

Seventh Edition

ART

A BRIEF HISTORY

Marilyn Stokstad • Michael W. Cothren



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This seventh edition of *Art: A Brief History* is dedicated to the memory of Marilyn Stokstad (1929–2016), who conceived and created the first edition of *Art History*, the textbook that was the basis for this abbreviated version.

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LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Colleagues,

When Marilyn Stokstad wrote the first edition of *Art History* in the early 1990s—the book that was later shortened into the abbreviated *Art: A Brief History*, first published in 2000—it represented an historical advance in the conception and teaching of the history of art. The discipline had recently gone through a period of crisis and creativity that challenged the assumptions behind survey courses and questioned the canon of works that had long been their foundation. We all rethought what we were doing, and this soul searching made us better teachers—more honest and relevant, more passionate and inclusive. With characteristic energy and intelligence, Marilyn stepped up to the task of conceiving and creating a new survey textbook for a new generation of students ready to reap the benefits of this refined notion of art history. From the beginning, she made it global in scope, inclusive in coverage, warm and welcoming in tone. Marilyn highlighted the role of women in the history of art both by increasing the number of women artists and by expanding the range of art included, focusing on media and genres that had traditionally engaged female artists and patrons. It was an honor to become part of her project a decade ago, and it is my sad responsibility to acknowledge her passing since the previous edition was published. To me, Marilyn was more than a brilliant art historian; she was a loyal and compassionate colleague, a great friend. The warmth and trust with which she welcomed me into the writing of her books was one of the great experiences of my professional life. I truly miss her, and I will work faithfully to continue her legacy as this book moves into the future. I promised her I would.

In certain ways, Marilyn and I shared a common history. Neither of us set out to become art history professors. Marilyn took her first art history course as a requirement of her studio arts program. I discovered the discipline almost by chance during a semester abroad in Provence when a painting instructor sent me on a field trip to learn from the formal intricacies of Romanesque sculpture. Perhaps as a result of the unexpected delight we found in these formative experiences, we shared a conviction that first courses in art history should be filled with as much enjoyment as erudition; that they should foster an enthusiastic, as well as an educated, public for the visual arts. With this end firmly in mind, we created books intended to help students relish learning about a vast and complex field of study. For millennia human beings have expressed their most cherished ideas and values in visual and tangible form. I believe that by engaging with these works from the past, we can enrich our lives in the present, especially because we and our students are living in a present when images have become an increasingly important aspect of how we communicate with each other.



Like its predecessors, this new edition of *Art: A Brief History* seeks to balance formal and iconographic analysis with contextual art history in order to craft interpretations that will engage with a diverse student population. Throughout the text, the visual arts are treated as part of a larger world, in which geography, politics, religion, economics, philosophy, social life, and the other fine arts were related components of a vibrant cultural landscape. This is a daunting agenda for a “Brief” book. But it is essential. Art and architecture have played a central role in human history, and they continue to do so today. This book will fulfill its purpose if it introduces a broad spectrum of students to some of the richest human achievements created through the centuries and across the globe, and if it inspires those students to respect and to cherish their historical legacy in the visual arts. Perhaps it will convince some to dedicate themselves to assuring that our own age leaves a comparable artistic legacy, thereby continuing the ever-evolving history of art.

Our discipline originated in dialogue and develops from the desire to talk with each other about why works of art matter and why they affect us so deeply. I would love to hear from you—mcothrel@swarthmore.edu.

Warm regards

WHAT'S NEW

Even an established introductory art history text must respond to the changing needs of its audience—both students and educators. In this way the art it introduces is more likely to challenge and nourish its readers' lives, both during the class and into the future.

Art history evolves as new works and new research become available for debate and consideration. This new edition of *Art: A Brief History* has been revised to reflect such new discoveries and fresh interpretive perspectives, and also to address the changing needs of the audience. With these goals in mind, and by incorporating feedback from our many users and reviewers, I have sought to make this seventh edition an improvement over its earlier editions in sensitivity, readability, and accessibility without losing anything in scholarly richness, or in its ability to engage readers.

Examples of NEW content in this edition

- **Global coverage has been deepened** with the addition of new works of art and revised discussions that incorporate new scholarship.
- **Chapter 16 on African art has been rethought and restructured** to focus on the way this art was perceived by those who created and first used it, rather than on the colonialist interpretation and categorization of African buildings and objects. The chapter now discusses works from across the continent and takes African art's history into the contemporary age.
- **Chapter 20 on Contemporary art has been expanded and reorganized for greater clarity**, inclusiveness, and timeliness. Numerous new works have been introduced.
- Throughout, **figures have been updated** whenever new and improved photographs were available.
- In response to readers' requests, **discussion of many major monuments has been revised and expanded** and the **examples chosen for some artists have been changed** to better represent them and the art world in which they worked.

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Designing Art: A Brief History in Revel

One of the principal objectives of the current edition has been to advance the transformation of the traditional narrative into an interactive learning experience in Revel. Revel is conceived to promote learning in a digital platform that is engaging and meaningful to today's student. Along with traditional narrative text passages, features such as pan/zoom images, videos, architectural panoramas, and audio text are integrated to better explain and present concepts key to understanding the history of art.

- **Pan/zooms** appear with a simple click for most of the figures, allowing students to zoom in and examine details with stunning clarity and resolution, 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. Since all works of art are scaled in a fundamental sense to the size of human creators and viewers (rather than to an arbitrary measuring system), this intuitive communication of size is more instructive for students than the specific measurements found in the captions.
- There are three **writing prompts** in each chapter. All are keyed to specific works of 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.

