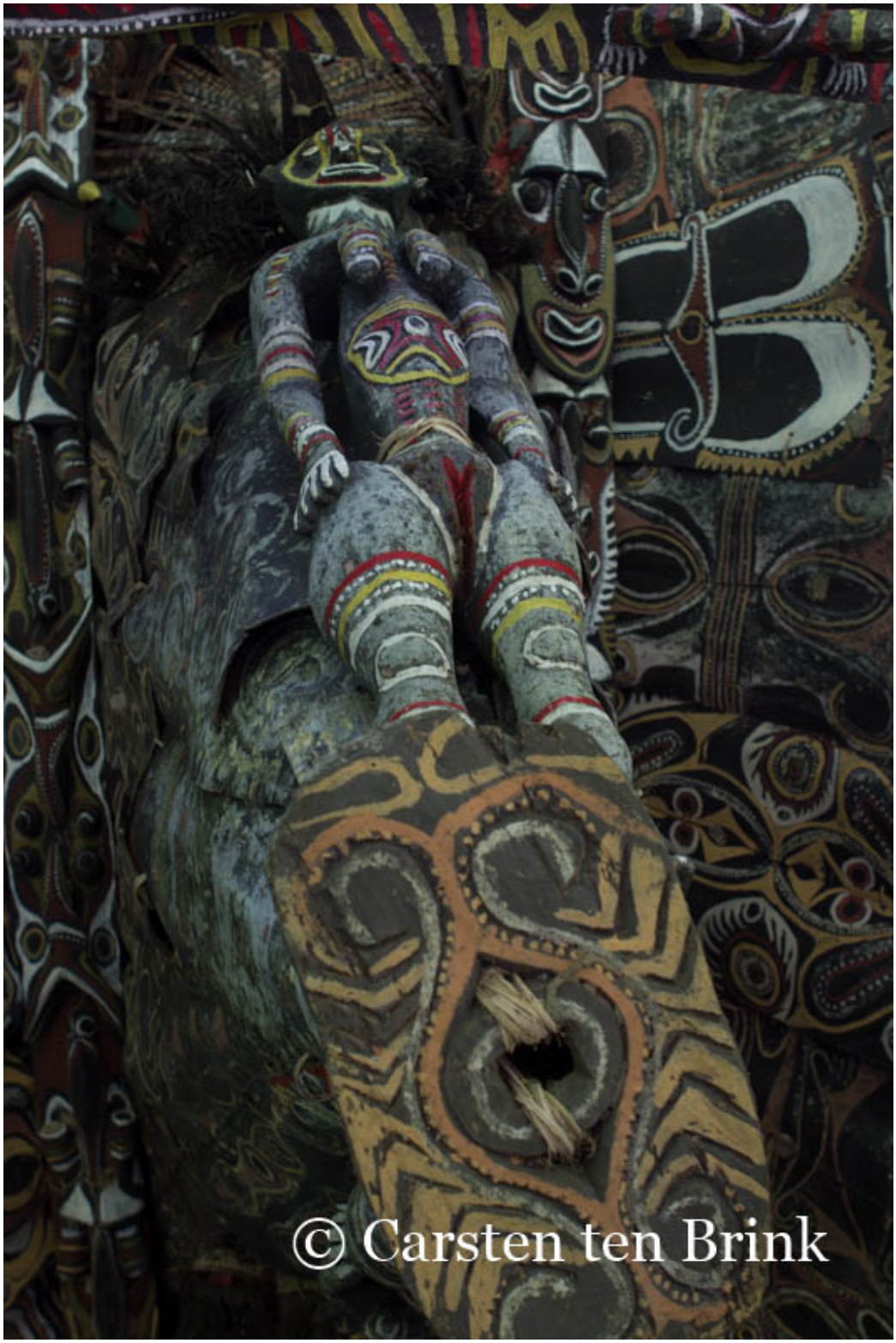


Abelam, Tamberan House (Museum der Kulturen Basel, Basel). Photo by Ismoon, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The growing of these remarkable yams is, for the Abelam, a secret activity undertaken by the members of the yam cult composed of initiated men and centered on the Korambo or Ceremonial House used to store and hide the images of the yam cult until the annual festival. The massive structure (280 by 40 ft), the size of which denotes its importance, is covered with extensive images of ancestors. They are painted on the ends of the long structure, on the deep overhangs beneath the central ridgepole. This pole, running along the peak of the roof and projecting out at both ends, is seen by the Abelam as **phallic**.

The faces that fill the pointed front of the Tamberam House are, like the yam masks, abstracted images with large, staring eyes. They are nearly identical, establishing a strong **pattern** that emphasizes the **unity** of the group.

As in Chauvet Cave, Tamberan House interior images do not seem to belong to a rigidly ordered composition. Indeed, sometimes the painted images in this cavernous space – seen as womb-like, in contrast to the phallic pole outside – do not correspond at all with the carved surface beneath, possibly because they are, as with some of the overlapping figures at Chauvet, simply independent of one another.



Interior, Tamberan House, in Tongajan (aka Tongijamb or Tongajamb) village on the Sepik River, New Guinea. Photo: Carsten ten Brink, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

What matters here is not some sort of naturalistic representation but rather, the power of the image, produced with paint believed to possess magical powers. While the interior images are not as precisely patterned as those on the exterior, they nonetheless hold together to produce a cumulative effect. They so thoroughly cover the interior that, when viewed along with freestanding carved ancestor images, the yam masks, and the yams, themselves, members of the yam cult would seem to be surrounded on all sides by their revered ancestors.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, 756-1031 CE



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Interior), begun 786, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo: Asa Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

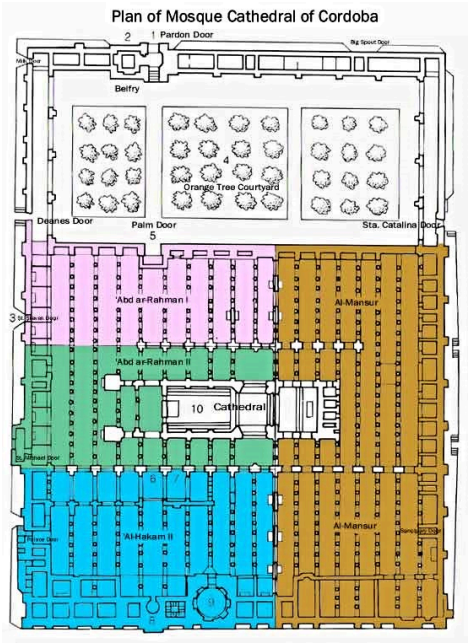
How is the **space** organized?
- How is **rhythm** used?
- What is the role of **texture** on the surfaces?
- What is used to **emphasize** elements?

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Upon entering the main **prayer hall** of the Great Mosque in Córdoba, Spain (756-1031 CE), the visitor is greeted with an overwhelming vista: row upon row of **columns** stretch into the distance in all directions. The hall is approximately 410 ft wide and 330 ft long (125 x 100m), and was at its height filled with 850 columns (though later renovations cut this number significantly). This massive structure was not built to its present size all at once, but rather, grew over nearly three-hundred years – always in the original style – in order to keep pace with the growing Muslim population of Córdoba to well more than twice its original area.

The columns used for the first phase of construction were **spolia** – pieces reused from earlier buildings, in this case reused from **Visigothic** Christian churches. This may have been done largely to save money, but might also have conveyed to any who recognized these columns the supremacy of Islam over Christianity. In the thirteenth century, after Córdoba had been conquered by Christian forces, a **cathedral** was build right in the center of the mosque, reversing the declaration of cultural dominance.

The Visigithic spolia columns are relatively short and so, in order to raise the **vaults**, the designers created a system of **double-tiered arches**. Each of these arches is horseshoe shaped, so that they curve back inward at their base. This has no structural benefit, so it is simply decorative.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Plan), 786-1600, (Córdoba, Spain). Image by Ali Eminov, CC BY-NC 2.0.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Interior), 786, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Richard Mortel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The visual effect is of stunning complexity, enhanced by the use of alternating bands of red and while on the arches. In the oldest arches, this pattern is the result of alternating courses of bricks and stone, which is probably the origin of the style, but in most of the hall, it is merely a pattern painted on plaster.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Interior), 786, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Asa Simon Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Because the original columns and **capitals** were from other buildings, they were not all the same color, size or shape, so there is a bit of irregularity in this otherwise rigidly ordered space. Instead of distracting, this slight inconsistency lends a bit of life and energy to the space, with the leaf carvings on the capitals making it seem almost as if the hall were a natural forest with the arches branching out from the columns to create a steady visual rhythm.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (arches in front of Mihrab), 10th century, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Asa Simon Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

While the banded, double-tiered arches seem visually complex, other elements of the mosque are far more ornate. In front of the **mihrab** – a niche in the wall of a mosque facing toward Mecca and therefore signaling the direction of prayer – is a series of arches of stunning elaboration. These arches consist of two levels of scalloped elements, capped at the top with a row of horseshoe arches. These are all covered in intricate panels of patterned **foliate** – that is, leaf-like – designs, produced in plaster.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (dome in front of Mihrab), 10th century, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Asa Simon Mittman, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Looking upward to the small multi-lobed **dome** above, the viewer is confronted with still increasing degrees of complexity and ornamentation. The dome is octagonal, and is supported on eight interlocking arches, which are supported on eight horseshoe arches, supported on small **engaged columns** and pilasters, all of which in turn rests on the series of horseshoe arches above the scalloped double-arches. Everything here is covered in elaborate foliate and **geometric** patterning, and much of it is covered in gold. This is far more effort than needed to support this small dome. It was done for the visual effect, which is stunning.

Running around the base of the dome in the octagonal band just above the supporting arches is an inscription in orange letters on a blue background. Based on the **Qur'an**, verses 22:77-78, the inscription directly addresses the viewer:

> O you who believe, bow down and prostrate yourselves, and adore your Lord, and do good, that you may prosper. And strive in His cause as you ought to strive, He has chosen you and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion, it is the religion of your father Abraham; it is He who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation), that the Apostle may be a witness for you.[2]

This inscription stresses that prayer is the essential element of Islam, a concept reinforced by other inscriptions in the mosque.

2. Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80-98, 86.



Great Mosque of Córdoba (Detail of Mihrab), 786 (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Richard Mortel, CC BY 2.0.

Inscriptions throughout the mosque describe the nature of the god of Islam. For example, an inscription beneath the dome, written in the horizontal band above the arch leading to the mihrab, contains another verse from the Quran (59:23). It reads:

> God is He, [other] than whom there is no other god, who knows [all things], both secret and open;
> He, most Gracious, most Merciful.[3]

In Islamic art, such inscriptions become major decorative elements. This is probably the result of the Muslim prohibition on the depiction of human and divine figures. Without figures of God, or of Muhammad and other major figures, artists turned to lines from the Qur'an, believed to be the word of God. This inscription is fitting, as it marks the entrance to the mihrab that indicates the direction for prayer. Taken together with the elaborate decorations, it is clear that the viewer is to pray in this direction toward a solitary, gracious, and merciful god.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Mosques are Muslim places of worship, and Muslims are the followers of the religion of Islam, currently the second most populous religion in the world (after Christianity) with about 1.5 billion followers. It was founded by Muhammad, born in Mecca ca. 570 into the family of Ishmael, the outcast son of Abraham, the Jewish **patriarch**, and his Egyptian concubine Hagar. Mohammad, a merchant, took shelter in a cave while traveling, and there, according to Islamic belief, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and commanded him to recite revelations from God.

From this point, forth, Muhammad is referred to as the Messenger of God and fought the polytheism then prevalent in Arabia, preaching instead that there was only one god (Allah in Arabic). Because of his unpopular beliefs, Muhammad and his followers were thrown out of Mecca in 622 and moved to Medina, a desert oasis. This flight, called the Hegira, marks

3. Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Meaning of the Great Mosque of Cordoba in the Tenth Century," *Muqarnas* 13 (1996): 80–98, 88.

the beginning of Islam as a religion, and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. In Medina, Muhammad preached and received further divine revelations, and then returned to Mecca with army of 10,000 followers. He then converted the population and had all of the idols destroyed.

Muslims view Muhammad as the third of three great prophets, following Moses and Jesus. Muhammad did not claim to be divine and did not perform miracles. Rather, he stated that he was a messenger striving to purify and perfect faith in God. Islam's central principle is total "submission to the will of Allah," which is the meaning of the word Islam. The main obligations of the religion are referred to as the Five Pillars:

1. Making the profession of faith, or *shahada*: "There is no deity but God, and Muḥammad is the messenger of God."
2. Praying five times a day, facing Mecca (though generally, only the main Friday prayers are said in a mosque, and led by an imam)
3. Giving alms
4. Fasting during daylight hours for the month of Ramadan
5. Making, if possible, the *hajj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca, once in a lifetime.

Muhammad was a secular ruler as well as the head of a new religion, and led the first of many conquests that helped Islam to spread remarkably quickly. By 711, less than one-hundred years after Muhammad was initially thrown out of Mecca, Islam had conquered all of the Middle East, North Africa, Egypt, and Spain. Monuments like the Great Mosque of Córdoba therefore marked not only religious belief but also secular conquest.

The Great Mosque was commissioned by Abd al-Rahman I, a noble of the Umayyad dynasty. The Umayyads had been massacred by their main rivals, the 'Abbasids, and Abd al-Rahman I seems to have been the sole survivor. He fled from Syria to Córdoba, and spend the next three decades consolidating his power, which he ultimately marked with the construction of the mosque. The version commissioned was a rather more modest structure than that which we see, today, but even at its inception (the section in light blue in the plan above), it was a work of intricacy and delicacy, such that subsequent builders felt compelled to maintain the style established by the earliest portions.

The intense energy devoted to inscriptions and ornament in Islamic art and architecture results from what has been the prevailing Muslim interpretation of the biblical Second Commandment:

> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.[4]

This is the primary texts with which Jewish, Christian, and Muslim artists have had to grapple in conceiving of their approach to art. Jews and Muslims have generally tended to take this text more literally, especially avoiding most depictions of sacred figures, above all else, of God.

Passages in the Qur'an echo and extend the Second Commandment. They read:

> No visions can encompass Him, but He encompasses all visions.
> My Lord, make this a peaceful land, and protect me and my children from worshiping idols.[5]

In works produced by **aniconic** groups – that is, those "without images" – other artistic elements may receive great

4. Exodus 20:4-6, New International Version.

5. Qur'an, 6:103 and 14:35.

attention. The lavish scripts used for Islamic inscriptions allow these words to stand in for the presence of God in mosque.

Comparisons and Connections II

The Great Mosque of Córdoba provides a powerful model of design used to celebrate religion, with row upon row of columns supporting intricate arches and elaborately inlaid inscriptions. The result is an overwhelming display of power and wealth, as well as religiosity. In this section of comparisons and connections, we will see a range of works grand and modest, figurative and **aniconic**, each of which makes a strong statement about the perspective of its **patrons** and designers. Some strive, like the Great Mosque, for grandeur and complexity. Others display a willful simplicity and austerity.



Dura-Europos Synagogue (West Wall), ca. 245 (Syria). Photo by Sodabottle, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The synagogue at Dura-Europos, Syria, built between 244-245 CE, presents a very different model for dealing with the constraints of **aniconism**. In this ancient Jewish house of worship, among the earliest to survive partly intact, we find an overwhelming profusion of imagery. Images fill the walls of this poorly preserved structure. They contain **narrative** images telling stories from the Jewish bible, portraits of major prophets including Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and images composed of visual symbols central to Judaism (like those found on the oil lamps discussed in the Communities chapter).

Some of the images in the synagogue ironically seem to address the danger of images, and thereby provide cautionary instruction to their own viewers. The image of the Temple of Dagon shows the Ark of the Covenant – the shrine containing the original tablets of the Ten Commandments, carried by the Israelites through their wandering in the desert and then installed in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem – being carted past a series of polytheistic idols including that of the Philistine god Dagon.



The Ark and the Temple of Dagon, ca. 245 (Dura-Europos, Syria). Photo: Public Domain.

In the Ark's presence, the idols spontaneously fall to the ground and shatter. This image about images directly contrasts the Ark, here depicted as an authentic source of divine power, with the idols, shown as false and powerless.

How are we to interpret this image that seems to be hostile to the creation of images? The contrast in styles between the **fresco paintings** of the synagogue and the idols they represent can help explain their existence. The fallen, shattered idols are shown to be sumptuous three-dimensional statues made of gold. They were set up in the temple in the background, recognizable by its white marble columns and triangular **pediment**, and, most importantly, they were *worshipped* there. This is exactly the sort of practice addressed by the Second Commandment quoted in full above. The key passage reads:

> You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.[6]

The frescos, themselves, in contrast, are two-dimensional, and the style is self-consciously flat. There is almost no effort to show, for example, that the Ark or the men who accompany it have **volume**. There is very little shading, and only the slight overlapping of the figures suggests that the group of three men is behind, rather than above, the man raising his arm to drive the oxen forward. They are very clearly just pictures, not gods, and they are there to instruct the viewers, not to be worshipped. They therefore follow the spirit of the Second Commandment, which is, in essence, not a prohibition against images, but against their worship.

6. Exodus 20:4-6, New International Version.



Parthenon, ca. 447 (Athens, Greece). Photo by Mr. G's Travels, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Judaism developed in the **Ancient Near East** (more or less the region we now call the Middle East), where polytheistic image worship was the standard religious practice, and its rejection of images of God (eventually also embraced by Muslims), may have been largely intended as a mark of separation from the surrounding groups. Throughout the ancient world, though, from our earliest clear records of religious practices until the eventual spread of Christianity, image worship remained the primary religious activity. The most celebrated of ancient polytheistic temples is the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, designed by Kallikrates and Iktinos and built from 447-432 CE. This massive structure, very much the heart of ancient Greek religion, was built to replace a smaller temple destroyed by an invading Persian army in 480 BCE.



Alan LeQuire, Recreation of Athena Parthenos, 1982 (Nashville, Tennessee). Photo by Mobilus in Mobili, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Parthenon had more sculptures than any other Greek temple, as far as we can tell. It had a continuous band of sculptures running for 525 feet, as well as almost a hundred separate panels and, dominating the exterior, two triangular **pediments** containing fifty figures, all over-life size, and some colossal, all overseen by the master sculptor Pheidias. Still, all of this imagery was ultimately dwarfed by the thirty-eight foot tall **chryselephantine** – that is, covered in gold and Ivory – statue of Athena Parthenos in the interior. This statue, now destroyed, was not decorative or ornamental, as we might consider the artistry of the Great Mosque of Córdoba, nor was it educational, as with the images of the synagogue of Dura Europos. It was not an embellishment for the temple; rather, the entire rest of the temple was a house for it, and the rest of the sculptures serve to support, to prepare the viewer for the statue within. Through rituals now only known in part, priests would prepare the sculpture and encourage the god to enter it, so that at least a part of the deity's divinity inhabited the work of art.

The Parthenon was first and foremost, like all ancient temples, a house for the god to live in. Visitors to the Parthenon, which sits atop the **Acropolis** – the raised, sacred precinct of Athens – would come to offer sacrifices before the statue. These would usually be in the form of animal sacrifices, burned before an altar that stood in front of the Parthenon, so that the smoke would rise up to Athena. The sacrifices needed to be made there because of the presence of Athena in the magnificent statue within the temple.

This is exactly the sort of practice rejected by both the Bible's Second Commandment and by the Qur'an passages quoted above. However, sacrifices before images of gods was the dominant mode of religious practice in the Middle East and Europe from prehistory to until the spread of Christianity.



Colossal Statues of Buddha, second-fourth century (Bamiyan, Afghanistan). Photo by UNESCO/A Lezine and Carl Montgomery, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Image making practices are hardly restricted to the West. Throughout the world, we find images of gods and other sacred figures. Among the most impressive religious images ever produced are the Colossal Statues of Buddha from the valley of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, created in the fifth or sixth centuries CE. Bamiyan was a major center of Buddhist devotion, and over the centuries, devotees carved out approximately twenty thousand caves, some used for collective worship and study and others to house a single person. The most impressive of these were a pair of standing figures for Buddha, 136 and 186 feet tall, the largest Buddhist statues in the world, made between the second and fourth centuries. Visible from miles away, they were painted, the smaller blue and the larger red, with the hands and faces covered in gold, and they were surrounded with smaller painted and carved images. Like the similarly opulent image of Athena from the Parthenon, dwarfed by these giants, the Buddhas become spectacular visions. Judging from surviving evidence and related works, it is likely that these enormous figures smiled down at the Buddhists beneath them with a calm benevolence.



Destruction of Colossal Statues of Buddha, 2001 (Bamiyan, Afghanistan). Photo by Christian Frei Switzerland, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The issues discussed in this section are not merely abstract questions of belief; they have real and tangible effects. After centuries of slow degradation, the two colossal figures were destroyed in 2001 by the Taliban, the Muslim fundamentalist then in control of Afghanistan. Still, the destruction revealed new evidence about the Buddhas: a reliquary was found, containing balls of ashes and a Buddhist **sutra** – that is, a key religious text – written on tree-bark, likely placed within the statue as it was being built, 1500 years ago, allowing the figure to serve as a sort of **reliquary**, like the Great Stupa discussed above.

On the other end of the spectrum from the massive Buddhas of Bamiyan, we find moving works of great sincerity, produced in humble scale and format, conveying individual piety and hope. Mexican *retablos*, also known as *ex votos*, are small paintings usually made on tin, generally commissioned from artists without formal training, but worshippers sometimes also produce their own. A large number of *retablos* were produced between 1820 and 1920, and the folk tradition continues today. Such works were for years neglected by scholars before being reappraised by the contemporary art world, where they are now very popular.



Angélica Portales, Ex-voto of Mrs. Cipriana Garcia El Progreso, San Luis Potosi. November, 1954. Photo: Angélica Portales, 2012, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Retablos are produced by or for individuals requesting the aid of saints or of the Christian god, and also to give thanks for divine assistance. They tend to refer to very precise events or concerns as in this example, which reads (in translation):

> With a serious disease affecting animals all around, I asked the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe to take good care of my animals, and I wholeheartedly entrusted my little goats, pigs and chickens to her, and our crops so we wouldn't lose them. And since not a single one of my animals died, I gratefully present her with this retable. Mrs. Cipriana Garcia El Progreso, San Luis Potosi. November, 1954.[7]

The text is quite specific in time, place, and content. This is not a generic image celebrating the beneficence of a deity, but a work made by or for a specific individual, in thanks for what is characterized as divine assistance.

7. Translation by Angélica Portales: https://www.flickr.com/photos/frozen-in-time/7076400521/.



Nkisi N'kondi, wood, resin, iron, ceramic, plant fiber, textile, pigment, nineteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Many religious traditions believe in the power of images to affect the lives of people. The *retablos*, the statues of Buddha and Athena, the yam masks and Tamberan house, these works are not decorative, are not, in our conventional sense really works of art, at all. They are objects of power that are designed to elicit a supernatural response.

Similarly, many of the sculptures of the Kongo are explicitly created to access and influence the spirit world. The *nkisi nkonde* is among the more visually arresting of these figures. *Nkisi* are figures created as hosts for magical powers, carved by sculptors and then ritually empowered by a diviner or other ritual conductor who would place *bilongo* – medicinal materials – within them. In this example, the hollow space in the chest was for the *bilongo.*

The figure is powerfully aggressive; his torso leans forward, his parted lips show sharpened teeth, and his placement of his hands on his hips and his elbows out all convey his forceful nature. The nails driven into the four foot tall figure attest to the *nkisi nkonde*'s use: whenever its help is needed, a nail is driven into it, bringing it sharply to attention. The figure would be called upon to preside over treaties, track down criminals, and even assist the sick. The large number of nails protruding from the figure demonstrates its frequent use, and therefore the faith placed in it.

There are works that exist in between the grand works produced to convey the devotion of a community, such as the Great Stupa, Cathedral of Saint-Lazare, Tamberan House, Great Mosque of Córdoba, Parthenon, and Colossal Buddhas, and the magical, protective and invocatory works like the *nkisi nkonde*, *retablo* and yam mask. The majestic *moai* figures of Rapa Nui (also known as Easter Island, ca. 1000-1500 CE), for example, at once embodied the dedication of the community and were created to serve immediate and practical, protective functions. Many of these figures are **monumental** in scale, with many approximately thirty-five feet tall, and others (including an unfinished example that was found in a quarry) twice that size. Everything about these figures conveys a sense of authority: their large size, their **frontal**, upright poses, fancy headdress or hair (the *pukau* topknot of red scoria stone) and their direct stares out of highly exaggerated and enlarged eyes made of white coral and stone that enliven their faces. They are also placed atop stone altars (called *ahu*), elevating them above the viewer yet further and making them sacred.

Scholars generally believe that these figures were intended to represent important ancestors, dead chiefs whose names they bore and who would serve as central figures for the community. The larger the figure is, the greater the status of the community. Almost all of the *moai* are carved out of soft volcanic tufa, but one example survives in basalt, a much harder and therefore much more durable stone.



Moai Figure, ca. 1000-1500 (Ahu Nau Nau, Easter Island). Photo by Márcio Cabral de Moura, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Hoa Hakananai'a, basalt, ca. 1100-1200 (British Museum, London). Photo by James Miles, CC BY-SA 4.0.

This four and a half ton sculpture was kept in a stone house in Orongo, the sacred center of Rapa Nui, and was one of only a few to survive a wave of destruction during a series of conflicts that seem to have resulted from the islanders' overuse of the available resources. Rapa Nui is the most remote island in the world, so the original inhabitants were highly limited in their resources, unable to import anything. If these figures were, indeed, seen as protective ancestral spirits, it makes sense that, in wars between tribes, the *moai* were attacked as if living beings. Works of art are not always seen as mere objects; for many cultures they have been and continue to be seen as active, living, powerful beings.

CONCLUSION

The grand sculptures of gods and majestic temples discussed in this section are a long way from Chauvet Cave in time and conception. Still, there is an affinity between all of the images in this chapter. The people who commissioned and created and used them might have been and might continue to be sharply at odds with one another, as the religions that inspired them often see themselves as mutually exclusive. The works themselves similarly conflict with one another, with naturalistic idols juxtaposed with highly stylized images for teaching, beside aniconic works rejecting all imagery. Grand monuments are adjacent to modest efforts. Wherever you travel, whatever cultures you confront, whatever museums you visit, you will find works inspired be the religions of the world, present and past, monotheistic and polytheistic, welcoming or intentionally exclusive. But all of these work, ultimately, have their roots in the caves, painted tens of thousands of years ago, where our subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, first worked out some of the visual tools that we can use to represent the supernatural, and our desires for it.

Spotlight Image III:

Statue of Mother Goddess Coatlicue, Aztec, Mexico, 1487-1520 CE



Coatlicue, basalt, ca. 1500 (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). Photo by Xuan Che, CC BY 2.0.



Coatlicue (Side View), basalt, ca. 1500 (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). Photo by David Cabrera, CC BY-SA 2.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

What are the main **compositional principles** used to design the figure?

What does the **material** used suggest?

How is **symmetry** used?

Is the work **naturalistic**?

Is the work **idealized**?

What can we tell about the figure and the culture that produced it without any contextual information? Be sure to bear in mind cultural beliefs and biases that you might bring to the work!

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- Interior, Tamberan House, in Tongajan (aka Tongijamb or Tongajamb) village on the Sepik River, New Guinea. Photo: Carsten ten Brink, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- Cordoba – 39
- Great Mosque of Córdoba (Plan), 786-1600, (Córdoba, Spain). Image by Ali Eminov, CC BY-NC 2.0.

- Great Mosque of Córdoba (Interior), 786, (Córdoba, Spain). Photo by Richard Mortel, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
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- Nkisi N'kondi, wood, resin, iron, ceramic, plant fiber, textile, pigment, nineteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Moai Figure, ca. 1000-1500 (Ahu Nau Nau, Easter Island). Photo by Márcio Cabral de Moura, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Hoa Hakananai'a, basalt, ca. 1100-1200 (British Museum, London). Photo by James Miles, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Coatlicue, basalt, ca. 1500 (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). Photo by Xuan Che, CC BY 2.0.
- Coatlicue (Side View), basalt, ca. 1500 (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). Photo by David Cabrera, CC BY-SA 2.0.

7. Sex

Introduction

Sex is among the most powerful elements of human lives – indeed of the lives of just about all animal species. It allows us to reproduce, and thereby to continue our family lines, communities, and species, but also arouses passions, motivates actions, influences the structure of societies, expresses power dynamics, and, of course, inspires a great deal of art. In this chapter, we will consider works that treat the interrelated subjects of sex, sexuality, and gender from a range of perspectives. Some are celebratory, some ambivalent, and some outright condemnatory. While some of the works covered are tame and modest in their approach to representing or implying sexual activities, others are explicit. Images from Prehistory, Ancient Greece, Rome and Peru, Renaissance Germany and Italy, nineteenth-century France, medieval India, Edo Japan, and the contemporary period showcase a rich range of responses the theme of sex elicits in artists and viewers throughout the world's history. It is worth noting that this is a subject that many art appreciation and art history textbook authors and publishers shy away from. Indeed, two publishers stated that this chapter could not be included in a work that they would publish! But I do not believe that any account of the world's art can claim to be anything close to complete – or even honest – if it ignores a theme that has been absolutely central in art-making from the earliest of prehistoric cave paintings straight on through to the contemporary world.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI, KINOE-NO-KOMATSU (PINING FOR LOVE), EDO, JAPAN, 1814 CE

VIEWING QUESTIONS



Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 1), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.

- What elements of the image draw the eye first?
- How do the colors affect the images?
- How do the images imply textures?
- How does scale impact the scenes?

PICTURES OF SPRING

In Edo Japan (1615–1868), erotic art was popular, and some of the most prominent artists of the period produced highly graphic works. These works are known as ***shunga***, meaning "pictures of spring," since "spring" was a euphemism for sex at the time. There is, though, nothing allusive about many *shunga* images, which range from gently erotic images of clothed courtesans to scenes of wild orgies, bestiality, and even scenes of sex with supernatural creatures, none of which were condemned in their day as obscene. The most common medium for *shunga* was ***Ukiyo-e***, a colored **woodblock printing** medium that allowed artists to produce inexpensive works for a large market while still maintaining high standards of beauty and delicacy. *Ukiyo-e* literally means "pictures of the floating world" – a reference to the active

red-light district of the capital city of Kyoto, and this term indicates how central the world of geishas, actors, sumo-wrestlers, and other inhabitants of "the floating world" were to the much-celebrated art of Edo Japan.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Ukiyo-e master Katsushika Hokusai produced several *shunga* albums, including his *Kinoe-no-komatsu* (*Pining for Love*). This section considers a few images from this album. The first depicts a couple about to engage in intercourse. They are both elaborately dressed, particularly the woman, whose layers of robes are pulled open to reveal her breast and hiked up to reveal her legs and genitals. The man's robes are similarly pulled up to reveal his highly exaggerated erect penis, which is almost the size of his forearm – a standard feature of *shunga* prints. The woman reaches around the man's neck as if both to pull herself upward and to pull him in closer to her. Both figures' mouths are parted as they seem to pant with excitement and anticipation.

The woman's robes consist of three layers, the innermost of which is ruffled into quite fleshy folds and colored in a soft pink. The openings this fabric frame become **yonic** – that is, they resemble a vulva – and her limbs – especially her right arm – emerging from these folds seem to echo the main action of the scene.

The couple is positioned so as to give the viewer the fullest view of the couple's genitals. The man kneels behind rather than between the woman's legs, which he holds open apparently as much for the viewer's **gaze** as for his own comfort. Still, the image does not focus exclusively on the sexual act about to occur. Hokusai includes small details that fill out the scene, to give it greater specificity and therefore more individuality. For example, while the man still wears both of his sandals, the woman seems to have lost one, which sits behind her. Perhaps we are to assume that it fell off her left foot when she raised it up over her head. This is a charming, even comic detail to include in what is nonetheless a highly explicit image of sex.



Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.

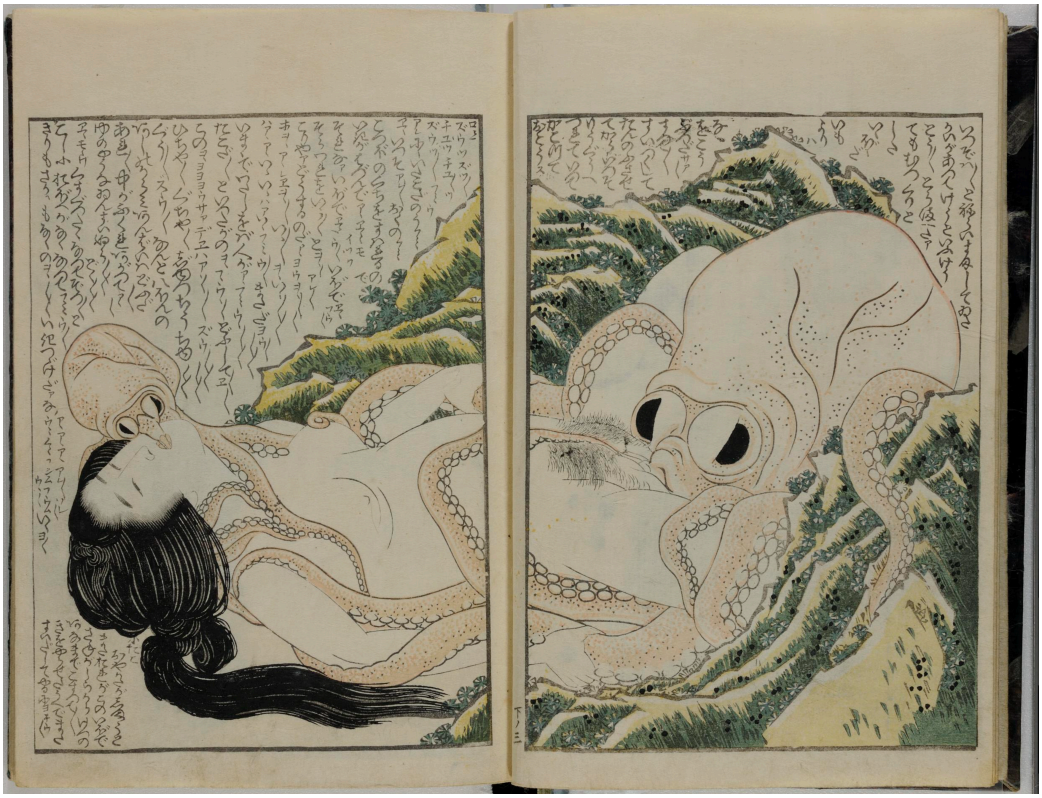
In another image from *Kinoe-no-komatsu, we see* a very similarly posed couple. The differences between the images are interesting. In the second image, the woman's legs seem to be bent back and the knees, so that her lower legs and feet are not visible. The man's feet are both bare. The colors are more muted, mostly in fleshy tones of beiges, browns, and pinks, which allow everything within the scene to blend smoothly together. Again, the figures are each partially clothed, but their robes are more fully pulled open, revealing their similarly exaggerated genitals.



Detail, Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.

Hokusai depicts this couple just at the moment of penetration. The man looks downward, as if to watch as his oversized penis enters into the woman, and the implied line of his gaze further directs ours to their genitals. The woman, on the other hand, tips her head back. Her eyes are almost closed, as if she is lost in the moment of pleasure. Her lips are parted and her teeth are just visible. She reaches out with her left hand to grasp her partner's robes, as if to pull him toward her. Despite the apparent focus on the figures' exaggerated genitals, Hokusai again includes details that humanize the lovers. The man's feet, revealed at the base of his robes, the tension in the woman's hands, the closeness of their bodies, and the fervor with which they seem to press together all stress their humanity and their deeply human passions.

They are surrounded by cascading waves of rumpled fabric, indicating the layers that needed to be removed to bring the couple to this point. They are also framed by the inscriptions that, through their energetic and trembling execution, as well as their content, convey some of the passion of the scene. While the image is openly erotic, it is not exclusively pornographic in nature, not intended to function solely within a visceral realm. Instead, the delicacy of execution allows the scene to appeal to the viewer above and beyond its potential ability to arouse. Indeed, some of the scenes within the album are either so unpleasant or outright bizarre that it seems unlikely that their primary function was to inspire sexual arousal.



Katsushika Hokusai, The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.

On what is the most well-known page of the album – indeed, one of the most well known works of *Ukiyo-e* – we find a startling scene: titled *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, it features a fully nude woman reclining on her back between the mossy, flower-filled rocks at the water's edge while a giant, monstrous octopus performs oral sex on her. Its long, sinuous tentacles wrap around her body, the suckers along their length perhaps suggesting through their repetition the act being performed. A second, smaller octopus seems to be performing a sort of French kiss with her lips, as she tilts her head back and opens her mouth to reach out to it with her tongue, colored in just the same peachy pink as the octopuses.

The creatures are enveloping the woman, running tentacles up her sides, over her legs and torso, cradling the back of her neck. One small tentacle even curls around her left nipple. This is a curious sort of fantasy scene of bestial or monstrous sex. Still, while we might expect this to be a scene of violence or even horror, instead we find the woman responding with pleasure – as the title tells us, this is *her* dream, after all. She reaches out, holding onto the tentacles that run along her sides, not as if to resist but as if to pull her lover toward her, much in the same manner of the women in the two previous images. We should not forget, though, that while the *fiction* of the text tells us this is her fantasy, in fact both are the product of the male artist, constructing an image of female sexuality as wild and rapacious, first and foremost for a male audience's interest.

Hokusai has moved the octopuses' bulbous eyes to the fronts of their large heads, giving them a slightly more human appearance. This effect is furthered by the pale, peach tone he chose for their skin. They are clearly not human, of course, but with these small shifts in the appearance of the animals, they seem more sentient, and their actions therefore seem more willful, more *human*, as is also emphasized by the text, which grants them speech (discussed below).

The scene is given a minimal setting, as is perhaps fitting for such a fantasy. Rather than being sited in a carefully rendered location, the figures are loosely framed by the rocky shore, above and below. Its soft greens, yellows, and blues contrast with the pale peach and pink tones of the woman and the octopuses. The rocks are quite jagged, and therefore emphasize the smooth, graceful arcs of the figures' bodies and limbs, and draw our attention to the smooth, unblemished texture of the woman's exposed skin.

Shunga images were often sold as small packets of prints contained within a wrapper, as if in opening them the viewer was unveiling the erotic scenes within, or even undressing the characters depicted, heightening the erotic nature of the scenes themselves. Some *shunga*, including works tentatively attributed to Hokusai, take this a step further, incorporating the viewer's participation in the process of the revelation of each image. Some ***surimono*** – privately commissioned prints produced in small runs to celebrate special occasions – for example, contain flaps that are printed separately and attached to the main image, to be closed or opened, thereby created tamer and more erotic images of the same scene.



Hokusai Katsushika (?), Sailing, Sailing (discrete version). Edo, Japan, 1812 CE. Image: Public Domain.



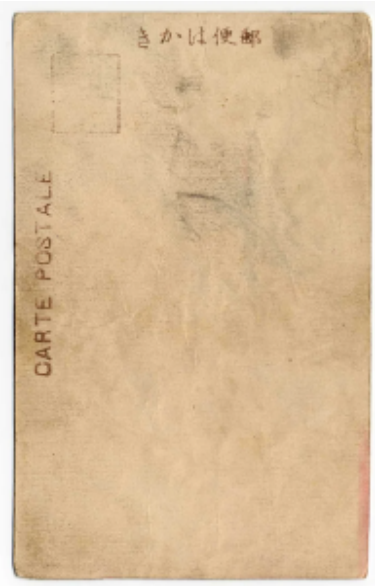
Hokusai Katsushika (?), Sailing, Sailing (indiscrete version). Edo, Japan, 1812 CE. Image: Public Domain.

A river scene, for example, shows a boatman greeting the rising sun – the print was commissioned as a new year's card – while a woman reclines in the cabin beneath him. With the flap of this *shikake-e* ("trick-picture") closed, we see her alone. With the flap removed, we see her with a lover. The blankness of her expression allows it to be read quite differently, depending on the position of the flap. This phenomenon is known as the **Kuleshov Effect**, named for Lev Kuleshov, a Russian filmmaker who experimented in the 1910s and 1920s. He showed viewers three pairs of film clips: A shot of a bowl of soup and then a close-up of current film icon Ivan Mosjoukine; an apparently dead girl in a coffin and then a close-up of Mosjoukine, and finally an alluring young woman reclining on a couch and then a close-up of Mosjoukine.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:
https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=740#oembed-1

(Skip ahead to 1:00 in this video.)

Viewers assumed emotional connections, so that Mosjoukine was seen as pensive, sorrowful, and lustful, in turn, when in fact all three shots of Mosjoukine were identical, the same clip, repeated. So, too, the woman in Hokusai's print seems pensive or bored with the flap closed, and aroused with it open. We invest our emotions into the figures in works of art, since these works are, of course, mere arrangements of lines and colors, not real people.



Blank back, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/



Woman Raking, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/



Woman Masturbating, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/

One final example, by an anonymous artist, further conveys the play at work in "trick" *shikake-e* prints. Yes, they are overtly sexual, but there is a kind of silliness, as well. In this case, the image is on a postcard which was never sent – the back was never filled out. Like so many postcards still sold at souvenir shops in tourist destinations, the content is playfully sexual, perhaps more than it is outright erotic (though, of course, the distinction is largely in the eye of the beholder). On the front of the postcard, in its initial position, we see a brightly-dressed woman holding a rake, as if she were simply out gardening. This anonymous work is far simpler in design and execution than works by Hokusai, with features only sketched in and forms far more generalized. This is more of a gag-gift, perhaps, than a fine print to be treasured. Still, the lovely colors enliven it.

In the card's initial position, the woman seems to be looking demurely down, presumably at the yard she has been raking. However, with the flap lifted, we see an entirely different scene. The woman, apparently standing moments ago, is now squatting with her skirts hiked up while she masturbates while a dog sniffs at her. Unlike the *shikake-e* attributed to Hokusai, which forms complete and coherent images in either position, with the flap lifted on the postcard, the woman's torso and face are largely blocked, covered by the blank back of the raised flap. (The reddish lines have transferred to the flap from the hidden image.) The woman's outer robe is filled in grey here, rather than the rich purple from the outer image, and the rake becomes an inexplicable detail, a distraction from the revealed scene. The survival of many cheap *shikake-e* images – some of which are far more direct and explicit than any of the examples here – indicates their wide popularity in the period, especially give that they are all ephemera, that is, items designed to be enjoyed briefly and then tossed away.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Edo period spans the 250-year **shogunate** (rule by a shogun, or military dictator) of the family of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who took control of Japan in 1600. This was a period of relative peace and prosperity, but also of increasingly repressive rule. In order to keep control of the *daimyo* – the lesser lords who owned obedience to the shogun – the shoguns required that they spend half of their time in the capital city of Edo (present-day Tokyo). **Buddhism** was the main religion of Japan in the period, and it preached that the joys of the world were fleeting. Rather than following the stricter strains

of Buddhist practice, the newly prosperous middle class of merchants, artisans and tradesmen thriving in Edo saw the transience of pleasure as a reason to seek it out, to enjoy life are richly as possible. They referred to the brief moment of joy in the world as *ukiyo* ("The Floating World"), and saw it as something to celebrate.

The culture of the capital was centered on the pleasure districts, home to teahouses, restaurants, brothels, bathhouses, theaters, and other entertainments. Actors and courtesans became the most famous and revered celebrities, and artists produced low-cost works of art for mass consumption by making woodblock prints.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=740#oembed-2

Since one set of woodblocks can produce many copies of a print, artists were able to invest time and care in their production, but still sell them at prices that the middle class patrons of the pleasure district could afford. Many prints focus on just these pleasures, with head-shots of actors and courtesans, scenes from popular plays and sumo wrestling matches, tea shops, and, of course, sex.

Katsushika Hokusai was a contemporary of Ando Hiroshige, who also produced a few surviving *shunga* prints in his characteristically lavish style. These two artists were the central artists of the Edo period, and Hokusai is considered by some to be the most prominent artist from all of Asian history, and, given the vast chronological, geographical, and cultural extent of Asian history, this is a very substantial claim. Hokusai was not a minor figure, a second-rate artist producing cheap pornography. He was a celebrated master artist, and his production of *shunga* prints reveals a great deal about Edo Japan. In this period, *shunga* was not a marginalized or despised genre, but a prominent subject for artists to represent and patrons to consume. While the methods of publication emphasize secrecy and revelation, this is not due to shame but to a desire to heighten the sense of intimacy and titillation. Opening small, wrapped packages containing such scenes of erotic fantasy would have delayed contact with the image, and therefore elicited a stronger response once the image was revealed.

The texts that accompany Hokusai's *shunga* prints have been criticized as lacking in the nuance and artistry of the images, and perhaps this is fair. The text surrounding the figures in *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, for example, is as absurd as the image, and as ecstatic, but also seems rather crude and direct. It consists of dialogue between the three participants, thereby granting human speech to the monstrous animals. At the same time, the woman's speech breaks down into incoherent sounds of pleasure. In this way, the animals are elevated to a near-human status through their ability to speak, and the human is reduced to a more base state, as she loses hers in this cross-species encounter. An excerpt serves to convey the tone of the complete text text (*bobo* is a Japanese term for an octopus, but is also a Japanese slang term for the vulva):

> LARGE OCTOPUS: My wish comes true at last, this day of days; finally I have you in my grasp! Your "bobo" is ripe and full, how wonderful! Superior to all others! To suck and suck and suck some more…
>
> MAIDEN: You hateful octopus! Your sucking at the mouth of my womb makes me gasp for breath! Aah! yes… it's…there!!! With the sucker, the sucker!! Inside, squiggle, squiggle, oooh! Oooh, good, oooh good! There, there! Theeeeere! Goood! Whew! Aah! Good, good, aaaaaaaaaah! Not yet! Until now it was I that men called an octopus! An octopus! Ooh! Whew! How are you able…!? Ooh! yoyoyooh, saa… hicha hicha gucha gucha, yuchyuu chyu guzu guzu suu suuu….[1]

While perhaps lacking the delicacy of the images, the text speaks to a celebration of the pleasures of sex, without the

1. James Heaton and Toyoshima Mizuho, "Hokusai's Octopi and the Maiden," *Kyoto Journal* 18 (1991): 15.

presence of moralizing or condemnation. Many *shunga* are scenes of mutual (or group) pleasure. While many of these images were produced by and for men, and often present the female body for a voyeuristic male gaze, many other examples are intended for a straight female audience. The genre of *shunga* as a whole seems to celebrate sex in the fullest range possible, featuring solitary figures masturbating (sometimes while gazing upon *shunga* prints, within the prints), straight couples, gay and lesbian couples, interspecies couples, groups, and on.

Not all *shunga* were produced with the level of care and nuance of those of Hokusai, but many were, even some that are if anything more overtly graphic. These works by Hokusai – a major Japanese artist working 200 years ago – should serve to establish that sexual imagery, even openly erotic and explicit imagery, despite common assumptions, is neither a modern nor a Western phenomenon, nor is it a marginal theme in the history of art. The section that follows examines prehistoric images about sex, ancient Greek and Roman erotic imagery, and Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres' nineteenth-century French scenes of Turkish harems.

Comparisons and Connections I

The representation of sexual activity is as old as representation itself. Paleolithic cave paintings feature many images of animals, as discussed in the Nature chapter, but also contain many human figures, as well as human-animal hybrids creatures. Images of women that emphasize their reproductive capacities are well-known and frequently reproduced. Images of sex and of disembodied genitals are less frequently reproduced but also *more* common. Hundreds of examples survive, the majority of which depict female figures and body parts. Many of these focus on the reproductive organs, to the exclusion of any other features. Some focus on the torso or lower abdomen, with the **pubic triangle** enlarged in scale, indicating its centrality to the image. Others eliminate all other features, whatsoever, presenting disembodied vulvas of various shapes.[2]

2. See: Marin Cârciumaru, Iuliana Lazar, Elena-Cristina Niţu, and Minodora Ţuţuianu-Cârciumaru, "The Symbolical Significance of Several Fossils discovered in the Epigravettian from Poiana Ciresului-Piatra Neamt, Romania," *Preistoria Alpina* 45 (2011): 33-44, 41.



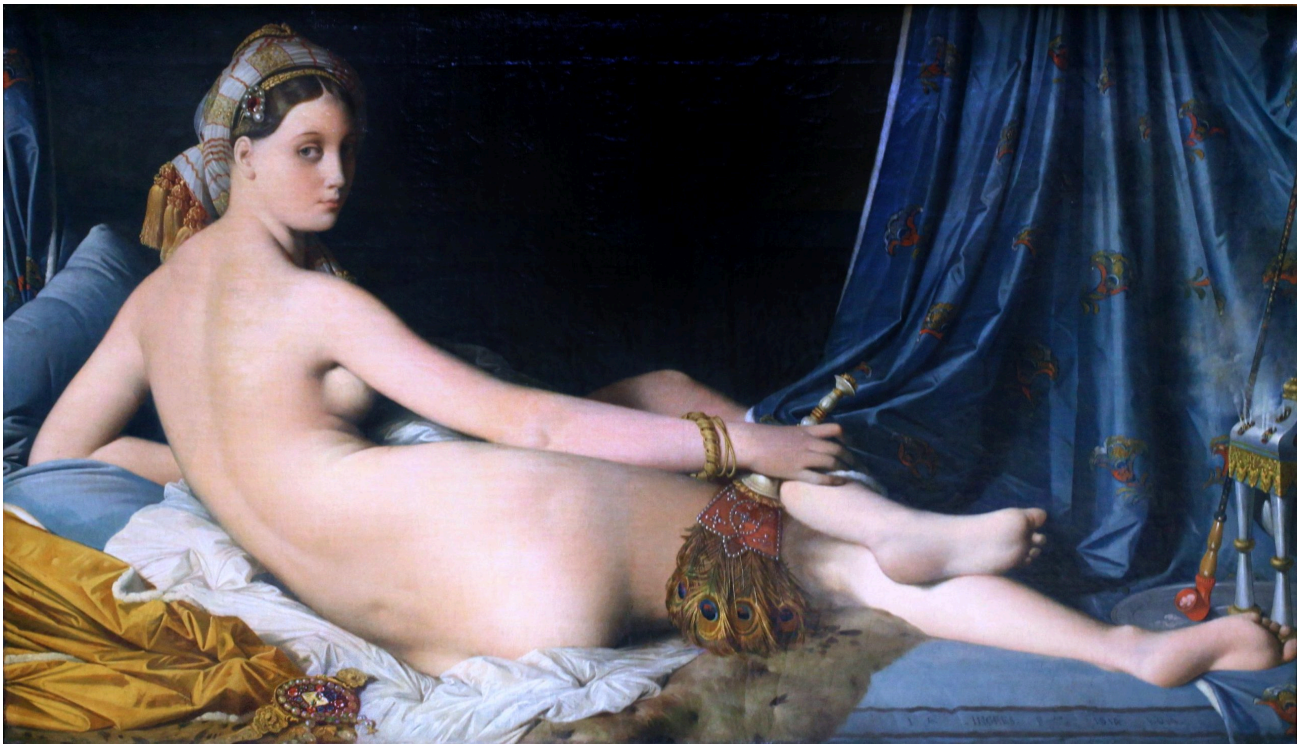
Drawing of the common types of drawings of vulvas found in prehistoric art, based on figure by Cârciumaru, Lazăr, et al. Image by Mari H.

Do they celebrate female fertility, or male lust, matriarchal power or female subjugation? We cannot be certain about the meaning(s) or intent behind these images since, as *prehistoric* images, there are no texts to supply explanations, and few contextual clues regarding these simple, line-drawn images. However, as the hundreds of known examples of vulva drawings are also echoed in a range of other media including stone and ivory carving and clay sculpture, their importance cannot be overlooked. Indeed, there are even fossilized shells that were likely transported great distances in order to be collected by prehistoric peoples apparently because of their strong resemblance to the shape of human vulvas.[3] Whatever purpose these images served, whatever goals their creators had, they clearly constidered this disembodied form to be of great significance.

Often representations of sex in art focus on reproduction, but to do so to the exclusion of its other functions is to mischaracterize the role that sexuality plays in human society. In addition to allowing *Homo sapiens* to carry on as a species, sex is used to define relationships, express love and intimacy, to establish hierarchies of power, and, of course, to provide pleasure. In order to talk at length about sexual imagery, it is necessary to discuss "the **gaze**." This is a term used in art history and related fields to describe a sexually charged form of looking, and it generally implies uneven power relations, frequently connected not only to gender but also to notions of race and "exoticism." Most often, it is used to describe the lustful look of a (usually clothed) man at a (usually naked) woman. The term can be used to describe looks among figures within works of art, but more often is used to describe the look of the viewer outside of the work at the figures within it.

Few artists are more obvious in their construction of the male gaze than Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, whose *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* (1806, see the Power chapter) showcases his strong interest in representations of power. The issue of power might seem less central to his *The Grand Odalisque* (1814), but through the concept of the gaze we can see the intersection of the themes of power and sex. The image is richly sensual, exhibiting Ingres' virtuosity as a painter of surfaces and textures. The contrasts among the representations of the crumpled sheets, soft fur and feathers, hard jewels and, most importantly, smooth, soft skin of the woman invite us into the work. The contrast in color tones – the cool blues of the setting, and the warm peaches and pinks of the woman – emphasize the potential warmth of her body. The pose of the figure, whose back is toward us, but who turns to look over her shoulder at us, is gently sinuous. Ingres has elongated the figure's back, encouraging our eyes to caress her body slowly.

3. See: Marin Cârciumaru, Iuliana Lazar, Elena-Cristina Niţu, and Minodora Ţuţuianu-Cârciumaru, "The Symbolical Significance of Several Fossils discovered in the Epigravettian from Poiana Ciresului-Piatra Neamt, Romania," *Preistoria Alpina* 45 (2011): 33-44, 41.



Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, La Grande Odalisque, oil on canvas, 1814 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

An **odalisque** is a woman enslaved or serving as a concubine, especially in a Turkish or Ottoman harem. The opium pipe at her feet, her head wrap, and other small touches throughout, serve to establish the setting of the work. In the nineteenth century, when the work was painted, Turkey was the site of considerable European fantasy, in which it was seen as a land of moral decadence, of languid, opium-fueled sensuality and sexual license. In essence, the "Orient" – the term used at the time to describe the Near East and Middle East, as well as South and East Asia and even some of North Africa, symbolized all that European society of the day denied itself.

This painting was so central to Ingres's career that he painted many simpler reproductions, often in black-and-white, from 1814, when he produced the original painting, and the 1860s. If an artist repeats an image for almost half a century, it is certainly a key image in their career.



J.-A. Moulin, Photograph of a nude woman, based on Ingres's The Grand Odalisque (1854). Photo: Public Domain.

An 1854 photograph by J.-A. Moulin based on *The Grande Odalisque* removes some of the pretext of its prototype. The photograph is a loosely faithful re-staging of the painting, with the parted curtains suggesting that the nude woman is being revealed to us as she reclines, with her back to us but her gaze, over her shoulder, perhaps meeting ours. However, unlike Ingres' spotless odalisque, the photographic model has dirty feet, perhaps grimy from the photography studio floor. This detail breaks the fantasy that of looking at an "exotic" member of a pampered and secluded harem far, far from Europe, and remind us that this model is actually a lower-class French woman merely posing as such. Stripped of the illusion provided by the setting, the photograph is perhaps closer to straightforward pornography in a way that the more explicit but

also more complex imagery of Hokusai is not. This is not to say that if her feet were clean this would be "art," but since they are dirty, it is "pornography." Rather, the dirt on her feet reveals to us the sordid circumstances of the production of the photograph and highlights the gap between what the image attempts to portray – a Turkish odalisque – and the reality behind it. It also reminds us that the model for Ingres's painting was *also* not an actual odalisque, but also most likely a lower-class French woman.

Who are we, when we look at Ingres' large, nearly life-sized painting? The artist places – indeed, attempts to force – us into the position of the sultan, contemplating this woman who is kept for his sexual pleasure. This is the embodiment of the sexually powerful male gaze. It is worth noting that a female viewer, when looking at this painting, is placed in the "male role" of the empowered viewer, just as surely as a male viewer, that a gay male viewer is pushed into the position of a straight male viewer, and so on. One more Ingres painting, though, should clarify these issues yet further.



Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, The Turkish Bath, oil on canvas glued on wood, 1862 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Grégory Lejeune, Public Domain.

His *The Turkish Bath* (1862) evokes the same exotic ***orientalist*** fantasy – that is, the European fantasy of the "exotic Orient" – as also see in *The Grand Odalisque* (though it is curious that one of two versions of *The Turkish Bath* was owned by the Turkish-Egyptian collector Khalil Bey, who had an actual harem).

