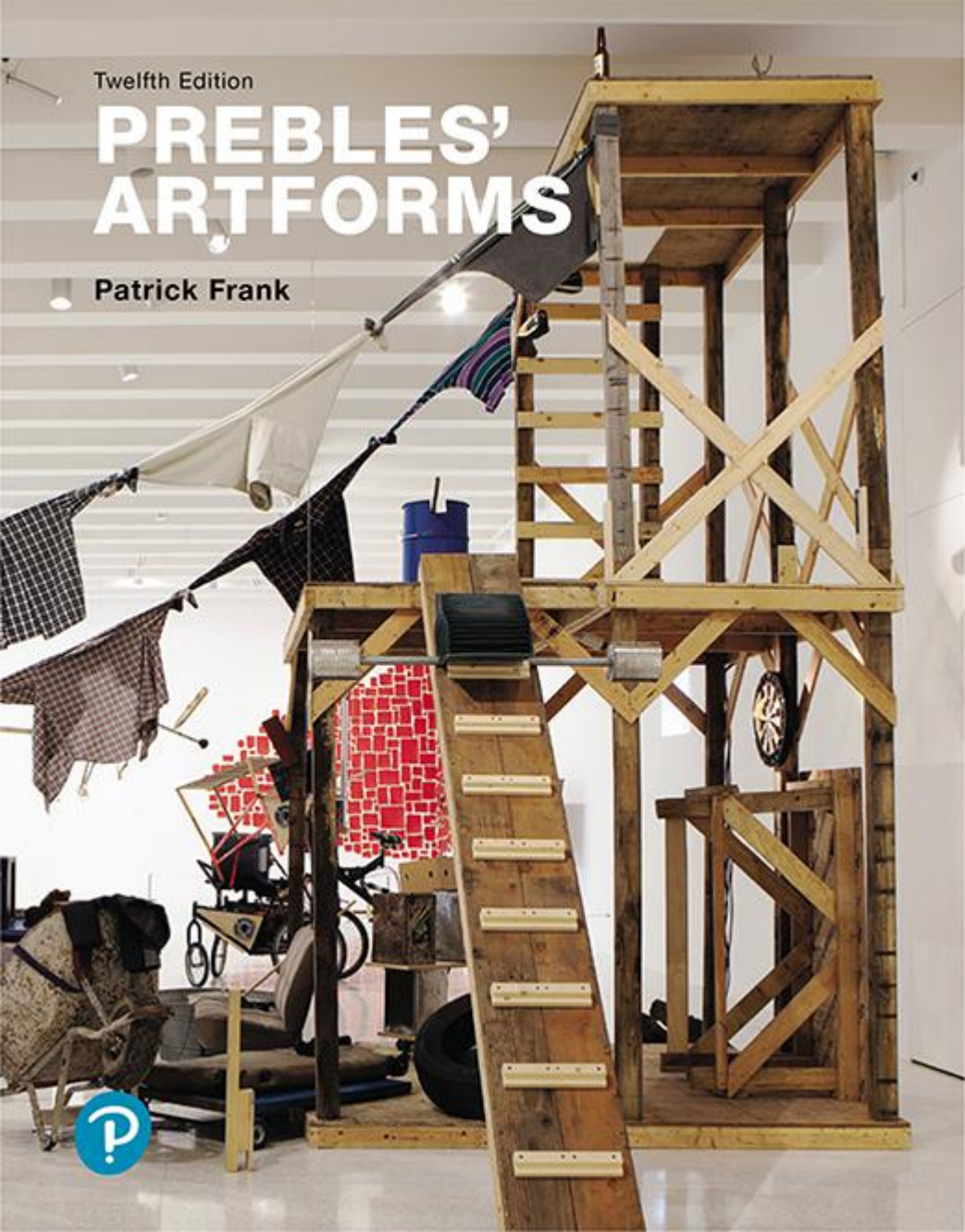
Twelfth Edition
PREBLES' ARTFORMS
Patrick Frank

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Patrick Frank

Pearson

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BRIEF CONTENTS

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Part Three
ART AS CULTURAL HERITAGE

DEAR READER

I'm a visual person; I have two Instagram accounts. I love looking at things and thinking about them. For me, art from any period or culture is just about the most interesting thing on the planet. This is because art is a human product, made by people just like us. Looking at a work of art instantly leads me to imagining the mindset and working methods of whoever made it. Then I start comparing it, in my mind, with similar things that I have seen; and then I am hooked.

We form art. Art forms us. The title of this book has a dual meaning. As humans form works of art, we in turn are formed by what we have created. Such human creativity influences and stimulates us. Several editions ago, this book's title was changed to Prebles' *Artforms*, acknowledging the pioneering contribution of the original authors, Duane and Sarah Preble. They first posited the emphasis on our two-way interaction with works of art, and that emphasis continues to inform every page of this book.

Why study art? Because artists have dealt at one time or another with nearly every aspect of the human experience, from the common to the forbidden, the mundane to the sacred, the repugnant to the sublime. Artistic creativity is a response to being alive, and by experiencing such creativity, we enrich our experience of life. This is especially true of today's creations, which are more wide-ranging than ever before, and sufficiently accessible to almost any curious person. Artistic creativity is a human treasure, and in art we can see it in a very pure form.

From my post here in southern California, I try to keep up with what's going on in the art world; I also travel a lot. My notebook tells me that in just the last year, I saw 220 art exhibitions. These ranged from Native American rock art sites to the latest London galleries. (To see what I am enthused about lately, visit my Instagram feed @PatrickFrankAuthor.) From all of that looking I select the best for inclusion in *Artforms*. Behind all of the learning objectives, new terms, quizzes, flashcards, and writing prompts that accompany this book, there is a wealth of visual creativity that has constantly informed, surprised, inspired, challenged, or thrilled me. If some of that enthusiasm of mine comes through in this text, I will count it a success.

Patrick Frank
Venice, California

WHAT'S NEW

This New Edition Enhances Learning for Students:

To facilitate student learning and understanding of the arts, this twelfth edition is centered on **Learning Objectives** that introduce each chapter. These learning objectives are tailored to the subheadings so that the student will be continually reminded of the goals and objectives of study as they progress through each chapter.

The art world is changing, and *Artforms* is changing with it. The twelfth edition of this book is a deep and thorough revision which unveils a great deal of new content. I have bought **a record 196 new pictures**, adding new works in the vast bulk of the cases.

New Content in the 12th Edition:

- Following up on the discussions of creativity introduced in the last edition, a new essay feature in each chapter called **Creators** highlights the contributions of key artists. Many classic artists are featured, such as Michelangelo and Vincent Van Gogh, but 13 of the 25 essays discuss female creators, and eleven of them discuss creators of color.
- The interaction of **art and the digital world** has driven new content in several chapters, for example: Chapter 6 on Drawing has expanded treatment of interactive comics and digital drawing. Chapter 9 on Photography has expanded discussion of digital cameras and artists' use of software editing. Digital creativity is now a special focus in Chapter 10 on Cinema and Digital arts, with increased treatment of special effects, virtual reality cinema, and high-tech artists such as Lynn Hershman Leeson. The section on Interactive Design in Chapter 11 has been rewritten and expanded.
- Chapter 2 has been rewritten to deepen the focus on the **social functions of art**.
- The chapter on Craft Media (Chapter 13) has been rewritten to focus specifically artistic objects **meant for use**.
- The last section of Chapter 14 has been revamped to increase treatment of **contemporary sustainable architecture**.
- New dating of some cave paintings in Indonesia makes them the **world's oldest painted art**, older than European work by several thousand years. They are discussed in Chapter 15.
- Through a new subheading in Chapter 19, *Artforms* is now also the only book of its kind to include discussion of **Muslim modern art**.
- The final chapter on Contemporary Art is one of the most revised, with 17 new images along with discussion of **new topics** such as relational aesthetics, Post-Internet art, and a biographical essay on Ai Weiwei.

New to the Revel Edition of *Artforms*

All of the new material cited above is included in the Revel edition as well, but Revel's cross-platform digital environment allows us to offer many more aids to student learning in an interactive, engaging way.

- **Pan/zooms** appear with a simple click for almost all of the figures, allowing students to zoom in and examine details with high clarity and resolution, and then return to the overall view of the work of art, so they can relate these details to the whole.
- The pan/zooms' **scale feature** opens a window where works of art appear next to a scaled human figure (or, for small works, a scaled human hand), giving students an instant sense of the size of what they are studying.
- **3D animations of architectural and art historical techniques** depict and explain processes and methods that are difficult for students to grasp simply through narrative text.
- **Panoramas from global sites** have been integrated into the design, bringing students into the setting, both inside and out, of major buildings and monuments such as the Taj Mahal, Great Zimbabwe, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater.
- **The Closer Looks** been transformed into Revel video presentations, where students are guided through a detailed examination of key works.
- A new series of **Explore** videos go into further detail on select topics in each chapter. The topics run a wide gamut, including political art, the stages of construction at Stonehenge, why some artists opted for the radicalism of Dada, and the latest innovations in photography.
- The entire text is available on **streaming audio**, read by the author.

In addition a variety of self-tests, review features, and writing opportunities have been built into the platform. These are all designed to ensure the student's mastery of the material.

- **Multiple-choice self-tests**, at the conclusion of each major section of a chapter, allow the student to assess quickly how well they have absorbed the material at hand.
- **Interactive learning tools**, in a variety of formats, review key terms and ideas, and make use of flashcards to test student retention.
- Each chapter contains three kinds of **writing prompts**. All are keyed to specific works of visual art and appear in conjunction with figures that illustrate the works. **Journaling** prompts focus on building skills of visual analysis; **Shared Writing** responses relate the material in the chapter to today's world; and **Writing Space** prompts encourage students to engage in cross-cultural thinking, often across chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I greatly appreciate the help and encouragement of the many people who have been directly involved in the writing of this twelfth edition. Several deserve special mention for their contributions: Picture researcher Julia Ruxton tirelessly tracked down images and fulfilled the increasingly complex legal requirements of today's copyright-sensitive age. Helen Ronan, Melissa Danny, and Deborah Hercun served as project managers, keeping us all on track while preserving a wonderfully civilized attitude.

This book also benefitted from assistance in specialized content areas from Elizabeth East, Charles James, and Ken Smith. Many artists opened their studios to me as I was researching this book; I greatly appreciate their generosity, just as I hope that I have communicated the vigor and inspiration of their creativity.

I also express my sincere appreciation to the instructors who use this textbook as well as the following reviewers. All offered exceedingly valuable suggestions that were vital to the revising and updating of this edition:

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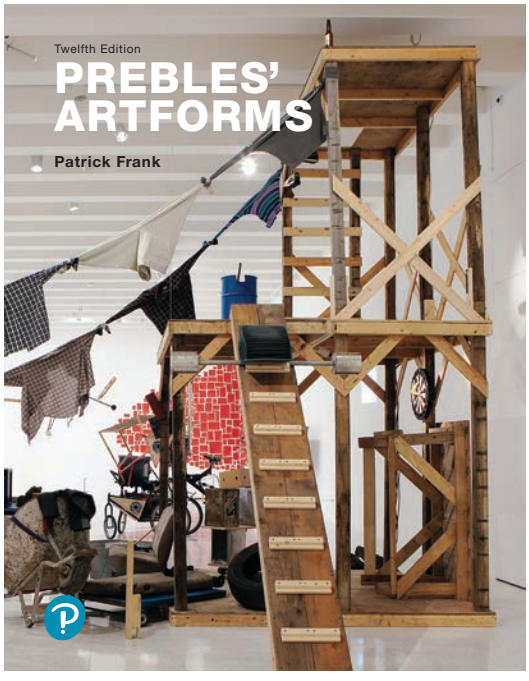
Jason Sweet, Atlanta Metro College

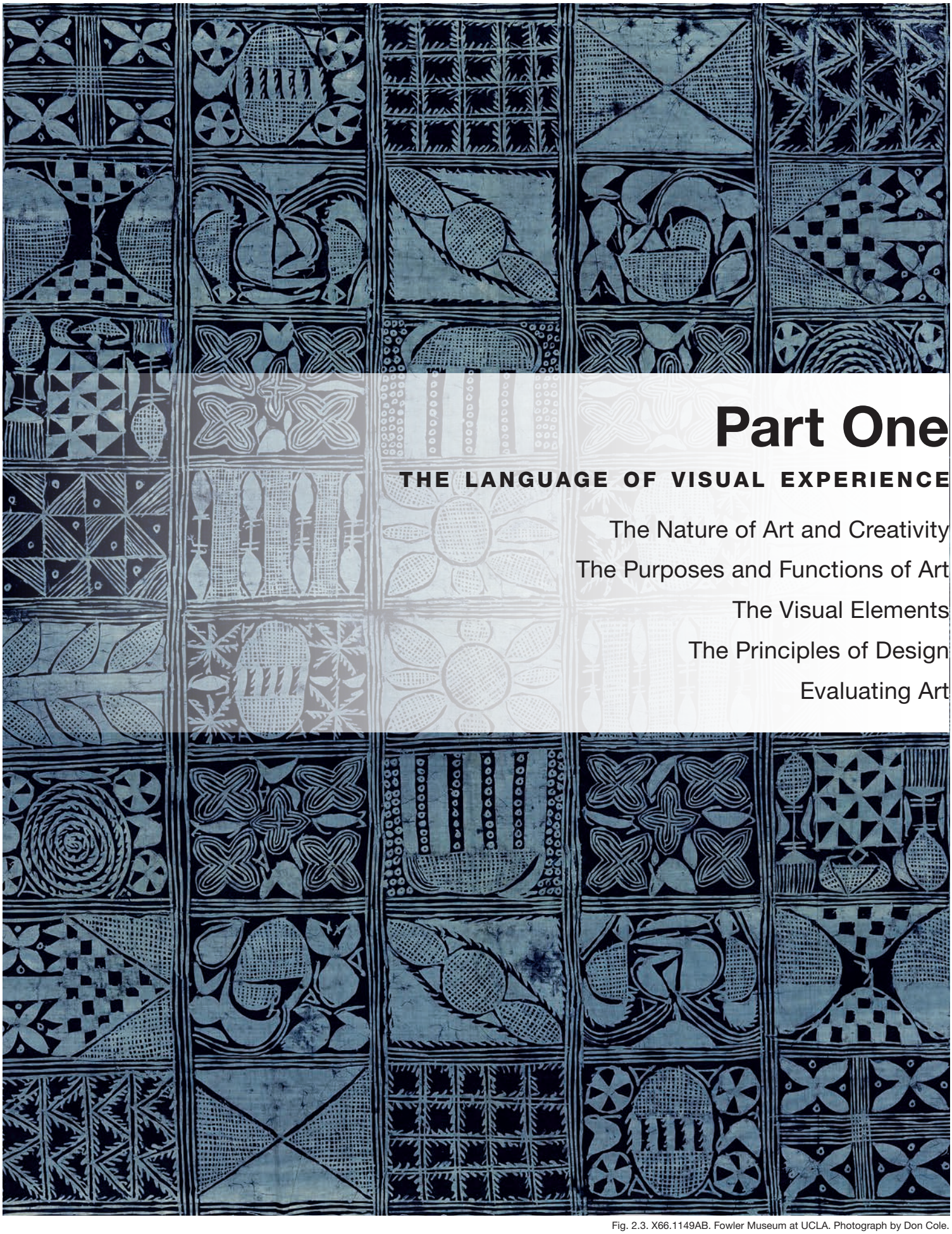
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Frank has taught in many higher education environments, from rural community colleges to public and private research universities. Most recently, he was Regents' Lecturer at the University of California, Los Angeles. His specialty as a scholar is modern art of Latin America, and he has authored or co-authored six books in this field. Most recently, he edited and translated *Manifestos and Polemics in Latin American Modern Art*, published in 2017 by University of New Mexico Press. He earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