New to This Edition of Revel

- **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.
- **New panoramas from global sites** sourced from 360Cities have been integrated, bringing students into the setting of major buildings and monuments such as the Taj Mahal and Great Zimbabwe.
- **Each and every Closer Look** has been transformed into a Revel video presentation, where students are guided through a detailed examination of the work, coordinated with the interpretive material about style, subject matter, and cultural context as it unfolds.

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Art: A Brief History first appeared in 2000 as a concise version of Marilyn Stokstad's *Art History*, which was first published in 1995 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and Prentice Hall, Inc. Because this new edition builds on the revisions of previous editions of both *Art History* and *Art: A Brief History*, the work of many colleagues and friends who contributed to the original texts and their subsequent revisions is reflected here. The work of Stephen Addiss, Chutsing Li, Marilyn M. Rhie, and Christopher D. Roy for the original book was updated by David Binkley and Patricia Darish (Africa); Claudia Brown and Robert Mowry (China and Korea); Patricia Graham (Japan); Rick Asher (South and Southeast Asia); D. Fairchild Ruggles (Islamic); Claudia Brittenham (Americas); Sara Orel and Carol Ivory (Pacific cultures); and Bradford R. Collins, David Cateforis, Patrick Frank, and Joy Sperling (Modern and Contemporary). For this seventh edition, Robert DeCaroli worked on the presentation of South and Southeast Asia; Susan Kart completely rethought and revised the chapter on African art; and Virginia Spivey did the same for the final chapter on Contemporary art.

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If the arts are an expression of human faith and integrity as well as human thought and creativity, then writing and producing books that introduce new viewers and thinkers to the wonders of art's history, and to the courage and visions of the artists and art historians that stand behind it remains a noble undertaking. I feel honored to be a part of such a worthy project.

Michael W. Cothren
Sedona, AZ
Spring 2018

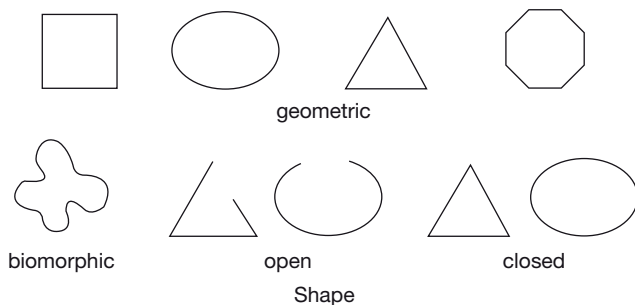
STARTER KIT

Art history focuses on the visual arts—painting, drawing, sculpture, prints, photography, ceramics, metalwork, architecture, and more. This Starter Kit contains basic information and addresses concepts that underlie and support the study of art history. It provides a quick reference guide to the vocabulary used to classify and describe art objects. Understanding these terms is indispensable because you will encounter them again and again in reading, talking, and writing about art.

Let us begin with the basic properties of art. A work of art is a material object having both **form** and **content**. It is often described and categorized according to its *style* and *medium*.

Form

Referring to purely visual aspects of art and architecture, the term *form* encompasses qualities of **LINE**, **SHAPE**, **COLOR**, **LIGHT**, **TEXTURE**, **SPACE**, **MASS**, **VOLUME**, and **COMPOSITION**. These qualities are known as **FORMAL ELEMENTS**. When art historians use the term *formal*, they mean “relating to form.”



Line and **shape** are attributes of form. Line is an element—usually drawn or painted—the length of which is so much greater than the width that we perceive it as having only length. Line can be actual, as when the line is visible, or it can be implied, as when the movement of the viewer’s eyes over the surface of a work follows a path determined by the artist. Shape, on the other hand, is the two-dimensional, or flat, area defined by the borders of an enclosing *outline* or *contour*. Shape can be *geometric*, *biomorphic* (suggesting living things; sometimes called *organic*), *closed*, or *open*. The *outline* or *contour* of a three-dimensional object can also be perceived as line.

Color has several attributes. These include **HUE**, **VALUE**, and **SATURATION**.

HUE is what we think of when we hear the word color, and the terms are interchangeable. We perceive hues as the result of differing wavelengths of electromagnetic energy. The visible spectrum, which can be seen in a rainbow, runs from red through violet. When the ends of the spectrum are connected through the hue red-violet, the result may be diagrammed



as a color wheel. The primary hues (numbered 1) are red, yellow, and blue. They are known as primaries because all other colors are made by combining these hues. Orange, green, and violet result from the mixture of two primaries and are known as secondary hues (numbered 2). Intermediate hues, or tertiaries (numbered 3), result from the mixture of a primary and a secondary. Complementary colors are the two colors directly opposite one another on the color wheel, such as red and green. Red, orange, and yellow are regarded as warm colors and appear to advance toward us. Blue, green, and violet, which seem to recede, are called cool colors. Black and white are not considered colors but neutrals; in terms of light, black is understood as the absence of color and white as the mixture of all colors.

VALUE is the relative degree of lightness or darkness of a given color and is created by the amount of light reflected from an object’s surface. A dark green has a deeper value



Value scale from white to black.



Value variation in red.

than a light green, for example. In black-and-white reproductions of colored objects, you see only value, and some artworks—for example, a drawing made with black ink—possess only value, not hue or saturation.

SATURATION, also sometimes referred to as *intensity*, is a color's quality of brightness or dullness. A color described as highly saturated looks vivid and pure; a hue of low saturation may look a little muddy or grayed.

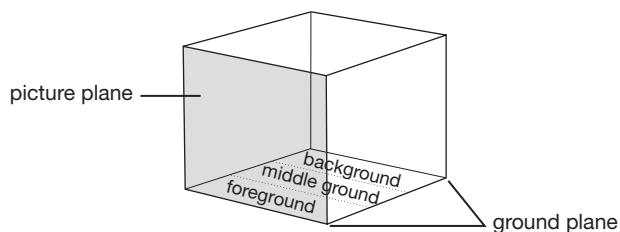


Texture, another **attribute** of form, is the tactile (or touch-perceived) quality of a surface. It is described by words such as *smooth, polished, rough, prickly, grainy, or oily*. Texture takes two forms: the texture of the actual surface of the work of art and the implied (illusionistically described) surface of objects represented in the work of art.