There are three fundamental differences between the *The Grand Odalisque* and *The Turkish Bath*. First, in place of a single odalisque, we see the entire harem. The women, predominantly naked, lounge indolently upon one another while they smoke opium, play music, eat, drink, and caress one another. The image is almost exclusively composed of the

organic, curvilinear lines that define the soft bodies of the female figures, echoed by the round format of the image. Second, none of the figures looks back at the viewer. Third, the **horizon line** is set curiously high, above the horizontal center of the image, which makes the viewer's eye-level unusually low, as if we are crouching down to waist-height while we look at the scene. Coupled with the **tondo** format – the circular canvas – the effect is that of peering through a keyhole at the harem, observing the naked women without concern of being, ourselves, observed. This allows a viewer to gaze freely, slowly, perhaps longingly, upon these women without having to confront their gaze, and therefore their individuality and humanity.

The painting, then, gives the vantage point of the **voyeur**, of the Peeping Tom, intended to allow a wealthy European, clothed, straight male audience to ogle enslaved, naked Turkish and African women in complete comfort and with a sense of mastery and control. These paintings are often celebrated for their beauty, and for the technical skill of the artist, but we should not do so without remaining aware that they encapsulate the colonial, sexist gaze of the **orientalist**.

Turning from a European work depicting a European fantasy of "the East" to a work produced in the Safavid Empire (Persia/Iran), we find a very different approach to the representation of eroticism. This Persian miniature by the prominent artist Muhammad Qasim Musavvir depicts Shah Abbas I, a Persian shah (king) celebrated for his military victories, but rather than showing a scene of battle and conquest, the artist depicts the ruler relaxing beneath a tree, while a serving boy offers him a cup of wine.



Muhammad Qasim, Portrait of Shah Abbas I and his Page, ink and color on paper, 1627 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

The figures are richly clothed, including with highlights in gold. The image reflects reports of Abbas' love of wine and feasting, and also of youthful male cup-bearers and pages. Rather than opting for the graphic nature of *shunga*, or the attempt to generate a personal connection with the viewer found in Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*, this image seems elegant, allusive, and self-contained.

The figures are in close contact with one another, as the older and more powerful figure pulls the young figure toward him. The turban signals that the young figure is male, but he is marked according to Persian culture of the period as effeminate, with his soft, smooth jawline and long curls. The phallic wine jug between his legs, which he grips and points toward Abbas' groin, alludes to their sexual relationship. At the right edge of the image is a short poem in Persian that reads:

> Him! May the world bring you satisfaction of three lips: the lip of your lover, the lip of the stream, and the lip of the wine cup.[4]

Such homoeroticism is common in Persian art and, especially, literature, where male beauty is often characterized as a powerful force, having a highly distracting effect on

4. "Portrait de Shah Abbas Ier et son page, Muhammad Qasim," *The Louvre* (2023): https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010321123

other men. In this way, the power of the gaze is reversed, so that it is the gazer who is disempowered, even incapacitated by his attraction to another.

While many cultures partake of the problematic gendered gaze epitomized by Ingres, others contain more balanced or varied representations of sexuality. Sexual imagery is absolutely central to the art of ancient Greece and Rome, where we find images that run the gambit from richly sensual to crudely humorous, and focused at least as often on the beauty or allure of men as of women. A series of works will serve to establish a few of the roles of sexual images in the period: two figural sculptures and two wine cups.

A great many images of the goddess of carnal love, **Aphrodite** (know to the Romans as **Venus**), survive, and many of these smolder with passion and energy. We will look, though, at other figures treated as the subjects of an erotic gaze. *The Barberini Faun* is a strongly emotional work believed to have been made in the **Hellenistic Period**, a period in ancient Greece beginning with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and ending in 31 BCE, when the last Hellenistic Greek dynasty was conquered by the Romans. The surviving work might actually be a Roman copy of a Hellenistic Greek sculpture (or possibly even a Roman invention), but in any case, it is quite typical of Hellenistic works in that it does not seem to be self-contained; instead, it solicits an emotional response from the viewer.



Barberini Faun, marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Barberini Faun, back, marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The image depicts a sleeping figure that at first seems to be a human man, but on close examination is revealed to be a faun or satyr, a mythical creature that is half-human, half-goat. Though fauns are usually depicted as goats from the waist, down, here the only clearly identifying features are the tail that can be seen emerging from the base of his spine and the horns, now damaged and easily missed amongst in his tussled hair and wreath of grape vines.

As semi-human beings, fauns were associated with animalistic sexual passions, and were depicted in all manners of sexual activity with a wide range of sexual partners, male and female, human and animal. This figure exudes sexual tension. The pose of abandon, with the legs splayed apart to reveal the figure's genitals, recalls the unselfconscious pose of an animal as much as of a human. The figure's loose pose presses out into our space and invites us to circle the statue. The tightening of the figure's abdomen indicates that his sleep is not relaxed and peaceful, but rather, torrid and intense. The sculptor seems to have captured a moment in time with such precision that we can tell that the faun has just inhaled, and is momentarily holding his breath before exhaling.



Barberini Faun (Detail of Face), marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The faun's turbulent sleep is also emphasized by his facial expression. His head is tipped back, with eyes closed, brows furrowed, and lips parted, in a manner that recalls the pose of the woman in Hokusai's *Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*. He seems to be in the midst of an erotic dream, and since he is insensible – possibly even in a drunken stupor resulting from partying with the god of wine, Dionysus – his muscular body is presented for the viewer's gaze much as the bodies of Ingres' odalisques are.

The delicacy of representation we see in the *Barberini Faun* is uncommon. We have many more examples of sexual imagery preserved in smaller, less costly artifacts. In particular, such imagery was a frequent choice for **kylixes** – large, shallow wine cups, often used at **symposia**, which were ancient drinking parties that often culminated in sex. One **red-figure** kylix from ca. 510 BCE, for example, depicts a wild orgy in which many revelers have sex with one another, in pairs and in groups. The execution is somewhat rough, with limited expressions on the figures (though the one at the left edge of the image seems to smirk).



Painter of Pédieus (?), Erotic scene on the rim of an Attic red-figure kylix (wine cup), terracotta, ca. 510 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, CC BY 3.0.

In this detail, we see two groups of three, linked by the overlapping of feet and hands in the space between the groups. The figure in the middle of the rightward trio is clearly female, though the sex of the figure in the middle of the leftward trio is indeterminate. The hairstyle suggests a male figure, but since the figure's back is to us, we cannot be certain. The lines of the image are crisp and energetic, and though they might seem as if quickly painted, the careful overlaps connecting figures within and between the trios suggest attention to detail.



Workshop of Nikosthenes, Kylix, Athens, Greece, 530/520 BCE. Art Institute of Chicago. Photo: Lucas Livingston, CC BY 2.0

An image of a contemporary **black-figure** kylix gives a better sense of the shape of these wine cups. The scenes on the outside of the cups would not be easily visible until the wine within was nearly consumed and the cup tipped back steeply. The imagery here makes a sort of joke about the effects of wine on such a drinker. Holding the large cup by the two handles at the sides, and draining the last of its contents, the drinker would in essence be holding a mask up before his face. The two large, staring eyes visible on the underside would cover his eyes and the handles would mimic wide ears. The cup foot – the flared circular form at the base – becomes a pig's snout, so the drunk reveler is reduced by wine to a goggle-eyed beast. At this point, drinker and their companions might well be preparing to engage in just the sort of activities the orgy image presents.



Bomford Cup, underside, terracotta, ca. 530-515 B.C.E. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Photo by Egisto Sani, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Bomford Cup, interior, terracotta, ca. 530-515 B.C.E. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Photo by Egisto Sani, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The Bomford Cup (525-500 BCE) also playfully implies the effects of wine on such a drinker. The eyes and ears are more or less the same as the previous example, but in place of the more usual circular cup foot, the potter has sculpted a set of male genitals. The inside of the cup contains a delicate and beautiful scene of partygoers reclining in flowing robes, their heads crowned with wreaths and their room hung with grapevines. As the cup is emptied, and the underside revealed, the drinker is transformed into a caricature of sexual excitement, reduced to his genitals, to his arousal. Between the eyes on the cup is the face of a faun, reinforcing the sexual energy of the work.

The final Ancient work to be considered here is a delicately rendered sleeping figure, probably a second-century Roman copy of a **Hellenistic Greek** original. As with the *Barberini Faun*, the work implores an emotional response. In the first image, we see the individual from the side that was likely intended as the initial view.



Sleeping Figure, marble, ca. 150-140 B.C.E., on marble cushion by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1620 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Pierre-Yves Beaudouin, CC BY-SA 3.0.

From this angle, we see the soft flesh of the figure's back, rendered with such delicacy that it seems as if it would yield to a gentle touch. The figure, like the faun, is sleeping restlessly (here, upon a stone cushion produced for it by the Italian Baroque master, Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the seventeenth century, after its rediscovery). The face is turned toward us, but the torso then twists away, and so it is difficult to speak of the sculpture's "front" or "back." Instead, the torsion of the human form encourages us to walk around the sculpture. As we work our way down the figure's body, we see the lower legs and feet are tangled in the sheets; the sleeper has been tossing and turning, and one foot is raised, toes curling tensely upward. This is a very complex pose, gracefully achieved.



Sleeping Figure, marble, ca. 150-140 B.C.E., on marble cushion by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1620 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Pierre-Yves Beaudouin, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Circling the sculpture, we see the figure from a range of angles, ultimately arriving at the opposite side from where we began. The intent is clearly to surprise the (straight male) viewer: from the original view, the figure seems to be a sleeping *woman*. We see a feminine face, long, tousled hair, a narrow waist, soft and broader hips, and the swelling of a breast. Having circled the sculpture, though, we see that the figure bears male genitals. According to a Greek myth, **Hermaphroditos** was the son of two deities, **Hermes** and **Aphrodite.** The nymph **Salmacis** fell in love with him and, when he refused her, begged the gods to never be separated from him. **Zeus** granted her wish, merging her body with his and producing a figure that was lauded in the Greek period as an ideal form, unifying male and female into a single body.

This figure is complicated, and needs to be considered with great care. It is sometimes seen as a sort of joke, tricking a presumably straight male viewer into a state of arousal only to surprise him with the revelation of male genitals that would frustrate his lust for the figure he assumed was female. However, this theory overlooks the stunning workmanship of this delicate marble sculpture, rather extravagant for a simple visual punch-line. More importantly, though, the "joke" theory ignores ancient notions regarding what constitutes acceptable and "normal" sexual behaviors. The notion that this is some sort of a joke relies on a problematic modern notion that same-sex attractions are to be ridiculed, and therefore that a person "tricked" into feeling them has been embarrassed. Such notions are largely absent in Greek art and literature. Ancient viewers were more likely to have seen in the figure an evocation of the earliest humans – believed by some Greeks to have had both sexes joined into dual-beings – or of the presence of the masculine and feminine elements that exist in all people.

Finally, the sculptor has also granted the figure a sense of interiority. That is, though this is actually just a piece of stone, when we look at the work, we cannot help but imagine what this sleeping figure might be dreaming of, as if it were a real, living person. In this sense, it is much like the Barbarini Faun. Both are powerful works that engage with the viewer, that pull us in, induce us to circle around them, and most importantly, to puzzle over what such beings would think about, dream about, and perhaps long for. In this, both works are more than mere objects for the viewer's gaze. None of this fits with the theory that this riveting figure is nothing but a cruel joke — indeed, a doubly cruel one, embarrassing the viewer at the expense not only of this complex sculpted figure, but also through the dehumanization and denigration of living people whose bodies are not located at either pole of the spectrum of sex and gender. The sleeping figure is no mere joke. Instead the work is a sensitive image of a figure neither male nor female, but graceful, sensuous, and full of provocative ambiguities.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

KANDARIYA MAHADEO TEMPLE, KHAJURAHO, MADHYA PRADESH STATE, INDIA (1025-1050)



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Ramón, CC BY-SA 2.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How do the artists create a sense of **movement**?
- How do the **forms** interrelate with one another?
- What is the effect of the **repetition** throughout the temple?
- How do **variety** and **unity** play out in the temple's imagery?

SACRED EROTICISM

The Kandariya Mahadeo Temple, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh State, India (1025-1050) is a remarkable work, a massive sandstone structure covered in several hundred carved figures that ripple across its undulant walls. It is a Hindu temple, primarily dedicated to the god **Shiva**, one of the most important of the thousands of Hindu deities. The temple houses a ***linga*** – a cylindrical column that is a symbol of Shiva and, according to some scholars, a **phallic symbol** – beneath its highest peaked roof. From a distance, the intricate decoration is reduced to a busy pattern, but as we approach the structure, we can discern hundreds of idealized figures, many of them erotic in nature. The highly sexual figures are integral to the temple's conception and design, and essential to its function.

VISUAL ELEMENTS



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Ramón, CC BY-SA 2.0.

The Kandariya Mahadeo Temple is an overwhelming mass of stone, of undulating and cascading forms. The towering roofs mimic the peaks of a mountain range, rising successively from the entrance porch at the east to the rearmost chamber at the west. The whole structure sits atop a massive, solid "basement" level, articulated with a series of horizontal bands of molding, regularly punctuated with niches containing relief sculptures. The imagery, though, is largely concentrated in the three main **registers** of sculptures at the main level, running between the open porches and containing a line of 650 sensuously idealized figures, human and divine, sculpted at approximately half life-size.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail of Decoration), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by deepgoswami, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

One set of images from among the vast profusion of lively figures surrounding the temple is the focus of this section. The scenes are at once lively and orderly, projecting and receding but in a clear and regular pattern. Similarly, the figures are consistent, yet varied. In each band, we see a sexual scene at the center, with a pair engaged in coitus, flanked by two auxiliary figures. These central scenes are surrounded by pairs of female figures, in turn surrounded by pairs of four-armed deities, surrounded by women (perhaps **yakshis**). The richly bejeweled deities sway in gentle ***contrapposto***, and look straight out at us. They hold their four hands (some of which have broken off) in similar positions and carry similar items, but a close look reveals differences. Some have animals at their feet, while others have human figures. One is bearded. Their headdresses are individualized, but many of the figures – male and female – seem to have the same features: wide, narrow eyes, overarched with thin, sharp eyebrows; broad noses; prominent, bow-shaped lips. The result is a unified composition that is nonetheless consistently interesting. Too little unity and the temple would be chaotic. Too much, and there would be no incentive to examine more than a few of the hundreds of figures.

Unlike the figures of four-armed deities, the female figures generally do not look out at us. Instead, they seem to comport themselves for the viewer's pleasure. Draped with elaborate jewelry and crowned with a great variety of headdresses and diadems, these lithe figures twist and turn in complex poses possibly drawn from yoga practices common in the period. Some face outward, displaying and even fondling their full breasts. Others turn their backs to us, posing in exaggerated *contrapposto*, thrusting their hips in our general direction, as if openly inviting our gaze. The motion of the figures echoes (and is echoed by) the very form of the building, with its many protrusions and recesses.

The forms are, like much sensual or erotic imagery, predominately curvilinear. Here, though, this is counterbalanced and therefore emphasized by the sharp-edged rectilinear **soffits** on which the figures stand, and the rectangular frames around the smaller figures and floral patterning between the bands. These squared elements highlight the loose, swaying, curving, organic nature of the figures, and their diaphanous drapery.

The lower band of figures, here, contains the most acrobatic of the lovemaking couples visible in the detail. The woman stands with her legs spread wide apart, helped by the two voluptuous women at her sides. The man stands unsupported upon his head, with his legs bent as if to hold onto his partner for support. Rather than using his hands for balance, he reaches up to place them on the flanking women's groins. These figures are scantly clad, even in the context of this temple's sculptural program, wearing only a few necklaces, armbands and other such accessories, which serve not to clothe them but to emphasize their nakedness.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail One), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by deepgoswami, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The emotive power of the work is not contained merely in the moment – mostly hidden from view – where their sexual organs meet, but in the numerous gentle gestures of touch, and in the gazes exchanged by the figures within the scene. The quartet is sculpted with great inventiveness, carved with such delicacy and grace, so that what otherwise might otherwise be an amusing scene – given the gymnastic complexity of the group – becomes touching and beautiful.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail Two), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Kkavita, CC BY-SA 4.0.

In another panel, the two central figures are so complexly intertwined that at first it is difficult to determine whose legs are whose. The two legs that stand upon the ground are similarly posed and aligned. Likewise, two legs are raised and curved around the couple's waists. However, a careful inspection – and these sensuous and richly carved works do invite such close looking – reveals that each figure is standing on one leg while they each wrap their other legs around their partner. Serenaded by small musicians in the band above them, the figures gaze deeply into each other's eyes. She tugs on his hair, pulling his lips to hers, while he presses her back and grasps her thigh, holding her body against his. The two seem a completely self-contained unit, unaware of the torrent of figures around them, even oblivious to the man and woman on either side of them who masturbate, presumably inspired by their torrid passion.

Crouching beneath the legs of the man to the left is a small female figure who is nonetheless clearly an adult, based on her voluptuous form. We do not know who she is, though she is represented in hieratic scale, and so must be a figure of lesser importance. Her gaze, though, serves to point our eyes right to the sight of the couple's union, and her smile may serve to suggest the desired response from the viewer.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Linga), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Rajenver, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Deep within the sanctuary at the heart of this complex structure is the ***linga*** or ***lingam***, a cylindrical column obscurely symbolic of **Shiva**. This simple, unadorned form stands upright on an elaborate base in a niche, surrounded by waves of voluptuous female figures. The role and symbolism of the *linga* is debated within Hinduism, but it the form is likely to have begun as a **phallic symbol** – a stand-in for a penis – and therefore as an emblem of fertility and power. Some are more overtly phallic in shape than the example at the Kandariya Mahadeo Temple. However, the *linga* does not represent human sexuality – though it seems to derive from it. Instead, it evokes the cosmic powers that Hindus brought the universe into being.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Kandariya Mahadeo Temple is in the Nagara style, prevalent in northern India in the medieval period. These structures frequently feature erotic sculptural imagery on their exteriors. While this example is among the most celebrated, it is also quite typical of the imagery of the style. The temple may have been commissioned by Vidyadhara (ruled 1004-35), one of the powerful Chandella rulers who collectively were responsible for building approximately fifty temples in Khajuraho around the turn of the first millennium. This group is characterized by highly complex forms for the temples, as well as by the imagery adorning them. They bear many horizontal bands of decoration, as well as many protrusions and niches, which create restlessly active structures.

The imagery was puzzling to its first European audiences, since the majority of these viewers were Christians, unused to celebratory sexual imagery in religious contexts. Hinduism, though, views sexuality as a positive aspect of human identity, connected to fertility and reproduction, but also to spiritual attainment. The *Shilpa Prakasha* (*Light on Art*), a text for architects and sculptors contemporary with the Kandariya Mahadeo Temple declares that images of attractive women, for example, are not merely acceptable but outright necessary for a successful monument:

> As a house without a wife, as frolic without a woman, so without the figure of a woman the monument will be of inferior quality and will bear no fruit.[5]

Indeed, the temples of Khajuraho frequently feature the sixteen female figure types recommended by The *Shilpa Prakasha*.

There are several arguments advanced in explanation of the remarkable array of erotic images gracing Hindu temple walls. They may be intended to imply (or invoke) fertility and abundance. Alternately, they may be metaphorical representations of a mystical union celebrated in the ***Upanishads*** – sacred Hindu spiritual texts. According to the doctrine of monism followed by some Hindu groups, the ***atman*** – the eternal self within an individual, somewhat like a soul – was part of ***Brahman*** – the infinite and unbounded power that sustains the universe. Monism teaches that individuals are one with Brahman, originating within it, connected to it throughout life, and returning to it after death. This union of two seemingly distinct entities was represented through the merging together of a couple in sexual union. A passage from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* reads:

5. Vidya Dehejia, *Indian Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 164-165.

> In the embrace of his beloved, a man forgets the whole world – everything both within and without; in the very same way, he who embraces the Self knows neither within nor without.[6]

It is also possible that the images relate to the contemporary prominence of the Kaulas, a tantric sect that worshipped Shiva and held sexual intercourse as central to their religious practice. Final interpretations are difficult, since Hinduism is not a single, doctrinal belief system. It grew out of earlier traditions of the Indus Valley in modern-day Pakistan, and was not based on the teachings of a single individual, or on a single text. There is not even a single interpretation of the divine. Indeed, Hinduism might be considered to be a loosely connected group of hundreds or even thousands of religions, based on hundreds of thousands of deities, though these are also often seen as **avatars** or manifestations of the formless, boundless *Brahman*.

These complicated, passionate images certainly celebrate the human form, and the power of sexuality. The specifics of their connections to religious beliefs and philosophical principles are less certain – or perhaps varied and open. The following section considers works from Italy, Germany, Peru, Cochiti Pueblo, and France, some of which celebrate human sexuality in its remarkable diversity, and others that condemn it. They are rooted in tradition, and at times groundbreaking; they draw on religious beliefs and cultural practices. While the specific messages vary, they continue to demonstrate the centrality of human sexuality to the visual arts.

Comparisons and Connections II

The profusion, exuberance and variety of erotic imagery in Hindu temples is perhaps unfamiliar to those only schooled in the European **canon**, but many religions make use of sexual imagery, either celebrating or condemning it, based on the narrative of the religion. Christianity's traditional perspective on human sexuality – which was central to the religion's art and rhetoric in the **Middle Ages** and **Renaissance**, and continues to have a significant influence on the lives of Christians and others living in Christian-majority cultures – is rooted in the Bible's account of the Fall of Man. According to the text of the Book of Genesis, the monotheistic God common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam creates the first couple, Adam and Eve, and provides them the beautiful and bountiful Garden of Eden in which to live, but instructs them that they must not eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Prior to eating the fruit, they are unaware that they are naked, which is often interpreted as a sign that they did not yet have any sexual consciousness, any sexuality. After disobeying God's order, they become aware that they are naked, notice the differences between their bodies, and cover their genitals out of shame.

6. Vidya Dehejia, *Indian Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 166.



Many artists have represented this subject over the last two millennia, and we will examine three examples. The first, by Tomasso Guidi (also known as Masaccio), is a **fresco** – pigment mixed into wet plaster and painted on a prepared wall surface so that, when the plaster dries, the painting is not merely on the wall; it is the wall. His work in the Brancacci Chapel in Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (ca. 1427) shows the Expulsion of Adam and Eve, the moment in which the **primordial couple** are thrown out of Eden after their disobedience.

In sharp contrast with the numerous joyous figures adorning the Kandariya Mahadeo Temple, these progenitors of humanity are agonized by their sorrow, guilt, and regret. At the very left of this image stands the gate to Eden. Sharp, straight black lines – once **gilded** – radiate outward, representing the angry voice of God. Adam, covering his face, seems to hunch away from them as they stab out toward his back. The angel (or cherubim) glares down at them from above, while pointing vigorously away from Eden. The text of Genesis reads:

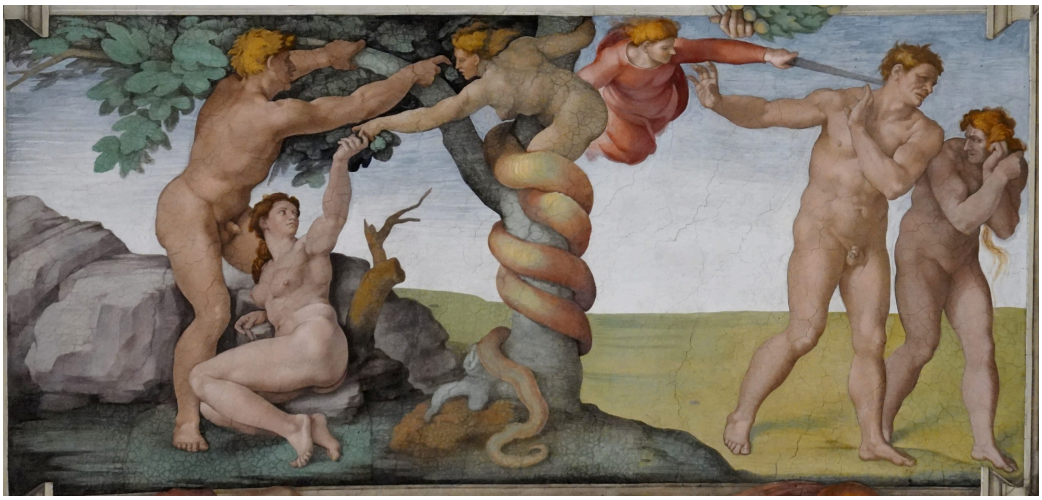
After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword

Masaccio, The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, fresco, 1426-7 (Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence). Photo by carulmare, CC BY 2.0.

flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.[7]

Adam and Eve are cast out into the harsh world. Represented in smooth, dull shades of tan, it seems dry and lacking in any fertility or vegetation. These early moments in religious narrative foster a negative relationship with sex, sexuality, and reproduction, which early Christians saw as sinful. Indeed, some of the most prominent early Christian theologians argued that the devout should abstain for all sexual contact whatsoever, even in the context of marriage for procreation.

Masaccio's image conveys a sense of shame and humiliation connected with sexuality. Unlike the proud figures on the Kandariya Mahadeo Temple, Eve covers her breasts and genitals. This early Renaissance painting demonstrates the period's interest in naturalistic representations of the human body, but Masaccio uses this naturalism as a vehicle to convey the figures' shame. Adam's torso is fairly similar to that of the *Barberini Faun*, but where the contraction of the faun's abdominal muscles is used to convey a sensuality or eroticism, Masaccio uses the same device to indicate that Adam is wracked with sobs.



Michelangelo, The Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1508-12 (Vatican City, Rome). Photo by Richard Mortel, CC BY 2.0.

Michelangelo Buonarroti, the central figure of the Italian Renaissance and one of the most prominent artists in world history, spent time in the Brancacci Chapel, drawing sketches of Masaccio's innovative figures when he was a young artist. His image of the Fall in the Sistine Chapel (1508–1512) is clearly based on Masaccio's, but Michelangelo provides more of the narrative. To the left, Adam and Eve reach for the forbidden fruit, handed to Eve by the serpent, whose body turns into that of a woman. To the right, they are cast out in poses drawn with some variation from Masaccio's figures, again awash in shame, horror and revulsion.

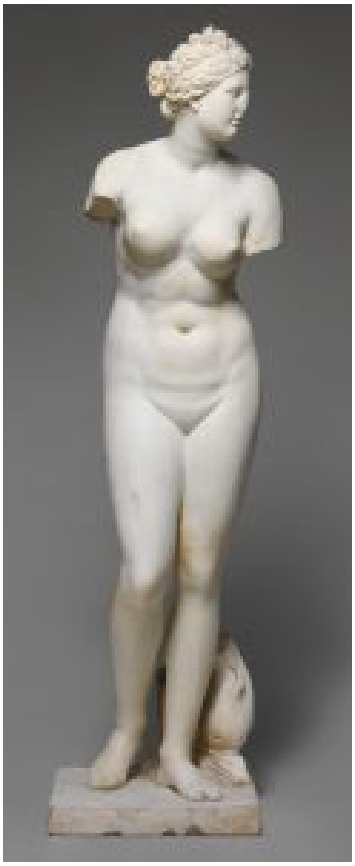
From before the Fall to after, Eve transforms. Before eating the fruit, she is beautiful, youthful, and radiant, appearing calm and confident; after, she is haggard, older, and darker (which, according to racist beauty standards in Europe in the period, would be read as uglier than her pale pre-Fall coloring). In medieval and Renaissance Christianity, which held that God designed everything in the world as a teaching device, inner and outer states were thought to match one another. Therefore, as Eve falls from purity to impurity, her outer form is made to match her corrupt inner state.

7. Genesis 3:24, New International Version.


1519

Hans Baldung Grien, Adam and Eve, woodcut, 1519 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

If these two Italian images gloss over the actual role of sex and sexuality in the Fall (perhaps implied by the proximity of Eve's face to Adam's genitals in Michelangelo's image), German Renaissance artist Hans Baldung renders this central to his images of the Fall, including a woodcut from 1519. Baldung dedicated much of his work to the exploration of sexuality and sensuality, returning to the theme again and again, frequently with a misogynistic tone. In comparison to the works by Masaccio and Michelangelo, his woodcut is a smoldering scene of sexual tension.



Aphrodite, Roman, 1st or 2nd century CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: Public Domain.

This sort of woodcut, unlike Japanese ***Ukiyo-e***, produces only monochromatic images, but Baldung subverts their stark quality by using **hatching** and **cross-hatching** to give the scene the illusion of shades of grey. The dark tree and Adam's shadowed body frame, contrast with, and emphasize the brighter, centered nude body of Eve, posed in *contrapposto* like a classical statue of Aphrodite.

Adam looms over Eve, placing a hand perhaps possessively on her shoulder. She turns as if startled. Her expression is ambiguous: Is she repulsed, aroused, or, perhaps, both? Her left hand is lowered as if absent-mindedly dropping the very fruit that was the cause of their interaction. Adam holds a conveniently posed fig-leaf, concealing Eve's genitalia from view, and yet its form seems mildly phallic, with the central lobe of the suggestively-shaped leaf pointing directly toward her hidden vulva and drawing our eye to the darkened space between her thighs. Additional shoots of the branch arch lewdly upward.

If this image might suggest ambiguity regarding Baldung's interpretation of the role of sexuality, his closely related painting of *Death and the Maiden* (ca. 1520-1525) should clarify his perspective. The figures are a mirror image of those in his *Fall of Man*, but Baldung has replaced the glowering figure of Adam with a rotting corpse, a personification of Death. If Eve's expression was ambiguous in the print, the maiden's horror is palpable in the painting. The implications are clear: for Baldung and many of his contemporaries, sex led to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and therefore to human mortality, and they saw sex, and the desire for it, as a mortal sin.



Hans Baldung Grien, Death and the Maiden, oil on panel, 1518-20 (Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel). Photo by Perledarte, CC BY-NC 2.0.

The ancient Moche culture, a pre-Incan civilization that flourished on the northern coast of Peru from about 200 BCE to about 600 CE, on the other hand, seems to express a rather permissive view of sex. Their pottery contains images of a range of sexual activities almost as wide as that depicted on Hindu temples, along with other scenes from daily life, animals, plants, and the like, often with humor. They used pots for ceremonies and buried them with their dead, but other uses have been suggested, as well.



Penis Pinching Its Nose Inside a Vagina, Moche Culture, Peru (Museo Arqueològico Rafael Larco Herrera, Lima). Photo by Laslovarga, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The wide variety of sexual scenes has led some to suggest that these pots might have been used for sexual education. Some examples make this seem fairly plausible, particularly those representing heterosexual intercourse, pregnancy, and childbirth. Others, though, would be hard to explain as educational. Humor seems to be the main motivation behind an example depicting an anthropomorphic penis. The penis rises out of the body of the pot, on which the outline of a vulva is drawn, suggesting that the penis is inside a vagina, where it is shown pinching its nose.



Stirrup Spout Bottle with Couple, ceramic, slip, pigment, ca. fourth-seventh century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Another Moche pot of pronounced inventiveness depicts a seated man, eyes wide, while receiving fallatio from a kneeling woman at his feet. In a similar piece, the woman's head is a separate piece of pottery, designed to be able to rock back and forth, simulating her activity. It is hard to see how such pots could serve as instructional fertility guides, considering how many of the acts depicted could not lead to reproduction. Instead, they seem to celebrate – and poke fun at – the sheer joy and variety of sexual experience.

Contemporary Native American pottery also explores myriad sexual acts and inclinations. Virgil Ortiz is a Native ceramicist and fashion designer from a family of artists in Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico. As a member of the Pueblo Council, is he a leading figure in his community, and uses his art to bridge the gap between the pueblo and the culture outside of it. He draws on traditional Cochiti pottery techniques, styles and subjects, but also updates these by including very contemporary subjects, transforming the tradition into his own idiom. As Ortiz writes:

> So the outside world knows what life is like inside Cochiti, I create traditional figures, but for the Cochiti people I create figures of unknown vocations so the people who rarely leave the pueblo have some sense of what life is like out there.[8]

Cochiti potters began sculpting unusual figures for an export market in the 1870s, and Ortiz continues this longstanding practice, pushing the boundaries further, especially in his two *Taboo* series. These bodies of work explore themes of drag performance (see links for images of Ortiz's works), BDSM (bondage and discipline, domination and submission, sadism and masochism), and other subcultures. (For other examples. see here, and here.) As he writes, his goal is to "use Taboo topics to engage people about today's society, culture, politics, religion and even social media."[9] The colors – black, beige and dusty red – are the traditional Cochiti pottery colors, and are used to achieve dramatic, high-contrast compositions. The graphic nature of the black patterns on the figure and pot are based on customary Cochiti forms. The forms of his pots are likewise traditional. However, by focusing his imagery on fetishized styles of sexual play and gear common in the BDSM community, Ortiz is able to play with these conventions, updating them and making his work transgressive. As Ortiz writes about one of his pots (image of the other side here):

> It's not the world in which we live our daily lives, but the unseen, underground world where people live out their

8. "Virgil Ortiz Biography," *Blue Rain Gallery*. Site is no longer active, but is archived on the Wayback Machine: https://web.archive.org/web/20060326210850/http://www.blueraingallery.com/artists/virgil_ortiz/9999.

9. "Taboo: Artist Statement," *King Galleries* (no date). https://kinggalleries.com/virgil-ortiz-taboo/

> fantasies that has power. Forbidden desires and fantasies are woven into the leather straps, vinyl and bondage imagery on this jar. Just like the men on the jar preparing to 'wrestle', we each wrestle with our human nature. That's just the nature of the beast.[10]

The traditional triangular patterns on Ortiz's pots, for example, become more powerfully energized by the danger they seem to pose to the figures between them. The stark, silhouetted forms recall current tattoo styles and fashion designs, and cause his works to resonate with contemporary culture, while evoking Cochiti traditions.



Miron Zownir, Untitled, 1984 (Hamburg, Germany). Photo: Permission granted by Miron Zownir.

If Ortiz's pottery representations of sexual subcultures at times render them innocuous, even perhaps cute, the imagery of German photographer and filmmaker Miron Zownir is thoroughly hard-edged, even willfully off-putting. An untitled photograph taken in Hamburg in 1984, for example, shows a man dressed somewhat similarly to Ortiz's figures, with comparable straps and piercings. Considering that the two works feature the same subject – a person dressed for BDSM – they could not be more dissimilar. Zownir's tattooed, pierced man stars out at us aggressively. He is defiantly un-idealized, older, a bit flabby and awkward in his straps. Zownir poses the subject slightly off-center, tilted and slouching. His body seems tired and overused, though the tattoo just above his groin – likely intended ironically – reads, "NUR FÜR DICH" ["ONLY FOR YOU"]. This portrait, tame in contrast with much of Zownir's work, presents a thoroughly unpolished image of sexuality, completely rejecting any sentimentality or romanticism, and instead emphasizing the gritty and harsh nature of some sexual encounters, defying the grace and beauty of works like the Kandariya Temple sculptures or even of the *shunga* prints. Zownir says that he chooses his subjects based on his own captivation with the bizarre:

> I am completely and radically devoted to what fascinates and interests me personally; things that I really want to get into, because they are mysterious to me, uncertain … In this thing, I knew I'd never reach a degree of saturation, when I'd say: now I've seen it all. You can never see it all … [V]ery few people dare the approach.[11]

The work of Yayoi Kusama is perhaps more ambiguous in its evocation of sexuality. A Japanese artist who joined the***avant-garde*** art scene of New York City in the 1960s, Kusama practiced obsessive repetition of a few forms, creating art installations and **happenings**, some of which – in keeping with the ethos of the 60s – she called "nude-ins." She would cover herself and her often-nude collaborators with polka dots, and they would appear in galleries but also in

10. "Taboo: Artist Statement," *King Galleries* (no date). https://kinggalleries.com/virgil-ortiz-taboo/

11. Miron Zownir, interviewed by Bennet Togler, *Eyemazing* 2 (2006), 71.

public spaces, such as her performance at the statue of *Alice in Wonderland* in Central Park, New York (1968, see here for images).

Kusama appears at the center of the image, fully clothed and shown in the act of painting polka dots onto one of her nude collaborators. Two of the men wear masks of women, while the woman seated on Alice's lap wears a mask of a man – in this case, Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, appearing in unclear association with a man wearing a mask of Richard Nixon, who was then running for president. In the context of the oversized figures from the absurdist tales of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, these bizarre figures seem to defy clear assertions of meaning. In her 2011 autobiography, Kusama describes this happening:

> How about taking a trip with me out to Central Park… under the magic mushroom of the Alice in Wonderland statue. Alice was the grandmother of the Hippies. When she was low, Alice was the first to take pills to make her high. I, KUSAMA, AM THE MODERN ALICE IN WONDERLAND. Like Alice who went through the looking grass, I, Kusama (I have lived for years in my famous, specially built room entirely covered by mirrors) have opened up a world of fantasy and freedom. You too can join my adventurous dance of life.[12]

Kusama sought out photographers to document her objects and installations. She would appear in these images, often dressed or decorated to appear as part of the work. She would then cut up these photographs in order to produce collages used to advertise her shows. In one such collage, the artist poses on her *Accumulation No. 2* (see here for image). nude but for her high-heeled shoes, and covered with her signature polka dots. The "accumulation" work – a couch covered in hundreds of phallic cloth protuberances, which are recurrent elements in her art – was part of her "Sex Obsession" series. In her pose, with her back to us but her face turned back to make eye contact, Kusama is playing with – or perhaps exploiting, or even both at once – her status as the "exotic" Asian object of a Western orientalist gaze in the manner of Ingres' odalisques, or of standard pinup posters. The photograph of Kusama was taken by Hal Reiff, and then combined with her *Infinity Net* as a backdrop and a "macaroni carpet" in the background, creating an impossible installation, mixing the scales of the original photographs so that even the tiny macaroni tubes become additional phallic symbols. Naked and surrounded by hundreds of phalluses, Kusama seems to become as much the subject of her advertisements as the works around her.

12. Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity* Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama, trans. by Ralph McCarthy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 42.



Gustave Courbet, L'Origine du Monde, oil on canvas, 1866 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

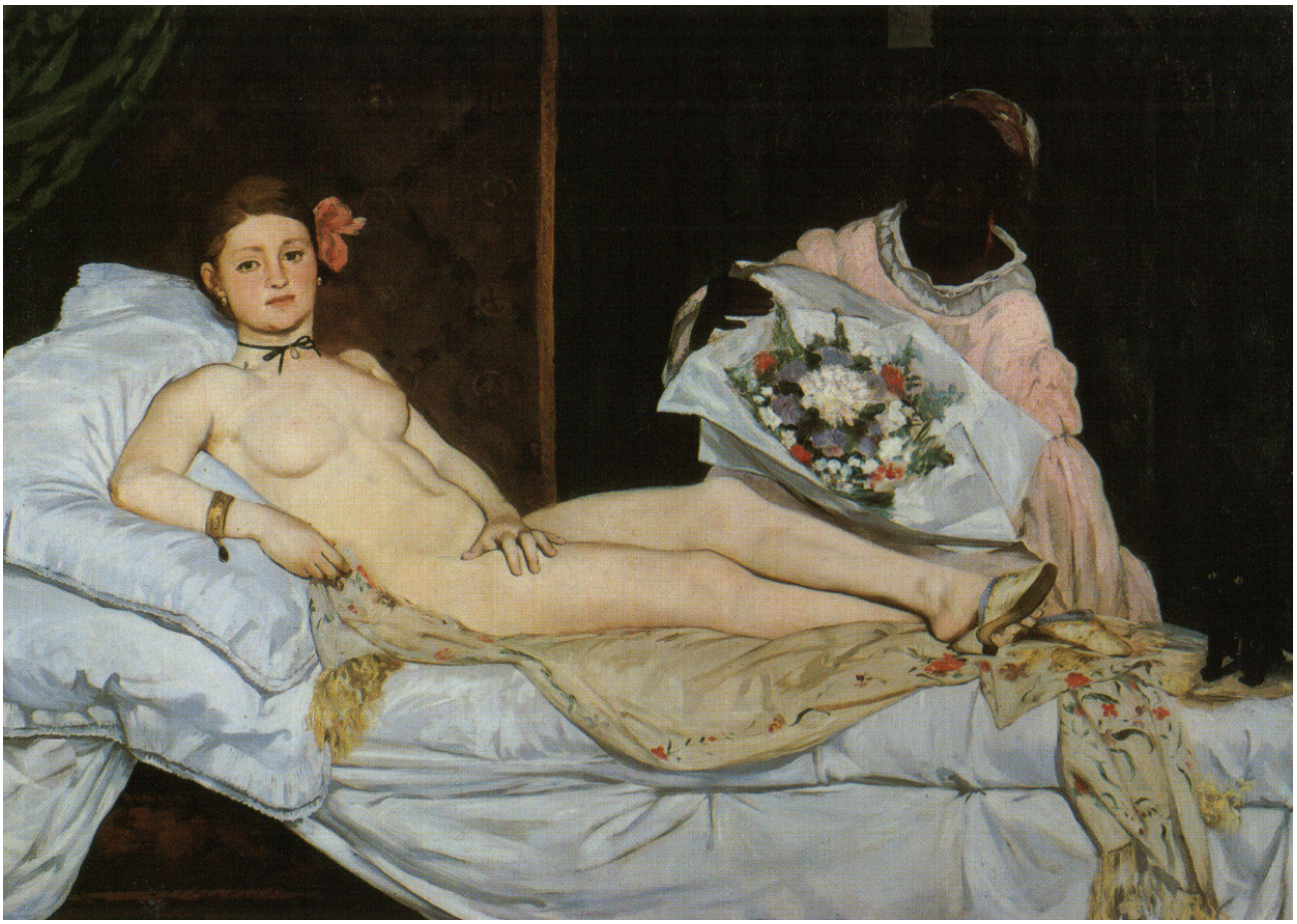
The final image of this chapter is Gustave Courbet's *Origin of the World* (1866). Like the prehistoric images discussed above, this work strips away any pretense of setting or narrative, focusing our attention directly on the vulva of the figure and, to a lesser extent, on her naked torso and thighs. The power of the image is in large measure the result of the close cropping, so that the figure's lower legs, arms, and, most importantly, face are cut out of the image. The result is a purely sexualized, objectified image of the woman, dehumanized through the elimination of her face and the reduction of the individual to her role as an object of sexual desire. She becomes permanently available for the gaze of Khalil Bey, the same Turkish-Egyptian diplomat and collector who commissioned one of Ingres' harem scenes, as well as several other Courbet paintings. Still, the figure's reproductive potential is conversely elevated as *The Origin of the World* itself. Bey was rumored to be nearsighted, which puts the intimate scale and cropping of the image into further context, as it is conceivable that the intended viewer would have been quite close to the image while gazing at it. This work, once owned by the famous psychoanalyst and theorist of human sexuality Jacques Lacan – a follower of **Sigmund Freud** – has been derided as pornographic, condemned as sexist and objectifying, cheered as a proto-feminist celebration of the positive power of female sexuality and reproduction, elevated as ***libertine***, hidden from view, displayed in museum exhibitions, set in its historical context, speculated on regarding its model, traced from owner to owner, and endlessly – indeed, even ironically – *reproduced*. In its stark presentation, with minimal context, the work resists any simple and straightforward analysis, but like all the images in this chapter, argues vigorously for the importance of human sexuality in the history of art.

CONCLUSION

Sexual imagery has been a part of the visual arts for tens of thousands of years. Such images often strike viewers as particularly compelling and emotionally affective, or especially distasteful, offensive, or even immoral. While some are celebratory and others condemnatory, many are ambiguous, inviting the viewer to contemplate the sexuality of the figures within the works, and therefore to reflect upon their own engagement with sex and the emotions it inspires.

Spotlight Image III:

EDOUARD MANET, OLYMPIA, 1863



Édouard Manet, Olympia, oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

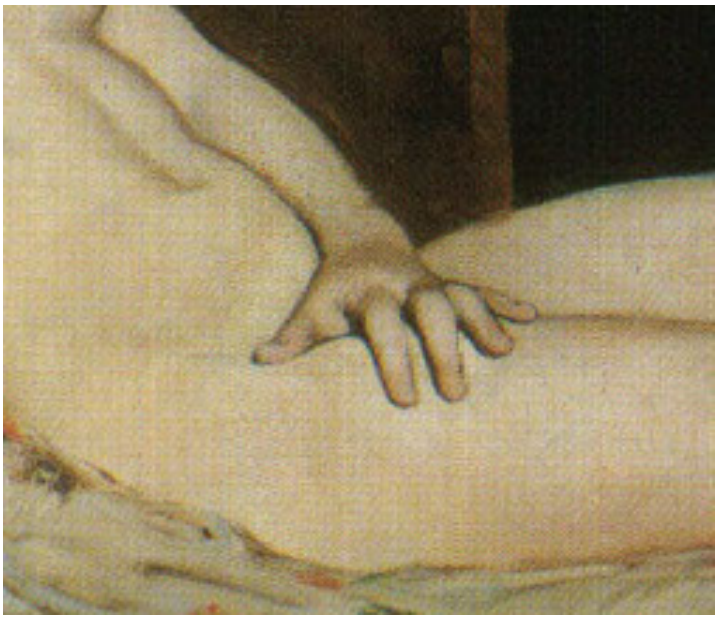
VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How does the figure of "Olympia" relate to the viewer?
- How do the colors influence the image?
- What is emphasized, and how?

- How does Manet create a sense of space?



Édouard Manet, Olympia (Detail of face), oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.



Édouard Manet, Olympia (Detail of hand), oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

Media Attributions

- Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 1), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.
- Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.
- Detail, Katsushika Hokusai, Untitled, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.
- Katsushika Hokusai, The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife, Kinoe no Komatsu (Volume 3), ink and color on paper, ca. 1814. Photo: Public Domain.
- Hokusai Katsushika (?), Sailing, Sailing (discrete version). Edo, Japan, 1812 CE. Image: Public Domain.
- Hokusai Katsushika (?), Sailing, Sailing (indiscrete version). Edo, Japan, 1812 CE. Image: Public Domain.
- Blank back, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/
- Woman Raking, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/
- Woman Masturbating, Trick Postcard (Shikake-e), ca. 1900, Japan. Photo: With permission of https://www.shungaisart.com/
- Drawing of the common types of drawings of vulvas found in prehistoric art, based on figure by Cârciumaru, Lazăr, et al. Image by Mari H.
- Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, La Grande Odalisque, oil on canvas, 1814 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- J.-A. Moulin, Photograph of a nude woman, based on Ingres's The Grand Odalisque (1854). Photo: Public Domain.
- Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, The Turkish Bath, oil on canvas glued on wood, 1862 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Grégory Lejeune, Public Domain.
- Muhammad Qasim, Portrait of Shah Abbas I and his Page, ink and color on paper, 1627 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.
- Barberini Faun, marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Barberini Faun, back, marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Barberini Faun (Detail of Face), marble, ca. 220 B.C.E. (Glyptothek, Munich). Photo by Steven Zucker, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Painter of Pédieus (?), Erotic scene on the rim of an Attic red-figure kylix (wine cup), terracotta, ca. 510 B.C.E. (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, CC BY 3.0.
- Workshop of Nikosthenes, Kylix, Athens, Greece, 530/520 BCE. Art Institute of Chicago. Photo: Lucas Livingston, CC BY 2.0
- Bomford Cup, underside, terracotta, ca. 530-515 B.C.E. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Photo by Egisto Sani, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Bomford Cup, interior, terracotta, ca. 530-515 B.C.E. (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Photo by Egisto Sani, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Sleeping Figure, marble, ca. 150-140 B.C.E., on marble cushion by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1620 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Pierre-Yves Beaudouin, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Sleeping Figure, marble, ca. 150-140 B.C.E., on marble cushion by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1620 (Musée du Louvre, Paris). Photo by Pierre-Yves Beaudouin, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Ramón, CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail of Decoration), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by deepgoswami, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail One), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by deepgoswami, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Detail Two), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Kkavita, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (Linga), ca. 1030 (Khajuraho, India). Photo by Rajenver, CC BY-SA 3.0.
- Masaccio, The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, fresco, 1426-7 (Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence). Photo by

carulmare, CC BY 2.0.

- Michelangelo, The Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, fresco, 1508-12 (Vatican City, Rome). Photo by Richard Mortel, CC BY 2.0.
- Hans Baldung Grien, Adam and Eve, woodcut, 1519 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Aphrodite, Roman, 1st or 2nd century CE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo: Public Domain.
- Hans Baldung Grien, Death and the Maiden, oil on panel, 1518-20 (Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel). Photo by Perledarte, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Penis Pinching Its Nose Inside a Vagina, Moche Culture, Peru (Museo Arqueològico Rafael Larco Herrera, Lima). Photo by Laslovarga, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Stirrup Spout Bottle with Couple, ceramic, slip, pigment, ca. fourth-seventh century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Miron Zownir, Untitled, 1984 (Hamburg, Germany). Photo: Permission granted by Miron Zownir.
- Gustave Courbet, L'Origine du Monde, oil on canvas, 1866 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Édouard Manet, Olympia, oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.
- Édouard Manet, Olympia (Detail of face), oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.
- Édouard Manet, Olympia (Detail of hand), oil on cavnas, 1863 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

8. Pleasure

Is art a pleasure? Is there pleasure in art?

Many students come to their first course on art appreciation or art history expecting to suffer, to be subjected to an endless, undifferentiated stream of dull slides. Thankfully, such expectations are often defied by the glorious and often delightful images projected throughout a semester. Art is designed for a great many purposes, as discussed throughout this book, but much art, whatever its justification, is also or exclusively designed to provide and reflect pleasure. A palace might be intended to display the power and wealth of a ruler, but is also intended to provide that ruler with a pleasurable home. A soaring and glorious religious structure may be justified as a tool to help a worshipper understand their deity, but the method to achieve this is, at least in part, pleasure. Erotic imagery, which is common throughout the world's art forms, is explicitly about pleasure, and often depicts moments of pleasure, while it is also intended to inspire pleasure in the viewer.

Pleasure takes many forms. There are quiet pleasures, like peaceful walks along the seashore, and clamorous pleasures, like parties and carnivals. There are solitary pleasures, like reading by a fireside, and shared pleasures, like sex. There are friendly, cheerful pleasures, like a child playing with a pet dog, and there are more subversive or even self-destructive pleasures, like the use of hard drugs. Artists work to capture, convey, and provide all of these forms of pleasure. Some cultures make the pleasure of the viewer is a central concern of artists, while others see pleasure as worthy of condemnation.

This chapter first consider gardens, which are spaces designed to provide pleasing, immersive environments. While not always included in discussions of art, gardens are carefully and precisely planned based on the same sorts of concerns and formal elements that artists and architects apply to all the forms of art throughout this book. Indeed, wealthy patrons, like kings and emperors, often commission prominent artists and architects to design their gardens. Contemplative monks work on their own gardens as part of their worship. Governments and civic organizations design gardens for the public to enjoy.

The first Spotlight Image is a prominent Chinese garden. The second is a northern European image of a wild garden of pleasure that contains a critique of such enjoyments. Between these two Spotlight Images, the chapter considers a range of garden types and images of gardens. The final set of images in the chapter depicts pleasures, and critiques of them. Through all of these works, we examine the very notion of pleasure that is at the heart of so much of the world's art.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

GARDEN OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL POLITICIAN (ZHUOZHENG YUAN), WANG XIANCHEN, MING DYNASTY, CA. 1506-1521 CE



Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Distant Fragrance Hall), ca. 1500-1535 (Suzhou, China). Photo by 外史公, CC BY-SA 3.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What sorts of **lines** and **forms** dominate the garden?
- Does the garden have **symmetry** or **balance**?
- How are the forms of rocks, waters and plants related to each other?
- How do the buildings relate to the natural elements?
- How did the designer of the garden create **emphasis**?
- Which is stressed, **variety**, **unity**, or both?
- Is this "nature"? If so (or if not), why?

INTRODUCTION: The Scholar's Garden

Extensive gardens are recorded in China from the third century BCE, onward. The "scholar's garden" is often considered the most complete expression of the Chinese garden, especially in the late Ming (1573-1644 CE) and Qing Dynasties (1616-1911 CE). These gardens maintain a delicate balance between the cultivated and the natural, seeking to convey the

effect of a wild landscape through the very careful and deliberate manipulation of every one of its elements. They are, therefore, a result of ideas about nature, rather than of nature itself.

Unlike some other garden types we will see, the scholar's garden is not organized around a geometrical pattern or idealized, totalizing plan. Instead, the viewer's personal experience is the guiding principle. As a scholar of Chinese art writes:

> [A] Chinese garden in the broadest sense is a landscape for man's pleasure. Place a pavilion where he stops, pave a path where he roams, span a bridge where he crosses, erect a hut where he rests ... and a garden is born.[1]

The scale of the garden, and all its elements, is quite human, designed to be comfortable, intriguing and pleasing at every turn.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Restful Variety



Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Rock Formation), ca. 1500-1535 (Suzhou, China). Photo by Caitriana Nicholson, CC BY-SA 2.0.

1. Wango H. C. Weng, *Gardens in Chinese Art from Private and Museum Collections* (New York: China Institute in America, 1968), i.

Everywhere the eye turns, it meets craggy shapes, strange, asymmetrical heaps of rock and willfully bent plantings. The manmade ponds and sculpted streams are all irregular, organic, and meandering. Fantastic rock forms jut out here and there, like natural growths, twisting and pitted with deep recesses. One such rock rises above the viewer, so riddled with holes that we can see out through it to the plants and sky beyond. Scale is hard to judge from a distance – this might be a small stone or a massive mountain – and this is part of the play of the design, which replicates in miniature far grander landscapes, as well as popular forms of landscape painting.

The garden has no clear principle of organization, no symmetry or axial layout, for example. Instead, ponds and paths bend around one another in a seemingly haphazard manner. Still, every view was carefully considered. The goal was not to create a rigidly structured layout that might be viewed from a distance, but instead, to create a seemingly endless variety of views and vistas that can only be appreciated by a person moving through the garden, walking along its many covered pathways, resting on a stone balustrade, or sitting within an open pavilion.

The paths are as curvilinear as the natural forms around them. Even bridges, like the Winding Path under Willow Shade, bend and twist across the garden. They do not provide the quickest route between sites, but instead encourage the viewer to stroll contemplatively, to wander, to slowly gaze upon his surroundings from constantly shifting angles. Small structures are scattered throughout the garden to invite viewers to pause, to sit and take in particularly scenic views. Similarly, bridges arch to structurally unnecessary heights over small streams, providing new vantage points.



Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Artificial Pond), ca. 1500–1535 (Suzhou, China). Photo: Caitriona Nicholson, CC BY-SA 2.0

At the heart of the garden is an artificial pond, and in the middle of the pond is a constructed island, which is then in turn bisected by a stream, so there is water within land within water within land. Plants are heaped and draped over many surfaces, including even the surface of the waters, such as we see in the lotus ponds. Jutting into the pond are small structures that are little more than a raised platforms with benches and a roof. They have no walls, only thin columns at the corners, so a viewer sitting within it, perhaps taking shelter from sun or rain, can comfortably contemplate the garden arrayed around.



Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Secluded Pavilion Among Parasol and Bamboo), ca. 1500-1535 (Suzhou, China). Photo by Jonathan, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician (Secluded Pavilion Among Parasol and Bamboo), ca. 1500-1535 (Suzhou, China). Photo by Marco Capitanio, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The overwhelmingly organic nature of the garden is offset by the linear and geometric structures. Garden houses, or *yian qi*, were seen as essential components of a garden, activating the space by implying a human presence and providing vantage points from which to view the carefully orchestrated scenery. The small but dramatic Secluded Pavilion Among Parasol and Bamboo, for example, is in essence a white cube, capped by a traditional sloping and flared roof. A great moon door – a fully circular doorway/window through which viewers can contemplate the peaceful scenery beyond – dominates each side.

These round openings call particular attention to the landscape, and emphasize the partial nature of any view of a garden. The frames of the doorways dramatically crop our views of the rocks, trees, ponds, and other structures, inviting us to focus on the fragments we can see. The effect is layered, with plants, rocks, paths, water, other buildings, open sky, and, at times, elements of the larger landscape beyond the garden's walls.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: A Ming Dynasty Retreat

The guiding principles of classical Chinese garden design are rooted in Daoism, a Chinese religion and philosophy inspired by Laozi's *Daodejing* ("Classic of the Way of Power"), which argues that there is a profound and imperceptible force, *Dao*, that guides and shapes the world, that keeps in balance Something (*you*) and Nothing (*wu*). The rocks of the gardens might be seen as symbols of the mountain homes of immortal Daoist sages, of tortoises carrying their islands through the seas, of rain-bringing dragons, and other important Daoist symbols. There are few fixed and certain symbols in these gardens, just as there are few obvious organizational elements. In the Ming Dynasty, a period of very powerful imperial rule that emphasized rigid hierarchies and order, the loose, organic nature of a garden was a respite for intellectuals, a place of open and free contemplation and reflection.