ABOUT THE COVER

Autoconstrucción Suites by Abraham Cruzvillegas. At first glance the installation seems like a highly disorderly scene. Wooden scaffolds dominate the view, with shirts tied together spanning the distance between them. A few television sets, primitive stairs, metal frameworks, a wheelbarrow, and other seemingly miscellaneous junk populate the gallery space. Cruzvillegas gathered these objects from the immediate neighborhood. Yet behind all of this apparent chaos is a story that relates to his personal history and, by extension, to most of us as viewers. The construction of the artwork parallels the story of the construction of Cruzvillegas's family home on the outskirts of Mexico City. There, in a neighborhood outside the reach of most city services, the artist's relatives built the house he grew up in, room by room, floor by floor, by themselves, using whatever they could find or buy.





Part One

THE LANGUAGE OF VISUAL EXPERIENCE

The Nature of Art and Creativity

The Purposes and Functions of Art

The Visual Elements

The Principles of Design

Evaluating Art

Fig. 2.3. X66.1149AB. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

1 The Nature of Art and Creativity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Describe art as a means of visual expression that uses various media and forms.

1.2 Explain what is meant by creativity.

1.3 Discuss the role creativity plays in the work of trained and untrained artists.

1.4 Assess the ways in which representational, abstract, and non-representational art relate to reality.

1.5 Contrast the terms looking and seeing.

1.6 Differentiate between form and content, and show how artists may use iconography to communicate the latter.

Is it necessary for us to give visual form to things we feel, think, and imagine? Must we gesture, dance, draw, speak, sing, write, and build? To be fully human, it seems we must. In fact, the ability to create is one of the special characteristics of being human. The urge to make and enjoy what we call art has been a driving force throughout human history. Art is not something apart from us. It grows from common—and uncommon—human insights, feelings, and experiences.

Art does not need to be "understood" to be enjoyed. Like life itself, it can simply be experienced. Yet the more we understand what art can offer, the richer our experience of it will be.

For example, when Janet Echelman's huge artwork *Her Secret Is Patience* (**fig. 1.1**) was hoisted into the air above Phoenix, Arizona, in mid-2009, even most of the doubters became admirers once they experienced this stunning work. Suspended from three leaning poles between 40 and 100 feet above the ground, its colored circles of netting appear both permanent and ever changing, solid yet spacious, defying gravity as they dance and wave slowly in the breeze.

The artist chose the cactus-flower shape to symbolize the desert city of Phoenix. She was inspired by the patience of the saguaro cactus, she said, "a spiny cactus putting down roots in search of water in the desert, saving up every ounce of energy until, one night, in the middle of the cool darkness, it unfurls one succulent bloom."[1] The work also refers to the character of nature itself. Echelman took her title from the words of American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote, "Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience."

The citizens who advocated the piece during the extended waiting time between conception and completion were patient as well. Doubters objected to the price tag ($2.4 million), the shape (one said it resembled a giant jellyfish), and the artist's origins (she is not from Arizona). Those misgivings and a few technical problems kept *Her Secret Is Patience* on the drawing board for a year and a half. But today most Arizonians look on the work with pride: This unique visual delight has become a landmark for the city of Phoenix just as the Eiffel Tower became one for Paris. The *Arizona Republic* editorialized: "This is just what Phoenix needs: a distinctive feature that helps create a real sense of place."[2]

The creation and the reception of *Her Secret Is Patience* embody an important idea: artistic creation is a two-way street. That is, we form art, and then the art forms us by enriching our lives, teaching us, commemorating our human past, touching our spirits, and inspiring or

1.1 Janet Echelman. *Her Secret Is Patience*. 2009. Fiber, steel, and lighting. Height 100´ with a top diameter of 100´.
Civic Space Park, Phoenix, AZ. Courtesy Janet Echelman, Inc. Photograph: Will Novak.

persuading us (see Chapter 2). It can also challenge us to think and see in new ways, and help each of us to develop a personal sense of beauty and truth.

While *Her Secret Is Patience* may not resemble the type of artwork that you are familiar with—it is not a painting, and it is not in a museum—it is art. In this chapter we will explore some definitions of what is meant by "art" and "creativity," and look at how creativity is expressed through different types of art and through its form and content.

What is Art?

When people speak of the arts, they are usually referring to music, dance, theater, literature, and the visual arts. Our senses perceive each artform differently, yet all art comes from a common need to give expressive substance to feelings, insights, and experiences. The arts communicate meanings that go far beyond ordinary verbal exchange, and artists use the entire range of thought, feeling, and observation as the subjects of their art.

The visual arts include drawing, painting, sculpture, film, architecture, and design. Some ideas and feelings can best be communicated only through visual forms. American painter Georgia O'Keeffe said: "I found that I could say things with colors and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way—things I had no words for."[3]

In this book, a **work of art** is the visual expression of an idea or experience, formed with skill, through the use of a **medium**. A medium is a particular material, along with its accompanying technique. (The plural is *media*.) Artists select media to suit the function of the work, as well as the ideas they wish to present. When a medium is used in such a way that the object or performance contributes to our understanding or enjoyment of life, we experience the final product as art.

For *Her Secret Is Patience*, Echelman sought to create a work that would say something about the Phoenix area, in a way that harmonized with the forces of nature. Thus, she chose flexible netting for the medium because it responds gracefully to the wind. She similarly chose the size, scale, shape, and color of the work that would best support and express her message.

Media in use for many centuries include clay, fiber, stone, wood, and paint. By the mid-twentieth century, modern technology had added new media, including video and computers, to the nineteenth-century contributions of photography and motion pictures. Many artists today combine media in a single work.

What is Creativity?

The source of all art, science, and technology—in fact, all of civilization—is human imagination, or creative thinking. But what do we mean by this talent we call "creativity"?

Creativity is the ability to bring forth something new that has value. Mere novelty is not enough; the new thing must have some relevance, or unlock some new way of thinking.

Creativity also has the potential to influence future thought or action, and is vital to most walks of life. In 2010, the IBM corporation interviewed 1,500 chief executive officers (CEOs) from 60 countries, asking them what was the most important leadership skill for the successful

1.2 Robin Rhode. *He Got Game*. 2000. Twelve color photographs.
Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong. © Robin Rhode.

businesses of the future. Their answer was not economic knowledge, management skills, integrity, or personal discipline, but creativity.

While studying creative people in several disciplines, the authors of the 2011 book *Innovator's DNA*[4] found five traits that seem to define creativity:

1. Associating. The ability to make connections across seemingly unrelated fields.
2. Questioning. Persistently challenging the status quo, asking why things function as they do now, and how or why they might be changed.
3. Observing. Intently watching the world around, without judgment, in search of new insights or ways of operating.
4. Networking. Being willing to interact with others, and learn from them, even if their views are radically different or their competencies seem unrelated.
5. Experimenting. Exploring new possibilities by trying them out, building models and then taking them apart for further improvement.

Creativity can be found in most human endeavors, but here we focus on artistic creativity, which can take many forms. A film director places actors and cameras on a sound stage in order to emphasize a certain aspect of the script. A Hopi potter decorates a water jar by combining traditional designs in new ways. A graphic designer seated at a computer creates an arrangement of type, images, and colors in order to communicate a message. A carver in Japan fashions wood into a Buddha that will aid meditation at a monastery. Most of us have at some time arranged images on our walls or composed a picture for a photograph. All these actions involve visual creativity, the use of imagery to communicate beyond what mere words can say.

He Got Game (**fig. 1.2**) is a good example of visual creativity using simple means. Contemporary South African artist Robin Rhode drew a basketball hoop on the asphalt surface of a street, then photographed himself lying down in 12 positions as if he were flipping through the air performing an impossible slam dunk. The artist here imitates the slow-motion and stop-motion photography often seen in sports television to create a piece with transcendent dramatic flair. The work cleverly uses low-tech chalk drawing and a slangy title to celebrate the cheeky boastfulness of street culture. As it clearly shows, creativity is an attitude, one that is as fundamental to experiencing and appreciating a work of art as it is to making one.

Twentieth-century American artist Romare Bearden showed a different type of creativity in his depictions of the daily life he witnessed in the rural South. In *Prevalence of Ritual: Tidings* (**fig. 1.3**) he created a work using borrowed picture fragments with a few muted colors to portray a mood of melancholy and longing. In the work, a winged figure seems to comfort an introspective woman who holds a flower, suggesting the story of the Christian Annunciation; a train implies departure, perhaps from this world or simply to a better life in the North. In this work, as in many of his others, Bearden was concerned with the effectiveness of his communication to the viewer, but equally important was his own inner need for creative expression.

1.3 Romare Bearden. *Prevalence of Ritual: Tidings.* 1967. Photomontage. 36″ × 48″.

Trained and Untrained Artists

Most of us tend to think of "art" as something produced only by "artists"—uniquely gifted people—and, because art is often separated from community life in contemporary society, many people believe they have no artistic talent. Yet we all have the potential to be creative.

In the past, the world's trained artists generally learned by working as apprentices to accomplished masters. (With a few notable exceptions, women were excluded from such apprenticeships.) Through practical experience, they gained necessary skills and developed knowledge of their society's art traditions. Today most art training takes place in art schools, or in college or university art departments. Learning in such settings develops sophisticated knowledge of alternative points of view, both contemporary and historical, and often trained artists show a self-conscious awareness of their relationship to art history. Romare Bearden, for example, learned his skills at the Art Students League in New York and the Sorbonne in Paris; Janet Echelman earned a Master of Fine Arts degree at Bard College, New York.

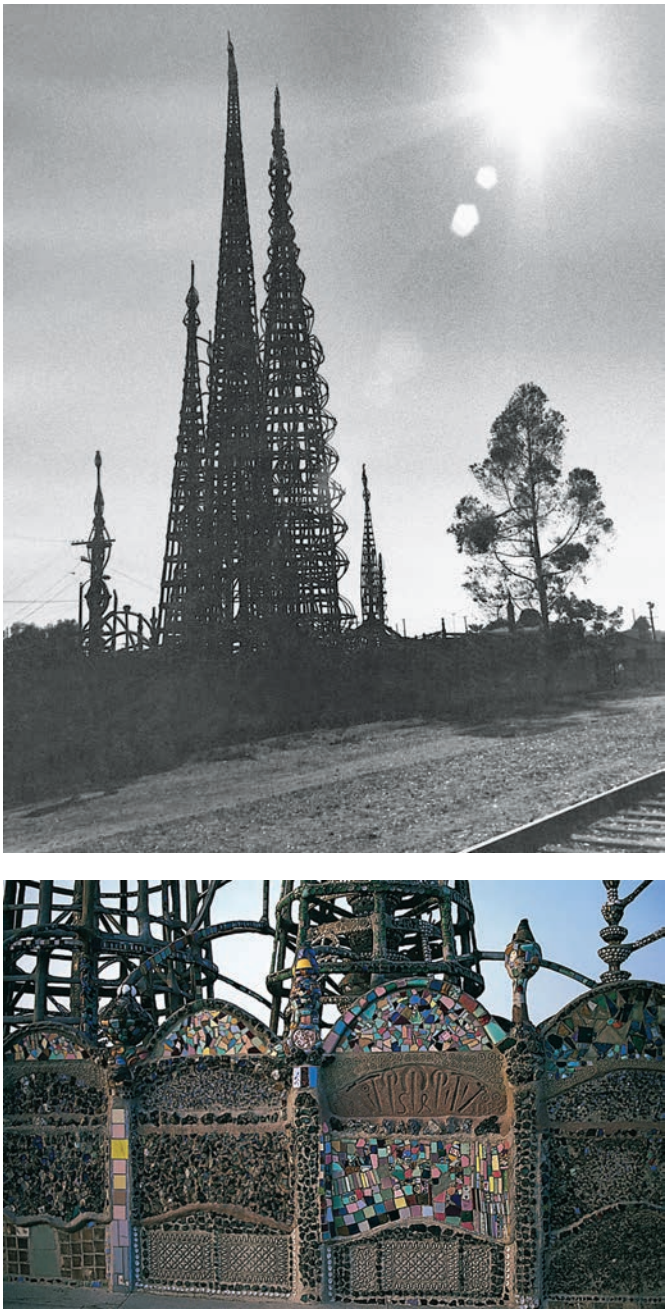
While training, skills, and intelligence are helpful in creativity, they are not always necessary. The urge to create is universal and has little to do with art training. Those with a small amount of or no formal art education—usually described as untrained artists or **folk artists**—and children can be highly creative. Art by untrained artists, also called **outsider artists**, is made by people who are largely unaware of art history or the art trends of their time. Unlike folk art, which is made by people working within a tradition, art by outsider artists is personal expression created apart from any conventional practice or style.

Outsider Art

One of the best-known (and largest) pieces of outsider art in the United States is *Nuestro Pueblo* (*Our Town*), more commonly known as the Watts Towers (**fig. 1.4**). Its creator, Sabatino "Simon" Rodia, exemplifies the artist who visualizes new possibilities for ordinary materials. He worked on his cathedral-like towers for 33 years, making the fantastic structures from cast-off materials such as metal pipes and bed frames held together with steel reinforcing rods, mesh, and mortar. Incredibly, he built the towers without power tools, rivets, welds, or bolts.