Space is what contains forms. It may be actual and three-dimensional, as it is with sculpture and architecture. Or it may be fictional, represented illusionistically in two dimensions, as when artists represent recession into the distance on a flat surface—such as a wall or a canvas—by using various systems of **perspective**.

Mass and volume are properties of three-dimensional things. Mass is solid matter—whether sculpture or architecture—that takes up space. Volume is enclosed or defined space, and may be either solid or hollow. Like space, mass and volume may be illusionistically represented on a two-dimensional surface, as in a painting or a photograph.

Composition is the organization, or arrangement, of forms in a work of art. Shapes and colors may be repeated or varied, balanced symmetrically or asymmetrically; they may be stable or dynamic. The possibilities are nearly endless, and artistic choice depends both on the time and place where the work was created as well as on the objectives of individual artists. **PICTORIAL DEPTH** (spatial recession) is a specialized aspect of composition in which the three-dimensional world is represented on a flat surface, or **PICTURE PLANE**. The area “behind” the picture plane is called the **PICTURE SPACE** and conventionally contains three “zones”: **FOREGROUND**, **MIDDLE GROUND**, and **BACKGROUND**.



Various techniques for conveying a sense of pictorial depth have been devised by artists in different cultures and at different times. A number of them are diagrammed here. In some European art, the use of various systems of **PERSPECTIVE** has sought to create highly convincing illusions of recession into space. At other times and in other cultures, indications of recession are actually suppressed or avoided to emphasize surface rather than space.

Content

Content includes **SUBJECT MATTER**, but not all works of art have subject matter. Many buildings, paintings, sculptures, and other art objects include no recognizable references to things in nature, nor to any story or historical situation, focusing instead on lines, colors, masses, volumes, and other formal elements. However, all works of art—even those without recognizable subject matter—have content, or meaning, insofar as they seek to communicate ideas, convey feelings, or affirm the beliefs and values of their makers, their **patrons**, and usually the people who originally viewed or used them.

Content may derive from the social, political, religious, and economic **CONTEXTS** in which a work was created, the **INTENTION** of the artist, and the **RECEPTION** of the work by beholders (the audience). Art historians, applying different methods of **INTERPRETATION**, often arrive at different conclusions regarding the content of a work of art. Single works of art can contain more than one meaning because they are occasionally directed at more than one audience.

The study of subject matter is called **ICONOGRAPHY** (literally, “the writing of images”) and includes the identification of **SYMBOLS**—images that take on meaning through association, resemblance, or **convention**.

Style

Expressed very broadly, *style* is the combination of form and composition that makes a work distinctive. **STYLISTIC ANALYSIS** is one of art history's most developed practices, because it is how art historians recognize the work of an individual artist or the characteristic manner of groups of artists working in a particular time or place. Some of the most commonly used terms to discuss **ARTISTIC STYLES** include **PERIOD STYLE**, **REGIONAL STYLE**, **REPRESENTATIONAL STYLE**, **ABSTRACT STYLE**, **LINEAR STYLE**, and **PAINTERLY STYLE**.

Period style refers to the common traits detectable in works of art and architecture from a particular historical era. It is good practice not to use the words “style” and “period” interchangeably. Style is the sum of many influences and characteristics, including the period of its creation. An example of proper usage is “an American house from the Colonial period built in the Georgian style.”

Regional style refers to stylistic traits that persist in a geographic region. An art historian whose specialty is medieval art can recognize Spanish style through many successive medieval periods and can distinguish individual objects created in medieval Spain from other medieval objects that were created in, for example, Italy.

Pictorial Devices for Depicting Recession in Space



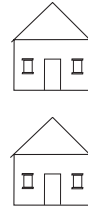
overlapping

In overlapping, partially covered elements are meant to be seen as located behind those covering them.



diminution

In diminution of scale, successively smaller elements are perceived as being progressively farther away than the largest ones.



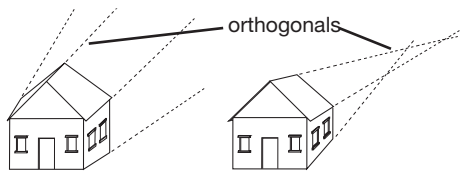
vertical perspective

Vertical perspective stacks elements, with the higher ones intended to be perceived as deeper in space.



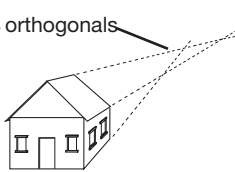
atmospheric perspective

Through atmospheric perspective, objects in the far distance (often in bluish-gray hues) have less clarity than nearer objects. The sky becomes paler as it approaches the horizon.



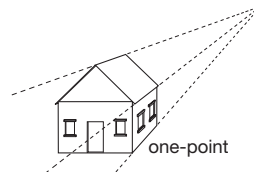
divergent perspective

In divergent or reverse perspective, forms widen slightly and imaginary lines called orthogonals diverge as they recede in space.



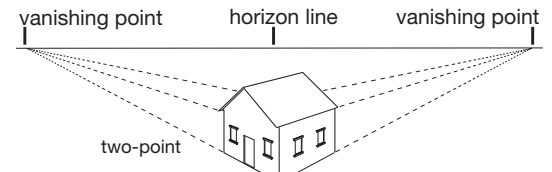
intuitive perspective

Intuitive perspective takes the opposite approach from divergent perspective. Forms become narrower and orthogonals converge the farther they are from the viewer, approximating the optical experience of spatial recession.



linear perspective

Linear perspective (also called scientific, mathematical, one-point, and Renaissance perspective) is a rationalization or standardization of intuitive perspective that was developed in fifteenth-century Italy. It uses mathematical formulas to construct images in which all elements are shaped by, or arranged along, orthogonals that converge in one or more vanishing points on a horizon line.