Daoism holds that rocks are the bones of the earth, and as such they feature very prominently in garden designs. As Tu Wan, a twelfth-century author and apparent stone collector wrote in his *Catalogue of Rocks and the Forest of Clouds*, "All things which are the core, the summation of heaven and earth, are linked together in the rocks."[2] Still, waters are seen as the blood of the earth, and so are similarly important in the conception of a garden space.

The humorously named Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician was created by Wang Xianchen, a retired minor Ming Dynasty official. He was, as the title he gave his garden indicates, unsuccessful in politics, and fell out of favor with the emperor. He returned to his home village, and his retreat into a quite retirement was marked by self-deprecating humor. He named his garden after line in an essay by a much more successful official, Pan Yue, who lived during the Jin Dynasty (265-420 CE). Pan Yue mocked unsuccessful politicians by saying that they might as well live a "free and happy existence," and grow vegetables. Wang Xianchen quoted this passage in explaining his desire to build his garden:

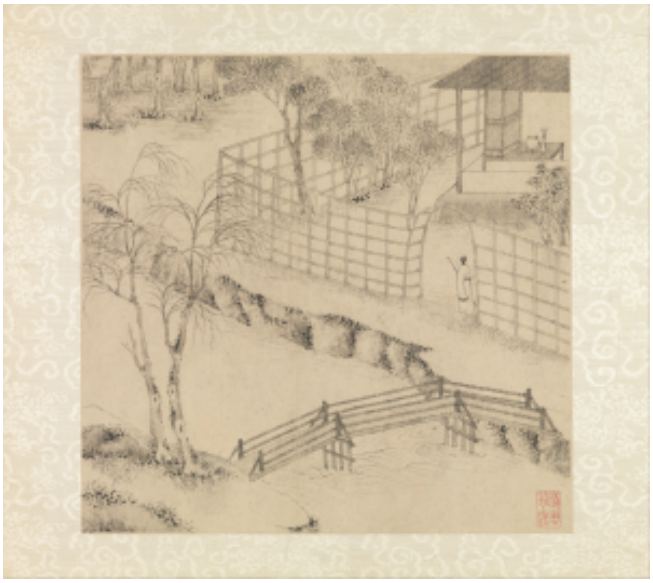
2. Dusan Ogrin, *The World Heritage of Gardens* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 168.

> It is my wish for fleeing happiness to build a house and plant trees and to lead a free and happy existence of idleness; let there be a pond to fish from … let me water the garden and sell the vegetables in order to provide for my daily meals, let me tend the sheep and sell the milk in order to pay the expenses in hot summer and cold winter … that is how a humble person administers his domain.[3]

This passage is an expression of humility, but also celebrates the virtues of simple country life over the power-hungry politics of the capital. The site Wang Xianchen chose for his garden had originally been a temple, and he preserved the peaceful tone in his private garden. It was renovated and expanded several times in the following centuries, but the core elements largely reflect the original intent.

Gardens were the subject of paintings, poems and books, including accounts like "The Garden that is Not Around" by the Ming hermit Liu Yuhua, which describe fantasy gardens at great length. Gardens particularly influenced Chinese landscape paintings, while landscape paintings in turn influenced garden design.

Many Chinese painters of the Ming Dynasty generated images bursting with similar forms, though often on a grander scale. While a garden might have an interesting and irregular rock as a central feature of contemplation, a landscape painting might feature a mountain. The scale is radically different, but the effect is largely the same, and the figures of poets and philosophers that populate such images serve as models for the viewer, encouraging them toward contemplative reflection.



Wen Zhengming, Garden of the Inept Administrator, ink on paper, 1551 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

Artists also celebrated gardens in their paintings. Wen Zhengming, an important painter, scholar, and calligrapher, left Beijing to live in Suzhou, and had a studio in the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician. The full work is a long series of poems about and paintings of the garden. In this detail, we see many of the important elements of the garden, including a stream with rocky banks, a gently bending bridge, carefully arranged clusters of trees, open fences, and an inviting pavilion. We also see a figure in the landscape, standing beneath the arched doorway of the fence, seeming to gaze into the distance. Wen may have helped to design the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician and certainly appreciated it, as his detailed scroll focuses on its many nooks and bends, though it has since been altered so many times that it is generally not possible to locate the particular sites that he painted in the present garden.

The gardens were, of course, not only visual. The first building a visitor enters in the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician is the Hall of Drifting Fragrance, located next to a lotus pond and filled with the delicate sent of the blossoms. Wen wrote this poem on his painting"

> **The Bank of Many Fragrances**
> Various kinds of flowers are planted next to the thatched hall,
> Purple luxuriance and red beauty in random array;
> The spring radiance and brilliance embroiders them with a thousand artifices,
> In the good air and scented mist a hundred fragrances mix.
> I love the smells that fill my bosom and sleeves,

3. Liu Dun-Zhen, *Chinese Classical Gardens of Suzhou*, trans. Chen Lixian (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 95.

I do not let the wind and dew wet my clothes,
My thoughts fly high beyond the flowery world.
Quietly, I watch the bees dance up and down.[4]

There is also a Listening to the Rain Pavilion, inviting the visitor to consider the sounds of the garden, which would be a mix of the burbling of the streams, rustling of wind through leaves, birdcalls and, of course at times, rain falling on rooftops, pathways, trees, and ponds. All senses are engaged in the pursuit of calm, reflective pleasure.

Comparisons and Connections I: Gardens and Garden Paintings

The Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician is a space carefully constructed to provide pleasure upon pleasure for its owner, and for any guests he might choose to invite into its winding paths. It memorialization by a leading painter of the period indicates its success. Each vantage point was considered, each perspective carefully orchestrated to achieve the most beauty. Many other cultures also created gardens as spaces of pleasure. Indeed, the modern English word "paradise" is based on an ancient **Avestan** word for "garden." Each culture designs its gardens in its own fashion, reflecting different notions of beauty and different concepts of pleasure. This section begins with a consideration of very noteworthy gardens in medieval Japan, twentieth-century England, and seventeenth-century France. It then considers images of gardens, designed to reflect the pleasure actual gardens inspire.

Idealized Nature

As many choices need to be made in the layout of a garden as in the design of any complex work of art or architecture, and each one reflects the values and goals of its designer. Many Japanese gardens bear strong influence from Chinese gardens, but one form is particularly characteristic of Japan, the ***kare-sansui*** – the dry garden – that was fully developed in the Muromachi period (1333–1568). Elements of the dry garden can be found in Japanese culture dating back over a thousand years earlier, but it was in the Muromachi period that the form came into its own. *Kare-sansui* can be literally translated as "withered mountain-water," and the closely related ***kare-sensui*** as "dried-up mountain-waterscape."[5] These gardens, influenced by Zen Buddhism imported from China, are "gardens" only in a loose sense, as some contain little or no greenery.

4. "Wen Zhengming, Garden of the Inept Administrator, 1551," *The Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/39654

5. Günter Nitschke, *The Architecture of the Japanese Garden: Right Angle and Natural Form* (Taschen, 1991), 99.



Ryoan-ji, 1450/1488 (Kyoto, Japan). Photo by Cquest, CC BY-SA 2.5.

The most famous dry garden is *Ryoan-ji*, the "Temple of the Peaceful Dragon," in northwest Tokyo. The current garden was established in 1488 by Hosokawa Masamoto, a powerful clan leader, after an earlier temple on the site burned down, though it is unknown who actually designed it. The design is startlingly simple. Like the Chinese scholar's gardens, there is a focus on dramatic rocks, but just about every other element has been removed. The result is stark and open, with far more **negative space** than **positive**: the garden, enclosed by a rectangle of walls and with a viewing platform along two sides, consists of fifteen rocks, arranged into three clusters. These rocks, like those chosen for the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, are individualized, craggy, irregular masses of stone. It seems that originally visitors were able to walk through the garden, treading on the gravel around the rocks, though now they are restricted to the platform.

The rocks float like islands in a sea of gravel. Like the elements of a Chinese scholar's garden, the rocks are not arranged with **symmetry** but still possess a very careful **balance** between close and far, large and small, and few and many. Many symbolic readings have been offered of the rocks – they are a constellation of stars, islands of the ocean, even a group of tiger cubs swimming – but the bare simplicity of the garden seems to push back against such readings. The moss clinging to their bases is the only plant life in the garden. The dominant element, here, is open space, which is appropriate for a Zen monastery. The garden was designed to provide a site for contemplation, in the hope that the viewer might, though such contemplation, achieve enlightenment. While the garden at *Ryoan-ji* is not lush or lavish, its quite, gentle balance provides a peaceful environment in which the Buddhist devotee can strive toward freedom from suffering.



Gertrude Jekyll, Munstead Wood, 1896-7 (Surrey, England). Photo by Sarah, CC BY 2.0.

Traveling to England, we find a rather different approach. The typical aesthetic of the English country garden is bountiful chaos. At Munstead Wood, the home of Gertrude Jekyll, we see great heaps of wildflowers, not quite wild but not arranged in any rigid or overly clear way, either. Jekyll, "the grand old lady of English gardening"[6] is considered to be the strongest influence on the development of the English country garden. She grew up in the small, picturesque village of Bramley, with aspirations to be a painter, and she practiced a remarkable array of arts, from metalwork and carpentry to embroidery and wallpaper design, before ultimately focusing her efforts on gardens. All her earlier explorations of the arts were part of her development as a gardener, and she considered her gardens to be works of visual art, writing to an artist friend that she was "doing some rigorous landscape gardening … doing living pictures with land and trees and flowers."[7]

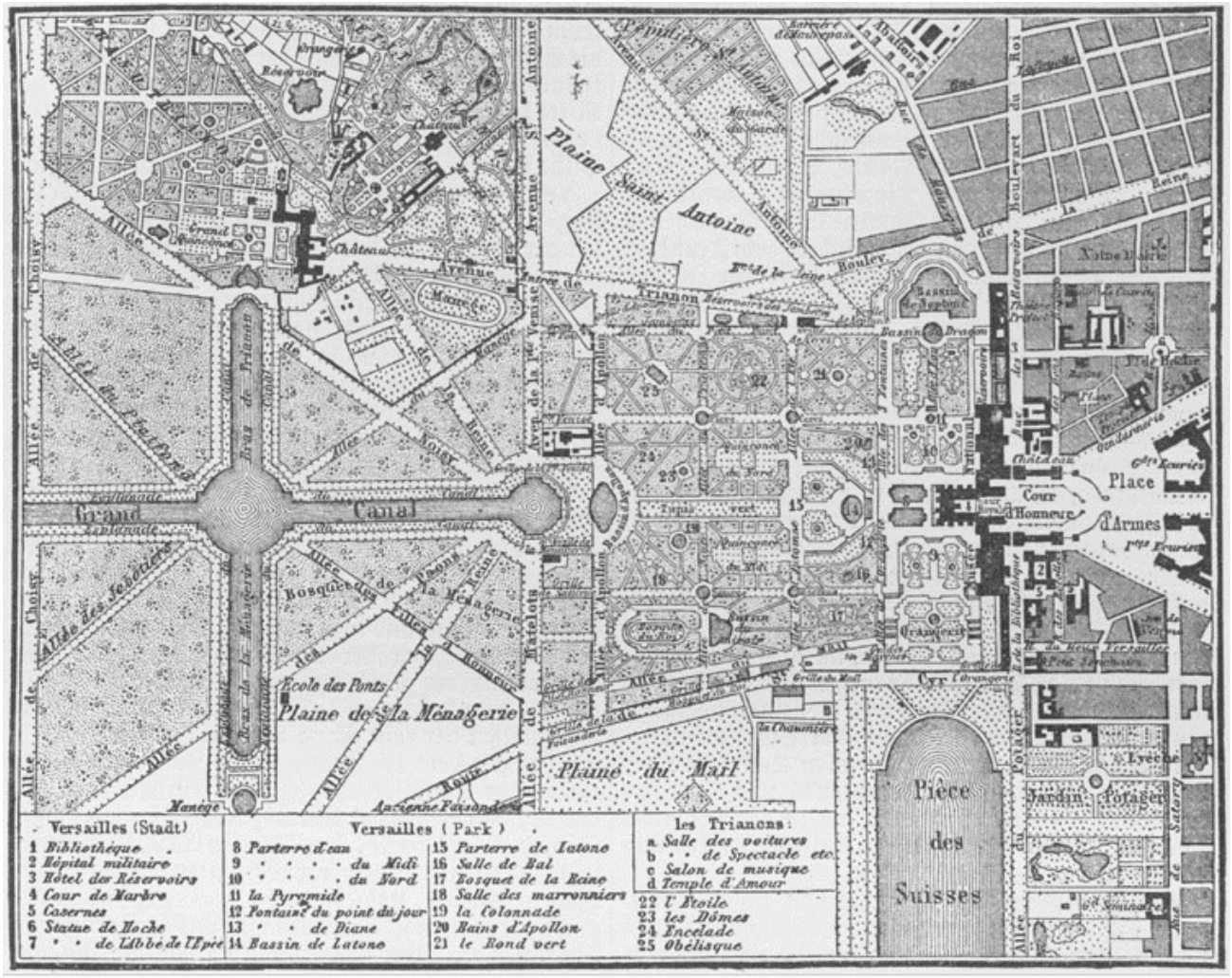


Gertrude Jekyll's garden at Munstead Wood, Surrey, autochrome photograph by Country Life Garden Editor Herbert Cowley, 1912. Photo: Public Domain.

Remarkably, some **autochromes** – early color photographs – survive from 1912, providing us with a sense not only of the design and layout of her garden, but also the rich use of colors that made her famous. Rather than organizing her gardens into neat bands of carefully trimmed and manicured plants, Jekyll cultivated a carefully controlled chaos, a riot of wildflowers loosely grouped into bands and borders by color and height.

The overall effect seems, at first glance – like that of the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician and *Ryoan-ji* – to be casually arranged, tossed together, but in all of these gardens, the effect was the result of great care. Indeed, Jekyll completed the plan for her garden before she even began to plan the house around which it was arranged. The garden and the eventual home at its center were carefully integrated, such that the house provided pleasing views of the garden, and the gardens provided pleasing views of the house. As Jekyll wrote, "My own little new-built house is so restful, so satisfying [and] so kindly sympathetic."[8] The overall goal, then, was to provide the occupant and her guests with comfort and pleasure at every turn.

6. Judith B. Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 9.
7. Judith B. Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 11.
8. Judith B. Tankard, *Gertrude Jekyll and the Country House Garden* (New York: Rizzoli, 2011), 21.



Versaille Garden Plans, ca. 1912. Photo: Public Domain.

The gardens of eighteenth-century France, in contrast, are among the most rigid and powerful styles. At the massive Palace of Versailles, the garden became another expression of the might of the king. Its plan encapsulates its principles of design. Unlike the Chinese scholar's garden, the Japanese dry garden, and the English country garden, the French royal garden is both **axial** and **symmetrical**. Indeed, the plan contains a series of symmetrical arrangements of symmetrical elements.

The main section of the gardens behind the palace (just right of the center of the plan), for example, consists of a nearly square grid of squares, each of which in turn is divided by paths and hedges and planting beds into complex but predominately symmetrical designs. These squares are all arrayed around the large path that defines the central access and leads to the large reflecting pool.



André Le Nôtre, Gardens of Versailles (Center View), ca. 1661 (Versailles, France). Photo Anna and Michal, CC BY 2.0.

While, unlike the garden at *Ryoan-ji*, plant life is everywhere we turn, nature itself seems to have been brought under the absolute control of the king. In the English garden, like the Chinese scholar's garden, the design gives the impression that nature has simply been allowed to run its course – though this is a carefully constructed illusion. At Versailles, not only are the plants laid out in geometric patterns. Even the plants, themselves, are not permitted to take their natural, irregular shapes, but are instead shaped into geometrical forms – cones, rectangles, and spheres. The overall effect is pleasurable – stunning, beautiful and impressive – but also formal and stiff.

The gardens were commissioned in 1661 by Louis XIV, known as the Sun King, a so-called absolute monarch – that is, a king with total power within his kingdom. His palace and gardens at Versailles were an expression and extension of his power. The gardens took decades to complete, thorough the collaboration of several designers, including André Le Nôtre, who was their primary designer, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Superintendent of the King's Buildings, Charles Le Brun, First Painter of the King, and Jules Hardouin-Mansart, an architect. The king himself was also highly involved in the creation of the gardens, keeping an eye on all aspects of their design. In addition, an army of men, or at least, regiments of the French army, were employed to bring in plants from all over France.



Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Hall of Mirrors, 1678-84 (Versailles, France). Photo Justin Mier, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The king considered his gardens not only as important as the palace, but as an important part *of* the palace. Interior and exterior spaces were connected by large windows, and also by carefully designed plays of light and shadow. The large reflecting pools, for example, are aligned to reflect the sun up and into the long Grande Galerie, or Hall of Mirrors, where it would be reflected and refracted in the 357 mirrors that line the wall opposite the row of windows overlooking the gardens. The sunlight, sparkling on the surfaces of the pools and fountains, and twinkling along the Hall's mirrors, would embody the power and grandeur of Louis the Sun King. They would also, though, provide pleasure for the king and his court. Indeed, the two are tied together. The ability of the king to command the creation of such a sublimely pleasurable space was a demonstration of his absolute power.

Representing Spaces of Pleasure



John Vanderlyn, Panoramic View of The Palace and Gardens of Versailles, oil on canvas, 1818-19 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



John Vanderlyn, Panoramic View of The Palace and Gardens of Versailles, oil on canvas, 1818-19 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

The previous section considered *actual* spaces of pleasure. This section will consider representations of such spaces, starting with John Vanderlyn's *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* (1818-1819). This giant painting is one of only a few to have survived from an American fad for panoramas in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The panorama bends into a circle 12 feet tall and 165 feet long and was originally displayed in a round building. Now housed in a round gallery in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, it remains an immersive environment. Such panoramas provided a sort of virtual travel in a period when only the very wealthy might travel from the U.S. to France. For a small fee, visitors could enter the darkened room containing the *Panoramic View of the Palace and Gardens of Versailles* and imagine that they were at the grand palace of Louie XIV, something like when we now view 360° tours and virtual reality tours of distant sites.

When viewed as if a flat painting, the image is stretched and distorted, but when viewed in a 360° space, the illusion is startlingly good. The horizon line is set to roughly the eye level of an expected viewer, which means that when we look out toward the horizon, we seem to be standing naturally in the landscape. As we focus on any detail of the image, we see out of the corners of our eyes more and more of the scene. The effect was, in essence, the nineteenth-century equivalent of our Imax screens – the largest, grandest and most impressive false image available. It was a spectacle designed to make visitors gape and gasp with pleasure.

The layout of the landscape painting emphasizes the formal layout of the garden, the geometrical, symmetrical organization. By placing the viewer precisely at the center of the main axis, aligning the viewer's eyes with the pinnacle of the fountain, Vanderlyn calls attention to the careful design of the gardens, but also elevates the visitor. By placing his virtual tourists – not able to travel to Versailles but able to afford the admission to the panorama – at the center of the gardens, Vanderlyn allows the viewer to momentarily feel not merely like a tourist, but to enjoy the pleasure of the fleeting fantasy of being the French king, himself, or at least a member of his royal court.



John Vanderlyn, Panoramic View of The Palace and Gardens of Versailles (detail), oil on canvas, 1818-19 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

The centerpiece of the image features a vast vista, punctuated with water. First, we see a giant fountain, cascading downward like the tiers of a wedding cake. Then, there is an open gravel path, a grassy sward, another fountain, a reflecting pool so large as to appear to be a lake, and beyond, more grass and trees. Turning to the left or right, we can see the steps that lead downward, inviting us to imagine walking down to the next plateau, joining the well-dressed couples populating the scene – men with cravats and women with parasols – and onward, out toward the horizon.



Bishndas, Babur Supervising the Laying Out of the Garden of Fidelity, ink and color on paper, ca. 1590 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). Photo: Public Domain.

The *Baburnama*, the personal memoirs of Babur, founder of the South Asian Mughal Empire (ruled 1526-30 CE), contains a grand image of the process of laying out the *Bagh-i-Wafa* (Garden of Fidelity), the first garden that Babur commissioned. This copy of the *Baburnama* was created for Babur's grandson, Emperor Akbar. Babur was very interested in gardens, and focused his artistic patronage on their creation. He was particularly fond of the *chār-bāgh* – a garden divided into four quadrants by water.

After conquering Kabul (in modern-day Afghanistan), Babur built numerous gardens there, as well as throughout his territory, which included much of what is now India. These gardens were not only pleasurable; they were built to house pleasurable activities, including parties, dinners, and poetry readings. In an image of the planting of the garden, we see Babur at the far right, clothed in flowing yellow robes and a white turban, personally overseeing its planting. In front of him, just behind a water basin, the architect holds up the grid plan for the garden. This suggests the highly organized and rational nature of the garden, echoed in the raised planting beds before him. The architect turns to look at Babur, who seems to be taking a personal interest in the plantings at his feet.

Outside of the walls of the garden, the natural landscape provides strong contrast. In the upper left, in the background, are a series of craggy mountains, inhabited by animals. Scraggly trees rise out of the barren rock, whereas within the garden, trees hang heavy with yellow fruits that echo the robes of Babur, suggesting that his wealth and bounty is the source of the garden's fertility.

Babur wrote critically of the disordered landscape of the region, and his formal gardens may have been a response to this perceived chaos. In place of asymmetry and organic shapes, his garden is depicted as a symmetrical arrangement of rectangular planting beds.

In an image of Babur from another **manuscript** (see here for image), we see the great founding emperor in one of his gardens. Babur reclines beneath a tree, seated on an ornate carpet laid with dishes. He is fanned by one servant and offered more refreshment by others. Musicians play and dancers twirl around a fountain. Filling all available space between the figures are the plants of the garden. This is a beautiful and lavish image, dominated by rich, saturated colors, evoking the pleasurable paradise of the gardens.



Claude Monet, Monet's Garden, 1883 (Giverny, France). Photo: Public Domain.

In Claude Monet's famous gardens at Giverny, in northern France, many of the threads of this discussion come together. This garden was in part inspired by Japanese gardens (in turn inspired by Chinese gardens), and was designed not only to

provide pleasure but also to serve as the basis for Monet's own paintings. Monet was a collector of Japanese prints, and from them learned to favor the asymmetry of Asian gardens over the symmetry of traditional French gardens, like those at Versailles. In a particularly picturesque section of the garden, he constructed an arching bridge like those found in Chinese and Japanese gardens, over a pond filled with water lilies. The pond is surrounded by heavy plantings, weeping willows that hang low over the water, Japanese maples with rich red leaves, and other plants. The waters are, in season, filled with the water lilies that Monet loved to paint.



Claude Monet, The Japanese Footbridge, oil on canvas, 1899 (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Turning to Monet's *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge* (1896-1899), we see nearly the same view as in the modern photograph of his garden. The scene is familiar, though the arch of the bridge is slightly exaggerated for effect. The colors are pastel, bright and cheerful. The light – which is a major focus of Monet's work – is strong, as if it is a sunny summer day conveyed by bright whitish highlights throughout. The brushwork is very loose, with each stroke visible on the surface of the canvas. The result is not a precise botanical illustration, but rather, a gentle image that conveys the pleasant atmosphere of the garden.

Though the gardens themselves are asymmetrical, Monet follows European painting conventions by framing the bridge in such a way as to create a symmetrical image, enlivened by small differences in the plants around the bridge, and in the shadows that fall more heavily on the right side of the image than on the left. The symmetry helps the desired effect: everything in the garden, and in the painting of it, speaks of calm, restful beauty. Monet's paintings of his garden at Giverny are among the most popular works of art in the world, frequently reproduced as posters that are common in college dorm rooms. Similarly, the gardens themselves attract over half a million tourists a year, drawn by the beautiful views, and by their experience of them through Monet's paintings.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

HIERONYMUS BOSCH, *THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHT*, 1500-1505



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights, oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How is the image organized?
- What colors dominate three panels of the triptych?
- What is the **focal point** of the image, and why choose that scene?
- How does the **horizon line** function?
- What is the role of **scale**?
- How does Bosch encourage the viewer to look closely at his painting?
- How does Bosch incorporate time into his painting?
- What is the message of the triptych?

INTRODUCTION: A Pleasure Garden?

We again begin with a garden. However, this garden is so vast and rich as to enclose within it many forms of pleasure not generally associated with pleasant strolls in gardens. Hieronymus Bosch is a painter of the **Northern Renaissance** – the fifteenth and sixteenth century in Northern Europe, centered on cultural centers in Flanders and the Lowlands, now Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and Northern France.

Bosch was born into a family of painters who had emigrated to the Netherlands. His family name was van Aken, as his family had come from Aachen, Germany, but he instead used an abbreviated form of the name of the Dutch town where he was born, and where his seems to have lived throughout his life, 's-Hertogenbosch. He married a wealthy woman twenty-five years older than he was, and lived in her large estate. He was among the wealthiest residents of 's-Hertogenbosch, and did not need any income from his painting. This may explain his usual subjects – since he did not have to sell paintings to live, he did not have to meet the desires of patrons. While Bosch has been the subject of wild speculations – he has been called a cult member, a free-love advocate, a student of magic, alchemy, or witchcraft, and on – it seems far more likely that he was a serious and even sour member of the religious orthodoxy. While his methods for encouraging moral behavior were somewhat unusual, his stance on morality and on the evils of pleasure, were well within the mainstream.

The Garden of Earthy Delights is Bosch's most famous work, and justly so (see here for a very high resolution image). It is massive, riddled with an almost impossible-seeming level of detail, all painted in luminous colors. The work is a **triptych** – a painting with three panels, hinged together so that the outer panels, or wings, can be closed over the central panel. The left wing presents the Garden of Eden – the place in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic mythology where God creates humanity – and the right shows Hell – a place of punishment in the afterlife for those who live sinfully. The subject of the center panel, though, is less clear. This panel shows the Garden of Earthly Delight itself, a fantasy riot of bizarre imagery, of giant animals, monsters cobbled together out of bits and pieces of other creatures, of all sorts of sexual escapades and gluttonies. What was Bosch saying about these pleasures? How are we to interpret the triptych, as a whole?

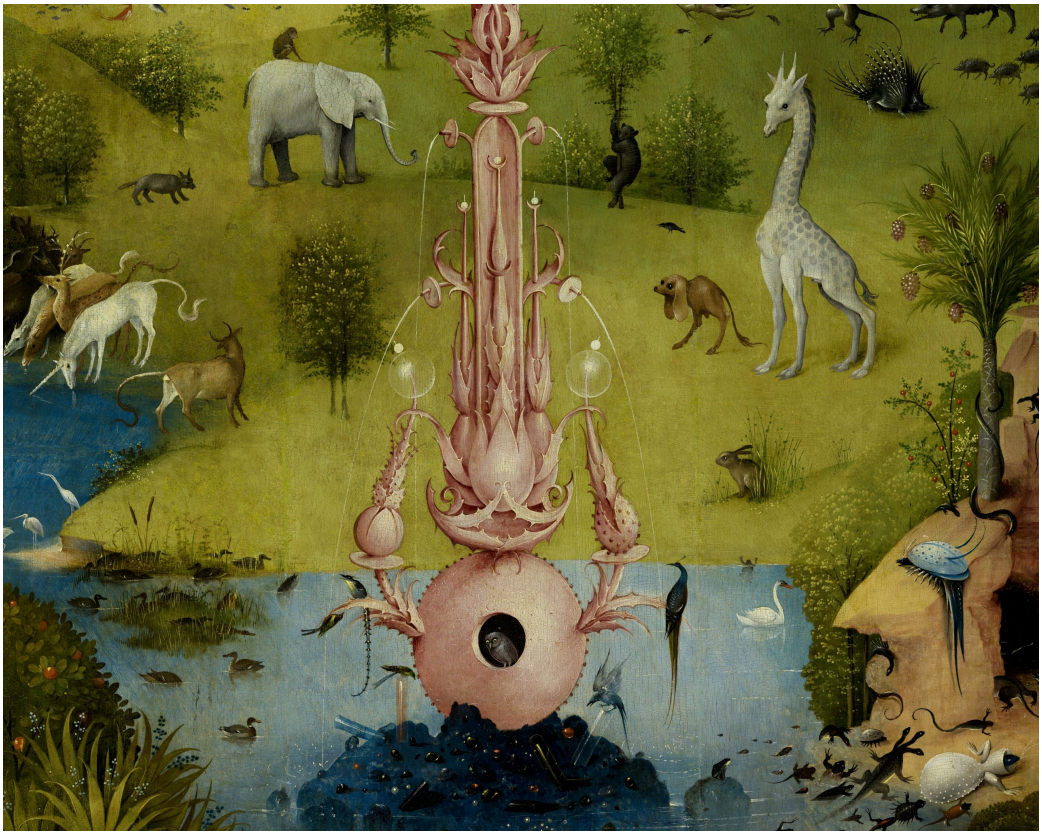
VISUAL ELEMENTS: Sustained Creativity

The entire triptych forms a continuous landscape, indicated by the common **horizon line**. From a distance, the soft greens of the grasses and trees, the gentle blues of the waters and sky, and the points of bright pink punctuating the left and center panels give the impression of a lovely spring day. The work invites us closer with its seemingly innocent palette and, due to the small scale of the figures, its promise of rich details. However, as we approach the center of this large work – over twelve and a half feet in width – we find the tiny images that fill so much of the composition are rather startling! There are hundreds of figures, almost all of whom are entirely naked. They dance and cavort, embrace and contort; they not only ride but also caress and cuddle fantastic beasts. They grab gluttonously – or lustfully? – impossibly large fruits and berries. And, above all, at least at first glance, they seem to be having a very good time.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Adam and Eve), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

To the left, we see the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve are being introduced to one another by a figure that seems to be Jesus, though it would normally be God the Father at this point in the story. Adam reclines calmly on the grass while Eve, framed by the shining gold **mandorla** of her hair, falls to her knees in front of him. The image is roughly symmetrical, with the figure of Jesus/God just to the right of center, beneath a strange fountain that is the same shade of pink has his robes. Again, at a glance, all looks relatively normal. As is typical, the Garden is shown as a bountiful land, overflowing with abundance.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Animals), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

However, the choice of animals is somewhat peculiar. In addition to the bears, stags, horses, cows, porcupines, boars, and birds, there are many animals from distant lands, or from realms of fantasy: an elephant with a monkey on its back, a giraffe, a unicorn drinking from the lake to the left, and a whole host of other unidentifiable fantasy creatures. A three-headed lizard crawls out of the main pond, toward the right edge of the panel. A three-headed bird hangs over the murky pool in the foreground (see image below), perhaps trying to catch the sea-unicorn or spoonbill-fish swimming before it. While we recognize the giraffe as a real animal, and we consider the two-legged dog in front of it and the rearing dragon just above it as fictitious monsters, early sixteenth-century viewers would have perhaps found them equally fantastic – or equally real. They would most likely not have seen any African or Asian animals in person, and would only have seen them or read about them in the same sources where they would have read about dragons and unicorns.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Pond), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

While Eden is often depicted as the one place where "the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together,"[9] in Bosch's Garden, in the upper right, the lion is devouring a deer or antelope. As if balancing this, to the lower left, a cat has caught a dark, unidentifiable creature, perhaps a rat, perhaps a lizard, perhaps a creature that is both at once. The cheerful palette, calm, symmetrical composition, and careful, linear forms all belie the troubling nature of the details throughout the image.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Fruit), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

The horizon in all three panels is quite high, almost at the top of the image, which gives the viewer a bird's-eye perspective on the scenes. This elevated perspective gives us a bit of distance from the wild cavorting in the center image, and also from the odd forms of torture in the Hell scene. We are floating above the fray, rather than walking among the hundreds of naked figures. The central Garden panel is divided into three sections, foreground, middle ground and background. The foreground contains the greatest level of detail. The pond to the left contains some of the most remarkable of vignettes, including a couple embracing within what seems to be a giant bubble of a berry. The shine of light off of the surface of the bubble is rendered with great care, partially obscuring our view of whatever is happening within. To the left, a man embraces a giant owl, while above them men and women ride a wonderfully detailed group of birds, all recognizable as specific species, such as the mallard duck, kingfisher, and hoopoe, with its great beige crest.

9. The Bible, Isaiah 11:6, New International Version.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Pool), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

The focal point of the entire triptych, in so far as this dizzying composition has one, is the so-called Pool of the Maidens. It is just above center, aligned on the vertical axis of the center panel and therefore of the entire work. Here, a group of naked young women swim and cavort. Some bear red fruits on their heads and one, toward the center of the pool, bends forward and balances such a fruit at the base of her spine, where she seems to also have a fish tail. Several of the women seem to gaze outward, and if we follow the implied lines of their gazes and gestures, we realize that they are looking at the wild procession that surrounds them. Naked men ride a fabulous menagerie of animals – horses, camels and cows, but also a griffin, a lion, and a unicorn-cat, among many others. Perhaps all of the couples and groups throughout the painting began at this pool before pairing up and finding semi-secluded nooks in which to embrace – a giant lobster tail, the shell of a giant mussel, the interior of a giant fruit, and so on.

The red fruits that appear on the heads and bodies of the figures in the pool, and all throughout the central panel, are *madronhos*. This fruit is famous in some areas of Europe not for its vibrant color but because it can be distilled into a very potent liquor of 70% alcohol by volume, which is 140 proof. Bearing this in mind, it is possible that several of the figures are lusting not for one another but for the *madronhos* and the alcohol that was made from them. This might account for the somewhat vacant expressions that some figures bear.[10]

10. Simon Carr, "3. The Mystery of the Other Forbidden Fruit," *The Garden of Earthly Delights* substack: https://ged051.substack.com/p/3-the-mystery-of-the-other-forbidden



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Buildings in Hell), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

This leaves the right panel; here, everything changes except, importantly, the continuous horizon line. The colors are much darker, with all the **tints** of the Gardens of Eden and Earthly Delight giving way to the dusky **shades** of Hell. The rich, verdant fields are replaced with hard, bare earth. The warm and inviting blue pools are replaced with a grey and black lake of ice.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Buildings in Hell), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

The strange pink and blue architecture, populated with animals, birds, and seemingly joyful people are replaced with jagged buildings that seem to be at once in the process of being built and of burning down. The light that blasts out of their windows and doors illuminates a sky choked with smoke, in contrast with the fresh blue skies of the Gardens. It is important, though, that the horizon line carries over, to remind us that these highly disparate scenes are directly and intimately connected.

Throughout all the panels, the scale is vital. These are all large panels, over seven feet tall, but the figures are quite small. Bosch's sustained creativity is astonishing; he created a painting with hundreds of figures, each of which is entertaining, curious, or downright bizarre. This is a work that rewards very close looking, and invites our gaze to linger at great length over its detailed and fascinating surface.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: The Road to Hell

Bosch lived in highly moralizing times, in a culture that condemned most or all bodily pleasures as sinful. He was a member of a religious confraternity called the Brotherhood of Our Lady, dedicated to the worship of the Virgin Mary, and not only completed five paintings for the group but was also

the only artist to be a member of a group that otherwise consisted of Christian clergy and scholars, suggesting both his strong dedication to the group, and their approval of his work. How do we reconcile this with a painting like the *Garden of Earthly Delights*, which depicts such a seemingly free and fun series of pleasures?



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Acrobatic Rider), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.

The Pool of the Maidens at the visual heart of the image seems to be what sets the whole orgy in motion. The men seem to be doing their best to impress the women, displaying themselves and balancing objects – mostly suggestive of sexuality and fertility, like eggs and fruit – on their heads. One even performs an impressive bit of circus-riding, balancing on one foot on the back of a horse while bending over to grasp his calf and look upward at his genitals, and at the bird that seems to be poking its long beak into his anus. The general chaos of the Garden, though, is so extreme that nobody in the image seems to be paying him any attention.

It is worth noting that there are several African figures in the pool and throughout the image. In the early sixteenth century, there would not have been many African people in the Netherlands, and it is to be expected that vast majority of the figures are pale-skinned and light-haired. What are these figures, like the one that poses with a *madronho* on his head at the lower right, doing here? It seems likely that they are part of the effort to represent an "exotic" scene, to include the variety within humanity just as Bosch has included the variety within the animal kingdom. There are also bluish grey figures that may be intended to represent "Moors" – North-African and Spanish Muslims, who are often depicted in similar shades (see the discussion of Juan de Pareja and race in the Selves chapter). There are even a few hirsute figures – figures whose whole bodies are covered with hair or fur, such as the woman standing in the same cluster as the African figure with the *madronho* on his head. Her body is entirely covered in glistening, golden hair, except for her face, hands and feet – and, notably, her breasts. She and the other figures like her may be "wild women," a popular subject in the period, standing in for the freedoms represented by the forest, idealized as untainted by the culture of the city, living in a state something like that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.



Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Figures), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.



Rogier van der Weyden, *The Last Judgement*, oil on oak panel, ca. 1445-1450 (Hôtel-Dieu Museum – Hospices de Beaune, Beaune). Photo: Public Domain.The pleasures of the Garden are clearly not only sexual, but more broadly sensual. Some figures are engaging in sexual behavior, others may be drunk on *madronho* liquor, and yet others are eating impossibly large foods. Many seem to simply be dancing, cavorting, and otherwise delighting in their apparent physical freedom. We must not forget, though, the right panel, the Hell scene tied to the Gardens of Eden and Earthly Delight by the horizon line. This triptych is in many ways similar to common images of the Last Judgment, such as Rogier van der Weyden's *The Last Judgment* from 1443-1451, but there is a vital difference.



Rogier van der Weyden, The Last Judgement (Detail of Gates of Heaven), oil on oak panel, ca. 1445-1450 (Hôtel-Dieu Museum – Hospices de Beaune, Beaune). Photo: Public Domain.

Last Judgments, like van der Weyden's painting, generally present Hell at the right and the Judgment of the souls in the center – with many small, naked figures moving across the landscape. The difference is in what is presented on the left. For van der Weyden and most other artists of the period, this is not the Garden of Eden but Heaven. The difference is highly meaningful. Last Judgments present the moment in Christian mythology when Jesus judges all the souls of the dead at the end of time, sending some to Heaven and some to Hell for all eternity. This is what we see in the van der Weyden, where the leftmost panel of this complex **polyptych** – a painting with many panels – shows an angel showing the saved the way through the gates of Heaven. At the front of the group os a monk, identifiable by his **tonsure** – a hairstyle where the top of the head is shaved as a marker of having taken the vows of a Christian monk. The gates of Heaven are literally golden here, covered in actual gold.

Bosch substitutes the Garden of Eden for Heaven (and does the same in his own Last Judgment triptych). This alters the dynamic by adding in the element of *time*. In biblical mythology, the human story begins in the Garden of Eden with the creation of Adam and Eve. Therefore, this scene cannot serve as the opposite of the Hell panel in the way that an image of Heaven can. Instead, it turns the entire panel into a **narrative**, a story that moves – as we now read and as and they then read – from left to right. For Bosch, humanity begins in the Garden of Eden, which already bears signs of corruption (the strange monsters, the animals eating one another), moves through the Garden of Earthly Delight, which seems to be his representation of his own world, and therefore *ends* – inevitably and for *all* people – in Hell. The pleasures of the Garden are extensive, richly invented, and depicted in great detail, but for Bosch, they bear strong consequences.

While the *Garden of Earthly Delights* is, as a whole, a strong condemnation of sensual pleasures, the work is nonetheless unquestionably pleasurable to contemplate. Its shocking variety and ingenuity gives the viewer cause to dally at length before it, seeking out more and more oddities, more ingenious hybrids, more unusual sexual unions. Was Bosch unaware that his masterpiece was, in a sense, working against its very goals, providing the viewer seemingly endless diversion? Or was he perhaps instead mocking his viewers, tricking them into engaging in a range of pleasurable sins at the same moment that he was instructing them that such sins led to the fires of Hell?

Comparisons and Connections II: Images of Pleasure, Pleasurable Images

In his rich, visionary images, Bosch presents scenes of pleasure and inspires pleasure in his viewers, but also undercuts

that pleasure by arguing that it bears dire consequences. It is, though, possible for artists to simply celebrate pleasures without such moralizing condemnation. In this series of comparisons and connections, we look at works of art presenting quiet and solitary pleasures, shared pleasures, private, and public pleasures, but also works that present potentially false pleasures. These create a more complete sense of the role of pleasure in art.

Quiet Pleasures



Claude Monet, Springtime, oil on canvas, 1872 (Walters Art Museum, Baltimore). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

There is, it seems, an entire genre of paintings of women reading. To twenty-first century viewers, this may seem an unusual subject to attract such interest, but in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reading was seen as an ideal pastime for young women. These paintings generally are intended to be positive images of the quite, solitary pleasure of reading. Claude Monet's *Springtime* (1872) is a typical example. Monet was a leading painted in a group known as the Impressionists, who attempted to capture the overall feeling of a scene, the impression it creates, rather than the fine details thereof. This technique is very different from that used by Northern Renaissance painters like Bosch and van der Weyden. As with Monet's image of his garden at Giverny, even from a distance, we can see the loose, large brushstrokes clearly visible on the canvas. The emphasis here is on the gentle, pleasant mood of the relaxed woman sitting in the

shade of a tree, her pale pink dress and the grass around her dappled with bright sunlight. These dots, in very bright **value**, give us the sense that it is a spring or summer day, and while the woman is largely in the shade, indicated by the use of darker **shades** contrasting with the splashes of sunlit **tints**, there is nothing remotely gloomy about the scene. Everything is lovely, peaceful and pleasant.

There is, though, another way to view this. This lovely, peaceful and pleasant scene presents the woman as perhaps equivalent to the pink flowers in the grass, to the cheery green grass, itself, to the sunlight that falls on them all. This is to say, the unnamed woman, in her frilly pink dress and her frilly pink hat, is reduced to a decoration, a passive object really not designed to convey *her own* pleasure, but for her to serve as a source of pleasure for the (presumably straight male) viewer.



Johannes Vermeer, Young Woman with a Pearl Necklace, oil on canvas, 1662-64 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Monet was participating in a longstanding tradition of quiet images of quiet women, perhaps most typified by Johannes Vermeer. Many of his images present young women in moments of quiet reflection by a window. They read, play musical

instruments, and examine their jewels. In *Young Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, c. 1662, for example, he presents a woman alone in a room, facing the gentle light streaming in through her window.

There is almost no movement in this piece – as in most of Vermeer's paintings. The scene seems suspended in amber, frozen in the soft light that falls on the woman, illuminating her, and drawing attention first to the figure as a whole, and then to her rich, fur-lined clothes, and finally inward to her shining pearl necklace and earrings. From a distance, each pearl shines with opalescence; viewed very closely. they are barely more than dabs of yellow and white.



Johannes Vermeer, Young Woman with a Pearl Necklace (Detail of Pearls), oil on canvas, 1662-64 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The foreground is a dark mass of furniture, cloth, and objects, serving as if to separate the woman from us, to preserve her solitude. We might expect to find her gazing into a mirror to see how she looks as she ties the necklace on with a yellow ribbon, but instead, she gazes out the window. Her eyes seem somewhat unfocused, and she gives the impression less of looking at the scene in front of her than of thinking about something else – perhaps about the person who gave her the pearls, perhaps about whatever event she is dressing for? Vermeer's works tend to have an introspective feel to them, and they invite us to imagine the interior lives of their subjects. We do not know *what* she thinks about, but we do get a sense of the pleasure she takes in whatever her private thoughts might be.

Shared Pleasures



Johannes Vermeer, Officer and Laughing Girl, oil on canvas, 1657 (The Frick Collection, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

In his *Officer and Laughing Girl*, c. 1657, Vermeer presents a similar scene. Again, we have a well-dressed young woman in front of an open window, by a desk. Again, she smiles, but this time, we can see the source of her happiness: sitting

with her at the table is a fashionable man in a rich, red coat and a broad-brimmed hat, his hand jauntily resting on his hip. Looking back and forth between the images, it could perhaps be the same woman as in *Young Woman with a Pearl Necklace*, though it is also possible that this is simply Vermeer's notion of idealized female beauty.

The layout of the composition gives us a sense of the intended audience: we are aligned much more closely with the man in the image than with the woman. We lean in over his shoulder to look at the smiling woman, and can therefore easily imagine ourselves in his place, taking a seat at the table with her. This allows us to share in *his* pleasure at her cheerful response to him, as if it is the viewer rather than the officer in red who inspires her happiness. This work, then, not only depicts a shared form of pleasure and intimacy between the two figures within the painting, but also draws us in, allowing us to partake of the mood of the work.

Yasmine Chatila plays with the tensions of intimacy and display, privacy and public expression in her photographic series *Stolen Moments*. The series, somewhat like Shizuka Yokomizo's photographs discussed in the Selves chapter, consists of photographs taken through apartment windows. Some of these feature couples, as in *The Kiss, Lower East Side, Sunday, 11:37pm*, from 2007 (see here for an image, and here for more from this series). This image has much in common with Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl*. The angle has been shifted so that we are now outside the window, looking in, but again, we have an intimate scene taking place in a private space that the artists has made visible to the public. Here, two men embrace tightly and kiss passionately. The contrast between the dark wall and the white window frame and light within focuses our attention on the interior, even though it is located off-center to the right. Inside this frame-within-the-frame, one man's light arms stand out in contrast with the other man's dark shirt, intensifying our sense of the pleasure they are taking in their embrace.

A cat sits like a sentry across the windowsill like the lion in Albrecht Dürer's *Saint Jerome in his Study*, as if to block our access to this private moment that has publicly displayed. The photograph has a grainy texture, the result of it having been taken in low light. The dark exterior of the building suggests that it is nighttime. The granular texture and a slight bit of apparent motion blur – also the result of low light and a correspondingly slow shutter speed – obscures the figures' faces, so we cannot identify them. This not only preserves their privacy – unlike Yokomizo, Chatila does not seek permission for her photographs – but also allows viewers to step into their places, as we step into the place of the officer in Vermeer's painting.



Cai Guo-Qiang, Cultural Melting Bath: Project for the 20th Century, 1997, 18 Taihu rocks, hot tub with hydrotherapy jets, bathwater infused with herbs, and pine trees, Installation dimensions variable, Collection of Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, Installation view at Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1997. Photo by Hiro Ihara, courtesy Cai Studio.

New York-based Chinese artist Cai Gou-Qiang pushes the boundaries between private pleasures and public displays further in his *Cultural Melting Bath: Projects for the 20th Century*, an installation originally housed at the Queens Museum of Art in New York in 1997. The instillation consists of a large bathtub, surrounded by large, dramatically shaped and pitted limestone rocks of the type used in the Chinese gardens discussed above. A twisted branch hangs over the bath, and the whole assemblage is surrounded by Chinese fishing nets. Visitors were invited to climb into the tub, to enjoy the warm water, the scent of the Chinese herbs floating on its surface and, perhaps most of all, the company of the other bathers. The original setting of the work was crucial to its success at creating a "Cultural Melting Bath"; Queens is the most diverse county in the US, providing the cultural diversity required for the melting-pot association to function. In a sense, the installation was more successful there than when it was included as part of his show called "Hanging Out

at a Museum," housed at the Fine Arts Museum in Taipei, Taiwan. Still, in both settings, the work was designed to provide pleasure. As Cai Gou-Qiang explains, "People say you can hang out with a pretty girl or hang out at an Internet café. In essence, the term 'hang out' means to enjoy something."[11] Art museums are certainly sites of pleasure – or at least, they can be – but not usual pleasures of this sort. For the bathers, there is the sensual pleasure of the bath, and for other visitors, there is the voyeuristic pleasure, like that witnessed in the Pool of the Maidens of the *Garden of Earthly Delight*, of viewing the bathers as they soak comfortably.

Pure Fun?

While much art is quite serious, even dour, there are artists who make works that just make us smile as soon as we see them. In some cases, a pleasurable surface conceals greater depth within, though in other cases it may not. Jeff Koons's *Balloon Dog (Yellow)* (1994), one of a large number of balloon animal sculptures he created, is just delightful (see here for an image). The work is pleasing in several ways. It recalls a childhood joy, but instead of simulating the powdery surface of actual balloons, Koons has these sculptures – which despite their light and airy appearance, are cast in steel – covered in colored chrome finishes. The surfaces are so polished and perfect (see here for a detail image) that they invite us to touch them, though in the context of the art museum, we are not allowed to do so. They also reflect our images back at ourselves, distorted into goofy, funhouse shapes by the deep curves of the dog. As it was installed on the rooftop gallery of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, this yellow *Balloon Dog* also reflected back the beautiful view of Central Park and the city's iconic skyline beyond it. The scale of the work is also cause for amusement. By blowing up the work to ten feet tall, Koons takes a small, fleeting carnival amusement and turns it into a monumental and enduring work of art. As Koons writes, his art can help viewers recapture something lost from childhood: the sheer, uncomplicated pleasure of looking at something:

> One of the things that I enjoy so much about childhood is just how open and nonjudgmental you can be. You just accept the color blue for its blueness—and turquoise for just being turquoise. You can enjoy plastic—just a great piece of plastic—for its color, or even the cereal box that you can look at forever. And so I always enjoy making reference to that.[12]

While there is a serious backstory to the series – Koons was seeking, in an indirect way, to communicate with his son, who had moved with Koons's ex-wife to her native Italy – this is further beneath the gleaming surface than the steel interior is beneath the chromed, mirror finish. This work is not a comment on the false joys of youth, or any such thing. Instead, it is an attempt to conjure the very real joys of childhood.

Takashi Murakami also makes slick, repeated images as part of his "Superflat" series, including *Flowerball Pink*, from 2007 (see here for an image). In this circular image, twenty-eight inches in diameter, Murakami presents an explosion of smiling flowers in a range of bright, cheerful colors. There is no shading at all, here. Every segment of the image is outlined clearly and the filled in with a solid block of color. Even the flowers that are clearly behind those that overlap them are not shadowed at all.

The viewer can hardly help but smile when viewing this work. It is so self-evidently joyful that it becomes a parody

11. "Hanging Out at a Museum: Cai Guo-Qiang in Taipei," *Artmag* (December 2009): http://db-artmag.de/en/58/on-view/hanging-out-at-a-museum-cai-guo-qiang-in-taipei/

12. "Balloon Dog (Red)" (1994-2000), PBS: http://www.pbs.org/art21/images/jeff-koons/balloon-dog-red-1994-2000, site not longer active but archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20141231084232/http://www.pbs.org/art21/images/jeff-koons/balloon-dog-red-1994-2000

of happiness. Indeed, Murakami's "Superflat" movement is intended to demonstrate and embody the overlap in Japan of manga – Japanese comic books – pop culture, graphic design, marketing, and fine arts. He sands down his canvasses to produce surfaces that are nearly as smooth and slick as a mass-produced poster.

At a glance, the *Flowerball* is delightful. When considered more carefully, especially when exhibited alongside a number of other works from the series, its relentless, aggressive happiness takes on a desperate tone and a surface shallowness that is stressed by the almost perfect surfaces of the work. This effect is apparent in his larger installations of works that tend to take over whole rooms with the manic joy of his smiling flower faces, as in his *Takashi Murakami: Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow* at The Broad Museum in Los Angeles in 2022 (see here for images). Here, entire walls are are papered in an overwhelming profusion of smiling flowers like those on his small *Flowerball*, and they break out of two-dimensional space into the three-dimensional world. The overall effect is as disturbing as it is cheerful, at once pleasurable and off-putting.

A Smile of Comfort and Desperation



Stele with Maitreya and Attendants, grey limestone, ca. 500 (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland). Photo: Public Domain.

In Buddhism, a **bodhisattva** is a figure who is able to enter Nirvana – the Buddhist afterlife which represents escape from all earthly suffering – but chooses to remain behind to help other people on their journey toward Nirvana. They are compassionate figures and, like the Buddha, are often shown smiling out at the viewer. There are many different bodhisattvas, and some images present thousands, but even in this crowd, the bodhisattva Maitreya stands out. His name means "Loving-Kindness," and he was the first bodhisattva to be represented in the visual arts. Maitreya is also the only figure who is both a bodhisattva (in this world) and a buddha (in the next).

An early sculpture of Maitreya survives from the second-century in the Kushan Empire, which originally stretched across parts of what are now Northern India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and western China. The figure raises a hand and smiles broadly at us. The sculpture was originally painted, so his eyes would not have been blank, but instead would have looked directly at us. According to Buddhist belief, Maitreya is a savior who will return to the world to bring all its people to enlightenment. He can see the future, and so his calm smile is comforting to the viewer. His body is gently idealized, and softly naturalistic. It is not muscular and threatening, like many images of ancient gods, nor judgmental and condemnatory, like many other images of gods. Instead, it is warm and reassuring.

Contemporary Chinese artist Yue Minjun, who draws on various figures from Chinese history in his work, turns this smile inside out, and robs it of its joy (see here for an image). Like Murakami's *Flowerball*, there is something willfully overdone in the figures' frantic smiles, repeated again and again in throughout the artist's work. Yue has cited images of Maitreya as a source for his famous smile. The face throughout Yue's work, always his own, appears again and again, sometimes in a solo image like *Salute* from 2005 (see here for an image), and sometimes in great clusters, like his playful satire of the Terracotta Army of Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (see here for an image).

In Yue's paintings and sculptures, again and again, the same face leers manically. In *Salute*, the colors are bright and cheerful, but perhaps slightly too bright. Yue's smile is stretched far too wide for comfort, and the skin of his face appears taught and shining. He has too many teeth stretching across his impossibly broad grin. In some works, like his *Contemporary Terracotta Army*, the repetition is internal within the work. In other works, like *Salute*, the repetition is between works. In either case, the impact is the same.

Underneath this grin, borrowed from Maitreya but grotesquely exaggerated, Yue conveys a sense of disillusionment with the Chinese government's standard sources of pride: the government and army, and China's remarkable and lengthy history. *Salute* seems to echo – and mock – the ever-smiling figures in images of the Cultural Revolution, like *Chairman Mao is the reddest reddest red sun in our hearts* (see the Power chapter). In his *Backyard Garden* (2005) and related paintings (see here for an image), we see the same sort of pitted limestone blocks that featured in the Garden of the Unsuccessful Politician, and again in Cai Gou-Qiang's *Cultural Melting Bath: Projects for the 20th Century*. However, instead of serving as a source of beauty and pride in Chinese art and history, the rocks are like a sort of trap, clutching at the figures' naked bodies with their jagged edges. Unlike Bosch's figures, who seem unaware of their fate, Yue *and* his image within his works seem all too conscious of his art's past, and his culture's present. Again, he grins frantically, like a lunatic, like a man with a gun to his head, forced to smile despite his oppression.

The Joy of Life



Henri Matisse, Le Bonheur de Vivre, oil on canvas, 1905-06 (Barnes Collection, Philadelphia). Photo by Regan Vercruysse, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Henri Matisse's *Le bonheur de vivre (The Joy of Life)*, from 1905-1906, provides perhaps the most direct contrast with Bosch's *Garden*. Again, we have a warm and inviting image – in this case almost solely composed of warm colors – and loose, curvilinear lines. Matisse's wild color choices intensify the scene. As in Bosch's painting, we have a circle of dancing figures in the middle ground, and naked figures embrace, kiss, play music, and otherwise lounge languidly in the foreground. There are even a few animals strolling about.

It seems possible that Matisse was thinking of Bosch's triptych when he conceived of this scene. Where they differ, though, is in Matisse's total rejection of the condemnation of this scene of pleasure. Unlike Bosch, and several other artists presented in this chapter, Matisse offers no critique of joy, no judgment, no Hell scene where these figures are made to suffer in return for the pleasures they experience in *their* garden of earthly delight. The work is an image of delight, aimed at generating yet more pleasure in the viewer, without moralization or denunciation. It is an unadulterated celebration of the *Joy of Life*.

CONCLUSION

Art is often a source of joy and excitement. It is just as often, though, a critique of these emotions. It is often a source of pleasures, and just as often a criticism of pleasures. Art uses pleasure – of the subject of a work, of the viewer of the work, or both – as a focus, and also as a technique to convey other notions and ideas. Hopefully, images from throughout this book provide *you* with various forms of pleasure! If a work of art can accomplish that, then it can often do a great deal more.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE III:

DANCING GANESHA, INDIA (MADHYA PRADESH), 10TH CENTURY



Dancing Ganesha, red sandstone, ca. tenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.



Dancing Ganesha (Detail of Head), red sandstone, ca. tenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- How does the artist create a sense of the god's dancing **movement**?
- What mood does the figure's pose convey?
- What does the figure's body **shape** suggest?
- How is Ganesha adorned?
- In what ways is this image of a god different from (or similar to) other images of gods?
- How does Ganesha's pleasure relate to the pleasure of the viewer?