As the towers rose in his triangular backyard, he methodically covered their surfaces with bits and pieces of broken dishes, tile, melted bottle glass, shells, and other colorful junk from the vacant lots in his neighborhood. Rodia's towers are testimony to the artist's creativity and perseverance. He said, "I had it in mind to do something big, and I did it."[5]

Some creative people are so far outside the art world that even their names are unknown to us. In 1982, an art



1.4 Sabatino "Simon" Rodia. *Nuestro Pueblo.* Top: distant view. Bottom: detail of enclosing wall with construction tool impressions. 1921–54. Mixed media. Height 100′. Watts, California.
Photographs: Duane Preble.

1.5 Philadelphia Wireman. *Untitled (Watch Face).* c.1970. Watch face, bottle cap, nail, drawing on paper, and wire. 7″ × 3½″ × 2¼″.
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

student in Philadelphia found several boxes of hand-sized sculptures that had been set out among the trash in a run-down neighborhood. Numbering more than a thousand, the sculptures were collections of refuse and other small objects, all wrapped in wire (**fig. 1.5**). Dubbed the Philadelphia Wireman, the creator of these works is still unknown, as no one has yet claimed authorship after several exhibitions of the works. Because of the force required to bend the wire, the artist is generally thought to have been male. In any case, he created compelling conglomerations of debris that stir memory and imagination.

Folk Art

In contrast to outsider artists, folk artists are part of established traditions of style, theme, and craftsmanship. Simply put, folk art is art by the folks. Most folk artists have little systematic art training, and their work often shows great enthusiasm or devotion to tradition. Folk art can take many forms, including quilts, embroidered handkerchiefs, decorated weather vanes, sculptures, or customized cars.

In many areas of the United States, quilting has long been a flourishing form of folk art, usually practiced by women. Often working together, the women embellish bed covers to make them into finely crafted and eye-catching works, as we see in *Peony* (**fig. 1.6**). In this quilt the decorations are made from fabric overlays that the artist stitched down. Often the imagery is traditional to the culture or region; this work shows influence from Pennsylvania German pottery. The artist suggested the bright, many-petaled blooms of peonies in the design, which she abstracted to six-pointed star shapes.

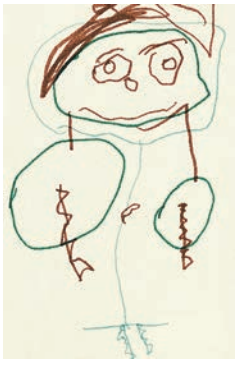
1.6 Mary Wallace. *Peony*. Quilt: pieced, appliquéd, and quilted cotton. 100¾″ × 98″.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Gift of Rhea Goodman (M.75.133)

1.7 *Retablo.* 1915. Paint on tin. 9″ × 11″.
Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

In Mexico and the American Southwest, the folk art of *retablo* painting is a customary way of giving thanks to God when someone escapes from danger or recovers from an illness. Such paintings generally depict the scene of salvation along with a narrative of the events. In this example (**fig. 1.7**), a man falsely accused of a crime escaped execution and created the painting. The inscription credits the "fervent prayers of my dear parents and my aggrieved wife" for saving him from the ultimate punishment. The spelling errors in the inscription combine with the sincere and charming painting style to yield a highly attractive work.

Children's Art

Children use a universal visual language. All over the world, drawings by children aged 2–6 show similar stages of mental growth, from exploring with mark-making, to inventing shapes, to symbolizing things seen and imagined. Until they are about 6 years old, children usually depict the world in symbolic rather than realistic ways. Their images are more mental constructions than records of visual observations. The drawing *Grandma* (**fig. 1.8**) by 3-year-old Alana shows enthusiasm and self-assurance in the repeated circles of green and brown. She found a rhythm in the eyes and the head, and she followed it exuberantly out to the sleeves.



1.8 Alana, age 3. *Grandma.*

Young children often demonstrate an intuitive ability to combine diverse elements into a whole. Unfortunately, much of this intuitive sense of balanced design is lost when they begin to look at the world from a conceptual and self-conscious point of view. Most children who have been given coloring books, workbooks, and predrawn printed single sheets become overly dependent on such impersonal stereotyped props. In this way, children often lose the urge to invent unique images based on their own experiences. Recent research shows that many children begin to doubt their creativity at about the age of 9 or 10 years. But creative people, be they artists or CEOs, retain their creativity into adulthood.

Whether trained, outsider, or folk, the most interesting artists are independent thinkers who have the courage to go beyond group mentality. In this way artists can offer fresh insights that extend the experiences of viewers.

Art and Reality

Artists may depict what they see in the physical world, they may alter appearances, or they may invent something that no one has yet seen. Regardless of their approach, most artists invite viewers to see beyond mere appearances. The terms **representational**, **abstract**, and **nonrepresentational** are used to describe an artwork's relationship to the physical world.

Representational Art

Representational art depicts the appearance of things. (When the human form is the primary subject, it is called **figurative art**.) It represents—or "presents again"—objects we recognize from the natural, everyday world. Objects that representational art depicts are called **subjects**.

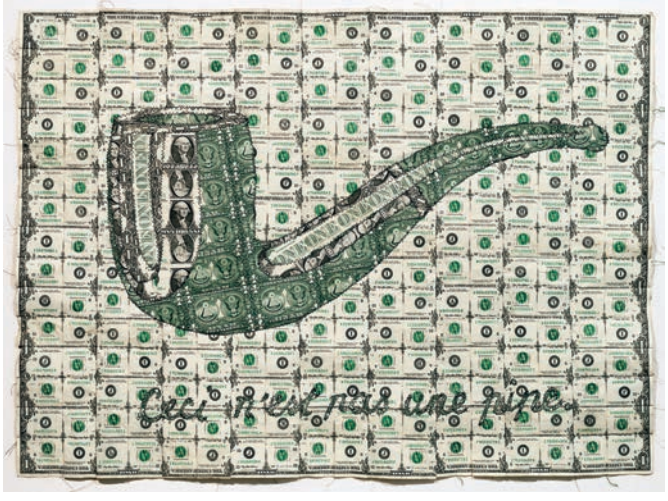
There are many ways to create representational art. The most "real"-looking paintings are in a style called *trompe l'oeil* (pronounced "tromp loy")—French for "fool the eye." Paintings in this illusionistic style impress us because they look so "real." In William Harnett's painting *A Smoke Backstage* (**fig. 1.9**), the assembled objects are close to life-size, which contributes to the illusion. We almost believe that we could touch the pipe and match.

Belgian painter René Magritte shows a different relationship between art and reality (**fig. 1.10**). The subject of the painting appears to be a pipe, but written in French on the painting are the words, "This is not a pipe." The viewer may wonder, "If this is not a pipe, what is it?" The answer, of course, is that it is a painting! Magritte's title, *The Treachery of Images* (*La Trahison des Images*), suggests the visual game that the artist had in mind.

California artist Ray Beldner further complicated the relationship between art and reality. He created a reproduction of Magritte's painting out of sewn dollar bills, and called it *This Is Definitely Not a Pipe* (**fig. 1.11**). Modern artists are so famous these days, and their work sells for such high prices, that they may as well be "made of money," just as this work is. Beldner's point is that even representational art has a complex relationship to reality; artists almost never merely depict what they see. Rather, they select, arrange, and compose reality to fit their personal vision. The process can take them several steps away from the fact of a pipe on a tabletop.

1.10 René Magritte. *La Trahison des Images (Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe).* 1929. Oil on canvas. 25⅜″ × 37″.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Purchased with funds provided by the Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection (78.7). © 2018 Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. © 2018 C. Herscovici, London/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

1.9 William Harnett. *A Smoke Backstage.* 1877. Oil on canvas. 7″ × 8½″.
Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of John Wyatt Gregg Allerton, 1964 (32111).



1.11 Ray Beldner. *This Is Definitely Not a Pipe.* 2000. After René Magritte's *The Treason of Images* (1929). Sewn US currency. 24″ × 33″.
Courtesy of the artist.

Abstract Art

The verb "to abstract" means "to take from"; it means to extract the essence of an object or idea. In art, the word "abstract" can mean either (1) works of art that have no reference at all to natural objects, or (2) works that depict natural objects in simplified, distorted, or exaggerated ways. Here we use abstract in the second sense.

In abstract art the artist changes the object's natural appearance in order to emphasize or reveal certain qualities. Just as there are many approaches to representational art, there are many approaches to abstraction. We may be able to recognize the subject matter of an abstract work quite easily, or we may need the help of a clue such as a title. The interaction between how the subject actually looks and how an artist presents it is part of the pleasure and challenge of abstract art (see *Alma Thomas: Devoted to Abstraction*, opposite).

Abstraction in one form or another is common in the art of many cultures. The chief's stool (**fig. 1.12**) from Cameroon shows repeated abstractions of the human form. We still recognize, of course, that the principal subject of the sculpture is people. They symbolize the community of the Cameroon grasslands that supports the chief who sits on this stool. This piece was regarded as the chief's "seat of power." No one else was allowed to use it, and when he died, according to custom, the stool was buried or thrown away.

Early modern artists in Europe also embraced abstraction. We see stages of abstraction in Theo van Doesburg's series of drawings and paintings, *Abstraction of a Cow* (**fig. 1.13**). The artist apparently wanted to see how far he could abstract the cow through simplification and still have his image symbolize the essence of the animal. He used the subject as a point of departure for a composition made up of colored rectangles. If we viewed only the final painting and none of the earlier ones, we would probably see it as a nonrepresentational painting.

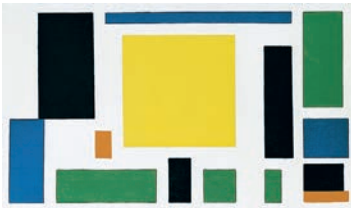
1.12 Chief's stool. Late 19th–early 20th century. Wood plant fiber. Height 16½″. Western Grasslands, Cameroon.
Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

1.13 Theo van Doesburg (born C.E.M. Küpper). *Abstraction of a Cow* series.
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Purchase 227.1948.1 (a.), 227.1948.6 (b.), 226.1948 (c.), and 225.1948 (d.).

a. *Composition (The Cow).* c.1917. Pencil on paper. 4⅝″ × 6¼″.

b. *Study for Composition (The Cow).* 1917. Pencil on paper. 4⅝″ × 6¼″.

c. *Study for Composition (The Cow).* c.1917 (dated 1916) Tempera, oil, and charcoal on paper. 15⅝″ × 22¾″.



d. *Composition VIII (The Cow).* c.1917. Oil on canvas. 14¾″ × 25″.

CREATORS

Alma Thomas: Devoted to Abstraction

1.14 Alma Thomas at an opening at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1972.
Alma Thomas papers, 1894–2000, bulk 1936–1982. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

When asked if she saw herself as a black artist, Alma Thomas (1891–1978) replied, "No, I do not. I am an American."[6] Through a lifelong devotion to abstraction, her creativity reached beyond accepted definitions, and it also unfolded in an unusual way. She was born in western Georgia into a middle-class home. Racial prejudice motivated her father to uproot the family and settle in Washington, D.C., in 1907. There she obtained a teaching degree and taught kindergarten for several years before realizing a dream to study art. She was the first graduate of the Howard University art program in 1924, and for the next 60 years she taught art in a junior high school in the nation's capital.

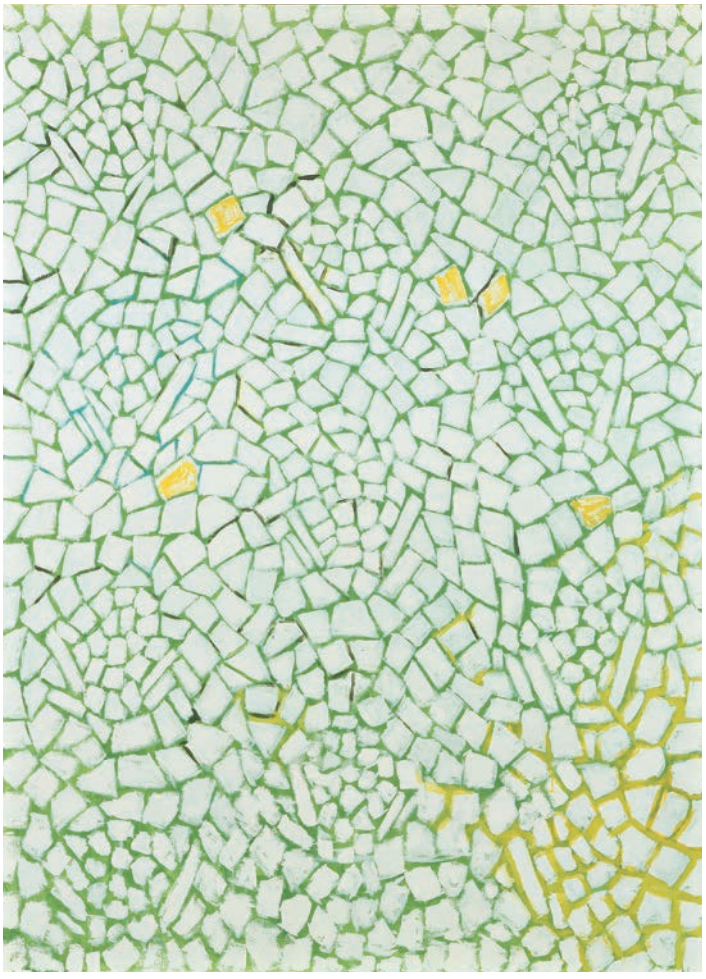
Thomas painted on the side, exhibiting her representational watercolors only occasionally. But she played an active part in the art scene in Washington; in 1943, she became the founding vice-president of the first private gallery in that city to show work by artists of all races. Further study at American University in the late 1950s exposed her to recent currents in modern art.

Only after her retirement from teaching in 1960 did Thomas begin to devote herself full-time to her art. She also had her first solo exhibition in that year, at age 69. Then her work progressed quickly toward the abstract style that she practiced for the rest of her life.