Representational styles are those that describe the appearance of recognizable subject matter in ways that make it seem lifelike.

REALISM and **NATURALISM** are terms that some people used interchangeably to characterize artists' attempts to represent the observable world in a manner that appears to describe its visual appearance accurately. When capitalized, Realism refers to a specific period style discussed in Chapter 18.

IDEALIZATION strives to create images of physical perfection according to the prevailing values or tastes of a culture. The artist may work in a representational style and idealize it to capture an underlying value or expressive effect.

ILLUSIONISM refers to a highly detailed style that seeks to create a convincing illusion of physical reality by describing its visual appearance meticulously.

Abstract styles depart from mimicking lifelike appearance to capture the essence of a form. An abstract artist may work from nature or from a memory image of nature's forms and colors, which are simplified, stylized, perfected, distorted, elaborated, or otherwise transformed to achieve a desired expressive effect.

NONREPRESENTATIONAL (OR NONOBJECTIVE) ART is a term often used for works of art that do not aim to produce recognizable natural imagery.

EXPRESSIONISM refers to styles in which the artist exaggerates aspects of form to draw out the beholder's subjective response or to project the artist's own subjective feelings.

Linear describes both styles and techniques. In linear styles artists use line as the primary means of definition. But linear paintings can also incorporate **MODELING**—creating an illusion of three-dimensional substance through shading, usually executed so that brushstrokes nearly disappear.

Painterly describes a style of representation in which vigorous, evident brushstrokes dominate, and outlines, shadows, and highlights are brushed in freely.

Medium and Technique

Medium (plural, *media*) refers to the material or materials from which a work of art is made. Today, literally anything can be used to make a work of art, including not only traditional materials like paint, ink, and stone, but also rubbish, food, and the earth itself.

Technique is the process that transforms the medium into a work of art. Various techniques are explained throughout this book in Technique boxes. Two-dimensional media and techniques include painting, drawing, printing, and photography. Three-dimensional media and techniques are sculpture, architecture, and many small-scale arts (such as jewelry, containers, or vessels) in media such as ceramics, metal, or wood.

Painting includes **wall painting** and **fresco**, **illumination** (the decoration of books with paintings), **panel painting** (painting on wood panels), painting on canvas, and handscroll and **hanging scroll** painting. The paint in these examples is pigment mixed with a liquid vehicle, or binder. Some art historians also consider pictorial media such as **mosaic** and **stained glass**—where the pigment is arranged in solid form—also as a type of painting.

Graphic arts are those that involve the application of lines and strokes to a two-dimensional surface or support, most often paper. Drawing is a graphic art, as are the various forms of printmaking. Drawings may be sketches (quick visual notes, often made in preparation for larger drawings or paintings); studies (more carefully drawn analyses of details or entire compositions); **cartoons** (full-scale drawings made in preparation for work in another medium, such as fresco, stained glass, or **tapestry**); or complete artworks in themselves. Drawings can be made with ink, charcoal, crayon, or pencil. Prints, unlike drawings, are made in multiple copies. The various forms of printmaking include woodcut, the **intaglio** processes (**engraving**, **etching**, **drypoint**), and **lithography**.

Photography (literally, “light writing”) is a medium that involves the rendering of optical images on light-sensitive surfaces. Photographic images are typically recorded by a camera.

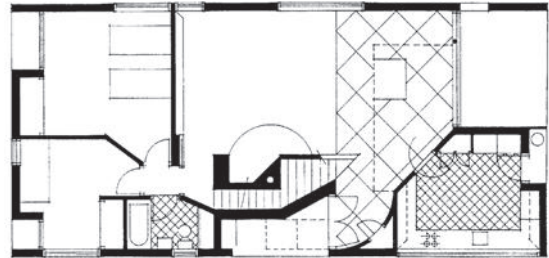
Sculpture is three-dimensional art that is **CARVED**, **MODELED**, **CAST**, or **ASSEMBLED**. Carved sculpture is subtractive in the sense that the image is created by taking away material. Wood, stone, and ivory are common materials used to create carved sculptures. Modeled sculpture is considered additive, meaning that the object is built up from a material, such as clay, that is soft enough to be molded and shaped. Metal sculpture is usually cast or is assembled by welding or a similar means of permanent joining.

Sculpture is either free-standing (that is, surrounded by space) or in pictorial relief. **Relief sculpture** projects from the background surface of the same piece of material. **High-relief** sculpture projects far from its background; **low-relief** sculpture is only slightly raised; and **sunken relief**, found mainly in ancient Egyptian art, is carved into the surface, with the highest part of the relief being the flat surface.

Ephemeral arts include processions, ceremonies, or ritual dances (often with décor, costumes, or masks); **Performance Art**; **earthworks**; cinema and video art; and some forms of digital or computer art. All impose a temporal limitation—the artwork is viewable for a finite period of time and then disappears forever, is in a constant state of change, or must be replayed to be experienced again.

Architecture creates enclosures for human activity or habitation. It is three-dimensional, highly spatial, functional, and closely bound with developments in technology and materials. Since it is difficult to capture in a photograph, several types of schematic drawings are commonly used to enable the visualization of a building:

PLANS depict a structure’s masses and voids, presenting a view from above of the building’s footprint or as if it had been sliced horizontally at about waist height.