Media Attributions

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- Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Animals), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.
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- Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (Detail of Buildings in Hell), oil on oak plank, 1500-05 (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). Photo: Public Domain.
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Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

- Johannes Vermeer, Young Woman with a Pearl Necklace (Detail of Pearls), oil on canvas, 1662-64 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Johannes Vermeer, Officer and Laughing Girl, oil on canvas, 1657 (The Frick Collection, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Cai Guo-Qiang (b. 1957, Quanzhou, China; lives in New York) Cultural Melting Bath: Project for the 20th Century, 1997, 18 Taihu rocks, hot tub with hydrotherapy jets, bathwater infused with herbs, and pine trees, Installation dimensions variable, Collection of Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, Installation view at Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1997. Photo by Hiro Ihara, courtesy Cai Studio
- Stele with Maitreya and Attendants, grey limestone, ca. 500 (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland). Photo: Public Domain.
- Henri Matisse, Le Bonheur de Vivre, oil on canvas, 1905-06 (Barnes Collection, Philadelphia). Photo by Regan Vercruysse, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Dancing Ganesha, red sandstone, ca. tenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Dancing Ganesha (Detail of Head), red sandstone, ca. tenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

9. Selves

Why Do Artists Present Themselves? And How Do They Capture Others?

The face has always held a central role in art. We find images of the human face particularly compelling. Our eyes are drawn to faces in art, and we also find images of faces where they are not – electric sockets present two eyes and mouth, buttons seems to smile out at us, and so on. Even before humans were yet modern humans, while we were still evolving, representations of the face were seen as important enough to become part of early burial rituals. Among the earliest "works of art" to survive from anywhere in the world is an object found in a grave in South Africa. It is a small pebble, buried with a body as part of a funeral ritual of some sort, and it bears a simplified image of a face.



Pebble from Makapansgat cave in the Makapan Valley, South Africa, buried 3 million years ago. PhotoL: WikipSQ, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The face was not carved by hand, but was a natural feature of the pebble. Still, it seems to have been recognized, since it was transported a long way before being included in the burial, and therefore transformed into a form of "**found art**." The pebble, though, was not buried with a human, a *Homo sapiens*, but with an *Australopithecus africanus*, an early hominid ancestor of modern humans, nearly three million years ago. Now, just as then, we seek out such images everywhere we go.

This chapter examines a series of images that strive to get beneath the skin of their subjects – that work to convey more than physical appearance. Many of the works are portraits, though not all. Some of them are self-portraits – images of the artists who made them – and some are portraits of other people. Some are known figures, and others are anonymous. We also look at a few works that manage to present the artist's personality or body, without an actual image. In some media, the artist's body directly manipulates the surface of the work, but even when working in less manual media, like photography or digital art, artists make the vital decisions that shape the outcome of their works, which therefore reflect them. All of these works – like so many throughout this book – convey something essential about the identity of their creators and subjects.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE I:

JUDITH LEYSTER, SELF-PORTRAIT, HOLLAND, 1635 CE



Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1630 (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What are the effects of the visible brushstrokes?
- What sort of a moment does the painting seem to capture?
- How do the colors impact our reception of the image, and its elements?
- How does the artist manipulate the **balance** of the image?
- How does the artist create points of **focus**?
- How does the painting within the painting differ from the rest of the painting?

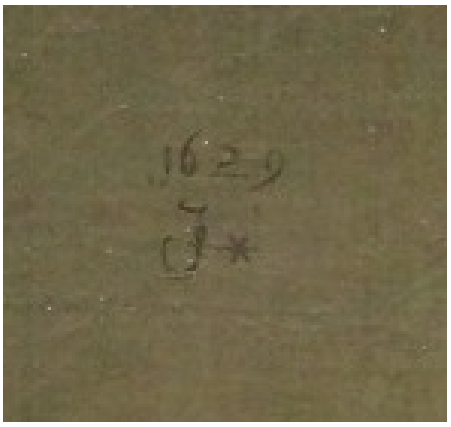
INTRODUCTION: A Star in a World of Painters



Judith Leyster, The Jolly Drinker, oil on canvas, 1629 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Photo by Roel Wijnants, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Judith Leyster was one of the most successful painters of seventeenth-century Holland, which was a bustling center of painting. **Portraits** (images of people that are based on actual people rather than fictional or mythical people), **still lifes** (images of inanimate objects) and **genre scenes** (scenes of everyday life) were the most popular subjects, and Leyster produced all three. In a period when women were rarely afforded status equal to their male contemporaries, she was celebrated and successful, even taking on male students, though after marrying Jan Miense Molenaer, also a painter (though now of much less renown than Leyster), she had five children and seems to have largely stopped painting.

Leyster was long written off as a follower of Frans Hals, the most prominent painter of her era, based on mistaken assumptions about the role of women in the arts of the period. She is now thought to have been a competitor of his, and records show that they fought over the best assistants. Leyster means "Lode Star" – a term that literally refers to the North Star, used by seventeenth-century sailors to navigate, but also used to refer to anything, or anyone, who serves to lead those around them. Punning on her name, she signed many of her works, such as the cheerful *Jolly Toper* (that is, the "Jolly Drinker," ca. 1629), with a monogram that ends in a shooting star, a sign of her confidence in her own status as painter.



Detail of artist's signature, Judith Leyster, The Jolly Drinker, oil on canvas, 1629 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Casual Composition

Judith Leyster's self-portrait (ca. 1635) is a wonderfully complex work, despite its apparent simplicity. Through a variety of techniques, elements of art, and principles of composition, Leyster manipulated her presentation of herself and of her role as a producer of art. At first glance, the portrait seems so casual and relaxed. We seem to have interrupted her at her work, but she seems to welcome our visit, turning to face us with a crooked grin. Her parted lips and teeth suggest that she is greeting us, and her smile and raised eyebrows suggest that her greeting is warm.

Leyster's pose gives her a relaxed air, as if her work as an artist is not a great and weighty labor as some artists present the task, but a joy. Her body is positioned such that it recedes into the canvas at an angle. This makes the image seem more naturalistic and relaxed than more traditionally posed, **frontal** portraits. The image looks like a snapshot taken by a friend, but of course, *all* of these details are the result of Leyster's careful planning.



Judith Leyster, Merry Trio, oil on canvas, 1629. Photo: Christie's, Public Domain.

Leyster's lighthearted presentation of her approach to painting suits her work, which is generally filled with cheerful figures, happily practicing their own crafts. For example, she painted several images of cheerful musicians, often surrounded by drinkers and other revelers, such as *Merry Company* (ca. 1630-1631). Painted only a few years before her self-portrait, this was one of her most well-known works within her lifetime. Here, brightly dressed figures laugh, drink, and play music. The young figure in red seems to invite us to join the party, looking out of the canvas directly at us, and raising his glass as if to offer us a drink.

In her self-portrait, the Leyster almost seems to be one of this crowd. Indeed, the fiddler on the painting within the self-portrait is borrowed from *Merry Company*, which places Leyster in the position of the figure in red, looking out at us and inviting us to join the fun. This is a rather different model of the life and role of the artist than we often see. Leyster does not wish to appear as a tortured genius, toiling in obscurity, or a wealthy master, seriously engaged in the creation of masterpieces, but rather, as a cheerful member of a joyous society.



Detail of sleeve, Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1630.

Leyster's work has an informal, casual appearance to it that is not merely the result of subject matter and composition. Her painting technique is loose and brushy – a style that is sometimes called "**painterly**" – so that we see each brushstroke. This was a relatively new style in her period, pioneered by Hals. A close look at her sleeve, for example, shows how she created the illusion of velvet and lace through quick, energetic layers of paint. Unlike Northern European painters of previous generations, who worked to hide their craft within perfectly smooth, illusionistic surfaces, or their more traditional contemporaries, Leyster and Hals loosened their style, resulting in images that have more movement, that seem more lively, spontaneous and active.

Comparing Leyster's painting of herself to her painting of the fiddler within the self-portrait, we see that they are very much of the same world. There is a rough symmetry, here, as each leans back from the center at an angle, though they are quite different in scale. The similarity of the figures invites us to compare them. Both appear against the loosely-painted neutral backgrounds that replaced the more formal backgrounds common to portraits from earlier periods. In each, the artist manipulates the shade of that background for contrast with the figure, in order to create emphasis. Since Leyster depicts herself wearing a bright white lace cap, she darkens the area just around her head for contrast. Similarly, she lightens the background around the fiddler's blue hat. In both cases, this helps draw attention to the figures' heads. This is also accomplished in the painting – as perhaps it was in life – by the very broad, starched lace collar, on which Leyster has painted a number of bright white stripes, pointing inward toward her open, accessible face. It is her right hand, though, that is closest to us. She holds her brush much as the fiddler holds his bow, and with her left hand, grips her palate much as he grips the neck of his fiddle. Both seem amply able to use their tools – perhaps effortlessly – to entertain us.

There is, though, one subtle difference in technique between Leyster's image of herself and her image of the fiddler she shows herself in the act of producing: the fiddler is painted in an even looser, brushier style, more characteristic of her other works. With this unusual use of variety of style within a single painting – since, really, there are not two paintings here, but one painting that has an illusion of a painting in it – Leyster is therefore displaying her ability to render images in the two more common styles of her day, but also differentiating between the supposed *reality* of the image of herself, and the painting she is here at work upon.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: A Period for Portraits

In Holland and Flanders, the Baroque period (ca. 1600-1750 CE) was one of crisis and conflict. It was filled with great religious tensions, including the 30 Years War, which raged between Catholics and Protestants from 1618-1648, originating in Austria and eventually spreading all throughout Europe. For 40 years, the Netherlands had been under Catholic Spain's repressive rule. The Protestants, with the help of the French, finally overthrew the Spanish. The Netherlands then split into Catholic Flanders (which is roughly modern Belgium) in the South and Protestant Holland in North. This was a period of absolute rule, with monarchs like Louis XIV claiming divine right – authority derived from God – but there was a corresponding backlash. Rebels agreed with the philosopher John Locke (1632-1704 CE), who argued that governments draw their authority from the governed, rather than from themselves or God.

After the 30 Years War, Holland developed a Free Trade Economy and became the leading trade nation in Europe, fostering a powerful new **bourgeoisie** – an upper middle class. The bourgeoisie was much larger than the old nobility,

and became a powerful new source of patronage of art. Prior to this period, most art was commissioned by religious groups and governments. The severe, new Protestant Church rejected most art as too luxurious, and so religious commissions began to dry up. Instead, the middle class began buying art for enjoyment and investment. According to seventeenth-century diaries, letters, records, and other documents, a large portion of the populace began collecting art. Even farmers left records of their art collections, which would have been unheard of in any previous generation.

The new art-buying public desired different subjects than the Church and Crown had. Religious scenes and royal portraits fell out of popularity, in favor of still lifes, landscape paintings, genre scenes, and more modest portraits of families and guilds. Most of these paintings were small, modest works, and many of them are quite light-hearted and entertaining. They are not generally moralistic or didactic – they do not aim to teach the viewer important lessons. Instead, they entertain and delight. Leyster's self-portrait is both an example of this tone – it is, itself, delightful – and a demonstration of the attitude of the painter toward the working process that would result is such paintings. She presents herself as a cheerful member of the bourgeois class to which she belonged.

Leyster was born in Haarlem, an important Dutch city, and worked in Amsterdam and Utrecht before ultimately settling back in Haarlem. There, she joined the painters' guild, which was a rare accomplishment for a seventeenth-century woman. The guilds were powerful organizations of merchants and craftspeople that both supported members and controlled production within their regions. They were something like modern day unions, with dues to be paid and collective power to wield. There were cloth makers' guilds, dyers' guilds, booksellers' guilds, and so on, and membership in them was essential for a successful career in any of these fields. Leyster's membership was therefore both a strong indication of her success as a painter, and also a great help in furthering that success. Once a member of the guild, she opened her own studio, took on assistants and students, and clearly enjoyed considerable success.

Leyster seems to wear this success lightly in her self-portrait, where she presents herself as quite comfortable with her role. She is richly and meticulously dressed in the latest bourgeois fashion. She stresses her proficiency as an artist and her friendliness, rather than presenting herself as an idealized beauty by the standards of her day. Leyster might have presented herself with a long, swanlike neck, or overflowing bodice, as women of the period are often presented, or alternately, as a serious and sober matron. Instead, she presents herself as a confident member of the new art-producing and art-buying class that was just forming around her. Indeed, her cheeks and nose are a bit ruddy; perhaps, like so many of the figures in her paintings, she has had a glass or two of wine. The section that follows continues to consider how artists use their art to explore their own creative processes and practices.

Comparisons and Connections I: Self-Portraits

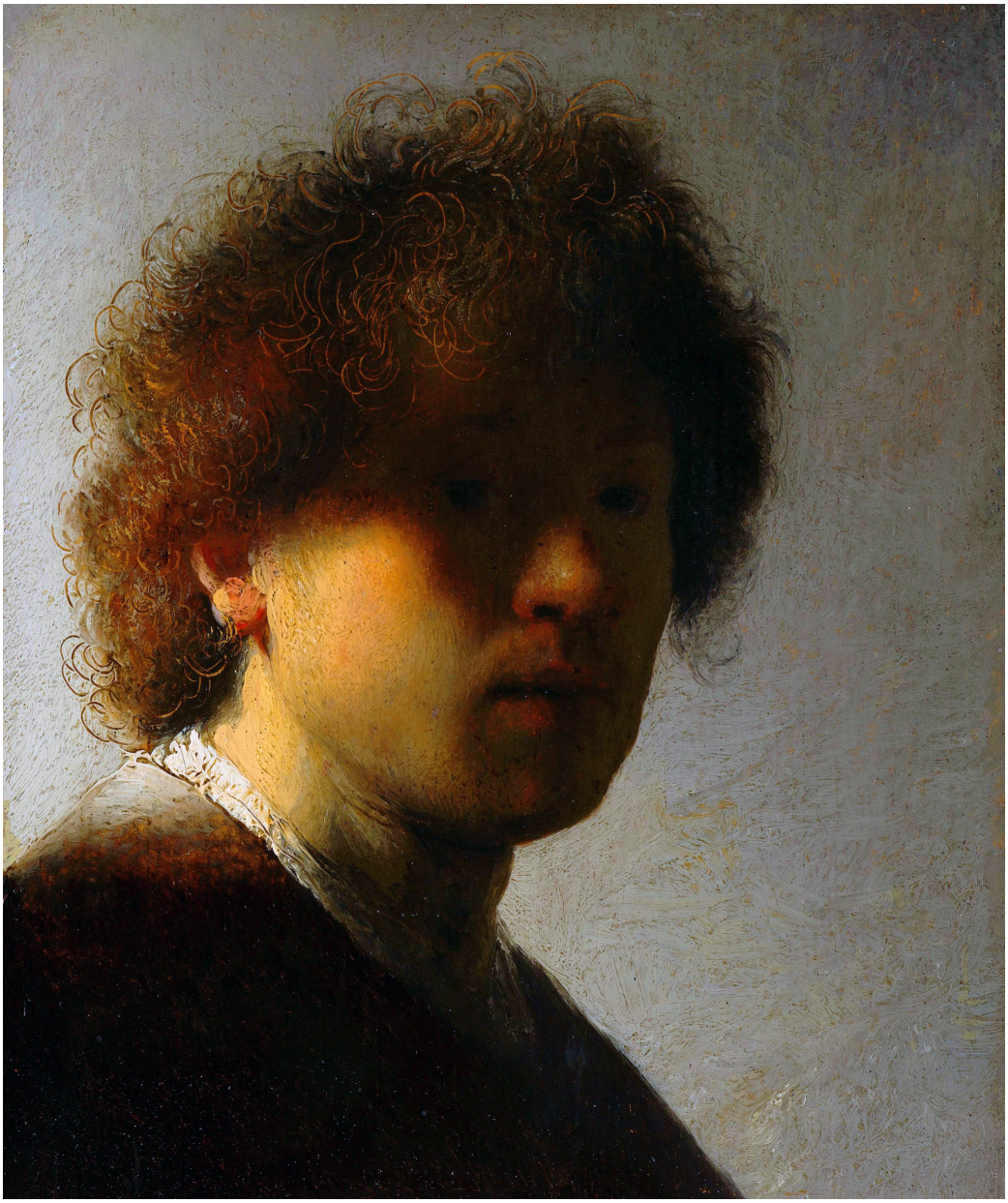
Judith Leyster's self-portrait raises several elements vital to a discussion of the production of art: artists, patronage, styles, guilds, genres, personal expression, idealization, and so on. This section of comparisons and connections will consider works produced in a variety of contexts and bearing traces of their circumstances of production.

The (Old) Master of Self-Portraits

We will begin with one of Leyster's contemporaries, Rembrandt van Rijn, who was without any doubt the most significant painter of the Dutch Baroque period. He was born in Leiden, Holland, and moved to Amsterdam after gaining early success. Unlike most painters, for the most part he ran his studio as he wished. Rather than working on commissions from patrons, he was one of the first artists in the Europe to produce works that could be valued as "Rembrandts," and therefore sought after regardless of subject matter.

Joachim von Sandrart published an early history of Dutch Painting in 1675, in which he tells us that Rembrandt had "countless distinguished children for instruction and learning, of whom every single one paid him 100 gilders annually,"

an enormous sum for the time.[1] Having students was common, but Rembrandt seems to have had many more than was usual, or even allowable under the rules of the Guild of St. Luke, patron saint of painters. Consequently, he had an outsized impact on the following generation of artists.



Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1628 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Photo by Stuart Rankin, CC BY-NC 2.0.

In his first fifty months in Amsterdam, starting in 1641, Rembrandt painted fifty portraits. Most of these were of the more expensive, full-length type, rather than the cheaper head or **bust**. His most characteristic works are his self-portraits. Indeed, Rembrandt the artist, Rembrandt the gentleman, Rembrandt the youth, Rembrandt in all his incarnations was Rembrandt's most absorbing and powerful artistic subject. Self-portraits, like that of Judith Leyster, were common in

1. David Bomford, *Art in the Making: Rembrandt* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery, 2006), 17.

the period, but Rembrandt adopted the subject of his own face as a life-long project, producing at least seventy-five self-portraits between 1628 and 1669.

One of Rembrandt's earliest self-portraits, painted in 1628 when he was 23 years old, shows a dynamic young man, filled with energy. His remarkable manipulation of light and shadow is already evident in the curious image. Most painters use light and shadow to define forms and create a sense of depth and weight. Rembrandt does this, to a degree, but more vital is his use of light and shadow to create moods and emotions. Most of the figure's face is shrouded in shadow. Even in this very early work, the painter conveys a mixture of optimism and wary concern. Rembrandt is presenting himself to us, and yet concealing more than he reveals. The light falls most sharply on his white collar, the side of his neck, and the edge of his jaw. These are all less expressive features than those he cloaks in shadow – the eyes, eyebrows, and mouth.



Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait at the Age of Thirty-Four, oil on canvas, 1640 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by Frans Vandewalle, CC BY-NC 2.0.

By studying the portraits Rembrandt produced over the following four decades, we can watch him grow up, age, shift and change, but certain qualities seem to remain through them all. In his *Self-Portrait Leaning on a Sill* (age 34, ca. 1640), Rembrandt is richly dressed, optimistic as he looks out to world. We see him here, at the height of his fame and success, and the image is a clear display of his wealth.

Rembrandt's modulation of light and shadow still conveys more than mere shape and weight; instead it suggests a mood. Here, the lighting is more traditional, falling on his face and illuminating him warmly. The image, like many of Rembrandt's works, seems to glow from within. This effect was achieved by building up many layers of translucent **glazes** – oil paints with little pigment in them, which subtly change the underlying colors and allow actual light to penetrate the surface of an image and shine back out from the paint. Unlike Leyster, he does not here show himself in the act of painting. Rather, as a very successful businessman, he presents what his painting has granted to him: status as a prosperous gentleman.

As he aged, Rembrandt's brushwork became looser, more "painterly." The result is that, even in works that are not self-portraits, the artist presents himself in every brushstroke. He also increasingly abandoned the high drama, the intense action and florid emotion that filled his earlier work in favor of more intense psychological content, more inner emotion. In a letter to Constantijn Huygens, a contemporary Dutch humanist and poet, Rembrandt wrote that he wished to convey "the greatest inward emotion."[2]



Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait at the Age of Sixty-Three, oil on canvas, 1669 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by Frans Vandewalle, CC BY-NC 2.0.

In his final self-portrait (age 63, 1669), he painted himself as a tired man, worn down with cares. Though he saw meteoric success as a young man, he lost a great deal over the decades. The youthful self-portrait of 1628 is a whirl of self-confidence, of promise and bold exploration of new techniques to render not only three-dimensional form but also light, and the moods it can convey. The late work of 1669 is heart-rending not because Rembrandt's powers of representation are diminished. Quite to the contrary, it is because they are so clearly in evidence. By this point in his life, Rembrandt had lost everything – his parents, his brothers, two wives, three of his children, and also his great wealth, culminating in the auction of his home and furnishings. He had lost everything, that is, *except* for that which made him great, in the first place: his ability to render, though subtle manipulations of tone, not only form, light, and shadow, but a tremendous, almost overpowering sense of individual character and emotion.

2. Seymour Slive, "Art Historians and Art Critics-II: Huygens on Rembrandt," *The Burlington Magazine* 94:594 (September, 1952): 260-264, 263, online at https://www.jstor.org/stable/870922.

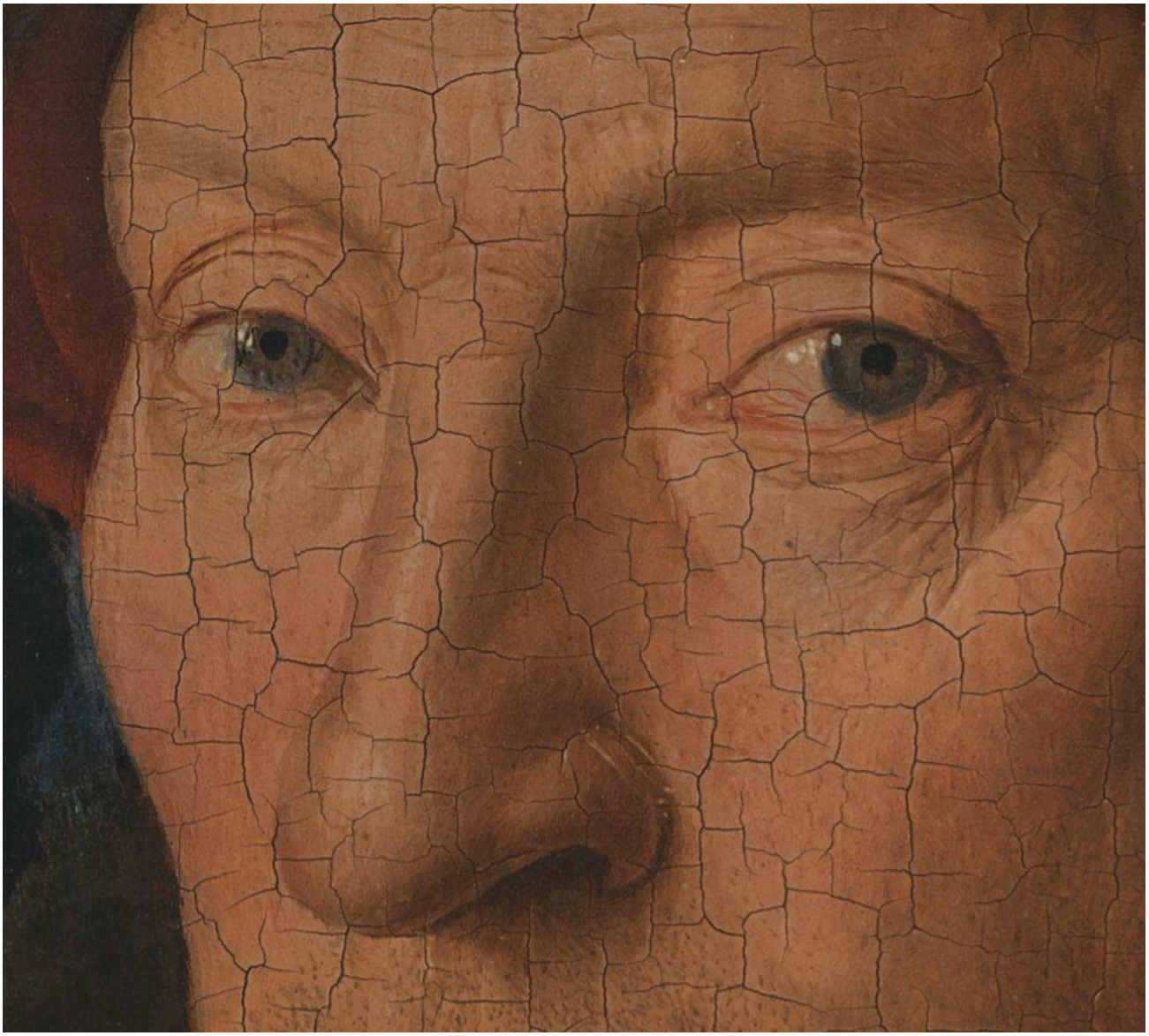
Hidden Self-Portraits



Jan van Eyck, The Man in the Red Turban (Self-Portrait?), oil on oak panel, 1433 (The National Gallery, London). Photo: The National Gallery, London, CC BY-NC-ND 4.01433: https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/NG222

While many artists make themselves the centerpieces of their art, others slyly slip themselves into works. Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo Buonarroti painted and sculpted his own face throughout his works, and his contemporary, Raphael Sanzio da Urbino, modestly added himself peering out from a work celebrating all the greatest thinkers from history.

Perhaps the artist most famous for his hidden self-portraits, though, is the fifteenth-century Flemish painter Jan van Eyck. He left us one work that is believed to be a self-portrait, though since this is not certain, it is usually called *The Man in the Red Turban* (1433 CE). It is a highly compelling work, with rich, luminous colors. Van Eyck was a pioneer of oil paints, which allow for bolder colors than were possible previously. They also allow for the use of glazes – thin coats of **paint** with little or no pigment – which van Eyck used, for example, to created the layers of glossy shine over the figures eyes.



Detail, Jan van Eyck, The Man in the Red Turban (Self-Portrait?), oil on oak panel, 1433.

The portrait is painted with remarkable precision. Every piece of stubble on the man's unshaven face is individually painted, and not as a single stroke, but with shading and highlights to suggest light striking glossy hair. The eyes, though, are the most arresting feature, pale blue and piercing, and ever so slightly pulled into a taught squint at the outer corners, where the skin is a bit dry and papery, suggesting concentration and age.

Why do many art historians assume this to be a self-portrait? Van Eyck painted many portraits by commission, so this could just be another wealthy patron. However, there are a few clues that suggest otherwise. First, most of his other portraits give us the name of the sitter. This one, though, only gives van Eyck's name (on the lower frame, where it is written in an abbreviated form of the Latin version of his name, "Johannes de Eyck"). The inscription at the top of the frame, in Flemish, reads "All I can," which we might take to mean, "The best I can manage." Is this genuine humility or false modesty? The work, especially when viewed up close and in person, is astonishing, dramatically more precise and detailed than the paintings of his contemporaries. The face that stares out at us is so sharp, so keen, and the eyes sparkle with a cold and clear intelligence that seems in perfect accord with van Eyck's paintings.



Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife, oil on oak panel, 1434 (The National Gallery, London). Photo: Public Domain.

There is, though, another reason to suspect that this is a self-portrait. Curiously, in the backgrounds of many other works by van Eyck, we can often just make out a figure in a red turban. In one portrait, we can see him through a window, strolling across a bridge with a companion. More remarkably, in a large portrait of a priest surrounded by a group of saints, he appears reflected in the shining shield of St. George!

Here, though, we look at his appearance in the background of the *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434). This work presents Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini and his eventual wife, Giovanna, though it was painted several years before their marriage, and may perhaps be intended to document their betrothal – their promise to marry. Arnolfini, an Italian merchant with connections to very powerful banking families, lived in Bruges, Flanders, and sought out the most prominent painter in the area for this image.

Again, the work is painted in beautiful, saturated colors, with incredibly fine detail and precision. The couple is presented as serious, even dour, but also as *very* wealthy – their robes are lined with fur, their furnishings are ornate, and even their affenpinscher dog would have been more costly than most other dog breeds, at the time.

Where, though, is the man in the red turban? If we look closely – very closely! – at the convex mirror hanging on the back wall, we see in its distorted surface first the Arnolfinis' backs and then, beyond them, two tiny figures, one in blue and the other in a red turban.



Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife (Detail of Mirror), oil on oak panel, 1434 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by cea +, CC BY 2.0.

The whole painting is only about 32 inches high, so the mirror is about 3.5 inches high, and this figure is only a fraction of that, less than an inch high. Just above the mirror is a very ornate inscription, slightly different from that on the frame of the *Man in the Red Turban*. That one reads (in Latin), "Jan van Eyck Made Me, 1433, 21 October." The inscription on the *Arnolfini Portrait* reads (again in Latin), "Jan van Eyck was here, 1434." The inscription and the tiny image of the man in the mirror suggest that van Eyck was serving as a witness to the scene we see before us. If the man in the red turban is van Eyck, then of course van Eyck "was here" for its creation, and so the slight difference makes sense. In the *Arnolfini Portrait*, both inscription and image assert van Eyck's presence. In *The Man in the Red Turban*, both instead assert his act of painting, and his remarkable skill.



Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting, oil on canvas, ca. 1638-1639 (Royal Collection Trust, London). Photo by David Short, CC BY 2.0.

Artemisia Gentileschi, a prominent Italian Baroque painter elected to the Florentine Academy of Design at the early age of 23, also produced straightforward self-portraits and other paintings that contain "hidden" self-portraits. Hers, though, are more dramatic than van Eyck's sly inclusions. In one painting, Gentileschi presents a self-portrait that is not concealed, but elevated into an *Allegory of Painting* (1638-1639 CE).

The image is quite unusual for a self-portrait, since it presents the figure from the side. This poses quite a challenge for an artist, living prior to the invention of photography. How could she ever have seen her profile from this angle in order to paint it? Perhaps she used a series of mirrors. The pose is a demonstration of her great virtuosity as a painter, a demonstration that she is a worthy model for the personification of Painting. Typical of her work, the image is dramatically lit with light streaming in from one side, striking the figure on the face and chest, and leaving her back in deep shadow. It is also rather asymmetrical, with the bulk of the figure right of the center of the painting, and only – and significantly – her hands and painter's tools to the left.

Unlike Leyster's self-portrait, where the painter is leaning back from her canvas, or Rembrandt's self-portraits, where the painter is presented without the tools of his trade, Gentileschi paints herself vigorously at work, almost diving toward her blank canvas, as if eager – even compelled – to being a new work.

This painting, probably produced while Gentileschi was in England at the invitation of King Charles I, was based on Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, a guidebook of subjects for painters. It describes the figure of Painting as:

> a beautiful woman, with full black hair, disheveled, and twisted in various ways, with arched eyebrows that show imaginative thought, the mouth covered with a cloth tied behind her ears, with a chain of gold at her throat from which hangs a mask.[3]

Gentileschi's image suits this description well, but for one very notable alteration: She has chosen to omit the gag in the mouth of Painting (intended by Ripa to suggest that painting is mute). Gentileschi was not to be silenced, as the next image demonstrates.

3. "Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting (La Pittura), 1638-1639," *Google Arts and Culture*: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/fAHok0QVLkyJXQ



Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, oil on canvas, ca. 1612-13 (Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Gentileschi's most famous works present the subject of *Judith and Holofernes*. These images, such as one painted in 1620-1621 CE, are powerful, violent scenes. Judith, according to the apocryphal – that is, unofficial or non-canonical – biblical Book of Judith, was a Jewish noblewoman who seduced and then beheaded an Assyrian general who was besieging the Israelites, thereby saving her people. The same subject had been painted by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (usually just called Caravaggio), who was the main influence on Gentileschi, but in comparison, his work is light and his Judith is delicate and distant from her grisly work.



Caravaggio, Judith and Holofernes, oil on canvas, 1598-1602 (Barberini Gallerie Corsini Nazionali, Rome). Photo: Public Domain.

Caravaggio's heroine looks confused by her actions. Gentileschi, on the other hand, has her heroine rolling up her sleeves and pressing hard both on Holofernes' head and on the hilt of the sword with which she hacks it off. She shows no doubt or confusion. Blood spurts out of Holofernes' neck in thick streams that seep into and run down the white bed sheets – a potent symbol, as will be clarified below – and spatter the hands and arms of Judith and her maidservant. Some drops of blood have even been flung as far up as Judith's bodice and breasts. Judith's expression is serious but not horrified – indeed, her lips, pursed together, almost seem to curve up, ever so slightly, into a smile.

The face should be familiar. Gentileschi has presented *herself* as Judith, here and in other paintings of the same subject. Why would she present herself in such a gruesome scene? While we can never be certain of the motives of artists in the distant past, we have striking evidence from Gentileschi's life that seems highly relevant. When she was 19, her painting tutor (and a family friend), Agostino Tassi, sexually assaulted her – the blood on the sheets may imply the loss of virginity. Her father Orazio (also a painter) sued Tassi for his actions, and records of the seven-month-long trial survive, providing a grim look into seventeenth-century courtroom practice. In addition to having to bear Tassi's denials and his accusations (which were so flagrant that Orazio also sued for perjury), Gentileschi was subjected to invasive gynecological exams and tortured with finger-bindings, since it was believed at the time that witnesses could only tell the truth under torture. In the end, Tassi was found guilty, and served a few months in prison.

In other works, Gentileschi presented herself as a martyr, and as Yael (a Jewish heroine who drove a tent spike through the head of Sisera, a Canaanite king who was at war with the Israelites). Gentileschi's Sisera looks rather like her Holofernes, and both bear strong resemblance to descriptions that survive of Tassi. It seems that Gentlieschi, in multiple works, chose to depict herself achieving violent and bloody vengeance against Tassi for his crimes against her.

From Artist's Subject to Artist



Velázquez (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez), Portrait of Juan de Pareja, oil on canvas, Spanish, 1650. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase: Fletcher and Rogers Funds, and Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot, by exchange, supplemented by gifts from friends of the Museum, 1971.). Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

In 1971, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City – the largest and most famous museum in the US – purchased a painting by the seventeenth-century Spanish painter Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez for the then-astounding sum of approximately $50 million (adjusted for inflation from 1971 to 2023). It has been one of the most iconic images in their massive collection ever since.

It had long been in a private collection in Europe, and had not been seen by most art historians. Tom Hoving, then the Director of The Met, described his first encounter with the work in a small, poorly-lit room at the auction house Christie's:

> The split-second impression was vivid. I thought I had seen a human being, alive and about to open his mouth to say something, coyly yet proudly gazing back at me I believed I had seen a film of sweat on his brow. The impression was shocking.[4]

The impression remains shocking more than half a century later. It has such vibrancy and presence, such immediacy. The figure is presented with such care and attention and individuality. Even elements of the sitter's clothing are represented with lively and energetic brushstrokes.



Velázquez (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez), Portrait of Juan de Pareja (detail), oil on canvas, Spanish, 1650. Photo: Asa Mittman.

And yet, for most of the fifty years since The Met acquired the painting, little attention was paid to *who this man was*. It has often be reproduced with the vague title of *Portrait of a Man*, those also with racializing titles like *Portrait of a Moor* – a term used by Europeans in from the late Middle Ages into the modern period used in unclear and ever-shifting ways to describe othered, exoticized groups in southern Europe (especially Spain), north Africa, and the Middle East, most especially dark-skinned Muslims.

And yet, the name of the **sitter** – the subject of a portrait – has be known since it was painted. The man's name was Juan de Pareja. He was from the town of Antequera in southern Spain and, though we don't know the circumstances that led to this, he was enslaved to Velázquez.

Slavery was very common in seventeenth-century Spain, and in Velázquez's home city of Seville, there were large populations of enslaved and formerly enslaved people of color, so this is in itself not remarkable, though slavery is a horror wherever, whenever, and in whatever form it exists.

Surprisingly, Pareja's manumission document – "a binding contract, stating that this person will no longer be enslaved if they meet the following conditions"[5] – survives and was exhibited in front of the portrait at The

4. Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 256.

5. Audio Guide 636: Manumission Document, 1650, "Juan de Pareja, Afro-Hispanic Painter," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (2023): https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/juan-de-pareja

Met as part of the first exhibition ever dedicated to him. The manumission came with a condition: Pareja had to continue his enslavement for four more years.

There is more of significance, here: even the earliest texts we have about Velázquez's portrait, such as a biography of the artist written by his contemporary, Acislo Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco, note that Pareja was Velázquez's "slave *and a fine painter*."[6] Several of Pareja's works survive, including his most famous, *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1661), which is a massive canvas over ten and a half feet wide.



Juan de Pareja, The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1661, oil on canvas (Museo del Prado). Photo: Museo del Prado, publicaciones sin fines de lucro, sitios web personales, blogs y medios sociales

The image is relatively typical of seventieth-century Spanish religious paintings. We see Jesus to the right, followed by some of his earliest apostles (the first twelve followers he gathered, who became influential in spreading his messages). In this scene, he enters a tax collection office and tells one of them – Matthew, seated closes to Jesus, dressed in elaborate furs and gold jewelry. Matthew gestured toward himself with one hand and toward the riches he has collected with the other as if to ask, "How can you be calling me to this, when I am a tax collector?" This is a story that took place

6. Daviud Pullins, "Reframing the Age of Velázquez, in *Juan de Pareja, Afro-Hispanic Painter in the Age of Velázquez*, ed. Elisa Urbanelli (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023): 60-109, 88. Emphasis added

in the first century CE, but Pareja has located it in his own time and place. Only Jesus and the apostles are dressed in the clothing of ancient Rome. While some of the costumes are fanciful imaginings, others are quite ordinary outfits of prosperous Spanish men of the seventeenth century, especially the three figures at the left.



Juan de Pareja, The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1661 (detail). Photo: Museo del Prado, publicaciones sin fines de lucro, sitios web personales, blogs y medios sociales

Perhaps you have already spotted that Pareja depicted himself at the left edge of the painting. He is immediately recognizable as the same man in the Velázquez portrait. His face, hair, and beard are all familiar, and he also appears in similar clothing and in a nearly identical pose. However, he has included one more detail to make sure that viewers not familiar with Velázquez's already-famous image of him knew this was an image of the artist, himself. In his hand is a slip of paper that reads in Latin, "I made this painting."[7]

This self-portrait is all the more remarkable because it is the only known self-portrait painted by an Afro-European artist of the era. Pareja made this painting after having been freed, and it might be seen as an assertion of his status as a free European. This was a necessary component of his acceptance as a professional painter. Here, he has placed himself not only in the context of wealth and status, but in direct proximity to the most important figure in the majority religion of seventeenth-century Spain: Jesus Christ.

Pareja's gambit succeeded: he was a successful painter. However, he then spent centuries largely forgotten by art historians. He is only recently again receiving the acknowledgement that he clearly earned.

Rejecting Tradition

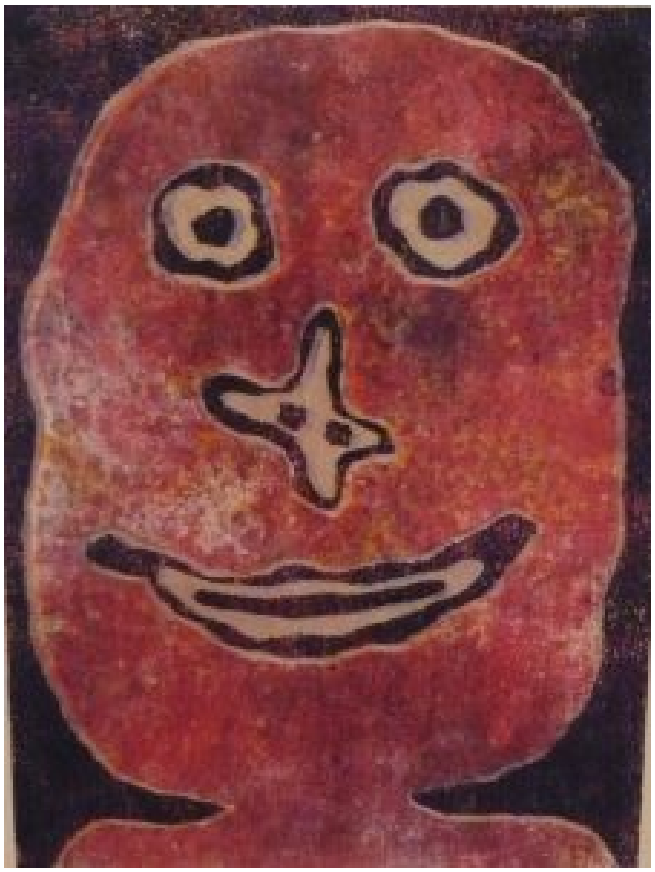
After these displays of artistic virtuosity by Leyster, Rembrandt, van Eyck and Gentileschi, it is worth a look at an artist who presents to us faces painted with deliberate simplicity, with willful rejection of such mannered skills. Jean Dubuffet was an iconoclast, striving to throw off conventions and happy to offend the general public. He described his approach as allowing himself "*carte blanche*," that is, total freedom, "to paint in perfect liberty, and at top speed, without troubling to cast a critical gaze upon my work, and experimenting in all directions." He collected the drawings of inmates of mental hospitals, and strove to make his work as raw and rough as possible.

7. Audio Guide 638: Calling of Saint Matthew, Juan de Pareja, 1661, "Juan de Pareja, Afro-Hispanic Painter," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (2023): https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/juan-de-pareja

Dubuffet changed styles many times over his career, so it is hard to identify a truly "typical" work, but *Smiling Face* (1948) captures many of his abiding concerns. The image is extremely rough and simple, childlike even. Dubuffet wanted to created art that would convey "the vision of an average and ordinary man without using techniques beyond the grasp of an ordinary man," and in this he has probably succeeded.[8]

The lines are scratched heavily into the surface of the canvas, and look to have been produced rapidly, in colors are bold to the point of being lurid. The features are all abstracted, but this makes them sound more careful and formal than they are. They are the features of faces in children's drawings, and deliberately so. How better to reject the artistic tradition?

And yet, how iconoclastic is this image? How wildly outside the artistic tradition? It is a bust portrait, in loosely naturalistic tones, at least for the skin of the figure, which is set against a dark, neutral background. It may be a grotesque parody of traditional works, but is also clearly their descendant. Wipe the smile from the face and smooth out the style, and how different would this be from a Rembrandt or van Eyck? Ironically, for all his efforts to be an "outsider" artist, Dubuffet has by now been thoroughly adopted into the art historical canon, appearing in textbooks (like this one) and collected by major museums throughout the world, where his paintings hang alongside the traditional artists he scorned.



Jean Dubuffet, Smile, lithograph, 1962 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Photo by Helena, CC BY 2.0.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

ZACHARIE VINCENT (1815-1896), SELF-PORTRAIT, 19th CENTURY

8. Roger Cardinal, "Dubuffet, Jean," *Grove Art Online*, Oxford Art Online: http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T023832.



Zacharie Vincent, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas (Musée de la Civilisation, Quebec City). Photo by Wilfredor, CC BY-SA 4.0.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What portions of the portrait draw your eyes and why?
- What does the artist choose to include in the image? What does he exclude?
- How is this self-portrait *similar to* European self-portraits, like those by Leyster and Rembrandt?
- How is it *different from* European self-portraits?
- How much depth is in the image, and how does this effect our interaction with it?
- Who do you think this person *is*? Where do you assume he comes from and what might his role be?

INTRODUCTION: The "Last Huron"

Zacharie Vincent (1815-1896) was a member of the Wendat or Huron tribe, then living near Montreal, Canada. His Huron name was Telari-o-lin, meaning "unmixed." Vincent presented himself as the last full-blooded Huron (though his father Ouenouadahronhé, who went by Gabriel, also claimed this title before him). In the late seventeenth century, the Huron had been chased from a region some 400 miles to the west by the Iroquois and, in their new home, came to be closely connected to European settlers. Many converted to Catholicism, and traded moccasins, snowshoes, canoes, and bags with settlers and with tourists, who came to their picturesque village in groups from Montreal. Their proximity and relative assimilation led to the Hurons becoming a favorite so-called "exotic" curiosity for European settler-colonizers. This eroticization has much in common with, and is ultimately based on, the sorts of Orientalist tropes discussed regarding Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres's *odalisques* in the Sex chapter, transferred to the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas in part because the first Europeans to arrive on these continents mistook them for the "Orient," for India. Many European artists painted portraits of members of the community. Vincent, though, chose to paint himself at least a dozen times, borrowing European painting styles but still choosing how he wanted to present himself.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Borrowed Style

Vincent's self-portrait is, in many ways, highly conventional. We see him likely seated, in a bust portrait – that is, from the midsection to the head. Rather than being posed either in full profile or fully frontally, the figure is slightly angled to his right, following European tradition. The backdrop is a neutral grey, which serves to focus our attention on the figure. Notice how Vincent, like Leyster, has lightened the area just around his head so that our eyes are drawn to it, and so that the darker shadows, particularly to his right, contrast more sharply against this background.

The composition, while balanced, is something of a jumble. There are so many items arranged across and in front of Vincent's chest that some careful looking is needed to sort out what is attached to what. The white beads are attached to the pipe, and the small silver medal that covers them is hanging from the red cord around his neck. Similarly, the tassels from his headdress hang over three shining silver disks that are actually an earring. The limited amount of illusionistic space and the flattened nature of the painter's style, especially in this part of the image, compresses these items into a nearly two-dimensional collage. It is not clear what is being emphasized or where our eyes should go. Do we look first at Vincent's face? Probably, and the red "V" formed by the cord holding the medal does direct our eyes upward, if we instead start at the large, bright silver disk on his chest. There is movement, but it is not clearly ordered. Our eyes jump around the collection of items. This piling up of symbols of Huron culture might be seen as overplayed, but might instead be seen as Vincent's attempt to capture as much of his dying culture as he could.



Antoine Plamondon, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, Last of the Hurons, oil on canvas, 1838. Photo: Public Domain.

Ironically, though, the very choice of oil painting might be seen as undercutting this effort. The illusion of three-dimensionality, conveyed through light and shadow, is convincing, if imperfectly so. The left hand, in particular, flattens out, as does the too-narrow sleeve from which it emerges. The very medium used here, oil paint on canvas, is borrowed from the settlers in the region, many of whom dehumanized, exploited, and otherwise harmed Indigenous peoples.

Vincent must have had some training in how to use oil paints, but would not have attended the sorts of art academies that trained aspiring Western painters. Perhaps his teacher was the painter Antoine Sébastien Palmondon, who was one of Canada's most famous nineteenth-century portrait painters, and who lived in a neighboring town. Palmondon painted Vincent as a young man in a work titled *The Last of the Hurons*, which won a medal in 1838. The works are as striking for their differences as for their similarities. Both are oil paintings, both feature partial-length images of Vincent, and both have him gazing moodily off to his right. However, there the similarities end.

In both images, Vincent wears Huron clothes, though in Palmondon's image they are far more subdued. As Palmondon presents him, Vincent looks like a dreamy poet, posed against the setting sun. The setting sun emphasizes the theme of the work, also conveyed by the title – this man is the *last* of his line, the end of a presumably ancient tribe of noble men. Vincent's self-portrait plays with this same theme by emphasizing all of the attributes of his culture. In this self-portrait, as in many others, Vincent borrows Romantic tropes from European painters whose images of Native Americans focused on what Europeans saw as their "exotic" culture. Here, Vincent holds a tomahawk and pipe, wears an elaborate silver headdress crowned by three large plumes, and is draped in silver and wampum – shell beads used as decoration and as money. This is not merely incidental. Instead, Vincent has pilled on these stereotypical attributes of the Native American, as used by the Hurons, yes, but also as imagined by many Western writers and artists. Even his severe expression plays into assumptions about stoic tribesmen. Still, at the center of his chest, that smaller silver medal, which Vincent also wears in other self-portraits, is Western. It appears to be an image of a queen, likely a relic of British rule of Canada. Hanging proudly from his neck, it suggests a complex, hybrid identity at odds with his Huron name, Telari-o-lin ("unmixed").

CULTURAL CONTEXT: The Last Huron

Vincent consciously adopted the title of the "last Huron." His self-portraits, therefore, seem to be more than images of himself. What does it mean to be a representative of a group that is ceasing to exist as distinct? Perhaps this tension was what inspired Vincent to paint himself several times. We do not have records to indicate whether he was aware of other artists, like Rembrandt, who painted themselves numerous times over the course of decades. While, like Rembrandt's self-portraits, Vincent's allow us to watch him age, there is an additional dimension, here. Rembrandt's approaching death was singular; as his body grew older, and his death nearer, he seems to have grown more reflective, to have dwelled more deeply on his mortality. As Vincent aged, though, his approaching death signified more than the loss of

an individual life. As the self-declared "last-surviving full-blooded Huron" – indeed, as Telari-o-lin, that is, "Unmixed" – Vincent's aging might be seen as standing in for the decline of his tribe, and his death as synonymous with the death of the tribe.

Of course, all of this talk of "pure blood" has as much to do with racist nineteenth-century European ideas about "racial purity" as it does with Huron beliefs about the purported value of "unmixed" bloodlines. This identity is, like Vincent's choice of painting technique, and like the medal on his chest, a sign of his assimilation, despite his own efforts to resist the encroachment of European culture.



Louis-Prudent Vallée, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, ca. 1875. Photo: Public Domain.

A photo taken by Louis-Prudent Vallee in the 1870s or 1880s gives us a curious view of the artist. He seems to sit in a photographer's studio, with a blurry painted backdrop and a few sprigs of greenery scattered on the floor to suggest that the photograph was taken outdoors. Vincent's pose and expression is quite similar to that in his self-portrait, but his clothing differs rather sharply with the clothing and accouterments he wears in his self-portrait, or in the very similar image he is painting (like Leyster) within the photograph.

In his paintings, Vincent is richly and elaborately dressed in traditional Huron ceremonial fashion. In the photograph, he wears what looks perhaps to be an old army jacket, and both his jacket and pants are threadbare and quite literally coming apart at the seams. Perhaps Vincent wore such worn-out clothing only for painting, and perhaps not, but in either case, he presented himself not only in more "traditional" clothing but also in more formal and expensive clothing in his paintings, which are, of course, artificial images, constructed to present an image of Vincent and, through him, of the Huron he strove to embody.



Louis-Prudent Vallée, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, ca. 1875 (detail). Photo: Public Domain.

The artist uses a traditionally Western medium (oil paint on canvas), style (naturalism) and subject (the bust-length portrait) to convey the nostalgic image of the "vanishing Indian." In so doing, Vincent is **appropriating** – borrowing, repurposing, putting to his own ends – the tools of the very culture largely responsible for the decline of Native American civilizations, in order to convey that very loss. This is a complex and sophisticated move, signaled by the almost parodic profusion of Native attributes heaped over the figure in the painting. In Vallee's photograph, we see a more or less standard "Painter at Work" image. Similarly, Vincent's portraits seem to be classic "vanishing Indian" images. Still, such images are generally painted by Western artists, and are often condemned for their Romanticism. Vincent's works, though, show the artist's active engagement with this difficult moment in his personal and cultural history.

Comparisons and Connections II: Representing the Self without Representing Oneself

Borrowed Faces

Most of the works of art discussed so far present the artist's own face. Not all artists, though, want to be the main subject of their own work. Some prefer to try to capture something of the personality or character of other people. Many photographers, for example, photograph people around them, sometimes without even obtaining their subjects' consent. Two photographers, though, Gillian Wearing and Shizuka Yokomizo, have played with the dynamic of collaboration with their subjects in interesting ways.

Yokomizo at first took photographs of people in their flats in London, using a telephoto lens. The subjects, like those of Yasmine Chatila, were unaware that they were becoming part of works of art. Yokomizo was understandably uncomfortable with the ethics of her actions, but also wanted more connection with her subjects, and wanted them to make eye contact with the camera. She therefore began writing anonymous letters stating her desire to take a photograph through a window, on a given date and time. The residents were able to ignore the letter or to draw their curtains, but several appeared at the appointed time, and met her gaze.

The photographs resulting from this curious form of anonymous collaboration, titled *Dear Stranger*, are striking (see here for images). In two examples, a woman and a young man stand in their own flats, spaces that are generally private, and stare out the window. They have chosen how to stand; his attitude is perhaps more defensive, with his chin raised and his shoulders not only squared to the plane of his window and the photographer but also seemingly rolled forward, and hers is more wary, with her body and head held at a slight angle, as if not quite comfortable with the process she has decided to join. The subjects' of the photographs are choosing how they wish to present themselves to the photographer, lurking outside their windows in the dark.

In these photographs, the frames of the windows are clearly present. Yokomizo might have cropped the images more closely, hiding the frames, but instead chose to emphasize her position outside, and therefore her subjects' positions within their own spaces.

Gillian Wearing, also working in London, produced a series of photographs of people on the street that similarly pushes the boundaries of what it means to collaborate on a work of art. The series, taken in 1992-3, is collectively titled *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (see here for images). She would approach strangers on the street, hand them paper and a marker, and ask them to write whatever they wished. She would then photograph them holding up their signs. As Wearing says"

> In 1992, we were still being fed this line that British people are reserved and don't like to express what they are feeling. The idea of *Signs* is that if you approached anyone they would have something interesting to say.[9]

She was clearly right, since many of the signs are revealing and some quite surprising. A somewhat disheveled man with a glazed expression, standing in what looks to be an Underground station, holds up a sign reading "I signed on and They Would not give me Nothing." His appearance and location suggest that he may be homeless or otherwise down and out, and his attitude suggests that he is resentful. Who are "they"? Does he mean Wearing? This would make the work seem exploitive. Or does he mean a government agency, an aid organization, or someone else entirely?

A man with a facial tattoo of a snake and tattoos on each of his knuckles holds up a sign reading "I HAVE BEEN CERTIFIED AS MILDLY INSANE!" While his expression is somewhat ambiguous, he does seem more amused than hostile, and perhaps is relishing presenting himself as a fairly threatening character. Of course, it is possible his sign is a lie, chosen to make himself seem more dangerous.

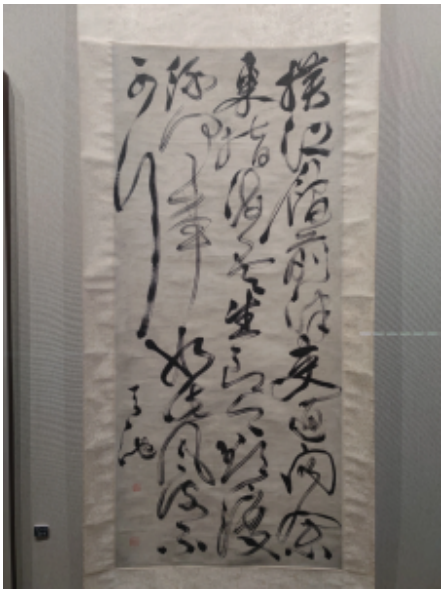
9. Tim Adams, "Gillian Wearing: 'I've always been a bit of a listener,'" *The Guardian* (March 3, 2012): https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/mar/04/gillian-wearing-whitechapel-gallery-feature

Perhaps the most discordant pairing of image and sign – and therefore the most famous of these images – is one of a young blond man in a well-pressed business suit who looks like the very model of a confident junior executive, but holds up a sign on which he has written "I'M DESPERATE." The power of this photograph comes not from Wearing's technical skill, nor from careful posing of the model. It comes instead from the man's choice to write this peculiar cry of desperation, at odds with his slight smirk. And yet he remains anonymous, and therefore uncredited. Wearing's photographs look like snapshots. They are not lush, richly colored, and high in contrast, like those of Yokomizo, and yet, through Wearing's interactions with her non-professional models, strangers chosen more or less at random, she has produced thought-provoking images that raise valuable questions about our assumptions about the people we pass on the streets, as well as about the process of producing art.

Self-Portraits without Portraits

Self-portraits are not the only ways that artists present aspects of themselves through their art. Indeed, some argue that *all* art is self-portraiture, in that it all bears evidence of its producer or producers. We may, as viewers, not always know *how* works of art reflect an artist's life and personality, but we can be fairly confident that they do, as surely as artists' signatures do.

Chinese calligraphy is an art form that bears the mark of the artist's hand as surely as a signature, and traditionally has been considered an indication of the writer's personality, morality, and education. Among the more emotional forms of script are *caoshu*, a simplified "cursive script" which came into use for informal, practical writing, since it is much quicker to write than other more formal scripts. The wildest forms of these scripts are known as *kuang caoshu* – "crazy cursive scripts" – popular among eccentrics, individualists, and even, purportedly, drunkard calligraphers. These "crazy" scripts, like that of Ming Dynasty calligrapher Xu Wei (sixteenth century), are valued precisely for their individuality, vitality, and illegibility.