Thomas said she was inspired by the flickering movement of leaves and flowers under differing light conditions in her garden, and she titled many of her paintings after such observations. Small strokes or patches of paint, rhythmically set down, in mostly brilliant colors, became her signature style. Sometimes these strokes resemble stones in a mosaic, as we see in *White Roses Sing and Sing* (**fig. 1.15**). Although the work seems nonrepresentational at first, the title gives the key to its inspiration: roses moving on their stems in a light breeze. Aerial vantage points also inspired the artist to avoid detailed depictions. She told an interviewer, "I began to think about what I would see if I were in an airplane. You look down on things. You streak through the clouds so fast, you don't know whether the flower below is a violet or what. And so I began to paint as if I were in that plane."[7]

Further recognition came in the 1970s, when Thomas became the first African-American woman to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. President Jimmy Carter invited her to the White House. She remarked on her success in museums, comparing it to her earlier life under segregation, when "the only way to go in there as a Negro would be with a mop and bucket."[8]

Thomas always believed that creativity was a human universal, not bound by race or nation. She said, "We artists are put on God's green earth to create. Some of us may be black, but that's not the important thing. The important thing is for us to create, to give form to what we have inside us. We can't accept any barriers, any limitations of any kind, on what we create or how we do it."[9]



1.15 Alma Thomas. *White Roses Sing and Sing*. 1976. Acrylic on canvas. 72½″ × 52⅜″
National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. 1980.36.3. © 2018. Photo Smithsonian American Art Museum/Art Resource/Scala, Florence

Nonrepresentational Art

A great deal of the world's art was not meant to be representational at all. Amish quilts, many Navajo textiles, and most Islamic wood carvings consist primarily of flat patterns that give pleasure through mere variety of line, shape, and color. Nonrepresentational art (sometimes called nonobjective or nonfigurative art) presents visual forms with no specific references to anything outside themselves. Just as we can respond to the pure sound forms of music, so we can respond to the pure visual forms of nonrepresentational art.

The following two contrasting works show that in nonrepresentational art, a wide variety of forms, compositions, moods, and messages is possible. The Pair of Doors (**fig. 1.16**) from an Egyptian mosque is a dazzling piece of wood carving that is centered on two twelve-sided stars. Radiating out we see a web of carved straight lines that ricochet off the edges and cross each other to create an array of polygonal panels. Curving symmetrical designs within these panels, carved of wood and ivory, interweave and overlap. Without representing anything or telling any story, the doors draw and hold our attention for the virtuosic display of skill and the tremendous intricacy of the lines, shapes, and patterns.

The Pair of Doors is symmetrical and obviously handcrafted of natural materials, but *Yellow and Black* by Carmen Herrera (**fig. 1.17**) is asymmetrical and sleek, while also nonrepresentational. We may see a hint of a subject in this work (a lightning bolt?), but the artist was only experimenting with the juxtaposition of two strong colors. The work communicates vigorous energy and an agitated state of mind. This impact is strengthened by the work's large size, 6 feet across.

While nonrepresentational art may at first seem more difficult to grasp than representational or abstract art, it can offer fresh ways of seeing and new visual experiences. In the absence of subject matter, we can direct our attention to the shapes and forms before us in themselves. Once we learn how to read this language of vision, we can respond to both art and the world with greater understanding and enjoyment.

1.16 Pair of doors. Egypt, c.1325–1330. Wood (rosewood and mulberry); carved, inlaid with carved ivory, ebony, and other woods. 77¼″ × 35″ × 1¾″, encased in weighted freestanding mount.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. 91.1.2064.

1.17 Carmen Herrera. *Yellow and Black*. 2010. Acrylic on canvas. 36″ × 72″.

Looking and Seeing

Whether a work of art is representational, abstract, or nonrepresentational, we access it primarily through our eyes; thus we must consider how we use them.

The verbs "look" and "see" indicate varying degrees of visual awareness. Looking is habitual and implies taking in what is before us in a generally mechanical or goal-oriented way. If we care only about function, we simply need to look quickly at a doorknob in order to grasp and turn it. But if we find ourselves excited about the shape and finish of a doorknob, or of the bright quality of a winter day, or we empathize with the creator of an artwork, we go beyond simple, functional looking to a higher level of perception; this is "seeing."

Seeing is a more open, receptive, and focused version of looking. In seeing, we look with our memories, imaginations, and feelings attached. We take in something with our eyes, and then we remember similar experiences, or we imagine other possible outcomes, or we allow ourselves to feel something about it. We are doing more than looking.

The twentieth-century French artist Henri Matisse wrote about how to see intently:

> To see is itself a creative operation, requiring an effort. Everything that we see in our daily life is more or less distorted by acquired habits, and this is perhaps more evident in an age like ours when cinema, posters, and magazines present us every day with a flood of readymade images which are to the eye what prejudices are to the mind. The effort needed to see things without distortion takes something very like courage.[10]

Because words and visual images are two different languages, talking about visual arts with words is always an act of translation one step removed from actually experiencing art. In fact, our eyes have their own connections to our minds and emotions. By cultivating these connections, we can take better advantage of what art has to offer.

Ordinary things become extraordinary when we see them deeply. Is Edward Weston's photograph of a pepper (**fig. 1.18**) meaningful to us because we like peppers so much? Probably not. To help us truly see, Weston created a memorable image on a flat surface with the help of a common pepper. A time exposure of over two hours gave *Pepper #30* a quality of glowing light—a living presence that resembles an embrace. Through his sensitivity to form, Weston revealed how this pepper appeared to him. Notes from his *Daybook* communicate his enthusiasm about this photograph:

> August 8, 1930
> I could wait no longer to print them—my new peppers, so I put aside several orders, and yesterday afternoon had an exciting time with seven new negatives.
> First I printed my favorite, the one made last Saturday, August 2, just as the light was failing—quickly made, but with a week's previous effort back of my immediate, unhesitating decision. A week?—Yes, on this certain pepper,—but twenty-eight years of effort, starting with a youth on a farm in Michigan, armed with a No. 2 Bull's Eye [Kodak] 3½ × 3½, have gone into the making of this pepper, which I consider a peak of achievement.
> It is a classic, completely satisfying—a pepper—but more than a pepper: abstract, in that it is completely outside subject matter . . . this new pepper takes one beyond the world we know in the conscious mind.[11]

Weston's photograph of a seemingly common object embodies a particularly intent way of seeing. The artist was uniquely aware of something in his surroundings; indeed, he seems to have gazed at the pepper for a long time. He worked over an extended period (perhaps 28 years!) to achieve the image he wanted. The photograph that he created communicates a sense of wonder about the natural world. It may also stimulate us to participate in his prolonged seeing.

Finally, seeing is a personal process. No two people will see the same thing in the same way, because each of us brings our own background, temperament, and feelings to bear. Confronted with the same visual information, different people will evaluate it differently, and come to differing conclusions about its meaning, worth, or importance (see Chapter 5).

1.18 Edward Weston. *Pepper #30*. 1930. Gelatin silver print. 9 7/16″ x 7 ½″.
Photograph by Edward Weston. Museum of Modern Art , New York. Gift of David H. McAlpin (1913.1968) © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence © 2018 Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Form and Content

In Weston's *Pepper #30* the texture, light, and shadow, and shape of the pepper is the form that we see, and the content is the meaning (or meanings) the work communicates—for example, a sense of wonder about the natural world. **Form** thus refers to the total effect of the combined visual qualities within a work, including such components as materials, color, shape, line, and design. **Content** refers to the message or meaning of the work of art—what the artist expresses or communicates to the viewer. Content determines form, and form expresses content; thus the two are inseparable.

1.19 Auguste Rodin. *The Kiss.* 1886. Marble. 5′11¼″.
Musée Rodin, Paris. Photograph akg-images / Erich Lessing.

1.20 Constantin Brancusi. *The Kiss.* 1916. Limestone. 23″ × 13″ × 10″.
Photograph: The Philadelphia Museum of Art/ Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © Succession Brancusi – All rights reserved (ARS) 2018.

One way to better understand the relationship is to compare works that have the same subject but differ greatly in form and content. *The Kiss* (**fig. 1.19**) by Auguste Rodin and *The Kiss* (**fig. 1.20)** by Constantin Brancusi show how two sculptors interpret an embrace. In Rodin's work, the life-size human figures represent Western ideals of the masculine and the feminine. Rodin captures the sensual delight of that highly charged moment when lovers embrace. We may remember or hope for such encounters ourselves. Our emotions are engaged as we overlook the hardness of the marble from which he carved it. The natural softness of flesh is heightened by the rough texture of the unfinished marble supporting the figures.

In contrast to Rodin's sensuous approach, Brancusi used the solid quality of a block of stone to express lasting love. Through minimal cutting of the block, Brancusi symbolized—rather than illustrated—the concept of two becoming one. He chose geometric abstraction rather than representational naturalism to express love of a solid, enduring kind. We might say that Rodin's work expresses the *feelings* of love, while Brancusi's expresses the *idea* of love.

Seeing and Responding to Form

Obviously, artists expend effort to produce a work of art; less obvious is the fact that responding to a work of art also requires effort. The artist is the source or sender of any work put on view; the work itself is the means of carrying the message. We viewers must receive and experience the work to make the communication complete. In this way, we participate in the creative process.

Learning to respond to form is part of learning to live in the world. We guide our actions by "reading" forms of people, things, and events that make up our environment. Even as infants, we have an amazing ability to remember visual forms such as faces, and all through life we interpret events based on our previous experiences with these forms. Every form can evoke some kind of response from each of us.

Subject matter can interfere with our perception of form. One way to learn to see form without subject is to look at pictures upside down. Inverting recognizable images frees the mind from the process of identifying and naming things. Familiar objects become unfamiliar.

When confronted with something unfamiliar, we often see it freshly only because we have no idea what we are looking at. For example, when we see the twisting, curving green and rust-red shapes in Georgia O'Keeffe's painting (**fig. 1.21**), we may not at first realize that the work depicts a jack-in-the-pulpit flower. The artist greatly enlarged it to 4 feet in height, and she focused closely on the flower, omitting nearly all else. We may wonder for a moment if we are looking at abstract or representational art.

O'Keeffe hoped that her way of seeing would cause us to sense the natural rhythms present in a flower. She said of this painting:

> Everyone has many associations with a flower—the idea of flowers. Still—in a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven't the time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint the flower exactly as I see it, no one would see what I see because I would paint it small like the flower is small.
> So I said to myself—I'll paint what I see—what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it.[12]

1.21 Georgia O'Keeffe. *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. V.* 1930. Oil on canvas. 48″ × 30″.
Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1987.58.4. Photograph: Malcolm Varon.

Iconography

As we have noted, form conveys content even when no nameable subject matter is represented. But when subject matter is present, meaning is often based on traditional interpretations.

Iconography refers to the subjects, symbols, and motifs used in an image to convey its meaning (from the Greek *eikon*, meaning image or picture). Not all works of art make use of iconography. In those that do, it is often the symbolism (rather than the obvious subject matter) that carries the deepest levels of meaning. Iconography is a set of customs or conventions that cue us about the meanings in a work of art. For example, if we are seeing a painting of a mother and child, its iconography will tell us whether it is Mary and the baby Jesus.

An artist's use of iconography can reveal a wealth of cultural information. For example, the Peruvian painting *The Virgin of Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory* (**fig. 1.22**) contains many iconographic details that enrich its meaning. Some of these are obvious to those familiar with Christian iconography: The two winged figures standing in the foreground are angels; at the top is God the Father holding the orb of the world; below him is a dove that represents the Holy Spirit; Mary wears a crown to show that she is the Queen of Heaven. People emerge from a flaming pit that is purgatory, led by an angel. In the left corner, another angel holds a cross that symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ; he also holds a balance, symbolizing the weighing of souls that takes place in purgatory. The meaning of these details is established by convention and long use.

1.22 Circle of Diego Quispe Tito. *The Virgin of Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory*. Late 17th century. Oil on canvas. 41″ × 29″.
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA/Bridgeman Images.

Other details might be less familiar but equally meaningful. *The Virgin of Carmel* refers to an appearance of Mary that took place in the thirteenth century; at that time she promised that anyone who wore a special garment called a scapular would not suffer the fires of hell. Both Mary and the child Jesus carry purselike objects that represent the scapulars that people wore or carried for protection. In this painting, Mary makes a special effort to save from purgatory the souls who may not have owned the protecting scapular. Thus the work was a sign of hope.

Asian traditions also use a rich iconographic language, which makes the Amida Buddha (**fig. 1.23**) easily distinguishable from a portrait of any other seated person. He has a topknot that symbolizes his enlightenment. The long earlobes show that he was a wealthy prince who wore heavy earrings before he sought religious truth. His garment is simple, as after enlightenment he lived by begging. His hands are folded in the traditional position of

meditation. His lotus-flower throne symbolizes the fact that enlightenment can come in the midst of life, just as a lotus flower may bloom on the surface of a stagnant pond. The degrees of abstraction in the hands, chest, and face point to a twelfth-century date for this work, but the iconographic details that mark him as the Buddha had already been in use for more than 1,000 years.

In our time, artists often mash up and quote from various iconographic traditions. Rashaad Newsome, for example, borrowed from art history, hip-hop, and heraldry for his collage piece *Saltire Compton* (**fig. 1.24**). The frame is one that might normally surround a precious historical painting, but he had it sprayed with radiant gold enamel at an auto body shop. Within the frame are scanned photos of jewelry, necklaces, and brooches from fashion magazines—"bling," in other words—objects that might be worn by a hip-hop artist or someone going out for a night of vogue dancing. A saltire is an X-shaped motif commonly found in

1.23 Amida Buddha (wood). Japanese school (17th century).
San Diego Museum of Art, USA/Bequest of Mrs. Cora Timken Burnett/ Bridgeman Images.

flags, family crests, and heraldry. The X at the center of this work is almost swallowed in the symmetrically arranged bling that surrounds it. In the lower center is a black T-shirt showing the word Compton, the name of a historically African-American city just south of Los Angeles, a center of hip-hop culture. Newsome, who is himself African American, walks a fine line in this work between celebrating and satirizing that culture.

As we have seen from the works illustrated in this chapter alone, art is produced in a range of media and for different reasons. Artists, whether trained or untrained, may use their creativity to bring forth something new of value that can enrich and inform our lives.