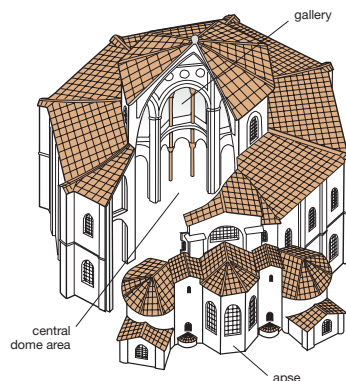
PLAN:
Philadelphia, Vanna Venturi House

SECTIONS reveal the interior of a building as if it had been cut vertically from top to bottom.

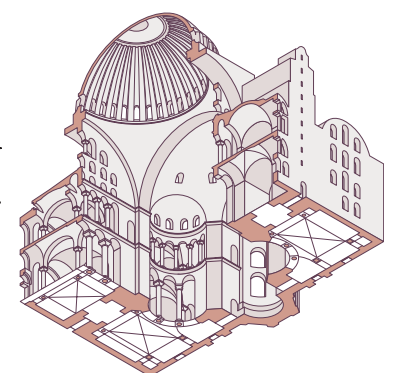


SECTION:
Rome, Sta. Costanza

ISOMETRIC DRAWINGS show buildings from oblique angles either seen from above (“**bird’s-eye view**”) to reveal their basic three-dimensional forms (often cut away so we can peek inside) or from below (“**worm’s-eye view**”) to represent the arrangement of interior spaces and the upward projection of structural elements.



**ISOMETRIC CUTAWAY
FROM ABOVE:**
Ravenna, San Vitale



**ISOMETRIC PROJECTION
FROM BELOW:**
Istanbul, Hagia Sophia



INTRO-1 • GREAT SPHINX, FUNERARY COMPLEX OF KHAFRE, GIZA, EGYPT

Old Kingdom, c. 2520–2494 BCE, Dynasty 4. Limestone, height approx. 65' (19.8 m). © Orlandin/Shutterstock

INTRODUCTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Intro.1** Consider the criteria used to identify and characterize works of art and their various modes of visual representation.
- Intro.2** Discover how to identify subject matter and symbols (iconography) and to situate the meaning of works of art within cultural contexts.

- Intro.3** Survey the various ways that artists and patrons have viewed themselves and have been viewed by the societies in which they lived and worked.
- Intro.4** Characterize the interpretive discipline we call “art history.”

Crouching in front of the pyramids and carved from the living rock of the Giza plateau in Egypt, the **GREAT SPHINX** is one of the world’s best-known monuments (FIG. INTRO-1). By placing the head of the ancient Egyptian king Khafre on the body of a lion, the sculptors joined human intelligence and animal strength in a single, huge image that stood for the superhuman power of a ruler. For nearly 4,600 years, the Sphinx has defied encroaching desert sands and the assaults of nature; today it also must withstand the human-driven sprawl of greater Cairo and the impact of air pollution. In its majesty, it symbolizes mysterious wisdom and dreams of permanence, of immortality. But is such a monument to human power a work of art? Does it matter that the people who carved the Sphinx—unlike today’s seemingly independent, individualistic, innovating artists—followed time-honored conventions and the expectations of their **patrons**? Most people would answer, “Certainly, this is art. Human imagination conceived this man-lion, and human skill gave material form to the concept behind it.” Are all—or just some—products of human imagination and skill works of art?

Intro.1 What is Art?

Answering this question was once easier than it is today. Most would agree that works of art demonstrate a combination of imagination, skill, training, and observation on the part of their human creators. They embody some of the most cherished

dreams, values, and beliefs of the cultures that created them. If they appeal to our own taste for, say, order and harmony, we may consider them beautiful. But we know that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, and that our aesthetic responses may not be the same as the responses of those in the past who created and originally saw the works. Whether we are taught at home, in classrooms, in museums, at the movies, or on the Internet, our responses to art—as well as our judgments about what constitutes art—are learned behaviors, influenced by class, gender, race, geography, and economic status, as well as by education.

The definition of art can also involve notions about the artists and patrons who shared responsibility for making the works. Definitions are also shaped by the responses of viewers—both observers today and those who saw the works when they were new. Art history has to explore these factors. Who were these artists and patrons? What were the ideas and expectations of the original viewers? Only after pondering such questions can we achieve an historical understanding and deeper appreciation of the special monuments and objects we now consider works of art.