Xu Wei, Calligraphy scroll, 16th century CE.
Photo: 陳寅恪, CC BY-SA 4.0

In a typical example, we see that the characters are painted with great energy, in rapid strokes. Xu Wei often allowed his brush to run dry as the ink was used up, rather than carefully redipping it to produce a consistent tone to the writing. Characters are reduced to curves and squiggles, since the calligrapher does not raise his brush carefully between each stroke, and whole characters are also connected together in Xu Wei's rush to write with great speed and expression, most particularly in the leftmost column of this image. The goal was not to create an easily readable copy of this poem, but rather, to convey the individuality and emotion of the calligrapher. In this sense, Xu Wei's act of production is as surely the subject of his scroll as Leyden's is of her painting.

The *kuang caoshu* of the Ming Dynasty has much in common with modern Action Painting, a style of abstract art most often associated with Jackson Pollock. He would place large canvases on the floor of his studio and, with a variety of implements including brushes and sticks, would drip paint onto them. As he worked, ashes from and, at times, the butts of his cigarettes would fall into the paintings. Particularly in his larger works, his shoes would leave marks from where he stepped on the edges of the canvases. Occasionally, he would lean down, resting his hand in the wet paint to reach further forward, leaving a mark as direct as possible, as immediate a record of his presence as could be. His creation of art, his motion, his body might well be seen as the subject of these drip paintings. To fully appreciate this process, it is helpful to see Pollock in action.

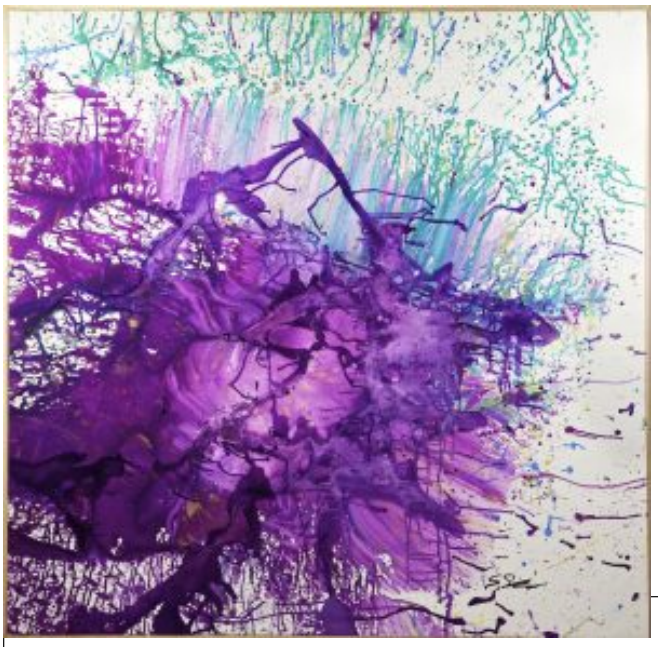
One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=1034#oembed-1

In these documentaries, the artist not only describes his process, but also asserts that he is "in the painting" and that he wants to "express [his] feelings rather than illustrate them." While the results may look haphazard and spontaneous, Pollock claims, "I can control the flow of the paint. There is no accident." A second video shows in greater clarity Pollock's process. Much like Xu Wei's calligraphy, every seemingly accidental and incidental line is a reflection of the artist's process of creation, and therefore is not incidental to the work of art. Rather, it *is* the work of art.

Shozo Shimamoto pursued a form of Action Painting yet more vigorous than Pollock. He was a member of the pioneering Japanese avant-garde Gutai ("Concrete") Group, which argued that paintings should not represent nature or convey symbolism, but rather, should exist as what they are: paint on canvas, resulting from direct, even violent actions of the artist. Shimamoto experimented with slashing his paintings, but ultimately settled on a process in which he produces paintings by smashing bottles filled with paint above or onto his canvases.



Shozo Shimamoto, Artworks 1920-2000, East and West, 2011-12 (Palazzo Magnani, Reggia Emilia). Photo by Il Fatto Quotidiano, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Shozo Shimamoto, Artworks 1920-2000, East and West (Final Product), 2011-12 (Palazzo Magnani, Reggia Emilia). Photo by Il Fatto Quotidiano, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Shimamoto's resulting paintings are far less controlled than Pollock claims his to have been, but are just as much a result of his direct, physical actions. Perhaps to stress the performative element of his art production, Shimamoto has had many of his acts of painting photographed and filmed, beginning with *Hurling Colors*, performed at the Second Gutai Exhibition in Tokyo (1956) and continuing through a performance in 2008 at the Ducal Palace in Genoa, Italy.

The painting he produced in his 1956 performance has been lost, but other early works survive. The paintings are often as clear a record of the action of their production as the photographs and videos of the artist at work are, with the explosions of color radiating out from where bottles seem to have hit, and then dripping down the surface of the work.

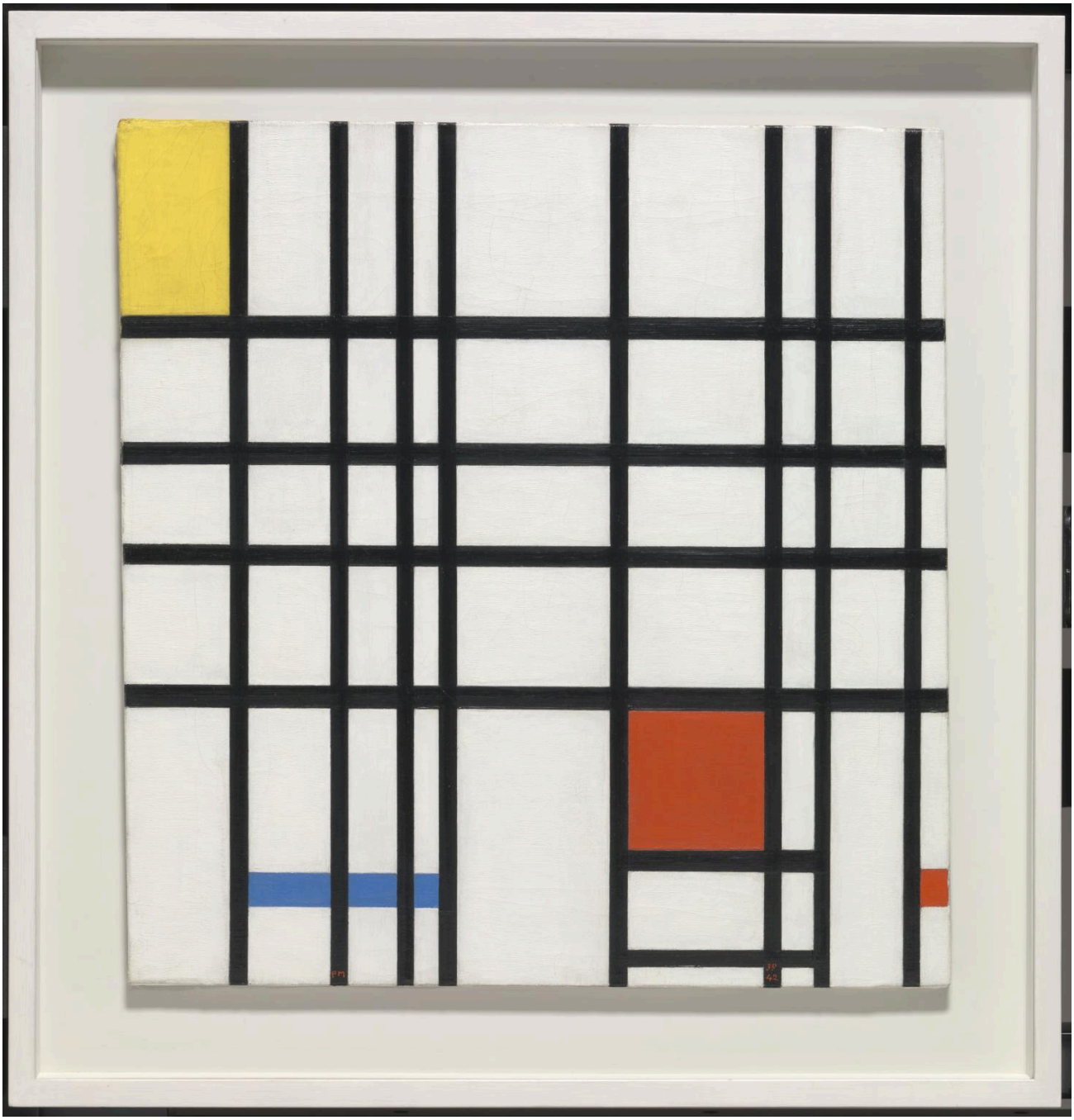
One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/lookatthis/?p=1034#oembed-2

Bits of glass are embedded in the paint, also marking the process of the work's production. Shimamoto has continued to produce works in related styles for half a century, at times becoming more extreme. He has had himself suspended from a crane to drop bottles of paint, and has also thrown them down from a helicopter. Still, it is his more direct works, where he hurls the bottles with great force, that most clearly bear the imprint of his act as the artist.



Shozo Shimamoto in Genoa, the day after. Photo: Marco Molinari, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

How far can we push the notion that any work conveys something of the self of the artist? Leyster and Rembrandt make this the subject of their works. Xu Wei, Pollock, and Shimamoto capture their presence and motion with every curve and splatter. Might we press further, all the way to Piet Mondrian? While a painter of total abstraction, like Pollock, Mondrian's work seems comparatively mechanical. There are few apparent brushstrokes, little imprint of the artist's emotion or the motions of his body. Still, in their cool austerity, surely Mondrian's purely geometric canvases reveal important elements of his character and philosophy. They are not works embodying emotional turmoil, but this is not the only quality of the artist's self a work can represent. The paintings do not even seem, at first look, to be works of artistic passion at all, but in their own way, they are as forceful a statement of the artist's convictions as any in this chapter.

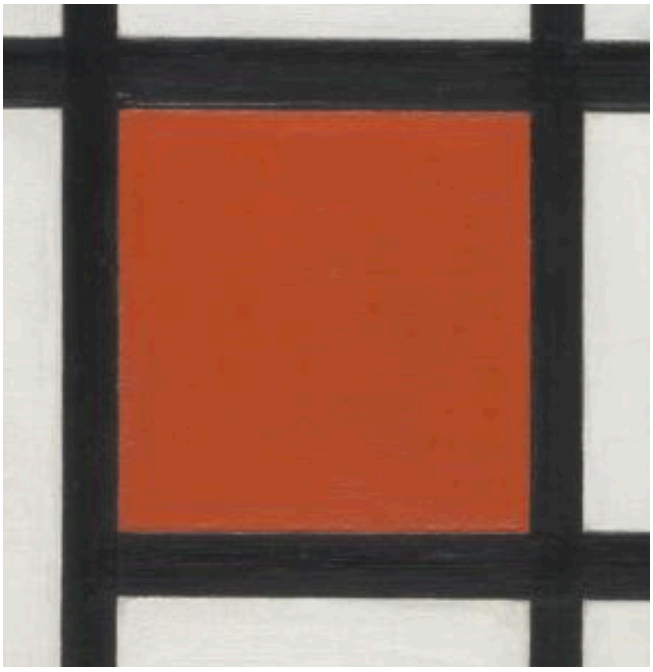


Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937–42 (The Tate Modern). Photo: Tate Modern, CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)

Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, from 1937–42, is typical of Mondrian's work. It is composed of purely geometric shapes, and these are exclusively formed out of vertical and horizontal lines in black, and filled in with white and the three subtractive **primary colors** (red, blue and yellow). The painting is asymmetrical, but loosely balanced, with the yellow rectangle at the upper left balanced by the red rectangles at the lower right, and so on. Mondrian's formal elements are spartan, stripped-down to the artistic bare bones. Where, in this work, might we find the artist?

In 1918, Mondrian and a group of his artistic colleagues formed a new art magazine, *De Stijl* (Dutch for *The Style*). They inaugurated the magazine by publishing a **manifesto** – a mission statement – that describes a grand vision for a

new art that would help usher in "a new consciousness of the age," rejecting "tradition, dogmas and the predominance of the individual" in favor of "an international unity in life, art, and culture."[10] It is hard to imagine loftier goals than the transformation of the life, art and culture of the entire world! One of the main tools by which Mondrian and his collaborators strove toward this was the explicit condemnation of just the sorts of images covered in this chapter.



Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937–42 (detail).

De Stijl's manifesto argues that the "old consciousness … is directed toward the individual."[11] Mondrian's decision to reject the practices of the past was, in part, a denial of his individuality, and his art was an attempt to stamp out just those personal touches that make the works of art discussed above so engaging. And yet, tiny traces of Mondrian keep breaking through. We have to get right up to the surface of the image to see them, but there they are – brushstrokes, variations in the thicknesses of the black lines, small splatters and drips. As prominent art historian and critic James Elkins (who provides excellent several close-up images) writes:

> You don't see any of this from two or three feet away, and it's clear Mondrian expected his viewers to stand back so they wouldn't see things like the sloppy way he truncated the ends of his stripes. But you are aware of a richness, a shimmering effect, a depth. The paintings are three-dimensional. The paint has visible gestures, it is human, it moves. In the language of art history, it is painterly. It belongs to the tradition of Titian and Rembrandt …, and not just to the asceticism and idealism of the early twentieth century.[12]

It is very easy to generate fake Mondrians with digital painting programs that would eliminate the manual element, and therefore the traces of the artist's body, but real Mondrians were made by hand – by Mondrian's hand, to be precise – and so they not only bear witness to his passionately held intellectual convictions, as described in the *De Stijl* manifesto, but also to his actual, physical presence and process of artistic creation.

CONCLUSION

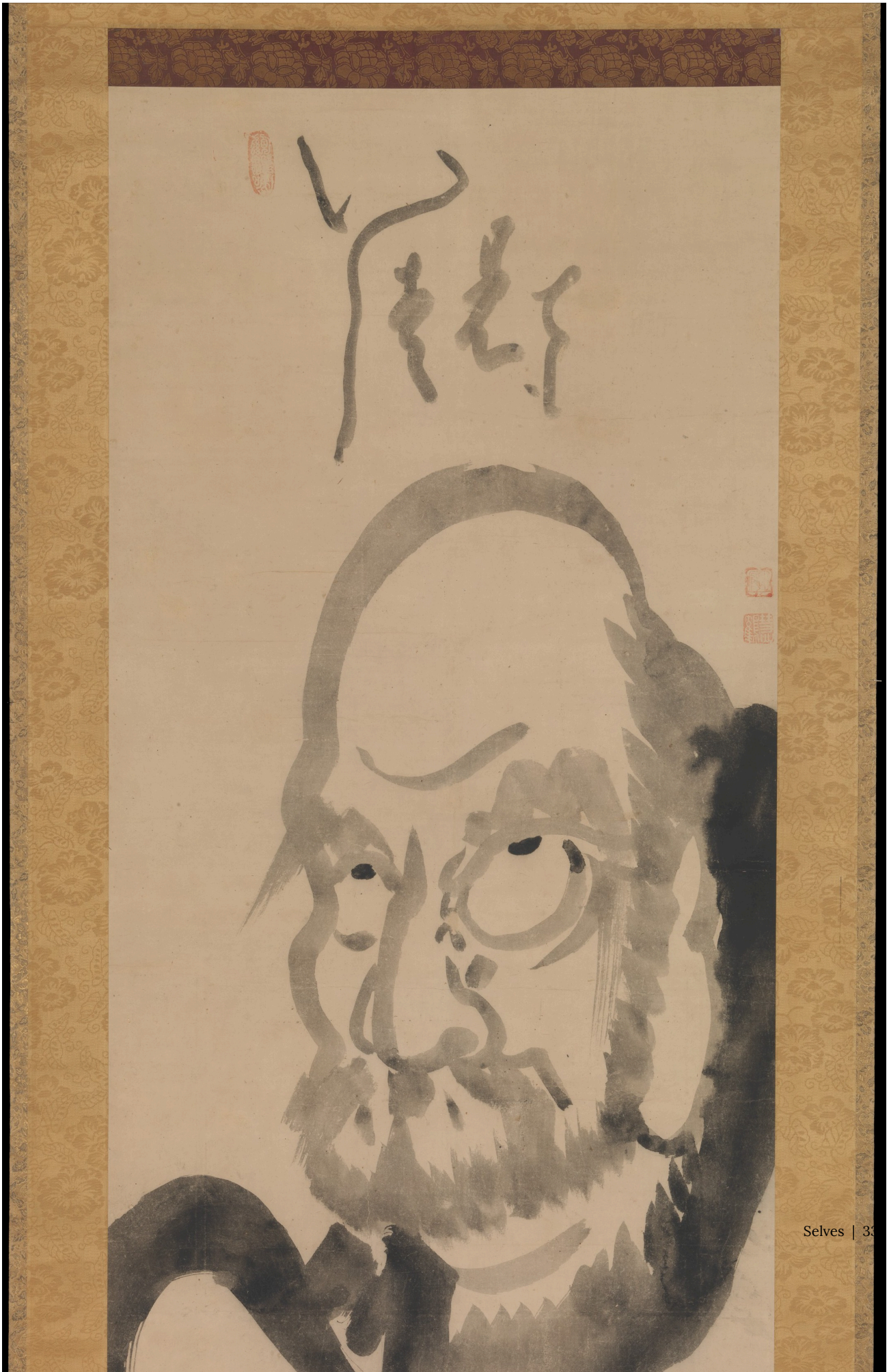
Many of the works of art in this chapter – in contrast with those in the Communities chapter – present individuals. We see their faces or traces in just about every mark on just about every work in this book. Through their choices of styles, compositions, subjects, and approaches, these artists work to convey something vital about themselves and their sense of self, or about their engagement with others. Some embrace this as a goal, others resist it, but all, one way or

10. "'De Stijl': Manifesto I," *De Stijl*, vol. II:1 (November 1918), 4.
11. "'De Stijl': Manifesto I," *De Stijl*, vol. II:1 (November 1918), 4.
12. James Elkins, "How to Look at Mondrian," *HuffPost* (October 14, 1010; updated December 6, 2017): https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post_b_756669

another, grapple with the complexity of representing not merely the surface appearance of people, but of representing something more fundamental about them.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE III:

HAKUIN EKAKU, DARUMA, 18TH CENTURY, HANGING SCROLL; INK ON PAPER, 61 3/8 x 17 3/4 in, Dallas Museum of Art



Hakuin Ekaku, Portrait of Bodhidharma, hanging scroll, ink on paper, mid-eighteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What features are **emphasized**?
- What does Ekaku include? What does he leave out?
- How does Ekaku use **line** to convey not only the appearance of the Zen Buddhist master Daruma, but also his personality?
- How do the Japanese characters above the figure relate to it visually?
- How does the **variation** in value of the ink guide your eyes?
- What sort of a person do you think Ekaku wants you to think Daruma was?

Media Attributions

- Pebble from Makapansgat cave in the Makapan Valley, South Africa, buried 3 million years ago. PhotoL: WikipSQ, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1630 (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.). Photo by Gandalf's Gallery, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Judith Leyster, The Jolly Drinker, oil on canvas, 1629 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Photo by Roel Wijnants, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Detail of artist's signature, Judith Leyster, The Jolly Drinker, oil on canvas, 1629 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Photo by Roel Wijnants, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Judith Leyster, Merry Trio, oil on canvas, 1629. Photo: Public Domain.
- Detail of sleeve, Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1630.
- Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas, ca. 1628 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). Photo by Stuart Rankin, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait at the Age of Thirty-Four, oil on canvas, 1640 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by Frans Vandewalle, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Rembrandt van Rijn, Self-Portrait at the Age of Sixty-Three, oil on canvas, 1669 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by Frans Vandewalle, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Jan van Eyck, The Man in the Red Turban (Self-Portrait?), oil on oak panel, 1433 (The National Gallery, London). Photo: The National Gallery, London, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
- Detail, Jan van Eyck, The Man in the Red Turban (Self-Portrait?), oil on oak panel, 1433.
- Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife, oil on oak panel, 1434 (The National Gallery, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Jan van Eyck, Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife (Detail of Mirror), oil on oak panel, 1434 (The National Gallery, London). Photo by cea +, CC BY 2.0.
- Artemisia Gentileschi, Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting, oil on canvas, ca. 1638-1639 (Royal Collection Trust, London). Photo by David Short, CC BY 2.0.
- Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Slaying Holofernes, oil on canvas, ca. 1612-13 (Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples). Photo by Jean Louis Mazieres, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Caravaggio, Judith and Holofernes, oil on canvas, 1598-1602 (Barberini Gallerie Corsini Nazionali, Rome). Photo: Public Domain.
- Velázquez (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez), Portrait of Juan de Pareja, oil on canvas, Spanish, 1650. (The

Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase: Fletcher and Rogers Funds, and Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot, by exchange, supplemented by gifts from friends of the Museum, 1971.). Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

- Velázquez (Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez), Portrait of Juan de Pareja (detail), oil on canvas, Spanish, 1650. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase: Fletcher and Rogers Funds, and Bequest of Miss Adelaide Milton de Groot, by exchange, supplemented by gifts from friends of the Museum, 1971.). Photo: Asa Mittman.
- Juan de Pareja, The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1661, oil on canvas (Museo del Prado). Photo: Museo del Prado, publicaciones sin fines de lucro, sitios web personales, blogs y medios sociales
- Juan de Pareja, The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1661 (detail). Photo: Museo del Prado, publicaciones sin fines de lucro, sitios web personales, blogs y medios sociales
- Jean Dubuffet, Smile, lithograph, 1962 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). Photo by Helena, CC BY 2.0.
- Zacharie Vincent, Self-Portrait, oil on canvas (Musée de la Civilisation, Quebec City). Photo by Wilfredor, CC BY-SA 4.0.
- Antoine Plamondon, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, Last of the Hurons, oil on canvas, 1838. Photo: Public Domain.
- Louis-Prudent Vallée, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, ca. 1875. Photo: Public Domain.
- Louis-Prudent Vallée, Portrait of Zacharie Vincent, ca. 1875 (detail). Photo: Public Domain.
- Xu Wei, Calligraphy scroll, 16th century CE. Photo: 陳寅恪, CC BY-SA 4.0
- Shozo Shimamoto, Artworks 1920-2000, East and West, 2011-12 (Palazzo Magnani, Reggia Emilia). Photo by Il Fatto Quotidiano, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Shozo Shimamoto, Artworks 1920-2000, East and West (Final Product), 2011-12 (Palazzo Magnani, Reggia Emilia). Photo by Il Fatto Quotidiano, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- Shozo Shimamoto in Genoa, the day after. Photo: Marco Molinari, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937–42 (The Tate Modern). Photo: Tate Modern, CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported)
- Piet Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937–42 (detai).
- Hakuin Ekaku, Portrait of Bodhidharma, hanging scroll, ink on paper, mid-eighteenth century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.Portrait of Daruma, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868) Hanging scroll; ink on paper; Image: 45 7/8 x 21 1/4 in. (116.5 x 54 cm) The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving, 2015 (2015.500.9.3) http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/78145

10. Copies

Can Copies be Original(s)?

Many modern museum visitors value originality above all other qualities in an artist. Viewers tend to like to see works that seem dramatically new and fresh, and when a work does not seem wholly original, it is often criticized as "unoriginal" or "derivative," or as "just a copy." However, for much of the history of art making, dramatic originality was not viewed as being all that important; indeed, in some times and places, it was seen as a negative trait. Regardless of the value judgments we might personally make about works of art, we should acknowledge that *all* art has a history, that *all* images and objects are, in some way or another, based on the art that preceded and surrounds them. The vast majority of "Ancient Greek" sculptures praised by art historians and adored by museum visitors, for example are actually Roman marble copies of lost Greek bronze originals, like the famous *Doryphoros* discussed in the introduction.

This chapter examines the work of artists who make creative and imaginative use of copied styles, subjects, themes, and images, artists who celebrate the nature of their works as, in some way and to some degree, copied. We see works by artists who copy works from the recent or distant past, who borrow from neighbors, from neighboring cultures, and from cultures across the globe. In all cases, we focus on the ways that copying can itself be a creative and "original" act. Because the subject here is *copying*, the first Spotlight in this chapter is a series of works rather than a single image

SPOTLIGHT IMAGES I:

OUR LADY HODEGETRIA ICONS



Virgin and Child (Hodegetria), Byzantine, possibly Palestine or Constantinople, 5th or 6th century, tempera and gold on panel, Santa Francesca Romana (Santa Maria Nova), Rome, Italy (heavily restored). Image: Public Domain.



Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, embossed silver, 13th century. Image: Public Domain



Our Lady Hodegetria, tempera on panel and gilding, 34.5×29 cm, Russia, Late 16th century CE, the Hermitage. Image: Public Domain.

AND:

Christabel Helena Anderson, The *Theotokos* of the Don, egg tempera panel icon with natural pigments (including ochres from the Forest of Dean in England and Lapis lazuli from Afghanistan) and 24 carat gold, 2011: See here for an image.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- In what ways are these icons similar? What elements of art and principles of composition are copied from one to the next?
- The icons are similar, but not identical. How do the works differ?
- What is **emphasized** in each icon, and how?
- How does each work present the relationship between the mother and her son?
- How do they differ in mood, and how is this accomplished

INTRODUCTION: A Timeless Image (?)

In the early fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity and began funding churches and works of art. He also moved the capital of the Empire from the city of Rome to Byzantium, a wealthy city in modern-day Turkey, which he then renamed Constantinople after himself. While at the time, its inhabitants still called their empire Rome, we now refer to it as the Byzantine Empire, which lasted about a thousand years, ending in the 15th century, when the army of the powerful Ottoman Empire conquered Constantinople.

The Byzantine period was one of tremendous wealth and power for the imperial rulers, and artists produced lavish works of art. The most characteristic creation of the Byzantine period is the **icon** – an image of a saint or other holy figure from Christian mythology, usually presented against a gold background and thereby separated from any specific contexts or moments from their lives. One of the most common subjects for such icons is the Virgin *Hodegetria*; literally "She Who Shows the Way" in Greek, these are images in which the Virgin Mary holds her son Jesus and gestures toward him, guiding the viewer to him and therefore, according to Christian belief, to salvation. Because of its common appearance from the Early Christian period to the present, *Hodegetria* icons are useful examples of the remarkable continuity of copies of icons throughout time. In this Spotlight, we will look at a series of *Hodegetria* icons, spanning about 1500 years.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Copying Across Millennia

At a glance, Byzantine icons strike many viewers as repetitive, as all being more or less the same. Their similarity, though, is by careful design. Their makers sought to preserve information about the appearances of their subjects, and traditions of their representations, and thereby to produce images that were not merely accurate but also magically or divinely powerful. To be clear, the icons discussed here are a few examples out of thousands of this same subject, and there is no evidence that they were directly copied from one another. Rather, they were part of a large network of icons, all based on related models.

Among the earliest known versions is a Byzantine *Hodegetria*, possibly made in the Roman province of Palestine or in the Roman capital city of Constantinople in the fifth or sixth centuries, and now housed in Santa Francesca Romana

(Santa Maria Nova), Rome, Italy. This work has been altered more than once, and has been extensively restored, so its details do not accurately reflect its original state, but do record some of the ways it changed over the centuries.

The two faces are the icon's oldest parts, painted in **encaustic** – pigment suspended in hot wax, a technique common in the late Roman Empire – on canvas. Sometime in the Middle Ages, these heads were cut out and inserted into a new painting, which is why the faces may seem somewhat out of place. They are different in technique – the medieval icon is **tempera** on wooden panel – but also in color and scale. Jesus's face seems far too small for his head. Mary's seems too large for hers, and is much paler than her hands. It is also likely set at the wrong angle. Her neck meets her body at an angle, suggesting that in the original work, her head was inclined toward Jesus.

What we see is quite typical of *Hodegetria* icons: a bust-length image of Mary holding Jesus with one hand and gesturing toward him with the other, hence her title as "She Who Shows the Way." She wears a very dark blue robe, as does Jesus. He holds a scroll in one hand and raises the other toward Mary in a two-fingered gesture of blessing. Her face is quite pale and, surrounded by her dark clothing and the gold background, draws our eyes. In this case, she looks out at us, while he looks up at her. Her eyes are dramatically enlarged, and their irises are very dark against their whites, so that they become the focal point for the work. We are compelled to make eye contact with Mary, as she then encourages us to look to Jesus. Behind the pair, on the restored golden background, we see two haloes, with Mary's radiating waves of light that again guide our eyes back to her face.

Almost a millennium later, little has changed. An icon of the *Hodegetria* from the thirteenth century preserves many of the features of the earlier icon. Again, there were changes made to the icon over time, including the addition of the embossed silver covering the original gold background, which now shows through at the edges where the sliver has been lost. The changes made to these icons over time indicates both their usage, which results in wear and tear, and their importance – damaged works can always be replaced rather than repaired if they are not seen as particularly worthy of preservation. The whole image has been reversed so that Jesus is now to Mary's left, which will remain more common.



Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)

Some features of the two icons are strikingly similar: in addition to their basic gestures and poses, Mary's very long nose, sharply cut brows, and tiny mouth are quite similar. In the thirteenth-century icon, she again looks out at us, though her eyes are no longer so dramatically oversized.



Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)

Jesus still holds a scroll in his left hand and raises his right in blessing. Jesus' attention, though, has been shifted quite significantly from Mary to the viewer. He looks out as us, and his hand, with the same gesture as in the earlier icon, is now turned toward us. The impact for a devout Byzantine Christian would be quite different, now that they are the object of Jesus's blessing.

There is something peculiar about the size and shape of Jesus' head. It may be intended to suggest that, though he is here a baby, he already bore adult (and divine) wisdom. On the other hand, it may be an echo of the strange medieval reconstruction of the earlier icon from Santa Francesca Romana, where the original, smaller face of Jesus was set into the larger head of the later work.



Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)

Moving forward another three hundred years to a sixteenth-century Russian *Hodegetria* icon, so much is again the same, so much copied from earlier models. Again, the two figures are posed as before, again with Mary in her blue robes, again against shimmering, precious backdrop, removing the pair from our ordinary world and placing them in a divine space. Mary's features are again quite similar – her long, narrow nose, her sharp brows, her small mouth – and again Jesus bears the curiously enlarged forehead. He is yet smaller, though, and more doll-like in her arms, and his proportions are less child-like. He is proportionally taller and thinner, more like an adult. This effect furthers the implications that he has adult wisdom. The figures also seem more cheerful – their lips curve up ever so slightly at the corners. The thirteenth-century pair is so dour, in comparison.

From one work to the next, we see something of a shift toward **abstraction** that contradicts the old idea that all artists want to make their work as **naturalistic** as possible, and that art therefore becomes increasingly naturalistic over time. Instead, these works become more **stylized** as they become copies of copies of copies of copies. In the earliest of our examples, Mary's face is shaded as if by natural light striking it from the left. This helps create an illusion of depth and volume. Her nose casts a shadow on her right cheek, and so on. In the sixteenth-century icon, while some of this naturalism is retained, some of the highlights on Mary's face and neck, as well as on Jesus – particularly his robes – are lines of gold. These reflect light. Rather than presenting the illusion of light hitting a surface, they actually shine. However, they do not look natural, at all. They make the figures more magnificent, literally more radiant, and otherworldly.

The Byzantine icon tradition carries on in the present, especially in Greece, Russia, and eastern Europe. Contemporary icon painter Christabel Helena Anderson created her *The Theotokos of the Don* (see here for an image) in 2011. Its connection to the 1500-year tradition that preceded its creation is clear. The figures are posed more or less as they have been since the fifth or sixth century example. Indeed, Anderson has returned Jesus to Mary's right, where he was in the earliest example here. Again, Mary bears her long nose and sharp brows. Again, Jesus' head is oversized and bulbous. The sixteenth-century icon seems to have been a direct inspiration for her, as Mary's features and robes are quite similar. Anderson has, though, made her own alterations. Most importantly, she has changed Jesus's position so

that he is snuggling right up to Mary's cheek. His body is still more like that of a lanky adult than a that of a baby, but his action is much more that of a young child nuzzling up to their mother.

Each artist who turns to this subject has a challenge: how does one preserve the accuracy and authority of the image, while creating a work that is new, fresh, and effective? The goal is not "originality," since a genuinely original work would break the connection with the works of the past, from which the new icons draw their power. But a work of simple, mechanical copying is likely to be less effective than one that finds a way to bring nuance to an old theme.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Byzantine Icons

Hodegetria icons have been considered particularly important and authoritative, since it was believed that the first version was painted by St. Luke from life, that is, with Mary and Jesus sitting as live models before him while he painted. Luke was the author of one of the four **Gospels** – the core texts of Christianity. This version was therefore considered accurate and authoritative; artists strove – and still strive – to copy it as exactly as possible, in order to preserve its record of what they believe to have been an actual, historical moment when Luke painted Mary and Jesus from life. There is debate over what happened to this first image. Some believe it was destroyed when the Ottomans conquered the Constantinople in 1453. Others believe it was smuggled out of Constantinople, and survives in Western Europe, though this camp has not reached consensus on which of several possible icons is the one painted by Luke. Most art historians, though, believe that the form of the *Hodegetria* developed in the Early Christian period, perhaps in the fifth or sixth century.

Icons were quite controversial in the Byzantine period. At the time, Christianity was still working to demonstrate its difference from Roman **polytheism** – the worship of many gods, in this case Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Venus, and the rest of the Roman **pantheon** of deities. One of the main differences that early Christians sought to emphasize was their rejection of polytheistic worship of **idols**, that is, of statues that have been inhabited by the deities they represent. Some Christians, following the Second Commandment, which prohibits idol worship, saw any images as problematic, but the vast majority embraced images. However, the ways that icons were actually used by Byzantine Christians did not help their critics to feel any more at ease. Numerous records survive that indicate that Christians were treating the physical objects – rather than the figures they present – as powerful, magical, or divine. Icons were dipped into poisoned wells to purify them. Sick people would shave off bits of icons to make medical drinks. Icons were carried as protective talismans before armies heading into battle. All of these practices indicate that, whatever highly educated Christian writers thought about the difference between *worship* of idols and *veneration* – great respect – of icons, many people clearly confused the two, and treated Christian icons in much the same ways their families had treated polytheistic idols only a few generations earlier.

When the Byzantine Empire was threatened by the spread of new powers and religions, particularly by the rise of Islam and the attendant Muslim conquests of territory, images were placed at the center of internal debates. Tensions between **iconophiles** – those who loved icons – and **iconoclasts** – those who destroyed icons – led to the Iconoclast Controversy, which raged from around 730 CE to 843 CE. This was probably the longest sustained debate on the use of art in the world's history. Many people were killed over the issue, and most early icons were destroyed. Only a handful survives from before the Controversy, including the earliest example here. The debate centered on the use of the images. Did the veneration of icons violate the Second Commandment?:

> You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,

> punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments.[1]

To make their case, iconoclasts simply pointed to this fairly strict regulation of images. The inconophiles made much more complicated and subtle arguments, but ultimately, it seems unlikely that the arguments are what really decided the matter. The iconophiles, literally "image-lovers," won simply because, on the whole, *people love images*. The Byzantines resumed creating and venerating icons in 843 CE, and Byzantine Christians – modern day Orthodox Christians – have been copying their earliest surviving models, ever since.

Comparisons and Connections I: Copying as Innovation and Resistance

While Byzantine icon painters are unusually consistent in their copying of earlier works over long periods of time, all artists are influenced by the styles and media of others, even those who stridently claim otherwise. Early Greek art influences later Greek art. Early Chinese painting influences later Chinese painting. Early Indian Buddhist art influences Chinese Buddhist art, which influences Japanese Buddhist art, and so on. The most influential works of art and artists make up what is called the "**canon**" of art history. These are the objects and artists that appear in all the major survey textbooks – Michelangelo, Leonardo, Matisse, Monet, and so on. We will look at some straightforward examples of these sorts of borrowings, but will also look at more unexpected moments of influence, where artists – like Zacharie Vincent, in the Selves chapter – look to unusual or unexpected sources as inspiration for their work, or manipulate their sources in interesting and nuanced ways.

1. The Bible, Exodus 20:5-6, New International Version.

Copying Great Masters



Masaccio, Tribute Money, fresco, 1427 (Brancacci Chapel, Florence). Photo: Public Domain.

In Europe, at least since the Renaissance, there has been an active tradition of artists learning and improving by copying the works of so-called great masters. Surely, the most famous master artist of the European tradition is Michelangelo Buonarroti, but when he was a young artist, Michelangelo looked to an earlier master for inspiration. In the Sex chapter, we see how Michelangelo's fresco from the Sistine Chapel was based on Masaccio's fresco from the Brancacci Chapel. Here, we will look at one more example of Michelangelo's use of Masaccio, this time a sketch he drew, based on another fresco from the Brancacci Chapel.

In Masaccio's image, we see St. Peter paying a tax collector. Masaccio was celebrated in his own day for his ability to create lifelike figures that seem to move through convincing, illusionistic spaces. Peter, in gold and blue robes, seems to have **volume**, to occupy real three-dimensional space, to stand firmly on the ground, over which he casts a soft shadow. This is conveyed through the use of light and shading. The light pours over the figure from the right, striking his face and the front of his robes, and leaving his back in shadow. The deep folds of his robes are also darkened with shadow.



Michelangelo, Male Figure after Masaccio, red chalk, pen and brown ink, 1492-93 (Staatliche Gaphische Sammlung, Munich). Photo: Public Domain.

Michelangelo spent months in the Brancacci Chapel studying and copying Masaccio's work. Only a single sketch, based on this figure of Peter, is thought to survive from this period. Here, we can see Michelangelo not only copying, but also adapting his model. The figures, wearing the same robes and lit from the same angle, stand in nearly identical poses. The differences between the figures, though subtle, are important.

Where Masaccio's figure stands on his back foot, and seems immobile, Michelangelo's figure is stepping forward, and his weight seems convincingly shifted to his front foot as he leans forward to pay the tax collector. Michelangelo also dips Peter's right shoulder down and forward. This helps render Peter's arm less stiff and more graceful, and the larger cuff Michelangelo adds exaggerates the gesture. Michelangelo draws Peter's robes falling more naturally, as if following the motion of the figure. Finally, whereas Masaccio's figure is nearly expressionless, Michelangelo adds – through the addition of only a few quick strokes of ink to Peter's face – a note of sorrow to the image. The pose and expression together make the figure more emotionally compelling, even though it is merely a quick sketch.

What is most remarkable about these changes is that they were not made from a new model, posed as Masaccio's presumably was. Instead, they were based on the original fresco, altered and augmented by Michelangelo's imagination. This is a case of an artist not merely copying a prior master's model, but actively reworking it to make it his own. These images were not considered sacred or magical, like Byzantine icons, so their artists and viewers would not have found the changes to be problematic.

Of course, Michelangelo would eventually become a master in his own right, and would become one of the most frequently copied of artists in Europe. Indeed, there is a whole period of art called Mannerism (ca. 1520-1600) that is, in essence, "art in the manner of Michelangelo." However, his influence did not end in the seventeenth century. Among a great many others, the nineteenth-century **Post-Impressionist** painter Paul Cézanne produced copies of works by Michelangelo. He made many drawings based on Michelangelo's two sculptures of enslaved people in the Louvre Museum in Paris.

As Michelangelo reinterpreted Masaccio's work for his own ends, so Cézanne in turn reinterpreted Michelangelo. Many artists who have copied Michelangelo's works have focused on his heightened naturalism, on his way of capturing and elevating the human body, or on studies of light and shadow – much as Michelangelo used Masaccio's work.

Cézanne, though, presents us with a curiously simple sketch. It seems washed out, like a photograph taken with too much light. Only the deepest shadows are represented, at all. The facial features are only just sketched in and the muscles are more implied than represented. This approach, which breaks up the soft and curving body of the figure into more generalized geometric forms, is typical of Cézanne's work.



Michelangelo, The Dying Slave, marble, 1513-15 (Musée de Louvre, Paris). Photo by Spencer Means, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Paul Cézanne, Dying Slave, graphite on wove paper, 1885–1900 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia). Photo: Public Domain.

What is the point, then, in starting with such a complex image as this sculpture? Perhaps it presented a challenge: How *can* an artist reduce this twisting, writhing, bulging figure to a simple set of geometric planes and shapes? There may, though, have been another motivation behind Cézanne's choice of model. In making a drawing from a sculpture, an artist must choose the angle from which to make the image. Most modern photographs are taken from a bit further to the left or right, but Cézanne has chosen to present the twisting figure from a somewhat awkward position that, instead of emphasizing the figure's musculature or motion, freezes him in space, with his legs open toward us and a curl of cloth

drawing our eye inward to his groin. Rather than am image of masculine strength and muscular power, the image seems one of soft, sexual vulnerability.

Copying the Othered



Stair Riser with Marine Deities or Boatmen, serpentinite, ca. first century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.

While many artists copy the works of artists from within their own culture – contemporary or historical – some look

to other cultures for models. The meeting of two cultures often results in conflict and violence, but also in trade and exchange of ideas. This section examines a series of works depicting borrowed themes or using borrowed styles, beginning with a work that relies heavily on ancient Greek models. **Naturalistic** Greek sculpture has proved to be extremely influential on European art, but also had an impact on the arts of Asia.



Corinthian Capital, Temple of Fortuna Augusta, Pompeii. Photo: Roger Ulrich, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Alexander the Great conquered much of the Mediterranean basin, including parts of what are now Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and in these regions established Greek-style cities, complete with Greek-style architecture and art. These works came to influence local representations of local deities. A relief panel of Buddhist marine deities from the Gandhara province of Northern Pakistan, for example, shows a series of highly naturalistic, idealized, muscular male figures. They stand casually, in Greek-style ***contrapposto*** – with their weight on one leg and a gentle S-curve to their bodies. The column at the left is topped with a capital in the Greek Corinthian style, like the example here from a temple in Pompeii. If the panel with the marine deities was not part of a Buddhist stupa (like that discussed in the Religion chapter), we would have a hard time telling it from Greek originals. Since many people learn how to imagine their gods through works of art, the influence of Greek prototypes goes beyond art, into the imaginations of Buddhist devotees.

A millennium and a half later, we find a South Asian work that also borrows from a European prototype, though this time the subject and composition are borrowed, while the style remains more characteristically local. Akbar the Great, who expanded the Mughal Empire to include what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan and northern India, was a Muslim, and curious about other religions, so he invited to his court Hindus, Christians, Zoroastrians, and others. He housed a group of Jesuit Christian missionaries in his palace, and ordered his court painters to produce hundreds of images of Christian subjects based on the extensive collection of European paintings and prints the missionaries had brought with them. He had these works included in many media and locations, from books to jewelry to wall decorations for his throne room (as well as his harems). Akbar was not, though, interested in conversion to Christianity. He practiced religious toleration and encouraged cross-cultural borrowings, and saw in Christian art support for his own interest in figural art, generally avoided in Muslim contexts.



Attributed to Kesu Dás, Crucifixion, ink and color on paper, ca. 1590 (British Museum, London). Photo by the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

A **crucifixion** painting produced for Akbar's courts and attributed to Kesu Dás (ca. 1590) was probably based on a **Flemish** print, probably of about a decade earlier. It follows European convention in its design and layout: Jesus appears elevated at the center, and below him to the sides are groups of his followers. To the right, Mary (in blue and yellow) faints as Saint John (in red) kneels by her side. We see the sun and moon above, a reference to the belief that at the moment of Jesus's death, there were total eclipses of both, as well as an earthquake. The figures around Mary and John, though, appear in traditional Mughal dress, with elaborate robes and jewelry. However, the men to the left are depicted as Europeans, presumably as the Jesuits who lived at the Mughal court.

The landscape is depicted in a European style, with layers of hills receding into a deep distance, and with the **horizon line** – where the sky meets the land – just about above the vertical center of the painting, whereas Mughal paintings usually have the horizon line almost at the top of the image. The bright color pallet, though, is typical of Mughal painting. The buildings, like the women's clothing, are Mughal in design, which has the effect of setting the crucifixion in India. This is, in a way, typical rather than radical; European scenes traditionally set the scenes of the Bible into European landscapes, rather than Middle Eastern ones. In the backs of Dutch and Flemish crucifixions, for example, we often find windmills. In German examples, we see the pointed spires of Gothic cathedrals. The Mughal crucifixion is work, then, that brings together styles, traditions, and cultures. It is clearly based on European prototypes, an in its inventive interpretation of the scene, copies its European model by bringing the scene into the local context of its **patron**.


30
名所江戸百景
上野
鶴屋
舖
徒、市画

Utagawa Hiroshige, Kameido Ume Garden, color woodblock print, 1857 (British Museum, London). Photo: Public Domain.



Vincent van Gogh, Flowering Plum Tree, oil on canvas, 1887 (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). Photo Lluís Ribes Mateu, CC BY-NC 2.0.

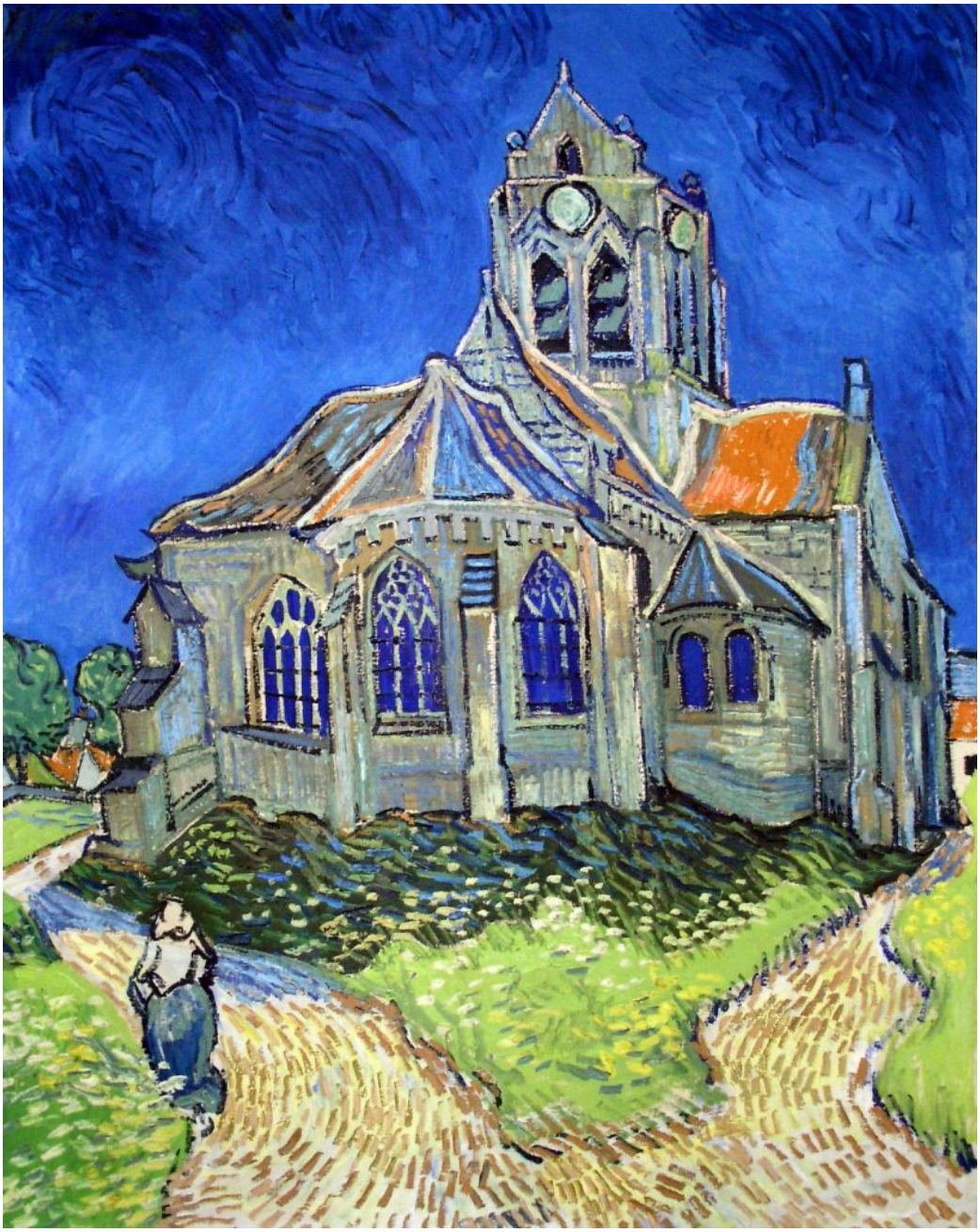
Perhaps the most well-known example of cross-cultural borrowing is that between Japan and Europe in the late 19th century. The impact of Japanese art, especially woodblock printing, on European art and design was so strong that a

term was coined to describe this large-scale borrowing: Japonisme. French, English and Dutch artists, in particular, sought to adopt elements of Japanese style, including flat, outlined forms filled in with unmixed colors, and they also copied traditional elements of Japanese imagery, such as plum blossoms. Vincent Van Gogh was a collector of Japanese woodblock prints, and made copies of a few of them, including Ando Hiroshige's *Kameido Ume* (*Japanese Apricot*) *Garden*, from his popular One Hundred Famous Views of Edo series (1857). Van Gogh then painted his version as *Flowering Plum Tree* (1887).

These works are strikingly similar, though Van Gogh's colors are a bit warmer and more muddled together. Van Gogh copied the entire composition, including the red inscription panels, though he did not read Japanese. Like his contemporaries, Van Gogh was struck by what were, to them, daring compositions, such as the placement of the main tree at the very front of the illusionistic space, blocking much of the scene behind it and running off the edge of the image without any clear framing or rationale for doing so. The many practitioners of Japonisme not only copied specific works, but also copied such techniques. These would then spill over into other works by Van Gogh and his contemporaries.

It bears mention that Van Gogh titled his work *Flowering Plum Tree*, rather than *Japanese Apricot*. He was apparently unable to tell one Japanese fruit tree from the other, and assumed that Hiroshige had presented the more stereotypical plum blossoms. Even in his very careful copying of this image, then, Van Gogh also reproduced European cultural stereotypes about Japanese art.

Cultural impacts generally flow in two directions. Just as their work was influenced European artists, Japanese artists were influenced by European art, borrowing **linear perspective** and other elements. In an interesting reversal of the usual discussions of Japonisme, Tagawa Ken produced woodblock prints that not only borrow some elements from European images, but seem to bear the direct influence of Van Gogh. His *Western Buildings in Nagasaki* (ca. 1930-40s) (see here for an image) is much looser and more flowing than is typical of traditional Japanese woodblock prints. The colors are more muted, as well. Tagawa's print is not a copy of a European work, as Van Gogh's was a copy of a Japanese work, but it strongly recalls works by Van Gogh, such as his *The Church in Auvers-sur-Oise* (1890).



Vincent van Gogh, The Church of Auvers-sur-Oise, oil on canvas, 1890 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo by Stefano Brivio, CC BY 2.0.

Western Buildings in Nagasaki and *The Church of Auvers-sur-Oise* essentially begin at their lower edges, where winding beige paths guides us into the works and then curve uphill toward a church. Both have figures facing away from us, trudging upward and functioning as surrogates for the viewer. Both depict the church against a blue sky marked by curving lines. Where traditional woodblock prints would have filled the sky with a single tone of blue or, in the more daring work of Hiroshige, with a gently blended blue proceeding from dark at the top to light at the bottom, Tagawa's is more splotchy and varied. Some of his marks seem to present clouds, but others, like Van Gogh's marks, seem to merely suggest variations in the tone of the blue sky. The strongest resemblance, though, is in the soft, swaying outlines of all the forms, so typical of Van Gogh's style.

Tagawa's choice of subject also suggests his interest in European art. For this work, he chose a district in Nagasaki that

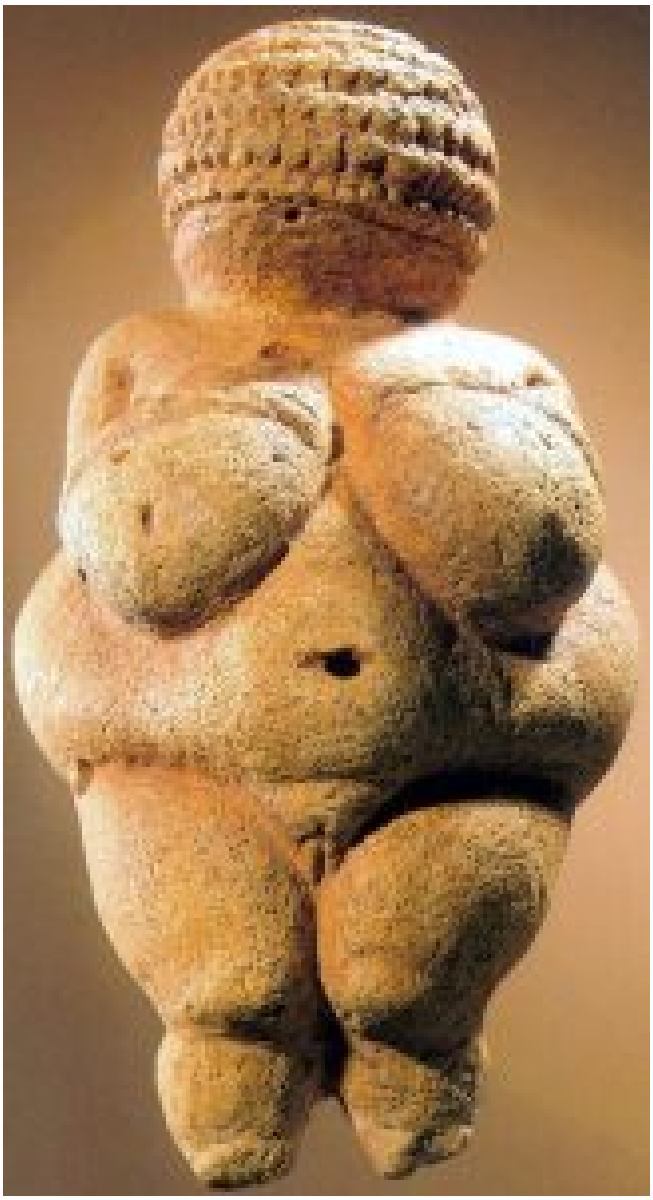
contained a number of Western-style buildings. There is nothing within the image to suggest that this is a Japanese city. This image – in a traditional Japanese medium, imitates the work of a European artist, who had been copying a Japanese style – in order to represent Japanese copies of European buildings!

Challenging the Canon

While some artists use copying to reinforce the **canon**, like Michelangelo copying Masaccio or Cézanne copying Michelangelo, and others, like Zacharie Vincent (see the Selves chapter), manipulate its traditions to their own ends, and yet others, like Van Gogh and Tagawa, import styles and ideas that eventually transform the canon from within, there are artists who use copying to work actively *against* the artistic canon. In particular, feminist artists have worked to break down the canon, which traditionally excluded all female artists, though now a few have made it into most survey textbooks.

Judy Chicago's landmark work, *The Dinner Party* (1979) was an early and bold challenge to the canon of "important" (and inevitably male) artists (see here for images). The work, permanently installed in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, consists of a large triangular table almost 50 feet long on each side, set with elaborate place settings for 39 women with prominent but then-underapreciated roles in the history of art. The women included are artists, mythical characters, and historical figures depicted in famous works. They include, for example, the prehistoric Fertile Goddess, Hatshepsut (a female Egyptian pharaoh), Sappho (an ancient Greek lesbian poet), Artemisia Gentileschi (Baroque painter, see the Selves chapter), Sojourner Truth (African-American abolitionist and advocate for women's rights) and Georgia O'Keeffe (American painter).

Each place setting features a plate with imagery copied – sometimes loosely, sometimes more directly – from earlier works. The imagery on the plates is frequently suggestive of female reproductive power, and the placemats are embroidered with the sitter's name and decorated with related imagery. Through her choice of subjects and models for her copies, Chicago creates a new canon of previously-excluded female figures.



Venus of Willendorf, limestone, ca. 24,000-22,000 B.C.E., (Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna). Photo by A. Currell, CC BY-NC 2.0.

The Fertile Goddess (see here for images) place setting relies of copies of some of the earliest sculptures produced by humanity – small pebbles sculpted to represent fertile women, usually with highly exaggerated breasts and **pubic triangles**, as in the famous Woman of Willendorf. In this prehistoric sculpture from ca. 23,000 BCE, the female figure's reproductive capacity is celebrated through the emphasis on her very large breasts, wide hips, full abdomen, and clearly denoted genitals, as well as her navel, the location of the umbilical cord that connects a fetus to its mother and thereby refers to cycles of human generations.