1.24 Rashaad Newsome. *Saltire Compton*. 2011. Collage in customized antique frame. 17¼″ × 14¾″ × 1½″.

KEY TERMS

abstract art – art that depicts natural objects in simplified or exaggerated ways which may not be recognizable at first

content – the meaning or message communicated by a work of art, including its emotional, intellectual, symbolic, thematic, and narrative connotations

figurative art – representational art in which the human form (rather than the natural world) plays a principal role

folk art – art of people who have had no formal, academic training, but whose works are part of an established tradition of style and craftsmanship

form – the total effect of the combined visual qualities within a work, including such components as materials, color, shape, line, and design

iconography – the symbolic meanings of subjects and signs used to convey ideas important to particular cultures or religions

medium (plural: media) – a particular material along with its accompanying technique

nonrepresentational art – art without reference to anything outside itself (also called "nonobjective")

outsider art – art produced by those with no formal training, outside the established channels of art exhibition

representational art – art that recognizably represents or depicts a particular subject

subject – in representational art, what the artist chooses to depict

work of art – what the artist makes or puts in front of us for viewing

2 The Purposes and Functions of Art

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

2.1 Explain the ways in which artists transform objects for daily use.

2.2 Describe how design and embellishment create visual delight in art.

2.3 Compare the different ways in which art can function as a means of communicating information.

2.4 Discuss the use of art for both public and personal expression.

2.5 Demonstrate how art can be used to meet religious and spiritual needs.

2.6 Explain how art can be used for political purposes.

Art forms us by meeting our needs. Not our most basic needs for food or shelter, but deeper and more subtle ones that define us as people and as members of a society. These needs vary with time and cultural setting. In a culture in which religion is very important, for example, a great deal of art answers that need. In our own society, which emphasizes individual achievement, much of our art is devoted to self-expression. Note that here we are considering purposes and functions of art in the lives of viewers, not as they may meet the needs of artists themselves. Thus, in this chapter we consider art in its social and cultural context, as it relates to six functions in the following general areas: daily use, delight, communicating information, public and personal expression, religion, and politics.

As we begin this discussion, we will quickly see that a given work may well address more than one function or need. A piece of political art might also delight us with its beauty; an item for daily use may also express something about its creator. And if one purpose for art seems to dominate in one culture, this does not mean that other possible functions go unfilled or are ignored. Viewing art from the perspective of its purpose or function shows us commonalities among people across different time periods and civilizations, from ancient times to the present. This is because most human needs that art meets have remained relatively constant throughout history. On the other hand, artists' methods of meeting those needs vary greatly. Thus art embraces many of the shared traits, and all of the diversity, of humanity itself.

Art for Daily Use

Objects of all kinds, from ancient carefully crafted flint knives to today's personal digital devices, have been conceived to delight the eye as well as to serve more obviously useful functions. Well-designed utilitarian objects and spaces—from spoons to cities— bring pleasure and efficiency into our daily lives. Artists transform objects for daily use by either designing them in new ways or by embellishing them; sometimes both.

Designing for Everyday

Objects that we use every day can be designed artfully for greater enjoyment. This is what Eva Zeisel did in the 1950s with a common sauce ladle and its accompanying boat (**fig. 2.1**). She brought the ends of the boat together at the top, and put a hole in the ladle that echoes that shape. She created the design in clay and then glazed it a creamy, deep white. This color highlights both the contents of the boat and the graceful lines that enliven both pieces. If the united tips of the boat have a somewhat playful look,

2.1 Eva Zeisel. *Sauce Boat with Ladle*. c.1949–50. Glazed earthenware. Sauce boat: 6¼″ × 6½″ × 5¼″. Ladle: 4″ × 4½″ × 1⅞″.
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Della Rothermel in honor of John Patrick Rothermel 404.1994.1-2 © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. © courtesy of the Eva Zeisel Estate.

2.2 George Nakashima. *Conoid Chair*. 1971. Black walnut and hickory. Height 35⅜″.
© George Nakashima Woodworker.

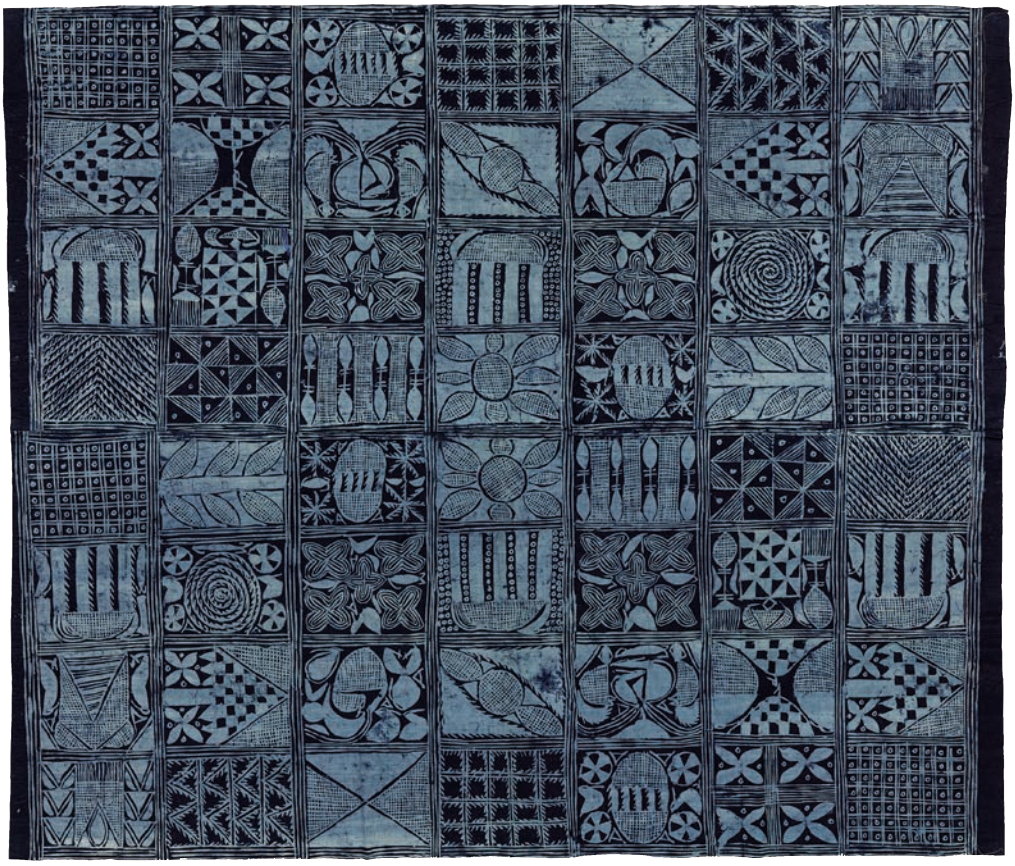
there is a reason for this. Zeisel once described her life's mission as "a playful search for beauty."[1] Molds were made for these shapes, and they are still being produced for wide distribution.

George Nakashima gave a radical shape to a common seat with his *Conoid Chair* (**fig. 2.2**). The design may appear unstable but in fact it balances well, and its two legs facilitate moving it over carpeted areas. Unlike the gravy ensemble above, this is a uniquely crafted object. The natural wood medium has special significance for Nakashima. He said, "I find it impossible to try to design a chair out of plastic or metal . . . in producing a fine piece of furniture, the spirit of the tree lives on and I can give it a second life."[2] Thus he carefully sanded and finished the chair to highlight its warm color and pleasing texture.

Embellishment

Most societies value the artistic embellishment of everyday things. Do you have a cell-phone case? If so, why did you choose that particular one? Maybe there was a practical reason (perhaps to protect the phone), but other factors in the choice would probably relate to your desire to embellish the phone, or to have it coordinate with other items you own. Embellishment of a useful object was probably an important factor in your choice.

The urge to embellish has motivated a great deal of creativity throughout history. For example, the Yoruba peoples of West Africa have for centuries used deep-blue dye from indigo plants to embellish practical items of clothing (**fig. 2.3**). The patterns on this cloth were created by women who applied a thick starch made from cassava flour to one side of the sheet before immersing the whole in a dye bath. The intricate designs that they painted in the flour paste resisted the penetration of the dye, leaving those areas a lighter shade of blue. The designs in this cloth are particularly detailed, and they repeat around the two central rectangles that show a sunburst. The dye process here yields an absorbing design in a rich blue color.



2.3 Resist-dyed cloth (*adire eleko*). Mid-twentieth century. Indigo dye on cotton.
X66.1149AB. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole.

Shelter is a basic need, but architects and designers can improve our surroundings and make them distinctive, as early twentieth-century American architect Frank Lloyd Wright did with Hollyhock (Barnsdall) House in Hollywood (**fig. 2.4**). The decoration scheme is based on repeated hollyhock flowers, the favorite plant of the house's first owner, Alice Barnsdall, who commissioned the building. Hollyhock flowers bloom on stalks, without branches; the band of decoration at the base of the roofline represents abstract versions of these. Wright also designed this house with the warm and dry local climate in mind: Each room opens onto an accompanying outdoor patio, and the flat roof has several terraces for indoor-outdoor living.

2.4 Frank Lloyd Wright. Barnsdall House, Los Angeles. 1919–1921. Exterior view.
Citizen of the Planet/Alamy Stock Photo.

Art for Visual Delight

Many of us probably think of delight as the principal goal of art. Why create art after all, if not for someone's pleasure or enjoyment? We need delight, enjoyment, pleasure, decoration, amusement, and embellishment in our lives to "lift us above the stream of life," as a noted art critic wrote.[3] Absorbed in contemplating a work, we forget where we are for a moment.

Visual delight happens when we are captivated by a work of art, and we enjoy it aside from practical or moral or political considerations. **Aesthetics** refers to the branch of philosophy that studies how and why artworks are considered beautiful. Most cultures that have a definition of "beautiful" define it as something pleasing to the eye and agreeable to the mind. However, what is pleasing to the eye or mind (and hence to the sense of beauty) varies considerably across cultures. Here we will consider two pathways to beauty: idealism and harmony.

Idealism

In some cultures, something beautiful must also exhibit a certain idealism. In other words, beauty is not found in the everyday but rather in something that is ideal or close to perfection. This belief animated much of the art of ancient Greece, which has influenced Western artists for centuries.

We see this idealism at work in the sculpture known as the Charioteer (**fig. 2.5**). This charioteer has won the race, but he remains alertly calm rather than jubilant. The sculpture personifies balance and quiet dignity; it shows "noble simplicity and calm grandeur," as a critic once wrote. This work is not a portrait—portraiture was rare in ancient Greece—because real people are too often imperfect in their looks and fallible in their deeds. Rather, this work represents the ideal charioteer, in the prime of life and blemish-free. The beauty in this work might therefore inspire others to similar deeds and attitudes.

In our own times, art has been far less often concerned with idealistic beauty. Rather, we are more likely to find such idealistic standards illustrated in fashion magazines or sports photography.

Harmony

Another common definition of beauty includes a pleasing balance or harmonious proportions. In Western art, many regard the landscape paintings of the seventeenth-century French artist Claude Lorrain as exemplifying these virtues.

2.5 Charioteer. c.470 BCE. Bronze. Height 5′11″.
Archaeological Museum, Delphi. © Craig & Marie Mauzy, Athens.

The composition of *Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Silvia* is very harmonious in its colors (**fig. 2.6**). Blues and blue-greens dominate the sky, the foliage, and the draperies of Ascanius as he holds his bow. Ascanius has not actually shot the stag yet, so any violence is only possible. The buildings on the left are balanced by the trees and cliffs on the right. This balance is not symmetrical, but then nature rarely is. Light is evenly diffused throughout, with just enough contrasting dark zones. The work does not depict an actual place; the artist invented it from the volumes of sketches he made on trips through the Italian peninsula. The storyline of the painting is mythological, remote from most viewers; most likely it engages the imagination for that reason. Claude Lorrain was so well known for painting such pleasant views that his works influenced landscape gardening in Britain. Some wealthy landowners in the late

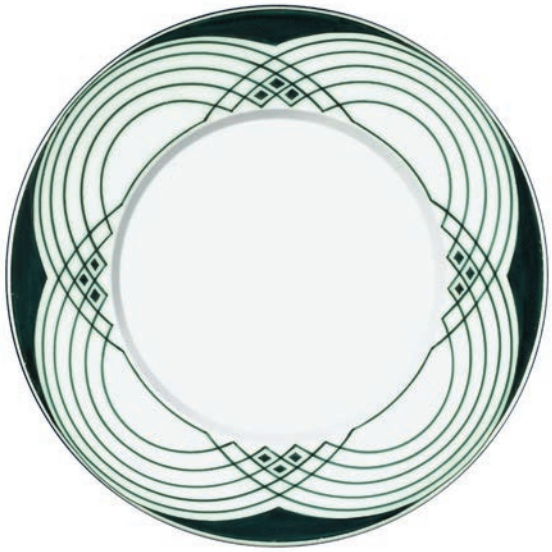
2.6 Claude Lorrain. *Ascanius Shooting the Stag of Silvia*, 1682. Oil on canvas, 48″ × 60″.
Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK/Bridgeman Images.

eighteenth century attempted to reproduce the harmonious effect of his paintings on their properties. Such landscapes were termed **picturesque**, meaning like a picture by Claude Lorrain. The term survives to this day.

A graceful arrangement of well-proportioned forms is basic to beauty, be it in a human face or an artwork. These same traits are also highly valued in the ancient Chinese artform of **calligraphy**, or the art of beautiful handwriting (**fig. 2.7**). Even without knowing what these two vertical lines of poetry say, we can appreciate the contained energy of the strokes as they make up the ten well spaced characters. This piece was created in 1261 by the emperor Lizong, who was more devoted to art than to governing during his rule. His calligraphy is still highly valued for its union of close detail, vigorous execution, and harmonious arrangement.

Peter Behrens, an early twentieth-century German designer, created a harmonious decorative scheme for his porcelain plate (**fig. 2.8**). The green arcs resemble ripples that we might see after dropping a stone in a still pond. They also echo the shape of the plate as a whole, in thin lines that required careful painting. The outermost arcs converge in a curving square motif at the center, suggesting the sort of embroidered napkin that might accompany this plate in an elegant table service. Such visual pleasure can prepare us for the other pleasures of the table, such as dining and companionship.

2.7 Emperor Lizong. Couplet from a poem by Han Hong. 1261. Song Dynasty. Fan mounted as an album leaf. Ink on silk. 8 3/16″ × 8 11/16″.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988 (1989.363.23a).



2.8 Peter Behrens. Porcelain plate. British Museum, London.
Photograph: © The Trustees of the British Museum. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Art for Communicating Information

Because art makes a statement that can be understood by many people, it has often been used to impart information and ideas. Indeed, before the invention of photography in the nineteenth century, artists and illustrators were our only source of information about the visual appearance of anything. During the Middle Ages in Europe, the stained-glass windows and stone sculptures of the cathedrals taught Bible stories to a largely illiterate population. By providing a visual account of a story or an event, or by expressing an opinion, artists have shaped not only the way people understand their own world but also how their culture is viewed by others.