Intro.1.1 Modes of Representation

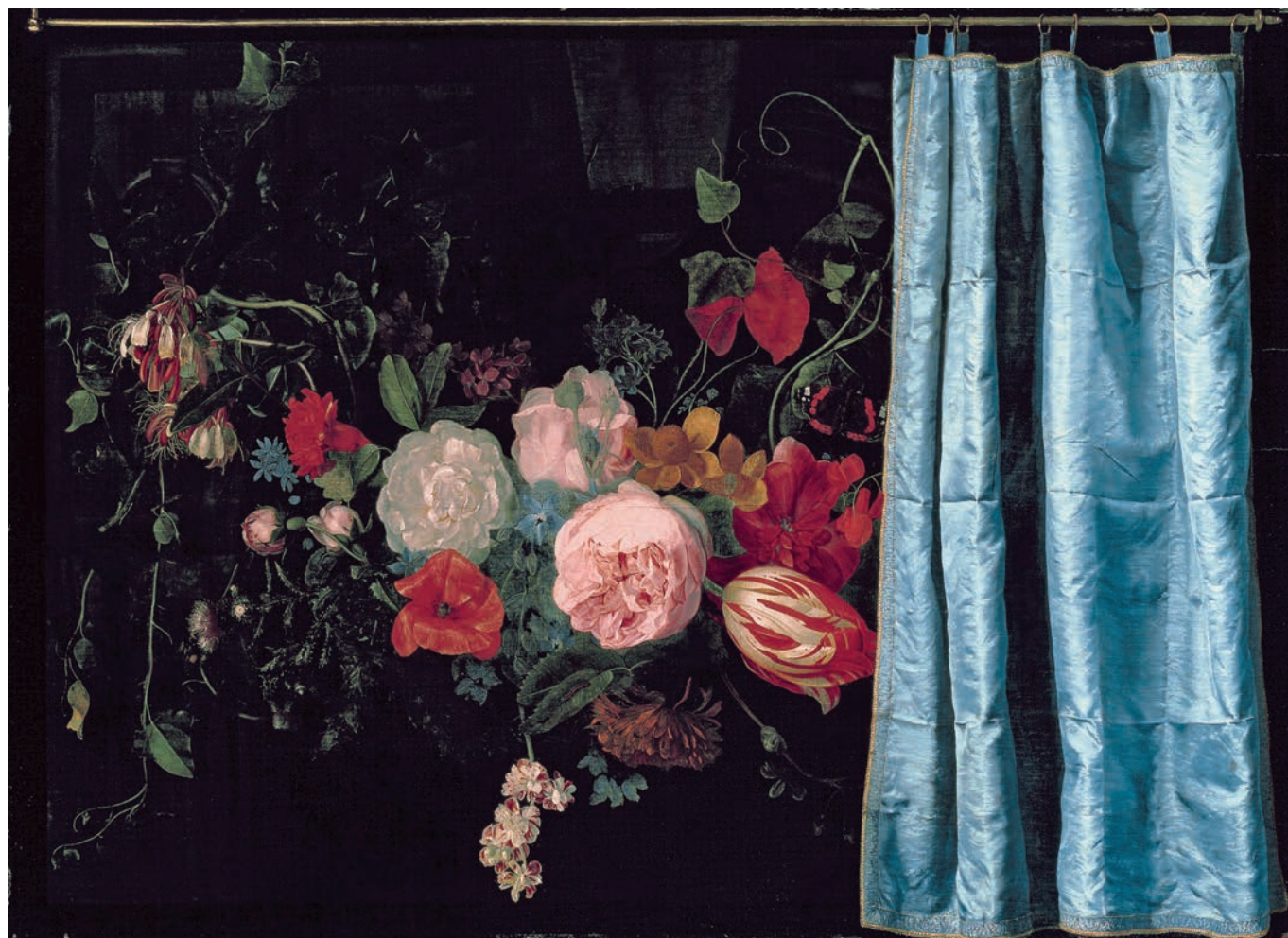
Not all cultures value the same qualities in works of art. The ancient Greeks especially admired the work of artists who were skillful at capturing the visual appearance of the natural world, as illustrated in a famous story about a competition between rival Greek painters named Zeuxis and Parrhasios,

held in the late fifth century BCE. Zeuxis painted a picture of grapes so detailed that birds flew down to peck at them. Then Parrhasios took his turn, and when Zeuxis asked his rival to remove the curtain hanging over the picture, Parrhasios gleefully pointed out that the curtain was not real. It was his painting. Zeuxis agreed that Parrhasios had won the competition since he, Zeuxis, had fooled only birds, but Parrhasios had tricked an intelligent fellow artist.

In the seventeenth century, painters Adriaen van der Spelt (1630–1673) and Frans van Mieris (1635–1681) paid homage to the story of Parrhasios' curtain with their painting of blue satin drapery drawn aside to show a garland of flowers (FIG. INTRO-2). This work is a *tour-de-force* of *trompe l'oeil* painting—**illusionistic** pictures that attempt to fool viewers into thinking what they are seeing is real, not a painted representation of the real. It is also an intellectual delight. The artists not only referred to Parrhasios' curtain illusion; they also included a reference to another Greek story that was popular in the fourth century BCE, the tale of Pausias, who painted a picture of the exquisite floral garlands made by a young woman named Glykera. This second

story raises the question of who was the true artist—the painter who copied natural forms in his art or the garland-maker who made the work of art out of nature? The seventeenth-century collectors who bought **still lifes** (pictures of inanimate objects and fruits or flowers taken out of their natural contexts) like these, knew such stories and appreciated the artist for their ability to make **Classical** references as well as for their technical skills in handling paint.

Even today some people think that lifelike descriptions of the visual appearance of the natural world (sometimes referred to as **naturalism** or **realism**) represent the highest accomplishment in art. Not everyone agrees. The first European artist to argue persuasively that precise observation alone produced “mere likeness,” not art, was the Italian master Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), who said that the painter who copied the external forms of nature was acting only as a mirror. He believed that the true artist should engage in intellectual activity of a higher order and attempt to capture the inner life—the energy and power—rather than just the outward appearance of a subject.



INTRO-2 • Adriaen van der Spelt and Frans van Mieris FLOWER PIECE WITH CURTAIN

1658. Oil on panel, 18¼ × 25¼" (46.5 × 64 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.

Photograph © The Art Institute of Chicago. Wirt D. Walker Fund/Bridgeman Images



INTRO-3 • Imogen Cunningham TWO CALLAS

Before 1929. Gelatin-silver print, 12 × 9½" (30.4 × 24.1 cm).

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

© 2018 Imogen Cunningham Trust

Like Van der Spelt and Van Mieris, Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) and Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) created pictures of living plants. In her photograph **TWO CALLAS**, Cunningham used straightforward camera work to capture the forms and textures of her subject accurately, even if drained of its color (FIG. INTRO-3). The artistic character of her photographic image depends not on the exacting detail recorded by the camera. It rests in the compositional choices and dramatic lighting controlled and set up by the artist who used it.