Other major features – her face, hands, and feet – are obscured or ignored. This has led archeologists and art historians to conclude that such images represent a goddess of fertility. This goddess is one of the first in the chronological list of invitees to Chicago's theoretical dinner party. The placemat is roughly sewn from coarse fabric to evoke the prehistoric context of the goddess. There are small reproductions of typical prehistoric fertility goddess sculptures attached to it, including one clearly inspired by the Woman from Willendorf (see here for an image). The plate at the center is decorated – as are many others in the work – with imagery reminiscent of flowers, which are the reproductive parts of their plants. The images, though, also evoke female genitals, celebrated throughout this work as humanity's great generative force. Similarly, the unusual triangular shape of the entire table echoes the form of the pubic triangle, as we can see emphasized on the Woman of Willendorf.



Georgia O'Keeffe, Red Canna, 1924 (oil on canvas). Photo: Public Domain.

The final place setting is prepared for Georgia O'Keeffe, an American painter famous for her dramatic, vivid watercolors

of flowers. Her *Red Canna* is a typical work, showing a close-up view of the center of a flower. The soft, organic shapes and rich, warm colors, in roughly symmetrical arrangement, are highly suggestive of the folds of the female vulva. In this way, O'Keeffe was surely a strong influence on Chicago, whose imagery on the plates of *The Dinner Party* is often at once floral and **yonic**. Not surprisingly, the place setting for O'Keeffe also features a soft, vaginal flower, now rendered three-dimensional (see here for images). In this way, Chicago has not directly copied O'Keeffe's work. She might have painted a copy of *Red Canna* right onto the plate, but instead she has taken inspiration from O'Keeffe's **oeuvre** – from all the works she produced throughout her career – rather than looking to a single painting as a model. Then, Chicago translated it into her own terms, from two to three dimensions, from paint to sculpted pottery.

Through O'Keeffe's placement as the final guest at the dinner party, Chicago at once acknowledges her source, and further celebrates the power of female fertility, which appears as a dominant theme in art from the prehistoric Woman of Willendorf to the present. Throughout *The Dinner Table* (which also includes the names of hundreds of other women on the floor beneath the table and on the walls of a corridor leading to it), Chicago acknowledges the powerful sources not only of her own art, but also of the traditional canon. She does not so much invent a new canon as demonstrate the potent, unacknowledged role of women in the current artistic and cultural canon.



Guerilla Girls, Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into The Met. Museum?, lithograph, 1989 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo by St. Lawrence University Art Gallery, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous collective of female artists, uses reproductions of canonical works of art to attack the canon more directly. Among their most famous works is a poster originally produced in 1989 and updated in 2005 and 2012, titled *Do Women Have to be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum?* The title references the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the largest, most well funded and most prominent art museum in the United States. The bright image was created in response to a request to create a billboard for the Public Art Fund of New York. The resulting work is a collage of images and texts.

The female figure is a black-and-white reproduction of Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres's *Grand Odalisque*, from 1814 (see the Sex chapter). The Guerrilla Girls chose this very famous image not in order to celebrate it but to critique its objectification of the nude female body. They then placed their own emblem over her face. This is a pun – gorilla (the animal) in place of guerrilla (freedom fighter) – but also a challenge to representations of women. It is aggressive and hyper-masculine, with its heavy brow, angry expression, bared teeth and, of course, considerable facial hair. The mask denies the male viewer his usual role as sexual voyeur, and thereby disempowers both male viewer and male artist. Through the use of **collage** – combining pieces of two-dimensional works to make a new work – the Guerrilla Girls fundamentally transform the meaning of the work they copy.

The text also works to transform our reception of the image, in essence asking us to be offended by this famous and well-respected work. The bold text, written in a heavy black typeface for clarity and assertiveness, declares their intent. It reads, "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less that 5% of the artists in the Modern Art section are women, but 85% of the nudes are female." The objection, then, is to two elements of the canon: first, that female artists are all but excluded from it; second, female nudes form a central and seemingly natural part of the canon, whereas male nudes are a minor element. As art historians have argued, an artistic canon is not made up of actual

works, but of their reproductions in textbooks, postcards, posters, and art history classroom slides. The Guerrilla Girls use a reproduction of a canonical work, here on a massive billboard, to strip it of its previously unquestioned place in the canon.

Interestingly (and problematically), as the Guerrilla Girls reproduced and updated their poster 23 years after its original publication, the numbers had not improved – indeed, while the percentage of female nudes declined a bit (from 85% to 76%), the percentage of female artists also declined (from 5% to 4%). In 1989, the Guerrilla Girls used a copy of a famous work of art to make a strong statement about the state of the art world and the artistic canon, actively engaging with history in their own production in 2012, it remained stubbornly relevant. A study in 2018 demonstrated that while the statistics are a bit improved, the problematic dynamic continues to today.[2]

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE II:

KEHINDE WILEY, ICE T, 2005

Kehinde Wiley, *Ice T*, 2005, Oil on canvas 243.8 x 182.9 cm (96 x 72 in) Private collection, courtesy Rhona Hoffman Gallery (see here for an image)

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What elements of Ingres' composition does Wiley copy?
- What elements of Ingres' composition does Wiley change?
- What elements of Ingres' style does Wiley copy?
- What elements of Ingres' style does Wiley copy?
- How do shifts in the figure's pose change the tone of the work?
- Besides replacing Napoleon with Ice T, what else is different in Wiley's painting?
- How does Wiley's use of an image of Napoleon as a model effect our viewing of his image of Ice T?

INTRODUCTION: New Master Portraits

"**Old Master**" portraits – those produced during the sisteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries – are often celebrated for their beauty, grandeur, and ability to convey the character of their subjects, in addition to their outward appearances. Few artists still produce works in the traditional styles used by these old masters. Kehinde Wiley, though, relies on them as models for some of his striking portraits, usually of young, fashionable African-American men (and, more recently, Senegalese men and women. For his style and compositions, he often copies famous European portraits by Diego Velázquez (see the Selves chapter), Jacques-Louis David, and others. Some of his models are famous celebrities, and others are average people, but all are elevated to new heights through Wiley's dramatic images.

2. Hettie Judah, "In 2018 a woman is still more likely to feature in a gallery as a painted nude than as a painter," *Evening Standard* (October 4, 2018). https://www.standard.co.uk/esmagazine/in-2018-a-woman-is-still-more-likely-to-feature-in-a-gallery-as-a-painted-nude-than-as-a-painter-a3951406.html

VISUAL ELEMENTS: Imperial Bling

Wiley's painting of Ice T – a rap musician and, later, television star – is bold and dramatic. It is also borrowed. Like the Guerrilla Girls, Wile based this image on a work by Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres: *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne*, 1806 (see the Power chapter). Unlike the Guerrilla Girls, though, Wiley copied Ingres' painting by hand. Wiley's choice of his model greatly influenced the new version of this painting. The image of Napoleon is designed to be imposing. We are supposed to literally look up to the newly-crowned French "emperor" – his throne is elevated and the painting was certainly hung (and still is) so that Napoleon's head was above that of the viewer. Wiley's image borrows and even intensifies many of the elements of Ingres' portrait.

The painting of Ice T uses deep, rich colors, particularly the regal, royal red of the robes the figure sits upon and the gold of the throne, scepters, and other details. These colors stand out against the very dark background and the figure's black clothing. The composition is largely symmetrical, with the throne centered vertically. The staff and scepter are posed at nearly identical angles, and frame the figure between them. In both images, the round back of the throne becomes a sort of halo, suggesting not merely earthly power but divinity.



Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne, oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.

Still, both artists made their images just a bit less static by introducing slight asymmetries. Both figures raise one arm and lower the other (though the scepters they hold match the raised arms and even end in small hands). Both also have their robes slung out to their lefts. Wiley also tilts his model's head back and to his left, and splays his legs at a casual angle that contrasts with the grand and formal tone of the painting.

There are other important differences between model and copy, in addition to the obvious substitution of one sitter for another and the small – but important – differences in pose. Wiley has also cropped his image slightly tighter, which brings his sitter a bit closer to us, while also compressing the space within the image. This makes for a more confrontational work. Napoleon is protected from our approach, and so sits bolt-upright. His head is perhaps tipped ever so slightly downward, emphasizing his position above us, raised up on a platform and then on his elevated throne. Ice T leans back a bit. His posture is certainly less formal, but it is not quite relaxed. His torso seems tilted away from us, as if to give himself a bit more personal space, and he raises his chin toward us in a gesture that might be either wary or confrontational – or perhaps both. By painting Ice T in a sleeveless shirt, Wiley also emphasizes his biceps, and therefore his physical strength.

The light source in both paintings is in front of the figures and to their right, as indicated by highlights and shadows, but Wiley intensifies its sharpness, picking out bright highlights on Ice T's arms, but veiling his eyes in the shadow of his ball cap. Lighting and pose seem to reveal Napoleon to us, but to partially conceal Ice T. The bright lighting also, though,

serves to emphasize the gold and jewels of the throne, scepter, and staff. In Ingres's work, they seem to merely be part of the general opulence of the image. In Wiley's image, in contrast, they pop out of the canvas. Ice T's watch is yet brighter, flashing in the light and reflecting it back at us.

The use of the opulent red robes is another important point of contrast between the two images. The robes are Napoleon's, not Ice T's, and the French emperor wears them with authority. The semicircle of rich ermine fur – recognizable because of the black points of the animals' tails throughout the white fur – draped over his chest completes the circle begun by the arcing back of the chair, framing Napoleon's face in dramatic fashion. Wiley has placed the robe as if in quite the same place, relative to the chair, but now it is behind the figure, like a backdrop. This creates a tension: why doesn't Ice T put on the robe? Is it because he is not really an emperor, not really a ruler and not worthy to wear it? Or is he too grand to wear such an affectation, instead merely sitting on it as if it were an old jacket?

CULTURAL CONTEXT: A New Ruling Class?

Although they are presented in the guise of European aristocrats, kings, and emperors, many of Wiley's models are poor, disenfranchised young men. Most are not music or television stars, like Ice T. Most are mere fans. All of his models, though, are elevated, presented as grand, dignified, and idealized in a manner befitting royalty. Some of his titles indicate their sources, such as *After Titian*'s "*The Penitent Mary Magdalen*" (2009, see here for an image) and others, such as *Ice T*, rely on the viewer's background knowledge of the artistic canon. In both cases, though, we are supposed to recognize the references being made, since our awareness of the sources draws attention not only to issues of class – even Ice T is no emperor, wealthy though he surely is – but also to gender and race. Wiley places male models in the roles of female figures, like Mary Magdalene or the *Three Graces*.

More consistently, though, he replaces European figures with figures of African descent. The original subjects of the Old Master portraits, like Napoleon, were frequently imperialists and colonialists, conquering and oppressing the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas. Indeed, Napoleon's army stole vast quantities of art while on military campaign in Egypt, including the very famous Rosetta Stone (later moved to the British Museum after England's defeat of the French army). By replacing these imperialists with African-American figures, Wiley is making a comment – perhaps obscure or unfixed – on the relative statuses of communities. Is he arguing that, under other circumstances, his sitters might have been kings? That they ought to be kings? Or, particularly in the cases of his wealthy and famous subjects like Ice T, that they *are* today's royalty?



Portrait of Emperor Lothair, Lothair Gospels, ink and color on paper, 849-51 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

It is worth noting that Ingres' portrait was, itself, somewhat derivative of earlier models. In order to create an image of Napoleon as the emperor of France, Ingres turned to portraits from the Middle Ages – the last time that France had "emperors." In the Middle Ages, France was part of the "Holy Roman Empire," and rulers such as Charlemagne and his descendants claimed the title of emperor. Images of these rulers, like the portrait of Emperor Lothair (great-great-great-great grandson of Charlemagne) from the Lothair Gospels have much in common with Ingres' painting (and therefore with Wiley's). Like Ingres's portrait of Napoleon (and therefore like Wiley's portrait of Ice T), Lothair is centered and seated on an elevated throne with a curved back. All three wear elaborate robes and hold scepters of authority. The red of Napoleon's robes is a reference to the "imperial purple" draped behind Lothair.

Still, in a sense, all three are pretenders to their thrones. Ice T is not a political ruler, Napoleon was briefly a powerful conqueror, but did not control an empire, and Lothair was, in essence, king of a small band of territory running along what is now the boundary between France and Germany, and slightly into northern Italy. And yet they are all presented as if they are *Roman* emperors, rulers of one of the most powerful empires in the world's history.

Wiley's fidelity to Ingres' *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne* is striking. Most of the composition is extremely similar, though the substitution of modern celebrity for earlier ruler completely transforms the image. Ingres was working for Napoleon and there is nothing intentionally ironic or amusing about his portrait (nor about Lothair's, for that matter). Napoleon was tremendously (if briefly) powerful, and took power by military force. The power he wielded was enforced through violence. Of course, hip-hop culture has its own history of violence and its glorification in lyrics and in life. The substitution, then, is not merely a joke mocking the trappings of Napoleon's authority, nor of Ice T's celebrity.

Wiley's work has been criticized for using hip-hop as mere fashion in his glitzy paintings, and not engaging with its more subversive or counterculture messages, but by laying hip-hop over old master, by recasting royal scepters as bling, Wiley calls into question the values placed on both. Of course, an expensive watch cannot connote the sort of real power and authority of Napoleon's staff and sword (both said to have originally belonged to Charlemagne himself). On the other hand, though, the modern accessories that shine out of his canvases invite us to question the role of the gold and jewels so liberally displayed in the ruler portraits he copies. The power of the emperor does not really derive from his scepter. The scepter is nothing but a symbol, and in that sense, how different is it from the bling worn by Wiley's subjects?

Comparisons and Connections II: Copies and Appropriations

Repeated, Repeated, Repeated Images

Andy Warhol pushed the notion of copying further than any artist had, before him. Warhol began in advertising design, like Barbara Kruger (see the Power chapter) and, like Kruger, brought this training and approach to his art. He was a founder of the Pop Art movement, in which he celebrated (and critiqued) copying, mass production, and American consumerist culture. He even went so far as to establish The Factory in New York City (which occupied three locations from 1962 to 1984), where he and a group of assistants worked like workers in a factory to produce a series of silkscreens – prints made using fine mesh stencils – and other prints. An early work from The Factory is *Marilyn Monroe Diptych* (1962, see here for an image). The print is based on a photograph of Monroe, who was then the most famous Hollywood star, and had very recently died of a drug overdose. Her image was reproduced endlessly in the popular media of the day – newspapers, magazines, television, film, posters, and on.

Warhol pressed this idea further by copying her image over and over within one work. The *Diptych* contains fifty copies of the same photograph of Monroe. The silkscreen technique reduced the original gradually shifting tones of the photograph to flat blocks of color, flatting out the face. Warhol chose garish colors and high contrast for the left panel, but only black and white for the right. By repeating her image over and over, Warhol was commenting on the media obsession with celebrity. But there is something more subtle at play, as well. Moving from left to right, as we would read a page, we see that Marilyn first appears lush and glamorous, then grey, smudged, and finally, as we approach the right edge, she starts to fade away. These copies are not identical. The slight variations in each image give a sense of something shifting within Monroe, beneath her perfect public image. The work, then, both celebrates and mourns the lost star, and celebrates and condemns the media culture of celebrity worship.

Appropriation Art

While artists have been copying one another's work for as long as people have been making art – all the way back to the prehistoric caves – it was only in the 1960s that "appropriation art" became a strategy and movement. Sturtevant (who generally only uses her surname) is usually credited as the first of the appropriation artists. Beginning in the 1960s, she produced hand-made copies of the works of her contemporaries. Her goal was to make the copies as close to the original as she could, mimicking the original techniques and media as well as the compositions.

In 1973, Sturtevant produced *Warhol Diptych*, a nearly identical copy of Warhol's *Marilyn Monroe Diptych* (see here for an image). Again, we see fifty Monroes, gradually fading from garish colors on the left to black and white on the right. There are, though, notable differences. Sturtevant's orange background is more uniform, whereas Warhol's shifts in tone. The faces are a more vibrant purple, the hair a brighter yellow. The colors are more heavily applied over the black and white silkscreen prints, so that fewer details show through. This renders the faces even flatter than they were in the Warhol. This copy of a copy, though produced by hand and therefore more of a re-creation than a mechanical copy, still produced something of the effect of a photocopier copy of a copy: each version is less detailed and more schematic than its predecessor.

How is this even a work of art, though? The conception and design were Warhol's. Sturtevant is not trying to hide her borrowing. She signals her sources with her titles, so that what was *Marilyn Monroe Diptych* becomes *Warhol Diptych*. She is trying, in this work and many others like it, to question the value we place on authenticity and originality, by producing works that are authentic – they are exactly what they claim to be – but also unoriginal. Her work, then, is not about Marilyn Monroe, whose name is removed from the title. For Warhol, the icon was Monroe. For Sturtevant, the icon

is Warhol. As one author writes, "Warhol holds a mirror up to the *world* to enable it to recognize what it is – Sturtevant, in contrast, holds a mirror up to the interior of *art*."[3]

Copying Copies (of Copies)

This section concludes with a series of photographs that are self-consciously based on earlier works. The original, in this case, is an iconic photograph by Walker Evans, titled *Alabama Tenant Farmer's Wife*, taken in 1936 (see here for an image) and included in a book entitled *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*, with photographs by Walker and text by James Agee. This image has become one of the most memorable photographs from the Great Depression, a massive economic crises in the US that began with a stock market crash in 1929. We see Allie Mae Burroughs, the wife of a sharecropper – a farmer who does not own the farm or tools, and works for a landlord, often making little or no profit (and, in the case of Burroughs and her husband, ending the year in debt to their landlord).

Evans took several photographs of Burroughs posing against the outer wall of her rustic cabin. In some, she is smiling and appears welcoming (see here for an image), but for his book, Evans chose one where she seems wary, tense, reticent. This is all conveyed through subtleties of her expression and pose. The tilt of her shoulders, the furrowing of her brows, the tension in her weather-beaten cheeks beneath her eyes, the way she bites her lower lip. The rough texture of the raw wooden planks implies the harsh life she leads. There is very little depth in the image, so we are pressed up against her, and she does not seem to welcome our presence there.

The figure is posed almost like the sitter for a traditional **Old Master** portrait – nearly centered, roughly symmetrical, isolated against a neutral background, like the portraits of Rembrandt discussed in the Selves chapter. However, instead of a prosperous, "important" subject, the subject here is a poor woman, one of millions left destitute by the Great Depression. Walker's choice to name the photograph *Alabama Tenant Farmer's Wife*, when he knew the Burroughs well, turns the individual into a representative of a larger group. Instead of this being a portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs, it becomes an image of all of the suffering rural poor of the Depression.

This photograph has had a very curious afterlife. In 1981, American photographer Sherrie Levine shot a photograph of a reproduction of Walker's *Alabama Tenant Farmer's Wife* from an exhibition catalog called *First and Last*. She called her photograph *After Walker Evans: 4* (see here for an image). This photograph of Walker's photograph is more or less indistinguishable from the original, and therefore calls into question the nature of Levine's work as an artist, as well as the nature of photography, which is a medium based on reproduction.

Unlike paintings or drawings, where originals are produced by the hands of artists, all photographs are mechanically produced, though planned, designed, selected, and edited by the photographer. Levine's photograph has upset many viewers since it was first displayed, since it seems to be nothing but a mechanically produced copy of the work of another artist. How is "her" photograph any different from the published reproduction of Walker's photograph from the *First and Last* catalog that Levine actually used to make her copy? How is her work any different from that of the anonymous photographer who made the copy of Walker's photograph that appears in the publication where Levine found it? It is very hard to find a distinction, here, in the work itself. If there is a distinction, it lies in the artist's intent. Levine's work is not a fraud. The title of her work, *After Walker Evans: 4*, directly identifies its source.

Levine is not the only artist to appropriate Evans's iconic photographs. Several other artists have also used them as source material for their own work. Lisa Oppenheim's photographs of *Killed Negatives: After Walker Evans* are among the more creative (see here for images). Of course, Evans took many more photographs than he ultimately printed and published. When he rejected a negative, he "killed" it by punching a hole through it. This would, he thought, make them

3. *Sturtevant Catalogue Raisonné 1964-2004*, ed. Lena Maculan (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 2005), 41.

impossible for others to print against his wishes, since the hole would appear as a black circle in any prints from these killed negatives.

However, Walker did not destroy these photos, and Oppenheim found them in the archives of the National Library of Congress. Oppenheim produced pairs of photographs, such as *Osh Kosh* (see here for an image) and *Boys* (see here for an image), both from her *Killed Negatives* series (2007), juxtaposing Evans' killed image (with a black circle where he punched the hole in the negative) with her own photograph, blacked out but for a circle in the same location as that in the original photograph. In this circle, Oppenheim attempts to recreate what was lost when Evans killed the negative. She tried to take her photographs at or near the site of the original photograph, and used color photography, whereas Evans used black and white (color photography was available, but uncommon, in the 1930s).

How does Oppenheim know what was missing? In most cases, the missing portion is not perplexing. The the denim of the man's overalls, and a bit of his shirt; top of a child's knee, covered in denim, against the bare wood plank of the wall. Still, Oppenheim must take liberties. What color was the man's shirt? How pale were the child's overalls? These photographs do not question the status of the authentic work, as Levine's do. Instead, they ask us to consider what we know and what we do not, what information photographs from the past convey to us, and what must always remain unknown and unknowable. Would the addition of the information lost in the circle *really* tell us more than the killed photographs, as they stand? Would color make the photographs more meaningful, or less striking? Oppenheim does not really provide more information by working to fill in the empty circles. Instead, she calls into question our interaction with and understanding of the rest of the photographs, including those that Evans did not "kill."

Levine's work comments on the nature of photography, which undermines concepts of artistic originality. Oppenheim questions the ability of photography to convey information across time. While Evans took the original photographs, the "work of art" we view is not the negative produced mechanically and chemically within his camera, but instead, all of the positive prints that he produced from it, or perhaps the reproductions contained in *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men.*

In the digital age, these issues are all heightened. With digital photography, there is no "original" negative, just a first version of a computer file that will be identical to any copy made of it. The Internet has made copying and dissemination of images so easy and inexpensive that issues of copyright are in the process of breaking down. I have respected modern and contemporary artists and the copyright they hold to their work throughout this book by providing links to images of these works, rather than "borrowing" the images without obtaining – by paying for! – the permission to use them. Still, while I have done this, it is nonetheless clear that such laws are becoming functionally irrelevant. Most of the images I provide links for are already all over the internet in ways that defy the artists' copyrights.

Playing with Levine's ideas, and with the then-new possibilities of the Internet, in 2001, Michael Mandiberg made scans of the photographs by Evans and Levine, and put them online on two websites he created, AfterWalkerEvans.com and AfterSherrieLevine.com. Following the model set by Levine, Mandiberg titled his works *Untitled* (*AfterWalkerEvans.com/2.jpg*) and *Untitled* (*AfterSherrieLevine.com/2.jpg*). Mandiberg's two sites are nearly identical, like the two photographs, Evans's original and Levine's copy. Mandiberg's stated goal is, "to facilitate their dissemination as a comment on how we come to know information in this burgeoning digital age."[4] Mandiberg supplies very high-resolution images (better than those I linked to above!), suitable for large format printouts on high-end photographic printers. He also supplies a "Certificate of Authenticity" that reads, in part, "This certificate guarantees that the accompanying digital image printout, Untitled (AfterWalkerEvans.com/2.jpg), is an authentic work of art by Michael Mandiberg."[5] He includes printing and framing directions to be followed precisely, so that the user of his website can produce a precise version of "his" work.

4. Michael Mandiberg, AfterWalkerEvans.com, 2001: https://afterwalkerevans.com/ and AfterhSherrieLevine.com, 2001: https://aftersherrielevine.com/

5. Michael Mandiberg, "Certificate of Authority," AfterSherrieLevine.com: http://www.aftersherrielevine.com/cert/2.pdf and "Certificate of Authority," AfterWalkerEvans.com: http://www.afterwalkerevans.com/cert/1.pdf

Slyly, there is actually only *one* copy of the image – call it *Alabama Tenant Farmer's Wife*, *Untitled (after Walker Evans)*, *(Untitled (AfterWalkerEvans.com/2.jpg)* or *Untitled (AfterSherrieLevine.com/2.jpg)*, as you wish – online at Mandiberg's sites, simply called "2.jpg." Regardless of whether you start at *AfterWalkerEvans.com* or *AfterSherrieLevine.com*, you get the same scan, drawing attention to the indistinguishably of Levine's photograph from Evans' photograph.

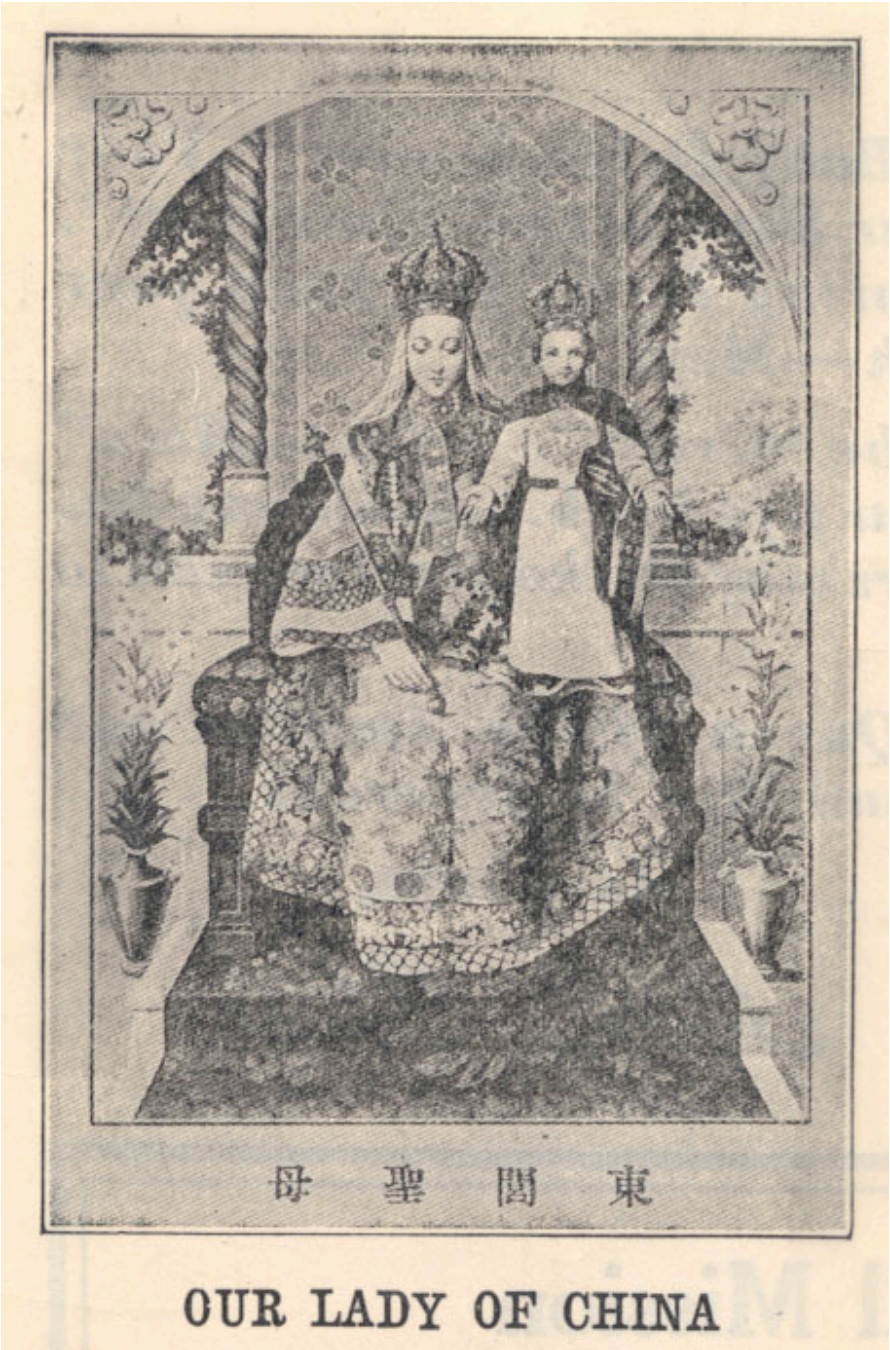
Would Evans himself object to all of these copies of his work? Perhaps not, as *he himself photographed photographs*. His *Family Snapshots on the Wall of Frank Tengle's Home* (1936) presents two photographs, tacked to a bare wooden wall (see here for an image). This work is not as direct a copy of the family snapshots as some of the copies of Evans's works, of course, and his choice to call them "snapshots" suggests a hierarchy in which his "photograph" is more artistic than the "snapshots" it contains. Who is the "producer" of any of these works? If you go to Mandiberg's site and make your own printout to his specifications, is the artist Evans, Levine, Mandiberg, or, perhaps, *you*?

CONCLUSION

Art viewers – casual and professional – tend the value originality very highly. However, the history of art is filled with examples of works that press us to redefine what it means for a work to be "original," and also to reconsider our basic assumption that more original works are more valuable and interesting than less original works. We might, though, think about the ways that some cultures, like Byzantium, valued close and careful copies, and about ways that artists have manipulated their source material to make new arguments about old subjects. For our purpose here, which is to *appreciate* art, we can choose to value original designs, but we might also consider the ideas behind a work, and the ideas works inspire in us. Any work of art – "original," derivative, or painstakingly copied – that causes us to think interesting thoughts or feel interesting feeling is surely is worth our appreciation.

SPOTLIGHT IMAGE III:

OUR LADY OF CHINA, DONGLU, CHINA, CA. 1904



Anonymous French painter, Our Lady of China, ca. 1904 (Donglu, China). Photo: Public Domain.



Dowager Empress Tz'u-hsi of China, late-nineteenth century. Photo: Public Domain.

VIEWING QUESTIONS

- This painting of Mary and Jesus was based on a then-popular photograph of the Dowager Empress Tz'u-his. Why use this photograph as the model for these figures?
- What elements are borrowed?
- What elements did the painter change?
- How does the painter present these figures?
- How does their clothing influence our perception of the figures?

Media Attributions

- Virgin and Child (Hodegetria), Byzantine, possibly Palestine or Constantinople, 5th or 6th century, tempera and gold on panel, Santa Francesca Romana (Santa Maria Nova), Rome, Italy (heavily restored). Image: Public Domain.
- Icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, embossed silver, 13th century. Image: Public Domain
- Our Lady Hodegetria, tempera on panel and gilding, 34.5×29 cm, Russia, Late 16th century CE, the Hermitage. Image: Public Domain.
- Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)
- Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)
- Icons of the Virgin Hodegetria (Details)
- Masaccio, Tribute Money, fresco, 1427 (Brancacci Chapel, Florence). Photo: Public Domain.
- Michelangelo, Male Figure after Masaccio, red chalk, pen and brown ink, 1492-93 (Staatliche Gaphische Sammlung, Munich). Photo: Public Domain.
- Michelangelo, The Dying Slave, marble, 1513-15 (Musée de Louvre, Paris). Photo by Spencer Means, CC BY-SA 2.0.
- Paul Cézanne, Dying Slave, graphite on wove paper, 1885-1900 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia). Photo: Public Domain.
- Stair Riser with Marine Deities or Boatmen, serpentinite, ca. first century (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo: Public Domain.
- Corinthian Capital, Temple of Fortuna Augusta, Pompeii. Photo: Roger Ulrich, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- Attributed to Kesu Dás, Crucifixion, ink and color on paper, ca. 1590 (British Museum, London). Photo by the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
- Utagawa Hiroshige, Kameido Ume Garden, color woodblock print, 1857 (British Museum, London). Photo: Public Domain.
- Vincent van Gogh, Flowering Plum Tree, oil on canvas, 1887 (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). Photo Lluís Ribes Mateu, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Vincent van Gogh, The Church of Auvers-sur-Oise, oil on canvas, 1890 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Photo by Stefano Brivio, CC BY 2.0.
- Venus of Willendorf, limestone, ca. 24,000-22,000 B.C.E., (Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna). Photo by A. Currell, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Georgia O'Keeffe, Red Canna, 1924 (oil on canvas). Photo: Public Domain.
- Guerilla Girls, Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into The Met. Museum?, lithograph, 1989 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Photo by St. Lawrence University Art Gallery, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
- Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, Napoleon on his Imperial Throne, oil on canvas, 1806 (Musée de l'Armée, Paris). Photo by Institutnationaldhistoiredelart, CC BY 2.0.
- Portrait of Emperor Lothair, Lothair Gospels, ink and color on paper, 849-51 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris). Photo: Public Domain.

- Anonymous French painter, Our Lady of China, ca. 1904 (Donglu, China). Photo: Public Domain.
- Dowager Empress Tz'u-hsi of China, late-nineteenth century. Photo: Public Domain.

11. Death

How do artists grapple with the idea and reality of death?

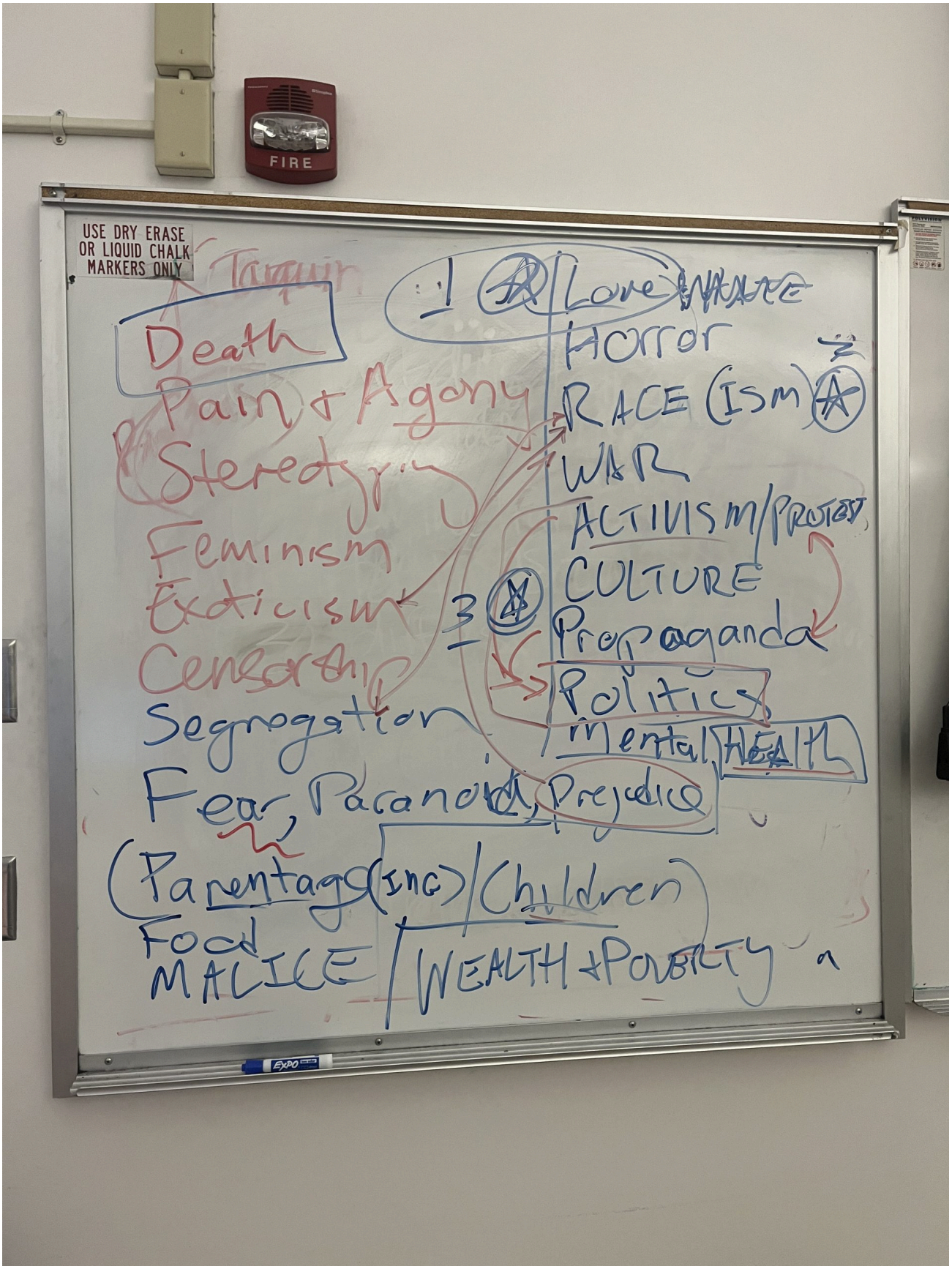
Death, the most implacable force in the universe, awaits us all, at least until science finds a route to immortality (embodied or disembodied). Many religions offer hope for some sort of continued existence after death, usually in the form of either an afterlife or reincarnation — being reborn again into a different body. This chapter considers works of art from throughout the world, and from ancient Egypt (famous for its interest in an afterlife) through the modern period. It is divided into sections dealing with grief, disease, funeral rites and rituals, journeys to the afterlife, and embodiments of Death itself, and then turns to the practice of human sacrifice, beliefs in the undead, and finally art that examines the fascination with death in pop culture. Much of this material is difficult, but important. Death is a theme in the work of just about every culture, and we must ultimately figure out how to face it. The works discussed here offer several different approaches to this grim subject.

A note about this chapter

This chapter was written by the students in my Chico State ARTH 400W: Public Art History course in Fall of 2024. In the syllabus, I describe the course as follows:

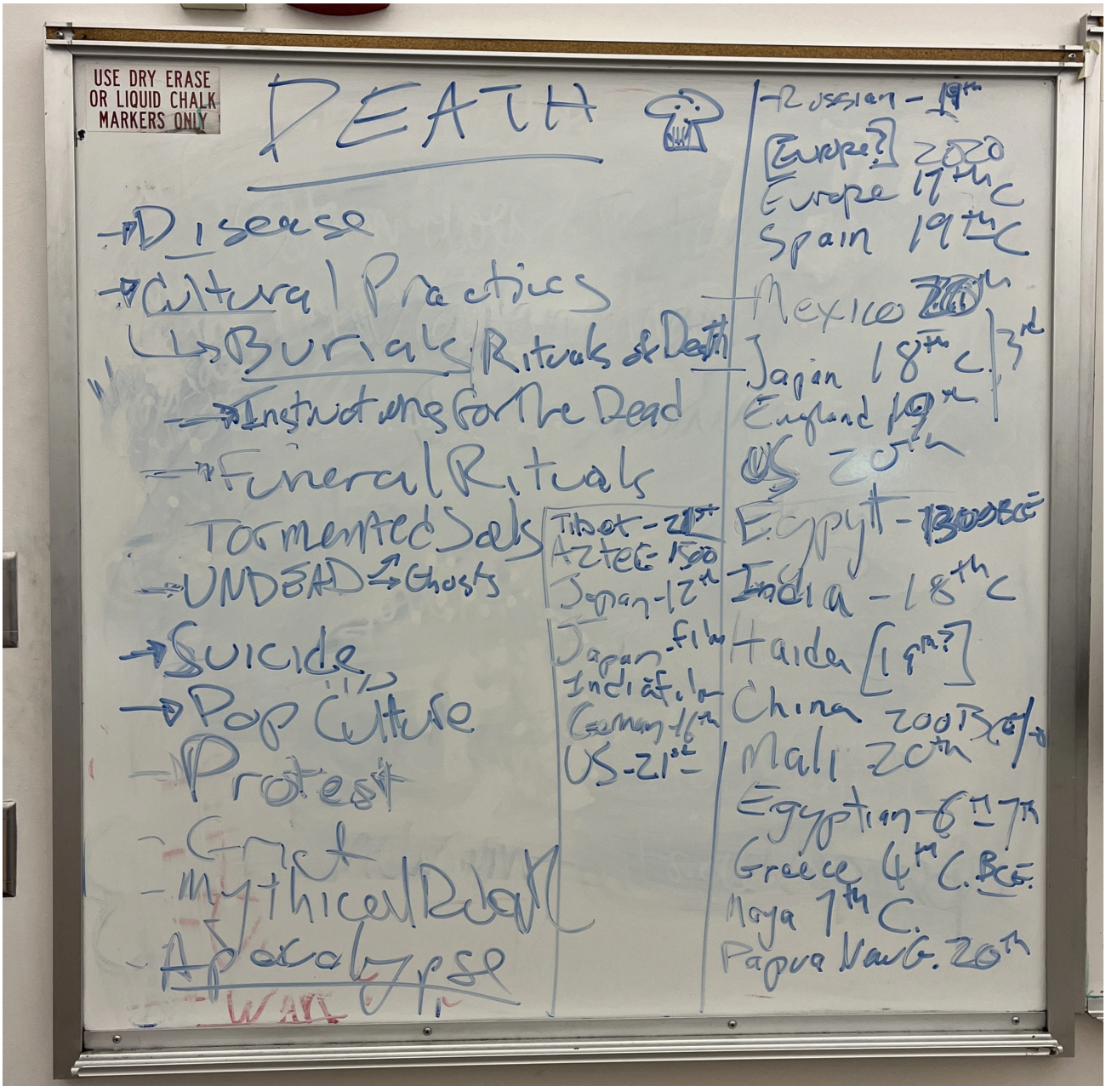
> The UC Davis Office of Public Scholarship and Engagement defines "public scholarship" as "research, teaching, and learning that has an impact for publics beyond the university." As the name indicates, this work involves scholarship — the generation of new knowledge, ideas, methods, and creative works — that is presented in a manner intended to be accessible to the general public. Examples include popular nonfiction books, articles and op ed pieces, public lectures and courses, signage in museums, historical monuments, national and state parks, and so on, and informative podcasts, videos, and websites. The goal of this work is to address social and cultural issues, contribute to contemporary debates, and improve the public's understanding of matters of concern. Students in this Special Topics course will learn to identify, analyze, and produce public scholarship, taking the work we do within the university out into the wider world.

One of the main assignments for the course was for the students to collaborate on a chapter for *this* online OER (Open Educational Resource — that is: *free*) textbook. The course had 27 students who, after class discussions, chose the theme for the chapter. Harrowing subjects dominated the conversation (e.g. pain, fear, paranoia, malice, horror, racism, war, poverty) though some students did suggest subjects that were more neutral (e.g. politics) and even some that were potentially more positive (e.g. love, family, children, activism).


USE DRY ERASE
OR LIQUID CHALK
MARKERS ONLY
FIRE
Death
Pain + Agony
Stereotyping
Feminism
Exoticism
Censorship
Segregation
Fear, Paranoia, Prejudice
(Parentage(ing)/Children
Food
MALICE
Love
Horror
RACE (ISM)
WAR
ACTIVISM/PROTEST
CULTURE
Propaganda
Politics
mental HEALTH
WEALTH + POVERTY

Classroom whiteboard with notes on discussion of possible chapter themes. Photo: Asa Simon Mittman

Once Death had won the day — as, really, it always does in the end — the students came up with a series of sub-themes to divide up the potential material, and began suggesting specific works. In doing so, we kept loose track of the cultures, regions, and periods they represented to make sure we were achieving the same sort of global, pan-chronological coverage found in the rest of the chapters.



Classroom whiteboard with notes on discussion of sub-themes. Photo: Asa Simon Mittman

Students then formed groups around subthemes (some of which developed in unexpected directions as they got to

work), produced drafts, worked through a series of edits and suggestions that I provided, and then completed their final drafts. I then edited these again, and strung them together into what I hope to be a reasonably coherent structure. Because of how this chapter was written, it does not have the same structure as the other chapters in the book. There are no "Spotlight Images." There is, though, a great wealth of fascinating images discussed throughout the chapter! I am quite proud of the work they produced, extending the focus and reach of their studies beyond the college classroom, producing a work of published public scholarship that I am confident is a valuable addition to this textbook, which is in use in art appreciation courses all over the United States and beyond. I hope you enjoy their work!

The student authors are:

> Leeah Barrett, Preston Breeze, Lauren Ceriani, Amaris Cisneros-Valdez, Dane Clarke, Eric Culpepper, Idaly Flores, Kai Fritz, Bo Gurnee, Shenise Halsey, Noah Jibikilayi, Cassidy Kuharski, Jackilyn Laffey, Esther Lawson, Jasmine Lezama, Kent Moore, Kelly Munson, Portia Osa, Adelaide Sands, Aimee Sayer, Chad Schneider, Raven Shaw, Marlo Sherman, Tyler Stewart, Michelle Stout, Ximena Villaneda, and Taylor Watkins.

Grief and Memorialization

How can artists convey the bottomless grief that often accompanies the death of a loved one? How can they give voice to their individual suffering, or the suffering of groups to which they belong? This section features a series of images that attempt to express the emotional toll of such loss.



Ilya Repin, Ivan the Terrible and his Son Ivan, oil on canvas, 1883-1885 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). Image: Public Domain.

Ilya Yefimovich Repin's *Ivan the Terrible and his Son Ivan* (1883-1885) portrays grief through several means. This painting presents the first tzar (emperor) of Russia, Ivan IV Vasilyevich, known as "the Terrible," who ruled in the late sixteenth century. He is the older figure on the left, holding his adult son, Ivan Ivanovich, in anguish. According to the most widely circulated historical accounts of the event, the father and son quarreled over an ongoing war, with the son arguing that too many had died and it was time for peace, and the father holding fast to his position that the war needed to continue. In some versions, the tzar first struck his son's wife, and then struck his son in a fit of rage, dealing a lethal blow he immediately regretted to his son's head. Ivan Ivanovich died a few days later. In this painting, the fatal staff lies in the foreground, and the overturned furniture and rumpled carpet suggest the extremity of the violent events that unfolded here.

The common accounts of the death of Ivan Ivanovich are likely inaccurate, but were nonetheless likely the versions known to Repin.[1] The painting shows Ivan's intense regret, as he cradles his son's head with a look of shock and trauma

1. Paul Bushkovitch, "Possevino and the Death of Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 55.1/2 (January-June 2014): 119-134

on his face. Ivan Ivanovich looks stunned, physically and emotionally. His face conveys a feeling of betrayal in his final moments. The artist was inspired by the time of political discord in his country, which led to violent events. The most notable of these, the one that inspired this painting, was the assassination of the Russian Emperor Alexander II on March 13, 1881, in a terrorist bombing in Saint Petersburg.

The piece depicts the fragility of life, and draws its emotional power from the permanence of death, even though caused here by a swift and impulsive action. The expression on Ivan the Terrible's face — eyes wide and bulging, brows raised in anguish, hair wild and askew — shows his intense mourning mixed with his horrified guilt. This painting stands out from many other images of grief for the rawness of its presentation, which led Russian Emperor Alexander III — son of the assassinated Alexander II — to ban it from public view. The work has continued to inspire strong, even violent responses. It has been attacked at least twice, once while Repin was still alive and able to restore it. The power of this work remains so vivid that it was attacked again, in 2018, in an incident that may have been inspired by a Russian nationalist view that holds that Ivan IV Vasilyevich did not kill his son, and was not "terrible," as his common epithet claims.[2]



Maxim Vorobiev, Oak Fractured by Lightning, oil painting on canvas, 1842 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). Image: Public Domain.

2. Matthew Bodner, "Ivan the Terrible painting 'seriously damaged' in pole attack," *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/27/famous-russian-painting-of-ivan-the-terrible-seriously-damaged-in-pole-attack> (accessed January 2025).

Another Russian painter, Maxim Vorobiev, took a more metaphorical approach to expressing grief over the death of his wife. Expressing the emotions he was feeling through this allegorical painting may have helped him cope with his grief. Traditional European symbol guides with which Vorobiev may have been familiar tend to associate oak trees with life. Here, a mighty oak is shattered by a sudden bolt of lightning, suggesting a life being taken away suddenly, without warning. The tree clings to a craggy cliff in a wild storm. Is it high within the clouds or battered by fierce ocean waves? The use of cold, dark muted colors, most nearly gray or black, establish a turbulent, grim tone. Though the work shows neither the dead woman nor those she left behind, it conveys a grief that feels rough and fresh, like an open wound.



Cadex Herrera, Greta McLain, and Xena Goldman, George Floyd Mural, 2020 (Hennepin County, Minneapolis). Image: Public Domain.

At times, the death of an individual can galvanize a community or even a nation. This was the case with the 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who was tried and convicted of three murder charges.[3] Police were responding to a call from a store claiming that Floyd paid with a counterfeit $20 bill. As captured on video by multiple witnesses, police body cameras, and security cameras, an officer handcuffed Floyd, who informed them that he was recovering from Covid-19 and having trouble breathing. After Floyd fell to the ground, Chauvin knelt with a knee

3. Aris Folley, "Chauvin taken into custody, bail revoked after jury finds him guilty of all charges in trial," *The Hill* (April 20, 2021) <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/549328-chauvin-taken-into-custody-bail-revoked-after-jury-finds-him-guilty-of/> (accessed January 2025).

on Floyd's neck for more than eight minutes. Throughout this time, Floyd repeated numerous times that he could not breathe, and at the end of it, he was dead.

First in Minneapolis, and then throughout the United States, mass protests erupted. Many protestors affiliated themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement, which Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi founded in 2013, in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black boy shot by George Zimmerman (who was later acquitted of a murder charge). As part of this protest movement, artists across the country turned blank walls and streets in city centers into canvases to express grief and outrage about the long history of anti-Black violence, especially the deaths of Black men and boys at the hands of police officers. The first George Floyd mural was created by community artists Cadex Herrera, Greta McLain, and Xena Goldman just hours after Floyd's murder. The mural was painted on the side of a grocery store in Minneapolis, Minnesota, just down the street from where Floyd was arrested and then killed on the sidewalk by police officers. The mural quickly became a memorial site for locals and visitors, who came to honor Floyd and mourn his needless, senseless death.

Herrera, McLain, and Goldman's mural features a portrait of Floyd, positioned in front of a large sunflower that functions like a halo behind his head. The black center of the flower is inscribed with the slogan, "Say our names," followed by a long list of Black people killed by police, including Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy shot while playing at a recreation center, and Breonna Taylor, a medical worker shot seven times while unarmed in her own home. As Herrera explains:

> That connects to all the people who have been killed by the police: I wanted to make sure they were also represented. George Floyd wasn't the first death, and now—just recently there's been a murder; another policeman just shot another Black man—now George Floyd is not the last.[4]

The artists painted Floyd's name radiating out from either side of the portrait. The letters are painted in the same yellow as the petals of the sunflower, and they are filled with small blue figures raising their fists, which recall the lively, abstracted style of Keith Haring's social protest art.[5] As Herrera explains, these figures are a "community inside his name, demanding change, raising their fists in support of George Floyd."[6]

The text at the bottom of the image, which reads, "I can breathe now," was added after the artists polled the local community to see what they wanted it to say. The text itself was added by a member of the community, and the artists also invited people from the supportive crowd that watched them paint to join them in creating the mural. In this way, the work becomes a stand-in for Floyd's stolen voice, for the artists of the mural, and for the larger community the artists were striving to represent.

4. Anya Shukla, "'A Community Effort': Cadex Herrera Discusses the Mural at the George Floyd Memorial," *The Colorization Collective* (June 16, 2020) <https://www.colorizationcollective.org/blog/a-community-effort-cadex-herrera-discusses-the-mural-at-the-george-floyd-memorial> (accessed January 2025).

5. Multiple posts, *Haring Foundation Blog* (multiple dates) <https://foundationblog.haring.com/topics/activism> (accessed January 2025).

6. Shukla, "'A Community Effort.'"



Andrea Mantegna, Lamentation over the Dead Christ, tempera on canvas, c. 1480–1500 (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan). Image: Public Domain.

Most images memorializing the dead present them as they looked in life, as does the George Floyd mural. However, in then-radical images, two Renaissance artists presented Jesus as a corpse: late-fifteenth century Italian painter Andrea Mantegna and sixteenth-century German painter and printmaker Hans Holbein the Younger. Both present the body of Jesus, after his death, marked with stigmata — the wounds from the large nails used to hang him from a wooden cross. Both also present the body from unexpected angels. Mantegna's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c. 1480–1500) positions the viewer at Jesus's feet, with the corpse highly **foreshortened**. His feet seem almost to jut out of the canvas into the space of the viewer. We see three mourning figures on the left, likely Mary Magdalene, who anointed the body with oil before its burial, Jesus's mother Mary, and John the Evangelist. Christ is delicately haloed, which reminds the viewer of the Christian belief in his divinity. Jesus's calm face, his relaxed brow, suggests that he is now peacefully at rest in death. His wounds are clearly on display, but they seem to have been cleaned and dried. Nothing here suggests

the eventual decomposition of the human body. It is possible that Mantegna made this image — which became quite influential — for his own personal comfort and devotion after the death of two of his sons.[7]



Hans Holbein the Younger, The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb, 1521-22 (Kunstmuseum Basel). Image: Public Domain.

In contrast, Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb* (1521-22) shows a grotesque life-size depiction of the stretched and unnaturally thin body of Jesus lying in his tomb. The figure, shown from the side, is presented as if just within the picture plane. Jesus's right hand, turning green and marked with a wound from one of the nails by which he was attached to the cross, seems — like the feet in Mantegna's image — to press into the viewer's space. Holbein presents Jesus, the central figure of Christianity, with the appearance of an ordinary human corpse. The painting is the actual height and length of a coffin, which is crucial to its disturbing effect.

Holbein, a Christian, would have believed that Jesus was not merely a man, but also the son of God and (at the same time), God himself. Why, then, emphasizes his very human death? The work was likely commissioned by Bonifacius Amerbach, a legal scholar, as a memorial to his parents and his recently-deceased brother Bruno, to be displayed in their tomb.[8] Having lost those close to himself, perhaps Amerbach took comfort in the idea that the god he worshiped suffered the same fate as members of his own family.

A similar tension between the grand and the ordinary lies behind several paintings by American painter Kehinde Wiley. Throughout his career, since his breakout show at the age of 26, "Passing/Posing" at the Brooklyn Museum, Wiley has been seeking to reimagine what images of young Black Americans might look like, asking, "What if he reversed the terms, simultaneously demystifying the Western canon and endowing Black youth with Old Master grandiosity," with the sort of dignity imparted to subjects by painters like Holbein?[9] "Down" is a series of large-scale portraits of young Black men inspired by Holbein's *The Dead Christ in the Tomb*, and he painted a new version of it (Kehinde Wiley, *Lamentation over*

7. "Andrea Mantegna, Lamentation over the Dead Christ," Pinacoteca di Brera (no date) <https://pinacotecabrera.org/en/collezioni/collezione-on-line/lamentation-over-the-dead-christ/> and Steven Zucker and Beth Harris, "Andrea Mantegna, Dead Christ," in *Smarthistory* (October 25, 2022) <https://smarthistory.org/andrea-mantegna-dead-christ/> (accessed January 2025).

8. "Hans Holbein d. J., Der tote Christus im Grab," *Kunstmuseum Basel* (no date) <https://sammlungonline.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultDetailView/result.inline.list.t1.collection_list.$TspTitleLink.link&sp=13&sp=Sartist&sp=SfilterDefinition&sp=0&sp=1&sp=1&sp=SdetailView&sp=165&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=T&sp=0&sp=SdetailList&sp=0&sp=F&sp=Scollection&sp=l969> (accessed January 2025).

9. Julian Lucas, "How the Artist Kehinde Wiley Went from Picturing Power to Building It," *The New Yorker* (December 26, 2022) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/01/02/how-the-artist-kehinde-wiley-went-from-picturing-power-to-building-it> (accessed January 2025).

the Dead Christ, oil on canvas, 2008: see here and here for images) as well as of Mantegna's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (Kehinde Wiley, *Dead Christ in the Tomb*, oil and enamel on canvas, 2007: see here for image).

Wiley references the iconography of death and sacrifice in European art, tracing it across religious, mythological and historical subjects. His paintings show figures struck down, wounded, or dead, referencing iconic paintings of mythical heroes, martyrs, and saints. All of his figures are Black, in contrast to the content of the European works he emulates. Some of Wiley's paintings puts death in full view, asking us to pause, witness, and grieve the senseless deaths of Black men and women. His versions of Renaissance paintings are often massive. His *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* is more than nine feet wide and his T*he Dead Christ in the Tomb* is twelve feet wide, giving them a grandeur even beyond that of the originals. They are also painted in exquisite detail and vivid colors that are quite overwhelming when viewed in person.

These remarkable images cannot be reduced to a straightforward attempt to mourn the victims of anti-Black violence. As David J. Getsy writes:

> When these paintings have been discussed, many critics have rushed to see them as laments about the dangers faced by black youth. While this is undoubtedly part of the context in which these works operate, to see these works only as this misses the ways in which they strategically deploy eroticism to activate and invert the power dynamics that often go uninterrogated in the history of Western art.[10]

The titles of both of these images, borrowed directly from their Renaissance inspirations, suggest that the figures are dead, but there are no signs of violence, no wounds, no onset of the rot that is so troubling in Holbein's unflinching image. Wiley's figures suggest health, not death. Nothing mars the bright white of the t-shirt of the man in his *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*; he might merely be asleep. The figure in Wiley's *Dead Christ in the Tomb* seems to turn to look directly out at the viewer, to make eye contact. Does his open mouth suggest the slack expression of death? Or does he perhaps call out to us? The wall behind him explodes with life, with stunningly rendered leaves and flowers. Perhaps, then, these images challenge narratives of Black death with vibrant images of life.