Storytelling

A great deal of art tells stories. These can be personal, moral, or historical. Today, we satisfy our desire for stories primarily through television and movies, but before the advent of mass media, artists had principal responsibility for the task. Stories of any sort can move us or teach us or merely interest us.

How about this for a fascinating story: It comes from the literature of ancient Rome. The princess Ariadne had helped Theseus to free her father, King Minos, from the monstrous Minotaur. Theseus then took Ariadne with him to the island of Naxos, but soon tired of her and cruelly abandoned her there in the wild. As she lamented her fate and plotted her next move, help arrived from an unexpected source. This is the moment we see in the painting *Bacchus and Ariadne* (**fig. 2.9**) by the sixteenth-century Italian artist Titian. Bacchus, the god of wine, has arrived in his chariot at the head of a procession of drunken revelers. Instantly enamored of the beautiful Ariadne, he leaps from his chariot and promises her the entire sky. Bacchus' glance leads our eyes to Ariadne at the left; she looks back at him with a mixture of hope and fear. The stars in the sky at the upper left form the constellation Corona Borealis, or Northern Crown, referring both to Ariadne's royal status and to the promise Bacchus made.

In contrast to Titian's recounting of a mythological story, some artworks tell stories of everyday life that can help to broaden our perspective by showing us how others live.

2.9 Titian. *Bacchus and Ariadne*. 1520–3. Oil on canvas. 5′9″ x 6′3″.
National Gallery, London/akg

2.10 Abraham Cruzvillegas, *Autoconstrucción Suites*. 2013. Installation view at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Courtesy of the artist, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo © Walker Art Center

We see a contemporary example of this in *Autoconstrucción Suites* (**fig. 2.10**) by Abraham Cruzvillegas. At first glance the installation seems like a highly disorderly scene. Wooden scaffolds dominate the view, with shirts tied together spanning the distance between them. A few television sets, primitive stairs, metal frameworks, a wheelbarrow, and other seemingly miscellaneous junk populate the gallery space. Cruzvillegas gathered these objects from the immediate neighborhood. Yet behind all of this apparent chaos is a story that relates to his personal history and, by extension, to most of us as viewers. The construction of the artwork parallels the story of the construction of Cruzvillegas's family home on the outskirts of Mexico City. There, in a neighborhood outside the reach of most city services, the artist's relatives built the house he grew up in, room by room, floor by floor, by themselves, using whatever they could find or buy. Cruzvillegas described the process in an essay:

> The materials and techniques they used were completely improvised, depending on the specific circumstances and immediate surroundings, in the midst of widespread social and economic instability in Mexico and probably across the world. Every solution answered a pressing situation or need, such as how to add a new room; to modify a roof; or to improve, alter, or eliminate a certain space. Because its construction lacked both a budget and input from architects, the house today looks chaotic and almost useless; however, every corner and detail has its reason for being there. The house is an authentic labyrinth, polished to a sheen by simultaneous construction, use, and destruction.[4]

Carrie Mae Weems created a remarkable series of photos, titled *The Kitchen Table Series* (**fig. 2.11**), that reveal the lives of other people to us. She installed a camera at one end of her kitchen table, under a hanging lamp, and took dozens of photos of life events that happened around it for

2.11 Carrie Mae Weems, *Man Reading Newspaper* from *The Kitchen Table Series*. Photograph. 1990.
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

several months. She used herself and her friends, neighbors, and relatives as actors in constructed scenes, some invented and some real, which she imagined and then shot, as a film director might. When she reduced the series to just 20 images in 1990, she found that she had told a story of the ups and downs of a relationship with a man and the birth of their daughter. In the photos reproduced here, we see a rather tense moment, as the man reads the newspaper while the artist herself smokes distractedly, eyes askance, before retreating into the background. The series depicts the course of a relationship, which viewers may recognize from their own lives. Weems said of the series, "Even though it's anchored around a black woman, my hope was always that it would be understood as a condition of women. And it exceeded my expectations, because women around the world relate to that piece, as do men; they see themselves in it."[5]

Commentary

Artists who fulfill our need for commentary often speak in a language that is easy to understand; they view art's primary purpose as communication between artist and viewer by means of subject matter. British artist William Hogarth took on the difficult subject of alcohol consumption in *Gin Lane* (**fig. 2.12**) in 1751. This memorable work urges moderation by exposing the horrors of excess. The dominant figure in the lower center is a drunken woman who reaches for a pinch of snuff as her baby tumbles from her lap. In the lower right corner, a cadaverous figure holds the fatal cup in one hand and a jug in the other. At the right edge, the distiller is doing a thriving business. The sign above shows that the company is called Kilman, an obvious reference to the work's message. Also open for business is the pawn shop at the left, where people hock their possessions to buy more liquor. Death haunts the work in two other places: At the upper right, a man has killed himself by hanging, and in the center, above the drunken woman, a partially dressed cadaver is laid in a coffin that probably came from the coffin shop just to the right. Hogarth made this print during a true binge of gin consumption in eighteenth-century London; he hoped, by telling many cautionary tales in this one work, to curb the habit. He made this print in a large edition and sold it for low prices in an effort to encourage sobriety.

Many artists have used photography to capture the grandeur and wonder of nature, but today's photographers

2.12 William Hogarth, *Gin Lane*. 1751.
Etching and engraving. Plate: 14¼″ × 12″.
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Rosenwald Collection.

are more likely to use their art to inform us about some of the ways that humans have impacted and even spoiled the landscape. Chris Jordan documents this grim reality in color photographs that give a visual jolt. For his recent series "Midway: Message from the Gyre" (**fig. 2.13**), he

2.13 Chris Jordan. *CF000668*, from the series "Midway: Message from the Gyre". 2009.
Photo by Chris Jordan.

traveled to Midway Island in the Pacific and photographed the decaying bodies of dead fledgling albatrosses. This island is a nesting ground for seagoing birds, and it is located at the center of a gyre, or circular pattern of ocean currents. The currents bring great deal of floating plastic waste matter toward the island's shores. The albatrosses frequently mistake the smaller pieces for food, which they then give to their young with often fatal results. Jordan cuts open the bodies, revealing the ingested colored pieces of waste that humans across the Pacific Rim have discarded inappropriately. At the time of writing, Jordan was editing his photographic journeys into a documentary movie about the island to help spread his message further.

Art for Public and Personal Expression

Sometimes a human life is so notable or an event so momentous that a monument is created to help us remember it. At other times self-expression by artists builds bridges of empathy to individual viewers.

Commemoration

Visual imagery can serve as an aid to our memories. Many of us carry photos of loved ones with us, or we take pictures to remember where we have been. When such commemoration becomes public, artists enter the process. Public commemoration connects us with the chain of humanity that stretches back millennia, making human life seem more significant and valuable.

2.14 Taj Mahal. Agra, India. 1632–48.

Many of the monumental works of art in the ancient world had a commemorative function. The pyramids of ancient Egypt, for example, are tombs of rulers. The best-known work in the Islamic tradition, the Taj Mahal **(fig. 2.14)**, commemorates the seventeenth-century ruler Shah Jahan's favorite wife, who died in childbirth. It sits at one end of a four-part paradise garden that recalls the description of paradise in the Qur'an. The surface of the white marble exterior seems to change color by catching sunlight at various angles. The proportions of the bulb-shaped dome make the building appear light in weight, as if it barely touches the ground. The Taj Mahal's testament to romantic love and devotion, and its combination of otherworldliness and beauty, draws visitors from across the world.

In many traditional societies of Africa, much art has a commemorative aspect. This carving (**fig. 2.15**) represents Shyaam the Great, the founder and most important king of the Kuba peoples of the Congo. He holds a ceremonial weapon in his left hand as he sits, cross-legged and aloof, the picture of quiet detachment. His headdress is traditional royal regalia, a hoe-shaped cap that alludes to his introduction of iron smelting and his encouragement of agriculture as the basic economic activity of the region. His eyes are shaped like cowrie shells, a symbol of wealth. The oval-shaped box at his feet represents the strategic board game known as *mankala* that he invented in order to improve the intellectual abilities of his subjects. While Shyaam was alive, this statue was kept in the quarters of his wives, to increase their fertility. On Shyaam's death, his successor slept with the statue in order to facilitate the transmission of wisdom between generations. Thereafter, the statue was stored as part of a commemorative altar, and regularly rubbed with oil, which gives this work its rich glow. If a royal portrait statue of this type is ever damaged, Kuba artists create a replica to prolong the memory; this work is an eighteenth-century copy of a seventeenth-century original.

Closer to our own time, many public spaces contain commemorative statues honoring heroes who are deemed worthy, or memorials to individual victims of warfare or atrocities. One distinctive war monument is the Vietnam

2.15 Royal Portrait Figure. Kuba peoples, Congo. 18th century. Wood. Height 22″.
The British Museum, London.
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Veterans Memorial (**fig. 2.16**) in Washington, D.C., by Maya Lin. Arousing controversy when it was completed in 1982, the almost 250-foot-long, V-shaped wall bears the names of the nearly 60,000 American servicemen and women who died or are missing from the time of that controversial war. The style of the monument, with its simple chronological list, was unprecedented among the monuments on the National Mall. The initial resistance to the work was so great that a further monument was commissioned, a statue of a group of three soldiers, for a nearby location. But the Vietnam Veterans Memorial soon attracted thousands of visitors, who appreciated the solemnity of the black granite walls and the personal attention involved in the recording of every lost soldier's name. The monument has also influenced many other public memorials since, as inscribing the names of all commemorated people has become a more common practice.

Self-Expression

For most of human history, self-expression has not been a primary reason for creating art. Other social and cultural needs, such as those discussed in this chapter, more fully engaged the talents of artists. In more recent times, however, particularly when a great deal of art is sold as a private possession, self-expression has increasingly become one of art's most common functions.

Art fulfills an expressive function when an artist conveys information about his or her personality 0-or feelings or worldview. Such art becomes a meeting site between artist and viewer, through which the viewer feels empathy and gains an understanding of the creator's personality. We all derive comfort from the fact that others in the world are similar to ourselves, and artists' various modes of self-expression reach out to us in hopes of establishing a bond.

Such bridges of empathy may also extend among viewers. If you have ever discussed with a friend or relative the feelings that you found in an expressive work, you have extended the chain of empathy that the artist initiated. Self-expression has been a fairly common theme in Western art for about 200 years.

2.16 Maya Lin. Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The Mall, Washington D.C. 1980–82. Black granite. Each wall 10′1″ × 246′9″.
Photograph: Duane Preble.

2.17 Frida Kahlo. *The Broken Column*. 1944. Oil on canvas. 15⅛″ × 12⅛″.

Museo Dolores Olmedo, Xochimilco, Mexico City, Mexico. Photograph akg-images/Album. © 2018 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Some of the most self-expressive work of the twentieth century was created by the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. At the age of 18, Kahlo suffered a severe internal injury in a bus accident. This led to a lifetime of surgical operations and medical treatments, which left her in nearly constant pain. Her 1944 work *The Broken Column* (**fig. 2.17**) is a confrontational self-portrait. Her body is split open at the core, revealing a shattered column. The brace that enfolds her torso is similar to one that she wore for most of her life. Nails pierce her flesh, a symbol of the injections and medical proddings she endured. Just as Kahlo exposes herself to us, so her body is exposed in a barren and gouged landscape. The artist seems to stare mutely back at us, eyes flowing with tears. Her firm yet impassive face enhances the emotional intensity of the work she created.

Not all self-expression tells stories of anguish, or even uses self-portraiture. Wassily Kandinsky, a leader in the Expressionist movement of early modern Germany, reached out to viewers by beginning with his inner feelings. He wrote that he hoped to create art only in response to what he called "inner necessity," or the emotional stirrings of his soul, rather than in response to what he saw in the world. He created nonrepresentational works in which he attempted to translate the swirl and surge of inner spiritual energies into color and form. *Composition VI* (**fig. 2.18)** renders a restless inner state, an experience probably not unknown to most viewers. Kandinsky often named his works after musical forms, because he wanted them to communicate as immediately as music does: "Color directly influences the soul," he wrote; "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another purposefully, to cause vibrations in the soul."[6] He hoped that the souls of viewers would resonate with the rhythms and colors of his paintings, and that his works would infect viewers with the same emotions that he felt while creating them.

Self-expressive art is less common outside the modern Western world, but we see one of the more distinctive manifestations of it in the totem poles of the native peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Artists carved poles on commission from families, and these poles illustrate the crests or legends associated with a family's history. Many tribal groups in that region organize themselves by family clans that are named after the animals from which they trace their heritage. This pole (**fig. 2.19**) has a complex mixture of large and small figures, starting at the top with three watchers who constantly scan the horizon for approaching danger.

2.18 Wassily Kandinsky. *Composition VI*. 1913. Oil on canvas. 76¾″ × 118″.

The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia. akg-images/Album/VEGAP © Vassily Kandinski/Prisma © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

2.19 Bill Reid. House Frontal Totem Pole. 1959.
Museum of Anthropology. Werner Forman Archive/University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Below them is a raven with a smaller human-bird hybrid face beneath its beak. Next is a bear with a raven between its legs, above the face of a frog. The largest eyes near the bottom are those of a bear, with a frog in its mouth, a wolf between its legs, and a cub between its ears. As with most such poles that survive today, the specific stories that it tells are lost, but the expressive intent is present, just as it is in many cultures that value family crests. The carver of this work wrote of totem poles, "Like heraldic crests, these poles told of the mythological beginnings of the great families, at a time before time, when animals and mythic beasts and men lived as equals."[7]

Art for the Spirit

Another function of art has been to enhance religious contemplation, and most of the world's religions have found ways to incorporate artists' creativity into their sacred rituals, places, and ceremonies. Sometimes this art serves the ritualistic needs of an established faith; other faith expressions in art are more personal, inward, or spiritual.