When Georgia O’Keeffe painted **JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT, No. IV** (FIG. INTRO-4), she wanted to capture the plant’s essence, not merely its appearance, by concentrating its organic energy and her artistic design on a painted detail, rather than by describing the way the plant actually looked as a whole. She sought an **abstract** beauty, capturing in paint the pure vigor of the flower’s life force. We will encounter throughout the history of art this move away from the recording of precise visual appearance to concentrate instead on **abstraction** or **stylization** so that artists can transform recognizable natural subjects into patterns or make them conform to ideals. This is not a goal unique to one time or place or culture.



INTRO-4 • Georgia O’Keeffe

JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT, No. IV

1930. Oil on canvas,

40 × 30" (101.6 × 76.2 cm). National

Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

© 2018 National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O’Keeffe (1987.58.3)



INTRO-5 • David Smith
CUBI XVIII (left).
 1964. Stainless steel,
 9' 8" (2.94 m). Museum
 of Fine Arts, Boston.
CUBI XVII (center).
 1963. Stainless steel,
 9' 2" (2.79 m). Dallas
 Museum of Fine Arts,
 Dallas.
CUBI XIX (right).
 1964. Stainless steel,
 9' 5½" (2.88 m).
 Tate Gallery, London.
 Shown installed at
 Bolton Landing,
 New York, in 1965.
 Photographs by David Smith.
 Art © Estate of David
 Smith/Licensed by VAGA,
 New York, NY

Even further from the appearance of the natural world are the pure geometric creations of polished stainless steel made by David Smith (1906–1965). His **CUBI** (FIG. INTRO-5) are **non-representational**—they do not depict a recognizable natural subject. Stylized art like O’Keeffe’s has both subject matter and content. Nonrepresentational art does not have subject matter, but it does have meaning, generated when the artist’s intention and the viewer’s interpretation interact. Some viewers may see the *Cubi* as cubic plants sprung from the core of an unyielding earth, a reflection of a mechanistic society, detached from the natural world. For them, there is a reference here to nature, even if natural forms are not directly represented.

Because the meanings of works of art are complex, and because they usually change over time, a central goal of art history is to explore the cultural factors behind the production and initial observation, or use of, works of art. In other words, art historians speculate on what works of art meant for the artists who made them and those who originally experienced them. But no art-historical explanation is definitive. The interpretation of works of art changes and develops over time as new evidence emerges and as new approaches are established. Art history is a work continually in progress.

Intro.1.2 “Real” and “Ideal” Bodies

Ever since people first made what we call art, they have been fascinated with representing themselves or the people around them. Portrayals of the human body change in appearance from culture to culture, and across the years, in relation to changing ideas and ideals of what constitutes a beautiful body. We see this happening today in contemporary popular culture. For the world of Classical antiquity—established on the shores of the Mediterranean by the ancient Greeks and Romans—the **MEDICI VENUS** (FIG. INTRO-6) represented female beauty. The allure of this goddess of love was in her fully rounded limbs and torso, the softness conveyed by the

sculptor in the carving of her flesh, the careful posing of her arms to conceal—and at the same time draw attention to—her sexual attributes, and the turn of her head to the side so that her eyes do not engage viewers directly. Such Classical figures of Venus served as paragons of female beauty and sensuality. They inspired and guided European artists and patrons from the fifteenth through the nineteenth century.

A very different notion of ideal beauty—also strictly regulated by cultural **convention**—stands behind the elegantly stylized woman featured in a **woodblock print** (FIG. INTRO-7) by Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806). Sleek shapes delineate the woman’s complicated garments and at the same time suggest, through contours and overlapping, the underlying form of her body. But the treatment of the rich textiles emphasizes surface pattern over bodily form, and the sharp, radiating diagonals of her hairpins distract us from initially grasping the shape of her elaborate coiffure. Utamaro has rendered the decorative silks and carved pins meticulously, but only suggested the woman’s face and hand with a few carefully chosen, sweeping lines. He avoids the shading that would give substance to her form. This picture does not represent a powerful goddess, but a high-ranking courtesan named Wakaume, from a brothel in “the floating world,” or urban pleasure district of Edo (present-day Tokyo). Even if the picture embodies a cultural notion of ideal female beauty, this print was actually produced to advertise a sex worker. Standing next to her is a child being trained to follow in Wakaume’s footsteps.

We encounter yet another ideal of female beauty in a fifteenth-century **bronze** sculpture from India (FIG. INTRO-8). The appearance of this woman is disquietingly distinct from those encountered thus far. Punitavati was a beautiful and generous woman who was deeply devoted to the Hindu god Shiva, and was abandoned by her husband because she gave one of his mangoes to a beggar. Punitavati offered her beauty instead to

Shiva, and the god accepted the offering. When he took her loveliness, Shiva turned her into an emaciated, fanged hag. According to legend, Punitavati and her clanging cymbals provide the music for Shiva as he keeps the universe in motion by dancing the cosmic dance of destruction and creation (SEE FIG. 9–4). By emphasizing the hideousness of Punitavati’s lost beauty, the sculptor sought to evoke the spiritual beauty of her generosity and sacrifice. Perhaps that is also why she addresses her audience directly, looking straight out toward them rather than averting her gaze by turning her head toward the side, as the woman does in the previous two works.