10. David J. Getsy, "Laying It Down: Heroic Reclining Men and Other Tactical Inversions," *Art Institute of Chicago* (2015) <https://webspaces.artic.edu/~dgetsy/Publications-Files/Publications2-Articles/Getsy-Wiley-Laying%20it%20Down-2015.pdf> (accessed january 2025).



Kathe Kollwitz, Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht), woodcut, 1919-1920 (MoMA, New York City). Photo by Damian Entwistle, CC BY-NC 2.0.

In Kathe Kollwitz's *Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht)* (1919-1920) the grief-stricken mourners that loom directly above the deceased have pale, sunken faces that remind us of their skeletons underneath. The implied line that runs across the composition slopes downwards from left to right, following the increasingly bent figures. Each figure along this line shows a further step in the cycle of human aging, conveyed by their hunched forms and the increasing lines and wrinkles carved into their faces. These declining figures, and the focus of their eyes, guide us to look at the face of the dead. Several figures in the background watch in a mixture of horror and sadness, making a spectacle of the open casket.

Kathe Kollowitz (1867-1945) was a German artist who specialized in printmaking, sculpture, and painting. Her work centers on social issues, motherhood, war, and death. She started out as a painter, but turned to the mediums of sculpture and printmaking after the influence of fellow artist Max Klinger.[11] Kollowitz endured the challenging times of both World Wars, which affected her work, as did the loss of her younger son and later her grandson, both of whom

11. Luise Mahler, "Käthe Kollwitz," *The Museum of Modern Art* (2016) <https://www.moma.org/artists/3201> (accessed January 2025).

died while serving in these respective wars.[12] Death became one of the key subjects of her work, which are harsh in their formal qualities, but nonetheless convey deep empathy for those mourning.[13] Liebkecht, the subject of the work, was an activist politician, a staunch communist and supporter of the rights of workers who voted against German entry into World War I and then tried to overthrow the government to stop the war. His life came to a sudden violent end when counterrevolutionaries shot him while he was under arrest.

In Memoriam Karl Liebkecht was, remarkably, only the second woodcut that Kollwitz made.[14] The decision to make this piece of art as a woodblock print was a deliberate one, but how can we determine this? What woodblock prints generally offer over paintings or sculptures is the ability to make high contrast, 2-D images in multiple copies. This means that it is possible for many people to own original prints of this image, which seems in concert with Liebknecht's own politics. Further, woodcut images can be quite stark and evoke strong reactions, which could be what Kollowitz was seeking. Kollwitz uses broad areas of black ink, broken up by thin white lines to create a somber atmosphere. The extreme contouring of the figures' faces, along with the high contrast achieved with the use of stark white paper and black ink, create a sense of shock accompanying the death of Liebkecht. This image is hard to look away from, making the viewer have to face and accept the reality of what's in front of them — and what awaits us all.

Death as Abstraction

All of the previous examples here of grief in art are representational. That is, they portray some aspect of reality in a more or less straightforward, recognizable way. Even Vorobiev's *Oak Fractured by Lightning*, though it is a symbolic representation of death and grief, is still a clearly recognizable image of a natural scene. Some artists, though, seek to express grief partially or purely in abstraction, in art that does not represent any recognizable images.

Works from Mark Rothko's "Black and Grays" series, like *Untitled (Black on Grey)* (acrylic on canvas, 1969-70, MoMA, New York City: see here for image), are purely non-representational, and yet work to express grief. The stark color palette of dark, muted tones conventionally convey despair and isolation, though these associations are cultural rather than natural. In some societies, white is the color of death and mourning, perhaps inspired by the color of bone, whereas in others, it is black, perhaps suggesting the darkness of the grave. It's likely that Rothko's "Black and Gray" series, produced in the year leading up to the artist's suicide, was deeply influenced by its creator's emotional state. We know this partially because of how open Rothko was about his artistic motivation. In a 1957 interview, Rothko denied any connection to the larger art movement of abstractionism and the concept of himself as a "colorist," saying:

> I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions — tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on — and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate those basic human emotions... The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, then you miss the point![15]

12. "Biography – Käthe Kollwitz Museum Köln," *The Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Köln* (no date) <https://www.kollwitz.de/en/biography> (accessed January 2025).
13. Mahler, "Käthe Kollwitz."
14. "In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht, Kn 159," *The Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Köln* (no date) <https://www.kollwitz.de/en/in-memoriam-karl-liebknecht-kn-159> (accessed January 2025).
15. Mark Rothko, *Writings on Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 119.

A few features of the "Black and Gray" series contribute to their sense of grief and despair. First is not the use of color but the near complete lack of color, in contrast to Rothko's usually colorful work. Typically, Rothko painted an undercoat of color even in his darkest works, but not in the "Black and Gray" series, the name of which emphasizes its grayscale palette, limited to **shades** rather than **hues**. Secondly, Rothko incorporated a border of white in each field of color, typical only to his late career, which separates and isolates each color from one another, rather than allowing them to overlap and blend at the edges. Finally, these last of Rothko's works are, while still fairly sizable, much smaller than his earlier paintings, This lends a more personal feeling to the experience of viewing them. They pull the viewer forward, drawing us into a more intimate interaction with them than his larger, brighter canvases, which tend to push the viewer back several steps. Drawn in close, into their colorless world, the viewer can perhaps feel some fraction of the grief Rothko was living with in the final year of his life.

Artists have also used conceptual art — art in which the idea or concept presented by the artist is considered more important than its appearance or execution — to express profound grief over loss and death. Conceptual art is frequently non representational, or the representational elements are being used to convey complex ideas which defy their traditional meaning. Felix Gonzalez-Torres' *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1987-1990, MoMA, New York City: See here for image) merely presents two ordinary and identical clocks hung directly beside one another. They are to be set to the same time, but eventually, one will slow and stop while the other carries on. This piece is widely understood to memorialize Gonzalez-Torres' relationship with his partner, Ros Laycock, who died from AIDS in 1991.[16] Gonzalez-Torres succumbed to the same disease five years later.

While this work might at first seem quite simple in comparison with the elaborate paintings discussed throughout the chapter, it is nonetheless a beautiful, even profound symbol of the grief that lies in wait for most couples in long-term loving relationships. Each tick of these standard, mass-produced clocks is like the beating of a heart, and so the stopping of one conveys the profound grief and sense of abandonment often experienced by a surviving partner whose heart keeps ticking on alone.

Dealing with Deadly Diseases

Deadly disease outbreaks have long provided opportunities for artists to create and disseminate information and propaganda in the attempt to sway the opinion of the public. During outbreaks of measles in Japan's Edo Period (1603 to 1867), woodblock printing became an affordable way to distribute information to quarantined civilians.[17] The print genre known as *Hashika-e*, or "Measles Prints," was used by businesses and political groups to spread eye-catching propaganda, often in the form of satirical social commentary.

16. Editorial Board, "25 Artworks: 1991–95," *Frieze* (August 16, 2016) <https://www.frieze.com/article/25-artworks-1991-95> (accessed January 2025).

17. Masami Yamada, "Pandemic Objects: Japanese Measles Prints," *The Victoria and Albert Museum* (2021) <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/design-and-society/pandemic-objects-japanese-measles-prints?srsltid=AfmBOoqBfxZPcCgPi9RbP8PKb5p26go1KuWWv3TktX80_GMaIeJSeZv4> (accessed October 3, 2024).


麻疹退治
○きん物
房事 一へ湯
酒 一きう一そだ
川魚一梅干一ねぎ
牛房一とうなす
そら豆 一里いも一志いたけ
ろうき物一こんにゃく
○よき物
かんひやう一ふんさん
ゆり一とうかん一たこん
とぜう一ろんとん一ふ
あづき一さとう一びい
いんげん一たくいん
やだ一なし
某種
昔ばなし
亞木 溪小版

Utagawa Yoshifuji, Defeating the Measles Demon, woodblock print, 1862 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Image: Public Domain.

Utagawa Yoshifuji's print *Defeating the Measles Demon* (1862) turns the fight against disease into a literal battle. Along with a high death rate, measles epidemics affected the economy, threatening the livelihood of any business that involved close social contact or the sale of alcohol.[18] In this example of *Hashika-e*, owners of such threatened businesses are depicted as a team of heroes attacking the Measles Demon. The heroes, some in the short robes of workers and others dressed in fashionable *kimonos* (formal robes tied at the belt with a wide sash), descend on the massive, rash-covered demon. They appear in a flurry of action poses. The demon, with haggard features and claw-like toes, falls like a giant tree under their coordinated attack. The print's action is centered on the page, almost centrifugal, with a churning, spinning motion like a whirling dance made of fluttering silk and cotton.

Most of the business owners in this print are depicted with heads that suit their profession. The figure in a lapis blue kimono toward the center of the right side represents a sake vendor, with his head shaped like a red sake cask. The more casually-dressed figure with a wooden bucket for a head may represent a public bathhouse owner. At the upper right is a geisha (a female entertainer trained in singing, dance, musical instruments, and the art of conversation, who also, at times, performed sex work) who attacks the demon with her iconic wooden pillow. Given the expectations that geishas would always present as demure and elegant, is it particularly significant — and perhaps intended as particularly humorous — that she rolls up her fancy sleeves to get in the fight. Each of these attacks are somewhat comical, but the business owners' collective fury is enough to bring down the giant demon.

Hashika-e often depicted the public's distrust of those who profited from epidemics, so the two figures in this image who are defending the demon are likely to be a doctor and a pharmacist. The pharmacist, at the lower left, seems to throw a figure, wearing a white medicine bag in place of its head, over the demon to shelter it. With the rising distrust of doctors and their expensive remedies, the woodblock printmaking industry thrived by selling *Hashika-e* that included written instructions for home remedies, magical healing rites, and advertisements for counterfeit medicines.

Like "Measles Prints" in Japan, magazines and newspapers were an affordable way to disseminate information and propaganda in Europe and the US during disease outbreaks. The art was similarly graphic, and was reproduced with woodblock printing, lithography, and metal etching. During the London Cholera outbreak of 1866, illustrator George Pinwell drew a cartoon that directed blame for the ongoing deaths at the local government.

18. Yamada, "Pandemic Objects."



DEATH'S DISPENSARY.

OPEN TO THE POOR, GRATIS, BY PERMISSION OF THE PARISH.

George John Pinwell, Death's Dispensary, engraving print, 1866 (Fun Magazine, London). Image: Public Domain.

Part of the cartoon's title reads "Open to the poor, gratis [free], by permission of the parish." "Parish" here refers not to a church but to local government, which Pinwell implies should have been caring for the poor. Pinwell's cartoon, which was published in *Fun Magazine*, was likely a response to the findings of epidemiologist John Snow, who discovered the link between the cholera epidemic and city drinking water being tainted with improperly managed sewage.[19]

In *Death's Dispensary*, the skeletal specter of Death pumps water for the poor of London. The crown Death wears is likely a reference to "King Cholera," one of the names given to the disease in Europe.[20] The woman and children who come to gather water have gaunt faces that almost look like skulls; their cheekbones and chin bones are prominent and there are dark shadows around the woman's eye sockets. Their poverty is evidenced by the children's bare feet, and by how the woman's toes poke out of her worn shoes. These struggling figures, downtrodden by poverty, have come for life-giving water but, with Death operating the pump, they will instead contract a deadly disease. Such advocacy eventually resulted in improvements in London's sewer and drinking water infrastructure, which led to a dramatic reduction in deaths, and eventually the eradication of cholera in the city.

19. "George John Pinwell, Death's Dispensary," *Public Health Image Library (PHIL)* <https://phil.cdc.gov/details.aspx?pid=5292> (accessed January 2025)

20. Sheffield Libraries Archives and Information, "Sources for the Study of Cholera in Sheffield," *Sheffield City Council* (2015), 4, <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-local-studies/research/cholera%20study%20guide%20v1-6.pdf> (Accessed October 3, 2024).



Friedrich Graetz, "The Kind of 'Assisted Emigrant' We Can Not Afford to Admit," color lithography, 1883 (Puck Magazine). Image: Public Domain

While printed art could be used to criticize those in power during disease outbreaks, it was also used to target specific ethnic groups as the bearers of disease, such as the next work, which was published in *Puck Magazine* in the US. In response to an outbreak of cholera in Great Britain that was believed to have come from British-controlled Egypt, Austrian immigrant Friedrich Graetz created a cartoon captioned, "The kind of 'assisted emigrant' we can not afford to admit."[21] In the image, a skeletal figure sitting on the prow of a ship bearing the British flag holds a scythe over its shoulder. The figure wears a western fantasy of Turkish clothing, including a red fez hat and a short red vest. Wrapped around its legs is a tattered sheet that resembles traditional baggy Turkish trousers. The edge of the sheet is labeled "Cholera." The perspective of the image makes the figure seem huge in comparison to all of the tiny humans on the shore.

As the British ship approaches the shores of New York, a rowboat confronts it, filled with men from the Board of Health who are ready to douse the ship in carbolic acid, a poisonous chemical that was then used as a disinfectant. Lining the

21. Friedrich Graetz, "The Kind of Assisted Emigrant We Can Not Afford to Admit," *Historical Society of Pennsylvania Digital Library* (2017) <https://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/objects/11758> (accessed October 3, 2024).

shore are angry Americans, shouting and waving clubs. Aimed at the ship are canon-like bottles along a wall labeled "Defensive Battery," filled with more disinfectant. Within the defensive wall is a round building labeled "Castle Garden," which was a major immigration center in New York.[22]

Fear of death by disease during major epidemics can manifest as fear of foreigners, and lithographs like "Assisted Emigrant…" could magnify or direct that fear in any era. In recent years, we have seen fear of pandemic diseases similarly weaponized against a range of ethnicities and nationalities. Such images argue that the people themselves are, in essence, a disease, and such dehumanization often leads not only to racist laws but also to direct violence.



NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on National Mall, color transparency, 1996 (Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington DC).
Image: No Copyright – United States
From 35mm color slide.

In contrast, the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* was created to foster understanding and acceptance of a minority population that became associated with a communicable disease that was deadly at the time. The first reported case of what would later be named AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) was in 1981. The disease (which can be transmitted by unprotected sexual contact, as well as through blood transfusions, dirty needles, transplants, and other means),

22. National Park Service, "Castle Garden Emigrant Depot," *National Park Service* (2024) <https://www.nps.gov/cacl/learn/historyculture/castle-garden-emigrant-depot.htm> (accessed October 3, 2024).

devastated the gay community. Indeed, a Queer San Francisco newspaper referred to it as "Gay Men's Pneumonia."[23] It peaked in the early 1990s, and by 2000, almost 450,000 people died of it in the US alone, a highly disproportionate number of whom were Gay men.[24] Many figures in positions of high power — particularly in the administration of then-president Ronald Reagan, which treated the disease as if it were a joke, disregarded the disease and its devastating effects while openly displaying their homophobia.[25]

Cleve Jones, a gay rights activist in San Francisco, founded the NAMES Project Foundation with a group of friends to memorialize all those they had lost to this disease. This was not designed to be a private memorial, though — far from it. In 1987, during the National March for Gay and Lesbian Lives, a group of volunteers from the NAMES Project Foundation displayed a quilt made from 1,920 panels on the National Mall in front of the U.S. Capitol Building.[26] This installation of textile art displayed the names of LGBTQ+ people who had died from AIDS. As Julie Rhoad, a later president of the NAMES Project wrote:

> Cleve Jones wanted the Quilt to be a weapon. A weapon that said, "we are going to break the barriers of stigma; we're going to fight homophobia." In '87, bearing witness to that display was a remarkable moment. Two thousand panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt arrived on the National Mall where they were not welcome, and they provided visual evidence that [these people] were actually loved by moms and dads, by heterosexuals no less."[27]

After this first installation, the quilt toured the country to raise awareness of the scale of devastation the AIDS epidemic was causing to families, friends, and lovers.[28] The quilt gained panels as it toured, and raised money for AIDS support. The above photograph from 1996 shows the final display of the installation in its complete form, again on the National Mall, where the project began. By 1996, the quilt had grown to 40,000 panels. Today the AIDS Memorial Quilt has almost 50,000 panels that include the names of more than 110,000 people who have died from AIDS.

23. "A Timeline of HIV and AIDS," *HIV.gov*, <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline#year-1981> (accessed January 2025).

24. "HIV and AIDS — United States, 1981-2000," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (no date) <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5021a2.htm> (accessed January 2025).

25. German Lopez, "The Reagan Administration's Unbelievable Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic," *Vox* (December 1, 2016) <https://www.vox.com/2015/12/1/9828348/ronald-reagan-hiv-aids> (accessed January 2025).

26. Cameron R. Sandlin, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt on the National Mall," *Smithsonian Institution Archives* (2020) <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/aids-memorial-quilt-national-mall> (accessed October 3, 2024).

27. "The Names Project Memorial Quilt," *Out in the Archives: Gender and Sexuality Collections at Georgia State University* <https://exhibits.library.gsu.edu/out-in-the-archives/hiv-aids/the-names-project-memorial-quilt/> (accessed January 2025).

28. National AIDS Memorial, "Activist Beginnings," *National AIDS Memorial website* (no date) <https://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt-history> (Accessed October 3, 2024).



AIDS Memorial Quilt 1, photograph, (Washington D.C., United States). Photo by Afagen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Each panel is made from multiple smaller pieces that contain the names of the dead, along with images and text that celebrate each life. Names are scrawled in marker, embroidered, appliqued, and sewn on in buttons. Some squares are made by experienced quilters, but most are made by novice artists, which gives the installation considerable emotional weight. The domestic form the memorial takes recalls the act of caring for someone or being cared for. A quilt is what a grandparent might make for a baby grandchild, and it can be the blanket that covers a body after death.

The *AIDS Memorial Quilt* is a powerful use of art to sway public opinion during a deadly epidemic. The shocking size of this memorial is meant to impress on the viewer how many people have been affected by the death of someone with AIDS. The quilt resembles a graveyard laid out in a grid pattern in front of the Capitol Building. The quilt was part of a larger effort, including AIDS walk-a-thons and other efforts, to educate the wider public about the disease and its devastating consequences. These eventually changed public opinion and public policy, and laid the groundwork for both medical and legal protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community — and for everyone else, as this disease is indiscriminate, and anyone can, of course, contract it.



Arnold Böcklin, Die Pest (The Plague), tempera on wood, 1898, Kunstmuseum Basel, Depositum der Gottfried Keller-Stiftung, Bundesamt für Kultur, Bern 1902. Image: Public Domain.

Many cultures personify death, thereby giving this abstract force a body and even, at times, a personality. What should death itself look like? *Plague*, an 1898 painting by Swiss symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin, shows one such physical embodiment of death. Here, death rides through a narrow city street atop a winged dragon-like creature that exhales clouds of disease. In this large painting, which is almost five feet tall, a horrifying figure looms over the viewer, due

to its placement high up on the central axis. A trail of smoke and devastation fills the background. The townsfolk are overwhelmed with grief and agony as they collapse in the street. These elements work together to create a suffocating feeling within the painting, as if death and disease are closing in on the viewer.

At the time of *Plague*'s creation, the Black Death or bubonic plague had not been seen in centuries, but Europe was experiencing widespread deaths from cholera and typhoid fever, both of which affected Böcklin personally. He lost six children in his lifetime, two of whom died from each illness.[29] Böcklin painted this work in his seventies, while struggling with illness and declining health, and he died before finishing it. Death was very much a looming presence in his life. Within *Plague*, it's clear to see the inevitability of death, and the fear associated with it. Through Böcklin's portrayal of Death, though, we can understand his perception of death as an impartial force. In his depiction, it is clear Death — hollow-eyed, gaunt, and grey-green — takes no pleasure, nor has any remorse; though it leaves a trail of desolation, it is merely an irresistible force of nature.

29. Eva-Betina Krems "The Inevitability of 'The Black Death': Böcklin's 'The Plague' of 1898," *Universität Münster* (no date) <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Religion-und-Politik/en/aktuelles/schwerpunkte/epidemien/04_Thema_Bilder_Metaphern_Allegorien.shtml> (accessed October 2024) and "Arnold Böcklin," *Gallery 19C* (no date) <https://www.gallery19c.com/artists/233-arnold-bocklin/overview/ (accessed October 2024).



Cristóbal Rojas Poleo, The Misery, 1886 (National Art Gallery, Caracas, Venezuela). Image: Public domain.

While works of art like the AIDS Memorial Quilt can memorialize the large-scale effects of deadly diseases, art can also express individual and personal tragedies. Tuberculosis (TB) has not always been an easily treatable disease. In the nineteenth century, TB was a leading cause of death in Europe and North America, killing one in seven people. It caused devastation all around the world, and was depicted in many different ways in artwork. Cristóbal Rojas Poleo approached this sorrowful subject through a depiction of an individual loss. His *The Misery* (1889) depicts a husband sitting next to a bed in which lies his wife, recently dead of TB. His face is distorted into a complex, ambiguous expression that seems to contain shock, anger, and grief. The palette of the painting is limited to dull, muted, even sickly colors, but for the ruddy tones of the husband's face and hands, which suggest his sturdy health, in sharp contrast to the yellowing, waxy skin, painted with green undertones, of his dead wife. His gaze is unfixed, unseeing.

The sparse state of the room — with rickety furniture, bare, dirty, stained walls, and worn wooden floors — indicates that the couple is poor. The bedding is frayed and tattered, suggesting that they can't afford even simple necessities. Perhaps the man's anger and frustration reflect the knowledge that poverty was a leading cause of the spread of TB, and also would have prevented them from affording the care needed to save his wife's life. Here, then, tragedy sits upon tragedy, sorrow on sorrow.

Victorian Post-mortem Photography. Image: Public Domain

Victorian Post-mortem Photography. Image: Public Domain.

The invention of photography created a new way for grievers to memorialize the dead: postmortem photography.[30] Also known as death portraits, these images became increasingly popular as Victorian nurseries were plagued with many diseases like measles, scarlet fever, rubella, and diphtheria, all of which could be fatal for infants and children. While these death portraits might seem morbid to many people today, when photography was new, uncommon, and expensive, these images were often grieving parents' only pictures of their beloved children.

This photograph depicts a pair of twins. One appears alive, with softly open eyes. The other, whose eyes are closed, is surrounded by flowers, indicating that this baby has passed away. In early photographs, which required long exposures, the dead are often captured in sharper detail due to their lack of movement, while the living tend to be a bit blurry due to their motion. The photographs, unsettling though they might be, give a sense of love of a mourning family for the family member they have lost.

Crossing Over: Funeral Rites and Rituals

The belief that souls cross over into an afterlife is fundamental to many cultures, and is often reflected in art. The Dogon people of the Sangha region in Mali exemplify a serious approach to this task. They hold a funerary feast service for Dogon men spanning six days, referred to as *Dama*. For elements of this feast, Dogon dancers wear costumes and masks. *Kanaga* masks are the most popular of these, and those who put them on "cavort, jump, and twirl on the stage in small groups,"[31] performing dances that "prove themselves real *sagatara*, strong young men, which is why this mask is so popular"[32] (see here for image). The Dogon people believe that dancing while wearing a *Kanaga* mask aids the spirit of the person who has died to cross over into the afterlife. The effort to move a soul to rest with the ancestors is also intended to protect the village, ensuring the safety of everyone living there by making sure that the spirit is not lingering and causing problems.

Members of the *Awa* group, a society of men holding ritual and political power in Dogon society, organize the *Dama* and make and wear all ceremonial masks. *Awa* has influence over many practices, including funerary rituals. The *Kanaga* masks — made with natural dyes and organic materials like wood, fiber, and hide — stand tall, with red and yellow tassels hanging down to cover the backs of the dancers' heads. The faces of *Kagana* masks are rectangular, with two vertical indentations pierced with triangular shaped eye holes. As the dancers move, the masks move too, so the motion of the masks contributes to the production of the dance. The masks serve a crucial role in the *Dama* and stand apart from

30. "Post-Mortem Photography: An Overview," "*So Once Were We*": *Death in Early America*, *University of Michigan Clements Library* (April 30, 2021) <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/death-in-early-america/> (accessed January 2025).

31. "Catalogue 18: Kanaga Mask," *African Brilliance: A Diplomat's Sixty Years of Collecting*, *Palmer Museum of Art* (2020) <https://exhibitions.psu.edu/s/african-brilliance/page/catalogue-18>.

32. Walter E. A. Van Beek, "Matter in Motion: A Dogon Kanaga Mask," *Religions: Religion, Ritual and Ritualistic Objects*, 9, ed. Albertina Nugteren (2018): 264 <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090264>.

other ceremonial masks. A key element to identify a *Kanga* mask is the double-barred cross. This is always above the face, with elements attached to the horizontal lines.[33] One theory is that this is representative of both creation and regeneration.[34] Another theory is that the bars are representative of serpents. This suggests a connection with a myth of the origin of death, which states that originally, instead of dying when the time came, elderly community members would travel to the countryside to transform into serpents, to live eternally in their new form.[35]

33. George Corbin, *Native Arts of North America, Africa, and the South Pacific* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 125.

34. Suzanne Preston Blier. "Words about Words about Icons: Iconologology and the Study of African Art," *Art Journal* 47, no. 2 (1988): 76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/777060>.

35. Corbin, *Native Arts*, 125.



[Malagan figure, wood, vegetable fiber, pigment, and shell (turbo petholatus opercula), north coast of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea 1882–83 C.E., Photo: (© Trustees of the British Museum, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Many cultural practices indicate a desire for connection with a spirit world. This is often seen through funerary rites and rituals. The post-funerary *Malagan* service of the people of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, is a feast celebrating the life of a community member who has died.[36] Artisans spend a vast amount of time in preparation to make figures for the ceremony. The craftsmen are also community members familiar with the deceased person's clan.[37] *Malagan* ceremonies are the last celebration to take place within their funerary service, after the completion of the mourning period. The ceremony can happen years after the person's death, which allows the artist working according to the clan's directions time to create the figure, which then stands in for the deceased individual during *Malagan*, acting as a skin for the spirit.

Not all *Malagans* look the same. Some are poles, like this one. Others are masks, woven circular mats, or wood boards. Some are even dugout canoes that typically have a carved figure inside. Whatever the design, they all serve the same function: a skin for the spirit during the end of their funerary service. They thereby allow the dead person to attend their own celebration as the guest of honor, while the community collectively commemorates them. The *Malagan* figure is discarded or dismantled at the conclusion of the ceremony. This act is crucial and holds an array of symbolism. *Malagans* serve solely for a single *Malagan* service and are discarded thereafter. Dismantling the figure reflects the process of death and decay.[38]

Organic materials — wood, pigment, vegetable fiber, and shell — are all used to make *Malagans*. Since the figures are to be destroyed, the materials are natural and local, down to the red, yellow, and black details that are made from natural pigments. When the *Malagan* breaks down, the materials reenter the earth. This process mirrors that of the deceased's cycle of life and death.

Malagan figures contain symbolic imagery tied to the clan's religious beliefs, including representations of specific ancestors. The head at the bottom of this figure, for example, is a rock cod, a type of fish that is protandrous, meaning that they are born male and then become female as they age, which the people of New Ireland see as symbolic of the matrilineal structure of their community.[39]

36. "Burial – Malagan ceremony, New Ireland," *Australian Museum* (February 11, 2018) <https://australian.museum/about/history/exhibitions/death-the-last-taboo/burial-malagan-ceremony-new-ireland/> (accessed January 2025).

37. "Malagan figures," *Denver Art Museum* (no date) <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/edu/object/malagan-figures> (accessed November 2024).

38. Susanne Küchler, "Malangan: Objects, Sacrifice and the Production of Memory," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 4 (1988): 625–637.

39. "Malagan figures," Denver Art Museum.



Anubis attending Sennedjem's mummy, c. 1292–1187 BCE (Tomb of Sennedjem). Image: Public domain.

Much of ancient Egyptian religion — most famously — was dedicated to preparing the dead for their journey into the divine world they believed existed after death, and providing for them once they had successfully arrived. Egyptians believed this required correct performance of rituals, including burial ceremonies, which they believed were presided over by several deities, such as Anubis, god of funerary practices and care of the dead. He is depicted, as in this image, with the head of a jackal on the body of a man. In the earliest myths, Anubis ate the dead — as jackals do — but eventually he came to be seen instead as an important figure in the process of conducting souls to the afterlife, and was credited with embalming the god Osiris, lord of the dead, and thereby creating the first mummy.[40]

Here, we see Anubis preparing Sennedjem in an image that decorated a wall of a tomb housing the bodies of Sennedjem, his wife Iynefert, and their children and grandchildren.[41] Inscriptions identify Sennedjem as a "servant in the place of truth," a title given to the workers who constructed the important tombs of the pharaohs in the Valley of Kings.

40. "Egyptian Mythology," *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*, ed. David Leeming (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online version 2006) <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780195156690.001.0001/acref-9780195156690-e-481> (accessed January 2025).

41. Hany Farid and Samir Farid, "Unfolding Sennedjem's Tomb," *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* (Spring 2001): 1–8, 1.

It is possible that Sennedjem and his family and their co-workers built and decorated this tomb, which is unusually lavish for people who were not royalty or nobility.[42]

The hieroglyphic text that accompanies this image identifies Sennedjem as a fierce supporter of Osiris who fought for him in his life, and asks that all those deities who attend to the rituals of the dead help his ba, his soul, enter into the House of Osiris. This image was part of a large-scale program of texts and images that covered the walls of Sennedjem's tomb. Just beside it, Anubis appears again, now leading Sennedjem to meet Osiris and be welcomed into the afterlife.[43]



Priests of Anubis performing the opening of the mouth ritual, Book of the Dead of Hunefer, papyrus, 1275 B.C.E. (British Museum). Image: Public Domain.

In addition to a tomb, and the sarcophagus it contains, ancient Egyptians believed that the dead needed a copy of

42. Farid and Farid, "Unfolding Sennedjem's Tomb," 1.

43. Farid and Farid, "Unfolding Sennedjem's Tomb," 5.

the *Book of the Dead* to be buried with them. This book, written on scrolls made of papyrus reeds, was intended as a manual on how to get to the afterlife by successfully passing through a series of trials. Many books of the dead existed, with authors varying the content. The earliest known versions of these texts are the so-called Pyramid Texts, which had been only available to royalty and consisted of spells and prayers meant to protect the dead in the afterlife. Eventually, the texts were available to any who could afford to have a scroll of the *Book of the Dead* produced for them, but these remained only affordable to wealthy individuals.[44]

This specific image depicts an Opening of the Mouth Ceremony. There are multiple figures presenting objects towards the mummy of Hunefer, a scribe and administrator to a pharaoh. It is possible that this royal scribe wrote the text of this copy, with which he would eventually be buried. The image shows the mummy's white linen wrappings as well as the mask, which may be presented with gold paint. As with the image of Sennedjem's mummy, again we seem to see the jackal-headed Anubis attending to the details of the ritual, but scholars now believe that this image is intended to show a masked priest dressed as this god.[45] During the ceremony, various gestures would be performed on the corpse that were believed to bring life back into it. One of the most common actions was for priests to touch the face of the corpse with sacred objects. In Hunefer's book, such sacred artifacts include a vessel, scepters, and a pipe. The purpose of doing such was to stimulate the functions and senses of the mummy: breath, taste, sight, and so on.[46]

This work utilizes contrasting colors in order to emphasize the focal point: the mummy. A majority of this piece is in warm shades of beige (the color of the unpainted papyrus and the female figures) and brown (for male figures). This makes the cool blue of the mummy mask — probably intended as a reference to the rich blue stone lapis lazuli — stand out. The contrast is further accentuated by the brightest parts of the piece being directly around the mummy. The figures extending their offerings also draw our attention to Hunefer by creating a series of implied lines from their arms towards his head. He is also presented in hieratic scale, depicted as larger than all the figures including the priest dressed as Anubis, standing behind him.

Across several images, this scroll depicts the full process of Hunefer's successful induction into the afterlife. It would have perhaps been a comfort for him during his life, and was seen as essential for his soul after his death. Each aspect of the burial ritual had to be conducted correctly for him to enter into the eternal joy that ancient Egyptians believed would await the virtuous in the next world.

44. Kellie Warren, *Book of the Dead: A Guidebook to the Afterlife. American Research Center in Egypt* (no date) <https://arce.org/resource/book-dead-guidebook-afterlife/> (accessed March 12, 2025

45. "papyrus, Book of the Dead of Hunefer," *The British Museum* (no date) <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA9901-5> (accessed January 2025).

46. Maria Rosa Valdesogo, "The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony on a 'Living Image'?" *María Rose Valdesogo: Egyptologist* (August 13, 2020) <https://www.mariarosavaldesogo.com/the-opening-of-the-mouth-ceremony-on-a-living-image/> (accessed January 2025).



Tomb Painting of Nebamun's Funerary Banquet (Ancient Egypt), fresco, 18th Dynasty (1350 BCE), Thebes, Egypt. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

A tomb painting showing the funerary banquet of Nebamun, another high-status scribe and official, offers a vivid window into ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife, where death is seen not as an ending but as a gateway to an idealized existence. This work shows a grand banquet meant to bring Nebamun eternal comfort and joy. Such scenes, full of feasting, music, and dancing, were common in tombs to ensure that the deceased could enjoy earthly pleasures forever. Egyptians believed that the afterlife continued the best parts of life, where joys were enhanced and made eternal. By including these scenes, the living aimed to provide for the deceased's needs in the next world.

The painting captures both the physical beauty of the event and the idea of a perfect world beyond, where earthly pleasures are everlasting. Musicians and dancers are arranged in two registers, evoking a sense of joy intertwined with the theme of death. In the upper register, men and women sit together, attended by a standing servant-girl, symbolizing their continued presence in the world beyond. The lower register features four musicians — two presented in a rare full-face view — seated on the ground as two dancers perform, bridging the gap between the living and the deceased. A neighboring panel depicts more musicians and the hieroglyphs above them provide the lyrics of the song the sing:

> The earth-god has caused
> his beauty to grow in every body...

the channels are filled with water anew,
and the land is flooded with love of him.[47]

Enriched by fifteen vertical registers of hieroglyphs, the scene adds layers of cultural significance that emphasize the afterlife.[48] The figures are painted in vibrant colors, with overlapping forms that suggest a communal bond that transcends mortality. Throughout the tomb's imagery, Nebamun is depicted with particular prominence, symbolizing his enduring status and reflecting the Egyptian belief that the afterlife is a joyful continuation of mortal existence,[49] allowing him to experience a world filled with happiness, prosperity, and harmony forever.



Paracas Mummy Bundles, D-Stanley. Photo: CC BY 2.0.

47. "A feast for Nebamun," *Google Arts and Culture* (no date) <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/a-feast-for-nebamun-the-top-half-of-a-scene-from-the-tomb-chapel-of-nebamun/MgGAnWLJymZxMA?hl=en> (accessed January 2025).

48. "Tomb of Nebamun (Thebes)," *British Museum* (no date) <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37986> (accessed November 2024).

49. The British Museum, "Paintings from the Tomb-chapel of Nebamun," *Smarthistory* <https://smarthistory.org/paintings-from-the-tomb-chapel-of-nebamun/> (accessed November 2024).

Although death is often perceived as a finality, an end-of-life event, Egyptians were not along among ancient (and modern) cultures in viewing death as a transformative transition to new life. In the early twentieth century, three burial sites were excavated on the Paracas Peninsula along the coast of modern Peru. Archeologists had found the Necropolis of Wari Kayán, containing hundreds of mummy bundles, which are seated, mummified bodies wrapped in masterfully woven textiles.[50] The Paracas culture had no written language that has survived, as was common in Ancient Andean cultures. What information we have therefore comes from their beautiful architecture and artifacts, which bore great spiritual significance to the people who created them. The symbolism of the burial arrangement and the elaborate designs on textiles used in them suggest their purpose: a restoration of life through "mythic transformation" from corpse to member of the ancestral community.[51]

In total, 429 bundles were excavated at Wari Kayán, 65 of which contain particularly elaborate artifacts and textiles, suggesting a social hierarchy in which social leaders are bundled with more wealth.[52] The bundles consist of many layers of woven textiles and garments wrapped around the mummified bodies. They are placed in mass burials, forming a community of the dead. Food offerings of yuca, peanuts, and maize surround the bundles, suggesting a belief that bodies required — and could bring — sustenance into the afterlife, contributing to the ancestral community and land with nutrients. The symbolism of this offering could describe "the deceased as a fertile producer or controller of different zones."[53] This motif of the corpse as a "fertile producer" can also be seen in the seed-like shape of the bundles themselves. The mummies are wrapped in layers and buried much like seeds planted in the earth, whereby the corpses might become growing ancestors and providers. The wide variety of garment sizes that wrap individual mummies could also reflect this. Ranging from miniature (9 cm long) to gigantic (34 m long),[54] they suggest the growth of the corpse, its transformation into a mythical ancestor.

The textiles that wrap the mummies contain repeated figures and symbols that support the motif of death as a transformation and nutrient to the ancestral community. Multispecies hybrid animal figures and repeated geometric designs suggest that the imagery exists not in reality but among "the spirit realms"[55] after death. One such image, for example, shows a figure that twists its body backward, grimacing, resembling a corpse.

50. Mary Brown, *The Emergence of the Bird in Andean Paracas Art: c. 900 BCE – 200 CE* (City University of New York: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2016), 2.

51. Mary Frame, "Blood, Fertility, and Transformation: Interwoven Themes in the Paracas Necropolis Embroideries," in *Ritual Sacrifice in Ancient Peru*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson and Anita G. Cook (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001): 55-92, 57.

52. Rebecca Stone-Miller, *Art of the Andes: From Chavín to Inca*, second edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 54.

53. Stone-Miller, *Art of the Andes*, 54.

54. Frame, *Blood, Fertility, and Transformation*, 73.

55. Stone-Miller, *Art of the Andes: From Chavín to Inca*, 58.



Backbent skeletal "corpse" figure with tunic and head ornament "Paracas border, flying man detail" by Pete Tillman is marked with CC0 1.0. To view the terms, visit https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/?ref=openverse.

These back-bending figures are often shown as part of a series of transformative mythical animal figures with overlapping traits. Across many textiles, the figures bend forward, acquiring head ornaments and tunics until they stand straight, creating a sequence and demonstrating a gradual transformation.[56] The bent, skeletal figures transition into mythical animal hybrids in elaborate costume, surrounded by plantlike motifs and seeds, representing the transformation of the bundled corpses after death into the ancestral community.

56. Frame, *Blood, Fertility, and Transformation*, 66.



Community of multispecies animal hybrids, surrounded by plant motifs "The Paracas Textile," profzucker. Photo: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

The skeletal figures are often depicted with a blade, which, coupled with their vulnerable back-bending position, implies bloodletting and self-sacrifice.[57] This likely has ritual significance, along with being representational of "fertile fluids"[58] in the form of blood, supplying nutrients to the ancestors.

Although no written primary source confirms these theories regarding the belief system behind the Paracas Mummy Bundles, common symbolism throughout the textiles and necropolis burials reveals a convincing explanation. Death was seen as a provider of new life, a transformation, and a nutrient to the ancestors. It was, to their creators, a transition to a new community, "reinforcing the individual's contribution to society and spirituality,"[59] rather than a grim, sorrowful fate.

57. Frame, *Blood, Fertility, and Transformation*, 56.

58. Frame, *Blood, Fertility, and Transformation*, 65.

59. Stone-Miller, *Art of the Andes: From Chavín to Inca*, 60.



The Cremation of Peshwa Madhavrao I (officiated 1761-1772) and the Sati of his Wife Ramabai, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, circa 1772-1775. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles). Image: Public Domain. https://collections.lacma.org/node/238882

Unlike the embalmed mummy burials of ancient Egypt, designed to house the souls of the dead for all eternity, or the Paracas mummy bundles of ancient Peru, which preserve the dead as part of their journey to a spirit world, in Hinduism, the dead are often cremated. *The Cremation of Peshwa Madhavrao I (officiated 1761-1772) and the Sati of his Wife Ramabai* is a tragic piece. The work depicts a Hindu funeral rite called *antyesti*. The *antyesti* is the last *samskara*, or event, of a person's life. In this practice, the body of the deceased is cremated on a funeral pyre, usually within a few hours of their death. Before the body can be cremated, it is cleaned and adorned with flowers. While the fire is being lit, mantras are recited to guide the body parts of the deceased back to their respective deities.[60] Once the body and pyre are prepped, the body is carried by friends and family to the cremation site. The purpose of the cremation is to return the dead to the elements from whence it was born. Around three days after cremation, the ashes are then spread over a sacred river. For ten to thirteen days after spreading the ashes, the family of the deceased is considered impure and must not partake in pleasure-seeking activities.[61]

60. Antyeshti Samskar Committee, *Hindu Antyeshti Samskar* (Houston: Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, Inc, 2009), 2.

61. "antyeṣṭi," A *Dictionary of Hinduism*, ed. W. J. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009).

The particular *antyesti* depicted in the image is that of Madhavrao I, ninth Peshwa — prime minister — of the Maratha Confederacy. The Maratha Confederacy was a political group started in 1674 in India to challenge the reigning power, the Mughal Empire. Madhavrao I became afflicted with tuberculosis and passed away. His body was cremated on the bank of the Bhima river, where grief-stricken citizens gathered to mourn their Peshwa and pay their final respects. During the ceremony, Madhavrao I's wife chose to join him on the funeral pyre and commit *sahamarana* — self immolation of a *sati* (a "'true' or 'virtuous wife'") on her husband's funeral pyre.[62] According to Hindu belief, "she ensures him a good rebirth by wiping out the consequences of his (or his entire family's) bad karmic actions." Although recorded as an option in ancient epics, becoming a *satī* in this ritual sense has always been regarded as an exceptional rather than a usual practice for widows

The artist uses contrast between the complementary colors of the dull blue-green river and bright, carnelian flames of the pyre. This creates a focal point at the center of the piece and highlights the figures burning atop it. The river also serves an additional purpose: it creates negative space around the focal point, which provides breathing space between the hatching and detailing on the funeral pyre and the figures in the foreground. Rather than the foreground figures serving individual purposes, they seem to blend together, creating a pattern-like effect that frames the focal point. The crowd is composed of people who are young and old, male and female, humble and grand, but they are united in their outpouring of grief at the loss of their leader. Despite the onlookers being in the foreground, their scale is much smaller than that of the two figures on the pyre, further emphasizing the importance of the husband and wife being cremated. The amount of emphasis placed on the two figures shows how important the funeral practice is to the culture. The image presents the funeral as a ceremony that not only honors the dead, but also strengthens the community of the bereaved.

62. "sati," A *Dictionary of Hinduism*, ed. W. J. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009).



Kokdu Wooden Figures, picture taken November 30th, 2014. Photo: Littlelixie, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Not all images associated with death are grim and grief-filled, though. Many cultures have celebrations of and cheery send-offs for the dead. In Korea, such practices have traces as far back as the fifteenth century, when *askkoktu* (or *kokdu*) figures were first used as colorful ornaments for the *sangyeo*, or funeral bier, on which the dead is placed for funeral rituals before burial.[63] The figures were provided as entertainers, as clowns and musicians who would perform novelty acts and play songs as they accompanied the spirits of the dead to the afterlife. While their "gaiety seems incongruous with mourning, they express a culture's deep desire that the dead enter the next world surrounded by joy — and its appreciation of the fleeting nature of all experience."[64]

Eventually, just about all walks of life came to be represented in the form of these charming figures: "aristocrats and civil servants, soldiers, monks and wizards, servants and acrobats, women and children."[65] The design of the figures reveals their intent. This pair has gentle, smiling faces. They seem friendly and welcoming. They are draped with brightly colored clothing, signifying their status as entertainers. Their calm, comforting vibe suggests the love and consideration that were poured into them as gifts for the deceased, to care for them on their journey into the afterlife. Few *kukdu* figures survive because they were traditionally burned after use, and the practice ceased in the twentieth century,[66] but those that remain are a reminder that death need not be a cause of grief.

63. "KOKDU — Companions of the Soul," *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde Leipzig* <https://grassi-voelkerkunde.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/kokdu/> (accessed January 2025).

64. "Korean Funerary Figures: Companions for the Journey to the Other World," *The Fowler Museum at UCLA* (2010) <https://fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/korean-funerary-figures-companions-for-the-journey-to-the-other-world/> (accessed January 2025)

65. "KOKDU — Companions of the Soul."

66. "KOKDU — Companions of the Soul."



Out of respect for practitioners of Palo, we have produced a digital image based on a series of photographs and drawings to approximate the general appearance of these altars. Image by Kent Moore and Greg Harms, 2025.

Mummification, burial, and cremation are but three of many ways that cultures across the globe seek to handle human remains. Many of these practices are, as discussed throughout this chapter, weighted with spiritual or religious significance, often tied to notions of an afterlife. In the Cuban practice of Palo, human bones are directly utilized. Palo is a Kongo-inspired form of witchcraft that uses altars called *prendas* (also known as *ngangas* or *enquisos*). All *prendas* contain *nfumbe* (human bones), at least a skull, fingers, and toes. *Prendas* are intended to channel the power of the dead on behalf of the living. Practitioners of Palo are believed to be able to use the power of the dead to heal or harm, making Palo craft "widely feared in Cuba."[67]

Before participating in the making or use of a *prenda*, one has to reach the rank of *padre* (father) or *madre* (mother) *nganga*. Reaching this rank requires multiple initiations, one of which is receiving a *prenda* made by already established *padres* and *madres*. *Prendas* contain a plethora of ingredients, some easy to find, some very hard. One of these key elements is a vessel to hold the *nfumbe* and other ingredients. A common vessel is a cauldron or clay urn. Within the chosen vessel are bones, both human and animal, different plants, and water. There can be colored powders, horseshoes, mercury, feathers, coins, silver, gold, and a wide range of other objects and materials. Everything in a *prenda* has a purpose and story, and each *prenda* looks different, though they all possess the key elements. Palo practitioners believe that, once made, *prendas* must be fed with blood to stay satiated, lest the dead get restless and wander, causing harm in their search for blood. Palo altars are not meant to be trifled with as they are seen as very powerful and dangerous, and even those experienced in Palo practice extreme care in using them.[68]

In stark contrast to the delicate and rather private use of human remains in Palo, the Body Worlds exhibit puts the dead on display for anyone (with enough money to buy a ticket) to see. Body Worlds is an exhibition created by German physician and anatomist Dr. Gunther von Hagens. von Hagens is the creator of "plastination," a technique "used for long-term preservation of anatomical preparations."[69] He and his partner, Dr. Angelina Whalley, physician and curator of the Body Worlds exhibit, use plastination on human bodies to allow the public to view real human anatomy. The cadavers are acquired from postmortem scientific donations, although it is unclear if the donors were aware their bodies would be used as models in a global exhibition instead of for medical research. The Body Worlds website frames the traveling exhibit as an opportunity to better understand how our bodies work, certain medical conditions we are susceptible to, and our limitations. Despite being advertised as an educational exhibit, some of the displays seem more of a spectacle. There are bodies posed in various ways, from swinging a baseball bat to having sex (see here for image). While these displays of how the body looks during different activities are interesting, they bring into question the ethics of how scientific donations are used, and the morality of hosting and viewing exhibitions containing human bodies.[70]

The Body Worlds's posed "plastates" are predominantly presented with their skin removed, leaving the musculature and bones on display. A figure posed with a baseball bat is contorted, with simulated exertion, face lifted to the sky as

67. Todd Ramón Ochoa, *Society of the Dead: Quita Manaquita and Palo Praise in Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 1.

68. Ochoa, *Society of the Dead*, *passim*.

69. Angelina Whalley, "About Us," *Body Worlds* (no date) <https://bodyworlds.com/about-us/aw-gvh/> (accessed November 2024).

70. Whalley, "About Us."

if watching the ball he just hit fly off, forever frozen in the glory of a moment he may have never known in life. In a perhaps more troubling display (which we are intentionally not providing a link to — *read to the end of this paragraph before deciding to Google it*), a female cadaver is posed astride a male cadaver. Stripped not only of clothes but of skin (and perhaps of dignity), the cadavers are positioned with her back to him in simulation of an intimate scene. The muscle and tissue of her abdomen is cut open and peeled back to expose the inside of her body, so that the viewer can see the man's penis inside of her. His hands are on her hips, and hers on his arm and knee. Her head is tilted up, the muscles of her face flayed and flared out. An ethical complication exists beyond that which applies to *all* these figures: since von Hagens and Whalley do not disclose the specifics of the individuals whose bodies are plastinated, posed, and placed on public view, it is unclear if these individuals even knew each other in life; it seems unlikely that they did, or that they consented to such a use of their bodies. This display, then, is built out of figures violated in death, and so raises the question of whether a display that likely enacts a necrophilic rape should exist at all, much less be toted around in an exhibit across the globe.

There is an intense irony in mimicking procreation using the dead as models. Anatomical representations of sex aren't uncommon, as we can see in Leonardo da Vinci's cross-section drawing of a couple having intercourse (see here for image).[71] But what makes the Body Worlds presentation stand out starkly is the use of real human cadavers. The entire exhibit displays the dead in the most dynamic ways possible, immortalizing the bodies in hundreds of vulnerable displays of humanity. Where many viewers may believe that a proper burial is the height of respect for the dead, there is something to be said for perpetuating the life they lived in motion. Still, it is not clear that any of these individuals agreed to have their bodies preserved and displayed this way. If the function of the exhibition is educational, as its advertisements often claim, and not base, vulgar, and prurient, then a similar exhibit could be made with simulated bodies that would not bear the ethical complications that come with reanimating the real bodies of the human dead.

Journeys to and from the Afterlife

Ideas about the afterlife, about what might await us after death, vary from culture to culture and period to period. Artists have been helping the viewers of their work to imagine what — good or grim! — they believed lay ahead.

71. "Leonardo's Study of Anatomy," *Royal Collection Trust* (no date) <https://www.rct.uk/collection/stories/leonardo-in-the-royal-collection/leonardos-study-of-anatomy> (accessed 2025).



A. 14.

And, lo! toward us in a bark
Comes on an old man, hoary white with eld,
Crying, "Woe to you, wicked spirits!"

Canto III., lines 76–78.

Gustave Doré, Charon, Ferryman of the Dead, engraving, 1890. Image: Public domain.

Gustave Doré's *Charon, Ferryman of the Dead* (1890) is a dramatic illustration created for a translation of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, a fourteenth-century Italian poem. In the poem, the poet is guided through a vision of the Christian afterlife, getting tours of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. His guide through Hell is the Roman poet Virgil. This "***canto***" opens with a description of the gates of hell, above which is inscribed one of the most famous lines in this poem: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

This image depicts Charon guiding souls across the River Acheron, which separates the land of the living from the land of the dead — a notion borrowed from the ancient Greek myth of the River Styx. At this point in the tale, Virgil has brought Dante through the gates of hell, past a group of tormented souls and angels who did not pick a side when Satan led a failed revolution against God, up to the river itself:

> Then looking farther onwards I beheld
> A throng upon the shore of a great stream:
> Whereat I thus: "Sir! grant me now to know
> Whom here we view, and whence impell'd they seem
> So eager to pass o'er, as I discern
> Through the blear light?" He thus to me in few:
> "This shalt thou know, soon as our steps arrive
> Beside the woeful tide of Acheron."
> Then with eyes downward cast and fill'd with shame,
> Fearing my words offensive to his ear,
> Till we had reach'd the river, I from speech
> Abstain'd. And lo! toward us in a bark
> Comes on an old man hoary white with eld [old age],
> Crying, "Woe to you wicked spirits! hope not
> Ever to see the sky again. I come
> To take you to the other shore across,
> Into eternal darkness, there to dwell
> In fierce heat and in ice. And thou, who there
> Standest, live spirit! get thee hence, and leave
> These who are dead." But soon as he beheld
> I left them not, "By other way," said he,
> "By other haven shalt thou come to shore,
> Not by this passage; thee a nimbler boat
> Must carry." Then to him thus spake my guide:
> "Charon! thyself torment not: so 't is will'd,
> Where will and power are one: ask thou no more."[72]

Here, Charon at first refuses to take Dante across the river since he only ferries the dead to hell, but Virgil commands him to, implying that it is God's will that he do so. In Doré's illustration of these lines, the artist uses high contrast of light

72. Dante Alighieri, *The Vision of Hell*, trans. Henry Francis Cary (London: Cassell & Company, 1892), online at https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8789/pg8789-images.html

and shadow to emphasize the transition from life to death, with the nearly naked form of the ancient ferryman bright against the nearly black cliffs behind him. Charon is shown with a muscular build and a complex pose and expression as he steers the boat through dark and choppy waters. What does his body language suggest? Is he drawing back in surprise, worried by the sudden appearance of a living person in the land of the dead? And what does his presence suggest about the land of the dead? Here, all seems stormy and foreboding, but then, of course, Dante enters the afterlife in hell, and this gaunt, alarming figure of Charon is therefore a fitting indication of what awaits on the other side of the river.

While in Dante's dour Renaissance poem, the narrator is unique in his experience of moving between the lands of the living and the dead — hence Charon's alarm at his presence — in other stories and cultures, this would be far less exceptional. Celebrants of the widely celebrated Mexican holiday of Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead (November 1st and 2nd), for example, believe that, on these days, the spirits of those who have passed on are able to return to our world. The holiday originated as a combination of the Christian holiday of All Soul's Day, brought by Spanish invaders, and ancient Aztec customs. The Aztecs believed that when someone died, their soul lived on the land of the dead, or *Mictlán*. Here, they would undergo many trials to reach their final resting place. Surviving family, friends, and community members would make altars as a means of supporting the deceased on their journey. On these altars, they would leave offerings of items they believed necessary for the soul's survival, such as food and drinks, images, and flowers.[73]

The practice of leaving offerings continues in modern Mexico (and elsewhere), and is included in traditional Día de los Muertos celebrations. Now, though, these are more often items meant to welcome these spirits back to the land of the living. *Ofrendas*, or altars, traditionally include the deceased's favorite foods, candles, and any other items with personal connections to the loved one. Oftentimes, marigolds will also be placed upon the *ofrenda* and the path surrounding it in the hope that these bright flowers will help guide spirits on their journey to the land of the living. *Ofrendas* are used as a way to remember those who have passed and to allow their memories to live on.

La Ofrenda (*The Offering*, 1931), by famous Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera, consists of three figures respectfully surrounding a small white altar (see here for image). Two of these figures sit on their knees, with their hands clasped in their laps, looking off into the distance as they pray before the altar. The third figure faces away from the altar mournfully and allows the other two figures to have a private moment to pay their respects to their deceased loved one. On the altar sit objects that we can assume were meaningful to the spirit that is being welcomed. The figures are overwhelmed by masses of greenery, highlighted by a chain of marigolds draped across a prickly pear cactus. The composition of the greenery creates a continuous path that is representative of the circle of life, which includes the marigolds, which guide spirits between the land of the living and land of the dead. This composition refers to the connection that unites the living and the dead.

73. Juanita Elizondo Garza, "Dia de los Muertos," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*, ed. Suzanne Oboler and Deena J. González (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005)

Embodiments of Death


I.M. 365–1923.
Yamadurmarajas who takes the Souls in the world on a Buffalo

Unknown Artist, Yama on a buffalo, gouache on watermarked paper, ca. 1820 – ca. 1825. Image: Public Domain: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London (non-commercial licence)

Many cultures create embodiments of death, either as deities or as the force itself. While some of these are malevolent or implacably neutral, there are benevolent gods of death such as the Hindu Yama. A nineteenth-century depiction of Yama shows the god as a humanoid with blue skin, riding a buffalo. In two of his four hands are his weapons of choice: a mace and a noose that he uses to bring souls into *Patala*, "the seven treasure- and wonder-filled subterranean worlds."[74] His secondary pair of arms holds the reins of the buffalo and a trident. He wears a golden crown and golden clothing embroidered with many gems along the front and sides. Perhaps most importantly, he wears a calm, benign expression on his face. He appears a welcoming and helpful figure, not an agent of divine wrath.

Yama is a very important figure in Hindu mythology (and in Buddhism, as well). According to the ancient *Rg Veda* ("Knowledge Consisting of Praise Verses"), Yama was the first person to die, and therefore became ruler over *Patala* and a guide for the dead when they pass on.[75] He uses the *Book of Destiny* to determine if they will enter one of the pleasurable or harsh realms of the dead. When a person has performed many good deeds, they are brought to heaven and then reincarnated in a higher class; those who have not are brought to hell and then are born into a lower class in the next life. As a benevolent god of death, Yama remains an important figure in Hindu culture. Here, the personification of death is very lively and colorful, implying his role in the cycle of life, death, judgment and reincarnation into new life.