Worship and Ritual

Many religious buildings intended for gathering the faithful have a striking visual aspect that helps to induce a feeling of wonder or sublimity. One of the most remarkable of these is the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (**fig. 2.20**). King Louis IX of France commissioned this building to serve as a personal prayer chapel and also to hold his collection of relics, which included what he regarded as the original crown of thorns from Christ's trial and crucifixion. The walls of the chapel consist almost entirely of stained glass, which floods the interior with colored light. This visual effect is probably about as striking to visitors now as it was in 1248, when the chapel was consecrated. The intricately designed stained-glass windows may seem at first to be a welter of color, but in fact they tell stories from the Bible and from the later discovery of the relics and their transportation to this site by the king. Statues of saints and martyrs mark the major

2.20 Sainte-Chapelle, Paris. Upper chapel, interior view.
Photograph: akg-images/A.F. Kersting.

2.21 Moon Mask. Eskimo, village of Andreofsky. Collected 1893. Height 13 ½", width 13".
Werner Forman Archive/ Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka, Alaska.

vertical supports. The Sainte-Chapelle overall resembles a giant jewel-box, appropriate to its original function as a storehouse for precious relics.

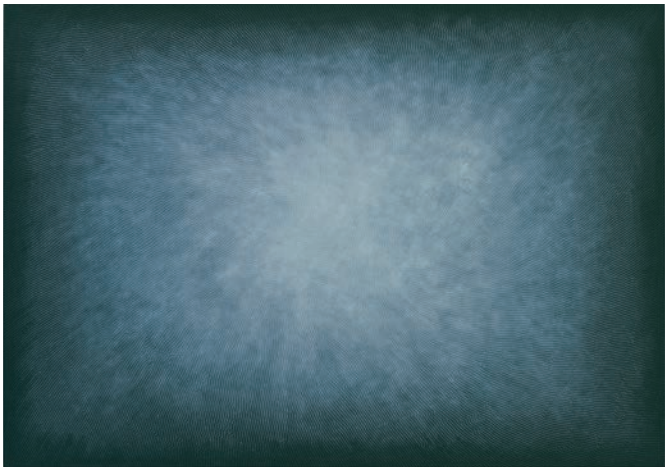
Other religious traditions show less interest in special buildings and focus their visual creativity instead on ritual tools. Such a case is the Eskimo peoples of the Arctic region. One of their creation stories tells of a mythical sister and brother who became the sun and the moon, respectively. The girl/sun chases her brother/moon across the sky daily, bearing a torch, which is the sun's light. This Moon Mask (**fig. 2.21**) represents the moon in the sky, with two outer rings that symbolize levels of the cosmos. The feathers are sparks from the sister's torch that became stars. This mask was used in ceremonies by a shaman, or person who serves as an intermediary between people and spiritual beings. Accompanied by the appropriate chants and dances, the shaman wore the mask in order to embody the moon in all of its mythical meaning.

Spirituality

Contemporary spirituality can take many forms, and art assists some of them. Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Iran and learned early about the mystical traditions of the Sufi branch of Islam; it influenced her work, along with other contemplative traditions that she blends together in paintings such as *Ancient Light* (**fig. 2.22**). Asked about her artistic goals, she said, "This work is about presence. Presence is like light—how can you describe light? Light can be only experienced, it has a presence. This work also has a presence and has only to be experienced." At approximately 6 by 9 feet, the work fills our visual field with a white glow of light that the artist has called an "energy field." She begins with small adjacent calligraphic pencil strokes, repeated hundreds of times like a meditation exercise. These combine into softly rippling lines that she compares to breaths or musical vibrations. She created the deep radiance with numerous layers of water-based paint, which gives the sensation of looking into a bottomless yet textured space. She said, "White is an experience of boundlessness, it opens in front of you," helping viewers to experience infinity. We could be staring into a microcosm of atoms, or a boundless expanse of space. But the artist does not mind the contradiction, because she hopes to reach the widest possible audience. She said, "I would like my work to be open and generous, different for every person who sees it."[8]

Nancy Holt was born in Massachusetts, but when she first experienced the flat, open expanses of nature in the desert West, she immediately felt at home and made this the subject of several artworks. "It seemed to me that I had this Western space that had been within me. That was my inner reality. I was experiencing it on the outside, simultaneously with my spaciousness within. I felt at one." She created *Sun Tunnels* (**fig. 2.23**) in 1976 on empty land in western Utah to express and represent the vastness of the landscape.

Contracting with various specialists, including an astrophysicist and various construction firms, Holt installed four huge concrete pipes, each 9 feet high and 18 feet long. These tubes form sight lines that viewers can look through to see the sunrise and sunset at each



2.22 Shirazeh Houshiary. *Ancient Light*. 2009. Pencil, aquacryl, and pigment on canvas. 74¾″ × 106¼″.
Courtesy of the artist.

2.23 Nancy Holt. *Sun Tunnels*, 1973–76. Concrete, steel, and earth. Great Basin Desert, Utah. Overall dimensions: 9′ 3″ x 68′ 6″ x 53′; diagonal length: 86′; each tunnel: 18′ 1″ x 9′ 3″ diameter.
Utah Museum of Fine Arts. © Holt-Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

winter and summer solstice. The effect is like seeing the desert through a telescope. She drilled holes in the pipes in arrangements that picture four different celestial constellations that hover over the site at night. The holes channel light from the sun and moon to re-create constellations on the floor of the pipes. She said of this work, "The tunnels orient you out in space and frame the view. It brings the landscape back to human scale."[9]

Art for Political Purposes

Just as art has often served religious needs, so at times it has been used to express political goals or ideals. Artists throughout history have worked on both sides of the most basic political equation: Some have attempted to persuade us to submit to authority; others have expressed protest or even encouraged revolt.

Persuasion

Many artforms have a persuasive purpose. Splendid government buildings, public monuments, television commercials, and music videos all harness the power of art to influence action and opinion. They invite and urge us to do or think things that we may not have otherwise.

To begin with expressions of authority, the rulers of the West African region of Benin commissioned skilled metalworkers to create brass plaques to decorate their palaces (**fig. 2.24**). This one depicts the king, or Oba as he is known, as a supernatural strongman. He wears ceremonial clothing, with a high helmet and neck rings. His all-seeing eyes glare back at us. From his belt hang two mudfish, showing the royal kinship with the gods of water, which nourish all of life. In a gesture of power, he raises two leopards by their tails, showing his rulership over nature. Both the king's garments and the background are finely textured, showing excellent workmanship. The technology of brass casting was reserved for use only by the royal family of Benin, and this plaque in its prominent location on the exterior of the palace showed to passersby the divine powers of the ruler who lived within.

Modern governments do not claim divine power, but they do use the arts to express their authority as well; the United States Supreme Court building in Washington,

2.24 Plaque Showing the Oba Holding Leopards. c.1700. Benin. Brass. 19½″ × 13½″ × 2½″.
The British Museum, London. Af1898,0115.31 © The Trustees of the British Museum.

2.25 Carol Highsmith. U.S. Supreme Court Building. Photograph. 1980.
Library of Congress, Carol Highsmith Archive, 2011632073.

2.26 Rodney McMillian. *Untitled (The Supreme Court Painting)*. 2004–2006. Poured acrylic on cut canvas, 216″ × 216″.
Inventory #MCR130. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo credit: Gene Ogami.

D.C., is a case in point (**fig. 2.25**). The style of this marble-clad building is derived from the ancient Roman Republican period, during which citizens also enjoyed the right to vote. It is massive and symmetrical, communicating balance, order, stability, and continuity with the past. The scale of the building is intended to correspond with that of the Capitol building across the street, where the Congress meets; this relationship shows the Court as an equal branch of government. The decorations on the outside of the building help to communicate the purposes and methods of the Court. Above the columns on a central panel we read "Equal justice under law." On either side of the inscription are garlands that symbolize the abundance and plenty that flow from justice. Above the inscription is a triangular sculpture group titled *Enthroned Liberty Guarded by Order and Authority*. Flanking the steps at the left and right are figures representing the contemplation of justice and the authority of law. The goal in designing this building, which was completed in 1936, was to house the justices in a building that communicates an image of the power of law in governing the country, as well as the dignity and serenity of the justices working therein.

Protest

Many artists use their creativity in the service of protest, involving themselves in the politics of the day (see *Käthe Kollwitz: Art of Human Concern*, opposite). We get a completely different view of the Supreme Court, for example, from contemporary African-American artist Rodney McMillian in his work *Untitled (The Supreme Court Painting)* (**fig. 2.26**). The piece protests against certain court decisions in the areas of voting rights and election districting that McMillian saw as harmful to African Americans. He made the painting on canvas in the shape of the façade of the building, but he removed the framework so that it sags and buckles. He mixed the colors and applied them to the canvas by pouring; this gives the work the look of fake marble. The central panel above the columns is blank, as if its inspiring inscription about equal justice has been erased. On either side we see that the garlands on the original building have been supplanted by smiley faces. What should be an inspiring symbol here becomes a tumbledown and phony-looking monument to lazy disorder. The artist created this work because he felt that the Court was moving in an unfruitful ideological direction; he felt that it had supported individual liberty and the quest for civil rights in the past, but that the justices were backing away from those commitments.

As we have seen, many works of art may fulfill more than one purpose; art that is persuasive may also delight with its beauty; a religious work may express the creator's personal quest for transcendence; a commemorative piece may also inform us. Yet all art meets one human need or another, and has the power to shape our lives in many ways.

KEY TERMS

aesthetics – the philosophy of art focusing on questions regarding what art is, how it is evaluated, the concept of beauty, and the relationship between the idea of beauty and the concept of art

calligraphy – the art of beautiful writing; broadly, a flowing use of line, often varying from thick to thin

picturesque – used to describe natural landscapes that are attractively poetic, rather than dramatic; original meaning is traced to the paintings of Claude Lorrain and other landscape painters

CREATORS

Käthe Kollwitz: Art of Human Concern

2.27 Käthe Kollwitz. *Self-Portrait*. 1904. Color lithograph. 16¼″ x 12½″.
Photograph akg-images. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

An artist who devoted her career to art that took political positions was the German printmaker and sculptor Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). Born into a middle-class family in Prussia, she showed artistic talent at an early age and took drawing classes at local women's colleges. At the age of 24, she married a physician and went to live in a poor neighborhood of Berlin. There her husband treated the local population as she took an interest in the lives of workers. She wrote, "I was powerfully moved by the fate of urban workers and everything connected with their way of life."[10]

Kollwitz made several series of prints that encouraged workers and peasants to attempt to improve their lot by protest and struggle. Her series *The Peasants' War* was based on her reading of a book about the event; she felt that workers in her times could learn from the struggles of the past. One of the prints from this series is *The Outbreak* (**fig 2.28**), which illustrates a rebellion by rural agricultural workers in Germany from 1522 to 1525. Kollwitz learned that one of the instigators of the revolt was a woman known as Black Anna, so she depicted her with arms raised, shouting encouragement to the peasants as they surge forward in a hunched, huddled mass. Kollwitz once stated that she identified with Black Anna; both devoted their lives to improving the lot of disadvantaged people. This work lacks color because it was created as a print on paper; this was the artist's preferred medium because she could sell the sheets at relatively low prices to more people and thereby spread her message.

When Kollwitz made art that directly depicted the difficult living conditions of Berlin's working classes, she often faced controversy or censorship. For example, in 1906 she made a poster promoting an art exhibition that showed an accurate but unvarnished image of a destitute woman; the Empress of Germany refused to allow the exhibition to open until every poster had been whitewashed.

Soon after her son died in battle in the early days of World War I, Kollwitz became a pacifist, opposing all wars on principle. In 1924, on the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, she released a print series on the human cost of war, printing on large, poster-size sheets for greater impact. She wrote of her hopes for the work in a letter to a friend, "These sheets should travel throughout the entire world and should tell all human beings comprehensively: that is how it was—what we have all endured throughout these unspeakably difficult years."[11]

The controversy that Kollwitz at times created added to her growing reputation among fellow artists. She was elected to the executive committee of the Berlin Secession, an artists' exhibition society. She was also the first woman ever elected to membership in the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts, where she also became a professor of printmaking.

Kollwitz's art of social commitment continued. In later life she began to focus her art on the particular problems that women face. She never joined any political party, attempting instead to speak to and for humanity as a whole. She wrote in her diary, "I am horrified and shaken by all the hatred in the world. I long for the kind of socialism that lets people *live*, and find that the earth has seen *enough* of murder, lies, misery, distortion."[12]

When the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933, Kollwitz was forced out of her teaching position and forbidden from exhibiting in public. Yet she continued to make her prints and to sell them to an ever-wider audience through private sales. In 1936 the Gestapo political police threatened to send her to a prison camp, but her international reputation likely prevented them from carrying out the threat. She left Berlin in 1943 for the rural city of Moritzburg; soon after, her house and studio were hit by Allied bombing, which led to the loss of many works. She died in 1945, just before the end of the hostilities.

2.28 Käthe Kollwitz. *The Outbreak*. From the series *The Peasants' War*. 1903. Etching, engraving, and aquatint on paper. 19½″ × 23″. Sheet 5 of the series: Bauernkrieg.
Hanover, Sprengel Museum Photograph akg-images.
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3 The Visual Elements

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

3.1 Describe the characteristics of line.

3.2 Identify the two general categories of shapes and their different qualities.

3.3 Differentiate between two-dimensional and three-dimensional depictions of mass.

3.4 Summarize how technical devices such as implied depth and linear perspective are used to render space in two-dimensional works of art.