INTRO-6 • MEDICI VENUS

Roman copy of a 1st-century BCE Greek statue. Marble, height without base 5' (1.53 m). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
© Erich Lessing/akg-images



INTRO-7 • Kitagawa Utamaro

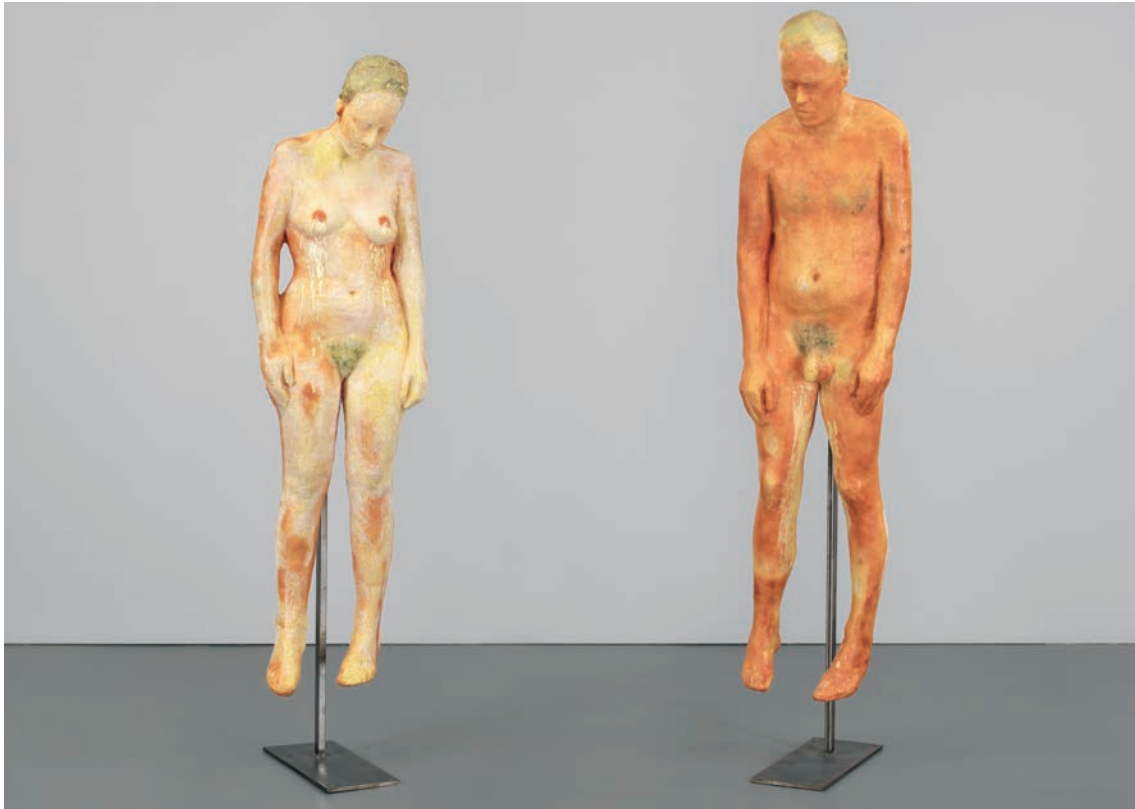
COURTESAN WAKAUME FROM THE TAMAYA IN EDMACHI

c. 1793–1794. Japan. Edo Period. Color woodblock print, 14¼" × 9¾" (36.2 × 24.7 cm). Honolulu Museum of Art.
Gift of James A. Michener, 1990 (20800)



INTRO-8 • PUNITAVATI (KARAICKAL AMMAIYAR)

A Shaiva saint, from Tamil Nadu, south India. Chola dynasty, c. 1050. Bronze, height 19½ × 8⅞ × 5½" (49.8 × 22.5 × 14.0 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust (33–533). Photograph © Joshua Ferdinand



INTRO-9 • Kiki Smith UNTITLED

1990. Beeswax and microcrystalline wax figures on metal stands. Overall (Installation): 78 × 71½ × 21¼" (198.1 × 181.6 × 54 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Purchase with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 91.19a-d. Photograph courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Courtesy Pace Gallery. © Kiki Smith

Sculptor Kiki Smith (b. 1954) uses portrayals of the human body not to engage with notions of ideal beauty—physical or spiritual—but to draw attention to the AIDS epidemic of the late twentieth century that had claimed the life of her own sister. In her 1990 work *UNTITLED* (FIG. INTRO-9), two life-size naked figures—made from flesh-colored painted beeswax—hang passively, but not quite lifelessly, side by side, a few inches above the ground. Milk drips from the woman's breasts and semen drips down the man's leg, as if both have lost control of bodily functions that were once a source of vitality and pleasure. Smith asks us to consider bodily control—both our own and the control that others exert on our body as we die—and suggests that relinquishing it may be as liberating as it is devastating.

Intro.2 How Do We Find the Meaning of Art?

As we have just seen, underlying our assumptions about works of art—whether in the past or in the present—is the belief that art carries a message, that it can inform, challenge, and/or persuade viewers, as well as give them pleasure or embody cherished cultural norms. But what gives a work of art meaning and expressive power? How do we discover its significance for the culture in which it was made and first experienced? How does it remain meaningful to us in the present?

On their own, exceptional works of art can speak to us with enduring eloquence over great expanses of time, but we usually need to understand a work's subject or **iconography** (subject matter and conventional symbols, and the study of them) before its deeper intended meanings become clear. For example, in *Flower Piece with Curtain* (SEE FIG. INTRO-2), the brilliant red and white tulip just to the left of the blue curtain was the most desirable and expensive flower in the seventeenth-century Netherlands; thus, it symbolizes wealth and power as well as natural beauty. Yet insects creep out of it, and a butterfly—fragile and transitory—hovers above it. Consequently, these flowers remind us of the passage of time and the fleeting quality of human wealth and natural beauty. Once its subjects and symbols have been decoded, this painting becomes more than simply an exquisitely painted still life or a clever reference to an ancient Greek story. It begins to embody some of the central preoccupations of the time and context in which it was created.

In "A Closer Look" (opposite), the iconography of two other seventeenth-century still-life paintings—one by Chinese painter Zhu Da and the other by Netherlandish painter Clara Peeters—is identified and elucidated. To understand these two works as bearers of cultural meaning, however, a deeper knowledge of the broader context and specific goals of the artists and their audiences is required. For example, the fact that Zhu Da became a painter is more about politics than art.