74. "Pātāla," A *Dictionary of Hinduism*, ed. W. J. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009).

75. "Yama (Kāla, Antaka, Dharmarāja)," and "Ṛg Veda ('The Veda/Knowledge Consisting of Praise Verses')," A *Dictionary of Hinduism*.



Unknown Artist, Statuette of Mictlantecuhtli, 2001, c. 900 ce. (Museo de Antropología de Xalapa in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico). Photo: Philkon (Phil Konstantin), CC BY-SA 3.0

Mictlantecuhtli, the Aztec god of death and ruler of mictlan, the "restful and silent kingdom of the dead,"[76] bears some similarities to Yama in function, but representations of him are strikingly different. A stone figure carved around 900 CE presents Mictlantecuhtli as a hunched skeleton, seated on his haunches, with his arms crossed over his knees. The figure is adorned with a tall headdress to indicate high status. Mictlantecuhtli's expression is menacing, with a toothy smile and round, bulging eyes set in deep, sharp-edged sockets. The artist places emphasis on the headdress and eyes by exaggerating their scale in comparison to the rest of the figure, adding to the foreboding nature of the statue. Statues like these were made as offerings and for rituals performed to appease the god in the hope that their maker or patron would enter paradise when they die.

However, Mictlantecuhtli is not only a god of death; like Yama, he is also a god of life and "appears as a protagonist

76. "Mictlantecuhtli," A *Dictionary of World Mythology*, ed. Arthur Cotterell, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

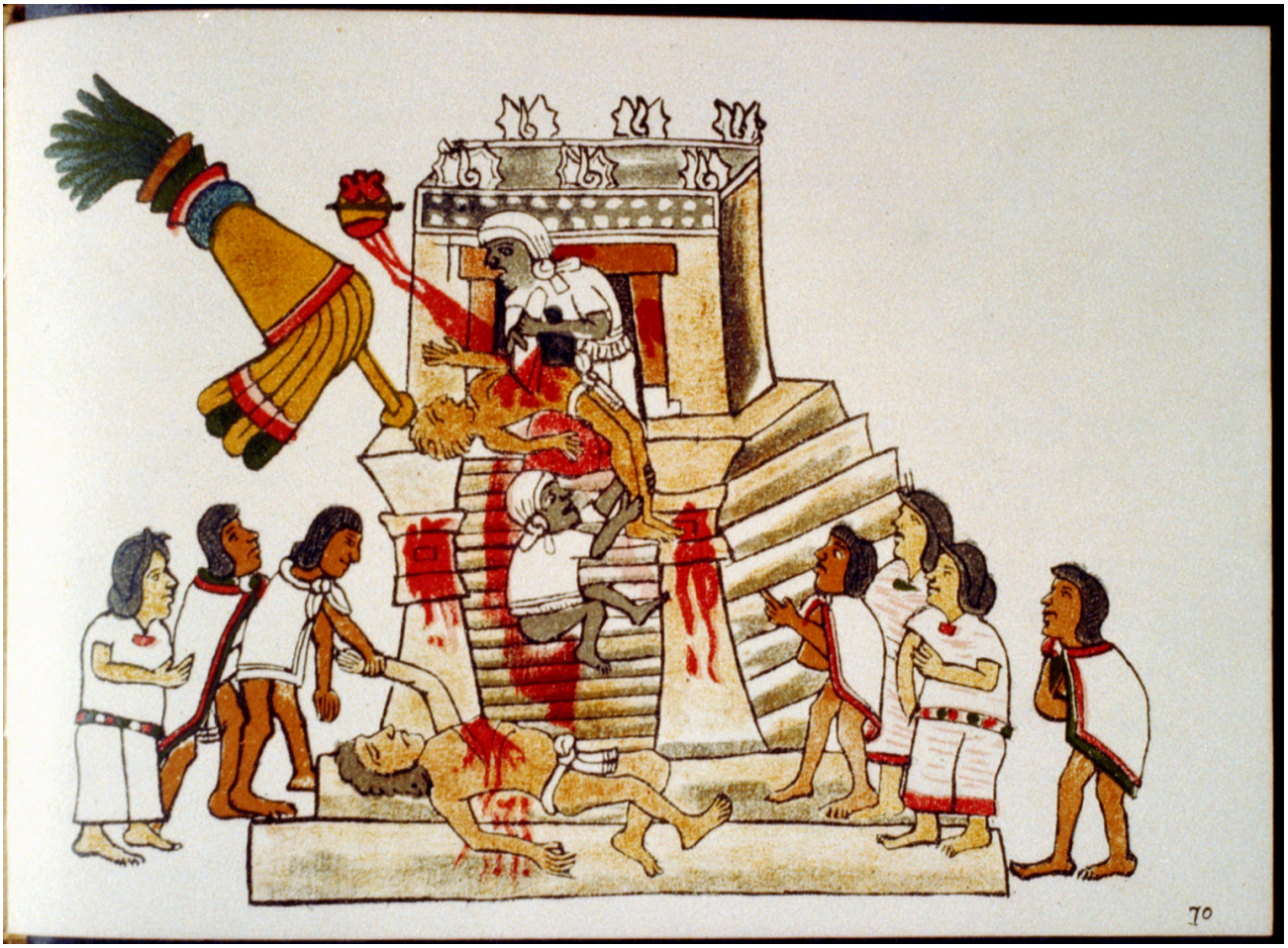
in scenes referring to penetration, pregnancy, the cutting of the umbilical cord, and lactation."[77] Death and life were, in Aztec religion, cyclically interconnected. The bones of the dead functioned as seeds, and the god Quetzalcoatl, creator of humans, was believed to travel to the underworld to steal the bones of the dead to use to create new humans. The Aztecs performed rituals they intended to help souls return to the earth after a journey through the underworld. They believed that the souls of the deceased must make a four year journey in order to be reincarnated. Rituals to aid in this process included offerings and the burning of incense, but also the consuming of the flesh of a person sacrificed while serving as an impersonator of the god. Since this was considered a heroic death in Aztec culture, the sacrificial victim was supposed to be granted a place in the underworld, since a person's place in paradise or the underworld was determined by their death, not their life.[78]

Human Sacrifice in Art

The ritual of slaughtering an animal or human as an offering to please or appease a god or other supernatural figure was common in the ancient world, and continues — at least in terms of animal sacrifice — into the present. Sacrificial imagery appears in works of art throughout the world, and across time.

77. "Death Deities," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Oxford: University Press, 2006).

78. "Sacrifice and Ritual Violence," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*.



Aztec priest performing the sacrificial offering of a living human's heart to the war god Huitzilopochtl, manuscript on paper (Library of Congress), 1904. Image: Public domain.

The Codex Magliabechiano is a collection of cultural data on Mesoamerican life, created by Spanish Christian priests working with conquistadors — Spanish and Portuguese conquerors, especially those who invaded and colonized much of the Americas — and indigenous artists. (The whole manuscript is available online.) As art historian Elizabeth Hill Boone summarizes the process, "Sometime between 1529 and 1553... a mendicant friar proselytizing among the [Indigenous groups] in Central Mexico requested a native artist (or perhaps several) to paint for him images showing the native deities, calendars, and customs."[79] The "codex," which is simply a formal term for a physical book, was created around 1566. Among other practices, it documents the Aztec practice of human sacrifice, which is also suggested by archeological evidence.

The Aztecs have long been associated with lurid tales of human sacrifice, often described as if they were somehow unique in this practice, though evidence exists of human sacrifice throughout the premodern world, from China to the

79. Elizabeth Hill Boone, *The Codex Magliabechiano and the Lost Prototype of the Magliabechiano Group* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 3.

Middle East to the Americas.[80] Tales about the Aztecs are frequently based on Spanish accounts that, while not wholly invented, bear the strong imprint of bias and self-serving motives. Scholars have argued that "the conquistadors made much of the practice not from a horror of it as much as because it provided an excuse for conquering." If an Indigenous person was, according to conquistadors, "guilty of the heathen practice of human sacrifice, it was perfectly lawful to take his gold and, if he resisted, to fight, kill or enslave him."[81]

The images of human sacrifice in the Codex Magliabechiano are particularly explicit. The artist who created this scene presents the ritual as gory and blood-soaked: a group looks on as a sacrificial victim is held down while a priest rips out his heart. Below them, a person drags away a second body from which the heart has been removed. The figures conducting the sacrifice are grey, likely a representation of the body paint worn by priests, which:

> consisted of all kinds of poisonous animals (scorpions, spiders, serpents etc.) which were burnt, after which the ashes were compounded and mixed... with the *piciete* [tobacco] and *ololiuhqui* (Morning Glory). Smearing this ointment on the body enabled the priests to see the gods and to communicate with them.[82]

The figure performing the sacrifice is an Aztec priest, and the sacrifice is for the war and sun god Huitzilopochtli. The victim's heart is floating up into the sky, presumably toward Huitzilopochtli.

The images are hand-drawn on imported European paper, and the main colors used are warm tones of red and yellow. The vibrant reds of the blood pull the viewer's eyes to the center of the image, where the sacrifice occurs. To the Spanish conquistadors, these killings were indications of the demonic evils of a "heathen" culture, though they were themselves engaged in the extremely bloody and violent conquest of two continents. To the Aztecs, these ritual killings provided the nourishing blood that the sun, Huitzilopochtli, needed in order to rise each day.[83] They therefore believed that these deaths, violent though they were, were necessary for the continuation of all life.

The Undead

How can we deal with the traumas of death, with the losses of those we love and the regrets about things said and done, or about opportunities missed? One response to such trauma is the creation of myths in which the dead continue to exist in meaningful ways, carrying on in undead forms. Ideas about the undead vary greatly within and among cultures, ranging from the horrors of restless spirits and reanimated corpses to the comfort of lingering loved ones.

80. Patricia R. Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice," *Archaeology*, 35, No. 5 (September/October 1982): 38-45, 38.

81. Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice," 40.

82. Maarten Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez, *Time and the Ancestors: Aztec and Mixtec Ritual Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 454.

83. Anawalt, "Understanding Aztec Human Sacrifice," 44.


尾上松助
豊国画

Utagawa Toyokuni I, Onoe Matsusuke as the Ghost of the Murdered Wife Oiwa, in "A Tale of Horror from the Yotsuya Station on the Tokaido Road," woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 1812 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Image: Public Domain.

The Japanese folk tale of Oiwa is a heartbreaking story of a woman married to a cruel and unloving man named Iemon. Iemon, wishing to marry a younger and more beautiful woman, conspires to divorce her. With the aid of the father of the woman he wishes to marry, Iemon gives Oiwa a poison that disfigures her face. When she learns of Iemon's treachery, she takes her own life, cursing her husband with her dying breath. After Iemon's marriage to the younger woman, Oiwa reappears as a vengeful spirit, haunting Iemon and causing him to kill not only his new bride but her father as well. After he commits these murders, Iemon flees to the mountains, where he is overcome with madness. On the way, Oiwa haunts him, appearing in a paper lantern, driving him to suicide. This story is familiar in Japanese theatre, and it is customary for the actors performing this story to visit a shrine at Oiwa's grave to pay respects.[84]

Made by Utagawa Toyokuni in 1812, this woodblock print depicts the angry spirit of Oiwa. The delicately-colored flames behind Oiwa immediately draw the eye. As one follows the trail of flames, one's attention is brought to the spirit's dark hair, followed by the striking facial features and the almost talon-like hands held before her. Her expression communicates the pain of the angry spirit, conveying the emotional impact of the sad tale.

84. Carol Kendall, *Haunting Tales from Japan* (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1985), 27-29.


お岩さん
百物語
前北舟尾
霍喜板

Katsushika Hokusai; Publisher: Tsuruya Kiemon, The Ghost of Oiwa, woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 1831-1832 (Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota). Image: Public Domain.

Another woodblock print depicting this tale presents the face of Oiwa as it appears in a paper lantern. Having killed his new wife (thinking she was the ghost of Oiwa) and her wealthy samurai father (thinking he was her loyal, old servant), Iemon flees to the mountains:

> He was driven, finally, to take refuge in an old abandoned house. Cowering there in the twilight, he was just assuring himself that he had outwitted the dread creature at last, when the guttering candle in his lantern began to lick at the oiled paper. Before his wildly-staring eyes the lantern slowly, inexorably, burned away, and the mutilated face of Oiwa took shape within it.[85]

This work, by the celebrated Edo-period printmaker Katsushika Hokusai, isolates the horrid image against a spare background. The face's drooping features and anguished expression again remind the viewer of Oiwa's tragic story. The anger of this ghost is clearly articulated in the smoldering remains of the haunted lantern. In both of these prints, the plays of Oiwa's tale, and in the original folktale itself, a wronged woman gets revenge from beyond the grave, death being no barrier to her vengeance against her wicked and cowardly husband.

85. Kendall, *Haunting Tales*, 29.



Frederick Hudson, Georgiana Houghton, photograph, 1872. Image: Public Domain.

Half a century later, England was in the grip of a spiritualist fad. People consulted fortune tellers, held séances to contact the dead, and invited friends over to try out a new invention: the Ouija board. Much of this occult interest was driven by a hopeful quest for interaction with the departed. Georgiana Houghton was a "medium" — a person who claims to be able to connect the living with the spirits of the dead — who worked under Frederick Hudson, a "spirit photographer." Houghton claimed to help spirits come through into our world, and then Hudson would allege to capture a photograph of the spirit. Mourning family members were the prime target for this fraud. This photograph shows Houghton, hands raised, summoning a spirit, which seems to float in the air before her.[86]

86. Vivienne Roberts, "Georgina Houghton," *Georgina Houghton* (2016) <https://georgianahoughton.com/> (11/04/2024).

There are many different ways that "spirit photographers" created these fraudulent images:

> During the printing process, the photographer could overlay multiple negatives to create the illusion of the sitter and a "spirit" occupying the same space. Another technique involved exposing a light-sensitized glass plate (or metal in the case of a tintype — a direct positive process requiring no negative) to the likeness of a "spirit" prior to photographing the sitter on the same plate. A model dressed in white could quietly pass behind the sitter as they were being photographed. The photographer could also smudge the glass negative.[87]

These images were predatory, with the photographers and "mediums" scamming bereaved people out of their money. Still, they probably did also provide some measure of comfort, allowing people to believe that the spirits of their loved ones were hovering nearby, though they could only be captured by the new technology of photography.

87. Emilia Mickevicius, "Seeing Ghosts: A Brief Look at the Curious Business of Spirit Photography," *SFMOMA* (October 2021) <https://www.sfmoma.org/read/seeing-ghosts-a-brief-look-at-the-curious-business-of-spirit-photography/> (accessed January 2025).



F.C.E. Dimmick, Ectoplasm Photography of the Medium Mrs. Henderson, gelatin-silver print, 1928. Photo: Public domain.

English photographer F.C.E. Dimmick invited Dorothy Henderson, another popular medium, to participate in séances so that he could produce spirit photographs. Dimmick captured this photograph while Henderson's head is down, as if she were unconscious, in a trance. On her lap is a white substance that she claimed to be "ectoplasm" — materialized

ghost energy — which provided another sort of visual evidence of the presence of a ghost.[88] A report detailing Henderson's process was published in *The International Psychic Gazette* (London, December 1928):

> In those days, dark séances were the rule; everyone held hands, and hymns were sung. The medium, however, was not contacted. She sat outside a cabinet, formed of curtains across a corner of the room, and a light table was placed inside, upon which were placed a two-piece tin trumpet, mouth organ, zither, fairy bells, and other small toys. Also face downwards on the table were two phosphorescent slates.[89]

We see the medium here, seated just outside her curtained "cabinet," with a smear or "ectoplasm" running down her lap. Figures reach in from either side to hold Henderson's hands to ensure that she is not performing some sort of sleight of hand trickery. Another passage from *The International Psychic Gazette* describes what might be the very sort of moment captured in Dimmick's photograph:

> It was soon found that the best results were obtained when the medium sat half in the cabinet. Then in a state of trance she would pull the two curtains together in front of her, thus shielding her body from the effects of the light. When sufficient ectoplasm had been produced the curtains would be opened and inspection of the phenomena would take place. Rapid progress was made, the medium was covered less and less by the curtains, and the period at which one could view the ectoplasm produced has increased from the few seconds at first to as long as two or three minutes at the present time.[90]

As with "spirit photography," such ectoplasm-producing séances were fraudulent, and were aided and abetted by the new artistic medium of photography. Such frauds are only able to succeed, though, because of the great desperation many feel at the loss of their loved ones to death.

88. John Beusher, "Do you Believe? Science or Seance?," *The American Museum of Photography* (2000) <https://photographymuseum.com/seance/> (accessed November, 2024); Cheroux Clements, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 104.

89. Frank Hawken, "Mrs. Henderson and her Ectoplasmic Manifestations: The Phenomena in a Clear Red Light," *The International Psychic Gazette* (London, December 1928): 37-38, reposted to John Beusher, "F. C. E. Dimmick (England)," *The American Museum of Photography* (2000) <https://photographymuseum.com/ectolg/> (accessed November, 2024).

90. Hawken, "Mrs. Henderson and her Ectoplasmic Manifestations."



Anonymous photograph of a séance, Munich, 1903. Courtesy of the Photographic Collections of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene, Freiburg im Breisgau. Photo: Public domain.

An anonymous photograph from 1903 captures a séance with a group of people holding hands around a table. In the image's background, we see a small table with an accordion on top of it. The table is apparently levitating. The medium at the center of the photograph is Eusapia Palladino; at a young age, she had fallen, and the fall caused a severe head injury, which was afterward marked by the shock of gray hair visible in the image. As a result of the injury, she claimed to have gained the ability to put herself in trances, which would purportedly result in spiritualistic physical phenomena such as rappings — knocking sounds with no clear cause — and objects levitating around her. She regarded herself as one of the world's most influential mediums and was known for embellishing the truth of her past. It is likely that she concocted a setup to make the levitations happen during her séances, like the one pictured here, which was hosted at the house of Baron von Schrenck Notzing in Germany in 1903. Another photograph from the same séance (see here for image), though taken from a slightly different angle, shows another floating instrument, this time a mandolin — a teardrop-shaped stringed instrument that we see with its stripped underside facing out toward the camera.

The images capture a dramatic moment. In the image with the floating table and accordion, Palladino's wide, bulging eyes bear a far-away look, as if she is looking at things beyond the rather ordinary room around her. The rest of the participants lean in or out dramatically, clearly caught up in the moment. The bearded man on the left seems to have been startled up from his seated position. The intensity of their response seems strongly at odds with the rather tidy, bourgeois furnishings.


J.J. Tissot
J. J. Tissot
Apparition Mediumnimique.
Dark seance d'Eglinton
du 20 May 1885
Londres.

James Tissot, The Apparition, mezzotint on woven paper, 1885 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Image: Public Domain.

Depictions of séances are not very common, but some noteworthy artists produced images of them, including James Tissot, a French impressionist painter and printmaker from the nineteenth century. His works usually focus on fashionable women, but following the loss to tuberculosis of his lover, a widow named Kathleen Newton, he "dedicate[d] himself to the rather monotonous illustrations for the Old and New Testaments which were to occupy him for the rest of his life."[91] His experience of losing to death the closest relationship he had drove him to the world of séances and spiritualism.[92] He began participating in ceremonies to commune with the dead and painted the visions he experienced during those vulnerable moments. His 1885 print *The Apparition* (based on a now-lost painting) recreates a scene of the artist and his lover communicating through the gathering of spirits. "A witness recalled that Kathleen and her spirit guide, at first faint, gradually became more distinct. He also reported that Tissot said that he felt her lips on his forehead and the caress of a kiss touch his face."[93] The print is an emotional piece; it expressed a moment where, at least in Tissot's mind, what was once taken away by death was given again, if only briefly.

In the print, two figures look out at the viewer in calm reverie. As this is a **mezzotint**, it relies on shading to create a contrasting image. The light source in the image seems to be the figures, themselves. Their hands are aglow, as if they are holding onto bright flames. The rest of the image gradually fades into darkness, casting peaceful shadows on the dead. The faces of the dead are calm, undisturbed. The female figure leans forward a bit, with an expression that is friendly, perhaps even hopeful. They are draped in fabrics that mimic ancient — perhaps biblical — robes, which conceal all but their faces and hands. While this image is not of the séance itself, it manages to portray one participant's experience. Unlike the haunting images of Oiwa, this image of communication with the dead is presented so pleasantly, without even the strange and perhaps gross evocation of "ectoplasm" to mar what seems a joyous reunion.

While spiritualism and spirit photography are often thought of as nineteenth-century phenomena, they remain of interest to contemporary artists, including Shannon Taggert, whose interest in spiritualism began at a young age and influences much of her work. This interest was piqued by a message a family member received from a medium about the death of their grandfather. This led to an 18-year, intercontinental photographic project. Two of her photographs, *Table-tipping workshop with mediums Reverend Jane and Chris Howarth* (Erie, Pennsylvania, 2014, see here for image) and *Medium Annette Rodgers leads a table-tipping experiment, with the help of her deceased daughter, Lauren* (Arthur Findlay College, England, 2018: see here for image) depict modern-day séances. The pair contrast well with one another — one is in a warm color palette, and the other is cold, though they show similar subject matter. The story they capture recalls the Victorian images, and indicates the continued relevance of spiritual practices today.

Taggert connects spiritualism with the feminist movement, noting that the movement began at the same time as and just a few miles from the famous Seneca Falls meeting for women's rights, which began the Women's Movement in the US. The first spiritualists were Kate and Margaret Fox, two teenage sisters who claimed to hear rappings — knocking sounds like those heard by Eusapia Palladino, discussed above — from a recently dead murderer whose body was found in their home. As Taggert said in an interview:

91. David S. Brooke, "James Tissot's Amateur Circus," *Boston Museum Bulletin*, 67, No. 347 (1969), pp. 4-17, 13.

92. Melissa Buron, "Séances and Spiritualism: The Visions of James Tissot," *Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco* (2019) <https://www.famsf.org/stories/spiritualism-tissot> (accessed January 2025).

93. "The Apparition," *Minneapolis Institute of Art* (no date) <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/125395/the-apparition-james-tissot> (accessed January 2025).

> There was definitely synchronicity between Spiritualism and feminism. The news of the Fox sisters talking to spirits quickly spread to women gathering at Seneca Falls who were calling for their rights to speak, be heard, be figures in the world, and be considered equal. It was empowering for women to be put on stage at a time when it was very dangerous to do so.[94]

Tagger's images are not frauds in the way that those of Hudson and Dimmick are, but she does echo some of their visual effects, using double-exposures and other such techniques to give her images an unearthly feel. In these two images, the focus is on the hands of the participants in a séance. The hands suggest youth and old age, but most of all, imply a fervent desire of connection with the dead. Taggert claims a neutral position on the potential reality of the ability to contact the spirits of the dead — and says she was thrown out of her graduate program because she refused to change the subject of her work, which she sees as intimately connected with the history of her medium of photography: "Spiritualism was the first religion to build an iconography using photography, rather than painting. Both Spiritualism and photography give life to the dead."[95] And both bear witness to the strong, at times desperate desire of the living to feel some trace of connection to those they have lost.

Death and Pop Culture

Andy Warhol, a pop artist who was at the forefront of mainstream pop-art movements in the 1960s, is known for his vibrant colors and imagery of mass produced goods and Hollywood celebrities. Out of all his creations, his most recognizable are probably his paintings and prints of Campbell's Soup cans in bold colors. With the popularity of his most flamboyant pieces, he additionally gained an understanding of how mass produced media captures the attention of the population. This attention is what inspired his "Death and Disaster" series. While this series never gained the same popularity as his more lighthearted pieces, it is well worth consideration.

As Jennifer Blessing writes, "Warhol was preoccupied with news reports of violent death—suicides, car crashes, assassinations, and executions."[96] The "Death and Disaster" series, consisting of around 70 works of art created between the years 1962 and 1967, was inspired by how the media and pop-culture tends to glamorize death, and thereby rob it of any power, which inspired him to stress death's harsh reality instead of its sensational appeal.

Warhol's first piece in the series, 129 *Die In Jet!* (Acrylic and Pencil on Canvas, 1962), is based on a newspaper article clipping depicting a plane disaster (see here for Warhol's image and the newspaper clipping that inspired it). This graphic front page story in the *New York Mirror* (June 4, 1962) features a large image of the crash site of Air France Flight 007, surrounded by the headline in massive typeface. This flight was hosted by members of Atlanta's arts community, who had just finished a tour of England, Italy, Holland, and Switzerland, where they had seen and experienced Europe's cultural highlights.[97] The news of this plane crash spread rapidly across the news media. Warhol simplified the imagery,

94. Miss Rosen, "A Photographer's 18-Year Quest to Uncover Spiritualism's Radical Feminist History," *Document* (December 2, 2019) <https://www.documentjournal.com/2019/12/a-photographers-18-year-quest-to-uncover-spiritualisms-radical-feminist-history/> (accessed January 2025).

95. Rosen, "A Photographer's 18-Year Quest."

96. Jennifer Blessing, "Andy Warhol Orange Disaster #5," *Guggenheim New York* (no date) <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/4176> (accessed January 2025)

97. Tiffany Harte, "The Day Atlanta Wept: Revisiting the 1962 Orly Crash," *Atlanta History Center* (November 10, 2023)

pairing it down to make it more dramatic. He simplified both the background and foreground, such that the plane's wing becomes even more dominant in the image. Are we reduced to mere gawkers, like those within the image, or are we able to reflect on the salaciousness of the desire to view such disasters?

Another group of works in Warhol's "Death and Disaster" series show the same car crash image many times, as in *Black and White Disaster #4* (*5 Deaths 17 Times in Black and White*) (acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 1963: see here for image and here for detail) and *Orange Car Crash* (*5 Deaths 11 Times in Orange*: see here for image). In each, we see the gruesome car crash. A car is flipped upside down, surrounded by blood. There are three people underneath. Two seem to be attempting to crawl out from under the wreck, but the third seems utterly inert. It is difficult to make out the fine details in Warhol's reproduction of this grainy newspaper photograph, but this figure is either unconscious or dead. It is possible that the figure's eyes are open, which suggests that this person was killed in the crash.

Warhol used acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, repeating the same image over and over in a range of colors. The two images here show it in the stark black and white of newspaper photography of the time, and then in lurid orange, each using the same type of repetition Warhol is known for in his artwork. For each variant of *5 Deaths*, Warhol used a different color. The repetition of this graphic image within and across these images makes a statement about how grim imagery in media and pop culture can often be overlooked by a public audience, but what is the effect? Does he jolt us out of our complacency, making us really see the horror of these deadly events anew, or does his extreme repetition of the imagery further dull us to the deaths of humans around us?

We will look at one more pair of macabre images from this grim series, each from 1971 and showing an electric chair covered in warm, bright colors: *Electric Chair Red*, *Screen Print*, *1971* (see here and here for images). These are two of ten prints in this collection depicting an electric chair, which are among the most well known from his "Death and Disaster" series. The brightness of the reds and oranges are in harsh contradiction with the scene taking place in the image. The sole subject of these images is an electric chair, a widespread symbol of a death sentence, bathed in almost fluorescent hues. The drama of this contrast makes the piece a statement about the glorification of death, and a condemnation of how, as a society, we have become desensitized to horrific news. If we take the time to look closely, through or beyond the bold colors, we can see the grim, utilitarian nature of the chair and of the room it sits in. Leather straps that would hold a condemned prisoner in place until their death dangle loosely. The bare floor is splotchy and stained — with what? The fluids of the dying and the dead? Stepping back again, the colors, which at first seemed cheerful and warm, now seem bloody and grotesque.

Conclusion

Across a wide range of images, we can see artists struggling to capture, describe, and defy the awesome power of death, a force at once universal and not quite comprehensible or even visible. These images are highly varied: individual or collective, sincere or fraudulent, heartwarming or chilling to the bone.

Media Attributions

- Classroom whiteboard with notes on discussion of possible chapter themes. Photo: Asa Simon Mittman
- Classroom whiteboard with notes on discussion of sub-themes. Photo: Asa Simon Mittman

<https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/blog/the-day-atlanta-wept-revisiting-the-1962-orly-crash/> (accessed January 2025).

- Ilya Repin, Ivan the Terrible and his Son Ivan, oil on canvas, 1883-1885 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). Image: Public Domain.
- Maxim Vorobiev, Oak Fractured by Lightning, oil painting on canvas, 1842 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow). Image: Public Domain.
- Cadex Herrera, Greta McLain, and Xena Goldman, George Floyd Mural
- Andrea Mantegna, Lamentation over the Dead Christ, tempera on canvas, c. 1480–1500 (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan). Image: Public Domain
- Hans Holbein the Younger, The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb, 1521-22
- Kathe Kollwitz, Memorial Sheet of Karl Liebknecht (Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht), woodcut, 1919-1920 (MoMA, New York City). Photo by Damian Entwistle, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Utagawa Yoshifuji, Defeating the Measles Demon
- George John Pinwell, Death's Dispensary, engraving print, 1866 (Fun Magazine, London). Image: Public Domain.
- Friedrich Graetz, "The Kind of 'Assisted Emigrant' We Can Not Afford to Admit," color lithography, 1883 (Puck Magazine). Image: Public Domain
- NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt on National Mall, color transparency, 1996 (Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington DC). Image: No Copyright – United States
- AIDS Memorial Quilt 1, photograph, (Washington D.C., United States). Photo by Afagen, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.
- https://pressbooks.calstate.edu/app/uploads/sites/5/2025/02/Arnold_Bocklin_-_Die_Pest-scaled.jpg
- Cristóbal Rojas Poleo, The Misery, 1886. Image: Public domain
- Victorian Post-mortem Photography. Image: Public Domain
- [Malangan figure, wood, vegetable fiber, pigment, and shell (turbo petholatus opercula), north coast of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea 1882–83 C.E., Photo: (© Trustees of the British Museum, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).
- Anubis attending Sennedjem's mummy, c. 1292-1187 BCE (Tomb of Sennedjem). Image: Public domain.
- Priests of Anubis performing the opening of the mouth ritual, Book of the Dead of Hunefer, papyrus, 1275 B.C.E. (British Museum). Image: Public Domain.
- Tomb Painting of Nebamun's Funerary Banquet (Ancient Egypt), fresco, 18th Dynasty (1350 BCE), Thebes, Egypt. Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.
- Paracas Mummy Bundles "Mummies" by D-Stanley is licensed under CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/?ref=openverse
- Backbent skeletal "corpse" figure with tunic and head ornament "Paracas border, flying man detail" by Pete Tillman is marked with CC0 1.0. To view the terms, visit https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/?ref=openverse.
- Community of multispecies animal hybrids, surrounded by plant motifs "The Paracas Textile" by profzucker is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/?ref=openverse
- The Cremation of Peshwa Madhavrao I (officiated 1761-1772) and the Sati of his Wife Ramabai, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, circa 1772-1775. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles). Image: Public Domain. https://collections.lacma.org/node/238882
- Kokdu Wooden Figures, picture taken November 30th, 2014. Photo: Littlelixie, CC BY-NC 2.0.
- Caption: Out of respect for practitioners of Palo, we have produced a digital image based on a series of photographs and drawings to approximate the general appearance of these altars. Image by Kent Moore and Greg Harms, 2025.
- Gustave Doré, Charon, Ferryman of the Dead, engraving, 1890. Image: Public domain.
- Unknown Artist, Yama on a buffalo, gouache on watermarked paper, ca. 1820 – ca. 1825. Image: Public Domain: ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London (non-commercial licence)
- Unknown Artist, Statuette of Mictlantecuhtli, 2001, c. 900 ce. (Museo de Antropología de Xalapa in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico). Photo: Philkon (Phil Konstantin), CC BY-SA 3.0

- Aztec priest performing the sacrificial offering of a living human's heart to the war god Huitzilopochtl, manuscript on paper (Library of Congress), 1904, Image: Public domain.
- Utagawa Toyokuni I, Onoe Matsusuke as the Ghost of the Murdered Wife Oiwa, in "A Tale of Horror from the Yotsuya Station on the Tokaido Road," woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 1812 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Image: Public Domain.
- Katsushika Hokusai; Publisher: Tsuruya Kiemon, The Ghost of Oiwa, woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 1831-1832 (Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota). Image: Public Domain.
- Frederick Hudson, Georgiana Houghton, photography, 1872. Image: Public Domain.
- F.C.E. Dimmick, Ectoplasm Photography of the Medium Mrs. Henderson, gelatin-silver print, 1928. Photo: Public domain.
- Anonymous, Munich, 1903. Courtesy of the Photographic Collections of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene, Freiburg im Breisgau. Photo: Public domain.
- James Tissot, The Apparition, mezzotint on woven paper, 1885 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Image: Public Domain.

Glossary

abstract

In some way or ways deviating from or ignoring the appearance of the natural world, simplifying or altering it for effect

abstraction

Deviations from the appearance of the natural world, simplifications or alterations of it for effect

Acropolis

the raised, sacred precinct of ancient Athens

Adam

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the first man, directly created by God

allegorical

Containing allegory, a work of art or literature that implies a non-literal meaning, often with moral or political importance

analogous colors

Colors next to one another on the color wheel

Ancient Near East

the region extending from Turkey in the east to Israel in the west, and centered on a series of civilizations that flourished in what are now Iran and Iraq from the fourth through the first millennium BCE

aniconic

avoiding the creation and use of figural images, especially of deities or other religious figures

aniconism

the practice of avoiding the creation or use of images, esp. figural images and images of deities

animistic

believing that inanimate elements of the world and universe, like objects and plants, have spirits or souls

anthropomorphic

having human qualities

Antiquity

The ancient past, especially ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome

apartheid

Formal, legal discrimination against members of a particular race or races, especially in South Africa, 1948 to ca. 1990.

Aphrodite

in ancient Greek myth, the goddess of beauty, love, and sex; equivalent to the Roman Venus

appropriating

In art, using of existing images by another artist or from another context within a new work of art, often in order to comment on the artist or culture of the original work

appropriation

In art, the use of existing images by another artist or from another context within a new work of art, often in order to comment on the artist or culture of the original work

ascetic

A person who lives a very simple, austere life, usually to achieve spiritual goals

asymmetrical balance

The property of an image where its two sides do not mirror each other, but still have approximately the same visual weight, the same amount of detail or shapes or color, and so on

atman

According to the doctrine of monism followed by some Hindu groups, the eternal self within an individual, somewhat like a soul

atmospheric perspective

The simulation in a work of art of the optical effect that makes objects in the distance appear paler, bluer, and less detailed than objects that are close to us

autochromes

early color photographs

avant-garde

the leading edge, the new and exciting

avatar

in Hinduism, a particular manifestation of a deity; also, in online spaces, the form taken by a person interacting in such spaces

Avestan

General term for two ancient Iranian languages, OId and Younger Avestan

axis

line running down the center of a figure

background

The portion of the image that appears to be furthest from the viewer

Balance

An even use of elements throughout a work

Benin

West African country and culture, known for exceptional work in bronze

Bestiaries

Medieval books of beasts that usually augment the natural history of animals with symbolic and spiritual meanings

bilateral symmetry

Symmetry wherein two sides of an image mirror one another

black-figure

ancient Greek pottery style in which figures are colored with black glaze, against a background of the reddish color of unpainted terracotta clay

Bodhidharma

Known as Daruma in Japanese, the founder of Zen Buddhism. Accounts of his life are largely legendary, with few details known to be accurate. A popular subject for art and literature

bodhisattva

In Buddhism, a figure who is able to enter Nirvana, the Buddhist afterlife which represents escape from all earthly suffering, but chooses to remain behind to help other people on their journey toward Nirvana

bourgeoisie

The middle class, especially the prosperous and materialistic middle class

Brahman

In Hinduism, the infinite and unbounded power that sustains the universe. Also, a member of the highest Hindu caste

Buddha

Literally, "the awakened," the title given to Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism, a prince you rejected his wealth in favor of a life of simple contemplation aimed at escape from endless cycles of reincarnation and into Nirvana, release from all suffering

Buddhist

a follower of the religion of Buddhism

bust

an image of a person depicting the head, shoulders, and upper chest only

Byzantine

Period from the sack of Rome (fifth century) through the fall of Constantinople (1453)

canon

a set of works (art, literature, music, theater, film, etc) considered by experts or the general public to be classic, major, influential, etc. These are the works that generally appear in introductory textbooks, though throughout this book, I have tried to move beyond the standard canonical works.

canto

section of a long poem

capital

architectural element at the top of a column or pillar that generally widens its form in order to help support a lintel or arch above

cathedral

In Catholicism and Anglicanism, a church housing the bishop's "cathedra," the throne that signifies their authority, and serves as the administrative center of a see (the area ruled by a bishop)

Chanukah

a Jewish holiday, traditionally minor, celebrating the retaking and rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 BCE by the Maccabees following desecration by Syrians, lasting eight days, starting on the 25th day of the month of Kislev. Celebrated by lighting a menorah, a candelabra with eight branches and a usually-central Shamash candle

chryselephantine

covered in gold and ivory

city-state

in the ancient world, an independent political unit consisting of a city and the agricultural land immediately around it

collage

a work composed out of pieces cut out from preexisting works or materials

Color

The light reflecting off objects, divided into hue, value and intensity

column

in architecture, a cylindrical, vertical member, usually supporting a lintel or arch

commission

an order for a specific work of art to be main according to the desires of the patron (the person making the commission)

Communism

A political and economic theory developed by Karl Marx that advocates for public ownership of all property and industry so that all people, especially the working class, can share in profits

complementary colors

Colors opposite one another on the color wheel

composition

How the visual elements of a work of art relate to each other

Confucian

Based on or following Confucius, highly influential Chinese philosopher, 550-479 BCE

contextual

the circumstances around a work, idea, event, etc.

contour lines

lines that define shapes

contrapposto

Literally, "counter-balanced," a pose used in for human figures, developed in Ancient Greece, where the figure's weight is supported by one leg, while the other is loosely bent, resulting in an S-curve throughout the body

Contrast

The amount of variation between the highest and lowest values in a work of art

cool colors

Colors from green to purple on the color wheel

cosmography

the study of the origins of the universe

cosmology

An explanation of the origins of the world and universe

cropped

cut down, often to shift or increase emphasis

cross-hatching

the use of closely spaced grids of lines to create the illusion of shadow

crucifixion

An ancient Roman method of execution by being hung or nailed to a large wooden cross and left exposed to the elements to die of thirst and hunger, or via suffocation caused by weakness that prevents the drawing of breath; most famously, the method of execution used on Jesus, the founder of Christianity, though many accounts say that while hung on a cross, he was stabbed in the side before dying of crucifixion, itself

Cubist

Art style that depicts forms as if from multiple perspectives at once. The images are often fragmented and disjointed, and it is up to the viewer to assemble them mentally into a cohesive image

deified

turned into a god

density

concentration of objects or details

dome

a rounded architectural feature shaped like half of a sphere

double-tiered arches

arches topped by arches

Early Christian Period

The period from the life of Jesus (first century) to the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine (fourth century), who legalized Christianity throughout the empire

emphasis

Techniques used to draw attention to one or more points in a work

encaustic

pigment suspended in hot wax and used as paint

engaged columns

columns partially embedded in a wall

Enlightenment

In Buddhism, the state achieved by the Buddha, and the goal of Buddhists, characterized by deep understanding of the self and of the world around it

epitaph

A short memorial in memory of a person who has died, often written on a tombstone

façade

The front face of a building

film noir

film genre, esp. of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, shot in black and white, characterized by a gritty or even harsh mood and cynical characters, often involving complex crime stories

Five Pillars of Islam

See here

flashbacks

Sections of texts, films, videos, etc., that take place before the main timeline of the narrative

Flemish

From Flanders, a country that once occupied territory centered on what is now Belgium

foliate

resembling plants, esp. plant leaves and vines

foreground

The portion of the image that appears to be closest to the viewer

foreshortening

The intentional distortion of a form -- often dramatic -- in a two-dimensional work of art to replicate the viewing of the object from a steep angle.

form

The property of a three-dimensional object; also used to describe the illusion of three-dimensionality

formal elements

see: visual elements

formline

Smoothly curving lines of varying thickness that outline forms in art of Pacific Northwest Coast Indigenous art, and the most important visual element of this artistic style

found art

art comprised of pre-existing, often ordinary or manufactured objects

fresco

paint mixed with wet plaster and applied directly to a wall surface

fresco paintings

see Fresco

frontal

showing the front of a figure or object as fully facing the picture plane

Garden of Eden

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the site of the creation of Adam and Eve, a beautiful and abundant paradise

gaze

in art, based on feminist theory: a specific, gendered, sexualizing look from a straight man at a woman, conveying an imbalance of power

gender

the performance of characteristics culturally associated with male and female sexes; increasingly acknowledged as a fluid spectrum rather than a fixed binary

genre scenes

scenes from everyday life, usually with a focus on the lives of the lower or working classes

geometric

characterized by straight lines and smooth curves of the sort found in mathematical geometry

gilded

covered in gold

glazes

oil paints with little pigment in them

Gospels

the four fundamental Christian texts, attributed to Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, telling overlapping (and at times conflicting) accounts of the background, life, death, and teachings of Jesus

Greco-Roman

a fusion of the cultures of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, led by Roman scholars from the first century CE through the third century CE.

happenings

Generally improvised or unplanned artistic events and performances, frequently involving audience participation

Hasidic

relating to Hasidism, a mystical Jewish movement beginning in the 18th century

hatching

closely spaced lines used to create an illusion of shadow

Hellenistic Period

Ancient Greek period from the death of Alexander the great in 323 B.C.E. to the rule of Augustus, first emperor of Rome in 31 B.C.E. Characterized by exaggerated forms and emotions

Hermaphroditos

in ancient Greek myth, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. He eventually merges with the nymph Salmacis, so that they dwell together in a single body with male and female characteristics

Hermes

in Greek mythology, the messenger god

hieratic scale

A type of scale based on relative importance, in which more important figures are represented as larger than less important figures around them

highlights

Bright elements of an image that often draw the viewer's attention

Hinduism

Oldest practiced religion in the world, originating in India. Hinduism has tens or even hundreds of thousands of gods, and no single set of beliefs or laws regarding them, but rather, celebrates pluralism.

historical era

the time period after the development of writing

history painting

paintings that show grand events from history

horizon line

The divide in an image between sky and land or sea

hues

the colors of the visible spectrum

icon

an image of a saint or other holy figure from Christian mythology, usually presented against a gold background and thereby separated from any specific contexts or moments from their lives

iconoclasts

literally, "image breakers," used in Byzantine art history to describe people who wanted to eliminate all religious icons in order to follow the Second Commandment.

iconography

Literally "picture-writing," the recognizable forms in images, often with symbolic meanings. Also used to describe the study of such images and their meanings

iconophiles

literally, "image lovers," used in Byzantine art history to describe people who fought to continue the use of religious icons

idealized

represented not as is, but according to a culture's belief about what the ideal form would be, eg. the form of the human body. Ideals change over time, and vary from culture to culture.

idol

an image designed to be inhabited by a deity

illuminated manuscript

A handmade, hand-written book with decorations and/or illustrations

illuminator

An artist responsible for adding images and decoration in manuscripts

implied lines

lines that are not actually drawn in an image, but can be inferred, such as the sight lines of figures in a work

inorganic or geometric lines

straight or smoothly, evenly curving lines found in geometric diagrams, and not common in nature

intensity

How bright or dull a color is

intertitle

A card containing text, used in silent films to convey dialogue and information

Jingu

Shinto shrines of the Japanese Imperial House

juxtaposition

Placing images, texts, or other content side-by-side in order to generate comparisons and contrasts

Ka'bah

A structure in Mecca believed by Muslims to be the house Abraham, the Jewish patriarch, erected for God

kare-sansui

literally "dried-up mountain-waterscape," a form of Japanese rock garden

kare-sensui

literally "withered mountain-water," a form of Japanese rock garden

Kuleshov Effect

the process by which viewers of films make connections between sequential shots, even when they may have nothing to do with one another. Named for Russian film-maker Lev Kuleshov

kylix

a wide, shallow Ancient Greek drinking cup

landscape

An image where the main subject is the natural world, itself, rather than people or other figures doing something in the world

libertine

one who rejects commonly held moral or ethical principles, especially about sex and sexuality; the property of one who does so

Line

A path either represented or implied

linear perspective

A technique used to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional image, achieved by drawing or implying a series of lines that all converge on one or more vanishing points

linga

see Lingum

lingam

In Hinduism, an object used in the worship of Shiva; a smooth, round-topped cylinder often considered a phallic symbol

lintel

a horizontal member placed on top of two vertical posts, as in rectangular doorways

lynching

Murder by a mob, usually by hanging and usually of a person or people, with the excuse of purported crimes or offenses, but without a trial to determine guilt. Lynchings were a central element of white supremacist campaigns of terror

mandala

An image using geometrical layout to represent the universe, especially in Buddhism and Hinduism

mandorla

a full-body halo

manifesto

a mission statement

manuscript

A handmade, hand-written book

mass

The central ritual of some forms of Christianity, in which wine and bread or wafers are consumed; some groups see these as a symbol of Christ's blood and body, while others believe them to be miraculously transformed into his actual blood and body

mat

A piece of paper or card stock used to support, frame, or embellish a work of are when framed

media

the materials used to make works of art, such as oil paint, marble, and steel

medieval

European era ranging from ca. 500-1500 CE

menorah

eight-branched candlesticks used in the celebration of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah

mezzotint

an engraving technique that can produce a wide range of tones from white to black.

Middle Ages

European period running from approximately 400 or 500 CE through 1400 or 1500 CE, depending on location

mihrab

in Islam, a niche in the wall of a mosque that faces toward the Ka'ba in Mecca and therefore indicates the direction of prayer

monarchy

Rule by a single individual, usually a king or queen, and usually based on inherited titles

monastery

The buildings in which a community of monks living under religious vows

monk

A man who has taken religious vows and lives in a monastery

monotheistic

believing in one deity

montage

A film technique where various clips are spliced together to create meanings and/or effects

monumental

large, massive

mosaic

An image composed of thousands of small pieces of glass, tile, or stone embedded in plaster

Motion lines

lines used to create a sense of movement in an image

Movement

A sense of motion as the eye is guided through a work

narrative

a story

naturalism

Making an image look like the “real world”

naturalistic

Of works of art, to display naturalism, that is, to look like the actual world

Ndebele

a people and language of Zimbabwe and adjacent regions of South Africa

necropolis

literally, "city of the dead," a district set aside for burials

negative space

the empty area around a form or forms in a work of art

Neolithic

From the Greek words for “new stone,” the period of prehistory following the Paleolithic, and running from the end of the last ice age, about 10,000 years ago, and accompanied by the development of agriculture

Nirvana

In Buddhism, the end of cycles of reincarnation and a release from all desires and the resulting suffering

non-representational

A work of art with no depiction of anything, also called total abstraction

Northern Renaissance

definition

odalisque

historically, a female concubine or sexual slave in a harem, esp. of the Sultan of Turkey. Also, a frequent subject for Orientalist painting

oeuvre

all the works an artist produces throughout their career

Old Master

Well-known premodern European artists, especially those living in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries

order

the property of being regular, clear, repeating, or otherwise structured

Organic lines

loose, curving, irregular lines like those found in nature

orientalist

term for 19th-century European scholars who studied Asian cultures; also used to describe the approach of such scholars. Widely condemned in more recent post-colonial scholarship as racist and sexist.

oriented

The direction a map faces at its top. The term comes from medieval Christian mapmaking practices, which usually put the east ("orient" in Greek) at the top

orthogonal lines

Lines that meet at the vanishing point in linear perspective

ovoids

rounded-off rectangles in Pacific Northwest Indigenous art

painterly

showing brushstrokes

Paleolithic

From the Greek words for “old stone,” the period of prehistory from approximately 2.6 million years ago (when the earliest stone tools were developed by our evolutionary ancestors) until about 10,000 years ago, ending along with the last ice age and accompanied by the development of agriculture in the Neolithic (“new stone”) period.

pantheon

all the deities of a people or religion; literally "all gods"

patriarch

The male head of a family or tribe, especially used to describe biblical figures

patron

a person commissioning a work of art to be made and paying for it

patronage

Paying for the creation of works of art; a person who provides patronage is called a patron

Pattern

Repeating an object or element evenly throughout a work or a part of a work

pediment

the triangular section, often filled with sculpture, at the top of the facade of a building, esp. an ancient Greek temple

perspective

in art, a system to create an illusion of three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional medium

phallic

resembling male genitals

phallic symbol

an object or image standing in for male genitals

photomontages

collages made out of photographs, often from popular newspapers and magazines

pilgrimage

Travel to holy sites or people

pilgrims

travelers whose travels have a religious purpose; often, pilgrims travel to holy sites

polyptych

a painting with many panels

polytheistic

believing in multiple gods

portraits

images of known individuals, often drawn from life (that is, with the person posing for the portrait)

positive space

sections of works of art occupied by forms and shapes

prayer hall

a space in religious architecture, generally large and open, where worshippers congregate for prayer

prehistoric

of any culture, before (or without) a written form of language

primary colors

Colors from which all other colors can be made

primordial couple

a couple seen as the first people, and the source of humanity, a trope common to many religions

proletariat

The working class

Proportion

The relationship of parts of a body or form to one another and of the parts to the whole, for example, the size of the head of a figure in relation to the entire body

Psalter

A volume containing the biblical Book of the Psalms

pubic triangle

the area on a body containing pubic hair and external genitals

pungsu (feng shui)

literally "wind and water" in Korean, the Korean adaptation of the Daoist Chinese concept of *feng shui*, an approach to the location, orientation, and design of architectural forms to facilitate the positive flow of *qi* [energy]

putti

winged cherubs or cupids

Qur'an

The holy book of Islam

radial

arranged around a central point

Radial symmetry

The property of an image that is symmetrical around a central point or axis, like a sunflower viewed head-on

realism

The property of images that represent the gritty or harsh realities of the world

Reconstruction

An image, model, or full-scale replica of a damaged or lost work of art or architecture

red-figure

ancient Greek pottery style in which figures are left the reddish color of unpainted terracotta clay, against a glazed black background

regalia

Formal, often elaborate ceremonial clothing

registers

Horizontal bands of imagery or decoration

reincarnation

being reborn into a new body after death

relic

The remains of a holy person, or items of great religious significance

relics

see "relic"

reliquary

a container for relics, which are the remains of a holy figure, or items of importance to them

Renaissance

literally "rebirth," most commonly used to describe the European artistic and intellectual movement of ca. 1300-1600, characterized by revived interest in the styles and subjects of ancient Greece and Rome

repetition

Similar to pattern, repeating an object or element throughout a work or a part of a work, but generally less precise or formal than a pattern

representational

Art containing an image of something, as opposed to pure abstraction

Rhythm

A visual tempo set by repeating elements in a work

Rococo

An eighteenth-century art form, especially in France, Germany, and Austria, characterized by light, breezy, cheerful, and sentimental imagery, often of wealthy people (or the rural poor depicted as if wealthy) playing in nature

ruin

A substantially damaged work of architecture, usually unable to continue to serve its original purpose

Saint Augustine of Hippo

Highly influential theologian and bishop of the North African city of Hippo from 396 to 430 CE

Salmacis

in ancient Greek myth, a nymph who lusted after Hermaphrodite, whose name indicates his parentage -- he is the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. She eventually merges with Hermaphrodite so that they dwell together in a single body with male and female characteristics

saturation

How bright or dull a color is

Scale

The relationship of parts of an image to the image as a whole, or to something in the world outside of the image, for example, the size of the figure of a king in an image as compared to the size of the figure of his servant in the same image, or the size of a statue of the king as compared to the size of an actual person

scribe

One who pens the text of manuscripts (Latin for "written by hand")

scripture

sacred religious texts

secondary colors

Colors made by mixing two primary colors

shade

Value produced by adding black to a hue

shading

The use of darker colors or lines to create the illusion of shadows

Shamanism

religion practice in which shamans are believed to connect with the spirit world in order to learn about or have an influence on this world

Shape

The property of a two-dimensional form, usually defined by a line around it

Shiva

In Hinduism, one of the main deities

shogunate

military dictatorship of Japan, 1192–1867, under the nominal control of the emperor

shunga

literally "pictures of spring," Japanese woodblock prints, esp. ca. 17th-19th centuries, though also later, that feature explicit sexual content

sight lines

lines that follow the direction of a figure's gaze

Sigmund Freud

Austrian founder of psychoanalysis, a process used to treat mental disturbances, often through the uncovering of unconsciously held thoughts and fears

silkscreened

produced with a printing technique in which the negative of an image transferred to a fine screen, through which ink is forced to produce positive image

sitter

the subject of a portrait

soffit

in architecture, a supporting member projecting from a wall

Space

Depth, real or represented, as well as the general area within a work

spolia

artistic or architectural elements reused from previous works, often displayed clearly in order to convey political or religious conquest

stele

an upright stone marker

still lifes

Images of objects, generally without human or animal figures

stylized

Designed according to the principles of a particular style rather than being beholden to the way things look in "the real world."

sumi-e

Japanese painting done in black ink

surimono

Japanese woodblock prints generally containing images and poetry, privately commissioned in small runs to celebrate special occasions

sutra

religious text in Buddhism and Jainism; also religious law in Hinduism

Symmetry

Usually used to describe bilateral symmetry, which is a mirroring of two halves of a work, or radial symmetry, where an image is symmetrical around a central point or axis, like a sunflower viewed head-on

symposia

in the ancient world, a dinner party centered on wine drinking, with conversation on a chosen theme, and often ending in a sexual orgy

Tamberan House

in East Sepik culture of Papua New Guinea, elaborately decorated "Men's House" structures used for communal rituals

tempera

pigment suspended in egg yolk and then used as paint

Teotihuacan

an elaborate ancient city in the Valley of Mexico

tertiary colors

Colors made by mixing a primary color with an adjacent secondary color

Texture

The feeling of a surface, real or represented

This

This means the very thing that I'm talking about here!

tint

Value produced by adding white to a hue

tondo

a round format for two-dimensional works of art, esp. paintings

tonsure

a hairstyle where the top of the head is shaved as a marker of having taken the vows of a Christian monk

toranas

In Buddhism, tall stone gateways

totemic

related to totems, objects of power; also, symbolic of qualities or concepts

triptych

a painting with three panels, hinged together so that the outer panels, or wings, can be closed over the central panel

tympanum

a semicircular sculptural panel over a doorway

Ukiyo-e

literally "pictures of the floating world," Japanese woodblock prints, ca. 17th-19th centuries that focus on the lively activities of the red-light district of Edo (now Kyoto), including sumo wrestlers, geishas, and actors

Unity

The use of similar elements so that all the parts of a work fit together well

Upanishads

ancient Hindu sacred Sanskrit texts

utopianism

Belief that a perfect state is possible

value

The degree of lightness or darkness of a color

vanishing point

Point on the horizon line where orthogonal lines meet in linear perspective

Variety

The use of different visual elements throughout a work

vaults

architectural elements consisting of a weight-bearing, arched roof, usually in stone

vellum

animal skin, usually calf or sheep, used as a support for writing; also called parchment

Venus

in ancient Roman myth, the goddess of beauty, love, and sex; equivalent to the Greek Aphrodite

verism

The highest degree of naturalism

Visigoths

Germanic peoples of Spain, from the late classical through the early medieval periods

Visual Analysis

The process of breaking down works of art into their parts (such as line, color, balance, and symmetry), figuring out how they relate to one another, and considering their effects of viewers.

visual elements

Line, Shape, Color, Space, Form, Texture

volume

three-dimensional space or shape

voyeur

one who finds sexual pleasure in viewing naked people, people engaged in sex, etc., esp. if those viewed are unaware of the viewer's presence

wabi

Japanese term for the appreciation of a simple, even austere lifestyle, often reflected in art

warm colors

Colors from yellow to violet on the color wheel

woodblock print

a form of printmaking where a wooden block is carved in reverse, inked, and then pressed into paper to create an image

woodblock printing

a form of printmaking where a wooden block is carved in reverse, inked, and then pressed into paper to create an image

woodcut

a printmaking process were a negative image is carved into a wooden block which is then inked and pressed onto a surface, usually paper, to create a positive image

Yahweh

the monotheistic god of Judaism, also shared by Christianity and Islam

yakshas

male benevolent minor deities common in Indian belief and found in both Buddhist and Hindu art

yakshis

female benevolent minor deities common in Indian belief and found in both Buddhist and Hindu art

yonic

Resembling a vulva

Zen Buddhist

A Buddhist sect focused on *zen* (literally, meditation) as the path to enlightenment, in contrast with Buddhist sects that emphasize more formal rituals. Closely tied to the practice of sumi-e painting

Zeus

the thunder god, head of the ancient Greek pantheon