3.5 Discuss how visual artists can express or embody the passage of time and the concept of motion in their work.

3.6 Explain the characteristics of light and how it is used as a medium in the work of contemporary artists.

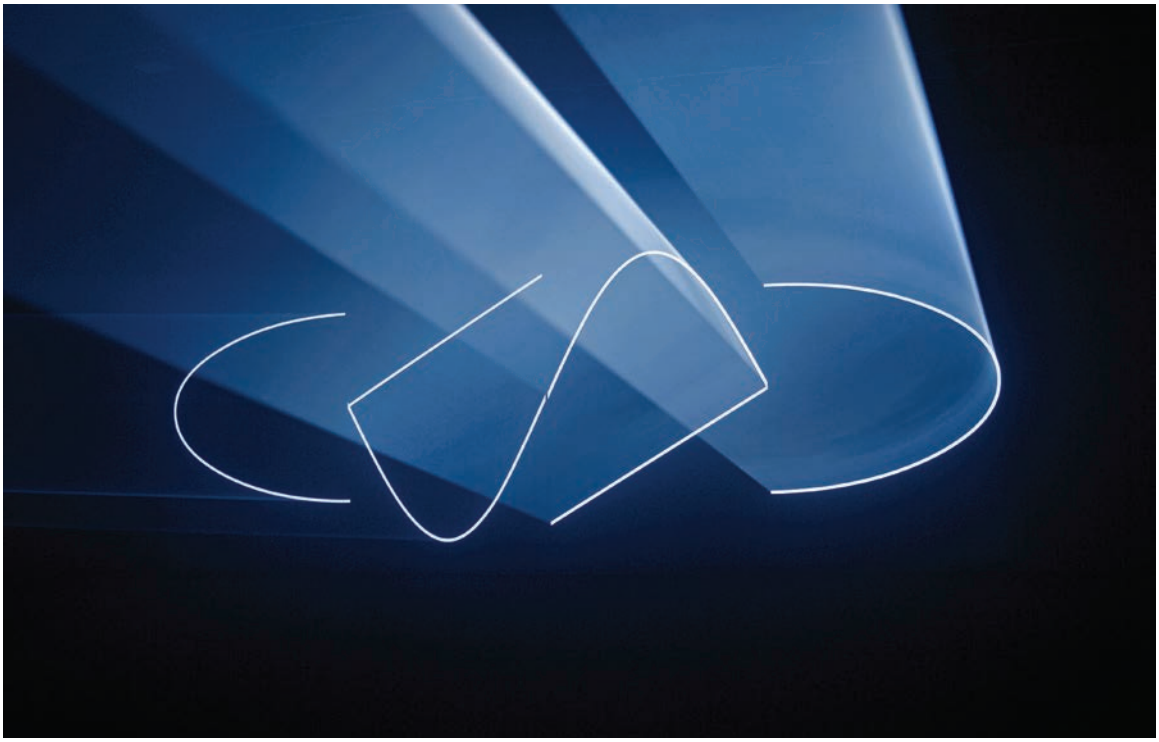
3.7 Describe the physical properties and relationships of color.

3.8 Discuss how texture aids the expressive quality of an artwork.

Edward Hopper's 1939 painting *New York Movie* (**fig. 3.1**) depicts a movie theater with a few people in the audience and an usher standing just outside in the lobby. More important, this work also shows the artist's use of several visual elements that play key roles in most works of art. On the right, thickly painted *lines* separate the walls and ceiling. The lamps above the theater seats reveal dimly lit suspended *shapes* that suggest the *mass* of the rows of balcony seats above. The work includes two *spaces*, theater and lobby, which seem to recede from us. Movies take place over *time*, and this movie is probably about to end, as the usher waits for the crowd to exit. *Motion* is suggested by the partial, blurred movie screen and by the expectation that the audience will soon be leaving. *Light*, coming from the overhead lamps in the theater and the three wall lamps in the lobby, helps to clarify the spaces in the work; it is particularly important in establishing the pensive presence of the usher. The deep blue *color* of her uniform contrasts with the pale colors of the walls. The artist also suggested smooth

3.1 Edward Hopper. *New York Movie*. 1939. Oil on canvas. 32″ × 40″.

Museum of Modern Art, (MoMA). Given anonymously. Acc. n.: 396.1941.© 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.



3.2 Anthony McCall. *You and I, Horizontal (III)*. 2007. Installation view, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, 2007.
Photograph by Steven Harris. © the artist, courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York.

and rough *textures* in the red velvet theater seats, the flat plaster walls, and the carved wood column at the center.

This chapter introduces the visual elements identified in *New York Movie*: line, shape, mass, space, time, motion, light, color, and texture. Not all these elements are important, or even present, in every work of art; many works emphasize only a few of them. To understand their expressive possibilities, we will examine some of the expressive qualities of each of these visual elements and the way in which artists use them.

Line

We write, draw, plan, and play with lines. Our individuality and feelings are expressed as we write our one-of-a-kind signatures or make other handmade lines. Line is our basic means of recording and symbolizing ideas, observations, and feelings; it is a primary means of visual communication.

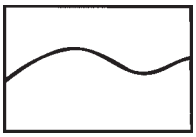
A **line** is a long, narrow mark, usually made by drawing with a tool or brush. Lines can be of various thickness, but length always predominates over height or depth. Wherever we see an edge, we often perceive the edge as a line—the place where one object or plane appears to end and another object or space begins. In a sense we often "draw" with our eyes, converting edges to lines. In *New York Movie*, this happens at the joints between the theater and lobby spaces, and where the lobby floor meets the wall.

In art and in nature, lines can appear to be paths of action—records of the energy left by moving points. Lines in space are the principal elements in Anthony McCall's *You and I, Horizontal (III)* **(fig. 3.2)**. We can imagine that moving points of light may have made the lines that make up this work. McCall set up projectors that send bright images of lines onto sloping dark screens. When viewers pass through the space, they interrupt the lines and thereby alter them at will. Viewers thus help to draw the lines that this work features.

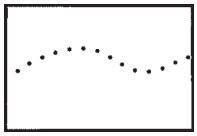
Characteristics of Line

Lines can be active or static, aggressive or passive, sensual or mechanical. Lines can indicate directions, define boundaries of shapes and spaces, imply volumes or solid masses, and suggest motion or emotion. Lines can also be grouped to depict light and shadow and to form patterns

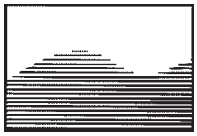
3.3 Line Variations.



a. Actual line.

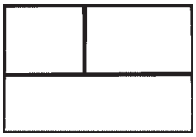


b. Implied line.

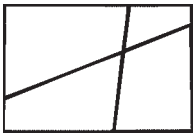


c. Actual straight lines and implied curved line.

d. Line created by an edge.



e. Vertical line (attitude of alert attention); horizontal line (attitude of rest).

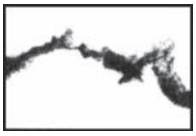


f. Diagonal lines (slow action, fast action).

g. Sharp, jagged line.

h. Dance of curving lines.

i. Hard line, soft line.



j. Ragged, irregular line.

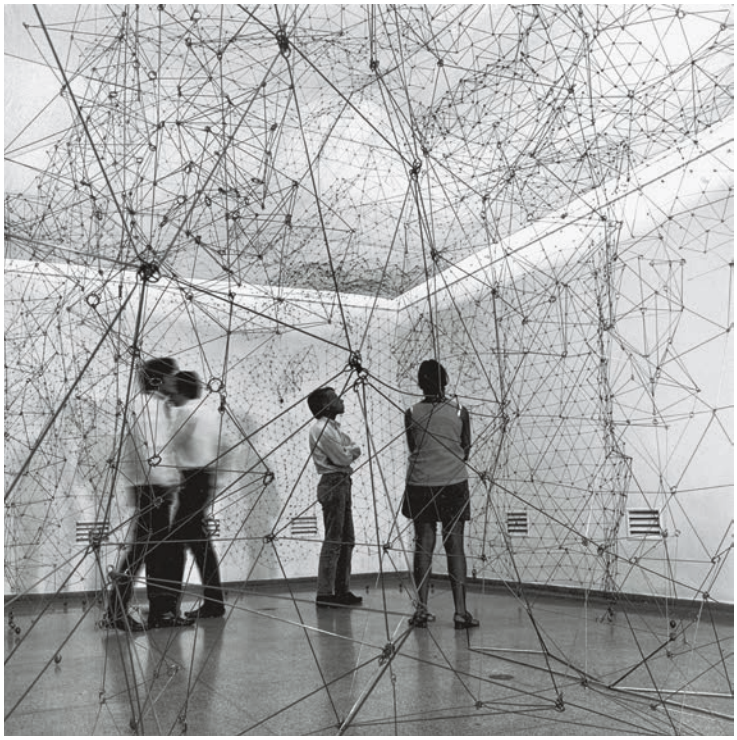
and textures. Note the line qualities shown in the Line Variations diagram (**fig. 3.3**).

Consider the range of uses artists found for lines in the works pictured here. The two Japanese prints have similar subjects, but use line in radically different ways. *Kabuki Actor* (**fig. 3.4**) is curvy and suggests slow, rhythmic motion. Torii Kiyotada's *Actor* (**fig. 3.5**), in contrast, uses angular lines to express swift and violent motion.

The Venezuelan artist Gego took lines into the third dimension in her room-size work *Reticulárea* (**fig. 3.6**).

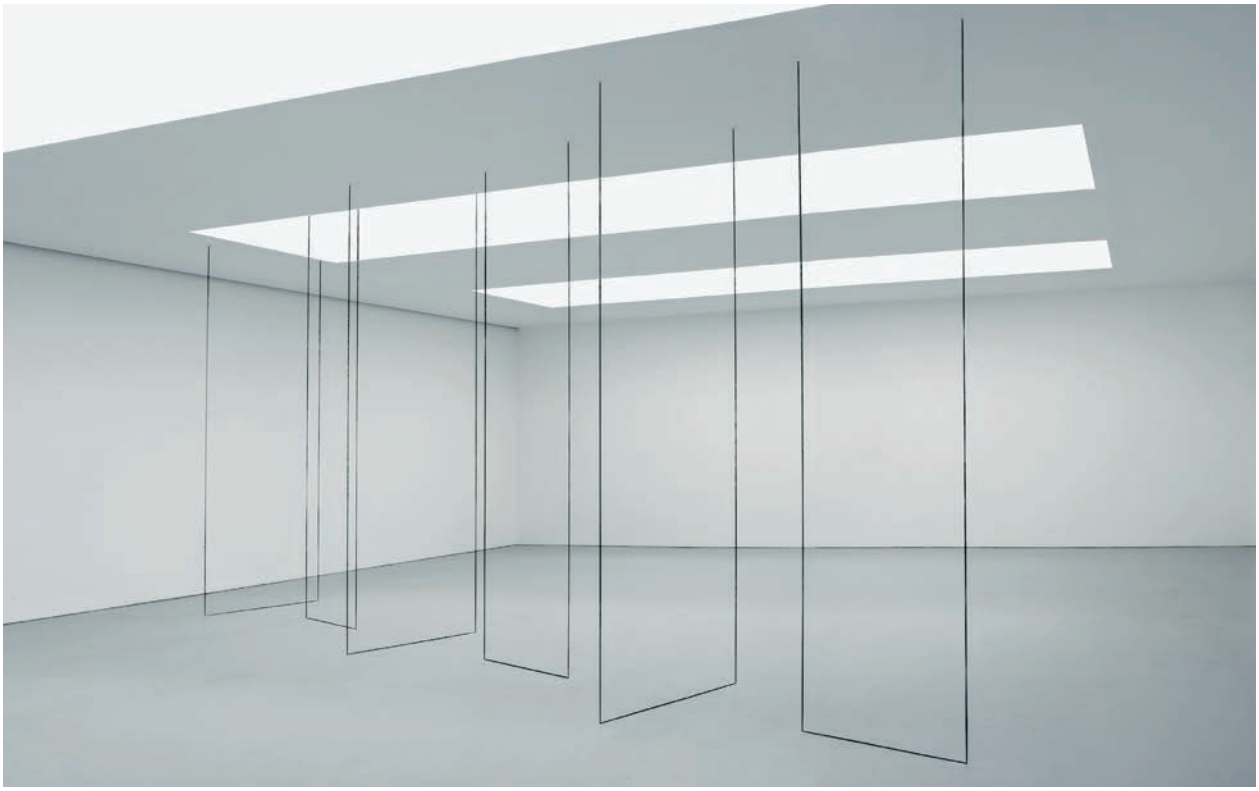
3.4 Far left: Attributed to Torii Kiyonobu I. *Kabuki Actor*. c.1708. Woodblock print. 21¾″ × 11½″.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Rogers Fund, 1949. (JP 3098).

3.5 Left: Torii Kiyotada. Ichikawa Danjūrō II in the Scene 'Wait a Moment' (Shibaraku). *An Actor of the Ichikawa Clan in a Dance Movement of Violent Motion*. c.1715. Hand-colored woodcut. 11¼″ × 6″.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Rogers Fund, 1949. (JP 3075).



3.6 Gego. *Reticulárea* (*Environment*). 1969. Aluminum and stainless-steel wire. Dimensions variable.
Fundación Gego.

She created this field of lines by linking segments of stainless-steel wire into a disorienting welter. As viewers move through the space, they see short lines in varying degrees of density that proceed in every direction. Fred Sandback also put lines into our space (**fig. 3.7**), but he used black yarn in a much more organized array to suggest elegant open rectangles. The shapes that the lines create alternate between only two orientations; three of the rectangles lie at 90-degree angles from the other three, creating a rather stately procession. The widely differing mood of these two room-sized works depends entirely on the artists' use of line.



3.7 Fred Sandback. *Untitled (Sculptural Study, Six-Part Construction)*. 1977/2008. Black acrylic yarn. Dimensions variable.
Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland. Photo by Cathy Carver © 2017 Fred Sandback Archive; courtesy of David Zwirner, New York/London.

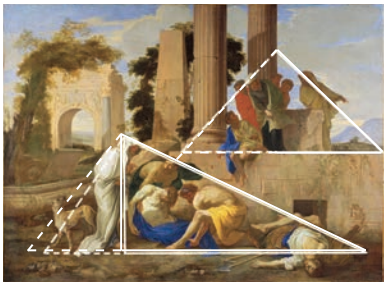
3.8 Kiki Smith. *Ginzer*. 2000. Etching, aquatint, and drypoint on mold-made paper. 22½″ × 31″.
Published by Harlan & Weaver, New York.

Many types of prints are made up almost entirely of lines, with little shading or color. Kiki Smith etched lines in a metal plate to create *Ginzer* (**fig. 3.8**), a depiction of her cat. She painstakingly drew one line for each of Ginzer's hairs. The eyes and foot pads are slightly shaded, but all else was done with line. She successfully captured the cat's flexible limbs and back as Ginzer reclined, but she also showed a hint of the animal's wild side in the mouth and alert eyes.

Implied Line

Implied lines suggest visual connections. Andrea di Lione used several of these in his painting *Tobit Burying the Dead* (**fig. 3.9a**); a diagram (**fig. 3.9b**) separates them out for clarity. Implied lines that form geometric shapes can serve as an underlying organizational structure. The figures in the lower foreground form a triangle with the head of the white-clad Tobit as its apex. One side of this triangle is the implied line from Tobit's head downward toward the right, through a head, back, and leg each belonging to other figures. Part of this triangle's other side is formed by the

3.9a Andrea di Lione. *Tobit Burying the Dead*. 1640s. Oil on canvas. 50¼″ × 68½″.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1989.225.



b Implied lines in Andrea di Lione. *Tobit Burying the Dead*.